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NEWSLETTER

# ART OF GLASS: TOBIAS MADISON

*By*

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INSTALLATION VIEW, 2010. IMAGE COURTESY  
TOBIAS MADISON AND SWISS INSTITUTE.

PHOTO BY DANIEL PEREZ

It's a big moment for art that uses vitrines. Damien Hirst's show at Gagosian is called "End of an Era," which sounds like economic-apocalyptic gravitas but actually refers to the last of his formaldehyde works. Jeff Koons' controversial show at the New Museum curated from the collection of Joannou includes just one work by the artist—that which touched off his collection, and is meant to stand as proof the Greek's connoisseurship—*One Ball Total Equilibrium Tank*, (1985), a basketball suspended behind glass.

As a method of displaying and containing work, what does it all mean? Is it about preservation, the way that when artist Marc Camille Chaimowicz famously installed a pond in a gallery he had to come by every day to feed his fish? Vitrines might indicate a different kind of immersion, like a fishbowl, a metaphor for living in a public where the prevailing effect is distortion.

In his New York solo debut at the Swiss Institute, young Swiss artist Tobias Madison fills vitrines with different flavors of Vitamin Water—the low-brow, 50 Cent-endorsed sticky stuff that generally has no business being near an artwork. Of course it's business—the advertisement and endowment of Vitamin Water, which filled the tanks—that got it here.

The press release describes their color as pastel, but they are muddier and less descript than pastels. While shaped like a shiny Donald Judd box and levitating like Liam Gillick's colorful bars, Madison's vitrines aren't transcendental or illusionistic, and they don't suggest any alternative reality. Different hardware like tubing is dropped into the vitrines, making them feel not only impermanent, but unpalatable. Madison's reality is part advertisement, but not for anything better than the image in front of you, which is as leaky as it seems.

TOBIAS MADISON IS ON VIEW THROUGH APRIL  
16. THE SWISS INSTITUTE IS LOCATED AT 495  
BROADWAY, 3RD FLOOR.