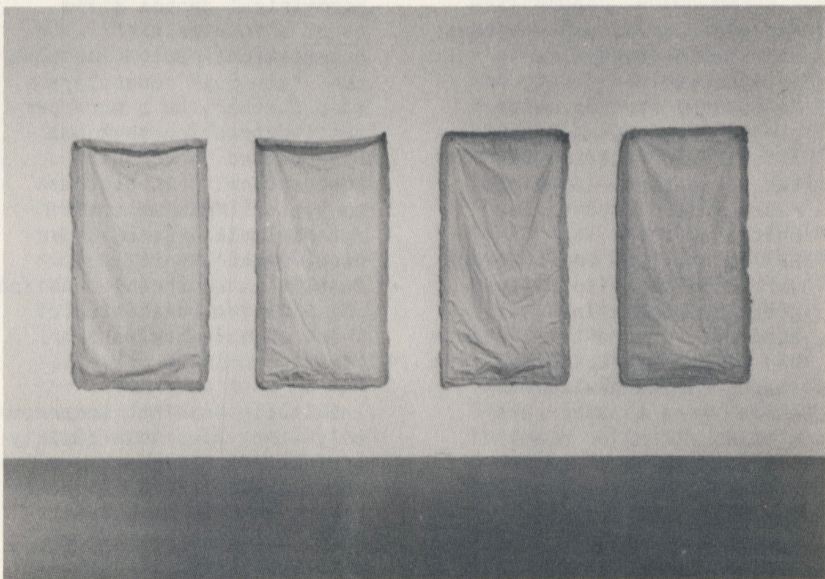


Eva Hesse
MATRIX/BERKELEY 53

University Art Museum
mid-July - mid-October, 1982

Augt., 1968



Many viewers will remember the Eva Hesse retrospective at the University Art Museum in 1973, which demonstrated the exquisitely sensitive approach of this major sculptor. The Museum is delighted to show an important gift of Hesse's work. On view in its entirety for the first time, the gift has been the subject of an innovative conservation study.

Hesse's emphasis on a process of experimentation is in evidence in the thirty sculptural studies or test pieces (found in her studio after her death) included in the exhibition. Some are remnants elevated to the status of found objects by Hesse; that is, these scraps were considered to possess great aesthetic interest. Also on view are trial pieces and molds, the latter to form shapes for more elaborate works. And a number are studies for major pieces. All display Hesse's finely attuned sensitivity to the aesthetic possibilities of unusual materials. "Decoration" and "beauty" were anathemas to her. Instead, she demonstrated the extraordinarily rich tactile potential of such unlikely materials as latex and fiberglass; in doing so, Hesse influenced many younger artists to explore new media. The test pieces are especially useful in showing the vocabulary of evocative, elemental shapes that Hesse developed in her work. Within that vocabulary, the idea of a vessel or cavity is a major component, lending an erotic quality to the art. Other forms are organic, threatening, or ambiguous.

Aught reveals the final transformation of a motif consisting of slab-like

rectilinear pieces of latex. Possessing qualities of both painting and sculpture, the work resides comfortably in the territory of being, simply, an object. Similarly, the title is meant to be all-inclusive; Hesse wrote in her diary that "aught" means "anything, whatever; any little thing."

The repetition of loosely geometrical shapes gives Aught a "minimalist" orientation. But Hesse took the "minimal" vocabulary a step further, to a more personal expression that has been called "eccentric abstraction." In contrast to typical "minimalist" materials like steel and wood, which are rigid, Hesse's latex sheets bend and sag. The vulnerability of these objects suggests a human, emotional content.

Inevitably--and not unreasonably--the vulnerable quality of Hesse's work has been associated with her personal life. Born in Germany in 1936, she came to New York with her family in 1939. Despite having escaped the Nazi regime at a young age, Hesse retained painful memories of Germany. Her mother's subsequent suicide added to the emotional scars that remained near the surface of Hesse's conscious life, as is shown by her writing. She graduated with honors from the High School of Industrial Art in New York and received a B.F.A. from Yale University in 1959. At a time when her work was attracting considerable attention in the art world, tragedy continued to haunt Hesse's life. In 1968 she began to show symptoms of a brain tumor from which she suffered until her death in May 1970.

The works on view in MATRIX 53 were very generously donated by the artist's sister, Mrs. Helen Charash. The Museum is also grateful to Sol LeWitt and to Donald Droll, an executor of the artist's estate, for the help and information they so graciously provided.

Elise Goldstein, Curatorial Work-Study Assistant

Mark Rosenthal, Curator of Collections

Conservation Problems and Solutions

Hesse's materials, particularly latex and rubber, are susceptible to the deleterious effects of oxidation and exposure to light. Oxidation is caused by oxygen atoms bonding with the atoms that make up the organic materials of the sculptures; ultimately the works would disintegrate into dust. Light, that is ultraviolet and infrared rays, can exacerbate the process of oxidation and induce harmful chemical changes.

Professor Henry Rapaport was consultant on the project from the beginning. He noted that several of the test pieces were doomed to a lifespan of perhaps ten years under normal conditions of museum display and storage. With protection, however, the sculptures might be preserved for a century or more. Rapaport's assessment led to the decision to exhibit and store the sculptures in an oxygen-free/argon-rich environment. An inert gas present in minute quantities in the normal atmosphere, argon will not link with other atoms to cause changes produced by oxidation.

After further consultation, especially with Professor Donald Hanson, the Museum preparation and design staffs devised an optimum environment for the pieces. Vitrines have been built in which the oxygen is removed and the volume filled exclusively with argon. Silica gel is placed in each box as a monitor; if the gel turns pink, water vapor is entering the environment, which means oxygen will reenter also. The vitrine must then have new infusion of argon. When in storage, the cases containing the test pieces will be enclosed in light-free boxes.

The resources of the University are ideally suited to address a complex problem of this type. We are deeply grateful to Professor Henry Rapaport and John Peterson (Chemistry Department), and Professor Donald Hanson, Kay Ekman, Fred Wolf, and Andy Anderson (Chemical Engineering Department), for their help.

Barney Bailey, Chief Preparator

Elise Goldstein, Curatorial Work-Study Assistant

Works in MATRIX:
Aught, 1968; 4 units: double sheets of latex stuffed with polyethylene sheets, metal grommets; c.78 x 40" ea.
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The following are untitled test pieces acquired in 1979. Each is identified by its acquisition number:
#2, '68; 2 units: canvas (purchased boat bumper), cotton string; c.5 x 11 x 11" ea. #3, '67-69; 10 units: latex; c.2-1/2 to 3-1/4" diam. ea. #4, '67-69 (possibly found object); latex; c.1 x 7-3/4 x 2-1/2".

#5, '66-67; 2 units: wood, (purchased) rubber form, papier mâché, nuts, bolts, paint; c.1-3/4 x 4-7/8 x 2-5/8" ea. #6, '67-69 (mold and casting); 3 units: wax, latex; c.2 x 4 x 3-1/2" ea. #7, '67-68; cloth, latex, rubber wire; c.78 x 5". #8, '67-69; metal screen, latex, pins; c.1-1/4 x 3-3/4 x 5-1/8". #9, '67-69; 9 units: wax; c.1/4 x 2-3/8 to 3-1/4" ea. #10, '67-69; cloth, latex; c.1 x 2-3/8 x 9-3/4". #11, '67-69; rubber tubing, staples; c.1-1/2 x 6-1/2 x 9-3/4". #12, '67-69; 10 units: wax; c.1-7/8 x 1-1/8 to 2 x 1-3/4" ea. #13, '67 (study for Accession series, '67-68; possibly found object); fiberglass, plastic tubing; c.3-7/8 x 5-3/8 x 5-3/4". #14, '67-69; 2 units: latex, cheesecloth; c.2-1/2 x 32 to 39" ea. #15, '67-69 (study for Sans series, '67-68); latex, wire screen; c.2-3/8 x 3-1/4 x 4-1/2". #16, '68 (study for Aught, Augment, '68, & Contingent, '69); latex, cloth; c.3-3/4 x 7-1/2". #17 (study molds for Sans I, '67-680; 2 units: clay; c.7/8 x 3-5/8 x 2-7/8" ea. #18, '67-69 (molds); 2 units: plaster; c.5/8 x 8 x 7-3/4" ea. #19 Posthumous cast from original mold, '67-69; latex; c.1-1/4 x 8 x 8". #20, '68 (study for Area, '68, & Seam, '68); fiberglass, varnish; c.3-1/4 x 14-1/2 x 7". #21, '67 (study for Repetition Nineteen I, '67; cardboard, gray paint; 3-3/8 x 3-3/8". #22, '67 (study for Repetition Nineteen I, '67; latex; 3-1/8 x 3-1/4". #23, '67-69 (molds); 2 units: plaster; c.1 x 3-3/4 x 3" ea. #24, '67-69; 13 units: latex, cheesecloth; c.1-1/4 x 5 x 6-3/4" ea. #25, '67-69 (possibly found object); aluminum screen, cheesecloth; c.49-1/2 x 6-1/8 (unfolded). #26, '67-69; 2

units: papier mâché; c.2-1/2 x 6"; c.2 x 12-1/2 x 3-1/2". #27, '67 (study for Schema, '67); 10 units: latex, paint, metallic pigment; c.1 to 1-1/2 x 2-1/4 to 3-1/4" ea. #28, '67-69; latex; c.4-3/4" diam. #29, '67-69; latex; c.4-3/4" diam. #30, Posthumous cast from reconstructed mold, '69 (study for Sans III, '69); latex; c.1-1/2 x 3 x 4". #31, '67 (study for Repetition Nineteen series, '67-68); latex; c.3/4 x 3-1/4" ea.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Allan Stone Gallery, NYC '63 (first); Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf '65; Fischbach Gallery, NYC '68, '70; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC '72 (cat. pub., trav. exh.); Mayor Gallery, London '74 (cat. pub.); MATRIX, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford '75; Droll/Kolbert Gallery, NYC '77; White Chapel Art Gallery, London '79; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, OH '82 (cat. pub., trav. exh.)

Selected bibliography:

Smithson, Robert. "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space," Arts Magazine, Nov. '66.
Lippard, Lucy R. "Eccentric Abstraction," Art International (Nov. '66).
"Flying, Dribble, and Dip," Life (Feb. 27, '70).
"An Interview with Eva Hesse," Artforum (May '70).
Interview by Cindy Nemser. Pincus-Witten, Robert. "Eva Hesse: Post Minimalism Into Sublime," Artforum (Nov. '71).
Lippard, Lucy R. Eva Hesse (N.Y. University '76).

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