The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES SWEEPING EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO ARTIST EVA HESSE HIGHLIGHTING THE CENTRALITY OF HER WORKS ON PAPER

Eva Hesse: Wild Space, 1957–1970 Brings Together More Than 150 Works on Paper, Sculptures, and Paintings Spanning the Artist's Prolific Career

NEW YORK, September 29, 2026 — The Museum of Modern Art announces ***Eva Hesse: Wild Space, 1957–1970***, New York's first major museum exhibition devoted to the artist in more than 20 years. On view from May 30 through September 25, 2027, the exhibition will feature an extensive selection of works on paper made between 1957 and 1970, along with key paintings and major sculptures. Many of these works have not traveled in decades, including *Contingent* (1969), which is being shown outside of Australia for the first time since 1974. Organized to foreground Hesse's expansive drawing practice, which served as the formal engine for her entire body of work, *Eva Hesse: Wild Space, 1957–1970* will reintroduce this pathmaking artist to a new generation. As she said in a 1970 interview, "Really, the drawings could be called paintings legitimately and a lot of my sculpture could be called paintings and a lot of it could be called nothing." One of the rare women artists working in New York during the 1960s to garner public acclaim, Hesse developed a radical approach to material, process, and form that remains influential to artists today. *Eva Hesse: Wild Space, 1957–1970* is organized by Lanka Tattersall, Laurenz Foundation Curator, with Margarita Lizcano Hernandez, former Curatorial Associate, Eva Caston, Curatorial Assistant, and Henry Wahlenmayer, Louise Bourgeois Fellow, Department of Drawings and Prints.

"This exhibition was conceived with today's artists in mind," said Tattersall. "Eva Hesse's work is vibrantly relevant in our present moment. Her work prompts the question, What alternatives might there be for an idea of art as something fixed and final? Throughout her life, she pushed the boundaries of form to create something she had never seen before, and in doing so cemented her position as one of the defining artists of her generation. This exhibition will shine a light on Hesse's open-ended search for freedom through material restlessness, boundless and often playful inventiveness, and profound curiosity about the human experience."

Born in 1936 in Hamburg, Germany, to a Jewish family, Hesse fled the Nazi regime in 1938, eventually settling with her parents and sister in New York City. From a young age, she was determined to make her way as an artist. After completing a certificate at Cooper Union, Hesse began courses at Yale University. Studying under Josef Albers and Rico Lebrun, she developed her open-ended approach to abstract forms and color. *Eva Hesse: Wild Space, 1957–1970* will begin with a selection of early works on paper from her Yale period, including an untitled 1957

etching from MoMA's collection that is among the few prints she made during her lifetime.

Upon her graduation from Yale in 1959, Hesse returned to New York and gradually began to incorporate collage elements and symbols, such as circles and arrows, into her visual vocabulary. In drawings and paintings from the early '60s, Hesse alternated between tightly controlled, deliberately constructed forms and an intuitive exploration of color and line. "They had a wild space," she would later say of her drawings from this period, describing these works as "not constant, fluctuating."

In June 1964, Hesse returned to Germany for the first time since her childhood flight. There she entered a period that would prove transformational. She and her husband, the sculptor Tom Doyle, were invited by the German industrialist Friedrich Arnhard Scheidt into what Hesse called an "unusual kind of Renaissance patronage," working in a defunct textile factory in Kettwig an der Ruhr, Germany. It was then that Hesse began intertwining machinelike imagery with organic shapes in her drawings, arriving at strikingly hybrid configurations. A selection of these lively drawings will be prominently exhibited.

Simultaneously, Hesse began to translate the drawn line into three-dimensional space as she expanded her explorations of materials. Using discarded cord found in her industrial studio, she created a series of reliefs, a group of works notable for their intensity of color and beguiling fusion of the bodily and the mechanical. In May 1965, in a greenhouse on the Scheidt family's property, Hesse displayed a collection of these breakthrough reliefs—including *Ringaround Arosie* (1965)—for the first time, alongside a selection of equally inventive works on paper. The MoMA exhibition will, for the first time, offer a dedicated focus on the greenhouse show, reuniting a constellation of these reliefs and drawings in a gallery devoted to this pivotal moment when Hesse's drawings expanded into three dimensions.

The same year, an invigorated Hesse returned to New York and became fully absorbed in the downtown art scene. Her distinctive response to the ascendance of Minimalism departed from that movement's strict geometry in favor of an interest in the elasticity of form, contradiction, and repetition. The circle—one of her favored motifs—became a springboard for Hesse's explorations of seriality, imperfection, and exaggeration. These experimentations ranged from intricate drawings on graph paper to such large-scale works as *Hang Up* (1966). This sculpture's exaggerated forms highlight a tension that became a hallmark of Hesse's practice: a meticulous attention to color and space, paired with what she would describe as "absurdity or extreme feeling."

The exhibition will conclude with a presentation of key drawings and sculptures made between 1966 and 1970, offering viewers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take a cross-disciplinary look at the works that established Hesse as a major figure during her lifetime. In tandem with drawing, she turned to such unconventional materials as latex and fiberglass, which allowed her to experiment with process and materiality in strikingly new ways. “It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know,” Hesse stated in 1968. This gallery will include *Contingent*, one of Hesse’s most notable works, which returns to New York after more than 50 years abroad. The work, completed shortly before Hesse’s premature death from a brain tumor at 34, has become an enduring emblem of her life and the radicality of her vision. Composed of eight monumental, sheetlike panels of fiberglass, resin, and latex-covered cheesecloth, this commanding yet fragile work crystallizes Hesse’s enduring desire to collapse the boundaries between drawing, painting, and sculpture. Although her death cut short a remarkable career, her body of work and her model of fearless invention persist as a source of inspiration to artists today.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue edited by Tattersall, with contributions by Jo Applin, Margarita Lizcano Hernandez, Kate Nesin, Laura Neufeld, Prudence Peiffer, Henry Wahlenmayer, and Lucina Ward and reflections on Hesse from artists Matthew Barney, Cameron Clayborn, Mire Lee, and Johanna Unzueta.

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