“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-bred-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 stages 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: LA/LA. So when Dávila says that he’s going right back into the studio to produce entirely new bodies of work for another round of solo shows—at Guadalajara’s Travesía Cuatro and Mexico City’s Galería OMR during Zona MACO—in addition to two monographs (one with 20 authors writing micro-fictions 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 “Here—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—is 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 cardboard, coffee (as paint), and a bunch of found pine needles and chain-link fence for a project titled “Pynamrs,” which subverts the false hierarchies she was spawned 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 Siensksie: 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 Shamira Morris 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
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

“AFTE RHIS, 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: LA/LA. 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 Travesía 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, Angote holds forth on her parallel trajectory. “Both of my parents are from Guadalajara,” she says, noting her family moved to LA 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 patternmaker 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 2015 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 shaped over a Highland Park residence—is floating above the booth of her Colombian gallery Instituto de Visión at ProjectsLA. She’s also been in residence for weeks this fall at PatteL A making use of cardboard, 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’re both partied at to an upcoming Mexican motorcycle adventure.

Michael Slenkske: 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 Shanae Momir 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
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 Shumon 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.

Jose Dávila

 JD: Has it 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 when you think about it, you can pinpoint relationships that were not planned. For example, Jorge Buitrago’s project of the trees 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.

CA: It almost feels like Tetrises in a way. It’s very much tridimensional Tetrises and I was an avid Tetrises player the whole way through.

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

JD: Exactly.

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

JD: I think what is interesting in what Carmonne is saying is how different movements or ideas of art are localized or transplanted 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 made-man, so it has direct link to handicraft but I think that is what makes it very Mexican in a way opposed to 1960s or 70s minimalism, which is very precise.

CA: I think with 720 Sp. Fr. 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 as 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 ingrained 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 dust, 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 in white and then through the round I reappeared them. It’s is 7 year old—all the greese 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 different sites in Los Angeles and how people will interact with these individual pieces in different ways. For instance, the owners of the Venice skate park idea of a skate park and have all the traces of that skate while maybe 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 some of them will even be missing, so all of this history they will bring as a sponge back into the work.”

—Jose Dávila

"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.”
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.

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 Maison 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 learning 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 projects 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.

“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

Carmen Argote performing in her painted architectural garments at the Orange County Museum of Art.