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Early in 1965, Hesse wrote to Ethelyn Honig: "I wonder if we are unique, I mean the minority we exemplify. The female struggle, not in generalities, but our specific struggles. To me insurmountable to achieve an ultimate expression, requires the complete dedication seemingly only man can attain. A singleness of purpose no obstructions allowed seems a man's prerogative. His domain. A woman is side-tracked by all her feminine roles from menstrual periods to cleaning house to remaining pretty and 'young' and having babies. If she refuses to stop there she yet must cope with them. She's at disadvantage from the beginning. . . . She also lacks conviction that she has the 'right' to achievement. She also lacks the belief that her achievements are worthy. Therefore she has not the steadfastness necessary to carry ideas to the full developments. There are handfuls that succeeded, but less when one separates the women from the women that assumed the masculine role. A fantastic strength is necessary and courage. I dwell on this all the time. My determination and will is strong but I am lacking so in self esteem that I never seem to overcome. Also competing all the time with a man with self confidence in his work and who is successful also.

"I feel you have similar problems which is also evident in your work. Are we worthy of this struggle and will we surmount the obstacles. We are more than dilettantes so we can't even have their satisfactions of accomplishment. The making of a 'pretty dress' successful party pretty picture does not satisfy us. We want to achieve something meaningful and to feel our involvements make of us valuable thinking persons.

"Read 'The Second Sex.'

"I am finishing book now.

"I've always suffered with these thoughts but now I've temporarily found a spokesman. But naturally I don't feel a native ability that she or others has that have succeeded."

Hesse died just before the Women's Movement gained a broad impact on the art world and she considered herself one of the unique ones, almost a freak, since there were so few women artists at all visible at that time. She was very aware, however, of the injustices she herself had suffered and she expressed often to both male and female friends her conviction that she was not being taken as seriously as her male colleagues because she was a woman.⁴⁴ For the most part she kept her complaints private as did most women then, given the additional struggle implicit in making a public issue of them. In January 1969 she wrote across the bottom of a letter from a feminist: "The way to beat discrimination in art is by art. Excellence has no sex." Which is all very true, but there is a lot more to the question than that. Today it seems very clear that if a woman's experience in this society is entirely different from that of a man—biologically, socially, politically—and if "art is an essence, a center," as Hesse put it, coming from the inside of a person, then it would seem equally obvious that there are elements in women's art that are different from men's, not elements of quality but elements with esthetic results. One reason there is so much resistance to this idea is that men are still considered superior, therefore quality is unconsciously read into such a statement.