

## Emily Hesse

### *The Taste of this History: a Church in my Mouth*

*Do you remember the first morning you awoke to find the world was no longer tangible?*

*Do you remember when you felt the centre of things tilt slightly on its axis?*

*Do you remember, as a woman, what it was to watch what you knew fall away, becoming some sort of manipulated care package travelling to Mars, containing within it what you thought was care, tenderness, belonging: your church?*

*As you watched it forced into another dimension, did it mutate?*

*Did you think that you witnessed transformation, or did you question your own witnessing until you disbelieved even the actions your eyes had themselves absorbed into your very being?*

*Tell me, when it all fell away, were you alone?*

*Can you still taste the stale memory of the space it occupied?*

*Do you still believe in love?*

Emily Hesse 2018

Workplace Foundation is delighted to present *The Taste of this History: a Church in my Mouth* a solo exhibition of new and existing works by Emily Hesse. Hesse's interdisciplinary, often collaborative practice includes the use of performance, drawing, writing, sculpture, ceramics and installation to question and aggravate social and political power dynamics through psychogeography, philosophy, and regional folk histories, collective action and the use of land and its associated materials as a physical form of protest.

Deeply rooted in social structures and the landscape itself, Hesse's work is born of the space she occupies and underpinned by free thinking approach influenced by the philosophies of 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Rachel Bespaloff, Albert Camus and Heinrich Blucher. Utilising aesthetics as a tool for subversion, Hesse takes her own land, the overlooked, personal items from her home and family life, the often ugly and unfamiliar, materials of historical significance and draws out their political and social mythologies, highlighting thought provoking content and transforming them into objects of collective familiarity.

Since childhood, Hesse has collected the material fragments of industrial Teesside. These materials range from the bricks that once formed the homes, buildings and structures of Hesse's hometown of Middlesbrough, the clay from which they were made or the stories shared within four walls. In Hesse's on going plight to write her historically marginalised community into history, she considers her works as building blocks; they not only hold the volumetric weight of an untold regional history, but also create a space for previously silenced and unheard voices to speak.

Drawing together a landscape and it's emotional content (like bringing a stone and a hammer to the table) *The Taste of this History: a Church in my Mouth*, sees Hesse piecing together the unknown and unspoken weight of both a regional and personal feminist history and placing it into the current international framework of female identity politics. Central to the exhibition is a sculpture literally titled, *The Centre of Things 2018*. A needle hangs millimeters from the ground, suspended by a thread woven from wool gathered from local moorland and the hair of the artist and her two daughters. The piece was made by Hesse over a period of evenings at home: a play on the craft traditions associated with the feminine, the continuity of time, the needle of a compass but sitting as the political state of the world does, slightly off centre. The origins of the work are linked to a newly developed performance work created in collaboration with Dr Martyn Hudson, Northumbria University. *There is No Ghost Sonata Being Staged Here 2018*, is a performance in reasoning in the work and philosophy of Hannah Arendt and the lesser known work of her husband, Heinrich Blucher. The work has been developed around a lecture on Homer given by Blucher in 1954 and is delivered with the permission of Bard College, New York.

*Magdalena, 2018*, is a new ceramic installation work featuring an inherited Lladro figure Hesse has known for the entirety of her life. The object becomes the site for the shared and conflicting working class identities of her maternal and paternal Grandmothers, one whom she inherited the object from and the other whom the work is named for. Half of the figurine is camouflaged by the very land she resides upon, reflecting these women's sometimes inflicted and often chosen role during their lifetimes of fading into the background

Hesse's performance works, shown for the first time, dating between 2012-2018, have been printed onto pages of a book written in 1877 by Reverend Joseph Shillito. 'Womanhood: A Book for Young Women. It's Duties, Temptations and Privileges,' was to serve as a set of instructions for how a woman should behave in society. Deemed by Hesse as a misogynist text that perpetuates patriarchal society, she has taken it upon herself to remove the artefact from existence. In an act that questions when the past should be removed from the present, and in very fragile fashion, the pages now depict performative acts of female repression, strength and cohesion. While in *The Shedding: Chat Up Lines, Snow White and The Glass Ceiling 2018*, found local marketing images of the 1950's are brought together with ephemera gathered from behind the radiators of a former local primary school to depict misogynist identity and the spectre of womanhood.

A series of new and existing ceramic brick sculptures including, *Alcmene and Galanthis, 2015* and *Enduring, 2018*, individually contain complex and layered historical stories and events that took place in Greek myth, Colonialism and the Holocaust. The direct marking of the bricks or their altering by re-firing and treating as ceramic objects is done so with everyday and found materials such as correction fluid, chalk, sand and glass but also more valuable gold leaf and copper in order to distort and question ideas of worth, value, invisibility and validity, not only of the object but of the story it bears witness to. Shown alongside these brick works, which almost form a stage setting, is the film *No Equivalent 2018*. An unknown hand is shown, pushing, dropping and letting go of unfired bricks from the second floor window of a terraced street house. Prior to the making of this film, the bricks had been used in a former work, which referenced and mocked Carl Andre's, *Equivalent VIII, 1966*. Each brick falls as if a dead weight. The thudding sound as they hit the ground serves as a chilling reminder that historically, a woman's voice has not had the strength to be heard as equal.

Emily Hesse was born in Middlesbrough in 1980 and lives and works in the Tees Valley. She studied at Durham University and has an MA in ceramics from Sunderland University. Her work was recently featured in *Vitamin C : Clay and Ceramic in Contemporary Art* published by Phaidon. Recent group exhibitions include *The Everyday Political* curated by George Vasey for CGP, London and *The Ideal Home Show* at MIMA, Middlesbrough. Hesse was co-founder and producer of New Linthorpe, part of *Localism* at MIMA in Middlesbrough in 2015, a Teesside-based exploration of contemporary and collaborative production that took a cue from the nineteenth century Linthorpe Pottery, and used clay dug from the same Middlesbrough seam. Hesse self-published her autobiography *Black Birds Born from Invisible Stars* in July 2018.

### **List of works**

<i>Northern Star, 2018</i> Found brick, correction fluid, charcoal	<i>Iron Brick, 2017</i> Unfired clay
<i>Accidental, Dear, 2018</i> Ceramic, Clay, Wild Boar Tusks	<i>Duties, Temptations and Privileges, 2018</i> Printed found book pages (The printed images depict a collection of actions, performances and drawings made by Hesse between 2012 - 2018)
<i>Put Me on eBay (Reclaim the Wilderness), 2018</i> Handmade brick from local clay, correction fluid	<i>No Equivalent, 2018</i> Video
<i>Imaginary Royals, 2017</i> Clay	<i>Magdalena, 2018</i> Lladro figurine, net curtain, clay, paint, plaster
<i>Enduring (The Ghosts in the Room), 2018</i> Found local brick, gold leaf paint and correction fluid	<i>The Shedding: Snow White, 2018</i> Collage on found photograph
<i>Alcmene and Galanthis (Finding Mycenae 2011 - ongoing), 2015</i> Ceramic, found local brick and copper (on Galanthis only)	<i>The Shedding: The Glass Ceiling, 2018</i> Collage on found photograph
<i>Where I Left You (The Ghosts in the Room), 2016</i> Found local brick, ceramic copper glaze with glass, sand, found metal, liquid chalk	<i>The Shedding: Chat Up Lines, 2018</i> Collage on found photograph
<i>A Lover of Monsters, 2016</i> Ceramic, clay	<i>The Centre Of Things, 2018</i> Wool, hair, steel needle, pink chalk
	<i>Black Birds Born From Invisible Stars, 2018</i> Audio