

Tom Sachs

Teaching Resource

Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony / September 16 - January 7, 2018

About Tom Sachs

Tom Sachs (American, born 1966) is a contemporary artist whose hand-built sculptures and installations pay tribute to familiar objects while simultaneously and playfully expanding our understanding of them. His large-scale works depend upon a team of studio assistants who abide by his "[Ten Bullets](#)," a strict code that governs Sachs's studio practice (and alludes humorously to the Ten Commandments). Examples of the code include timeliness, list-making, optional group exercise, and the practice of "[knolling](#)" (arranging objects in parallel or 90-degree angles as a method of organization—the name refers to the geometries of furniture). Sachs studied at the prestigious [Architectural Association School of Architecture](#) and worked in [Frank Gehry's](#) L.A. furniture shop. He currently lives and works in New York City.

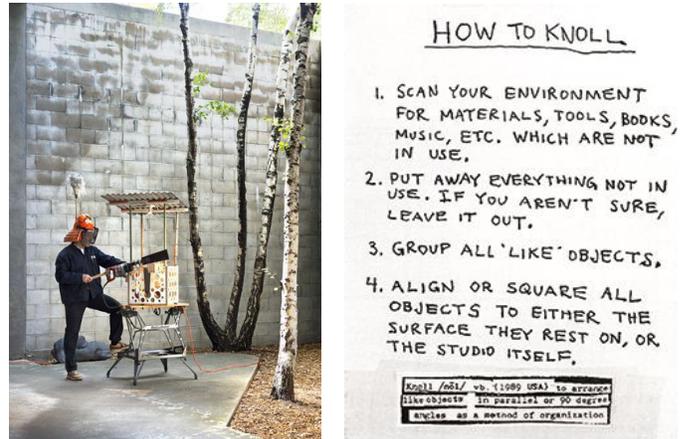
- Thinking about Tom Sachs' studio code, create a code of your own for a particular place like your bedroom, home or classroom. What are your rules for that place and why?

Bricolage

As a young boy, Tom Sachs figured out a way to give his father a birthday gift that he could not afford: he made a clay replica of it. Since then, Sachs' various bodies of work have been made by way of "bricolage," a French DIY method that emphasizes repurposing and remixing readily available materials to create new forms and meanings. For Sachs, a "bricoleur" is one who hobbles together functional contraptions out of existing or collected materials.

Examples of Sachs' use of bricolage include a recreation of designer Le Corbusier's 1952 *Unité d'Habitation* housing development using only foamcore and a glue gun, a copy of the Apollo 11 Lunar Excursion Module out of steel, plywood and electronics, and the artist's own version of a McDonald's built out of plywood, glue and assorted kitchen appliances. Sachs has also made Hello Kitty and her friends in materials ranging from foamcore to bronze.

- Where do you see examples of bricolage in the galleries (things handmade or assembled to resemble a recognizable object)?
- What makes Sachs' versions of these objects unique?
- How does your understanding of the object change based on the materials it is made from?



LEFT: Tom Sachs cutting ConEd laminate into cubes for use as charcoal briquettes. Photo: Genevieve Hanson. RIGHT: *Ten Bullets* codebook, 2011, "HOW TO KNOLL" Knoll



TOP: *Leica M6*, 2002, ink, foamcore, thermal adhesive, 5x3x2.75" BOTTOM: *Unité*, 2001, cardboard, thermal adhesive, 86 x 207 x 38"

Outer Space

Many of Sachs' projects reveal his interest NASA and the [Space Race](#). In 2012, Sachs created a life-size model of an imagined expedition to Mars at the Park Avenue Armory in New York, which included launch platforms, space suits and other NASA gear made from plywood, glue and bricolaged objects. Sachs also built a tea house as part of this exhibition: a small, welcoming space on an alien planet.



TOP: *Apollo LEM*, 2007, steel, plywood, electronics, tools, 277 x 263 x 263" BOTTOM: *H.K. P.L.S.S. (Hello Kitty Buzz Aldrin)*, 2000, ink, foamcore, hot glue (right)

- Imagine that you are an astronaut exploring new territory. You've just landed and are stepping out of the spacecraft for the first time. What do you see? Make a drawing or a collage of this strange place. Include things like the land and sky, plants and animals, the architecture and yourself as a space traveler!

Inner Space: The Tea Ceremony

"We engage the traditions but also develop our own to connect with the parts that are meaningful to us."

—Tom Sachs

For the exhibition *Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony*, the artist has reimagined *chanoyu* (the traditional Japanese tea ceremony), and created an environment for this new ceremony to take place. Sach's reinterpretation of the quiet and communal Japanese ritual of preparing, serving and drinking tea is meant to honor the original tea ceremony and provide a space to explore one's "inner space," or psyche.

In the galleries, Sachs will install a tea house in a garden accessorized with variations on lanterns, gates, a wash basin, a koi pond, a bronze bonsai and other objects of use and contemplation, all made from commonplace materials. During the course of the exhibition, the Nasher will present a series of public demonstrations in which Sachs or a colleague will perform the tea ceremony for guests. Sachs' ceremony demonstrates his own reimagining of tea culture—from bowls and ladles, scroll paintings and vases, to a motorized tea whisk and electric kettle.

- Imagine creating your own 'tea ceremony' based on a food that you often eat, the place you eat it and the people you are with. What type of unique ceremony will you create? Where will it be held? What tools or utensils will you need? What actions will be performed?

"Within the act of preparing and serving a bowl of tea, we have the opening to investigate human relationships and the human condition." —Tom Sachs

Chanoyu is translated "hot water for tea" and refers to "a tea gathering." *Matcha* is powdered green tea. *Koicha*, or thick tea, is made by mixing hot water and matcha with a *chasen*, or whisk.



Chabako (tea utensils), 2015, 12.375 x 14.25 x 9". Installation view, *Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony* at The Noguchi Museum, Long Island City; *Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony (opening matcha cannister)*, The Noguchi Museum). Tom Sachs whisking tea with motorized chasen.

After Your Visit

Bricolage

Choose a tool or small appliance from school or home that you find interesting to look at. Study the form of the object, paying attention to its volume, mass, size and shape. Use the bricolage method to piece together a copy of the tool using materials you have on hand. Things like paper, cardboard, old cereal boxes, tin foil or tape will do. When you are finished, take a picture of the two objects side by side.

Make a 'Zine!

Tom Sachs makes notebooks or zines for most of his projects. They contain writing, collage and drawing to express his ideas. The examples at right are from his [Ten Bullets](#) codebook.

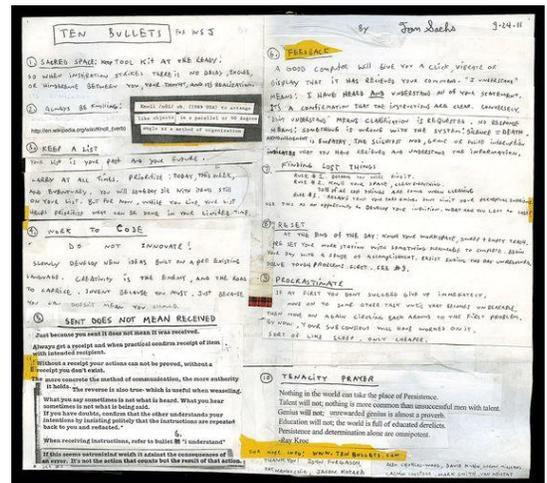
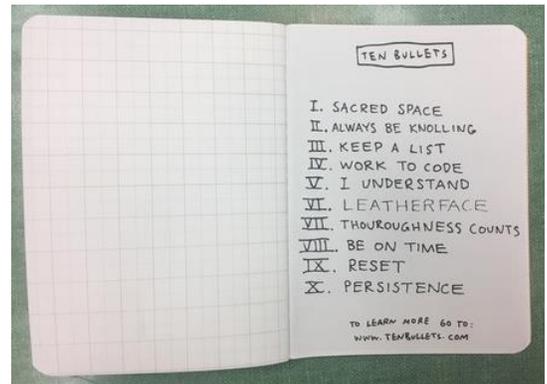
In the classroom: Think about a project or a task that you want or need to get done. Come up with a set of rules that will help you get the task completed in the best way. For example: make up ten rules for how to make a new friend, or ten rules for completing your homework on time, or ten rules to make the perfect donut.

On a piece of scratch paper, answer these questions: what will you call your code? What will its logo look like? Make a sketch of it. List the 10 guidelines of your code and share them with a partner or in a small group when you're done.

Now, make a zine! If you've never made a zine, [here is one way to do it](#). You will need a sheet of 11"x17" paper, an exacto knife, tape and any materials you want to draw, collage or write with. This might take some time! Have fun and share it with your classmates when you are done. Publish a copy for your friends by unfolding the zine, making photocopies of it and folding them back up afterwards.

Additional Resources

- [Tom Sachs' website](#)
- [Hyperallergic: Drinking Tea with Tom Sachs](#)
- [Nuvo: Artist Tom Sachs: Ground Control to Major Tom](#)
- [Lyst: The History of Knolling](#)
- [Japanese Chanoyu \(tea ceremony\), Asian Art Museum SF, CA](#)
- [New York Times: Tom Sachs workshop: Willy Wonka would approve](#)



Ten Bullets codebook, 2011, table of contents, (right) and inside (left)

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Historical and Cultural Relevance, Critical Evaluation and Response, Creative Expression | §117.52. Art, Level I (c) (1), (3) and (4)

English Language Arts Electives: Creative Writing | §110.52. Creative Writing Pages, (b) (1) (A) and (B)