

ARTNEWS

Mezcal in Space: Sculptor Tom Sachs Celebrates
'Star Wars' and Fine Mexican Libations

by Andy Battaglia
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Tom Sachs, *Sandcrawler*, 2018
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Aficionados of mezcal and modes of transport in *Star Wars* movies will find a lot to like in sculptor Tom Sachs's newest offering in New York: a wooden curio constructed in the form of a so-called Sandcrawler that has been cut open to house a mini bar holding bottles of fine Mexican libations along with citrus and salt to help them go down. Small ceramic cups are included, with hand-scrawled NASA logos of the kind that feature in Sachs's "Space Program" accessories, and among them are signs of more earthly concerns: pictures from porn magazines and a box of condoms tucked away in a corner. All the elements add up to the makings of a starry night.

"It was this form begging the question: what's inside?" Sachs said of the sculpture, which he had started as a *Star Wars* fan—the Sandcrawler is a giant vehicle that first featured in *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*—but then amended. He said he liked the contraption's original unsullied shape, comparing it to something by Max Ernst,

Tony Smith, or Lynn Chadwick—"all the high-modernist forms." But after a couple years of it lying around, "I was like, 'Fuck it—let's cut it open.' Then it turned into—or became a vehicle for [Ed. note: the pun was not lost on him]—all the ritualized activities I've been interested in."

Among those are the many meticulous gestures in the art of Japanese tea ceremony, which has figured in Sachs's performative and sculptural "Space Program" works as well as a particular body of creations—a makeshift tea house, koi pond, and countless jury-rigged gizmos to help whip matcha into refined drinkable form—that he has installed in institutions including the Noguchi Museum in New York.

To show *Sandcrawler*, Sachs found an accomplice in Vito Schnabel, who is exhibiting the work for one week only (closing December 8) at his Vito Schnabel Projects space in Greenwich Village. "We used to surf in Rockaway

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together and I've always been a fan of his work," Schnabel said. "This is kind of a prelude to our exhibition at my gallery in St. Moritz [in 2019], which has to do with space, Joseph Beuys, and an espresso machine that is kind of Nam June Paik-esque."

For Sachs, the selection of his preferred tequila-affiliated elixir has different valences. "Mezcal is the drink of my studio," he said. "It's been the party-stripper of choice in the studio for 30 years of degenerate behavior—studio visits gone right. It's also a drink that I discovered through an artist friend, Ron Cooper, who started bootlegging it across the border from Mexico to New Mexico in his jacked-up Cadillac. I first tasted it in Taos and have this kind of romance with it and artists from the '60s."

Among the characters he associates with it are Ed Ruscha, Dennis Hopper, Frank Gehry, Larry Bell, and Ken Price, who designed the graphics for bottles in the revered Del Maguey line of mezcals started by Cooper. "It's like a combination of finish fetishists, Pop artists, conceptual artists—those are all like my fathers, and that was the drink of their community."

There's a seasonal valence, too. "I wanted to celebrate the holidays and alcoholism and ritualized drug consumption," Sachs said, pointing at the bar/sculpture's mirrored surface. "The thing I like about cocaine is that you're in a very private space with people you may or may not know doing something illicit. You become bonded through that. It's a lot like the tea ceremony—and having mezcal with someone is akin to that."



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