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Press Release

Louise Bourgeois The Red Sky

Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles

17 February – 20 May 2018

Opening reception: Saturday 17 February, 6 – 9 pm



Los Angeles... Beginning 17 February, Hauser & Wirth will present 'Louise Bourgeois. The Red Sky,' the gallery's first Los Angeles solo exhibition devoted to the legendary French-American artist whose remarkable life yielded what she once described as 'an exorcism in art.' 'The Red Sky' is an intimate presentation of never before exhibited works on paper from the final years of the artist's life: six multi-panel works on paper, created between 2007 and 2009, with words and images mining Bourgeois's central themes of memory, trauma, nature, and the body.

Shedding new light on Bourgeois's creative process and the importance of working relationships to her practice in old age, the hybridized works on view combine printmaking, drawing, painting, and writing, but extend beyond the confines of each individual medium through the artist's intensive and inventive collaborations with publishers and printers. The panels, which are six feet high by over 20 feet wide, each feature different stages of etching and form the armature for a layering of loose gestures in watercolor, gouache, ink, pencil, and hand-applied fabric. With these final expressions by one of the most influential artists of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, 'The Red Sky' reveals a woman courageously confronting her past and finding redemption through tireless art making that continued to her last days.

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For Bourgeois, the process of making art was a means of working through personal trauma, transmitting, and metabolizing emotion through her materials, and thus creating a form of self-portraiture. The early loss of her mother, the feeling of abandonment brought on by her father's multiple war deployments, and the pain of perceived betrayals by both her philandering father and her tutor, had deep and lasting effects on Bourgeois and shaped a highly charged temperament. For decades she sought to exorcize her devastation through the cathartic effects of art making. And through ceaseless examination of her own fear, loneliness, and anxiety, Bourgeois found that she could reach the viewer on an ineffably intimate level. She reflected on this transformation of emotion into object, saying, 'Life is made of experiences and emotions. The objects I have created make them tangible.'

Although Bourgeois is known for a heterogeneous body of sculpture extending over seven decades, writing, drawing, and printmaking were also essential to her artistic practice. Over the course of her prolific career, Bourgeois experienced two major periods in which her print output flowered in particularly significant ways. She first engaged with printmaking in the 1940s while raising three boys, when time and space to work were scant commodities. In this period, Bourgeois experimented with a variety of printing methods, including drypoint, engraving, etching, aquatint, and relief printing. She learned many of these techniques at Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17, a renowned print studio which had relocated from Paris to New York during World War II. Her second phase of intensive printmaking began in the late 1980s, subsequent to her first retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. At this point, Bourgeois collaborated with a number of printmakers who re-invigorated her interest in the medium. The working relationships she developed with printers and publishers at this time allowed Bourgeois to continue her copious output, benefitting from the nature of the medium and the physical assistance of her collaborators.



The Los Angeles exhibition begins with multi-panel works comprised of conjoined sheets that capture the strength and immediacy of the artist's hand as she drew directly on copper plates to revisit elements in her personal lexicon of shapes and symbols. Since printmaking allowed the artist to explore the endless possibilities of shapes and marks through repetition, Bourgeois was able to combine themes, colors (especially tones of red), and words, which she culled from her decades-old notebooks and psychoanalytic texts.

For Bourgeois, colors were symbolic of distinct emotional states, and could be deployed to communicate in profound subliminal ways. Red represented for her 'the intensity of the emotions involved,' and was often synonymous with pain. She equated it with blood, violence, danger, shame, jealousy, and depression, when she

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wrote, 'Depth of depression is measured by your attraction to red.' In 'The Red Sky' (2008), Bourgeois applied red to nature, linking the landscape with the body and its attributes – blood, muscles, vessels and capillaries, organs, and breasts – and heightened emotions. The sky in particular was a constant reference point for the artist. Its stars helped reorient her in times of emotional vulnerability, while the serene blue of a clear day had a positive, calming energy. By infusing the sky with the color red and its symbolic associations, Bourgeois correlated her physical experiences in the natural world with the inner turmoil of the psyche.

The exhibition concludes with a series of large-scale works that demonstrate Bourgeois uncanny talent for matching text with images, as evidenced in such works as 'Have a Little Courage' (2009), 'The Fear is Inside You!!!' (2007), 'What Hurts' (2007), and 'This Need' (2007). In 'Have a Little Courage,' the artist intersperses the following words and phrases with panels of organic, interlocking abstractions: 'Dizzy / Spells // Beheaded / jilted / unprotected / slipped / and / could not get up // when fear / becomes conscious // watch out / and / Have a little / Courage.' Created just one year before her death, the work stands as a testament to the artist's love of language and its power as a portent to herself as well as to the viewer.

'Louise Bourgeois. The Red Sky' will be on view at Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles daily from Tuesday – Sunday, 11 am – 6 pm from 17 February through 20 May 2018.

About the Artist

Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911, Paris, France, d. 2010, New York NY) was a pioneering sculptor, painter and printmaker whose prolific practice delves into the deepest fissures of emotion, psychology and autobiography. 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. Through this highly charged personal content, which dealt with birth, death, love, loss and fear, the artist found a beautiful and haunting visual language that resonates on a profoundly universal level.

Major solo exhibitions include: 'Louise Bourgeois: An Unfolding Portrait,' Museum of Modern Art, New York NY (2017); 'Louise Bourgeois: Twosome,' Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel (2017); 'Artist Rooms: Louise Bourgeois,' Tate Modern, London, England (2016); 'Structures of Existence: The Cells,' Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2015), which travelled to Guggenheim Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain (2016) and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2016); 'Louise Bourgeois. I Have Been to Hell and Back,' Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2015), which travelled to Museo Picasso Málaga, Málaga, Spain in the same year. Bourgeois's work is included in some of the most important museum collections worldwide including the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, Hague, Netherlands; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada; and Tate Modern, London, England.

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Gallery hours:
Tuesday – Saturday
11 am – 6 pm

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Louise Bourgeois
The Red Sky (Detail)
2008
Watercolor, ink, gouache, pencil, colored pencil
and etching on paper, 11 panels

Louise Bourgeois
This Need (Detail)
2007
Watercolor, gouache, ink, colored pencil, pencil,
fabric and etching on paper, 3 panels