

Tom Sachs

(New York, USA, 1966)

In the late 1990s Tom Sachs became well known for his ironic sculptures, such as *Hermès Value Meal*, *Prada Toilet*, and *Chanel Guillotine*, where he branded particularly provocative objects (a MacDonalD's meal, a water bottle, a guillotine) with famous fashion labels. Over the course of his career Sachs has reconstructed every type of modern icon: pianos and weapons, emblems of modernism and junk food, NASA stations and electric chairs.

In the creation of his sculptures he often employs a practice that he calls bricolage, where the intervention of the artist's "hand" is fundamental since it is he who chooses the materials, usually humble and rough (wood, cardboard, glue, and exposed screws) and establishes a new significance for them. The results are fetish-objects, such as fast food, that are mythicized not only by "mass" culture, but also by "high" culture, as in the case of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation*, which Sachs reproduced at a 1:25 scale in 2003 (*Unité*), or works by Mondrian, executed in colored tape on canvas in 1996.

Hello Kitty is one of the leitmotifs in his work, and key for understanding the ambivalent relationship of critics to his work and the artist's fascination with consumer society. A well-known fictional character, created to be infinitely reproduced on every type of gadget, *Hello Kitty* boasts vast numbers of fans throughout the world. It already appeared in Sachs's imaginary world in Christmas 1994, when he was working as a window dresser at Barney's, an elegant New York department store, and he created an improbable—and scandalous—Holy Family, where the stable bore the MacDonalD's trademark, the Three Kings were interpreted by Bart Simpson, and *Hello Kitty* was entrusted with the role of the Madonna. Defined by the artist as a pure icon of merchandising that is universal and immediately understandable, "empty" in an almost Buddhist sense, he has celebrated *Hello Kitty* at every scale and in every material, from polystyrene to bronze, finally transforming it into a fountain in the center of Paris (*Crying Hello Kitty*, 2008), to the great joy, ironically, of the kitten's true fans.

In *Lost in the Wilderness*, 2001, Sachs presents the kitty as a little figure inside a huge oven-television. Here nothing remains of the concept of a vast, unexplored, and wild moor, addressed earlier by Conrad, except an unreal little meadow, significantly closed off in a microwave oven and blown by a silver fan. Inside, *Hello Kitty*, an emblem of unawareness—its creators deliberately designed it without a mouth so it would have no expression—stands at a loss, innocent, like a contemporary little red riding hood, ignorant of a destiny that does not seem auspicious. (EV)