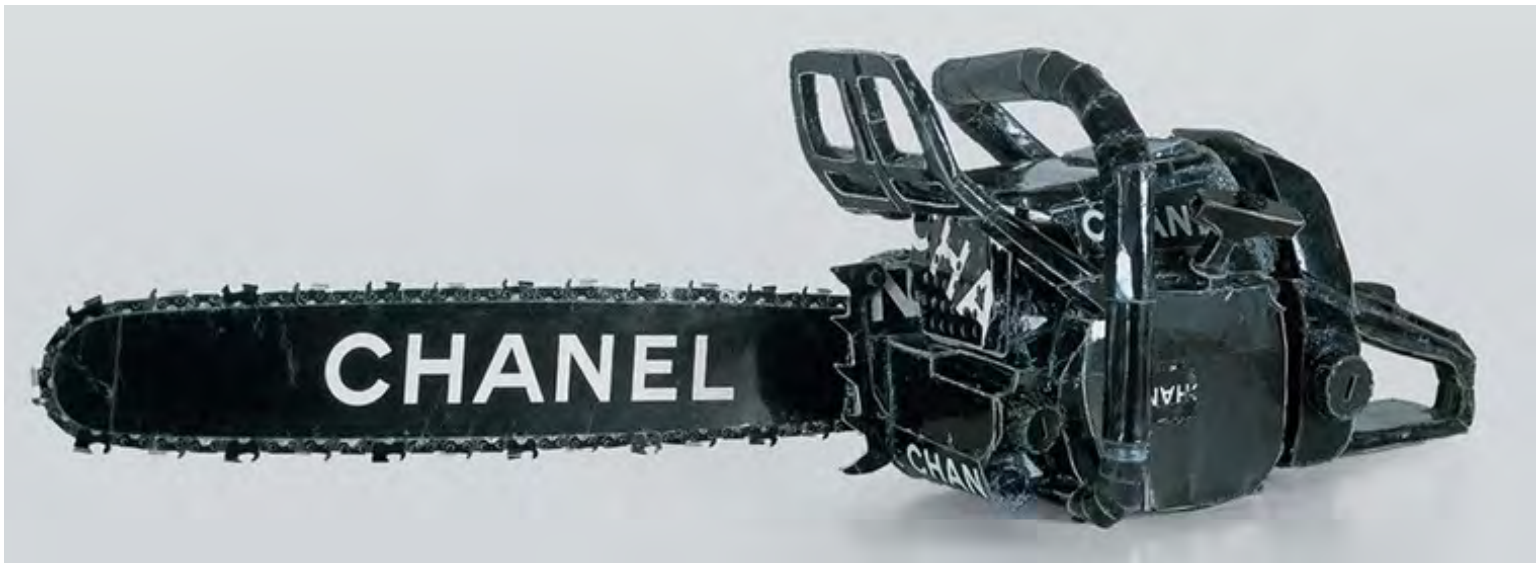
Visiting Artist: Tom Sachs

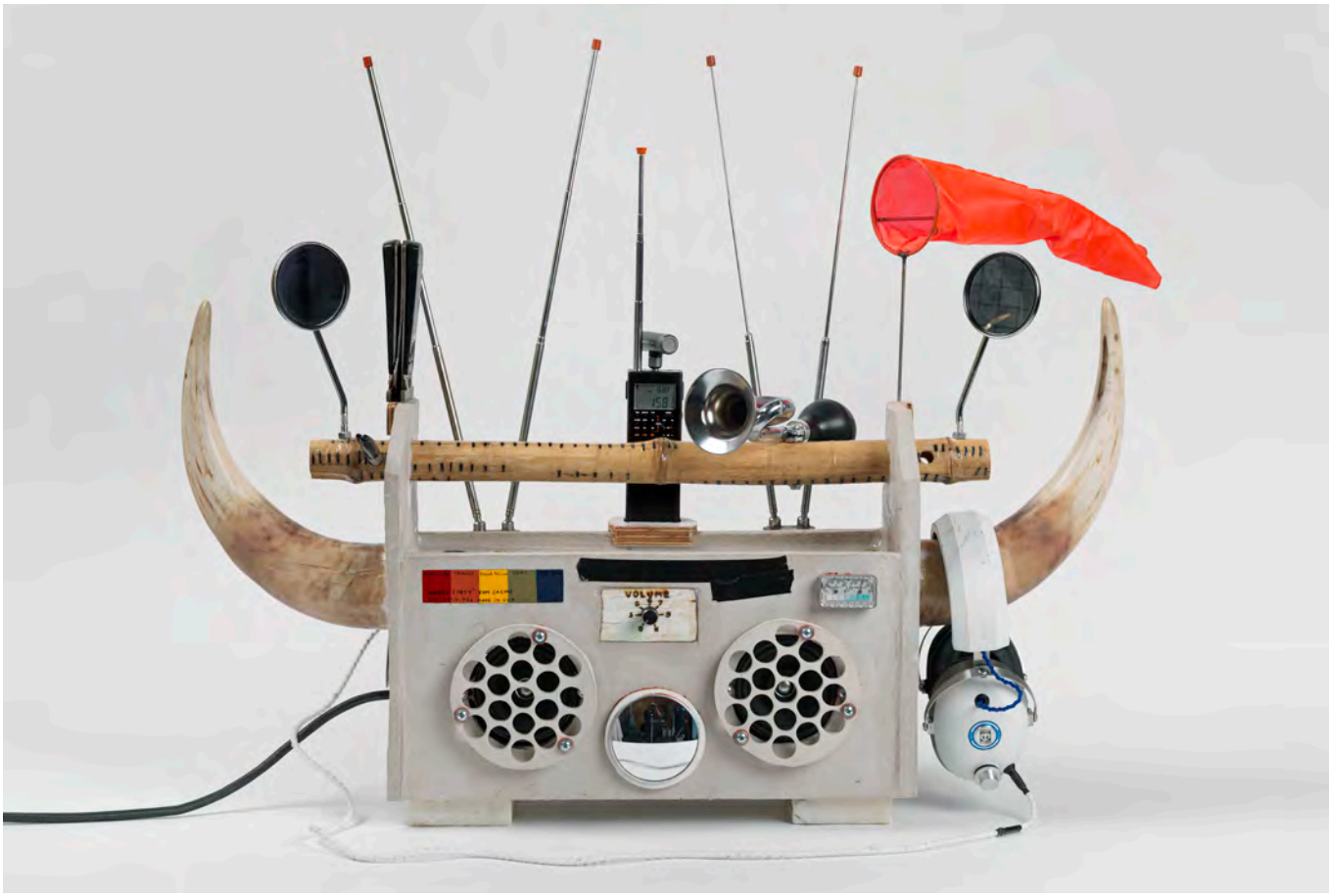
Wednesday, November 29, 6:30 pm
Sleeper Auditorium

About the artist

Tom Sachs is an interdisciplinary artist known for his intricate, hand-built reconstructions of American cultural detritus. Utilitarian objects, luxury goods, artifacts from the NASA space program are combined and reimagined using makeshift materials, laboriously assembled by hand. Simultaneously playful and critical, Sachs' work looks closely at consumerism and capitalist iconography to create tensions between high and low culture, the handmade and the mass-produced, labor and leisure, and the venerated and the overlooked. Sachs has exhibited internationally, and has work in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., to name a few.

Works

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Tom Sachs
by Jon Kessler

Tom Sachs, *Nutsy's*, 2002–03, mixed media. Installation view, Bohen Foundation, New York. Courtesy of Sperone Westwater, New York.

This conversation took place on the occasion of Tom Sachs's recent exhibition at the Bohen Foundation in the meatpacking district of New York. *Nutsy's* is a commissioned work that will travel to the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin later this year. We started out talking in the back room of an industrial supplier near Tom's studio, a reminder of what lower Manhattan once was like. It's also a place where we both spend a fair amount of time shopping, so we thought it would be appropriate.

Tom Sachs's highly personalized use of materials and processes is rooted in *bricolage*, a French word for do-it-yourself. His work addresses a wide range of issues including appropriation, branding, consumerism, globalization, entertainment and functionality. He first became known for making guns out of urban detritus and store-bought hardware. Then he became better known for branding his own constructions with the logos of luxury fashion houses like Prada, Chanel and Hermès. He made headlines when a bowl of live ammo at the front desk of his show at Mary Boone's 57th Street gallery landed her in jail for a night. Recently his work was on the frontline again when his controversial sculpture *Prada Death Camp* , a model of Auschwitz made out of a Prada hatbox, was exhibited at the Jewish Museum, New York.

His new show outdoes everything he's done previously. An urban sprawl of foam core and hot glue, united by highways for remote-controlled race cars, *Nutsy's* is a world in 1:25 scale complete with a McDonald's, a sculpture park, a ghetto, and *Unité d'Habitation*, Le Corbusier's housing project in Marseilles. It also has a life-size DJ booth and a 10,000-watt boom box. Oh, and it took Tom and Team Sachs two years to build. Like most of Tom's work, it has a

A mutual friend, the actress Gina Gershon, brought me to Tom's gun show eight years ago and I was won over at once, not just by the work but also by the person. We've been friends and have exchanged studio visits ever since. He is one of the most committed, generous, and ferociously talented people on this or any other planet.

Int. Day. Victor Machinery, New York.

Jon Kessler Here we are a few doors down from Tom's studio, at Victor Machinery on Centre Street. There's only a few of these places left in New York.

Tom Sachs I was attracted to this area because of all the industrial stuff.

JK It's so close to both our practices.

TS You know, when I was studying architecture in London, I went to see the Saatchi Collection. There were these sculptures of yours, turntables with figures of army men on them and a light shining through that cast their shadows onto the wall. It was visually complex but relatively simple mechanically. I liked Haim Steinbach's work there too: it was all Air Jordans, Yoda masks, lava lamps and weight-lifting machines. I liked how cold it was, like a supermarket display. But when I saw your piece I got a bit of a push to go ahead and do my own thing. I had already been going to thrift shops, but that's when the idea of combining became essential for me.

JK What happens when there are no more stores like Victor's, and you have to shop for everything on the Internet? I assume that you get most of your stuff sent to you UPS now?

TS Yeah. When I moved to this area, Canal Street and places like Victor and Eastern were still forces, and Centre Street was all machinery. I could get my motors and army surplus, even consumer surplus. That quickly disappeared and was replaced with fake Gucci sunglasses and Prada handbags. Then I started buying *that* stuff. That was how that whole branch of my practice got established. I would bring Gucci sunglasses to people in Europe and they would say to me, Are those real? And, you know, they're real *sunglasses*, they're just not *authorized*.

Tom Sachs, *City of Aspen (12 Gauge Shotgun)*, 1999, mixed media, 8 × 30 x 2 inches. Courtesy of Tom Sachs Studio.

JK Your work is very populist, and I wonder if that's the main reason you haven't been given the critical attention you deserve.

there was never a movement toward the real. People didn't go all the way. It's too threatening to the art-world system to have art that works, because part of what makes it so strong is that it is insular. You need to be a little provincial to keep your things tight. That's partially why I'm not as interested in art as I am in media and technology.

JK There are so many ideas in your work, like failed utopianism, functionalism and design, high and low culture, surveillance and globalization, that I would imagine critics could really bite into. That is, if they don't want to talk about hot glue and duct tape.

TS Well, it's like Barnett Newman said, it's what ornithology is to the birds.

JK You're talking about criticism?

TS There is a lot of art that has its pants down, so to speak, and gets the critical attention. I think the popularity of my work doesn't leave a void for critics to fill. It's a very complete world; it's anti-elitist. There might as well be a sign on it saying, "This doesn't need anyone to explain it."

JK How did *Nutsy's* change when it went from the studio to the Bohen Foundation?

TS I don't think it's as interesting. It's the difference between being at home and being a guest in somebody's house. The original plan was to make it a home for us to move into, but that wasn't realistic. A gallery is not a studio, and a public space has different constraints.

JK I became aware of the interactivity of your installation when I went to one of the Tuesday night races. The drivers are smoking bongs and there's a DJ spinning records and you're all in your Tyvek jumpsuits running through the installation with your remote controls.

TS The performances give the installation more life. All the functional aspects of these things, like the boom box and the repair station, are evolving as we get better. Sculpture for me has always been about developing a language. The actual making is a big part of that language. That's what building it, operating it, and constantly developing it is—developing a language.

JK Despite the fact that you have a studio full of assistants, the work doesn't feel fabricated: your hand is all over it,

TS Well, it's all real.

JK What does that mean?

TS It's not made up to look like something other than what it is. All of that stuff is built by me and my crew, and we have a very specific ethic: Make the effort to show your work rather than hide it. We have all these great people who start out as studio assistants but wind up making really personal contributions. We maximize everyone's natural skills.

JK Your studio reminds me of an architect's.

the screw, show it. Always show the glue mark. Let the tape show the dirt that it picked up while being handled. There are other rules too. Writing is always in Sharpie, and if something needs to be written and I'm not there, there's a chart of my handwriting so it matches. When it comes to making the logos, sometimes it's just a question of using a projector and tracing the letters. Duct tape is generally done in cross-hatch pattern, and if it's laid horizontally it must go on in a shingle-like pattern so that dust doesn't accumulate on the ridges. Mending plates should always show the price tag from OK Hardware, which indicates that the thing was built in SoHo.

Tom Sachs, *Sony Outsider*, 1998, mixed media, 5 x 5 x 10 inches. Courtesy of Tom Sachs Studio.

JK There was so much in the show, so many pieces, so much material and so much process, that it was easy to miss a lot. People were walking around with a kind of glazed look.

TS Maybe I should be more manipulative. I often think about Robert Gober, who hides all the details of how he makes things. That restraint is what's so exciting about his work. But I could never do anything like that. All I can do is what I do.

JK I know you know Richard Wentworth. I see the influence of those English artists, Woodrow, Wentworth. Richard Deacon, especially in this show. You must have seen their work while you were living in London.

TS Yeah. That generation, for sure. Bill Woodrow is a big one, Tony Cragg, there are even a couple of younger artists that are right out of that, who I think are just as good. Like Rachel Whiteread and Steven Pippin. What I like about all those English artists is that they're process oriented. I always used to say that what I do is process-oriented conceptual art. The concept is really about the making. That part of it is really un-chic right now. People don't obsess over that aspect of Rachel Whiteread's work, do they? It's more about its monumentality.

JK Most people are out of touch with how things are made.

TS People always say to me, Where did you get this stuff? And I'm like, I made *everything*. There's nothing I like more than talking shop.

TS The first show.

JK You've come a long way baby—from the guns, Hello Kitty, the telephone books and the art-about-art stuff. Appropriation. I told you to give that shit up. From that you went to the *Sony Outsider*. And then to the show at Mary Boone's that addressed the body and functionality and exposed all the systems and guts.

TS I really believe you have your God-given talent and then you have your job, and your job is to bring your talent to the world. The fashion packaging was a way to report on culture. I thought I'd give the world this information through my bricolage stuff. Which is what the building of the guns was about too. I mean, I watch TV. Then with the *Sony Outsider* I thought, Okay, I'm going to expand this idea and make it more violent and aggressive and difficult I'll make a perfect full-scale model of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki, but I'll make it Sony. It's like cargo-culture shit. We don't just drop bombs, we drop culture, and that's how we erase culture. So instead of using bomb parts I made it like a capsule, but deluxe, with a DVD player. It was a huge failure because it was so expensive and had all these moving parts and lights and heating and air conditioning and plumbing. One critic who usually misses the point really nailed what was wrong with that piece. She said it looked too machine-made, it didn't look like art. And I remember never feeling like that piece was mine because it was one of the first things I didn't make in the shop. I had it fabricated.

JK You didn't make the shell?

TS No.

JK But you put all the circuitry in?

TS I put all the circuitry in, and I did some of the plumbing. When I reshowed that piece at SITE Santa Fe, I reworked it. I made a much more beautiful steel-welded base instead of a fiberglass boat base. And I redid all the labels that had been stuck on, hand-painted them with a Sharpie so it looked more handmade. I'll fuck with it some more for the Albright-Knox show in October.

JK So you've been around long enough now to see artists come and go. It doesn't necessarily last.

TS To be honest, I never think about them going.

JK Hey, I haven't shown in a long while and people think that I'm gone.

TS Well, you've become less visible publicly, but your work continues through me and others who have been inspired by you. Your work, like mine, is much larger than you. All of us are just chipping away at this thing that is much bigger. It's like a sci-fi movie with some giant art alien, where all these themes are blown apart and make the universe understandable to everyone. That's when all of us are going to be out of business. It'll be great—we'll have this incredible global consciousness of peace. Just like in James Cameron's film *The Abyss*.

Tom Sachs, *Hermès Valuemeal*, 1998, hot glue, ink and paper, 18 × 12 × 12 inches. Courtesy of Tom Sachs Studio.

JK I love that.

TS It might take a thousand more years for us to understand nature on that level, but only then are we going to have situations where we're not killing each other. In the meantime, you and I have a lot of fucking work to do. The Björk song about that, "All is Full of Love", has all the machines inside the mountains just waiting to come out. They've always been there, and the dinosaurs too.

JK Björk's a genius. You have a healthy relation to history, more so than most artists I know. It seems much less movement-based and academic. Maybe it's because you don't feel fixed to a generation or a movement.

TS I don't think academia or the system helps the important ideas behind art. It helps art as a business, the commercial aspect of it. It helps academia itself because it keeps people in school and a dialogue going. But it doesn't help the big things.

JK But if aesthetics is "what ornithology is to the birds," then you wouldn't necessarily have an understanding of what the taxonomy is like without—

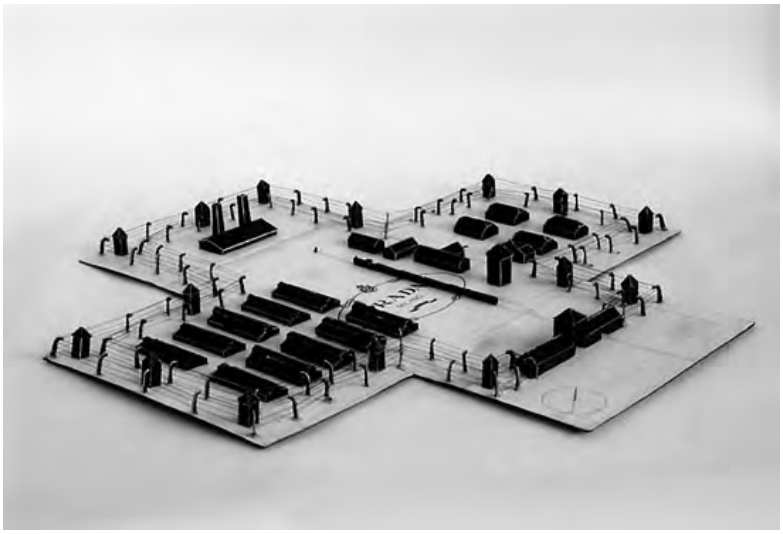
TS —ornithology. That's important, and I don't mean to discount it for those who are interested in it, but it's not important to my practice. It can be counterproductive. I find that the people who make the most interesting work are *working* artists. People who have gone out and done something in life, have had real jobs or have been educated in medicine, and they've been able to apply that life experience to it. How the fuck do these architects build buildings without ever having been on a job site? There's no sensitivity there to the laborer who does the actual building, or to the materials.

JK At Columbia most of the architecture students don't construct models anymore. It's all done on computers. There is no relationship with materials except a virtual one.

TS The computer does not show details. It informs. Frank Gehry uses computers to realize complex forms that are developed through models first. A computer can't teach a joiner how

JK That's the way Norman Foster does it.

TS He's an exception of course, and we're lucky that he gets to build. He has integrity. For him it's about the materials.



Tom Sachs, *Prada Death Camp*, 1998, cardboard, ink and adhesive, 27¼ x 27¼ x 2 inches. Courtesy of Tom Sachs Studio.

Int. Day. Kessler's Studio, Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

TS Look at these sculptures. They show the scars of labor. When you move a screwhole, that scar is a mark that tells us where you were. This registration mark shows where the center of the circle you're making is. What gives value to that logo FUCK YOU are all those drips. They make it yours. Most artists and craftsmen would have erased those.

JK But does that really give the piece more intimacy, or do you just like it because you're a fetishist?

TS I don't think I'm a fetishist. We are practitioners and we finger the evidence of our practice. If we were to start faking it and start rubbing duck butter on stuff, that would get pretentious. You have to really be vigilant because it's a slippery slope and you could easily drift into pretentiousness.

JK I'm reminded of the recent *Times* story about Levi's and their quest to create the ultimate faked worn-out jeans.

TS Helmut Lang had these beautifully worn jeans with paint splatters and a blob of silicone on them. Six pairs with stains all in the *exact* same place. But getting back to the thing that I think is exciting about this new work: you're playing and moving things around and you're getting to enjoy that time. Once you commit to building it, all the play is gone and the execution therapy begins.

exist in the way that it does if I didn't make it. I couldn't draw this stuff out and send it to someone and tell them to make it. People suggest that and I realize that they don't understand the level of intuition involved. By the way, what was that arcade game you used for the Aspen show?

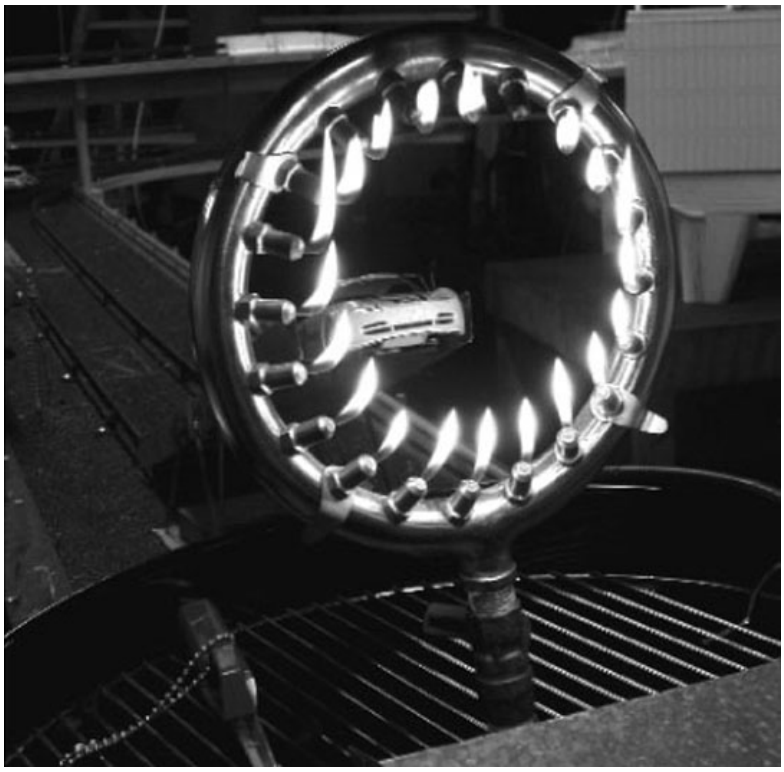
TS Williams's 1980 Defender. I bought that on eBay for 300 bucks. I've seen them for as much as 800.

JK I love that piece.

TS Where did you see it?

JK I saw it in your studio. That was the beginning of my dualistic relationship with your work, loving the physical piece but feeling removed from the experience of using it. Not being able to play arcade games, I felt more like a voyeur. It was the same the other night at Bohen. I didn't know how to race the little cars, so it made me feel a little old, but I enjoyed watching the race anyway.

TS Well, think about African art, it's all made for real rituals in an actual place. Our fucked-up ritual is as obscure to anyone else as African tribal ritual is to me. It doesn't make a ceremonial mask any less cool. It maybe even makes it cooler for me to see that object in a museum than some fucked-up sculpture. One race night at Bohen John had one car and Eric had another and one guy went into the McDonald's first and slid sideways and blocked the entrance. But if he backed out, the other guy would get to the burger first. So they had this ballet where they're blocking each other for two minutes. Meanwhile Will, who was in third place, was quickly gaining ground and they had to give up this combat to prevent Will from coming in and catching up. (*laughter*) It was so exciting, and it became very clear that we needed more places on the track where smash-up combat could occur. Right now if you get pole position you have a major advantage.



Tom Sachs, *Nutsy's*, 2001–03, mixed media. Performance view, Tom Sachs Studio, New York. Photo by Tom Powel Imaging. Courtesy of Tom Sachs Studio and Tom Powel.

JK What's pole position?

TS Pole position is always first car out, the closest position to the starting pole. From there you have a 75 percent chance of getting to the bong-hit station first. The bong and the pot are loaded into the trunk of the car, and if you're the second person you have to wait all this time for the DJ to load the second bong hit into the car and by then the first guy's back at the bong station.

JK So if you create more spaces where the squabbles could happen—

TS —you even the playing field. I hope that this summer at the Deutsche Guggenheim we'll have time to manipulate the track to enhance the competition. To bring it back to the idea of playing, it's like with these things that you're making here. You play with them but at a certain point you have to commit to metal, and once you commit to metal it's hard to change it.

JK For me it's a balancing act between needing to get formed and wanting to remain unformed. Maybe it's an equation.

TS It reminds me a little of the quitting coefficient.

TS Let's say you've got an idea. So idea is zero, and completion is ten, along a horizontal axis. And on the vertical axis you have time. It takes you one-fifteenth of a second to think of a really elaborate sculpture, but it takes you a year to make it, or the rest of your life.

TS Yeah. So let's say that you're working on it and all of a sudden you're halfway to completion. And then you're three-quarters of the way. By now you've spent like 500 hours and you're 99 and 99 hundredths of the way there. But you're still not there. You'll never get there. It's Zeno's paradox. You never quite get there, and ultimately you have to quit and say, Okay, this is good enough. It's analogous to Fibonacci's Golden Section. I call it the quitting coefficient.

Tom Sachs, *Nutsy's*, 2001–03, mixed media. Installation view, Tom Sachs Studio, New York. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging. Courtesy of Tom Sachs Studio and Tom Powel.

Ext. Day. Outside Kessler's studio.

JK Tommy's back there dumpster-diving. What is that, a Mix Master? He's got it, he's taking it. He's taking that old toolbox too. All right! Score!

here.

JK Look at all this stuff. Here's a cool ice-pick.

TS This is from England. This thing is good to have in a car. These things, I can never have enough of.

JK What is that?

TS This? Hello. Where the hell do you buy that?

JK There's a bunch of fishing stuff in here. This is a serious bricolage case.... Here's a file.

TS We should play rock-paper-scissors to divide this shit up.

JK No, it's all yours.

TS Are you telling me you don't want this Craftsman wrench?

JK I have three that size.

TS That's really the only valuable thing in here.

JK I just like the smell of the box. Let's market that as a cologne.

TS You know what I love? Those amazing shrines in Chinatown. You've gotta go to the sheet-metal shop on Grand Street. In the back they've got all these guys who weld stainless steel, and they are incredibly low tech. They use these Lincoln Tombstone welders that they somehow hopped up to make them weld stainless. They've made these incredible little stainless-steel shrines where they keep their personal tools and their Buddhist shrines and their incense—

JK —and their pile of oranges.

TS Exactly. They're kind of crappy, but they're stainless so they look really fancy and yet functional and sacred. They seem to take the place of pinup girls.

JK That kind of stuff influenced my art for years.

Tom Sachs, *Nutsy's*, 2001–03, mixed media. Installation view, Bohen Foundation, New York.

Int. Night. Planet Thailand restaurant, Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

JK Do you mind sitting next to my fountain?

TS It'll be like background noise.

JK They called me up the other day because the fountain wasn't working. The pump was broken, and there was no place left in New York that would fix it. I wanted to cry, it was so sad. Even in Chinatown, where the art of bricolage is still thriving, nobody would fix it. I finally opened it up myself, it was only a little blockage, just some crap keeping the rotor from turning.

TS You've said that some of your students don't know how to make things. That's a shame because it's so important. It's really not in style right now. H. C. Westermann hasn't had a major show in New York, which is amazing. That big tour never came through Manhattan. But I think people will come around.

JK I heard that Jessica Stockholder, who heads the sculpture program at Yale, is teaching a materials and process class for the grads. She felt that there was a need for that. That's a big change right there.

TS I did a class at Cal Arts called Combat Construction Techniques and the Zen of Joinery. I tried to compare Japanese joinery to combat construction techniques developed during Vietnam.

JK You mean like using Krazy Glue on skin?

TS Yeah, that kind of shit. I did a demonstration using the hot-glue gun to join two pieces of wood. I let it cool and then pulled them apart. Then I heated up two similar pieces of wood with a propane torch for 15 seconds and put them together, and no one was able to pull th

materials. I was encouraging them to invent things on their own.

JK I think we're finally coming out the other side of the post-studio thing. But it's going to take a lot of time to educate kids again about how to manipulate and work with materials in order to get their ideas across. There's not enough understanding about how to make the ideas and the objects play off each other.

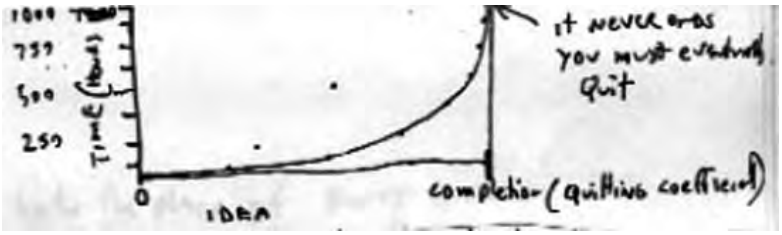
TS For me it was always about taking the wrong thing and putting it with the right thing. Like taking a Hermès package and making it into a model of a weapon. Or taking bricolage plumbing and making it into a weapon that I could shoot. I feel lucky that my practice of bricolage allows me to exercise the way an athlete would. If I need to drop a little theory or throw in some context to keep an audience, I'm okay with that kind of whoring.

JK What's going to be the next thing?

TS Well, I tried to fake an art movement with the *American Bricolage* show, with Tim Hawkinson as the central character. I really wanted American Bricolage to be a thing. But it was too soon.

JK That was an excellent show, Tommy.

TS I wish we could have gotten Calder's toaster. But everything else was good.



Tom Sachs, "The Quitting Coefficient." Courtesy of Tom Sachs Studio.

Int. Night. Bohen Foundation, New York.

TS In the Bohen installation there's McDonald's versus Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* — the reality of modernism versus the potential of its optimism, *Unité*'s promise to solve the world's housing problems. Le Corbusier, of course, is blamed for the problems of housing. His ideas were so pure and intelligent, but often the greedy management of places like *Unité* were inhumane. Although he was a sensualist, a great humanist, Le Corbusier is accused of insensitivity to the occupant. And then the other duality is bricolage, the handmade, and manufacturing, how you have at one end something like a NASA rocket, which is handmade, and then things like *The Bricolage Sound Systems of Jamaica*, the 10,000-watt boom box, which is custom made with very limited rather than unlimited funds. It's ultra-limited funds with maximum effect. It's that triangle again, of good, cheap, and fast. You have to choose two. You can never, ever have all three in anything. NASA obviously chooses good and fast. And with the boom box it's good and cheap. I don't know how you judge speed of art,

gather as many speakers as they could and make these walls of sound. They were like gangsters; they would have rivalries. There were these amazing painted speakers and the tradition carries on to this day; if you go to the Caribbean you'll see these speakers all over, sometimes mounted on trucks. The traditions of this music are not rooted in wealth.

JK How does that speaker system function in your show?

TS Formally it's a foil for *Unité*. They're two walls that relate. Structurally, *Unité* is a wall of sound as well: it's this really flat absorptive material, foam core, almost like a negative. The boom box is a positive, and it pushes out sound. We made the speakers, and before we assembled them we painted the wood so everywhere there was a cut you would see the wood grain. We used silver rather than black screws, and every time there was a hole we filled it with resin and we didn't repaint, so you see every repair and fuck-up. Anyway, the building models and the functional things are both parts of our studio practice. One shoots out sound and then the other absorbs it.

JK There are a lot of situations in your work where the object, which is the stand-in, the surrogate for the art object, if you will, and the other thing that is actually functional, the thing that you play with and that gets used, stand together.

TS Yeah, the guns that look real don't shoot and the guns that look fake do. In a way the functional pieces, because they are functional, have the most potential outside this art-world context because they can really work. Last Tuesday, when Glenn O'Brien came over to Bohen to play his great old records, I felt like there was a party going on, and in a way there really was.

—Jon Kessler is chair of the visual arts division of Columbia University's School of the Arts, where he teaches sculpture. Recognized for its innovative use of materials, his work is included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Kessler is cofounder Bozart Toys, a company that manufactures artist-designed toys.

Tags: Sculpture, Technology, Conceptualism, Appropriation, Mixed media, Studio practice, Criticism, Cultural critique

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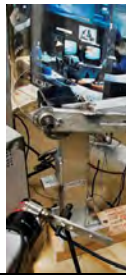

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SPACE PROGRAM

GROUND CONTROL TO TANGO SIERRA

A
MISSION DEBRIEF
WITH

Tom Sachs

written by JOSEPH AKEL

Space Suit, 2007

Framed by clear acetate Wayfarers and a mop of curly hair, the intensity of Tom Sachs's gaze is matched only by the playful, almost boyish enthusiasm he exudes when discussing his art. Sitting down to talk about his epic ongoing project, "Space Program," he references everything from his deep fascination with the Shaker movement to what he considers the most overlooked scene in Ron Howard's blockbuster lunar mission thriller, *Apollo 13*.

Sachs is busy planning the third iteration of his "Space Program," a "manned" expedition to Europa, the ice-encrusted sixth moon of Jupiter. His matter-of-fact delivery regarding such ambitions is no joke. Indeed, for the artist who once said, "going to the moon was the greatest art project of the twentieth-century," the space race of the '60s and '70s was a grand, technological work of performance art, one that drew upon the dense constellation of patriotism and iconology reflective of America's cultural attitude at the time. And while his projects are terrestrially bound—for now—it would seem that for Sachs, the final destination is not some extra-planetary touchdown, but rather illuminating the creative machinations required to get there.

Prior to "Space Program," Sachs made a name for himself with works that mordantly and provocatively examined relationships between consumerism, capitalism, and production. Notoriously, in 1999, longtime NYC gallerist Mary Boone was arrested for exhibiting a Sachs piece—an Alvar Aalto vase filled with live 9mm rounds. In other works, such as his *Chanel Chain Saw*, 1996, Sachs built a mock chainsaw with boxes from the namesake Parisian fashion house. In a D.I.Y. creative process that he considers bricolage, Sachs looks to fashion new, often useable objects out of existing found materials, an approach that allows him to recast the quotidian within the context of the improbable. Excitedly recalling the scene from *Apollo 13* in which a team of engineers is tasked with creating an air filter using only existing objects on the drifting lunar module, Sachs proclaims the event "one of the defining moments of the entire space program."

For his 2007 show at the Los Angeles arm of art world powerhouse Gagosian Gallery, Sachs shifted his attention away from the world of conspicuous consumerism toward astronomical fantasy. Among other works included in the show, he had a full-size homemade version of the Apollo Lunar Excursion Module (LEM) constructed out of plywood. True to his bent for the comical, included in the lunar module was a fully stocked bar. During the exhibition, two female astronauts, fully clothed in space suits composed of tyvek, cotton polyester, and plywood air packs, took "samples" by drilling into the gallery's concrete floor.

Sachs's attention to detail and craft borders on the obsessive. But it is this totality and uniformity of vision that marks his projects as something other than a space nerd's vision writ large. Indeed, speaking of his overall practice as an artist, Sachs told me that one of his guiding figures was Mother Ann Lee, founder of the Shaker religious movement. Led by a theological ethos toward production that mixes the spiritual with the material, Shakers believe that making things well and consistently is itself an act of prayer. For Sachs, such dedication and discipline of production extends to the rotating cast of assistants who work with the artist in his Soho studio. For every new employee joining Sachs's team, a ten-part film produced by the artist, *Ten Bullets*, is required viewing (tenbullets.com). While the delivery is tongue in cheek, the underlying message is more serious in tone; among the precepts the narrator of the instructional series intones, "Follow this guide carefully and you probably won't be fired."

In 2012, Sachs took over the 55,000-square-foot interior of the Park Avenue Armory for "Space Program 2.0: Mars," the second installation of his "Space Program." Several pieces from his earlier "Moon" project were stationed throughout the cavernous hall, among them his version of the LEM, now refitted for exploring Mars. In addition, a fully operational 1972 Winnebago Brave was transformed into a Mobile Quarantine Facility (MQF), replete with antennas and NASA logos. Elsewhere, amongst other structures, including a hydroponics laboratory, a teahouse stood constructed out of iconic Con Edison barriers. Every day throughout the exhibition, Sachs's legion of crew members buzzed about the armory, whether on bicycle or skateboard, busily executing tasks and repairs associated with the mission—that is, when they weren't drinking beer from a life-size Darth Vader fridge. No detail left to chance, all members of the Mars entourage were decked out in limited edition gear that the artist, collaborating with engineers from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and NIKE, produced for the exhibition.

Whether whimsy or folly, Sachs's creations probe themes that bring to the fore a very human aspect of the empirical age we live in today. Whether reproducing tools of exploration or restaging scenes of great technological accomplishment, his works are uniquely personal—a reminder of the extraordinary relationship that exists between man and the devices he creates to understand the unknown world around him. "Scientists, like artists, are men of faith," he says.

Tom at Mission Control, 2007

Challenger (Crawler), 2003 Courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, photo by Tom Powell
opposite page from top: *Dr. John Neiggemann, 2007* Photo by Tom Sachs
LEM, Space Program: Mars, 2012 Courtesy Tom Sachs Studio, photo by Genevieve Hanson

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Tom Sachs

Chanel Guillotine (Breakfast Nook), 1998. Wood, steel, leather, nylon, and rubber, 147 x 122 x 125 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Tom Sachs

In Conversation With Dakin Hart

Tom Sachs is an American artist, based in New York City, with a talent for putting unlikely things together with a deep antipathy to verisimilitude. Everything he makes—from his fully-functional Chanel Guillotine (Breakfast Nook) *of 1998 and the 103 working cannons on his* Barbie Slave Ship *(commissioned 2013) to a full line of easy-care IKEA particle board and carbon fiber tape Judd chairs (launched 2009 and ongoing)—is or does something real. For two decades, Sachs and his merry band of bricolympians have synthesized their complementary obsessions with modern sculpture and consumer-age-materialist-tweaker subcultures (e.g. model car racing, Hello Kitty, luxury goods, Star Wars, the military-industrial complex, international modernism, and, small arms manufacture) in assembled worlds brought to life through actual use.*

Remember what it was like to be nine, when you lived whatever alternate reality you and your friends were into? I played Dungeons and Dragons in 12-hour stretches with Roger Crist and audiophiled it up with my dad, comparing versions of Sibelius's Symphony No. 2 *on a tricked-out hi-fi with a Heathkit preamp he let me help him build. My younger brother was into ninja paraphernalia, Taco Bell, and drawing cartoons. That's how Sachs, his studio, and the constellation of inspired lunatics who orbit around each of his projects conduct their business—like a band of nine-year-olds with* laissez-faire *parents and access to one kid's dad's well-appointed garage workshop in the summer after fourth grade. Begging the question, "What is the only full-size, free-standing, Apollo-era lunar lander in the world other than NASA's—namely Sachs's—doing if it is not being used to explore space?" Bullshit. Tom's lunar module has been to the moon (Los Angeles, 2007) and Mars (New York, 2013). This summer—gods and the suspension of disbelief willing—it will touch down on the ultra flat frozen surface of Jupiter's ice moon Europa.* Tom Sachs Space Program: Europa *is the second stop on a tour that began earlier this year as* Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony *at The Noguchi Museum and will conclude at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas in the summer of 2017, returning to that compact, tea-focused configuration. (The arc of the tour roughly reflects that of three overall missions: first, research, development, and space camp at the Noguchi, then the voyage to Europa at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and finally the return to Earth, decompression, and debrief at the Nasher.)*

Among the many subcultures to which Tom has devoted himself, none is more reflective of his ambition than his version of NASA, which runs in parallel with the US government's, itself one of the greatest craft projects in the history of man, albeit on a slightly larger budget. Exploring the universe leads to a lot of thinking about humanity in the abstract. Tom's response has been to investigate the different ways in which we represent who we are—just as NASA did with the Voyager Golden Record—as well as strategies for managing the many difficulties associated with sending fellow humans off-world. Research is ongoing—pot is still, obviously, in the running—but Tom has concluded, at least for now, that the two things we should take to the Moon or Mars or Europa when we're ready to colonize are hip hop and tea ceremonies. Those also happen, not coincidentally, to be excellent tools for staying in tip-top mental shape if you're making the journey and expected to function at a consistently high level, with great ingenuity and flexibility, under less than optimal conditions.

In the following conversation, Tom and I address (obliquely) why Sen no Rikyū (1522-91), the godfather of Japanese tea ceremony and one of history's earliest recorded artist martyrs, and Alan Shepard (1923-98), only the fifth man to step on the moon but the first to play golf there, would undoubtedly have been friends or lovers had time not conspired to keep them apart. For a somewhat more focused and cogent account of the natural sympathy between humanity's search for self in outer space and within the confines of the tea house, see Tom Sachs' Tea Ceremony Manual *(The Noguchi Museum, 2016).*

Untitled (Nikon), 1974. Clay and paint, 3 x 2.5 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Tiffany Glock (Model 19), 1995. Cardboard, thermal adhesive, and ink, 2.5 x 6.5 x 9 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

We're sitting in your studio, not at the Noguchi Museum where* Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony *is on view through July 24. There is nowhere quiet at the museum to have a conversation right now, so this makes more sense. It's also good, because we want to talk about your history, not just what's going on at the museum.

It makes me think, over the course of the 11 years we've known each other—what blows me away is how much your studio transforms, based on whatever you're working on. This space has been so many different things. It's been a mission control center; right now you're building a café; it was a bodega just a few months ago; it's been a shrine for James Brown. It's always kind of an Italian renaissance studio for craft traditions of every conceivable sort—woodworking, metalworking, ceramics, painting, and sculpture, obviously. It's like Verrocchio's studio. Or Donatello's, even better, where you do it all, can make anything, whatever a patron or client needs.
The model that I think of when I think about the studio is Eames's studio. When I read interviews about what it was like, they said in a week it could be three totally different things. They'd move all the tables, stack them all up against the wall and build a set, and then they'd come back the next day and it's like an office.

But it's like Eames with schizophrenia, or Eames on crack—without boundaries. I mean, they were amazing and inventive, and you know, extraordinarily open-minded, and it's still neat to look back at what they did, but you've added 10 other modalities.
Well, we do a lot of stuff here. Making a movie is incredibly elaborate. Doing a tea ceremony is equally elaborate in a different direction—making sculpture, having all this equipment to do different material. That's why I've avoided ceramics for so long, because of the dust. I hate it.

Is it worse than sawdust?
Yeah, I think plaster is the worst, and ceramic dust, because it's so fine, it just gets everywhere. When I was in college I didn't do ceramics—I did metal because all the ceramicists were covered in white dust and it wasn't sexy, whereas metal workers always had black dust and it just looked tougher. That's how I got into metal. Sex appeal. It just looks cooler.

Okay, so just a very open-ended question about the language you use in your work—what's a nugget?
A nugget is a gold nugget. It's the idea of traveling to the West Coast and going into the wilderness and finding something in nature, in the abyss of nature . . . the idea of the nugget, or the McGuffin, the unknown, the magical object of high density and value is the metaphor. But then when I think about what it has to do with sculpture; there are certain sculptures that have a high density. I'm not talking about a sprawling Richard Serra, but I imagine a sculpture of Max Ernst's, where it's small and dense.

But it doesn't imply anything about what formal tradition it is or isn't in. I think that's part of what I respond to in your work: you have a capacious definition of what constitutes magical, in terms of what can be a nugget. It's not within a limited frame. You said Max Ernst, I think more of Jean Arp if you're thinking in abstract terms, but that is a very narrow-minded way to look at it.
Arp is a better sculptor. Max Ernst isn't known for his sculpture.

Ernst is a better storyteller, but he doesn't make things that are as formally compelling.
Yep, without a doubt, but I think the over-arching thing, whether it's a spaceship or a Judd , is that the object itself, regardless of what the story is, has formal considerations that use high density as a priority. So, not flailing arms, but a torso fragment. Not a figure, but a head. Certainly Brâncuși's sculptures are nuggets, but maybe less *Bird in Space* and more so *Flying Turtle (Turtle)* or *The Kiss*.

A wooden cup. Those are the Brâncușis I want. Any of those ones that don't sit up straight.
That contain nothing.

Right. Just wood.
Solid. That's the ultimate.

With a little handle—I don't even know what you call it, it's barely a handle.
It's a gesture of a handle, yeah, the wooden cup. But of course with the wooden cup, it doesn't work without the Brâncuși base. That's a huge part of it because it's the presentation. And I don't even remember which bases he used for that cup.

I'm picturing it in the middle of your marble table right now. It looks pretty good.
Yeah, I think that's true, but this table is a particularly great sculpture pedestal. Everything looks good on this, even more so on the small coffee tables I think. Even Bose speakers. It came with a tulip base, it was the same kind of thing.

It's very Atomic Era.
And those were beautiful—when speakers were things that were things to be seen first and then heard, that kind of was the apotheosis. Now of course speakers are invisible.

The only question event planners want to know is how thin are the speakers, how discreet.
They're hideous. They should be heard and not seen. It's sound. I agree with that.

But you don't agree with it at all because you love engineering made visible, and that is what's so wonderful about speakers, and this whole tradition of designing speakers to be viewed without their screens, is that the speaker functions better without its screen. That was a debate at my house, whether my dad had to leave the screens on the Infinity tower speakers or not. My dad argued that a) they sound better (that's all that really matters), and b) it's great to see the cones going.
Men buy with their eyes. Yeah, it's storytelling. I think that's one of the things that is very important in all of what we do here is that you see the evidence. That's why you paint the wood before you cut it, because you see that it was cut.

One thing that occurs to me is that there's not just one way—there's not one answer to how to work. You said in carpentry there's no going backwards. You've turned that into a defining trait of what you do. Everything you make—your entire approach to making things—is all about forward motion. Where do you go from here? "Okay, so now I fucked that thing up, I broke it, I sawed too far, the hole is too big, the screw stripped out," whatever it is, it's, "Okay, now what do I make it into?"

The Island, 2006. Mixed media, 135 x 135 x 264 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Wood is only a reductive material, but someone reading this would say, "Oh but you know, you can always use glue or screws," and of course, and that's what I do. But, a wood carver would say that's not carpentry, it's composite work or something, and so there's the adage: a good carpenter is someone who can fix his mistakes quickly. Grinder and paint makes me the welder that I ain't! Or it looks good for my house. But I think, for me, as a self-taught worker in all these mixed media, it's those fuck-ups that make the thing sing because the iPhone is flawless in every-way it's the most, best, perfectly made thing and there's zero evidence—and continuing zero working evidence—to show that human beings were involved with making it.

I'm fascinated by the hermeticism of the iPhone, the idea that there's no way into it.
Right, and having taken one apart after watching extensive YouTube videos on how to take one apart and put it back together—and I am extremely handy—I will never, ever take one apart and successfully get it back together again. It is just beyond my patience. Showing the flaws is what gives Sachs character or Dakin character—the things that you make, the beautiful handmade "please don't do cocaine in the bathroom" sign, which I still need to hang in the bathroom. Cocaine is disgusting; it's awful. Amphetamines are way superior in every possible way, but I don't have any drug hang-ups.

Are amphetamines totally synthetic?
As far as I know. I don't know how it's manufactured.

Cocaine is natural, right?
Yeah. But I don't know if I'm getting . . . in New York City, if I'm getting the pure un-diluted stuff. I've had what people say is "good coke," but to me it's not nearly as good as the Adderall they prescribe to children so that they can get into Brown.

Have you ever thought about doing a bricolage drug? How would you go about constructing a drug?
Well, before I answer that I would just say that my interest in drug culture, going back to high school, has always been about the paraphernalia and how you bricolage the ingestion of the drugs. I've made so many bongs, but I've never really liked smoking weed. They were these illicit objects, you know, the criminality of it was sexy, the rituals were interesting. I remember my best friend was not asked back to my prep school, and I remember I gave her this bong as a going-away present because she was going to boarding school, where you have to have a really good bong, and years later, decades, people would come up to me and say, "Oh you're Tom Sachs? You made *Scarface*." And I was like, "What's Scarface?" And people would say that was the name of Alex's bong. And I was like, "What was it?" And they described it, and I had totally forgotten I had taken all these little soldier parts and made a really horrible gory battle scene where I like pushed tank treads into people's bodies. It was probably like a really shitty—a 15-year-old boy's version of that amazing Chapman Brothers scene with all the zombies and Nazis—the best sculpture of all time.

That's what I was picturing. But it predated the Chapman Brothers. They may have seen it!
Maybe if they went to that boarding school!

If you were going to build a drug, how would bricolage apply to drug-making? We're identifying two really different paradigms of how to make drugs.
Isn't that what cooking and hospitality and the tea ceremony is really all about?

I was working my way there, damn it!
I didn't know, I didn't know! Sorry but no, they're not unrelated.

I mean, the broad question is like, what links together all of these cultures that you're interested in, and that you draw on? And you just said one thing, which you say all the time, that the only reason you do this is to make cool shit in a long, well-developed tradition of things, but it's not just that. What gets you from bongs to tea? That seems more kind of obvious because of the ritualistic quality and the communal nature and all of that. But what gets you from Star Wars to tea? Or, Satanism to tea?
People are into tea for four reasons, roughly three general food groups of reasons. Number one, spirituality, religion. My aunt is in the religion industry. And I told her that I was exploring Zen and was so happy that I had finally found a religion that I felt like I could deal with. She said, "Sorry to disappoint you, Thomas, but Zen is not a religion, it's a philosophy." But I was close enough. It's faith. Fuck people who spend all their time making stupid distinctions between big huge important things. Is it art or design? I don't know. I don't care!

Yeah, it doesn't matter. The same kinds of decisions are made. Same usefulness, the same function in your life.
Number two is sensuality. Drugs. Taste. Texture. Food. How things interact with your body. How many of the senses can you tickle? Sound, all that. And then the third main category is architecture. The tea house that surrounds us, the garden, the kimono, the tea bowl, the hardware, the tea scoop, the whisk, all the ways of conveying water from the bottom of the well mixed with tea that grows from the trees that's then processed into matcha. Fire, which starts with wood that's grown from a tree, that's made into charcoal, that's cultivated to organize and control flame, so that altogether the tea ceremony is nothing but the act of preparing and serving a bowl of tea. All these three things come together. The ritual and the architecture come together to create the sensuality of the experience. So for me, my focus has been clearly on the architecture, the design, the sculpture of the accoutrements, the hardware. I'm not James Bond, I'm more Q, the guy who makes the weapons and the cars and stuff for James Bond to fight with. That's also how the tea ceremony links to other activities in the studio, like the space program or the action of making sculpture. Architecture connects the tea ceremony with the sculpture that I've been doing in the studio for the past 30 years.

My love is for the thing, but without context the thing means nothing. When I think about something incredible like a Giacometti or a Brâncuși or something, those things kind of can exist almost without context.

They were made to be able to survive any context.
Yeah, and they do. You can see one buried in a garden, you could see one in the oppressive exaltation of the Museum of Modern Art.

Or some shitty corporate lobby, or who knows where.
And they were, and they are still in a goddamn lobby. Although, I think some of those places are probably stressed about the value of them and have to deaccession them from that context because lobbies are too shitty. And I think that, to be honest, that's where my ambitions have always laid, in those perfect realms; that's sort of how I started. But the utility starts to communicate rituals. But at the core and with posterity the context again is stripped and the object is rendered pure by history. It's more interesting when things rely on context. I think I was trying in the beginning to make things that could be context-proof.

Guru's Yardstyle, 1999. Mixed media, 53 x 24 x 25 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

A perfect, autonomous, discrete, indestructible, aesthetic statement.
And I think a true nugget does that. I think a Cycladic figure does that, but then again, it needs to be on a base in a glass box because it's so precious. Or Picasso's skull (the bronze skull) has that ability. There's a great article by Harold Rosenberg, where he talks about how the Nazis went through France and took all those bronze sculptures and melted them down to make ammunition and they went through a foundry and collected all the bronze, but when they saw this Picasso bronze skull they were afraid of it, or liked it, so they left it.

Totally apocryphal. But it is true that Picasso had a lot of people help him out—because . . . he kept casting in bronze even after the Nazis had made it illegal to cast anything other than weapons. They basically turned this entire industry over to hell-wreaking, but Picasso wanted to get a lot of his plaster casts because he was worried what was going to happen through the run of the war. And actually it was the fault of French soldiers, not German soldiers, because he was at his place in Boisgeloup and the French moved in to use it as a headquarters for the army, and they tossed a bunch of his plaster sculptures out the window, and broke them. Not good. He loved those things; so moved what he could to Paris and then went about casting them in bronze in secret, even though it was already illegal.
So they would be more durable.

So they'd survive.
Right, because they're just as beautiful in bronze as they are in plaster, but in bronze you could probably toss it out a second story window, and you could still get your money at Sotheby's.

Absolutely. He didn't care about what they were worth, but he wanted them to survive. He loved the idea that these things that he made would be found a thousand years from now. How much do you think about the survival of your nuggets? Because so many of your nuggets are—just by the nature of working as a bricoleur—so many of your objects are made up of things with different degrees of survivability.
Inherent vice, even.

So much. You could make an argument that all of your work is about inherent vice.
As the years pass I've become more conservative. There's an 18-foot long, 7-foot high, 3-foot wide foamcore model of Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation in Marseille in the Guggenheim's permanent collection. I remember when the acquisition was made, I was not totally happy with the terms of it, but now that it's not my problem. I feel like I made the best deal in the universe.

You mean it wasn't enough money, but now you know that that thing is going to be preserved forever?
I just know that it's not my problem anymore. Or maybe it is my problem, but I've got partners in my problem.

But it is still kind of your problem, because we have a small piece of it that you kept in the exhibition at The Noguchi Museum.
Yeah, we have a fragment from of it. It's made of paper . . . a sandwich of paper on the outside and rotting Styrofoam on the inside, so it's literally got leukemia.

The great thing though about foamcore is that it's so light. One misconception that many people have about sculpture—Noguchi working in stone—is that it's really durable. But the reality is that the heavier something is the more danger it is to itself.
Because it can crack?

Well yeah, if you move them. The equipment to move a piece of stone is, at the end of the day, stronger than the stone. So it can do a lot of damage to it, and so can gravity. Whereas something as light as your Unité building, that structure, yeah, little things will ding and dent and—
Water. Moisture.

Water's bad for sure. That's tough. It's like a sponge. But so is stone, by the way. Our stones sweat out the water that they've accumulated through the winter every spring.
And that can also cause cracks, and then they break.

It does, because if they freeze, you know . . . in rock versus ice, ice wins every time.
So every material has its pros and cons. Ceramic is very durable. But it's also—if you drop it—it breaks, and they crack, and ceramic is what survives, but ceramic is also—chemically it's basically stone. I mean, it's totally inert; it will not change. Glazes and things can't change, but they break.

Fortunately, museums and curators like them even when they're broken. We're assuming that will be true a thousand years from now.
Who knows? There's a tremendous amount of context, a whole museum around it.

I'm hoping that the future is so fucked up that somebody will eventually try to reconstruct the entire culture of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony based on the things that you've made.
Oh boy! Then we are all in a lot of trouble.

Before we leave it entirely—the sort of formal lineage—because this is something you and I have done a lot now, touring through the exhibition, where I blather on and on and on setting the conceptual frame, and you stand there looking at me like, not daggers exactly, but like all you want me to do is talk about the formal lineage you're in. Because you're thinking to yourself, "What's the point in having a curator if that curator doesn't compare you to all the other important famous people that you look to and care about?" I can see you—the crawl going across your head is: "When is he going to mention Brâncuși? When is he going to mention Brâncuși? When is he going to mention Brâncuși?" So it's just talking about Rodin, Brâncuși, Noguchi, Judd—Judd would be in that line too, and you know—why is that formal image so important?
Eames.

Yeah, throw Eames in there too, certainly. Your idea of what the lineage looks like is much broader, more open-minded.
Right, so take Eames out because we're talking about sculpture.

Unite, 2001. Foamcore, thermal adhesive, Uniball Micro, wood, steel, resin, Bristol board, and white-out, 86 x 207 x 38 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Toyan's Jr., 2001. Mixed media, 73.625 x 103 x 23.375 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

You like to talk about sculpture, the things—not in lieu of, but often in preference to, the ideas, the performance of concepts.
This is a deficiency that I have. I want the narrowness, but then I can't help myself because I see all things interconnected. Ever since Beuys I can't—I can't think about art in just the art world context because although his work is specifically and exclusively understood only in art world contexts, his ideas were about following his Fluxus avenue of investigation, blowing the doors off those associations. And even though you were trying to steer this conversation back to where I want it to be, I can't help myself! And it's like a sickness because after Beuys, after situationism, after even Marcel Duchamp, who also saw everything as art, you can't conceptually go back.

But the money is in the sculpture. And when I say the money, I don't mean actual cash money, I mean the design ideas, because sculptures like a Picasso bronze or a Brâncuși or a Judd box, or a Rodin, or the Noguchi basalts, are pure sculpture, and are part of a really slow-moving tradition that went to hyperspace after 1945 and exploded into a million different stars all over the galaxy, with every artist being his own different thing, his own different movement I should say, instead of a thing. But the issues of sculpture, of density and volume, of negative space, of connection with the earth, these formal issues of language, of modularism, the parts to the whole, the whole to the part, are what drive great design. In a car—and I can't name a single car that's made today that has great design. It's very difficult. As you go back in time it gets easier. The whole world of design has exploded. Actually it's like an industry, whereas before Raymond Loewy (he was the first person to be called an industrial designer) you just had engineers. That's more of a reflection of consumerism. It's hard for me not to talk about those things (money, the market, consumerism), because they're so pernicious. But there's nothing more beautiful than an object that's used to convey water from the earth—a bucket—and sure, its utility takes it out of the formal conversation of pure sculpture.

Does it? I mean, neither one of us agrees with that. Neither one of us feels that way. You're just as comfortable analyzing water—who makes the small Japanese insulated bottles?
Zojirushi.

I mean you're every bit as comfortable formally analyzing a Zojirushi bottle as you are a Brâncuși. You don't see any problem with that. I don't see any problem with that.
I don't, and also because Zojirushi, like Apple, and their packaging, is on the ascent. Like Jony Ive has actually gotten better.

Did he design the iMac?
The bubble, the first one, I think he did.

What a godforsaken piece of shit that is.
Well yeah, I think someone, I don't know who, probably Steve fucked up with the colors. I have an iMac and I spray painted mine olive drab and it's beautiful, because all the surfaces are unified so it didn't have those formally disruptive heterogenous panels.

I think what was interesting is that you laid out a lot of the qualities that formal sculpture explores. I thought your list was excellent. What's interesting about your list, is that you don't do almost any of those things. Because in bricolaging, your sculptures are composi-

Nutsy's McDonald's, 2001. Mixed media, 96 x 74 x 72 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Waffle Bike, 2006. Mixed media, 105 x 125 x 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

tions, cut and pasted in many ways. They're collages of things, so you're usually borrowing those elements from elsewhere. Your genius is in synthesizing and combining.

Well of course, but I'm a product of the '80s, I'm a product of Public Enemy and Robert Rauschenberg.

Yeah, totally.

And if I'm going to pick a couple of artists to really be my parents, it's them. The best hip-hop was (and you could argue still is), like *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* or *Fear of a Black Planet*, happened right before the laws were written to prevent art like that from happening without crediting, or to make it economically impossible to make—they were using a lot of the same strategies that Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines* or collage paintings, where he had images from popular culture where you take found things that you know and recognize like a picture of a moon landing or a goat and a tire. We all know what a goat is, we all know what a tire is, but you combine them in this really wrong way and you get a magical combination. And when you use a car alarm as a percussive element, an annoying, beeping, horrible thing that we all have to endure, but you loop it—and looping is still one of the foundations, and still an underused thing in hip-hop—looping sounds is how you create a texture and a feeling, because music is rhythm. In a sculpture, I'll have a graphic element or a formal element or a shape from one thing combined with a shape from another thing—something from 18th and 19th century ceramics or like coopering (making a bucket) combined with a 20th century weight-saving device for aerospace technology, and those two technologies are never connected, but you put them together and you get to tell a story of the bucket, of water conveyance. But also of abstract form and pure composition.

You're describing a water bucket that's used in* Tea Ceremony*—there's one here in your studio.

And then you get a combination of coopering, which is those vertical slits, but then, of course, it's a super high-tech epoxy resin, there's nothing more advanced than a composite, which is epoxy, a hardener, and then a substrate of fiberglass as rebar (reinforcing bar) to keep the resin together. Because without internal structure it will crack, and then aluminum weight-saving struts with structural lightening holes and a wood handle that's the exact milling profile of a lacrosse stick, which is an octagon, which is engineered to fit the hand.

Perfectly grippable.

Like the iPhone 5 that has a faceted edge instead of a perfectly round broomstick, which doesn't grip as well, because it doesn't grip into the crevices and digits of your hand meat. Whenever I make a handle for anything, one of the tricks I've learned is to squeeze it as hard as I can for as long as I can, like whatever—ten seconds or half a minute and then release. And then I feel where my hand hurts, and then I just file those parts down. Repeat till the pain is evenly distributed.

I thought you were going to say that when you grip it as hard as you can then you would look for the indentations and if it doesn't make any indentations then that's a problem because that means that you have no grippability.

Right, but because it's a grip thing, I go by feel. And because when we buy a product like an iPhone 5 versus a 6, it's ultimately the feel. That's the difference between an Evian bottle and a Volvic bottle and a Poland Spring bottle. Some of them have little grips. Or the ridge of a coffee cup. Sure, it's how it performs, like conveying water from the earth to your body, but it's also how it feels, and how it makes you feel. It's a very subtle thing.

Anything will work—your hand is a cup—you can pour water into it and drink it, but because it's one of these things that have defined all cultures—you can judge any culture by its cups, or its weapons—it's an opportunity to understand external cultural phenomenon. These plastic bottles are our cups; this is our cup that we throw out billions of every day. Right now we have water on tap that's purified against bacteria and disease, yet we're drinking water from a bottle made in France out of convenience and to support our complex tastes.

I want to get back to the bucket for a second, which is a water-carrying device. What is best about the bucket? Is it the combination of unlike materials? Is it the combination of different making traditions—the coopering and aerospace lightening? Is it that you've innovated, that you've made a better bucket by combining elements of some others? It has a straight side so it doesn't bang against your leg when you carry it heavy and full of water; it just slips right by your leg . . . and by the way, the resin work there is very helpful, because it makes it nice and slippy so it just, you know, beautifully skims your leg. You make it sound simple. You described it beautifully in a detailed and complicated way, but of all of the things that go into making a Sachs bucket, what—I guess I'm just going to call them innovations—in all of the things that you've done, what do you value the most?
First is the utility, how it works, that it doesn't bump against your leg, that it feels good in your hand, the handle is not so small that it digs into your hand, not so big that you can't get a good grip on it—that it actually conveys water without leaking, although I have very low standards of performance excellence. My standards are not that it works every time no matter what, like in the military—but that it works at all. And then of course there's the storytelling of all these different technologies through history and the old, new, from here and there, from aesthetics of military to colonial architecture—because coopering is a thing that you could argue was elevated in the New World. Lastly it's always the look, which is generated by the maker's politics.

It's Shakery.
Yeah, there's a spirituality of craft that the Shakers led. But none of that means anything if it doesn't look good because you could do that bucket and paint it a hideous purple that was designed to appeal to the most number of consumers, that's why that Apple teal—if you remember, teal was the first color, which was disgusting, and then they came out quickly with an equally ugly orange version, an equally ugly pink version.

Which were ripped right off of a popsicle box—those garish jewel-tone popsicles that we all loved.
But I suspect that it's even worse, that it was a color *council choice*, and someone paid someone a lot of money to choose them, because it was only the generation after that that they did the last CRT iMac all white, and that was the much more powerful computer. That was the moment when Apple invented the color white. Before the iMac everything was beige.

Apple II plastic was some of the shittiest plastic in the history of the world.
I call that tan color "office." I always wanted to paint one of the teal Apple iMacs that "office" color. I'm sure someone online has done that.

It doesn't age the way the plastic does though, because that plastic started going yellow from the first millisecond.
Beautiful in a way. There's an article someone sent me about the most hated Pantone color in Europe, and it's basically army green.

Why is that?
I read they think it looks like smoker's teeth. The context of that is that there's nothing worse, but it's basically army green. And you don't see a lot of consumer products in army green. You don't see any.

So that's why you wanted to make the tea ceremony manual army green. You like army green.
Well I do, because the most beautiful things that are made without planned obsolescence, that are designed and built to never fail are army green, like all the best vehicles. If it had leather seats and a good surround sound system, I'd drive a Humvee or a Jeep, but not a Mercedes Geländewagen where they actually did all that and then painted it glossy black . . . like why can't it be both? But, to get to the final thing, which in the end it has to look good. The bucket or the sculpture has to look good, and that's a very subjective thing, and it boils down to taste. And my taste is the best taste that there is. I believe that everyone needs to say that about their own taste. Because I'm the artist, these sculptures are mine, and I know best for me.

Vision beats the shit out of data every time.
Always. Because it's instinct. You don't always know why, but if you feel why, and you're sensitive to it, and intelligent, you can achieve great things. Now, of course, you can make the biggest blunders ever in the same way, but it's better to have great failures and great successes than toe the line. Any day.

There's one other subject that we should definitely talk about. We haven't actually mentioned your show at YBCA. We barely mentioned the Noguchi show. I think you listed all the things that we should talk about at the beginning and I don't think we've actually talked about any of them, and my final question for you has absolutely nothing to do with either one of them in a way, but it's just because it's definitely the elephant in the room. We've talked about it a lot, and it is such a good subject because you are brave in the way that you go right at things, so just to talk for a second about cultural appropriation and what that means. That's really not the right term for what you do, but it's easy to stereotype what you do as culture appropriation, so just to begin with, kind of a strong statement: You are not to Japan, in the context of tea ceremony, what the surrealists were to Africa. There is a huge element of imperialism and colonialism that's missing from what you do. You are involving yourself in something, not stealing. You are trying to, if anything, when that is an issue, you're trying to undo it, take it apart, re-engineer it, roll it back, fix it. You know, there's so much heart and spirit in the way that you dive into other cultures, and cultures defined really, really diversely, from Satanism,* Star Trek, Star Wars *and the American arms manufacturing industry, to Japanese consumer electronics and tea ceremonies, and Barbie or whatever else. How do you look at it?
I love the tea ceremony because it's a beautiful ritual activity. It's also incredibly elitist. You have to be wealthy to do it. It's insulting and unfair, but they go hand in hand. In *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, Clement Greenberg talks about pulp fiction and how in the 20th century literacy became so much wider because with industrial culture you need workers who know how to read, but since they're working in the factory all day they don't have time to read really heavy stuff so they have to invent easier stuff, so pulp was invented so that more people can read it with less available leisure time. You have to have a lot of leisure time to read Proust and get through it, and when I see someone reading Proust I am in a way insulted that they're not working harder to save puppies and help the planet. I say: how dare you!

Well, we all want it all.
There's sort of an elitism in that much free time . . . it hurts. But at the same time I have tremendous respect for the tea ceremony. You could maybe look at it as cultural appropriation. But because no one is being exploited, it's not appropriation; it's amplification. We're taking these ideas and blowing them up through a filter; the artist is the medium. I'm the filter and my experience as an American growing up in New York is a way of taking the Japanese tea ceremony through the filter of my experience and bringing it out the other end so it becomes an authentic representation of the tradition, but also an authentic expression of the studio. Through doing that it has the unique vision of the studio and it's authentic. That's very different from the sort of dogmatic misinterpretations of Sen no Rikyū's teachings that were all about Mitate, using the wrong thing for the right reason, improvisation, the ready-made, all those things are thrown out the window because the tradition of the tea ceremony is so by the rules.

That wasn't his fault. There's nothing wrong with dogmatism in the first iteration.
It's when it gets repeated and mutated—

The first iteration is genius. It's just when it gets repeated that it becomes horse shit.
Right, and that amazing episode of *Star Trek*, I'm going to find it and send it to you, the Kohms and the Yangs, kind of is like that, when they mutated over generations and it got all crazy and weird, and Shatner doing the Declaration of the Independence—"We the people?" He reads the Declaration of Independence from memory to save the planet. It's fantastic.

Does that fix it?
Oh yeah.

That does it.
Because he remembers it, because he's Kirk. And he's Shatner.

That is very Kirk. Kirk was very big on relics. So was Picard, right? Like owning special little bits from—amazing expressions of humanity.
Well because without art, none of this stuff is worth fighting for. That's the good stuff, and throughout history all the great military guys and explorers love art. When Shackleton's ship was crushed in the ice and they had to walk a thousand miles across ice, he delivers his speech to the survivors about traveling light and fast. He takes his gold pocket watch and throws it on the ice and his gold coins, and the Bible that the queen gave him, and tears out just the front page plus the book of Job, and he makes the photographer burn all his negatives so he doesn't go back for them, and then he points and says, "but bring the guitar—we'll need that." That's making art a priority.

I just want to talk about respect for a second because you say you have great respect for the tea ceremony, which sounds like a political statement, like it was written by your speech writer. It's what respect means to you. What it means in this context is that you've devoted four years of your life to building an entire tea culture. That's respect. You respect it enough to hate it in some of its particulars; you respect it enough to be bored to death by it. You respect it enough to insult it. What you do is you respect all of these cultures that you "appropriate" or borrow from or whatever through engagement. You respect them enough to dive into them and really live them, and try to make them live in the present—to make them genuine and present, and to open up new possibilities for them, for their future survival.
For me respect means a lot of things. Disrespect is part of respect.

Is any of what I said true or fair?
Absolutely. It sounds better than I imagine it. Yeah.

Time is respect.
Yeah, I want you to feel connected with me and with the experience, and not be alienated. And of course, one of the biggest problems with tea ceremony is that it takes eight years to be a good guest.

Which is a little alienating.
Which is totally classist and alienating, and my guests do not have eight years. I have served people with eight years experience. And it's just as hard as serving someone with no experience, because they have eight years of expectation about the way it's supposed to be. It's a dance, and it's sort of like doing martial arts with a black belt as a novice. Maybe I'm not a novice; maybe I'm a green belt or something. But in another way, to quote James Brown, "I don't know karate, but I know crazy." I've got my own form of martial arts, which is derived from serious study, and gets the job done. But again—respect is the most important thing because it's kind of like filmmaking. If you don't respect the viewer you lose the most valuable thing, which is their attention.

You're learning. You're teaching yourself things.
Yeah, yeah. I have some of the parts left over and worked into other things. That's the most important, keeping attention, and it's performance, and it's time. But also that's why I focus so much on the tea ceremony and about the objects, because it's very difficult, the performance stuff, and time is very frustrating, and I hate it. I'm so fucking sick of these tea ceremonies. It's so not fun. It's like throwing a dinner party for someone who doesn't love you, who doesn't want to be there. And that's also why it's so rewarding when someone is into it, when I see the light in someone's eye and they're excited about something. It's very rewarding to feed someone. But one more thing—because Johnny just asked me—why the tea ceremony? You said once, why the tea ceremony and the space program, what do they have to do with each other? Which is a question that you've been asking from the beginning, about YBCA, and I would an-

swer: astronauts and rocket scientists at the other NASA work hard to scrub the spaceship so that they don't have bacteria on them, so that we don't bring earth creatures to Mars. So we don't pollute Mars. But as an American, and as a member of the creative community during the Homogenocene, the time when we bring bacteria all around the world and trade in goods that destroy and build economies and even change the geologic landscape, global warming, all these things that humans do—but whatever, I'm going to bring the noise. I'm not going to scrub the spaceship of bacteria, so I'm going to bring bacteria to Mars, accidentally or on purpose. If we don't find life on Mars we'll put it there.

You've done that. You seeded Mars, the Martian surface, with poppy seeds.
But that's the opposite, it's called terraforming, and it's a controversial thing that some people like Elon Musk think is essential to our survival, and other people in NASA Planetary Protection Protocol think is unethical. But that's a debate. The key issue of our culture is the African diaspora. How Africans were taken—abducted—and brought to the New World to build an industrial power big enough and power enough to defeat the Nazis and eventually go to the moon. This wonderful thing happened at a horrible cost to humanity. The byproduct of slavery was the greatest art of the 20th century, and that's the art of Louis Armstrong, and the boombox is a symbol of that because it's the symbol of street culture and Lil Wayne, his greatest disciple. But, if I'm going to pick an object that exists, or an art object, or an art form that exists in purity, I'm going to go back a little farther. I'm going to go back to 16th century Japan, which is an adaptation of Chinese tea ceremony. The Japanese have always taken things from other cultures. They've taken the Chinese tea ceremony and elevated it, they hijacked Korean pottery, they out-Leica'd Leica, they out-denimed Levi's. The 16th century Japanese tea ceremony—which has remained largely unchanged for the past 500 years, represents the best of what humanity can offer in a pure form, a pure dogmatic, ridiculous, precise manner with its appreciation of nature, of religion or philosophy through Zen, the adaptation of Chinese scrolls, of ceramics, of the sensuality of food, of the architecture of the kimono, poetry, haiku, ceramics, these are all descendants of that, so that's why, in a way it's my version of Carl Sagan's gold record that's bolted to the front of Voyager. To me it's the bridge to the space program.

Yeah, I guess what I connect to in it is that NASA—it's so wonderful, powerful, that there is this agency (and it's hilarious and so paradoxical that it's a US government agency) that represents more than anything else does, humanity. And humanity at its best, at its most aspirational. I love that—what you say is that—in trying to work through getting the most out of your astronauts and your ground crew, which is part of your job, running your NASA, the best strategies are exercise and tea ceremony. Those are the most effective tools for keeping people at a peak level of performance, for managing the kinds of problems that you have to manage when you're in a little tin can with one other person traveling for nine months to get to Mars in a super hostile environment. It's the tea ceremony that for you represents the apex of communal human coping culture. Not that it's perfect in any way or anything like that, but that it's got lots of components, in the ritual and the tools and everything about it, the whole culture of it, that is us being as good as we can be in a kind of quiet, simple, fully integrated, connected to our environment kind of way. It's lovely.
That's beautiful. I appreciate hearing that because I think it would easy to look at this as an overabundance of bureaucratic nonsense. Whether it's the space program and all the systems and keeping people alive in a hostile environment, or preparing an elaborate and obsessive tea ceremony—but all those ritual steps themselves are the art.

It's also the survival of it because you're saying that's what keeps us alive, that's what makes NASA work, all of their to-do lists. That's what makes the studio work, it's all the to-do lists. Tea ceremony is training for that approach to things, that systematic, quiet approach. I'm still not able to make a bowl of tea the right way, which is doing only one thing at a time. I cannot make myself do one thing at a time.
Neither can I. People ask how many proper tea ceremonies have you been to? Zero!

Zero! All the training, preparation, everything else, still—zero. One final thing about* Tea Ceremony *at Noguchi, and I mean the actual ceremony. I want to ask you about a magical moment. I always like things that are surprising—we all do—we like to be surprised. Your version of a tea ceremony has a shot clock, and we make jokes about it and why it's important, and the whole idea that Americans don't have much patience for the time that self-enlightenment takes, so you've put it on the clock. Like, hey, self knowledge is on notice. We have to do it pretty quickly—get centered, find ourselves—or it doesn't seem worth doing. But you always manage to take something that seems like a joke and make it into something sacred. This is an example of that. That high school basketball buzzer ends up being the perfect unexpected thing, the magical thing that transforms the experience. In some ways it's the most important part of your version of tea ceremony. Like music, it speaks straight to the brain. It's not formal, it's not physical, it's not seen, it's just heard. It sounds through beautiful little handmade ceramic bells, or domes, that you made for this unit. But that sound, plus the special environment, the tea house in the indoor-outdoor galleries at Noguchi, in the context of that ritual, takes it to Europa, takes it to outer space, takes it somewhere so perfectly idiomatically American. Every time I hear it, it fucks with my brain. It's like part of my brain is imagining it as the intonation of a gong or a bell in a Zen temple.
It's a wake-up call. It's an alarm saying "foul" or "end of period."

Or be here now!
Exactly.

It's crazy! It's so perfectly hybrid. Just that one obnoxious sound.
It's a re-centering sound. When it says "Be here now," it's a wake-up call. A slap in the face. The most shocking thing possible, but it does snap you out of it and it helps you to be centered.

That sound, that centering—centering is such a great metaphor and it connects for me to the density of a nugget. I would say one thing that a nugget is—a nugget is like a black hole or a sun—it's a super-dense thing in the universe which creates a gravitational field that pulls other things in. And the amazing thing about that sound—which is so simple, such a throw away in a way: a two-cent ringtone you downloaded for nothing is that in that context it gets the whole universe of tea swirling around it in a new and different way that's unbelievably transporting. Just like Tea is supposed to be. Thank you for that.
Thanks, Dakin.

Icebucket, 2015. Plywood, synthetic polymer paint, epoxy, aluminum, steel hardware, and Con Edison barrier wood, 7 x 8.125 x 9.875 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Hibachi, 2015. Steel, 10.5 x 14 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Dakin Hart is Senior Curator at The Noguchi Museum, where he oversees the Museum's exhibitions, collections, catalogue raisonné, archives, and public programming, and has the daily good fortune of collaborating with Isamu Noguchi in absentia. His previous positions include Assistant Director at the Nasher Sculpture Center (Dallas), Artistic Director and Director of Artists in Residence at Montalvo Center for the Arts (Saratoga, CA), and Assistant to the Director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. He has worked as an independent curator and writer, was born in French Hospital at 6th and Geary, has two young children who make it difficult to sleep or concentrate, enjoys unconventional curatorial duties such as tending Tom Sach's tea garden, and once caught a disoriented sparrow by hand in the middle of a board meeting and set it free.

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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Artifacts | Man on a Mission

By Linda Yablonsky

A piece of Tom Sachs's "Space Program: Mars" installation, "Extravehicular Mobility Unit," 2007-2012. Josh White

With its space shuttle in retirement, NASA is now preparing to land humans on Mars. The other Mars, that is.

To set foot on a more down-to-earth model, all anyone needs is a slight suspension of disbelief. On arrival, Tom Sachs will be waiting — by the espresso machine.

A sculptor best known for his duct tape, foamcore and construction-barrier reproductions of Modernist furniture and buildings, guns, Hello Kitty dolls and even Nazi death camps, Sachs is now leading visitors to the Park Avenue Armory around his own private Red Planet. Temporarily ensconced within the armory's vast Wade Thompson Drill Hall, it has a beer cooler, a hot peanuts dispensary and the aforementioned espresso machine, all stripped of polish and ready to rocket.

Definitely bring the kids. “Space Program: Mars,” a collaboration between Sachs, Creative Time and the armory, is an inner-space playground for the whole family. It’s also a serious artwork.

Sachs, 44, has been developing his own space program since at least 2006, when his full-scale, plywood Lunar Landing Module set down at the Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles. The same structure, newly outfitted with a functioning bar, toilet, “fecal stimulant” and command center, now sits on a launch pad at the center of the space, surrounded by red plywood berms that stand in for the Mars terrain, lit by a “sun” of bright lights mounted on a large, tripod-supported disc.

Under “Colonel” Sachs’s command, a crew of 20 highly trained technicians carries out its exploration and survival mission with a precision that would be the envy of NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Their tasks include ritualized routines that involve dispensing food (the aforementioned foil-wrapped hot peanuts), collecting scientific samples, testing rockets, running a daily exercise regimen, churning out a hand-stitched ‘zine documenting the mission every week and exploring the space in a working replica of a NASA rover.

Visitors who want to do more than just look around must first undergo “indoctrination” in Sachs’s dictatorial work ethic before they can join the team and enter the capsule. That means performing menial tasks (sweeping floors, sorting nails), watching a series of instructional films in a screening room and stamping brown paper bags for popcorn with the mission logo. Also on view is that part of the American psyche that subscribes to Manifest Destiny, where no frontier is out of reach of the imagination — ground zero for an artist.

For Sachs, whose code name for the moment is Tango Sierra, science is the only true religion and “Space Program: Mars” is his D.I.Y. temple to it, and the culmination of all of his work since his first show in New York, in 1995, when he introduced the products he branded as “Cultural Prosthetics” — guns made of discarded hardware and cut-up Con Ed barriers, monochromatic duct-tape paintings and Hello Kitty icons, and taped foamcore Knoll furniture.

At the armory, his ultimate goal is to answer the age-old cosmic question “Are we alone?” Because his show is really about life on Earth, the answer is a conclusive no. “Exploring other planets,” he said at a preview on Tuesday, “is a way of studying Earth and understanding how precious life is right here.”

Also how fun. Personally, I had a great time exploring this Mars. First, I watched an utterly realistic demonstration of a rocket launch displayed on the bank of monitors that make up Sachs’s Mission Control center. Later I discovered the rocket was actually a foot-long, handmade model contained within a tool cabinet.

Going to another planet, Sachs had said, also means considering how we interact with it, especially when we try to colonize it. That usually means bringing the comforts of home to it. To that end, the Sachs studio has imported the culture of the handmade object, something increasingly precious in a society that worships packaging and branding.

Nick Doyle and Pat McCarthy at “Mission Control Center (MCC).” Genevieve Hanson, NYC

One import is a domed, tatami-matted teahouse made of Sachs’s signature Con Ed barriers. On a separate platform, friendly crew members, all dressed in white pants, ties and shirts with Mars mission pocket protectors, roasted tasty peanuts under the heat of a clamp light, and then sent them down a conveyor belt for collection in a bathtub wheelbarrow. Others dispensed ice-cold vodka and beer from a black refrigerator as tall as Darth Vader and topped with the character’s helmet. Another station was a galley kitchen serving rice and beans.

What looked like a pinball machine was in fact the “rescue” station, where a crew member manipulated a plastic yellow helicopter that picked up a space capsule that had just splashed down at sea and moved it to a model aircraft carrier. Beside it, in a Winnebago where astronauts suited up in a quarantined area, was a red phone on which successful astronauts could talk to the president — Nixon, in this case, who delivers an actual speech (written by William Safire) that was prepared in case real-life astronauts were stranded on the moon.

The best part of this experience was going into the air-conditioned landing module and examining (though not trying) the toilet and looking through the library, where there were copies of “Ulysses,” “Origin of the Species,” “Remembrance of Things Past” and other bibles of Sachs’s religion. Though it weighs 22,000 pounds, it takes only four casters of compressed air to lift it a few inches off the floor, which will happen at the end of the “mission.” All I know is that I was so comfortable up there, I didn’t want to leave.

But “Space Program: Mars” isn’t all fun and games. The basic idea is to demonstrate how much labor is actually involved in mundane activities, and that there is life in every product, even if it’s Mars.

This may strike some as sheer folly, a waste of time and foamcore. But all inventions seem like the outpourings of the mad, whether they work or not. Sachs is fetishizing the whole process and doing what sculptors always do — mold objects that change our perception of space.

And there’s more to come. When the show closes, Sachs and his team of specialists will embark on a new mission: to Europa, Jupiter’s moon. Speaking into a microphone that carried his voice over the program’s P.A. system, Sachs said, “Tango Sierra in ascent.”

Tom Sachs’s “Space Program: Mars” continues through June 17 at the Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Avenue, New York. The crew performs demonstrations for the public every Thursday from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.