

ARTIFICIAL: AUTHORITY OVER THE FISH

NICOLE SKELTYS SERVES UP AN ELECTRO LOLLIPOP EXPLOSION

"Every 'now' person wants the sound of yesteryear, only a bit more 'tomorrow.' My record is totally five minutes ago. No one who had had three or more spliffs could deny that." So says Nicole Skeltys, aka Artificial, in the bio that accompanies her way funky new album, *Electro Lollipop Explosion*, a winning mix of retro kitsch and cutting edge beats, serious intent and surreal humour that she describes as "a heady puff of Pharma Records, early Prince, Sideburn Records, electro, espionage movies and old-skool acid house."

With its '70s-inspired cover artwork and sounds that frequently invoke the blaxploitation movies of that era, it's fitting that Skeltys refers to *Electro Lollipop Explosion* as "a big tongue of influences. I wanted to make this a fun record without making it too gimmicky. The tracks might be lo-fi but they're also very complex - I put a lot of time into the programming. So it's a serious album for me, but at the same time I just want people to enjoy it."

The album's humour comes not just from the artwork but also from its irrepressible energy, the juxtaposition of sounds and the cheekiness of the samples, including snippets from what Skeltys describes as "B-grade British comedy," such as *Steptoe & Son* ("No Taste in Music").

Electro Lollipop Explosion isn't Skeltys' first foray into record shops. In '96, she and partner Kate Crawford, working as B(if)tek, released *Sub Vocal Theme Park*, an album of twisted acid that scored great reviews both here and overseas, through Net fanzine *Geekgirl*. Skeltys, who has a whole room full of blinking black boxes in her



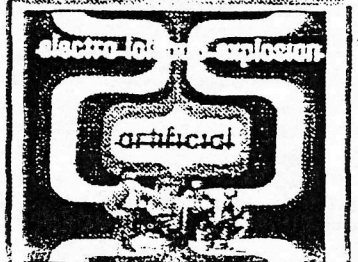
Melbourne home studio, admits, "I've always been a geek, it goes right back to the cradle. And I've always loved electronic music. My brother was a big Brian Eno fan and that was where it all started for me."

Meanwhile, Artificial has also been picked up in the US by funky electro label Oxygen Music, who will be releasing "Car Chase" and "Authority Over the Fish" on vinyl. Finally, there's another Artificial release in the pipeline, a vinyl-only offering called *Stoner Classics Volume 1* that will include some new stuff Skeltys describes as "very loose, very funky, very down-tempo, even a bit hillbilly, a bit rootsy. Really drug-fucked analogue stuff, but still danceable - one that will sort the stoner sheep from the goats. Lower fidelity for a higher reality."

"I really want to push electronic music into crossover territory, but without guitars," she concludes. "That's the sensibility, because sometimes dance music is confined by where it's usually presented. You can get really trapped into thinking that you have to have the four on the floor for the clubs and that's too restricting. I'm more adventurous than that." **STUART HITCHINGS**

drum media June 96

CLUB reviews WITH PARIS POMPOU



ARTIFICIAL Electro-Lollipop-Explosion MUK thru Shock

Hubba hubba, the title says it all - an effervescent little bottle of bubbling electric soda-pop coming from the workshop of Nicole Skeltys (one half of B(if)tek). It's groovy in the way macramé used to be; Skeltys having obviously spent many busy hours knitting together bits of colourful fuzz and woolly waveforms to come up with this funky caraligan and slipper set - ideal for home, or a night out on the town. This is positive now-retro: not a rehash - more of a new bake, giving ingredients from the far-out past relevance in today's cut and haste world. If you could record on velvet, it would sound like this. Loaded with samples, Artificial makes it easy to be hip by creating a kind of "new" soundtrack which features all those cool & rooky sounds that make lounge lovers and retro-lovers soil their pants. Synth sizzles, bouncing bass and percolating percussions all join hands in this tribute to electro grooviness. If this were less up-to-date, it wouldn't be recorded yet. Final words: Secure it!