

Press Release

Louise Bourgeois. Gathering Wool

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Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street



New York...Over the course of her seven-decade career, Louise Bourgeois never privileged figuration over abstraction, any more than she favored one material over another, and yet her relationship to abstraction has been less well defined and understood, less easily situated within the main currents of postwar art.

'Gathering Wool' explores the artist's complex relationship to abstraction through a series of late sculptures, reliefs and works on paper, many of which have never been exhibited before. These will be installed alongside a selection of earlier works to illuminate the consistency of Bourgeois's themes and her development of a symbolic abstract language.

The exhibition takes its title from an enigmatic work Bourgeois created in 1990. Gathering wool is an expression signifying rumination, daydreaming, letting the mind wander—a break from conscious, purposive thinking. This was the mental state in which Bourgeois worked as she experimented with forms and processes in her studio. She trusted the process by which these thought traces, fragments of dreams, idle speculations, hunches, fancies and intuitions coalesced into a form, but it remained mysterious even to her. The piece itself consists of seven wooden spheres arranged in a circle in front of a tall semicircular screen made up of four panels. 'Gathering Wool' (1990) is a precursor of her celebrated Cells in that it is both a sculpture and an environmental installation.



The exhibition begins on the first floor with the large installation 'Twosome,' (1991) in which a small tank on a track moves endlessly in and out of a larger tank. For Bourgeois, this mechanism represented the mother-child relationship. The same gallery also features a video clip from her 1978 performance 'A Fashion Show of Body Parts,' in which the actress Suzan Cooper belts out the song, 'She Abandoned Me,' which addresses the fear of separation from the mother. This juxtaposition of works manifests how the same psychologically charged emotions which gave rise to Bourgeois's more figurative works also underpin the formal devices in her more abstract works.

An iconography of things protruding out of other things prevails in many works on the ground floor. In 'Untitled (With Hand)' (1989) a child-like arm protrudes from a large sphere, in 'Mamelles' (1991) water spills from a long frieze of bronze breasts, in 'Gathering Wool' (1990) mushrooms grow out of the cracks and crevasses of the wooden spheres, and in 'Le Défi II' (1992) light emanates from glass elements meticulously arranged on the shelves of a metal cabinet. These works probe the boundary and the slippage between container and contained, past and present, the conscious realm with its rationality and order and the timelessness of the unconscious.

On the fifth floor, the works are predominantly abstract, consisting of vertical progressions and stacked forms. For Bourgeois, stacking was an ordering action that attempted to impose regularity and predictability on the chaos of her emotions. Each formal device she deployed corresponded to an emotional or psychological state or impulse. Thus, the repetition and stacking of like elements signify obsession and compulsion. The precarious balance of top-heavy forms indicates fragility and instability. Interlocking forms are safeguards against the fear of abandonment that dogged Bourgeois throughout her life. Triangular forms are expressions of jealousy. The pathological roots of Bourgeois's art generated a vocabulary of eccentric abstract forms. As the artist once wrote, 'I am the author of my own world with its internal logic and with its value that no one can deny.'



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 our time. For over seven decades, Bourgeois's 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's oeuvre—employing a variety of genres, media and materials—plays upon the powers of association, memory, fantasy and fear.

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Caption and courtesy information:

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Gathering Wool

1990

Metal, wood and mixed media

243.8 x 396.2 x 457.2 cm / 96 x 156 x

180 in

Photo: Peter Bellamy

Twosome

1991

Painted steel, electric light, and motor

190.5 x 193 x 1244.6 cm / 75 x 76 x

490 in

Photo: Elad Sarig

Untitled

2000

Painted wood and fabric

179.1 x 22.9 x 24.8 cm / 70 1/2 x 9 x 9

3/4 in

Photo: Christopher Burke

Untitled

1988

Painted wood and marble

214.6 x 57.2 x 49.5 cm / 84 1/2 x 22 1/2

x 19 1/2 in

Photo: Christopher Burke