R.E.M., 1986
Acrylic, alkyl, and compound on wood
60 x 60 x 4
The Saatchi Collection, London

Being Blue, 1986
Oil, alkyl, acrylic, enamel, cement, compound, and wood, 60 x 60 x 4
Collection of James S. and Marisol G. Higgins
**Institutional Body.** 1985
Acrylic, compound, alkyd, and oil on wood
84 x 47 x 4
Collection of Ruth Bloom

**Ooze.** 1987
Ceramic tile, eurotempo, compound, acrylic, and oil on wood, 181 1/2 x 132 1/2 x 68
The Sarchi Collection, London
Cell, 1987
Acrylic, compound, oil, alkyd, vinyl, and aluminum on wood, 96 x 192 x 4
The Sainsbury Collection, London
Transfusion, 1988
Ceramic tile, compound, chrome, rubber, acrylic, and stainless steel on wood, 37 x 31 x 33
The Oliver-Hoffman Collection

Fingerprint, 1989
Wired glass, aluminum, and ink on paper
11 3/4 x 17 3/4
Collection of Bill and Gael Grimsms
**Toxic Rain**, 1990
Acrylic and ink on linen, 70 x 71
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York

**Intensive Care**, 1990
Aluminum, glass, compound, plastic, rubber, and steel
58 x 40 1/2 x 20
Galeria Fernando Alorean, Barcelona
Richard Armstrong: I often read references to your early paintings. Can you describe them? Tishan Hsu: I began in the tradition of American Realism—my first teacher painted in the tradition of George Bellows. I liked Edward Hopper a lot—still do. Then there was a succession of different styles over a period of years—the Venetian School of Old Master painting, Abstract Expressionism, Impressionism, and then that area between Pop and Minimalism. Your early paintings were both abstract and representational?

Yes. After 1965, they were completely abstract. The first time I saw an abstract painting, I knew that was it. Up until college, the only thing I would look at was twentieth-century art. But then something changed as I got older, and I began to find that twentieth-century modernism no longer held my interest. I never imagined feeling that way. I was suddenly spending a lot of time studying European Old Master paintings. All my ideas about abstraction came into doubt. I think film held a strong attraction then because it almost inherently incorporated people, bodies—there was a corporeality to it—but yet it was conceptually abstract.

And then came three-dimensional, freestanding things? Yes. And whom had you been looking at who really nourished you in this last phase of other sculptors? It was a combination of factors. I had done a lot of thinking in architecture about how things are put together—how things are ordered and put together can say a lot about how we think of the world, how we explain the world to ourselves. In addition, I had been thinking a lot about materials—what is a material, what are its properties, how can a material be used? Why has the medium of paint managed to survive and sustain artists for so long? At the same time, I was profoundly affected by Minimalist and Post-Minimalist work. I remember attending the opening of Lynda Benglis' installation at MIT's Hayden Gallery. There were these huge blocks of synthetic material projecting from the walls. That impressed me. I spent a few semesters painting under the guidance of Wayne Andersen, teaching there at the time, who was very much in touch with artists in New York. He strongly urged me to leave MIT and totally immerse myself in what was going on in New York. I visited Soto regularly from Cambridge in the early seventies. Richard Serra's thrown lead was very seminal for me, as were Carl Andre's plate pieces. I remember talking to Doug Sanderson, who was my neighbor when I first moved to New York. I thought Minimal Art was like an end—or the end. He felt, on the contrary, that it was a beginning. That got me thinking a lot. Does the contrast between Serra's thrown lead and Andre's ordered metal plates incorporate a dichotomy that is still part of your work?

Yes, although I'm not always aware of it. Another constant is your use of the grid to counterbalance other effects. I know you repeatedly refer to the body and its integration with technology. Does the grid symbolize technology, while the body serves as another kind of...
METAPHORS? When I first began there were no metaphors, no images. I began by trying to figure out what basic properties the work would have. I felt the process was analogous with the beginning of our own existence in which the properties of matter were the basic determinants. If we emerged on a different planet, the "world" would be very different, as determined by the local chemistry. Part of the change that I see happening is that the properties of media and information are becoming the properties of our existence, equal to those of "physical" properties, like weight or volume. This is a change at, perhaps, the level of structure. Would you say that your work is intuitive? Yes, in the sense that it is evolving from something that I cannot articulate or verbally conceptualize.

BECAUSE YOU ARRIVE AT IT EMPIRICALLY? THAT IS, YOU DON'T SET OUT TO ILLUSTRATE A POINT OR A QUESTION? As much as I would like to, I don't know what point to illustrate. What I would illustrate or ask is being revealed to me as I do the work. Similarly, it is the work that is asking me the questions. The work is revealing the concept, the idea. The work is a way that I have of exploring what I have not been able to explore elsewhere. AND DOES THAT SEPARATE YOU THEN FROM THE IMPULSES OF CONCEPTUAL ART? No, I don't think so at all. I think Conceptual Art is as empirical, intuitive, and subjective as any art or idea. The dichotomy you are suggesting is misleading. Even in science the distinction between theoretical and empirical is blurred. Language is not the only way of being conceptual. Perhaps the process of making objects can provide still another sense—a way of revealing something about the world, before language.

One of the important influences on my work was reading the book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* by Elaine Scarry. The structure of how she was describing things seemed to resonate with a lot of what I was seeing in the work. The persuasiveness of her discourse gave me a lot of confidence in continuing the process at a time when I felt little support for the validity of what I was doing. So working then is your mode of investigation? Definitely, just to get it out there in front of me. It has never been clear to me whether making physical objects in the world is the only way for me to approach the issues. Perhaps there are other modes.

**FILM?** Film or maybe a combination of things. I think Joseph Beuys is exemplary and seminal here. One needs to see everything, or as much as possible, to really get a sense of what he was after. The underlying breadth and depth of his ideas needed a wide range of activity. This was a real revelation to me during my stay in Germany, where I was able to see the great Beuys installations that have never traveled here. During most of the 1980s you were occupied with a series of reliefs? They were a first attempt at dealing with the ideas. Later, looking at all the work, I began to see certain similarities in the properties of the work that led me to believe that there was a need to focus more—that there was perhaps an underling concept operating that was not clear to me yet. Perhaps that is a central paradox in your work: by making wall-bound objects with abstracted imagery you are making work that is more ambiguous to the world at large even while its subject comes into closer focus for you.

What do you mean by 'abstracted'? For example, any wall-bound object by nature is somewhat less real than a freestanding, space-occupying object, especially when it supports mostly abstract, linear motifs. I think the world is becoming less of what we traditionally called 'real.' Perhaps the paradox you describe is a paradox that is beginning to emerge in the world we live in. The relationship between what is 'abstract' and what is concrete or 'real' is changing. One of the basic qualities of media and information is their illusion—sur-real or, in eighties jargon, 'hyperreal' quality. For me, there is a sense of danger and freedom from this feeling that all the world is illusion. Is that quality real or abstract? For instance, watching television and talking on the telephone are bizarre occurrences, very ephemeral, surreal, even telepathic, separate from 'reality.' However, when there is a technical glitch in the central telephone office, the impact of the 'reality' of life is enormous. A slight alteration in this abstract system brings chaos to the concrete 'reality' of daily life. At that point the system doesn't seem so abstract anymore. Similarly, genes are thought of abstractly, as an informational system, but when there is a glitch in our genetic information, we can end up with a very concrete effect, like cancer. At the same time, we are surrounding ourselves more and more with manufactured objects that we consume—to the point where we are becoming, psychologically and literally, manufactured objects. As we consume more, these manufactured objects are developing traits that are closer to our organic, 'human' existence and further from their mechanical attributes. The big push is for 'user-friendliness,' as opposed to speed or efficiency. I don't think people look for a faster car anymore. They look for a machine that is least environmentally damaging that can transport them in a way most sensitive to their physical and psychological needs. These traits are not unlike what we look for in people. I think this tendency has major implications.

**FOR THE HUMAN BODY?** Yes, for the human body as one measurement of the object world. And perhaps a unit of measure that is becoming increasingly necessary for global survival. With tragedies like AIDS and the environment, the increasingly abstract, unreal aspect of our lives is being met head-on by the persistent claims of our organic existence. It is when the needs of the body demand recognition that we are forced to deal with the political; and it seems the body is asserting itself more than ever now. This was not predicted by modernism or science. What role does color play in your work? Right now, I use color to support and clarify the underlying concept behind the work. My work is not about color. So, for instance, recently the color has either derived from the colors of the body, since that has been a central focus of the work, or there has been no color.
YOU WANT COLOR TO BE EXPLICIT, SPECIFIC? Yes, for now, I am trying to clarify, for myself, what it is I am doing. IN THESE RECENT PIECES THERE SEEM TO BE REPEATED, OVERT REFERENCES TO APERTURES IN THE BODY, ORIFICES. IS THAT AN ONGOING CONCERN? Parthly, were you trying to replicate an anatomical organization? Not in the beginning. If one looks at the properties of land, the surface of water, the field of light in a television image, or a computer graphics description of heat, they all have the properties of orifices, rolling surfaces, protrusions, and what have you. AND NOW? Right now, I am consciously focusing on the sense of body. My hunch is that the sense of body will lead into other areas, but in a clearer way. The body will act as a reference point for what will develop, rather than being the end result—the "point." THERE ARE REFERENCES TO VIDEO TAPE, FILM, AND THE FORMAT OF THE SCREEN. Yes, definitely. Because you see them as the overarching visual activities of the time? Yes, I see that what was described as surreal, ephemeral, and illusionistic in the beginning could also describe the qualities of telecommunication, the qualities of information. OCCASIONALLY THERE HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY ECCENTRIC EXAMPLES OF YOUR SENSIBILITY, SUCH AS DOZER AND HOLLY COW. IS THAT A REACTION TO THE SYMMETRIES OF SOME OF THE OTHER PIECES, OR ARE YOU AFTER A KINESTHETIC INTERPRETATION? IS YOUR WORK MEANT TO MOVE THROUGH SPACE IN A CERTAIN WAY, TO LOOK ANIMATED? I am looking for something very fluid—like film or information flow. Along the way, there are always these eccentric pieces. I don't try to edit them out—they are part of the process, although I think they can confuse people. I tend to think they are a hint of some part of the "picture" that I have not yet seen, but that will emerge in a more substantial way later. Similarly, through their difference, they often reveal me what is of interest in the less eccentric pieces. HOW CRITICAL IS TACTILITY IN YOUR WORK? IT HAS THAT DOUBLE BIND, NO FUN INTENDED, WHERE YOUR EYES ARE INVITED TO SEE THE SURFACE AS ALIVE, YET YOUR HANDS ARE NOT ENCOURAGED TO EXPERIENCE THAT REALITY. Do you mean because one is not supposed to touch art? I have always wanted to touch, taste, or feel the work I like most. For me, the most convincing work often arouses the senses. In my work, I feel there is an organic quality regardless of how technological it appears. I think the tactility is a by-product of this organic quality. IS TACTILITY THE VEHRICLE THROUGH WHICH YOU EXPLORE SPACE? I'm not sure what you mean. I make things in the world. Tactility is one of the properties that I have to work with—like color, weight, size, medium, etc. When you say "space" do you mean physical space, political space, conceptual space, or what? I think it is very difficult to talk about "space" with any agreed-upon meaning. That is part of the complexity of the situation. I am trying to describe a world of many "spaces" and I need as many properties of matter as I can find in order to do so.

WHY HAVE YOU ADDED WHEELS TO SOME OF THE MORE RECENT FREE-STANDING OBJECTS? I think I liked the wheels because they give a sense of mobility—a vehicular sense to the work. I've had a passion for cars ever since I can remember. Most of the qualities that people attribute to the work I never intended. I myself am surprised at how the work looks as well as the kind of reaction people have to it. I never thought the work would be repellent, schizophrenic, weird, or tactile. If you really want to pin it down, I think in all the work there is this surface. When people say, for instance, is this a body, is this a landscape, is this television? When I look back now at the work I do see there's a vague consistency going on. When I think of the world, whether you're talking about the surface of water, a landscape of mountains and valleys, or if you think about the body, or about the television screen—you're dealing with this flat surface that kind of undulates and moves. And that's a common basic property to all these things. BECAUSE IN TELEVISION OR FILM THE WORLD IS ELECTRONICALLY TRANSMITTED. ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THE IMAGERY OF THE SENSES, MORE PARTICULARLY OF SIGHT? Yes, that's interesting. Whether electronically transmitted through a cathode ray tube or transmitted by electrons through our organic sense organs, we're talking about imagery of the senses. Perhaps the sense of flat surface calls attention to the flat two-dimensional surface common to both the film and the retina itself. Our conception of the world is dependent on the particular organic attributes of our sense organs. I think that the questions media and information are raising can be applied to our own sense organs—thus forcing us to question our entire orientation in the world. What is the difference between a TV image and a retinal image? If science is based on the empirical method of observation, is all science then an illusion like TV? In which case, the world begins to appear not concrete, physical, and explainable but, instead, ambiguous, irrational, and illusionistic. When you move on the land, like a highway—we all know that experience—there is this ribbon flowing up and down, up and down over this land. If you look at the surface of the water and observe the waves, there's a kind of up and down quality on the surface; light bounces off it. If you look at the body closely, it's the surface that moves up and down and around and inside and outside, and it's very continuous. There's a continuous surface—look at a television, for instance, when you don't get any channel and just get static—and it rolls. That rolling is a surface again, a rolling, undulating surface. It's the cathode ray's surface of light that moves and rolls, and it's this property common to all of them that the work seems to be pointing to. WHEN THE WORK GOES TO THE WALL IN A PIECE LIKE CELLULAR AUTOMATA, BECOMING MODULAR AND MORE PERPLEXING ABOUT ITS SOURCE, WHAT'S HAPPENING? IS IT A MURAL ABOUT INTERCHANGEABILITY? Yes, I think that's part of it. IS IT COMPOSED OR AT RANDOM? It was done randomly.
Born in Boston, 1951

Studied at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge (B.S., 1973; M.Arch., 1975)

Lives and works in New York City and Hudson, New York

**One-Artist Exhibitions**

- 1984 White Columns, New York
- 1985 Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
- 1986 Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
- 1987 Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh
  
  Hillman Holland Gallery, Atlanta
  
  Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
  
  Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
- 1988 List Visual Arts Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge
- 1989 Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
- 1990 Galeria Lino Soverini, Barcelona

**Installation view, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, 1984**

**Installation view, Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh, 1987**

**Group Exhibitions**

- 1970 Hayden Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge
- 1983 The Art Institute of Chicago
  
  The Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts
  
  Brooklyn Army Terminal, "Terminal New York, Preparing for War"
- 1984 Basketville Watson, New York, "Brilliant Color"
  
  Dramatis Personae Gallery, New York, "The Abstract Persona"
  
  Matthews Hamilton Gallery, Philadelphia, "Invitational"
  
  M-13 Gallery, New York, "August Minter"
- 1985 White Columns, New York, 1985 Update
- 1987 Asian Arts Institute, New York, "Emily, Anna & Tishan: The First Generation"
  
  Charlottenburg Exhibition Hall, Copenhagen (travelled), "Brave New World/ A New Generation"
  
  Fabian Carlsson Gallery, London, "More Than Meets the Eye"
- 1986 American Fine Arts, New York, "Modern Sleep"
  
  Daniel Newburg Gallery, New York, "As Sculpture"

**Installation view, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, 1987**

**Installation view, Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh, 1987**

- 1987 Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, "Los Casentini y sus artistas"
  
  Galerie Albrecht, Munich, "Nomenclature"
  
  Galerie Charles Carwright, Paris, "Sculptures"
  
  Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg (travelled), "LocaSiona"
  
  Maxime Andriello Gallery, New York, "The Antique Future"
  
  Mayor Rozen Gallery, London, "New York, New Art"
  
  Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, "Armleder, Artchirager, Hua"
  
  Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, "Primary Structures"
- 1988 The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (travelled), "The Binational: American Art of the Late 80s, German Art of the Late 80s"
  
  Laurie Rubin Gallery, New York, "Drawings"
  
  The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, "A New Generation, the 1980s, American Paintings & Sculpture"
- 1990 Aloha Viana Gallery, New York, "Summer Group Drawing Show"
  
  Beaver College Art Gallery, Glenisle, Pennsylvania, "Culture in Pieces: Other Social Objects"
  
  ELAC Art Contemporain, Lyons (travelled), "Statue de la sculpture"
  
  Galerie Charles Carwright, Paris, "The Shadow of Presence"
  
  Kanzok Art Museum, New York, "The Technological Mass"


Kasp, Donald. "Reviews: Ti Shan Hsu, Leo Castelli, Pat Hearn." *Artscope*, 16 (September 1987), p. 122.


Wei, Lily. "Talking Abstraction: Part II (Interview)." *Art in America*, 75 (December 1987), pp. 112-20, 171.


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