

**Tavares Strachan Represents the Bahamas Pavilion at the 55th International Art Exhibition
la Biennale di Venezia, June 1 – November 24, 2013**



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(May 7, 2013) New York– The Bahamas, which will host its inaugural pavilion at the 55th International Venice Biennale in 2013, will present ***Polar Eclipse***, a multi-sensory installation by Tavares Strachan that investigates themes of heroic exploration, cultural displacement, oral history, and the shifting of historic narratives over time. Three geographically and culturally disparate sites—the Venice Arsenale, downtown Nassau, and the North Pole—will momentarily coexist in the Bahamian pavilion. The exhibition will exist in two dimensions: as a single, comprehensive installation, and as a collection of individual artworks. Key works will include a 14-channel video, a sound installation, and a selection of neon sculptures.

Strachan's recent trip to the magnetic Pole is the subject of a 10-foot, 360 degree video installation. 14 monitors, installed to create an immersive space, will screen documentation of the artist's reenactment of a historic narrative: the 1909 polar expedition of Robert Peary and Matthew Alexander Henson. Henson, Peary's associate, is often credited as the first American to reach the pole. However, various written and oral iterations of that journey—whether Henson reached the Pole before the physically incapacitated Peary, whether Henson planted the American flag, and their complex relationship to one another and to Inuit communities—remain fluid and contested, more reflective of shifting ideologies than historic truth.

Also included in the exhibition are neon-light sculptures that further address the theme of belonging through the language of historic Conceptualism. *Here and Now* (2013) consists of three works titled, *I Belong Here*, *You Belong Here*, *We Belong Here*. The works speak to the idea of displacement directly, immediately confronting the viewer with the problematics of belonging and place. "I'm fascinated by the idea of being in two or more places at once, and exploring difference that way," says Strachan. "The way that the Venice Biennale, historically and now, deploys the idea of "difference" as cultural tourism is an interesting problem to work with."

One way in which Strachan attempts to problematize the lingering Biennale model of nationally defined spaces is through the installation *40 Days and 40 Nights* (2013). As The Bahamas celebrates forty years of independence this year, Strachan arranged for a corresponding number of schoolchildren in Nassau to learn a song from a rapidly vanishing Inupiaq folk tradition called *ayaya*—then brought them to Venice to perform it. Among Inuit, *ayaya* is both a fundamental means of individual expression and a process of intergenerational bonding. In the ostensibly transnational space of the Arsenale, the song is both evidence of meaningful exchange between liminal communities, and a signifier of the cultural displacement that makes such exchanges possible. Virtually untranslatable, the song operates outside the much-touted "internationalism" of the global art world.

Other works installed within the pavilion—a sculpture of a levitating Inuit figure, large-scale collages of Arctic wildlife—play specific roles in Strachan's larger project of exploring nuanced, often-invisible shifts in cultures, physical environments, and recounted histories over both space and time, in the wake of globalization and narratives of progress. Having lived and worked in the Bahamas for much of his life, these issues are reflective of Strachan's biography and emigrant experience.

In Strachan's prior works, a major topic has been orthostatic tolerance—the body's ability to circumvent hypotension and withstand pressure during gravitational stress, often caused by quick changes of altitude. Although orthostatic tolerance can describe a change as simple as the body's reaction to standing up quickly after being seated, Strachan's art investigates the more extreme circumstances of being launched into the earth's stratosphere or submerged to the oceans' depths, focusing on the ability of life to acclimatize itself to radically inhospitable environments. His investigations have extended to hands-on training at the Yuri Gagarin Russian State Science Research Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City, Russia, as well as a residency at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he worked with some of this institution's cutting-edge scientists.

Strachan's scientific explorations are tied to his establishment of the nascent Bahamas Aerospace and Sea Exploration Center (BASEC) in his native Nassau. In the course of working with BASEC, Strachan has made several rockets wholly from Bahamian natural resources (glass from beach sand, and fuel from sugarcane) and launched them 15 to 20 miles into the earth's stratosphere, before collecting and presenting their fallen remnants as sculptural relics. His experimentations with BASEC and his research into extreme conditions have been the basis for exhibitions at the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia (2008); Grand Arts in Kansas City, Missouri (also 2008); and MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, MA (2010).

The Bahamas Pavilion is curated by Jean Crutchfield and Robert Hobbs with major support granted by Nalini Bethel of The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. Produced by Christopher Hoover, Michael Hall, and Christophe Thompson, with Deputy Curator/Director of Programs Stamatina Gregory, and Venice producer Fiona Biggiero.

Tavares Strachan (b. 1979, Nassau, Bahamas; lives in New York City) received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2003 and an MFA from Yale University in 2006. Strachan may be best known for his internationally celebrated 2006 piece titled *The Distance Between What We Have and What We Want*, consisting of a 4.5-ton block of ice harvested in a river near Mount McKinley, Alaska. The ice was then sent via Federal Express to the Bahamas, where it was placed in a transparent refrigerated case and exhibited in Nassau. Ironically, solar power was used to keep the ice frozen.

His solo shows include *Orthostatic Tolerance: It Might Not Be Such a Bad Idea if I Never Went Home Again*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA (2010); *Orthostatic Tolerance: Launching from an Infinite Distance*, Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO (2010); *Tavares Strachan: Orthostatic Tolerance*, the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (2009); *Where We Are is Always Miles Away*, The Luggage Store, San Francisco, CA (2006); and *The Difference Between What We Have and What We Want*, Albury Sayle Primary School, Nassau, The Bahamas (2006). A catalogue documenting *Seen/Unseen*, his major installation in an undisclosed New York City location, will be distributed by D.A.P in 2013.

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