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Abstract: Psychosexual Strategies of Enclosure and Entanglement: Re-Reading Bourgeois and Hesse

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Enclosure and entanglement underscore shared themes in the works of both Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse. Used as both strategy and image, enclosure and entanglement indicate metaphorically the psychological consequences of space or the connections between individuals. Each artist focused in her works on the domestic as an enclosed, contained environment, suggesting protection as well as claustrophobia. Entanglement is evident in Bourgeois’s and Hesse’s continued emphasis on needle-based or weaving forms. Entanglement themes and strategies are used in their oeuvres to imply emotional solidarity as well as interpersonal oppression.

These two artists share important biographical similarities. Through comparative examination of several major works by each artist, the importance of enclosure and entanglement is shown to be key to understanding their art. Those works in which such significant usages appear are those which exemplify major developments or progressions within each artist’s evolution.

Related sources in Bourgeois’s and Hesse’s autobiographies include their artistic inheritances from Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism which contributed to their focus on enclosure and entanglement. Investigation of the feminist underpinnings of drawings, paintings, and sculptures by Bourgeois and Hesse demonstrates the psychosexual roots of their employment of the body, their working out of compulsions and obsessions, their exploration of domestic spaces, and their incorporation of needle-based and weaving forms.

Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse used their art to foster new phenomenologies of space, images, and forms, that (re)present a feminine sensibility. Providing a purposeful response to their own experiences, they created original art which has been influential in many quarters. Through their similar reliance on entanglement and enclosure, they transformed the treatment of process, materials, and space. This concentrated thematic study of Bourgeois’s and Hesse’s usage of these strategies and devices investigates their individual struggles to expand the boundaries of personal expression, to create a dialogue with historical and artistic processes and movements, and, most dramatically, to define and comment on this dialogue from a radically personal and feminist perspective.