

# Quasi-skin and Post-religion: Lin Pey Chwen's *Eve Clone* series, 2010-11

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*The Portrait of Eve Clone Series*, created by the artist Lin Pey Chwen in 2010-2011, is a series of 3-D works based on the portrait of Eve with her inspiration from the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The latest *Portrait of Eve Clone* continues to explore the issues of femininity, which was the major theme in her earlier works. It is also related to religious symbolism and the symbols that Lin has adapted in the creation of her work. In order to analyse Lin's 2011 *The Portrait of Eve Clone Series*, it is necessary to review the style of her works over the past twenty years and to analyse the special art form and style she has created by her use of media and technology.

Across Lin's twenty-year art career, it is not difficult to see the essential concerns and themes of her works, which have led to the creation of the *Eve Clone Series*. She began to speak out her own art in 1989 when she returned to Taiwan from America and commenced her energetic participation in the activities and exhibitions of Apartment 2. Although both an artist and a teacher, she also needed to find her own time between the role of wife and mother. Lin began to be influenced by western feminism during 1993 when she studied for her PhD in Creative Arts in Australia. After returning to Taiwan once more, she attended several Taiwanese organizations and activities related to feminist art. When examining Lin's early experiences and inspiration for her art, it is evident that a consciousness of feminism influenced her artworks from the outset. Although Lin is deeply influenced by early feminism, her recent artworks using digital art as the media and do not directly criticise patriarchal ideology. On the contrary, with a more macroscopic view, the issues of her works have turned from emphasising feminism to caring about life and nature.

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<sup>1</sup> More information about Lin Pey Chwen's work can be seen in her website:  
<http://ma.ntua.edu.tw/labs/dalab/>

This kind of feminist characteristic is part of the so-called ecofeminism, which asserts that capitalism is like patriarchy, taking nature/the female as a colonised object. Consequently, it asserts the freeing of nature and a return to human nature. The superego, a concern for the environment and a care for the natural environment may all be traced back to Lin's 1999 artworks, *Back to Nature* and *Treasure*, which show the transformation of her artistic concerns. This kind of feminist pattern of thought moved to another level in 2011 after teaching in the Department of Multimedia and Animation Arts at the National Taiwan University of Arts. Although using science and technology to create art, Lin criticises technical civilisation and reclaims the importance of nature. This explains why a digital rendition of the female body of Eve was chosen as the theme of the whole series.

### **“Quasi-skin” and “Post-religion”**

Art, technological media, academic research and science have constructed an interdisciplinary curriculum that influence each other. At the same time, when technological art is analysed, it cannot be explored merely by focusing on technology and art. The cultural and symbolic meanings behind artworks, and their relationship with society, are significant points which should be interpreted when analysing a contemporary artwork. In order to incise in the technological, substantial and symbolical view of the artwork, I use “Quasi-skin” and “Post-religion” as this article's title to narrate Lin's work *The Portrait of Eve Clone*. Quasi-skin has been created from the main technical operation of digital technology. Meanwhile, religion (specifically Christianity in this case) offers inspiration to artists. The religious theme is not visualised. As Lin transforms the religious theme into her art which does not predominately about the religion, this is why it is called “Post-religion”.

Lin Pey Chwen's earliest work of *The Portrait of Eve Clone #2* was created in 2006. Eve is represented as a perfect female without any body hair, as this is an unreal and quasi body created by the artist. It is a digital human situated somewhere between the real and the fake, between the organic and the inorganic. Lin has combined it with images of

butterflies and pupa. Eve combines a human body, a butterfly's pupa and technological sound and light, and through the interaction between the audience and a computer program/screen, the butterfly becomes animated and starts to flap its wings. Under the colourful lighting effects and sounds, the artist has explored issues of artificial life and conflicting relationship between science and nature. Lin's 2010 version of *The Portrait of Eve Clone* is different from *The Portrait of Eve Clone #2*, in which Eve was inspired by the book of Revelation, 13:18. God prophesied that the mark of the beast, 666, will be marked on people's foreheads.<sup>2</sup> In *The Portrait of Eve Clone #2*, Eve is a beautiful and attractive hybridisation of human and butterfly, and Lin indicates that the inspiration of this hybridity is from the impact of technology on people. *The Portrait of Eve Clone series*, exhibited in The Museum of Contemporary Art in 2011, expressed a sense of evil through the half-human-half-beast body.<sup>3</sup> It mocks the potential damage to mankind by technology, and reveals social restriction on the female body in an active and direct way.

In Lin's latest series of *The Portrait of Eve Clone*, Eve's head is hybridised with many kinds of beasts through a use of the high technology of 3-D dynamic holograms. Then it is given different colours and the textures of minerals. The number 666 on Eve's head is shown in various languages, including Chinese, Japanese, German, Arabic, Egyptian and Hungarian. Through this work, the artist expresses the negative effects on humans resulting from the extreme development technology. The effects appear on different races and societies around the world. The skin of Eve, with its diverse textures and colours, displays several possible hybridised forms of human and beast. Continuing the concept of the work *Specimen* from 2006, these portraits of Eve, which have been placed in black frames made of transparent acrylic material, are reminiscent of specimens of dead bodies. Nevertheless, Eve's eyes move and follow the movement of the viewer. These figures seem to be alive. The strange feeling between death and life is similar to the tension and unease between science (inorganic) and nature (organic) that the artist wants to express.

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<sup>2</sup> An email correspondence from Lin Pey Chwen, received on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Lin Pey Chwen's solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei (MOCA) was on display on 24 March – 1 May 2011. More information about the exhibition can be seen in the website of MOCA: <http://www.mocatapei.org.tw/blog/post/27206842>

There are two basic ways in which the artworks could be analysed: through semiotics or through iconography. Lin's *The Portrait of Eve Clone* in 2010-11 is suitable for analysis through iconography, particularly because before contemporary art, iconography, including the cross, Jesus' portrait and other religious symbolic figures, is often used by art historians to analyse religious artworks. Religious themes have long been expressed through art. This may be traced back to the time before the Middle Ages, via Renaissance and to the early twentieth-century period. Although contemporary artists seldom use Christianity as a direct source of inspiration, undeniably Christianity is still taken as a source of motivation and inspiration for creating art.<sup>4</sup>

Different from many classical artworks and artists taking Christianity as the source of inspiration, as found in western art history, the religious reference in Lin's works is more indirect. Lin has chosen Eve as the theme of the series. The figures do not have a strong religious colour. On the contrary, the artwork shows a strong sense of contemporaneity and is created with modern high technology. As a result of the viewer walking back and forth in front of the work, it appears to have a 360-degree image effect. The high technology gives Lin's Eve a modern feeling and Eve's figure is different from the feminine image in the Bible. Eve's quasi-skin shows various metal textures and the colours of minerals. It shines weakly, even against the dark background, so the image of digital skin reveals an uneasy, mysterious and strange feeling. The number 666 on Eve's forehead, written in various languages, retains a strong religious symbolism. However, like many works using specific images as artwork, the audience needs to understand the background of the images. This means that members of the audience need to have relevant knowledge to understand the symbolic meaning of the images, or they will easily become immersed in the visual effects of the technology of the artworks, thereby overlooking the meaning the artist wants to express.

Apart from the various appearances of Eve, made with 3D dynamic holograms, Lin

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<sup>4</sup> For the history of Christianity and art, see: John De Gruchy. *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

created an artwork which used interactive images to show her imagination of Eve, and this piece is entitled *Portrait of Eve Clone #3*. Lin presented Eve by combining different mineral colours and textures with interactive images, which is a technology in which she excels. When the viewer moves in front of the artwork, Eve's appearance appears to change continuously. Sometimes the image shows the frontal view, sometime the back, and sometimes the image appears to be turning around. After Eve turns around, the image moves up and down as if it will jump out of the image. *The Portrait of Eve Clone # 3* was shown with six interactive projection devices when it was exhibited in The Museum of Contemporary Art. Lin used 3D computer animation technology, kinetic sensors in an interactive computer system to create the newest, yet most shocking Eve Clone image. This work takes flowing water, light and shadows as the background. Eve's appearance continues to change with the movement of the audience, while the reflection from the water and the light also changes. The changes to Eve's image result from people's interference, fitting in with the interaction between humans and technology that Lin wants to express. The relationship of ambiguous, mutual influence and blindness is what the artist emphasises -God created Eve and humans created the Eve Clone. The Eve Clone image is the result of human creation through technology. The strange beauty of the Eve Clone reflects the negative influences of artificial and technical civilisation on nature. In the meantime, Lin wants to express the strange characteristics of Eve through a mix of human and beast, and the evil symbolism of the number 666 in Christianity. This work has achieved a stronger effect than that created by the 3D dynamic hologram.

According to the Bible, the mark 666 appears both on Eve's forehead and on her right hand. Therefore, Lin has created six pairs of hands, using a range of materials and colours, which she has placed in the type of glass bottles which are used to store organs in a hospital. This work is called *Eve Clone Hands*. These six pairs of hands were made with gold, silver, copper, iron and kaolin, using different textures, such as snake skin, pupa, industrial parts, shells, wood, etc. The "Quasi-skin" of the hands was created in a complex way. Firstly, Lin made sculpture moulds and then transferred the work into transparent resin. Specifically, the artist arranged blue-green lasers and bubbles on the hands in the glass bottles in order to make them more mysterious. The natural thing (the

hand of a human being) created an unnatural thing (“Quasi-skin”). Looking closely at the hands with their strange texture and images, it seems that they symbolise the same concept as Eve - a body which is a mix of human and beast. Eve’s quasi-skin expresses three-dimensional space in a two dimensional way through 3-D hologram technology. The hands were originally shown in a three-dimensional way, and having been placed in glass bottles, they express the properties of a specimen which is similar to how Eve is portrayed.

Although the mark on the six pairs of hands is 666, for the same as on Eve’s hand, in this case it does not have a strong and direct religious symbolism. The mix of sculptures of hands and Eve portraits is the concept of the quasi-skin. The latter mimics the different colours and materialised skin of females through the use of high technology. The former shows different skin textures within a sculptural concept, and then it is animated with a strange feeling between death and life with laser light and bubbles. Although Lin’s work does not narrate skin culture and its symbolic significance, nevertheless, the skin’s symbolic references in the work cannot be ignored. Although human skin is either rough or smooth, it is simultaneously both alive and dead with an ability to recover and reborn. The biological characteristic conforms to the one Lin wants to express - a natural thing created by scientific technology and an organic life created by inorganic technology.

The French artist and theoretician, Stéphane Dumas, asserted the concept of the “Creative Skin”. She pointed out that creative skin could be a metaphor through which we reconstruct the world. The skin is between the outer world, the human body, a body referring to multiple identities and a sensory body.<sup>5</sup> By computer technology, Lin has created a fake quasi-skin for Eve. It is a criticism of technical civilisation and introspection on the outer world. In Lin’s Eve series, the half-human-half-beast skin of different materials is a reflection of how we are uncertain about reality and artificiality in the world.

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<sup>5</sup> Dumas, Stéphane. ‘The Return of Marsyas: Creative Skin’ in Jen Hauser (ed). *sk-interfaces: Exploding Borders – Creating Membranes in Art, Technology and Society* (Liverpool: FACT and Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 19.

In Lin's new work - *Eve Clone Hands #2*, she has placed transparent resin finger sculptures into medical test tubes, and then exhibited them in black acrylic frames. Similar to *Eve Clone Hands*, Lin illuminated the fingers with green light, through which a strange feeling appeared from the dark frames and background. Through this new work, Lin wants to express how Eve is in the process of creation, which is both artificial and scientific, rather than natural. The artist proposes the importance of the concept of going "back to nature" through science and technology. Via the artificial Eve's inorganic genes, the work, relating to an ecofeminist perspective, again criticizes digital technology and artificial life.

In Lin's solo show held at the Gallery Grand Siècle in Taipei in August 2011, she exhibited three new works, *Mass Production of Eve Clone*, *Eve Clone #4* and *The Inspection of Eve Clone*. *Mass Production of Eve Clone* consists of 18 8-inch digital frames of Eve Clone, which were hung on a wall. Eve Clone spreads the fingers of her right hand and gently touches her breast. Her left hand is placed before her eyes, which are looking downwards. The 18 images show the same post-Eve Clone, but as with the earlier works, they are expressed with different colours and textures. At the same time, they continuously rotate through 360 degrees and are shown at different angles. The work is extremely similar to *Eve Clone Hands*. They are both soaked in liquid and placed in medical tubes or jars. As Lin points out in her artist's statement, for this work: "Mass production and normalisation represent the production process, by which it creates something which is completely the same as the original, using a cloning technique." Eve Clone's artificial and mechanical clone character is exposed in this work. Expressed through a neat presentation of 18 digital frames, it provides a metaphor for the artificial and inorganic life characters in a clone factory. It echoes with the concept of Lin's early work, *Specimens*.

*Eve Clone #4* could be an extension of the *Mass Production of Eve Clone*. It was shown with a huge interactive projector. With two synchronized projectors, the artist attempted to express Eve Clone images which were shocking, with several Eve Clone images being shown synchronously. Through a special-program operation, Lin showed an accumulated

number, calculated in milliseconds, at the top of the images. The accumulation of the number began when the audience entered the exhibition space. When the audience left, the number automatically stopped accumulating and the colour of the image would gradually turn back to black and white. Lin has been criticising the confrontation between the artificial and the natural, which parallel and resist each other, since 1999 in works such as the *Back to Nature Series*. The transformation of numbers and images caused by the viewers in *Eve Clone #4* again responds to the artist's attempts during the past 10 years to represent artificial life. Furthermore, in this work, Lin used 5 different languages (Chinese, English, Greek, Latin and Hebrew) to display the image of the woman who symbolizes evil in the Bible. The background music is similar to the visual elements of the work. It creates an uncanny atmosphere, therefore, when the audience walks into the gallery, they feel as if they are immersed in a surreal world. *Eve Clone's* beautiful but evil image, the continuously changing Bible scriptures and the uncanny music offer the audience a shocking and rare sensory experience.

This article takes Quasi-Skin and Post-religion as one of its main directions. It describes how *Eve Clone's* virtual Quasi-Skin expresses the symbols the artist wants to convey. Lin's work, *The Inspection of Eve Clone*, reveals the double concept of Quasi-Skin: that *Eve Clone* is constructed from digital skin and that the tattoos on her Quasi-Skin show the ambiguities surrounding body and technology. The tattoos include a rose, a dragon, a phoenix, a snake and a scorpion, which were specifically chosen by the artist. The patterns of tattoos connect to the idea of iconography which is addressed earlier in this article, and the tattoos relate to *Eve Clones'* symbolic connotation given by the artist. Both the tattoos and *Eve Clones* have the meaning of a "beautiful trap", while they both stand as a metaphor for an uneasy atmosphere with violence and danger. *The Inspection of Eve Clone* is presented with digital prints, and shows different angles and different parts of *Eve Clone's* body with infrared rays. Lin marks the number, date, time and the artist's name at the top and bottom of the work, as if the artist is examining and diagnosing *Eve Clone* with a medical device. Lin points out that "the tattoo's pattern symbolises and reveals the hidden danger of the beautiful *Eve Clone* under the inspection of infrared



rays.” In other words, through the infrared rays, the artist reveals the negative symbolic meaning of Eve Clone’s beauty.

Analysing Lin’s recent works, it is not possible to separate religion and faith from her art. For Lin, her religion and faith is at the root of her art. The connection between religion and fine art practice is not difficult to find in many contemporary artworks, including Buddhism (e.g. Southern Korean artist Nam June Paik’s 1981 *Buddha*) and Islam (Islamic-American artist Dhirin Neshat’s series of Islamic-themed photographs and images.) Although the image 666 has strong Christian symbolism, it is not appropriate to analyse Lin’s works in a religious way. In terms of aesthetics, techniques and the professionalism of their construction, her works surpass any religious meanings of the images. The Quasi-skin and the symbolism of being between death and life, in addition to the strange, dreamy and unreal feeling of Lin’s works are the unique characteristics of *The Portrait of Eve Clone Series*.