

Waddoups, Ryan. "Jose Dávila's Eternal Pursuit of Equilibrium." *Surface Magazine*. May 07, 2021.

SURFACE

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.



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.

SEANKELLY

“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

SEANKELLY

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.

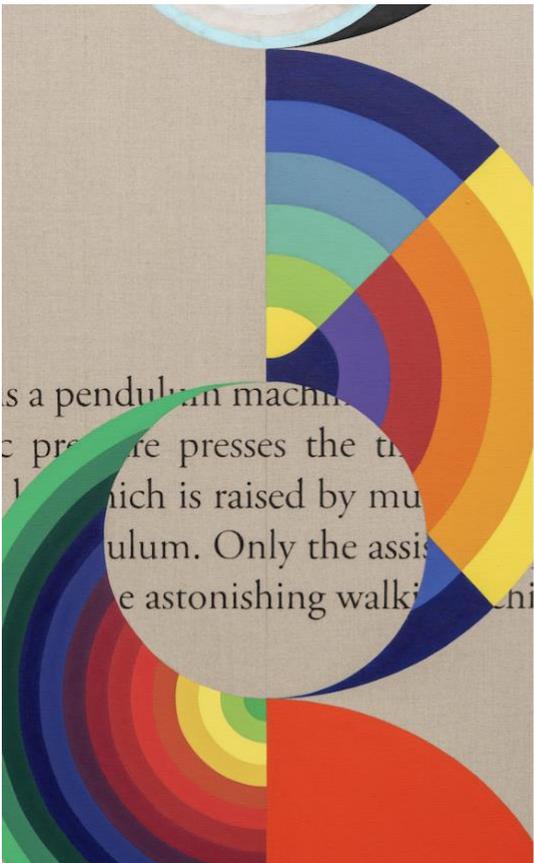
Do these works have any political undertones?

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.

SEANKELLY



SEANKELLY



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.