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Press Release

Louise Bourgeois L'araignée et les tapisseries

Hauser & Wirth Zürich

15 June – 26 July 2014

Opening: Saturday 14 June, 6 – 8 pm

'My mother would sit out in the sun and repair a tapestry or petit point. She really loved it. This sense of reparation is very deep within me.'¹

Hauser & Wirth Zürich is pleased to announce an important solo presentation of works by Louise Bourgeois. This exhibition is the most comprehensive overview of Bourgeois's tapestry works to date, including previously unseen pieces made between 1996 and 2008. Comprised of almost 30 works, and with important loans from private collections, this is the first time that Bourgeois's tapestry oeuvre has been brought together, offering a new perspective on her late practice.

The materials and techniques related to tapestry weaving are profoundly connected to Bourgeois's childhood experiences. Bourgeois's mother and maternal grandparents originated from the French town of Aubusson, famed for its tapestry industry. Her parents owned a gallery in Paris where her father sold antique tapestries, while her mother ran the tapestry restoration workshop in Choisy-le-Roi and, later, in Antony. Bourgeois's incorporation of tapestry into her wider practice draws on personal memories of working alongside her mother in the workshop. Nowhere is her maternal relationship explored in more depth than in Bourgeois's spider and tapestry works.

For Bourgeois, the process of making art was a means of working through personal trauma, transmitting and expelling emotion into her artistic materials. Her work allowed for a process of unraveling the unconscious in an attempt to discover the origins of her feelings. Towards the end of her life, Bourgeois's oeuvre became consumed with exploring her relationship with her mother, replacing a prior preoccupation with her father. The persistent cutting and destructive impulses present in her earlier works dissipated in favour of themes of reparation and construction. Consequently, Bourgeois gravitated towards the familiar techniques from her childhood – stitching, weaving and embroidery – to process her feelings towards her mother.

Bourgeois's tapestries deal with reparation in both a literal and metaphorical sense; fragmented tapestries are pieced together and repaired, or fashioned into new forms. Four tapestry totems stand in the galleries. Reminiscent of her earlier Personages, but featuring building blocks



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incorporating fleurs-de-lis, ornate floral wreaths and the visages of a couple, Bourgeois repurposes old tapestries full of symbolism to explore the narrative potential of the medium. In a series of heads created between 2001 and 2003, Bourgeois literally re-builds composite figures from decorative tapestries.

Coupled with the medium of tapestry, Bourgeois's recurring motif of the spider fully explores the complex relationship between mother and child, with mother as protector, but also as rival. Speaking on an edition of drypoint works titled 'Ode à ma mère', Bourgeois herself introduces the spider as a reference to her mother:

'The spider – why the spider? Because my best friend was my mother and she was deliberate, clever, patient, soothing, reasonable, dainty, subtle, indispensable, neat, and as useful as a spider... I shall never tire of representing her.'²

'L'araignée et les tapisseries' presents four various spider sculptures. The largest is 'Spider' (1997), spanning over 5 metres, in which the creature envelops a steel cell with its long spindly legs, simultaneously protecting and suffocating its charge. Cells are often reconstructed as domestic environments by Bourgeois, but they are starkly populated and related to various types of pain; psychological, mental and intellectual. Inside this cell sits a single chair, making the structure reminiscent to a confessional room.

Religious connotations are rife within these late works. In 'Spider' (2003), the anthropomorphic main body of the spider, rendered in tapestry, is bent double, recalling the image of a martyr from biblical art. Her stainless steel legs are welded at the knees to create fragile stilts conjuring images of needles – tools related to the craftsmanship behind tapestries.



The works in this exhibition are each intensely personal; as she repairs and reassembles images from found tapestries into new configurations, a sense of picking apart and rebuilding relationships emanates. In these late works, Bourgeois incorporates these most sentimental fabrics into her work ensuring a longevity that outlasts her own life.



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'L'araignée et les tapisseries' is curated by Jerry Gorovoy, President of The Easton Foundation, who worked with Bourgeois from the early 1980s until her death in 2010. The exhibition is accompanied by an extensive publication, which includes archival photographs and facsimile documents from the Bourgeois family archive, as well as excerpts from the artist's psychoanalytical writings. The catalogue is published by Hauser & Wirth, 2014.

1. Louise Bourgeois in an interview with Trevor Rots, 10 May 1990
2. 'Louise Bourgeois', exhibition catalogue, Tate Modern, London 2000



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Spider
2003
Stainless steel and tapestry
59.7 x 71.1 x 63.5 cm / 23 1/2 x 28 x 25 in
Collection The Easton Foundation
Photo: Christopher Burke

Untitled
2000
Tapestry and steel
180.3 x 28.6 x 22.2 cm / 71 x 11 1/4 x 8 3/4 in
Private Collection, courtesy Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Christopher Burke

Spider
1997
Steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric, rubber,
silver, gold and bone
449.6 x 665.5 x 518.2 cm / 177 x 262 x 204 in
Collection The Easton Foundation
Photo: Frédéric Delpech

Untitled
2002
Tapestry and aluminium
45.7 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm / 18 x 12 x 12 in
Collection The Easton Foundation
Photo: Christopher Burke

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