
TOM SACHS: TEA CEREMONY

A review of 'Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony' at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery.

This review was published on this is tomorrow and edited by Claire Phillips.



Tom Sachs, 'Tea Ceremony', (2019) installation view, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery.

Despite the readymade being a well-established component in modern art, there are still new ways of using mass-produced objects to draw our attention to how we connect with the everyday material world. In the case of Tom Sachs, the New York City-based sculptor known for fashioning makeshift objects and installations from materials as commonplace as duct tape and electrical appliances, his recent exhibition at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery focuses on the use of objects as part of rituals, specifically, as the title makes plain, the Japanese tea ceremony.

Arranged by The Noguchi Museum in New York, the exhibition 'Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony' originated in 2016 in Long Island and already travelled to both San Francisco and Dallas before finding its way to Japan, to the culture that inspired it. Now in its final instalment, the show pays tribute to traditional Japanese culture, but represents it using the readily available stuff of daily life.

It consists of five spaces - a historical tearoom, outer garden, inner garden, theatre and corridor. In the outer garden, blocky wooden stepping-stones surround a pond where koi carp swim. Various structures are dotted about the place - how each is constructed is apparent. Sometimes machines are part of things. There's a faint steampunk feel to the works with appliances embedded in them. The most surprising discovery is finding a toilet cubicle from a Boeing 747 in the outer garden.

A fence made of broom handles divides the gardens. After which, you encounter a space with traditional Japanese landscape ornaments, but instead of being carved from stone, they are made from materials more likely sourced from the local supermarket or hardware shop. A weeping maple tree is decorated with cotton buds. There's even a life-sized plywood teahouse furnished in Sachs' signature red and white hazard tape.

The overall impression is a playful mishmash of old and new, local and international, hand- and machine-made, that uses customs and consumerism to equal effect. One amusing detail is a large jar of extra crunchy, super chunky peanut butter perched atop a Japanese stone lantern or *tōrō*. The shape and size of this stout cylinder are ideal, even if its purpose seems vaguely inappropriate. Sachs' material translations are often witty and satisfying to recognise. With a few simple modifications, a hardhat and feather duster become a samurai helmet and plume.

Sachs' work has an appealing do-it-yourself aesthetic to it. It's immediate. Being able to see the rivets attached to domestic utensils offers agency for the viewer. Everything is made and how it is made is shown. In the theatre, a video shows the artist cleaning and preparing the exhibits for display. Without words, the artist performs a number of rituals through action alone. Ultimately, 'Tom Sachs: Tea Ceremony' is a love letter to everyday rituals. Just don't touch.