



The contributions of Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis on contemporary sculpture and how they have influenced my work
by Roberta Joy Holloway

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sculpture
Montana State University
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PREFACE

The intent of this professional paper is to honor and credit Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis of the Post-Minimal movement. In order to accomplish this I decided to compare and contrast their ideology and methodology with the Minimal Movement. In doing so, I found within the Minimal Movement, as with any particular stylistic methodology, a lot of contradictions. I would like to state that in its most basic conception, the Minimal artists concentrated on formal fundamentals of design. They created large geometric shapes that not only dominated a space but also proposed a nonrelational and nonhierachcal arrangement of forms. What I find extremely interesting is that Minimal art and Minimalistic art can mean two different aesthetics. When I talk about the Minimal art object I am referring to the object that reflects the intrinsic characteristics of the Minimal Movement. When I discuss my own work I am talking about the Minimalistic tendencies that pertain to the unaltered state of materials and the hand manipulation of materials that produces a pure and clear relation between the artist response to materials and the ability to transform media into aesthetic form. I have found that color, texture and scale as well as angularity can have a Minimalistic stance with out having the conceptual ideology of the Minimal art movement. In fact it may have been Hesse's work that has allowed Contemporary artists to speak of their work in these terms. It has been my experience that the term Minimalistic is a catch phrase to describe anything that lacks decoration or ornamentation within the abstracted object. I would like to make it clear that an object can be Minimalistic but have the expressive and emotive qualities that a Minimal object denies.

"... a shift from man-made form to the
unshaped raw material of experience
constitutes a return to concrete reality,
from which alone new thought can arise."¹
Rudolph Arnheim

¹Marcia Tucker, "Anti-form," Robert Morris, (Whitney Museum of American Art, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970), p. 38.

What I find influential as an artist is work that communicates originality, experimentation and innovation. Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis of the Post-Minimal movement in particular exemplify these characteristics. The Post-Minimalists of the mid sixties created abstract objects using unique materials and processes. In doing so, they successfully introduced new methodologies that freed artists from the restrictions of creating art confined by a particular ideology. This movement was multi-faceted. Each artist exhibited forms that ranged from the biomorphic to the geometric. They also confronted and addressed issues through contradiction and paradox, such as male/female, hard/soft, clarity /chaos and naturalistic/ industrial. They deliberately incorporated contradictions to give the objects ambiguity, to raise questions rather than dictate answers. The common denominator among the Post-Minimalists was their determination to redefine sculpture in ways that had never been thought of before, unlike the Minimal artist, who made sculpture based on traditional, elemental properties. In doing so, the Minimal artist dictated that sculpture be made large in scale, angular, and with commercial constructive materials.

The Minimal artists, active around 1965, transformed two-dimensional properties into three-dimensional properties. They took painting techniques and the sensibilities of the rectangle, cube and the grid and turned them into sculpture. Sculptors Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Robert Bladen, Robert Grosvenor, Tony Smith, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, as well as Sol Lewitt made large scale geometric

objects that confronted the viewer's spatial boundaries and dominated the space in which the objects were placed. The forms were all hard edged and emphasized that content was primarily based on the formal fundamentals of art: line, space, and color. In doing so, the Minimal artists proposed the authority of good design and the well built aesthetic. A cube, rectangle and square must be perfectly constructed to sustain its integrity. This integrity combined with the elemental philosophies of painting, such as the grid, the rectilinear and cubist form, inspires good design and is formally based.

The Minimal movement was comprised strictly of men. Even Anne Truitt, who was creating large scale geometric shapes in 1963, is not considered a Minimal artist. Her forms are closely related to the minimal object but differ in that she incorporated bands of color around the objects. What I find discouraging about this movement is that these men were dictating that art should be constructed, have hard edges and follow the traditions of art. They were so busy trying to uphold the traditions of art that they lost sight of free expression and the power that expression can have in a piece of work. This male dominated movement may have perpetuated traditional art, but in doing so did not offer anything unique or inspiring for the artistic community. There is a reason that this movement ended as quickly as it appeared: lack of interest. In my opinion, the only contributing factor that came from the Minimal movement was that it sparked a change in thought processes and procedures of creating art.

The metamorphosis of dynamic, ambiguous, and thought provoking art can

be contributed to Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis of the Post-Minimal movement. Hesse set out to make “nothing”² so that something, anything, could replace the formalistic approach of the Minimalists, while Benglis exemplified the properties of process art³ and its infinite possibilities. By approaching art with these diverse components, the Post-Minimalists made a long lasting impact on contemporary art.

Hesse and Benglis in particular were pivotal figures in making the transition from the preconceived, prefabricated geometric object, to the spontaneous, intuitively worked, repetitive aesthetic of process art. My thesis proposes that Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis, by employing unique and original approaches to materials and processes, redefined sculpture and established infinite possibilities to creating three-dimensional objects. I will juxtapose the Minimal and Post-Minimal movement, and will illustrate the impact that Hesse and Benglis had on American art. These artists depended on process and innovative materials as intrinsic components in their work and thus introduced new approaches to creating abstract art. My work will also be discussed as it is inspired by the work of Eva Hesse.

To begin, the innovative materials that Hesse and Benglis used inspired experimentation with and investigation of new substances. Commodities of string, latex balloons, plaster, liquid latex, and polyurethane foam not only denounced traditional materials of wood, steel, and bronzes, but introduced a commitment to

²The concept of nothing will be discussed later when I introduce Eva Hesse and her philosophies to creating art.

³Process art will be defined in detail on pages 13.

working media that in the past were suspect and considered invalid as sculptural elements. According to the Post-Minimalist, the more eccentric and original the material, the closer the artist was to achieving a new sensibility that questioned and rejected the principles of the Minimalists.

Most Minimal artists chose to work in plywood and steel. These constructive commercial materials combined with the restrictions of making geometric objects communicated a detached and less involved participation of the artist with the work. The difference between the Minimalists and the Post-Minimalists is that the Post-Minimalists intentionally ceased to make art, metaphorically, and the Minimalists physically made nothing and let the labor force of the factories create the components of their objects. Most Minimalists ordered their materials and shapes over the phone.⁴ I find this method of working completely irresponsible and pompous. I also believe that these materials perpetuated a very controlled and limited range of aesthetic possibilities. The fact that a factory worker can execute a Minimal object reiterates the simplicity and meaninglessness of this movement. In my opinion, these geometric shapes mirror the shallow and detached methodology of the Minimalists.

By employing innovative materials, Hesse and Benglis produced a wide range of aesthetics. Although these two artists worked independently of each other, they shared a quest to create something totally expressive and original, which in part

⁴referring to "Minimalists sculptors had their work factory-made(as soon as they could afford to),Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," Art forum, (1990), p. 51.

is defined by their choice of non-traditional media. Robert Pincus-Witten, a critic of the sixties, has coined "Signature Substance" as the material that identified a particular artist and set her/him apart from other Post-Minimalists.⁵ Lynda Benglis used liquid latex and polyurethane foam.

Eva Hesse, contrary to Pincus-Witten's theory, used a variety of materials and cannot be identified by one particular substance. Hesse set the experimental and innovative forum in which all Post-Minimalists worked. She began her sculpture career by using various found materials in an old weaving factory in 1964. Hesse used string, screens, and plaster. The grid like structure of the screen called for something to be poked into it. She first used wire, but, when she ran out of that material she turned to cloth and plaster. She dipped the cloth into the plaster to give it the ridged quality of the wire; then she poked the strips into the screen. The process of poking combined with knotting later became the working style of her mature pieces.

Lucy Lippard called the movement that Hesse was working in during the 1960's "The New Material Syndrome."⁶ She meant that the more innovative the material, the better it was for the artist's credibility. By 1965, Hesse used malleable materials such as surgical tubing, inflatable beach balls, latex balloons, polyethylene sheeting, inner tubes and nets. Each material demanded a different approach to forming. Hesse was quoted in her retrospective, "... materials are lifeless til given

⁵Robert Pincus-Witten, Post-Minimalism (Out of London Press, Inc., N.Y., 1977), p.15-16.

⁶Lucy Lippard, Eva Hesse, (First Da Capo Press edition, 1992)p. 136.

shape by the creator. . . materials by their own create the end."⁷

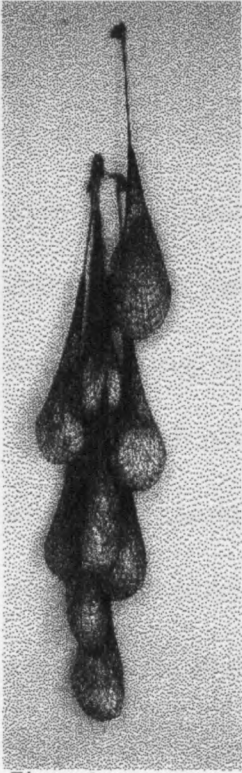


Figure 1

For Hesse, the material was the form. Hesse loved the hands on manipulation of malleable materials. In *Not Yet*, 1966,(Fig. 1) and *Vertiginous Detour*, 1966,(Fig. 2) Hesse had discovered the powerful expressiveness of working netting, plaster, polyethylene and inflatable beach balls. One can see the spontaneous work habits that developed as a result of reaction to a material. The properties of the nets, plaster and polyethylene have an ugly yet soft and supple seductive quality that is contrasted by the weightiness and confinement of these multiple bulbous forms by a net. In this respect, Hesse

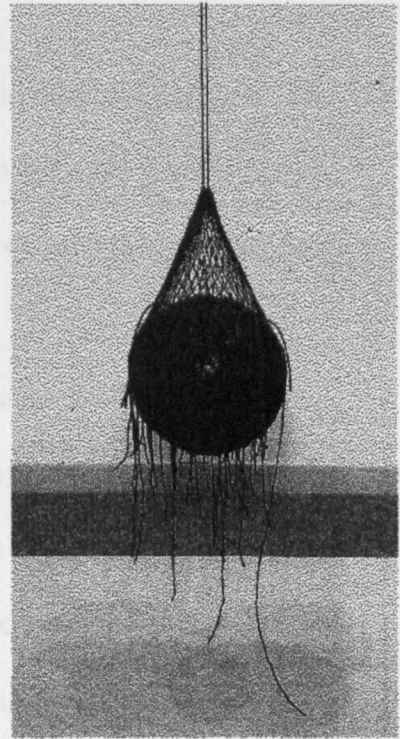


Figure 2

uses non-traditional materials that communicate an expressive and emotive aesthetic with ambiguous overtones. These materials reject the restrictive attitude of the Minimalists which made art in the media that would best illustrate a purity of design.

One can see a stark difference between a Judd object and Hesse object. Donald Judd's, *Untitled*, 1966,(fig. 3) made of painted cold-rolled steel communicates nothing

⁷Helen A. Cooper, "Eva Hesse: Diaries and Notebooks," *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*, (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, 1992), p.23.

more than the repetition of rectilinear order of shapes. I feel that this piece falls short. This minimal object reiterated a non emotive and non expressive stance so that the clarity within the object would be revealed. It is static, symmetrical and ordered. Its scale dominates a limited spacial surrounding, and confronts the viewer with nothing more than an

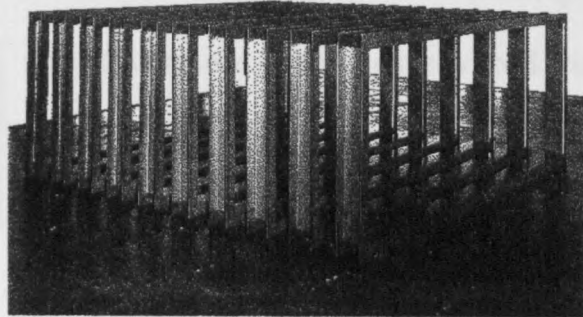


Figure 3

answered quotation about rectangles, "A rectangle will always be a rectangle" The eccentric materials that Hesse and Benglis used however, produced aesthetics of ambiguities and dynamics. They also increased the realm of possible solutions in creating art.

I remember the first time I saw Eva Hesse's Retrospective show at the Hirshorn Art Gallery in D. C. I was so inspired by her use of cord dipped in paper mache, and then wrapped over balloons, that I went home and created a cocoon series. The first cocoon's internal structure was made of card board rings that had



Figure 4

paper mache' wrapped around each ring. I then pulled jute twine through the rings and created a warp so that more twine could be woven and wrapped around the rings. I repeated the weave until the skeleton of the form was totally concealed.

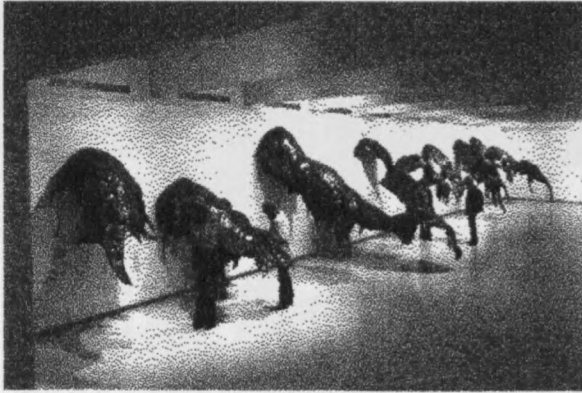


Figure 5

I also made cocoons out of plastic bubble wrap, hay and Colorado soil with chicken wire armatures. I remember feelings of empowerment when I discovered that I could use a natural material of soil with hay to execute very sturdy and semi permanent organic forms. As an artist, the

best feeling in the world is discovering something that has never been thought of before.

Benglis contributed to the redefinition of sculpture by creating incredible biomorphic shapes with polyurethane foam. These behemoths are comprised of foam alone. Benglis



Figure 6

installed six environmental pieces around the country, (Fig. 4-9). During the early sixties and seventies, Benglis's signature substance was liquid latex and

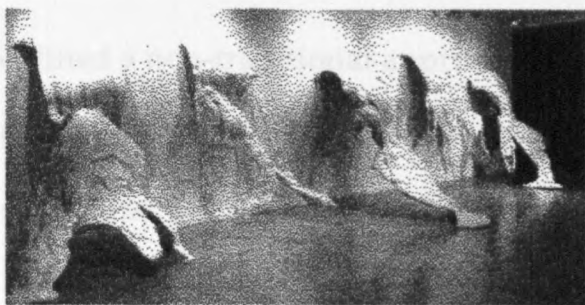


Figure 7

polyurethane foam. Both materials have an inherent quality of paint when wet and a sculptural quality when congealed.

Although it looks soft in her finished pieces, it is actually very hard like plastic.

Benglis used the transformative properties

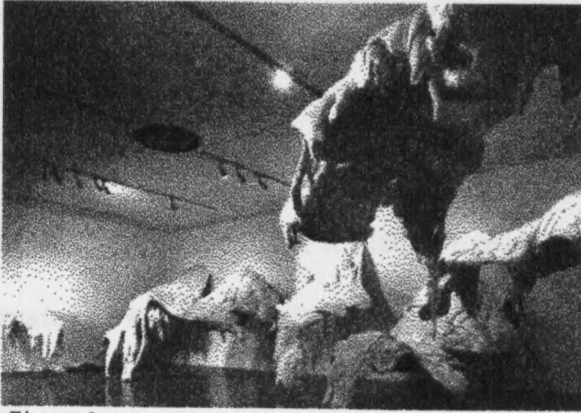


Figure 8

of foam to create objects that represented naturalistic biomorphic shapes. Her material, once worked, looks like a stalactite. Benglis's ability to sculpt this material successfully developed over time. She spent many hours in the studio

perfecting and discovering the properties of the foam. Benglis explained the nature of this material:

To create the material used to make the piece, I first mix the pigment -in this case black- with resin, and then I mix the catalyst in. Once the catalyst and resin combined it causes a chain reaction which causes the foaming. I can vary the thickness with water. I add depending on the pour I want. . . The water is a "Blowing Agent" which causes the material to foam up more. . . The length of time I take to pour it makes a difference- in other words sometimes I let it foam up and then pour it later, and sometimes I pour it before it has a chance to foam up at all.⁸

The ability to master an un-tried material for sculpture validated her as an influential artist. Her material alone defined a non-traditional approach to making art. Both Hesse and Benglis have stated that the material is an intrinsic

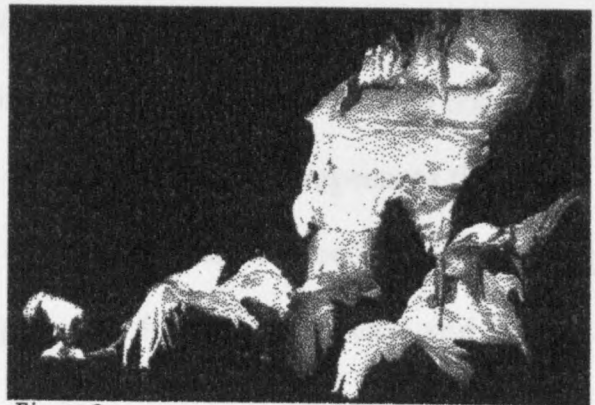


Figure 9

⁸Susan Krane, Lynda Benglis Dual Nature (High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, 1991), p., 26.

component to creating the form. In fact, in most cases, especially in Benglis's, the material does the forming. There are no precalculated drawings to work by. Benglis's pieces are indeterminate and operate on chance. Instead of the artist making the form, the matter or material makes the form. This dependency on material has been criticized by a minimal artist, Sol Lewitt. He states:

New materials are one of the great afflictions of Contemporary Art. Some artists confuse new materials with new ideas. There is nothing worse than seeing art that wallows in gaudy baubles. By and large most artists who are attracted to these materials are the ones who lack the stringency of mind that would enable them to use the materials well. It takes a good artist to use new materials and make them into a work of art. The danger is, I think in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of the work. (another kind of expressionism).⁹

I think what is more important to note is that new materials can have a seductive and expressive quality within themselves, so much so, that the artist may lose sight of her/his intent. I have found this to be true with my own work. For instance, when I discovered that peat moss could be bound with elmers glue, I proceeded to make one thousand hand sized balls. This hand manipulation combined with working in the earth set me into a production mode. The content of this body of work came later when I realized that the balls could represent the masses. I feel that if a new material is being used and is transformed into something else, then it does succeed in portraying an expressive form of art. Hesse and Benglis

⁹Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," Sol Lewitt: The Museum of Modern Art New York (The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1978), p., 167.

were extremely successful in transforming media so that the initial associations of the material were diminished and new associations or metaphors were introduced. In this instance Sol Lewitt was correct in assuming that any artist that could use a new material well was a good artist. By employing innovative processes, Hesse and Benglis were able to transform their media into expressive, ambiguous abstract objects that initiate dialogue.

Post-Minimalism was most basically concerned with the independent and different approaches to working materials through process. Robert Pincus-Witten defined Post-Minimalism as a "Term covering a multitude of stylistic resolutions preceded and posited by an apparent generative style."¹⁰ These stylistic resolutions included the variety of processes and materials to which each artist responded. Process became a transformation of raw materials into aesthetic forms. Process was an integral aspect of the finished piece. The end product could not survive without process. Some characteristic examples of processes in the Post-Minimal movement include throwing, pouring, knotting, dipping, and scattering. Another characteristic of process art in the Post-Minimal movement was demonstrated by the obsessive act of repetition. In all cases, the material became the dictating factor for the form. The form was created by the material. In other words the material dictated how the work should be formed. The absence of tool use was a third property of process art. Space, gravity and placement on the wall became an aspect of process and were as important as the material. This act of placing materials on the wall defined pictorial

¹⁰Robert Pincus-Witten, Post-Minimalism (Out of London Press, Inc., N.Y., 1977), p. 15-16.

sculpture. Pictorialism resulted when the Post-Minimalists refused to employ stretcher support systems common to traditional two dimensional work. The walls literally supported the elements which the Post-Minimalists chose to throw, splatter, dangle or hang against them. In pictorial sculpture, the walls, the floor, and the ceilings are considered tools and elements in forming the material.

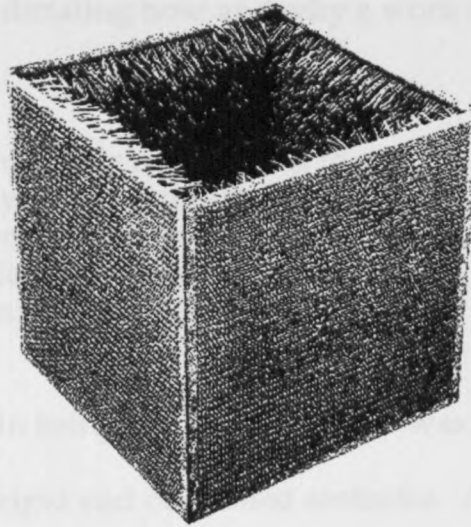


Figure 10

The Post-Minimalists did not depend on a prefabricated or preconceived drawing to execute their ideas. Mel Bochner, an artist, stated that the Post-Minimal methodology was "solopsist,"¹¹ in that the artist did not depend on personal decision making, but responded to the logic of what the material needed in order to be formed. He wrote, . . . "artists carry out their work to its logical conclusion, which, without adjustments based on taste or chance, is the work"¹² The Minimalists, on the other hand, needed a plan to work from in order to communicate to the factory worker what needed to be done.

The Minimal artist's process of making geometric slabs, cubes, squares,

¹¹Robert Pincus-Witten, "Mel Brochner, The Constant as a Variable," *Art forum*, 11 (December, 1972), p.32.

¹²Pincus-Witten, "Mel Brochner; The Constant as a Variable," p.32.

columns and spheres proposed the “proper way” to make things. By this I mean that the Minimalists were very deliberate in dictating how and why a work should be made. For instance, Morris states,

Primary forms can be easily made. Thus their relationship to a technological, industrial, man-made system is implicit; it is a system where the best means of forming is to employ right angles, rectangular forms and flat surfaces to eliminate waste and to facilitate the storage, stacking, transporting or joining of these forms.¹³

The Minimal artists were very practical and in being so, created art that was non-metaphorical, non-symbolic, and that had a rigid and controlled aesthetic. Although the issues of gender categorizing do not apply in the 1990's, I feel that the Minimalists certainly did their best to sustain construction and geometric forms as their authority. I would also like to point out, without being too stereotypical and general, that the Minimalists helped perpetuate that a male sensibility lay in constructing hard edged geometric forms. Hesse, however, took the cube and dramatically altered the associative concepts of this geometric form.

Eva Hesse's *Cube*, in *Accession II*, 1967, (Fig. 10) for example, is made up of a galvanized steel box with 30,670.00 plastic tubes knotted inside. The materials have not been altered. They are honest and simply stated in the finished piece. The piece demonstrated a strong hand manipulation with an obsessive repetitive act of knotting. It also demonstrated the elimination of tools and of the thought processes of a preconceived and precalculated form. This process of working developed from

¹³Marcia Tucker, “Minimal Works,” Robert Morris, (Whitney Museum of American Art, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970), p., 29.

her experiments when she found screen and wire at a weaving factory in 1964.

Hesse's objects rejected the material restrictions of the Minimalists and thus rejected the procedures associated with a prefabricated form. She instituted a more spontaneous and intuitive way of working.

Her process exhibited a gestural improvisation that was more about expressionism and chaos than about "the nonhierarchical, and nonrelational arrangement of forms"¹⁴ that the Minimalists achieved with their solid, hard edged, monumental geometric objects. In

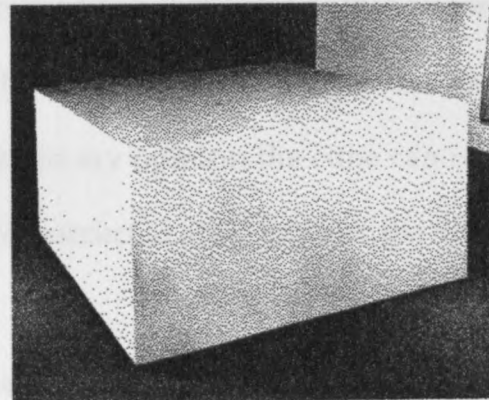


Figure 11

fact, as Danto comments, "Hesse made objects as art that were wildly discontinuous with anything that could be countenanced as art in the days of essentialism."¹⁵

Because the cube is not solid and has a bristly inside, it evokes many interpretations and poses many questions. Hesse's piece instills a quiet yet loud existence. It lends itself to ambiguities and is provocative. The difference between Hesse's cube and that of Morris *Untitled*, 1966, (fig. 11) is that Hesse's cube symbolizes her sexuality and addresses gender issues based on male and female genitalia. Anna C. Chave, a critic, described *Accession II* as "seductive, erotic and pertaining to the female

¹⁴Magdalena Dabrowski, "Recent Nonfigurative Tendencies," Contrast of Form Geometric Abstract Art 1910-1980 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1985), p.205.

¹⁵Arthur Danto, "Learning to live with Pluralism," Beyond the Brillo Box (Farar Straus Girox, New York, 1992), p.226.

genitalia.”¹⁶ The box becomes intensely inviting to the touch yet it is curious and feared in that it suggests a “thorny” inside.¹⁷

By contrast, Morris’s *Untitled* cube, made of white pigmented plywood, reiterates the sculptural element of shape. Morris’s cube presents a concept of perception. By this I mean that the cube is perceived as a cube and nothing more. There is no illusionistic element to the shape. It does not change as the viewer moves around it. It remains constant and fixed. In my opinion the cube can not by pass the fact that it is a cube. Its large colorless constructed scale enables the viewer to perceive it as just that, a large cube.

Lynda Benglis, on the other hand, demonstrated endless possibilities by using a pouring, throwing and dripping process. In the environmental series, Benglis transformed liquid matter into aesthetic form. The congealing properties of the polyurethane foam contributed to her working methodology. Benglis used a pouring process. There was a fusion between process and form. This way of working challenged the formal or traditional attitudes of the Minimalists. Benglis refuted the restrictions of the Minimalists by using her intuitive insight about process.

Benglis began her installation of the environmental series by making a stick and chicken wire armature. She poured the foam over the skeletal structure layer by layer. She made gestural sweeps with every pour. Each time, she looked and

¹⁶Anna C. Chave, “Girl Being a Sculpture,” *Eva Hesse: Retrospective* (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, 1992), p.111.

¹⁷*ibid.*, p., 104.

evaluated where the next sweep should occur. When the pours were completed, she let them dry. She then removed the armature. The chance operations of layering a material and installing these environmental pieces are indeterminate and in contrast to the serial display of geometric shapes found in a Sol Lewitt piece, (Fig. 12).

Although both artists are using a repetitive action of either pouring or stacking, one can see the differences between the two.

The first difference is in the process. Although Benglis did the initial pouring of the medium, she let the matter do the forming in her installations. Sol Lewitt's process begins and stops at the drawing board. As Lucy Piccard points out, "Lewitt is a designer and has never

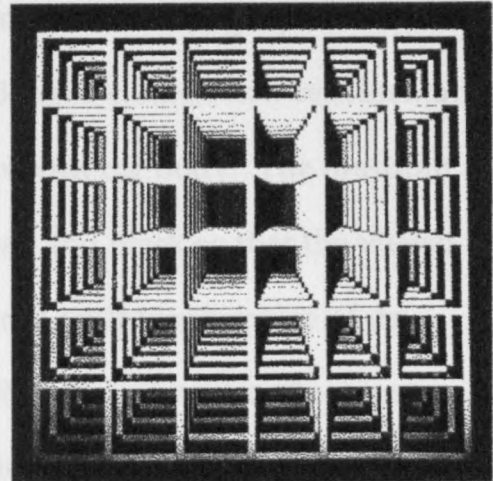


Figure 12

been a craftsman."¹⁸ She also wrote, "He designs experiments, creates hypothesis, than hands them on to a mathematician friend."¹⁹ His process is presented as a conceptual idea that is executed in sequential steps. Like Benglis, Lewitt does not know how the structure will be perceived until it is built. However, one can count on a very mathematical, grid like configuration of cubes and squares placed in a systematic order. Benglis's process, on the other hand, incorporates her physicality and became parallel to Pollock's painting techniques.

¹⁸Lucy Piccard, "The Structures, The Structures and the Wall Drawings, The Structures and The Wall Drawings and The Books," Sol Lewitt: The Museum of Modern Art New York (The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1978), p.23.

¹⁹Lucy Piccard, Sol Lewitt: The Museum of Modern Art, p., 23.

By allowing the foam to create the form and by a pouring and dripping process, Benglis positioned herself within the context of the work. The material and her process became like Pollock's paint drips and pours on the canvas. In fact, she made a "parody of the formalist figure/ground issues of painting."²⁰ She created a dialogue between the sculpture, the wall, and the floor.

In her *envirnomentl* series, the organic forms assert the legacy of abstract expressionism. Through the process of pouring, Benglis created non-representational forms that were about movement and associations with the body. The multiple layers are presented in various shades of white, gray and black so that the viewer can distinguish between pours. The result was a pictorial sculpture because of its placement on the wall. Benglis, like the Abstract Expressionists, was "not just involved in the act of process."²¹ She was interested in "all the associations with material."²²

... I've always been involved with the idea of induction in logic, an open-ended system not a closed system. In other words, I think the so called 'process artists' had definite steps and that the process and the work were one. The process could not be clearly read in any of these works I've done. The process was hidden. The process was transformed by the image. I have always been interested in imagery.²³

²⁰Susan Krane, Lynda Benglis Dual Nature (High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, 1991), p.,14.

²¹Grace Glueck, "But Varied the Season Starts," Art in America, 59 (July-December, 1972), p., 122.

²²Glueck, "But Varied the Season Starts," p., 122.

²³Krane, Lynda Benglis, p., 14.

If Benglis is involved with imagery, then she surely succeeded in creating something so abstract, that it had many associations. Her environmental series communicates everything from science fiction to crustation to natural phenomena. Regardless of what it evokes, Benglis was successful at creating ambiguous abstract objects that provoked questions and inspired artists to work in new ways.

Sol Lewitt's piece also employs a similar repetitive process of stacking blocks, but Lewitt depicts and represents the fundamental elements of form and the right angle. Because he does not physically do the work of making or stacking, his pieces lack a hand manipulation and communicates a conceptual idea. In my opinion, his pieces communicate a detached coolness that reminds me of how a building looks before its walls are in place. One can see or project the solid form around his angular skeletons, but because they are empty, his pieces to me evoke a functionality that has not been fully executed. By functionality, I mean that his work implies a design aesthetic that could be used in graphics or home decor. Hesse and Benglis steered cleared of the functionality within art and presented abstract objects that inspired infinite processes to making aesthetically dynamic forms.

The Post-Minimalists made abstract forms that raise questions rather than provide answers. In this respect these forms had more of a time element. By this I mean that the Post-Minimalist piece stayed with you, unlike a Minimal object, where you see a cube and it is easily dismissed because of its familiarity. The cube is an object that has already defined itself. Hesse and Benglis had the ability to present an object with limited associations and created a multitude of perplexing antidotes.

When it comes to examining my most recent work, I find that the elements of process are juxtaposed with the fundamental elements of geometric forms and non-traditional media. I have always been inspired by the tactile manipulation of naturalistic materials. In the past, I have worked with peat moss, straw, and beeswax. Recently I have been working with copper wire, sheeting, and tubing as well as wood, beeswax, burlap, and rocks. This wide range of media enables me to work in an intuitive manner.

Like Hesse, I use geometric forms such as the wedge and cube to represent my personal experiences as a woman, mother, and artist. In *Maine to Montana*, 1995,(Sl. 1-3), the two cubes are 2 ft. squared and are covered with beeswax and burlap. They are connected by a 23 ft. cooper tube. The cube makes reference to my lineage and past and present chronology. I use the cube because it is very linear and I find that history is best explained in linear terms. One event is built upon another event. I would like to emphasize that by making geometric shapes, I am by no means working under a Minimal ideology. I transform the traditional approaches by emphasizing a process orientation within the context of the rigid forms. In the case of, *Maine to Montana*, I dipped the burlap into beeswax. I like my solids to have a skin or an additive element which is in contrast to the formal ideology of the Minimal movement.

My wedges as well, are inspired by the hands on manipulation of Hesse's work. I made four free standing wedges,(Sl. 4-7) that had coper wire, rocks, or burlap, wrapped or stacked around each wedge. As mentioned earlier, various

processes enable me to produce a wide range of expressionistic aesthetics. For instance, the six foot wedge with stacked river rocks around the bottom is about how I substituted my love of the ocean with Montana rivers and their smooth multicolored rocks. Regardless of what my intentions are in making a piece of art, I have always been interested in what a material can do and how I can work it to produce an ambiguous abstract object. Thanks to the work of Hesse and Benglis, I have been able to explore and experiment with different approaches and materials.

The Post-Minimalists intentions rejected the traditions of art and strove to make something so innovative that the preconceived notions of art would be questions and redefined. Mel Brochner states that, "No stylistic or material qualities unite the artist using this approach because what form the work takes is unimportant (some of the artist had ceased to make 'things')." ²⁴ Brochner here referred to the Post-Minimalist quest to make non-art that directly rejected the traditional aspects of object art which had been expressed through construction, tools and the specific intentions of any particular political or environmental statement. Non-art in theory was Hesse's determination to unlearn all that she had been trained to know and begin from a beginning, her beginning. By doing so, Hesse introduced innovative approaches that reconstructed the meanings and methodology behind the Minimal movement.

When examining the Minimal movement, it appeared that the artists were

²⁴Robert Pincus-Witten, Mel Brochner; The Constant as a Variable," *Art Forum*, 11 (December, 1972), p., 32.

conceptualizing the same non-art premise, however, after further scrutiny, I found that the Minimal artist used the concept of non-art as a facade. By this I mean that the Minimal object was considered non-art because it lacked compositional elements and could not be discussed in relational terms. I believe that because they embraced formal and almost classically founded fundamentals of art, they could not escape the 'art for art's sake' stance. Irving Sandler an art critic states that, "the art for art's sake ideology in and of itself posited art as a thing in itself rather than as a representation of or metaphor for something else."²⁵ Based on the clarity and purity within these minimal objects, the concept of non-art in my opinion does not hold true because they were exhibited as formally based objects. I believe that by using a conceptual ideology within this movement, the Minimal artist could present ideas vocally and hide behind the non-art facade through language, when in actuality, the work, as static and ordered as it is, does state a fundamental art stance. Hesse and Benglis on the other hand, by trying to avoid traditional criteria of sculpture, created ambiguous meanings that were directly related to their experiences as women within the art of the sixties.

In order to make process art an acceptable and valid art form, Hesse and Benglis had to first denounce and reject the preconceived attitudes of traditional art. Hesse's intentions stemmed from a primary motivation to create something completely new. She stated with Nemser that, "I am interested in solving an

²⁵Barbara Haskell, Donald Judd (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1988), p., 47.

unknown factor of art and an unknown factor of life.”²⁶ . . . “In fact, my idea now is to counteract everything I’ve ever learned or been taught about those things- to find something that is inevitable that is my life, my feeling, my thoughts.”²⁷ When she worked obsessively, she looked for the potential qualities within the materials and the forms. She was not interested in preconceived form. Hesse’s work became parallel to her life and ambition. She looked for the potential within herself. In striving to be a unique and outstanding artist, she empowered herself as a woman and artist in her own time. Hesse achieved what she set out to do.

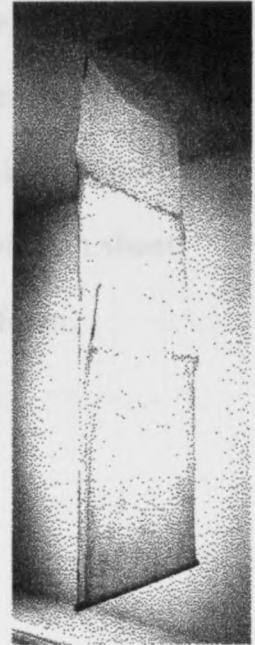


Figure 13

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 that anything is possible. I know that.
that vision or concept will come through total risk, freedom,
discipline.
I will do it.²⁸

Indeed she did do it! In *Contingent*, 1969, (Fig.13) Hesse successfully manipulated eight sheets of cheesecloth and fiberglass that stand perpendicular to the wall. She presented contradictions of soft/hard, transparent/opaque and

²⁶Cindy Nemser, “An Interview with Eva Hesse,” *Art Forum*, 8 (1970), p., 59.

²⁷Nemser, *Art Forum*, p., 59

²⁸Robert Pincus-Witten, “Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime,” *Art Forum*, 10 (November, 1971), p.43.

ordinary/ innovation that constituted ambiguities and nothingness all at the same time. Each sheet is different and exhibits a wide range of textures from smooth to rough, form thick to thin. The piece is magical and very seductive in that it almost seems to float where its weight is primarily focused in the middle of each sheet.

Hesse's catalogue statement communicated her intentions for this form.

Piece is in many parts.
 Each in itself is a complete statement,
 together I am not certain how it will be. A fact. I cannot be
 certain yet
 Can be from illness, can be from honesty.
 irregular edges, six to seven feet long.
 textures coarse, rough, changing.
 See through non see through consistent, inconsistent.
 enclosed tightly be glass like encasement just hanging there.
 . . . They are tight and formal but very ethereal, sensitive, fragile.
 see through mostly.
 non painting, not sculpture, It's there though.²⁹

Hesse's inspiration for making art paralleled her quest for personal enlightenment about life's contradictions and infinite possibilities.

Like Hesse, Benglis' intent to unify form and content created dynamic playful objects that are about her female physicality. They were intuitively worked and her involvement through process created soft biomorphic shapes. The curvilinear lines of her environmental series became female, directly rejecting the patriarchal Minimalist aesthetic of hard angularity. The physicality of the pieces remains a constant reminder of that rejection because of their spacial placement and scale considerations. This series is powerful and has been described by Krane as "Natural

²⁹Lippard, Eva Hesse, p., 165.

phenomena such as the flow of lava, the pull of gravity, the turbulent power of crashing waves, the violent force of an earthquake.”³⁰ Benglis was very interested in communicating these “unnatural and bizarre conditions in the context of daily urban life.”³¹ Even though Benglis’s pieces seemed to resonate something naturalistic, she created an uncertainty as to what kind of nature these forms could come from. Benglis’ pieces, like those of the Abstract Expressionists, communicated diverse meanings through expressions of movement with matter.

The Post-minimalists wanted to create a new dialogue about object art. They demonstrated infinite possibilities of making abstract art. They also wanted to create something new out of something old. They achieved a familiarity by choosing materials that viewers have seen in every day life, but surprised them with the materials’ ability to perform as fine art. They made something curious out of something that had a preconceived purpose or meaning. It is this sensibility that has intrigued me enough to work in the manner that I do.

In short, my work, like the Post-Minimalists, is about process and pictorial sculpture, (Sl. 8-18). The objects on the wall are meant to resonate a quiet and simplistic language of purity. Although process allows me to work intuitively and spontaneously, I also use construction and the alteration of found objects. I juxtapose the organic with the linear to create an equilibrium between the whimsical and the serious. My intent as mentioned earlier is based on my personal

³⁰Krane, Lynda Benglis, p., 32.

³¹*Ibid.*, p., 32.

experiences as woman, mother and artist.

In conclusion, the Post-Minimalists wanted to create a new dialogue about abstract art. They achieved this by dismissing the formal attitudes of the Minimal movement. More importantly, the Post-Minimalists' intentions were to create sculpture that was innovative and to introduce something that had never been thought of before. They achieved a new sensibility by using eccentric materials and new processes.

The diverse interests in materials and processes of the Post-Minimal movement established an ideology of originality and spontaneity. In the quest to produce art without formal prejudices, Hesse and Benglis achieved an aesthetic of purity, honesty and indeterminacy. The process artist created forms that were executed through knotting, pouring, dipping, throwing, and hanging. In all of these processes the form is created by a hands on manipulation. Instead of tools, the artist employs gravity, space, and the placement on the walls as structural elements. The intentions to respond to the materials' logical conclusions through the transformative qualities of the media produced a multiple range of ambiguous sculpture. The inability to define a single meaning to a form is what contributes to the expressive abstract object. Thanks to Hesse and Benglis, later artists have been encouraged to create Minimalistic forms that evoke emotion and dynamics and still maintain a language of purity and clarity.

In fact, Contemporary artists such as Jackie Winsor, Richard Serra, Robert Rauschenberg, and Joseph Beuys have employed the sensibilities of process and the

hands on manipulation of materials to create abstract objects that evoke emotive and powerful dynamics that in turn present mystery and a holistic language of purity and clarity. The end result is a piece that leaves the viewer with something to ponder and question.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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Eva Hesse, *Vertiginous Detour*, March, 1966
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2. Maine to Montana, 1995, (Detail)
wood, beeswax, burlap
3. Maine to Montana, 1995, (Detail)
wood, beeswax, burlap
4. Untitled, 1995
wood, copper wire
5. Substitute Attachment, 1995
wood, rocks
6. Precariously Balanced, 1995
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wood, copper wire
8. Second Wall Arrangement, 1995
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9. First Wall Arrangement, 1995
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10. Hair Extension, 1995
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11. Untitled, 1995
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12. Squared Onion, 1995
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17. Postoperative Sensation, 1995
copper wire
18. Untitled, 1995
wood, copper screen
19. Untitled, 1995
brass shavings copper paint
20. Untitled, 1995
found copper

Roberta J. Holloway



4. Untitled
wood, copper wire

3. From Maine to Montana
(Detail)
wood, beeswax, burlap, copper



Roberta J. Holloway

2. From Maine to Montana
(Detail)
wood, beeswax, burlap, copper



Roberta J. Holloway

Roberta J. Holloway



1. From Maine to Montana
(Detail)
wood, beeswax, burlap, copper

Roberta J. Holloway



8. Second Wall Arrangement
copper, wood

Roberta J. Holloway



7. Untitled
wood, copper wire

Roberta J. Holloway



6. Precariously Balanced
wood, beeswax, burlap, copper

Roberta J. Holloway



5. Substitute Attachment
wood, rocks

Roberta J. Holloway



4. Squared Onion
copper, wood

Roberta J. Holloway



11. Untitled
copper wire, found copper

Roberta J. Holloway



10. Hair Extension
copper

Roberta J. Holloway



9. First Wall Arrangement
copper, wood

Roberta J. Holloway



6. Ambiguous Nature
cheesecloth, beeswax, wire

Roberta J. Holloway



15. Ambiguous Nature
cheesecloth, beeswax, wire

Roberta J. Holloway



4. Fallopian Tube
wood, copper

Roberta J. Holloway



13. Domestic Craft
copper

Roberta J. Holloway



20. Untitled
found copper

Roberta J. Holloway



19. Untitled
brass shavings, copper paint

Roberta J. Holloway



18. Untitled
wood, copper screen

Roberta J. Holloway



17. Postoperative Sensation
copper wire





