



TEHCHING HSIEH

One Year Performance 1980-1981
(Time Clock Piece)

Neue Nationalgalerie
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Tehching Hsieh's entire artistic oeuvre consists of six performances, which the artist refers to as his "lifeworks." Hsieh carried out these performances with extreme rigor, establishing a set of rules and conditions and then adhering to them over an extended period of time - the first five of his performances lasted one year, the sixth thirteen years. He adopted the aesthetic of administration, often incorporating elements such as legal documents to underscore the constraints he placed on his art and his life.

Born in Taiwan in 1950, Tehching Hsieh grew up in a village with 15 siblings. He took art classes as a child, eventually dropping out of school, "to focus on art, and through art to ponder life, time, and being. My influences were Dostoyevsky, Kafka, and my mother." For his earliest performance, "Jump", he jumped from the second floor of a building in Taipei in 1973, breaking both ankles. It initiated his artistic practice, which demanded extreme physical and mental endurance. In order to leave Taiwan, Tehching Hsieh trained as a sailor, and in 1974, came to New York City. Until 1988, Hsieh lived in the U.S. as an illegal immigrant, trying to meet ends as a cleaner and dishwasher in restaurants. "One day I go to clean a restaurant, and I come home and I am just work, back, work, back home and thinking what am I looking for? I am already *in* the piece. My work is about how I explain life and change it into art. I create, but my creation is not like an object, it is an idea which is basically life, it deals with *time*."

In 1978, he began his first "One Year Performance 1978-1979", for which he had built a cell in his studio and furnished it with a bed, blanket, sink and bucket. His lawyer locked the door and sealed it with screws on the one hand and a written contract on the other. Talking, reading or writing, radio or television were not allowed. Every three weeks his studio was open to the public; visitors could visit it like a gallery and look at the work in progress. After exactly one year, his lawyer returned, confirmed that the seal was unbroken, and Hsieh left his cell.

Here at Neue Nationalgalerie, his second "One Year Performance 1980-1981" shows evidence how Hsieh punched a time card on the hour for one year from 1980 to 1981. A year is the time in which the earth circles the sun once, a cycle, "a human calculator of life" and thus for Hsieh the ideal unit and way to talk about real life.

Hsieh used a 16mm movie camera to shoot one frame on the hour, continued for a year, resulting into 8,760 photos that became a 6-minute time-lapse film. His changing hair length visibly documents the passage of time. Again, everything was previously put in writing with the lawyer, also recording the 133 missed stamps that Hsieh was unable to complete due to mental breakdowns from sleep deprivation. "Time Clock" was on display at the Guggenheim New York (2009), (parallel to "Cage Piece" at MoMA, 2009), Tate Modern (2017) among other institutions worldwide. Now is the first time this exhibition travels to Germany.

By 1986, he completed three more "One Year Performances": one year Hsieh spent exclusively outdoors; in another, an eight-foot rope connected him to artist Linda Montana, though they were not allowed to touch each other once; this was followed by a year in which he was not permitted to make, look at, or discuss any art. Hsieh's final work lasted 13 years: from 1987 to 1999 he did not exhibit his art.



No new works have been created since 2000.

Hsieh, described by Marina Abramović as a master of performance, lived most of his career in relative obscurity, explaining his artistic practice very modestly as a means to "pass the time."

"I lived in it, 24 hours a day for a year—it is life. Your heartbeat continues. Art and life become one. My work shows different perspectives of thinking about life. For me, life is a life sentence; life is passing time, life is free thinking (...) My work was not part of any art movement, it was not easy to be categorized, I was an outsider in the art world—and in reality. But I believed that solitude is good for understanding and responding to the essence of *being*, I believed in what I do. Being overlooked by the art world didn't bother me, I made a living through worker's jobs. That suits my character better. Even now, the neighbors on my block only know me as a construction guy, not an artist at all."

Hsieh's performances endure through the poignant photographic as well as contractual documentation, but most of all through the imagination of the audience. His life's work can be read as an exploration of the meaning of freedom and imprisonment, stasis and movement, or, more appropriately, the universal human condition.