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‘You Cannot Stop Creativity’: Jérôme Sans on Denver’s New Cookie Factory Art Space

The curator speaks to *frieze* about transforming a former fortune cookie factory into a kunsthalle-style space, resisting institutional constraints, and why Denver might just be the art world’s best-kept secret

BY JÉRÔME SANS AND TERENCE TROUILLOT IN INTERVIEWS | 23 MAY 25



This weekend, Denver’s cultural landscape gains a striking new addition with the opening of Cookie Factory, a contemporary art space housed in a former fortune cookie factory in the city’s Baker neighbourhood.

Conceived by philanthropist, real estate developer and designer Amanda J. Precourt and artist Andrew Jensdotter, the institution is free to the public, dedicated to commissioning new work, and operates outside a traditional non-profit model – eschewing a board and donor competition in favour of curatorial independence. To shape its vision, they invited renowned curator Jérôme Sans to serve as artistic director.



Terence Trouillot Let’s start with the space itself. It’s a former fortune cookie factory in Denver’s Baker neighbourhood – now home to a new kunsthalle-style institution. How did that context shape your vision as artistic director?

Jérôme Sans: Everything started with a shared vision and a unique historical fortune cookie factory in city’s Baker residential neighbourhood. We didn’t want to create just another space to display a private collection. The context – human-scale and walkable – was key. It inspired us to create a new model for a space where the content would extend beyond the private walls into the public sphere, where artists would engage the neighbourhood not only through exhibitions, but also community activations, block parties, and performances across disciplines. The idea was to create a living organism – something in dialogue with its surroundings, yet resonating nationally and internationally. For us, an institution shouldn’t just open doors and windows – it should open minds and boundaries.

The fortune cookie became a metaphor. When you open one, there’s a message inside. You read it aloud, you share it around the table – it becomes a moment of exchange. That’s how I see this space: not centripetal but centrifugal. It radiates outward and invites participation. It’s inclusive by design.

TT And on a practical level, it’s also a very human-scale institution.

JS Yes. There’s an obsession today with making things bigger but bigger doesn’t always resonate. We wanted something more modest and rooted – a place where artists could create new work on site, specifically for this context. Not a mix of things made elsewhere. The audience feels the difference. They know that this was made especially for us.

TT You’ve worked with unconventional spaces all over the world – from the Palais de Tokyo in Paris to the UCCA in Beijing to Lago Algo in Mexico City. What drew you to this project?

JS I’ve been lucky to be a part of the genesis of numerous new institutions in many different countries, cultures and contexts. My real interest is in continuously building new singular models as a specific response to a moment in time with an approach that allows creativity to activate. Each place should respond to its cultural, historical, even natural context both globally and locally. Cookie Factory is different because it’s trying to do something specific – something local, generous, and outreaching with a humble community resonance towards an international dialogue.



‘Sam Falls: Nothing Without Nature’, Cookie Factory, Denver, 2025, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and 303 Gallery, New York; photograph: Third Dune.

TT When I spoke to Amanda Precourt and Andrew Jensdotter, they described Cookie Factory as a philanthropic institution: free to visitors, operating as a nonprofit but without a traditional board. Do you see this as a new model?

JS Absolutely. To clarify, this is not a nonprofit, we are not dictated by fundraising or making profit. From the outset, we met with the key cultural figures, local players and institutions such as MCA Denver, the Denver Art Museum, and others to say: we’re not here to compete. We want to complement what’s already happening. We are inviting curators, directors, creators – everyone – to be a part of this. It’s an open platform where inclusivity takes precedence.

TT It does feel like a paradigm shift, especially at a time when board politics and institutional constraints are stifling so many curatorial visions.

JS It’s quite the opposite here. We make decisions together, fast. It’s like going into a kitchen and cooking something together – everyone brings something to the table. There’s no heavy structure. Too many voices dilute clarity. We’re here to say: art is one of the last places on Earth where freedom still exists. You cannot stop creativity. It’s like smoke. Try to block it, and it goes around you. It’s unstoppable.



‘Sam Falls: Nothing Without Nature’, Cookie Factory, Denver, 2025, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and 303 Gallery, New York; photograph: Third Dune.

TT The original plan was to present two exhibitions a year. Is that still the case?

JS Yes, two exhibitions alongside many regular activations intertwined with music and other creative sectors. That said, we are focused on showing one artist at a time. We want to go slow and resonate deeply. Spend time with the artist, with the community. It’s about quality in the exchanges and dedication to the artists, audience, communities and the experience. Sometimes people want numbers, but we are interested in building a soul with intellectual engagement and presence – being present with the work, with the people.

TT How do you see Cookie Factory positioning itself in Denver’s cultural landscape?

JS As a complementary actor within the Denver ecosystem. We’ll bring international artists, yes – but only those who are interested to engage with the community. Some artists just aren’t wired that way, and that’s okay. But here, we want people who are generous, who want to connect. It’s about building something human.



‘Sam Falls: Nothing Without Nature’, Cookie Factory, Denver, 2025, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and 303 Gallery, New York; photograph: Third Dune.

TT Sam Falls is the first artist to show here, and his work is so deeply tied to the landscape. How has Denver influenced your thinking?

JS As a European, I was struck by the scale of nature here. When you land, you’re already in it – the mountains, the sky, the air. It’s something very particular. And there’s a spirit of contagious positivity in this city. Many people have relocated here recently – tech people, creative people – looking for a better quality of life. The energy here is very real and very powerful. Though Denver is a relatively young city, its spiritual soul is rooted in the landscape with a long past and layered human history.

Sam Falls was the perfect fit to launch Cookie Factory. His attitude, practice and direct collaboration with the Colorado landscape has created a very special and unique exhibition.

TT And what do you want people – especially international audiences – to understand about Denver?

JS That Denver is a place to share, not just to show. That it’s a multicultural booming ecosystem with a different attitude and openness of spirit. There’s a thriving creative community here – artists, architects, filmmakers, musicians, fashion designers and makers of all types. When people come here, they’re often surprised by how dynamic it is. It’s time to show the flip side of the coin to the world, revealing that this type of collaborative spirit and soul will lead our way forward.