

LOUISE BOURGEOIS
FAURSCHOU FOUNDATION
ALONE AND TOGETHER

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LOUISE BOURGEOIS
ALONE AND TOGETHER

PRESS RELEASE

FAURSCHOU FOUNDATION IS PLEASED TO PRESENT "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: ALONE AND TOGETHER," CURATED BY JERRY GOROVY, OPENING ON 27 OCTOBER, 2012, IN THE 798 ART DISTRICT OF BEIJING. CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ARTISTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THIS WILL BE BOURGEOIS'S FIRST RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION IN CHINA.

SPANNING LOUISE BOURGEOIS' SEVEN DECADES OF PRACTICE, THE EXHIBITION INCLUDES WORK FROM ACROSS HER DIVERSE OEUVRE: FROM HER SENSUOUS BRONZE AND MARBLE WORKS, TO HANGING ALUMINUM SCULPTURES, FROM HER "CELL" INSTALLATIONS, TO HER SOFT SCULPTURE WORKS; FROM HER ICONIC SPIDER SCULPTURES, TO THE EVOCATIVE SERIES OF "FEATHERY" GOUACHE DIPTYCHS ON PAPER FOR WHICH THE EXHIBITION IS TITLED.

A FIERCELY INTELLIGENT, WELL-READ ARTIST, FOR WHOM THE MAKING OF ART WAS AS MUCH A MEANS OF 'BEING IN THE WORLD' AS A VOCATION, BOURGEOIS DREW HEAVILY ON PSYCHOANALYTIC THOUGHT. PERFORMING UNCANNY EXORCISMS, SHE NAVIGATED THE LABYRINTHS OF HER PAST AND HER UNCONSCIOUS THROUGH HER CREATIONS. THROUGH THE SPINNING OF METONYMICAL VISUAL NARRATIVES, BOURGEOIS'S WORK FORMS A WEB OF STORIES ABOUT HER LIFE THAT ARE SIMULTANEOUSLY STORIES ABOUT THE PARADOXES OF THE HUMAN CONDITION AND SERVED AS A CRUCIBLE IN WHICH A SELF – STRAINING TOWARDS THE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE YET EXISTENTIALLY NECESSARY ACT OF CONNECTING WITH OTHERS – COULD BE FORGED OUT OF ALIENATION AND PERSONAL TRAUMA.

BOURGEOIS' ART EMBODIES A COURAGEOUS STRUGGLE TO BALANCE BETWEEN THE ANTINOMIES OF 'BEING IN THE WORLD' – ALONE AND TOGETHER – THAT THE ARTIST UNDERSTOOD SO WELL. WE ARE MORTALLY ALONE AND WE ARE INEXTRICABLY CONNECTED. THIS CONNECTION IS FRAUGHT WITH ANXIETY AND PAIN, BUT IT IS ALSO ONE OF THE GREAT SOURCES OF PLEASURE AND REASONS TO PERSIST IN OUR SEPARATE, YET INTERTWINED EXISTENCES.

JERRY GOROVY, BOURGEOIS' LONGTIME ASSISTANT, HAS SELECTED A BODY OF WORK THAT REVEALS THE CENTRAL THEMES AND RHYTHMS OF HER AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ART. GOROVY OFFERS CHINA AN UNPRECEDENTED CHANCE TO BE TOUCHED BY THE REPARATIVE, HUMAN POWER OF BOURGEOIS'S ART.

—MAYA KÓVSKAYA, PHD

ABOUT THE ARTIST

INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED ARTIST LOUISE BOURGEOIS WAS BORN IN PARIS IN 1911. ALTHOUGH SHE LIVED IN NEW YORK FROM 1938 AND UNTIL HER DEATH IN 2010, MUCH OF HER INSPIRATION WAS DERIVED FROM HER EARLY CHILDHOOD IN FRANCE. USING THE BODY AS A PRIMARY FORM, BOURGEOIS EXPLORED THE FULL RANGE OF THE HUMAN CONDITION. FROM POETIC DRAWINGS TO ROOM SIZE INSTALLATIONS, SHE WAS ABLE TO GIVE HER FEARS A PHYSICAL FORM IN ORDER TO EXORCISE THEM. MEMORIES, SEXUALITY, LOVE AND ABANDONMENT ARE THE CORE OF HER COMPLEX BODY OF WORK. HER WORK APPEARS IN COLLECTIONS WORLDWIDE AND SIGNIFICANT EXHIBITIONS INCLUDE HER BREAKTHROUGH 1982 RETROSPECTIVE AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, IN NEW YORK; 1993 VENICE BIENNALE (WHERE IN 1999 SHE WAS ALSO AWARDED THE GOLDEN LION AWARD); HER RETROSPECTIVE AT TATE MODERN, LONDON (2007-2008), WHICH TRAVELED TO THE CENTRE GEORGES POMPIDOU, PARIS (2008), THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK (2008), ETC.; AND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS," AT THE QATAR MUSEUMS AUTHORITY, QMA GALLERY, IN DOHA (2012).



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
LABYRINTHINE TOWER, 1962-1981
WHITE MARBLE: 92.7 X 61 X 50.8 CM.
TIMBER: 28 X 66 X 58.4 CM.
COURTESY CHEIM & READ AND HAUSER & WIRTH

PHOTO: ALLAN FINKELMAN,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY

LOUISE BOURGEOIS
C.O.Y.O.T.E., 1947-1949
BRONZE, PAINTED PINK, AND STAINLESS STEEL
131.8 X 209.6 X 28.9 CM.
COLLECTION FAURSCHOU FOUNDATION

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
HANGING JANUS, 1968
BRONZE, DARK AND POLISHED PATINA, HANGING
PIECE
17.5 X 27.9 X 15.9 CM.
COLLECTION FAURSCHOU FOUNDATION

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY





LOUISE BOURGEOIS
NATURE STUDY, 1984; CAST 2000
PINK RUBBER: 76.2 X 48.3 X 38.1 CM.
STAINLESS STEEL BASE: 104.1 X 55.2 X 55.2 CM.
COURTESY CHEIM & READ AND HAUSER & WIRTH

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
PREGNANT WOMAN, 2002
FABRIC, GLASS AND ALUMINUM
32.4 X 30.5 X 30.5 CM.
COURTESY THE EASTON FOUNDATION

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
FÉE COUTURIÈRE, 1963
BRONZE, PAINTED WHITE, HANGING PIECE
100.3 X 57.2 X 57.2 CM.
COLLECTION FAURSCHOU FOUNDATION

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
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LOUISE BOURGEOIS
THE COUPLE, 2003
ALUMINUM, HANGING PIECE
365.1 X 200 X 109.9 CM.
COURTESY CHEIM & READ AND HAUSER & WIRTH

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY





LOUISE BOURGEOIS
CROUCHING SPIDER, 2003
STEEL
270.5 X 835.7 X 627.4 CM.
COURTESY THE EASTON FOUNDATION

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
AVENZA REVISITED, 1968-1969
BRONZE, SILVER NITRATE AND POLISHED PATINA
43.2 X 104.1 X 88.9 CM.
COLLECTION FAURSCHOU FOUNDATION

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY

LOUISE BOURGEOIS
FORÊT (NIGHT GARDEN), 1953
BRONZE WITH BROWN AND BLACK PATINA AND
WHITE PAINT
92.1 X 47 X 36.8 CM.
COLLECTION FAURSCHOU FOUNDATION

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER BURKE,
© LOUISE BOURGEOIS TRUST / LICENSED BY VAGA, NY



ALONE AND TOGETHER
by Jerry Gorovoy

Bourgeois had written in “the unraveling of a torment you have to begin somewhere.”¹ Even I, who was so intimate with Louise Bourgeois for so many years and had the privilege to be a first-hand witness as she created her objects, had access to her diaries, and had so many long conversations with her over more than thirty years of a shared life, was unable to unravel the torment that lay behind this complex body of work. What insights I have, unfortunately, come from those moments when her intense anxieties were projected onto me. These episodes were horrific and painful for both of us, but I knew they were much worse for her.

I was mystified by my ability to calm her down and rescue her from the well of blackness that seemed to descend from nowhere. That she sensed this capacity in me from our first encounters was also mysterious, but Bourgeois had uncanny insights into everyone. So we became a couple - she the arrested young girl, and I her “pacifier”.

I understood much later that when she invited me to her home for the first time, letting me glimpse the incredible objects she had made over the previous 40 years, I had entered a trap she had set. The way she lived her life in that house, what she had created, how she spoke about its meanings, what the sculptural forms looked like in relationship to her physical presence, all seemed inseparable. There was something there in the primal-looking sculptures strewn about that had taken hold of me, and this intense identification with both her and her art was revelatory.

Over the years, each new work was like a piece of an intricate puzzle. I now realize that she had removed certain pieces from the board long ago, ensuring that the puzzle could never be solved, as a safe guard that I would never abandon her. Perhaps what she wrote about her own art, “The search (pushing on) for the truth is what has kept me going, the secret of my anxiety”² was exactly what I acted out in my relationship to her.

1 Louise Bourgeois, June 6, 1994. Diary entry. © The Easton Foundation.

2 Louise Bourgeois, April 1, 1974. Diary entry. © The Easton Foundation.

All Bourgeois's works emanate from a dialogue with the Other. She needed a "polar star that I cannot live without."¹ Her life was a series of crushes and seductions. I know that she created works addressed to me, and made others that were about us, but they were never about those "islands of silence"², the happy moments of reprieve from torment. Her art is about the difficulties she had relating to other people, and about how badly things can go wrong. She needed the Other to define who she was, and despised that dependency in herself. Without the Other, she experienced the terror of nonexistence. She hated silence. It filled her with anxiety. It made her want to kill. She was afraid of destroying all the close relationships she had in real life – her husband, her sons, and me. As a defense against this fear, she created figures in her art that would cling to each other for eternity. The violence, the jealousy, the murderous impulses expressed in her sculptures are retribution for feelings of abandonment and betrayal. Whenever I left her, her horror of loneliness welled up and every return was met with revenge and punishment.

This breaking of relations with others, not being understood, being rejected, not living up to what was expected, caused an enormous amount of guilt. This explains the confessional tone of her writings, where she confirms that "all my production is an apology."³ Her need for reparation with others and to be at peace with herself, the desire to be "whole again"⁴ is something she was only able to achieve through her art. Thus, her artistic process is one of continually creating, destroying, and rebuilding. Bourgeois's writings reveal that she was aware of the destructive nature of her acting out. In her sculpture, she vividly expresses this fragmentation of her body under the pressure of anxieties and fears. Bourgeois lived in an emotional world that grounded her art in the primacy of her body because "the fears of the past were connected with the functions of the body, they reappear through the body".⁵

1 Louise Bourgeois, March 19, 1995. Diary entry. © The Easton Foundation.

2 Inscribed in French on the drawing: Louise Bourgeois, DANS LA TOURMENTE, 1950, Pencil and ink on paper, 11 x 8 1/2"; 27.9 x 21.6 cm.

3 Louise Bourgeois, April 24, 1952. Loose sheet: 11 x 8 1/2 in. (27.9 x 21.6 cm). LB-0128. © The Easton Foundation.

4 Meyer-Thoss, Christiane. Louise Bourgeois: Designing For Free Fall. Zurich: Ammann Verlag, 1992, page 133.

5 Meyer-Thoss, Christiane. Louise Bourgeois: Designing For Free Fall. Zurich: Ammann Verlag, 1992, page 195.

We will never know exactly what happened to her between the ages of 12 and 16, those years of puberty, but something traumatic did happen. Was it a single event? A coalescing of many emotional experiences? Was there a loss, a split, a rejection, or a breaking apart? Whatever occurred, real or imagined, conscious or unconscious, it left its imprint forever. I witnessed that repressed, sexualized childhood erupt into the present, causing hysterical fits, screaming matches, and the smashing of her own sculpture. I was always aware that the smallest event – passing a particular building on the drive to her studio, the arrival of a plumber at her house, or even something I said – could transport her back to that traumatic moment in the past. It was as if she was caught in some rip tide, and I was dragged into the maelstrom with her.

She never left behind the world of her childhood; it “never lost its magic, never lost its mystery, and never lost its drama”¹ because it was highly sexualized and therefore pleasurable. Yet to be continually drawn back to this past trauma the child who never underwent the rites of passage was also immensely painful: the acting out of these regressions was destroying her relationships in the present. The contradictory emotions one finds in a single form throughout her work attests to the importance of memory to her creative process. Her complex forms must contain both perpetrator and victim, crime and punishment; a safeguard is built into every form so that these polarities balance each other out. One has the sense that she is confessing everything in her art, that she is “a woman without secrets”², yet suppresses everything at the same time. Bourgeois’ art is the retelling of a life out of chronological order precisely because her memories and emotions attach themselves associatively. The manifestations of her art objects need to be continually revived as they spiral around the fixed point of her psychic wound. Each new encounter in the present and its emotional correlative has to be processed and linked to the traumas of the past, thereby constantly recalibrating the narrative. In every work of art,

1 “Louise Bourgeois: Partial Recall”. Produced by the artist’s The Easton Foundation (First shown at LB’s MoMA, Retrospective, 1982-1983) 1983, 17:25 minutes.

2 Meyer-Thoss, Christiane. Louise Bourgeois: Designing For Free Fall. Zurich: Ammann Verlag, 1992, page 137.

she repeats the drama of her whole life, since “art is... an acting out... [and] not a liberation.”¹

I only speculate that this trauma resulted in the primacy of the visual in her relationship to the world, and that this visual relationship is sexual in nature. The trauma seemed to have dislodged her from a certain kind of analytical and critical thinking, forcing her to inhabit a world of emotions. In Bourgeois’s writings, you see the moments of “silence”² in her torment when she steps back and tries to make sense of the stream of consciousness pouring out. She is capable of faithfully recording her inner turmoil even as it occurs. Her detachment allows her to give concrete shape to her emotional states. In the process of making sculpture, as in her encounters with the Other, Bourgeois had direct access to her unconscious.

Though she told the story of her tapestry dealer father’s serial liaisons many times and spoke of the pain they had caused her, she never really admitted how deeply in love she had been with him and how competitive she was for his affection. Her ambivalence towards her father was paralleled in her relationship with her ailing mother (a tapestry restorer). Her writings attest to an intense oedipal rivalry, although as a young girl, in a reversal of roles, Bourgeois had nursed her. Her lifelong fear of abandonment began when her father went off to war and continued with her mother’s illness. Her mother’s death in 1932 caused Bourgeois to abandon the certitude of mathematics for art. Her depression over her father’s death in 1951 led her into psychoanalysis. In this mixing of maternal and paternal identification Bourgeois joined art and psychoanalysis. This fusion accounts for her endless oscillation between past and present, passive and active, male and female, hard and soft, cutting and sewing. If, when she acted out in real life, she enacted the infantile emotionalism of her father, art making placed her in the position of the mother who repaired and restored tapestries. The phallic daggers of her early Personages are

1 Louise Bourgeois, in conversation with Jerry Gorovoy, c. 1992. Loose sheet: 11 x 8 1/2 in. (27.9 x 21.6 cm). LB-0837. © The Easton Foundation.

2 Inscribed in French on the drawing: Louise Bourgeois, DANS LA TOURMENTE, 1950, Pencil and ink on paper, 11 x 8 1/2"; 27.9 x 21.6 cm., (BOUR-14336)

associated with her antagonism against her father, the later soft fabric sculptures with the nurturing mother.

This first presentation in China of Bourgeois' works and writings derives its title, "Alone and Together", from a series of late gouache diptychs. On the left panel of each, Bourgeois has rendered herself as a multi-breasted naked figure. The corresponding right panel depicts a couple – her self-portrait joined by a male figure. In some of these drawings Bourgeois added a fetus inside her belly. The overall embryonic feeling of the imagery is enhanced both by the color red and the fluid handling of the gouache.

In these works one sees the themes of birth, growth, and regeneration, family and motherhood that she has explored for decades. However, like all of Bourgeois' iconography, these images are multi-layered in meaning. She told me, as she painted the child inside the belly, that it was her. We know from Freud that the wish to return to the womb symbolizes death. As a defense against her lifelong fear of abandonment, she still needed to create images of a happy family. With her body becoming frailer, through these works Bourgeois is calling for her mother to protect and comfort her. This same plea for help finds expression in the large spider sculpture she called Maman.

The impregnation in "Alone and Together" can also symbolize the "the fear of emptiness"¹ that comes from being alone. Bourgeois' response to Sartre's, "Hell is others" is "Hell is the absence of others."² To be without the Other is to inhabit a world of fear and anxiety. It is a world without love. "If you leave me I kill myself – the separation is equal to death."³

1 Louise Bourgeois, YOU ARE MY POLAR STAR, 2009, archival dyes printed on fabric and embroidered, 36 x 27 5/8"; 91.4 x 70.2 cm.; edition published by Carolina Nitsch Contemporary Art.

2 Storr, Robert, Paulo Herkenhoff and Allan Schwartzman. Louise Bourgeois, London, England: Phaidon Press Limited, 2003. (Translated into French by Phaidon Press Limited in 2004.), page 13.

3 Louise Bourgeois, c. 1957. Loose sheet: 6 1/8 x 4 7/8 in. (15.6 x 12.4 cm). LB-0247. © The Easton Foundation.

For anyone wanting to study this autobiographical body of work, the chronological evolution of her forms would be a useful beginning. Bourgeois assimilated many historic moments in her art, from the tapestries of her youth to Art Deco, the Symbolists, and the Surrealists, yet she always stands apart. Literature – the fables of La Fontaine, the existential novels of Camus, the case histories of Sigmund Freud – also shaped her work. The themes she continually returns to and spirals back on, elaborated in ever-changing forms, lie at the heart of her artistic creation.

Her sense of architectural space is a metaphor for her relationship to the other – whether close or separated, isolated or joined forever. We see this in the way she installed her Personages in the 1940s, emphasizing their loneliness; in the solitude of her involuted lairs of the 1960s as she turns inward on herself; and in the cage-like environments of the Cells of the 1990s, where she is trapped and boxed in, a prisoner of her memories. Her psychology – her compulsions, obsessions, the urgency of emotions – is the driving force behind her formal inventions, as her writings attest. Her work is a form of exorcism. More than mere self-affirmation, it is an act of self-preservation and survival.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS: ALONE AND TOGETHER

Maya Kóvskaya, PhD

The life and work of Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) – one of the most celebrated artists of our time – are monuments to the paradoxical nature of being in the world. The impetus of her lifelong creative and personal trajectory has been described as the need to “alleviate a core experience of abandonment”¹ by her longtime assistant, companion and ‘found family’ Jerry Gorovoy, who has curated her first retrospective in China, *Louise Bourgeois: “Alone and Together”*, at the Faurschou Foundation in Beijing.

Spanning Bourgeois’ seven decades of practice, the exhibition includes work from across her diverse oeuvre: from her sensuous bronze and marble works, to hanging aluminum sculptures, from her “Cell” installations, to her soft sculpture works; from her iconic spider sculptures, to the evocative series of “feathery” gouache diptychs on paper for which the exhibition is titled. With a body of work that reveals the central themes and rhythms of her autobiographical works, Gorovoy offers China an unprecedented chance to be touched by the reparative, human power of Bourgeois’ art.

A fiercely intelligent, well-read artist, for whom the making of art was as much a means of ‘being in the world’ as a vocation, Bourgeois drew heavily on psychoanalytic thought. Performing uncanny exorcisms with her creations, she navigated the labyrinths of her past and her unconscious. Through the spinning of metonymical visual narratives, Bourgeois’ work forms a web of stories about her life. These are simultaneously stories about the paradoxes of the human condition and served as a crucible in which a Self – straining towards the nearly impossible yet existentially necessary act of connecting with Others – could be forged out of alienation and personal trauma.

Born in Paris in 1911 to a father who sold and a mother who restored and repaired medieval and renaissance tapestries, Bourgeois’ understanding of herself was formed in a complex relationship to her family. Troubled by a highly charged, conflicted relationship with her father, whom she both loved and resented, family trauma permeated her adolescence and left its traces on her art. Her father betrayed the family, and pressured young Louise to be someone she was not. In order to become who she needed to be, she had to reject and negate him. This symbolic loss of her father was compounded by the untimely death of her passive but nurturing mother in 1932, following a long illness, during which Bourgeois cared for her in a poignant reversal of roles.

¹ Gorovoy, Jerry and Danielle Tinkin, “There’s No Place Like Home,” in *Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture*, exhibition catalogue, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 1999, p.15.

Trauma, rage, and retribution against her father would fuel the making of many artworks throughout a significant part of Bourgeois' life. Her later works, however were increasingly informed by a coming to terms with the loss of her mother and the reclamation of a generative, maternal power. Through the making of artworks, she found an inner clarity and strength to make reparations (to others and to herself) for what she had suffered and lost. Finding herself through her art took place, in part, along the axes of her "bad father" and "good mother." Defining herself required negotiating her own place somewhere in between their two poles.

Later in life, when Louise Bourgeois had left her mark deep upon subsequent generations, and risen to a position of prominence in the art world paralleled by few artists of her time, male or female, some would wryly claim her as contemporary art's very own "bad enough mother," – an artist who was "bad enough" to challenge and transgress the taboos and repressive order of society, yet maternal enough to engender new forms of growth and healing through her artwork's regenerative power. As the first woman to have a retrospective at the New York Museum of Modern Art (in 1982), Bourgeois helped open the way for a new generation of marginalized artists to claim their places in the art world.

At the time her mother died, however, Bourgeois was still an emotionally volatile, vulnerable young woman seeking her way in the world. She enrolled at the Sorbonne to study Mathematics, hoping its rationality and order could still the tumult inside her caused by her family dramas. When she failed to find the relief she sought in Euclidian Geometry two years later, she flouted her father's contempt for artists, and sought solace in the geometry of visual forms on paper, and later in three-dimensional space, instead.

As a young girl, Bourgeois had used her drawing talents to help her parents repair worn tapestries by sketching in the missing parts that had to be rewoven. After leaving the Sorbonne, in 1934 she sought formal training at various art institutes, such as École de Beaux Arts, Académie Ranson, Académie Julian, and began to frequent artists' studios, encountering artists such as Yves Breyer, Fernand Léger, Andre Lhote, and others.

In 1936 she rented a flat in the building where famed Surrealist André Breton's gallery Graciosa was located. Soon familiar with their work and their circle, Bourgeois rejected both the patriarchal authority of that male-dominated scene, and the label of Surrealist, and identified herself instead as an existentialist. Uninterested in finding either surrogate father figure or paternal patron, and unwilling to play the main roles available to women in the scene – that of sexual object and/or muse – Bourgeois chose independence over belonging and maintained a certain distance from the Surrealist movement.

In 1938, over discussions of Picasso at the print shop she had opened in Paris, where she sold lithographs of major artists, Bourgeois met her future husband, Robert Goldwater, an eminent art historian who pioneered the study of “primitive” art. They married soon thereafter and she moved to New York. There she would raise their three boys, survive the death of her husband in 1973, and pursue her vigorous art practice from her late twenties until she died at the age of 98 in May of 2010, at the peak of her creative powers.

In New York, Bourgeois' art practice galvanized around the intensely personal motifs she would explore throughout her life in various media. When she first arrived in the US in late 1938, the respected painter and art teacher Vaclav Vytlacil mentored her. Her paintings and prints from that period already offer a precocious glance at many of her life-long preoccupations – in particular her fraught relationship to the twin poles of autonomy and connectedness – and prominent themes that reappear in various guises throughout her long career.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, Louise Bourgeois became a respected participant in the art world. Although her work was well-received within the art circle and by the 1940s she was exhibiting alongside major American artists such as Mark Rothko, Willem De Kooning, and Jackson Pollack, she did not enjoy the same widespread public recognition garnered by her male peers until her breakthrough 1982 Retrospective at the New York Museum of Modern Art.

Too expansive to be contained within the confines of established “schools of art,” Bourgeois’ work drew freely on the visual and conceptual resources of art history and defiantly resisted assimilation into easy categories. Her gift for making meaningful wholes out of a patchwork of ragged parts has ensured the evocative force and enduring relevance of her work. Indeed, the visual grammar that she offered for making sense of the human condition now inhabits the deep structure of our collective unconscious in ways that have transformed the landscape of contemporary art in Asia as well as in the Western hemisphere.

Throughout her seventy-year career, Bourgeois worked her way through multiple modes of exploration that form the distinct genres of her practice. In her early paintings, from the late 1930-40s, such as her “Femme Maison” works, disciplinary domestic architecture envelops the heads and upper bodies of nude female figures.

In her sculptural debut in 1949 with her “Personages” works, the totemic wooden pieces were long, thin, vertical, phallic, and precariously installed throughout the gallery environment like a group of people viewers had to move among and face.

Between 1953 and 1964, Bourgeois worked in relative isolation. Her move to Chelsea, with her studio in the basement, where she lived until her death in 2010, marked a shift in her practice. “Soft Landscapes” were wrought from materials as diverse as alabaster and plastic, from 1963-67. Plaster and latex molded into squat, biomorphic forms, culminated in her most overtly phallic work – “Fillette” (1968) – and father-oriented work – “Destruction of the Father” (1974), which was a symbolic, cannibalistic consumption of the tyrannical, once-beloved father who betrayed her.

In the late 60s, a trip back to Europe led to a two-decade-long enchantment with ‘traditional materials’ such as bronze and marble. She explored more biomorphic and gender ambiguous, polyvalent imagery in a form she called the ‘cumul,’ which like cottony clouds in the sky seem to shift shape to yield abstracted body parts, and morphing masculine and feminine signifiers.

In the 1990s, Bourgeois began making her “Cell” installations, which combined the found and the fabricated, sculpture and installation to create emotionally evocative environments.

During the same period, she began to make works using textiles and sewing, to turn her own cast-off clothing into figurative soft sculpture, and produced a body of work that manifested her growing preoccupation with motherhood, and the reparative possibilities of maternal power, among other existential states of being. Perhaps because her mother was a weaver who could make the frayed and damaged whole again, Bourgeois saw needles as restorative, rather than violent symbols.

At the turn of the century and into the new millennium, when she was well into her nineties, Bourgeois was still prolific. Reanimating her “good mother,” the weaver, in a new guise, she began to make her iconic spiders, exemplified by the 9-meter tall steel “Maman” (1999) protecting her clutch of marble eggs.

Vulnerable yet formidable, frightened yet courageous, Bourgeois explored her conscious and unconscious fears of abandonment and need for human connection through her remarkably diverse and prolific art practice. This enabled her to give concrete forms and specific faces to her most intimate hopes and fears in an effort to confront and heal the wounds of the past. The enduring power of her art is a testament to the ways in which the fragmented, damaged parts of an individual’s life can be repaired and restored into a coherent whole that can speak to the larger human condition.

Just as the central mode of meaning-making in Bourgeois’ work is metonym – in which a part stands for a larger whole – her private, personal preoccupations stand for elements of our shared human experience of being in the world. Her art embodies a courageous struggle to find equilibrium between the antinomies of ‘being in the world’ – alone and together – that she understood so well. We are mortally alone and we are inextricably connected. This connection is fraught with anxiety and pain, but it is also one of the great sources of pleasure and reasons to persist in our separate, yet intertwined existences.

With the intensity of someone for whom art offered the only safety net she knew how to weave, Bourgeois lived and worked like a tightrope walker balancing herself over the abyss of the mortal world of Others, afraid of heights, but nevertheless forcing herself to keep looking down.

Like so many of us, in her personal life, Bourgeois needed and sought a human intimacy that she feared and sometimes fled. In her art, she evoked binaries and oppositional categories in a way that undermined them, dissolving their boundaries. Even as she feared instability and chaos, her work consistently challenged the order these binaries represented, rendering them ambivalent, and offering us new possibilities for seeing ourselves and our world in the process.

Perhaps we can imagine Bourgeois as one of her iconic spiders, clinging to the threads that crisscross and intersect to form the web of her works, spun out of past traumas and transformed into existential safety nets. Spinning visual narratives that gave form to her fears, and allowed her to exorcise her demons, making art gave Bourgeois a thread to navigate her way through the labyrinth of her unconscious, and her painful past. The shared pathos of this human predicament and the gloriously *sui generis* manner in which Bourgeois conducted her life and made her art resonate on a frequency across the webs that bind us all together in ways that ensure the enduring relevance and restorative power of her work.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS: SHAPING THE SUBTLE SPIRIT

Zhu Qi, PhD

(Translation: Cindy Carter)

In the process of transforming autobiography into art, Louise Bourgeois describes the shape of the subtle spirit, the hidden mysteries of the human soul. Her creations suggest the offspring of some genetic coupling gone awry, creatures modeled on parts of the female anatomy, in which the parts have been distorted, dislocated, deformed, or subjected to repeated replication.

Although Bourgeois assimilates Western concepts of Surrealism, Symbolism and modern psychoanalysis into her work, her sensibility at times seems closer to Eastern animism, the notion that all living beings are imbued with a spirit, that there is some inherent spirit animating all living things. Her sculptures evoke a parade of fantastic supernatural beings, mysterious fetishes, some hidden occult parasitic on a corporeal body of fragmented or misshapen flesh—a neck with three heads, a stone trough with breasts, a four-breasted headless pink torso, two legless bodies fused together end to end, and an enormous, soft slithering creature.

Judging from their physical form, all of these creatures appear to be in the throes of suffering. Their peculiar shapes make it seem as if they came into this world half-formed, partial or incomplete, afflicted by some unspeakable anxiety or dread. In Eastern mythology and artistic tradition, peculiarly shaped objects or living things are seen as spiritual embodiments, aesthetic symbols of a life force that transcends space and time. In this respect Bourgeois is thoroughly modernist, for her peculiarly shaped creations make reference to the psychoanalytical “division of mind” and Weltschmerz, the awareness that life is necessarily incomplete, fragmentary, and fraught with psychological fragility and malaise.

For Bourgeois, there is a clear referential relationship between art and autobiography. She rarely strays beyond the narrow biographical confines of self and family, and nearly all of her subject matter derives from the subtle spiritual connections between the artist and her parents, husband and children. Bourgeois takes these relationships and transforms them into symbolic allegories. Her most representative work, "Maman", is no mere portrait of the artist's mother; it is an enormous spider whose vast form defines a psychological space symbolizing the artist's desire to be encircled by her mother. "Maman" reflects a contradictory inner desire: to enjoy one's solitude and silence, while also looking forward to a more intimate form of coexistence with the mother figure.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

ABBREVIATED BIOGRAPHY

1911	BORN IN PARIS, FRANCE
1938	MOVED TO NEW YORK CITY
1995	BECAME AN AMERICAN CITIZEN
1997	RECEIVED UNITED STATES NATIONAL MEDAL OF ARTS
2008	AWARDED FRENCH LEGION OF HONOR MEDAL
2010	DIED IN NEW YORK CITY

EDUCATION

1927	LYCÉE FÉNELON AND COLLÈGE SÉVIGNÉ
1932	SORBONNE, UNIVERSITY OF PARIS (BACCALAURÉATE IN PHILOSOPHY)
1934	PAUL COLIN
1936-1937	ATELIER ROGER BISSIÈRE DELL'ACADÉMIE RANSON ACADEMIE OF D'ESPAGNAT
1936-1937	ÉCOLE DU LOUVRE
1936-1938	ÉCOLE NATIONALE SUPÉRIEURE DES BEAUX-ARTS (STUDYING WITH ANDRÉ DEVAMBEZ) ACADÉMIE DE LA GRANDE-CHAUMIÈRE, AS AN ASSISTANT OR MASSIÈRE TO YVES BRAYER
1937-1938	ÉCOLE MUNICIPALE DE DESSIN & D'ART,
1937-1938	ACADÉMIE DE LA GRANDE-CHAUMIÈRE, STUDYING PAINTING WITH OTHON FRIESZ AND SCULPTURE WITH ROBERT WLÉRICK
1937-1938	DOCENT AT THE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE ACADEMIE JULIAN
1938	ACADÉMIE SCANDINAVIE WITH CHARLES DESPIAU
1938	STUDIED WITH FERNAND LÉGER
1938	MARCEL GROMAIRE AND ANDRÉ LHOTE
1938-1939	L'ACADÉMIE RANSON
1939-1940	VACLAV VYTLACIL
1939	ART STUDENT'S LEAGUE OF NEW YORK

SELECTED INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1982-83

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK, "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: RETROSPECTIVE". TRAVELLED TO CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM, HOUSTON, TX; MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO, IL; AKRON ART MUSEUM, AKRON, OH.

1989-91

FRANKFURTER KUNSTVEREIN, FRANKFURT, WEST GERMANY, "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: A RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION". TRAVELLED TO STADTISCHE GALERIE IM LENBACHHAUS, MUNICH, WEST GERMANY; MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN, LYON; FONDACION TAPIES, BARCELONA, SPAIN; KUNSTMUSEUM, BERNE, SWITZERLAND; KRÖLLER-MULLER-MUSEUM, OTTERLO, THE NETHERLANDS

1993-96

AMERICAN PAVILION, VENICE BIENNALE, ITALY. AN EXPANDED EXHIBITION "THE LOCUS OF MEMORY", TRAVELLED TO THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM, NEW YORK; THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, DC; GALERIE RUDOLFINUM, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC; MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE DE LA VILLE DE PARIS; DEICHTORHALLEN, HAMBURG; MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

2000

TATE MODERN, LONDON, ENGLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: INAUGURAL INSTALLATION OF THE TATE MODERN ART AT TURBINE HALL" (5/12/00-11/26/00)

2001

THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS AT THE HERMITAGE" (10/9/01-1/13/02). TRAVELED TO HELSINKI CITY ART MUSEUM, FINLAND (2/02-5/02); KULTURHUSET, STOCKHOLM (6/02-8/02); MUSEET FOR SAMTIDSKUNST, OSLO, NORWAY (9/02-12/02)

2003

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE, KÖLN, GERMANY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS" (4/25/03-9/6/03)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS, BEACON, NEW YORK "LOUISE BOURGEOIS INSTALLATION AT INAUGURATION OF DIA:BEACON" (5/17/03-LONG TERM LOAN)
THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK, NY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE INSOMNIA DRAWINGS" (6/14/03-9/21/03)

2004

CHEIM & READ, NEW YORK, NY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE RETICEN CHILD" (10/21/04-12/31/04)
GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE, PARIS, FRANCE "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: PRINTS" (11/20/04-2/12/05)

2005

GALERIE HAUSER & WIRTH, LONDON, ENGLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: SUBLIMATION" (1/28/05-3/12/05)
WILFREDO LAM CENTER, HAVANA, CUBA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: ONE AND OTHERS"(2/4/05-4/26/05)
XAVIER HUFKENS GALLERY, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE WOVEN DRAWINGS AND RECENT SCULPTURES" (3/27/03-9/7/03)
MARLBOROUGH GRAPHICS, LONDON, ENGLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: SELECTED PRINTS 1989-2005" (3/30/05-4/22/05)
KUKJE GALLERY, SEOUL, KOREA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS" (4/7/05-5/8/05)

2005-2006

KUNSTHALLE WIEN, VIENNA, AUSTRIA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: BACK AND FORTH" (11/24/05-2/5/06)

2006

WALTERS ART MUSEUM, BALTIMORE, MD AND CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM,
BALTIMORE, MD "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: FEMME" (2/11/06-5/21/06)

KUNSTHALLE BIELEFELD, BIELEFELD, GERMANY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: LA FAMILLE" (3/12/06-6/5/06)

2007

KUKJE GALLERY, SEOUL, KOREA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: ABSTRACTION"
(4/20/07-6/29/07)

MARLBOROUGH GRAPHICS, LONDON "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: RECENT PRINTS"
(10/10/07-11/2/07)

2007-2008

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, BOSTON, MA "BOURGEOIS IN BOSTON" (3/27/07-3/2/08)

2007-2009

TATE MODERN, LONDON, ENGLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: RETROSPECTIVE" (10/10/07-1/20/08).

TRAVELED TO THE CENTRE GEORGES POMPIDOU, PARIS, FRANCE (3/5/08-6/2/08); SOLOMON R.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM,

NEW YORK, NY (6/27/08-9/28/08); MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART,

LOS ANGELES, CA (10/26/08-1/25/09); HIRSHHORN MUSEUM & SCULPTURE GARDEN, WASHINGTON
D.C. (2/26/09-5/17/09)

2008

INVERLEITH HOUSE, ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS, EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

"NATURE STUDY" (5/3/08-7/6/08)

GALERIE HAUSER & WIRTH, ZURICH, SWITZERLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: LA
RIVIÈRE GENTILLE" (6/1/08-7/26/08)

CHEIM & READ, NEW YORK, NY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: ECHO" (9/9/08-11/1/08)

2008-2009

MUSEO NAZIONALE DI CAPODIMONTE, NAPLES, ITALY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS FOR CAPODIMONTE"
(10/17/08-1/11/09)

2009

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE, COLOGNE, GERMANY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: A STRETCH OF TIME" (9/4/09-
11/25/09)

2010

KUKJE GALLERY, SEOUL, KOREA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: LES FLEURS"
(2/24/10-3/31/10)

THE MUSEUM OF CYCLADIC ART, ATHENS, GREECE "LOUISE BOURGEOIS"
(5/13/10-9/19/10)

FONDAZIONE VEDOVA, VENICE, ITALY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE FABRIC WORKS" (6/5/10-9/19/10).
TRAVELED TO HAUSER & WIRTH, LONDON, ENGLAND (10/14/10-12/18/10)

2010-2011

MAISON DE BALZAC, PARIS, FRANCE "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: EUGÉNIE GRANDET" (11/2/10-2/7/11)

2011

HAUSER & WIRTH COLNAGHI, LONDON, ENGLAND "DO NOT ABANDON ME:
LOUISE BOURGEOIS / TRACEY EMIN COLLABORATION" (2/16/11-3/12/11)

FUNDACIÓN PROA, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE
RETURN OF THE REPRESSED" (3/11-EARLY 6/11). TRAVELLING TO THE
INSTITUTO TOMIE OHTAKE, SAO PAULO, BRAZIL (LATE 6/11-8/11); THE
MUSEU DO ARTE MODERNO, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL (9/11-11/11)

CHEIM & READ, NEW YORK, NY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE FABRIC WORKS" (5/10/11-6/25/11)

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS:
FEMME" (5/27/11-9/11/11)

MARLBOROUGH GRAPHICS, LONDON, ENGLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: SUITES ON FABRIC" (6/7/11-7/2/11)

KUNSTHALLE WIEN, VIENNA, AUSTRIA "SURREALISME -- C'EST MOI" (6/22/11-10/23/11)

2011-2012

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, OTTAWA, CANADA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS HOMAGE" (4/21/11-8/3/12)

FOUNDATION BEYELER, RIEHEN / BASEL, SWITZERLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: À L'INFINI" (9/3/11-1/8/12)

2012

QATAR MUSEUMS AUTHORITY, QMA GALLERY, KATARA, DOHA, QATAR "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS" (1/20/12-6/1/12)

HAMBURGER KUNSTHALLE, HAMBURG, GERMANY "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: PASSAGE DANGEREUX" (2/10/12-6/17/12)

FREUD MUSEUM, LONDON, ENGLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED" (3/12-6/12)

KUKJE GALLERY, SEOUL, KOREA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: PERSONAGES" (5/23/12-6/24/12)

2012-2013

FAURSCHOU BEIJING, BEIJING, CHINA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: ALONE AND TOGETHER" (10/6/12-3/24/13)

CASA ENCENDIDA, MADRID, SPAIN "LOUISE BOURGEOIS (2000-2010): HONNI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE" (10/16/12-1/13/13)

ETH, ZURICH, SWITZERLAND "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: THE GRAPHIC SERIES" (11/7/12-1/18/13)

HEIDE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, BULLEEN, AUSTRALIA "LOUISE BOURGEOIS: LATE WORK" (11/22/12-3/10/13)

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