



TAVARES STRACHAN
SAN FRANCISCO

Where We Are Is Always Miles Away is Tavares Strachan's West Coast debut [The Luggage Store Gallery; November 17, 2006—January 13, 2007]. For this ambitious feat, Strachan directed the excavation of a three-thousand-pound, twenty-square-foot plot of land from Crown Street, just outside of Yale University's School of Art. The piece was carefully crated and trucked to San Francisco where Strachan guided another crew to bring it through the gallery's second floor windows by crane. Meanwhile in New Haven, the site was paved over once more.

At the Luggage Store, the plot was sealed hermetically inside of an industrial, terrarium-like chamber designed to keep the air—also imported from New Haven—at a crisp forty degrees Fahrenheit. The gallery windows were darkened, and fluorescent lights installed in the chamber's ceiling replicate the stark loneliness of a cold urban night. The thick, precision-cut slab of pavement reveals sub-strata of pristine concrete and crumbling earth. Its surface minutiae are intact: cigarette stubs, a bottle cap, and the steel-blue cover of a municipal water line. A sign towers over a parking meter. Both plunge between cracks filled with small tufts of struggling grass.

Where We Are Is Always Miles Away follows in the wake of *The Distance Between What We Have and What We Want*, a feat executed in 2005 with the support of Pierogi Inc. and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, whereby Strachan carved a four-and-a-half-ton piece of ice near Alaska's Mount McKinley. He then shipped it to Nassau, his Bahamian hometown, and exhibited it in his former elementary school, stored in a tank refrigerated by solar energy.

Dialectical tensions underpin the realization of Strachan's projects. The artist reveals these tensions in the works' constant negotiation with their material, social, and economic conditions of possibility. *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away* performs a rigorous exercise in preservation, yet is simultaneously exhibited in a climate that threatens to undermine those efforts. Peering inside

its eerie vault, one can't help but wonder what might crawl out from under Crown Street should the California air seep in to coax the earth from hibernation. Thus, Strachan suggests a potential dialogue between two cities whose divergences extend well beyond climate. As a self-contained unit, *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away* struggles to counteract the ravages of entropy. Its measured efficiency belies the futility of this effort. Unable to stop or reverse time, it occupies an interstitial space between stillness and decay.

Strachan doesn't move the earth in the same manner as his Earthwork predecessors. He has upped the ante for geographically engaged practices by employing a level of scientific and conceptual sophistication that introduces a different—perhaps greater—risk of logistical failure into his process. Not only does he think big, but his ideas demand execution. Unsurprisingly then, he has positioned himself strategically within the systems of power that govern artistic production. Posted in the gallery, a letter reveals that the City of New Haven worked with several of its bureaus to extract the sidewalk free of charge, and even stored the piece on the city's dime. Strachan documented the entire operation in a small series of photographs. These occupy an anteroom where, every few minutes, the excavation effort is projected on the floor before them by way of a short time-lapse video. As the footage cuts away, process gives way to mythology. While few have witnessed Strachan's exploits, many have already heard of them.

—Sarah Hromack

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Tavares Strachan, view of *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away*, 2006, installation [courtesy of the artist and The Luggage Store Gallery, San Francisco; photo: Jay Jones]; Martin Cary Horowitz, *2 Foot Gold Grenade*, 2006, bronze, enamel, and 23.75 kt gold, 24 x 16 x 11 inches [courtesy of the artist and Linda Durham Contemporary Art, Santa Fe]