

Adela Andea As Gynolux : The Power of Woman as Light Artiste

By Dr. Charissa N. Terranova

The work of Adela Andea is unique in many ways. She uses an array of everyday materials—neon lights and LEDs, various grades and colors of plastic, fish tank filters, gurgling water, light-fused filament, and lenticulars—thwarting their intended functions for the sake of art. She sways these parts from planned purpose to glittering statement, recombining them as networks of electrically charged, seemingly living entities of light art.



Cover Panel: Lux, Lumens & Candelas, Gallery View, LED with remotes, magnifying plastics, 15 x 15 x 10 feet, 2014.

Most unique though of all Andea's qualities is her gender. Andea is gynolux, a woman using electricity and light as material in art. More precisely, she practices in the hybrid field of art and electronic media, otherwise known as "media art," which has been historically dominated by men. In the broad sense of the term, media art includes anything using light, electricity, and suggestive of movement. This would include photography, film, kinetic art, Op Art painting, early computer and information art, and digital art and gaming in the present. Forebears of the field include Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Gyorgy Kepes, George Rickey, Mary Corse, Helen Pashgian, Victor Vasarely, Bridget Riley, and Stelarc. As with other fields of art practice prior to Second Wave Feminism that emerged in the 1960s, there are few female names present. So what does it mean when a woman uses electricity as a medium? Does being a female artist using electricity mean



anything special? Does it distinguish her from other female artists using graphite, paint, clay, wood, or bronze? The quick answer to these questions is no. Any female artist successfully practicing is a feminist at some level, witting and unwitting. She is a strong feminine role model guiding younger women along the way. The slower, more deliberative response to these questions is, simply put, yes. It makes Andea a creator not of natural life, not of human offspring, but of artificial life. As a maker of artificial life, Andea recalibrates how we think of “woman” and “gender.” She untethers gender from gender stereotypes, such as men are naturally macho and paternal while women are naturally nurturing and maternal. Like a de-gendered cyborg, Andea is at once woman and other, working between fantasy and science. Think here of Dr. Frankenstein who brought life to his monster from electricity, two characters notably fabricated by woman writer Mary Shelley, and Luigi Galvani and Allesandro Volta, two eighteenth-century scientists whose experiments queried the relationship between organic life and electricity. Andea does not so much play god in the act of creating art-as-life but scientist. She continues to hew an expanded space for art first opened by the many figures listed above, where electrical engineer meets biologist meets classical artist-impresario.

The work in Adela Andea: Lux, Lumen, and Candelas at Women & Their Work occupies space as though organic form. Like adaptive species, the individual works take corners, inhabit walls, hover below ceilings, and dangle above the floor, spreading across gallery space as though viral bacteria or spongiform marine life. In its use of fluid media, both electricity and water, this work mimics life and in many ways seems to come to life. Carefully crafted conglomerations of plastic with light and water coursing through them, the works feel like they are alive, thereby questioning the boundaries between the non-living and living.

In tapping this fault line, Andea sets off a series of urgent ethical and



ecological questions. If life is medically assisted and biologically created, do we have a duty to medically terminate and biologically destroy life when and if necessary? Who decides when and where to turn the switches? What is the value of the living in the age of viable cloning? What are the effects of life on life and the non-living on life? Like a meteor blasting into the earth, is humankind the cause of what some scientists are calling the “sixth great extinction?”

If we were to bear down on her materials, breaking down light, the key element of Andea’s work, to its most symbolic and catalytic element, we would look to heat. And just as much as electricity is living or life-like, heat is destructive, part of the carbonic breakdown of living matter. Here, Andea plays out entropy, a concept of energy and information flow, balance and imbalance, and the steady creep towards universal chaos, which motivated earthwork artist Robert Smithson and continues to motivate Dallas artist Jeff Gibbons. In layman’s terms, entropy explains the wearing down of all matter—cars, bones, houses, etc.—into disarray. Order turning to disorder: this is entropy.

Andea’s layered and woven light pieces are not in anyway chaotic in terms of the broader time of entropy. It is not art about the imminent heat death of the universe. Rather, more intricate and subtle, the temperature and suggestive heat of the lights plays out the dynamic moment of entropy in which we live now. These are works of art that capture the process of entropy something like snapshots in three-dimensional form. They tell of living matter acting on living matter: humans foraging the earth for vital elements that are transformable into energy producing materials, such as petroleum, natural gas, and all grades of metal. We break down and create in repeated instances of what Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter described as “creative destruction.”

In her latest body of work, Andea has been inspired by first-person



experience of this dynamic: her experience of climate change's sublimities along the opposite end of the spectrum from our own. Think here declining tundra rather than rising desert. In a recent trip to Alaska, she witnessed the closest rings of destruction emanating out from melting polar icecaps. Giant chunks of ice fell from the tips of magnificent glaciers, making splashes below and inspiring Andea to capture language with light form, i.e. to bring home her experiences in art form to Texas. In response, Andea developed a set of themes including crystals, shoots, and systems out of wack. In homage to the native people of Alaska, Andea gave the work Inuit names, such as Navcaq, meaning "neurotic snow," Kaneq, meaning "frost," and Nevluk, meaning "clinging debris."

Andea relays a message from nature. We are all interconnected; we are responsible for one another. Like the brightly colored filament that meanders around the wall and corner in Kaneq, twining and cleaving floor to walls to ceiling, the desert Southwest of our own backyard and the melting glaciers in Alaska are part of the same ecosystem. Andea's uses diverse materials, a matrix of hydrogen, oxygen, luminescence, plastic, and electricity, to declare the adaptability, resilience, and simultaneous preciousness of our shared ecology. She mobilizes electricity in order to raise consciousness of the wellbeing of the earth and its diversity, making light-forms that hide their gloominess in the ebullience of bright lights and coursing energy.

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