

Press Release

Louise Bourgeois. The Heart Has Its Reasons

Tarmak22, Gstaad and hauserwirth.com
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Would it be absurd to
say that strength (the one I
work so much on acquiring) is
the competence of the heart

– Louise Bourgeois, loose sheet, c. 1955

This winter, Hauser & Wirth brings the work of one of the most celebrated artists of the 20th Century, Louise Bourgeois, to the Swiss Alps. Available to experience at the exhibition space Tarmak22 in Gstaad and online, the exhibition takes its title from Blaise Pascal's well-known phrase: 'the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.' Bourgeois studied mathematics and philosophy at the Sorbonne, Paris, and wrote her thesis on Pascal; but the death of her mother in 1932 eventually led her to abandon these studies and turn to art making. Yet she remained a Pascalian, so to speak, in her belief that there is something in our emotional and psychological experience of the Other that eludes, or transcends, rational explanation. For Bourgeois, this relationship to the Other is a complex arrangement, and a world in itself.

'The Heart Has Its Reasons' features a selection of important sculptures and drawings from the artist's oeuvre spanning from 1949 until 2009, and explores themes central to her practice. The motifs that unify the presentation; the couple, the paired form, the house, the bed, landscape, and human anatomy, are grounded

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in the dynamic interplay between the binary oppositions—mind and body, geometric and organic, male and female, conscious and unconscious—that animate Bourgeois' work as a whole. Above all, this exhibition speaks about Bourgeois' need for love, the 'polar star' she could not live without.

In one of the landmark sculptures in the presentation, 'Couple' (2007-2009), the hair of the female figure is transformed into an eccentric spiral form that binds her together with the male figure. That the sculpture hangs from a single point expresses the fragility and precariousness of the relationship. The tight coils of the enveloping spiral are aimed at warding off the fear of separation and abandonment. The motif of the house in Bourgeois' work is similarly double-sided. In the two nest-like hanging Lairs (1962; 1986-2000), it is a metaphor for retreat and withdrawal, while the house that sits on one of the cast arms in 'Untitled No. 7' (1993) represents an ideal of repose, safety, and the happy couple.

In 'Eyes' (2001), light emanates from the protruding pupils as if to project an inner psychic landscape onto external reality. For Bourgeois, the act of looking symbolizes introspection and self-knowledge, but also has its sexual and erotic side (that is, looking and being looked at). In the suite of drawings 'La Rivière Gentile' (2007), which alludes to the river Bièvre that flowed behind Bourgeois' childhood home in Antony, landscape is introjected into the body, and person and place are merged through the artist's act of recall. As Bourgeois wrote in the text (c. 1959) that formed the basis for this work:

The sound of a pebble falling into the black
and distant water of a well.
the unconscious memories that are reborn

Bourgeois' work is inextricably entwined with her life and experiences: fathoming the depths of emotion and psychology across two- and three-dimensional planes of expression. Rooted in her own individual introspection, 'The Heart Has Its Reasons' grapples with the complexities of human experience.

The exhibition coincides with 'Louise Bourgeois. To Unravel a Torment' at the Serralves Museum, Porto, Portugal, on view from 3 December 2020 to 27 June 2021. Forthcoming projects include the upcoming exhibition 'Louise Bourgeois, Freud's Daughter' opening next spring at The Jewish Museum in New York, NY, curated by Philip Larratt-Smith.

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About the artist

Born in France in 1911, and working in America from 1938 until her death in 2010, Louise Bourgeois is recognized as one of the most important and influential artists of the 20th Century. For over seven decades, Bourgeois' creative process was fueled by an introspective reality, often rooted in cathartic re-visitations of early childhood trauma and frank examinations of female sexuality. Articulated by recurrent motifs (including body parts, houses and spiders), personal symbolism and psychological release, the conceptual and stylistic complexity of Bourgeois' oeuvre – employing a variety of genres, media and materials – plays upon the powers of association, memory, fantasy, and fear.

Bourgeois' work was included in the seminal exhibition 'Eccentric Abstraction,' curated by Lucy Lippard for New York's Fischbach Gallery in 1966. Major breakthroughs on the international scene followed with The Museum of Modern Art in New York's 1982 retrospective of her work; Bourgeois' participation in Documenta IX in 1992; and her representation of the United States at the 45th Venice Biennale in 1993.

In 2001, Bourgeois was the first artist commissioned to fill the Tate Modern's cavernous Turbine Hall. The Tate Modern's 2007 retrospective of her works, which subsequently traveled to the Centre Pompidou in Paris; The Guggenheim Museum in New York; The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; and The Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C., cemented her legacy as a foremost grande dame of late Modernism.

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Louise Bourgeois in 1978.
Photo: Carollee Pelos / Art
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Louise Bourgeois
The Couple
2007-2009
Cast and polished aluminum, hanging piece
154.9 x 76.2 x 66 cm / 61 x 30 x 26 in
Photo: Christopher Burke

Louise Bourgeois
Eyes
2001
Bronze, golden brown patina, and electric light: a pair
One eye: 99 x 137.1 x 147.3 cm / 39 x 54 x 58 in

2nd eye: 86.3 x 147.3 x 121.9 cm / 34 x 58 x 48 in

Louise Bourgeois
Night and Day
2007
Archival dyes on hand-sewn fabric, in two parts
Each: 83.8 x 106.7 cm / 33 x 42 in
Photo: Christopher Burke