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Fundación PROA  
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Argentina

# Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed

Curator: Philip Larratt-Smith

Fundación Proa  
Instituto Tomie Ohtake  
Louise Bourgeois Studio



Louise Bourgeois. *Arch of Hysteria (Arco de histeria)*, 1993. Bronce, pátina pulida, pieza colgante. 83,8 x 101,6 x 58,4 cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser & Wirth.  
Fotografía: Allan Finkelman

**From March 19th to June 19th, 2011**

PROA

Tenaris  
TECHINT

# Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed

Curator: Philip Larratt-Smith

With the support of Tenaris / Organización Techint

**Opening** Saturday, March 19th, 2011

## Organization

Louise Bourgeois Studio, New York  
Instituto Tomie Ohtake, Sao Paulo  
Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires

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## Design

Louise Bourgeois Studio  
Fundación Proa

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## Montage

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Fundación Proa

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## Travelling to

Instituto Tomie Ohtake, Sao Paulo. July 2011  
Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro. September 2011

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Louise Bourgeois  
The Return of the Repressed

Special thanks

Palacio Duhau - Park Hyatt Buenos Aires  
Bodega Ruca - Malén

With the support of

**Embassy of the United States.**  
**Buenos Aires - Argentina**

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## About the exhibition

**Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed** will be inaugurated at Proa on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March and presents for the first time in Argentina an exhaustive panorama of Louise Bourgeois, exhibiting 86 works—drawings, objects, paintings, sculptures and installations—by the French-North American born in Paris in 1911 and recently deceased, at the age of 98, in New York. An artist from history and an exception of art in the greatest exhibition of her work in Latin America.

Curated by Philp Larratt-Smith and organized by the Louise Bourgeois Studio in New York, the Institute Tomie Ohtake in San Pablo, and the Fundacion Proa, the exhibit links the artist's work with some of the most important concepts of psychoanalysis. In the words of the curator, the way in which Louise Bourgeois finds "artistic equivalents" to "psychological states": "All of the works have been chosen to emphasize the constant presence of psychoanalysis as a force of inspiration and a space of exploration in her life and work," explains Larratt-Smith.

The ghost of the father, echoes of infancy, autobiographical imagination, motherhood and hysteria, are all present in the exhibit, which includes work from the beginning of her career through the year 2009.

Louise Bourgeois' life coincided with the most important artistic movements of her time. Louise Bourgeois worked on the themes most present in 20<sup>th</sup> century thought. Louise Bourgeois had the same concerns as many. However, her legacy is irreducible to the order of the aesthetic currents and the artistic vanguard. With **Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed**, Proa once again offers the unique opportunity to experience an unclassified work of art.

Gender and phallic representation. The physiological. The dream dimension and the unconscious. Oscillating, the Louise Bourgeois' works do not follow a single geometry nor do they adapt to realism. On the contrary, they activate a personal vocabulary and pursue an emotive function: "My work is to occupy myself with the pain," wrote the artist.

Installed in Proa's esplanade, the monumental and emblematic spider *Maman* opens the exhibition. Giant in its threat. Enormous in its protection. Proa installs one of the artist's capital works into the public arena, as was done in London, New York, and Paris. An expository challenge that facilitates the interaction of the public with an iconic work of art.

France. New York. The mother tongue and English. The first World War. Infancy and the forms of damage. Neither a surrealist dream nor a classic Freudian interpretation: Louise Bourgeois imagined her own sanity and designed the imaginary. Her work emerges from there, as does her writing.

The edition of a collection of unedited texts by Louise Bourgeois, never before published in English nor in their original language, about the impact of psychoanalysis on her creative process, is one of the fundamental **aspects** of the exhibit. Translated for the first time are her notes, reflections, memories, and notes on a family novel.

The catalogue **Louise Bourgeois: el retorno de lo reprimido** also reproduces a series of essays that help one deepen their understanding of her work. The edition integrates curatorial texts by Philip Larrat-Smith, an interview with Louise Bourgeois conducted by the historian and critic Donald Kuspit, interpretative essays by prominent investigators and an important body of images of her work.

A historical exhibition that confirms the agreement between Brazil and Argentina to disseminate exceptional work. The institute Tomie Ohtake in San Pablo and the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro are the next sites for the exhibit. A tour that consolidates the institutional dialogue. A dialogue made possible by support from Tenaris/Organizacion Techint.

**Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed** is supported by Tenaris/Organizacion Techint.

## Introduction, by Philip Larratt-Smith

### **Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed**

More than any other artist of the twentieth century, Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911 – d. 2010) has produced a body of work that consistently and profoundly engages with psychoanalytic theory and practice. While the Surrealists may have tapped into dream imagery and the Abstract Expressionists linked their gestural spontaneity to the unconscious, Bourgeois's art offers unique insight into the linkage between the creative process and its cathartic function. Taken as a whole, her art and writings represent an original contribution to the psychoanalytic inquiry into symbol formation, the unconscious, the talking cure, the family romance, maternal and paternal identifications, and the fragmented body. Through her exploration of materials, forms, and sculptural processes Bourgeois finds a plastic equivalent for the psychological states and mechanisms of fear, ambivalence, compulsion, guilt, aggression, and withdrawal.

Bourgeois considered the act of making art as her “form of psychoanalysis”, and believed that through it she had direct access to the unconscious. In her view the artist, powerless in everyday life, possesses the gift of sublimation and becomes omnipotent during the creative act. Yet the artist is also a tormented, Sisyphean figure condemned endlessly to repeat the trauma through artistic production. Hence the very process of making art is a form of exorcism, a means of relieving tension and aggression. It is also, like psychoanalysis, a source of self-knowledge. Or as Bourgeois has often said, “Art is a guaranty of sanity”.

Bourgeois's career as an artist in New York began with solo exhibitions of paintings in 1945 and 1947 followed by three exhibitions of her wood sculptures and environmental installations in 1949, 1950, and 1953. She would not have another solo show of new work again until 1964, when she presented an innovative body of abstract sculpture at the famous Stable Gallery in New York. These seminal forms in plaster, rubber, and latex were included in Lucy Lippard's epochal exhibition “Eccentric Abstraction” at the Fischbach Gallery in New York in 1966, along with Bruce Nauman and Eva Hesse. Yet where Nauman and Hesse arrived at postminimalist forms by way of philosophy and conceptualism, Bourgeois's evolution was informed and inspired by her own experience of psychoanalysis.

Bourgeois began psychoanalysis with Dr. Leonard Cammer in 1951, the year her father died. In 1952 he switched to the analyst Henry Lowenfeld. Born in Berlin in 1900, a former disciple of Freud in Vienna, Lowenfeld moved to New York in the same year as Bourgeois (1938), and there became an important member of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, publishing widely. Bourgeois would remain in therapy with Lowenfeld until the early 1980s. During a period of withdrawal and depression in the 1950s, Bourgeois not only underwent analysis but also steeped herself in psychoanalytic literature, from Sigmund Freud to Erik Erikson, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, Heinz Kohut, Susanne Langer, Otto Rank, Wilhelm Reich, and Wilhelm Stekel.

Prior to her retrospective at the Tate Modern in 2007, two boxes of writings were discovered in Bourgeois's home, followed by two more in 2010. These writings, which have never been published, serve to augment and enrich our understanding of Bourgeois's artistic development and fill in the gap in her otherwise copious diaries and process notes. In literary quality and historical importance they may be compared to the journals of Eugène Delacroix and the letters of Vincent van Gogh. They constitute a parallel body of work expressing her struggle to come to terms with her psychic life and the legacy of her past. In these documents Bourgeois records and analyses her dreams, emotions, and anxieties, and in particular her conflicted feelings about being simultaneously a creative artist and a mother and wife. The linkage between feeling, thought, and sculptural process becomes clearly delineated. At the same time these writings, like her sculptural works, critique psychoanalytic theory in its relationship to female sexuality and identity. These writings illuminate

her transition from the figurative works of her Abstract Expressionist period to the abstract pieces that ushered in the Postminimalist tendency, and articulate how her relationship to psychoanalysis remained active until the end of her life.

“The Return of the Repressed” will be the first in-depth examination of her relationship to psychoanalysis and art. The current checklist consists of drawings, paintings, and sculptures as well as an extensive selection of relevant writings from the artist’s journals. The works in the exhibition range from the *Femme Maison* paintings of the late 1940s to fabric works and red gouaches made in 2009. Her major outdoor sculpture *Maman* (1999), an ode to her mother, will be installed in front of the Fundación. All have been selected to highlight the enduring presence of psychoanalysis as a motivational force and a site of exploration in her life and work. A two-volume publication edited by Philip Larratt-Smith will accompany the exhibition. One volume will be devoted to the artist’s unpublished writings, while the other will feature contributions from art historians and psychoanalysts. The contributors are Larratt-Smith, Elisabeth Bronfen, Donald Kuspit, Juliet Mitchell, Mignon Nixon, Meg Harris Williams, and Paul Verhaeghe & Julie de Ganck.



Louise Bourgeois. *Red Room (Parents)* [Cuarto rojo (padres)], 1994. Materiales varios. 247,7 x 426,7 x 424,2 cm. Col. Ursula Hauser, Suiza. Fotografía: Peter Bellamy

## Louise Bourgeois at Proa, by Adriana Rosenberg

The dialogue between art and psychoanalysis is one of the prominent trends of thought of the 20th century and constitutes a fundamental intersection of this new time. It is the moment for the irruption of vacancy, silence, subjectivity, and unconsciousness, which enter the text and images of the work and transform the relationship between art and reality. New forms of narrating experiences and designating previously unnamed feelings have appeared. Neurosis, trauma, and unconsciousness are now active subjects in the discourse, and the dream is a new conception of time. The repressed wins significance and traverses the split subject that Baudelaire detected in the vertiginous and feverish city of Paris, Louise Bourgeois' city of birth. The development of cities brings about a loss of individual identity and determines a new manner of organizing chaos: the concept of the mass. Thus, with the renovation of how people name, look, and conceive of themselves and one another begins an indispensable century.

Through art, it is possible to reconstruct step by step the diverse neurological moments of the relationship between art and psychoanalysis: the efforts that have been made to elucidate the complex personalities of artists, which has been the subject of many essays throughout the century, is proof of this. Louise Bourgeois, a fundamental artist of the 20th century, models a scattered conceptual universe in her work and writings that stage and place a value on the creativity inherent in language: its contradictions, its deeply rooted traditions, and its complex logic.

Buenos Aires, a city where psychoanalysis has randomly found a home, is a city of language, literature, and reflection. This city hosts the first exhibition of Louise Bourgeois in Latin America, which will later be presented in Brazil.

**Louise Bourgeois: the return of the repressed** reunites a prominent collection of pieces created between 1942 and 2009. The exhibition expands upon the thoughts and ideas about psychoanalysis articulated by the artist. This curatorial decision was derived from the discovery of unedited writings about Bourgeois' relationship with her psychoanalyst and her thoughts about psychoanalytic theory. This material was edited for the first time, giving form to almost a hundred thematic texts, whose publication accompanies this exhibition. The curator, Philip Larratt-Smith, recuperates the dialogue between two languages—the image and the written word—and makes them susceptible to the same aesthetic universe.

The exhibit composes a psychoanalytic geography, a map of language and an x-ray of intimate, subjective events that, cast in a psychoanalytic light, invite the spectator to traverse the interior of the psyche, which has been discovered for more than a century.

Gigantic and iconic, the spider **MAMAN**, from 1999, welcomes us in Proa's esplanade. Constructive, CONSTRUCTIVA, threatening, and protective, **MAMAN** is one of the most significant images of the feminine universe. The artist's proposal to present it in a public space in a great city is simultaneously a reflection, a question, and a demand. For Fundacion Proa, it is a new expository challenge to exhibit this piece in the same way it was exhibited in London, Paris, New York, and Bilbao. From the entrance to Proa, **MAMAN** both shelters and warns us.

Edited in two volumes, the catalogue **Louise Bourgeois: the return of the repressed** reproduces the pieces on display in the exhibit and includes an exhaustive biography of the artist and a bibliography of critical and theoretical texts. Prominent academics such as Donald Kspit, Meg Harris Williams, Migmon Nixon, Elisabeth Bronfen and Paul Verhaeghe, and Julie de Ganck accompany and enrich the curator's perspective, with unedited studies that focus on the value and the importance of psychoanalysis in Bourgeois' work edited for the first time in Spanish.

Louise Bourgeois' psychoanalytic writings are another key to accessing the exhibition. In these manuscripts, which until today remained unedited in Spanish as well as in their original language, Louise Bourgeois exposes herself in a naked, intimate, and surprising manner. Her writings provide a tour of her own unconscious, an unknown landscape that she explores through from her psychoanalytic experience and in which the protagonists from her familial story appear. Sketches of revelatory dreams, notebooks filled with notes, diary entries: infancy, the artistic present, and the contradictions between domestic and professional life. Writing that surprises us with its literary scope and poetic freedom.

This unique and extraordinary exhibition was organized thanks to an ensemble of wills: the Instituto Tomie Ohtake in San Pablo, the Louise Bourgeois Studio in New York, and the Fundación Proa in Buenos Aires. Thanks to the initial efforts of *Paulo Herkenhoff* to promote Bourgeois' work on our continent, today, after a long period of work, Philip Larratt-Smith's project for Argentina and Brazil comes to fruition. The plan was made possible initially by relying on Louise Bourgeois' enthusiasm. We therefore pay homage to her today with this exhibition.

It would be inconceivable to be able to exhibit such an extraordinary body of work without the generous support of Jerry Gorovy, and we offer him our deepest gratitude. An unfathomable figure, Jerry, whose weight is a permanent presence in much of the artist's work, maintains and guards Louise Bourgeois' memory. His active and generous presence is a mark of wisdom and reflection for this event. Many thanks as well to The Easton Foundation, which supported the edition of the volume of Bourgeois' writings in order to amplify the diffusion of her ideas. And thank you to the Louise Bourgeois Studio.

To Bruno Assami and Recardo Othake from the Instituto Tomie Ohtake in San Pablo, and to their entire team for constant organization and support, thank you.

The directors of Tenaris deserve a special mention, as they decided to accompany the exhibition in Brazil as well as in Argentina in their commitment to spreading a seminal body of work in order to advance an understanding of current art and thought. To support Proa in participating in a central chapter of contemporary art reaffirms their unyielding encouragement.

A child's words, a woman's drawings, a mother's sculptures, a patient's writings. Fundación Proa completes its annual program and presents once again a historic exhibition that invites the public to experience a unique body of work capable of generating many readings, not only in the art world but also in the field of psychoanalysis, which is especially prominent in Buenos Aires.

## The catalogue

The edition of two special volumes on the work, writings, and thoughts of Louise Bourgeois emphasizes the start of her extraordinary production in Argentina. An unedited publication, in the framework of a truly artistic event for the city, the country, and the region. The catalogues that accompany the exhibition Louise Bourgeois: the return of the repressed will be offered for sale in the bookstore at Fundacion Proa at a very reasonable price.

Rigorously selected by Philip Larratt-Smith, curator of the exhibit, the unedited texts, widely cited but never reproduced, are translated in Spanish for the first time by Jaime Arrambide.

They have never been published in a single volume in English. The texts are evidence of the impact of psychoanalysis on Louise Bourgeois' creative process and allow us to discover one of the artist's central creative dimensions: her writings. Notes, impressions, questions, lists, biographical sketches, annotations in the margins of lectures by Freud, Melanie Klein, and Lacan, among others entries, are included. Her writing is art, and art appears in her writing. The first volume is comprised of new essays of special relevance, translated by Graciela Speranza, Marcelo Cohen, and Martin Schifino. Larratt-Smith reflects on sculpture as a symptom in the artist's work. In another text, the curator attempts an interpretation of the psychoanalytic concept that forms the backbone of the proposal: the return of the repressed. The prominent North American historian and critic Donald Kuspit reconstructs the artist's therapy experience with Henry Lowefeld, Louise Bourgeois' analyst of thirty years. In another essay, Kuspit traces the mechanisms of the symbolization of loss in Bourgeois' work. The German specialist Meg Harris Williams, who has an extensive formation in psychoanalysis, lucidly narrates the artist's life and work. Jealousy and the back and forth of the therapy process are the object of British psychoanalyst and feminist Juliet Mitchell's study. In L., the historian Mignon Nixon connects Louise Bourgeois' words with her artwork in a revealing lecture. Elisabeth Bronfen replays the fight between Bourgeois and her father. Finally, the Belgian psychologists Paul Verhaeghe and Julie de Ganck delimit the zones of artistic production and therapeutic and contextual foundation. The first volume is complete with reproductions of the 87 works in the exhibit— objects, drawings, sculptures, and installations—a biography of the artist and a bibliography.



Louise Bourgeois. *Rejection (Rechazo)*, 2001. Tela, acero y plomo.  
63,5 x 33 x 30,5 cm. Vitrina de aluminio y vidrio. 185,4 x 68,5 x 68,5 cm.  
Col. John Cheim, Nueva York. Fotografía: Christopher Burke



## MAMAN in Proa



Louise Bourgeois. *Maman (Mamá)*, 1999. Bronce, acero inoxidable y mármol. 927,1 x 891,5 x 1.023,6 cm. Instalada en Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires. Col. privada, cortesía de Cheim & Read, Nueva York.

Installed in Proa's esplanade, the monumental and emblematic spider **Maman** (1999) will be the prologue to the exhibition **Louise Bourgeois: the return of the repressed**. Thus, Proa will insert one of the artist's capital works into public space, as was done at the Tate Gallery in London (2007), the Guggenheim Museum in New York (2008), and earlier the Guggenheim in Bilbao (1999).

Bourgeois wrote: "The Spider is an ode to my mother. She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver. My family was in the business of tapestry restoration, and my mother was in charge of the workshop. Like spiders, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother."

Made of stainless steel, bronze, and marble, Bourgeois conceived of this spider as a representation of the power and threat of her mother: to spin, to weave, to care for, to

provide

protection. **Maman** is the largest of the series of spider sculptures, weighing 22,000 kilos and measuring 9 meters in height and 10 meters in width.

After Buenos Aires, **Maman** will be exhibited in the Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) in Rio de Janeiro. Proa considers its esplanade as an expository space. In this case, **Maman** will be put into dialogue with the public, introducing the artist's universe and interacting with the educational activities that are realized in the space.

## Paralell activities

**ARTISTS AND CRITICS** To complement the exhibition, a parallel program of reflection and encounters aims to enrich the exploration and understanding of Louise Bourgeois' work. Every Saturday at 17hs, starting in April, the encounter **Artists and Critics** unites distinguished professionals who offer their perspectives on the exhibit.

**EDUCATION** From Tuesday to Sunday at 17:00hs, the Department of Education organizes guided in depth visits. Tuesdays are student days, where reference materials such as books and catalogues are made available to the public in the bookstore.

**AUDITORIUM** In the **Auditorium**, the documentary *Louise (Querida Louise)* by Brigitte Cornand, 1995 is projected. The film reveals the artist's passion and inspiration that gave rise to her powerful pieces of work. Set in her house and studio in New York, the film draws on memories from infancy to draw an intimate portrait of an original and active artist. *The Spider, the Mistress, and the Tangerine* by Marion Cajori & Amei Wallach, is a captivating tour of the world of the legendary artist and over six decades of her work. During the two following decades, she created her most powerful and persuasive pieces, including the monumental sculptures of spiders that have toured the world.

## List of works

Works are organized chronologically. All works not otherwise credited are from the collection of the Louise Bourgeois Trust.



Louise Bourgeois. *Femme Maison (Mujer casa)*, 1946-1947. Óleo y tinta sobre tela. 91,4 x 35,6 cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser & Wirth.  
Fotografía: Rafael Lobato

1. *Untitled*, 1942  
Pencil on paper. 22.9 x 21.6 cm. Private Collection, New York
2. *Femme Maison*, 1946-1947  
Oil and ink on linen. 91.4 x 35.6 cm.
3. *Femme Maison*, 1946-1947  
Oil and ink on linen. 91.4 x 35.6 cm.
4. *St. Senastienne*, 1947  
Watercolor and pencil on paper. 27.9 x 18.4 cm. Private Collection, New York
5. *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, 1947  
Suite of nine engravings with text. Each: 25.4 x 35.6 cm. Note: 4 out of 9 pages reproduced
6. *Dagger Child*, 1947-1949  
Bronze, paint and stainless steel. 192.1 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm.
7. *Untitled*, 1950  
Ink on blue paper. 21.6 x 10.2 cm.
8. *Dans la tourmente*, 1950  
Pencil and ink on paper. 27.9 x 21.6 cm.
9. *Untitled*, 1953  
Ink on paper. 29.2 x 18.4 cm.
10. *Untitled*, 1953  
Bronze. 150.5 x 21.6 x 21.6 cm. Note: wood version reproduced
11. *Forêt (Night Garden)*, 1953  
Bronze, brown and black patina and white paint. 92.1 x 47 x 36.8 cm.
12. Loose sheet of writing, circa 1959  
27.9 x 21.6 cm., LB-0464. Louise Bourgeois Archive, New York
13. *Untitled*, 1960  
Red ink on paper. 29.8 x 22.9 cm.
14. *Untitled (double sided)*, circa 1960  
Recto: Ink and pencil on paper. Verso: Pencil on paper. 34.3 x 25.4 cm.
15. *Clutching*, 1962  
Plaster. 30.5 x 33 x 30.5 cm.
16. *Torsade*, 1962  
Bronze. 20.3 x 20.3 x 15.2 cm.
17. *Labyrinthine Tower*, 1962  
Bronze. 45.7 x 30.5 x 26.7 cm. Note: plaster version reproduced
18. *Lair*, 1962  
Bronze, painted white. 55.9 x 55.9 x 55.9 cm.
19. *Lair*, 1963  
Latex. 24.1 x 42.5 x 36.5 cm.
20. *Rondeau for L*, 1963  
Bronze, greenish black patina. 27.9 x 27.9 x 26.7 cm.
21. *Fée Couturière*, 1963  
Bronze, painted white, hanging piece. 100.3 x 57.2 x 57.2 cm. Note: detail view is of plaster version
22. *Torso, Self Portrait*, 1963-1964  
Bronze, painted white, wall piece. 62.9 x 40.6 x 20 cm.
23. *Amoeba*, 1963-1965  
Bronze, painted white, wall piece. 95.3 x 72.4 x 33.7 cm. Note: plaster version reproduced
24. *Le Regard*, 1966  
Latex and cloth. 12.7 x 39.4 x 36.8 cm.
25. *End of Softness*, 1967  
Bronze, gold patina. 17.8 x 52.1 x 38.7 cm. Private Collection, New York
26. *Germinal*, 1967  
Marble. 14 x 18.7 x 15.9 cm.
27. *Sleep II*, 1967  
Marble. 59.4 x 76.8 x 60.3 cm. Two wooden timbers, each: 27.9 x 83.8 x 35.5 cm.
28. *Soft Landscape*, 1967  
Aluminum. 17.1 x 50.2 x 43.8 cm.
29. *The Love Hand*, 1967  
Bronze. 22.9 x 31.8 x 20.3 cm.
30. *Unconscious Landscape*, 1967-1968  
Bronze, black and polished patina. 30.5 x 55.9 x 61 cm.
31. *Janus Fleuri*, 1968  
Bronze, gold patina, hanging piece. 25.7 x



Louise Bourgeois. *Untitled (S/T)*, c. 1970. Óvalo: pintura sobre panel. 119,4 x 149,9 cm. Col. privada, Nueva York. Fotografía: Christopher Burke

31.8 x 21.3 cm.

32. *Hanging Janus With Jacket*, 1968  
Bronze, dark and polished patina, hanging piece. 27 x 52.4 x 16.2 cm.

33. *The Fingers*, 1968  
Latex and plaster. 8.3 x 44.5 x 22.9 cm.

34. *Fillette (Sweeter Version)*, 1968-1999  
Pigmented urethane rubber, hanging piece. 59.7 x 26.7 x 19.7 cm.

35. *Harmless Woman*, 1969  
Bronze, gold patina. 28.3 x 11.4 x 11.4 cm.

36. *Portrait of Robert*, 1969  
Bronze, painted white. 33 x 31.8 x 25.4 cm.

37. *Rabbit*, 1970  
Bronze, wall piece. 58.4 x 28.9 x 14.9 cm.

38. *Untitled*, 1970  
Oval: paint on board. 119.4 x 149.9 cm.  
Private Collection, New York

39. *Le Trani Episode*, 1971  
Bronze, dark and polished patina. 41.9 x 58.7 x 59.1 cm. Note: plaster version reproduced

40. *The Destruction of the Father*, 1974  
Plaster, latex, wood, fabric and red light. 237.8 x 362.3 x 248.6 cm.

41. *Spiral Woman*, 1984  
Bronze, hanging piece, with slate disc.  
Bronze: 48.3 x 10.2 x 14 cm. Slate disc:

3.17 x 86.3 x 86.3 cm.

42. *Nature Study*, 1984-2002  
Blue rubber. 76.2 x 48.3 x 38.1 cm. Stainless steel base: 104.1 x 55.2 x 55.2 cm.

43. *Here And Now*, 1988  
Chalk on blue paper. 73.7 x 58.4 cm.

44. *Mamelles*, 1991  
Pigmented urethane rubber, wall relief. 48.3 x 304.8 x 48.3 cm.

45. *Le Défi II*, 1992  
Painted wood, glass and electric lights. 200.7 x 179.7 x 59.7 cm.

46. *Arch of Hysteria*, 1993  
Bronze, polished patina, hanging piece. 83.8 x 101.6 x 58.4 cm.

47. *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, 1994  
Ink on paper. 27.3 x 12.7 cm.

48. *Red Room (Parents)*, 1994  
Mixed media. 247.7 x 426.7 x 424.2 cm.

Collection Ursula Hauser, Switzerland

49. *Home for Runaway Girls*, 1994  
Gouache on sandpaper. 22.2 x 15.9 cm.

50. *Untitled (double sided)*, 1995  
Recto: Ink and pencil on paper. Verso: Pencil on paper. 30.5 x 22.9 cm.

51. *Untitled (I Have Been to Hell And Back)*, 1996  
Embroidered handkerchief. 49.5 x 45.7 cm.  
Private Collection, New York

52. *Couple I*, 1996  
Fabric, hanging piece. 203.2 x 68.6 x 71.1 cm.

53. *Single I*, 1996  
Fabric, hanging piece. 213.4 x 132.1 x 40.6 cm.

54. *Spider*, 1997  
Steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric, rubber, silver, gold and bone. 449.6 x 665.5 x 518.2 cm. Private Collection, Courtesy Cheim & Read



Louise Bourgeois. *Le Défi II (El desafío II)*, 1992. Madera pintada, vidrio y luces eléctricas. 200,7 x 179,7 x 59,7 cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser & Wirth. Fotografía: Peter Bellamy

55. *Couple IV*, 1997  
Fabric, leather, stainless steel and plastic.  
50.8 x 165.1 x 77.5 cm. Wood and glass  
Victorian vitrine: 182.9 x 208.3 x 109.2 cm.

56. *Medical Horizontal* (double sided), 1998  
Colored inks, pencil and whiteout on paper.  
22.9 x 30.5 cm. Private Collection, New York

57. *The Punishment of the Dagger Child*  
(double sided), 1998  
Ink and gouache on paper. 29.2 x 22.9 cm.

58. *Unconscious Compulsive Thoughts*,  
1998  
Pencil on paper. 22.9 x 29.5 cm.

59. *Untitled*, 1999  
Fabric, wood and metal. 64.8 x 20.3 x 30.5  
cm. Stainless steel, glass and wood vitrine:  
188 x 60.9 x 60.9 cm.

60. *Maman*, 1999  
Bronze, stainless steel and marble. 927.1  
x 891.5 x 1023.6 cm. Private Collection,  
Courtesy Cheim & Read

61. *The Smell of Feet*, 1999  
Ink and whiteout on paper. 27.9 x 21.6 cm.

62. *Art Is a Guaranty of Sanity*, 2000  
Pencil on pink paper. 27.9 x 21.6 cm.  
Collection Museum of Modern Art, New York

63. *Rejection*, 2001  
Fabric, steel and lead. 63.5 x 33 x 30.5 cm.  
Aluminum and glass vitrine: 185.4 x 68.5 x  
68.5 cm. Collection John Cheim, New York

64. *Couple*, 2001  
Fabric, hanging piece. 48.3 x 15.2 x 16.5  
cm. Stainless steel, glass and wood vitrine:  
193 x 60.9 x 60.9 cm.

65. *Seven in Bed*, 2001  
Fabric and stainless steel. 29.2 x 53.3 x  
53.3 cm. Stainless steel, glass and wood  
vitrine: 172.7 x 85.1 x 87.6 cm.

66. *Self Portrait: La Nausée*, 2001  
Red ink and pencil on paper. 23.5 x 20.3  
cm.

67. *zUntitled*, 2002  
Ink and pencil on music paper. 29.8 x 22.9  
cm.

68. *Je les Protégerai*, 2002  
Ink and pencil on paper. 24.1 x 20.3 cm.  
*Knife Figure*, 2002  
Fabric, steel and wood. 22.2 x 76.2 x 19.1  
cm. Stainless steel, glass and wood vitrine:  
177.8 x 96.5 x 45.7 cm.

69. *The Reticent Child*, 2003  
Fabric, marble, stainless steel and  
aluminum: six elements. 182.9 x 284.5 x  
91.4 cm.

70. *Hey Hole*, 2005  
Ink on pink graph paper. 27.9 x 18.7 cm.

71. *The Beating of the Heart* (double sided),  
2006  
Recto: Watercolor and pencil on embossed  
paper. Verso: Watercolor on paper. 76.2 x  
53.3 cm.

72. *Cinq*, 2007  
Fabric and stainless steel, hanging piece.  
61 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm.

73. *The Feeding*, 2007  
Gouache on paper. 60 x 45.7 cm. Collection  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

74. *The Feeding*, 2007  
Gouache on paper. 59.7 x 45.7 cm.

75. *The Feeding*, 2007  
Gouache on paper. 59.7 x 45.4 cm.

76. *The Good Mother*, 2007  
Gouache on paper. 37.1 x 27.9 cm.

77. *Untitled*, 2007  
Fabric and thread. 33 x 47 x 30.5 cm.  
Stainless steel, glass and wood vitrine:  
177.8 x 76.2 x 60.9 cm.

78. *Claustrophobia and Omnipotence*, 2007  
Pencil on paper, suite of four. Each: 75.6 x  
57.2 cm.

79. *The Family*, 2008  
Gouache on paper, suite of nine. Each: 36.8  
x 27.9 cm.

80. *Conscious and Unconscious*, 2008  
Fabric, rubber, thread and stainless steel.  
175.3 x 94 x 47 cm. White oak, glass and  
stainless steel vitrine: 224.8 x 167.6 x 94 cm.

81. *MAMAN*, 2008  
Gouache on paper. 45.7 x 61 cm.

82. *I Am Afraid*, 2009  
Woven fabric. 110.5 x 182.9 cm.

83. *Spiral*, 2009  
Gouache on paper. 59.7 x 45.7 cm.

84. *Spiral*, 2009  
Gouache on paper. 59.7 x 45.7 cm.

85. *Maman*, 2009  
Gouache and pencil on paper. 91.4 x 121.6  
cm.



Louise Bourgeois. *Nature Study*  
(*Estudio del natural*), 1984–2002. Goma  
azul. 76,2 x 48,3 x 38,1 cm. Base de  
acero inoxidable: 104,1 x 55,2 x 55,2  
cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser  
& Wirth. Fotografía: Christopher  
Burke.

## Louise Bourgeois' writings, by Philip Larratt-Smith



Louise Bourgeois. *Art Is a Guaranty of Sanity* (*El arte es garantía de cordura*), 2000. Lápiz sobre papel rosa. 27.9 x 21.5 cm. Col. Museum of Modern Art, Nueva York. Fotografía: Christopher Burke

[...] It might strike the reader as odd that Bourgeois considered the output of the writer superior to that of the artist. It was her view that the writer engages in an intellectual process and has the ability to prove and persuade, whereas the artist is caught up in self-expression. In the end, however, she distrusted words:

The existentialists disappeared when the structuralists came in. Lacan came in. The structuralists were interested in language, grammar, and words. Sartre and the existentialists were interested in experience. Obviously, I am on the side of the existentialists. With words, you can say anything. You can lie as long as the day, but you cannot lie in the re-creation of an experience.

As La Rochefoucauld said, 'Why do you talk so much? What is it that you have to hide?' The purpose of words is often to hide things. I want to have total recall and total control of the past. Now what would be the sense in lying?<sup>1</sup>

The body, with its functions, dysfunctions, failures, and rich panoply of sensations, does not lie. Bodily distempers give her access to the realm of the unconscious, which is the royal road to the otherwise unrecoverable past. So she studies closely and compulsively records her menstrual cramps, stomach upsets, headaches, and spells of insomnia because "the fears of the past were connected with the functions of the body" and therefore "they reappear through the body."<sup>2</sup> Bourgeois:

The premenstrual tension shows – withdrawal

self degradation, suspicion + guilt – There is

something wrong with me + it is my fault

the post menstrual tension is revengeful + aggressive [sic]

there is something wrong with me but it is

"your fault" you did it (the recipient of the

accusation is the mother figure)<sup>3</sup>

At the same time Bourgeois displays that particular talent of the French for parsing emotions in the language of rationality. There are writings where she observes herself as if from a distance, as if the psychic events being recorded – which following Cézanne she called her *petites sensations*, and which appear to be bubbling up from her unconscious unimpeded – were actually happening to somebody else. Her penchant for making a rational analysis of her emotions, fortified by a detached and almost clinical tone, may derive in part from her early study of mathematics and philosophy at the Sorbonne, where she wrote her thesis on Pascal. Bourgeois was a true Pascalian, and quotes with approval one of his best-known aphorisms: "*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.*"<sup>4</sup> Other writings, by

1 Meyer-Thoss, 202. Once, apropos of La Fontaine's *Le loup et l'agneau*, she remarked: "the *loup* comes and pontificates to the *agneau*, in order to eat him - that was my father!" Kuspit, 32.

2 Bourgeois concludes, "sculpture is the body, and my body is the sculpture." Meyer-Thoss, 195.

3 LB-0036 (17 October 1955).

4 Allan Bloom wrote that all Frenchmen are either Cartesians or Pascalians. (See *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987), 52.) If the



contrast, give us a raw, uncensored stream-of-consciousness that seems to emanate from an irresistible compulsion to spill her guts or assuage her guilt. This compulsion is related to the parallel need to *faire le vide*, to empty her body or her house as much as to evacuate her mind – a need that coexists, once again, with an opposing drive to fill in empty space, as if under compulsion of a *horror vacui*, as in the sheets filled with repetitive injunctions (“*calme toi*,” “*ne pense à rien*”) or in her drawings of webs and skeins wherein everything is continuous and interconnected. In some cases the stream of her associations is triggered, à la Proust, by a sensory stimulus that throws open a vista on a hitherto unremembered incident from her past. In others it is an encounter with another person that brings the unconscious to the fore. In still others her associations appear to be the result of an exercise in automatic writing deliberately undertaken as a method of unlocking the past.

Bourgeois once described the process of drawing as a journey without a destination, and the same could be said of her writings. Closely aligned to her practice of drawing, they often have a strong visual dimension that evinces the same obsessive, repetitive mark-making. There are texts where her lines are written in tight spiral configurations, and texts where they radiate outwards like spokes from a hub. Sometimes she illustrates a given point with drawing elements. Her exhaustive lists of people, places, and things are often organized in a column, like one of her stacked segmented forms from the early 50s. She catalogues the rivers she knows, the houses she has lived in, the ateliers she has attended. She runs through the conjugations of a verb, or the permutations of a given phrase, or the associations of the colour pink. Occasionally she imagines how each of the members of her two families of five would behave in the face of a sexual attraction. Elsewhere she asks and answers the most elementary questions in an interior dialogue, like a catechism.

Thus her collections and recollections of names and place-names are as much *aide-mémoire* as exorcism: the valences may shift from positive to negative or vice versa but the underlying mechanism is the same. Bourgeois is compelled to remember everything in order to hold on to her past, and at the same time wants to forget the past in order to live in the present. Her past has never lost its magic, mystery, and drama precisely because it is also the site and origin of the trauma to which she must eternally return. “To unravel a torment”: the process of tracing her anxieties back to their root causes allows her to make the shift from the passive, a victim of fear and depression, to the active, the author of her own destiny.<sup>5</sup> Yet each state is dialectically dependent upon its opposite. So, for example, her aggression, which is as prominent in the psychoanalytic writings as it is in the physical act of carving wood or marble, is actually a defense mechanism. The marble *Femme Couteau* series reverses the standard associations of femininity with passivity and withdrawal, proposing instead a fusion of woman with knife. The iconography of knives, scissors, guillotines, disjointed forms, and dismembered body parts in her work gives symbolic form to a marked conflict between maternal and paternal identifications – a conflict that is thus tethered not only to aggression but also to frustrated sexual desire. Likewise the psychoanalytic writings show her attacking her husband as a way of warding off unwelcome feelings of castration. Yet she frequently identifies Robert with her mother, which adds another layer of complexity (and eventual remorse). *Femme Couteau* takes on the phallic form identified with the aggressor.<sup>6</sup> But her own acts of aggression invariably end in guilt and depression

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Cartesian worldview is rationalistic and posits a mind-body division, the Pascalian emphasizes the power of intuition and the limits of reason (as in the famous wager of faith). Bourgeois’s remark that she is “trying to be a Descartes. [...] I think, therefore I am; I doubt therefore I am; I am deceived, therefore I am” (Meyer-Thoss, 71), may seem somewhat counterintuitive since she is so clearly on the Pascalian side of the ledger. It may be that she is merely appropriating here the syntactic structure of Descartes’ most famous proposition. More likely, in my view, her wish to adopt a Cartesian position privileging mind over body expresses a wish to escape the anxiety that torments her.

<sup>5</sup> Diary entry, 22 February 1949: “the aetiology of hysteria by / Freud / hysterical symptoms can / always be traced to / repressed sexual memories / usually having occurred (experienced) / the memories may become / conscious much later, at puberty / my father walking around in / his nightshirt holding his genitals.” LBD-1949.

<sup>6</sup> “I’m afraid of power. It makes me nervous. In real life, I identify with the victim, that is why I went into art. In my art, I am the murderer. I feel for the ordeal of the murderer, the man who has to live with his conscience.” Meyer-Thoss, 195.

# Life & Work



Louise Bourgeois trabajando en *Sleep II (Sueño II)*, Italia, 1967.  
Fotografía: Studio Fotografico, I. Bessi, Carrara

## Selection of writings

**April 24, 1952**

My mother left me behind two winters.

winter of 26 - 27 when she went to Pau

I wanted to go away and save people from evil *Travail devoir veu*

T D V. This lasted for years. I was 16 years old.

My father never belonged to the house. felt at the *hotel des anges* with the three girls. and the mannequin in his bed.

The long search for a father who would belong to the house. In St Sulpice and St-Germain-des-Prés. I feel at peace.

guilt feeling and need to be punished or atone for. Unable to blame a parent some children accept the guilt as their own, and want to pay for it. If my father had been unsuccessful in his bad behavior the way a foolish drunkard is we would have been glad to help him and like him and feel sorry for him. But my father was not pitiful, he had pleasure, unjustly, and did not pay

for his leaving his family. He even put God on his side, at the same time making fun of the religion and preaching "honesty."

On top of that it was my innocent mother who suffered, there was two injustices. My father stood as a figure of success in the family, community. He was rewarded by both pleasure and standing. Pierre never got either.

**c. 1958**

The analysis is a jip

is a trap

is a job

is a privilege

is a luxury

is a duty

is a duty towards myself

my husband      my parents

my children      my

is a shame

is a farce

is a love *affair*

is a rendez-vous

is a cat + mouse game

is a boat to drive

is an internment

is a joke

makes me powerless

makes me into a cop

is a bad dream

is my interest

is my field of study -

is more than I can manage

makes me furious

is a bore

is a nuisance

is a pain in the neck-

**c. 1953**



Louise Bourgeois. *Fée Couturière (Hada costurera)*, 1963. Bronze, pintura blanca, pieza colgante. 100,3 x 57,2 x 57,2 cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser & Wirth. Fotografía: Christopher Burke





Louise Bourgeois. *Janus Fleuri (Jano florecido)*, 1968. Bronce, patina dorada, pieza colgante. 25,7 x 31,8 x 21,3 cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser & Wirth. Fotografía: Christopher Burke

**LB-0513 (c. 1953)**

*I was always conscious of a possibility of silence falling like the lid of a Lorsqu grave and engulfing me for ever and ever.*

*The silence invaded the room and I was afraid to hear my heart beat. this danger was coming from within and that this only inincessant [sic] flow of words could keep it at bay if not master it.*

*to hear chaos, a cascade.  
the Marne locks – Beethoven  
a river that carries  
rocks and trees  
The thunder rolling  
By.*

**LB-0257**

Jan15-1959

*I read before falling asleep Sartre 10pm  
Le Mur and the room*

*I cannot fall asleep I wait  
awake until 2:30AM . then take  
an aspirin. I dream of a family  
scene where life is calm The  
mother is very tall corseted formidable  
but nothing unpleasant ever  
occurred -*

*All of a sudden a person the gifted stocky  
type asks do you know what  
a symbol is - It is something that  
pretends to be something else .  
You know this women that you call your  
Mother . she really is "Death" her  
body is like a wicker basket*

*underneath her dress - I am atrociously  
flabbergasted to have lived so long  
without knowing and thank God without  
being in conflict with her*

**LB-0124 (17 de septiembre de 1959)**

*After Maman's death, I started to be afraid  
to leave the house especially after lunch  
Sometimes I was thinking that if someone were putting  
poison in her food she would be out like  
a light - Then I started to forbid people to  
cook for her, also I mounted guard and I was afraid  
that people would hurt her - after she was dead I said  
that at least she would not suffer any more. I was definitely  
relieved by her death and I put myself in her bed  
and forbade people to come in her room after mother's  
death I felt lighter too and kept her *souvenir* alive  
in the children's memory as an atonement.*

**LB-0768 (c. 1959)**

*scalp  
the forehead  
the ears  
the base of the skull  
the back of the neck  
the back between the shoulder blades  
the base of the ribs -  
the solar plexus -  
the stomach the esophagus the throat -  
the intestines - the anus  
the pelvis bones the joints  
the legs thighs ankle toes  
the arms forearms and hands  
the breathing the tr  
he palpitations  
the hot flashes  
the pains - the cramps -  
the sweaty smell of the stalked  
animal extreme tension*

**LB-0234 (c. 1961)**

The dramatic quality of the black wood statue  
comes from: 1°) *the verticality indicates an effort or élan  
or a rush from the id -*  
2°) *the horizontals are like "stops", checking,  
worries, conventional, an effort to curb instincts  
representation of an inner conflict, where there is élan and  
frustration= tormented Baudelaire "-I felt  
today the wind blowing..."*

**LB-0516 (c. 2008)**

Never let me be free from  
this burden that will never  
let me be free  
Louise Bourgeois

Cf. diary of 4 April 1954: "*insist on the impossible / insist on the  
absolutely unnatural / short of an unceasing vigilance / Deny force  
of gravity. Insist / so they stiffen and straighten up / + stand vertical  
when their own / weight and shape brings them / back down to the  
ground constantly - / Psychology view of my work / trouble with the  
bases / inhibition about the bases[.]*"

The allusion is to Baudelaire's "My Heart Laid Bare" (*Mon Coeur  
Mis À Nu*, 1864): "I have cultivated my hysteria with joy and terror.  
Now I am always dizzy, and today, 23 January 1862, I received a  
singular admonition, I felt pass over me the wind of the wing of  
imbecility." ("*J'ai cultivé mon hystérie avec jouissance et terreur.  
Maintenant, j'ai toujours le vertige, et aujourd'hui, 23 janvier 1862,  
j'ai subi un singulier avertissement, j'ai senti passer sur moi le vent  
de l'aile de l'imbécillité.*") (I am indebted to Françoise Gramet and  
Richard Sieburth for identifying this allusion.)



## Biography

### The following chronology is included in the catalogue:

#### 1911

Louise Joséphine Bourgeois is born in Paris, on December 25th, to Josephine Valerie Fauriaux Bourgeois and Louis Isadore Bourgeois. The family, including her seven-year older sister Henriette Marie Louise, rents an apartment at 172 Boulevard Saint-Germain on the fourth floor. The family has a tapestry gallery at 174 Boulevard Saint-Germain.

#### 1912

The Bourgeois family rents a house in Choisy-le-Roi outside of Paris at 4 Avenue de Villeneuve-St.-Georges, until 1917. The house has a two-story atelier for the tapestry workers. The property extends all the way to the Seine River.

#### 1913

Pierre Joseph Alexandre, Louise's brother, is born.

#### 1915-1918



Louise Bourgeois. *Sleep II (Sueño II)*, 1967. Mármol. 59,4 x 76,8 x 60,3 cm. Dos troncos de madera, cada uno: 27,9 x 83,8 x 35,5 cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser & Wirth. Fotografía: Peter Bellamy

Her father, Louis Bourgeois, and his brother Desiré are mobilized to fight in World War I. During the war, the Bourgeois family moves temporarily to Aubusson, the home of Louise's maternal grandparents. Her uncle, Desiré, is killed the first week of the war. Louis Bourgeois is wounded in 1915 and brought to a hospital in Chartres, where Louise and her mother travel to visit him.

#### 1919

The Bourgeois family acquires a property in Antony at 11 Avenue de la Division Leclerc.

#### 1921

Louise attends the Collège Sèigné and later graduates from the Lycée Fénelon in Paris, 1927. Just after World War I, Louise's mother Josephine contracts the Spanish flu. Louise's education is interrupted to care for her mother.

#### 1922

Sadie Gordon Richmond is hired by Louis Bourgeois to teach English to the Bourgeois children. She becomes the his mistress and lives with the family periodically until 1932.

#### 1923

At the age of twelve, Bourgeois is asked to use her drawing skills to help out in the tapestry workshop. She becomes an expert at drawing legs and feet. The Bourgeois family rents the Villa Marcel in Le Cannet. They spend the winters at Le Cannet and the summers at Antony.

**1932**

Bourgeois enters the Sorbonne to study calculus and geometry, receiving the Baccalauréate in Philosophy from the University of Paris. Her dissertation is on Blaise Pascal and Emmanuel Kant.

Her mother Joséphine dies on September 14, in Antony.

**1933**

Bourgeois is depressed by the death of her mother. She abandons the study of mathematics and begins to study art. Over the next several years, she studies in various artists' ateliers in Montparnasse and Montmartre.

**1936-1938**

Bourgeois is an assistant or *massière* at the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière in the studio of Yves Brayer. She also studies under Marcel Gromaire and André Lhote. Bourgeois studies with Fernand Léger (1938) who suggests that her sensibility leans more towards the three dimensional.

**1938**

Bourgeois partitions off part of her father's tapestry gallery at 174 Boulevard Saint-Germain in order to open up her own art gallery dealing in prints and paintings by Delacroix, Matisse, Redon, Valadon and Bonnard. There she meets Robert Goldwater, an American art historian who is in Paris doing research on his doctoral thesis "Primitivism in Modern Painting". They marry on September 12th in Paris.

Bourgeois moves to New York City with Robert Goldwater. They live at 63 Park Avenue. Goldwater is an instructor in art history at New York University.

**1939**

Bourgeois and Goldwater return to France to arrange for the adoption of Michel Olivier, an orphan, who was born in Margaux near Bordeaux in 1936.

**1940**

Jean-Louis Thomas Bourgeois is born to Louise Bourgeois and Robert Goldwater on July 4th.

**1941**

Alain Matthew Clement Bourgeois, their third son, is born on November 12th.

**1945**

Bourgeois has her first solo show, "Paintings by Louise Bourgeois" at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery in New York City.

**1947**

For her second solo exhibition, Bourgeois exhibits seventeen paintings at Norlyst Gallery in New York City.

**1949**

"Louise Bourgeois, Recent Work 1947-1949: Seventeen Standing Figures in Wood", the artist's first solo exhibition of sculpture is presented at the Peridot Gallery in New York City. Conceived as an environmental installation, it includes *Dagger Child* (1947-1949), *Woman With Packages* (1949) and *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1947-1949).

### 1950

Bourgeois has a second exhibition, "Louise Bourgeois: Sculptures," at the Peridot Gallery. Fifteen wooden sculptures are shown, including *Persistent Antagonism* (1946-1948) and *Sleeping Figure* (1950).

Robert Goldwater receives a Fulbright Scholarship to study in France.

The family returns to France and lives in Antony. They eventually rent a house at 77 Rue Daguerre in Paris where Bourgeois will have a studio until 1955.

### 1951

Bourgeois's father, Louis, passes away on April 9th.

Depressed, Bourgeois begins therapy with Dr. Leonard Cammer and eventually begins psychoanalysis with Dr. Henry Lowenfeld. Her intense analysis is from 1952-1967, but she continues to see Lowenfeld until his death in 1985.

### 1953

Bourgeois has her third and last solo show at the Peridot Gallery entitled "Louise Bourgeois: Drawings for Sculpture and Sculpture" which includes *Foret (Night Garden)* (1953).

### 1955

Bourgeois becomes an American citizen.

### 1957

In 1957, Robert Goldwater is hired as a Professor of Art History at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

### 1960

Bourgeois starts experimenting with organic materials, such as plastic, latex and rubber. Bourgeois's brother Pierre dies.

### 1964

After a hiatus of eleven years, Bourgeois exhibits a new body of work, "Louise Bourgeois: Recent Sculpture", at the Stable Gallery. She exhibits *Clutching* (1962), *Labyrinthine Tower* (1962), *Lair* (1962-1963), *Rondeau for L* (1963) and *Fée Couturière* (1963). The Rose Fried Gallery simultaneously presents a solo show of works on paper, "Recent Drawings by Louise Bourgeois".

### 1966

Lucy Lippard organizes the exhibition "Eccentric Abstraction" at the Fischbach Gallery in New York City. Her work is shown with a younger generation of artists such as Eva Hesse and Bruce Nauman.

### 1967-1968

Bourgeois makes her first trip to Pietrasanta, Italy to work in marble and bronze. She makes *Germinal* (1967) and the *Janus* series (1968) in bronze. In marble, she realizes *Sleep II* (1967) and *Cumul I* (1969). She will continue to return regularly to Pietrasanta through 1972.

Bourgeois becomes active in political and feminist events. Her work, such as *Le Regard* (1966), *Fillette* (1968) and *Femme Couteau* (1969-1970), become more sexually explicit.

**1973**

Bourgeois's husband Robert Goldwater dies on March 26th.

**1974**

Bourgeois exhibits at the alternative space called 112 Greene Street. Entitled "Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture 1970-1974," it includes *Labyrinthine Tower* (1962), the hanging *Janus* series (1968) in bronze, and the installation *The Destruction of the Father* (1974).

**1978**

Bourgeois exhibits the installation *Confrontation* (1978) at the Hamilton Gallery of Contemporary Art in New York City. Her performance, "A Banquet: A Fashion Show of Body Parts", is presented inside the installation where models parade while wearing latex costumes.

**1980**

"The Iconography of Louise Bourgeois" is curated by Jerry Gorovoy at Max Hutchinson Gallery in New York. The exhibition includes early prints, drawings and paintings, including the four *Femme Maison* (1945-1947) paintings. Bourgeois's older sister, Henriette, dies on July 9th.

**1982**

"Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective" opens at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The exhibition, curated by Deborah Wye, is the first retrospective given to a woman artist at the museum. The show travels to the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and the Akron Art Museum in Ohio. Bourgeois makes a slide presentation called "Partial Recall" that recounts the story of her early family life, to accompany the MoMA exhibition. For *Artforum*, Bourgeois will create a layout excerpted from "Partial Recall" that tells the story of her English tutor Sadie Gordon Richmond's relationship with her father.

**1989**

Organized by Peter Weiermair, Bourgeois has her first European Retrospective at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, "Louise Bourgeois: A Retrospective Exhibition." The show travels to the Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich, the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Lyon, the Fundación Tàpies in Barcelona, the Kunstmuseum in Bern and the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo.

**1990**

Bourgeois's son Michel passes away.

**1993**

Bourgeois represents the United States at the American Pavilion of the Venice Biennale.

**1995**

The MARCO in Monterrey, Mexico mounts "Louise Bourgeois" which travels to the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo in Seville, and to the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City.

**1996**

Bourgeois is included in the Sao Paulo Bienal, curated by Paulo Herkenhoff and Jerry Gorovoy.

**1997**

Violette Editions in London publishes *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father / Reconstruction of the Father (Writings and Interviews 1923-1997)*, edited and with texts by Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist.

The National Medal of Arts is presented to Bourgeois by President Clinton at the White House. Her son Jean-Louis Bourgeois accepts the award on her behalf.

**1999**

Curated by Jerry Gorovoy and Danielle Tilkin, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte / Reina Sofia in Madrid mounts the Retrospective exhibition "Louise Bourgeois: Architecture and Memory".

**2000**

Bourgeois is commissioned for the inaugural installation at Turbine Hall of Bankside Power Station, opening as the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art. Bourgeois displays a thirty foot steel and marble Spider called *Maman* (1999) and three steel architectural towers called *I Do, I Undo* and *I Redo* (1999-2000) that employ the use of staircases and mirrors and incorporate fabric and marble sculptures within the interiors.

**2001**

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao purchases the thirty foot bronze, stainless steel and marble Spider *Maman* (1999) and installs it outside of their titanium paneled building designed by Frank Gehry.

**2007-2009**

The Tate Modern in London organizes a Bourgeois Retrospective in collaboration with the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. The exhibition travels to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington DC.

**2008**

The French Legion of Honor medal is presented by President Sarkozy to Louise Bourgeois at artist's Chelsea home.

**2010**

Louise Bourgeois dies on May 31st.

**2011**

Curated by Philip Larratt-Smith, "Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed" presents the first in-depth examination of Bourgeois's relationship to psychoanalysis and art. The exhibition is organized by the Fundación Proa in Buenos Aires and the Instituto Tomie Ohtake in Sao Paulo and also travels to the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro.

# Texts & Essays



Louise Bourgeois. *The Feeding (El dar de comer)*, 2007. Gouache sobre papel. 60 x 45,7 cm. Col. Museum of Modern Art, Nueva York. Fotografía: Christopher Burke



## Introduction: Sculpture As Symptom, by Philip Larratt-Smith

[...] The psychoanalytic writings chronicle Bourgeois's descent into severe depression in the 50s, agoraphobia being merely one of the most obvious symptoms. She was acutely aware that this breakdown was unravelling her family life and undermining her identity as daughter, wife, and mother. Worse still, it had become almost impossible for her to work. In the face of her depression, Bourgeois's principal defense lay in making art that allowed her to enact the ritual movement from passive to active of which she often spoke and wrote. The process of making art also enabled her to channel and transform her dammed libido and her aggression against



Louise Bourgeois, *Couple IV (Pareja IV)*, 1997. Tela, cuero, acero inoxidable y plástico. 50,8 x 165,1 x 77,5 cm. Vitrina victoriana de madera y vidrio: 182,9 x 208,3 x 109,2 cm. Cortesía de Cheim & Read y Hauser & Wirth. Fotografía: Christopher Burke

others and herself into symbolic form and through symbolic actions such as cutting, drilling, carving, and pouring. When she was deprived of this outlet, Bourgeois felt herself to be locked in a vicious circle of frustration, hostility, and guilt.

If the trauma of her mother's death in 1932 had been the primary motive for her switch from the study of mathematics and philosophy to art, the death of her father in 1951 had served as the catalyst for her decision to undergo psychoanalysis.<sup>1</sup> In her youth her mother had repaired the tears and holes in the tapestries that passed through the family workshop at Antony. Bourgeois took this activity as a model for the restorative possibilities of art. In an undated loose sheet, she wrote: "why sculpture – because –the experiences / reached when working are the deepest and / most significant [...] / *Sculpture is the others / or rather clay is the others and / the sculptor is the ego. these are situa / tions concrete and precise.*"<sup>2</sup> For most of her life, art was her primary form of psychic restoration, although at the height of her depression psychoanalysis served as a substitute for art, at the same time that it helped her to learn how to continue to make art. The psychoanalytic writings flesh out the relatively unknown period between 1952, when she was still articulating her series of monolithic and segmented wooden Personages, and 1964, when she would exhibit a new body of work at the Stable Gallery in New York City.<sup>3</sup> They establish the crucial role played by psychoanalysis in Bourgeois's artistic development, and their richness of detail and emotional range confirm Lucy Lippard's observation that "rarely has an abstract art been so directly and honestly informed by its maker's psyche."<sup>4</sup>

Along with Marxism, that other twentieth-century unity of theory and practice, psychoanalysis was the lingua franca of the intelligentsia in the United States of the 1930s and 40s. The Abstract Expressionist artists, Bourgeois's contemporaries, were versed in Freud and Jung and spoke of their art in relation to the unconscious and the visual language of the dream world, all of which was the heritage of Surrealism. What Bourgeois's writings now make clear, however, is that her relationship to psychoanalysis was of a different order of magnitude. Probably no other artist has engaged more profoundly with psychology and psychoanalysis. Bourgeois firmly believed that the artist is privileged with access to the unconscious and with a rare capacity to express fundamental psychic realities in symbolic form. She maintained that although the process of making art offers the artist no permanent cure, it does at least grant him a momentary reprieve or exorcism of past trauma. By digging deep into his unconscious the artist paradoxically develops the ability to create powerful images of universal significance. Both sculpture and psychoanalysis yielded distinct forms of knowledge that became fused in Bourgeois's artistic practise.

Writing about Bourgeois's installation of her Personages, Rosalind Krauss stated that the "nature of the encounter" was a "projection of the Unconscious onto the space of the real."<sup>5</sup>

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1 Her motivational matrix takes the form of a chiasmus. Bourgeois stated, "I inherited my mother's rationality and my father's sick heart," ("Self-Expression Is Sacred and Fatal: Statements," in Christiane Meyer-Thoss, Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall (Zürich: Ammann Verlag, 1992), 185), viewing her mother as rational and reserved, and her father as emotionally expressive and self-indulgent. Yet when her mother died she abandoned the certitudes of mathematics and the logical structures of philosophy for the self-expression of art, hence she moved in the direction of a paternal identification; and when her father died she shifted back to the rationalistic self-inquiry of psychoanalysis, hence moved towards a maternal identification. Throughout her oeuvre she oscillated between these two identifications. This explains why the late works, including *Maman* and the fabric pieces, are grounded in a strong maternal identification.

2 LB-0630 (undated loose sheet, c.1959).

3 Bourgeois would continue writing extensively in her diaries, loose sheets, notebooks, even annotating the fronts and backs of drawings. This is not to mention the four articles she wrote for *Artforum* ("Child Abuse" in December 1982, "Freud's Toys" in January 1990, "Obsession," an article about Gaston Lachaise, in April 1992, and "Collecting: An Unruly Passion" in Summer 1994, all of which were psychoanalytically oriented) as well as the numerous interviews she gave over the years, with Donald Kuspit, Christiane Meyer-Thoss, et al.

4 "From the Inside Out," *Artforum*, 13 (Mar. 1975), 27; quoted in Deborah Wye, Louise Bourgeois (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 29.

5 "Magician's Game: Decades of Transformation, 1930-1950," in 200 Years of American Sculpture (Boston: David R. Godine,

The psychoanalytic writings reveal that the rigid, top-heavy Personages, which could barely stand by themselves and had to be bolted directly into the floor, mirrored the inner fragility of her psyche. Like the artist herself, they were literally scared stiff. By making these surrogates portable Bourgeois ensured that they were dependent on and inseparable from her, which expresses in reverse her fear of abandonment. Their titles reflect Bourgeois's states of mind: *Persistent Antagonism* (1946-48), *Dagger Child* (1947-49), *The Tomb of the Unknown Child* (1947-49), *The Observer* (1947-49), *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1951), and so on.<sup>6</sup> According to Bourgeois, these works represented "mourning"—not just for her father who died in 1951, nor for the other loved ones she had left behind in France when she moved to the United States in 1938, but mourning for her own disintegrating psychic integrity— even, perhaps, proleptic mourning for herself, since she was not certain that she would make it out of her depression alive. [...]

## The Return of the Repressed, by Philip Larratt-Smith

[...] To give unconscious expression to her Oedipal conflict Bourgeois created a triadic form, one which was sufficiently open to comprehend multiple narratives and shifting subject positions but also subject to the condensation and displacement characteristic of symbols and dreams. *Janus Fleuri* embodies the triadic structure of the Oedipal situation: the individual terms of this triad can be rotated and switched out, but the basic structure remains fixed. The central crevice of furrowed folds where two identical breasts/phalli are conjoined resembles the labia and opening of the vagina, here the third sexual organ. This tertiary point uniting two equidistant polarities forms the apex of an imaginary triangle. Like a theorem, *Janus Fleuri* concisely establishes the coordinates of Bourgeois's blocked Oedipal strivings and passions. Its double-faced form allows it to serve as a repository of good and bad identifications in the Kleinian sense, which is a crucial turning point in the passage through the Oedipal phase.

The first triadic dialogue must be the nucleus of the Bourgeois family, Louis – Joséphine – Louise, a reading that brings together the father's phallus and the mother's breast. At the threshold of puberty a powerful love for and jealousy of her father coexists with a solicitous devotion to her sick mother that cannot conceal an incestuous fantasy of taking the latter's place in the conjugal bed. In a loose sheet dating from 1959, Bourgeois notes various compulsive precautions she took to "protect" her mother from unspecified "people" who might wish to "hurt her," which is to say that she displaced her own unacceptable death wishes against her mother onto others. "I was definitely / relieved by her death and I put myself in her bed," coupling a symbolic enactment of her incestuous wishes for the forbidden father with a formulaic rationalization of the reason for her "relief" that displaces and disguises the source of her unconscious pleasure: "after she was dead I said / that at least she would not suffer any more." That she later kept her mother's memory alive "as an atonement" only confirms Bourgeois's sense of guilt.<sup>7</sup> *Janus Fleuri* represents the polarities and contradictory impulses of love and hate, but also the possibility of reparation. "I wanted to keep her alive (the / vow) it means I was trying or not to / get her dead ; then it was a mitigated and / crude aggression I felt (the reason is not necessary / to know) =I felt like killing – but this has never / been felt – I acted as if I was saving her."<sup>8</sup>

Another permutation of the triadic dialogue is the now-canonical love triangle of Louis – Sadie – Louise. Sadie Richmond Gordon was hired by Louis to tutor Bourgeois and her siblings in English and became his mistress. That Sadie was very close to Bourgeois and lived in the same house (like "a standard piece of furniture," in Bourgeois's mordant phrase<sup>9</sup>) made the liaison all the more traumatic. More, Sadie's liaison with Louis occurred right when

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in association with the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1976), 168; quoted in Wye, 20.

6 Some were natural wood, others were painted white with touches of Prussian blue, and others still were painted black with touches of red. Formally the sculptures show affinities both with the then-regnant Abstract Expressionist idiom and with primitive totems.

7 LB-0124 (17 September 1959).

8 LB-0654 (14 November 1966).

9 "Child Abuse," *ArtForum*, 20, no. 4 (December 1982), 40-7; rpt. in Bernadac and Obrist, 133.

Bourgeois was entering puberty and becoming sexually aware (the 1923 diary, dating from when Bourgeois was eleven years old, records her awareness of boys looking at her). Yet much as Dora facilitated her father's affair with Frau K. by spending time with Herr K., Bourgeois facilitated her father's liaison with Sadie by taking the role of her mother's nurse. No less than her mother Joséphine, she too is complicit in her father's liaison, adding another layer to her later guilt. Bourgeois's love for Sadie, with the intensity typical of her age, is analogous to the feelings Dora harbored towards the "adorable white body"<sup>10</sup> of Frau K.; it was also an unconscious identification with her father. If "the combined parent figure forms the basis of the ego ideal,"<sup>11</sup> then these various triangular configurations can only have contributed to the split in Bourgeois's ego.

Conflicting impulses emanating from within the triadic configuration leads to murderous hostility and violence. Reverting to a pre-Oedipal position, Bourgeois feels castrated, dispossessed of the father's phallus that she regards as rightfully hers. Impossible to identify with the weak mother figure of Joséphine, who has been supplanted by Sadie in the conjugal bed. And yet Bourgeois's transference of hostility from her mother to Sadie, from Sadie to her father, ultimately produces only confusion:<sup>12</sup>

I have the missing link – Kill \*  
 The killing – the stabbing to death  
 [...]
   
 Is it Sadie back of it all -  
 [...]
   
*my jealousy is deadly*  
*Look how the triangle establishes itself*  
*I feel two against one – against me*  
*with Alain + Robert against me*  
*the men against the woman*  
*and the couple against me*<sup>13</sup>

In later life she will play out this dynamic with the men in her own family, "with Alain + Robert against me." She feels beleaguered by the "couple" which, in true Oedipal fashion, she wants to break up. As the title of *Janus Fleuri* implies, her repressed Oedipal deadlock continues to blossom and bear fruit in the present.

Bourgeois later wrote that "the story of Sadie is to me almost as important as the story of my mother in my life. The motivation for the work is a negative reaction against her."<sup>14</sup> The tale of a "double betrayal" by father and mother, by Louis and Sadie, can be said to culminate in *The Destruction of the Father* (1974), a murderous fantasy staged amid fragmented body parts. The Oedipal deadlock gives rise to "a patricide idea" that expresses the "wish for freedom from an overstrong father fixation" and "from a jealousy which does not permit the patient to share his father with other siblings"<sup>15</sup> (or, in Sadie's case, surrogate sibling). In Bourgeois's account of this installation work, the children devour the overbearing father in order to bring his reign to an end. Certainly her murderous hostility against the father suggests a regression to a pre-Oedipal phase. But to eat the father is to incorporate the father's body into oneself, a symbolic representation of intercourse. The guilt that follows this act of killing is nothing other than a screen for the true cause of her guilt, which stems from having symbolically enacted her repressed wish to sleep with her father and of having usurped

10 [Fragment](#), 54.

11 Glover, 121.

12 "Robert who is an authority in / History + authenticity + critical / study of document is called / upon by Louise to establish the / fact that she is the only one / who can rightfully stand / next to Louis Bourgeois in a / picture gallery." Earlier in this entry Bourgeois observes "I litterally [sic] cannot live or function / without the protection of a father." (LBD-1952, 12 May 1952)

13 LB-0153 (18 March 1964). It need hardly be said that motions of stabbing are symbolic of genital intercourse. The impulse to "stab" Sadie places Bourgeois's in the position of her father, who did "stab" her.

14 On the occasion of Bourgeois's retrospective at MoMA in 1982, the artist created a slide show called *Partial Recall* that was presented alongside the work and later adapted into a limited edition book: [Louise Bourgeois: Album](#), published in 1994. It was first published as an edited version titled "Child Abuse" in [ArtForum](#) (vol. 20, no. 4, December 1982). Bourgeois's own psychoanalytic account of her childhood, which immediately became the definitive critical lens on her production, advanced the interpretation that supplied critics with a hermeneutic device that was no less aesthetically convenient than ideologically congenial. It is only with the discovery of the psychoanalytic writings that the true complexity of her Oedipal situation has become clear.

15 Stekel, 19.

her mother's place.<sup>16</sup> Bourgeois manifests an obsessive fear that "it is certain that if I steal a P / that belongs to her since my father belongs / to her she will not be content / and she will take her revenge." This revenge will take the form of abandonment ("my mother will abandon me"):

*but silly you I am not going  
to love him I simply want to  
steal him, to dispossess him, and I will come back to you  
Both of us we are going to steal him, we  
are going to eat him*<sup>17</sup>

Nicky Glover writes that according to Klein, "emptiness" is "the most profound anxiety experienced by girls [and] is the equivalent of castration anxiety in boys."<sup>18</sup> The killing of the father in *The Destruction of the Father* is Bourgeois's retaliation for the feeling of emptiness which indicates a castration anxiety (and which is so evident in her psychoanalytic writings). To fill herself with the father fulfils the most elementary "infantile phantasies" which are "associated with on the one hand love and on the other hand hunger."<sup>19</sup> [...]

## The Child, the Container and the Clastrum: the artistic vocation of Louise Bourgeois, by Meg Harris Williams

[...] In Bourgeois's iconic series of Spiders, especially the giant *Maman*, the male and female aspects of the combined object achieve 'equilibrium' and emphasize the true scale of the infant's powerlessness in proportion to its source of self-knowledge. She recounts tottering between items of living room furniture higher than her head, encouraged by her mother. Bourgeois said she wanted to be able to move around underneath the sculpture – in line with her many childhood play 'tents' ('textile sculptures'), bearing in mind the fact that the large tapestries restored by the family had originally served as room dividers; recalling also playing beneath the family table, as in her earlier sculpture *The Blind Leading the Blind*, which she associated with watching her parents' legs moving about as they prepared the dinner. The complex articulated legs (as male component) are also the abandoned family members of the *Personnages*, mourned and reconstituted and held in equilibrium via the fulcrum of the female body with its hanging egg-sac. The sac recalls all her hanging works, rooted in the childhood memory of beans and chairs suspended from the barn rafters, and suggestive of a birth looming: its white marble eggs are Louise's siblings, the world's babies. The carefully poised legs are strong and mutually reinforcing, forming a series of arches radiating from the central body. Each leg is an 'arch of hysteria,' a wound bundle of muscle and nerves, recalling the twisted rolls of tapestries wrung-out in the river Bièvre, or the arched skeins of hair in her drawing 'Altered States' (which she considered one of her 'finest').<sup>20</sup> Strands of turbulence or volcanic sexual excitement are enveloped in formal containment (polished bronze) before they shapelessly explode. Hair, she writes, 'represents beauty.'<sup>21</sup> It is beauty when it is sculpted – for as she points out, the artist does not 'serve beauty in its raw state; it / must be consumed, assimilated and recreated.'<sup>22</sup> It is beauty when it achieves a kind of abstraction or refinement, which appear cruel and cutting, as in *Femme Couteau* (cut woman as well as knife-woman), or her armless *Harmless Woman*.<sup>23</sup> For she described her work-process as one of continuous simplification until the meaning was finally revealed through form. The two types of artist traditionally characterized as maker and seer (or by Stokes, modeller and carver) are really one

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<sup>16</sup> If in the standard Oedipal template the boy who desires the mother (id) is threatened by castration by the father (superego), one may imagine that for the girl the terms are reversed, that is to say that the formation of the superego is tied to maternal law.

<sup>17</sup> LB-0649 (15 April 1958). See also LB-0596 (undated loose sheet, c. 1959): "the fear (phobia) of / being abandoned by my / mother (Robt) may be the / fear of retaliation of my / mother for my incestuous / wishes so this is the answer."

<sup>18</sup> Glover, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Eduardo Colombo, "Sexuality and Erotism: From Sexuality to Fantasy," in *Infantile Sexuality and Attachment*, ed. Daniel Widlöcher, trans. Susan Fairfield (New York: Other Books, 2002), 71.

<sup>20</sup> "Interview with Marie-Laure Bernadac," in *Pensée-plumes*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995); rpt. in Bernadac and Obrist, 302.

<sup>21</sup> "Statements," in Meyer-Thoss, 178.

<sup>22</sup> LBD-1950 (25 January 1950).

<sup>23</sup> Bourgeois explained that the wordplay on 'harmless-armless' was to do with 'knowing limits'- a necessary orientation in refining the symbol. "Statements," in Meyer-Thoss, 177.

and the same.

*Maman* conquers agoraphobia to achieve what Stokes would call ‘beneficence in space’<sup>24</sup> by unfolding downwards, mapping the sky-space, in a way that can be associated with Bourgeois’s love of geometry and the ‘calming’ quality of gridded paper and of the colour blue, all qualities associated with her mother.<sup>25</sup> In this sense the sculpture fits Stokes’s formulation of the archetypal ‘triumphantly mourned mother.’<sup>26</sup> It revises a nightmarish dream in which her mother had appeared as Death, in the shape of a wicker basket veiled in clothes.<sup>27</sup> *Maman* still evokes fear and apprehension but it is open, contained in beauty. There are many leg-ladders (lines of energy) and many spaces between them, leading out of the claustrum to the sky beyond – and twisting back in again.<sup>28</sup> Together they weave a container, in the manner of those classical godlike figures Athena and Penelope, and affirm the religious nature of Bourgeois’s ‘faith in the symbolic action.’<sup>29</sup>

There is an interesting visual correspondence between the Spider and a revealing dream of Melanie Klein’s child patient, Richard; it is the dream which first led her to formulate the idea of the ‘combined object.’ In this ‘umbrella dream’ the penis-stick inside the breast has an overwhelming quality for the child, since he is not sure if he is being controlled by it or not: the world turning round was the whole world he had taken into himself when he took in the breast or rather Mummy mixed with Daddy, and her children, and all she contained. He felt the internalized powerful Daddy-penis – the secret weapon – as something which made him powerful if he used it against an external enemy. But it became dangerous if it attacked and controlled him internally. Nevertheless he trusted mummy and daddy – the umbrella – more than previously, both as external people and inside him. That was also why he now treated Mrs K’s umbrella more carefully than he had formerly treated Mummy’s.<sup>30</sup> Both the spoked umbrella and the leggy spider, overarching the child like ‘the whole world turning round,’ are discoveries for the child of a many-faceted god that is within him, arousing the capacity for awe (fear and attraction) that fulfils his human nature as a symbol-maker (Langer). For the art-symbol is not just a signifying code, representing something that could be translated in another way, but a whole that is more than the sum of its parts.<sup>31</sup> Its ‘underlying Idea’ (Langer) is served by the artist and captured in a formal way so it remains available to viewers of the future. [...]

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24 [Painting and the Inner World](#) (London: Tavistock, 1963); rpt. in Wollheim, 228.

25 “Tender compulsions”; rpt. in Bernadac and Obrist, 305; see LBD-1991 (21 February 1991) and LBD-1994 (6 June 1994) on the colour blue. Also recalling Bourgeois’s use of the top of her apartment building as an open-air studio in the early days of New York, with her *Personages* becoming part of the skyline (as shown in a photo). The architectural scale of *Maman* associates it with skyscrapers even though it was created for the Turbine Hall.

26 [Painting and the Inner World](#); rpt. in Wollheim, 72.

27 In the dream a servant says: ‘[...] *what is / a symbol - it is something that / pretends to be something else. / You know this woman that you call your / mother. she really is “Death” her / body is like a wicker basket / underneath her dress [...]*’ LB-0257 (15 January 1959).

28 In the Cajori and Wallach film she is seen showing the way through one of her Cells and says: ‘there doesn’t seem to be a way out - but there is.’ She liked three-dimensionality partly for the opportunity of constructing windows, and felt that in order to become better artworks, even tapestries could have ‘holes’ not just their natural ‘slits,’ and become more sculptural. See Bourgeois’s review of the exhibition “Wall Hangings” at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in [Craft Horizons](#) 29, no. 2 (March - April 1969); rpt. in Bernadac and Obrist, 87.

29 “Interview with Trevor Rots,” in Bernadac and Obrist, 194. Bourgeois identifies with Penelope in her diaries, and cites Athena as goddess of weaving.

30 Meltzer, [Kleinian Development](#), 120, discussing Klein’s account in *Narrative of a Child Analysis*.

31 Bourgeois cites this in her diary of April 24, 1996. LBD-1996.

## Beyond the return of the repressed: Louise Bourgeois' chthonic art, by Paul Verhaeghe & Julie De Ganck

[...] Even a nightmare fails in its attempt to represent the unthinkable; we wake up before the final confrontation with what is literally undreamt-of. Louise's insomnia spells may be understood as a nightly vigilance to keep the horror at bay, with the insomnia drawings functioning as a charm to ward off the danger of the Real by introducing it into the Symbolic. This is the final level, i.e. the confrontation at the border with the truly unconscious, facing the most fundamental forces that drive us. Eros pushes towards synthesis, destroying all individuality in a deadly fusion. Thanatos precipitates towards analysis, destroying all unity and giving birth to the individual in a deadly isolation. These two principles govern the organic world, from chemistry to the male-female relationship. By and large, their reign is unconscious for us and we only confront them in those moments that are called "existential": death, birth, sex. Even then, we are usually well-protected because we have buried this Real under the layers of the Symbolic, usually in a mixture of religious, scientific, and artistic forms. For some, this defense is broken through, meaning that they have to construct a new one by themselves for themselves. Such is the case with Louise Bourgeois.

As previously suggested, *chthonic* is the best denomination for her work from that period (incubating in the 1950s, produced mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, roughly speaking). In its original Greek signification, chthonic means pertaining to the earth, subterranean. Chthonic art must be distinguished from and contrasted with Oedipal art, which is always in one way or another a sexual-genital and relational processing of these originally undifferentiated and more anxiety-provoking forces. Such processing is almost completely lacking in chthonic works, as shown by the different versions of *Soft Landscape* (1963-67), *Portrait* (1963) and *Lair, Amoeba* (1963-65), *Le Regard* (1966), *Germinal* (1967), *Avenza* (1968-69), *Cumul* (1969), and *Sleep* (1967). These works cannot be interpreted, in our opinion, because they are themselves first attempts to interpret what can never be fully represented. In Louise's words: "It is not an image I am seeking. It's not an idea. It is an emotion you want to recreate, an emotion of wanting, of giving, and of destroying."<sup>32</sup> Because chthonic precedes the traditional erotic level, it is not surprising that Louise Bourgeois rejected the sexual interpretations of her work.<sup>33</sup> Such automatic interpretations say more about the interpreters than they do about her work.<sup>34</sup>

Once these works had provided her with a more or less stable footing, we see a return to the first inklings of shared meanings at the pre-Oedipal level with its ambivalent bond between mother and child and with the onset of gender differentiation. The latter is illustrated by the different versions of *Janus* and *Fillette*, *She-Fox* and *Nature Study*. The former appears in her comment on a drawing (*Untitled*, 1986) of a large pair of shears with a smaller version between its legs, linked by an umbilical cord. She tells us that the big pair is her mother, and she is the small one: "That she was a monstrous cutting instrument didn't matter to me. I liked her the way she was: very dangerous."<sup>35</sup> Ten years later, the spider project (1995-1997) or *Maman* endorses this return to the pre-Oedipal level from her horrific encounter with the Real. In part 9 of the film *The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine*, Louise tells us that the spider is her mother and an ode to her mother: "it represents a reconciliation." She says this while walking around the spider, pulling and hitting the legs ("they can take a lot"). [...]

After returning from the borders of the Real via the pre-Oedipal stage back to the normal level, meaning the Oedipal stage of sexuality and gender relations, the quality of her

32 "Statements," Meyer-Thoss, 194.

33 Jerry Gorovoy, conversation with the author, July 2010.

34 In a BBC-documentary directed by Jill Nichols (*Imagine... Louise Bourgeois Spider Woman*, 2007), only the sculptor Antony Gormley voiced a different reading: "...she has made her pain into form...anxiety, anxiety is the thing we need to find a form for."

35 Quoted in Meyer-Thoss, 133. Drawing reproduced on page 222.

work, compared to that before the 1950s, is much higher — the confrontation with the fringes of madness proved to be very fruitful. A number of her later works condense the Oedipal and the pre-Oedipal level. That she herself is conscious of this condensation appears from her commentary on *The Twosome* (1991) as a rendering of the attraction of adultery for the male and female elements and at the same time of the effort of a child to gain independence.<sup>36</sup> With *Arch of Hysteria* (1993) she deliberately mixes the two genders, but now with an erotic, almost seductive quality. *Altered States* (1992-94) brings the couple back, although originally still with a dominating woman/mother. This is no longer the case in the many versions of *Couple*. With the different versions of *Red Room* and *Cells*, as imaginary constructions of childhood memories, fantasies and anxieties about love and betrayal in the intimacy of the family, she can truly say “I have been to hell and back. And let me tell you. It was wonderful.”<sup>37</sup> Her return is illustrated by her diaries from the early nineties as well, mirroring the anxieties of her early years, the Oedipal craving for The Father included – in translation: “I have to manage to find a good father / a professor, a scholar, a genius, a / doctor [...]”<sup>38</sup>. [...]

## The Sublime Jealousy of Louise Bourgeois, by Juliet Mitchell

[...] “jealousy, the other / fellow is getting the thing I want, (it makes you see red, ready for / anything. Gushing of hate, and destructive impulse. / The creative energy seems to be related to that gushing of emotional / force slightly diverted by a soothing hand. reassurance of the right [...] / kind. That reassurance which transforms the hate into work [...]”<sup>39</sup>

Lowenfeld will not have given the reassurance of a friend or family member; my hunch is that the absences from which he returned thereby showing that he could accept her violent rejection (or the story of her violent rejection), and a presence in which she could work out how to transform her artistic production, was “reassurance of the right kind.” According to her notes, Lowenfeld considered her all-pervasive problem was her inability to accept her aggression.<sup>40</sup> By 1980, when she was seeing him for another stretch of analysis, she could write: “I do not forgive nor forget /I[t] is the motto my work feed [sic] on.”<sup>41</sup> She must not go down memory-lane as a way of living but must do so for her art and its “ecstasies.” She must experience the past and “[...] transfer to a scene to day [sic] a / emotions [sic] that I experienced 40 years ago [...] /but was this ecstasy [sic] / present 40 years ago [...] / I live in the Past. I relive each day / parts of my past [...] / a complete misunderstanding / [...] agony of pain.”<sup>42</sup>

The task she set herself was to keep the emotions raw and alive because her sculpture was to make conscious what we all experience unconsciously. She must move from the “all-encompassing to the precise” which she equates as a move from “the unconscious to the conscious.”<sup>43</sup> What she grasps from the repressed in which her individual history is but one instance of what we all share, she must force into the art object where we can understand it: “In terms of sculpture we become specific and visually understandable and satisfying for me and the spectator.”<sup>44</sup> She thus has to have more not less of her symptoms; both bad and good

36 See *Louise Bourgeois*, directed by Camille Guichard (Paris: Terra Luna Films and Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993).  
 37 Statement was embroidered on a handkerchief: Louise Bourgeois, *Untitled (I Have Been to Hell and Back)*, 1996 (BOUR-2827).  
 38 LBD-1994 (3 September 1994).  
 39 LB-0455 (17 December 1951).  
 40 LB-0158 (20 March 1964).  
 41 LBD-1980 (27 January 1980).  
 42 LB-0566 (undated loose sheet, c. 1956).  
 43 In conversation with Jerry Gorovoy, 29 October 1998 (LB-0559).  
 44 Ibid.



experiences must be intensified: "I am likeable [...] / [it] lives like a sun deep / within me [...] / but I will kill someone out / of rage."<sup>45</sup>

It is not just that Bourgeois makes literal and concrete what she feels and experiences, it is that she goes into what is unbearable/unknowable (which is why it is repressed) and makes it conscious in visual form. This is why it is hard to free associate for therapy; she must do that for art. Her papers offer a web of associations of ideas. This is somewhat different from the absence of censorship underlying "free association" which is the one and only (but difficult) demand of a patient using psychoanalysis as therapy. Like all her objects, *Spiral Woman*, which she calls a signature sculpture, illustrates this associative process: Lowenfeld has gone away on holiday, so to stay equal she distances herself emotionally from him, which frightens her. To work, she must feel frustrated and guilty; the guilt may be because she wants to attack him; attacking him verbally is also to want to attack physically: this she associates to the physical violence of wringing out tapestries (childhood); she does this to him and to herself –

*"I detached myself from Lowenfeld / and my rage of the last weeks comes from there [...] / The frustration (self-imposed + intolerable [along with] / Guilt are the enemies n°1 and n°2 – / [...] the spiral / means squeeze out of, wring the laundry / wring dry – spin dry – twist your own idiot / twist his arm to make him do or talk or give / squeeze him, here is then the message of my spiral / that is going on since Lowenfeld left July 15<sup>th</sup> – / [...] Do not forget / this Louise, that has been difficult, for Robt also!!!"<sup>46</sup>*

Also: "my spirals are a vacuum. The void of anxiety,"<sup>47</sup> which links associatively with "The whirlpool of hysteria [sic] [...] / follows a form of hypertightening faster and / faster, stronger and stronger [...]"<sup>48</sup> which links to the twirling of girls at play: "the drawing / starts with a jab and goes / round and round [...] / faster and faster / like the children who swirl / faster and faster."<sup>49</sup> (See *Spiral Woman*, 1984.)

Along with an enactment of a relationship with Lowenfeld, for *Spiral Woman*, as elsewhere, she works out what her feelings are about his leaving and about herself, as she induces the frustration that produces the necessary rage that enables her to change her perception and translate the complexity of feelings into the unity of a sculpture. Then, mocking analysis, she mock-scolds herself about Robert. A second (linked) line in *Spiral Woman*'s incarnation moves from the inner emptiness that indicates anxiety to sexuality (see "'Life' and the Telling of Stories" below). The so-called "primary process" that operates in the unconscious is multiple, non-linear; consciously ("secondary process thinking") we can only have one thought at a time and the next will follow in sequence. But if that thought has been brought into the light of day from the repressed, it will be aware of its many associated strands from which it has grown ("like a mushroom out of its mycelium"<sup>50</sup>); so too will the sculpted object or even the sequentially regarded pieces in an installation. [...]

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45 LB-0322 (1 October 1963).

46 Ibid.

47 In conversation with Jerry Gorovoy, c. 1990s (LB-0028).

48 LB-0245 (5 March 1957).

49 LB-0266 (28 October 1958).

50 Sigmund Freud [1900-1], "The Interpretation of Dreams," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. IV and V, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 525.

## L., by Mignon Nixon

[...] Bourgeois's writings not only expand the archive of psychoanalysis but transform it. In particular, she brings feminine aggression to the forefront of psychoanalysis, makes this the main theme. The trend of violence and its yield of anxiety, guilt, and fear dominate these pages, precipitating the analysis itself and providing its core dynamic. Reading Melanie Klein on July 14, 1956, Bourgeois makes one of her rare comments on the treatment itself: "(To Lowenfeld this / seems to be the / basic problem) / it is my aggression / that I am afraid / of) and this / nucleus would fit in / with Melanie Klein / and Freud)."<sup>51</sup> Bourgeois was a close reader of Klein, whose theories, we now know, featured early and prominently in her own analysis.<sup>52</sup> Lowenfeld posited the anxiety of aggression—fear of one's own destructive impulses and their harming effects—as "the basic problem" of her analysis, a classic Kleinian stance. Throughout her artistic life, Bourgeois would pay elaborate homage to this theory. Her work also crucially expands its compass. Repeatedly breaking the cultural taboo on maternal aggression, for instance, she created works in which the anxiety of aggression is provocatively extended to the mother's relationship with the child. As anger, or "*colère*," escalates, and is played out in the domestic scene, the vicissitudes of fury and remorse come under the pitiless scrutiny of this most scrupulous of diarists. "I was so angry that I / was afraid of what I / might do. I needed all / my self control and it / kept me from answering / I became paralysed by / my own violence," she writes, Sunday, May 9, 1954<sup>53</sup>--Mother's Day on the commercially printed pocket calendar.

Yet, Bourgeois is anything but compliant in her attitude toward psychoanalysis, her analyst, and the culture that treats women's aggression so differently from men's. The analysis, she frequently remarks, has the coercive aim of making her more "acceptable," of bringing her into conformity with cultural expectations of femininity.<sup>54</sup> Her diaries and analytic notebooks are mordant on the subject of feminine deportment. She drily enumerates the expectations of a good wife, mother, and hostess to be friendly, flattering, and clean. "*My house work is finished / The house is clean 2PM - / I deserve my nap. I am reading Simone / de Beauvoir on the atrocious fate of / women.*"<sup>55</sup> Bourgeois lists "remedies" for social anxiety: "1) pay complete attention to the other / 2) listen + understand what he says / 3) answer to the point--" "What if he says nothing?" she demands. "That is a good point," she answers herself. "However don't give / up the ship—encourage him --"... "How?" she pursues. "By looking at him in the eyes and smiling," she suggests. "Should not I give a compliment?" she wonders. "No, it is too gross—maybe taken as patronizing / who am I to distribute compliments like rose / petal blessings it is assinine [*sic*]?" comes the tart riposte. But, "With your eyes and your expression invite / friendly feeling [...]" she advises.<sup>56</sup>

Bourgeois bemoans the coercive climate of analytic treatment with its aim of making her more socially acceptable. She fumes at being assigned inconvenient "housewife" hours. She anguishes over Lowenfeld's fees, which deepen her financial dependency upon her professor husband, and opens Erasmus, a small book and print shop, to generate independent income. The entire ritual of the analysis seems at times profoundly dispiriting. She considers breaking it off—and does not. Unlikely as it was in the chill 1950s with visions of the "happy housewife" dancing in ad-men's heads and fantasies of "infanticide" lurking in those of housebound women, the analytic situation became, for Bourgeois—at her insistence--a

51 LB-0158 (20 March 1964).

52 For a reflection on Bourgeois's dialogue with, and challenge to, Kleinian psychoanalysis, see Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press/October Books, 2005).

53 LBD-1954 (9 May 1954).

54 Bourgeois writes, for example: "insofar as my analysis was motivated / by a desire to be 'acceptable' I have / felt the need for a little interest (kindliness or help) from Robert [Goldwater]" LB-0175 (27 February 1960).

55 LB-0693 (undated loose sheet, c. 1964).

56 LB-0744 (31 October 1964).

setting in which to examine the psychic trends of feminine and maternal aggression.<sup>57</sup>

“When I do not ‘attack’ I do not feel myself alive,”<sup>58</sup> she reflects, voicing a sentiment all but expected of male artists of her generation, whose “colère” is so often enthusiastically celebrated as a virile stimulus for art.<sup>59</sup> Struggling with her own aggressive impulses, which are the “basic problem” of the analysis and a source of intense suffering, but also a symptom of the repressive patriarchal authority she defies in the defense of her own integrity, Bourgeois produced an unparalleled portfolio of writings on a question that psychoanalysis itself for too long failed to address: What makes women mad?

*Louise elle est maligne.  
cette pensée me plait +  
J'ai écrit ces pages pour  
me soulager d'un  
feeling malheureux  
de guilt, mon aggression  
me fait peur  
me rend guilty*<sup>60</sup>

In these writings, Bourgeois holds herself to account daily, even hourly, in a painstaking catalogue of self-examination, duly acknowledging the pleasures of her own beastliness (*Louise elle est maligne, cette pensée me plait*) and the pain of its boomerang effects (*mon aggression me fait peur, me rend guilty*). In a household with three little boys, the cultural taboo against maternal aggression is persistently violated.<sup>61</sup> Like her art, these analytic notes, the final dossier of the writer Louise Bourgeois, carry political and ethical import. Unsparing but never self-lacerating, she recounts the “psychic facts” of life, in a phrase supplied by the Kleinian psychoanalyst Hanna Segal, destructive impulses, even toward one’s own children, being foremost among them.<sup>62</sup>

Bourgeois’s decision to offer her analytic notes to study, to expose her faithful record of human failing to any reader, is an invitation to share her close and patient interest in all that is worst about us—all. It is a gesture in keeping with the entire trend of her art, which is toward responsibility. As an art of subjectivity, Bourgeois’s work is most often seen as abstaining from politics, apart from its engagement with feminism. Some even question her fidelity to feminism, as if this, too, were vitiated by the exploration of subjective experience, including her own. This is not surprising. For a splitting of the subjective and the social might qualify as a defining condition of political discourse, even of the Left, and is ritually invoked in the political critique of psychoanalysis. Bourgeois made no claims for the political significance of her art.

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57 The ironic phrase “happy housewife” was coined by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). On infanticide as a tragic symptom of patriarchal culture’s repression of maternal ambivalence, see Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976).

58 LB-0019 (undated loose sheet, c. 1965).

59 In conversation with Jerry Gorovoy, on February 9, 1994, Bourgeois continues to pursue this theme: “I never saw my mother angry in her 52 [years]. So if I get angry I’m ashamed. Women do not get angry [...] People who get angry are the men, women are suppose [sic] to run away or shut up. If you get angry you feel like a man and get even more angry. It makes me scream. It attacks my identity. Men are admired for being angry [...] When women become angry they] become ugly and people laugh at them.” LB-0023.

60 LB-0511 (11 May 1962). Translation: “Louise, she is coy. / this thought I like + / I wrote these pages to / rid myself of an / unfortunate feeling / of guilt, my aggression / frightens me / makes me feel guilty.”

61 October 31, 1964: “I do my hair dress myself nice / shine my shoes and finally leave / to save Rbt [Robert Goldwater] from another speech / what did I say. I have reproached / things he did to me—threats / to give myself courage I am going to end it / with myself and with J.L. [Jean-Louis] / terrible / [...] after these 2 pages I had my monthly terrific suicidal terror tantrum at Robt.” LB-0744.

62 “From Hiroshima to the Gulf War and After: Socio-Political Expressions of Ambivalence,” in *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972-1995*, ed. Jon Steiner, vol. 27 (London and New York: New Library of Psychoanalysis, 1997). Rosalyn Deutsche discusses the significance of Segal’s thinking about what psychoanalysis offers in a situation of war in “Hiroshima After Iraq,” *October* 131 (Winter 2010), 7.

But, devoted as she was to examining the vicissitudes of the passions, and the dark fantasies of everyday life, her art was politically significant precisely in questioning the psycho-social divide. Her rejection of cultural myths of the maternal-infantile relation is fundamental to this endeavour and begins, perhaps crucially, in advance of analysis. Bourgeois brings to psychoanalysis some searching questions about motherhood, and she uses psychoanalysis, both in theory and in praxis, to explore the dynamics of maternal subjectivity in her art. [...]

## Contending with the Father: Louise Bourgeois and her Aesthetics of Reparation, by Elisabeth Bronfen

[...] As Louise Bourgeois reformulates the family story behind *The Destruction of the Father*, her comments tap into yet another aspect of repetition compulsion. Psychic reparation seamlessly transforms into a complex gesture of reappropriation, in which the daughter and the father exchange positions. The terrifying family dinner table, headed by a father who sits and gloats, with the mother initially trying to satisfy the tyrant while the children, reduced to a state of utter incapacitation, sit in silence, also emerges as the scene of a battle over who owns the right to excessive self-expression. In the statement Eleanor Munro published in her profile of the artist, we have a slightly different version of the same story: "There is a dinner table and you can see all kinds of things are happening. The father is sounding off, telling the captive audience how great he is, all the wonderful things he did, all the bad people he put down today. But this goes on day after day. A kind of resentment grows on the children. There comes a day they get angry. Tragedy is in the air. Once too often, he has said his piece. The children grabbed him and put him on the table. And he became the food. They took him apart, dismembered him. Ate him up. And so he was liquidated. It is, you see, an oral drama! The irritation was his continual verbal offence. So he was liquidated: the same way he had liquidated his children."<sup>63</sup>

In this case, the story is told not as the personal confession of one of the actors at the table, but from the position of a distanced spectator of a ritual, who wants us to read it as a mythic narrative of retribution. Significantly, the mother is absent from the scene of transgenerational struggle, with the children doing unto the father what he has done unto them; literally paying him back in kind. If his compulsive story-telling reduced them to nothing, they now obliterate him. Furthermore, eating the father who has selfishly been feeding on their attention, demanding their pity and their reassurance while leaving no room for their own emotional needs, also involves another turn to the literal. The children answer the father's harsh demand to partake in the stories he compulsively tells about himself by actually partaking of his flesh, rendering the distinction between paternal words and body obsolete. Yet for the daughter artist, who commemorates this act of destruction by recreating it, more is at issue than simply recalling a ritual punishment. If the attack puts an end to the father's abusive speech, it also marks the moment when her previous silence becomes aesthetically loquacious. By incorporating the father, she ironically also takes on what was at the root of the killing fantasy to begin with, namely the act of projecting oneself in storytelling. In commenting on her sculptured scene, she not only claims for herself the right to speak the last word, judging the father who incessantly judged her. She also poignantly places her act on a par with other mythic tales of filial insurrection, from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* to Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*.

Finally, these commentaries, recapitulating both an intimate scene of fantasy and uncovering the back story to a sculpture, also draw attention to Louise Bourgeois's deep emotional investment in aggression as the driving force behind her artistic work. In her writings, she consistently connects paternal presence with a destructive force, noting, "When my father / arrived we no longer existed."<sup>64</sup> If, however, the father is remembered

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63 Originals: American Woman Artists (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979); rpt. in Bernadac and Obrist, 115.  
64 LB-0315 (undated loose sheet, c. 1964).

as bringing an intensity of emotions with him whenever he entered the house, turning her childhood into “many Melodramas with / intense suffering, friendship desired, compliments / or encouragements fervently expected, puni / shments feared, blame, shame, distributed with / pain and with ‘reluctance,’” she also admits that her own fantasy work itself often takes a violent turn: “of everything I make an awful story where / things go from bad to worse [...] / children conspire against the parents / parents cook their children.”<sup>65</sup>

A proclivity to destruction is thus what she faults her father for but also what she shares with him. Indeed, to take on the father emerges as a duplicitous gesture. Even while, in fantasy, she draws scenes of competition with paternal authority, in her work as a sculptor she is beginning to handle her paternal debt by implicitly engaging the father as one of her key sources of inspiration. She appropriates the annihilating power she attributes to his presence (and above all his words), so as to productively refigure this legacy into her own artistic language. Indeed, as she confesses in a diary entry from May 24, 1978, “is it through Identification with / aggressor or with God / I manipulate them, they do not / manipulate me.”<sup>66</sup> The murderous impulse on display in *The Destruction of the Father* emerges as the lynchpin to the shift her work took in the early 1970s because it puts her interest in conquering her personal fears and anxieties on display.<sup>67</sup> Yet her reenactment of the fantasy scene of paternal devouring does more than cathartically exorcise his demon. It takes on her complex debt to the father, identifying his abusive verbal power as the source of her own destructive reconstruction; self-consciously taking possession of a past that possesses her. [...]

## Symbolizing Loss And Conflict: Psychoanalytic Process In Louise Bourgeois’ Art, by Donald Kuspit

[...] Psychoanalytic process is a kind of weaving, and weaving is Bourgeois’s way of dealing with her penis envy and managing her conflicts and splits. Madame Lefarge compulsively knits, and Bourgeois compulsively weaves, with the same aggressive concentration and sexual undertone: weaving is a simulation of sexual intercourse—a symbolization of its “form”—and of interpersonal intimacy and intersubjectivity, elegantly and eagerly uniting opposites, forcefully and formally making the incommensurate commensurate, psychically binding the physically different in an undifferentiated orgasmic whole, at once tidy and messy, a truce in the ongoing “war of the sexes.” Weaving is the metaphor par excellence for Bourgeois’s art, its primary method: she is an artful weaver, both on a physical and psychic level, and on both simultaneously, for she weaves together the physical and psychic with a seamlessness unmatched by any expressionist weaver. Weaving is a romantic process that results in classical form—a clear, rational, stable pattern, sometimes elaborated but always essential, simple but never simplistic, unified but never mechanically uniform, at least at its best, composed of fluid, organic, richly textured materials. Goldwater once said that “romanticism looks to the sublime rather than the elemental,”<sup>1</sup> but Bourgeois’s romanticism looks to both and integrates them to classical effect.

Weaving is a dialectical process, and so is psychoanalytic process. Its ambition is to establish an equilibrium of forces: “as in all human things, equilibrium is only maintained in art by the law of contradiction, by the battle and opposition of different currents.”<sup>2</sup> Bourgeois is desperate for equilibrium, mental and physical, and struggles to equilibrate them by making art which for her is a psychoanalytic process of weaving together opposites—most noteworthy, as in *The Destruction of the Father*, 1974, breast and penis--into a symbol of her True Self. Psychoanalytic weaving is doubly dialectical. On the one hand it involves the

65 LB-0176 (undated loose sheet, c. 1959).

66 LBD-1978.

67 In the interview with Donald Kuspit, she goes on to explain, “The Destruction of the Father deals with fear - ordinary, garden-variety fear, the actual, physical fear that I still feel today. What interests me is the conquering of the fear, the hiding, the running away from it, facing it, exorcising it, being ashamed of it, and finally, being afraid of being afraid. That is the subject,” adding, “And after it was shown - there it is - I felt like a different person.” 21, 24 passim.

weaving together of analysand and analyst in a so-called “therapeutic alliance.” On the other hand it involves the analysand’s weaving together of conflicting psychic currents into a symbolic pattern under the tutelage of the analyst’s interpretation of them. Dreams are full of personal symbols; interpreting them involves socializing them into familiarity--objectifying them so that their meaning becomes clear, and thus less anxiety-arousing and traumatizing. Looking at Bourgeois’s notes about her psychoanalysis, it seems clear that she sometimes needed what has been called empathy rather than interpretation—holding rather than understanding--and when she didn’t get it she had a so-called negative therapeutic reaction and narcissistic rage.<sup>3</sup> Psychoanalytic process is a learning process, and it taught Bourgeois to use art to learn about and sustain herself—interpret and mirror, and even idealize and double herself, all at once.<sup>4</sup> Art making was self-analysis for her, but also a narcissistic way of having a mirror, idealizing, and twin transference. All transference (“a new edition of an old object,” as Freud said, and of old relationships, as object relational psychoanalysts say) is dialectical, and Bourgeois’s art can be understood as a kind of dialectical narcissism, narcissism being a dialectical relationship with an idealized twin of oneself, or at least one’s body, beautified by being reflected in the mirror of one’s self-love.<sup>5</sup>

I am arguing that Bourgeois’s art--her symbolic object-forms--are psychoanalytic torsades, not to say Gordian knots, weaving together the opposites that constitute her inner world and environment. I also think, no doubt more speculatively, that virtually all her later male figures are, unconsciously, her psychoanalyst, even as they are her family members. He, after all, became a very important member of her inner family.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, one of the fruits of a successful psychoanalysis is that the analyst becomes a good internal selfobject. He is the Other that gave her the Self-confidence she desperately needed, and thus whom she identifies with—unavoidably internalizes to the extent of becoming a kind of psychoanalyst herself, her own psychoanalyst and the psychoanalyst of Others. And, I venture to say, with whom she wanted to have sexual intercourse with, as though to enact their unbearable yet desirable and desire-filled intimacy. I think that her last woven copulating couple represents herself and her psychoanalyst, for she began psychoanalysis after her father’s death (1951), and her psychoanalyst became a replacement for her husband, suggesting that psychoanalysis is a kind of “mind-fucking,” in which the listening psychoanalyst and the talking analysand play both male and female roles, active listening a deceptively passive way of receiving the other into oneself, active talking a way of penetrating the other, sometimes forcefully. The physical distance between them remains even as they psychically copulate. “Je suis un autre,” Rimbaud famously said, and psychoanalysis is about discovering and investigating the Others in one’s Self—acknowledging the others that are parts of one’s Self and thus gaining Self-knowledge. It involves understanding their role in and power over one’s Self, allowing one to manage them and form a harmonious family, knowing full well that war will sooner or later break out between them, disturbing one’s peace of mind. I suspect that Bourgeois’s psychoanalyst became a very important Other, as the fact that she seemed to be continually at war with herself suggests. [...]

## Louise Bourgeois In Psychoanalysis With Henry Lowenfeld, by Donald Kuspit

[...] Bourgeois read extensively in the psychoanalytic literature—even though she said she didn't want to “dirty” her analysis by such reading<sup>68</sup>—and had an extensive psychoanalytic library. She seemed to have read Anna Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defenses* (1936) thoroughly, and knew the writings of Karen Horney, an early psychoanalytic feminist who argued that women envied men's power, the penis being merely a symbol of it—as well as those of Marie Bonaparte. She criticized Lacan for his “anti-Jewishness,”<sup>69</sup> implicitly an attack against the Jewish Freud—a remarkable insight into the fact that Lacan's so-called return to Freud dismantled and undermined his ideas (Lacan took the “Jewishness” out of the “Jewish science” of psychoanalysis, Frenchifying the dynamic unconscious almost beyond recognition by reifying it as a language)—and appreciated Erick Ericson's concept of “identity crisis,” which she undoubtedly experienced, particularly in adolescence. She knew Alfred Adler's work—his “masculine protest” became her “mastery complex” and his “inferiority complex” became her “insecurity complex”<sup>70</sup>—and read Breuer's and Freud's *Studies in Hysteria* (1893–95), and early on identified herself as a hysteric,<sup>71</sup> apparently male as well as female, if her *Hysteria* sculpture is any clue. (She also mentions “*the hysteria of war*,”<sup>72</sup> suggesting hers during World War I.) But her object relational problems are the major source of her sexual and aggression problems, as she came to realize. She was aware of object relational theory—she clearly realized that the Self was composed of Objects (others), ambivalently good and bad (“*the good mother needs the bad mother*,”<sup>73</sup> even though they tended to polarize into idealized good mother and persecuting bad mother, suggesting a borderline aspect to her psyche)—even as she tended to blame her aggression for her problems. Lowenfeld made her secure because he was a good object, even though she sometimes attacked him with her anxiety as though he caused it, and thus was as bad as she felt she was.

Although Bourgeois had the conventional—and early psychoanalytic—idea that making art was a cathartic sublimation, and that the work of art, like the dream, was a substitute gratification, she was also ahead of her times in regarding the work of art as a substitute object, and especially in her idea that “*form is the refuge of creativity*.”<sup>74</sup> She anticipated the later psychoanalytic concern with consciously made form rather than only unconscious content, however much she realized that the genesis of the work of art, like all creative activity, is in large part unconscious,<sup>75</sup> just as, according to Freud's topographic model, consciousness only gives us a glimpse of the unconscious, which is the most influential, “largest,” and dominant part of the psyche. She was acutely aware of what she called “the irrational in everyday lives,”<sup>76</sup> a play on Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), but she knew that art had to seem rational if it was to be convincing as art, however inwardly irrational—however much it dealt with the irrationality of life. Her sculptures represented “emotional states,”<sup>77</sup> but they had to be unemotionally presented and self-contained if they were to be socially accepted. Her spirals are rational—mathematically correct—constructions however irrationally compulsive they are. Indeed, they suggest that repetition compulsion is the basis of her compulsive creativity, or at least one of its “motivations.” It is worth noting

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68 LB-0309 (14 July 1952).

69 In conversation with Jerry Gorovoy, 5 September 1990 (LB-0051).

70 LB-0383 (undated loose sheet, c. 1963); on September 28, 1957 she notes her “inferiority feeling.” LB-0224.

71 LBD-1949 (22 February 1949).

72 LB-0246 (undated loose sheet, c. 1957).

73 LB-0827 (1995–96 notebook).

74 LB-0007 (August 1991).

75 LBD-1954 (15 January 1954).

76 LB-0249 (undated loose sheet, c. 1967). Bourgeois: “How does the irrational / present itself in everyday / live [sic]”

77 LB-0134 (undated loose sheet, c. 1958).

that serial Minimalism is compulsively repetitive—reminding us of Bourgeois’ compulsive documenting of her feelings in her journals, the same feelings repeating again and again. (She speaks of her “*masochistic impulse to repeat a frustrating ritualistic experience.*”<sup>78</sup>) It is also worth noting that Minimalism involves achieving “security” by way of “elimination,” as Bourgeois says,<sup>79</sup> which suggests the difference between her insecure, often irrationally sprawling webs and secure, neatly rational staircases.) She uses psychoanalytic concepts deftly—reaction formation especially, applying it to herself—and records her dreams diligently, agreeing with Freud (and the Symbolists) that they are the “royal road to the unconscious.” Psychoanalysis was clearly of great intellectual as well as emotional benefit to her.

Bourgeois seemed to have anticipated Wilfred Bion’s concept of the “bizarre object”—“*let the sediments form themselves sealed by / the peace of forgetfulness*”<sup>80</sup>—and sharply distinguishes between her menstrual periods and her chemical periods, connecting the latter with the psychoanalytic process, which she brilliantly realizes is as physical as it is emotional,<sup>81</sup> and as painful as her menstrual periods. And suggesting that she realized that psychoanalysis changed her body’s as well as psyche’s “chemistry.” Bourgeois was imbued with psychoanalysis, and understood it more than any other artist-thinker of her time—Breton had a limited, narrow understanding of it compared to her, Pollock appropriated a few psychoanalytic generalizations (debatably Jungian or Freudian) which he probably didn’t understand, and Motherwell, for all his symbolization of castration anxiety, never dealt with woman’s sense of inferiority and feeling of abandonment by society (“*you are nothing since you are / only a woman,*”<sup>82</sup> “the diseases of the femininity”<sup>83</sup>)—which makes her the premier psychoanalytically oriented artist of modernity, all the more so because she understands the male as well as female psyche, and their inseparability. Lowenfeld was her psychoanalytic mentor, and psychoanalysis became her cultural homeland, and made her feel at home and one with herself as nothing else did. One might say that thinking psychoanalytically gave her the alchemical ability to turn her leaden feelings of deprivation and emptiness into the creative gold of her art. [...]

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78 LB-0263 (13 November 1957).  
79 LB-0431 (undated loose sheet, c. 1951) .  
80 LB-0254 (undated loose sheet, c. 1959).  
81 LB-0036 (17 October 1955).  
82 LB-0320 (undated loose sheet, c. 1958).  
83 LB-0331 (undated loose sheet, c. 1965).