



Pudgy water bottle stars in 'Free Fall'

By Molly Glentzer | January 11, 2013



Sculptor Tony Feher displays one of the Aquapod pieces that make up his "Tony Feher: Free Fall" exhibit at DiverseWorks. Photo: Molly Glentzer

More Information

'Tony Feher: Free Fall'

When: Opens 7 p.m. Friday. Noon-6 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays, through March 19

Where: DiverseWorks, 4102 Fannin, Suite 200

Information: Free; 713-223-8346 or www.diverseworks.org

Also see: "Tony Feher"

When: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Wednesdays and Fridays-Saturdays; 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Thursdays, through March 17

Where: Blaffer Art Museum, 120 Fine Arts Building, University of Houston

Information: Free; 713-743-9521 or www.blafferartmuseum.org

The artist [Tony Feher](#) has watched a number of products appear and disappear during the 25 years he's used familiar, often discarded objects as prime materials for his minimalist sculptures.

Last week the Aquapod, a pudgy little disposable water bottle, dangled ever so precariously in his mind. Actually, two of them dangled near a window in DiverseWorks' offices, each anchoring a line of thin, hot pink twine strung over a rafter - the quiver ends of "arrows" drawn in the air that pointed to the ceiling. These were test pieces for "Free Fall," an installation opening Friday.

The Aquapod, a cute orb on a base of four short feet, has loads of personality. Created by the Nestle Corporation to entice kids to drink bottled water, it was heavily marketed a half-dozen years ago.

Feher ties Aquapods to twine so they tilt, half-filling them with liquid so the water plays across the broad surface inside - a hanging version of other "water line" pieces in jars and bottles he lines up on shelves. "You put these up high, and they catch light that you didn't (previously) really recognize as being there," he said. "Other water bottles are ribbed, and that interrupts your vision of the light."

The liquid inside is also dynamic, quivering with the slightest provocation from air currents or vibrations that happen when, say, a big truck rumbles by.

Feher has been thinking lately about larger ways to activate his hanging pieces. DiverseWorks director [Elizabeth Dunbar](#), who has worked with him twice before, pushed Feher to embrace their performative capabilities, asking him to invite artists from other disciplines to respond to "Free Fall" with a series of performances.

"Elizabeth is a fantastic curator," Feher said. "It's not just a free-for-all; there's a real conversation. ... A good curator helps an artist find their path."

"Free Fall will feature 15-minute performances by various Houston artists. Choreographer [Leslie Scates](#) and composer/bassist [Damon Smith](#) are the lead artists for Friday's opening. They'll also perform Saturday. Other performances, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, will feature [Daniel Adame](#), [Urban Souls Dance Company](#), literary artist [John Pleucker](#) and a few yet-to-be-named students.

That all will come together on the fly, however.

Last week, Feher was waiting for UPS to deliver materials from his New York studio, including plastic bags. He plans to affix the translucent bags to DiverseWorks' big plate-glass windows to create clouds of light and shadow, a technique he sometimes uses to eliminate glare and outside distractions.

"I like to control the environment. I don't want you looking outside. I want you in here," he said, putting his hand over his heart. "And ... it's a material. It's light. It's something you can take advantage of."

He wasn't sure yet how he'd hang the Aquapods or even how many there would be. He does know, however, that he can't do installations with them forever.

While crafters convert them into toy rockets, terrariums and Halloween décor, Aquapods have become - perhaps even more so than larger disposable bottles - environmental pariahs. Soccer moms don't want 50 bottles rolling around in the back of their SUVs, Feher quipped. He can't find the bottles everywhere anymore, so he's stockpiling them from grocery stores.

He's adapted before - one of the hazards of relying on consumer culture for your materials. When New York banned nonreturnable glass soda bottles he was using years ago, he thought his career was over, he said, laughing. "It forces me - or allows me - to continually seek out the new," he said.

Feher can pretty much tell you what came in any empty bottle you throw at him. "You're forced by default, almost, to become an expert on the thing you're working with, though those qualities and characteristics do not have anything to do with why I started to use the piece in the first place," he said. "Mustard is always in a little pot. And pickles are a different shape than the mayonnaise bottle. And olives often come in a long, tall one."

Recently, he's been collecting cheap Depression glass and pressed glass, common household decorative pieces from the early and mid-20th century. "I find them very ugly, but the color in the glass is extraordinary. The range - you get five or six different colors of blue, three or four or five greens," he said.

They're also a solution to another conundrum: How to keep his art from deteriorating when it's exposed to ultraviolet light and heat. In September, he hung little compotes, vases and bowls on chains in the window of his San Francisco gallery, Anthony Meier Fine Arts.

"I wanted to come up with something that had no restriction. You want to put it in the window? Fantastic. You want it on the south window? Go for it. Love it. It turned out to be just beautiful."

With hanging works, the string is equally critical. "I do see it as a line, a drawing line," Feher said.

He uses mason's twine - made of tiny ropes twisted together - for the Aquapod pieces because it stays tight when it spins. "String will unravel, and you just have a mess," he said.

He likes the myriad hues of twine in vibrant pinks, oranges, greens and yellows he's finding at hardware stores that are designed for staking off sidewalks and foundations.

He said he'd probably use neutral cotton for "Free Fall," however, because he didn't want to riff on the space's previous [Franklin Evans](#) show, which incorporated miles of painted tape. Feher also likes that the cotton twine can look as gray as a graphite pencil line - or disappear, depending on how the light hits it.

Or how a dancer might set it swinging.

"It's a stand-alone exhibition as well, and anybody who enters at that moment becomes the performer," Feher said. "A single individual in the space, with the randomness like it's raining, it's a beautiful experience."