

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE WEATHER

A clipper will bring accumulating snow from Detroit to Cleveland and much of New York into New England on Sunday into Sunday night. Weather map appears on Page 36.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025

Prices in Canada may be higher \$6.00

16 AR

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025

Art

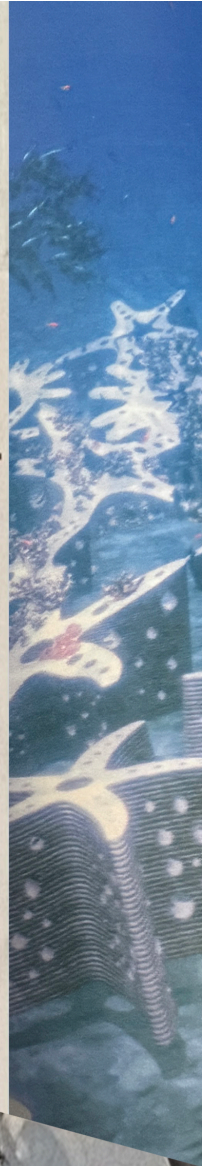


Exhibit Mingles With the Fishes

An underwater sculpture park aims to be a haven for artwork and corals, but some skeptics are wary of any scientific benefits.

By BLAKE GOPNIK

MIAMI BEACH — I've reviewed art in a tuxedo.

I've reviewed it in shorts and sneakers. I've reviewed it in a fur hat and snow boots.

But I've never before done my critic's job in a wet suit and flippers.

grown gorgonians — "soft" corals that look more like drab seaweed than like the better known, more colorful "stony" corals whose skeletons form reefs. On Erlich's cars, the gorgonians should grow several feet high, swaying in the currents as fish swim in for protection and food.

"We're going to have a forest growing on a traffic jam," said Colin Foord, the 43-year-old



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...a bit excessive: The benefits of corals, and the risks they now face, are really all about the stony, reef-building corals that protect the shore. The soft-bodied gorgonians used by Reefline are at less risk from global warming, according to scientists I spoke to. And even if Reefline someday extended for the full length of Miami Beach — the next two projects, planned for submersion next summer beside Erlich's, are a concrete whale heart, 17 feet long, by the London artist Petroc Sesti, and a seafloor constellation of concrete stars, designed by the Floridians Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre — any practical benefits would go more to fish than to humans. Projects like Reefline are part of "a global growth industry, putting degraded coral reef the something to look at," said eminent coral scientist William Erlich, emeritus at James Cook University in Townsville, Australia. He cites mermaid scuba diving in the Caribbean waters off Grenada, a concrete car sculpture in Miami Beach, and cars with coral stuck on them, as the best distraction from the reefs along the Florida coast. "Its ecological or utility is pretty close to zero." Foord disagrees. He suggests Reefline's sculptures might draw attention away from natural reefs so those reefs are a kind of test-bed for how corals grow

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Arts & Leisure

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Art

Sculptures Mingle With Fishes and Coral

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

And that's totally fine, said Joshua Shannon, 53, an art historian at the University of Maryland in the emerging field of eco-criticism. His forthcoming book is called "How and Why to Look at Art in the Time of Climate Change."

To actually protect the planet, action has to happen at a scale that only states can manage, Shannon said. But people working at the scale of art can change the culture so those larger actions take place. "You don't get rid of slavery without a culture that finds it intolerable; you don't get rid of monarchy without a culture that writes about these things without a culture that wants it; you don't start ally weird, abstract things — and you don't start rights and civil rights — and you don't start recasting our place in nature until there's a culture that wants it recast. Shannon pointed to Reefline's public funding — \$5 million, approved by Miami Beach as a sign of the project's place in our changing culture.

And Reefline's message, he said, gets conveyed with an immediacy that most art can't provide. "You don't just see a video in your basement of coral being restored, but you swim in it with your own body." This art is about humans actually in nature, as part of it, not looking at it from afar in some Ansel Adams photo.

But Shannon also pointed out the irony that Erlich's sunken cars are made of concrete — 300 tons of it — a material thought to contribute about 8 percent of the world's coral-killing emissions. (Caminos said she is hoping to get permission to use a new, lower-carbon concrete for future projects.) Hughes, the Australian professor (and skeptic), said that simply as an artistic Im-Cézanne or Warhol, art that "gives you unending complexity and engages you on several mixed feelings and engages you on several different levels," Shannon said.

Just as sculpture, Erlich's cars are not particularly compelling — this is hardly the first art of everyday objects — and their messaging seems fairly predictable, about offering nothing more than "a simple, didactic, political takeaways," as Shannon put it. But maybe Reefline's art, by Erlich or the artists coming next, isn't really in its objects, but in the ocean setting they plunge a viewer into, as just another creature among nature's many. Art-looking, an ultimately human activity, gets forced to take place in a context that reads as unhuman. Floating



REEFLINE EXCURSIONS

ART Phase 1 of Reefline consists of "Concrete Coral" by Leandro Erlich. 22 car sculptures sank in 20 feet of water off Miami Beach, near Fourth Street. Next summer, Reefline plans to sink Petros Sesti's concrete whale heart and the seafloor stars of Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre. In 2025, Reefline will begin refining Phase 3 proposals from a shortlist of artists, choosing one to produce an underwater installation that has yet to be permitted.

ACCESS Visitors can experience "Concrete Coral" from the beach — by swimming, paddleboard, etc. — or from the water by private boat. Electric paddleboards are available for rent from Reefline.

Four times a week starting Monday, Reefline's "Art & Science Discovery Dives" will take visitors out to "Concrete Coral" on boats run by a local firm. Diver's Paradise, at a cost of \$149 to \$425 per person. Once a month from December through May, access to the dive boat's trips will be free.

Reefline has received more than \$55,000 in seed money of \$55,000 from the Miami Foundation in 2022. In 2023, it received \$1 million in additional funding.



Top, a diver exploring Reefline's first project, which is meant to provide soft corals he collected in the wild; and the writer at the site of the coral collection.

Exhibit With t

An underwater sculpture and corals, but some skepti

By BLAKE GOPNIK

MIAMI BEACH — I've reviewed it in edo. I've reviewed it in shorts and sneak. I've reviewed it in a fur hat and s



Early in the day, divers in hooded gear and 100 lab

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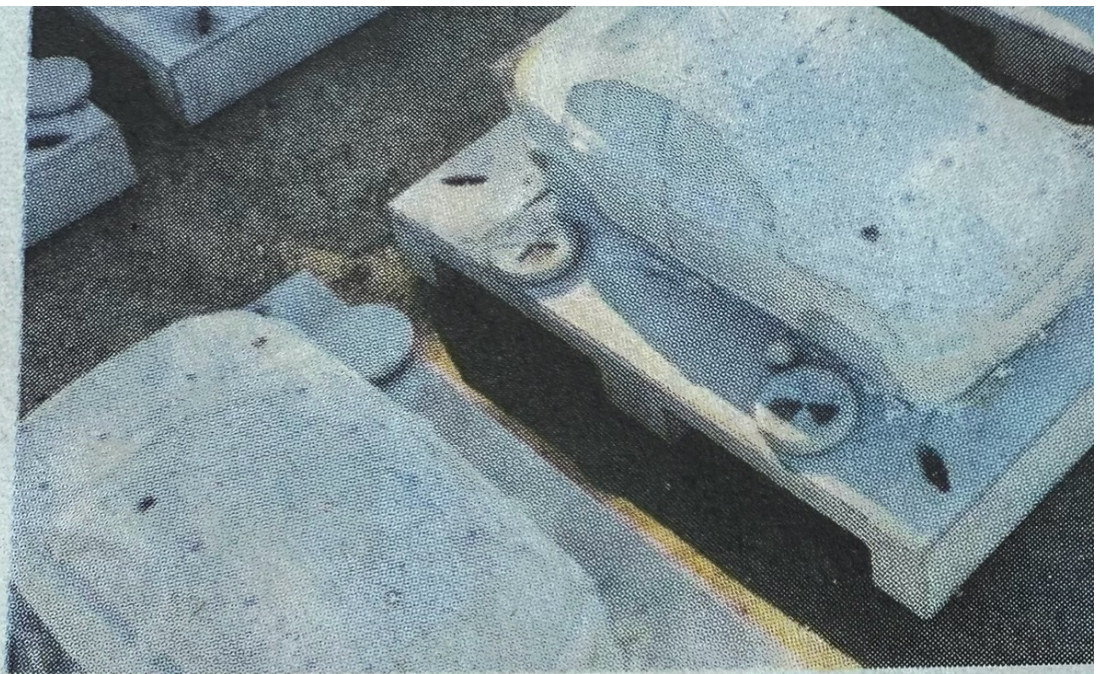
otic water-world that has behind?

car U.S.A. that has seen in favor of less noxious my dive, Erlich's traffic on its way to being re-re, with spadefish, fish and shark-loving to find a home there. Experiences and readings relevant to the true, full

performative," said line's founder and ar-performative in the se, she explained, but e meant to perform a ing eye-teasing art. er my Reefline dive, ne. "Our structures re to actually grab l.

submerging a se-res along Miami t of this decade — are ready to go, a s are still wishful rtificial reefs, pro-and of marine life,

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