

Lin Pey Chwen installation *Catching* at MOCA Taipei: an installation worth experiencing

By Pierre Martin

The new installation work *Catching* by Lin Pey Chwen is presented at MOCA Taipei until December 31st. It is an installation that is built on 3 points. First, it is a process in space that needs the movement of the spectator. Second, it is also an exploration of time through moving images. Finally it point out to the importance of the spectator and it is built for him, it needs the spectator's eyes and body.

At the entrance of the installation you first have to pick up some white gloves and special glasses, so you are waiting for a surprise inside, or maybe something unusual. But you already feel you will have to do something, and that your presence (and your participation) are really needed.

So when you go inside the room of her installation, the first thing you see at the entrance is a small frame. It looks like kind of plastic, or a small box, containing the image of a butterfly in color, all wings expanded, presented flat in the middle of the box, like floating, with no backgrounds. So the first impression is that of an insect collector's box containing a dead butterfly, maybe fix into plastic, frozen anyway in this material like in ice, to keep it from deteriorating. This feeling is accentuated by the frame of the box, which is very present, but also by a very present, clear and digitalized number put just over the butterfly. It's like a reference number, just like butterfly collectors will put the Latin or scientific name of there precious and delicate specimens on a small paper just over it. It also can be seen has a name because this number comes from real student's school numbers, so it is finally "someone". You then realized that this image of a butterfly moves with your movements and looks like 3D, the wings of the butterfly seemingly flapping slowly as you move. You think about a new technology, maybe an hologram. In fact it's a new technology for 3D images. When you penetrate for good in the room, 13 of those framed butterflies hang on the left and the right of the room. All those images seem to move if we, as spectators, move. We are in a 3D space, those images are 2D, but they seems to move and become 3D only if we decide to move and when we decide to move. They follow us. We control them.

But right away our eyes are attracted by the moving images at the back of the room. The silent film shows butterflies flying in all directions, not really fast but also not very slow, king of a natural pace. They are very colorful, they fascinate us, attract us, and right away we thing they are the framed butterflies now filmed live somewhere. If we put the glasses given at the entrance, and walk toward the back of the room, the closer you get, the more 3D effects you get. From about 2 meters to the screen all the butterflies seem to fly around you, you fell like surrounded by them. Also at that stage the projected images starts to hit your hole body, you really feel like integrated in the phenomenon, you are like in a pool of butterfly images. With the white gloves you tend to try to catch them, like if they were real, or you just tend the hand and the projected images will appear very clear, crisp, as if you are the screen itself. You also tend to move all parts of your body in this space, your arms, legs, head, to catch or hit the butterflies, to use your body as screens or tools to catch. You are not in a normal 3D space anymore. You can experience a "real" virtual reality space, where 2D and 3D get mix up, where your hole body experience that 3D space but also create this 3D space. You are not in the room anymore. You can play with it. Be like a kid. The flying of the butterflies being all over, you feel after a while also disoriented, overloaded with the uncontrolled flying of the butterflies. This saturation effect reminds me a little bit the effects in front of a painting by Jackson Pollock and his exploration of indefinite, continuing and saturated movements to burry the spectators in his works and destabilize our control of reality to concentrate on the sole movement. The famous "all over" effect.

So after a while you step back into the middle of the room, back into the comfort of the 3D reality space that we know. Then we are attracted by sounds coming from a piece in the central left corner. Soft sounds of nature, of forests, of insects. There you immediately notice that the images of butterflies are projected vertically, from up to down, because they dance on the ground all around some king of small round sculpture or stand on which white shining and surreal material, like glittering feathers glow in the dark with some blur colors moving on them. Going toward that you naturally put your hands over the white material, placed just at the right high to do so. Immediately the colors projected on the white material becomes clear butterflies on your white gloves. You feel like being at a fountain, and putting your hand under the water, suddenly feeling the weight, the sensation and the temperature of the water. Here you feel the effect of the images on the hands, the sudden appearance. It is like a miracle, or like a dream. The soft and real sounds

around keep you between reality and fiction. Also in this position your hole body stands in the real 3D space, but you can experiment a virtual 3D fountain flowing vertically in front of you, and decide to dip your hands in, a little bit like in those science fiction movies where you have doors communicating to other spaces, times and worlds, and you just have to jump in to see an arrive to a complete different world. Many stories uses this idea of gates to an other world (could be mirrors, water, beam of lights, transport machines, etc, from the adventures of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* to the movie *Stargate*.

You then think that you saw it all. But no. As your eyes gradually get use to the darkness of the room and if you look carefully, you will notice that some vague and dancing colors appear over the main entrance door. You then realize that they are reflection coming from the images projected on the wall, some kind of ghosts of the butterflies projected on the opposite wall, some secrets that not everybody experiencing the installation will discover and see, an other dimension, a beautiful indescribable phenomenon out of reach. After talking with Pey-chwen, she told me that phenomenon was an accident, the result of the installation of a complex system of lenses on the horizontal projector, that she saw it after the installation was done and kept it because it was interesting. It reminds me of one story about the work *Le Grand Verre* of Marcel Duchamps. Transported one day for an exhibition, one of the big glasses of the sculpture was accidentally broken. Transporters were very sorry and proposed to Duchamps to replace the glass. But he said not to so, to leave it like this, that he was very happy because that accident gave another level of life to the work and was part of it's history. I think for me that those reflections on the entrance's wall are also an other level of life of this work an gives another dimension to the whole installation.

So we can point out that that this installation develop 4 different kinds of spaces: 1) the central space of the installation is a real 3D space from this world, spaces that we know and that we control with our body. From that space we can control the perception, the life and the movements of the framed images of butterflies. 2) The back part of the room becomes as we move in a complete bath of 3D virtual space: there we do not fully control the space of our body, we are in an other dimension, swimming in an other world. 3) the sculpture part on the left: it is a frontier space, a mix space, where our body can stand in this world but our hands and arms can penetrate and go to an other reality in and out as we want. 4) the

reflexion over the entrance door, a secret and unreachable space (reflections coming from a movie which comes from digital images scanned from invented images of butterflies...).

I conclude that the use of space by Lin Pei-chwen in this installation is very elaborate and multiple. For me, this multiple levels of development signal a good work of art. It reminds me of her installation *Viewing Views – Garden, Ocean, Sky*, year 2000, where she also uses space in an effective way to completely make the space work for her.

This use of multiple levels can also be found in the multiple levels of meanings that can found in the work: butterflies and the local history of Taiwan, the link to ecological issues like pollution and preservation, time and transformation issues (butterflies are famous for there extraordinary transformation from a caterpillar to a chrysalis and then to a butterfly). For meaning we can also think about a great number of famous stories implicating butterflies. Oriental stories like (couple transform to butterflies), or occidental stories (I think about the famous French movie *Butterfly*).

Finally those butterflies are good vehicle with the central point of this installation, which is to navigate between different levels of reality and fiction. On one side butterflies come from reality, from the nature, something real, real nature. Something we can touch. On the other side, new technologies used in this installation, for fix images or moving ones, come from fiction, from creation, something unreal, that creates unreal nature. Something we cannot touch. But this installation tries to finally make us touch and feel those butterflies again: it tries to bring us back to some nature. The circle is complete. But what we get is still a false nature. What you get is not what you see.