

SEANKELLY

Toal, Drew "Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh," *Time Out New York*, March 26 - April 1, 2009.



"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh"



One Year Performance 1978–79 Photograph: Cheng Wei Kuong, 1979 Tehching Hsieh, New York

Like Kafka's hunger artist, Taiwanese endurance master Tehching Hsieh has made a career out of aesthetic stoicism. Unlike that emaciated fictional character, whose performances, Kafka tells us, are necessarily limited to 40 days, Hsieh's five exercises in deprivation undertaken between 1978 and 1986 each spanned exactly 12 months. The first and most spectacular of these living monuments to self-denial, *Cage Piece*, is the focus of this retrospective at MoMA.

By way of chronologically ordered photo portraits (taken daily), candid shots of Hsieh doing not much of anything, and even the titular construction (looking much as it did when Hsieh occupied it), the work recounts the year the artist spent imprisoned in his Tribeca loft—never talking, never reading and without so much as a Rubik's Cube to occupy himself. Hsieh willfully removed himself from the events and interactions that usually mark the passage of time—a condition that might break a person who had any shred of self-doubt. By essentially shackling himself to the wall, Hsieh presented the ultimate stripped-down version of life as art, with literally nothing for him to do but exist and think about existence.

Knowing, intellectually, that time is relative is one thing, but actually seeing someone apprehend the essence of that in such a direct, spartan way is quite another. It's all the more resonant when viewed through the lens of our society's slavish devotion to distraction—which of course includes the viewing of art.—*Drew Toal*

Museum of Modern Art, through May 18