

# KYOTO

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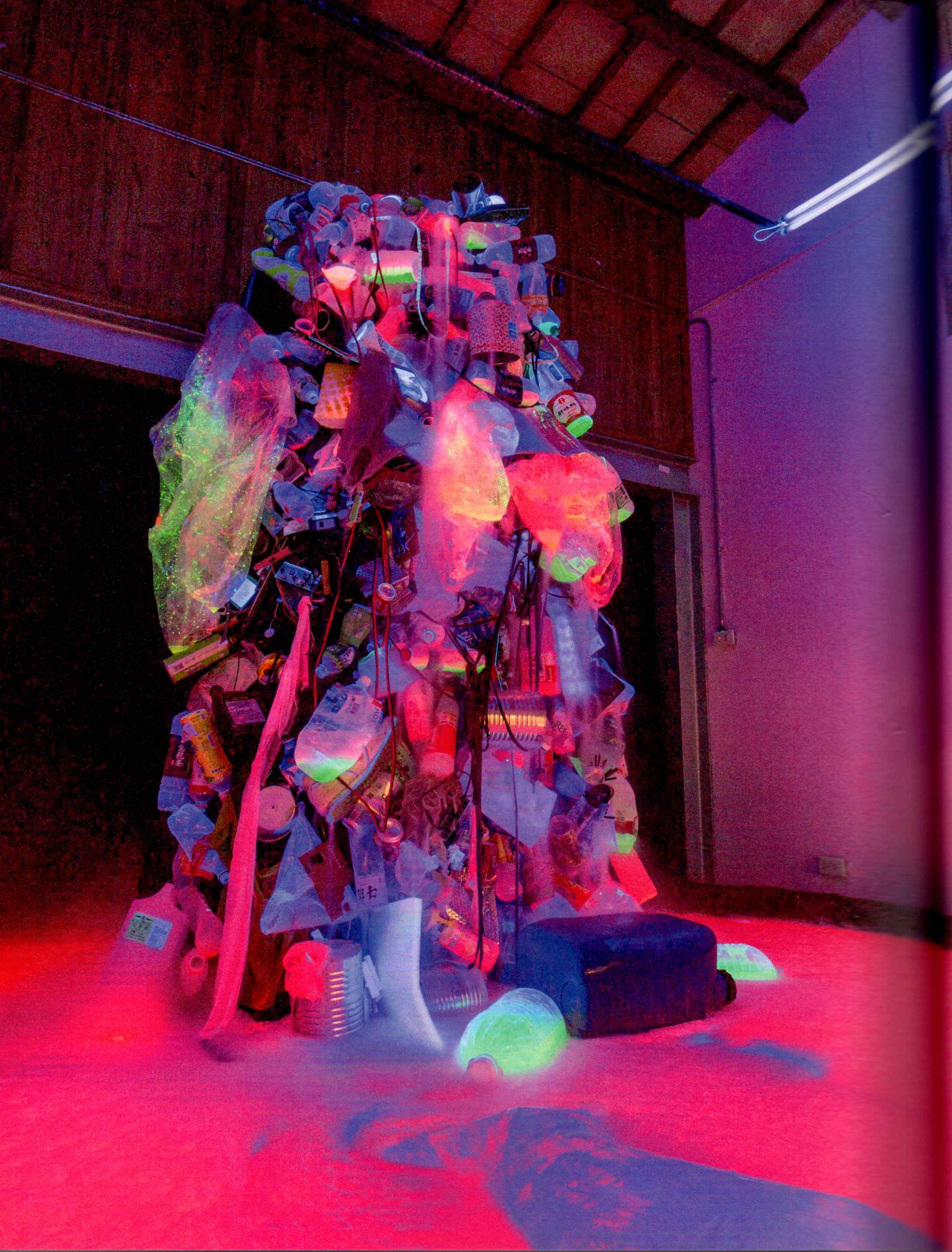
## JOURNAL

96

Our Neighbor, *Formosa*





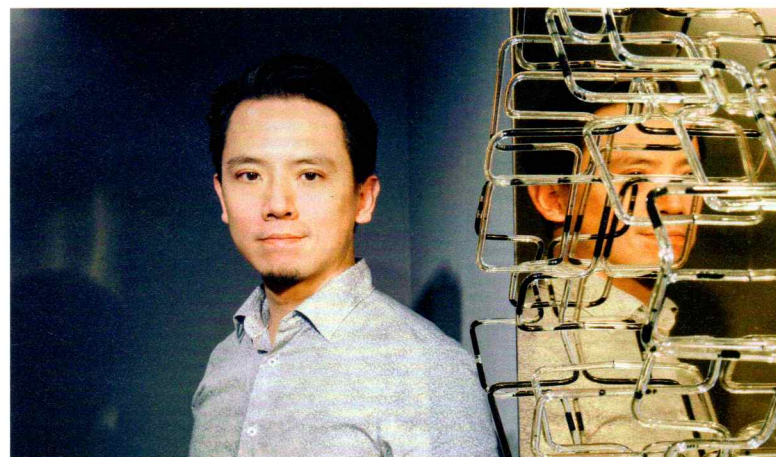




# De

## constructing the art/science divide

ALEXANDRA TING TALKS WITH  
IVAN LIU OF LEGACY LAB INTERNATIONAL



### NIRVANA (2019)

In Buddhism, "Nirvana" is a state without pain, trouble, life or death. It is a state of happiness and contentment, and the ultimate state which Buddhists aim to achieve through life-long practice. If we take Buddhist practice as a metaphor for the continuous advancement of technology, then what will Nirvana be like for us?

In this work, we use recycled waste and fluorescent dye to construct a landscape consisting of rocks and a running waterfall. The form of the installation reminds viewers of natural landscape, yet the visual image and colors suggest something completely opposite. This visual conflict creates an unsettling experience, evoking introspection. On one hand this work can be viewed as a warning for humanity, and perhaps on the other, a prediction of the future world we will live in.

Origin Sun Studio/Dennis Wang

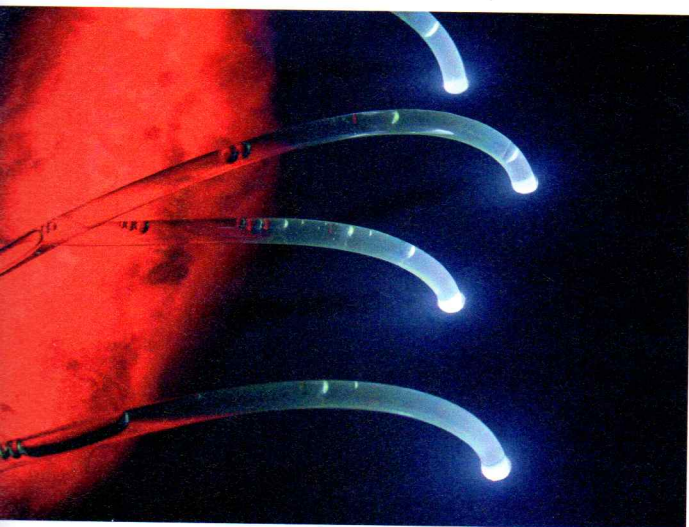
It took some time for this new art form—somewhere at the intersection of science, digital media, and contemporary art—to gain traction. But since its founding in 2013, Taipei-based Legacy Lab International has been making progress by producing thought-provoking works that cross what many would consider long-established boundaries.

Its artistic director Ivan Liu and I found we had a lot to talk about. We are both of Taiwanese descent, but I grew up in the U.S. and studied art history at university; I now manage a scientific research initiative for the University of Cambridge. Somewhat conversely, Ivan moved to England when he was 16 and after attending university in London and completing a PhD in physics in Germany, found himself starting a creative studio upon returning to Taiwan.



I have been thinking about the intersection of art and science for a while now, and to be honest, am quite sceptical about it. Most of the collaborations I have seen somehow manage to further the divide between the two, and in doing so, oversimplify and perpetuate the narrative of their opposing natures: science as rational, rigid and useful and art as irrational, interpretive, and lacking intrinsic value. Legacy Lab International, however, creates work from the perspective that there is no divide between the disciplines to begin with.

It is clear that Ivan's vision is deeply rooted in philosophy, art history, science, and more; yet he seems most comfortable in the spaces between, thinking critically about the links that connect, rather than divide, the disciplines. In many ways, the values conveyed by the creative studio are as simple as unity and wholeness, manifesting in works that would resonate equally with each of us, regardless of our backgrounds. Through its rigorous and thoughtful creative process, Legacy Lab International is at the helm of an epistemological shift—one in which art has moved away from solely translating *what* we know and instead, has begun to question *how* we know what we know, and in doing so, is producing knowledge.



THROB, 2016

**ALEX TING: What is the essential concept here?**

**IVAN LIU:** In school, art was portrayed as something subjective, with no right or wrong, while science was purely based on fact. So one person was divided into two parts: the emotional side and rational side. And in terms of career paths, we categorise ourselves into one thing or the other. That's not natural at all. Now, people are seeing the bottleneck that comes from this kind of system, so Legacy Lab International is attempting to bring the balance back.

**How does that mind-set manifest in the artwork?**

We create art with the process and rigor of the scientific method. For example, several of our works use coloured liquids that flow through transparent tubes. We spent almost three years researching the fluid dynamics and building a custom digital platform to control it. From there, we thought about what kind of artwork could be created with the technology (*Throb* [2016], *Fragmentation*, [2017], *Water City* [2018]). For our current piece, *Nirvana* [2019], we thought, "Now we have these fluids in tubes, but what if we take them out of the container so it becomes like a waterfall?"

Our methodology involves research and experimentation to understand the physical properties of media and materials. Then we then manipulate their appearance. Through the process of accumulation of ideas and techniques, we aim to captivate the viewer's senses and provoke them to question the relationship between humans, nature, and technology.

**Tell me the story behind one of your pieces...**

*Chthulucene* (2018) embodies a sort of doomsday aesthetic. We were thinking about environmental issues and the fact that, at this point, it will be impossible to completely eliminate the impact of human existence on this planet. We are living in a world with our by-products; some call it 'the second nature.'

What we are asking is, "What will life look like in the future and will a new kind of aesthetic come from this environment?" For example, obesity is a product of industrial food and it has already begun to change our appearance. In this work, we poisoned the plants using carbon sulphate which is found commonly in waste water. This yellowish look might be considered trendy in the future. It's hard to imagine now, but 50 years ago, people probably couldn't believe that restaurants with exposed beams and pipes would look good. But now this industrial, minimalist style represents our era and culture. In *Chthulucene*, we are toying with the idea of building blocks for a future aesthetic.



After a number of years in Kyoto, **ALEXANDRA TING** is now based in England where she is completing a master's degree in arts education with a focus on the intersection of art and food. She continues to love and support KJ from afar.

[www.legacy-lab.com/en/home](http://www.legacy-lab.com/en/home)  
[www.facebook.com/legacylabinternational](https://www.facebook.com/legacylabinternational)  
[www.instagram.com/legacylabinternational](https://www.instagram.com/legacylabinternational)





### WATER CITY (2018)

Flowing colour segments intertwine within a complex network of tubes. The architectural form serves as a metaphor for the foundation of modern civilisation. The dynamics of the fluid represent its underlying energy, a driving force that keeps society lively.

Legacy Lab International utilises its own fluid dynamics aesthetics and custom-built digital control technology to create segments of colour flowing in transparent tubes. The three-dimensional structure transforms this work into a micro-architecture that yields a different view from every angle.

### CHTHULUCENE (2018)

This work comes from the idea that plantations living under pollution may survive, but in a critical state between life and death. This critical state and its appearance are manifestations of co-existence between nature, humanity, and technology. Will this appearance in the critical state play a role in defining future aesthetics? In this work, Golden Pothos (a.k.a. Devil's Ivy) plants are fed with copper sulphate solution (a typical heavy-metal pollutant) of various concentrations. Some will die after a day, some a few days later, while some will survive in the critical state. We construct an installation with plants in such conditions, and speculate on future art forms.

Photos Courtesy of Legacy Lab International

