

Tavares Strachan at Pierogi and Ronald Feldman

It's one thing for a talented young artist fresh out of graduate school to have a debut solo exhibition in New York. Tavares Strachan, who is from the Bahamas and studied at RISD and Yale, upped the ante with two simultaneous exhibitions, both featuring evocative, quasi-scientific works that have an understated humor and an outlandish streak. For *Homeostatic Feedback Loop #1 (Natural Body Water)*, 2003-06, at Pierogi, Strachan collected, boiled, purified and bottled a year's worth of his own urine, in effect turning his waste products into a revitalizing force. On view was Strachan's modest equipment, which included glass vessels and tubes, plastic hoses, metal stands and a burner. More vessels (made by the artist, who studied glassmaking) containing traces of salt left over from the boiling process were installed in a row on one wall. High up on another wall three video projections offered different snippets of Strachan working in his home-made laboratory; as he continuously appears and disappears, his diligent activities double as

an enigmatic performance concerning presence and absence.

One also saw the end product of Strachan's procedures. An illuminated commercial refrigerator chock full of water containers with convincing labels—"Product of Tavares Strachan," they aptly announce, "Bottled at the Source"—had an almost magical power, highlighting the water inside as if it were both a newly launched brand and some spectacular, perhaps holy, elixir. Of course there is something disturbing about looking at, and imagining drinking, another person's urine, however purified, but the work goes much further than that. It evokes our stubborn and always faltering attempts at purity and transcendence, and taps into anxieties about human sustainability in the midst of mounting ecological crises.

With *I Can't Forget What I've Forgotten* (2005-06), Strachan devised a cooling system that lowered the temperature of Pierogi's back room to 40 degrees Fahrenheit. A pedestal with a heating plate inside emitted a cube of heat said to measure 10 by 10 inches, an invisible sculpture one could feel but not see, and a succinct conflation of Strachan's tropical birthplace and his oftentimes chilly adopted homeland. In these fractious times, it is striking that Strachan's work often involves the cooperation of elemental opposites like heat and cold, solids and liquids (or vapors), motion and stasis, visibility and invisibility. *Glo-Our Rain Maker* (2006), shown at Ronald Feldman, is a computerized system that intermittently turns New York City water and silica dust into a brief but gorgeous white cloud in a suspended glass globe. These temporary, ultra-contained, mechanically rendered cloudlets conjure the expansive majesty of actual clouds. Twenty-nine lightbox-mounted photographs of Strachan's bottled clouds, hung in a horizontal row on two adjacent walls, evince cloud formations that vary from cumulus congestus to altocumulus opacus, and seemed to propel the gallery outward, even as far as the eventful skies seen from beaches in the Bahamas. With *Components for Absolute Symbiosis* (2006), a human circulatory system made from hollow blown glass stands upright in a vertical Plexiglas vitrine filled with 300 gallons of mineral oil. The submerged structure is ghostly, mysterious, exceptionally fragile and altogether enchanting.

—Gregory Volk

View of Tavares Strachan's installation *Glo-Our Rain Maker*, 2006, cloud chamber, computer program, lightbox photos; at Ronald Feldman.

