

ENCORE Presentation

The Walker Art Center brings back Tomás Saraceno after his soaring art experiment in 2008

Tomás Saraceno

Walker Art Center, May 14–August 30
www.walkerart.org

Last October, on the grounds of the Walker Art Center, Argentine architect-artist Tomás Saraceno and writer Alberto Pesavento launched their utopian art object—a giant balloon the size of a basketball court and made of plastic bags collected from participants around the globe—using the heat of the sun. Titled Museo Aero Solar and constructed during a series of community workshops at the Walker, the balloon was created “in the spirit of an experiment,” says Walker visual-arts curator Yasmiil Raymond. Saraceno approaches much of his work in this way.

In May, Saraceno returns to the museum for a one-man show featuring drawings, kinetic sculptures, photographs, and a new audience-engaging installation. The show intends to flesh out some of the concepts hinted at in “Museo aero solar.” One is Saraceno’s concern over the depletion of earth’s natural resources; thus, the gallery

will be illuminated using solar panels positioned in the gallery windows and/or on the adjacent terrace.

Another is his penchant for fantastical constructions that offer an escape from the politics, boundaries and economics of planet Earth: airborne communities that require only an imagination and a “floating passport,” as Raymond explains. Saraceno calls these utopias Air-Port-Cities, which he has described as “huge kinetic structures that work toward a real economic transformation” by allowing for “more elastic and dynamic border rules (political, geographical, etc.) for a new space/cyberspace.”

He comes by such imaginings naturally. Trained as an architect at the Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, Saraceno also studied with Peter Cook of Archigram, a London architectural group formed in the 1960s that—similar to American architect Buckminster Fuller—hypothesized futuristic utopias that utilized new technologies to generate opportunities for community.

For instance, in some of his sculptures Saraceno’s used aerogel, a sponge-like insulating substance developed by

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the aerospace industry. Using more vernacular materials like balloons, netting and air plants he created one of his “Flying Garden” sculptures, an aspect of his Air-Port-Cities through which he proposes what he’s called “the sustainable occupation” of the air.

“He’s going for utopia, not feasible, realistic ideas,” Raymond says. “That’s why he makes art. But he’s the kind of artist who thinks, ‘If you don’t take the risk of thinking the wildest of ideas, then you cannot achieve the wildest of possibilities.’ He represents a spirit of risk and experimentation.”

His work is intended, in part, to allow one’s imagination to float free when contemplating the possibility of a city hovering in the air. “These flying shelters are not dependent on borders, land and territory,” Raymond says. They provoke not only questions about “cities that sustain themselves in the sky,” she adds, but ask “who are you as a person living in a floating city no longer dependent on property, passport or a potential mortgage?”

Saraceno’s work, she concludes, inspires us to not only dream, “but to readjust our principles, to reconsider other ways of living. His ideas are elemental in a way, but also poetic and powerful, because it’s almost a change in ethics about how we approach the earth without a sense of ownership.”

—Camille LeFevre



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