

# ArtReview

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Future Greats – the artists to look out for in 2016

## Tavares Strachan *Seeing is Forgetting the Thing that You Saw*

Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco 6 November – 11 December

History is a weapon, the late historian Howard Zinn tells us. It doesn't so much reveal what happened as provide interesting stories of how select things took place, as told by people with competing perspectives, agendas and ideals. That view is endorsed by conceptual artist Tavares Strachan in his newest exhibition. An exacting object-maker who is also an insightful amateur historian, Strachan here devotes himself to making visible history's hidden protagonists.

Titled *Seeing Is Forgetting the Thing that You Saw*, Strachan's nine new artworks continue his investigation into the lives of individuals who have made important historical contributions but whose names go largely unnoticed in their time. In his Bahamas Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale, Strachan took inspiration from the world of Matthew Alexander Henson, the African-American explorer who guided Robert Peary to the North Pole in 1909. In his latest works, the Nassau-born artist turns to the scientific achievements of Rosalind Franklin

– an English chemist whose X-ray diffraction images helped decipher the helical structure of DNA. Though Franklin's findings in other areas were appreciated in her lifetime, her contributions to the discovery of DNA were mostly recognised posthumously.

Because a young Strachan learned a great deal about the world by reading Britannica's print precursor to Wikipedia, he pays back-handed tribute to encyclopaedias in two wall-mounted works that consist of entries for the letters 'C' and 'D'. Transferred digitally onto stretched linen, the entries' images are all whited out. A second flat wall work (*Rosalind*, all works 2014–15) features a large black-and-white collage portrait of Franklin's face made up of approximately 10,000 image fragments. These free-associated reproductions include pictures of Martin Luther King, Haile Selassie, vibrantly coloured birds and the enduringly flamboyant Jimi Hendrix.

Elsewhere, Strachan makes his own use of science to address the freighted issues of

exposure and concealment. In a series of works titled *The Invisibles*, the artist presents five museumlike vitrines containing disparate items such as a cricket ball, a microscope, surgical instruments and a pair of nurse's shoes, each half-submerged in containers of mineral oil. All of the objects contain biographical connections to Franklin. Uncannily, the individual articles carry forward their physical properties as a light-refracted shadow within the oil due to the artist's having cut off the submerged ends of the original objects and replaced them with glass prostheses.

But the exhibition's *pièce de résistance* consists of a neon sculpture of a human skeleton and cardiovascular system: Franklin's, we're made to understand by means of artistic elision. From this floating Christ-like effigy pulse lights that mimic blood, nerve impulses and the daily flows that animate the human body. History is also in there, Strachan seems to say, drawn out of the dark by an interior current.

Christian Viveros-Fauné



*The Invisibles (Rosalind Franklin)*, 2014–15, cricket bat, mineral oil, Plexiglas, glass, wood, 109 × 33 × 33 cm. Photo: Tom Powel. Courtesy the artist and Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco