



#23 Infinity and Beyond with Artist Tavares Strachan

by Charlotte Burns (January 25, 2018)



Guest Tavares Strachan with host Charlotte Burns

Whether hauling ice from the Arctic, partnering with SpaceX or training as a deep-sea diver, the artist Tavares Strachan works on an ambitious scale—often at the cutting edge of technology. He largely operates beyond the gallery model, instead relying on patrons, partnerships and collaborations to create innovative works of art.

The Bahamian-born artist, who was recently appointed to the MIT and RISD boards, is interested in overlooked or forgotten histories and “operating in a state of play”. His work ranges from multimedia installations to large-scale earthworks and is often an exercise in creative problem solving. Speaking to our host Charlotte Burns, he says: “If there’s a way that art can actually affect the way we think about the world, it is forcing us to think about the gray, about where we overlap and how we’re actually the same. If we spend more time focusing on that as an exercise, we may be able to move some immovable ideas.”

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[Transcript]

Charlotte Burns: Hello and welcome to In Other Words. I'm your host Charlotte Burns, and joining me today is the artist Tavares Strachan. For those of you who don't know, Tavares Strachan is a very ambitious and hardworking conceptual artist whose work defies easy categorization and appears in myriad forms: from multimedia installations to large-scale earthworks; using found objects, neon, drawing, various other media; from solo expeditions to incredibly ambitious collaborations working on the cutting edge of technology.

Tavares, maybe what I'll do first is tell people a little bit about some of the work you've made. One of the most well-known works was something you did in 2006 called *The Distance Between What We Have and What We Want*, in which you harvested a 4.5 ton block of ice from the Arctic, shipped it via FedEx back to the Bahamas where it was displayed in a solar powered freezer in your elementary school.

You've also trained as a deep sea diver in the Bahamas and as an astronaut outside Moscow at the Yuri A. Gagarin Research & Test Cosmonaut Training Center for another work, *Orthostatic Tolerance: It Might Not Be Such A Bad Idea If I Never Went Home*, in 2010.

Another work I'm going to single out is the powerful and provocative work you made for the post-Katrina New Orleans Prospect Triennial in 2014, which was a 100 foot long, 22 foot high neon sculpture that sat on top of a barge that floated along the Mississippi and spelled out: "You Belong Here".

This is a very diverse body of work. Do you have a standard day?

Tavares Strachan: That's a good question. I do. I'm in the studio from 8am to about 6.30pm, and I do it every day other than the weekends.

Charlotte Burns: And your studio is in New York?

Tavares Strachan: Yes, it is. It is. What's great about that is this sense of practice that I think is really nice. I think it's grounding, especially when one works in such diverse ways.

Charlotte Burns: You were born in the Bahamas—

Tavares Strachan: Yes.

Charlotte Burns: —and you've spoken about coming from a country where, I'm going to quote you here: "There's not a historic tradition of art making, at least from the Western perspective," and you said that that allows you to "take on the idea of the foreign or the strange or the alien." How did you come to art, and how did you start to define your position as an artist in the art world?

Tavares Strachan: When I first started to travel, one of the things that I realized was how different the world was based on one's perspective and how the idea of home and growing up in such a small, tight-knit community changed when I started to leave. For example, if you're in a high school or elementary school in the Bahamas, you wear a uniform. One of the things that happens when you wear a uniform is that students try to find variations. They try to find the gaps, forms of self-expression. But if you go too

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far outside of that realm, you're ridiculed. One of the joys of art making is to be able to look for those flaws or ripples in the system and try to rip at them.

Charlotte Burns: That began with the dress code at school and now involves working on projects to do with space and time. Your projects are very research driven. You often focus on figures who have been overlooked or forgotten by history, this sense of amnesia in society. Can you talk to me a little bit more about that?

Tavares Strachan: Yeah, I mean, I think going back to the school thing: so much education all over the world is based on the idea that we're looking for things that we've already found.

Charlotte Burns: What do you mean?

Tavares Strachan: In the sense that when you study something, you're studying something that already exists. How do we approach the creative challenges of the future? By thinking about the things that are not being studied, the things that aren't visible. The characters that don't make it into the books, the people that don't make it into the halls of history. How do we create platforms where we can actually think about those ideas, those people as a way of forging a more creative premise to education?

Charlotte Burns: Do you work with schools?

Tavares Strachan: I do. For me, I think that part of my own self-discovery happens when I'm in those scenarios.

Charlotte Burns: Working with kids?

Tavares Strachan: Yes. Yes. I think we get to be explorers together.

Charlotte Burns: Right.

Tavares Strachan: There's a certain kinship. One of the things that I'm interested in is how we can disrupt hierarchy and disrupt the sort of power dynamic between adult and child.

Charlotte Burns: How do you do that?

Tavares Strachan: Well, one of the things that I'm interested in, and one of the things that I've just finished working on was a series of works that were all done on this sort of cast calcium carbonate structure. They become these kind of earth works, and they're drawn on. We did one actually at the LA County Museum [of Art, Lacma] with a few scientists from SpaceX.

Charlotte Burns: Right.

Tavares Strachan: And we invited them to the museum. One of the things that happened was there was a problem, and the problem in this case was: "How do we get to space?" And the rocket scientist—

Charlotte Burns: I love that. That's the problem. How do we get to space?

Tavares Strachan: How do we get to space? The rocket scientist is in a room full of children, and there are a few boards and the rocket scientist is explaining to a group of six, seven, eight and nine year-olds what it means and how it is to get into space. The beauty of it is being able to articulate complexity.

Charlotte Burns: Right.

Tavares Strachan: I think there's also this sort of cultural phenomenon now of shying away from complexity.

Charlotte Burns: Yes. I think so.

Tavares Strachan: If the categories aren't clear cut, we sometimes articulate and understand that as something we should run away from, not run toward. When I'm working on a project like this and setting up these kinds of scenarios, these situations, one of the things that I am poking at is the authority structures that we have and being able to disrupt the hierarchy.

Charlotte Burns: You just mentioned your work with Lacma and SpaceX. You were the recipient of an Art + Technology [Lab] artist's grant in 2014.

Tavares Strachan: That's right.

Charlotte Burns: From what I read on the website's blog—which was a kind of halfway report, so it needs a little bit of updating which I'm hoping you'll do for me today—you came into the program with a proposal to create and launch glass rockets powered by alternative fuels in the Bahamas and Los Angeles, which I definitely want to talk to you about because it's so interesting that you would be thinking about alternative energy as an art project, and then using that for rockets. Then, after spending time in LA and visiting SpaceX, you came up with an entirely new concept involving the lost history of a pioneering astronaut, and the project has ties to the history of art and to the museum's collection, especially the ancient Egyptian collection. Can you tell me more about this? I've been trying to write about this since 2014, by the way.

Tavares Strachan: Yes. It's something that everyone's excited about and we're getting very, very close to. You have that look on your face that: "Oh, he's going to not give me the information."

Charlotte Burns: You're going to fudge.

Tavares Strachan: Yes. There's not much I can say about it contractually at this point. We're really excited about it. The team at SpaceX is excited and the team at Lacma is excited.

Charlotte Burns: For people who don't know what SpaceX is, can you explain the organization?

Tavares Strachan: SpaceX is a space exploration research facility, and it is invested in space exploration. There are several goals. They go into space, launch payloads into space regularly and one of the goals that the founder of SpaceX has is to eventually—

Charlotte Burns: And that's Elon Musk?

Tavares Strachan: Elon Musk, yes—is to eventually get humans into Mars.

Charlotte Burns: Are you working on getting humans into Mars, Tavares?

Tavares Strachan: I think we all are. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on our perspective.

Charlotte Burns: And is this project—I read somewhere, so this is out there somewhere, that the pioneering astronaut in focus would have been the first African-American in space, but then the project stalled and he didn't make it to space. So, not only did he not get to have that history himself, but we lost that moment in history too, which would have been a really important moment, and that you, in your infinite research wisdom, have found this history and are working to make it happen.

Here's where my imagination tells me that this project goes: is that you have used found objects and incorporated elements of history, and you are going to send some of that to space so that this astronaut finally gets to make it.

Tavares Strachan: I will give you a lovely smile in response.

Charlotte Burns: When will I know?

Tavares Strachan: In due time.

Charlotte Burns: I mean, the idea of taking art beyond the white cube is something that you're really doing in your work. You're literally sending things into the most alternative space that exists in our universe.

Tavares Strachan: I haven't really thought about it that way. I mean, I think for me it's never really been about working outside of the white cube. It's just been about working. The ideas lead, and fortunately my life has been able to put me in positions where I can have that kind of privilege to work in that way. It really is me paying attention to some opportunities and taking advantage of them when they arrive.

Charlotte Burns: I remember we met a few years ago, and I think I was writing an article about the gallery system and how there were threats to the traditional model of artist representation by galleries. You said to me at the time: "You know, it really doesn't affect me. I don't work in that way. I have never really been represented. I'm not really in the market. I just make work. I work in collaboration with people and I kind of exist outside that model." Which I thought was really interesting.

I know you have had gallery shows. You've worked with Tony Meier in San Francisco, and Fergus McCaffrey in the Caribbean, and a couple of other galleries here and there, but it's not really the bulk of your work. How do you survive? How do you make a career beyond that model that you have to get into a gallery, be represented, go to art fairs? You don't really work in that way.

Tavares Strachan: Well, it's tricky because in some ways I do, in some ways I don't. I think for me, being a human being is all about relationships, developing relationships with people, not necessarily with ideologies, right? And I think there's a distinction.

Charlotte Burns: What do you mean?

Tavares Strachan: Creating relationships between human beings that work with institutions, for me, have always been more fruitful kinds of exchanges. Instead of working with an ideology—this is what one is supposed to do when one hits a certain age, for example—for me, it's more useful in a creative sphere to think about the relationships we have to people and not necessarily focus on a kind of blind ideology, like "this is the way one should live one's life".

To stress the sort of creative enterprise, if we're truly in a creative enterprise, I think it's useful to think about going about one's life as a creative exercise. In this instance, for me at least, it's useful to think of ideas, projects, research, working in a studio, working in a laboratory as a way of life.

Charlotte Burns: When you say: "If this is a creative enterprise," do you mean the art world or do you mean life?

Tavares Strachan: The art world is very much seen as a creative space, which I think is sometimes a major, major oxymoron.

Charlotte Burns: It's a misunderstanding, is it? Yes.

Tavares Strachan: Oh yes, massive. Massive.

Charlotte Burns: This brings us nicely onto this idea of fact versus fiction. You've said that the poetry component of storytelling is interesting in that authenticity isn't the highest thing on the agenda. Especially when you're an artist, it's not as important. I find that really fascinating because you do so much research, you really dive deep into the stories that other people have forgotten or have been written out of history. And then, you bring to that poetry, and you push poetry and story over the details. Can you explain to me what you mean about authenticity not being the highest thing on the agenda? How do you define authenticity, and where do you see it?

Tavares Strachan: Yes. I think the question that you're asking is very much related to perspective. Perspective is really fascinating to me because when I grew up in the Bahamas, all the international artists that I loved were artists that I saw in books. There is already this sort of filtering of my experience. When you have these kind of filtered experiences from the jump, you have this filtered relationship with art making and reality. I think it opens up this really lovely kind of poetic space where, for example, most of what you've seen in the past year of art, I'm going to assume that it's been mediated in some way. It hasn't been direct. You can't go to every show. You can't go to every biennale. So, at some point, some other entity is infiltrating how you understand a work of art.

Charlotte Burns: More so than ever now, with social media.

Tavares Strachan: Exactly.

Charlotte Burns: I always have a little joke to myself about how Agnes Martin would not have been very popular because she's so un-Instagrammable, you know? Very abstract white canvases, very pale colors with delicate lines don't photograph well.

Tavares Strachan: Yes. That is actually a very, very important detail: what can be digested in the sort of media frenzy of this era that we live in and what might not be.

Charlotte Burns: Right.

Tavares Strachan: Hopefully and ideally—going back to this idea of the art world being this creative space in its most infinite and ideal sense—we can have those kinds of conversations creatively, in the sense like what about the works and the things that are not so Instagrammable? I think there is still room for that in the art world, and that’s one of the upsides of it, I think.

Charlotte Burns: Well, that’s why I find your work so fascinating because you do work in a different way, and the work you make is also completely distinct. It’s not part of a movement. I’m curious as to how you make that work. Practically, how do you survive?

Tavares Strachan: I mean, there are many artists historically who have existed outside of movements or time frames or periods. It’s a hit or miss game, yes? Some of them, they survive this sort of ambiguity or complexity—if you will—not fitting primarily into one kind of target category.

My commitment to my creative process in making is not negotiable. I’m not going to stop what I’m doing and go do something else. If I do something else, it would be in support of what I’m doing, and fortunately I have never even come close to having to make those kinds of decisions.

Charlotte Burns: I like something you said about pipe dreams. You said: “The majority of things we work on in the studio are pipe dreams. I think it allows us to relax and simply get to work. It’s so unreasonable that you succumb to the task of it.” Do you work on one project and focus on that? So, the SpaceX thing, is that just something that consumes you for a period of time, or is it something you dip in and out of?

I know that while the SpaceX thing has been going on, you also did the project for Desert X in which you dug 290 craters over 100,000 sq ft, which is roughly the size of two American football fields, which you then lined with neon cubes that appeared from the ground to be an abstract intervention and a kind of earthwork, but when viewed from the sky, it spelled out “I am”, which is a phrase you’ve borrowed from Vedic philosophy in which “I am” means to identify oneself with the universe and/or ultimate reality. You’ve been working on very ambitious projects simultaneously.

Tavares Strachan: Yes.

Charlotte Burns: Is that common for you?

Tavares Strachan: It is. I think for me, they’re all one work. They exist as one work. They exist as a series of gestures over a continuum, so it is kind of long thinking. I think that’s one advantage of working the way that I work. There are several disadvantages, but this is one major advantage. [It’s that] if I’m committed to the prospect of working in the way that I work, I can work on a project for 15 years, 20 years because I know I’m committed to doing this, irrespective of what opportunities may or may not come my way. It allows for me to work on these projects simultaneously, and when they get closer to completion, I can focus more on one, but I’m always working on several of them.

Charlotte Burns: You’ve just launched a residency project, Two By Four.

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Tavares Strachan: How do you get your information, by the way? You seem to know things.

Charlotte Burns: I don't know.

Tavares Strachan: You seem to know everything, actually.

Charlotte Burns: The Internet, conversations. I'm not sure.

Tavares Strachan: That's an interesting place, the Internet.

Charlotte Burns: The residency, can you tell me a little bit about it?

Tavares Strachan: Yes. Two By Four, it sort of evolved out of wanting to create an international platform in the Bahamas from a local space. So, international and local kind of colliding, combining groups of people from the creative spheres that would have a conversation in Nassau. And Nassau is particularly interesting, because it's one of the first international cities in the west. People were coming from all over the world into Nassau in the early days before people even knew what tourism was.

Charlotte Burns: What kind of time are you talking about?

Tavares Strachan: 1500s, for example. Some guy came over on a boat, and he said: "I'm discovering this place." And since then, it's always been this stronghold of exploration and interest in internationalism.

Charlotte Burns: The program is going to take the form—correct me if I'm wrong—of an independent publication that's going to appear as four-color pages in Bahamas' main newspaper, The Nassau Guardian.

Tavares Strachan: Yes.

Charlotte Burns: It's about disseminating art to a mass public on some level. And the first project was with Christian Viveros-Fauné, who is a reviewer for us. It was about immigration. Can you tell us more about that?

Tavares Strachan: Yes. Creatively, for me, what I was interested in is looking at topics that were more archetypal and then diving into it, or having the creatives, the people coming with the critical eye, take a deeper dive into it and provide an outside perspective. We were fortunate enough to get Richard Mosse there to do a lot of photography work, and he went to Haiti.

There's a huge dichotomy between immigration in the Bahamas versus immigration in Haiti. It's a really tough issue at the moment.

Charlotte Burns: What do you mean by a dichotomy?

Tavares Strachan: Well, less of a dichotomy and more of a struggle. Immigration is one of those hot button topics today, and in the Bahamas, the issue is that there is an influx of immigrants coming in from Haiti, and there's really no infrastructure. Most of the immigrants who are trying to leave Haiti, who are getting on rafts and small boats to leave Haiti, are trying to find the United States.

On their way, they're hitting the Bahamas. There are over 700 islands, cays and rocks in those Bahamas. So, it's easy to get lost in those islands, and there's no way to really police them. Then the immigrants that are there, there's an inclusion problem in terms of are we going to naturalize the immigrants from Haiti that are there? Are they going to have to go back to Haiti? There are so many cultural overlaps. If you look at the early days of the slave trade, the slaves that went to the Bahamas are not necessarily that different from the slaves that went to Haiti, so how do we define sameness? How do we define difference? How do we create a border around a bunch of islands?

These are very, very challenging problems having to do with migration and the future. I think I wanted to get an artist's perspective on these topics, and I think we were able to put some interesting things together.

Charlotte Burns: How many times a year will you be publishing something?

Tavares Strachan: Well, one of the ways that Two By Four is possible is by support of a few patrons, who prefer to go unnamed, actually. And I'm really interested in the patron model. This was the previous status quo before the systems that we have now in place. The patrons that are enabling Two By Four to happen—the plan is to do one year's worth and then reassess, so that's where we're at.

Charlotte Burns: Right. How many projects do you conceive of happening in that year?

Tavares Strachan: I think the plan is to do six, so once every two months.

Charlotte Burns: Yeah, that's a lot.

Tavares Strachan: Yes.

Charlotte Burns: It's interesting what you say about the patron model because it's so overlooked. You work often with patrons, and some of them are institutional, of course, but others are private patrons who support your work.

Tavares Strachan: Yes. I think you find each other. I think one of the more exciting things about being an artist in this era is how interconnected people are. We're not analog. With that comes a large influx of flow of information and people. When you're able to have a relationship that's a patron based relationship, you're able to really be aggressive and attack some on the ground issues, and for example, be able to say: "Let's put together a cultural magazine in the Bahamas. Let's contend with what that means." And I'm neck and neck with the people who are supporting it, and that's a really lovely experience for me and a lovely way of processing information in the world.

What ends up happening is the studio practice, it evolves from—it's never really been relegated up to just pure object making, pure sausage making, but it allows me to go further with that idea that an artistic practice in this day and age has a lot to do with creating disruption. And you can create that disruption through the efficiency of this sort of patron model.

Charlotte Burns: It's fascinating. You also, talking about the dissemination of information, you said in an interview in 2015—the reason I'm putting a date on this is because I'm curious if your opinion changed—you said: "The Internet is the only thing that can counteract colonialism and all the holdovers

from colonialism. It puts power in the hands of people who would never have had power. And however minimal that power is, it's still something."

The Internet as we have discussed it, after 2017 there seemed to be a shift away from this belief that the Internet could be a utopian, democratic good to people being more aware of the downsides of technology. You were very positive about the power of the Internet in 2015, and I wonder if you feel that way still or if your opinions have shifted.

Tavares Strachan: I think they have pivoted a little bit, but not much. It's still a tool. Ultimately, it's at the mercy of its users. There is an underwritten access that didn't exist even 100 years ago. Major structures are collapsing as a result of people's access to this information. Structures are being formed. New economies, new ways of operating, new ways of thinking about the world are evolving. It's changing the way we educate children. It's changing the way that we are traveling. It's changing the way that we're growing food. And I think all these ways are ways in which its users are expressing their autonomy. That's really fascinating. I think that's really cool.

I think I do also see some of the pitfalls of this tool. I was in a group of school students once, and we were having a conversation about some technological device. I don't remember what it was. And the students said they didn't know what it was. And I thought it was funny because they were on their phones saying that they didn't know what it was when you can just look it up on your phone. If you're not using the tool, or using the tool in ways that aren't empowering, that are just mindless regurgitation, narcissistic social media, then I think: "Yes, maybe the future is not so bright."

But if you're a farmer in Haiti, for example, then you're looking at the Internet for weather patterns, then it becomes quite useful.

Charlotte Burns: You are an artist who works—incorporates technology very much into your work.

Tavares Strachan: There's no line. There's no technology or not technology. Effectively, in the most general terms, technology refers to the use of man-made tools, really. Really it's about ideas and storytelling, and it's about one's ability to influence people through ideas. The form is super-useful. But the form can morph depending on what the content is.

Charlotte Burns: Are the artists you admire? And is their work like yours? Or do you secretly adore El Greco?

Tavares Strachan: It's funny. I've been increasingly interested in digging deep into history and looking at the structures by which we believe we know the world today, using history as a model for understanding the present. And I'm really fascinated as to how flawed of an exercise that has been for me because it's revealed so many gaps to the point where I'm in a kind of no-man's land if I'm using history primarily as a sort of pinpoint, pivot point, to understand the present.

Charlotte Burns: Which history?

Tavares Strachan: The history of the world. The history of the world.

Charlotte Burns: But whose history? Who told it and when?

Tavares Strachan: I think that's kind of the question. Who told it? And when? And why? This is what I mean about education being a kind of regurgitation of the past of what we know already or what you think you know already, and maybe pivoting and changing that into thinking about, well, what are we not thinking about? What are we missing? What do we not know?

Charlotte Burns: There seems to be a move towards that. I remember being a kid in school and somebody saying: "It's not *her* story." And I was like: "*Whoa!*" It completely blew my mind. And then the more you study, the more you realize the truth is negotiable and it depends who saw something. And they could be telling the truth; their truth may just be a different truth. And there seems to be a movement to redress the imbalances of history. Museums are broadening their collections. Stories are being told by different people, whether that's the fact that there are more women writers, there are more people of color working in professional positions. So, that changes. The demographic shifts, professional demographic shifts, change the histories that we're hearing about.

Tavares Strachan: Information and learning is not binary. I think what you're saying is the idea of critical thinking. Critical thinking is not necessarily about being right or wrong. It's about absorbing a series of tools in which one can be effective as a human being. Critical thinking, it's really beautiful, especially when you're living in a timeframe in America specifically where I feel like things are very black and white, very polarized. And the pendulum swings from one side to the next. And you're either red or blue, or you're either up or down, or you're either left or right. And there is this attack on nuance. For me, it's a real challenge going into the future. How do we think about the gray? How do we think about the nuance?

Charlotte Burns: I agree.

Tavares Strachan: How do we get people to actually focus on the fact that the shared space is the nuance space?

Charlotte Burns: If you had an aim for your work, would that be it?

Tavares Strachan: I think it would be difficult to have such a lofty aim. I believe that if there's a way that art can actually affect the way we think about the world, I think it is forcing us to think about the gray, thinking about the nuance, thinking about where we overlap—how we're actually the same and not necessarily how we're different. If we spend more time, I think, focusing on that as an exercise, I think we may be able to move some immovable ideas.

Charlotte Burns: Which kind of brings us to this idea of collaboration and how you work with different people to get those stories out, which seems to be an effective way of doing it. I hear that you're working on a project with Paul Allen as well, the founder of Microsoft. Can you tell me more about that?

Tavares Strachan: I should be able to tell you more about that, but we're still in the early stages of ironing that out.

Charlotte Burns: Do you think you could tell me about it?

Tavares Strachan: Tom Skalak runs Paul Allen’s Frontiers Group, which is a research group that is in Seattle, and we met I think three years ago. We both were talking about this idea of having an artist in residence. They had never had one before.

We had a series of conversations over a year, and the idea is that I would be an artist in residence there and spend several days out of a particular month per year there until the year has ended, and we’re still ironing out the details of what potential outcomes might be, but in Seattle there’s a lot. It’s a huge blank canvas. Paul has been working on a lot in Seattle, so there’s a lot of access to a lot of different kinds of technologies, different ways of thinking, different ways of working, a lot of research is being done there.

[The residency will occur at the physical location of “The Allen Institute”, which houses about 350 scientists.]

Charlotte Burns: Fascinating.

Tavares Strachan: Yes.

Charlotte Burns: When I think of you working—this may be the wrong thing—I always think of Willy Wonka. Like you always seem to be finding something really exciting and new, and I kind of imagine you going to Seattle sort of like a kid in the chocolate factory, being like: “Look at all these things that I can now use.” For some people that might be overwhelming. For you it seems to be very motivating, very productive to have all these tools and collaborations ahead.

Tavares Strachan: Yes.

Charlotte Burns: Do you see possible outcomes, or do you just think: “Oh, I have this idea, I’m going to run with it”?

Tavares Strachan: I think it’s a little bit of both, but I think mostly it’s this idea that I’m operating in a state of play. I’ve had the opportunity to meet with a few world leaders, and one of the things we often end up talking about is play as a form of problem solving, right?

How can we solve problems through the idea of play? How do we not destroy the world with seriousness? Right? And so, the idea of play is actually extremely crucial to me and to not get overwhelmed by the ideology again.

Charlotte Burns: Right.

Tavares Strachan: And so, when I walk into a place like a lab at Paul Allen’s space, one of the things I think about is play. Wonder. What am I not paying attention to? What am I not seeing? How can the outcome not be so tied up in seriousness?

Charlotte Burns: So, the final thing I wanted to ask you is about your board appointments. You were recently appointed to the board of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), which is where you started your BFA in glass before you went on to get an MFA in sculpture from Yale. You also announced as one of five new appointees to the MIT List Visual Arts Center advisory committee.

Can you tell me a little bit about why you would join a board, what you would hope to achieve from that position and learn?

Tavares Strachan: There are so many people that grew up in neighborhoods that I grew up in who don't get to have a voice in decision-making processes of large institutions. Joining these boards weren't decisions that I took lightly, specifically because there's a huge demand on my time at the moment, so I don't have a lot of it, but the opportunity—it sort of merged into being a kind of responsibility to help the conversation and be a part of the change that I'm interested in personally.

So, joining these boards was a way to participate, to actively participate, to take an active role in the future. I'll give you an example. When you go to university, one of the things that they talk about before you go is pre-college.

Charlotte Burns: What does that mean?

Tavares Strachan: I think what it means is there's a sort of target group of high school students that get to participate in a pre-college program.

Charlotte Burns: Oh okay.

Tavares Strachan: They come to university, and they kind of spend time there. How I grew up and where I grew up, there was no such thing as pre-college. You just didn't think about college. So, the question is: how do we get people thinking about university in these communities that are not thinking about it? Not the ones that are already thinking about it, because chances are the ones that are thinking about pre-college will already go to college, right?

Charlotte Burns: Yes. They've figured out the system.

Tavares Strachan: Yes, so if we're actually trying to make things better, then perhaps we should look at that. I think that's one of the advantages that I may have. Growing up the way I grew up, growing up in a tiny little island in a sort of lower income neighborhood, those perspectives are interesting because I think it's all about creativity, and I think we can find creative people all over the world. We just need to look. So, that's one way in which I think I can have a little bit of an impact in that kind of space.

Charlotte Burns: Can you tell us more about projects you're working on or are they all tightlipped?

Tavares Strachan: There's like one of the guys from my studio outside the door who promised to break my neck if I say anything about what we're working on.

Charlotte Burns: All these secrets. We should have done this in the dark with thumbscrews. Is there anything that you wanted me to cover that I didn't cover?

Tavares Strachan: No, I think you did actually, shockingly, a thorough job because there are some things in there that I wasn't aware that you would throw at me. Like, what? You know that? How do you know that?!

Charlotte Burns: I've been following your career for a while, Tavares.

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Tavares Strachan: My goodness. Geez Louise.

Charlotte Burns: Well, thank you so much for being my guest. This has been so much fun and very interesting, and I will continue to follow your work with real interest.

Tavares Strachan: Thank you.