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# THE SHED Press Release

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**THE SHED PRESENTS *TOMÁS SARACENO: PARTICULAR MATTER(S)*, THE ARTIST'S LARGEST US EXHIBITION TO DATE**

**Featuring Shed commission *Free the Air: How to hear the universe in a spider/web*, a sensory experience within a 95-foot-diameter installation**

***Tomás Saraceno: Particular Matter(s)*  
On View: Friday, February 11 – Sunday, April 17, 2022  
Press Preview: Wednesday, February 9, 2022**



Tomás Saraceno, *Webs of At-tent(s)ion* (detail), 2018. © Studio Tomás Saraceno, 2018. Courtesy the artist.

**NEW YORK, NY, December 22, 2021**—The Shed will present the largest exhibition in the US to date of works by artist and community activist **Tomás Saraceno**, producing a multisensory experience throughout the new arts center. On view from February 11 to April 17, 2022, [\*Tomás Saraceno: Particular Matter\(s\)\*](#) features *Free the Air: How to hear the universe in a spider/web*, a 95-foot-diameter installation commissioned by The Shed that will fill the soaring 17,000-square-foot McCourt space, and an expansive survey exhibition of the artist's works and projects in The Shed's Level 2 and Level 4 Galleries. Combined, the exhibition totals approximately 25,000 square feet. Through floating sculptures, interactive installations, and an artistic process that centers collaboration, Saraceno proposes a situated knowledge of climate justice informed

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by the various perspectives of human and nonhuman lifeforms that have been disregarded, such as the air, spiders and their webs, and communities impacted by inequitable environmental policies and practices.

“At the heart of Tomás Saraceno's work is a new way of inhabiting and experiencing the world, one that centers on an ecologically post-fossil fuels future. Tomás presents the necessity to reevaluate how we perceive and operate in the world and what to expect from it, which he achieves through interconnected, non-hierarchical collaborations across the human and nonhuman,” said **Emma Enderby**, The Shed’s Curator-at-Large. “The air and the particles that define it, spiders and their webs, and our visitors are all protagonists in *Particular Matter(s)* at The Shed.”

In a call for environmental justice, Saraceno’s artistic collaborations renew relationships with the terrestrial, atmospheric, and cosmic realms, particularly as part of his community projects, [Aerocene](#) and [Arachnophilia](#). *Particular Matter(s)* brings this layered approach together, rethinking dominant threads of knowledge in the Capitalocene era, while celebrating the importance of all who make up this vibrating, dynamic ensemble.

“This will be Tomás Saraceno’s first major survey exhibition in the United States, a multidisciplinary exhibition that showcases Saraceno’s visionary, decades-long practice, dedicated to imagining sustainable futures amid our worsening global climate emergency,” said **Alex Poots**, The Shed’s Artistic Director and CEO. “Spanning three-quarters of our building, Saraceno’s exhibition explores ways of witnessing the environment through ecology, interspecies communication, and environmental justice. We very much look forward to welcoming audiences to experience this new show.”

For more than a decade, Saraceno has been imagining a world free from borders and fossil fuels, in collaboration with spiders and their webs, situated forms of knowledge, and the vibrant superorganism that is the cosmic web. In an era of climate emergency when ecosystems are at risk, Saraceno’s work addresses environmental racism and justice, envisions alternative ways of engaging with Earth’s atmosphere, and deepens an understanding of interspecies cohabitation and communication. Featuring new and recent work, *Particular Matter(s)* builds upon Saraceno’s platforms and projects that invite visitors from around the globe to more deeply understand and celebrate the radical interconnectedness of all things, and to imagine a world that adapts to and survives the climate crisis.

The exhibition is organized by Emma Enderby, The Shed’s Curator-at-Large with Alessandra Gómez and Adeze Wilford, Assistant Curators. The Shed’s multidisciplinary commissioning program is conceived by Artistic Director and CEO Alex Poots with the senior program team, including Emma Enderby; Tamara McCaw, Chief Civic Program Officer; Madani Younis, Chief Executive Producer; and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Senior Program Advisor.

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## FROM THE ARTIST

*Free the Air: How to hear the universe in a spider web? “Close your eyes, cover your ears, and sense felt vibrations...Gravitational waves resounding the cosmic web, yet to be felt. Infinite sensing of the world, life-forms weave constellations.”*

*Free the air from particulates! A particular matter for spider/webs: “What you see is my mind, my body. I cannot eat until I weave the mouth that feeds me. These threads belie the geometries of extinction, telling stories against extraction. Mind the stories you are spelling out in your trajectories.”*

*Knowledge is never without its situation, its context. It is never without specific identities whose interactions define and confine the production of knowledge. Attune to what knowledge and whose knowledge weaves the Web of Life, and who benefits from its use.*

*How can we hear the universe in a spider/web to Free the Air from Particulate Matter? Spiders and arachnid diviners might hold the answer.*

— From MULTIVERSE and SPIDER/WEB INTELLIGENCE from Tomás Saraceno’s *Arachnomancy Cards*, 2019–.

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## EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

### ***Free the Air: How to hear the universe in a spider/web***

For his Shed commission, Saraceno is creating a 95-foot-diameter sculpture, *Free the Air: How to hear the universe in a spider/web*, moving toward flights free from fossil fuels in an Aerocene era, to debut in The Shed’s 17,000-square-foot space, The McCourt. The large-scale installation will house an orchestrated sensory experience—a concert of vibrations emitted by the movement of particles in the air and spider’s entangled terrestrial and cosmic webs. This woven ensemble is composed of and performed by arachnid players, spider diviners, and atmospheric and cosmic matters, captured via recording devices in collaboration with the Arachnophilia community and amplified in the installation.

The sculpture’s interior will feature floating web-like floors stretched end-to-end on two levels, the first 12 feet above the ground, the second 40 feet. Visitors enter the installation to find themselves enveloped in a light mist, suspended on these nets floating in 450,000 cubic feet of air, or participating from wheelchair-accessible platforms on the lower level. Then, with the stage set, a concert in four movements for the air and for spider/webs begins as participants see what they cannot hear: particles of black carbon PM2.5 fogging the air, moving between participants and the geography of a spider’s web. The lights dim as the nets shake with recorded sound waves produced by spiders building and interacting with their webs. As the space enlarges, much like the expanding universe, unheard

voices become felt vibrations. In *Free the Air*, vibrations of climate justice with the Aerocene community offer participants a portal to connect across species, ability, and origins. The body becomes an ear, perceptive to the vibrating net reverberating beneath it and to the rhythms of other species and situated knowledges. Formed out of this entanglement of scales, a new togetherness emerges from these webs of life.

During the run of the exhibition, a version of *Free the Air*'s concert will be available via the Arachnomancy App. People will be able to consult the spider/web oracle anywhere in the world and share in this sensorial celebration of interspecies rights.

### **Level 2 Gallery**

The Shed's Level 2 Gallery houses a survey exhibition and inquires into Saraceno's interest in spider/webs and divination practices, particulate matter in the air (particle pollution), and terrestrial and cosmic cloud ecosystems. Works on display include such sculptures as *Webs of At-tent(s)ion*, made in collaboration with spider/webs from The Shed and other locations, and the artwork *Particular Matter(s)*. The vibrations of these and other artworks were recorded for the concert *Free the Air*.

The second new Shed commission, titled *We Do Not All Breathe the Same Air*, was greatly influenced by scholar Harriet A. Washington, whose discourse with Saraceno informed the artist's research on the uneven distribution of pollution along geopolitical and racial lines for this commission. The first iteration of this project, *Calendrier Lun-Air de Paris* at Palais de Tokyo in 2018, arranged filter tapes from BAM-1020 air pollution monitoring machines to visualize air pollution and its hourly discrepancies in Paris. These paper strips capture the amount of particulate matter in the air each hour in the form of variably shaded dots. As air pollution increases during an hour, the corresponding dot darkens in color on the paper strip. Readymades created by the atmosphere itself, these tiny dots reveal the intertwined relationship between fossil fuels, location, race, and the air based on pollution density. For *We Do Not All Breathe the Same Air*, Saraceno and The Shed collected filter tapes from air pollution regulation agencies across the United States, revealing what areas are most affected by air pollution across the country. Local community groups including El Puente and Bronx United contributed to conversations behind the development of this artwork. In March 2020, a portable ambient air quality machine called the E-BAM was installed on The Shed's roof to collect air quality readings for this commission in partnership with Met One Instruments, the company responsible for developing the Beta Attenuation Mass Monitor in the mid-1990s.

### **Level 4 Gallery**

Another highlight of the exhibition builds upon the Aerocene community, initiated by Saraceno. This open-source project is devoted to interdisciplinary endeavors seeking to activate ideas toward post-fossil fuel life on Earth. The various works presented on this level all float with heat provided directly by the sun instead of

fossil fuels, helium, hydrogen, solar panels, batteries, or burners, moving towards an Aerocene era, and demonstrate how to free the air from particulate matter.

The *Aerocene Backpack*, on view outside the Level 4 Gallery, is a portable flight starter kit that encloses an inflatable sculpture that anyone can borrow from the Aerocene Foundation. In January 2020, Aerocene flew with the communities of Salinas Grandes, setting 32 world records recognized by Fédération Aéronautique Internationale for distance and duration of a piloted balloon flight powered by the sun and air. On view will be the large-scale installation *Museo Aero Solar*, an ongoing sculpture made by various communities from around the world that repurpose plastic bags that float in the air free from fossil fuels. To date, hundreds of thousands of plastic bags have been reused from more than 30 countries to build this sculpture. However, *Museo Aero Solar* is not a singular object; it can be created as a DIT (Do-It-Together) project wherever people embrace the possibility of flying free from carbon. Through a virtual flight simulator utilizing open-source meteorological data, plan your journey to The Shed and move into an era free from borders and fossil fuels with the Aerocene App.

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### **PUBLICATION**

The catalogue for the exhibition assembles essays, fiction, and experimental texts on or inspired by the work of Saraceno, and documents the exhibition artworks and new commissions that will be presented at The Shed. In support of the artist's concerns about the environment, the book will be printed in part on waste paper salvaged from other print jobs by Italian printing atelier Musumeci, in an effort to reduce the waste associated with the production process. Contributors include Vinciane Despret, Emma Enderby, Alessandra Gómez, Michael Marder, Andreas Malm, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Filipa Ramos, Tomás Saraceno with Studio Tomás Saraceno, and Harriet A. Washington. Co-published by The Shed and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, the book will be available for purchase through international distributors, at The Shed, and at [theshed.org/publications](https://theshed.org/publications).

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### **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

In partnership with Columbia University's Climate School and Studio Tomás Saraceno, The Shed presents a series of six moderated conversations to explore key issues around climate change and environmental justice, while identifying connections with Saraceno's work on view. The conversations will be offered both in person at The Shed and online for free.

In partnership with the Friends of the High Line's Teen Program, The Shed will provide programming specifically created by and for young people. The Shed's curatorial and programming teams, together with Saraceno and members of his studio, will work closely with the teens to create a digital guide to the exhibition and weekly in-person tours. On Saturday, April 2, The Shed will host a daylong science and activism fair featuring keynote speakers, panel discussions, hands-on

workshops about how to measure air, earth, and water quality, poster sessions, environmental poetry sessions, and DJ sets.

### Schedule of Conversations:

Thursday, February 10

*An Outlook on Particular Matter(s)*: A presentation and contextualization of the exhibition and its goals and themes, featuring artist **Tomás Saraceno**, the exhibition's curator **Emma Enderby**, and The Shed's Senior Program Advisor **Hans Ulrich Obrist**.

Wednesday, February 16

*Environmental Justice and Covid-19*: Opening with Saraceno's artwork *We Do Not All Breathe the Same Air*, a newly commissioned work inspired by the research of Harriet A. Washington, this discussion will be framed by questions of environmental justice within the context of the pandemic. How do these crises intersect? How can we generate the urgency needed to raise awareness and gain traction around environmental crises and their disparate effects on Black, Brown, and lower socioeconomic populations around the world? Featuring **Harriet A. Washington**, leader in environmental racism discourse; **Peggy Shepard**, Co-founder and Executive Director of WEACTION; **Linda Goode Bryant**, filmmaker and activist; and moderator **Courtney Cogburn**, Associate Professor of Social Work, Columbia.

Wednesday, March 2

*Capitalocene, Aerocene*: An investigation of the role of capitalism and production in the climate crisis. How did we get here? What are the responsibilities of governments, corporations, and individuals? What potentialities for change can we think of with an Aerocene era? Featuring **Jason Moore**, environmental historian and historical geographer at Binghamton University; **Michael Marder**, Ikerbasque Research Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Basque Country; **Luisa Palacios**, Senior Research Scholar at the Center on Global Energy Policy; and moderator **Andrew Revkin**, Director of Initiative on Communication Innovation and Impact, Columbia Climate School.

Wednesday, March 16

*From Arachnophobia to Arachnophilia*: An exploration of interspecies interconnectedness and interdependence. What can we learn from situated knowledges? Featuring **Eric-Paul Riege**, artist; **David Zeitlyn**, Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University; **Peggy Hill**, Professor Emerita of Biological Science at The University of Tulsa; and **Markus Beuhler**, materials scientist and engineer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Additional speakers are to be announced.

Wednesday, March 30

*Invention, Experimentation, and Radical Imagination*: A survey of artistic and scientific frameworks for research, experimentation, and theorizing that depend

upon interdisciplinary collaboration to unlock meaning and potential paths forward, featuring the Aerocene community and era. How do we imagine possible just and safe futures from these perspectives? Featuring **Kate Marvel**, Associate Research Scientist at Columbia University; **Caroline Jones**, Professor in the History, Theory, and Criticism section, Department of Architecture, MIT; and moderator **Sandra Goldmark**, Associate Professor of Professional Practice in Theatre and Director of Campus Sustainability and Climate Action at Barnard College. Additional speakers are to be announced.

Wednesday, April 13

*Where Do We Go from Here? Rights of Nature: Policy, Activism and Change:* What are diverse, international approaches in regards to the rights of the air? In Salinas Grandes, Jujuy, Argentina, what are the rights of water? How can community or artistic actions, such as the flight of *Aerocene Pacha*, support environmentalism over capitalism around the world? Speakers are to be announced.

## ONLINE ARTWORKS AND PROJECTS

### **Arachnomancy App**

*How to hear the universe in a spider/web: A live concert for/by Invertebrate Rights*

Consult the spider/web oracle anywhere in the world and share in this sensorial celebration of interspecies rights. The full haptic, binaural, and visual rendition of the concert can be experienced through the Arachnomancy App.

Users can wear headphones and turn vibration mode on while using the app to feel the earth beneath their feet and hear the song of the spider/webs and stars.

The Arachnomancy App is an artwork by Tomás Saraceno and an invitation to attune to our sympoietic futures.

### **Aerocene App**

Users can plan virtual journeys and engage with the Aerocene community. Floating with virtual aerosolar sculptures, flight trajectories are composed via real-time information from 16-day forecasts of wind speeds at different altitudes. Users are able to engage with the over 103 tethered, 16 free, and 8 human Aerocene community flights that have floated in more than 43 different countries. The Aerocene App is an ever-evolving artwork by Tomás Saraceno.

### **Ask the Spider/Web, with Bollo Pierre**

*Nggàm* divination in Somié, Cameroon

“My name is Bollo, I’m a spider diviner from Somié, Cameroon. Today, I come to offer you the future read by the Spiders and share my practice of Nggàm with the world.” A web/site for mediation between human and spiderly response, *Ask the Spider/Web* is a project by Bollo Pierre with the help of Tomás Saraceno, founder of the Arachnophilia community.

All material published on the web/site remains the intellectual property of the diviners and people of Somié. All funds raised through *Nggàm dù* will be donated to a program of local projects and the remuneration for each diviner's work. Upon visiting the web/site, users can discover the historic and transgenerational practice of spider divination on [nggamdu.org](http://nggamdu.org)

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### ABOUT TOMÁS SARACENO

Tomás Saraceno is an Argentina-born, Berlin-based artist whose projects dialogue with forms of life and life-forming, rethinking dominant threads of knowledge in the Capitalocene era and recognizing how diverse modes of being engage a multiplicity of vibrations on the Web of Life.

For more than two decades, Saraceno has activated projects aimed towards rethinking the co-creation of the atmosphere, including *Museo Aero Solar* (2007–) and the Aerocene Foundation (2015–), towards a society free from carbon emissions and the abuses of the Capitalocene. Aerocene has floated 7,060 minutes in the air free from carbon in 110 tethered flights, 15 free flights, and 8 human flights. The 2020 project *Fly with Aerocene Pacha*, stood in solidarity with the indigenous communities of Salinas Grandes, Jujuy and their protest against harmful lithium extraction practices in northern Argentina. With Aerocene, *Pacha* set 32 world records, marking the most sustainable flight in human history.

Arachnophilia, an interdisciplinary, research-driven community, also emerged from the artist's more than 10 years of collaboration with humans, spiders, and their webs. With researchers at the TU Darmstadt, Saraceno developed the Spider/Web Scan, a novel, laser-supported tomographic technique that allowed precise 3-D models of complex spider/webs to be made for the first time. *Nggàm dù*, a web portal by the spider diviners of Somié, Cameroon, meditates on the possibilities of reciprocal, intercultural and inter- and intraspecies relations.

Saraceno's work with local communities, scientific researchers, and institutions around the world, aims to seek out a more equal balance of human, techno- and bio-diversity, with the understanding that knowledge is produced from specific situations. He has held numerous residencies including MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (2012 – ), Atelier Calder (2010); published in *Nature* and *PNAS*; presented a TED talk; staged artistic interventions with COP20, COP21, and COP26; has lectured at Princeton, Columbia, Centre Pompidou, Herald Design Forum, Hirshhorn Museum, CCK, and Interspecies Internet among other locations.

He has also been the subject of solo exhibitions and permanent installations at museums and institutions internationally, including Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018); Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires (2017); K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Ständehaus, Dusseldorf (2013); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New



York (2012); and Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2011). Saraceno has participated in numerous festivals and biennales, including the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale (2020) and the 53rd and 58th Venice Biennales (2009, 2019).

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### **SUPPORT**

Major support for this exhibition is provided by the Ford Foundation.

The creation of new work at The Shed is generously supported by the Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch Commissioning Fund and the Shed Commissioners. The Shed is connected by Altice.

We would like to recognize the Aerocene and Archnophila communities, along with Studio Tomás Saraceno.

Thanks also to Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York/Los Angeles; Pinksummer, Contemporary Art, Genoa; Neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Andersen's Contemporary, Copenhagen; and Ruth Benzacar Gallery, Buenos Aires.

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### **ABOUT THE SHED**

The Shed is a new cultural institution of and for the 21st century. We produce and welcome innovative art and ideas, across all forms of creativity, to build a shared understanding of our rapidly changing world and a more equitable society. In our highly adaptable building on Manhattan's west side, The Shed brings together established and emerging artists to create new work in fields ranging from pop to classical music, painting to digital media, theater to literature, and sculpture to dance. We seek opportunities to collaborate with cultural peers and community organizations, work with like-minded partners, and provide unique spaces for private events. As an independent nonprofit that values invention, equity, and generosity, we are committed to advancing art forms, addressing the urgent issues of our time, and making our work impactful, sustainable, and relevant to the local community, the cultural sector, New York City, and beyond.