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FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE

"EVA HESSE, AND THE TWO LAOCOONS"

BY

DEIRDRE COLGAN

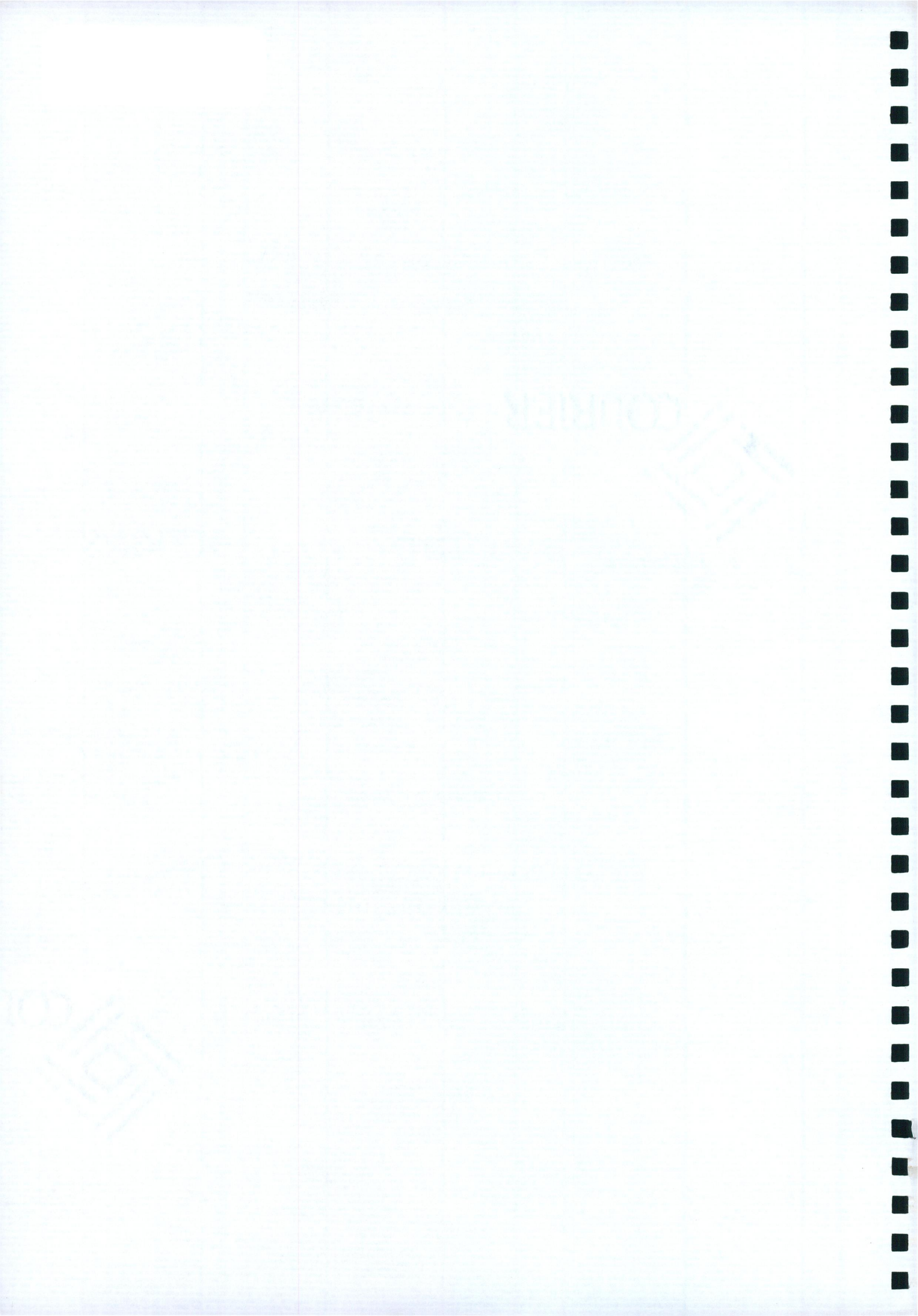
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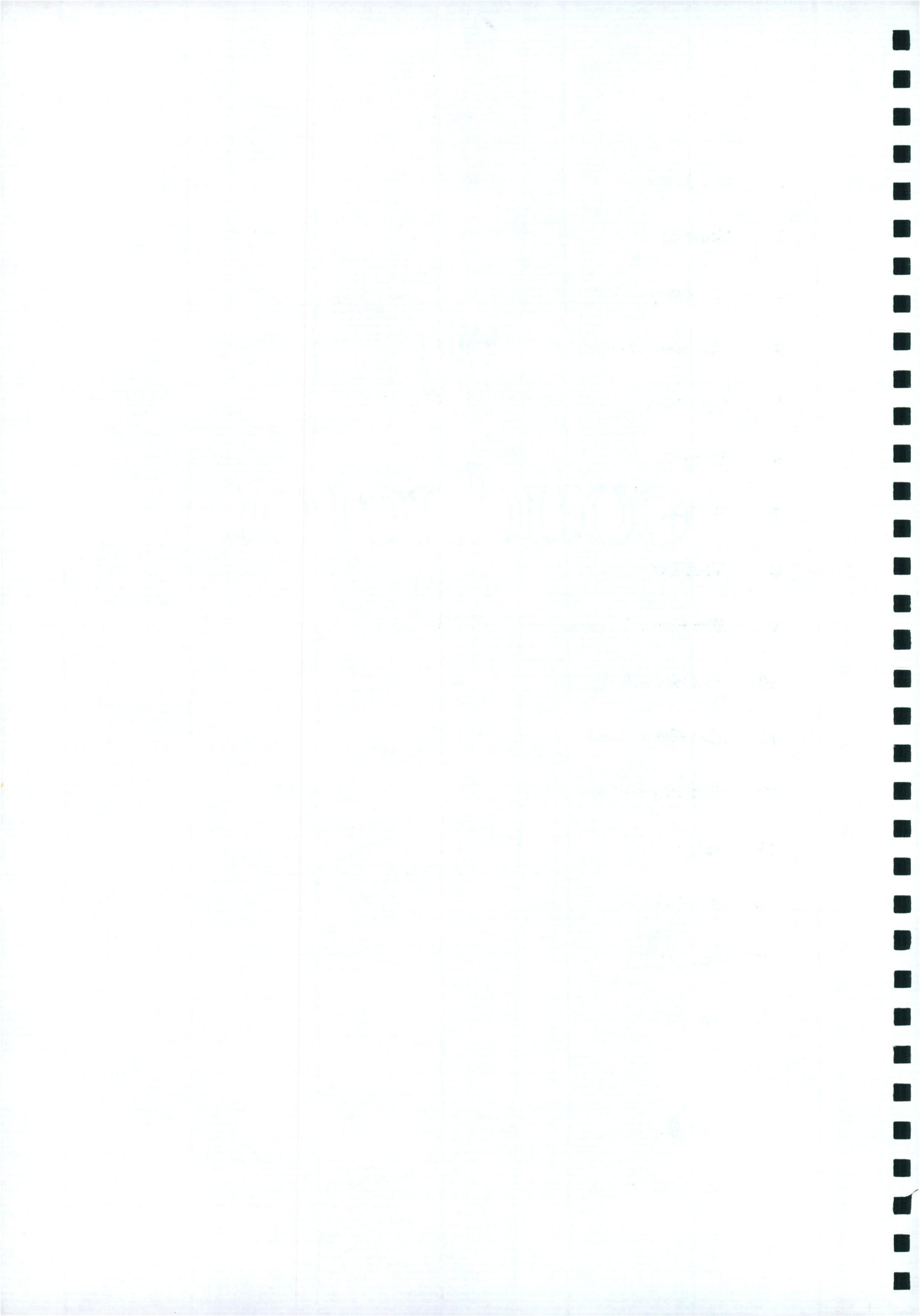
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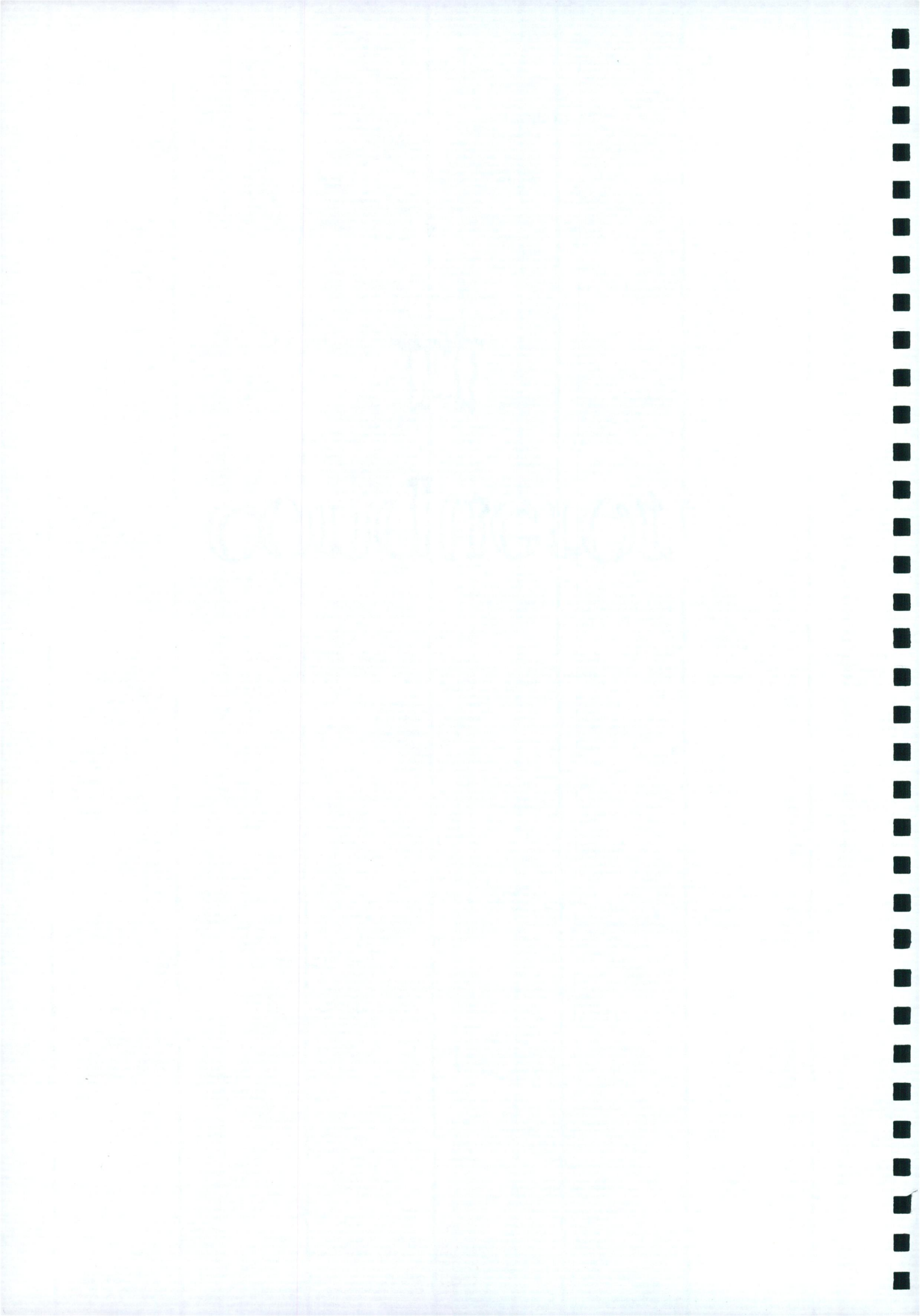
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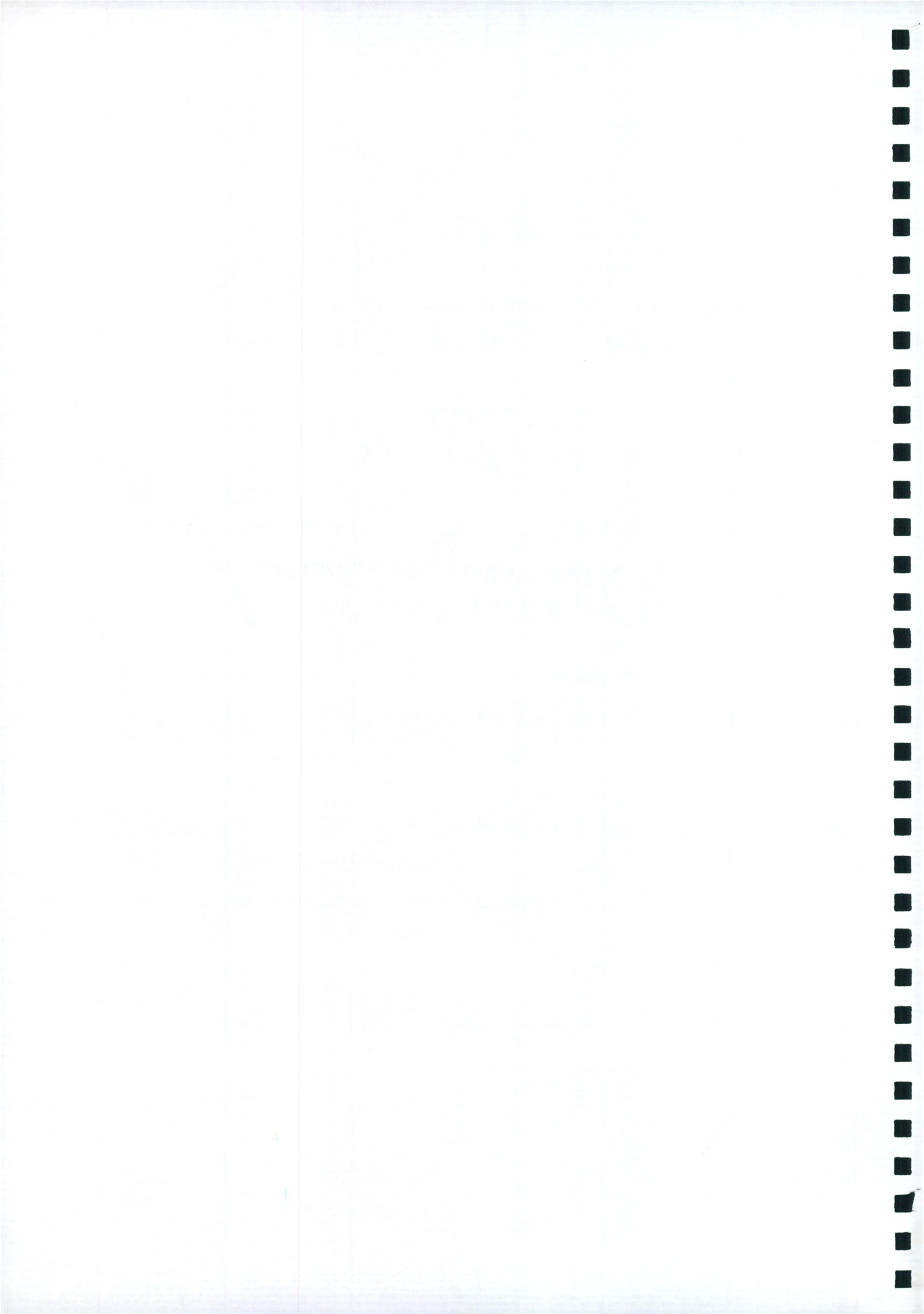


INTRODUCTION

When Eva Hesse saw the Greek sculpture "The Laocoön" in Germany, it formed the key to an unconscious connection made by her between two societies centuries apart. The following text is an exploration of how her sculpture "Laocoon" embodies this connection.

When examined, the societies of Late Hellenistic Greece, circa 150 BC and the New York Art world of the 'sixties share important features. Both societies were founded upon a patriarchal structure that marginalised women. There also prevailed in both societies, a climate of rigidity and constraint that was upheld by the people controlling the male oriented ethics. Anyone who did not adhere to these ethics in Greece was punished. "The Laocoön" remains as a testament from this society of such punishment. Similarly, when artists chose to work outside the confines laid down by a minimalist and conceptual order, they were punished by the galleries, dealers and curators who upheld this order, by rejection.

Eva Hesse worked outside this prevailing trend and instead created art that was of a different order: of feeling. As well as arising from her conscious mind, Hesse's "Laocoon" can also be seen on a deeper level as a product of the working, of what Jung termed, the collective unconscious.

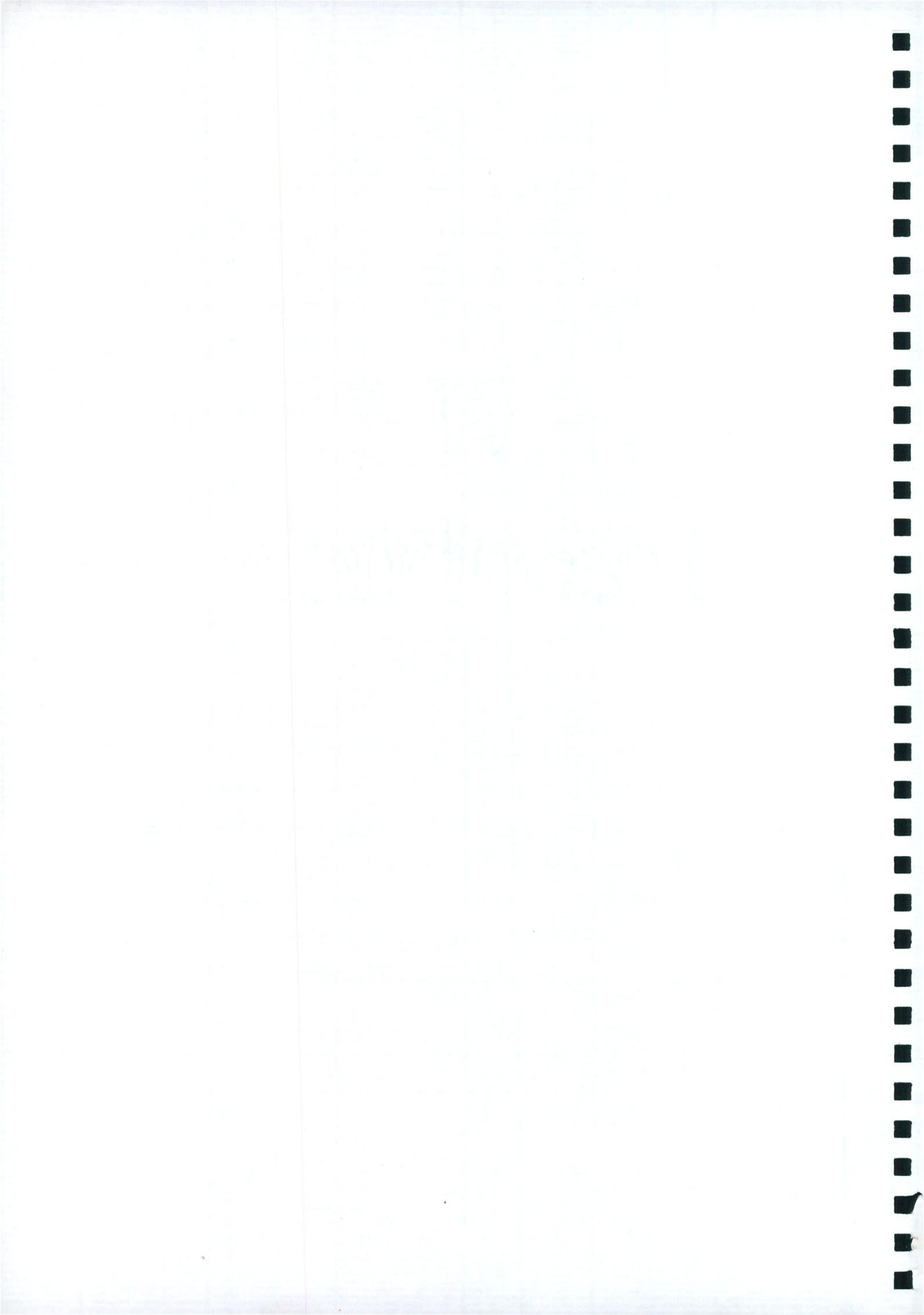


ONE

Eva Hesse was born in 1936 in Hamburg. When she was two years old she and her older sister Helen were sent on a children's train to Amsterdam to escape Nazi persecution. The girls rejoined their parents and moved to New York in 1939. Hesse's mother Ruth had been severely traumatised by the events and was eventually hospitalised. The parents divorced in 1945 and soon after her father married Eva Nathansohn. Both Hesse and her sister lived with him. The next year, when Hesse was ten, her mother committed suicide. The event was to plague Hesse throughout her life as she feared she had inherited her mother's instability. For this and other reasons, Hesse entered into therapy; first in 1954 with Dr Helen Papanek and later, when Papanek suggested she might make better progress with a male doctor, with Dr Samuel Dunkell. He remained her psychologist until her death. Throughout her life, Hesse recorded dreams, thoughts and feelings in journals which she used in therapy and to come to terms with the unconscious side of her nature.

Hesse originally trained as a painter. She began her study at Cooper Union in 1954, after leaving an advertising design course at the Pratt Institute. After graduating from Cooper, she accepted a scholarship to the Yale Summer School and began studying at Yale the next September. Her teachers at Yale were Josef Albers, Rico Lebrun and Bernard Chaet. Her idea of painting was an abstract expressionist one (her hero at the time was Bill de Kooning) and she often became frustrated with her teachers' ideas of painting, even though she was a good student:

I loved Albers' color course ... I did very well with Albers. I was Albers' little color student ... But he couldn't stand my painting and of course I was always much more serious about the painting. But I had the abstract expressionist student approach not Albers', Lebrun's, Chaet's idea".¹



Hesse went against the general opinion and beliefs of her tutors and strove hard to be an abstract expressionist painter. For the first time she overcame working conditions that were far from perfect. Helen A Cooper, writing in *The Chronology of Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*, describes the conflict in Yale at that time between Chaet and Lebrun and mentions that Albers postponed his retirement until a successor could be named. She explains that Hesse's anxieties and ambivalences about the instruction she was receiving were exacerbated by the ongoing tensions in the school. Hesse reassured herself in diary entries of that time:

The hell with them all. Paint yourself out, through and through, it will come by you alone. You must come to terms with your own work not with any other being.²

Even at this early stage of her career, Hesse is beginning to realise that the responsibility to her art lies within herself and that she has the power to overcome obstacles that lie in her way.

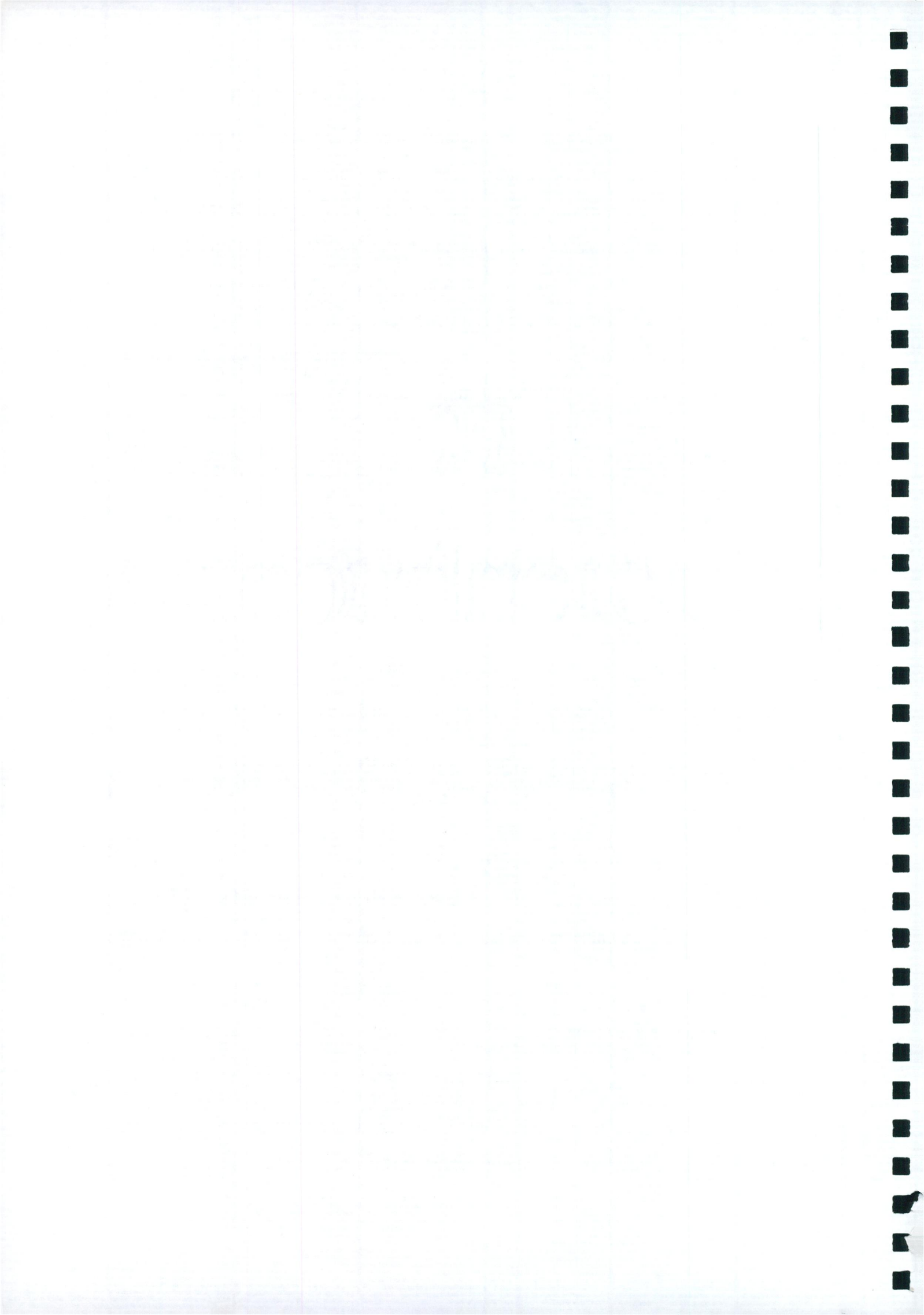
Although racked by self-doubt at the beginning of her career, she mentions having

feelings of inadequacy persist and I am constantly torn in a million directions. I cannot believe in myself to make any statement mine.³

She has a strength inside her that comes to light whenever circumstances seem extremely difficult. She uses her work to get through the crises in her life and at times there is a battle between her lack of confidence and the knowledge that she is an artist of worth.

All my stakes are in my work, I have given up in all else ... I do feel I am an artist and one of the best.⁴

This realisation enables her to survive the break-up of her marriage to Tom Doyle, a time that coincides with one of her most fertile working periods.



Hesse met Doyle in 1961 when she was exhibiting in her first major show: "Drawings: Three Young Americans", at the John Heller Gallery.⁵ She writes at the time:

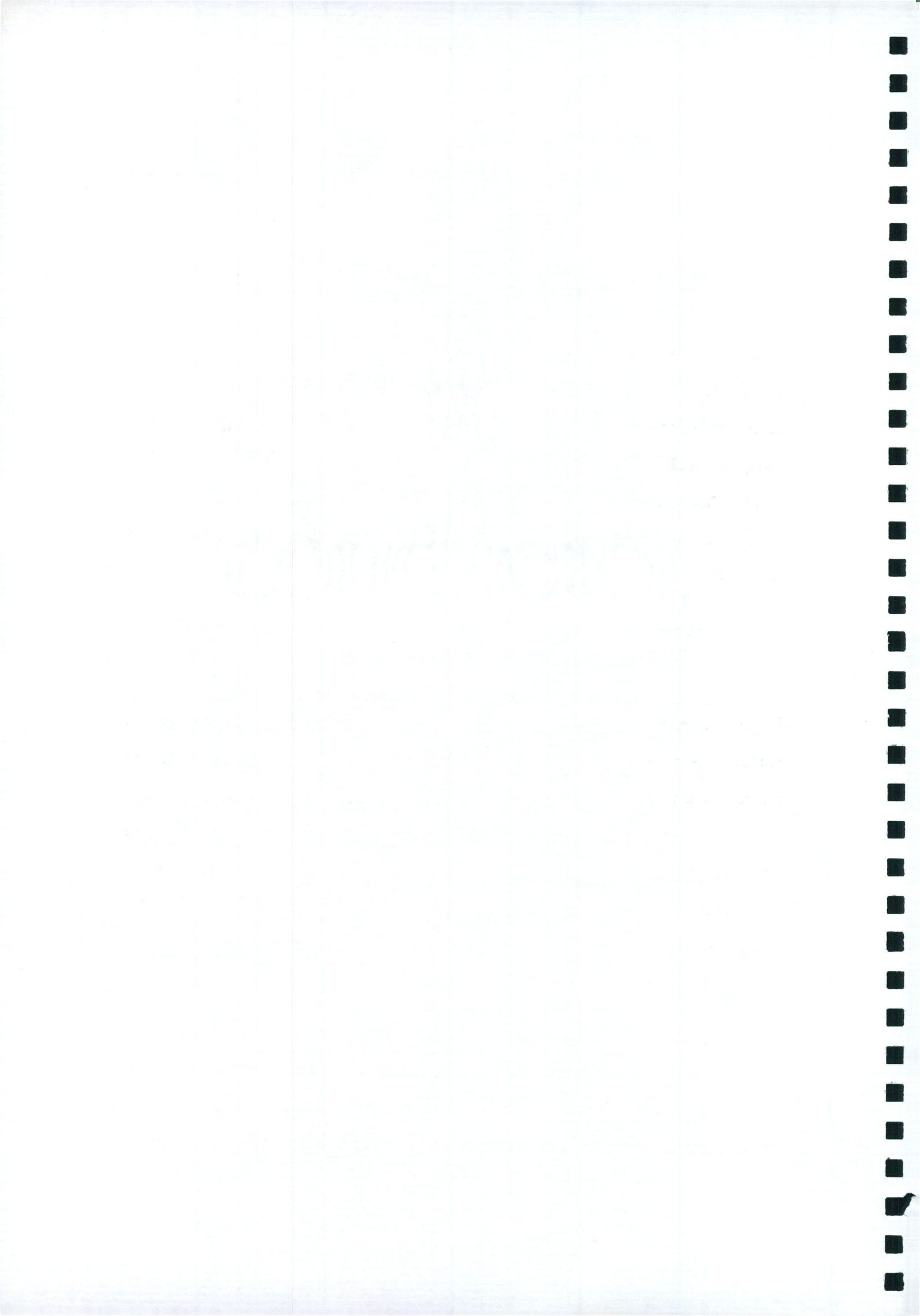
It will not be easy with Tom - maybe this too is good. Maybe love - or love between complex people can never be easy. Am I capable of at least trying? ⁶

However, what first appears to her to be a challenge, soon develops into a problem that made the relationship a difficult and painful one. Hesse found it difficult to be romantically involved with Doyle and work at the same time. Even at the outset, when the relationship had just begun, she recorded:

All is well, it's been a beautiful week. The only think I missed in a certain sense is not being able to paint ... How to combine all aspects of my life momentarily is rather difficult. ⁷

Hesse and Doyle married in the November of that year (1961), after spending an idyllic summer together in Woodstock. It appeared that Hesse was at her least prolific when her life was going well. During this time and throughout the next year she worked only sporadically and the lull in her work corresponds with a similar lack of diary entries. She wrote nothing in her diary for almost a year and did not resume extensive diary writing until January 1964, when she believed her marriage was disintegrating. However, the couple travelled to Germany together and the relationship did not end until 1966 when Doyle moved out. When Hesse is happy and secure in her relationship with Doyle, she doesn't feel the need to either work or write in her diaries.

Before this relationship with Doyle, Hesse had recorded having trouble with intimate relations. After the marriage of painter Victor Moscoso, her closest friend from Cooper Union and Yale and with whom she was intimately involved, she writes:



I am in a bad way. Things have come to pass so disturbing that the shell made of iron which has refused to be set ajar - will - must - at last open ... Problems of my past, of my past sickness, of the scars of my early beginnings. The deep-rooted insecurity which had made any relationship, meaningful one impossible. ⁸

With what appears to be a difficulty that had roots in her traumatic childhood, and affected all her relations with men before this, it seemed inevitable that these difficulties described by Hesse above, would enter her relationship with Doyle. Even though she notes at the beginning. "... we are both strong individual people", in her hopes for the success of her marriage, the reality of living with Doyle and trying to work at the same time as an artist becomes too much of a strain to balance her initial euphoria of finding someone to share her life with. Prior to meeting Doyle, Hesse had been feeling very alone and wrote the month before she met him:

... started painting. Do not feel well, low in spirit. Want to be alone and/or only with one person I can love. ⁹

Up to the time of meeting Doyle, Hesse had been struggling to make herself a career as a painter and worried about painting concerns. When she first met Doyle, it must have seemed that he was someone with whom she could share these concerns. Doyle, by then, is a mature, older, already-established artist. It soon becomes apparent that the relationship is not going to solve her problems, in fact, it only adds to them for now she has to juggle her career and her desire for recognition, against her place as "Tom's wife" which is how many of their friends in the art world view her. She expressed this frustration in her diaries:

I cannot be so many things ... Woman, beautiful, artist, wife, housekeeper, cook, saleslady, all these things. I cannot even be myself, nor know what I am. I must find something clear, stable, and peaceful within myself. ¹⁰

She wrote: "It is difficult as it is said, to be an artist's wife and an artist also". ¹².

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Just when the marriage seemed over, an opportunity was offered to Doyle by German industrialist and collector Arnhard Scheidt who had seen some of Doyle's stone sculptures and decided it would be easier to transport the Doyles rather than the work. He offered them both a year to work in his abandoned factory in Kettwig-am-Ruhr near Essen in Germany. He would supply materials and support in exchange for a certain amount of sculpture.

Hesse's trip to Germany at this time (June 1964) proved to be the catalyst that resulted in huge changes in her life. Germany saw the evolution of Eva Hesse as a sculptor. Before the Doyles left for Kettwig, Hesse had been growing increasingly frustrated with painting and had turned to drawing as a medium with which she could work through the emotions she was feeling. Her work always reflected what was going on in her life. In an interview with Cindy Nemser near the end of her life, she said: "In my inner soul life and art are inseparable". It is not surprising therefore, that when confronted with an experience that included going back to the "fatherland" that had treated her so cruelly as a child (Hesse spoke fluent German), and facing the reality of a failing marriage, that her previous frustration with one medium would emerge into another that could more aptly deal with the dilemmas she was facing. Even throughout the period she spent making mainly drawings, Hesse hadn't abandoned painting as her main concern. When she started using the studio in Kettwig (she chose a tiny room instead of the expanse of floorspace used by Doyle), her first thoughts were to paint. She became frustrated quickly and expressed her feelings in a diary entry:

For me painting has become (anti-climactic) 'making art, painting a painting' The Art, the history, the tradition is too much there. I want to be surprised, to find something new. ¹⁴

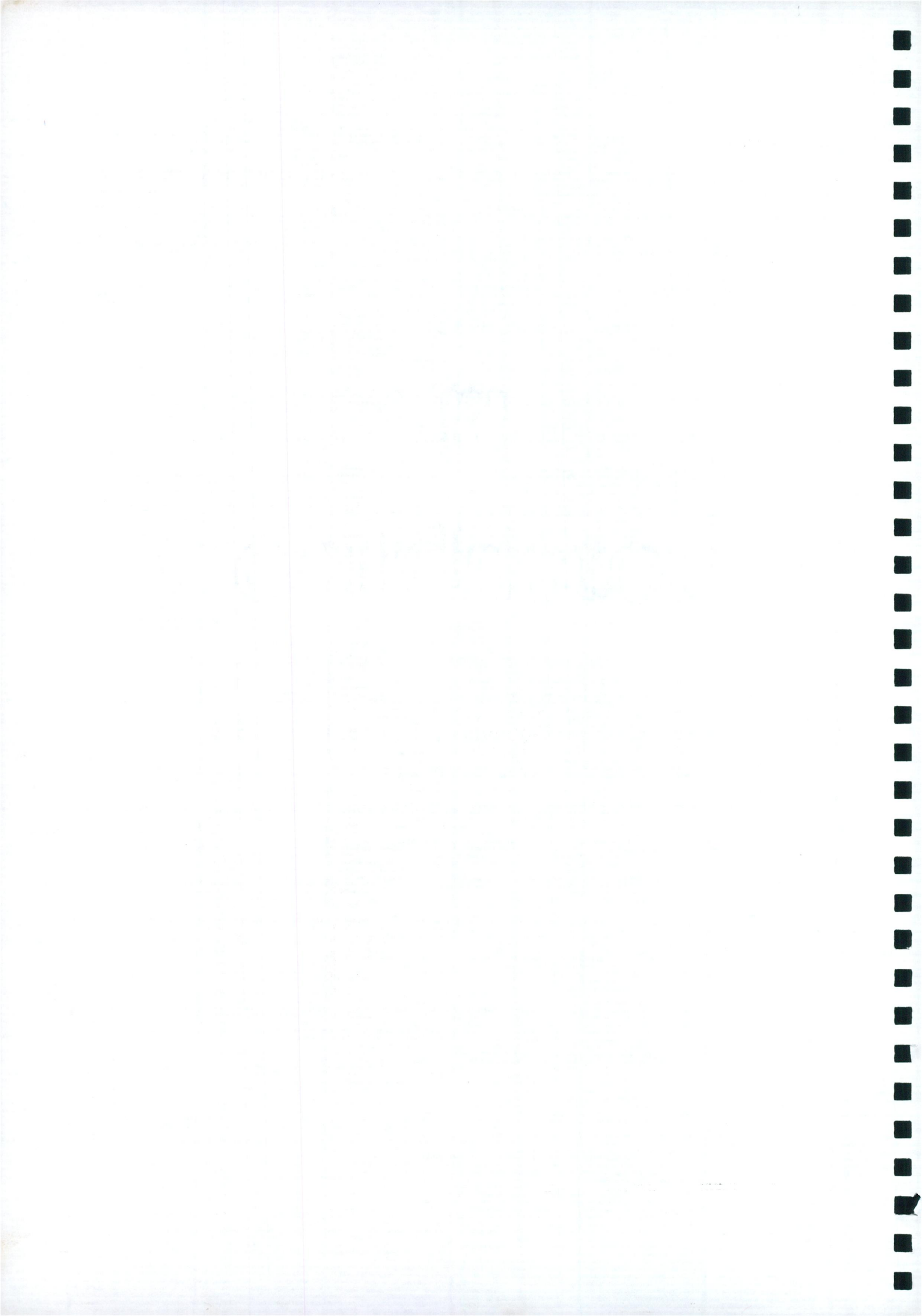
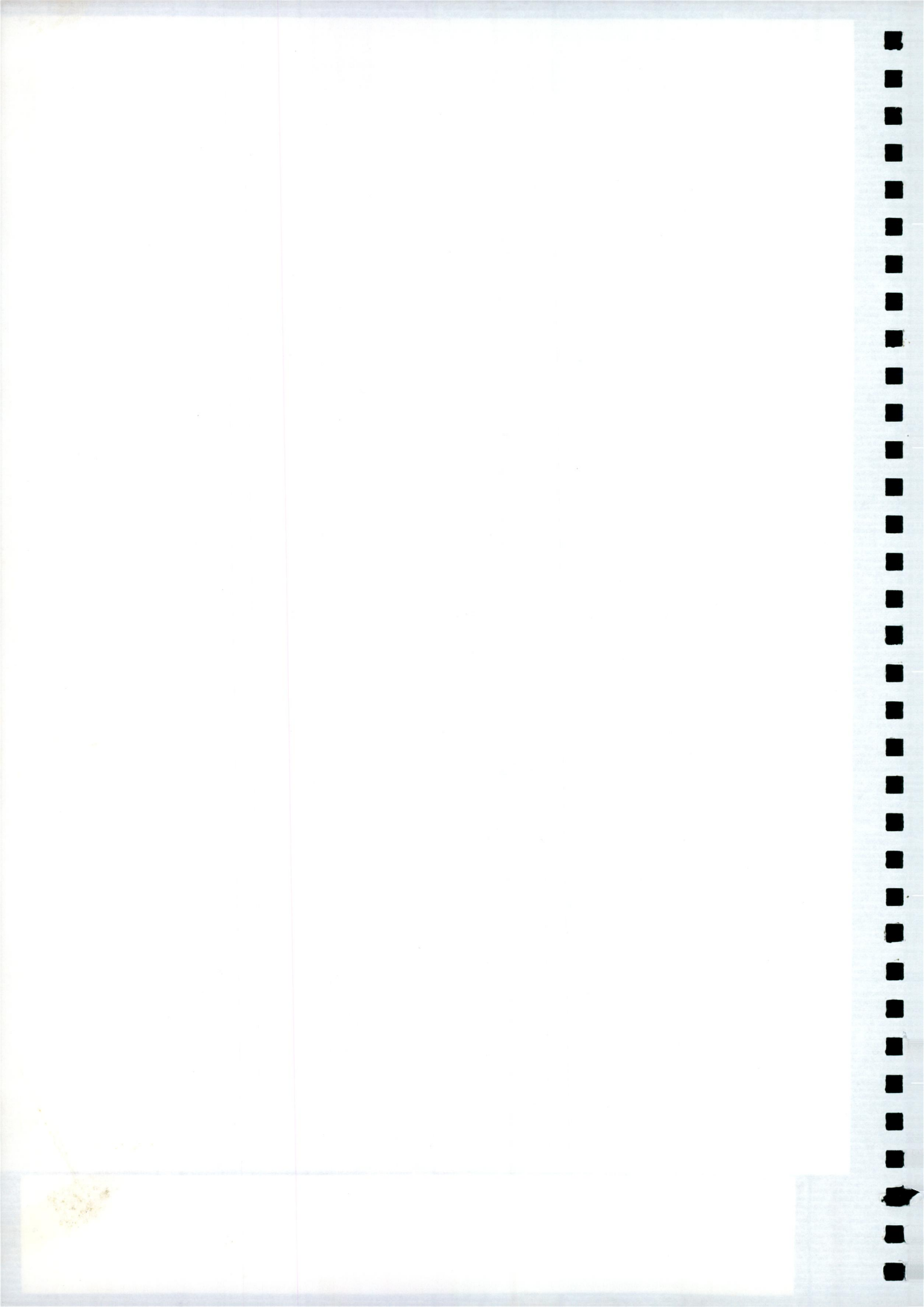




Fig. 1

Eva Hesse with German relief pieces taken from the catalogue cover of the exhibition in Düsseldorf: "Eva Hesse: Materialbinder und Leichtungen" in 1965. Photograph by Manfred Tischer.

Reliefs clockwise from upper left: "Legs of a Walking Ball", "An Ear in the Pond", "Two Handled Orange-Keyed Utensil", "Ringaround Arosie" and "Tomorrow's Apples".



In the factory she began to experiment with discarded machine parts, first drawing them, then eventually incorporating them into wall-based reliefs. Early on, at Doyle's suggestion, she started working with string and other discarded weaving materials in the factory, anticipating later works completed at the end of the sixties.

The fourteen mixed media reliefs that she exhibited at the end of their stay, (both at an informal exhibition in a greenhouse owned by Scheidt, and in the Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf) (see fig 1.) form the stepping stones of the move Hesse made from being a painter to a sculptor. Hesse's stay in Germany formed the basis of this transition.

The New York art world the Doyles left, was turning more and more steadily towards a stark, minimalist ideal. Being away from the familiar artists and prevailing thoughts, gave Hesse the space to form her own opinions of how best to express herself through art. While she was in Germany she came into contact with a wide spectrum of European artists. Soon after they arrived in Germany, Hesse and Doyle travelled to Kassel to see Documenta 3. They were living very close to Düsseldorf which, at the time, was becoming an avant-garde melting pot. Joseph Beuys had been recently appointed head of Monumental Sculpture at the Kunstacademie there, at the age of forty, and used his position to gather a wide diversity of local and international artists to work and show. It was also the site of important Fluxus events greatly influenced by John Cage, and involving other artists such as George Macuinias and Nan June Paik. Düsseldorf was also the home of Zero group founders Otto Piene and Heinz Mack and their close associate Günther Uecker, whose work was of special significance to Hesse.¹⁶ These movements and works contributed to the expansion of Hesse's horizons, beyond the confines of her previous New York experience. Hesse and Doyle came into contact with many artists who were working in Germany at that time, most notably Hans Haake, who was teaching in the high school in Kettwig at the time of their stay. They became



friends with him and his American wife Linda, and through them they meet the photographer Manfred Tischer, whose wife Erika, Hesse became friends with, and the artist Thomas Lenk. The time in Germany gave Hesse a break which gave her time to gather the reserves of strength that would be needed in order to work upon her return to New York. Linda Norden says in her essay, "Getting to Ick":

Hesse's fourteen months in Germany ... offered both a traumatic and protective isolation. ... The intensity of Hesse's confrontation with herself, her art, her homeland, and her estrangement from her husband nearly destroyed her. Ironically it also provided her with the space required to truly experiment.¹⁷

Hesse's stay in Germany resulted from a trip she and Doyle made with friends to spend Christmas in Berlin in 1964. While there, she visited the Staatliche Pergamon Museum in East Berlin where she saw the "Laocoön", the late Hellenistic sculpture by Athanodorus, Hagesandros and Polydorus of Rhodes. This experience was to have profound reverberations for Hesse. The experience of seeing the sculpture had great meaning for her, and two years later she made a sculpture which she also called "Laocoon".

Hesse and Doyle returned to New York at the end of August 1965. Hesse expressed her fear of returning in a diary entry before she left: "Here (is) not so bad. I fear the New York scene"¹⁸. Her marriage virtually over, Hesse begins work on a series of sculptures that utilise materials such as surgical tubing, rubber cord, inflatable beach balls, mostly covered in obsessively wrapped cord (fig 2). There is a dark, disturbing side to this work which seems to express the intense emotions Hesse was experiencing at the time: feelings of anger, hatred and abandonment for and by Doyle. The sculptures share the attribute of being:

"dependent on other materials and on outside support to stand or hold their shape and so their integrity".¹⁹



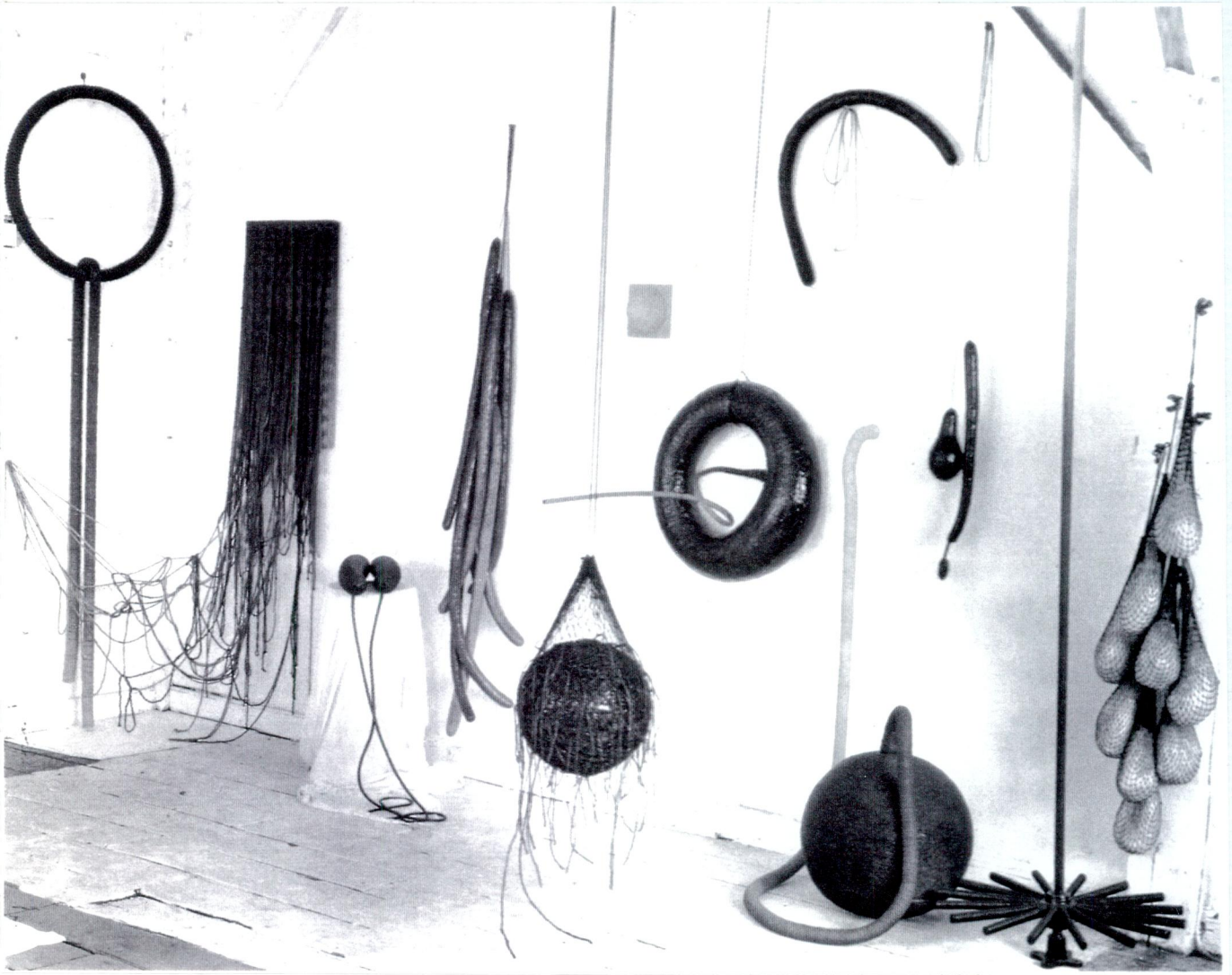


Fig. 2
Eva Hesse
Sculpture from 1865 - 1966, photographed in Hesse's Bowery studio by Gretchen Lambert.



and relate directly to Hesse's need up to that time for someone to "lean on" in order to feel secure. Her "Laocoon" (fig. 3) marks a new departure for Hesse where she has had to stand alone and survive on her own. It is her first major free-standing sculpture. When her relationship with Doyle finished, in January of 1966, Hesse was devastated, but she worked through this crisis and "Laocoon" reflects her own confidence in her ability to survive alone.

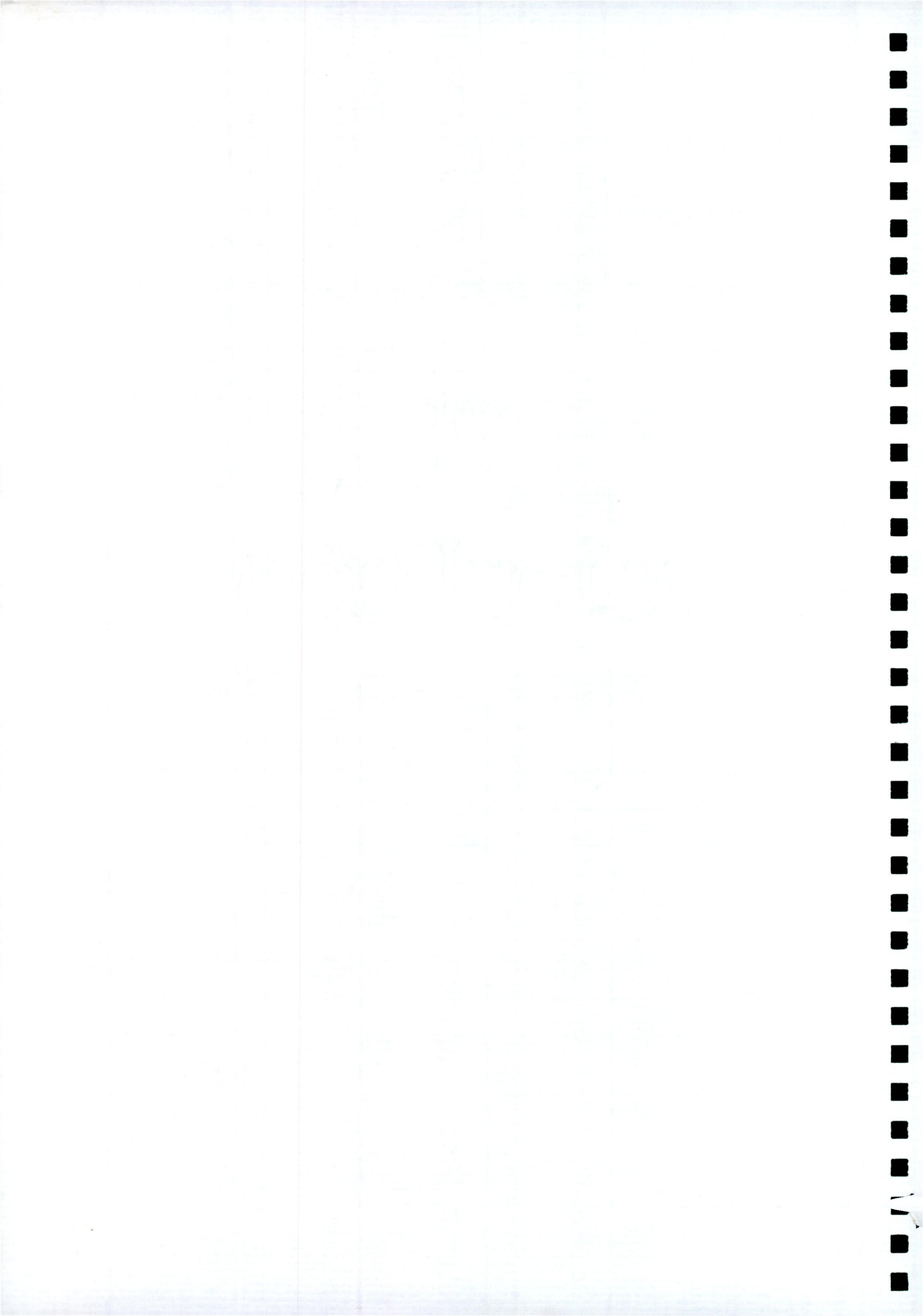
In a diary entry written after Doyle moved out, resulting in a break that was final, Hesse posed the question to herself:

Where do I go from here ..

1. By means of work and also through the fruits of acceptance and approval.
2. Friendship and social life.
3. Unveiling past - and thus overcoming shit - purging it from entering future life - altogether, forever!"²⁰

"Laocoon" has been neglected by most art historians writing about Hesse's work.²¹ (For example, it was not included in the recent (1992) Retrospective exhibition of her work at Yale.) However it was a breakthrough piece in Hesse's artistic career.

In "Laocoon's" reference to the past, Hesse is making a conscious attempt to heal her own past. At this time in her life when she wishes to unveil the past and purge it from entering her future life, it seems appropriate that she chooses to refer to a piece of work from the past: one which she had seen at a very important turning point in her life, her trip to Germany. There is also, and very importantly, an unconscious reference to this antique sculpture.



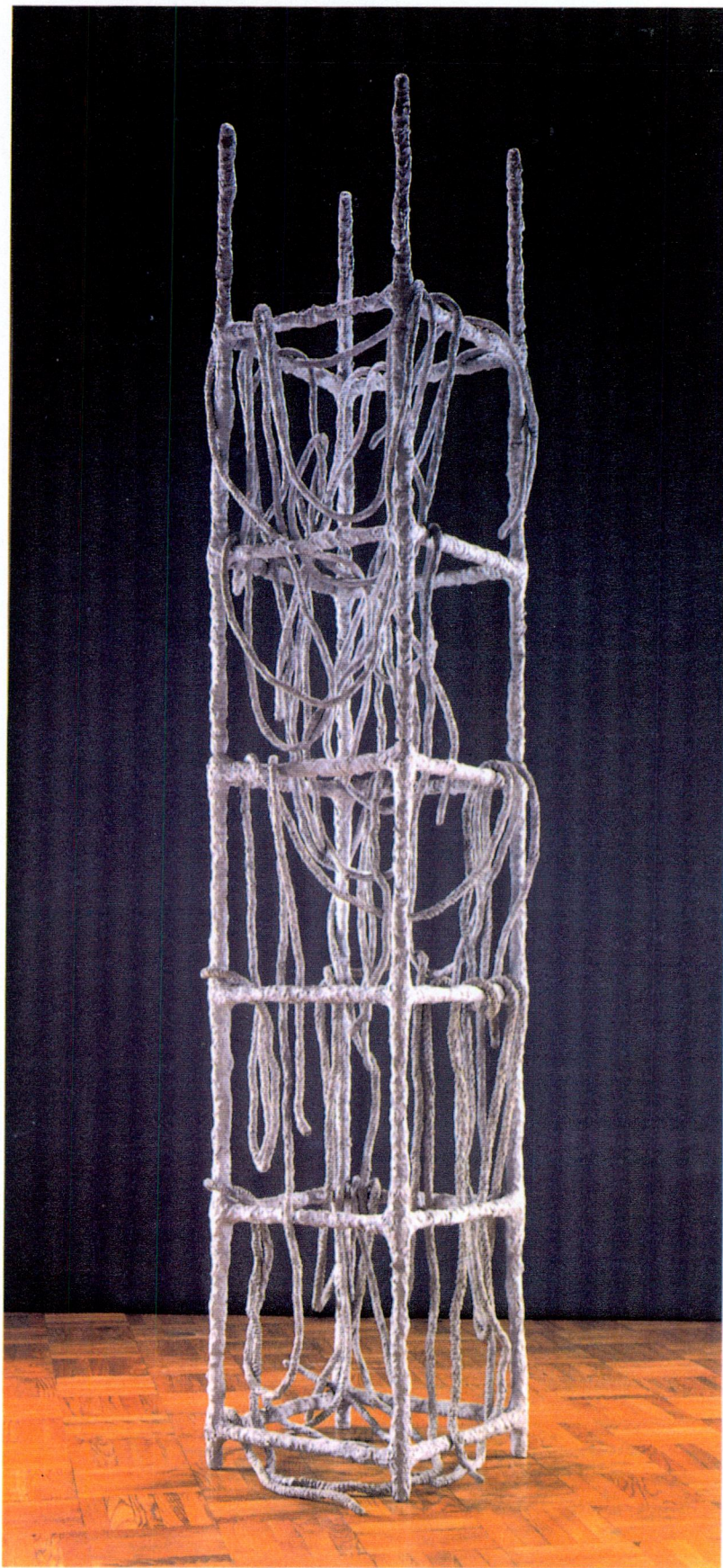


Fig. 3

Eva Hesse LAOCOON March 1966.

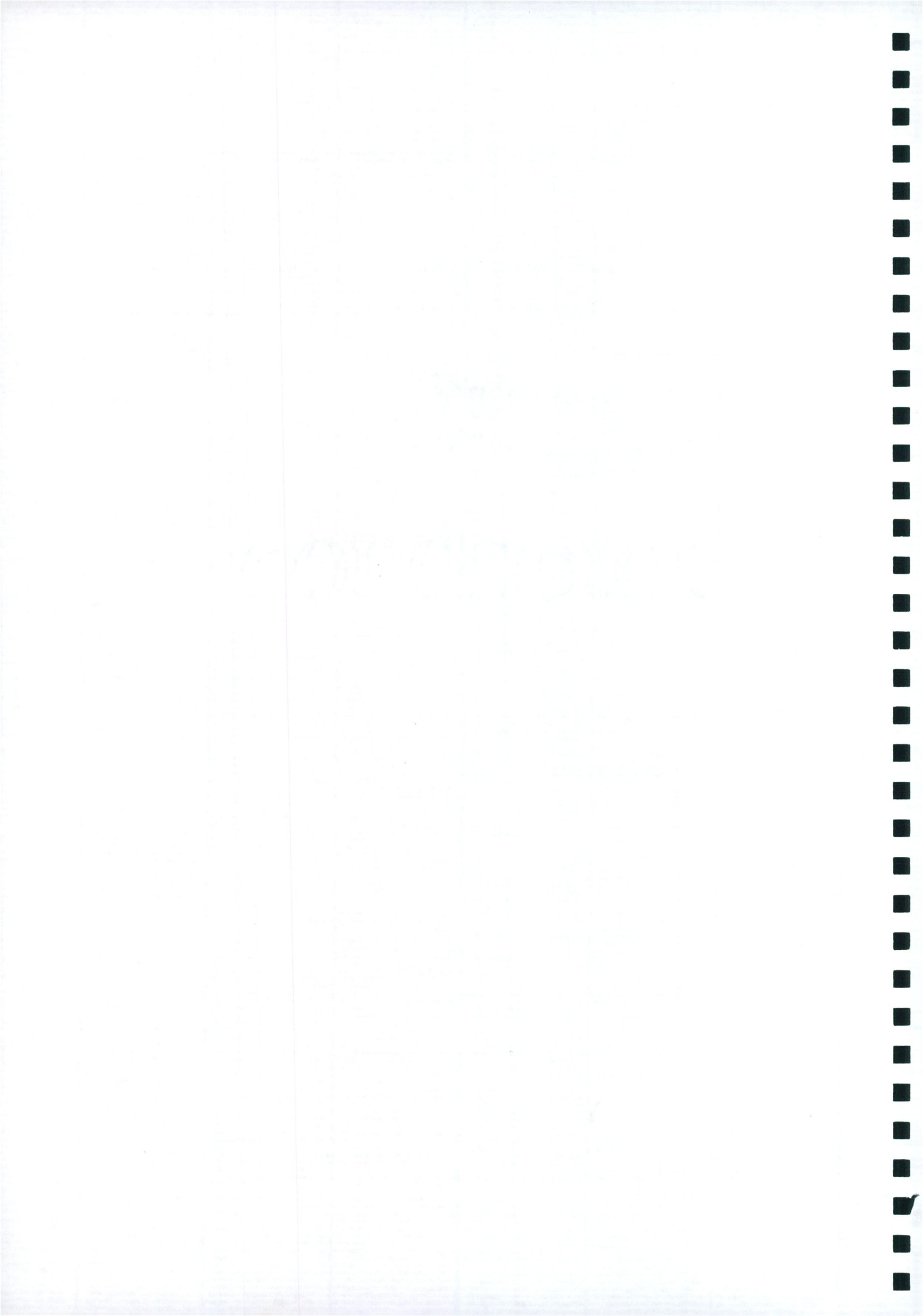
Acrylic paint, cloth covered cord, wire and papier maché over plastic plumber's pipe. 120 x 24 x 24 inches. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio.



Footnotes to Chapter 1:

Note: All diary entries are quoted from the chronology of Hesse's life published in "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".

- 1 Quote from the transcript of the interview between Cindy Nemser and Eva Hesse, shortly before her death in January 1970, "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective"
- 2 Diary entry of April 14, 1959.
- 3 Diary entry of August 8, 1962.
- 4 Diary entry of December 12, 1965.
- 5 The exhibition includes the work of two of her classmates from Cooper Union, Donald Berry and Harold Jacobs.
- 6 Diary entry of April 12, 1961.
- 7 Diary entry of April 19, 1961.
- 8 Diary entry of December 12, 1960.
- 9 Diary entry of March 30, 1961.
- 10 Diary entry of January 4,, 1964.
- 11 Diary entry of from July 14, 1964.
- 12 Diary entry of April 21, 1964.
- 13 Quoted from Cindy Nemser "An Interview with Eva Hesse", Artforum, May 1970,
- 14 Diary entry of December 10, 1964.



- 15 One of the influences of this experience was provided by a Picasso she saw at the Documenta exhibition. The painting caused Hesse to re-think her use of colour, and, although her reliefs employ a wide use of colour, Hesse later made the decision to work in a monochrome. Colour in the form of light and translucency appeared again in her work when she reintroduced by using latex. After the exhibition, she writes:

I cannot stand the colour I use ... The Picasso at Documenta had an interesting use of color. I end up with red, yellow, blue, green, and I hate it. It is dumb uninteresting and I know better. I guess I am so involved in creating my own forms that I can't at (the same) time be concerned that much.

(taken from a diary entry of July 1, 1964.)

- 16 Maria Kreuzer discusses this significance in her essay: "The Wound and the Self. Eva Hesse's Breakthrough in Germany", published in "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".
- 17 Linda Norden "Getting to 'Ick': To Know What One is Not", published in "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective", page 63.
- 18 Diary entry of June 4, 1965.
- 19 Anna C Chave, "A Girl Being a Sculpture", published in "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective", page 105.
- 20 Diary entry of February, no date, 1966.
- 21 One reason for this may be caused by Hesse's decision against showing "Laocoon" in the exhibition "Eccentric Abstraction", organised and curated by Lucy Lippard, which occurred the autumn after "Laocoon" was completed (20 September - 8 October 1966). She records rejecting the gallery as a suitable place to exhibit the piece: "We went to Fischbach, looked at the space. Lousy ceilings. Bad for all art. My big piece Laocoon will not be right with all the gadgetry above ...". Instead she began working on "Metronomic Irregularity" which was exhibited. This was totally new departure creatively and stylistically and as a result "Laocoon" got left in the sidelines: it was not widely viewed and its impact was overlooked in favour of the new works she produced.

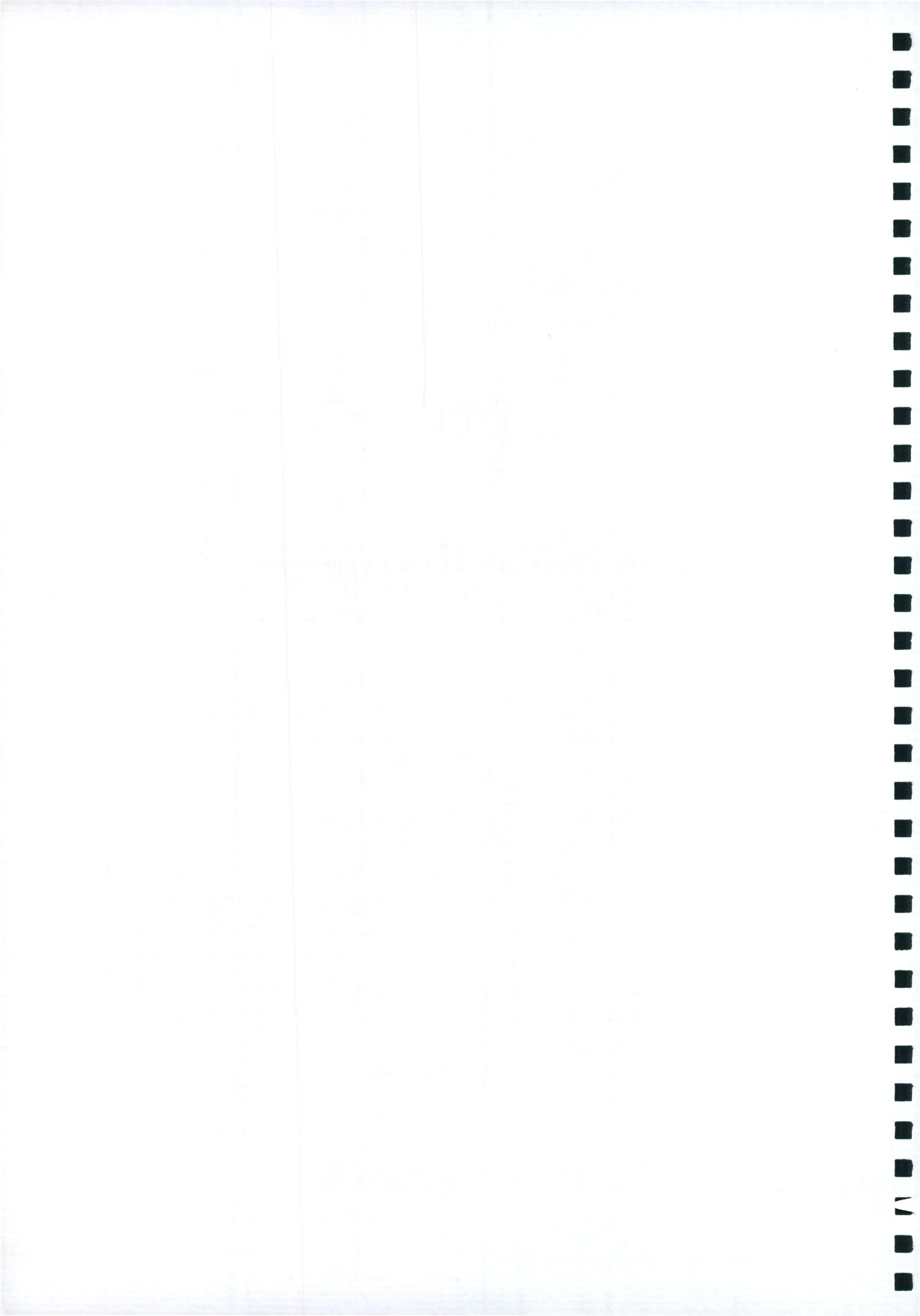
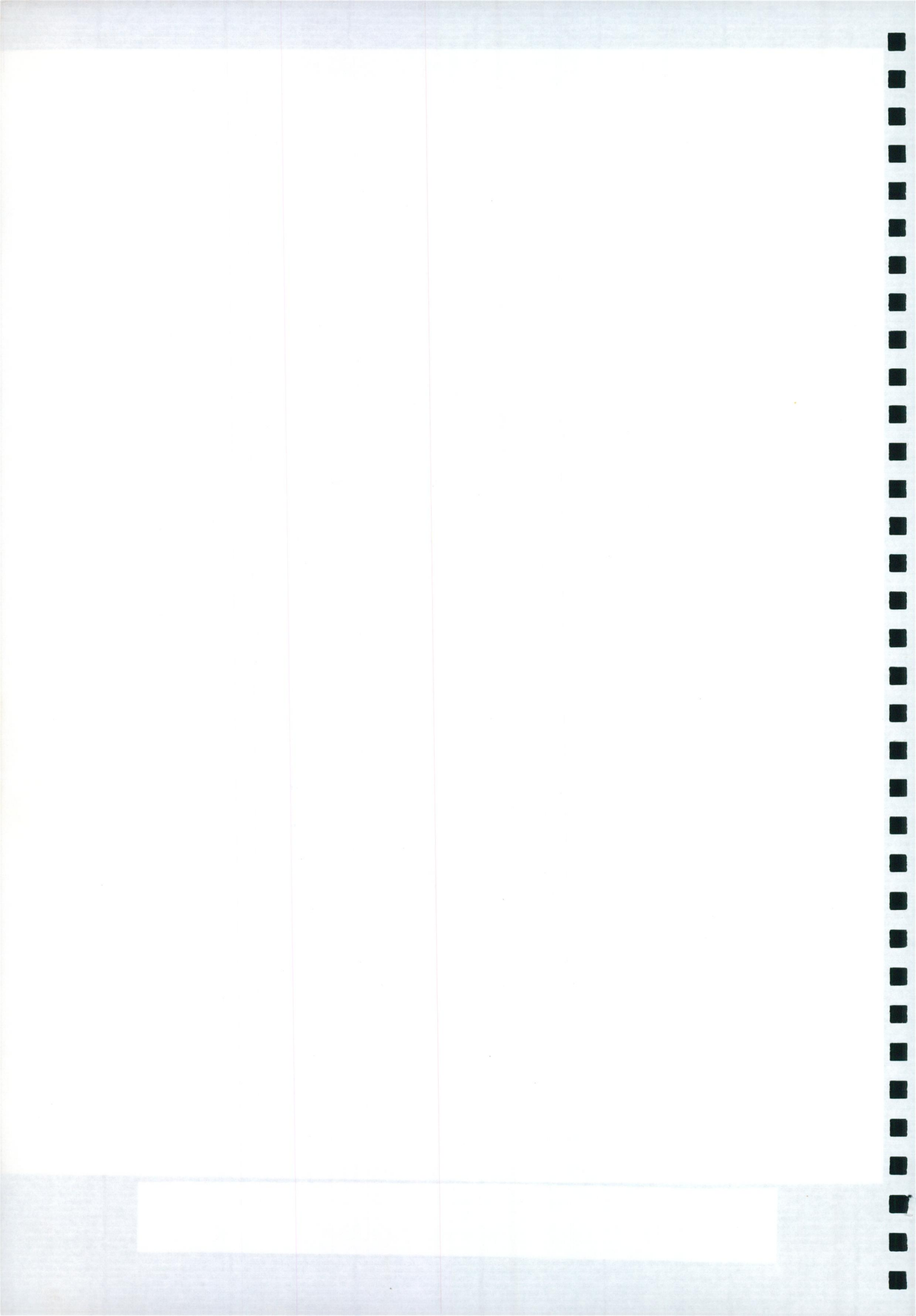




Fig. 4
Hageandros, Polydorus and Athanodorus of Rhodes, "The Laocoön".
Reconstruction of the group by E Vergara Caffarelli (from Richter, 1950)



TWO

"The Laocoön" attributed to the three Rhodian sculptors, Athanodorus, Polydorus and Hagesandros, describes the murder of the priest Laocoön and his two sons Antiphas and Thimbraeus by two sea-serpents sent by the gods as punishment for offending them. John Onians discusses these offences:

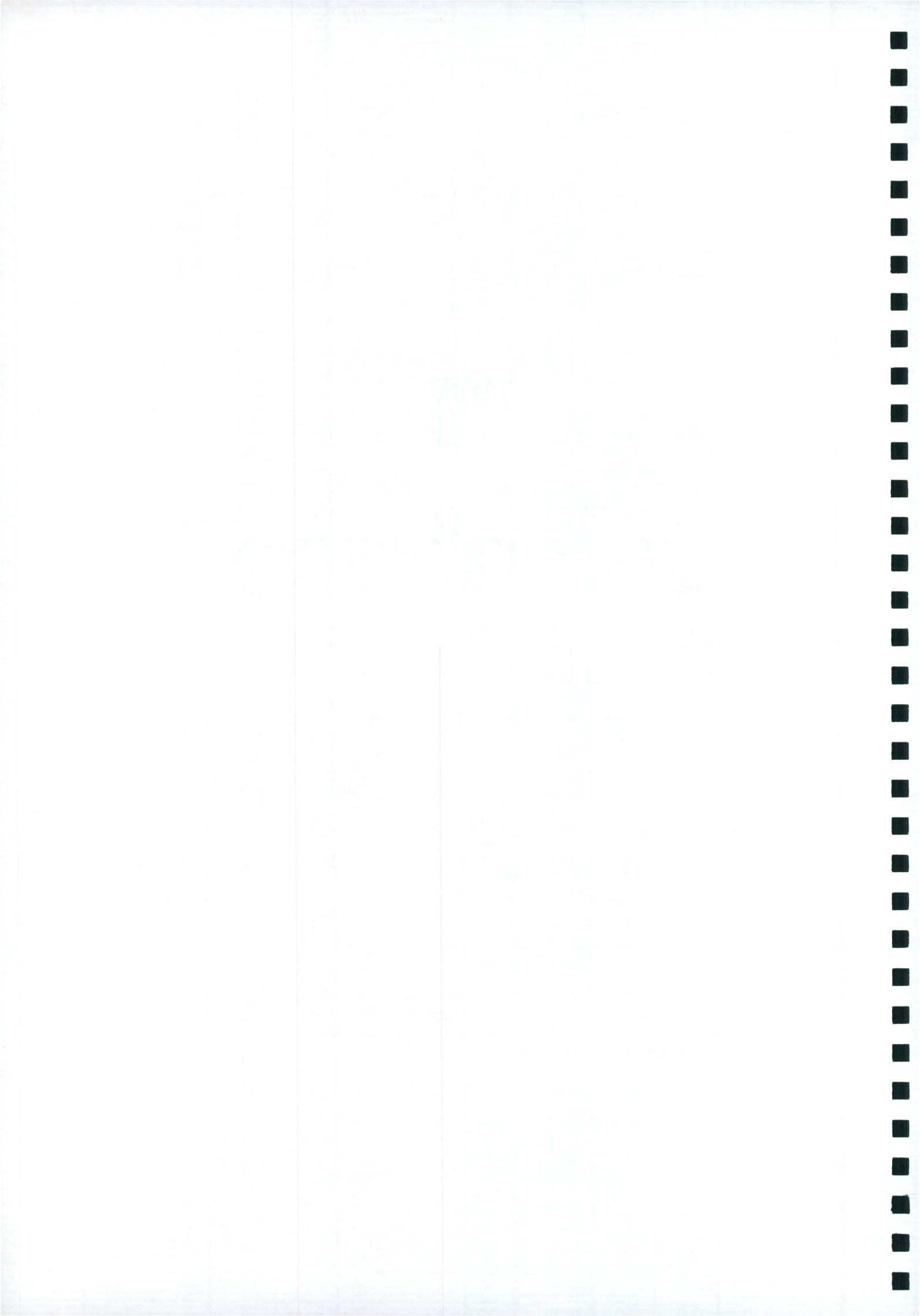
It is usually assumed that Laocoön is being made the victim of divine wrath for his attempt to warn the Trojans about the wooden horse; but it is hard to see why such a scene should merit such artistic attention, while to show a good man suffering in this way, because of the petty jealousies of the gods is quite unparalleled. Instead the serpents should probably be thought of as being sent by Apollo to punish his priest for his sacrilege in marrying and getting children, as is described in another version of the story. This interpretation would explain both the prominence given to Laocoön's offspring and the sensuality of his face.¹

The wrath of the gods that causes Laocoön such pain, is echoed in the inexorability of the forces in Hesse's sculpture. The grey, obsessively-wrapped, tall, thin form ascends skywards only to be hopelessly weighed down by the descending forms of the tangled "snakes"* that restrain and overpower it.

Both structures are overcome by snakes: the ladderlike construction of Hesse's sculpture and the male figures in the Greek sculpture, who can be seen as a metaphor for the rigid social organisation of the late Hellenistic society from which they emerge. Jung has written that snakes represent the baser, instinctual feelings associated with man:

The lower vertebrates have from earliest times been favorite symbols of the collective substratum, which is localized anatomically in the subcortical centres, the cerebellum and the spinal cord. These organs constitute the snake.²

* Eva Hesse's term for the rope forms in the sculpture.



Virgil gives an account of Laocoön's terrible fate in the "Aenid:"

First each snake took one of his little sons, twined around him, tightening, and bit and devoured the tiny limbs. Next they seized Laocoön ... they bound him in the giant spiral of their scaly length, twice round his middle, twice round his throat.³

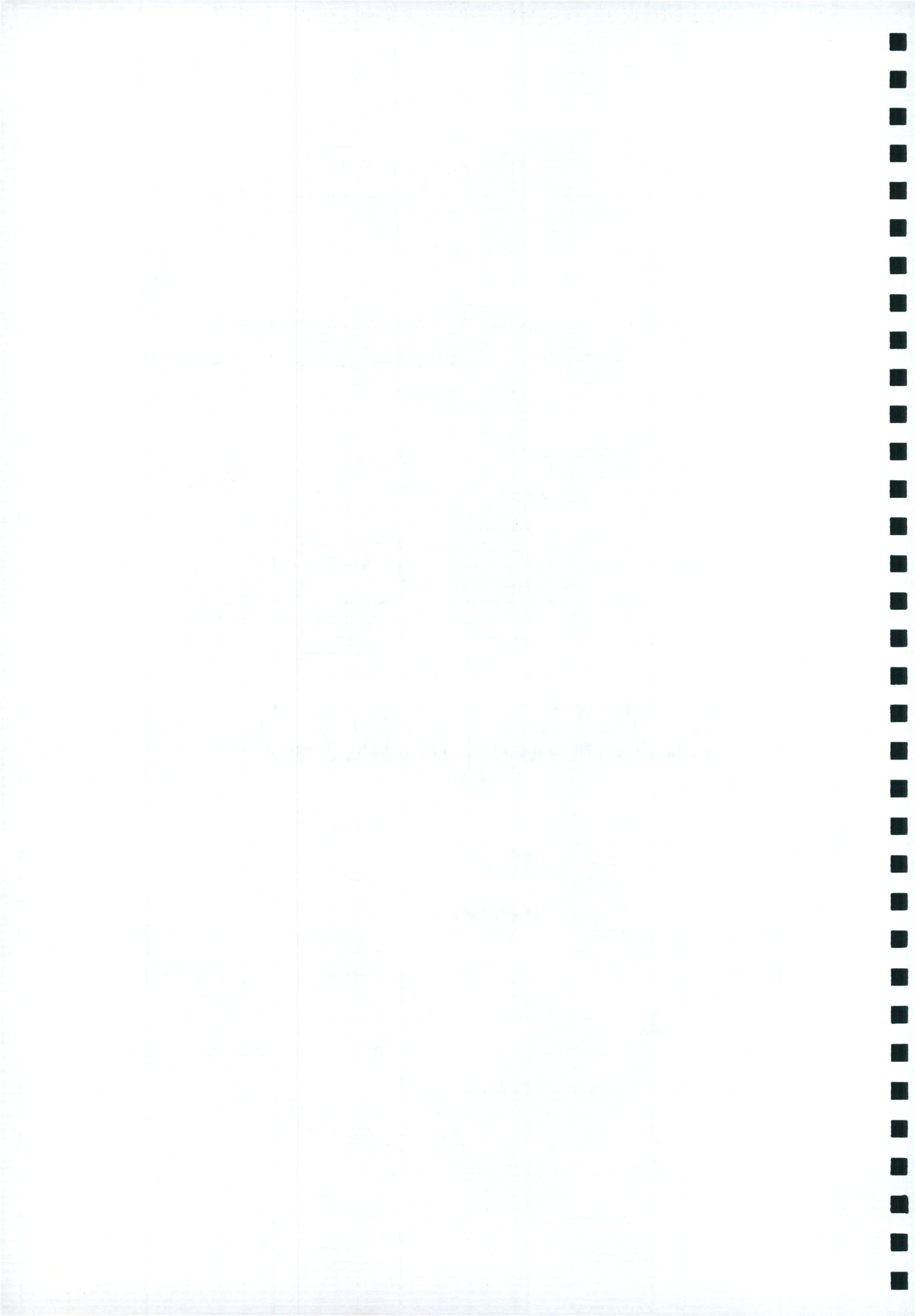
Hesse originally had in mind the title "Structured Snakes" for her sculpture, which Lucy Lippard says was later "mercifully replaced".⁴ Lippard describes the evolution of the piece:

Ray Donarski helped her build the plastic pipe armature which, in her small studio, reached from floor to ceiling. Hesse worked on this, her first major free-standing sculpture, for a long time, and discussed it with all her friends. [In the] first version ... there were fewer coils and no matter how they were arranged, they looked forcedly composed. The 'irrational' element was not powerful enough to conquer or balance the rational structure and something was wrong with the proportions, the thinnesses and thicknesses. Hesse re-made the whole piece [over the old structure] wrapping the structure as well as the wires in cloth. The pipes had previously been covered with papier maché and 'made fat' only at the joints. The addition of many more 'snakes' chaotically looped and tangled around the now heavier structure, pulled the piece together.⁵

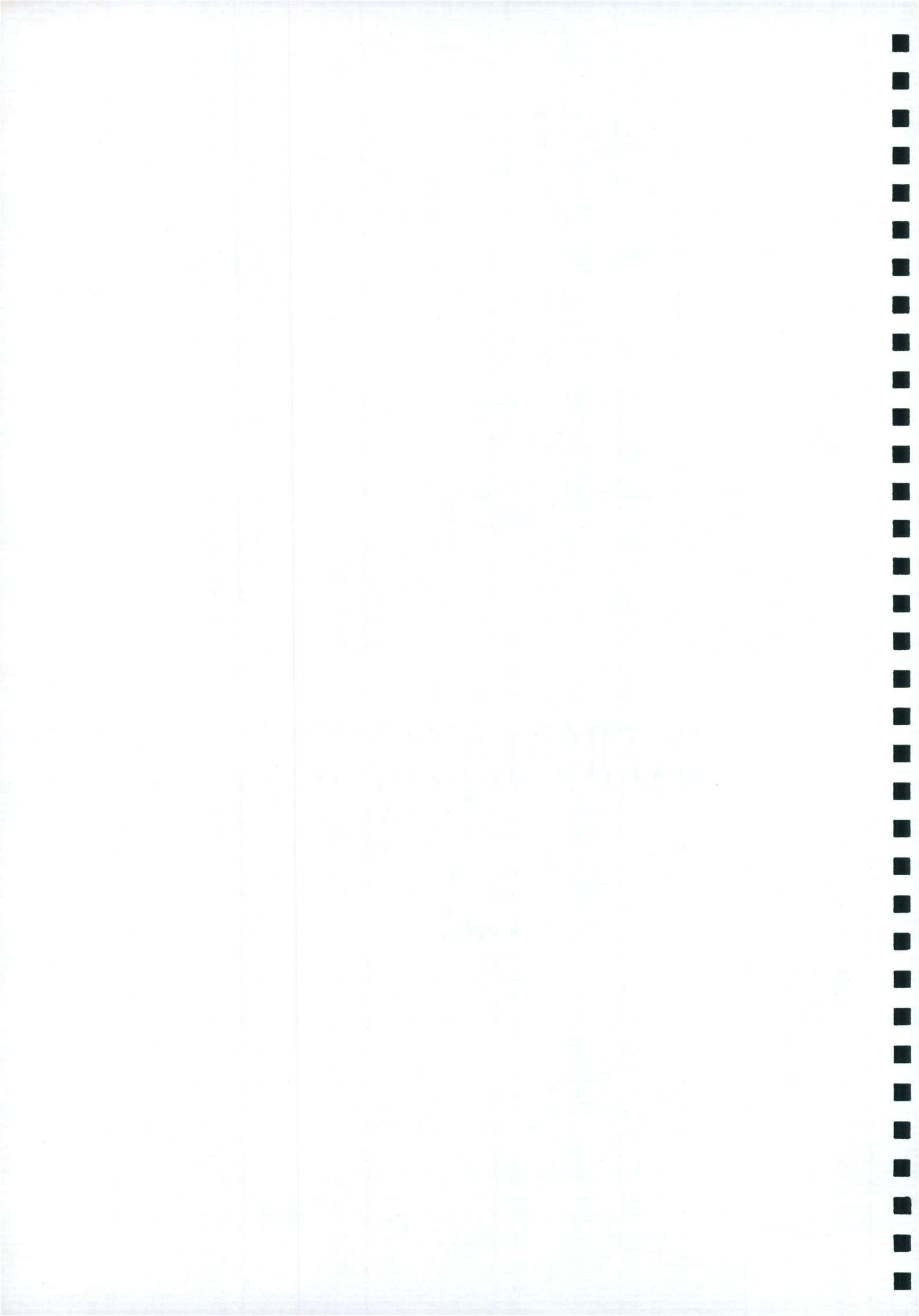
Hesse once described her use of conflicting opposites generally in her work, to Cindy Nemser:

I was always aware that I should take order versus chaos, stringy versus mass, huge versus small ...⁶

The conflict between order and chaos is present in both sculptures. In the Greek "Laocoön," the order is represented by the vertical male figure of Laocoön, flanked on either side by his sons. This structure degenerates into chaos as we see him helpless in the grip of two monstrous serpents, despite his formidable physique and the portrayal of him as a strong man in his prime.⁷



The sheer force of his pain, at the mercy of these monsters and powerless to free or aid his two sons, evokes chaos. In Hesse's "Laocoon," this struggle is abstracted. The ladderlike structure's rigidity is softened and mocked by the seething mass of snakes tangled around it.



Footnotes to Chapter 2.

- 1 Onians, page 90
- 2 Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", page 166.
- 3 Quoted in "Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture".
- 4 Lucy Lippard, "Eva Hesse", page 58.
- 5 ib id
- 6 Quoted by Lucy Lippard in "Eva Hesse: The Circle", Art in America, 59, no. 3 (May - June 1971).
- 7 The presence of his beard indicated his maturity and wisdom. In Greece only when a boy gained these attributes, was he able to grow a beard. (Plato, "The Symposium").



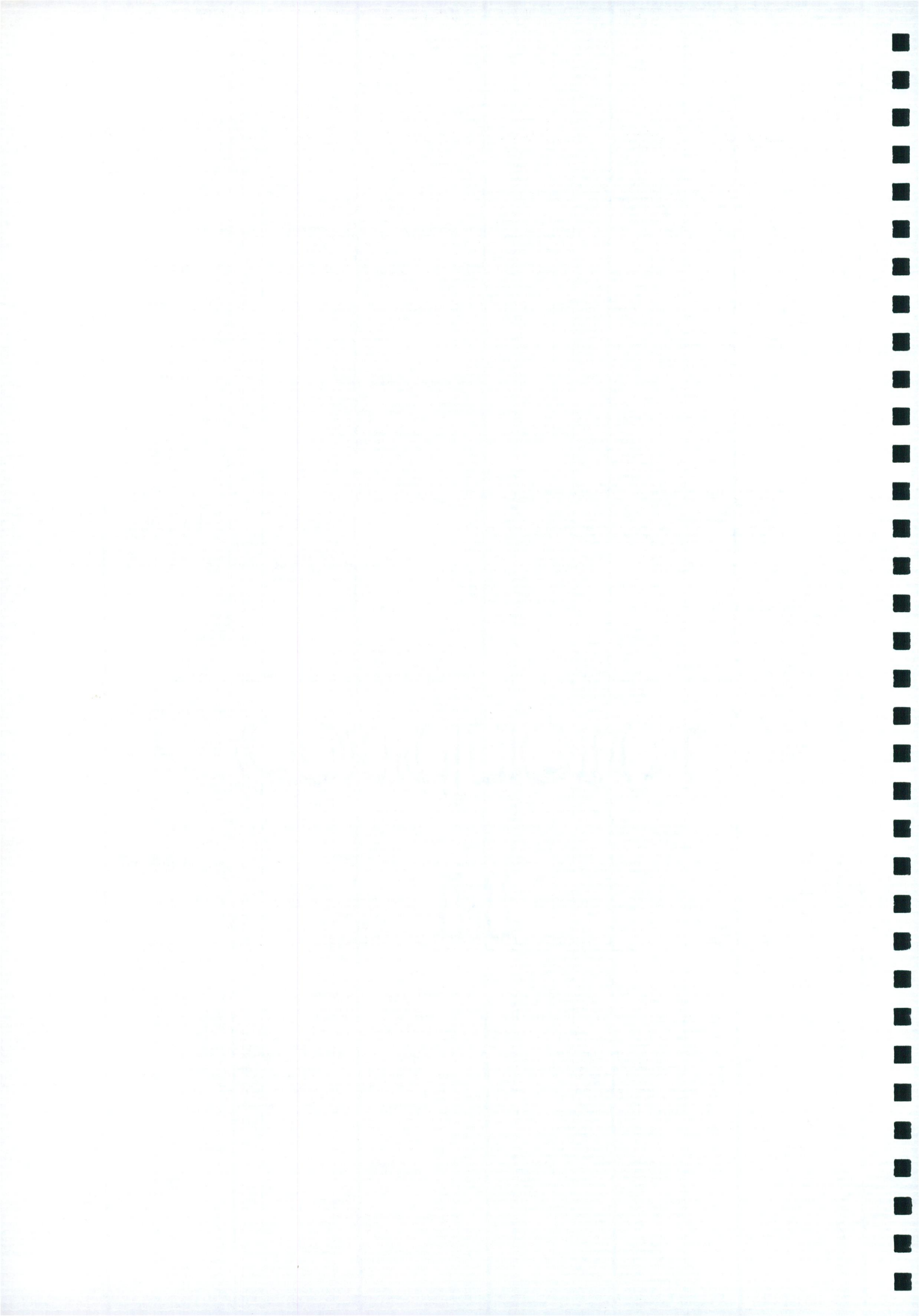
THREE

Greek civilisation has been revered and considered a highly evolved perfect society. For many years after its demise as the western world's dominating force, public opinion of the society that lived and ruled in Greece, was of admiration and awe. The Romans copied their art and architecture and the modern world is indebted to ideas and teachings of Greek philosophers and writers such as Plato, Aristotle and Homer. Our world also owes much to the influence of the art and artefacts originating in Greece.

The society living in Greece during the late Hellenistic period (150 - 30 BC) had the benefit of all the previous generations of learning, art and thought. It can be seen as a culmination of knowledge accumulated during the classical period and intervening years.

This standard account of an almost utopian rational society has been revised by more recent commentators. For example, it was a society that depended on slavery for its existence. It was a sexist civilisation, women were given little if any status and were placed in the same category as slaves for their similar lack of value and influence. This "perfect" society was only perfect for a minority of Greek, free males. It was a culture living within the boundaries laid down by this same minority of men. Michel Foucault writes about the oppression of women by the society in volume two of his "History of Sexuality: The use of Pleasure":

women were generally subjected to extremely strict constraints, and yet this ethics was not addressed to women. It was ethics for men: an ethics thought, written and taught by men, and addressed to men - to free men obviously. A male ethics, consequently, in which women figured only as objects or, at most, as partners that one had best train, educate, and watch over when one had them under one's power, but stay away from when they were under the power of someone else (father, husband, tutor).¹



The basis of the civilisation was male domination. John Onians writes that "they rejected the musical modes which seemed in any way feminine, because of their incompatibility with 'aretē' (mainly virtue)".² There is a parallel between these men's treatment of the women in the society and their fear of accepting the feminine within themselves.³ Onians goes on to say that:

It is characteristic that Plato should have insisted on the eradication of every trait that seemed a deviation from what he considered truly human, truly male and truly Greek⁴

... implying that Plato didn't consider women as being truly human, indicating their inferior status and lack of importance in this male order.

Seen in the context of the culture from which it originated, The "Laocoön" sculpture can be seen as an expression of the strangulation involved in living in such a rigid masculine society, where the showing of emotions was considered a weakness and an assault against the "aretē" mentioned above. Made in the last phase of the Greek era, before the domination of Rome, it signifies a joint venture on behalf of the people living in late Hellenistic Greece. It has been attributed to three sculptors, Athanodorus, Hageandros and Polydorus of Rhodes, however, there has been much controversy as to whether these artists made the Roman copy or the original. There is also a lot of disagreement over its date.⁵ However, for the purpose of this essay, I am citing Carpenter and Pollitt in assuming a late Hellenistic date (190 - 100 BC). The sculpture was produced from a compression of the collective thinking and attitudes from the age it was made in. It forms a concentrated image of the culture it emerged from.

One way in which the Hellenistic age differed from the classical, according to Onians, was the introduction of a visual type of allegory as opposed to the mythical one formerly used by Plato.



(It is difficult to find written evidence of the Laocoön myth so this visual representation may account for the lack of written documentation). The stoic system of thinking gained prevalence during the Hellenistic age. Onians says that:

The stoic wise man was supposed not to have the basic feelings of pain, fear desire and pleasure. These were the mark of the bad man. If a man was susceptible to any of these feelings he was susceptible to others. One could not feel pleasure and avoid pain, have desire and not be afflicted with fear. The pain and fear on the faces and in the gestures ofLaocoön identified ... (his) fatal weakness as (his) enslavement to passions. In fact, the stoics saw desire as the pursuit of what seemed, wrongly, to be good and pain as the subsequent experience of its badness. ⁶

Laocoön's expression of pain and his sensual face as opposed to the uniformity of other models from Greek sculpture (Apollo, Athena etc.) recall the circumstances of his suffering - the desire for love which resulted in his breaking the vow of celibacy taken by him as a priest of Apollo and fathering two sons, who are also destroyed in the moment of punishment.

The snakes as carriers of divine wrath, express the strangulation felt within a culture where people were not at liberty to express their emotions. "The Laocoön" reveals the struggle the people of the Greek society at this time had with the limitations and restrictions imposed on them by the rigidity of the structured society they lived in. In this respect there are parallels between the culture from which this sculpture emerged, and the culture within which Eva Hesse struggled to find expression.



Footnotes to Chapter 3

- 1 Michel Foucault, "The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality, Vol. Two" page 22.
- 2 John Onians, "Art and Thought in the Hellenistic Age", page 24.
- 3 Jung's theory of archetypes, designates both masculine and feminine parts within both sexes. The masculine part of a women can be called the animus and the feminine part of a man the anima.
- 4 Onians, pages 24 - 25.
- 5 The range of opinions varies greatly between art historians. G. E. Lessing, who wrote "Laocoön, an Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry", believed the sculpture to have a date of AD30, A W Lawrence's "Later Greek Sculpture" (pages. 40 and 130) argues that one of the three sculptors lived in Rome in 22 AD and puts the date at 5 AD.

However, Rhys Carpenter in "Greek Sculpture, A Critical Review" (pages 222 - 224) believes that the sculpture is in the same grouping as the Pergamon altar statues, made in the late Hellenistic period. (190-100BC)

J J Pollitt in "Art and Experience in Ancient Greece", (page 145) also dated "The Laocoön" as a late Hellenistic work produced under the influence of the Pergamene School.
- 6 Onians, page 25



FOUR

The New York art world Hesse returned to from Germany was one which was dominated by minimalism. Doyle describes their time in Germany as a kind of "half-time. When we came back everything was minimalism".¹

Before the Doyles left for Germany, they had moved studios to the Bowery, and while there Hesse became involved in a loosely knit group of artists working in the neighbourhood, including Robert Ryman and Lucy Lippard, Frank Viner, Robert and Sylvia Mangold. She had already met Sol Lewitt who was a close friend throughout her life and through him met Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, Donald Judd and Carl André, amongst others. Though her period in Germany had given her the freedom to test out her own voice away from the fray of the New York art world, Hesse constantly worried about her voice as an artist amidst artists like Lewitt, Bochner and Smithson who would bandy around concepts for hours at a time.² Hesse expressed her fears:

Sometimes I feel there is something wrong with me. I don't have that kind of precise mind. I don't know if I stand alone ... but ... I don't have that kind of a system.³

Hesse did not feel comfortable with the kind of conceptual totalising of people like Lewitt and Carl André. Within the New York artists' community to which she belonged, Hesse was uniquely aware of the damage totalitarian systems can do (from her childhood experience fleeing Nazi Germany). The work of André in particular, reminded her of 'the concentration camp. It was those showers where they put on the gas'. Such was her chilling reaction to his stark 'plains', with their square flat metal plates lined up on the floor. (See fig. 5). Hesse preferred not to have a strong theory to hold her work together. She said in the Nemser interview:

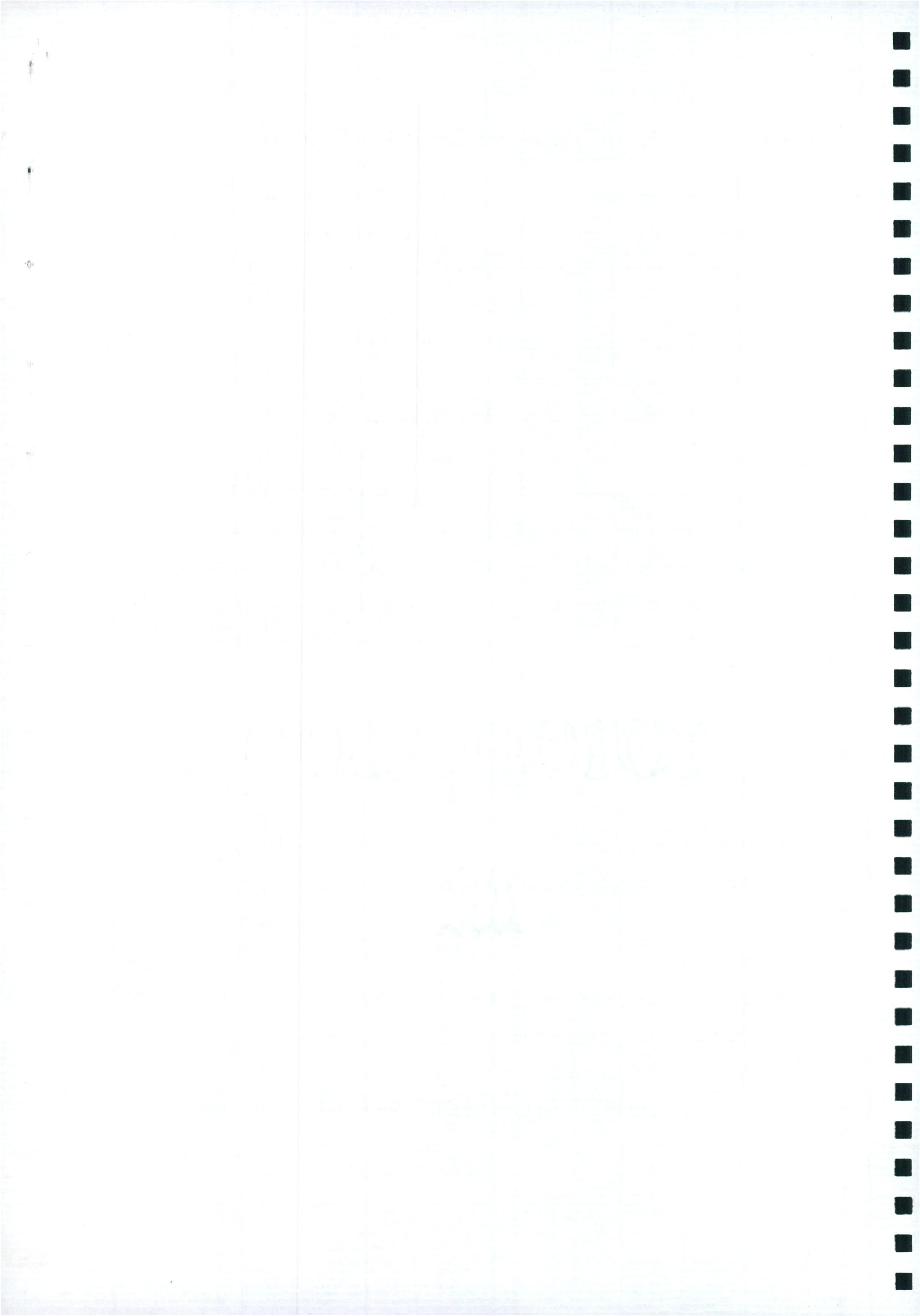
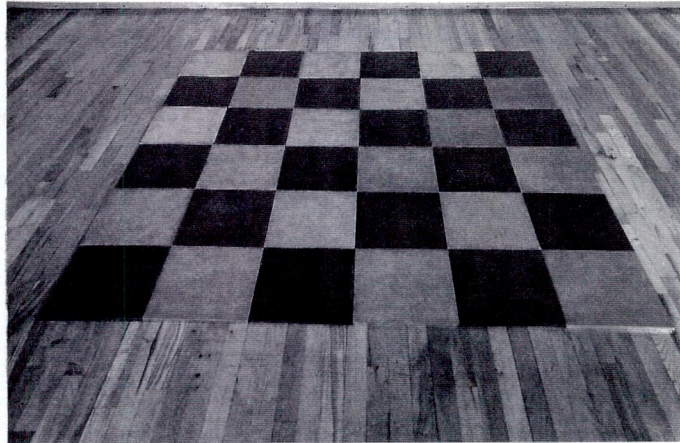


Fig. 5.



Carl André Lead Aluminium Plain New York 1969.
Lead and Aluminium, 36 Unit Square - 3'8" x 72" x 72" overall Seattle Art Museum.

I can't go on a sheer program. And at that time I thought 'the more thought the greater the art', but I wonder about that and I do have to admit I think there's a lot that I'll just as well let happen.⁵

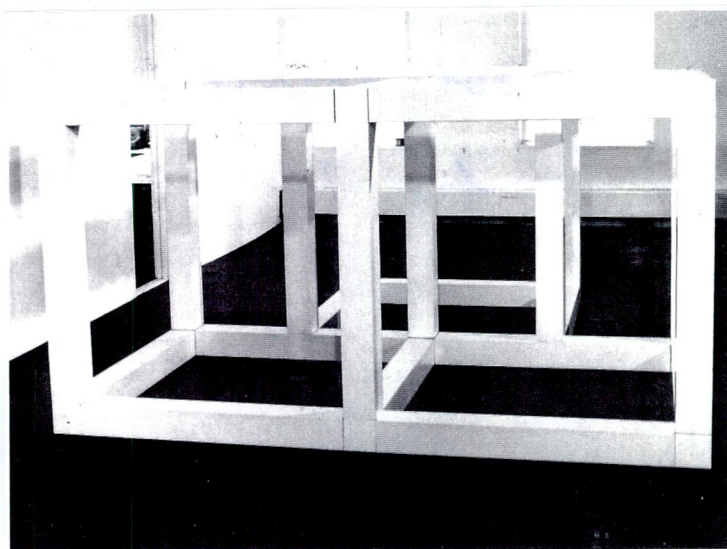
Surrounded by friends who were stressing the phallic rigour, formal and conceptual order and closure that resulted from their systems, contrast Hesse chose a system that was "ordered, yet non-ordered, chaos structured as non-chaos".⁶ Her work privileged a feminine sensibility which stood permeable and alone amidst the plethora of masculine work produced by her peers. This was emphasised by the fragility and malleability of the materials she used in contrast to the minimalist ethic of using materials that were more suited to industry than art and the work was signified by being deliberately de-selfed. Linda Norden writes that the carefully controlled male "voices in print" ... seem to have grown in direct proportion to the removal of the persona from the work. Some of the men working were also critics (Bochner, Smithson) and were involved in making their work according to a tight intellectual programme. Artists defined systems for themselves to work within and stuck rigidly to the confines of the concept they had chosen. Artist had turned their backs on the abstract expressionist works of the last generation and were using more mass-production techniques for making art.

Carl Andre
"Plains" ...

fig 5

Multiples were one product of this philosophy, and objects were mass-produced echoing non-art technology; also, serial art such as that produced by Sol Lewitt where one structure such as a cube was repeated over and over to emphasise the original element (see fig. 7). Using techniques like this, artists were interested in totally de-personalising their work.

Fig. 7



Sol Lewitt, HALF OFF PIECE
160 x 305 x 305 cm. Moderna Museet Stockholm.

Hesse's work on the other hand, was involved in an opposing concern.

While she was in Germany, Hesse realised that she wanted to create work that dealt with her own personal experience. In a diary entry of 1964 she writes:

... it just seems to me that the 'personal' in art if really pushed, is the most valued quality and what I want so much to find in and for myself.⁷

There is a very strong personal element in her work. Hesse took from minimalism what she felt was relevant to her concerns, her multiples for example, such as the sleeve pieces she made for friends from latex (figs. 9 & 10) or her piece "Tori" (fig. 11), were never similar. They were all personalised by the process she used to make them. She used serial art to repeat elements that amused her and to emphasise their absurdity.

sol. Zellwitt.

fig. 7



Fig. 9

Eva Hesse, UNTITLED ("TIPANELLI SLEEVE") 1968-69

Latex over cheesecloth, staples, rubber bands, and metal shielded hook-up wire with part of wire exposed. 2 x 3½ x 6¼ inches. Goia Timpanelli, New York

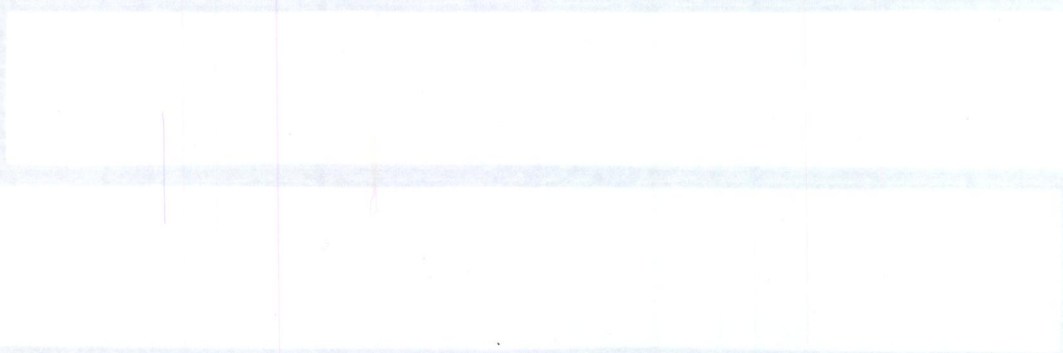
Fig. 10

Eva Hesse, ENCLOSED 1969

Produced as part of an edition of 100 multiples. Latex over cloth tape and balloon, each unit approx. 8" - 10" x 3" - 5" x 2" - 3", collection of Dr and Mrs. Aaron Esman, New York.



COPIES OF THE



2



Fig. 11

Eva Hesse, TORI August 1969

Fibreglass and polyester resin over wire mesh. 9 units each 30" - 47" x 12½" - 17" x 11¼" x 15". Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Fig. 13

Eva Hesse, REPETITION NINETEEN III July 1968

Fibreglass and polyester resin. Each unit 20" high x 12" diameter approx., with minor variations. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



The hand-made look that resulted in her pieces was a contrast to the hard-edged look of her minimalist peers. When she made "Accession II" (fig. 12), she used a box structure that had been fabricated for her by Arco Metals, a factory in Manhattan where Smithson was working at the time (1967). Her decision to have the structure made for her for the first time, did not in any way contradict her previous work's quality of being made by hand. When the structure of "Accession" was complete, she threaded to 30,670 holes in the sides with vinyl tubing by hand. This process takes all the hard edges away giving the whole piece a peculiar anthropomorphic quality.

"Repetition Nineteen III" (fig. 13) was another example of how Hesse manoeuvred the "rules" of minimalism to suit her own ends. All the elements of this piece are based on the same shape (a beaker-like vessel) but all are in varying degrees of distortion. Together they are placed in a congenial disorder.

Each unit is a distortion of the shape they suggest when together.
Each unit has been gathered into a different configuration.⁸

She went to Aegis Reinforced Plastics to fabricate the fibreglass version of this piece.⁹ Before this, she made all her pieces in her own studio, even the structure for "Accession" had been brought back from Arco Metals and completed in the studio. Lucy Lippard writes that "she went to Aegis with some trepidation; this was a real factory, utterly male-oriented, and she expressed fear of 'all those men with their great big sculptures'."¹⁰

Her feelings about entering the male-oriented factory of Aegis, reflect in microcosm her situation as a woman working within the New York art world. "Those men with their great big sculptures" perfectly captions the trend of art that dominated at the time.



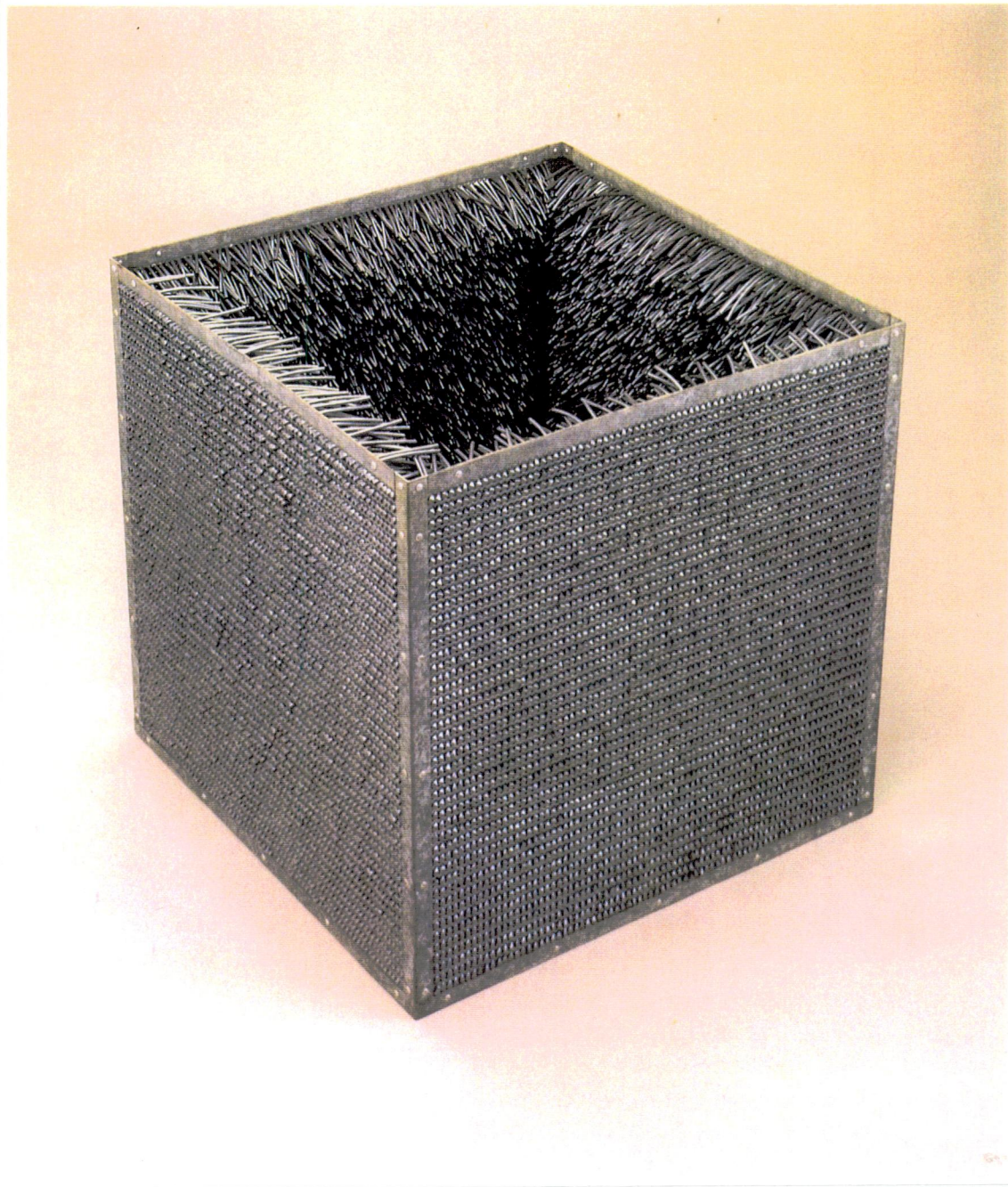
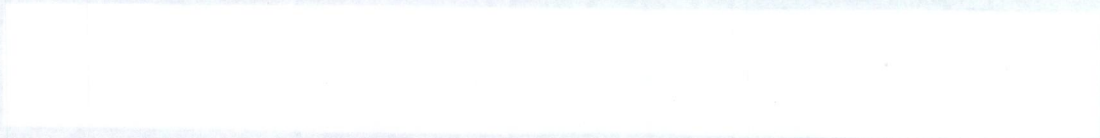


Fig. 12
Eva Hesse, *ACCESSION* Completed 1969
Galvanised steel and plastic tubing, 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Detroit Institute of Arts.



There was an almost 'salon' type snobbiness about the minimalist work with galleries and museums showing this idea-based conceptual work almost to the exclusion of everything else. One of the most well-known commercial galleries was the Dwan Gallery which represented all the most successful artists in the scene. Smithson, Lewitt and, most upsetting for Hesse, Doyle, all exhibited there. Hesse felt she was^{as} serious, committed and as good as her male associates and yet she wasn't being taken seriously as an artist by any of the major curators or gallery owners. While still in Germany Hesse's confidence had suffered through her competitiveness, at the beginning of her time there, with Tom Doyle. He was also working in a way that was personal to him, yet what resulted was the type of art that was embraced by the commercial galleries and that sold. (fig. 8). It succeeded under the collective minimalist heading. She wrote in a diary entry of the time, "Tom can achieve both in the right way, that is he can find himself in his work and then therefore achieve recognition".

fig. 8



Tom Doyle, ALLEY-OOP 1966
Iron 38 x 60 x 30 cm. Arnhard Scheidt, Kettwig, Germany.

This did not happen for Hesse. Her personal issues were considered too messy, too female for the art world she was living in.

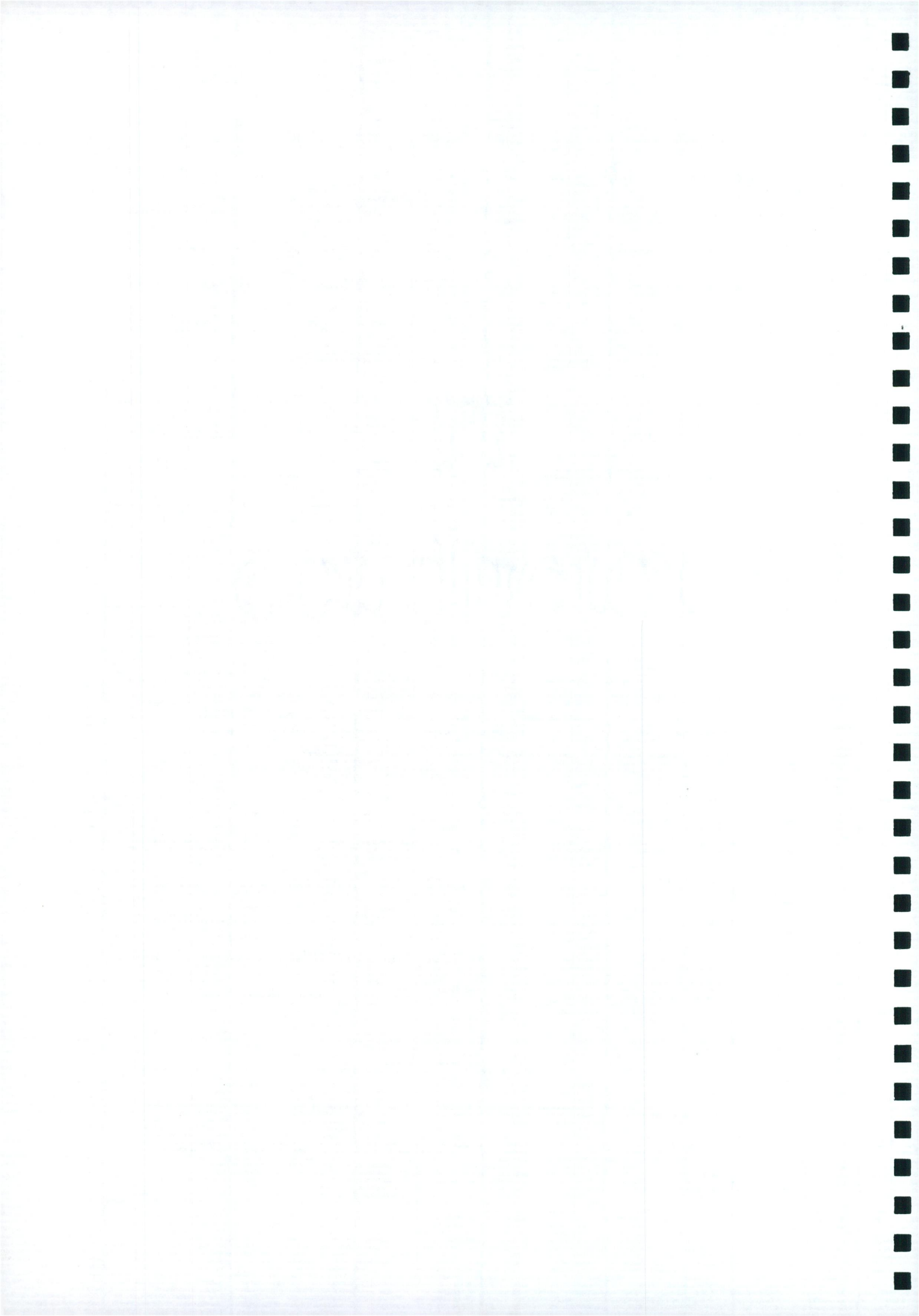


As a result, she wasn't considered an artist by most curators and art dealers because the work she was making wasn't commercially viable. This all changed when minimalist artists began to react against minimalism. Male artists such as Keith Sonnier, Richard Serra, Robert Morris and Bruce Nauman began to produce work that was much freer and looser than the previous harsh lines and stark surfaces that typified their earlier minimalist work. This new work was given the title "anti-form" by Robert Morris, and was signified by a move away from such minimalist materials as metal, canvas and paint, towards materials that had not really been considered "art" materials; felt, cloth, rope neon. Hesse was included under the collective heading of anti-form, even though she had been using these materials and the way of working that this title embraced ever since her return to New York from Germany. Sol Lewitt writes in 1978:

It was my friendship with Eva that made me aware of the problems what women artists face in a world dominated by a male hierarchy (critics, editors, museum and gallery administrators). There seems to be an implicit rule (even among female critics) that a woman can never be considered the dominant practitioner of a style or idea. When the time came for the type of work that Eva Hesse was doing (a reaction to minimalism, it was called 'anti-form', whatever that may be) to be officially recognised, she was relegated to a minor role. Only later did the mistake become evident. But even now women face the same intellectual blindness and sexist 'put-down'.¹²

In the years when minimalism was the dominant trend in the New York art world, the work Eva Hesse did was unpopular among the commercial galleries because it was unfashionable. With the advent of anti-form, Hesse's work became popular and sold. It was the beginning of her acceptance into this predominantly male world. She became a successful female artist at a time when this still constituted a political oxymoron.¹³

When Morris, Sonnier, Nauman and others turned to what was later termed anti-form, they did so as an intellectual decision to reject the minimalist principles that were then prevalent.



The move they made was a reactive one against minimalism. Hesse's work had evolved some years before from an ongoing struggle to find a voice for herself that expressed her feelings amidst the art world she was working in. The change made by artists such as the men mentioned above, was paralleled and aided critically by their ability to guide/persuade people into their way of thinking through their writings.

The late 'sixties witnessed the intense determination of many (mostly male) artists to control - through their own writing and published dialogues - both the perception of and critical response to their art.¹⁴

Hesse had noted in Germany with frustration:

I am ultimately convinced that people must first be told that so and so is great and then after a period of given time, they come to believe this for themselves.¹⁵

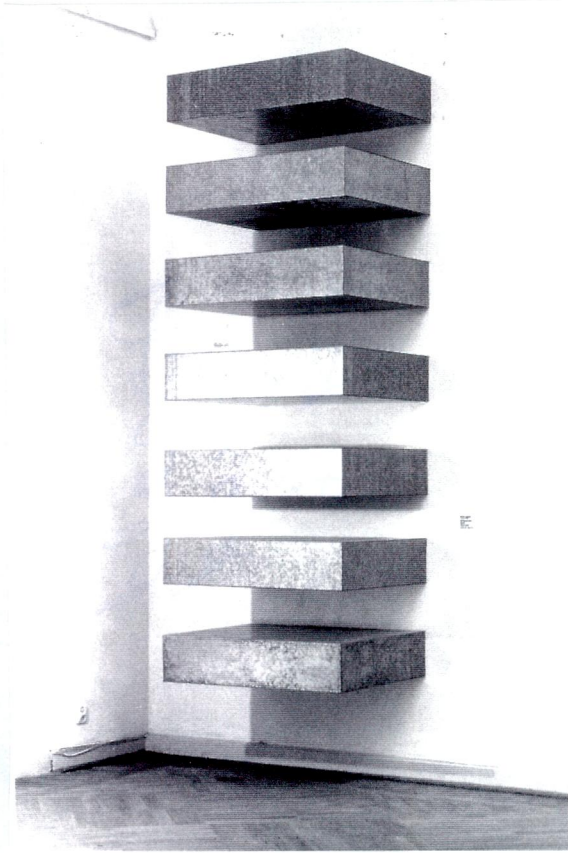
She suffered this feeling again in New York. Hesse's writings about her own work were descriptive rather than prescriptive. Her reflective, interrogative pieces read more like poetry in a total contrast to ...

... the sure statements of Lewitt, the carefully crafted epithets of Carl André, or the philosophical exegeses of Mel Bochner, Donald Judd, Dan Graham, Robert Morris or Robert Smithson.¹⁶

Hesse preferred to make her public statements within the art she produced. Unfortunately it was the prescriptive prose that made the work of the above male artists more commercially successful, which was frustrating for Hesse.¹⁷

Handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, in blue ink, centered on the page.

Fig. 6



Donald Judd, Untitled, 1966

Galvanised iron, ten units each 9 x 40 x 31 inches with 9 inch intervals. Collection of Gordon Locksley and George T. Shea. Locksley Shea Gallery.

In a letter she wrote to Ethelyn Honig while she was in Germany, she acknowledges the difficulties a woman has keeping her feminine identity while working in a male domain when she says: "There are handfuls that succeeded, but less when one separates the women from the women that have assumed the masculine role".¹⁸

She wrote in Germany, "Do I have a right to womanliness. Can I achieve an artistic endeavour and can they coincide".¹⁹

Hesse's "Laocoon" expressed the strangulation she felt working in the systematic structured world as a female artist, working to express concerns that were radically different from the prevailing trend. It was a world that had been made by males for males.

Bernard
J. Ward
fig 6

Footnotes to Chapter 4

- 1 Page 63, "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective", "Getting to Ick: To know what One is Not", by Linda Norden. Quoted from conversations by the author with Doyle in 1991.
- 2 Reference to Anna C Chave, "A Girl Being a Sculpture", "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective", page 107.
- 3 Hesse/Nemser transcript (quoted in "A Girl Being a Sculpture" as above).
- 4 Anna C. Chave quotes from Hesse/Nemser transcript in "A Girl Being a Sculpture", page 107. "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".
- 5 ib id.
- 6 ib id.
- 7 Diary entry of June 19, 1964.
- 8 Lippard, page 108.
- 9 Other "Repetition Nineteen"s were made. I - from papier maché and wire, painted white. A regular version of the fibreglass Repetition 19 III was rejected by Hesse.
- 10 Lippard, page 127.
- 11 Diary entry of July 14, 1964.
- 12 Quoted by Linda Norden in "Getting to Ick", page 51 - "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".
- 13 Diary entry of June 19, 1964.



- 14 "Getting to Ick", page 53, "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".
- 15 Diary entry of February 22, 1965, after Scheidt invited a group of friends to see Doyle's sculpture and Hesse's drawings.
- 16 "Getting to Ick", page 53, "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".
- 17 It was only at the end of her life, that this began to change when Cindy Nemser interviewed prominent women artists working at the time (others includes Marisol, Lee Bontecou and Louise Nevelson) in an effort to yield some information and reflection among artists not always predisposed to analysing their art. Nemser interviewed Hesse in 1970, three months before her death from a brain tumour. An edited version of the interview was published in "Artforum" in May about two weeks before she died. Subsequently Eva Hesse became widely known and respected as an accomplished sculptor.
- 18 Quoted in Lippard, page 205.
- 19 Diary entry of March 7, 1965.



FIVE

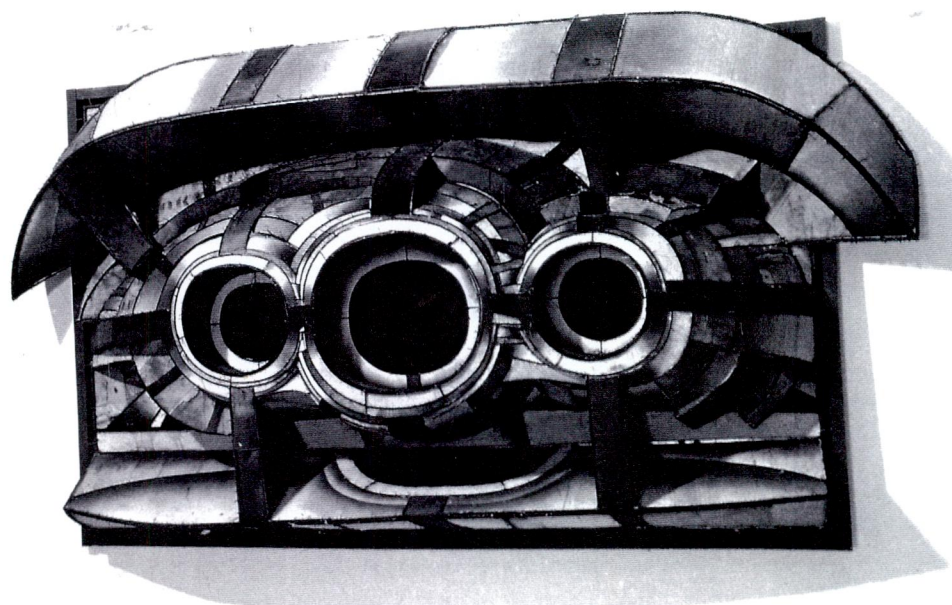
Hesse was among a minority of women artists working in New York between 1965 and 1970. Amongst these, were Marisol and Lee Bontecou, who had broken through the male barrier and achieved recognition. Hesse writes of Marisol:

Marisol does all the work herself. She will try anything, experiment with any media, incorporating all things ... What she does do though is leave too much on the surface. Design, decoration. Mystery is lost.¹

Bontecou's work was an example for Hesse of what it was possible to do and what it took to do it. She writes in her diary after meeting her:

Incredible! ... Spent an entire evening with Bill (Giles) and Lee Bontecou ... I am amazed at what that woman can do. Actually the work involved is what impressed me so. The artistic result I have seen and know. This was the unveiling to me of what can be done, what I must learn ...²

Fig. 14



Lee Bontecou, UNTITLED 1962
Welded steel on canvas, 65 x 111 x 20 inches. Leo Castelli Gallery Collection.

Andrew

fig 14

Lee Bontecou

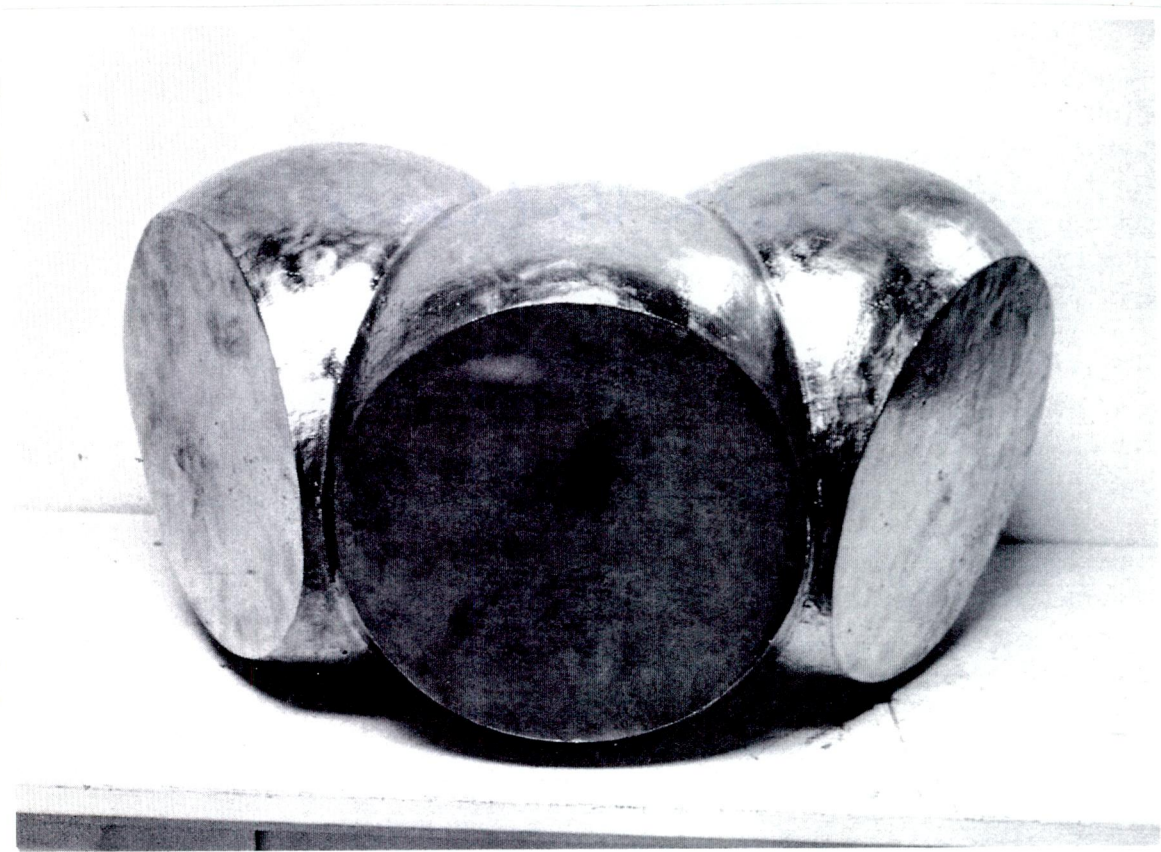


Fig. 15

Ruth Vollmer TRIMER 1965 - 66

Bronze, 27.5 x 27.5 x 57 cms. Jack Tilton Gallery, New York.

Ruth Vollmer

15

Along with Ruth Vollmer ³ (fig. 15), Lee Bontecou was one of the few established female artists that Hesse admired. Other contemporary female artists included her friends Grace Wapner and Ethelyn Honig, with whom she had shared her first studio with Doyle in Manhattan.

Hesse refused to be diminished by being written off as a "female artist" and categorised according to a gender-based discussion of her work. She wrote to Cindy Nemser: "The best way to beat discrimination in art is by art. Excellence has no sex". ⁴

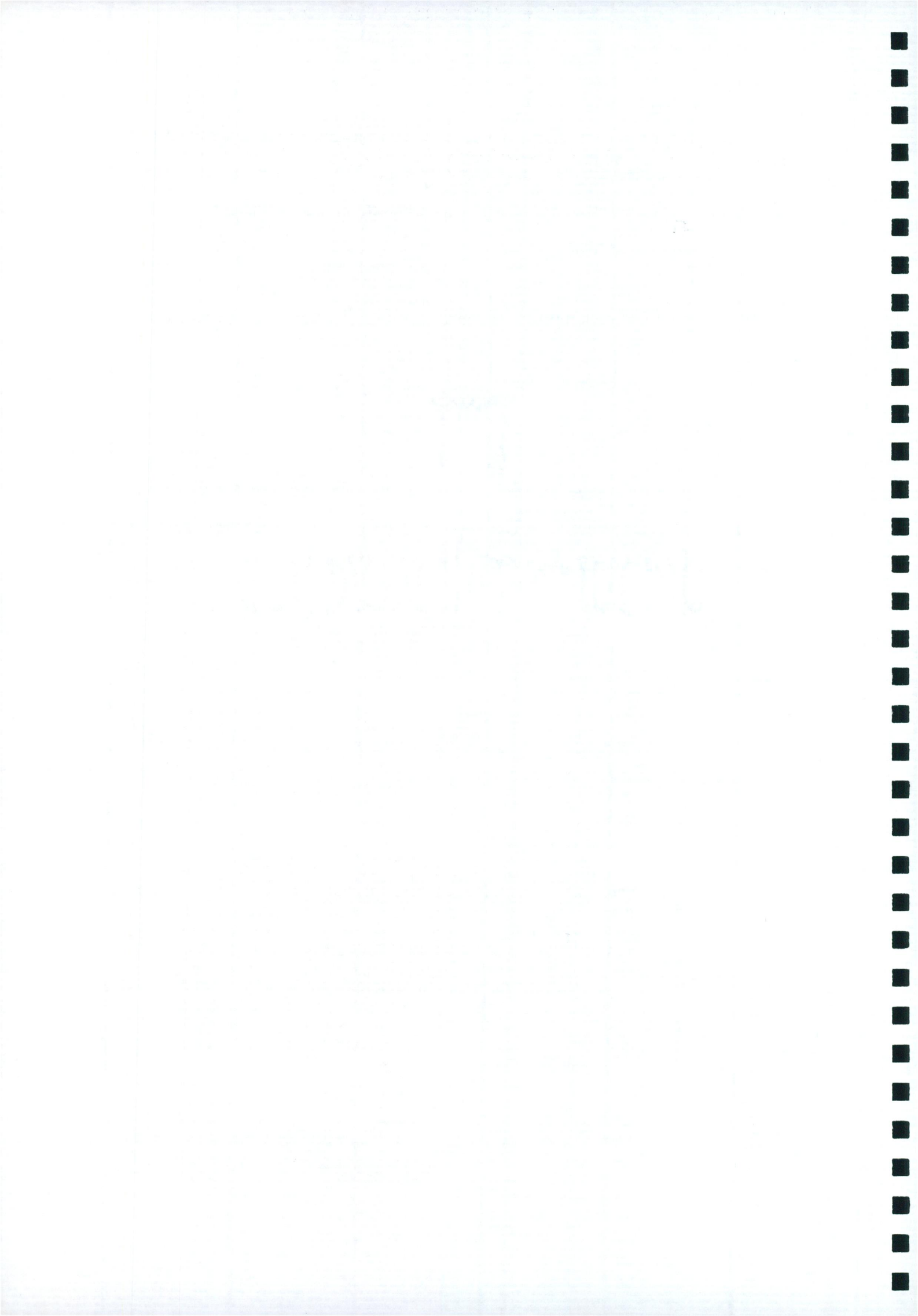
Hesse managed to accept her own sexual identity without making it either the subject or the syntax of her art. This was due in part to her attempt to implement what she had read in de Beauvoir:

What woman essentially lacks today for doing great things is forgetfulness of herself; but to forget oneself it is, first of all necessary to be firmly assured that now and for the future one has found oneself. ⁵

At the same time she acknowledged the difficulties a woman had working in such a male dominated world as the New York art world at that time. Early in 1965 she wrote to Ethelyn Honig:

I wonder if we are unique, I mean the minority we exemplify. The female struggle, not in generalities but our specific struggles. To me insurmountable to achieve an ultimate expression, requires the complete dedication seemingly only a man can attain. A singleness of purpose no obstructions allowed, seems a man's prerogative. His domain. A woman is side-tracked by all her feminine roles from menstrual periods to cleaning house to remaining pretty and 'young' and having babies. If she refuses to stop there she yet must cope with them. She's at a disadvantage from the beginning ... She also lacks conviction that she has the 'right' to achievement. She also lacks the belief her achievements are worthy.⁶

This was at a time when she was still living and working with Doyle, and continues to write:



My determination and will are strong but I am lacking so in self esteem that I never seem to overcome. Also competing all the time with a man with self-confidence in his work and who is successful also. ⁷

Much of the above letter owes to Simone de Beauvoir's conception of ambitious women in a man's world as "The Second Sex", which Hesse had just finished reading and recommended Honig to read.

Hesse's use of soft, malleable materials and her use of methods that had been denigrated in the past as "women's work" may be seen as an awareness of her position as a woman within the male society she lived and worked in, and of the pain this position often entailed. Anna C. Chave describes these methods in "A Girl Being a Sculpture":

Spinning and weaving, sewing and wrapping and bandaging: working with fiber is conventionally women's work and Hesse - like many women of her generation - learned as a matter of course, how to sew, knit and crochet. Historically, needlework has signalled women's confinement in the household and the limitation of their accepted creative outlets to activities that are, in the first instance, domestic chores. From one perspective, then, Hesse's extensive use of fiber might be seen as a symbolic concession to the constricting roles of dutiful daughter and wife. But in becoming a professional sculptor - one who courageously refused both academic and avant-garde orthodoxies - Hesse effectively declined such stultifying roles, while inverting the means and materials of women's work into a mode of self empowerment. ⁸

Hesse's work with fibre materials began in Germany when she started to experiment with the discarded cords and threads lying around the textile factory that was her and Doyle's studio. At about this time she records in her diary, the making of a scarf for her husband that anticipated the inversions to which she would later subject the material in later sculptures.





Fig. 16
Eva Hesse, ENNEAD 1966
Dyed string and painted papier maché, 36 x 22 x 1½ inches. Ganz collection, New York.

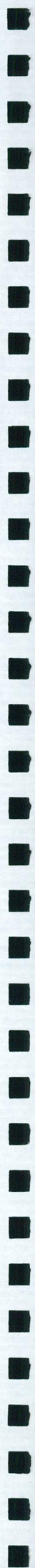




Fig. 18

Eva Hesse UNTITLED ("ROPE PIECE") 1970

Latex over rope, wire and string. Size varies with installation. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



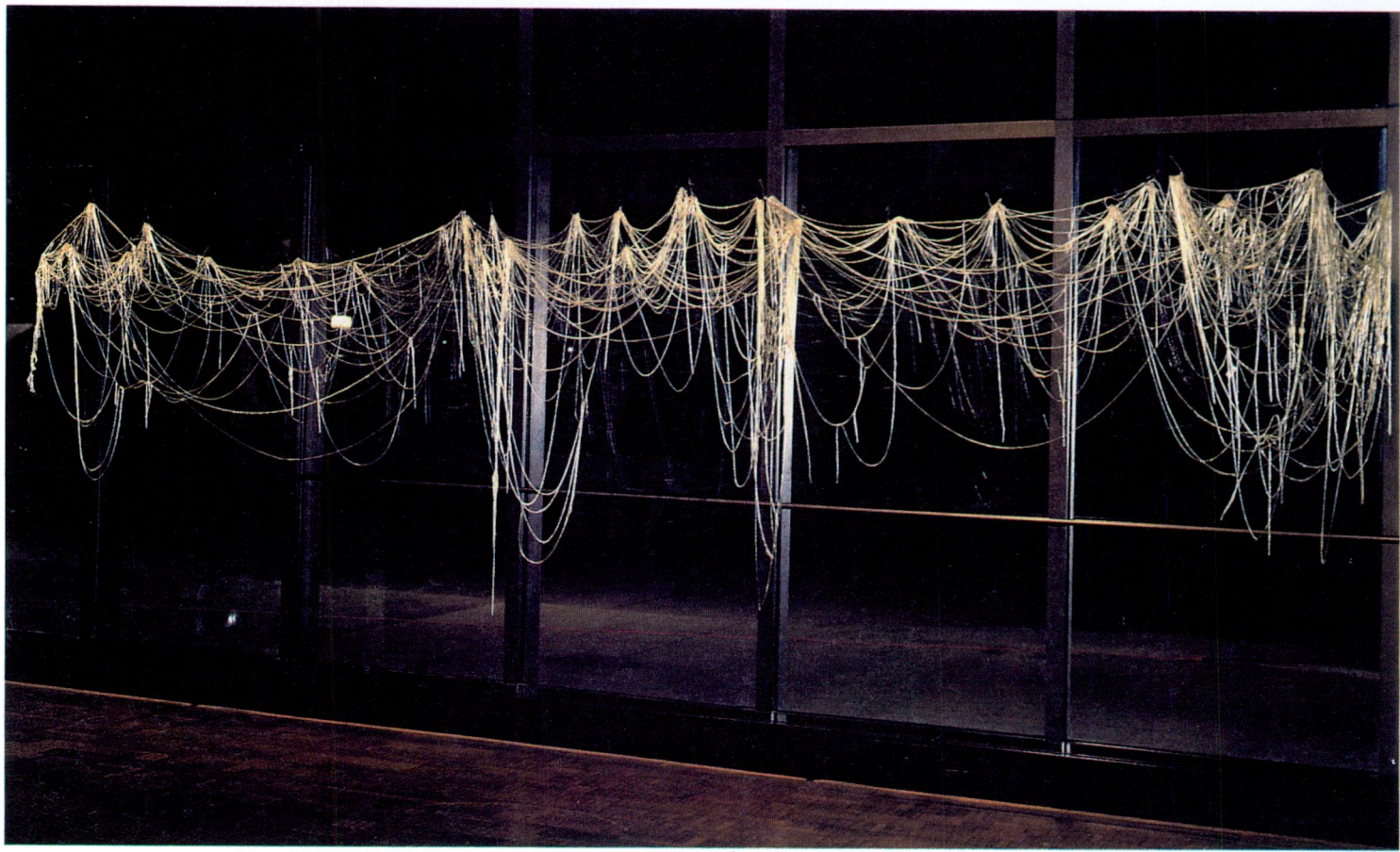
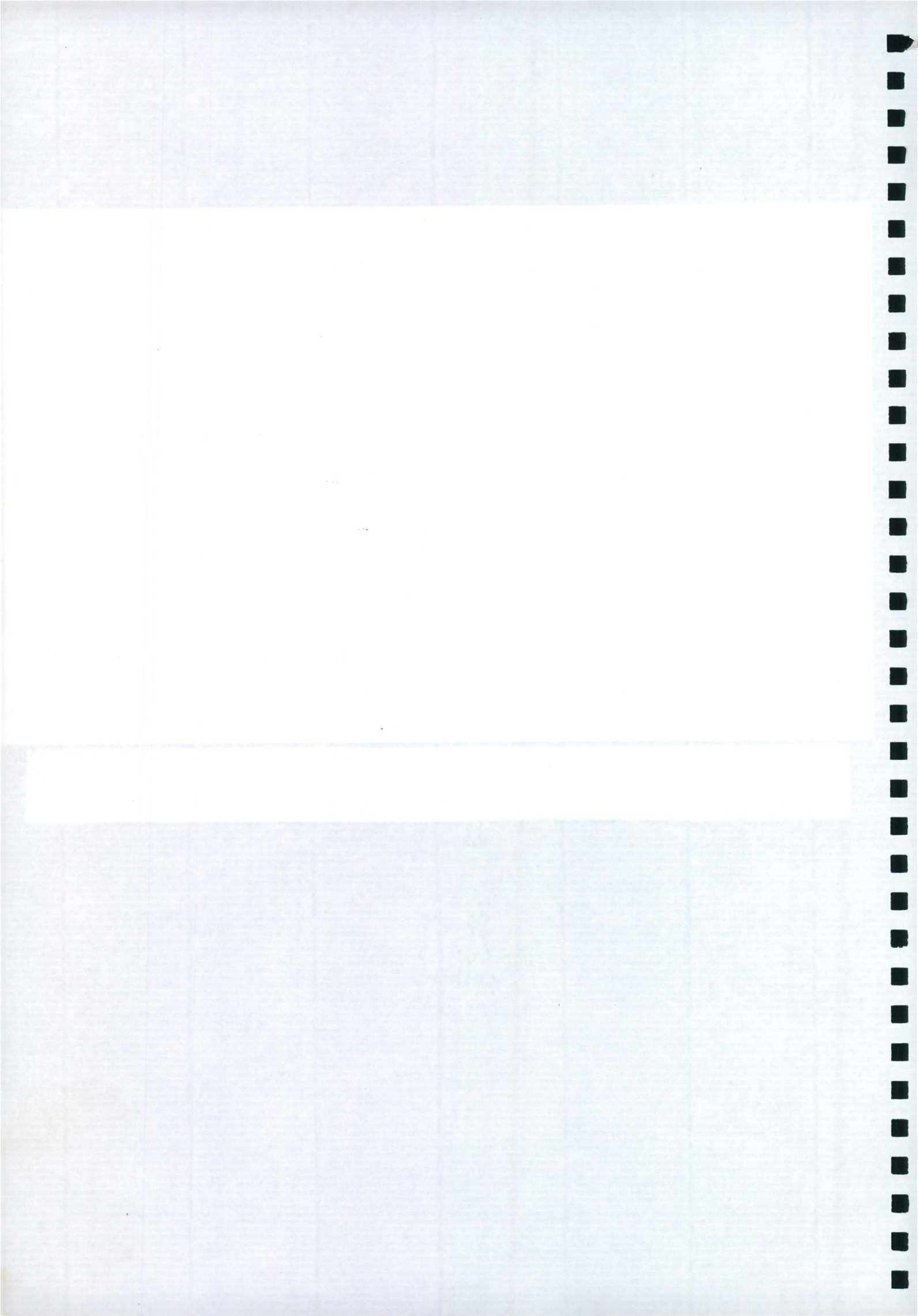


Fig. 17

Eva Hesse, *RIGHT AFTER* July/August 1969

Casting resin over fibreglass, cord and wire hooks. 60 x 216 x 48 inches (dimensions variable). Milwaukee Art Museum.



Needless to say, we bought the most wild wool we could find, of this they had only five skeins. I keep unravelling so I can hopefully get required length. The width keeps diminishing till now it can get no skinnier.⁹

Hesse continued to explore the chaos she could create from these traditional materials and methods in works like "Ennead" (fig. 16) which incorporates a knotted mass of rope into a wall based piece and further in pieces like "Right After" (fig. 17) and "Untitled (Rope Piece)" (fig. 18) where she feels sections of rooms with tangled expanses of ropes and knots, "these are not the carefully controlled displays of needlecraft, but like needlework gone berserk like a madwoman's overgrown macramé project".¹⁰

Hesse's use of obsessive activity in many of her sculptures can be seen as a method to criticise the structure she was working within, specifically minimalist structures and more generally, the New York art society of the time. She says of her hand-typing the plastic tubing knots through more than 30,000 holes, when she made the Accession boxes: "That's obsessive repetition",¹¹ and recognised that the obsessive or "endless repetition ... can be considered erotic"¹² based on an observation Lucy Lippard made about her work. This erotic quality made the work stand out among the barren, sometimes almost antiseptic work of her minimalist peers. Obsessive activity however, also entails as Catherine Clément has argued, a kind of exceeding and caricaturing of "limits in the direction of law, constraint, and conformity .. In adding more to the rigidity of structures, and in adding more to ritual (the obsessive person) works destructively".¹³ Hesse's Laocoon, obsessively bound and bandaged, can in this light be seen to criticise the stifling she felt within the minimalist male society she worked in.

Much of Hesse's personal agenda for work evolved from the pain she suffered in her life. Hesse was no stranger to physical illness and suffered from various ailments all her life, resulting in various bouts in hospital. She once equated her



struggle to be healthy with her struggle to be an artist: "Fight to be a painter. Fight to be health. Fight to be strong".¹⁴ Her illnesses gradually deteriorated into the brain tumour from which she died.

Hesse's emotional pain can be seen as having two sources: the first resulting from her tragic experiences in childhood, as a German refugee and trauma she suffered as a result of her mother's suicide; and her pain as a woman artist working in a male domain. Hesse's status in New York as a holocaust survivor was strongly emphasised by her father who kept numerous scrap-books of the political events leading up to their flight. A close friend of Hesse's, Rosalyn Goldman, said that "if one doesn't include Hitler in discussing Eva's life and art then one is missing the boat".¹⁵ Hesse spoke of herself as:

... the Eva who grew up sick and unhappy in the sickest of environments but therefore must make a new world where this does not exist.¹⁶

She described the pain she experienced as a child as causing "tearing apart insides - outsides damages unknown".¹⁷ Throughout her life she used her work to heal the wounds she suffered as a child and the pain she experienced in later life. In Jungian terms Hesse can be described as "the wounded healer". The origins of this archetype are described by Andrew Samuels:

Meir (1949) drew parallels between the ancient healing practices of the temples of Asclepius and modern analysis ... Healing practices and rituals took place within a closed setting, the temenos or temple precinct, and fostered sleep in the hope of the 'patient' having healing dreams. The teacher of the healing arts, Chiron the centaur, is depicted as suffering from an incurable wound.¹⁸

Hesse's "Laocoon", both in terms of the process of its making and the final work, operates in a cathartic mode. Such a work, generating a powerful emotional intensity, would in itself suffice to put Hesse outside the minimalist/conceptualist



pale. On the other hand, for any viewer ^{responsive?} reactive to Hesse's "Laocoon", the ^{experience?} expression of it, i.e. the aesthetic experience, is a return to the body and to the realm of feeling.¹⁹ This relates Hesse's work back to the Greek notion of the body, in contrast to the prevailing notion of intellectual appreciation in New York c. 1960. The viewer who relates to Hesse's "Laocoon" is responding aesthetically not to details of the artist's biography (this after all is an abstract and not a representational piece) but to the embodiment of these which suffuse the work and which through the process of unconscious association connect with the wounds of the viewer. The work is twice read simultaneously, so while wounded themselves, artists and other wounded healers can achieve a universality, can heal others through the process of exploring and healing their own wounds.

Healing procedures, in the context of physical hurts, are evoked in Hesse's work by her use of such materials as surgical hose, bandages and blood-pressure cuffs as sleeves. Medical procedures and healing rituals are also signified by Hesse's use of bandages and cords to bind and wrap her sculptures. Both the structure and the snakes in "Laocoon" are bound by this obsessive method, a metaphor for Hesse's method of healing herself. She describes another of her sculptures "Hang Up" (fig. 19) in the Nemser interview.

The frame is all tied up like a hospital bandage - like as if someone broke an arm ... The whole thing is absolutely rigid, neat, cord around the entire thing ...²⁰

The pain Hesse felt while she was in Germany led her to identify with the antique "Laocoön" which she saw in Berlin. She associated with the figure of the father "Laocoön" whom Lessing has referred to as the epitome of pain, as the greatest figure of suffering in Western art. Just as Laocoön was strangled by three devouring snakes in this product of a male oriented society, Hesse felt suffocated by the confines of the male society in which she was working.



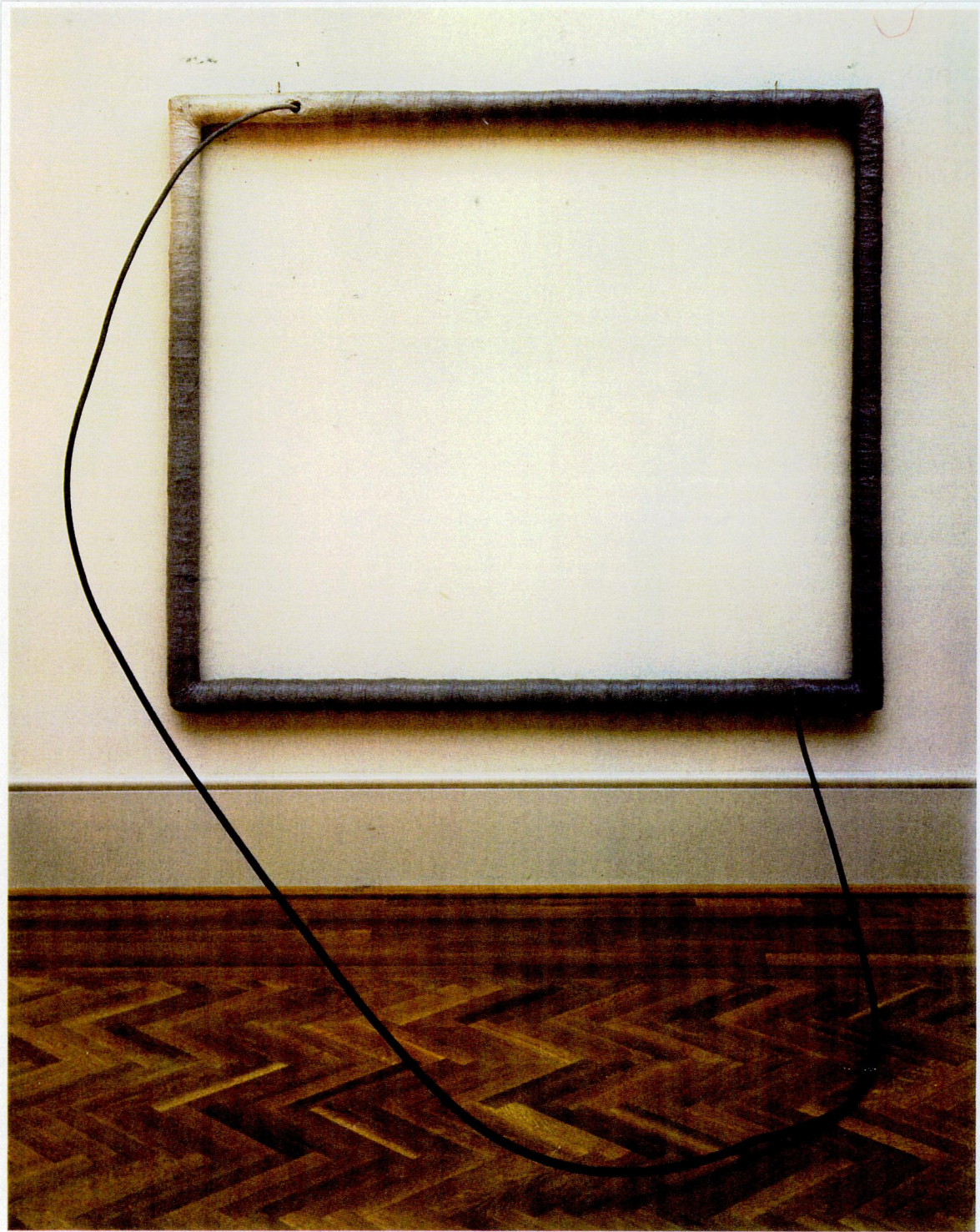
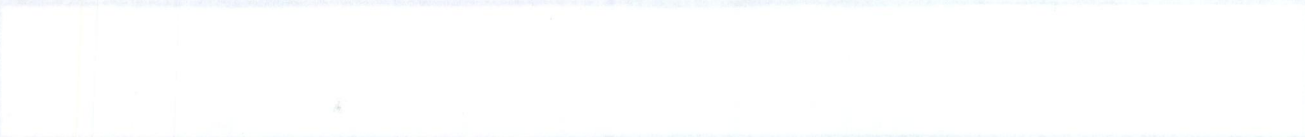


Fig. 19

Eva Hesse HANG UP January 1966

Acrylic paint over cloth over wood. Acrylic paint on cord over steel tube. 72 x 84 x 78. The Art Institute of Chicago.

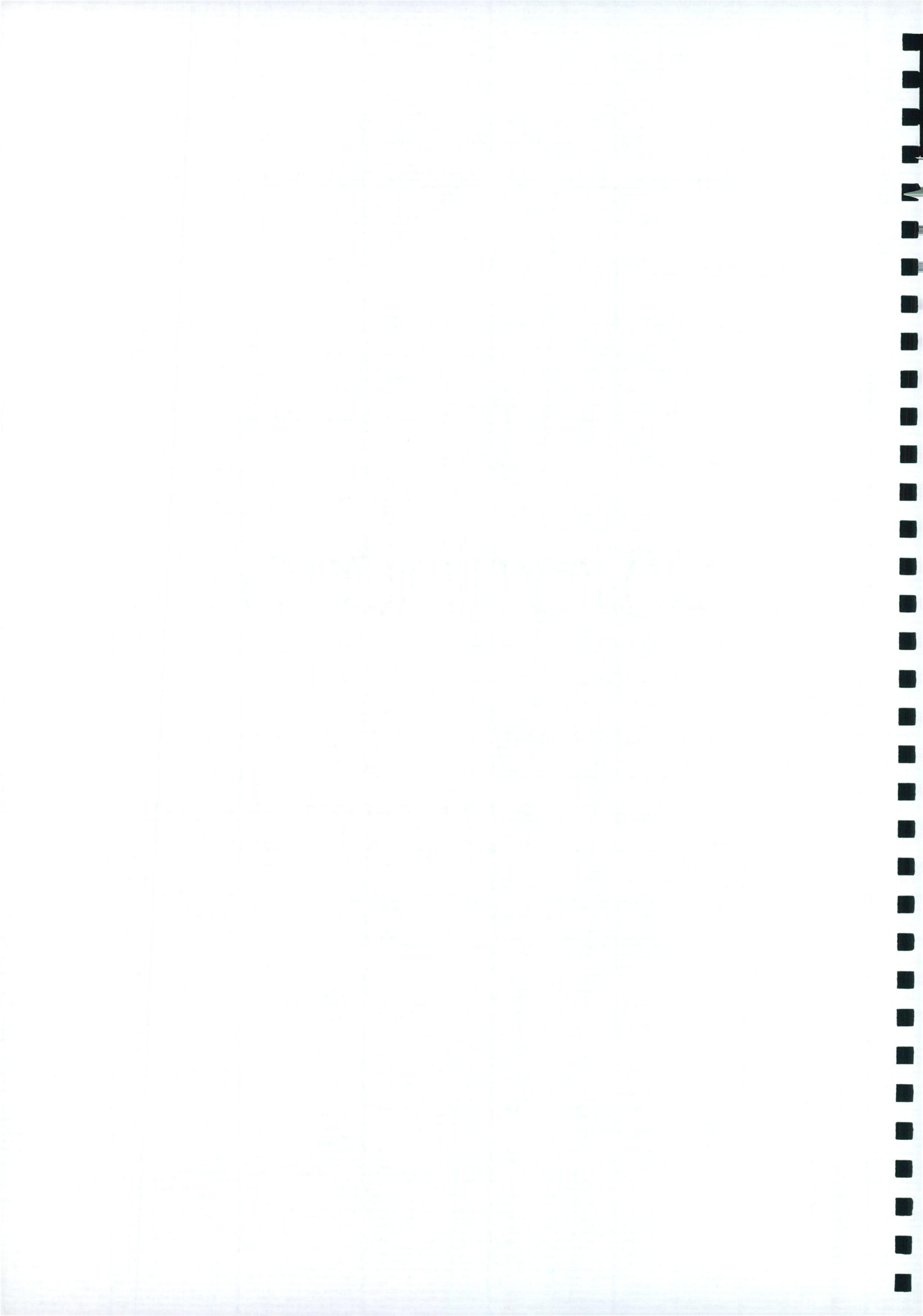


Footnotes to Chapter 5

- 1 Undated Diary entry (May 1966), quoted in "Do the Wrong Thing", by Robert Storr, from "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective", page 90.
- 2 Diary entry of 13 December, 1965, quoted as in 1.
- 3 Lippard mentioned the fact that Vollmer was something of a mother-figure for Hesse. She had the same name as Hesse's own mother - Ruth; Lucy Lippard "Eva Hesse", page 204.
- 4 Hesse scribbled this on the bottom of a letter Nemser sent her at the time of their interview asking her to answer questions.
5. Hesse quotes from Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" in a Diary entry of November 22, 1964.
6. Letter to Ethelyn Honig quoted by Ethelyn Honig in Lucy Lippard's "Eva Hesse", page 205.
- 7 Anna C. Chave, "A Girl Being a Sculpture", "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective", page 108.
- 8 ib id.
- 9 Diary entry of Saturday, 21 November, 1964.
- 10 Anna C. Chave, "A Girl Being a Sculpture", "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective", page 108.
- 11 Hesse/Nemser transcript, cited in "A Girl Being a Sculpture".
- 12 "Eros Presumptive", by Lucy Lippard, "Hudsen Review", Spring 1967, cited in "A Girl Being a Sculpture".



- 13 Anna C. Chave quotes from Helène Cixous and Catherine Clément, "The Untenable ; In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism", "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective"
- 14 Diary entry of April 24, 1960.
- 15 Quoted by Linda Norden in "Getting to Ick", page 64 "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".
- 16 Hesse/Nemser transcript quoted in Lippard, page 118, "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".
- 17 Diary entry of May 1966, quoted in Anna C. Chave, "A Girl Being a Sculpture", page 108.
- 18 Andrew Samuels, "Jung and the Post Jungians", Routledge and Kegan Paul, London Boston, Melbourne and Henley, 1985, from the Chapter "The Wounded Healer", page 187.
- 19 The Greek origins of the word aesthetic relate to the perception through the senses and not through thinking or intellect. It was misapplied by Baumgarten to "criticism of taste" and which has been used as an English definition since 1830. The 1798 definition was "received by the senses".
- 20 Hesse/Nemser transcript, quoted by Robert Storr in "Do the Wrong Thing" by Robert Storr, "Eva Hesse: A Retrospective".



SIX

When Eva Hesse saw the antique sculpture: "The Laocoön" in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, it triggered conscious and more importantly unconscious associations. This occasion caused knowledge stored in Hesse's collective unconscious to associate with this work, created over two thousand years earlier. Jung defines the collective unconscious as follows:

For Freud .. the unconscious is of an exclusively personal nature, although he was aware of its archaic and mythological thought forms. A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the 'personal unconscious.' But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the 'collective unconscious'. I have chosen the term 'collective unconscious' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrata of suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us. ¹

On a conscious level, Laocoön as an epitome of pain ² was a figure with whom Hesse could have associated with. She suffered a lot of pain in her childhood and had continual emotional and physical pain throughout her life. In view of the collective unconscious theory, the Laocoön can be seen as a symbol by which Hesse was able to connect two societies, the Greek society of 150 BC and the New York art world, ages apart which were basically similar.

Jung explains how a third element is necessary to unit conscious and unconscious:

As opposites never unit at their own level ... a supraordinate 'third' is always required in which the two parts can come together. An since the symbol derives as much from the unconscious, it is able to unite them both, reconciling their conceptual polarity through its form. ³



Hesse's conscious decision to make her "Laocoon" in 1966 ⁴ was united with the unconscious association she made between her society and the similar male oriented ethics of the Greek society c. 150 BC. The third element involved was the late Hellenistic "Laocoön", which triggered the collective unconscious memory in Hesse. Jung has said of its influence:

... the collective unconscious is a living force that follows its own inner laws and gushes up like a spring at the appointed time. ⁵

... and so it appears that it chose the occasion of Hesse's seeing the "Laocoön" to spring up and take effect.

The myth behind the creation of the Greek sculpture may also have had some influence upon Hesse's collective unconscious association. Although there is much confusion over the events in the myth, the most important elements were immortalised in "The Laocoön" by its portrayal of the punishment of a father and his sons by a power beyond their control. This power; which takes the form of the Gods revered within the Greek society; legitimised the given social order. In this case, the priest Laocoön was punished by the Gods which constituted religion that was a reflection of the repressive rules created by the society. Jung says that ...

... such ideas or representations collectives' are always true in so far as they express the unconscious archetype, their verbal and pictorial form is greatly influenced by the spirit of the age.

Of the different forms of religion present within various different societies, Jung writes that they were created...

... in the obvious attempt to conjure up or re-awaken those deeper layers of the psyche which the light of reason and the power of the will can never reach, and to bring them back to memory. ⁷

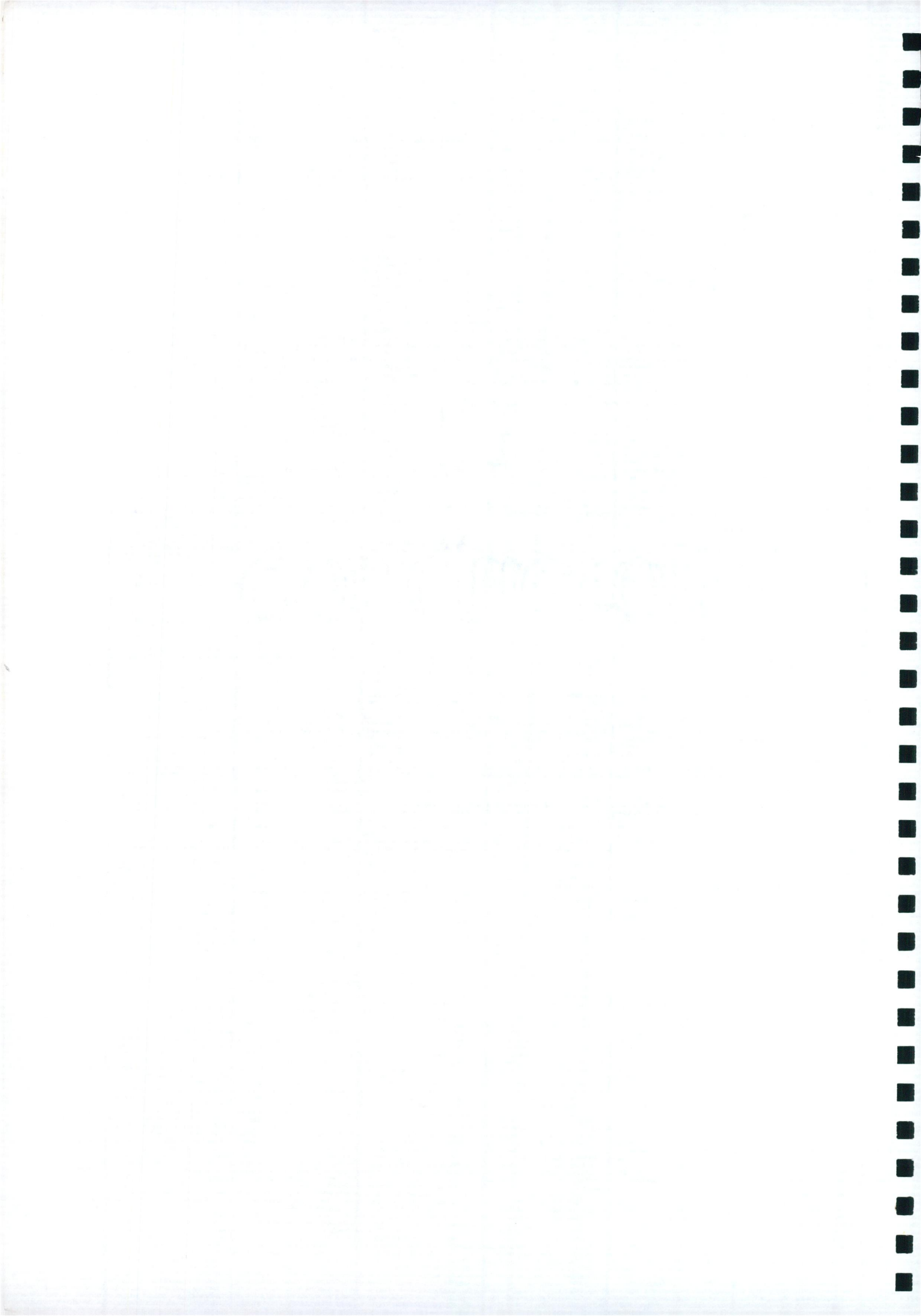


The society was controlled by males, created for and by men. The Gods can be seen as a creation of this society, to enforce the restrictive rules that were present under this male order.

Jung has written that ...

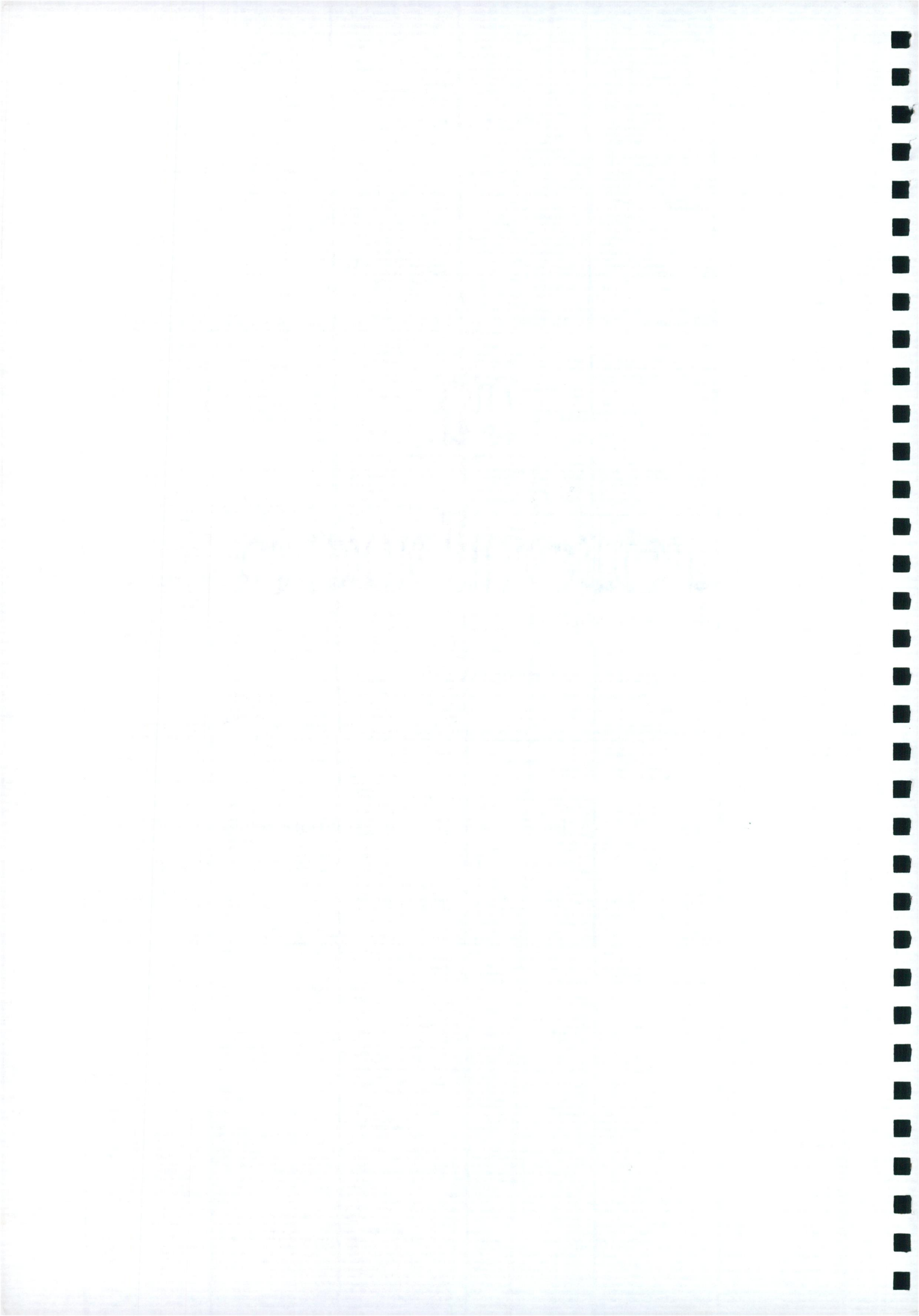
... myths and fairy-tales give expression to unconscious processes, and their rebelling causes these processes to come alive again and be recollected, thereby re-establishing the connection with conscious and unconscious.⁸

The rigidity that existed in the late Hellenistic society from which "The Laocoön" originated was portrayed to Hesse through the sculpture and which depicts the punishment that ensued when those rules were broken. She made an unconscious connection between the Greek society and the society she lived in: the male dominated New York art world. The order within her society enforced minimalist and conceptual reasoning. Hesse struggled with the rules of this society and the unfairness of its sexist judgement of artists. She embodied this struggle through making her sculpture "Laocoön". In making this sculpture in 1966, Hesse brought to consciousness the contents of the myth that were stored in the unconscious form within the Greek Laocoön. These contents related closely to the New York society she lived in and in a broader sense relate to every viewer who has seen her sculpture.



Footnotes to Chapter 6

- 1 "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" by C G Jung page
- 2 As described by G E Lessing in "Laocoön", an essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry".
- 3 Jung, "Aion", page 180.
- 4 There was a two year interval between Hesse seeing the "Laocoön" and making her "Laocoon", which gave her the time to associate unconsciously with the similarity of the masculinist ethos between the two societies, whereas before going to Germany, she hadn't really experienced the sexism of the art world as directly.
- 5 Jung, "Mysterium Coniunctionius", page 104.
- 6 Jung, "Mysterium Coniunctionius", page 522 (Chaper VI, "The Conjunction").
- 7 Jung goes on to say that if this collectively produced idea of religion changes "the rite loses its meaning and degenerates into mere superstition - examples of this on a grand scale are the extincion of the ancient Egyptian civilisation and the dying out of the Gods of Greece and Rome." Mysterium Coniunctionius, page 523.
- 8 Jung, "Aion", page 180.



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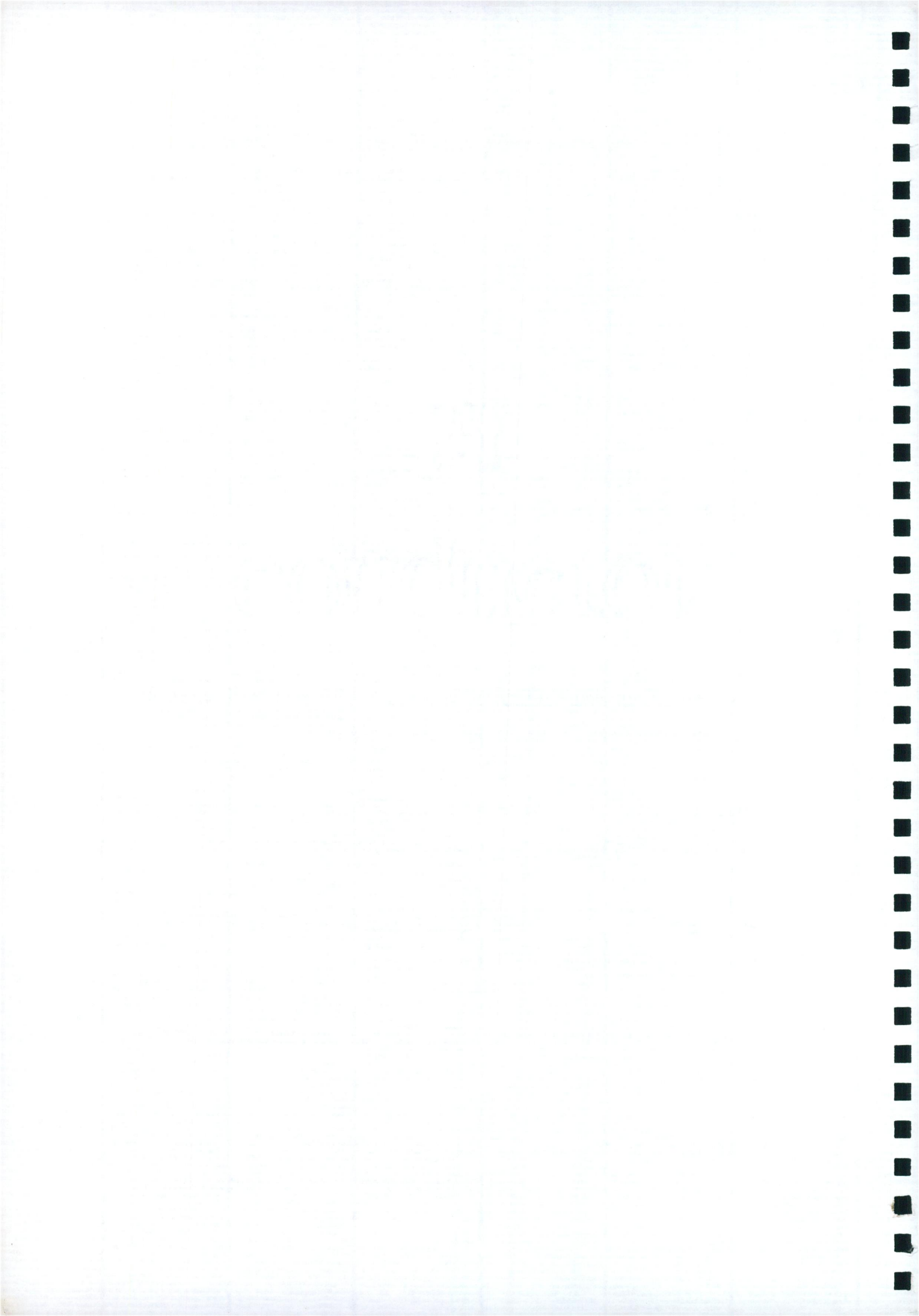
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