

# The Gaze from the Apocalypse: An Analysis of Lin Pey-Chwen's Portrait of Eve Clone

DOI: 10.24981/2414-3332-4.2017.1

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來自末世的凝視：林珮淳〔夏娃克隆肖像〕作品評析

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## 摘要

本文就林珮淳的新媒體藝術創作〈夏娃克隆肖像 / Portrait of Eve Clone〉進行探討。作為台灣近代美術史上的關鍵註腳之一，這件全像印刷肖像作品揉合了人 / 獸特徵、聖經寓言和先端科技。我們首先將從符號學的角度來解析作品所承載的各個元素及其意義指涉，即作品中源自聖經的符碼，配合形式和技術的運用，所帶來的加乘效應。這其中，全像印刷作為一種全新的媒介，其對於物件光場的完全紀錄，將使藝術家、作品及觀眾的「觀點」發生根本性的變化。因此在本文後半部，我們轉換角度，從觀看經驗來切入作品，以「凝視」為核心，討論觀眾與作品之間「看」與「被看」的互動關係，試圖從中揭露作品的本質。除了作為觀者來思考作品，我們也希望透過此一互為主體的關係，多少理解藝術家的意圖，或至少一窺創她所採取的「立場」。

關鍵字：肖像，全像攝影，聖經符碼，觀看，視角，互動性

## Abstract

This article discusses Lin Pey-Chwen's new-media artwork, Portrait of Eve Clone (2011), a set of multiple holographic portraits that combine human figures, biblical signs and animal features. It starts by analyzing the significance and references of the work through the lens of semiotics. This will be done by analyzing the signs derived from the Bible, and the effects brought about by the technologies and form of the work. In the second part of the article, we will shift to the visual experience and focus on "Gaze" to discuss the interaction between "viewing" and "being viewed". Aside from analyzing the work as spectators, we hope to, more or less, grasp the artist's intentions, or at least get a glimpse of the stance taken by the artist through this intersubjective relationship.

Keywords: portrait, holography, biblical signs, gaze, view angle, interactivity

## Introduction



Figure 1: Lin Pey-Chwen, Portrait of Eve Clone, holographic printing, 2010. © Lin Pey-Chwen

This article discusses Lin Pey-Chwen's new-media artwork Portrait of Eve Clone, one of the pivotal presentations in *Dancing with Time - Artists: 40 Years × Taiwan Contemporary Arts*. The exhibition, co-organized by Kaohsiung Museum of Fine

Arts and Artist Magazine in 2015 and based on *Taiwan Contemporary Art Historiography: Artist Magazine 40 Year Anniversary Edition* (published in the same year), presents the development of contemporary art in Taiwan over four decades. Listed as a pivotal artwork of 2011 in the art historiography and exhibited in one of the four main exhibition areas named "Trans-disciplinary and Unconfined (2005-2014)", Lin's work clearly occupies an

important niche in Taiwan's art history. However, as far as the author knows, no in-depth and comprehensive analysis of each element in the work has been conducted so far. Therefore, this article attempts to take a closer "look" at her piece of work from this angle.

### Starting from Signs

Portrait of Eve Clone is presented as a set of multiple portraits that marry human

figures with exterior features of insects or animals, such as scales and bulged cutin. The foreheads of each portrait are carved with the number "666" in different linguistic signs. These lexicons take spectators through time and space and address moral issues. Suffice it to say, these lexicons, or symbols, are able to travel through time. To begin with, Eve is the well-known wife of Adam appearing in the first chapter, *The Book of Genesis*, in the Bible, and the forefather of mankind. Lured by the snake, Eve committed the "Original Sin" by eating the forbidden fruit, which would give mankind wisdom and the power to overtake God. In the work, the fine and flawless faces of the portraits that secretly reveal their mystic sexiness are reminiscent of that dangerous lure. On the other hand, the holograms constructed through cutting-edge technologies has laid bare the nature of the "lure": the highly advanced technologies in modern times.

Another intriguing sign is that Number of the Beast is marked in different languages on each portrait. In the *Bible*, Ancient Babylon is often used as a metaphor for human civilizations' characteristic of arrogance, obsession with development, and inability to control the outcomes. In *The Book of Genesis*, the ancient Babylonians once attempted to build the sky-high Tower of Babel to showcase their greatness. To stop these arrogant people, God divided them into different ethnic groups that speak different languages. At last, the construction fell flat due to poor communication. Therefore, the doomed Ancient Babylon is often referred to as "*the great whore that sits on many waters*" "*with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.*" From top to bottom, people of the country succumbed to the mindset of endless development and became trapped. The

"*many waters*" seated upon are in fact "*many peoples, and nations, and tongues*",<sup>1</sup> meaning the vices spread across the world.

Does it mirror our modern technological civilization?

Perhaps the forbidden fruit enabled technological development to trump faith. From the perspective of Marshall McLuhan, specialization has greatly divided human development, and has gradually detached the pursuit for knowledge from moral values. From the Romantic Period onwards, "*The new technique of control of physical processes by segmentation and fragmentation separated God and Nature as much as Man*".<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the tragic outcomes of greed and indulgence are manifesting themselves, as evidenced by global warming, smog, extremism and declining moral values...

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<sup>1</sup> Apocalypse, 17:1-15

<sup>2</sup> M. McLuhan, 1964: p. 191.



Figure 2: Portrait of Eve Clone at Digital Attraction, FZ15 Animation & Story Callary, 2015-16. © Lin Pey-Chwen

The number 666 and the beast skin of the portraits squarely reflect those tragic outcomes. In the last chapter of the New Testament, "The Book of Revelation", a "beast" joins forces with humans in their war against God prior to the end of the world. Featuring seven heads and seven horns, this beast came to the earth and required those who had faith in him to mark "666" on their hands and foreheads. This mark is known as "The Mark of the Beast". Here, the artist combined the "beast" and "humans", as shown by the marked foreheads and the blended human / beast bodies. In addition, the Clone in the title inevitably leads spectators to think about cloning, animal organ transplant, and gene modification, among other highly-controversial technological issues.

From the beginning of mankind (Eve in Genesis) to the end of history (the beast in Revelation), *Portrait of Eve Clone* travels through civilizations by way of parables in

the Bible, unfolding the concerns over humans' inherent fetish for lust, as well as the pursuit of unchecked scientific development.

### **Image Reproduction Technology**

The technology applied in the work is a developing yet revolutionary one called "holographic printing". Different from traditional photography, it does not use lens for "photographing" the object. In this way, only light from one direction can be taken in. By using sensitive elements, holography directly documents all information of the reflected light onto the surface of the object. The information is then fully reconstructed through film, hence holography. By observing holographic photos from different directions, we're able to see different angles of the object, thereby forming a three-dimensional view.

### **The Stealthiness of Subjectivity**

The biggest difference between holography and traditional photography is that while cutting traditional photos, the picture would be cut subsequently, leaving only a partial image in the cut photo. On the other hand, no matter where we cut a holographic photo, the configuration of the captured object remains the same in whichever direction. The surprising effect is achieved in that each display unit of holographic photos preserves all image information of the object. Lin's holographic work reconstructs a complete 3D light field that exists "behind" the planar medium. Hence, the portraits in the picture are out-and-out replicas, unconstrained by frames.

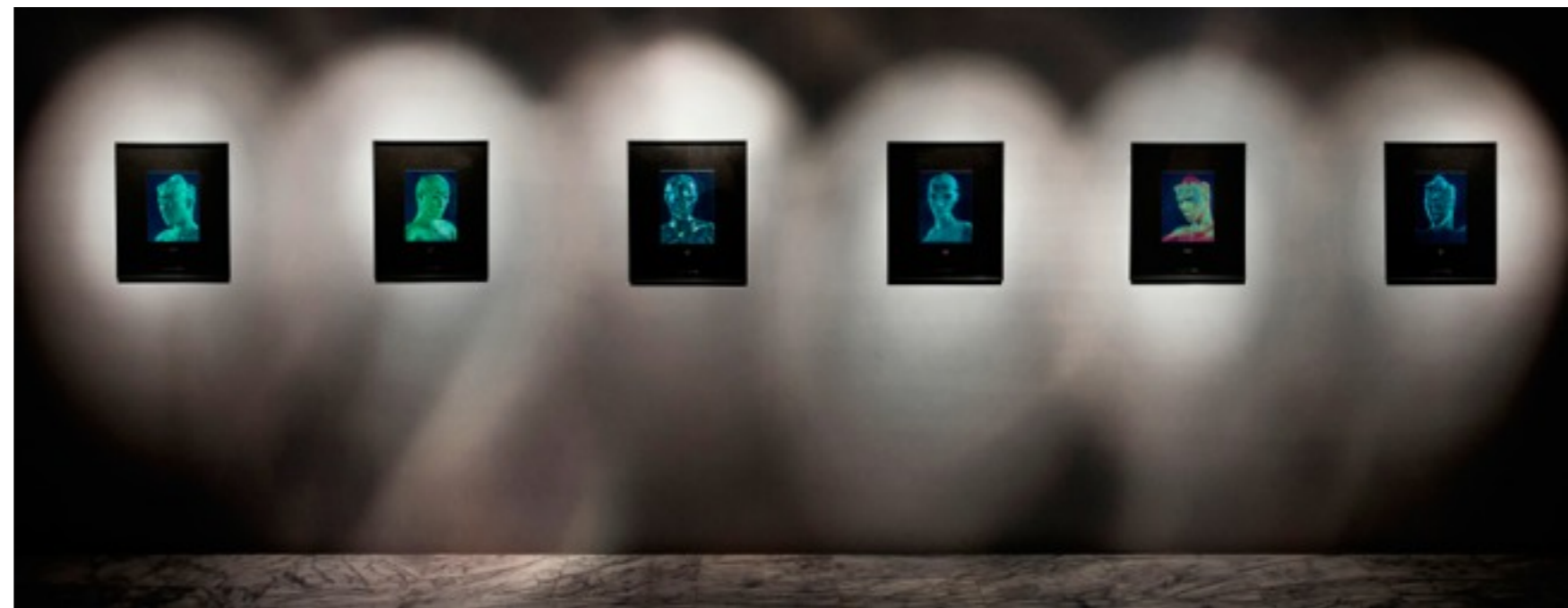
During the 1930s, Walter Benjamin analyzed the artificial reproducibility of photos and movies, two new media in his time (See *Walter Benjamin Essais* by W. Benjamin) and reckoned that mechanical reproductions wipe off the "aura" of the

original work - the mark of its unique existence. Nowadays, the prowess of "digital replication" has even taken the spread of images to another level where the existence of an "aura" is no longer a concern, inasmuch as the objects in the picture often do not come from the real world. For example, the origin of a holographic bird on the credit card is no more than a 3D image without any reference to reality.

The new "problem" presented by holography is that it pushes the conventional pursuit of perspective effects in Western arts to its limits, creating a full reproduction of space. The most serious consequence is that this technology removes any predefined "perspective". Traditionally, the artist's perspective has been the key to a piece of work, be it traditional paintings, photography, or traditional literature. Holography challenges this concept. By creating a

whole space, the artist deliberately shied away from the subjectivity of the view angle, making the forming of "perspective" fully dependent upon the interaction between spectators and the work. As such, it turns out that we could no longer interpret a piece of work from a single aspect. And this warrants the fact that interpretation must be multidimensional and open to different opinions- a dispersed, decentralized state that is similar to the nature of hypertexts.

Figure 3: Portrait of Eve Clone, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2015. ©LI Jing-wei



## The gaze

Next, we start from the author's visual experience, trying to dive into the core of the work. But can personal feelings be used as parameters? Phenomenologically speaking, a "sensation" is in fact the ticket to understanding matters. Edmund Husserl stressed that what we should do has never been exploring the "fait" (truth) of matters. Rather, we can only get closer to the "essence" through clarifying the "phenomena". The phenomena, as referred to herein, means the way a matter presents itself within the flow of consciousness of the observer. In other words, the "vécu" (real life) that the observer experiences as subject isn't insignificant personal feelings, but the key to the existence of the matter: essence lies within phenomena. Though reality is beyond reach, we could perhaps sort out certain general principles from our experience to manifest the essence of the work.

While we're viewing the work, the figure in the picture looks back at us. This method has been applied in countless paintings from remote antiquity. The difference is that we must stand in front of this kind of painting to feel the gaze of the figure, whilst the gaze of the figures in Lin's work dynamically follows the spectators at all times, rendering the feeling of "being viewed" even more realistic.

Being viewed by the work, we couldn't help but approach the issue of "subjectivity", since viewing isn't possible without being a subject. In the case of this work, spectators, used to stand in a dominant position as a subject, have backed down, while the "subjectivity" of the portraits creeps into the relationship between the both through their eyes. In fact, we do not think that the virtual portraits really have what it takes to become subjective; rather, we use the eyes projected by the work as clues to lead us to the subjectivity on "the other end": the

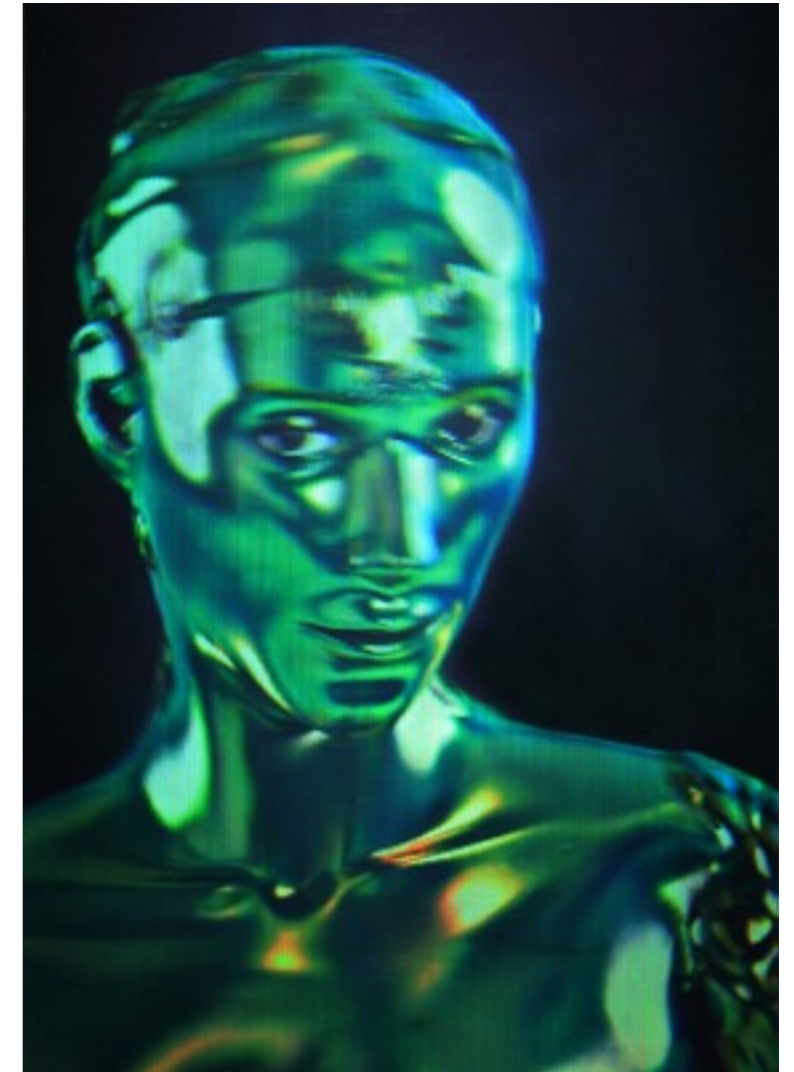


Figure 4: Portrait of Eve Clone, gaze of one of the figures. © Lin Pey-Chwen



artist herself. Through the incarnation of the creator (the portraits' eyes), we hope to get a glimpse of the artist's position and intentions.

The eyes also conjure up an intriguing experience of mine. One time I was snorkeling around the outlying islands of Taiwan. At that time, not a soul could be seen in the ocean, and I was enveloped by an expanse of murky water. Suddenly, a giant fish appeared right before my eyes and stared silently at me. The tremble I felt at that moment continues to haunt my mind until now. Viewing is a subjective act. In contrast, being stared at by a stranger is downright uncomfortable. As I looked closely at Lin's work, this kind of unease set in again. Holographic printing is dependent upon changes to spectators' viewing angles. By skillfully utilizing this property, the artist makes the figures in the work "follow" the spectators, thereby successfully creating an unspeakable uneasiness.



Figure 5: Portrait of Eve Clone, International Festival of Electronic Art 404, Platforma, Moscow, 2014. ©Kuo Wei-peng

In addition, the mysteriously profound expression of the figures confounds anyone who attempts to interpret their eyes (she? he? or it?) as they seemed tender but persistent, showing no apparent evil intention; yet not a trace of goodwill can be felt. They are a lure, a ghostly confusion. Surprisingly, the slightly upturned mouth and the calmness makes me feel that these figures have, in an eerie way, some kind of anticipation, understanding or sympathy of our meeting. The gaze comes from an "other" that is strange, justifiably handsome, androgynous (even if it is named Eve by the artist), orc-like, and with vague roots and intentions. Moreover, it is "fake" and virtual.

But how do the eyes of virtual figures create such sensations? Perhaps it wasn't all my illusion. Rather, it is probably because of the viewing attitude towards the masses, the applied techniques, and herself, adopted of and by the artist, that have

been hidden behind the screen of creation. Through the work, we see that the artist, as an "other", gazes from "there" to "here", an act that is neither human nor realistic, indicating the stance the artist has taken as an outsider. Without the stance, art would never become critical.

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**This article is revised and translated from the original Chinese version published in Art Accrediting No. 67, Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, April 2016.**