Press Release, Monday 15th May 2023

**TOMÁS SARACENO IN COLLABORATION**

**WEB(S) OF LIFE**

*When clouds appear like rocks and towers, the Earth’s refreshed with frequent showers.*

*If you want to live and thrive, let the spiders run alive.*

At Serpentine South, and in The Royal Parks
1 June – 10 September 2023
Press view: Wednesday 31 May, 9:30am – 12pm

In the presence of Tomás Saraceno, Verónica Chávez, President of the Indigenous Community Santuario Tres Pozos, Maximiliano Laina, Filmmaker, Natividad Vílte, President of the Indigenous Community Sol de Mayo – El Moreno, and David Zeitlyn, Professor of anthropology at Oxford University among others

Left: Indigenous Communities of Salinas Grandes and Laguna de Guayatayoc with Aerocene Community demonstrate against lithium extraction, in January, 2020. Cuidemos la Pachamama - “Let’s take care of
Mother Earth”. Right: ON AIR, Card 9 out of a deck of 33 Arachnomancy Cards, 2019-ongoing. Let your future be read by a spider/web with the Arachnomancy app. Courtesy of the artist and the arachnophilia community.

From 1 June to 10 September 2023, Serpentine will present Web(s) of Life, the first major exhibition in the UK of artist Tomás Saraceno and collaborators, including spider/webs; the communities of Salinas Grandes and Laguna de Guayatayoc, Argentina; spider diviners in Somié, Cameroon; the ongoing research-driven community projects Aerocene and Arachnophilia initiated by the artist; as well as the life forms of the Royal Parks.

Tomás Saraceno will create a porous environment where Serpentine’s building and operations will respond daily to the immediate landscape of the surrounding park and weather conditions. It will bring together new and recent interactive works to propose how it is possible to take a more responsible, and responsive, approach to one’s actions in relation to other people, interspecies co-habitation, and the climate injustices unfolding across the world. Challenging the ways in which exhibitions are conceived and enacted, Web(s) of Life will become a ‘living organism’ that responds to the weather outside and the gallery’s unique location in the biodiverse habitat of the park and beyond.

Saraceno is a multimedia artist, who for more than two decades has produced a body of work that draws attention to our role in a complex network of relationships that make up an ecosystem. Web(s) of Life at Serpentine will delve into the many ways in which life forms, extractive technologies, and energy regimes are inextricably linked to climate injustice.

In Web(s) of Life, Tomás Saraceno asks: “In the context of the environmental crisis and the need for a just, eco-social, energy transition, can the socio eco(nomical) debt of the global North be equitably taken into account? Can techno-diversity and biodiversity interact differently? Can systems of power move beyond the inequalities of capitalism and the reproduction of neocolonial extractivism of minerals and data? Can the privilege of digital memories over ancestral memories be overcome? Enter the spider’s dream, a space with codes of another ritual... It is high time some of us change our habits and not the climate!”

Bettina Korek, CEO, Serpentine, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine, say: “We’re honoured to partner with The Royal Parks to extend Tomás Saraceno’s exhibition beyond the walls of the Serpentine South Gallery and into Kensington Gardens. The most ambitious show in the UK to date by the Argentine artist, Saraceno will put his decades of research bridging the natural and social sciences, and visual arts into action as a fully participatory creative intervention that is as alive as the audiences it touches. Saraceno is moved by a desire to raise awareness on the climate emergency through practical solutions, and by activating the natural setting that surrounds us, this partnership promises to deliver on Serpentine’s mission of building new connections between artist and society.”
The exhibition is conceived as a performative intervention into the Serpentine’s power supply, what the artist refers to as the “Ballad of Weather Dependency”. Energy for the exhibition will be generated by, and dependent on, solar panels newly installed on Serpentine’s roof. The artworks on display will adapt according to the daily levels of energy generated. The actions of the participants, the weather and fluctuating levels of energy play a crucial role in the exhibition.

The infrastructure of the Serpentine’s building will shift. Equipment used to control the temperature and humidity will be switched off and some doorways in the gallery will be opened to allow natural ventilation and encourage the movement of different forms of life.

Through these subtle interventions, the working habits of the gallery’s staff, the opening hours of the exhibition space and the ways in which visitors can participate and view the works will shift daily. Should a heatwave occur, rather than using climate control within the gallery space, areas of the exhibition will close, and visitors will be encouraged to engage with the multispecies and interactive sculptures that populate the exterior of the building and the park.

Saraceno has long called for close observation of spiders as a source of wonder and inspiration. The extraordinary architecture of their webs and their myriad behaviours encourage a move from arachnophobia (a fear of spiders) to arachnophilia (a love of spiders).

**Inside**, Saraceno will present a constellation of intricate spider webs woven in his Berlin studio, in collaboration with multiple spider species.

A new work will repurpose a disused confessional booth, traditionally found in churches, as a space for communing with the vibrations of a spider.

Upon entry, visitors will be invited to relinquish their mobile phones before encountering a projected film by the spider diviners of Somié, Cameroon that presents their intergenerational practice of ṣgam dû. Relieved of our phones and the ability to map and document our place in the world through real time data, visitors are invited to slow down and use other senses. During ṣgam dû, binary questions are presented to a ground-dwelling spider whose responses are interpreted via its rearrangement of a set of cards that have been placed at the entrance to its burrow. Local diviner Bollo Pierre ‘Tados’ invites visitors to ask the spider a question via their web portal titled Nggamdu.org. In an era of rapid technological advancement, Saraceno points to the practice of looking to bioindicators: organisms that can signal shifts in weather, climate, pollution levels, and ecological well-being.

Central to the exhibition is Saraceno’s filmic installation *Fly with Pacha, Into the Aerocene* (2020–23) which documents the artistic performance and flight of an aerosolar balloon sculpture over the salt flats in Salinas Grandes, Argentina. The flight marked the first
ever fossil-free human flight without batteries, helium, hydrogen or lithium and was recognised as the most sustainable flight in human history by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), setting 32 world records. This was the result of extensive, collaborative research carried out by the Aerocene Foundation (an interdisciplinary group founded by Saraceno that seeks to devise new infrastructures of planetary mobility and ethics) and the indigenous communities of the Salinas Grandes and Laguna de Guayatayoc basin in Jujuy who are fighting for the preservation of land and water which is threatened by the mining of lithium – a material used predominantly in batteries for mobile phones, vehicles and other electrical devices – for an energy transition mainly in the global North at the determinant to the global South.

Outside in the Royal Parks, visitors will encounter interactive sculptures from Saraceno’s Cloud Cities series that engage with the park’s rich biodiversity of birds, insects, foxes, ducks and other species. Highlighting the decline of urban wildlife populations and their role in the collapse of ecosystems, newly commissioned cloud-like sculptures populate the park, the rooftop and façade of the building, offering spaces of interspecies encounters and co-habitation.

A cycle-powered web server invites riders to generate energy as they listen to a reading of the Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South from the Peoples of the South, which ‘rejects false solutions that come with new forms of energy colonialism, now in the name of a Green transition.’ For those pedalling, the social cost of energy and water regimes to power the internet is made immediate and physical.

‘Constantly alive’, the exhibition invites viewers to consider the distant effects of local actions. With the Aerocene App (via aerocene.org), visitors can become part of a community that imagines how it would be to float through and with the air, powered only by the sun, free from fossil fuels and lithium. With the Arachnomancy App (via arachnophilia.net), participants are invited to consult with real spider/web oracles through Arachnomancy card readings. A dedicated exhibition portal (websof.life) will host contextual material and petitions by collaborators of Web(s) of Life.

During the time of the exhibition, the conversation with Saraceno’s collaborators continues. The artist’s ongoing commitment to these communities will also take the form of implementing a new model of art stewardship, known as Partial Common Ownership. This model has been devised to honour the relational nature of artworks that are inspired by communities engaged in critical societal struggles such as climate justice.

Made in collaboration with Serpentine’s Future Art Ecosystems team and RadicalxChange – a movement for 21st century political economies – a new partial common ownership system for time-based ownership of art will be launched at the closing of the exhibition. This aims to highlight the possibility of art to create more symbiotic forms of conceptual and economic interdependence.
Over the course of the summer, weather dependent arachnomancy readings will take place in the park. The exhibition will culminate with a day-long festival taking place on Saturday 9 September and will include talks, conversations, workshops, ‘do-it together’ activities and in the spirit of the exhibition, a weather dependent Aerocene flight. On the evening of 1 June, a panel discussion will take place in which the artist will be present. Further information to be announced in due course.

Notes to Editors

Tomás Saraceno is an Argentina-born, Berlin-based artist and researcher whose projects dialogue with forms of life and life-forming, rethinking dominant threads of knowledge in the Capitalocene era and recognising how diverse modes of being reveal a multiplicity of meanings.

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, for ecosocial justice. *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 led the development of 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, pursuing the unfolding of science through collaborations with world renowned institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Max Planck Institute. Nggamdu.org, 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 biodiversity, 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) following the Calder Prize (2009); published in Nature and PNAS; presented a TED talk; staged artistic interventions with COP20, COP21, and COP26; has lectured at Princeton, Columbia, Centre Pompidou, Davos, Hirshhorn Museum, CCK, among other locations; and received recognitions such as the Konex Platinum Award in Art and Technology (2022).

Saraceno has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, and permanent installations at museums and institutions internationally, including the Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania (2022); The Shed, New York (2022); Towada Art Center, Japan (2021); Carte Blanche at 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), and is part of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fundació Sorigüé Fundación Hortensia Herrero, Arnault Collection, Boros Collection Fontanals-Cisneros, TBA 21 (Thyssen Bornemisza Collection), Espace Muraille Dragonfly Collection, Fundación Helga de Alvear, Foster Collection, Sammlung KiCo, Kupferstichkabinett Museum Berlin, and QAGOMA Brisbane, among others.

Saraceno has participated in numerous festivals and biennales, including the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale (2020) and the 53rd and 58th Venice Biennales (2009, 2019).

About Serpentine

Creating new connections between artists and society, Serpentine presents pioneering contemporary art exhibitions and cultural events with a legacy that stretches back over half a century, from a wide range of emerging practitioners to the most internationally recognised artists, writers, scientists, thinkers, and cultural thought leaders of our time. Based in London’s Kensington Gardens, across two sites, Serpentine North and Serpentine South, Serpentine features a year-round, free programme of exhibitions, architectural showcases, education, live events and technological activations, in the park and beyond the gallery walls.

The Serpentine Pavilion is a yearly pioneering commission, which began in 2000 with Dame Zaha Hadid. It features the first UK structures by some of the biggest names in international architecture.

Public art has emerged as a central strand of Serpentine’s prrogramme. Major presentations include a collection of Eduardo Paolozzi’s sculptures (1987), Anish Kapoor’s Turning the World Upside Down (2010), Lee Ufan presented Relatum – Stage (2018-19), Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s London Mastaba in the Serpentine Lake (2018), I LOVE YOU EARTH by Yoko Ono (2021), Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster In remembrance of the coming alien (Alienor), (2022), and Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg’s Pollinator Pathmaker (2022 - ongoing).

Proud to maintain free access for all visitors, thanks to its unique location, Serpentine also reaches an exceptionally broad audience and maintains a profound connection with its local community.

When clouds appear like rocks and towers, the Earth’s refreshed with frequent showers.
If you want to live and thrive, let the spiders run alive.

* Popular proverbs

For more information, please contact:
Nicolas Smirnoff, Head of Media Relations, NicolasS@serpentinegalleries.org
Funmi Lijadu, Press Officer, Funmil@serpentinegalleries.org
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TOMÁS SARACENO IN COLLABORATION: WEB(S) OF LIFE

List of works

Gallery (anti-clockwise from entrance)

*Ballad of Weather Dependency, 2023*
Interspecies, intergenerational performance, power systems, behavioural change, life cycles, climate dependent, duration variable
Courtesy of the sun, the clouds, the spider webs... with Tomás Saraceno
Special thanks to Painting S.R.L Luzara RE, Italy; Carlo and Isabelle Clavarino; Candido and Carla Fendi Speroni Foundation, Rome; Hofima SPA; Erica Roberts; Teresa A. L. Bulgheroni; Michele E. A. Codoni; and Paolo and Olimpia Falcone for the Falcone Foundation for the Arts, Palermo/Rome

*The birds will keep calling you, 2023*
Twenty-one repurposed wood and glass cabinets, minerals, tokens, mobile phones, low consumption LEDs
Courtesy the artist

*Nggamdu.org, 2021–ongoing*
Excerpts from Nggamdu.org
Courtesy Bollo Pierre ‘Tadios’, Iréné Nguea, ηgam (the spider)

*World(ing)WideWeb(s).Life, 2023*
Spider silk, lights, tree branches, spider frames, glass
Courtesy of the spider webs... with Tomás Saraceno

*Particular Matter(s), 2023*
Light beam, cosmic dust, PM2.5 (particulate matter), stellar wind, air movement, kinaesthetic feedback, sonic waves, video camera, speakers
Courtesy the artist

*ArachnoAnacróArcano, 2023*
Refurbished neo-Renaissance confessional stall, spider/webs vibrations, shakers, spider sculptures, cushions, stained glass
Courtesy the spider webs... with Tomás Saraceno
Webs.Life 202.3 (Zombie spider), 2023
Eight framed embroideries
Courtesy the artist

Fly with Pacha, Into the Aerocene, 2017–ongoing
Single channel video, with archival material from the 2017, 2020 and 2023 gatherings in Salinas Grandes and Laguna de Guayatayoc Basin, Argentina, as well as material from Aerocene and Museo Aerosolar, 2007–ongoing
67 min 15 sec
Video directed by Maximiliano Laina and Tomás Saraceno
Special thanks to Espace Muraille, Eric and Caroline Freymond
Courtesy of Aerocene

Wayra, 2023
Mixed media canvases
Courtesy the artist

Cloud Cities: Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, 2023
Three clouds with cohabitational spaces for thirteen species and...
Courtesy the House Sparrow, Blue Tit, Robin, Starling, Barn Owl, Jackdaw, Great tit, Wren, Yorkshire Terrier, Domestic Short-hair Cat, Red Squirrel, Solitary Bees, Butterflies... with Tomás Saraceno
*Title taken from French novelist Georges Perec’s collection of writing Species of Spaces and Other Pieces (1974).

Cloud Cities: Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, 2023
Four clouds with cohabitational spaces for eight species and...
Courtesy the House Sparrow, Starling, Spotted Flycatcher, Swift, Kestrel, Jackdaw, Butterflies, Insects... with Tomás Saraceno
*Title taken from French novelist Georges Perec’s collection of writing Species of Spaces and Other Pieces (1974).

In the shadows, 2023
Various animal silhouettes
Courtesy the artist
Outdoor works

Weathervane, 2023
Mixed media
Courtesy the wind, the sun... with Tomás Saraceno

Arachnomancy reading session with arachnomancy desk of thirty-three cards printed on carbon footprint neutral paper
Courtesy the spider and spider webs, the diviners... with Tomás Saraceno

Bi-cycles for life-cycles (go as fast as you can, as slow as you must*), 2023
Bicycle generators, trolley, pedal-powered web server streaming a reading of Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South, read by Manthia Diawara
Courtesy the Ecosocial and Intercultural Pact of the Peoples of the South with Aerocene
*Title taken from a quote by American educator and psychologist Anna Gillingam

Cloud Cities: Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, 2023
Four clouds with cohabitational spaces for eight species and...
Courtesy the House Sparrow, Starling, Spotted Flycatcher, Swift, Kestrel, Jackdaw, Butterflies, Insects... with Tomás Saraceno
*Title taken from French novelist Georges Perec’s collection of writing Species of Spaces and Other Pieces (1974).

In the shadows, 2023
Various animal silhouettes
Courtesy the artist

Cloud Cities: Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, 2023
One cloud with cohabitational spaces for twenty-four species and...
Courtesy the Swift, Kestrel, Barn Owl, Tawny Owl, Green Woodpecker, Jackdaw, Spotted Flycatcher, Starling, House Sparrow, Robin, Pied Flycatcher, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, House Martin, Marsh Tit, Red Squirrel, Hedgehog, Two Coloured Sheet Web Spider, Pomeranian Dog, Domestic Shorthair Cat, Butterflies... with Tomás Saraceno
*Title taken from French novelist Georges Perec’s collection of writing Species of Spaces and Other Pieces (1974).