

**LAS  
PIEDRAS  
SABEN  
DORMIR**

**ESTACIÓN MAZ, ZAPOPAN, MX.**

**JOSE DÁVILA**

# LAS PIEDRAS SABEN DORMIR

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Known for his works that explore precarious balance, Jose Dávila materializes universal forces of nature and physical phenomena such as gravity and equilibrium. By creating unexpected encounters between materials—concrete, marble, wood, glass, stone—where human intervention appears through straps holding his installations together, the artist explores the dichotomies of nature and humanity, solidity and fragility, stability and uncertainty, reality and imagination, permanence and impermanence over time. The exhibition's title, *Las piedras saben dormir* (Stones Know How to Sleep) thus resonates as a poetic metaphor for quiet resignation to the greater, universal forces of the natural world.

This exhibition at the MAZ in Guadalajara is not a retrospective but an introspective journey—a “re-vision” of the artist's evolving vocabulary. Through architectural interventions, cut-outs, and sculptural assemblages, Dávila navigates themes of memory, identity, and historical reinterpretation, questioning notions of permanence and change. Playing with the idea of the ‘unfinished,’ he challenges conventional notions of artistic completion and authorship while aligning with an appropriationist approach and referencing influential artists from art history.

With an academic background in architecture, the Mexican artist creates large-scale installations of glass and concrete blocks that seem on the brink of collapse, using risk and instability as catalysts for new narratives. His use of cut-outs also stands as a quintessential image of a dividing line. Born to a Texan mother, Dávila questions the concept of borders—arbitrary lines that dictate identity by redrawing maps, while communities, families, and cultures remain far more complex, fluid, and ‘borderline’ than a simple cut on a map.

Set in the artist's hometown of Guadalajara, *Las piedras saben dormir* (Stones Know How to Sleep) is a deeply personal unveiling of Jose Davila, and invites the viewer to challenge today's fixation with novelty, favoring instead the power of reinterpretation – a reactivation of the past to better look at the present, and onto the future.

Jérôme Sans

# THERE'S NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

JOSE DÁVILA INTERVIEWED BY JÉRÔME SANS

**Jérôme Sans:** You titled this exhibition “Las piedras saben dormir”, which in English translates to “Stones Know How to Sleep”. Why this title?

**Jose Dávila:** “Las piedras saben dormir” — “The Stones Know How to Sleep” — stems from the intuition that there are ways of being in the world that don’t rely on visible movement, but on a quiet, contained presence. Stones don’t act, they don’t insist, they don’t seek — they wait. And in that waiting, there’s wisdom. They know how to inhabit time without dominating it, how to yield to their surroundings without disappearing.

The title suggests a kind of silent resistance, an active form of waiting. Stones seem still, but they are attentive. They erode, settle, and change over time. They are witnesses. I’m drawn to that way of being — one that doesn’t demand attention, but holds history.

To sleep, in this case, is not inaction — it is trust. It’s a way of staying open to time, to whatever may come. Stones know how to sleep because they understand, without hurry, that what matters will eventually arrive.

**Jérôme Sans:** This exhibition is like a re-discovering of your work, creating new unexpected twists on existing works, revisiting them, playing with new material, form, sizes. As you’ve said, it’s a “re-vision”, re-playing differently existing pieces. How do you see this notion of “re-vision” in your exhibition?

**Jose Dávila:** “Re-vision” is a quiet form of return — not to repeat, but to reencounter. It’s about engaging with something that has always been part of you, but seen now from a new vantage point. Like visiting a friend after years apart: they haven’t changed, and yet everything feels different because you have. It’s not a pursuit of novelty, but of clarity — of seeing again, and seeing deeper.

**Jérôme Sans:** Is it like reactivating things that have been done, but in a different way? Jose Dávila: It’s like stepping back into the park of your childhood. The trees are still there, the paths familiar — but now you’re not running, you’re watching. The same

place becomes something else because time has shaped you. What once was play becomes reflection. What was noise becomes silence. The space hasn’t changed, but your presence within it has.

**Jérôme Sans:** And you are not at the same height anymore, so you see with a new pair of eyes.

**Jose Dávila:** Yes, the trees have aged, the light falls differently, and the ground beneath your feet has shifted in subtle ways. But it’s still the same park, and you’re still you — though not in the same way. The park and the person you are have both changed, yet the essence remains. It’s a new park, and a new you.

**Jérôme Sans:** Taking place in Guadalajara, your exhibition is in your hometown. What does it mean for you to exhibit there? What is your relationship with this unique city in Mexico?

**Jose Dávila:** My relationship with Guadalajara is layered, intimate — like tracing the lines of one’s own face in the mirror. It’s a city I’ve resisted and embraced in equal measure. It holds every version of myself: the son, the friend, the artist. Exhibiting here isn’t just returning home — it’s exposing all the paths that have led me to this point, within the very streets that shaped them.

**Jérôme Sans:** Exhibiting in one’s own town is always very special. It’s not like going out in an unknown place where you can experiment without fear. Here, you’re showing with all your peers, your friends, your family, everyone around. Does it feel like you cannot hide anymore?

**Jose Dávila:** There’s nowhere to hide when the audience knows your silences as well as your voice. Showing work in your hometown is not just a professional gesture — it’s a personal exposure. These are people who have known me not just as an artist, but as a human being in all my contradictions. What’s on display is not only a body of work, but the life that sustains it.

**Jérôme Sans:** You studied architecture at ITESO in Guadalajara from 1993 to 1998, and are a self-taught artist. How did you turn from architecture to art?

**Jose Dávila:** Architecture became an accidental doorway — not the destination, but a passage. It gave me language, structure, rhythm. But I never inhabited it fully. I was always leaning toward the margins, toward what escaped the blueprint. It offered me form, and I brought in doubt.

**Jérôme Sans:** Were there particular teachers in that academy of architecture who influenced you?

**Jose Dávila:** Yes, I owe much to several teachers — Sergio Ortiz, Luis Montalvo, Juan Palomar, Gabriel Michel. What marked me was their love for art as much as architecture. They didn't draw a line between disciplines. That ambiguity allowed me to move freely between structural questions and artistic intuition. I took every optional art course I could find — painting, sculpture, history. It felt like finding hidden doors inside the building I thought I was supposed to stay in.

**Jérôme Sans:** What did your first work look like at the time?

**Jose Dávila:** My first works were born from urgency, not polish. I had little to work with — just what the place offered: discarded materials, broken things, timeworn surfaces. But in that scarcity, there was freedom. Each piece was a dialogue with the site, a provisional truth shaped by circumstance. Many of them are lost now, like whispers that served their moment.

Jérôme Sans: How would you describe your practice?

**Jose Dávila:** My practice is shaped by not having been formally trained in art. That absence became a space of curiosity. I studied art history obsessively, read constantly, observed with hunger. Over time, I developed a kind of silent literacy — learning to see what the world was already showing. I work with invisible forces: gravity, friction, proximity. My materials respond to them. I move between media to stay awake — sculpture, painting, cutouts. The shifts prevent repetition. Each work is a new negotiation, not a formula.

**Jérôme Sans:** Your sculptural work is characterized by apparently fragile equilibrium and a focus on gravity. Why such a fascination?

**Jose Dávila:** Yes, my fascination with gravity began in architecture — the first principle is simple: the structure must stand. But beyond that, I'm drawn to forces that don't ask for attention but rule everything. Gravity is not just a condition, it's a presence — silent, invisible, inevitable. It doesn't shout, but it defines. It outlives us, and yet we negotiate with it every day. In my work, I don't try to defy it. I let it speak.

**Jérôme Sans:** Is this apparently precarious balance a metaphor for the fragility of life, the everyday, our current world?

**Jose Dávila:** Absolutely. Fragility is not weakness — it's awareness. It reminds us that everything is temporary, that nothing holds forever. And that truth, rather than defeating us, sharpens our sense of presence. We become more alert, more grateful. In fragility, there's honesty. In precariousness, a strange kind of dignity.

**Jérôme Sans:** In your installations such as stacked-up stones or glass, there is always a notion of risk, of everything falling down, collapsing, breaking. Unlike minimal art, where elements are always solid, fixed, your work is constantly playing with the potentiality of danger. What does this notion of risk, of danger mean to you?

**Jose Dávila:** Risk, or the sense of it, awakens something primal. When we sense danger — even implied, even quiet — we become more alive. I use that tension to draw the viewer into the present. A sculpture that seems still but could fall at any moment forces a kind of mental choreography: you imagine its collapse, you measure its silence. The work stays still, but the mind moves. That invisible shift — between stability and its possible failure — is the true material I work with.

**Jérôme Sans:** Besides this fragility, there is also a notion of play in your work. You have notably made a public installation *Sense of Place* made up of concrete blocks and cubes that can be re-assembled, becoming an interactive piece with the public. Your work is like a permanent laboratory. What does this notion of play mean to you?

**Jose Dávila:** Play and danger are two sides of the same impulse — both awaken us, both invite imagination. Play is how we first learn to exist in the world, to test its limits, to make sense of its rules. In my work, play creates access. It's not just about interaction, but about recognition — a way for people to feel part of something without needing to decode it. When art appears in the public space, unannounced, it becomes an invitation rather than a declaration.

**Jérôme Sans:** This exhibition begins outside, notably with your sculptural installation *To Each Era Its Art, To Art Its Freedom*. What is your relationship to the public realm, to outdoor spaces?

**Jose Dávila:** Public space should offer more than function — it should offer meaning. I see my work not as an object imposed, but as a catalyst for experience. Something to sit with, to play with, to encounter unexpectedly. Art in the public realm must remain open, vulnerable — like the space itself. It's not about permanence or authority, but about creating a moment of relation between people and place.

**Jérôme Sans:** Is it reversing the traditional notion of a monument, into a platform for collective experience?

**Jose Dávila:** Traditional monuments ask to be remembered — they speak of conquest, permanence, authority. I'm more interested in the opposite: a sculpture that doesn't demand attention, but allows presence. Not a symbol to revere, but a platform to inhabit. A place where something might happen, or not. Where the city becomes softer, and people might linger without knowing why.

**Jérôme Sans:** You are constantly going from photography to painting, sculpture to installation, with great ease. How do you connect all your various works and mediums?

Jose Dávila: Each medium is a different conversation, but the questions are the same. I'm drawn to ideas that echo across form: balance, tension, repetition, variation. The circle appears in my paintings, but also in my sculptures — not just as shape, but as logic. I don't try to force coherence. I let each work respond to the material and the moment. Over time, connections emerge — not by design, but by persistence.

**Jérôme Sans:** The way you could connect all of your works is the way you are always trying to embrace, revisit, and reactivate the recent history of modern and contemporary art as an artist. Again, there is this notion of revisiting, re-visioning, as you initiate explicit, ongoing dialogues with artists such as Josef Albers, Alexander Calder, Marcel Duchamp, René Magritte, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Roy Lichtenstein, and many others. What does it mean for you to revisit now key artists from the past?

**Jose Dávila:** I agree — revisiting the past can be a contested gesture, but for me, it's a way of moving forward. There's an old phrase I hold close: *there is nothing new under the sun*. I don't believe in originality as rupture. I believe in authenticity

— in returning with intent, in echoing without imitation. The more I revisit certain artists, the more clearly I begin to hear my own voice. It's not a contradiction — it's a dialogue across time, one that reveals who you are by how you choose to respond.

**Jérôme Sans:** It's like playing an instrument—the more you practice it, the more you can invent something out of it.

**Jose Dávila:** You can play the same piece of music a thousand times, and never play it the same way twice. Repetition isn't stagnation — it's refinement. The more we engage with what came before, the more fluent we become in our own language. I don't think of influence as inheritance, but as interpretation. Playing someone else's score is, paradoxically, a way to discover your own tone.

**Jérôme Sans:** In one of your works, you twist one of Donald Judd's iconic Stacks, by using cardboard boxes of commercialized goods. How do you see your connection with minimalism?

**Jose Dávila:** Minimalism is full of contradictions — clarity that borders on opacity, simplicity that requires immense control. I approached it with a sense of play, even mischief. What happens when you apply minimalist logic to something discarded, unstable, ephemeral — like a cardboard box? There's beauty in trying to build permanence out of the impermanent. I see myself standing at the southern edge of minimalism, where the gesture is the same, but the material speaks of another reality — one marked by scarcity, fragility, and wit.

**Jérôme Sans:** And in the most economical way?

**Jose Dávila:** Exactly. It resists the idea that value comes from perfection. My materials aren't precious — they're available. I want to prove that meaning doesn't depend on polish or permanence. Sometimes, the most resonant forms are made from what was meant to be discarded.

**Jérôme Sans:** Where everything had to be flawlessly produced, with no trace, no imperfections.

**Jose Dávila:** I sometimes say I'm a minimalist who's been through psychoanalysis — I've made peace with imperfection. I don't need every angle to be 90 degrees. There's room for error, for softness, even contradiction. That's where the human slips in.

**Jérôme Sans:** With your use of stone, “simple” materials, and precarious balance, your work recalls the Arte Povera movement, and especially Giovanni Anselmo. What is your relationship to Arte Povera and to Giovanni Anselmo in particular?

**Jose Dávila:** I feel a deep affinity with Arte Povera — not just as a movement, but as a sensibility. In Mexico, you encounter it daily, sometimes without realizing. It’s in the improvised fix, the repurposed object, the poetic use of necessity. As I walk to my studio, I pass countless gestures that could be read as Arte Povera. It’s not theory — it’s survival with elegance. That’s where my connection to Anselmo begins: with gravity, yes, but also with the silent tension between matter and meaning.

**Jérôme Sans:** In your paintings, you often depict circles in a post-Delaunay manner. Why this obsession with circularity, movement, and tension?

**Jose Dávila:** The circle is the first geometry we reached for — a sun, a wheel, a symbol of the infinite. I’ve always been drawn to its elegance and impossibility. My daughter and I once tried to draw a perfect circle by hand. We laughed at how impossible it was — and that impossibility stayed with me. We can clone a sheep, but not trace perfection without flaw. That failure holds something essential: the attempt to reach balance, knowing it can never be absolute. Like Giotto, we try — and the gesture becomes more meaningful than the outcome.

**Jérôme Sans:** For *A Brief History of Sculpture*, you draft a succession of iconic architecture, which you then cut out in the manner of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. How did this series begin?

**Jose Dávila:** The series began with an absence. I visited the Circus Maximus in Rome and found almost nothing left — just a hollow in the ground. Yet people still gathered there, drawn by the idea of what once was. That fascinated me: the monument had disappeared, but its memory remained. I began to wonder — what happens if we subtract the object but preserve the space around it? The cutouts emerged from that thought: when you remove the form, you reveal its ghost. And somehow, the ghost speaks just as loudly.

**Jérôme Sans:** How do you link your own work to this *Brief History of Sculpture*?

**Jose Dávila:** Many of my sculptures can be dismantled in minutes — they’re temporary, even if they look solid. What interests me is the imprint they leave, the mental image that persists. *A Brief History of Sculpture* speaks to that: it’s about the memory of form, the persistence of absence, how something can be gone but still felt.

**Jérôme Sans:** Is your work itself not going through all the possibilities of sculpture, creating another “Brief History of Sculpture”?

**Jose Dávila:** Perhaps my work traces another version of sculpture’s history — not linear, not canonical, but intuitive. A constellation of gestures, influences, materials. I’m not trying to define it, just to participate in its unfolding.

**Jérôme Sans:** Your cutouts playfully revisit Richard Prince’s *Cowboys* series. How do you see this form of double appropriation?

**Jose Dávila:** In Mexico we say: *A thief who steals from a thief earns a hundred years of forgiveness*. Appropriating from someone like Richard Prince is a way of acknowledging that appropriation itself is a language. I’m not just quoting — I’m entering the same room from a different door. By removing the cowboy, I’m not erasing him — I’m opening space for others to appear. It’s a quiet interruption in a loud image.

**Jérôme Sans:** By cutting out the cowboy, especially as a Mexican, it could feel like you’re interrogating the representation of the White American cowboy.

**Jose Dávila:** By removing the cowboy, I’m not just subtracting — I’m inviting. I leave a space that others might inhabit. It’s a question: who belongs here, and why? It challenges the assumed protagonist and leaves the frame open.

**Jérôme Sans:** The cutouts also reference the Mexican folk-art tradition of *papel picado*. What does it mean for you to use this technique to address the cowboy ideology?

**Jose Dávila:** My mother’s family is from Texas — from a time when Texas was still Mexico. The cowboy is not a foreign figure to me, but a layered one. Hollywood gave him a face, but the desert gave him a history. By using *papel picado*, I’m speaking in two dialects at once — the folkloric and the conceptual. It allows me to complicate the myth without discarding it.

**Jérôme Sans:** Your cutouts also recall John Baldessari’s collage work. Do you feel indebted to Baldessari? How do you see yourself in relation to the “Picture Generation”?

**Jose Dávila:** I admire Baldessari deeply, but my approach diverges. Where he layered, I subtract. Where he composed, I carved absence. My cutouts aren’t just about image — they’re about what’s missing, and how that absence reshapes perception.

**Jérôme Sans:** In this exhibition, we were thinking about showing your cutouts on big billboards, using the vocabulary of advertisement. What does that mean to you?

**Jose Dávila:** If we don't realize them now, we must someday. There's something poetic about returning the image to the place it came from — the billboard, the urban sky. To reinsert the cutout where the original once was. It's not a repetition; it's a folding back of time.

**Jérôme Sans:** In these cutouts, much like some of the long titles you sometimes choose for your works, there seems to be a place for comedy. What is your relationship with words and titles, and how do you see the role of humor in your work?

**Jose Dávila:** Titling a work is like naming a dream — you do it after the fact, with a smile. I collect phrases, overheard sentences, fragments from books. The title is the final touch, the one that doesn't explain but invites. It's where seriousness meets mischief.

**Jérôme Sans:** Who are the living artists you feel close to? And why?

**Jose Dávila:** I feel close to artists who are also searching — not just for form, but for questions. Pedro Cabrita Reis, Andrea Zittel, Ugo Rondinone... We don't all work alike, but we share a certain restlessness. A desire to inhabit the space between disciplines, between clarity and ambiguity.

**Jérôme Sans:** How do you see the future?

**Jose Dávila:** The future is motion. What was will return, what is will vanish, only to resurface in another form. I don't believe in permanence — I believe in recurrence. Art will continue to shift, to reappear in different clothes. Our task is to remain attentive to its changes.

**L A S   P I E D R A S   S A B E N   D O R M I R**

**JOSE DÁVILA**