

The Prints of Louise Bourgeois



THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

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Louise Bourgeois

Deborah Wye

Carol Smith

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NEW YORK

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A Drama of the Self: Louise Bourgeois as Printmaker

BY DEBORAH WYE

*"This is about survival . . . about the will to survive."*¹

For Louise Bourgeois, art is a tool or strategy that provides both emotional release and a greater understanding of herself and her surroundings. Most often, it exorcises thoughts or moods that menace her, but it also expresses feelings of pleasure, warmth, and humor. This approach reflects a combination of will, intelligence, and artistic sensitivity that has been forged to harness strong emotions. Bourgeois wants to comprehend and control her deeply felt responses to people and events, and making art helps her do so. She has described a kind of necessary relation between perception and emotion, referring to it as an "equation." One wants, she has said, "to look, to see, to listen, to try desperately to hear . . . to sometimes perceive. But these processes must be manipulated by the emotions. If there are no emotions, there is no perception."

In the decade following The Museum of Modern Art's 1982 retrospective exhibition *Louise Bourgeois*, organized by this author, the private dramas embodied by Bourgeois's sculpture reached a wider public; her increasing recognition culminated with the selection of her work to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1993. Yet for most of her long career, her considerable body of printed work, exploring at an intimate scale many of the same personal and artistic concerns as her sculpture, remained largely unknown. Her decision in 1990 to donate to the Museum her complete printed oeuvre has made it possible for this important aspect of her achievement to be catalogued and presented to the public comprehensively in this book.

Bourgeois has undertaken approximately 150 compositions in print. Many of these compositions underwent significant development through sequences of states and variant proofs, resulting in a body of printed work numbering some 600 sheets. Most of these sheets constitute unique works of art, since few published

editions were made. About half the prints were created from 1938 to 1949 and half from 1973 to 1993; during the long intervening period, none were made at all. By 1993 Bourgeois was so actively involved in printmaking that several compositions at the end of this catalogue are still in progress.*

Bourgeois has used the phrase “a drama of the self” to describe what until now has been her best-known printed work, the book/portfolio *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947; cat. nos. 29–38). That description can also be seen as an underlying concept for much of her large and varied print output. In prints as in sculpture, the examination and expression of the self preoccupy her and constitute a kind of self-portraiture. Her specific motivations and subjects, and their visual manifestations, are discussed in detail below.

THE ARTIST'S LIFE AND CAREER

Bourgeois's approach to printmaking, and the meanings of her printed oeuvre, can be fully understood only in the context of her long life and career. Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911 to a family of comfortable means, whose business was restoring and selling tapestries. The young Bourgeois helped out by drawing missing portions of scenes on tapestries being repaired. She learned English from a young woman who lived with the family and who, she discovered, carried on an affair with her father. The tangled relationships between Bourgeois, her father, and the tutor produced emotions in Bourgeois that have fueled her work throughout her life.

A bright student, Bourgeois initially pursued mathematics but eventually turned to art. She met an American, Robert Goldwater, who was studying art history in Paris, and married him in 1938. She moved with him that year to New York, where his circle of friends included artistic, literary, and academic figures, and where the couple would raise three sons. Though Bourgeois ultimately made her reputation as a sculptor, through most of the 1940s she worked primarily in painting, drawing, and printmaking. In 1945 her first solo gallery exhibition was devoted to her paintings, and around that time she began to appear in group shows that included artists such as William Bazotes, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. Following her second painting exhibition, in 1947, she decisively turned to sculpture, which she first showed in 1949 and 1950 at the Peridot Gallery in New York City. The Museum of Modern Art acquired *Sleeping Figure* (1950; fig. 1) in 1951. Her early figural wood pieces were elemental upright poles, which represent, she has said, friends and family in France whom she missed. When exhibited, these sculptures were arranged in an installation that suggested a gathering of people. In the later 1950s Bourgeois's wood sculptures, both large and small, were often composed of units grouped together, resembling figures huddling or plants sprouting.

By the 1960s Bourgeois had begun using plaster and latex, and she eventually worked in marble as well. Her sculptures began to look like nests and lairs, with inner folds and hidden recesses. Curvilinear in structure

*The catalogue includes works completed or in progress as of October 1993; Bourgeois has continued to make prints.

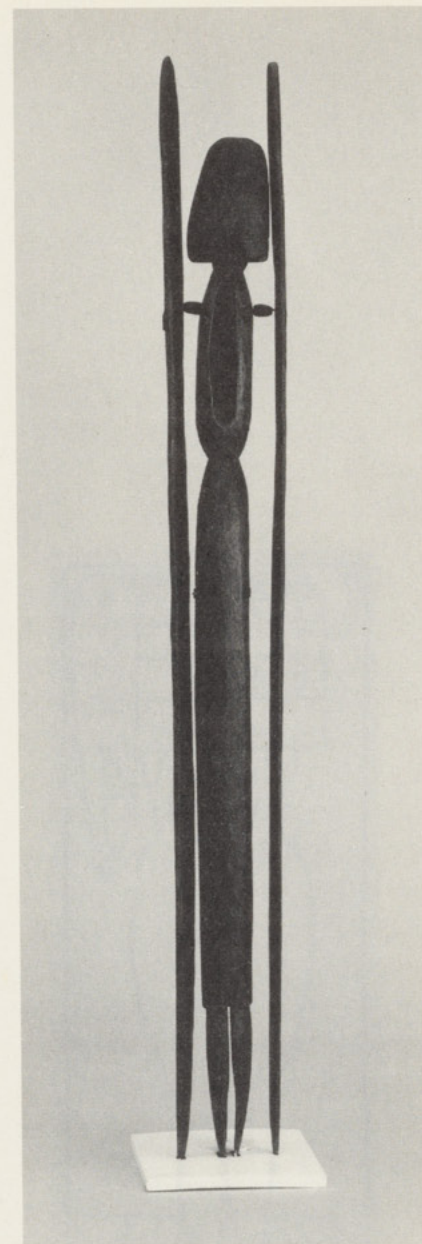


FIG. 1. *Sleeping Figure*. 1950. Balsa wood, 6 ft. 2½ x 11¾ x 11¾ in. (189.2 x 29.5 x 29.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katharine Cornell Fund.

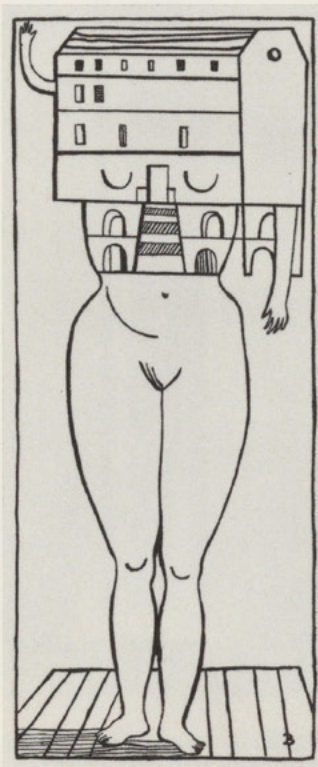


FIG. 2. *Femme Maison*. 1984. Photogravure with pink chine collé.
Plate: 10 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 4 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (25.6 x 11 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of the artist.

and organic in feeling, their bulbous shapes evolved into forms suggesting body parts. In her work of the later sixties an erotic element became explicit, the shapes of breasts and penises merging with landscapelike elements to imply both the sexual and the primordial. Also at that time and in the early seventies, the rise of feminism spawned a women's art movement, and Bourgeois came to be recognized as a model for women artists. Her *Femme Maison* (Woman House) imagery of the forties—a female body topped by a house instead of a head—became a familiar symbol for feminists (and eventually a print [fig. 2; cat. no. 75]).

In the 1970s, she spent some time teaching, notably at The School of Visual Arts and The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, in Manhattan, and at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Though she had continued to be included in group shows in the fifties and sixties, her sculpture was seen in only two solo exhibitions in New York City between 1953 and 1978. In all, it could be said that for most of the fifties, sixties, and seventies, Bourgeois maintained an “underground” reputation—known to a certain segment of the New York art audience but not a subject of widespread attention.

In a 1975 issue of *Artforum* magazine, which featured a work by Bourgeois on the cover, the critic Lucy Lippard stated: “Despite her apparent fragility, Bourgeois is an artist, and a woman artist, who has survived almost forty years of discrimination, struggle, intermittent success and neglect, in New York’s gladiatorial art arenas. The tensions which make her work unique are forged between just those poles of tenacity and vulnerability.”² By the late 1970s, in an atmosphere of renewed interest in the content and meaning of works of art as distinct from their formal attributes, Bourgeois’s work began to have broader appeal. The 1982 retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art presented to a wide public the full range of Bourgeois’s achievement. It vindicated some, who had long recognized the power of her work, and was a revelation for many others, who were introduced to her explorations of human instinct, need, and identity. Bourgeois’s work flourished in this newly welcoming environment, and her creative output during the last decade has been enormous, with works in wood, metal, marble, rubber, and glass, ranging in scale from the intimate to the room-sized.

BOURGEOIS’S APPROACH TO ART

Printmaking is only one vehicle by which Bourgeois pursues the purposes of her art, and she has said “there is no rivalry” between the various mediums and techniques she uses: “They go together as different modes of expression. They say the same things in different ways.” What Bourgeois’s prints say to her was made evident in extensive interviews conducted by the author. The artist was shown each of her printed compositions, and she responded to them with interpretations of their iconography and memories of the motivations that led to their creation. (Commentaries by her are included in almost all of the catalogue entries.)

A specific emotion or motivation is always the impetus for Bourgeois to begin an artwork; the visual

forms then take their own course—changing because their inherent qualities suggest new forms or because the precipitating mood itself shifts. Bourgeois has characterized one impulse for making an artwork as an attempt to give “reality to a futile desire,” but many kinds of moods and thoughts are made bearable for her by giving them material form. Once tangibly outside her, disturbing feelings can be examined more easily, and they often disappear, at least temporarily. Feelings of pleasure, although not as potent for her as despair, can also be embodied in visual form and thus given the possibility of being experienced again. Forms so articulated, however, are not preconceived by the artist. Bourgeois has described the evolution of a particular print’s imagery in this way: “You try and you try . . . suddenly it gets there. I didn’t know that it would turn out that way. It is a mystery.”

Bourgeois’s personal dramas are not the viewer’s own, yet her works inspire emotions that human beings share—many of them often unmentioned, forbidden, or repressed. Her images can communicate loneliness, anxiety, and sometimes fear—in response to the isolation, turmoil, or danger that she often depicts. Such emotions emerge from imagery that is often constructed by combining real and imagined elements. Recognizable details or suggestive fragments serve as reference points for the viewer, while functioning as vehicles for specific concerns of the artist. Such elements can be seen in the prints *Thompson Street* (1945/1948; cat.no. 27) and *Bosom Lady* (1948; cat. no. 28), for example. In some prints of the late 1930s and early 1940s, flattened-out figures are seen in dreamlike environments that reverberate psychologically, due in large part to special inking and wiping, which create areas of light and dark that evoke mysterious moods (see *Pierre* [1939; cat. no. 17] and *Youth* [1941/1943; cat. no. 18]). In the latter half of the forties, anthropomorphic architectural structures occupy barren landscapes, as in the plates of *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*. Natural elements such as rivers, storms, plants, and insects are also given human characteristics in *Le Soleil (The Sun)* (c. 1947; cat. nos. 44.1–2), *Tempête du vent (Tornado)* (c. 1948; cat. no. 45), *Champs de blé (Fields of Wheat)* (1949; cat. no. 57), and *Artraignée (Spider)* (c. 1948; cat. no. 64). Sometimes the balance between real and imagined components shifts and semiabstract forms assume roles in Bourgeois’s visual dramas. But spirals, saclike shapes, repeated strokes, and geometric structures are also vehicles for moods and feelings, and the artist invariably uses psychological terms when referring to them. She even has used words such as “calming,” “caressing,” or “stabbing” to describe ways in which she manipulates her tools.

It is clear that some aspects of Bourgeois’s approach situate her within a framework of psychoanalytically-inspired Surrealism. She shares the Surrealists’ belief that the unconscious exerts a powerful effect throughout one’s life and that its sources are to be found in one’s childhood. Her method of working recalls the free-associative “acting-out” of Surrealist automatism, with its goal of prompting the unconscious to the surface. But in her case, the process of “acting out” merges with that of analyzing. Her aim is to attain both emotional release *and* self-awareness. Her desire to take responsibility for herself by recognizing, appreciating, and

controlling aspects of her temperament is an important factor in the genesis of her art, as well as in her comprehension of its final forms. Linking Bourgeois's approach to Surrealism or, in fact, to any other movement is not sufficient. Her works speak from a deeply personal and idiosyncratic foundation that cannot be easily characterized.

Discussing the motivations behind her prints, Bourgeois has said, "It is an appeal to reason all the time . . . the strategy you evolve to be tolerated, accepted, loved." Given the raw power of much of her art, the analytical side of her nature may be surprising, but her determined allegiance to reason is seen in her approaches to many aspects of her life. She was highly praised for her intelligence as a child and continues to depend on it, constantly reading, probing, and analyzing, hoping to find insight. Some of her habits are revealing: she constantly refers to dictionaries for the precise nuance of a word in French or English, and she looks to her many encyclopedias to provide other kinds of information. She has a passion for accuracy; she will examine indexes of books, for example, and, finding an error, correct it in pencil. She might seek information about a myth in her one-volume Larousse or look up the dates of a medieval battle in an old volume of French history. She has described such reference books as helping her "to be right . . . to be able to find the last word on a subject . . . to be educated. . . . Early on I did it so I would be appreciated by my parents. I am a searcher . . . I always was and I still am . . . searching for the missing piece. The search goes on and on forever."

Bourgeois also manipulates spoken and written language with precision and flair. "I love language," she has said. "You can stand anything if you write it down. . . . Words put in connection can open up new relations . . . a new view of things." For every year of her adult life, she has kept daybooks, which list appointments and mundane information, but which also serve as sketchbooks for small drawings and repositories of random thoughts, patches of analysis, and even brief narratives. When she suffers insomnia, Bourgeois may draw, or she may write down the thoughts that crowd her mind. She inscribes the backs of drawings, sometimes indicating the origins of particular imagery. She makes notes on the endpapers of books, regarding these jottings as "indispensable." She even brandishes words in her art: "no" is repeated over the surface of one print (cat. nos. 66.1-5); another simply states, "We Love You" (cat. nos. 122.1-2). But finally, words are not sufficient. She has said, "My complaint about language is that it is perfect, indispensable, but not enough. It doesn't say everything." She believes that she can get at what she is after more directly and meaningfully in drawings, prints, and, above all, sculpture.

BOURGEOIS'S SUBJECTS

The subjects Bourgeois discusses in relation to her prints are the driving force behind their creation. Over five decades, in a body of work that evidences great stylistic differences, the motivations preoccupying her have remained remarkably consistent. While certain formal developments can be noted—for instance, the larger for-

mat and more forceful imagery of her recent work—by focusing primarily on formal elements, one risks missing her work's essence.

Subject matter was for some time left out of discussions of modern and contemporary art, and an artist's explanation of his or her intentions was considered only with reluctance. Perhaps a change in how this issue is regarded has been among the factors that have made Bourgeois's work more acceptable in recent years, for it is work that confronts the viewer with its subjects. Moreover, appreciation of it is only deepened by listening critically to her comments, for, even though the works are experienced visually and viscerally, and precise verbal explanations are impossible, Bourgeois has depended on language as an analytic tool throughout her life, and her powerful verbal responses to her works frequently add a profound dimension to our understanding of them. Being "read," in a metaphorical sense, in fact may be central to her artistic intentions. In a droll remark, she has described her stamp for sealing letters, which is used in *Stamp of Memories II* (1993; cat. no. 110.1, state XIV), as "immediately readable," adding, "If people knew me . . . if they could read me . . . they could not fail to love me!" Nevertheless, Bourgeois has warned, "These works do not illustrate . . . they are an exorcism. The difference is that I *discover* the emotion through the work . . . the emotion comes after. I ask, what could this mean? The purpose is to *gouge out* what is cooking, not to illustrate it." And, "That is what I am after . . . to dig and to reveal."

Many layers of meaning are relevant to the artist at any one time, and she has often responded differently to works at different times, depending on her mood. During the many interviews for this catalogue, Bourgeois's reflections sometimes came easily and sometimes did not. On certain occasions she left the room to escape recognizing motivations she had uncovered. It became clear that her prints provided for her a kind of Rorschach test, and reliving her emotions was often exhausting. She is fascinated that her prints might similarly prompt the viewer.

Bourgeois's thematic concerns have had a marked continuity. For example, it was startling to hear her describe the need to protect the three eggs that represent her children in *Bosom Lady* of 1948 (fig. 3) and then voice similar concerns regarding three eggs nestled in an elaborate hairdo in *Ste Sebastienne* "small" of 1990/1993 (fig. 4; cat. no. 110.1). When she made the earlier print, Bourgeois was actually caring for her three small boys, and that considerable responsibility seems to have remained an integral part of her sense of self. In further discussion of *Ste Sebastienne* "small"—a female figure attacked by arrows that recalls the martyrdom of St. Sebastian—Bourgeois explained: "Don't make the gods jealous . . . if you have a beautiful child, hide it."

Just as it is not unusual for imagery appearing in Bourgeois's early work to recur in later pieces, similar themes are also expressed in various mediums. The jars clustered together on shelves in the woodcut *During the War: Shortage of Food in Easton* (1942/1944; fig. 5; cat. no. 9) relate to those in *Le Défi* (*The Challenge*) (1991

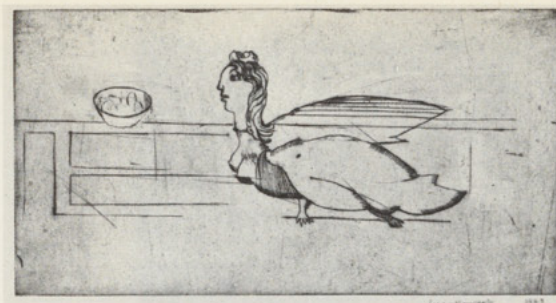


FIG. 3. *Bosom Lady*. State IV, 1948. Engraving and drypoint. Plate: 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{13}{16}$ in. (19.7 x 37.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.

FIG. 4. *Ste Sebastienne*. First version (*Ste Sebastienne* "small"). State V, 1990. Drypoint. Plate: 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. (42.6 x 25.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.





FIG. 5. *During the War: Shortage of Food in Easton. State IV.* 1942/1944. Linoleum cut, printed in color. Comp.: (irreg.) 11 ¼ x 8 ⅞ in. (28.5 x 22.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.

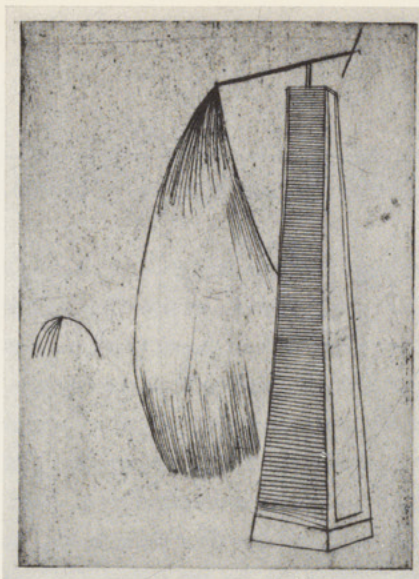


FIG. 7. *Pivotage difficile (Difficult Steering).* State II. 1946/1947. Engraving. Plate: 6 ⅞ x 4 ⅞ in. (17.4 x 12.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.



FIG. 9. *Tempête du vent (Tornado).* State III. (c. 1948). Engraving. Plate: 6 ⅞ x 4 ⅞ in. (17.5 x 12.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.

FIG. 6. *Le Défi (The Challenge).* In progress, 1990; completed 1991. Glass and wood, 67 ½ x 58 x 26 in. (171.4 x 147.3 x 66 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



FIG. 8. *Fuseau (Needle).* 1992. Steel, flax, mirror, and wood, 9 ft. 1 in. x 8 ft. 5 x 56 in. (276.8 x 256.5 x 142.2 cm). Collection of the artist.

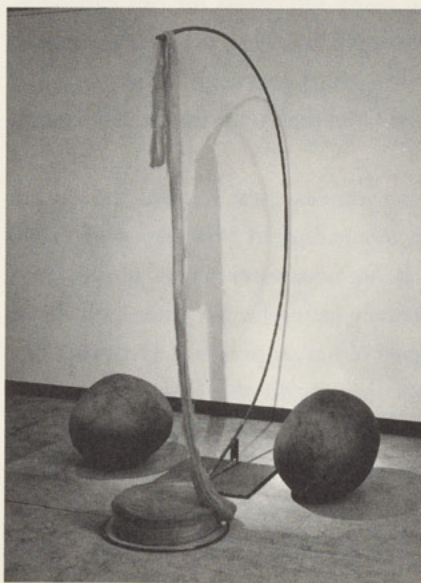
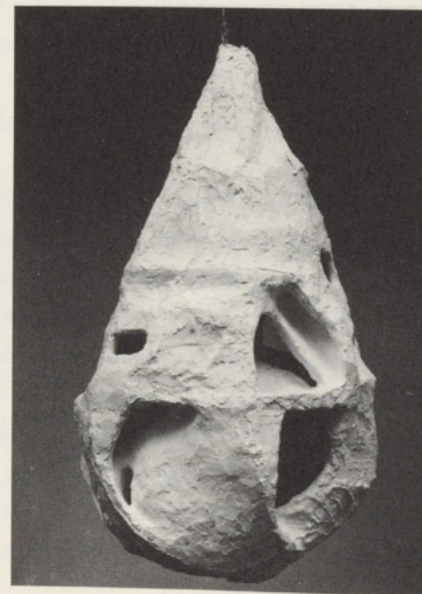


FIG. 10. *Fée couturière (Finch Nest).* (c. 1963). Plaster, 39 ½ in. x 22 ½ in. diam. (100.3 x 57.1 cm diam.). Private collection, New York.



[fig. 6 shows the work in progress, 1990]). Similarly, the fanciful structure on the right of the engraving *Pivotage difficile* (*Difficult Steering*) (1946/1947; fig. 7; cat. no. 42) is recalled in the 1992 sculpture *Fuseau* (*Needle*) (fig. 8). Bourgeois has also noted an equivalence between the floating saclike shape of *Tempête du vent* (fig. 9), which may suggest germination, pregnancy, seedlings, or nests, and the forms of her plaster hanging sculptures of the 1960s, such as *Fée couturière* (*Finch Nest*) (c. 1963; fig. 10). It is not at all unusual for Bourgeois to come across an artwork made fifty years before, recognize in it emotions that are still vivid, and resume working on it as if not a day had passed. For example, in 1993 she returned to a drawing of the 1940s that depicts two of her small children in the bathtub. She reworked it in drypoint (see *Tub* [1993; cat. no. 150]) and hopes to continue this process with several other early drawings of family life, perhaps eventually publishing them as a portfolio.

Certain subjects, however, do recur primarily during Bourgeois's early period, while others appear only later. Loneliness is a theme of her first years in America, when she felt homesick and isolated. *Boxwoods* (c. 1945; cat. no. 24) combines both sentiments in a representation of a sculpted boxwood tree that she remembered from her grandmother's garden. Bourgeois has described those trees as "friendly presences." During the war years, her homesickness was intense. She recalled that it was difficult even to get letters through to her family. She celebrated the landing of the Allies in Normandy with her lithographic holiday greeting card of 1944 (cat. no. 3). In the forties, Bourgeois also used drawing and printmaking as a way to record the people and events in her daily life; in several studies, for example, her husband or her children are seen reading. Some of these early images portray life at the family's country house in Easton, Connecticut. There, Bourgeois spent considerable time in rural surroundings, and themes of nature turn up in several prints of that period.

On the other hand, a subject that Bourgeois discusses only in response to later prints is ambition. She interpreted tall towers in several prints of about 1989 (see cat. nos. 83–85) as ambition that knows no limits. Commenting on them, she said: "If you live with this big dream, you will be destroyed." Spirals, seen in certain prints, refer to her fear of losing control (see cat. no. 67): "You must know your limits." She tempers unrealistic dreams by reminding herself to be satisfied with an "everyday, miserable, trivial pursuit." In addition, the theme of the hysterical figure, arching its body in a kind of fit, occurs only recently, in several sculptures (see, for example, fig. 11), as well as in the print *Arched Figure* (1992, published 1993; fig. 12; cat. no. 125).

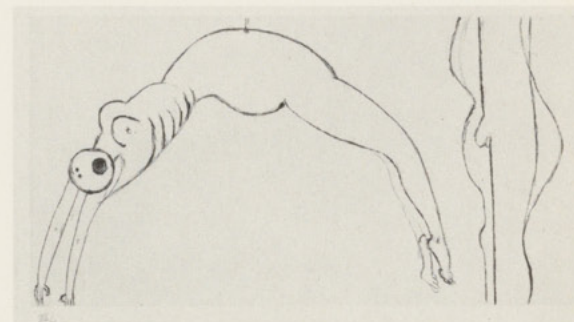
PERSONAL HISTORY

Bourgeois's early life is a significant and continuing source of her art. "You better pay your debt to the past and then forget it," she has said, yet for her this never seems possible. An involvement with events of her youth is part of a wider relationship she maintains with memories and objects of personal history from all periods of her life. Bourgeois saves everything. In addition to her own daybooks, described above, she has kept those of her



FIG. 11. *Arch of Hysteria*. 1993. Bronze, 33 x 40 x 23 in. (83.8 x 101.6 x 58.4 cm). Collection of the artist.

FIG. 12. *Arched Figure*. 1992, published 1993. Drypoint. Plate: 7¹⁵/₁₆ x 14⁵/₁₆ in. (20.1 x 37.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.



mother. "Nothing is lost," she has asserted. "There is something sacred about things that are your past." Within minutes, she can produce the most obscure artifact—snapshots, now of historic interest, that her father took at the front in World War I, her mother's handwritten inventory of tapestries, even all her old driver's licenses. Since she saves so much, it is not surprising that she frets over the fact that some of her engraved copper plates from the 1940s have been lost. When the missing plates were mentioned by the author, Bourgeois was immediately pained. "You are going to make me cry," she said. She cannot understand how she ever let them out of her sight.

Bourgeois's father is the individual from the past who plays the most catalytic role in her work. He was often cruel and sarcastic toward her, and she is still troubled by memories of him. She has said that she went through experiences with her father that were not "spectacular," but which were unusual because of the intensity with which she experienced them. Such unfinished emotional business is dealt with through her art. "You have to figure them out . . . you have to understand them to get rid of them . . . those nasty memories." On the other hand, Bourgeois was very attached to her mother, whom she called her "best friend." When Bourgeois was twenty, her mother died after prolonged ill health, and Bourgeois could not console herself. Her father ridiculed her pain and mourning, and her response to this is expressed in *Vase of Tears* (c. 1945; cat. no. 26).

DESPAIR AND SURVIVAL

It is apparent in Bourgeois's descriptions of her prints that she has often been subject to unpredictable moods of despair. Her imagery frequently seems to grow out of an attempt to analyze her painful situation and impose control. As she has said, "You have to build up a miserable little strategy to defeat despair." Her aim is to make order out of the perceived chaos that often overwhelms her and affects her relations with others. She wants to survive and believes that survival is possible. Although she is "subject to terrific pulls in many directions," she "does not break." While she must struggle to balance conflicting impulses of despair and hope, she maintains that a fresh start is always possible. Morning becomes the symbolic as well as the literal moment to begin again (see cat. no. 20). She recently noticed a sentence in a daybook of the late forties that she still found very meaningful: "At the darkest mood, at one end, is suicide; at the other end is the bath of gratitude."

The danger Bourgeois feels because of the unpredictability of her moods is evident in images that evoke hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding rivers. In commenting on *Tempête du vent*, she asked, "How do you survive . . . how do you keep your balance in a hurricane?" She has described buildings in a composition as personages trying "to keep their dignity" who "have been overrun and broken by the flood of the river." The color red in her work can signal danger or violence, particularly in contrast to her calming and pure blue. One of the aims of her work is exorcising these fears "of being blown away and demolished." She still agrees with a comment

once made to her: “Louise, you are afraid of *yourself*, of what you may do; you are not afraid of others.” She explained that “this relates to everything, even today.”

Specific objects also can symbolize potential danger. In discussing *The Burner* (1948; cat. no. 50), Bourgeois mentioned the realistic hazards of using a Bunsen burner, but she also seemed to be speaking metaphorically. This instrument is “the most dangerous thing on earth,” she said. But she saw the possibility for the regulation of danger through careful manipulation of its parts. She also noted that even when things appear benign, a threat may be lurking. “There is always the feeling that something will give way,” she remarked. “One always has to be on guard, even when happy—or *because* you are happy.” For the second volume of *Homely Girl, a Life* (1992; cat. nos. 136–43), a story by Arthur Miller concerning blindness and love, Bourgeois used as illustrations images of diseased eyes. Each pair is more frightening than the last, and Bourgeois has said of them: “Nothing could be worse than this. . . . It is good to feel that things could not be worse . . . that you have reached the limit of the bearable.”

No matter how difficult the circumstances, Bourgeois continues to believe that regeneration or reconciliation is the other side of despair. The flowers that illustrate the first volume of *Homely Girl, a Life* (1992; cat. nos. 126–35) may become broken, but they sprout again. In several other prints a lighthouse or a form like a radio tower connote protection; they “watch for danger, both day and night” (see *Le Phare [The Lighthouse]* [1946–47; cat. no. 43] and *Pont transbordeur [Drawbridge]* [1946/1947; cat. no. 41]). For Bourgeois, “you can take precautions and the fear disappears” or—pointing to an image of the sun coming out—turn chaos “into something predictable or safe.” She interpreted the Bunsen burner in her print as making a kind of peace with the house depicted next to it, stating, “The most beautiful thing in life is the moment of reconciliation.” With a certain optimism, she pointed to other aspects of her imagery that suggest situations can be resolved. “If you have the right attitude, you will recover.”

SELF-RELIANCE

Self-reliance is expressed in Bourgeois’s prints by compositions that convey the ideas of balance and support. It is also implicit when she refers in conversation to various means of physical support: bases for sculpture, a banister for climbing stairs, an arm to steady her when crossing a street. In this context, Bourgeois recalled that, as a child, she fell a lot and was teased for constantly having bandages on her knees. It is noteworthy that these comments about the loss of physical support often seem to meld into expressing a need for emotional support.

Antithetical to self-reliance is helplessness, and Bourgeois’s images suggest a fight against it. “A woman is a helpless creature,” she has explained. “All she is doing throughout her life is finding support—physical, moral, whatever—just to keep going.” She has mentioned helplessness even when discussing housekeeping.

More consequentially, she has talked about her sense of powerlessness when caring for children. “My children always put me on the defensive . . . I lose my emotional balance.” As her prints witness, caring for children weighed heavily on her. In *Girl Falling* (1993; cat. no. 145), derived from a 1947 drawing of a pregnant woman, she expresses the fear of toppling over from the weight of being responsible for a child.

RELATIONS TO OTHERS

Bourgeois has pointed repeatedly to details in her prints as representing “moi” and “toi,” the French words for “me” and “you” (traditionally used between those who are intimate). She even has related these terms to a print-making process: “Embossing is a metaphor for the effect that one has on another . . . the effect that ‘toi’ has on ‘moi.’ The difference has to do with the relative hardness or softness of the two subjects.”

Bourgeois is also concerned about misunderstanding the motivations of others and about her own motivations being mistaken. When looking at the recent *Dismemberment ANATOMY* (1990; cat. no. 111), she said: “I always felt that I could not defend myself because I could not understand what motivates people. . . . I still feel that way.” Regarding *Youth* (1941/1943; cat. no. 18) and *Dream* (1939; cat. no. 7) of her early period, she described listening intently, but not being able to hear. This subject reminded Bourgeois of a recent room-size sculpture, *Cell 4* (1991; fig. 13), which contains a huge ear. She said, “Listening is everything.” She wants to understand others and she does not want to be isolated. Looking at *Reaching* (1989; cat. no. 87), she explained that “reaching power” is the ability to extend oneself to others. In depicting little forms nestling together in *Swaying* (c. 1989; cat. no. 79), she suggests a need for physical closeness. Similarly, in responding to *Hair* (1990; cat. no. 99), a print of a braid in the portfolio *Anatomy*, she described the sections of hair as if she were referring to an ideal relationship between people: “The parts relate harmoniously, but retain independence.” Yet when describing the various spirals that appear in her prints (see cat. nos. 91–93) and drawings, she acknowledged the problems that she brings to relationships. The spirals, she explained, are “a plea to be accepted with many different moods . . . a plea for love.”

While Bourgeois endures problems in relationships with others, she also shows aggression when pushed too far. “If I am asked too much, then I get angry and break the furniture!” But such a reaction never helps. “Every time you break things, you dig your own grave; you always lose ground.” In apprehension of a visit, she stabbed a sheet of paper to create *Appointment at 11:00 a.m.* (1989; cat. no. 89), which then served as a maquette for a possible multiple. When making *Whitney Murders (I–III)* (1978; cat. nos. 72–74), she hammered type into sheets of lead to relieve her anger over being rejected. But she also worries about the consequences of her fierce reactions and wants to repair any damage she may cause. The multiple *Reparation* (1989, published 1991; cat. no. 90) shows such an attempt to smooth things over; here, she sewed on a patch to hide what she

FIG. 13. *Cell 4*. 1991. Mixed mediums, 82 x 82 x 84 in. (208.3 x 213.4 x 213.4 cm). Collection of Ginny Williams, Denver.



considered her injury to the paper. Similarly, her comments on *merci. mercy.* (1992; cat. no. 123) show her desire to be absolved. She betrayed puzzlement over who might be at fault in a particular confrontation, asking, "Is it you or is it me?" She explained the title by saying, "I want much more than thank you . . . I want forgiveness."

SEXUALITY AND THE BODY

While sexuality has become overt in Bourgeois's later work, it was hinted at in the forties, particularly in the series of paintings called *Femme Maison* (Woman House), depicting a woman's body with the head replaced by a house. One of these images is now fairly well-known, being regarded by feminists of the last two decades as a potent symbol of muzzled self-expression (the artist made a print of it in 1984 [cat. no. 75]). Yet her recent comments about the *Femme Maison* print are not revealing and even could be described as slightly repressed or as a kind of self-denial: "I consider this perfect," she said. "It brings the personal together with the environment . . . it is a kind of acceptance."

By the 1960s, when the body and sexuality came to the forefront of her work, Bourgeois was not making prints. But in 1990, in the portfolio *Anatomy*, sexuality became explicit, particularly in two prints depicting female figures with legs spread, which recall one painting in the *Femme Maison* series. Another print in the portfolio is titled *The Gait* (1990; cat. nos. 104.1–2), which she humorously interpreted in sexual terms. Discussing the hip bones pictured, she said, "We undulate the best we can in this part of the body . . . even *with* the bones!" This slyness also was evident in her response to the cat in *Champfleurette, the White Cat* (1993, in progress; cat. nos. 148.1–2). To Bourgeois, the look on its face seemed "goody-goody." But its curvaceous body, high heels, and painted nails, she said, reveal that its "deeper mind is on something completely different!" A sense of teasing is evident as well in *The Giveaway* (1990; cat. no. 106), also in the *Anatomy* portfolio. Responding to this assemblage of blue paper and a woman's garter, Bourgeois saw herself as an instigator, gleefully waiting for a reaction. She laughed, "I am not the mouse . . . I am the cat!"

The expressions of sexuality in Bourgeois's prints can range from erotic or flirtatious to humorous or insecure. While some prints in *Anatomy* focus directly on female genitals, Bourgeois has created prints that simply emphasize beautiful hair, full breasts, or a fashionable outfit. Such features merit "showing off," she says. In reference to the print *Ste Sebastienne* "small," she warned: "Cutting your hair . . . that is the equivalent of cutting off your head." It is an act of "self-criticizing, self-destroying, self-mutilating." Yet Bourgeois is sometimes ambivalent about female attributes. She has remarked, "You worry about what you have and what you don't have." She also tries to accept the fact that she wants men to find her attractive. "If you can please men and not be guilty about it . . . you have it made . . . that's it." She related an amusing story acknowledging these complexities. It is about the ways a man ought to address a girl who is pretty and one who is smart. To the pretty

girl, he should say, "My, how smart and clever you are!" To the smart girl, "My, how pretty you are!" Even with her deeply-held feminist concerns about maintaining self-sufficiency, she still has said, regarding the print *Self Portrait* (1990; cat. no. 112): "This is not a feminist statement . . . it is the opposite. Nothing happens unless men and women get along."

BOURGEOIS AND PRINTMAKING

There are many reasons why Bourgeois has gravitated to printmaking. At specific times, opportunities presented themselves that made its requirements, such as special techniques and equipment, accessible to the artist. More important, however, is the fact that certain aspects of printmaking are inherently attractive to her. Her knowledge of prints derives from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century books illustrated with steel engravings. The extent and quality of the illustrations are what draw Bourgeois to those books, and she has collected them since her early adulthood. Although she considers the books' subjects to be of secondary interest, she has concentrated on collecting in several subject areas that tend to have especially good illustrations: children's literature; medicine (particularly ophthalmology) and medical instruments; weaving, embroidery, and tapestries; and dictionaries and encyclopedias, perhaps the most cherished part of her collection. Once, after pointing out the detailed engravings of eyes in a nineteenth-century book on ophthalmology, Bourgeois turned to the title page, wanting to know how these wonderful illustrations were acknowledged. She was shocked to see that the number of them was prominently stated, but that the name of the illustrator was not given. "The illustrator is indispensable, but not important!" she exclaimed ironically.

As subjects, engraving techniques and the history of printing are important enough to Bourgeois that an area of her book collection is devoted to them. She also has collected prints, including items of general interest, such as maps and street scenes, as well as fine prints by Eugène Delacroix, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Odilon Redon, and Suzanne Valadon, among others. This collecting impulse was probably nurtured in her youth by her father, who collected garden statuary, antique chairs, and photographs.

Bourgeois is particularly drawn to the tools and materials of engraving and drypoint, techniques of digging into or scratching metal with the burin or needle. It is not surprising that Bourgeois, being a sculptor, has an affinity for the tactile aspects of printmaking. Her strong sense of tactility was evident during all of the interviews with her, as she often got up when talking about her prints to find something relevant to the conversation that could be touched, rubbed, or simply held to be admired. During one interview she remembered some etching pans stored away for decades, located them, showed off their solid enamel finish, and demonstrated how they were used. On other occasions, she was reminded of various tools that pierce or cut and materials that can be used as printing plates. She brought out a piece of balsa wood stuck with rows of pins when she described the

stabbing action used to perforate a piece of paper to make *Appointment at 11:00 a.m.* Likewise, she showed off a blue cloth-covered board filled with needles of all sizes when she discussed the mending that was part of the process of creating the multiple *Reparation*. The discussion of pins and needles, which are not-too-distant relatives of her printmaking tools, recalled her fondness for safety pins in particular. "I like the idea of the safety pin . . . it is dangerous, but it holds up my whole attire. Safety pins can keep things together." She has said, "It is conversion of something aggressive and mean into something acceptable." An engraving burin or drypoint needle also can be seen as an aggressive tool used for acceptable purposes, as can her large cutting shears, used to fashion printing plates from thin sheets of lead. On one occasion, Bourgeois demonstrated how she hammered letterpress type into lead with a mallet to create *Whitney Murders (I-III)*. The action helped rid her of unpleasant feelings. She has spoken of using a razor blade to scratch out an image, and she keeps one handy in her pencil box. "The corner of a razor blade is very neat . . . it is very strong. You can have perfect control. I would take a razor blade and I would make come alive a tiny, incisive line. It was etching life out of the blackness."

Bourgeois tried lithography in the late 1930s and early 1940s but did not find the medium satisfying. Even woodcut was not quite right. "I don't like to show the grain of the wood," she has said. She prefers what she has characterized as "the symbolic act of engraving . . . it was an effective way of directly converting antagonism." About her introduction to engraving she has recalled, "It was a revelation that you could get three-dimensional effects in drawing. It was a discovery . . . it was terribly exciting." But as a small woman, Bourgeois is frustrated by not having the strength to engrave a line easily; being advanced in age only makes the process more difficult. "It is very deliberate," she has explained, "very muscular . . . it is a push line. It is hard to get if one doesn't have biceps. It is the only way I know to convert extreme aggression . . . into a muscular statement. You give the burin its power . . . you break the resistance. But if you don't have biceps, it is easier to go right into real cutting, in sculpture." She also has said, describing drypoint, "The scratch is an endearing thing . . . it is a stroking . . . it takes care of things. But it cannot express antagonism. The scratching is almost like the wiping of the plate."

Printmaking offers other unique satisfactions to Bourgeois, particularly the possibility, before each printing of the plate, of keeping parts of her composition intact and altering others. In fact, the distinguishing aspect of Bourgeois's approach to printmaking is her experimentation with states and variants, and her most characteristic print is the unique proof. (Except for *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* of 1947, she has produced editioned prints only in recent years, when she has worked with publishers.) As she has exploited this potential of the printmaking process, the number of different states has sometimes reached as many as fourteen. Since her successive changes are recorded by the sequence of states, she has noted, "The whole history of the creative process is there. In painting or in sculpture, it would be gone." In addition to these states, she makes

variant impressions, without altering the plate, by such means as selectively wiping it before printing or by making hand additions to an impression after it has been pulled. Often the changes seen in intermediate variant impressions are incorporated into the plate in later states. For *Ste Sebastienne* “small,” for example, the combined number of states and variant impressions comes to twenty-four.

Bourgeois makes changes when she works, no matter what the medium. She has said that she is always “searching,” and her compositions reflect her changing moods. Since she is determined to express herself accurately, she finds it almost impossible to declare a work finished. When engraving, it is necessary for her to burnish the plate to make changes, and evidence of her burnishing can be seen especially in her prints of the 1940s. “The problem with the burin,” she has complained, “is that you cannot erase!” In certain instances, Bourgeois has felt that she has made too many changes on a plate and prefers an earlier state (for example, state V of *Les Trois Fées* [*The Three Fairies*] [1948; cat. no. 52]). Yet, while Bourgeois’s working process is laborious, it permits the viewer to follow her creative thinking as it unfolds when the many states and variants are seen in sequence. It is the exceptional case that Bourgeois is satisfied with her first attempts on a plate, as she was with most of the compositions for the portfolio *Anatomy* of 1990 (cat. nos. 97–108).

Bourgeois usually begins a print with a drawing, transferring it onto the plate through tracing and rubbing. This outline serves as her starting point. Recently, her printer has photo-screenprinted drawings onto plates and Bourgeois has used the removable silkscreen line as a guide. Generally, Bourgeois changes this original drawing significantly, either when engraving or scratching it onto the plate, or in her many subsequent states. In the forties, drawings and the resulting prints were done at roughly the same time. In recent years Bourgeois has frequently chosen a drawing from the past to serve as the basis for a new print. She uses the most readily accessible sources of her drawings: the large volume *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings*, published in 1988 and containing 184 examples; or the photocopies made from drawings microfilmed by the Archives of American Art in the early 1970s. She chooses something that strikes her at that moment, even though the drawing might have been executed long ago. Her continued emotional involvement with the subject is the major consideration. This practice of selecting old drawings as the basis for new prints makes it impossible to trace in her work a chronological development, either formally or by subject.

Bourgeois has introduced a few new procedures in her recent printmaking. For instance, she occasionally uses photocopying to enlarge a composition. This method was particularly helpful in the process of making *Ste Sebastienne* “small” into *Ste Sebastienne* “large” (1990–93; cat. no. 110.1–2). In other cases photocopies serve almost the same function as states and variants, since Bourgeois makes changes on them with ink and gouache to decide how to proceed to the next printed state (see *Paris Review* [1993, in progress; cat. no. 147]).

While Bourgeois only occasionally employed a printer to pull proofs in the early years, she has collab-

orated since the late 1980s with several publishers and printers. Publishers approach her to undertake projects; printers can provide technical assistance. With *the puritan* (1990; cat. nos. 114–21), for instance, Bourgeois wanted a clean, unwavering, engraved line. She realized that she did not have the “biceps” necessary to achieve exactly what she wanted, so she enlisted the help of a master engraver and printer. On the other hand, Bourgeois will not proceed with a technique suggested by a printer unless she is convinced that it is appropriate for a particular project. Recently, a printer thought Bourgeois might like to try the sugar-lift technique for an early version of *Champfleurette, the White Cat*. Bourgeois decided that the painting motion this technique requires was not what she wanted. “It doesn’t appeal to me. I want my digging in,” she said. (Interestingly, she decided to use this method for *Paris Review*, which has a painterly stroke that is relatively unusual in her work.)

When conventional printmaking solutions do not lend themselves to Bourgeois’s purposes, she approaches techniques in her own way. In the forties, in a fit of hurt and anger, she simply took a rubber stamp of the words “hand weaving” and banged it down on paper again and again (cat. no. 65). The stamping action, and the tangibility of the resulting image, assuaged some of her bad feelings about a particular incident. More recently, Bourgeois took hammer and nail to thin sheets of copper, punched out the phrases “merci. mercy.” and “We Love You,” and created printing plates that are, in essence, low-relief sculptures (see cat. nos. 123 and 122.1–2). The same method was used to make the whirling spiral in *Tornado* (1991/1992; cat. nos. 124.1–2). Another unconventional approach resulted when Bourgeois was asked in 1992 by The Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia to undertake a print project. She had the words of a brief parable, written by her in the forties, silkscreened in red on a 178-foot cheesecloth banner that resembles a huge bandage (cat. no. 144.1). This unusual print was used in a performance and an installation.

BOURGOIS AND PRINTMAKING AFFILIATIONS

Printmaking is an art form not readily available to artists because of the specialized materials, tools, and technical procedures required. Bourgeois, who had not made prints before coming to the United States in the fall of 1938, first took up lithography at the Art Students League in New York. She enrolled in classes for which students signed up monthly and could attend daily. (She also took painting classes there.) Will Barnet was one of the school’s master printers, and he printed the stones on which Bourgeois had drawn, since only the most experienced students were allowed to do their own printing.³ Bourgeois made lithographs at the League on and off during the first half of the 1940s. In this period, she also employed commercial offset lithographers when she needed holiday greeting cards printed in quantity. She attempted the more primitive techniques of woodcut and linoleum cut at home, without taking classes or using special equipment. Being in a comfortable setting, and not having constraints such as needing to arrange for time on a press, Bourgeois evolved the printmaking

procedure that is most natural for her. In 1939 she made fourteen states of the woodcut *Dream* (cat. no. 7), using several blocks for color printing, and beginning the practice of altering her imagery through evolving states.

Before Bourgeois practiced intaglio techniques at Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17 in the mid-1940s, she prepared etching plates at home. She "found a way to deal with the acid" by diluting it to a strength just barely more potent than wine or vinegar. As she pointed out, "wine is nine percent and vinegar is twelve percent [acid]; I wanted fifteen percent." Instead of soaking a plate for only a few minutes in a strong acid solution, as is done in a print workshop, Bourgeois used her very weak acid to do an "overnight bite." It was so weak, in fact, that even if her small children had put their hands in it, they would not have been harmed. At that time, Bourgeois also purchased a small intaglio press for use at home. By pulling proofs herself, she could experiment with the inking and wiping of her plates and make changes as she went along. "Instead of being a reproductive medium," she has said, "it was for me a creative medium. The idea of making an edition didn't occur to me."

During this early period, Bourgeois entered print competitions and exhibited prints at The Brooklyn Museum, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and The Print Club of Philadelphia. These exhibitions were fine opportunities for artists who made prints, and their checklists indicate that they included works, in a range of styles and by artists of varying reputations, that reflected the state of the medium at that moment in America. Bourgeois's work was seen together with the traditional views of John Taylor Arms; the urban realism of Armin Landeck, Martin Lewis, and Louis Lozowick; the everyday scenes of Peggy Bacon and Isabel Bishop; the quasi-Surrealism of Federico Castellón and Ivan Albright; and the abstraction of Werner Drewes and Alice Trumbull Mason. Her daybooks from these years also note appointments with Una Johnson at The Brooklyn Museum and with Karl Kup at the New York Public Library Print Room to study prints. All these activities identify her as a participant in New York's small but active printmaking community.

In 1946 Bourgeois finally found her way to Atelier 17, the intaglio workshop that Hayter had moved from Paris to New York in 1940. The expertise of Hayter and the array of international artists who worked there made the Atelier a center of printmaking activity in the city. When asked about the Atelier recently, the first thing about it that came to Bourgeois's mind was the social setting. "There were a lot of interesting people there. The French language was helpful—that is why Hayter tolerated me." The Chilean artist Nemecio Antúnez, who also spoke French, became a good friend, and she developed a close relationship with Joan Miró when he was at the workshop in 1947. Miro's production "was enormous compared to mine," she recalled. "He had great powers of concentration; he was a hard worker, working long hours." But even with these friendships, Bourgeois cannot be considered part of the group that is most closely identified with Atelier 17 in this period. Those artists, such as Mauricio Lasansky, Gabor Peterdi, and André Racz, were nurtured in that environment and went on to

found printmaking departments in universities, spreading their technical expertise widely. Bourgeois, in contrast, was something of a loner. A mother of three small children and relatively new to this country, she came to Atelier 17 mainly for the opportunity to interact with other foreign-born artists, as well as to learn more about printmaking.

Bourgeois's experience with Hayter himself was not so positive. She believes that he did not take women artists very seriously; in fact, "he hated women," in Bourgeois's view. "I exasperated Hayter," she explained. He was a printer-perfectionist. His impatience came because very few people had the control of the hand. He wasn't interested in beginners. He would shout. He would throw things." But still, as was Bourgeois's way, she wanted to please the teacher. Looking at the white areas in *Les Trois Fées* or in *Papiers dans le vent* (*Papers Fluttering in the Wind*) (c. 1948; cat. no. 54), the results of gouging out the plate, she explained that these details were "a tribute to the boss, because that was his specialty." Bourgeois also remembers Hayter's instruction in engraving. He "talked and talked about the turning of the plate, while cutting into it with the burin." Her *Horizontal Mountain Landscape* (c. 1948; cat. no. 62) began as a test plate, which Bourgeois practiced turning while engraving. Looking at it recently, she could only exclaim, "What flourish!" Handling the burin became for Bourgeois a kind of art form in itself. One test was the ability to get "the greatest length of copper hair"—that is, the thin strip of metal that curls up while engraving a line. "You were *worth* the length of that hair," Bourgeois recalled, "and Hayter could get an enormously long strip." By ending a line without breaking that thread of copper, he avoided the undesirable burr at the end, and Bourgeois, too, tried to avoid that burr. She also wished to acquire another sought-after skill in the workshop, that of making perfectly parallel lines—a "test of greatness!" Bourgeois slyly remarked.

Bourgeois's fears about acid are the basis for another vivid memory of her time at Hayter's workshop. She contends that she "could cope with acid at home because it was a friendly environment." In contrast, Atelier 17 was "an anxious environment." She often felt tense there and said that this feeling "made me fear my own initiatives." Under these circumstances, she could not bring herself to enter the acid room and had no way to etch her plates. Luckily, Kenneth Killstrom, another artist whom she befriended, had "a morbid attraction to acid. . . . He and I had different fears," she said. Consequently, Killstrom helped Bourgeois by taking care of all the procedures involving acid.

Despite the less-than-ideal conditions at Atelier 17, Bourgeois undertook there her most important print project of the forties: the book/portfolio *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, with nine engravings and accompanying parables. Perhaps the company of the other artists stimulated her to attempt something very ambitious; perhaps she wanted to impress Hayter, since she felt unappreciated by him. Perhaps her growing maturity as an artist gave her new confidence, and her development of a particularly suitable visual vocabulary suggested a nar-

rative format. Her paintings of that time include personages and architecture that relate to the imagery in *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*. Bourgeois also remembers a series of vertical frescoes that she did for her bedroom, which she believes was an influence. According to her daybook of that period, she hoped to make her work as an artist better known through this publication. Having an edition in mind was very unusual for Bourgeois at the time. Not very long after the completion of this project, Bourgeois definitively turned to sculpture; interestingly, her first wood pieces have a close affinity with the book/portfolio's imagery.

At Atelier 17, Bourgeois was eventually stymied by not being given enough press time to have her plates printed. "Hayter was such a sadist by frustrating people with his 'We will do it tomorrow,'" she has said. Ironically, she stopped going there after Hayter returned to Europe and others were put in charge of daily operations. She maintains that she did not take the place as seriously anymore. At about this time, after consistently working with prints during her first decade in New York, Bourgeois ceased making prints altogether. She had become immersed in the three-dimensional medium of sculpture and, although she continued drawing, she also stopped making paintings, which had gained her a modest reputation. It is not surprising that she abandoned printmaking, since its techniques are often complex. Bourgeois was beyond the point of taking classes, and she was not attracted to any other workshop. Print publishers were rare in New York at that time and, in any case, Bourgeois had not yet established the kind of reputation that is usually required before a publisher will commit resources to a project.

One experience that involved Bourgeois with prints during the 1950s was opening and briefly running a shop called Erasmus Books and Prints. From Bourgeois's recollections, it seems that this was not a very successful or happy venture for her. She recalled focusing mainly on illustrated books, saying, "Well, I had all those books and nothing to do with them." Bourgeois summed up her feelings about the venture this way: "I had a wonderful time *finding* the books and prints, but the shop—it was a disappointment."

One print curator remembered frequently visiting Bourgeois's shop when he was a student.⁴ He had become acquainted with the artist in the print room of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. She was looking at prints related to the Renaissance scholar and humanist Erasmus, the namesake of her shop, and perhaps hunting for a logo. He recalled that the shop was filled with books of all kinds. He believed that they had been collected for a long time, and thought that perhaps some had come from her family. He also recalled Bourgeois indicating that the decision to open the shop had something to do with her father's death, that she had decided not to do any sculpture for a time, and that the shop was an outlet for her.

It was not until the 1970s that Bourgeois became involved with printmaking again. The period after her husband's death in 1973 was a sad and difficult one for her. A friend suggested that she might want to teach some courses at The School of Visual Arts, and from 1974 to 1977 Bourgeois taught six courses in printmaking, as

well as a few in sculpture. She has said of teaching, "It took all my energy—three days to recover—but I liked it. It helped me to get through that period." Bourgeois recalled one incident with a student, which she related, circuitously, to printmaking. The student had proudly told her that she was a collector of manhole covers. "I was speechless," Bourgeois said. "People could fall down in those holes. Can you imagine something so horrible?" Bourgeois decided to "do something to make this horror story manageable." Since she had been thinking about stamping, embossing, and rubbing in relation to her printmaking class, Bourgeois made a rubbing of a manhole cover for her student and explained, "You see, you do not have to *own* the covers . . . you can convert this obsession into a work of art."

Another student has described what it was like to be in one of Bourgeois's printmaking classes.⁵ Apparently she never taught print techniques, leaving that to an assistant. Instead, she ran the class as a studio in which the students worked individually. She would have them talk about the meaning of their work. "She would say very cryptic, psychological things and would ask probing questions," her former student recalled. "Why are you doing this? Why is it important?" Some students seem to have been attracted to the artist's unconventional methods, and they enrolled in her course several times. Bourgeois, in fact, made several close friends among the young people. But as she thought back on this teaching experience recently, she said: "I am of two minds about teaching. My motivation was always to impress *my* teachers. I would work for *my* teacher. It was difficult to work instead for the students."

Even though Bourgeois taught printmaking, she made only a few prints in this period, and none represents a sustained return to the medium. One, *Vertical Lines* (1974; cat. no. 68), appears to be a test plate. Bourgeois has described two others, *Père, gardez vous . . . (Father, Protect Yourself. . .)* (c. 1974; cat. no. 69) and *Ferocity* (c. 1974; cat. no. 70), pulled from unusual triangular plates, as ultimately unsatisfying: "I wanted to use those triangles to make sculptures instead." Until the late 1980s and 1990s, when she again became active as a printmaker, Bourgeois made prints only occasionally, usually for specific purposes. One was a benefit print, made in 1984 for Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, for which she had photogravure plates made of two old drawings (cat. no. 76). These plates were done by the printer Deli Sacilotto, who had been introduced to her by a friend. Realizing the potential of photogravure for reproduction, Bourgeois had the idea of using it to reissue *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, since the original plates had been lost. Sacilotto made three plates (*Plate 1*, *Plate 3*, and *Alternative Plate*) in 1984, but the reissuing of the book/portfolio did not take place. In 1985 Bourgeois agreed to have two drawings from the forties reproduced as photolithographs in conjunction with an exhibition and catalogue at Galerie Lelong, Paris (cat. nos. 77 and 78).

By the mid-1980s, renewed attention to the content of works of art had created a welcoming atmosphere for the concerns of Bourgeois's work, and it became widely recognized and highly regarded. There was a

new respect, generally, for the individualistic and idiosyncratic artwork. In addition, uncompromising, and sometimes disturbing and raw, subject matter became more acceptable. Pain, confusion, and personal struggle were given expression in a range of works of art, as were issues of sexuality. A sensibility embracing the work of artists such as Francesco Clemente, Robert Gober, Bruce Nauman, Kiki Smith, and Rosemarie Trockel finally appreciated that of Bourgeois as well. Given her new prominence in this period, it is not surprising that several publishers approached Bourgeois to engage in print projects.⁶ The invitations served to reawaken in her a natural inclination toward the techniques of intaglio printmaking—a proclivity that had, by and large, lain dormant for forty years.

In the late 1980s Deli Sacilotto, with Donald Saff of the technically sophisticated workshop Graphicstudio in Tampa, Florida, encouraged Bourgeois to make a series of multiples there. Nothing ultimately came of that project, but Peter Blum began talking with Bourgeois shortly afterward about a multiple for *Parkett* magazine, as well as other projects. Her acquaintance with him subsequently led to a sustained working relationship. The publisher Benjamin Shiff came to Bourgeois in 1988 as well, with the hope of making an illustrated book. He met with her and experimented with a variety of techniques, bringing her plates and other supplies for her to work with at home (see cat. nos. 79–85 and B1–B9). He even had plates prepared with worn surfaces that he thought conducive to Bourgeois's approach to printmaking. After much work and discussion, Shiff published *the puritan* (cat. nos. 114–21), a large-format volume with a 1940s text by Bourgeois and eight engravings. Collaborations such as this one marked a new phase of printmaking for Bourgeois, very different from that of the late thirties and forties when she had worked at home by herself, at the Art Students League, or at Atelier 17.

The French master printer Christian Guérin, who had been introduced to Bourgeois by a mutual friend in 1989, operated the Gravure workshop, with a small gallery, Maximillian, in TriBeCa. Bourgeois admired his four huge presses and also felt a personal rapport with him as a printer. She initially thought that he, too, might help with the reissuing of *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*. He assisted in engraving versions of *Plates 2* and *6*, using existing impressions as guides (cat. nos. 30.2 and 34.4). This led to other projects: besides assisting on the plates for *the puritan*, Guérin served as printer for *Dismemberment ANATOMY*, *Self Portrait*, and the first phase of *Ste Sebastienne* “small,” to name the most important ones.

Judith Solodkin, master lithographer and owner of Solo Press, also became involved in Bourgeois's printmaking around this time. Solodkin, who had once been a neighbor of Bourgeois, called on her in 1989, bringing some lithographic stones. Because Bourgeois was never particularly comfortable with this technique, only *Reaching* (cat. no. 87) resulted at that time. But Solodkin played a role in facilitating Bourgeois's reentry into printmaking by helping publisher Peter Blum with some of the early projects he undertook with the artist.

Solodkin arranged for Harlan and Weaver Intaglio to print the intaglio plates done for Blum, with proofs being brought to Solodkin's shop for study. At this point, Bourgeois did not meet directly with Felix Harlan and Carol Weaver, although the cooperative arrangement among Blum, Solodkin, and Harlan and Weaver was in place for several prints. Among the most important projects they executed in this manner was the portfolio *Anatomy*.

By now printmaking had begun to occupy much more of Bourgeois's time. Jean Frémon, a director of Galerie Lelong, Paris, which had been exhibiting her sculpture, and which had published two photolithographs by her, approached Bourgeois about doing a print project. Rather than initiate something new, it was decided to reprint old plates still in her possession, since this early work was unknown to the public. Of these plates, eleven were in suitable condition for editioning, and they were reprinted by Piero Crommelynck in Paris. Nine of them constitute the portfolio *Quarantania* (1990; see page 205). Bourgeois chose the title, derived from the French *quarante* ("forty") because the prints are from the 1940s. She requested that the housing be a linen portfolio similar to that used for *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, since she thought of this new set as a kind of continuation of the earlier work.

For a while, publishers Osiris Editions (Benjamin Shiff), Galerie Lelong, and Peter Blum Edition, as well as printers Christian Guérin, Judith Solodkin, and Felix Harlan and Carol Weaver, were working concurrently on prints with Bourgeois. By 1992 Peter Blum Edition and Harlan and Weaver Intaglio became Bourgeois's primary printmaking team. The combination of publisher and printers, and the routine that evolved with the artist, were conducive to her working habits. A transplanted European, Blum often speaks to the artist in French. He also shares her interest in rare books and once found for her a seventeenth-century book by another Louise Bourgeois, a midwife to members of the French royal family who also wrote on fertility and childbirth. The volume, including a portrait engraving of the author, amazed and delighted the artist.

Of the printing team of Harlan and Weaver, it is Harlan who works most closely with Bourgeois as her prints evolve. The even-tempered and patient Harlan has said of Bourgeois: "She is mercurial, but I enjoy her. She takes to printmaking . . . she likes the direct touch . . . she relates to metal." In fact, the way Bourgeois presently works with her prints seems a very natural part of her daily routine. For example, Harlan may telephone to report that some impressions are ready, and Bourgeois will ask that he bring them to her. Upon his arrival, Bourgeois often leaves the room until he has arranged the proofs, since she likes to get a sudden "shock of recognition" by seeing them all at once. After studying them, she usually reworks parts of each composition with gouache. With his technical knowledge, Harlan generally can find a way to accomplish what Bourgeois wants. He subsequently brings fresh proofs, and the process continues. Bourgeois often asks for the plates back to work on them further, making changes over the course of several days. Compositions sometimes change completely before the printer returns.

Bourgeois experiments with the process of printmaking just as rigorously now as she did in the 1940s. She has always found it difficult to stop work on a composition, and she is never completely satisfied. Consequently, projects keep evolving, and sometimes they are put on indefinite hold. The states and variants of *Ste Sebastienne* “small,” for example, were begun in early 1990, continued in 1991, and then put aside. In 1992 the composition was reconceived, enlarged, and published as *Ste Sebastienne* “large.” In 1993 Bourgeois went back to the plates for the small version and finally completed it as *Stamp of Memories I* and *Stamp of Memories II*. Now it seems that even her involvement with the preparations for this catalogue has stimulated her printmaking. Her attention is again focused on digging a line into metal and on the possibilities suggested by that act, and by the tools and materials needed to achieve it. The individual sheets made during the many stages of this process testify to the extraordinary creative adventure Bourgeois continues to pursue in this medium. Once again prints are an integral part of her repertoire of artistic mediums, again helping her to deal with memories, understand and control moods, alleviate anxiety, analyze a troubling situation, or even savor a joyous moment.

1. All quotations of Louise Bourgeois in this essay are from extensive interviews with the author in 1992 and 1993.
2. Lucy R. Lippard, “Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out,” *Artforum* 13, (March 1975): 33.
3. Conversation with Will Barnet, 1993.
4. Conversation with Henri Zerner, Professor of Fine Arts, Harvard University, and former Print Curator, Fogg Art Museum, 1993.
5. Interview with former student Hannah H. Alderfer, 1993.
6. Information was gathered through interviews or conversations in 1993 with the following: Peter Blum, Felix Harlan, Deli Sacilotto, Benjamin Schiff, Judith Solodkin, and Carol Weaver.

