

ARTIST ROOMS

# LOUISE BOURGEOIS

RESOURCE PACK



# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) is widely regarded as one of the great figures of modern and contemporary art with a career spanning eight decades from the 1930s until 2010. The ARTIST ROOMS collection holds a remarkable survey of Bourgeois's late works including drawings, prints, sculpture and fabric works. A further group of important sculptures and works on paper are held in Tate's Collection. Other significant collections are held by the Guggenheim Museum, MoMA (Museum of Modern Art, New York), Whitney Museum (New York), SFMOMA (San Francisco Museum of Modern art), Centre Pompidou (Paris) and the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa).

This resource is designed to aid teachers and educators using the ARTIST ROOMS Louise Bourgeois collection with groups of young people engaged in related learning activities and projects. The resource focuses on specific works and themes and suggests areas of discussion, activities and links to other works in the online collection pages.

For schools, the work of Louise Bourgeois presents a good opportunity to explore cross-curricula learning. The themes in Bourgeois's work can be linked to curricula areas such as English, expressive arts, health and wellbeing, social studies, citizenship and science.

**A glossary at the back of the resource provides further information on key words, terms and people associated with Bourgeois and related themes.**

Cover image: Louise Bourgeois

*COUPLE I* 1996

ARTIST ROOMS National Galleries of Scotland and Tate.

Lent by the Artist Rooms Foundation 2013

Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

# CONTENTS

What is ARTIST ROOMS?	03
Louise Bourgeois	04
1. CHILDHOOD TRAUMA	06
2. HOME	08
3. FEAR AND ANXIETIES	10
4. BODY PARTS	12
5. SPIRALS	14
6. FRIENDSHIP	16
7. WRITINGS AND RECORDINGS	18
Summary	20
Find Out More	21
Glossary	22





# LOUISE BOURGEOIS

Louise Joséphine Bourgeois was born on Christmas Day 1911 in Paris to Joséphine Fauriaux and Louis Bourgeois. She was the second of three children and her parents ran a tapestry restoration workshop and gallery, where Louise assisted from an early age. She first studied Philosophy at the University of Paris and had enrolled to study Geometry and Mathematics, before deciding instead to embark on a career as an artist. She undertook her artistic training at a number of the principal artists' studios and academies in Paris from the mid to late 1930s. During this period she studied with Fernand Léger, among others, developing three-dimensional work, as well as paintings and drawings. In 1938 she opened her own gallery where she met her husband, the eminent art historian, Robert Goldwater. Goldwater and Bourgeois married and moved to New York the same year.

Bourgeois's first solo exhibition, which consisted of twelve paintings, was held at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New York, 1945; that same year her work was also included in the Whitney Annual (later the Whitney Biennial). Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, while raising three sons, she exhibited in both group and solo exhibitions and her work was acquired by major museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She was associated with the New York School, befriending the

likes of Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning and later joined the American Abstract Artist Group. Her first three-dimensional works like her totem-like figures collectively known as *Personages* 1946-55. These sculptures were made from wood, and were installed as environmental installations. Bourgeois often used her roof as a studio and the *Personages* recall the skyscrapers and rooftops that surrounded her. The *Personages* depict individuals, and Bourgeois's relationship with them, often reflecting her homesickness and the people she left behind in Paris.

Following the death of her father in 1951 Bourgeois suffered from serious bouts of depression and agoraphobia. In the early 1950s Bourgeois began to engage in psychoanalysis, and would continue to do so for thirty years. She only had one major solo exhibition between 1953 and 1964. In her sculptural works of the 1960s, she moved away from the rigid *Personages* and towards biomorphic forms and cavities which saw her working in bronze, plaster, latex and marble. The materials became inconsequential; they were primarily a means to express a psychological or emotional state. Despite her relatively low profile during 1950s, 60s and 70s she was recognised in important exhibitions such as *Eccentric Abstraction* – curated by Lucy Lippard – where Bourgeois's work was shown with a younger generation

of artists such as Eva Hesse and Bruce Nauman. Bourgeois's organic and bodily forms often combined male and female elements.

Following the death of her husband in 1973, Bourgeois continued to make art and teach, and she also became associated with the New York feminist movement. In 1982 she had a major retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the first ever at MoMA for a female artist, which introduced her to a broader audience. It was during this period that Bourgeois began to speak publicly about her childhood traumas and how this informed her work. The artistic climate during the Postmodern era celebrated personal and narrative based artistic practice further raising Bourgeois's profile.

Bourgeois's first European retrospective in 1989 was organised by the Kunstverein in Frankfurt; the same year she began to make her Cells. The Cells, typically constructed from a mixture of salvaged architectural materials such as old doors, windows, wire mesh and glass panes combined with found objects and sculptural fragments, would become an important part of her artistic production during the remainder of her life. In the mid 1990s Bourgeois began to work with textiles, including old garments, primarily her own and those of her mother, that she had saved for many years. Imagery relating to



Robert Mapplethorpe *Louise Bourgeois* 1982  
© Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission.  
ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland.  
Acquired jointly through The d'Offay Donation with assistance  
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spools of thread, sewing and mending maintained a central place in her practice until her death.

In 1993, at the age of eighty-one, Bourgeois was chosen to represent the USA at the Venice Biennale and in 2000 she became the first artist to create a commission for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, for which she made *Maman* 1999, a giant Spider. Although her work has been associated with several different art historical movements, including Surrealism and Minimalism, Bourgeois always created works on her own terms. Louise Bourgeois died in 2010 at the age of ninety-eight.

# CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

*I NEED TO MAKE THINGS. THE PHYSICAL INTERACTION WITH THE MEDIUM HAS A CURATIVE EFFECT. I NEED THE PHYSICAL ACTING OUT. I NEED TO HAVE THESE OBJECTS EXIST IN RELATION TO MY BODY.*<sup>1</sup>

– Louise Bourgeois

From an early age Louise Bourgeois's drawing skills were put to use as she worked in the family business repairing and restoring medieval and Renaissance tapestries. Her drawing skills made her indispensable to her parents.<sup>2</sup> Bourgeois would draw and keep diaries throughout her life but her prolific artistic output was never dedicated to a single material or process. She worked in a variety of mediums creating sculptures and environments in bronze, wood, glass, metal, fabric, plaster among others. Her selection of materials – as well as the processes used and the environments they were created in – are inextricably linked to our understanding of the work. Whatever the mode of expression employed, however, the driving force behind her art remained the exorcism of her childhood traumas.

Bourgeois's childhood traumas relate to her fear of abandonment, which stems from her mother's illness and death, her father's philandering and the horrors of the First World War. Bourgeois's highly complex work should not just be read in relation to one memory. However, her

relationship with her parents and her memories of childhood would inform her work throughout her life. She later spoke of her mother's logic and intellectual approach to life, in contrast to the emotive and passionate character of her father, opposing forces that would later occupy her artistic practice.

Bourgeois described her Spider sculptures as her 'most successful subject'.<sup>3</sup> She created a series of steel and bronze Spider sculptures in the second half of the 1990s, picking up a motif that she first depicted in two small ink and charcoal drawings in 1947. The spider, both predator (a sinister threat) and protector (an industrious repairer), is an eloquent representation of the mother. The spinning and weaving of the spider's web links to Bourgeois's own mother, Joséphine, who also worked in the family's tapestry restoration business, and who encouraged her to participate in their tapestry business. Joséphine was a woman of delicate health and Bourgeois cared for her over an extended period of time until her death in 1932 when Bourgeois was twenty-two.

[1] Louise Bourgeois, 2003, unpublished manuscript, quoted in Thomas Kellein, *Louise Bourgeois: La Famille*, exh. Cat., Kunstalle Bielefeld, Bielefeld 2006, p.16.

[2] Louise Bourgeois quoted in 'Autobiographical Notes' from the early 1960s, in Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father, Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923–1997*, London, 1998, p.67.

[3] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Marion Cajori and Amei Wallach (dir.), *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, The Mistress and The Tangerine*, 2008, Zeitgeist Films Ltd



Louise Bourgeois *Spider I* 1995  
Collection The Easton Foundation  
Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

## Discussion

In groups, walk around the exhibition and identify the different materials used. Discuss the types of materials used and what aesthetic and tactile effect they give the artwork. Think about what emotions the materials might reflect and how you interpret the work.

## Activity

Identify other works in the exhibition that you think have opposing forces or themes. Create your own work,

thinking about these opposing forces, and think about ways to relate them to an imaginary or personal narrative.

## Artist Link

The British artist Tracey Emin (born 1963), who collaborated with Bourgeois on a series of prints in 2009-10, also has an autobiographical element to her work. *The Family Suite* 1994 in the National Galleries of Scotland's collection is a deeply personal series of prints recalling Emin's childhood in Margate.



Louise Bourgeois *Home for Runaway Girls* 1994  
Lent by Artist Rooms Foundation  
Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

# HOME

*I WAS IN EFFECT A RUNAWAY GIRL. I WAS A RUNAWAY GIRL WHO TURNED OUT ALRIGHT.*<sup>1</sup>

– Louise Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois left Paris for New York in 1938 soon after marrying Robert Goldwater and just prior to the breakout of the Second World War. Her early paintings in New York such as *Runaway Girl* c.1938 depict Bourgeois leaving behind her childhood home while *Fallen Woman (Femme Maison)* 1946-7 depicts a female figure with her head and torso covered in a house. Bourgeois wrote “She does not know that she is half naked, and she does not know that she is trying to hide. That is to say, she is totally self-defeating because she shows herself at the very moment that she thinks she’s hiding”<sup>2</sup>. The artist’s longtime assistant, Jerry Gorovoy, compares Bourgeois from this period with Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* 1939: ‘Like the young runaway Dorothy Gale from Kansas, Bourgeois has been on a journey to alleviate a core experience of abandonment.’<sup>3</sup>

Bourgeois revisited the theme in the drawing *Home for Runaway Girls* 1994. In this work the words ‘HOME FOR RUNAWAY GIRLS: EMPTY HOUSES. LES FILLE MERE D’ANTHONY.’ – which refers to a real girls home – are painted in gouache on sandpaper. Bourgeois here reminds us of her ongoing feelings

of displacement and her belief in art as form of therapy and escape. The piece is ellipse shaped, reminiscent of a door plaque and the rough textured surface is at odds with the comforts associated with the ‘home’.

The theme of the *Fallen Woman* would be revisited by Bourgeois in *Fallen Woman* 1981, a small bronze sculpture, with a woman’s head attached to a phallic-shaped handle in place of her body. This sculpture can be seen as relating to the experience of abandonment, she is sad and pathetic, unable to utilise the power suggested by her phallic extension. Bourgeois said that her early work could be related to ‘a fear of falling’ and ‘later a fear of failing’<sup>4</sup>.

Themes of the domestic and the home reoccur throughout Louise Bourgeois’s work. Early works on canvas and paper of the mid-1940s show the female figure trapped inside a small-scale house, while her room-like Cell structures often contain objects associated with the domestic. Bourgeois explores the role of female identity throughout her work, often challenging the conventional role of women throughout the twentieth century.

[1] Jerry Gorovoy and Danielle Tilkin, ‘There Is No Place Like Home’, in *Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture*, exh. Cat, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 1999, p.15.

[2] Asbaghi, Pandora Tabatabai and Jerry Gorovoy, *Louise Bourgeois: Blue Days and Pink Days*, essay by Paulo Herkenhoff. Italy: Fondazione Prada, 1997, page 98..

[3] Jerry Gorovoy and Danielle Tilkin, ‘There Is No Place Like Home’, in *Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture*, exh. Cat, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 1999, p.15.

[4] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Christine Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall*, Zurich 1992, p.177.



Louise Bourgeois *Fallen Woman* 1981

Lent on behalf of the Artist Rooms Foundation

Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

## Discussion

*Fallen Woman* and *Home for Runaway Girls* are artworks full of contradictions. Discuss in groups what these contradictions are and why the artist might convey themes of isolation, displacement and ideas of freedom in such a way. Think about the materials and processes used as well the works title and what relevance the artist's biography might be.

## Activity

Create an artwork based upon a journey you, a friend or a family member has taken. Incorporate positive and negative elements.

## Artist Link

The American photographer Francesca Woodman (1958-81) often depicted herself in contained and claustrophobic settings, which allude to the domestic. Like Bourgeois, Woodman's work is often also discussed in relation to Surrealism.



Louise Bourgeois *Cell XIV (Portrait)* 2000

ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Lent by the Artist Rooms Foundation 2011

Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

# FEAR AND ANXIETIES

*EACH CELL DEALS WITH A FEAR. FEAR IS PAIN...EACH CELL DEALS WITH THE PLEASURE OF THE VOYEUR, THE THRILL OF LOOKING AND BEING LOOKED AT.<sup>1</sup>*

– Louise Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois began to make her self-enclosed structures known as Cells in 1989 and they would become an important part of her practice for many years. The Cells are typically constructed from a mixture of salvaged architectural materials such as old doors, windows, wire mesh and glass panes, combined with found objects and sculptural fragments. The word 'Cell' is used to refer to both an enclosed room, as in a prison, and the most basic elements of the plant or animal life, like the cells of the body.

*Cell XIV (Portrait)* 2000 houses a metal table on which a red fabric sculpture sits on a small pedestal. The fabric sculpture is a trio of screaming heads, which are fused together. The three fused heads are reminiscent of Cerberus in Greek mythology where each head often represent birth, youth, and old age; the cycle of life which preoccupied Bourgeois. Fabric head sculptures appear in much of Bourgeois's late practice, either as single frontal heads, or in double, or in triple headed sculptures, such as *Cell XIV (Portrait)*. Here, Bourgeois revisits themes of confinement, anguish and fear.

*Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* 1989-93, one of Bourgeois's first Cells, has at its centre a

large rough marble stone elevated by steel girders with carved and polished black eyes, which look up at a 90-degree angle towards a large circular mirror. Other mirrors contained within the Cell are reminiscent of those found at a dressing table or an oversized vanity mirror, suggesting the sense of the domestic. In the ceiling the large round mirror is attached to a hinged circular panel cut out of the centre of the wire mesh ceiling, which can rotate to reflect different aspects of the interior. Walking around the sculpture can have an unnerving effect on the spectator as the eyes and mirrors confront and reflect the viewer.

Bourgeois wrote: "It is the quality of your eyes and the strength of your eyes that are expressed here. Nobody is going to keep me from seeing what is instead of what I would like."<sup>2</sup> Through *Cells (Eyes and Mirrors)* Bourgeois invites new perspectives in reality.

The use of found objects by Bourgeois in her Cells signals the influence of Marcel Duchamp – who she once referred to as a father figure – and his 'readymade'. However, Bourgeois's selection of objects is rooted in memory and biography whereas Duchamp's selections are more conceptually based.

[1] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Lynne Cooke and Mark Francis, *Carnegie International 21*, exh. Cat., Carnegie Museum of Art (Penn.) 199, p.60.

[2] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Nigel Finch (dir.) *Louise Bourgeois: No Trespassing*, 1994, Arena Films, BBC.

## Discussion

Many of Louise Bourgeois's Cells contain found objects as well as hand-made sculptural fragments. Although the physical process of making was important to Bourgeois she also included these found objects. Identify what these found objects might be and discuss why you think she included them.

## Activity

Think about a room you spend a lot of time in at home. How would you change it into a Louise Bourgeois type of Cell? What colour scheme would you adopt? What materials would you

use to change your room? What is the title of your new room or Cell? Find samples and swatches of lots of different materials to support this activity and to build up a picture of your Cell.

## Artist Link

The American artist Bruce Nauman (born 1941) has also worked in a vast range of media. Like Bourgeois he also studied mathematics prior to art and his practice can be seen as an open-ended enquiry into the stuff of the world, its materials, the body, language and emotions.



Louise Bourgeois Detail of *Cell XIV (Portrait)* 2000  
Collection Artist Rooms Foundation  
Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

# BODY PARTS

OUR OWN BODY COULD BE CONSIDERED, FROM A TOPOLOGICAL POINT-OF-VIEW, A LANDSCAPE WITH MOUNDS AND VALLEYS AND CAVES AND HOLES. SO IT SEEMS RATHER EVIDENT TO ME THAT OUR BODY IS A FIGURATION THAT APPEARS IN MOTHER EARTH.<sup>1</sup>

– Louise Bourgeois

The human body looms large throughout Bourgeois's oeuvre; from her earliest paintings to her Cells and her fabric works, the human body is referenced and explored. In the 1960s, her sculptures referencing bodily forms and body parts became more suggestive of organic matter, distinctively different from earlier sculptures in both shape and their materials. Working in materials such as latex, plaster, marble and bronze, these works, such as *Janus Fleuri* 1968, used and repeated rounded forms, often suggestive of male and female genitalia and breasts.

*Tits* 1967 is a small sculpture cast in bronze. The sculpture, as the title indicates, can be seen to represent two breasts, fused together to create a single bulbous form. This double, mirrored image was a technique that Bourgeois employed in other works, drawn from the example of Surrealism. The form of *Tits* can be related to *Janus Fleuri* 1968 where two stunted phalluses are joined back to back to create a sexualised form that has connotations of both male and female organs. Both *Tits* and *Janus Fleuri*

point in opposite directions – the past and the future – referencing memory.

Bourgeois more explicitly combines what resembles organic matter with the human form in *Nature Study* 1986. This small bronze sculpture takes the form of a hand, with a likeness to the root of a small tree, holding a small naked female figure. These small sculptures are typical of Bourgeois's investigation of complex emotional states through imagery of fragmented bodies or severed and dislocated limbs, which appear regularly in Bourgeois's work and are often referred to as 'part-objects'.

The term 'part-object' was first used by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein in her theoretical writings on infant development. In Klein's view, the primary 'part-object' is the mother's breast. Art historians have since taken up the psychoanalytic concept of the 'part-object' to describe sculptural works by modern and contemporary artists that take the form of body parts, often with a particular reference to sexuality, desire or questions of gender.

[1] Louise Bourgeois, 'Two Conversations with Deborah Wye', 7 January 1979 and 14 October 1981, Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father, Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923–1997*, London, 1998, p.126.



Louise Bourgeois *Tits* 1967

ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Lent by the Artist Rooms Foundation 2011

Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

## Discussion

By isolating a body part the artist is drawing attention to it and playing with notions of its connotations and representation. The body parts that Bourgeois isolates often reference sexuality, desire and gender. In groups discuss the role of gender in Bourgeois's work and how she sometimes questions/or plays with its conventions.

## Activity

Play the drawing game in which you draw just a head and neck, fold the

paper to leave a few marks visible and pass to the next person who draws the torso, folds and passes on again to draw the legs, then the feet. Unfold the drawing to find a hybrid body. Change the activity by drawing in some objects, such as a shoe or table to see what can evolve.

## Artist Link

The American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-89) created a number of highly sculptural photographs of fragmented body parts. He once stated: 'I zero in on the body part that I consider the most perfect part in that particular model'.

# SPIRALS

'THE SPIRAL IS IMPORTANT TO ME. IT IS A TWIST. AS A CHILD, AFTER WASHING TAPESTRIES IN THE RIVER, I WOULD TURN AND TWIST AND RING THEM... LATER I WOULD DREAM OF MY FATHERS MISTRESS. I WOULD DO IT IN MY DREAMS BY RINGING HER NECK. THE SPIRAL – I LOVE THE SPIRAL – REPRESENTS CONTROL AND FREEDOM.'<sup>1</sup>

– Louise Bourgeois

Certain forms and shapes reoccur throughout Louise Bourgeois's work, perhaps none more so than the spiral, since it represents 'an attempt at controlling the chaos'. She likened the spiral to the twisting of tapestries in the River Bièvre near the family business as a child and young woman. The spiral first emerged in Bourgeois's practice in two wooden sculptures of the early 1950s, and the artist returned to it many times.

In the hanging bronze sculpture *Spiral Woman* 1984 the figure is bound by a thick coil, with only her limbs visible. Trapped by the spiral she hangs in mid-air, suspended and spinning in a constant state of her own fragility. Although the spiral has the capacity to control chaos, there is always the underlying threat that the spiral will unravel.

In *A l'infini* 2008-9 spirals are present again. Here, the spiralling lines flow freely around representations of falling

female bodies, disembodied limbs, a couple and childbirth. Interlocking etched, ribbon-like lines at the basis of the multi-part work allude to the fibres that bind a single thread or a double helix, the building block of DNA or life itself.

Bourgeois's *A l'infini* refers to the endlessness of life. The suite abstractly conveys life as a journey, moving from birth, to youth, to coupling, and ultimately, to death. Birth, love, sexuality and death are an endless loop in the cycle of life.

The spiral can also be seen in a suite of twelve woodcuts named *Spirals* from 2005. Nine of the prints use red ink, two black, and one blue. Some of the spirals are loose and sketchy while others are more tightly wound and uniform. In the sculpture *Nature Study* 1986 a tightly coiled spiral morphs into a hand holding a human figure.

[1] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Paul Gardner, *Louise Bourgeois*, New York, 1994, p.68.

Louise Bourgeois *A l'infini* 2008-9 (detail)  
Lent on behalf of the Artist Rooms Foundation  
Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation





Louise Bourgeois *Nature Study* 1986  
ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Lent by the Artist Rooms Foundation 2011  
Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

## Discussion

For Bourgeois the spiral is an attempt to control chaos but it was always in danger of unravelling and spiralling out of control. In groups identify the different spirals in the exhibition and why you think the Spiral relates to chaos. How are spirals different from one another?

## Activity

Bourgeois described how she had less control over the spiral if she was

drawing from the outside to the centre as opposed to the reverse. Create our own spirals using both the outside and centre as starting point. Complete each drawing in a single continuous line.

## Artist Link

Robert Therrien (born 1947) continuously builds upon ideas and motifs. Many of the shapes that reoccur in his work are not confined by their reference to a single item and potentially relate to multiple objects.

# FRIENDSHIP

WHEN YOU ARE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL, YOU LOOK AROUND AND SAY, WHO IS GOING TO GET ME OUT? IN THIS CASE IT IS JERRY WHO COMES AND HE PRESENTS A ROPE, AND I HOOK MYSELF ON THE ROPE AND HE PULLS ME OUT.<sup>1</sup>

– Louise Bourgeois

Jerry Gorovoy met Louise Bourgeois in the late 1970s and he was her assistant, confidant and best friend for over thirty years. Bourgeois made many drawings and sculptures of Jerry Gorovoy's and her own hands and would refer to them as intimate 'portraits'. Among the intimate portraits Bourgeois made was *The Welcoming Hands* 1996, a bronze sculpture of her hands clutching those of Jerry's, which sits in the Tuileries Gardens in Paris.

Bourgeois also depicted a representation of her friendship with Gorovoy in the multipart work *10 am Is When You Come To Me* 2006, which consists of twenty hand-painted sheets that depict the artist's hands and those of Gorovoy. The hands are mostly painted over printed musical score paper in red gouache, and the artist's hands can be identified by the wedding ring she wore. The title relates to the time Gorovoy would arrive at Bourgeois's studio or home to begin their daily routine together.

Hands reoccur in many of Bourgeois's works, often as a symbol of support or dependence. The use of the colour red is also significant since it represents heightened emotional states for Bourgeois. *10 am Is When You Come To Me* relates to a personal narrative and its images convey the sense of reliance and bond of trust characteristic of the closest friendships.

The body of Gorovoy would also be used by Bourgeois in some of her sculptures including *Arch of Hysteria* 1993 and *Cell (Arch of Hysteria)* 1992-3, in which Bourgeois presents a male counterpart to the classic nineteenth-century stereotype of the psychologically distressed female.

*Give or Take* 2002 can be read as a commentary on the sometimes conflicted reliance of friendship. This sculpture presents a two-handed limb – one open, the other clasped – an object that is simultaneously gentle and cold.

[1] Louise Bourgeois quoted in an interview with Lawrence Rinder, 9 May 1995, in Francis Morris (ed.), *Louise Bourgeois*, 2007, p.150.

## Discussion

Colour is very important in the work of Louise Bourgeois; the colours red, white and blue – the colours of her adopted and home country flags – are particularly important to her. Discuss the meaning of colour for you; do particular colours have particular meaning for you, and why might that be?

## Activity

Pay homage to a friendship by creating a work inspired by *10 am Is When You Come To Me*. Draw around your and a friend's arms and hands

thinking about the type of paper you might use, the positioning of the then on the paper, the colours you might use and how you might distinguish your hands and arms from your friends.

## Artist Link

Bill Viola (born 1951) explores universal human experiences such as birth, death and the unfolding of consciousness. In the work *Four Hands* 2001 the hands of three generations are seen in this work – a young boy, father, mother and grandmother – using hand gestures that accompany emotional states.



Louise Bourgeois *Give or Take* 2002

ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Lent by the Artist Rooms Foundation 2013

Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation



Louise Bourgeois *10 am is When you Come to Me* 2006

ARTIST ROOMS Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Lent by the Artist Rooms Foundation 2013

Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

# WRITING AND RECORDING

*I LOVE LANGUAGE...YOU CAN STAND ANYTHING IF YOU WRITE IT DOWN... WORDS PUT IN CONNECTION CAN OPEN UP NEW RELATIONS...A NEW VIEW OF THINGS.*<sup>1</sup>

– Louise Bourgeois

Early in her career, Bourgeois produced a portfolio titled *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* 1947, combining poetic text with a sequence of engravings. In later years she would incorporate words, phrases and drawing, and occasionally also embroider them onto cloth. The text sometimes addresses the viewer with a challenge or an exhortation: didactic, ironic and sometimes moralising statements are presented with a sense of playfulness, or, as critic Robert Storr says, 'with jarring psychological candour'.<sup>2</sup>

In *Repairs in the Sky* 1999, one of a series of lead wall reliefs, the typescript text of the title is engraved into the surface in uppercase. Around the text are five cavities, which resemble bullet holes that pierce into the lead, 'repaired' with fabric and thread. Here, Bourgeois again combines opposing elements; the soft lead, thread and fabric are contrasted against steel, which has

been hammered and distorted with the cavities and the text engraving.

In the woven fabric piece *I Am Afraid* 2009, Bourgeois lists her fears as silence, the darkness, falling down, insomnia and emptiness, revisiting the themes and anxieties that reoccur throughout her oeuvre. Bourgeois was an obsessive list-maker with a fascination for dictionaries and encyclopedias, perhaps because of their sense of completeness and certainty. Her early love of geometry can be related to order, stability and lack of chaos.

Bourgeois also kept three types of diaries: 'the written, the spoken (into a tape recorder), and my drawing diary, which is the most important. Having these diaries means that I keep my house in order.'<sup>3</sup> Like drawing, writing was a compulsion for Bourgeois; her writings are a collection deeply personal thoughts and memories like her sculptures and drawings.

[1] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Ann Coxon, *Louise Bourgeois*, 2010, p.89.

[2] Robert Storr, Paulo Herkenhoff, Allan Schwartzman, *Louise Bourgeois*, London, 2003

[3] Louise Bourgeois, 'Tender Compulsion', *World Art*, February 1995, no.2, p.108.



Louise Bourgeois *Repairs in the Sky* 1999  
Lent on behalf of the Artist Rooms Foundation  
Photo: Christopher Burke, © The Easton Foundation

## Discussion

In groups discuss the quotes above by Louise Bourgeois and how they relate to works in the exhibition. Think about uses of language in the work of Louise Bourgeois and when it might be didactic, ironic or moralising.

## Activity

Walk around the exhibition and make a list of words and motifs that reoccur throughout. Use the words to create your own phrase or narrative.

## Artist Link

The American artist Jenny Holzer (born 1950) uses text in her sculptures and installations. Her text-based works present and call into question the rhetorical strategies of different forms of speech and writing, from philosophical tracts to fundamentalist preaching.

# SUMMARY

## **Key things to think about:**

### *Key Words:*

Architecture • Childhood • Feminism  
Sexuality • Gender • Diaries  
Autobiography • Red • Domesticity  
Fear • Anger • Loneliness  
Desire • Making • Ideas • Emotions  
Stability • Chaos • Family  
Homesickness Materials • Friendship  
Memory • Mythology

### *Examples of Materials:*

Latex • Bronze • Marble • Plaster  
found objects • Steel • Cotton • Thread

### *Styles and Movements:*

Surrealism • Abstract Expressionism  
Minimalism • Postmodernism

### *Links to other artists in National Galleries of Scotland and Tate collections:*

Fernand Léger • André Breton  
Joan Miró • Alberto Giacometti  
Marcel Duchamp • Meret Oppenheim  
Bruce Nauman • Eva Hesse  
Robert Mapplethorpe  
Francesca Woodman • Tracey Emin

# FIND OUT MORE

## Websites

Louise Bourgeois:

Hauser & Wirth: [www.hauserwirth.com](http://www.hauserwirth.com)

Cheim & Read: [www.cheimread.com](http://www.cheimread.com)

Fine arts Museum of San Francisco:  
[www.famsf.org](http://www.famsf.org)

Whitney Museum of American Art:  
[//whitney.org](http://whitney.org)

Museum of Modern Art, New York:  
[www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)

Dallas Museum of Art:  
[www.dallasmuseumofart.org](http://www.dallasmuseumofart.org)

Brooklyn Museum:  
[www.brooklynmuseum.org](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org)

Centre Pompidou:  
[www.centrepompidou.fr/en](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/en)

National Museum of Women in the Arts:  
[www.nmwa.org/](http://www.nmwa.org/)

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden:  
[www.hirshhorn.si.edu](http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu)

More about artist links can be found:  
[www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/artistrooms](http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/artistrooms) and [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

ARTIST ROOMS on tour:  
[www.artfund.org/artistrooms](http://www.artfund.org/artistrooms)

## Further Reading

Lucy Askew and Anthony d'Offay, *ARTIST ROOMS Louise Bourgeois, A Woman Without Secrets*, Edinburgh, 2013

Mieke Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider, the architecture of art-writing*, Chicago, 2001

Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father, Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923–1997*, London, 1998

Louise Bourgeois and Marius Bewley, *He Disappeared into Complete Silence: Suite of Nine Engravings by Louise Bourgeois*, New York, 1947

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Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois: The Secret of the Cells*, Munich, 2011

Jean Frémon, *Louise Bourgeois: femme maison*, Paris, 2009

Paul Gardner, *Louise Bourgeois: Universe Series on Women Artists*, New York, 1994

Jan Greenberg and Sandra Johnson, *Runaway Girl: The Artist Louise Bourgeois*, New York, 2003

Ulf Küster, *Louise Bourgeois*, Ostfildern, 2011

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Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall*, Zürich, Ammann Verlag, 1992

Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois: Stitches in Time*, London, 2003

Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art*, Cambridge, Mass., and London 2005

Robert Storr, Paulo Herkenhoff, Allan Schwartzman, *Louise Bourgeois*, London, 2003

Deborah Wye and Carol Smith, *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*, New York, 1994

# GLOSSARY

## **AGORAPHOBIA**

An anxiety disorder characterized by anxiety in situations where the sufferer perceives certain environments as dangerous or uncomfortable, often due to the environment's vast openness or crowdedness.

## **AMERICAN ABSTRACT ARTISTS**

The American Abstract Artists group – also known as AAA – is an artist-run organisation established in New York in 1936. Bourgeois joined the group in 1954; other members included the Abstract Expressionists Mark Rothko, Willem De Kooning and Jackson Pollock.

## **ASSEMBLAGE**

The making of three-dimensional or two-dimensional artistic compositions by putting together found objects.

## **BIOMORPHIC**

A non-representational form or pattern that resembles a living organism in shape or appearance.

## **CELLS**

The Cells are sculptures or installations by Louise Bourgeois typically constructed from a mixture of salvaged architectural materials such as old doors, windows and wire mesh combined with found objects and sculptural fragments.

## **CERBERUS**

A multi-headed creator in Greek mythology, which guards the gates of the Underworld, to prevent those who have crossed the river Styx from ever escaping.

## **MARCEL DUCHAMP**

French artist (1887–1968), associated with dada and Surrealism, who was a major influence in twentieth-century art. He is sometimes referred to as the 'father of conceptual art'.

## **ENVIRONMENTS**

Sculptural works that are presented so that they alter the environment or space in which they are shown for the viewer, as opposed to being presented frontally or monumentally before the viewer.

## **FEMINIST MOVEMENT**

The feminist movement in art began in the 1960s and corresponded with developments in feminist theory. Broadly feminist art reflected women's lives and experiences. Bourgeois never described herself as a feminist but a younger generation of feminist artists took her as a role model.

## **ROBERT GOLDWATER**

An art historian and African arts scholar (1907-73), who was the first director of the Museum of Primitive Art, New York, from 1957 to 1973. He was the husband of Louise Bourgeois, from 1938 until his death.

## **JERRY GOROVOY**

Louise Bourgeois's assistant and closest friend for over thirty years. Gorovoy is now the President of the artist's foundation, The Easton Foundation.

## **EVA HESSE**

An American artist (1936-70) of German birth. Hesse is known for her pioneering work in materials such as latex, fibreglass and plastics. Bourgeois exhibition alongside Hesse in the 1966 for the important exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction*.

## **MELANIE KLEIN**

An Austrian-born British psychoanalyst (1882-1960) who devised novel therapeutic techniques for children and who was influential on child psychology and contemporary psychoanalysis.

## **MAMAN**

Maman is a sculpture Bourgeois from 1999. The sculpture, which is monumental in size, is made from steel and marble. The title is the familiar French word for Mother. It was created by Bourgeois as a part of her inaugural commission of The Unilever Series in 1999 for Tate Modern's vast Turbine Hall.

## **FERNAND LÉGER**

French artist and film-maker (1881-1955). His early works were associated with a form of cubism, which he gradually modified into a more figurative, populist style.

## **LUCY LIPPARD**

An American writer, art critic and curator (born 1937) who was among the first writers to recognize the dematerialisation at work in conceptual art and was an early champion of feminist art. Lippard curated the important group exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* 1966, which featured Louise Bourgeois.

## **MINIMAL ART**

An art movement from the late 1960s. Minimalist artists typically made works in simple geometric shapes based on the square and the rectangle. Many minimal works explore the properties of their materials; which were often industrial.

## **ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE**

An American photographer (1946-89) known for his highly stylized black and white portraits, photographs of flowers and compositions of the human figure.

## **BRUCE NAUMAN**

American artist (born 1941) known for using a broad range of media including sculpture, photography, video, drawing, installation printmaking and performance. He exhibition alongside Louise Bourgeois in the exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* 1966.

## **PERSONAGES**

A series of carved forms that Bourgeois made between 1946 and 1955. Monolithic in the 1940s, they became segmented and more articulated (like vertebrae) in the 1950s.

## **POSTMODERN**

A term that describes the Postmodernist movement in the arts, its set of cultural tendencies and associated cultural movements. Some of the outstanding characteristics of Postmodernism are that it collapses the distinction between high and low culture; that it tends to efface the boundary between art and everyday life; and that it refuses to recognise the authority of any single style or definition of what art should be.

## **SURREALISM**

An avant-garde art movement that began in the early 1920s, and aimed to resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality. Louise Bourgeois is sometimes associated with Surrealism.

## **SYMBOLISM**

A late nineteenth-century art movement of French, Russian and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts.

## **PSYCHOANALYSIS**

A set of psychological and psychotherapeutic theories and associated techniques, originally popularised by Austrian physician Sigmund Freud and stemming partly from the clinical work of Josef Breuer and others.

## **WIZARD OF OZ**

A children's book by L. Frank Baum (1856-1919) from 1902, which chronicles the adventures of a young girl named Dorothy in the Land of Oz, after being swept away from her Kansas farm home in a tornado. It was later made into a hugely successful Hollywood film in 1939.



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