

Press Release

Tom Sachs "A GOOD SHELF"

14 October—20 December 2025
Private View Tuesday 14 October, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac Ely House, London
37 Dover Street, London, W1S 4NJ



Chawan Shelf, 2025.

English porcelain, plywood, ConEd barrier, epoxy resin, aluminum, steel, and hardware with pyrography.
34.9 x 37.5 x 19.7 cm (13.75 x 14.75 x 7.75 in).

Thaddaeus Ropac London presents "A Good Shelf", an exhibition and interactive installation by Tom Sachs that marries his signature *bricolage* sculpture techniques with the ceramic practice he began in 2012. A selection of 30 of the New York-based artist's hand-formed ceramics, displayed on singular shelves built from found materials, will be accompanied by *Mezcaleria*, a working coffee and mezcal bar, as Sachs continues to explore themes of ritual and process.

The ceramics on view can be used as mezcal copitas, cortado cups, cereal or soup bowls, but their ancient, versatile form originates from the East Asian tea bowl, or chawan. Sachs first started sculpting NASA-logo chawans after his 2012 *Space Program: Mars mission*, when he created a *bricolage* version of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony to be conducted on Mars. Over the course of more than a decade, Sachs has continued and deepened his study of ceramics. His chawans are



Air Tight, 2025.
English porcelain, ConEd barrier, Police barrier and hardware.
10.2 x 45.7 x 12.4 cm (4 x 18 x 4.85 in).

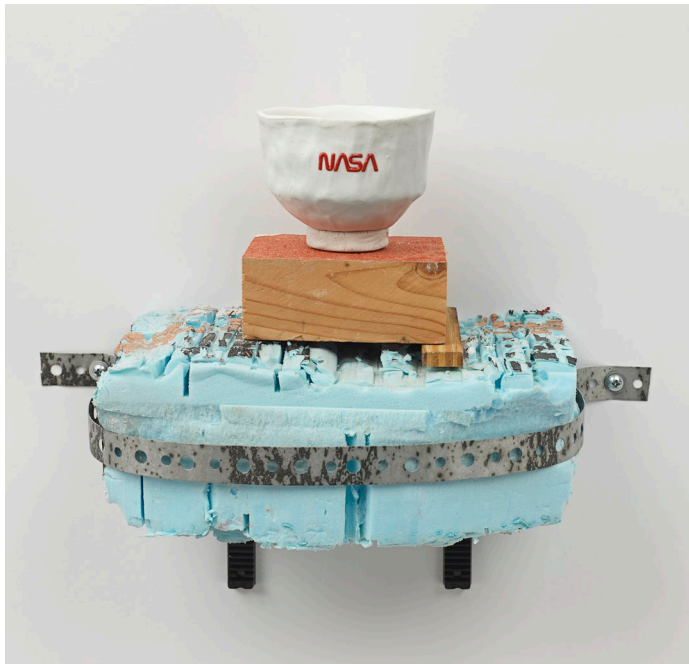
sculptures in their own right, and “A Good Shelf” is the first European exhibition dedicated to them.

Sachs is drawn to the Japanese tea ceremony for the same reason he is drawn to space travel – and the same reason people do anything at all – a desire for spirituality, sensuality and stuff. ‘Spirituality,’ Sachs says, ‘is about pursuing the big existential questions. Where do we come from? Are we alone? Sensuality is about going where no man has gone before: exploring space, the exhilaration of g-force, the awe of the cathedral, the feel of the kimono, the taste of matcha. Stuff is the hardware: a spaceship, a tea bowl, a chair. Our priority is sculpture. But sculpture doesn’t mean shit without that trinity and without its rituals.’ The tea bowl itself is emblematic of Sachs’s ongoing existential and material investigations.

With a small number of exceptions made in stoneware – a strong, vitrified ceramic that tends towards earthy tones of red and brown – Sachs mostly works in white English porcelain: its bright, industrial sheen making it the perfect blank slate. His handmade sensibility, too, finds a corresponding expression in the medium: the artist explains that he uses porcelain ‘because it shows

the fingerprints.’ Hand-shaped rather than wheel-thrown, each ceramic work betrays traces of its creation: puckered, pinched, pleasingly crooked. By the nature of the process, each vessel is one of a kind, countering today’s world of flawless, soulless machine-made objects. Evidence of labour is the point.

Sachs has a deep admiration for ceramicists’ ‘dedication to doing the same thing over and over again’, and he bases all of his ceramic cups and bowls on the same signature silhouette originated by the 16th-century ceramicist Chōjirō, with each one made following the same set of instructions. Though ceramic has long been considered a decorative or domestic art form, Sachs underpins his ceramic sculptures with the rigour and rules of Conceptual art, bringing to mind longtime influences like Sol LeWitt. Sachs identifies repetition and adherence to a self-imposed set of rules as a way of ‘bringing you to another dimension’; of going deeper in the execution of an idea. These sculptures amplify the artist’s studio practice of committing to the exploration of serialisation, repetition and progression. He treats each bowl as a meditation on process itself, and as a unit in a larger ritual – stamped, serial numbered and catalogued – where the



Spirits of the Dead Return, 2025.

English porcelain, ConEd barrier, plywood, extruded polystyrene, steel, plastic, and hardware. 27.9 x 30.5 x 13.3 cm (11 x 12 x 5.25 in).

act of making is as meaningful as the object itself, and where the deeply personal act of repetition becomes conceptual.

Though Sachs is a prolific ceramicist – ‘one of my daily rituals is to make a new one every morning before I check my phone’, he says – most of his pieces never leave the studio. From among them, he selects a small number of what he calls ‘heroes’: chosen for a sense of perfection in their handmade imperfection. This could take the form of a visual balance between lip and foot; a well placed NASA logo; a nicely done crack repair in resin. With the culture that birthed the chawan in mind, these ‘hero’ bowls embody the concept in traditional Japanese aesthetics of wabi-sabi, where just the right amount of imperfection becomes the key to beauty. It is only the ‘heroes’ that appear in the exhibition, where they are each displayed on their own unique, hand-sculpted shelf. These shelves serve as pedestals, presenting Sachs’s handmade cups and bowls in the same reverent sculptural context in which one might find a Brancusi.

Each shelf is made from studio offcuts, or what Sachs calls ‘sacred scrap’. Most are constructed around the plywood and hardware combination that the artist has long been known for, and which has earned him a position at the forefront of contemporary sculpture. Some also include intact found objects: a mop, a used rag, a skateboard. Some of the shelves hold the vessels at their centres like jewels: protectively enclosed, often backed with mirrors that reflect them to the viewer. Other

shelves lift their ceramic vessels high atop broom handles or poles, or, in one example, a set of wings, riffing on the visual codes of importance and value.

Throughout his career, Sachs has employed his characteristic *bricolage* approach to reverse the modernist drive towards ever-sleeker objects. In “A Good Shelf”, he brings his pragmatic tenderness towards scraps too good to be thrown away together with the meditative tactility of ceramics, treating the two media as profoundly equal. Governed by ritual, guided by the cerebral systems of Conceptual art and generated by our very human desire for the comforts of *stuff*, in this new body of work, Sachs once again finds a novel way to champion the aesthetics of imperfection, recycling and repair.

To premiere along with “A Good Shelf”, Sachs has built *Mezcaleria*, a working coffee and mezcal station, open to the public at Thaddaeus Ropac London. Art installation and bar, the sculpture expands upon the ideas of the exhibition, inviting visitors to consider and participate in the everyday rituals we all partake in. *Mezcaleria* will be activated on the opening night with the live bottling of a limited edition of 100 Coca-Cola bottles, each hand-customised by Sachs, in homage to Joseph Beuys.

“A Good Shelf” will be accompanied by a Tom Sachs Studio-produced publication documenting the works.



Chawan Shelf, 2025.

English porcelain, cinder block, and hardware. 27.9 x 19.1 x 20.3 cm (11 x 7.5 x 8 in).



Tom Sachs, portrait of the artist. Photo: Mario Sorrenti.

About the artist

Tom Sachs is an internationally acclaimed artist. His four decades of *bricolage* sculptures invite viewers to participate in rigorously crafted and obsessively researched worlds, from *Nutsy's* (2001), a dynamic remote-control car race around icons of Modern art and architecture fashioned from foamcore, to *Space Programs 1* through *5* (2007–25), a series of immersive missions throughout the solar system, each comprised of dozens of multimedia works with materials ranging from plywood to steel to porcelain and beyond. Throughout his artistic practice, Sachs challenges perceived hierarchies of materials and objects, treating each of his pieces, and what they're made from, with equal amounts of curiosity, reverence, and devotion. 'To me, there's no difference in value between a Picasso and a toilet plunger,' says Sachs. 'I've explored both ideas in my work, because I want to understand the process of making the things with which I have the deepest and most authentic connections, whether it's art, everyday objects, or spaceships.'

Sachs's work is in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York;

the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; and The Art Institute of Chicago.

For more than 35 years, Sachs's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions around the world. Major solo exhibitions of his work have been on view at Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), Seoul (2025); Art Sonje Center, Seoul (2022); Hybe Insight, Seoul (2022); Deichtorhallen Hamburg Hall for Contemporary Art (2021); Schauwerk Sindelfingen (2020); Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery (2019); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2017); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2017); Sogetsu Kaikan, Tokyo (2016); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2016); The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York (2016); The Contemporary Austin (2015); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2012); The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield (2009); Fondazione Prada, Milan (2006); Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2003); and SITE SANTA FE (1990).

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