

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG WOMAN

Documenting the Innovation and Influence of Eva Hesse

The documentary feature *Eva Hesse*, which follows the life of the pioneering mid-20th century artist throughout the rise of her career, marks the feature film debut of director Marcie Begleiter. Produced by Karen S. Shapiro (*Beat the Drum*) and Michael P. Aust (*Pommes essen*), the Zeitgeist Films release premiered at Film Forum in New York in April.

Eva Hesse charts the artist's life from her escape from Nazi Germany at age 2 to her emphatic break with Minimalism, followed by her tragically early death from a brain tumor at age 34, and her posthumous celebration as one of the most important artists of the second half of the 20th century. A German-born American artist who quickly rose to fame in the 1960s New York art scene following more than 20 group shows and a cover article in *Artforum* magazine in 1970, Hesse died that same year. And although only a single solo show of her sculpture was staged during her short life, subsequent years have seen multiple retrospectives. Her work has been added to the permanent collections of museums including the Whitney, Hirschhorn, Pompidou in Paris, London's Tate Modern and MoMA in New York.

The partially Kickstarter-funded project, which raised more than \$66,000 from 468 backers, was shot by cinematographer Nancy Schreiber, ASC, and assembled by editor Azin Samari.

Schreiber says of working with Begleiter, "Because of Marcie's background in the arts, as well as her being a professor and author, I was intrigued by the project and knew it would be a very fruitful and creative collaboration."

Samari used Avid Media Composer to edit *Eva Hesse*, which interweaves archival footage shot by German filmmaker Werner Nekes when he was still a student with material from Hesse's unpublished journals (with voiceover narration by Selma Blair), newly uncovered still photographs, and selections from nearly 60 hours of interviews



Eva Hesse in Textiel Factory Studio, Kettwig, Germany, 1964

with art world luminaries including artists Dan Graham, Richard Serra, Carl Andre, Robert and Sylvia Plimack Mangold, and Nancy Holt. Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate museums, Whitney curator Elisabeth Sussman and writer Lucy Lippard, all of whom curated important Hesse exhibitions, also appear in the film, along with beautifully lit shots of Hesse's work.

"I keep returning to Avid 6.5.4, partially because of compatibility issues with Mac operating systems, but mainly because of the ScriptSync feature, which I heavily rely upon for documentary projects," Samari comments. "It's an invaluable feature—you can just open a transcript, type in a specific keyword, and then bring up that frame of that interview. It would have taken much longer to do the same work without that tool."

Schreiber initially opted to use a Sony PMW-F3 digital camera outfitted with Cooke 18-100mm lenses to capture seated interviews for the project, which spanned more than four years and three generations of cameras before it was completed. For footage of the art itself, Schreiber employed an older Angenieux HR 25-250mm lens along with a macro lens or diopter on the zoom lens to get close-up shots of the materials Hesse used in her work.

Working with camera houses Birns & Sawyer in Los Angeles, TCS in New York, Daufenbach Camera in New Mexico, and a range of vendors in the U.K. and Germany, Schreiber occasionally also used a Fujinon Alura 18-80mm T2.6 zoom lens and various prime lenses coupled with a light Schneider Classic Soft filter or Tiffen Glimmerglass, depending on the interview subject.

Because they were shooting fine art in museum settings, the production team wanted to employ the best cameras it could afford, but they needed to avoid the high cost of storage a 4K workflow can entail. In the end, Schreiber shot in 2K, pairing the Sony F3 with AJA Video's Ki Pro Mini as an external recorder in order to capture 10-bit 4:2:2 S-Log footage. "I liked the color of the F3," she recounts. "I had worked with it before, and it was small enough to take into people's studios and more affordable than the [ARRI] Alexa, which I most often shoot with when I'm shooting digital. At that time the F3 was the perfect choice."



Director Marcie Begleiter and cinematographer Nancy Schreiber discuss shooting Hesse's "Untitled (Rope Piece)," 1970, at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Hybrid Kits

High performance counterbalanced fluid video heads with our top selling photo tripods.



MVK500190X3
\$299.99

MVK502055XPRO3
\$399.99

Available at all Manfrotto authorized dealers including:

Hunt's

midwest
photo exchange

MIKE'S
CAMERA



Shooting "Repetition 19" at the Hamburger Kunsthalle

Then, as camera technology changed, in 2013 Schreiber began using the Sony PMW-F5 CineAlta digital cinema camera and, when it became available, the Sony PMW-F55 CineAlta 4K digital cinema camera. "We had to sort of dumb down the F55 because we couldn't afford 4K and the external recorder," she laughs. "I shot with SxS cards in 2K and was very pleased with the result."

When shooting interviews with artists inside studio settings, Schreiber sought a look that would match the quality of the artwork footage. "My biggest challenge became the white walls," she relates. "White walls, skylights, windows with uncontrollable sun and a lot of daylight. That was a major challenge because I wanted the look to be controlled. I spend a lot of my life shooting features and television, so lighting and control are very important to me. Also, because it's a film about art and artists, who are very controlled in their work, I wanted the look of the interviews to have that same control."

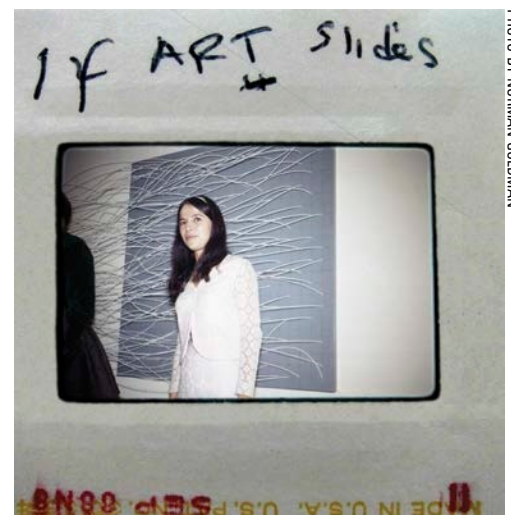
Schreiber describes her lighting approach as directionally soft. "I came up as a film electrician and gaffer, so lighting has always been important to me, whether it's natural or created, or some combination," she says. "And you can do so much with very little these days. The cameras are very fast, so most often it becomes about taking the light away."

To shoot the artwork itself, Schreiber used

low-temperature lights to avoid subjecting the pieces to excess heat. "One had to be very careful about hitting her work with light," Schreiber recalls. "In fact, when we went to the Whitney to shoot 'Connections'—a glistening, golden piece with looping strands that cast a shadow on the wall—I could only turn on the lights for a very short period of time."

Employing a small dolly to capture footage of the artwork, Schreiber lit the sculpture with hard lights for brief seconds at a time. "I didn't leave the piece lit for all that long so I know I didn't damage it," she states emphatically. "But I felt that her work had to be lit in a three-dimensional manner. Even on the wall her work was three-dimensional, with the pieces emerging from the wall. I felt that was so interesting and I wanted to show the 3D nature of it, that it wasn't just a 2D painting on a wall."

Asked which parts of her toolkit are the most essential, Schreiber responds, "My eye and my heart." The cameras are just tools, she insists. "I like the Alexa because I worked with a lot of ARRIFLEX and Panavision film cameras coming up, and it's a lot like a film camera. I like the color of the Alexa, its ease of use and the intuitive menus. Having said that, I have shot many movies using various generations of the RED [camera] and they all look great. There are so many cameras today: the [ARRI] Alexa Mini; the Panasonic VariCam 35, a 4K camera that I find quite wonderful and



Eva Hesse at the opening reception for *Eccentric Abstraction* in 1966

PHOTO BY NORMAN GOLDMAN

quite ergonomic; the even newer Panasonic VariCam LT, which I'm very excited about; and finally the [Sony] F65, which is large but produces beautiful imagery. Sony now has the [PXW] FS7 [XDCAM], which is a smaller affordable camera but still very professional, and I've liked using it for documentaries. I've also used the Canon [EOS] C300 and C500.

"Basically, I'm camera-agnostic," Schreiber says. "I still love film when it's appropriate, but it's not always appropriate or affordable. It's just a camera, so it's what you do with it and what makes sense for your production that's important. It's just a choice, and we have a lot of choices these days." **dv**