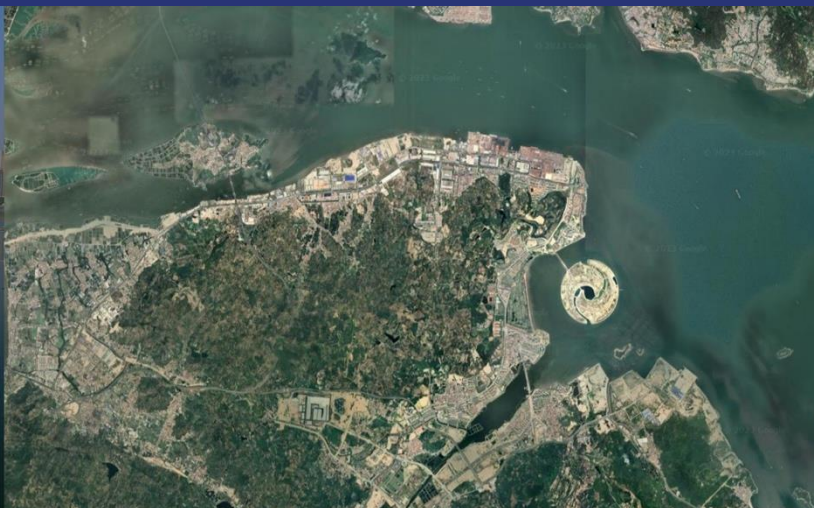


Xiamen Oyster/ 厦门牡蛎

By Dr Stephen Connolly



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Stephen Connolly
Name of Output:	Xiamen Oyster / 厦门牡蛎
UCARO link/s:	[Make sure you create a UCARO record for all research outputs]
Output Type:	Installation Artwork
Year and mode of dissemination:	Interactive Artefact built by ICI students Exhibited at G Museum & Art Gallery, Fuzhou 15.04.2025 – 17.07.25
Key Words:	Oyster, Biosphere, Interactive, Installation, China, Xiamen
Funding:	UCA KE Funding 2023; XMU 大创 XMU DaChuang/Strong Create Program (students)

Synopsis

Xiamen Oyster is a project of creative visualisation exploring the biological, ecological and social aspects of large-scale oyster farming across the Xiamen Bay Area. The project aim is to make a digital moving image and interactive artwork, to be exhibited as an installation to visualise the environmental function of oysters in the Xiamen biosphere.

The research question is how to visualise interspecies relationships, specifically the interdependencies between oysters and humans in the Fujian littoral.

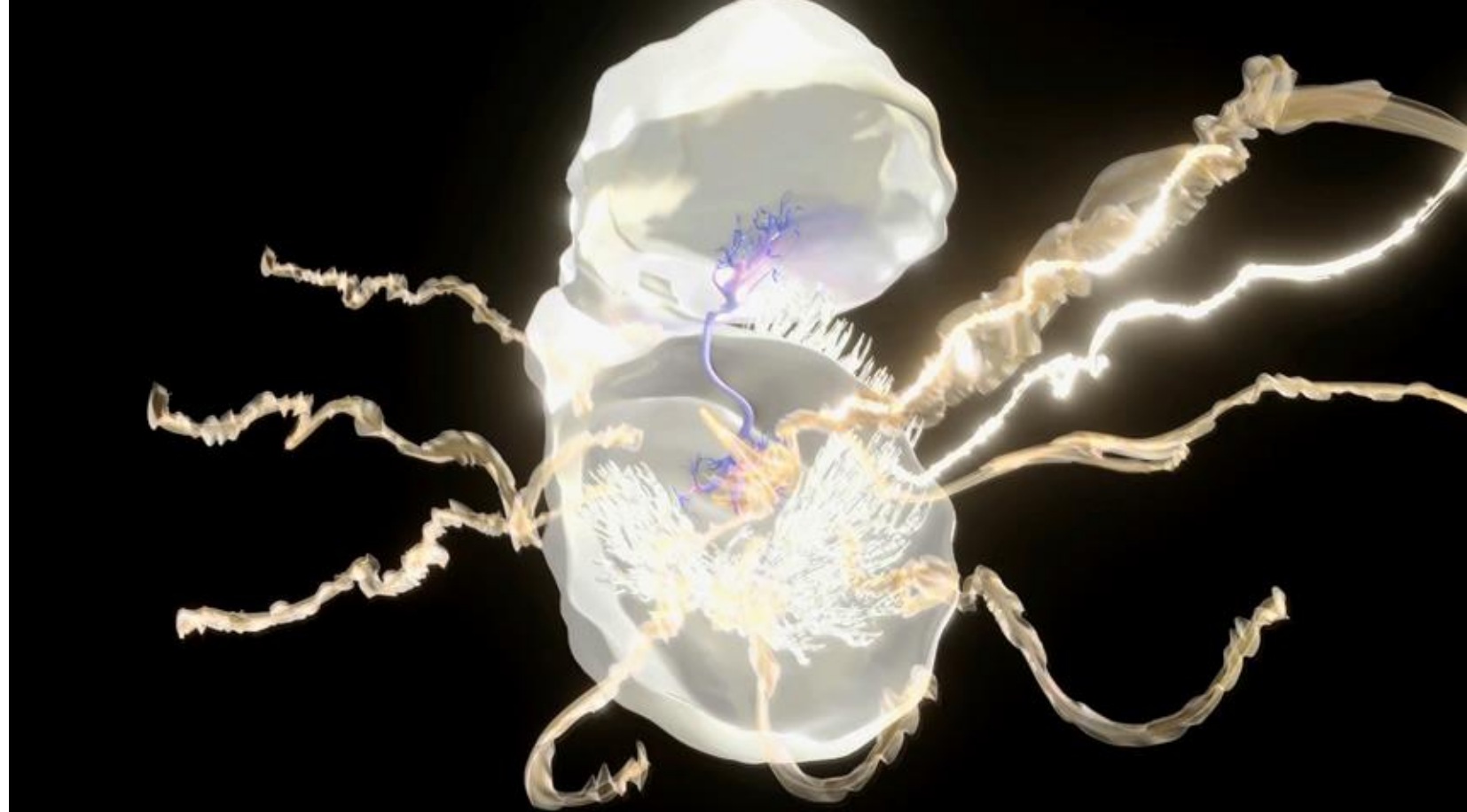
Project director and co-ordinator -
Stephen Connolly assisted by Francesca
Brunetti & Feng Sha 冯莎

ICI Digital Media Arts students realising
the project -

Simiao Yang 杨斯渺, Ruiyan Cheng 程睿妍,
Xuan Huang 黄萱, Zhewen Hu 胡哲文,
Ruixin Pan 潘睿鑫, Xinyue Gan 淦馨悦,
Yi Wang 王易, Yiyang Gao 高亦阳



*Student visit to an oyster farm,
Zhangzhou, Fujian*



Xiamen Oyster
Animation still

Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:	How can interspecies relationships between oysters and humans be visualised? How can interactivity add to the exploration of these relationships? What are the possibilities and constraints on ICI staff leading externally-facing projects locally in Fujian
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Research questions:	The project aim is to make a digital moving image and interactive artwork, to be exhibited as an installation to visualise the environmental function of oysters in the Xiamen biosphere.
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Context

The project recruited 8 Digital Media Arts students to research and develop the project.

Place for more text

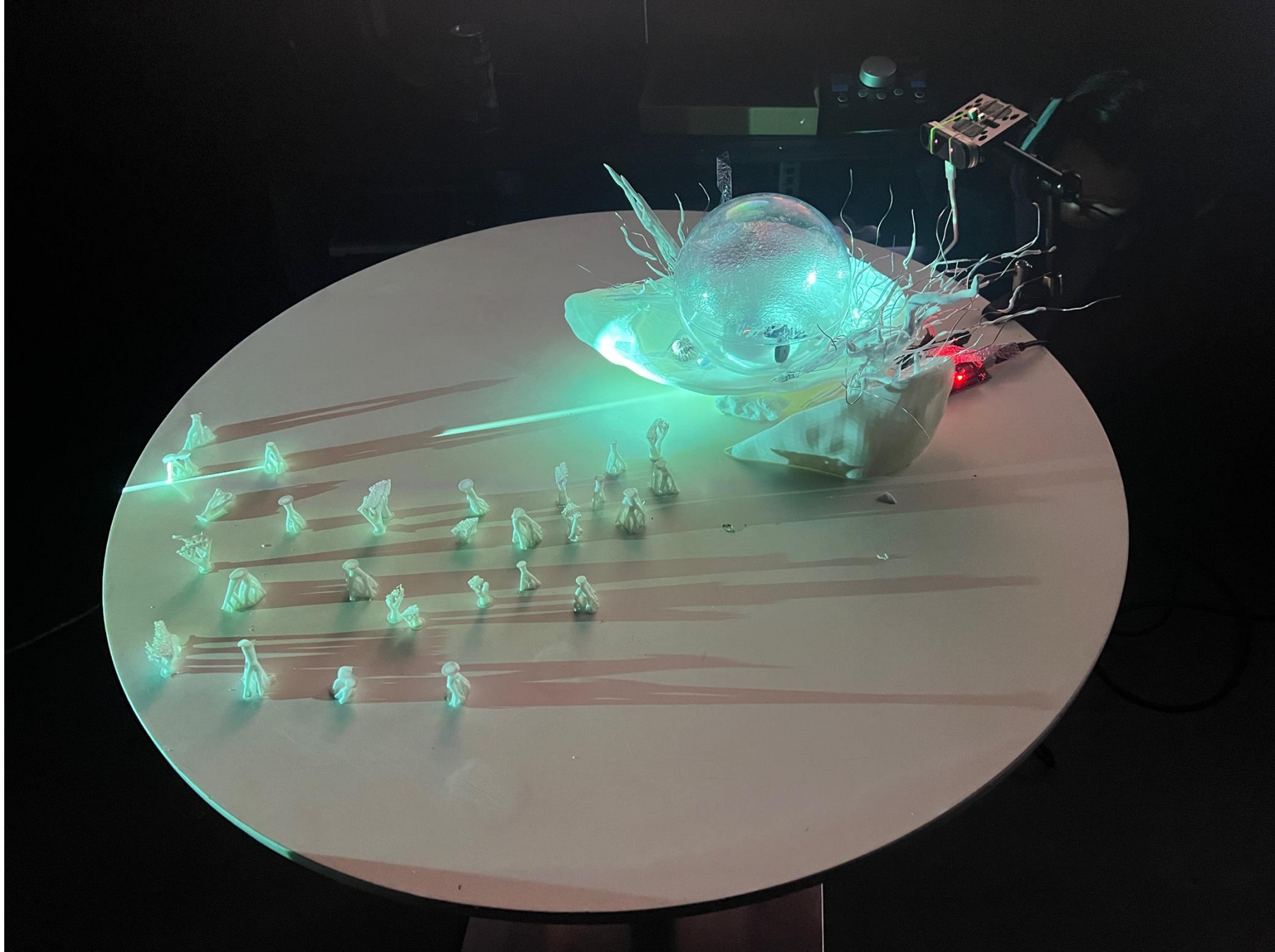
The research gap is the challenge of visualising the scale and impact of oysters as a significant biome participant – a *hyper-object* (Morton) - in a coastal biosphere where cities of up to 8 million inhabitants, significant marine farming industries, and a vulnerable shellfish restricted to the inter-tidal zone of the littoral co-exist.

Partners included the XMU Marine Laboratory (Xiang' An campus) and oyster farmers local to ICI, XMU Zhangzhou Campus.

Key references –

Morton, T. (2013) *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Caracciolo, M. (2021) *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene*. University of Virginia Press.



*Xiamen Oyster –
First iteration*



*Xiamen Oyster –
First iteration*

Research Methods and Process

Students research the materiality, process and labour of oyster production by visiting local oyster farms. They investigated the science of the resilience of bivalve species to chemical pollution and climate change evidenced in the warming waters of the South China Sea.

Oysters, or *bivalve molluscs*, are known as ecosystem engineers in coastal waters. Clusters of oysters create micro-habitats that attract other species in symbiotic relationships that build ecosystems. They can ingest and filter across their gills up to 190 litres of water every 24 hours. Oysters ingest plankton and non-food particles; digesting and concentrating non-food materials for expulsion to the bottom of the body of water.

A significant study in Xiamen established oysters concentrated copper pollution emitted from an industrial creek, giving at that time a characteristic blue appearance to the afflicted shellfish.

The use of the oyster as a symbol in local cultural expression was also a topic of research – the pearl of the oyster framed in myth as a symbol of wealth and mystery; and in the figure of the mythical beast 白泽 Bai Ze a source of illumination of the heavens and the earth. 白泽 Bai Ze, a composite of lion, bull and oyster, is capable of ‘understanding the reasoning’ of all things.

Students worked with this crossover of framings – the oyster as both held in esteem in the ancient world; and as science has uncovered, an important component of the biome on the other.

Three perspectives - mythical framing; high value as a scarce consumer item; and science of interspecies relationships informed the making of the work.

Research Contribution, Dissemination and Recognition

Refelctions:	The student team facilitated workshops for young people at the XMU Xiang' An campus in November 2024 focusing on the project. Xiamen Oyster was represented at the East Asian Seas Congress in Xiamen November 2024 The ICI Students working on the project received XMU Dachuang / 大创 - Strong Create Program – funding – the completion certificate for project director Stephen Connolly
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厦门大学大学生创新创业训练计划项目

证 明

兹证明创意与创新学院教师Stephen Connolly（教工号：2022182014）指导大创项目如下：

- 1. 2024年大学生创新创业训练计划项目，第1指导老师，项目名称：厦门牡蛎-人类与海洋物种接触的社会和文化研究，项目级别：省级，项目类别：创新训练，该项目负责学生王易，项目执行时间：2023年11月至2024年12月，项目已经结题。
- 2. 2024年大学生创新创业训练计划项目，第1指导老师，项目名称：厦门牡蛎-基于海洋物种的生态系统的创造性可视化，项目级别：省级，项目类别：创新训练，该项目负责学生杨斯渺，项目执行时间：2023年11月至2024年12月，项目已经结题。

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Research Reflection

Reflections:

External relationships with partners in China face challenges to develop and foster - language and customs – students can be required to mediate

Sci-Art collaborations need to start with data; abstract concepts (Anthropocene; Hyper-object; interspecies relationships) are very difficult to materialise in student projects.

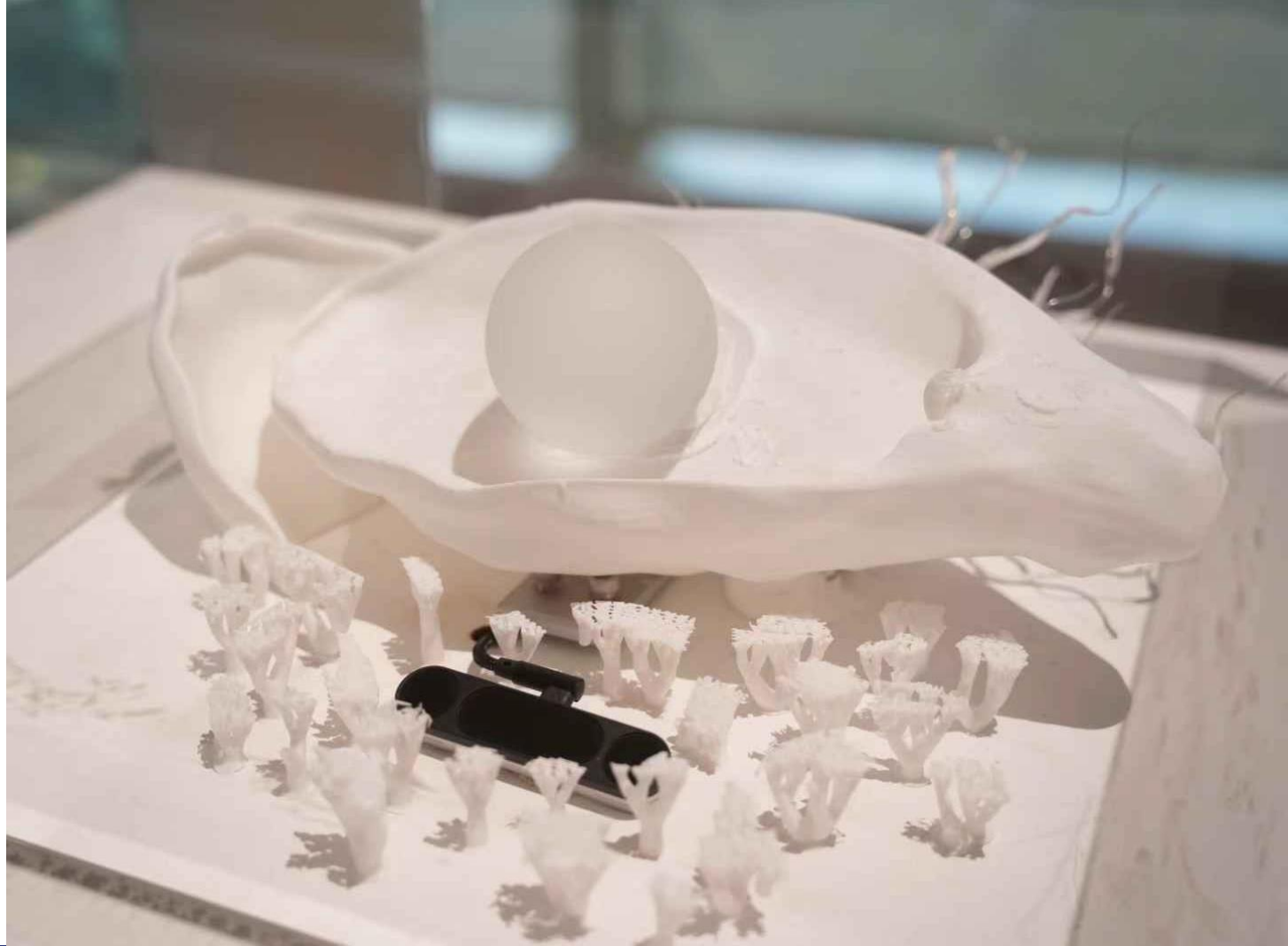
The art and gallery sector in China faces financial challenges; public funding is not available, and exhibitions can be subject to commercial relationships and imperatives.

ICI students undertaking joint UCA/XMU degrees are extremely constrained in their time and have little for external projects. High teaching loads place constraints on staff time to realise external projects

Nevertheless, Xiamen Oyster was a ground-breaking initiative at ICI involving outside collaboration in China.

*Love was the Pearl of her Oyster –
Exhibition shots, G Art Museum &
Gallery Fuzhou 15.04.25*





*Love was the Pearl of her Oyster – Exhibition
shots, G Art Museum & Gallery Fuzhou
15.04.25*



*Love was the Pearl of her Oyster – Exhibition
shots, G Art Museum & Gallery Fuzhou
15.04.25*



University for the Creative Arts
Research Portfolios

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Graphic Design:

Studio Mothership

FRONT COVER IMAGE
Xiamen Oyster graphic

BACK COVER IMAGE
Love was the Pearl of her Oyster –
Exhibition group photo, G Art
Museum & Gallery Fuzhou
15.04.25

