Tomás Saraceno
Cloud-Specific

Special Events and Public Programs

OPENING
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 7–9 pm
Exhibition Opening and Public Reception

SPECIAL EXHIBITION TOUR
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1 PM
Associate Curator Meredith Malone leads a tour of the exhibition.

ARTIST LECTURE:
TOMÁS SARACENO
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5
The artist discusses the exhibition with Associate Curator Meredith Malone.
Reception  6 pm
Lecture  6:30 pm
Steinberg Auditorium

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PANEL DISCUSSION
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27
Panel  4:30–6:30 pm
Steinberg Hall
Reception  6:30–7:30 pm
Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum

CITIES OF THE FUTURE:
A FILM SERIES
DECEMBER 6, 7, 8
Tivoli Theatre, 7 pm
Metropolis, 1927
Directed by Fritz Lang
Paysage, 1967
Directed by Jacques Tati
Silent Running, 1971
Directed by Douglas Trumbull

Checklist of the Exhibition

**Upside Down**, 2007–11
Transparent PVC film and distilled water
25 x 45" diameter
Edition of 5

**Space Elevator 2**, 2009–10
Single-channel video projection
24 min.
Coproduction by Musée d’Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (Mudam), Luxembourg, and Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti

**Air-Port-City / Cloud-City / 9 Cloud Modules**, 2010–11
Beech plywood
26 x 71 ¼ x 27 ¾"

**Air-Port-City / Cloud-City / 24 Cloud Modules**, 2011
Beech plywood
27 ¼ x 57 7/8 x 27 ¼"

**as yet untitled (wall drawing)**, 2011
Laser print on adhesive paper
Dimensions variable
Edition of 5

**Biospherical (140)**, 2011
Black rope
55 ¼" diameter of sphere; overall dimensions variable
Edition of 3

**80SW Iridescent / Flying Garden / Air-Port-City**, 2011
Eighty transparent pillows with transparent film, black webbing, black rope, elastic black rope, and iridescent foil
130" diameter of sphere; overall dimensions variable
Edition of 3

**One Cloud Module**, 2011
Aluminum, PVC pillow, transparent film, and solar cookers
196 ¼" diameter

**Solar Interior**, 2011
Solar panels, rope, LED lamp, light-sensitive sensors, and battery
39 ½" diameter of sphere; overall dimensions variable

All artworks appear courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, unless otherwise noted.

Education Opportunities

TOURS
The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum offers many opportunities for free, individualized, docent-led tours and education programs. To schedule a tour for your group, organization, class, or friends and family, contact Stephanie Ruse at 314-935-5624, ruse@wustl.edu, or visit us online at kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/tours.

ONLINE RESOURCES
Visit the Museum’s education section at kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu to access downloadable PDFs of this brochure, an educational guide related to Tomás Saraceno: Cloud Specific, and other guides to exhibitions currently on view.

CATALOG
A fully illustrated catalog distributed by the University of Chicago Press is forthcoming. Coedited by Meredith Malone, exhibition curator, and Igor Marjanovic, associate professor of architecture at Washington University, it will be among the first substantial publications devoted to Saraceno’s work to date.

GENERAL INFORMATION
The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum is free and open to the public 11–6 every day except Tuesday; open 11–8 on Friday. Visitor parking is available; easy Metrolink access (one block south of Forsyth station). Contact: 314-935-4523 or kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu.

Support for the exhibition is provided by I-CARES at Washington University in St. Louis; the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; the Regional Arts Commission; James M. Kemper, Jr.; the David Woods Kemper Memorial Foundation; John and Anabeth Weil; the Hortense Lewin Art Fund; and members of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum.
Contemporary artist Tomás Saraceno is internationally recognized for his inflatable sculptures, fantastic architectural proposals, and environmental installations. The exhibition Tomás Saraceno: Cloud-Specific highlights the breadth of the artist’s experimental practice while presenting his newest work, which advances his longstanding exploration of Air-Port-City / Cloud-City (2001–present), a visionary project for a sustainable city in the sky consisting of a series of bubblelike cells fueled by solar energy. Drawing inspiration from forms found in nature—clouds, bubbles, spiderwebs—the artist produces spectacular structures and other models that raise challenging questions about the sociopolitical conditions in which we live. With his installation at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Saraceno effectively transforms the gallery space into an investigative laboratory; the dynamic array of inflatable sculptures, models, and prototypes on view here all visualize in small scale the possibility for future airborne existence.

Initially trained as an architect, the artist pursues a research-based practice that synthesizes art, architecture, engineering, and natural science, building on their capacities to envision alternate ways of being and inhabiting the world. Employing both readily available and highly specialized materials—aluminum frames, polyester cords, high-density polyethylene sheeting, and flexible solar panels—he presents strikingly engineered spheres and network configurations, which are enlivened by a documentary video of the artist and his team conducting test launches in the field. The exhibition is intended to reflect both materially and theoretically Saraceno’s experimental ethos—a form of spatial practice driven by the belief that the most significant innovations emerge not from within singular disciplines but by working across realms of expertise. The artist’s cross-disciplinary process includes collaborations with scientists at NASA as well as with a range of engineers, chemists, botanists, physicists, and spider researchers, among others. The dialogues he enters into and the ideas sparked by his practice-based research are as much a part of the work as the finished art objects and installations he produces.

The operative concept at the heart of Saraceno’s Air-Port-City / Cloud-City, based on a dynamic balance similar to that of a functioning ecosystem, is an adaptable module for living, theoretically capable of generating new social and environmental organization with implications for political and economic transformation as well. As Saraceno explains of his ongoing project, “Work on this structure tries to contest political, social, cultural, and military restrictions that are accepted today, in an effort to reestablish new concepts of synergy.” The patent optimism of his visionary scheme revisits and revises the seemingly discredited terrain of modernist utopian experimentation. The utopian function of Saraceno’s art is similar to its critical function, offering less a pragmatic solution than a creative proposal for an imaginative alternative to the reality that exists. At the same time, it provides insight into the contemporary limitations and predicaments that drive the will to seek such an alternative—including the growing ecological crisis and the social and political effects of globalization.

Saraceno’s work is part of a lineage of fantastic projects emerging out of experimental architecture, environmental activism, and utopianism that have challenged concepts of the built environment as static, fixed, and strictly earthbound. Like


2 Saraceno’s floating metropolis can also be understood as a metaphor for the dislocation of the global traveler, a particularly contemporary mode of being in the world, influenced, according to the artist himself, by his own peripatetic lifestyle.
distinct aspect of Saraceno’s experimental endeavors. The fourteen-sided Solar Interior (2011) is covered in solar cells and sensors that soak up energy during the day to power a small LED lamp at night. 80SW Iridescent / Flying Garden / Air-Port-City (2011) consists of eighty transparent pillows filled with air and encased by a net of black rope, strands of which fasten the cluster of pillows to the floor, walls, and ceiling. Suspended above the ground and covered in iridescent foil, this pneumatic work gleams with various colors depending on the changing light conditions in the gallery. The two-part Biospherical (2011)—in reference to the term biosphere, the part of the world in which life can exist—complements these large-scale sculptures, as moons to a planet. Made up of webbed globes in 120- and 140-centimeter diameter iterations, these spheres hover in midair and are supported by black polyester cords that extend across the space of the gallery to interpenetrate the already dense universe of points and lines. With each touch of a passersby, the cords reverberate, sending quivers throughout the system that serve as tangible manifestations of interconnectivity.3 Upside Down (2007–11), a large transparent pillow filled halfway with water and positioned on the ground, shifts focus away from the orbs suspended above to the terrestrial realm below, suggesting both a single drop of water and a world of its own.

The building blocks of Saraceno’s Air-Port-City / Cloud-City are its mobile modules, which are conceived of as both highly adaptable shelters and as transport vehicles: “Up in the sky there will be this cloud, a habitable platform that floats in the air, changing form and merging with other platforms just as clouds do. It will fly through the atmosphere pushed by the winds, both local and global, in an attempt to equalize the (social) temperature and differences in pressure. It will be a sustainable and mobile migration.”4 The dimensions and function of his cloudlike structures are thus variable, expanding and evolving as determined by the community inhabiting them and the changing environmental conditions. The sculptural models on display in this exhibition, including Air-Port-City / Cloud-City / 9 Cloud Modules (2010–11) and Air-Port-City / Cloud-City / 24 Cloud Modules (2011) offer schematic views of these cluster communities, which are inspired by bubble formations as well as cloud configurations. The artist’s interest in the form of bubbles builds upon the work of German visionary architect Frei Otto, who studied the physical properties of

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4 Tomás Saraceno, interview with Stefano Boeri and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Domus 883 (July–August 2005).
lightweight tensile and membrane structures, including soap films. Saraceno’s models also make specific reference to the Weaire–Phelan structure, a flexible three-dimensional structure representing an idealized foam or cluster of equal-sized bubbles devised by physicists Denis Weaire and Robert Phelan in Dublin in the early 1990s.\(^5\) One Cloud Module (2011), a prototype for a single modular unit, provides a drastic shift in scale and perspective. This polyhedron-shaped structure measures five meters in diameter and resembles a geodesic pod. It is constructed of a lightweight aluminum frame and fitted with multiple solar cookers, thermal devices made with reflective material that concentrate light and heat from the sun into a small cooking area.

The video Space Elevator 2 (2009–10) presents another crucial aspect of Saraceno’s experimental practice—the actual testing of concepts and materials in the environment. The video documents Saraceno and his team of collaborators running a trial in the vast landscape of Argentina using helium-filled spheres, elastic rope, and a tent. The endeavor playfully and intuitively approximates that of NASA and various international space associations to create what was for decades the stuff of science fiction, an “elevator” from Earth’s surface into space. The concept behind the space elevator is simple: an orbiting satellite is linked to the surface of the Earth by a cable, which vehicles can then climb up and down. The design and construction of such an audacious device, however, pose significant unsolved challenges, not the least of which is production of a cable 22,250 miles long and strong enough to support the system. The project has inspired extreme engineering on both a macro- and nano-scale. In Saraceno’s video, we see him and his team inflating three large orbs that glisten against a changing backdrop of intensely blue skies dotted with fluffy clouds and breathtaking sunsets. Sitting inside a tent, which is tethered to both the land below and the giant spheres overhead, the artist is sent aloft, like so much cargo en route to the heavens above. This piece, like all of Saraceno’s work, mines the space between pure imagination and science, provocatively animating the tension between the poetic and the practical, between the worlds we envision and the realities we create for ourselves.

Meredith Malone
Associate Curator

\(^5\) In 1993, Denis Weaire and Robert Phelan, physicists at Trinity College Dublin, devised a solution to the problem of how space could be partitioned into cells of equal volume that would have the least surface area.