

TISHAN HSU

Since the mid-1980s, Tishan Hsu's prescient artistic practice has been probing 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 enigmatic paintings and sculptures explore and manifest poetic new ways to engage and reimagine the human body.

After studying Environmental Design and Architecture at MIT in the 1970s, Hsu rose to prominence during New York's East Village era with a quick series of exhibitions at the Pat Hearn Gallery and a 1987 show with Leo Castelli.

"Looking back," Hsu notes, "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."

From early on Hsu's work began to reflect his "assessment that technology was becoming an extension of the human body," as Julie Belcove writes, which is "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, Hsu came to realize, could no longer be represented the way it had been for centuries. He was seeing the future.

Following a two-year move to Cologne in 1988, Hsu took a job teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, from which he recently retired. An artist-intellectual ahead of his time, Hsu worked quietly for many years, largely overlooked or forgotten by the art world – until now.

After his mother's death in 2013, Hsu turned his longstanding interest in the social and technological constitution of bodies to the more personal consideration of race, history, and heritage. Traveling to China for the first time, Hsu discovered among his mother's possessions an archive of family letters and photographs documenting life in the years immediately following the 1949 revolution, when his family was separated and his parents unable to return to their Shanghai home. Elements of the archive appear throughout this series, simply titled *The Shanghai Project*. Hsu deploys these personal artifacts using a variety of digital processing techniques as a way of navigating the gaps and traces of cultural memory and individual consciousness within the digital realm. Family photographs recur in varied states of opacity within fields of warping pixels. The images are manipulated digitally using photo editing software, scanning, and re-photographing, as well as through material interventions. After being printed onto aluminum sheets, Hsu builds up the surfaces of the works with drips and protrusions of pigmented silicone. These works occupy the site of the mind and body striated by the flux of information. As the artist notes, *The Shanghai Project* engages "how the personal registers through technology; what is coded, stored, and what is not."

Hsu has been making the majority of his paintings on canvas since the late 1980s using a silkscreen process to juxtapose images of his close-up pastel drawings of flesh with appropriated biomedical images of orifices and body parts. The scale of these works is such that the dot matrix of the silkscreens is markedly legible. His most recent paintings, further, almost announce their techno-mediation through an evident digital reproducibility. Various re-engaged motifs from his visual vocabulary are now warped and morphing into hardware and screens and become part of a larger corporeal entity. "The appearance of white noise, glitches and dislodged body parts adrift in the grid," writes Jeppe Ugelvig, "is reminiscent of the 'cyberpunk' aesthetics of the early 1990s, which similarly worked to articulate anxieties and fantasies about an 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 not as some disposable prosthetic, but as a kind of interface, a place that connects various systems of reality." As our lives increasingly expand into the unleashed digital domain, Hsu locates the human body amid different forms and velocities floating in the data stream.

Tishan Hsu (b. 1951, Boston) lives and works in New York. He studied environmental design and architecture at MIT and received his BSAD in 1973 and M.Arch in 1975. His first exhibition in New York was at Pat Hearn Gallery, and in 1987, he had a one-person show at Leo Castelli. Hsu's survey exhibition, Liquid Circuit, opened at SculptureCenter in 2020, following its first iteration at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. In 2022, his work was included in the 59th Venice Biennale, The Milk of Dreams, and in the 58th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, Is it morning for you yet? Tishan Hsu: recent work was on view at the Secession, Vienna earlier this year; and his first European survey exhibition opened at MAMCO, Geneva in March, 2024. In 2019, DELETE, was held at Empty Gallery, Hong Kong. Hsu's first New York gallery exhibition in 32 years, skin-screen-grass, took place at Miguel Abreu Gallery in October 2021. Hsu's work has also been featured in major group exhibitions, including Between pixel and pigment: Hybrid painting in post-digital times at both Museum Marta Herford and the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany (2024); the 13th Gwangju Biennale, Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning (2021); TECHNO at Museion, Bolzano, Italy (2021); and The Poet-Engineers at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2021), among others.

Hsu's solo exhibition, Interface Remix is currently on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto. His work is included in The Living End: Painting and Other Technologies 1970 – 2020, curated by Jamillah Jones at the MCA, Chicago through March 16, 2025.

Tishan Hsu's work is held 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; Dallas Museum of Art; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt; MAMCO Geneva, Switzerland; Pinault Collection; High Museum, Atlanta; San José Museum of Art; The Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis; Terra Museum, Mexico City; Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami; X Museum, Beijing; and The Rubell Family Collection, Miami, among others.