

# National Gallery of Art

## NEWS RELEASE

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### NATIONAL GALLERY COLLECTORS COMMITTEE

#### SELECTS EVA HESSE'S "TEST PIECE FOR 'CONTINGENT'"

#### FOR ITS 1996 ADDITION TO THE COLLECTION;

#### ALSO MAKES POSSIBLE ACQUISITION OF KEY WORKS ON PAPER

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Test Piece for "Contingent" (1969), among the last six works created by Eva Hesse, was selected for purchase by the National Gallery of Art's Collectors Committee for inclusion in the Gallery's twentieth-century collection, director Earl A. Powell III announced today.

"Test Piece for 'Contingent' is one of the most hauntingly beautiful and remarkably innovative objects that Eva Hesse created during her brief life," said Powell. "It will be the first piece by this influential artist to enter the Gallery's collection."

The work is currently installed for public viewing in the upper level galleries of the Gallery's East Building. It is suspended vertically, perpendicular to the wall, and measures twelve feet in length by forty-four inches across. With Test Piece for "Contingent," Hesse breaks down traditional barriers

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between painting and sculpture, creating an amalgam of both with a painterly application of latex to a cheesecloth support. Draped over a dowel, the work conveys a liberation from form, appearing as a radiant skin that has been peeled from a canvas or a sculptural body. Although it is abstract, Test Piece for "Contingent" bears certain associations with the human body in its skin-toned coloration and tactile surface. The austerity of minimalism is blended with the sensuous qualities of so-called post-minimalism.

According to the Gallery's curator and head of twentieth-century art, Marla Prather, this work "has the compelling emotive presence that has attracted Hesse's audience since the 1960s."

Test Piece for "Contingent" was made by Hesse in preparation for a work consisting of eight suspended, bannerlike elements. Called Contingent, it was executed later in 1969 by Hesse's assistants under the artist's direction and is in the collection of the Australian National Gallery, Canberra.

Eva Hesse was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1936 and in 1939 emigrated with her family to New York, via Amsterdam and London. She studied art formally from the time she was sixteen until 1959, earning a bachelor's degree from Yale University that year. Hesse worked in Germany from 1964 to 1965 with her then husband, sculptor Tom Doyle, under the patronage of industrialist and art collector F. Arnheidt Scheidt. It was at Scheidt's

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factory in Kettwig-am-Rein, near Düsseldorf, that Hesse made her first sculpture. Upon her return to New York, Hesse continued making sculpture until her death in 1970 at the age of thirty-four.

The Collectors Committee also made possible the acquisition of a number of works on paper. The group includes seven photographs: Robert Adams' Apple Road, West of Lyons, Colorado (1980) and On Signal Hill, Overlooking Long Beach, California (1983); Harry Callahan's Morocco (1981); Mark Klett's Under the Dark Cloth, Monument Valley (1989) and Longest Day: Last Light of the Solstice, Carefree, Arizona (1994); and Hiroshi Sugimoto's Caribbean Sea, Jamaica (1980) and North Pacific Ocean, Stinson Beach (1994). These are the first works by Klett and Sugimoto to enter the Gallery's collection. The print acquisitions are R. B. Kitaj's In Our Time: Covers for a Small Library after the Life for the Most Part (1969), a portfolio of fifty screenprints; Louise Nevelson's etching, Figures in the Forest (1953-1955); and James Turrell's Deep Sky (1984), a portfolio of seven aquatints.

Since 1975 the Collectors Committee has made possible the acquisition of sixteen paintings, seventeen works of sculpture, and two tapestries, as well as five drawings, 114 prints (including several series), thirty photographs, and two illustrated books.

The committee was formed in 1975 under the leadership of

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Ruth Carter Stevenson, chairman of the Gallery's Board of Trustees since 1993. The committee's goal was to help select commissions, such as Alexander Calder's giant mobile Untitled (1976), for the great public spaces of the East Building, then under construction, and to finance them through Committee members' annual contributions. When the committee completed that goal three years later, it began a new role of purchasing for the National Gallery paintings and sculpture by major twentieth-century artists. In 1989 the Collectors Committee established a curatorial discretionary fund for acquiring prints, drawings, and photographs.

The Collectors Committee is the principal means by which later modern and contemporary art is purchased for the National Gallery. Each year the Gallery's curators present a group of works to the committee, from which it may vote to choose as many as its funds and members' interests allow. Approximately half of the committee's acquisitions have been works by living artists.

The committee is currently chaired by Barney A. Ebsworth and Doris Fisher, both major collectors of twentieth-century art. Ebsworth, from St. Louis, is the owner of INTRAV, a travel company, and Clipper Cruise Lines. Fisher, who lives in San Francisco, is co-founder with her husband Donald of The Gap.

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