

Eva Hesse
MATRIX 5

Wadsworth Atheneum
March April 1975

xerox copy
of original

Tori

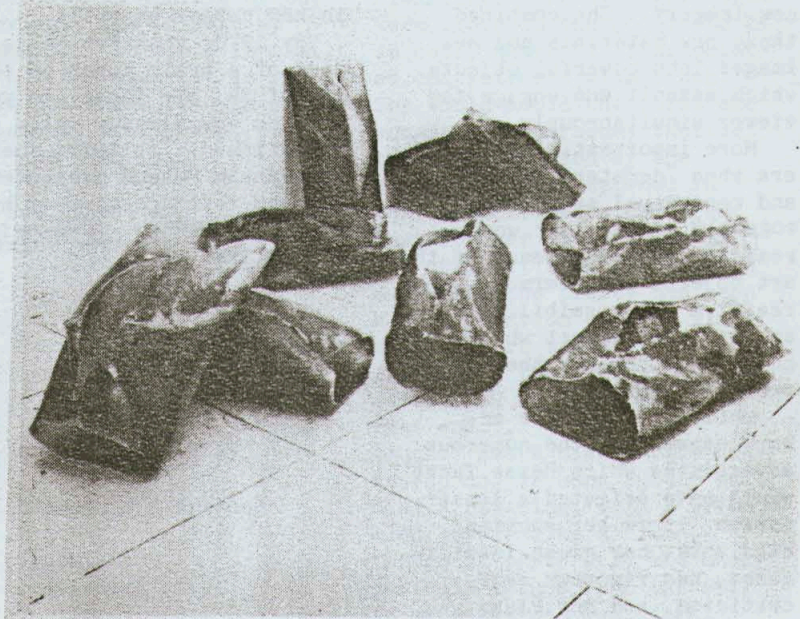


Photo: J.A. Ferrari, NYC

The work Eva Hesse produced from 1964 until her death in 1970 represents a major contribution to contemporary art. She appropriated a vast number of new materials with an authority that established them almost immediately as part of the artistic vocabulary of her time. In reacting against the decorative in art, against paintings in frames and sculptures on pedestals she produced a new imagery. She combined these new materials and new images into powerful objects which assault and engage the viewer simultaneously.

More importantly, in an era when "dematerialization" and conceptual art are so cogently argued, her works reaffirm the legitimacy of the art object. Furthermore, they reaffirm the possibility of an emotional impact which in no way compromises the artist's creative integrity.

While it should be acknowledged that the numerous adversities which Hesse faced would have defeated a lesser person, it is her constant hard work, her great intelligence, her rigorous self-criticism, and her clear sense of what she felt was moral in art (pretty was not) that best explain her considerable achievement.

Eva Hesse was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1936. Fleeing the Nazi tyranny, her family arrived in New York City in 1939. Her early years included political dislocation, the separation of her parents, the suicide of her mother. She graduated from The High School of Industrial Arts with honors, then attended several art schools in New York City and worked at Seventeen magazine. In 1959 she received a BFA from Yale University. In 1964 she traveled to Germany where she spent a year and a half before

returning to New York.

For Hesse the painful remembrances of childhood upheavals had always been close to the surface. From adolescence on she kept written notes about artistic and personal concerns. Both her return to Germany in 1964 and the death of her father in 1966 seem to have re-stimulated the traumata of her youth. These events coincide with a turning point in her career as well.

By 1970, when Eva Hesse died of a brain tumor at the age of 34, her legacy to young artists was already well-established. In 1972, the Guggenheim Museum presented a major retrospective of her work, Eva Hesse: A Memorial Exhibition.

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Works in MATRIX

Aught, 1968, double sheets of latex over polyethelene sheets, 4 units, each 78" x 40". Lent by Fourcade, Droll Inc., NYC.

Tori, 1969, fiberglass and wire mesh, 9 units, each 30" - 47" x 12 1/2" - 17" x 10 1/4" x 15". Lent by Karalyn and Steven Robinson, Miami.

"...not painting, not sculpture...I remember I wanted to get to non art, non connotive, non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non nothing, everything, but of another kind, vision, sort. from a total other reference point. is it possible? I have learned anything is possible ...that vision or concept will come through total risk, freedom, discipline. I will do it...how to achieve by not achieving? how to make by not making? it's all in that. it's not the new. it is what is yet not known, though seen, touched but really what is not. and that is."

from Eva Hesse, Art in Process, IV, 1969

- "1 art is what it is
- 2 tension and freedom
- 3 opposition
contradictions
- 4 abstract symbol
- 5 not symbols for something else
- 6 detached but intimate/
personal"

Eva Hesse, from her diaries,
1970

"It is a curious characteristic of many of Hesse's works that once you have been touched by them you are caught between emotions. That they can be simultaneously experienced as humorous, impressive, whimsical, pathetic, calm, frantic, grand, or sad is a measure in some contradictory manner of the seriousness that lies at the core of her art...In a period when cleanliness and straight edges were close to the godliness of success, Hesse still associated concreteness with touch. She would mould the forms she sought by a personal tactile confrontation and by the accidents that happened in that realm...Hesse declared that for her 'decorative is the only art sin...' Getting away from the pretty had been a preoccupation of hers since she left art school. The eroticism, the humor, the new materials, were all means to that end..."

[Aught] has a highly pictorial aspect and is hung on the wall like a painting, with a wrinkled border like a frame, though it perversely and unexpectedly bulges from the wall to maintain its sculptural identity as well...
[about Tori:] The nine empty receptacles on the ground, their surfaces scarred...lie as though discarded...tossed carelessly against each other... It is impossible not to read into these broken and barren forms--like seed-pods past their prime--the downward plunge of Hesse's life at this time."

Lucy Lippard, Eva Hesse

Selected one-woman exhibitions:
Allan Stone Gallery, NYC '63
(first); Kunsthalle, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf '65; Fischbach Gallery, NYC '68; School of Visual Arts Gallery, NYC '71; Detroit Institute of Arts, '72; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC '72; Mayer Gallery, London '74.

Selected group exhibitions:
Brooklyn Museum, 21st International Watercolor Biennial '61; John Heller Gallery, NYC Drawings: Three Young Americans '61; Graham Gallery, NYC Abstract Inflationism and Stuffed Expressionism '66; John Gibson Gallery, NYC Anti-Form '68; Leo Castelli Warehouse, NYC Nine at Leo Castelli '68; Kunsthalle, Bern When Attitude Becomes Form '69; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia Grids '72; Documenta 5, Kassel '72

Selected bibliography by Hesse:

Statement, Art in Process IV, exhibition catalogue, Finch College Museum, 1969, unpaginated.

"An Interview with Eva Hesse," Artforum, vol. 7, no. 9 (May '70), by Cindy Nemser, pp. 59-63.

"Eva Hesse: Last Words," Artforum, vol. 11, no. 3 (November '72) pp. 74-76.

Selected bibliography about Hesse:

Smithson, Robert. "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space," Arts, vol. 41, no. 1 (November '66), pp. 28-31.

Wasserman, Emily, Artforum, vol. 7, no. 5 (January '69), p. 60.

"Fling, Dribble and Dip," Life, vol. 68, no. 7 (February 27, '70), p. 66

Lippard, Lucy R. Changing: Essays in Art Criticism, E. P. Dutton (New York) '71.

Shearer, Linda. Eva Hesse: A Memorial Exhibition. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York) '72.

Shapiro, David. "The Random Forms in Soft Materials and String," Craft Horizons, (February '73), pp. 40-45, 77.

Gula, Dasha Linville. "Eva Hesse: No Explanation," Ms. Magazine, vol. 1, no. 10 (April '73), pp. 39-42.

Lippard, Lucy R. Eva Hesse. Paul Bianchini Book, New York Graphic Society Ltd. (Greenwich) to be published '75.

The Atheneum would like to acknowledge the assistance of Lucy R. Lippard who allowed us to read and quote from her forthcoming book, Eva Hesse, which will be published this fall (see Selected Bibliography).