

Klinger's chimeras or Odilon Redon's Symbolist imagination—a lounging *Snail on Sofa* or an *Owl in Wardrobe*. The titles' deadpan nature deftly reflects the works' imagery; the amphibious-looking bird of *What Is a Monster?: Ostrich in Car* perches with aplomb on the vehicle's backseat. These works obliquely suggest just how much Gnoli's painting—in all of its ostensible plainness—betrays an inquisitiveness into the fantastic presence of ordinary things.

—Ara H. Merjian

Tom Sachs

PARK AVENUE ARMORY

Though Tom Sachs's preposterously hypertrophic installation "Space Program: Mars" proposed to viewers a kind of voyage, it turned out to provide a very different sort of trip than the one advertised. Organized by Creative Time, the prolific artist's ersatz expedition to outer space—which colonized a heroically large proportion of the Park Avenue Armory's floor plan—never really got off the ground. But the actual journey on offer, one into the mind and working habits of its author, was a fascinating adventure nonetheless.

The show was, in essence, an extravagant, life-size (and then some) working model recapitulating Sach's modus operandi—a madly macrocosmic enactment of his legendarily fastidious studio practice. And the array of quasi-participatory, bricolaged sculptural scenarios that composed it beautifully demonstrated not just the artist's carefully honed sense of the ironically maladroit but also the intermittent horror vacui that provokes his most overelaborated artifacts. Informed by what seems to be a naturally occurring case of undeniably generative OCD—as well as a well-documented tendency toward almost logorrheic pedantry—Sachs's physical and conceptual constructions initially propose themselves as spontaneous and appealingly offhand. Here, however, they were almost always less interesting as things-in-themselves than as representative cogs in his rigid metasytem of command and control, a system instantiated vividly in the usually handwritten text that percolated in and alongside the works like haywire didactic verbiage, ever-presently murmuring to viewers suggestions on how to look at, use, and/or understand them and their larger context.

If the specific pieces often boiled down to vehicles for low-ambition, knowingly schlocky gags—a biology lab set up to grow poppies for the cultivation of opium on Mars rejiggered, "due to federal law

restrictions," to produce "soapium," a Dial soap-based substitute"; a Winnebago RV fashioned into a "mobile quarantine facility" for returning astronauts, stocked with copious amounts of top-shelf booze—the conceptual coup de grâce of the larger project was the way it cheerfully strong-armed visitors into playing along with its central conceit. The centerpiece of the sprawling, umpteen-part "Space Program: Mars" was—fittingly, given its roots in the artist's "Space Program," a 2007 Gagosian LA show that mooted a similar lunar voyage—a full-scale model of an Apollo LEM, or lunar excursion module, which had been repurposed for its new Martian destination. Unlike the rest of the show, this work was off-limits to all but those who'd passed a set of examinations being given beneath a large sign blaring INDOCTRINATION in goofily menacing capitals. If the oral part was easy enough—knowing the order of the solar system was probably the trickiest question—a second, written test could only really be passed after sitting through an hour-long series of the artist's films hosted in a little adjacent cinema, complete with a concession stand selling bad popcorn.

For all the dense diversity of the project's sculptural program, it was here that its central motivations were truly fleshed out. The loop featured a mix of Mars-themed films, such as *Space Camp*, 2012—detailing the calisthenic and other preparations undertaken for the mission by the large cast of collaborators and helpers drafted into the project—and more general introductions to the Sachsian weltanschauung, including *Ten Bullets*, 2010, the most celebrated in a series of kaleidoscopically persnickety short movies that the artist has been releasing in recent years. Proposing a kind of unified field theory of discipline and efficiency for Sachs's studio assistants—and by extension, the world at large—*Ten Bullets* is a winking masterpiece of professional tunnel vision and self-regarding procedural confidence. Here it also radically resituated the performative activity of "Space Program: Mars"—young pocket-protected people earnestly hurrying from one station to the next on scooters and bicycles, twiddling science-y knobs, watching aimless monitors, adjusting hoses, and sorting screws—from an oddly flat-footed form of pseudotechnical satire to a space of dynamic, discomfiting intersubjectivity governed entirely by the artist's authoritarian brand of whimsy. That the LEM was full of freshly minted, officially certified Sachs experts for the hour-plus I was there confirms the persuasive power of at least one of the things he makes about as well as anyone—spectacles, especially ones in which he's the star.

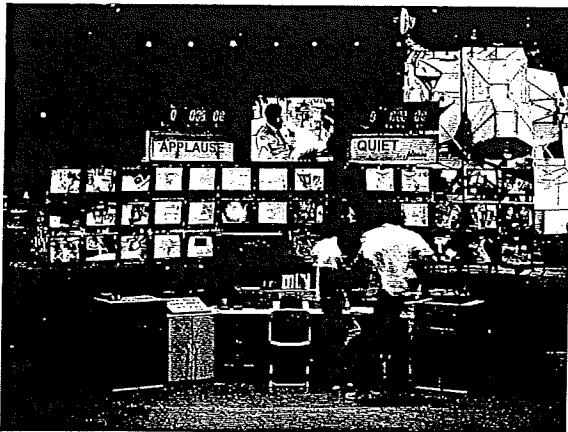
—Jeffrey Kastner

Christian Jankowski

FRIEDRICH PETZEL GALLERY

As a metaphor for art criticism, "message in a bottle" is, at best, rather anomic. Is that what we as writers do: just chuck it out there and pray some random reader halfway around the world stumbles on the entreaty of our otherwise lonely prose? *Review*, 2012, part of Christian Jankowski's exhibition "Discourse News," consists of approximately one hundred bottles sealed with red wax, which contain handwritten art reviews the artist solicited from critics and were here organized in clusters throughout the gallery space. Not only are the enclosed texts proleptic—Jankowski asked the writers to appraise a work that hadn't been made yet—and therefore not reviews, but the fraught image of the many mute messages in their bottles imparts an unmistakable whiff of futility to the notion that critics' discursive efforts have any audience at all.

Jankowski often initiates collaborations that ultimately spiral back, perhaps narcissistically, to himself. But can artists ever really "collaborate" with others without subsuming joint efforts into their own



View of "Tom Sachs," 2012.



Christian Jankowski, *The Eye of Dubai* (detail), 2012, video, black-and-white, sound, 47 minutes 20 seconds; ink-jet print, 48½ x 48½".

production? *Everyone* involved seems to toil in Jankowski's works, from the Italian psychics he called to poll for their prophecies about the success of his 1999 Venice Biennale outing, to his former gallerist Michele Maccarone, who, for *Point of Sale*, 2002, he had switch roles with her downstairs neighbor George Kunstlinger, an electronics dealer, so that each pitched the other's wares. Ultimately, however, Maccarone was hawking for Jankowski, and Kunstlinger (reading Maccarone's script) was as well.

Jankowski can be tough on himself, too. In the forty-seven-minute video *The Eye of Dubai*, 2012, also on view, the artist and his crew spend nearly the entire time blindfolded (in the piece, Jankowski mentions, without naming the artist or work explicitly, Joseph Beuys's similar *I Like America and America Likes Me* performance of 1974). As Jankowski stumbles around Dubai on his first trip to the UAE, his guide, local gallerist Rami Farook, narrates the attractions as Jankowski's sightless team struggles to keep the artist in focus and the sound boom somewhere—anywhere—near the action. Jankowski's rich German-accented English baritone offers a convincing facsimile of Werner Herzog at his most ponderous, particularly when Jankowski muses on the experience of standing on the viewing deck of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper, while not seeing a damn thing, or when he's in the Ski Dubai shopping mall groping a resigned-looking king penguin (shades of Herzog's suicidal penguin in *Encounters at the End of the World*). Jankowski's motley troupe is accompanied by a second film crew, from the BBC World News, shooting a documentary in a series named, almost farcically, *Collaboration Culture*. The allegory of a blind visual artist is, of course, poignant to the point of bathos, but as played throughout *The Eye of Dubai*, Jankowski's "artist as center of attention" is a significantly more caustic performance. As Farook herds this art-media circus around Dubai's "sights," the blindfolded artist tries repeatedly to engage bewildered residents. In the souk, Jankowski bellows questions into the ether (in English, recall), hoping to parley with the largely non-Anglophone locals. *The Eye of Dubai* hilariously sends up the unspoken demand that artists demonstrate effortless social fluency in whatever cross-cultural situations they parachute into, and then—no pressure!—make art while they're there.

While *The Eye of Dubai* is funny and shrewd, the video *Discourse News*, 2012, despite being only less than six minutes long, felt fulsome. In it a NY1 news announcer, seated in a studio environment, drily reads quotes taken from Jankowski's critics embedded in a convoluted argument about the need for artists to intercede in the mass media on their own terms. Had this been an actual televised intervention, such an argument would seem more pointed, as in *The Eye of Dubai*'s literal refusal to visually consume the spectacles of the UAE's absurd self-promotion (skiing in the desert?) while still incorporating an entire BBC TV crew. It's unclear whether *Discourse News*, or even the mass of unread text of *Review*, should be interpreted under the aegis of the

fourth work in the gallery, a neon sign near the video in the gallery entryway that reads, in a cursive scribble, PLEASE STOP YOU'RE BORING ME TO DEATH.

—Eva Díaz

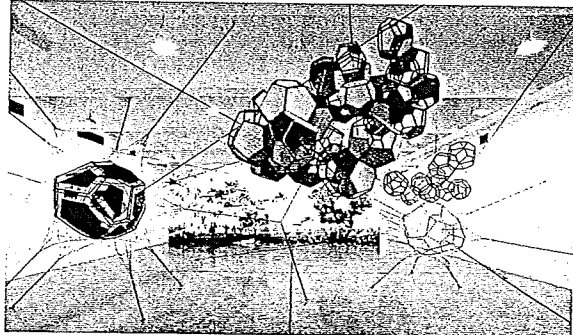
Tomás Saraceno

TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY

The sculptures and collages shown in Tomás Saraceno's recent exhibition belong to a wide-ranging scientific and philosophical project begun in 2002, variously called Cloud Cities and Air-Port-City. At the crux of the undertaking is a speculative metropolis composed of continuously shifting configurations of cell-like modules that float above the earth, the entire process powered by solar energy and wind.

In Tanya Bonakdar's large downstairs space, various arrangements of polyhedrons made from beech plywood or nylon string—representations of the Cloud City's component cells—hung from the gallery ceiling among complex webs of more nylon string that were anchored to the gallery's floor and walls; navigating this floating city required the audience's full attention, as if to underscore our earthbound clumsiness. The polyhedrons are based on the Weaire-Phelan model of an ideal bubble structure, a three-dimensional armature that minimizes surface area and maximizes volume; in other works, Saraceno has drawn on the webs of the black widow spider and the Millenium Simulation, a computerized model used by scientists to investigate the structure of the universe. The ease with which his artistic practice moves among architecture, science, and philosophy recalls the practices of Buckminster Fuller, Archigram, and Gyula Kosice, who designed the otherworldly Hydrospatial City. (In fact, Saraceno studied with Archigram's Peter Cook.) Saraceno's previous knotted works also bring to mind Gego's "Reticularaeas," with their scientific precision and echoes of what we perceive as chaos in the natural world.

The Cloud City proposal is in one sense anarchic, rhizomatic, and revolutionary—Saraceno sees its inhabitants as united by "cloud citizenship" and predicts "a three-dimensional era of social engagement" and a "planetary feeling of belonging." But there are darker undertones to this plan, which begin to emerge in a large rendering, spread over a gallery wall, of the Cloud Cities floating above a rooftop that looks a good deal like that of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (where a larger version of a Cloud City cluster, which viewers can climb into, is currently on view). In this depiction, the modules are connected by ladders and tunnels, at times resembling nothing so much as featureless corporate atria, at others something out of an Escher nightmare. The people inhabiting the cells are caught in the odd stasis particular to figures in architectural renderings—real but not quite—yet amplified by a zany



View of Tomás Saraceno, 2012.