



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WHERE SCIENCE MEETS ART: MACLA presents COSMOS CODEX Commissioned work by Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL May 2—August 2, 2014 MACLA, 510 South First Street, San José, CA 95113



April 21, 2014 (San José, CA)—
MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana presents **COSMOS CODEX**, a commissioned, site-specific work by artist Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL. This is MACLA's first art exhibition dedicated to the relationship between art, astronomy and space research, the artist's first solo show in California and the first time he has publicly exhibited sculptural objects.

Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL (VSU) is primarily known for large-scale murals, paintings, drawings, and sound recordings. He sources American and Russian spaceflight programs, astronomy, and aerospace architecture to create commissioned, studio-based and public artworks for museums, galleries, private and public spaces.

A major aspect of the exhibition is VSU's dialogue with scientists and other subject matter experts at the NASA Ames Research Center to gather information directly informing the artworks in the exhibition. Vargas-Suarez is exploring concepts for retrieving materials from Mars, asteroids and other orbiting bodies in our solar system with the intention of allowing artists, architects and designers access to these materials to expand and explore possibilities not available to them with traditional materials available here on Earth. Mónica Ramírez-Montagut, who curated the exhibition and is MACLA's Senior Curator and Associate Director, says, "**VSU's work bridges space research and astronomy through art and makes it intriguing and accessible to people who have otherwise not been exposed to these new images and new vocabularies that are our contemporary and future language.**"

The exhibition installation in MACLA's gallery will be set up as a mock "clean room," or spacecraft processing facility, typically found at NASA operations centers. The installation will include hand-intervened new digital prints, murals, paintings, sculptural objects, and a video produced in collaboration with artist Barbora Bereznavova.

MACLA, positioned in Silicon Valley, a fertile area for art, science, and innovation, is the ideal setting for COSMOS CODEX. San José in particular is a place where artists, scientists, thinkers, and other creative minds can find ways in which science can inform art and vice-versa. This is



an opportunity for both disciplines to come together to create unique projects which engage a broad community of artists, scientists, students, and others to discuss questions which both art and science ask: what is our place in the universe? How do we conceptualize, idealize, or represent our position here? How can art present scientific data in compelling ways and how can science be a source of inspiration for artists?

Further, this exhibition presents an exciting educational opportunity for the hundreds of middle school and high school-aged students which MACLA serves every year. MACLA, a San José-based institution that uses art and related disciplines for community-building and youth education, hopes that the exhibition and the artist's residency will encourage their students to engage with art and science in a different and meaningful way. VSU, who studied both astronomy and art history in college and himself has been inspired by the data collected by space/research entities, including NASA, is an inspiration for Latino youth who may be considering studies and careers in the arts and sciences. Executive Director Anjee Helstrup-Alvarez says, "Rafael's exhibition is timely in many ways, with the national push for students to pursue the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), which is even more critical for Latino and other minority youth given rapidly changing demographics in California. The latest developments in space exploration bring STEM applications to life. This exhibition fits nicely at the intersection of MACLA's visual arts and youth education programs, and we hope that everyone who comes to see it finds those connections between art and technology to learn something new and interesting."

About

Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL is an artist based in New York. He was born in Mexico City and raised in the Houston suburb of Clear Lake City adjacent to the NASA Johnson Space Center. He studied astronomy and art history at the University of Texas at Austin and moved to New York City in 1997. He is primarily known for large-scale murals, paintings, drawings, and sound recordings. He sources American and Russian spaceflight programs, astronomy, and aerospace architecture to create commissioned, studio-based and public artworks for museums, galleries, private and public spaces. VSU has conducted post-studio research at NASA Ames Research Center; Arecibo Observatory, Puerto Rico; Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral, FL; Johnson Space Center, Houston, TX; Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center, Korolyov (Moscow); and the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

His writings have been published by Right Brain Words, New York; Edizioni Charta, Milano; and, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. His work are in the following selected collections: The Museum of Modern Art Library; Whitney Museum of American Art; El Museo del Barrio; Queens Museum of Art; Brooklyn Museum of Art; RISD Museum of Art; Baltimore Museum of Art, MD; Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX; Palazzo delle Papesse Centro Arte Contemporanea, Siena, Italy; Centro Atlantico de Arte Moderno (CAAM); Winzavod Contemporary Art Centre, Moscow; and, the UBS Art Collection.

Ames Research Center, one of 10 NASA field centers, is located in the heart of California's Silicon Valley. For over 60 years, Ames has led NASA in conducting world-class research and development. Ames provides NASA with advancements in entry, descent and landing technologies; information technology; next-generation aviation improvements; astrobiology; airborne sciences; and, small satellite programs. Ames maintains expertise in information technology, aerospace and aeronautics research and engineering; conducts research in space, Earth, lunar and biological sciences; develops lead status for NASA in small spacecraft missions;



expands public and private partnerships; and, contributes innovative, high performance and reliable exploration technologies.

Monica Ramírez-Montagut, the exhibition curator, is the Associate Director and Senior Curator for MACLA. Previously she was the Senior Curator at The San Jose Museum of Art and the Curator at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut. She was also a former Assistant Curator of Architecture and Design at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum where she worked on the exhibitions *Zaha Hadid*; *Restoring a Masterpiece: Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum*; and, *Cai Guo-Qiang*. She has also served as the Curator of Collections and Public Programs at the Price Tower Arts Center. Her publications include *KAWS* (2010) and *Erik Parker: Colorful Resistance* (2012), both with Rizzoli. Mónica received her B.Arch from the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and her M.Arch and Ph.D. from the Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya, ETSAB, in Barcelona. Her essay on VSU will be released in June.

Carla Stellweg, who contributed an essay to the exhibition catalogue, is a Latin-Americanist who has worked as a museum and non-profit director, writer, editor, curator and professor. Ms. Stellweg is a pioneer promoter and facilitator in the Latin American contemporary art field and has been instrumental in introducing for US and international audiences many young and mid-career artists from Mexico, Latin America, Latino-U.S., Cuba and the Caribbean, producing conceptual, socially-engaged art in both new and traditional media. In the 1970's, she was the founder and editor *Artes Visuales*, the first bilingual quarterly contemporary art journal in Mexico. Since her move to New York in 1982, Stellweg established herself as a prime point of contact for all queries and interests related to Latin American art. Notably, in 2010, the Stanford University Library Special Collections acquired Ms. Stellweg's 40-year archive. She is currently a professor in the Department of Visual Critical Studies and Art History at the School of Visual Arts. She is also a visiting professor at the Instituto de Investigaciones Esteticas and Facultad de Filosofia y Letras at UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) as well as a lecturer at the Instituto Tecnologico de Monterrey, Mexico.

Related Event: Cosmos Codex – Art + Science in Conversation

May 2, 2014, 6:00–8:00 p.m. Free

Artist Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL, NASA Ames Research Center staff Christopher P. McKay, Ph.D and Yvonne Clearwater, Ph.D will be in discussion about the innovative ways in which scientists and artists use their complementary skills and sets of knowledge to produce new perspectives and exciting projects.

Exhibition Organization

This exhibition was organized by MACLA. Presentation is made possible by Applied Materials, SVCcreates, a Cultural Affairs grant from the City of San José, the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, the Castellano Family Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Applied Materials Excellence in the Arts Grants through SV Creates, the James Irvine Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, ArtPlace America, and MACLA donors.

MACLA and Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL thank the NASA Ames Research Center for its support.



Calendar Listing

COSMOS CODEX: commissioned work by Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL

California Premiere

MACLA, 510 South 1st Street, San José, CA 95113

Exhibition: May 2—August 2, 2014

Talk: May 2, 2014, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Free

Gallery Information

Wednesday & Thursday, 12—7pm, Friday & Saturday, 12—5pm, and by special appointment

Free Admission

510 South First Street, San José, CA 95113

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About MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana

MACLA is an inclusive contemporary arts space grounded in the Chicana/o experience that incubates new visual, literary and performance art in order to engage people in civic dialogue and community transformation. MACLA is located at 510 South First Street, San José, CA 95113. For more information about MACLA call (408) 998-ARTE or see www.maclaarte.org

Image: *Vargas-Suarez UNIVERSAL, Космос Кодекс (Cosmos Codex) 2013, in-situ wall drawings, mixed mediums*
30th Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, Moderna galerija (Museum of Modern Art), Ljubljana, Slovenia

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