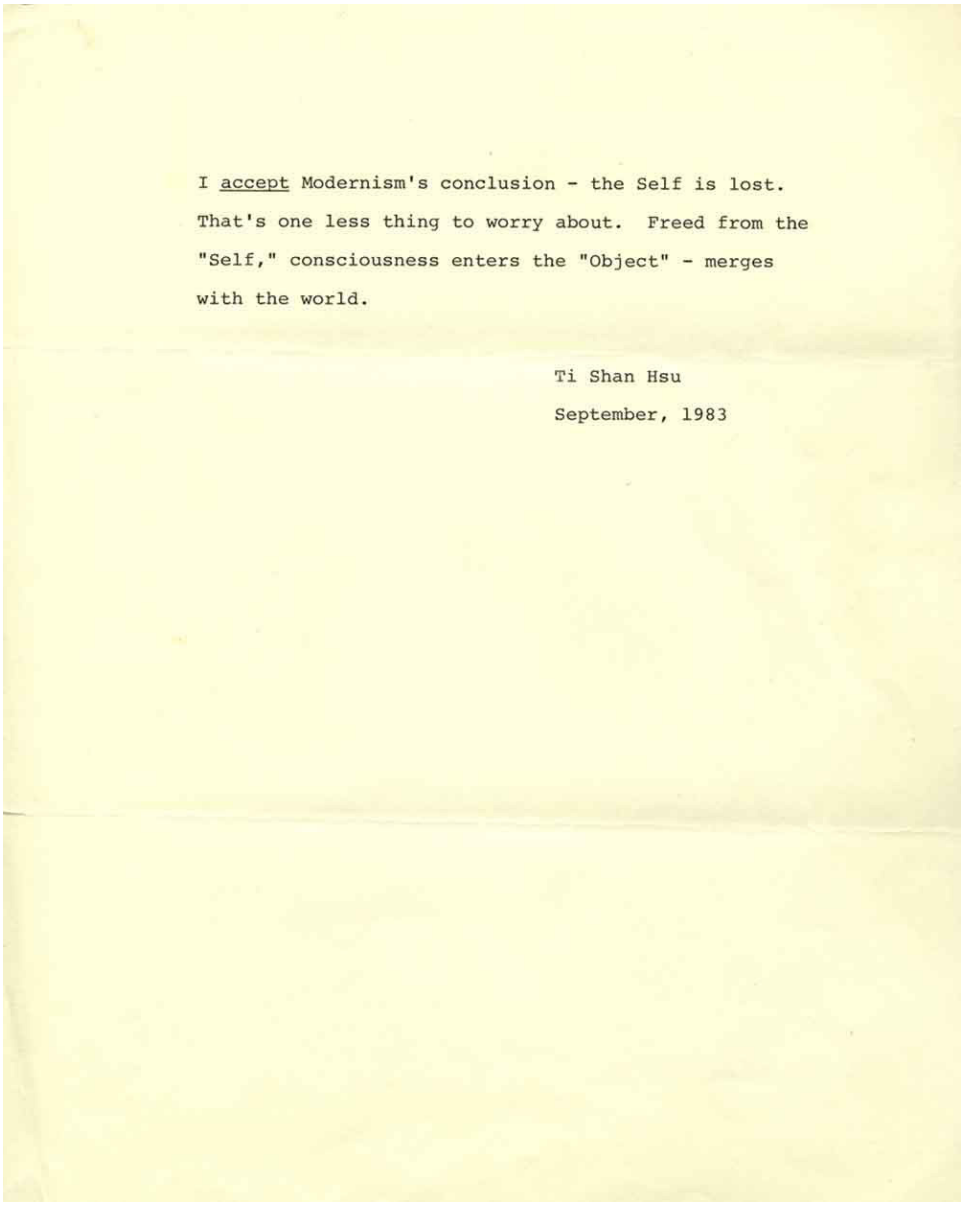

I accept Modernism's conclusion - the Self is lost. That's one less thing to worry about. Freed from the "Self," consciousness enters the "Object" - merges with the world.

Ti Shan Hsu
September, 1983

SPIKE

Tishan Hsu at Secession

Ramona Heinlein

View of "recent work 2023," Secession, Vienna, 2023. All photos: Oliver Ottenschläger

Deliriously vibrating between wonder and unease, an exhibition in Vienna deepens the artist's probe into the fusion of bodies and machines.

Experiencing Tishan Hsu's exhibition "recent work 2023" feels like a rollercoaster ride: You get the rush of dissolving reality, the near weightlessness at the top, but also the nasty contraction of the viscera and the slight nausea that sits in the throat on the way back down. This is surprising as, except for one LED panel with an animated video and sound (*grass-screen-skin: zoom 2*, all works 2023), there is no actual movement involved in this show. Hsu manages to shake you up with static renderings of creature-like grids and mechanical nudes that combine abject carnality with dizzying digital illusion.

Hsu's recent rediscovery and his introduction as a late-understood visionary, first by a major survey at the Hammer Museum and the SculptureCenter in 2020, followed by his appearance at the 2022 Venice Biennale, continues at Secession, where a selection

of new works is shown. Hsu's oeuvre has always been marked by an astonishing stringency, while consistently being infused with the latest technological developments, from digital images and photoshop to 3D printing and AI (the latter used by Hsu for the first time in producing the exhibited works). His engagement with the entanglement of body and technology dates back to the early 1980s, when the artist moved from Boston, where he grew up and studied architecture at MIT, to New York, where he took up a job as word processor at a Wall Street law firm. These forward-looking environments informed his practice around cyborg-like hybridity, which, at that time, was largely a trope in sci-fi literature and film rather than in the visual arts.

In Vienna, one of the most striking pieces, *skin-screen: emergence (quadriptych)*, consists of four rounded panels that, attached to the wall at a distance, leave a neon orange radiation behind them. Here, hyperreal evocations of skin are fused with a distorted grid. A shimmering, heart-shaped form with numerous, fragile wrinkles seems to push outwards, while skin clothed with goosebumps, simultaneously formless and razor-sharp, floats in a stream of blurred dots – receding materiality meeting stirring physicality. As though this were not visually and viscerally bewildering enough, there are also silicon forms growing out of the panels, whether as tiny messy blobs that seem to be squeezed out of the grid or as some kind of limb breaking out of and repenetrating its surface. In between, there are juicy nipples and screen-like recesses that show an X-ray of an animal and slightly fuzzy images of flesh and orifices.

Every surface in the exhibition, encompassing further wall works and two sculptures, is like a battlefield of different realities, textures, and modes – and even of the body itself, albeit never in its "natural" wholeness. Destabilizing essentialist categories like

"gender," "subject," "nature," or "technology," the body is only shown from a clinical, factual perspective in total fragmentation and depersonalization, as a locus of surveillance and control by techno-rationality. At times, the artist chooses quite stale images to make his point – for example, a person behind a screen touches it as if being captured (*double-breath-green-2*), or a masked human overwritten with the slogan "Erase all data? [Y/N]" (*screen-bodydata*) – while still managing to maintain an uncanny atmosphere.

Simultaneously, the exhibition space is surreally filled with the innocent chirping of crickets and the singing of birds – a nature soundtrack reminiscent of sleep sounds meant to relieve insomnia. The moment is immersive, just like the striking work *ears-screen-skin: Vienna*, a printed wallpaper that covers the whole front wall in different motifs derived from the panel works. Even though the ornamental structure contains repetition and seriality, the forms in this body-tech landscape are inexactly mirrored, lending it an affective liveliness that tosses back and forth between discomfort and marveling.

Hsu's works constantly play with building up illusion, only to break it down once more. If you look closely, you will see not only literal holes in the surfaces, but also glitches. The artist is not scared to be bold, nor to make mistakes, the works' imperfection and contingency testifying to a hybrid sensibility. The dot grid in *skin-screen: emergence (quadriptych)* is interrupted with slight deviations; the

various parts of the wallpaper don’t always perfectly match; and the sculpture *tablet-skin-screen*, a laptop-like surface with bodily silicon molds on the its front, reveals its profane building structure on its back. Hsu’s works disclose their made-ness, emphasizing that they share a continuum of existence with the spectator, instead of creating yet another fictitious world. It is their eccentric combination of the rational and scientific with the uncontrollable and irrational, their vulnerable situatedness in the here and now, that make you look in awe, and not without a shiver down your spine.

ART PAPERS

Jes Fan, *Sites of Wounding: Chapter 1* at Empty Gallery, installation views, 2023. Photos: Michael Yu.

Of Oysters, Roaches, and New Pessimism in Hong Kong

Arriving at Empty Gallery is always an experience. There's getting to Tin Wan in the first place a part of Hong Kong that feels like a world unto itself on its peripheral downtown perch along the edge of Aberdeen Harbor. Then there's the lift that takes you up to the 19th floor of a nondescript high-rise that hosts this two-floor black box space where art functions as the light in the dark. Such was the case with works by Tishan Hsu and Jes Fan, whose solo exhibitions each occupy one floor.

In Fan's show, Sites of Wounding: Chapter 1, blown glass orbs glow under spotlights as they slump over metal frames and ooze from resin slabs composed to invoke the surface of oyster shells. A pigmented aqua resin vessel holds two glass orbs in *Left and right knee, grafted* (2023), while fine, pigmented aqua resin sheets are layered like waves to form a square on the wall in *Diagram XIX* (2023), out of which a glass orb seems to excrete itself. Nearby, square glass sheets are stacked at intervals on a stainless steel tower frame, in *C is for you* (2023). Each of the sheets was kiln-fired with an oyster shell so that it holds the impression of its shape, as well as ashy traces of what once was.

Palimpsest (2023), a single-channel video projected on the wall, introduces the ideas that infuse the show. This dreamlike study shows pearls being grown by implanting the mantle tissue of oysters native to Hong Kong with delicately cut Chinese characters for "pearl of the orient," Hong Kong's colonial nickname. As the sounds of shucking and the clicking of underwater life define an ambient, pared-down soundtrack, images take on the details of an oyster's internal flesh, the waters in which they reside, a shell in hand. Through subtitles, we learn that oysters produce pearls in reaction to an intrusion, and thus in defense of their autonomy, and we are told of the artist's desire for the oyster to swallow its own name to turn into itself. Words beginning with C are then listed—for example, "C is for colony," which Hong Kong once was, and "C is for change," what Hong Kong is experiencing now.

Jes Fan, *Palimpsest* (still), 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.

Tishan Hsu, *double-breath-1*, 2023. UV cured inkjet, acrylic, silicone, ink on wood. Courtesy of the artist, Empty Gallery and Miguel Abreu Gallery. © Tishan Hsu/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Tishan Hsu, *screen-skins* at Empty Gallery, installation view, 2023. Photo: Michael Yu.

Palimpsest is also a visual index for the sculptures in the room. Pigmented resin sheets mimic the green swells of the city's seascape, while glass orbs referencing the iridescent matter that oysters produce in response to an imposition are reflected in the mirrored surfaces of shopping malls, all of which Fan weaves into Palimpsest. The connections between meaning and context seem endless here. Take Oyster Bay, a shoreline on Lantau Island that was abundant with oysters but has been filled in with reclaimed sand for development alongside a vast swath of the sea. What metaphorical pearl might be produced from this incursion? What iridescence might grow as a result? If "C is you," then who are we?

Questions such as these resonate across Hong Kong, like the murmuring rumble of an ever-populated present that holds bodies in uncanny tension—something Tishan Hsu seems to manifest one floor above in screen-skins. Works composed of wooden panels coated in UV-cured inkjet prints depict warped mesh fields, on which images are printed, like the black-and-white silhouette pressing its hands against a television screen in *double-breath 1* (2023). Each composition is washed with undulating tones of pale fluorescent blue, corpulent pink, and sandy ocher. Silicone forms invoking bodily orifices create pustules and wounds across dermal surfaces.

It's all very *Videodrome*. That body horror manifests in *phone-breath-bed 3* (2023), a sculpture presented in its own small room. A silicone face emerges out of a Perspex panel, where, lower down, a silicone slab forms a womblike concave depression. The panel hovers over the form of a hospital bed with the support of gray plastic piping, whose mattress is a screen-skin painting with creased dermal folds framing silicone protrusions that swell from the flatness. In its expression of a body that has become enmeshed with the technologies and apparatus designed to keep it alive, the sculpture harmonizes with the oyster shell traces burned into glass downstairs in Fan's show—both expressions of a hybrid, post-human singularity.

But while Fan's exploration of nature is a metaphor for a mutational resilience—growths created from fragmented occupations produce something beautifully reflective—Hsu's implosion of the body into the frames of technology visualizes a terrifying future.

Tishan Hsu, *phone-breath-bed 3*, 2023. polycarbonate, silicone, stainless steel wire cloth, UV cured inkjet, wood, steel. Courtesy of the artist, Empty Gallery and Miguel Abreu Gallery. © Tishan Hsu/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Numéro art

CHINA

徐梯善 人机惘事

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SUMMER 2023 ART 6月刊
定价：人民币100元 港币120元
ISSN 2789-2980
9 772789 298008 >
国际标准连续出版物号 ISSN 2789-2980

TISHAN HSU

COVER STORY 封面故事

人机惘事

徐梯善（Tishan Hsu）掌握摄影、成像和数码科技等技术，捕捉科技和身体之间的“体现（embodiment）”形式 。多年沉寂后，徐梯善在近几年备受艺术圈的关注，作品见于威尼斯双年展、卡内基双年展、惠特尼双年展等大型览，并被大都会和泰特等知名美术馆收藏，今年纽约雕塑中心（Sculpture Center）的年度 Gala 也专门致敬。最近徐梯善在筹备他年底在维也纳 Secession 展览馆的个展，以全新作品展示科技带来的改变。摄影 : Tim Barber，采访及撰文 : Venus Lau。

羊毛长裤、Lug系带靴，BOTTEGA VENETA。T恤，艺术家私服。

《Closed Circuit II》，1986，丙烯、醇酸树脂、聚苯乙烯、乙烯基水泥复合材料于木板上，149.9 x 149.9 x 10.2 cm，迈阿密卢贝尔家族（Rubell Family）收藏。摄影：Jeff McLane。

皮革印花衬衫，BOTTEGA VENETA。

电影《闪灵》里的 Danny 能看见过去未来，甚至可窥见以血浪形式出现的“horror”本身。美籍华裔艺术家徐梯善似乎也具备“闪灵”能力。他掌握摄影、成像的前沿技术，并依靠其直觉，以绘画、雕塑和录像预示科技嬗变所铭刻在身体的痕迹——他 1986 年的绘画《Closed Circuit II》就如先知般“预言”了 Instagram 的商标。

徐梯善的作品里经常出现眼睛、手指、肋骨、嘴唇、肚脐等的图像，这些人体局部的意象，散布在具有流动感和皮肤垂坠感的视觉质地上。哲学家韩炳哲把光滑的皮肤、艺术品和手机屏幕视作当代标志，是现今人们对“无伤状态”的迷恋之象征。徐梯善作品中的“皮肤”并不平滑，它们坑坑洼洼，呈现着肉质起伏或孔洞。徐梯善有些八九十年代的雕塑，如《Bioube》（1988）和《Virtual Flow》（1990）看起来像变形的医疗仪器和家具，上面密铺着肉色瓷砖，像极生物教科书里的皮肤结构图中过度增生的角质细胞。这些雕塑的轮子和艺术家对数码世界流动性的理解相呼应，它们仿佛可以滑行到任何空间和语境。精神分析学家 Didier Anzieu 讲过“皮肤是灵魂的摇篮”，他提出“皮肤自我”（the skin-ego）是种心理表征，是婴儿的体表经验，建构了自身作为一个心理内容的容器的想象，包封着婴儿的精神机制和情动（affect），并留存婴儿和“外界”接触的初始痕迹。徐梯善作品中的“皮肤”却不是包裹型的结构，而是外延的、幽灵性和流体性的。感觉徐梯善并不刻意把“皮肤”的意象往身份政治延展，而是把它当作普世的、非人格化的场域，像医学成像体模（它们在放射科的另一个名称是幽灵，“phantom”），模拟人体组织参数，以分析和校准成像仪器的性能。所以它们建构的皮肤自我，有可能是 common skin-ego——无名的、不知来去何处的感官经验和来自不同语域的意象，通过技术，寄生在同一片皮肤平面上。

皮肤记载了婴儿的感官记忆。在当下，个人的皮肤和直觉记忆，通过屏幕接通了大数据——一种外化的记忆。徐梯善承认个人记忆和集体数据的边界愈来愈模糊，甚至说过自己是赛博格，谷歌是他的记忆体。2013 年徐梯善母亲去世，他在整理遗物的时候接触到一些老相册和书信，遂开始了解家族历史，与亲戚交流家族照片，并创作了一系列平面作品——简称“上海项目”。这些私人记忆在传输的过程穿越社交媒体和邮件的虚拟空间，艺术家用丝网印刷等创作手段转化和“液化”这些他并未经历且被外化的记忆，不止活络了家族历史的脉络，也唤起了斯蒂格勒式的“后生系统”记忆（epiphylogenetic memory）——外在化的技术工具的集体记忆和痕迹。徐梯善在八十年代初做过文字处理的工作，他特别在意磁卡插进卡槽的动作，直觉地认为那是当时新科技的标识。德里达用 pharmakon 来解构“书写”是毒又是药的多面性。文字处理机把书写的自我追踪过程让渡给机器，磁卡卡槽就像一个打开另一种知觉几何学的物理通路，它们启发徐梯善在绘画作品里重复描画肉质孔洞，例如在《Outer Banks of Memory》（1984）里就有圆形和长圆形的隙缝，通过它们能洞悉什么？是不是记忆的衍射？但更让我在意的是垂直贯穿绘画的黑线，它让绘画平面看起来像电梯门，阻挡了它背后的另一个世界。

写毕上面种种，与其说更明了地概括徐梯善的艺术实践，不如说勾起更多想法和疑问。我不知为何想起日本享和三年（1803）流传甚广的“虚舟事件”：一只玻璃穹顶、制作精良的陀螺形的空心船漂浮到茨城县海边。船内的红发异国女子紧抱着一个箱子。作家涩泽龙彦将此段传说改编成短篇小说《虚舟》，描述当地村民对于那位流落日本的异国女子和其“宝箱”的好奇与遐想。其中一位村民仙吉得以进入船体和女子交流，并窥见她箱子内的物件——仙吉自己的头颅，后来仙吉、虚舟和异国女子一同失踪（小说下半部情节转入现代世界，这是后话，在此不赘）。仙吉的头颅，或许可以比喻在当下各种媒介中的身体形象，后者脱离身体“原主人”的控制，被非人格化，并流向充满未知的资讯海洋，甚至不知何时被陌生人捕获和持有。我脑中突然浮现 1983 年徐梯善讲过的一句话：“我接受现代主义的结论：自我在消失 ..... 而意识从自我中获得释放，进入客体，融入世界。”

Numéro Art: 您在麻省理工接受了建筑师培训，是什么让您开始涉足艺术领域的?

Tishan: 我从很小的时候就开始对艺术感兴趣。但将我的一生奉献给艺术是另一回事。

您以前在上海有一个工作室，它和您在纽约的工作室有很大的不同吗?

我在上海有两个不同的工作室，它们都在居民楼里。而纽约的工作室是一个仓库。

Julie Belcove 认为您的艺术实践是对“评估技术正在成为人体延伸”的反思，您同意这种说法吗？您认为我们的身体会延伸到怎样的技术领域？

是的。看看如今的情况。科技正在包围并进入我们的生活。我们被相机拍了多少次？电子设备和 AI 的使用，正在实现一种技术的具象化，这超越了我的想象。

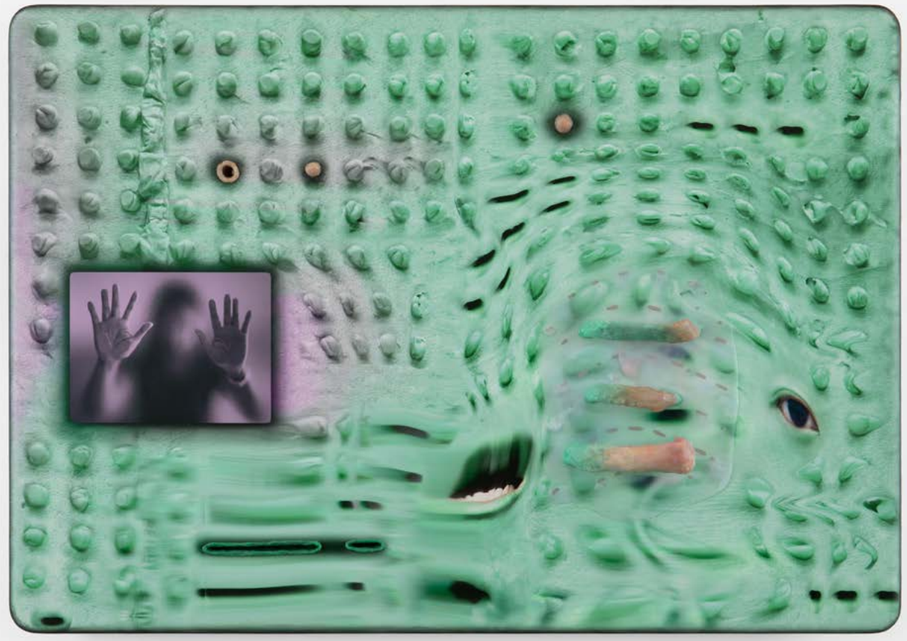
皮革印花衬衫、羊毛上衣、皮革牛仔长裤，
BOTTEGA VENETA。

马海毛针织衫，羊毛长裤，BOTTEGA VENETA。

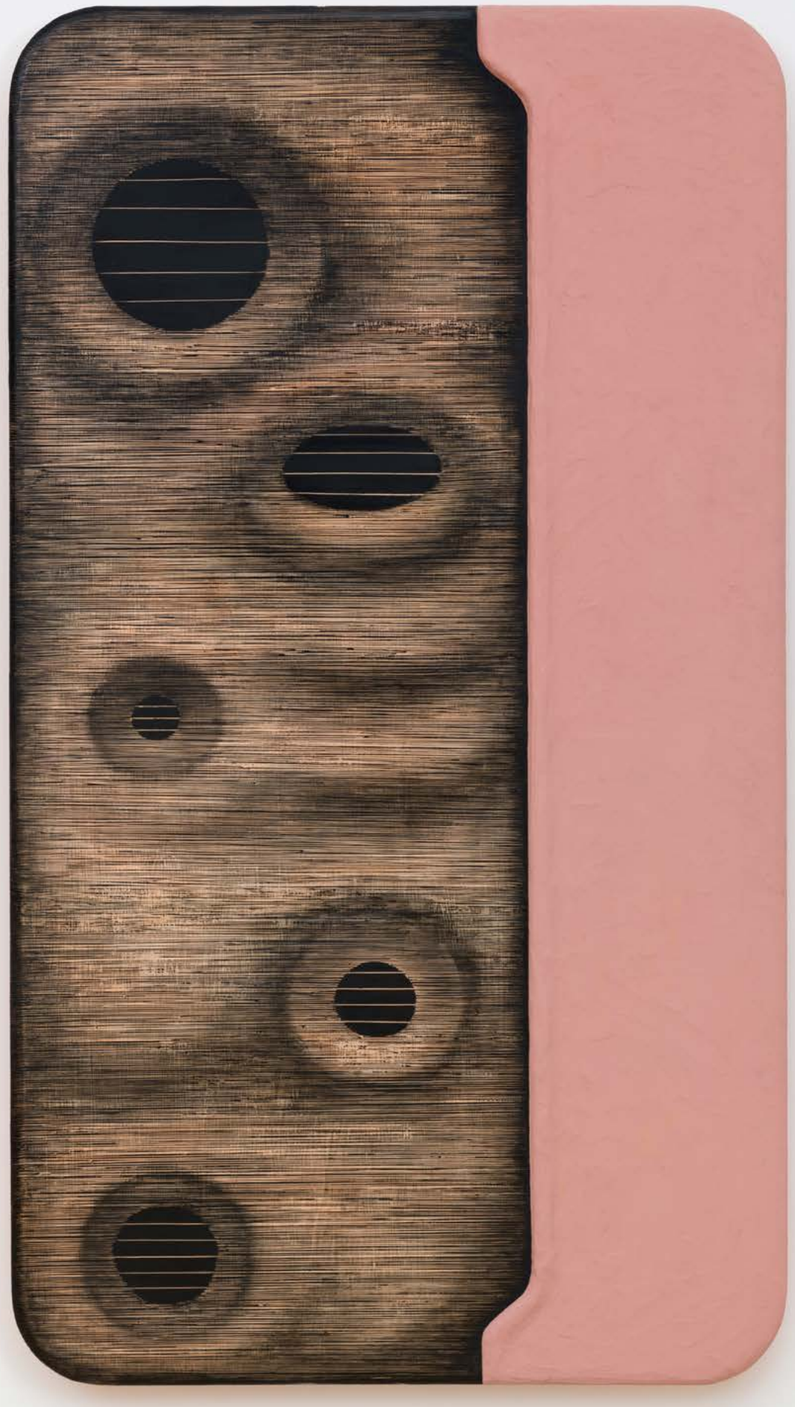
《Phone-Breath-Bed 3》，2023，聚碳酸酯、硅胶、不锈钢丝布、UV固化喷墨、木材、钢材、塑料，115.6 x 195.6 x 121.9 cm。艺术家、香港Empty画廊及纽约Miguel Abreu画廊惠允。摄影: Katie Morrison。

《Liquid Circuit》，1987，丙烯、乙烯基水泥复合料、醇酸树脂、油、铝于木板上，228.6 x 363.2 x 22.9 cm。明尼阿波利斯，魏斯曼艺术博物馆（ Weisman Art Museum，Minneapolis ）馆藏，Dolly J. Fiterman捐赠。摄影：Jeff McLane。

羊毛大衣，PRADA。纯棉牛仔裤，
LEMAIRE。T恤和凉鞋，艺术家私服。



《Double Interface－Green》，2023，紫外光固化喷墨、丙烯、墨水与硅胶于木版上，85 x 120.5 x 12 cm。艺术家、香港Empty画廊及纽约Miguel Abreu画廊惠允。摄影: Katie Morrison。



对页：《Institutional Body》，1986，212.1 x 120.7 x 5.1 cm，丙烯、乙烯基水泥胶合物、油、醇酸树脂于木板上。Ruth与Jacob Bloom赠予洛杉矶现代艺术博物馆。

汽车是技术发展带来肉体延伸的典型例子（根据 McLuhan 的说法，技术发展也带来了“截肢”[amputation]）。不过，当涉及人体与技术间的思考时，它似乎正在慢慢被数字屏幕所取代，屏幕元素在您的作品中越来越明显和明确，如《Watching 1&2》（2021）、《Grass-Screen-Skin》（2021）以及 2023 年于香港 Empty 画廊的个展“screen-skins”。您如何看待屏幕与我们身体的关系？

从早期的台式电脑开始，电脑屏幕这项技术就开始变得具有交互性。这在认知层面上改变了互动和体验的质量。如果不谈意识的话，屏幕现在已经成为连接技术和认知主体的端口。

液晶显示屏是最常见的屏幕类型之一，将信息和图像传输到我们的认知空间。毫不夸张地说，液晶已经成为我们新的体液（这可能是一种重言式，因为细胞膜和染色体都有液晶态）。流体的意象在您的作品中频繁出现，您如何描述这种存在于我们生活中的身体图像的循环？

有人曾写过，摄影正如写作，两者都被视为一种改造。身体图像的流通是其中的一部分。当我们在空间中移动时，图像的流动是更奇特、更具物理性变化的一部分，同时信息流动的速度也造成了心理上的变化。关于这些变化，有人阐述得比我更有说服力，也更清晰。

在您的艺术实践过程中，“技术”的概念是否发生了变化？如果是的话，那是怎样的变化？

不。技术的概念非常古老，可以追溯到工具的发明。在我的生活中，科技对人类生活的影响已经达到了人类历史上前所未有的程度。

《纽约时报》刊登过一篇关于您和您的艺术实践的文章《一位反乌托邦时代的艺术家》（2021.01）。当人们谈论科技的时候，很难不去想象和判断它的未来，您经常被描述为“有远见”，您认为科技的未来是怎样的？

有了人工智能后，感觉我们好像正在经历另一种具体技术的进化，比数字和屏幕更极端，也许也更危险。我认为用反乌托邦和乌托邦的概念去形容人们身处某事件时的切身感受，不一定是准确的。相对于 20 世纪后期，生活似乎变得更加复杂和不稳定。我认为人类与科技的融合将会超出我们的想象。我的工作是为了探索一种变化，它是直观的，不容易用语言表达出来。这大概就是我的艺术实践嬗变的过程相对缓慢的原因。我还想补充一点，我认为生物技术的变化同样会带来革命性的转变。

身体部位的图像：眼睛、四肢、嘴唇……在您的实践中反复出现多年（它们就像幻肢或放射学中的成像模型），但为什么您的面部在最近的实践中才出现？例如作品《Breath 7》（2022）。

在纽约，我被疫情期间的经历所触动，医院里挤满了躺在病床上的病人，同时我在屏幕上目睹了乔治 · 弗洛伊德的死亡，这令我震惊。我觉得有必要在作品中更加真实地描绘身体。那一刻我不知何故想在作品里展示一个头，它不一定是我自己的，它可以是任何一个头。我自己的头部模型在工作室里闲置了几十年了，是在我付不起钱请模特时做的。考虑到再做一个新模具的成本和麻烦程度，我就在作品中用了我自己的头部模型，并将它侧面放倒或水平放置，因为乔治 · 弗洛伊德的头被水平压制在地面上的画面给我留下了十分震撼和不可磨灭的印象。关于“breath”的灵感，是与乔治 · 弗洛伊德的呼吸和那些在病床上挣扎的人的呼吸画面有关。此外，通过功夫武术训练我了解到“呼吸”也是一种气的能量。

您曾经说过谷歌是您的记忆，这样的陈述很精妙，因为我们将大部分记忆（包括已知的陌生事物）储存在设备、云和搜索引擎里。《The Boating Scene》是与您的家族历史紧密相关的一系列艺术作品。在我们生活的数据海洋中，在这个人类记忆与计算机数据界限十分模糊的时代中，您如何定位个人记忆？ 这个问题让我想起了您 1984 年的作品《Outer Banks of Memory》（1984）。

我感觉自己没有足够的动力在大数据时代中去有意识地“定位”个人记忆。您提到的“模糊感”是准确的。数字技术让我觉得自己被淹没在一片图像和被触发的记忆之海中，没有所谓的“定位”，而更像是相互融合引发了一种不确定性：什么是真正的记忆？什么是由设备触发的认知系统下的记忆？

上次我们聊天的时候，您提到了日本《侘寂：致艺术家、设计师、诗人和哲学家》一书中描述的“不需要的物品”的概念。 计划性报废加速了科技产品的“生死循环”，并在它们诞生的同时产生了它们的“不被需要”。在我们的技术领域有所谓的“侘寂”吗？

世界各地的垃圾填埋场都堆积着所有过时的技术和设备。它们被认为是“不被需要”的。 我觉得越来越令人不安的是，不被需要的“对象”或许会开始包括人，因为人工智能或将取代需要岗位及生活工资的劳动力。我不知道“侘寂”的概念是否包括人类。

您在另一个采访里提到您会演奏多种乐器，都有哪些？

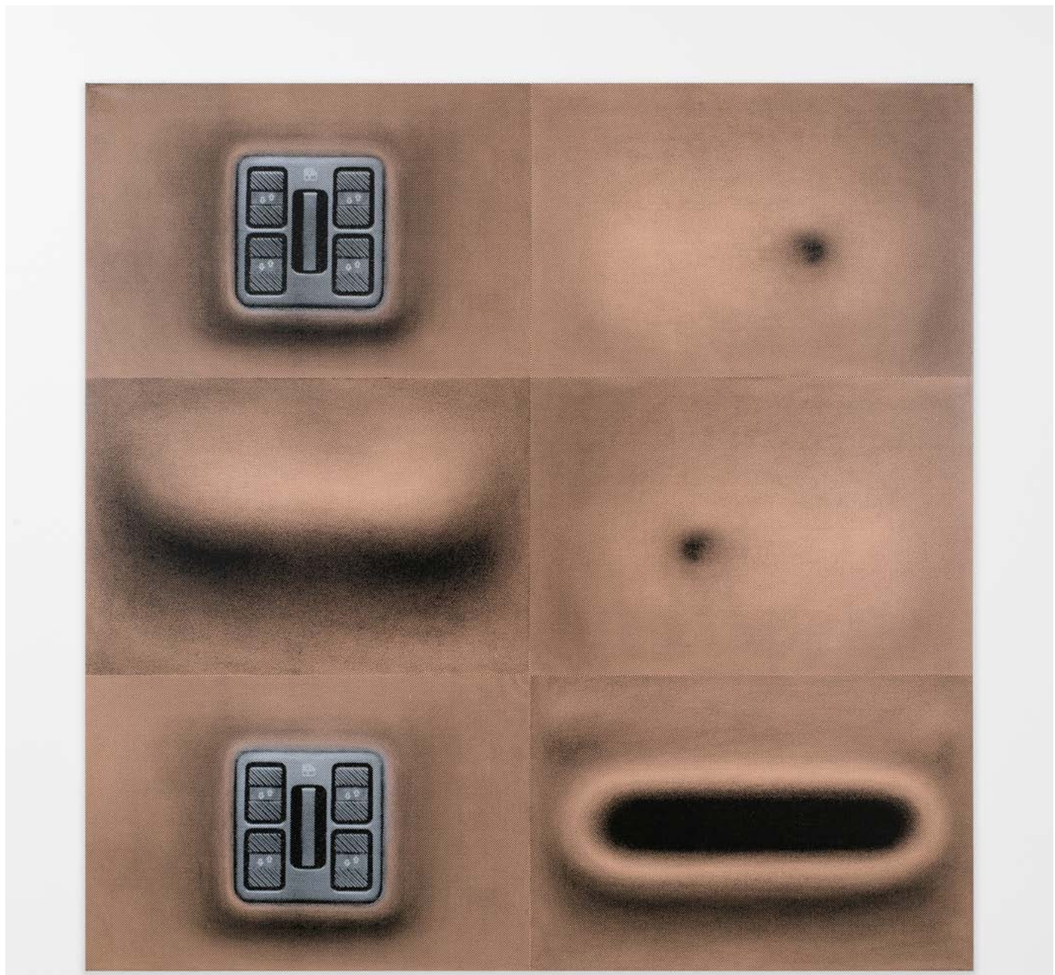
我妈妈曾是音乐家，戏剧家，钢琴家。在成长的过程中，我弹过钢琴，拉过大提琴，吹过萨克斯，也弹过吉他。

您的部分雕塑看起来很像家具，变形的家具，比如 1990 年的《Vitual Flow》（1990），这是否受到了您的建筑背景的影响？此外，您有些雕塑作品带有轮子。可移动性在您的雕塑实践中是否具有一些特殊意义？

回想起来，我觉得跟我的建筑学背景有一些间接影响。使用轮子是为了将“偶然性”的概念引入静止物体。我想让我的作品具有一种它们可以随时随地出现的感觉。它们在哪里没有任何区别。同样地，当我安装那些画时，我将它们视作可以挂在任何地方：高处、低处、不平衡的或随机的地方。很久以后，我才意识到位置的随机感是我们的数字设备和数字本身的一个特征。

《Virtual Flow》，1990/2018，瓷砖、玻璃丝网印刷、丙烯、
塑料、树脂、感光乳剂、钢制珐琅推车，尺寸可变。

马海毛针织衫，BOTTEGA VENETA。



《Cordless 2.0》，2018，布面丙烯、油墨丝网印，180.3 x 180.3 cm。
艺术家、纽约Miguel Abreu画廊及香港Empty画廊惠允。

羊毛大衣，PRADA。T恤，艺术家私服。

《Boating Scene 1.1.2》， 2019，铝板UV打印、硅胶、颜料，228.6 x 170.2 x 7.6 cm。艺术家、纽约Miguel Abreu画廊及香港Empty画廊惠允。

一些您较早期的作品描绘了与通风孔相似的物体，比如《Cell》（1987），《Liquid Circuit》（1987）；或者是呈现“呼吸”的图像，例如《Phone-Breath-Bed》（2022），在您的实践中，空气循环在技术叙事中的作用是什么？

我倒没想到空气循环，尽管它是对数字流体特性的一种有趣的比喻。我记得当我的银行推出第一台自动提款机时，我将卡插入插槽。同样地，我早期从事文字处理工作时，也是把薄磁卡插入插槽中。插槽形式似乎预示着一种新技术。这些缝隙在画作里被变形后可能看起来像通风孔。我还将插槽的形状插入我作品有机的皮肤意象中。我一直纠结于如果不通过身体和语言的形式，如何将科技感和数字化以一种有机的感觉使它们在视觉和形式上融合起来。我还在为此努力。

在过去几年（大概是三四年前？），您的艺术实践体现了很明显的变化，您似乎已经发展出了另一种图像制作形式 / 设备 / 方法，可以具体讲讲吗？

随着数字成像质量和图像访问的发展和加速，我工作和生活中的方方面面都发生了一些让人意想不到的事情。这种变化也是我在上海工作期间，在实验中所沉淀的结果。2019 年我在纽约的首个展览，是我第一次对自己 30 多年来的作品进行回顾。这是一个启示，以新的方式阐明了我对作品的理解。同时，由于数字媒体的属性，各种媒体中广泛的实验性作品正在开始相互连接，形成一种协同效应。这种协同效应使得各种媒体之间以前所未有的方式进行交流，而我目前才刚开始探索其中的可能性。

可以和我们聊聊您正在筹备的年底即将在维也纳 Secession 展览馆举办的个展吗？

展览会展出自 2020 年以来的全新作品，并呈现作品的演变过程。这是个独特甚至算得上独一无二的空间，有宽敞的空间，良好的天窗采光和网格天花板。这个空间似乎与我的作品相得益彰，因为我一直设想我的作品在理想状态下应该有充足的空间和自然光的漫射。这个规模可以让我去做以前从未尝试过的大型作品。我还计划展示一些新的绘画和媒体作品。

翻译 Ciel Bai

编辑：张诺然，造型：Tim Lim，妆发：Tomoyo Shionome，数码支持：Hope Christerson，造型助理：Ciel Bai、Alisa Wang。

《Becoming Fish》，1996，丝网油墨、布面丙烯，180.34 x 241.3 cm。艺术家、纽约Miguel Abreu画廊及香港Empty画廊惠允。

Miao Zjin, “Interview:” Tishan Hsu, Artforum China, May 29 2023
https://www.artforum.com.cn/interviews/14591

ARTFORUM
艺术论坛

采访 INTERVIEWS
徐梯善
2023.05.29 • 徐梯善谈作为物的屏幕与新的杂糅体

徐梯善，“screen–skins”展览现场，2023. 摄影：Michael Yu. 艺术家及Empty画廊惠允.

今天，现实似乎终于追上了徐梯善（Tishan Hsu）的创作。自上世纪八十年代以来，他就一直借助多重媒介对身体与技术之间彼此交织的关系进行着探索。在艺术家于香港Empty画廊的最新个展“screen–skins”（屏肤）展出的近作中，附着于作品表面的肉色硅质褶皱物以及易于辨识的图像成为假想置身可见或不可见的生命政治管控模式与美学场域的路径。我们通过屏幕进入虚拟空间，而艺术家在幽暗的现场将屏幕翻转成实物，试图通过让错觉过载，来正面回应当下技术环境的内在矛盾。展览将持续至6月24日。

在我的创作里，不同系列有不同的工作方法，使用的媒介也多种多样。我的兴趣不在单个媒介上，而在于你能用这个媒介或这些媒介做什么。就《camera–screen–skin》而言，我使用了自己的照片以及其他一些原始材料。这种使用摄影图像的工作方法在过去十年发生了很多演进，原始材料数据库及其获取途径都在软件技术的影响下发生了变化。我感觉自己如今浸泡在某种图像和软件的“装置”里，而我的身体正以一种诡异的方式变成肉身化的技术本身，这就是我在作品中试图描述的现象。

作品的平面性是有意为之的，这也是我的作品自1980年代以来就有的一个特征。借此我想传达的是，随着互联网兴起，屏幕技术所营造的3D环境里实际存在着一种悖论。一方面是作为物的电脑屏幕，这是我们通过身体来体验和感知的，但与此同时，屏幕也是互动网络的虚幻世界。此处的虚幻不是传统绘画中透视空间的那种虚幻，不是那种观众可以透过它看到另一个“世界”的窗口或框架。此处的幻觉是通过平面屏幕的物质性而发生的。这种来自实在物体的幻觉并不是纯粹想象或梦境的产物。二十世纪的抽象绘画和达达主义致力于消除绘画平面的幻觉，追求一种忠实于物的实在性，以之描绘一个理性的、科学的世界。从那以后，到今天，我们发现我们自己深陷一个奇怪的世界，这个世界充满各种从平面屏幕来的幻觉，这些幻觉已经渗透到我们的身体感知领域，强烈地动摇了我们的“现实”感。人工智能正在把这种不确定性推向人类进化史上前所未有过的一个极端。因此，我的创作并不是在试图挽救“丢失的幻觉”，而是想描述我们身边不断以“现实”的面貌涌现的幻象，它们的真实程度毫不亚于实物。

徐梯善，“screen–skins”展览现场，2023. 摄影：Michael Yu. 艺术家及Empty画廊惠允.

这次展览Empty画廊全黑的展厅和特殊的照明条件凸显了作品在视觉上与“屏幕”的相似性，或者说，让这批作品看起来如同剧场里点亮的屏幕。不过，我感觉这也导致作品很重要的一个面向被丢掉了。如前所述，我的作品里很多思考针对的是屏幕作为物的悖论式存在。从最早起，我的绘画就选择用圆角，当时完全没想到电脑和其他电子设备会用同样的设计。圆角及其与错觉式绘画表面之间的关系能够避免观众把画面当成透视窗口来解读。圆角让图像同时也变成了一个物。此外，这些画面都有一个黑色的细边，虽然在全黑的展厅里完全看不出来，但如果放到浅色墙上就会比较明显。这个薄薄的细边很重要。它强化了错觉与平面性之间的矛盾。此外，我还在画的背面涂了具有反光性的颜料，以此让表面的“平”看起来更为突出，这种背后的“照明”一方面强调了作品作为物的属性，一方面又创造了一种屏幕的“灵光”，但这部分在黑展厅里也被遮盖了。其实，把这批作品看作是“点亮”的屏幕并不需要一个全黑的空间。部分程度上，我的作品希望在这种幻觉式的屏幕与我们身处的现代主义环境之间建立对比，后者往往是如同医院一般灯光雪亮的中性空间。我想要在屏幕里充满“灵光”的幻觉世界与21世纪人类日常居住的近乎纤尘不染的实体环境之间制造反差。

作品题目里的单词之所以选择小写，部分是为了表示任何一个存在都并不比另一个更重要。这就打开了一种可能，即：任何一个事物都可以连接到另一个事物上，就像乐高积木一样。在乐高里，无论是头、手，还是砖块、轮子、窗户、植物，所有积木都是同等重要的，而且可以随意拼接。我对把不同组件融合在一起感兴趣，就像身体–屏幕或身体–技术，得出新的杂糅体。我好奇的是，如何能造出令人信服的杂糅体，不光是在观念层面，有时也在绘画层面，如何创造一个也许很奇怪但非常有说服力的“整体”。我觉得在我们与世界的互动方式里，某些界线正变得越来越模糊，有时候这会导致困难和混乱。技术正在让这种模糊成为可能，人工智能更是加快了模糊的进度。是否存在一种屏幕与皮肤的新实体，共同构成一个“物/客体”？而就身份而言，我在自己的身份里同样体验过这种杂糅现象。

采访 / 缪子衿

译 / 卞小慧

Andrew Russeth, "Hong Kong Diary: Conservative Painting Shows and Nightmarish Reminders of Raw Reality Collide During Art Basel", *Art in America*, April 25 2023

Art in America

Hong Kong Diary: Conservative Painting Shows and Nightmarish Reminders of Raw Reality Collide During Art Basel

Andrew Russeth, April 25, 2023

In her 1997 history Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire, Jan Morris relays that, in 1870, the poet Huang Zunxian described what was then a colony as being "embroiled in a sea of music and song, its mountains overflowing with meat and wine." If only Huang could have seen the city during this year's Art Basel Hong Kong! The city had all that, plus a bounty of art—at fairs and auction houses, museums and galleries, many newly opened or expanded.

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Over at De Sarthe, the art stared back. Beijing-based Wang Jiajia printed tall glowing, glowering pairs of eyes on canvas and surrounded them with swirling waves of paint. A news release for the solo show (titled "A/S/L," after the archaic chatroom introduction meaning "age, sex, location") cleverly compared these menacing cartoon eyes to those of the final bosses that loom at the conclusion of video games. They are goofy, mildly endearing pictures, teasing fears about the identities and agendas that loom behind screens—and contemporary artworks. If they are also repetitive and one--note, well, so are most online (and art) experiences.

Over in nearby Aberdeen, at one of Kiang Malingue's spaces, Guangzhou's Liu Yin exhibited paintings that give Shōjo manga–like faces to pink roses, juicy pears, and (why not?) a gargantuan skull that sits on grass and winks at the viewer as butterfly-fairy hybrids flutter about. (The show's title: "Spring.") The cuteness level is off the charts in these charismatic pictures, which range from watercolors smaller than a sheet of paper to canvases almost 7 feet across. In one, a group of flowers has tears in their eyes; another has a pair sharing a passionate kiss. Liu hijacks kawaii tropes and lays bare how easily they can manipulate, even though (or because) these characters are generic and impossible to differentiate. Seductive artworks about seduction, they have their cake as they eat it. Liu also has a talent for slipping bizarre notes into otherwise benign scenes: one work contains a bunch of cyclopic bananas; cute for a minute, they're likely to reappear in nightmares.

More discomfort was in store at Empty Gallery's Aberdeen branch where new wall works by Tishan Hsu smashed bodies into digital space. Their inkjet-printed patterned surfaces teem with additional sculptural elements, such as unplaceable orifices and the odd body part, including at least one glaring eye. A rare sculpture from the New York–based artist took the form of a futuristic life-size hospital bed on top of which silicone molds resembling hunks of a person—a pale blue face, expanses of sticky looking tan skin—appear to be awaiting implantation. Surveillance--style images are embedded in some of Hsu's pieces, like the 2023 pareidolia-conjuring *screen-body-data*, which sports a black-and-white still of footage from CCTV. It shows a man in a balaclava standing in an empty room and doing something on his phone—a slice of raw reality intruding into the artist's harsh, unreal world.

Tishan Hsu, *phone-breath-bed 3*, 2023, © TISHAN HSU/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/COURTESY EMPTY GALLERY, HONG KONG, AND MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY, NEW YORK

While Liu toys with the coercive power of popular culture, Wang and Hsu channel the dark truth that someone or something is always watching these days, whether on social media or within a bureaucracy, and threatening to act. In Hong Kong the week of the fair, a theatrical run of the slasher flick Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey (2023) was canceled under hazy circumstances (the adorable bear has been used as a caricature of Chinese president Xi Jinping, and censored in the mainland in the past), and the Sogo department store removed a video by Angeleno Patrick Amadon from a digital-art program running on its LED billboard after the artist revealed that it included information about pro-democracy activists jailed in Hong Kong.

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Louise Benson, "Tishan Hsu's Art Preceded Internet Aesthetics by Decades. Now, His Prescient Work Is Finally Getting Its Due", *Artnet News*, March 22 2023

artnet news

Tishan Hsu's Art Preceded Internet Aesthetics by Decades. Now, His Prescient Work Is Finally Getting Its Due

A digitally native generation has become captivated by the New York artist, who is in his 70s.

Louise Benson, March 22, 2023

Tishan Hsu, *phone-breath-bed 3*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist, Empty Gallery and Miguel Abreu Gallery. © Tishan Hsu/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Tishan Hsu is an artist in search of his own vision of the future. His creative journey has unfolded over almost five decades as Hsu has refined and honed his visceral interrogation of the collapse between human and machine. Yet, following a handful of solo shows staged in New York during the 1980s, including one with famed dealer Leo Castelli, for over 30 years Hsu rarely exhibited his work publicly at all. Instead, he chose to privately focus on his relentless quest to capture a new kind of embodied technology that had not yet come into being.

In the end, it was the world that managed to catch up with him. In recent years Hsu, who was born in the 1950s to Chinese parents in Boston, has found his optically vivid silkscreen-printed canvases and eerie silicone sculptures suddenly at pace with the present and very much in-demand.

His prescient works have reached an audience that seems, finally, ready to understand them. In April, he will be honored at SculptureCenter's annual gala, following showings at the 2021 Gwangju Biennale and 'The Milk of Dreams' at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. Hsu opened his second solo exhibition with Hong Kong's Empty Gallery last week, in time for a revived Hong Kong Art Week and Art Basel Hong Kong.

Tishan Hsu, *screen-body-data*, (2023). Courtesy of the artist, Empty Gallery and Miguel Abreu Gallery. © Tishan Hsu and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Hsu's unique use of pigment recreates the flickering, familiar glow of screens; the rounded corners of his paintings foreshadowed the industrial design of the iPad and iPhone and the graphic representation of mobile app icons. *Closed Circuit* bears an uncanny resemblance to the Instagram logo: the painting was made in 1986, 24 years before the social media app launched. "There's a certain mystery to this whole thing," Hsu said, speaking over a video call from his studio in New York. "The work is resonating with things I see going on in the world now. I had no awareness at the time, but looking back to that early work, it's surprisingly synchronistic."

The artist's surfaces often feature parts of protuding faces, echoing our own embeddedness with technology, but, in a darker turn, it also comments on our surveillance society and its acceleration towards the use of biometrics and facial recognition technologies. "For the first time, I feel the work is able to address many of the issues that are most important to me all at once, without explanation," said Hsu. "I don't need any articulation. The work is speaking on its own."

Tishan Hsu, *grass-screen-skin / object 3*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist, Empty Gallery and Miguel Abreu Gallery. © Tishan Hsu/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

A Personal Perspective on Technology

Part of his interest in technology was informed by his academic roots as a student of architecture at MIT in the 1970s. Hsu recalled encountering "a whole way of thinking about the world that was very forward." On campus, he encountered a community engaged not only in imagining the future but in making it a reality, through experimentation in everything from robotics to computing. He added that "it was deeply inspiring" and afforded him "a glimpse of where things might go."

This gave him the confidence to begin his own creative exploration into how these new developments would impact modern life. "I could see the level of research going on, and it was very, very convincing," he said. His studies in architecture merged with a new fascination in tech. This is apparent in the work: square ceramic tiles make a recurrent appearance in his sculptures over the decades, conjuring at once minimalist bathroom design and digital pixels.

Although Hsu began working on these far-reaching themes during a period of optimism about the networked virtual future, he has consistently infused his paintings and sculptures with an underlying anxiety about what this hybrid existence might look like. His skill lies not only in predicting the reality that we now live in, but in his readiness to muse at what the feelings of tech-embedded life; it's an approach that has led many observers to liken his work to the imagined techno-landscapes of science fiction.

Tishan Hsu, *phone-breath-bed 3*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist, Empty Gallery and Miguel Abreu Gallery. © Tishan Hsu/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Yet for Hsu, he has been seeking something much closer to the real. "Science fiction never interested me, and I remember it felt like a fantasy when I was growing up," he said. "But we are moving so quickly now that recent science fiction isn't far off from what we're actually living."

In the early 1980s, Hsu worked as a word processor inputting data on an early computer. This gave him an insight into how machines might act as an extension of the human brain, and greatly informed his artistic works. While experimenting in the studio rather privately, for 22 years Hsu worked as a professor of visual art at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, a role that he retired from in 2018 at the age of 67. From that vantage point, while he had had a steady career in academia, it would have been hard to predict that from then on, his career would spiral upward as it did.

In "Delete," his first exhibition at Empty Gallery staged in 2019, Hsu reflected on data as a carrier of memory, a subject that he introduced from a personal perspective. There, he traced his own history, including the rediscovery of family photographs following his mother's death while he was living in Shanghai in the early 2010s. The exhibition was the first time that Hsu directly confronted his own identity within his work.

Tishan Hsu. Courtesy of Tishan Hsu.

The artist does not speak Chinese, and explained that his parents did not emphasize their heritage while he was growing up. "There was a drive towards assimilation, like many immigrants in America," he said. He considered how this early experience may have shaped his work: "I grew up in a culture where I was a racial other, and then I chose to explore the 'otherness' of technology, which itself was perceived as alien at the time."

It was only in 2020 that Hsu had his first survey exhibition, "Liquid Circuit," which was organized by curator Sohrab Mohebbi of SculptureCenter, New York, and first staged at UCLA's Hammer Museum; it then traveled to SculptureCenter in 2021. The shows were a tipping point: "Liquid Circuit" introduced a generation of digital natives Hsu's early 1980s work, created primarily during a decade in which most of them were born. Even later works like the painting Interface Remix (2001), where disembodied mouths, eyes, and limbs collapse together within a fleshy vortex, can readily resonate with digitally native millennial and Zoomers' lingering sense of unease about the digital realm.

Installation view of "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit", 2020, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane. Courtesy of the artist and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

A Lifetime of Work Finds New Resonance Today

Hsu admitted that the newfound recognition has been a welcome surprise, if a little overwhelming. "I have always felt that the work will reveal itself," he reflected. "But that emergence is a very long process."

In an age of rapid gratification and fast fame, Hsu's slow approach to his own artistic voice does not feel simply anomalous—it feels like a radical act of resistance. "I withdrew from exhibiting because I was involved in a lot of experimentation and exploration, and I never really felt that the work clicked, even though it sold," he said. "Although people now see the work differently than I did at the time, for me, I was always in laboratory mode."

Over the years, Hsu's way of working has been intuitive—like feeling blindly towards another realm that hovers just out of reach. He described this process as "trying to capture some sense of a shift in this integration of technology into our organic life." The challenge, he explained, has been introducing this paradox into the work over the years. The results are full of glitches and imperfections integrated into his pieces—the dot matrix of the silkscreen process within many of his paintings left deliberately visible.

When we met, Hsu was about to fly out from New York for the opening of his latest exhibition, "Screen-Skins," at Empty Gallery in Hong Kong. The solo show continues his work begun during the 1980s, while responding directly to the new technologies available today. "I used to have to photograph a model in the studio and then process those photos. Now, because of the evolution of digital imaging, I can go online and have an infinite source of images," he said.

Installation view of “Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit”, 2020, SculptureCenter, New York. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Courtesy of the artist and SculptureCenter, New York.

His wavering ambiguity about technology has struck such a chord with today’s disillusioned audiences, and this mood courses through the show. In the darkened spaces of Empty Gallery is one artwork that displays an image that reads, “Erase All Data.” Hsu debated at first about including it in the context of the political shift currently taking place in Hong Kong, as mainland China continues to assert control of the territory. “Data can be both dangerous and a way of maintaining a presence in the digital age,” he said.

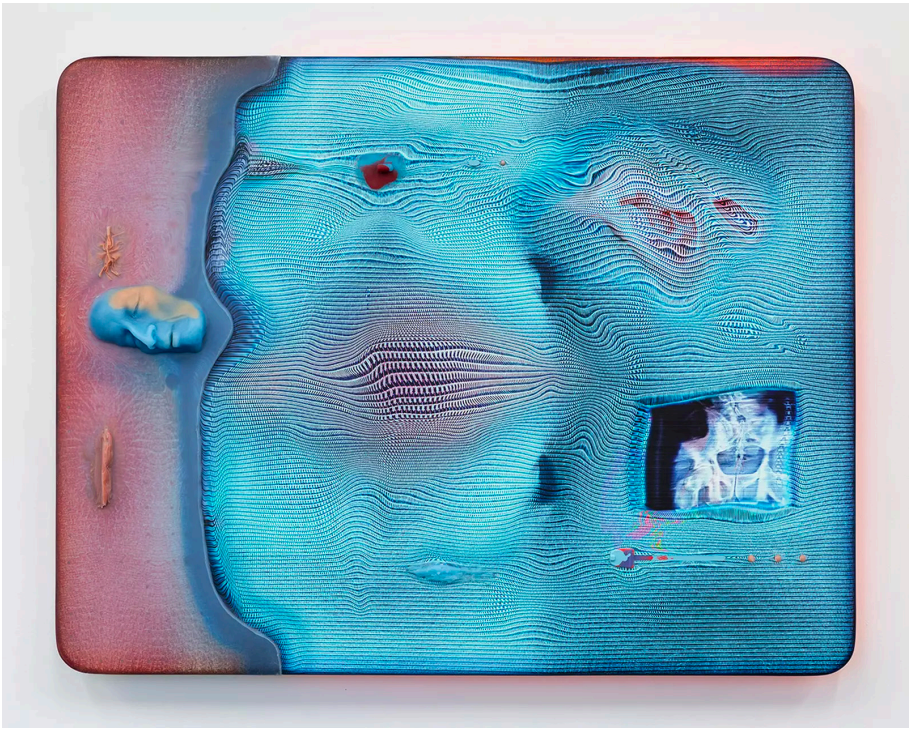
His wariness also extends to machine learning, but not for the reasons one might expect. “With A.I. emerging, people now talk about the ‘singularity’, where we literally are going to be taken over by the technology, but that is a very long way off,” he estimated. “I think the question of human agency is the question of our age. The problem is how will our organic bodies continue to exist? What will be the quality of that existence?”

Hsu continues to speculate on what may still be to come. He remains acutely aware of the limitations of the tools that have become so integrated in our lives, even as he unravels the existential implications of their rapid advancement. “Our technology is taking us into worlds we never imagined, but it is forcing us to also realize how we remain very organic,” he said as our call came towards its end. It is the tension between the two that sits at the heart of Hsu’s work. It is like the sudden sight of your own indistinct reflection upon a darkened digital screen, the body revealed in the afterglow when it is finally switched off.

HIGHSNOBIETY

IN BETWEEN AGES WITH ARTIST TISHAN HSU

15 November 2022 In Culture
Words By Dean Kissick

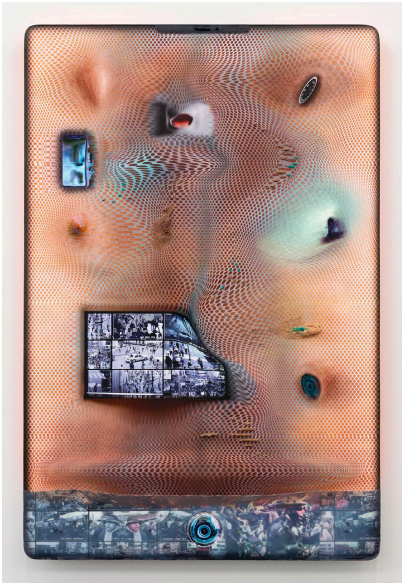


Tishan Hsu, Breath 7, 2022

In the 1970s, while studying architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Tishan Hsu began to feel that the world was changing. He felt that we were about to live through unprecedented times, and to be confronted by something bigger than we can understand. Technology was about to change everything.

The following decade, having moved to New York City, Tishan tried to channel and express a sense of that change by making art. Today, aged 71, he continues to attempt what few other artists do: to describe how it feels to be alive now, in this strange, new technological world. He has been doing so for decades, but reality has finally caught up with him and the metamorphoses he was sensing have become plain for all to see. Humans, machines, and software are bound closer and closer together. We are sinking into our screens, and so is the world.

These past four years, Tishan's career has flourished. He's in this year's Venice Biennale, until November 27, and the 58th Carnegie International, which opens in Pittsburgh on September 24, as well as the group shows "The Painter's New Tools" (which I helped organize with my friend Eleanor Cayre) at Nahmad Contemporary, New York, until September 24; "Cloud Walkers" at Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul, until January 8, 2023; and "Future Bodies From a Recent Past" at Museum Brandhorst, Munich, until January 15.



Tishan Hsu, Watching 1, 2022

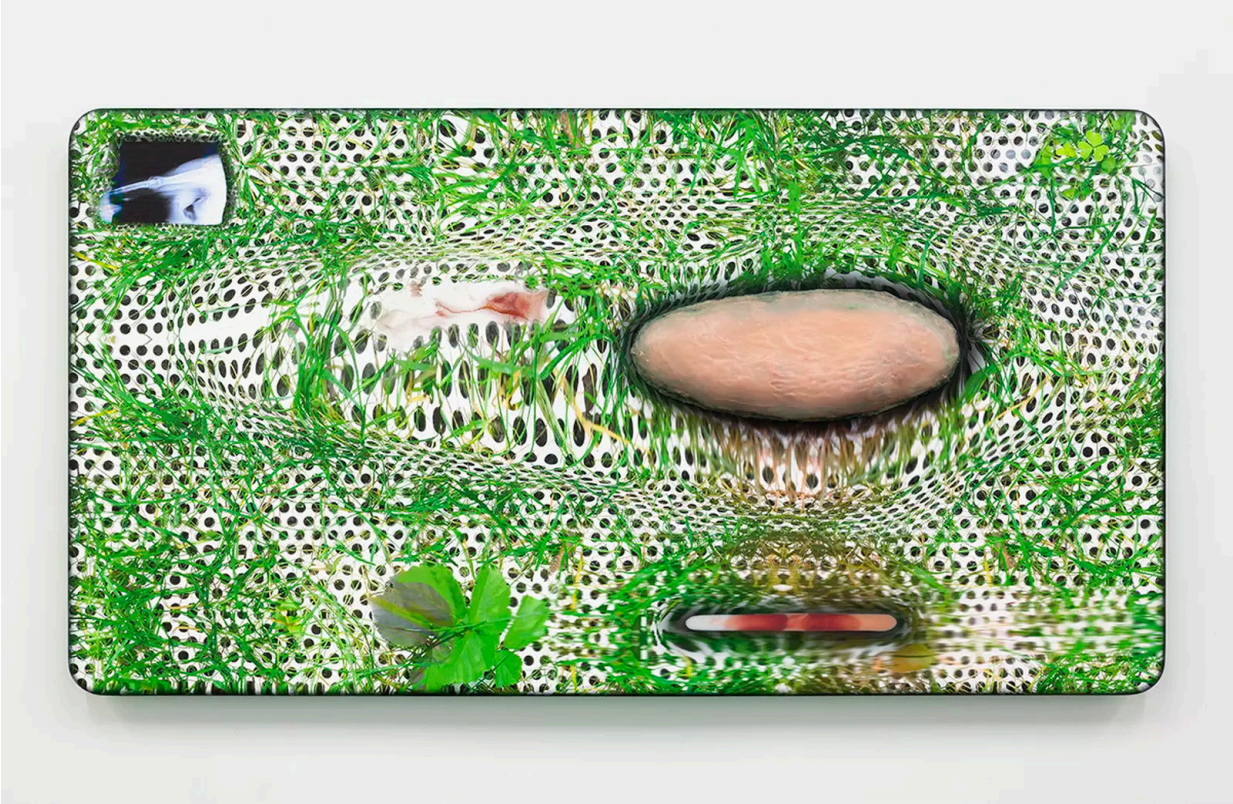
Tishan Hsu, Watching 2, 2022

Before 2019, Tishan hadn't shown in a long while — assuming the work he was engaged with would have little appeal to the market. At the end of the 1980s, after exhibitions with Pat Hearn Gallery and with Leo Castelli, just as the art market was really accelerating, Tishan left the New York gallery world. He moved to Cologne for a couple of years. He came back and took a part-time teaching job at Sarah Lawrence College that allowed him to keep making his art and experimenting in his studio without

having to worry about sales or pleasing anybody else. In 2018, the art world began to take interest in his ’80s work again, just at the time he was about to retire.

It was in his New York gallerist Miguel Abreu’s group exhibition, “The Poet-Engineers,” in 2021, that I saw one of Tishan’s works, Breath, for the first time. I had no idea what to make of it, or where it might have come from. It was like nothing else I’d seen: an inkjet of undulating blue cybernetic goop, with a trompe-l’œil window opening into an x-ray of a skeleton, printed on a wooden board with soft, rounded corners, which floated in front of the wall and emitted a faint, rosy glow from its back. On its surface protruded waxy silicone fingertips, or maybe nipples, and a man’s face floating there in the slime, eyes closed, his expression uneasy. I was reminded of John Everett Millais’ painting of a drowning Ophelia (1851–52) in the Tate, and also of The Matrix (1999); of figures trapped in lines of glowing code, of men asleep inside the pod dreaming of their lives.

Tishan Hsu’s compositions are disorientating. They are screens you could lose yourself in. Everything is warped, or melting into something else. Bodies are disassembled. Eyes, noses, and ears are scattered Picasso-like about the place. They might seem cold and impersonal, dehumanizing even, but they come from his very personal experience of living through momentous and ongoing changes we have yet to understand. They seem to embody some of the keenest questions of the 21st century: like how has digital technology transformed our experience of reality? How has it affected our sense of selfhood? What level of agency are we able to retain as the tools we create spiral out of control, and where is art in all of this?



Tishan Hsu, grass-screen-skin / object 1, 2022

Dean Kissick: Your mother was an opera singer. Was that a big influence on you becoming an artist?
Tishan Hsu: Certainly my mother being an opera singer had a big influence, not so much because of opera, but because of her artistic passion. She had a number of ideas about how she wanted to raise her children that involved what you do with leisure time and the arts. When she observed my interest in art, she brought in private teachers right away. She had a very professional attitude toward encouraging my creativity. She never imagined my being a professional artist, she just thought, we were living in America, there was a lot of leisure time from what she could see, and she didn’t want me just wasting it. She wanted to give me something more sustaining.

So we had music, art, literature, trips to museums, concerts, and that kind of thing throughout my childhood. Both my brother and sister played multiple instruments, as did I. We had trios in the house. I competed on piano. But at a certain point in high school, she could see I was having much more fun with my social life and let me drop all of the music. She saw I had a far greater passion for visual art and gave me a private studio in the house.

One thing I learned from my mother is that I saw what technique does. Playing music requires a particular kind of discipline, and she did give me pointers on how to practice. I was able to stick with it, whether from parental pressure, or because I found a certain interest in it. But I could see after a year of practicing in certain ways, with techniques she learned from her Russian teacher early in her training, that you could do a lot of things with the discipline of technique, once you have it. Technique can enable a kind of freedom. That really struck me.

My mother had a great appreciation for all art and the history of art. She loved watching basketball and saw the players’ movements and plays as pure artistry. She discussed why certain composers were great and why others weren’t. She would talk about different opera singers’ voices. She talked about different periods, how when you’re in between two ages, you have two different sensibilities, and that can be very rich; rather than if you happen to be born in the middle of one age, so that you only

really have one sensibility. But I never considered going to art school. I never considered being an artist. This was just a hobby. Coming from an Asian-American family, I had those kinds of pressures.

Tishan Hsu, Closed Circuit II, 1986
© 2022 TISHAN HSU / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.
PHOTO: JEFF MCLANE.

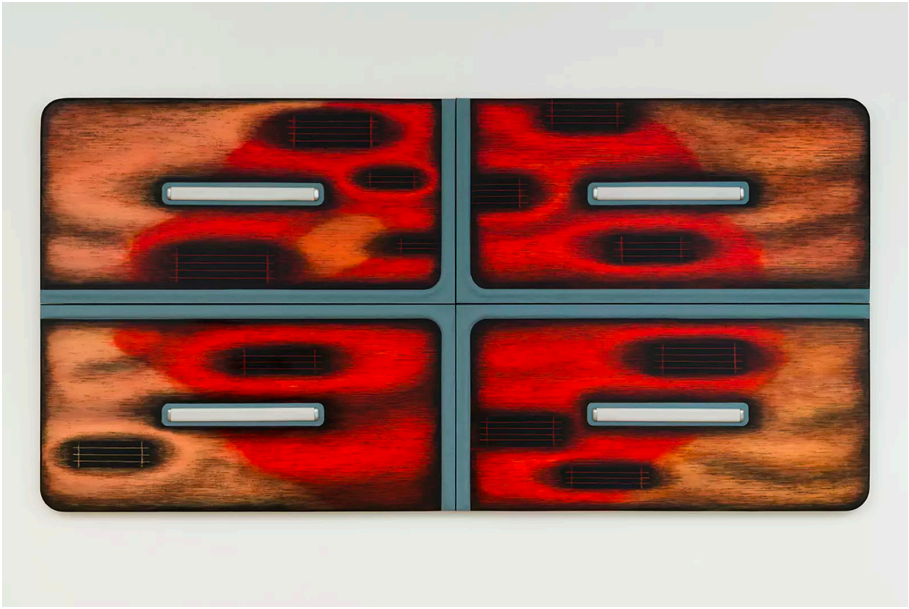
Tishan Hsu, signal.noise/membrane, 2020
© 2022 TISHAN HSU / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.
PHOTO: STEPHEN FAUGHT.

Kissick: Yes, I can relate.
Hsu: I went to college and studied architecture. I loved architecture, and it would allow me to have the kind of economic security that my parents were concerned with. But in college I still felt the nagging question of whether to be an artist. That was a much more intimidating decision. In college I did take a painting class and I was still thinking seriously about it. I was observing what was going on in contemporary art. I went to New York a number of times from Boston. This was in the mid ’70s.

There wasn’t an art department at my college. But it turned out that one professor who was an art historian was very familiar with the contemporary art world. He started this studio painting class, which was more based on a personal interest he had. After the course, he told me I should drop out, and go to New York to eat, breathe, and drink paint. That was just really wild to me — that a professor would propose this.

But it gave me a taste. And in graduate school, where I got my architecture degree, the same professor told me, “You’re never going to go back to it. You’ve stayed out too long.” And I said, “Well, I think I’m going to take the whole year off after I graduate. I’m just going to do nothing except art. So if I want to do anything else, I’ll just say, ‘No, you can’t do it. I can only do art.’”

I felt I needed to do this as a final way of making the decision before I really got started in life, and I needed to know whether I really had it in me. That’s what I did, and at the end of the year I gave up. It wasn’t working out, the work wasn’t coming. Then I took a drafting job in a small architecture firm, and after three or four months, I decided I couldn’t be an architect, that it wasn’t a choice anymore and making art was just what I needed to do by necessity. I then started producing work that I felt could sustain me and really committed myself. My lifelong partner, Alina, was a profound influence in making this commitment and in the evolution of the work throughout my life.

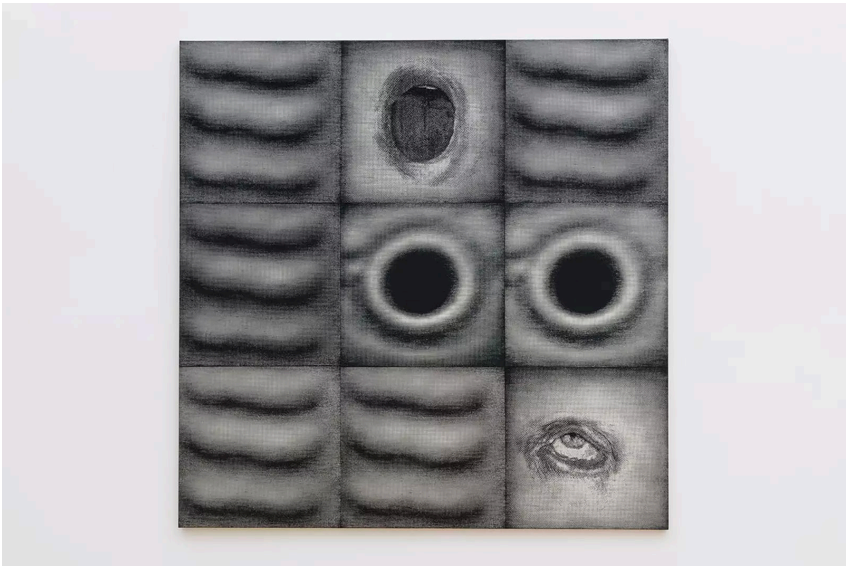


Tishan Hsu, Cell, 1987
© 2022 TISHAN HSU / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK. PHOTO: JEFF MCLANE.

Kissick: And you became a star of the New York art world in the ’80s.
Hsu: Well, first of all, I never felt like I was a star. I would never describe myself that way. Even though I was showing in major galleries, I always felt somewhat alienated from the art world. I showed at Pat Hearn and Leo Castelli because they were the only gallerists who were willing to actually give me a show. People were not understanding my work. I didn’t fit in anywhere. I felt a lot of rejection around the work, perhaps because of incomprehension, or perhaps due to my race, or both, although the reviews were positive. Everything felt confusing in terms of what I was doing in the art world and how I was being perceived. But in my mind, my work was not very resolved, and I felt the strangeness of the work. I felt people were looking at it like it was finished. And I knew it wasn’t. To me, it had a lot of problems, even though works sold. What I was showing was just what I could do then. I felt there was a much longer way to go.

So why did I withdraw so much from the art world? There were a number of factors. My son was born right around then, and raising him took a lot of psychological and emotional energy. I had experienced how much energy and effort was taken up by exhibitions. A career of exhibitions doesn’t necessarily feed into the energy needed for doing one’s work. So I did what many artists do: I found a teaching position that gave me a certain financial independence. I was still connected somewhat to galleries; but I could tell at the same time where I wanted the work to go, and I didn’t think collectors were going to buy it or galleries would show it, even though almost all of the previous shows had sold well. I wanted to make the work more extreme and I needed time to be very experimental with it.

I wanted to be removed from concerns over whether it was going to sell. And much of the discourse in contemporary art at the time just did not feel compelling to me. I saw other things going on in the culture, and going on in the world, and those weren’t what the art world at the time was discussing, although there were overlaps and connections. I felt compelled enough by what I was observing to sustain me in doing the work without art world validation. I tell students you have to get up every day to be able to work and you need something that’s going to motivate you. The urgency of the world around me was the driver. I knew what was motivating me and what wasn’t.



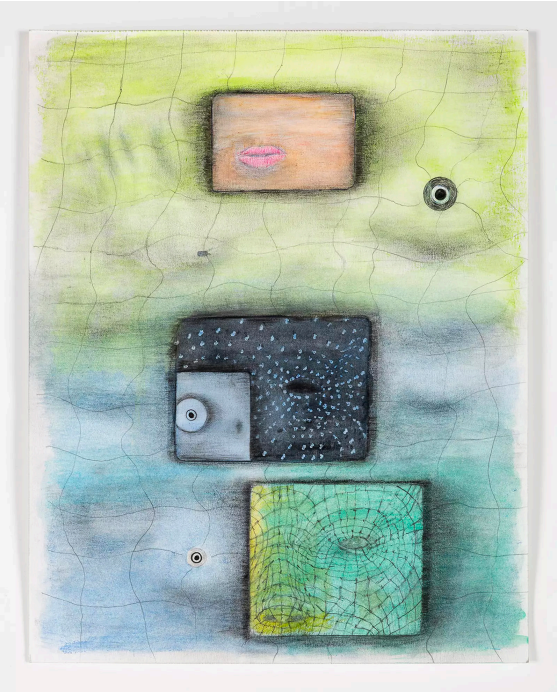
Tishan Hsu, Cellular Automata 2, 1989

Kissick: Do you feel more in sync with the art world now?
Hsu: The art world’s very different than it was. I feel like there’s a wider understanding of what my work is trying to do, and that feels validating and gives me energy, time, and support. But I feel out of sync with the extent to which the market has influenced the expectations and perhaps requirements of galleries. Before, the work was more in my imagination, and now I can draw from the world explicitly. The work feels closer to the world we’re living in. That changes my relation to the work in an unexpected but liberating way. I don’t have to imagine it. Its attributes are everywhere.

The way I interact with much of the art world now is through the screen, which is ironically what the work has tried to address: the cognitive effects of taking in the world through the screen. What I was trying to imagine was a change in syntax; the way it has physically expressed itself was unimagined. I happen to live in a certain historical period here. I was born in the middle of the 20th century, and I’m living into the 21st.

Kissick: We’re between ages.
Hsu: When I emerged in the ’80s, there was very much a sense of cynicism among artists, that everything had been done. I didn’t feel that way. Particularly having experienced MIT, where the entire institution is premised on the opposite. I mean, it’s not an optimistic future that we’ve ended up with, and I think that fact contributed to this cynicism, but I felt that there was still something unknown going on, and it didn’t need to be optimistic. I wanted to understand it — to be more conscious of it. It wasn’t projecting an ideal world as with Modernism, where we were going to get rid of all the ills of human existence and reach a kind of transcendence. But there was still something unprecedented emerging from technology and integrating with human life in unimagined ways. In the context of Postmodernism, I felt we had to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

I felt, at the time, much of the existing art did not address certain aspects of the change I was feeling. However, in music and literature, there was more experimentation around these questions. I asked myself, what is it I’m going through here? There’s something that needs work here, needs understanding. Whatever it is, reverting to the past wasn’t helping me to make sense of what I was experiencing.



Tishan Hsu, Gray Zone-5, 2020
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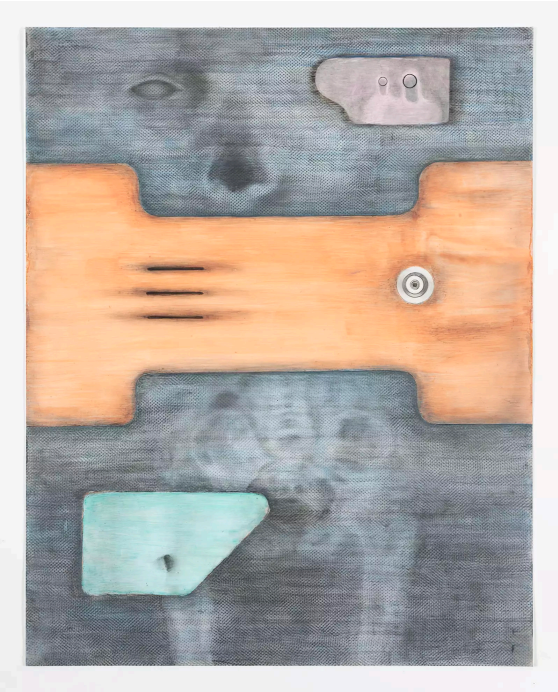
PHOTO: STEPHEN FAUGHT.



Tishan Hsu, Gray Zone-4, 2020
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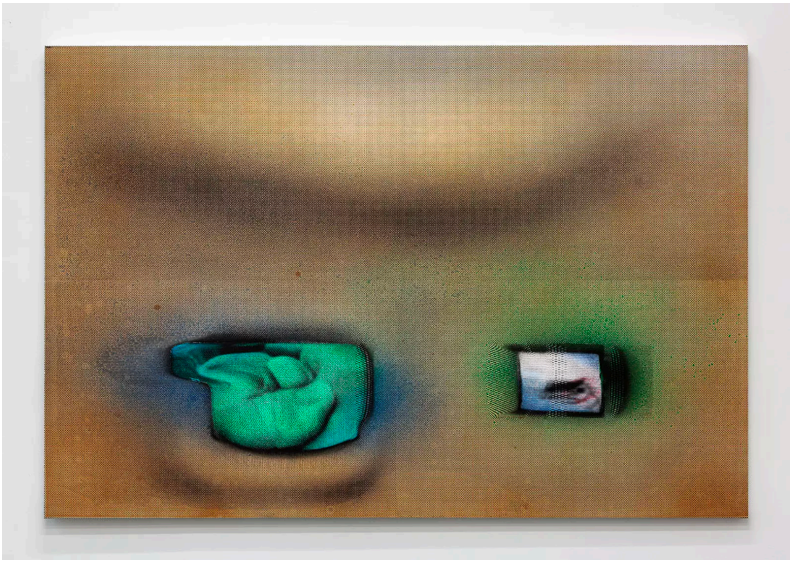
PHOTO: STEPHEN FAUGHT.

At MIT, I had observed the research that was going on. I had a sense of the impact it was going to have on the world. It was just going to happen. It was going to create problems of its own, but it was going to be new and we would need to deal with it and find agency. I felt we still, as human beings, needed to make sure that whatever is developing is somehow in sync with what we want the world to be. And that there was a certain agency to be maintained, if not fought for, there still. At this point, the concept of agency is much more complicated by our beginning to question, what is human?

I spent a long time thinking about Postmodernism and the idea that everything is predetermined. That was part of the cynicism, and I think it's still going on today, actually — this question of, do we have any agency left? Are we going to be able to control AI? Can we control social media for our benefit?



Tishan Hsu, Thumb-Eye-Extended 2.0, 2020
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PHOTO: STEPHEN FAUGHT.

Kissick: It's really going on today.
Hsu: That's the existential position I feel we're in. I think with the integration of technology in our lives, there's so much happening to us in this collision that we don't understand. And the works are helping me to realize how much we don't understand about what's going on and where we are. Where are we, as humans, going to end up? The work helps me to keep asking that question. And as the work evolves, it clarifies certain things and then opens up other things. There's just so much. I see the question of what is human intersecting with questions around environmental collapse. These are incredibly powerful forces. I mean, I don't need to even say it — just the whole political world now is at the hands of this technology. These are the arenas where this is all playing out. And basically, I think we are underestimating the magnitude and impact this is really having, and I think that's part of the problem. Our governments, corporations, education, healthcare, law, and civil rights are barely keeping up. Technology's moving faster than we can almost cognitively take in. That's how I experience it. That sense of unknowing is what the work is pointing out for me. So the work to me looks very strange. I can't describe, with words, the whole thing. I can feel it when I'm doing it, and I see it, but it's asking for a different language. I don't think that's there yet.

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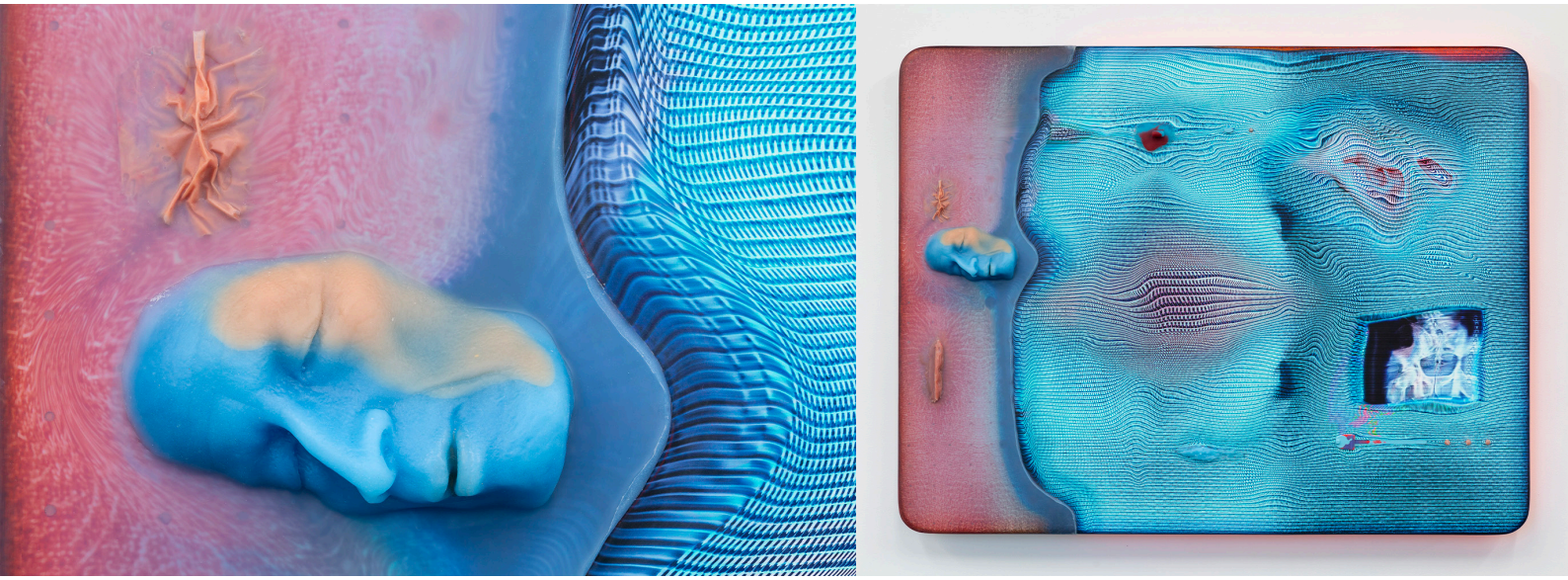
Flash Art

Tishan Hsu: Body Currents by Franklin Melendez



Tishan Hsu, *Breath 7*, 2022. UV cured inkjet, acrylic, silicone, and ink on wood. 121.9 x 157.5 x 14 cm. Courtesy of the artist; Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong. All images @2022 Tishan Hsu/ Artist Rights Society(ARS), New York.

As of late, "prescient" has become the preferred modifier for artist, Tishan Hsu. Indeed, as framed by the recent retrospective that traveled from UCLA's Hammer Museum to New York's Sculpture Center, his output since the mid- 1980s has anticipated — and in many ways mapped with eerie accuracy — the convoluted interdependence between body and screen that now defines all aspects of our lived reality. His wall reliefs and sculptures are punctuated with fleshy openings and orifices — Cronenbergian mouth-eye hybrids adrift in ergonomically shaped vessels that seem to hover just off the wall (in reality recessed plywood panels with edges and backs painted in fluorescent tones to create the illusion of backlighting). This effect predates the touchscreen by decades, even as it aptly captures its distinctive feel. An often-cited work, Closed Circuit (1986), with its rounded corners and cyclops visage, even manages to conjure Instagram's logo thirty years before the social network ever popped up in anyone's app store.

Over the years, his technique has evolved hand-in-glove with new photographic, imaging, and digital technologies to create increasingly complex fields and effects that modulate with the flux of our media landscape. More recently, he's utilized these networked coordinates to address questions of lineage, familial connections, and geographic displacement, utilizing the vicissitudes of affect to expand unitary conceptions of "identity" and its politics while simultaneously rewiring the expectations of technologically geared art. In doing so he has laid down a rich and varied artistic groundwork that reverberates across a young generation of artists that continue to mine the bio-tech convergence (figures as diverse as Josh Kline, Anika Yi, Julia Phillips, and Max Hooper Schneider come to mind). Indeed, the overall impression, looking back, is less that we are witnessing a practice evolving as we are our own cultural evolution finally catching up with it.

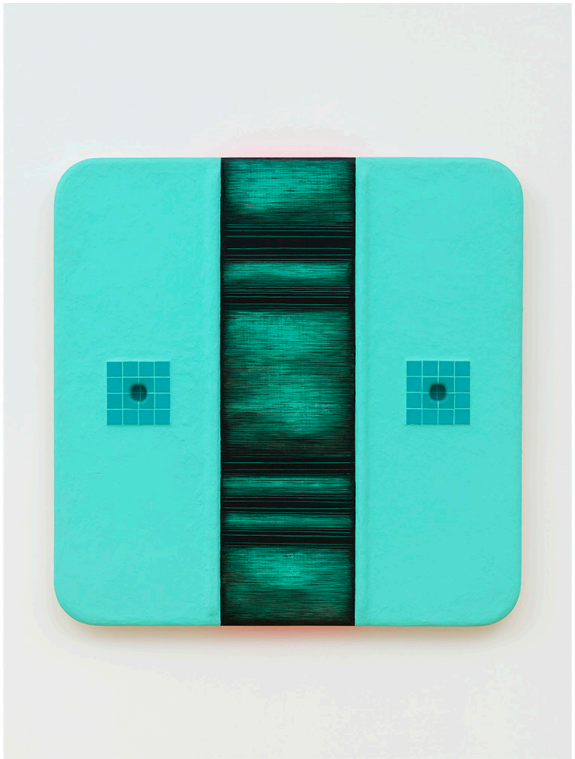
Tishan Hsu, *Closed Circuit II*, 1986. Acrylic, alkyd, Styrofoam and vinyl cement compound on wood. 149.9 x 149.9 x 10.2 cm. Photography by Jeff McLane. Collection of Rubell Family, Miami. All images @2022 Tishan Hsu/ Artist Rights Society(ARS), New York.

Painting as Screen

All of the above is perhaps even more remarkable for a practice that is arguably rooted in painting. Born in Boston to Shanghainese parents (displaced by the Cultural Revolution), Hsu embraced this most traditional of mediums from the onset, diving into classical techniques as early as elementary school and into his teens. Stints in wildly disparate places — from Switzerland to Wisconsin — are linked by this ongoing passion, and despite ultimately studying architecture and environmental design at MIT, his keen sense of form and color formed an unshakable foundation. Settling in New York in 1975, Hsu connected to Pat Hearn, the ex-punk-turned-emerging--gallerist who was to become one of the cornerstones of the then-burgeoning East Village scene. Her predilection for disruptive points of view challenging the codes of painting made for a natural fit, eventually yielding a series of seminal shows, beginning with his solo debut in 1985.

It is impossible to capture the strangeness of the early work, especially in its original context, but pieces like Portrait (1) (1982) or Plasma (1986), with their alien contours and bulbous protrusions, provide a good indication while attesting to Hsu's expert manipulation of unorthodox yet humble materials. Their fleshy expanses — hovering between base materiality and slick illusionism — certainly made an impression, but lacking any immediate points of reference or critical coordinates they were also largely misread. At the time, Hsu was lumped into the rubric of neo-geo, a term that gained some traction in the late '80s but is now mostly notable for its general vagueness — a portmanteau for a broad range of practices favoring a hard-edged approach that at times verged on (or deliberately embraced) kitsch. Fellow Hearn stablemates Philip Taaffe and Peter Schuyff were also shoved into this "next big thing," which was sometimes referred to by the hipper postmodernist moniker "simulationism."

If we're speaking about formal affinities alone, perhaps Peter Halley's early cell and conduit paintings might have been a more apt analogue. But the problem with any purely formalist reading was that it grasped only half of the equation, and in so doing missed the animating core of Hsu's practice. For in trying to invent a new syntax of painting for himself, Hsu was also brushing up against the massive technological shifts reorganizing everyday life in the 1980s. Rather than an accelerated fetishism of consumer objects, his was a concerted effort to grapple with an emergent material reality that was remapping our own experience of the body. And this was not just a theoretical pursuit; for Hsu it was also lived practice, having worked a night job at a word processing terminal on Wall Street during grad school, perhaps one of the earliest jobs involving prolonged stints with a computer monitor. It was an experience that left an indelible impression, as he notes in a recent interview: "I felt that there was this screen world that was very different than television because I was interacting with it...I'm sitting in front of this screened object for many hours, several days a week, and my bodily, physical, material presence was very much there. I felt there was this paradox between the illusionary world of the screen and the physical reality of my body, and that I wanted my work to account for both. I felt that my body in front of that screen still really counted."

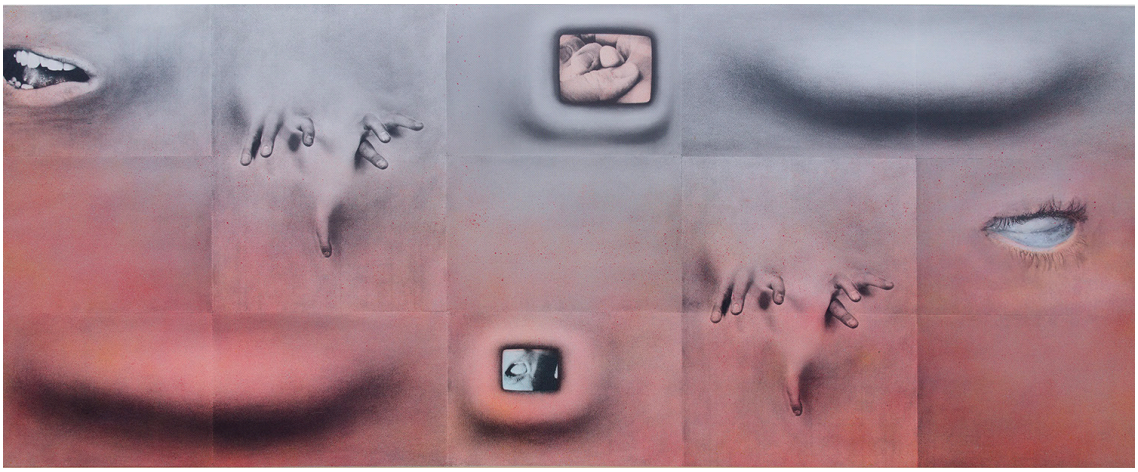


Tishan Hsu, *Vertical Ooze* , 1987. Ceramic tile, urethane, vinyl cement compound, acrylic on wood. 132.1 x 180.3 x 61 cm. Photography by Jeff McLane. Collection of Centre Pompidou, Paris. All images @2022 Tishan Hsu/ Artist Rights Society(ARS), New York.

Membrane to Membrane

It is this insistence on the body and nuanced understanding of its communion with nascent technologies that differentiated Hsu from his peers and also placed him decades ahead of contemporaneous theorizations of digitalization and its far reaching cultural impact. This was particularly the case as the 1980s transitioned into the 1990s, and strands of sci-fi, speculative fiction, and other paranoid, somewhat techno-phobic lines of thinking congealed into the slick, plugged-in aesthetic of cyberpunk. In stark contrast, Hsu committed to a far more sober approach: rather than the body's absorption into or effacement by the technological, he traced a complex co--presence facilitated by the very materiality of his objects. He notes: "There were physical properties of the world I was experiencing having to do with my body and the screen, and whether I could integrate those visual and physical properties, that drove the early work. I did not want the sensibility I was trying to convey to be dependent on one medium. Working in different material formats (2-D and 3-D) required I have a clearer understanding of what the work was trying to do and/or reveal to me."

This is the operating principle of a sculpture like Vertical Ooze (1986), a stack of three hospital-green tiers that evoke an architectural model, a fountain, or a trippy distortion of Anthony Caro's Euclidian arrangements. The interiors of each segment are lined with tiles that are as banal as any found in a public bathroom, yet maybe also nod to the elasticity of the pixel (this is how I read the nub-like protrusion on the bottom tier). This hybrid object — brushing up against the virtual, but also reveling in its own gravity — posits an encounter between two distinct but interrelated corporealities: viewer and object. In so doing, it opens up a line of thinking that is less interested in projecting visions of an anxious future than mapping the vicissitudes of an ever-shifting present.



Tishan Hsu, *Fingerprinting*, 1994. Silkscreen ink and acrylic on linen. 180.3 x 449.6 cm. Photography by Jeff McLane. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. All images @2022 Tishan Hsu/ Artist Rights Society(ARS), New York.

It is worth stressing the radicality of Hsu's position at this specific historical juncture. Art historically, he adapts the concerns of Minimalism and its virtual forms to elucidate the experience of our networked era; he also anticipates many of the critical threads taken up by what was to be called "new media" art of the 1990s and early aughts without succumbing to the spectacle of gadgetry. More generally, he offers a counternarrative to the posthumanist view of technology that would entrench itself in our cultural consciousness (and arguably retains much of its thrall even today). Here, the computer screen (now the phone) was seen as a portal into a new disembodied reality. The is the vestigial body as dramatized vividly in a number of cinematic works from the period, including David Cronenberg's Videodrome (1983), Ghost in the Shell (1995) (based on Masamune Shirow's 1989 manga of the same name), and, of course, the Wachowskis' The Matrix (1999). These drew heavily from or resonated with contemporaneous theoretical contributions, including Jean Baudrillard's work on Simulacra and Simulation (1981) as well as Fredrick Jameson's seminal 1991 tome on postmodernity. As critic N. Katherine Hales wrote in 2000, this tech worldview "presumes a conception of information as a (disembodied) entity that can flow between carbon--based organic components and silicon-based electronic components to make protein and silicon operate as a single system... In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals."

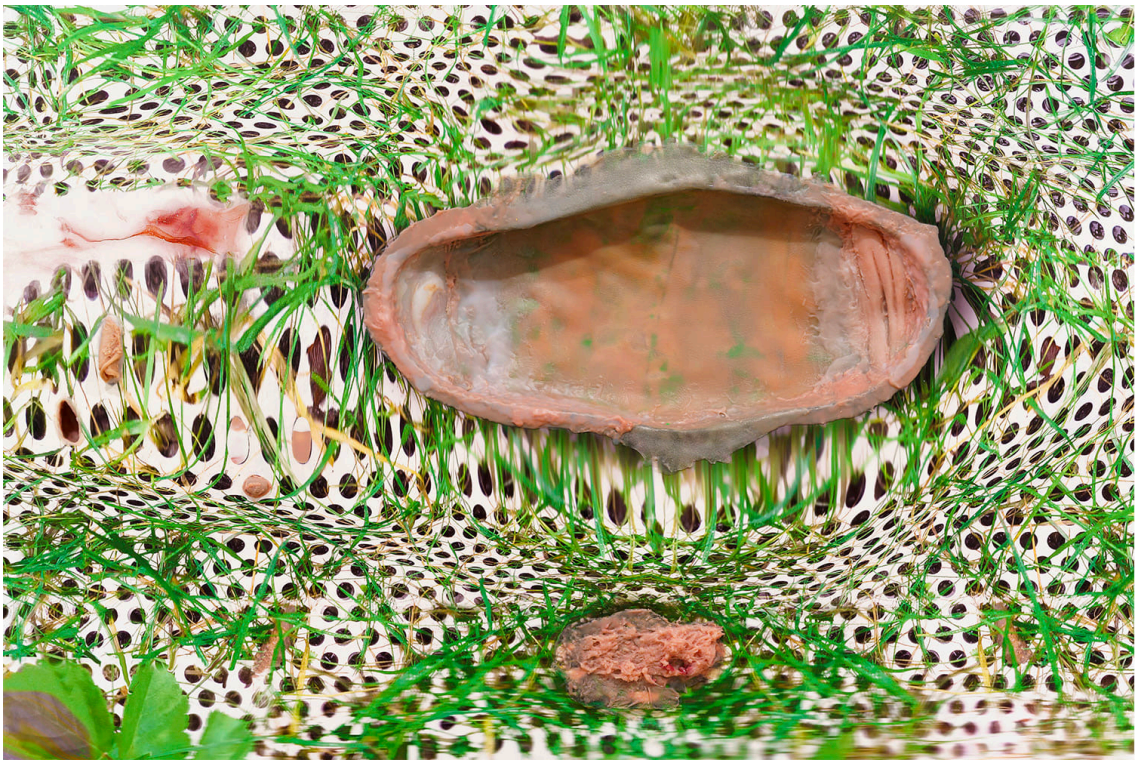
Intuitively, Hsu understood the folly of this fallacy (and, it should be noted, years ahead of critical correctives such as Hales'). His philosophizing through the body recast the notion of "interface" as a function of immanence rather than imminent transcendence. This is dramatized in a work like Fingerpainting (1994), with its grid-like structure and fuzzy, static-charged ground against which hands are being pulled into or pushed through. Free- floating mouths are echoed by organ-like monitor insets. But the movement on the surface is also rife with humor, dramatizing our anxiety as much as poking fun at it, as underscored by the title itself, which references the technique of silk-screening used here to anticipate or mimic the effects of Photoshop (which, it's worth saying, would not become readily available until 1995).

Tishan Hsu, *Phone-Breath-Bed 1*, 2001. Detail. Polycarbonate, silicone, stainless steel wire cloth, UV cured inkjet, wood, steel, and plastic. 115.6 x 195.6 x 121.9 cm. Photography by Stephen Faught. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. All images @2022 Tishan Hsu/ Artist Rights Society(ARS), New York.

Beyond Concrescence

This synchronicity between technique and technology has defined Hsu's output from the 1990s to the present, unfolding in a way that almost approximates a seamless feedback loop. As he notes, "The congruence of technological media and the formal evolution has been a mystery to me as well. I never imagined digital imaging, Photoshop, 3-D printing, wide-format digital printing, the properties of silicone or bathroom tiles, as media, nor the iPhone or desktop computer. I developed them as a medium in pursuit of a sensibility I was intuitively seeking. Every technology seemed to provide an option I was looking for, in retrospect, but which I never imagined."

Prescience aside, this level of sync has freed up other avenues and registers for exploration, including fresh materials, like silicone, along with denser and more complex visual fields. It has also opened up space for the political — always an implicit subtext but not taken up directly, particularly post-2013, when the death of his mother led him to an archive of personal objects, among them family letters and photographs dating back to the 1950s. This trove of hard data filled in the emotional gap of displacement (his parents were prohibited from returning to China) as it registers on the individual level. Known simply as "The Shanghai Project," Hsu embarked on a focused mission, activating links, reconstructing family lineages, suturing connections truncated by geographies and ideologies. The result is a body of work that is extremely personal but no less engaged with the technological — in fact, it is made possible by it. Take for instance Boating Scene Green (2019), a pastoral snap of a family outing on a lake, overlaid with distorted sim cards. Neither nostalgic nor sentimental, the work attests to absence even as it documents the attempt to reconstruct it through available means, including emails, Skype, and WhatsApp exchanges. In it history becomes a diffused thing, with scattered components hinging the personal and the political and always as an incomplete picture.



Tishan Hsu, *grass-screen-skin / object 2*, 2002. UV cured inkjet, silicone, acrylic, stainless steel, ink on wood. 121.9 x 228.6 x 13.3 cm. Photography by Stephen Faught. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. All images @2022 Tishan Hsu/ Artist Rights Society(ARS), New York.

Affect emerges as the dominant tonality in these works. In doing so, it brings into relief a more specified body — not a generalized abstraction but Hsu's very own, embedded in the particuliarities of his lived experience. This yielded the subtle poetry of his most recent solo exhibition, "skin-screen-grass," which combined work from "The Shanghai Project" alongside a number of pieces that advanced fresh avenues of inquiry. Among these, Phone-Breath Bed 1, (2021) — a gurney-like sculpture that incorporates a face cast, torso X-rays, and fleshy drippings of silicone that can't help but conjure the anxiousness of anyone living through 2020. There is also Spa (2021), a monumental multi-panel work memorializing the victims of the Gold Spa shooting. There is a radicality in the directness of the piece that also undercores the utility of affect as a vector into that which exceeds our understanding. As Hsu notes: "[affect] seems to be reaching for a kind of awareness of our emotional, psychological, and embodied processing, as an integrated response, which might help to identify, in some partial way, what is happening internally in this new interface we increasingly inhabit, between the body and technology." He adds with typical forward-looking candor: "I am reaching intuitively, and perhaps I use the term too loosely, partly because I feel we may not have an adequate vocabulary to describe what we, as a species, are undergoing at this time in history."

Tishan Hsu was born in 1951 in Boston. He lives and works in New York. Since the mid-1980s, Hsu's artistic practice has probed the cognitive as well as physical effects of transformative technological advances on our lives. Through the use of unusual materials, software tools, and innovative fabrication techniques, his paintings and sculptures explore and manifest poetic reimaginings of the human body. Various motifs from his visual vocabulary are continually reengaged via hardware and screens to become part of a larger corporeal entity. Hsu's work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and Tate Modern, London, among others. His works are included in the 59th Venice Biennale, "The Milk of Dreams," through November 27, 2022.

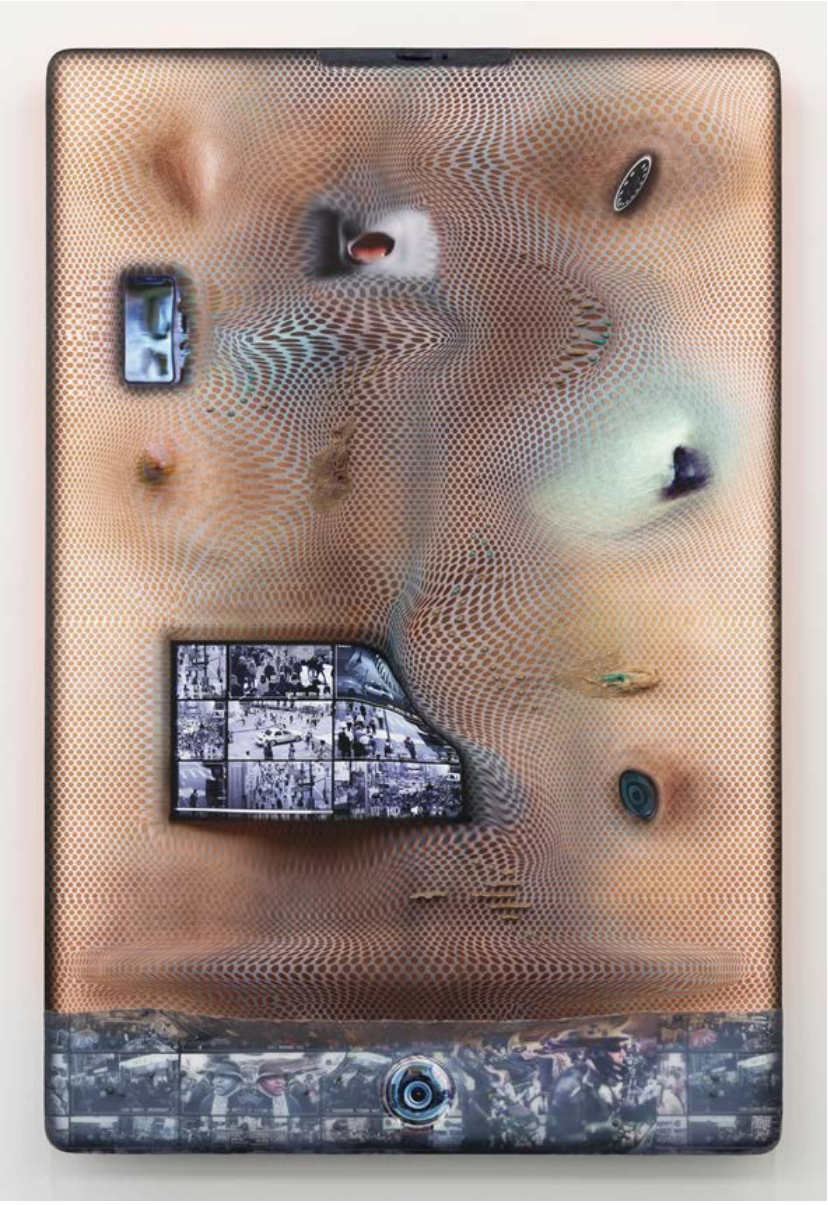
Franklin Melendez is a writer, art advisor, and independent curator based in New York. He is the co-founder of DM Office, which he currently runs in collaboration with Romain Dauriac.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Tishan Hsu: *skin-screen-grass*

DEC 21-JAN 22

By Cassie Packard



Tishan Hsu, *Watching 1*, 2021. UV cured inkjet, silicone on wood, 72 x 48 x 3 inches. Courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery.

Tishan Hsu has been exploring the messy entanglement of bodies and technology for over three decades. Spanning painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, and video, his work is characterized by a slippery lexicon of biological and technological motifs—lingering on the *touch* in touchscreen and the *face* in interface—that probes the more visceral, affective, and lived aspects of our relationships to machines. A strong complement to *Liquid Circuit,* the artist’s first American institutional show staged at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and SculptureCenter in New York, Hsu’s first solo show at Miguel Abreu Gallery features 13 pieces made between 2019 and 2021, a pandemic period when, for many, physical isolation brought new manic intensity to our enmeshment with our devices.

A painting of a green expanse delicately incised with lines of static and partly sheathed in tactile silicone, *signal.noise/membrane* (2020) feels aligned with the artist's earlier abstract portrayals of screens, initiated in the 1980s before the advent of Photoshop (of which Hsu was an early adopter). Largely, however, the works on view incorporate multiple images mutated through digital reproduction, sometimes becoming distorted and warped beyond recognition. Here, longstanding touchstones for the artist, such as television screens, computer screens, and biomedical imagery and devices, meet newer reference points: phone screens, facial recognition software, fever detection cameras, and, more obliquely, digitized family photos, a memory prosthetic that Hsu began working with after his mother's death in 2013.

"I consider myself a cyborg. Google is my memory," Hsu has said, relatably. "I'm not the body we think of in the premodern sense of a figurative body." Rather than being discrete entities, the cyborg bodies that Hsu depicts are simultaneously excessive, distributed, fragmented, and riven in the space of a single work. His creations crawl with fields of gaping mouths, errant nipples and navels, and flesh enlarged to the point of abstraction. A woozy interface of porous skin and perforated metal—evoking the mesh panels that facilitate airflow for overworked hardware—reappears across works on view.

Tishan Hsu, *Grass-Screen-Skin: New York*, 2021. Inkjet on mylar, with QR code linked to video, 2:10 minutes, 122 1/2 x 229 3/4 inches, installation dimensions variable. Courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery.

Material springs to life in *Grass-Screen-Skin: New York* (2021), a 19-foot-long inkjet print on Mylar that renders blades of grass pushing through a gleaming grille. By directing a cyborg eye(phone) at a QR code in the image, the viewer can play a video that portrays a slice of the same scene at exceedingly close range. In the video, the metal morphs into pale skin, and the turf into bodily orifices. The layered viewing experience unnervingly interpolates *skin* with *screen* and that vast network of which humans are only a small part, *grass*. The membrane that separates ontological categories is leaking. Who gets to lay claim to animacy in this scenario? Floating in the inkjet grass is a dental X-ray glitched with rainbow lines, the unruly—playful, even —imaging and printing technologies seemingly more alive than the segmented, compliant, and medicalized body they render.

Tishan Hsu, *signal.noise/membrane*, 2020. Oil, alkyd, silicone on wood, 60 x 60 x 4 inches. Courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery.

In *Watching 2* (2021), mechanisms of gatekeeping, surveillance, and control are the obverse of technologies of health and protection. The work incorporates another skin-screen, this time made from UV cured inkjet on wood with silicone; the wood is shaped to resemble the freestanding temperature kiosks that became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. In one small inset screen, a thermal image of a person is synecdochally labeled "fever," while in another, facial recognition software scans a portion of a visage, logging it. Beneath a layer of encrusted silicone along the bottom edge of the work is a frieze-like surveillance image of a crowd of individuals tagged with green or red boxes that indicate whether they are "stressed" or "relaxed." Their gender and race are also noted, alluding to the violent constructs that difference skins and bodies, and are deeply entrenched in and perpetuated by our algorithms. The work's counterpart, *Watching 1* (2021), features surveillance images of Black Lives Matter protesters, who have been watched by police from the movement's early days—and who have watched the police back. Both pieces contain depictions of anamorphic camera lenses, nodding to a technique historically used by painters to code subversive images into their work, glitching representational systems contrary to the desires of those in power. Small, fleshy silicone protrusions in a variety of skin tones poke through the two works' sleek, flat surfaces, proclaiming the stubborn presence of the corporeal in technological territory.

Where a popular rhetoric of ease and lightness—Donna Haraway called it "sunshine"—seems to cleave machines from the realities of human bodies and human pain, Hsu's visceral work asserts that such extrication is not true to lived experience on individual or algorithmic levels. Examining our affective, embodied relationship to technology, and taking that examination seriously, means rejecting some of the notions of neutrality and distance that serve the blinkered white imaginary. What could we build?

Contributor

Cassie Packard
Cassie Packard is a Brooklyn-based art writer.

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

LOWER EAST SIDE

Tishan Hsu

Through Jan. 15. Miguel Abreu, 88 Eldridge Street, Manhattan. 212-995-1774; miguelabreugallery.com.

Tishan Hsu’s “Grass-Screen-Skin: New York” (2021), inkjet on Mylar, with QR code linked to video. Tishan Hsu/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; Stephen Faught

In a short span of time, digital technology has entered our bodies and transformed our consciousness. Few artists have created works that visualize this integration as skillfully as Tishan Hsu, which you can see in his first exhibition at Miguel Abreu, “Skin-Screen-Grass.” The show includes works based in photographic imagery, but digitally tweaked or transformed into sculptures, wall reliefs and wallpaper.

“Watching” (2021) is an inkjet print whose composition mimics the layout of a smartphone screen. “Grass-Screen-Skin: New York” (2021) functions like an architectural skin: photographs of grass (and other objects) turned into inkjet-on-Mylar wallpaper. A QR code in the work links to a nearly three-minute video that features grass growing through a metal grid, humans touching their skin and eerie insect sounds. (It’s one of the best works I’ve seen that uses this device.) “Phone-Breath-Bed” (2021) is a steel sculpture shaped like an institutional bed on wheels, mounted with photographic images and silicon body parts. The work is particularly uncanny in this moment, when I.C.U. Covid patients appear merged with medical equipment or new cars, like the Tesla, are described as “smartphones on wheels.”

Hsu gained attention in the 1980s with a handful of exhibitions in the United States and Europe. Then he receded from view. The hackneyed adage of an artist being “ahead of his time” is, in his case, true. His art works in which the human body and technology are fused seemed like science fictions in the ’80s; now they are science facts. *MARTHA SCHWENDENER*

THEGUIDE.ART

Tishan Hsu, *Gray Zone-5*, 2020. Graphite, acrylic on Duralar, 24 x 19 inches.

Tishan Hsu
skin-screen-grass

Miguel Abreu Gallery
88 Eldridge Street,
4th Floor

New York
Lower East Side

Remember the tuning knob? Not the electronic radio button that automatically seeks and lands when it finds solid form, but the manual knob you have to turn ever so slightly to exit static and enter language, music. Tishan Hsu’s work at Miguel Abreu Gallery functions like that kind of emergence through attunement. Form is embedded somewhere in the opacity of abstraction.

Hsu’s first museum survey exhibition at SculptureCenter last year solidified a narrative of the artist as one whose vision was out of step in 1980s New York. Undeterred by market and societal pressures, Hsu has pursued a consistent, unconventional body of work. Many reviews mention his uncanny prescience or how much his works from 40 years ago resemble iPhone screens and the Instagram logo. Like science fiction, what was strange has normalized.

But in this exhibition, works Hsu has made since 2019 speak to how strange that normal is. The works on view are mixed media and their flatness conflicts with their illusionism and silicone protrusions that invade the space. All are sickly screen-glow green, bright white, electric blue, blood red that drips and pink-white flesh tone. In *Watching 2* (2021), Hsu directly references the iPhone face—its format is narrow and vertical with beveled edges, and the speaker sits in its familiar position at the top. But the screen is uncannily like a torso, with a macro photograph of a nipple and five other nodes in mammalian formation speaking to some massive future litter. Where the "home" button should be, a circular camera stands in for the navel, the lifelong imprint of original physical connection.

Each work references scanning in some way: x-rays, surveillance footage, thermometers, systems that identify individuals' identity, mood and race, and even a QR code that leads to a video piece. In *Boating Scene 1.2.3* and *QMH 6.2.1* (both 2019), old family photographs stretch as if someone had eagerly opened a scanner too early.

Hsu is a self-described news junkie, and poignantly, *[SPA] – to be titled* (2021) contains an image credit for a photograph that appeared in *The New York Times* on March 25, 2021. The article it accompanied was an investigation into class divisions among Asian Americans and the precarity of spa workers Soon Chung Park, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Delaina Ashley Yaun, Xiaojie Tan and Daoyou Feng, who were murdered by a white gunman this year.

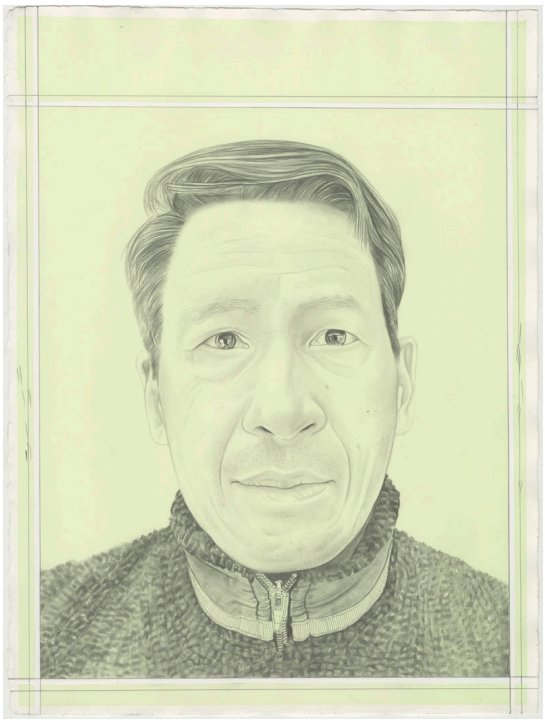
By this last room of the gallery, I realized that Hsu had included all the major horrors of recent years. Recently, I exchanged my radio alarm clock for my iPhone's ringtone. The racism, Trumpism, police brutality and pandemic made the search through static almost unbearable—form itself had become chaos. The world has caught up with Hsu and the dystopian present requires no prescience. — *Sarah Cowan*

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Tishan Hsu With Martha Schwendener

"I wanted to break away from that paradigm of painting where we're looking into a window of a world that's an illusion, a kind of imagined world."

Tishan Hsu speaks with art historian and critic Martha Scwhendener about his painting and sculpture practice, the relationship of the screen to the body, and Vilém Flusser's prescient theories of photography. This conversation was held on the occasion of Hsu's survey exhibition at SculptureCenter, *Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit* (September 25, 2020 – January 25, 2021), which was curated by Sohrab Mohebbi. It was originally recorded as a New Social Environment and has been edited for clarity, concision, and readerly pleasure.



Portrait of Tishan Hsu, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui

Martha Schwendener (Rail): My real enthusiasm for your work comes not just from what's going on in the present but in the longer history of the art of technology, of bodies, of sculpture of object making and photography—a lot of other things! I first encountered your work at the SculptureCenter in Long Island City. I felt a little embarrassed, I have to say, that I hadn't known about your work beforehand. For me it was really encountering a new artist, but that's how art history works, and also historiography. I write about someone who was kind of forgotten from the same period, a writer, philosopher named Vilém Flusser. Sometimes people aren't ready for certain images or ideas or objects, because the thinking seems either very future oriented or so strange in the present. I don't want to say that your work was ignored, it was highly celebrated, but then there was a quiet moment and people like me who came into the art world a little later, weren't aware of it. So Tishan, can you talk about your process in terms of your background in architecture? And I know you studied painting as well. How does it synthesize in your practice?

Tishan Hsu: Looking in retrospect at this body of work, which covers the 1980s into the '90s, I have a very different sense of it than I had when I was making it. This was a very intuitive process from the beginning. I did not have any kind of explanatory text to provide, and I think that made it difficult for people to understand the work. I emerged at a time when critical theory was being discussed at length in the contemporary art world. I was aware of the texts and of the discourse, and I could see lots of parallels to what I was concerned with. But at the same time, I felt a lot of things intuitively that the texts were not addressing. I think that's partly why the initial reception was strong but people didn't know what to do or where to go with it.

At the same time, as another context for this work—I could see that the market was really beginning to accelerate, as a driver in contemporary art in a way that it never had. I felt very much under pressure as I happened to emerge in a very visible gallery situation. I did not choose that. It just happened to be where I landed, and the pressure of the market was beginning to really interfere with the much slower internal process that I started out with. Artist friends and collectors were advising me and saying I had to be careful, because they could see the clash. That was one reason why I decided to work in Germany for a couple years.

My concerns in the work were about the body and technology; it was very simple. All of my work is really an effort to come up with something that would convey this paradigm that I felt would become very influential, that would have a huge impact on our reality, and that I was already seeing happening in much simpler ways.

Many people asked me if I was trying to imagine a future. I felt I was responding to what I saw in the present. But as has been said before, "the future is really the present." Historically, cultures often live in the past and understandably so, because it's easier. One of the things that distinguished American culture in much of the 20th century was a sense that it was looking at and inventing the future. But I was trying to address what I saw in the world. That was part of my academic training. I was surprised, coming into New York, that the context of the contemporary cultural world was to go into the past, in an appropriated way. I understood this approach, as many older cultures in the world have appropriated the past for centuries as a method of cultural production and often with wonderful results. The past for me was not something I could connect to as a driver for my work, and in retrospect there could be several different reasons, one of which was I felt the past couldn't address the issues that I was seeing in the present. Another factor may have been my experience as an "other," in that the American media and consumer culture I grew up in wasn't something that I connected to strongly enough to drive the work. That drove me to create something visual that I felt could address what I was seeing and experiencing. At the time in the '80s, I thought music and literature were in some ways ahead of what was going on in the art world, in trying to capture a sense of the present-future. Science fiction at that time had a lot of techno-body qualities to it, where the body was being infused or was being inserted into technology. So there were definitely active currents, but less so in visual art.

So with that in the background I was trying to figure out a way to infuse a technological consciousness with the body—that's all. I was somewhat single-minded about it. In retrospect, looking at all the work and thinking about the process of doing it—it felt scattered and nothing really cohered or made sense. I was doing this and doing that. I didn't really understand what the underlying sense was in the work, it just felt like lots of experiments. Every time I would do one body of work I would already see the next step and I didn't have a sense of things to focus on a coherent body of work for a show. I had a sense of how I wanted the work to feel, its affect, but it was vague and unclear, partly because I didn't yet have a vocabulary for it. In retrospect I see that it's really about an embodied technology. What is the affective state of this interaction?

Hsu: In college I studied both photography and film, along with architecture, and I seriously considered being a filmmaker. I thought film was going to be the media of the future. After grad school, I experienced the culture beginning to adopt this screen modality in the workplace, working a part-time job as a word processor in a Wall Street law firm. I felt there was a new kind of affect in the body's relating to a screen object. To me, it was compelling. And even though I wasn't working in a media that was technological like film or video, I felt that there was something perhaps more traditional media could address, that could grasp the kind of sensibility that is created when we're interacting with technological objects. I felt that this was going to be a new paradigm and I began reading writers who were discussing it in that way. This helped to confirm the intuitive sense that I had enough to pursue it. With that in mind, I began focusing on the work.

Rail: Can you tell us a little about your education and how it informed your early work?

Hsu: My background was in traditional Western painting, and I had a pretty rigorous training in studio art from very early on, driven by my love of making things as a kid. In elementary school, I was taught by someone who painted in the school of Thomas Cole and I was copying Edward Hopper paintings, as well as learning techniques of glazes and underpainting from Renaissance painting. Later I moved to Virginia and studied with the painter Maryann Harman, who was taught by a person who came from the French tradition of Impressionist painting, and that's where I learned everything I know about color. With both teachers, I learned how to see in a very focused way. These are traditional disciplines, but remained a part of the background of the early works, as a method. Although I studied architecture and film in college and grad school, and learned about media, form and design, the real impact was gaining a sense of a technological world that was being created all around me, and my response to it. In a way, I wanted to understand how this strange new world felt. What was the context like? This was at a time when the tech nerd was at the fringe of society and the farthest from the world of art and the humanistic tradition. Technology was also an "other," but one I felt was important to go towards rather than avoid, as I sensed the world was going to become technological whether we wanted it to or not.

Now, the dilemma I had with these early works on wood—like *R.E.M.* or *Plasma* (both 1986)—is that as I was sitting working in front of a word processor in the early days of the screen, I felt that there was this screen world that was very different than television because I was interacting with it. The interactivity was a jump from the passiveness of TV. So I'm sitting in front of this screened object for many hours, several days a week, and my bodily, physical, material presence was very much there. I felt there was this paradox between the illusionary world of the screen and the physical reality of my body, and that I wanted my work to account for both. I felt that my body in front of that screen still really counted. And I felt that also by somehow maintaining a sense of the body in the work, I would be able to address the political, while also addressing the technological, because it's the body and specifically the body in pain that really creates politics, on a sort of ontological level.

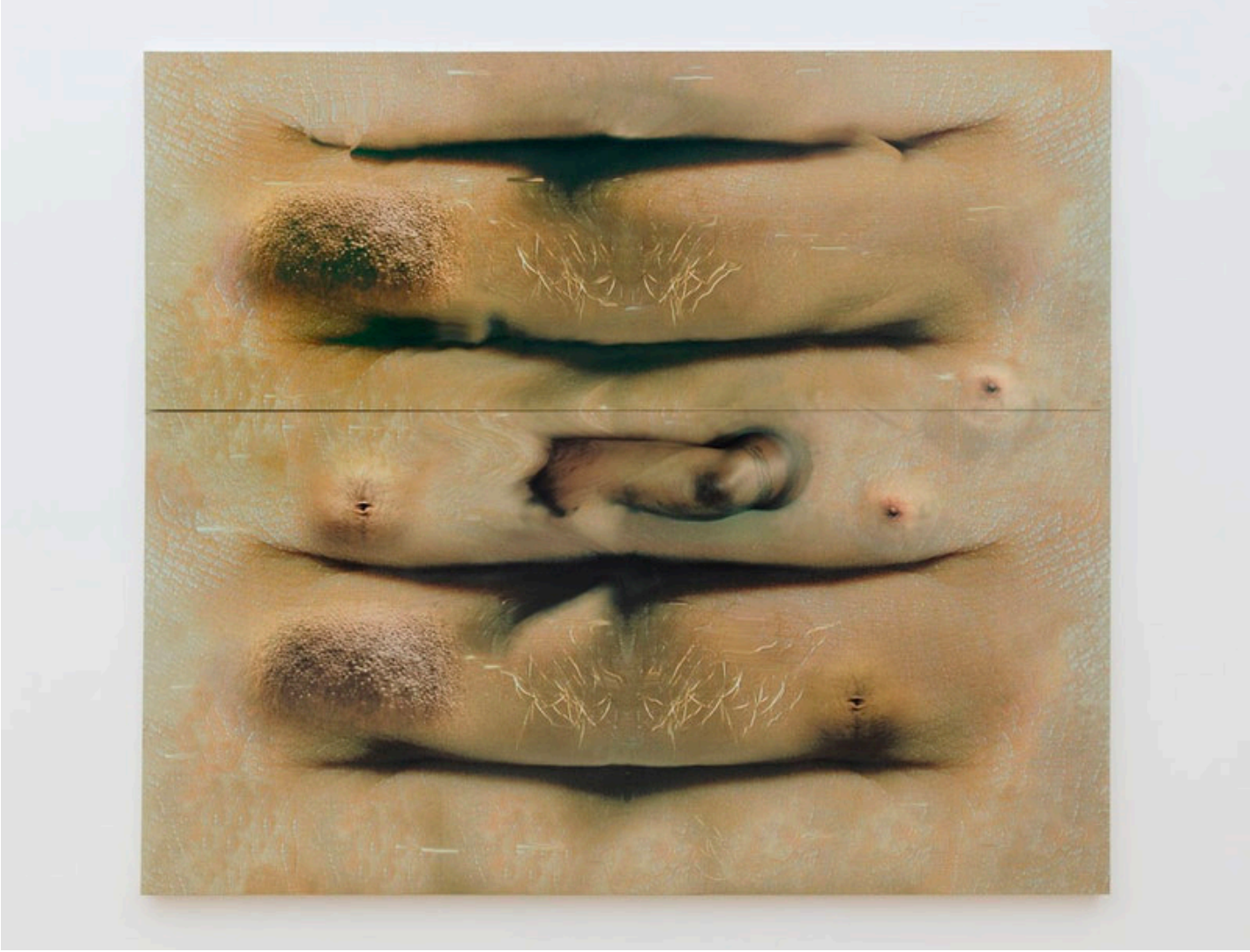
Tishan Hsu, *Plasma*, 1986. Acrylic, alkyd, oil, vinyl cement compound on wood 16 x 93.5 x 4 inches. Collection of Daniel Newburg.

Hsu: I'm saying this in retrospect. I had no awareness of this while I was doing it. I was trying to create a syntax for beginning to address issues in the world and my experience of it. And so all of this work that's in the SculptureCenter show is somewhat removed, and abstracted from the world, and I think that's one critique people had about the work. It seemed like a kind of fantasy. But I was trying to first change the syntax of painting, for myself, for what I needed. In that sense, I did not want a square image in the sense of the window of a canvas. I wanted to break away from that paradigm of painting where we're looking into a window of a world that's an illusion, a kind of imagined world. I wanted these things to be objects on the wall, coming from the issues that were raised with Minimalism and Post-Minimalism where contemporary art began to really be more in the room that we're in with no illusion. That sense also drove my interest in architecture, which I still have.

Hsu: So, in that sense, I was trying to establish how I can get that object there and that's partly what drove the idea of the rounded corners, and that these flat boards are away from the wall so they appear to float on the wall. These are just three-eighths inch painted plywood. Now for those of you who haven't seen the work, all of the organic shapes are just completely flat. It's an illusion of some materiality, along with painted forms that maybe look like concrete or material that is actually projecting from this flatness. So, it was both maintaining an object and at the same time creating an illusionary affect but not a world, as in an imagined world. In a more formal sense of painting, I was looking at the history of pre-Modern painting in Western art and saying, "that's really interesting that they were also painting an illusionistic world." And much of it was religious iconography located in a world of space and time that imitated my experience.

There was a point in Western art history where you could only paint whatever feelings or emotions you had through biblical iconography. It was a kind of illusion, and it was a rendering of the formal illusion of perspectival space on a flat surface. There was another kind of illusion in Eastern ink painting but it was not so concerned with depicting a "realistic" illusion of space. It was a philosophical kind of space, but still referencing actual space. Similarly, in the culture of early African work, the works are more animistic in that the works embody the spiritual, physically. I was experiencing the screen as something illusionary, but it's not biblical or referential; it's the illusion of something organic and alive, if not the body itself. I wanted to try and convey this sense of illusion, but I didn't want the viewer to feel as though they were entering a fantasy world. In that sense, I was not interested in Surrealism. So there was a paradox, and that was key. I wanted something that was going to be paradoxical. And I think that's partly what contributed to the strangeness people felt looking at it. People were often surprised that the works were painted as an illusion, because it looked at first glance (or in reproduction) like it was just all made with materials in space. So on the one hand, the work is recognizing itself as this object and at the same time there is an illusionary aspect but that illusionary world is responding to the object, not another world. So if you'll note that in the forms and shapes, they're still within the shape of the object itself as though the illusionary forms could actually be three-dimensional. The two and three-dimensional create a kind of hybrid experience. And so it was this close responsiveness between the illusionary aspect and the physical object that is in front of you. And I think that relation is paradigmatic of the interactivity of digital media itself.

Rail: How about photography? Part of the reason I'm interested in that is because particularly—we could talk about *Cellular Automata 2* from 1989 or *Fingerpainting* from 1994—we're in this moment, and this is what's important about photography, in the '80s you had this movement from chemical to digital photography and now we're beginning to see that photography can be printed in three dimensions and that includes: organs, skin, weapons—those kind of things. So when I saw these works, particularly one like *R.E.M. revisited* (2002), I wanted to know how photographs are involved. How did you go about this?

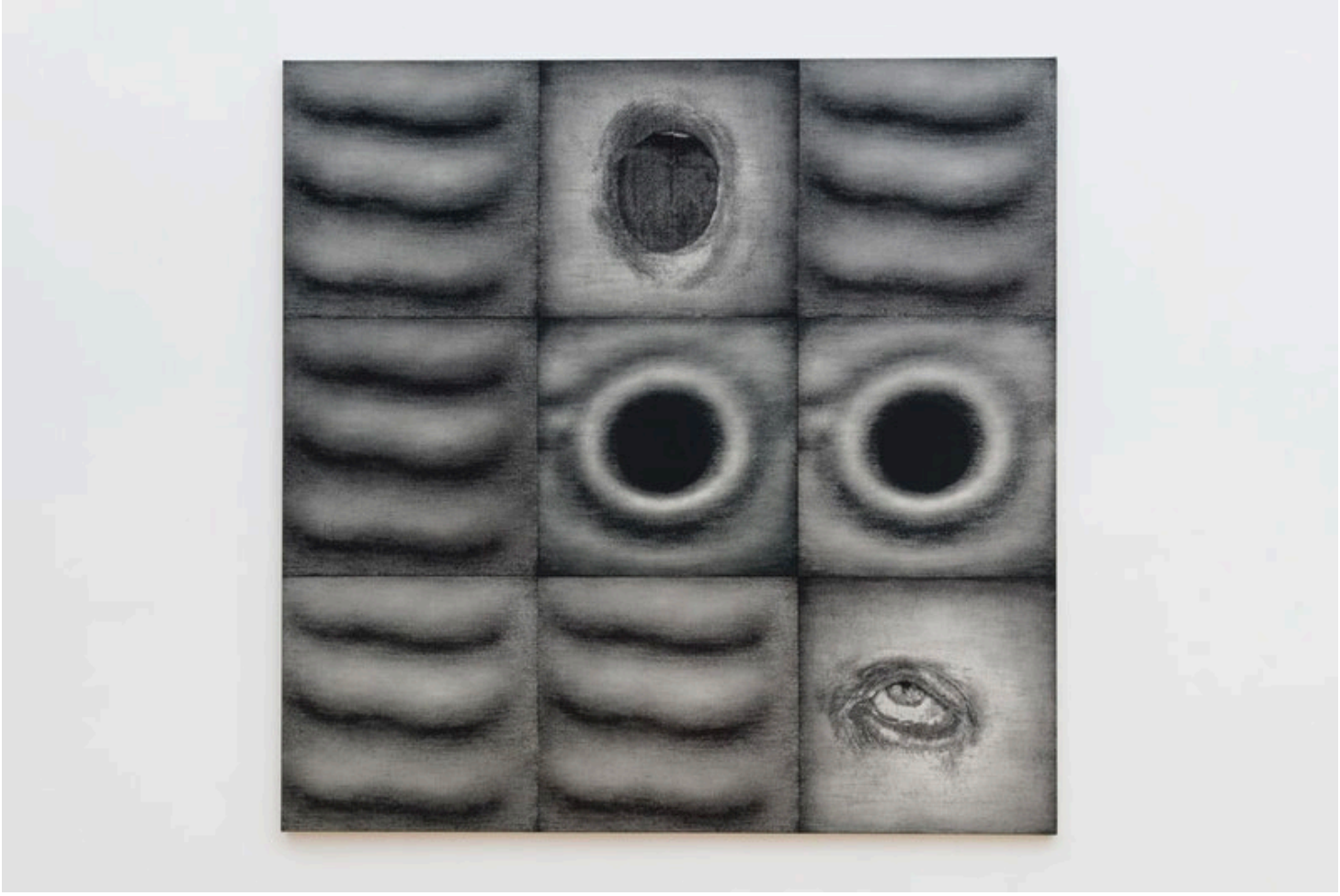


Tishan Hsu, *R.E.M. revisited*, 2002. Archival inkjet on canvas. 96 x 110 inches. Courtesy the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.

Hsu: Photography became a key aspect of the evolution of the work. And that happened going from the '80s to the '90s, where the work I've just been talking about was executed in traditional media, oil on wood. I felt from the response to the work that people weren't getting it at all. They were going all over the place. I needed to really clarify that I was dealing with the body and dealing with technological affect. So I began working with silk screening, as an image that you printed, and so it's manufactured, and at the same time I could then use photographs of the body. That made things very clear.

Rail: Can you talk about *Cellular Automata 2*?

Hsu: Yes, so here I'm just experimenting with black and white silkscreen. The way this is made is modular which is a structural paradigm in all my work, in that technology is designed and produced modularly. So the square module was done by hand. It was just one module, and then I photographed that one square, and then had that image put into a dot screen matrix, and then printed that with silkscreen.



Tishan Hsu, *Cellular Automata 2*, 1989. Silkscreen ink on canvas. 82 x 82 inches. Collection of the artist.

Hsu: What I was trying to do is to take the dot aspect of silkscreen—if you look closer at this work the dots are very large—and bring in these images that are from medical textbooks and put those into dot screen matrix, and then print them so that the whole screen is just dots. And what it's trying to do is to fuse the hand painted with the technological photographic image into a hybrid entity. So, I could create the work by just duplicating one module. And then there's one other module with a round circle that was also hand painted, but at the same time, I also inserted two medical images that really pin this kind of painted illusionary organic body-like or tissue-skin-like image into something that we know right away is about the body.

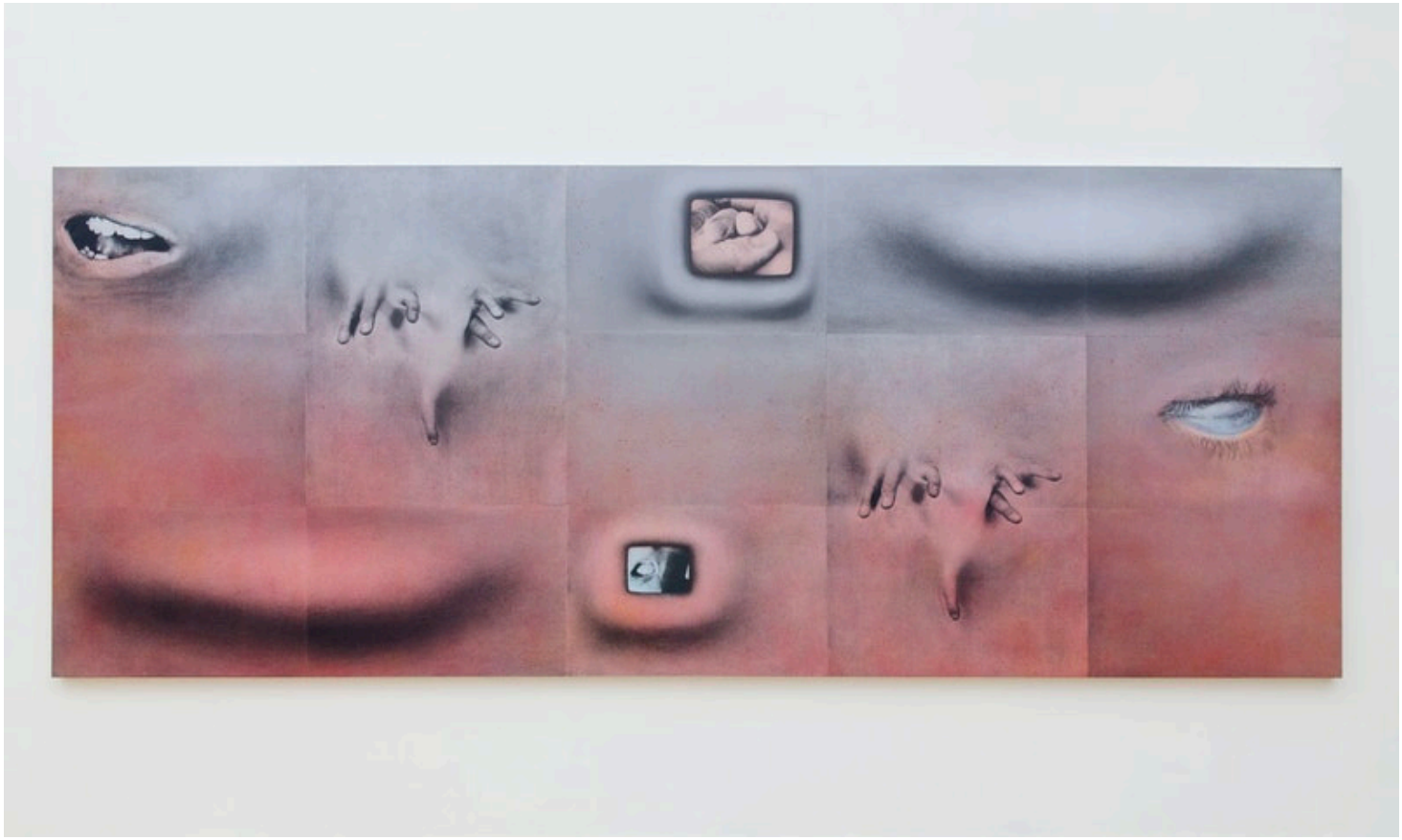
So it's a technological process and then it's somehow about the body. But I also wanted to maintain the affect of more traditional, handmade media. The fact that I could hand make these ripples gives me a certain affect that was important to me. I'm fusing them with the clinical affect of medical images. Maintaining a continuum between the affect that happens with traditional handmade techniques of art making, and the more technological production of images was very important to me.

Rail: How about *Fingerpainting*? What changed?

Hsu: So this is like five years later. I wanted to get rid of the grid and the modular, and to put things together in a very crude way. I wanted the modules to grow together into a whole, if you will. This was really just a technical and conceptual visual experiment about my sense of the body and the technological world. Could I create modular images with almost invisible lines so the affect you get is not this gridded modular flatness but this continuous surface in which these—whether they're actual images of body or created images emerge out of this continuous flatness—would go on and on, in sort of an infinite moving flatness of space. That for me was a metaphor of the web.

There was a lot of discussion about the web at that time, what it was going to be like, what it would do. Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* was published, and I was imagining the sense of infinite space that was virtual, and that's what drove not just the imagery but also the scale. I was not trying to do a big painting to impress, but to see what would happen if these modules could just keep going and going and going in a continuous way. That was also the affect that drove the tile pieces like *Ooze* (1987).

Rail: When you mentioned the screen, which is just incredibly important, this quote bubbled to mind. In the mid-'90s Lev Manovich, the media theorist, said that we don't know whether we're the society of the spectacle or not but we're definitely the society of the screen. In my capacity as an art critic I'm constantly seeing painters in particular who have to respond to this idea when we're talking about two-dimensional surfaces of the screen and the fact that people are looking at screens all the time, so how do you shift over? I'm also interested in how the modernist idea of the grid gets moved over in the '80s and shifts into this notion of a matrix. There's this idea of the grid in the digital age becoming something else.



Tishan Hsu, *Fingerpainting*, 1994. Silkscreen ink, acrylic, on linen canvas. 71 x 177 inches. Courtesy the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.

Rail: Another person that comes to mind is Thomas Bayrle who had a show at the New Museum in 2018. He's somebody whose work I've been close to and it's different from your work. It tends to be more technological, more industrial/technological things than the body, whereas your work is about this very intimate close relationship. I wanted to point this out because it becomes, for me at least—although I don't think it's too much of a stretch when we see the color here and knowing that you have this strong background in color relationships—this kind of flesh matrix, that the two-dimensional work becomes a kind of skin. So rather than the Renaissance window or the modernist grid, we have this thing that gives the illusion of a kind of breathing, kind of a warp and weft.

In one interview you gave you mentioned your interest in early Bakshaish rugs, which made me think of the relationship of the jacquard loom to the early computer, but also I think about how when you look at a rug and people will say, "hey, this can go on the wall or it can go on the floor," which reminds me of some of your work in terms of these objects that are sort of cascading—I wouldn't say from the wall to the floor but where they are sculpture and then all of a sudden they're floating or melting onto the floor particularly works like *Ooze* and *Reflexive Ooze* (1987).

Hsu: Martha, it's great you brought up the rugs. That has kind of been a private passion. It began more as a decorative thing. I never really knew about oriental rugs and then when I was a student I actually saw one for the first time, you know a good one and I was just amazed at the materiality. The fact that someone made this, it just blew my mind. And then later, after doing some of my early work I was looking at the rug more and you know I had a small one, and I realized they were sculptures to me. If you study them and look at the backing they're grids. I only came to look at rugs slowly over many years and began seeing unexpected connections, but the fact that you're seeing these connections is kind of amazing to me. The handmade rugs used a loom, which is an early technology. There is a hybrid production of the handmade with technology. The other worldly patterns are multi-dimensional. The way color is handled is extraordinary and almost digital. And then the sheer, almost technological flatness of the soft, fuzzy, material feels minimalist, so cool, as affect.

Rail: You mentioned this in an interview I read, I wish I could say I was that perceptive!

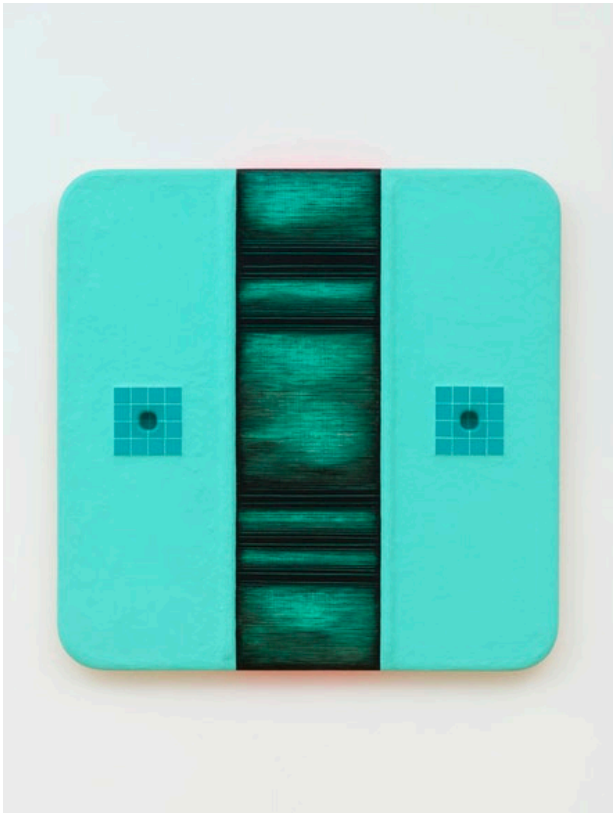
Hsu: Well, someone might know that I mentioned it but not see the connection. So anyway I think there is something perhaps unconscious going on there. One thing that struck me when I started doing the flat tile pieces on the floor is that I also was looking at a flatness in experiencing the rugs, and then as you get closer you see them two-dimensionally in these amazing organic patterns, so there's this paradox again of the screen, if you will, and the object. There's this illusionary world, but then as you move around the work, it's a physical thing in the world. For me these rugs are like a sculpture if you think of Carl Andre's steel plate pieces on the floor.

But to go back to the grid, for me it was beyond the kind of modernist grid of minimalist conceptual work—I'm thinking of works by Hanne Darboven or Sol LeWitt—for me it was the next step in how space would be defined. When I was a student at MIT, I happened to be working next to Nicholas Negroponte's architectural machine where he was inventing a 3D software. The computer that he needed to do that, which he was creating from scratch, was the size of a 10 by 10 room. I could observe the screen he was working with, and the way he was defining the space on that screen was a grid. The topology was a flatness that moved through space as a way of defining space. The flat grid was becoming organic, if not actually moving. If you use any 3D software, it places you in a three-dimensional gridded space as a way of even thinking about space. More recently, this underlying grid has become the conceptual visual basis for facial recognition and other data intensive applications that measure and define not only the world we live in but also our bodies in the world.

Hsu: The flat tile pieces, like *Ooze* or *Vertical Ooze* (1987) really were about this kind of technological space of data, and that it would go on and on and I was trying to do it in what may seem a retro way, using actual physical materials, rather than just hopping onto the computer and going with it. The works also float. So if you see the work, it's off of the floor and there's no sense of base to it. That was an affect I wanted in all of the work, whether it's hanging on the wall, or eventually on wheels, like Biocube from 1988. What I liked about traditional media, versus technology itself, like film or media, was that it was slower, and thereby elicited a different kind of awareness of affect that only a slower meditation can elicit. That was important to me.

I wanted everything to feel contingent, that it could be here or it could be there, or anywhere. That was something I felt was another affect, and I'm using the word affect a lot because that is what drove the work here. It wasn't trying to declare we are now in a technological world. I was trying to get at some sense of what the feeling of all of this technology was/is. And so for me "contingency," or this continuous surface quality, or this sense of illusion—that's what I was going for. Why I wanted to do it is partly unconscious but there's also a sense that we really didn't and don't understand what this new interface was doing to us. In order to figure that out, we first had to figure out: what are we really feeling here, interacting with all this stuff? There's this kind of cognitive, emotional, psychological resonance going on between us as this organic body, and this screen, and it is affecting us and the culture, if not the world, in deeper and deeper ways. And so I felt the affect is important for us to become more conscious of in some way, if possible, just to stop a minute and ask, what is going on here? What is this? What we are going through is unprecedented in human history. And that's what was driving my interest in trying to visualize these physical attributes in the work.

Rail: My favorite book is *The Posthuman Glossary*, which I want to bring in terms of this idea of an affect and embodiment that we're seeing, and this is why your work from the '80s and the '90s looks just so incredibly canny. We are thinking in terms of questions like: What is the body in front of the screen? But also, what happens when you start to have the screen inside the body?



Tishan Hsu, *Reflexive Ooze*, 1987. Ceramic tile, vinyl cement compound, oil, acrylic, alkyd on wood 58.75 x 59 x 3.5 inches. High Museum of Art, Atlanta. Gift of Hillman R. Holland through the 20th Century Art Acquisition Fund in memory of Dr. Robert H. Brown.

I was also looking at a catalog of your show at Pat Hearn from 1986 and it's very interesting some of the different sources you draw from, say for instance Derrida, and people who were thinking of philosophy. People have often described *Closed Circuit* II from 1986 as predating the Instagram logo. And, you know, some of the new geometries that you discuss. And one of the things I like very much in this catalog is that you have this poem, "When Science is in the Country," and it made me think of the Richard Brautigan poem, "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace" which circles back to what you said earlier about how visual art was lagging behind things like literature and music in terms of thinking about these new worlds, whether they were technological or digital, or new forms of embodiment. The other thing I wanted to do is talk about your early Photoshop works.

Tishan Hsu, *Closed Circuit II*, 1986. Acrylic, alkyd, Styrofoam, vinyl cement compound on wood 59 x 59 x 4 inches. Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

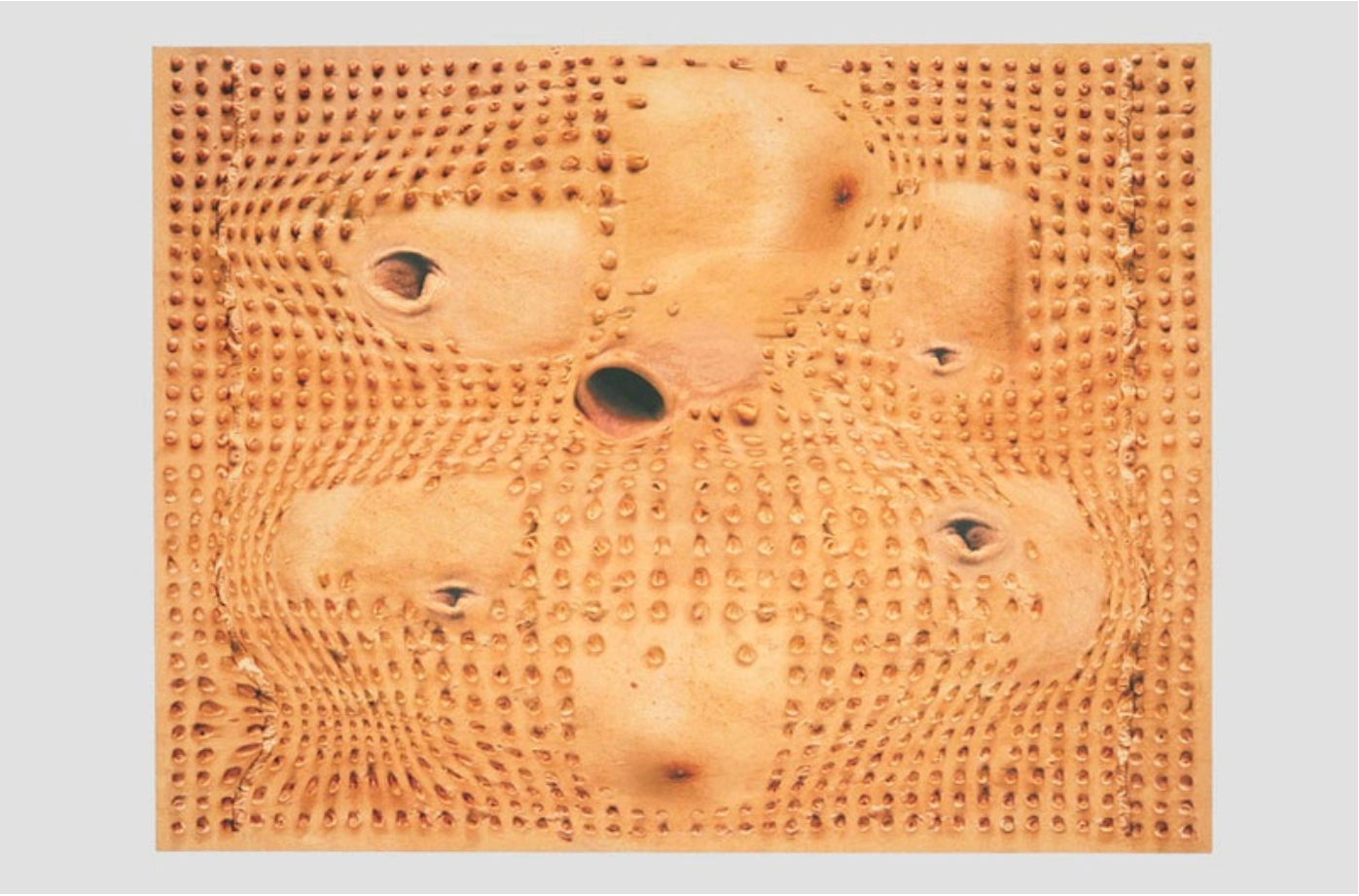
Hsu: When Photoshop appeared for the consumer and for the artists to work with, I took a year off from teaching just to learn Photoshop, just to see whether it was something I really felt like I could invest myself in as a new way of making an image. In the beginning I thought it wasn't going to work, but by the end of the year it was just so automatic. I felt a connection to that mouse like I do a pencil. I felt it was likely training in a sport, where I had to do it everyday where its functionality became automatic.

Rail: That's interesting. And how about more recent photographic work, like *Innies and Outies or Interface with Lips* (both 2002)?

Hsu: In the late '80s, I explored photography because I wanted to get something more clinical in the work, as opposed to the hand created images. I was trying to get people to see I'm dealing with the body, and I felt the affect of the clinical was something technological in the way that it is so real, like an augmented eye.

At this point, the technological advance of photography has been startling. And it is an ontological change. Maybe it was Baudrillard who said the public will become private and the private will become public. That is our private lives are becoming so transparent and public. At the same time we know almost too much about the world, and it's coming right into our bedroom, so to speak. And so it's this kind of realness that photography offers of something very intimate, like skin, to whatever we see through the photograph more than we do even with our human eyes. And I think that's really apparent now with how our experience of the news is evolving.

And so the sense of this clinical microscopic focus is the affect that I really wanted to use and that's what drove me to continue to work with the Photoshop, which could use photographic images. However, what drove this is wanting to then go back and, in a way, invoke much of my experience of painting, frankly, and what the affect of painting has done through time, and to bring that into this technological medium.



Tishan Hsu, *Innies and Outies*, 2002. Archival inkjet on canvas. 44 x 57 inches.

And so in a way I see works like *Interface with Lips* as paintings, but then I'm also working purely digitally. I say this only because after the year I spent learning Photoshop, the "Interface" works in 2002 are my first experimental works with the digital. I should say digital imaging, but also printing on a wide format printer, which was important. I don't think I would have gone down this road had that not developed simultaneously. And I think Epson was seeing the demand for that. Soon after I started working on the canvas they announced that inks were going to be archival which was the other important component. At the time, I was imagining the further evolution onto a more expansive wall, which I was not able to realize until the SculptureCenter show.

But when I finished *Interface with Lips* I felt something was lacking because it was so controlled. I had all the control that technology allows, but I couldn't do anything more with it, once it was printed. Once it was done it was done. For me there was something missing, the element of contingency, of risk, of chance, I really wanted back into the work. And it's not that I was only trying to examine whether this attribute was something that I just feel a personal connection to, but also does it somehow resonate with what I'm seeing in the world?

I felt that in spite of the control that we have with technology, the sense of accident and risk going on in the world continues and that's part of what the body is. And so that drove me to want to bring back a more traditional medium of some sort that could work with the technological. Now, I could not just paint on the printed canvas. I couldn't just invoke painting, because once I started painting I was bringing in the whole history of painting and that was kind of antithetical to this kind of technological sense that I was going for. So I spent a number of years trying to figure out a way of bringing back materiality, but having technological affect.

With photography, and the affect of clinical reality, I felt ready to move the work more into the real world and to address issues coming from that. In the '89 show with Pat, it was about surveillance and security, the medical environment, and the sense of how bodies are extracted through data. These are contexts in which the body is interfacing with technology in society. The use of photography enabled me to do that in a way. I could use the syntax of body and technology and address these more specific, real world contexts. And that's what drove the work after 2005.

Rail: You know, I do all my writing on a theorist named Vilém Flusser who was writing in the 1980s. Initially he became well known for his book Towards a Philosophy of Photography which came out in 1983. His idea was that we need to stop talking about images per se, and instead talk about apparatuses, which might mean the camera. Of course now everybody walks around with a camera all the time, and everybody is a photographer, and this is why Flusser's book is very forward looking. He was also and this is what I'm spending my time on right now is a chapter for a book that has to do with his book Vampyroteuthis Infernalis (1987) about a squid and using that squid as this way of thinking through philosophy with an underwater animal.

For Flusser this idea of photography in the digital realm and biotechnology were completely linked. So when you start talking about "skin" in photography, for Flusser that could be something like photographic paper, because it functions in a similar way in terms of being photosensitive and having color. He would treat skin as a technological interface. And what I see in your work as well is this convergence of how to talk about technology in the body, and not just as augmentation, or artificial intelligence, but what you stated initially, that you might have been working intuitively, or in a kind of science fiction sense. Flusser actually called his work "science fiction philosophy" because it was speculative instead of this idea that we know what we're talking about. No we don't always know what we're talking about, and this is particularly true in terms of art, in terms of bodies, in terms of technology and joining them all together.

Hsu: Flusser was so prescient. People always ask if I'm interested in science fiction and I always have to say I'm not in the sense that I'm not trying to create an imaginary world. For me, my process focuses on what I perceive as the real world not fictional, or the world that I experience as emerging. What's interesting to me is science fiction has really grown as a genre in writing. It's taking up much more space now as serious literature, and I think that's partly because the world is moving so fast that before you can even think about it, we're already there. The world we're living in right now is science fiction, it's more wacky than much of science fiction I've read.

And so I think Flusser's speculative writing is very accurate in terms of what's happening now, and about to happen in a much more obvious way perhaps. I think the sense of time and future-past is collapsing because things are moving so quickly. A lot driven by the speed of technology and the speed of capitalism, frankly. We can hardly keep up. I feel like the implications of Flusser's writing are providing directions on how to make sense of the world we are in right now, because I frankly cannot make sense of it anymore. I don't feel there's a present. There's a kind of anticipatory future that assists with speculating on what is going on right now, because all of my past ways of organizing the world are not working anymore.

frieze

Tishan Hsu's Prescient Yet Apolitical View of Technology

At SculptureCenter, a recent survey takes a narrow look at the artist's career, focusing on his tech-inspired works from the 1980s and '90s

The medium looks like it could use a good massage in Tishan Hsu's painted wooden panels. With their rounded corners and painted backs that cast a screen-like glow onto the walls, they suggest our now-ubiquitous smartphones and tablets. Their surfaces are built up with acrylic and enamel to mimic a machine's casing and frame trompe-l'œil, shadowed displays that make literal the computing metaphor of a 'skin'. In *R.E.M* (1986), a moulded peachy-buff casing frames a staticky black-and--white swathe that suggests a lumpy ribcage bisected by venting grilles. The effect is one of dermal layers stretched across hardware, at once both man and machine. But these works were made in the 1980s, and seethe with bulging veins and trapped body parts with all the body horror of David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983). Hardware melts into meatware replete with trypophobia-inducing ports. The paintings are accompanied by sculptures, drawings and a video in 'Liquid Circuit', the artist's first institutional solo show in the United States, currently on view at SculptureCenter in Long Island City. (The survey opened last year at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles before travelling to New York.)

Tishan Hsu, *R.E.M.*,1986, installation view, 'Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit', SculptureCenter, New York, 2020, acrylic, alkyd, vinyl cement compound on wood, 152 x 152 x 10 cm. Courtesy: the artist and SculptureCenter, New York; collection of Marian and James H. Cohen; photograph: Kyle Knodell

After studying architecture at MIT and film at Harvard, Hsu found himself working nights at a law firm, hunched over a word processor. It's a posture that has since become so commonplace as to have spawned its own neologisms such as 'tech neck', 'texting thumb' and 'tablet elbow'. (You're probably doing it right now.) While the Pictures Generation was appropriating on-screen images, Hsu was more interested in the apparatuses that broadcast them and their all-too-visceral effects on our bodies. There is one exception: a small side room features a number of pencil drawings, mostly preliminary sketches for other works in the show. There are also some silkscreens and Xeroxes from the mid-1990s onwards that include a character from *The Simpsons* (1989–ongoing). It's a jarring geo-cultural anchor in a show that may scream 1980s but otherwise floats in a vacuum. Notably, unlike artists making cyborg-like works today, Hsu's bodies are neither explicitly racialised nor gendered. He did not begin making work about his Chinese heritage – none of which is included here – until 2006.

Although Hsu showed with iconic dealers such as Leo Castelli and Pat Hearn, he was consistently overlooked during his time. But it's hard to tell whether this exhibition is a reappraisal or a rediscovery. There's a melancholic air of obsolescence here, all these hybrid forms being relegated to the scrap-heap of art history before ever getting their chance to shine. And there's a sense of closing an academic fist around a firefly too, which dampens some of the works' curious effervescence that appears not as bubbles but as tickly static. I think of the way that 20th-century science fiction wanted the future to be just, but cyberpunk just cared that it was weird. My disappointment with this show is that it feels under-contextualized in this space – but maybe it's just that it's not weird enough.

Tishan Hsu, *Liquid Circuit*, 1987, installation view, 'Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit', SculptureCenter, New York, 2020, acrylic, vinyl cement compound, alkyd, oil, aluminum on wood, 229 x 363 x 23 cm.
Courtesy: the artist, the SculptureCenter, New York, and Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis; gift of Dolly J. Fiterman; photograph: Kyle Knodell

The first rule of writing about Hsu is to call him prescient. Here are some things that his work prefigured: a post-human fusing of man and machine, secondary and tertiary screens, flat design, our wretched technological present. The painting *Closed Circuit II* (1986) is particularly unsettling in its resemblance to Instagram's old logo. Of course, said logo was loosely based on the Bell & Howell camera of the 1950s, but skeuomorphism nevertheless becomes a pertinent way to consider the show's beguiling mixture of smoothness and metal-cold terror of being trapped mid-transformation. Only: who is the designer, and who is the audience here? Is the obsolete object on which these hybrid forms are modelling their current skin the human or the machine? Better not to dwell on it. Safer. Long live the new flesh.

'Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit' *is on view at SculptureCenter, New York, through 25 January 2021.*

Main image: 'Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit', 2020, exhibition view, SculptureCenter, New York.
Courtesy: the artists and SculptureCenter, New York; photograph: Kyle Knodell

THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

ARTIST'S QUESTIONNAIRE

An Artist for the Dystopian Age

For decades, Tishan Hsu has explored the ever more salient relationship between technology and the human body.

Tishan Hsu lives above his Williamsburg, Brooklyn, studio, where an immense skylight keeps a Norfolk Island Pine alive. The miniature green chair was once the artist's son's but, these days, Hsu uses it to work on pieces on the floor, like the glassy tank just behind him — a cast-off component of a sculpture that grew in another direction. Credit: Flora Hanitijo

When Los Angeles's Hammer Museum was shut down last March, so was the first retrospective of the 69-year-old artist Tishan Hsu. Hanging from the gallery walls for no one to see was Hsu's immense "Cell" (1987), a 16-foot-wide raft of carved wood painted in fleshy tones and overlaid with rigid bars to recall the experience of staring down a microscope into a magnified view of human blood. In another gallery sat "Virtual Flow" (1990-2018), a suite of mock laboratory equipment in a sickening shade of millennial pink, built to "Pee-wee's Playhouse" proportions. Meanwhile, the recorded sounds of a hospital respirator emanated from the device playing the 2005 video work "Folds of Oil."

In addition to upending the schedule of his retrospective, which was organized by SculptureCenter in Long Island City, Queens, where it is now on view, the pandemic impeded Hsu's plans to start an ambitious work cycle, as well as the staffing of his studio, in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn. But the coronavirus has also made the artist's longstanding interest in the relationship between the body and technology, the organic and the man-made, seem even more prescient. "I remember telling people in the '80s, 'I don't know what the work is about. I don't have a text here. The work will reveal itself,'" Hsu said on a recent video call. "It just validates the unconscious."

An early adopter of digital editing techniques, Hsu helped develop the studio for interactive art at Sarah Lawrence College, where he taught for more than 20 years before his retirement in 2018. Here, his large-scale printer sits next to "Blue Interface With Lego" (2019), a dye-sublimation print. Credit:.Flora Hanitijo

Born in Boston and raised by an opera singer and an engineer, Hsu had a childhood that was scored by the warbles of humanity as much as by the orderly hum of machines. As a student at MIT, he studied architecture and began to experiment with sculpture, putting to use his knowledge of ergonomics and organic forms. To fund his art-making after graduation, he took a job temping as a word processor at various law firms; typing on a primitive computer, his thoughts would veer to what screens might do for memory and sense perception. In his off hours, he was reconsidering painting, working with plywood forms. He eventually developed a technique of scratching through layers of paint to reveal gooey, naturalistic shapes in the wood. Staring at these early works can be a bit like looking at an electrical outlet and seeing in its contours and openings a face in shock: eyes and lips sometimes appear to cohere, then fade back into abstraction.

When Hsu started showing his hand-wrought slabs in New York in the mid-80s, the work felt out of step with the decade's slick graphic art and loopy, graffiti-inspired paintings. But the subsequent decades revealed Hsu's anticipation of our current era of industrial design. Pull out an iPhone to take a picture of Hsu's "Squared Nude" (1984) or "Institutional Body" (1986) and you'll notice that the shape, orientation and proportions of the gadget are roughly the same as those of the painted wall hangings. When Hsu's show opened at the Hammer last January, a curator pointed out that "Closed Circuit II" (1986), a square wall hanging with a lenslike, circular form, resembles an early logo for Instagram. And when asked about "Portrait" (1982), a horizontal wooden slab whose rounded outer edges frame a rectangle scratched in the manic texture of a static-filled screen, Hsu insisted: "I was not thinking of the iPad at the time."

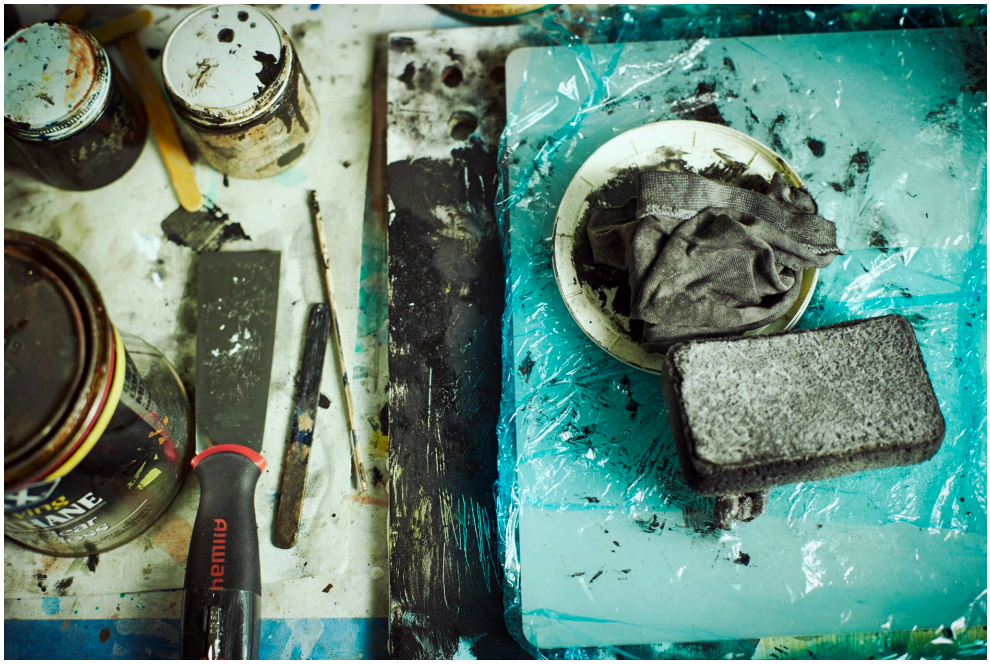
For a 1989 show at New York's Pat Hearn Gallery, Hsu focused on the idea of medical intervention. Doctors had told him that he would eventually need a kidney transplant, but that future technology would make the procedure less risky. "I had this idea that the hospital was the most radical site for what we're doing to our bodies," he said. "That some future people might look back on us, as we look back on very early cultures that do these things to the body, like impel them or scar them." The kidney transplant, which Hsu finally underwent in 2006, increased the likelihood of his having a severe response to Covid-19. And so, last spring, he let his staff go and joined his wife, who stays at their home in the Berkshires, where he lived out a version of Thomas Mann's "Magic Mountain" (1924). "After a month or two it started getting very weird psychologically; you lose track of the days," he said. At the same time, he spent more of those days scrolling through the news, thinking about how the headlines were designed to entice him to click. He started making drawings studded with eyes and lenses that "watch" the viewer, reversing the direction of the gaze and subverting the hierarchy of spectator and work: the surveyor becomes the surveyed.

Yogurt containers are just one part of Hsu's system for organizing the substrates he uses to give his sculptures textures that are alternately scratchy and gooey, organic and shellacked. Credit:.Flora Hanitijo

Even in the mountains, then, the artist felt watched: by the sites he visited, by the phone he took to bed. "They actually have cognitive psychologists helping them design this software so that they know what will pull you in," Hsu said. "We need to stop and think about what it's doing to us and our bodies. So in a way that's what my work has been trying to grasp. I would say, whether people connect to my work — I think I'm really just trying to ask the question, 'What is really happening?'"

On display together for the first time, Hsu's sculptures ask more questions than they answer. Like props built for the Harkonnen den in a "Dune" remake, they seem designed to furnish a future we could not want to live in — a dystopia that may reflect aspects of our reality, but remains enigmatic enough to hide its politics, and grotesque enough to make more squeamish viewers turn away before they've had a chance, as Hsu said, to "stop and think."

Now back in Brooklyn (his apartment is above his studio), Hsu answered T's Artist's Questionnaire via Zoom, having chosen a virtual background of an oozy-looking stucco wall that could easily have been mistaken for the handworked surface of one of his sculptures.



A mix of alkyd resin and oil paint produces a thick, tarry black that Hsu began deploying in the 1980s to paint wooden forms that he'd scratch, forming networks of lines that seemed to buzz with electricity. Credit:.Flora Hanitijo

What is your day like? How much do you sleep, and what's your work schedule?

I have to have eight hours of sleep. I work much of the day and evening. I live where I work, and I like being able to integrate everyday life with my work. I may go down in the evening for several hours, depending on what's going on. Phone and internet, doing my work, working with assistants and, you know, eating or socializing — it's all kind of mixed together. I feel like I'm always working mentally, if not actually in the studio. I don't keep a schedule.

How many hours of creative work do you think you do in a day?

Seven, 10, maybe.

What's the first piece of art you ever made?

Oh, I can't remember. In elementary school I was drawing all the time. I recall doing a landscape by looking out the window for the first time, and I remember doing a papier-mâché mask, a picture of which was published in the local paper. I drew an architectural rendering in elementary school, and the teacher brought people in to look at it.

What's the worst studio you ever had?

The worst one? I had a studio, I mean, I used the living room of a summer house that had no heat. I was taking a year off after grad school to decide whether I was going to be an artist and said, "I'll only allow myself to do art and nothing else, so if you're not going to do art, you're not going to do anything." And a friend offered this empty old house for the winter. I put down a piece of linoleum and just worked there. The ceiling, floors and walls were all dark brown wood. Small antique windows, a ceiling bulb and a space heater. It was 20 feet from the ocean, which can be pretty grim in the dead of a New England winter.

Hsu's techy, dystopian vision also includes powder pinks, swimming pool aquas and taxi cab yellow — all on view in his collection of acrylics. He credits his understanding of color to an early teacher of his, the painter Maryann Harman. Credit:.Flora Hanitijo

What's the first work you ever sold? For how much?

A painting in high school, a landscape. I don't remember exactly what the price was — a few hundred dollars. I was painting from observation along the lines of the Impressionists, studying with the painter Maryann Harman, who taught me everything I know about color.

When you start a new piece, where do you begin?

My ideas for my work have always felt like steps in a long arc of an idea that is still being revealed through intuition. A new piece doesn't feel like a first step, but rather a step in an ongoing journey, where I am already in a context within the work, and am making the next step. Sometimes it has been difficult to stop at a given point and produce a body of work, enough for a show, when I am seeing the next step. And spending time on the last step feels frustrating and repetitive, like variations on a theme. A teacher once told me I jump too fast and need to get more out of each idea that emerges. I feel I finally have enough understanding of the work that I can retrieve ideas that emerged along the way and allow them to unfold more fully, more effectively, or recombine several in ways I hadn't imagined, thanks to the advance of technological tools available to artists. The steps, in a way, are already there. I just need to take them.

How do you know when you're done?

I don't feel there's anything more to do.

How many assistants do you have?

With Covid, one. Pre-Covid, between two and four.

Before the pandemic, Hsu was planning to hire more help. Lately, he and his sole studio assistant have been using these panels to test a new process for printing. Credit:.Flora Hanitijo

Have you assisted other artists before? If so, whom?

No.

What music do you play when you're making art?

Generally, techno. I like a lot of the techno coming from — well, early on it was Germany, where a lot of musicians from around the world were working.

When did you first feel comfortable saying you're a professional artist?

When I moved to New York, after grad school, I called myself an artist. The term "professional" never meant much to me.

Is there a meal you eat on repeat when you're working?

I don't eat in the studio.

Are you bingeing on any shows right now?

I don't watch TV. There are some shows I would like to binge on but don't allow myself the time. I like film, where I can experience it in one sitting. And I'm a news addict, which is one of the big issues I'm wrestling with.

What's the weirdest object in your studio?

The skin of a stingray. It's very tough, and there's almost like an eye right in the middle that's part of the pattern of the skin. It looks like something out of sci-fi. At some point, I was looking for different kinds of skins. I've always been fascinated by how color and pattern manifest in nature and on living creatures.

How often do you talk to other artists?

Well, at this point, my assistants are generally artists, often younger. Occasionally I talk to artist friends closer to my generation.

What do you do when you're procrastinating?

I spend too much time following the news and commentary on the web. I sometimes think I may not be entirely procrastinating. What I feel is an addiction might not be entirely about my own impulses. I am thinking about the reality described in the recent documentary "The Social Dilemma" (2020).

Hsu barely touches oil paint these days — a degree in architecture at MIT and an interest in industrial design pulled him away from painting and toward sculpture — but the medium defined his early study of conventional landscape painting.Credit: Flora Hanitijo

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What's the last thing that made you cry?

I can't remember the specifics but some things on the news last year made me cry.

What do you usually wear when you work?

Old clothes.

If you have windows, what do they look out on?

I don't have windows in the studio. There are only skylights, and I look at the sky.

What do you bulk buy with most frequency?

I order a lot of water. Five-gallon bottles of water. I lived through 9/11 downtown when we had to carry water up seven flights of stairs.

What embarrasses you?

Responses I often get when I'm asked my age.

Do you exercise?

Yes. I do martial arts, specifically action meditation and resistance training.

What are you reading?

"The Futurica Trilogy" by Alexander Bard and Jan Söderqvist. Also, "Critique of Black Reason" (2013) by Achille Mbembe.

What's your favorite artwork (by someone else)?

There are so many. One? Rosemarie Trockel's steel sofa with the plastic sheet on it ["Copy Me" (2013)]. A performance of Pope.L in which he buried himself vertically except for his head ["Sweet Desire a.k.a. Burial Piece" (1996)], which I witnessed; I will never forget it. Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's "Can't Help Myself" (2016), shown recently at the Guggenheim. William Kentridge's early animations. Early Bakshaish rugs.

sculpture

Tishan Hsu, installation view with (foreground) Autopsy, 1988, plywood, ceramic tile, acrylic, vinyl cement compound, stainless steel, and rubber, 55 x 49 x 94 in.; and (background) Interface Wall 2.0 – NY, 2020, from *Interface Remix*, 2002–ongoing, inkjet on vinyl on sheetrock, dimensions variable. Photo: Kyle Knodell

Tishan Hsu

January 4, 2021 by Elaine A. King
Long Island City, New York
SculptureCenter

"Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit," on view at the SculptureCenter through January 25, 2021, makes a compelling and timely statement about our technologically driven age. Hsu trained as an architect in the 1970s at MIT, where the program emphasized a combination of traditional and late 20th-century approaches to building materials. During his studies, he became interested in film and video, which prompted him to question a society determined by media and information. These concerns led Hsu to invent a visual language capable of manifesting ideas about what he calls "a presence life."

Hsu's work is not a theater of science fiction but an interpretation of the present imbued with thoughts about the future. It is also a realization of his efforts to come to terms with a new biological and technical paradigm. Though his work is deeply rooted in questions of how technology affects us as human beings, there is no denying its debt to the dematerializing strategies of Minimalism and conceptualism. And yet his two- and three-dimensional objects transcend Modernist formal values to reveal the eerie eccentricity of life in a post-industrial age. Multiplicity rather than singularity is paramount: pared-down forms meld with eccentric, brightly colored rhomboids and ovoids, assorted illusionistic gashes, holes, and glazed, scratched black surfaces reminiscent of silent electronic screens. Intended to evoke many things, these divergent elements coexist within carefully calculated, unconventional constructions that blend the sculptural and the painterly through clashing textures, high-tech materials, and bombastic surfaces. The metaphorical layering is at times disturbing, yet its bewitching novelty demands further examination. Wood, metal, acrylic, rubber, and aluminum seem to offer material familiarity, but their unusual juxtaposition within strange color planes, protrusions, and haunting light dissolves any sense of comfort.

The SculptureCenter, with its cracked concrete floors, industrial-height ceilings, and steel beams, provides the perfect setting for Hsu's work. Rather than the polished milieu of the Hammer Art Museum, where the exhibition debuted last year, the SculptureCenter expresses the DIY, garage aesthetic of 1980s tech start-ups. Many of the key sculptures, wall reliefs, drawings, and media works in "Liquid Circuit" were produced between 1980 and 1988 and thus predate Wi-Fi, iPhones, Facebook, Google, Twitter, and Netflix; yet they demonstrate Hsu's acute prescience about how technology was quickly becoming an extension of the human body—a foresight he shared with Tony Oursler. Both artists anticipated rapid advances in the production and transmission of signals, emanations, images, and codes—electronic, magnetic, mimetic, virtual. When asked about showing this work during Covid-19, Hsu said, "It has been uncanny how the pandemic and the reliance on the Internet for remote 'presence' have crystallized what the work was always about: the embodiment of the technological."

Walking Gray (1980), a seminal work, twists a bizarre sculptural form into a functional bench. An organic oozing compound interrupts the linear tile surface, suggesting some type of meltdown. In *Holey Cow* (1986), a dwarfish form with bright yellow and black spots scattered over a flowing, contoured surface, an isolated geometric grid of tiles ruptures the implied rhythm. This discordant architectural reference raises questions about its presence while stabilizing the organic shape. Hsu often takes a small element like this and uses it as a primary focus in subsequent pieces. This becomes clear in *Ooze*, *Reflective Oooze*, and *Vertical Ooze* (all 1987), which all magnify and transform the tile grid in *Holey Cow* into a dominant structural presence.

Tishan Hsu, *Walking Gray,* 1980. Vinyl cement compound, porcelain ceramic tile, acrylic, wood, and steel, 31.5 x 60.75 x 35.5 in. Photo: Tom Warren, © Tishan Hsu, Courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

The wall construction *Liquid Circuit* (1987) consists of a large horizontal panel in vivid yellow with three chrome bars in the center, framed by two blue-black screens resembling ultrasound imagery. Its high-tech veneer asserts a commanding dignity in which the human and the mechanical collide. Other startling pieces include *Closed Circuit II* (1986), which eerily resembles an Instagram icon; *Squared Nude* (1984), evocative of an iPhone (first released in 2007); and *Outer Banks of Memory* (1984), in which wood, concrete, and Styrofoam recall unhealthy tissue observed under a microscope. Though these are wall-hung works, their unusual compositions depict deep, illusionistic space not unlike an electronic screen, imparting the impression that they are floating in space, perhaps portals to another reality.

The multi-sectional, freestanding *Autopsy* (1988), tiled in shades of rustic rose and brown, calls to mind operating rooms from old science-fiction and horror films. An enormous phantasmagoric inkjet print on PVC, *Interface Wall 2.0* – NY, was created for this show from Hsu's ongoing *Interface Remix*, which has been evolving for more than 17 years. As installed here, Interface Wall 2.0 – NY, with its skin-like surface punctuated with distorted compositions of lips, mouths, and eyes, supplies a perfect backdrop to Autopsy. Using a Lego board as a mold, Hsu made a cast with skin-toned urethane rubber: "Using the tools of Photoshop, [I] 'cloned' skin images between all of the nodules, producing an image of actual skin in a continuous surface filled with emerging nodules. For me, it was a conceptual image of bio-technology." The piece is both compelling and disturbing, with echoes of Dante's Inferno. It's a radical distillation of Hsu's earlier work, harkening back to the core of his focus on the consumption of the body by technology.

Folds of Oil (2005), a video spanning 21 minutes, is filled with ominous, animal twittering synchronized with the sound of human breathing through a ventilator. Set to images of an eerie landscape, this very personal work was made one year after Hsu had a kidney transplant. Though it provides insight into his understanding of the relation between body and machine, it also serves as a foundation for newer works that grapple with the climate crisis.

There is only one difficulty with this exhibition—curator Sohrab Mohebbi's claim that "Liquid Circuit' is the "New York–based artist's first museum survey exhibition in the United States." This is incorrect. A survey of Hsu's work, which I curated, was presented at the Carnegie Mellon Art Gallery in 1987. Nonetheless, a second survey of Hsu's exceptional work has been long overdue, and this show, which brings his output up to the present, introduces a new generation of viewers to a unique and visionary artist.

CULTURED

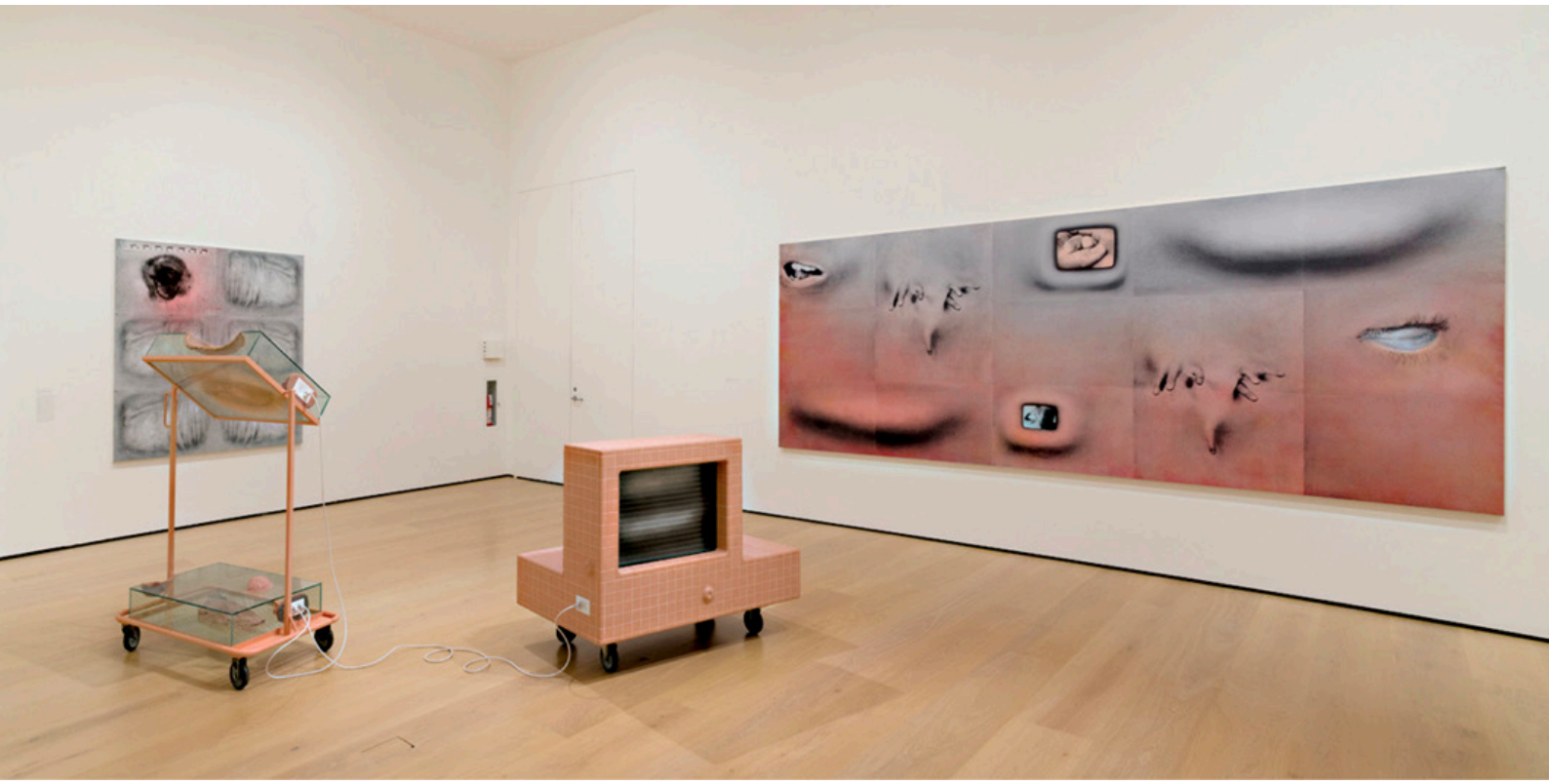
Though never an easy task, choosing the top five art shows for a year when no one went to see many art shows is just bizarre. But tradition calls. In addition to those exhibitions that squeaked in before covid hit and those that opened during the comparatively chill period of summer and early fall, we couldn't help but include some shows that went largely—or entirely—unseen in the flesh, and some clever efforts to send art out into the world through means other than in-person viewings.

Tishan Hsu's "Liquid Circuit" Hammer Museum and Sculpture Center

INSTALLATION VIEW, "LIQUID CIRCUIT," HAMMER MUSEUM.

Now everyone's favorite artist, Tishan Hsu languished for a few decades after an initial flourishing in mid-1980s New York. The revival can't merely be pinned to the fact that his wall-mounted pieces look like giant iPhones—though it doesn't hurt. The work is fascinating and fun, solid and deliquescent. His woozy sculptures and sculpture-painting hybrids capture a lot of current obsessions in a techno body-horror cartoon.

ARTFORUM



View of "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit," 2020, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Wall, from left: *It's Not the Bullet but the Hole 2*, 1991; *Fingerpainting*, 1994. Floor: *Virtual Flow*, 1990–2018. Photo: Jeff McLane.

MYRIAM BEN SALAH

MYRIAM BEN SALAH IS THE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF CURATOR OF THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY IN CHICAGO. SHE RECENTLY ORGANIZED (WITH LAUREN MACKLER AND IKECHUKWU ONYEWUENYI) MADE IN L.A. 2020: "A VERSION," THE FIFTH EDITION OF THE HAMMER MUSEUM'S BIENNIAL IN LOS ANGELES.

1

"SHAHRYAR NASHAT: FORCE LIFE" AND "ADAM LINDER: SHELF LIFE" (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK; CURATED BY STUART COMER) "Force Life/Shelf Life" was a provocative overlap of two exhibitions, a double meditation on the limits—in space, in time, in theory—of the body, one preferably without organs, one that flirts with technology. Nashat and Linder left me thinking about flesh, what comes before the body, "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography," as Hortense Spiller describes it. Flesh, for these artists, is fugitive. It acts outside a fixed reality. It resists—or rather, it escapes, runs the hell away from—ideology.

2

1

1

2

TISHAN HSU (HAMMER MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES; CURATED BY SOHRAB MOHEBBI AND ARAM MOSHAYEDI WITH NICHOLAS BARLOW) Usually, about once a year, I lose faith in contemporary art. Then I come across a practice that makes me start believing again. It happened to me with "Liquid Circuit," an overdue survey of Hsu's work that contended with a cyborgian trope: There is no alterity in the machine; in fact the machine is me, or part of me, a phantom limb of sorts. Through a formal and theoretical tour de force, Hsu bypasses the failures of language and representation to communicate the body's most quintessential feature: pain. His is an art of radical empathy.

Organized by SculptureCenter, New York.

1. (left) **Adam Linder, *Shelf Life*, 2020.** Rehearsal view, Museum of Modern Art, New York, January 31, 2020. Justin Kennedy and Leah Katz. Photo: Denis Doorly. (right) **View of "Shahryar Nashat: Force Life," 2020,** Museum of Modern Art, New York. From left: *Blood (what is authority)*, 2020; *Barre (when will you get rid of my body)*, 2020. Photo: Denis Doorly. 2. **View of "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit," 2020,** Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Wall, from left: *It's Not the Bullet but the Hole 2*, 1991; *Fingerpainting*, 1994. Floor: *Virtual Flow*, 1990–2018. Photo: Jeff McLane. 4. **Nina Beier, *Total Loss*, 2020,** marble lions, milk, performance. Installation view, Andrejsala, Riga, Latvia. Photo: Andrejs Strokins. 5. **Orian Barki and Meriem Bennani, *2 Lizards: Episode 1*, 2020,** HD video, color, sound, 1 minute 26 seconds.

4

SECOND RIGA INTERNATIONAL BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART: "AND SUDDENLY IT ALL BLOSSOMS" (CURATED BY REBECCA LAMARCHE-VADEL) Can there be art without exhibition making? Hans Ulrich Obrist might lose it over this interrogation. Let me rephrase: How is art best served? When Lamarche-Vadel conceived of an exhibition that posited the end of the world, she did not anticipate that the apocalypse would actually delay, alter, and reframe her debut as the curator of the Riga Biennial. What if the exhibition became a movie set? Would the artworks be props? Would the performers be actors? Together with Latvian film director Dāvis Sīmanis, she's producing a feature-length film not *on* the show but, for most intents and purposes, *as* the show.

5

Art in America

Tishan Hsu, *Liquid Circuit*, 1987, acrylic, vinyl cement compound, alkyd, oil, aluminum on wood, 90 by 143 by 9 inches; at SculptureCenter.
PHOTO KYLE KNODELL

In the early 1980s, the painter, sculptor, and all-around technological savant Tishan Hsu landed a night job as a "word processor" at a Wall Street law firm. Encountering early computers before they entered widespread use, Hsu spent his shifts engrossed in a now mundane task: staring at a screen. Entranced by the symbiosis between user and machine, Hsu has continued to probe the interstices between the virtual and the physical over the past four decades, blending elements of architecture, medicine, and computer processing into inimitable hybrid objects. Following a debut at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in January, "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit," his first museum survey, was scheduled to arrive at SculptureCenter in New York in May. Delayed due to the pandemic, the exhibition opened in September in an interlinked, computer-dependent world Hsu prophesied. Encompassing paintings, sculptures, drawings, and videos, the show traces an arc from the dawn of personal computing to the advent of social media.

Born in Boston to Chinese immigrants, Hsu studied architecture at MIT before moving to New York in 1979. Briefly a fixture of the downtown art scene, exhibiting at the Pat Hearn and Leo Castelli galleries, he went on to become one of the first artists to experiment with Photoshop and digital manipulation, incorporating newfound computational techniques into analog art forms.

Hsu's first exploratory paintings are curious creations, straddling the border between two and three dimensions. *Couple* (1983) and *Squared Nude* (1984), vertical wooden panels composed of paint and mixed mediums, evoke Futurism reinvented for the digital age; instead of capturing a flurry of movement made newly visible by photography, they render human cells and orifices as if pixelated on a staticky screen. To create that effect, however, Hsu scratched and etched into his wooden surfaces. Later paintings continued to grapple with the "space" of a screen; to capture both material flatness and virtual depth, Hsu often thrust three-dimensional objects violently through the picture plane. In *Outer Banks of Memory* (1984), a miniature "screen" rests jauntily against a larger canvas; *Fingerpainting* (1994), a silkscreen print, juxtaposes Renaissance-esque depictions of outstretched hands with screen-mediated body parts. Despite his interests in technology, Hsu never relinquished a manual sensuousness. (Indeed, some of the main delights of the show are his drawings and smaller studies; delicate, finely lined, and whimsically colored, they are frequently jotted down on whatever Hsu had at hand—a scrap of paper, legal letterhead, an envelope.)

View of the exhibition "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit" at SculptureCenter.
PHOTO KYLE KNODELL

View of the exhibition "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit" at SculptureCenter. PHOTO KYLE KNODELL

Hsu's dazzling sculptural installations, composed of cellular tiles, exude something humanoid in their fragility, with their knobby bumps, growths, and cancerous protrusions, yet appear simultaneously pastoral, given their likeness to landscapes with hills, gorges, and valleys. In *Virtual Flow* (1990—2018), plugs, outlets, and wheels protrude from an eerily corporeal, fleshy mass. A wonderful series of aquatint structures—*Ooze* (1987), *Vertical Ooze* (1987), and *Reflexive Ooze* (1987)—resemble swimming pools in their use of lacquered, ceramic tiles, recalling the domestic simulation of nature. Their rounded edges and rippling surfaces only further the uncanny recognition of something commonplace made novel.

Hsu's works are so unique that it is difficult to imagine corresponding movements. Some pieces reveal the influence of Minimalism—Donald Judd's stacked aluminum boxes, Carl Andre's floor grids of metal or stone—yet Hsu's insistent bodily references evade those artists' impersonal abstraction. Hsu also worked in a different way than his contemporaries in the Pictures Generation. Whereas artists like Richard Prince, Laurie Simmons, and Cindy Sherman used photography to appropriate and critique the imagery of mass media, Hsu remained fixated on the infrastructure of technology. (His closest peer is probably Nam June Paik, less for his video works than for his towers of television monitors.) There are no pop culture references in the exhibition, unless we count one 1986 painting with an eerie resemblance to the Instagram logo, or, curiously, a Xerox copy of Dr. Hibbert from "The Simpsons." Not gaining traction amid the Neo-Geo and Conceptual movements, Hsu decamped to Cologne in 1988; after returning to the United States two years later, he taught at Sarah Lawrence College until 2019.

In hindsight, Hsu's emphasis on the systems as well as the products of the information age appears remarkably prescient, as we come to realize how Silicon Valley has reshaped both the means and the content of our consumption. At the same time, however, Hsu's works seem to accommodate the burgeoning tech industry's ideal of a disembodied—deracialized, degendered—subject. The latest piece included in the show, *Folds of Oil* (2005), a video with a beeping, breathing soundtrack, implies an evolution of Hsu's practice into newer forms of technology, focusing on immersive, multimedia installations. Yet this inclusion also belies a more personal, retrospective direction.

Between 2013 and 2016, Hsu maintained a studio in Shanghai; in 2019, he exhibited his work from that studio in Hong Kong. (Unfortunately, there was not enough time to include any of it at SculptureCenter.) Repurposing photographs depicting family members during the Cultural Revolution, Hsu scanned, distorted, and reprinted the images onto aluminum panels adorned with silicone forms, suggesting that history can operate much like technology in embellishing and supplanting one's memories. No longer an outlier in an art world that today includes artists like Paul Chan, Hito Steyerl, and Ian Cheng, Hsu presents works that bear little trace of "Asian futurism"—to borrow the critic Dawn Chan's term for a techno-Orientalism that situates Asian agency solely in the future—but reflect instead the globally ubiquitous experience of the human subject being rendered into data points to be collected and processed. In the light of his "Shanghai Project," we can recognize Hsu's lifelong obsession with absence and embodiment as a reaction to the past as much as to the future, and his collected output as an act of reclamation.

View of the exhibition "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit" at SculptureCenter. PHOTO KYLE KNODELL

The New York Times

5 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Cecily Brown's new paintings, Sam Gilliam's sculptures and monochromes, Gideon Appah's otherworldly vistas, Tishan Hsu's first museum survey and works from the Purvis Young trove.

Tishan Hsu

Through Jan. 25. Sculpture Center, 44-19 Purves Street, Queens; 718-361-1750; sculpture-center.org.

Installation view of "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit," an exhibition of about 30 sculptures, wall reliefs and other works that the artist made from 1980 to 2005.Credit...Tishan Hsu and Sculpture Center; Kyle Knodell

"Consciousness is constantly mutating, moving from one state to another, and possibly back again," the New York-based artist Tishan Hsu wrote in a catalog accompanying his exhibition at the Pat Hearn Gallery in 1986. How to represent these mutations in artistic form? Mr. Hsu did that with strange, gorgeous precision in about 30 sculptures, wall reliefs, drawings and other works made from 1980 to 2005 that you can see in "Liquid Circuit" at the Sculpture Center, the artist's first museum survey exhibition.

Mr. Hsu trained as an architect at M.I.T., but he was also interested in artificial intelligence. The builder's and technologist's approach is apparent in "Liquid Circuit" (1987), an electric yellow wall relief with industrial handles that has waving lines painted in a dark field suggesting a spooky digital screen. "Vertical Ooze" (1987) is a powder-blue object that straddles the divide between biomorphic sculpture and a tiled industrial space or a science-fiction film set.

Mr. Hsu's wall reliefs recall elements of Minimalism and '80s Neo-Geo, like Ashley Bickerton's sculptures. (Mr. Bickerton extended the concerns of Pop Art, however, by including product logos and references.) Mr. Hsu's work is subtler, with flickers of surrealism, psychedelia and cybernetics. Mostly, however, they feel fresh and wildly prescient, predicting perfectly how consciousness has mutated even further in a digital and biotech age.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

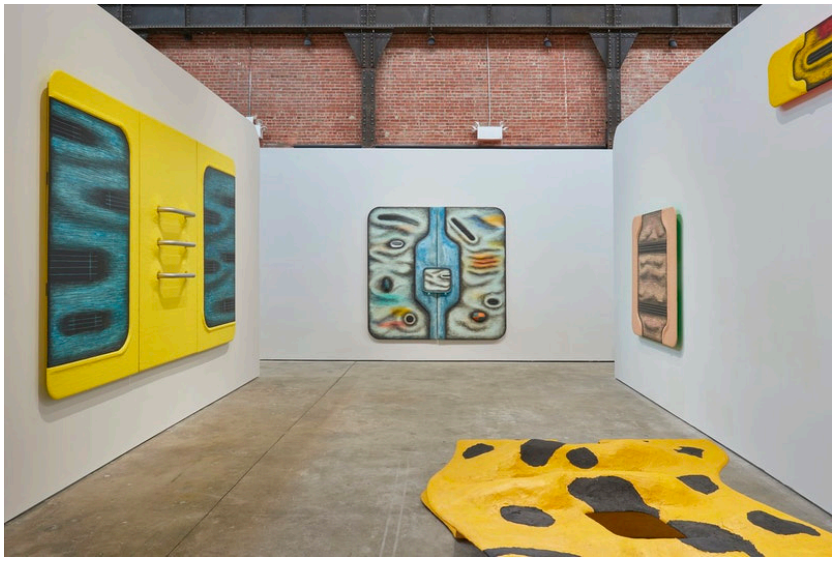
Tishan Hsu: *Liquid Circuit*

Installation view: Tishan Hsu: *Liquid Circuit*, SculptureCenter, New York, 2020. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

For the last four decades, Tishan Hsu has worked across sculpture, video, painting, and photography to consider the question: "How do we embody technology?" Hsu was born to Chinese parents in Boston, trained as an architect at MIT, and active in the NY art scene in the 1980s where he worked with gallerists like Leo Castelli and Pat Hearn. Hsu's work was prescient then, and still feels prescient now, although the context he found himself in during the '80s was unable to synthesize disparate aspects of his work: its relation to Minimalism, the ongoing gentrification of New York, and his Asian-American identity. Hsu's material references draw from sculptors like Robert Gober and Ashley Bickerton, but his imbrication of body and media feels like a conceptual precursor to contemporary art/tech practices like Sondra Perry and Juliana Huxtable, for whom any claims to an indivisibility between body and media are always laced with questions of race and gender. This conversation is part of the future that Hsu's works anticipated.

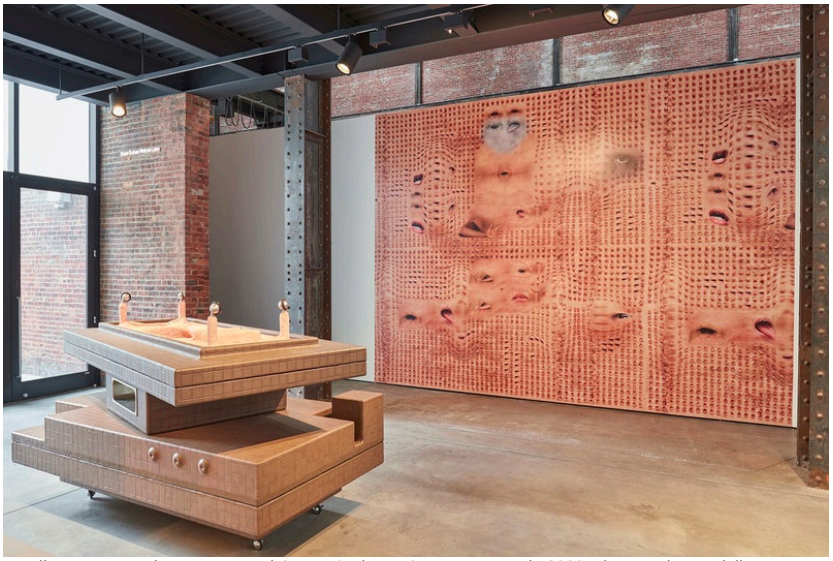
Encountering the work in 2020, it seems to have accrued new references over the years—the rounded edges of *Closed Circuit II* (1986) look like the Instagram logo, *Squared Nude* (1985) resembles an iPhone, the "diseased" surfaces of *Outer Banks of Memory II* (1984) make one wary in a pandemic. These were not the initial references in his work, but feel uncannily relevant now. Hsu's work combines traditional materials like paint, encaustic, and wax with more "technological" surfaces like stainless steel, glass, and TV screens to draw up rich material dramas that illustrate how our relationship to technology is at once symbiotic and parasitic.

Virtual Flow (1990–2018), a two-part sculpture featuring a squat, tiled TV set seemingly "plugged in" to a glass tray table sets up this dichotomy. Virtual Flow looks like a millennial set piece gone wrong: pastel pink and vaporwave grids are punctuated with sores and welts, sitting on wheels as if to be carried elsewhere. A goopy, waxy substance approximating skin grafts patches up sections of the glass. The sculptures are connected by cords that mutually draw energy from the outlets set in both the "human" and the "non-human" components of the sculptures. It is unclear who is drawing power from whom.



Installation view: Tishan Hsu: *Liquid Circuit*, SculptureCenter, New York, 2020. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

Hsu's surfaces recall both the slick, retro-feeling grids of '80s futurama (like vaporwave meets the Jetsons) but also degraded, or sickly, human flesh. In *Cellular Automata 2* (1989), nine quadrants show a range of isolated parts: two holes that look like round nostrils, perhaps, a mouth, an eye, and then several ambiguous folds of tissue. The openings are reminiscent of wounds, but the smooth edges around the holes suggest that they've healed, or that they were engineered in some way. Occasionally, the holes are the result of violence. *It's Not the Bullet but the Hole 2* (1991), is a silkscreen black-and-white image split into six quadrants, the top left of which appears to be a photograph of a bullet wound, complete with a small measuring tape. A red blush effect stands in for blood or inflammation, hinting at the violence of the interface between humans and technology. The remaining five quadrants have fleshy, rectangular protrusions with wrinkles and folds that look like skin.



Installation view: Tishan Hsu: *Liquid Circuit*, SculptureCenter, New York, 2020. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

Other holes look more like computer parts. In *Manic Panic* (1987), two rectangular panels with oblong protuberances have various orifices with lines in front of them that make them look like grates, or the ventilation sections of computers, or in *Liquid Circuit* (1987), a large panel in Thunderbird yellow, a set of chrome ladders resemble ribs flanked by ventilator grates. In Hsu's work, the collision of machinic and human bodies is not always harmonious.

Installation view: Tishan Hsu: *Liquid Circuit*, SculptureCenter, New York, 2020. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

And what sort of bodies do Hsu's sculptures refer to? In what way are they raced, gendered, or abled, if at all? The sculptures in this show carry no recognizable markers of race or ethnicity, but they do carry a sense of difference that is hard to categorize. This difference has at times been ascribed to his Asian-American identity, but this feels like a red herring: Hsu only recently, in 2013, started making work that explicitly addresses his Chinese heritage. Rather, the difference in Hsu's work feels more ambiguous. "In a way, I had to create a different body in the world," Hsu said in a 2020 interview, "maybe I was just projecting all of this onto new technology: we'll have a different body." Hsu's "different body" could refer to many different things: his experience as an Asian-American person, with technology, or a shifting relationship to the natural world. The only video work in the show provides a hint at this. In *Folds of Oil* (2005), warped landscapes are synchronized to animal sounds. This is one of the only two works that references animals explicitly—*Holey Cow* (1986), a folded yellow cow skin, is the other one. Framing the human body's relationship to technology in relation to the natural world feels akin to contemporary experiments in identity like works by Jes Fan and Tiffany Jaeyeon Shin, for whom a critical engagement with biology is an escape route from the gridlock of identity politics. Through this lens, the difference of Hsu's work explores an internal sense of alienation, maybe the cosmologies of bacteria, fungi, and other organisms that constitute the natural "technologies" of the human body.

HYPERALLERGIC

Sculptural Paintings That Channel the Static Soup of Television

In Tishan Hsu's work, the canvas becomes a television, a platform of multiple channels, where what channel to tune into is the viewer's choice.

Tishan Hsu, "Liquid Circuit" (1987), acrylic, vinyl cement compound, alkyd, oil, aluminum on wood, 90 x 143 x 9 inches (all images courtesy SculptureCenter)

In 1965 Nam June Paik proclaimed, "The cathode-ray tube will replace the canvas." To some extent Paik's observation rings true, though the art historical pendulum swings both ways; in the 70s and 80s, television became so ubiquitous that it inspired some artists to strive towards materiality. Structuralist filmmakers experimented with celluloid. The Pictures Generation artists appropriated images from the screen, calling attention to the ideology concealed in images from everyday life. The early work of Tishan Hsu continued this fascination with the materiality of media, exploring how the two-dimensional screen could exist in three-dimensions.

Tishan Hsu, "R.E.M." (1986), acrylic, alkyd, vinyl cement compound on wood, 60 x 60 x 4 inches

His early paintings — wall reliefs may be a better term — on display at SculptureCenter in Long Island City, evoke the rounded squares of vintage television consoles. Using Styrofoam and cement, he builds up a topographic moon-like terrain onto the surface of his panels, later flooding it with either neon or flesh-tone acrylic paint, only to then scratch the paint away to reveal the stratum below. The scratches upon the rounded canvas recall white noise on a television screen; static made tangible. Some of these works, like "R.E.M" from 1986, take a more sculptural form, reminiscent of a flattened Barbara Hepworth. At other times, works like "Liquid Circuit," from a year later, incorporate ready-made elements such as stainless-steel handles, calling to mind Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines*.

In *What Do Pictures Want?*, W.J.T. Mitchell claims a medium is "an in-between or go-between space or pathway that connects two things, a sender to a receiver, an artist to a beholder." In many ways, Mitchell is describing an interface, a point in which any two systems meet. Hsu's inter-media work complicates this one-to-one interface relationship between both technological objects and human, human and art objects. By combining the language of sculpture, painting, and technology, Hsu transforms the media interface into a platform or a circuit, where multiple multiple systems of meaning operate simultaneously.

Tishan Hsu, "Portrait" (1982), oil stick, enamel, acrylic, vinyl cement compound on wood, 57 × 87 × 6 inches

In Hsu's representation of a television screen, viewers encounter neither a sculpture fully in the round, nor a painted screen depicting a human subject. Nevertheless, his undulating reliefs evoke the curves of the human body, and the tv-like shape of the canvases gesture to embodied rituals like sitting in front of the tv. In some cases, like in "Portrait" (1982), he even depicts facial features floating unmoored in the static soup of his scratched reliefs.

For Hsu television did not replace the canvas. In his work, the canvas becomes a television, a platform of multiple channels, where what channel to tune into is the viewer's choice.

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit continues through January 25, 2021 at SculptureCenter (44–19 Purves Street, Long Island City, Queens). The exhibition is curated by Sohrab Mohebbi, with Kyle Dancewicz.

SculptureCenter hosts an overview of the artist's compelling, unnerving work.

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit, installation view. Image courtesy SculptureCenter. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Pictured, left to right: Couple, 1983, and Portrait, 1982.

It is perhaps unfashionable to invoke Caravaggio. Yet I have become fixated on his *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601–02). That finger in that wound. The superlative work of Tishan Hsu conjures something like this: dark orifices and glaring eyes, wet cavities and lumpy protrusions—though in Hsu's work, as in much of technologically driven contemporary life, the establishment of veracity by the senses and the complete banishment of doubt both feel like possibilities long foreclosed.

Organized by SculptureCenter, and first on view at Los Angeles's Hammer Museum, *Liquid Circuit* is the New York–based artist's first major exhibition in the United States. This crisp overview of his practice—featuring forty-three works made from 1980 to 2005, including drawings and experiments in video—is a sign of the renewed interest in Hsu's work. Hsu was far from unknown when these works were made—many debuted at major galleries like Leo Castelli and Pat Hearn—but they were strangely timed, out of step with their surrounds. As Castelli warned Hsu, they "needed a context" in which they would make sense. But the extant context was, instead, the postmodernism heralded by Hsu's 1980s East Village milieu. Often lassoed by the slightly misleading term "neo-geo," many artists were then presenting lush, bright geometries, dizzyingly repetitive patterns, and winking pastiches of corporate decor. Paging Dr. Baudrillard. Hsu's work was a world apart: it does not frolic in the proliferation of pixels nor in the indiscernibility of copies for which '80s postmodernism is best known, but rather calls forth the ever-tightening tether between body and interface so concerning today. Unbearably prescient in the early '80s, his work can perhaps only now be readily understood.

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit, installation view. Image courtesy SculptureCenter. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Pictured, left to right: Virtual Flow, 1990–2018, and Manic Panic, 1987.

Indeed, today's vantage gives one the ineluctable sense of Hsu as a premonitory model rescued from the past. The context Castelli said Hsu required would only come much later—Hsu's closest "peers" are perhaps found in a generation of artists working now: the plaiting of wry, surreal weirdness, technological savvy, and body horror in works by Kelly Akashi, Julia Phillips, Jesse Darling, Olga Balema, Elaine Cameron-Weir, Hanna Levy, and Kevin Beasley, to name too many, but also only a few. That Hsu's reception throws time askance seems appropriate to his subject matter: the data centers, screens, and medical devices to which his works can allude are themselves means of storage and transmission—after all, what is a computer if not a kind of time machine?

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit, installation view. Image courtesy SculptureCenter. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Pictured, foreground: Ooze, 1987.

Tishan Hsu, *Liquid Circuit*, 1987 (installation view). Acrylic, vinyl cement compound, alkyd, oil, aluminum on wood, 90 × 143 × 9 inches. Image courtesy SculptureCenter. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

Hsu's works comprise two major groups: quadrilateral wall-mounted "screen" works, edges rounded and soft, mostly done in industrial materials on wood panels, as in Manic Panic (1987), the twin teal and wavy-striped panels of which nearly kiss in their jutting centers; and sculptural floor works, at once conjuring medical and other institutional spaces, often incorporating ceramic tiles. Consider Ooze (1987), a gridded, architectural maquette that evokes a pool or arena to which it does not permit entry. Semblances of a floor, partial walls, and ledges connote sequestration and physical containment, while the object's edges, undulating and slicked over in urethane, suggest an unstable entity, seeping ominously outward. Tiles are partial readymades that invite, rather than thwart composition: their colors and sizes are preordained by the gods of industry, yet they are also modular "pieces," workably systematic. The interest in modularity and segmentation that drives Hsu's use of tile also often manifests as wood panels, which hug or approach one another in duos or trios. Their arrangements are like pieces fitting together as in a jigsaw puzzle, circuit board, or the articulation of a physiological joint: every penetration met by snug encapsulation.

Hsu's planar surfaces are held aloft by smaller, sharply rectangular supports that have them lurch and float into the gallery, or lift eerily off the floor, as if uncontained by gravity. Some of these mostly hidden wood supports are left raw; in others, Hsu paints their edges in such that the wall behind or ground beneath them seems aglow with color. This visual effect—startling in person—is nearly imperceptible in a jpeg (and perhaps as a consequence is infrequently mentioned in the literature). In Liquid Circuit (1987), three panels draw focus to a center furnished with metal grab bars. Behind them, the supports' sides are coated in a highlighter yellow paired to its striking front. Plasma (1986), also yellow, is mounted high like a blinking sentinel and backed by cadmium red. Beaming like a mutant HAL 9000, it summons the increasing role of surveillance and capture motoring much technological advance today.

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit, installation view. Image courtesy SculptureCenter. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Pictured, left to right: *Plasma*, 1986, and *Holey Cow*, 1986.

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit, installation view. Image courtesy SculptureCenter. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Pictured, foreground: *Virtual Flow*, 1990–2018.

At SculptureCenter, the industrial-lite architecture of which suits the work, the partition walls' corners are subtly rounded, hearkening to Hsu's preferred shape. I can't help but think, admittedly ungenerously, of Michael Fried's confession that besides revulsion, minimalist sculpture invoked in him a disquieting sense of something or someone in a dark room—a hulking form, waiting to pounce. Hsu takes that feeling and cranks up the dial.

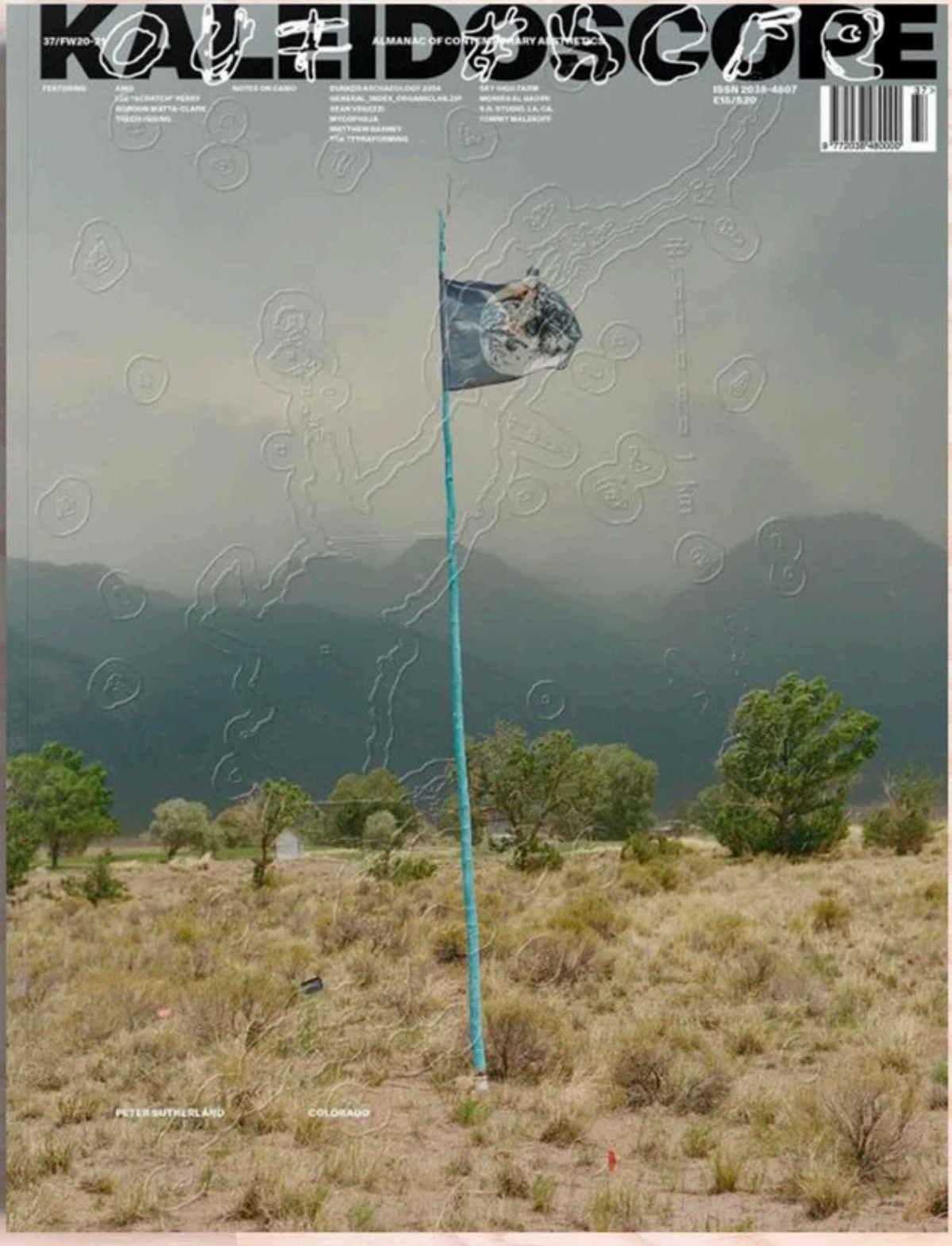
Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit, installation view. Image courtesy SculptureCenter. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Pictured, foreground: *Heading Through*, 1984.

For me, these works are by turns compelling and pleasantly queasy-making, but not without a welcome sense of humor, as in their ba-dum titles such as Holey Cow (1986), a drippy, wide bench in bright yellow shot through with apertures and Holstein-black splotches alike. In another macabre joke, Heading Through, of 1984, four welded steel legs support a tiled carapace, parallel to the floor; divots in the planar surface suggest orifices as much as VCR or ATM slots. The creature figured is as if Gregor Samsa were filtered through the lenses of David Cronenberg and, with its pastel aquamarine tiles, Wes Anderson. The humanoid face thrusts forward, like a heraldic ship's figurehead, but also like Rodin's wretched figures, which can seem to be writhing out of their abstracted bronze grounds. This sense of physiological imbrication with technological device is similarly present in Virtual Flow (1990–2018). Here, we see a low-slung monitor connected by outlet, plug, and cord to a futuristic medical cart (procedural use unclear), on which a set of vitrines encases fleshy silicone agglutinates.

Hsu has long eschewed articulations of his work through that choking diaphane called "identity." This is true even in a recent project that draws from family photo albums found in Shanghai, a place he did not know in his youth, but where he has recently spent a few years living and working in the wake of his mother's death. When Hsu found the albums, many images were missing—a removal attributed to the Red Guards. In the resulting works, he elides these representations still further: warping and eroding them, covering faces with cells in the indelible green of early digital screens' phosphor type. These most recent endeavors are not represented in Liquid Circuit, but their emergence perhaps elucidates how, for the last forty years, Hsu's interest has not been in the self, nor the individual's subsumption into technology, but rather in a larger political economy of visual culture, the digital forms of which are never—despite loud claims to the contrary—truly immaterial. From vast server farms to cobalt mining in the Congo to the manufacturing of chip boards and precision plastics in places like Malaysia and Shenzhen, the smooth interfaces of our digital lives are made possible by environmental degradation and mass immiseration at the hands of both corporate evil and our own complicity. It's a wound so big you don't have to stick your finger in it to believe.

Lola Kramer, Tishan Hsu Liquid Circuit, *KALEIDOSCOPE*, Issue 37 Fall/Winter 2020-21

KALEIDOSCOPE



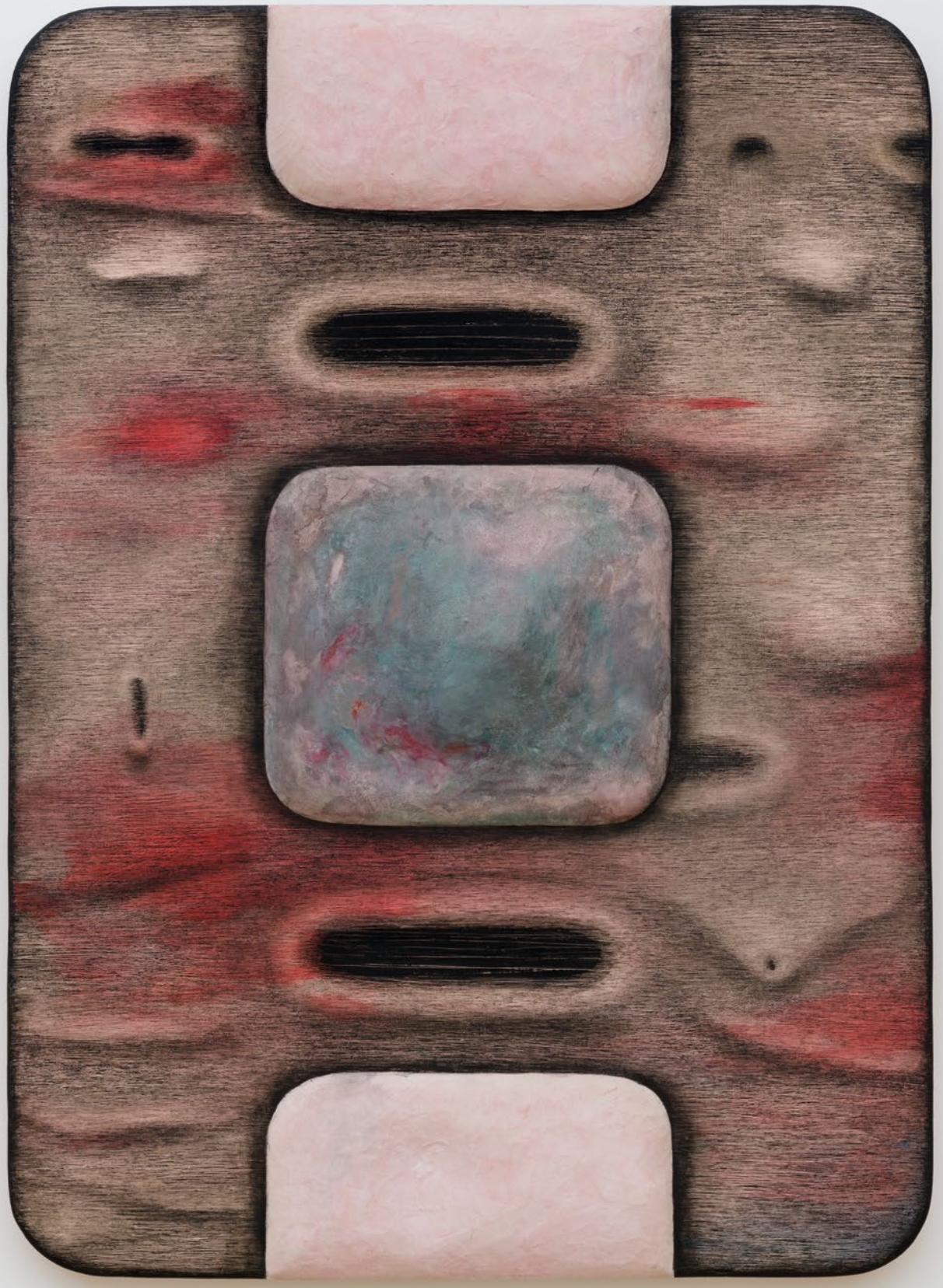
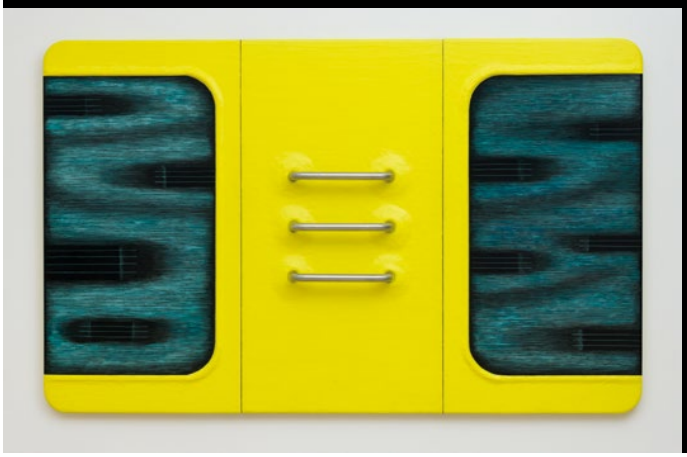


Image courtesy of the artist and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Sculpture Center, New York.



TISHAN HSU LIQUID CIRCUIT

Words by Lola Kramer

On view through 25 January 2021 at Sculpture Center, New York, "Liquid Circuits" is the first museum survey exhibition in the USA of artist Tishan Hsu (American, b. 1951, lives and works in New York) bringing together key works from 1980 to 2005.

To explore the influence of technology on the human condition, turn to Tishan Hsu. The New York-based artist has created work about the alienating relationship between technology and the human experience for nearly forty years. His first museum survey in the United States, "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit", has finally arrived at Sculpture Center, a bi-coastal event that follows its initial debut at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. Curated by Sohrab Mohebbi with Kyle Dankewicz, the exhibition assembles significant works from 1980 to 2005. It tells the story of an artist's capacity to apprehend momentous changes and speaks to the notion that an artwork might not be meant for the time it was made. Although his radical paintings and sculptures captured the attention of the downtown East Village art scene of the '80s, Hsu's work has been largely overlooked by audiences until now. Without much market success through his exhibitions at galleries like Pat Hearn and Leo Castelli, Hsu ultimately withdrew from the art world to dedicate himself to teaching, echoing Duchamp's 1961 prophecy that "the artists of the future will go underground."

After completing the Environmental Design and Architecture program at M.I.T., Hsu found a position at an architectural firm. However, he quickly knew that working a conventional 9 to 5 would never suit him. In a recent conversation with Hammer curator Aram Moshayedi, the artist recalls that he "started having fantasies about walking out of the office without telling anyone where [he] was going." Hsu decided that he would be an artist and that he needed to do this in New York—but he was also a realist, and understood that he couldn't rely solely on his artistic practice to pay the bills. During the late 1970s, the unavoidable role of technology in the workplace began to come into view. There was a new demand for this kind of work. Hsu learned to type and found himself a night job doing word processing at a blue-chip Wall Street law firm. A stealthy infiltration of the screen began to find its way into his work. Even before computers were widely available, Hsu understood that to be a body in the future is to be a body with a device. In *Cell* (1987), a large-scale rectangular wall-relief composed of four painted panels with sculptural forms resembling ceiling light fixtures attached, our digital divide is embodied both three-dimensionally and pictorially. Behind these floating appendages is a finely scratched, painted surface of wood, an illusionistic technique Hsu uses throughout the work to convey screen static. Organically shaped holes of black space betray the void behind the ominous picture plane of the screen. What appears are red glowing lines that are reminiscent of a music sheet before any notes have been written.

Wall-hanging works like *Cell* simulate the sense of the technological without being technological. While Hsu's use of static mediums like painting and sculpture may have appeared counterintuitive, they were not. He was not attempting to rewire or reconfigure television sets as Nam June Paik had in his 1987 work *Li Tai Po*; nor was he merging with the flow of media through video works as Gretchen Bender had done. Instead, he was transmitting the feeling of one medium through another. This is precisely what one feels when encountering the cold, sterile environment of *Virtual Flow* (1990–2018), a two-part modular pink tiled sculpture with a glowing screen on wheels attached to an incubator-like machine with biological forms growing inside of it. The work recalls the unlikelihood of Richard Brautigan's 1967 poem "Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace," in which the machines of the future have freed people from the oppressions of labor (a fate which may or may not come to fruition any time soon). The work is yet another example of Hsu's ability to project into the future. Even today, the fields of healthcare have become "virtual." The technological shift is still underway, furtively transforming our lives from its fundamental elements and its bodies. Being "plugged in" is a way of life, and Tishan Hsu's work feels more urgent than ever.

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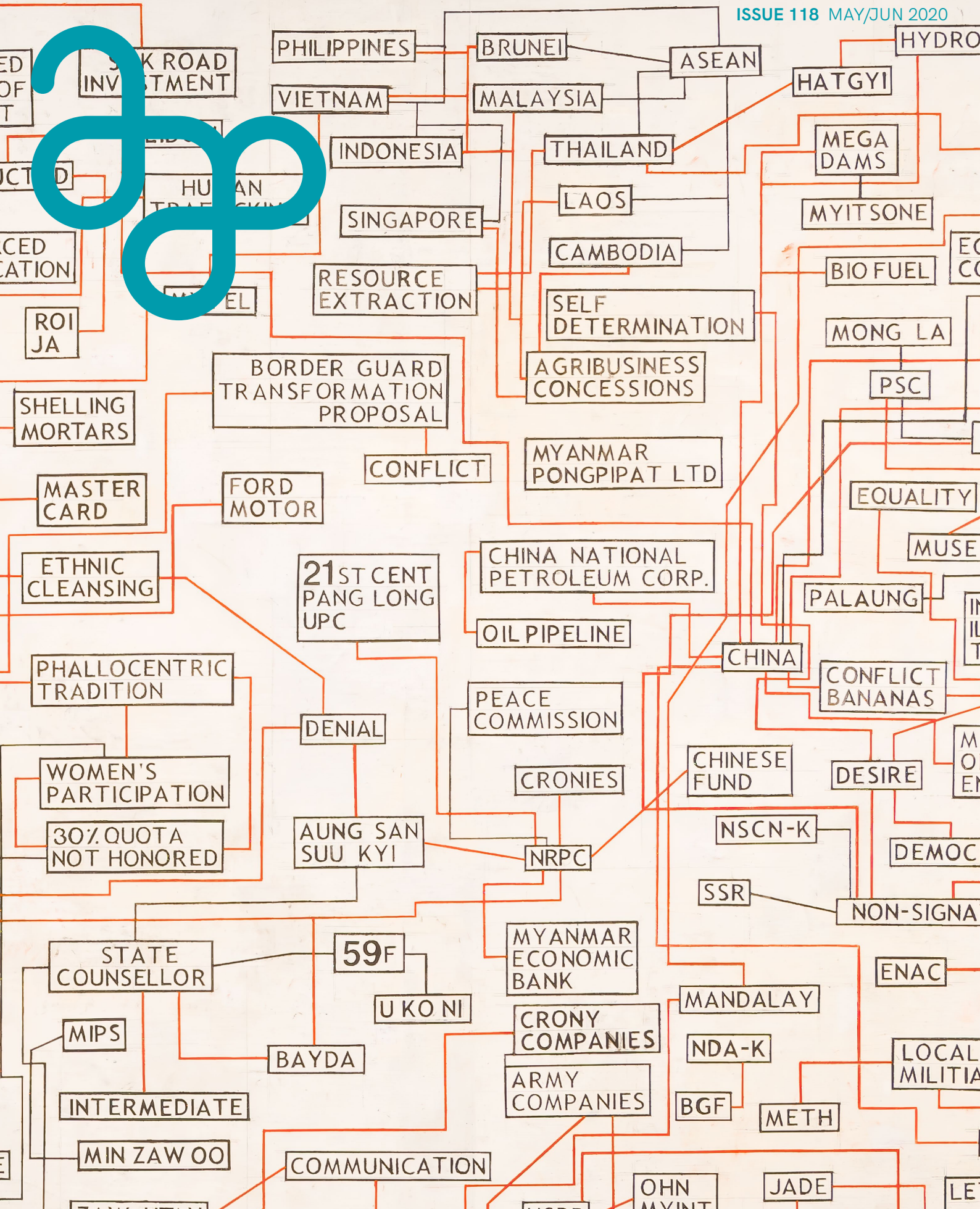
ISSUE 118 MAY/JUN 2020



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Tishan Hsu
Liquid Circuit

Contemporary art frequently expresses the zeitgeist, with artists taking on the role of truth-teller or even diviner. Chinese-American artist Tishan Hsu began making work that approximated present-day screen culture back in the 1980s—decades before smartphones became commonplace. His uncanny clairvoyance in picturing our current technological intertwinement was so avant-garde at the time that audiences and the art market were simply baffled by his acrylic and wood wall sculptures and expansive tiled installations. As a result, Hsu continued to work in relative obscurity in the ensuing decades. His first institutional survey, "Liquid Circuit," organized by SculptureCenter in New York, debuted in January at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. With pieces from the '80s to the new millennium, the show introduced a new generation of viewers to Hsu's prescient work.

Hanging high on the wall and evoking the all-seeing Dr. TJ Eckleburg billboard in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Hsu's *Portrait* (1982) employs a Magritte-like surrealism to picture the jumbled components of a face and body within a black contoured frame like that of an iPad—a visually apt but anachronistic comparison, since Hsu created this work 28 years before the device's invention. Floating eyes and orifices, rendered in sketchy, fuzzy lines meant to mimic television static, gape at the viewer amid pink, fleshy, vinyl blobs. In its dissolution of the human form into the technological and vice versa, *Portrait* reminds us that while technology surveils us at every turn, we have become willing culprits as we adopt digital tools as mediators between us and the world. To this point, *Closed Circuit II* (1986) bears a strange resemblance to the Instagram logo, which in turn is based on a Polaroid camera. The surface of Hsu's sculpture is subtly molded as in the curves of a body; the aperture evokes a Cyclopean gaze. As with a spouse or a beloved pet, technology and humanity begin to resemble one another.

Squared Nude (1985) again shows remarkable foresight in its resemblance to a giant iPhone hanging on the wall. Protruding shapes float across the work like cellular bodies or lesions. Three decades before we started inputting our personal and medical information into our devices, before we used our gadgets as our eyes and ears, Hsu predicted this human-tech symbiosis. There is something unsettlingly human and visceral about *Nessea* (1984), another iPhone-shaped sculpture, this time featuring tumor-like protuberances on which the artist's handprints are visible. Our devices are outgrowths of ourselves, Hsu implies.

Oddly modular, freestanding tiled sculptures painted in strange shades of seafoam green and pink, such as *Ooze* (1987), *Vertical Ooze* (1987), and *Autopsy* (1988), evoke the operating rooms of dated science-fiction movie sets. In *Virtual Flow* (1990–2018), a metal stand with an assortment of bodily blobs cast from fleshy silicone is plugged into a monitor encased in pink ceramic tile with sonogram-like blurs across its screen. It is unclear which is powering which; organic and synthetic are indistinguishable. A video in one room, *Folds of Oil* (2005), intermittently broadcasts foreboding sounds of beeping and breathing, like a medical ventilator, throughout the exhibition space. Here, the artist was prescient yet again, though in a more personal manner. A year after its creation, Hsu had a kidney transplant, an ordeal during which he felt as though his body was a machine, and his surgery the ultimate art installation.

In a recent interview, the artist stated: "I consider myself a cyborg. Google is my memory." This pithy quote illustrates the manner in which Hsu himself has embraced technology as a natural component of the human body and mind. As Hsu sees it, integrating with the artificial, the technological, and the foreign is the most optimal way to be human.

JENNIFER S. LI

TISHAN HSU, *Portrait*, 1982, oil stick, enamel, acrylic, vinyl cement compound on wood, 145 × 221 × 15 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo by Jeff Lane. Copyright and courtesy the artist.

Spike Art Magazine

NYC Issue

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DIGITAL DINOSAURS

TISHAN HSU
"LIQUID CIRCUIT"
HAMMER MUSEUM
26 JANUARY –
19 APRIL 2020

Tishan Hsu's exhibition "Liquid Circuit" puts on display a series of figures that look like they were made through highly sophisticated, machinic versions of the Surrealist game of chance known as exquisite corpse, in which a single piece of paper is folded into sections onto which each person involved draws a body part. What is robotic about these sculptural and painted pieces, however, is that while they do resemble a composite body, they are also skilfully constructed – anything but the result of random choices. They exist as fully formed figures, often resembling a fusion of a furry animal, human flesh, and car parts.

After studying architecture at MIT Hsu dashed from the rigidity of New England to the rich artistic scene of downtown New York in the early 1980s, beginning to show with the infamous Pat Hearn gallery. "Liquid Circuit", the first museum survey of Hsu's paintings and sculptures in the United States, opens with a gallery of sketches like blueprints for the paintings and sculptures that populate the show. Many of the works, like *Cell* (1987), are covered with orifices, illusions of openings, of a void continuing into a dimension behind the frame, threading through to the other side. Like vacuums, these forms look as if they could suck you in but just as easily spit you out. Hsu's compositions bring to mind American sculptor Lee Bontecou's works of the 60s, in which three dimensional wall-hanging forms jut out into the space of the viewer with a vacant opening in the centre. Oscillating between protrusion and retraction, there is something intimidating about the presence of Hsu's painted constructions, a feeling that if they could be turned on, they would overtake you in a heartbeat.

Many of Hsu's sculptures are like stagnant appliances, some looking like retired medical equipment, no longer functional. In *Virtual Flow* (1990–2018), two glass cases on a cart containing fleshy

Tishan Hsu, *Cell,* 1987
Acrylic, compound, oil, alkyd, vinyl, aluminum on wood, 244 x 488 x 10 cm

Photo: Jeff McLane

View of "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit", Hammer Museum

forms are attached beneath what looks to be a medical monitor covered in fleshy pink 80s shower tiles, on wheels. The two objects, affixed with three-pronged outlets, are connected via a power cord. There is something almost clumsy about the deliberateness of this connection, tethered as it is to pervasive stillness of the objects it connects. There is no pulse or movement. What looks like grey static appears on the screen of the monitor, while decaying organs are preserved in the other. Making work in New York's East Village in the 80s and 90s, Hsu was a witness to the AIDS epidemic. This becomes apparent in works like *Virtual Flow* and *Autopsy* (both 1988) which evoke scenes of medical emergency, or a body in decline. The failure of medical professionals and government services to save those suffering from the disease, which in part defined this period of fear and anger, is suggested in these medical-looking objects. Even the monitor has sores resembling a belly button or an anus. The surface of the glass cases appears to have melted. Hsu has said that he's interested in making work that gets at the feeling or affect of technology. Rather than achieve this through a digital medium, he illustrates the implications of technology on the human condition through traditional modes of artmaking – painting and sculpture – that share a "real" space with the viewer.

Made at the dawn of the contemporary digital age, this body of work, through its anthropomorphising of digital objects, seems prescient, foreshadowing the present reliance on technology, which Hsu appears to have been particularly attuned to. This is reflected in works like *Splits* (1992) and *Natural Languages* (1994) in which TV-screen shapes become another detached body part. The work, overall, registers a kind of indifference to technology even as it could be seen as reflecting the optimism about its potential that was pervasive in the early 90s. Digital technology was seen as a form for adventure. It had potential to democratise the flow of information, to generate connection and community and traverse boundaries of time and space.

Hsu's works also express a more ambivalent attitude towards technology, however, raising questions about its effects on the human body and psyche. Rather than portals, they seem more like voids. One of the most striking motifs of Hsu's sculptures are these gaping black openings that appear again and again in different forms. Feathered around the edges, they give the illusion of depth, but they are, in fact, shallow. Are they a source of fear? Pleasure? Liberation? Hsu doesn't provide an answer, preferring to create a form that will suck you in.

Grace Hadland

Matthew Ronay, Body Horror, *Art Forum International*, May/Jun 2020

BODY HORROR

This page: **Tishan Hsu, *Vertical Ooze*, 1987**, ceramic tile, urethane, vinyl cement compound, acrylic, and oil on wood, 61¾ × 70⅞ × 24¼".

Opposite page: **Tishan Hsu, *Closed Circuit II*, 1986**, acrylic, alkyd, Styrofoam, and vinyl cement compound on wood, 59 × 59 × 4".

TISHAN HSU'S paintings and sculptures evoke nightmarish visions of the body's forced integration with its technological surrounds. After a spate of exhibitions in the 1980s at venues including Pat Hearn Gallery and Leo Castelli, the artist's work largely disappeared from public view. Now, New York's SculptureCenter has organized the survey "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit." The show debuted at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, this past winter and was slated to open at SculptureCenter in May before being postponed in the wake of Covid-19. To mark this occasion, *Artforum* invited artist MATTHEW RONAY and art historian LANE RELYEA to reflect on Hsu's dark, prescient, and singularly weird oeuvre.

MATTHEW RONAY

I NEVER KNEW THAT I LOVED DRAINS. An algorithm on YouTube revealed this predilection to me. As a connoisseur of portals, orifices, and pores, I should have known that drains and the waste they imply, hidden beneath their sterile exteriors, would be in my pleasure zone. I look at most art in the same way I look at drains on YouTube: in reproduction, removed from reality. I came across Tishan Hsu at a similar remove, through books and the internet. The vents, screens, intakes, fantasy architectures, and fleshy degradations that pervade his work "clogged" me from my first impression.

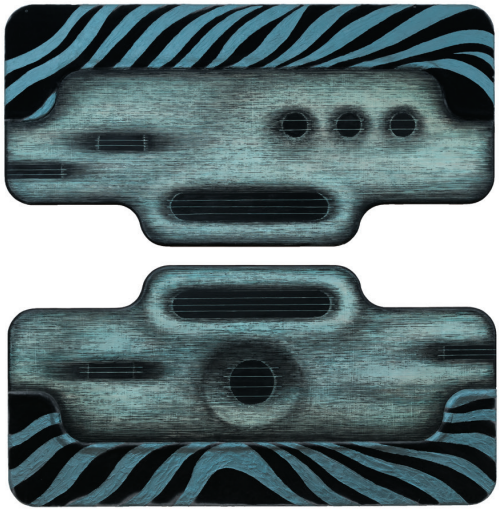
Some of Hsu's pristine Euclidean models, such as *Ooze*, 1987, resembling a barren sauna basin waiting to be filled with myriad fluids, arouse in me a love for the rational illusion that architecture brings to sculpture. Offsetting this order are feelings of confinement, abandonment, and disease. Are the works' patterns, punctured with holes, just some piebald markings, or are they lesions, viral cells, torture wounds? The world created by Hsu's reliefs feels stagnant, swampy; at the same time, it suggests the paradoxical experience of cosmic velocity, when things seen through a spaceship window appear still even though they're careening through the universe. The ship's claustrophobic interiors will also appear in sharp contrast to the sublime infinity of outer space. Similarly, the louvers in Hsu's paintings like *Closed Circuit II*, 1986, which resemble dashboards or readouts—or interfaces for an AI assistant like the medicine cabinet in George Lucas's *THX 1138* (1971)—are hauntingly still, almost refrigerated, yet imply activity. The oscillators in the painting show nothing, or perhaps their sine waves are so long we cannot see them. *Has humanity flatlined?* the artist seems to ask. *Has technology paused evolution?*

Undulating, sagging flesh is abundant in Hsu's work. Who among us hasn't noticed their own flabby bits or felt a shock run through them when confronted with the failing body of a loved one in a hospital? On one of the transparent vellum pages of a book filled with quotes and diagrams from eclectic sources Hsu made for a 1986 show at New York's Pat Hearn Gallery, I came across a citation of Elaine Scarry—*who?* Research. I was researching Tishan Hsu; now I'm reading Elaine Scarry's 1985 book, *The Body in Pain*. "Human beings project their bodily powers and frailties into external objects such as telephones, chairs, gods, poems, medicine, institutions, and political forms, and then those objects in turn become the object of perceptions that are taken back into the interior of human consciousness where they now reside as part of the mind or soul." It's all starting to flow. It doesn't make sense yet, thank goodness, but I'm beginning to grok. Scarry has much to say about the body

Left: **Tishan Hsu, *Outer Banks of Memory*, 1984**, acrylic, alkyd, Styrofoam, and vinyl cement compound on wood, 90 × 96 × 15".

Right: **Tishan Hsu, *Manic Panic*, 1987**, acrylic, alkyd, oil, and vinyl cement compound on wood, overall 100 × 96 × 4".

Below: **View of "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit," 2020**, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Wall, from left: *Nessea*, 1984; *Closed Circuit II*, 1986; *Squared Nude*, 1984; *Couple*, 1983. Floor, foreground: *Heading Through*, 1984. Floor, background: *Ooze*, 1987. Photo: Jeff McLane.

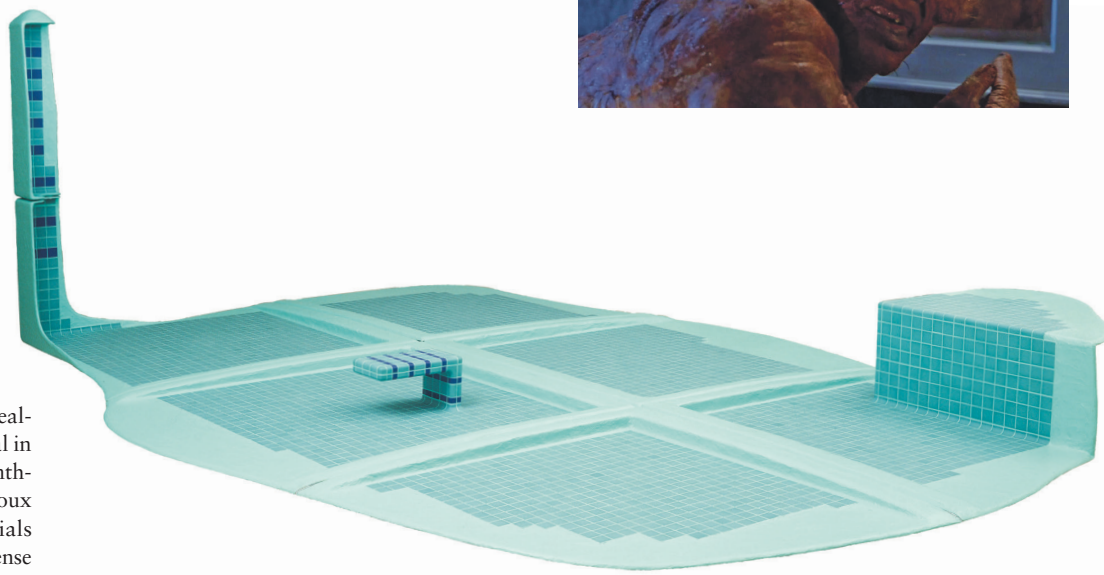


Has humanity flatlined? the artist seems to ask. *Has technology paused evolution?*

and the room. How the body is like a room and vice versa. She also writes about how we don't have nuanced language to communicate pain and how we don't believe each other's pain. And now I'm thinking about the kind of pain that a body remembers. Looking at Hsu's work makes me feel like I am renting pain in the process.

Even his more rigid tile pieces—such as *Vertical Ooze*, 1987, and *Holey Cow*, 1986—sag or bulge, as if he had merged neural networks with isometric drawings, skin tags, and booths for intergalactic spa treatments. Are they models of nature? How is it that this work feels simultaneously organic and technological? Why can't I stop thinking about drains and what kinds of liquids ran through them even though there are none here? I also see bunkers, sites of decontamination or compartmentalization. When I look at pool pieces like *Heading Through*, 1984, I wonder if I'm in the shower scene from the 1983 nuclear drama *Silkwood*. Or perhaps a germ-free future? The tile works are idealized, fantasy architectures, very useful if your goal in creating shelter is to express yourself. The eighteenth-century Neoclassical architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux realized all manner of civic solutions for essentials such as pumping stations without jettisoning his sense of humor or heightened aesthetics, and I wonder what necessity these snippets of space Hsu has created embody. Hsu's are sites of self-care—future hammams where liniments are applied and dermabrasion happens and dead cells disappear down holes into pipes. Sometimes I imagine his cropped rooms are bodies: In *Vertical Ooze*, they sure look pressed against each other polyamorously. They're often tumescent—from pleasure? Or pain? Neither, since the whole world Hsu has created is a simulation. Or is it?

I always see abs in the paintings, too. They may be something similar to the pharyngeal arches that appear just beneath the head of a human embryo. These outpouchings, which look like little fat rolls, develop into the facial muscles we use to express ourselves. They also become the muscles and bones of the neck, as well as important organs that help us speak, like the larynx. Hsu's are folds of expression. Although perhaps they're—yes—ribs? The painting *Outer Banks of Memory*, 1984, is sick. It has sores. I recognize this as the same language of falling apart I revel in every time I watch Jeff Goldblum in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986). It, too, is a tale of aging, disease, entropy, and the winnowing of organic matter, an artwork made during the 1980s that seemingly reflects the horror of AIDS, even though the director insisted there was more to it. Is it possible that an artwork can insist when an artist does not? I hope so, for selfish reasons. (I usually grow bored of my own interpretations.) We currently find ourselves suffering the wrath of an elementary technology—the Covid-19 virus—and the sterility and the vulnerability of our bodies Hsu's works addressed in the '80s hold as true now as they did then. That Hsu's abstractions, almost forty years after they were made, can capture the cruelty and ethos of a similar moment suggests that abstraction's slipperiness is still useful and will remain so.



Right: **David Cronenberg, *The Fly*, 1986**, 35 mm, color, sound, 96 minutes. Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum).

Below: **Tishan Hsu, *Ooze*, 1987**, ceramic tile, urethane, vinyl cement compound, and acrylic on wood, 11'5½" × 15'1½" × 5'8½".

I encountered my first Hsu in the flesh in "Searching the Sky for Rain," a 2019 group show at New York's SculptureCenter: *Heading Through*, 1984, a tile work perched on tubular metal legs from which spouts a head made from grout. I was shocked to see emerging from one side of the "scurniture" (part sculpture, part furniture)—embedded in the rational geometry of its tiles—a clay demon. How bold! This is the suffering, untheoretical part of Hsu's art: A body falls apart, only to cybernate later.

When I'm looking at his work, I'm trying to find out if I identify with the Body or with the Mind. Certainly, the strict, geometric tile grids of shower works like *Autopsy*, 1988, encourage me to apply empirical knowledge to the forms, to read them in accordance with the languages of design, architecture, and science, as do the utilitarian qualities of control-panel works like *Manic Panic*, 1987—works with ordered holes covering or holding in some sort of smog or organs and wires. But their lumps, and their Möbius strip–like bending of space, keep me from classifying them as such. The works are skins, and skins protect. Scarry writes of how the rooms where torture takes place mimic the bodies being tortured: "In normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life. It is, on the one hand an enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same way the body protects the individual within." I keep coming back to the sense that Hsu's work is made by an artificial intelligence that harvested all the information about life-forms so that it could build a virtual model, the walls of which articulate its observations. But by trying to isolate and understand their tendencies, it destroyed the Gaia-like properties of life-forms by dividing them up. Division leads to more division. What we're left with is prisons.

We, humans under the influence of technology, are desperately trying to recapture a feel for our skin, to be reembodied, to prove that we are still *here*. But perhaps we aren't here any longer. We've dominated nature completely, and now we're running a simulation. There is a harmony between the body and the mind somewhere, but not in Hsu's works, which feel so accurate to me because harmony is so hard to find. His art is not pessimistic; it just offers a humbled perspective—a seductive warning. □

MATTHEW RONAY IS A SCULPTOR LIVING IN NEW YORK.

Above: **David Cronenberg, *Dead Ringers*, 1988**, 35 mm, color, sound, 116 minutes.

Below: **Richard Artschwager, *Table and Chair*, 1963–64**, melamine laminate on wood; table: 29¾ × 52 × 37½", chair: 45 × 17¾ × 21".

Opposite page: **Tishan Hsu, *Autopsy*, 1988**, plywood, ceramic tile, acrylic, vinyl cement compound, stainless steel, rubber, 55 × 49 × 94".

LANE RELYEA

AT SIXTY-EIGHT, Tishan Hsu is enjoying belated recognition in the form of a retrospective, organized by Sohrab Mohebbi at SculptureCenter, New York, that surveys work from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s. Many say that it took the art world this long to catch up with Hsu because his paintings and sculptures were just too strange and ahead of their time when they first appeared. I don't remember it that way. Not that his shows at New York's Pat Hearn Gallery in the latter half of the '80s were run-of-the-mill; they were distinct but also plugged into all the talk back then about Baudrillard and simulation. His output begged comparison to the work of artists like Peter Halley and Ashley Bickerton, who likewise blurred the line between abstraction and representation. There was also a shared interest in how the seductions of the commodity dovetailed with the enigmatic power of emerging computerization and telecommunications. A high-tech look that conveyed dark glamour was the prevailing aesthetic (and not just in the art world; think of such concurrent pop-cultural offerings as David Cronenberg's 1988 *Dead Ringers*). Hsu was very much a participant in it.

But again, there were differences. Like other neo-geo artists, Hsu paid homage to the sleek Minimalism of the '60s and seemed especially drawn to the work of Richard Artschwager. But for Hsu—unlike, say, his contemporary Haim Steinbach, who was also influenced by Artschwager—it wasn't the older artist's Pop tendencies that were of interest; rather, it was the surrealism of his material choices, how his preference for synthetics over metals, for concoctions like Formica and Celotex, seemed less about the hard facts of industry than about the hocus-pocus of chemistry. Like Artschwager, Hsu favored a dyspeptic palette of drab browns and grays unsettled by sudden flashes of more pungent hue. And like Artschwager's, his work confounded its own status as autonomous art by flirting with the unassuming look of functional furniture and equipment, mere auxiliaries in a wider landscape of purposive activity.

And then there was Hsu's interest in the corporeal. For him, the issue wasn't representation or reproduction but rather cellular mutation. His visual vocabulary relied heavily on rationalist geometry only to show how thoroughly integrated it had become with the organic huffing and sweat of the biomorphic. Indeed, what Hsu's art from the '80s anticipated was not so much our present techno-aesthetic moment as what was then only a few years around the corner—the turn to the body in the work of artists like Kiki Smith and Robert Gober, and, even more significantly, the fascination with biomedical engineering that characterized Matthew Barney's earliest exhibitions.

Take Hsu's *Autopsy* from 1988, a standout in the retrospective. The piece has a fresh gleam to it, albeit a contradictory one, befitting both showroom merchandise and sterile lab equipment. Which makes the object initially suspicious: Is this about the allure of consumerist pleasure or the threat of hospital suffering?

Hsu's visual vocabulary relied heavily on rationalist geometry only to show how thoroughly integrated it had become with the organic huffing and sweat of the biomorphic.

The work is all the more disturbing not despite but because it seems rather poker-faced, more pragmatic than symbolic. It appears functional, like it has a job to do. The fact that it sits on wheels reinforces the theme of utility: Not just a workstation, it's a movable one, which makes it all the more accommodating of contingencies. It's obviously a product of design thinking, whose goals are to maximize efficiency and multiply applications. The object seems to prophesize a whole spectrum of highly technical operations and procedures. But exactly what tasks it performs can't easily be pinned down.

And then there's that strange pink paste that crowns the work. Whatever it is (the checklist suggests cement compound coated in acrylic paint), it stands in stark contrast to the piece's otherwise smooth, disinfected surfaces, all that stainless steel and ceramic tile, which can be so easily mopped clean. Opposed to the regularity and sameness of the gridded brown tile work, the pink cement is all craggy irregularity. Maybe this is the object's function: to provide an appropriate theater for the sober, clinical inspection of such aberrations and eccentricities. Unlike the wheels at its bottom, the wheels at its top are out of commission, their usefulness suspended. They can't act, though they can be acted on. They recall the way cartoons depict dead animals, flat on their backs, with their legs sticking straight up in the air. Suddenly symbolism creeps back in; this could be some sort of high-tech funeral pyre. But that's not quite right, because the ritual performed here seems too convoluted, too self-absorbed. What we're looking at is an apparatus that has become preoccupied with its own lack of seamlessness and self-consistency, that has grown aware that it too possesses a soft underbelly. *Autopsy* comes across as an object that's about to dissect itself. □

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PENTA

Contemporary Artists on Art and Society

By Abby Schultz, March 23, 2020

Tishan Hsu
Photograph by Grace Rivera

Penta brought together four New York–based artists—Tishan Hsu, Christopher Myers, Mika Rottenberg, and Tariku Shiferaw—for dinner at the Midtown Manhattan restaurant Butter to talk about the role art can play in society. The discussion began with an excerpt from W.H. Auden's poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats":

> You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:
> The parish of rich women, physical decay,
> Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
> Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its making where executives
> Would never want to tamper, flows on south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.

Penta: **While poetry may not make anything happen, it does provide "a way of finding meaning," as the U.K.–based poet Tamar Yoseloff has said. How do you think art—in the form of poetry, painting, sculpture, or anything else—helps society understand the social and political disruptions of our time?**

Mika Rottenberg: In times of breakdown or war, sometimes art becomes more conservative. Maybe artists want to do stuff with color and texture and kind of retreat, to say, "I can't deal with this." Maybe art should just be about that—feelings and textures. What kind of art was made during real wars? Usually there was not that much, or something [emerges] like Dadaism that tries to find a new logic.

Tariku Shiferaw: When politically hard times happen, there are artists that have gone to abstraction. You could look at [African-American artist] Romare Bearden [1911-88], who retreated to abstraction during hard times. So did [African-American artist] Jack Whitten [1939-2018], who, after 1969, goes deep into abstraction and starts talking about the stars and science fiction, because it affords him something internal, something safe.

Christopher Myers: Jack Whitten notoriously had a body of sculpture that he didn't show because he felt it was going to pigeonhole him as African-American—which tells you that in terms of social good and socially progressive thinking, with artists who are thinking about conflict and desperation, there's always going to be a mask at the center. I don't think of masking in the Western sense of concealment, but more masking in this pre-Western notion of telling another kind of truth. Sometimes the gift of older-generation artists like Jack Whitten is to make clear that there's a separation between his mask and the work that he's doing. All of that sculpture work, which for me is some of his most exciting work, is what he's investigating. It's not for public consumption.

We all have to deal with markets and we have to deal with sustenance. Romare Bearden worked as a social worker his entire career. What then is his political statement as an active social worker in New York City? That is as much a part of his content as is any kind of abstraction that he's looking at.

Tishan Hsu: That's been the trajectory of a lot of what we would consider the paradigm of the modernist artist. Think of [Franz] Kafka, who worked for an insurance company and eked out writing that he never wanted anyone to read, including after his death. The idea that the artist has their true self and has to then wrestle with the external world but somehow manages to eke out this work, whether it's a painting or a book or whatever—that has been in the modernist paradigm. [Carl] Jung said you have to get to the very personal to get to the very collective.

Art has always been there, will always be here. There are always human beings who need to connect to something personal that ends up having some kind of meaning. You can see that in every culture. That's what we define as art, whether it's marketed or not.

Myers: One of the things that interests me about the [Auden] poem is that it's about Irish identity. Yeats, as an Irishman, is central to Yeats' practice…in that sense of being a colonized people who is resurrecting the kind of beauty, romance, and specificity of the Irish idiom within an overarching English idiom. What is contrasted in the piece is this sense of Irish literary storytelling, song, and culture as being loud and empty and without any kind of consequence. The fact that we are still talking about Yeats proves the lie to that. Everything from tap dancing to a certain kind of storytelling comes from that kind of early progenitor.
Look at the quilts of Gee's Bend—working-class people making quilts that rival any of the abstract expressionists, their contemporaries—and you realize there is a way in which art is made for speaking from the bottom up. Art is really good at having an outsize voice, a voice that allows for Motown [in Detroit] to Burna Boy in Nigeria; for young, poor people to be able to speak to the masses. What's sad is when the art world forgets that this is in our capacity—to speak from the bottom up.

Shiferaw: I don't think art [disrupts] intentionally. It just does it naturally. The moment you introduce yourself into the world, you're already disturbing and disrupting a system that's already ongoing. An unseen person is out there being seen, like Burna Boy. I don't make work to intentionally disrupt, but my existence within a system disrupts it. That's why it's probably more interesting to see works from [those who are] not so rich or privileged.

Penta: **Can artists bridge the divide between the practice of making things and the expectations of the art world?**

Hsu: There have always been museums, there's always been an art world, and there's always been art. And art sometimes is part of the art world and sometimes it's not. The power of art is that it manages to survive while all of the social, political contexts that surround it change.
I'm curious whether something like performance will survive as a form. [Serbian performance artist Marina] Abramovic managed to do her retrospective in a kind of museum context and preserve the performances after 20, 30 years [at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the spring of 2010].

Rottenberg: Performance, maybe, is one of the only art forms that could survive because it could be like an oral tradition without materiality, like an oral tradition of myth-making, rather than of preserving technology or objects in climate-controlled storage.

Myers: I'm interested in the idea that there are art worlds that aren't easily mappable onto New York or L.A. or Paris. In that space comes a lot of possibility for resistance.

When you see young performance artists in the Philippines or Vietnam or Kenya, everybody is into "durational performance." Why? Because their images of performance are all still images. They think I laid down [in a photo] for 10 hours, and that's what the performance is. It's a fascinating moment of misinterpretation, retranslation. In places in which the language doesn't quite meet up, there is a lot of space for resistance.

Hsu: By where they are and what they're doing, you mean? It's not conscious resistance.

Myers: Mistranslation is one of our most fruitful tools as artists. Meritocracy is a lie. The best artists are not the ones who are selling. The ones who are selling are the ones who have access to the market in a certain way. When you realize that mistranslation is as much a part of this as anything else, it opens up a sense of possibility.

Hsu: It's difficult to say that if a work is succeeding in the market, it's not good work, and only work that is not in the market is good. Because art is bigger than that, no matter how big or powerful the market is. Good art can come from any context, as can bad art.

Myers: Amen.

New York–based artists Christopher Myers and Tishan Hsu.
Photograph by Grace Rivera

Shiferaw: The Aboriginal Australians, the native people of that land, have always made works—song lines, patterns. But in recent years, there are a lot of wealthy entrepreneurs, Western art historians, who have tried to market Aboriginal art as contemporary art, which I find interesting because I don't see it as contemporary art, I see it as its own thing and it's as significant as contemporary art.

Hsu: Even in the context of contemporary art, I don't think it detracts from the power of that work. The work is there, and in a way [the Aboriginal artists have] gained more exposure to the world by somehow being seen as contemporary. They shouldn't need the market or the contemporary collectors, but it has [brought] a lot more people to see the work and to look at it for what it is.

Rottenberg: But then that's problematic, too. It's like: Who can speak for politics? Who has the right? There's also this fear of like, "Oh, I can't speak to that." Since the Trump era, there's a kind of retreating again to, "I can't do work that would touch any kind of sensitive topics because I don't perhaps have the full kind of vision of what that means." There's a lot of fear, too, of upsetting people.

Hsu: Do you feel that's related to the market or a separate issue going on right now?

Rottenberg: It's a separate issue. It's a political issue. It's about what your peers are going to say, rather than if [an artwork] is going to sell or not: "How can you take your privileged freedom to document things that are not in your immediate surroundings or to speak for people that are not you." There's also confusion and questioning about what position you come from as an artist.

Hsu: That's a critical issue. [Artists] dealing with their "work" are dealing with issues that are very much a part of being human that don't actually fall within economics or law or business, or whatever other things that the professional world or the working world deals with. To the extent that artists, because of the road that they're open to, hit on these kinds of collisions and controversies, are actually revealing to the broader world that doesn't have necessarily the time or focus to do so [themselves]—but actually is interested in it. Art is a filter that we can [use to] begin to talk about these other things or begin to be aware of these other things. That's a way that art can illuminate social, political issues.

THE ART NEWSPAPER

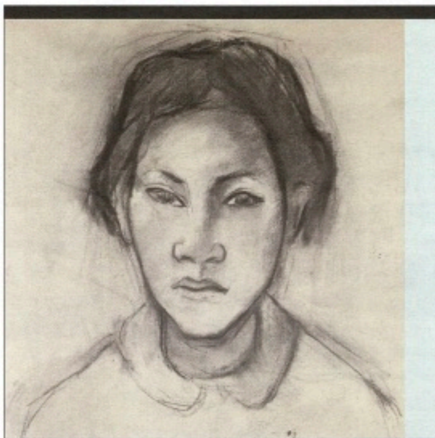
Exhibitions: Previews & listings around town

By Editors, 15-16 February 2020

EXHIBITIONS

Previews & listings around town

Our pick of shows



Artists on the Move: Journeys and Drawings

Getty Center
UNTIL 3 MAY

Today it is almost taken for granted that artists are nomadic, flying from one biennial to the next, from residencies to research trips, and even to art fairs. Before the age of mass travel, getting about internationally was an arduous affair but nonetheless many artists still set off on their adventures. *Artists on the Move: Journeys and Drawings* at the Getty Center delves into the museum's collection to bring together examples of travel drawings by European artists from the 16th to the 19th century. The show explores how artists learned about their new surroundings through the act of drawing, and also how local traditions influenced their work. Among the drawings on show are Jean-Honoré Fragonard's red chalk *Ruins of an Imperial Palace, Rome* (1759); Edward Lear's 1858 ink and watercolour landscape of Petra; and the charcoal portrait *Head of a Tahitian Woman* (around 1892) by Paul Gauguin, the most famous of those long-distance artist travellers whose work would never have been the same had he not sailed to the other side of the world. *J.S.*

Paul Gauguin's *Head of a Tahitian Woman* (around 1892) features in the Getty's show on artists' early travels

Rodriguez's 1970 image of a Chicano student protester

George Rodriguez: Double Vision

Vincent Price Art Museum
UNTIL 29 FEBRUARY

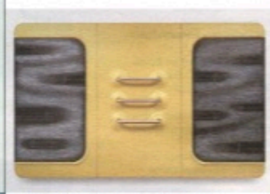
George Rodriguez's first museum retrospective brings together around 130 photographs taken between the 1950s and 1990s, when the LA native captured both the burgeoning music careers of The Jackson 5, Aretha Franklin and Jimi Hendrix, and pivotal social movements such as the 1992 riots against police brutality and racism. A wall of pictures of the Compton rap group N.W.A. faces another showing images of the labour activist Cesar Chavez, taken during a 1969 strike. Juxtaposing protests by agricultural workers next to the faces of Marilyn Monroe and Hillary Clinton, the exhibition presents Rodriguez as one of LA's greatest visual documentarians, who captured the city in all its sprawling, turbulent, stranger-than-fiction glory. *K.J.*

Do Ho Suh: 348 West 22nd Street

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
ONGOING

Visitors to Lacma are momentarily transported to an ethereal New York apartment as they wander in and around Do Ho Suh's *348 West 22nd Street* (2011-15). The South Korean artist—who lives between London, Seoul and New York—has become well known for his detailed replicas of domestic objects and spaces, and in particular his homes. This recent museum acquisition, which first went on view late last year, is a 1:1 scale copy of Suh's ground-floor Chelsea apartment replete with fixtures and furnishings made in his signature translucent polyester. Suh's colourful, immersive works draw Instagrammers like moths to a flame. But they also have a somewhat poignant side: the delicate renderings of houses and their items look as though they could easily be ripped apart, hinting at the precarity, for many people, of the places we call home. *J.S.*

The installation replicates Do Ho Suh's ground-floor New York apartment



Liquid Circuit (1987) explored the early digital landscape

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit

Hammer Museum
UNTIL 19 APRIL

Since the 1980s, the New York-based Tishan Hsu has been examining the use of artificial intelligence and the potential pitfalls that lurk within our accelerating use of digital technology—now one of the chief concerns among today's contemporary artists. Hsu's experiments with Photoshop, for example, are among the earliest examples of an artist using the software. By investigating the visual imagery of the nascent digital landscape, Hsu established himself as a pioneer of "internet aesthetics"—long before most people had heard their first dial-up tone. Organised by the SculptureCenter in New York, the artist's first museum retrospective in the US includes around 30 wall reliefs, drawings and architectonic paintings and sculptures. *K.J.*

Listings are arranged alphabetically by category

Museums & institutions

18th Street Arts Center
1639 18th Street, Santa Monica 90404 and 3026 Airport Avenue, Santa Monica 90405
- Las Hijas de los Dias. 7 Female Views from the Margins (Airport Avenue)
UNTIL 3 APRIL
- Drawing Connections (Airport Avenue)
UNTIL 4 APRIL

A + D Architecture + Design Museum
900 E 4th Street, Los Angeles 90013
- All Over the Place
UNTIL 5 APRIL
- Berfin Ataman: Movement and Motivation
UNTIL 5 APRIL
- Cadi Barbini: The Executive Condolence
UNTIL 5 APRIL
- Museum as Brand
UNTIL 5 APRIL

Annenberg Space for Photography
2000 Avenue of the Stars, Los Angeles 90067
- Vanity Fair: Hollywood Calling
UNTIL 26 JULY

Art + Practice
3401 W 43rd Place, Los Angeles 90008
- Collective Constellation: Selections from The Eileen Harris Norton Collection
UNTIL 1 AUGUST

The Broad Museum
221 S Grand Avenue, Los Angeles 90012
- Shirin Neshat: I Will Greet the Sun Again
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY
- Christopher Wool
UNTIL 21 FEBRUARY 2021

California African American Museum
600 State Drive, Exposition Park, Los Angeles 90037
- LA Blacksmith
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY
- Timothy Washington: Citizen/Ship
UNTIL 1 MARCH
- Making Mammy: A Caricature of Black Womanhood, 1840-1940
UNTIL 1 MARCH
- Cross Colours: Black Fashion in the 20th Century
UNTIL 23 AUGUST
- Dust My Broom: Southern Vernacular from the Permanent Collection
UNTIL 15 MARCH

Charles White Elementary School
2401 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 90057
- Rufino Tamayo: Innovation and Experimentation (with LACMA)
UNTIL 11 JULY

Craft Contemporary
5814 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 90036
- The Body, The Object, The Other
UNTIL 10 MAY

Eastside International
602 Moulton Avenue, Los Angeles 90031
- Stationary Front: Curated by Megan Mueller
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY

Fowler Museum
308 Charles E Young Dr N, Los Angeles 90024
- Through Positive Eyes
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY
- On Display in the Walled City: Nigeria at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924-1925
UNTIL 8 MARCH
- Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World
UNTIL 31 MAY

Getty Villa
17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades 90272
- Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq
UNTIL 5 SEPTEMBER 2022

Hammer Museum
10899 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 90024
- Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit
UNTIL 19 APRIL
- Paul McCarthy: Head Space, Drawings 1963-2019
UNTIL 10 MAY
- Inside the Mask
UNTIL 17 MAY
- Collective Constellation: Selection from The Eileen Harris Norton Collection
UNTIL 1 AUGUST

Human Resources
410 Cottage Home Street, Los Angeles 90012
- Ken Ehrlich: Dysfunctional Furniture
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens
1151 Oxford Road, San Marino 91108
- Carolina Caycedo: Apariciones/Apparitions
UNTIL 17 FEBRUARY
- Beside the Edge of the World: Nina Katchadourian, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, Rosten Woo, Dana Johnson and Robin Coste Lewis
UNTIL 24 FEBRUARY
- Lynette Yiadom-Boakye
UNTIL 11 MAY
- Andrew Raftery: The Autobiography of a Garden
UNTIL 4 JANUARY 2021

Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
1717 E 7th Street, Los Angeles 90021
- Bee Morton: The Plant that Heals May Also Poison
16 FEBRUARY-14 JUNE
- Ann Greene Kelly
16 FEBRUARY-14 JUNE

J. Paul Getty Museum
Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles 90049
- Balthazar: a Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance Art
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY
- Unseen: 35 Years of Collecting Photographs
UNTIL 8 MARCH
- Käthe Kollwitz: Prints, Process, Politics
UNTIL 29 MARCH
- Artists on the Move: Journeys and Drawings
UNTIL 3 MAY
- Peasants in Pastel: Millet and the Pastel Revival
UNTIL 10 MAY
- In Focus: Platinum Photographs
UNTIL 31 MAY

Japanese American National Museum
100 N Central Avenue, Los Angeles 90012
- Taiji Terasaki—Transcendents: Heroes at Borders
UNTIL 29 MARCH
- Under a Mushroom Cloud: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Atomic Bomb
UNTIL 7 JUNE
- Common Ground: The Heart of Community
ONGOING

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions
6522 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles 90028
- SOUND OFF: Silence + Resistance
UNTIL 15 MARCH
- The Archival Impulse: 40 Years at LACE
ONGOING

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 90036
- Betye Saar: Call and Response
UNTIL 5 APRIL
- Lachita Hurtado: I Live, I Die, I Will Be Reborn
UNTIL 3 MAY
- Julie Mehretu
UNTIL 17 MAY
- Where the Truth Lies: The Art of Qiu Ying
UNTIL 17 MAY
- Fiji: Art and Life in the Pacific
UNTIL 19 JULY
- Do Ho Suh: 348 West 22nd Street
ONGOING

MAK Center for Art and Architecture
835 N Kings Road, Los Angeles 90069
- Soft Schindler
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

The Mistake Room
1811 E 20th Street, Los Angeles 90058
- Felipe Baeza: Through the Flesh to Elsewhere
UNTIL 11 APRIL

Museum of Contemporary Art, Geffen Contemporary
152 N Central Avenue, Los Angeles 90012
- Barbara Kruger: Untitled Questions 1990-2018
UNTIL 30 NOVEMBER

Museum of Contemporary Art, Grand Avenue
250 S Grand Avenue, Los Angeles 90012
- Open House: Gala Porras-Kim
UNTIL 18 MAY
- With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-85
UNTIL 18 MAY

Norton Simon Museum
411 W Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena 91105
- By Day and By Night: Paris in the Belle Époque
UNTIL 2 MARCH
- Beyond the World We Know: Abstraction in Photography
UNTIL 20 APRIL
- Raphael 2020
UNTIL 18 MAY

Skirball Cultural Center
2701 N Sepulveda Blvd Los Angeles 90049
- Through a Different Lens: Stanley Kubrick Photographs
UNTIL 8 MARCH
- El Sueño Americano | The American Dream: Photographs by Tom Kiefer
UNTIL 8 MARCH

Underground Museum
3508 W Washington Boulevard, Los Angeles 90018
- Rodney McMillian, Brown: videos from The Black Show
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

USC Fisher Museum of Art
University of Southern California, 823 Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles 90089
- Charles Arnoldi: Four Decades
UNTIL 4 APRIL

Vincent Price Art Museum, East Los Angeles College
1301 Avenida Cesar Chavez, Monterey Park 91754
- Gabriela Ruiz: Full of Tears
UNTIL 15 FEBRUARY
- George Rodriguez: Double Vision
UNTIL 29 FEBRUARY
- Yolanda González: Sueño de Familia/ Dream of Family
UNTIL 14 MARCH
- Umar Rashid (Frohawk Two Feathers)
UNTIL 27 MARCH

Commercial

1301PE LLC
6150 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 90048
- Jessica Stockholder: Digital Thoughts
UNTIL 29 FEBRUARY

AF Projects
7503 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles 90046
- Thomas Lawson, Attending to the Bats
UNTIL 4 MARCH

Anat Ebgi
2660 S La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles 90034
- Jibade-Khalil Huffman: You Don't Have To Say You Love Me
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

as-is.la
1133 Venice Boulevard, Los Angeles 90015
- New Drawings: Aram Saroyan, organised by Michael Ned Holte
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY

Baik Art
2600 S La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles 90034
• Michael Brewster: Frequency
UNTIL 14 MARCH

Bel Ami
#105, 709 W Hill Street, Los Angeles 90012
• Olivia Erlanger: Split-level Paradise
UNTIL 7 MARCH

Blum & Poe
2754 S La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles 90034
• New Images of Man
UNTIL 14 MARCH

Bridge Projects
6820 Santa Monica Blvd, Los Angeles 90038
• Phillip K. Smith III: 10 Columns
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

Charlie James Gallery
969 Chung King Road, Los Angeles 90012
• Sandy Rodriguez: You Will Not Be Forgotten
UNTIL 7 MARCH

Château Shatto
Suite 1030, 1206 S Maple Ave, Los Angeles 90015
• Parker Ito: Longevity Bars
UNTIL 4 APRIL

Commonwealth and Council
Suite 220, 3006 W 7th Street, Los Angeles 90005
• Saki Seokyeong Kang
UNTIL 7 MARCH

David Kordansky Gallery
5130 W Edgewood Place, Los Angeles 90019
• Huma Bhabha
UNTIL 14 MARCH
• Lauren Halsey
UNTIL 14 MARCH

Diane Rosenstein Gallery
831 N Highland Avenue, Los Angeles 90038
• Farrah Karapetian
UNTIL 28 MARCH

Fort Gansewoort, LA
4859 Fountain Avenue , 90029
• Zoya Cherkassky: Soviet Childhood
UNTIL 28 MARCH

François Ghebaly Gallery
2245 E Washington Blvd, Los Angeles 90021
• Kathleen Ryan
UNTIL 29 MARCH
Victoria Gitman
UNTIL 29 MARCH

Gagosian, Beverly Hills
456 N Camden Drive, Beverly Hills, 90210
• Richard Prince: New Portraits
UNTIL 21 MARCH

Hannah Hoffman
Hosted by Kristine Kite Gallery, 3400 W Washington Boulevard, Los Angeles 90018
• Barbara Kasten
UNTIL 4 APRIL

Hauser & Wirth, LA
901 E 3rd Street, Los Angeles 90013
• Lucio Fontana, 1948-1968
UNTIL 12 APRIL
• Nicolas Party: Sottobosco
UNTIL 12 APRIL

Henry Taylor's
510 Bernard Street, Los Angeles 90012
• Honor Titus: Goodness Gracious
UNTIL 15 FEBRUARY

Honor Fraser
2622 S La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles 90034
• Joe Sola: I Drove to San Francisco and Back
UNTIL 27 FEBRUARY

Jeffrey Deitch
925 N Orange Drive, Los Angeles 90038
• All of Them Witches
UNTIL 11 APRIL

Jenny's
4220 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles 90029
• Carter Seddon: Souvenir
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY

JOAN
#715, 1206 Maple Avenue, Los Angeles 90015
• Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

Karma International, LA
4619 W Washington Boulevard, Los Angeles 90016
• Markus Oehlen: CELTIC FUNK ETCETERA
UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY

Kayne Griffin Corcoran
1201 S La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles 90019
• Hank Willis Thomas: An All Colored Cast
UNTIL 7 MARCH
• Raul Guerrero
UNTIL 7 MARCH

LA Louver
45 N Venice Boulevard, Venice 90291
• Edward and Nancy Kienholz: the Merry-Go-World or Begat by Chance and the Wonder Horse Trigger
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY
• Alison Saar: Syncopation
UNTIL 29 FEBRUARY

LAST Projects Gallery
206 S Avenue 20, Los Angeles 90031
• Marval A Rex: MARVAL A FLEX
UNTIL 6 MARCH

LAXArt
2700D Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles 90038
• Postcommodity: Some Reach While Others Clap
UNTIL 29 FEBRUARY

ltd los angeles
1119 S La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles 90019
• William Brickel: Countrymen
UNTIL 14 MARCH

Shirin Neshat's *Untitled (Women of Allah)* (1996) at The Broad

M+B Gallery
612 N Almont Drive, Los Angeles 90069
• Pat Phillips
UNTIL 14 MARCH

Marc Selwyn Fine Art
8983 S Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills 90212
• Helene Aylon
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY
• Barry Le Va
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY

Matthew Marks Gallery
1062 N Orange Grove, Los Angeles 90046
• Katharina Fritsch: Zwei Männer/Two Men
UNTIL 1 MARCH

Molet DTLA
256 S Mission Road, Los Angeles 90033
• Lucien Smith: Fear Eats the Soul
UNTIL 17 FEBRUARY

Melkonian Briggs
203 N Fairfax Avenue, Los Angeles 90036
• Johannes Wohnseifer
UNTIL 21 MARCH

Michael Benevento
3712 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles 90004
• David Snyder
UNTIL 21 MARCH

MILK Los Angeles
Studio C, 855 N Cahuenga Boulevard, Los Angeles 90038
• Louis Vuitton Objets Nomades
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

Morán Morán
937 N La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles 90069
• Eric N. Mack: Face It
UNTIL 7 MARCH

Neutra VDL
2300 Silver Lake Blvd, Los Angeles 90039
• Shio Kusaka
UNTIL 2 APRIL

Nicodim Gallery
#160, 1700 S Santa Fe Avenue, Los Angeles 90021
• Devin B. Johnson: Melody of a Memory
UNTIL 21 MARCH

Night Gallery
2276 E 20th Street, Los Angeles 90021
• Claire Tabouret
UNTIL 21 MARCH
• Josh Callaghan: Social Block
UNTIL 1 JUNE

Nino Mier Gallery
7277 and 7313 Santa Monica Boulevard, and 1107 Greenacre Avenue, Los Angeles 90046
• Jan-Ole Schleman: New Works
UNTIL 13 MARCH
• William N. Copley: The Temptation of Saint Anthony (Revisited), Drawings and Paintings, 1965-1969
UNTIL 13 MARCH

Nonaka-Hill Fine Art
720 N Highland Avenue, Los Angeles 90038
• Sofu Teshigahara
UNTIL 21 MARCH

O-Town House
#44, 672 S Lafayette Park Place, Los Angeles 90057
• Owen Fu: Small Talk
UNTIL 4 APRIL

Overduin & Co
6000 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles 90028
• Gracie DeVito: Motion Picture Seaweed
UNTIL 28 MARCH

Park View/Paul Soto
2271 W Washington Blvd, Los Angeles 90018
• Aidan Koch: Always put the rock back
UNTIL 28 MARCH

Parker Gallery
2441 Glendower Avenue, Los Angeles 90027
• Marley Freeman: Why I'm Turning My Key
UNTIL 29 FEBRUARY

Philip Martin Gallery
2710 S. La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles 90034
• Kirsty Luck: Transformer
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY

Praz-Delavallade
6150 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 90048
• Kayode Ojo: Never Been Kissed
UNTIL 28 MARCH

Regen Projects
6750 Santa Monica Blvd, Los Angeles 90038
• Anish Kapoor
UNTIL 16 FEBRUARY

Roberts Projects
5801 Washington Boulevard, 90232
• Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe: Black Like Me
UNTIL 7 MARCH
• Wish You Were Here
UNTIL 7 MARCH

Royale Projects
432 Alameda Street, Los Angeles 90013
• Rubén Ortiz Torres: Plata o Plomo o Glitter
UNTIL 11 APRIL

Shulamit Nazarian
616 N La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles 90036
• Naama Tsabar: Inversions
UNTIL 29 FEBRUARY

Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles
5900 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles 90036
• Cyprien Gaillard
UNTIL 21 MARCH

Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects
#101, 1700 S Santa Fe Avenue, Los Angeles 90021
• Whitney Bedford: Reflections on the Anthropocene
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY
• John Somini: Cowboy Stories & New Paintings
UNTIL 22 FEBRUARY
• Karl Haendel: Double Dominant
UNTIL 7 MARCH

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery
1010 N Highland Avenue, Los Angeles 90038
• Lisa Oppenheim: The Eternal Substitute
UNTIL 21 MARCH

The Box
805 Traction Avenue, Los Angeles 90013
• Johanna Went: Passion Container
UNTIL 14 MARCH

The Lodge
1924 N Western Avenue, Los Angeles 90029
• Robbie Simon
UNTIL 14 MARCH

The Pit
958 Roberts Avenue, Glendale 91201
• Keith Boadwee
UNTIL 23 FEBRUARY
• Miyoshi Barosh
UNTIL 23 FEBRUARY
• Diana Yesenia Alvarado
UNTIL 23 FEBRUARY

Track 16 Gallery
#1005, 1206 Maple Avenue, Los Angeles 90015
• If Everything is an Outrage: The Binder of Women
UNTIL 21 MARCH

UTA Artist Space
403 Foothill Road, Beverly Hills, 90210
• Arcmanoro Niles
UNTIL 14 MARCH

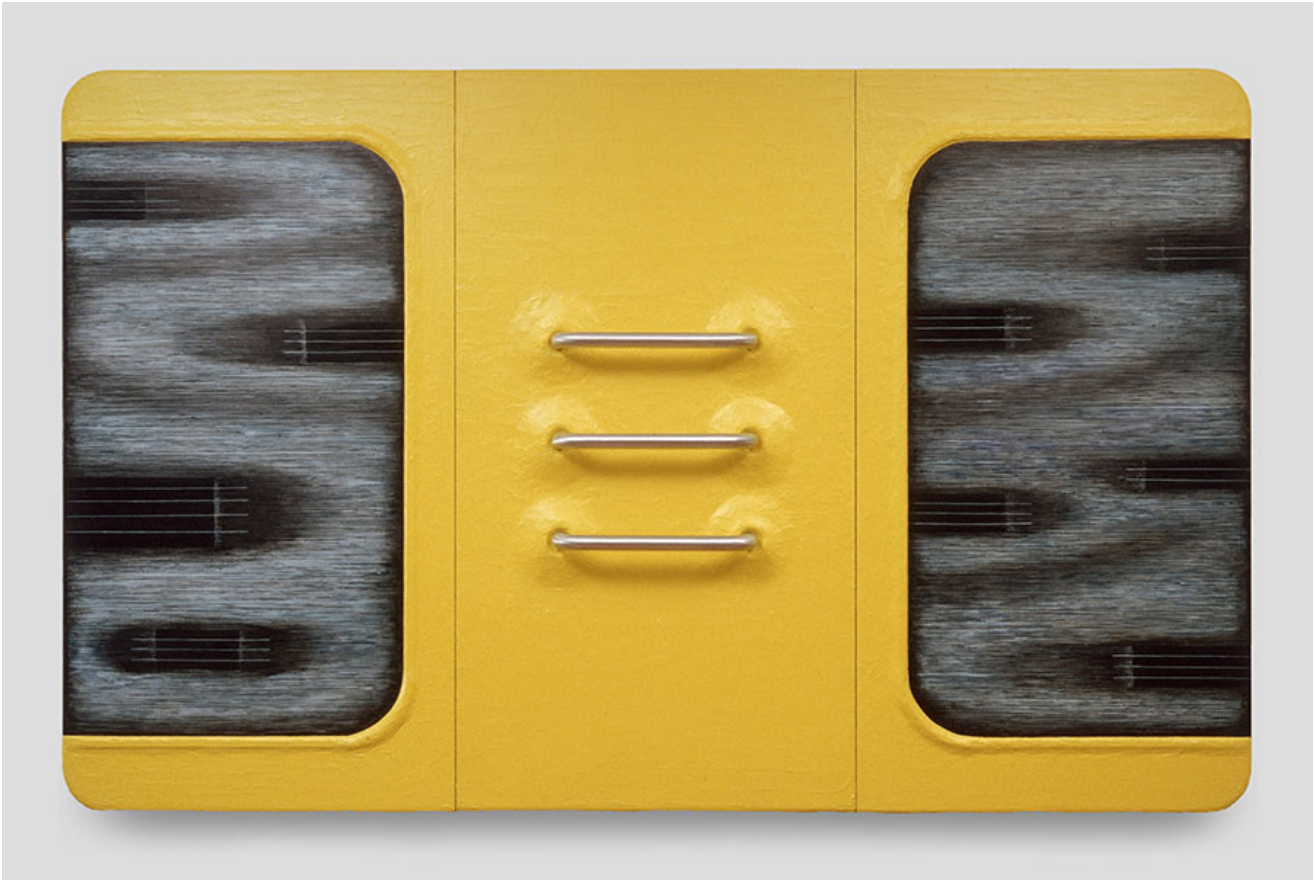
Various Small Fires
812 North Highland Avenue, Los Angeles 90038
• Calida Rawles: A Dream for My Lilith
UNTIL 14 MARCH

Visitor Welcome Center
4200a, 3006 W 7th Street, Los Angeles 90005
• Golare Khoshgozaran: Likely Mine
UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY
• Eduardo Consuegra | Endless revisions of what will be
UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY
• Miller Robinson | Sunk
UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY

Frieze

The Best Show to See in LA: From ‘a coven of witches’ at Deitch Projects to the ‘totemic roughness’ of Huma Bhabha at David Kordansky Gallery, our critic’s guide to Los Angeles

By Travis Diehl, February 11, 2020



Tishan Hsu, *Liquid Circuit*, 1987, acrylic, compound, alkyd, oil, aluminum on wood, 229 × 363 × 23 cm. Courtesy: Frederick R.Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis

Tishan Hsu
Hammer Museum
26 January – 19 April

This survey of Tishan Hsu’s sculptures and paintings from the 1980s to 2005 features an uncanny, organic minimalism of hard, alien surfaces. Sharp clefts and orifices reveal almost-bloody coagulations of colour. The works’ topographic surfaces are often interrupted by tubes, drains, wheels and tiles that serve as visual sutures as much as handles. Paintings of vent-like forms and stains accent their bright, factory-fresh pastels. Installed both on the wall and floor, they seem intended for a mysterious, possibly sinister use.

Galerie

5 Artists Having Their First Museum Solo Shows This Year: From Salman Toor at the Whitney Museum to Genesis Bellanger at the Aldrich in Connecticut, these exhibits are not to be missed

By Osman Can Yerebakan, January 6, 2020

From rapidly emerging talents to more established names finally receiving their due, many artists will be making their institutional debuts in 2020. Museums' continuous efforts to offer more inclusive and accessible programs are reflected in their exhibition schedules, with artists from various geographies, generations, and statements finding space on their walls.

Here, *Galerie* highlights the five most anticipated museum debuts in 2020.

Tishan Hsu, *Vertical Ooze,* 1987. Photo: Centre Pompidou, Paris.

5. "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit" at SculptureCenter
Long Island City, New York

Tishan Hsu emerged in 1980s, when the East Village was a burgeoning hub for artistic celebration of body politics; however, Hsu's tech-infused approach to corporeality was considered too obscure for its time. Three decades later, the art world and Hsu are finally on the same page. The artist's sleek sculptures that have long investigated the mysterious relationship between the body and the machine, tapping into our post-Internet-era sensibilities and anxieties in elegant forms.

"Liquid Circuit" will be the first U.S. survey of the Boston-born artist's career, opening at L.A.'s Hammer Museum in late January, followed by a New York adaptation at SculptureCenter. The exhibition will manifest Hsu's avant-garde vision and boundary-pushing approach into three dimensionality with sculptures, wall reliefs, architectonic paintings, and film. Across 30 sculptures on view, visitors will encounter traces from the artist's architecture training at MIT, with buildinglike forms—both dystopian and convivial—adorned in unexpectedly domestic materials, such as tiles, which coat surfaces with a subtle technological aesthetic. From Photoshop to urethane, Hsu's innovative utilization of physical or analog mediums reflects the vision of a forward-thinking artist and a thinker who challenged his time's demands and trends for a body of work that now seems more urgent than ever.

"Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit" is on view at SculptureCenter from May 9 – August 17.

Robb Report

Artist Tishan Hsu Was Ahead of His Time. Now His Art Is More Relevant Than Ever.

Tishan Hsu's paintings and sculptures about the blurring line between technology and the human body left '80s audiences baffled. The art world is finally catching up to him.

BY JULIE BELCOVE ON DECEMBER 29, 2019

Courtesy of Peter Ross

Back in the early 1980s, before personal computers and the internet and Wi-Fi and iPhones, before Facebook and Google and Uber and Netflix, when tax returns and college theses and invitations and bills were all on paper, Tishan Hsu worked nights word processing in law firms so he could make art by day. A graduate of MIT and a keen observer of the human condition, he noticed not only the speed with which a word processor churned out documents but how operating the nascent technology made a person sit, how it made a person feel. Gradually, a funny thing happened: The two worlds collided.

His paintings and sculptures began to reflect his assessment that technology was becoming an extension of the human body, a condition he concluded was destined to intensify over time. Modular tiles in his sculptures echoed bits of digital data; three-dimensional objects hinted at contraptions yet to come. Paintings evoked computer monitors but also blood cells or flesh. The body, he determined, could no longer be depicted the way it had been for millennia. Hsu was seeing the future. "At that point, art was in this camp and the technology people were in the other camp, and they were going to be 'evil,' undermining the humanistic world we live in," he says. "And I didn't see it that way." Making no value judgment on new technology itself, Hsu was interested instead in its inevitability—and its impact.

An archetypal misunderstood intellectual ahead of his time, he worked quietly for decades, largely overlooked or forgotten by the art world—until now. Curators too young to have been on the scene in the '80s have rediscovered Hsu, and a retrospective of his work will open at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles on January 26 before traveling to the SculptureCenter in New York in May. "I realized I'd never encountered work like that," says SculptureCenter curator Sohrab Mohebbi of a Hsu piece he saw in a group show in 2018, which spurred him to organize the exhibition. "It really felt of now but was made in 1987. I went to his studio and was blown away."

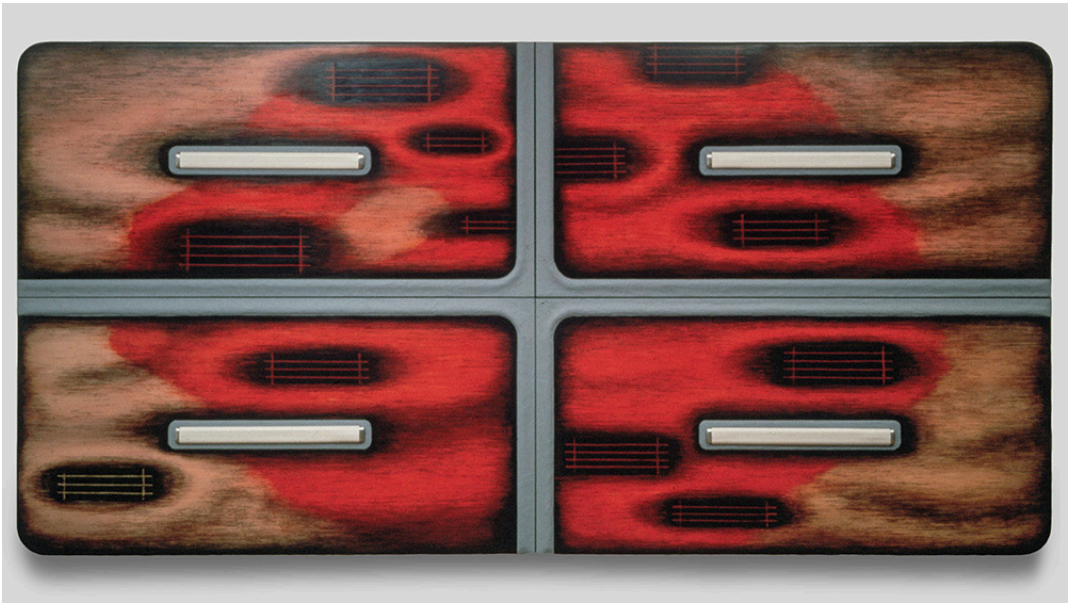
Autopsy, 1988
Courtesy of Peter Ross

On a quiet block in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Hsu, 68, opens the door to an unassuming building. It is deceptively spacious, with a small studio opening onto a much larger one. Several of his completed paintings hang on walls like a time capsule; in one, mouths are interspersed with a warping grid, and in another, the surface is striated like a computer screen on the fritz. Other works, unfinished experiments, lie on tables or lean against shelves. Hsu lives upstairs. The proximity allows him, on sleepless nights, to come down and fiddle around, or just think. He is tall, a little stooped, his hair still dark. His demeanor is serious. He doesn't smile much.

On the back wall, there's an enormous painting with seemingly disparate blown-up images: The mouth of a fish represents nature, he explains; a wound from an incision suggests the human race, and a temperature dial, technology. "They're all connected, they're all together as one," Hsu says, then quickly adds that he himself figured out the symbolism largely in retrospect. While painting it he would tell visitors, "This is very intuitive. The work will reveal itself. I can't give you a shtick that's going to say what it's about."

Hsu's prognostications about the digital age could perhaps themselves have been foretold. Born in Boston to Chinese immigrants, he grew up with a father who was an engineering professor and a mother who was a trained opera singer and encouraged his artistic leanings. Living in Zurich as a small child and then hopscotching across the US—Madison, Wisc.; Blacksburg, Va.; Long Island, N.Y.—he studied privately with local painters. One teacher his mother found had him painting in the sobering realist style of Edward Hopper; another guided him toward impressionism. Hsu began showing—and selling—his paintings while a teenager in Virginia.

During his last two years of high school, by then transplanted to a suburb of New York City, he hesitated giving up what he describes as the "validation" he received for his art. But he wasn't drawn to the artist's life, at least not the cultural stereotypes of it. He excelled academically, and his father and brother had attended MIT, so he decided to matriculate there to study architecture, though he never fully abandoned painting. MIT had little in the way of art offerings, but Hsu found a painting seminar. At the end of the term, his professor told him, "You should just drop out, move to New York, eat, drink and breathe paint."



Cell, 1987
Courtesy of Peter Ross

"I was just like, whoa," Hsu recalls. "I couldn't quite compute."

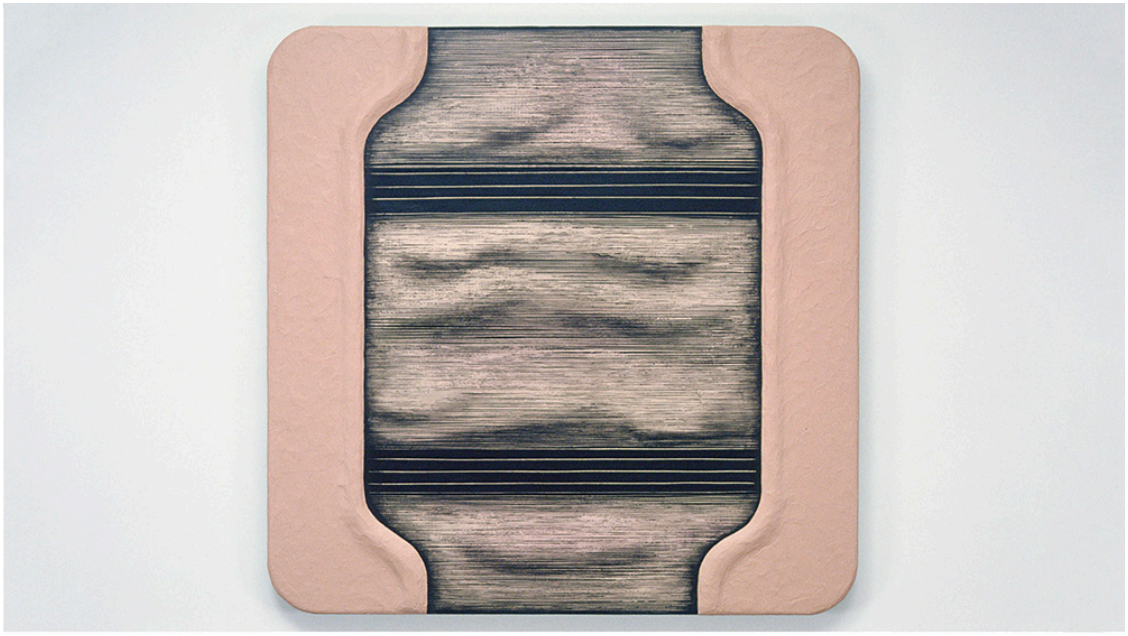
He worked up the nerve to go down to New York to meet a few of his professor's contacts and trawl the SoHo galleries. In one, he recalls, "you opened this door and there was all this stuff in the hallway. You go upstairs, and there's this painting on the wall in an empty room. And that was the show. It was so raw and laid-back. It was astonishing.

"And this is what he wanted me to drop out for," continues Hsu, eyebrows raised in disbelief.

Returning to MIT was a no-brainer. Hsu finished his degree and stayed on to earn a master's. Architects still used pencils then, but next door to his studio, the discipline's first wave of digital 3-D graphics was being developed. "I could see eventually this is going to be everywhere, and I could just intuit this was going to change everything," he says.

He loved architecture, but as grad school wound down, he started thinking about giving painting a real shot. "I began to see that it was not a choice—that I sort of had this disease," he says. "Or dis-ease. It was something I could not avoid."

Hsu moved to a barn in the country and gave himself a year. "I said the only thing I'll allow myself to do is artwork," he recalls. Walks would be tolerated; a paying job, not. "By the end of the year, the work really wasn't coming very well. I said, 'Okay, I gave it a try.' " Conceding defeat, he recommitted to architecture and took a job.



R.E.M., 1986
Courtesy of Peter Ross

Then a funny thing happened. Within a few months, his ideas about art finally started to coalesce. Hsu quit his job and landed a subsidized studio in Boston. Eventually, with his savings depleted, he hit upon word processing as a survival gig. It was the 1970s, and traditional secretaries were still wedded to their typewriters. "So having gone through six years of higher education without learning how to type, I taught myself typing," he says. "I went to a local secretary school, got their textbook and then got a job temping for law firms word processing. And I say this only because that began my real interaction with technology and language."

With a marketable skill, Hsu moved to New York in 1979. For years—was it two? five? He can't quite remember—he made art in his studio by day, then word processed documents at a law firm after dark. "It was perfect because I could devote my best attention all during the day, and when I was really tired and exhausted, go in and start working for them," he says. "It was also very removed. You didn't have to talk to anyone. You could just go in there and bliss out. And actually still think about my [art]."

The two worlds Hsu inhabited—mindlessly typing legal documents in one, dreaming up inventive works of visual art in the other—could not have seemed more opposite. But gradually, they merged. "I'm here physically in front of this machine, but then this machine is taking me into this whole other illusionist world," he recalls feeling. "It wasn't like a window you look into. This was a totally immersive environment."

In the way that for centuries European artists painted stories from the Bible almost exclusively, Hsu decided to make art about our culture's dominant alternate reality: technology. And more specifically, how its relationship to the body was "getting more and more comfortable, more and more seamless."

The artist in front of Natural Language, 1994
Courtesy of Peter Ross

Hsu rounded the corners of his canvases to echo the curves of a screen, painted eyes and used relief techniques in areas to allude to human tissue. The pieces looked paradoxically manufactured yet organic; they were illusionistic yet objects in and of themselves. The work spoke presciently of a future few could fathom, one that, 35 years hence, we are now living, AirPods jammed in our ears, fingerprints unlocking our phones. But the art world was stuck in the '80s.

Art galleries tended to build their stables through connections—one artist recommended another, often an art-school friend or a studio mate. Not having attended art school, Hsu felt a distinct disadvantage when it came to networking. In those days, though, an artist could still walk into a gallery cold and drop off slides of the work in the hopes of luring a dealer for a studio visit. Hsu made the rounds. "They all talked with each other," he says of the gallerists in those days.

Jay Gorney, who'd opened a gallery in the emerging East Village in 1985, explained to him that "sculptures were expensive to sell, hard to ship, hard to move," Hsu recalls. Being an architect, "I had a lot of sculptures at that time." Susan Brundage, who worked for Leo Castelli—a towering figure in postwar art who represented Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol, to name a few—kept encouraging Hsu to come back to the SoHo gallery. "She'd say, 'Well, he's really busy right now, but maybe next time.' " Eventually, Castelli granted an audience and advised him, "Get a show in the East Village and then come back to me."

In the meantime, Baskerville + Watson, on 57th Street, put him in a 1984 group show with other young artists. "Carole Anne [Klonarides, the director] was the first one who I think really got it," Hsu says. But after the show, she told him, "This is going to be hard."

"It was just very strange work," he says. "People didn't know where to begin."

The artist in front of Splits, 1992
Courtesy of Peter Ross

And it had no context: No one else was making anything remotely like it, which, rather than scoring him points for originality, left viewers bewildered. Peers in the group show, for instance, included Richard Prince and Louise Lawler, who were on the cusp of breaking through as pioneers of appropriation—blatantly borrowing other artists' work for their own—and their pieces couldn't have looked more different from Hsu's. Nor were his works anything like Julian Schnabel's, Eric Fischl's or those of the other neo-expressionists then in high demand.

It wasn't only his artistic sensibility that made Hsu an outlier. The art world of the 1980s was lily white, and Hsu stuck out. The East Village community appealed to him, but he didn't really feel a part of it. Nevertheless, boundary-busting gallerist Pat Hearn took a chance on Hsu. "The reviews in general were very positive, but no one understood what this was," he recalls. Musical instruments? Faux wood? Surrealism? "They were just making guesses." Still, some of it sold.

Hsu simplified his work, enabling Hearn and, later, Castelli to sell more of it. The powerful British collector Charles Saatchi acquired pieces. "Then the work started getting more difficult for people. It was much less approachable," he says. "And I could see that if I really wanted to pursue the vision that I wanted to do, I really could not work with this idea of developing a market." Hsu moved to Europe.

Unlike just about every other living artist on the planet, Hsu recoiled from his newfound ability to live off his art in Cologne, Germany. "I hated having to sell work and then pay my rent or whatever," he recalls. "I said I'd much rather have a 9-to-5 job than this. This is probably why I didn't relate to being an artist. It wasn't cool to me."

He returned to the US, moved his family to upstate New York and landed a teaching job at Sarah Lawrence College. For more than 20 years, before retiring in 2018, he continued to make work on his own time but showed rarely, a state of being that contented him. "It didn't occur to me not to do it," he says. Silk-screening led to Photoshopping. "But I knew the digital alone was too detached," he says. Seeking what he calls the "effect of painting without painting," he began playing with silicone, more commonly a sculpture medium.

Hsu's brushes
Courtesy of Peter Ross

Angela Ferraiolo, a member of the visual and studio art faculty at Sarah Lawrence, describes Hsu as a "very responsive membrane" and an "exacting" experimenter who spends years perfecting his materials and processes. "He believes in art in its purest form," she says. "What his day job did was allow his art practice to be pure R&D."

In 2006, Hsu experienced perhaps the modern world's ultimate melding of the body and technology: He underwent a kidney transplant, particularly ironic in light of his 1987 work Transplant, which was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "The operational theater was totally an art installation," he says with a laugh. "It was amazing." Now, he says, not altogether facetiously, "I consider myself a cyborg. Google is my memory."

One year Sarah Lawrence introduced a course on Asian-American literature, which Hsu had never had the opportunity to study. He audited the class and came away with a heightened sense of his own identity. "In fact, I was questioning why I didn't have more explicit connections to identity in my work," he says. "Am I in denial?" What he came to understand, though, is that there is no single Asian-American experience and that he was indeed making work about his identity, which includes his architecture training and his work as a word processor as well as often having been the only child of Chinese heritage in the classroom. "In a way, I had to create a different body in the world. That seems very simple. And maybe I was just projecting all of this onto new technology: We'll have a different body. Maybe it's really about my own situation in the world."

After spending decades contemplating humanity's future, Hsu in recent years has found inspiration looking to his own family's past. Throughout his assimilated American childhood, which began in the 1950s aftermath of Mao Zedong's ascent and McCarthyism and bumped up against the Cultural Revolution in his adolescence, his mother, fearful they would be shunned in the US and their relatives persecuted in China, urged him to pretend the family's roots were in Hong Kong, not mainland China. His mother spoke little of her life there before immigrating, and her death in 2011 led Hsu to reconnect with his extended Chinese family.

Hsu again left New York, this time for Shanghai, in 2013. "I said to myself, 'If no one wants to show the work that I do here, would it be worth it?' And I said it would be." Each morning he would walk five blocks to his studio—"Five blocks in China, where you don't know the language, is like a universe"—and then delve into old family photographs his Chinese relatives shared with him. Intuitively, he blended these artifacts—themselves products of a once groundbreaking technology—with his visual language. As he repeatedly manipulated the images digitally—a boat is full of people and then suddenly not—and printed them on aluminum, he says he came to accept "that this really isn't about my history. It's realizing the absence of this family history in my growing up in the US."

Liquid Circuit, 1987
Courtesy of Peter Ross

In this age of ubiquitous digital photography, Ferraiolo sees the thread from Hsu's earlier oeuvre in this ongoing body of work, titled "Shanghai Project." "It's about technology's effect on memory," she says, "how we construct memory, how we bring memory back into the present."

Although the work is deeply personal, Hsu says the idea of absence is growing more universal as social media becomes all-consuming. "Can you be absent anymore? Can you erase yourself?" asks Hsu, who has never even joined Facebook. "Can you actually have privacy anymore?"

It was during his time in Shanghai that Hsu received an e-mail from a curator interested in exhibiting his work. He has since shown to enthusiastic reviews in Hong Kong as well as in group shows at the Hirshhorn Museum and Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies in upstate New York. Hsu laughs at how his friends suspect his years of obscurity were all just part of a grand plan. "They used to say, 'Tishan, what's going on here? I mean you're not doing anything,' " he says. But Hsu knew people would see the work differently one day. He simply had to wait patiently for the future to arrive. "The fact that I could just do my work and be really true to my vision—I couldn't really ask for more."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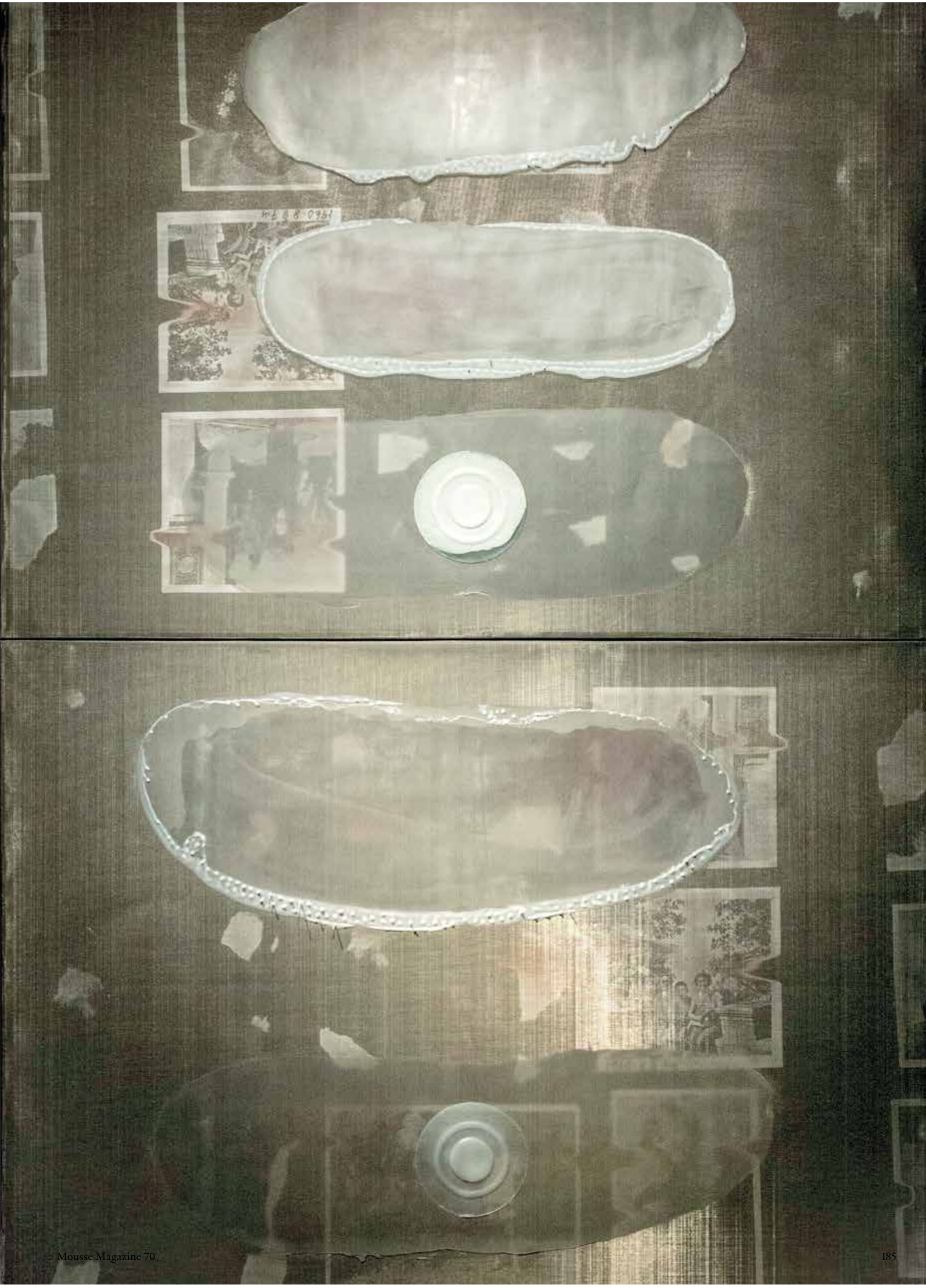
Clinical Cosmology: TISHAN HSU

BY

Hera Chan

Contrary to popular belief, TISHAN HSU offers a simple proposal. Orifices open up from flat surfaces or tiled sculptural pieces, or are embedded in skin-bag surfaces or technologically manufactured images. But his violating fissures, seamlessly embedded, are not intended to illustrate the engagement of the body under the historical epoch of technology. Rather, they produce an affective relationship with the technical object. It doesn't look like anything you've seen before because he isn't referencing standards and methods in art history—in fact he evades these, which is why you'll never see paint in his work because of the medium's provenance in the history of painting. He produces work on another premise altogether.

1960·8 莫干山



180 *Blue Cross* (detail), 1991.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.
Photo: Pierre Le Hors

183 *R.E.M. revisited* (detail), 2002.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

184 *QMH 3.2.1* (detail), 2019.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.
Photo: Lance Brewer

185 *Dread-Fog*, 2013.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.
Photo: Michael Yu

186 *Boating Scene 1.1.2*, 2019.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.
Photo: Lance Brewer

190 *Auto-Immune*, 1988.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

191 *Double Bind*, 1989.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

192 *Intensive Care*, 1990.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

193 (Top) *Cellular Automata*, 1989.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong
(Bottom, left) *Vertical Ooze*, 1987.
© Tishan Hsu. Collection of Centre Pompidou, Paris.
Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong
(Bottom, right, from top) *Reflexive Ooze*, 1987.
© Tishan Hsu. Collection of High Museum of Art, Atlanta.
Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong;
Portrait (2), 1984.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong;
Cold Cut, 1987.
© Tishan Hsu. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

Yuk Hui's book *The Question Concerning Technology in China* (2016) proposes a theory of technology called "cosmotechnics" that roots the contemporary definition of *techne* in Chinese cosmology, which perceives a unity of heaven and humanity. The argument goes that different places are informed by different material conditions and thinking, thereby necessitating a different theory of technology. Hsu's unfamiliar articulation of *techne* in his work since the 1970s is grounded in anterior foundational myths as well, nurtured by a cosmology he has been surgically suturing through intuition.

After studying architecture at MIT, Hsu moved in 1975 to New York, where he worked at one of the very few office jobs that then involved a word processor. He found this engagement with the virtual presented on-screen remarkable, but regarded the physicality of the word processor itself as the site of mediation: you look at this box and see a screen that shows you a complete illusion of a world, and it is completely absorbing. You realize the world shown is not an illusion. It's in the same space you are, and your awareness of this object occurs at the surface. The interface—introducing body to machine—is constitutive of sorcery, or as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun writes, "sourcery." In her account, introduced in 2008, we valorize the user as agent, a fantasy of our control. Source code is a fetish and makes our machines demonic and our desire for dominance endless. Close engagement with software "will not let us escape fictions and arrive at a true understanding of our machine, but rather make our interfaces more productively spectral."[1] It is its concern with the physical that makes Hsu's work critical and confusing. Its spectrality is materially based. Hsu does not believe that uploading to the cloud hails the end of the body. There is no preoccupation with ghosts of future's past, nor fear of technological dominance over humans, but an animistic articulation from the presence of present cyborg-like interfaces. In these foundational myths there are no origin stories.

In general, Hsu's work does not photograph well. Most of the works appear flat where they are sculptural, or like a screen even when they are three-dimensional. The tiled sculptures appear clinically clean and perform surgical theater with dramatic suspense. One of Hsu's earliest hanged works, *Portrait* (1982), was made using oil stick, enamel, and concrete on wood. The piece is six inches thick. The corners are rounded (another evasion of hanging-art convention, which usually presents the work as an angular window) and there is a thick black-and-pink frame around the eyes, lips, and other orifices operating on the same field. A rounded pink rectangle seemingly pushes through the plane in the center. *Portrait (2)* (1984) was made with oil stick, enamel, Styrofoam, and concrete on wood. It is a rounded square bearing a black vignette around its edges, the steel gray surface marked by defined ridges with an upside-down trapezoid-like shape in the center. Resembling a dehydrated body, it suggests a strange musculature underneath the canvas surface. Hsu's only other work that has ever implied self-portraiture through its title is *Fingerprint* (1989). Hsu was in Cologne from 1988 to 1990 for an artist residency, and the requisite paperwork required his fingerprints and a "certificate of good behavior." *Fingerprint* is a one-off piece and the only straightforwardly figurative work in his opus. It features a laser-printed copy of the submitted document, his inky prints contained by a thick aluminum frame with wire-reinforced glass on top. The work is vacuum sealed—a comment on bodily surveillance replicating a synthetic environment where the body has no air.

Hsu's works often present clinical trials and tribulations, like surgical theater. This is where you can see the body exploded. Though he himself does not watch surgical theater (which looks something like a livestream of an operating room), Hsu did go under the knife in 2006 when he experienced a kidney transplant. Through this process, he came to know practically every chemical in his body because he did a lot of research on his own. He felt that the doctors treated him like a machine, and his earlier work from the 1980s began to feel newly prophetic. *Cold Cut* (1987) is a rounded square hanging work divided into top and bottom, its orifices fitted with mini grates, smatters of fresh red "blood" spilling out. *Transplant* (1987) as a title is evocative enough, seeming to refer either to surgical procedures or the status of an immigrant, or both. The question is not about locating the body in relation to technology; such modular structures, Hsu tells me, seek to "reconstitute the body in a different way."[2]

Even the "furniture" pieces mirror this constant restructuring, following both Hsu's architectural education and the way offices can be arranged. His earlier furniture pieces are simpler, made of ceramic tile on wood, oil compound, steel, and sometimes vinyl or concrete. *Cellular Automata* (1989) is divided into a three-by-nine grid outlined with organic black shadows that bulge like musculature under skin, and references Hsu's work from the earlier half of the 1980s, which included many cell-like diagrams. The size of the body is unclear, but either way, it can be taken apart like building blocks and put back together. The proposition might be understood as liberating or as a bodily horror, reminding me of the reception of the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. On the "body without organs" in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), psychoanalyst Joel Kovel wrote, "Immersion in their world of 'schizoculture' and desiring machines is enough to make a person yearn for the secure madness of the nuclear family."[3] In 1990, the Paris-based gallerist Charles Cartwright showed *Cellular Automata* in a group show. Cartwright had recommended Deleuze and Guattari to Hsu, although the latter would not begin a deep engagement with their texts until more than a decade later.

Proceeding through Hsu's work chronologically reveals that the timeline of his works parallels progressions in technological innovations in production processes. In *Cellular Automata*, Hsu used silkscreen for the first time. Transferring photographic film onto nylon-like screens, and we witness the inaugural technological repetition of his forms. Hsu does not use technology as a means to an end, or merely as a tool for visual illustration. He is engaged with technological processes themselves and how technology can produce its own images—another unification of the organic and machinic. Over time, the high-contrast black outlines that demarcated the modularity of Hsu's work in the early 1980s began to fade. The work of the 1990s

shows faint traces of lines marking a grid, making a hybrid surface constituted of different materials and images. In the early 2000s the artist spent a year mastering Photoshop. The development of archival printing by Duggal, one of the largest printing labs in New York that was willing to work with artists, led to the possibility of digital printing on canvas. What Hsu originally did by hand became possible first via silkscreen, then Photoshop, and later in *The Shanghai Project* (2013–ongoing) by UV printing on aluminum. Technological processes had evolved dramatically, and mobilizing them yielded plastic and seamless works—the opposite ethos of collage.

In David Shannon's beloved children's picture book *A Bad Case of Stripes* (1998), Camilla Cream loves lima beans but refuses to eat them because her friends make fun of her for it. She begins to turn into the colors and patterns of her friends' taunts, growing roots, berries, and crystals and eventually merging with the architecture of the room. Though farfetched, Shannon's illustrations remind me of Hsu's works; they both demonstrate the mimetic potential of the body to fuse with its environment, mutually constituting each other into a singularity. Hsu was born in Boston to Shanghainese immigrant parents, grew up in Switzerland and Wisconsin, and later became part of Pat Hearn's East Village gallery roster. The 1990s language of identity politics did not speak to Hsu then, and it still doesn't. He is neither here nor there, though this position does not disturb his sense of place, which is one of immediacy. As Jeppe Ugelvig pointed out in his profile on Hsu for *ArtReview Asia*, Hsu's politics are much more aligned with the posthuman and the theories of Rachel Lee.[4] In *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies* (2014), Lee asks: "If race has been settled as a legal or social construction and not as biological fact, why do Asian American artists, authors, and performers continue to scrutinize their body parts?"[5] Rather than looking at the radicalized body through socially constructed notions of race, Hsu literally reconfigures its parts, suggesting another social order.

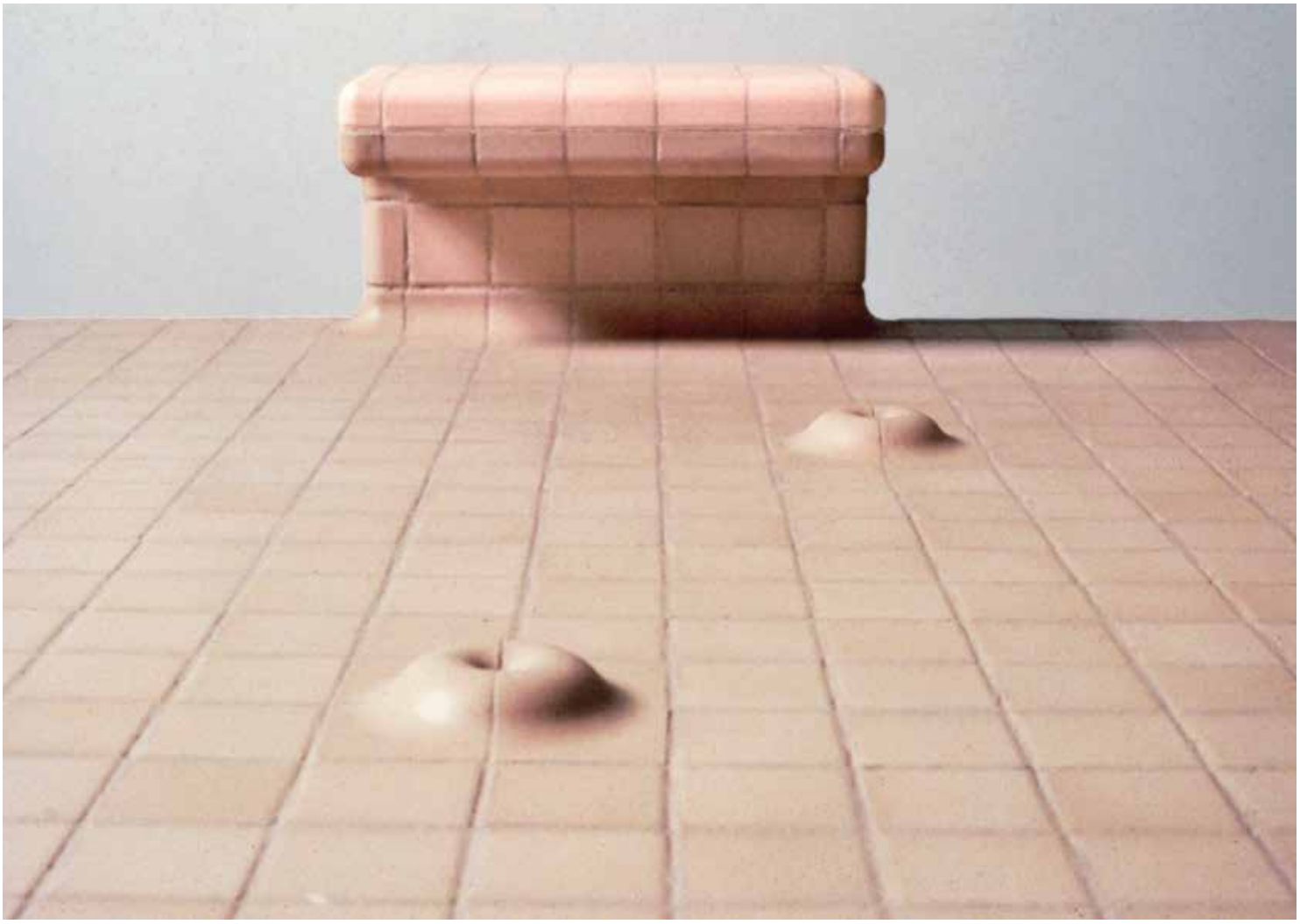
Following his mother's death in 2013, Hsu set up a studio in Shanghai and worked there for three years. Among her possessions he found letters between his mother and her family in China from the 1950s and 1960s and a rich family archive of photographs accumulated by his great-uncle. Some pictures were missing from the photo albums, edited out by the Communists during the Cultural Revolution, requiring the album's future owner to imagine the missing scenes of bourgeois life. Aware of the weight of this historical burden, Hsu felt disconnected from the images: they had everything and nothing to do with him. His parents never spoke of this time when he was growing up. Hsu first showed the collection of works known simply as *The Shanghai Project* at Empty Gallery in Hong Kong in 2019. It featured family photographs seemingly disturbed by digital transmission waves and further morphed by bright red or green silicon markings and drips. He felt the topic would be too sensitive to show in mainland China and too distant to show outside an Asian context.

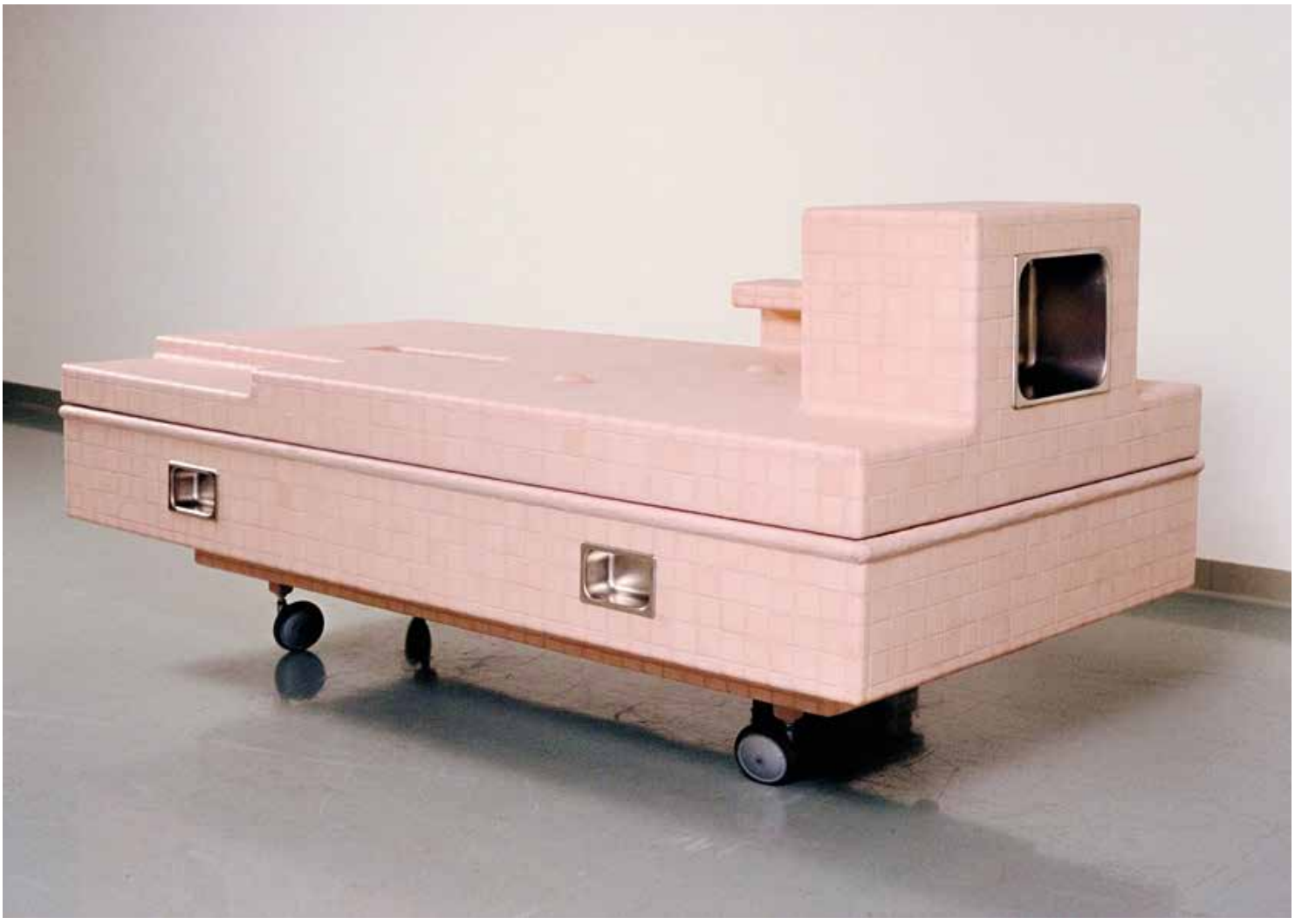
The four works in the *Boating Scene* (2019) series show warped images of a well-dressed family on a boat. A double displacement occurs, first of the family itself in migration, and then in its confrontation with digital textures. The images are UV printed on aluminum, and computer-chip-like shapes of pigmented silicone appear to drip through the back of the plates. As Donna Haraway proposed in "The Cyborg Manifesto," "The silicon chip is a surface for writing; it is etched in molecular scales disturbed only by atomic noise, the ultimate interference for nuclear scores."[6] The images appear disturbed by ghostly transmissions, rendering the historical accuracy of the original image a moot point. Through this project, Hsu became aware of the prescient absence in his personal historical imaginary. Like all absences, it is constituted by the presence of something else. Hsu's cosmology provides an ontology, a logic of being guided by the animism of technical objects. What a sense of being alive.

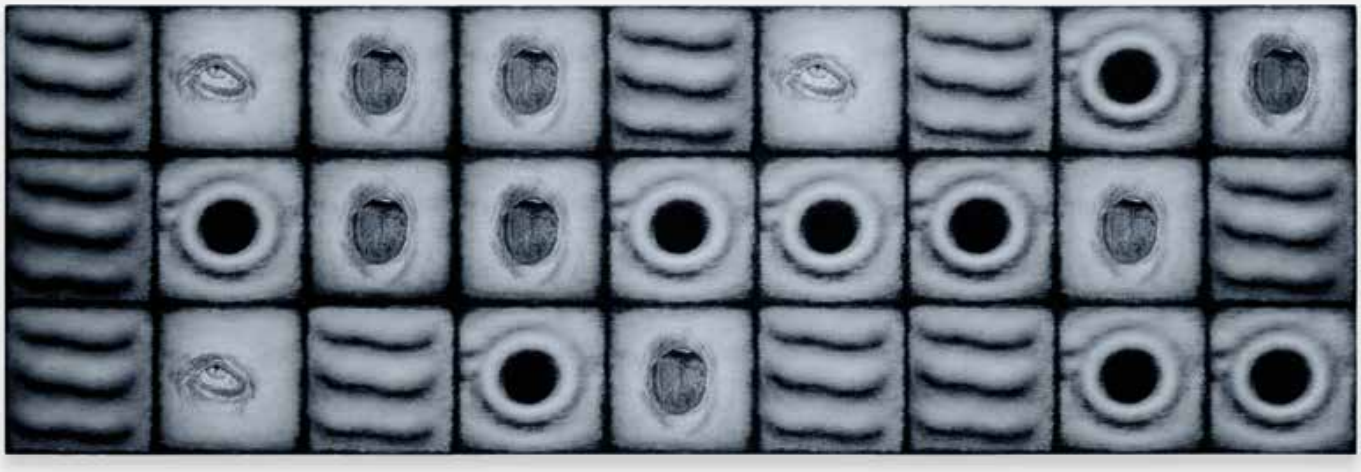
1 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "On 'Sourcery,' or Code as Fetish," *Configurations* 16, no. 3 (2008): 300.
2 Author interview with Tishan Hsu, November 30, 2019.
3 Joel Kovel, *History and Spirit: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1991), 255.
4 Jeppe Ugelvig, "Tishan Hsu: The Chinese-American Artist Who Pioneered New Ways of Representing the Interface between Physical and Virtual Worlds," *ArtReview Asia*, Spring 2019, https://artreview.com/features/ara_spring_2019_feature_tishan_hsu/.
5 Rachel Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).
6 Donna Haraway, "The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," first published in *Socialist Review*, reprinted at https://faculty.uca.edu/rnovy/Haraway--A%20Cyborg%20Manifesto.htm.

TISHAN HSU (b. 1951, Boston) spent his very early years in Zurich, then grew up in Ohio, Wisconsin, Virginia, and New York. He studied architecture at MIT and received his BSAD in 1973 and M.Arch in 1975. While at MIT, he studied film at the Carpenter Center, Harvard University. He moved to New York in 1979, where he currently resides. Hsu first showed in New York at Pat Hearn Gallery. Since 1985 he has shown extensively in the United States, Europe, and Mexico. His work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; the High Museum, Atlanta; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami; and the Frederick R. Weisman Museum, Minneapolis. Hsu has served as a board member of White Columns, New York, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He has been a professor of visual arts at Sarah Lawrence College and a visiting professor at Pratt Institute and Harvard University.

HERA CHAN is a curator and writer based in Hong Kong, currently working as the associate public programs curator at Tai Kwun Contemporary. Her ongoing work involves building a global contemporary art pageant through Miss Ruthless International. She was fellow at the RAW Material Company, Dakar, and a curator in residence as part of the All The Way South exchange between the Guangzhou Times Museum and Artista x Artista in Havana. She cofounded Atelier Céladon in Montreal and has staged projects at Para Site, Hong Kong; Spring Workshop, Hong Kong; UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing; SBC galerie d'art contemporain, Montreal; SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin; and Artista x Artista, Havana. Her writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *ArtAsiaPacific*, *ArtReview Asia*, *Frieze*, *Ocula*, *Spike Art Quarterly*, and *TAKE.*







artnet® news

Here Are 21 Highly Anticipated, Mind-Expanding Museum Exhibitions to Seek Out Across the US in 2020

By Sarah Cascone, January 6, 2020

You won't want to miss these shows.

Alex Da Corte, *Rubber Pencil Devil* (2018), installation view. Photo by Tom Little, courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London.

There are a bevy of significant museum shows opening across the country in the first half of 2020, ranging from a provocative examination of AI art in San Francisco to a historic survey of El Greco in Chicago. Here's everything you need to know about the exhibitions we are looking forward to most.

"Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit" at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles
January 26–April 19, 2020

Tishan Hsu, *Cell* (1987). Photo courtesy of the Hammer Museum, collection of Ralph Wernicke/Hubertushoehe art + architecture, Berlin and Zürich.

The first US museum survey for Tishan Hsu, who trained as an architect at MIT, was organized by SculptureCenter in Queens, and will now be making its West Coast debut. Curator Sohrab Mohebbi makes the case that Hsu is an artist who was ahead of his time, making works back in the 1980s that already considered the dangerous implications of artificial intelligence and other technological advances.

The Hammer is located at 10899 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California; admission is free.

ARTFORUM

Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit

By Ania Szremski of Artforum, January 2020

Tishan Hsu, *Liquid Circuit,* 1987, acrylic, vinyl cement compound, alkyd, oil, and aluminum on wood, 7' 6“ × 11' 11” × 9".

HAMMER MUSEUM
10899 Wilshire Boulevard
January 26–April 19, 2020

Curated by Sohrab Mohebbi

By the mid-1980s, Tishan Hsu was already creating weird works informed by the impact of an increasingly technologized reality on our minds and bodies. The paintings and objects were strange and slow—totally disconnected formally from what Hsu's fellow East Village artists were creating to popular acclaim at the time—but they presaged the concerns of an entire future generation of artists. Now that the art world has caught up to him, Hsu is finally receiving his first US museum survey. The exhibition, co-organized with SculptureCenter, New York, features close to fifty works spanning from 1980 to 2018, including soothing, screen saver–like abstract paintings, eerie sculptures made of ceramic tiles and cement, and early experiments with software, all capturing a specific historical juncture in the human relationship to technology, but in a visual language that feels ever more relevant today. *Travels to SculptureCenter, New York, May 9–August 17.*

— *Ania Szremski*

WSJ | MAGAZINE

The Eight Best Designed Items of December: An Eiffel Tower–inspired necklace, the hottest new facial accessory and more in our editors' monthly picks of design and fashion items

December 2, 2019

TECH TAKE tishan Hsu's 1987 work Vertical Ooze, part of a traveling retrospective of the artist's work opening in January at L.A.'s Hammer museum.

Working in painting, photography, sculpture and multimedia installation, the 68-year-old artist Tishan Hsu has tracked the origins of artificial intelligence and technology—and their effects on humans—since 1980. "What might've seemed very strange and bizarre when I first showed it," he says, "now has a certain resonance and reality." Hsu's 25-year survey, *Liquid Circuit*, is at L.A.'s Hammer Museum from January 26 to April 19 before traveling to SculptureCenter in New York City. *hammer.ucla.edu—Cody Delistraty*

OCULA REPORT

In a Year of No Future: Cyberpunk at Hong Kong's Tai Kwun

Emily Verla Bovino Hong Kong 22 November 2019

Shinro Ohtake, MON CHERI: A Self-Portrait as a Scrapped Shed (2012). Mixed media, timber, electronics, sound, steam. Dimensions variable. Exhibition view: Phantom Plane, Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (5 October 2019–4 January 2020). Courtesy the artist and Tai Kwun Contemporary.

In what was reportedly Tokyo's cloudiest summer in over a century this July, Yoshiji Kigami, key animator of the cyberpunk classic Akira (1988), died in an arson attack that killed 35 people at Kyoto Animation. The attacker lit the fire with a lighter after dousing the studio with gasoline. 'They are always stealing', he explained in the belief the studio had taken ideas from a draft novel he sent them. About one month earlier, on 16 June, nearly two million people took to Hong Kong's streets to challenge a bill that would have allowed the special administrative region to honour extradition requests from countries it has no extradition treaties with, including China, which has been sovereign over the city since 1997. Police refusal to approve public gatherings has made it increasingly difficult to mobilise peacefully, and Hong Kong's universities are now at the centre of the revolt, which aims to 'blossom everywhere'. To quote Joshua Clover, 'surplus danger, surplus information (...), surplus emotion' characterise this year of no future.

Theorists of techno-orientalism assert that Japan and China are 'screens' for the projection of both 'technological fantasies' and the fear of being 'colonised, mechanised and instrumentalised.' For some, self-orientalisation is empowering; for others it is all about market gain. For the curators of group show Phantom Plane, Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future at Tai Kwun Contemporary (5 October 2019–4 January 2020), it appears self-orientalism is tactical. This Hong Kong-based exploration of 'cyberpunk'—the 'snappy label' that writer William Gibson accused of depoliticising dissidence in the science-fiction subgenre—feels excellently executed if perplexingly cynical. Works by 21 artists spanning three floors of this colonial-era prison turned heritage-and-arts-complex eagerly feed the techno-orientalist frenzy that the show plays at interrogating.

Left to right: Tetsuya Ishida, Interview (1998). Acrylic on board. 103 x 145.6 cm; Lee Bul, After Bruno Taut (Beware the sweetness of things) (2007). Crystal, glass, and acrylic beads on stainless-steel armature, aluminium and copper mesh, PVC, steel, and aluminium chains. 258 x 200 x 250 cm. Exhibition view: Phantom Plane, Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (5 October 2019–4 January 2020). Courtesy the artists, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, and Tai Kwun Contemporary.

The suppression of any intelligible voices by a mix of sounds from various works glitching, pounding, and crackling over haunting tunes, seems an intended effect. We cannot hear ourselves think, let alone speak. Voices trying to communicate serve the soundscape but not the messages they want to relay. The gallery's iconic spiral staircase leads through the show's spectral portals, all nested like an infinite mise-en-abyme. Zheng Mahler's Nostalgia Machines (2019) is a wall-size projection of a 3D-animated film around a doorway—its purple-orange cityscape flooded by rising water levels spins under the glowing eye of a corporate logo and provides access to the first floor. This cinematic gateway frames Tishan Hsu's blistering esophageal reliefs (Terrain, 1985; No Name, 1986; Stripped Nude, 1984), which give way to Jon Rafman's chatroom-led meander through live-action and found footage of Hong Kong and Istanbul (Neon Parallel 1996, 2015). Between images of mask-jewellery crafted to evade facial recognition software and a leaping beetle-like military craft, the viewer is both pursued and in pursuit through the city streets of the Mediterranean and the Pearl River Delta.

Left to right: Jon Rafman, Neon Parallel 1996 (2015); Tishan Hsu, Stripped Nude (1984). Oil stick enamel, Styrofoam, concrete on wood. 213 x 122 x 22 cm; No Name (1986). Acrylic, cement compound, alkyd, oil on wood. 226 x 122 x 10 cm; Terrain (1985). Acrylic, concrete, Styrofoam, oil, enamel on wood. Exhibition view: Phantom Plane, Cyberpunk in the Year of the Future, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (5 October 2019–4 January 2020).

Art in America

January: Tishan Hsu
July, 2019

"Habitat," which debuted at MASP in spring 2019 and is titled after a design magazine that the architect and her husband founded in 1950, offers an in-depth look at Bo Bardi's buildings, furniture, writing, curatorial innovations (such as hanging paintings on glass panels wedged into concrete blocks), and work as a museum director.

Museo Jumex, Mexico City, Jan. 23–May 10, 2020; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, June 13–Sept. 27, 2020.

Tishan Hsu

Even today, Chinese-American artist Tishan Hsu's "posthuman" sculptures and paintings – which he began making in the mid-1980s after studying architecture and film and working as an early word processor at a law firm – feel mysteriously forward-looking. Approximately thirty works, many exploring the way the human body interacts with an increasingly tech-dependent world, are on view in the survey "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit."

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Jan. 26–Apr. 19, 2020; SculptureCenter, New York, May 10–Aug. 17, 2020.

FEBRUARY ▼

Paul McCarthy

In a contribution to the May 2015 issue of this magazine, Paul McCarthy recalled his early work: "I made paintings by dragging my face across the floor, paintings with my penis, and paintings where I used shit for paint and my head and upper body as the brush." Even when made with more conventional tools and materials, McCarthy's art brims with raw, abject expressivity. In "Head Space, Drawings 1963–2019," his works on paper – sometimes evoking familiar Disney characters – combine elements such as oilstick and mixed-medium collage in explorations of his eternal theme: the psychology of violence and desire.

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Feb. 2–May 10, 2020.

Mary Weatherford

The dramatic canvases of Mary Weatherford build on the gestural vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism, often with her characteristic addition of glowing tubes of neon, which serve as a kind of abstract drawing and a physical reminder of light's effects on color. This thirty-year survey emphasizes Weatherford's engagement with cultural references, such as opera and Greek mythology, as well as her engagement – in various suites of works – with the visual properties of the locales where she has worked.

Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., Feb. 8–June 27, 2020; SITE Santa Fe, Oct. 16, 2020–Feb. 28, 2021.

Nicole Eisenman

Although Nicole Eisenman built her career on painting, her sculpture has been gaining ground. The cover image she produced for A.i.A.'s September 2015 issue featured a striking plaster-and-ceramic work; her 2018–19 show at the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden in Germany centered on her sculptural efforts; and numerous critics hailed her motley figural

Mary Weatherford: Canyon, 2014. Flashe and neon on linen, 112 by 99 inches.

Weatherford: Photo Fredrik Nilsen Studio

Museum Previews

Tishan Hsu

Even today, Chinese-American artist Tishan Hsu's "posthuman" sculptures and paintings – which he began making in the mid-1980s after studying architecture and film and working as an early word processor at a law firm – feel mysteriously forward-looking. Approximately thirty works, many exploring the way the human body interacts with an increasingly tech-dependent world, are on view in the survey "Tishan Hsu: Liquid Circuit."

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Jan. 26–Apr. 19, 2020; SculptureCenter, New York, May 10–Aug. 17, 2020.

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Three exhibitions to see in Hong Kong this week

From Tishan Hsu's family photographs at Empty Gallery to a group show on violence set inside a former police station

AIMEE DAWSON, HANNAH MCGIVERN, JULIA MICHALSKA
29th March 2019

It feels apt that an exhibition on violence is on show at the former Central Police Station compound that is now the Tai Kwun Centre for Heritage and Arts. But the theme of Performing Society: the Violence of Gender (until 28 April; free), is not that literal: the show looks at how societal structures are a form of violence, and how gender norms are defined and imposed. Organised by Susanne Pfeffer, the director of Frankfurt's Museum für Moderne Kunst, the show features 11 artists, such as Hong Kong's Wong Ping and Germany's Anne Imhof, the Golden Lion winner of the 2017 Venice Biennale. With several videos on show depicting scenes of a graphic or sexual nature, parts of the exhibition are age-restricted, including Wong's animation Who's the Daddy (2017) which makes references to penises, fisting and abortion.

Tishan Hsu (until 25 May; free) at the Empty Gallery in Hong Kong is shines a spotlight on the Chinese-American artist, who came to prominence in the 1980s but retreated from view in the 1990s. The gallery is staging an exhibition of Hsu's most recent works at its venue in the Grand Marine Center, and also showing pieces dating from the 1980s and 1990s on its stand at Art Basel in Hong Kong. "We found Tishan, archived his work, and got his studio up and running again," says Alexander Lau, the gallery director. In the past few years, Hsu has worked on a project focused on historical photographs discovered in albums of his extended family, examples of which are on show at the Empty Gallery. "The work evolved out of a confluence of events, including the death of my mother in Boston, which precipitated my setting up a studio in Shanghai, where family members who I never knew for most of my life have lived for many years," Hsu says.

Taking its title from one of the French-American artist's writings, Hauser & Wirth's show Louise Bourgeois: My Own Voice Wakes Me Up (until 11 May; free), presents a series of red gouaches, topiary-inspired sculptures and rarely exhibited holograms, all made in the last two decades of the artist's life. The deeply personal and confessional nature of Bourgeois's work is a focus of this show, which is organised by Jerry Gorovoy, who worked as her assistant from the early 1980s until her death in 2010. The exhibition coincides with Bourgeois's first solo show in China, The Eternal Thread, which opened at the Long Museum, Shanghai, and travels this month to the Song Art Museum, Beijing.

CULTURED

OUR 5 FAVORITE BOOTHS AT ART BASEL HONG KONG

JENNIFER PIEJKO
03.29.2019

Art week ignites Hong Kong's spring season with a dizzying program of openings, special events, and new galleries—and it all starts at Art Basel. Between cups of milk tea and bites of dim sum, here are a few outstanding presentations at the main fair.

TISHAN HSU AT EMPTY GALLERY.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND EMPTY GALLERY.

Tishan Hsu, Empty Gallery
Perhaps the city's most dynamic young art space, Empty is a must-visit destination in Hong Kong year-round. At the booth, they give a spare, selective presentation of work by American artist Tishan Hsu, a first showing of work he made between the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. This presentation runs concurrently with "Delete," the 68-year-old New York- and Shanghai-based artist's show now on view at Empty, in which he digitally manipulates and reworks family photo albums that survived China's revolutionary years. The gallery is known for presentations of experimental exhibitions and sound work (and raves!).

EXHIBITIONS

Tishan Hsu "delete" at Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

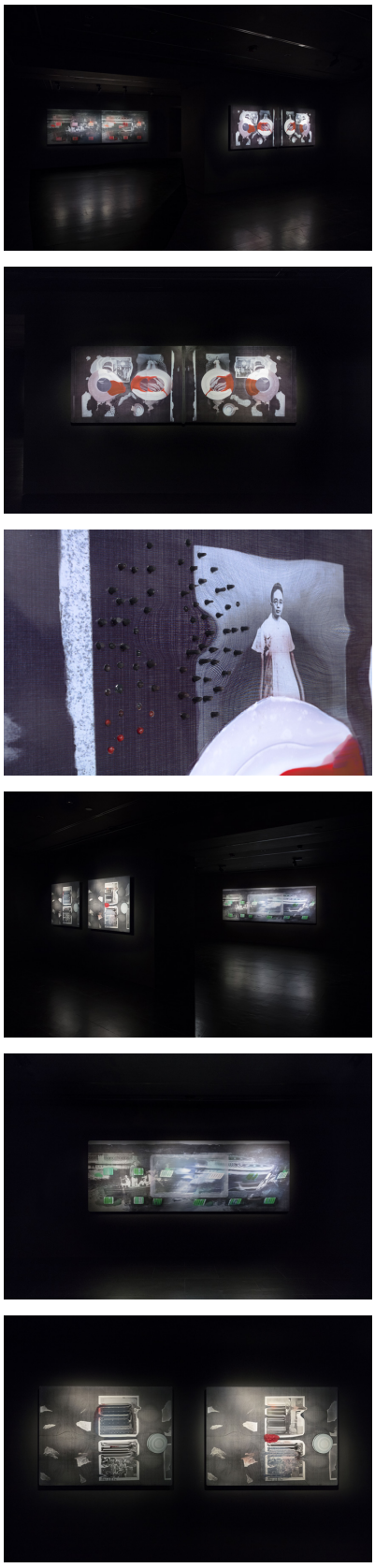
Empty Gallery is proud to present delete, New-York and Shanghai-based artist Tishan Hsu's first solo exhibition in Asia. Working between painting and sculpture, Hsu's practice explores the effect of a rapidly expanding technological sphere on our embodied subjectivity and conception of the human. The body of new work on view in delete interprets these concerns through the lens of Hsu's recent research into his own family history. Drawing on a collection of family photo-albums which survived partially intact during China's revolutionary years, Hsu subjects this archive to a multi-layered process of digital manipulation and re-photography. In the process, these iconic images of early 20th century Chinese life – at once intimate and anonymous – are transformed into mirage-like landscapes reflecting the virtuality of history.

For Hsu, the experiences of history and technology are in fact inseparable. History can only become knowable through its representations, which are increasingly subsumed into the liquid flow of mediated images which comprise our everyday existence. This relationship between historical space and virtual space is made manifest through Hsu's complex treatment of his source material. Each image is scanned, digitally manipulated, and re-photographed through a stainless steel mesh, before finally being printed on to aluminum panels and embellished with drips and protrusions of pigmented silicon. The re-photography process flattens Hsu's steel mesh into an omnipresent grid which permeates all the works; a charged surface which both supports and entraps the images embedded within it. This surface serves as a metaphor not only for the process of digital (or photographic) mediation, but also for the mediation of state ideology, cultural memory, and individual consciousness – the mundane phenomena which condition how history makes itself known.

If Hsu's earlier work attempted to describe how the pressures of an increasingly technological world acted on the body of the individual subject, the works in delete perform a similar gesture in relation to the effects of history on the body. Like the technological subject, the historical subject is determined by a totality which is inaccessible to them except through fragmentary representations. This totality can make itself felt only negatively, through a rhetoric of distortion, dislocation, and absence. The dark and formless mass of unrepresented history presses against Hsu's screens, causing them to warp and buckle along with their images. The body is formed by these energies traveling through history, which push against a grid of representations unable to contain them – excreting themselves as unidentified fluids and organs.

Hsu does not seek to reclaim a history that has been erased – whether by death, forgetfulness, or repression – but to speculate on this erasure itself and the paradoxical way in which even absence can structure the material body. The works in delete additionally suggest a shared history; a history which turns out to be not only Hsu's own, but one collectively held by all those members of the Chinese diaspora whose embodied consciousness has been molded by an experience of exile, trauma, and displacement. Hsu's personal investigation thus becomes a tentative mapping of a shared affective space – one whose contours have been only too infrequently explored.

at Empty Gallery, Hong Kong
until 25 May 2019



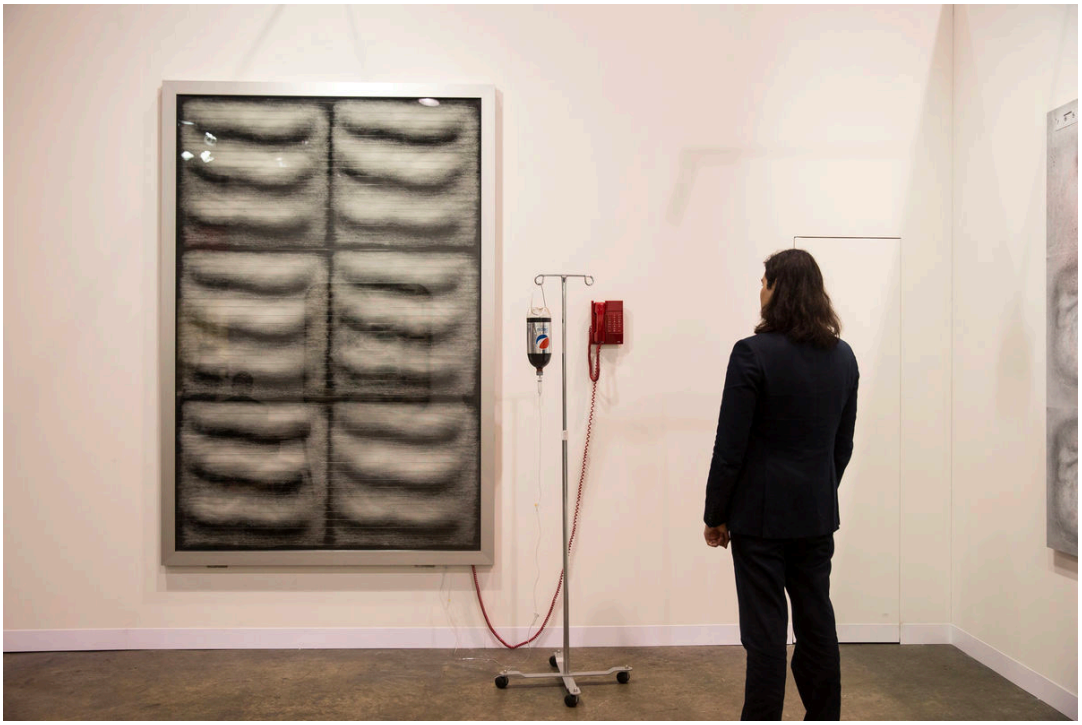
Tishan Hsu "delete" installation view at Empty Gallery
Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, HK

The 10 Best Booths at Art Basel in Hong Kong

Alina Cohen Mar 27, 2019

On Monday and Tuesday evening, the international art world filtered through Hong Kong to attend openings at the increasingly global set of galleries the city has to offer. The Pedder Building alone is home to Pearl Lam (Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore) and Hanart (Hong Kong), as well as numerous American imports (Gagosian, Lehmann Maupin)—a microcosm, perhaps, of the seventh edition of Art Basel in Hong Kong, which opened to VIPs on Wednesday across two floors of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center.

This year, Art Basel in Hong Kong features 242 galleries from 35 countries and territories. "As good as the shows are in the West, at this standard, none of them have this kind of global diversity," said Marc Spiegler, global director of Art Basel. Exhibitors hailing from São Paulo to Seoul, Calcutta to Melbourne, courted new collectors and coped with varying degrees of jet lag. Spiegler noted that he's seen major changes in presentations since the fair began in the 2010s. "This is a discerning market," he offered. "In the beginning, perhaps people thought that they could empty out their inventory.…The same quality is expected by the collectors as they would see at other shows, and the galleries meet that—or they don't, at their own peril." Below, we share highlights from the fair's best booths.



Installation view of Empty Gallery's booth at Art Basel in Hong Kong, 2019. Courtesy of Art Basel.

Tishan Hsu's mixed-media work Feed Forward (1989), on view at Empty Gallery's booth, features a wheeled stand with an upside-down bottle of Pepsi, hooked up like an intravenous drip to a wall-mounted silkscreen. The print features shadowy lines resembling an X-ray of a rib cage; the piece's final component is a red phone mounted on the wall. The strange, humorous juxtapositions ask viewers to reconsider the relationship between art and the body. Such haunting corporeality is central to many of Hsu's works in the booth. And the artist, who's been exhibiting since the early 1980s, is enjoying a minor resurgence.

"He was really active in the New York art scene back in the '80s," explained Empty Gallery's Ching Ching Cheung. "I guess it was a bit too avant-garde for people to understand.…He just felt misunderstood." Hsu distanced himself from the art world and began teaching at Sarah Lawrence College (and continued there until retiring recently). Hsu also has a solo presentation on view at Empty Gallery's Hong Kong space, and his work is included in an exhibition space connected with Adrian Cheng's new major development, Victoria Dockside. The artist hasn't achieved so much concentrated attention since around 1990, when the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Katonah Museum of Art, and a series of other institutions featured him in their shows. The art world seems to be decanting Hsu's practice, letting it breathe after years on the shelf.

The New York Times

The World Catches Up With Tishan Hsu

Tishan Hsu's "Virtual Flow" (1990) will be shown at Art Basel Hong Kong.
CreditCreditTishan Hsu and Empty Gallery

By Ted Loos

March 27, 2019

For most of his more than four-decade career, the multimedia artist Tishan Hsu had a knack for being steadily out of sync with the art world, and the art market in particular.

But rather than brooding over that, Mr. Hsu, now 68, simply pursued his vision — making works that ask "how do we embody technology?" as he puts it.

Born in Boston to Chinese parents, Mr. Hsu is about to be featured in three shows in Hong Kong.

"These are my first-ever shows in Asia, and it represents a kind of return, which is really interesting," he said.

At Art Basel Hong Kong, taking place this weekend at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, Empty Gallery will show his works from the 1980s to the early 1990s. The gallery also features a show of Mr. Hsu's newer work, "Delete," from March 26 to May 25 at its gallery space in the city's Aberdeen neighborhood. At the same time, several of his works are featured in "Glow Like That" at the K11 Art Foundation from March 27 to May 13.

"I've always made very personal work," said Mr. Hsu, chatting in his large studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (he lives upstairs). "But I admit it's been a little frustrating at times when people have said, 'What planet do you come from?'"

At Art Basel Hong Kong, Mr. Hsu will have his first show in Asia.
via Empty Gallery

As he spoke, Mr. Hsu was surrounded by old and new works that demonstrate how hard he is to categorize: He's sort of a painter and sort of a sculptor, and he works with photography, too. But his creations aren't really "installations" in the way the term is used these days, either.

Standing on the floor was "Virtual Flow" (1990), a two-part sculptural contraption made of antiseptic pink ceramic tiles, with a screen-like square evoking a computer or a TV, attached to a cart covered with strange-looking growths.

Hanging above it was "Outer Banks of Memory" (1984), a painting on wood with an evocative textural grain that incorporates concrete and Styrofoam and is studded with biomorphic forms.

In the latter work, Mr. Hsu said, "memory" referred to that of a computer. It was a perfect example of how he has employed shapes that evoke mid-20th-century Surrealism and Modernism, but always with a forward-leaning, technological slant.

It was with such works that Mr. Hsu gained the attention of the art world in the 1980s, after growing up all over the United States and graduating from M.I.T. He worked with some the most renowned dealers of the day, including Leo Castelli, Colin de Land and Pat Hearn, who were encouraging, even though Mr. Hsu's work didn't fit the prevailing ethos.

At the time, image appropriation was all the rage, as evidenced by Pictures Generation types like Cindy Sherman, as was the painterly brio of Julian Schnabel and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Mr. Hsu's "Outer Banks of Memory" (1984).
Tishan Hsu and Empty Gallery

Mr. Hsu's "Boating Scene GREEN 2" (2019).
Tishan Hsu and Empty Gallery, photo by Lance Brewer

"Leo Castelli once told me, 'Tishan, the work needs a context,'" Mr. Hsu recalled. "I could see it didn't fit in anywhere, so I was sort of in agreement."

Asked whether his being Asian-American was an impediment to breaking out as a star in the '80s, he responded, "Oh yeah, definitely," adding that the art world seemed to be asking the question, "Is this American work?"

Mr. Hsu said that in retrospect, a gig in the early '70s doing word processing at a Manhattan law firm, during which he had to look at a screen all day, was probably influential in terms of his subject matter. "It was very new at the time," he said. "People had just started putting together this virtual world."

Christopher Y. Lew, a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, says Mr. Hsu now looks prescient.

"Where we are now in art, more than one generation has been taking on technology and the body," Mr. Lew said. "We're all catching up to what he was doing. He was so ahead of the curve."

Mr. Hsu largely took himself out of the gallery scene for two and a half decades when he took a job teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, from which he recently retired. But he was always making new art, and his practice took a new direction around 2013.

"My mother died, and a lot of family history emerged out of that," Mr. Hsu recalled, adding that there was "blocked trauma" bubbling up because of what his relatives endured during the Cultural Revolution and other upheavals in Chinese history. "At the same time, because of the opening up in China, I was able to meet a lot of my relatives that I never met before." He started exchanging family photos with cousins.

It eventually led him to spend two years in Shanghai, making the body of work that will be on view at Empty Gallery. In "Boating Scene GREEN 2" (2019), he has manipulated and then printed on canvas a family photo showing his great-uncle and a group on a lake outing. He studded it with green silicone forms.

"I don't speak Chinese, and I found it about as foreign as you can possibly get," Mr. Hsu said of his time there, adding that the family photo albums fascinated him. "It was riveting for me, to see this whole narrative. So that became the basis for this project."

The series was enabled by changes in technology that Mr. Hsu took pains to master several years earlier. "I actually took a year off from Sarah Lawrence and just focused on how to do work with Photoshop," he said. "I said, 'You have to do this every day like a sport so that it becomes automatic.'"

His return to the art world conversation continues in the United States, too. Last year, Mr. Hsu was featured in "Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s" at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, and next year he has a solo survey show that will travel from the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles to the SculptureCenter in New York, which organized the exhibition.

He was sanguine about whether such visibility represented a long-awaited moral victory, after so many years of making work.

"Are people coming back around to me?" Mr. Hsu asked. "I'm not sure I'd put it that way. I think that now, there's more of the world that I was imagining."

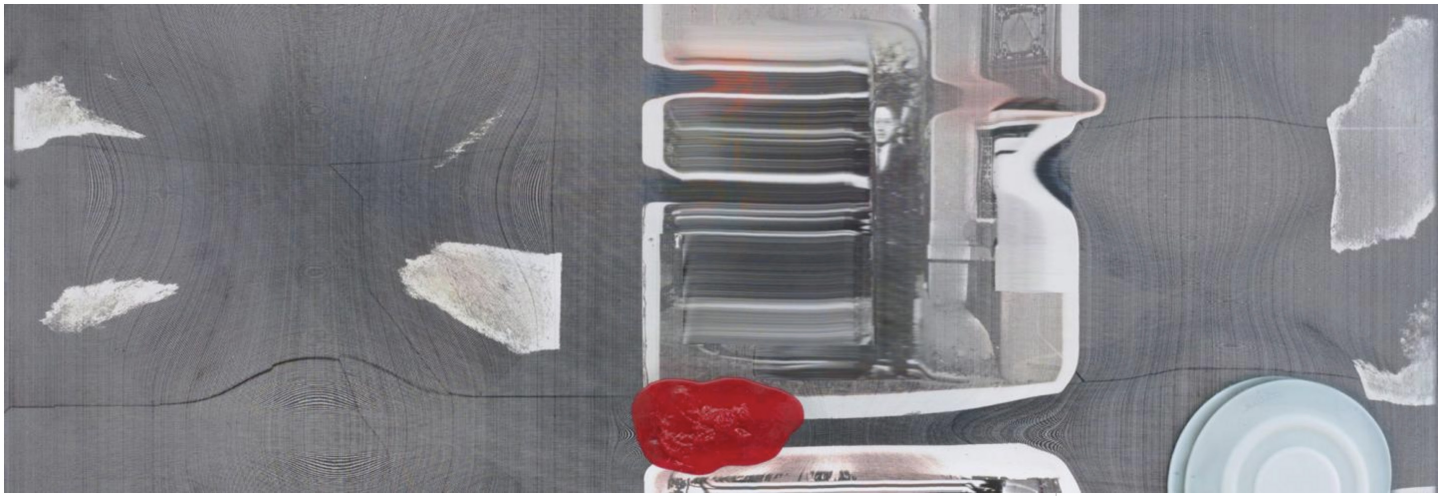
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/arts/tishan-hsu-art-basel-hong-kong.html?partner=rss&emc=rss

Frieze

Your Guide to the Best Shows in Hong Kong

Ahead of Art Basel Hong Kong, our selection of must-see exhibitions

BY AMY SHERLOCK AND INGRID CHU
27 MAR 2019



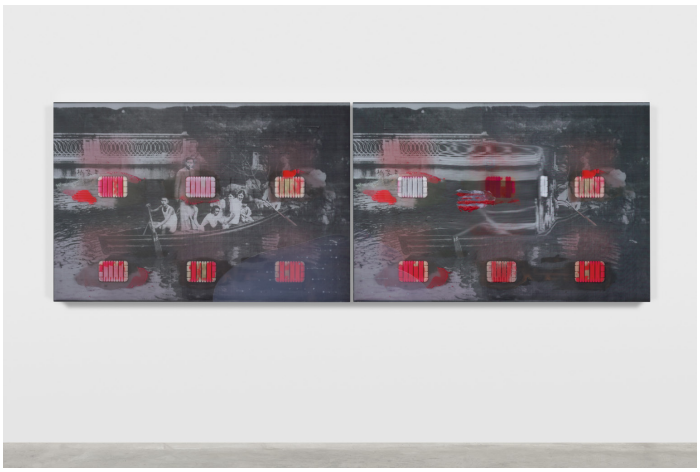
Tishan Hsu and Cici Wu
Empty Gallery
26 March–25 May

Memory – its embodiment, erasure, recuperation and mutability – is the theme that unites two solo presentations by two artists of different generations at Empty Gallery, a cavernous black-box gallery on the south side of Hong Kong island. Hsu, who is Chinese-American, made a name for himself in the New York art scene of the 1980s with pre-digital, technologically inflected 'sculptural paintings', which collaged and fused organic and scientific imagery, before fading from view in the 1990s. 'Delete', his first solo exhibition in Asia, presents a new body of work drawn from a much more personal story – a family photo album that was altered during the Cultural Revolution to scrub images with any connections to bourgeois life. These images have been scanned, further distorted and digitally collaged into liquid-seeming compositions where washes of colour and form are overlaid. The works' surfaces, however, remain startlingly flat: a trick of perception that, like the vagaries of memory, remind us that even intimate histories are subject to manipulation from within and without.

Born a generation later than Tsu, in 1989, in a post-reform and opening up Beijing, Wu's historical gaze is shaped not by the Cultural Revolution so much as another landmark event, the 1997 handover of Hong Kong back to China by the British. The New York-based artist's new film centres on Yu Man-hon, an autistic child who disappeared while crossing the border between Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Shenzhen, in the People's Republic of China, in the year 2000. Beautifully shot on 16mm – in all its oneiric, nostalgic haze – The Unfinished Return of Yu Man-hon (2019) and its repeated motifs of motion and transit, evokes a moment, as relevant now as to '97, of heading into a future that remains unknown.

Amy Sherlock

Main image: Tishan Hsu, QMH 1, 2019, mixed media. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery, photograph: Lance Brewer



Tishan Hsu, Boating Scene RED, 2019, mixed media. Courtesy: the artist and Empty Gallery; photograph: Lance Brewer

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Overlooked, but not forgotten: Tishan Hsu presents first solo gallery show in over 20 years

His most recent works are on display at the gallery's Grand Marine Center venue, while earlier pieces are on view at its stand at Art Basel Hong Kong

GARETH HARRIS | 25th March 2019

Tishan Hsu's Virtual Flow (1990-2018) on show at the Empty Gallery
Courtesy of Tishan Hsu and Empty Gallery

The Empty Gallery in Hong Kong is shining a spotlight on the Chinese-American artist Tishan Hsu, who came to prominence in the 1980s but retreated from view in the 1990s. Hsu's most recent works are on display at the gallery's Grand Marine Center venue, while earlier pieces from the 1980s and 1990s are on view at its stand at Art Basel Hong Kong. "We found Tishan, archived his work and got his studio up and running again," says Alexander Lau, the gallery's director.

Works at the fair include the installation Feed Forward (1989, $80,000), a piece mimicking a hospital drip using a Diet Pepsi bottle, and the styrofoam and enamel work White Noise (1983, price undisclosed), which resembles a warped electronic plug socket.

The forms and contours of Hsu's futuristic works are inspired by technology. "In some of my earliest work, I reference forms from technological devices such as radio and television that were beginning to penetrate our cognitive reality in new and more invasive ways," Hsu says.

The artist often uses "relatively traditional processes, such as silkscreen, painting and carving, to explore the effect and feeling of technology," says Lau, who adds that Hsu's interest in technology grew out of his upbringing and training as an architect (Hsu studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the early 1970s).

Hsu says that his work may have been overlooked because although it was "intuitive and slow", it did not reference any text or history, "which has been an important component of contemporary art". He adds: "While there was significant collector and institutional interest, there was not enough to create a market."

But in a sense, technology caught up with Hsu. At the turn on the millenium, he began to make works using early versions of Photoshop. "Looking back, the evolution of imaging software, printing technologies, new materials, sensor technology, video and sound have enabled the work to unfold in clearer and more radical ways. The sensibility needed the technology. There has been a synchronicity that I did not expect," he says.

In the past few years, Hsu has worked on a project focused on historical photographs discovered in albums of his extended family; this new body of work is on show at Empty Gallery. "The work evolved out of a confluence of events, including the death of my mother in Boston, which precipitated my setting up a studio in Shanghai, where family members who I never knew for most of my life have lived for many years," Hsu says.

He discovered that family photos were physically removed from several of his great uncle's family albums during the Cultural Revolution; some of the new works incorporate images of these defaced pages. "Recent advances in the technology of photography and the internet have enabled me to reconnect to an 'absent' history through historical photographs preserved and shared by extended family members in China and the US."

• Tishan Hsu, Empty Gallery, until 25 May

ArtReview Asia

Tishan Hsu

The Chinese-American artist who pioneered new ways of representing the interface between physical and virtual worlds

By Jeppe Ugelvig

Tishan Hsu's early work provokes a strange corporeal response that speaks directly to the experience of inhabiting a body in a digital age. The unidentifiable orifices, limbs and proxy-organs in his paintings of the 1980s and 90s fuse seamlessly with glitchy cybernetic grids, while the sleek ergonomic curvature of his sculptures evokes body parts, computer screens and office furniture. Hsu's works could be considered bodies in their own right, but also assert an almost corporate objecthood when you encounter them in person (that corporate and corporeal are cognate only makes the status of these objects as physical things – to be sold or inhabited – more ambivalent).

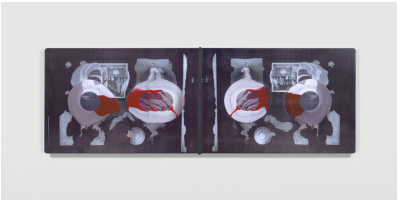
By rendering technology as the interface where representation and abstraction intersect in both art and life, Hsu proposes a radically alternative approach to the body and its politics, beyond the boundaries of what we understand as 'physical' and 'virtual', carbon and silicone, flesh and soul. This perspective makes 1980s works such as Head (1984) – an eerie flesh-toned, wall-based landscape of bodily holes rendered in lumpy Styrofoam and acrylic – and Ooze (1987) – an imposing and alien interior rendered in turquoise tiles – seem hyper-contemporary more than three decades after their completion, at a time when digital systems have encroached further into the experience of being human, and techno-bodies such as cyborgs, robots and avatars are being created, debated and politicised with ever greater speed.

While echoing the historical preoccupations of much cybernetic art of the past 30 years, Tishan Hsu has remained outside its canon. Born in Boston and raised in Switzerland and Wisconsin to Shanghainese immigrant parents, he started making art in his teens but chose to study architecture at MIT before moving to New York in 1975. There he encountered Pat Hearn, the Boston ex-punk and emerging gallerist, who had just set up shop in the East Village. As part of a programme including Milan Kunc, Peter Schuyff and Philip Taaffe, he inevitably became affiliated with the resurgence of painting of the 1980s variously known as neo-geo, neo-pop or post-abstraction – genres generally shunned by the critical art establishment, who saw them as cynically reducing abstraction to pure decor, to kitsch. But while evoking a politics of simulation similar to that of, say, Taaffe, Hsu's work aligns more closely with predecessors such as Bridget Riley, concerned with examining the effect of the body moving through and across optical planes – such as paintings, for example, or computer screens.

Hsu's emphasis on affect, indeed, couldn't be further from the cold simulationism of his contemporaries: the work is intimate, personal and in continuous dialogue with the body. As a graduate, Hsu worked as a word processor at one of the city's earliest office jobs involving a computer, and it is this now--ubiquitous experience – existing in front of a monitor – that would produce the conceptual basis for much of his work. Bodies morphing into hardware can be seen in works such as Lip Service (1997), in which TV screens become a part of a larger corporeal entity. Inversely, in Virtual Flow (1990–2018), bodies appear as silkscreened medical images (sourced from hospitals) within clinical glass boxes on a steel cart, mutated by skin-toned craters and lumps. That the unsettling structure – half medical cabinet, half body – extends to a standard electrical socket brings the trope of being 'plugged in' to an abject extreme.

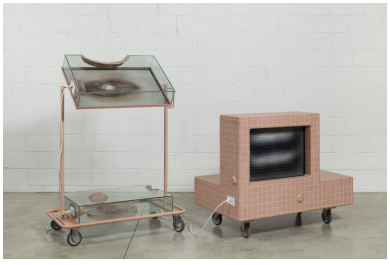
The appearance of white noise, glitches and dislodged body parts adrift in the grid is reminiscent of the 'cyberpunk' aesthetics of the early 1990s, which similarly worked to articulate anxieties and fantasies about a uncertain digital future. But while much cybernetic thinking from this era imagined the web as a form of life privileging the immaterial mind (and thus doing away with the body), Hsu's work insists on the fundamental corporeality of our encounter with such virtual systems. The body figures here not as some disposable prosthetic, but as a kind of interface, a place that connects various systems of reality. "I have always had certain doubts about the 'transition' from the body to the virtual," Hsu tells me in his Brooklyn studio. "There is a tendency to default to the image of the body we have inherited, but what we experience ontologically and cognitively opposes that quite directly." In the Interface series of inkjet prints from 2002, for example, Hsu began to present body parts in warping grid systems, forming a kind of skin that resembled a digital screensaver. He describes it as an attempt to "explore a different kind of 'embodiment' than art (Western or non-Western) had portrayed" that could reflect "the impact of technology on how the body located itself in the world".

Boating Scene 1.1.2, 2019



Double Ring, 2019

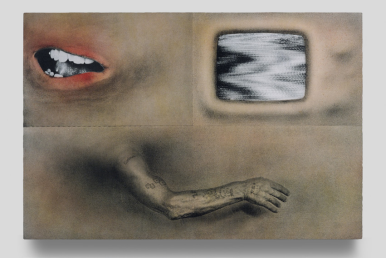
QMH 1, 2019



Virtual Flow, 1990- 2018

Image courtesy the artst and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

This bodily discourse – stripped of markers such as gender, sexuality and race – is a far cry from the representational identity politics of the 1990s. Hsu's posthuman approach to the body echoes the work of more recent scholarship by theorists including Rachel C. Lee, who in her 2014 book The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America veers away from a conventional biological understanding of race to explore a more fragmented and distributed material sense of Asian American identity, informed by chemical, informatic and cybernetic flows. While one of the few successful Chinese-American artists of his time, Hsu never joined its roster of names in the canon of American art-history, in part, perhaps, because his art did not foreground his ethnic identity (one could think of Simon Leung, for example, a contemporary of Hsu, who also started at Pat Hearn Gallery). In fact, his prophetic biocybernetic perspective struggled to find its audience. After a few years in Cologne during the late 1980s, Hsu, disillusioned, retreated from the commercial artworld and acquired tenure as a professor in fine arts at Sarah Lawrence College in upstate New York.



Lip Service, 1997

Courtesy the artst and Domus Collection, Beijing

The death of his mother in 2013 caused Hsu to reconsider his heritage and its relevance to his artistic practice. Perusing her possessions, Hsu discovered a collection of letters between his mother and her family in China dating back to the 1950s and 60s. Separated by the communist revolution of 1949, which prohibited Hsu's parents from returning to Shanghai, the letters spoke of persecution, suicide and survival as well as the more mundane aspects of everyday life; a winding social history of which Hsu had been totally unaware. So he set out to track down and reconnect with the extended families of his late parents. Taking up residence in Shanghai for three, then five, then six months at a time, Hsu became absorbed by this newly discovered social and historical context and spent several years examining its material remnants, particularly the family's rich image archive (a result of his great uncle's passion for photography).

Elements of this archive appear in Hsu's rounded aluminium print Boating Scene – Delete (2019), part of a new body of work referred to simply as The Shanghai Project, featuring a bucolic boating scene with an impeccably dressed family, a rare document of prerevolution Shanghai from the 1930s. Double Ring – Absence (2016), also an aluminium print, features scanned pages of a photo album, with many of its images seemingly ripped out. This pictorial absence speaks to the rigorous governmental censorship of the time, as any representation of bourgeois life was carefully and systematically erased by the city's Red Guards, as well as the absence of this family history from Hsu's own life. Hsu labours these images or absent spaces through a variety of present-day scanning, editing and digital reproduction techniques, accentuating their eeriness as alien historical documents: the layers of affect, lost and retrieved over time.

Head, 1984

Courtesy the artst and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong

How does genealogy and family history translate into data? As always, it is the circulated information embedded in the virtual that constitutes the actual 'material' of Hsu's practice. While his early work simulated a digitisation of the image, his new work emerges directly from it. "The whole reason I could do this project is because of technology, because of the Internet," he points out. By mining a lost experience of familial trauma through digital communication – email, Skype and Whatsapp exchanges with his Shanghai family – and by processing the material remnants through digital image-making and editing, Hsu again renders technology as a space in which to negotiate identity, the body and history. "Somewhat ironically, it is the technology of photography in the twenty-first century that is not only enabling me to make any connection to but in fact has made me aware of the absence in the first place." This absence – this personal data loss – speaks to how cultural memory lives, dies and recoups itself, even in today's photo-saturated, digital and seemingly 'connected' culture. Through the suggestive aesthetic of tech, familiar diaspora themes such as cultural memory, trauma and social histories are rethought through digital and technological metaphors. "It's kind of about information and the personal," he adds. "And how the personal registers through technology; what is coded, stored, and what is not."

While evoking the critical strategies of quintessential identity-based art practice – memory, trauma, personal archaeology – Hsu regards The Shanghai Project as an extension of his life's practice, although its reference to Asian bodies is, he acknowledges, a 'radical step'. After consulting its local artworld, Hsu estimated that showing this more personal body of work in Shanghai would be too politically risky due to the contentious status of the history of the revolution. Hsu believed that first showing the work in the US would entail its being read, against the artist's wishes, as a statement bound up in identity politics, so for some time it seemed likely that the project would remain permanently in storage. But when an opportunity arose in Hong Kong, it seemed to make sense. The Chinese Civil War of the 1940s resulted in mass immigration from China to the then-British colony; even now a third of the city's population is of Shanghainese origin. "This resonates with my own position as an Asian American who is showing work for the first time in Asia," he concludes. "I am an in-between, a hybrid of being inside of the outside in China and outside of the inside in America, if you will."

Tishan Hsu: Delete is on view at Empty Gallery from 26 March through 25 May

From the Spring 2019 issue of ArtReview

BY CHRIS WILEY
22 SEP 2018

The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery & America Fine Arts, Co.

Frieze

An exhibiton at Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, is dedicated to two of New York's most influential galleries of the 1980s

It's hard to catch lightning in a bottle, but it may be harder still to stuff the squirming facts of an artistic and social scene into a museum exhibition. Valiantly, and perhaps slightly quixotically, co-curators Jeannine Tang, Lia Gangitano and Ann Butler attempted to do just this in 'The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery and American Fine Arts, Co.' at Bard College's Hessel Museum. A retrospective snapshot of the intertwined contributions of Pat Hearn and Colin de Land, the redoubtable couple whose galleries cut a storied path through the New York art scenes for 21 years, the show is a reminder of the vital energy that dealers have occasionally injected into the art world. However, through no fault of its own, it feels less like a rousing road map for the future than an elegy for a lost time, both professionally and aesthetically.

Hearn and De Land championed diffcult, nearly unsaleable art. De Land, in particular, was known for his desultory approach to the art business, despite his role in founding what would become the Armory Show. (The catalogue notes that De Land frequently owed his artists money and struggled to pay his rent, while Hearn ran a significantly tighter ship, presumably partly owing to her early advocacy of 1980s market darlings like Philip Taaffe, Peter Schuy and George Condo – the latter's work was notably absent from the show.) It's hard to imagine an approach less suited to our time, where the scramble for mountains of cash, especially among galleries of comparable size to Hearn's and De Land's, has become less about greed than about a struggle against rising rent. (Ramiken Crucible, the claimant of De Land's throne, closed this year.)

'The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery & America Fine Arts, Co.' exhibition view, 2018. Courtesy: Hessen Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson

Hearn, among her long list of accomplishments, is remembered for her advocacy of artists and activists who were affected by the AIDS crisis, particularly the photographers Mark Morrisroe (represented here with a collection of his grubby, sexually charged portraits) and Jimmy DeSana (whose black and white pictures of people as sexual sculptures recall Erwin Wurm's 'One Minute Sculptures', 1997– ongoing, crossed with Robert Mapplethorpe's 'X-Portfolio', 1978), and for almost single-handedly founding the East Village gallery scene. De Land's programme, on the other hand, was associated with artists like John Knight, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green and Peter Fend, who were grouped together under the imprimatur of Institutional Critique, as well as überhip avant-gardists like Alex Bag, Kembra Pfahler and Art Club 2000 (a collective of Cooper Union undergraduates for whom De Land acted as ring leader). Both Hearn and De Land died tragically young, both of cancer.

Christian Philipp Müller, Works from A Scene of Friendliness Mellowness and Permanence, 1992, mixed media installation. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler

The pair were long due for a retrospective, and the exhibition and comprehensive catalogue amply fill in the history. Many of the works on view were familiar, like Joan Jonas's ritualistic films and the lush paintings of Jutta Koether and Mary Heilmann. Others, however, were welcome surprises, like the trio of wall works and a sprawling sculpture by the unjustly forgotten Tishan Hsu and a hilarious installation by Alex Bag, which bitingly satirizes art fairs as venues for artistic prostitution. The show's lamest ducks are sententious, bone-dry works by Peter Fend, Jason Simon, Lincoln Tobier and their October-toting ilk, which embody the worst impulses of the era's snooty academicism and political windmill-tilting. But despite these small pitfalls – ticks of De Land's academic training in philosophy – the exhibition's total picture is one of insatiable intellectual and aesthetic curiosity and uncompromising integrity, the likes of which are rarely seen today.

'The Conditions of Being: Pat Hearn Gallery & America Fine Arts, Co.' runs at Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, until 14 December 2018.

Main image: Renée Green, Bequest (detail), 1991, panels of lath siding printed with words leading to a door locked with a pad lock. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler

Gallery-as-Form: 'The Conditions of Being Art' at the Hessel Museum of Art

Jeppe Ugelvig

Installation view, 'The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery & American Fine Arts, Co. (1983–2004)', Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 2018. Courtesy Hessel Museum of Art.

What is a gallery? A site, a context, a situation. Imbricated in the history of art are diverse facilitating institutions, and the commercial gallery is a contributor often left out of analysis. As a site of simultaneous production and exchange, galleries may constitute a physical framework for the 'socius' of art, while gallerists' individual strategies of support, advocacy, sale and distribution (as well as, of course, speculation and exploitation) inevitably shapes art in both overt and indirect ways. Yet, with only a few exceptions,[1] the significance of the operations of galleries and the 'work' of gallerists are, beyond biography, rarely accounted for in the discipline of art and even exhibition history. By tracing two of the most remarkable US gallerists of their time – Pat Hearn and Colin de Land – the exhibition 'The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery & American Fine Arts, Co. (1983–2004)' at the Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson sets out to do just that, presenting the gallery as one of art's sites from which one can and must write a history of art – a history that is at once formal, social and interpersonal.

Unknown to some, near-cult characters to others, Hearn and de Land were central actors in New York's art world from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, initially as distinct agents but increasingly overlapping as their social, professional and romantic lives interweaved through the 1990s. (Both passed away prematurely as a result of cancer, Hearn in 2000, de Land in 2003). While both partook in multiple exhibition platforms in and outside of New York, the exhibition (curated by Lia Gangitano, Jeannine Tang and Ann Butler) focuses on each of their (more-or-less namesake) commercial galleries, whose libraries and archives have been housed and expanded upon at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College and the Hessel Museum since 2012.[2] An avid participant in Boston's punk-driven art and music scene of the late 1970s, Hearn relocated to New York and launched her pristine floor-tiled gallery on the corner of Avenue B and East Sixth Street in 1983 with a series of 'New Painting' shows. De Land, meanwhile, launched the sesquipedalian 'American Fine Arts, Co. – Colin de Land Fine Art' on East Sixth Street in 1986, showing the work of Richard Prince, Peter Nagy and 'J. St. Bernard', one of several pseudonyms under which he would produce art throughout his career. Distinctly, both displayed a fascination for performatively enacting and speculating the 'gallery' as a stage and situation within the cultural milieu of a booming cultural metropolis – Hearn through a polished, Mary Boone-esque persona, de Land as an underground impresario – and both with an exceptional understanding of art's social, political and economic development in their time.

In a scattered chronology, the exhibition traces many of the solo presentations and curated exhibitions facilitated by the two galleries. Between the presentation of now recognised artists' earliest work – including that of Simon Leung, Joan Jonas, Jessica Stockholder, Mark Dion and Jutta Koether – important historical recoveries appear too, for example in the case of Kembra Pfahler (whose name is mostly known in the underground film and music world), the institutional critical artist Lincoln Tobier[3] and Tishan Hsu. A contemporary of New York's 1980s 'neo-geo' trend ('neo-geometric conceptualism'), Hsu's wall- and floor-based objects (*aHead*, 1984 and *Institutional Body*, 1986) are abundant with bodily orifices, but also what appears as interior fixtures, the soft curves of stationary computer screens and warped cybernetic grids. As part-bodies, part-machines, they procure an eerie corporeality radically different from the polished, simulated surfaces of many of his contemporaries at PHG, such as Peter Schuyff and Philip Taaffe, whose work surrounds Hsu's in the exhibition's central gallery.

Installation view, 'The Conditions of Being Art', Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 2018. Courtesy Hessel Museum of Art.

Accompanying many of the works and re-staged installations at the Hessel is carefully presented archival documentation, where promotional material, correspondence and ephemera runs alongside photographs of gallery installs, Christmas parties, art fairs, openings and vacations. In this way, the exhibition sheds a light on the labour of production, mediation and advocacy that lies behind any work of art, particularly as it circulates (or attempts to do so) in a market – but also on the social life that inevitably informs this kind of labour. The curatorial vision is, as a result, purposely messy, leveraging a variety of museological techniques (archival, biographical, formal, contextual) to pose a question back to the audience: *how* do we 'remember' art and its world(s)?

At times the exhibition falls back on well-established art historical themes or tropes, categorising along identitarian lines such as gender or sexuality. For instance, the sexually explicit black-and-white photographs of Jimmy De Sana, a long-time friend and collaborator of Hearn, are presented alongside the post-minimalist installations of Tom Burr, who developed his approach to queer urban archaeology while at AFA. While evoking the iconography of S/M, De Sana's images feel self-consciously outside any real discourse of sexual practice, concerned instead with presenting the human body as one object amongst others; on the other hand, Burr's *From 42nd Street Structures* (1995) and *Movie Theater Seat in a Box* (1997) specifically address gay cruising practices by way of its architectural remnants, the body notably absent, echoing the rapid disappearance of these spaces in a changing New York City. If the exhibition's foregrounding of singular works is sometimes compressed, the accompanying catalogue expands on the social thematics of the show with ten newly commissioned texts by an intergenerational group of art historians and curators, as well as an exhaustive (and very useful) exhibition chronology. In their respective essays Mason Leaver Yap, Jeannine Tang and Diedrich Diederichsen all tackle the ways in which the formation of cultural 'scenes' happens alongside processes of gentrification (Hearn was the very first commercial gallery, following the non-profit Dia, to move to the run-down Chelsea neighbourhood in 1994); and in a highly personal text, Gangitano solidifies Hearn as a ferocious supporter of queer artists, taking on responsibility for multiple artists' estates as the AIDS crisis continued to take its toll.

Installation view, 'The Conditions of Being Art', Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 2018. Courtesy Hessel Museum of Art.

What comes across strongly from both exhibition and catalogue is the fact that art history always unfolds at the interface between personal lives, social scenes, markets and institutions; what artist Renée Green has referred to as 'contact zones', 'where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.'[4] For her 1994 exhibition 'Taste Venue' at Pat Hearn Gallery, partially re-staged at the Hessel, Green recast the gallery as the generically named 'Venue', a 'cheap trendy space in a hip downtown location', advertised in newspapers such as *The Village Voice* as a space for rent by anyone interested.[5] Over the span of the month, a range of cultural and commercial events unfolded there, marking art's overlapping with other cultural scenes in New York's hip downtown milieu. Whether by actively stylising the presentational modalities of a commercial gallery,[6] or by showing art 'about' art and its spaces of contact and exchange, it is indeed the concern for the gallery *as a site* that emerges as the most persuasive characteristic across the projects initiated or supported by Hearn and de Land. Julia Scher's security systems, for example, exhibited and installed at both PHG and AFA, reflected on the ambivalent, paranoid pleasure of knowingly being surveilled;[7] and Andrea Fraser explored the choreographed protocols of the gallery space through performance works at AFA such as *May I Help You?* (1991), which saw three performers – known as 'The Staff' – promptly commencing dense, theory-driven sales pitches of Allan McCollum's minimalist paintings. Distinct from both classical institutional critique and relational aesthetics, the gallery is here neither antagonised nor idealised so much as it is subject to a form of discursive 'site analysis' in which all agents – the artist and gallerist in particular – are subject to interrogation.[8] By being re-cast or read alongside other cultural spaces (cruising grounds to poker clubs, prisons and natural history museums), we approach through the exhibition an analysis of the gallery as a central platform of modern society, characterised by shifting modes of cultural consumption, work, sociality and critique.

The fact that many of these *in situ* works are still to be properly examined by art history is perhaps due to their limited presence in present-day exhibitions, hard as they were to collect and maintain, and, as a result, re-install or re-stage. The exhibition responds to this through a variety of museological tactics: Scher's *Hidden Camera/Architectural Vagina* is recreated (presumably, non-functionally) in the gallery's entry gallery, Fraser's performance is presented through a single-channel video, while Green's *Taste Venue* is re-presented as a reduced installation on one wall, facing (rather iconoclastically) a series of melancholic oil paintings by Pat de Groot (the last solo exhibition staged at Pat Hearn). An entire room is devoted to 'works from' (i.e. not the entire work) Christian Philipp Müller's exhibition-artwork *A Sense of Friendliness, Mellowness, and Permanence* (1992), including a 'gallery menu' of AFA's achievements, artists and prices and a bookstand stocked with his own exhibition catalogues (reducing his practice to one of didactic, self-exoticised promotion). Stockholder's early total-installation at AFA is represented through a single architectural object (*Untitled,* 1989) in a room of other individual works of art by many artists; while the 1993 occupation of PHG by the experimental Cologne-art space Friesenwall 120 (organised by Stephan Dillemuth and Josef Strau) is rendered through traditional archival vitrines. In grappling with such a large variety of installations (all, presumably, with different involvement from the artists), the exhibition inevitably conveys an uncertainty about the museological importance of the 'stuff'

of exhibitions: is it enough to resurrect the scenography but not the show itself?

Christian Philipp Müller, Works from A Scene of Friendliness Mellowness and Permanence, 1992, mixed media installation. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler

It is also by its focus on the life *around* a gallery that the exhibition conveys some of its most vivid histories. Most pertinently, Lutz Bacher's *Closed Circuit* sits as a haunting but poetic portrait of Hearn's last year as she underwent cancer treatment. In 1997, the artist installed a CCTV camera over Hearn's desk, with the live-feed displayed in the hallway of the gallery. In the 40-minute montage included in the present exhibition, we see Hearn writing, talking, reading and speaking on the phone before the slowly accelerating footage begins to bleach out entirely due to the accidental repositioning of a desk lamp. After Hearn's death in 2000, de Land continued for a while to run her gallery by merging it with his own under the moniker 'American Fine Arts, Co. – Colin de Land Fine Art at PHAG, Inc.' Ever the corporate simulator, de Land extended Hearn's stoic professionalism beyond her death, continuing to support her artists and increasingly fusing their critical trajectories.

While romanticisation is an ever-present risk in articulating such histories through the lens of the personal, from the point of view of today it is the idiosyncratic operations of Hearn and de Land – not the cult of their personalities – that qualify as the material for the writing of art and exhibition near-histories. Balancing finely between these, 'The Conditions of Being Art' is a contribution to an understanding of, as Green articulated in her press release for 'Taste Venue', 'the function of the gallery … what it *has* been, fissures in that structure and what it can become'[9] – as well as a bold exploration of how one might remember such a function in the space of a museum.

'The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery & American Fine Arts, Co. (1983–2004)', is on display at the Hessel Museum of Art until 14 December 2018.

The Washington Post

The 1980s New York art world was cynical and crass. Should we be honoring it?

Barbara Kruger's 1987 "I Shop Therefore I Am" silk-screen, featured in the Hirshhorn's "Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s." (Tim Nighswander/Barbara Kruger)

By Philip Kennicott
Art and architecture critic
February 14, 2018

If you lived through the 1980s, here's a trigger warning: The Hirshhorn's "Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s" dredges up some ugly stuff. There is little pleasure in much of the work on view, which can be seen only as a symptom of a wrong turn in American culture. This is the rag-and-bone shop.

It may, however, be a necessary show, albeit a sad one. Curator Gianni Jetzer has brought together material that explores the evaporation of the line between art and commodity in the 1980s. It deals with the branding of art and artists, who embraced the techniques of corporate advertising, sometimes critically and with ironic detachment, but all too often with uncritical enthusiasm.

It also focuses on key developments in critical theory and ideas about representation, as the media-saturated world we know today began to take shape, and artists reveled in what seemed to be a breakdown between the real and representation. It ends with the economic crash of 1987 and the age of AIDS, a disease cruelly exacerbated by the sudden right turn in American politics to a sunny, mindless optimism that privileged consumption over compassion, selfishness over the social contract, and American power over American idealism. Artistically, and culturally, we are directly descended from the greed and hypocrisy of the 1980s — a fact that this exhibition emphasizes and perhaps implicitly endorses.

The 1980s are now being chewed up and processed by the art world, with the "Club 57" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York exploring the formation and efflorescence of East Village artistic culture from 1978 to 1983; a critically acclaimed Peter Hujar exhibition at the Morgan Library celebrating the independent vision of a brilliant photographer who died of AIDS in 1987; and a Leon Golub show at the Metropolitan Museum channeling the anger of an expressionist artist keenly aware of his country's foreign-policy failings during this same period. The generation of artists, curators and critics who came of age in the 1980s are now running the show, and have turned their attention to the decade that marked their arrival on the scene three decades ago. "Brand New" is part of this generational attempt to establish the lines and paradigms of history.

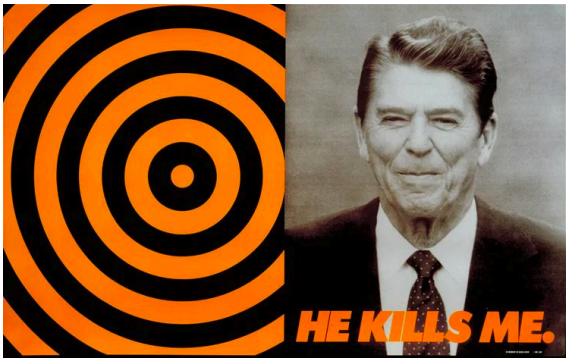
Jeff Koons's "New! New Too!," from 1983. (Private collection/Private collection, New York)

"Brand New" focuses on artists who have become household names — Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer — along with lesser-known figures who were concerned with similar ideas and themes. It's hard to disagree with the premise of the show, stated in the wall text that greets visitors: "… these New York artists changed the landscape of the art world forever — directly impacting the practice and reception of art in the twenty-first century." One might add, many of them also contributed to the moral landscape of the 21st century as well, to the larger art market as we know it today, with its infantilized collectors, money laundering and intellectual triviality.

The show does little to advance the critical understanding of these figures beyond where it has been for decades. And that boils down to a basic question that remains as troubling now as it was 30 years ago: Can you flirt with commercial culture and commercial practices without being co-opted by them?

Kruger has remained a trenchant voice; Koons has not. Other artists on view put too much stock in the idea of mere appropriation, as if lifting a product out of the supermarket and putting it in the art gallery was sufficient. Too many of them simply didn't understand what they were reading, as if the whole of French critical theory could be reduced to an ironic bafflement at the slippage between the sign and signified. Too many of them believed that irony was a sufficient defense against the corruption of consumerism, as if they could somehow sidestep the blunt message of Kruger's 1987 "I Shop Therefore I Am" silk-screen with a knowing wink.

Krzysztof Wodiczko's "Homeless Vehicle in New York City," 1988-89. (Krzysztof Wodiczko/Galerie Lelong & Co.)



Donald Moffett's "He Kills Me," from 1987. (Donald Moffett/ Marianne Boesky Gallery)

The art on view runs a range, with the best of it the most engaged with genuine political and cultural concerns, and the worst sophomorically confused by the bewildering barrage of media, advertising and poorly digested critical currents floating in the ether. The Guerrilla Girls managed to use the techniques of advertising effectively to challenge the misogyny of the art world; so, too, the artists of Gran Fury, who created the iconic "Silence=Death" logo to call attention to the Reagan administration's purposeful neglect of the AIDS crisis. Tishan Hsu's 1988 "Biocube," seemingly stripped out of some kind of morgue or abattoir, is a powerful object, distilling fears of bodily fluids and disease and the dehumanization of health care. David Robbins's 1986 "Talent," a collection of black-and-white glamour shots of artists associated with the New York scene adds nothing of value, nor does the repurposing of a Deutsche Grammophon CD cover by Clegg & Guttmann.

This exhibition focuses particularly on the artists of New York during this period, and especially the transformation of the New York art scene from a scrappy outsider to polished insider mentality. But there was a lot of art being made — about the environment, about political culture, about personal identity and about art itself — that dealt more honestly and substantially with the world, especially in Los Angeles. There also was art being made — see the work of Hujar and Golub for example — that remained rooted in visual aesthetics. That isn't the scope of this exhibition, but it's worth remembering that what is on view here is just one current of the 1980s.

The Guerrilla Girls' "These Galleries show no more than 10% women artists or none at all," 1984-85. (Cathy Carver/Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden)

The tone of the show is ambiguous, but in the end, it feels celebratory. The work was "transformational" to be sure. But there also is an implicit connection of the worst of this work — the least critical, most vapid and fully co-opted — to the contemporary art market in a way that feels like self-justification. If much of the contemporary art world is an elaborate scheme to park obscene concentrations of wealth into easily traded commodities, it is in part because some of the artists on view (and the gallerists and critics who celebrated them) in "Brand New" helped lay the groundwork for the current moment. There may have been skepticism about the market and the Man in New York in the beginning of the 1980s, but by the end of the decade, the embrace of branding was all but absolute.

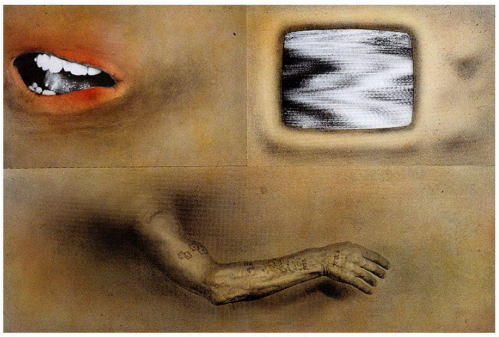
Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s is on view at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden through May 13. For more information, visit hirshhorn.si.edu.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/the-1980s-new-york-art-world-was-cynical--and-crass-should-we-be-honoring-it/2018/02/14/a520d680-11b0-11e8-8ea1-c1d91fcec3fe_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a74735523747

Once Deemed Too Weird for the 1980s Art World, Tishan Hsu Is Back

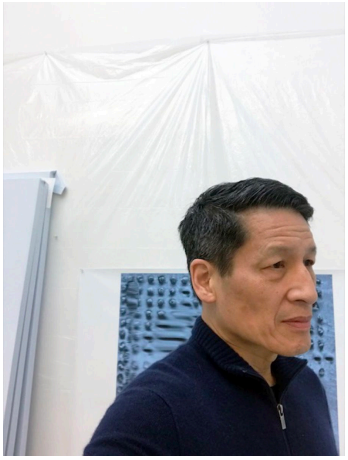
Rob Goyanes | Jan 30, 2018

Entering Tishan Hsu's studio, I notice, among the clutter of tools and books and notes, a rubbery ear sitting on the table. And on the walls: eyes, noses, nipples, and skins, all repeating like distorted code across a series of artworks hung on the wall. Kindly but cautiously, Hsu offers me green tea. It steeps as we walk around. The art seems to breathe. "I always felt from early on that technology was going to profoundly change our lives," he says.



Tishan Hsu, *Lip Service*, 1997. Courtesy of Empty Gallery

Hsu—one of the few Chinese-Americans who found success in the 1980s New York art scene—was known for his hybridic, sculptural paintings and installations, and was shown by titanic dealers of the era such as Pat Hearn, Colin de Land, and Leo Castelli. I'm here to discover, among other things, why he disappeared from public view for nearly two decades—only to reemerge this year with a series of major shows: inclusion in "Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s," at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., opening in February; in March, he'll have work at Empty Gallery's booth at the Armory Show, followed by a solo show at Empty Gallery later in the fall; and will have work at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies in June.



Portrait of Tishan Hsu, 2018.

Tishan Hsu, Boating Scene (Diptych), 2016. Courtesy of Empty Gallery.

Born in Boston in 1951, Hsu spent his early childhood in Zürich, Switzerland, while his father was completing his engineering dissertation. That was followed by a drastic change of scenery, as Hsu then moved to Ohio, Wisconsin, and Virginia. At the age of 10 in Wisconsin, Hsu's mother arranged private lessons in the art department of the school where his father taught. A precocious artist, Hsu started winning awards and showing in museums while living in Virginia. "My first one--person show was at the Roanoke Fine Arts Center in my early teens, after which I began selling work privately," Hsu says.

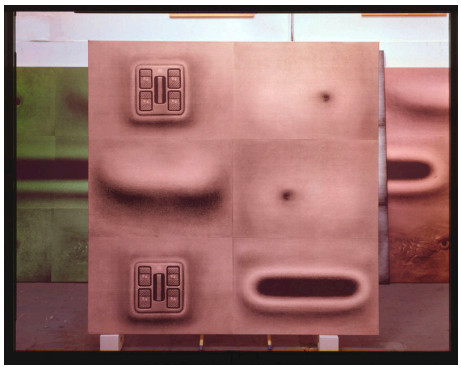
While studying architecture at MIT in the mid-1970s—as well as a stint studying filmmaking at the Carpenter Center at Harvard—he realized that his deepest interest lay somewhere in the technological ether.

"Philosophically, I was interested in this technological context that I had no idea about," Hsu says. "Conceptually, I was always interested in the object, and the change in our understanding of the object," he adds.

This "technological context" was the one that would rise from the ashes of Fordism and manufacturing.

After moving to New York in the late 1970s, the artist worked as a word processor at a law firm while also working full-time on his art practice. He had a solo show with White Columns in 1984, and another with Pat Hearn in 1985. "I was always doing both painting and sculpture together," Hsu says. Indeed, the works combined not only mediums, but also probed the fusion of the body and technology. Hsu utilized the shape and spirit of screens before they were a ubiquitous reality, and rounded the edges of his sculptural, trompe-l'oeil works before ergonomic design was mass market—pieces like BlueBlood (1985), which seem to combine these features with a microbiological focus on cell-like structures swimming in waves, or Ooze (1987), an installation that resembles a lake with grids floating atop.

Hsu's aesthetic is a mingling of the human body, mind and machine; the artist is a creator of biocybernetic landscapes. As we walk around the studio, he shows me some other works from this time period: There are more half-hidden eyes, or lips that seem like they're trying to speak.

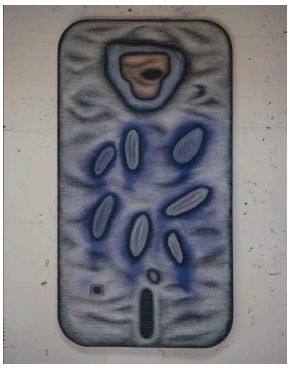


From early on, Hsu held a clinical interest in the body. He would call up hospitals for medical images and embed them in the work. Looking at these pieces, it feels like you're staring into a chthonic, unearthly soup that's swallowed and mutated people and objects alike. The experience is also akin to looking in a mirror that magically reveals the true but hidden nature of your own relationship with technology. "I felt that we needed a different way of thinking about our bodies in the world," Hsu remarks, "and that images of the body, on their own, would not necessarily reflect the way that our bodies were functioning in the world."

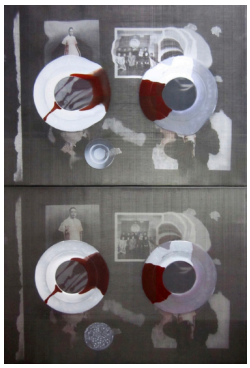
After a successful string of shows in New York, Hsu went to Cologne, Germany. He showed across the continent, and though he was not meteorically successful, he was able to support himself with his art. However, something wasn't quite right. "When I was living in Europe and selling a lot, I could feel the pressure of the market, both subliminally and consciously," Hsu tells me. He also felt that many people's reception of the work was off the mark—perhaps because it was, simply, ahead of its time. (Hsu also acknowledges the fact that the art world was extremely white—even more so than today—which presented an additional hurdle.)

Despite the similar aesthetic of visual artists such as Ashley Bickerton or filmmakers like David Cronenberg and David Lynch ("Blue Velvet was a stunning movie for me," he says), Hsu admits that it didn't seem people were ready for the work. "It was a very frustrating exercise to go through," he says, "so misunderstood."

So Hsu decided to self-impose a disappearance from the art world. He got a teaching job, had a kid, and spent the '90s outside the public eye. However, this doesn't mean he stopped making art. One such work from this decade, Fingerpainting (1994), which hangs on the wall of his studio, is a giant silkscreen work that undulates from fleshy to bluish, hands outstretched as if they're trying to escape the art, or pull you in.



Tishan Hsu, Blue Blood, 1985.
Courtesy of Empty Gallery.



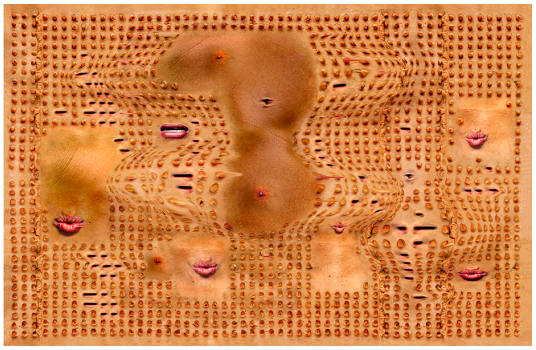
Tishan Hsu, Double Absence, 2016.
Courtesy of Empty Gallery.

Crucially, the emergence of digital technology was starting to enable Hsu to make the work he'd always dreamed of. "As technology was evolving throughout all of this, I was able to try it out," he says with a smile. With the emergence of a very user-friendly version of Photoshop at the turn of the millennium, and wide-format printing, a new horizon appeared. "What was interesting is that [the technology] was just following what I was trying to do. It was making the work more clear, more radically what the art was trying to be."

Then, in 2006, Hsu encountered a life-changing experience that reaffirmed and echoed his practice of negotiating the body's merging with foreign objects: He received a kidney transplant. "When I entered the surgical theater, I thought, *this is the most intense installation I have ever experienced,*" Hsu says.

In much of his oeuvre, there are little to no obvious clues pointing to his Chinese heritage. However, a new piece is brewing for a show at Empty Gallery in Hong Kong later this year. The "Shanghai Project," as he refers to it, started in 2012 following the death of his mother. "My sister and I discovered hundreds of letters written to her and her brother," Hsu says. "Those letters were hidden from us for our entire lives because of the trauma."

The topic of the family living through the violence of the Cultural Revolution was something that was rarely, if ever, discussed. The discovery of these letters led Hsu to reconnect with family across the U.S. and China, and he decided to visit Shanghai, where a relative of his—a doctor whose identity Hsu would rather not specify due to the political sensitivity of the subject—had his home. Around 1967, the living room of the house was converted into an office for the Red Guards.



Tishan Hsu, Interface with Lips, 2002.
Courtesy of Empty Gallery.

In 2013, Hsu visited Shanghai, and would maintain a small studio there until 2016. It's not what Hsu found in a relative's home that shocked him, but rather what he didn't find.

"So we start digging these [photo albums] up, and I noticed there were all these missing photos. I asked, 'What is this? Why are they missing?'" There was adhesive residue in the areas where the missing photos had been, ghostly traces. Hsu's relative told him that the Red Guards were responsible: "They took out pictures that had any connection to bourgeois life."

Hsu scanned the albums, which contained images of family gatherings, some on boats and others portrait-style, and added his signature gestures: digital warping, pools of fluorescent green, cell-like sculptural structures, or drips of silicone extending out, like stalactites in some forgotten cave.

"Because of digital imaging," Hsu says, "I could take these photos, scan them, then blow them up and alter and edit them. The state of digital editing allowed me to work with these in a way I never would have done 15, 20 years ago." The works from the "Shanghai Project" are even more haunting than the body parts that populate his other works, evidence of the forced forgetting that the Red Guards tried to impose.

So, after a long period of research and work outside the public's view, Hsu is back.

His uncommon aesthetic, too weird or layered for most audiences in the 1980s, now seems prophetic, anticipating like-minded works by younger artists such as Hayden Dunham and others. The artist—who has always mingled the technological and the human—has appropriately found new tools to explore the trauma and resilience of his own family.

Rob Goyanes

The 20 Best Booths at The Armory Show

Alexander Forbes, Molly Gottschalk and Scott Indrisek
Mar 7, 2018

The 24th edition of The Armory Show opened to VIPs on Wednesday. This year, 198 galleries from 31 countries exhibit through Sunday on New York's Piers 92 and 94. Forty-three of those galleries are participating in the fair for the first time; the entire affair is also being overseen by a brand new executive director, Nicole Berry.

The Armory Show has a bit of something for everyone—from a 16-foot-tall ferris wheel sculpture to rare works on paper by Yayoi Kusama, made with materials gifted to the artist by Joseph Cornell when the pair split up.

Artsy's editors scoured both piers and picked 20 presentations that stand apart from the rest.

Empty Gallery

Galleries Section, Booth F26
With works by Tishan Hsu, Takeshi Murata

Installation view of Empty Gallery's booth at The Armory Show, 2018.
Photo by Adam Reich for Artsy.

Takeshi Murata's *Houdini* (2018)—a sculpture of a droopy-faced cartoon dog— is fantastic, but it's the installation of works by Tishan Hsu that are worth a few moments of quiet contemplation. Hsu came up in the 1980s in New York, but never quite received the same accolades as his peers. He's back in the game again, with a solo show at the Hong Kong-based gallery later in 2018, and an inclusion in the current survey at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., "Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980s." The silkscreen-and-airbrush-based paintings here are ripe with eyeballs, mouths, and undefined circuitry. (As Empty Gallery's director Alexander Lau puts it, Hsu's focus tends to be on combining "an animal, organ, or body part [with] the technological.") Larger canvases from the 1990s are on offer for around $50,000; a fantastic plywood and concrete assemblage from 1984 commands a heftier $80,000.

ARTNEWS

With an Eye Toward Technology and Bodily Change, the Armory Show's Focus Section Sees a Dark Future

BY Alex Greenberger POSTED 03/07/18

Here are a few things you will find this year in the Focus section of the Armory Show: devices that allow women to urinate while standing, paintings that resemble blood spatters, Jesmonite slabs that sprout arms, a photograph of a woman running from a fast-approaching tank, and manipulated pictures of bodies pulled from the internet. Consider them weird incursions for weird times. Gabriel Ritter, the curator and head of contemporary art at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, who organized the Focus section this year, said he knows his section won't be the cheeriest one in the fair: "It's not necessarily a pretty picture."

This year's Focus section will focus on "the body mediated by technology," as stated in an Armory announcement. Some 28 galleries from around the world are bringing work by 34 artists to the section, with analog and digital generations represented in equal measure. Bruce Nauman's lithographs will be on view alongside photographic work by Constant Dullaart; Emma Amos's portraits from the 1980s and '90s will be exhibited not too far from videos by Tabita Rezaire, who hasn't yet turned 30. "It's diverse, not just generationally but geographically," Ritter said.

In the beginning, however, the section leaned younger. Ritter was asked by Armory Show deputy director Nicole Berry to take over Focus, which is given to a curator who designates a theme and invites galleries to participate. He thought he might expand upon an exhibition he mounted for the Dallas Museum of Art in 2015, "Mirror Stage: Visualizing the Self After the Internet." "I was looking at identity as an elastic entity and how artists were rethinking it via digital technology and the web," he said. He wanted to update it for the present, and that meant looking to a generation of artists who had grown up with the internet readily available.

But as he started inviting galleries to participate, they began to suggest other artists who might interest him, too. He first approached Hong Kong's Empty Gallery with the intention of showing work by Takeshi Murata, whose videos, photographs, and animations suggest a world where users are permanently morphed by the technology they own. The gallery was interested in bringing pieces by Murata to the fair, but they also suggested Tishan Hsu. "I'd maybe seen an image in a book, but he was not someone at the forefront of my mind," said Ritter, who was intrigued by ways that, like Murata, Hsu explores "how the physical body could internalize the virtual realm."

These cross-generational presentations—Hsu began working in the '80s, Murata started in the mid-2000s—typify this year's Focus section, which surveys matters of identity and diversity as well. "Issues related to representation of the body [and] representations of people of color are still very fraught territory," Ritter said.

But they are part of an evolving history that is worth observing, the curator added. A world of growing artificial intelligence and technologies that can alter organs and limbs is "not just science-fiction," he said. "It'll have huge ramifications for pressing conversations that are going on right now."

http://www.artnews.com/2018/03/07/eye-toward-technology-bodily-change-armory-shows-focus-section-sees-dark-future/

FEBRUARY 14, 2017

Focus on the Collection – Tishan Hsu's Liquid Circuit

It is garish. It is massive. It, at times, protrudes. It seduces its viewer into examining every pulsating, changing inch of its black and yellow acrylics and it generates a subconscious, encompassing buzzing not unlike a pervasive television static.

No sound is literally produced. The canvas remains still.

Thus is the power of Tishan Hsu's 1987 work Liquid Circuit. The title is just one of the riddles prompted by Hsu's "sphinx-like creation"—a work that plays between moods of a cool, disaffected technological and a dynamic, gurgling biological. The biological moments glow with a pulsing nuclear power in an effect Hsu describes as an "ether." The overbearing, almost noxious yellow is suggestive of a type of flesh (whether it originated from a futuristic, android, or alien being is difficult to say). Hsu's exaggerated staples puncture the flesh, their entry points marked with keloid scars invoking the natural, communal, and eventual atrophy all organic bodies endure. Yet the luminescent flesh is stretched over the skeleton of Liquid Circuit's twin monitors and given raidused corners, which equates the structure with insentient technology such as computers and television sets. The mysterious screens are certainly the originators of the enveloping white noise, as their static buzzes and paces up and down the canvas while searching for a signal. Vents appear between the gray and blue electromagnetic waves and though their presence hints at a Central Processing Unit, they do not reveal any underlying mechanics. On top of it all, the radioactive Liquid Circuit seems to breathe within the comfort of its own undulating atmosphere, again evoking Hsu's "ether."

It is a strange and contradictory biomorphic machine. Perhaps the answer to Liquid Circuit's riddle lies in, as they always do, a calculating logic. It offers a treaty between the two moods, questioning whether such a difference needs to, or still, exists. Hsu argues for the reality of a merged identity between technology and biology. He demonstrates this balance through presenting a technological art with a distinct hand-craftedness. It is this presentation within Liquid Circuit that argues his locked technological system breathes and grows simultaneously with the viewer.

And why shouldn't such a symbiotic relationship exist in the current era? In the same year of Liquid Circuit's creation, the artist explained, "we make machines, then they make us." After thirty years, Hsu's insight is equally, if not more, relevant. In the twenty-first century, necessity emphasizes efficient and constant potential. In 2015, 92 percent of American adults owned cell phones and 73 percent owned personal computers. Information is no longer delivered in a linear format capped daily by the 10 p.m. news but is instead placed within an eternal blogroll. Personalities are defined and divided by social media, or even operating systems—lifestyles simplified to "Mac or PC." The static hum is ever-present through lightbulbs, watches, self-powered vacuums, electric toothbrushes, and other technologic material culture. Hsu notices these objects evolving the contemporary culture responsible for establishing them, saying, "these objects were made to help us but they have changed the world and therefore changed us."

Hsu does not offer a critique of the intimacies of humans and technologies. Liquid Circuit is merely a mirror to it—more hopeful than resigned and questioning what it means to exist in the world where entire exchanges and relationships can live in the technosphere. It's the age of the techno-sublime, and the colossal, neon bio-machine reflects the relationships between "people, their desires, and their systems."

– Laura Moran, 2016 – 17 E. Gerald and Lisa O'Brien Curatorial Fellow. Taken from the Spring 2017 Newsletter.