

Tavares Strachan

Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia

This exhibition, which centered on Tavares Strachan's mission to build rockets able to launch from the Bahamas, travel to the moon, and graze the bottom of the sea upon their return, contained a hint of childlike whimsy. But the artist, who was born in Nassau and lives in New York, approached his task with an artisan's pride in skill and an astronaut's sense of diligence.

Orthostatic Tolerance (2009), featured in the museum's second-floor project space, was part installation, part documentation. Strachan built his improbable rockets out of equally improbable materials: it is made of glass blown from island sand and powered by sugarcane-based fuel. A pristine model of the rocket was on view in a display case, as were shards of glass from the original's ill-fated launch.

A white three-wheeled Piaggio truck was at the center of the room. Its open trunk was lined with copper foil (like a lunar module), and a monitor inside played black-and-white footage of the big day. In it, Strachan, clad in a space-age white jumpsuit, fastens his precious rocket to the top of the vehicle and sets out for a deserted sandy shore. Anticipation builds as he and his cohorts, employees of the fictional Bahamas Aerospace and Sea Exploration Center, prepare their cargo for launch. The rocket finally takes off. Within seconds it crashes, breaking into hundreds of pieces. Strachan and company silently approach the wreckage, quickly collecting the remnants before they're washed away to sea.

The gallery's walls were hung with panels, signs, and ephemera such as photographs of the rocket's brief voyage and pictures of Strachan at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City, Russia. There's a healthy dose of Dada in the project—in the paradoxical glass rocket, in Strachan's aeronautical training, and most of all, in the implausibility of a tiny island country entering the space race, even 50 years after the fact.

—Rachel Wolff



Tavares Strachan, *BASEC transport vehicle*, 2008–9, painted Piaggio Ape, 68" x 123" x 58", installation view.
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