

Journeys: Conrad Shawcross and Tavaras Strachan, July 8, 2011-October 23, 2011

Shawcross and Strachan recall the historical precedent of the Enlightenment, when artist-scientists set forth into uncharted territories to record and understand natural phenomena. Like such explorers, who created precise representations of newly encountered geological and biological phenomena, these artists document and re-present their journeys through maps, found objects, and material evidence. They also construct vehicles for exploration — a wood rowboat or a glass rocket — that reflect both function and craftsmanship.

Exploration, both physical and artistic, underlies the multi-part sculptural projects of Conrad Shawcross (English, b. 1977) and Tavares Strachan (Bahamian, b. 1979). Each artist employs scientific methods to examine issues of culture, travel, and technology. Using a range of materials and modes of presentation, here each engages and documents a particular geographical location — New York City's Gowanus Canal and Nassau, Bahamas, respectively. Shawcross sets off on excursions along over-industrialized and polluted waterways, while Strachan adopts astronomical expertise to engage in space exploration.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Tavares Strachan, Bahamian, b. 1979, (RISD BFA 2003, Glass)

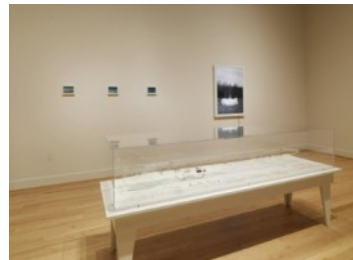
Blast Off, 2009

Shattered glass rocket, color photographs, light box

Mary B. Jackson Fund 2010.59

Tavares Strachan's *Blast Off* consists of a shattered glass rocket and photographs of its experimental launch and brief flight off the coast of the artist's hometown, Nassau, Bahamas. After the launch and crash of the rocket, Strachan searched for the broken shards and reassembled them for a display that recalls the presentation of skeletons in natural history and archeological museums. The rocket, handmade from melted, local beach sand and powered by sugarcane, exemplifies the artist's ongoing quest to explore infinite space while maintaining a connection with the natural materials of his home.

Blast Off is part of Strachan's multi-phase project *Orthostatic Tolerance*, begun in 2006. The term "orthostatic tolerance" describes the ability to withstand pressure while standing upright, specifically in response to the physiological stresses experienced by cosmonauts and deep-sea divers when they leave and return to the surface of the earth. This phenomenon has guided the artist's exploration of space and sea, which has included intensive training at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City, Russia, and an extended residency at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At MIT he collaborated with the Manned Vehicle



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Laboratory in the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics on a gravity-augmenting centrifuge and with the Autonomous Underwater Vehicle Laboratory in the Sea Grant College Program to develop an underwater rover fashioned entirely from clear glass. In addition to projects involving astronaut training and deep-sea diving, which have taken him from the Arctic to the tropics, Strachan hopes to one day establish the Bahamas Aerospace and Sea Exploration Center (BASEC).

Conrad Shawcross, English, b. 1977

Pre-retroscope VI (Gowanus Canal Journey, NY), 2009

Wood boat, mechanical system, video projection, wall drawing, color photographs by Poppy de Villeneuve

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2011.15

Pre-retroscope VI (Gowanus Canal Journey, NY) features a handmade rowboat that Conrad Shawcross built and launched for an expedition along Brooklyn's contaminated Gowanus Canal in 2009. Equipped with a video camera on a revolving motorized track, the boat captured 360-degree panoramic views of the waterway and its urban surroundings. As presented in the gallery, a video projector and small screen replace the camera on the boat's circular track, displaying video footage from the journey. Documentary photographs and a schematic wall drawing of the Gowanus Canal fill out the journey's archive.

This project is part of a series of Shawcross's excursions at sea and on land. Earlier iterations explored bodies of water in England, including the Lea River, Birling Gap Beach, the River Fal in Cornwall, and coastal South Cornwall. Maps, found objects, and recorded observations document Shawcross's trips and reflect on his experience of each particular place.

