

Miami artist's installation dips into the darker side of swimming pool

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As the weather turns towards swim and tan season, a new exhibition is opening up in Miami to highlight a centerpiece of the summertime experience: the swimming pool.

Miami-based artist Nicolas Lobo's *The Leisure Pit* opens in Miami this week and is an attempt to force the audience to think more deeply about a mundane object.

Lobo is an artist with a habit of taking strange materials, obsessing over them, then using them to build gallery quality work. Past installations include the use of napalm, Play-Doh, and off-brand energy drinks billed as having aphrodisiac properties. This time around, the material is a swimming pool – its chemicals, water and associated paraphernalia like flip-flops.

These items were brought together to form the center of his exhibition, a collection of concrete ring sculptures that were cast in a swimming pool, using the chemicals and water that traditionally fill it. The gallery walls are covered with carbon fiber wall hangings and etched with hydrochloric acid.

With these atypical art supplies, Lobo's day-to-day process was one of experimentation: he would introduce different concentrations and combinations of chemicals to form the rings.



“I think I had failures every single day,” Lobo told the Guardian. “Honestly, if I was trying to make a profitable concrete factory, I would have failed. I guess that’s part of the luxury of art ... that failure is kind of successful a lot of the time.”

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He said The Leisure Pit is about spinning the concept of luxury on its head to show the more grimy and utilitarian side of a seemingly mundane object. This is done with the concrete rings, which are inspired by storm drains, a less-glamorous element of the suburban water transport process.

“The main theme that I am interested in with this project is this kind of hyper-dichotomy between labour and leisure that we have here in Miami,” Lobo said. “There’s no labour that’s not in service of leisure, and vice versa – leisure is kind of like a job here.”

To move unusual art products to a grand gallery scale, Lobo immerses himself in research, which accounts for the myriad sources of inspiration he identified for the project – from ancient Greek and Roman culture to how skateboarders use emptied swimming pools as ramps.

“This idea of a pool as a ruin, as a machine,” Lobo said. “I guess I wanted to throw my hat in the ring with that.”

He noted that swimming pools have been a symbol for luxury in past art as well. Lobo said Edward Ruscha’s photo series *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* and JG Ballard’s *Super-Cannes* are part of the “ultra-elite iconography” that portrays swimming pools and inspired his work.

He also drew inspiration from a childhood visit to Thomas Edison’s estate in Florida, where the gleaming swimming pool is on display. To him, this leisure item is more associated with eye irritants and dangerous chemicals. “I never saw it as the beautiful oasis that it’s supposed to be,” he said.



The site for his mixing and moulding was a friend's swimming pool, which was due for refurbishment – so any damage from the art-making process would not be a serious problem.

While these moulds were created in the depths of a friend's pool, they will be displayed inside a gallery, which Lobo has transformed for the project. The museum gave him permission to etch the walls with hydrochloric acid, which is unlikely ever to be completely removed from the walls.

But Perez Art Museum was designed to incorporate past exhibitions, whether it's the shadow of a vinyl exhibit name or the remnants of potentially noxious pool chemicals. "The vision was that you'd have ghosts of past exhibitions, but this is the first time the exhibition kind of takes that into account," said Lobo.

The Leisure Pit is open at the Perez art museum, Miami