

OKAY MOUNTAIN

When Miami won't come to the Mountain ...

Okay Mountain's recent trip to Miami for the Pulse Contemporary Art Fair was an unqualified success for the Austin visual arts collective. Its riotous re-creation of a convenience store in an art-fair booth earned some major recognition – a front-page plug in *The Miami Herald* and the Miami 2009 Pulse Prize, which marks the Okay Mountaineers as “emerging artists of distinction” and comes with a tidy little \$2,500 purse – and sold about 40% of its “inventory.” That would be all the handcrafted items that the collective artists had created as fun-house versions of typical quickie-mart merchandise (Edward James Olmos Mustache Cream, Great Grandpa's Favorite Salt Chewing Gum, Muhfuckin' Cat Food, No Choice Pregnancy Test, Evil in a Box, to name but a few) and offered for sale. (The prices were outrageous by 7-Eleven standards but crazy bargains for art-fair art.)

The *Chronicle* managed to track down a couple of Austin's new international art stars as they were making their way across the Sunshine State, hauling their carcasses and the remainder of their *Corner Store* installation back home to Texas. While Sterling Allen handled the wheel, Tim Brown filled us in on how the “store,” which had been commissioned by Arthouse and was intended in part to send up the intense commercialism of Pulse-type fairs, was received by the arterati. “The reactions ranged from disbelief to laughter to total open-mouthed awe,” writes Brown. “The only people put off by it were the ones looking for real bottled water or coffee and thought they had found a place



Inside the Corner Store: Want some Bottled Breath with that?

to get them. Almost everyone who came in had a good time, whether they knew about the subtext of it or not.” And those bogus items, um, artworks began flying off the shelves pretty quickly once, he notes, “customers started to understand that they could-buy everything in the store.” Feedback from other exhibitors left the Okay Mountaineers feeling like they might have a solid shot at the Pulse Prize, “but there's always those nervous moments before the announcement when you don't know what's going to happen. We were really happy to win it,” Brown says. Moreover, the group is “really psyched about the opportunities this show has given us in the future. I hadn't been to Miami for the fairs before, and I can't really imagine it getting better than this. We've had a total blast.”

– Robert Faires