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Tavares Strachan's 'The Day Tomorrow Began' Reveals Invisible Histories Through Reimagined Realities

At LACMA, the artist's immersive and encyclopedic installations invite viewers to reconsider how knowledge is recorded, classified and erased.

By Mya Ward (October 18, 2025)



Strachan, *Six Thousand Years*, 2018. The posted entries provide a narrative on history that Strachan deems "invisible." Courtesy of LACMA.

Summarizing Tavares Strachan's art is difficult because the very thrust of his practice defies categorization. That complexity is, of course, by the artist's design. In 2006, he embarked on an expedition to the Alaskan Arctic to excavate a 2.5-ton ice block and deliver it to his hometown elementary school for *The Distance Between What We Have and What We Want*. In 2018, Strachan collaborated with SpaceX to send *ENOCH*, a small gold urn—filled with sacred air blessed by a Shinto priest and engraved with the likeness of the first Black astronaut, Robert Henry Lawrence Jr.—into orbit. And in October 2025, under the stewardship of LACMA's curator of special projects, Diana Nawi, and with support from the Hyundai Project, Strachan debuted his latest exhibition at the museum: "The Day Tomorrow Began," which codifies the scientific, artistic, intellectual and civic achievements of the African diaspora into a wonderland of both practical and imagined realities.

In a world governed by neat narratives, Strachan seeks to unravel and transgress every one. Born in Nassau in the Bahamas in 1979, Strachan has fostered a unique and dynamic practice that comprises a confluence of inspiration. Notwithstanding his projects' marked ambition and theatricality, they tend to center on highlighting the magnitude of Black contributions. *The Distance Between What We Have and What We Want* brought attention to the little-known contributions of Matthew Henson, an African American explorer credited as the co-discoverer of the North Pole. Robert Henry Lawrence Jr. died in a plane crash before he was able to experience spaceflight. With *ENOCH*, Strachan not only honored Lawrence's memory but expanded upon his legacy by symbolically launching him into space.

"The Day Tomorrow Began," which unfolds across seven galleries, follows a similar thread by uniting imagined histories, invisible realities and unwritten truths across a spectrum of craft and concept. "This exhibition is an opportunity for viewers to not only engage with the diversity of concepts and hybrid approaches that animate Tavares's practice, but also to experience his attention to the craft of object-making and the importance of worldbuilding," Nawi told Observer.

The first room of the show—the Encyclopedia Room—is a sprawling collage of print and pigment so vast that it becomes overwhelming at times. Occupying all four walls of the space is Strachan's *Six Thousand Years* (2018), the unspooled knowledge of Strachan's 2,000-page *The Encyclopedia of Invisibility (walnut #3)* (2018). A wink to the Encyclopedia Britannica, each panel is a single entry on a figure, place, event or narrative that Strachan considers obscured. Webbed over the panel are images illustrating the various entries—James Baldwin, Billie Holiday, the fiction of H.G. Wells, blueprints depicting everything from 747s to Ferris wheels, and much more. Profuse and unrelenting, the room serves as a lexicon on the content of Strachan's work, a primer to his practice and an introduction to his art that is, by every measure, a multisensorial, multimedia and multidimensional experience.

In *The Barbershop* installation, focusing on the few pops of color in the space—presented in the form of ceramic jars and digital silkscreen posters advertising mid-century Black hair care products—is much simpler. Yet it is the Black elements, functionally melting into the all-black room, that truly frame the exhibit. Poised beside the mirror at each barbering station are bronze busts—two of which are flocked with hair—showcasing region-specific hair practices across the African continent. Correspondingly, large-scale paintings of flocked hair (*Mind Field No. 5*, *Mind Field No. 3* and *Mind Field No. 6*) tabulate into concentric circles, invoking a celestial map. Adornment, especially of one's hair, is a pillar of Black culture across the African diaspora and constitutes more than just identity but civics and politics. The barbershop is—especially in Strachan's carefully crafted world—a brick-and-mortar manifestation of hair's importance within the Black community. An open copy of the Los Angeles Times, draped casually on the chair of station no. 1, reinforces the space as one of symposium as well as fraternity.

The Monument Hall, visible through a niche in *The Barbershop*, houses Strachan's latest sculpture series. *In Praise of Midnight* emphasizes the exhibition's driving argument by literally flipping dominant history on its head. The central sculpture depicts the triumphant Henri Christophe, figurehead of the Haitian Revolution, atop an inverted Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1804, the very same year that Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor of France, Christophe and the Haitian Revolution were successful in obtaining Haiti's independence. The sculpture series satirizes the Western neoclassical monuments and statues that tend to fabricate ideal legends out of bloody shreds of history. Through *In Praise of Midnight*, Strachan venerates Black figures who have been overshadowed, working their relevance into a regal, practically divine depiction. One sculpture of Nina Simone atop Queen Victoria renders the High Priestess of Soul in British regalia, holding the Sovereign's Scepter and Orb, while Queen Victoria holds a

dragon fruit and a palm stalk. Notably, the fallen fruit at Queen Victoria’s feet—coconuts, bananas, pineapple, dragon fruit, papaya and mango—are native to the American tropics and Southeast Asia. They signify the artist’s acknowledgment that the wealth British colonialism extracted from these countries spanned far more than jewels, land and labor.

In the site-specific *Rice Grass Meadow*, where pads of rice grass curl into Ghanaian Adinkra symbols and the air is pleasantly fragrant, ceramic depictions of historically and culturally significant Black women open to the viewer. In one rice paddy, Rita Marley’s head blossoms from the bud of a dragon fruit; in another, we see Andrea Crabtree, the United States’ first Black female deep-sea diver. In Strachan’s majestic depiction of the aquanaut, she wears a Nefertiti-esque cap crown, with her gilded diving helmet balanced gracefully atop it.



Tavares Strachan, *Inner Elder (Nina Simone as Queen of Sheba)*, 2023. Nina Simone’s regal countenance down the center to reveal a turbaned woman, an inner ancestor. Courtesy of LACMA.

Like *The Barbershop*, *The Wash House*, an all-gray room modeled after a laundromat outfitted with whirling washers and dryers, bleach and detergent bottles and a neon sign reading *Some Loads Are Too Heavy to Carry Alone*, represents a space Strachan visited often in his youth. The two monochrome rooms in “The Day Tomorrow Began” reflect one another in ritual and camaraderie, notwithstanding the overarching theme of historical whitewashing that appears most saliently in *The Wash House*. The labels on the disinfecting bleach bottles advertise that it “Kills 99.9% of truths, archives, and inconvenient voices.”

On occasion, costumed performers roam the exhibition: a Greek chorus to both silenced and imagined histories, animating each display through song and soliloquy. “Even monuments need laundering,” one performer proclaimed in *The Wash House*; “Washing is testimony, laundry is legacy,” declared another.

“The Day Tomorrow Began” is not only a testament to the lost, forgotten and outright effaced achievements of Black figures but a measure of one artist’s ability to retain and acknowledge these

achievements, to construct an entire world in which they are the pinnacle and all else falls away. As is to be expected from a brief exhibition review, there are details we will leave out in hopes that the reader might one day wander the exhibition and appreciate these small marvels for themselves. Yet with “The Day Tomorrow Began,” there seems to be a surplus of spectacular details that should not go without recognition—like the Wall of Gemini, the wallpaper at the back of *The Monument Hall*, a cipher sprinkled with words such as “conductors,” “Black” and “history”; the negligible television monitors posted in the corners of every room displaying a single chess move; and the distinct Pine-Sol redolence of *The Wash House*. Even in a world Strachan rendered with such careful continuity and construction, it is those little finishing touches that some might consider invisible that are the most triumphant.