



Michael Barnes
Out & About

Build your own Out & About column

We want your stories on one Austin subject and your pictures of another.

The best ideas for columns often come from readers. With that in mind, we want your stories on one Austin subject and your pictures of another.

As you might have noticed, the Paramount Theatre is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The festivities will culminate in the autumn, when the old vaudeville house brings back its huge vertical-blade sign and throws a giant centenary party.

Many things have happened at the Paramount, not just movies, music, plays or comedy. Locals met there for first dates. They brushed shoulders with celebrities in the lobby. Or maybe they worked there, slinging popcorn or taking tickets.

Please send your personal stories to mbarnes@statesman.com. Attach pertinent images if available.

In the same spirit of "building your own column," we beseech social media buffs to post their images of the new Austin boardwalk on Instagram. (Many of you already have. It's rivaling the Penny-backer Bridge for snapshot status.)

Use two hashtags – #austin360 and #austinboardwalk – and we'll take it from there.

While we are on the subject, you can find a selection of my pictures on Instagram @outandaboutatx. I try to mix Old Austin and New Austin, while sharing tidbits about our city's people, places, culture and history.

For those not already doing

Barnes continued on D10



Joggers and walkers make their way on the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail at Lady Bird Lake. RICARDO B. BRAZZIELL / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

ART



Artist Tom Sachs signs his name and show title "Boombox Retrospective 1999-2015" under the sign for The Contemporary in downtown Austin. His work of boom boxes is on display inside the gallery. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY STEPHEN SPILLMAN

Sight and sound

Contemporary Austin exhibit celebrates artist's craftsmanship and playfulness.

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin
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Tom Sachs is a showman. A few hours before the opening party for his exhibit, at the Contemporary Austin, Sachs mounted a ladder and climbed to the awning that fronts the museum's building on Congress Avenue and Seventh Street.

Then – attracting plenty of attention from passers-by on a busy Friday afternoon – the New York-based artist spray-painted the title of his exhibit on the museum's facade: "Tom Sachs: Boombox Retrospective, 1999-2015."

The following day, arriving to give a talk at the Contemporary's Laguna Gloria site, where several of his large-scale sculptures have joined the Marcus Sculpture Garden, Sachs pulled into the verdant gardens driving a decommissioned 1980s police car and defiantly parked on the manicured lawn in front of the elegant, historic 1916 Driscoll Villa.

Such opening weekend folerol may have passed, but

Sachs continued on D3



"Model One" (2009, mixed media) is one of Tom Sachs' works on display at the Contemporary.

'TOM SACHS: BOOMBOX RETROSPECTIVE, 1999-2015'

When: Through April 19

Where: Contemporary Austin (700 Congress Ave.) and Laguna Gloria (3809 W. 35th St.)

Cost: \$3-\$5 (Tuesdays free)

Information: 512-453-5312, www.thecontemporaryaustin.org

Also inside

» "J.J. Peet: Brain to Heart to Object" is on view at the Contemporary's Gatehouse Gallery, D3

THEATER

Playwright draws on collaboration in her work

Kenah's newest play opens Friday at the Off Center.

By Claire Canavan
Special to the American-Statesman

For local playwright and performer Hannah Kenah, the most exciting theater is forged through the fire of collaboration.



Austin actress, playwright Hannah Kenah

She will lead a team of performers and designers through the blaze as she directs her newest play, "Everything is Established," produced by Physical Plant Theater and opening Friday at the Off Center.

Kenah trained as a performer at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre in northern California, an eclectic program known for its emphasis on devised original work.

"My time at Dell'Arte solidified my interest in devised, physical theater," she said, "but even during college, I always found the most engaging projects to be the new work

– which was often the student work – pieces being built from scratch and on their feet. It is terrifying and challenging to build a new piece of performance, and in the best collaboration processes, it is also joyful and surprising."

After moving to Austin in 2006, Kenah reviewed theater for the Austin Chronicle

Playwright continued on D3

'EVERYTHING IS ESTABLISHED'

When: 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, starting Friday through Feb. 21

Where: Off Center, 2211 Hidalgo St.

Cost: \$12-\$25

Information: www.physicalplant.org

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Sachs

continued from D1

the party that Sachs’ art celebrates starts the moment you step in to the Contemporary’s downtown Jones Center.

There, filling street-level picture windows, is a giant multi-speaker painted plywood boom box.

Standing 8 feet tall and stretching 12 feet long and dubbed “Toyan’s” (it’s named after a Jamaican reggae disc jockey), it’s the largest of Sachs’ 15 handmade sound systems on display.

Like the others, “Toyan’s” is fully functional, its white wood sides bearing the scuff marks of its well-traveled existence over the past decade since Sachs crafted it. (Most of the boom boxes were made for specific happenings and events.)

And yes, “Toyan’s” is a boom box that booms: The well-connected Sachs enlisted celebrity friends including Kanye West and Frank Ocean to create playlists, and the boom boxes on exhibit at the Contemporary are jointly connected to the same music feed.

Wherever you wander in “Boombox Retrospective,” a soundtrack follows you.

Sachs is an irrepressible tinkerer. And though he’s made claims he knows nothing about it, a pirate radio channel broadcasts the exhibit’s soundtrack.

It’s no mistake that the museum timed Sachs’ exhibit to dovetail with the biggest show on Austin’s fest-scape: South By Southwest. (Sachs will be back in town for yet-to-be-announced SXSW



Tom Sachs’ “Toyan’s” (2002) is part of his exhibit in the Jones Center at the Contemporary. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY GENEVIEVE HANSON

events at the museum.)

Electronics-store-geek tinkering is at the heart of Sachs’ boom boxes and much of the artistic output that makes up his two-decade, celebrated career.

Sachs refers to his creative strategy as bricolage – using whatever available quotidian materials are at hand.

And he marshals outdated technological gadgets (cassette tapes, turntables, analog dials) to cobble together his charmingly dorky boom boxes with glue and solder and duct tape.

There’s nothing sloppy or haphazard in the manufacture of these idiosyncratic sound systems.

They are meticulously crafted no matter how worn or outdated or modest the materials.

Two of the boom boxes on display were creat-



Tom Sachs installed his “Miffy Fountain” (2008, silicon bronze and paint) at the Marcus Sculpture Garden at Laguna Gloria.

ed just this past year in Austin, when Sachs spent a few weeks working in

the ceramics studio at the Contemporary’s community art school. Fashion-

ing workable structures out of porcelain proved challenging. Sachs built nearly a dozen, only two of which survived the high-temperature firing process.

Together, stretched out over two floors and augmented by a few other quirky pieces of equipment, including a mobile DJ turntable, Sachs’ orchestra of handmade boom boxes function as a valentine to 1980s urban music culture, a love letter to a very specific kind of technology that shaped the way we listened to music.

Sachs takes his boom box geekiness to a unique level with his bodega installation – a version of the type of modest convenience stores that once dotted New York.

At the Contemporary, Sachs’ bodega is wired with speakers like a boom box, but it is also staffed and fully stocked – and selling – an oddball selection of wares from wire and electrical supplies to popcorn and cat food.

For all Sachs’ geeky fanboy homage to the boom box, a few of his other works in the exhibit reveal the rather self-conscious impertinence and coy provocation that’s part of his artistic ethos.

Sachs fashioned a certain bad-boy profile for himself early in his career with his irreverent co-opting of consumer culture icons.

Among other ersatz products, he made a 21-foot-tall “Hello Kitty” bronze sculpture and crafted a Chanel chain-saw out of cardboard.

At the Contemporary’s Jones Center, there’s a couple of Sachs’ Miffy

ALSO ON VIEW

“J. J. Peet: Brain to Heart to Object”
When: Through April 19
Where: Gatehouse Gallery at Laguna Gloria, 3809 W. 35th St.
A master ceramicist, J.J. Peet served as a mentor to Tom Sachs, helping him craft fully operable boom boxes from porcelain. For a small solo exhibit in the Contemporary’s Gatehouse Gallery, Peet presents a collection of small-scale sculpture, hybrid porcelain objects that are imagined devices for seeing, much like cameras or viewfinders. Peet’s whimsical combination of found objects and a deliberately handmade aesthetic are more mischievous than they might seem at first glance.

sculptures made of foam-core, riffs on the popular storybook character. At Laguna Gloria, there’s a bronze Miffy fountain, water spurting out of its eyes. It’s a little glib.

There’s more sincerity – and sheer fun – to the boom boxes. With them, Sachs puts on quite a show.

Contact Jeanne Claire van Ryzin at 512-445-3699.

Playwright

continued from D1

and performed with local companies. In 2008, she was cast in the Rude Mechanicals’ production of “I’ve Never Been So Happy” and has been performing with the experimental company ever since.

In recent years, her work as a playwright has expanded.

She wrote the text for the Rude Mechs’ “Now Now Oh Now” and penned an original show for Salvage Vanguard Theater called “Guest by Courtesy.” Kenah’s writing is strongly influenced by what she’s learned as a performer, and she tends to prefer work that entwines language and physicality.

“Probably due to growing up with a mother who is a children’s book author, I am drawn to distilled worlds and stories that seem to take place in a time and space of their own,” Kenah said.

“Everything is Established” features just this kind of distilled world. The show hinges on the simple and farcical premise that two servants find their lives changed when their master dies. They hang around the now-



Michael Joplin (left) plays Plaster, Jeffrey Mills is Montgomery and Lee Eddy is Sally in Physical Plant Theater’s production “Everything Is Established.” The play is about servants whose lives are changed when their master dies. CONTRIBUTED BY ROBERT GOYER

trashed house enjoying their freedom, when suddenly their former master’s mail-order bride shows up. The surprised servants feel the need to pretend the master is still alive, so they grab one of his old coats and devise a ruse to fool the bride.

Kenah first drafted the play while an undergraduate at Dartmouth College, and after putting it away for years, she’s been enjoying the process of revisit-

ing an old script. In case you’re imagining a period piece focused on master-servant relationships (“Downton Abbey” comes to mind), Kenah emphasized that the show is not set in any specific place or time period but in an archetypal, storybook kind of world.

To create this timeless quality, set designer Stephanie Busing has imagined a minimalist set that represents Kenah’s world, “the bones of

a once elegant home, left behind by a cranky imperialist. What we are met with on stage is the nest his servants have made of the place.”

Composer Graham Reynolds will underscore the mood of the piece through original music.

The world premiere play features three top-notch performers – Lee Eddy, Michael Joplin and Jeffery Mills. Eddy returns to the Austin stage after spending years in

New York, and all are known for their comedic chops.

Though Kenah had a script written when rehearsals started, she has been leaving space for the performers to change the text based on discoveries they make in rehearsal.

“You can’t work with such good improvisers without wanting to honor the hilarious stuff they’re coming up with,” she said. “They make up a fireball of a cast.”

A veteran collaborator, Kenah makes sure to acknowledge the contributions that her actors, design team and producer Steve Moore have made to “Everything is Established.”

“My favorite thing about new work is it makes every individual in the room an integral part of the process,” she said, “and the product becomes something that none of the individuals could have or would have created on their own.”

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