

Tomás Saraceno

CCA / Singapore

"Arachnid Orchestra Jam Sessions" at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore presents Berlin-based artist Tomás Saraceno's latest research, in which he employs the spider web as a musical instrument.

The exhibition comprises a series of spider web receptacles, "invented" musical instruments that include strings, percussion and a specially conceived Aeolic instrument, a video and a darkened reading room with publications on the oeuvre of the artist. Within this context, spiders are the featured collaborators — musicians "jamming" as the instruments translate the vibrations they make with the silk of their webs.

As an extension of the spider's "performances," three live performances with local sound artists, Bani Haykal, Joyce Beetuan Koh and Brian O'Reilly, focus on attempts to communicate with the spiders or create a language of sounds derived from the spiders. For example, Bani Haykal extends Saraceno's work by attempting to transmit vibrations to the spiders, responses to which are effectively acts of communication.

Outside of these jam sessions with human interlocutors, the exhibition is beautiful but difficult to navigate; the viewer feels like he or she is groping in the dark, both in terms of understanding the science and language at play and in physically moving from spotlighted instrument to reading desk to the shine of the video screen. The theatrical framing of spider webs as both the platform and instrument of communication makes the exhibition seem phantasmic. One is not sure if he or she is lost in translation or caught in a circular solipsism. In this sense, the exhibition's aesthetic, both theatrical and engaged in a kind of real scientific inquiry, speaks to the speculative nature of Saraceno's work, which, at its best, gestures at a post-anthropocene future.

by Kathleen Ditzig

Inventing Ritual Hu Xiaoyuan

Exhibition Hall of MadeIn Company / Shanghai

On the occasion of the first edition of the PIMO Contemporary Art Festival, a six-day initiative promoted by Xu Zhen's Madeln Company and David Chau's CC Foundation, Madeln and artists Lu Pingyuan and Zhao Yao mounted the third and most ambitious iteration of "Inventing Ritual," a time-based exhibition comprised of contributions by more than twenty Chinese artists, originally performed in the context of last year's Moscow Biennale. Over a forty-minute timespan, various actions were combined with a video playlist presented on multiple screens; while art objects served as props or, displayed in symmetrical pairs, suggested a theater stage.

Madeln Company's exhibition hall featured He An's piles of recycled cardboard boxes maniacally stenciled with pencil (*Able to Suffer and to Grieve, Even Able to Die*, 2012); diptychs of Zhao Yao's totemic steel sculptures (*You Can't See Me, You Can't See Me*, 2015); and Xu Zhen's photographic enlargements of tools (*Corporate: 4 Knives Group*, 2014). These enclosed a chancel-like area in which the actual performances — mostly repetitions of mundane gestures — were charged with the spiritual aura of a religious ceremony.

Acts like removing a belt and putting it on the floor (Liu Chengrui, *Own Reinventing Method*, 2015); squeezing a roll of bubble wrap (Hu Xiangqian, *Reconstructing Michelangelo*, 2015); rubbing a 100 RMB banknote against a sheet of A4 paper (Li Gang, *International A4*, 2015); inflating letter-shaped balloons to compose the sentence "You and I are unique" (Yu Ji, *You and I Are Unique*, 2015); etc. were turned into creational myths for everyday life.

Thus "Inventing Ritual" seems to be a successful attempt by a group of contemporary artists to reconsider their own artworks through semantic displacements, recontextualizations, performative displays and pure play. In a cultural industry governed by the market, as the Chinese art system surely is, this liberating hymn to pure creativity defied the certainty of the artwork as commodity.

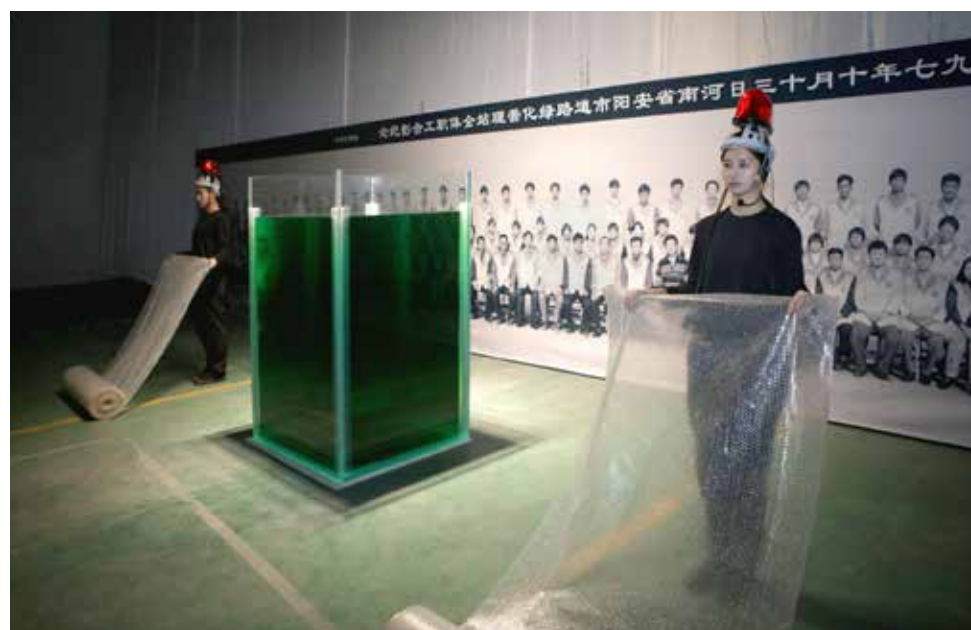
by Michele D'Aurizio

Beijing Commune / Beijing

Casually arranged in the first room of "Ant Bone" is a grouping of Hu Xiaoyuan's signature "Wood" pieces all made in 2015. For this series, started in 2008, Hu first cuts and grinds unidentifiable pieces of found wood. She then covers these geometrical wooden structures with a thin layer of painted silk, meticulously simulating the pale skin of raw lumber. Notable here are a couple of delicate wood pieces employing traditional mortise and tenon joints (*Ant Bone No. 4* and *Ant Bone No. 5*); the lyrical spiral shape of these two works formally counterbalances the upright posture of three wood sculptures that incorporates heavy, sharp-angled steel (*Ant Bone No. 1*, *Ant Bone No. 2* and *Ant Bone No. 3*). Among these and an array of similar works is a strange sculpture comprised of a pair of hollow eggs tethered to a pink, perforated plastic stool via a net made from Hu's own hair (*Untitled No.6*, 2015); and an elegant sculpture that resembles a traditional Chinese zither.

In the second part of the exhibition is a trilogy of video works (all 2015): *The Character of Human Nature* is a playful five-channel video work. In one section a sharp needle punctures a balloon; in another, three people draw on each other's wrists. In *Gentle and Painful Ripples* an adult in a ridiculous costume stands in a child's pool. He or she faces away from the viewer, occasionally twisting to make ripples in the water's surface. *Bang* depicts two people trapped in a flesh-colored net with balloons attached; they uneasily wrestle and roll on the ground from the left to the right side of the frame. Taken as a whole, the exhibition somehow abruptly unfolds as a dialectic that is at once solemn and humorous. In fact, all these works suggest dichotomous relationships: intimate and distant, familiar and uncanny, strong and delicate, internal and external, artificial and natural.

by Li Bowen



From top, clockwise:
Hu Xiaoyuan
"Ant Bone"
Installation view at Beijing Commune, Beijing (2015)
Courtesy of the Artist and Beijing Commune

Tomás Saraceno
Hybrid semi-social solitary musical instrument NGC 613: built by a pair of *Cyrtophora moluccensis*, one day, one *Cyrtophora cirticola*, three weeks and one *Agelena labirintica*, six weeks (2014)
Installation view at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (2015)
Courtesy of the Artist and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

"Inventing Ritual"
Installation view at Madeln Company Exhibition Hall, Shanghai
Courtesy of Madeln Company