CULTURE | ARTS & THEATER

Houston artist Adela Andea finds inspiration in the depths of the ocean

"Midnight Zone(s)," opening this weekend at the Anya Tish Gallery in Montrose, creates beauty from darkness and light.

By **Brittanie Shey**, *Former Culture Reporter*
Jan 13, 2023

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Adela Andea works on her new solo exhibition, "Midnight Zone(s)"
Adela Andea

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The term "midnight zone" refers to the layers of ocean so deep—3,000 to 10,000 feet below the surface—that sunlight can't reach them. This makes life difficult to sustain, but many species have developed unique traits
survive.

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Those creatures, and the darkness that surrounds them, serve as the inspiration for a new exhibit by Houston's own Adela Andea opening Friday evening at Anya Tish Gallery. "Midnight Zone(s)," which will run through February 25, is a continuation of the artist's lifelong obsession with the unexplored corners of the natural world. It's also her sixth solo exhibition with the Montrose gallery.

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For the works in her exhibit, Andea uses everyday household items like plastic chicken wire, pool noodles, and plastic tubing, plus industrial tools like flex neon, LED lights, and laser printers, to make large-scale installations that evoke the flora and fauna of the deep sea.

Water pressure within the midnight zones has made them nearly impossible for humans to explore. Most research expeditions into this part of the ocean make use of remotely operated vehicles that are equipped with cameras, which have captured sometimes alien, sometimes whimsical creature
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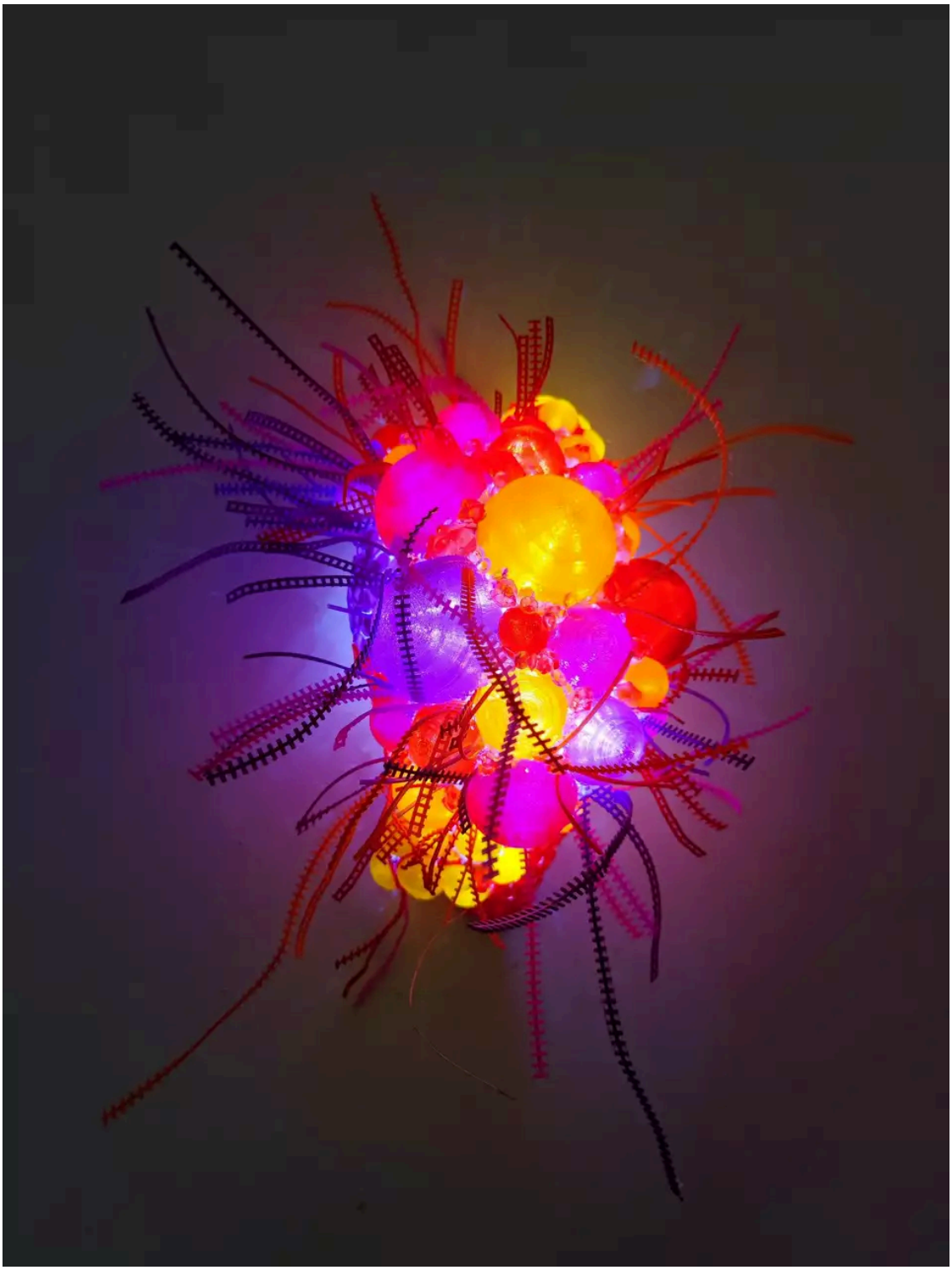

"Midnight Zone(s)" by Adela Andea
Adela Andea

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The artist, who has been based in Houston sinc
Romania in 1976, and spent her early life behind
old in 1989 when Communist governments thro

Her fascination with the deep ocean comes from growing up in figurative, and literal, darkness, she says. "We would often have no power, and no electricity."

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With a whole new world of knowledge open to her after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Andea began to explore the ways that technology and the natural world are pitted against each other, she says. "They're seen as opposing to each other, destructive to each other. We try to control nature, but we live in nature, and we are a part of it."

Andea also began to look at environmental conservation, and how technology is used in those efforts. A previous exhibit of hers at Anya Tish Gallery, for example, used mirrored Plexiglass and LED light to emulate the way light is reflected and refracted by the frozen water in glaciers.

LED light, in particular, is a great example of the dichotomy between technology and conservatism, she adds. Electroluminescence was first observed in 1907, but wasn't put into commercial use until the 1970s, "when we decided to conserve energy."

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By 1999, Andea was attending law school in Romania when her husband, a software engineer, won a green card lottery to emigrate to the United States. They moved to the greater Los Angeles area, where Andea worked as a paralegal and studied painting in her free time. In 2005, the couple moved to Texas so that Andea could study art full-time. She graduated from the University of Houston with a degree in painting in 2009, then began pursuing her MFA in sculpture at the University of North Texas in Denton.

At the time, Andea was building off the work of previous generations of light artists like James Turrell and Dan Flavin, but also incorporating robotics and mechanical elements into her art. In the beginning, she was shunned for her use of computerized elements. "I had been told that if you plug it in, it isn't art," she says.

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"Midnight Zone(s)" by Adela Andea, a recent exhibition at the Anya Tisch Gallery
Adela Andea

When the UNT college of arts decided to start a master's program in new media, she became one of the program's pioneering students. Since then, Andea has received worldwide acclaim and recognition, including being invited by fashion designer Steve Madden to create an installation for a pop-up shopping experience in New York City in 2018.

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In 2022, she spent six weeks creating a 60-foot-long, 16-foot-high work for the 20th anniversary of the Center for International Light Art in Unna, Germany. Shortly afterward, the museum acquired another of Andea's pieces for its permanent collection.

For "Midnight Zone(s)" Andea invites visitors to the gallery to walk under and through the installation, part of which dangles from the ceiling. The work is meant to be both immersive and submersive. Andea says she hopes to recapture the feeling she had as a young teen, initially overstimulated by the world that opened up to her when Communism fell. After all that darkness, she said "life finds a way."

"Midnight Zone(s)" *will be on display at Anya Tish Gallery through February 25 with an opening reception at 6 p.m. tonight, Friday, January 13. 4411 Montrose Blvd, Houston, TX 77006; 713-524-2299*

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Brittanie Shey
FORMER CULTURE REPORTER

Brittanie Shey was a culture reporter for Chron.

Shey is the former associate editor of Eater Houston and Dallas, and a lover of pickles.

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