

SEANKELLY

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Slow and Steady: Tehching Hsieh in Venice

From September 26, 1981 to September 26, 1982, Tehching Hsieh lived outside in New York City, never seeking shelter in a building. He was 31 when he began the performance work, which he titled *One Year Performance 1981–1982 (Outdoor Piece)*, and 32 when he finished it. Now he is 66 and representing Taiwan at the Biennale, where records of that work are on display with another one-year piece for which—every hour, on the hour—he punched a time clock and shot a self-portrait on one frame of film. That one ran from April 11, 1980, through April 11, 1981. He was supposed to punch the clock 8,760 times, and he only missed it 133 times, mostly because he was actually sleeping. To say that this is heroic work would be a profound understatement. Thinking of the self-inflicted pain involved in these pieces sends chills through the body.



Documentation of *One Year Performance 1980–1981 (Time Clock Piece)*.

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On walls in the show at the Palazzo delle Prigioni (which is right next to the Palazzo Ducale) are every film still that Hsieh shot in the 1980–81 piece, and the clothes that he wore that he wore in the 1981–82 work, including his Converse All-Stars, are displayed in a vitrine. While living outside, the artist, who was born in Taiwan and came to the United States in 1974, meticulously kept track of where he was spending his time—where he was buying food, where he was sleeping, and, yes, where he was defecating. Maps showing his movements line other walls.



Documentation of *One Year Performance 1981–1982 (Outdoor Piece)*.
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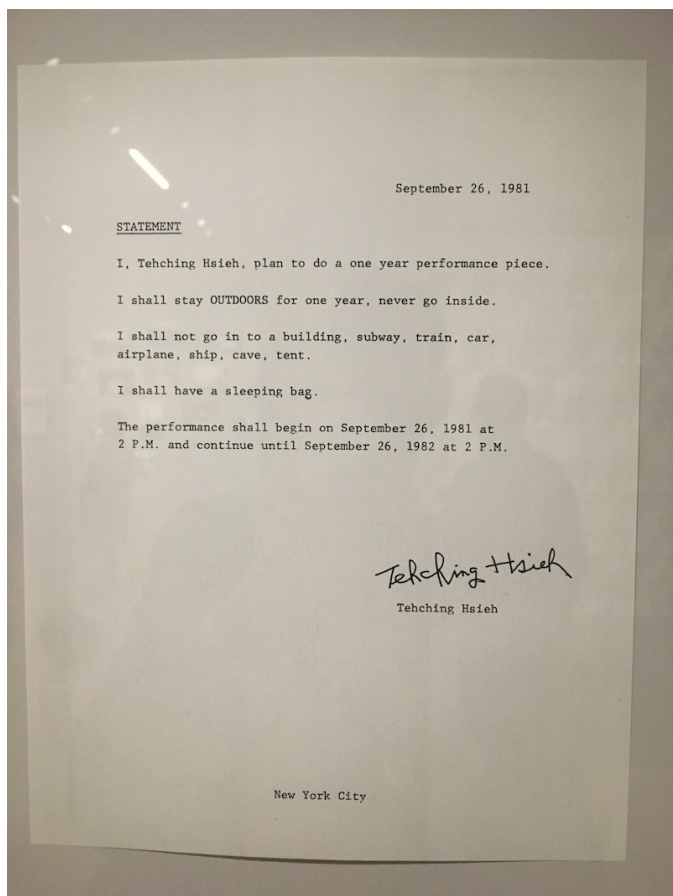
The map for May 11, 1982, exactly 35 years years ago today, reveals that he spent the day in Downtown Manhattan. He woke up at 8 a.m. at 120 Mercer Street in SoHo, bought lunch at 11 a.m. at 373 Avenue of the Americas in the West Village (the address is now home to a nail salon and spa), purchased dinner at 8:40 p.m. at 117 Mott Street in Chinatown (now a realty office), and then went to sleep at 11:30 p.m. back at 120 Mercer (now the back of the Hugo Boss store on Broadway).



The map for May 11, 1982 of *One Year Performance 1981–1982 (Outdoor Piece)*.
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Often Hsieh's work is discussed in terms of endurance and suffering, and those are no doubt elements of it, but it is also about the deliberate experience of change, about being in the moment. It slows life down. That is a welcoming feeling when in Venice for the Biennale, when everyone is rushing from one show to another, always watching the clock.

In a new documentary on his life that appears in the show Hsieh makes another poignant statement. "I did not try to make my life as difficult as possible," he says. "I tried to make my ideas as clear as possible."



A statement for *One Year Performance 1981–1982 (Outdoor Piece)*.