

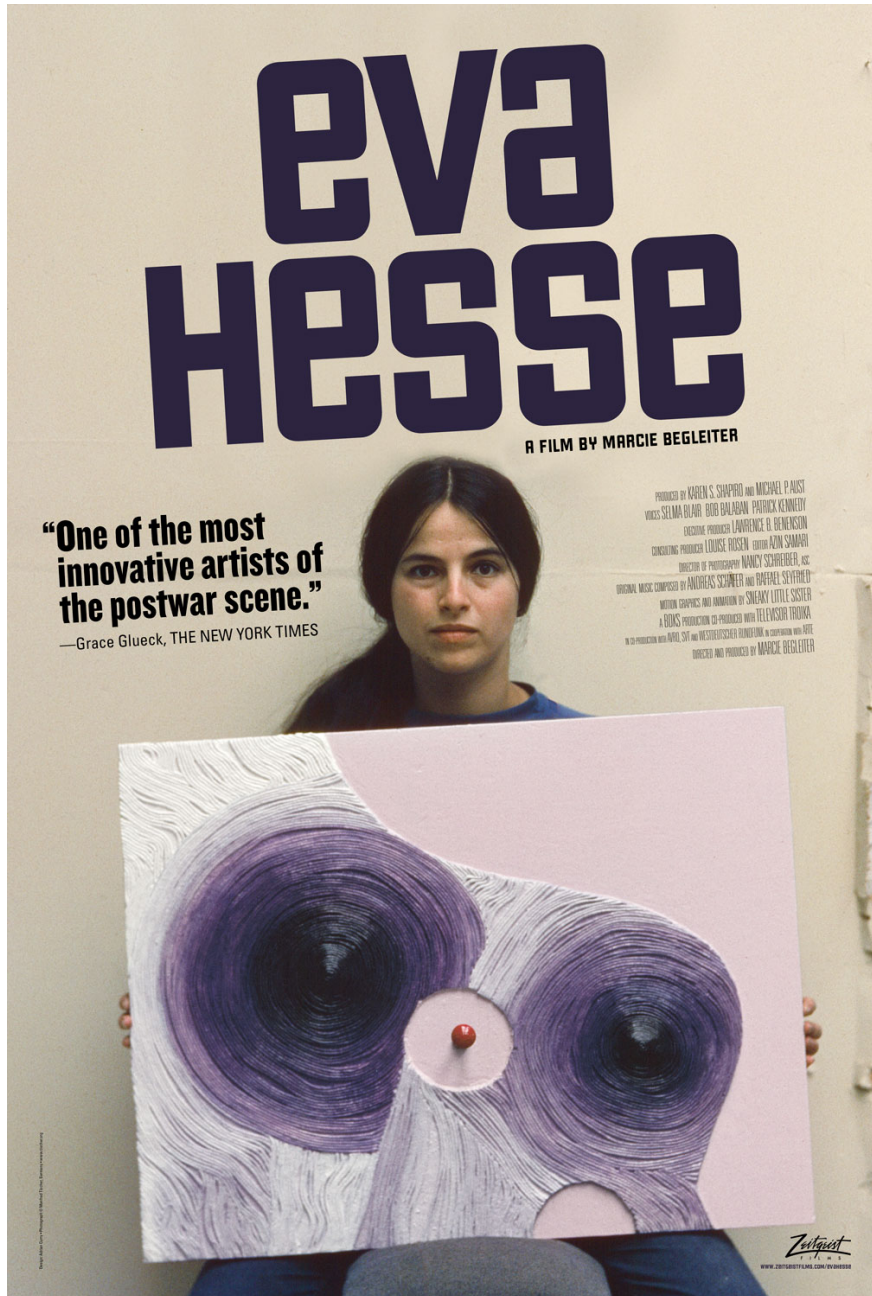
# eva hesse

A FILM BY MARCIE BEGLEITER

**"One of the most  
innovative artists of  
the postwar scene."**

—Grace Glueck, THE NEW YORK TIMES

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CONSULTING PRODUCER: LOUISE ROSEN AND AZIN SHAMATI  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: NANCY SCHREIBER, ASC  
ORIGINAL MUSIC COMPOSER: ANDREAS SCHWETI AND DANIEL SEYFHERD  
MOTION GRAPHICS AND ANIMATION BY SNEAKY LITTLE SISTER  
A ZEITGEIST PRODUCTION CO-PRODUCED WITH TELEVISION TROJAN  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH APRIL SWI AND HISTORISCHES THEATRIUM IN STUTTGARTEN UND BETH  
DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY MARCIE BEGLEITER



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**A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE**

# EVA HESSE

A film by Marcie Begleiter

Eva Hesse (1936-1970) is one of America's foremost postwar artists. Her pioneering sculptures, using latex, fiberglass, and plastics, helped establish the post-minimalist movement. Dying of a brain tumor at age 34, she had a mere decade-long career that, despite its brevity, is dense with complex, intriguing works that defy easy categorization. *Eva Hesse*, the first feature-length appreciation of her life and work, makes superb use of the artist's voluminous journals, her correspondence with close friend and mentor Sol LeWitt, and contemporary as well as archival interviews with fellow artists (among them, Richard Serra, Robert Mangold, Dan Graham) who recall her passionate, ambitious, tenacious personality. Art critic Arthur Danto has written that her work is: "full of life, of eros, even of comedy... Each piece vibrates with originality and mischief." The documentary captures these qualities, but also the psychic struggles of an artist who, in the downtown New York art scene of the 1960s, was one of the few women to make work that was taken seriously in a field dominated by male pop artists and minimalists.

-Karen Cooper, Film Forum

# EVA HESSE

## Biography

“I am interested in solving an unknown factor of art and an unknown factor of life.”

From the beginning, Eva Hesse's life was marked by drama and social challenges. Born in Hamburg in 1936 to a German-Jewish family, the artist's fierce work ethic may have developed from a complex psychology that was formed, in part, as a Jew born in Nazi Germany. Having escaped the fate of her extended family, Eva and her older sister Helen were sent out on one of the last Kindertransports (trains that carried Jewish children to safety) and was eventually reunited with their parents in Holland. They made their way to New York in 1940 but her family struggled to make a new home. When Eva was 9 her mother, after many years of depression and a failed marriage, heard about her own parents' demise in the concentration camps and committed suicide. The remaining years of Hesse's youth were difficult, but she discovered herself as an artist early in life. The passion and serious attention she gave TO her studies supported her later successes.

The artist graduated from Cooper Union and Yale School of Art, then returned home to Manhattan in late 1959 and began to receive attention for her highly original, abstract drawings. In 1961 Hesse met Tom Doyle, an already established sculptor, and in a whirlwind romance married him a scant 6 months after first glimpse. Their relationship was both passionate and competitive. Hesse struggled with the desire to be on equal footing with Doyle in terms of their art making, but also wanted to be in a marriage with someone who could offer her the security that life had often denied.

In 1964 Friedrich Arnhard Scheidt, a German industrialist, offered an all-expenses paid artist's residency to Tom Doyle for year of working in an abandoned textile factory near Essen, Germany. It was tough choice for Hesse – go back to the country that had murdered her family or stay in New York and work menial jobs while trying to make art with any time and energy left over. Ironically, the work on which her reputation was built began to emerge during this extended visit to the homeland she had escaped 25 years earlier.

When the couple arrived for the residency, Doyle was clearly the artist of note. But something happened during those 14 months in the cold factory on the Ruhr River. Eva arrived in Germany a painter. But as she worked in the thin German light, she began to incorporate pieces of metal and string that she found in the corner of her studio into her work. By the time the couple were ready to return to New York in the fall of 1965, Eva had fully incorporated a 3-dimensionality into her work which was now neither painting nor sculpture, but an exciting cross-breed of the two. And people were beginning to take notice. Within months after returning to New York in the fall of 1965, her work was thriving but the marriage failed. Tom moved into his studio just across the Bowery.

For the next five years, Eva worked non-stop on an impressive body of work, completing dozens of major sculptural works and hundreds of works on paper. Although she sold little, critical attention was paid and she was showing often and in excellent venues. She was also offered a teaching position at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. In 1969 Hesse began having debilitating headaches and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Although her operation was deemed a success, the tumors reappeared and she died in 1970 at the age of 34 the same month that that her work was on the cover of ArtForum. A memorial retrospective filled the entire Guggenheim two years later and solidified Hesse's place in art history as one of the century's most significant artists.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

by Marcie Begleiter

I have an abiding interest in the art and life of Eva Hesse. The work moves me deeply in the mysterious way that powerful art can function. It's hard to categorize; inhabiting a space that moves fluidly between media and ideas. The work made me want to know more about the artist and that led to Lucy Lippard's "Eva Hesse", the first book written on the artist after her early death in 1970. This volume includes fragments from Hesse's unpublished journals and the single audio interview she gave in her lifetime.

I connected strongly with the voice and heart that came through in these short quotes and began to search out more material from Hesse's archive. Like Eva, I also have roots in the European Jewish community, a history that comes with many opportunities as well as inherent challenges. The female perspective is also very strong in her writing as is her ambition and bravery.

No biography in English has been published, so I decided to go visit those unpublished journals at the Allen Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio where they are housed. Given a pair of white gloves, I sat for a week in their rare manuscripts library, reading through hundreds of pages. The journals told a deep and compelling story about this remarkable woman's journey. It was characterized by loss, but more importantly for me, by a triumphant commitment to work and living life to its fullest. By week's end I had fallen for the woman as I had for the work and began a series of projects of which this film is the latest incarnation.

Using Hesse's writings as inspiration, I wrote the theatrical work "Meditations: Eva Hesse" which was co-produced by Highways Performance Space in Santa Monica, CA during their 2010 season. The play was well attended, and Karen Shapiro (one of the films producers) approached me about taking the play to a larger venue. With that in mind, and wanting to reach out to Hesse's estate, in 2011 I conducted a series of audio interviews with the artist's family and friends.

Their passion for Eva, a woman gone for over 40 years, and their insights into her life and times was so deeply engaging, I sensed there was another project to be developed based on the material. I also realized that given the age of Eva's family and colleagues, this idea needed to be moved upon sooner than later. I called Karen to ask if she would like to produce a film in lieu of the play and before I could get the words out she said "I know what you are going to say: You want to make a documentary." I was astounded. "How did you know?" She said, "I saw it in my meditation this morning." So the producing team was together from day one.

There was a chance that a documentary had already been made so I called Helen Hesse Charash, Eva's sister and head of the estate. She told me there had been interest, but none had been produced. Given Hesse's importance in the art world and her incredible life, I was surprised and asked her if we might go ahead and try to do it. She immediately said 'Go for it!' That 'yes' has propelled the last 5 years, through the most intense and rewarding professional experience of my life.

"Eva Hesse" is a film that is a personal culmination of the work that has been informed by this remarkable artist; her art and her world. Along with the dozens of talented and dedicated collaborators, we have worked in concert to create a work of that reflects Eva's beauty, intelligence and power; a fitting tribute to this extraordinary artist.

# INTERVIEWEES

## FAMILY

HELEN HESSE CHARASH Sister of Eva Hesse and head of the artist's estate.

TOM DOYLE Sculptor and Hesse's husband. Although they separated in 1965, they remained married until her passing away in 1970.

## ARTISTS/WRITERS IN HESSE'S DOWNTOWN ART CIRCLE

LUCY LIPPARD Writer, mostly about culture and art. Wrote "Eva Hesse" the first book about the artist, published in 1976. Knew Hesse well and included her work when curating the groundbreaking exhibition of post-minimalist art "Eccentric Abstraction" in 1966.

SOL LEWITT. Artist and central figure in the conceptual and minimal art movements. Hesse's beloved friend and confidant. (Interview from Michael Blackwood's *Four Artists*).

CARL ANDRE Artist known for his minimalist sculptural installations. Hesse friend.

DAN GRAHAM Artist and Hesse studio assistant in 1966.

RICHARD SERRA Artist who traded studio visits with Hesse and showed with her in important exhibits, including the Castelli 'Warehouse Show' in 1969

ROBERT MANGOLD Painter and, with his wife Sylvia Mangold, was friends with Hesse.

SYLVIA PLIMACK MANGOLD Painter and close Hesse friend.

MIKE TODD Artist and close Hesse friend during 1965-66.

ROSIE GOLDMAN Outsider artist and lifelong friend of Hesse

BARBARA BROWN Photographer. Shot the streets of NY during the 1960s and '70s and also photographed many artists in their studios at that time. Friend of Hesse who shot many of the B&W images in the film.

GIOIA TAMPANELLI Writer and Storyteller. Close friend of Hesse who invited the artist to live and work in Woodstock during the summer of 1969 when she was recovering from her first brain surgery.

GRACE WAPNER Artist. Friend of Hesse who shared a studio with her and Tom Doyle on lower 5th Ave. in the early 1960s. Lives in Woodstock.

ETHELYN HONIG Artist, Hesse studio-mate and friend.

DOUG JOHNS Artist and Hesse's studio assistant from 1968-1970.

NANCY HOLT A pioneering artist in the Land Art movement, Holt and Hesse spent many nights talking art with (and without) Holt's husband, artist Robert Smithson. It was Smithson who first published Hesse's work in a 1966 essay in Arts Magazine.

LINDA HAACKE Friend of Hesse, and lived nearby in Germany during the artist's 1964-65 residency.

### **COLLECTORS WHO KNEW HESSE**

TONY GANZ Art collector. Ganz met Hesse in the late 1960s through his parents (see below)

VICTOR AND SALLY GANZ The Ganzes had an important collection of art that included Picasso, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. They purchased Hesse's work when she was alive and then went on to purchase a major collection of the artist's sculpture after her passing. (Interview from Michael Blackwood's *Four Artists*).

### **GERMANS WHO KNEW HESSE**

GABRIELLE AND JOHANN SCHEIDT Children of Arnheldt Scheidt, the German industrialist who invited Hesse and her husband Tom Doyle to live in one of his abandoned textile factories in 1964-65.

WERNER NEKES Filmmaker and 'driver' for the Doyles during their year in Germany. In the summer of 1965 Nekes was handed a movie camera by Tom Doyle and was asked to shoot footage of a reception for the artist and Hesse's work at the estate of Arnheldt Scheidt. This proved to be the first film of of this renowned German filmmaker.

WOLFGANG AND ROSEMARIE LEISEN Artist and Weaver, respectively. Friends of Hesse and husband Tom Doyle and lived nearby in Germany during the artist's 1964-65 residency.



## **CURATORS AND HISTORIANS**

**ELISABETH SUSSMAN** Curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Hesse scholar and curator of 2 major retrospective on the artists' work.

**SIR NICHOLAS SEROTA** Director of the Tate Museums, London. In 1979 during his time as Director of the White Chapel Gallery, he was the first to curate a retrospective show of Hesse works in Europe.

**RENATE PETZINGER** Curator and Art Historian. Edited the Eva Hesse Catalog Raisonne and co-curated major retrospective of the artist's work for Museum Wiesbaden in 2002.

**WILL WENKE** Historian. Hamburg-based German historian whose field of study includes Jewish life in Hamburg before, during and after WWII

## EVA ON ART AND LIFE

Quotes excerpted from Hesse's Journals (late 1950s—1970)  
and Cindy Nemser interview (1970)

"I am interested in solving an unknown factor of art and an unknown factor of life."

"Art is the easiest thing in my life, and that's ironic. It doesn't mean I've worked little on it, but it's the only thing I never had to. That's why I think I may be so good. I have no fear."

"My life has been so traumatic, so absurd, there hasn't been one normal, happy thing. I'm the easiest person to make happy, and the easiest person to make sad because I've gone through so much. And it's never stopped."

"For me, it's a total image that has to do with me and life. It can't be divorced as an idea or composition or form. I don't believe art can be based on that. This is where art and life come together."

"I'm very complex, I'm not a simple person, and the complexity – if I can name what it consists of is the total absurdity of life."

"I remember always working with contradictions and contradictory forms, which is my idea also in life. The whole absurdity of life, everything for me has always been opposite. Nothing has ever been in the middle."

"I've been a giant in my strength and my work's been strong and my whole character has it inside. But somewhere I'm a terribly frightened person."

"My life has never had anything normal or in the center. It was always extremes. And I think, and I know that, in forms that I use in my work, that contradiction is certainly there."

"But my right or wrong isn't to have a pure or fine edge. I do think there is a state, a quality, that is necessary, but is not based on correctness. It has to be based on the quality of the piece itself. That hasn't to do with neatness, not artisan quality for the sake of craft."

"I have very strong feelings about being honest, also heightened since I have been so ill. I'd like to be true to whatever I use and use it in the least pretentious and most direct way."

"This is what I want to be, the most Eva can be as an artist and as a person."

"What makes a tight circle or a tight little square box more of an intellectual statement than something done emotionally, I don't know."

“Art is an essence, a center.”

“It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go. It is something, it is nothing. I would like the work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions.”

“I think the circle is very abstract. I could make up stories of what the circle means to men, but I don't know if it is that conscious. I think it was a form, a vehicle. I don't think I had a sexual anthropomorphic, or geometric meaning. It wasn't a breast and it wasn't a circle representing life and eternity....”

“When I gave you my autobiography, my life never had anything normal or in the center. It was always extremes.”

“I wanted to get to non art, non-connotive, non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non, nothing. Everything, but of another kind, vision, sort.”

“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, thought, seen, touched but not really what is not. And that is.”

“Excellence has no sex.”

“Do I have a right to womanliness? Can I achieve and artistic endeavor and can they coincide?”

“When an artist is successful, it represents a lot in society.”

“What drives us to work? It seems to me some kind of recognition which maybe we cannot give to ourselves. One should be content with the process as well as the result. But I am not!”

“I have really been discovering my weird humor, maybe sick or maybe cool but I can only see things that way. Experience them also, but I can't feel cool – that is my hopelessness.”

“How do you believe in something deeply? How is it one can pinpoint beliefs into a single purpose?”

“I don't mind being miles from everybody else. The best artists are those who *have* stood alone and who *can* be separated.”

## **Public Collections that include Eva Hesse's Work** (selected list)

### **USA**

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
The Jewish Museum, New York  
Art Institute of Chicago  
Hirschhorn Museum, Washington, DC  
San Francisco Museum of Art  
Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio  
National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC  
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo  
Detroit Institute of Arts  
Philadelphia Museum of Art  
University of California, Berkley Art Museum  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
The Baltimore Museum of Art

### **INTERNATIONAL**

Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, Germany  
Museum Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, Germany  
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany  
Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Zurich  
Daros Collection, Zurich  
Pompidou Center, Paris  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes  
Kroller-Muller Museum, the Netherlands  
Tate Modern, London  
Israel Museum of Art, Jerusalem  
The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Samsung Museum of Modern Art, Seoul, Korea

## **THE FILMMAKERS**

### **Marcie Begleiter**

Director

Director Marcie Begleiter has been researching and writing about Eva Hesse for a number of years. She authored the play "Meditations: Eva Hesse" and directed the short "Eva Hesse, Walking the Edge" for the Hamburger Kunsthalle in 2014. Her book "From Word to Image: Storyboarding and the Filmmaking Process" is a bestseller and she is recipient of grants from the NEA, the Durfee Foundation and the Foundation for Arts Resources. This is her first feature documentary as director.

### **Karen Shapiro**

Producer

Producer Karen Shapiro's films include the film festival hit "Beat the Drum", the romantic comedy "The Neighbor", the drama "The Low Life" and the Academy Award winning short, "Violet". Her television work includes the Emmy Award winning "Other Mothers" and "Between Mother and Daughter", winner of the Humanitas Award. Two of her documentaries, "Awake and Sing" and "Together As One" were produced for a benefit concert that commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of Nazi-occupied Europe.

## VOICE-ACTOR BIOS

### **Selma Blair**

Voice of Eva Hesse

Played Liz Sherman in the fantasy films *Hellboy* (2004) and *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008). Other notable films include *Legally Blonde* (2001), *The Sweetest Thing* (2002), *The Fog* (2005), *Purple Violets* (2007), *The Poker House* (2008) and *Columbus Circle* (2012). She will return to television in 2016 during the first season of the series *American Crime Story: The People v. O.J. Simpson*.

Blair narrated the Holocaust-related documentary *The Diary of Anne Frank*, for which she was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2011.

### **Bob Balaban**

Voice of William Hesse, Eva's father

Actor, author, producer, and director. One of the producers nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture for *Gosford Park* (2001), in which he also appeared.

Among his early roles in the 1970s were those of Orr in *Catch-22* and the interpreter David Laughlin in the 1977 Steven Spielberg science fiction film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. In 1979 he received a Tony Award nomination for his role in *The Inspector General*. During the 1980s he appeared in films such as *Altered States* and *2010*. He directed the Randy Quaid picture *Parents*, and the Armin Mueller-Stahl picture *The Last Good Time*.

Balaban has had supporting roles in films such as *Absence of Malice*, *Bob Roberts*, *Deconstructing Harry*, *Ghost World*, *The Majestic*, *Lady in the Water* and Christopher Guest's *Waiting for Guffman*, *Best in Show*, *A Mighty Wind* and *For Your Consideration*.

## Patrick Kennedy

Voice of Sol LeWitt

An English actor in over 16 films and television shows. Lead series regular role on HBO's series *The Money* opposite Brendan Gleeson and Nathan Lane. Kennedy Had a recurring role on *Boardwalk Empire* for which he was nominated for a Screen Actors Guild Award. He shot *War Horse* with Steven Spielberg and booked a leading role in the HBO mini-series *Parade's End*.

Kennedy also appeared opposite Keira Knightley in the Oscar-winning film *Atonement* and is a dual US and UK citizen. He appeared in *The Last Station* alongside James McAvoy and Paul Giamatti as well as *Me and Orson Welles* alongside Claire Danes. On the TV side, he was a series regular opposite Carey Mulligan in the BBC's *Bleak House*, as Richard Carstone.

# EVA HESSE

Directed and Produced by **Marcie Begleiter**

Produced by **Karen S. Shapiro** and **Michael P. Aust**

Executive Producer **Lawrence Benenson**

Consulting Producer **Louise Rosen**

Editor **Azin Samari**

Director of Photography **Nancy Schreiber, ASC**

Original Music Composed by **Andreas Schäfer** and **Raffael Seyfried**

Motion Graphics and Animation by **Sneaky Little Sister**

All narration taken from the writings and interviews of  
Eva Hesse, William Hesse, and Sol LeWitt

Voice of Eva Hesse **Selma Blair**  
Voice of William Hesse **Bob Balaban**  
Voice of Sol LeWitt **Patrick Kennedy**

A bdk's production co-produced with Televisor Troika in co-production  
with Avro, SVT and Westdeutscher Rundfunk in cooperation with arte.

USA - 2016 - 108 mins - Color

**A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE**

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## Finally, a Documentary About Eva Hesse's Life and Work

by [Benjamin Sutton](#) on May 15, 2015

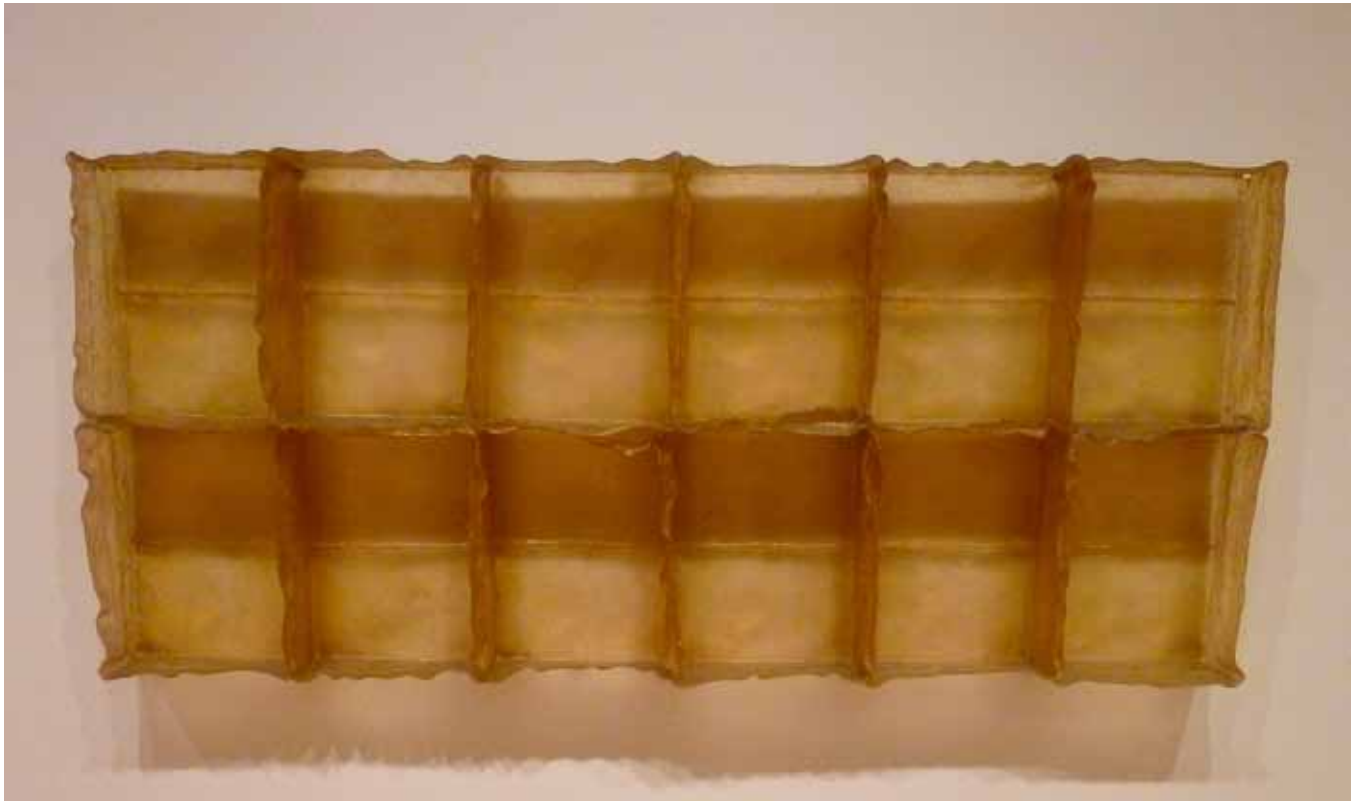


Eva Hesse c. 1963 (photo by and courtesy of Barbara Brown)

Eva Hesse's life story exudes drama. From escaping Nazi Germany at age two aboard one of the last Kindertransport trains bound for the Netherlands, to her emphatic break with the dominant mode of art making of the 1960s — Minimalism, to her death from a brain tumor at 34, and to her posthumous celebration as one of the most important artists of the second half of the 20th century, her biography has all the requisite elements of a rousing documentary or tear-jerking biopic.

But it's only now, 45 years after Hesse's death, that a feature-length documentary has been made about the artist's life and work. Director [Marcie Begleiter](#) recently completed [Eva Hesse](#), which will have its world premiere [Sunday](#) at the [Whitney Museum](#), where one of Hesse's last and most famous works is featured prominently as part of the institution's inaugural show in its new building, [America Is Hard to See](#). Hyperallergic spoke to Begleiter and the film's producer,

Karen Shapiro, about the process of reading through Hesse's diaries, capturing her notoriously unwieldy rope and textile sculptures on film, and the powerful impact she had on her contemporaries' lives.



Eva Hesse, "Sans II" (1968) at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

\* \* \*

**Benjamin Sutton:** *Eva Hesse kept fairly extensive diaries and notebooks; how essential were those to the process of making this film?*

**Marcie Begleiter:** It's not just diaries, it's correspondence, and she was a very thoughtful person in terms of what she kept, the ephemera. There is a very large [archive of her papers](#) at the [Allen Art Museum](#) at in Oberlin College in Ohio. And there was a pretty substantial audio interview done with Hesse in 1970 with the writer named Cindy Nemser. And that has been widely [published](#). That interview, it's been published in *October* magazine and in *Artforum*, it's been around for over 40 years. The very deep journal writing that she did starting — I think the earliest journals that we were looking at were from the late 1950s, and the journal writing was pretty consistent. There were two years in the late '60s where the journal writing sort of dropped out and she kept very specific datebooks instead. So for those years — '67, '68, and '69 — we have a lot of sense about what was going on in terms of her practice and also in terms of her social life because of these datebooks, as opposed to her journals, which were more prose-oriented.

The work is what originally drew me to the artist, so the entry into the story came through the work, and then reading some excerpts from those journals in [Lucy Lippard's book on Eva Hesse](#) that came out in '76 intrigued me. I read it many years later, but she was really the first one to do a full book about Hesse and combine her own personal knowledge of the artist with

excerpts from the journals.

The journals are unpublished, except for excerpts. The originals are in this wonderful archive at Oberlin, so I applied for grants to spend a short residency there — I was there about a week and a half. Every day they would bring out another box or two and give me white gloves, and I would get to read through the journals and letters, and it was in the process of reading all this material — and also looking at all these drawings that are also there — that's really where I, as I describe it, went down the rabbit hole. I became really fascinated with the woman behind the work.

We engage her through her writing. There's no traditional narration; the whole narration is made up of excerpts from Eva's journals, her interviews and her letters, as well as the letters and interviews of her father and Sol LeWitt. These are the three main characters who we could not interview. Of course, Eva's story, Eva's writings are the whole arc of the narration, and that's how you get to know her, along with the work. Some art documentaries go more toward the work and some art docs go more toward the human being, more like a biography. We worked really, really hard to walk a road that touched on both. And you can measure and take a look at how one thing was guiding the other. Her writings and interviews were really the basis of how we told the story. Certainly it's an interpretation because everything's an interpretation, but it's really her story.

**Karen Shapiro:** And we've expanded the film so that it's not only her story. We also look at the culture — the community of artists in Downtown Manhattan in the '60s, so that really expands it. She's the spine of the film, and the community of artists are the flesh and bone. That comes through in the interviews with the artists we talked with, and some in her journals. Her journals are poetic, and they have tumultuous things in them. As Marcie said, we tell her story, how her life created her work and how her work created her life.

**MB:** We have also spent quite a bit of energy and resources traveling to London, to Germany, to New York and shooting the artworks, because there are some issues about the fragility of her materials, and because of that museums cannot light them — well, they light them with conservation in mind rather than being able to show the materials in the most interesting way. But we could do that because we only turned the lights on for 10 minutes at a time. So, we want to give an audience the experience of the artwork.

**KS:** And it's up close as well as far away. You see the texture. You see the color. Marcie's done an incredible job, along with our cinematographer, Nancy Schreiber, on visualization, making it a beautiful film that's worthy of Eva's art. The other thing that we've done is extensive research, and in the research we've found photographs that have never been seen before as well as footage from her time in Germany that has never been seen before. There is new research in this project.



Eva Hesse, “Addendeum” (1967) on view at Tate Liverpool in 2012 (photo by Rept0n1x [via Wikimedia Commons](#))

**BS:** *It’s interesting what you just said about making a point of going the extra step to see the works in person and film them; her work seems, more so than a lot of other contemporary artists, like the type of artwork that you need to see in three-dimensional space, and showing it on film seems like a perfect way to give people a sense of what is so unique about it.*

**MB:** We absolutely agree. When we went in, we moved the camera dolly through pieces. We’re able to give people a sense of moving through space. What surprised me is that the work holds us at every scale. You can shoot it wide, you can shoot it macro, and because of the way she used materials and the type of materials she used and how she used them, I can look very, very closely and the structure of the material reveals itself in a new way. So, for me, that was one of the big surprises. That and also how there’s got to be at least 1,500 pages of her writing that we’ve gone through. We’ve been involved with this project for almost four years now, and you go back to it for final editing and you’re like, “I see something now that I didn’t see before. I understand this now in a way that I didn’t understand it before.” After all of the time I’ve spent with the material, the fact that it continues to reveal itself, that’s been a surprise.

**KS:** It’s interesting because it’s all interconnected: you learn more about the art from the writing and you learn more about the writing from the art. And her life — she was interconnected in every aspect in that regard and very aware. The other thing that probably surprised us the most is traveling around and speaking to so many people who knew Hesse. We’re talking 45 years almost after she passed on and we’re talking with elders who haven’t seen this woman in over 40 years. It’s unbelievable how many people talk about how she has been with them every day. And this is not even her sister, these are people who knew her many, many years ago and

the power of who she was, her presence is in their lives; they still feel it in a very particular way. One woman said to us, “I’ve lost, in my age, a lot of people, but Eva Hesse stays with me.” Not something you’re necessarily expecting to hear multiple times.

**MB:** From people who knew her well to people who only came into her orbit for a shorter amount of time. It’s part of what makes a powerful story, the change or the impression that not only her work made — which we have a lot of artists talking about — but again, who she was. And I agree with Karen, I don’t think you can completely separate the power of her artwork — the power it still has to move people — and also this woman who reveals herself not only through the art, but through her writing and through her relationships.

**BS:** *I’m curious about that. People have known about her work for a long time now, but one doesn’t get a sense very easily of who she was as a person or what her personality was like. Based on your research and the people you’ve spoken to, what kind of personality profile did you get of her?*

**MB:** Someone who had a very complicated and at times a very challenging life. I mean, this is not someone who was prolific and ambitious without lots of other facets coming into play. One of the reasons I think she wrote so much was that she was in psychotherapy from the time she was 19, pretty continuously, until she died. So that’s the majority of her life. The fact that she and her sister were two of the last children out of Germany on a Kindertransport in 1938, and also losing her mother — her mother committed suicide on the week of Hesse’s 10th birthday — there’s a loss of family in the beginning of her life. And she didn’t just put that behind her. She engaged with her loss. She engaged with her pain, and she engaged with all of her hopes and ambitions, often in writing. She was very naturally driven; other people come out of difficult circumstances and don’t do what she did.





Eva Hesse in her Bowery studio c. 1968 (photo courtesy of Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College)

But I think for me the core of the personality comes out in the writing when she talks about the utter absurdity of life. That's a real core issue for her that she wrote about a lot and that people talk about. There's a great quote, a great nugget from our interview with Nancy Holt — who passed away about six months after we filmed her. Nancy was talking about hanging out with Hesse in her studio in 1966 and looking at this wall of work that was really absurd looking, crazy-looking forms and some of the first work that Hesse made when she got back from Germany. They were minimal but they were also surreal, and she and Eva sat there and just laughed about how completely absurd it was. Eva liked when the work was more absurd because it was her view on life being absolutely absurd. That was kind of key to her personality to me.

**KS:** Well, for me it's that she didn't just hide her struggles, she didn't just dwell in her struggles, she worked through them. People talk about her complaining, but she had such power that even when she complained and talked about her past, they loved her and they adored her. She had this magnetism and this strength and this drive that took her beyond her challenges. She worked through all of that, and I have no doubt that the art she created was integral to her life.

**MB:** She declared herself in a letter to her father, she was probably 19, she says: 'I don't want to have a life where I just do the same thing every day — I'm an artist.' At that age, knowing what it was going to take for her as a woman in the late '50s, early '60s, to stand there and go: 'You know what, I'm good enough. It's not just about being a woman artist, I'm good enough and I'm smart enough to be acknowledged as a great artist on any level.'

**KS:** Her father, whom she adored, was scared for her. Any parent is like, 'how are you going to make a living, how are you going to live?' They'd lost everything, so it's that losing of everything that made him want to make sure his daughter was secure. But on the other side of it, it's not as if she was confident all the time. She wasn't! She was totally not confident a lot of the time, but nothing stopped her. The lack of confidence didn't stop her from exploring. She had times when she had what I might imagine you'd call writer's block. She had times when she wasn't creating, but she worked through it; it didn't stop her. That's what I admire: nothing stopped her. Maybe in the moment, but in the long term, nothing stopped her.

**BS:** *People appreciated her work during her lifetime, but the appreciation of her work exploded after she died; did you get the sense from your research and talking to other artists who had known her that she realized how profoundly different and original her work was?*

**KS:** I don't know that she thought of it as history-changing, but I know she realized she had made it. When she got on the cover of *Artforum* the same month she passed away, she knew she had made it, that she had achieved her goal. Do I think she knew she changed the profile of art history? I don't think she knew that.

**MB:** None of the artists who we interviewed had that kind of perspective on their own work or her work. Richard Serra, Carl Andre, Bob and Sylvia Mangold, they all talked about how at the time they thought it was really good work, it was solid work, and they all were all working at a very high level. We have a lot of people saying, in retrospect, we can look back and we can see how essential that work was and still is in terms of an influence, but, you know, when you're making it, she knew she got into a great show at the Whitney, she was in the anti-form show in '69 [*Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*], she was in a major show at the Jewish Museum. She was getting into important institutional shows. I'm sure she could feel that energy building and,

as Karen mentioned, when you're on the cover of *Artforum* — and she did see the cover before she passed away — that's as much as she knew.



Eva Hesse, "Untitled" (1960), on view at the Brooklyn Museum in 2011 (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

**BS:** *In reading her diaries and her notes, did you get a sense that she had reflected on the end of her life? Did she make peace with the fact that she was going to die very young? Or was she working at her normal pace up until her death?*

**MB:** In a way, all of those things were true. There was a year between her first hospitalization and surgery and her last hospitalization and her death. She fell ill in April '69 and she died in May '70. At the beginning they told her they got it all, so she thought, 'OK, I'm cured and I'm going to go back and I need to rest,' but she was back in her studio and making work almost immediately. And she made an extraordinary amount of work in the year between the first hospitalization and her death. That said, she thought it would be OK and it was probably at the time of the second hospitalization, which might have actually been in December or January,

that she began to realize what might happen. And she wrote about it and talked about it. She did come to peace with it. We have it in the film — it's quite moving how she chose to face what we all have to face. She faced it early and, of course, coming out of the personal history she had, she was not unfamiliar with facing death.

**KS:** And she worked from the hospital bed on her last piece. Her assistants, who were her students, made it, but she created it.

**BS:** *Her work has been cast in a lot different lights — as a response to Minimalism, as textile or fiber art, and, retroactively, as feminist art. In the film, do you address the way her work has been put to these different agendas or movements?*

**MB:** It's interesting, isn't it? How the work can be read in these different ways. Our film focused on the relationship to Minimalism and to process art. We also focus on Hesse's work as being, as I like to call it, proto-feminist, even though she wasn't part of the feminist conversation. She was reading Simone de Beauvoir and she was writing letters to friends about the particular challenges of being a female artist, but it was her insistence that she only wanted to be known as an artist. Maybe that would have changed if she had lived another five or six years and seen the feminist movement. Where she was in the '60s, I believe she aligned herself in terms of the work she was kind of engaged in, the work she was looking at. For us, because of her close association with people like Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, Carl Andre, she was thinking about the work conceptually and she was thinking about the work in terms of Minimalism and, I think Robert Pincus-Witten coined the term, post-Minimalism. But your point is well taken, which is that a number of different groups look at the work and can find a touchstone of ideas in it.

**KS:** What Mike Todd and Dan Graham talk about in the film is how she looked at everyone and was influenced by all of the art. Graham, who was initially her studio assistant, witnessed her looking at everything. We also have that when she went back to Germany in 1964, and when she was there, she went to all the museums. And she wrote about all of her experiences at those museums and looking at all the art. So there's no doubt that she looked at others as well, and not just one group.





Eva Hesse, no title (1969–70), latex, rope, string, and wire, at the Whitney Museum (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

**BS:** *The Whitney Museum seems like a very appropriate place to hold the preview. How did that come about?*

**MB:** It came about very directly from an event we did in New York about a year ago. Last April we did a private event, for a good chunk of people from curators to artists, at [Eykyn MacLean Gallery](#) on the Upper East Side. We were invited to do this event because Kristy Bryce, one of the directors of the gallery, had seen a presentation that we did at the Blanton Museum in cooperation with the opening of a show curated by Veronica Roberts called [Converging Lines: The Art of Sol Lewitt and Eva Hesse](#). At the event were some people from the Whitney, including Elisabeth Sussman, who was interviewed for the film and also has been a consultant, and Adam Weinberg, the director of the Whitney. He saw our presentation and invited us.

**KS:** He came up to me and Marcie separately and said, “I want to screen this film. I want it to be part of the opening festivities at the Whitney when we reopen in May.” And that was a year ago.

**MB:** It’s really apt for Hesse because they own some major works and they were one of the

institutions in New York that acknowledged and showed her work in major group shows early on.

[Eva Hesse](#) premieres at the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#) (99 Gansevoort Street, Meatpacking District, Manhattan) on May 17 at 2pm.



Museums Get Creative with Their Permanent Collections



Can You Name Three Women Artists?



Something Special About Her, Eva Besnyö at the Jeu de Paume