

# The Transgressions of Aesthetics: Lin Pey Chwen “Eve Clone” Series

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## **God’s Creation, The Devil’s Sculpture: Aesthetics of Pretense**

Throughout history, excessive obsession over the body and the desire for eternal life has led humankind to pursue the artificial alteration of themselves. According to historical accounts, Emperor Qin Shi Huang sent agents to the east to search for the elixir of life. Later, Emperor Han Wu also roamed the lands to find the potion of immortality. Dongfang Shuo, Grand Palace Grandee to Emperor Han Wu, drank the potion of immortality in one gulp before it could reach Han Wu. Outraged, Han Wu ordered Dongfang’s death. Dongfang laughed and told Han Wu that if he really believed in immortality, how could he order Dongfang’s death? The illusion of immortality has become the inspiration for the irony of human nature. The Fountain of Youth in Greek mythology represents humanity’s everlasting desire and imagination regarding innocence and youth. An example of artwork that is based on this imaged topic is Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1504), which depicts an imagined setting where happy, naked, young men and women bathe in a fountain together, and, during the 15th century, Spanish explorer, Juan Ponce de León, even sailed to South America in search for the Fountain of Youth. Myths about the Fountain of Youth also spurred the creation of many Christian prophetic artworks, often in the form of church murals. Such works often depicted naked, narcissistic men and women who were obsessed with their bodies and lived a hedonistic lifestyle that went against all Christian principles. Prophecies about physical indulgences do not have to be presented with demonic expressions. With today’s advances in biotechnology and plastic surgery, people have already proven that their desires are capable of inspiring the devilish re-engineering of their body.

Fountain of Youth, 14th century church mural by Castello della Manta from Piedmont, Italy

Lin Pey Chwen's digital artwork consists of either perfect, beautiful people or alien-like beings. Her “Eve Clones” are an extension of the Bible’s “Mark of the Beast.” With the combination of “Eve” and “Clone,” Lin’s works predict the dawn of a new generation for human-made life forms which will mark the end of natural proliferation. Artificial humans, artificial-artificial humans, and humans created by artificial-artificial humans... As a result, an unpredictable cycle will be initiated. What is the goal of creation? Who controls this creation? This is a paradox that has no answer. The ultimate destination of genetic engineering is referred to as a vacuum in ethics.

Able to reproduce itself asexually, Eve Clone is a product of science. She is held captive by her creators in a virtual world. The artist plays the role of a witch who experiments with magic spells to train and harness the charms of the asexual Eve. Drawn into a world of experimentation and science, she also plays the role of Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein*, overstepping nature’s boundaries to create lives that do not stem from a sacred origin.

Through genetic engineering, regeneration, life extension, and aesthetic medicines, cloning and re-creations are an extension of our desires. With trepidation, humans are dazzled by the endless possibilities of science, which can answer their insatiable lust for beauty and yearnings for everlasting youth. This propels humanity into unknown territories. Within the imaginations behind Lin’s work, Eve Clone, technology subverts the natural cycle of life to embark on seven forbidden

journeys. Humanity's actions, God's traces, and the devil's pretense mix together chaotically. As a result, our sins and virtues cannot be judged.

### **The Satisfaction of Controlling Technology: Fiddling with Aesthetics**

The advance of cosmetic surgery, beauty services, and the weight-loss industry caters to those who are not satisfied with their body. However, humanity is casted into the anxiety of "perpetual enhancements." French feminist artist, Orlan (her original name is Mireille Suzanne Francette Porte, 1947~), creates works that transform her own body. By undergoing a series of plastic surgery procedures, Orlan changed her appearance. This included liposuction, rhinoplasty, and cheek and lip fills. More strikingly, she also had her brow bones protrude from her forehead to make her look more beast-like. During these surgical operations, she would record the processes, which later formed her work, *Reincarnation of Saint Orland*. She also performed custom shows, for which she would pose like a Catholic statue of a female saint with an exposed breast. With her altered body, Orlan would pose as a statue to subvert sainthood, obscenity, spirituality, and flesh. Through invasive surgical methods, she showcases humanity's desire to manipulate their bodies. With our reluctance to part from our obsession with beauty, people become apt at being trained and self-trained in a world of science and aestheticism. This causes our desires to run wildly and uncontrollably. We lose our yardstick for measuring beauty as a result.

The interaction found in the works of *Eve Clone* alludes to a sense of total control and submission, and of being stared at or examined. The image of *Eve* shifts to face the audience at every angle. Viewing the work from every angle along 180 degrees, the audience would see *Eve Clone*'s face from each side, revealing all of her different expressions. Some expressions are shy, while others are seductive. In the frame, *Eve* resides not as a passive doll that is "being watched," but as a flirting temptress. Drawing from the Bible, Lin creates many expressions of *Eve* to represent temptation. With *Eve Clone*'s line of sight on par with the viewers, the audience gains control over the interactive aspects of the work. It is also *Eve Clone*'s monitoring device. As always, Lin's works explore the truth about technology and aesthetics. At the *Eve Clone* exhibition space, images of digitally-created, perfect, and beautiful people are presented that tease us, the viewers, who are bound to our mortal bodies. Under the unreal and interactive environment, hosts and visitors exchange position. It also predicts the future that human is taken place by technology. Extending Lin Pey Chwen's exploration to technology and aesthetics, at the exhibit space, the extraordinary beauty made by program treats us as if she is teaching us, who are with heavy body.

### **A Complete Replacement in a Virtual Realm: The Temptation of Aesthetics**

Regarding obsession with immortality and youth, Patrick Süskind's recent novel, *Das Perfume*, tells the story of a male perfume apprentice who begins to stalk and murder virgins due to his search for the perfect scent. It has also been made into a movie. The apprentice soaks the bodies of the murdered girls in liquid to extract their scent. His obsession for beauty turns into a gruesome and perverted experiment. Although he was able to preserve "beauty," his sense of humanity was lost.

In "*Eve Clone*," the notion of a biological specimen is exaggerated in terms of form and concept. In Lin's works, a specimen is a means of preserving as well as visualizing a species' mutation process. The specimen transcends the context of medical preservation. The specimen for "*Eve Clone*" is not a record of a living organism from the past. Rather, it is the

beginning of a new form of life. Genesis and the Big Bang are no longer abstract or conceptual. Humans are no longer passive and at the mercy of nature. Now, human can create, plan, and control their own appearance. This specimen arouses our superficial desire for beauty. With the drive for this desire, people have transgressed some norms - perhaps, the order between species, the human-make-human power or God's law. With medical science and imaging technologies, human can create and change life, as well as create virtual and alternative worlds. We have become creators. With this, a shift in the relationship between reality and fiction has occurred. "Eve Clone" is a "prophecy for a virtual world" or a "predicted virtual world." With these two assumptions, art is used to hint at an upcoming future. Virtual and artificial images are replacing our perceptions about life. The perfection of digital images is substituting for our drive for life.

On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michaelangelo interpreted the creation of Adam through the hand of God, which did not necessarily need to be in contact with Adam. Durer used a style similar to Christ's gesture to paint a self-portrait. In the context of iconology, the hand represents the creative powers of God, His blessings, and mankind's talent. A branded hand highlights humanity's final imaged destination. With the advances of technology, people still have to take responsibility for their creations. There is no protection and no Promised Land.

When Lin mentions the bubbles in the containers for the glass specimens, we can think of Neoplatonism's Emanationism. When Creationism was debunked, people could still rely on Emanationism to explain the world and its various degrees of good and evil. The glittering and translucent, transient bubbles carry our wavering sense of aestheticism regarding of life.

### **The Transgressions of Aesthetics**

The prophecy constructed by "Eve-Clone" is like a palindrome: aesthetics drive technology, and technology creates a new aesthetic standard. It once again pushes technology to develop and reform. Within this prophesied world, species do not breed or reproduce for the sake of interdependence. Rather, there exist only selfish instincts without an ultimate direction. Lin uses Eve to tempt us into this virtual, futuristic space so that we may experience the swing between human desire and the devil's incitement, the dialectical debate between God's will and people's interpretations. In Eve Clone's view, we are not just all prisoners of aesthetic temptations, but also accomplices of aesthetic transgressions.