

renegade

game changers | thought leaders | rule breakers | style makers

COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 12

**WHY IT PAYS
BIG TO SOUND
A LITTLE DIRTY**

#thefrankeffect

**LEANDRA
MEDINE**

REPELLING MEN
SINCE 1988

**ALL THE
RIGHT
MOVES**

NAILING
YOUR
NICHE

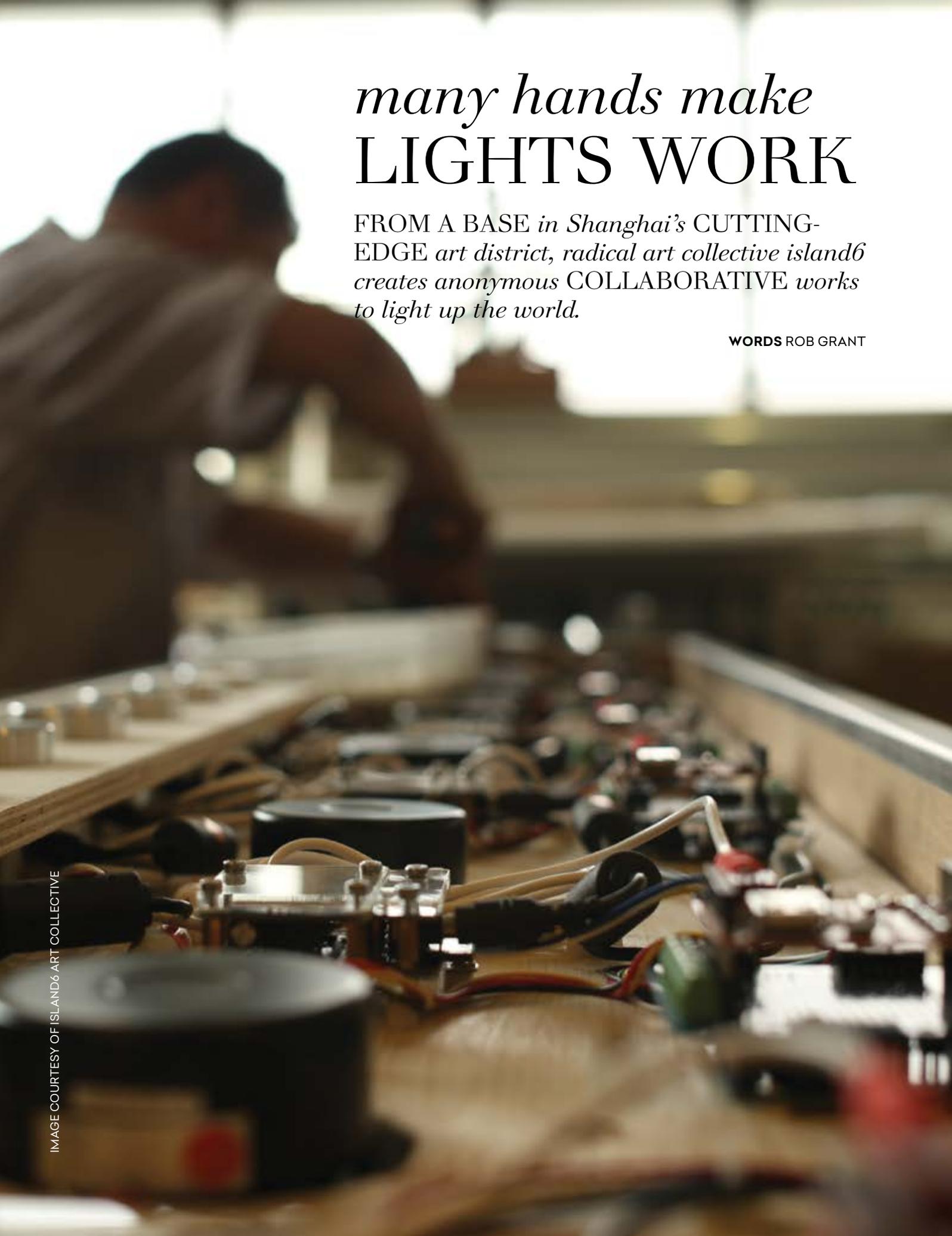
+

3D

**SKETCH IT
PRINT IT
WEAR IT**

**LILY
COLE**

model turned everything

A person is seen from the side, working on a large, complex electronic circuit board. The board is filled with various components like capacitors, resistors, and integrated circuits, with many wires connected. The person is in a workshop or studio setting, with a blurred background showing other people and equipment. The lighting is warm and focused on the work area.

many hands make LIGHTS WORK

FROM A BASE *in Shanghai's CUTTING-EDGE art district, radical art collective island6 creates anonymous COLLABORATIVE works to light up the world.*

WORDS ROB GRANT



It's hard to imagine a dull day at work when your colleagues include a Russian architect, Irish sound engineer, Chinese dancer and French digital animator. Linguistically challenging, perhaps, but rarely dull. Throw in a few animated electronic butterflies, a stuffed tomcat and some bondage gear, and you'll definitely not be caught dozing at your desk.

Irreverence and diversity underpin the philosophy of Shanghai's radical art collective, island6 (Liu Dao), which has been producing collaborative contemporary art since 1996.

Based in Shanghai's M50 art district which is home to more than 100 studios and galleries, alongside the otherwise grimy Suzhou Creek, island6 brings together painters, sculptors, photographers, filmmakers, digital imaging artists, dancers, writers and engineers to exchange ideas and produce inspiring pieces of art.

Originally from Georgia in the US, where she studied art, curator Margaret Johnson was drawn to the group's ability to create artworks that no one person could possibly produce.

"The opportunity to bounce ideas from one another, and have them grow into something completely unique and

innovative, is a rare occasion. It's never boring and always moving," she says. Every artwork produced by island6 is signed 'Liu Dao', with individual artists remaining anonymous. It's a very deliberate practice to drive collaboration for the greater creative good, instead of fuelling individual reputations.

"Current art markets, especially in China, serve to elevate, or inflate, only the individual and nurture a growing ego," says Margaret.

"At island6, we actively work against this to promote a new idea or an open working platform that draws from the strength of the whole, rather than the individual."

Their résumé also represents the collective, with the education section reading like an art lover's academic dream, including a diploma in art law, degrees in folkloric dancing, fine arts and art history, and masters in sculpture, cinematography and digital arts. (Clearly this person in real-life would be classified as an overachiever.)

Rather than working in secret between exhibitions, island6 operate from a huge workshop housed in a

converted flour warehouse which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Guests are invited to step inside and witness works as they're created, with often amusing results.

"Our artwork can be quite comical, so guests may enter our gallery to see a girl dressed in whips and chains; it's all rather unexpected for our visitors. The reactions are always priceless."

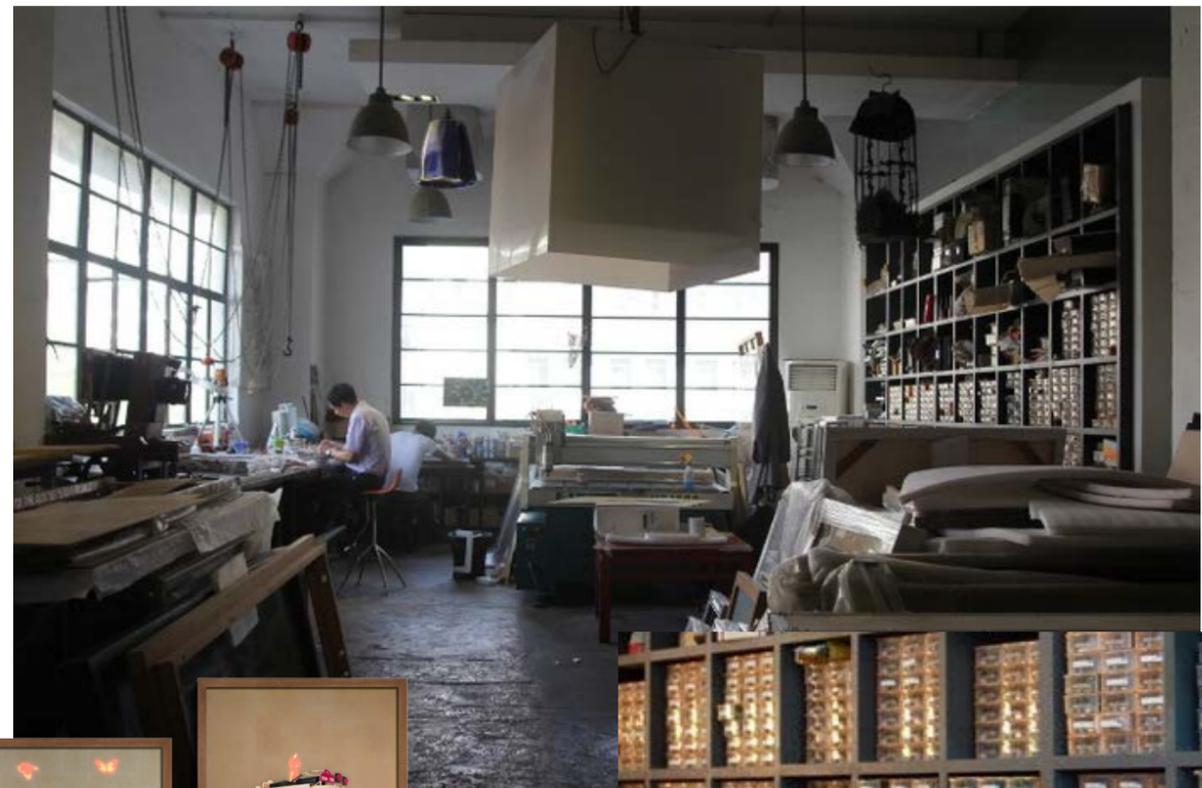
Indeed humour plays an important

Current art markets, especially in CHINA, serve to ELEVATE, or inflate, only the individual and NURTURE a growing ego.

role in the way island6 works – partly as a stance against the stuffy art world and also as a coping mechanism within a multilingual environment.

"There are no more than three people who share the same mother tongue. We've gotten used to any language difficulties, they mix with the industrial chatter from our workshop and fill the gallery," adds Margaret.

In the artworks themselves, tongue-in-cheek humour is also never far away,



IMAGES COURTESY OF ISLAND6 ART COLLECTIVE



as seen in exhibition titles like, The Artist Always Gets Paid Last, The Cat That Eats Diodes and The Altar of Bling.

Margaret describes the latter of these exhibitions as "an exploration of the cult status of luxury, featuring a rather decadent spread of oil-painted cars, paired with videos of elegantly dressed passengers and delicate painted porcelain vases with ethereal LED butterflies darting around."

While it's hard to categorise the art island6 produces – a fact which would please them – cleverly combining tradition and culture with cutting-edge technology is one important recurring theme.

Among their ranks are traditionally trained Shanghainese paper cutters and a Shandong province Shan Shui (water mountain) painter, whose talents are melded with LED animations, interactive light artworks and time-based mediums.

Although based in Shanghai, island6 sees itself inspired but not constrained by China.

"We shy away from being tagged as 'Chinese art', as we feel once you put a country in front of the word 'art' it becomes kitsch and more of a souvenir. People wouldn't travel to New York to find 'New York art,'" Margaret points out.

"The link to China in our art is strong, but it's more about our collective personal experiences."

Their work can be viewed at their galleries in three locations in Shanghai, plus spaces in Hong Kong and Phuket. Taking their collaborative principle further still, they have gallery partners in a dozen global cities who also provide art direction.

"Being an international collective based in Shanghai, our philosophy is inherently of the world," says Margaret.

Yet it's on home turf in Shanghai, witnessing the collective conception and creation of art, that the spirit of island6 can most inspire.

Here the evidence is clear – the sum of the parts is definitely greater than the whole. ■