

Andy Medina  
Gaby Cepeda

Andy Medina's work revolves around questions of language, though not precisely around the rigid linguistic structures that limit our ability to categorize and make sense of the world but the ones that focus on its critical and experimental possibilities.

His work investigates pictograms and the history of oppression for which languages have become a pawn—exploring graphics and logos that manage to rule our relationship to value and into genealogies of symbols and how they work to remain relevant and alive through the ages of human transformation.

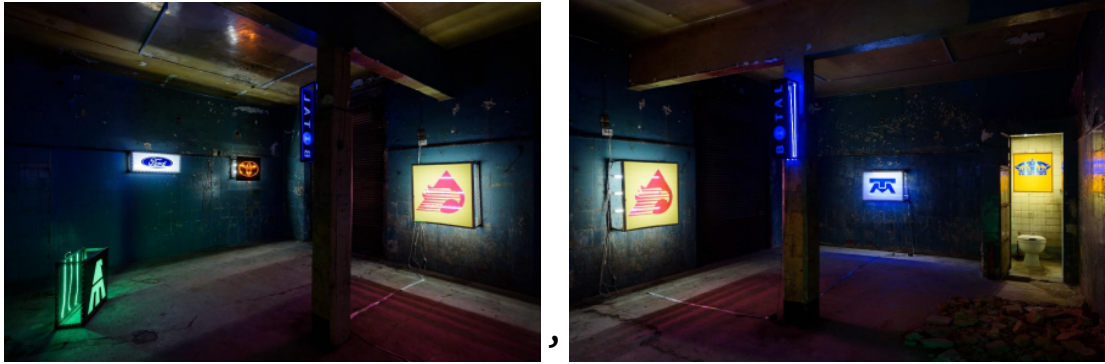
Medina was born and raised in the urban landscape of Oaxaca city, the capital of Oaxaca, a much beloved and exploited area in Southern Mexico, both culturally and economically. While of indigenous descent, Medina does not readily identify with any of the thirteen-plus indigenous groups living in Oaxaca; his relationship with language reflects his coexistence with the region's linguistic diversity.

In Mexico, the receipt for a person's belonging to an indigenous group is through their ability to speak an indigenous language. Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil —the linguist, writer, translator, and activist from the Ayutla Mixe region in Oaxaca— explains it. In contrast to Canada, indigeneity derives from one's percentage of indigenous blood. In Chile, adhesion to Mapuche culture comes with one's last name;

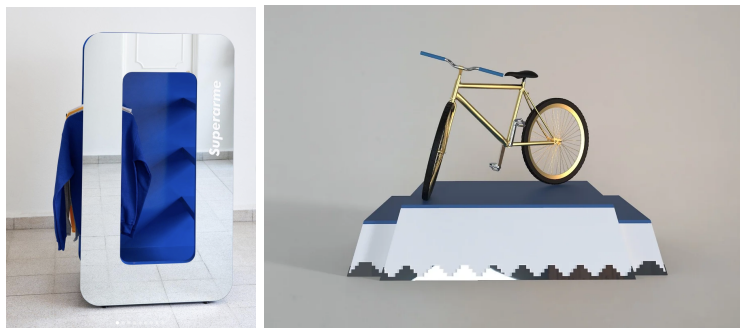
The Mexican state holds a schizophrenic relationship with its indigenous population; their material cultures are readily commodified for an urban and foreign audience while constantly subjected to pharaonic mega-projects threatening their lands. Cultural heritage is seen as worthwhile only if it is fit for commercialization; Mexico's 68 languages and their preservation as a means of resistance are not. It is no coincidence that Mandatory education in Mexico is provided only in Spanish.



This relationship is at the center of Medina's *Lii Qui Gannalu'* (2016), an installation in which the artist painted the title phrase boldly on the wall with a school chair facing it directly, one of its legs sawed off and supported by a stack of books: the Mexican Constitution, a Spanish dictionary, a Spanish–English one, and a book on Mexico's role in globalization. *Lii qui gannalu'* means "you don't know" in Zapoteco, a translation of the Spanish word ignorant, an accusation commonly thrown at indigenous language speakers, whom, ironically, are more likely to be bilingual or trilingual than monolingual Spanish speakers. *Lii Quii Gannalu* reveals Medina's interest in graphic-heavy, language-based work, where a phrase becomes a slogan and a logo in a recurrent cycle.



In *A Space for Nostalgia* (2017), Medina created a dark, cavernous sanctuary illuminated by the back-lit presence of old, obsolete logos: Telmex, the Mexican telecommunications giant owned by Mexico's richest man Carlos Slim; PEMEX, the old state oil ex-monopoly; Corona, a signifier of Mexican-ness for beach-minded foreigners; and BITAL, one of the first banks to bite the dust after NAFTA. Medina presents space to reflect on the parasocial relationships built around these symbols and how, through time, their images become signifiers of more than just a malignant company and stand-in for a more extensive program of adherence to a corporate-state-sanctioned identity that affects all Mexicans.



In 2021 Medina developed *Superarme*, a hybrid of a clothing brand and a critique on the power of logo-mania. *Superarme*, a term widely used to encourage working-class Mexican citizens to self-improve, plays on the cult skater label Supreme. Altering Supreme's Barbra Kreuger appropriated branding from red into a stately blue regularly used in Medina's work and swaps supremacy for 'superación'. *Superarme* produces and sells clothing and objects covered in its lifted branding, prodding at a dogma of self-improvement while also observing how anything can increase its value or improve itself by being slapped with a logo—or a label such as 'art.'



Medina's research on the power of visual codes expands into semiological elements; in his exhibitions *Manual Códice Visual* (Visual Codex Manual, 2018) and *Índice* (2018), Medina combined pre-Columbian

pre-linguistic elements with car culture. In *Manual*, he remixed glyphs found in Mixteco and Mexica visual languages by seamlessly blending them with simplified articulations of road signage. Then in *Index*, he recreated the iconic cave-dwelling pictorial gesture of painting the negative contour of one's hand onto a car wheel. Medina's dislocation of pre-Columbian elements onto objects of our urban landscape alludes to his pop sensibility and conviction in the power of recognizable visual cues on our understanding of objects. At the same time, these shows guide us toward his interest in anachronism and the lost futures harkened by pre-Columbian symbols and language placed upon contemporary culture.



In Medina's first solo show at Estrella Gallery in New York City, *Mitla*, two essential elements make a comeback. First is the investigation of "la greca," a meander or molding design usually identified with Greek and Roman architecture but also present in Pre-Hispanic architecture; it is a recognizable motif in Mexico, occurring across ruins in Central America. Medina focuses explicitly on the heavily ornate, fractal-like "Grecas" that the Mixteco and Zapoteco peoples made in Mitla, the most critical religious compound in the Oaxaca region. Medina regularly appropriates a classic spiral design found in the Mitla ruins that recall clouds, pixel art, and mosaic abstraction.

Medina's second comeback is to painting, a practice he has strayed from since his art-school years. The return to painting is not a return to academicism. The works in *Mitla* bridge the explorations in *Manual Códice Visual* (Visual Codex Manual, 2018) and *Superame*(2021); Medina juxtaposes references from clashing visual universes, translating Mixteco and Zapoteco symbols out of stone and onto bright backgrounds that harken graffiti art. The paintings look heavily contrasted, and the harsh Mixtec and Zapotec symbols become squiggly and soft, like the s-shaped doodles we did while bored in class.

For Medina, this is an exercise in abstraction and translation. Language is, of course, already such a system: it simplifies our reality into random yet differentiable signifiers and signifieds so that effective communication can exist. Medina attempts to overrun this so-called efficiency by sublimating *la greca*, this element of pre-linguistic communication—at least in Westernized terms, into a graffiti abstract expressionism. This act allows several interpretations; a task Medina leaves to the audience. In displacing Westernized linguistic efficiency, Medina seeks to center alternative types of readings. Readings are not focused on precise results or communicability but enjoyment and further fractalizing abstraction.

— Gaby Cepeda, Mexico City, 2022.