BENEATH EVA HESSE’S FIBERGLASS VEIL

Visual artist, 1936-1970
Based on Hesse’s artwork, her journal, and two biographies.
Sections in italics are quotes from Hesse’s journal or titles of works.

I
FROM PAINTER TO SCULPTOR

the positioning

where it comes from

the ceiling

or the floor

Long-stemmed reeds arranged like a forest. Fleeing Germany.
I studied window dressing.
My mother gone threw herself out the window, our cord snapped apart.

My studio is less womb-like. The glass window from ceiling to floor in the old warehouse. The space in paintings is too flat. I find myself really afraid of the men here at school. They have strange attitudes to the few women that are around school. White-to-gray tendrils try to escape their surface. I thread a leadwire out of the canvas.

I go back to Germany with my husband for a year. My German relatives are all dead. Vertiginous Detour. Our studios are in an abandoned factory. All around me: machine parts, joints, nozzles, rims, wires, hoses. I start to use them, first papier-mâché and then wrapped with wire and painted to make: penis shapes, circles, concentric circles, coiled forms, testicles, C-Clamp Blues, fragile crotch, breasts, chairs, lamps, shoes, a vacuum cleaner, penis with thorns, tendrils, loops, Two-Handled Orange Keyed Utensil, umbilical cords hanging from electric sockets, vagina.
All *ultra alive.* My weird humor.

appears from

and then

disappears into the surface

to emerge again in another area

At a show of my reliefs and drawings in a greenhouse, some hung from the rafters *like things growing,* Tom said. My hair was wrapped into a high beehive, and I was holding a cigarette and wilting tulips. *I still want to be a little girl,* but no one respects me as an adult. *Most others don’t know me as an artist.* *Is it right for a girl to be a sculpture?*

II

**Crazy Grids and Series Not Adding Up**

An empty picture frame with just the wire hanger coming into the room. Fishnet bags netting something with tentacles, pulled out of the water. *Pink* is made of raised circular forms built up from papier-mâché, each circle wound in wires, painted pink.
Another relief uses two panels, wires from one threaded into the other at precise places, each tiny wire in its hole, graceful irregular waves connecting the panels. He starts to see someone else. The stress on the panels makes them both fall.

*It ended up in a jungle of strings.* Boomerang phallus, gourds made of balloons plastered over and up in the air. The marriage ends. *My father was in a coffin.*

A friend who is a writer gave me a spiral of words to describe me: *disguised, conceal, wrap-up, cloak, bury, ensconce, hide, entomb, hedge-in, encirclement, ringed, shell, hull, mummify, shroud, surround, wrap.* My main tool is a *crudely-shaped wrong side of a brush.* My processes are: winding, bandaging, poking through, sewing gone wild, tying, knotting, wrapping, binding, knitting. I go out further until lines are pulled out into real space. What’s on the back of something sewed?

*Laocoön*

A skeletal ladder goes up rational, reaching up one rung at a time to a trap door while wrapped ropes, snakes, tangle in the lattices and pull downward, everything painted pavement gray, impressions of my fingers pressing into the moldings of the ladder.
Metronomic Irregularity

monochrome entanglements

atrophied organs

private parts

mummified in string.

III

Living Space

Two sculptors living across the street from my studio masturbate at their window. Someone shoots at my back window with a BB gun. I have two small rooms in my Bowery loft. I like working in the living space which is less lonely than my tall-ceiling studio. My work table has an ashtray from Persia, a kaleidoscope, ruler, pencils, a metal spike, pitcher and matching cup, plastic tubing, and a copy of the periodic table. Fumes from resin, aluminum wire, papier-mâché, Elmers Glue, turpentine, polyester resin, Dutch Boy White Diamond Gloss Paint hover in the rooms and sting my throat.

I pull rubberhose through the inside of the cube like hooking a rug. All hose goes inward, inside box; outside box looks woven to make a softly bristling interior. People at the exhibit get in it and wreck it. I collapse the day I finish re-threading it.
In a glass pastry case I arrange small pieces neatly:

a miniature umbilical cord, shell-cunt, box of string,
sprouting clear tentacles, epoxied sleeves of fiberglass.

I make a box for a friend’s son holding a lock of his hair.

IV
Hovering in Mid-Air

Fiberglass:

translucent

flexible

ugly

off-white   fleshy

Panels hung like stiff curtains refracting and absorbing light like windows expanding across the room, passing you in elegant waves. I cut off my long hair. Measurements disintegrating at both ends, rubberized, loose, open cloth, coarse, rough, changing, enclosed tightly by glass encasements just hanging there. Line connects one impossible space with another. Fiberglass poles link the wall to the floor, and fiberglass icicles hang from the ceiling. 

They are not for architecture or sun, water or for the trees, and they have nothing to do with color or nature or making a nice sculpture garden. They are indoor things.

Sequel—a continuation of a story or process. January is the anniversary of my mother’s suicide. My father left her for me.
SICK: exhaustion, headaches, vomiting, hospital, brain tumor, surgery, radiation, chemo, recurrence.

I draw the windowpanes in a cabin. It’s raining outside.

The surfaces are opaque but light filled, watery, and rectangular shapes float out over the borders, the window frames. In a photograph I’m standing behind clear cellophane, serious, my arms reaching upward, on the other side looking back.