



Tom Sachs Pumps Up the Volume

By Sarah P. Hanson

The beat goes on at the Brooklyn Museum in a show devoted to the artist's bricolage boomboxes.



2014, porcelain and mixed media. Collection of Max Power Jacobellis, Washington, CT. Courtesy the artist.

Tom Sachs is best known for his ersatz approximations of useful machines and objects: bathroom fixtures fashioned from cardboard Prada boxes, faux Swiss passports dispensed from behind a bulletproof bodega window. These clever commodities reached a peak in 2012 with his Creative Time-backed takeover of New York's Park Avenue Armory for "Space Program: Mars," in which the artist mounted a participatory interplanetary installation featuring replicas of all-terrain vehicles, a mission control room, a suit-up station, lab units for scientific measurement, and more. But in one line of Sachs' practice, going back to 1999, the jerry-rigged machines actually *work*: his boomboxes, 22 of which just went on view at the Brooklyn Museum.



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April 20, 2016

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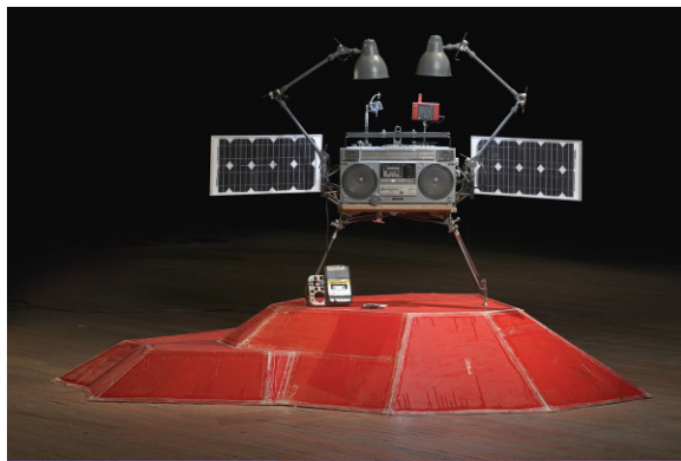
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Yardstyle," 1999, mixed media. Courtesy the artist.

As Sachs recalls, "I have been making boomboxes since childhood. I hooked my Sony Walkman up to a set of mini speakers and Velcroed them to a block of scrap plywood. It was a clusterfuck of wires. In 8th-grade woodshop, I made a box for the whole mess out of pine. It had a knob to hang the headphones that was made out of a broomstick." After stints at the London School of Architecture and in Frank Gehry's studio, he continued in the same vein as a young sculptor in New York, creating bricolage versions of things he wanted to possess, like Mondrians outlined in gaffer's tape on plywood. According to the show's curator, Eugenie Tsai, "One of the most distinctive aspects of Sachs's sculptural practice is his transformation of ordinary materials into playful and scrappy one-of-a-kind objects. What is amazingly consistent in the works from 1999 to the present is the degree of invention and the evidence of the [artist's] hand in each object, no matter how large or small."



2011, mixed media. Photo by Genevieve Hanson; courtesy the artist.

Each boombox has a distinct personality. The earliest piece in the show, *Model One*, from 1999, is the most humble in stark, hand-painted white, but they quickly grew more fanciful, as demonstrated by the umbrella-topped *Guru's Yardstyle* from the same year. More recent iterations like *Phonkey*, 2011, and *Sarah*, 2014, incorporate inventive appendages from his larger space series and recent focus on Japan. Part creative recycling of obsolete technology, part salute to their use as a protest tool, part fanboy homage to the music they blasted (disco, early hip-hop) in their heyday, the boomboxes strike as an uncommonly personal side project. Sachs told *T Magazine* during the installation of the show's previous iteration, at the Contemporary Austin, "The nostalgia I feel for these boomboxes is intense. But it's not exactly nostalgia—because I haven't let them go."



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David Bowie, Château d'...
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"Sarah,"

2014, mixed media. Courtesy the artist.

For those who crave the surround Sachs experience, check out the artist's fully-fledged homage to the Japanese tea ceremony at the [Noguchi Museum](#) in Queens, through July 24, and mark your calendars for June 16, when Sachs and Questlove will host a [discussion](#) about art, science, and music.

Tom Sachs: Boombox Retrospective, 1999-2016" is on view at the [Brooklyn Museum](#) from April 21 through August 14.

Top image: Model One, 1999. Mixed media. Collection of Philip and Shelley Fox Aarons, New York. Courtesy of the artist.

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