

SAN FRANCISCO

Tavares Strachan

LUGGAGE STORE

Tavares Strachan's *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away*, 2005–2006, is a deft, clever act of land use and creative shipping. The artist has removed a chunk of Connecticut sidewalk—from Crown Street, New Haven, to be exact—and sent it, via truck, to the San Francisco gallery Luggage Store. The project, while easy to describe, is an attention-getter invested with myriad implications. With *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away*, Strachan engages in a dialogue around global capitalism, personal mobility, and cultural displacement. His installation implies balkanization on physical, biographical, and political levels.



Tavares Strachan,
Portal, 2005–2006,
mixed media,
11' 2" x 9' x 21' 9".

The work *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away* is literally a piece of a place, one with many associations. The patch of turf clearly acknowledges Strachan's—rarified—experience of earning his MFA at Yale, but also alludes to New Haven's urban grit. It's an understated epic that recalls Christo and Jeanne-Claude's navigation of officialdom, Hans Haacke's politicized Minimalism, Robert Smithson's Earthworks, and Gordon Matta-Clark's literal deconstruction of urban architecture. To these allusions, Strachan adds elements of Tom Friedman's transfiguration of the commonplace, and his own drive to address the displacing effects of globalism.

Born in the Bahamas, Strachan is an artistic citizen of the world, able to navigate bureaucracies as easily as FedEx depots. He somehow managed to convince New Haven's Department of Cultural Affairs to extract, store, and replace the twenty-square-foot slab of sidewalk pro bono. The official document that details the department's apparently enthusiastic participation is displayed in a lighted niche in a spotlight alcove, like a historic treaty. (A related video and handful of photographs also serve as artful documentation.) Still, it's difficult to imagine just what kind of sweet-talking the artist must have been required to employ in order to realize the project, and that unseen maneuvering is key to the work's appeal. (The City of San Francisco was apparently a harder sell—they ignored an appeal for assistance in hoisting the heavy concrete to the second-floor gallery.)

As installed, the project boasted a moody theatricality in addition to its purely conceptual appeal. The stairs leading to the gallery were made into a black-lit passageway that primed one's eyes for the darkness of the gallery space itself. *Portal*, 2005–2006—a separately titled work that is also part of the *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away* project—a gigantic sealed vitrine with thick windows allowing views of the monolithic specimen, formed a sculptural centerpiece. The excised

portion of sidewalk—which includes a No Parking sign, a parking meter, some sprouting weeds, a scattering of cigarette butts, and a Heineken bottle cap wedged into the concrete's surface—was placed inside. Eerie fluorescent illumination approximates the quality of New England light at the time of the excavation, while air that Strachan collected, Duchamp-like, in the university town is cooled to 46 degrees Fahrenheit and circulated in the gallery, again reproducing conditions the day the sidewalk was removed.

In *The Distance Between What We Have and What We Want (Arctic Ice Project)*, 2004–06, Strachan displayed a large cube of ice from Alaska in the sweltering Bahamas (and, later, Miami.) As with the earlier piece, the presentation of *Where We Are Is Always Miles Away* is everything, and here it conveyed not only visual cool and scientific remove but, above all, the construction of an audacious, politicized poetry from the spectacle of overnight-express culture.

—Glen Helfand