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VOGUE

Tom Sachs Unveils His Nike Mars Yard Overshoe Collaboration in His New Film *Paradox Bullets*

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Tom Sachs holding the Mars Yard Overshoe. Photo: Courtesy of Tom Sachs

There are a lot of headliners in Tom Sachs's latest film, *Paradox Bullets*, which premiered today at the Frieze art fair in London. Ed Ruscha is its leading man. Werner Herzog is its narrator. Van Neistat cowrote the script. Virgil Abloh will deejay its after-party. Oh, and in the film Sachs reveals his 11-years-in-the-making project with Nike, the new Mars Yard Overshoe.

The film, a spiritual successor in many ways to Sachs's work *10 Bullets*, is a meditation on contradiction, complexity, nuance, and the fealty of rules. Ruscha plays a man in the Mojave Desert who loses his keys while attempting an important delivery. Things go haywire from there, with Sach's new set of guidelines, the Paradox Bullets, to lead Ruscha. Among them contradictions like, "Do the easy things first. Do the hard things first." and "Never freak out. The virtues of a freak-out."

En route to the film's premiere, Sachs rang up *Vogue* for a quick chat about working with his "art dads," his new sneaker, and the difficulties of conveying complex messaging in an increasingly 2-D world.

Hi Tom! Can you speak to the idea behind *Paradox Bullets*—how does this concept relate to *10 Bullets*? Is there a "message" for viewers to take away from the films?

Ten Bullets, that's kind of the like the 10 Commandments, these rules that we live by—but you can't really live by them, it's more of a compass to point you in the right direction. *Ten Bullets* have been around for a while and it's been our benchmark for how we live and die in the studio, and *Paradox Bullets* is in a way a softer approach where it embraces the contradiction. It's another set of 10 bullets—it's actually nine bullets—but they're pairs so you have a contradiction like, "Do the hard things first," and then the opposite, equally valid, "Do the easy things first." So *Paradox Bullets* is a story about a man who loses his keys in the desert and has to use [nine] bullets to get home, but they don't really work. He's got to embrace the contradictions of rules to get the job done, which is to survive.

I think a lot of this idea comes from me breaking one of the cardinal rules of being a YouTube filmmaker and that's "Thou shall not read thy comments," because people are so filled with hatred. I've noticed that [the thing] extending all this hatred is that people want to have clear, rational answers. In life things are always filled with contradiction and nothing is simple. So we wanted to make a movie that really embraced those contradictions, that's why it's called paradox.

Why did you want to work with Ed Ruscha and Werner Herzog on the project?

I think Ed and Werner are like my dads, like my art dads—actually they're about my dad's age. Philosophically, they're my parents because when I was growing up we only had three VHS tapes—because when I [was a] kid VHS tapes cost like 80 bucks each—and one of the three that we owned was *Fitzcarraldo*. I watched it over and over again as a kid. My writing style, the movies that Van [Neistat] and I write together, are always kind of in Werner's voice. I'm always thinking like, *How would it sound coming out of his voice?* When we wrote the movie we brought it to him and asked him as his disciples if he would do it. In a way, there are a couple different voices in this movie, but he's the voice of authority. He's the character who says, "The opposite is equally valid." To have a voice of authority telling you [the opposite idea is valid]—people like Rush Limbaugh and those guys who are in office get elected because they sell certainty over truth. Truth is very unpredictable and scary. Certainty, even if it's wrong, is an easier pill to swallow. We're trying to make a movie about uncertainty.

Then, of course, Ed is the guy who married Pop Art to Conceptual Art. He is the best art book maker ever. I do Pop Art and Conceptual Art and make books, so Ed has always been a huge influence in so many ways. I've known Ed as friends for many years and I asked him if he would be interested. Immediately he said yes and he loved the idea . . . He even got involved and he did the scouting locations on his own. I don't want to reveal too much, but it's a portrait of the Mojave Desert, where Ed lives sometimes.



Ed Ruscha in the film Paradox Bullets. Photo: Courtesy of Tom Sachs

What was the process of working with Ed and Werner like? Was it very collaborative or were you able to have a sort of directorial dictatorship?

It's collaborative, but I think when you're aligned with people in a true genetic sense, you do the same things automatically. Van and I have been working together for like 20 years, so our ideas are the same, we finish each other's sentences. With Ed and Werner the only things those guys did was make it better because they have more experience and time. There were never disagreements, it was only refinement. I think those are the best collaborations. Sure, I'm kind of the final word, I guess, and there were things that we, maybe, didn't always agree upon because we're different people, but again we're part of the same continuum. There's this concept in Japanese culture called on, and it means this idea or project or company is handed down to me by my forefathers and I am building it to hand it down to the next generation. It's this ideological genealogy.

Tell me about the new sneaker—how is it an evolution of the Mars Yard and Mars Yard 2.0?

The Mars Yard was made for Tommaso Rivellini at the Jet Propulsion Lab so he could work at the synthetic Mars Yard . . . the high-tech materials were great for Mars but failed on earth. The main change on the 2.0 was using polyester, something much less exotic than Vectran, something more normal, and it worked really well. It was also more durable and breathable—a refinement.

This new shoe, we're calling it the Overshoe, and it's a Mars Yard that's wrapped in a Dyneema bag. Dyneema is another super high-tech waterproof material. It's designed to keep your feet warm in the miserable month of March. Our nickname for it is the March Yard. You can even roll it down if you go inside so your feet can breathe. It's sort of like a winter boot that you can go running in with total confidence.

As an artist and collaborator of many other artists and companies, what appeals to you about collaborating with Nike?

There's a huge community with Nike, and I think probably the biggest thing that inspires me is that we have these shared ideals of: work first. It's not just about winning the marathon, it's about training for it. It's not about finishing the sculpture, it's the act of making things. For me,

the advantage of being in the studio is I can make something one at a time, 19th-century-style. Nike doesn't have that advantage, but has the ability to build thousands of products. As a result you have to make different kinds of decisions, and that process is very inspiring and challenging for me. I only do things that are interesting and keep me on my toes It's a really major achievement, the shoe. I'm very, very proud of it. It's something that I started working on in 2007 and just came to life this year. It's something I didn't know for sure if it was ever going really happen. It's kind of a reminder that nothing can take the place of tenacity.