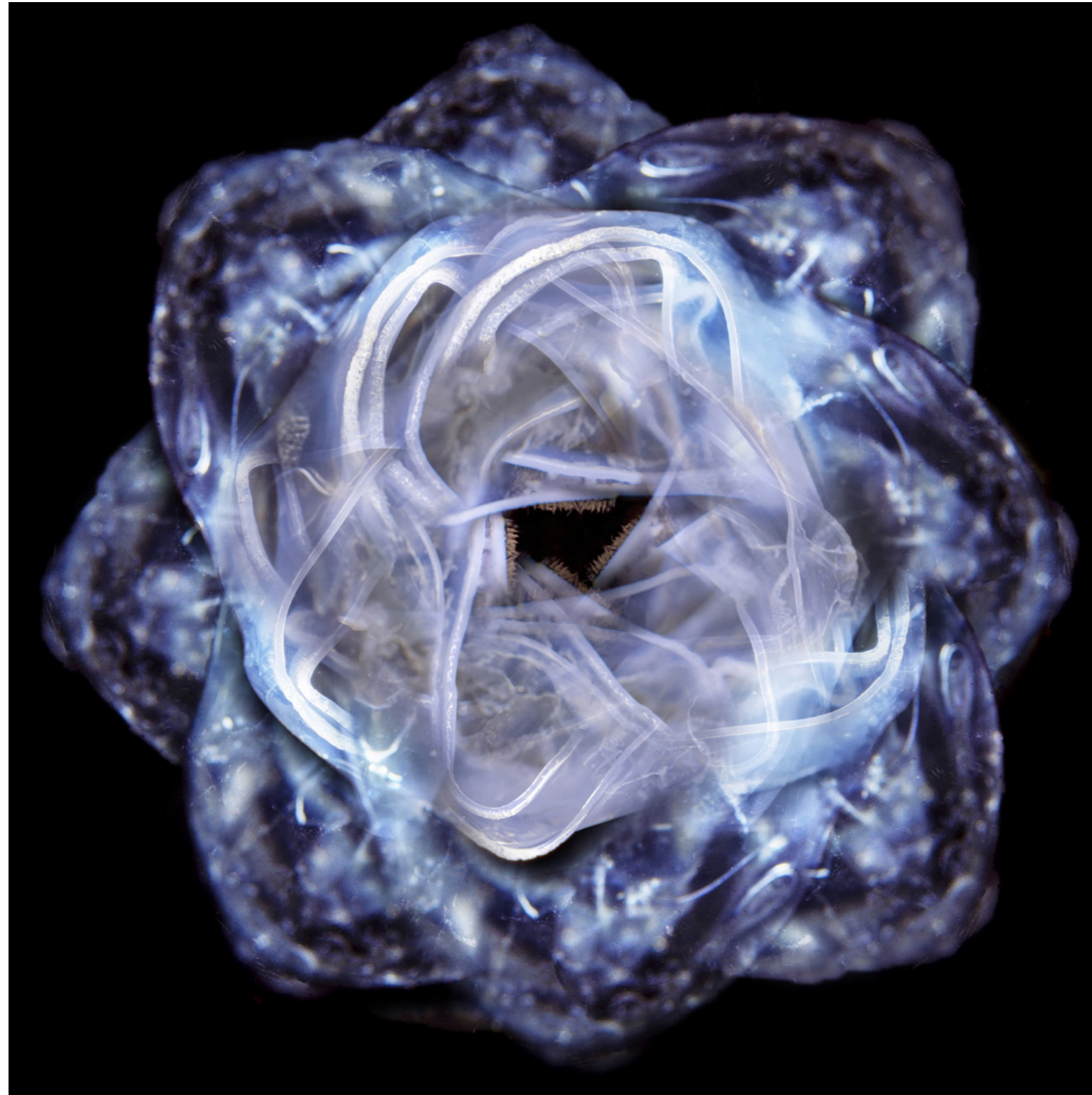
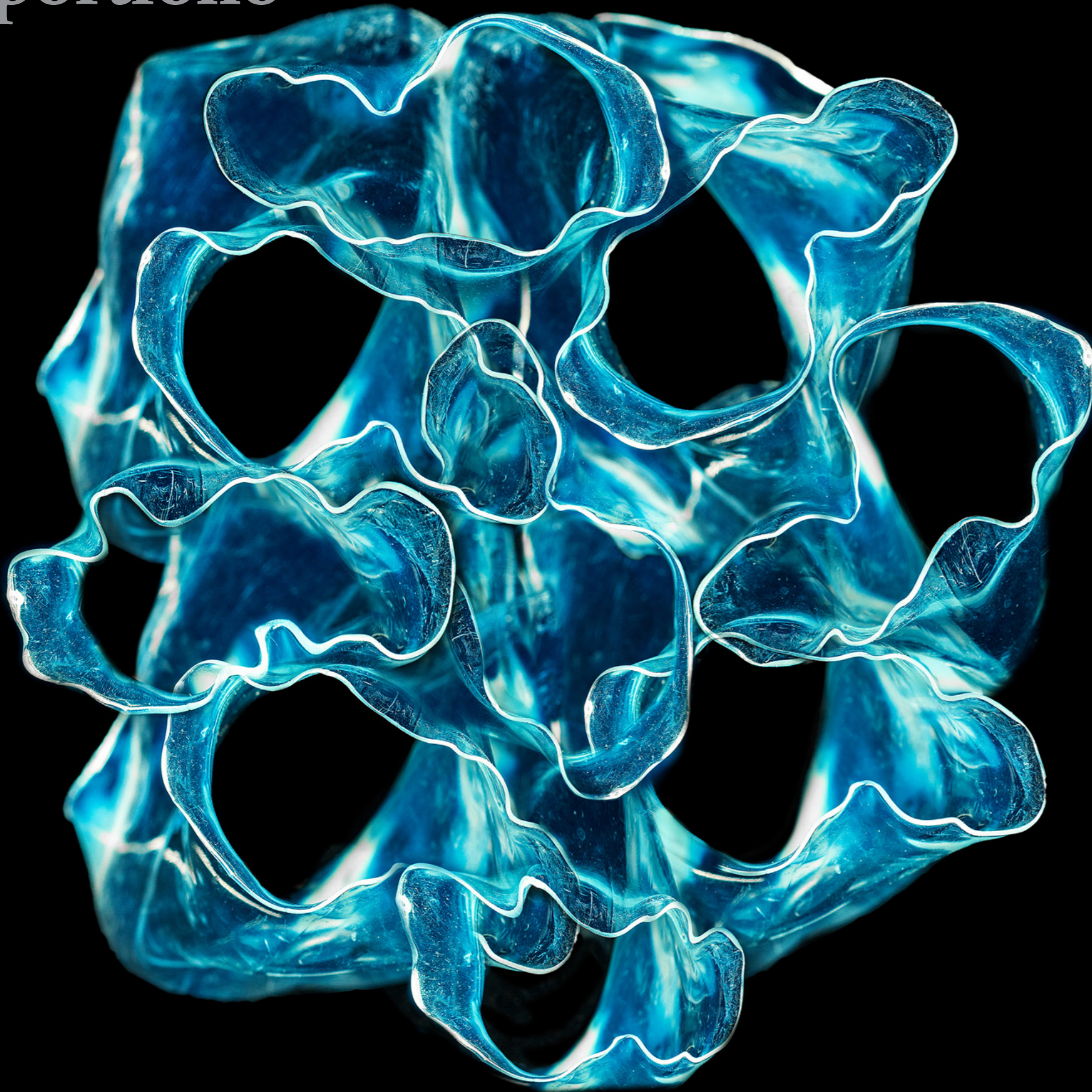


Kristen Regan



P O R T F O L I O



In her *Plastisphere* series, American artist and photographer Kristen Regan has created spell-binding photographs of plankton forms, inspired by microscopic ocean life, using repurposed plastic materials. *X-Ray Mag* interviewed the artist, currently based in Pensacola, Florida, to find out more about her artwork, creative process and efforts to raise awareness of the problem of plastics pervading our oceans, marine life and food chain.

Text edited by Gunild Symes
All artwork and photos by Kristen Regan

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about yourself, your background and how you became an artist.

how did you develop your style of photography?

KR: I grew up in Pensacola, Florida, and art was an essential element of my education. My mother is an artist, and my parents fully supported my decision to pursue a career in art and education. Travel has been a driving force in my work, with numerous trips throughout Europe as well as to India, Egypt and Venezuela. I received my Master of Fine Arts degree at Savannah College of Art and Design and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in photography from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Currently, I am Associate Professor of Photography at Pensacola State College.

KR: Over the years, my work has utilized



ephemeral materials and organic forms to reference the cycle of life, while my newest series explores the antithesis of the cycle of life. Plastic is engineered to last forever and the overabundance of single-use plastics has created a ceaseless tidal wave of trash. I was motivated to create the *Plastisphere* series after watching a video of plankton eating microplastics, proving that tiny bits of plastic have been introduced into our food chain through

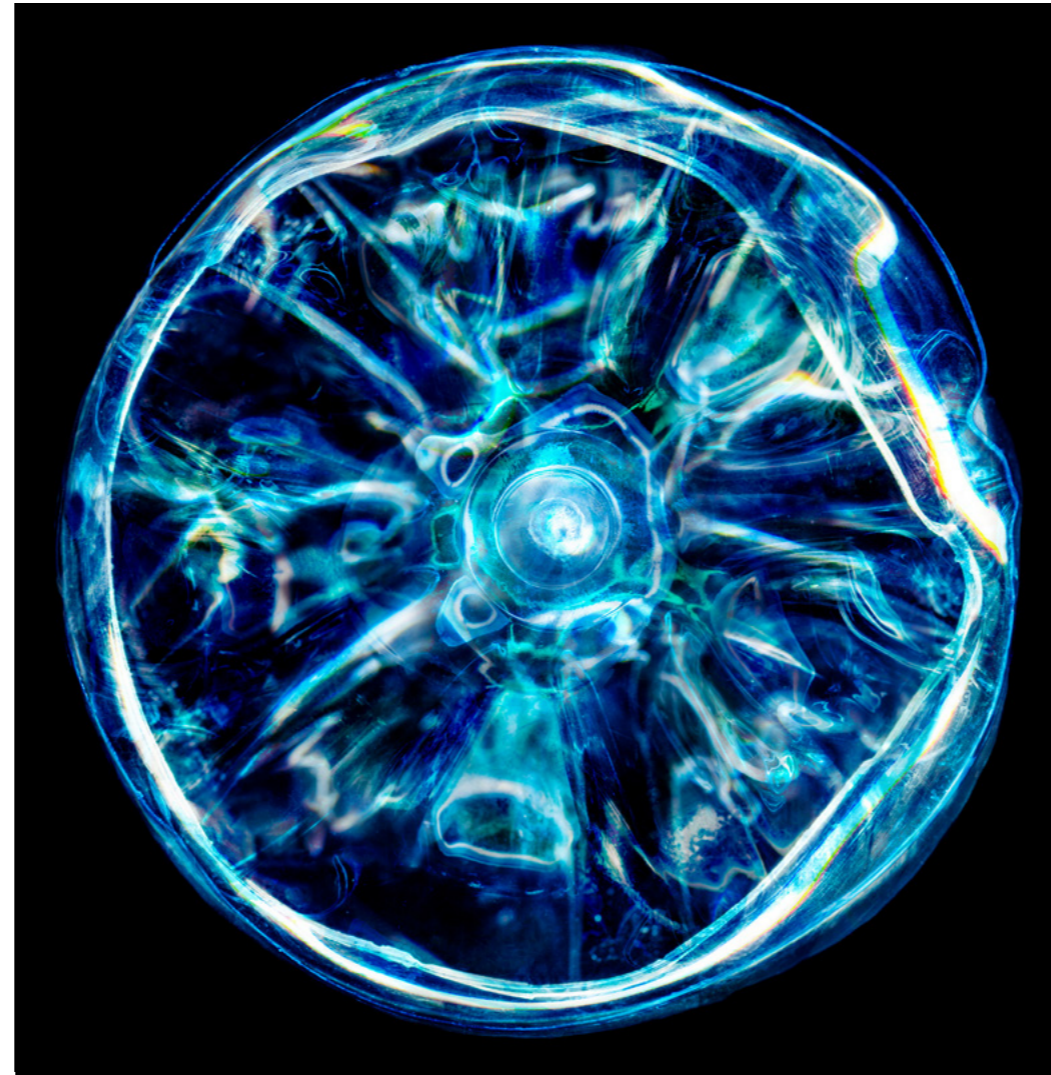
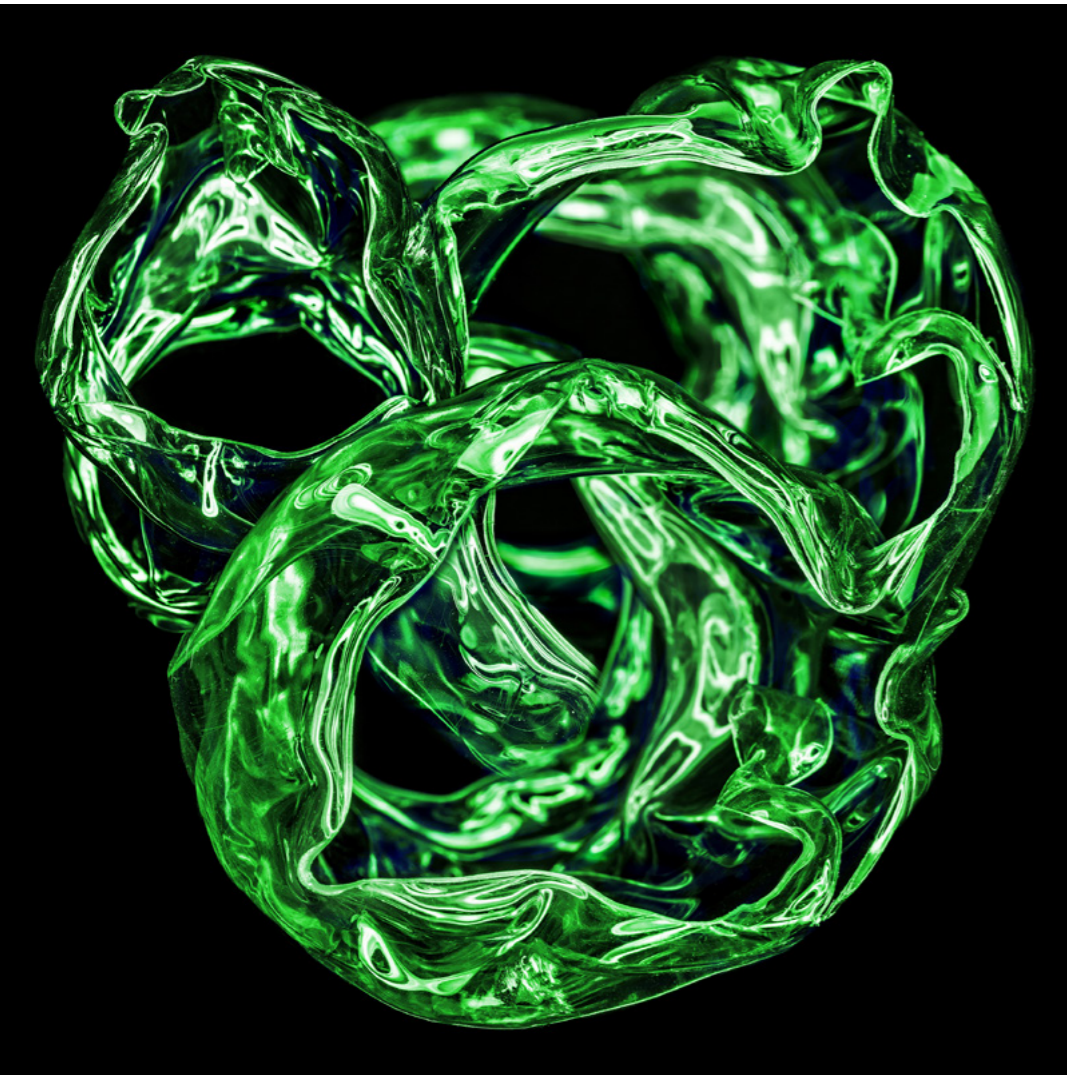
bioaccumulation.

X-RAY MAG: What is your artistic method or creative process?

X-RAY MAG: Why plastic and plankton? How did you come to these themes and

KR: After researching various types of plankton, I was inspired by the stunning

Volvicus radiolarian (above) and *Ctenophora aquafinas* (previous page). Digital composites of repurposed plastic by Kristen Regan



Foraminifera spritea (left), *Aurelia eviana* (center) and *Nassellaria heinzia* (right). Digital composites of repurposed plastic by Kristen Regan

delicate structures to create my interpretation of these creatures using plastic. During weekly beach cleanups, I collected discarded water bottles, some clean, some dirty and weathered. A blowtorch was used to melt the plastic, which produced some surprising results. The thin translucent plastic looked like liquid glass, and I fell in love with the new delicate sculptural qualities of the transformed plastic bottles.

I photographed the bottles on black velvet with a ring light strobe and macro lens to emulate the look of dark-field microscopy. After photographing the plastic,

Photoshop was used to combine multiple photos into a variety of composites.

My creations are new “specimens” complete with scientific-like names that incorporate the brand name of the product with the plankton that inspired it. The image, *Sapphirina dasania* (next page), references the type of water bottle photographed, “Dasani,” and “Sapphirina,” a tiny crustacean known as a sea sapphire. The males of the species flash a brilliant iridescent blue color that scientists think plays a role in communication and mate recognition.

Another example would be

Ctenophora aquafinas, named for the Aquafina bottle used and the resemblance to a comb jelly. Ctenophores (Greek for “comb bearers”) have fused cilia arranged along the sides of the animal. Many ctenophores, like various other planktonic organisms, are bioluminescent. In a way, I am inventing a species of plastic plankton.

X-RAY MAG: What is your relationship to the underwater world and coral reefs? Are you a scuba diver or a snorkeler and how have your experiences underwater influenced your art? In your relationship

with reefs and the sea, where have you had your favorite experiences?

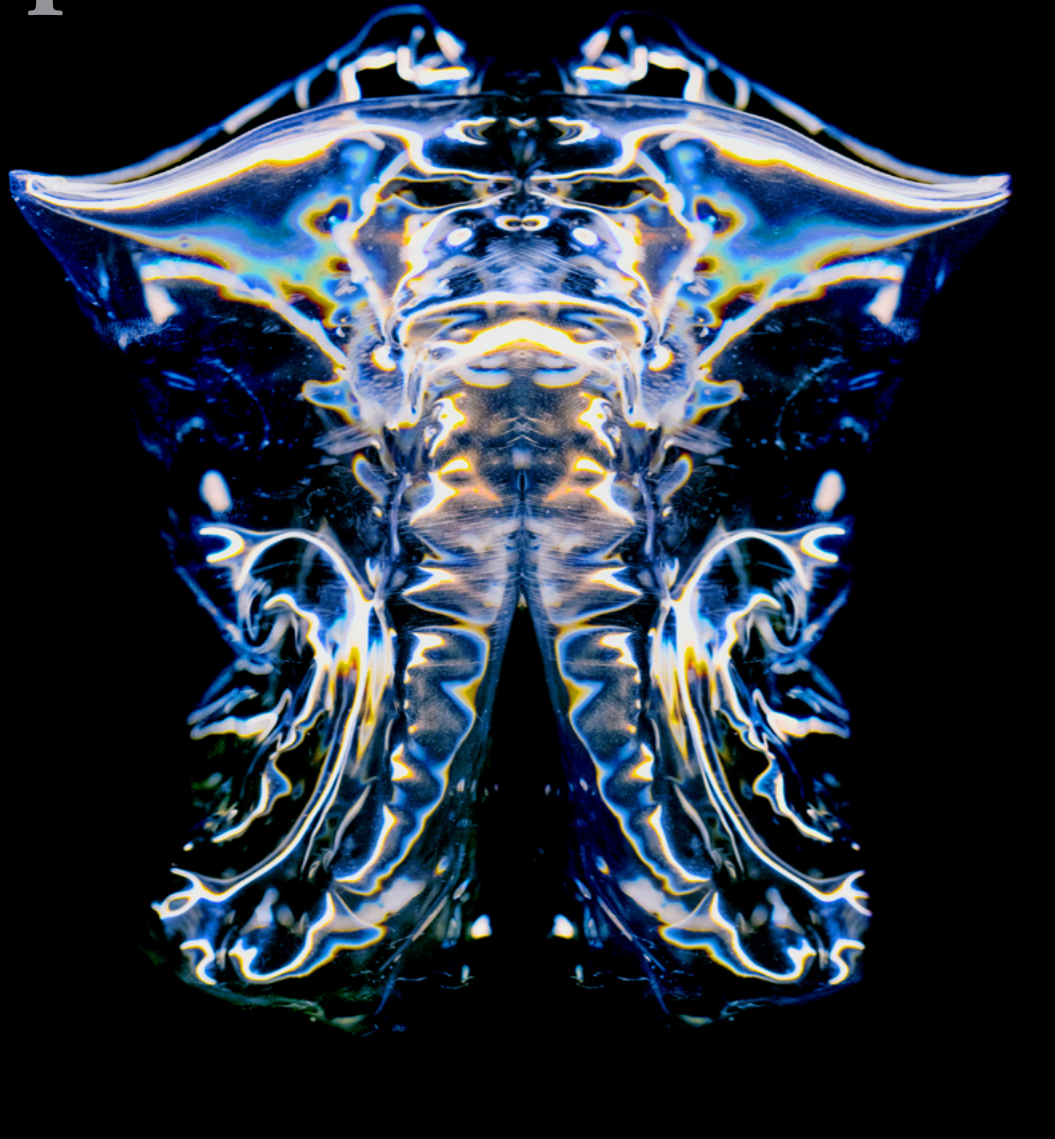
KR: I grew up very close to Pensacola Beach and enjoyed sailing, kayaking, swimming and exploring the beach. I have only been scuba diving once with my father in the Bahamas, and I would love to pursue diving in the future.

My fascination for the underwater world has grown from reading books and watching documentaries about alien-like creatures—some visible, some invisible. The abundance of life beneath the waves seems foreign, untouchable,

bizarre and beautiful. To see the unseen, from microscopic grains of sand to the largest creatures on earth, is widely inspiring and humbling.

X-RAY MAG: What are your thoughts on ocean conservation and coral reef management and how does your artwork relate to these issues?

KR: Plastic pollution is an epidemic, and the facts about global warming, rising water temperatures, coral bleaching, and offshore drilling are grim. I am passionate about trying to minimize



Larvacea nestlea (left), *Sapphirina dasania* (below) and *Hippopodius fijiopus* (bottom right). Digital composites of repurposed plastic by Kristen Regan



produce art, market yourself and make a living as a teaching artist.

My advice for an aspiring artist is to make sure you love what you do. If you are an environmental artist, be sure to practice what you preach and take every opportunity to educate your community about ocean conservation.

X-RAY MAG: How do people respond to your works?

KR: The most common reaction I get from those viewing my work is disbelief that these images are of plastic bottles. I really look forward to showing my images to children and getting them excited about conservation.

I am scheduled to present my work to at-risk youth students attending Dixon School of the Arts and Sciences. I will educate the students about plastic pollution in the ocean through the creation of plastic sea creatures. We will col-



my impact on the environment. Change lies in our hands, and the more educated we are about the negative effects that plastic poses in our environment, the more power we have to reduce plastic waste.

Following my last exhibition of *Plastisphere*, a friend that owns a restaurant vowed to eliminate bottled water from his business. My students began bringing reusable water bottles to class rather than buying bottles of water from the vending machine.

I know that my work can influence people to change their habits and think more about how

their actions impact the environment. I want to continue educating my students, friends and community through art.

X-RAY MAG: What is the message or experience you want viewers of your artwork to have or understand?

KR: The most important message is acknowledging the problem and vowing to make changes. We can become numb to the facts and numbers regarding plastic pollution, but visual art can allow people to see the problem in a different light. Art can facilitate

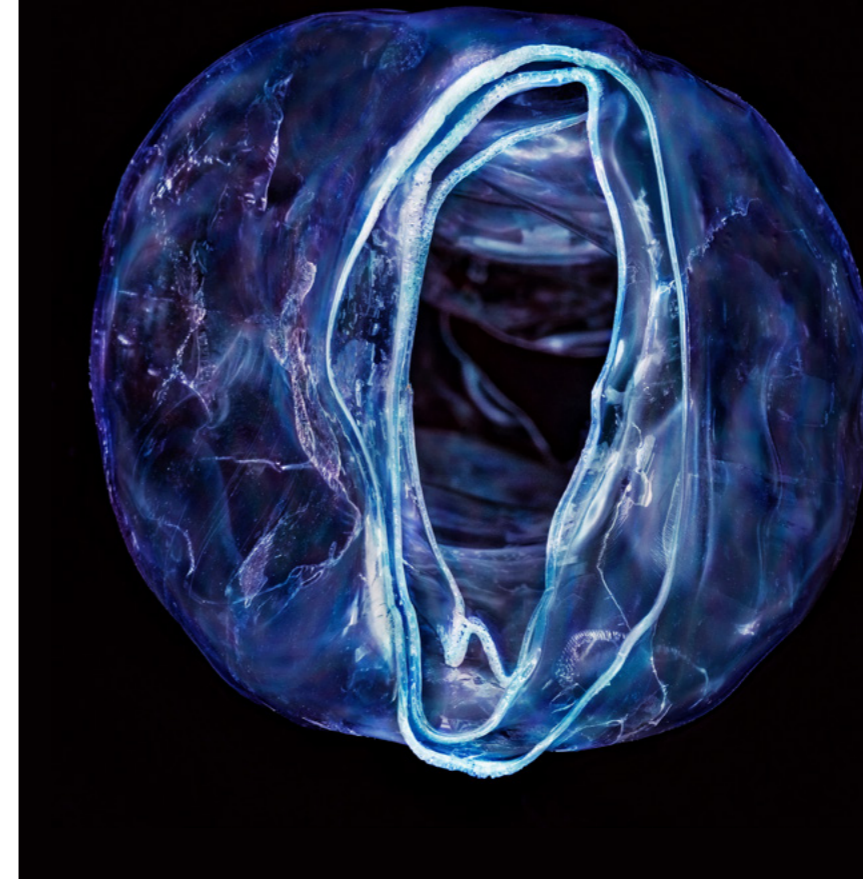
a dialogue about the issue and contribute to real changes.

I want the viewer to question a culture of consumerism and sustainability with regards to our environment. Most importantly, I want to educate the public about the small steps that can be taken to reduce or eliminate single-use plastics in our environment.

X-RAY MAG: What are the chal-

lenges and/or benefits of being an artist in the world today? Any thoughts or advice for aspiring artists in ocean arts?

KR: The biggest challenge for me is funding my projects and finding time to create work. I am a mother of a two-year-old, and I teach full time. I want to get my work in front of as many people as possible, and it is time-consuming to



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Velutinid aquafinas (left), *Polycystine heinzia* (far left) and *Pyrosome polandia springus* (below). Digital composites of repurposed plastic by Kristen Regan

about marine conservation, and I know that seeing actual photographs of plankton alongside my fictitious "plastic plankton" will aid in their understanding of my series *Plastisphere*. ■

For more information or to order prints and commissions, please visit the artist's website at: KristenRegan.com. Special thanks to Michael Salvarezza and Christopher P. Weaver.

give a presentation of my work at the Long Island Dive Association (LIDA) film festival in New York on February 9th, 2019. My work can also be seen on my website at: KristenRegan.com.

X-RAY MAG: Lastly, is there anything else you would like to tell our readers about yourself and your artwork?

KR: Honestly, I want to reach out to the dive community to collaborate on new images. Lately, I have

lect discarded plastic to promote the importance of recycling, and I will show my work and talk about reducing their use of plastics.

Introducing environmental education to young children can change their attitudes about the environment, and can influence their behaviors and that of their family and friends. Connecting knowledge with hands-on activities can promote a lifetime of posi-

five environmental stewardship.

X-RAY MAG: What are your upcoming projects, art courses or events?

KR: My work is currently on view for PhotoNOLA at Luna Fine Art Gallery at The Mercantile Hotel in New Orleans. PhotoNOLA is an annual festival of photography currently in its thirteenth year, with

exhibitions taking place in venues throughout New Orleans. Several images from the *Plastisphere* series were purchased by Innisfree hotels for their private collection to be displayed in their Executive Boardroom at the Hilton on Pensacola Beach.

My work will be on view at the Pensacola State College faculty exhibition from January 21st to March 13th. I am scheduled to

spent a lot of time contacting people who have photographed plankton to ask for permission to use their images. I want to display my images along with the marine creatures that inspired their creation. If any photographers, divers, or scientist have images of plankton and are willing to permit me to use their images (with credit, of course), please contact me.

My goal is to educate people

