

Librería  
*Bonilla y Asociados*  
desde 1950



**Título:** Eva Hesse Spectres 1960

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**Precio:** \$580.00

**Editorial:**

**Año:** 2010

**Tema:**

**Edición:** 1ª

**Sinopsis**

**ISBN:** 9780300164152

In 1960 Eva Hesse (1936-1970) created an unusual group of oil paintings that, when considered in contrast to her sculptural assemblages from 1965 to 1970, foretell her desire to embody emotional states in abstract form. Contrary to existing scholarship, which suggests that these works represent a form of self-deprecation, this book seeks to consider these "spectre" paintings as manifestations of a private, haunted interiority in the context of the artist's burgeoning maturity.

The paintings in the spectre campaign comprise two distinct categories. The first, a selection of small-scale oil on Masonite paintings, depicts two or three loosely rendered figures positioned in vacant pictorial spaces. These gaunt forms portray an apparent disconnection between one body and another; and yet, the pictorial drama of the works would be incomplete without the presence of each figure. The second group of paintings imbues a more perplexing psychological state, as characters alternately take on the forms of alien-like creatures or as close resemblances to the artist herself. Through an enlightening assessment of these underappreciated works, readers will gain new insight into their pivotal role in Hesse's oeuvre.