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MAGASIN 3
STOCKHOLM KONSTHALL

TOM **FRIEDMAN**

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COLOPHONE

THE BOOK

Tom Friedman – Up in the Air

by Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, 2013

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THE EXHIBITION

Up in the Air

by Tom Friedman at Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall

5 February – 6 June, 2010

Exhibition curator: Richard Julin

Curatorial Assistant: Lisa Boström

Museum Director: David Neuman

PA Museum Director: Katja Finkel

Deputy Director, Chief Curator: Richard Julin

Curator: Tessa Praun

Curator Program and Education: Sara Källström, Liv Stoltz
(substitute)

Curator of Collection Research/Senior Registrar: Bronwyn Griffith

Curatorial Assistant: Nina Øverli

Communications Manager: Lisa Boström

Administrative Director: Tove Schalin

Administrator: Erika Magnusson, Erik Jonsson (substitute)

Chief Technician (Exhibitions): Christopher Garney

Chief Technician (Collection): Thomas Nordin

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TOM **FRIEDMAN**

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PROLOGUE

David Neuman

Museum Director
Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall

FOR CLOSE TO THIRTY YEARS Magasin 3 has provided intellectual, curatorial and financial opportunities for visual artists from all over the world to create artworks that reach outside the conventional institutional parameters.

Tom Friedman's *Up in the Air* is truly in that category, a breathtaking and extraordinary work of art. At its unveiling at our institution in the spring of 2010 no one had a firm count of just how many individual handmade sculptures were hanging from the ceiling. Over 500 objects? Easily. More than 800 objects? Maybe.

I remember the crates of whimsical, beautifully crafted compositions and the realization that there might not be enough space to hang them all in our vast main exhibition gallery. Rightly, I assumed the unutilized sculptures would have to wait to be viewed in an installation at another museum some time in the future.

Tom's world is intriguing. He approaches the complexity of the paradoxical society we live in by allowing himself to freeze moments and statements of our time. Many of the images are tremendously personal, sometimes coming from his unedited dream world, but always straight from the core of human observation and often very close to the marvelous free zone called humor. All these valuable combinations make Tom Friedman's artworks unique and accessible.

Utterly convinced that the artwork *Up in the Air* warranted a comprehensive presentation, in book form, we are pleased to present this publication. It is the result of three years of close collaboration with Tom. There have been a number of individuals involved; my gratitude is primarily directed towards the artist, Tom Friedman and his creative genius, Magasin 3's deputy director, an amazing chief curator and a dear friend, Richard Julin, Tom's wife Mary Ryan and his team in Massachusetts and finally the dedicated staff at Magasin 3, all of whom are invaluable.







ALL THAT IS SOLID

Charlotte Eyerman
Art Historian and Curator

If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts: but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.

Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626)

The world is tumultuous and unpredictable, rife with violence and also filled with hope and possibility. New discoveries, modes of thinking, and technologies expand the boundaries of what and how we know. Religion, politics, science, philosophy, business, and art intersect, sometimes with great friction. Wars rage on and disruption lurks around every corner. Extreme opulence and extreme poverty co-exist, as some enjoy abundance to the point of waste, while others barely subsist. Economic over-extension has led to a dramatic and precipitous bubble bursting, plunging the previously prosperous into bankruptcy and despair. What are our values? What will endure? When, if ever, will prosperity and stability return?

Such was the state of the world in the early 17th century in Europe, as the Thirty Years' War (really, a series of wars, that went on for more than three decades) raged on until the Peace of Westphalia brought it to an end in 1648 (... other wars would ensue, of course). The "tulip mania," an economic bubble brought on by the speculative market in tulip bulbs resulted in financial ruin for once-prosperous Holland when it peaked in 1637. Religious and political tensions wracked all of Europe. And through it all, some of the most important artistic and intellectual advances emerged. These were the times that brought us Shakespeare's plays, Sir Francis Bacon's philosophy, Rubens' massive religious and political paintings, Caravaggio's radical vision of faith rooted in the mundane, Bernini's ecstatic and noble sculptures, the classical restraint of the French artists Lorrain and Poussin, the triumph of everyday life painting and the still life in Holland, and ultimately the poetic, preternatural calm of

Vermeer, who was born as the “tulip mania” hit and war raged. Art has always thrived in times of conflict and survived periods of boom and bust, responding to new challenges and new moments with fresh answers in the form of new subjects, techniques, and ways of experiencing it. Innovation has never been in short supply.

Arguably, such is the state of the world today. And like the great artists and thinkers before him, Tom Friedman faces difficult times and difficult questions with a keen eye, a skeptic’s distance, and, thankfully, an extremely healthy sense of humor. He is an artist with a philosopher’s bent. Without irony, he recently remarked (in the context of a talk at a museum showing his work), “I make things and the art context is where they belong. If there were another context, they could go there.” He articulates that he is interested in making art that draws attention to the processes of looking and his works clearly reflect this.

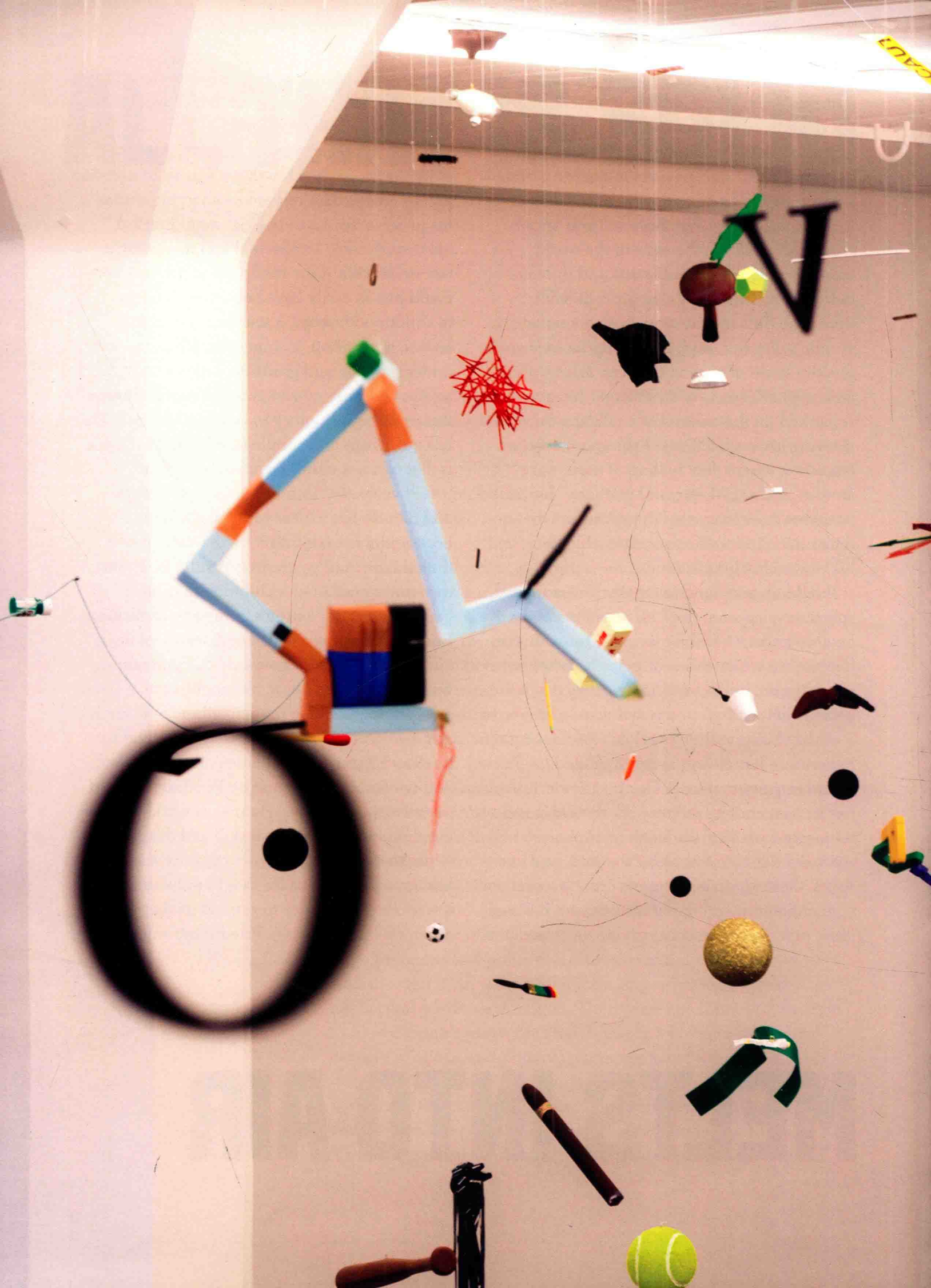
Friedman asks fundamentally philosophical, specifically epistemological, questions about how we know what we know, and by extension, how we see what we see or perceive what we see. His aim, in his words, is to “slow down the process of looking,” precisely because we live in a world of information overload. Perhaps human experience has always accommodated intellectual and sensory overload. Our postmodern world has its own endless military conflicts and various tulip-esque manias: the stock market crash of 1988, the dot-com bubble of the mid- and late 1990s, the subprime mortgage crisis (and related, concomitant on-going crises) unleashed in 2008. Now, however, these crises are documented and

communicated by a 24-hour news cycle with global and instantaneous reach and seem to be a different animal altogether.

It is this current context of cultural static and strife that nourishes Friedman’s drive to question and to create. The two are inseparable within his process. Fortunately, Friedman directed his considerable intellectual and imaginative resources toward the discipline of art, but he could just as easily have become a magician (a childhood hobby), a scientist, a doctor, a lawyer, a musician, a comedian. He pursued undergraduate and graduate degrees in art, and as a practitioner of over twenty years he brings these realms of inquiry to bear on his work. He has a rigorous and supple mind, and his stance is that of a not-entirely-amused outsider.

Up in the Air, Tom Friedman’s new work that debuted in 2010 at Magasin 3 on the occasion of an exhibition by the same name, took the form of an enormous still life. It was the centerpiece of an exhibition that showcases Friedman’s extremely varied production. Friedman’s *oeuvre* celebrates diversity of form and materials, and resists easy categorization. He is at once a sculptor, a draughtsman, a painter, a photographer, a participant in “new media,” and a conceptual artist. His materials tend to be drawn from the mundane and the familiar, and are then transformed by Friedman’s “mad scientist” imagination. He makes works that are dazzling in their technical skill and discipline, while seemingly simple or straightforward. He has a magician’s love for sleight of hand and the trickster’s impulse to remind us that things are not what they seem. Friedman’s works

MELTS INTO AIR





invite questions about what is real, about how we see. They beg questions that are sometimes benign and gentle, and sometimes menacing, and often these notes are struck within the same works.

Both *Up in the Air* (the work of art) and “Up in the Air” (the exhibition) invite the viewer into Friedman’s uniquely complex world where science, popular culture, dreams/nightmares, fantasies, fears, politics, and humor coexist. They are not neatly or antiseptically separate, but rather experienced all at once.

Up in the Air is Friedman’s response to the financial collapse that engulfed the international community at the end of 2008. It is, as he articulates it, an artwork that explores the notion of the “open system,” as opposed to a closed system (which his artistic practice has also considered). Friedman appropriates these notions from the laws of thermodynamics and applies them within the realm of art and the experience of viewing. An “open system” continuously interacts with its environment, whereas a “closed system” does not. *Up in the Air* celebrates the idea of the open system, as it is a potentially infinite installation, limited only by the all too familiar mandates of time and space.

The objects that together create the work are all handmade, a notion which defies our expectations. Since it is suspended from the ceiling, literally floating on air, this assemblage is at once a kind of giant collage and a brilliant riff on the great tradition of *trompe l’oeil* (“fool the eye”) painting. Also, Friedman’s choice to make a complex, multi-faceted work that engages the ceiling invokes predecessors as varied as Michelangelo, Mantegna, Le Brun, Tiepolo, Delacroix, and Duchamp (with whom he has the most in common), among others.

Friedman’s operatic ceiling is not a painted illusion, but rather a joyously cacophonous celebration of the stuff and the “thingness” of everyday materials. He employs all manner of objects, all laboriously handmade in his Western Massachusetts studio. They are variously abstract and representational, literal and metaphoric. His subject matter is all that is relevant to our time, and specifically to American (and/or Western) consumer culture. Friedman admits an obsessive relationship to complexity, and our ambitiously consumerist culture is the kind of open system that fascinates him. He employs a scientific methodology of modeling (both through drawing and an almost zen-like meditative practice to imagine how the objects will behave in space), particularly when his subject is a complex system. He creates without judgment, however, and employs a kind of “equal opportunity” playfulness, even when the objects he creates have sinister associations. Offsetting the grimness of objects that signify death or fascism or oppression (all of which play a role in *Up in the Air*),