

LOUISE BOURGEOIS: I HAVE BEEN TO HELL AND BACK. AND LET ME TELL YOU, IT WAS WONDERFUL.

SEPTEMBER 25 [WED], 2024 – JANUARY 19 [SUN], 2025 MORI ART MUSEUM [53F, ROPPONGI HILLS MORI TOWER]

The Mori Art Museum, in Tokyo, is pleased to present *Louise Bourgeois: I have been to hell and back. And let me tell you, it was wonderful.* from Wednesday, September 25, 2024 through Sunday, January 19, 2025.

Louise Bourgeois (born 1911 in Paris; died 2010 in New York) is one of the most important artists of the last century. During a career that spanned 70 years, and in a wide variety of media – including installation, sculpture, drawing, and painting – she explored the tensions within binary oppositions through unrivaled formal invention. Polarities such as male and female, passive and active, figuration and abstraction, conscious and unconscious, and others, often coexist within the same work.

Bourgeois's art was inspired in part by the complex and at times traumatic events of her early childhood. The act of restaging her memories and emotions allowed her to sublimate them into universal motifs and to express contradictory emotional and psychological states: hope and fear, anxiety and calm, guilt and reparation, tension and release. Performances and sculptures that foreground sexuality, gender, and the lived body have been highly acclaimed also within a feminist context.

Bourgeois's art has had a profound influence on many artists and continues to be exhibited at major museums around the world. This exhibition, Bourgeois's first in Japan in 27 years and her largest solo exhibition in the country to date, will showcase approximately 100 works across three chapters that offer a comprehensive overview of her practice.

The subtitle of the exhibition, *I have been to hell and back. And let me tell you, it was wonderful.* is taken from a late fabric work in which Bourgeois embroidered these words on a handkerchief. It alludes to the fluctuations and ambivalent character of her emotions, as well as hinting at her black sense of humor. Bourgeois saw herself as a survivor. Her body of work expresses her strong will to live and promises ways of overcoming the sometimes "hellish" suffering of mankind, which is all too often exacerbated by war, natural disaster, and disease.



[left]
Crouching Spider
2003
Stainless steel and patina on bronze
270.5 x 835.7 x 627.4 cm
Photo: Ron Amstutz
© The Easton Foundation/Licensed by JASPAR and VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

[right]
Untitled (I Have Been to Hell and Back)
1996
Embroidery on handkerchief
49.5 x 45.7 cm
Photo: Christopher Burke
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BIOGRAPHY

Born 1911 in Paris, Louise Bourgeois was the second daughter of parents who ran a tapestry restoration atelier and sales gallery. The effects of a complex family dynamic left a lasting impact on young Louise's heart: her father's domineering behavior and the caregiving she provided her chronically ill mother led to pervasive feelings of guilt, betrayal, and abandonment. In 1932, when she was twenty, her mother died. Bourgeois subsequently enrolled in mathematics classes at the Sorbonne University, but her ongoing grief soon turned her to art. She began taking art classes at the Sorbonne, but also studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, the École du Louvre, and l'Académie de la Grande Chaumière. She frequented several artists' academies and studios in Paris, including that of Fernand Léger. In 1938, she married the American art historian Robert Goldwater and moved to New York, where she began exhibiting her work in the mid-1940s. She became an American citizen in 1957 and was the first female sculptor to have a major solo exhibition at Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1982. In 1989, she held her first solo exhibition in Europe at Frankfurter Kunstverein (Germany); and in 1993, Bourgeois represented the United States at Venice Biennale. In the 1990s and 2000s, she had numerous important solo exhibitions, including at Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1995), Yokohama Museum of Art (Japan, 1997), and Tate Modern (London, 2000).

Bourgeois's reputation has only grown since her death in 2010. Major exhibitions have been organized at Beyeler Foundation (Basel, Switzerland, 2011), Freud Museum London (2012), Moderna Museet (Stockholm, 2015), Haus der Kunst (Munich, Germany, 2015), Museum of Modern Art (New York, 2017), Long Museum (Shanghai, China, 2018), Hayward Gallery (London, 2022), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2022), Galerie Belvedere (Vienna, 2023-2024), and Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney, 2023-2024).



Louise Bourgeois in her studio in front of her print *Sainte Sebastienne* (1992) in Brooklyn 1993
Photo: Philipp Hugues Bonan
Photo courtesy: The Easton Foundation, New York

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition Title: *Louise Bourgeois: I have been to hell and back. And let me tell you, it was wonderful.*

Organizers: Mori Art Museum, The Yomiuri Shimbun, NHK

Curated by: Tsubaki Reiko (Curator, Mori Art Museum), Yahagi Manabu (Assistant Curator, Mori Art Museum)

Advising Curator: Philip Larratt-Smith (Curator, The Easton Foundation)

* The exhibition is organized by the Mori Art Museum in collaboration with The Easton Foundation, New York, based partly on the exhibition *Louise Bourgeois: Has the Day Invaded the Night or Has the Night Invaded the Day?*, organized by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney and curated by Justin Paton (Head Curator of International Art) and Emily Sullivan (Assistant Curator of Contemporary International Art).

Exhibition Period: 2024.9.25 [Wed] - 2025.1.19 [Sun]

Venue: Mori Art Museum, 53F, Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, 6-10-1 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo

Hours: 10:00-22:00 | Tue: 10:00-17:00 | * Open until 22:00 on Tuesdays of December 24 and 31, 2024.

* Admission until 30 minutes before closing. | * Open every day.

Admissions: [Weekdays] Adults 2,000 yen (1,800 yen) / [Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays] Adults 2,200 yen (2,000 yen)

* It is encouraged to make advance booking for a designated date/time slot and purchase the admission ticket on the booking website.

* () = Admission when purchased online.

* Admissions without advance bookings will be allowed so far as the time slots have not filled up on the day of your visit.

* All prices include tax.

* Ticket also valid for admission into the following Mori Art Museum small programs that run concurrently: *MAM Screen 020: Ghost 2561-2567*; and *MAM Project 032: Bady Dalloul*

General Inquiries: 050-5541-8600 (Hello Dial, within Japan) / +81-(0)47-316-2772 (Hello Dial, from overseas)

www.mori.art.museum/en

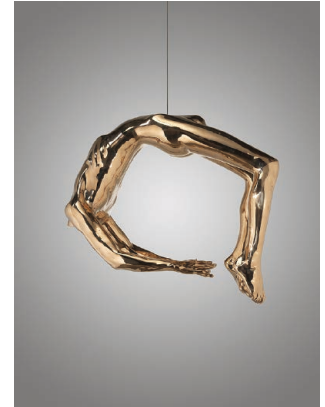
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EXHIBITION FEATURES AND HIGHLIGHTS

Bourgeois's largest ever solo exhibition in Japan and her first in 27 years More than half of the works are being shown in Japan for the first time

This is Bourgeois's first solo exhibition in Japan since 1997, and will showcase approximately 100 works, including sculptures, paintings, drawings, fabric works, and installations.

Bourgeois continued to create artworks until her death at the age of 98, and during her final years produced many works that might be considered some of the most iconic of her career. About half of the works in this exhibition, such as her fabric works, were created after 1998, and will be on view for the first time in Japan.



Arch of Hysteria
1993

Patina on bronze 83.8 x 101.6 x 58.4 cm

Photo: Christopher Burke

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Three chapters explore the theme of family relationships

The exhibition consists of three chapters based on Bourgeois's relationship with her family, a prime source of her inspiration. Chapter 1, "Do Not Abandon Me," is about her relationship with her mother; Chapter 2, "I Have Been to Hell and Back," is based on the negative emotions towards her father; and Chapter 3, "Repairs in the Sky," is about the restoration of family relationships and emotional liberation.

In addition, two smaller spaces between the chapters, are dedicated to a chronological presentation of earlier works: Bourgeois's paintings (1938–1948) and "Personage" series sculptures (1946–1949), whose subjects straddle her childhood and youth in France and her adult life in New York; and her more abstract sculptures from the 1960s, which were created in the wake of her intensive immersion in psychoanalysis over the course of the previous decade.

Bourgeois was also a gifted writer. She left a vast archive of diaries and letters, as well as hundreds of texts, now known as the psychoanalytic writings, made during her time in analysis. These revelatory writings mine complex emotional and psychological states: Anxiety, anger, jealousy, murderous hostility, guilt, compassion, gratitude, and love. Excerpts from Bourgeois's writings in various formats will complement her artworks throughout the galleries.

Display of early paintings that are attracting global attention

The exhibition will feature a selection of paintings Bourgeois made during the first 10 years since she moved to New York City in 1938. This important body of work has been reevaluated in recent years with focused exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2022) and Galerie Belvedere (Vienna, 2023–2024). Around ten of these paintings will be on view in Asia for the first time.

In 1938, Bourgeois married American art historian Robert Goldwater in Paris and moved to New York. The paintings she produced in these early years established many of the motifs that she would go on to explore over the next six decades: self-portraits, houses, references to France and family left behind, an iconography of plants, and nature, various architectural forms and the "Femme Maison" series, in which the top half of a woman is obscured by a house which both imprisons and protects her. These last paintings were championed by the feminist movement in the 1960s, and are among the most iconic of her oeuvre.

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Fallen Woman (Femme Maison)
1946-1947

Oil on linen 35.5 x 91.4 cm

Photo: Christopher Burke

© The Easton Foundation/Licensed by JASPAR and VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



The Runaway Girl

circa 1938

Oil, charcoal, and pencil on canvas

61 x 38.1 cm

Photo: Christopher Burke

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Introduction of the works featuring spiders and the public artwork *Maman*, the symbol of Roppongi Hills

From a small 1947 drawing to the much later, and larger, sculptures in bronze, the spider has repeatedly appeared as an iconic motif in Bourgeois's art. For her, the spider was symbolic of her mother, a weaver who oversaw the family tapestry workshop and a calm, diligent force whom Bourgeois characterized as her 'best friend.' The complexity of motherhood is conveyed through a spider that is both a repairer, healing wounds with its threads, and a menacing predator. It is also a self-portrait: the spider produces its web from its body, much as Bourgeois made art in relationship to her body and as a reaction to her inner anxieties and emotions.

Presentation of Jenny Holzer video installation using Louise Bourgeois's words

Jenny Holzer (born 1950 in Ohio, USA), internationally known for her conceptual artworks that feature words and phrases, developed a friendship with Bourgeois in the late 1990s. Inspired by her strong interest in Bourgeois's diaries, letters, and writings, Holzer curated a solo exhibition of Bourgeois's work, much of which had textual elements, at Kunstmuseum Basel in 2022. She also projected excerpts from Bourgeois's writings on the facades of buildings scattered throughout the city of Basel. For this exhibition, a similar presentation of Bourgeois's words, selected by Holzer, will be projected.

In addition, footage of Bourgeois's seminal performance, *A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts*, which took place inside her gallery-sized installation, *Confrontation*, in 1978, features the underground artist Suzan Cooper (1952-2023), and will also be shown in this exhibition.

History of Bourgeois's practice, and display of archival materials

A chronology of Bourgeois's 98-year life and various activities as an artist will be presented along with a selection of archival materials. The exhibition will include selected diary excerpts (including from a diary she kept as an eleven-year-old girl), facsimiles of her psychoanalytic writings, ephemera and exhibition announcements, and a documentary film about the artist.

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STRUCTURE OF THE EXHIBITION

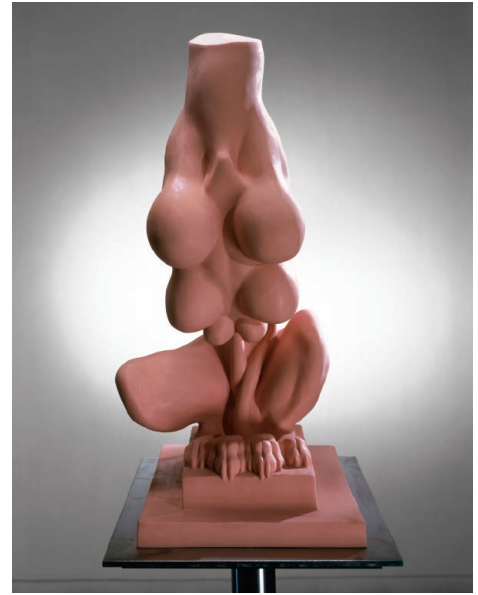
Chapter 1 Do Not Abandon Me

Bourgeois suffered from a lifelong fear of abandonment. The first chapter of the exhibition, “Do Not Abandon Me,” traces this fear back to the original separation from the mother. Bourgeois explored the theme of motherhood in all its ambivalence and complexity, as demonstrated in her sculpture *Nature Study*. She believed that the mother-child relationship set the template for all future relationships.

Bourgeois once said that her sculpture was her body, and her body was her sculpture. Images of bodily fragments often appear in her work as symbols and symptoms of psychic instability and disintegration.

Nature Study
1984 (cast in 2001)
Rubber 76.2 x 48.3 x 38.1 cm
Photo: Christopher Burke

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Chapter 2 I Have Been to Hell and Back

The works in the second chapter, “I Have Been to Hell and Back,” bear witness to a host of conflictual and negative emotions: Anxiety, guilt, jealousy, suicidal impulses, murderous hostility, fear of intimacy and dependency, and fear of rejection. The fabric head bust *Rejection* is such an example.

Bourgeois believed that making sculpture was a form of exorcism — a way of discharging unwelcome or unmanageable emotions. Working against the resistance of the material provided her with an outlet for her aggression.

Through her analysis, Bourgeois came to understand that much of her work was generated by a negative reaction against her father. In 1974, Bourgeois created the installation *The Destruction of the Father*, which stages a fantasy of cannibalistic revenge against a domineering father figure. This seminal piece represents the culmination, and in many ways the synthesis, of the forms and materials she had explored throughout the 1960s and early 1970s — from the undulating abstract landscapes to the more sexually explicit body parts.



[left]
Rejection
2001
Fabric, steel, wood, and lead
63.5 x 33 x 30.5 cm
Photo: Christopher Burke
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(ARS), NY

[right]
The Destruction of the Father
1974
Archival polyurethane resin, wood,
fabric, and light
237.8 x 362.3 x 248.6 cm
Collection: Glenstone Museum,
Potomac, MD, USA
(Exhibition copy shown; 2017)
Photo: Ron Amstutz
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Chapter 3 Repairs in the Sky

Bourgeois saw herself as a survivor, and her art as the instrument that enabled her survival, like a crutch or prosthesis. The final chapter of the exhibition, “Repairs in the Sky,” shows how her art enabled her to bring conscious and unconscious, maternal and paternal, past and present into a precarious balance. *Topiary IV* and *Clouds and Caverns* beautifully exemplify such restorative and regenerative forces. As Bourgeois famously stated, Art is a guaranty of sanity.

Louise Bourgeois believed that the artist enjoyed unusually direct access to the unconscious and possessed the gift of sublimation — that is, the ability to channel sexual and aggressive drives and impulses towards artistic ends. Her sculptures and other works are symbolic representations of psychological states, and constitute an attempt to impose order on the chaos of her emotions.

By using clothing and other fabrics from her life Bourgeois acted out the wish to hold on to the past and give it permanent form in her art. Sewing and joining are symbolic actions that ward off the fear of separation and abandonment. They also evidence an unconscious identification with her mother, who ran the tapestry workshop in the Parisian suburbs.



Topiary IV
1999
Steel, fabric, beads, and wood
68.6 x 53.3 x 43.2 cm
Photo: Christopher Burke
© The Easton Foundation/Licensed by JASPAR and VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Clouds and Caverns
1982-1989
Metal and wood
274.3 x 553.7 x 182.9 cm
Photo: Christopher Burke
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