

Dallas, 2003
wood, plastic,
polyurethane, wire,
size: 30 x 30 x 30 cm
University of Texas at Dallas

My initial blankness on meeting *Sans II* diffused slowly. Restlessness, anticipation, and an anxiety about missing a wonderful opportunity, were dissolved by the act of moving and looking. Dark and light, a rhythm, from one blurred, boxed form to the next, everything a repetition, but everything different, and the open-ended emptying out into the space beneath, which became full and supportive like an invisible plinth holding every side of the work, sealing interior, exterior and surrounding space into a symbiotic dependency.

By now I am as close to the work as I can be. A different mood prevails, a fear of disturbance: close up the work demands stillness and silence. There is a pulling inwards, as into long-frozen ice, an odd response, when the material itself has warmth. The chill is bewildering, at odds with the embedded hairs of the fibreglass, and the softly caramelised edges, and the aged, yellowing resin. It doesn't make sense, but then this is all in my mind, isn't it, and not really anything to do with the work.

But of course it is. Objects are emotive, because of their formalism, their structure, their place and time in relationship to ours. Upright and suspended things are different to collapsed and recumbent things, obvious enough, but being there with objects in these conditions influences our own condition, the way we look, move and behave. The memory of the work is not the same, however powerful, just as a text is not the work.

My description is identifying a paradox: the hotter the sense of touch, and the evidence of process, the cooler the resulting work. Tactility is duplicitous and misleading. Liquid to solid materials only have so much time in which they can be handled whilst they are setting: it is a one-hit relationship. And with a material like resin, if it has not set, due to a faulty mix, or too cold conditions, the process of restoring the surface to how you want it to be is excruciating. And there were such nightmares encountered with Hesse's working methods. To get dripping lengths of resin-sodden cloth to hang, drop, fall exactly so, working with its temperamental chemical reactions, as in *Untitled*, 1970 would have only permitted minimum contact of tactile, hands-on, activity. Resin's carcinogenic potential is now notorious.... Therefore, *Untitled's* tactile heat is in stark contrast to the reality of its making where the resin impregnated fibreglass would have been as deftly, and as quickly manipulated as possible, in fact, as hands-off as possible.

Meanwhile, those supposedly coolest of cool objects of Donald Judd or John McCracken, of Koons or Hirst, have every inch of them handled, touched, manipulated, not necessarily by the artist but certainly by their fabricator.

The work of Eva Hesse is contradictory. If its materiality and process are the work, then these belie their pragmatism, offering paradoxes instead: where hot is cold, touched is untouched, anti-form is precision, and place is time. The work could not be more different and complex than its simplified interpretations within art schools, or its reputations which have mythologised its sensitivity, confusing it with sentimentality and nostalgia.

My conundrum is how to evidence through language what is there and the being there, a language which can have a critical status unencumbered by an over emotive rhetoric on one hand and an over laden theoretical position on the other. The work of Eva Hesse is gloriously nameless. But an Eva Hesse is unequivocally an Eva Hesse. For me, it cannot yield to a worded, semiotic process. Its paradoxes are its meanings. The work exists as if it has always been in the world. And, paradoxically, despite its unequivocal signature, it exists as if it could have been made by you.

This text was first presented as a paper at the *Eva Hesse Symposium*, Tate Modern, London, November 15 2002.