

Inside POP Austin's "Illumination"



Todd Williams

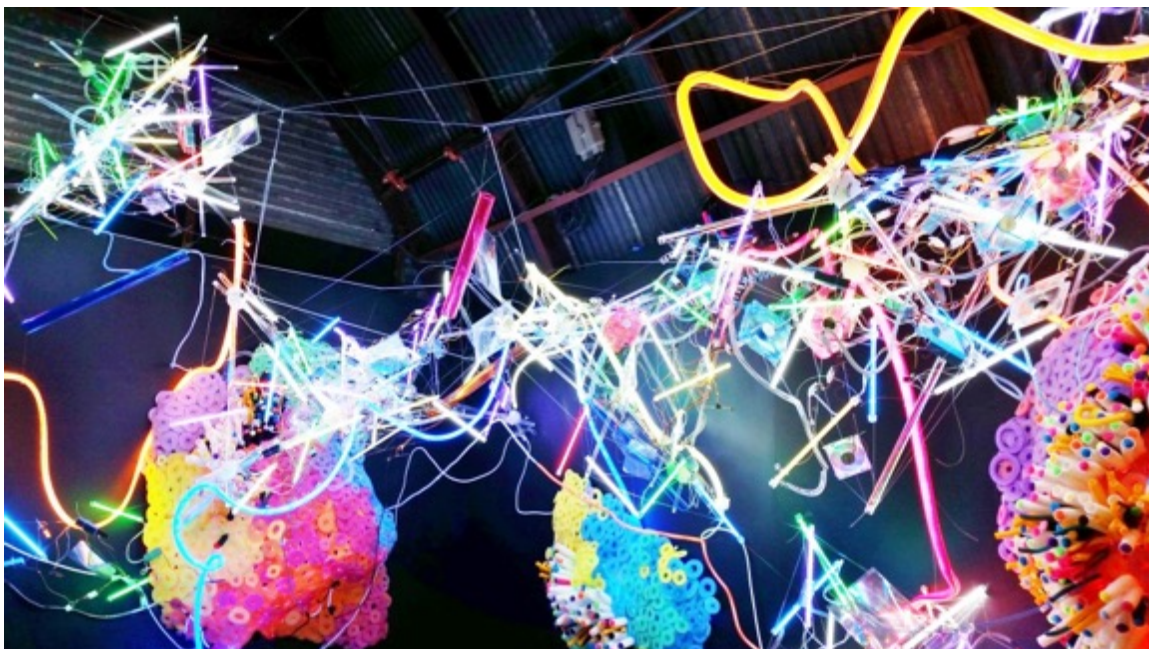
Todd Sanders, White Luchador and Red Luchador (2014)

Let's face it: pop art is past its prime. It's become so ubiquitous and widespread as to transcend the artistic realm and exist solely as decor. Whether you're a millionaire looking for an original Warhol or a college student picking up a print at Target, pieces like the Campbell's Soup Can are so readily identifiable and excessively reproduced as to rival the reach of the actual soup.

Pop art has achieved such success that it exists almost purely for the novice: if you're looking for "art" but you're not interested in having someone question your taste or challenge your choices, pop art is for you. And so it is not a surprise that POP Austin has gathered work from some of the most celebrated pop artists from the past 50 years to coincide with the arrival of the Formula 1 U.S. Grand Prix. If you're not an art aficionado but you've got some money to burn, then Warhols and Basquiats and Murakamis are for you. This is not to say that these artists are bad—they're not. They're just no longer interesting. They're safe.

Coinciding with the Circuit of the Americas exhibit, however, is a POP Austin show called "Illumination." Held at Fair Market on E. 5th, "Illumination" is a less well-worn affair. All of the works at "Illumination" deal with neon and light—a medium, as artist Adela Andea describes it, that is still in its "infantile stage." Light-based artists have recently begun to permeate our national consciousness—see James Turrell, the inspiration behind the music video for Drake's "Hotline Bling"—which made the "Illumination" exhibit feel timely rather than simply tired. The space, a dark warehouse filled with pumping dance music and haunted sound effects, augments the beauty of the pieces and adds a rarefied air to the exhibit. Although some pieces feel a bit like nightclub decor, the majority of the show is engaging and entertaining, and features a healthy combination of local and international artists. Such juxtaposition is good for Austin artists, as it exposes them to a wider audience and gives them the gravitas of working alongside artists with international stature.

We spoke with Houston artist Adela Andea, whose work *Lux Aeterna* is a highlight of the show. Andea's work incorporates light tubes, whirring computer parts, chopped up pool noodles, and other materials, melded together into chaotically organic structures that shine like galaxies or bioluminescent coral. Excerpts of our interview, along with a sampling of photos from the exhibit, can be found below.



Lux Aeterna

Adela Andea, Lux Aeterna (2015)

Tell us about your piece.

AA: What you see here—the CCFL, the computer fans, the LED fans—they're all run by computer sources. It's a computer that exploded: it's inverted, it's inside-out. I like the physicality of it—I wanted the physicality of the technology to become the medium. Not just the cyber-reality of the computer. That's why I started to work with different materials and different components, consumer electronics on the market, to be able to use new technology in a way that can redefine what the light installation movement is today.

What's here today is a combination of several elements from different installations.

When I switched to the medium of light, as an artist I decided that I want to create work using new technologies and challenging what is the medium of light and what is important in our society right now, in our culture, so I became interested in the environment, environmental art, and how the term nature became disconnected or antithetical with the term technology. Back in time with the industrial revolution, the manmade machines, industrial, geometric, they redefined the meaning of natural, organic, they weren't working in synergy. But I think, today, there is a connection between what is natural and what is man-made technology. And I try to blend this together. We have a very important mission, in a way. We can't go back to the woods—we have to move forward, to save the environment and blend them together and not disconnect them anymore.

I read an article about group psychology saying that as a group, as society, as we destroy the environment, in order to replace the guilt of destroying the environment, we recreate or put things in its place, to replace our guilt towards the destruction of environment with a good purpose. That means we start to control or organize nature. And I found that fascinating, because I'd never thought about it, but maybe it's true... It made me think, how do we know what is truly natural? What was the first thing created by machines? So I hope I can intrigue a little bit, or make people think about it in that regard.



Lux Aeterna

What inspired you to use pool noodles?

AA: I think it's a good material in the long term, to diffuse the light, but also to have the multiplicity of the elements, from thousands and thousands of pieces put together in an overwhelming way... It's plastic. It's a form of destruction for the environment. It will last forever; it will outlast us. But it makes people happy when they see it!

It does. They have such bright colors, and they bring to mind the fun you have when you're in the pool. They make your work feel more fun. Perhaps more fun than a lot of other light artists'—Dan Flavin, or anyone in this exhibit. There's always a strict formalism of material and geometric application to anything they create.

AA: That's the minimalists. I don't feel that I'm a minimalist—I'm represented by a minimalist gallery, but I'm a maximalist. But Dan Flavin, in my view, he was a pioneer that the medium light is a medium in itself in the fine art world, but he did use consumer electronics—lights

that were available on the market for everybody, for everyday use, the Marcel Duchamp, readymade kind of idea, and that was very inspiring. I don't know if today he would be a minimalist, but that was a good starting point, because before that, only a few experiments—Bauhaus, the Light-Space Modulator—were accepted in the fine arts world with the medium of light.

I do have geometric art. And I like geometric art, and I like white, too. I use a lot of white, I have a series on white, based on the melting glaciers. I go through phases. I try to blend everything and stay on top of what is available, what is on the market. The biggest mistake an artist can do is repeat something that was done. If it's intentional, then that's just stupid. But if it's unintentional, then you are not informed, and that's a bad thing. You need to keep an eye on everything if you want to be cutting edge.

LED technology was invented 50 years ago, but it didn't catch on the market until recently, because we are talking about the environment and saving energy. And that's an interesting element, I would say—there are visionaries, there are geniuses, but it's not catching up with the society.



Adela Andea

AA: There are many ways you can use art to do all those things. Making donations and raising money and doing all that. And I've been in a show where it was all about the environment, and discarded materials. And I've been challenged about that. Why are you buying this? Why aren't you using something recyclable? And in that regard, I'm not overexpending. I make a statement that says I am using this much energy, and you can compare that to what you use in your house. It's tricky because if you make something, you do consume. But you can make a statement. And there are ways to change things and participate in this discussion.



Lux Aeterna

— SEAN REDMOND