

## LOUISE BOURGEOIS PERSISTENT ANTAGONISM

Lower Belvedere  
22 September 2023 to 28 January 2024



Louise Bourgeois, *Roof Song*, 1947  
Photo: Eeva Inkeri, © The Easton Foundation / Bildrecht, Vienna 2023

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A highlight of the museum's 300-year anniversary and for many a new discovery: For the first time in Europe, the Belvedere is dedicating a major solo exhibition to the little-known paintings by Louise Bourgeois, one of the most iconic artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in the context of her oeuvre.

*General Director Stella Rollig: After almost twenty years, a major solo exhibition celebrating Louise Bourgeois is long overdue in Vienna. By presenting some sixty paintings we are highlighting a new facet of Louise Bourgeois's art, showing it as the origin and root of her sculptural and graphic practice.*

It was only in the 1990s that Bourgeois became internationally famous with iconic works such as the monumental spider sculptures and room-sized *Cells*. Little known, by contrast, are her early paintings in which the French-American artist established the formal and thematic foundations of her later work. Although the show features some key paintings, such as the *Femme Maison* series or *The Runaway Girl*, the majority of exhibits have rarely been on public display.

*Bourgeois undoubtedly reacted in her work to the prevailing power relations between men and women and reflected the social role of women within the then still dominant patriarchal structures, said curator Sabine Fellner.*

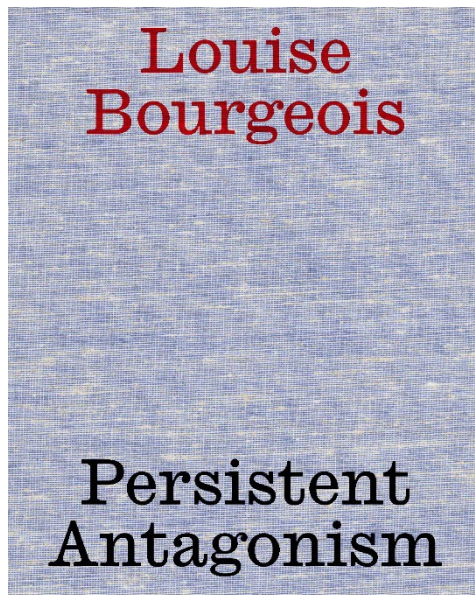
Accompanied by the artist's quotes, the exhibition places Bourgeois's paintings in a dialogue with sculptural masterpieces such as *Arch of Hysteria*, *Fillette*, and *Janus Fleuri*, her *Cells*, and numerous series of graphic art. In the city of Sigmund Freud, a special emphasis is given to the significance of psychoanalysis in Bourgeois's life and work with her writings inspired by her own analysis providing personal insights into her art. The exhibition is complemented by a monumental bronze spider sculpture, prominently displayed in the Belvedere's Baroque Gardens.

Louise Bourgeois's career, encompassing a variety of media, spanned seven decades. It was in her early oil paintings made between 1938 and 1949 that the French-American artist already developed her unmistakable visual vocabulary and the themes that would run through her entire oeuvre.

*Curator Johanna Hofer: In her paintings, Louise Bourgeois started to inextricably intertwine art and life. She discovered art as a way of addressing her demons—her fears, her anger, her rage, her sadness, her self-doubt.*

Existential themes such as love, fear of loss and abandonment, birth, sexuality, and death are at the core of her art, which is intuitively comprehensible, and yet often elusive in its complexity. Despite her proximity to the Surrealists in 1930s Paris and the Abstract Expressionists in 1940s New York, Bourgeois's work remained highly individual, unconventional, and predominantly figurative. Louise Bourgeois succeeded in expressing the tension between oppositions, such as male and female, conscious and unconscious, figuration and abstraction.

## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



### **Louise Bourgeois. Persistent Antagonism**

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## LOUISE BOURGEOIS

### 1911–2010

#### 1911

December 25: Louise Joséphine Bourgeois is born in Paris. Her parents own a tapestry restoration business, which includes a sales gallery at 174 boulevard Saint Germain.

#### 1912–18

From 1912–17, the family lives in Choisy-le-Roi, where they rent a property with an atelier for tapestry restoration. During World War I, Bourgeois and her siblings, Henriette (1904–1980) and Pierre (1913–1960), often stay with relatives in Aubusson. Bourgeois's father, Louis, fights in the war and is wounded in 1916. Around 1918 her mother, Joséphine, falls ill, likely with Spanish influenza, and never fully recovers.

#### 1919

The family acquires property in the Parisian suburb of Antony, where they live and operate their tapestry restoration atelier. Louis maintains the Paris gallery.

#### 1922–31

Louis hires Sadie Gordon Richmond as an English teacher and governess. She stays with the family for almost a decade, during which time she and Louis have an affair—one of his many infidelities. The complex dynamics of Bourgeois's childhood and her subsequent feelings of abandonment and betrayal, further complicated by her mother's illness, will later find expression in her work. As Joséphine's health worsens, the family begins spending winters in the South of France. By 1928 Bourgeois becomes her mother's primary caretaker.

#### 1932

September 14: Joséphine Bourgeois dies. October 29: Bourgeois receives a baccalauréat in philosophy from the Lycée Fénelon. She enrolls at the Sorbonne to study mathematics but soon pivots to art.

#### 1933–37

Bourgeois studies at several art schools and ateliers in Paris, including the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, the

Académie Colarossi, the Académie Ranson, the Académie Julian, the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, and the École du Louvre. She also works as a certified docent at the Musée du Louvre.

### 1938

Bourgeois studies with Fernand Léger. She later credits him with encouraging her to work in three dimensions. Bourgeois establishes a small gallery within the family tapestry gallery, selling prints and drawings by Pierre Bonnard, Pablo Picasso, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Suzanne Valadon, among others. On August 24 American art historian Robert Goldwater (1907–1973) visits her gallery. They marry on September 12, and Bourgeois arrives in New York City in October. She enrolls in the Art Students League, where she studies with Vaclav Vytlačil.

### 1939

In June Bourgeois and Goldwater return to France. Bourgeois participates in *La Groupe 1938–1939 de l'Académie Ranson*, an exhibition of work by former classmates at Galerie Jean Dufresne, Paris. In September they arrange to adopt Michel Olivier, an orphan from Bordeaux, and then depart for New York.

### 1940

May 21: Michel Olivier Bourgeois (1936–1990) arrives in New York.  
July 4: Bourgeois gives birth to Jean-Louis Bourgeois (d. 2022).

### 1941

The Bourgeois-Goldwater family moves to an apartment building known as Stuyvesant's Folly, at 142 East 18th Street. Bourgeois uses the roof as an open-air studio and creates her first mature sculptures, the *Personages*, in the mid-to-late 1940s (fig. 7).  
November 12: Alain Bourgeois is born.

### 1945–46

February 3–28: Bourgeois's painting *Natural History* (c. 1944) appears in *Personal Statement: A Painting Prophecy, 1950* at David Porter Gallery, Washington, DC, alongside works by Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and others.

June 4: Bourgeois's first solo exhibition, *Paintings by Louise Bourgeois*, opens at Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New York. Twelve paintings are shown, including *The Runaway Girl*.

June 12–July 7: *The Women* at Peggy Guggenheim's New York gallery, Art of This Century, presents thirty women artists, including Bourgeois, Leonora Carrington, Lee Krasner, and Hedda Sterne.

November 27–January 10: Bourgeois's Painting: *Red on White* is included in the *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Future *Annals* will include *Southern Scene* (now *Abstract Figure*, 1947; in 1948 and *Woman in Process of Placing a Beam in Her Bag* (1948 in 1949).

#### 1947

Bourgeois publishes *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, an illustrated book of nine engravings, accompanied by her own short texts. She develops *He Disappeared* while frequenting Stanley William Hayter's renowned print shop, Atelier 17, where she works alongside Le Corbusier, Joan Miró, Louise Nevelson, and others.

October 28–November 8: Bourgeois's second solo exhibition, *Louise Bourgeois: Paintings*, at Norlyst Gallery, New York, features seventeen paintings including the works later titled *Femme Maison*.

#### 1949

October 3–29: Bourgeois's first exhibition of sculpture, *Louise Bourgeois, Recent Work 1947–1949: Seventeen Standing Figures in Wood*, at Peridot Gallery, New York, is conceived as an environmental installation. The sculptures, including *Persistent Antagonism* (1946–48), are installed

directly into the floor and arranged in clusters as if chatting at a cocktail party.

#### 1950

April 21–23: Bourgeois participates in "Artists Sessions at Studio 35." Moderated by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Richard Lippold, and Motherwell, the closed-door symposium invites fourteen artists, most of whom are Abstract Expressionists, to discuss contemporary American art.

October 2–28: *Louise Bourgeois: Sculptures* at Peridot Gallery features fifteen wood Personages, including *Untitled* (1947–49). October 26: The Bourgeois-Goldwater family moves to France for a year while Goldwater pursues research for a Fulbright.

#### 1951

April 9: Louis Bourgeois dies in Paris. Summer: Bourgeois and Goldwater travel to Northern Europe and London, where they meet Francis Bacon. November: Bourgeois experiences profound depression precipitated by the death of her father and begins psychoanalysis in New York.

#### 1952

Bourgeois undergoes analysis with Dr. Henry Lowenfeld. She begins writing what are now known as the psychoanalytic writings, an extensive output that essentially replaces her

artistic practice for the next decade. She sees Lowenfeld regularly until 1967, and then sporadically until his death in 1985.

**1953**

March 30–April 25: *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings for Sculpture and Sculpture* is on view at Peridot Gallery. Bourgeois will not show new work until 1964.

**1957**

March: Bourgeois becomes an American citizen.

**1959**

April 9–25: *Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois* at Cornell University's Andrew D. White Art Museum, Ithaca, New York, features eleven *Personages*.

**1962**

Bourgeois and Goldwater move to 347 West 20th Street, New York, where the artist lives for the rest of her life.

**1964**

January 7–30: *Louise Bourgeois: Recent Sculpture* at The Stable Gallery, New York, is Bourgeois's first solo exhibition of new work since 1953. She debuts several of her *Lair* sculptures, including *Fée Couturière* (1963), which developed from experiments with organic materials, such as plaster, latex, and resin.

**1966**

September 20–October 8: Bourgeois, with Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, and others, is included in *Eccentric Abstraction* at Fischbach Gallery, New York, the seminal exhibition organized by Lucy Lippard.

**1967–70**

Bourgeois makes several trips to Carrara, Italy, and other nearby towns. Working in marble and bronze, she produces many significant sculptures, including her *Janus* series.

**1970–73**

Though never identifying as a feminist artist, Bourgeois is increasingly involved with the feminist art movement. She takes part in various demonstrations, panels, and exhibitions focused on women artists. On December 11, 1970, she protests the opening of the Whitney Museum's 1970 *Sculpture Annual* for its low representation of women artists (despite being included herself). On April 12, 1972, she joins Chryssa and Lee Krasner in a demonstration for women artists at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, and in 1973 she protests in support of an employee strike.

**1973**

March 26: Robert Goldwater dies.

**1974**

December 14–26: *Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture 1970–1974* at 112 Greene Street Gallery, New York, is the artist's first solo exhibition in ten years.

**1978**

September 16–October 21: *Louise Bourgeois: New Work* is presented at Hamilton Gallery of Contemporary Art, New York. On its closing day, Bourgeois stages the performance, *A Banquet / A Fashion Show of Body Parts*. September 26–October 21: *Louise Bourgeois: Triangles: New Sculpture and Drawings, 1978* at Xavier Fourcade Gallery, New York, includes *Maisons Fragiles* (1978).

**1980**

March 18–April 19: Bourgeois participates in *10 Abstract Sculptures: American and European 1940–1980*, curated by Jerry Gorovoy at Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York. She develops a deep friendship with Gorovoy, who will become her primary assistant and work closely with her for the rest of her life.

May: Bourgeois acquires a studio space in an old garment factory at 475 Dean Street in Brooklyn, allowing her to work on increasingly large-scale sculptures.

September 6–October 11: *The Iconography of Louise Bourgeois* at Max Hutchinson Gallery, curated by Gorovoy, features more than thirty paintings,

including the *Femme Maison* series, *Roof Song* (1947), and *Red Room* (1947).

**1981**

Bourgeois returns to Italy for the first time since 1972 with Gorovoy and begins several new marble works, including *Femme Maison* and *Torso, Self-Portrait* (both 1982).

**1982–83**

November 3–February 8: *Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective*, organized by Deborah Wye, is MoMA's first retrospective of a woman sculptor and marks the beginning of more widespread recognition of Bourgeois's art. In conjunction, Bourgeois produces *Partial Recall*, a slideshow with voiceover narrative recounting her childhood and early family relationships.

**1985**

February–March: Bourgeois's first solo exhibition in Europe, *Louise Bourgeois: Retrospektive 1947–1984*, is presented at Galerie Maeght-Lelong, Paris; it travels to Maeght-Lelong, Zurich.

**1988**

October 22–December 31: *Louise Bourgeois: Works on Paper 1939–1988* is presented at Museum Overholland, Amsterdam. After attending the opening, Bourgeois returns to Italy and

works on a series of sculptures in pink marble.

#### 1989–90

December 12–January 28: Bourgeois's first European retrospective opens at the Frankfurter Kunstverein in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Organized by Peter Weiermair, it travels throughout Europe until 1991. After attending the opening, Bourgeois returns to Italy to work.

#### 1991–92

October 19–February 16: Bourgeois debuts six *Cells* in the *Carnegie International*, organized by Lynne Cooke and Mark Francis at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Ultimately encompassing sixty works, the *Cells* are atmospheric, room-like enclosures that evoke memory and the senses through unique groupings of sculpture and found objects. One of the series, *Precious Liquids* (1992), premieres at Documenta IX in Kassel, Germany in 1992.

#### 1993–95

June 9–October 10, 1993: Bourgeois represents the United States at the forty-fifth Venice Biennale, and features four new *Cells* with wire mesh cages, including *Cell (Choisy)* (1990–93). An expanded version of the exhibition, *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*, organized by Charlotta Kotik, opens at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, in April

1994.

September 13, 1994–January 3, 1995: MoMA presents *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*. The show introduces the first volume of Bourgeois's catalogue raisonné of prints.

#### 1996–99

Bourgeois begins to incorporate clothing and textiles from throughout her life into her work. Increasingly celebrated, she is the subject of several solo exhibitions, including *Louise Bourgeois: Blue Days and Pink Days* at Fondazione Prada, Milan (May 15–July 20, 1997); *Louise Bourgeois: Homesickness* at Yokohama Museum, Japan (November 2, 1997–January 15, 1998); the traveling exhibition *Louise Bourgeois* at the Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux (February 6–April 26, 1998); *Louise Bourgeois* at the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany (February 30–May 2, 1999); and *Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (November 16, 1999–February 14, 2000). In 1999 Bourgeois participates in the forty-eighth Venice Biennale and is awarded the Golden Lion.

#### 2000

May 12–November 26: Bourgeois is commissioned for the inaugural installation of the Tate Gallery's Turbine Hall, London. She debuts her

monumental spider, *Maman* (1999), as well as three towers, *I Do*, *I Undo*, and *I Redo* (all 1999–2000), which incorporate mirrors, staircases, and viewing platforms along with smaller-scale fabric and marble sculptures.

**2001–02**

April 24–May 27, 2001: *Louise Bourgeois: Reconstruction of the Pastis* presented at the Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien in Vienna and travels to the Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria.

October 9, 2001–January 13, 2002: The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, presents *Louise Bourgeois* at the Hermitage, the museum's first exhibition of a living American artist.

July 5–September 15, 2002: *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings and Sculpture* at the Kunsthhaus Bregenz, Austria, juxtaposes recent work with early drawings and sculptures.

**2003–04**

November 25–February 29: *A View from the Outside, Louise Bourgeois: The Reticent Child* is exhibited at the

Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna.

**2005–06**

June 12–November 6, 2005: Bourgeois is included in the fifty-first Venice Biennale. November 24–February 2, 2006: Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna

presents *Louise Bourgeois: Back and Forth*. December 2005: Bourgeois is forced to vacate the Brooklyn studio where she created her iconic *Spider* and *Cell* works so that it can be torn down.

She later uses a salvaged spiral staircase from the studio as a central element in *Cell (The Last Climb)* (2008).

March 12–June 5, 2006: *Louise Bourgeois: La Famille* is on view at the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany.

**2007–08**

October 10–January 20: A major exhibition, *Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective*, organized by Frances Morris, Marie-Laure Bernadac, and Jonas Storsve, debuts at Tate Modern, London.

**2010**

May 31: Louise Bourgeois dies.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

<b>Exhibition</b>	Louise Bourgeois. Persistent Antagonism
<b>Curators</b>	Sabine Fellner, Johanna Hofer
<b>Exhibition design</b>	Silvia Merlo
<b>Exhibition management</b>	Tatjana Gawron-Deutsch
<b>Duration</b>	22 September 2023 to 28 January 2024
<b>Location</b>	Lower Belvedere, Rennweg 6, 1030 Vienna
<b>Opening Hours</b>	Monday to Sunday, 10 am to 6 pm
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For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit [www.belvedere.at/en/press](http://www.belvedere.at/en/press)