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CONVERSATIONS Q & A

JOSE DÁVILA

ARTIST

"I'm an artist but also a viewer, part of an audience; and I like to research and read about art."

**Born in 1974, Jose Dávila lives and works in Guadalajara, Mexico. Working across a range of mediums including photography, sculpture and installation, his work questions the inherent qualities of modern architecture and art.**

**Dávila has exhibited widely around the world including exhibitions at PS1, New York; Kunstwerke, Berlin; San Diego Museum of Art; Reina Sofia, Madrid; Prague Biennale, Camden Arts Centre, London; Musée de Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne; Fondazione Brogiovico 33, Lake Como; IVAM, Valencia. He has also been the recipient of support from the Andy Warhol Foundation, a Kunstwerke residency in Berlin and the National Grant for young artists by the Mexican Arts Council (FONCA) in 2000. Dávila was a co-founder and Director of Oficina para Proyectos de Arte, an artist-run space in Guadalajara.**

**In your work you reflect on modern and contemporary art, architecture, urbanism and human history. You originally studied architecture; can you tell us about how you came to work as an artist?**

I originally intended to study art. I was living at the time in Guadalajara and the art school there was offering old-school techniques, such as figure drawing and bronze sculpture of ballet ballerina. I was not looking for that, so I visited the architecture school and my connection to it was immediate, when I saw the model workshops, experiments with light and space, etc. During my architecture studies I shared a studio outside the school with some friends, two of whom were painters. I had a darkroom, as I was heavily invested into black-and-white photography. A curator, Guillermo Santamarina once came to the studio to see the work of the painters, and realized they were not alone: we were a group of about 7 or 8 creative people doing things, so he invited us all to do an art show... after that, one thing led to another.

**It has been commented that your work is "...fuelled by the interest in the relation between place and fiction, space and temporality under architecture..." Can you expand on this?**

A space in the built environment becomes a place due to the architecture that constitutes it. Architecture is history written in stone, but it is also the cradle for the fictional story we come to believe is our life, the fiction that comes naturally as memories of our past, of our childhood. We can go back to a place we used to live in or visit often, and realize that as we have changed through time, the place is not the same either; we had a place in our head. This perception, this sort of creative illusion is something I pursue in art.

**Your work also reflects on the work of key artists and architects in history, expressing humor, melancholy and a sense of loss. Tell us about your influencers and inspirations.**

I'm naturally and have always been fascinated by art. I'm an artist but also a viewer, part of an audience; and I like to research and read about art. This has led me to try to shed light or comment on specific aspects of certain works. However, I want to do this through art, and not through writing for example; I

intend to generate new meaning on top of already existing meaning. I'm inspired by artists that generate universes through prolific creativity. I'm very much influenced by Minimalist and Conceptual American art, and also by Brazil's Neo-concrete movement.

**To what extent do you view yourself as a Mexican artist, responding to the complex and distinctive traditions, history and socio-political circumstances of Mexico?**

I'm against nationalism. If that is the case, my work is Mexican just because I hold a Mexican passport and is made within Mexican borders. My mother's family used to live in Texas, then the border moved and they became American...so what am I? My work is nurtured by the manual skills of artisans, carpenters, and locksmiths. The socio-political situation in Mexico affects me first and foremost as a person, therefore affecting my work subconsciously. I try not to make my work the recipient of that, I rather have a more universal approach.

**You are a co-founder of the Office for Art Projects in Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city. Can you tell us about how this project evolved, what role it has had in your practice as an artist and how it continues to function today?**

Office for Art Projects (OPA) is now officially closed. It ran for over ten years and I think some fantastic shows of great artists took place there. We had the policy of spending a minimum in insurances, shipping, handling, etc. We tried to use money for artists to produce new work, to come to Guadalajara and develop a relationship with the place and the city's circumstances, and create something out of that. I helped to produce many shows, doing all sorts of practical and logistical work and trying to always make the artists' intentions or wishes possible, whatever they were. So I learned a lot, in many levels and had very good conversations that have stayed in my mind.

**What are you working on at the moment?**

I'm working on a show for Figge Von Rosen Gallery in Cologne, to open in September. It's a show comprised only of sculptures, as a link to our behavior in a given space and traditional notions of size, scale and the plasticity of materials that generate meaning through their use.

**What projects do you have coming up for the rest of 2013?**

A show at MUAC (Univerisy Museum of Contemporary Art, UNAM) in Mexico City, titled *The Persistence of Geometry*; and a show at a museum in Lithuania, curated by Lorenzo Bruni.

**Which international art destination would you like to visit or exhibit in?**

I was just there six weeks ago, but I've always liked London very much and I'm always very excited to be and work there.

*Jose Dávila is represented by OMR, Mexico City*



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**Conversation**

**Simon Lee Founder, Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong and London**

When Simon Lee, owner of Simon Lee Gallery, arrives for our interview, he appears very relaxed. With 30 years of experience under his belt, including time at the Guggenheim and then as Director for many years at Anthony d'Offay Gallery – he exudes the confidence of a person who has...

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## Conversation

### Stephanie Dieckvoss Director, Art14 London

Stephanie Dieckvoss is Director of Art14 London, the self-proclaimed global art fair launched in London in 2013 by ArtHK founders Tim Etchells and Sandy Angus. Dieckvoss joined the fair after co-directing ArtHK, and has been a driving force behind the fostering of Art14's global ambitions...

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## Conversation

### Seung Yul Oh Artist, Korea

Born in Korea in 1981, Seung Yul Oh moved to New Zealand in 1997 and graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland in 2005. He has exhibited widely in New Zealand and Korea. In 2013 he was recipient of the SEMA Nanji Residency in Seoul and in 2011 was recipient of the...

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## Conversation

### Antonia Carver Fair Director, Art Dubai

Antonia Carver became Fair Director of Art Dubai in August 2010. A long term advocate for contemporary Middle Eastern Art, she has written extensively on Middle Eastern art and film, as a correspondent for The Art Newspaper and Screen International, among other publications. Antonia joined the...

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## Conversation

### Meg Maggio Founder, Pékin Fine Arts, Beijing and Hong Kong

Meg Maggio's enthusiasm is a force to be reckoned with. She races into her gallery space in Wong Chuk Hang to meet me, with entrepreneur and friend, Juan van Wassenhove in tow. She runs around the gallery eager to introduce visitors to each other, with a: "You need to know him, he..."

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## Conversation

### Max Gimblett Artist, New York and Auckland

What a strange and wonderful place to meet the painter Max Gimblett – in the hutongs of Beijing. It was as a student of art history in New Zealand that I first came across the work of Max Gimblett. Although the artist has been based in New York since 1972, is now a citizen of America, and...

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## Conversation

### Mariko Mori Artist, Japan

She may be remembered as an '80s fashion model or more known for her Cindy Sherman-esque photographs in which she inserted herself into everyday scenes while dressed in futuristic costumes—think cyborg in a convenience store, metallic astronaut in the subway and blue plastic mermaid...

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## Conversation

### **Koyo Kouoh Curator and Producer, Cameroon**

Koyo Kouoh is a Cameroonian-born curator and cultural producer who lives and works in Dakar, Senegal, who was originally educated in banking administration, cultural management, and curatorial practice in Switzerland, France, and the United States. She is the founding director of Raw Material...

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