

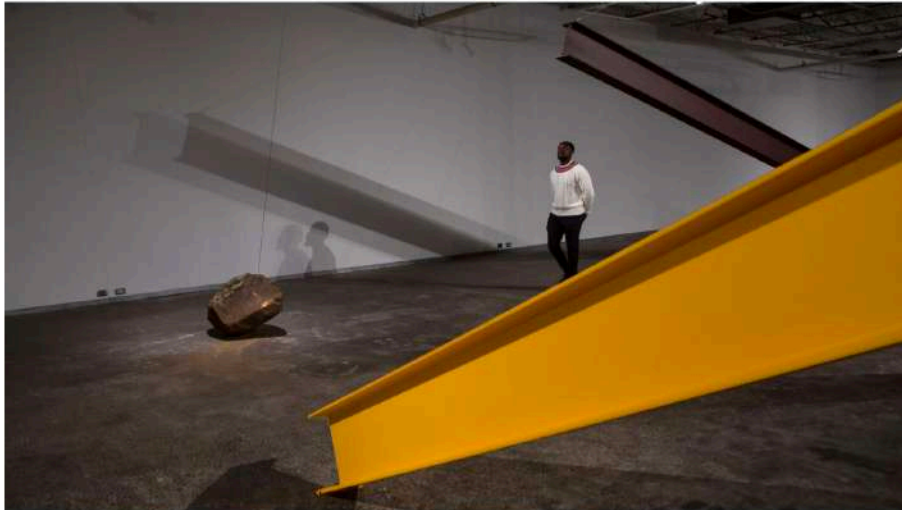
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ARTS ENTERTAINMENT > VISUAL ARTS

## Jose Davila challenges accepted boundaries with exhibition at the Dallas Contemporary

The Mexican artist makes social commentary with his large-scale sculptures.



Visitor Olajide Asekun checks out artist Jose Davila's "Directional Energies" exhibition at the Dallas Contemporary. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)

By John Zotos  
6:00 PM on Feb 27, 2020



For several years now, the Dallas Contemporary has sought to program important exhibitions of significant artists who make challenging work.

With "Directional Energies," Mexican artist Jose Davila, 46, manages to comment on serialized social structures with large-scale sculptures that use the language of minimalism, remarkably derailing the styles' core tenets to further his own ends.

The work on view, in one way or another, both formally and intellectually challenges accepted boundaries. This exhibition was curated by adjunct curator Pedro Alonzo, and it was realized with the help of a structural engineer who worked directly with the artist.

Davila's interest in space and structure is a combination of his study of architecture in Guadalajara, Mexico, in the 1990s plus the time he spent at the Fine Arts Academy of San Miguel de Allende grappling with sculpture.

Essentially a conceptual artist, he has worked variously with photographic cutouts, sculpture and installation art with the goal of overturning preconceptions about both symmetry and balance by investigating precarity, gravity, tension and stasis.

The curatorial statement contends that the suspended objects found in this exhibition are "a metaphor for the constant struggle of opposing forces as well as a representation of the friction between modernity's tendency to homogenize and humanity's need for diversity."

This may sound like a mouthful, but it directly places the work in context, suggesting how industrial materials can interact with natural elements. A type of dialogue ensues that represents humankind's attempt to solve problems, whose solutions can simply be described by the word "culture."

The pieces themselves are complicated arrangements of industrial I-beams, wire, locally sourced boulders and volcanic rocks. Some are stacked compositions of the beams and rocks that revel in an asymmetry easily depicted in the graphic arts but rarely seen in the real world as in *Perpetuum Mobile*.



In works like the 2019 piece "Poggendorff Phenomenon," artist Jose Davila uses large-scale minimalist sculptures to comment on serialized social structures. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)

It consists of five I-beams stacked as if they would rotate on a central axis, topped by a volcanic rock. You can imagine the entire thing spinning out of control in an entropic delirium. With this seemingly simple construction, Davila uproots the overwhelming presence of grids as determinants of conformity. The playful language of chance and multivalence, suggestive of new possibilities, replaces them.

In the suspension pieces, I-beams are attached to the gallery floor at one end, while the other end is raised at a steep angle and held in place by a metal wire that runs up to the ceiling. The wire runs back down and attaches to a boulder, which balances the ensemble, completing the evident tension between the two ends of a sort of tightrope metaphysical game. In several instances, the wires veer off at odd angles, conjuring the force of vectors from the realm of physics.

Speaking of physics, *Newton's Fault*, the most compelling piece in the show, directly references Sir Isaac Newton and his famous apple. The sculpture sets up a binary set of opposing vector forces that act upon iron beams with two boulders, one on either side.

They hold the piece in tension, with the difference here being that the connection is elegantly broken and replaced with a synthetic, and equally symbolic, apple. A long vertical beam hangs from the ceiling, supported by a boulder on one side, stopping just short of the apple by about an inch.

In turn, the apple rests on a horizontal beam that carries the lines of the piece toward the other side. It delicately breaks the point where the beams would usually connect, placing itself within a visual tight squeeze. This gap is the "fault" referred to in the title, creating a visually anxious space where the I-beams are prevented from joining, which suggests that they do have a weakness.

Surprising moments like this make all the difference when it comes to the visitor experience.



"Newton's Fault," a 2019 work, features a synthetic apple in a seemingly precarious position. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)



The 2019 work "Perpetuum Mobile" features a volcanic rock perched atop metal beams. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)

Davila has created a space where patrons can walk around and beneath large-scale suspended materials that wouldn't normally be set up as they are here. In a way, the oblique angles that define the pieces act as his meta-narrative critique of society's dominant hierarchies, suggesting that alternate and fruitful pathways are available if we look for them.

*John Zotos is a Dallas-based art critic and essayist.*

## Details

Jose Davila's "Directional Energies" runs through March 15 at the Dallas Contemporary, 161 Glass St., Dallas. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Free.

**[dallascontemporary.org](http://dallascontemporary.org)**.



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