

Fundamental Concerns

Sacha Craddock

How has Jose Dávila's work, normally so self-engaged, self-sufficient and as often turned in on itself with an inbuilt system of cause and effect, changed? Will the relation between his recent freestanding sculpture series titled *Fundamental Concerns* and the audience shift to something quite another, perhaps to a more psychological state that necessitates the question why as opposed to how? Dávila always uses historical sculptural reference, with his marble, and glass, and straps to hold weight and strain, for instance, or blocks of stone trapping more natural form between, to supply the audience with experience, excitement, trepidation and a sense of understanding. Dávila's pieces, often working evidence or examples of their own action with balance, strain and stress, never hide their mechanism beneath the front they present. The recent work, however, has arrived in a different manner, with material perhaps touched, polished, sharp and rough, combined with 'found' elements that say something else in a different manner.

When the sculpture, as sculpture, starts to reference something like the figure, the relationship to the audience inevitably starts to be different. It is able to suggest through its scale and presence a sort of dance, as it becomes an active question mark in a one-to-one relationship both familiar and new. The work implies with its perhaps familiar proportions a more equal relationship, a sister- or brotherhood, accompanied by an easy sense of knowing and unknowing. Elements brought together, albeit apparently also with ease, are able to cross-refer and inhabit space. With blocks, a range of scale, neutral and suggestive, the allusion has much more to do with one's own physicality rather than to function, with a one-to-one approach that ultimately comes close to something quite other than that of building a singular idea. Freestanding, upstanding, sometimes bent under the reality of an uneven surface, each sculpture is an amalgam to stop with or pass-by.

Instead of opening up the rationale of one thing doing something to another, of comprehending the precarious and perhaps perilous relationship between elements, Dávila's *Fundamental Concerns* act more like a tool the therapist will use to encourage a child to draw what she or he could not otherwise recount. The work makes an independent, contradictory jump away from, and then towards, mystery with an altogether different form of consideration. Dávila uses cut, raw and coloured stone, crumpled industrial moulds, a cluster of brick, and stone blocks in between. Obviously every material carries significance, and stone, which can be cut, built up, made smooth, rendered rough and rustic, or left alone, combines anyway neutrality with associative promise. Here Dávila also places in between found, already existent, elements such as a souvenir or decorative piece cut into and broken away from its original perhaps decorative context. At one point Dávila is using an element like Marcel Duchamp's famous bottle drying rack, with its outline of almost lost function. The structures are somehow familiar, reminiscent of a game, where the identity of a generic 'type', the butcher's daughter, for instance, is alluded to and lost, or of *Consequences*, when sections of pages turned over are drawn upon blind, to reveal when opened shifts in humorous scale, with sections suddenly stopped and replaced by a different drawing style altogether. Formal expectations remain the same, yet real connectivity is destroyed.

Dávila has always used elements both interior and exterior, domestic and public. It would be pointless and sad with the recent work to weigh the significance of each individual element, to formally pick the three-dimensional collage apart. Proportion, however, does

play a part, with suggestions of representation from classical Greek sculpture through to Cubist painting. Modernist elements brought together to take on an emphatic and strangely familiar sense are countered by softness, colour, legs from a perhaps cheap figurine. Dávila, who originally studied architecture, is showing the way that material writes its own story or song. Meaning, with Constantin Brâncuși's iconic stack, does not however only reside in its positioning and repetition. Each recent free-standing piece is a pile of associative language: male, female, soft, hard, learned, limp and upright; forced and compressed in relation to each other like notes in a tune.

Instead of looking on and into the work, the sense may be of a parallel existence. What arrives in the artist's hand, in a relaxed manner, brings varying degrees of dumbness and sophistication each time. One piece suggests a fixed position for viewing the work, one plane of a block is painted *Fundamental Concern XXI* (2018) while others carry, push and pull with colour, or refer to geometry set in positions reminiscent of parts of the body. Is this process of piling one thing onto another a fundamental component of sculptural practice? Instead of saying something comprehensible through its material, the balance, risk, push and pull gives way, to perhaps a more domestic, interior tension.

Like the cartoon figures in a Philip Guston painting, each individual sculpture will carry on existing at night once everyone has left. Through the logic of the material, and an age-old play with gravity and force, the sculpture is able to create a sense of uncertainty. We stop thinking about outcome, result, beginning or end, and suggestion can really pay off. The off-hand touch of independence brought about by such a one-to-one reading of physical equivalence will also undermine any simple attempt at understanding. The shiny ball, or head, at the top of some of the works *Panopticon IV, V, VII, VIII, IX* (2018), reflect space around but dematerialise the role of its support at the same time. The implication of bones trapped between blocks in *Panopticon VII* (2018) extend upwards to admit a desire for physical resolution, and so the relaxed relation to the figure is able to release a particularly free state of mind. It all seems to have happened without exhaustive deliberation. The accumulation of different ideas of sense and balance in Dávila's *Fundamental Concerns* ensure that relations between image and experience morph into one, and poetry is free from function.