

## Hidden Universe | Gallery Explorer

### The North American Nebula

Seen here in visible light, the North American Nebula strangely resembles its namesake continent. Expanding our view to include infrared light, the dark dust lanes and concealed stars glow in red colors while the continental gas clouds shift to an ocean-like blue. Pushing entirely into the infrared spectrum, we see even more detail in the convoluted dust clouds.

The ultraviolet glow from massive young stars heats the gas and sculpts the dust clouds into fantastic shapes throughout this composite of visible and infrared light. The hot gas, rendered in blue, fills the spaces between the denser dusty regions that appear red.

This dramatic cluster of baby stars can only be found in infrared images. The stars are forming within dense dust filaments in the “Gulf of Mexico” region. The dusty cocoons around these protostars glow red in this expanded infrared view.

A similar, though smaller, filament of baby stars can be found nearby, in an area known as the Pelican Nebula. Picking out the red protostars is easy in the full infrared view.

Combining infrared data from NASA’s Spitzer Space Telescope with light from other parts of the spectrum gives astronomers a more complete picture of star formation. Each different combination of observations provides more insight into how one generation of stars can give rise to the next.