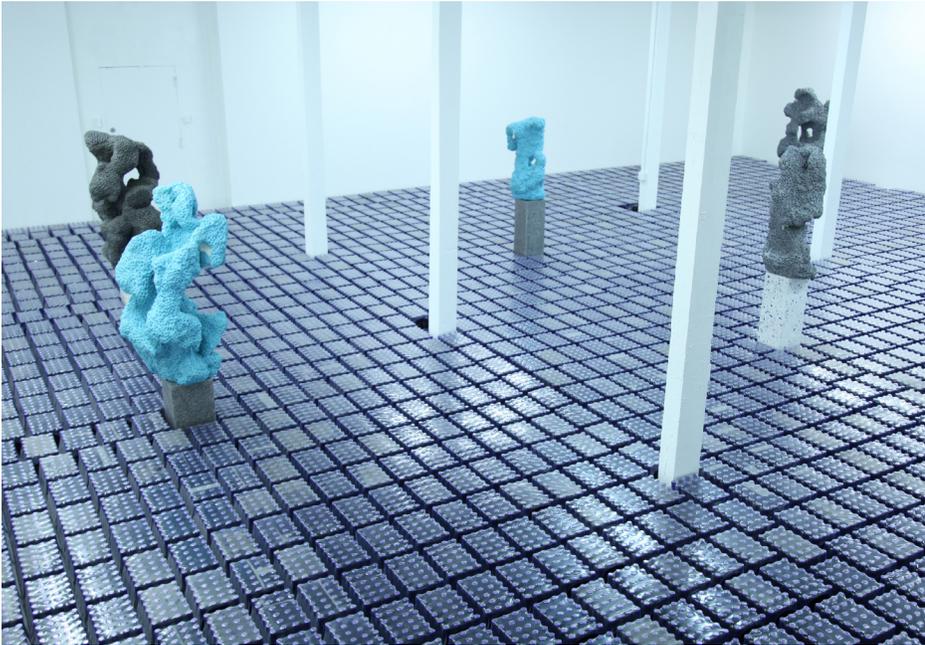


SEXUAL SODA – ALSO, ART!

By RACHEL SMALL



A few years ago, artist Nicolas Lobo roamed into a dank, dusty garage, seeking out a studio space in Miami's Opa-Locka neighborhood. Instead, he discovered a stimulating new medium. Forsaken in the space were around 69,000 electric blue bottles containing a soda of the same color. With a red rabbit logo, they bore the deranged appearance of an off-brand medication, or energy drink.

This was not far off: The "herbal supplement" Nexcite was a short-lived venture from a Swedish company, marketed to women as a sexual analeptic. Originally called "Niagara," the brand reportedly lost momentum after being sued by Pfizer for too closely resembling a notorious little blue pill of a similar name. Yet millions of bottles had already been shipped to the United States. Not so surprisingly, no one knew what to do with them.

Most would be repulsed, or maybe detachedly amused with the find. But Lobo was fascinated—so much so that the drink is the subject of his latest show "Bad Soda/Soft Drunk" at Miami's Gallery Diet (the gallery's name is coincidental). The installation employs the soda as a multifaceted experience. Five bulbous sculptures contain a napalm core, formed randomly by gasoline and benzene, and an outer skin of "Nexcite-flavored" play-dough. Two glow with the soda's unearthly blue. Bubble-wrapped cases form a tight grid on the floor. This forces viewers to literally tread on the drink as they view the works, which reveal new undulations from every angle. The amorphous shapes are pitted with Lobo's fingerprints, and bear slight protrusions where the artist impressed the play-dough with bottle caps. Even the rectangular bases contain bottle fragments.

Though the conceit superficially feels a bit alien, Lobo means to underscore a human element. With the napalm, for instance, "its whole purpose is to stick to the skin. I saw it as a sensuous thing in a horrible way," he explains, conceptually tying napalm's grisly intimacy to the artificial sexuality of Nexcite. "It's the body, but not the body. It's these things that relate to the body, but horrible, and highly chemical." Additionally, "in person, [you can see] the role of the hand in making the sculptures," he says of the "finger-poke texture" on their surfaces.

The idea is the latest in the artist's experiments with manufactured substances, like the purple cough syrup sprayed on warehouse walls in a video piece titled Grape Syrup Action (yum!). Born in Los Angeles, the Cooper Union grad divides his time between his hometown, New York and Miami. This his second solo show at Gallery Diet, on for two weeks only. Meanwhile, it's hard not to wonder whether Lobo, who has plenty of Nexcite left, ever tried the stuff. "Yeah, it's horrible. It tastes like peach Windex." Perhaps it's best that the rejected soda found its place in a gallery—consumable, but not by ingestion.

"BAD SODA/SOFT DRUNK" IS ON VIEW AT GALLERY DIET IN MIAMI THROUGH MARCH 29. FOR MORE ON NICOLAS LOBO, VISIT HIS WEBSITE.