

# Bad 'Apple'

A recent newspaper article publicized accusations of fraud that could tarnish a well-known art figure's reputation and potentially ruin her career

BY BLAKE CARTER  
STAFF REPORTER

**T**unghai University Department of Fine Arts head Lin Ping (林平) recently spent nearly two weeks carefully preparing what looks like a 27-page crash course in contemporary art. "I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep ... It's a disaster in my life," she said late last month.

The paper covers subjects ranging from "appropriation" and "found objects" to conceptual art, and includes references to American assemblage pioneer Joseph Cornell, 1996 Turner Prize-winner Douglas Gordon and Taiwanese artist Mei Dean-E (梅丁衍).

Although these terms and artists would probably be covered in undergraduate contemporary art history courses in Taiwan, the essay wasn't written for any of the classes Lin has taught during her 11 years at the university in Taichung, nor was it intended for publication.

*Professorial Candidate's Reply to Allegations* is aimed at eight anonymous art professors tasked with deciding whether Lin fraudulently copied work by well-known Western artists as well as a group work by National Kaohsiung Normal University (NKNU) students. If deemed guilty, the 53-year-old's application to become a full-fledged professor will be rejected, she will be barred from re-applying for at least five years and she could be fired.

Lin says that since applying for professorship last September, she has fulfilled all the usual criteria but one: a final review originally scheduled for June 19, at which Tunghai's university-level evaluation committee was supposed to rate her on "teaching" and "service to the school and students." As she had already passed crucial college and university-level evaluations of her artwork by professors outside Tunghai, Lin thought the meeting would end her eight-year tenure as an associate professor.

But two days before the meeting she received a phone call: A report had been submitted to the committee saying Lin's artwork was suspiciously similar to that of other artists. The evaluation process would be delayed while the report was investigated.

A week later, Lin says she was given copies of the original report as well as another more detailed accusation submitted by the same party, whose name(s) had been blanked out by the committee. According to the accusation, she had copied concepts and works from French artist Christian Boltanski, other Western artists and a group of NKNU students. She was given 15 days to prepare a defense that would be sent, along with the accusation, to be re-evaluated by the same eight

outside professors who had previously approved her application at the college and university levels. For obvious reasons — word spreads fast in Taiwan's incestuous art circle — the names of the outside professors aren't disclosed to applicants.

Lin said that by this time, however, she had heard from colleagues who the accusing party was, but could only speculate as to why she was being targeted. She wrote a 27-page defense and submitted it several days ahead of the July 10 deadline.

Enter *Apple Daily*. According to Lin, *Apple* journalist Tseng Wei-min (曾維民) called her on July 18 and asked her to defend herself against accusations of copying other artists. When she said her application was being re-evaluated and that she would hold a press conference after the decision had been made, Tseng "was not satisfied with this. He told me that I better have more to say."

Tseng asked her why she used a fax machine in a show at Taipei's Huashan Culture Park (華山文化園區) in 2005, two years after students from NKNU had also shown a work at Huashan that included a fax machine. Lin realized that the accusatory documents she had received from Tunghai's evaluation committee had been leaked.

On July 19, *Apple's* "investigation team" published a half-page article that included pictures juxtaposing Lin's work, the NKNU students' piece and two works by Boltanski. The article quoted the accusing party from the documents Lin had received. It also quoted Ho Huai-shuo (何懷碩), a respected 68-year-old painter and part-time Taiwan Normal University professor, as saying: "This is definitely inappropriate. Not only are there a lot of similarities, even the spirit of the work copies others."

When contacted by the *Taipei Times* on Aug. 6, Ho confirmed that he had spoken with *Apple* but said he had not read the article. He said he told the daily that Taiwanese contemporary art in general was too imitative of Western art, stressing that he did not mean to single out Lin for criticism. But by then it was too late.

After the article was published, Lin began hearing about it from friends, colleagues, students, and even her family.

She decided to go public. The day after the *Apple* article appeared, she started a blog ([www.wretch.cc/blog/pinglin123](http://www.wretch.cc/blog/pinglin123)) and posted documents related to the case. Although she posted the accusation, her defense, the *Apple* article, and comments on the case,



PHOTO: BLAKE CARTER, TAIPEI TIMES

**Lin Ping, an associate professor at Tunghai University, is accused of fraudulently copying work by well-known Western artists as well as a group work by National Kaohsiung Normal University students**

she did not post anything about the accusing party.

"I've publicized details of the case that were partially disclosed in the *Apple* report," Lin says, adding that she felt it was only fair to defend herself against such public accusations. "Although I know who and think I know why [the accusing party has] done this, unlike [the accusing party], I've chosen to let the facts speak for themselves."

Appendix I of the accusation received by the university says that Lin's concept and choice of media are overly similar to Boltanski's: They both use old photographs, lightboxes connected by wires, and personal objects such as used furniture to create an atmosphere of reminiscence. One of Lin's key points in her defense is that the ideas and media listed above are so common in contemporary art that her use of them is not unusual. She also says that, to her knowledge, Boltanski doesn't use lightboxes.

Appendix II includes images of Lin's work alongside that of Boltanski, three other European artists and the NKNU

students' piece. The similarities are presented as proof that Lin knowingly copied other artists' work.

Pages 1 and 2 of Appendix II juxtapose works by Lin and Boltanski, both of which include illuminated old photographs and openly display cords that provide energy for the lighting. Although Lin uses lightboxes and Boltanski uses frontally lit photographs, the works appear similar.

Page 5 shows a rocking chair from Lin's studio that she included in last October's Found Memory exhibition at Stock20 art space so that viewers could relax while viewing her works. Page 6 shows high-backed hardwood chairs, cushioned armchairs, a lamp and other objects in an exhibit by Boltanski titled *Inventory of Objects Having Belonged to a Baden-Baden Inhabitant* (1973).

The accusation says that one of Boltanski's major themes is the use of old furniture to explore memory and self-identity. Although other works in Boltanski's *Inventory* series display items as diverse as CDs, cutlery and underwear, on Page 5 the accusing party focuses on seats: "As we can see, the European-style chairs in Boltanski's work become a Taiwanese-style rocking chair in the work of Lin Ping."

Pages 9 and 10 compare fax machines. The accusation shows the students' machine displayed on the floor with a long strip of paper emerging from it. Lin's was placed on a school bench inside a framed glass structure. Beneath the bench the strip of paper was piled up, twisted into a band and wrapped around a large wooden spool. Throughout the exhibit she sent messages that added to the pile of paper.

"They're both fax machines dispensing strips of paper," the accuser is quoted as saying in *Apple*. "Is it possible that just because the words are different this qualifies as a new artwork?"

Although the question is rhetorical, the answer might be found at Baltimore's Contemporary Museum, which next month is opening an exhibition called FAX. The show's central theme is the use of the fax machine, and it will feature fax-based works "by more than 120 international artists, designers, architects, scientists, and filmmakers," according to online art newspaper [artdaily.org](http://artdaily.org).

Lin says the university committee will notify her of the results of the re-evaluation sometime in the next few weeks. In the meantime, her blog has received some supportive messages from members of the art community and "very mean" anonymous messages

aimed at Lin, the accusing party and others not directly involved. She eventually closed the comments section "because it changed from a discussion of art to gossip."

Artist Wu Mali (吳瑪俐) told the *Taipei Times*: "Lin Ping has developed her own artistic language in her own context ... It doesn't matter whether part of the detail is similar to someone else or not."

Other art-world figures are hesitant to take sides, at least publicly.

But speaking on the condition of anonymity, some artists told the *Taipei Times* that Lin was too busy with other projects to make important art.

"When we think of Lin Ping, we don't think of her as an artist," one source said, adding that it might have been better if she had applied for professorship as a curator or critic, rather than basing her application on her artwork.

Having passed the original outside evaluations, however, the quality of Lin's art doesn't seem to be the issue. The question is whether she knowingly copied other artists' work. If so, Boltanski would be a poor choice. While the French artist may not be a household name for the general public, he is well-known among contemporary Taiwanese artists because influential educators, critics and artists such as Huang Hai-ming (黃海鳴), Ku Shih-yung (顧世勇) and Chen Tai-song (陳泰松) studied in France and, since returning, have spread their knowledge. Ask your neighbor to name a contemporary French artist and you're likely to hear "Monet," who died 83 years ago. Ask an art student and the answer will more likely be "Boltanski."

In researching and choosing to publish this article, I have struggled with an issue that is at the very heart of the matter: Shouldn't art professionals be deciding this privately? Whether or not the charges are true, whoever involved the *Apple Daily* thought a very public forum would be best for discussing this case.

Contacted by the *Taipei Times* on Aug. 12, *Apple* reporter Tseng confirmed that he had spoken with Lin and Ho, but declined to comment on who wrote the July 19 piece or whether he had spoken with the accusing party quoted in the article. Asked whether Ho had directly accused Lin of copying other artists' work, as implied in the article but later denied by Ho, Tseng suggested contacting "someone else."

"Talk to the director of the *Apple Daily*," he said.



Lin Ping, *Mascots for Ruins and the Rotten*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIN PING



Top: Lin Ping, *The Made and Left in Daily Life*. Above: Lin Ping, *We Are Related*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIN PING

## Tree of knowledge

Although Lin Ping (林平) said she was unable to reach *Apple Daily* investigative reporter Tseng Wei-min (曾維民) after their phone interview, the *Taipei Times* found his cellphone number easily using an online search engine. The following are excerpts from Blake Carter's phone conversation with Tseng:

During the 13-minute call, Tseng said repeatedly: "These are strange questions. Is your article directed against the *Apple Daily*?"

"My question is about the *Apple Daily* article's use of quotation marks," I said. "Did or did not Ho Huai-shuo (何懷碩) directly tell you that Lin Ping's (林平) work fraudulently copied Western artists?"

"I'm not going to tell you," Tseng said.

"What about the accusing party quoted in the article? Did you speak directly?"

"That's a strange question," Tseng said. "I'm not going to tell you."

"Although you've said you won't tell me who wrote the article, I imagine you're familiar with it," I said. "When the article uses quotes attributed to the accuser, does that mean the accuser spoke with *Apple Daily*?"

"Quotation marks mean that somebody said something," Tseng said.

"Said something to you or the *Apple Daily* directly?" I asked.

"That's a strange question," Tseng said. "I'm not going to tell you."



Above: Lin Ping, *Stalls of Memories*. Left: Lin Ping included a rocking chair at last October's Found Memory exhibition at Stock20 art space so that viewers could relax while viewing her works.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIN PING