

Sense of Place

Guillermo del Toro



Jose Dávila
Sense of Place, 2017
concrete
240 x 240 x 240 cm
unique

Jose Dávila

Sense of Place

You can't step into the same river twice, or so people say. This adage refers to the way time acts on things, moving them, altering them, dragging them along.

The installation *Sense of Place* by Mexican artist Jose Dávila (born 1974 in Guadalajara) elevates this idea to its guiding principle. In September 2017, in cooperation with Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND)* and Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA**, he erected an 8-ton, 2.4-meter concrete cube in West Hollywood Park, Los Angeles — Dávila's largest and most complex outdoor sculpture to date. The object is no monolith, rather it consists of forty separate concrete elements that only make a cube when correctly assembled—a giant three-dimensional Tetris puzzle.

From November 2017, Dávila began taking the sculpture apart again, step by step. In three phases elements removed firstly from the top traveled to twenty select locations in Los Angeles, including Santa Monica Pier, Hollywood, Beverly Hills City Hall, UCLA, Downtown, and Los Angeles Union Station. Eventually, all of the cube's pieces had been removed and for six months "floated" around the city. Free of any specific purpose, they appeared here and there, were used to sit or climb on, and became covered in dirt and graffiti.

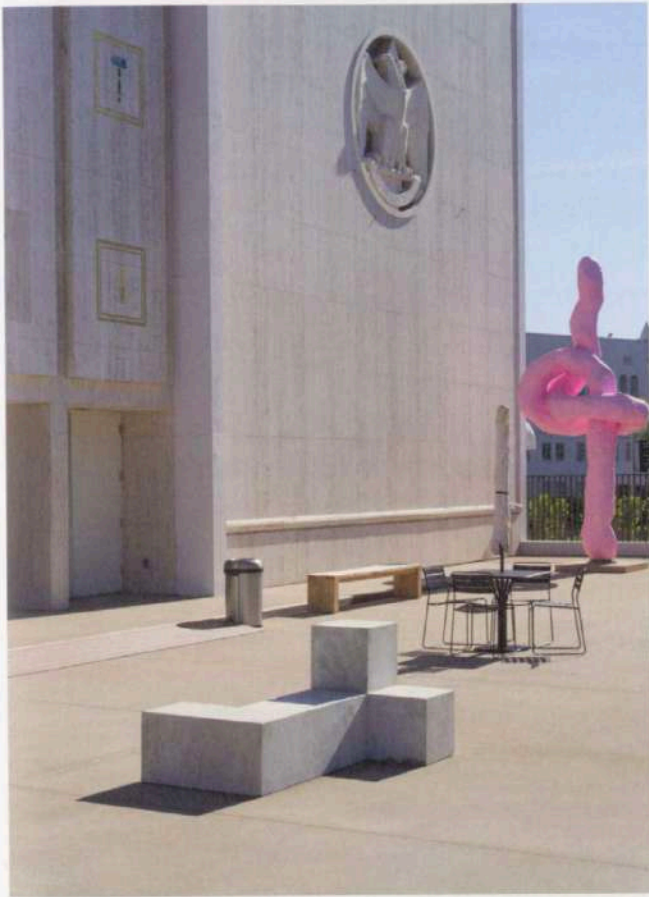
After interacting with the city and its various inhabitants in this unplanned way, in May 2018, the parts found their way back to their original location in West Hollywood Park. No longer the same as it had been before, the cube told the story of its journey. As curator Shamim Momin explained at the outset: "When they come back, visibly or not, they'll bring their histories back to the site, creating a portrait of Los Angeles."

In a short essay, film director and author Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Shape of Water*), who was also born in Guadalajara, refers to Dávila's installation when he describes Los Angeles as a city in flux, put together like a puzzle, and which cannot be reduced to a common denominator: "the dynamic of [...] LA is fluid, ever-changing."

*Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND) is a nonprofit organization founded in 2009 with the commitment to curating site-specific public art exhibitions in Los Angeles and beyond.

**Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a collaboration of arts institutions across Southern California, each presenting thematically linked exhibitions and programs designed to celebrate the region's vibrant cultural history.





Photography: Agustin Arce; Jeff McLane; Ed Mumford

Guillermo del Toro

Untitled, LA

Los Angeles is not a city, it's a puzzle of cities. When people say that they love or hate it, I always wonder which of the many cities they are talking about.

One of my favorite puzzle cities in Los Angeles is Koreatown. Even its denomination hints at the ever-changing nature of Los Angeles. In the early part of the twentieth century, a few Korean families bloomed around its churches. By mid-century, the area contained many beautiful architectural landmarks of the cosmopolis—some, like the Ambassador Hotel, were linked with the film community (Academy Awards were hosted there), while others, many others figured prominently in the emerging film noirs, most famously the *D.O.A.* building on Serrano Avenue—and its very urban landscape proved to be incredibly photogenic.

After the 1960s, economic decline dominated the area but solidified its Korean identity, establishing in the '80s the proper Koreatown, and the area rose again.

In my opinion, many of its streets and buildings stand as some of the most cinematic of this city, and both culturally and on the culinary front, Koreatown offers innovation and enormous power. The dynamic of every piece of the puzzle that is Los Angeles is fluid, ever-changing. Each area holds a secret history in its genealogy and identity: faded splendor coexists with gritty street life and stands side by side with pop-up restaurants, old eateries, and avant-garde art. It's hard to know exactly which of these energizes Koreatown the most. Much like all notable things in our life, it is their polychrome nature—the very fact that their parts seem both deep and irreconcilable—that make us fall in love with them so hard.

