

Wai Kit Lam - review

## **Look at 'Her' ... and You See 'Them'**

by Stanley Ng Wai Cheong, May 2007

"Self-portraits? No?"

"Is this a picture or two?"

"What on earth is she shooting?"

"Why does she shoot people and also scenery? What is she trying to shoot?"

"I have some feelings towards it...but I don't know what she wants to do!"

"It's so casual, just like Lomo Snap Shot..."

"Umm, I think it's about herself and her minds. If not, why is it called 'Divided Minds'? Of course it's about minds."

I am not sure how the artist will respond to such comments. It is interesting that the series of photographs which bring about such comments are placed in the middle of traditional salons and old photographs, making it outstanding and at the same time amazing. At the entrance of the exhibition, looking from the 'traditional' old photographs and old cameras, you just turn and will suddenly see this set of photographs which is entirely different from other photos. On the one side, there are scenery photographs; on the other are the self-portraits which are so natural that they do not look like self-portraits (Many visitors do not know they are self-portraits until they read the introduction!) Two photos are displayed side by side and become a piece of work. Eight of such set photos and three independent big photos are exhibited along a dark corridor which deviates from the environment of the whole exhibition. These works are quite out of tune with the surrounding area, the old photos and cameras. It sounds more interesting when you hear how visitors comment on the works. What I am talking about is Lam Wai Kit's display of her series of works: Divided Minds in the exhibition Cameras Inside-out in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum from 3/2 to 3/9, 2007.

Cameras Inside-out is one of the largest exhibitions of the Photograph Festival in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. The whole exhibition focuses on cameras of different ages and brands, displaying works of photographers of different ages using various cameras, trying to record and show personal thoughts, emotions and the society or space-time condition of an era. In the same exhibition, apart from old photographs and valuable classic cameras, there are also displays of works done by five contemporary Hong Kong artists who regard Photographing as a creative media, showing the diversity of Art of Photography. (For details, please refer to the official website of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum [http://hk.heritage.museum/english/exhibition\\_exid.asp?exid=96&Status=4](http://hk.heritage.museum/english/exhibition_exid.asp?exid=96&Status=4))

I have visited this exhibition a couple of times. What is strange is that there were many visitors and discussions. Most of them took photos there. Old cameras were of course the main focus. To be extreme, Hong Kong's 'Mammonism' appears in stock and property markets and later becomes worship of valuables. Now even culture and art cannot escape. People love antiques but not the history and culture behind. Their pursuit of instant pleasure brought by camera flashes intensifies in the age of digital photographing. There were people and discussions everywhere but in fact they just glanced over the works and few of them stopped and really looked at the works in details or listened to the audio guides. In the exhibition hall, I heard not only the comments on the works of the contemporary Hong Kong artists but also their doubts after listening to the audio guides and speeches between friends. Lam Wai Kit's

works were included in those comments. The quotes at the beginning of this essay in fact are questions not only to works in *Divided Minds* but also to other works, especially those of the contemporary artists.

When we enter the exhibition areas of contemporary artists, we have to make ourselves clear about this: whether photography is aiming at photography itself or is treated as a creative media. To many of us, photography is simple, with no room for reflection. Especially when the use of digital cameras and mobiles with cameras is so popular nowadays, anybody can take photos of anything at any time, without caring about others' feelings and regulations. In those times with insufficient resources, the fees for photographing devices, films and development were really expensive. The cost of taking a photo was high so photographers would think twice before they press the shutter, fearing for serious mistakes. Yet, now is the age of digital photographing, photography aiming at photography itself is promoted under wide advertising of the digital product markets. People take photos whenever they want. What they have to think about is the expenditure they should spend on the devices and memory cards. Before pressing the shutter, few people think, "Why should I shoot?", "Why should I take photos that somebody else has already taken?", "When will I see the photos I have taken today again?" and "Whom are those photos of the blog shown to? Why should I put them there?" Well, it does not matter how it is photographed. There is no need for development and even if it is badly photographed, it can be modified by computers, or you can simply delete it. You do not need to pay much and it is free for you to save the photos and share them with others. There is no threat of making serious mistakes, so why should we think twice? "Photograph as you like". You just follow your feelings and do it. The rational way of photographing is a nuisance. Thoughts before photographing become the burden of 'free creation'. Before taking photos, we do not think, we need not think and we are not used to thinking. Everything is decided by something external, like skills and composition. Who cares about internal meaning?

Photography as a creative media is another kind. To be frank, it is a creation of art, but not photography. So if artists do not think before they take photos, how can they express their messages through their works? It is the same as painting. Its purpose is to express messages but not to show the action of painting, or to tell people, "See how valuable my painting brush is!" Photography here in fact is the process or procedure of creation which is done for Art, but not for recording. Lam Wai Kit, who always regards the self-exploration of female identity as a subject matter, portrays the state of her/our brains in this exhibition *Divided Minds*. It is not her first time combining environment and things with self-portraits, and it is not her own style. Yet she tells us how 'she' exists in different environments. The corresponding mental state can be shown by related scenery photos. From her self-portraits, visitors know where 'she' is, what 'she' sees and thinks. 'She' makes use of images to show 'them' 'her' thinking. To tell 'them' 'her' thoughts, she has to think before that. If not, how can there be the arrangements and display of photos? How can it be 'casual' photographing?

When 'they' see, on the one side, 'her' existence in the external environment, they think 'she' is thinking about the scenery of the other side. It seems that 'she' just exists in a certain place at a certain time, and 'her' thoughts are just images in 'her' mind. Yet, have they ever thought that in fact, to 'them', 'she' has never ever existed. 'They' never know 'her'. 'They' are never 'her' friends and 'she' does not know 'their' names. 'They' see *Divided Minds*, assuming what 'she' thinks must be reflected by those images. Yet, images about environments are in fact objective. 'They' just suppose the objective environments must represent 'her' thoughts, but they may not know that objective environments have to exist in real life but 'her' self-portraits may not be real---they may just be a reflection on the glass or another 'her' in other lens. They may be reversal and unreal. People just wishfully take it for granted that self-portraits must be real and the scenery and things must reflect her thoughts.

When taking photos, which special skills to use, what subject to focus on and even the concept of 'Photograph as you like' are taken for granted. People think it takes nothing to take photos so they need not be so serious about the creation, manipulation and explanation of images. They can just click 'delete' and restart again until they are satisfied---that means, they 'make' a piece of work which echoes with photo-takers' will by using digital photographing and they

do believe that they are right. 'Photograph as you like until you get satisfied' and the low costs behind are the greatest advantages of digital photographing but then we forget that the creation and explanation of images are not as simple as what we think. One of the values of art creation is that people can think and reflect themselves in artistic works. If creations lose room for thinking, or are taken for granted, they will lose their values. *Divided Minds*, as this essay has said, is an art creation with photography, but not just a series of photos. From her works we can see not only 'her' and 'her' images from her brain but also introspection of 'their' attitudes towards images.

*Translated from Chinese to English by Kriss Wong.*

Copyright © 2007 Stanley Ng Wai Cheong. All Rights Reserved.

## 看「她」．．．．．更看到「他們」

伍偉昌，二零零七年五月

「自拍照？唔係啫？」  
「呢度展緊一張相定係兩張相？」  
「佢．．．．．到底影緊乜？」  
「點解又影人又影景？到底佢想影乜？」  
「好似好有感覺咁．．．．．但都唔知佢想做乜？」  
「好似好隨意．．．．．Lomo Snap Shot咁囉．．．．．」  
「哦．．．．．影緊佢自己同佢諗緊??．．．．．如果唔係又邊叫『左思右想』，梗係左邊係思，右邊係想．．．．．」

不知道藝術家聽到這些說話會有甚麼反應？有趣的是令人講出這些意見的一系列照片是放在傳統沙龍與老照片群中間，見其突出之餘，又給予人奇異的感覺。在同一展場的入口，從看「傳統」的老照片和舊相機堆中轉一個彎角，便突然看到這些彷彿風馬牛不相及的一套照片。一邊的是景物，另一邊則是拍攝自然得不似自拍照的自拍照（不少在場人仕要看看作品簡介才知道是自拍照呢！）。兩張照片左右並排成為一幅作品，而八幅這樣組合的大照片裝置在彷彿與整個展場環境抽離的一條黑色走廊內。這些作品，與走廊外的週邊環境、老照片和相機比較，顯得有點格格不入，再聽到觀眾的反應，更加有趣。說的是林慧潔在二零零七年二月三日到九月三日在香港文化博物館「相裡．鏡外」展出的一系列「左思右想」作品。

「相裡．鏡外」是香港文化博物館攝影年的大型展覽系列之一。全個展覽以不同年代品牌的相機為重心，展示每位不同年代使用不同相機的攝影師，將個人的思想、感情、一個時代的社會面貌或時空狀態，運用相機和鏡頭記錄及展示出來。同場除老照片和價值連城的經典機相引人入勝外，展覽還安排了五位以攝影為創作媒介的當代香港藝術家作品展出，以呈現攝影藝術的多樣性（詳情參見香港文化博物館官方網。

[http://hk.heritage.museum/chinese/exhibition\\_exid.asp?exid=96&Status=2](http://hk.heritage.museum/chinese/exhibition_exid.asp?exid=96&Status=2)

筆者看過是次展覽數次。奇怪的是，看的人多，說的人多，在場拍照到此一遊的人更多，古老相機當然成為焦點。或者偏激一點說，香港的「拜金主義」從股金樓市的延伸到貴重物品的崇拜，連文化藝術亦難幸免。愛古玩而不愛背後的歷史文化，但求剎那一攝閃燈處處亮的快感在數碼拍攝年代變本加厲。處處留影走馬看花議論紛紛，但沒多人會停下來細看或詳細聽過導賞聽筒的內容。在場內筆者聽到不少有關對這些當代香港藝術家作品的言論，或聽完導賞聽筒後仍摸不著頭腦，或連隨與身邊的朋友偉論連篇，當中包括林慧潔這套作品的有趣意見。文章開首引述的，其實不單只是對「左思右想」作品的提問，在其他作品展區，特別是幾位當代藝術家的，同樣聽到類似討論。

其他的不說，走進當代藝術家的展區內欣賞時，還是要分清楚以攝影為目的的攝影和以攝影為藝術創作媒介這兩回事。對於不少人而言，拍照就是拍照，沒有思前想後的理據。特別是現今數碼相機和影相手機的普及，何人何事何地隨意可拍，莫須理會顧忌、規則、甚至別人的感受。相比以前資源貧乏之年代，拍攝用的器材、膠卷、沖晒等費用不菲，一張照片的代價非淺，故攝影者定必左思右想才按下快門，唯恐「一失手成千古恨」。但是，到了如今的數碼年代，以攝影為目的的攝影，在數碼商品市場大員大力摧谷下，要影就影，或者只會顧慮要花錢多買器材和記憶卡。很少人會在

按下快門前想到「我為何要影？」、「為何要翻拍別人的作品？」、「我幾時會再翻看今天到此一遊的照片？」、「網誌記這些照片給誰看．．．．．幹麼要放上去??」反正拍成怎樣也不要緊，沒有沖晒的必要，再差可用電腦「執」，或者乾脆刪除不想要的作品，就是沒太大代價要付，儲存和分享方便，自由自在。沒有了「一失手成千古恨」的恐嚇，又何須想太多。「喜歡就影」，一切隨感覺而行，理性的「想過才影」彷彿變得累贅，攝影前的思想變成「自由創作」的包袱。拍攝前不去想，或不用想，或慣性不想便拍，一切只在乎外在的技術和構圖，影像的內涵又有誰會在乎？

以攝影為藝術創作媒介則是另一類別。說實在，就是在創作藝術，而非拍照。因此若藝術家不先思想，又怎可以在作品中表達他/ 她所思想的訊息？與用畫筆繪畫原理一樣，目的為畫及畫中要述說的內涵訊息，而非繪畫本身這個動作或者告訴別人「我的畫筆有多名貴！」。攝影在這裡是扮演創作的過程或工序，目的是藝術，而非為進行記載影像這個動作而做。一向以女性自身身分探討為題材的林慧潔，在是次展覽的「左思右想」中把她/ 我們腦袋的狀態用影像告訴我們。以環境事物與自拍照組合成一幅作品並非是她首次的創作模式，亦非她獨有。可是她告訴了我們，「她」在不同環境包圍下是怎樣的存在，呼應的心理狀態則在相連的景物照中可見。對於觀眾而言，看她的自拍照可以看到「她」在哪裡，同時看到「她」所見到所想到的是什麼。「她」把「她」的思想用影像告訴觀看的「他們」。要把「她」的思想告訴「他們」，若不先「思想」，何來安排影像擺放和展示的方式？那又會是「隨意」的拍攝呢？

當「他們」看到一邊是「她」在外面的環境之中，以為「她」正思想另一邊的風光。彷彿一邊的「她」是在某時某地存在過，而「她」所思想的只是在「她」腦海中存在過的影像吧。可是「他們」又會否想到，對於「他們」，其實「她」不曾存在過。「他們」從來不認識「她」，不知道「她」。「他們」和「她」不曾是朋友，「她」亦不知道「他們」的名字。「他們」看到「左思右想」，以為「她」所思所想必然是這些影像。但是，環境事物的影像其實是客觀的，只是「他們」一廂情願以為一邊的客觀景物必定代表「她」正在想的是甚麼，但「他們」未必想到，客觀的景物是必然真實存在過，只是「她」自拍的影像未必是真正的「她」——自拍的可能是玻璃上的倒影或另一個鏡頭內的「她」，可能是左右反轉，而非真實的「她」。以為自拍必定是真實的「她」，景物必然是「她」的想像內容，這只是一廂情願理所當然的想法。

在攝影時，很多人會以為用甚麼方法技巧，或拍攝甚麼題材，甚致認為「喜歡就影」皆是理所當然。特別以為攝取影像是不用付上甚麼代價時，對影像的創造、使用和詮釋，便不用太認真，亦無須認真，反正可以一按「DELETE」推倒重來，影到「?心水」為止——即是以數碼影像的方式「造」出一幅與拍攝者心意一樣的作品，以自己的想法為是。「喜歡就影、影到喜歡」和其背後所付出的低廉代價便是數碼影像攝取的最大好處，但是這樣的好處令我們忘記了影像的創造和解釋並非理所當然以自己的想法為是。藝術創作的其中一個價值是讓人從作品中思考和反省，若創作失去思考空間，以為一切均是理所當然，作品便會失去其價值。「左思右想」如前文所言，是以攝影為媒介的藝術創作，而非單單的攝影作品。作品看到的，不止是「她」和「她」腦袋中視覺裡的影像，還有「他們」對影像態度的反思