

• Art

More than mere artists

By Deng Zhangyu | China Daily | Updated: 2018-12-26 09:05

Liu Xin blends art and science not only professionally but also personally.

The New York-based engineer, who works for the MIT Media Lab's Space Exploration Initiative, flew to South China's Hainan province earlier this month in a capacity different from her day job—that is, as an artist presenting installations, videos and performances.

The 27-year-old joined a group show in the tropical city, featuring 20 young artists nominated for the 2018 Huayu Youth Award, an independent art prize focusing on artists under the age of 35.

She displayed her video, Orbit Weaver, in which she uses a homemade device to shoot string in the zero-gravity environment of outer space, and her installation, Tear Set, consisting of bottles of artificial tears she created based on her own actual tears.

Liu developed her second career as an artist after graduating from Tsinghua University's department of precision instruments. She also studied digital media at the Rhode Island School of Design.



Artist and engineer Liu Xin presents her installation Tear Set and video Orbit Weaver at a group show in Art Sanya featuring 20 young artists nominated for the 2018 Huayu Art Award.[Photo provided to China Daily]



"I believe humans are naturally polymaths," she says

Liu is one of many contemporary Chinese artists with day jobs that are also core components of their multifaceted identities.

It's especially commonplace among young artists, many of whom can't make their livings through art—at least, not yet.

A Thousand Plateaus Art Space's founder, Liu Jie, says young artists must earn money through various channels when the global economy isn't good.

He says many artists he meets have multiple identities—sometimes out of choice and sometimes out of necessity

"Young artists are more open to multiple careers compared with older, established artists," the gallery owner explains. He adds that many mid-career artists were able to make a living by selling their work just after graduating from art colleges in the 2000s, when the art market in China increased quickly.

Shanghai-based artist Guo Cheng worked for university labs, taught students and took jobs at art institutions before deciding to become a professional artist last year

The 30-year-old hasn't yet sold any pieces, but he has captivated the art world's attention with his research-based art pieces that mainly explore the relationship between technology and humans.

He primarily finances his art career through an art residency.

Guo traveled to Amsterdam to join an art project with a chemist and environmental scientist, whose focus is on micro-plastics.

He spent three months there digging a hole and restoring the soil so that it's as pristine as it was before contact with human influences.

It took him half a year to produce the first series of photos, installations and videos based on the project.

"I create slowly," the 30-year-old says.

"I don't think I can live on art for long."

That's why he applies for funded projects and works part-time jobs, but he hopes to someday make it his main career.