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Tehching Hsieh (Tehching Hsieh)

Taiwan-born New York-based performance artist **Tehching Hsieh** is not the sort of person one would immediately associate with feats of extreme endurance and inner strength. His slight stature and humble demeanour are at odds with the radical artistic practice that has gained him a reputation as a pioneer of performance art and one of the greatest artists of his generation.

Hsieh is best known for his series of five One Year Performances which he began in the late 1970s as a way of exploring and observing the passing of time and the concept of life. Currently on show at Carriageworks in Sydney is the second of the artist's One Year Performances, "One Year Performance 1980-1981" (commonly known as the "Time Clock Piece"), in which the artist punched a time clock in his studio, every hour on the hour, twenty-four hours a day, for a whole year.

The installation at Carriageworks consists of the documents produced by the artist during the performance. A series of self-portraits, one for each punch of the clock, is the centerpiece of the installation, which also features a stop-motion film created using the self-portraits, the time cards used during the piece, as well as an artist's statement and witness statements.

To find out more about his incredible practice and the "One Year Performance 1980-1981" installation, **BLOUIN ARTINFO** got in touch with the artist and asked him a few questions.

Your performance works are long in duration and extreme in nature. What made you decide to start making One Year Performances in the first place? What motivated you to produce your first One Year Performance, Cage Piece?

I came to New York from Taiwan in 1974 lived as an illegal immigrant. For the first four years I struggled at the bottom of life and thought about how to make art but didn't have any outcome, until one day I suddenly realized that I could present this state of thinking with an art form. One year is the basic unit of calculating life, is the time that the Earth goes around the Sun. I used one year as the time frame; it also can bring the piece a quality of life. The second piece was formed during the first piece, I didn't think of all the pieces at one time.

You originally trained as a painter. Why did you change from painting to performance?

I painted intensely from 19 to 23 years old. Then I felt painting limited my expression of ideas. Doing actions fits my characters better; I did actions and recorded them. From Cage Piece, I started calling my work performance.

In Time Clock you punched a time clock every hour on the hour for an entire year. How did you come up with idea for the work, and what is the meaning of the work?

In the first piece, I was passing time. In the second piece, Time Clock Piece, I was still passing time, in a different way. Punching the clock every hour for a year is a repetition in duration, its meaning is open to different interpretations.

During Time Clock you failed to punch in numerous times. What significance do these "failures" have to you and to the work itself?

I tried my best and achieved 98% success. In this piece there are different kinds of mispunches: too early, too late, and overslept. From the perspective of rule, the mispunches broke the rule of this piece; from the perspective of art, mispunches reveal more details. It all depends on how you see it.

Time Clock deals with the concepts of time, life, and work. What does Time Clock reveal about your concept and philosophy of work and life?

The work of punching the clock includes but is not limited to just a 9 to 5 work day; it is 24/7 for a year, it becomes life itself. It is a gesture of repetition, a Sisyphean absurdity.

What was the most difficult aspect of making Time Clock?

Waking up every hour was difficult.

What do you want to convey to the audience with your One Year Performances?

For me, life is a life sentence, life is passing time, life is freethinking.

You stopped making art in 2000. Why did you decide to stop making art?

I didn't have ideas, and stopped doing art was an exit. Doing art and doing life are both doing time, they are not much different for me.

If you have another great idea for a new work, will you start producing art again?

There are many possibilities in life to do things creatively without calling them art, I prefer to think in this way.

"One Year Performance 1980-1981" is at Carriageworks until July 6, 2014.