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Tom Sachs: "Connecticut"
6 May – 5 June 2004

Sperone Westwater is pleased to announce an exhibition of new sculpture by Tom Sachs. "Connecticut" is the artist's first gallery exhibition in New York since 1999. Following the enormous success of his most recent installation "Nutsy's", shown last summer at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin, this exhibition alludes to many things Connecticut: Alexander Calder; David Smith; Josef Albers; Yale University; President George W. Bush; affluent suburbs; and McDonald's.

The exhibition's most emblematic piece is a Presidential Seal measuring nine feet in diameter; it is the largest of its kind, larger even than what one would find on Air Force One. Built from scratch using hand-cut plywood, synthetic polymer paint, and hardware, the work suggests both the artist's ongoing interest in corporate branding – an exaggeration of the symbol and power of the American Presidency – and his devotion to bricolage. The closest translation of this French word would be "do-it-yourself"; it describes perfectly Sachs's aim to build each of his operative sculptures from scratch, using building codes he has invented. The sacred work ethic embraced by the artist and his crew – "to show your work, rather than hide it" – is evident in every piece. From the wood-burned portraits of Flavor Flav, R. Buckminster Fuller, and Malcolm X; to a formidable free-standing wood and steel door sculpture (*Uncle Door*); to *London Calling*, an enormous chest (prophetically constructed from blue and white police barricades) which houses hand-made, operational guns for every song on "The Clash" album of the same title, and is configured like a mandala. Unlike so many of the mass-produced consumer items which surround us, Sachs's sculptures make no attempt to hide the process by which they were constructed, showing the artist's labor, mistakes, and decisions.

The centerpiece of the show is a life-size, black refrigerator, titled *Vader*. While two wooden doors open to reveal an impressive number of laminated shelves, the most remarkable aspect of the work is the functional cooling system welded from copper pipes and other gerry-rigged machines. Related to this piece is a free-standing refrigerator door – complete with a working ice dispenser – whose form mimics Connecticut artist David Smith's *5 Units Equal* from 1956. Unlike a polished original, this hand-crafted, wooden "dub" version is scarred with the evidence of its own creation, and this "bricolage" remake reveals the artist's idiosyncratic personality and signature touch. The ice dispenser, which Sachs equates with "man's need for instant gratification", is an object he both covets and disdains, and it epitomizes his ambivalent relationship to status and prestige.

It is not incidental that Connecticut, the affluent state where Sachs was born and raised *and* the title of the exhibition, can also be seen to epitomize this relationship. He characterizes Connecticut as a state in service to a city, but describes its distance from New York as a "contemplative distance." It is "a state of mind, it means the suburbs but it's also a word that represents the end of the industrial corridor of manufacturing bases, all the way up from Manhattan to cities like New Haven and Hartford which were once big centers of wealth". Finally, he notes that Alexander Calder, the bricoleur whom he respects most, came into his own in the state, as did Joseph Albers, to whom homage is paid with Sachs's own homage to the Square: a series of square asphalt paintings constructed from the racetrack of Nutsy's. Welcome to "Connecticut".

For more information, as well as photographic images, please contact Katharine Smyth at Sperone Westwater at (212) 999-7337, or info@speronewestwater.com.