

PRESS KIT

JOSE DÀVILA

TRAVESIA CUATRO

STUDIO VISIT

Jose Dávila's Eternal Pursuit of Equilibrium

After spending the pandemic year researching circles in Guadalajara, Jose Dávila emerged with newfound perspective on stasis, resistance, and forward movement. The self-taught artist now channels his findings into a new body of paintings, sculptures, and silkscreens that prove his ruminations on balance and tension resonate in any medium.

BY RYAN WADDOUPS

May 07, 2021



Dávila's studio in Guadalajara, Mexico. All photography by Agustín Arce unless where noted

You spent the pandemic researching the circle—a symbol of perfection and human progress. What compels you most about the shape, especially during this moment?

It's a shape used for movement, to get things going forward. Let's remember it's also a cycle—an end and beginning at the same time. So if we don't learn, it can be

like Uroboros, the snake eating her own tail. However, it's a shape of resistance and balance, a form of life.

"The Circularity of Desire," your new show at Sean Kelly Gallery, is the biggest presentation of your paintings yet. Was it challenging to pivot from sculpture to two-dimensional works?

It wasn't difficult at all. In different ways, I've been painting all of my life. The difference now was to embrace painting as the anchor of the project, and that was something I haven't done before. The most interesting part of this process was realizing that the preoccupations and concepts you are working on are present regardless of the medium—they just unfold in different ways.

You're mostly known for assemblages of found objects that embody balance, equilibrium, tension, and stasis. These paintings are a different type of assemblage—pictorials and texts on canvas—that feel like 2-D manifestations of your sculptures.

I'm trying to find that stasis—that tension and that equilibrium—graphically, but also conceptually, as it is conceptual painting. I'm trying to find a balance between what you see and the historical research that nurtures the work. The paintings are executed according to a defined plan and composition, very much in the way of Sol Lewitt. The expression of impulse is not what these paintings are about. They are like a kind of palimpsest, using the history of painting to repaint circles that have shaped that history graphically and metaphorically.



Jose Dávila. Photography by Retrato Junio

These works include written statements that discuss how light can be used as a compositional tool. What was your biggest revelation while sourcing these texts?

It's impossible to talk about painting without talking about color, and we can't talk about color if we don't talk about light. Light is the fundamental source of color, but also the fundamental source to achieve a mood in people. It was indeed very revealing to find out how precise were the intentions of the vitals in churches back in the 17th century to create certain moods in the congregation. The churches were a vehicle to create very specific narratives, just like contemporary spatial installations, centuries ago.

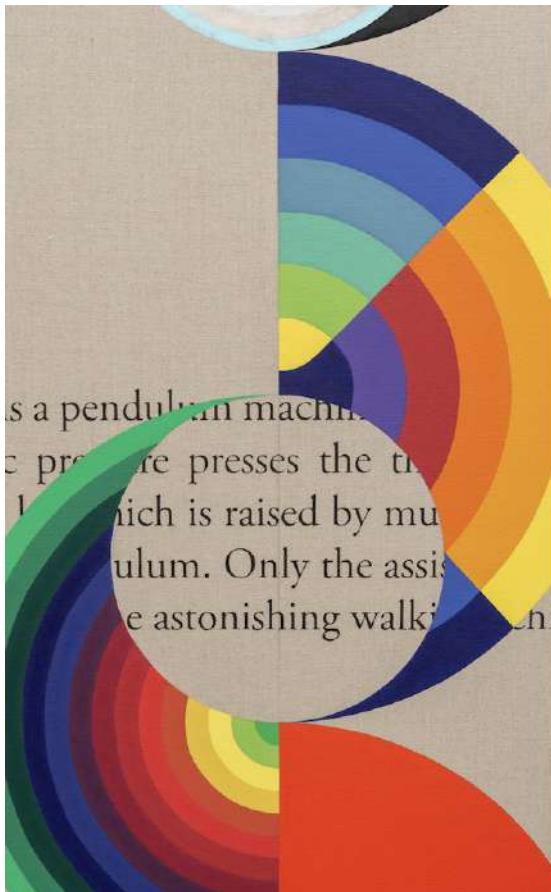
Do these works have any political undertones?

I always want my work to touch and move people. I like to view my work as an artistic tool rooted in the capacity to trigger people's minds and open all sorts of questions. Maybe this is a political undertone. I don't know. However, I'm not looking to use my work as critical propaganda, as I believe that for specific cases and unjust situations there are very precise ways to address this, and art being shown in fancy institutions and fairs is way less effective than joining a non-government association, for example, and doing something real. I aspire for my work to be beyond that.

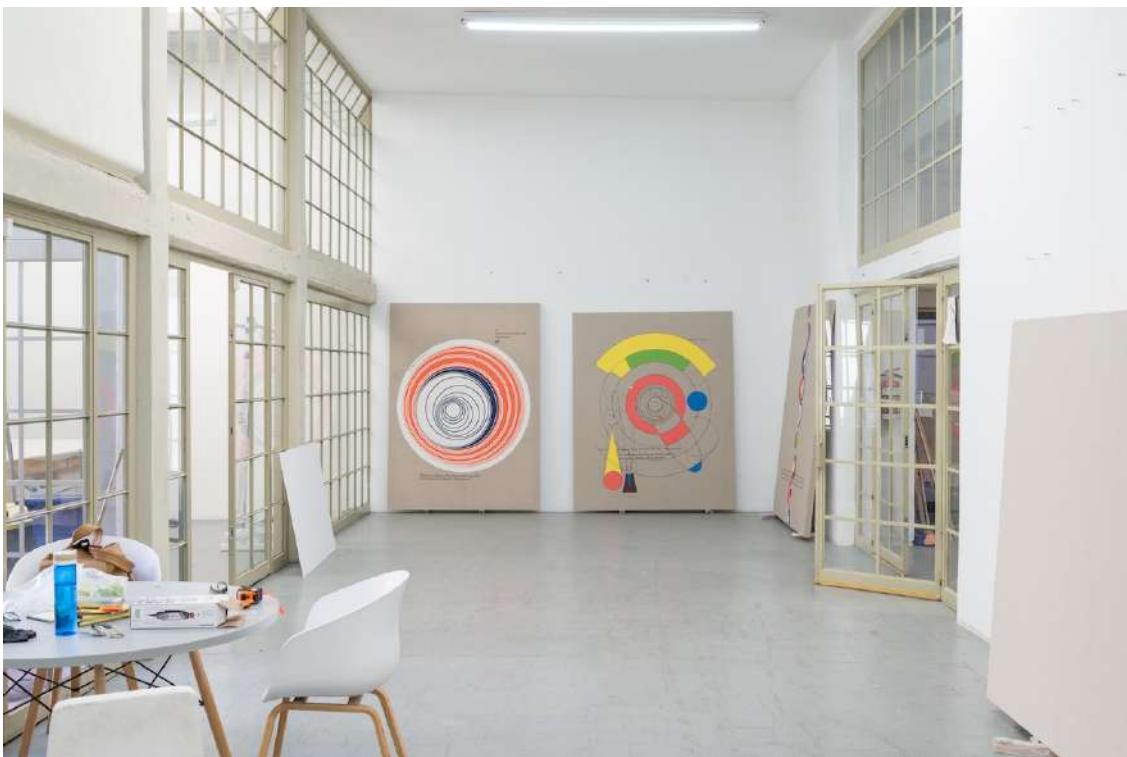
A key part of your practice involves recontextualizing history's greatest artists—Sonia Delaunay, Frank Stella, and Willys de Castro. Is this a function of being self-taught?

Undoubtedly, as you teach yourself about art history you find all sorts of affinities, coincidences, aspirations and motivations. A way to reflect on the research is to use this as a source for my own work. I assume we're standing on the shoulder of giants.





is a pendulum machine. The pressure presses the tip of the pendulum which is raised by muscle power. Only the assistance of the floor is needed. The astonishing walking technique is based on the principle of the pendulum.



Many artists you reference have created an entirely new universe within their oeuvre. Are you consciously following suit?

Creating your own new universe is one of the ultimate goals. I'm conscious of this, but I'm also aware that this is something you can't "craft." It either comes as an organic result of what you did in your career or it just doesn't. You have to take

risks to enjoy working, to be positive, to follow your intuition, and the rest comes along.

What's the backstory behind one particularly important piece in the show?

The largest sculpture in the show is made with driftwood, which I had because I was building a vegetable garden with my wife in the pandemic. After we had finished, I had this leftover wood, so I took it to my studio and just embarked on the goal of turning it into a sculpture as I like the capacity for my materials to be many things. The work is in the will, not in the material.

You studied architecture in Guadalajara. How has it influenced your sensibilities?

I never worked as an architect, never practiced. I did study architecture 25 years ago but it seems like another life. The city has been important for me because it has constituted a platform of peripheral thinking. Guadalajara is a savage place. It's hard—full of limitations—and horrible things happen here. It's definitely a place where you have to find your own way and endure all circumstances. At the end, Guadalajara has influenced me into endurance and resilience.





What keeps you rooted in the city?

My family, my studio, my walks in the city... The freedom of time and very few distractions. Some good friends and a sense of community in the art world. I'm not sure if it's better or worse than any other place, but it does feel like home to me.

How has the past year of disruption shaped your creative outlook?

It made me rethink my priorities in general and where my time was being spent. This has obviously had a great impact in my creative outlook. I'm doing things more slowly and trying to walk with stone feet in the creative decisions I'm making. The rush is gone.

What are you itching to learn next?

Patience!





Jose Dávila al Centro di Scultura di Peccia

JOSE DAVILA - Il 2 maggio è stato inaugurato il Centro Internazionale di Scultura di Peccia e nel nuovo spazio espositivo si è tenuto il vernissage del grande artista messicano Jose Dávila, che ha usato il marmo di Peccia come il principale protagonista delle sue opere. JOSE DAVILA CORR 2.mp4





JOSÉ DÁVILA: EL PRIMER FUEGO

El primer fuego es una exposición que replica el ecosistema matérico y relacional que se ha gestado en el estudio de José Dávila a lo largo de años de producción constante y continua. Aprovechando la proximidad geográfica del estudio y Travesía Cuatro, en Guadalajara, la galería se ha convertido en un espacio de trabajo y opera a manera de espejo de los procesos que anteceden a la consolidación del trabajo escultórico de Dávila.

La exposición presenta los diferentes momentos que ocurren desde la selección del material en crudo hasta la concretización del objeto escultórico, resaltando la importancia de la interrelación de los objetos que es canalizada por el artista para generar sistemas estructurales de dependencia. Esta dependencia se caracteriza por el préstamo y el intercambio de propiedades entre materiales contrastantes para asegurar un cierto grado de balance y permanencia. La creación de estos circuitos híbridos refiere a una comprensión cíclica de la transformación de la materia, un vaivén entre la auto-preservación y la desintegración.



Vista de la exposición «El primer fuego», de José Dávila, en Travesía Cuatro, Guadalajara, México, 2020.
Cortesía de la galería



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La obra central de la exposición representa un retorno a una obra temprana de Dávila (Guadalajara, México, 1974) exhibida en 1999 en el Museo de las Artes de Guadalajara. La recreación de esta obra consiste en una hoguera que es encendida intermitentemente dentro del espacio de la galería, rodeada por madera acumulada que espera a ser utilizada a manera de combustible. La charola de metal que funciona como plataforma para activar la hoguera, se presenta a sí misma como un espacio liminal en el cual la materia asume un proceso de transformación. El gesto mínimo de Dávila presenta al fuego como un símbolo autosuficiente que hace referencia al origen y a lo primitivo, una energía potenciadora que puede reconfigurar la realidad de las cosas y en ocasiones develar dinámicas internas de los objetos que permanecían ocultas.

A manera de preámbulo, la fogata es antecedida por un par de esculturas que funcionan como contrapesos reflejados. Una roca en crudo es sostenida con una polea desde el techo y se ve enfrentada por una manzana de bronce suspendida en el aire. Estos elementos forman parte del vocabulario escultórico recurrente en la obra de Dávila; la manzana simboliza un recordatorio reconocible de las consecuencias de la fuerza de gravedad.

Estas formas compositivas son replicadas en la siguiente sala donde unos contenedores industriales de líquidos se encuentran fijados a muro. Esta secuencia de obras genera un ritmo tangible que sugiere la prevalencia de un cierto orden. Los cinchos industriales, los cables y las cadenas que Dávila utiliza para conectar un objeto con otro son formas de mediación que producen un itinerario estructural. Estas trayectorias reconfiguran la experiencia espacial del espectador pues introducen la tensión como un elemento activo que afecta el desplazamiento de los visitantes y también dialoga con la disposición arquitectónica del espacio, modificando y fracturando las dinámicas que normalmente surgirían en la galería.

La intuición de un cierto orden es interrumpida bruscamente por la acumulación caótica de materiales en crudo en una de las salas próximas. Volúmenes de concreto, rocas, losas de mármol, placas de acrílico, trozos de cantera y otros objetos de construcción ocupan la habitación casi en su totalidad. Esta instalación es un vistazo a los materiales que normalmente circulan por el estudio y a la ética de trabajo de Dávila que se caracteriza por intuir los diferentes modos de relación que pueden existir entre esta gran diversidad de objetos.



Vista de la exposición «El primer fuego», de José Dávila, en Travesía Cuatro, Guadalajara, México. 2020.
Cortesía de la galería



Vista de la exposición «El primer fuego», de José Dávila, en Travesía Cuatro, Guadalajara, México. 2020.
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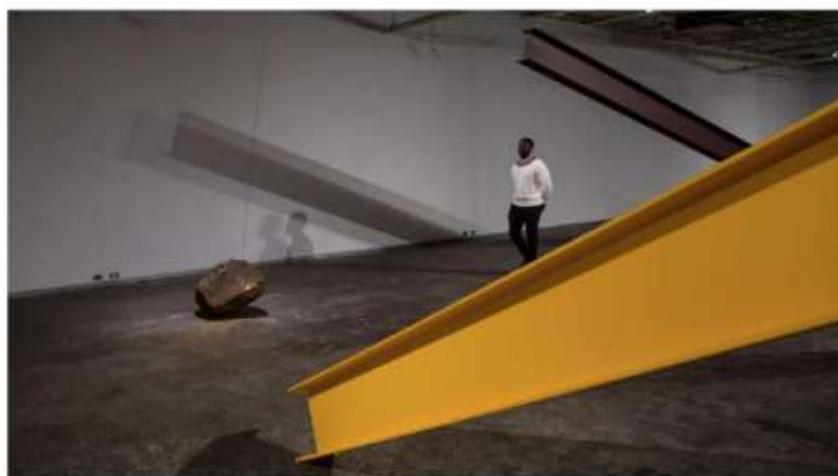
El hecho de que muchos de estos materiales son utilizados comúnmente para la construcción implica la sugerencia de ciertas relaciones prácticas. Dávila no reduce las interacciones de los objetos que utiliza a este campo, sino que se inclina por una resonancia poética que pueda otorgar autonomía a los materiales. La coexistencia de estos cuerpos líticos y objetos industriales en el estudio es aquello que permite el surgimiento de estas posibles conexiones que se caracterizan por ser más orgánicas en lugar de ser forzadas desde una concepción preestablecida de lo escultórico.

La circulación de estas presencias matéricas a través de los diferentes edificios que conforman el estudio culmina con una obra que muestra un librero inclinado sobre una acumulación de carbón. La relación entre ambos objetos surge como algo principalmente cromático, agregando una dimensión pictórica al objeto escultórico, pero también resalta la configuración cíclica de la exposición en su totalidad: el círculo que se desdobra sobre sí mismo hacia el infinito, variando intermitentemente entre el mundo de lo humano y la configuración original de las materias primas inalteradas.

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT • VISUAL ARTS

Jose Davila challenges accepted boundaries with exhibition at the Dallas Contemporary

The Mexican artist makes social commentary with his large-scale sculptures.



Visitor Olajide Asakun checks out artist Jose Davila's "Directional Energies" exhibition at the Dallas Contemporary. (Van Coulter / Special Contributor)

By John Zetos
8:00 PM on Feb 23, 2020



For several years now, the Dallas Contemporary has sought to program important exhibitions of significant artists who make challenging work.

With "Directional Energies," Mexican artist Jose Davila, 46, manages to comment on serialized social structures with large-scale sculptures that use the language of minimalism, remarkably derailing the styles' core tenets to further his own ends.

The work on view, in one way or another, both formally and intellectually challenges accepted boundaries. This exhibition was curated by adjunct curator Pedro Alonso, and it was realized with the help of a structural engineer who worked directly with the artist.

Davila's interest in space and structure is a combination of his study of architecture in Guadalajara, Mexico, in the 1990s plus the time he spent at the Fine Arts Academy of San Miguel de Allende grappling with sculpture.

Essentially a conceptual artist, he has worked variously with photographic cutouts, sculpture and installation art with the goal of overturning preconceptions about both symmetry and balance by investigating precarity, gravity, tension and stasis.

The curatorial statement contends that the suspended objects found in this exhibition are "a metaphor for the constant struggle of opposing forces as well as a representation of the friction between modernity's tendency to homogenize and humanity's need for diversity."

This may sound like a mouthful, but it directly places the work in context, suggesting how industrial materials can interact with natural elements. A type of dialogue ensues that represents humankind's attempt to solve problems, whose solutions can simply be described by the word "culture."

The pieces themselves are complicated arrangements of industrial I-beams, wire, locally sourced boulders and volcanic rocks. Some are stacked compositions of the beams and rocks that revel in an asymmetry easily depicted in the graphic arts but rarely seen in the real world as in *Perpetuum Mobile*.



In works like the 2019 piece "Poggendorff Phenomenon," artist Jose Davila uses large-scale minimalist sculptures to comment on serialized social structures. (Van Coulter / Special Contributor)

It consists of five I-beams stacked as if they would rotate on a central axis, topped by a volcanic rock. You can imagine the entire thing spinning out of control in an entropic delirium. With this seemingly simple construction, Davila uproots the overwhelming presence of grids as determinants of conformity. The playful language of chance and multivalence, suggestive of new possibilities, replaces them.

In the suspension pieces, I-beams are attached to the gallery floor at one end, while the other end is raised at a steep angle and held in place by a metal wire that runs up to the ceiling. The wire runs back down and attaches to a boulder, which balances the ensemble, completing the evident tension between the two ends of a sort of tightrope metaphysical game. In several instances, the wires veer off at odd angles, conjuring the force of vectors from the realm of physics.

Speaking of physics, *Newton's Fault*, the most compelling piece in the show, directly references Sir Isaac Newton and his famous apple. The sculpture sets up a binary set of opposing vector forces that act upon iron beams with two boulders, one on either side.

They hold the piece in tension, with the difference here being that the connection is elegantly broken and replaced with a synthetic, and equally symbolic, apple. A long vertical beam hangs from the ceiling, supported by a boulder on one side, stopping just short of the apple by about an inch.

In turn, the apple rests on a horizontal beam that carries the lines of the piece toward the other side. It delicately breaks the point where the beams would usually connect, placing itself within a visual tight squeeze. This gap is the "fault" referred to in the title, creating a visually anxious space where the I-beams are prevented from joining, which suggests that they do have a weakness.

Surprising moments like this make all the difference when it comes to the visitor experience.



"Newton's Fault," a 2019 work, features a synthetic apple in a seemingly precarious position. (Van Coulter / Special Contributor)



The 2019 work "Perpetuum Mobile" features a volcanic rock perched atop metal beams. (Nan Coulier / Special Contributor)

Davila has created a space where patrons can walk around and beneath large-scale suspended materials that wouldn't normally be set up as they are here. In a way, the oblique angles that define the pieces act as his meta-narrative critique of society's dominant hierarchies, suggesting that alternate and fruitful pathways are available if we look for them.

John Zotos is a Dallas-based art critic and essayist.

Details

Jose Davila's "Directional Energies" runs through March 15 at the Dallas Contemporary, 161 Glass St., Dallas, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Free.
dallascontemporary.org



John Zotos, Special Contributor. John Zotos is a Dallas-based art critic and essayist.

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Vista de la exposición "Pensar como una montaña", de José Dávila, en el Museo Amparo, Puebla, México, 2020. Foto cortesía del museo

JOSÉ DÁVILA: PENSAR COMO UNA MONTAÑA

El Museo Amparo presenta la exposición *José Dávila. Pensar como una montaña*, un proyecto realizado específicamente para esta institución en Puebla (Méjico), bajo la curaduría de Amanda de la Garza. En la muestra, Dávila parte de una investigación sobre las cualidades matéricas y fenomenológicas de la piedra, uno de los elementos primigenios no sólo en la escultura, sino también culturalmente, al ser usado por los humanos para erigir sus edificaciones. Con el transcurrir del tiempo, la piedra se convierte en ruina y vestigio. La investigación emprendida por el artista para este proyecto se origina a partir de una amplia gama de referencias visuales e históricas, así como de una reflexión sobre los procesos de producción en donde el trabajo en el taller juega un papel central. Artista autodidacta y multidisciplinario, Dávila (Guadalajara, Méjico, 1974) presenta en esta exposición doce obras escultóricas y pictóricas en las que explora las relaciones entre materiales naturales y materiales industrializados, símbolos y significados, para producir nuevas articulaciones entre ellos. El diálogo se establece en buena medida por medio de citas, alusiones y guiños con la historia del arte. De manera específica, incorpora en su trabajo las reflexiones planteadas por el minimalismo, la abstracción geométrica, así como del arte concreto brasileño, el constructivismo y el brutalismo. Sin embargo, también abreva de la literatura y de la poesía, de sus imágenes visuales y mentales, de la condición instantánea y a la vez duracional del arte. Dávila ahonda

en las diferentes potencias de la materia y la forma, las frecuencias de transmisión de los significados que comportan, y su relación con el espacio de exhibición. El artista reinterpreta el vínculo entre el objeto y su contenido simbólico para hablar no sólo de la materia, sino de la relación que sostenemos con los objetos. Produce reflexiones que inquietan y profundizan sobre la especificidad de la materia por medio de un trabajo a la vez metódico e intuitivo. La obra responde al contexto, pero lo hace de una manera abstracta, sin abandonar el sentido temporal que albergan los materiales que emplea.



Vista de la exposición "Pensar como una montaña", de José Dávila, en el Museo Amparo, Puebla, México, 2020. Foto cortesía del museo



Vista de la exposición "Pensar como una montaña", de José Dávila, en el Museo Amparo, Puebla, México, 2020. Foto cortesía del museo

Investigaciones materiales *Pensar como una montaña* es producto también de una investigación artística emprendida por José Dávila que parte de la idea de principios de trabajo, que a su vez constituyen modos de relación entre los objetos: equilibrio, suspensión, acoplamiento, resistencia, progresión, transparencia, negación, dependencia y voluntad. El artista indaga en la condición material de la piedra y el vidrio, al mismo tiempo que esta condición se hace visible y concreta por medio de las interacciones que sostienen con elementos constructivos como el cemento y las vigas de acero. Sin embargo, las relaciones entre estos materiales están planteadas a través del límite de los objetos, su lucha y su relación de dependencia con la gravedad. Simultáneamente, el espectador es quien produce y contempla estas relaciones de consonancia y diferencia.

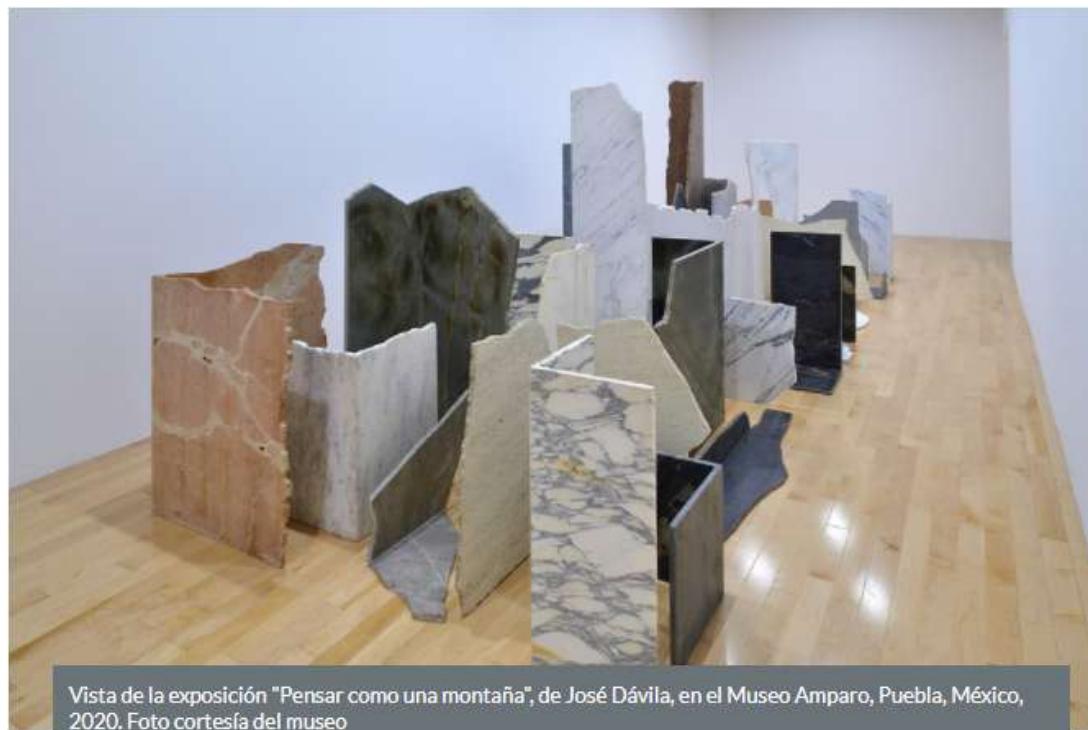


Vista de la exposición "Pensar como una montaña", de José Dávila, en el Museo Amparo, Puebla, México, 2020. Foto cortesía del museo



Vista de la exposición "Pensar como una montaña", de José Dávila, en el Museo Amparo, Puebla, México, 2020. Foto cortesía del museo

Reordenar y coexistir En el estudio, los materiales conviven entre sí, coexisten con personas y objetos, así como con el propio edificio que los alberga. Su condición escultórica está latente en la medida que los objetos interactúan entre ellos, o permanecen largas temporadas en un sitio esperando a ser utilizados o ensamblados, esperando pacientemente su lugar como objetos públicos. Los objetos gozan de autonomía y, tal vez, de una cierta voluntad en la medida en que ofrecen resistencia entre sí. El estudio es también un centro de operaciones; en él habita una ecología de objetos, algunos intervenidos directamente por el hombre, mientras que otros permanecen en el estado en el que fueron encontrados.



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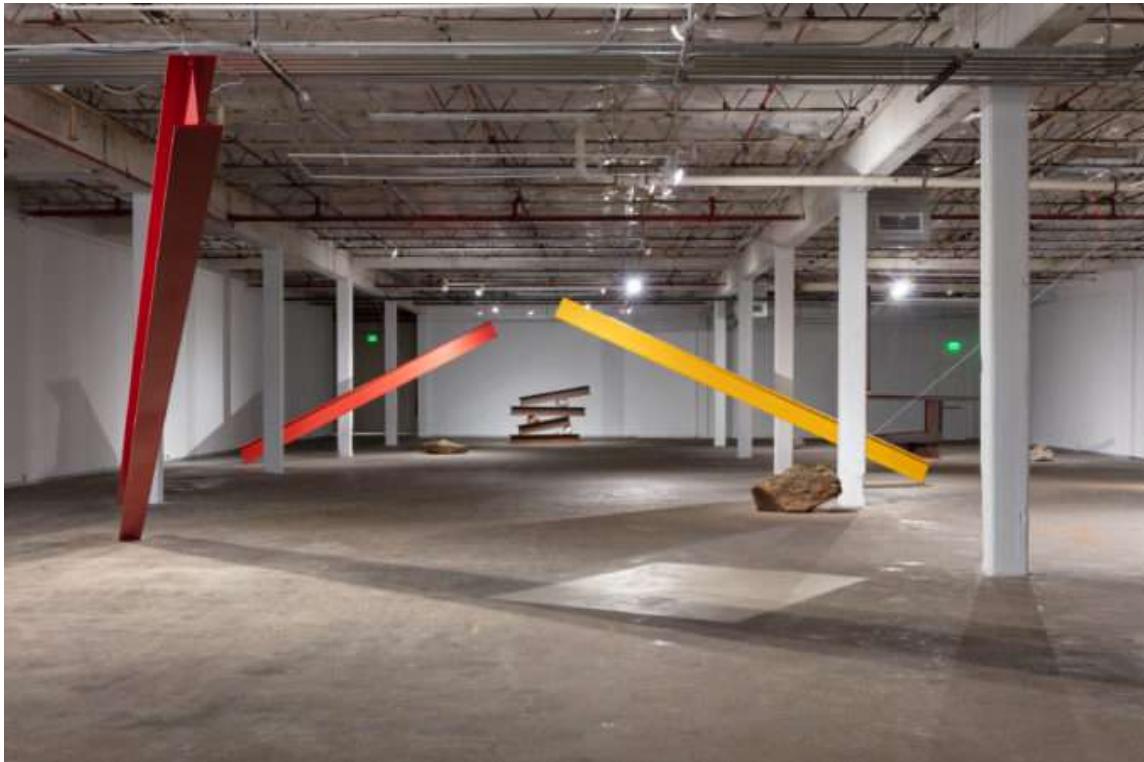


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Poética del fragmento Cada una de las obras en la exposición está constituida por vestigios y fragmentos, a pesar de que algunos de los elementos son unidades en sí mismas, o bien, sólo pueden existir en la medida en que establecen relaciones con otros. A partir de un sistema hecho de fragmentos, los objetos constituyen composiciones escultóricas y también paisajes líricos posibles, que hablan de aquello que es humano y al mismo tiempo montaña, roca o peñasco. El ojo sigue el fragmento para encontrar las tramas invisibles de los objetos. Con una observación detenida, aquello que está presente o ausente frente a nosotros permite establecer sus contenidos simbólicos, así como el sistema de relaciones que soporta a cada una de las partes. Son, al mismo tiempo, metáfora y materia.



Jose Dávila, *Directional Energies*, 2019. Photo by Kevin Todora. Courtesy of the artist.

VISUAL ARTS

The Tension Is High in Jose Dávila's *Directional Energies* at Dallas Contemporary

The Mexican artist's precarious sculptures illustrate the struggle between humans and nature.

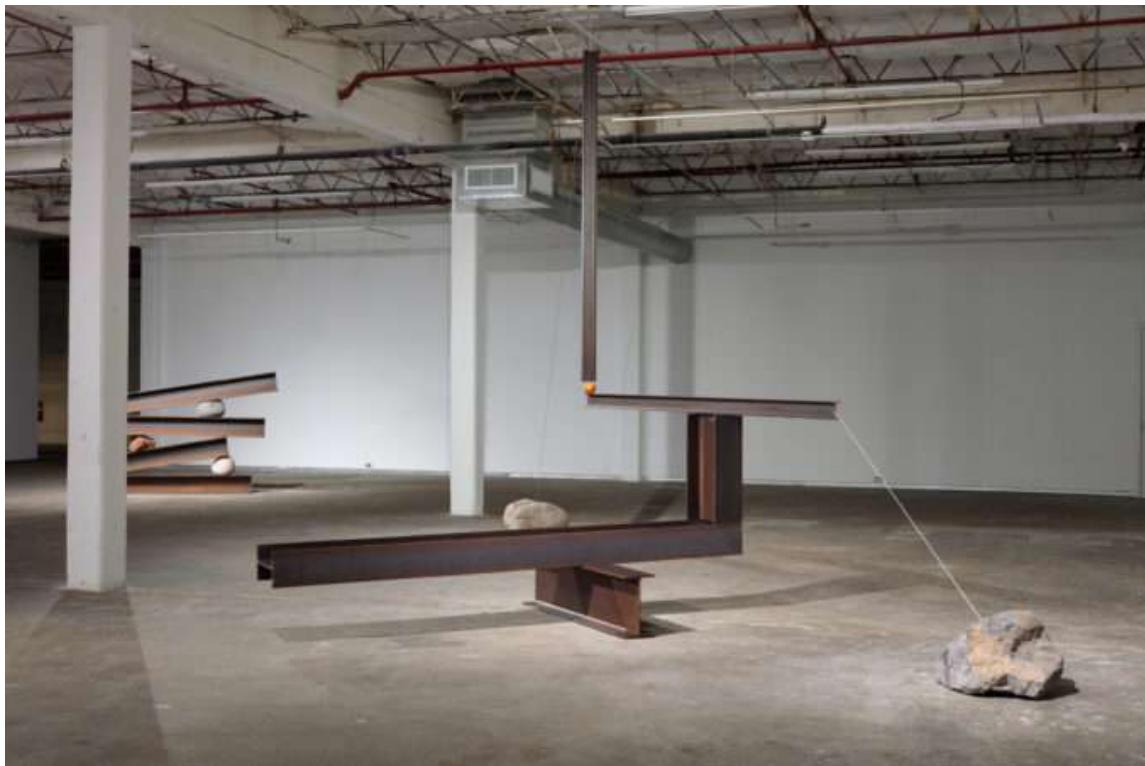
BY TRACE MILLER PUBLISHED IN **ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT** FEBRUARY 5, 2020 11:20 AM

Jose Davila's installations are the kind of art that makes me think, *I could do that myself*, except I couldn't. His sculptures require the quarrying of large, moss-covered boulders and the procurement and transportation of construction-grade I-beams. At minimum, I'd need myself plus a few machines. Then there's the fact that Davila's work depicts and discusses the fundamental violence, irony, and contradiction of our time. There's more to the artist's minimal compositions than what meets the eye.

In fact, the work of Jose Dávila is "a metaphor for the constant struggle of opposing forces." His "erratic freestanding structures defy the formal order and repetition commonly associated with modernity and minimalism." At least, so claims the brochure for his solo exhibition *Directional Energies*, on view at Dallas Contemporary through March 15. The claims hold water.

Take, for example, *Untitled*—a sculpture comprised of an I-beam bolted, at one end, to the floor and hanging from a wire slung over a ceiling beam and anchored to a large boulder on

the floor. The tension between beam and boulder begs the question: Is the dangling beam struggling to uproot the boulder? Or is the boulder struggling to yank back the beam? Science would tell us that the suspended beam has a potential gravitational energy of gmh and is therefore pulling on the boulder, which has only inertia and is therefore at rest. But the eye and the imagination are not so sure. It's the primeval struggle of knowledge and belief.



Jose Dávila, *Directional Energies*, 2019. Photo by Kevin Todora. Courtesy of the artist.

Directional Energies includes four iterations of *Untitled*. The repeated theme of boulder versus beam, also found in the sculpture *Newton's Fault*, suggests the struggle between capitalism and climate. The squat boulders, covered in lichen and moss, recall the natural. The brightly painted beams recall the unnatural. This leaves the strained and skinny wire to ruefully intimate some sort of tenuous balance between the two, between industry and earth.

Of course, the irony is that the boulders aren't natural anymore. Human touch plucked the rock from its habitat, human gaze dragged the boulders into a human sphere of reference. This is Dávila's first implication of the violence of human perception. His second implication is slightly more damning. For by incorporating volume in his sculptures, Dávila forces the viewer to decide where the sculpture ends and the gallery begins. The viewer must cut and rip the piece's volume out of the gallery's contiguous volume and space. As artist Wu Tsang and poet Fred Moten wrote, "there is *no* non-violent way to look at some-*body*." Or some-*thing*.

Dávila's sculpture isn't limited to climate versus capitalism, earth versus industry. It's not limited to science versus religion. It's about the violence of human perception versus the elusiveness of the perceived. And that's where Dávila defies Modernism, a movement which crowns humankind the master of nature. Dávila questions human violence, both its validity and its veracity. He illustrates the human-universe struggle as an eternal draw, balanced between the force of a wire and the weight of a single, forsaken apple.



JOSE DÁVILA
The Moment of Suspension
text by Jeffrey Grunthaner

KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin
Oct 26 – Feb 9, 2019
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Over the course of a career spanning more than 20 years, Guadalajara-based José Dávila has engaged with the architecture, symbolism, and material integration of space. For his third solo exhibition at König Galerie, he has poised disparate kinds of lithic bodies—ranging from basalt stone and volcanic rock, to more quotidian materials like limestone and concrete—against each other to create a delicate interaction of volume and mass. Intimating utopian ideals, uncut rock and sculpted concrete are brought into uneasy congruence, realizing an equilibrium that holds differently weighted materials in place.

While the language of sculpture traditionally speaks to solidity and permanence, Dávila's work evinces a decided fragility that contrasts with the density of the materials he puts to use. As though verging on the brink of collapse, his take on sculptural form introduces viewers to a clash of directional energies, resulting in a precarious appearance that undercuts monolithic stability. What comes to light is less a single unified object than an exchange of physical forces, a cross-section of elemental processes that refer to the inexorable law of gravity.

DÁVILA'S ARTICULATION OF SPACE MIMICS PRIMAL HUMAN BEHAVIORS, SUCH AS STACKING AND BALANCING, UNDERSCORING THEIR CAPACITY TO EXPRESS A COLLECTIVELY SHARED IMPULSE TOWARD CONSTRUCTION.

Several works in *The Moment of Suspension* feature uncut rock tethered to angular concrete blocks by a ratchet strap. An aura of weightlessness halos the topography of the linked stones. As individual works, these layered sculptures foreground the disintegrating influence of time, concretizing an entropic process that ends in perpetual stasis.

Places of meeting and points of intersection also constitute recurring aspects of Dávila's work. His architectural eye recasts volume itself as a raw material, using vertical surfaces, rectangles, and spheroid shapes to signify development and growth. The makeshift stratification underlying each sculpture invokes the uniqueness of a once visited place, or remembered physique, preserving only its constructed essence.

A holistic attitude cuts through *The Moment of Suspension*. Every work on exhibit embodies an architectural rhythm where the vastness of geologic time becomes affixed to the spatial planes of a concrete surface. The necessary union of each element functions like the organs of a body, the vehicle of consciousness. Blending structural innovation with a cosmological understanding of duration, Dávila shows how individuated parts relate to an overarching design. If the microcosm is removed, the macrocosm collapses.



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CREDITS

Photos by installation view by Roman Maerz

TAG

Berlin, Jose Dávila, König Galerie

Jose Dàvila



Over the course of a career spanning more than 20 years, Guadalajara-based Jose Dávila has engaged with the architecture, symbolism, and material integration of space. Intimating utopian ideals, uncut rock and sculpted concrete are brought into uneasy congruence, realizing an equilibrium that holds differently weighted materials in place.

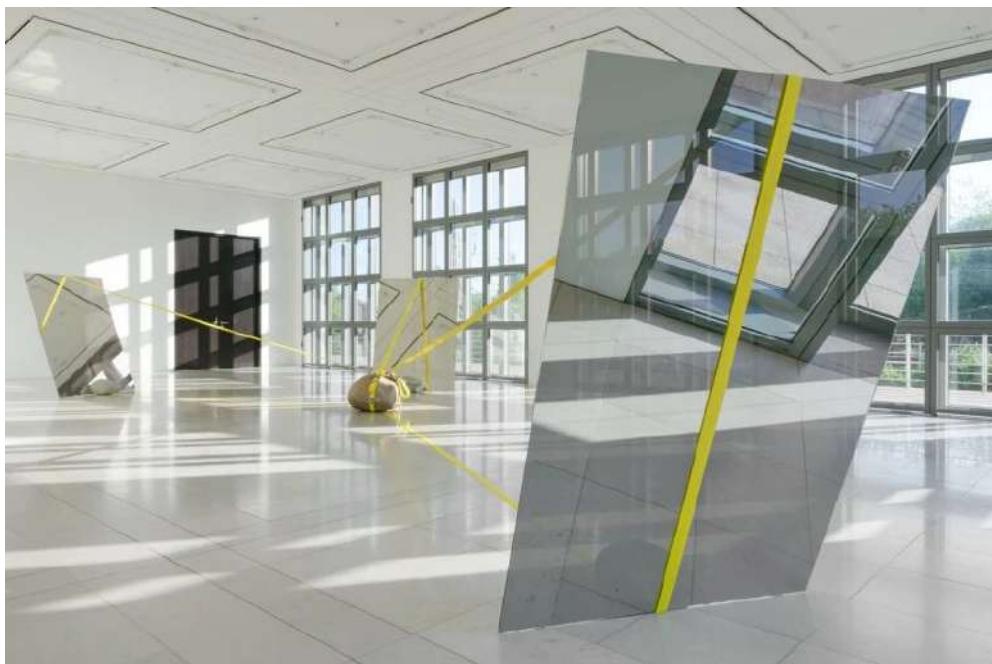
Text Jeffrey Grunthaner All images Courtesy of the artist and König Galerie.

While the language of sculpture traditionally speaks to solidity and permanence, Dávila's work evinces a decided fragility that contrasts with the density of the materials he puts to use. As though verging on the brink of collapse, his take on sculptural form introduces viewers to a clash of directional energies, resulting in a precarious appearance that undercuts monolithic stability. What comes to light is less a single unified object than an exchange of physical forces, a cross-section of elemental processes that refer to the inexorable law of gravity.



Installation view: *The Weaker has Conquered the Stronger* (2019),
Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK.

Image courtesy of the artist and Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead.
Photo: John McKenzie © 2017



Installation view: *Die Feder und der Elefant* (2017), Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, DE.
Image courtesy of the artist and Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.
Photo: Kay Riechers © 2017



Installation view: Somewhere Behind the Eyes (2018), Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf, DE.

Image courtesy of the artist and Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf.

Photo: Paul Schöpfer © 2018

Dávila's articulation of space mimics primal human behaviours, such as stacking and balancing, underscoring their capacity to express a collectively shared impulse toward construction. Several works feature uncut rock tethered to angular concrete blocks by a ratchet strap. An aura of weightlessness halos the topography of the linked stones. As individual works, these layered sculptures foreground the disintegrating influence of time, concretizing an entropic process that ends in perpetual stasis.



Installation view: The Moment of Suspension (2019), König Galerie, Berlin.

Image courtesy of the artist and König Galerie.

Photo: Roman März.



Installation view: The Moment of Suspension (2019), König Galerie, Berlin.

Image courtesy of the artist and König Galerie.

Photo: Roman März.

Places of meeting and points of intersection also constitute recurring aspects of Dávila's work. His architectural eye recasts volume itself as a raw material, using vertical surfaces, rectangles, and spheroid shapes to signify development and growth. The makeshift

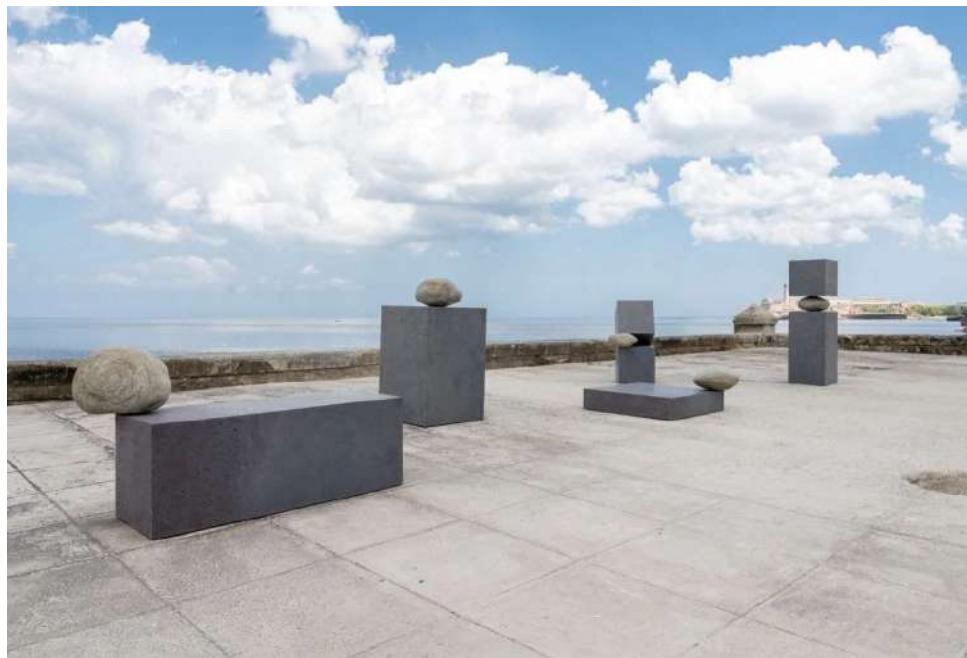
stratification underlying each sculpture invokes the uniqueness of a once visited place, or remembered physique, preserving only its constructed essence.



Installation view: Every Blind Wonder Ends in a Circle (2017), Blueproject Foundation, Barcelona, SP.

Image courtesy of the artist; Blueproject Foundation, Barcelona; and Travesía Cuatro, Madrid.

Photo: Roberto Ruiz © 2017



Installation view: Los límites de lo posible (2019), XIII Bienal de La Habana, La Habana, CU.

Image courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Photo: María Rincón © 2019

Every work on exhibit embodies an architectural rhythm where the vastness of geologic time becomes affixed to the spatial planes of a concrete surface. The necessary union of each element functions like the organs of a body, the vehicle of consciousness. Blending structural innovation with a cosmological understanding of duration, Dávila shows how individuated parts relate to an overarching design. If the microcosm is removed, the macrocosm collapses.



Jose Dávila. Los límites de lo posible II (2019), Recinto stone and boulder, 174 x 96 x 119 cm.

Exhibited at Los límites de lo posible (2019), XIII Bienal de La Habana, La Habana, CU.

Image courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Photo: María Rincón © 2019



Jose Dávila. Aporia X (2017), Brown Camberos marble and smoked glass, 190 x 183 x 102 cm.

Exhibited at Somewhere Behind the Eyes (2018), Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf, DE.

Image courtesy of the artist and Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf.

Photo: Paul Schöpfer © 2018



Vista de la exposición *Pensar como una montaña* de Jose Dávila en el Museo Amparo, 2019. Cortesía del museo.

El arte y los vestigios de la civilización. Entrevista con Jose Dávila en el Museo Amparo

ENTREVISTA | 28/11/2019

Manuel Guerrero

A propósito de su nueva exposición en el Museo Amparo, platicamos con Jose Dávila para conocer los detalles de esta muestra curada por Amanda de la Garza.

Desde el 16 de noviembre el Museo Amparo presentará la exposición *Pensar como una montaña*, donde es posible ver piezas nuevas del artista Jose Dávila, realizadas específicamente para las salas del recinto.

En esta exposición, Dávila parte de una serie de intereses sobre la cualidad matérica y fenomenológica de la piedra: un material natural utilizado por varias civilizaciones antiguas para realizar piezas con valor artístico, arquitectónico o cultural.

Con un enfoque que oscila entre las nociones de creación y vestigio, Dávila realizó una serie de piezas en las que, si bien la cualidad plástica de los materiales es primordial, **hace referencias a la historia del arte, el urbanismo y aspectos relacionados con los modos de vida, donde es posible notar elementos constantes a lo largo de la historia de la humanidad como especie.**

Esta exposición, curada por Amanda de la Garza, incluye también **pinturas en las que el artista explora y pone a prueba sus intereses creativos en torno al espacio**, algo peculiar en todo su cuerpo de trabajo.

En entrevista para Código, **Jose Dávila comparte algunos detalles sobre el proceso detrás de cada una de las piezas, su interés en el material desde una perspectiva plástica y sus apreciaciones sobre el vínculo entre el arte y la historia.**

—Gran parte de las piezas de la exposición están basadas en la idea del vestigio o la historia que nos revelan los materiales. En este contexto mundial que se está volcando cada vez más hacia lo digital, ¿qué crees que se pueda decir sobre esta circunstancia histórica a través de la piedra?

Hay una anécdota reciente que me fascinó cuando la leí: después del tristísimo incendio del Museo de Arte de Río de Janeiro hace unos años, hubo una imagen que empezó a circular en la que se mostraba dentro del museo un meteorito, de tamaño considerable, intacto. Hubo fotos donde se mostraba cómo todo se había quemado, con las salas completamente negras por el humo y la combustión, y sin embargo el meteorito seguía ahí.

Creo que las piedras nos recuerdan eso: pase lo que pase, se desarrolle como se desarrolle el mundo y la historia por venir, las piedras siempre van a estar ahí y en cualquier circunstancia siempre hay una manera de volver a ellas. **Evidentemente todo este mundo digital, inmaterial, el mundo de la nube, en donde ya nada existe físicamente, va a una velocidad increíble, pero creo que necesitamos la contrapartida,** de lo que siempre va a estar ahí.



Jose Dávila, *Es en nosotros donde los paisajes tienen paisaje*, 2019. Cortesía del Museo Amparo.

—El conjunto de piezas fue pensado y realizado para este espacio del Museo Amparo. ¿Cuáles fueron los principales retos con los que te encontraste en el proceso?

Efectivamente, las salas del museo son muy peculiares: **se trata de un edificio histórico que nunca fue pensado para ser museo**. Una de las cosas que pude identificar en las primeras visitas fue que **las salas eran bastante estrechas y largas, entonces quise trabajar con esa direccionalidad y con esa proporción**.

Lo anterior lo tomé en cuenta para el desarrollo de obra y para la selección final de las mismas obras, a fin de enfatizar y dialogar positivamente con esta peculiaridad de las salas.

El museo, al ser un edificio antiguo, en algunas de las salas tenía limitaciones muy claras de peso; lo que soporta el piso. Eso fue algo que se tuvo que tomar en cuenta para trabajar.



Vista de la exposición *Pensar como una montaña* de Jose Dávila en el Museo Amparo, 2019.
Cortesía del museo.

—La idea del vestigio y la relación entre material y cultura son aspectos que destacan en la exposición. En referencia a la investigación de la que se deriva la muestra, ¿en qué se podría convertir el arte de una civilización que desaparece?

Siempre me ha llamado la atención cómo [por milenios] ciertas culturas empezaron por adorar un objeto, que a veces era un **simple monolito**. De pronto, era un cierto acomodo de varios monolitos, así que ya había otra intención o una narrativa más compleja. Sin embargo, ambos tienen una gran fuerza simbólica. **¿Por qué de pronto hay montañas sagradas?** Pensemos en el **Uluru**, en Australia, donde está prohibido escalar, a petición de las civilizaciones nativas, ya que es una piedra sagrada para ellos.

Eso me lleva a pensar en las pinturas rupestres de Lascaux o de Altamira, que en general son los vestigios más antiguos que dan testimonio de un pensamiento humano, en donde se revela su capacidad de abstraer y representar el entorno y también sus miedos y adoraciones. **Todo está ahí y a la vez se relaciona en la escultura de grupos prehispánicos; esas formas labradas en piedra hablan de mucho más que el simple objeto, de las que se puede deducir una idiosincrasia o una manera de vivir, o unas prácticas culturales.**

Pienso que el arte siempre va a estar ahí como vestigio de la humanidad.



Jose Dávila, *They Combined Single Figures*, 2019. Cortesía del Museo Amparo.

—Aunque mencionaste que lo sagrado es algo muy presente desde el inicio de la humanidad, ¿consideras que esta idea tiene cabida en el contexto actual?

Es difícil porque se suele asociar a lo sagrado con lo religioso. **Están íntimamente ligados, pero me refería a lo sagrado en un sentido a veces un poco místico, en donde ciertos objetos le representan a cierto grupo de personas una conexión con algo más allá de lo explicable.** En este sentido, creo que a veces [el arte] te puede representar una relación profunda de algún sentimiento con algo que a ti te significa; digamos, como sucede cuando uno tiene ciertas pertenencias con valor afectivo. Aparentemente algo no puede valer nada; digamos una piedra, que trajiste porque fuiste a acampar cuando eras niño. La piedra en sí misma no tiene nada excepto ese vínculo que le atribuyes.

Habría que rescatar y entender el valor afectivo que podría tener el arte contemporáneo hoy en día y no nada más, por ejemplo, los otros tipos de valores que se asocian al arte contemporáneo, como el económico.



Vista de la exposición *Pensar como una montaña* de Jose Dávila en el Museo Amparo, 2019.
Cortesía del museo.

—Mencionaste en el recorrido de prensa un dato: «en 2030 aproximadamente el 60% de la humanidad vivirá en ciudades», lo cual es algo que nos pone a pensar en que, conforme crece la población, también crece esta idea de que lo hemos descubierto todo como especie, tanto en el planeta como fuera de él. Por esto quería conocer tu opinión sobre lo sagrado como una cualidad humana con relación a esta perspectiva del futuro.

De hecho, creo que es un poco pretencioso pensar que la humanidad en tanto especie conoce todo el planeta Tierra; se sabe que hemos explorado muy poco los océanos. Leí que solamente el año pasado habían descubierto cinco especies marinas en las profundidades del océano; o que hay animales que se creían extintos desde hace décadas y de pronto aparece uno casi de la nada.

Creo que también como raza humana creemos controlarlo todo y ni siquiera podemos controlar el planeta, por no mencionar las formas en las que lo estamos destruyendo.

La exposición estará abierta al público hasta el 16 de marzo de 2020.

0070/2019
ARTES VISUALES

Pensar como una montaña

LA REDACCIÓN | Jueves, 25 de noviembre de 2019



Corredor del Museo Amparo.

El Museo Amparo presenta la exposición *José Dávila. Pensar como una montaña*, un proyecto realizado específicamente para el espacio poblano bajo la curaduría de Amanda de la Garza. A través de citas, alusiones y guiños, Dávila establece un diálogo con la historia del arte.

Pensar como una montaña presenta 12 obras escultóricas y pictóricas, y es producto de una investigación artística emprendida por Dávila, que parte de principios de trabajo que a su vez constituyen modos de relación entre los objetos: equilibrio, suspensión, acoplamiento, resistencia, progresión, transparencia, negación, dependencia y voluntad.



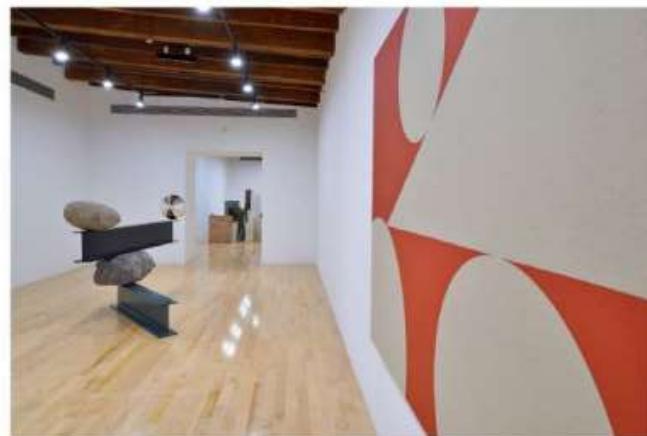
Los materiales empleados por el artista constituyen un motor para indagar sobre la condición material de la piedra y el vidrio, al mismo tiempo que esta condición se hace visible y concreta por medio de las interacciones que sostienen con elementos constructivos como el cemento y las vigas de acero.

Las relaciones entre estos materiales están planteadas a través del límite de los objetos, su lucha y su relación de dependencia con la gravedad. Simultáneamente, el espectador es quien produce y contempla estas relaciones de consonancia y diferencia.



Para esta muestra, que estará vigente hasta el 16 de marzo de 2020, el artista incorpora reflexiones planteadas por el minimalismo, la abstracción geométrica, así como del arte concreto brasileño, el constructivismo y el brutalismo.

A diferencia de otros artistas, José Dávila –que considera al arte como una investigación personal y empírica– no transforma los materiales para generar obras, su práctica consiste en evidenciar la materia de la que éstas se conforman.





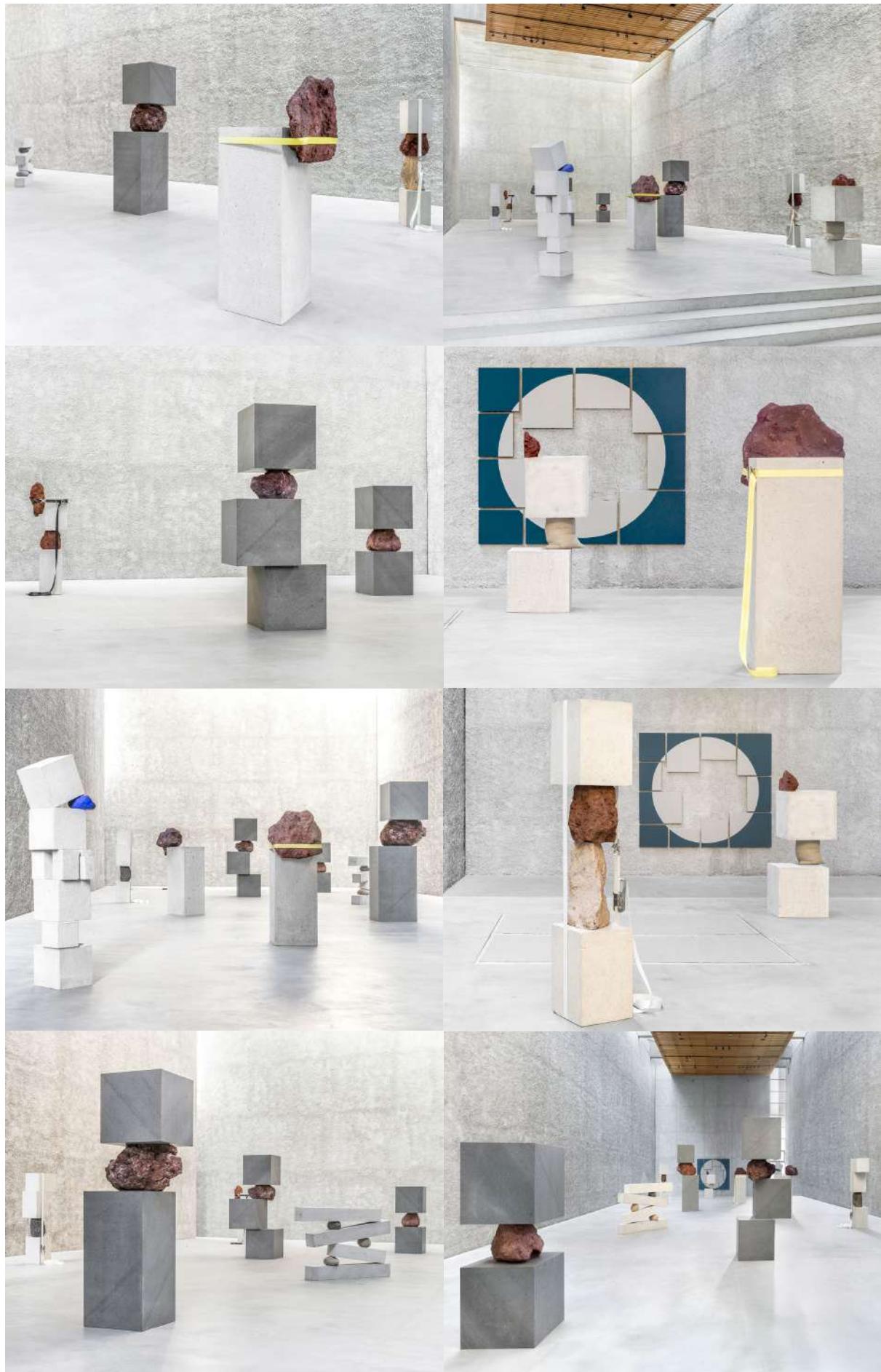
Mexican sculptor trained architect Jose Dávila's work originates from the symbolic languages that function within art history and Western visual culture. With strong sculptural languages, they reconfigured as contradictory and contrasting relations, taking the correspondence between form and content to its limit.

It's his third solo exhibition, *The Moment of Suspension*" at the stunning, 1967 Brutalist church, **König Galerie** in Berlin – Several works in the exhibition features uncut rock tethered to angular concrete blocks by a ratchet strap. An aura of weightlessness halos the topography of the linked stones. As individual works, these layered sculptures foreground the disintegrating influence of time, concretizing an entropic process that ends in perpetual stasis.



His architectural eye recasts volume itself as a raw material, using vertical surfaces, rectangles, and spheroid shapes to signify development and growth.







Photography by Roman März



José Dávila, Los Límites de lo Posible (The Limits of the Possible), 2019. Installation, Detrás del Muro (Behind the Wall), 13th Havana Biennial. Variable dimensions.

13th Havana Biennial

TATIANA FLORES

The 13th Havana Biennial, held from April 12 to May 12, 2019, opened under the shadow of Decree 340, a censorship measure established in December 2018. Widely decried by artists and intellectuals, the decree curtails artistic independence by forbidding gatherings and exhibitions without a permit and criminalizing uses of certain content, among others. Under these circumstances, it was somewhat ironic that the theme of the biennial was "The Construction of the Possible." Although the curatorial concept related to how to respond to contemporary global precarity under conditions of violence, social inequality, and environmental vulnerability, the theme also spoke to how to continue to operate under the latent threat posed by the Cuban regime.

The biennial's curatorial team consisted of Margarita González Lorente, Nelson Herrera Ysla, Margarita Sánchez Prieto, José Manuel Noceda Fernández, José Fernández Portal, Ibai Hernández Abascal, and Lisset Alonso Compte. The exhibi-

tions were spread over multiple venues, the main ones being the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wilfredo Lam, the Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales, Fototeca de Cuba, Casa Oswaldo Guayasamín, Casa México, and Pabellón Cuba. Indeed, the multiple locales made the experience of visiting the biennial unwieldy. The website of the event listed forty-four exhibition spaces, not counting the collateral shows, which numbered 133 on the official map. In all, it was next to impossible for any visitor to view the entire biennial in Havana. In addition, the cities of Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spíritus, and Camagüey also featured parallel exhibitions as part of the program.

The point of departure for the biennial was the Centro Lam. Here, visitors were treated to a tightly curated selection of works—an auspicious beginning. In the courtyard, Aleixa Miranda's *Tejido colectivo* (Collective Weave, 2013-19) welcomed the spectator. These cylindrical weavings in white cotton hung suspended from hoops, forming multiple intricate patterns as three-dimensional sculptures.

BIENNIAL

but also in two dimensions, through the shadows they cast on the ground. Their presence in this central location spoke to the artist's desire for these objects to activate communities. In her statement, she referred to how these weavings in her native El Salvador sought to function as a "tool for human cohesion." At the Centro Lam, they certainly compelled visitors to linger in the courtyard or to look down on it from the second story to view both the ways in which fellow spectators interacted with the weavings and the interplay of patterns they formed. Another sculptural piece that recalled phenomenological legacies of geometric abstraction was Tamara Campo's *Rincón* (White, 2019), an installation of hanging vertical white cloths positioned symmetrically to form an angle, which converged in a sort of

vanishing point when viewed from the center of the room. As expressed in the artist's eloquent statement, the piece spoke to "scale, monumentality, disorientation, the void, the search, nothingness, and everything."

The strength of the selection of textile-based work at Centro Lam was admirable. The tapestries of Abdoulaye Konaté, striking for their vivid colors and stunning designs, were equally intriguing for establishing a powerful counterpoint with Campo's and Miranda's pieces. Their white monochromes gave way to seemingly limitless tonal variation in Konaté's compositions. Most of the tapestries were formed of strips of color sewn onto the surface of an expansive plane, and they tended to hover between abstraction and representation. *Le Rouge*

et le Noir et les Signes (The Red and the Black and the Signs, 2018) established counterpoints of reds and blacks while *Papillon* (Butterfly) suggested an immense butterfly in blues, greens, and whites. Their meditation on color paired nicely with David Beltrán's five paintings from the series *The Archaeology of Color*, which occupied a nearby gallery. These works took as a point of departure minute paint samples from well-known paintings which are enlarged to reveal a universe of visual information in what would otherwise appear to the naked eye as pure color. In the case of the Cuban paintings, the artist was able to obtain samples from works by Sandú Darié and Joné Mijares from the collection of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. The remaining three paintings were based

The theme of the biennial was "The Construction of the Possible." Although the curatorial concept related to how to respond to contemporary global precarity under conditions of violence, social inequality, and environmental vulnerability, the theme also spoke to how to continue to operate under the latent threat posed by the Cuban regime.

Abdoulaye Konaté: *Composition vert et rouge (personnage)* (Composition Green and Red (Personage)), 2016. Textile. 96.75 x 74.75 in. (220 x 190 cm). Photo: Todd Whittle Art Photography. Courtesy of the artist and Diaz/Southern.



Aleixis Miranda: *Dónde Huelo Fuego de la noche Típico costarricense* (Where Was Fire from the Collective Weave series), 2013-2019. Interactive installation and intervention to renew the social fabric. Variable dimensions.





David Beltrán. *La sombra del pastor de la serie Arqueología del color iluminada en la fotografía stratigráfica a la obra La atracción de los pastores por Domenico Theotocópulos 'El Greco' (The Shadow of the Shepherd from the Archaeology of Color series based on the stratigraphic photograph of the work The Adoration of the Shepherds by Domenico Theotocópulos 'El Greco')*, 2019, Óleo en canvas, 55 1/2 x 98 1/2 in. (140 x 250 cm).

on existing stratigraphic photographs from conservation analyses of works by El Greco, Van Gogh, and Velázquez. The paintings were both fascinating, for thinking about the qualities of pigments in microcosmic terms, and also beautiful in their vivid coloration and unexpected formal attributes. They were complemented by didactic information in vitrines, which featured reproductions of the original paintings pinpointing the location from where each of the samples was drawn.

The installations and prints of Adler Guerrier delved into the relationship between abstraction and representation through a poetics of the mundane. His piece *Untitled (We find moments in the landscape, ripe for replenishment, and in positions conducive to imagine anew)* (2019) meshed perfectly with the theme of the biennial. The photographs of tropical nature are common in his work, but rather than being undefined sites of tourist desire, typical in representations of the Caribbean, they suggest a specific sense of place. Based on these images, the artist creates prints on paper overlaid with polygons which are echoed by wall paintings in pastel hues. The gallery included tropical plants within, engendering a playful exchange between representation and reality.

Maya Watanabe probed the threshold between life and death in her video installation *Sensus* (2018). Filmed in a Dutch anatomical theater, the video captures a crucian carp achieving a state

of biorhythms, in which all metabolic processes shut down, and the minimum of energy is expended. The fish is able to reach a level of cryogenic preservation to survive the winter's freezing temperatures. For the artist, this process is akin to the coping mechanisms of victims of ecocide and genocide. Tania Candiani also meditated on survival strategies in her video on view at the Centro Lam. Titled *El sonido de la labor: Cantos de trío* (Sound of Labour: Songs of Work) (2019), it featured a group of Afro-Cubans from Trinidad singing songs that their enslaved ancestors would have sung in the sugarcane fields. The shots of the singers were juxtaposed to the landscape and architecture of the sugar industry. Different scenes were introduced by quotes from Fernando Ortiz's *Black Slopes* (1916), which foregrounded the barbarism of the institution of slavery.

The painter and psychoanalyst Clemens Krauss also chose to work with local subjects. He offered free therapy sessions to visitors and painted a mural in the back patio inspired by these conversations. Rendered in thick impasto, the painting featured people viewed from above in configurations that underscored alienation and opacity because of their placement in relation to each other and within the vast expanse of the wall. It was a compelling display of social practice converging with pictorial representation.

Another strong showing of works was the selection presented at the Centro de

Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales. Memorable installations included a collection of pocket watches owned by notable Cubans who led nineteenth-century independence efforts presented by José Manuel Medina. It also featured Esther Aldaz's transformation of the building's rooftop into an urban oasis of sorts with a group of people-sized nests connected by walkways of newspapers against a blue backdrop suggesting a marine horizon. A series of tapestries installed in pairs by Reena Saini Kallat, transcribed in a combination of English and braille the preambles of the constitutions of countries in conflict. Lourdes de la Riva created a map-like wall installation composed of the pages of books that had been devoured by bookworms. The irregular page fragments were positioned against areas of black paint resembling inkblots, evoking themes of erasure and loss. Although many of the works were abstract or conceptual, there were strong instances of figuration, particularly in the case of Mary Sibande's installation of a mask resembling the artist's face and grounded in the reality of race and gender isolated against purple sculptural and pictorial elements evoking the fantastic. Cuban artist Luis García teamed up with the Spain-based collective C.A.S.I.T.A.—comprised of Loreto Alonso, Eduardo Galvagni, and Diego del Pozo—to present one of the most captivating and well-executed installations of the entire biennial. Titled *Jaboboco*, the work was a video projec-



tion in a room with objects and colored lights which were periodically activated to correspond to what was happening on screen. The video was based on an action executed at the Museo Histórico de Guanabacoa, which brought together seamstresses who had previously worked in textile factories that had been shuttered. A workshop was established where they sewed bags ("Jobos" in Cuban Spanish) and spoke about the impact that the closing of the factories had on the town and their lives. The video included clips of the women working, images of industrial machinery projected alongside their narration, and performative actions miming the labor of dressmaking and sewing. Flawlessly installed, the piece compelled visitors to stay for its entire 15-minute duration.

Across the Plaza Vieja, the Fototeca de Cuba presented a smaller selection of artists. Letta Alain's photomural, installed in the courtyard, was the highlight of this

grouping. Titled *Amar las diferencias* (Love the Differences), it was a selection from her series *Les Marocains* (The Moroccans) in which the artist traveled through Morocco with a makeshift studio making portraits of the people she encountered. Each of the subjects was photographed against a black background, and they were blown up larger than life-sized. Hovering over the spectators, the images both heroicized ordinary people and urged for empathy in the face of difference. Another notable series at the Fototeca was Max de Esteban's *20 Red Lights*. These were black and white photographs each overlaid with a red circle which offered a glossary of sorts of economic terms associated with neoliberalism. Printed against a white background, the images included words such as "Credit Default Swap," "Off-Balance-Sheet Financing," and "Sweet Equity" atop abandoned billboards or in urban environments, with their definitions provided below. These strange phrases and their equally convo-

luted meanings offered a potent critique of the inner workings of capitalism.

The Casa de México featured artwork by Charo Oquet, Richard-Víctor Sainsily-Cayol, and Matilde Marín. Sainsily-Cayol exhibited *Grosel Cruz II* (2019), a sculpture with nine barrels of rum atop a triangular base with blue neon light. The piece referenced to the triangular trade—the route between Europe, West Africa, and the Americas—where commodities were exchanged for human lives. The heavy barrels stacked in a pyramid formation contrasted with the ethereal light projected on their base; the human body was notably absent. Oquet's installation *Hues de Guáibir* (Caliban's Voices, 2019) was a complex assemblage of wood, ribbons, bottles, beads, feather, fake flowers, and colorfully painted diagrams around a structure akin to a tree of life. The festive colors and whimsical forms belied a somber message. The work was grounded on histories of violence against Haitian sugar

Richard-Víctor Sainsily Cayol, "Grosel Cruz II", 2019. Light installation from barrels and LED lights. Variable dimensions. (Photo courtesy of the artist)

Letta Alain, *Porteur d'eau* (Water Carrier) from the *Les Marocains* (The Moroccan) series, 2010–2014. Photograph: Courtesy Fundación Letta Alain and Galleria Continua





plantation workers in the Dominican Republic. Referencing Haitian Rara traditions (known as Gaga in the Dominican Republic), which are shown in an accompanying video, the piece speaks of resistance in the face of adversity. Nearby at the Casa Guayasamín, José Braithwaite presented a cohesive selection of sculptural reliefs and floor sculptures. Composed of found materials and intervened with white marks, the reliefs were structured as grids, infusing the legacy of geometric abstraction with a sense of randomness and disorder. The floor sculptures, consisting of mounds of earth with individual tiles interspersed within, reflected on the precarity of architecture.

Farther afield in the Vedado district, Pabellón Cuba featured a large selection of artists, including Dayana Trigo, Dania González, Adonis Flores, Nicolás Consuegra, Javier Hinojosa, Manaf Halbouni, Narda Alvarado, Natalia Rondón, Marianne Fahmy, Moataz Nasr, Cheikh Ndiane, Pedro Cabrita Reis, Hans Hamid Hasmusen, and Karlo Andre Ibarra. Among these, *Estratosfera* (Stratosphere, 2019) by Adonis Flores, a project envisioning a network of cable cars over Havana, was one of the most complexes. Installed in a corner, it juxtaposed a photographic rendering of the city visualizing the cable cars hanging overhead with transit maps complete with station names and connecting points for the proposed urban system. In the statement, the artist pointed out that instead "than seeming utopic, this idea is elevated over the dystopia that is Havana today,

overpopulated and subjected to the gradual impoverishment of its spaces." Natalia Rondón also contributed a cartographic series to the selection. Titled *Cartografía portátil. Objetos de viaje* (Portable Cartography. Travel Objects), the pieces were weathered textiles with maps, and transit plans from Venezuela printed on them, in some cases barely visible. Suggesting blankets, these cloths spoke to collective nostalgia for a country that has become a shadow of its former self.

The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes featured several exhibitions from the biennial. A solo show of recent sculptures by Gabriel Orozco was presented in the building dedicated to international art. Installations by the heavyweights of Cuban art of the last few decades were installed on the ground floor of the Cuban art building as part of the exhibition *Museos interiores* (Interior Museums), featuring works that recently entered the collection. A regatta by KCHO, first made in 1993, felt equally relevant today.

An installation of eight cabinets, *Alacenas (Cupboards) Katrina, Sandy, Gustav, Michelle, Ivan, Wilma, Flora, Irma, and Andrew* (2018)—each named after a major hurricane that has affected the region—containing an audio track of storm sounds collected by the artists, was poignant both for its subject matter and for being one of the last works that Los Carpinteros made together. The selection also included *Partitura* (Score, 2017) by Carlos Garaicoa, an installation of videos on small screens placed on lecterns and mimicking the

Los Carpinteros. *Alacenes* (Pantries) series, 2018. Installation with kitchen pantries and sound recordings produced by hurricanes. Variable dimensions.



configuration of an orchestra, around a central projection featuring a score based on music played by buskers in an urban space. The most arresting of the pieces on display was *Taller de Reparaciones* (Repair Shop, 1997) by René Francisco Rodríguez. It is a fascinating collection of objects, art reproductions, and machines that hold a special significance for the artist. A contemporary cabinet of curiosities, the piece is a kind of self-portrait through things. It comments on the process of collecting as autobiography while also being remarkable for having been made during the Special Period, demonstrating ingenuity under adverse living conditions. Originally exhibited at the VI Biennial at La Cabaña, the colonial fortress that used to host the event, it was adapted to its new setting with a chain-link fence that created an open communal space. Overall, the selection of *Museos Interiores* demonstrated the strength of Cuban art over the past three decades. What was disappointing was that no women were included in the selection.

The city itself also served as an exhibition space for diverse projects. Glenda León presented the installation *Mecánica Natural* (Natural Mechanics) at an abandoned terminal tram station in Vedado. The artist placed in this cavernous hangar-like space two related scenes, a group of tree branches replete with little toy cars driving atop them as if on an interstate and an actual vehicle—completely wrecked—underneath a dead tree. The juxtaposition was startling. As described in the curatorial text written



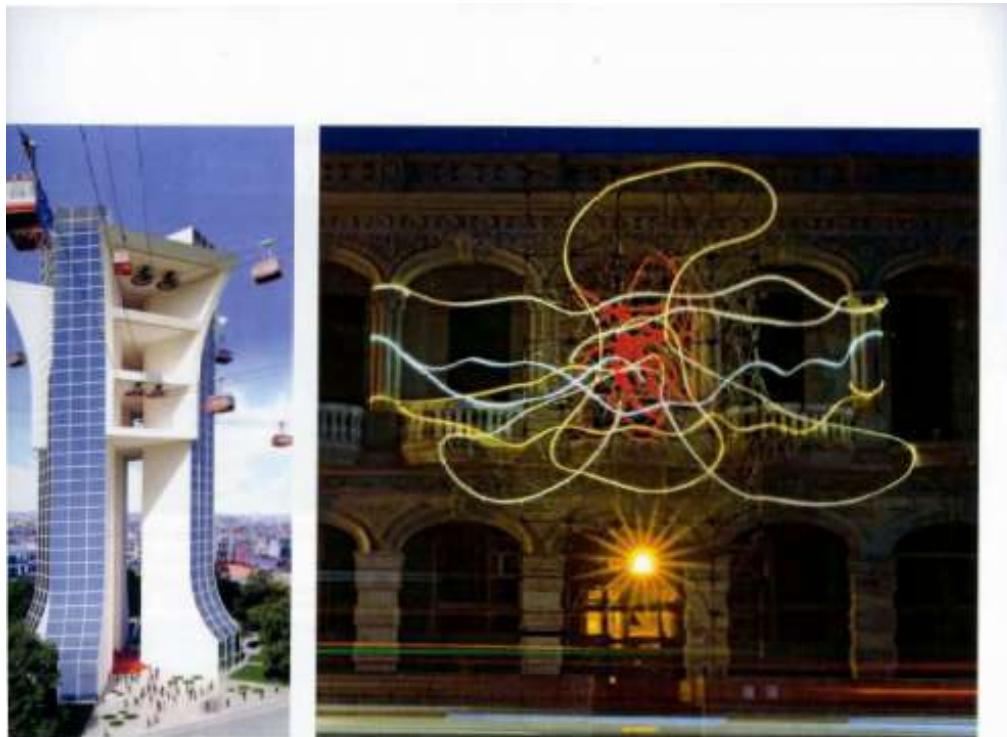
Carlos Garaicoa. *Pintura (Score)*, 2017. Installation. Variable dimensions

René Francisco Rodríguez. *Taller de reparaciones (Repair Shop)*, 1997-2019. Different objects, oil on plexiglass. Variable dimensions



Glenda León. *Mecánica Natural (Natural Mechanics)*, 2019. Installation with dead trees, car, toy-sized cars and butterfly. Variable dimensions





Tatiana Flores, Estatuílles (Stethographs), 2019.

Grimanesa Amorós, Mariposa dorada (Golden Butterfly), 2019. Light sculpture, Variable dimensions.

by Pompidou's curator Ilaria Conti, "By shifting between macro-and micro-scale, the artist has induced a glitch in our expectations, allowing us to observe the pre-constructed forms of interpretation that guide our thinking."

Closer to the center of the action, *Detrás del Muro* (Behind the Wall), a public art exhibition around Havana's iconic Malecón seaside boulevard, held its third edition. Curated by Juan Delgado Calzadilla, the event included thirty Cuban artists and fourteen international ones. Some of the artists were repeated attendees, including Carlos Martiel and Arleix del Río, and Cuban-Americans Emilio Pérez, Antonia Wright, and Enrique Martínez Celaya. International artists included Grimanesa Amorós, with a striking neon light sculpture on the façade of a building, and José Dávila, with large rocks resting on concrete slabs. William Córdova, who presented a concrete pyramidal structure composed of blocks which were casts of boomboxes, and Marcos Lutyens, with a textured walkway, meant to be exper-

enced while blindfolded to activate the sense of touch through the feet, were also featured. Overall, the presentation of this outdoor work created communal spaces and engaged inhabitants and visitors of the city who would not otherwise visit the biennial's exhibitions. It was the most central and visible of all.

Shortly following the closure of the biennial, President Trump's announced new restrictions on traveling to the island from the United States, eliminating the people-to-people group travel category. It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the cultural life of the island and the next biennial. Although this edition was maddeningly dispersed, it was clearly a labor of love for the curators, artists, and cultural workers who made it possible. For visitors, it was inevitable to avoid the sense of having missed much of it, but this was counterbalanced by certain encounters with remarkable works of art.

TATIANA FLORES

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EXCERPT: EXHIBITION

A New Jose Dávila Exhibition in A Stunning Brutalist Church

by Monica Khemsurov

If you've ever visited König Galerie in Berlin, which is housed in a renovated 1967 Brutalist church with a skylit concrete nave, you'll know that there are only a few places in the world to experience contemporary art in such a breathtaking setting. There are also only a few artists whose work would be quite so at home in that nave as Jose Dávila, the Mexican sculptor who trained as an architect and is known for his focus on space, balance, and proportion. In his third solo exhibition at König, *The Moment of Suspension*, Dávila has created a dialogue with the surroundings by way of two of his favorite materials, stone and concrete — stacking them into totems whose textures echo the walls, yet whose precariously balanced forms introduce a quietly charged uncertainty into a room that was quite literally built as a paean to symmetrical perfection. This is one we truly wish we could see in person, but scroll down to see the next best thing.

11/05/2019

PHOTOS BY ROMAN MÄRZ



Jose Dávila: el arte de estivar

Cristián Silva

Ya desde los inicios de su trayectoria fue posible advertir en la obra de Jose Dávila (Guadalajara, México, 1974), una predilección por la pureza formal y el uso de lenguajes plásticos que lograron conciliar un peculiar balance entre austerioridad y exuberancia. Es así como a lo largo de los años, sus propuestas han estado invariablemente conformadas por gestos limpios, categóricos y rotundos, tras los cuales subyace siempre una fuerte carga emocional.

Visual, material y culturalmente oscilando entre lo orgánico, lo geométrico y lo sintético, entre lo frágil y lo estable, entre lo erudito y lo popular, entre lo calculado y lo azaroso, entre lo contingente y lo trascendente, la obra de Jose Dávila se ha distinguido por revisar con lucidez las fricciones modernas entre las artes visuales, la arquitectura y el diseño.

Intrigado fundamentalmente por las nociones de equilibrio, vacío, descalce, transparencia, reflejo y repetición, durante la última década Dávila se ha encargado de habilitar en su ciudad natal un laboratorio de experimentación, investigación y producción desde el cual ha explorado la naturaleza transitoria de ciertas estructuras físicas, a través del desarrollo de una suerte de "ingeniería poética".

A veces a partir de gestos diminutos y otras veces por medio de ambiciosas operaciones, su obra consigue orquestar fuerzas opuestas y evocar los misterios de la condición humana, en toda su inestabilidad, precariedad y grandeza; en ese sentido, su trabajo se permite ser juguetón (sin perder la compostura), sentimental (sin ser cándido), y solemne (sin dejar de lado la picardía tan propia del folclor y las artes tradicionales mexicanas).

Desde la permanente negociación con la fuerza de gravedad, cada pieza de Jose Dávila constituye una especie de acuerdo, de pacto o tregua momentánea y armónica entre elementos

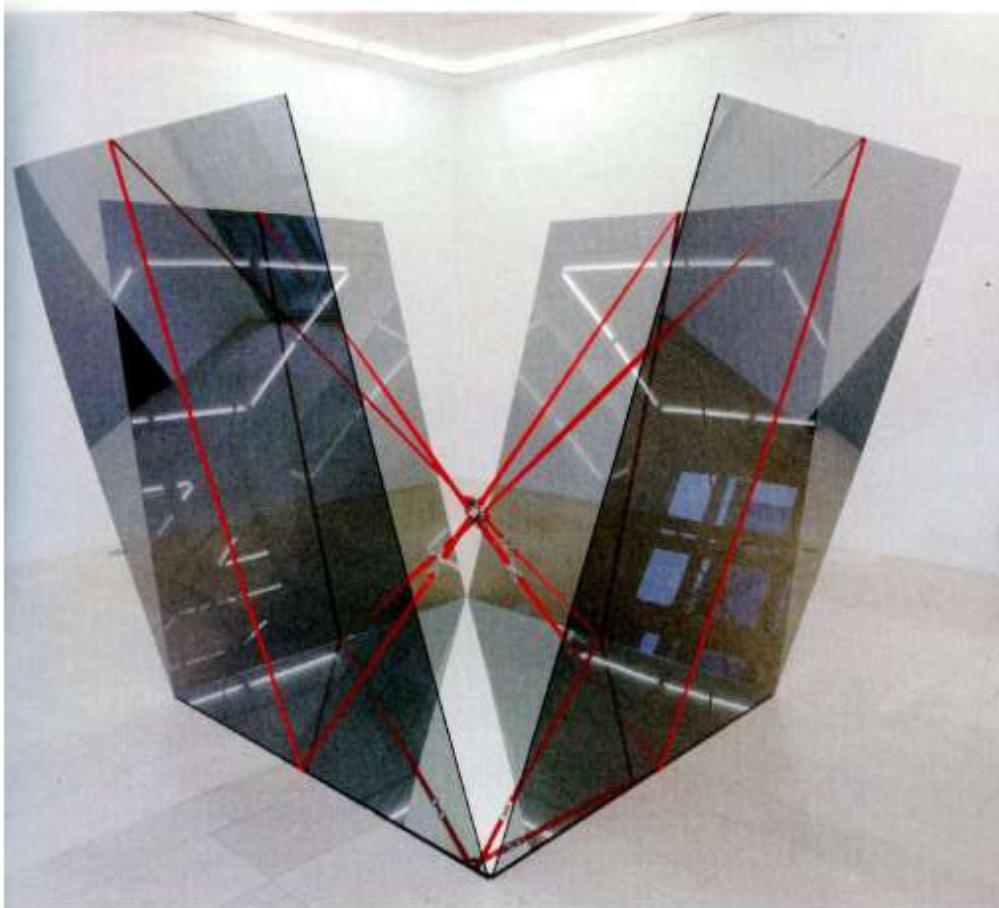
divergentes, disparatados, a veces hasta antagónicos. En extremo alejado de la "desaparición del objeto" propuesta por el arte conceptual más ortodoxo, Dávila saborea, celebra y exalta la materialidad y su presencia, enfatizando los alcances simbólicos de ciertos objetos y materiales, y buscando el modo para que todo aquello resuene vivencialmente ante la particularidad —y ojalá la complicidad— de cada espectador.

Poniendo en práctica la mayoría de los términos que el escultor Richard Serra sugirió en su célebre lista de verbos de 1967 ("...plegar, almacenar, torcer, anudar, insertar, rotar, enganchar, colgar, suspender, recolectar, agrupar, tensar, empaquetar, amontonar, distribuir, sujetar, envolver, amarrar, aparear, abisagrar, expandir, modular, estirar, forzar...", etc.), Dávila se ha convertido en el maestro estibador por excelencia, y hasta podría afirmarse que las estrategias de configuración visual y espacial de sus obras surgen desde la capacidad misma de acomodo, elasticidad, aguante y resistencia de la materia.

Los siempre elegantes ejercicios formales y racionales de Jose Dávila intentan ambiciosamente acercar la abstracción —tanto geométrica como orgánica— a un nivel más íntimo, afectivo, humanista, incluso sensual; se trata de piezas que no solo van al rescate del asombro y la contemplación, sino también de la interacción entre la espiritualidad y las dinámicas físicas.

Para Jose Dávila el arte es y será un espacio de libertad: la construcción sensible de sistemas de relaciones en los que conviven diferentes eras, estilos, emociones y corrientes de pensamiento.

Cristián Silva es crítico y profesor universitario en Chile.



Jose Dávila. A cube symbolically has no middle point, 2017. Foto: Kai Riechers. Cortesía del artista.



Jose Dávila
Sense of Place, 2017
concrete
240 x 240 x 240 cm
unique

Jose Dávila

Sense of Place

You can't step into the same river twice, or so people say. This adage refers to the way time acts on things, moving them, altering them, dragging them along.

The installation *Sense of Place* by Mexican artist Jose Dávila (born 1974 in Guadalajara) elevates this idea to its guiding principle. In September 2017, in cooperation with Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND)* and Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA**, he erected an 8-ton, 2.4-meter concrete cube in West Hollywood Park, Los Angeles – Dávila's largest and most complex outdoor sculpture to date. The object is no monolith, rather it consists of forty separate concrete elements that only make a cube when correctly assembled – a giant three-dimensional Tetris puzzle.

From November 2017, Dávila began taking the sculpture apart again, step by step. In three phases elements removed firstly from the top traveled to twenty select locations in Los Angeles, including Santa Monica Pier, Hollywood, Beverly Hills City Hall, UCLA, Downtown, and Los Angeles Union Station. Eventually, all of the cube's pieces had been removed and for six months "floated" around the city. Free of any specific purpose, they appeared here and there, were used to sit or climb on, and became covered in dirt and graffiti.

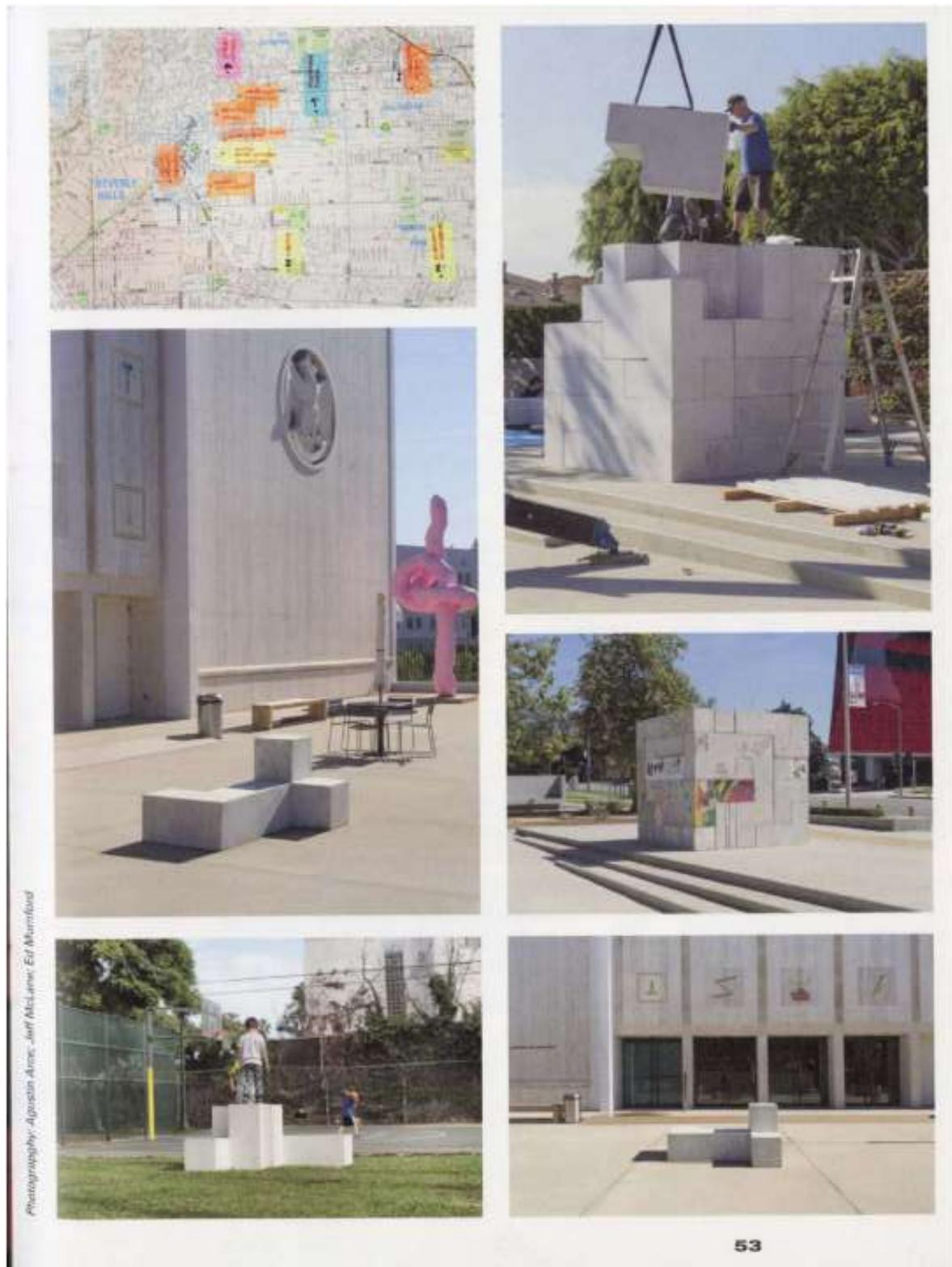
After interacting with the city and its various inhabitants in this unplanned way, in May 2018, the parts found their way back to their original location in West Hollywood Park. No longer the same as it had been before, the cube told the story of its journey. As curator Shamim Momin explained at the outset: "When they come back, visibly or not, they'll bring their histories back to the site, creating a portrait of Los Angeles."

In a short essay, film director and author Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Shape of Water*), who was also born in Guadalajara, refers to Dávila's installation when he describes Los Angeles as a city in flux, put together like a puzzle, and which cannot be reduced to a common denominator: "the dynamic of [...] LA is fluid, ever-changing."

*Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND) is a nonprofit organization founded in 2009 with the commitment to curating site-specific public art exhibitions in Los Angeles and beyond.

**Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a collaboration of arts institutions across Southern California, each presenting thematically linked exhibitions and programs designed to celebrate the region's vibrant cultural history.





Guillermo del Toro

Untitled, LA

Los Angeles is not a city, it's a puzzle of cities. When people say that they love or hate it, I always wonder which of the many cities they are talking about.

One of my favorite puzzle cities in Los Angeles is Koreatown. Even its denomination hints at the ever-changing nature of Los Angeles. In the early part of the twentieth century, a few Korean families bloomed around its churches. By mid-century, the area contained many beautiful architectural landmarks of the cosmopolis—some, like the Ambassador Hotel, were linked with the film community (Academy Awards were hosted there), while others, many others figured prominently in the emerging film noirs, most famously the *D.O.A.* building on Serrano Avenue—and its very urban landscape proved to be incredibly photogenic.

After the 1960s, economic decline dominated the area but solidified its Korean identity, establishing in the '80s the proper Koreatown, and the area rose again.

In my opinion, many of its streets and buildings stand as some of the most cinematic of this city, and both culturally and on the culinary front, Koreatown offers innovation and enormous power. The dynamic of every piece of the puzzle that is Los Angeles is fluid, ever-changing. Each area holds a secret history in its genealogy and identity: faded splendor coexists with gritty street life and stands side by side with pop-up restaurants, old eateries, and avant-garde art. It's hard to know exactly which of these energizes Koreatown the most. Much like all notable things in our life, it is their polychrome nature—the very fact that their parts seem both deep and irreconcilable—that make us fall in love with them so hard.



Perderse para encontrarse

El mexicano Jose Dávila expone en Madrid los tótems con los que amplía su definición de escultura y ratifica su defensa del arte por el arte

ÁNGELA MOLINA

13 SEP 2018 - 11:27 CEST



El artista Jose Dávila, en su estudio en Guadalajara, México. AGUSTÍN ARCE

Las esculturas de Jose Dávila ([Guadalajara, 1974](#)) están íntimamente ligadas a las preocupaciones de los primeros artistas abstractos que realizaron tótems o cuyos títulos delatan un interés por las prácticas rituales y el movimiento. En *Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost* (*No todo el que vaga está perdido*) está contenida esa idea, como una brújula que apunta al Sur, en el pabellón Villanueva del [Real Jardín Botánico de Madrid](#), donde está su “gliptoteca acumulativa”, que en unos días pondrá a disposición de los visitantes para que deambulen mientras exploran los procedimientos de modelado, de adiciones y sustracciones de material, huellas y ecos de un territorio que otros ya habían descubierto. Dávila reelabora continuamente sus fuentes, ancladas en la escultura moderna que considera el volumen no un objeto sagrado y arcaico, sino la expresión condensada de un complejo de sentimientos y deseos que el artista siente operar en sí mismo. En

paralelo, la galería **Travesía Cuatro** exhibirá sus últimas pinturas y serigrafías compuestas con textos e imágenes apropiadas de la gráfica neoconcreta.

PREGUNTA. En el arte moderno, era común que los artistas jugaran con los diferentes puntos de vista de sus esculturas. El propio **Matisse** hacía que se tomaran varias fotografías de la misma escultura y disfrutaba con las discordancias entre ellas. ¿Le interesa provocar o burlar al espectador?

Respuesta. Conuerdo con la riqueza de la tridimensionalidad y las posibilidades de que una obra ofrezca más de una sola visión de sí misma, pero eso no implica una burla o provocación al espectador. Yo soy muy a menudo espectador, y desde luego no me interesa que intenten burlarme. Lo que me motiva es ver una exposición que me haga reflexionar, y me dispare procesos de pensamiento, de imaginación y emoción. Más que una provocación, lo que busco es la complicidad con el espectador.

Mi obra está llena de referencias. No entiendo el arte como un concurso de originalidad sino como un ejercicio de libertad.

P. Los trabajos que exhibirá en el Jardín Botánico muestran la oposición entre la escultura como fragmento y la escultura como totalidad. ¿Cómo gestiona esta paradoja?

R. En mi trabajo parto de ciertos principios para guiar un desarrollo de resultados no controlados. Me centro en lo que busco y no en lo que puedo obtener. Si la obra supera o no esa paradoja, acaba siendo circunstancial, no algo que busque por se.

P. Entonces se parece más al proceso de un pintor.

R. Sí, es más parecido a estar frente a un lienzo e ir trabajando con una paleta de colores. Procuro tener la cantidad necesaria de materiales en mi estudio e ir utilizándolos según el momento. Me parece fundamental tener en cuenta que es el material el que habla, los objetos están llenos de poder simbólico, también de valores que les damos personal y culturalmente. Es en esta medida que he intentado amalgamar un amplio espectro de materiales para esta exposición en Travesía Cuatro y generar un amplio compás de libre asociación de ideas. Hay un ecosistema de materiales que están en el estudio. No tienen un fin específico, están ahí esperando para que en el momento adecuado los pueda utilizar, como el resultado de una necesidad inmediata que se desprende de la improvisación. Esa interconectividad es un distintivo de este cuerpo de obra que se basa en un lenguaje clásico y atemporal de la escultura.

Al mercado le encanta la repetición incesante de una fórmula para controlar al artista e identificarlo en el pasillo de una feria.

P. Reivindica el idealismo y una vuelta a la modernidad como un valor casi ético, aunque su obra es formalmente posmoderna.

R. Soy un artista, admirador, espectador, mi obra está llena de referencias y, como Newton, pienso que nos subimos a hombros de gigantes que no supieron patentar sus conocimientos. No entiendo el arte como un concurso de originalidad sino como un ejercicio de libertad.

P. ¿Cómo se enfrenta a la industria del arte, a la comodificación del objeto?

R. De la manera más honesta que puedo, y es no pensando en ello. Los procesos creativos no están mediados por el apetito del mercado. Me gusta trabajar con las ideas y con las necesidades que encuentro de manera personal para no estar repitiéndome o copiándome a mí mismo. Al mercado le encanta la repetición incesante de una fórmula para así controlar al artista y poder identificarlo sin mayor esfuerzo en el pasillo de una feria. Yo trabajo sin preocuparme por esto. Tengo varios cuerpos de obra que son muy distintos entre sí. Y no solo el mercado castiga; a veces también la crítica puede entender la búsqueda como dispersión.

P. Sus obras esquivan temas tan actuales en la escultura como las condiciones del espacio colectivo, urbano, público. ¿Es una crítica indirecta a la superabundancia de obras políticas?

R. Me parece que el peligro está en el manierismo político de muchas de estas obras que se llaman “comprometidas”, que desde la ingenuidad no solucionan nada. Se hacen desde la ligereza y acaban socavando el interés de las buenas obras de arte que sí plantean seriamente el tema. Creo que la vía cívica suele ser mucho más efectiva que la artística cuando la intención que se tiene es atacar el problema de fondo. Yo tengo contacto con gente muy comprometida en México que ayuda a gente muy desfavorecida y no les interesa el foco del arte, y conozco también a artistas que no donan ni un solo euro a las causas que dicen defender en sus obras. Prefiero ayudar desde mi responsabilidad social como ciudadano y ser honesto como artista en mi interés del arte por el arte.

P. La tradición artística mexicana es política y realista...

R. Estamos involucrados en un entorno que no deja a nadie indiferente. Hay cientos de cosas fatales en mi país. Lo que intento decir es que el arte tiene sus propias reglas, las reglas que cada uno le pone a sus obras. Debemos inventar las montañas para después poder escalarlas.

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Voces desde
el arte

| Jose Dávila |

Jose Dávila

Fotografía / Stepanie Munguia

La obra de Jose Dávila cuestiona la tradición modernista que ha dado forma al arte del siglo XX. A través de la apropiación y la consecuente reconfiguración, el artista utiliza como material de trabajo las obras de ciertos artistas, poniendo especial énfasis en cómo han sido registradas y puestas en circulación a manera de imágenes. Mediante la duplicación y la alteración, Dávila fractura las dinámicas de reconocimiento que normalmente permiten la configuración de iconos y de modos de ver. Otra vía para problematizar lo anterior es transformar lo plásmicamente pictórico en elementos escultóricos, imponiendo consecuencias espaciales a lo que solía ser bidimensional.

Su trabajo escultórico toma como punto de partida la especificidad de los materiales utilizados: su procedencia o su valor son elementos que entran

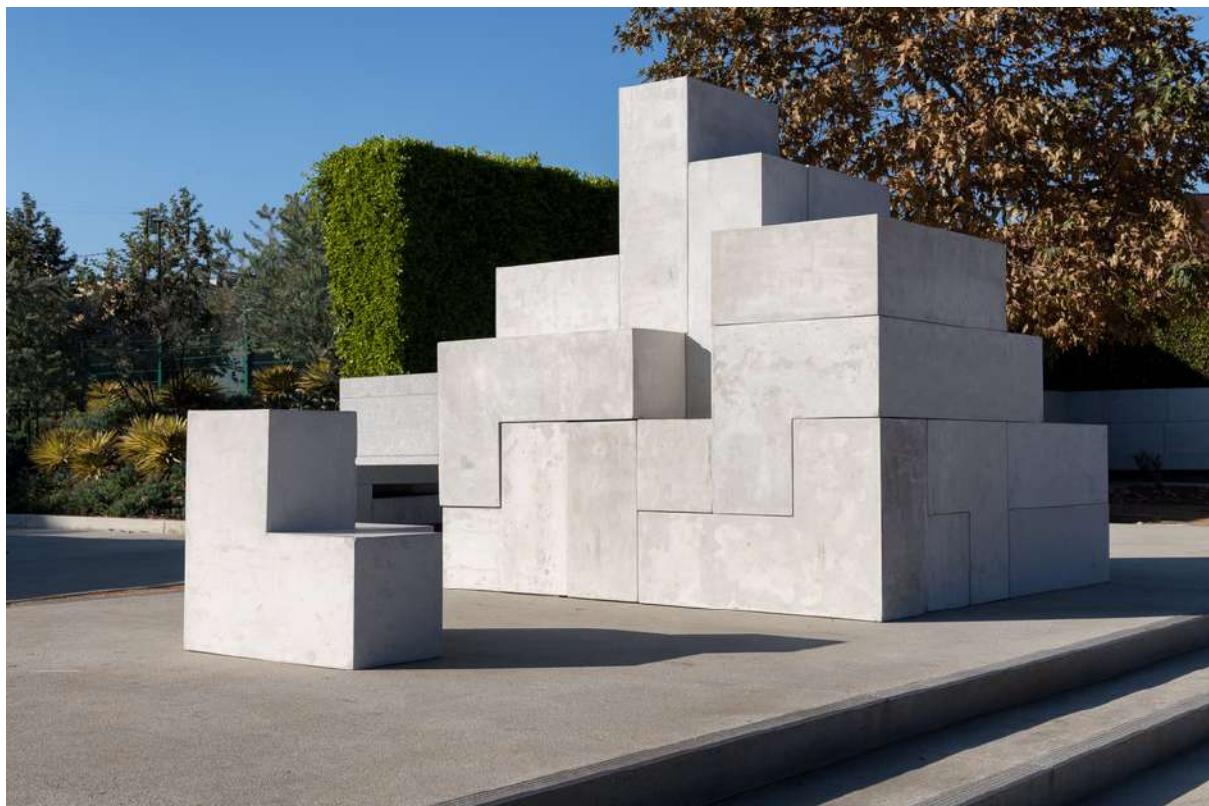
en juego. Materiales industriales como el vidrio, el acero o el concreto, interactúan con materiales naturales "en crudo" como rocas o mármol. Dávila también utiliza objetos comunes como cajas de cartón, para crear réplicas de otras esculturas fácilmente reconocibles, con el fin de evidenciar cómo ciertas formas de ocupar el espacio también se inscriben en este sistema de referencialidad visual.

Dávila ha recibido apoyo de la Andy Warhol Foundation, la Kunst-Werke Residency y la Beca Nacional para Jóvenes Artistas por el Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes. Su trabajo ha sido exhibido en instituciones y museos en Estados Unidos, Europa y América Latina. Jose Dávila vive y trabaja en Guadalajara, México.

josedavila.mx

JOSE DÁVILA: DECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

BY MILLER SCHULMAN



Photographed by Agustín Arce

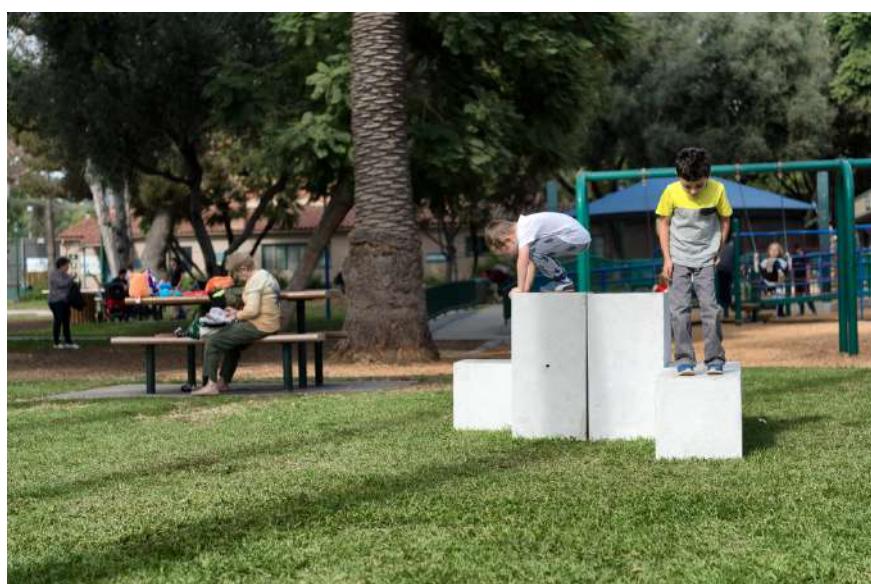
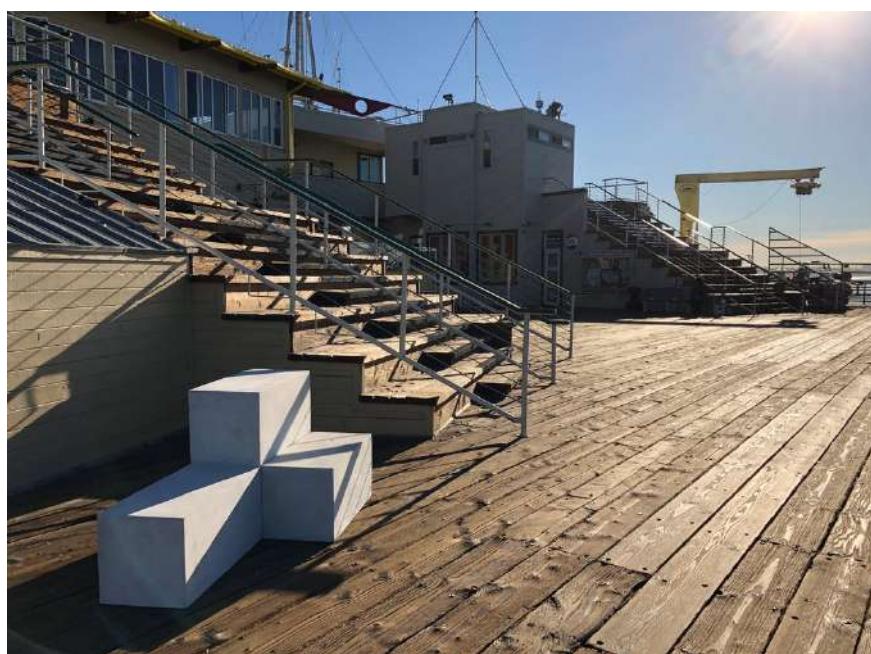
With a solo show at Mexico City's OMR Gallery, and a multi-site exposition of large-scale public sculptures throughout Los Angeles, Dávila is quickly defining himself as one of Mexico's most renowned contemporary artists. Yet Dávila's artistic practice—and views toward Mexican contemporary art—deviates from the status quo of the Mexican art world. Mexico's scene, including the best galleries, museums, and private foundations, is largely centered around Mexico City. The US-Mexico border also has its own creative centers and idiosyncratic culture, which many prominent contemporary artists explore and examine in their work. Dávila belongs to neither of these groups. Born and based in Guadalajara, Dávila rejects the label of *Mexican* contemporary artist.

At first glance his art is placeless and timeless; his sculptures and paintings interrogate, reproduce, and deconstruct canonical pieces of 20th century art and architecture. In other works Dávila explores structural tension and balance; pieces of raw construction material are placed at precarious angles, or constructed seemingly on the verge of collapse. Yet his tensions

and interventions always neutralize the art works. Famous paintings and photographs are cut out and flattened, and sculptures are safely counterbalanced and structurally sound.

These tensions and pressures come forward in Dávila's personality. Speaking to Dávila before his opening at OMR, he explained that he dislikes the concept of the "Mexican" contemporary artist. "As a Mexican artist, it can be difficult to escape the perceived *exotic*," explains Dávila. He then told us that he has always been skeptical of national identities, and has attempted to make his art more universal. "I am interested in international materials—these erase borders in a way," says Dávila in front of his sculptures. "The same steel beam, for example, in this piece, can be bought in the US, in Brazil, in India, wherever in the world."

While most of Dávila's materials are inherently global, selected components tether him to Mexico. For some of his sculptures he incorporates boulders found outside of his hometown of Guadalajara. Though these boulders are innately Mexican, in a way they are also global. "They are at once placeless, and completely of the location from which they were found," says Dávila.





Dávila reconciles his Mexican and international identities in his Los Angeles sculpture exhibition, *Sense of Place*. Commissioned and curated by the Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND), *Sense of Place* is a public sculpture exhibition that migrates and integrates into the diverse urban landscape of Los Angeles, drawing a portrait of the city's varied experiences and storied past. Beginning in September 2017, Dávila installed an 8 square-foot cube composed of 40 pieces of reinforced concrete in a West Hollywood park. Over the course of nine months, the form has been disassembled and scattered throughout diverse spaces in Los Angeles. At the end of the project in May 2018, the cube will be reassembled, "holding its travel histories in its reunited form." While the components of the cube are aesthetically placeless, they were produced in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Like many of Dávila's architecturally-influenced projects, *Sense of Place* is based on the deconstruction and disassembling of a structure. With an academic formation in architecture, Dávila often takes inspiration from iconic Mexican designers like Luis Barragán and Mathias Goeritz. Though he tries to distance himself from his Mexican identity, Dávila is constantly being drawn back to his national roots, whether through his explorations and deconstructions of Mexican modernism or through his use of Mexican materials.

It is in the pieces that examine both Mexico and the world beyond that Dávila is most successful as an artist. Like the components in *Sense of Place*, Dávila has been marked by his personal history and place of origin. He is at once aesthetically international, and deeply Guadalajaran. Yet these tensions aren't negative or contradictory. Dávila thrives on tension, and harnesses its energy to posit himself as one of Mexico's most influential artists.

Questionnaire: Jose Dávila

Q: What should stay the same? A: 'The North Pole.'

BY JOSE DÁVILA



Fernando González
Gortázar, *La torre de los cubos* (The Tower of Cubes), Guadalajara, México, 1972. Courtesy:
FGG archive;
photograph: Carlos Díaz Corona

What images keep you company in the space where you work?

I'm surrounded mainly by my own work, which changes now and then. At the moment, I've hung up a photograph of Marcel Duchamp smoking a cigarette next to his urinal, *Fountain* (1917) – except he's been cut out of the picture. There's also a painting I recently completed, based on graphics by Hilma af Klimt, and another small painting by my daughter, alongside a photograph of the two of us taken by a friend.

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?

Every morning, on my way to school, I would pass by Fernando González-Gortázar's public sculpture *La Torre de los Cubos* (Tower of Cubes, 1972). Even though I was only six or seven years old, it always made me wonder.

If you could live with only one piece of art what would it be?

Erased de Kooning Drawing (1953) by Robert Rauschenberg.

What is your favourite title of an artwork?

Throwing Three Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line (Best of Thirty-Six Attempts) (1973) by John Baldessari.

What do you wish you knew?

How to play piano well enough to lose myself all afternoon.

What should change?

The corruption and impunity affecting all levels of the government and judiciary in Mexico.

What could you imagine doing if you didn't do what you do?

Owning a small restaurant where i would buy the produce myself every morning at the market, and cook it myself every night for my guests.

What music are you listening to?

Simón Díaz's album *Tonadas* (2003).

What are you reading?

Tales of the Greek Heroes (1958) by Roger Lancelyn Green.

What do you like the look of?

My wife and daughter laughing together.

What is art for?

To trigger people's minds..

JOSE DÁVILA

Jose Dávila is an artist based in Guadalajara, Mexico. In January, he had a solo show at Galería OMR, Mexico City. He has forthcoming solo shows at LAND, Los Angeles, USA, in May, and Kunsthalle Hamburg, Germany, in June.



José Dávila elabora el discurso de *Mecánica de lo inestable*, su exposición en la galería OMR, a partir de las características de los materiales que conforman sus esculturas. “Me interesa eximir momentos poéticos a soluciones aparentemente muy técnicas”, comenta el creador, que se formó como arquitecto. En la primera parte de la muestra, en la planta baja de la casa ubicada en la calle de Córdoba de la colonia Roma, hay dos largas vigas de acero suspendidas del techo. Contrastan con un globo rojo, un pequeño gesto que acentúa la diferencia de los materiales. “Además de ser un discurso sobre el equilibrio y la gravedad, las piezas también exhiben lo primitivo y lo industrial, lo frágil y lo sólido”, asegura Dávila.



El título de la muestra, que el creador asegura podría ser el de una tesis de ingeniería, revela que gracias a la gravedad es posible entender conceptos como el de estabilidad, balance y desequilibrio. “Las piezas que están abajo se sostienen a sí mismas.

Evidentemente me interesaba la altura del espacio de la OMR y que la retícula de su techo, que está hecho de casetones, permite pasar el cable metálico para sujetar los elementos, no fue necesario poner argollas y anclarlas. Las cuatro columnas prominentes de la galería, por otro lado, también entraron al juego de sostenimiento de las vigas”, explica Dávila. Arriba, donde continúa la exposición, se decidió hacer contrapeso a lo contundente, sólido y grande de estas piezas con otras más frágiles y silenciosas.



A diferencia de otros artistas, Dávila –que considera al arte como una investigación personal y empírica– no transforma los materiales para generar obras, su práctica consiste en evidenciar la materia de la que éstas se conforman. *Panopticon*, una pieza con volúmenes apilados, que forma parte de la segunda parte de la muestra, por ejemplo, juega con el contraste del peso de sus materiales. Un elemento interesante de la obra es la escultura que simula un atlas griego que sostiene un cubo de yeso, un bloque de madera y una roca. Encima de esta torre pende una esfera dorada, rematando las fuerzas que mantienen en pie a la escultura.

Este entramado de piezas en equilibrio es matizado con elementos a través de los cuales se visibilizan de forma poética las propiedades de la materia. Otra escultura de la muestra, *Every Finding Has a Consequence*, es coronada por una manzana roja. El creador lo explica de esta forma: “Hay elementos simbólicos que generar otras lecturas. La manzana, por ejemplo, tiene que ver con la gravedad y lo científico, pero también con la religión y las tentaciones”. Sobre el globo rojo, que convive en medio de la pesadez de las vigas, Dávila comenta que “alude a lo infantil, lo romántico y lo naive (lo opuesto a lo racional). El globo, por otro lado, siempre va en contra de la fuerza de gravedad, aunque parezca frágil tiene toda la fuerza para trabajar en un sentido opuesto y elevarse en lugar de caer, debido al helio que contiene”.



A *Mecánica de lo inestable*, que genera imágenes entre sistemas aparentemente opuestos que son interpretados a partir de la dicotomía entre la ecuanimidad y el desequilibrio, la constituyen un cúmulo de contradicciones matéricas que son inherentes a cualquier cosa que ocupa un lugar en el espacio. La muestra se podrá ver hasta el 24 de marzo.

Jose Dávila: Un diálogo entre el arte y la arquitectura

ENTREVISTA 09.02.2018

Ricardo Porrero

El artista y arquitecto Jose Dávila nos habla en esta entrevista sobre sus procesos, exposiciones e influencias.



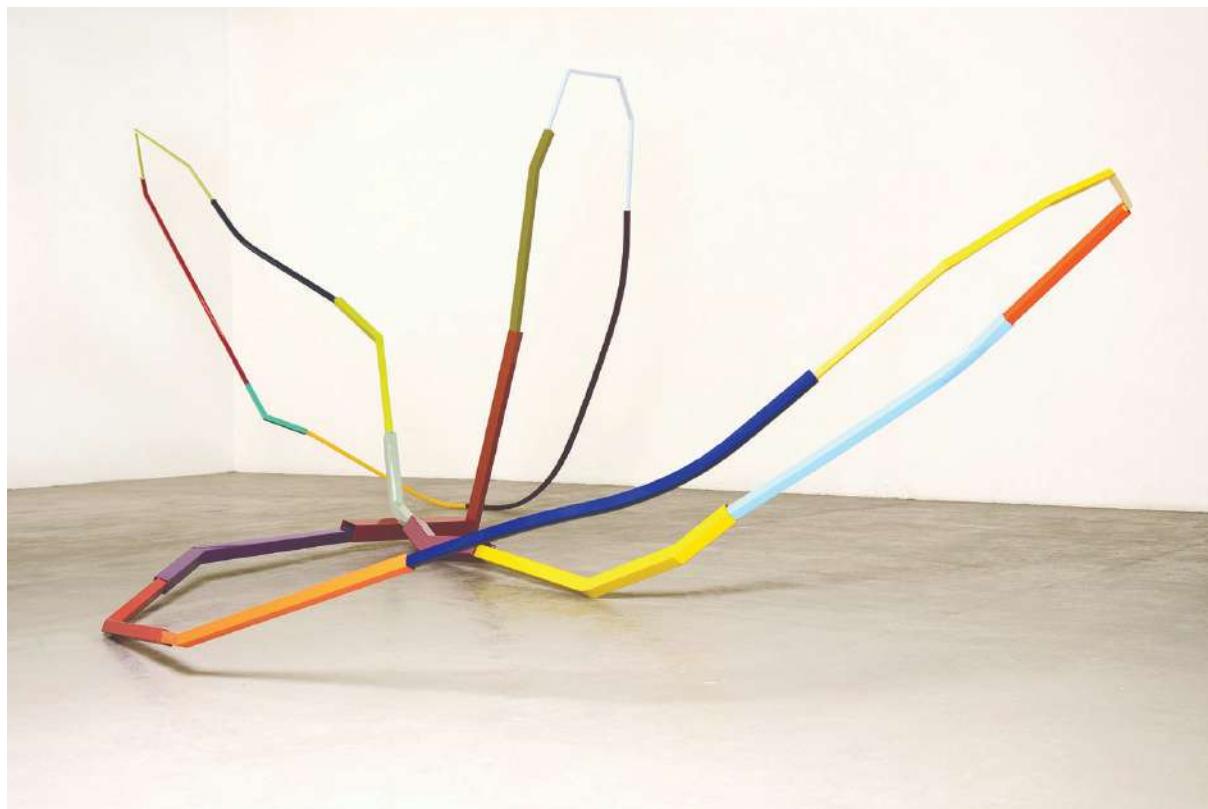
Jose Dávila, imagen de Elogio de la Sombra, 2012. Cortesía: Jose Dávila.

Jose Dávila, artista originario de Guadalajara, ha construido una obra a partir del diálogo entre la arquitectura y las artes visuales. Su trabajo, que explora conceptos como el espacio, las sombras, la gravedad o el vacío, intenta que el espectador se involucre en el proceso creativo; a veces de forma involuntaria.

—Podemos comenzar esta entrevista hablando sobre las escuelas de arte. ¿Por qué no estudiaste arte?

Fueron múltiples factores. En la escuela de arte de Guadalajara no encontré lo que estaba buscando. Es una escuela muy tradicional y yo no quería estudiar arte para aprender a dibujar desnudos o hacer escultura de bronce vaciado o bailarinas de ballet. Tampoco recibí apoyos para estudiar arte en otro lugar. Sin embargo, la escuela de arquitectura de Guadalajara tenía cosas más interesantes. La manera en

que pensaba el espacio, las maquetas, las posibilidades de los materiales, y, por supuesto, la teoría que revisaba, me llamó la atención.



Jose Dávila, *The rules of attraction*, 2013. Cortesía del artista y galería OMR.

—Eres parte de la generación de artistas que comenzó a exhibir su trabajo a finales de los noventa y principios del dos mil. ¿Cómo era la escena de Guadalajara en ese momento?

Era bastante peculiar porque estaba Expoarte, la primera feria de arte en México. De hecho, yo hice mi servicio social en sus taquillas. Expoarte convocó a una cantidad importante de artistas, galeristas, y críticos. Guadalajara quizás vivió periféricamente el movimiento que se estaba generando en todo México respecto del arte. Era una escena bastante llamativa. También hacía algunos proyectos con compañeros de la facultad donde trabajábamos con el contexto. Desarrollábamos arte *in situ* a partir de proyectos de una sola noche en un colectivo llamado Incidental.

—¿Podrías decir que Expoarte fue una especie de incentivo para ti y para los artistas de tu generación en Guadalajara?

Sí, sin duda. Expoarte nos mostró cosas que no habíamos visto. Por otro lado, en esos años pasaban cosas interesantes en el Museo de las Artes, a cargo de Carlos Ashida, y en la galería Arena México, también de los Ashida. Era un momento especial.

—*¿Qué estrategias del arte y la arquitectura has puesto a dialogar para crear tu propio lenguaje?*

Una de las herramientas del arquitecto es analizar las cosas en general. El arquitecto analiza cómo se debe sostener algo, cómo va a envejecer, cómo se va a construir, dónde se consiguen los materiales para hacerlo. Este tipo de análisis, de carácter técnico, lo he trasladado al arte. De hecho, es ahí donde lo he desarrollado, porque como arquitecto trabajé solamente un par de años. También he puesto a dialogar aspectos como las dimensiones del espacio, la escala, las maquetas, los dibujos de planeación. Por otro lado, la arquitectura tiene sus propias limitantes técnicas y el arte me ha servido para romperlas. En el arte uno puede tener una voz propia y libre. En la arquitectura, por ejemplo, debes presentar planos para que te den permiso de construir una obra, es parte de un proceso. En el arte los procesos son más íntimos, personales y experimentales.

—*La arquitectura está comprometida con la funcionalidad...*

La arquitectura debe ser funcional para ser efectiva. De lo contrario se convierte en un capricho. En el arte las cosas son al revés. Es extraño que el arte funcione para algo. Una de sus grandes bellezas es que no es funcional.

—*Has recurrido a referencias de la arquitectura moderna, especialmente a Le Corbusier o Mies van der Rohe. ¿Se puede leer esto como un comentario a las utopías de la arquitectura o al fracaso de la modernidad?*

Sí, sin duda. Son temas con los que he trabajado siempre y me ha gustado abordarlos desde el arte, porque desde la arquitectura es difícil hacerlo. La autocritica es una herramienta que la arquitectura no tiene.

—*¿Crees que la arquitectura ha pretendido perpetuar esa utopía?*

Sí. Creo que la arquitectura no puede dejar de pretender hacer la vida mejor al hombre. Por su parte, el arte no necesariamente persigue el mismo propósito. Justo leía una cita de Tolstoi al respecto. Hay gente que piensa que el arte debe mejorar la vida, pero la arquitectura lo hace puntualmente.



Jose Dávila. Cortesía del artista y OMR.

—En tu obra has recorrido la historia del arte y reinterpretado piezas icónicas del arte conceptual y minimal de los sesenta y setenta, produciendo piezas con nuevos significados. ¿Cómo funciona este proceso?

Quiero comentar piezas para generar significados que no poseían las originales. Por ejemplo, para comentar las pinturas y gráficas que homenajean el famosísimo cuadrado de Josef Albers (que fue un estudioso del color que incluso daba en Yale una cátedra al respecto) hice una repisa de madera que sostiene vidrios transparentes de un color monocromático pintado en la parte trasera. El efecto lumínico que se logra a través de los vidrios hace que cambie el tono del color. La reflexión que hago a partir de Albers es sencilla: el color es luz. Tomo como punto de partida las obras para hacer comentarios personales.

En el arte soy autodidacta. Me he formado a partir de la lectura. Una parte importante de mi trabajo es investigar y repasar la historia del arte. Así, en mi obra hago naturalmente este tipo de síntesis y reflexiones.

—La serie de fotografías recortadas, como *Moments of Equilibrium I* o *Topologies of Minimalism*, me recuerdan la frase de Ortega y Gasset: «Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia, y si no la salvo a ella no me salvo yo». ¿Qué buscas cuando separas al sujeto del contexto de las piezas?

Dentro de estas series hay dos intenciones. Las primeras imágenes que recorté eran de edificios icónicos. Al sacarlos de su contexto hago un comentario arquitectónico entre el edificio y el entorno. Una especie de simbiosis: cuando quitas a uno de ellos observas que lo que está a su alrededor es parte de él.

Sin embargo, me di cuenta que al quitar los edificios, la gente los sigue viendo. Me interesa trabajar respecto de la memoria colectiva y la memoria personal: observar cómo funciona el proceso en el que el espectador tiende a llenar un espacio vacío, ora a través de la memoria ora de la imaginación. Aunque no lo quiera, el espectador se involucra en el proceso creativo.

Vivimos en una época con un bombardeo de imágenes. Así, traté de investigar cuáles son las cosas que pasan por la cabeza del espectador.



Jose Dávila, *Topologies of minimalism*, 2012. Cortesía Wikiart.

—A mediados de los ochenta, Dan Graham mencionó, a propósito de la obra de Gordon Matta Clark, «los arquitectos construyen mientras los artistas destruyen». En tu obra, ¿se puede hablar de la destrucción de la forma? Pienso en piezas como *Daylight Found Me With No Answer*, *Magic is not Absurd* o *Make Your Own Sunshine*.

Más que una destrucción de la forma es una de la función y de la lógica. Recuerdo las palabras de Robert Smithson: «El edificio era más bello cuando estaba en construcción, a medida que se iba terminando se le iba quitando la belleza y en el momento que estaba terminado la perdía por completo». En estas piezas cuestiono más la función que la forma.



Jose Dávila, imagen de la instalación *Daylight found me with no answer*, 2014. Tomada de Mousse Magazine.

—¿Y su significado como obra de arte?

Me interesa cualquier pieza que haga reflexionar al espectador sobre dónde está, adónde va, qué hace ahí...

—En *La invención de lo cotidiano* Michel de Certeau menciona que el espacio es un lugar practicado. ¿Cómo relacionas estas palabras con piezas como «*The Space Beneath Us*» o «*Espacio continuo*»?

Estas dos piezas son funcionales e intentan dar vida a los espacios que no la tienen. *Espacio continuo* activó un patio trasero que no se usaba. Al quitar la fachada de vidrio y hacer que las columnas que la sostenían fueran parte de la pieza la gente comenzó a usarlas. Por su parte, *The Space Beneath Us*, en el Collins Park de Miami, era una especie de plaza para que las personas pudieran sentarse y convivir. Estas obras señalan la inutilidad de ciertos espacios urbanos y tratan de habilitarlos de otra manera.

—En tus exhibiciones, «*Elogio a la sombra*» y «*La sombra como rumor*», ¿sugieres que las apropiaciones que has realizado de modelos arquitectónicos o de sistemas de pensamiento se convierten en espectros?

El título refiere a la alegoría de la caverna de Platón, donde lo único que podían ver los presos eran las sombras proyectadas por el fuego de la caverna. Así, observaban una proyección de la realidad. Desde la historia del arte hay muchas

maneras de interpretar este acontecimiento. De alguna manera estamos viendo sombras. Cada quien ve su propia sombra. Pero claro, no hay nada nuevo bajo el sol.

—*La ola de corrupción y la violencia que han invadido el país, ¿influyen en tu trabajo?*

No. Me influyen como persona, como ciudadano. He optado por no hacer de mi trabajo una radiografía del entorno social. No creo que le esté dando la espalda, pero me interesan cuestiones más universales. Me gustaría tener soluciones puntuales para mi contexto, porque es un tema que no se puede negar.



Jose Dávila, imagen de *Elogio de la Sombra*, 2012. Cortesía: Jose Dávila.



INSIDE: Billy Al Bengston | MNDR | Awol Erizku | Carmen Argote | Valerj Pobega | Friedrich Kunath | Larry Bell
Kimberly Brooks | Benjamin Millepied | Ry Rocklen | Dion Neutra | Kate and Laura Mulleavy | Rosie Lee Hooks
Garance Doré | David Montalba | Amanda de Cadenet | Adam Bravin | Brett Ratner | David Netto | Gary Simmons

HECHO EN MEXICO, MADE FOR LA

Guadalajara natives Jose Dávila and Carmen Argote, who is now one of Los Angeles' brightest lights, talk about the intersections of memory, architecture and home in their interactive art installations for Pacific Standard Time.

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY MICHAEL SLENSKE · SELF-PORTRAITS BY JOSE DÁVILA AND CARMEN ARGOTE

"AFTER THIS, I NEED TO GO DEEP INTO the studio for some new work," Jose Dávila tells me as we drive from the Pacific Design Center to my home in Hollywood for a talk with Carmen Argote. By "this," the Guadalajara-born-and-based artist is referring to the eight concurrent exhibitions he has work being shown in around the globe. That is to say nothing of his biggest project to date, *Sense of Place*, a 12 x 12 x 12 foot cement cube built from 40 Tetris-like volumes—each weighing up to 450 pounds—at the entrance of West Hollywood Park. The installation has been 10-years-in-the-making with the Los Angeles Nomadic Division and will disassemble in three stages and send the various pieces to 20 different locations throughout the city from Plummer Park to the Santa Monica Pier. In May, it will reassemble after various states of use (or abuse) at the park to offer up some kind of psychic thumbprint of the city. Without a doubt it is one of the most ambitious projects on display for the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: L.A.L.A. So when Dávila says that he's going right back into the studio to produce entirely new bodies work for another round of solo shows—at Guadalajara's Travesia Cuatro and Mexico City's Galería OMR during Zona MACO—in addition to two monographs (one with 20 authors writing micro-fiction about each of the destinations for *Sense of Place*) it's surprising, but then not. After studying architecture, but never practicing, he launched his art career with a series of photographs, dubbed *There But Not*, featuring architectural and art history icons that he literally cut out of the printed image. Since that auspicious debut his practice has always pushed the boundaries of light, space, architecture and the balance that can be found in voided images or slabs of marble and glass anchored to a boulder with industrial tie downs (or simply gravity).

As we sit down with a round of tequila, Argote holds forth on her parallel trajectory. "Both of my parents are from Guadalajara," she says, noting her family moved to L.A. when she was 5. "My father went to architecture school and he had this way of doing blueprint drawings—very minimal and imperfect but in plan—and my mother is a pattern-maker so that is a different visual inventory. I think of them as separate and that I am where they come

together." Her first work, *720 Sq. Ft.: Household Mutations* (2011), merged these two inventories in the space of a painted carpet that was recently acquired by LACMA in August and is currently on display in the museum's "Home—So Different, So Appealing" survey. "Deep down inside my work is really about economy and class," says Argote, whose painted architectural garments were just featured in the 2017 California-Pacific Triennial at the Orange County Museum of Art and a collaborative show with Rafa Esparza at Ballroom Marfa. Meanwhile, her 2014 installation "Houses He Wanted to Build"—abstractions of her father's drawings that were originally draped over a Highland Park residence—it floating above the booth of her Colombian gallery Instituto de Visión at ProyectosLA. She's also been in residence for weeks this fall at Panel LA making use of candlewick, coffee (as paint), and a bunch of found pine needles and chain-link fence for a project titled "Pyramids," which subverts the false hierarchies she was spoon fed as a working class expat from Guadalajara. "I grew up with the fantasy of Guadalajara and the fantasy of upward mobility in Los Angeles and I relate them to my experience as an artist," says Argote, who plans to travel back to her birthplace in the fall for a new project that will require her to slow down a bit. While Dávila won't have that leisure he says the languorous pace and ease of the city should help his process. In fact, he echoes John Baldessari's reasoning for living in Los Angeles—"I live here because L.A. is ugly... If I lived in a great beautiful city, why would I do art?"—as his rationale for remaining in his hometown.

Here, the two artists meet for the first time and discuss everything from their current projects in L.A. to a Guadalajara mansion they've both partied at to an upcoming Mexican motorcycle adventure.

Michael Sleske: Where did this project start for you?

Jose Dávila: I started to plan an urban intervention with Los Angeles Nomadic Division many years before PST, but for diverse reasons the project didn't happen. When Shamin Momin was just starting LAND as director, I was one of the first artists she approached. At some point I had a similar project that was more of



José Dávila producing the piece
for his *Sense of Place* sculpture
in his Guadalajara studio.

"The individual pieces will go to different sites in Los Angeles...Some will be graffitied; some will be smashed. I don't know if one of them will even be missing, so all of this history they will bring as a sponge back into the work."

—Jose Dávila

a multi-formal sculpture that comes out of the cube as an anchor form that you could open in a park and have in different shapes during certain time lapses. But it was a way bigger cube, made with wire frames and metal, more like a playground. For one reason or another we didn't feel that it was good enough. We didn't find the funding, there were some technical issues in how to make it in Mexico, but at some point Shamim called me and said, "We have PST coming up, would you be interested in developing a project as a commission?" I took up the other project where it ended and developed it into one that involved all of L.A. as a city.

MS: How far away is it from where it began?

JD: It has changed in material, it has changed in size and it has changed in scope. I think it's much broader to spread 40 different pieces in 20 sites around L.A. than just being able to shift the form of a cube in one single park. But it has common ground. Obviously, there is a certain reference to minimal art with the cube as a platonic solid base, but this project has to be with a nature of its own. At some point, if you think about it, you can pinpoint relationships that were not planned. For example, Joseph Beuys's project of the bees because it brings into question the idea of how to make one project that is disseminated into many pieces of unity and fragmentation and how to have one sculpture that can be spread all around the city.

MS: It almost feels like Tetris in a way.

JD: It's very much tridimensional Tetris and I was an avid Tetris player as a kid.

Carmen Argote: In hearing you talk, it really reminds me of when I go to Guadalajara and the dissemination of these ideals of minimalism, but interpreted in different ways.

JD: Exactly.

CA: Every neighborhood interprets it differently and it reminds me of these pieces of *Sense of Place* in a way, but they are all part of this bigger system. It's metaphoric.

JD: I think what is interesting in what Carmen is saying is how different movements or ideas of art are localized or tropicalized through the actual fabrication of things in Guadalajara. For example, in this case, you can see the cube is not about this perfect industrial engineering. It's actually man-made, so it has a direct link to handcrafts but I think that is what makes it very Mexican in a way as opposed to 1960s or '70s minimalism, which is very precise.

CA: I think with 720 Sq. Ft. the handmade is right on the carpet itself, but I'm really interested in hearing Jose speak about where these influences come from. When I was making that piece I hadn't connected my father's practice as an architect with my work. When we first came here he tried to get a job so he made all of these

architectural plans by hand. They were all from above and drawn out in a very specific style and when I was a kid I would look at these and I think that imprinted and stayed with me. To me, when I look at those drawings they look minimal but it's not Donald Judd at all. It's not entering from that point it's these layered interpretations of movements from Europe that have been translated and adapted. When I was working on the piece I wanted to make work that was more personal, but about architecture, so I was sitting in the house that I had grown up in and I was looking at this dirty, 20-plus year-old brown carpet with all these stains. We never had the money to change it. What I decided to do was reveal the shape because in my visual inventory the shapes of spaces were very meaningful, so I taped maybe eight to 12 inches from the perimeter and then I painted the middle area of the entire apartment white and then through the years—because that piece is 7 years old—all the grease begins to seep through so it's revealing itself through time.

JD: When I was looking at your work today I was thinking how interesting it is that the carpet ends up being an object that monitors personal human activity through all the stains or certain parts where certain furniture was and it might not look like the rest of the carpet because it wasn't used. I was thinking about how that related to the work I'm doing and how the individual pieces will leave the cube to go to different sites in Los Angeles and how people will interact with those individual pieces in different ways. For instance, the ones in the Venice skate park will be skated on and have all the traces of that skating while maybe some others that are at the Beverly Hills Sculpture Garden no one might actually touch it. Those pieces will come back to form the cube again with the imprint of whatever happened to them and around them. Some of them will be graffitied, some will be smashed. I don't know if one of them will even be missing, so all of this history or stories that happens to them while they were away they will bring as a sponge back into the work and I think about how the carpet is a sponge of the history of the family, in this case yours.

MS: In regards to the work at ProyectoLA and Panel LA, do you think that work overlaps with 720 Sq. Ft. and the concerns you had then?

CA: It's really given me a way of working, not just because it's one of my first pieces, but because it's personal. I enter it through my process in a personal way, but it still has to make what I call "the flip" so it has a conversation with minimalism or painting and what I call "the graphic element", and flips between a painting and the object that it is. So "Houses He Wanted to Build" is a combination of a rubbing of a house in Highland Park on muslin that combines

several of my father's architectural drawings of these houses that he wanted to build in Mexico. There was a feeling that you couldn't get these houses. The pool and the pony and the whole fantasy was somewhere else back in Mexico and that really stayed with me as a child and when I look at the L.A. landscape that's layered in many ways in front of it. I always encounter that when I see that house. It's just this nice four bedroom house. It becomes this imaginary house so at Proyectos instead of being shown on the house it's hovering, hanging above.

MS: Your pieces won't be hanging at Proyectos I presume.

JD: No, I'm showing a couple of new sculptures that deal with the notion of gravity, balance, and something very primitive like a boulder or rock with a quintessential material for a sculpture, which is marble historically, but in a very precarious balance in a very precarious way. There's no modification of the elements or materials, it's only the composition of the positioning. No tie downs.

MS: So it's kind of dangerous in a way.

JD: Only in L.A. [LAUGHS] I tend not to start with a sketch of what to do but a vague idea of what I want to make in terms of elements dialoguing with balance, equilibrium, like I have to balance this rock otherwise this piece of marble will fall and what do I have at hand? Okay, I have another rock. It would be impossible to sketch the idea beforehand. The process is very much the same with the ratchet straps. But I guess at some point ratchet straps have their own limitations.

CA: It's so resonant, this idea of being surprised in the studio. You were talking about this concept of just responding and I'm thinking about the projects I've been doing. The last three projects that I've worked on at OCMA, Ballroom Marfa, and LACMA the timelines are much faster so I'm in a position of sink or swim. I used to make these models to think and plan and now it's more about responding to the space. How is the space making me feel? It comes from staying there, sleeping there.

MS: You're literally sleeping there?

CA: I'm in residence, yeah. For Panel LA I've been sleeping there for three weeks and for Marfa it was two weeks from the conception to production. I'm responding to the spaces and that dictates the material and that dictates how the whole thing is going to respond to the architecture.

MS: Where do the wearable pieces come from?

CA: I just call them garments. They are paintings that transform into architecture because they are so big and then I cut into it and the architecture becomes doors and windows that get reconfigured over the body. Architecture is attached to the grid, but how do you organize over the human body? My answer was through pattern-

making, taking these cut out pieces and then laying these patterns that are designed for specific garments. The architectural move, the one-to-one to the body was something I was interested in.

MS: It sounds like *Sense of Place*.

JD: The cube in West Hollywood Park, at some point, will not be there, it will disappear completely and at some point it will come back in a different form using elements that bring back memory and imagination. It evolves organically and then somehow I believe that every work you've done is included in the new work you're doing. Even if it's not there, it's embedded. Every work contains all the past works.

CA: It reminds me of when I got to Marfa. I noticed all these boxes and in Los Angeles you never really see boxes because they get collected. People have routes. It's competitive. But in Marfa I was on a bicycle collecting trash, and when people saw me collecting boxes they were like, "Oh, do you want another box?" So it became a way for me to know the town and to talk to people because everybody had these boxes and the boxes had this beautiful shape when they are laying flat, like a cross. I'd been thinking about the way things are arranged and creating psychological architecture, if that makes sense. You arrange your things and create new spaces because you arrange them in a certain way. I started thinking about a previous piece that I had done in Mansión Magnolia in Guadalajara.

JD: My friend got married there.

CA: My aunt owns it. It belonged to my grandmother. It's a beautiful house. But the work in Marfa is about shifting perspectives, seeing things differently and that process of being in the moment and responding and being surprised and letting that guide me is becoming increasingly important. So the work, the material shifts at Panel LA, I'm really surprised how it turned out. I think the show is really about upward mobility for me. I grew up in that neighborhood about two miles away. It's called "Pyramids" and I think about when I was in elementary school and I saw this pyramid diagrammed that said, "If you don't go to college you'll make no money; if you go to community college you'll make a little money; and if you go to college you'll be fine." I've thought a lot about these systems that have to do with ideas of success or upward mobility. I'm staying true to the materials that are available so I'm using cardboard boxes and coffee because I'm always drinking coffee and it's always around and I'm using chain-link fences and pine needles that I collect on walks. I'm accessing emotions I had as a child and emotions I'm having currently that relate to economy and class.

MS: Some other Latin artists I've spoken with who are participating

"I grew up with the fantasy of Guadalajara and the fantasy of upward mobility in Los Angeles and I relate them to my experience as an artist."

—Carmen Argote

in PST were curious about the large mandate of the project and that only in the US would we presume to ask, "Hey, Latin America, will you come show us your art?" You would never have a broad city-wide show about American art in Guadalajara.

BOTH LAUGH

JD: Centers of power are a magnet and then obviously that stays in the subconscious and you always expect things to come to you instead of going to them, so in that sense I guess that is true. Come and show us what you do, what you are. I remember years ago there was this art fair in New York City that was devoted to Latin American art and African art and I thought, 'Why isn't there an art fair devoted to Caucasian European art?' It's because that's everywhere, that's every fair. But if you do an art fair of Latin American art or African art or Asian art in many ways it ghettoizes certain art that should be more universal.

CA: It is what you make it. The systems were already in place before PST. There's a trajectory, there's an arrow pointing from Latin America to the U.S. and Europe. There always has been. So I don't think that's the point. I think actually what is interesting right now is that we are meeting for the first time.

JD: I haven't felt that PST is at all exoticizing the Latin American aspect. That's what I was saying with those art fair projects, which tend to exoticize because through that it's also easier to sell in a very precise box. In this case, PST is more about gathering what is already here. I think it's fair to say the relation between Los Angeles and Latin America is—well, Los Angeles was Latin America.

CA: Your friend got married at *Misión Magnolia*.

JD: Yes, exactly.

CA: It's all connected.

JD: All these links do exist and have existed. They are not being created to have a show, I think it's more about accepting them and making them more open to everyone and focusing on some things that weren't seen.

MS: I guess it's serendipitous that PST is happening in this political climate.

JD: Definitely. These things happen, these fortunate coincidences.

MS: So what's next?

CA: I'm leaning to ride a motorcycle after Panel. I'm going to be going to Guadalajara to work on a piece in November. The motorcycle is part of that, but I'm slowing down a little bit because the last project have been so fast. I want to bring what I've learned from the last three projects but slow it down and let the work develop with that confidence. I am different with each work so I feel this is the time to take on something big.

JD: I'm going back to the studio. I would just like to keep on working in the same way I've been doing and try to find some new results. I know that might sound contradictory because if you're looking for new results then you should change your approach.

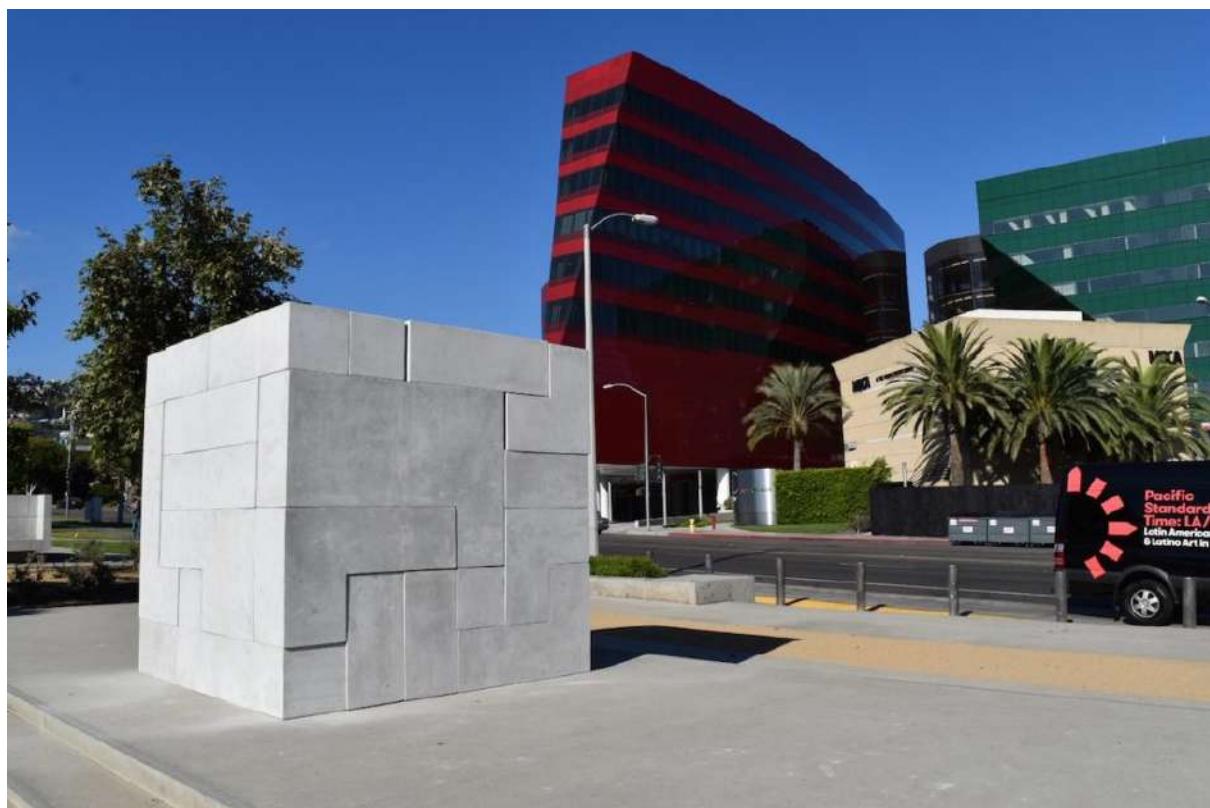
MS: Isn't that the definition of insanity?

JD: Right, but I guess I am more and more confident with the processes going on in my studio and I'm more curious about the new things that can come out of them. Instead of changing the process I'm trying to go deeper.

Artist Jose Dávila Plans a Portrait of LA by Sending Out Blank Sculptures—and Waiting for the Graffiti to Arrive

For Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, Jose Dávila and the nonprofit LAND will scatter sculpture across the city.

Julia Halperin, September 14, 2017



Jose Dávila's *Sense of Place* in West Hollywood Park. Image: Ben Davis.

If you visit the Santa Monica Pier this winter and sit down to look out at the ocean, pay careful attention to what's underneath you. You just might be sitting on an artwork.

The Mexican artist Jose Dávila has teamed up with the public art nonprofit LAND to create a sprawling, continually unfolding installation that will travel to 20 carefully chosen spots across Los Angeles over the next nine months.

The project—the most ambitious work Dávila says he has ever created—was developed as LAND's contribution to Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, the Getty-funded initiative sponsoring Latin American and Latino art exhibitions that kicks off across Southern California this week. (The Getty supplied LAND with a total of \$160,000 to research and execute the complex project.)



Installation of Jose Dávila's *Sense of Place* (2017). Photo: Jeff McLane.

Right now, the work looks simple enough. Installed Tuesday on the edge of West Hollywood Park, *Sense of Place* (2017) is an eight-foot-square white cube of interlocking parts that looks like what might happen if Donald Judd met Jenga.

Over the next nine months, however, the cube will dissemble. Workers will transport its 40 heavy concrete slabs to different sites across Los Angeles, from Grand Central Market in downtown LA to Langer's Delicatessen-Restaurant in Westlake. After the last of the slabs depart in March, the park will be empty—but only temporarily. In May, the 40 pieces will reunite at their original location.

"When they come back, visibly or not, they'll bring their histories back to the site, creating a portrait of Los Angeles," says Shamim Momin, the director of LAND. "We're not exactly sure at this point how they are going to look," she continued, but they can be expected to accrue graffiti, grime, and other site-specific wear and tear over their stay.

The idea of creating a fragmented sculpture felt particularly fitting for LA, which Momin describes as "one of the most condensed, fragmented cities that exists."



Sense of Place Artist Rendering, Estudio Jose Dávila, 2017.

The slabs—made by hand at Dávila’s studio in Guadalajara and transported to LA on two flatbed trucks—will travel to tourist destinations, neighborhood gathering-spaces like the Brand Library and Art Center in Glendale, and more traditional art venues like the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Hollywood.

The modules will be delivered in three batches, or what the artist calls “movements.” The sites for the final two movements have yet to be confirmed. (Dávila hopes to pay tribute to the sculpture’s Modernist form by displaying a module at one of LA’s great Modernist homes, but he hasn’t yet selected the lucky recipient.)

Despite its deceptively simple form, the cube required years of planning and complex engineering. Each slab—which weighs between 330 and 440 pounds—had to be carefully measured to ensure it would fit into the larger cube without any adhesive or rebar. Dávila, who originally trained as an architect, supplied LAND with a 400-page instruction manual to make certain there would be no questions about its assembly or disassembly.



Model for Jose Dávila's *Sense of Place* (2017). Photo: Jeff McLane.

Although the work, like most PST: LA/LA projects, was conceived before President Trump was elected, Dávila says it has taken on new resonance in light of the current administration.

“I’ve been thinking about [how the piece relates] to immigration: individual pieces have to travel and interact in a community, coming from outside, and then come back together—very different from when they left.”



Installation of Jose Dávila's *Sense of Place* (2017). Photo: Jeff McLane.



Sense of Place Artist Rendering, Estudio Jose Dávila, 2017.

Guadalajara artist Jose Dávila moves around LA

by Gerardo Lammers | Sep 5, 2017



Jose Dávila, *Sense of Place*, 2017. Concrete, 40 pieces, Overall: 8'x8'x8', individual dimensions variable.
Courtesy of Estudio Jose Dávila, 2017

When I heard the title of Jose Dávila's recent book, *Daylight Found Me with No Answer*, it sounded familiar. During the years I was living in Guadalajara, I frequently talked with Dávila and other mutual friends at endless parties that lasted until dawn. But I hadn't seen Dávila since those distant days and this was the first time I had ever paid him a studio visit. He was finishing a public project to be presented this fall at Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND).



Jose Dávila Portrait

His studio is located on Colonia Artesanos in downtown Guadalajara in a workshop neighborhood whose chaotic atmosphere signifies what many consider to be a specifically Mexican aesthetic. *Daylight Found Me with No Answer* is also the name of a Dávila sculpture made of twisted metal frames.



Jose Dávila, *Daylight Found Me with No Answer*, 2013.

Metal frames and enamel paint, 550 x 250 x 270 cm.,
Courtesy of Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen, 2015.

Photo: Alejandra Jaimes.

This area also features many colonial churches (a couple of blocks from here there is even a church, El Refugio, right in the middle of Federalismo Avenue), dilapidated old houses with barred windows and central patios typical of early-20th-century architecture and streets lined with orange trees whose fruit nobody eats.

The façade of Dávila's studio reveals only a number graffitied in purple, but when I cross the metallic threshold I discover an ample space with pieces made of rocks, concrete and glass. An assistant leads me across a patio filled with pots to a flawlessly kept library on the second floor, where I am given a refreshing glass of agua de ciruela amarilla. I am looking through the bookshelves when Dávila appears in a short-sleeve shirt, bermudas and white tennis shoes. He's fresh from his honeymoon and the next day is his 43rd birthday.



Jose Dávila, Untitled (Duchamp), 2012.

Archival pigment print, 174.8 x 133 cm.

Courtesy of Estudio Jose Dávila, Guadalajara, 2017.

Photo: Agustín Arce.

"I'm very happy to make an urban sculpture in Los Angeles; it is something new for me," he tells me while seated at a large wooden table in another huge space of this—I now realize—enormous studio. Here, under a two-sided roof, I can see one of his paintings (from the series "A Copy is a Meta-Original"), one of his cut-outs (Duchamp and his Fountain) and on a small piece of paper pinned to an office board is a geometric shape that gives me a first glimpse of what will become Sense of Place, his work at LAND: a cube, 2.40 meters each side, made of concrete, able to separate itself into pieces — as Dávila says, like a Tetris game. After a first exhibit as a complete cube in West Hollywood Park, the sculpture will then be deconstructed and each part will be taken to different places, both public and private, in LA.
"The idea," he relates, "is that the pieces should present themselves in different contexts. Then, after eight months, they return and form the cube again. The cube will say something about how LA as a city is made up of many mini-cities."



Jose Dávila, Untitled, 2015.
Acrylic and vinyl paint on loomstate linen, 200 x 220 cm.,
Courtesy of Galería Travesía Cuatro, Madrid, 2015.
Photo: Agustín Arce.

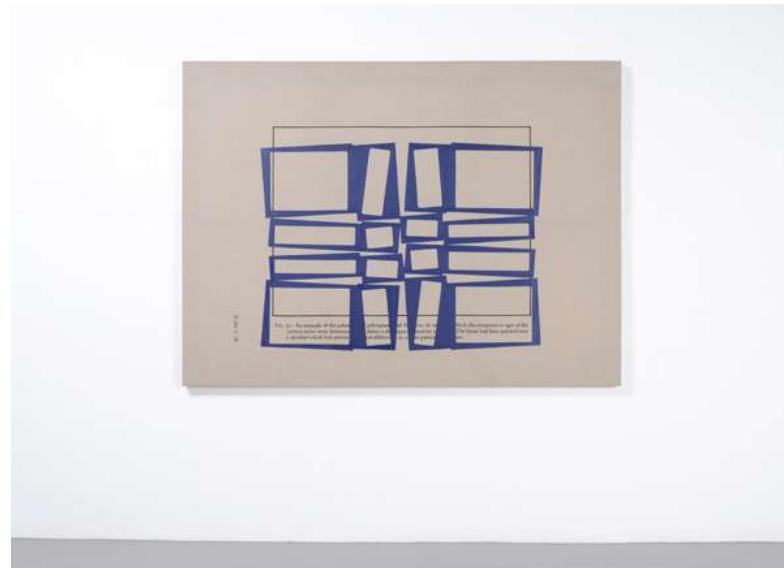


Jose Dávila, Truly A Difficult Subject to Express, 2016.
Acrylic and vinyl paint on loomstate linen, 182 x 226 cm.,
Courtesy of Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen, 2016.
Photo: Agustín Arce.

Dávila's fascination with squares and cubes brings me to suggest that Sol Lewitt is one of his main influences; he adds the name of Josef Albers.

Although Dávila has been drawing and sculpting since he was a sedentary child — he was born with cancer, and treated for many years in a Houston hospital—he decided on finishing high school to study architecture rather than art. The old-fashioned oil-painting classes at the public school of art didn't appeal to him, and when visiting the faculty of architecture at a private university he was attracted to the layouts and models on display.

I suggested to Dávila that Luis Barragán, the award-winning Mexican architect, might have provided his introduction to art and that he would have discovered the work of Josef Albers when he visited Casa Barragán for the first time. “Yes, indeed,” he confirmed. “Actually there is a story I love about this Albers painting that Barragán had in the hall of his house, the yellow one (*Homage to the Square*, 1969). It isn’t an original but a copy Barragán made himself. I understand that Albers, knowing who Barragán was, wanted to give it to him but Barragán said, ‘Oh, no, thank you. I don’t need a gift, I only need your permission to replicate it.’”



Jose Dávila, *The Bison Had Been Painted Over*, 2016.

Acrylic and vinyl paint on loomstate linen, 144 x 194 cm,

Courtesy of Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen, 2016.

Photo: Agustín Arce.

In the absence of good art schools and galleries in Guadalajara, Dávila and his fellows of that time —Gonzalo Lebrija and Fernando Palomar—had an idea that grew as time went by. In 2000 they created Oficina para Proyectos de Arte (OPA), a space based on the 22th floor of the Condominio Guadalajara—a functionalist tower, the first skyscraper in the city, with a spectacular view of the four cardinal points. Many contemporary artists were invited to work there over the next decade. The Albanian artist Anri Sala made his notorious work *No Barragán No Cry* (2002) there, in which Dávila helped Sala to ride a pony by elevator to the roof of the building. “OPA was for me a kind of master degree or even a PhD. It was really what helped me to learn lots of things I hadn’t studied. As a self-taught person, helping other artists produce their work was a school in itself,” says Dávila.



Jose Dávila, *The Lips Are Bright Crimson*, 2016.
Acrylic and vinyl paint on loomstate linen, 168 x 126 cm.,
Courtesy of Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen, 2016.
Photo: Agustín Arce.

Some years have passed since then and Dávila now has a workshop and a growing reputation with international projects like the one in LA. At a point in his career when he can move wherever he wants, I wonder why he chooses to remain in Guadalajara. “Guadalajara gives me time,” he replies. “I mean, when I have been in other cities like Mexico City, New York or London, I realized these cities are very time-consuming places. There is great culture on offer but it takes hours to get around. By contrast, here in Guadalajara it takes me 10 minutes to get from my house to the workshop. I have all the time I want. I’d like to quote John Baldessari when he was asked why he lives in LA. He said it was because it seemed so horrible to him. If he’d lived in a beautiful city like Paris or New York he wouldn’t have arguments to make about art. I’d like to apply this sentiment to Guadalajara.”

I mention seeing a photo of his at OPA. I recall that nobody appears in it—there’s just a table with three computers and that’s all. “We had nothing,” Dávila remembers, smiling. “The truth is that many times we only went over there to listen music for hours on end.”

Jose Dávila's Monumental Concrete Sculptures Journey Through L.A.

Sense of Place is the Guadalajara-based artist's poignant public-art project for LAND and Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA

BY KATY DIAMOND HAMER

AUGUST 30, 2017



Mexican artist Jose Dávila's **Sense of Place** will debut September 16 in West Hollywood Park.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LAND

As part of a successful Kickstarter campaign, LAND (Los Angeles Nomadic Division), a public-art initiative dedicated to site-specific art, raised \$20,094 to bring a project by celebrated Mexican artist Jose Dávila to fruition.

Opening as part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA on September 16, *Sense of Place* is made of 40 pieces of reinforced concrete that, when put together, form a large cube. Blending contemporary art and architecture, this sculpture will be disassembled and reassembled, with the individual geometric shapes placed at various Los Angeles locations chosen by Dávila. The artwork will be installed first in West Hollywood Park and, over the course of nine months, be taken apart and journey to the farthest corners of the city.



The 40 pieces of reinforced concrete form a mammoth six-ton cube.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LAND

It is the artist's goal that the concrete will show signs of physical interaction with the public—graffiti, cracks, or even smoothed-down edges from human touch. The sculpture functions metaphorically as an hourglass, documenting its own passage of time. But instead of grains of sand, the pieces are concrete blocks that slowly trickle through the city and then reunite, solid with solid, in May 2018.

It also serves as something of a mirror to the human condition; it's taken apart, broken, and used, before becoming whole again. "When it comes back together, it will never be the same," says Dávila. "I think it's a metaphor for the passage of life and

how we age, have experiences and get hit and obtain scars along the way. We're not the same, yet we are the same. It is not only a fractal of the city of L.A., but it can also be a fractal of oneself." It's a poetic gesture and one that Dávila is apt to make.



A rendering of *Sense of Place* as its pieces begin migrating.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LAND

Working often in a sculptural format, he tends to use gestures that revolve around physical tension, gravity, and the concept of fragmentation. Weighing approximately six tons when assembled, *Sense of Place* is the artist's largest public undertaking and is perfectly suited for LAND and Pacific Standard Time, the latter of which highlights Latin-American and Latino artists throughout Los Angeles. With a studio in Guadalajara, Mexico, Dávila travels about half the year, using that time not only for meetings and global projects but also to read and develop his ideas.



The sculpture will travel to 20 different public sites throughout the city.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LAND

Dávila first met Shamim Momin, director and curator of LAND, at a café while she was on a research trip in Mexico City in 2004. “We had been talking for a while about doing a project for LAND,” Dávila says. “Ideas came and went, and we didn’t find the appropriate project until she had the idea to do something with the Getty, which organized Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA.”

“Many architects and philosophers have addressed the idea of place,” Dávila explains. “My project intends to absorb the many different parts of L.A. like a sponge, and bring its many elements back together.”

A catalogue is in the works featuring 20 essays by a combination of Los Angeles-based and Mexican writers and will chronicle *Sense of Place* in detail. Free public programming will also accompany the exhibition through the duration offering new ways to engage with the city.

Sense of Place runs from September 16, 2017, through May 2018.

Pintura con pies de hormigón

El mexicano José Dávila propone en Barcelona una alternativa posimpresionista

ÁNGELA MOLINA
8 AGO 2017 - 00:04



Vista de la exposición de José Dávila en la Blueproject Foundation de Barcelona. JUAN RIOBÓ

Las preguntas sobre el arte posminimalista son a menudo más interesantes que las respuestas. Ocurrió lo mismo con el posimpresionismo. ¿Fue una evolución o una ruptura con el impresionismo? ¿En qué grado el puntillismo, el cubismo, el fauvismo, el futurismo, el expresionismo, incluso el surrealismo son deudores de un estilo que volatilizó las barreras del taller del artista para centrarse en las formas geométricas de la naturaleza y su luz prismática? Sobre el posminimalismo, ¿tradujeron los artistas del *povera*, la *performance*, los procesos, el *land art* o el conceptual los principios formales del objeto tridimensional puro a “actitudes” y materia excéntrica o sencillamente buscaban colapsar la escultura?

La obra del mexicano [José Dávila](#) (Guadalajara, 1974) propone una alternativa posimpresionista sobre una de las corrientes artísticas más fructíferas del último tercio del siglo XX y que consiguió llevar la escultura al grado cero de visualidad. [La Blueproject Foundation de Barcelona reúne cuatro piezas recientes de su serie *Joint Effort* \(esfuerzo conjunto\)](#), donde la lógica de los materiales industriales —vidrio, acero, hormigón— y crudos —rocas, mármol— descansa en la “actuación” (la gravedad, el equilibrio, la permanencia, el contraste entre lo rígido y lo frágil), pero también en su estetización, la luz y la composición de formas y figuras.

De formación arquitecto, José Dávila toma como referencia las esculturas de autores seminales de los años setenta (Smithson, Heizer, [Serra](#)) y las reconfigura a modo de imágenes, destacando los materiales como si fueran elementos básicos de una composición *plein air*. A esto ayuda el uso que hace del color —grises, negros, ámbar— tratado sobre el vidrio. Las esculturas verticales colocadas en un orden preciso se someten al escrutinio del espectador para que las aborde, las atraviese o se refleje en ellas. El artista entiende la gravedad y la luz como fuerzas suprematistas en descomposición, materia increada, manipulada y apilada en un único momento, una forma pasajera, desterritorializada. La escultura revela su fluidez esencial no como forma, sino como color. Podríamos pensar en una pintura *performática* que remite a estructuras y líneas geométricas con pies de hormigón.

Otra característica de estas obras, y que refuerza su carácter ilusionista, es que no han sido hechas específicamente para un lugar: la danza a la que el artista las somete hace que puedan ser contempladas en el espacio limpio, acorde con el esquema tradicional pictórico de forma/fondo, un hecho al que sucumbieron la mayoría de los maestros posminimalistas, Richard Serra, [Carl Andre](#), Robert Morris, y algo menos Eva Hesse, pues se preocupó más por la psique, los impulsos y las obsesiones. Para qué engañarnos, muchas de las esculturas de aquel periodo no buscaban el concepto por el concepto, ni la transgresión del objeto en el marco de un espacio institucional, sino que eran una investigación de la evolución del campo visual.

José Dávila reflexiona abundantemente sobre estos límites. Es el salto que llevó a [Cézanne](#) y a sus contemporáneos a cambiar la historia de la pintura.

Quilting Points

The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art inaugurates its biennial artists' award with a show marked by the idea of transference

BY EN LIANG KHONG IN OPINION | 24 JUL 17



Vienna-based sculptor Toni Schmale has been thinking a lot lately about 'transitional objects', the term coined by psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott in 1953 for the items that young children seize as tools for psychological comfort: dolls, stuffed toys, even blankets. On a recent Wednesday, I followed Schmale around her installation at Gateshead's Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, for which she's created her own 'family' of 'transitional objects', she explains. It's a punishing constellation that reaches out to the inner machine. 'Nothing can make you believe we harbor nostalgia for factory work but a modern gym', Mark Greif writes in his mischievous 2004 essay in *n+1*, 'Against Exercise'. And just so, Schmale's objects dissolve the last vestiges of industry – a language of pulleys, racks, levers – into their simplest elements, rearranging them into compositions that invoke, in equal measure, exercise and BDSM equipment, finished with a military-black polish.



Toni Schmale, *waltraud*, 2016, BALTIC Artists' Award 2017, installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead.
Courtesy: © 2017 BALTIC; photograph: John McKenzie

Schmale's sculptural production in *The Good Enough Mother* (2017) and *waltraud* (2016), in which industrial remnants are resurrected in stone and metal as sexually-charged silhouettes of guillotines and treadmills (minus the gym bunnies), find an admirer and clear echo in her former tutor Monica Bonvicini. This year, the Baltic has asked Bonvicini, along with Mike Nelson, Pedro Cabrita Reis and Lorna Simpson (all established artists with strong links to the art centre) to each nominate an artist for its inaugural biennial artists' award, receiving GBP£25,000 to create new work, along with a GBP£5,000 fee.

Dominating the Baltic's vast, warehouse-like upper gallery, Mexican artist Jose Dávila (chosen by Reis) has installed *The weaker has conquered the stronger* (2017) which calls on the rhythms and materials of construction and architecture and produces an unsettling transformation of the functional into a gravity-defying illusion. A steel cable plunges through the floor, shoots back up to the ceiling and seems to visibly strain as it ties together iron girders, boulders of sandstone, and a red latex balloon into an impossible concatenation of events. Dávila likes to 'subvert the logical experience of things', he tells me – his closed-loop structure takes an anxiety-inducing moment of drama (the balloon swaying ever so slightly under a mass of rock, suspended in mid-air) and freezes it.



Jose Dávila, *The weaker has conquered the stronger*, 2017, BALTIC Artists' Award 2017, installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. Courtesy: © 2017 BALTIC; photograph: John McKenzie

Dávila, who is currently based in Guadalajara, started on a series of photographic cut-out works in the late 1990s, in which he stripped out landmarks from their surrounding landscapes, leaving a gaping white void. This sense of negative space is flipped in recent compositions in which found, raw materials – glass, marble and concrete – are strapped into a precise perimeter. The blank spaces created between the components of *The Weaker Has Conquered the Stronger* are filled with the

phobia of physical threat, the idea that the whole thing might come crashing down on you. At the same time, this hovering megalith also wants to ground you in an appreciation of place and time: the girders reference the industrial history of Gateshead, and Dávila has made sure to source the sandstone from a local quarry.

Dávila's mass effect renders Eric N. Mack's installation, which occupies the other half of the gallery, even more fragile and weightless. The New York-based artist (chosen by Simpson) collages the traces of everyday, domestic labour – a knotted brass bedframe, crumpled tent cover, splattered clothes – into a rag-tag, painterly blur: 'a transference of utility' as he sees it. A performer, dressed in a toga of vividly patterned fabrics, drifts through the installation. Mack quilts a contorted fragment of fencing into the ruffles and flourishes of a bed skirt in *The opposite of the pedestal is the grave* (2017), while stained fabrics are stitched up with a slice of dried orange and a sequined dragon in *Implied Reebok or Desire for the Northeast Groover* (2016), playfully curved into the contours of the Reebok 'cross check' logo. He draws inspiration from Sam Gilliam's drape paintings, and continually thinks about how 'absorption, the depth within the fabric, the staining' all manifest within his own work. Mack makes his mark by pushing pigment through peg boards, imprinting a sequence of dots across the surface of his select textiles.



Eric N. Mack, *A Lesson in Perspective*, 2017, BALTIC Artists' Award 2017, installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead.
Courtesy: © 2017 BALTIC; photograph: John McKenzie

'When I've seen Eric's work before, I've also seen him come up against architectural limits, but now to have that height...', Simpson says, pointing towards the gallery's high ceiling, from which a gently gyrating parasol cloaked in a cascading quilt is hung: the giant umbrella of *Palms on Cotton* (2017) implies a deeply private architecture, but is rendered at such a scale that it almost resembles a banner. For Mack, this new relationship to space became a challenge: 'I asked myself, what do I want my practice to become, to be realized in a full sense?' He uses rope to carve through the gallery space (a scaling up from thread), literally tethering the fabrics to the space: a clothes line that creates a framing of sorts.

Heading back downstairs, past Schmale's row of fetishistic gym gear, another darkness beckons beyond. Mike Nelson has chosen London-based Chinese artist Shen Xin, and her sprawling video installation feels refreshingly cool. For Nelson, there was an intuitive attraction to Shen's interest in stripping apart belief systems and vast narratives – 'the distillation of a lot of confusing aspects of the world from a person half my age' – as well as a preoccupation with the idea of the theatre set. *Provocation of the Nightingale* (2017) uses four screens as dividers, forcing people to watch a series of films one by one. The first video sets up a dialogue between the manager of a DNA testing service and her meditation mentor, dressed in grey and red robes, which veers between flirtation, denied romance, and a heartbreak dive into personal history. Shen uses the theatre of the Asia Culture Center in Gwangju, Korea, as a backdrop throughout *Provocation of the Nightingale*, accentuating the choreography and physical interplay at work within the piece. The next two films lace together a screen showing archive footage of misbehaving monks, and female Muslim communities in China, and another documenting two dancers facing off (their performance stripped out), recording a process of decaying physical energy. The final piece animates YouTube recordings of people commenting on the experience of having a DNA test, their voices matched by undulating, looping yellow rings. There's a hazy, meditative sensation at work throughout the entire installation, in which image and sounds are increasingly arranged in slippage.



Shen Xin, *Provocation of the Nightingale*, 2017, BALTIC Artists' Award 2017, four channel video, installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. Courtesy: © 2017 BALTIC; photograph: John McKenzie

When I visited Shen's studio late last year, we discussed her latest pieces, including the 2014 film *Counting Blessings* in which she documents the work of her father, a realist painter, and his deployment of rural Tibetan life as his subject. Shen was drawn towards her father's paintings' fetishization of Tibetan masculinity, and more broadly, the ways in which muscular sexuality is always something to be both promoted and oppressed in Chinese society. Meanwhile, her 2015 project *Shoulders of Giants* staged a symposium of artists and theorists (including the late Mark Fisher), using their voices to animate fantasy beasts from the 4th-century Chinese text, the *Shan Hai Jing* ('The Classics of Mountains and Seas'), unpicking the power dynamics and ritual of a radical politics seminar. While Shen's latest work continues these themes (belief systems, unorthodox behaviour, righteous practice), it does begin to feel different: less rooted in the personal, and like the other work created for this year's Baltic prize, foregrounding close studies of energy in moments of resurrection, immobility, and transference.

Jose Dávila

BALTIC Exhibition review

by Josie Burdon



Jose Dávila, BALTIC Artists' Award
15 July - 30 October 2017
BALTIC Exhibition review by Josie Burdon

Jose Dávila is an innovative artist who explores the spatial occupation and “transitory nature of physical structures,” using: sculpture, installations, painting and photography. Originally from Guadalajara and born in 1974, Dávila produces works which engage and occupy spaces while delving into the instrumental values of architecture and art history.

Currently, Dávila's work is being shown at BALTIC on level 3, as part of BALTIC's Artist Award, where visitors can vote for their preferred artist.

Immediately as I entered the space I was astounded and intrigued by the pure scale and simplicity of Davila's huge formations! Two large steel structures stood "balanced precariously but in perfect equilibrium." As if defying gravity! Dávila purposely composed the structures at particular angles to create an almost imposing feeling as you enter, but also sparking visitor's curiosity. By designing work that compliments the space around it, Dávila has emphasised BALTIC's height and volume, creating sculptures which encompass the space."How" was the first question I asked myself when I entered the exhibition. I was amazed at the angles at which the artworks appeared to be balanced, shadowing the room in their precision and magic.

My favourite part of the work was the rock and balloon balanced on top of each other, because I liked the use of antithetical imagery suspended at a height. I interpreted the red balloon as the embodiment of new aspirations meanwhile the boulder above signifies our cracked society which appears to be trying to crush the cluster of new and unheard of innovations. Boulders usually have properties such as strength, weathered surface and weight. In this work it appears the balloon is pushing against gravity, or society until it reaches a balanced compromise. My idea of new innovations also links to Dávila's original theme based on Gateshead's industrial past and new innovations- like BALTIC. The balloons' positioning and height therefore may symbolise how far Gateshead has developed, but how fragile its development is and therefore how easily it could be destroyed.

This piece makes me feel curious and therefore fuels my imagination, however simultaneously it creates a sense of calm throughout. The simplicity and stillness of each structure feels almost like a snapshot of time as if they are free falling. The pure, earthy rocks juxtapose the impenetrable steal, yet they also appear to lean in perfect equilibrium as one. I appreciate the fact the piece does not come with any text or sound, (as many sculptures do,) because it allows peoples thoughts to hang in the air without interruption or influence.

Overall I feel Dávila has created a work which has a clear theme yet is intriguing and open to interpretation. Their imposing silhouettes leave visitors astounded. Leave children as believers of magic. And left me inspired! My only criticism is the combination of exhibitions in the room, because I feel like Dávila's work needs space to be fully appreciated and shouldn't be surrounded by other objects, however I would highly recommend this exhibition running until 1 October 2017. And maybe if you visit you will be able to answer Dávila's question: where do the artists hands begin and end?

Written by Josie Burdon.

Photograph courtesy of BALTIC Archive.

Diálogo de mármol y cristal en Blueproject

El mexicano José Dávila expone sus esculturas trampantojos en la fundación barcelonesa

ROBERTA BOSCO
Barcelona 14 JUL 2017



Dávila, en su exposición en Blueproject. JUAN RIOBÓ

¿Cómo se crea una atmósfera poética a partir del diálogo entre mármol y cristal? Lo demuestra el artista mexicano José Dávila en su primera exposición individual en Barcelona, abierta en la Blueproject Foundation hasta el 29 de octubre. Con solo cuatro piezas, Dávila consigue crear un espacio que envuelve el visitante en un fascinante juego de reflejos, contrastes y ambigüedades visuales. Mientras deambula por el espacio, el público no puede evitar rodear las piezas sorprendiéndose al encontrar materia donde pensaba que sólo había un reflejo y al no hallar absolutamente nada donde pensaba que había un trozo de mármol. "Los cristales, que se mantienen verticales gracias al juego de fuerza horizontal entre los dos trozos de mármol, crean un juego de ilusiones ópticas, reflejando los elementos de la

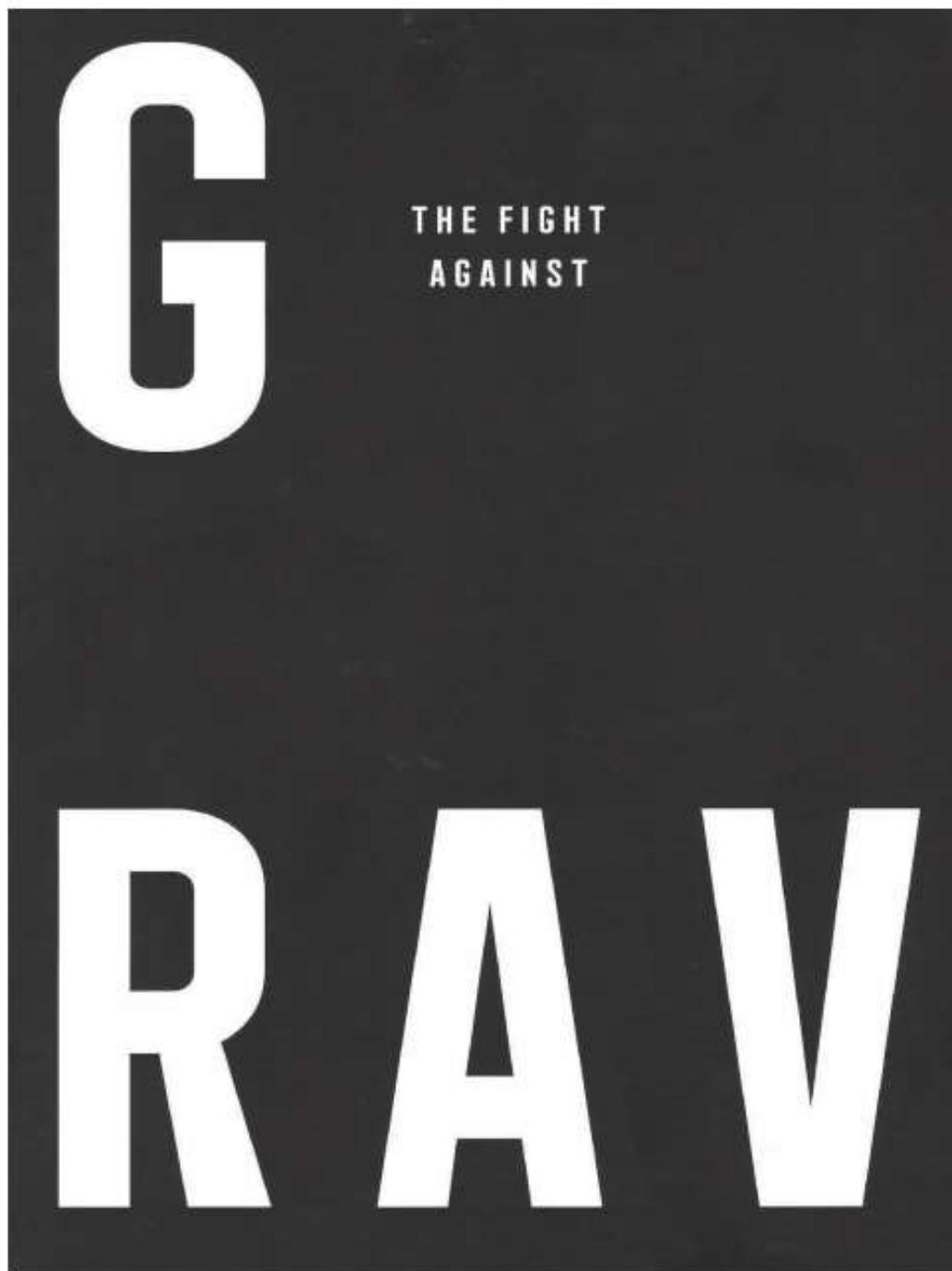
pieza así como las demás obras y el propio visitante", explica el artista, que por eso ha bautizado la serie *Esfuerzo Conjunto*.

Hace tiempo que Dávila investiga las potencialidades del equilibrio entre contrarios: fragilidad y solidez, resistencia y flexibilidad. Su amor por los materiales y su control del espacio delatan su formación como arquitecto en la escuela de Guadalajara que fundó el célebre Luis Barragán. "Me licencié, pero nunca he diseñado un edificio que llegara a construirse", asegura Dávila, uno de los valores en alza de la escena latino-americana. En España le representa la galería madrileña Travesía Cuatro, que desde 2003 tiene sede también en Guadalajara, pero ya se lo rifan pesos pesados del galerismo internacional como la mexicana OMR, Wallner de Copenhague, König de Berlín y Sean Kelly de Nueva York.

En España se le conoce desde 2005 cuando impactó Madrid con una instalación monumental para la fachada de la Casa de América. "Méjico era el país invitado de la feria ARCO y me pidieron crear una obra *site-specific*", indica el artista que montó una estructura de andamios transitables que proporcionaba una nueva e inédita vista de la Cibeles. Dos años antes con otro artista mexicano, Gonzalo Lebrija, había fundado en Guadalajara, la Oficina para Proyectos de Arte (OPA), un centro independiente por el cual durante diez años pasaron algunos de los creadores internacionales más interesantes del momento.

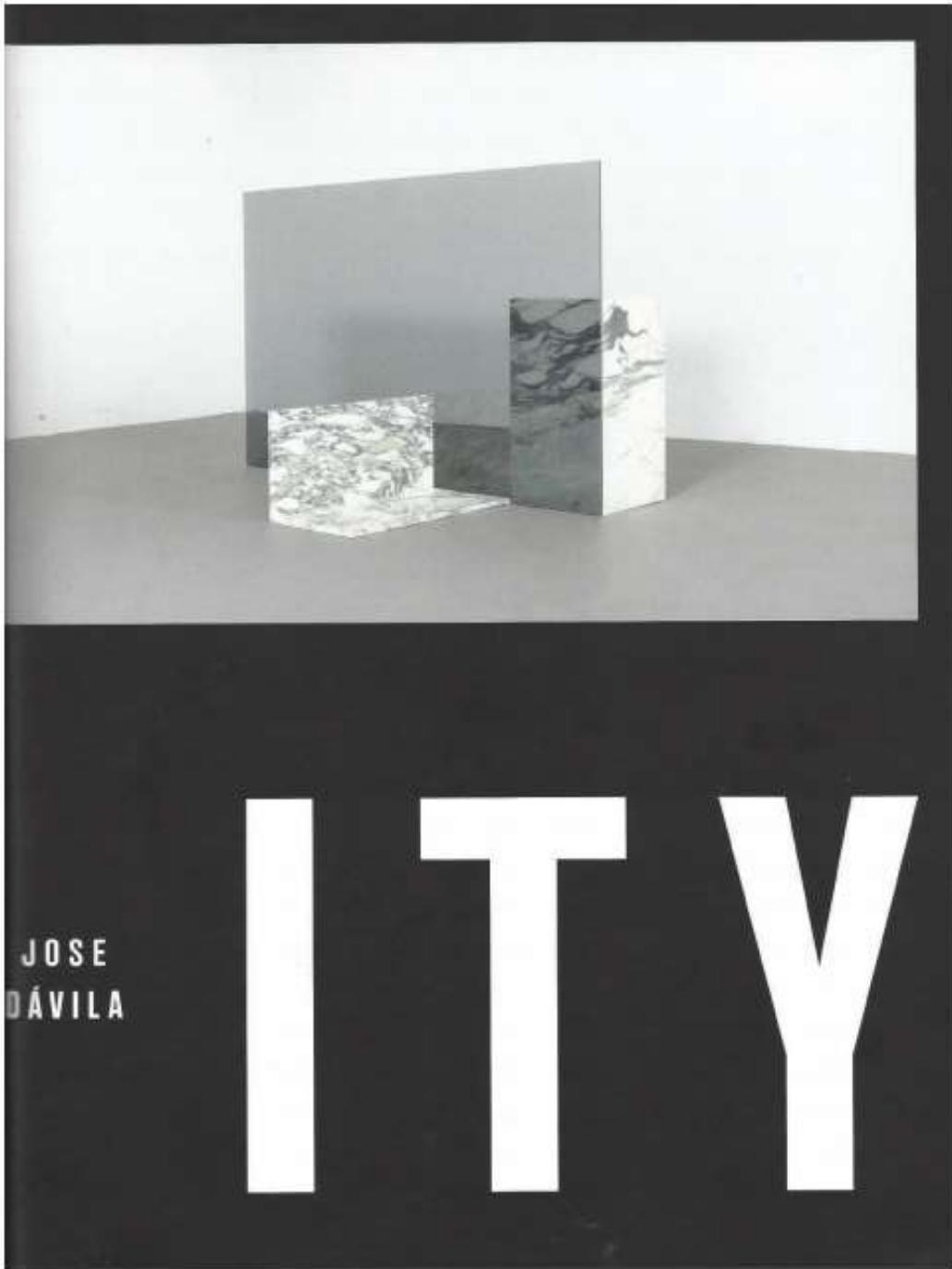
Tras inaugurar la exposición en Blueproject viajará a Newcastle donde como ganador del Baltic Art Prize, inaugurará una escultura de grandes vigas metálicas que sostienen un contrapeso al revés entre un globo y una piedra. "La pieza es una referencia al pasado industrial de la ciudad y a su momento actual, como el globo y la piedra suspendidos en el espacio y congelados en el tiempo", explica Dávila, que también en esta obra, como en las esculturas de Barcelona, utiliza materiales sin modificar. Su ubicua presencia se desdobra en la Kunsthalle de Hamburgo, que le dedica la muestra *El elefante y la pluma* y en Trienal de la Fundación Getty en Los Ángeles.

Además hasta el 1 de octubre, Blueproject presenta la primera muestra individual en España de David Ostrowski (Colonia, 1981), que ofrece una aproximación a su universo plástico a través de una selección de pinturas que rodean una gran instalación, creada para Barcelona.



C THE FIGHT
AGAINST
CRAW

Elephant Magazine n°31
Summer 2017



JOSE
DÁVILA

ITY

The pleasures of Jose Dávila's work are akin to those of a great novel: suspense, wit and the thrill of recognizing an old idea born anew. The Mexican artist is best known for his photographic cutouts and for his sculptures, which appear to have conquered gravity. Trained as an architect, Dávila still sometimes operates within that profession's vocabulary and concerns—while at the same time carrying the weight of art history lightly but persistently. Words: Ariela Gitlen.



J

ose Dávila's ongoing series *Joint Effort* combines ordinary construction materials in restrained yet surprising ways. Panes of glass and blocks of marble are leased, tied and balanced, sometimes at the height of tension, but always with engineered precision.

Dávila also revels and romps amid the visual language of Western art, reproducing Donald Judd's pristine boxes in cardboard and repeatedly reimagining Josef Albers's *Homage to the Square* series in gilded ceramic, coloured glass, and, most recently, as a collection of lazily spinning mobiles. In his recent show at Sean Kelly, he investigated the language of art-historical scholarship by painting over the top of captions culled from a textbook, the airy blumes of paint taking the place of faded cave paintings and other ancient artefacts.

This will be a busy year for Dávila, who has solo shows at the Kunsthalle Hamburg in Berlin and Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna. In September, he will participate in the Getty Museum's initiative *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA*, an array of Southern California-based exhibitions. With a grant awarded by LAND, Dávila will create a large-scale, modular public artwork that pays homage to the diversity and character of Los Angeles's many neighbourhoods.

When I spoke with the artist over Skype, he had just returned from New York to his studio in Guadalajara, the city where he was born and now lives and works.

Was there a moment during your training as an architect when you realized that you wanted to make art instead?

Since the very beginning I was very dubious about whether to go to school for art or architecture. I was more interested in going into art school, but what I found here in Guadalajara was not exactly what I was looking for and when I visited the architecture school I was immediately drawn to what I saw: models and spaces-making lighting, etc. So I went to architecture school, but no more than a year and a half into it I had already started thinking I wanted to do art. At that school, classes like history of art, sculpture and painting were already embedded in the architecture school and I was drawn to that.

Did studying architecture give you any tools that you still use in your work?

It certainly did. This capability of being able to draw what you're thinking, to make it real by downloading it onto paper, is a powerful tool, and one I use every day. I think a lot about materiality, fighting the force of gravity, proportion and scale. All things that were part of my education in architecture are perfectly applicable to sculpture making.

*In your recent show at Sean Kelly in New York, your ongoing series of *Joint Effort* sculptures looked less precariously balanced than they have done in the past. How has this body of work*

changed since you began balancing glass and stone?

Other works I've done previously with glass, marble and ratchet straps were intended to make the fight against gravity visible. As you point out, they often had a more precarious balance, but in this case these sculptures are actually in a state of rest. The glass is straight because the two pieces of marble beside it are an opposing force. As with the others, it's still an equation of balance, but in this case the forces are horizontal and the glass is perfectly vertical. It's a moment of stability in a way.

Why did you jettison all that tension?

I think it's just a natural result of working with different balances. When the glass is stable it shows another aspect of gravity. I wanted to have something that looked more solid.

Are the new glass and marble works site-specific, as others from this series have been in the past?

In this case I used the space only as a vehicle to put this work into. It was more about the sculptures themselves than the space that surrounded them, which is also a shift in my practice. At other times I have always been very aware of the space where the works would be, but in this case I just wanted to fully concentrate on what the sculptures would ask me, what they needed. Therefore, I answered those questions only in regard to the sculptures themselves.

Many more interest in the relationship between the sculptures and the viewer than between the sculptures and the space?

The important relation was about how the sculptures functioned in the space, how people would interact with them as they moved through them, how they change your experience of the exhibition by blocking or directing you in a certain way.

*Your photo cutouts based on Roy Lichtenstein's *Femme d'Algier* are also a departure from your previous strategy, because instead of only altering a single image, you show the same print in thirteen variations, each with an increasing number of elements cut away. Why did you approach these pieces differently?*

Normally when I work with cutouts, I do many proofs, cutting different parts of the same image in order to choose how to show it as a final work. But when I saw these proofs I decided to show them all together as one work because it would demonstrate how much you can affect the original image by intervening in it. Sometimes when you only see one image, you don't have a very fresh memory of the original one, so you don't know the extent of the intervention.

Was it a demonstration of the way you test ideas as part of the creative process?

That's exactly what that piece was. It was the first time that I used the whole process to make the work, not only choosing one part of it, but rather showing it as a whole.



This page

Portrait by Clio Beatty at
Jose Dávila, Sherry Dávila & More
at Sean Kelly, New York

Opposite page

Landscape
2014
Gesso, lacquered, varnished maple, glass
150.0 x 125.0 cm each
overall 100.5 x 287 x 19.0 cm



**"THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO ARE
NEIGHBOURS, WE ARE INDIVISIBLE. EVEN IF [TRUMP]
WANTS TO DIVIDE US, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE"**

DAVILA 108

Y

our new work on paper, A Copy is a Meta-Original, are captions copied from an old art-history textbook and painted with paint. What is the relationship between text and image?

I was very interested in this art-history book because all the captions that are supposedly descriptive are actually very abstract, even poetic. They include the opinion of the author. They're also trying to explain something that was made thousands of years ago, so they're guessing in a way, because the intentions of the artist are unknown. When I was reading these captions I realized that they are opinions that could very well be applied to anything.

When I draw something that is obviously not being described on top of these captions, it opens a free flow of associations. Because what you see isn't what you're reading, you're compelled to make connections between what you're reading and what you're looking at.

*The captions read like they're from another era.
How old is the book?*

It's an antique from Oxford University, published in 1919.

So it's a little window into what art history was like in the early twentieth century, on top of which you've layered your own associations?

The newer books about art history are just more dull, I don't know why. The captions are more often very dull descriptions, there's no interpretation. If you read the same caption from a 1919 book and a 2009 book, you'd be a little bit sad about how it is described today.

It reminds me of the difference between reading the King James Bible and then reading the newer translation. The newer version is clearer, but you lose so much of the beauty of the language.

'There's a way art historians understood art a long time ago that was by looking at the past and making an interpretation of it. Now scholars are more concerned with the philosophical aspects of art, rather than taking an archaeological approach to discovering what made art happen. Today it's just more about what art is trying to tell us about our current state of affairs.

Your work often references images from the art-historical canon, and relies on the viewer sharing this visual language. Do you ever worry that we're losing a set of common touchstones when it comes to visual culture?

I don't think so. I see a lot of things repeating because they're grasping at the very same ideas and concepts. No matter where they come from, a different country, a different artist or a different age, they are very similar because we are involved in this process of globalization which channels into thinking about the same ideas.

Your references are very Western. You don't venture too far outside that narrative.

My references are a direct result of studying art from books. In Mexico we have a huge deficit

of books about the current state of local artists. If you go to a bookstore, normally they only have foreign books. The publishers were mainly American, German or English, and therefore I go along with that narrative.

Can you talk a little bit about your contribution to the Getty Museum's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative?

It's a public sculpture that starts as a cube made out of twenty-three different pieces. Once the cube is installed in Hollywood Park it will slowly start to disappear because the twenty-three pieces will be separated and taken to iconic parts of Los Angeles. One will be installed in a skatepark in Venice. Another one will become a bench in a public basketball court. After about six months the pieces will start to return to Hollywood Park and the cube will form again, but maybe some pieces will have the traces of what's happened to them, graffiti or whatever happens. The sculpture is really about unity and disintegration at the same time. In a way Los Angeles is a city of many cities together, no? It's actually very different, one place to another, and each has its own character and demographics. They are together by proximity, but they are different cities within.

In the face of Donald Trump's promise to divide the US and Mexico by building a border wall, Pacific Standard Time's theme of "LA/LA" (Latin America/Los Angeles) seems more pertinent now. Especially since you don't have to go too far back in history to when the two were in fact effectively part of Mexico.

So much is shared between the two places that any kind of division seems futile.

Right. For example, my mother's family is from Texas, they've lived there for generations, when Texas was Mexico. Suddenly, when Texas was annexed by the US in 1846, the border moved, but because they stayed living on their land they became Americans. It's funny because I have a lot of family who don't even speak Spanish, but their names are Spanish, and they are still seen as immigrants in Texas even though they've been living there for over 150 years.

What is the role of the artist in politics? In these difficult times has it become important to make art that's political in some way?

I think we have to be very engaged politically as citizens. Whether you're an artist or a cook you have to be involved in these times. Especially when we are being attacked as a country, and called names by this insane and stupid human being, Donald Trump. The United States and Mexico are neighbours, we are indivisible. Even if he wants to divide us, it's impossible. Artists don't have to express their political views through their work, because sometimes art might not be the most effective vehicle, but we do have a responsibility as citizens.

Opening spread

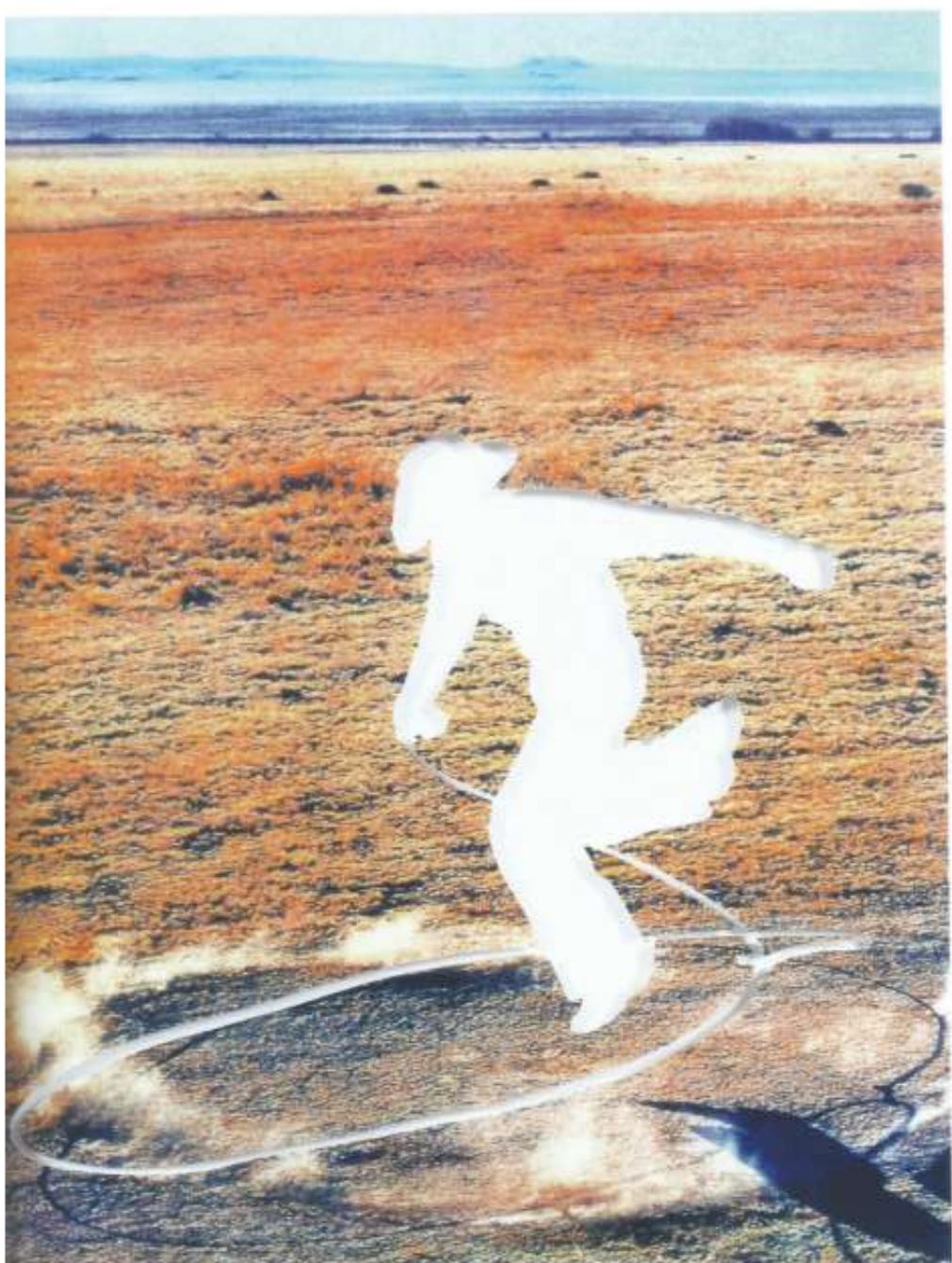
Urchin
2010
Refracted glass and reaction
240 x 360 x 100 cm

Second spread:

Untitled (Chris... Alright...)
2010
Acrylic on pigment print
670 x 70 cm
(framed 103 x 728 x 78 cm)

Opposite page

Untitled (Copycat), 2010
Acrylic on pigment print
668 x 20 cm
(framed 80.6 x 22.9 x 7.8 cm)



Baltic Artists' award 2017 review – big balloons and fetish steel get too close for comfort

Adrian Searle

Fri 30 Jun 2017 18.43

There are some great moments, but this disjointed show makes our critic pine for more wildness, more excess – and more naked encounters with oiled steel



Get a grip... work by Toni Schmale on show at Baltic, Gateshead.
Photograph: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

After last year's successful Hepworth sculpture prize in Wakefield, Gateshead's Baltic asked four artists to choose candidates for an innovative new prize of its own. The selectors – Monica Bonvicini, Lorna Simpson, Pedro Cabrita Reis and Mike Nelson – have each nominated a single artist, who receives £25,000 for production of work, plus a £5,000 fee to show something new in the gallery.



Arrested danger ... Jose Dávila's I-beam work. Photograph: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

At the front of the top-floor gallery, Mexican sculptor Jose Dávila (chosen by Reis) shows a single work. A taut cable connects steel I-beams, two large sandstone boulders and a red helium balloon. These grounded, suspended, dangling and floating elements don't so much dance in space as give the impression of danger arrested. One boulder hovers like a cloud over the balloon, the space between them full of tension. I'm tense, too: pop the big red balloon and you imagine everything will come crashing down.

This, of course, is a piece of theatre. The illusion is destroyed by a little wedge that the gallery has insisted Dávila place under the foot of the tilted steel beam that angles up from the floor. It is only a little thing, put there to stabilise the beam and prevent it swaying, but the wedge effectively wrecks the illusion of precarious equilibrium on which *The Weaker Has Conquered the Stronger* depends. I wonder, for a moment, whether the artist had been thinking of critic Michael Fried's early objections to minimalism, which he denounced for its theatricality.



Fun ... Eric N Mack's fabric arrangements. Photograph: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Beyond Davila's balletic conceit, Eric N Mack's various arrangements are fun: tent covers, paint-soiled and patterned fabric, clothing, clothes rails, a large garden parasol, chains, an aluminium stepladder, and – in one work – a cowboy hat. A live model, draped in raggedy fabrics, wanders between Mack's sculptures. I think of windblown yurts, washing lines, rag-picker's yards, kid's make-believe houses, poverty-chic street fashion, and plenty of art I've seen before, from Robert Rauschenberg to Jessica Stockholder.

This in itself is fine, but I'm left wanting more wildness, more excess, maybe more paint, definitely more life. Selected by American artist Simpson, Mack's work also takes its cues from street life (Colombia-born Mack lives in New York) and fashion, as well as the textures of the everyday. I wish his art were less polite.



One of Toni Schmale's intriguing objects.
Photograph: BALTIC Artists' Award 2017.
Courtesy BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art

Chosen by Bonvicini, who showed at Baltic last winter, Toni Schmale's art resembles Bonvicini's own. Schmale's objects are mostly black, slightly sinister and threatening, and cousins to industrial presses, gym equipment (she is a former athlete), and (following Bonvicini) the hardware you might find in a well-equipped BDSM dungeon. There's also something fetishistic in her list of materials: "sandblasted, black-finished, oiled steel", "stainless steel, polished, tempered on 170 degree brass". Mmm, don't you just imagine your naked body against all that black, oiled steel? Or, of course, it could just be me, trying to imagine a use for her art, to make it more fun for myself.

My biggest problems are with Shen Xin's vastly overcomplicated, four-channel video installation. There are lovely moments in the London-based Chinese artist's work – in particular a conversation between a younger woman and her older meditation teacher – but also a great deal of confusion, and what I regard as a meretricious use of some of Shen's material – including old footage of Jan O'Herne, a devout catholic girl bought up in the former Dutch East Indies who describes being forced into sexual slavery as a "comfort woman" by the invading Japanese army in 1944.



Touching scene ... a moment in Shen Xin's video installation. Photograph: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

The parallel, broken narratives of Shen's *Provocation of the Nightingale* don't cohere. You have to hop from screen to screen, and try to find your way through it all. DNA-testing and Buddhism, corrupt monks and missionaries are also in there somewhere.

The Baltic artists' prize does not make for a satisfying exhibition. The four selected artists have little in common. Putting the work of the four selectors together in a group show wouldn't make sense, either. People love prizes, I suppose. There is no overall winner, though to pep things up the gallery's audience can pick a favourite. This, apparently, "will inform" a further commission "enabling a deeper engagement between one of the artists and local communities in Gateshead", to be announced next year. This is all a bit opaque. I wish it worked.

José Dávila, invitado a territorio incierto

El mexicano presenta en Hamburgo una instalación específica

Hamburgo, 06/06/2017



José Dávila. *Joint effort*, 2017

Hamburger Kunsthalle cuenta con un espacio para el desarrollo de proyectos específicos anuales a cargo de artistas invitados: *Uncharted Territory*; por él ya ha pasado Haegue Yang (del 30 de abril de 2016 al 1 de mayo de este año) y desde este junio al de 2018 su inquilino es un creador mexicano con el que Yang comparte generación: José Dávila.

Los creadores llamados a exponer en esta sala tienen en común la reflexión en su trabajo sobre asuntos vinculados a los procesos de transformación globales en lo relativo a migraciones e identidades y Dávila, que vive y trabaja en la Guadalajara mexicana y ya ha expuesto en grandes museos europeos y americanos, aborda esas temáticas proponiendo también un cuestionamiento de las formas: apropiándose de obras de ciertos artistas del s. XX y reconfigurándolas, hace hincapié en cómo esas piezas han sido registradas y puestas en circulación como fotografías, como imagen.

Recurriendo a la duplicación y a la alteración, rompe con las dinámicas de reconocimiento que habitualmente nos permiten establecer íconos distinguibles y nos propone transformar nuestros modos de ver, o al menos ser conscientes de las convenciones de las que son fruto. Es frecuente también que llame nuestra atención sobre esa reducción a imagen de las tres dimensiones utilizando él el procedimiento

contrario: transformar lo pictórico en elemento escultórico, concediendo así cualidades espaciales a lo que fue bidimensional.

Lo primero que llama la atención al contemplar esas esculturas es la especificidad de sus materiales; Dávila busca que advirtamos su procedencia o su valor para jugar al contraste: materiales industriales como el vidrio o el acero interactúan en estos trabajos con materiales naturales apenas alterados por su mano, como rocas o mármol. También emplea objetos comunes, como cajas de cartón, para generar réplicas de otras esculturas fácilmente reconocibles, evidenciando así cómo algunas formas de ocupar el espacio también forman parte de nuestro imaginario y se inscriben en este sistema de referencialidad visual en torno al que su producción gira de forma constante.

Influenciado por su formación como arquitecto -en el Instituto de Bellas Artes de San Miguel de Allende-, Dávila dispone de los objetos como si fueran elementos básicos del dibujo (punto, línea y plano) para crear construcciones basadas en equilibrios, permanencias y desafíos a esos conceptos.

Más allá de estas lecturas, podemos entender también sus obras como reflexión lúdica o crítica sobre el arte del s. XX y también como homenaje a los logros de los artistas sobre los que trabaja, entre ellos Richard Serra, Dan Flavín, Donald Judd, **Josef Albers** y los arquitectos Luis Barragán y **Mathias Goeritz**. Parte de sus ideas para generar trabajos que a veces son continuación lógica del legado de sus antecesores y, en otras ocasiones, contradicciones absolutas a sus principios.

Para *Uncharted Territory*, ha desarrollado Dávila una instalación frágil en su fisicidad e imponente en lo visual. Juega en ella con las tensiones inherentes a las fuerzas físicas, el equilibrio y la masa, experimentando con materiales y formas muy distintos entre sí para generar, paradójicamente, una pieza armónica que es también vulnerable.



José Dávila. *Joint effort*, 2017

Neither Land Nor Sea: A Q&A with Jose Dávila

BY TAYLOR DAFOE | NOVEMBER 08, 2016



(/photo-galleries/jose-davila-stones-don-t-move-at-sean-kelly)

Installation view of "Jose Dávila: Stones Don't Move" at Sean Kelly, New York.
(Photography: Jason Wyche, New York / Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York)

Jose Dávila's new show, "Stones Don't Move," up now at Sean Kelly Gallery, brings together new examples of the artist's signature bodies of work: his delicately balanced sculptural arrangements, freestanding and forever on the verge of collapse; his "cutout" works, in which he excises the central object or form from photographs of iconic artworks; and his "Homage to the Square" mobiles, which nod to Josef Albers (/artists/3218-josef-albers)'s various investigations into the square. In the gallery's downstairs exhibition space, Dávila also presents new entries in his series, "A Copy Is a Meta-Original," which feature sparse gestural marks in paint on top of prints from a book analyzing cave paintings, as well as a new sculptural work comprised of stones arranged in an imperfect circle. One of the show's highlights is Dávila's newest cutout, in which he takes Roy Lichtenstein (/artists/roy-lichtenstein-225)'s "Femme d'Alger" from 1963 as his subject. Lichtenstein's painting is also a reference to Pablo Picasso (/artists/pablo-picasso-111)'s "The Women of Algiers" from 1955, which itself was inspired by Eugène Delacroix's classic 1834 painting "The Women of Algiers in their Apartment." Dávila's version of the

image is presented in eight different versions, each with more materials cut out from it than the previous. Just before the show's opening, Dávila sat down with Artinfo to discuss the new work, and some of the tenets that run through his multifaceted practice.

In virtually all of your work, there's an element of traversing mediums. In this show alone, you reimagine paintings as sculptures and photographs, book pages as prints and paintings, and so on. What is the significance of this gesture for you?

It's one of my central interests; it always has been. Through the process of translating a work into a different medium, you also change the content. For example, I've also been interested in how the act of cutting out an object makes the paper react and behave as a physical object in the world. Normally in photography the paper is used merely as a vehicle to put an image into the world, representing something else. But by cutting it, the paper is suddenly representing itself; the viewer is aware of its physicality, its fragility. It becomes a three-dimensional work. There's a Mexican poet named José Agustín, who has a line about wet sand being neither the land nor the sea. It's both and it's neither. I'm interested in those areas, and how you can convert and change meaning.

That's what's so great about the seriality of the "Femme d'Alger" cutouts. Your understanding of the work transitions gradually from a photograph to a sculpture as you start to see, for example, the edges of the paper curl, the shadows on the wall behind the print, and so on.

Exactly. Through the process it stops acting like an image and instead acts like a sculpture. And, by losing the color, it looks like the trace of the original image and starts to feel more like a drawing than a painting. There are many things at play.

Let's talk about the "Femme d'Alger" cutouts. In those works, there are three different generations of artists present within it.

In every decision, there's always more than one interest or answer. I wanted to do a serial cutout that would make very visible just how much you can intervene into an image by cutting out and stripping away its parts. When you only show one, the audience has a certain memory of it that they use to fill in the missing space, but it's just a memory—that's their only point of reference. I already had the idea of presenting a cutout serially, to let the audience see how the original work could be reduced to various stages. When I came up with this idea, I was thinking about which image would have the most dimensions, both visual and historical. I came to find Roy Lichtenstein's "Femme d'Alger" from 1963, which, as you point out, has already been tackled by Delacroix, Picasso, and Lichtenstein. The image in itself is a fractal of the work. And the seriality of the works represents the transformations that the original image has gone through. In that moment, it made perfect sense, and I had to think no further.

Why is it important for you to so directly confront art history? For other appropriationist artist, the act of using another image in their own work tends to be a more aggressive move—the artist takes the image, perhaps illegally, and makes it their own. But in your work, that move is much more restrained. You may cut out one aspect of the work, but you're still operating on their picture plane. You're altering it, but you're asking the viewer to still think within the framework of that previous image.

I think it comes out of the direct experience of me being a self-taught artist. I learned about art through books and images I could find on the internet. All at once, in the same process, I had to learn art history, art theory, and art-making. So it was an organic collusion, in a way. I was never interested in trying to hide the references; I wanted to be very blunt in the use of other works.

I like what you said about operating on top of the other work, because I think that's exactly what it is. It's using that work as the prime material, while also generating a space for critical response. For instance, when I reimagined Donald Judd ([/artists/donald-judd-3221](#))'s stacks with cardboard: embedded in that work was a political commentary about how you could achieve the same spatial impact with much lesser means, that an artist from Latin America or a third world country would work with cardboard while a first world artist would have to work with very strong, expensive materials. So there are always certain types of commentary about the works that I'm interacting with in the cutouts, but ultimately it remains about the original creations. In a way, it's not about my work.

Why do you choose to show your different bodies of work together? In the case of this particular show, the cutouts, paintings, and different series of sculptural works all exist together.

Certainly that's always a primary concern. I work with different bodies of work that don't necessarily have a correlation between them, but I like to have present a widespread range of interests and research and work. Rather than simply focusing on one thing and repeating it over and over again, I prefer to be open to finding new materials, new interests, etc. Sometimes it can be a challenge to make two works suddenly collide and to generate a dialogue between them. But I have found through experience that, when I do that, I start to find the not-so-obvious point of intersections between them. That doesn't happen until I risk it and put them in the same space. There's always the chance that it won't work, and that they'll just be two bodies of work cohabitating in the same space. I was afraid that might be the case for this show, but, through the process of installation, I started to realize, for example, the form of the cutouts has a lot of similarities with the sculptures—the transparency of the glass and the interaction of geometrical and non-geometrical shapes.

Going in, I didn't feel that either body of work could totally stand on its own in the gallery's big space. It allowed me to say, Okay, I'm going to try to make two works talk to each other.. Then I have two other spaces to then fully concentrate on the other works. But, as you'll notice, there is one work that isn't apart of a larger series but just stands on its own—the paint-on-linen work, titled "Here the simplification," in the big space. I wanted that to serve as a lynchpin for the other works.

That painting is also visually similar to the works downstairs.

Exactly. I wanted it to provide a pivotal point for the show. That's why there's only one. It obviously has a very graphic and visual similarity to the other forms, especially the sculptures and the paintings downstairs. For me, it also invokes Ellsworth Kelly ([/artists/ellsworth-kelly-3961](#)), who talked about entering into these forms by looking at the shadows, which also has a lot to do with the sculptures and "Femme d'Alger" cutouts, as they interact with the light in the gallery. So it made sense to me to present that particular painting there, so everything would feel connected.

What about the sculpture downstairs, which is comprised of stones arranged in a circle on the gallery floor. The stones are made of many of the materials you often use, but I've never seen your work presented in that way.

The title is "Imperfect Circle. It stands against the cube—the cube being a symbol for the platonic human desire to construct geometrical, perfect shapes. The stones are, obviously, primitive elements of construction, but are also abstract forms unto themselves. Same for the imperfect circle. It connects to the very childish, direct gestures of the paintings on paper downstairs. I wanted to address this idea of the essential desire of expressing and making art that we've always had. Those texts, that the paintings are on top of, are from a book that analyzes cave paintings, and the origins of art. Additionally, the circle is reminiscent of a fireplace—a primitive form of sustenance and way of bringing people together.

The Delacroix Masterpiece That Unites Picasso, Lichtenstein, and Jose Dávila

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Left: Roy Lichtenstein, *Femme d'Algiers*, 1963, The Eli and Edythe Broad Collection; © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein; Right: Jose Dávila, *Untitled (Femme d'Algier) V*, 2016. © Jose Dávila. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

What does a Dan Flavin sculpture look like without the fluorescent bulbs? Or a photograph from Richard Prince's "Cowboy" series, minus the titular ranch hand? Spend some time with Jose Dávila's work and you'll have your answer. Since 2008, the Mexican artist has been creating photographic cutouts in which the focal point of an image is stripped away to leave only a blank silhouette—first eliminating notable architectural sites from his own photographs, then later applying the same process to recognizable pieces of modern art.

For his upcoming show at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, Dávila turns his attention to a single work: Roy Lichtenstein's *Femme d'Algiers* (1963). But in the case of this particular painting, it's not simply a work by Lichtenstein that's going under the knife—it's works by Pablo Picasso and Eugène Delacroix as well.

To understand what links these three art-historical heavyweights, we must rewind almost 200 years to 1832, when Delacroix traveled with a diplomatic convoy to north Africa. The French painter was immediately enchanted: "I am like a man in a dream, seeing things he fears will vanish from him," he wrote. Delacroix feverishly sketched the turbaned men, Jewish weddings, and harems he encountered. These travels would serve as inspiration for the rest of his life, resulting in almost 80 completed oil paintings. And it was a tour of an Algerian home, arranged by a converted Muslim who worked for the French government, that served as the source for two of the artist's most enduring works. Both were titled *Femmes d'Algiers dans leur appartement* (the first version completed in 1834 and the second between 1847 and '49) and offer a rare, sumptuous glimpse into the women's quarters of a Muslim residence.



Eugène Delacroix, *The Women of Algiers*, 1834. Collection of the Louvre. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

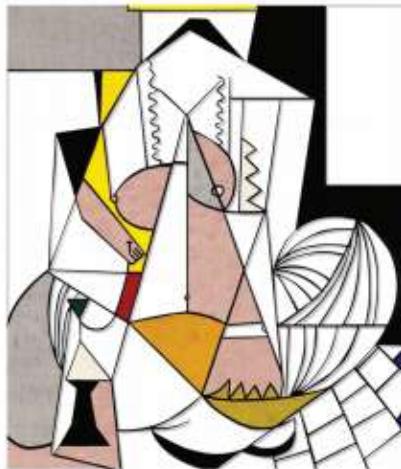
The 1834 version would set off a firestorm of lesser imitations when it was exhibited at the Salon in Paris that year, fanning the flames of orientalism in Western art. But this potency would extend far beyond Delacroix's lifetime. A century later, while living in Paris, Picasso himself began to obsess over the painting. "He had often spoken to me of making his own version of *Femmes d'Algier* and had taken me to the Louvre on an average of once a month to study it," Picasso's muse (and artist in her own right) Françoise Gilot once recalled. "I asked him how he felt about Delacroix. His eyes narrowed and he said, 'That bastard. He's really good.'"

The death of Henri Matisse in November 1954 was the push Picasso needed to finally embark on the project. In honor of his late rival and friend—a staunch admirer of orientalism in general and Delacroix in particular—Picasso ended up painting 15 versions of the *Women of Algiers* between December 13, 1954, and February 14, 1955. "When Matisse died he left me his odalisques as his legacy," the Spanish painter remarked to a friend. These canvases are designated *A* through *O* and reveal Picasso freely mixing and matching elements from both versions of Delacroix's masterpiece, all heavily filtered through a Cubist lens. *Version O* went on to become the most expensive work sold at auction to date when it achieved a \$179 million price tag at Christie's in May 2015.



Less than a decade after Picasso had completed the series, it would serve as fodder for a young Lichtenstein seeking work to appropriate. Similar to the way in which Picasso had deeply (albeit begrudgingly) admired Delacroix, Lichtenstein revered the Spanish painter as one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. "I think he had just more magic, more insanity, more images, more styles, greater production than many others," the Pop artist said. In an echo of Picasso and his frequent trips to the Louvre, Dorothy Lichtenstein fondly recalls attending exhibitions with her husband. "It was actually great going to a museum with Roy," she once said. "Everything was grist for his mind. He was always looking at paintings and how he might be able to transform them." Lichtenstein's 1963 interpretation of *Les femmes d'Alger* isolates a single figure, giving her an owl-like face that obscures any emotion. Picasso's bold colors and forms are simplified and fractured, leaving the woman floating in an abstracted background that no longer features the lavish furnishings carried over from Delacroix's original.

When Dávila finally happened upon Lichtenstein's work, he felt a particular affinity for this inherent seriality. "It was an image that had already been interpreted by different artists on top of each other," he noted. "It's like a fractal of what happened throughout time, throughout history." Dávila's previous works touch on similar themes, including sculptures that pay tribute to painter Josef Albers and the repetitive nature of his "Homage to the Square" series. With *Femme d'Alger*, Dávila emphasizes the painting's serial nature by trying something new—this is the first time he has created multiple cutouts of the same work. The show at Sean Kelly will feature a string of 13 cutouts, each with more missing than the one before. The final cutout is nothing more than black outlines, essentially transforming the painting into a line drawing.



1: Roy Lichtenstein, *Femme d'Algier*, 1963. The Eli and Edythe Broad Collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein. © Jose Dávila, Untitled (*Femme d'Algier*) V, 2016; 2: Jose Dávila, Untitled (*Femme d'Algier*) XI, 2016; 3: Jose Dávila, Untitled (*Femme d'Algier*) IX, 2016; 4: Jose Dávila, Untitled (*Femme d'Algier*) VII, 2016; 5: Jose Dávila, Untitled (*Femme d'Algier*) V, 2016; 6: Jose Dávila, Untitled (*Femme d'Algier*) III, 2016. Works © Jose Dávila. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

1: Roy Lichtenstein, *Femme d'Algier*, 1963. The Eli and Edythe Broad Collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein. 2: Jose Dávila, *Untitled (Femme d'Algier)* XI, 2016; 3: Jose Dávila, *Untitled (Femme d'Algier)* IX, 2016; 4: Jose Dávila, *Untitled (Femme d'Algier)* VII, 2016; 5: Jose Dávila, *Untitled (Femme d'Algier)* V, 2016; 6: Jose Dávila, *Untitled (Femme d'Algier)* III, 2016. Works © Jose Dávila. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

This, says Dávila, is his contribution to this string of interpretations—an experiment in medium. Shifting between different modes of representation has been on his mind since his early days in the darkroom. "I always wondered why there was this pristine usage of photography without a notion of photography in physical terms, in terms of the paper itself," he said. "I wanted to make a twilight zone between a two-dimensional work and a three-dimensional work, between a sculpture and representation."

And with his "Femme d'Algier" series, that dichotomy begins to blur. "The more paper you cut out of an image, the more the paper starts to react physically to the fact that there are holes in it," Dávila said. "The more I cut out of the paper, the more it reacts and twists. I want the paper to behave as a physical object, as a sculpture itself, rather than just a vehicle to carry an image."

—Abigail Cain

"Joie Dávila: Stones Don't Move" is on view at Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, Oct. 28–Dec. 3, 2016.



Jose Dávila's *Sense of Place* is a public installation supported by Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND) curator and director Shamim Momin, in conjunction with the Getty's Pacific Standard Time-LALA. The concrete artwork was unveiled in West Hollywood, then disassembled, and will be situated in site-specific installations to be continued in five self-contained "movements" reflecting an orchestrated migration around Los Angeles.

These movements are also improvisational, in that Dávila and Momin have not prescribed how audiences should interact with the works. "How the pieces function in those spaces is up to the people who encounter them," Momin said. People may use the work as benches, or tag it, or treat it with reverence like the concrete memorials in Mexico, Dávila's home.



Home and identity play critical roles in *Sense of Place*. The 40-piece cube is a visual translation of multiple languages and narratives of the city, one that explores the fluidity between aesthetic composition and these languages of representation. As a participant-observer in LA's fracture and complexity, Dávila plays with notions of insider and outsider, interpreting the social, cultural, architectural and geographic modalities that inform the city. He has become an artist in Mexico and yet he is engaging in the politics of subjectivity by activating a work that inserts itself into the continuum of migration stories in LA, even though he is not actually a U.S. immigrant. Through this installation, Dávila is appropriating material, narrative, form and identity to act as a mirror for the city.

At one layer of discursivity, *Sense of Place* highlights the elemental building blocks of modern architecture, as well as the concept of location as a symbol of communal awareness and identity. Dávila conceives his multipart concrete cube as an examination of minimalist architecture that, Momin notes, "is an ongoing injury to so many working-class Latin American neighborhoods." However, Dávila's interest lies in discovering the potential of the object, through its material and its form, to be more than its particular history. Momin and Dávila began this exploration by provocatively anchoring *Sense of Place* on a platform in West Hollywood Park. Here it takes on a majestic air, ennobling the quotidian and thereby rewriting its history from humble material to revered object, riffing on LAND's mission to elevate the transformative power of art.

Dávila unpacks the contradictions of place and expression by assessing the locus of the modest and flawed material with the social implications of situating elements of the object in neighborhoods whose locations represent specific cultural narratives. The viewer is forced to reexamine the moments where truths, fiction, stereotype and mythology intersect. This is not a white cube with a canonical cosmology. *Sense of Place* is an art object with its own narrative, and these public spaces provide opportunities to expose the paradoxes between language and visual subjectivity. Through this practice, Dávila creates a new, more useful episteme for understanding the aesthetic and conceptual considerations of his project.

Sense of Place is richly embedded in another layer of the language of materiality, specifically the connection of the movements of the piece—components of the cube will travel to multiple locations in five sets of movements—to historically important Latin American kinetic artists. Jesus Rafael Soto and others employed the visualization of three-dimensionality in order to dissolve the boundaries between art, architecture and design. In these works from the postwar period, as in *Sense of Place*, the viewer is engaged to grasp the meaning of the work beyond what is there. Dávila furthers this invitation with the expectation that viewers will join his ethnography, becoming participant observers themselves and intervening in the piece with their own uses and signifiers. The evolution of the work through audience interpretation and intercession expands its narrative resonance.

Dávila's considerations of motion also replicate the individual body and the body politic, whereby the elements are greater than the sum of their parts. This metanarrative challenges viewers to contemplate the performative and functional aspects of identity and the significance of intention. Los Angeles is composed of multiple stories and ways of seeing, reflecting the larger supposition of American consciousness, one from many, even while social stratification grows so disparate that many communities will fall apart, perhaps to be reconstituted elsewhere. *Sense of Place* suggests this cycle of building and reimagining is inherent in social agency, and Dávila's project offers a succinct and sophisticated visualization of this archetype.

Clearly, Dávila is a polyglot, excavating multiple social, historical and aesthetic allegories for public consumption. *Sense of Place* is a travelogue with which to educate participants, both engaged and encountered, about art and social agency. This discursive practice is readily accessible because Dávila is quite comfortable with the improvisational quality of his object's call and response with multiple communities. Accepting both the tension and the temporality of the experience, Dávila welcomes the appropriation into the cultural narratives of the spaces *Sense of Place* will occupy, in whatever manifestation it occurs, as part of the life of the object. It is this concept of building that makes it such a powerful metaphor, and such a powerful artwork.

NOUVEL
ACCROCHAGE

MERCI !

PAR BERNARD
BLISTÈNE
DIRECTEUR DU MUSÉE
NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE

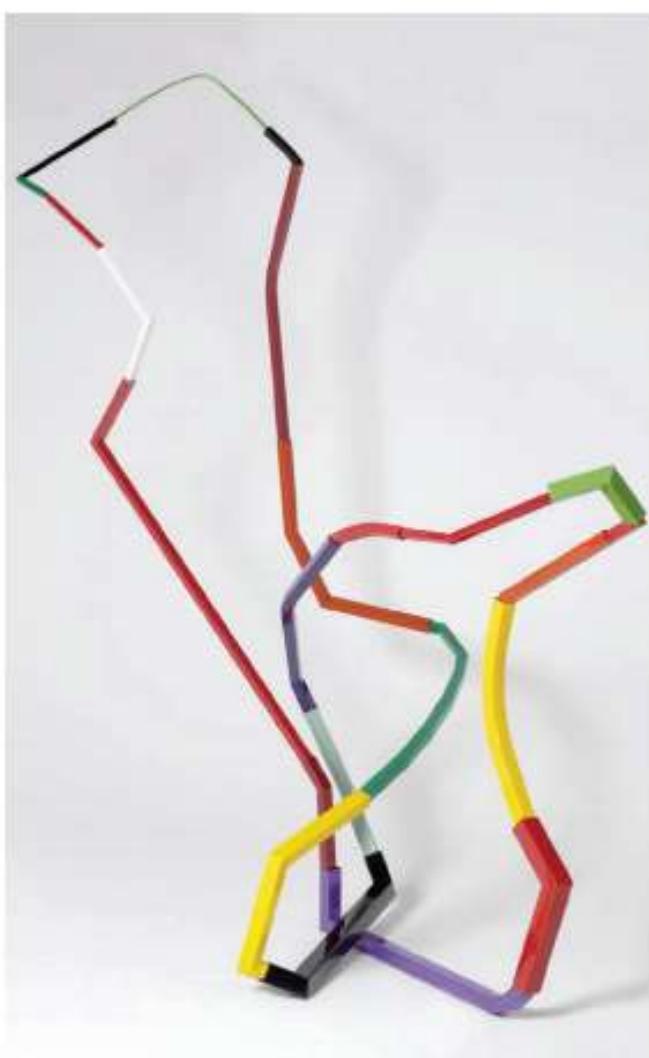
**UNE GÉNÉROSITÉ ET UN ENGAGEMENT
MAGNIFIQUES POUR LE PATRIMOINE
NATIONAL.**

Depuis son ouverture en 1947, le musée national d'art moderne – alors situé au palais de Tokyo – n'a cessé de bénéficier de la générosité exceptionnelle de dona-

teurs soucieux de voir réunies en son sein des œuvres témoignant de l'art du temps. Grâce aux donations successives, notamment celles suscitées par son premier directeur, Jean Cassou, et ceux qui ont suivi, les collections du musée national d'art moderne ont pu bâtrir leur identité sur de grands ensembles uniques au monde. Ainsi, les fonds Brancusi, Braque, Chagall, Delaunay, Dufy, González, Kupka, Laurens, Matisse, Pevsner, Picasso ou Rouault ont dans une large mesure été constitués grâce aux dons et legs consentis par les artistes, leurs familles ou les collectionneurs qui leur étaient proches. La nouvelle présentation des collections modernes, inaugurée au printemps dernier, a permis de mesurer combien ces donateurs avaient, au fil de quelque soixante-dix années, contribué à leur richesse et à leur éclat.

Aujourd'hui, cette générosité et cet engagement participent tout autant à l'enrichissement du patrimoine national. C'est pourquoi le Centre Pompidou salue les donateurs de tous horizons, habités par la même passion pour l'art et le sens du partage. La Société des amis du musée national d'art moderne (voir ci-contre) permet à ceux qu'il souhaite de s'engager à la mesure de leurs désirs et de leurs choix : le groupe « Perspective », qui réunit les jeunes amis, a ainsi récemment acquis pour le musée une œuvre remarquée de Christodoulos Panayiotou. La Centre Pompidou Foundation, quant à elle, fédère depuis 1977 ceux qui, depuis les États-Unis, souhaitent défendre la présence des artistes américains dans les collections. En témoigne, entre autres, la superbe œuvre d'Edgar Arceneaux exposée en majesté dans la grande allée du niveau 4.

L'engagement, bien sûr, dépasse le cadre des groupes constitués. Artistes, galeries, mécènes d'entreprises, fondations et innombrables passionnés d'art témoignent chaque année à titre individuel de leur attachement à l'institution. Verez Daniel Cordier, Aube Ellouët Breton, Florence et Daniel Guerlain ! Verez la Scaler Round-



tion ! Voyez aussi comment, en 2015, d'importantes œuvres d'artistes contemporains dont Ding Yi, Wang Jianwei ou Zhang Enli sont entrées en collection grâce à d'ardents défenseurs de l'art chinois.

Par cette présentation exceptionnelle, premier volet d'hommages désormais régulièrement renouvelés, le Centre Pompidou souhaite saluer l'engagement et la passion de tous ces acteurs indispensables à la vie

de la collection, une collection unique en Europe qu'il leur doit tant. Merci ! X

LE CENTRE POMPIDOU Salue LES DONATEURS DE TOUS HORIZONS, HABITÉS PAR LA MÊME PASSION POUR L'ART ET LE SENS DU PARTAGE.

À PARTIR
DU 16 MARS 2016

COLLECTION D'AMITIÉS

Créée en 1903, la Société des amis du musée national d'art moderne est plus que jamais engagée dans l'art de son temps avec pour vocation d'enrichir les collections d'art moderne et contemporain du Centre Pompidou. Entretien avec Didier Grumbach, son président.

Vous arrivez à la tête de la Société des amis du musée. Quels sont vos objectifs ?

Je prends la suite de François Trèves et de Jacques Boissonnas dont la famille a tant œuvré pour l'enrichissement de la collection. Je voudrais porter mes efforts sur l'ouverture internationale de la Société des amis et sur le décloisonnement vers d'autres disciplines : la photographie et le design par exemple. **Comment fonctionne la Société des amis du musée ?**

L'association est ouverte à toutes et tous, les montants des cotisations étant variables. Elle bénéficie du soutien de plus de huit cents particuliers, toutes formes d'adhésion confondues. C'est le beau panel d'activités proposées qui permet à nos donateurs de soutenir les projets du musée. La France bénéficie d'un dispositif légal très stimulant : la loi Allagon, qui permet une défiscalisation importante et qui encourage la générosité des amoureux de l'art que sont nos amis.

Quels sont les liens avec les équipes du musée national d'art moderne ?

L'harmonieuse participation des conservateurs aux différents comités d'acquisition est essentielle au succès de notre action. Dans le cadre du Groupe d'acquisition pour l'art contemporain, ce sont les collectionneurs qui procèdent aux propositions d'achats et les conservateurs qui choisissent les œuvres parmi ces propositions. Le Groupe intervient comme une tête chercheuse pour la plus jeune génération d'artistes. Il témoigne de notre engagement.

Quelle est la place des jeunes générations au sein de la Société des amis ?

Nous avons créé une catégorie pour de jeunes donateurs, réservée au moins de quarante ans, « Perspective », en construisant une offre adaptée à leurs attentes. Cette jeune génération se sensibilise au mécénat. C'est très important.

La Société des amis est-elle internationale ?

À l'image du Centre Pompidou, nous ne cessons de nous ouvrir au monde et à d'autres scènes artistiques. Notre Cercle International compte une cinquantaine de membres et s'élargit d'année en année, ce qui permet de riches échanges entre amateurs d'art et collectionneurs de tous horizons. Notre mission est de créer un langage commun entre tous nos adhérents, quels que soient leur pays d'origine ou leur culture. X

DEVENEZ AMIS

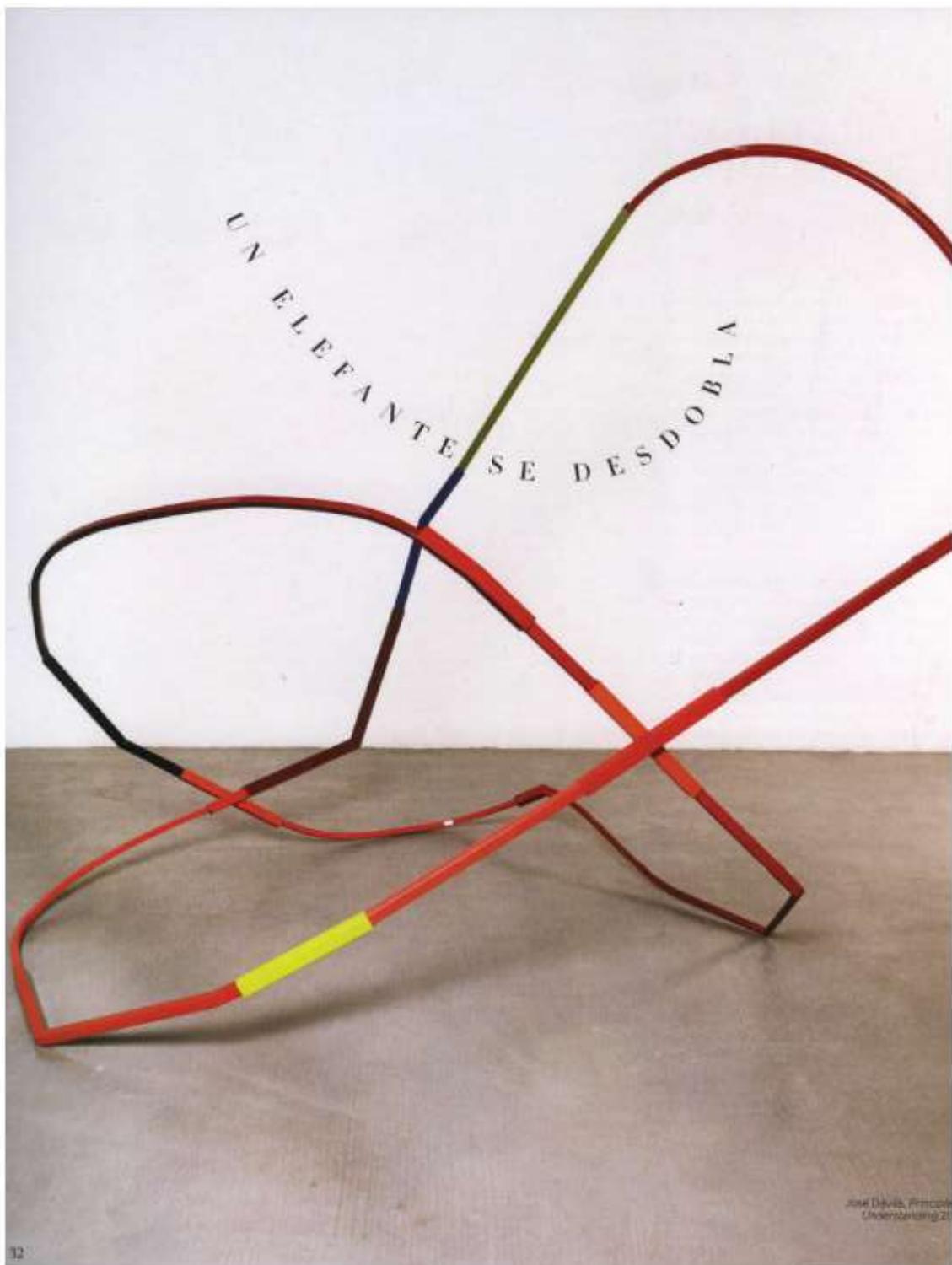
À PARTIR DE 25€
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DES CONDITIONS
EXCEPTIONNELLES,
AU CENTRE POMPIDOU
ET DANS LES PLUS
BEAUX LIEUX
D'EXPOSITIONS.
SOUTENEZ
LES ACTIONS DU MUSÉE
ET L'ENRICHISSEMENT
DE SES COLLECTIONS.

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PAGE DE GAUCHE :
JOSE DÁVILA, MAKE YOUR OWN
SUNSHINE, 2013, ÉMAIL SUR MÉTAL,
200 X 150 X 130 CM,
DON DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DES AMIS
DU MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE





En PORTADA



José Dávila
en su estudio

Una reflexión sobre José Dávila y su despliegue del dibujo en la escultura. Allí, y como ocurre en los dibujos animados, la retícula siempre es maleable.

Por Valentina Jager

Dos personas sostienen un costal de plástico por sus extremos. En ese momento, el costal descansa horizontalmente, paralelo al piso, hasta que una tercera persona deja caer una piedra sobre él. Estos tres individuos son testigos de la colisión, en la cual, por caída libre, la roca choca con el suelo, con el costal de intermediario, forzándolo a seguir su misma trayectoria. El costal pierde así su forma horizontal: como se deformó, así se queda. Tanto la velocidad de la roca como la del costal no detendrá por la fuerza opuesta de la tierra y ambos se congelan en esa posición. Paralelamente, la roca impacta contra el suelo, sobre otro costal. Cualquier cuerpo suspendido en el espacio permanecerá suspendido hasta ser consciente de su situación. Cualquier cuerpo en movimiento tendré a seguir moviéndose, hasta que alguna materia sólida intervenga repentinamente. Así lo citan la primera y la segunda ley de la física animada, promulgadas en 1980 por Mark O'Donnell (*la revista Esquire*).

En otra escena, un personaje camina más allá del borde de un rascacielos: como en una cuerda floja, tiene su paso suspendido en el aire. Podría caminar varios kilómetros siempre y cuando no se dé cuenta de dónde está parado: sobre la nube. Flotar es un ejercicio de resistencia contra el control de gravedad, de la arquitectura y de todo aquello que pesa. En los dibujos animados, también es un truco en contra de la conciencia: un caso más de la lógica de lo imposible-verosímil, típica de la cultura clásica de la caricatura occidental.

Wile E. Coyote experimenta continuamente con la materia. Le ha caído un yunque encima en el ierto, al sudoeste de Estados Unidos, y lo ha dejado como estampa en el suelo. Cuando el yunque desintegre o cuando por alguna razón sea retirado, el coyote volverá a su forma original. Esto que nos aparece como algo casual y, sin embargo, cuidadosamente colocado —no importa a dónde se lleva el coyote, el yunque siempre le caerá en la cabeza. La roca sigue su camino vertical de A a B, ▶



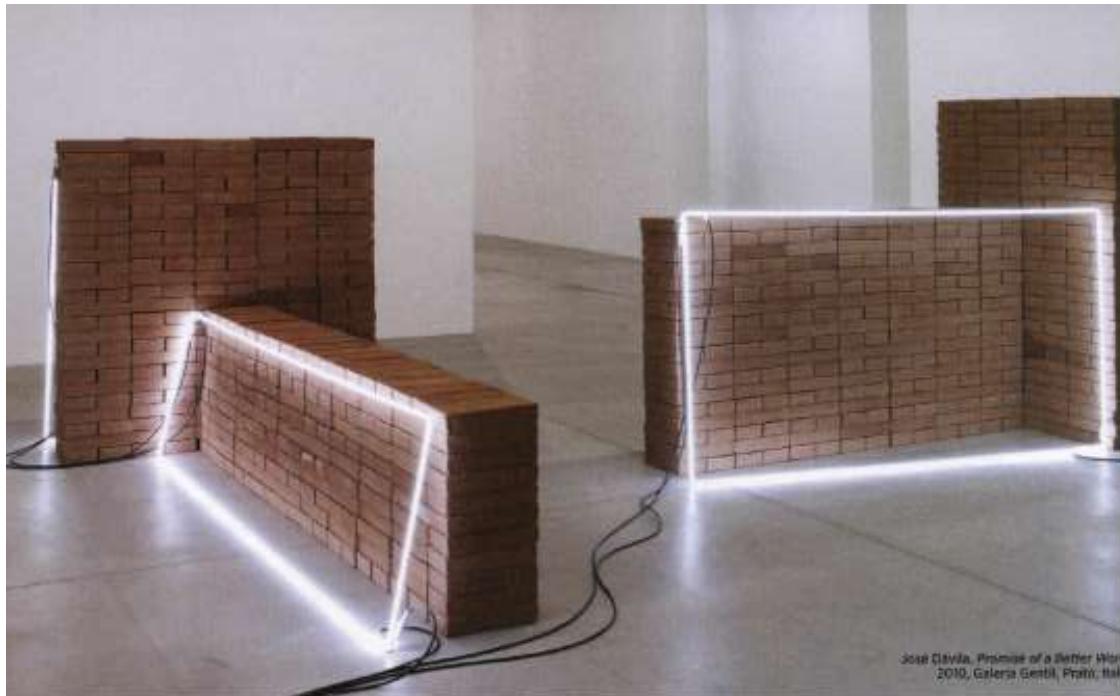
Detalle de *Principle of Understanding*.



José Dávila, *In Theory, I Could Make a Different Decision*. José Dávila 2016.



Otro aspecto de la pieza de Dávila.



José Dávila, *Promise of a Better World*, 2010, Galería Gestil, Praga; Italia

de arriba a abajo, y la figura del coyote se aplata —aún dentro de la evidente bidimensionalidad de la caricatura. Aquí, como en la obra de José Dávila, se observa una representación de los signos y efectos de la gravedad, o una explicación visual de un concepto y un proceso, el de la fuerza que la Tierra ejerce hacia su centro. Al igual que en las historietas, sus objetos son un regreso a los básicos de la forma: línea, superficie y volumen. A su vez, la reducción de los recursos visuales y materiales sirven para manifestar características esenciales y llegar a un significado sin rodeos: todo cae por su propio peso.

Diversos personajes atraviesan las paredes de sus estudios, talleres u otros espacios de trabajo. Algunos dejan a sus modelos de pie, esperando a su regreso. No se sabe cómo, pero han desaparecido de la imagen impresa. Cualquier cuerpo que atraviese la materia sólida —por ejemplo, un muro, una piedra, una mesa— dejará una perforación tipo túnel con su silueta, promulga la ley número tres de O'Donnell. La ausencia es perceptible en el papel horadado y en los perfiles de loz que las sombras delimitan al fondo. Amás del vidrio-pantalla de los *auto-arts* de Dávila se encuentran dos imágenes: la recortada y la “aparecida”. También conocido como el efecto de “silueta de paso” o el “recorte de galleta” —*sombras cut-out*—, se trata del fenómeno en el que la presión o la huida repentina de dichas figuras son dirigidas directamente a través de la pared de una casa. O, en este caso, a través del papel.

Nos enfrentamos a la alegoría de la caverna de Platón. Sin embargo, la relación de las sombras con los objetos sensibles está invertida: no son sombras las figuras que percibimos a través de los sentidos, sino la luz, la sombra blanca. A veces, la luz neón es un intento de darle cuerpo a las sombras y esculpir aquello que no está a la vista. Otras veces es el vacío la sustancia misma con la que se trabaja. Si los personajes encadenados en la cueva se dieran la vuelta para ver a sus compañeros de afuera, la luz tampoco les permitiría verlos: solamente podrían apreciar su silueta.

En la novela satírica de Edwin Abbott *Platónlandia, una novela de muchas dimensiones*, Esfera se presenta a Cuadrado en la segunda dimensión, pero éste, en su ceguera de dos dimensiones, fracasa en reconocerla. En la visión Cuadrado, Esfera es siempre una línea que, a diferencia de él, ni siquiera cambia de tamaño dependiendo el ángulo en que sea vista... hasta que llega el día de llevarlo al mundo tridimensional. Si bien el problema de Cuadrado uno de percepción entre la superficie y el espacio, el paso de una dimensión a otra lo lleva a comprender qué ha ocurrido en las que los garabatos escapan el papel y se desdoblan en el espacio, como el Cuadrado en Cubo, como el Coyote escapando del espacio-tiempo a través de un agujero pintado en el suelo, que lo llevará a otro sitio a otro agujero, del cual no sabremos nada, ni dónde está ni cómo es.

En la lógica de los dibujos animados, la retícula siempre es maleable. Como ocurre con la tendencia del cultor José Dávila a destruir, reforzar y retrazar la retícula, de enmarcar o hacer suya una estructura existente desbaratada, de hacer bolita un papel, estirarlo de nuevo y colgarlo en la pared. De desdoblarse una imagen plana en volumétrica: el dibujo de un elefante en una estructura de metal cuya forma cambia constantemente, según posición del espectador. ■

66 DÁVILA DESTRUYE Y RETRAZA, AL IGUAL QUE EN LOS DIBUJOS ANIMADOS. 99

En PORTADA



José Dávila, Untitled, 2014.

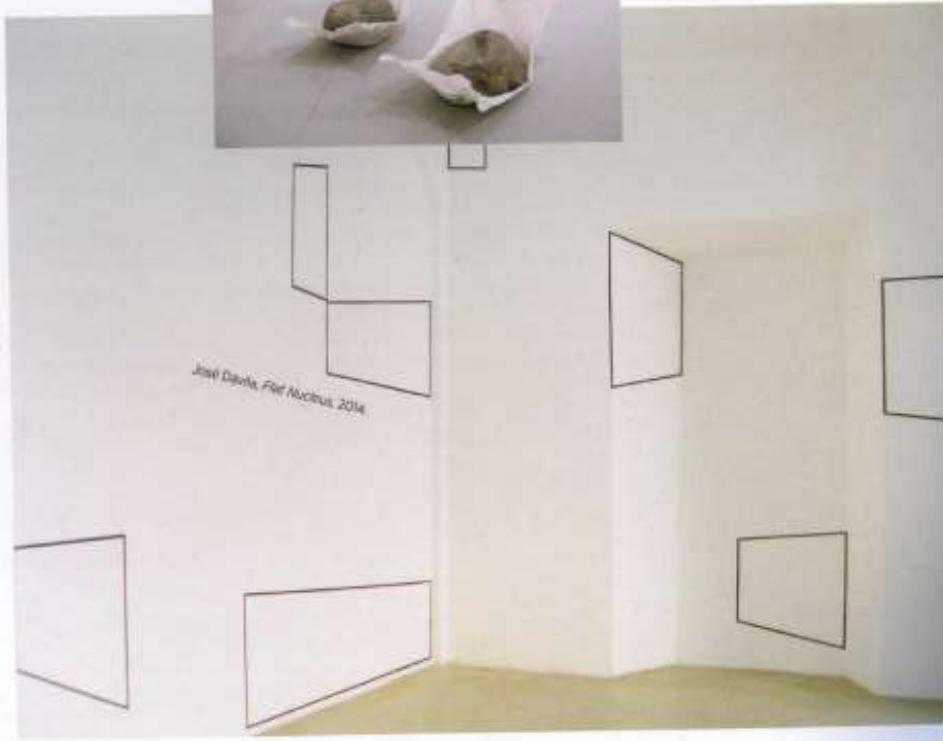


José Dávila, Untitled, 2014.



José Dávila, Brute Force, 2014.

José Dávila, Fid Nucleus, 2014.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSÉ DÁVILA. STYLING AND PROPS BY MARINA VASQUEZ. HAIR AND MAKEUP BY SEAN HILL

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View a biography of Mexican artist Jose Dávila on the Poetry of Precarious Balances

Meet the Artist
Jose Dávila on the Poetry of Precarious Balances
By Andrew M. Goldstein
Feb 5, 2015



The artist Jose Dávila

The Mexican artist Jose Dávila uses simple materials to explore profound themes, building architecturally inspired environments and creating abstracting photographic interventions. The Guadalajara-based artist's work has gained international acclaim, and his guessing game photographic pieces in particular have gone viral. Last December he won the ArtNexus Latin America Art Award, and earlier this year he was picked up by Sean Kelly Gallery. He is now at work with Los Angeles' Normandy Division on a provocative, ambitiously scaled project for the 2017 edition of Pacific Standard Time.

This week, during Mexico City's Zona Maco art fair, Artspace and LAND have debuted an exclusive new edition with Dávila that functions as a summa of many of the themes enlivening his work. To mark the occasion, Artspace editor-in-chief Andrew M. Goldstein spoke to the artist about his work, his preoccupation with Josef Albers, and his complex perspective on the state of art in Mexico today.

You're renowned today as an artist, but you started your career as an architect. How did you transition from one field to the other?

My original intention was to study art, but I couldn't afford to go to university outside of Guadalajara and the school there wasn't really what I was looking for—it was very old-fashioned, and not in a good way. But I also visited some architecture schools, and I found the idea of working with clay, light, model-making, material test labs, et cetera to be very appealing. So I went into architecture school, but I always had an interest in art, and during my summer breaks I started taking sculpture and photography classes at the Institute of Fine Arts in San Miguel de Allende, a little colonial town about two hours from Guadalajara.

At the time, in 1994, I also had a darkroom where I was living, so I was already very active in photography. My very first exhibition was in the foyer of the university cinema in Guadalajara in 1996, showing a few black-and-white photographs. Almost immediately after, I formed a collective with a group of fellow students where we made one-day happenings for exhibitions in very particular architectural contexts, doing art projects that highlighted the essence of the place where we were intervening. It was called Incidental.

Did you see the photography as being related to your architectural studies, or did you see them as different pursuits?

I saw it as completely related, because I was also using photography in my architectural composition process. I would photograph certain models that I was making and then use those photographs to create the plans for my student projects.

To this day much of your work seems to incorporate both the functional aspects of architecture and also its non-functional, purely aesthetic aspects. For instance, your sculptures employ the same types of materials you would see in a construction project and call upon the same considerations of architectonics and counter-balance, but they're clearly useless as architecture.

Yes, I think those were very formative years. I was mixing the different aspects of the functional and the not-functional, using the materials of construction, the idea of making, and being careful about the history of things.

What would you say was your first sculptural project?

I was in a group show in 1999 at the Museo de Las Artes of the University of Guadalajara where I used ceramic casts to mass-produce 200 small identical buildings, which mimicked government housing at the time, to create a sort of square in the ground all over the museum. It was both an abstract composition and a kind of architectural model criticizing government housing.

Today you're well known for your gravity-based sculptures of glass and stone, or thin slices of marble and stone, held together by ratchet straps. These pieces are enlivened by this duet of delicate and very hard materials and by the idea of precarious balance. How do you generate these tensions in your work?

I've always been interested in using raw, untouched materials rather than transforming a material's shape or form. I'm more interested in creating an interplay between elements as they are. Therefore, for example, the glass planes are as they are. The marble slabs are just as you can find them at marble suppliers. The tie-downs are just commercial objects. So there's no modification of any of the elements, but the play between them comes back to the universal struggle of humanity against gravity—that's been a continuing preoccupation with me.

I remember, since we were talking about my university years, that I used to take a class called "Practical Structures," which was kind of like an engineering class but without any mathematics. It was all empirical work about how materials reacted to certain forces, and you would have to put them to different tests. I loved that class, and I think that these works owe a lot to that kind of thinking, of working with gravity and tension without any engineering calculations. With my work, I don't do any calculations in a theoretical or mathematical way—I do them all practically.

Your works acknowledge the legacy of Latin American concrete art—particularly artists like Helio Oiticica—as well as western artists like Josef Albers and Richard Serra. Can you talk about how you employ these references?

I didn't go to art school, so I was really self-taught in the sense of art history. I'm an artist but I'm also obviously an art lover, and since Guadalajara is not an art capital in the sense of Paris or New York or London or L.A. or Mexico City, even, the way I got to know about art was through books. And the result of consulting all these books to learn art history was a natural contamination, if you will.

Josef Albers is a particularly important touchstone for you, since you've done tributes to his famous Homage to the Square series in all manner of formats—from wall pieces to Calder-esque mobiles to swimming pools of concentric squares of different colors. What is your relationship to Albers, whose approach was so painterly and principally concerned with color theory?

The very first piece I made about Albers was a wooden shelf that held four different-sized glass planes that were all in the proportion of an Albers painting, leaning against a monochrome backdrop. I did that because I was trying to make a comment on the fact that color is the result of light and cannot exist without light. The glass planes modify the light as it passes through them, giving you different shades of the same color in the same perspective of an Albers painting. While I was doing that, I realized that another thing I really liked about Albers was the way he introduced seriality, changing the shade of the colors from piece to piece.

What about the ceramic pieces in your Homages to the Square series, such as the new edition you recently made with LAND and Artspace?

At the time I was also working with ceramics in the very traditional Mexican way, and I realized how important Albers's time working with applied arts at the Bauhaus was to his art. I became interested in working in this applied-arts style in the ceramics factory, putting the same ideas of decoration and hand into an artwork. With ceramics you don't get a perfect square, and I asked for them to be cut by hand—rather than with an angle or ruler—to give them the imperfection of the handcrafted.

I like to work with the multiple format because it has that aspect of seriality that I was talking about. I also like to draw connections between different artists, sometimes connections that go beyond what I can rationally explain but arise from personal admiration for the artists and the fact that I find junction points between them. I used gold-leaf monochrome in this edition because I relate that technique to the work of a German artist named Mathias Goertz who came to Mexico to teach, first in Guadalajara and then Mexico City. He was very interested in Josef Albers—they were all from the same historical period, and I guess they each in their own way were working with color and mysticism. The artist was famous for using gold-leaf monochrome, so I wanted to make this junction between these two figures.

What are some other examples of connections between artists in your work?

Once I did two different paintings, one of them in the personal color chart of Albers and the other one in the personal color chart of Donald Judd. I thought Judd and Albers have a lot in common, since Judd profited from the works that Albers had done with serialization, and then I discovered that Albers's color chart was from 1948 while the Judd chart was from 1984—a perfectly arithmetic doubling of the kind that was important to Judd, who always worked in the same proportion of 1:2 or 1:1.

Another body of your work that has become very well known is your cut-outs, where you take photographs of architectural landmarks or notable artworks—like Richard Prince's cowboys—and excise the central images, leaving only their contexts. I've read that this series began in 2003 when you took a copy of the O.M.A. book Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large and cut out pictures from there. Can you talk about the origin of that work, and how it has evolved over time?

I purposely work with well-known images, to dwell on that existing relationship that these images have with people already. By subtracting the main subject I intend to compel the viewer to perform a creative act, because they have to somehow fill in that central image from their memory and imagination. And even if it's an image you've seen many times, whatever you might recall might not be the same thing that I recall.

This interest may have begun in architecture school, where we sometimes were asked to cut out an image of a building and place it in a new setting, destroying the original context. I realized that the surroundings themselves and the missing building were very appealing to me, because it forced people to think about what was no longer there. In fact, I also remember once visiting Rome and being struck by the site of the Circus Maximus, of which not even a single stone remains, only a slight impression of the racetrack upon the ground. I remember seeing tourists walking around and taking pictures of themselves, but with nothing! I thought, "That's really using your imagination."

In these referential series, your work plays into a great tradition in Mexican modern art, and also Latin American modern art in general, where ideas that came out of the European canon were absorbed and reconfigured. Looking around the Mexican art scene today, in the era of globalization, do you find this kind of exchange to still be dynamic, widespread, and relevant?

That's a difficult question, but an interesting one because I think the scene of contemporary art in Mexico has changed a lot in the last 10 or 15 years. I remember that when I was younger and first starting out there weren't really any contemporary artists at the time, or there were contemporary artists but the artistic languages they were using were not contemporary, instead based on more traditional art from the 1920s or even the 19th century. Younger artists like me couldn't find an artist to work for as an assistant or anything, so we had to form our own projects, like one-day projects or artist-run spaces. We had to develop the scene ourselves. I'm talking about Guadalajara but that's something that happened in Mexico City as well.

I'm not saying that artist-run spaces don't exist anymore—I know there are some in Mexico City—but I think it's shifted into a more professionalized scene and also a more market-oriented, museum-show-oriented, international-exposure-oriented scene than it was before. I guess it sounds cliché, but you can see the globalization process playing out in the Mexican art scene. Obviously it has some Mexican aspects to it, as every kind of art will have in this place, but I think we are in a certain process of internationalization. So I see younger generations of artists in Mexico who find it quite difficult to know where they are from, since it seems very much like any other art scene, like Berlin or L.A. or New York. I'm not saying it's negative, I'm just saying that's what I see. Perhaps it's positive, I don't know.

How do you use your own artist-run project space Oficina para Proyectos de Arte, which is located on the 23rd story of a skyscraper in Guadalajara, to nurture artists in this context?

Well, that's an artist space I formed with another two fellow artist friends in 2002 because for a long time there wasn't a single space in Guadalajara that would show really contemporary art. At some point other spaces opened, so I'm not saying we were the only one, but at the time we opened it there was really nothing around, so we thought we should do something, and it started to grow beyond our expectations. We were always most interested in this particular project in inviting international artists to be able to come and produce work here, rather than having to deal with shipping and insurance and all these things in order to put on a show. We gave them complete freedom to do whatever, obviously, in a more risky way than a museum would, because we wanted to give young people here a way to see art in the flesh, not in a book or as an image on the Internet. I think seeing something in person transmits to you a certain energy, a certain veracity and weight, that you can only see through the physicalness of a sculpture, for example, and which a photo can't communicate.

It's interesting that you were talking about your ambivalence towards the globalization of the Mexican art scene, since it sounds like you actively sought to help import these global ideas.

I'm not at all advocating nationalism. We brought a lot of international art into Guadalajara, which had to have had an effect, and I think it did, but we have to be careful with nationalist stereotyping of what it takes to be a Mexican artist or a Japanese artist. These days it's difficult to say something is German art or British art or American art in the same way you used to be able to, but it's still easy to say that something is Brazilian art or Japanese art. So we were interested in showing these different artistic languages that could help develop ideas that were not rooted in nationalization. That was why when I was talking about the shift in the Mexican art scene, I wasn't saying that that it's necessarily bad. I hope that it can create an art that is universal. That would be perfect, I guess.

Speaking of international dialogue, you have a major project in the works for the next edition of Pacific Standard Time, which is coming up in the fall of 2017. Could you talk a bit about that?

The next edition of Pacific Standard Time is titled "LA/LA" and it will focus on the relationship between Latin America and Los Angeles. My project in particular has to do with the very strong relationship between Mexico, as a continent and a culture, and L.A., given that at one point it actually used to be part of Mexico, and that it holds the second-largest population of Mexican people in the world outside of Mexico. I think for the curators it was interesting to do something with someone from Guadalajara, because Guadalajara has a very direct relation with L.A. even more than Mexico City. Guadalajara is geographically in the Pacific, so it's closer and the weather is very similar. Guadalajara is also kind of an urban sprawl. It may be a bit of a wild comparison, but I would say that Mexico City is more like the New York of Mexico and Guadalajara is more the L.A. of Mexico.

What I'm planning is an urban sculpture that will spread out in different pieces throughout very specific areas of L.A. The process will be documented photographically, with pictures taken of what happens to every piece over the course of a year, because I'm trying to make the sculpture a kind of urban sociological cultural study of the many different aspects of culture included in L.A. and the different communities within. This will all come together again after a year, when I present an extensive display of these photographs. I'm very excited about this. I'm looking forward to seeing what the results are.

<http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews/features/jose-davila-interview>



CONVERSATIONS Q & A
JOSE DÁVILA
ARTIST

"I'm an artist but also a viewer, part of an audience; and I like to research and read about art."

Born in 1974, Jose Dávila lives and works in Guadalajara, Mexico. Working across a range of mediums including photography, sculpture and installation, his work questions the inherent qualities of modern architecture and art.

Dávila has exhibited widely around the world including exhibitions at PS1, New York; Kunstwerke, Berlin; San Diego Museum of Art; Reina Sofia, Madrid; Prague Biennale, Camden Arts Centre, London; Musée de Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne; Fundazione Brogovic 33, Lake Como; IVAM, Valencia. He has also been the recipient of support from the Andy Warhol Foundation, a Kunstwerke residency in Berlin and the National Grant for young artists by the Mexican Arts Council (FONCA) in 2000. Dávila was a co-founder and Director of Oficina para Proyectos de Arte, an artist-run space in Guadalajara.

In your work you reflect on modern and contemporary art, architecture, urbanism and human history. You originally studied architecture; can you tell us about how you came to work as an artist?

I originally intended to study art. I was living at the time in Guadalajara and the art school there was offering old-school techniques, such as figure drawing and bronze sculpture of ballet ballerina. I was not looking for that, so I visited the architecture school and my connection to it was immediate, when I saw the model workshops, experiments with light and space, etc. During my architecture studies I shared a studio outside the school with some friends, two of whom were painters. I had a darkroom, as I was heavily invested into black-and-white photography. A curator, Guillermo Santamarina once came to the studio to see the work of the painters, and realized they were not alone: we were a group of about 7 or 8 creative people doing things, so he invited us all to do an art show... after that, one thing led to another.

It has been commented that your work is "...fuelled by the interest in the relation between place and fiction, space and temporality under architecture..." Can you expand on this?

A space in the built environment becomes a place due to the architecture that constitutes it. Architecture is history written in stone, but it is also the cradle for the fictional story we come to believe is our life, the fiction that comes naturally as memories of our past, of our childhood. We can go back to a place we used to live in or visit often, and realize that as we have changed through time, the place is not the same either; we had a place in our head. This perception, this sort of creative illusion is something I pursue in art.

Your work also reflects on the work of key artists and architects in history, expressing humor, melancholy and a sense of loss. Tell us about your influencers and inspirations.

I'm naturally and have always been fascinated by art. I'm an artist but also a viewer, part of an audience; and I like to research and read about art. This has led me to try to shed light or comment on specific aspects of certain works. However, I want to do this through art, and not through writing for example; I intend to generate new meaning on top of already existing meaning. I'm inspired by artists that generate universes through prolific creativity. I'm very much influenced by Minimalist and Conceptual American art, and also by Brazil's Neo-concrete movement.

To what extent do you view yourself as a Mexican artist, responding to the complex and distinctive traditions, history and socio-political circumstances of Mexico?

I'm against nationalism. If that is the case, my work is Mexican just because I hold a Mexican passport and is made within Mexican borders. My mother's family used to live in Texas, then the border moved and they became American...so what am I? My work is nurtured by the manual skills of artisans, carpenters, and locksmiths. The socio-political situation in Mexico affects me first and foremost as a person, therefore affecting my work subconsciously. I try not to make my work the recipient of that, I rather have a more universal approach.

You are a co-founder of the Office for Art Projects in Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city. Can you tell us about how this project evolved, what role it has had in your practice as an artist and how it continues to function today?

Office for Art Projects (OPA) is now officially closed. It ran for over ten years and I think some fantastic shows of great artists took place there. We had the policy of spending a minimum in insurances, shipping, handling, etc. We tried to use money for artists to produce new work, to come to Guadalajara and develop a relationship with the place and the city's circumstances, and create something out of that. I helped to produce many shows, doing all sorts of practical and logistical work and trying to always make the artists' intentions or wishes possible, whatever they were. So I learned a lot, in many levels and had very good conversations that have stayed in my mind.

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm working on a show for Figge Von Rosen Gallery in Cologne, to open in September. It's a show comprised only of sculptures, as a link to our behavior in a given space and traditional notions of size, scale and the plasticity of materials that generate meaning through their use.

What projects do you have coming up for the rest of 2013?

A show at MUAC (University Museum of Contemporary Art, UNAM) in Mexico City, titled *The Persistence of Geometry*; and a show at a museum in Lithuania, curated by Lorenzo Bruni.

Which international art destination would you like to visit or exhibit in?

I was just there six weeks ago, but I've always liked London very much and I'm always very excited to be and work there.

JOSE DÁVILA

By / por Greg Lindquist
(continua)

A South American artist friend recently suggested that the migration and digestion of contemporary art from North to South America sometimes takes many decades to be reflected in the art. Perhaps, the rapid increase in distribution and circulation of art through the Internet and international fairs has also sped up this process. However, Jose Dávila's sculptures and photographic manipulations responding to many North American and European threads of modernist traditions and movements, demonstrate that this process of exploration and investigation can be a slow, protracted and rewarding act. Through email dialogue, Greg Lindquist and Jose Dávila discussed these concerns surrounding his work.

surrounding his work.
Greg Lindquist: In Untitled (The Space Beneath Us) (2012) at Art Basel Miami Beach, notions of the purity of color are toppled in favor of an improvised sense of material and place. In reworking the structure and scale of Joseph Albers's Homage for the Square into a public sculpture, how did notions of site play inform the way this piece was made?
Jose Dávila: Public space is a utopian context for an artist to work in. Everyone can experience the work, an old lady, children, etc. Most people that come across the work were not searching for it, so their expectation is somehow totally "clean". To work in public space always presents this opportunity. To give the work the opportunity to confront real life and see how it adapts to it. I was indeed interested in doing a work that would interfere in a positive way with the park, with what people do in the park, to become an activity and not just an object to look at. I wanted to do a staggered real space, out of the notion of a suggested space by a fake perspective that comes out of Albers's paintings.

G. L.: Through the literal removal of these artists from the photographs with their work—largely men, such as Henri Matisse

Un amigo artista sudamericano sugirió hace poco que a veces lleva muchas décadas que la migración y la asimilación del arte contemporáneo de América del Norte a América del Sur se refleja en el arte en general. Tal vez el rápido incremento en la distribución y circulación de arte a través de Internet y de las ferias internacionales han acelerado este proceso. Sin embargo, las esculturas e intervenciones fotográficas de José Dávila, que responden a muchas vertientes de tradiciones y movimientos modernistas de América del Norte y Europa, demuestran que este proceso de exploración e investigación puede ser un acto lento, extendido y gratificante. A través de un diálogo por correo electrónico, Greg Lindquist y José Dávila discutieron estas inquietudes concernientes a la obra de este último.

Greg Lindquist: En *Untitled (The Space Beneath Us)* (2012) presentada en Art Basel Miami Beach, las nociones sobre la pureza del color se ven desplazadas en favor de un sentido improvisado del material y el lugar. Al reelaborar la estructura y la escala de la obra de Joseph Albers *Homage for the Square/Homenaje al cuadrado*, transformándola en una escultura pública. ¿Cómo influyeron las nociones del juego con el lugar en la forma en que se creó la pieza?

José Dávila: El espacio público es un contexto utópico para el trabajo de un artista. Todo el mundo puede experimentar la obra; una señora mayor, los niños, etc. La mayoría de las personas que se topan con la obra no la estaban buscando, de manera que su expectativa es, de algún modo, totalmente "limpia".

El trabajo en un espacio público siempre presenta esta oportunidad. El darle a la obra la oportunidad de enfrentarse a la vida real y ver cómo se adapta a ella. Me interesaría hacer una obra que interfiriera de manera positiva con el parque y con lo que la gente hace en el parque, que se convirtiera en una actividad y no simplemente en un objeto para mirar. Quería hacer un espacio



Untitled (The Space Beneath Us),
2012. MATERIALE, Artebano
Maya Beach, 2012.
Materiale Tradizionale
formato da circa 10 x 10m.
Cerimonia tradizionale messicana dei
Tzotzil que rendono i morti.
Courtesy of Cortesía de la
Galería Travesía Cuatro/
Madrid, Spain/España

Alberto Giacometti, Pollock, and Yves Klein—in *Topologies of Identity* (2012) for example, are you critical of this Western European male grand narrative that is being exalted? They also have a disturbing quality as photographic portraits, forcing one to focus on the creative work rather than the creator.

J. D.: I didn't intend this work to be a precise critique of the Western European Male grand narrative but rather a critique of the notion that fuels the myth of the artist as a personage. The solution of a sort of King Midas, in which everything he does

real escondido, basado en la noción de espacio sugerido por una perspectiva falsa que surge del laborioso trabajo de Albera. G.L.: A través de la remoción literal de estos artistas—en su mayoría hombres, como Henri Matisse, Alberto Giacometti, Pollock, e Yves Klein—de las fotografías en las que están retratados con su obra, en *Topologies of Identity/Topologías de la identidad* (2012) por ejemplo, ¿eres crítico de la gran narrativa masculina característica de la Europa Occidental que se practica? También tienen una cierta perniciosa como refritos fotográficos, forzando al observador a enfocarse en el trabajo creativo, más que en el creador.

J.D.: No era mi intención que esta obra fuese una crítica específica de la gran narrativa masculina de Europa Occidental, sino más bien una crítica de la noción que alimenta el mito del artista como personaje. La adulación de una especie de rey Midas que implica que todo lo que hace está bien simplemente porque él o ella lo han tocado. Se trata de una propuesta más que de una crítica, destinada a recordarnos que debemos enfocarnos en la obra más que en el personaje.

G.L.: ¿Crees que esa adulación de la mitología del artista constituye un problema

ARTISTS | ARTISTAS



I think healthy works of art raise questions, which I don't have the answers for. | Creo que las obras de arte saludables plantean preguntas para las que no tengo respuestas.

O jango de lo posible, 2012
Partial view of the show/Vista
parcial de la exposición
Courtesy of Comisaría de la
Sala de Exposiciones Cuatro
Madrid, Spain/España

Horizonte vertical, 2012
Wooden poles, metal bases,
356 x 80 x 22 cm.
Vigas de madera, bases de
metal, 356 x 80 x 22 cm.
Courtesy of Comisaría de la
Sala de Exposiciones Cuatro
Madrid, Spain/España

is good, just because he touched it. It's a proposal, rather than a critique, to remind us to focus on the work rather than the character.

G. L.: Do you feel like that adulation of the artist's mythology is a problem in contemporary art now?

J. D.: Yes I do.

G. L.: In *Untitled* (2012) the sculptural mobile based on the structure of Albers's square, the removal of color functions similarly to *Topologies of Light* (2012) in which you cut out the fluorescent tubes from photographs of Dan Flavin's light sculptures. In a way, in both works, you are removing a key quality in the work. How much do these works in your opinion complicate homage? And do they function to you as a critical gesture towards, for example, the fetishization of purity or reduction of form?

J. D.: The very first mobile I did was indeed all black, because I wanted to work with the proportion frames Albers used. That somehow functioned as a container to be filled many times with diverse combinations

en el arte contemporáneo en la actualidad?

J. D.: Sí, lo creo.

G. L.: En *Untitled/Sin título* (2012) el móvil escultórico basado en la estructura del cuadrado de Albers, la eliminación del color funciona de manera similar a *Topologías de Luz/Topologies de la luz* (2012) en la que has recortado los tubos fluorescentes de Dan Flavin. En cierto modo, en ambas obras estás eliminando una calidad clave de la obra. En tu opinión, ¿en qué medida complican estas obras el homenaje? ¿Y consideras que funcionan como un gesto crítico con respecto, por ejemplo, de la leticiosis de la pureza o el reduccionismo de la forma?

J. D.: El primer móvil que creé fue de hecho enteramente negro, porque quería trabajar con los parámetros de proporción utilizados por Albers, que funcionaban en cierta forma como un contenedor que podía ser llenado muchas veces con diferentes combinaciones de colores. Quería emplear esos parámetros desde un punto de vista espacial, como una obra tridimensional que surgiera de una obra bidimensional reflejada



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of colors. I wanted to use those frames in a spatial way, a three-dimensional work that came out of a two dimensional one about perspective. However, into the search of trying to produce a sculpture out of a painting I realized it could work also with color and so I did. Neglecting the light tubes in Flavin's photograph is a strategy to raise the question in the viewer about which role the tubes played in Flavin's work, are they the work? Or do they produce the work? I think healthy works of art raise questions, which I don't have the answers for.

G.L.: Absolutely. If you remove the light tubes, then you have the atmospheric light, which is a result of the light tubes. But the tubes alone do not make the work, even though when Flavin first exhibited this work, this was the most challenging part of the work. No one wanted to acknowledge the result of the tubes. Are you interested in any spiritual implication of the light?

J.D.: I'm not personally interested in spiritual implications in art; however, it is indisputable that light does have a great impact on human behavior and reactions to perceive spaces and even feelings. It is interesting how susceptible human feelings are to light.

G.L.: In many of your works, you locate new materials or ways to reconfigure and reconsider Modernist and Minimalist forms. This comes up several times with the motif of Donald Judd's Stack formations. For example, in *Horizontal Vertical* (2012), you re-imagine them with weathered driftwood. *Untitled* (2009) with segmented shipping containers. *Untitled* (2007) and (2009) with consumerist cardboard boxes. Judd's dour ideas of symmetry, repetition, the specificity of a particular object and the inherent qualities of the surface are placed in a tense contrast to the ephemeral and irregular qualities of your choice of

a la perspectiva. Sin embargo, en el curso de la búsqueda implícita en tratar de crear una escultura a partir de una pintura me di cuenta de que también podía trabajar con color y así lo hice.

El descartar los tubos de luz de las fotografías de Flavin constituye una estrategia tendiente a hacer que el espectador se cuestione el papel de los tubos de luz en la obra de este artista. ¿Constituyen ellos la obra? ¿O producen la obra? Creo que las obras de arte saskiables plantean preguntas para las que no tengo respuestas.

G.L.: Absolutamente cierto. Si eliminas los tubos de luz, queda la luz ambiente, que es una consecuencia de los tubos de luz. Pero los tubos en sí no constituyen la obra, aunque cuando Flavin exhibió esta pieza por primera vez, esa fue la parte más desafiante de la obra. Nadie quería reconocer el resultado de los tubos. ¿Te interesa alguna implicancia espiritual de la luz?

J.D.: Personalmente, no estoy interesado en ninguna implicancia espiritual en el arte. No obstante, es indiscutible que la luz tiene un gran impacto sobre el comportamiento humano y las reacciones para percibir espacios y sus sentimientos. Es interesante lo susceptibles que son los sentimientos humanos a la luz.

G.L.: En muchas de tus obras, incluyes nuevos materiales o formas de reconfigurar o reconsiderar las formas modernistas o minimalistas. Esto surge varias veces en el tema de las formaciones de apilamientos de Donald Judd. Por ejemplo, en *Horizontal Vertical*, (2012), las reimágenes utilizando madera de deriva desgastada. *Untitled* (sin título) (2009) contenedores de carga segmentados. *Untitled* (sin título) (2007) y (2009) con cajas de cartón propias de la sociedad de consumo. Los pioneristas ideales de Judd sobre la simetría, la repetición, la espectralidad de un objeto en particular y las cualidades inherentes a la superficie se sitúan en un tenso contraste con las cualidades de transitoriedad e irregularidad en tu elección de materiales. Además, al utilizar un contenedor de carga y empaque de productos, por ejemplo, te enfrentas directamente con las formas de transporte en las cadenas de consumo. ¿Crees que estas obras hacen referencia a problemas y contenidos característicos de una economía global y ya no son tan estadounidenses como Judd habría querido verlas?

J.D.: Tiendo a relacionar estas obras de Judd más con el sentido de la aritmética del espacio y la forma en que operamos en él.

Especie de lo posible; 2007
E-print, 105x78 in.
Fotografía a mano, 27 x 20 cm
Courtesy of Casula 44 la
Sala la Travesía Cuatro
Madrid. Spain/Spagna

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materials. In addition, with using a shipping container and product packaging, for example, you confront head on the modes of transportation in consumer chains. Do you believe these works speak to issues and content characteristic of a global economy and are no longer as American as Judd would have liked to have seen them?

J. D.: I tend to relate these works to Judd more in the sense of the arithmetic of space, and how we operate in it. How the distance between things influences our behavior, more than on the pristine quality of the materials Judd used.

This is why I use, for example, cheap cardboard or simple driftwood. Judd's precept surely holds true, but I think is universal and can be achieved with materials associated with poorness or third world.

G. L.: Are these materials that you associate with economic status also something that reflects a particular culture, in Mexico or Latin America, or elsewhere in our world? If so, how?

J. D.: In many poor areas of the world, cheap and found materials are reconfigured to create something else than the purpose these materials or objects were originally created for. I like that cue. It is a very interesting form of recycling, reusing, which boosts the creative force that comes out of the scarcity of resources. I remember how impressed I was when I saw once, a house in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, that one of its walls was created by stacking old, broken refrigerators.

G. L.: In "Bichos Gigantes," (2009) you cite the matchbox forms of Lygia Clark as inspiration. How much do recent Latin American movements of art, such as the Brazilian Constructivists, or culture at large, influence your work?

J. D.: Certainly the Brazilian Constructivists movement and artists fascinate me, as well as modern architecture in Latin America or Africa, outside of the rich western countries. Yes, these two fuel my creative process in many ways, sometimes more intuitively and sometimes more rationally.

G. L.: Can you give some examples of modern architecture in Latin America and Africa?

J. D.: For example, the Obafemi Awolowo University campus in Nigeria, built in the sixties. Or the Agadir affordable housing project in Morocco. Have to mention, evidently, the city of Brasilia in Brazil. The main campus of the National University of Mexico, in Mexico City. Or the general work of Mario Pani, or Félix Candela, in Mexico, amongst others.

La forma en que la distancia entre las cosas influye sobre nuestro comportamiento, más que con la purísima calidad de los materiales que utilizaba Judd.

Es por eso que utilizo, por ejemplo, cartón barato o simple madera de desecho.

El precepto de Judd seguramente continúa siendo válido, pero pienso que es universal

y puede ser alcanzado utilizando materiales asociados con la pobreza o el Tercer Mundo.

G. L.: Son estos materiales que asociales

con el estatus económico también algo que

refleja una cultura particular, en México o

America Latina, o en alguna otra parte del mundo?

De ser así, ¿de qué forma?

J. D.: En muchas zonas pobres del mundo

se reconfiguran materiales baratos o encontrados para crear algo diferente del propuesto para el cual estos materiales u objetos habían sido creados originalmente.

Me gusta ese pie. Es una forma muy

interesante de reciclaje, de resutilización,

que potencia la fuerza creativa que surge

de la escasez de recursos. Recuerdo lo

impresionado que estuve cuando una vez vi

una casa en una *favela* de Rio de Janeiro,

una de cuyas paredes había sido construida

apilando viejos refrigeradores en desuso.

G. L.: En "Bichos Gigantes," (2009)

citas las formas creadas con casas

de fórmica de Lygia Clark como

inspiración. ¿En qué medida influyen

sobre tu trabajo los recientes movimientos

artísticos latinoamericanos tales como

el constructivismo brasileño, o la cultura

latinoamericana en general?

J. D.: Claramente el movimiento

constructivista brasileño y los artistas que

lo representan me fascinan, lo mismo que

la moderna arquitectura de América Latina

o de África, ajena a la de los países

occidentales. Si, ambas cosas alimentan

mi proceso creativo de muchas maneras,

a veces más intuitivamente y a veces más

racionalmente.

G. L.: ¿Puedes dar algunos ejemplos de

arquitectura moderna en América Latina y

Africa?

J. D.: Por ejemplo, el campus de la

Universidad Obafemi Awolowo en Nigeria,

construido en los años sesenta. O el

proyecto Agadir de viviendas económicas

en Marruecos. Debo mencionar,

evidentemente, la ciudad de Brasilia en

Brasil. El campus principal de la Universidad

Nacional de México. O la obra en general

de Mario Pani y Félix Candela, en México,

entre otros.



Untitled/Solo chico, 2011.
Oil on canvas, 19.7 x 28.5 in.
(50 x 72 cm).
Courtesy of Centro de creación
y producción de la Contemporaneidad,
Barcelona. Foto: Agustín Aragón.
Foto: Ruth Bandy.



[Pronunciar el nombre]

José Dávila's work is based on his interest in the relationship between reality and fiction, space and temporality under architecture as a recurring theme. Since 1996, Dávila has exhibited in numerous venues such as MoMA PS1, New York; Kunstwerke, Berlin; San Diego Museum of Art; Reina Sofia Art Museum, Madrid; Prague Biennale; Ciudad Arts Centre, London; Museo de Arte Moderno, São Paulo; Fundación BragaVice 33, Coimbra, among others. His work has been represented in international publications such as *Creatas 3*, Phaidon Publishing House, 100 artists: *Intervenciones*, Exit Publishers and *Megastrukturas Reloaded*. Héctor Cerezo, editor. Dávila has received support from the Andy Warhol Foundation, the KunstWerke Residence in Berlin, and he has been the recipient of the Scholarship for Young Artists granted by the National Council for Culture and Art, Mexico. He is the director and co-founder of the OPA spaces for art management, Guadalajara, Mexico, where he currently lives and works.

El trabajo de José Dávila se apoya por su interés en la relación entre la realidad y la ficción, espacio y la temporalidad bajo la arquitectura como un tema central. Dávila, el año 1996 ha expuesto en numerosas espacios tales como el MoMA PS1, Nueva York; Kunstwerke, Berlín; San Diego Museum of Art; Museo de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Biennal de Praga; Ciudad Arts Centre, Londres; Museo de Arte Moderno, São Paulo; Fundación BragaVice 33, Coimbra, entre otros. También ha aparecido en publicaciones internacionales como *Creatas 3* de editorial Phaidon, 100 artistas: *Intervenciones*, de la editorial Exit y *Megastrukturas Reloaded* de Héctor Cerezo, editor. Dávila ha recibido el respaldo de la Fundación Andy Warhol, la residencia KunstWerke en Berlín y la beca Rockwood para los artistas jóvenes otorgada por el Consejo de las Fintas de México. Es director y co-fundador del espacio de gestión artística OPA en Guadalajara, México, donde actualmente vive y trabaja.

Jose Dávila and Valeska Soares at Max Wigram, London



Jose Dávila's work makes constant reflections on modern architecture and urbanism, contemporary art, its forecasts and failures. For this exhibition, the artist has produced new works exploring notions of logical and illogical systems of thought and perception, the hidden geometry embedded into them, whilst offering a moment of reflection on modern history and its cultural tropes.

The exhibition consists of a selection of hybrid works. On the walls are shown a series of prints of iconic Dan Flavin's neon sculptures, intervened on by the artist by removing the central subject. With this iconoclastic gesture, Dávila reduces these images to pure context, reminding us of the indivisibility between the subject and the site, posing the question: what is, or was, more important – the subject, the moment, the place, or the context? With these works, Dávila comments on the role of images in our cultural and subjective memory, and develops an active relationship between the work and the viewer – we are compelled to fill in the void, recurring to our memory or imagination, thus performing a creative act. Reproducing this absence by arranging the frames with a void at the centre, the artist leaves a space for the viewer to fill, personally and symbolically.

A large metallic sculpture placed on the floor offers a link between the two-dimensional works on the wall and three-dimensional space. This structure seems to extend beyond balance, presenting us with a nonlogical system of form, questioning the relationship between form and function and its significance in art. The sculpture draws a continuous line in space, a sideways eight, the symbol for infinity. This Möbius strip is disrupted by the artist, who breaks it up with angles, twists, and colour blocking that do not follow a discernible pattern. This sculpture actualises space in relation to movement. The viewer is here invited to walk through and around the sculpture, filling the void with his or her body. Ever changing depending on the point of view, yet uninterrupted, the sculpture becomes a metaphor for history, suggesting its eternal recurrence across infinite time and space.

Dávila appropriates history, works of art, systems of thoughts, architectural models, and takes up their potential by repeating them in a series of critical homages that open them up to discourse and create new moments of creative possibilities.

at Max Wigram Gallery, London

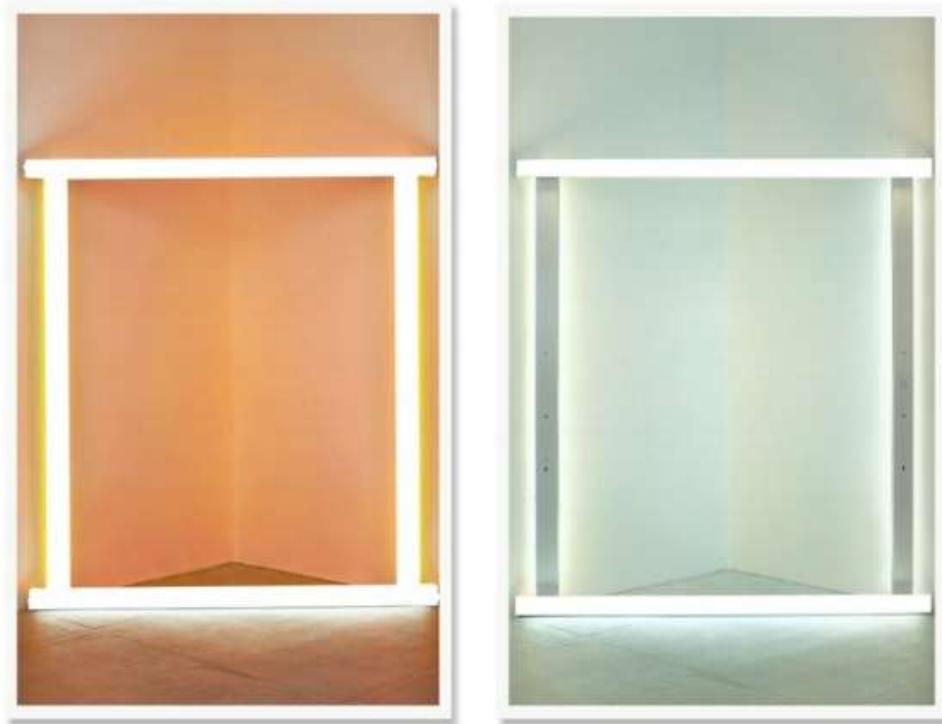
until 13 July 2013



Jose Dàvila, *Topologies of light III*, 2013



Jose Dàvila, *Untitled (Monument 4 for Those Who Have Been Killed in an Ambush)*,
2013



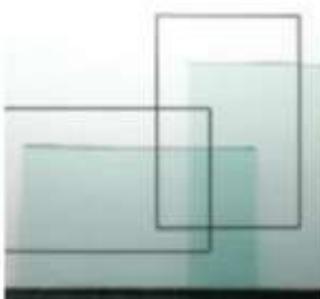
Jose Dàvila, *Untitled (Flavin Pair)*, 2012

Above – Jose Dàvila, *Shadow as Rumour*, installation view, Max Wigram Gallery, London, 2013

Courtesy: the artist and Max Wigram Gallery, London

Online published article Friday November 5, 2010

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José Dávila

OMR. Mexico City

by Adriana Herrera

In José Dávila's one-person exhibition at OMR Gallery in Mexico City, *Ningún donde puede ser aquí* a title inspired by the expression "Nowhere can be there", found in a letter by Gordon Matta Clark this artist born in Guadalajara in 1974 features a show that is as consistent in terms of his own trajectory as it is enlightening with regard to reflection about the properties of the bodies and the ways in which matter and representation interrelate in the bordering territories between art and architecture.

This photography installation featuring 35 shots, manipulated and framed separately, of constructions that have an iconic character from the Pyramid of Cheops to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, the house above the waterfall; from the Roman Coliseum to the Niemeyer Museum poses queries about the relationship between space and the construction of forms, or between contour and volume. Through a look that has drifted away from the naturalness with which we incorporate in the world buildings that then become an inseparable part of the landscape, and in a certain way, we cease to be surprised by their forms; the artist revises the great architectonic projects of mankind in an unusual way: he transforms them into cutout silhouettes. Seen in this way, they become shapes without perspective, reminiscent of shadow puppets, and tinged with unreality. And nevertheless, they are real. Oddly enough, this distance brings these architectures, whose common trait is immensity, back to the realm of the human dream, which is ultimately the origin of every constructed space. And back to an unusual relationship with utopia. Because they have existed. But their visual intervention rigorous, insofar as it does not alter the forms but only dissolves volume and details refers them to the empty space. Dávila makes a dissection, not of the constructions, like Matta Clark, but of the perception of the way in which, by darkening them, these legendary constructions become abstract shapes. And, as the artist himself explains, this involves the lacanian notion of "extimacy", a reference to the shift by which the intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and vice versa. For the work refers the viewer to the biography of the artist's searches, to that long fascination distance relationship with architecture, from which he learned the rigor of requisites and key rules for composition during his formative period, but which he had to transcend in order to enter the domain of artistic creation. In architecture, there is no such thing as a blank page: the point of departure is always a place.

Part of the search for a no place and at the same time, of the posing of a set of rules, unfolds in another fantastic work, photographically documented; that explores the possibility of making a drawing without the direct intervention of the hand. Dávila tied a red balloon laden with a poetics, with references to a string that remains vertical thanks to a small weight that keeps it balanced, and at the end of the string, he placed a felt tip pen. He allowed the pen to descend gradually on a page so that it would imprint its trace randomly until it went beyond the edge of the page or stopped moving. None of the resulting drawings are identical, even though the number of times this procedure is repeated equals the number of images that comprise this subset.

Another way of approaching the relationship between painting and architecture is to resort to construction elements such as glass and its shadow, or the wall he has intervened in by featuring black squares or stripes to create, three-dimensionally, abstract geometric works that evoke a long pictorial tradition, from the Russian suprematists, through the optical artists or the minimalists, to the pioneers of Concrete Invention art. Reflection on matter and form reaches its culminating point in the sculpture the artist fabricates with building bricks which are very cheap and therefore rustic, endowed with organicity and slightly different from one another and which he surrounds with neon squares on all sides. While the piece evokes Carl André, or Dan Flavin and Lewitt, at the same time it trans-figures all that tradition through the selection of an imperfect material, such as the brick that constructs the volume, and its contrasts with the perfection of neon. In his work, the relationship rules he explores based on a certain set of pre-established procedures, but from a vast mental field, are subject to a permanent tension between art and architecture (with all their tradition), or between the conceptual and its formal solution. But the unequivocal sign is unceasing transformation.

mostre

Jose Dávila

Jose Dávila/ L'architetto illegale.
Una conversazione tra Jose Dávila e Marco Scatini

MS Preferirei cominciare a parlare del tuo lavoro partendo dalla fine. E cioè dalla tua mostra "Illegal architect" presso lo Studio Dabbeni di Lugano.

In questo caso all'interno della galleria non ci sono altro che pareti da vedere a uno spazio vuoto da attraversare. Costruisci un ambiente interno mediante cinque entità-involucro o pareti che hanno una superficie ricoperta di diverso colore. Le pareti però sembrano lasciate in fase di allestimento e rivelano la loro materia - legno e cartongesso - la loro struttura volumetrica - un reticolato geometrico - così come la loro precarietà e temporaneità - possono essere spostabili. Sembrano addirittura dei sistemi seriali minimalisti di cui non conosciamo la progettazione. Mettono in scena la definizione di uno spazio di cui ci sfugge la grammatica costruttiva. Come nasce questo progetto e quale è, se c'è, la sua grammatica. È il modello di qualcosa?

JD Questo progetto riguarda le relazioni spaziali, con allusioni a strutture indeterminate e incompiute della vita quotidiana, quali muri di cartongesso o strutture che dividono gli spazi.

L'ispirazione di questa opera è nata dalle fotografie di strutture murali in costruzione per scopi "museografici", in diversi spazi espositivi.

Prima che questi muri fossero finiti, potevano essere per me delle sculture in sé.

Il senso di indeterminatezza e incertezza mi ha interessato molto, ed ho quindi usato queste fotografie come punto di partenza per la creazione di *Sistema aperto*. Ho cercato di catturare questo momento di indeterminatezza nel processo, come scopia di quest'opera.

Le cinque entità in quest'opera possono essere collegate l'una all'altra in modi multipli, a seconda del luogo o della situazione spaziale. Possono stare da sole o tutte insieme in infiniti modi.

In questo senso quest'opera è sempre la stessa, ma può comunque essere diversa ogni volta che lo guardiamo.

MS Il colore ha però qui un suo ruolo di cui non mi hai parlato. Penso ad un altro tuo lavoro del 2003 in Svizzera dove eri intervenuto facendo dipingere tutte le pareti che sezionavano lo spazio interno. Quale ruolo hanno qui a Lugano questi piani colorati?

JD Quando venni invitato alla Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais per un seminario agli studenti e per fare un progetto per la scuola, trovai questa struttura grandissima e bianca, una sorta di spazio fieristico, nel quale gli studenti mostravano i propri progetti alla fine di ogni anno. Per il resto dell'anno la struttura rimane inutilizzata, un po' troppo per non approfittarne.

La mia intenzione, nel dipingere ogni muro con un colore diverso, era quella di combinare le funzioni della struttura; convertirla in un'opera in sé, piuttosto che in un "ricevitore" di opere. In questo caso, sono riuscito a produrre un intervento sul posto attraverso un'azione semplicissima: la pittura.

I colori vivaci e il loro uso indiscriminato fanno parte del luogo d'origine dal quale provengo, non ho paura di usarli. È una relazione naturale.

Mi ha anche dato l'opportunità di sperimentare con il colore in modo tridimensionale, una specie di labirinto cromatico, nel quale il colore è quasi in faccia allo spettatore, in grandissime estensioni.

Jose Dávila
L'architetto illegale
10 marzo - 29 aprile 2006
Studio d'arte contemporanea Dabbeni

Jose Dávila/ Illegal architect
A conversation between Jose Dávila and Marco Scatini

MS I would like to talk about your work starting from the latest, your exhibition "Illegal architect" at the Studio Dabbeni in Lugano.

Here there is nothing to see inside the gallery but walls and an empty space to be crossed. You have constructed an interior with five entities-casings or walls with their surfaces covered with different colours. The walls look as if they have been left at the preparation stage and reveal their matter - wood and plasterboard - their volumetric structure - a geometric grid - and their precariousness and temporality - they can be moved. They even look like Minimalist serial systems with an unknown progression. They produce a definition of a space with a constructive grammar that escapes us. How did this project originated and what, if any, is its grammar.

JD This project is about spatial relationships, with allusions to indeterminate and unfinished structures in our everyday life, such as walls made of plasterboard or structures that divide spaces.

The inspiration behind this work came from taking pictures of wall structures being built for museum purposes in various exhibition spaces.

Before these walls were finished, I thought they could be sculptures in themselves.

The sense of indeterminateness and incertitude fascinated me so I used these pictures as the starting point for the creation of "Sistema aperto". I tried to capture this moment of indeterminateness in the process, as a purpose of this work.

The five entities in this work can relate to each other in many ways depending on the site or spatial location. They can stand alone or all together in endless combinations.

In this sense, this work is the same yet will be different every time we see it.

MS Colour plays its own specific role that you have not yet mentioned. I am thinking of another of your works dating from 2003 in Switzerland, in which you had all the walls dividing the interior into several parts painted. What role do these coloured planes play here in Lugano?

JD When I was invited by the Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais to do a workshop with students and a project at the school, I found this really big, white structure, a sort of art fair type, where students show their projects at the end of each year. The rest of the year this structure was unused and too good to waste.

My intention in painting each wall a different colour was to change the function of the structure and turn it into the work itself, rather than a receptacle for works.

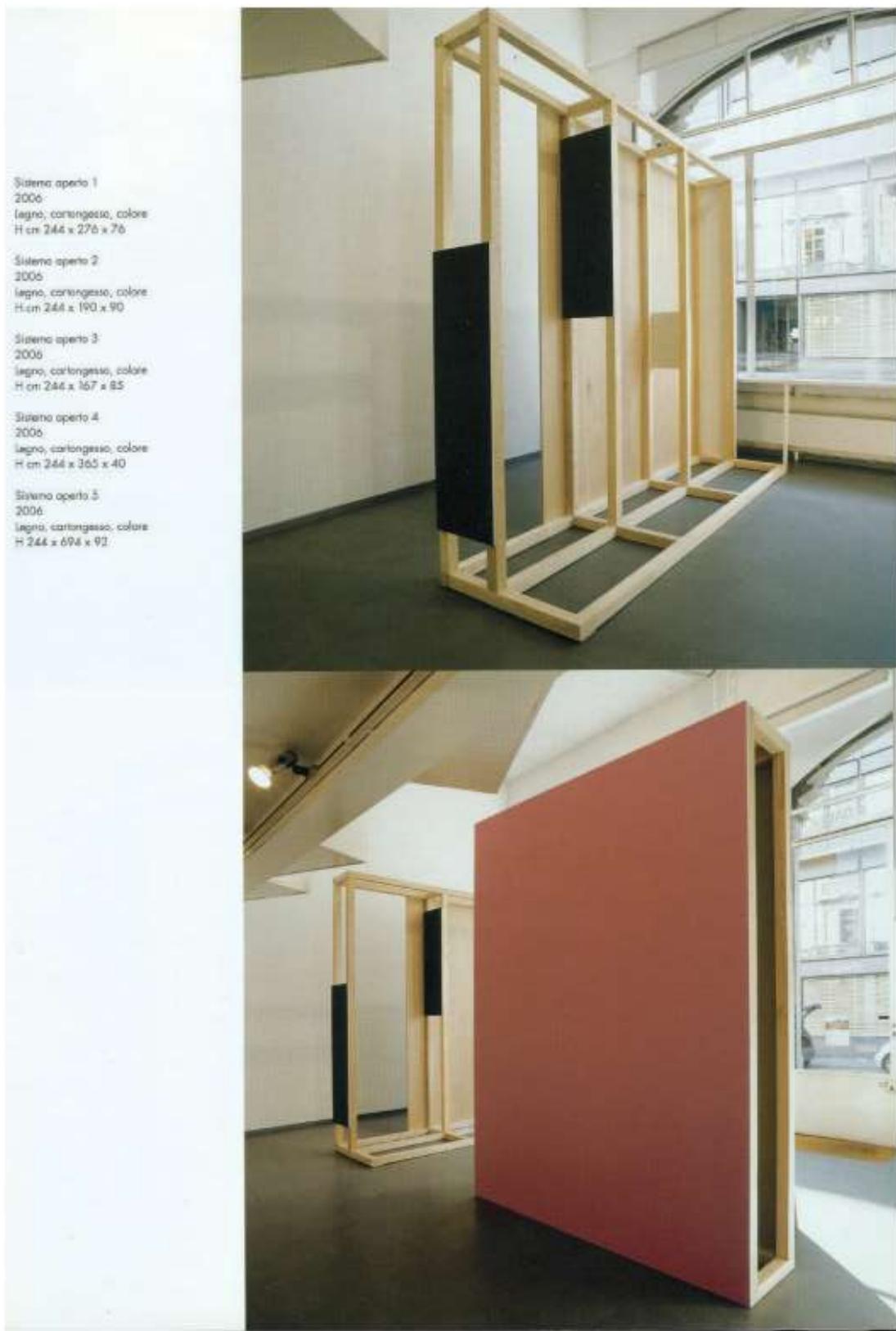
In this case, I was able to produce a very large on-site intervention with a simple action: painting.

Bright colours and their indiscriminate use is part of where I come from; I'm not afraid to use them. It's a natural relationship.

It also gave me the opportunity to experiment with colour in 3D, a sort of chromatic labyrinth in which colour is pretty much in your face in large parts of it.

Yves Klein said: "It is not conceptually the same to paint one square centimetre of colour as ten square metres" I believe this to be true.

After the show was over, the structure was painted white again and went back to being what it always had been.



Temporale n°62-36
03/2006



Temporale n°62-36
03/2006



Yves Klein disse: "Non è concettualmente la stessa cosa dipingere un centimetro quadro di colore o dieci metri quadrati, credo sia vero.

Dopo la fine della mostra, la struttura fu ridipinta di bianco, e ritornò ad essere ciò che era sempre stata. Il colore era stato il veicolo per produrre quest'opera.

MS All'interno della galleria e dunque della mostra c'è un altro progetto che trovo importante: questa volta fotografico, in cui delle situazioni eventuali incontrate per strada come un bancarelle di laterizi, un blocco di marmo, un reticolato di metallo abbandonato si trasformano in modelli di architettura costruita. Il titolo è emblematico: "Studies for future buildings". La maquette è sempre stata in architettura una previsione in scala ridotta del futuro. In qualche modo una simulazione di ciò che dovrà essere nella realtà. In questo caso però il modello è casuale, imprevisto, incontrato per caso: fuori dal progetto. Queste microarchitetture ci richiamano per associazione ad edifici modernisti del passato. È come se tu invertissi l'idea del progetto in quanto tale.

JD Amo i modelli. Mi interessa molto il modo in cui i modelli hanno una vita propria. In essi esiste l'architettura, che vengono costruiti oppure no.

Ho visto molti progetti di architettura nei quali i modelli del processo creativo sono molto più interessanti degli edifici veri e propri. Per gli ultimi tre anni circa ho scattato fotografie di questi oggetti che ho incontrato in situazioni e luoghi molto diversi, tutti hanno catturato la mia attenzione in quanto architettura, non come un *objet trouvée*, come edifici che già esistono attraverso il proprio modello. Modelli creati dalle circostanze, che forniscono idee architettoniche.

MS A Praga in "Accion Directa" hai scritto sul muro la parola "tomorrow" con vernice nera e gocciolante. Ancora un riferimento all'idea del progetto: si tratta di una contestazione all'idea di pianificazione, all'idea di un ritorno al futuro? In favore dell'immanenza?

JD La parola *tomorrow* è piena di significati multipli attraverso i quali possiamo spiegare la storia e la società attuale. L'idea di "domani" è uno chiave di volta nell'idea di progresso, di conseguenza nell'impulso di modernismo e nelle utopie, che hanno in un certo modo controllato il XX^o secolo. La nozione di futuro era un motore molto importante per la società modernista e anche uno strumento per imporre le proprie vedute e intenzioni. Ho dipinto la parola "tomorrow" a Praga, con l'estetica della decadenza e dei semplici graffiti che vedeva normalmente quando viveva a Berlino, forse nessun'altra città conosce meglio questa parola logora, i cui principi sono ora vuoti. Quest'opera rappresenta l'utopia perduta e lo sgomento dei principi modernisti.

MS In un testo recente ho parlato a proposito del tuo lavoro de "L'architettura e il suo doppio". Costruisci sempre un duplice speculare ma differente dell'elemento architettonico che assumi come oggetto d'indagine. Come però ci hanno insegnato i maestri della ripetizione come Nietzsche, Kierkegaard e Deleuze, nella ripetizione non si riproduce l'identico ma sempre qualcosa di nuovo. Così l'ingombro della macchina a Puerto Rico, le colonne di Praga e di Santiago del Cile, la parete del Padiglione Barcellona di Mies a quella in legno di una Favelas. Che senso ha per te questa operazione di duplicazione?

JD Per me queste opere di duplicazione sono più una parodia che una ripetizione. La parodia è sempre stata nella storia un interessante strumento per lo critico.

Come hai detto, in questi oggetti che riproduco o catturo con la fotografia non ho mai cercato di fornire una rappresentazione equivalente, non sono mai identici al reale.

Mi interessa l'"iperrealismo della simulazione" di cui parlava Baudrillard, nel quale alla fine del processo di riproduzione, il reale diventa non soltanto quello che può essere riprodotto, ma ciò che è sempre già riprodotto: l'iperreale.

Colour was the vehicle by which this work was created.

MS There is another project in the gallery, and therefore in the exhibition, that I find important – a photographic one this time, in which situations possibly encountered in the street such as a pallet of bricks, a block of marble, or an abandoned metal grid become models of constructed architecture. The title "Studies for future buildings" is emblematic. Models in architecture have always been a small-scale anticipation of the future. To some degree, a simulation of what the reality will be, in this case, however, the model is casual, unplanned, encountered by chance – outside the project. This micro-architecture leads us by association to the Modernist buildings of the past. It is as if you were inverting the very project idea.

JD I love models. I'm very interested in the way models have their own lives. Architecture exists in them, whether they are built or not.

I've seen many architectural projects in which the models of the creative process are far more interesting than the buildings themselves. For about the last three years, I've been taking pictures of these objects I come across in very different situations and places; all of them have captured my attention as architecture, not as an *objet trouvée*, as buildings that already exist in their models. Models created by circumstance, which provide architectural ideas.

MS In "Accion Directa" in Prague you wrote the word "tomorrow" on the wall in dripping black paint. Is it another reference to the project idea; is it an objection to the concept of planning, of deferring to the future? In favour of immanence?

JD The word *tomorrow* is one filled with multiple meanings from which we can exploit history and today's society. The idea of "tomorrow" is a keystone in the idea of progress, therefore the drive of Modernism and the utopias that somehow governed the 20th century. The notion of the future was an important motor in the Modernist society and a tool with which to impose their views and intentions. I painted the word "tomorrow" in Prague with the aesthetic of decadence and simple graffiti I used to come across when I lived in Berlin; perhaps no other city knows this spent word of now void principles better. This work stands for the loss of utopia and the disillusionment with the Modernist principles.

MS In a recent piece, when speaking about your work I said "architecture and its double". You always construct a similar but different duplicate of the architectural element adopted as the object of your investigation. However, as the masters of repetition such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Deleuze have taught us, with repetition you do not produce something identical but something that is always new. The bulky production machinery in Puerto Rico, the columns in Prague and Santiago in Chile, the wall of Mies' Barcelona Pavilion and the wooden one of a favela – what does this work of duplication mean to you?

JD I see these duplication works more as a parody than a replication. Parody has historically been an interesting critical tool. As you mention, I have never tried to offer an equivalent representation in the objects I reproduce or capture photographically; they are never identical to the real thing.

I'm interested in the "hyperrealism of simulation" Baudrillard spoke of, in which at the end of the reproduction process, reality becomes not only that which can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: hyper-reality. In these duplications, I have attempted a kind of circular seduction in which one can easily highlight the differences and, therefore, the critical points; all these works address and negate intrinsic qualities of the original object. Like a machine that doesn't work or produce anything, a column that doesn't support, a Mies pavilion created via improvisation and preconsciousness.

MS The scaffolding for the Camden Arts Centre (2001) and the Casa de América in Madrid (2005) also involved a sort

Temporale n°62-36
03/2006

Studies for future Buildings
2005
Lambda print
cm 40 x 30

Studies for future Buildings
2005
Lambda print
cm 40 x 30



Temporale n°62-36
03/2006

Studies for future Buildings
2005
Lambda print
cm 30 x 40

Studies for future Buildings
2005
Lambda print
cm 30 x 40



14



Studies for future Buildings
2005
Lámina print
cm 30 x 40

Studies for future Buildings
2005
Lámina print
cm 30 x 40



15



In queste riproduzioni, tento una sorta di seduzione circolare in cui si possono facilmente distinguere le differenze e di conseguenza i punti di critica, tutte queste opere si rivolgono e negano le qualità intrinseche dell'oggetto originale. Come una macchina che non funziona o che non produce nulla, una colonna che non regge, un Padiglione di Mies fatto attraverso l'improvvisazione e la precarietà.

MS Anche i ponteggi per il Camden Arts Center (2001) e per la Casa de America di Madrid (2005) implicavano una sorta di duplice delle facciate degli edifici; erano però una specie di parassita complesso perché diventavano un percorso praticabile e richiamavano tutta una serie di altre funzioni. Come nasceva l'idea?

JD Mi sono interessato all'idea maturata negli anni '60, di espandere i limiti della galleria e all'idea di un oggetto che diventa arte al punto che ci offre una certa esperienza che si può chiamare arte. Il ponteggio è di solito un non-evento visivo, la facciata fisica di un retroscena perduto; queste strutture nomadi vanno da edificio in edificio coprendo il paesaggio urbano.

Al Camden Arts Centre, nel 2001, ho costruito una struttura di ponteggio per un'opera non-produttiva o funzionale, ma piuttosto come luogo per la contemplazione della città, aperto al pubblico. Ho trasformato questo oggetto costruttivo in un altro non-utilitaristico, solo perché servisse a uno scopo diverso.

Era in realtà, come tutti i ponteggi, noleggiato per un periodo di tempo, il che significa che, dopo la fine della mostra, sarebbe nuovamente tornato a essere un ponteggio per le costruzioni e avrebbe smesso di essere un'installazione d'arte, se è così che lo si vuole chiamare.

In questo caso è chiarissimo che l'arte non è l'oggetto che si guarda, ma l'esperienza che questo oggetto ti dà o ti fa vivere.

MS Il rapporto tra la città formale e quella informale ha un ruolo nel tuo lavoro?

Penso ai vari livelli di complessità di una città come Mexico DF e delle città in America Latina. Questo rapporto è stato molto importante per alcuni artisti/architetti come Marjetica Potrc e Francis Alÿs. Per Te?

JD È molto difficile non essere in sintonia con la città se vivi in un Paese come il Messico, dove spesso la realtà è più strana della finzione e migliore di molta arte.

Alcuni artisti si dedicano più direttamente a questo e alcuni finiscono per farne il leitmotiv delle proprie opere.

La città non gioca un ruolo diretto o evidente nelle mie opere, ma spesso alimenta i miei processi creativi; ad esempio, la logica dell'improvvisazione e le tecniche immaginative di costruzione scoperte in zone povere sono state di grande ispirazione per me. Ciononostante, cerco di mantenerne l'idea invece di tradurre la sua estetica direttamente nelle mie opere.

Cerco di mantenere la mia opera il più aperta possibile, credo che l'arte sia un veicolo di idee e, di conseguenza, dovrebbe essere lasciata libera di esplorare. La mia relazione con la città è quindi più promiscua, non è pianificata, potrebbe accadere a partire da un qualcosa di accidentale al quale sono aperto.

MS Qual è il tuo rapporto con l'eredità del Moderno e con architetti messicani come Barragan, Juan O'Gorman o Mathias Goeritz da un lato, dall'altro con Rem Koolhaas su cui hai fatto un lavoro?

JD Sono affascinato da come l'architettura si sia sviluppata, ideologicamente e tecnicamente, più in 50 anni di modernismo che nei 200 precedenti. La mia relazione personale con il modernismo non può essere dissociata dall'architettura più che da qualunque altra cosa.

Vengo in realtà dalla stessa città in cui è nato Barragan e dove Goeritz venne per la prima volta in Messico per insegnar-

di duplicate of the building facades; however, they were a sort of complex parasite because they became a practicable route and conjured up a whole host of other functions. How did the idea originate?

JD I have been interested in the idea from the 60's of expanding gallery boundaries and the idea of an object being art so long as it offers a certain experience which can be called art. Scaffolding is commonly a visual non-event, a physical front to a lost backstage; these nomad structures go from building to building covering the urban landscape.

At the Camden Arts Centre in 2001, I built a scaffolding structure for non-productive or functional work as a place from which to contemplate the city and open to the public. I transformed this construction object into a non-utilitarian one, only because it was serving a different purpose.

Actually, like all scaffolding, it was rented for a certain time, which meant it was going to become construction scaffolding again after the show was finished and would stop being an art installation, if this is what you would like to call it.

In this case, it is very clear that art is not an object you look at but the experience the object provides you with or allows you to have.

MS Does the relationship between the formal city and the informal one play a part in your work?

I am thinking of the various levels of complexity of a city such as Mexico DF and Latin American cities. This relationship was extremely important for some artists/architects such as Marjetica Potrc and Francis Alÿs. What about you?

JD It is very difficult not to relate to the city if you live in a country like Mexico, where reality is often stranger than fiction and better than a great deal of art.

Some artists will address this more directly and some will ultimately make it the leitmotiv of their work.

The city does not play a direct or obvious role in my work but it often fuels my creative processes; for instance, the logic of improvisation and imaginative construction techniques found in poor areas inspire me greatly. Nevertheless, I try to hold onto it as an idea rather than translate its aesthetic directly into my work.

I try to keep my work as open as possible. I believe art is a vehicle for ideas and should be set loose to explore. So, my relationship with the city is more promiscuous, not a plan; it may happen accidentally, which I'm open to.

MS What is your relationship with the Modern legacy and Mexican architects such as Barragan, Juan O'Gorman and Mathias Goeritz on the one hand, and with Rem Koolhaas on the other, the subject of a new work?

JD I'm fascinated by how architecture developed ideological and technically more in 50 years of Modernism than in the previous 200. My personal relationship with Modernism cannot be detached from architecture any more than anything else. I actually come from the city where Barragan was born and where Goeritz first taught in Mexico in the late 1940's. This city has a strong architectural heritage, in many ways thanks to Barragan and Goeritz.

Their collaboration and investigations into the points of intersection between architecture and sculpture have been important for me; and also the way they gave their works a strong emotional and mysterious content. I like the "emotional architecture" proposed by Goeritz, although I do not sympathize with Goeritz's religious mysticism.

As for Koolhaas? I don't think I have any kind of specific relationship; it is great to see him accomplish and carry many of the ideas and intentions presented in New Babylon by Constant into real life. I think Koolhaas is a friend of both god and the devil.

I once made a work from one of his; I sliced the famous book he produced in collaboration with Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, into four parts.

re alla fine degli anni '40. Questa città ha una forte eredità culturale che si deve, in molti modi, a Barroga e a Goeritz. Le loro collaborazioni e indagini sui punti di intersezione fra architettura e scultura sono state importanti per me; e anche il modo in cui hanno fornito alle proprie opere un forte contenuto emozionale e misterioso. Mi piace l'"architettura emozionale" proposta da Goeritz, sebbene non simpatizzi con il misticismo religioso di Goeritz.

Koolhaas? Non credo di avere un qualunque tipo di relazione specifica; è straordinario vederlo lavorare e realizzare molte delle idee e intenzioni presentate alla New Babylon da Constant. Credo che Koolhaas sia amico di Dio e del diavolo al tempo stesso.

Ho creato una volta un'opera da una delle sue, ho tagliato in quattro parti il famoso libro che fece in collaborazione con Bruce Mau, S,M,L,XL.

MS Tuttavia mi domando quale era la tua idea quando hai sezionato in quattro parti S, M, L, XL di Rem Koolhaas. Anche in questo caso un duplice alter ego? Una parodia, come dici tu, di un libro che trasformavi in scultura? Anche in questo caso prendevi ad oggetto la forma e il volume del libro e non il suo contenuto. Oppure si trattava di qualche cosa d'altro?

JD La mia intenzione nell'intervenire sul libro era quella di creare una sovrapposizione fisica di informazioni, distorcere il contenuto del libro mischiando pagine diverse in sezioni diverse, per esplorare il caos come strumento creativo, per creare una specie di "iper-informazione" nel libro.

Ma mentre lo facevo, ho capito che non faceva alcuna differenza, o almeno niente di particolare, dal momento che questo libro era semplicemente da guardare, non da leggere. Questo libro è l'esempio archetipico di ciò che molti libri d'arte sono diventati negli ultimi anni, un'ossessione di immagini priva di contenuto.

Ho diviso il libro in quattro parti, con misure diverse che variano dal piccolo all'extra-large.

Il libro è stato quindi trasformato in una scultura tautologica o in una meta-scultura.

MS All'inizio della tua attività tu hai ricoperto una macchina con carta argentata, appallottolato foto di paesaggio con skyline da cartolina che poi esponevi spiegazzati. Vogliamo finire parlando di questi interventi delle origini? Come hai cominciato?

JD L'auto venne realizzata nel periodo del ponteggio al Camden Arts Centre, e stava nuovamente lavorando all'idea di espandere i limiti della galleria.

Ho coperto la macchina con un incarto metallico, in mezzo alla strada, fuori dal Centre Cultural d'Mexique, usando la strada come posto per la creazione.

Divenne un'azione che interveniva sulla struttura della vita urbana, per la sua apparente inutilità.

Stavo usando la scultura per "congelare" un dato momento, come uno strumento documentaristico, quasi come fa una fotografia. Perché il calco metallico di quest'auto, che veniva parcheggiata tutti i giorni nello stesso posto, venne più tardi introdotto come scultura all'interno della galleria per lo stesso.

Gli orizzonti accartocciati sono un commento sulla scomparsa dell'utopia attraverso la distruzione dell'idealismo. È un modo di modificare il contenuto dell'immagine intervenendo sulle qualità fisiche della carta. Usa la distruzione come mezzo per la creazione.

Ho cominciato studiando architettura. Amo l'idea che l'architettura sia storia scritta con la pietra, ma poi ho capito che l'arte è la storia del pensiero umano e delle emozioni scritta con qualsiasi mezzo a disposizione.

MS I wonder what your idea was when you cut Rem Koolhaas' S, M, L, XL into four parts. Is it another case of an altered duplicate? A parody, as you say, of a book that you turned into sculpture? Again, you were taking the form and the mass of the book as an object, not its contents. Or was it something else?

JD My intention when working on this book was to create the physical superimposition of information; to distort the contents of the book as different pages mixed in different sections, to explore chaos as a creative tool, to create a sort of "hyper-information" in the book.

But, as I was doing this, I realized it didn't make any difference, or at least a big one, because the book was intended merely to be looked at and not read. This book is the archetypical example of what so many art books have become in recent years, obsessed with image and devoid of content. I cut the book into four slices, varying the sizes from small to extra-large.

So, the book was turned into a sculpture, a tautological or meta-sculpture.

MS At the beginning of your career you covered a car with foil wrap and screwed up landscape photographs with picture-postcard skylines, which you then exhibited straightened out. Shall we finish by speaking of these works of the early days? How did you start?

JD The car was done at the same time as the scaffolding at the Camden Arts Centre and I was, again, working with the idea of expanding the gallery boundaries.

I covered the car with foil wrap in the street, outside the Centre Cultural d'Mexique, using the street as the place of creation.

It became action on the fabric of urban life, apparently without purpose.

I was using sculpture to "freeze" a certain moment, as a documentary aid, almost like photography does. Because the metallic cast of this car, parked outside in the same place everyday, was later introduced as a sculpture inside the gallery for the show.

The crumpled skylines are a comment on the disappearance of utopias through the destruction of idealism. It is a way of modifying the content of the image by intervening on the physical properties of the paper. It uses destruction as a means for creation.

I began by studying architecture. I like the idea that architecture is history written in stone, but then I realized that art is the history of human thought and emotions written with whatever available.

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■ Jose Dávila

Camden Arts Centre London
September 14 to November 11

Jose Dávila's work in Camden Arts Centre's Gallery III is the result of a short on-site residency. The piece is a shamelessly indulgent encounter with the internal and external architectural structure of the room and its elevation over Finchley Road. A scaffolding platform leads out through a large window, around the outside wall, to another window in an adjacent wall. Coloured mesh adorns the structure outside, which maintains a sense of authenticity. This looks and feels like real scaffolding, grimy and slightly wobbly. At certain times the windows are opened, allowing passage along the scaffold. Near the exit point of the platform, an indecipherable floorplan has been sketched on the wall. Opposite this a thick red line has been painted so that it marks out a territory across one wall and onto the floor. Although engaging in itself, the propinquity of this piece to the discourses of social engagement and ethical responsibility suggested by the work of Doris Salcedo and Sophie Ristelhueber is unfortunate. These artists are engaged in an activity that is both politicised and theoretically complex in a way that seems far removed from Dávila's playful approach to construction aesthetics and viewer participation.



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