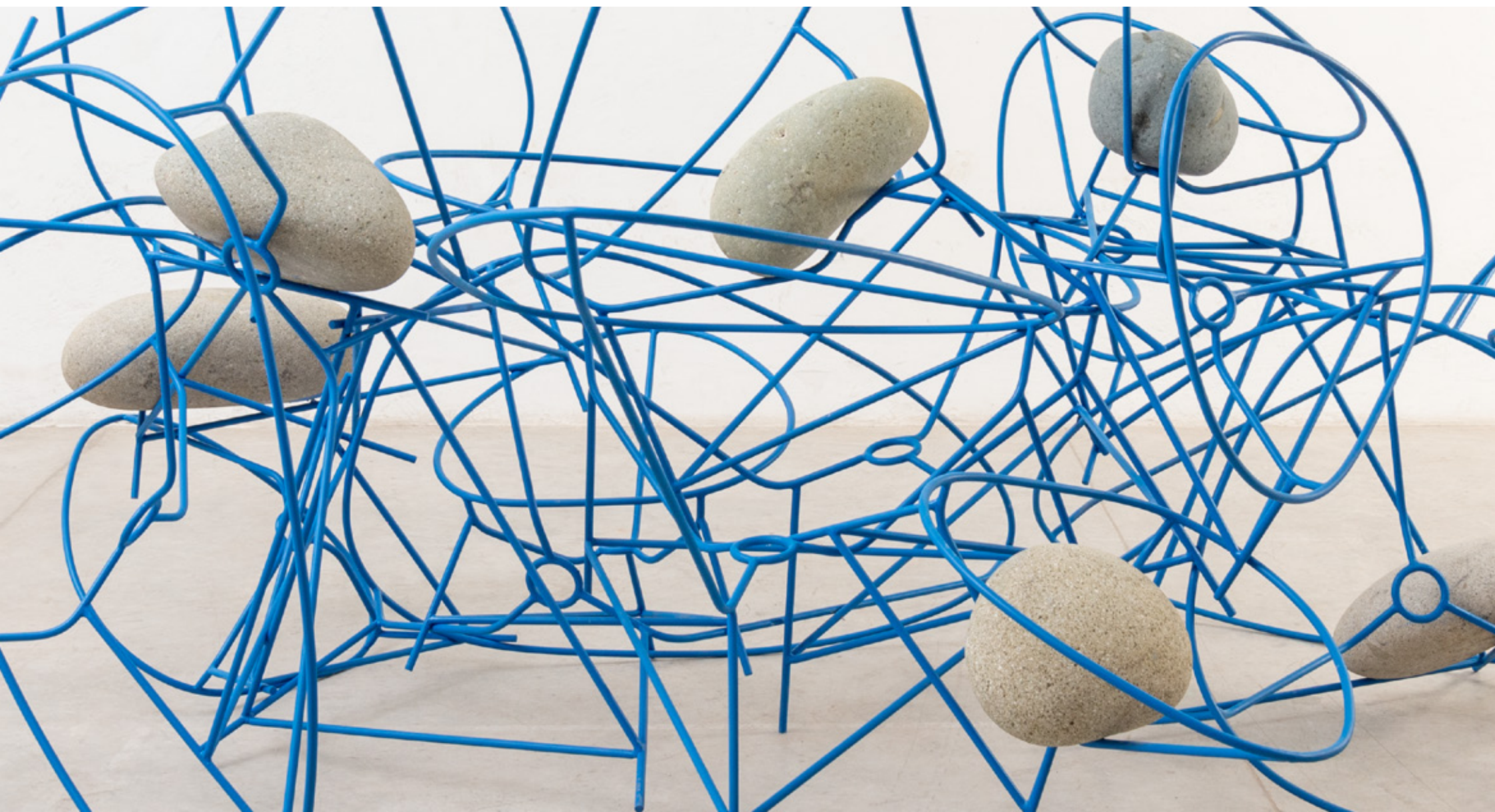


nara roesler

jose dávila



jose dávila

b. 1974, Guadalajara, Mexico, where he lives and works

For more than two decades, Jose Dávila (b. 1974, Guadalajara, México) has been working in the sculptural field, creating works that bring together materials in precarious compositions. By studying and understanding how gravitational energy works, the artist plays with balance. That is one of his most important compositional methods, as well as seriality and stacking, which he employs to create not only visual but physical tensions. The apparent instability of his pieces claims the public's attention, demanding a deep perception of space and spatiality. Dávila challenges the viewer to face the elements and construction of the work from different perspectives, observing how they are capable of making rawness and fragility coexist, as well as organic and artificial form, system and chaos, danger, and peace.

Jose Dávila's practice is based on an original approach to the fundamental properties of the sculptural medium, such as weight, density, shape, volume, and mass. These aspects, in interaction with the characteristics of each material, often used in their raw state, such as rocks, or after having gone through industrial processes, such as metal, concrete, and glass structures, lead us to see his works as an expressive manifestation of human constructive will. Frequently, the artist brings together different forms and objects using ropes and wires, or leaning on each other, giving protagonism to physical forces, made explicit by the co-dependent relationship between the work's internal forms, emphasizing the different rhythms created by internal dynamics and tensions in their configuration

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selected solo exhibitions

- *A pirate, a poet, a pawn and a king*, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2023)
- *Las piedras saben esperar*, Centro Internazionale di Scultura, Peccia, Switzerland (2021)
- *Directional Energies*, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, USA (2020)
- *Pensar como una montaña*, Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico (2019)
- *Non tutti quelli che vagano sono persi*, Museo del Novecento, Florence, Italy (2018)
- *Die Feder und der Elefant*, Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany (2017)
- *Jose Dávila: The Object and the Environment*, Jumex Museum, Mexico City, Mexico (2016)

selected group exhibitions

- 16th Bienal de Lyon, France (2022)
- 22th Bienal de Sidney, Australia (2020)
- 13th and 12th Bienal de Havana, Cuba (2019 and 2017)
- *Walking Through Walls*, Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany (2019)
- *Cher(es) ami(e)s*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (2016)
- *Panorama. Foreigners everywhere*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), São Paulo, Brazil (2009)
- *Eco. Mexican Contemporary Art*, Museo Nacional Centro de Artes Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain (2005)

selected collections

- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA
- Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- Pérez Art Museum, Miami, USA
- Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain
- Instituto de Arte Contemporânea de Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil
- Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany

cover *Acapulco chair stack*, 2022 [detail]

all images courtesy of the artist and Nara Roesler

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early work

Dávila's early work often deals with a thorough analysis of how space is deployed and used. It also reconsiders our relationship with common, every-day objects; by frequently using materials such as cardboard, aluminum foil and books, the artist carries out a series of alterations that reveal the inner dynamics of the visual referencing that shapes contemporary life.



Open Studio, 2000
wood, sheetrock, and furniture
variable dimensions



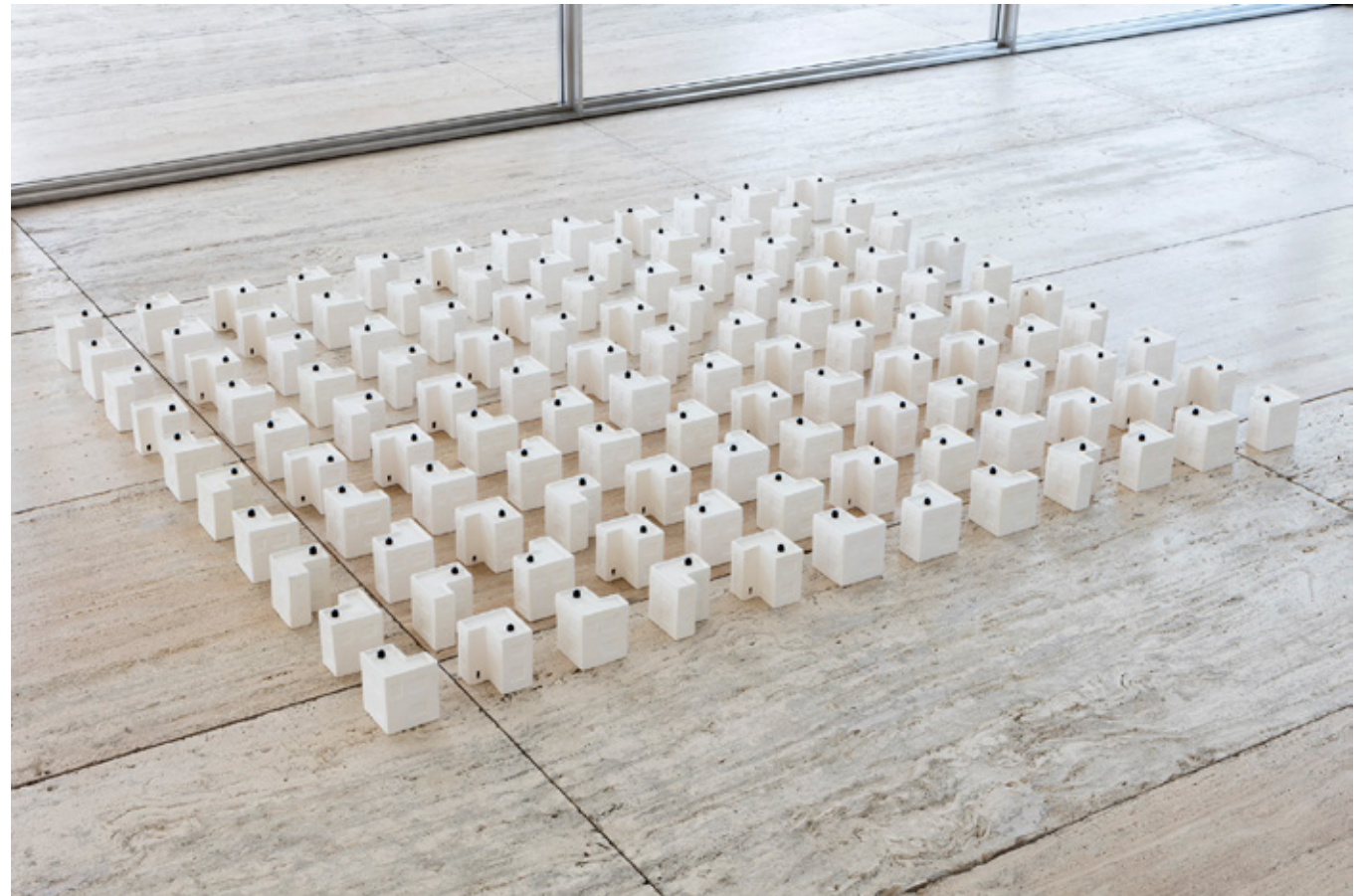
‘Dávila is particularly concerned with the utopian verve of modernist architecture, although he does not limit himself to the deconstruction of architectural icons. Rather, he investigates interior and exterior spaces, and duplicates elements from the immediate environment. A column of stacked cardboard boxes, for example, deceptively adopts the form of a wooden pillar in the exhibition room. In the grain of the wooden boarding covering the façade of a beach hut in Jalisco, Dávila rediscovers the expressively lined marble wall from Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion, and sets them opposite each other in a photographic diptych. In London and Madrid, he expanded the exhibition rooms with large accessible scaffoldings into the exterior, thus transforming apparatus typical for its serving and covering function into an additional building part with a new façade’, once wrote curator Sabrina van der Ley.

Fake Column, 2000
cardboard boxes
variable dimensions

→
Temporality is a Question of Survival, 2001
scaffold, wooden planks,
acrylic paint, and color net
variable dimensions



Through a series of symbolic fractures, the artist reveals how the present-day context is permanently conversant with modernist tradition. For example, the work *Conjunto Habitacional* from 2000, makes a critical commentary on mass housing in Mexico by approaching the idea of the single-unit house which is designed to efficiently maximize space, but ignores human needs. The work is made with ceramic, playing with the notion of repetition and massive production.



Conjunto Habitacional, 2000
ceramics
11,5 x 10 x 10 cm |
4.5 x 3.9 x 3.9 in each

sculpture

Jose Dávila's sculptural work refers to notions of balance and equilibrium, which are generated during the moment of withdrawal between two opposing forces that remained in conflict, finally ceding. The artist seeks to extend this condition of precarious balance and indetermination by taking advantage of the natural disposition of materials to be arranged in relations of correspondence, even though they hold contrasting properties.

Joint Effort, 2014
mirrors, boulder, and ratchet strap
181,5 x 139 x 130 cm
71.4 x 54.7 x 51.1 in

→
Sem Título (Allure), 2014
allure marble, ratchet straps,
and eye bolts
177,7 x 301.1 x 550 cm
69.9 x 118,5 x 216.5 in







In curator's Geovana Ibarra words:

'The rupture of balance and equilibrium, which would imply the existence of movement, only occurs as a past or future event, never a present one. Balance and equilibrium exist due to tension; as verbs, as infinitives. As a result, repose is just a visual appearance. The elements that make up these apparently static systems are intrinsically linked by forces that neutralise one another; their activity is constant and constitutive. The state of rest depends on the successful correlation between the material involved'.

The endless struggle between structural systems and the effects of gravity is synthetized in the opposing nature of the elements which eventually reveal a certain composition. Fragility encounters solidity, flexibility is complemented by rigidity; angular edges from industrial materials interact with the more capricious forms found in organic objects.

←
Esfuerzo Común, 2022
concrete, metal, boulders, volcanic
rock, one way mirror, and strap
185 x 660 x 315 cm
72.8 x 259.8 x 124 in

The rope sometimes bursts, 2022
metal drums and ratchet strap
217 x 89 x 170 cm
85.4 x 35 x 66.9 in





Joint Effort, 2015
concrete, boulder, and ratchet strap
199 x 40 x 40 cm
78.3 x 15.7 x 15.7 in



Untitled, 2022
concrete, boulder, and ratchet strap
163 x 94,5 x 112,5 cm

→
The Rules of Attraction, 2013
metal frames and enamel paint
600 x 250 x 270 cm





On the subject of the dual aspect of his work, by bringing together oppositions, Dávila states: 'In many aspects of my works I do indeed find myself constantly searching for the way to bring together or reconcile two opposites. Often they are only opposite in appearance, because often opposites need and complement one another. Everything that is created belongs to a register that is broader than the duality between opposites. I want the pieces to be meeting points, a chance to reflect on different realities'.

With these works Dávila proposes an exegesis of minimalist tradition and art history in general, recurring to an object-oriented vocabulary which highlights the specificity of materials, this challenges the scope of understanding provided by the subjective gaze. The sculptures remain as intermediate gestures, somewhere in between looming destruction and immutable permanence.

Acapulco chair stack, 2021
metal, epoxy paint, and boulders
179,5 x 130 x 132 cm
70.6 x 51.1 x 51.9 in

→
Acapulco chair stack, 2022
metal, epoxy paint, and boulders
170 x 360 x 210 cm
66.9 x 141.7 x 82.6



outdoor projects

Dávila's interventions in outdoor settings often intend to present the contrasting characteristics of materials through a dramatic shift in scale. By creating large-scale sculptures the artist produces spatial experiences in which geometric language becomes a tangible and transitable platform. The introduction of these elements into the landscape intends to reveal the hidden aspects of the surrounding environment and the social dynamics that are embedded within the disposition of space.



Untitled, 2015
intervened shipping container
and epoxy paint
285 x 245 x 2360 cm
112.2 x 96.4 x 929.1 in



An example of this are the series of works inspired by Donald Judd's *Stack* sculptures. Dávila creates an architectural experience by reconfiguring the disposition and general layout of these works, rearranging the involved elements for constructing a sort of transitable pavilion. The shapes used by Judd are magnified until reaching a human scale, and verticality is translated to a horizontal disposition, making more evident its habitable characteristics. The work is executed with a repurposed shipping container, which is cropped into sections respecting Judd's original dimensions; it remains in between a *povera* installation, a monument and a useful architectural space.

Untitled, 2015
intervened shipping container
and epoxy paint
285 x 245 x 2360 cm
112.2 x 96.4 x 929.1 in



install at Valle de Bravo,
Mexico, 2021
© image Agustín Arce

→
Joint effort, 2019
installation view at Rockefeller
Center, New York, USA
courtesy of Timothy Schenck/Frieze





Conjunto escultórico, 2017
San Jacinto Park,
Guadalajara, Mexico
concrete and stones
© courtesy of the artist
© image Agustín Arce

→
Each Era Its Art,
to Art Its Freedom, 2020-2022
Now + There / Boston, USA

→ →
Los límites de lo posible, 2019
Havana Biennial, Cuba
Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly,
NY / Photo: © María Rincón





ceramic and other materials

Dávila's sculptural work often expands to different materials and media, including works made with ceramics, plaster, cardboard, metal and found objects. In 2018 the artist developed a series of works using plaster casting molds from a local ceramic factory in Guadalajara, where utilitarian objects along with specialized pieces and artworks are produced. The molds exist as remnants of a previous process, leftovers meant to be discarded or stored for a later use. Their shapes are revealed by having their internal sections covered in gold leaf, hinting the sort of object they produced in the past.

Homage to the Square, 2014
hand-cut ceramic and metal shelf
50 x 50 x 7,5 cm
19.6 x 19.6 x 2.9 in





‘Duplication and repetition can be as much a recipe for never finishing things, for boredom and sameness, as for potential and purpose.’
Remarks curator Shamim M. Momin.

‘Dávila often uses outlines and frameworks to underscore his interest in these systems (versus the actuality of their forms), while the specificity of materials he employs keeps his investigations grounded in direct experience. His Judd box or stack series, for example, reinterprets Donald Judd’s famous sculptural series in pure metal outlines or in even more humble materials such as found cardboard boxes.’

Homage to the Square, 2011
acrylic paint, glass, and wood
84 x 80 x 20 cm
33 x 31.4 x 7.8 in

Dávila has also used cardboard, ceramic and glass for creating new versions of iconic works of art from the 20th century, ranging from minimalism to geometric abstraction and referencing specific pieces by Donald Judd and Josef Albers. These series of reconfigurations question the way we consume artworks as visual content, how the politics of recognition function within the contemporary world, and the inherent meanings that are attached to specific materials.



Homenaje al Cuadrado, 2014
hand-cut ceramic and metal shelf
50 x 50 x 7.5 cm
19.6 x 19.6 x 2.9 in

mobile

Throughout recent years Dávila has created a large group of kinetic sculptures replicating the geometric arrangements created by the German artist Josef Albers; the individual works from these series display a wide array of dimensions and color palettes. The formal compositions and the color rhythms displayed in Albers' paintings are replicated in Dávila's sculpture by means of metal frames suspended from the ceiling that move freely; each metal frame is painted in a different tone producing a certain chromatic cadence. The movement of the floating squares produces a prismatic effect generating an ever-changing visual composition.

Homage to the Square, 2019
polished stainless steel
and epoxy paint
90 x 90 x 5 cm
35.4 x 35.4 x 1.9 in





The previously two-dimensional pictorial format unfolds itself as a three-dimensional presence; the perception of color depends directly on light and the superficial interactions that the sculptures have with the surrounding space and other nearby objects. The Homage to the Square series by Albers aimed to concretize new ways of color perception, by using movement and expanding the canvas towards its surroundings. Dávila takes these intentions into the sculptural field using industrial materials and offering new perspectives on iconic works of art belonging to recent art history.

Curator João Fernandes, once noticed that 'Albers' Homage to the Square, for instance, is no longer an equation of colour circumscribed to the objectual condition of the painting, but a spatial construction as, in Dávila's series from 2010 to 2012, the square is defined by a monochrome vinyl installed on a wall onto which several square glass plates lean that bestow upon it new properties of transparency, opacity and reflection.'

Homage to the Square, 2019
polished stainless steel
and epoxy paint
120 x 120 x 120 cm
47.2 x 47.2 x 47.2 in



work on paper and cardboard

Jose Dávila's works on cardboard depict geometric compositions that accumulate and blend together, generating a certain spontaneous rhythm and a sensation of order. Previously, Dávila has used cardboard for executing a series of 'local adaptations' of iconic minimalist sculptures; this process can be described as a material desacralization, since it translates easily-recognizable sculptures into generic volumetric presences, as simple patterns for occupying space. Cardboard materializes these patterns, communicating them from its own fragility, symbolic connotations and locality.



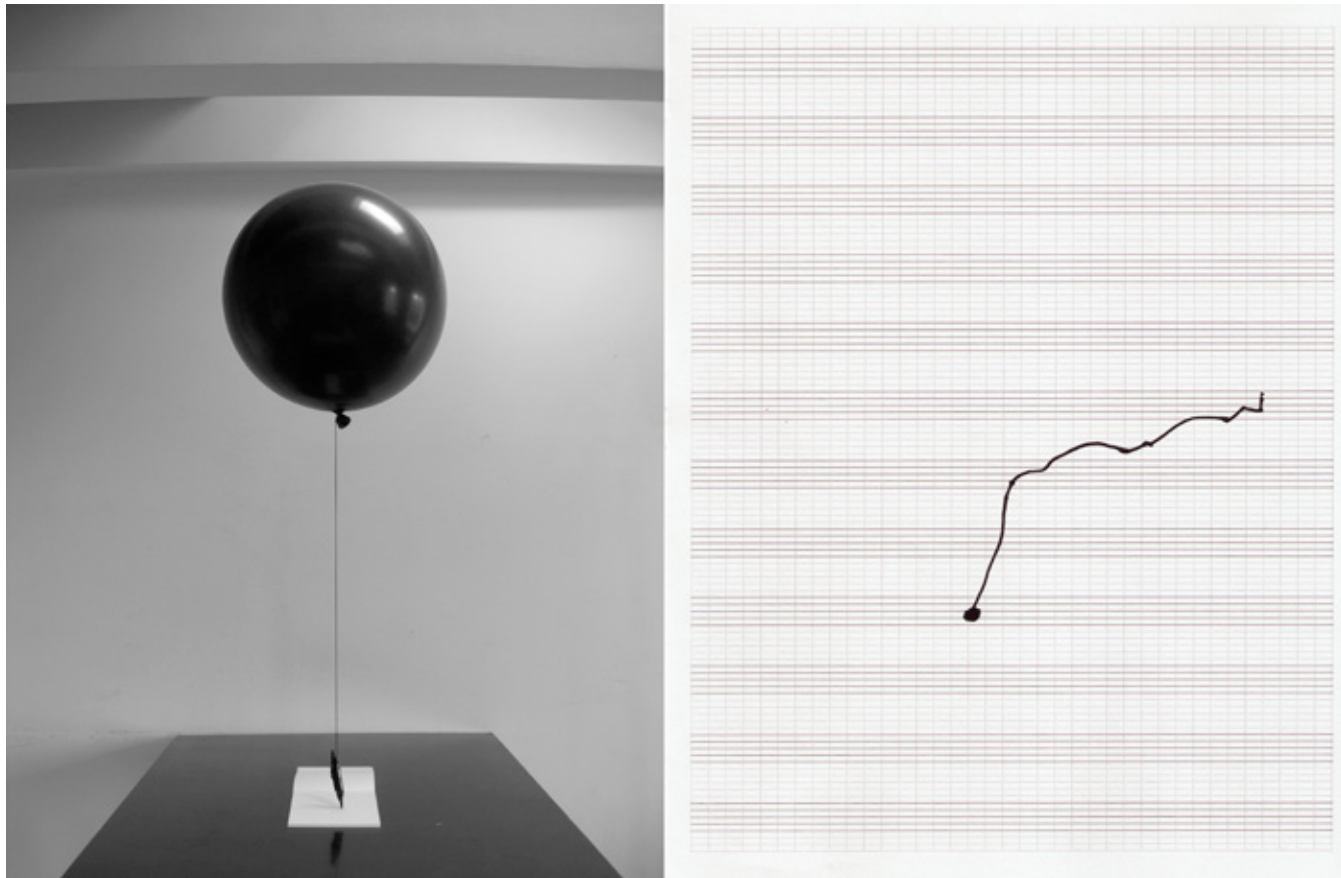
Orden Discontinuo, 2020
silkscreen print on cardboard
74 x 63,6 x 4,5 cm
29.1 x 25 x 1.7 in

With these graphic works Dávila takes these ruminations into the pictorial field. Different cardboard segments are arranged in an almost accidental way; the geometric shapes that appear are reminiscent to the language of modernist abstraction. With povera elements Dávila creates a contradictory modular system, the sensation of order is intermittent and is interrupted by the material itself; this system does not assure the repetition of the formula it illustrates.

Other works on paper include the series. This series of drawings reveal chance as their producing agent. A helium balloon holds a brush or pen in balance, hovering over a sheet of paper. The process plays with the idea of authorial control and completion in the work of art. Evoking abstract painting and automated processes explored by 20th Century Avant-garde, the drawings establish a dialogue with the legacy of modern art history.

Discontinuous Order, 2021
silkscreen print on cardboard
73 x 62 x 4,5 cm
28.7 x 24.4 x 1.7 in





When arranging the instrument to create *Exercise of the Possible*, Dávila places himself as an indirect drawer. Thus, both physics and chance are part of the artistic process, becoming coauthors of the work. This process recalls Donald Judd's ideas, who, when asked if real artists make their own art, declared that methods should not matter 'as long as the results create art'.

Exercise of the Possible, 2007
ink on paper and C-print
variable dimensions

painting

Jose Dávila's wide variety of paintings on canvas share the same conceptual intention, the overlapping of already existing images coming from different sources. The canvas functions as a transformation ground: words can substitute an object, an image can replace a word, the name of an object can become an image. Dávila understands the pictorial field as a platform where the relations between images, objects and words get loosened up; the path from a word towards an image can be diverted or delayed, painting becomes a certain accumulation of detours.

*The astonishing walking
achievements of human beings*, 2021
silkscreen print and vinyl paint
on loomstate linen
234 x 190 x 6 cm
92.1 x 74.8 x 2.3 in





These works by Dávila display new methods of association, replacement, juxtaposition and fusion. A series of geometric elements interrupt silkscreened descriptions coming from different sources: books about art history, the nature of human perception or anatomy. The graphics, on the other hand, come directly from some of Dávila's artistic references: Ellsworth Kelly, geometric abstraction, the Brazilian neo-concrete movement, Russian constructivism, Hilma af Klint, among others. At the same time, it is an exploration on composition, one of the formal aspects of painting, where the artist takes conscious controlled aesthetic decisions of the distribution of shapes and color.

The fact of constantly returning to the same point or situation, 2021
vinyl paint on loomstate linen
140 x 113 x 6 cm
55.1 x 44.4 x 2.3 in

→
The fact of constantly returning to the same point or situation, 2021
silkscreen print and vinyl paint on loomstate linen
210 x 170 x 6 cm
82.6 x 66.9 x 2.3 in



cut-outs

Jose Dávila has created a series of cut-out works that approach the pictorial languages of Roy Lichtenstein and Pablo Picasso, with a special emphasis on their portraits and paintings depicting human forms. The progressive dissection of elements from the photographic documentation of these works transforms the brushstrokes and the color blocks into autonomous three-dimensional presences. The background or the primary subject become absent figures, creating compositions that exist only through negation. These apophatic gestures contribute to the possibilities of the homage and the reinterpretation of art history.

Untitled (Cold Shoulder) IV, 2019
archival pigment print
223 x 153 x 8 cm
87.7 x 60.2 x 3.1 in





Dávila sees in these series of work an experiment of translation. '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.' Revealed the artist.

Untitled (Visage), 2021
archival pigment print
177,4 x 148,3 x 8 cm
69.8 x 58.3 x 3.1 in

Even though the isolated brushstrokes render an ambiguous composition, they successfully reference their origin. This visual identification becomes almost automatic due to the familiarity the public has with the works by Picasso or Lichtenstein. The pictorial consequences of these visual styles that took place in the canvas are replicated and taken to the support of the image itself, staggering the medium of representation.

Dávila has been working on his Cut-out works for years now and has a wide variety of research lines through this technique, approaching the work of specific artists such as Dan Flavin, Richard Prince, Alexander Calder, among others. He has also created thematic compendiums dissecting the visual languages that function within architecture, art history and the existing photographic documentation of artists and their studios.

Sem título (Brushstroke), 2022
archival pigment print
140 x 110 x 8 cm
55.1 x 43.3 x 3.1 in

→
Sem título (Cowboy), 2013
archival pigment print
127 x 178 x 7 cm
50 x 70 x 2.7 in





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