

Nicolas Lobo: Bad Soda/Soft Drunk at Gallery Diet By Bryan Granger

Get Nexcited! So beckons the label of Nexcite, an aphrodisiac beverage once produced in Sweden. When it first came out in the early 2000s in the United States, it was sold under the moniker Niagara, and it was wildly popular. Shortly afterward, Pfizer filed a lawsuit claiming copyright infringement (the name is similar to Viagra), forcing the beverage to be renamed Nexcite. It was never able to regain its popularity, leading to stockpiles of the stuff lingering in warehouses—like the one in nearby Opa-Locka that Nicolas Lobo recently stumbled upon. For his show *Bad Soda/Soft Drunk* at Gallery Diet in Miami, he rescued tens of thousands of bottles of the love potion.



Nicolas Lobo. *Bad Soda/Soft Drunk*, 2014; installation view, Gallery Diet, Miami. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Diet. Photo: Jaime Martinez.

Starting this review with a description of the beverage is necessary, because it's one of two highly charged substances taking center stage in the show. The other is napalm. Certainly, mentioning either napalm or a discontinued, neon-blue aphrodisiac beverage in a press release is guaranteed to garner a raised eyebrow from even the most jaded art-world savant. But the substances' inclusion in this show creates a brilliant contrast: one (supposedly) libido-enhancing, the other a violent incendiary known for wreaking destruction in the Vietnam War.



Nicolas Lobo. Napalm Stone (Nexcite Version 1), 2014; napalm, Play-Doh, terrazzo, and Nexcite; 70 x 30 x 28 in.
Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Diet, Miami. Photo: Chi Lam.

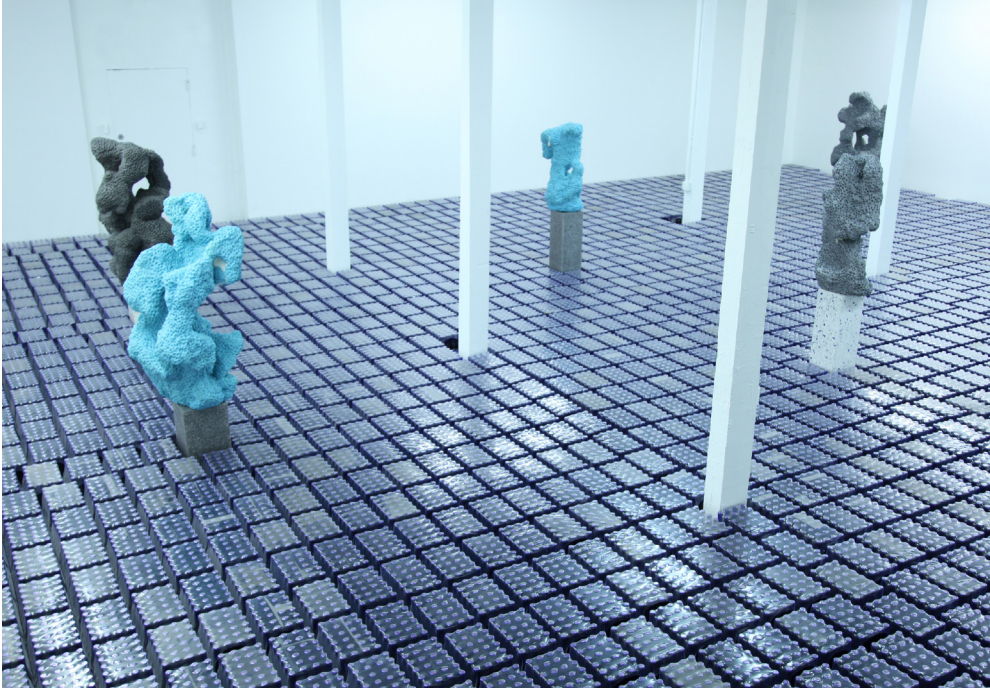
Using the process to make napalm, Lobo poured gasoline on blocks of polystyrene, melting it away in segments in a chance-driven way. As the sculptures reached a form that was pleasing to him, he covered each one in Play-Doh; in some cases, the Play-Doh was mixed with Nexcite, imparting it with its rave-blue color. Then he completed each by vigorously making small dimples with his finger all throughout the surfaces of the resulting sculptures. In doing so, he set into motion a bizarre system of simultaneous consumption and production, one that processes the diverse materials of chemical warfare and children's play. The resulting sculptures are iterations of such a system; they are indices of Lobo's inquisitive artistic practice.

The press release likens these stones to Chinese “scholar’s stones,” naturally occurring rocks with unique formations and textures. Aesthetically a connection exists, but Lobo’s versions provide an interesting foil to the traditional stones, in that they comprise two ubiquitous industrial materials (Styrofoam and gasoline), which together form a destructive war device.



Nicolas Lobo. Napalm Stone (Volcanic Version), 2013; gasoline, polystyrene, Play-Doh, resin, pigment, and terrazzo; 70 x 28 x 28 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Diet, Miami. Photo: Chi Lam.

While these sculptures would have made a fine show on their own—and in a way, their significance is overshadowed—Lobo has used the bottles of Nexcite to create a new floor in the gallery. In twelve-pack, shrink-wrapped cases, the Nexcite bottles not only cover the space's floor but function as one, as visitors must walk on them to get around the gallery. Making one's way around the space is tenuous, especially at first—missteps bring with them the possibility of either breaking a bottle or losing one's balance. Formally, they create a rigid grid, offering a structural contrast to the sensuous, post-minimalistic sculptures.



Nicolas Lobo. *Bad Soda/Soft Drunk*, 2014; installation view, Gallery Diet, Miami. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Diet. Photo: Jaime Martinez.

By installing the Nexcite on the floor, Lobo also explores the beverage's intrinsic qualities. The 62,000 bottles stand erect in their cases, invoking myriad phalluses that must be confronted when navigating the gallery. Additionally, as a brand name that failed—hence its relegation en masse to a warehouse in Opa-Locka, Florida—the Nexcite here is reduced to a mere platform for viewers to walk around, left to find other means for arousal.

Lobo's art practice includes videos, books, and an iPhone app, among other projects. He particularly excels when transforming materials, such as his one-day 2013 show at Gallery Diet called *Timber, lakes*, in which he featured a Justin Timberlake song slowed down by a factor of 100,000 times. This ability to consume and transform extends to *Bad Soda/Soft Drunk*, as does his ability to combine disparate materials and concepts in a perpetual quest to seek new meanings and forms.

Nick Lobo: *Bad Soda/Soft Drunk* is on view at Gallery Diet through March 29, 2014.