ALMINE RECH

Jose Dávila
Half Empty, Half Full

Mar 15 — Apr 19, 2025 | Paris, Turenne & Turenne (Front Space)

Almine Rech Paris, Turenne is pleased to present 'Half Empty, Half Full', Jose Dávila's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from March 15 to April 19, 2025.

"My body is the pivot of the world." This is how French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty expressed the relative nature of thought, which is inextricably linked to our experience. From this gray area of subjectivity emerge countless possibilities held by objects once they have become the mirror of our perception. This is exactly what we find throughout the work of Jose Dávila, whose sculptures, paintings, and environments seek less to be seen than to sharpen the act of seeing by revealing the contextual dimension of the elements composing them.

The artist's titles are enigmatic and sometimes tinged with humor, already invoking the polysemy that is inseparable from reality with its inherent contradictions. This exhibition is about measure, with its title, 'Half Empty, Half Full,' embodying an irresolvable statement making it possible for two opposites to coexist. Indeed, ambiguity infuses all of the artist's work, which is entirely concerned with tensions and imbalances, as his oeuvre is constructed around the idea of gravity. In his rocky totems or sturdy industrial structures with their shaky connections, the eye is naturally drawn to the negative spaces carved out by the materials, leading to mental pictures of falling and collapse. Yet something here moves beyond this dialectical opposition of forces, something the artist describes as an "expansion of the range of possibilities."

Movement comes from friction: Jose Dávila recalls this constantly through his combinations of forces and materials that appear to be contradictory—the natural and the industrial, the full and the empty—whose ceaseless dialogue acts, in his words, as "an initiator of emotions" eluding any fixed signifiers. Trained as an architect, the artist visited many construction sites during his youth so that he could closely observe the processes at work. "Construction sites are the best places to appreciate sculpture," he says, fascinated by the constant quest for balance taking place there. So it is not a coincidence that his work calls on a range of elements from the world of construction (metal beams, glass panels, concrete), whose sparseness is combined with the organicity of natural materials (mainly stone).

Memory is fully involved in this work of reclaiming, whether it is personal memory or historical memory. An avid reader of artists' memoirs, Jose Dávila includes direct or indirect allusions to art history in his work, sometimes creating a dizzying sense of artworks within artworks. Primarily evoking the compositions of Hilma af Klint, his series of hypnotic paintings of circles defined with smooth strips of color also suggests Nietzsche's eternal return through its title (*The fact of constantly returning to the same point or situation*). This fertile motif leads each viewer to peel away its various layers according to their own sensibility. Similarly, Dávila's sculpture *A secret wish,* a thin metal plate with several Acapulco chair frames, incorporates narratives around the idea of originality, as there have been longstanding debates about the inventor of this iconic design, which was never trademarked. The artist subtly takes hold of all these references in order to blur the boundaries between different planes of reality—between his own work and that of others—and thus claim its collective belonging.

Indeed, the relational aspect is primary in Jose Dávila's work, and through endless viewpoints he evokes the invisible framework of reality and the tenuous connections it maintains with its material manifestation. And this is true even of the raw materials of his sculptures, which acquire a new kind of existence simply by coming together. The artist is aware of the ability of these sculptural elements to be reabsorbed into daily life and to exist as artworks only through a network of relationships: "For this reason I act minimally on the materials that I use," he explains. This itself reveals the intimate interconnections between the processes of degeneration and regeneration that structure the world, as summed up in Heraclitus' famous maxim, "everything flows."

Such terms resonate with particular intensity in a globalized world in perpetual flux. The artist crystallizes our world's imperceptible systems of relationships and silent dynamics. He sometimes does this more allusively, for instance in *Joint Effort*, where various objects placed on a base are linked by a black strap. How are these elements interdependent? Are they helping each other? Collaborating? Do they embody the power of the collective? There are no definite or definitive answers to these questions put forth by the artist. In fact, it is this polyphonic dimension of interpreting reality that interests Jose Dávila, whose work is voluntarily situated in an in-between zone, shifting between sturdiness and lightness, within and without, spare lines and organicity. In this regard, the artist has been influenced by Josef Albers, whose theory of colors grants the viewer a central role, placing them at the heart of the aesthetic experience. "Any perception of color is an illusion: we don't see colors the way they really are," the German painter stated, thus reaffirming the artwork as a tool for stimulating awareness. This leads to a crucial question: how do we see?

Jose Dávila asks this question in terms of color and composition, but especially in terms of space. These sculptures' very presence reevaluates our relationship to matter and the void by revealing elusive forces. Our bodies themselves take note of this, gripped by a kind of stiffening as we view this gulf containing the hypothesis of collapse. In this way, the gap between the artwork and the viewer is blurred, as the viewer is called on to experience their own subjectivity. This is a meditative invitation to fully inhabit one's sight and to perceive space, color, and shape no longer as windows onto the world, but as catalysts of experiences that are deeply revealing of our humanity.

— Alison Moss, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Le Quotidien de l'Art*