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The Original Marina Abramović Has Resurfaced at the Venice Biennale



It may have seemed impressive when Marina Abramović spent 736 silent hours stationed inside New York's Museum of Modern Art during her 2010 retrospective. But in terms of marathon performance art, the original record holder is still the 66-year-old Taiwanese artist Tehching Hsieh, whom Abramović has called a "personal hero" and a "master."

Take, for example, the time Hsieh locked himself in a wooden cage for an entire year from 1978 to '79, during which he also abstained from reading, talking, writing, listening to music, watching TV, and using a restroom, opting instead for a wash basin and a pail that his friend (who also delivered him food) would remove every day. He followed up on that performance just months later by punching a time clock every hour and immediately taking a photo of himself for a full year in order to document his own sleep deprivation.

As his Taiwanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale can attest, those were not the only times Hsieh put himself through a very long 12 months. Between 1978 and 2000, he carried out five such year-long performances, including an annum living on the streets of New York City, during which he apparently never once entered any type of building, vehicle, or even tent—though he did carefully note where he defecated in maps that recall the

Japanese artist On Kawara's own carefully tracked travels through New York. (Not that Hsieh was always alone—like Abramović, who once knotted her hair to her partner Ulay's for 16 hours in 1977, Hsieh spent 1983 to 1984 linked to the artist Linda Montano by a rope, without otherwise touching.)

During all that time, Hsieh, who's now 66, was also living in the U.S. illegally. One among a brood of 15 kids, Hsieh moved to New York from Taiwan after completing his compulsory three years of military service, dropping out of high school to paint. While still in Taipei, he soon moved into abstract works, short performances, and photography, too—beginnings that are also showcased in “Doing Time,” the exhibition that spans his decades-long career in Venice.

Hsieh, for his part, has long abandoned stunts like his wooden cage, a project which was spotlighted at an exhibition in MoMA in 2009. And while he now lives in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, and claims to have stopped being an artist in 2000, the Venice Biennale is undeniably breathing new life into his past—and attracting the likes of Klaus Biesenbach and Ai Weiwei.

Plus, a new documentary on the artist, *Outside Again*, will also be screening continuously for the length of the exhibition. Too bad the biennale only lasts nine months, not a year.





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Tehching Hsieh, One Year Performance, 1980-81, in "Tehching Hsieh: Doing Time" at Palazzo delle Prigioni, Castello 4209, San Marco @labiennale
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