

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## FIRST RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION OF BOURGEOIS WORK TO OPEN AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The first exhibition to consider the full range of the art of one of America's great sculptors, LOUISE BOURGEOIS, will open in the West Wing Galleries of The Museum of Modern Art on November 6, 1982. Directed by Deborah Wye, Associate Curator of the Museum's Department of Prints and Illustrated Books in collaboration with Alicia Legg, Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition will present some 100 works, executed between the early 1940s and the present, which together explore the artist's development, from her early polelike wood figures to her highly provocative and original sculptures of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The exhibition will reflect Bourgeois's consistent focus throughout her career on certain humanistic themes and subjects. In addition to sculpture, it will also include a selection of paintings, drawings, and prints that will reveal the full scope of her achievement. LOUISE BOURGEOIS, which will remain on view through February 8, 1983, is made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The current era of post-modernism in the arts has provided an atmosphere in which Louise Bourgeois, for many years working outside the mainstream of American art, is finally recognized as one of this country's most important artists. She is an artist of remarkable power and mystery who has always worked in a very personal, idiosyncratic, and expressionistic

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mode. In so doing, she foreshadowed recent developments in the contemporary visual arts and the prevalent artistic atmosphere, where individuality and intensity are widely appreciated.

For years, Louise Bourgeois's work was familiar in New York art circles but not well-known to a general, wider public. While her work had been seen with regularity in group shows, her solo shows were infrequent. "By 1978, however, the artistic atmosphere had changed," comments Wye, "and Bourgeois's individuality and intensity became widely appreciated." In the next three years, between 1978 and 1981, she had seven solo shows, some reexamining early phases of her work, others focusing on recent developments. The nature and quality of Bourgeois's unusual and even eccentric work has not changed over the years; rather, "a fundamental change in aesthetic thinking has occurred," concludes Wye. "Personal content and deeply felt themes are sought and explored, and Bourgeois's work speaks directly to these new needs, which welcome stylistic diversity and deeply expressionist content." As a result, there is great interest in finally seeing the full range of her oeuvre, in its evolution and development over a lifetime of art-making.

Deeply personal motivations are the foundation of Bourgeois's art, and her works are always a poignant reminder of one's humanity. Bourgeois believes that making art is the process of giving tangible form to, and thus exorcising, gripping subconscious states of being. As a result, her works seem to contain indwelling energies, and "her achievement of such potent emotional intensity within a wide range of inventive and meaningful images is ultimately the real mystery of her artistic powers."

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Born in Paris in 1911, Bourgeois studied mathematics at the Sorbonne, but eventually left to pursue the study of art. From 1934 to 1938 she studied at several schools and ateliers in the French capital, including the École des Beaux-Arts, the Académie Ranson, the Académie Julian, and the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière, and came in contact with such artists as Fernand Léger, Yves Brayer, Roger Bissière, André Lhote, Othon Friesz, and Robert Wlérick. Bourgeois came to live in this country in 1938. Her early paintings, prints, and drawings already reflected the very personal use of iconography that still characterizes her art today. In fact, the relevance of their imagery to visual concerns of the present day is remarkable. In 1949 Bourgeois had her debut as a sculptor in a solo exhibition at the Peridot Gallery, and exhibited there again in 1950 and 1953. Elemental, upright wood pieces, each with a distinct symbolic personality, dominated her early sculpture shows. (One such piece, the six-foot-tall Sleeping Figure, 1950, the first of five works by Bourgeois to enter the Museum's Collection, was acquired by Alfred Barr in 1951.) Bourgeois first produced single-figure forms, but later combined them in tentative couples and groups. Still later, she clustered elements together on bases, finally incorporating this clustering format in a wide range of materials. In the Sixties Bourgeois experimented with many new shapes and materials. In one series in plaster she created nestlike, cocoonlike sculptures that she characterizes as "lairs." In addition, Bourgeois produced pieces in such materials as rubber, plastic, bronze, and marble, always exploring and reinterpreting her personal themes. An interesting reinterpretation of the female figure in marble is seen in Femme-Couteau (Woman-Knife), ca. 1969-70. In the

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forties she had painted a series of subjects called Femme-Maison (Woman-House) that portrayed women with houses perched on their bodies in place of heads. "In them, a woman's most obvious sign of identity, her face, has been replaced," explains Wye. These creatures "are prisoners of the house and also hide behind its facade, thereby denying and defining their female identity." In Femme-Couteau, the female figure is characterized as an elegant and elongated knife, into which, chameleon-like, she has transformed herself for purposes of protection or retaliation.

After her marble pieces executed in the late sixties and early seventies, Bourgeois evolved in the direction of environmental-scale works. Of these, both the cavernous 1974 latex tableau, The Destruction of the Father, and the 1978 room-size wood and latex Confrontation will be reconstructed for the exhibition. On the occasion of the original exhibition of Confrontation, Bourgeois also staged a performance in conjunction with the piece. "Here her sense of the ridiculous and the surreal prevailed," explains Wye, "as she dressed friends and students in costumes she had made and had them parade around a central table with some members of the audience becoming part of the sculpture as they stood and sat in the surrounding structures."

In his foreword to the accompanying catalog, William S. Rubin states, "In this pluralistic period, when collective taste suffers from wavering convictions and evanescent excitements, it is a source of immense pleasure and reassurance to confront Louise Bourgeois's sculpture. Her strongly etched artistic profile--which transcends the mutations in typologies and methodologies of her varied oeuvre--is felt in the consistency of her

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concerns and in the high order of her realization."

The 124-page catalog, which is being published by the Museum in conjunction with the exhibition, represents the first publication to be devoted to the full range of Louise Bourgeois's work. With a foreword by William Rubin, Director of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, and an essay by Ms. Wye, the book will contain a detailed chronology and exhibitions history of the artist's work, a bibliography, and quotes by Bourgeois on selected works. The catalog, with 183 black-and-white and 4 color illustrations, is available in paperback only for \$12.50.

Two lectures on the art of Louise Bourgeois will be presented by The Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with the exhibition. The first, on Tuesday, December 7, 1982 at 8:30 P.M., titled "Form As Memory," will feature Lucy Lippard, writer on contemporary art, co-founder of Heresies, Printed Matter and P.A.D.D., while the second, "Bourgeois Truth," on January 11, 1983 at 8:30 P.M., presents Robert Pincus-Witten, Professor of Art History at Queens College, CUNY and The Graduate Center, CUNY. Both lectures will be held in the Museum's new Roy and Niuta Titus Theater, 18 West 54 Street. Tickets are available in advance at the Museum's Lobby Information Desk, or by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope with request and payment to the Department of Education, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Ticket prices are \$5.00; \$4.00 for MoMA members; \$3.00 for students with current I.D. Ticket holders may view the exhibition prior to the program. The lectures are made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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After closing at the Museum, LOUISE BOURGEOIS will circulate both nationally and internationally.

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For further information, please contact Luisa Kreisberg, Director (212) 708-9747 or Sharon Zane, Associate Director, 708-9749, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York NY 10019

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