

HAYWARD GALLERY

Press Release

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Tavares Strachan There Is Light Somewhere

18 June — 1 September 2024



IMAGE CREDITS IN NOTES TO EDITORS

This summer the Hayward Gallery will present ***Tavares Strachan: There Is Light Somewhere*** (18 June - 1 September 2024), the first mid-career survey of the New York-based, Bahamian artist. A recipient of the MacArthur 'Genius Grant', Strachan has created a range of boldly inventive and ambitious exhibitions over the past two decades, including presentations at the 2019 Venice Biennale and the 2018 Carnegie International, establishing him as one of the most compelling, imaginative and audacious artists of his

generation. Whether making expeditions to the North Pole and sending back a 4.5 ton block of Arctic ice to his birthplace in the Bahamas; launching into orbit a gold sculpture of the first Black American in the US space programme; or creating his own alternative 3,000-page encyclopaedia, Strachan has worked to expand the boundaries of contemporary art with the imaginative verve of a true pioneer.

This multifaceted exhibition will showcase the ways in which Strachan's art vividly highlights key questions of cultural visibility. Dedicated to telling 'lost stories', Strachan celebrates unsung explorers and neglected cultural trailblazers, inviting audiences to engage with overlooked characters whose lives illuminate histories hidden by bias. Featuring monumental new sculptural commissions alongside striking large-scale collages, neon works, bronze and ceramic sculptures, and mixed-media installations, *Tavares Strachan: There Is Light Somewhere* will take visitors on a journey of discovery and recovery that is simultaneously playful and impactful. Strachan's vividly realised stories of erasure and remembrance shine a light not only on histories of colonialism and racism, but also on how the past impacts the universal desire for a sense of belonging.

The importance of this sentiment will be spelled out across the facade of the Hayward Gallery in a nine-metre-high neon work that declares: **You Belong Here**. Accompanying this work outside the gallery will be a giant bronze head of 20th century Black nationalist Marcus Garvey, whose own ambitious projects were fueled, in no small part, by his desire to forge a collective sense of belonging for people of the African diaspora. Marked and weathered so as to resemble an ancient sculpture, Garvey's head will be presented as if a relic of a lost civilisation.

Inside the Hayward Gallery, presentations will be devoted to the three major thematic arenas of Strachan's work to date. A selection of his early work will focus on projects that address cultural histories of exploration, including the artist's 2008 creation of the **Bahamas Air and Sea Exploration Center (BASEC)**, conceived as a Bahamian community project to increase young people's access to science and technology. This section will bring together works that deal with Strachan's own activities as an explorer, many of which implicitly challenge historical stereotypes, as well as pieces that pay homage to pioneers such as the African-American explorer Mathew Henson, who may have been the first person to reach the North Pole. Other works are inspired by individuals who broke physical and social barriers, or who explored uncharted territories of knowledge.

A second part of the exhibition will be centred around Strachan's **Encyclopedia of Invisibility** (2018), which the artist describes as 'a home for lost stories'. The product of an immense (and ongoing) research project, this work features over 17,000 entries detailing extraordinary figures forgotten by history. Conceived as a much-needed alternative to the hidebound viewpoint reiterated by traditional encyclopaedias, Strachan's enormous, leather-bound volume calls into question the power relationships that frame and legitimise certain stories, while obscuring and erasing others. Hundreds of select pages from the *Encyclopedia of Invisibility*, many animated by vivid images, will be presented in a wall-to-wall installation that will enable visitors to scan some of the volume's expansive contents. In addition, the exhibition will include a display of Strachan's large-scale **Encyclopedia Paintings** – collage-like compositions that strikingly, and pointedly, juxtapose images drawn from diverse fields of history and culture.

A third section of the exhibition will feature recent work, mostly made during the past five years, in which the artist imaginatively remaps lost connections to traditional African cultures. ***Distant Relatives*** (2020) pairs tribal masks from different regions of Africa and Papua New Guinea with plaster busts of Black cultural figures in the West, ranging from well-known figures such as author **James Baldwin** and singer **Nina Simone** to Jamaican-British nurse and entrepreneur **Mary Jane Seacole**. A selection of Black cultural and political figures – from writer **Derek Walcott** to activist **Steven Biko** – also appear in Strachan’s painted, ceramic sculptures, which recall traditional clay ceremonial vessels and pots whilst bringing together dream-like mixes of objects and symbols that hint at a spiritual or mythic dimension to these public personae. The exhibition will also include a new and enlarged version of ***Coronation Hut*** (2022), an installation that implicitly links the pageantry through which the British crown is empowered and legitimated to ancient African village rituals.

Tavares Strachan says: *“My practice as an artist is a quest to reveal hidden histories and to tell lost stories with a weight that matches the profound nature of the characters I speak for. I have always thought about making as a form of storytelling, a way for us to engage in things that might be more difficult to grasp during the normal course of our day.”*

Ralph Rugoff, Director of the Hayward Gallery, says: *“**There Is Light Somewhere** will take visitors on a thrilling and deeply felt journey of discovery and recovery. Referencing numerous histories, people, objects and belief systems that lie outside the often narrow parameters of Western contemporary art, Tavares’ exhibition will offer revelatory lessons that profoundly shift our view of the world. Through surprising juxtapositions, stirring memorials, and inventive homages, his work extends an invitation to dig deeper and explore what lies beyond what we already know.”*

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue designed in close collaboration with the artist. It features an introduction and interview with the artist by Hayward Gallery Director Ralph Rugoff, new essays by writer and curator Ekow Eshun and American academic Maggie Cao, and an index featuring short biographies of some of the leading characters that feature in Strachan’s art.

Tavares Strachan: There Is Light Somewhere is curated by Hayward Gallery Director Ralph Rugoff, with Assistant Curator Thomas Sutton and Curatorial Assistant Hannah Martin. Its themes will also inspire the Southbank Centre’s wider multi-artform programme ‘You Belong Here’ across the summer of 2024, exploring the notion of welcome and belonging.

Tavares Strachan: There Is Light Somewhere is kindly supported by the Exhibition Supporters’ Group: Perrotin, Marian Goodman Gallery, Bridgitt and Bruce Evans, Simon Morris and Annalisa Burello and those who wish to remain anonymous.

Additional support for the exhibition’s outdoor public artwork is provided by VIA Art Fund.

#ENDS#

NOTES TO EDITORS

Image Credits Top Left to Bottom Right:

- Tavares Strachan, *Six Thousand Years*, 2018. Inkjet print, pigment, enamel, vinyl, graphite, Mylar, spray paint, cut 11 x 8 x 2 1/8 in. (27.9 x 20.3 x 5.4 cm) [each, 832 panels total]. Courtesy of Regen Projects Los Angeles, photo by Bryan Forrest
- Tavares Strachan, *A Map of the Crown (Congo Candle Wick)*, 2022. Bronze, human hair, wood. 69 3/4 x 23 5/8 x 23 5/8 in. (177 x 59.9 x 59.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Claire Dorn.
- Tavares Strachan, *You Belong Here*, Prospect.3 New Orleans, 2014. (Installation view from Prospect 3 Biennale, New Orleans, LA). Blocked out neon travelling installation on the Mississippi River. 30 ft x 80 ft on 100-ft barge. Courtesy of the artist, photo & video by Joe Vincent Grey.
- Tavares Strachan, *Lift Off #1*, 2008-09. Two glass rockets, Bahamas sugar fuel cell. 15 x 73 x 23 1/4 in. 38.1 x 185.4 x 59.1 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Photo by Tom Powel Imaging.

Exhibition Listing Information:

Tavares Strachan: There Is Light Somewhere

18 June - 1 September 2024

Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX

Full price standard: £18

Concessions available & Southbank Centre Members go free

Hayward Gallery opening times:

Tue – Fri, 10am – 6pm

Sat, 10am – 8pm

Sun, 10am – 6pm

Further information:

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

Twitter: [@haywardgallery](https://twitter.com/haywardgallery)

Instagram: [@hayward.gallery](https://www.instagram.com/hayward.gallery)

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About Tavares Strachan

Tavares Strachan was born in 1979 in Nassau, Bahamas. In 2013 he represented the Bahamas in the nation's inaugural pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale. Other solo exhibitions include presentations at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2009) and Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2018) as well as outdoor commissions for the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland (2018) and Barclays Center, New York (2021). Strachan has participated in numerous international biennials and major group exhibitions, including the 12th Biennale de Lyon (2013); Prospect.3, Prospect New Orleans (2014); Desert X, California (2017); and the 58th Venice Biennale (2019). From 2019-20, Strachan was artist in residence at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. In 2022, he was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship prize.

About the Hayward Gallery

The Hayward Gallery, part of the Southbank Centre, has a long history of presenting work by the world's most adventurous and innovative artists including major solo shows by both emerging and established artists and dynamic group exhibitions. They include those by Bridget Riley, Bruce Nauman, Anish Kapoor, Lee Bul, Andreas Gursky, Tracey Emin, Jeremy Deller, Kader Attia and

Matthew Barney, as well as influential group exhibitions such as *Africa Remix*, *Light Show*, *Psycho Buildings* and *Space Shifters*. Opened by Queen Elizabeth II in July 1968, the gallery is one of the few remaining buildings of its style. The Brutalist building was designed by a group of young architects, including Dennis Crompton, Warren Chalk and Ron Herron and is named after Sir Isaac Hayward, a former leader of the London County Council.

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest multi-arts centre and engages the most diverse audiences of any performing arts organisation in the UK. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats) is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the ambition and values of that project – that arts, ideas, innovation and culture can heal communities and should be available and accessible to everyone – are still our guiding principles today. The Southbank Centre is uniquely able to offer a wide-ranging, inclusive and world-class artistic programme spanning contemporary visual arts, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy and spoken word across the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery and our free spaces. We are also home to the National Poetry Library, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) and six resident orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra).

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

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