

# Tom Sachs *Ritual*

London Ely House  
3 June—31 July 2021



Thaddaeus Ropac

London Paris Salzburg Seoul

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Thaddaeus Ropac is pleased to present *Ritual*, an exhibition of new works by Tom Sachs, never previously seen in the UK, including four new sculptures conceived for the exhibition in order to demonstrate the comprehensive spectrum of Sachs' distinctive sculptural practice. Displayed on bespoke pedestals inspired by modernist shapes, each sculpture is characterised by the same bricolage aesthetic that has gained Sachs a unique position in the field of contemporary sculpture. Influenced by the subcultures of the urban metropolis, specifically the phenomenon of corner shops and their reflection of the diverse civic and cultural demands of modern city living, the artist replicates commonplace industrial objects using everyday materials including plywood, cardboard, resin, tape and paint. The sculptures bear traces of their making, becoming vehicles for reflection on the creation of value and human labour.

*As I create, I meditate, and the lust of acquiring a product is replaced by the love of making it.*  
— Tom Sachs, 2021

While the sculptures on view have a direct relationship with urban and consumer culture, their formal qualities and plinths on which they are exhibited define each work within a more complex art historical narrative. Placed on its Brancusian pedestal, the lowly laundry basket is elevated to the position of high art. Whether a leaf blower or a surveillance camera, quotidian objects are presented to invite deeper reflection on the tenuous relationship between the public and the private; the intersection of innovation and human industry with the intimacy of domestic life. Everything has form, but the objects are selected and displayed so that the conversation between their shapes and their pedestals engages the viewer in the tradition of modernist sculpture.

With *Ritual*, Sachs reflects on consumerism while dealing with the history of urban living and the unique subcultures specific to the city. Sachs' artistic drive is powered by what he calls 'guilty consumerism'; for him, the making of an object is a way of connecting with it, building intimacy. "As I create, I meditate on it and the lust of acquiring a product is replaced by the love of making it."

The exhibition emphasises the potential for a singular household object to be embedded within a variety of seemingly disparate everyday systems or rituals. The laundromat has long been an essential necessity of city life. Free, easily accessible, and open 24/7, it is often unsupervised and becomes a shelter and community hub for those who have nowhere else to go. Within this context, items like the laundry basket or leaf blower hold particular significance. However, the connotations of these seemingly everyday objects are frequently reconfigured. The increasing ban of leaf blowers in wealthy neighbourhoods like Palm Beach or Beverly Hills is perceived as a representation of class struggle because the conflict places professional gardeners, whose ranks are heavily Latino and Asian American, in opposition to the white people who hire them but complain about the noise their jobs entail. *Leaf Blower* (2020) replicates those used to clean lawns, gardens and street corners across America. Aside from its contemporary political resonance, the slender, elegant and anthropomorphic shape of the sculpture is reminiscent of Constantin Brancusi's *Bird in Space* (1923).

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Sachs first encountered the work of Brancusi during his formative years at Bennington College, learning about the pioneering sculptor outside the confines of formal art history classes and developing a personal relationship with Brancusi's work through library research and trips to New York City, Philadelphia, as well as endless trips to his atelier in the Marais. While some sculptures in the exhibition might directly evoke the shape of Brancusi's most famous works such as *The Bird in Space* or *The Kiss*, Sachs' relation to the artist is more connected to the way Brancusi challenged the traditional distinction between the sculpture and the base. In *Figurative Tower* (2021), Sachs' perfectly obsessed over plywood renditions of Andy Warhol's iconic boxes are stacked to become their own Brancusian base. Many art historians have noted Brancusi's passionate concern for the relationship between his sculptures and the space around them and how, over time, the distinction between the sculptures, the works commonly referred to as their bases, and the other objects in Brancusi's studio became even more blurred. This evolution, which corresponds to a deeper questioning of the parameters of sculpture, certainly informed Sachs' own ambiguous view on sculpture-as-object and object-as-sculpture.

*Everything in this show has something that is formally prioritized, whether it's a leaf blower, a surveillance camera, a milk crate or Kelly bag. Everything has form, but the objects are selected and presented so that their shapes along with their pedestals engage the viewer in the tradition of modernist sculpture, at eye level on a plateau. — Tom Sachs, 2021*

## About the artist

Tom Sachs was born in 1966 in New York, where he lives and works. He studied at the Architectural Association, London in 1987 and graduated from Bennington College, Vermont in 1989. In an early exhibition, he made Knoll office furniture from phone books and duct tape; later, he recreated Le Corbusier's 1952 Unité d'Habitation using only foam core and a glue gun. Major projects have included his versions of the Apollo 11 Lunar Excursion Module, the bridge of the battleship USS Enterprise, and a 1:1 model of a McDonald's Frying Station, now in the collection of the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo. An important survey of his work was shown at the Astrup Fearnley in 2006, followed by solo exhibitions at the Fondazione Prada, Milan (2006); Space Program: Mars, Park Avenue Armory, New York (2012); Space Program: Europa, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2016); and Boombox Retrospective 1999–2016, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2016). In 2016–17, he created Tea Ceremony for the Noguchi Museum, New York and the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas – a distinctive reworking of chanoyu, a traditional Japanese tea ceremony, including the myriad elements essential to the ritual. His Swiss Passport Office, created for Thaddaeus Ropac, London in 2018, reflected contemporary concerns relating to Brexit, the Syrian crisis, Trump's immigration policies and global citizenship. A retrospective of his work was shown at SCHAUWERK Sindelfingen, Germany in 2019-20, followed by Space Program: Rare Earths at Deichtorhallen Hamburg in 2021.