

Louise Bourgeois

DESTRUCTION OF THE FATHER

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE FATHER

WRITINGS AND INTERVIEWS 1923-1997

My name is Louise Josephine Bourgeois.

I was born 24 December 1911, in Paris.

All my work in the past fifty years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood.

My childhood has never lost its magic, it has never lost its mystery, and it has never lost its drama.

INTERVIEWS

Si l'on s'en souvient, Paris a joui en 1922 d'un printemps précoce et charmant ; vers la fin avril, il a

déjà dessiné son offensive fleurie. Je me trouvais aux Champs-Elysées certain après midi ; la température était si douce que, sous les arbres parés de leurs premières feuilles, nombre de Parisiennes étaient assises. Comme je jetais discrètement, en passant un regard sur l'élégante assistance, je reconnus Mlle de Verbouisset, une petite demoiselle d'enfance, à qui j'allai tout aussitôt présenter mes hommages. Mlle de Verbouisset aujourd'hui la quarantaine ce qui n'est rien pour une femme et beaucoup pour une demoiselle. Ma vieille grand'tante qui s'est mariée trois fois et dont les veuvages additionnés n'ont pas altéré la bonne mine, prétend que le mariage conserve : ce disant, elle pense évidemment plus à elle qu'à ses défunts époux... Je pris une chaise à côté de Mlle de Verbouisset en exprimant la satisfaction que je tirais de la rencontre.

- Dans quelques jours, me dit-elle, je me promènerai, selon toute vraisemblance, dans les parcs de Vichy aux beaux ombrages.
- Comment ? Pourquoi devancer la saison ? Seriez-vous souffrante ?
- Pas le moins du monde. Ce n'est pas pour suivre un traitement que, cette année, comme les précédentes, je me rends aux Eaux ; c'est pour chaperonner ma sœur cadette qui, depuis qu'elle est mariée, a le léger travers de ne pouvoir rester chez elle.
- Vichy doit être un désert à cette époque. Ne craignez-vous pas d'y périr d'ennui ?

M A I

SAMEDI 5

Matin j'ai travaillé à l'école et suis venu déjeuner à antony sous les marronniers.

Soir j'ai travaillé dans le jardin sans beaucoup me fatiguée je me suis roulé dans le foin sur la brouette nous avons lavé le chien qui faisait que jretiller dans la rivière y ai bu de la bière me suis roulé sur l'herbe avec papa.

Et puis on va me couper les cheveux courts très courts et je suis contenté.

Et aujourd'hui j'ai gagné ce beau livre en récompense de mon anglais (dans la vie faut pas s'en faire)

Lison Bourgeois

C. ST AUGUSTIN

— Quelle erreur ! C'est de plus en plus la mode d'y faire de bonne heure sa cure. La plupart de nos amis se préparent au départ.

— Mais tous ne vont pas à Vichy, je suppose ?

— Evidemment. Quant à moi, j'ai une prédilection pour cette ville aimable...

— *Veni, vidi... Vichy!* Oh! pardon! Depuis mon accident!... Et vous allez demeurer longtemps à Vichy ?

— La bougeote de ma sœur ne me le permettra guère, j'en ai peur. Nous ferons, est probable, la tournée des stations thermales. Tour à tour, Aix-les-Bains, Evian, Bellevard, Vals, La Bourboule, Uriage, Châtel-Guyon, nous verront passer. Nous apprécierons successivement la vertu de leurs eaux.

— De leurs eaux ? Mais qu'en faites-vous, si vous n'êtes malade ?

— Eh ! Y a-t-il seulement des malades dans les villes d'eaux ? Et combien de personnes croient se découvrir une affection pour le plaisir de villégiaturer dans des sites agréables ! Interrogez les docteurs à ce propos. « Docteur, ne pensez-vous pas qu'un séjour aux Eaux me serait salutaire ? » Et le docteur acquiesce. Si le client ou la cliente vraiment "quelque chose", le docteur a vite fait d'indiquer la station hydrominérale qui s'impose ; la France a toute la gamme des eaux qui guérissent ou soulagent. Si le client ou la cliente se porte comme un charme, c'est au docteur psychologue — et ils le content tous un peu — de deviner où l'on désire aller. Pour moi, je n'ai pas le souci de

DIMANCHE 6

Matin j'ai été à Damart avec tout le monde et soir sauf Lachie. Lachie a pris une grande planche est montée dessus et tombée dans la rivière. Pendant ce temps nous jouions sur la palouse avec jacque maurice car (à la soupe est euite) resulat nul.

C'était le match de Carpentier. Nille nous avions voté pour sous pour carpentier ou sous pour nilles j'ai perdu car Carpentier était vainqueur.

Nous avons passés une très bonne journée

Lison Bourgeois

ST JEAN P. L.

MAI

MARDI 15

Temps terriblement affreux
j'ai djeuné seul avec l'adie à l'appartement
nous avons mangé des escalopes avec
des pommes sautées comme lors de leur
du pain et du beurre et comme dessert
de la confiture de cerises et une banane
nous ne sommes pas mécontents de l'ain
En arrivants une bonne nouvelle
m'attendait maman était tout en
déménagement car elle sacrifiait son
cabinet de toilette pour me faire une
chambre j'ai couché dans ma petite
chambre en rêvant au collège.

ST ISIDORE



Journée du jeudi

MERCREDI 16

Je me suis réveillé à 8 heures et je me
suis levé j'ai rangé mon linge et une
partie de ce reste. Maman m'a fait de
bonnes mettre une table (très grande
ou l'on fait la leçon nous avons
jeuné en mangeant de la saucisse
de veau des pommes au en robe de cho
bre j'ai cassé un chandelier vert et les
de 7 du temps j'ai été avec la couturière
elle m'a appris des chansons de soir
Papa est arrivé il est venu voir ma che
bre il s'est couché sur mon lit se fut à
mon tour après à dix heures.

ST HONORÉ

MAI

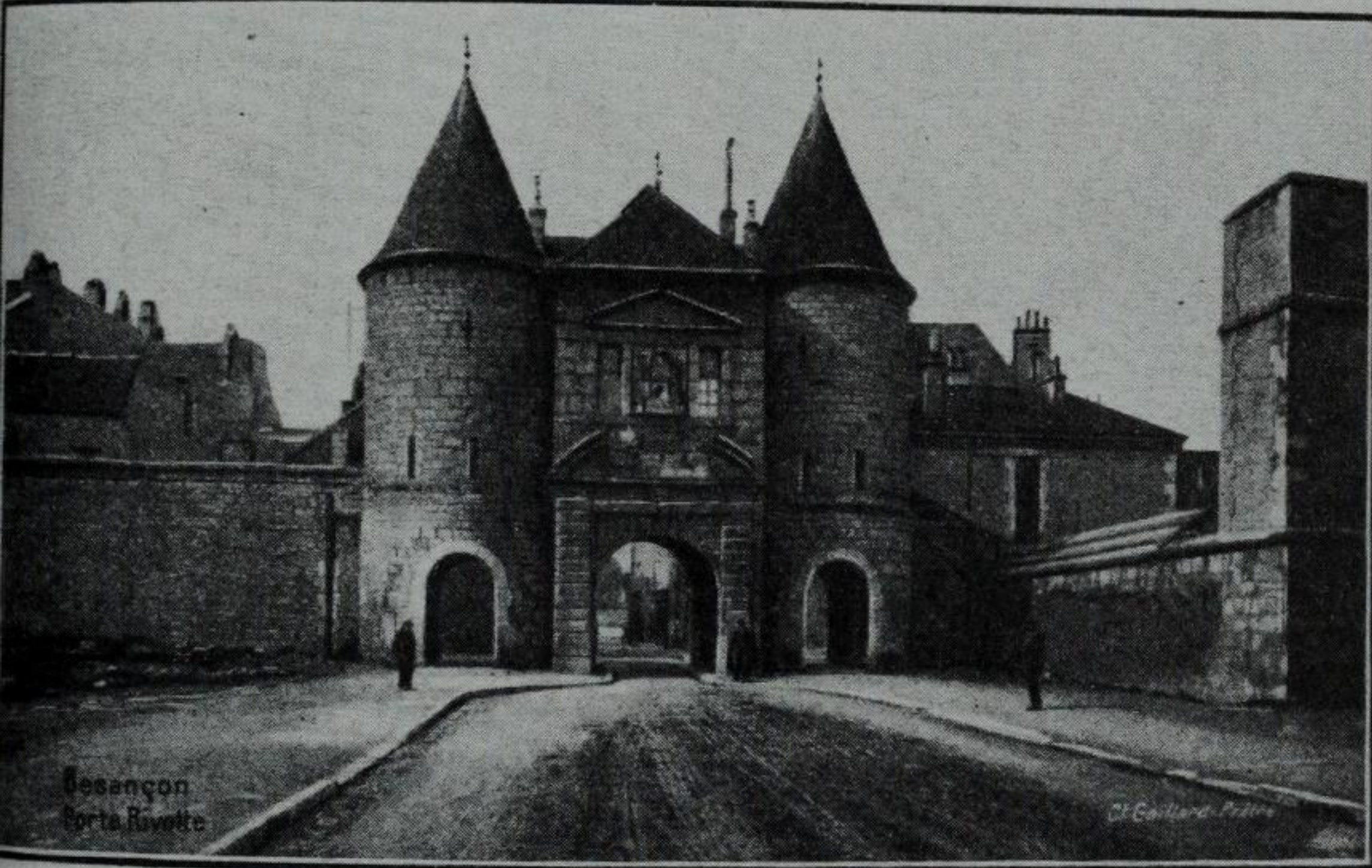
Journal du Vendredi

JEUDI 17

Le matin j'étais réveillé quand Ernest ne est venu j'ai cherché mes chaussures partout je suis partie à l'école comme d'habitude. J'ai ris avec Andrée Bauppa un on s'est embrassé aux grands éclats de rires de Renne j'ai sauté par-dessus le bar



ST PASCAL



VENREDI 18

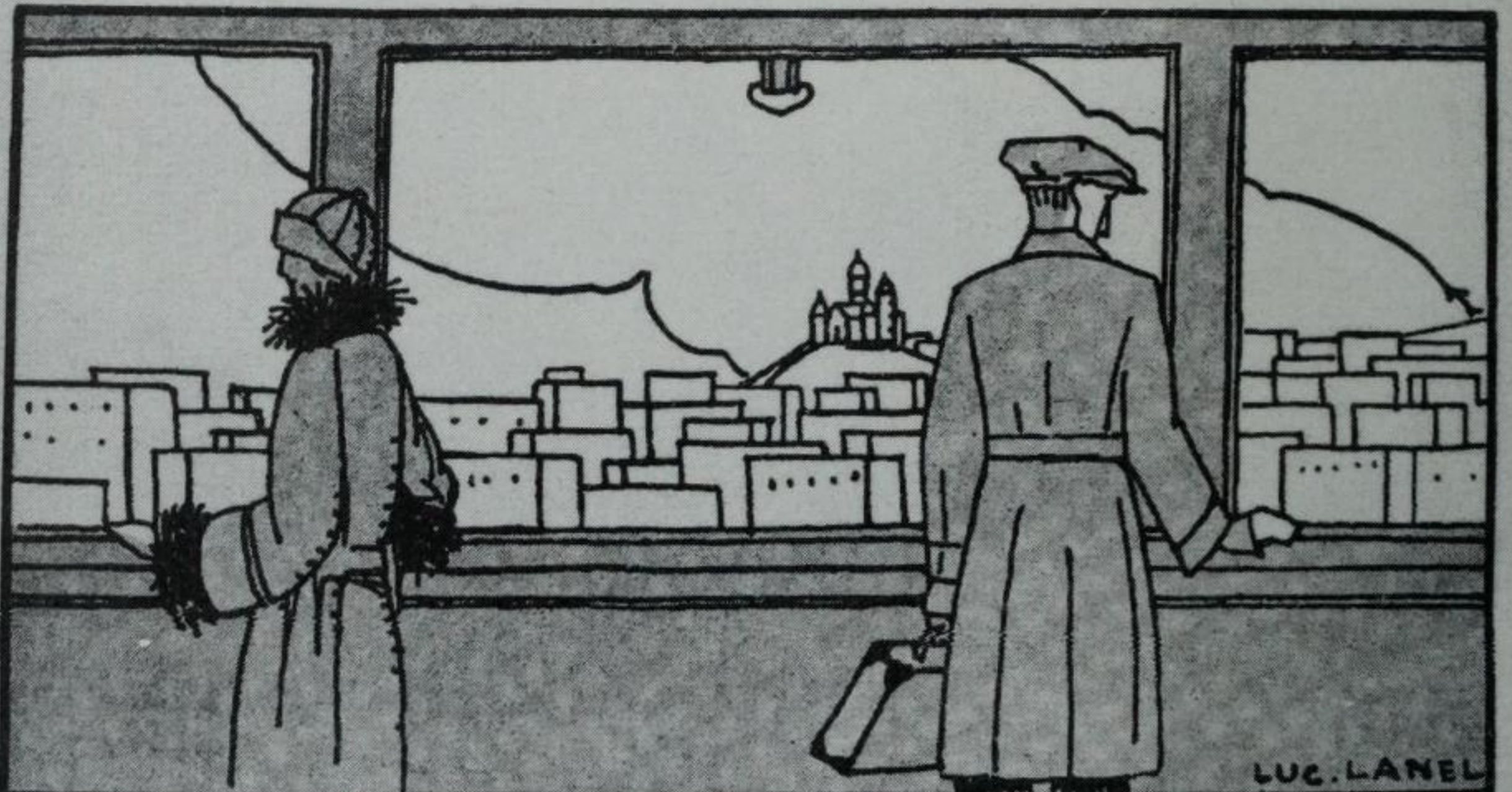
Les chansons que j'ai apprises

STE JULIETTE

NOVEMBRE

MEMENTO

Le mois de Novembre a été
pour moi un assez bon
mois y'ai été 11^{ème} y'ai
y'ai été toujours bien
avec ma maman
y'ai toujours été bien avec
Papa
Je ne me suis pas grave-
ment disputée avec Pierre
et Hérédite.
Je n'ai pas menti
y'ai bien appris mes
leçons



LUC LANEL

Et puis, on est sûr, n'est ce pas, d'avoir toute la vie pour se
disputer et cela de le retour.

MEMENTO

Je me suis bien appliquée
Je n'est vexé ni fâché au-
cune de mes petites amies
y'ai écrit à Sadie assez réguli-
èrement
y'ai assez bien obéi Hérédite
et Suzanne
et comme les égyptiens
Je suis pur

bonnes
actions



mauvaises actions

y'ai bien tenu mon huile de foin de morale



AJACCIO EN HIVER
PAR LUCIEN PÉRI



Louise Bourgeois

DESTRUCTION OF THE FATHER RECONSTRUCTION OF THE FATHER

Writings and Interviews 1923–1997

Edited and with texts by Marie-Laure Bernadac
and Hans-Ulrich Obrist

The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
In association with Violette Editions, London



Frontispiece: Pierre, Louise, and their father, photographed in Nice around 1923 with Sadie Gordon Richmond, the children's tutor and father's mistress, on the "Promenade des Anglais" with the Palais de la Méditerranée in the background

Inside front cover and pages 2–7: facsimile reproductions of the 1923 "Journal de Louison," the diary of Louise Bourgeois, written in an illustrated Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée almanac, lost on a train when the artist was twelve years old and recovered in 1996 from a Paris market stall

First published in the United States and Canada in 1998 by The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in association with Violette Editions, London

Text and works of art by Louise Bourgeois © 1998 Louise Bourgeois
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Edited by Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist
with Jerry Gorovoy and Robert Violette
Designed and typeset by Peter B. Willberg
Printed and bound in Italy by Grafiche Milani

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bourgeois, Louise, 1911–

Destruction of the father/reconstruction of the father:
writings and interviews 1923–1997
Louise Bourgeois.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-262-52246-2 (pb : alk. paper)

1. Bourgeois, Louise, 1911–. 2. Sculptors—United States
—Biography. 3. Bourgeois, Louise, 1911– —Interviews.
4. Sculptors—United States—Interviews. I. Title.

NB237:B65A2 1998

730.92—dc21

[B]

97-43132

CIP

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Preface *Hans-Ulrich Obrist*

“L’espace serait au lieu ce que devient le mot quand il est parlé, c’est-à-dire quand il est saisi dans l’ambiguïté d’une effectuation.”

—Michel de Certeau

“In relation to place, space would be what the word becomes when it is spoken: that is, when it is caught up in the ambiguity of an effectuation.”

The idea for this publication of the writings and interviews by Louise Bourgeois came during a conversation with the artist in 1994 in New York. While preparing my first interview with the artist, we researched Parisian libraries, browsing through the impressive list of Bourgeois’ exhibition catalogs, artist books, and magazine articles. In reading these texts, we were again and again impressed by the intensity of Bourgeois’ statements and moved by the directness of her interviews. During many subsequent discussions with Bourgeois and Jerry Gorovoy we also discovered a collection of previously unpublished notes, fragments, letters, poetical writings, and further interviews.

Bourgeois’ words—spoken and written—are less about the meaning of her art than about the emotional forces behind it: namely, her autobiography, past and present experience. This book includes heterogeneous examples of texts by the artist, beginning chronologically with facsimile pages of a pre-adolescent diary from 1923, recently recovered from a Paris market stall, and ending with a selection of interviews from the last twenty years, a period in which the artist has become recognized internationally as one of the most important artists of our time.

An artist’s words are always to be taken cautiously. . . . The artist who discusses the so-called meaning of his work is usually describing a literary side-issue. The core of his original impulse is to be found, if at all, in the work itself. Just the same, the artist must say what he feels. . . .

I want to explain why I did the piece, I don’t see why artists should say

anything because the work is supposed to speak for itself. So whatever the artist says about it is like an apology, it is not necessary. . . .

I never talk literally; you have to use analogy and interpretation and leaps of all kinds. . . .

I am suspicious of words. They do not interest me, they do not satisfy me. I suffer from the ways in which words wear themselves out. I distrust the Lacans and Bossuets because they gargle with their own words. I am a very concrete woman. The forms are everything. . . .

With words you can say anything. You can lie as long as the day, but you cannot lie in the re-creation of experience. . . .

Bourgeois' texts are a testimony to her constant refusal and rejection of labels, clichés, and programs. However close she was to Surrealism and its protagonists—as her texts from the 1940s demonstrate, but which she has repeatedly denied—from very early on Bourgeois has mistrusted its ideological underpinnings. Bourgeois' broad range of texts “reveal a desire to occupy three dimensions, to gain consistency and tangibility,” (Gilles Deleuze)—less to reflect on things than to create and produce movement.

Opposed to the negativism of dialectic, Bourgeois' *élan vital* is a positive *tourbillon* born out of an inner necessity: rupturing indifference, questioning certainties, experiencing myriad confrontations, maintaining the internal tension of “the explosive forces that life carries within itself. . . . It is always a case of virtuality in the process of being actualized, a simplicity in the process of differentiating, a totality in the process of dividing: Proceeding by dissociation and division, by ‘dichotomy’ is the essence of life.” (Gilles Deleuze in *Bergsonism*)

Dichotomy between/of: the conceptual and the three-dimensional, the scientific and the romantic, the rational and the irrational, the geometric and the organic, the abstract and the figurative, the simple and the complex, the rigid and the pliable, resisting and letting go, the permanent and the ephemeral, the horizontal and the vertical, feeling/emotion and physical form, joining and cutting, construction and destruction, destruc-

tion and reconstruction, breaking and repairing, tenderness and violence, love and hate, harmony and conflict, frustration and happiness, success and failure, birth and death, youth and age, the isolated individual and the shared awareness of the group, the one and the other, the private and the public, sculpture and environment, art and life, addition and subtraction, interiority and exteriority, verticality and horizontality, process and object, spontaneity and assemblage, consciousness and unconsciousness, first creative vision and the final result, *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, the passive and the active, mind and matter, repetition and difference.

Marie-Laure Bernadac and I are deeply grateful to Louise Bourgeois for the generosity of time and spirit she has shown during the intense dialog which has produced this book. We are especially grateful to Jerry Gorovoy for sharing with us his depth of knowledge and experience of the artist's work; he has encouraged and guided this publication from its very beginning. We would also like to express our thanks to Wendy Williams, of Louise Bourgeois' studio, for her tireless research and assistance; to Peter Willberg for his exceptional graphic design; to Zoe Manzi for her editorial assistance; to Roger Conover of The MIT Press; to Brigitte Cornand; and to Robert Violette, without whose enthusiasm and editorial vision this book would never have been published.

Introduction *Marie-Laure Bernadac*

Louise Bourgeois began writing her diary at the age of twelve and has never stopped since. Her cupboards are filled with dozens and dozens of private diaries, in notebooks and exercise books, on loose sheets of paper, and in engagement books; all are meticulously preserved, dated, and archived. The diaries chart her days, her encounters and appointments, and transcribe her emotions and the movements of her thoughts. Sometimes they also serve as a laboratory of writing, a starting point for her work with the written word.

The fabric of her language is woven from everyday materials. Her constant practice of writing goes hand in hand with that of drawing. Louise Bourgeois is always drawing, on any surface that comes to hand. These drawings she calls her "thought feathers." Drawn lines and written lines entwine to create the tapestry of her childhood memories, and to exorcize her fears. Although true exorcism is achieved only in sculpture, drawing is a soothing and healing activity, particularly during her long, sleepless nights.

Alongside these two forms of *journal intime*, the written and the drawn, a third form of diary exists: the spoken word. Over the last ten or more years, Louise Bourgeois has given numerous interviews to newspapers and magazines, and has also taken part in television programs and films. To her collection of notebooks she can now add her collection of audio cassettes. The rituals that accompany recording sessions in her home are a testimony to the importance she gives to the spoken word and to conversation, but they also reveal her nervousness when faced with an unknown interviewer, and with the ordeal of recounting and reliving an event from the past. She fears misunderstandings, and the difficulty of "saying the unsayable"—one of the topics to which she reverts most often. At the same time, she wants to reveal all, to be "a woman without secrets," capable of carrying introspection ever deeper in order to confront and conquer her own anxiety. Paradoxically, the freedom and confidence with

which she talks is accompanied by a deep mistrust: no sooner has she bared her soul than she pulls back. She has the greatest difficulty in relinquishing the tapes that contain not only a part of her but a part of the other person as well. Everything important that is said must be committed to memory: that is, written down or recorded, placed in store. For her, this is a way of waging war against time by recreating the past.

This book attempts to take account of the multiplicity of her written and spoken statements, and of their diversity of levels: a diversity which matches that of her artistic work, reflecting the fundamental dichotomy between professional control and spontaneity, between the conscious and the unconscious, between the expression that is structured, assembled, and thought through, and the expression that is presented raw, as the product of an urgent impulse.

How is it possible to select from such a daunting and diverse mass of texts? We began with all Louise Bourgeois' published texts: poetic texts accompanying prints, magazine articles on art and artists, letters to editors, commentaries on works in exhibition catalogs, interviews (many of them revised before publication), public statements at conferences and award ceremonies, and extracts from the most important films on her work.

As for the hitherto unpublished material, this includes a selection of the notes written in the margins or on the backs of drawings, together with some particularly interesting examples of letter writing and some extracts from the diaries. This last element has been kept to a minimum, and is included here as a counterpoint to the writings on art; it offers revealing glimpses of the artist's mental processes and methods of writing. To do justice to the diaries of Louise Bourgeois would require a separate book, and a specialized editorial process, because they were never written with publication in mind. Similarly, the texts attached to drawings would need to be accompanied by reproductions both of the drawings themselves and of the works to which they gave rise.

Together, all these texts display a precise and penetrating intelligence, alert to the complexities of human emotion. Louise Bourgeois

often talks in proverbs and aphorisms, expressing profound observations on art and life in very simple terms. Her writing also reveals a passionate interest in words: their sounds, their colors, and their evocative power. We encounter a free and audacious mind, and a powerful personality in constant pursuit of a form of authenticity.

In her writing, Louise Bourgeois alternates between English and French. Her memories of childhood and of places in her life are written in French; all of her published texts are in English. In recent years, her writing has often taken the form of rhymed texts, litanies, lists, and jingles, which use alliteration, rhyme, and repetition. She enjoys word play, and much of her writing is characterized by the same formidable element of irony and humor that permeates her work as an artist.

By painting a faithful portrait of her many-faceted personality, Louise Bourgeois' writings both complement and adjust our perception of her work. The form and spirit of her writing, and the very individual tone of her voice, afford a glimpse of deep uncertainties, latent suffering, and the violence that she battles constantly to keep in check. We become aware that her whole being is straining to control the inner chaos through words, images, and forms. In order to summon up the past, she rehearses every aspect of time.

Translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt

*50 years old be kept in the dark—result rage
result—frustration from knowing*

*10 years old unsatisfied curiosity—rage outrage
result rage
kept out*

*1 year old—abandoned—why do they leave me
where are they*

3 month old—famished and forgotten

1 month old—fear of death



Louise Bourgeois at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris, 1937

Previous page: note, early 1960s.

Letters to Colette Richarme, 1937–1940

Previously unpublished letters to artist and friend Colette Richarme (1904–1991), whom Bourgeois had met while studying in 1937–8 at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris. Compiled by Atelier Richarme, Montpellier. Translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt.

Paris, 6 September 1937

My dear Madame,

It was a great pleasure to receive your letter explaining the reason for your sudden disappearance. It surprised me because last time we met I had no idea you were leaving so soon.

You told me how very exhausted you felt, and I was pleased to hear that you are having a good holiday. The air down there is wonderful, but don't force yourself to work if you don't feel like it.

May I say how much I regret your departure? Montpellier sounds like the other end of the world to me. My regret is purely selfish. After the tremendous effort you put in here, solitude, even prolonged solitude, can only be of very great benefit. Your work may well be more arduous than it was in the studio, but it will also be more personal. In that part of France there must be such a beautiful light, and so much peace. I have not been away at all, this year, and it fills my head with dreams.

When you come back to Paris in the autumn, bring your work, and your daughter's work too.

Do you want to show any work here after the summer break? If so, you must let me have something immediately, because the Tuileries and the Salon d'Automne open more or less simultaneously at the beginning of October.

The studio starts up again on the 27th, as I told you.

Meanwhile, all's quiet on the western front.

I hope to see you soon and meanwhile I remain, affectionately yours,

Louise Bourgeois.

[Letter written on paper headed "Musées nationaux. Direction."]

Paris, 14 January 1938

My dear friend,

How cross you must be with me! I can't bear to think about it. I was annoyed to find that the Christmas card I had sent you in Paris was on my desk when I came into the office on Monday. Did you remember that you hadn't left me your address?

Once again, I send affectionate greetings to you, your husband and two daughters. I wish you good health and success.

I hope you will make rapid progress. I'm certain you will. Solitude, a rest from responsibilities, and peace of mind, will do you more good than the atmosphere of the studio and the conversations which, generally speaking, are a waste of time.

I showed your painting to Brayer and then took it home. He liked your interesting interpretation (the handling, the impasto), and your values. He was less pleased with the placing of the subject. He said you should have centred the head in the frame, which would have shown off the chin and beard to full advantage and given weight to the painting. He also found the colours a bit too like the French flag. His advice is to add some green to the blue.

Work continues at the studio. Here is the list of students: Jouve, Mme Bernard, [Burias] and Voss, Le Baron, Mesnil, Mme Bourdais (a pupil of Belloul Bouillat), [Teme], two other Swedes who were having lunch at Wadja, Storowsky (a Russian), Tucker (a German), Kaiser (an elderly Swiss woman), Michel who is Greek and Kato the Japanese. It makes a good group and some of the best members have created a spirit of rivalry and liveliness that makes for rapid progress. The latest model, whom you may have seen at Ranson, is terrific. "She's as beautiful as an ancient Greek amphora," declared Michel.

We continue to meet at Wadja. There is lots of noise and laughter, and sometimes sadness. That place still appalls me. It's the opposite of a decent interior, with its moral squalor. They're a bunch of no-hopers. Our clothes smell horribly of frying fat when we leave. The other students agree with me totally about these disadvantages, but whether it's fate or

sheer laziness on our part, that's where we always meet.

Have you heard about the Goya exhibition? Read the latest issue of *Beaux-Arts*. The subject for our next sketch is "Homage to Goya," and the boss is adamant that everyone should do it.

It's late and I'm writing to you in bed. If I shut my eyes I can see you coming along on your bicycle, wobbling round the bend. I find this delightful, and I am a bit envious. I need to smell grass, earth, and the wind from the sea. I feel as if I have not left the gray streets of Paris for a century, and that I haven't heard your soft, reasonable voice and your maternal tones for a century either. Life's a strange journey.

I mentioned my idea of going in for the teaching certificate. Since you left I've done some decorative art (mosaic is enthralling—enamel and tiles) and sculpture with Wlérick at the Grande Chaumière, in the ground-floor studio. It's difficult, but now I have a better grasp of form!! Try and do a bit yourself. You just need a few kilos of clay, and you'll see what a leap forward (or rather into depth) you'll make. It's worth a thousand drawings.

I've been reading Charles Péguy recently. I'll say more about it in another letter.

Please describe the countryside you see daily and the flowers in the gardens. And tell me about your work too.

I shan't leave it so long before writing to you again.

With sincere greetings, from your friend,

Louise Bourgeois.

A few little extras:

Basler stands tall these days (in the figurative sense): he is having a show at the Petit Palais. Othon Friesz is charming. I'm going to have him correct my work, and I'm taking him my pictures on Tuesday. Mme Bernard Jouve and Mme Bourdais thank you for your kind thoughts and send you their best wishes.

The boss is exhibiting at Galerie Charpentier in February. We are going to his house next Saturday; he looks a complete fright, because he's working so hard. I've

stopped writing to the Swiss man, because I do not want to leave Paris or stop painting. Madame Rose is crippled with aches and pains. It's extremely cold here, and there were people skating on the water of the Saint-Sulpice fountain.

Affectionately.

Paris, 7 March 1938

Dear Friend,

How long it's been! I daren't give you any reasons, because they won't be good ones. Nevertheless, every evening, when I sat down to write to you, I was intimidated by the sheer number of things I wanted to tell you.

I spent two weeks with André Lhote and I learned so much; I want to pass on some of his rules and advice. The basis of his teaching is that a canvas is an arrangement of lines, surfaces, and volume on a plane.

Your paintings (apart from the *Church*) lack shape. You are going to object, I know, but I shall carry on all the same.

On the subject of drawing, you must put the essence of what you want to say into a painting. The rest is *arbitrary*. Chosen with discernment, but chosen, and choice involves elimination. Once the drawing is established and composed, you compose the other values in the same way. Thirdly, choose two colors, and the painting is a harmony of those two colors, then you add a discordant note. In a red-blue-purple harmony, your dissonance is Naples yellow, almost neat and in small quantity.

During the unexpected solitude that you are enjoying at present, read Lhote's *Le coeur et l'esprit*, his first book and much better than the second one. It will teach you far more than all the teachers in the world.

Here's what the boss said: *Aigues-Mortes* is charming and could serve as the basis of a larger composition; its values are correct and its colors well balanced. The *Church* is your best sketch from the point of view of values and drawing, but the priest preaching is far too big. You'll notice this at once when you look at the picture again. The *Tree* drawing could be reused in a landscape—a useful discipline. In the landscapes, he says that so much sun can only be due to the excessive influence of Van Gogh. He considers such a blatant light in the sky antipictorial. With such a warm

light, your startling cold patches in the shadows have the effect of "decoloring" the painting, which is otherwise warm. The effect is lost. Your *Homage to Goya* is interesting as far as composition and interpretation goes, but the painting flickers; the whites need to be massed and centered.

The master was surprised to receive such a big consignment. He sends you his best wishes and encouragement, despite all the criticisms that I have passed on unmodified. The latest subjects are "The Billiard Players," "Fencing," and the Surrealist exhibition. His exhibition was a great success. Good sales, good reviews in the right-wing press, less flattering reviews in the left-wing papers. He advertised heavily all over Paris and succeeded in winning a concession for the municipal pillar sites, which are usually reserved for exhibitions put on by the City of Paris at the Petit Palais. In artistic circles this bold and unprecedented move caused a scandal and aroused jealousy in various quarters. There's been quite a rumpus. He takes no notice and is still quite happy.

I'll carry on with the answers to your questionnaire. There was an amusing gathering at the Vélodrome d'Hiver. Artists and sportsmen met; this will go on for two months.

1. Not only is Utrillo not dead, he has no intention of dying yet, as he has just remarried. He is not old. Do you remember I was reading Carco's biography of him? I'll send it to you if you like. His private view was certainly entertaining: during the last few years he has become totally sober and serious. He made his entrance sandwiched between Mme Utrillo and his parish priest.

2. I must admit that I wasn't aware of the Salon des Jeunes Artistes that you mentioned. I'll look for the issue of *Beaux-Arts* in which it appears. There's little chance of my submitting anything. There's a painting I've been working on for ages, which I want to finish. It seems to be my first really personal painting and is far to the left of Brayer. I don't wish to exhibit in a lot of small shows; it's very expensive and not much use. It's better to make one's entrance into the world of art with a single good submission that will make an impression.

3. I have never made fun of you for building up your impasto. I'm almost doing that myself these days. In my next letter I'll explain a technique which can become habitual, and which takes the effect further. In the second stage of this methodical manner of working, the warm and cold areas need to be established with a full brush (this is really impasto in itself).

4. One day I met a friend of the [illegible: Palestrimeri?] who talked to me about his exhibition. He told me that he'd had quite a reasonable success. I'm quite ready to believe him, but mainly I think that, to take on the always considerable expense of an exhibition, you first need to make sure of the support of the professional critics. There are so many exhibitions in Paris that it's quite possible for one to go unnoticed. The example of a classmate of mine from the Beaux-Arts is a good one: [Panichon] is a very promising young painter who brought back some excellent work from a trip to Italy, including portraits, still-lives, and all sorts of interesting things. He had a bit of money, so he put this towards hiring suitable premises in Rue de Seine at an appropriate time of year for exhibitions, the beginning of February when galleries charge double rent. The street was one that the critics were known to include in their rounds. He awaited his opening with confidence. But there were so many other artistic events to attract the critics' attention at the time that they simply forgot to look in on our young [Panichon]; not one word of praise appeared in the newspapers. It's sad to have to say it, but there is no way into the world of art without backing, however much effort and money you expend.

5. Don't pine for the Beaux-Arts, or for models. That's all artificial. Make the people around you pose for you, as you suggest, and paint from nature. Read Lhote, who will teach you a lot, and send the boss your work. He's broad-minded. The other day I told him I was going to work with Gromaire, and he said: "You will gain nothing but good from it, because your mind tends naturally that way." What he meant was that you can be extremely personal, and he will understand you and be able to encourage you in *your* way. Whatever you do, don't try to copy him. Fortunately he

does nothing to encourage that, unlike the painters mentioned above, who try to found "schools." I know anyway that you are a hundred miles from pastiche, which is why I can speak to you so freely.

The studio is a bit weak at the moment: Jouve is working at his profession, Kato doesn't come any more, the Swedes are in Tunis, Othon Friesz is preparing an exhibition for America. It's a quiet period. I'm taking the exams for technical teaching in June, I hope, so I have enrolled in Mme [Broupet's? Brayer's?] school. I work there from morning to night: modeling, perspective, architecture, techniques. It's a rest from high art, and when I come back to painting I have a fresher, calmer approach and a surer touch.

I may go away for a bit during the Easter holidays. Dear Colette, dear friend, I wish you luck with your work and embrace you affectionately,

Ever yours,

Louise Bourgeois.

Basler is working hard. He is showing forty paintings at the Petit Palais and deserves to do well. The Swiss writes to me weekly to announce his return but every week, tearfully, he postpones it. At the moment his mother is ill. He will probably come at the end of March. Yesterday I saw the English exhibition: very good. Twice during the last fortnight I have been to [Plutus], it's marvelous. Last week three interesting Surrealist films, very interesting. Life is wonderfully rich!

Kisses and, once again, good-bye. Soon I hope we shall have masses of good news. Thank you for the article on Delacroix; I found it very interesting.

[September 1938]

Colette, my dear friend,

I don't like to think how long it is since I last wrote to you. I will tell you about the past three months in the space of a few lines.

At the end of June, to take my mind off my teaching exam, I went to the salerooms with my father. I bought some contemporary drawings, then I exhibited them in a part of the house in the Boulevard Saint-Germain, which I have transformed into a gallery. I hope you'll visit the

gallery some day. I thought I'd be coming to see you in Montpellier as agreed, but I have been getting busier and busier and haven't been able to leave the house.

One day a friend who had bought a Picasso from me, and who came back to give me lessons on the modern movement in France and in America, suggested that we might be able to work together in New York. In between conversations about Surrealism and the latest trends, we got married, and I am just about to go to see him onto the boat at Le Havre. I hope to join him in October. Of course I would love to see you before I go. If you like, you can have my place in the studio. It was agreed that, with Brayer, I would do correction day as I did last year. If you have some work, send it to me at Boulevard Saint-Germain or to the studio, whichever you like, before 15 October.

Our group has broken up a bit. Mme Bernard is with Lhote, Kaiser with Gromaire, Jouve has given up, the little lady from Bourg-la-Reine has gone off to the Beaux-Arts with dignified mien, I think, Mme Bourdais is producing (or overproducing) for the Salons, Basler is making progress, the big Swiss boy is coming back to Paris in October. The boss is still working.

My husband is thirty years old. He loves painting and teaches at New York University. He has written a book, which I am going to translate and get published here, on the influence of the primitives on modern art. His name is Robert Goldwater. Dear Colette, I hope to hear from you or to receive a visit very soon, and I will end by asking you to give my respects to Monsieur Boisseau and greetings to your daughters.

With much affection, I embrace you,

Louise Goldwater.

On board the *Aurania*
8 October 1938

Colette, dear friend,

Once again you will be surprised to receive this letter, particularly when you see where it comes from. I hoped to stay in Paris for a bit longer, and I had even thought of coming to visit you for a few days, but it was not possible. I told you that we had married in some haste because I wanted to marry in France. My husband had to return to New York for the beginning of the academic year. He left Paris a week after our wedding, and I was supposed to join him at the end of October, which would have allowed me to organize my gallery for my year's absence and to prepare everything, in Paris and at Antony. The shipping of our furniture was also a long saga.

I don't know if I told you in my last letter that Robert had been called to Chicago to present his book in a lecture at the museum of modern art. The book is entitled *Primitivism in Modern Art*. Included in the primitive arts are primitive African and Asian art, the art of New Caledonia and particularly the art of Easter Island.

Seurat's best painting is on show at the museum in Chicago: his *Sunday Afternoon at La Grande Jatte*. I don't know whether you like Seurat; it's a question of artistic development, and I don't know where you are at the moment. If you want to know more about him, read Robert Rey's book *Le Renouveau du sentiment classique au XXème siècle: Cézanne, Renoir, Degas, Gauguin, Seurat*. He's best on the two last named.

Are you still working hard? I admire your energy. Since I started buying modern drawings and paintings again and set up my little shop (I called it a gallery in a spirit of irony, it wasn't very big, but it was going well), I've had no time to work. But I have no regrets. Firstly because I met my life's companion through it, just as I had dreamed I would—or rather not dared to dream. And also because in the past few months I have seen work by painters like Picasso, Derain, Lautrec, Modigliani, La Fresnaye, Pascin, Dufresne: all the twentieth-century school and the one that preceded it.

What has distressed me for a long time is the difficulty I have in

working. Every time I have to pick up a brush, it causes an internal storm. It seems as if the more I learn, and the more my sensibility asserts itself, the more my inspiration disappears. The more I have to say, the less I can speak. Fortunately in New York I shall be joining artistic circles. Othon Friesz is there at the moment, so is Fernand Léger. Chirico and Salvador Dalí are Robert's friends and will be in our house regularly. Picasso and André Breton will also be there. These names may not mean much to you, because they are all much more "avant-garde" than Brayer. Breton, for example, wrote the Surrealist Manifesto, and I know that this will make you laugh, for the present at any rate.

If you come back to Paris to work, do come back to the studio. Whatever anyone may say, Brayer is good, very good. You could also go to Bissière at Ranson; I've talked to you about him already and objectively speaking he's worth more than all the Frieszes, Picards, Ledoux, Lhotes, and Darnas in the world. He's the only teacher that I miss, and as soon as I return to the fold he is the one I shall follow. . . .

[New York,] 4 February 1939

My dear Colette,

Your last letter gave me enormous pleasure, and I'm pleased that you are working so hard. I get the impression that, in painting, we have moved off in very different directions since we met in the studio, and I think our directions suit our ideas pretty well. I am sending you some photographs, unfortunately not of things I have made but by the painter who monitors and guides the group I am working with. Our great master is Picasso. As you know, Colette, in matters of painting the young are always right. I'm talking of schools rather than of individuals. I believe that truth is on the side of magazines like *Cahiers d'Art* rather than of *Beaux-Arts*. This is not meant to be a dig at the latter, which I receive here and read with pleasure, but I am alarmed by the gulf that is developing between our two ideals. Perhaps this is only temporary, but painting is so difficult and life so short!

See you soon—best wishes, Louison.

New York, 11 June 1939

My dear Colette,

It's a long time since I wrote. Your last long letter and the photographs gave me great pleasure. Your house looks very pretty, with all those vines around it. I won't write to you at any great length today because I haven't got your last letter by me; also we are coming to France in ten days' time, and I hope we shall be able to talk for a long time, in person. We shall be in Paris for almost the whole time. Will you come to Paris for a bit and take the opportunity to do some work? You told me that you had been turned down by the Artistes Français: on this I can only congratulate you. Where else can you exhibit? At the Salon d'Automne and the Tuileries, of course, both a hundred times better than the Artistes Français! I've noticed that the Nationale and the Nationale-Indépendants are both completely uninspired, as well. Besides the Salon de l'Automne and the Tuileries there are group exhibitions at [Carmine], for example, which is a very young gallery. You have one inhibition that I don't understand: you appear to be interested in painters like Friesz, Dufy, Derain, Picasso—and yet you also value the opinion of people who paint the way people used to paint two hundred years ago. If you pay the same attention to both groups, you will never belong to either of them, and this ambiguous situation will damage your work very gravely. To convince others, you have to convince yourself; and a conciliatory or even an unduly understanding attitude—in that it is inevitably superficial—is not helpful to creativity.

Since I arrived here I have been studying the work of Matisse, Bonnard, Derain, and Picasso—in the original and from slides. These are the great masters. La Fresnaye and Braque too. I have carried on with my own painting, but at the same time I've been making colored woodcuts (with several plates) and etchings, to provide myself with discipline. The techniques are easy and interesting, but the materials are so much poorer and less promising than oils that it takes a great effort to express oneself completely. This summer I am going to work at Ranson with Bissière and with Léger. When I think of the amount of time I wasted sketching and studying anatomy at the Grande Chaumière!! I'm a bit cross with myself.

I think I could talk to you for days on end about the things I've learned. I have a much deeper understanding now, far calmer and more assured than last year; Robert has contributed to it so much, by making me carry an idea or a piece of work, once started, through to the end. I'm not anxious now, as I used to be, and it shows in my work.

I'd love to see the paintings you have done—your *Annunciation* and your *Portrait*.

By the time you receive this letter I shall be at sea. We arrive in Paris on 26 June. I have spent the last week at my in-laws' house by the sea. I printed my woodcuts and prepared more blocks, and we spent the rest of the time sailing. The countryside is beautiful and the climate is bracing. I think the real reason for my present happiness is the thought of seeing my own country again.

L.G.

Paris, 30 June 1939

My dear Colette,

Thank you for your delightful welcome and for your invitation to La Vignette. I should love to visit you. Your house looks beautiful, and the countryside too, and we could paint together. We shall see how things develop. I think the most feasible idea would be for you to come to Paris, where we could work together at Ranson or Léger or Gromaire. Robert and I will be here until 1 September. I sent four paintings to Bissière at Ranson today and they will be exhibited. I've also brought some work by young American painters. I don't yet know where I shall show them. I have been so looking forward to these two months in France, I must make a great effort to make as much progress as possible during the time. Paris seems sad and different, and it is dreadful to hear everyone talking about war. Tell me if you can come. I embrace you,

L.B.

6 August 1939

My dear Colette,

Please forgive me for not replying earlier to your kind invitation. When I received your letter I thought I should be able to visit you in Montpellier, and I was waiting to fix a date.

Things have altered since then. We went to Geneva to see the Prado exhibition (it was marvelous), and we said we wanted to see friends who live in Mégève on our way. But Papa, who will be in Paris, with my family, for the whole duration of our stay in France, seemed to take offense at our projected travels because we have so little time to devote to our relations. The result is that we are going to stay here, now that we only have a month left. Robert has some work to do at the Bibliothèque Doucet, and I am preparing for the Salon d'Automne and studying, trying to understand the process by which a painter like Picasso came to the work he is doing today; and studying the group with whom he exchanged views and ideas, especially Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob. It is quite clear that as early as 1912 [date underlined three times] the whole Cubist movement and the Surrealist movement can be found in the work of those two poets. The two movements are completely opposed to one another in painting, since the former deals almost exclusively with plastic problems and the latter with literary problems. The poet owns the field of images as well as the field of words. As a creator of images, the poet is close to us, which is why I read Joyce, Jarry, James, and Gertrude Stein. I'll talk to you about it all some other time. You mentioned sketches; I don't do them any more. I do unshaded drawings, as thoughtful and delicate as they used to be emphatic, and I go on working at a form for days and days. I have a whole collection of drawings by La Fresnaye. I recently saw some Cocteaus and some Picassos from the classic period. I don't know if I told you that I have some things on show with the group Despierre, Grüber, Marchand, etc. I exhibited with the Ranson group at Galerie Jean Dufresne: both the Braque and Surrealist influences. . . .

Paris, 31 August 1939

My dear Colette,

The drawing shows enormous progress and is very sensitive. You do not seek abstract forms, and that is your perfect right. It is a *Shepherd*—and from the subject point of view I think it's too much of a shepherd. A painting can be non-representational and still be of great value, even in a purely pictorial sense. Almost all that the subject gains, the painting loses. The Artistes Français are interested only in the subject, and *subordinate everything else to the subject*. They are perfectly clear about this (in 1937 they put a stop to the "Independent Art" exhibition at the Petit Palais by bringing a lawsuit against the City of Paris). This is just a detail, but proves that there are two schools of painters: the ancients (academic) and the others (independent). By ancient I don't mean their age: Bonnard is 75, Picasso 60, etc. You are taking as your mentors people who can't teach you anything until you have had the experience of abstract painting; then you will observe nature with new eyes.

All this takes us away from the *Shepherd*, but if I were speaking from an academic point of view I would tell you this: keep on with your drawing and gain even more suppleness and subtlety. From what I consider to be the true viewpoint of a twentieth-century artist, however, I should say this: renounce skill, shun it. On a practical note: (1) work in black and white, forms and values; (2) in color, paint only patches of color, and banish black and white from your palette. *Light* will be warm *ochre*, and *shade* will be *blue*, with no attempt at drawing.

I myself have used no color for a year.

Exhibition: try the Salon d'Automne; perhaps you should write to Brayer. I'm thinking of exhibiting with the printmakers this year. Try and send me some photos of your work. If you light them well you can photograph your paintings with your Kodak.

Do you think things will work out? You are better placed than anyone to know. The last few days in Paris have been so gloomy, particularly the evenings with the blue blackout lights.

I did not tell you that in your *Shepherd* I noticed great concentration of mind and great discipline. That's really thrilling.

I can't talk about anything but work, because I am too sad. Because of my own set-up and because of this country. I would like to see Papa, who is in Evian. I'm like a motherless child. This has not happened to me for two years—when I was in Rue Mazarine.

I look forward to your news. Affectionate kisses, dear Colette,

Louise.

[New York,] 19 January 1940

My dear Colette,

A few days ago I received the long letter you wrote on Christmas Day. It gave me great pleasure. I hope your husband is better. I imagine he will have recovered by the time you receive this letter, but his recovery means more loneliness for you, and all the other anxieties connected with his leaving for the war. I was very young in 1917, but I always remember Maman crying when Papa went back after he was wounded for the second time. I often think of you and of all the other people I left behind. Soldiers write a lot of letters, maybe because they are unhappy but do not show it, or maybe because they have time. Yesterday I received a long letter from Brayer. He told me that his father joined up a while ago, of course, and that he went to enlist with Régis and Alain. Do you remember the boy who was his youngest brother, who used to come to the studio? The eldest is full of optimism, is working hard and hoping to come here when peace returns. He took a major part in the decoration of the French Pavilion last year. On a visit to Philadelphia, I discovered the French painting section in the museum (as you know, the World's Fair is closed for the winter and will reopen in 1940). To my taste, the exhibition gives too much space to paintings by the Artistes Français, but still . . .

You must have heard that there was an exhibition of 400 paintings by Picasso here (forty years' work). It was so beautiful, and it revealed such genius and such a collection of treasures that I did not pick up a paint-

brush for a month. Complete shutdown. I cleaned brushes, palettes, etc. and tidied everything. Once the source of such joy disappeared, life became depressing. I have been listening to political discussions, conversations whose sole aim is to conceal the frightful term "neutrality." I assure you, it's useful living abroad: it helps one to understand how propaganda and false information is circulated for whatever secret purposes. There was some animosity on the subject of the US Mail, which the English held up in Gibraltar. It's of no importance, but neutral countries are very sensitive, and the English are paying such a high price at the moment that one should at least be tolerant towards them. In the end, no doubt the Japanese will anger the Americans, and this will be as well for us.

I'll continue on this ugly, thin paper because the weight of airmail letters is strictly controlled. . . .

I'd like to know what you are doing in your painting. Could you send me some photos of yourself (close-ups, and also you and your daughters), your work, and your garden? It would give me so much pleasure.

It's interesting: you are never discouraged. I've seen some things recently that are so beautiful that I can't find any strength or self-confidence. For example, Hyperion has just published the *catalogue raisonné* of the work of Van Gogh. Robert brought it to me yesterday evening. What wealth!! What can one add that is new when there is such genius around? If art is for personal satisfaction only, it is too much of a selfish pleasure. But I don't want to go on in this vein, both for my own sake and because I don't want to risk discouraging you. Congratulations on the Sunday life studio you have set up with your friend.

Tell me what I can send to the soldiers. Knitwear? Books? I have no idea. Here the aid organizations for French soldiers don't seem to know what they need. . . .

Louise Goldwater.

New York, 8 August 1940

My dear Colette,

Your letter reached me at the clinic, the day after Jean-Louis was born, and I can't describe how much pleasure it gave, or how much it moved me too.

I don't know what to say about the behavior of the Americans. On the whole they are irresponsible. The newspapers, without exception, are trying to mold public opinion. The news they carry is correct, but the slant they put on events is tendentious—or, most of the time, false. We listen to the wireless every evening, but the reports from American correspondents in all the European capitals bear an uncanny resemblance to the stories written by journalists here. Now that Paris and thousands of soldiers have escaped the worst, what do people think in France? Is there a complete barrier between the occupied zone and the rest? Are the inhabitants of the occupied zone suffering? Do you have news of them? Can you move freely from one zone to the other? . . .

Select Diary Notes 1939–1944

Previously unpublished. Certain passages translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt.

6 March 1939

Study of *Cahiers d'Art*, Picasso Works 1933–34–35: Picasso paints what is true; true movements, true feelings. He is sane and strong and simple and sensitive. The copyists are perverted (Cocteau, Giraudoux, Campi) because sensitive and weak.

Picasso is an enthusiast. He says so, and that is why his works are young. Skepticism is the beginning of decadence. It's a form of abdication and bankruptcy.

The truth, naturalness, Pascal Picasso. Never depart from the truth even though it seems banal at first. In painting truth is nature. All movements painted by Picasso have been *seen* and *felt*; he is never theatrical. The Surrealists are theatrical. New York painting, the painting that wants to be or is fashionable, is theatrical. Theater is the image of life and Picasso sees life or rather *reality*! Keep your integrity. You will only count, for yourself and in your art, to the extent that you keep your integrity.

1940s

It is wrong to be ashamed of one's paintings. Something bad may one day supply an idea, a starting point for something better. It is wrong to destroy old canvases, for the same reason.

Miró had finished painting his picture *The Farm*, and everyone was telling him your picture is finished, your picture is finished, but he said no and he was looking for something all the time. In the end one day he said I know and he painted the farmer's footprints on the path that leads to the farm, and he said, it's finished.

A painting must not be a battlefield it must be a statement. Set out with something to say and not with the vague desire to say something. Things never simplify themselves they always complicate themselves on the way from the brain to the canvas. Set out, taking your precautions.

Woman with the Fig Tree—If the negative surfaces of a painting are more elaborate from the point of view of form and handling than the positive surfaces, which are left the same color as the background, there is an introduction of plasticity. After trying several subjects with this aim “in mind,” I succeeded only with grounds laid down in advance and painted in dark colors, ocher red for example. Negative surfaces white.

A painting is not a joke. If you aren't serious, every single time you cheat by not being serious, every time you cut a corner, you are making a record of your stupidity and you won't be able to take it back. In the end the painting is the sum of everything you have put into it. Sometimes it's a sum of stupidity. Something stupid can never be erased—if you put down a black and afterward you put a red on top to correct it, your red will not be red.

You have to realize that you aren't working in a blind . . . way for the good of humanity in general. You have to set up a scale of objectives and values and work systematically. Current example: Why show Italian anti-Fascist journals to your American friends (Rus & Ed)? The attention and the interest they devote to these publications (perfectly OK in themselves) will be so much energy diverted from a cause closer to your heart (French art publications, etc.). Another current example: Why work on a magazine and promote other people's work when you can and must promote your own?

10 September 1944

See Red—*Natural History* at Norlyst Gallery—

The painting is not big enough in general the size is too small for a group. It could be at least three or four times bigger. There is a lack of clarity in the purpose of the painting. It isn't striking. Establish the background values more clearly. There is a weight and richness in this painting that is a bit crowded. It would be more comfortable bigger. There is timidity in the way the idea is presented. The idea is not timid; it's quite good. Work on it some more.

19 November 1944

I'm in a state close to sleepwalking, which has something to do with the impression I have of not being able to focus my attention on anything for long. At the same time my brain is tremendously active. I have all sorts of ideas and plans in my head and I'm all set to write, or to draw—anything—but physically I'm very tired and calm and feverish. I'm irritable with the children, highly sensitive, as if on the verge of tears. But this condition seems favorable to intellectual work. Make notes another time and compare them.

Letter to Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

6 April 1942, while Barr was Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, concerning a lecture given by Dr. Edgar Wind, a Renaissance scholar affiliated with the Warburg Institute, London, who was then lecturing at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York.

Dear Alfred,

Many thanks for your suggestion that I might like to put some questions to Dr. Wind. His lecture did in fact raise many problems, some too long to phrase in simple question form. The ones I have listed below are among those that occurred to me:

1. Can one say of any man such as Baudelaire, who uses vice as the road to virtue, who stresses the immoral as the proof of the moral and harps on their final union, who writes a "Litany to Satan" but puts it in a section called "Revolt," and who (as the sinner honest with himself opposed to the hypocritical Pharisee) is so obsessed with transgression, that faith was not one of his profoundest concerns.

2. Was not Baudelaire's idea of the savage quite naturally that of his romantic period (*luxure, calme, et volupté*); was it not this and not his art that Baudelaire liked; and so is not the taste of the twentieth century for the primitive really closer to that of Champfleury and the Realists than to that of Baudelaire.

3. Dr. Wind's peroration suggested that scientists and artists together would solve the problems of the immediate future, as in the Renaissance. Apart from the recognized phenomenon that the main concerns of any period are to be found in all of its principle activities, can the parallel be drawn. Are the investigations of the Surrealists to whom Dr. Wind referred (whatever and however great their significance), to be put on the same level of those of psychiatrists, biologists, and bio-chemists.

I hope that the above three are clear and not too long for your use.

Sincerely, Louise Bourgeois

Natural History

Written in December 1944 and first published in February 1945 by the David Porter Gallery, Washington, D.C., in the catalog for the group exhibition *Personal Statement: Painting Prophecy 1950*.

The slow life of a plant given unified and consistent expression in terms of abstract forms. The problem may be divided into three parts, although in the actual painting of the picture the three are never and can never be separated:

I: The relationship of the three main areas—one vertical set against two horizontals—establishes a tension in the picture space. The space is shallow, comparable to that of a low relief. Inside these three areas are three subjects related to each other through shape and design, through color, and through content.

II: *Motif*: The life of a plant in three parts: First the whole picture of the plant itself, with root, stem, and leaves; second the flowers of the plant; and third the fruit. These three stages of evolution in the plant are at once consecutive and interdependent; they are, at different times, both part and whole. Hence a NATURAL HISTORY.

III. A concern with the richness and the feel of the pigment, the tangible quality of the surface, *matière*.

Looking at the cross-section of a tree-trunk, for example, I admire the slow process and precise work of nature. But in my painting I have not tried to copy nature's work realistically (for this a photograph would be more to the point); I have tried rather to paint my picture in a spirit of deliberation and precision that has more and more made me study the possibilities of the surface. The surface quality has been obtained by superimposed glazes—of which there are in some place as many as ten coats.

The picture should be looked at in a very strong light.

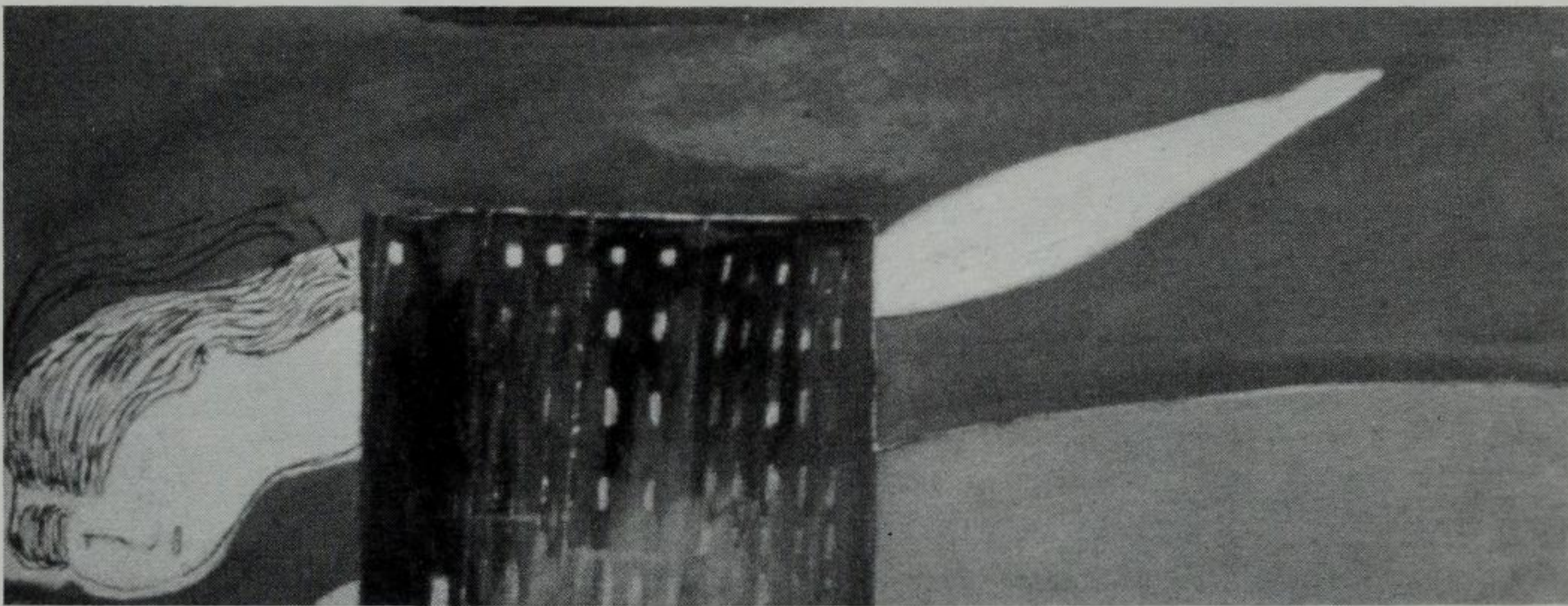


Natural History, 1944, oil on canvas, 111.7 × 66 cm.

On Early Paintings

Previously unpublished note, 18 March 1947.

Even though I am French, I cannot think of one of these pictures being painted in France. Every one of these pictures is American, from New York. I love this city, its clean-cut look, its sky, its buildings, its scientific, cruel, romantic quality.



Fallen Woman, 1946–7, oil on linen, 91.4 × 35.5 cm.

He Disappeared into Complete Silence

First published in 1947 by Gemor Press as a limited edition book of engravings made at Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17, New York, with an introduction by Marius Bewley (assistant to Peggy Guggenheim).

Plate 1

Once there was a girl and she loved a man.

They had a date next to eighth street station of the sixth avenue subway.

She had put on her good clothes and a new hat. Somehow he could not come. So the purpose of this picture is to show how beautiful she was. I really mean that she was beautiful.

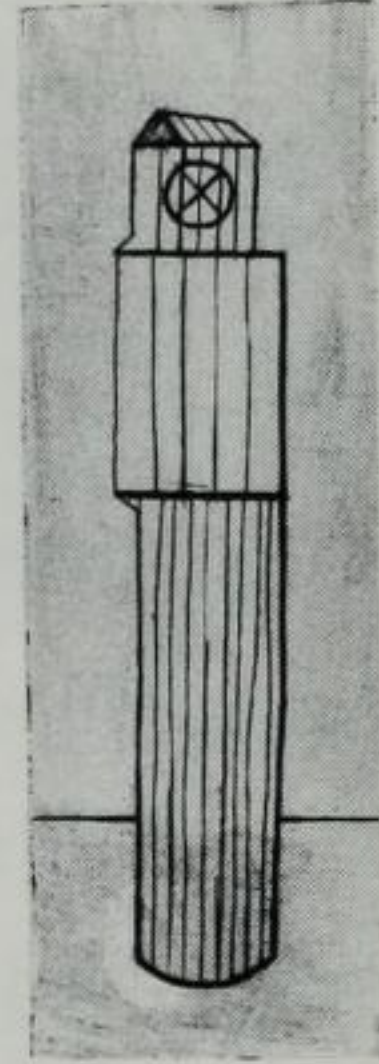


Plate 2

The solitary death of the Woolworth building.

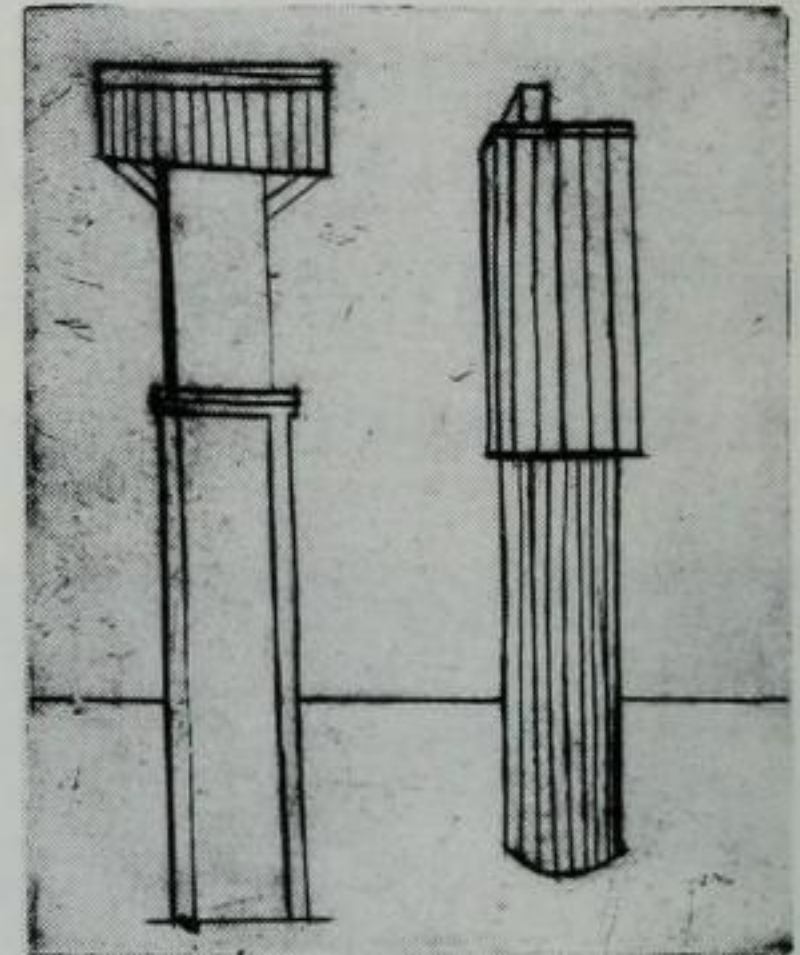


Plate 3

Once a man was telling a story, it was a very good story too, and it made him very happy, but he told it so fast that nobody understood it.

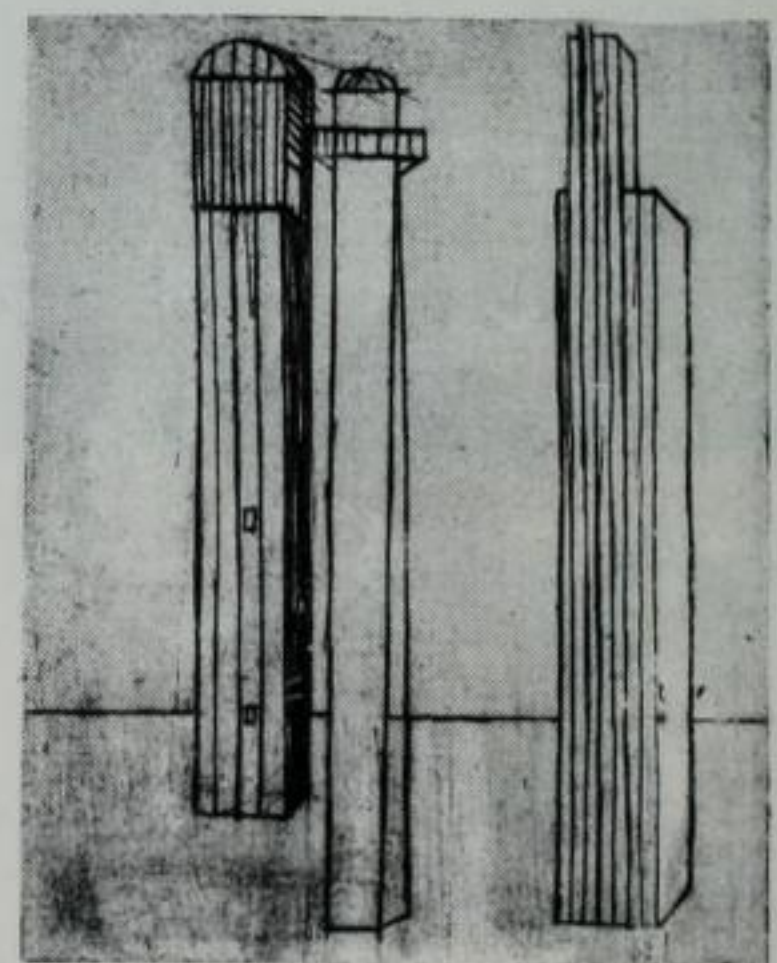


Plate 4

In the mountains of Central France forty years ago, sugar was a rare product.

Children got one piece of it at Christmas time.

A little girl that I knew when she was my mother used to be very fond and very jealous of it.

She made a hole in the ground and hid her sugar in, and she always forgot that the earth is damp.

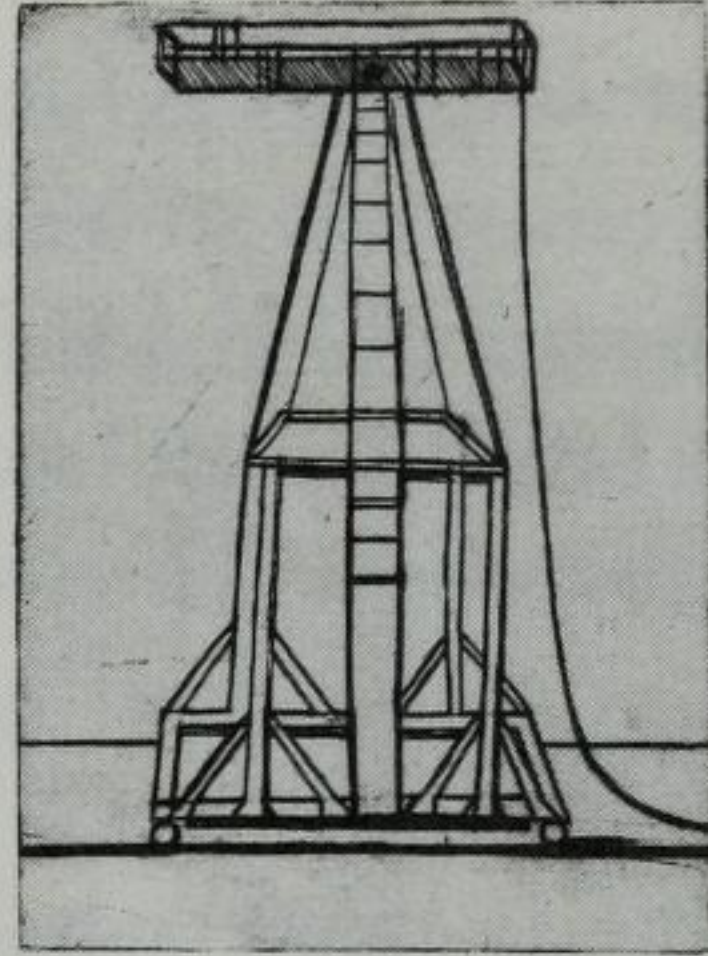


Plate 5

Once a man was waving to his friend from the elevator.

He was laughing so much that he stuck his head out and the ceiling cut it off

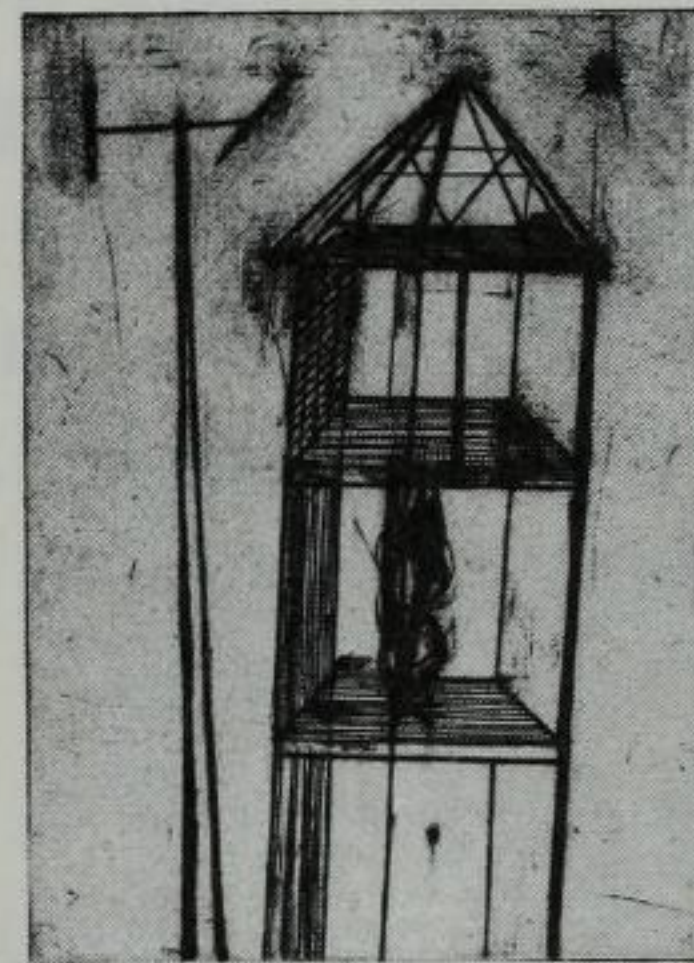


Plate 6

Leprosarium, Louisiana.

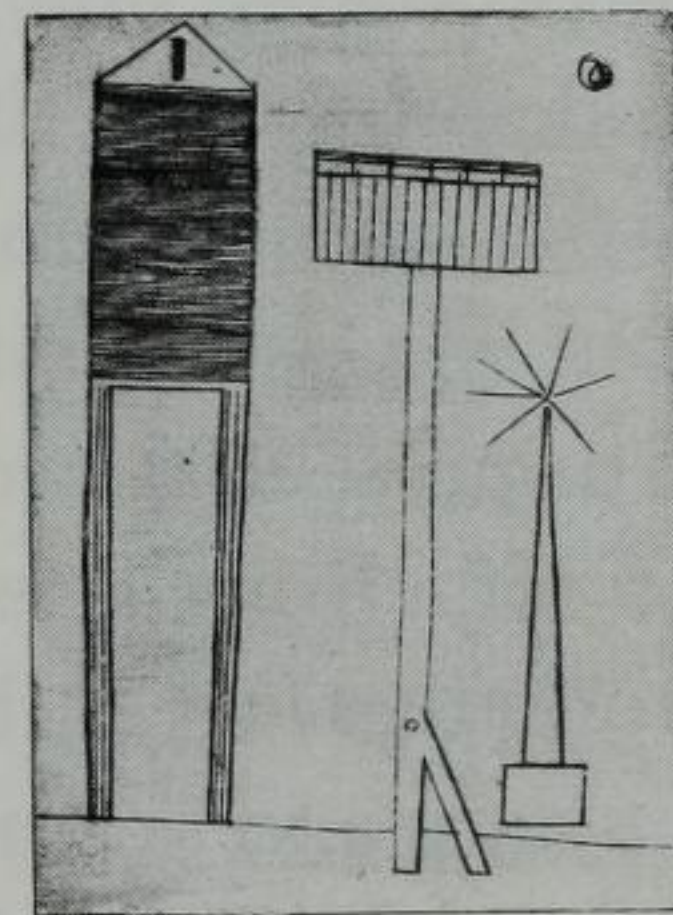


Plate 7

Once a man was angry at his wife, he cut her in small pieces, made stew of her.

Then he telephoned to his friends and asked them for a cocktail-and-stew party.

Then all came and had a good time.

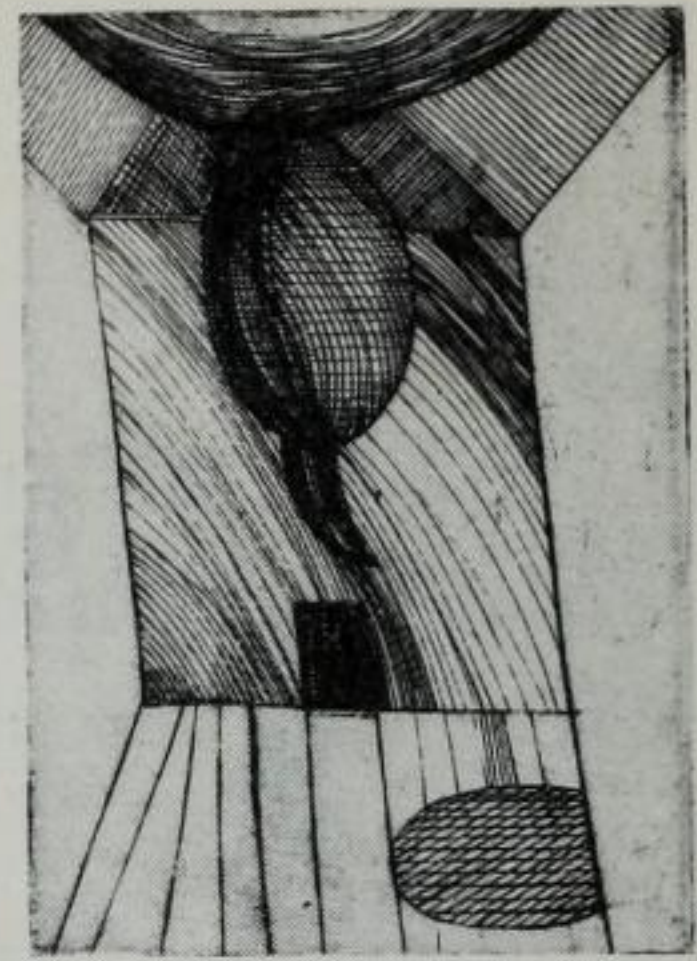


Plate 8

Once an American man who had been in the army for three years became sick in one ear.

His middle ear became almost hard.

Through the bone of the skull back of the said ear a passage was bored.

From then on he heard the voice of his friend twice, first in a high pitch and then in a low pitch.

Later on the middle ear grew completely hard and he became cut off from part of the world.



Plate 9

Once there was the mother of a son. She loved him with a complete devotion.

And she protected him because she knew how sad and wicked this world is.

He was of a quiet nature and rather intelligent but he was not interested in being loved or protected because he was interested in something else.

Consequently at an early age he slammed the door and never came back.

Later on she died but he did not know it.



* * *

The whole trend of this book [*He Disappeared into Complete Silence*] is about the lowering of self-esteem. It is a descent . . . a descent into depression. But I believe in resurrection in the morning. This is a withdrawal, but it is temporary. You lose your self-esteem, but you pull yourself up again. This is about survival . . . about the will to survive. . . . I love language. I have fun with the English language because of the loving permissiveness of my family.

When inspiration would come I would write one [a parable such as *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, *The Puritan* (1947/90), or *She Lost It* (1947/92)]. I didn't do them all at once. . . . You can stand anything if you write it down. You must do it to get hold of yourself. When space is limited, or when you have to stay with a child, you always have recourse to writing. All you need is a pen and paper. But you must redirect your concentration. . . . Words put in connection can open up new relations . . . a new view of things.

[Comment by the artist first published in 1994 by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois* by Deborah Wye and Carol Smith, p. 72.]

* * *

The following lines were written by the artist for *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* but not included in the published print portfolio: "Sorry not to have answered your note sooner. You ask for advice, dear; I am afraid you overestimate me. I do not feel qualified to give you any—however, you expressed in the past a wish to die and if your wish has remained unchanged I will be glad to help you."

She Lost It

Parable written in 1947 in the artist's daybook and in 1992 screenprinted by Bourgeois onto a silk scarf and published in a limited edition by The Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia. This text was subsequently printed onto a 178-foot cotton cheesecloth banner used by the artist in a performance on 5 December 1992 at The Fabric Workshop on the occasion of its Fifteenth Anniversary Benefit, which honored Bourgeois and Anne d'Harnoncourt, director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. During this performance, the banner, completely wrapped around one person (Robert Storr), was slowly unwrapped and rewrapped around a man and a woman in embrace. During the unwrapping, the text on the banner could be read by the audience. The performance began with a magician followed by a slide screening of the plates from *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, accompanied by an oral reading of the nine parables from that book/portfolio.

A MAN
AND A WOMAN
LIVED TOGETHER.
ON ONE EVENING HE DID NOT COME BACK
FROM WORK AND SHE WAITED.
SHE KEPT ON WAITING AND SHE GREW
LITTLER AND LITTLER.
LATER A NEIGHBOR STOPPED BY OUT OF FRIENDSHIP
AND THERE HE FOUND HER IN THE ARMCHAIR
THE SIZE OF A PEA.



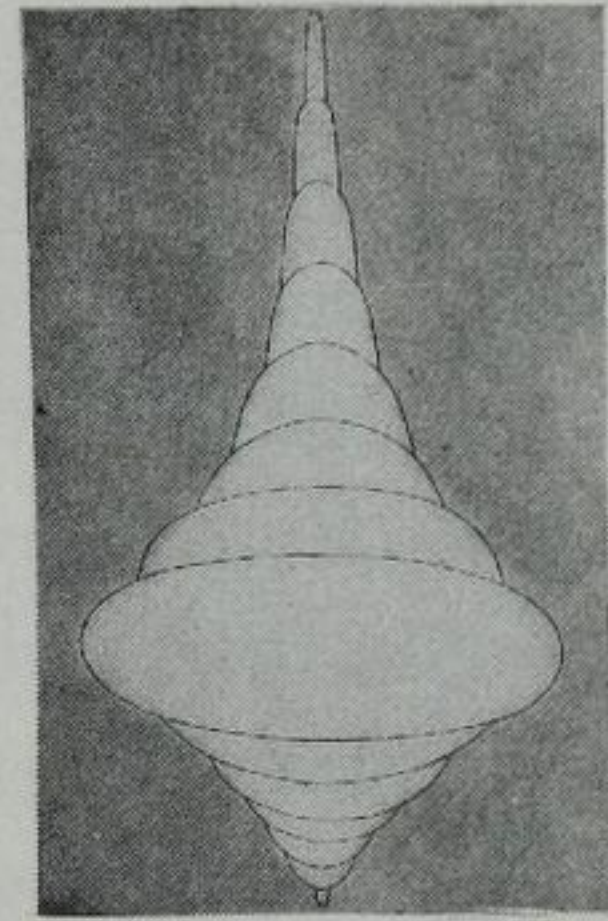
She Lost It, 12 May 1992, performance at The Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia.

The Puritan

This text, written in 1947 and based on Alfred H. Barr, Jr., then Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was first published in 1990 by Osiris Editions, New York, in a limited edition with eight engravings.

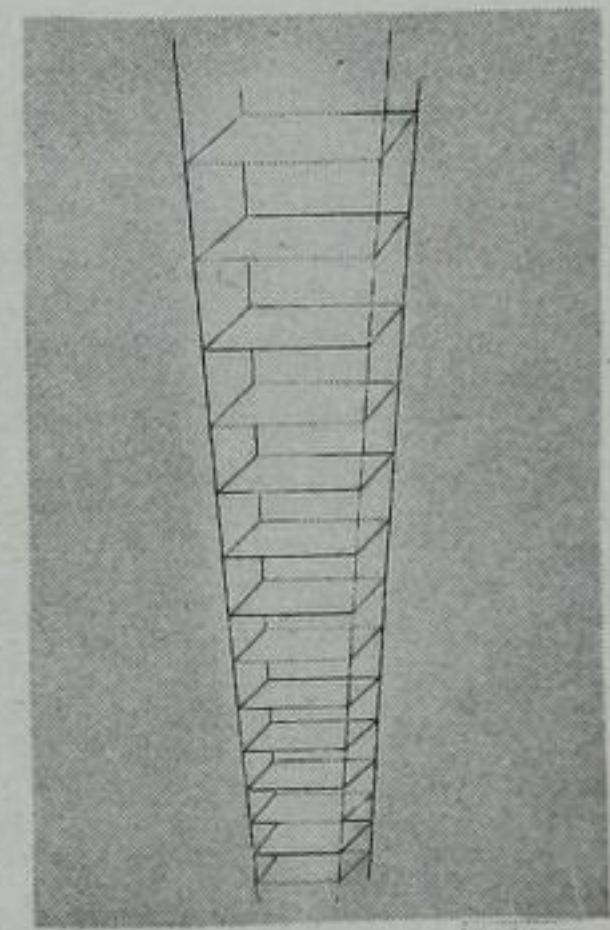
I.

Do you know the New York sky? You should, it is supposed to be known. It is outstanding. It is a serious thing. Can you remember the Paris sky? How unreliable, most of the time gray, often warm and damp, never quite perfect, indulging in clouds and shades; rain, breeze, and sun sometimes managing to appear together. But the New York sky is blue, utterly blue. The light is white, a glorying white and the air is strong and it is healthy too. There is no foolishness about that sky. It is a beautiful thing. It is pure.



II.

There was a street in New York and it was full of the New York sky. It spread over it like a blue aluminum sheet. At that particular place I know why the sky was so blue, so completely himself. Because right under him the most formidable building in the world was standing up. In that street, close to the sky and close to that building, there was a house. The sky, the building, and the house knew each other and approved of each other.



III.

This was not a living in structure. It was a working in one. There was efficiency, everyone looked clean, lots of type writing machines and type writing girls, but not the usual ones. These were earning their living with refined people and they knew it. You could see that in their postures and noises.

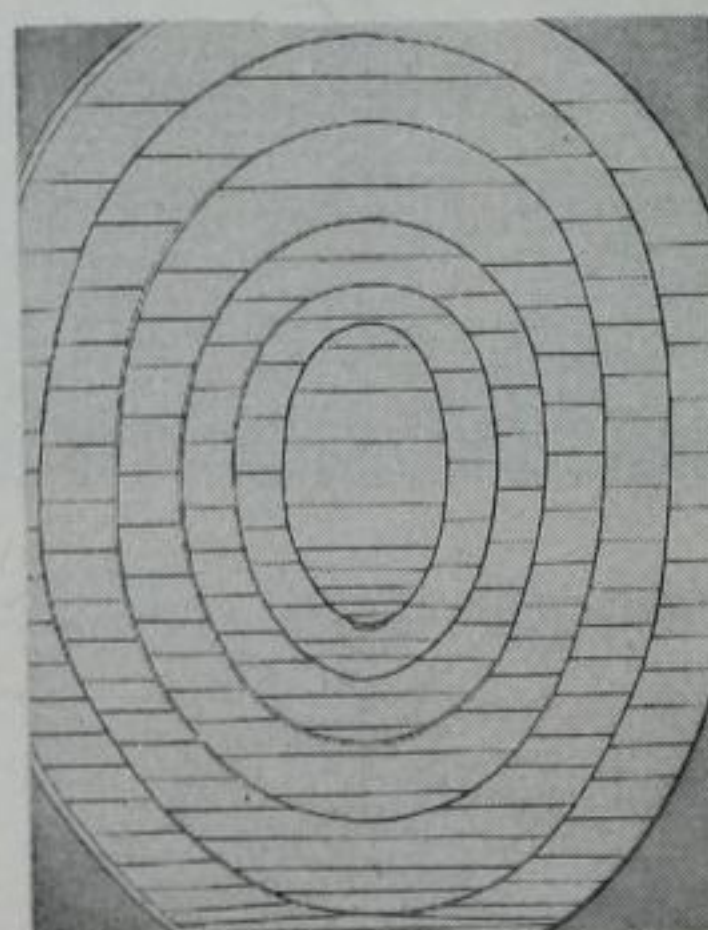
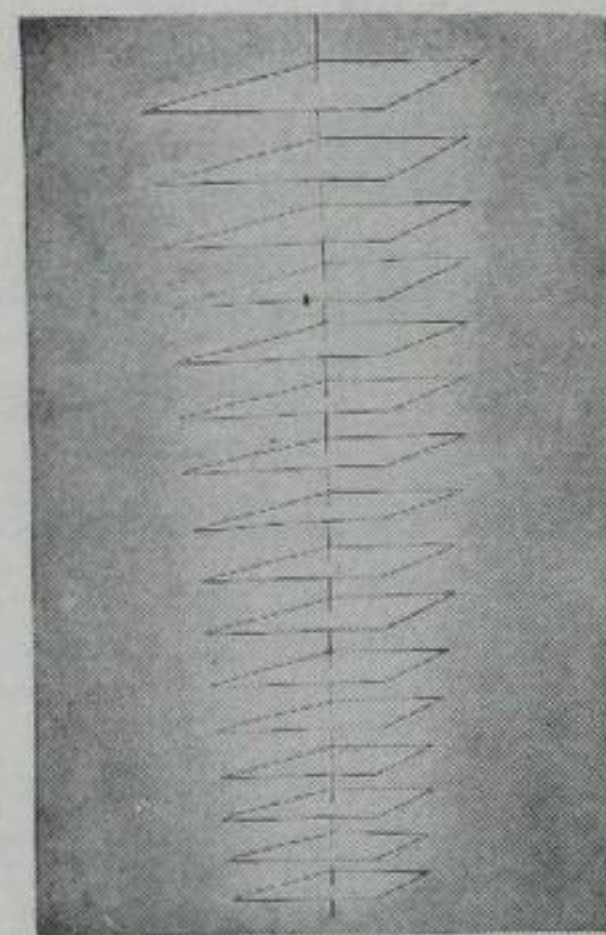
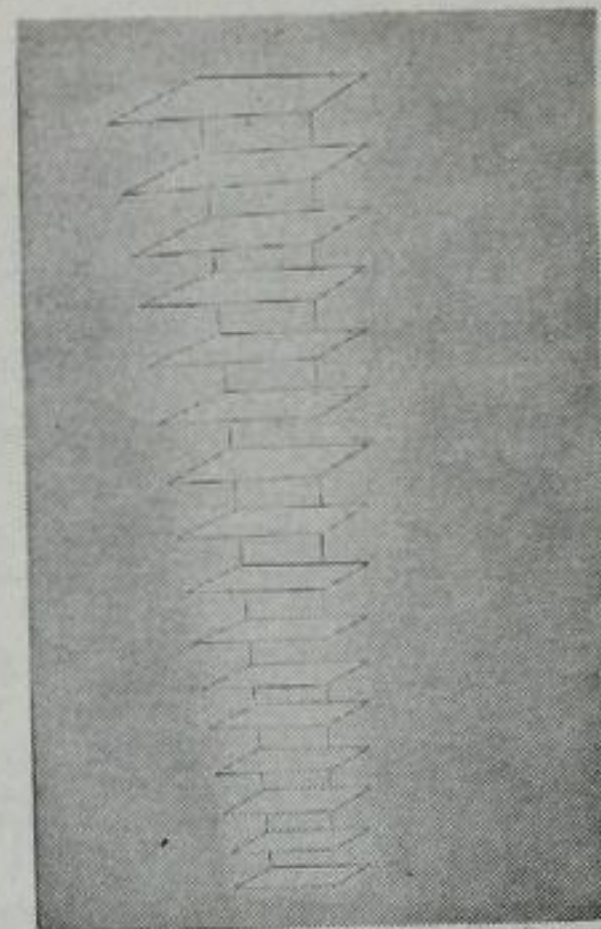
IV.

In this structure there was a man, there always is, so there was and he was very fine. He belonged to the place the way the place belonged to him. Everyone there was very fond of him and looked up to him. He accepted this because apart from being civilized he was kind. There was a definite, well-organized, successful and ambitiously satisfied feeling about the place.

V.

The trouble came when one of the doors was left open and apparently someone came in. Maybe it was an oversight or a mistake but I doubt it because this was not in the style of that place, nor in the character of the man. We might assume the door was left open almost on purpose, as a half invitation to someone passing by to come in for fun.

Well she did, she came in, though she had no taste for fun. She saw him, she saw that he was good and of course she loved him.



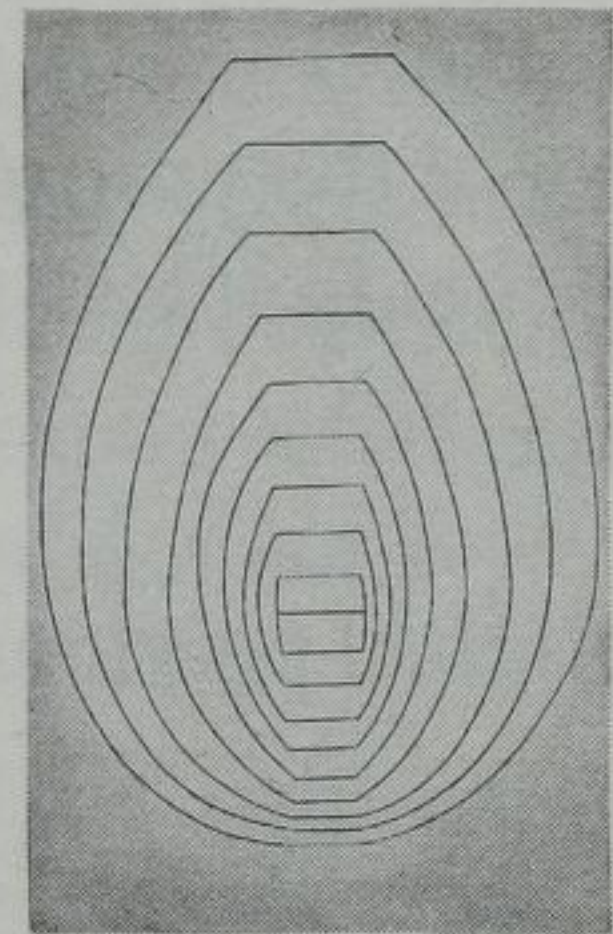
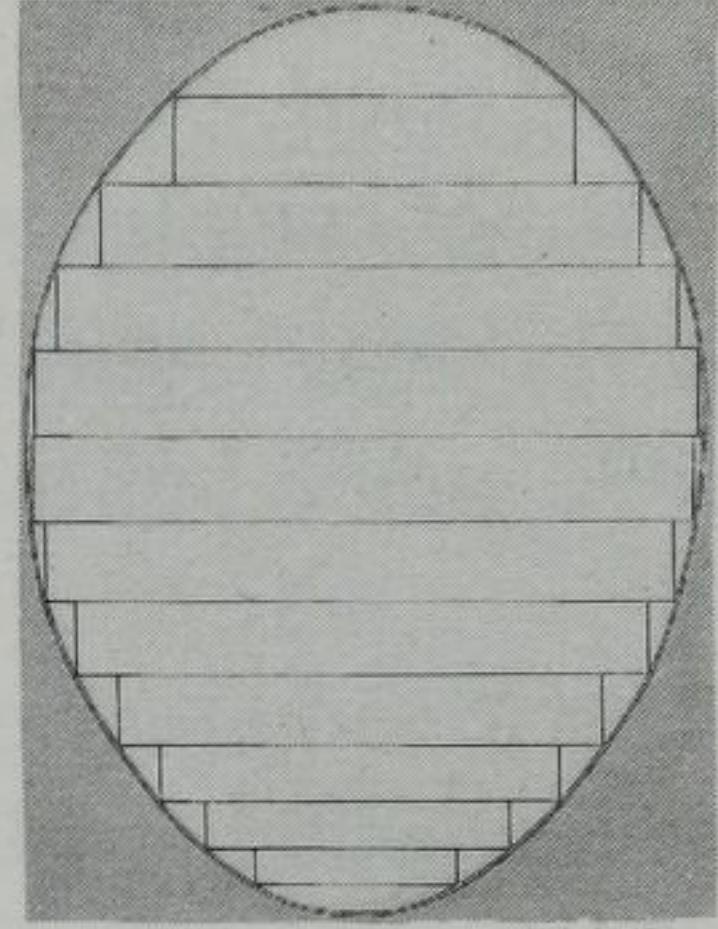
VI.

What happened next is that before they knew it something got between them. The wisdom of nations wants that nothing can keep apart people who love each other. Not even a million armed men packed around that house could have kept them together. There was still to try to help them such things as a common friend, a sheet of paper, and the telephone, don't forget. They saw each other sometimes too; and the eyes of someone you understand can tell you more than four Western Union telegrams.

But there it was. There was a snap, and there was silence. First an expecting silence, and then the silence of the completely dead.

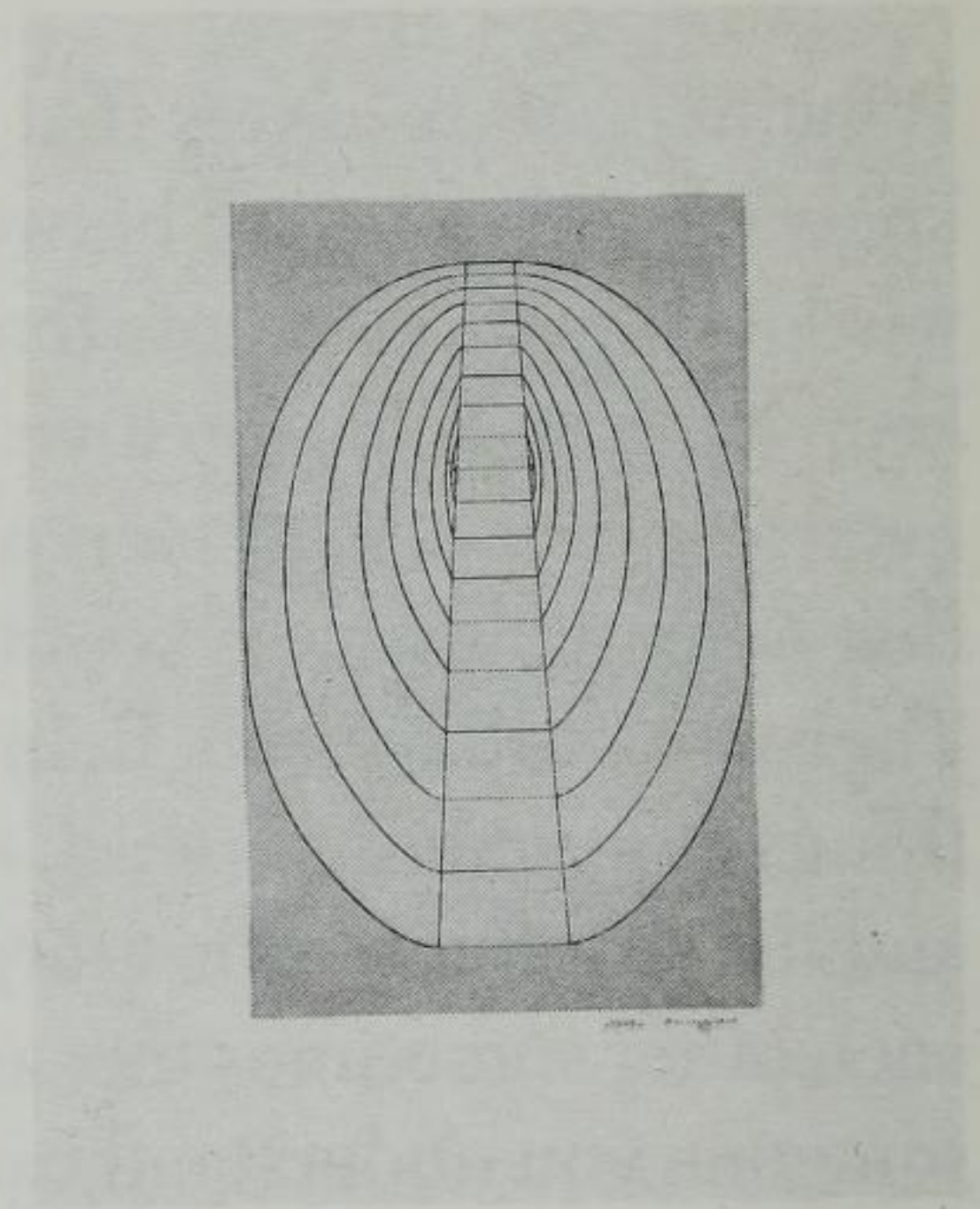
VII.

I told that story to my neighbor who is a resourceful man, and he assured me that some men are afraid of soldiers around their house. That besides, telephones can be tapped and typewriters have ears. Even a sheet of paper frail as it is can be frightening. But I told my neighbor he was wrong because that man was afraid of nothing, that he was just, and because of this should have had nothing to fear.



VIII.

Later on he died right in his factory of refinement. Everyone worth talking about cried and cried. Of course no one could see his soul, not even his wife. But they said that his body was dry and they think he was a puritan.



Postscript, 1990:

If you have a secret, you become afraid.
You are paralyzed by your desires, and are
in terror of the desires still to be uncovered.
The demands of love are too great, and you withdraw.

Original previously unpublished postscript, 1990:

I wrote *the puritan* in 1947.
It's the story of someone so
frightened by his love that he
withdraws. He's simply incapable.

We destroy the very thing
we most desire. It's a tragic
mystery. The subject still interests
me today.

If you have a secret, you become
afraid. You become afraid of
yourself, and what you might
want, of wanting the wrong thing,
even afraid of love.

* * *

With *The Puritan* I analyzed an episode forty years after it happened. I could see things from a distance . . . I put it on a grid. Geometry was a tool to understanding . . . it was a pleasure . . . there was order. Instead of feeling a person drowning, I considered the situation objectively, scientifically, not emotionally. I was interested not in anxiety, but in perspective, in seeing things from different points of view. Looking and seeing . . . you look as you intend to look . . . you see what you can.

There is Euclidean geometry, but there are also a number of other geometries so you can have a way out from the rigidity of the Euclidean towards freedom. The Euclidean is comforting because nothing can go wrong . . . but it is not the geometry of pleasure. To survive you must have *different* routines . . . *different* geometries. But geometry is a tool . . . only a tool. It is a means, not an end.

All these plates are different. These are optical illusions . . . all have more than one meaning. You have one reality and I have another reality. How much liberty will the geometry take . . . how much will you take? What are the limits before it snaps? There is always the fear of losing consciousness of one's limits. . . . But the optical illusions are comforting . . . they have a measure of secrecy . . . people don't know what you are talking about. They force you to adjust your vision. You can not be so rigid . . . you must adjust to the picture.

[Comments by the artist on *The Puritan* first published in 1994 by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois* by Deborah Wye and Carol Smith, p. 191.]

* * *

On 28 May 1989 Bourgeois sent the following letter to the editor of the *New York Times*: "Reading the review of Alice Goldfarb Marquis's biography of Alfred Barr (30 April), I noticed the following remark by Louis Auchincloss: 'Ms. Marquis . . . implies that [Barr] had little interest in either sex.' I beg to differ—let me assure you, he was *not* indifferent (that is an insult), only repressed. Louise Bourgeois, New York."

Select Diary Notes 1949–1954

Previously unpublished.

22 February 1949

Washington's birthday.

Self-destruction under the form of destruction of my marriage—

The etiology of hysteria by Freud—

Hysterical symptoms can always be traced to repressed sexual memories usually having occurred (experiences).

1. The memories may become conscious much later, at puberty—My father walking around in his nightshirt holding his genitals.

2. The dog Pyrame being buried in the garden—mound—

6–7 May 1950

You worry about everything that you do.

You look away from the things that are hard to do.

You are always making excuses for yourself.

You think you are always right.

You lack faith in yourself.

You cannot see the other person's point-of-view.

You avoid people, live too much within yourself.

You have no aim in life.

You lack outside interest.

You have fits of temper.

You go around with a chip on your shoulder.

You neglect physical health, appearance.

You are not tolerant and have no control of your emotions.

You cannot form friendship.

You are unable to laugh at a situation or at yourself—

Artists are not interested in their colleagues' work, they are interested in their technique—

Feelings expressed in form or values—formal qualities.

My interest in this gives it a pattern.

The technique is a choice, free, how is it that everyone is not an artist?

7 September 1950

Everything pays divided except dreaming—dreaming softens you and makes unfit for daily work. It is difficult to be an artist and close the door to dreams.

14 September 1950

Exile or alienation is a necessary (tho' not sufficient) condition of work.

21–22 September 1950*

dimanche lent

figure attendant

gait of ascending figure

hasteless gait

figure un attendance

figure looking at skywriting

steps of a garden

statue to be placed above eye level

emotional significance of architectural forms—

statue to be placed near a body of water

figure portant un objet

figure portant un pain—

les figurants

figure to be placed in front of a row of trees—boxwoods

cariatides—figure supportant sa maison

figure dans une maison

figure contre une maison

figure endormie

figure walking in a room
figure standing in a room
figure alone in a room
statue between two columns

*This list relates to the titles of sculptures in the artist's exhibition at the Peridot Gallery, New York, October 1950 (see illustration of announcement card on p. 176).

22–23 November 1950

In the attic I found the records that we used to play in my youth:

1. *Aïda* (Verdi) Belleste Aïda
Siguro (Reyer) Esprits Gardien
2. *Roméo et Juliette* (Gounod) Scène du tombeau
Le Mage (Massenet) Grand air
3. *Faust* (Gounod) Air des bijoux; Ballade du roi de Thule
4. *Le grand mogol* (Audran) Air du charlatan
Surcouf (Planquette) C'est connu dans Saint Malo
5. Mignonne (G. Rollé) Scottish
Gage d'amour (Marie) Scottish
6. Le Tringant (Paris) marche
Plume au vent (Turine) marche
7. Les cloches de Corneville (Chanson des cloches) couplets
Les cloches de Corneville (couplets)
8. Marche Richard Wallace (Sellenick)
Le Lion de Flandre? (Moeremans) pas redouble!
9. L'Attaque du moulin
Roméo et Juliette (Gounod) "Benédiction"

10. La Voix des chênes Goublier
Le Credo du paysan Goublier
11. *Le Chalet* (Adam 1eme partie)
Carmen (Bizet air de toréador)
12. La Chanson des blés d'or (Doria)
Je veux la voir (Fontapied)
13. Barcarolle sicilienne (St. Servan)
Reviens (Fragson) valse
14. *Le pré aux clerics* (Herold) Le rendez-vous de noble compagnie
"Mignon" (Thomas) Romance
15. Pas de quatre (Meyerlutz)
Dans le Sud (Myddêitisme)—danse americaine
16. Chansons d'hiver (St. Servan)
Au pied du drapeau (St. Servan)

Lycée Hoche, Versailles, 5 February 1951

[LB and her family returned to live in France for a few months in 1951.] I wait for Robert in the Café de la Justice. Write postcards to Jean-Louis and Alain in the Lycée. I wait for Robert while he mails the letters. Look at Versailles which I love every time I see it. I wait in the *cour du Louvre* before going to the Cabinets des Estampes with Robert. To take the time to look and analyze the city or a building or an object is of the same nature as owning it, except that ownership is not a satisfactory feeling—but understanding is a form of complete assimilation. To really work and produce, there must be integration of your work in your life, or the integration of your life in your work. As far as our year of work is concerned, we should live right next to Montparnasse and the Bibliotheque Nationale.

7 October 1951

McDonald, Dwight. Ask him about the significance of conformism (religions in the work of artists). Wherever there is power (church) and respectability, there is danger for the artist.

27 December 1951

Lionel Abels. Philosophy of time: historical time versus the duration of time. The shock element is gone. What is left if not history? It does not create any reverberations in you therefore it doesn't exist. It becomes only history.

6 January 1953

Rothko works big and miniature.

What does bigness express?

How long does it last?

Recurrent permanent temporary

Dignity related to self-respect

is expressed in personal appearance,
day to day, and emotional stability ...

Why do some people want to destroy your dignity?

How do they do it?

Are all works of art produced in a whim or fit of rage?

Is creation sporadic, does it have to be?

Susceptibility is the appearance and the reverse of dignity.

10 March 1953

The eyes of the animals in the night are those of L.

The eyes of the Tiger are the color of her skin.

12 March 1953

Depression is connected with my father in the analytical situation—the rage is connected with my mother—sugar got me out of depression into rage—a heavy boat, charged with emotions, even conflicting emotions, is difficult to steer right. Danger of crashing ahead.

Tension with neck ache, revolt, work, rage—no sleep.

Depression—no pain—no work—no fight—no hope—no interest in work or appearance.

17 January 1954

Have new materials brought about new shapes or is it the desire for new shapes that have created new technical solutions?

Letter to Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

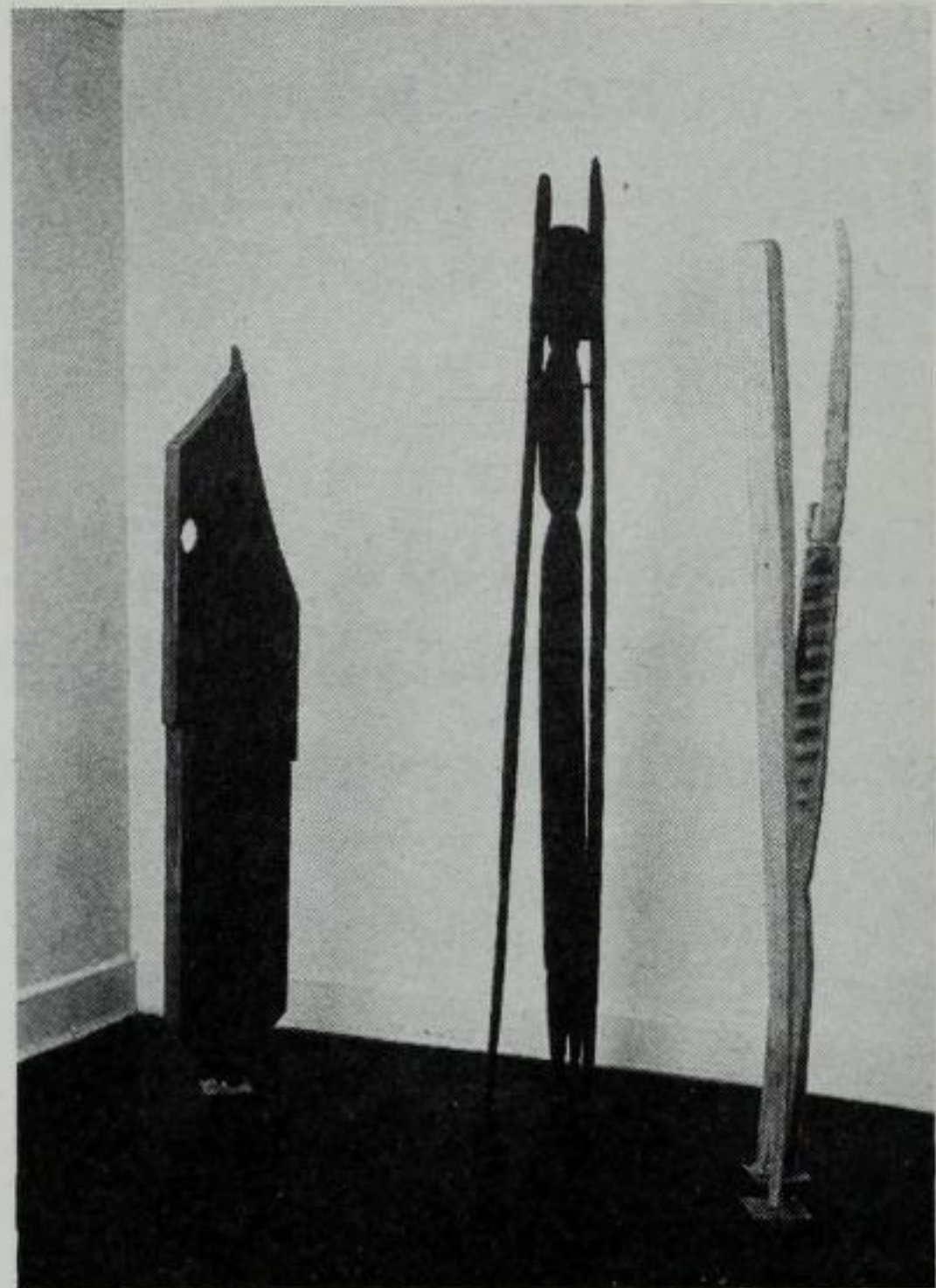
1951, following Barr's purchase for the Museum of Modern Art, New York, of the artist's sculpture, *Sleeping Figure* (1950), which was seen by Barr and first exhibited in 1950 at the Peridot Gallery, New York.

Dear Alfred,

Some day I have to tell you about the missing pieces of the *figure endormie*. If you look closely at the shoulders of the figure you will see two holes that go through the thinness of the wings. They are made for a different position of the arms when the figure is not endormie any more. At that time the arms are not closed to protect the body, by facing the spectator, leaving the body free & at rest. The feeling of rest is given by the unbroken parallelism of the three volumes (*corps & bras*) in the new position.

However two new shapes of wood have to be placed as shown on the drawing.

The owner of the figure should be able to do that himself. Besides there are not two shoulders but two sets of shoulders one gay and one sad. (However I am not quite sure about the plasticity of the gay one, so I will send you only the serious one.) The statue should be in working order when delivered (and I will see to it that it is, and that no piece is missing) after this it is the role of the owner to take care of it by using all its possibilities such as: The statue should be made to function in different surroundings, sometimes indoors sometime outdoors, sometimes in a dark space, sometimes in direct or indirect or grazing light, sometimes on a crowded floor some-



Sleeping Figure (center), 1950, wood, 187.9 cm high, photographed in 1950 by Aaron Siskind during the artist's solo exhibition at the Peridot Gallery, New York. Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

times in solitude, sometimes standing, sometimes resting horizontally on two brackets. I would not let anyone but the artist venture to place the statue in any angle position but it could be done if the artist is not held responsible.

Also pieces should be added or placed aside according to results wanted. In that fashion there would be a more complete enjoyment of the work of art. If there is in the process, damage or breakage the artist could be called upon to repair it, paid a reasonable fee, he should be happy to handle old work of his. But of course he should be mistrusted and watched carefully during the repairing since no artist sees his work today quite the way he saw it yesterday and his impulse will be to "improve" the given piece and sometimes the improvement might reach the point of destruction.

The Genesis of a Work of Art

On 22 April 1950, a panel discussion took place over several days amongst a group of artists, writers, and curators, moderated by Robert Motherwell, the transcript of which was first published in *Modern Artists in America*, no. 1, 1950. On the third day of the discussion, Motherwell opened with the following remarks before reading aloud questions written by the artists. Motherwell: "The questions we all have written down fall into three categories, though they overlap. One is a series of questions that are historical, which Grippe, Ernst, Hare, Reinhardt, Barr, and Gottlieb ask; the largest number of questions are strictly esthetic questions, about the process of creation and about the quality of creative works—the questions of Ferber, Hare, Baziotes, Lippold, Smith, Sterne, Hoffman, Biala, Lassaw, and Bourgeois. Five people, Pousette-Dart, Lipton, Tomlin, Newman, and Brooks, have asked an identical question: a question of community—what is it that binds us together (if there is something that binds us together)? Would you like me to read all the questions, either anonymously or signed?" The artists unanimously agreed to have them read aloud by Motherwell attributed to the author of the question. The following is the question proposed by Louise Bourgeois.

The Genesis of Work of Art; or in what circumstance is a work of art born:

1. *Definition* of the term "genesis"—process of creation. Is it the process of being born or the process of giving birth?

2. What *causes* the work of art to be born? What is the primary impulse? What makes the artist work? Is it to escape from depression (filling a void)? Is it to record confidence or pleasure? Is it to understand and solve a formal problem and reorder the world?

3. What conditions the birth and growth of the work of art?

(a) Before the act of creation:

Sociological aspect (surroundings and milieu).

Taine ato theory of the milieu.

Personal aspect.

(b) During the process of creation:

Experience undergone while the work is being done.

Resistance of the medium.

Properties of the medium.

Letter to Erick Hawkins

In December 1951 and January 1952, Bourgeois collaborated with dancer/choreographer Hawkins (husband of Martha Graham) and composer Wallingford Riegger, and designed sculptural props for *The Bridegroom of the Moon*, part of a program of new dances performed at the Hunter Playhouse, New York, on 19 January 1952.

Dear Erick Hawkins,

Just a word to say that I have started working for you. Things are going to go ahead—I have found a theater where I can see in flesh and bone (so to speak) and real size what I am drawing. Thanks for the poem. I like it. Are you set on your opening date? Answer this please (about the date). You mention the show at the museum and I am very touched by your offer of protesting against my not being there. The unusual part of it is that the museum [Museum of Modern Art, New York] bought the best piece of my show that you visited [Peridot Gallery, 1950] called *Figure Endormie* [*Sleeping Figure* (1950)], a tall black piece. Because your name as an artist carries weight and also to show the museum that sometimes artists can stand together and even help each other, and also because I believe in protest, I would be grateful to you if you did protest to the director of that special abstract show the fact that my work is not represented.

It is only a matter of principle and I do not know what value you place on principles. In art since we have little to work with except talent and a vision we want to put across, the question of values and choices to make becomes worth defending. Go and see the *Figure Endormie*. I hear it is being shown now in the new acquisitions show. Tell me about the music for the ballet, what instruments are included? Where will the musicians be? I wish I could hear it.

Technical letter will follow with sketches.

My very best; thanks for the poem again.

Louise Bourgeois

An Artist's Words

First published in 1954 by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in *Design Quarterly*, no. 30, p. 18.

An artist's words are always to be taken cautiously. The finished work is often a stranger to, and sometimes very much at odds with what the artist felt or wished to express when he began. At best the artist does what he can, rather than what he wants to do. After the battle is over and the damage faced up to, the result may be surprisingly dull—but sometimes it is surprisingly interesting. The mountain brought forth a mouse, but the bee will create a miracle of beauty and order. Asked to enlighten us on their creative process, both would be embarrassed, and probably uninterested. The artist who discusses the so-called meaning of his work is usually describing a literary side-issue. The core of his original impulse is to be found, if at all, in the work itself.

Just the same, the artist must say what he feels: My work grows from the duel between the isolated individual and the shared awareness of the group. At first I made single figures without any freedom at all; blind houses without any openings, any relation to the outside world. Later, tiny windows started to appear. And then I began to develop an interest in the relationship between two figures. The figures of this phase are turned in on themselves, but they try to be together even though they may not succeed in reaching each other.

Gradually the relations between the figures I made became freer and more subtle, and now I see my works as groups of objects relating to each other. Although ultimately each can and does stand alone, the figures can be grouped in various ways and fashions, and each time the tension of their relations makes for a different formal arrangement. For this reason the figures are placed in the ground the way people would place themselves in the street to talk to each other. And this is why they grow from a single point—a minimum base of immobility which suggests an always possible change.

In my most recent work these relations become clearer and more intimate. Now the single work has its own complex of parts, each of which is similar, yet different from the others. But there is still the feeling with which I began—the drama of one among many.

The look of my figures is abstract, and to the spectator they may not appear to be figures at all. They are the expression, in abstract terms, of emotions and states of awareness. Eighteenth-century painters made “conversation pieces”; my sculptures might be called “confrontation pieces.”

Autobiographical Notes

Previously unpublished notes from the early 1960s relating to an application for graduate studies in fine art at New York University towards securing a teaching degree.

I was born in Paris, France, and lived there until my marriage in 1938. My husband being an American teacher, I have since then lived in New York.

Both my parents were French and made their living as restorers of antique tapestries, and I grew up deeply interested in art and the history of art. They were successful in a moderate way, and we—my parents, my sister, my brother and myself—lived in a spacious house outside of Paris. The choice of our residence was dictated by the chemical qualities of the Bièvre River, which were useful and even necessary for the dyeing of the wools we used in our tapestries. (For the same reason the Gobelins' factories had been built nearer Paris on the same river.)

I went to school at the Lycée Fénelon in Paris from kindergarten until, after getting my degree, I entered the Sorbonne—that is, twelve years in a school of long tradition and high scholastic standing.

My mother was of delicate health and she considered that I ought to become established in her profession as soon as possible. Very early she acquainted me with the problems of drawing and color and the various historical styles of old tapestries. There were also the chemical problems

of finding unfading dyes that my mother thought I should work on further.

For these reasons my parents took me out of school when I was fifteen (two years before the "*Bachot*" degree) even though I was the honor student of the year. They decided I needed more intensive professional training, so I left the Lycée and worked both at home in the restoring and weaving ateliers, and in classes in Paris preparing for matriculation at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

My *Baccalauréat* degree was in philosophy, and the courses leading to it were divided among ethics, logic and psychology. An empirical approach was employed in both logic and psychology. Logic was concerned with the methods through which knowledge is acquired rather than with abstract theory. Psychology emphasized the history of experimental psychology and the study of sensations from the point of the American pragmatists.

I decided to expand my previous interest in the history of practice of art.

On the one hand I continued at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts (which is a graduate professional school) and was received there and worked in the atelier of Monsieur d'Espagnat. On the other I also studied the history of art at the Ecole du Louvre, which prepares for jobs at the Louvre Museum. After completion of this course I became a docent at the Louvre and was working there in 1938 when I met my future husband, who was then preparing his doctorate in the history of art. He is now associate professor of art at Queens College. I came to live in New York in September 1938.

In New York I found a flourishing artistic milieu. In this environment I became anxious to establish a reputation as an artist.

I have had five one-man [*sic*] shows in New York and one in Chicago, my work is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art and in several private collections and has been published in books on contemporary art. I mention all this because with my family it has been the core of interest until now, and because it is partly on the basis of my experience and position as an artist that I now wish to orient my studies. In recent

years, thinking about my own problems as an artist, and discussing them with other artists, I have become more and more interested in understanding the psychology of art, and it is in this direction that I now wish to resume my formal academic training.

* * *

I have been led from an understanding of creative work derived from an observation of the processes of my own work and from discussion with my fellow artists to a wider interest in the psychological and sociological basis of the arts.

In the last two years I have done considerable reading in the psychology of the arts. I would now like to add a formal training in psychology to the insight into the interpretation of visual forms given me by my personal experience of the last fifteen years.

My purpose in undertaking these courses is therefore a double one:

1. To enrich and deepen my own future artistic production.
2. To acquire the necessary theoretical and experimental foundations so that I will be able to find a useful position in the field of diagnostic testing and remedial care of children.

Select Diary Notes 1960–1979

Previously unpublished.

Early 1960s

I was the wonderful little girl of two wonderful *Papa et Maman*. We were the three of us in a hostile world—then we traveled during the war, my mother and I. To follow my father. She would get quite hysterical when she had no letter from him (daily letter). We had our photo taken, the three of us, when he was taken (wounded) to the hospital. She got hysterical because Les Dames de la Croix Rouge in Chartres thought he was a poor dear and so handsome and quite weak.

Later they complained to their little girl about the jungle (the law of the jungle)—friends try to get things from you. Interest La Rochefoucauld *et* La Fontaine.

Solace and escape.

5 January 1960

Aggressiveness and guilt—back and forth—rather, rage and guilt—
Descending progression where the rage against the other turns itself on me.

6 January 1966

I want here and now. Every minute of the day, intensity of the will. Why?

29 January 1966

Refusal to say what I want, so of course I am furious—nobody can guess it or is interested. I want to be pretty, nice, popular, have friends for dinner, be successful as a sculptor, push myself like everyone else, but above everything else be liked. I was ashamed in the past of wanting what I wanted. How do you know—well I *still* am.

1. Pierre [the artist's brother], or even Henriette [the artist's sister], did not get it.

2. I could not tell my parents that I would have liked Papa to stay

with us alone, more, not show off for the rest of the family—Jean and Madeleine.

3. Get more attention, no so much showing off.

8 August 1972

The importance of an urgent action. The sense of importance in the object and urgency in the subject.

28 January 1973

It is not possible to function, to learn, to connect, to make progress, or even to hear in a climate of fear. Fear can be repressed, the psychology of the soldier. Fear can be repressed as excitement. Fear can be spotted like gold in the ground. Dig them out, and make them help you. Fears make the world go round.

9 March 1973

It is a compulsion of a moral impertive to think out loud: If I say everything about myself, everything will be right. It is a terror of not being loved.

24 July 1973

I did not deserve to be loved so that I turned people against me. I did not deserve to be lovable; to be lovable means to be killed, to be fucked means to be killed. I thought they were killing each other.

[1997 comment by the artist on the above note: “I had witnessed the encounter of my sister with a neighbor’s son when he was fondling her. She resisted for the simple reason that she was menstruating—so blood appeared on the scene. I thought he was killing her—the point of view of the young child. My sister was boy crazy.”]

21 January 1974

My father said on 18th Street: “Do you remember how beautiful our past was?” I said: “I do not know what you mean.”

1 April 1974

The search (pushing on) for truth is what has kept me going. The secret of my anxiety. What is it since childhood? It has to do with hostility—what is wrong with me.

20 April 1974

Louise Michel and Rosa Luxembourg were sources of inspiration to my mother, and Zola could do no wrong for my father, grandfather—and Proudhon.

I grew up with socialism, and anti-clericalism, and *manger de curé*. It was familiar and *semblait normal* for artists—to be political seems a matter of course.

16 March 1975

You need a mother. I understand but I refuse to be your mother because I need a mother myself.

23 June 1975

Life today is the present, if you can begin to take it.

What is meant by *the present*:

Hate and terror
of the present
crush it
every minute—
nausea.

sex, my face and body
clothes appearance
Political fights and arguments
laundry
newspaper
cleaning
friends
taxes

Want to protect
the future, plan
scheme about it

The Future
savings
real estate
art work
Prepare, be ready
fear to be late!

Want to relive my
past. I secure my
present with a
guarantee that I will
never forget it.

The Past
Antony
174 Boulevard St. Germain
Choisy
Aubusson
Do not forget

23 February 1979

The ransom of fantasies is that they influence your thinking and your expectations. In other words, they have a momentum and grow.

On the Creative Process

Previously unpublished notes, mid 1960s.

There is a long lapse between the first creative vision and the final result; often it is a matter of years. For instance, hollow forms appeared first in my work as details, and then grew in importance until their consciousness was crystallized by a visit to the Lascaux caves with their visible manifestation of an enveloping negative form, produced by the torrent of water that has left its waves upon the ceiling: my underlying preoccupation had been constant, but it had taken me seven years to develop and give it final shape.

There has been a similar gradual development from rigidity to pliability. When I was asked to give a fourth side to the flat back of a statue called *Spring*, which had been conceived as a stiff caryatid, I found it impossible to do: rigidity then seemed essential. Today it seems futile and has vanished. In the past my work fought, sustained and challenged; my new work, in which modeling and building up has replaced hacking away, can roll and wear out, and settle down to a peaceful existence.

Though the titles of many of my pieces refer to nature or the human figure, they are not abstractions in the usual sense. Rather they arise out of a state of awareness provoked by a revealed and fleeting vision of nature. Its very elusiveness gave me the desire to fix it, for fear of not finding it again. If the work holds any magic I consider it successful. This personal vision which some people say the artist wants to impose on others, in fact only becomes clear to the artist himself from the finished work. When he sees it, he knows he has finished his work.

Form

Previously unpublished notes for a lecture, late 1960s.

Restif de la Bretonne

Colette, Willy

Apollinaire, Guillaume

Breton, André

Céline

Artaud, Antonin

Mailer, Norman

Form: *la vie des hommes*, the visual abstract, the language of forms, or “the style is the man,” “the style is of today.”

Abstracted, the forms if correct should have a direct impact even unconscious.

The work has to stand by itself and it is the form that will guarantee its survival.

Vocabulary is how we communicate, find ways to stimulate through signs and symbols, directed at our five senses.

The forms have a language understood by a few. You cannot understand erotic forms if you are completely innocent and a symbol is a symbol only if what it stands for is known. The standing for is almost an equating but rather an analogy. Symbols can be literal and literary as in Surrealism or they can be suggestive as in abstract art. The rhythm then will be suggestive: slow, rapid, sudden, repetitious, with different intervals and intensities. To understand the language or vocabulary of a given artist, in a non-descriptive mode, there must be on the part of the spectator an attentive and receptive attitude with deference, endurance, and patience, and if I am not readily understood I do not mind—as time goes by people will see new things in the work—things that the artist did not put there or did not know he had put there—the successive analogies or associations of subjects to symbols will be read and reinterpreted—e.g. the oozing out of milk

(mother) water (spring in mother earth)—saliva in snails—lava in volcano—creates an ambivalence of feelings that goes from pleasure to fear.

The work should stand by itself—without explanation after it leaves the studio the piece begins a life of its own for better or for worse—the intention of the maker does not matter anymore—the “message” may not be understood or forgotten. The artist may be long dead and the work goes on along its way.

As time goes by people will see in it things that we did not put there, did not intend to put there or did not know we put there and yet are there (that is the problem of the degree of planning an artist controls).

For instance those four sculptures shown on the screen are shown as “erotic” art—I respect what classification they have given (put in) but I do not think of them as such. I do not plan to be erotic and doubt if I am but if when you come in their presence the esthetic shoe is an erotic one—who am I to tell you it was not so?

Content is a concern with the human body, its aspect, its changes, transformations, what it needs, wants and feels—its functions.

What it perceives and undergoes passively, what it performs.

What it feels and what protects it—its habitat.

All these states of being, perceiving, and doing are expressed by processes that are familiar to us and that have to do with the treatment of materials, pouring, flowing, dripping, oozing out, setting, hardening, coagulating, thawing, expanding, contracting, and the voluntary aspects such as slipping away, advancing, collecting, letting go—

Pornography has the same content as eroticism: without being art it is completely literal and over-explicit—if not obvious it leaves nothing to be discovered.

The content is today the erotic message—everything that takes place as a result of the presence of two people. Pleasure, pain, survival, in public or in private, in a real or imaginary world.

Brief Account of Career

Previously unpublished, c. 1965.

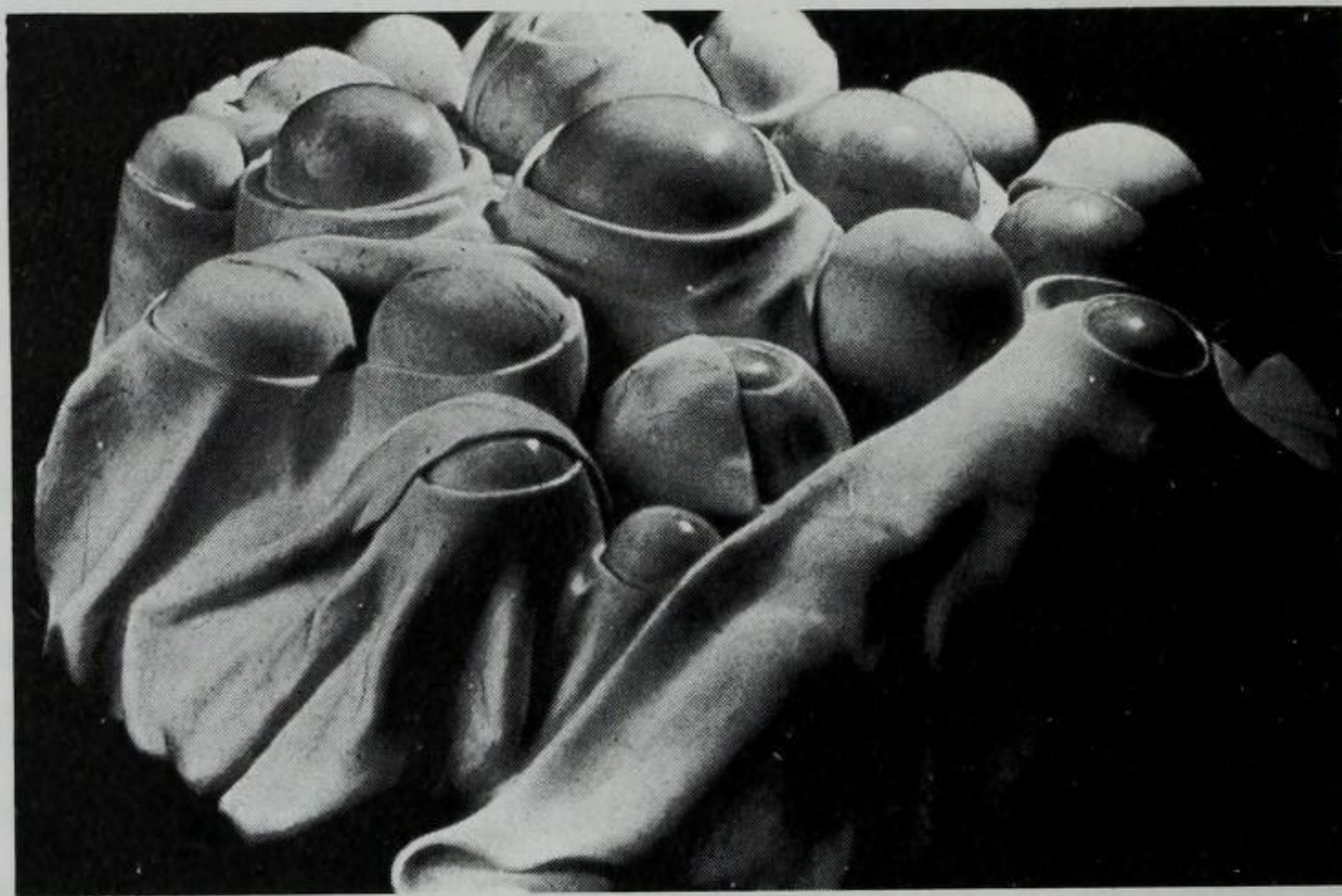
My first mature personal work (1945–51) was direct wood-carving, executed at life-size scale. The forms were severe and simple, slender and upright, and were painted (mostly black and white), not to get coloristic effects, but just the opposite—to increase the visual unity of each and to avoid any romanticism of materials. These extremely reduced forms, although apparently abstract because they were uncomplicated, were conceived of and functioned as figures, each given a personality by its shape and articulation, and responding to one another. They were life-size in a real space and made to be seen in groups, and they were exhibited in this way in two shows at the Peridot Gallery, 1950 and 1951. These works were among the first “environmental” sculptures (although the word was not used at the time), and their considerable influence upon others has since been written about. This theme of symbolic abstraction through the creation of forms that suggest both the structure of geometry and human individuality has been a consistent preoccupation of my work.

The sculpture of the 1950s continued to be in wood. It too was concerned with the symbolic relation of simple forms, but these forms were now smoother and gentler in their outlines and were brought close together in huddled assemblages anchored to a common base. At that time I wrote of a piece called *One and Others* (1955, Whitney Museum) that its title might be the title of many of them, that I was concerned with the relation of the individual to his surroundings and the wish to translate this concern into simple, elemental compositions and visual structures, always the very opposite of sentimental.

During the last few years, while continuing to work in wood, I have concentrated on plaster, bronze, and now more recently marble. I have continued to make works of fused units and also assemblages. If anything, my forms have become even simpler, but their relationships more complex. There also has been a gradual change from rigidity to pliability, and a

change from upright verticality to spiral forms and structures that open up within an enveloping skin to reveal internal rhythms. In all my work the desire and the tendency (which I believed is achieved in some) is toward discarding the superfluous in order to obtain clear and fundamental relationships whose simple structural rhythms are visually meaningful, and which for this reason convey a symbolic mood.

Through the teaching I have done at Brooklyn and at Pratt, and through my experience with foundry workers in France and Italy, I have become aware of ways in which new materials can relieve the more traditional methods, and by permitting the artist to be both creator and technician allow him to achieve new effects with time-honored materials. To do this in accordance with the aims of my sculpture, which continue to be essentially the same, has been the focus of my most recent efforts.



Cumul I, 1969, marble, 124.5 × 40.6 × 119.4 cm.
Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Program for Work in Sculpture

Previously unpublished text from 1968 written as part of a grant application to continue work abroad.

I wish to continue with the sculpture I have been doing, based on the same underlying concepts, but with a specific program in mind.

As a result of a brief stay in Pietrasanta, Italy, this past year (and following earlier work in France), closely directing the traditionally skilled workers, I know that concepts which I have thus far only been able to make as drawings can now be carried out in sculpture. New materials for molds, glues, etc. make possible a greatly simplified handling of the more traditional materials, and permit a freedom of form that corresponds to ideas for sculpture that I have long had in mind. I will in this way be able to extend and deepen my work through the execution of intricate and subtle structures which will still retain the overall basic simplicity I have always found necessary.

This can be done only in Italy, because only there is close, daily cooperation with skilled workers possible—and also for reasons of cost. Therefore I would plan to divide my time, first making drawings and models in my New York studio, and following this with a minimum of six months, uninterrupted work in the sculpture ateliers of Pietrasanta.

Letter to Albert Elsen

20 May 1968, concerning Elsen's introduction to the catalog for the group exhibition *The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture*, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore (2 December 1969 to 1 February 1970).

Dear Al,

I enclose this note with the photos, and trust that Mrs. Gilfoy will pass it on to you.

The photos are of the two pieces you wanted. That of "Attentive Figures" is a detail (i.e. itself a partial photo). I've used it because I think it is a beautiful photo which catches what I had in mind. It was taken at the time it was first shown at Peridot (1949) and I have just had the prints made from the old negative.

As to my "thoughts" on the partial figure, and also on the erotic, I'll think about it over the summer, and see if I can put some sentences in order. In the meantime, I copy down something I once answered to a similar question:

"I have been told that there is quite a bit of eroticism in my work. Well of course there is, since I am constantly interested in the human body. But I don't feel the eroticism myself. My sculptures please me because they represent a certain harmony and certain emphases, and I wouldn't say my work is erotic, even though this side of it seems obvious to many people."

Meilleures amitiés, et à très bientôt

Louise Bourgeois

William Rubin—Louise Bourgeois: Questions and Answers

Previously unpublished questions asked by Rubin at the time of writing his article on the artist, "Some Reflections Prompted by the Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," published in April 1969 in *Art International*, vol. 8, pp. 17–20.

To what extent are your sculptures improvisational? How much of a vision of them do you have when you start? To what extent do they relate to ideas derived from drawing? Do you work in an additive way when using latex and plaster?

There seems to be an interval of about three years between the initial drawings and the realization in three dimensions. The works in latex are additive since they consist of many superimposed layers. (For the others see answers to questions two and three.) I would say that my sculptures are improvisational (i.e. free—the final result has only a distant relation to the initial drawings with which they start), but within an obsessive intention and theme.

Would you state your feelings about certain traditional materials like marble and bronze which you use for final versions, and the relationship of the materials to the more manipulable materials (like latex) used in actually building up the works.

Some materials are fine for the pinning down of ideas, but they are not permanent, and they do not take a satisfactory surface. However, all the shapes have in common the fact that originally they were poured, and could be obtained only through that process. (The poured form is stretched from the inside and obeys the laws of gravity.) For the pouring to be expressed you must have an elastic container; e.g. hot wax poured into freezing water will assume a unique shape. Because the poured form is necessarily basically simple, it can without contradiction be given permanence in marble. I think these methods preserve the fusion of geometric and organic forms which interests me.

Technically, bronze can best be used for intricate and pierced or hollow shapes which have originally been built up rather than poured. As my

early pieces showed, when by painting the wood black thus hiding its “natural” surface (I believe I was the first, in 1949, to do this), I have never believed in the romanticism of “truth to material.” The only thing that counts is whether the result has plastic validity.

To what extent do elements invisible in the final works (e.g. some interior parts of the “lair”) play a necessary role in the inspiration and integration of the works?

Since the “lair” grow from within (contrary to the poured forms) each stage is the necessary pre-condition for what follows. In principle each “lair” could be arrested at every level, but in practice each seems to have an internal life which causes it to grow to a certain size. The latest “lair” oscillate on their bases and are weighted in such a way that if they are pushed they rock and eventually come to rest through their own inner stability.



Rondeau for L, 1963, bronze, 26.7 cm high.

Did you begin as a sculptor, or as a painter (e.g. in Europe)? If as a painter, at what point did the changeover take place and what was the motivation?

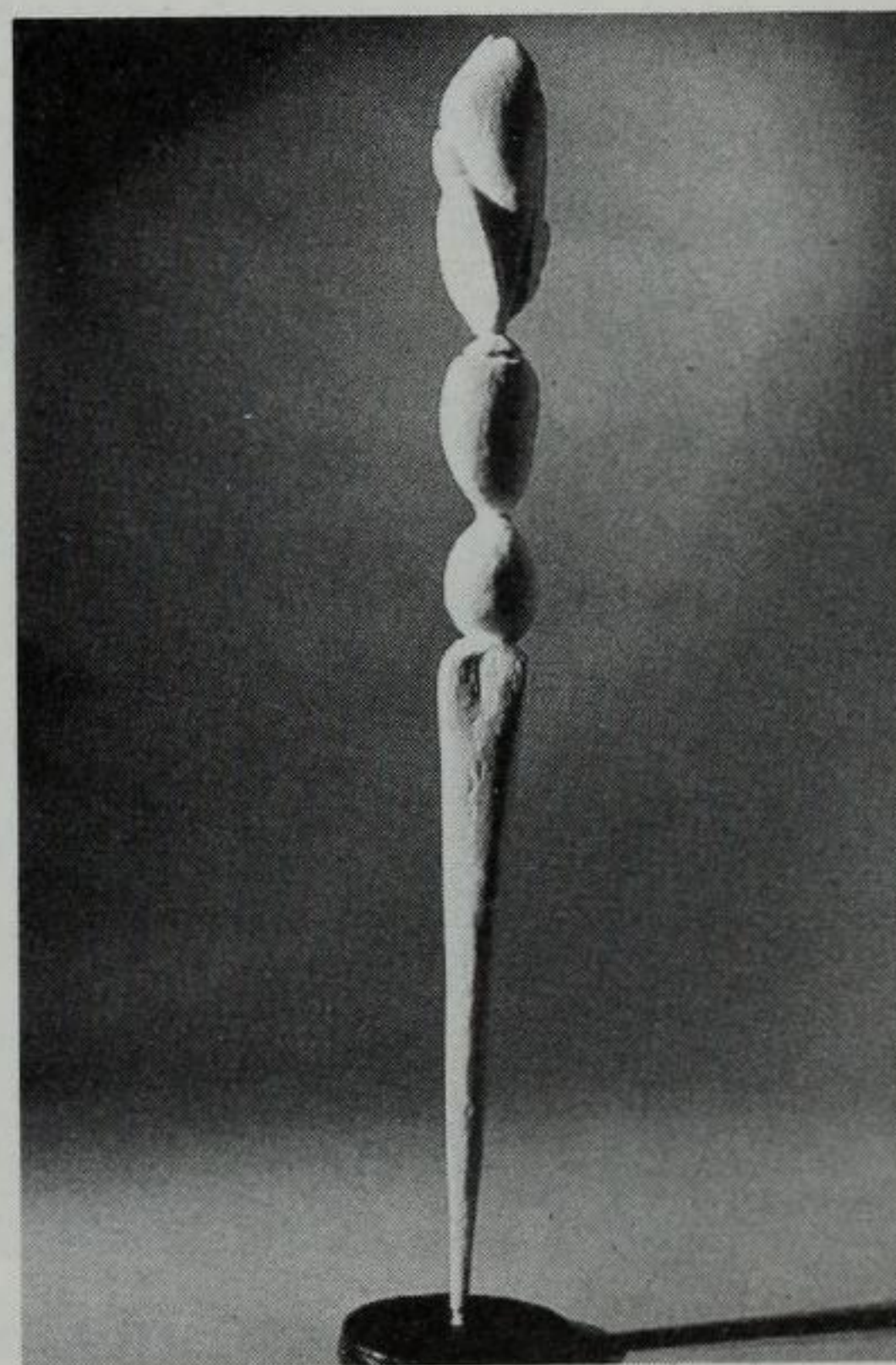
I started as a draughtsman in my parents’ atelier at the age of fifteen, mak-

ing cartoons for the repairing of tapestries. At the same time I majored in mathematics at the Lycée Fénelon. Solid geometry was a revelation and was continued at the Sorbonne. It was at the origin of my love of sculpture. As a student at the Beaux-Arts, Ranson, and the Grande Chaumière (where I was mace bearer) I studied both painting and sculpture.

After I came to New York in 1938, there was a period in which I also did very graphic paintings and engravings, but these already reflected my sculptural interests. (Compare the *femmes maisons* exhibited at the Norlyst Gallery show, 1947, as well as the figure-houses of the series *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*.) In these the symbolic objects (or figures) in space were similar in form and relatedness to those exhibited in my first one-man sculpture exhibition at the Peridot Gallery in 1949 (and again in 1950). (This was the period of association with Arp and Matta.) But in the end this concern with the identity of the person shown graphically didn't satisfy me. A realization is a thing in three dimensions; for me, there is no escaping this.

Danny Robbins sees you "not related to the New York milieu." Do you not feel an affinity to the work done in the forties and early fifties by Ferber, Lipton, Rossak, and others who were exploring themes of eclosion and organic growth, often in a context of biomorphism distantly derived from Surrealism?

I do not feel any affinity with the sculptors you name. I would like to mention that the theme of eclosion appears in a piece called *Spring* that was shown at the Peridot Gallery in 1950. My two shows of 1949 and 1950, which contained life-size, but highly stylized "environmental"



Spring, 1949, bronze,
151.1 cm high.

groups (the Museum of Modern Art's *Sleeping Figure*, 1950, was purchased at that time), were stylistically very important for the direction taken by a number of sculptors in the following years.

Your text "Natural History" [see p. 44], and certain of your sculptures suggest that you might have been interested in Arp, particularly the kinds of sculptures he thought of as being located in nature. What are your feelings about Arp? To what European sculptors of his generation do you find yourself attracted, and why?

I admire Arp's work, and personally found him very *sympathique*. If there has been an influence it was unconscious; I don't see the connection myself. I find that Arp's sculptures have a certain pornographic aspect that doesn't interest me as such; if there is any interest it would be in the formal relations he achieves in his work.

Speaking of "pornography," I have been told that there is quite a bit of eroticism in my own work. Well of course there is, since I am constantly interested in the human body. But I don't feel the eroticism myself. My sculptures please me because they represent a certain harmony and certain emphases, and I wouldn't say my work is erotic, even though this side of it seems obvious to many people.

How would you characterize the relationship of your recent work to your wood sculptures of the forties?

The relationship of my present work to the work of the forties is very strong. They have the same simplicity. Instead of being "phallic" as in the past, the recent sculptures are in the shape of spirals; so instead of having a linear direction they have a circular or spiral direction.

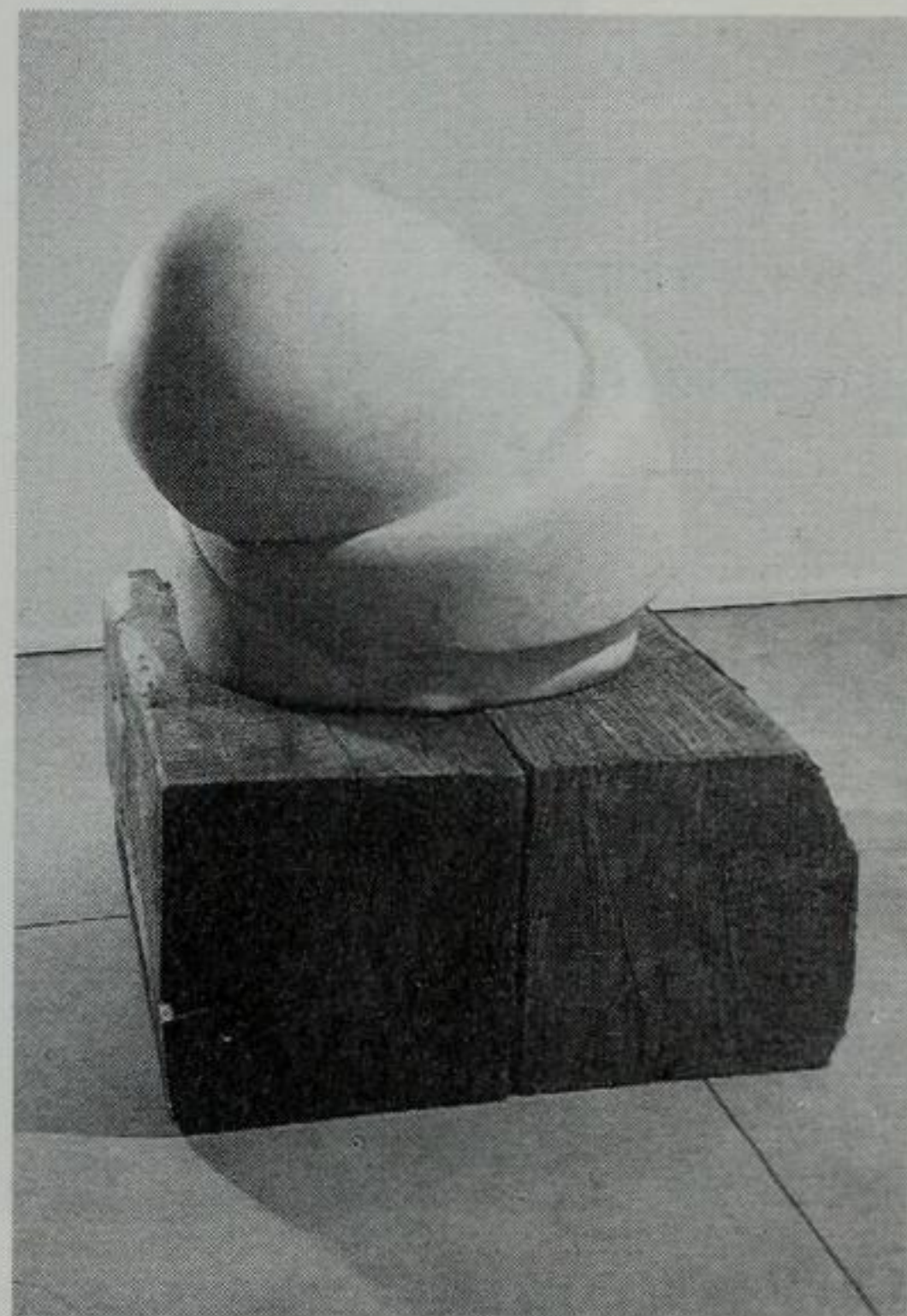
My past work seems to show that I have two types of sculptures which appear alternatively; one is the spontaneous kind, and it includes both the circular and the upright pieces. I could call them impetuous, but I would prefer to call them spontaneous, and in being spontaneous they obey a certain dynamism of emotion. If I want to express something that is of immediate, all-consuming importance to me, I will make a piece that is inspired by a very strong desire to say this (whatever it is), and I will make

it quickly and without interruption. Whether these works are of the figure type (upright), or of the cocoon type, they obey this law of immediacy, a desire to stand for something, to be positive; or perhaps the contrary, to retreat into something. What they have in common, even though their themes may be at opposite poles, is a similar quality of something immediately resolved.

Now both in the past and today I have also made a very different kind of sculpture, that is to say, a work of assemblage; a synthesis, a putting together of elements, which is peaceful as opposed to the outburst of the previous type of work. This second kind of work makes use of many, originally separate, pieces gathered together to bring out their similarities and their differences, and also to make them into a whole which is more than the sum of its separate parts. There is nothing impetuous about such a way of working. There is on the contrary a great restraint, care, reflection, and time involved, and the possibility of endless minor changes and adjustments.

So, to answer the question of whether I see a great difference between the work of the past and that of the present – I see, of course, a change formally, and besides my work is more involved. But basically the motivation is the same, and even the ways of handling this motivation is the same. The person is the same.

To what extent do particularized organic and sexual references (e.g. the phallic character of Sleep II and Labyrinthine Tower) become conscious and/or problematic in the conception? Do you ever feel any conflict between the allusive and formal levels of the work?



Sleep II, 1967, marble,
59.4 × 76.8 × 60.3 cm.

As I said before, I am not particularly aware or interested in the erotic of my work, in spite of its supposed presence. Since I am exclusively concerned, at least consciously, with the formal perfection, I allow myself to follow blindly the images that suggest themselves to me. There is no conflict whatsoever between these two levels.



Labyrinthine Tower, 1962, plaster, 45.7 cm high.

The Fabric of Construction

Artist's review of the exhibition *Wall Hangings* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, first published in March–April 1969 in *Craft Horizons*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 30–5.

[*Craft Horizons* preamble: “The first exhibition of contemporary weaving at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (25 February to 4 May), contains forty experimental pieces by four men and twenty-five women from eight countries. Called *Wall Hangings*, it was co-directed by Mildred Constantine, consultant to the Department of Architecture and Design, and designer Jack Lenor Larsen, and installed by Arthur Drexler, director of the Department. According to the catalog, written by the exhibition's directors, developments during the last ten years ‘have caused us to revise our concepts of this craft and to view the work within the context of twentieth-century art.’ The editors of *Craft Horizons* asked internationally-known sculptor Louise Bourgeois, whose background in weaving gives her special interest in the show, to comment on the work in a taped interview at her New York home. Here follows the edited transcript:”]

These are all nonfunctional weavings, many of them constructed off the loom by knotting, wrapping, braiding, and a variety of other techniques. They have been called woven forms or objects because although they must use traditional methods or materials, they are not made for traditional purposes. Would you consider them art? In other words, in the use of fibers to build volumes, or what Anni Albers has called “pliable planes,” do you feel in these works any reaching toward the space of sculpture?

It is just that kind of sculptural space I want to find. Since I have a background in weaving, and have become a sculptor, it means that I have found the medium of weaving incompatible with the art of the sculptor. The emptiness and the fullness which is essential to the space and volume of sculpture is not present because there is a background which is never really pierced, except, with some of the pieces, by vertical slits. However, these slits are not holes. Slits are warps separated and pulled apart. As an example, I would like to have seen Magdalena Abakanowicz's weaving with real openings, with a window in it, for these windows are necessary to bring in three-dimensionality which is a prerequisite of sculpture.

But I like all these pieces. They are interesting as objects. For instance, yesterday I saw some stump work, scenes of eighteenth-century England that were delightful. But they existed as *curiosa* or *objets d'art* rather than falling into the category of fine arts. A painting or a sculpture makes great demand on the onlooker at the same time that it is independent of him. These weavings, delightful as they are, seem more engaging and less demanding. If they must be classified, they would fall somewhere between fine and applied art.

When I originally heard the show's title, *Wall Hangings*, I had three associations, one being the United States Post Office where they have dozens of open mailbags hanging on the wall waiting for the mail, beautiful in their simplicity and practicality. Another image was of the hanging, movable walls of the voting booth. A third image had to do not with a hanging object but with a rising one. That is, the veil of steam that comes up from the street from the pipes of Consolidated Edison, a cloud of a kind of smoke twirling in front of you, like a soft ghost.

Among the most sculptural pieces in the show is the three-dimensional transparent hanging by Kay Sekimachi (U.S.) where the thing was contorted and folded and really manipulated. The crochet by Ewa Jaroszynska (Poland) is really my favorite piece. It relates to relief with regular undercuts and raised surfaces held to the background. Yet it is almost freestanding and nearly autonomous from the wall. This is true also of Walter Nottingham's (U.S.) crochet work. The crochet method can lead to great expanses of imagination, whereas the loom is a very rigid tool. In the loom work, and I will here mention Magdalena Abakanowicz, the woven background is made first and then the artist has picked at the surface and has added things here and there. Weaving itself remains unimaginative.

The pieces by Susan Weitzman are built on two distinct parallel vertical planes. They are unique. The variations in yarn thickness have been achieved by careful hand spinning and measuring the yarns in a warp on a frame. This idea could be enlarged upon and made richer.

In the beginning tapestries were indispensable, they were actually movable walls, or partitions in the great halls of castles and manor houses, or the walls of tents. They were a flexible architecture. This is the kind of hanging that I was used to. I was brought up in Aubusson, my mother having been born and brought up there. Aubusson is in a part of France—a very poor country—where there is nothing but granite, as in Brittany, which is famous for its lace; the same combination of stone and needlework in both. The women wove and the men cut stone in the quarries.

I, myself, have very long associations with tapestries. As children, we used them to hide in. This is one reason I expect them to be so three-dimensional—why I feel they must be of such a height and weight and size that you can wrap yourself in them. Gobelins tapestries, out of fashion and discarded, were saved because in the colder climate of Aubusson, they were used to wrap animals in—protection for a cow giving birth, and as blankets for the horses.

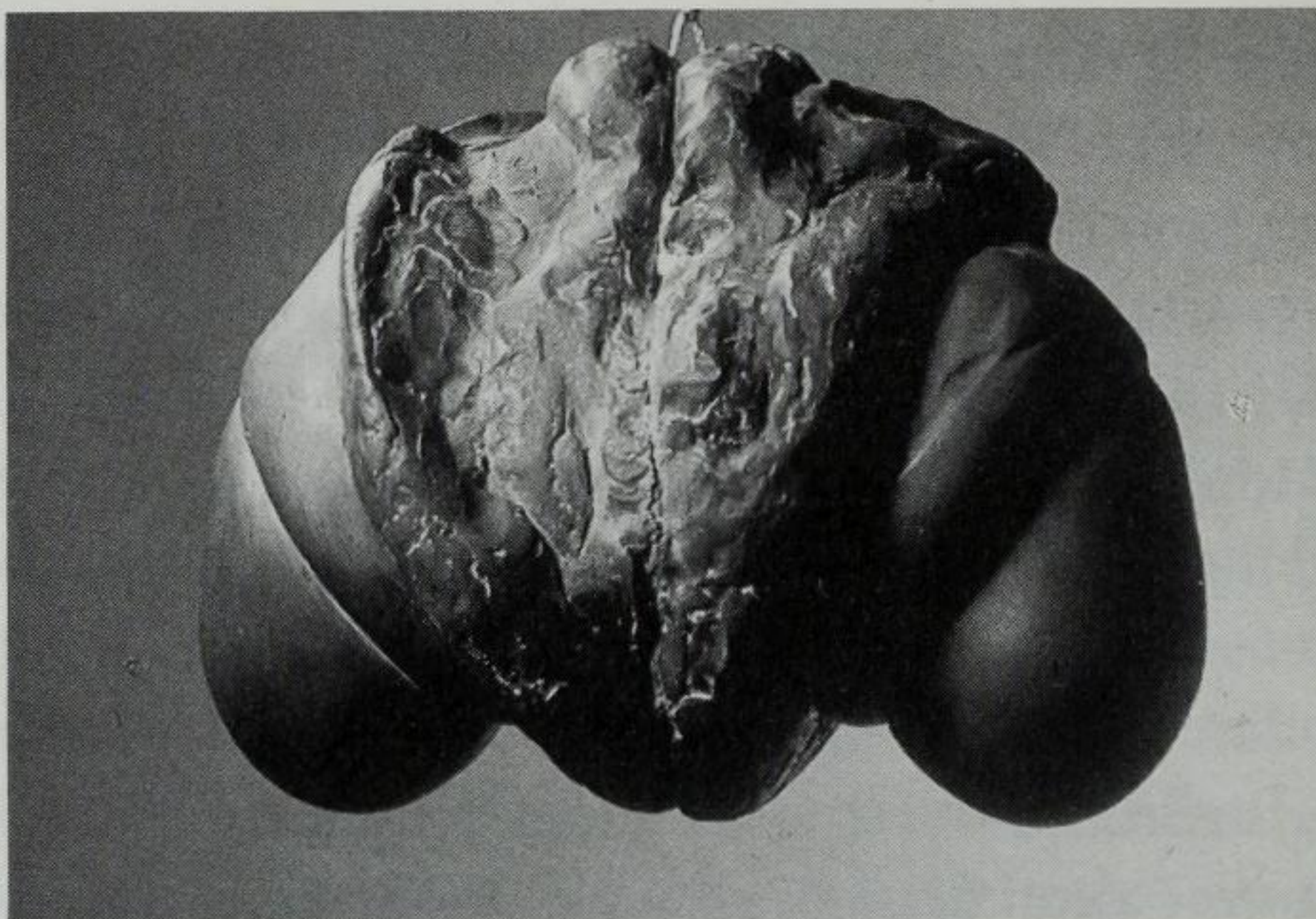
My personal association with tapestry is for this reason, highly sculptural in terms of the three-dimensionality.

A tent is very important in my vocabulary—a form of textile sculpture to be entered—a form of collapsible architecture. In Africa, I remember the caravan blacks who wear clothes like tents and fold them around themselves, even sleep under them.

To return, however, to the exhibition, I feel that though it showed very fine weaving, it could have been a little wilder. It is in effect a very sedate show, the only daring aspect being the title and the first-rate installation. I could think, for instance, of all kinds of turned shapes—cubes or any three-dimensional forms that could have been used. The pieces in the show rarely liberate themselves from decoration and only begin to explore the possibilities of textiles. They can be woven into any shape and then made rigid by spraying. They can be stretched over armatures, draped, and pulled. All this is still open to exploration by the many fine artists who have shown their work in this exhibition.

On Janus Fleuri

First published in September 1969 in *Art Now*, vol. 1, no. 7.



Janus Fleuri, 1968, bronze, 31.8 × 25.7 × 21.2 cm.

Every time I am asked to talk about my work I desiccate. The only way in which I can manage it is to go into my studio and walk back and forth and around a piece. Then the relations between the work and me snap alive again. At this point the how it was made is obviously of no importance or relevance. I made it the best I could, considering that the object became what it is, and this becoming was not completely under the control of conscious desire or premeditation. The fluctuation of possibilities can be minute, slow, rough, sudden, re-examinable or definite. Any way you slice it, there is always a battle to the finish between the artist and his material: sometimes with visible result, more often with experience gained but no result.

Shop talk belongs to the artist, not the art lover. Immediate concern with the materials of sculpture is an avoidance of the true issue—like admiring the frame on a painting. But for the artist shop talk continues the close involvement that, finally, allows him to shape substance to his own ends, to purposes that go beyond materials.

The ebb and flow of my work is in the pouring, then the cutting. Poured plaster is a material of the twentieth century, made possible by the flexible container and the ever present packaging—paper, plastic, cardboard, or rubber—that can be bent, stripped off and thrown away. Once poured, the plaster can be cut and filed, and so reduced, or it can be made to grow and multiply and be transformed before it is cast—as it has been here. But this is shop talk, a necessary obsession for the artist, an escape for the spectator.

If I am asked what I want to express, then this makes more sense. At that point there is a mystery we can at least talk about, since for a lifetime I have wanted to say the same thing. Inner consistency is the test of the artist. Repeated disappointment in its expression is what keeps him jumping.

What then of this particular work of sculpture. It has the permanence of bronze, although it was conceived in plaster. It hangs, it is simple in outline but elusive and ambivalent in its references. Hanging from a single point at eye level it can both swing and turn, but slowly, because its center of gravity is low. It is symmetrical, like the human body, and it has the scale of those various parts of the body to which it may, perhaps, refer: a double facial mask, two breasts, two knees. Its hung position indicates passivity, but its low slung mass expresses resistance and duration. It is perhaps a self-portrait—one of many.

Sixty-one Questions

Previously unpublished questionnaire, with answers by the artist, written in 1971 by Alexis Rafael Krasilovsky as student research in Dr. Lenore Weitzman's course "Sociology of the Woman Artist" at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

1. When did you first start painting?

I started modeling, as a child, at the dinner table as a device to keep to myself at a time when children were supposed to be seen but not heard.

2. What was your mother's occupation?

My mother was a tapestry restorer. She employed about twenty girls and this group of weavers had an influence on me as women and as an artist. My mother herself was a feminist follower of Louise Michel.

3. What was your father's occupation?

Beginning in 1904, my father was responsible, almost single-handed[ly], for the rediscovery of Aubusson and Gobelins tapestry, which he showed in his gallery in Paris.

4. As a child, what was your mother's reaction to your drawings?

My mother considered my drawings as a preparation for my eventually helping her in her work.

5. As a child, what was your father's reaction to your drawings?

My father felt that a woman should have a way of making a living, and drawing was one more string to my bow.

6. How do your parents react now?

They are no longer alive. They would be reasonably impressed by my success.

7. Do you have brothers and sisters?

Yes.

8. Did your parents treat you differently?

They treated me with more respect than my brother or sister because of my abilities and potential.

9. How did your friends react to your drawing as a child?

My friends felt that my "art" was an escape from life, friends, and flirting.

10. *Did boys react the same way as girls?*

Yes.

11. *What did your teachers do?*

In my schooling (Lycée and University, Sorbonne) there was no contact with my interests in art, except through my own interest in solid geometry.

12. *Were you inspired by any artists?*

I have been influenced by artists I did not meet; or artists of the past, such as Seurat, or the sculptures of Angkor Vat [*sic*].

13. *Did you know any of them personally?*

I have met many artists, first in Paris and then in New York, including Vuillard, Bonnard, Matisse, Bissière, Léger, Lhote, Lipchitz, Duchamp, Masson—as a rule I have reacted *against* them.

14. *Did you work closely with any other artists?*

I have worked closely with my teachers: Bissière, Lhote, Léger, Wlerick.

15. *Did you work with anyone your own age?*

I was very aware of the work of my fellow students, and I tried to remain myself by working in a counter-direction.

16. *Did you work with someone as an apprentice or as a protégé?*

I was an apprentice to my parents; but *not* as a sculptor.

17. *Did anyone sponsor your work or push you to work on your own?*

Yes—my parents encouraged me.

18. *Who first recognized your work?*

My parents showed my drawings.

19. *Was it self-recognized or did it come from outside?*

Self-recognized.

20. *What was the first time you had your work exhibited?*

My work was shown first to a group of friends and associates of my parents: I was about fifteen years old at the time.

21. *Have you ever felt discriminated against?*

I first felt discriminated against as a woman when I began to submit my work to exhibition juries. Later, discrimination came as much from women gallery owners as from men.

22. *What have you done about it?*

I [have] brooded.

23. *How do you deal with someone propositioning you who is very important to your career?*

I panic and refuse.

24. *Do you have an agent?*

I have had many galleries, and have one now. (This also presents problems.)

25. *Do people ever seek you out to exhibit your work?*

Museums for national exhibitions. Also other galleries who contact me and are not those I wish did.

26. *At parties where gallery or museum people or patrons are mingled with artists, do you feel that anyone has encouraged your work because they want to sleep with you or promise to help display your work in order to sleep with you but not follow through?*

No. I have not suffered from being pursued sexually.

27. *What do you do about it?*

Nothing. The trouble seems to lie somewhere else.

28. *Do you feel any conflict between people you want to get to know as friends and cultivating friends for your career?*

Only occasionally. The people I see are chiefly in the art world—if they interest me, whether or not they could be useful for my career.

29. *Do you consider art a man's world?*

Yes. It is a world where both men and women are trying to please men in power.

30. *How do you feel about other women artists?*

I react to their work, more than to them as women.

31. *Do you think there is a specific style or aspect of a style which women artists share?*

Not yet. Before this takes place women will have to forget their desire to please the male power structure.

32. *Do you search out other women artists and discuss their work with them, and your work? Under what conditions?*

I like to find talent among women artists, and to encourage it.

33. *Do you notice any particular reaction of men to your art?*

Yes; they find it erotic, even though I am not always aware of it.

34. *Do you notice any particular reaction of women to your art?*

Same as above.

35. *Do you feel excluded from informal friendships or social events hinging on the exchange of ideas?*

There is too little contact between artists and other groups interested in literature, music, and ideas.

36. *Do most men consider you an artist, a woman artist, or a woman?*

They consider me a woman first, and an artist second (but not a "woman artist").

37. *What is more important to you—being a woman or being an artist?*

For better or worse I *am* a woman; I can *become* a better artist, so it occupies more importance in my consciousness.

38. *Do you live with anyone?*

Yes.

39. *Have you lived with anyone in the past?*

Yes.

40. *Have you ever been legally married?*

Yes—and still am.

41. *Has your work influenced your decision to marry or not to marry?*

Yes, it has positively influenced my decision.

42. *What effect has your married life had on your work?*

There has been an interaction between the two.

43. *How does your husband feel about your work?*

He encourages it.

44. *What effect has your work had on your married life?*

There has been an interaction between the two.

45. *What effect has your work had on your children's lives?*

My work having made me a better person, I was a better mother. But taking a great deal of my time, it has kept me away from them.

46. *What kind of friends do you have?*

Most of my friends are in the art and university worlds.

47. *Are your mutual friends your husband's friends or your friends?*

A mixture of both.

48. *Are most—or any—of them artists?*

Most of them are artists or connected with art through museums and universities.

49. *Do your friends help you in your career?*

To a moderate degree.

50. *What influence do you have on your friends' careers?*

I believe considerable; because I cannot restrain my admiration when I feel that it is deserved.

51. *How do you spend your days?*

I work like a bee and feel that I accomplish little.

52. *How much time do you spend on housekeeping?*

About one-third of my time.

53. *How much time do you spend on child care?*

Now, none.

54. *How much time do you spend in relaxation?*

For me, relaxation is not separate from the rest of my life. I find most relaxation in talking and spending time with certain persons.

55. *Is your painting world separated from your living world?*

My sculpting world and my living world are one.

56. *How do you measure personal success in art?*

Personal success in art is measured by how nearly you have arrived at what you want to say in your work.

57. *Do you feel sexual satisfaction through your work?*

Yes.

58. *Whom do you consider the most successful artists?*

There are many kinds of success. For the most important, personal kind, see answer to question 56.

59. *How do you support yourself as an artist?*

At the present time I have a good contract. I have not had in the past, and will not have (probably) in the future.

60. *To what extent have financial considerations affected your work?*
Limited returns from my work have constricted my willingness to make the investment necessary for full production.

61. *Do you feel you have as much recognition of your work as you would like?*

No. But recognition will come in time, and this is enough for me.

Forum: Women in Art

First published in February 1971 in *Arts Magazine* in the article "Forum: Women in Art" by Cindy Nemser which includes replies to the same question from other artists such as Eva Hesse, Alice Neel, and Nancy Spero.

How do you feel about the position of women in the art world today?
A woman has no place as an artist until she proves over and over that she won't be eliminated.

Letter to the Editor, *Art in America*

First published in January 1972 in *Art in America*, vol. 60, no. 1, p. 123.

The Judson Three

I write to the readers of *Art in America* on behalf of the Judson Three, artists accused of having desecrated the flag. Their appeal is being handled by the New York Civil Liberties Union. To help cover the considerable costs of this appeal the Union is conducting a sale of art works, to which over four hundred of today's best-known artists have contributed paintings, prints and sculpture. Tickets at \$25.00 can be purchased in twenty-six New York galleries. The drawing, strictly blind and anonymous, will be held in the early spring, at 420 West Broadway. Your support is needed, and very important.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS, Sculptor
New York City

Does Art Have a Gender?

Text written for a panel discussion with Janet Sawyer, Pat Mainaridi, Howardina Pindel, Lee Roser, Alice Baber, Elise Asher, Faith Ringold, Fay Lanzer, and others at the YMCA, 15th Street, New York, 16 February 1972.

I would like to talk about the search for success and the search for failure among artists. Success and power that we supposedly all want, rarely achieve, in the art world—is it different in other fields? Success for the artist does not mean power, even though he or she would enjoy it as much as anybody else. The artist is not able to get power because he insists on doing what he wants the way he wants and when he wants it. This egocentric attitude keeps him locked within himself or within a very small group where he finds approval in exchange for giving approval—I approve of you if you approve of me—as we all know, this is a state of equilibrium. Considering the modesty of the goal, this success can be easily achieved—but power is something else. It is concerned with the want: insisting on communication with others, imposing your will in doing things for people, against them, or simply manipulating them to your ends. This is a state that the artist never reaches, partly because he does not or is not able to apply himself to that end—he is too concerned with himself and does not reach an objective and detached relation to the goal of his ambition. The pact that society imposes on the artist is one of dependence on the one hand and lip-service encouragement on the other.

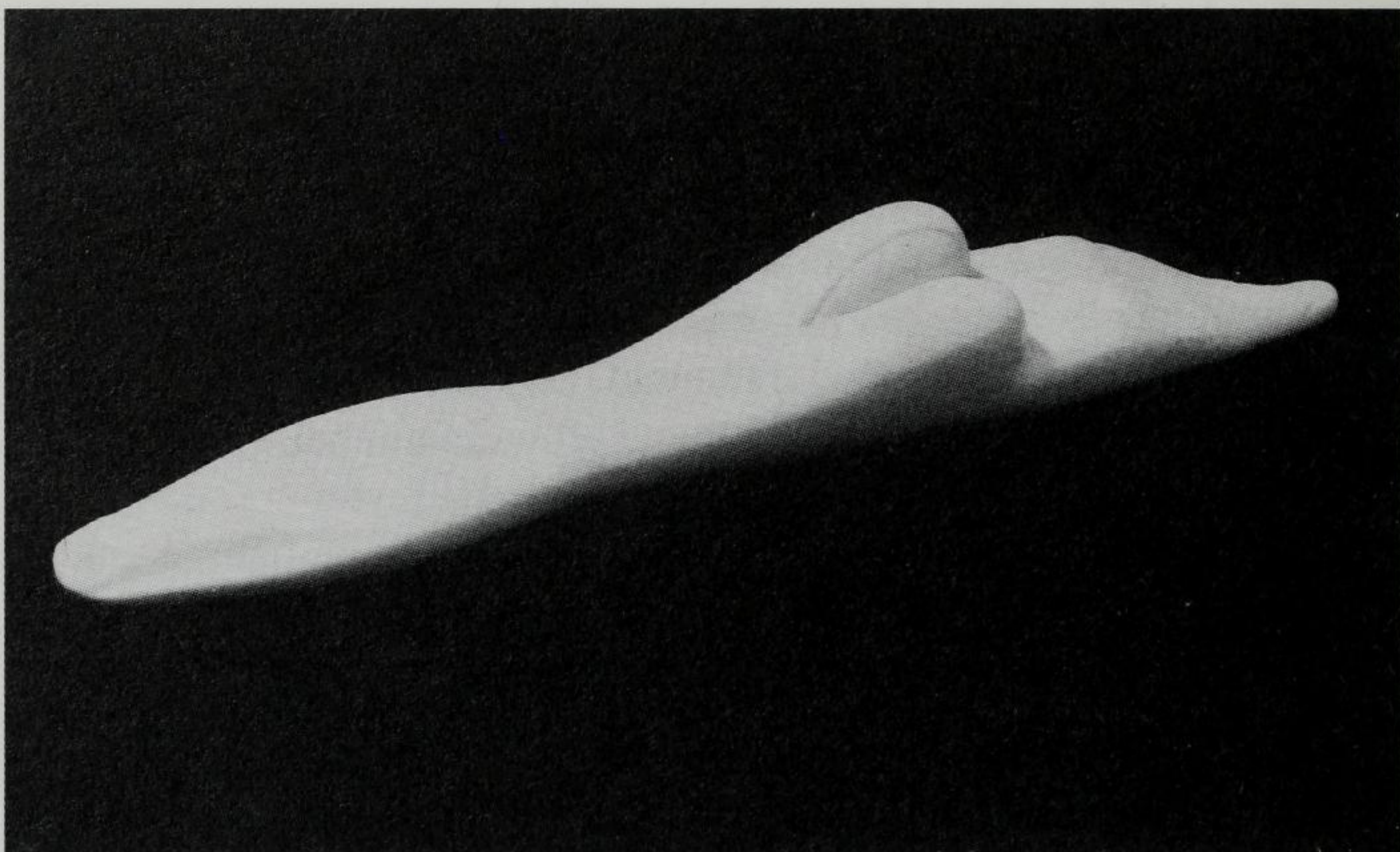
One member of the panel this evening related: “I wanted a show, and finally I had one. Then I thought—so what—it had no effect—I had no effect on anybody—it is something else I am after—something more—interaction—not only a dialog between me and a deeper me, between what I *want* to achieve and what I *can* achieve—self-expression is not enough.” This is the clear statement of an adult who does not have the makeup of an artist. Even if a painter is bought, has a gallery, a teaching job, and a few collectors, he functions in a vacuum—he is bought for the wrong reasons and is dropped from the gallery if he is not bought any

more—the teaching positions are given on the basis of working papers called MFA and BFA. There is even now a doctorate in painting and sculpture, which is a joke played on the painters and sculptors.

Whoever says he is an artist is indeed an artist—and today, in this open society, collectors, gallery goers, models, Seventh Avenue figures play a role which they fancy being the role of the artist—they feel good and are looked at. The collector from Seventh Avenue picks the artists himself, gives them one hundred dollars for a work of art and promises them publicity and museum exposure! He also tries to pick and pay a writer for the introduction to the show. Then he “gives” the show to a museum—which does not dare to refuse!

Instead of a written and read statement, I would have liked to review here the articles of the *New York Times* and art magazines also —what shows opened—especially of the Inwood Marble Hill symposium of twelve sculptors, commission for the Chase Manhattan complex downtown—also the opinions of Grace Glueck on the activities of the Women’s Lib of 12 February 1972, where she pays more attention to the impact and publicity different organizations got than to individual workers. Groups and teamwork for the media is being helped by foundations—the solitary artist is going to be a thing of the past with his soul, his omnipotence, his pride, his patience and his destiny.

The inner necessity of the artist to be an artist has everything to do with gender and sexuality. The frustration of the woman artist and her lack of immediate role as an artist in society is a consequence of this necessity, and her powerlessness (even if she is successful) is a consequence of this necessary vocation. We do not choose our roles—we obey the calling and accept its terms—though it does not mean that we do not resent them, of course. This is not completely clear; we become sculptors, let us say, because of our inability to grow up (and it is a blessing in disguise), but it is a fact that we remain beggars all our lives. Well, we can talk about it, and in spite of all the frustrations, be gracious about it.



Femme Couteau, 1969–70, pink marble, 67 × 3 × 12.5 cm.
Collection: Jerry and Emily Spiegel, New York.

A Merging of Male and Female

First published on 11 February 1974 in *New York* (magazine), an issue subtitled "Why Women are Creating Erotic Art," and in the context of the article "The Female View of Erotica" by Dorothy Seiberling.

There has always been sexual suggestiveness in my work. Sometimes I am totally concerned with female shapes—clusters of breasts like clouds—but often I merge the imagery—phallic breasts, male and female, active and passive. This marble sculpture—my *Femme Couteau*—embodies the polarity of woman, the destructive and the seductive. Why do women become hatchet women? They were not born that way. They were made that way out of fear. In the *Femme Couteau*, the woman turns into a blade, she is defensive. She identifies with the penis to defend herself. A girl can be terrified of the world. She feels vulnerable because she can be wounded by the penis. So she tries to take on the weapon of the aggressor. This is a problem stemming from childhood and from lack of sensible, sympathetic education. When I was young, sex was talked of as a dangerous thing; sexuality was forbidden. It is important to show girls that it is natural to be sexual and that men also can feel helpless and vulnerable. When I was at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, we had a nude male model. One day he looked around and saw a woman student and suddenly he had an erection. I was shocked—then I thought, what a fantastic thing, to reveal your vulnerability, to be so publicly exposed! We are all vulnerable in some way, and we are all male-female.

Interview with Susi Bloch

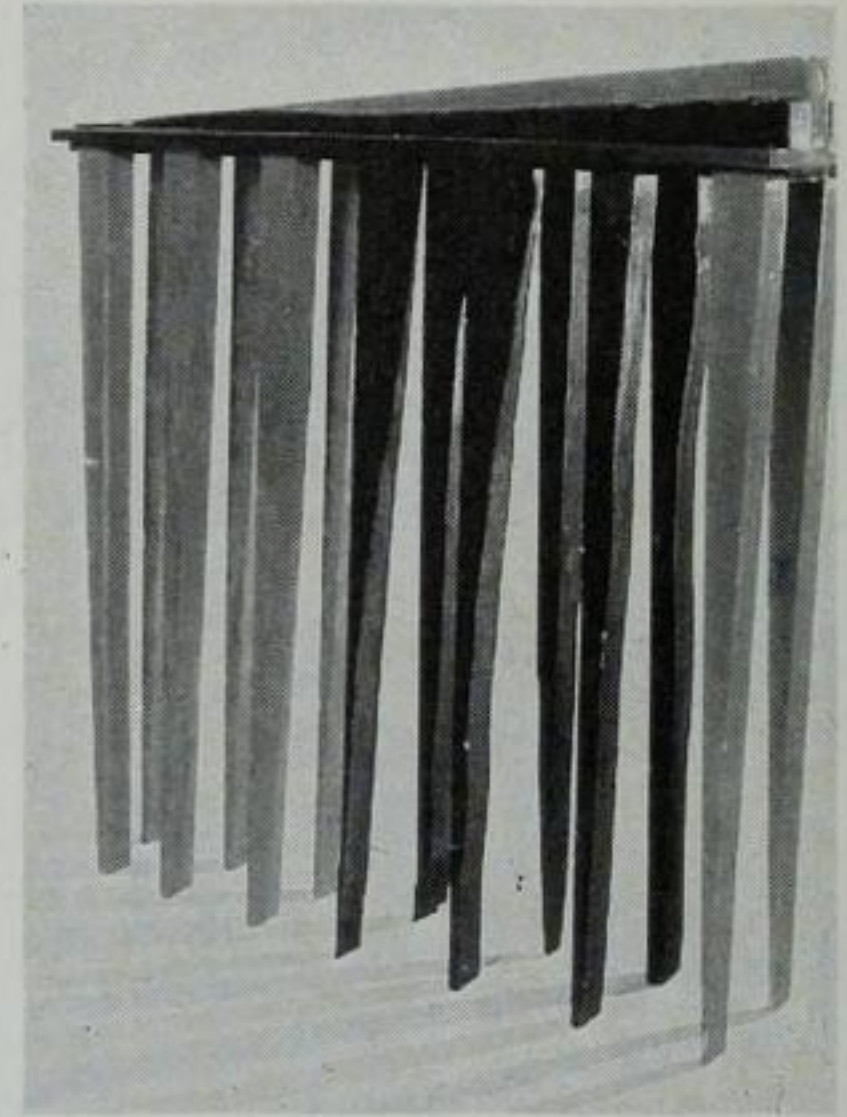
First published in Summer 1976 in *The Art Journal*, vol. 35, no. 41, pp. 370–3, at the time of the group exhibition *200 Years of American Sculpture* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Looking at your two pieces, The Blind Leading the Blind (1947–9) and One and Others (1955) in the Whitney show, what is immediately interesting and pertinent is that despite the confusion of the installation these pieces impose an integrity of space; that locked, closed . . . remote space and distancing of object that was so important in the development of abstract sculpture, particularly your sculpture, at that time.

We have to point out a matter of date. *The Blind Leading the Blind* was exhibited at the Peridot Gallery on Twelfth Street in 1949, and the piece *Sleeping Figure* was part of that show. Although it has mistakenly been dated later, it was made in 1947 [the artist's date of record remains 1950]. My work which was very elliptical and direct at the same time was seen by Arthur Drexler who was a painter then. He took a shine to it and he offered me the show at Peridot. *Sleeping Figure* was bought by Alfred Barr for the Museum of Modern Art in 1951.

You began making sculpture in 1947, making work that seems to relate strongly in motif to the etchings and parables, He Disappeared into Complete Silence, worked on in 1946, published in 1947.

They relate primarily in their symbolic geometry. Geometrical figures, circles, half-circles, points, lines, vectors . . . were my vocabulary and still are today. The basis of Euclidean geometry is that parallels never touch. Parallelism excludes any kind of touching, distance remains the same in time.



The Blind Leading the Blind, 1947–9, painted wood, 171.5 × 163.5 × 41.5 cm. Collection: Ginny Williams Family Foundation, Denver.

What do you mean by symbolic geometry?
I mean solid geometry as a symbol for emotional security. Euclidean or other kinds of geometry are closed systems where relations can be anticipated and are eternal. It comes naturally to me to express emotions through relations between geometrical elements, in two dimensions or three dimensions. . . . In the Peridot exhibition the disposition of and relations between the figures, grouped in twos and threes or isolated, represents a readable floor graph.

The Blind Leading the Blind you identify as environmental; the Peridot show you conceived as an environment. Was the gallery space then understood by you as ideal?

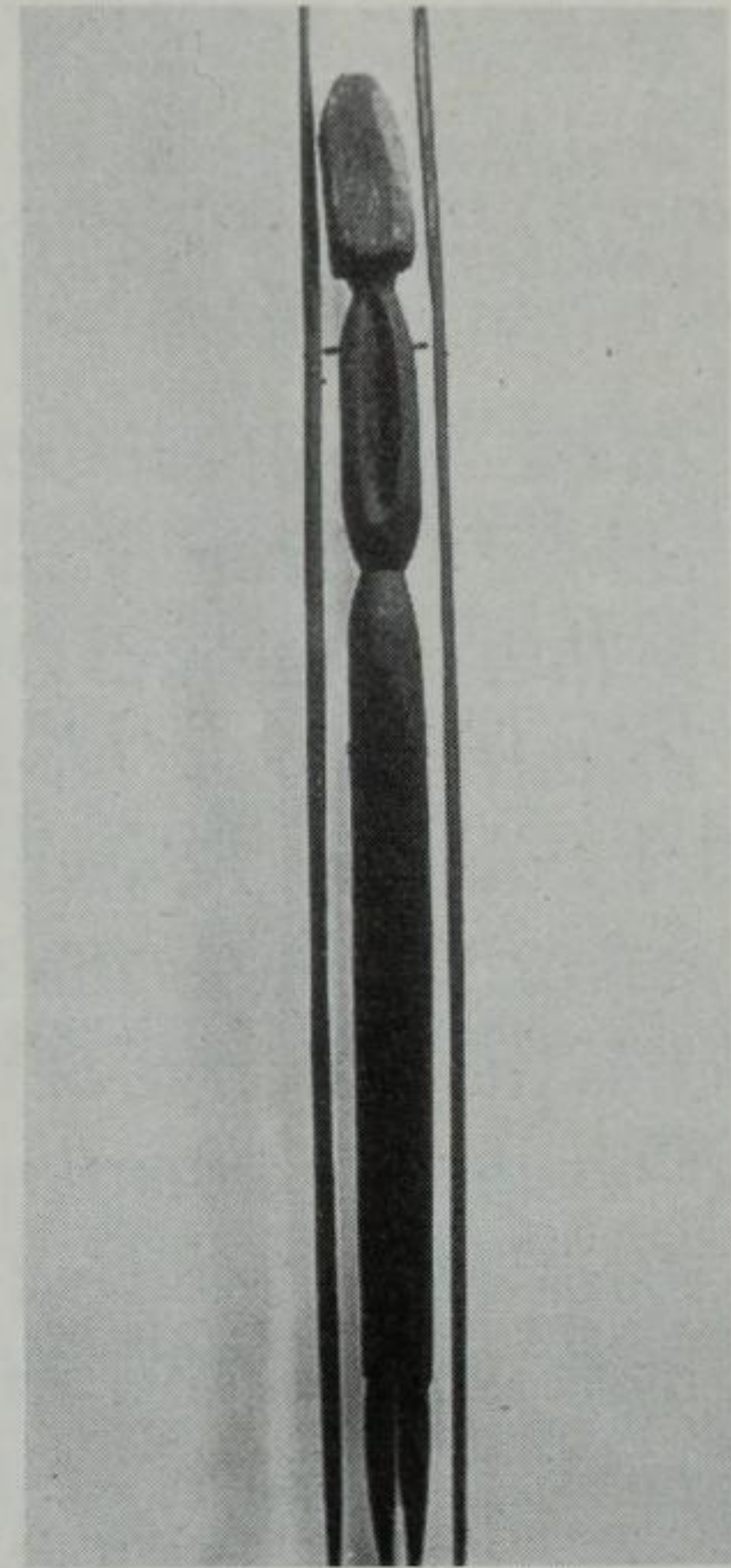
Ideal?

Well, the idea implies that the disposition of the objects and the particular sense and abstraction of the forms aimed at creating the same dislocating, psychological warp of space that One and Others achieves as a single unit. In the gallery there is the complexity of overlap, a confusion between real space and configured space, between real and configured relationships.

Why confusion? They exist without overlapping. One is real space and one is a symbolic space.

One and Others excludes this duality. The scaling and closed cluster effect a purely illusory dimension of space in which the object is distanced.

That's because you see it as a viewer and not as a maker. I see it is a maker.
But one's position and identity as "viewer" is something precisely



Sleeping Figure, 1950, wood, 187.9 cm high. Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

determined by the structure of the piece. Although I co-habit the sculpture's space, can walk around it, can touch it, the piece always insists on and maintains its illusory, psychological distance.

Yes.

In the Peridot exhibition where gallery space and sculpture were conceived as creating an environment, that conceptual reality, analogous to that of One and Others in intention, was actually penetrated and disturbed by the viewer.

Well, I would say here that the space of the viewer *becomes* the space of the maker. You enter the space and manipulate objects within that space which is the privilege of the maker.

Was this the intention of your environment—that the space of the viewer be actualized as the space of the maker?

Yes. This is really the origin of the environmental sculptures, or later the Happenings. That is to say the necessity for the artist to function in a real space is carried on during the show.

Then the space remains a privileged space?

It is a privilege that the gallery offered me and that I took over completely. It was a concession of the gallery to the artist.

You used the gallery space then in a way different than usual?

I took hold of the gallery, of the space that was given to me and used it. Instead of displaying pieces the space became part of the piece. Peridot worried about his floors. I explained that these pieces had to come without any kind of bases, coming directly to the floor on one point. As mentioned before, the figures, the distance between figures, compose a diagram of points. If there had been bases the bases would have isolated the figures not only from the spectator but from the other figures. The figures construct



One and Others, 1955, painted wood, 46.1 × 20 × 16.8 cm. Collection: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

and inhabit their own social space. . . . The privileged space has certain characteristics. It is closed and exactly defined and belongs to the artist in the way the stage belongs to the performer for a certain number of minutes. The spectator is no longer merely a viewer if he is able to move from the stage of viewing to the stage of collaborating. . . . Dislocation is analogous to the state of passivity that is rejected and becomes a state of active being. In other words it is the dislocation, the transformation of a person who is passive, depressed through a *crise de conscience*, into a person who becomes suddenly active—the passage from death to life through the creative act.

One problem of modern sculpture was its necessity to create a space in which it could exist.

But the artist was satisfied with academic space. Nobody asked for anything more until a certain time in America—at an exact date, when the artist said I am not satisfied to be an artist, I want to be a participant—an active element instead of being a passive one. So it is a *crise de conscience*.

Was the idea of environmental sculpture or exhibition as an environment prevalent at the time of your show at Peridot?

No, it wasn't prevalent at all; in fact it was the first one. There were seventeen figures circulating in the room; the show was photographed by Aaron Siskind and was documented by Alfred Barr. The photographs show the figures in space as a diagram of positions. Euclidean geometry turns around the notion of point. As a consequence the line is seen as an infinite number of points. The vector we can experience as distance, a succession of an infinite number of directed points. The definition of a vector is simply a line which is a distance; we have attached to it the notion of time. All of this establishes this passion for the security geometry affords, and anticipates or explains a certain kind of sensitivity.

Why did you start thinking in terms of an environment?

The reason was a psychological one. These pieces were presences—missed, badly missed presences. Now do you want me to talk about my personal life . . . I don't like to do that.

No, not necessarily. We talked about this before—the question of the sublimation of content where abstraction is concerned and simply the residue of a resonance of meaning. More broadly, we also talked about difference in cause and effect; the difference between the conditions which motivate a solution and the conditions imposed by the solution.

In this case it has to do with the way the environment appeared—I was missing certain people that I had left behind. It was a tangible way of re-creating a missed past. The figures were presences which needed the room, the six sides of the cube. . . . It was the reconstruction of the past.

But even when the “room” did not exist, the individual figure or presence, and clusters of figures or presences, as in the photograph of such a group stationed at the top of the stairs in your house which you showed me, maintained their own discrete space, that illusory distancing. If you wanted to, I guess you could say that the quality of their remoteness is a condition of their pastness; they are only present, remotely, as past. . . . The move to the environment of the exhibition, which becomes an event—this is something very different.

The dynamism of the presence in a claustrophobic space such as the top of the stairs under the roof was much more dynamic than the gallery. I accept that. But the gallery would not have permitted me to place my personages in a closet which in effect is the way they were conceived. The gallery wanted the whole space to be used. But when you came to the Peridot you went two steps down and you had the very strong sense of something going on. You moved within an integrated work rather than around or between isolated works; you moved within the social space of the figures themselves.

The idea of the environment and the locked form and space of these sculptures, did this have something to do with the problem of making sculpture at that time?

No. I was less interested in making sculpture at the time than in re-creating an indispensable past. The motivation was extremely strong. I showed you photographs of figures on the roof and the way they were grouped

together. The figures on the roof had nothing to do with sculpture, they meant physical presences. That was an attempt at not only re-creating the past but controlling it.

Does One and Others involve the same idea?

Yes. But it was done later, in 1951. So it was more abstract and I did not need the presence of people who were the height of my brother, my parents, they could be much smaller.

One and Others becomes a more abstract distillation of those earlier figures and environment.

Yes, I hope . . . I do not say yes, I hope so. In *One and Others* all distance has been reduced to zero. The forms touch each other and they function exclusively in their touching, their relation to each other . . . There is such a shock after a show. A show is an experience and after a show the artist is a different person. He moves on—so does the work. So the space that was so indispensable for me when I needed a real space with real six-foot people, that need disappeared completely. It was resolved and forgotten. . . . I could move in abstract space.



Louise Bourgeois, 1978, outside her home in New York wearing a costume from the performance *A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts*.

Statements 1979

Quoted from the profile on Bourgeois written by Eleanor Munro and first published in 1979 by Simon & Schuster, New York, in Munro's book *Originals: American Women Artists*, pp. 154–9.

I would love to be articulate, because of this optimistic, way-down streak in me that believes *if* people knew me, they could not fail to love me—I do believe that! And that is why I try so hard to be articulate.

* * *

[Robert] Frost says good fences make good neighbors, but I take the exactly opposite position: good fences are obsolete! Therefore when the people next door decided to take down their old fence and build a much, much higher one to keep the local children out of their garden, and dumped the old fenceposts into my yard, I determined to make a conceptual sculpture out of them. I decided to illustrate the obsolescence of fences in the twentieth century by processing them as a work of art. Very carefully, very elegantly. I bought a strapping machine and strapped them into groups with strong iron tapes. You see the extreme deliberateness of the process. You cannot just throw things out casually. We have the means of eliminating waste in a most elegant fashion today.

Obviously, the art was in the eliminating of a fantastically painful subject—and also the *damn fence*.

* * *

Duchamp, Ozenfant, and I had met before, but we met again when we were investigated by McCarthy in 1951. We had different fates. Duchamp had powerful friends, so he was safe. Ozenfant was a very awkward person, original and independent. When he was attacked he would attack back like a child. So he was kicked out of the country. But I defended myself. I was interrogated several times after I made an application to become a citizen. My defense was that I had no connection with or knowl-

edge of what the men I was involved with were doing politically. And fortunately by this time women had come into their own to this extent: that I was not considered merely someone's wife or friend. I was Louise Bourgeois. And I always have been.

* * *

I have had a guilt complex about pushing my art, so much so that every time I was about to show I would have some sort of attack. So I decided it was better simply not to try. It was just that I had the feeling the art scene belonged to the men, and that I was in some way invading their domain. Therefore the work was done and hidden away. I felt more comfortable hiding it. On the other hand, I destroyed nothing. I kept every fragment.

Nowadays, however, I am making an effort to change.

* * *

I was called Louise because Mother was a feminist and a socialist; her ideal was Louise Michel, the French Rosa Luxemburg. All the women in her family were feminists and socialists—and ferociously so!

* * *

Each of us, my sister, my brother, and I, had a garden and we tried to make the most of it, learning the art of cutting trees, espaliering pears and apples. They were formal gardens, with roses in certain areas marked off by boxwood. I was hard-working, interested in that garden. And I had a passion for rock collecting. I began with granite and moved on, through studying geology, to other kinds of rock.

But that garden had another importance for me. We had a tent at the bottom of it, and sometimes we would sleep there. Often we took our meals there, and then we had to carry all the food out from the kitchen and back. Dinner was served late, and night would surprise us as we were eating. Then you could look back and see the light of the kitchen, only far away through the trees.

And then our father would often say, "Now, I don't want to have children who are afraid, so you are going to go to the kitchen and bring the salt shaker." So my brother and I would run, terrified. We would take different ways back, and I would end at the kitchen door. There was always a man there, the man who took care of the sheep and the pig. He would say, "You are not supposed to come into the kitchen!" The reason was that he had been kissing the cook. Then both of them would say things to make me blush. It seems to me now that our father did this to test us, knowing, among other things, that we children were afraid of the dark.

There was always a moral aspect to the issue of authenticity for my father, since one of his sublimated urges was to be a moral man. A tapestry, for instance, had to be *authentic*. He was able to touch a piece of furniture and tell whether it was an authentic antique. Naturally this translated, in time, into the importance of a person finding and keeping to his or her own personal style. . . . In my mother's eyes, he could do nothing wrong. He was a sportsman then. His great love was gliding. He would glide, and she would admire him.

When my mother said something, the building shook and my father fled. She had a lot of women working for her and she had to be forceful. Even today I am still afraid of what I think of as the "Angry Mother."

* * *

I didn't have the security of any kind of religion, so in the end, that is how I became an artist—to find a mode of survival.

I learned that it was possible to study subjects where all the rules were known. Studying geometry, I learned a system in which things proceed without surprises. One is, essentially, safe. That was a revelation: that it was possible to anticipate! You could predict the position of the stars. The sun would rise where it was supposed to. It never failed you. Never betrayed you.

Principally, it was a world of order that I wanted. I had been in a state of anxiety and needed reassurance. Solid geometry and cosmography—the dynamics of the stars. That was paradise. It lasted several years, my happiest time. . . . Now, with the mathematical triangle you can actually do something. For instance, if you want to measure a plot of crooked land all you have to do is divide it topographically into a series of triangles and measure each one. But triangles also have to do with the relationships between men and women. And about the triangles that I was aware of in real life, there was not a thing I could do.

* * *

Once I was beset by anxiety. I couldn't tell right from left or orient myself. I could have cried out with terror at being lost. But I pushed the fear away by studying the sky, determining where the moon would come out, where the sun would appear in the morning. I saw myself in relationship to the stars. I began weeping, and I knew that I was all right.

This is the way I make use of geometry today. The miracle is that I am able to do it—by geometry.

* * *

In those days I only sensed it, but now I understand clearly. If you ask a person, "Are you male or female?" what should that person do? Should one simply die of embarrassment that such an intimate personal matter has been revealed to the whole world? The woman I was drawing in those days—the *femme maison*—did not yet have enough poise or objectivity simply to say, "Don't ask me such a question!" No. She fled, and hid herself away.

* * *

I was less interested in making sculpture in those days [early 1950s] than I was in creating a past that I could not do without. And not only re-creating the past: also controlling it.

* * *

[On *Femme Couteau* (1969–70)] People say it is an aggressive form, but it is *not*. She is harmless, armless, but very afraid! She is in a defensive period of her life. She is a girl who has found a knife but doesn't know what to do with it. It is a beautiful thing, shiny, but wasted on her. After all, she is only a little bird defending her nest.

Women are losers, they are beggars, in spite of women's lib. Because our fate is conditioned by our gifts. That is a very cruel thing. If you have no gift, have only a third-rate education, no manners, no self-restraint, then what are you going to do with your life? So it is a serious matter, life. It is often tragic. And yet, beyond the tragic, there is Black Humor. There is Dada.

* * *

[On *The Destruction of the Father* (1974)] There is a dinner table and you can see all kinds of things are happening. The father is sounding off, telling the captive audience how great he is, all the wonderful things he did, all the bad people he put down today. But this goes on day after day. A kind of resentment grows in the children. There comes a day they get angry. Tragedy is in the air. Once too often, he has said his piece.

The children grabbed him and put him on the table. And he became the food. They took him apart, dismembered him. Ate him up. And so he was liquidated.

It is, you see, an oral drama! The irritation was his continual verbal offense. So he was liquidated: the same way he had liquidated his children.

The sculpture represents both a table and a bed. When you come into a room, you see the table, but also, upstairs in the parents' room, is the bed. Those two things count in one's erotic life: dinner table and bed. The table where your parents made you suffer. And the bed where you lie with your husband, where your children were born and you will die.

Essentially, since they are about the same size, they are the same object.

And all those things of latex are actually casts of animal limbs. I went down to the Washington Meat Market on Ninth Avenue and got lamb

shoulders, chicken legs and cast them all in soft plaster. I pushed them down into it, then turned the mold over, opened it, threw away the meat and cast the forms in latex.

I built it here in my house. It is a very murderous piece, an impulse that comes when one is under too much stress and one turns against those one loves the most.

A Memoir: Louise Bourgeois and Patricia Beckert

Previously unpublished remarks from a conversation recorded in the late 1970s.

Aubusson was the town where my mother and grandmother spent their childhood. It was founded in the sixteenth century by tapestry makers who came there from the North, from Belgium and Tournais on the border, because of the special chemical qualities found in the Creuze River. Tannin poured into the water from upstream and wool washed in it was particularly receptive to dyeing agents. Originally, tapestries were moving walls to use against the cold, and tents that were taken into battle to shelter the generals—a great luxury. So their original purpose was utilitarian. The whole town of Aubusson survived on tapestry and still does today.

My grandmother had her own atelier. She got started in tapestry making simply because she was born in Aubusson. She had married a granite cutter, because that was the men's work. (Creuzemen were famous all over Europe for their stone cutting. The itinerant stonemasons built the aqueducts that carried water for the fountains; they cut the cobblestones for Saint Sulpice. All the window lintels in town were carved by hand from the granite from the countryside.) At any rate, this man had an inclination toward numbers and games of chance and gambling; it explains why my grandmother had to work so hard. She had three children. Alex, the eldest, was her favorite, and he became the *dessinateur* (draftsman) of the atelier, making the drawings from which the tapestries would be made. The second son, Emile, was fortunately interested in gliding, *vol à voile*, an interest he shared with my father. And that's why I'm here. That's how my parents met. My father and Emile went gliding. My mother tagged along with them when they rode their bicycles out to the flying fields.

My father was from Paris, born near the Gare de Lyon. His family came from Clamart, a village near Paris. He was as emotional and unreasonable as my mother was patient and reasonable. They got along very well, except that the war interfered. After the war, my father developed

habits of finding other women attractive. My mother endured these escapades, and he invariably came back.

His profession was landscape architect, but he never got a single cent out of it. Our garden was filled with the decorative lead statues he brought back from his travels in France, Spain, and Italy. They were from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, made in the tradition of French garden sculptures, conceived to be submerged, usually utilitarian. Those statues were made of lead so thin, cardboard thin, that they constantly had to be repaired, taken care of, straightened up. (It is partly why I became a sculptor: I was so familiar with them.) When the war began, someone came and took them all away to be melted down.

Since six horses could not keep my father home, he was always traveling, looking for his leads. He would sleep where he could, at little inns around the countryside, and when he was looking for the statues, he would be led to people who collected things, people with a taste for folkloric things. This is how he found the first tapestry: he saw a horse in a barn, covered with part of an old tapestry, and he brought the scrap back to my mother.

He had a great advantage: his wife was from Aubusson, and therefore had information and knowledge and appreciation of the tapestries. But there was no demand for them because of the condition they were in. My father brought them all torn up to the house and they were put back in shape according to my mother's standard of quality. She took over completely, did everything. It was a lot of work. Tapestry was the family tradition, the family business. The idea of tapestry was in my family for generations. There was just nothing else.

My grandmother's cherished older son was the *dessinateur*, but they needed another because there was so much work. I got the job because of my privileged position as granddaughter, starting with the drawing of feet. No woman had *ever* done this. It was simply forbidden. I filled in on Thursdays, which were holidays from school, and Sundays. I began this when I was around eight years old, and they let me do it because it was

useful. The idea of being an artist and being useful is quite rare. You see, my parents had eloped and had a daughter, who died. Next they had my sister, Henriette. Then the third girl, Louise, was born. My temperament was like my father's; still is. He wanted me to be just like him. I was able to meet his expectations. The difficult thing is that in my position I had to please them both. Everybody has a desire to please, to be included, but a lot of people are not able to do it. They are not able to make themselves useful. My mother said, when I was quite young, "Louise, you do not have to fear not to succeed in life, not to find a place for yourself. All you have to do is make yourself indispensable." The idea that sometimes you are not able to make yourself indispensable, and sometimes you are not wanted, and sometimes you are outcast and rejected and thrown out, it never entered her mind!

After the war, there was that explosion of optimism in England, the United States, and France. The sky was the limit. And it was then my father moved his family, my mother, my sister and brother, and me, to Paris. Aubusson was, after all, very dull. Antony is on the Bièvre, which ran into the Seine. Like the Creuze, the Bièvre was full of tannin. My father waited until he found a house right on the river, and then we moved and the atelier began operating.

My mother had helped her mother in the atelier, but she had never left home and had no business sense. All she lived for was the dyeing of the wool and the repair. My mother was a scientist by nature, and decided that she would repair only the old tapestries made before 1830. Before that date, the tapestries were woven on the warp of wool, but after that, they were woven on a warp of cotton. Gobelins made the cotton ones, and my mother said they were ruining tapestry by making it that way and by using chemical, not natural, dyes. Nobody cared. But there was nobody else in the position to know as well as my mother that she was right.

The wool, when it comes from the animal, smells a mile away. First, the grease had to be removed through alkaline baths. Then the spinner prepared the wool by hand, twisting it, lifting the wool from the pile,

twisting it with her fingers into a spiral-shaped spindle. There would still be grease in the wool, so the thread, now looped into skeins about two feet long, was bathed in vats of ammonia outside near the river (if grease is left in, moths eat the wool). Then it would be rinsed in the river, because of the tannin.

In the dyeing, the important thing was the fire. We had to have a gas stove with a series of burners with vats of the different dye baths at different temperatures sitting on them. You had to leave the skeins for a certain length of time in the dyes to get the desired density of color. Each of the skeins, held on two sticks, went into progressively darker dye baths. The skein would be held in the dye for one minute, two minutes, then it would be lifted out and moved along on the sticks. Sometimes the dye would be boiling; we used a thermometer to know its exact temperature. The important thing was to leave the skein untangled. The dyed skeins would be put on wooden rollers across the bridge or on the trees to dry. When they did at last dry, the wool was finally rolled into balls.

My mother revolted against the chemical dyes by demonstrating that they were not fast. Ever since Chevreul had developed the chemical dyes, they were used for the tapestries. But my mother proved that the new dyes faded in the sun, and she decided that the tapestries she repaired would never fade. She used the natural colors used before Chevreul's discoveries had been adopted: our ingredients came from the *herboriste* who strictly sold herbs for health and beauty. There was cochineal, a purplish red made from the bodies of little red female insects, and indigo, which was a fast color. Gaude, the name of the yellow dyeing agent, was not stable, so that the verdure, the landscape, which is supposed to be green, faded to blue. The underside is green, spinach green, but the front of the tapestries is that lovely blue.

My mother discovered the black dye would not stay black, and it was of course necessary. We were traveling in the Basque country; Mother took the waters for her health. One day we walked in the mountains and saw the sheep. They were black! and they were in the sun all the time, so

their color must be fast. My mother bought big, big quantities of the black wool. It was her curiosity and her tenacity that kept her working, perfecting the tapestries.

When we first started to work with the tapestries, there was some general interest in textiles. In provincial museums, there were old, beautifully made, absolutely superb peasant women's skirts. The people my father met when he was looking for his leads would say, "Look at these torn textiles we have." They would be horses, little scenes. Little by little, it would turn out, one could say, this used to be an Aubusson, a Gobelins Metrounaire, an Arras. My mother had shelves where she kept the tapestries folded up, arranged like books in a library by subject. I don't think that there were more than fifteen groups on the shelves. It is strange how you came to know all of them. Sometimes two halves of a tapestry would find their way back together again, even though they had been cut up years ago. There might be an enormous tapestry, thirty feet long, that had been cut up into two or three pieces to make curtains against the cold.

To bring them back together, we put them through a process called *rentrayage*: remake, reweave across the cut, rather like invisible weaving. The most infinite care was needed; the most difficult part was when they were rewoven on the top of the tapestry. This was done in our home, where we lived.

First the tapestry had to be cleaned in the Bièvre with a special unadulterated blue soap from Marseilles. On the river bank was the public wash house where the women came to do their laundry. There were rocks lining the bank that they would use as a washboard. When the tapestries were brought to the river for washing, the workers had a special wooden box to kneel in, placed on the rocks, each with a pile of straw or a cushion to protect their knees. The wet wool would be so heavy that men would have to help the women as they held the tapestry in the water. Then it would be spread out to dry in the open air, reverse side exposed to the sun. Once dry, the tapestry would be laid down and nailed in place on top of a large table, and the women would start the reweaving. A woman

could accomplish about fourteen inches of this work in a day. When my mother would at last say a piece was finished, it would be taken off the loom. A little oil lamp with a flame turned low would be passed across the surface of the repaired areas to burn off the fuzz from the new wool. That was always the way you could tell a tapestry was really wool, by the smell.

There were locks above the village, and sometimes there would be no water in the river bed, only mud and dead fish. People in hip boots would come along to shove the mud onto the river banks, and the villagers would take it away in wheelbarrows to use as fertilizer because the mud was so rich with minerals.

We all enjoyed planting things in that soil from the river. What grew well was boxwoods. When it rains, they smell so sweet. And there were hawthorns, pink and white. And tamaris. There were the asparagus beds that you planted and waited two or three years. Masses of peonies. Fruit trees, pear and apple, grew in espaliers using and hiding the stone walls. Apple trees would be bent when they were a foot high and run in cordons along the sides of the road. There were some empty spaces just before the Bièvre left the property, so my father planted double rows of poplars, just like the ones growing along the Seine that are hundreds of years old.

Antony is on the route between Paris and Orly. When DeGaulle was president, an immense road was built between them. There had always been acres and acres of strawberries growing on the land, acres and acres of Boston lettuce for Les Halles. Suddenly this changed into a heavily trafficked area. Land was at a premium, so the river was filled in, covered over by the highway.

I hadn't seen the house we lived in for fifteen years. When we came back, the children and I, we looked for the river, and it was gone. The public wash house stood. And the poplars my father had planted were still there as witness.

Two Conversations with Deborah Wye

Previously unpublished; recorded respectively on 7 January 1979 and 14 October 1981 in the course of Wye's research for the artist's 1982 retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

7 January 1979

I would like to talk about the early years, about the atmosphere of the Second World War, about your involvement with printmaking and painting at that time . . .

My relation to the war appears in the work by the use of black, the black of the war, which was the black of mourning. For Franz Kline, whom I talked to and worked with, it gave a color to the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties. He was not interested in the war, but he was interested in the black. What the war meant to me was that suddenly—and this is documented by dozens of drawings—I saw everything in black, black coffins, black legs, black people. It was the deep mourning of the war. It is as simple as that.

Since you mention the prints, I became interested and fascinated by the black of the black plate, first of all in lithography on stones and second in lithography on zinc, where I would take a roller and make the whole world black, the whole page black. I would take a razor-blade and I would make come alive the tiny and incisive line of the corner of a razor-blade. It was etching a little bit of life out of the blackness. This is where I see the black. This is what the war did.

I had the impression of you, in terms of printmaking and how I know you, as a quiet and shy person in your younger years. Not exactly timid, but . . .

Retiring, yes, right.

In a certain way, the printmaking seems to go along with that. It is very private. It takes up a small amount of space. There is something comforting about working on a print . . .

Yes, working at the corner of a table; you hold yourself at the corner of a table. Yes, it is very private.

It also seems very therapeutic . . .

Yes, repetitive.

I have a sense that in the 1940s the prints and the paintings were what you showed in public, but then you had this private side when you were making sculpture. It was part of your private life.

I could express much deeper things in three dimensions. And I felt [physically] constrained in two consecutive apartments. I felt very constrained.

There was that separation, because you were showing paintings. For instance, Natural History [1944].

That is a matter of identity, cards of identity. The identity of the person who leaves the country, the identity of the adopted child. The French refused us to take Michel [Bourgeois' son] out of the country because of his identity.

That is what the term "Natural History" means? It has to do with identity?

Right. It is the fact that you have to prove that you are alive. You have to prove that you have the right to exist. It has to do with documents.

[Looking at *Natural History*; see p. 45] So this person is complete. This person is not a cripple, this is a symbol for a person. The plant is a symbol of a person, and you have to prove your right to exist. All the members—maybe it is sexual—all the members of the plant are there. It has a right to exist, to grow, and to procreate. That was at the time when I thought I couldn't have any children, so I proved to myself that I had the right to have a child. I was complete. I was not a mediated man, I was a woman. All the parts show that the plant is going to procreate.

Didn't you already have children by the time you painted this?

No. I had adopted one. It has to do with the adoption of a child. When I adopted Michel, it meant that I was not able to procreate. And it was a trauma.

But it turns out that you were able to have children.

Then I did something else. I didn't stay on that subject. I found another subject. The anxiety was gone. It is the case of the hysterical woman who cannot procreate because she *is* hysterical. It is a standard case. The fear of not having children made me hysterical, it made me emotionally upset. This is tangible proof that I am a normal person. It is the opposite problem of birth control.

The boys [Jean-Louis and Alain] were born in the forties.

Yes. This dates the things—I am trying very hard to follow your train of thought. When you say Jean-Louis was born in 1941, and so on, well this is subject to many interpretations. You may say that I am trying to prove that this plant is complete. You see the flowers, the grain, all these systems. It means that there was an anxiety about the physical self.

The idea of fertility must have been high in your mind anyway, even when you had the boys.

Yes, because you're always afraid of losing them! The anxiety persisted after conception. This is not something which disappears. For instance, when the children are much older you are afraid of something else. You are afraid of losing them; you are afraid of being abandoned; you are afraid of becoming aggressive; you are afraid of lots of things. So it is not a thing which stops once they are born. It diminishes, but it does not stop.

* * *

14 October 1981

Well, I'm on all these landscapes, unconscious landscapes, soft, the end of softness—even the *Cumuls* all belong to the same group. They are anthropomorphic and they are landscapes also. Our own body could be considered, from a topographical point-of-view, a land with mounds and valleys and caves and holes. So it seems rather evident to me that our own body is a figuration that appears in mother earth. This is where these landscapes come from. Technically they are two kinds: there is the poured [latex] landscape that you actually cannot control, since it is poured; and there is a certain kind of sculptured and cut landscape, where the landscape is chiselled with a hammer and chisel. The last landscape I made was a landscape of udders. Well, just picture a female dog, or a cow; you put her on her back and you have a very interesting, moving, live, and flexible landscape. Everything comes back to that. If you hold a naked child against your naked breast, it is not the end of softness, it is the beginning of softness, it is life itself.

The other aspect of that polarisation, between softness, flexibility, and the sudden stiffness—I was very interested in the opposite—that is to say, in several—you have to forgive my English and my vocabulary, not because I don't know how to speak English, but because I am under a great tension when I have to talk about my work. . . . During the last trip in Italy, I was concerned—for reasons that I don't know and that I don't even care to know—I was interested in stiffness, which is the very opposite. I made a series of *Fallen Women*. The fallen woman is in a state of shock and, well, stiffness. She is falling like an arrow; she is not falling in a heap, she is falling like a very stiff person. That was one of them. The fallen woman reappears from years ago, in marble; of course, she has no arms and she falls head first. Now, there was another portrait—since all these things are portraits—where my sister appears as the pregnant woman, the wooden-leg-pregnant-woman. It applies to my sister, who had a stiff knee; she had, in effect, a wooden leg. This bothers me very much,

because her demeanour when she walked was very special. On top of that she used a cane and when I was little this impressed me as a kind of threatening and unfortunate event. She never had any children, so to please her, as a gesture of love for my sister Henriette, I have pictured her as an enormous pregnant woman with a wooden leg. [Laughter] She would have loved that. Now I have to stop, because suddenly I have a renaissance of memory. . . .

What do you mean by unconscious landscape?

Unconscious—I mean that this is something you do not want, that you undergo. Unconscious is something which is volcanic in tone, and yet you cannot do anything about it, and you better be it's friend, you better accept it, and even love it if you can, because it might get the better of you, you never know.

For instance—this may be unrelated, and yet in a strange way the association is there—one of the first problems I was faced with, which has stayed with me all my life, occurred when I was about five or six. It was a conversation in the garden between my father and my grandfather, and my grandfather looked at me and said in a sententious tone to my father: “That little girl, that little Louise, is going to make you suffer.” This is what the grandfather said, and I remember my impression. I thought: Louise, you better watch out, because you fell into a nest of nuts! [Laughter] I thought they were completely idiotic, and I had better watch out for my little body because they were ridiculous. . . . I cannot express it except that I considered that they were crazy, and I had better watch out and pick myself up and try to cross the room and take them for what they were. That means to say, pompous asses. [Laughter] They didn't know what they were talking about. . . . I had been told by my mother that I was very small but very healthy, and I believed it. My problem was to cross the room and not fall between the chairs! I functioned at *that* level, so how I could make one of these idiots suffer. It was beyond me. So, this is what I mean, that you have to deal with forces, since I was at the mercy of these people, you have to deal with forces that you simply can't control, much less under-

stand, and you just watch out for yourself, for your physical survival.

In this story with the father and grandfather, the child, in a pathetic way, was totally alone. It was not relying on these ridiculous adults and had nothing to go by except the physical self and the reasonable self, in evaluating how much you can do and counting on absolutely no one. It was a kind of ferocious desire towards independence, and this is present in all the work. All the figures are a determination to survive at whatever tragic level you can achieve.

In a strange way these two stupid old men did love me, and I knew that. My mother for very kind of low reasons loved me, basically because I looked like her husband. This was the luck of my life, that I look like my father. No claim advanced there, but I made it because of that, on two levels: because she could flatter him by saying, "I know that you wanted a boy. I'm sorry about that, but look, I know it is only a girl but she is your portrait." That was my chance in life, right? My second chance was that she loved me; whether it was because I looked like him or not, I don't know. But I felt that when I represented the two naked bodies of the child and the mother, I can still feel her body and her love.

It all comes back so vividly . . .

So, what I'm trying to say, to mention, is the polarity of the little kid who has a hard time standing, which applies to all the work; and then, at the other end, there is that phase of being together, you know, of the *Cumuls* and of the rest, huddling together. Much later on there is the appearance of the stiff woman who stiffens herself against interference. As I said, I'm interested in the stiffening of the body. . . . At the same time, I felt that this is very unconscious, because I felt terribly happy in Italy. I was in the sun all day and doing what I wanted. I was a picture of health and happiness, and at the same time I was doing the "hysteric" woman, actually. So, there is a great, great distance between what you are and what bothers you.

For instance, when you talk about this last piece of the pregnant-wooden-leg-lady, there is no wit in it at all. I'm not trying to be funny—it is fact. It is a pathetic vision—I'm not sure it is pathetic, it is a very posi-

tive and friendly vision of my sister, who always inspired a great deal of compassion in me, and who desperately wanted children and never had any, and who hobbled around with a cane and a stiff knee due to water-on-the-knee. So, she had this very, very strange profile when she walked and I was very sorry for her. There is no wit at all. I wasn't making fun. I'm just trying to say that you can be great and pregnant even though you have a stiff knee.

But sometimes there is wit, like in Fillette. I think it is the outrageous quality that makes them funny. The surprise of seeing them sometimes would make you laugh.

But that is not the intended result. Things really are so funny, but it is not my desire to represent them as such. It was no desire of mine, it just turned out that way—because life is so funny. Life is so ridiculous.

Select Diary Notes 1980–1987

Previously unpublished.

Sunday 27 January 1980

Forgive and forget, they say—name of a piece. I do not forgive nor forget. It is the motto my work feeds on. I am shaking like a leaf. I do not want to talk about the past, I want to talk about the future.

11 September 1980

The only access we have to our volcanic unconscious and to the profound motives for our actions and reactions is through the choices of our encounters with specific people. Start with examples. It is all you have.

12 October 1982

Love between teacher and student has to be present for the learning process to take place. . . . In fear strange things happen. A horrible fear makes you the opposite of what you are. Fear—not to be able to cope.

20 April 1983

Success or good news is terrifying and provokes attack, anxiety attacks or aggressive and murderous attack; it is the fear of the alter ego. I do not want to be rewarded or exalted. I detest it. It makes me bite. It is not ingratitude, it is not fear, it is terror.

30 April 1983

Works on Pilgrimages—urge to save people or things—to rescue—may bring out terrible challenge. I cannot resist saving, saving from oblivion, rescuing from death, destruction, or perdition (moral). Sacrifice oneself to the saving of someone else—vows of sacrifice, of chastity, denial, teaching of the church, against sin.

25 June 1984

Sheherazade talked to ward off castration (assasination). She talks as a last defense. It is a pretty miserable motive, useless and dangerous, silence is wonderful.

27 August 1984

I love all artists and I understand them (flock of deaf mutes in subway).
They are my family and their existence keeps me from being lonely.

To be an artist is a guarantee to your fellow humans that the wear and tear of living will not let you become a murderer. God invented art (including all forms) as a regulating device, as a survival device. Audience is bullshit, unnecessary. Communication is rare; art is a language, like the Chinese language. Who gets it? The deaf mutes in the subway.

Reconciliation is the sweetest feeling.

5 November 1985

My father could not be bothered with the help (male help). I liked and found female help. . . . Why was my mother a "She-Fox"? [see p. 141]
Because she never let on that she could not read a plan. She never let on that she was jealous of my father. She never gave her "reasons." I never "graduated" to her level, yet I *looked* up to her until Sadie came.

4 February 1986

My work has to do with the testing of authority (emotional authority symbolized by geometry). The god that failed.

23 February 1986

Reconstruction, recondition, rehabilitation, restitution, remember, repent, vocabulary of guilt.

30 March 1986

Self-control means:

Do not show your arrow, idiot.

Do not make threats, stupid.

Do not frighten horses.

Do not rock the boats.

Do not push a tantrum.

Do not show your jealousy.

Do not show how much you care.

30 June 1986

Symbols are only empty bottles. They function only through what you put in them—personal symbols means personal alphabet, our uniqueness is all we have. The image is sacred and should not be stolen.

12 August 1986

Pornography has a therapeutic value and should be allowed as such.

8 August 1987

You are born alone. You die alone. The value of the space in between is trust and love. That is why geometrically speaking the circle is a one. Everything comes to you from the other. You have to be able to reach the other. If not you are alone. . . .

Abandonment is the trauma of one. I am going to hit you so hard, you will never know what happened to you [to a student].

3 October 1987

Transparency interests me. I want to be transparent. If people could see through me, they could not help loving me, forgive me. What is the difference between the two? None.

Child Abuse

A project by Louise Bourgeois made at the invitation of editor Ingrid Sischy and first published in December 1982 in *Artforum*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 40–7.



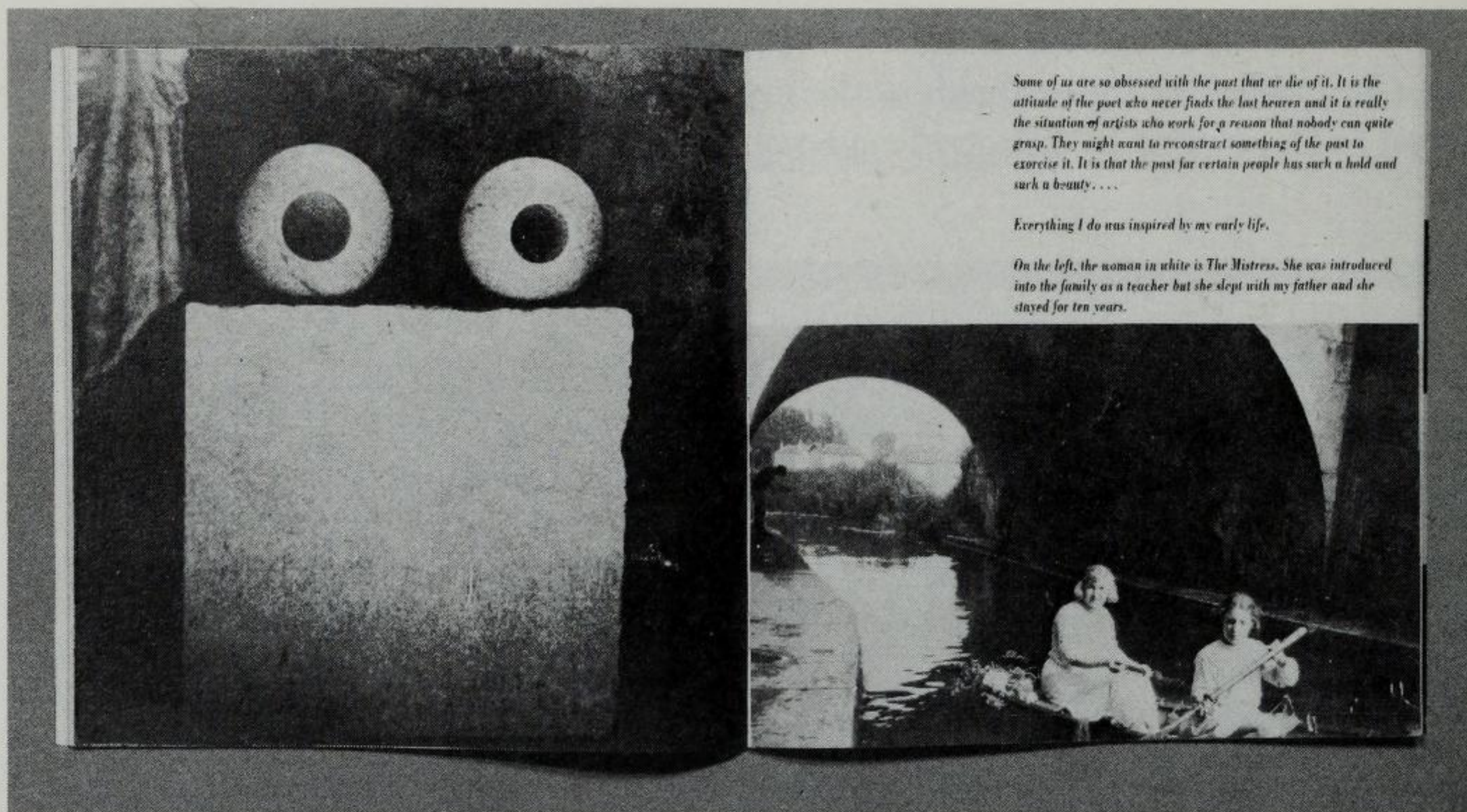
Some of us are so obsessed with the past that we die of it. It is the attitude of the poet who never finds the lost heaven and it is really the situation of artists who work for a reason that nobody can quite grasp. They might want to reconstruct something of the past to exorcise it. It is that the past for certain people has such a hold and such a beauty . . .

Everything I do was inspired by my early life.

On the left, the woman in white is The Mistress [see illustration on next page]. She was introduced into the family as a teacher but she slept with my father and she stayed for ten years.

* * *

Now you will ask me, how is it that in a middle-class family a mistress was a standard piece of furniture? Well, the reason is that my mother tolerated it and that is the mystery. Why did she?



So what role do I play in this game? I am a pawn. Sadie is supposed to be there as my teacher and actually you, mother, are using me to keep track of your husband. This is child abuse.

* * *

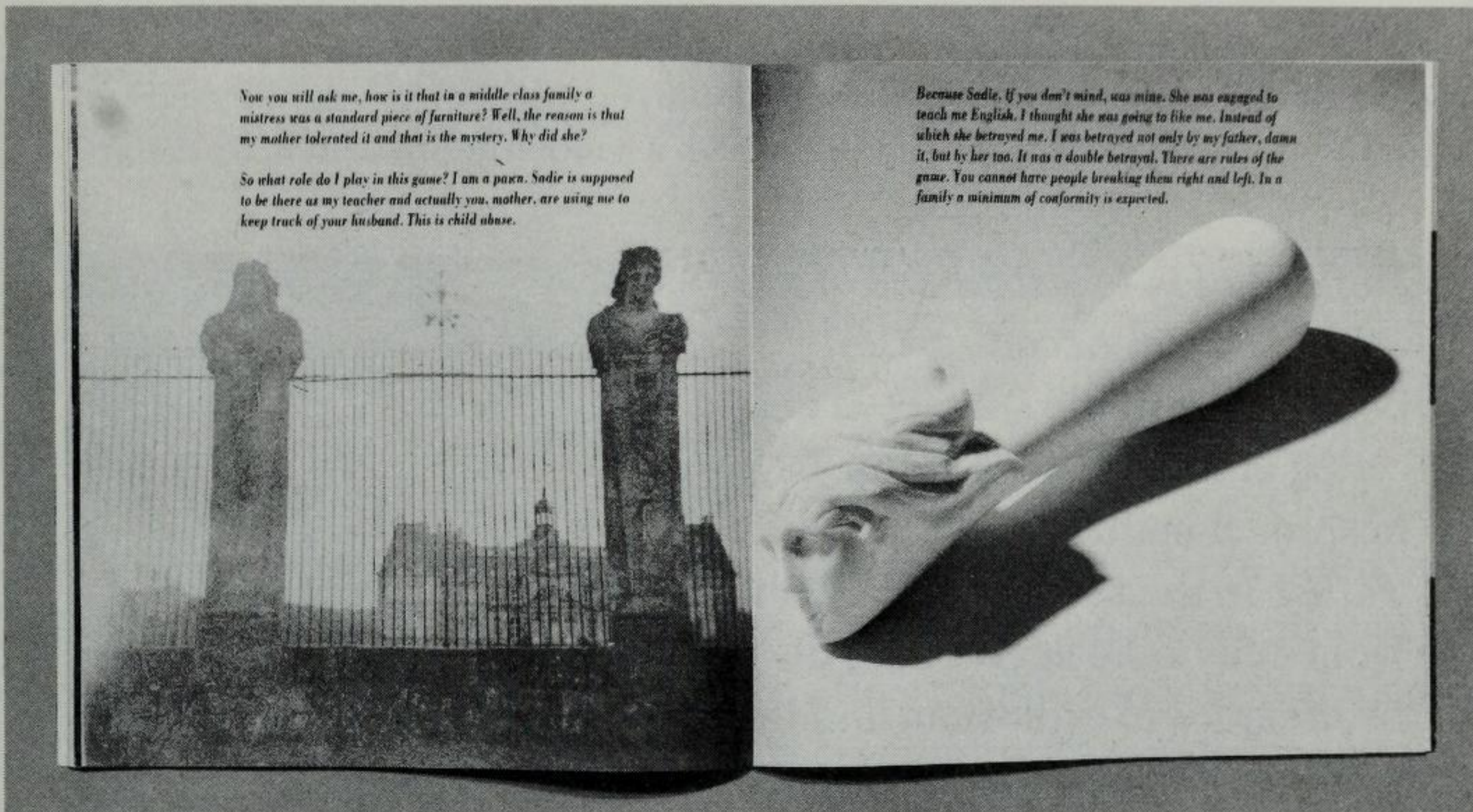
Because Sadie, if you don't mind, was mine. She was engaged to teach me English. I thought she was going to like me. Instead of which she betrayed me. I was betrayed not only by my father, damn it, but by her too. It was a double betrayal. There are rules of the game. You cannot have people breaking them right and left. In a family a minimum of conformity is expected.

* * *

I am sorry to get so excited but I still react to it.

Concerning Sadie, for too many years I had been frustrated in my terrific desire to twist the neck of this person.

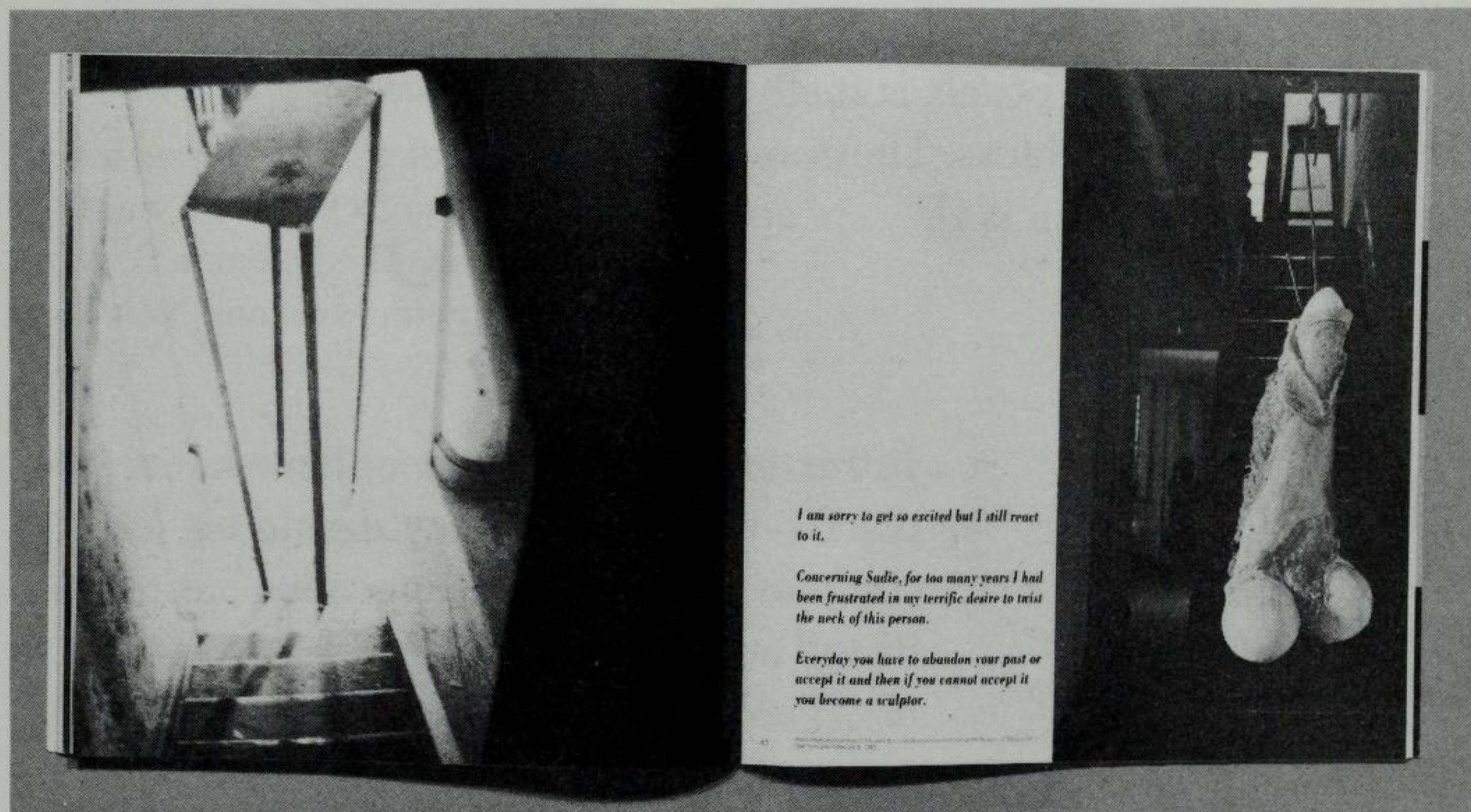
Everyday you have to abandon your past or accept it and then if you cannot accept it you become a sculptor.



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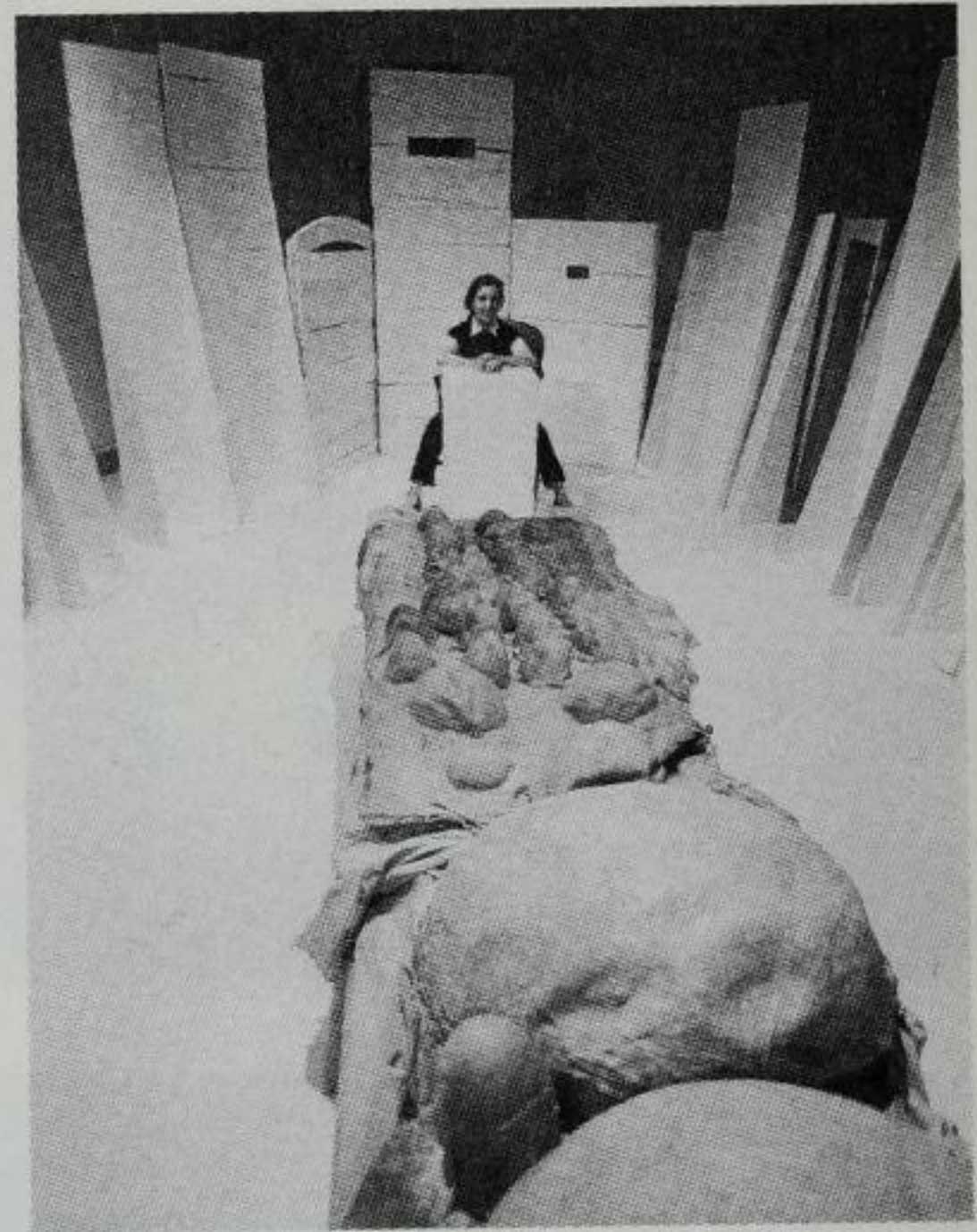
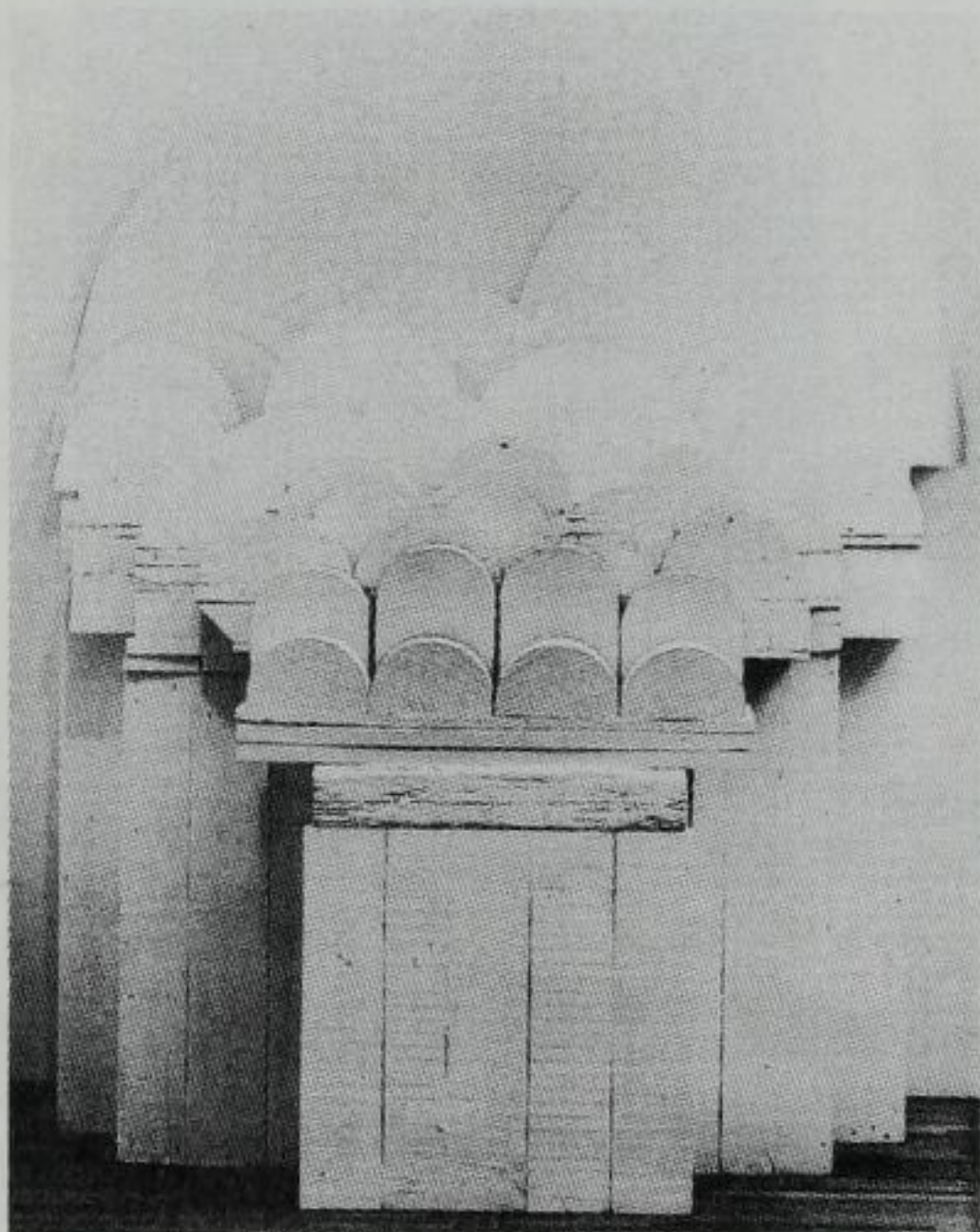
This and previous pages: *Child Abuse*, 1982, as printed in *Artforum*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 40-7.

Symbolic Architecture

Statement by the artist transcribed from an audio recording of an unpublished interview with Deborah Wye, 11 July 1981, with a handwritten addition by the artist.

Confrontation / Destruction of the Father / Partial Recall

Confrontation, with the subject of death as the price of unfulfilled passion, is very close in subject matter to *The Destruction of the Father* in the sense that they both come from emotional aggression, dislocation, disintegration, explosion, and total destruction or murder. Now at the opposite pole there are pieces that are peaceful. After so much emotion, they represent a search for, if not peace, actually forgiveness or forgetfulness. They are a plea for a peace and that is all . . . peace with oneself.



Confrontation, 1978, mixed media, 1128 cm long × 609.5 cm wide. Collection: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

* * *

In *Partial Recall* the pieces have fallen into place—things are as they should be, *les comptes sont réglés*—vengeance has taken its toll and justice appears.

Pardon & forgiveness are fine but they are a refinement.

Partial Recall, 1979, wood, 228.5 × 274.3 × 167.6 cm. Private Collection, New York.

On Fulfillment

First published in May 1985 by *New Age Journal* in "In Search of Fulfillment: Six Meaningful Lives" by Norman Boucher and Laura Tennen, p. 32.

Fulfillment is what in the eighteenth century was called inspiration. It is impossible to understand the logic of a person who is in a state of inspiration. The processes are neither predictable nor scientific. It's a matter of associations . . . but in a positive way. You can work in sculpture only if you are in a state of controlled high. I believe in my instincts . . . As I grow older the problems I see are not only more intricate but more interesting. Fulfillment comes from the solution of a problem. The problems that I'm interested in are more directed toward other people than toward ideas or objects. The final achievement is really communication with a person. And I fail to get there.

Please

I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I am not afraid it
I am not afraid
I am not afraid
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve
I do not deserve
I do not deserve
I do not deserve
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it

I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
because I say
because I say
because I can say
I do not want it
I do not deserve sex
friends, friends
no thank you
this advantage
it is embarrassing
I do not need it
Keep it please
I want to be rid
I can do without
give it to someone
never, never.

a publisher
a show
a photographer
I do not deserve it
I do not want it
no thank you
it is too heavy
I do not deserve
I do not deserve
Thanks a lot
this privilege
no thank you
I do not want it
no thank you
of it quite away
it is not such a
else, please, it
please believe me
give it to Pierre
to my best

The challenge is
The challenge is yours
the challenge is yours
the self denial
the offer challenge
you are tempting me
you test my ground

give it to John
give it to my cat
is a passive position
is a passive position
Can you resist it
can you resist
not mine
challenge
is yours
that is your challenge
I test my strength

a dependant position
a depressive position
can you resist
can you really
my challenge is
is self destructive
and I do not / a
my challenge is
and ability to cope

all I have to my
all I have to my
all I have to my
all I have to my
all I have to my
I do not deserve
I do not deserve
To be unafraid
I am not able
Chapter, Self destruction and the artist.

name is my no thanks,
name is my refusal
name is my little
name is my denials
name is the Right
the power to offer
to accept temptation
is to say no thank
to be unafraid

my self denials
my self, sacrifice
denials, denials
denials, denials
and power to
or grant favors
because I am afraid
you and like it
- sorry. Propose

a friend
a fan
a bracke
I do not
I do not
I do not
I do not
I do not
friends
property
I agree
this present
Keep it
enjoy it
no thanks
it, it, it
big deal
is beauti
look for
to Henriette
friend
dependant
watch out
an offer
Resist
to Resist
how far
how far
to reject
to cope

I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not want it
I do not deserve it
I do not care for it
I do not deserve sex
I do not deserve it
I hate it but I cannot
this friendship
for someone else
at all it embarrasses me
no thank you
what is it? it
do not fuss,
feel, it is fine
someone else
to Josephine
to my land lord
on an offer, an
regressive, Regressive
yes I can resist
how much can
are you willing
are you able to go
temptation
with temptation

my right
my right
my right
my right
Refuse
but Power
of seduction
someone else.

to say no
to be arbitrary
to destroy you
to say no to
your condescension
is another story
I have the right
to be unafraid.

I want something else and
Hell starts again

I want to pay for it
I want to pay for it
I want to pay for it
I do not want to owe
because I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
I do not deserve it
or husband or family
it is too heavy no thank
handle it
this love, better not
I do not deserve it
give it to someone else
thanks a big lot.
it is, your attention
forget about it
it is perfect, but
my brother my sister
to Michel + To Jean Louis
to my very best friend
offering hand -
regressive position
blues are coming
if it kills me
you reject, refuse
to go
step by step, crawl
or seduction.
with seduction
to choose to say no
to choose to say yes
offer and my desire
everything + life itself
and your position
where is it with
the given on the given

I cannot make anything out of this. words are here, where are the subjects + verbs?

**Meanings, Materials, and Milieu—Reflections of Recent Work
by Louise Bourgeois: from an Interview with Robert Storr**

First published in 1986 in *Parkett*, no. 9, pp. 82–5.

The latest work is called *She-Fox*. It is a six-foot-high black marble piece. It is an animal, which is definitely a she, but it is not any she. She has a lot of breasts in front, each one harder and better than the last—but, well an animal has a lot of breasts—and she is crouching on her hind legs. She has beautiful thighs, her feet are good and solid, and she has a wonderful tail with a little panache at the end.

And she has a big slit in her throat, and her head has been cut off—a double mutilation. Otherwise she is perfect. She has great dignity and great presence and she is waiting. She is undisturbed. People do things to her but she can endure it, she can stand it, it doesn't affect her, mutilated as she is.

Then under her haunches is a kind of nesty place, and there I placed myself. That is to say, I put a statue that used to be called the *Fallen Woman*.

If you go into the personal meaning of the thing—obviously this person is my mother. I was preoccupied with the idea that my mother could not possibly love me, and this I could not take. The appellation “fox” means I considered my mother to be a very intelligent, patient, and enduring if not calculating person. To me she was a fox because I did not measure up to this kind of competence and this antagonism, this threatening aspect, exasperated me and pushed me to violence. So, I would try and hurt her, and this time I did. I cut her head off. I slit her throat. Still, I expect her to like me. The tragedy is: Is a person who I have treated like this going to like me? Right?

It is difficult to believe in the love of somebody you have really hurt very much. If you act like a monster it is very difficult to expect your friends to like you.

She-Fox is the portrait of a relation. It is an expression of the faith a



She-Fox, 1985, black marble, 68.5 × 179 × 81 cm. Collection: Paul and Camille Oliver Hoffmann.

child can have in a parent and of the violence between the strong and the weak. This is the meaning of the piece.

Once a sculpture is done, it has served its purpose and has eliminated the anxieties that I had. The anxieties are gone for ever. They will never come back. I know it. It works.

In *She-Fox* the material didn't give anything. To hunt, to seduce, to deal with a stone is really to deal with terrific resistance.

How are you going to turn this around and make the stone say what you want when it is there to say "no" to everything. It forbids you. You want a hole, it refuses to make a hole. You want it smooth, it breaks under the hammer. It is the stone that is aggressive. It is a constant source of refusal. You have to win the shape. It is a fight to the finish at every moment.

Gaston Bachelard* would explain this by saying that the thing that had to be said was so difficult and so painful that you have to hack it out of yourself and so you hack it out of the material, a very, very hard material.

I read Bachelard when I was over seventy-five. If I had read Bachelard before, I would have been a different person, I would not have been divided inside since I would have taken the materials, with their different characters, and I would have been more friendly towards them. In the past, every time somebody asked me about materials, I used to answer, "What interests me is what I want to say and I will battle with any material to express accurately what I want to say." But, the medium is always a matter of makeshift solutions. That is, you try everything, you use every material around, and usually they repulse you. Finally, you get one that will work for you. And it is usually the softer ones—lead, plaster, malleable things. That is to say that you start with the harder thing and life teaches you that you had better buckle down, be contented with softer things, softer ways.

Assemblage is different than carving. It is not an attack on things. It is a coming to terms with things. With assemblage or the found object you are caught by a detail or something strikes your fancy and you adjust, you give in, you cut out, and you put together. It is really a work of love.

But there is something else in the assemblage, there is the restoration and reparation. Mind you that is what my parents did, they restored and repaired tapestries, so there is a common attitude. To repair a thing, to find something broken, to find a tapestry torn apart with big holes in it and destroyed and step by step rebuild it—making an assemblage is that. You repair the thing until you remake it completely.

So, the second piece in the show, *Articulated Lair* (1986),** is a closed environment eleven feet high. It is a circle with two openings. It is a “lair.” You can come in, sneak into it by a very small door, and there is another small door at the other end to get out. It looks like a trap but if you were clever even though it is deserted and terribly lonely you could get in and out.

Inside, there is just one, tiny stool. Nobody’s around. It is a place to face the fact that there is nothing—nothing to expect. You can sit there. It is not unsafe but it is empty. Nobody can hurt you. You are not even afraid of being hurt. You are afraid of being alone. Why? Because you have chased everybody out. You are alone by your own doing. It is total loneliness.

It is like the set for *No Exit* of Jean-Paul Sartre. Jean-Paul Sartre said in *No Exit*, “*L’enfer c’est les autres*” (Hell is others). I say that Hell is the absence of others—that’s hell.

Also, a lot of objects are hanging from the ceiling. They are symbols. By symbols I mean things that are your friends but that are not real. Symbols are indispensable because symbols allow you to communicate at a deep level with people. But when you are interested in reality and you are facing the fact that your life has been spent in vain because you have accepted the symbol and were satisfied with that, you realize, which is the case here, that symbols are just symbols. Even if they work, it is a communication which is not a flesh and blood communication.

Like everything else it is fifty-fifty. The symbol is a double-edged weapon. These things are very, very clear, very simple—and absolutely devastating.

* * *

I am an American artist. My experience as an artist has been the New York experience. In my work there is this desire, this compelling need to work and that has to do with France because this is where everything happened to me. I lived there until I was twenty-seven. All the motivation resides there for better or worse. But the realization is American.

I was not a sculptor in France, and I don't think I would have become a sculptor. Because to be a sculptor is kind of a ridiculous position in the sense that the food of an artist is, first, what he sees—what he sees in the street. Now, in New York everything is dumped on the sidewalk. So you find beds—whole beds—you find all kinds of household things, as if a whole apartment had been put on the sidewalk. It is not that people abandoned them but that people are separated from them. Now for an artist, you well understand, this can be full of fantastic objects and you look at them and you combine them and that is the beginning of the assemblage. It is a rescue mission. You try to save these things because they are so wonderful. Well, in France it is not like this. It is tidy. Everybody has a place and everything is saved in France. You cannot find anything on the streets. So I wouldn't have had the freedom in France to realize things that I do here.

In America anything goes, especially today. Artists are accepted in France in a way that they are not accepted here. I know that. Here maybe you are a "nobody," maybe you are even considered useless, but you are not denied the right to live the way you want. It is real freedom here. Here you can be as private as you want, you can look the way you want and nobody is going to bother you.

My first experience of great luck was when I was not picked up by the art market and I was left to work by myself for about fifteen years. I did not consider that I was ignored. I considered that I was being blessed by privacy. This is very, very important to me.

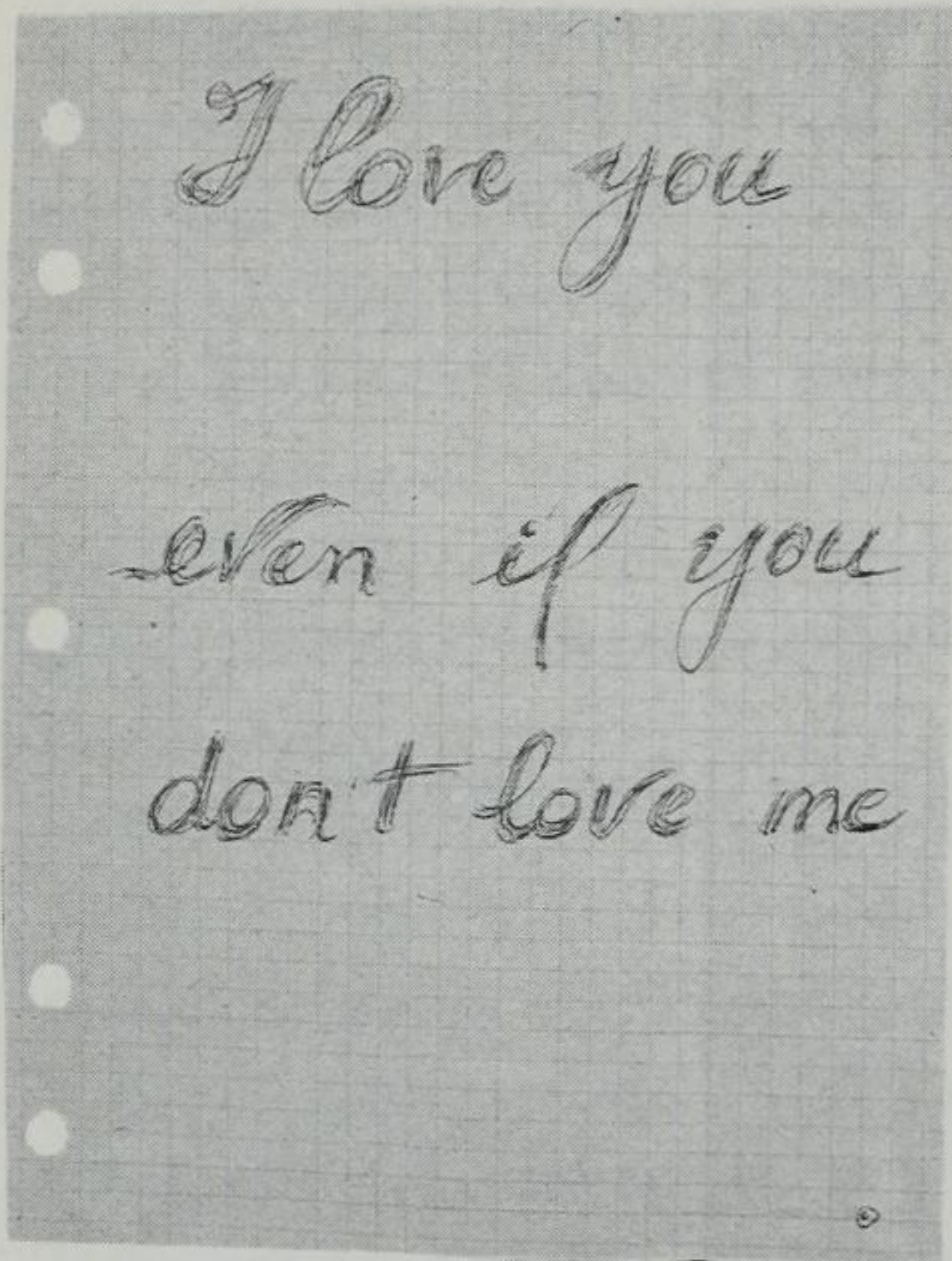
My second piece of luck was my positive relation to the younger generation. I live with people of a certain age, less than thirty-five or forty. I understand them, I can push them once in a while but I don't do it on

purpose. I just do it and they forgive me the way I expect to be forgiven. But my love is with them. I relate to them and there is an exchange. I would not say that of my contemporaries. I do not hold a grudge, I just ignore them and give my positive feelings to the younger ones.

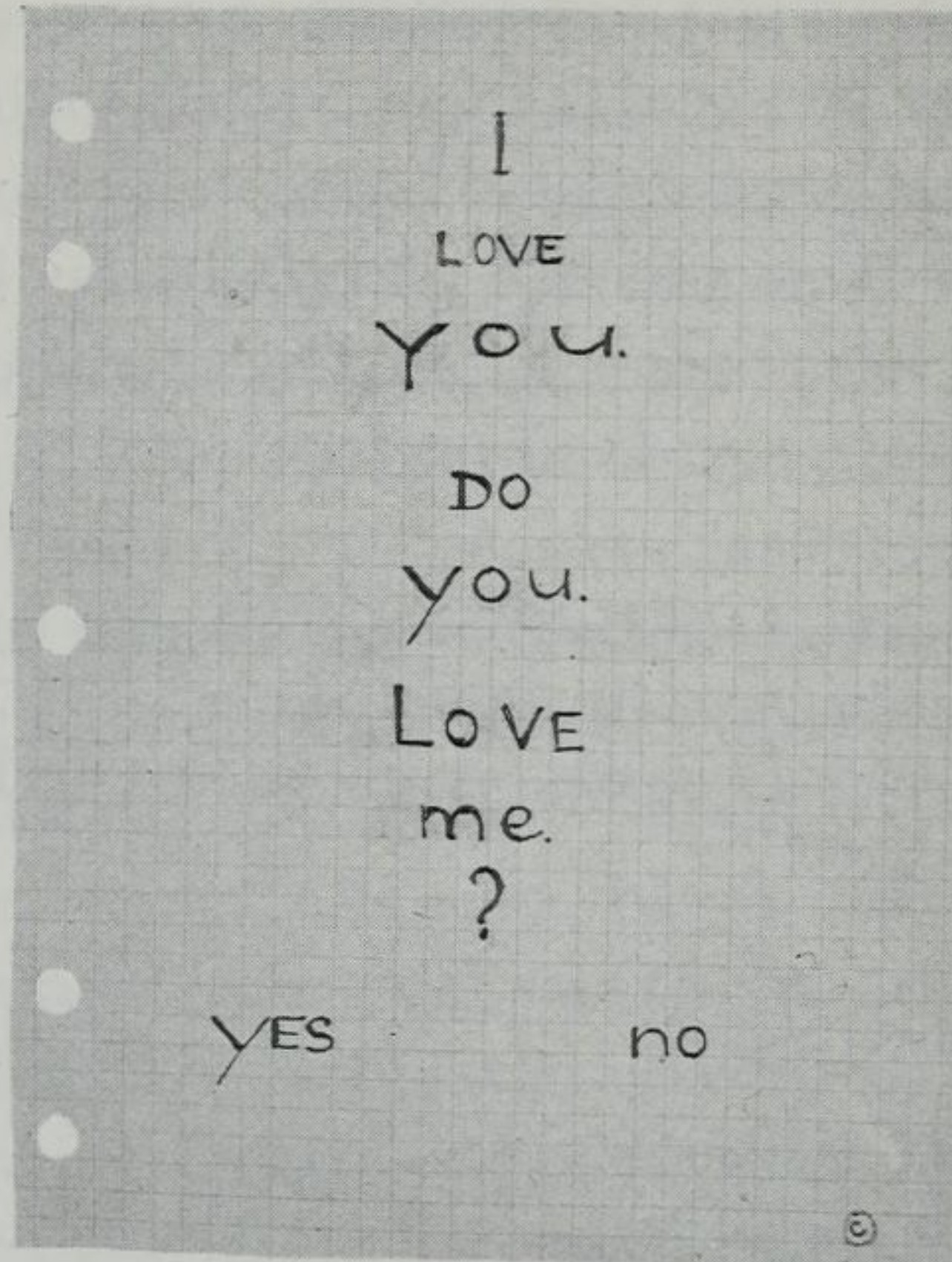
I have been inhabited by a ferocious mother-love. In that way *She-Fox* is also a self-portrait.

* Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher whose primary works concern the phenomenology of space and matter.

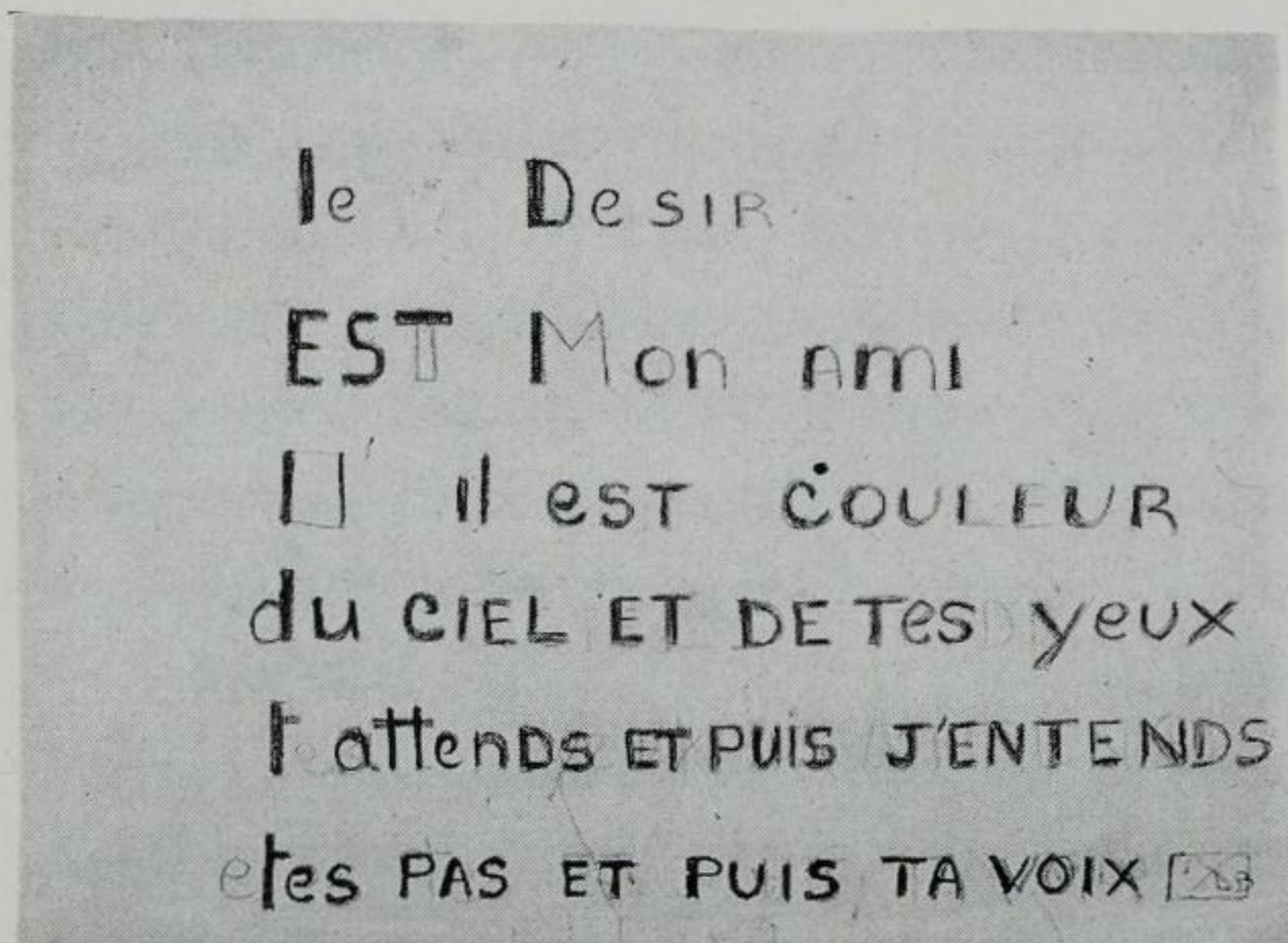
** *Articulated Lair* was first exhibited at the Robert Miller Gallery, New York, in May 1986.



I Love You even if You Don't Love Me,
1987, ink on graph paper, 20.3 x 26.6 cm.



I Love You. Do You. Love Me.? Yes No,
1987, ink on graph paper, 20.3 x 26.6 cm.
Collection: Jerry Gorovoy, New York.



Untitled (Le Desir), 1987, pencil, crayon,
watercolor, 41 x 29.8 cm.

what can I do for you. This is the password
 what can I do. what can I do for you Dialogue listen, listen and learn
 I have fallen from grace, Louis, telling follows of very interesting,
 true story of - Luthbert Rath, Francis + Julie father of Jamie in
 my fear of not being to help. I panic, I am afraid, made frantic in
 my desire or desire or desperate wish to help. I want I want I want
 I want at all cost to impress the person who needs help. It is
 indispensable to understand the challenge, the irresistible want or
 need, or absolutely prove that I can save a soul from suffering. This
 is it, the challenge to defend someone. Prenez garde vous a droite. Prenez
 garde vous a gauche. J'achèverai mon salut ou en sauvant quelqu'un
 mourant je suis la sauveur et c'est mon destin. Je remplirai
 ce non. L'évangélisme est mon salut. Incroyable mais vrai
 Do you hear, parle français, l'appel au secours - sauvez moi. C'est le
 cri qui me challenge, c'est derrière l'attrait de la restauration, Repara-
 tion, self defeatism, sauvez moi de la suicide, sauvez de la noyade
 sauvez moi, s'il vous plaît de ces mauvaises habitudes, de mes fautes
 de ma maladie, de ma défaite, de mon malheur, de mon destin. Je
 vous aimerai et je vous sauverai de votre propre pessimisme, c'est
 le prix du self estime, c'est la raison du pardon, vous serez perdue
 vous mériterez votre salut si vous sauvez une autre âme. Vous
 évitez les reberberations de cette admission de peur. Je suis tombé au
 désespoir; c'est le pire, c'est l'écueil, c'est fini, sauve moi. En éclair
 une décharge électrique mes passe entre les 2 temps. et le challenge est
 et hémorragie, comme une terreur, c'est le chapitre de la peur. qui me
 revient. la peur ou plutôt la terreur me terrasse, me confuse et
 me rend stupide, aveugle et totalement dépourvu. Je n'est pas
 question d'apprendre car je suis totalement détruite par la peur
 je suis agressée par la devorante, c'est incroyable mais c'est vrai -
 à ce moment je veux compenser et impressionner les gens. je suis de
 l'autre côté du désespoir, et cela m'arrive 4 fois par jour. Je n'ai
 jamais je veux abandonner et ne voir personne. fini. Bouclé, bonsoir,
 The system - The job was difficult because 2 specialists were there 24 for the day
 I felt completely unready, unprepared, inadequate, very
 responsible - my friend was "helping" trying his utmost best, showing off
 for nothing around in all its charm & coziness.
 Paralyzed with apprehension I was sitting next to the vertical pipes

The Blow up
 when I realize that he did not have a degree no credit left
 you have no degree no credit left
 vous vous êtes à l'eau

This and following pages: notes, 1986, 29.8 x 41 cm.

Let us begin at the beginning. How did the accident occur
I would rather commit suicide than go through this again.
What happened? I will tell you. It was Saturday morning and
the men were there, arrived over an hour late. I thought they
would not come and the trip was in vain. I heard the squeaking of
the door, and I knew that they were indeed in and we were
in for the day - unloading, double doors swung open. The cold
comes in - I am as tight as a knot - hide in the hall room to pull
myself together.

There is the finding, counting, measuring, sorting out but in a
certain order, clean, and paper + organising. I have done this
in my head all week everything short of fetch + carry. See
the difference between those 2 events. Planning and entering
realisation - when you start cutting & welding you are committed
point of no return but but, but you have to have a system
the system, lack of it, provoked the blow up, what I called
the accident, because I blew up and I cannot afford to blow up
because it frightens people and separates them from me, this is
where the accident lies. Well of course since I cannot cope
I cannot cope if the guy has no system, the realisation
that he does not know what he is doing & explodes, la
meuse, la statue de tel, le short circuit & le bursting of the
water main, what else. The loss of temper or the tantrum. Do
not indulge in that because alternation follows, Baby behaviour
(when I found them together copulating. I started to scream.
Do you understand the terror or don't you understand the terror

The diseases of the ego in the art world at the Institute

It is a different kind of value system
commonly known as sentimental value. anything entering the work has a sentimental
value (at 475) we found it together. dignity and significance of this found object.
souvenir attached. uniqueness, la gaité qui se abaissement. un passé en soi sans mes
souvenirs objets. Je valorifie un objet, un projet, je crée une valeur
à mes créateur

I learn, I learned, I learned, I learned, I learned, I learned, I learned, I learned,
 you blew it. I learned a lot, I learned something, I did learn, did you
 I learned a lot today and it made my day. I learned a lesson I feel better; let
 learn. I learn, you learn, he learns, you learn, we learn, they learn
 we learn to get better and we begin to understand each other, make
 no demands on me the way I make no demands on you - Let us
 just learn a little every day. try to, it is so difficult to learn, what
 keeps us from learning - Be on a learning spirit. Do not be afraid
 to spend time learning - you have lots of time I have lots of time
 we have lots of time. If we just learn nothing will go wrong -
 just be receptive, just be accepting, just be tolerant, just be self
 loving, not self indulgent, not selfish, but self respecting, self
 respecting, self forgiving, self relaxing, self undemanding, self
 respect repeating - self unafraid, self trusting and learning
 will be less difficult - do not pass judgement, wait and see -
 give it a chance, try again, so many chances, so much time, so
 much patience, give yourself a chance, as you give them a chance
 endless chances, every day is a new chance, to know too
 a whole life time of chances, no reason to despair, no reason to be
 judging, complaining, pushing, wanting, expecting from the others
 or yourself. The others do not judge you, they do not even know that
 you are there, no one is against you, do not worry, you are not that
 compelling, who are they to judge you - they do not know enough
 they are going to learn about you and so they will begin to understand
 you. to understand is to forgive - no problem - but you certainly have
 to learn to understand and that is truly difficult - whether it is
 mysterious, complicated, heavy duty, or weird. To learn is difficult
 but it is rewarding, try again, and start again tomorrow and cry
 if you have to - learn to learn, do you like to learn, are you good at it. Do
 you get there, learn for the sake of learning for itself, be crafty at it. Do you have
 the knack to learn to discover, to uncover, to turn upside down and
 side up again - to deconstruct and reconstruct. to make sense out of
 the unliterally - learn to answer, to question, to make out the other one
 for the sake of discovering, not telling anybody that you ^{are} possessed
 step by step, from position to position you put the puzzle to gether.

Learning is your secret, it is all you have. If you share it is the only thing you can call your own. Nobody can take it away.
 you learn for yourself not for others.

you better learn or die
 ignorance is no excuse
 and remember

Taking Cover: Interview with Stuart Morgan

First published in January 1988 in *Artscribe*, pp. 30–4.

What's this piece called?

It embarrasses me to say that I don't know what it's called. As time goes on it means different things to me, so I don't have a title. This is not my job. As far as I'm concerned it should have four or five titles. My subjects recur. They might look different but the subjects themselves are the same. This one might be called *Number 17*. I've done about that number of these. *Triangle 17*. It is a triangle because there are three points.

And what does the triangle mean?

Triangle means trouble. Triangle means a conflict in the relationship between three people.

It looks like a single form.

Three people or three different sides of the same person.

Does a triangle represent a love relationship?

Love? I didn't say love. A triangle means a tense relationship between people. Most of the time it is quite hostile.

Are we dealing with passion? Or revenge?

Resentment, yes. Revenge? It is very unwise to be vengeful. Disagreement, I would say. Instability. But this hand, which appears several times, is a pacifying hand which says, "Now, cool it. It's not so bad. Things will be all right."

If a three-way relationship which is so tangled and fraught can reach a point of equilibrium is that good or bad?

It is very good and it is very rare.

The work is about the alleviation of tension, then.

Well, there are three spirals here, and the spiral is a symbol of tension. The centripetal spiral becomes wider and wider and nothing happens. This is a centrifugal spiral, which moves toward one point. This is to say that you can crank it, and if you crank it too much it cracks.

In this case energy is turned in on itself. Is it emotional energy?

No. Plain energy, the energy you have at eleven o'clock in the morning after a very sweet, sugared cup of coffee. You might call it strength. What you do with it is something else.

Is the work autobiographical?

The pacifying hand could be considered a self-portrait. Rightly or wrongly, I fancy myself as reasonable. In this other triangle, the hand is a child's. It is inquisitive, almost grasping, very young. It wants a lot and wants it instantly. Children are unreasonable, unwise and undisciplined. Their wishes are conflicting, exaggerated. They have no doubt. This is the hand of a little god.

Are children foolish?

They know no strategy.

You lay great emphasis on techniques for survival.

I'm interested in all that but I'm an ignoramus about it. I have no doubt that you understand strategy yourself.

This is turning into a private conversation.

I don't mind. Whether something is private or public makes no difference to me. I wish I could make my private *more* public and by doing so lose it.

Aren't you afraid of exposing yourself by doing that?

Yes. For instance, when we started talking today I felt that I couldn't go on because my clothes were going to fall off. I said to myself, "Louise, your clothes are *not* going to fall off," and I controlled it.

Let's get back to strategy.

This show is about the inability to use strategy. When I fail to trap whoever I want, what else can I do but run for cover?

Taking cover is an acknowledgment that you are trapped.

Yes. Absolutely. You have it. I am trapped. How do you expect me to trap anybody when *I* am trapped? So it is a movement from the active to a regression into passivity, into means you can afford. I don't want to be bookish but I'm going to be. I am interested in the phenomenon of inspiration: why today I cannot do a single thing and the next day everything happens and I can make myself understood. In the eighteenth century

when they were very pragmatic and very scientific and very American, they had it pinned down. Inspiration, they said, was this or the other thing. Ernst Kris has written, and I discovered it at the end of his book, that inspiration is the regression of the active into the passive. "I have to hide, otherwise I will be trapped." So in admitting that we have no power, we become more than ourselves; we think in ways that the mind has no normal access to.

So what you are saying is that the mind is not finite.

No, no. The self is always turning around.

But if we admit that we are finite, even for a moment, we receive energy from somewhere else. Where does it come from?

It comes from our love of the self. That is to say, instead of despairing and breaking, you say, "Well, I cannot have this," and you have to be satisfied with less. This is an admission of fear and maybe of hostility too.

Inspiration comes from retreat.

Well, how do you feel about religious people who ...

I am not dealing with nuts now. I am being absolutely rational. Right?

The metaphor of retreat is central to your work. One of your favorite titles is "Lair."

I know how to make lairs. I can make them subterranean, I can make them ...

How do you define "lair?"

It is a place to go, a place you need to go, a transitory protection. The latest is called *Articulated Lair* (1986) because it has no fixed form; it is completely flexible, with forty-seven uprights, each of which has three hinges.

And they fit together to make a circle.

If the circle was not completed, the parts would all fall down, like dominoes. And you can add or subtract.

There are two doors, one in front and another at the back, to one side. One is an entrance, and the other is an exit so in order to escape if cornered.

For you to escape.



Louise Bourgeois inside *Articulated Lair*, 1986, painted steel and rubber, 335 cm high. Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Right. For people without strategy. All they can muster is a lair.

Is escape a strategy?

It is a strategy all right, but a miserable one. It doesn't deserve the *title* of strategy, that's for sure. For me, strategy is always a move, not toward the self but toward someone else.

So you sit on your stool in the middle of your articulated lair.

And I enjoy it. It is a beautiful place.

And it's your nest, like an animal's.

Right. If this one is destroyed, I can make another.

So it's about lying low.

And watching. You watch to see whoever is coming and you have an attack of anxiety whenever a person is coming. But you recover and escape. It is a very considered way of living.

"Articulated" means the lair is made in sections.

You can add or subtract. That's what "articulated" means. So articulation is the symbol of a relationship that can change and improve.

Another new work is shaped like a house, cut away to reveal every floor. But it also looks like a kind of shop-window display showing

white plaster molds with clustered forms that resemble fingers or cacti.

It's about the pleasure you get from being with and talking to and fooling around with people you understand. The people I understand are artists. I cannot understand critics. I bear with them. I cannot say we are pals. But artists are all basically the same. When there are no tensions or rivalry then we really have a good time because there is room for everybody. In this piece the elements are happy to nestle together and act together because they want the same thing, they suffer from the same ailments.

It looks like a greenhouse, with things growing.

But as you see, some *don't* grow. Some stay tiny and others develop. But they definitely like each other. In civil rights marches in the 1960s there were thousands of people who didn't know each other. They communicated because they wanted the same thing. And you had the feeling that anybody who came in was welcome. It is actually the definition of America. I don't want to be moral now, but this is the feeling I have as a foreigner here. If you make the effort you won't be pushed out.

Presumably the dangling leg relates to a difficulty in articulation.

It is about the control of pain. When I was about eighteen or nineteen I got a job as a guide at the Louvre in Paris. Believe it or not I talked to Americans, and sometimes people from Australia. The Australians would say, "Gorgeous! Gorgeous!" I'd never heard that word before. Anyway, this was my job. I worked from nine to five. Now, the French are very strong on lunch. I was allowed to go to the basement and have lunch with the staff. This is like a story I am telling. So I go downstairs and find a hell of people with amputated limbs, people who had been wounded in the war. If you are wounded in the war in France you are entitled to an official position. I'm talking seriously now. And I walk in and look and a leg is cut off or an arm is gone and they are all in that basement eating their lunch. And I had such revulsion, such revulsion. I had to do something about this unfortunate occurrence with legs. This is trouble with articulation, right? If you take a little key you can unscrew this bronze leg and change the

direction of the light. It is definitely not a catastrophe. Definitely. And that is it. When I say articulation I mean hardware. With the *Articulated Lair* my pride and glory is that the hinges are foolproof. There are three of them on each upright and nothing can go wrong. Each piece must be lifted out. It is simple and very secure.

She-Fox (1985) seems to be about a relationship.

She-Fox is simply my mother—not the way she was but the way I perceived her until recently. There is an enormous creature with no head. The head has disappeared and the throat has been slit. So you can see the poor thing has gone through quite a lot. But she is still standing because she is eternal. There is something under her left paw, a little figure nestling there. And as you move up close, you see that the little figure is as pleased as Punch, because she is protected. The murderous creature who is treating her that way has no motive except to be loved. The kid is myself. It is a self-portrait.

That figure has appeared before in your work.

Yes, it is the shape of the *Fallen Woman* (1981), which is also a kind of self-portrait. All these subjects appear on many occasions. Now, *She-Fox* is a very tender piece. The fact that you have tried or even almost succeeded in killing your parents doesn't mean that they don't like you. You can count on them.

When you talk of killing the parents you are talking literally or metaphorically?

I never talk literally. Never, never, never. You do not get anywhere by being literal, except to be puny. You have to use analogy and interpretation and leaps of all kinds.

How strange that you think this, then go away and work with hard materials.

Oh, but the resistance of the material is part of the process. If there was no resistance I could not express myself. I can express myself only in a desperate fighting position.

Fighting against the marble.

Fighting anything you can. If you look at the finish of the material in *She-Fox* you can see that it has been hacked away with a pointed chisel. This is a unique finish for me and it is very carefully done as you can see from the light. It allows for extremes of tenderness and aggression.

Why is her surface different from that of the child?

Because she can take it. Such is the resistance of the mother figure. This is the definition of a parent. You have to be a saint to be a parent.

Would you call She-Fox a drama?

In a way it is dramatic; it is universal, but the figure is personal.

Don't you feel that in working in this way you are making a monument?

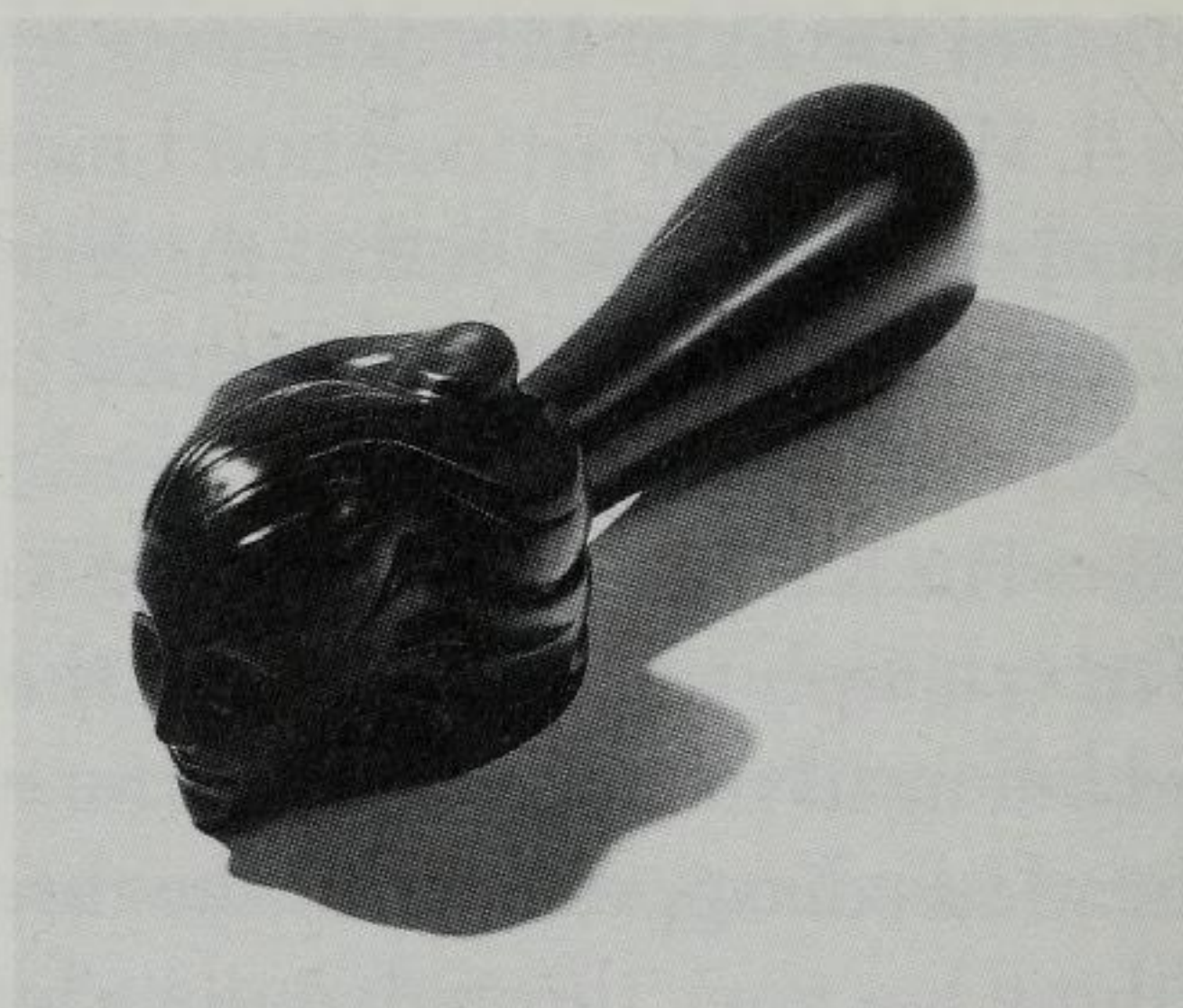
But my parents *are* monuments. This is not too big. It could be much bigger.

Once again this is an articulation, two things moving in rhythm. Do we conclude that the only strategy is to make life tolerable by trying for equilibrium like this?

You know I have no recipe for anything.

Then we can't end the interview.

We can end by saying that sculpture is an exorcism and when you are really depressed and have no other way out except suicide that sculpture will get you out of it and get you back to a kind of harmony. That is the purpose of it.



Fallen Woman, 1981, black marble, 8.5 × 10 × 34.5 cm. Collection: Ginny Williams Family Foundation, Denver.

Statements from an Interview with Donald Kuspit

First published in 1988 by Random House, Inc., New York, and Elizabeth Avedon Editions/Vintage Contemporary Artists, in *Louise Bourgeois* by Donald Kuspit, pp. 19–82.

The Destruction of the Father (1974) deals with fear—ordinary, garden-variety fear, the actual, physical fear that I still feel today. What interests me is the conquering of the fear, the hiding, the running away from it, facing it, exorcising it, being ashamed of it, and finally, being afraid of being afraid. This is the subject.

I'm not an expert, but I know what fear is; I know what fear will make you do. The fear—garden-variety fear—what do you do about it? Do you run away? There is a long, long list of what you can do. The way immature people can conquer—they don't conquer it, but they feel that they make the fear disappear—is by falling in love. Right? You deceive yourself, you pretend to yourself that you love in order not to feel that pang of the fear. You “fall in love” with somebody that you are afraid of, and it short-circuits the fear; you do not feel the fear. If you take a snake and a bird—the bird is fascinated, right? It's exactly the same. It's mesmerized. He doesn't suffer, he's not afraid—in fact he's thrilled—and the snake gobbles him up. That's it! All my thinking is in terms of images. This is my trouble. But the difference from real love is that it does not come to sex; there is no real desire. I think that the test of being in love—real love—is that you want to give.

But you cannot “love” everybody to obscure the fear—it is completely time-consuming and unproductive. You'd never grow up! So you go from puppy love to puppy love, and you don't feel afraid; you feel that you have conquered something. But you have conquered nothing! And the years pass, you have not experienced love—since that kind of love usually does not materialize—and you have wasted your time. And that waste of time is expressed by a great anger, because you feel that you have

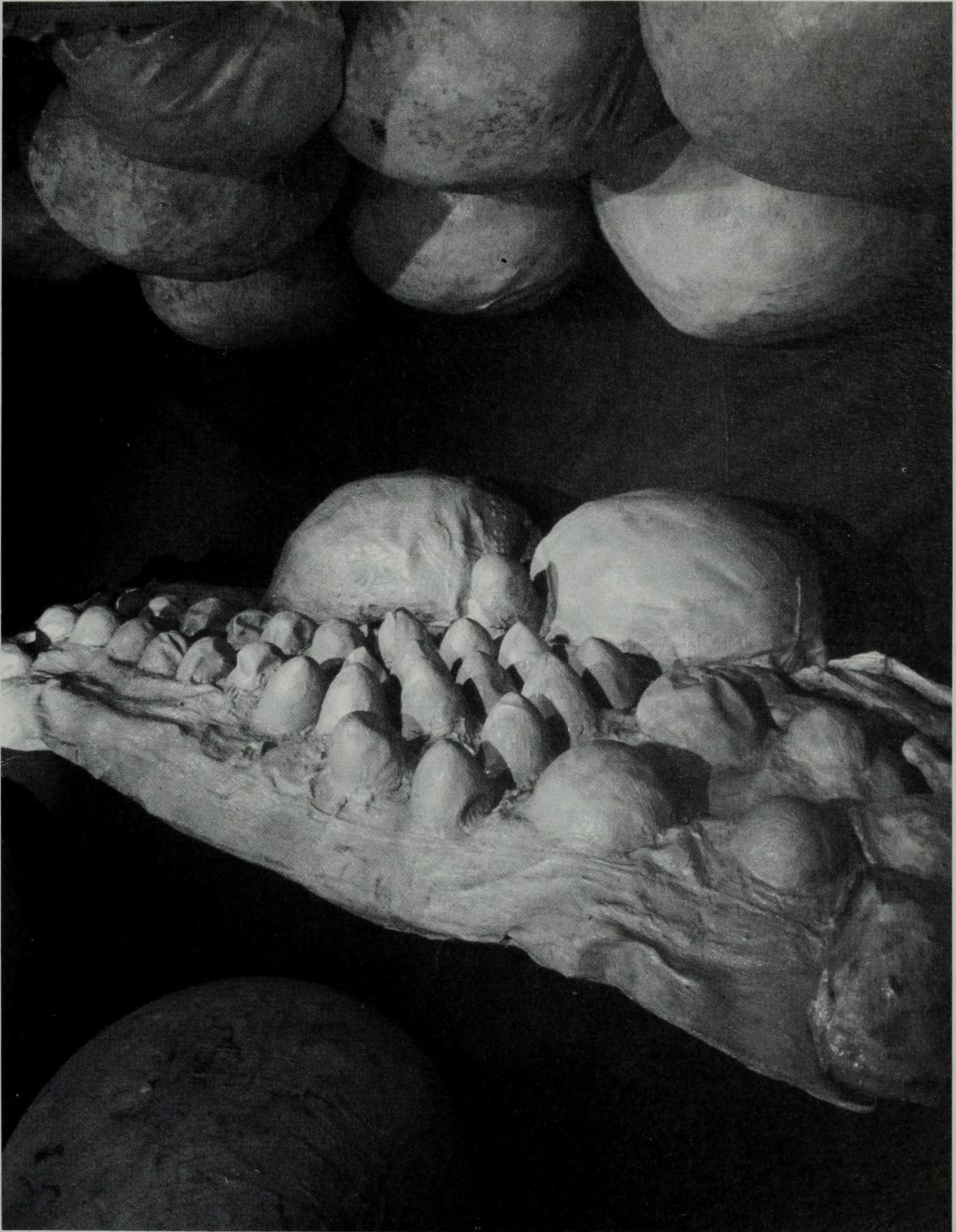
not lived, that life has passed you by. This is what *The Destruction of the Father* is about.

* * *

Now, the purpose of *The Destruction of the Father* was to exorcise the fear. And after it was shown—there it is—I felt like a different person. Now, I don't want to use the word *thérapeutique*, but an exorcism is a therapeutic venture. So the reason for making the piece was catharsis. What frightened me was that at the dinner table, my father would go on and on, showing off, aggrandizing himself. And the more he showed off, the smaller we felt. Suddenly there was a terrific tension, and we grabbed him—my brother, my sister, my mother—the three of us grabbed him and pulled him onto the table and pulled his legs and arms apart—dismembered him, right? And we were so successful in beating him up that we ate him up. Finished. It is a fantasy, but sometimes the fantasy is *lived*. I have seen the sudden onslaught of a victim, when—if you remember—two or three years ago when Khadaffi teased us and pushed us, and suddenly it was enough and he was bombed out of his mind. Never heard about him again! With *The Destruction of the Father*, the recall was so strong, and it was such a lot of work, that I felt like a different person. I felt as if it had existed. It really changed me. That is the reason artists go on—it's not that they get better and better, but they are able to stand more. So when I talk about success it is not a material success that I'm talking about, it is about the successful outcome of the making of a work of art.

* * *

First, you have to conceptualize what you want to do; you have to have an idea. The idea, as I said before, comes from a failure somewhere, a failure of power somewhere. For instance, if you have had a disagreement with the people you work with, if you have a problem to solve—with your children, for instance—you have to deal with it and show no criticism and no tension, and it is a terrific strain. There are many kinds of tension, but the one I am trying to deal with, to alleviate, is a social tension. My trouble is



The Destruction of the Father (detail), 1974, plaster, latex, wood, and fabric,
237.8 × 362.2 × 248.6 cm.

that it is absolutely impossible for me to put them together in a sequence, to organize my material so that it comes to a certain . . . I'm not trying to convince you of anything—and I *couldn't* convince you of anything. All I can do is to have these flashes of intense experience that are represented by this, and this, and this, and this. This is one of the bases of my repeated work—that I have to make a whole out of all these parts, and it is not possible for me because every time I take a position, it shakes me so much that the thinking process does not take place.

It is by thinking about what is missing there, thinking about it little by little, in the night or when I travel, and so on—“What is wrong? What is wrong?”—that I find a way of repairing the difficulty by making a piece. This is a conception at a certain level—art is about life. So in order to put through what I have to put through, I have to prove to myself that I can organize and I am going to make the piece. That is at the very beginning. It is not deductive, it is intuitive—you have to read Pascal!

* * *

I have never mentioned the word *dream* in discussing my art, while they talked about the dream all the time. I don't dream. You might say I work under a spell, I truly value the spell. I have the privilege of being able to enter the spell, to enter this very arid land where you are likely to find your birthright. In the spell I can express myself.

Isn't being in a spell also a Surrealist idea?

The spell and the dream are not the same. The spell is more friendly than the dream. The “spell” is acted out on a physical level; it's not a passive state, like a dream. The dream blinds you; the spell does not. It is a friendly process.

* * *

You might mention as a general characteristic, to understand the tenor of my work, that I am a masochist. Whether that is the general attitude of women, I do not know. The masochism expressed itself at the time of the *Femmes Maisons* [early 1980s] in the feeling that I didn't have the right to

have children, and that I didn't have the right to be an artist. This was a privilege. So if you consider art as a privilege, then by definition, you feel that you do not deserve it. You are continually denying yourself something—denying your sex, denying yourself the tools that an artist needs—because to be a sculptor costs you money. If you consider art a privilege instead of something that society will use, you have to save and suffer for your art, for what you love; you have to deny yourself in the cause of the art. I felt I had to save my husband's money rather than do sculpture that cost money. So the materials I used in the beginning were discarded objects. This was given a poetic meaning by saying that the discarded object has a value. That's true as well, but certain artists—for instance in black neighborhoods you will see that people will make sculpture with refuse because they don't have the money to buy new wood. The Surrealist object, on the other hand, was in the direction of *preciousness*, of rarity—rarity in time, in that there are very few left, and rarity in space, in that you don't find it so much. Rarity, preciousness, “beauty of material” . . . Joseph Cornell. But that is not me at all.

* * *

First I work on a drawing, then I will translate the concept into cardboard and then into corrugated cardboard. Here, let me show you. I get hooked on a subject and I make sketches and drawings. It means the obsession is going to last for several months. Then it will disappear, and reappear several years later. I am involved in a kind of spiral, a spiral motion of motivation. The material itself, stone or wood, does not interest me as such. It is a means; it is not the end. You do not make sculpture because you like wood. That is absurd. You make sculpture because the wood allows you to express something that another material does not allow you to.

* * *

Art comes from life. Art comes from the problem you have in seducing birds, men, snakes—anything you want. It is like a Corneille tragedy,

where everybody is pursuing somebody else. You like A, and A likes D, and D likes . . . Being a daughter of Voltaire and having an education in the eighteenth-century rationalists, I believe that if you work enough, the world is going to get better. If I work like a dog on all these contraptions, I am going to get the bird I want . . . [yet] the end result is rather negative. That's why I keep going. The resolution never appears; it's like a mirage. I do not get the satisfaction—otherwise I would stop and be happy.

* * *

I work very hard and I never—never!—get people to understand what I mean. I want them to understand tenacity as a virtue, as an end in itself. More than that, they must understand that I had to equate sex and murder, sex and death. They could never understand the problem of this equation. I should be softer on myself, I should not pursue such a mystery, but it is still a mystery, and I still pursue it. . . the fear of death destroys your sense of the edge in sex. It is this same moment, when death and sex are one, that I want to get in my work.

* * *

I do not claim that my work is a communication, because that is like a game also. I do not play the communication game, because one will always be betrayed in communication as in love.

* * *

I am not interested in art history. My husband taught it, so I had my fill at home! I do believe in it as an activity, as a form of intellectual pursuit, but it did nothing for me—except that it kept me at a certain bracing level of intellectuality.

In general, my work portrays and encompasses the whole tradition of art. It is baroque, for example. I have even called one work *Baroque*, a work made about 1970. My art involves other styles as well. I privilege no one style or material.

* * *

I try to translate my problem into the stone. The drilling begins the process by negating the stone. The problem is how to complete the negation, to take away from the stone, without altogether destroying it, but overcoming it, conquering it. The cube no longer exists as a pure form for contemplation; it becomes an image. I take it over with my fantasy, my life force. I put it to the use of my unconscious.

* * *

In a closed society, the first child in the family would inherit the wealth, whatever wealth there was. Sometimes there was nothing to inherit, but the first child was expected to have the values, the good judgment. If there was a house, the first child would have it. The second would have the intangibles, or a little money, or something like that. The third child would join the foreign legion. This was a very cruel world, a really cruel world. You had constantly to prove to everybody that you were worthwhile, that your life was worth something. You had to prove to your parents that you were worth having. Your parents had you only because the Church said they should have you. This is the world I was born into. It was a very cruel world . . . I was the third girl born. Of course, my father wanted a son. So I was an embarrassment when I was born. It is a fact. My mother, who, as I said, was very rational and a very cool person, my mother said to her husband, to my father: "Don't be disappointed with that little girl. You know, she is your spitting image. Don't you think so?" It was not clear that he thought so, but my father said, "Yes, she is pretty nice." And my mother said, "She is your spitting image, and we are going to name her for you." You see, my mother was trying to sell me to him. And she succeeded to an extent. But my father was still disappointed that he did not have a son. My brother finally came, but my mother had problems. She was quite a strong woman, from the mountains in central France. But soon after my brother came she contracted Spanish influenza; it was all over Europe at the time, in 1918. She recovered, but not totally.

She contracted emphysema as well. She remained ill the rest of her life. After that, maybe their sex life was not quite the same, not as it had been. It was then that my father looked at other women, looked. His behavior became very, very childish. Immature. Not childish, but immature. After the war, the First World War, he was desperately trying to find peace, and women were his way of doing so.

* * *

Art is a privilege, a blessing, a relief. Privilege means that you are a favorite, that what you do is not completely to your credit, not completely due to you, but is a favor conferred upon you. Privilege entitles you when you deserve nothing. Privilege is something you have and others don't. Art was a privilege given to me, and I had to pursue it, even more than the privilege of having children. The whole art mechanism is the result of many privileges, and it was a privilege to be part of it. . . . The privilege was the access to the unconscious. It is a fantastic privilege to have access to the unconscious. I had to be worthy of this privilege, and to exercise it. It was a privilege also to be able to sublimate. A lot of people cannot sublimate. They have no access to their unconscious. There is something very special in being able to sublimate your unconscious, and something very painful in the access to it. But there is no escape from it, and no escape from access once it is given to you, once you are favored with it, whether you want it or not. . . . To escape you have to have a place to go. You have to have the courage to face risk. You have to have independence. All these things are gifts. They are blessings. . . . Sublimation is a gift; lots of people cannot sublimate. The life of the artist is basically a denial of sex. I really think my power of sublimation, my power of total recall, is due to the education my parents gave me—the discipline and also the notion of what you can expect.

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My feminism expresses itself in an intense interest in what women do. But I'm a complete loner. It doesn't help me to associate with people; it really

doesn't help me. What helps me is to realize my own disabilities and to expose them. Another very sad statement is that I truly like only the people who help me. It is a very, very sad statement.

* * *

Alfred Barr was not a trustee [of the Museum of Modern Art, New York]; he was an employee, like all the rest. The trustees had real buying power. Alfred Barr had special skills, but he was not part of the Board of Trustees. He was on the other side. The artists who succeeded in selling at the time—Calder, Mark Rothko, Ben Shahn, they were the three—pleased the trustees. You had to entertain the Board, and these Three Stooges knew how to do that, knew how to socially entertain these important people, these trustees. I did not mind that, as a woman, but I could not do it.

Women had to work like slaves in the art world, but a lot of men got to the top through their charm. And it hurt them. To be young and pretty didn't help a woman in the art world, because the social scene, and the buying scene, was in the hands of women—women who had money. They wanted to be entertained—they were very lazy and sometimes stupid, and they wanted to be entertained by men of a certain age. So these charmers were what was called in the eighteenth century a *pique-assiette* in French, somebody who picks at your plate, who will come entertain for dinner, like a buffoon—it is a kind of profession that interests me very much. And they are picked from among artists because there is a certain prestige to being an artist, but from a professional point of view they are more entertainers than artists. They relate to the storyteller, which was a profession. The storytellers of the Middle Ages were men who went from place to place, telling their tales, and sometimes reached the top because of their acting and verbal abilities.

Because of the profession and personality of my husband, I lived among these people. It was interesting. And because I was French and kind of discreet, they tolerated me—with my accent I was a little strange, I was not competition—and I was cute, I guess. They took me seriously,

on a certain level, but they refused to help me professionally. The trustees of the Museum of Modern Art were not interested in a young woman coming from Paris. They were not flattered by her attention. They were not interested in her three children. I was definitely not socially needed then. They wanted male artists, and they wanted male artists who did not say that they were married. They wanted male artists who would come alone and be their charming guests. Rothko could be very charming. It was a court. And the artist buffoons came to the court to entertain, to charm.

Now it has changed, now the younger men are in—older women and younger men.

* * *

I am not interested in art history, in the academies of styles, a succession of fads. Art is not about art. Art is about life, and that sums it up. This remark is made to the whole academy of artists who have attempted to derive the art of the late 1980s, to try to relate it to the study of the history of art, which has nothing to do with art. It has to do with appropriation. It has to do with the attempt to prove that you can do better than the next one, and that a famous art history teacher is better than the common artist. If you are a historian, you have to have the dignity of a historian. You don't have to prove that you are better than the artist.

* * *

What modern art means is that you have to keep finding new ways to express yourself, to express the problems, that there are no settled ways, no fixed approach. This is a painful situation, and modern art is about this painful situation of having no absolutely definite way of expressing yourself. This is why modern art will continue, because this condition remains; it is the modern human condition . . . it is about the hurt of not being able to express yourself properly, to express your intimate relations, your unconscious, to trust the world enough to express yourself directly in it. It is about trying to be sane in this situation, of being tentatively and tem-

porarily sane by expressing yourself. All art comes from terrific failures and terrific needs that we have. It is about the difficulty of being a self because one is neglected. Everywhere in the modern world there is neglect, the need to be recognized, which is not satisfied. Art is a way of recognizing oneself, which is why it will always be modern.

When and Why Did You Decide to Become an Artist?

Previously unpublished answer to a question posed by *Art News*, late 1980s.

The decision was made for me by the situation of my family. My parents made their living in the arts—they repaired tapestries—so I was born into it. In a very practical way I had to make myself useful around their atelier. But there is a more basic motivation. I was the third daughter of a man who wanted a son. So to survive I had to create ways of making myself likable. It was the only way of escaping the depression which came from feeling superfluous—from feeling abandoned. Having been privileged with a native energy I switched from a passive role to an active one, which is an art I have practiced all my life—the art of fighting depression (emotional dependence).

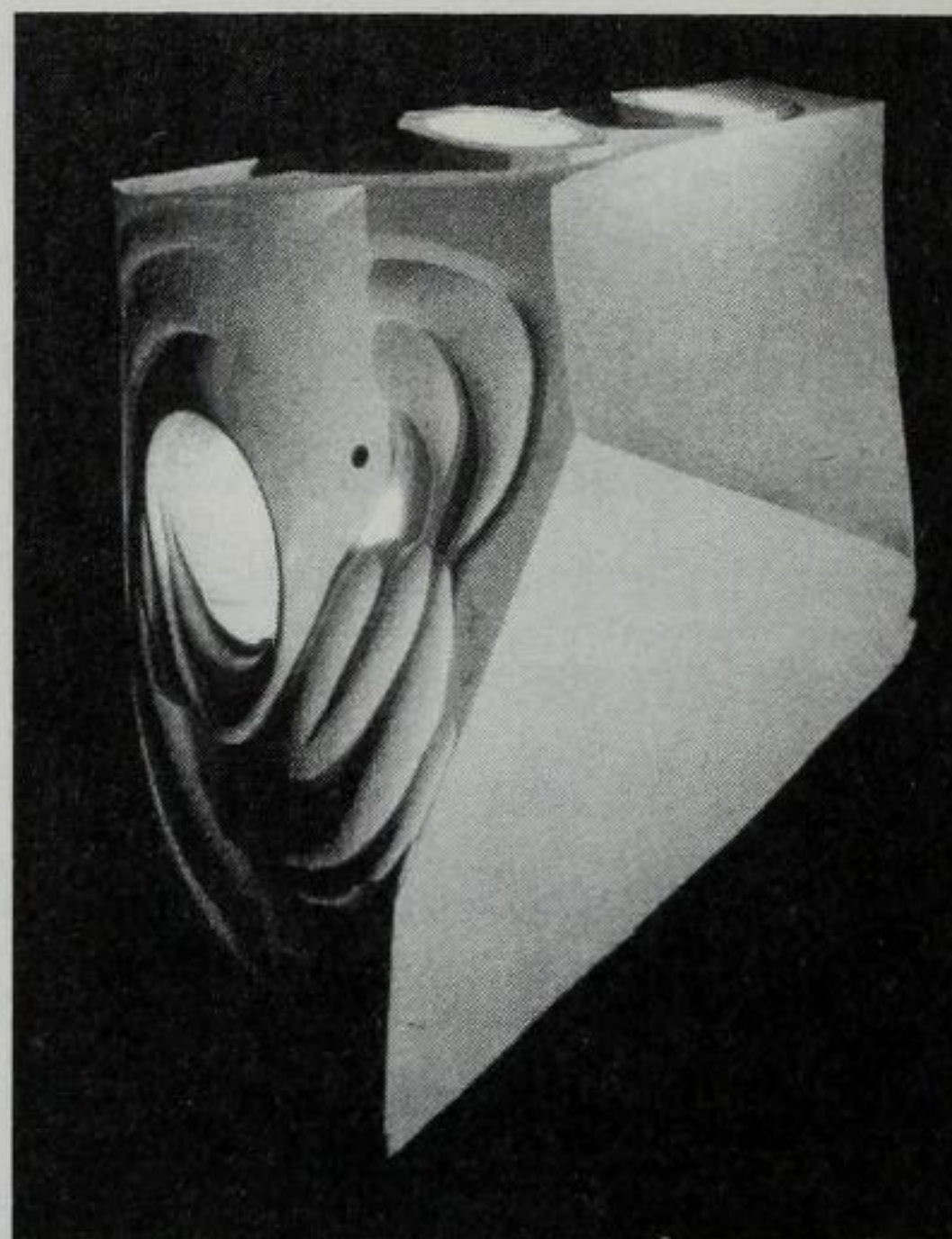
On *The Sail*

Dated 17 December 1988 and first published in 1989 by the Frankfurter Kunstverein in the catalog for the group exhibition *Prospect '89* (21 March to 21 May).

I want to explain why I did the piece. I don't really see why the artist should say anything, because the work is supposed to speak for itself. So whatever the artist says about it is like an apology, it is not necessary.

I would say that what challenged me into doing this piece is that it expressed in polarity two things that are opposite—that is to say, the *imponderable* quality of the softness of the wind that gives the piece its shape and its title. The wind is pushing through the sail and gives it a very special kind of shape. The cut surface is not flat at all. It has the gentle curve of a sail. The other characteristic of the piece, which is very subtle and *imponderable*, is the reflective quality of the surface—that is to say it is a high polish. And as the sun turns the room, the surface will assume a different shape—the surface moves. And it is a very live surface. So these two very subtle things are pitted against the resistance of the material. So we express the breeze in a sail in a very hard material, which is marble. There is a kind of anatomy there. What challenges me is what resists me. The challenge is there—what is supposed to be impossible, it amuses me, challenges me to show that it is not impossible—maybe it is impossible for you, but it is not impossible for me.

A work of art has nothing to do with the artist, a work of art has to stand by itself, so I repeat that it is totally unnecessary to ask me what



The Sail, 1988, marble,
152.4 × 76.2 × 177.8 cm.
Collection: Ginny Williams Family
Foundation, Denver.

I want you to see in a piece, because you are supposed to see it by yourself.

I do sculpture because I *need*, not because I have fun. I have no fun at all—in fact everything I do is a battlefield, a fight to the finish. It is not a battlefield, it is a battle and a fight to the finish. So if I have pleasure it is definitely sadistic and masochistic pleasure, not a casual one.

I was struck, at the quarry, in Carrara—I found this extraordinary piece, which offered, since it was in the quarry, a natural cut. This would challenge me—I thought it was beautiful. Instead of being industrially cut like cubes of sugar, this cut was formed in that way when the stone was struck. It fell so the way a walnut splits when you crack it open. So I kept its natural shape. Of course if you have a natural shape which is a curve, as in this case, you are going to find inside the stone that same curve repeated in striations—that is geology. And I found this wonderful. The stone was shipped here—it cost nothing to transport it from Carrara to Hoboken, because it provided ballast to the boat—they'd almost pay you to take it. But to get it from Hoboken to Brooklyn was a fortune! It weighed about two tons.

So after it arrived, it took me a year to see how I was going to make that curve say something I wanted to say. So the two aspects of the motivation appear there—there is that tenderness of the curve, the high polish ready for the light to be reflected in, and then the terrific need I had actually to destroy it—to destroy it in order to reconstruct it. This is basically what happens. This was achieved by piercing the stone through and through—through the center—and basically coming to terms with the problem I wanted to resolve when I got to the crux of the matter. Some people go right to the crux of the matter—they are brutal, and sometimes wrong in the consequences, but right in their motivations. They go to the heart of the matter and it gives them a kick, it gives them the feeling, not that they can overcome it but that they can understand it. They can tear it apart and put it back together again, which gives them the feeling that they can understand. The wish and the need to understand is the need of

a very young person. I have lived all of my life with very smart people—people who are very smart appeal to me, I like them, I love them, I tell them, I deal with them, I am comfortable with them. But by the same token, I like them because I perceive in them something that I do not understand—just like the stone. So I married a guy that I absolutely could not understand—he was so intellectual, and so predictable. I thought he was like a piece of architecture and I thought I had found a diamond. And I could never make him out. Now I have a son who is his portrait and we fight all the time, I cannot talk to him.

So the piece is the product of a challenge. It is so many other things, by the way. It is also a sun dial. Now Jerry [Gorovoy], who is my mentor in many ways, says, “Don’t say that. Don’t give the piece a label of being something useful, because something that is useful is not art.” But if you know what a sun dial is as a stone structure, if you have a stone in the garden that has a hole, you will see that at a certain time of the day the rays of the sun go all the way vertically down in the hole. And you can tell the time of day—I can tell the time here, because at twelve o’clock I hear the shouts of the schoolchildren—at one o’clock (not in summer, but in the winter)—at one o’clock the sun will give a certain shadow—that’s what a sun dial is. There are hundreds of sun dials in the garden here, so it’s nothing to boast about, but it does explain that the hole is the most important part of the piece.

I didn’t need sketches for this one because I was familiar with it and I worked on it for so long. I carried the shape of the stone in my head all the time. And one day the thing had to be pierced from several sides.

Another sculptor might come along and say, what’s cooking here? How did you make a tunnel through that stone with hand tools. It’s not possible. The tunnel is over four feet, and the stone is very narrow. So every time you dig into it, you risk fracturing the piece. This piece could not have been made except in the twentieth century. This I am very proud of. You need power tools—very special power tools. And what is more important, you need somebody special—not a material, but a per-

son, a talent, to handle that tool. I could write a short story on my relationship to the guy who came and carved that thing. He was not interested in art at all. He thought it was completely useless and silly. But he was interested in what he could get from his tool. These craftsmen are interested not in the tool itself, but in their power over the tool. The tool was called a core drill. The blade is a cylinder with very little teeth at the end. Very gently it will dig in and take out the marble in layers, like layers of skin, gradually expanding the tunnel. So there was a telescopic tunnel—like one cylinder inside another, which I did just because it was interesting. If the marble had been flawed—if it had had another natural curve inside it, we would have run the danger of having the thing split—beautiful!—along a parallel curve. But there was no splitting because of the gentleness, the preciseness of the tool. So we drove a tunnel right through it. The tunnel became an acquired quality of the thing. So I wanted to do it again and again and again—the repetition of the person who is dissatisfied. So this need showed up again, one fine morning. So I made another hole to reach the center of the stone. In the end, there were holes on all four sides. The piece has six sides. The side with the sail is untouched, but there are holes on all the other sides.

Part of the motivation has to do with the survival of the piece. It has to do not with what you want but what you get. If you get something wrong, the piece is destroyed sooner or later. In this case it is definitely an outdoor piece. Anything of marble should be an outdoor piece. That's easy to say, but there are lots of marble pieces that crack open. It doesn't happen in Italy, because it doesn't snow there, but in France—in Père-Lachaise, or in the cemetery at Montparnasse—you have some beautiful pieces that crack open because the snow comes in and freezes and cracks it open as it expands. So this has to be considered. There are very few shapes—the piece that you see at the Met there (*Eyes*)—the design of that piece means that it can stay outside for centuries and it will not crack. The water runs off it. The same is true of *Sail*. I sloped the top. When a fellow came from Canberra Museum in Australia to look at it, he

was amazed by the shape. "Why, why, why that shape? I don't understand." So we took a pail of water and poured it over one end, and it ran off like that. But it is not a fountain, it is not a sun dial, even though there are practical reasons why I made some of those decisions. Otherwise your piece will not survive.

A piece that can stay outside offers some very special qualities. There is a kind of notion of eternity outside, and a notion of proximity with nature—and of not being bothersome, not taking up living space. But outside, it doesn't bother anybody.

It's quite finished, this piece—much more than my pieces usually are. I enjoyed making it very finished. It belongs to a series. The one that came before, the concerns were the same, but the shapes were very different, the piece was very different. I have discovered that there is quite a bit of self-esteem to be gained in getting things perfectly clean, in the idea of cleaning. I am able to enjoy the cleaning. The finishing means the cleaning, getting it perfect—I am able to enjoy that now, in the past I was not able to, I did not relax enough to finish and polish. All the pieces in the series are marble—they represent a *voyage*.

The showing of the work is a problem that doesn't concern me. I am not interested in what is finished, only in what is coming.

Statements 1988

First published in 1988 by Robert Miller, New York, and Daniel Lelong, Paris, in *Louise Bourgeois Drawings*.

I find the past terribly painful though I am tied to it. It's unresolved. Yet I have no taste for re-visitation. It's a landscape you have gone through and explored, and outgrown. Only tomorrow is interesting.

You take the event in hand and actively manipulate it in order to survive. You turn the passive into the active, the Freudian identification with the aggressor. You have to be able to do that. There is a constant desire to manipulate instead of being manipulated. Art is manipulation without any intervention.

The skeins of wools are a friendly refuge, like a web or a cocoon. The caterpillar gets the silk from his mouth, builds his cocoon and when it is completed he dies. The cocoon has exhausted the animal. I am the cocoon. I have no ego. I am my work.

The repetitive motion of a line, to caress an object, the licking of wounds, the back and forth of a shuttle, the endless repetition of waves, rocking a person to sleep, cleaning someone you like, an endless gesture of love.

I am not particularly aware or interested in the erotic in my work. Since I am exclusively concerned, at least consciously, with formal perfection, I allow myself to follow blindly the images that suggest themselves to me.

Problems are symbols of a privileged territory a lot of people do not have access to. It implies the possibility of sublimation. I'd say everything, going from day to day, depends on your ability to sublimate, on the quality of your sublimation.

Art is a sacrifice of life itself. The artist sacrifices life to art not because he wants to but because he can not do anything else.

Acceptance Speech: CAA Achievement Award

15 February 1989, first published in 1989 in *CAA Newsletter*, Spring, vol. 14, no. 1.

It is with great pleasure that I accept the [Lifetime Achievement Award] of the College Art Association. It is a distinguished honor that I cherish deeply.

I am very sorry to be unable to accept the award in person. My absence has nothing to do with you. It reflects on me. I travel very badly.

Travel can bring out strange behavior in certain people, including me. Under pressure of traveling some people start dressing strangely. Others become loquacious, or they can't stand still, or they become promiscuous, or they start prancing around the room, or give in to expressing uncontrollable criticism and snide remarks. Some even inflict outright violence on innocent bystanders.

And there is something else. I dread questions. Appearing in front of an audience usually grants the right to ask questions of the speaker. This situation terrifies me. It makes me feel like St. Sebastian about to be punctured with arrows. I tell stories to keep questions at bay. In my family this habit was so well known that at dinner table I would be asked: "Louison, why are you talking so much? What are you trying to hide?"

Being put on the spot gives me a shot of adrenalin which I sense as a physical challenge, and whatever form my behavior takes, it makes me ashamed. In Charcot's time, in La Salpêtrière, doctors theorized that under extreme stress, a person's body automatically arches into a rigid, bow-like figure. I try to avoid this.

It is the same case as the mother who sees her child on the railroad tracks with the train approaching. The shock given to her by this terrible vision gives her such strength that she lifts the train to save her child. I think you will agree that this is somewhat disgusting. This arching reaction is something you would prefer not to see me endure.

There is a last advantage to my absence. I sympathize with the account of a man who was horrified at the idea of having to speak in public.

Once, when he absolutely had to, he was in the building and was on his way to the auditorium, when he passed an office with its door open. He went in. He saw a computer terminal. Unable to control himself, he unplugged the computer, picked it up, and tried to leave the building. Unfortunately, he was caught. You see, because I didn't come to San Francisco, at the least the computers in this building are safe.

It is a shame that I cannot be with you today. But I very much hope that, when you are in New York, individuals among you will come and visit me. I enjoy meeting people on a one to one basis. I am a friendly, accessible person, and I look forward to your visits.

The honor you are bestowing means a great deal to me. I am extremely grateful. But in a way I don't deserve your kindness, your showering me with your gift. What did I do to deserve it? I was just trying to have a good time by telling my own story without fear and with a touch of humor.

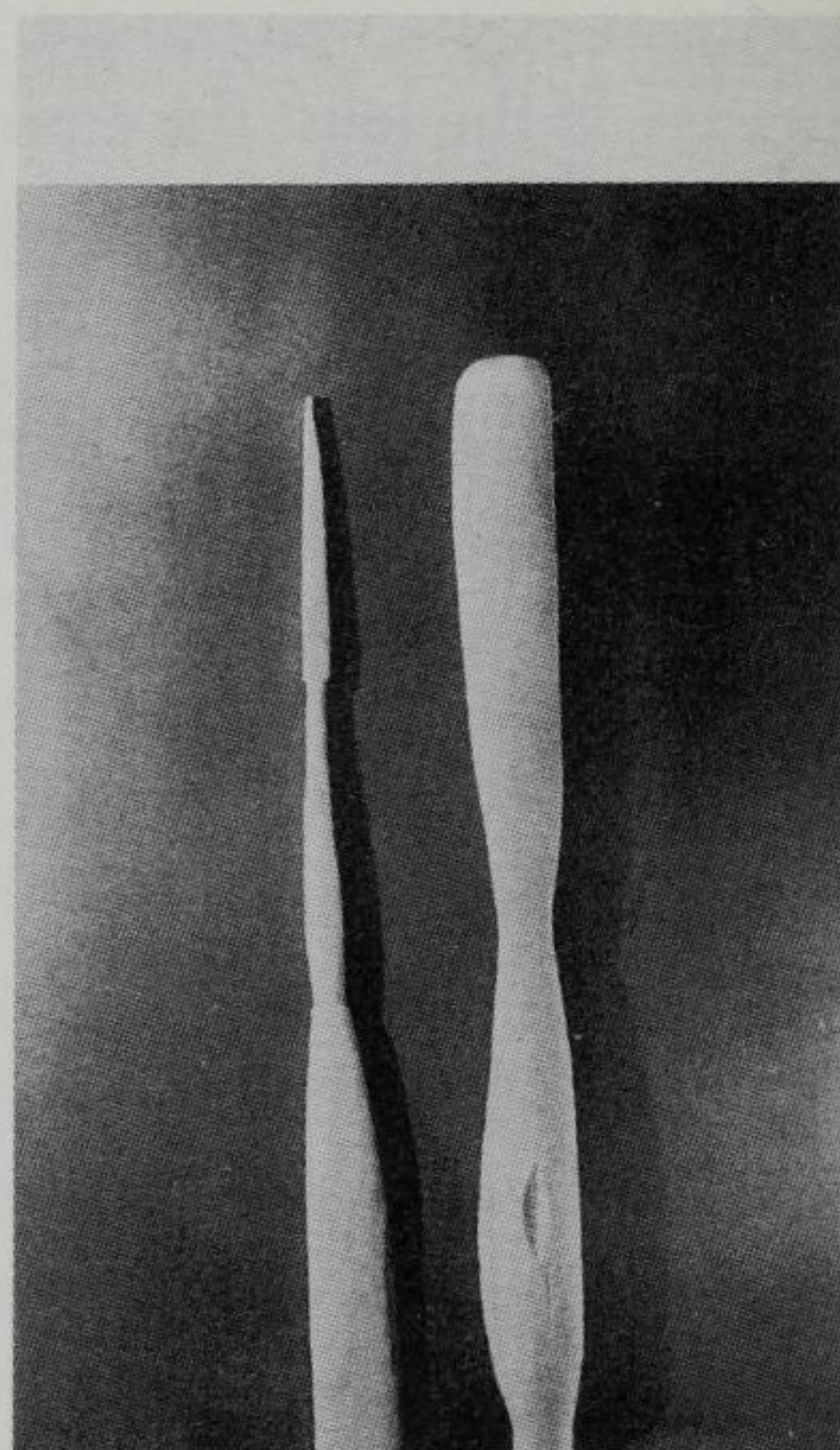
Thank you very much.

The Passion for Sculpture: a Conversation with Alain Kirili

First published in March 1989 in *Arts*, vol. 63, no. 7, pp. 68–75. Translated from the French by Philip Barnard.

Your work always has a very powerful sexual charge. Could you recall the great shock in adolescence that was determinant in your work?

I think that I can only speak about a particular work. Since we have here the 1949 and 1950 invitations from the Peridot Gallery, I can tell you my story, but only in terms of the examination of a work. The 1949 exhibition was brought about by Arthur Drexler, who at that time was a poet, and who subsequently became the historian of architecture at MoMA. I recall the name of Arthur Drexler with gratitude, for he was the first to discover me. He came to my house, viewed all of the works, and, as Peridot's advisor, said, "We're going to show all of this." Now obviously I was French. I belonged to a certain milieu. Pierre Matisse and Duchamp came by and said, "This is extraordinary!" I told them that it was simply a manifestation of "homesickness." They looked at each other and understood, that's all there was to it. And it's written on the invitations, you see: one is in French and the other in English. This represents a progression from 1949



LOUISE BOURGEOIS

sculptures

1. Femme qui apporte du pain
2. Femme regardant ses mains
3. Femme qui regarde ses mains
4. Femme qui regarde vers sa mère
5. Femme qui rentre dans une pièce
6. Statue pour une maison vide
7. Deux figures qui portent un objet
8. Une femme avec les mains d'un jardin
9. Figures qui attendent
10. Figures qui se parlent sans se voir
11. Figure endormie
12. Figure pour une niche
13. Figure quittant sa maison
14. Figure de plus vent
15. Figure emportant sa maison

PERIDOT GALLERY

6 E. 12th St., New York City October 3-7, 1950

Invitation to Louise Bourgeois' second solo exhibition at the Peridot Gallery, New York, 1950.

to 1950, a progression in my ability to adapt myself to some degree.

● Figure qui apporte du pain [*Figure Who Brings Bread*]. Figure regardant une maison [*Figure Gazing at a House*]. Figures qui supportent un linteau [*Figures Holding Up a Beam*]. Figure qui s'appuie contre une porte [*Figure Leaning Against a Door*]. Figure qui entre dans une pièce [*Figure Who Enters a Room*]. Statue pour une maison vide [*Statue for an Empty House*]. Deux figures qui portent un objet [*Two Figures Carrying an Object*]. Une femme gravit les marches d'un jardin [*A Woman Mounting the Steps of a Garden*]. Figures qui attendent [*Figures Waiting*]. Figures qui se parlent sans se voir [*Figures Who Talk to Each Other without Seeing Each Other*]. Figure endormie [*Figure Asleep*]. Figure pour une niche [*Figure for a Niche*]. Figure quittant sa maison [*Figure Leaving Its House*]. Figure de plein vent [*Figure in the Wind*]. Figure emportant sa maison [*Figure Carrying Away Its House*].

And thus the titles indicate exactly what I meant. There's no mystery at all!

I'm merely reciting them.

But there is a great intensity and very great personal emotion. This is apparent in the constant repetition of the word "figure," which expresses the fact that I had left my entire family in Europe. At bottom, I wasn't ashamed, but I was sick at having abandoned them because I was the only one to leave. I married an American student and left along with him. Thus my entire family remained in France and the homesickness was doubled by a sense of abandonment. I felt I had abandoned them.

I wanted to ask you...

Be careful what you mean to say! What were you asking?

In crossing the Atlantic, did you perceive this situation that I feel: the puritanism of a society, another society?

No, coming from a promiscuous milieu I found all that very admirable. I have nothing against puritans because I had escaped from a French promiscuity, and thus puritanism did not make me suffer.

For me it had a repressive effect. Turning to the sculptures of 1947, can you tell me why you painted these white?

For the sculptures that were shown in 1949 and 1950, that means that they were made during the five preceding years. White is something immaculate. They are absolutely pure. And the common characteristic of all these pieces is that they terminate in a point that expresses the fragility of verticality, and that represents a superhuman effort to hold oneself up. This is not completely biographical, then, for these are figures of my family. Later there's my brother, but at this point there is no mention of the members of my family. In the second exhibition . . .

Woman in the Shape of a Shuttle.

Every word is significant. Coming from Aubusson, where my mother's family were tapestry-merchants, the shuttle was the tool of my grandfather's milieu.

Ship Figure. Friendly Evidence. New York City Doorway with Pillars. Attenti Pillars. Rear Façade. Tomb of a Young Person.

Tomb of a Young Person expresses a fear, a kind of protective exorcism for the health of my children.

Letter to a Brother.

Yes, my brother Pierre.

Persistent Antagonism.

Antagonisms because I was isolated from my entire family, suffered from it.

Woman Carrying Packages.

A woman who carries packages is responsible for what she carries and they are very fragile, and she is totally responsible. Yes, it is a fear of not being a good mother.

Portrait of C Y.

That was a terrific fight I had with a member of the Surrealist group. Well, I had a lot of terrible fights, this was nothing new. But this one I exorcised, I got rid of by making a statue, putting a name on this statue.

Did you encounter Alberto Giacometti at the time of his 1948 and 1950 exhibitions at Pierre Matisse in New York?

Alberto Giacometti I remember. He was difficult. I don't mean to say that he confided in me, but I knew him well. He was afraid to come out, to come out of the kitchen, at Pierre Matisse's. He was afraid to go to bed, and therefore spent the entire night with his head in his arms. Fear is a phenomenon that interests me immensely. He was numb with fear, he couldn't speak, and Pierre Matisse was an outgoing fellow who was married to Pat at that time. Everyone treated him kindly, but he was like a lost child.

But his sculptures had surprised many artists in New York.

I don't remember those exhibitions. But I do remember him. And in France he was completely different. In France he was incredibly nasty [*méchant comme un rat*]. Here he was numb with fear, but in France he wasn't terrified at all. He sat in the front row at Deux Magots. I was born above the Café de Flore; that is, I was born at 174 Boulevard Saint Germain, the building in which the Café de Flore is situated. He sat there with a Japanese man, and he hated his colleagues.

Captain's Walk on the Irving Place Building.

Yes, that's a reference to the house in which we were living on 18th Street.

Here is a fine title: Blind Vigils.

It's ironic. These titles are informative about my entire oeuvre. *Blind Vigils* is like *Blind Leading the Blind*. Blindness came from the blush I experienced at the side of the people around me, everybody. As I say, my father was promiscuous. I had to be blind to the mistress who lived with us. I had to be blind to the pain of my mother. I had to be blind to the fact I was a little bit sadistic with my brother. I was blind to the fact that my sister slept with the man across the street. I had an absolute revulsion of everybody—everything and everybody. Mostly for erotic reasons, sexual reasons. So when I met this American student who was a puritan, I thought it was wonderful. And I married that guy.

Therefore you were willing to marry a puritan in order to escape this overload of sexual promiscuity.

Consequently I liked puritans. I still like them. In fact I find puritans very sexy, because they're a challenge. This is quite important in that there was

the great puritan of this period, Alfred Barr. And the fact that I had a crush on Alfred Barr—it is a fact, you know. The fact was, he was absolutely inviolable. He was not a puritan, he was repressed. He had a repressed sexuality, and this is what attracted me; as a challenge.

You like challenges; you find them stimulating.

Absolutely. How can a fortress of this order be conquered?

Bravo, Louise! Excellent! Now a few words on the difference between the Pillars, between the ones that are monoliths from a single piece of wood, and those that rise in a pile. The play between the two.

The play between the two: first of all, the monoliths are absolutely stiff—the stiffness of someone who's afraid. The way one can say, "He's scared stiff." Immobilized with fear. Stuck. This was an entire period. And then suddenly there's a kind of softening that came from the softness of my children and of my husband; that changed me a little. I got the nerve to look around me, to let go [*m'adoucir*]. Not to be so nervous. Not to be so tense. The pilings make it possible to turn around. And consequently it's the fundamental concept of the statue. The *Blind Vigils*: these are handicapped persons because they're supposed to protect you and they're blind. They're good-for-nothings because they're feminine; and this theme, which is psychological, is figuratively repeated in the sculpture *Blind Leading the Blind*.

That's an extraordinary sculpture. I noticed recently at the Pat Hearn Gallery that Blind Leading the Blind exists in a color that's almost flesh pink; I had known the sculpture before, but only in red and black. The first time I saw it was in the exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1976, Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture.

There it was entirely black.

Yes, there's also an entirely black version.

It was born entirely black, because it's a dramatic subject.

There are three versions, then: black, red-black, and flesh pink. Can you give me the chromatic symbolism of the transition between these three sculptures?

It's a psychological evolution.

You told me that it was an evolution that went from a dramatic situation to something softer.

The tragic aspect of that period, and of the homesickness. It's the tragic aspect of a person you miss. It's the tragic aspect of mourning, in other words of people one has lost. The fact that I lost them because they stayed in France, or the fact that I lost them because they died is not the important thing. It was an immense mourning. It's the black of mourning. So someone can say to me: what are you talking about, no one died in your family. And it's true. No one died, it's just that they were missing in my unconscious.

Are the wood pieces found or carved?

At that time, the wood sculptures were not found objects. I still like fine material. But today I have a certain affection for found materials. In that period these materials came from the makers of water towers for high buildings in New York. The water towers which sit on the top of the buildings were made of a special wood, were made of redwood of California.

So there was an attack directly into the wood, which is very important, and the holes pierced through the monoliths?

I made the holes myself, with razor blades.

There are also drawings on some of the monoliths.

Yes, that's quite important.

Similar to the ones on paper. What is the significance or the role of the drawings on the sculptures?

They're openings; very often they're openings, and very often they're embeddings, attached pieces, or one element fixed in the other.

I was referring to the drawings that are painted on the white surface.

Yes, that means they have to be carved out.

Ah yes, excellent. And certain of the wood pieces were also transferred to bronze, such as Pregnant Woman.

Oh, that was done thirty-five years afterwards!

Thirty-five years later, then, you wanted a version in bronze.

I'm not the one who wanted it. These things existed for thirty years without being exhibited, because I have no need to exhibit. It is not a necessity for me. I need to make things, but I have no need to show them.

But you were in agreement with the casting in bronze?

Yes, I agreed, but it wasn't my initiative, any more than the exhibition of drawings that took place at Robert Miller. I have nothing against it. They're drawings that date from that time. I have nothing against it, but it's not the result of my own efforts. I myself wouldn't have shown them. But Robert Miller, so diplomatic, he does what he wants and then tells me about it. I myself am a woman with no secrets; but I would never have shown these drawings. That for thirty years they stayed in boxes, in storage, proves it.

The sculpture Memling Dawn is a very fine piling. Were those squares, these wooden cubes, found?

Yes, they were found and almost all of them are in redwood because in the neighborhood where I was living there were many carpenters making those tanks for the water towers. The wood was marvelous because it had beautiful grain and because I could cut it.

Let's move forward a few years, thanks to the beautiful photograph of your 1964 exhibition at the Stable Gallery, which is reproduced in the Museum of Modern Art catalog (Wye, 1982) of your work. I am also very interested in these curves that are the opposite of the Pillars.

Wood is less satisfactory because it's perishable and all of the statues were breaking, deteriorating. For this reason I moved from wood to plaster.

And these works in plaster reveal forms that spiral. What is the importance of spirals for you?

The spiral is the beginning of movement in space. As opposed to the rigidity of the monolith, the subject is exploring space.

This is why you call one of them Homage to Bernini. And then there is Spiral Summer, Rondo for L. In the introduction to the Museum of Modern Art catalog, I read: "When you experience pain you can withdraw and protect yourself but the security of the lair can also be a trap." What is this "lair"?

It's when a rabbit takes shelter in his refuge. Therefore a refuge can also, in a certain sense, be a trap. Yes, of course, it's the bipolarity of what's a trap and what's a refuge.

In certain of your sculptures there are explicitly sexual forms, for example in Fillette [Little Girl], which includes both masculine and feminine elements.

Mapplethorpe took a photograph of that sculpture, *Fillette*, in which I'm holding it in my arms. Which means simply that from a sexual point of view I consider the masculine attributes to be extremely delicate; they're objects that the woman, thus myself, must protect. It's a very, very strong thing, because I was considering the masculine genital parts as attributes that I have to protect. Perhaps this is childish; you're asking me what I think but this is the origin of the word *Fillette*. The word "fillette" is an extremely delicate thing that needs to be protected. And to displace these attributes onto something that is dear to me in fact, the attributes of my husband. It's very complicated.

Very profound!

Very profound. People won't necessarily understand.

At some point this touches on the truth of sculpture.

But it's the opposite of aggression. It's a polarity between the tenderness that I express and the violence that is inside me.

I understand you very well. When I'm working the clay for my terracotta pieces, I express all sorts of violence. I bring out feminine forms in the modeling. The verticalities, on the other hand, are more hieratic.

That is to say that we're made of completely contrary elements, opposed elements; and this produces formidable tensions.

Often when I sculpt, the part that I finally free from the unconscious, the part that is repressed for me, is in some sense feminine. Let us talk now about the marble sculpture Cumul I of 1969, which is at the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris. When did you begin using marble?

1967.

You went to Carrara several times, then.

First to Pietrasanta. I don't like Pietrasanta, though, because it's over-touristed, whereas Carrara is much more serious. The transition stems from the fact that the aggressive side of my nature liked the resistance of the stone. Wood is too soft a material, and above all it's perishable and offers no resistance. Whereas the resistance that must be overcome in stone is a stimulation; like the fact that puritans attract me sexually because they're a formidable challenge. It's almost a playing with the impossible.

Ha, ha! I love that. And so marble is calming.

It is a fight to the finish. So it is a challenge.

This is the extraordinary advantage of the art of statuary and of sculpture over painting.

Painting doesn't exist for me.

The resistance of the material allows all sorts of drives to be freed. It's true: when I forge my aluminum and it explodes, I can tell you that I'm very calm when I leave the studio afterward.

It's the physical aspect of sculpture.

Yes, and this marvelous truth of the resistance of materials.

There is a redemptive quality in this. That is, one has the right to be aggressive, one has the right to cut everything and break everything, and to do it for something useful, for something beautiful.

For something sublime. A word on the title Cumul.

The title *Cumul* comes from a system of clouds.

Ah yes! A very beautiful drawing goes with it, as well.

It's a system of clouds, and for me it's the study of clouds, of the sky, of the heavens; which is something very positive, very calming, and very verifiable, anticipated, and *reliable*. Consequently it is peace, the peaceful side of things.

There is a certain serenity.

It comes back all the time. In addition, there is a repetition, an endless repetition that is also something very calming.

And Clamart?

Clamart is very important for me because my grandparents and my parents are buried there. It's the family tomb.

And this absolutely magnificent sculpture that makes me think of Brancusi's Penguins, which is called Eye to Eye. It's at our friend Aggie Gund's, and is a very fine sculpture from 1970. Can you tell me something about its title, Eye to Eye?

Yes, it involves elements that relate to each other. In effect, elements that look at each other like little windows in a house.

And this extremely beautiful repetitive series entitled No March No. 72, which has all these elements—cylinders of a sort—and cuts that are sometimes oblique.

This work is in the open air, and that is very important. Because the rain cannot harm it.

* * *

We had decided that the interview had reached its conclusion at this point, when Louise Bourgeois asked me to record the following remark:

I consider this interview with Alain Kirili to be very important because it's really the only occasion on which I have been given the chance to speak about this period and about the origin of the figures in wood, which are completely autobiographical and French in origin, and about my concerns with France.

Freud's Toys

Artist's review of the exhibition *The Sigmund Freud Antiquities: Fragments from a Buried Past* at the University Art Museum of the State University of New York, Binghamton, first published in January 1990 in *Artforum*, vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 111–13.

When I look at this catalog of Freud's collection, I think of Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. The analogy is not entirely a put-down. The collection is a document; it has the nostalgia of a period piece, and it's very moving. Freud collected because it gave him pleasure, a kind of self-

esteem. Why did he need self-esteem? I don't know. How can a man like Freud need reassurance? Perhaps the collection gave him a social standing that he may

have felt he lacked. Perhaps it gave him a way of decorating his office. Perhaps it gave him a distraction while he worked, since he must have been painfully weary of the sob stories of his patients. On the other hand, he must have been weary of their silences as well. It's terrible to spend an hour with somebody who will not open up, not because they don't want to but because they cannot, or because they have nothing to say, or their mind is blurred, or because they want to go and get drunk, or they want to express antagonism. God knows what the reason for the silences are, but Freud was probably bored. I doubt very much he liked most of his patients. Which only means he was human.

Freud's collecting was a pastime. He could hold the antiquities, he could caress them, he could dust them, he could handle them physically. Although he used many archeological metaphors in his writings about the psyche and the unconscious, I doubt that these antiquities helped him in his work. He was a doctor, a neurologist, a disciple of Darwin, a student of Charcot, a materialist and a determinist. He was concerned with the laws



Sigmund Freud's desk and office at 20 Maresfield Gardens, London. Courtesy Freud Museum, London.

of causality. He wanted to convince his patients to listen to reason. He even rejected hypnosis. He was solely interested in evidences, proofs, and documents. The information he used very often came from his own library. Freud was interested in biographies, case studies, and written, verifiable documentation. He could not have extrapolated much from these objects. He was not a visual person: his collection has no visual consistency. He hopped from Chinese to Greek, from Greek to Roman, and from Roman to Egyptian. Strangely, African art seems not to have concerned him much. And of course he had no interest in the art of his day.

It's true, as the catalog says, that psychoanalysis can be equated with digging. But the analogy is a cheap one. Anytime you are presented with a problem, you dig. You dig in your mind. We all dig for the truth. A cat will dig in the garden to hide its shit. We all dig all day long, so the metaphor is obvious. More revealing than Freud's archeological language is his use of terms from physics and mechanics, terms like energy, condensation, and displacement. He wanted to be scientific.

So these objects were not crucial to Freud's work. They were his toys. They gave him a kick. They were part of the good life, and as I said, he may have needed reassurance. I also think you have to see the enormous, threatening presence of Jung behind Freud's collection. Jung really deduced his theories from his knowledge of antiquities, although he overdid it. But Freud was a reasonable and scientific man. He was content with these little trifles, but they did not engage his intellect or his ability as a doctor. One of the ways he sometimes healed was to move his hand



Eros, Turkey, Hellenistic Period, c. 150–100 B.C., terracotta, 38 cm high. Courtesy Freud Museum, London.

to the forehead of the patient and just touch it. This physical contact was so real that suddenly the patient would start to talk, start to function. So as a healer, Freud was a very powerful person. Meaning that reality for him was not in the little figures. Reality for him was in the life or death of his patient. Reality was in the struggle for the survival of his patient.

I see his office with the half-dead hysterics there as a pitiful place. I don't want to exaggerate, but I call them maggots. Freud was so in tune with the misery of people, and with the misery of their fantasies and superstitions, that he needed to look at the comforting spectacle of civilizations that have died and yet still live today. He needed relief from his constant, painful facing of the fragmented pieces of broken minds. Although he was irreligious, he believed in a kind of resurrection. Freud treated these people because that was his way of fighting death. For selfish reasons, he was challenged to prove to himself that he was stronger than death. The patient was dying inside, but Freud could push death away. Still, he was constantly facing the disappearance of these maggots. But the comparison is strange, because a maggot is very alive. A maggot is wiggling with life. A maggot is actually a symbol of resurrection.

He found in the chaos of his relation to the patient that he was able to believe in a resurrection through culture. All the cultures that Freud put together in his collection gave him the hope that history is whole. All civilizations have the right to exist. He could make sense out of history, and that assured him he had a place in it. He belonged somewhere, in spite of the injustices he suffered. After all, he incorporated with a vengeance the suffering of his father. We all want to defend our parents. It was when Freud's father died that he started to collect, and in his collecting he was very generous. He accepted all these figures. He gave a place to every one of them, so therefore *he* had a place, too. Their being there on the desk or on his shelf was a physical thing. But they weren't important to him visually. Ten books would have done the same. In fact, Freud was in love with his library. It didn't have to be those little concrete entities.

I am not a collector. It gives me fantastic pleasure to discover some-



Sphinx, Greek, from southern Italy, late 5th–early 4th century B.C., terra-cotta, 18.4 cm high. Courtesy Freud Museum, London.

thing, but once I have acquired it and I have to put my money where my mouth is, I instantly lose interest. I feel ashamed to have indulged in such a pleasure and immediately try to get rid of the object.

My father had one collection and I found it. I still have it. It was a box and inside there were pebbles. There were hundreds of pebbles, and he had it on his desk. He said, “Every time I have a beautiful moment, it proves to me that life is worth living, and in gratitude I put a pebble in the box.” So he was collecting beautiful moments. Why did he have to do that? Probably because he was anxious, he considered life hell, and he had to prove to himself that in spite of everything, beautiful

moments existed, and the pebble was the proof of their existence.

In these terms, there is no more value in a Greek statue than in a pebble. Both can help you to believe that life has an order and a *raison d'être*. Still, there is a big difference between a personal symbol and a social symbol. There is also a big difference between an artifact and art. An artifact is first of all useful, and does not relate to anything more vitally than to its use. It is isolated in its momentary meaning, and is easily reproduced. It is not an original. So much contemporary art should really be seen as artifact; but then, so should some of the objects in Freud's collection. Is a little Tanagra statuette from the Greek period a real embodiment of that civilization? These figures were made by the thousands, from molds, because they were funerary statuettes and were placed in the tombs. They are not symbols today. Andy Warhol collected cookie jars; these are only valuable in that they represent Warhol's choice. They meant something to him, but they are not socially significant. Today they are a commodity of the mass

media. A toy is fine, but it is only a toy. It's not a reality. Art is a reality. The artifact is a manufactured object; a work of art is a language. The artifact has only an educational or sentimental value. The work of art has an *absolute* value. How could Freud have had an eye for esthetic quality when the esthetic of some of these objects is so low?

Ultimately, I am less concerned with Freud's interest in art than with his interest in artists. I simply want to know what Freud and his treatment can do, have tried to do, are expected to do, might do, might fail to do, or were unable to do for the artist here and now. The truth is that Freud did nothing for artists, or for the artist's problem, the artist's torment—to be an artist involves some suffering. That's why artists repeat themselves—because they have no access to a cure. People sublimate and turn to art because, first of all, they would like to be sexual but they are afraid, and second, they feel guilty. In this day and age it is easy for people to be separated from sex. You certainly do not have to be religious to be afraid of sex. And the need of artists remains unsatisfied, as does their torment.

Interview with Trevor Rots

Previously unpublished, 10 May 1990.

You said on another occasion, that one of the reasons for coming to America was to get away from your father figures.

Right.

What did you find when you first came to America?

What I found, and still find, is that in America everything goes. There is room for everybody. It's very difficult to make a name for yourself, but nobody will keep you from doing it if you keep trying.

How were you received when you first came to New York? Did you find a place within the art community right away?

No, no. I went to the Art Students League clique, which was a school, and still is. I worked with the constructivists, like Vytlačil. He was a very good teacher. I went there mostly at night, and they didn't appreciate me particularly because I was French. The French are not, were never that well liked by Americans.

After the war broke out, however, the "father figures" that you had left behind in France began, literally, to show up on your doorstep.

Well, yes, certainly, André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and the Elders were there. It was a very small circle and everyone met everyone. I had mixed feelings toward them, however, since they were not interested in women, period. They were interested in rich women, of course, but that is a special breed of women. Secondly, they were not interested particularly in young women and I was a student when they came. Thirdly, they were not interested in other artists. They were interested in themselves.

Still, you played an active part. For example, you organized an exhibition documenting the literary and artistic underground in France during the Occupation. How did that come about?

Yes. It was a show that took place at Columbia University and it was called *documents france 1940–1944: art—literature—press of the french underground*. It was divided into sections on the secret anti-Nazi press, on art,

poetry, and so on. It had posters and photographs, work by Bonnard, and Picasso, poems by Aragon, Pierre Seghers, texts by Gide, Triolet, and Getrude Stein—a great many things. And, in this case actually Duchamp was very helpful to me in putting it together.

From the list, the show seems to have been very perspicace in the sense that it marks the separation in French Culture between pre-war and post-war generations. Along with those mentioned, for example, there was also Dubuffet and Sartre. But while you were acting in this way as an intermediary between the French community and the American public, your primary artistic associations were the Americans.

That is to say, I made friends with the artists of my age, the American artists of my age, and I showed with them. At the Peridot Gallery from 1949 to 1953, at Norlyst and at Egan, which was one of the key galleries for the Abstract Expressionists. And Alfred Barr [then Director of the Museum of Modern Art] was a supporter from the beginning. He included me in an early panel discussion along with de Kooning and the rest [see p. 64] and he bought a piece in 1951 [*Sleeping Figure* (1950)] which has been shown at the Museum ever since.

Would you tell me something about the shows at Peridot, which were conceived of as installations? In fact, they were among the first instances where sculpture was presented that way, not as isolated statues but as a unified and interrelated group.

Yes, actually, it was an environment. It was a re-creation of people I missed. They were presences, and they occupied the whole room. They represented the people I had left behind, that is to say, my father, my brother, and their family, my cousins, all the people I had left in France, since I had come to this country alone. It was a kind of memorial, you might say. I must have felt guilty to have abandoned my family in France, it's as simple as that.

And you re-created them here?

Right. I have been re-creating the whole family situation here. When I went back to France two or three years ago, I discovered that it is

documents france 1940-1944 **art - literature - press of the french** **underground**

UNDERGROUND ANTI-NAZI PRESS

its purpose was the organization of an effective resistance. its newspapers, tracts, and pamphlets were addressed to the general public, to trade unions, and to professional groups:

defense de la france
resistance
combat
le franc tireur
la revue libre
l'insurge
liberer et federer
le populaire
m.o.f.
l'humanite
le peuple syndicaliste
jeune garde
cahiers politiques
les cahiers du temoignage chretien
le palais (de justice) libre
l'universite libre
etudiants de la classe 44
l'ecole de bara
le medecin francais
appel a l'intelligence francaise
debats de l'assemblee consultative provisoire
la convention de la haye
le patriote
le patriote lyonnais
l'instituteur francais

ART

posters, le marche noir,
participez au recensement,
il compte sur vous,
liberation posters
photographs
100 photos of german occupation
paintings
pierre bonnard
pablo picasso
jean dubuffet by louis parrot
jean dubuffet by pierre seghers
letter from jean paulhan to jean dubuffet
articles by rene huyghe, jean cassou
art magazines

norlyst gallery

59 west 56

new york city 19

POETRY

louis aragon (francois la colere): Broceliande (manuscrit); le musee grevin (editions de Minuit); les yeux d'elsa; le creve-coeur.

jean cassou: 33 sonnets composes en secret (editions de minuit).

jacques Decour (decourdemanche): pages choisies (editions de minuit).

pierre emanuel: combats avec tes defenseurs.

loys masson: delivrez nous du mal.

pierre seghers: le domaine public; chien de pique.

poetes prisonniers (editions de minuit).

poesie 42: pour les quatre saisons (*pierre emanuel, loys-masson, andre de richaud, pierre seghers*).

poesie 44: (*paul eluard, max jacob*).

PROSE

louis aragon: le crime contre l'esprit (editions de minuit); la facon de vivre et de mourir de gabriel peri; saint pol roux ou l'espoir, temoignages.

debu-bridel: angleterre (editions de minuit). (*mortagne*): le marque de l'homme (editions de minuit).

jean bruller (vercors): le silence de la mer (editions de minuit).

elsa triolet (jean le guern): l'arrestation.

jean-paul sartre: la nausee; l'homme et les choses (poesie 44).

problemes du roman (confluence).

les cahiers de la liberation (editions de minuit).

andre gide: la justice avant la charite (combat).

gertrude stein: problemes du roman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

this exhibition would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of the following:

office of war information; columbia university library; french press and information service.

messrs. louis clair, marcel duchamp, peter c. rhodes, eugene sheffer.

i wish to express my sincere thanks to all of them for their kind assistance.

JUNE 4 to JUNE 19, 1945

EXHIBITION ARRANGED BY LOUISE BOURGEOIS

Invitation to the 1945 exhibition *documents france 1940-1944: art—literature —press of the french underground*, curated by Bourgeois at the Norlyst Gallery, New York.

impossible for me to work because the past comes back, and my energy is spent in remembering, instead of working. Instead of making new things, I mope about the past.

Having said that, the images themselves show feelings of extreme violence as well as tenderness toward people you left behind.

Well, the violence in the work comes from frustration. And any kind of frustration will make an animal violent. Now, we are all frustrated to some degree, for some reason, and frustration and violence are like a pendulum, oscillating back and forth, back and forth. It operates still like that for me today. But violence can be replaced by restoration. Fortunately, I come from that background where we repaired the damage on the tapestries and the idea of repairing has stayed with me. Things can be repaired. I do not quite believe in the Phoenix, that things die and resuscitate. I am rather areligious. But I have some faith in the symbolic action. Wanting to repair the past involves the experience of guilt, and guilt is present in all my work.

One of the things that the work constantly refers to is the persistent antagonism between "one and others." Rather than feeling comfortable within a family or a larger community, the individual experiences relentless discomfort.

Right. But that discomfort, that persistent antagonism, is not so easy to describe. You might call it mourning, and mourning is a very frustrating experience. It is also frustrating to have a comfortable, friendly relation with someone because every time you form a positive relation you feel that you shouldn't, you feel guilty. You are not supposed to feel nice, you are supposed to feel bad.

One of the sources of this antagonism is suggested by the sexual content of your work.

Oh—I wouldn't admit that—but you can always propose it. Frustration applies to subjects that you do not necessarily want to deal with, sexual frustration is behind all the crime, everything.

Well, you have committed murder in your work more than once.

Right, so? I have many fears, but under certain circumstances, I find great release in aggressiveness. I do not feel guilty at all—until the next morning. So I am violent, and I have fantastic pleasure in breaking everything around. I freak out the next day, because it was so bad to do that, it's true. But while it goes on, I enjoy it. I do. I'm not afraid of violence. That is self-expression. That is all I want. So, I get it. And then later on, I try to make myself, make myself be forgiven, but, [at] the next provocation [it] starts again.

So yours is a very bloodthirsty world.

It's really a world of people who are very unhappy because they are unable to be reasonable. And artists are even worse because artists are greedy on top of that. They want recognition, they want publicity, they want all kinds of ridiculous things.

One of the questions raised by your work is whether the violence in it is an acting of frustration against the sources of antagonism—the vengeance of the one against the others—or whether it is self-directed and a punishment for guilt.

You might call all the work symbolic. A symbolic action is an acceptable activity. For instance, you hack wood, or you cut marble. These are actually aggressive acts, definitely, they are not gratuitous. So the form of the work is generated by the physical action, and the choice of materials.

Conversely, a certain solicitude in assembling things that don't go together would seem to be the opposite of such violence.

The two can coincide. You hack away, which is aggressive, and then you polish what you have made, and you oil it and you take care of it, and then you keep it for thirty years. That is a nurturing. Working oscillates from extreme aggression to repair and a need for pardoning. It is the same with putting things together that have been broken or separated. So when I talk about storage, I mean that I have kept and taken care of these pieces for years and years, and I never left them, the way I left my family. I did not leave my work. It is the problem of the exile, the story of *mal du pays* [homesickness].

One of the things that perhaps explains the time that it has taken for people to catch onto what you are doing is the fact that your work has taken so many forms, made use of so many materials, and employed so many different procedures.

Well, yes, but I have never been terribly eager to get approval, or even to sell, because that is not self-expression. Self-expression does not mean that you have to find friends to like your work. This is not the point. The point is to express yourself, and this I did. And this is why I am so grateful to America to let me do it. It is possible to do it here. This is a privilege. When I did not show, I was protected by being invisible. And I enjoyed that. Every time you have a show and you expose your private symbols, you feel that a great deal is lost. It falls into the public domain. I had a very long career because people did not bother me.

Do you think there is something particular about how art was looked at in the 1980s that made it possible to see your work afresh?

Yes, it is a younger generation who did that. It is not my colleagues, people of my age, or older, it is the younger people who adopted me—and I adopted them. I am also grateful for the fact that my former work, which was anti-establishment, appeared very suddenly and new when it was actually twenty-five years old. So I was not a discovery, I was a rediscovery.

Ironically enough, although you've been showing more than ever before—both the historical and recent work—you've actually produced more work in this decade than in any previous one.

I did not care to show, I was not a pusher. But, as I said, I have never forsaken what I wanted to say and now every morning I feel I will not live long enough to say everything.

Dominique Bozo purchased Cumul I (1969) for the Beaubourg back in the 1970s, you showed at Maeght-Lelong in 1986, and last year you were included in Les Magiciens de la terre (Centre Georges Pompidou). Even so, these were only glimpses of your work. The show in Lyon which comprises both old and new work is at once an historical overview and the first comprehensive introduction of your work to

the French public. How do you feel on the eve of such an event?

I am very pleased, and I hope the show will be of interest even though it is very different from what is being produced today in France.

How do you see those differences? Where do they lie?

They lie in the forms. The French are so articulate, and in that respect I am less French than my compatriots. I am suspicious of words. They do not interest me, they do not satisfy me. I suffer from the ways in which words wear themselves out. I distrust the Lacans and Bossuets because *ils se gargarisent avec les mots* [they gargle with their own words]. I am a very concrete woman. The forms are everything.

Well, there's an expression—actually it's the title of one of Thomas Wolfe's novels—that says, "You can't go home again." And yet here you are, and it seems as if you will beat the odds.

That's true, that's true.

Does being the exception to the rule give you pleasure?

Yes, yes, I am quite the gambler.

MacDowell Medal Acceptance Speech

On 19 August 1990, The MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, awarded the Edward MacDowell Medal to Louise Bourgeois. The following speech by the artist was preceded by introductory comments by Robert Storr, Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and first published in the Spring 1991 issue of *MacDowell Colony News*, vol. 20, no. 1.

What can I possibly say now? Rob Storr has said everything. His stories are so wonderful. He has some good interpretations of my work that I do not fully agree with, but since Rob Storr talks so much about the Mapplethorpe issue I will stay on the subject.

The story of this photograph is actually quite complicated. When Mapplethorpe approached us to make this portrait, I was a little apprehensive. Now, to be photographed is quite common, but you have to know how to be casual about it. You have to be ready for it. Instead of being photographed candidly in my own studio, I had to go to Mapplethorpe's studio. That is how it is with highly-professional photographers—it was the same way with Scavullo and Avedon. They work on their own terms and operate from their own studio. It was up to us to go there. That gives me stress.

So I prepared with Jerry Gorovoy and appeared as scheduled at Mapplethorpe's studio. This is my attitude towards men, you have to be prepared and work at it. It is a very strange attitude, but it is consistent. You have to prepare everything. You have to feed them, tell them they are great, you literally have to take care of them. They constantly get insulted, they turn what you say into the opposite. I mean, it's really a job.

So on the day of this appointment at Robert's studio, I thought, "What can we bring? What prop can we bring?" Jerry's used to that. We prepare, we over prepare, we're early, you know, we're real pros. So I got *Fillette* (1968), which is a sculpture of mine, which was hanging among others. I knew that I would get comfort from holding and rocking the piece. Actually my work is more me than my physical presence. So the sculpture is in the background of the photograph.



Portrait of Louise Bourgeois with *Fillette*, 1968, by Robert Mapplethorpe, 1982.
Copyright © 1982 The Estate of Robert Mapplethorpe.

You see the triple image of the man you have to take care of, of the child you have to take care of, and of the photographer you have to take care of.

The *Fillette* had been done years before and relates directly to a family situation. You see, talking about personal things in public makes me break out in a sweat. My family, we were five. There were three children, there were no maids and my husband was a teacher at the time. He made a moderate salary. I had three boys plus my husband, so I had four men that I had to take care of. And I do not say that I didn't love them, I did love them. Coming from a French background, where the wife is really a mother, the idea of loving men means helping them. But you have to know how. You have to have bright ideas.

My mother was quite clever, much more than I. My father betrayed her. As a traditional French wife she has to humor him. French men have their little betrayals. The mother is supposed to forgive. She is supposed to say she's sorry that he betrayed her. You have to see it to believe it. There is no such thing as divorce in France, not in those days.

There I was, a wife and mother, and I was afraid of my family. I was afraid not to measure up. My mother had understood her role and was not afraid of the demands. I did not understand my role and I'm afraid I did not fill it. So what do you do when you are afraid?

Today, once again, I'm placed in a role with demands I am not sure I can fulfill. How can I help raise money for you? Maybe you picked the wrong Medalist. The challenge for me now is to prove to you that you were right to trust me.

My bright idea is to let the successful artist get the money for you. We have to force the artist to give to MacDowell, to live up to their responsibility to less successful artists. This would be a continuation of the parental situation where the parents take care of the needs of the children. Besides, artists—artists who have made it—give so much money to the government anyway.

Of course, many artists freak out at the mention of money, or at least

have no idea what is done with money. They become too emotional. So instead, let's deal with their closest associates, the I.R.S. [United States Internal Revenue Service], the shrink, and the attorney.

The shrink makes the artist reasonable, the attorney makes the artist clever, and the I.R.S. makes the artist richer.

If your attorney is not your best friend, you'd better change attorneys. Mapplethorpe, for one, would not step out of the house without holding on to his "best friend," his attorney Michael Stout. So let us deal with the attorneys of artists who are cooler humans.

MacDowell serves a high purpose. It believes in the artist and it is right to do so. It is artists who are going to save MacDowell. Thank you for giving me the honor. I appreciate it.

Rushes: on Robert Mapplethorpe

Transcript of a filmed interview which was eventually not used in the documentary on the artist made by Nigel Finch for Arena Films/BBC, London, 1993 (see pp. 253–62).

Can you tell me why you don't like being photographed?

Because I don't think much of my looks. I am not an actress. I am not what I look like. I am what I do. I am my work.

How did you feel when you went to get photographed by Robert Mapplethorpe?

I thought it was going to be a catastrophe and I prepared for it. I did take a piece of mine because the piece is more myself than the person . . . I took it as a precaution against a catastrophe . . . I am not used to being summoned. So to be told to come, even though Robert was a famous photographer, made me uncomfortable . . . When we got there he was completely silent . . . He gave very little at the beginning. So it was up to me. I had a monkey coat. I love monkey fur. It's a very long streaky thing, with a piece of white here and a piece of white there. I love the coat and I love the object that I was bringing . . . I counted on what I brought. Namely on the coat and the phallus.

Why did you choose a large phallus?

It is not a phallus. This is what people say and what it is is completely different . . . The piece is called *Fillette* (1968). *Fillette* means *une petite fille* [a little girl]. If you want to indulge in interpretation you could say that I brought a little Louise . . . It gave me security.

You have a grin on your face.

Yes, of course, because I knew what people were going to say.

It is a very big penis, isn't it?

That's what you say, but it is not what I say. I am used to critics, and they really get you through the mill.

What did you think of the photograph when you finally saw it? What is it that the sitter brings to that moment? What do you as the sitter try to project?



Fillette, 1968, latex over plaster, 26.5 × 59.5 × 19.5 cm.
Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

I had a question in my mind. Because I wondered what the relationship between Robert to his sitters was. And I was surprised to be placed in that company. And I am referring to the very handsome and powerful blacks that he's famous for. He is not famous for the flower photographs. He is not famous for his portraits. He is famous for the kind of sitters that he loved. So, he is a very honest man. I didn't think that Robert Mapplethorpe would be terribly interested in me, considering his usual sitters. So this was very heavy. I was surprised to be there. But why not. I could see in his sitters, in the very handsome black, what he saw. Not for the same purpose, but I could see it. He has a very knowledgeable eye. I hope he is not disappointed. That's what I mean.

He says he is interested in perfection in photography.

I am not sure because . . . the point is the finished product, what he did, what his photograph looked like. His personal adventures are not the point. Happy people have no stories, they have no history, they have nothing to say. They have been happy, and this is completely unproductive. The work of art is completely separate and sometimes the opposite of what we wish. . . . I understand what Robert Mapplethorpe is like as a person, but it is different from his production. His production happens to be very fine. It is possible that you don't like me. I can take it. I don't mind if you don't like me. But I would like you to like my work. I am my work. I am not what I am as a person.

On Cells

First published in 1991 by the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, in the exhibition catalog for the Carnegie International (19 October 1991 to 16 February 1992), curated by Lynne Cooke and Mark Francis, p. 60.

I.

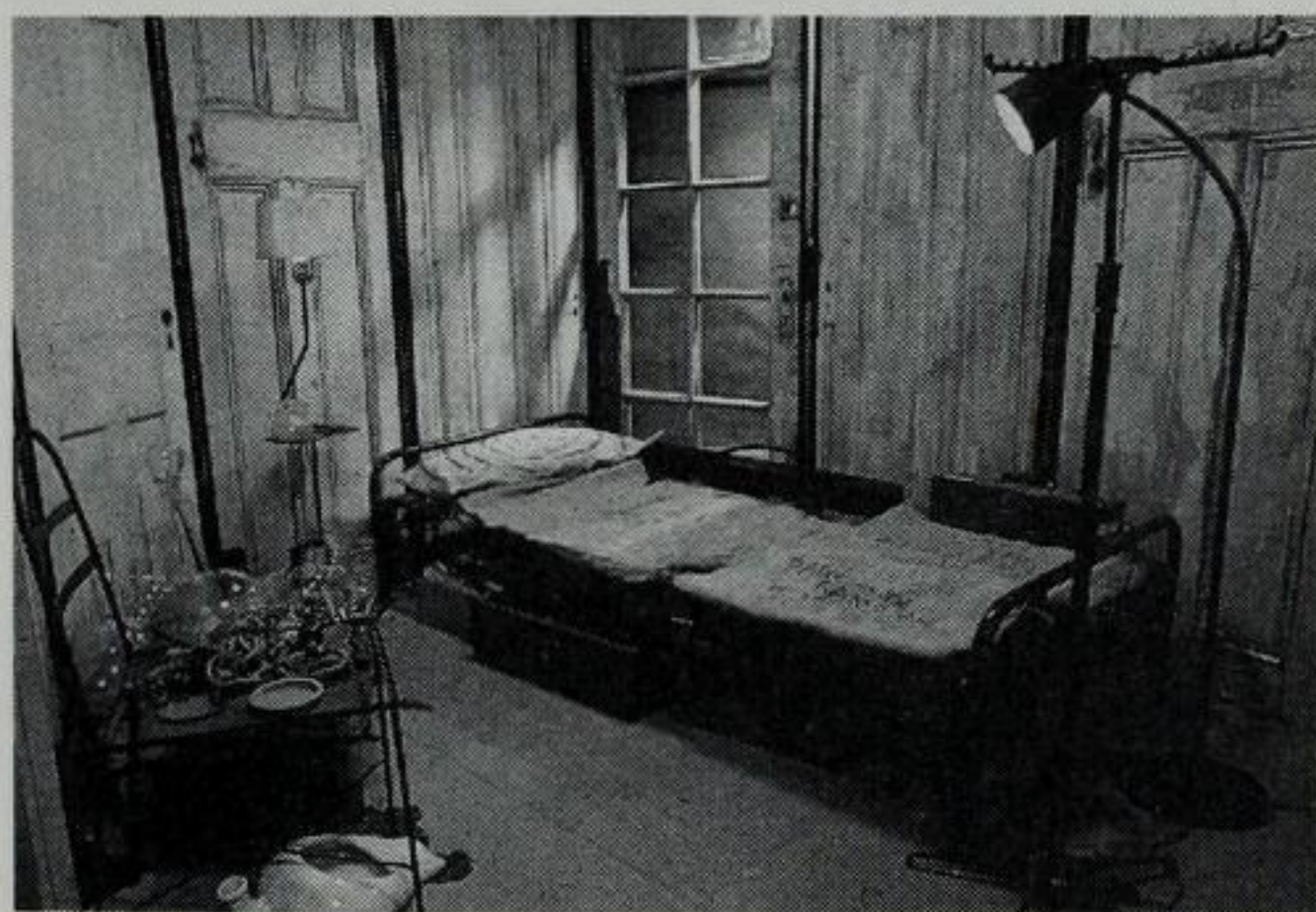
The subject of pain is the business I am in. To give meaning and shape to frustration and suffering. What happens to my body has to be given a formal abstract shape. So you might say, pain is the ransom of formalism.

The existence of pains cannot be denied. I propose no remedies or excuses. I simply want to look at them and talk about them. I know I can't do anything to eliminate or suppress them. I can't make them disappear; they're here to stay.

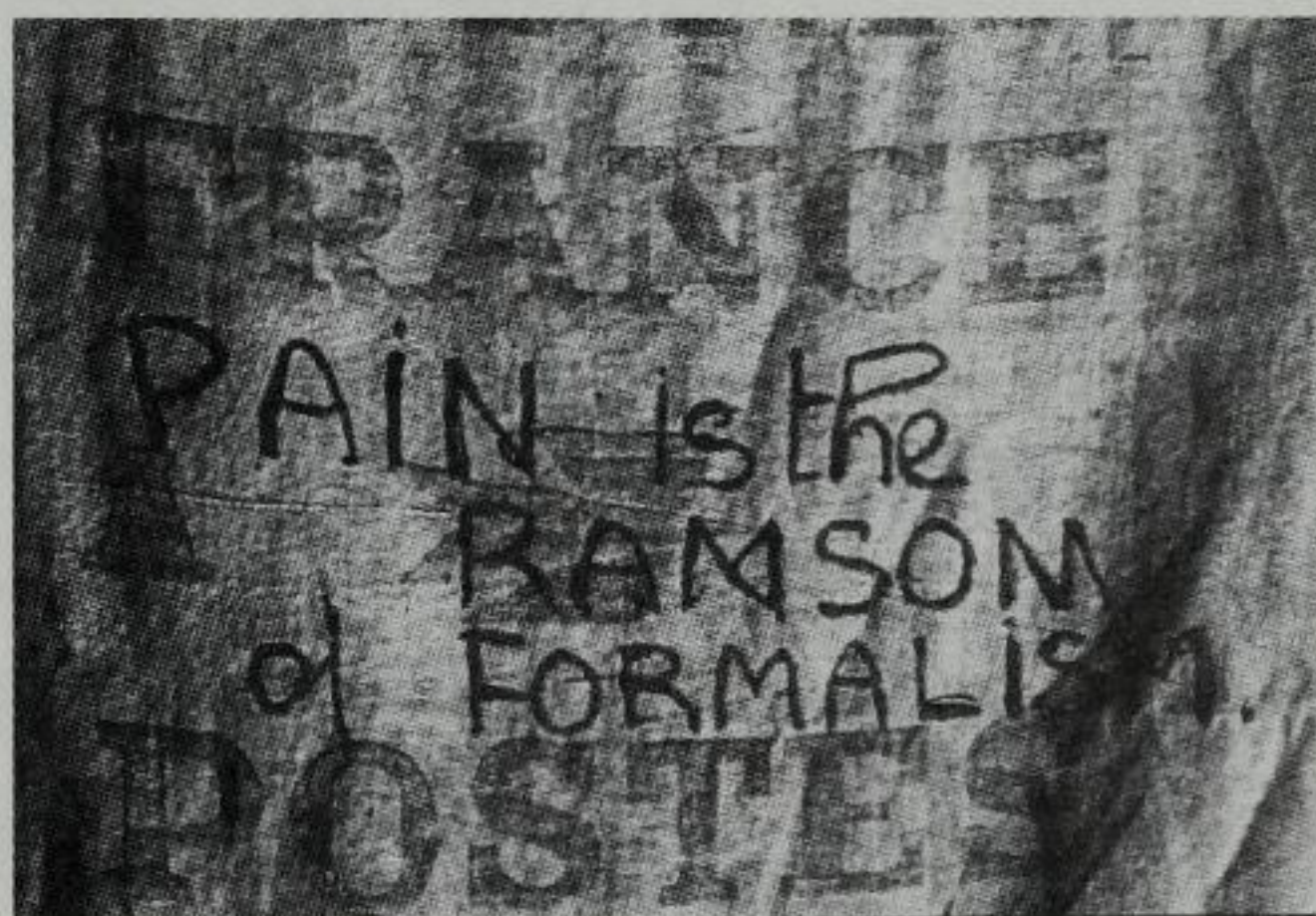
The *Cells* represent different types of pain: the physical, the emotional and psychological, and the mental and intellectual. When does the emotional become physical? When does the physical become emotional? It's a circle going round and round. Pain can begin at any point and turn in either direction.

Each *Cell* deals with fear. Fear is pain. Often it is not perceived as pain, because it is always disguising itself.

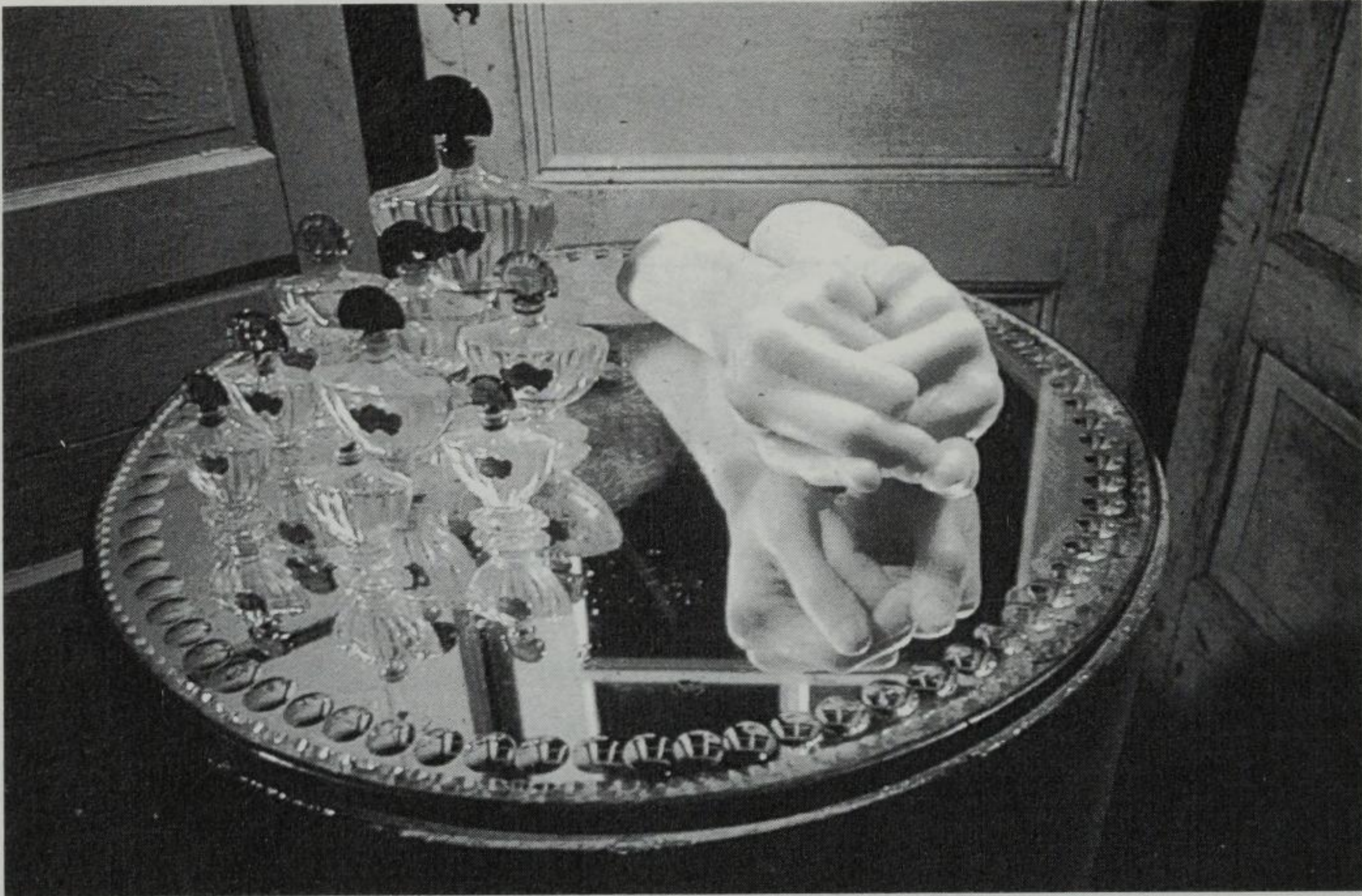
Each *Cell* deals with the pleasure of the voyeur, the thrill of looking and being looked at. The *Cells* either attract or repulse each other. There is this urge to integrate, merge, or disintegrate.



Cell I, 1991, mixed media,
210.8 × 243.8 × 274.3 cm.



Cell I (detail from bed).



Cell II (detail), 1991, mixed media, 210.8 × 152.4 × 152.4 cm.
Collection: Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

II.

In this *Cell* the hands, tightly clenched in pain, are made of stone. Pain, like stone, is indestructible. It comes from the rage of not knowing how to understand, of not knowing how to learn. There is this inner resistance that keeps me from learning, that keeps me from understanding. The resistance itself is unconscious and my inability to progress puts me in a state of rage. You confuse the world of emotions, which has a personal logic, with the world of the intellect, which has a universal logic. It is the confusion that drives you to rage. It's crystal clear.

I think the rage to understand comes from the fact that you do not ask the right question. You will never find the right answer if you do not ask the proper question. It's like trying to open a door with the wrong key. There is nothing wrong with the key, and there is nothing wrong with the

door. Some questions are too painful to answer. Some questions we are unwilling to ask. And some are impossible to answer.

When my mother died in 1932, this rage to understand took over me. I simply could not make out the why of her disappearance. Why my mother died and abandoned me would be clear if the question was perhaps a different one. If the question was replaced by why do I suffer so much from this loss, why am I so affected by this disappearance. Now these questions are possible to answer. Do I feel guilty? Does it represent a danger? Does it repeat the trauma of abandonment? If you fear abandonment, it keeps you in a state of dependency, which makes you feel you are unable to cope.

So there is this rage of not knowing how to live up to your fate. It's the pain of not knowing how to make yourself loved. This pain never goes away, and you don't know what to do about it.

The *Perfume* is the opposite. It's the evanescence of pleasure, the fleeting pleasure of the sense of smell. You cannot grasp it; it's so subtle you cannot touch it. You cannot hear it or see it or taste it. All the five senses show five totally different worlds. One cannot substitute for the other. Yet the sense of smell has the great power of evocation and healing.

III.

The *Cell* with the figure or arch of hysteria deals with emotional and psychological pain [see p. 249]. Here is the arch of hysteria, pleasure and pain are merged in a state of happiness. Her arch—the mounting of tension and the release of tension—is sexual. It is a substitute for orgasm, with no access to sex. She creates her own world and is very happy. Nowhere is it written that a person in these states is suffering. She functions in a self-made cell where the rules of happiness and stress are unknown to us.

The ironing board represents the flattening out of the creases, the diminishing of tension toward sleep. There is the big sleep, which is death, and the little sleep which follows orgasm.

IV.

In bed, crouching in fear, the person in this *Cell* is hiding. What he is hiding is his state of sickness. He is physically sick and afraid of death. But it is not that simple; he has other fears. What is not justified is his fear of people knowing about his sickness. He is afraid of not having any friends or afraid of losing those he has.

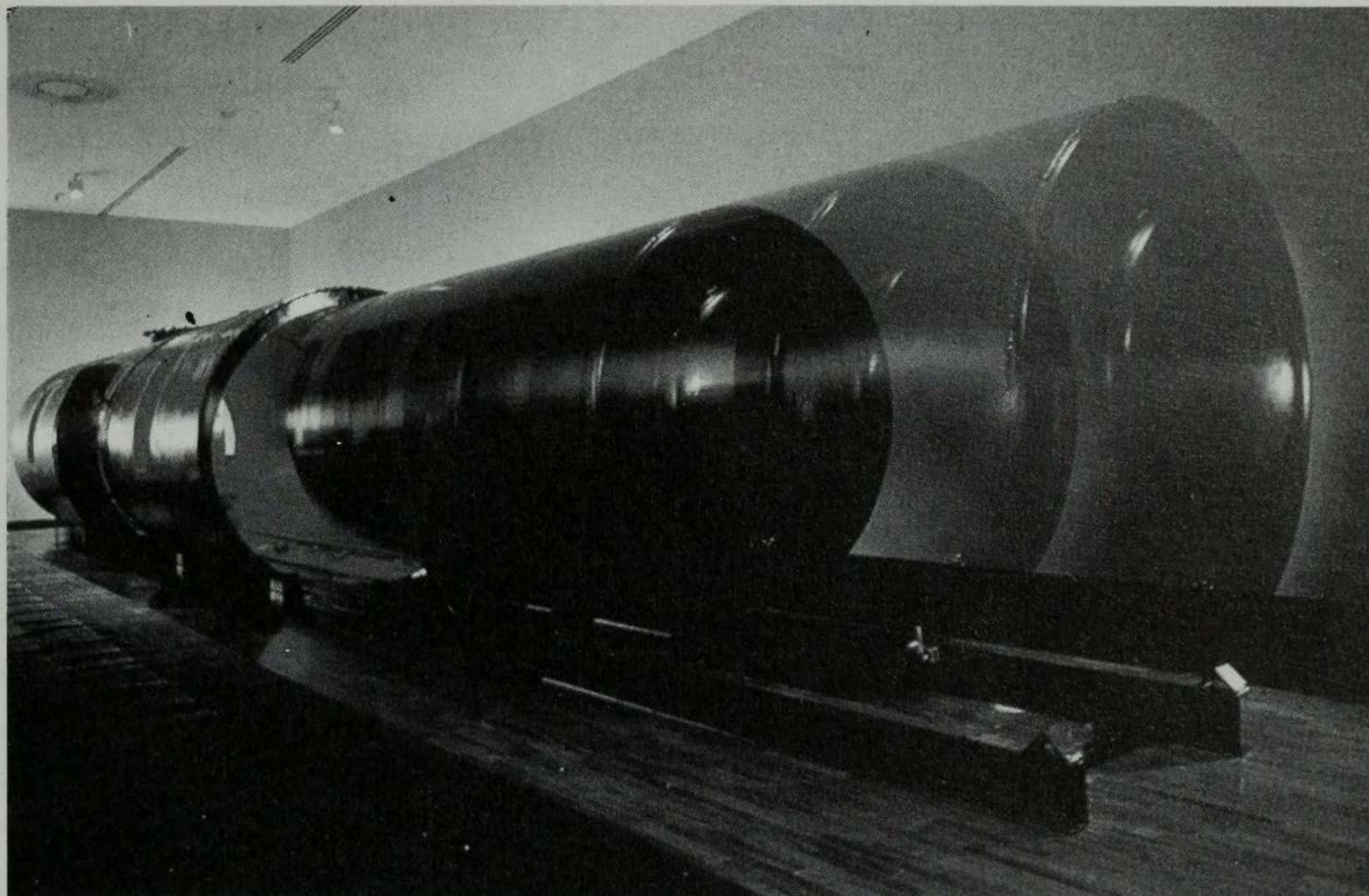
Some diseases are considered shameful because sinful. So he is intensely possessive of his privacy and fears the onlookers. He fears people are going to pry into his privacy. Yet he is projecting his fear of being seen, for he himself is a voyeur, a latent voyeur. This is expressed by the windows. If you can look out, they can look in. The clear glass represents no secrets.

Sick people die of the need of companionship, a stroking hand, a hungering for compassion. He runs away from people, and people run away from him out of fear of contagion. So he is isolated by his own fear and by that of others.

The transparent glass represents a sickness. When you're sick, people don't like you; you're not desirable. My mother was ill and used to cough up blood; I helped her to hide her illness from my father.

On *Twosome*

Statement from an interview with Robert Storr, first published in 1991 by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in the catalog for the group exhibition *Dislocations* (16 October 1991 to 7 January 1992), p. 37.



Twosome, 1991, steel, paint, and electric light, 203 cm diameter × 1158 cm long.

Geometry has no scale unless you give it scale. You can see it as the size of the universe, or you can see it as the size of a crawling snail. You must give geometry a size. This piece was invested with the size of the family. It is scaled to the relations of the family and the house. The opening and the mechanics are very important, because the small one can roll in and out without interference and with great ease. They each have their place but they're completely isolated from each other. But on the other hand, to be next to each other is better than to be lost in the outside. It relates to birth, sex, excretion—taking in and pushing out. In and out covers all our functions. In and out is a key to the piece. It's a meditation on these words, a

metaphor for being in and out of trouble, in and out of fashion, in and out of line, in and out of synch, in and out of focus, in and out of bounds. A twosome is a closed world. Two people constitute an environment. One person alone is an object. And object doesn't relate to anything unless you make it relate, it has a solitary and poor and pathetic quality. As soon as you get concerned with the other person, it becomes an environment, which involves not only you, who are contained, but also the container. It is very important to me that people be able to go around the piece. Then they become part of the environment—although in some ways it is not an environment but the relation of two cells. Installation is really a form between sculpture and theater, and this bothers me. What the visitor thinks and feels interests me. But I am not doing things for people, I'm doing things for myself. This has to be understood. I am not a teacher. I do not want to preach or convince. All I want is the right to affirmation, which is very modest. Very modest. If the viewer is trying to find out what I want to say, they cancel themselves out of the game. The person has to be free and in touch with their emotions, with their intellects. The point is to have a reaction when they see that thing. If they say, "Hey, this bothers me, suddenly I'm breathing faster," or "I'm startled," this I do like. I don't want them to be interested in me, I want them to be interested in what I did. If it bothers them, then I'm really successful. If it doesn't bother them, I feel I don't have any communication. It makes me feel lonely, if they don't react.

Obsession

First published in April 1992 in *Artforum*, vol. 30, no. 8, pp. 85–7.

So Gaston Lachaise had one god. And it was a woman, his wife. He put this particular woman on a pedestal, both figuratively and literally. What did he need from her? What did she give him? This remains the mysterious mechanism of a relationship that worked.

Some artists, being masochists, must find a valid cause. They get a perverse pleasure out of suffering for the cause. They get their self-esteem from pain, in the overcoming of it. They are willing to pay in time, in labor, and in expertise for being listened to, considered, and noticed.

Some artists function only in a “feed me” setup, meaning “You feed me compliments. You feed me encouragement. You feed me self-esteem.” That’s all they ask. You feed them faith in themselves. The question in Lachaise’s art and life is: “Who fed whom?” When the sculptor met Isabel Dutaud Nagle (in Paris, sometime between 1902 and 1904), he met the muse of his life and art. He was 20 and she was 30, married, with a child. Photographs show that she was not stately or heroic. Contrary to the “signature” proportions in which Lachaise rendered her, she was far from being impressive and monumental. She turns out to have been a smallish, unassuming woman. Yet for Lachaise, she was “the Goddess I am searching to express in all things.”

The form of Lachaise’s masochism was that he let himself be the slave



Gaston Lachaise, *In Extremis*, c. 1934, bronze, 38.1 × 26 × 23.5 cm. Collection: The Lachaise Foundation, courtesy Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York.

of this demanding woman. He was pumped dry by this muse, he sacrificed himself to this god. In what ways? In time: he devoted thirty-three years of his life to her. In labor: he worked tirelessly to support her. In social and financial expertise: he skillfully sought out collectors, commissions, and cash.

Isabel personified Lachaise's unacknowledged dream of hope and adventure in the New World. After he married her, in 1917, he labored under constant financial stress in order to supply her every want and fancy: her Fifth Avenue apartment, her summer house in Maine, her seamstress, hatmakers, and maid. To finance this woman's endless demands, Lachaise made everything from cement plaques for a house on Long Island to zodiac designs for elevator doors to a spread-winged seagull for Arlington Cemetery—the gamut from hardware to monumental sculpture. In spite of everything, as the late work shows, the one thing he did not sacrifice was his talent.

Lachaise was a consummate technician. He had the traditional French academic training, and he had worked for René Lalique in Paris, making jewelry and designing vases and Art Nouveau ornaments. Once settled in America he was to find work with the sculptor Paulanship. Yet despite the strong support he received from patrons, he was always hard up. He borrowed to such an extent that people avoided him. He is said to have been reduced to having his bronze-casting done in Munich because he had exhausted his credit in New York. The hole in his pocket was Isabel.

Lachaise had a reputation as a portraitist. He was one of those rare artists who could on occasion achieve a likeness and psychological depth at the same time, a talent I greatly respect. His bust of the painter John Marin in particular is quite powerful. Still, Lachaise did not reach the heights of Roman sculptural portraiture, or of Jean-Antoine Houdon, Franz Xavier Messerschmidt, or Henri Matisse's *Jeannette* series, 1910–13. We witness no transformation or formal evolution in his portraits over the years; he was a prisoner of his own talent, making flattering,

commissioned likenesses of famous clients he sought out. After Lachaise, with rare exceptions, portraiture seems to have disappeared from sculpture and moved largely into the domain of photography.

Yet a certain part of Lachaise's creativity remained his secret garden. It is only in the torsos, full figures, and abstracted female forms inspired by Isabel that Lachaise was able to reach his fullest expression as an artist. These forms are a convincing compulsion. I am all in favor of his authenticity, which bloomed only when he was alone in his studio. Only alone with the thought of his muse did he allow himself to express his sexual compulsion.

What are the secret demons in Lachaise's relationship to his muse? Why the obsessions with breasts and cunts? Why did he have to keep repeating himself, and what did he have to prove? Therein remains the secret of his life. Can it be analogous to the insatiable Don Juan, who had to prove himself irresistible, seeking to replace his mother's love with his conquests? Perhaps in this case the Don Juan complex involved the insatiable desire to possess one woman.



Gaston Lachaise, *Dynamo Mother*, 1933, bronze, 28.2 × 45 × 18.4 cm. Collection: The Lachaise Foundation, courtesy Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York.

Contrary to Don Juan, and to what many feminists may feel, Lachaise did not exploit women but enjoyed them. To be a sex object is a flattering experience. Why her and not me? His sculptures are the greatest compliment to women, just as Francis Bacon's work or Gary Indiana's book *Horse Crazy* is a compliment to men: it is a compliment to grant the sex object such power that it can trigger such passion.

A consequence of Lachaise's fixation is his tendency to repeat instead of to develop his style. This we deplore. But at the same time, it's this

obsessive quality that is so fantastic, such a gift. The formal distortions in the late erotic work, where the human body is deformed and enlarged, increase the audacity of Lachaise's expression. These late pieces—*Breasts with Female Organ Between* (also known as *Abstract Figure*; large version), 1930–2, *Dynamo Mother*, 1933, *In Extremis*, c. 1934, *Kneeling Woman*, *Hands on Head*, c. 1930–5—reflect an extremely powerful and original vision of his relationship to this woman.* It is in these works that Lachaise expresses his deepest emotion about woman—as mother, as lover, as ideal, as god.

*It is unfortunate that many of the late works were never exhibited before Lachaise's death, in 1935, so that the versions we have of them, produced later from his casts, may not take the definitive forms he envisioned for them.

On Teaching Art

Previously unpublished, 1990s.

To be born an artist is both a privilege and a curse. How can it be taught? It is not possible to become one, you can just accept or refuse the gift. It is not in my power or is it my responsibility or am I willing to try the impossible aim [of] teaching someone to “become” an artist.

However, we can talk about Art Education until the cows come home. It is nice and it can even be funny.

Artists in the medical profession (Therapy) could be invaluable [teachers] because of their insight and their access to the unconscious—their tolerance and understanding of the disturbed.

Statements from Conversations with Robert Storr

The following previously unpublished statements from the 1980s and 1990s have been selected by Robert Storr from taped interviews with or recorded statements by the artist during the preparation of his forthcoming monograph on Louise Bourgeois.

The mistress is a threat because *she* is the favorite. Competition with the mother is one thing, but competition with a *chosen* favorite is unthinkable, intolerable.

To make a set is to be in full possession of analytic powers. Anxiety comes when you sense that a part is missing.

You abandon your critical role—the will or ability to differentiate—in your need for amazement. You count on your intuition and let go of your analytic spirit. The price of compulsion is the abdication of discernment. Everything is jumbled. Amazement is itself a compulsion. It is an attempt to muzzle anxiety.

I detest anything primitive. I was brought up *bourgeoise*, enlightened, optimistic, Rousseau-ian.

I have a religious temperament, which is why things are so difficult for me. I was brought up in an anti-religious attitude. There are 140 religions or so, so one more doesn't matter. And my religion is art. It allows me to make sense of everything.

The wonderment at nature, it doesn't mean we have to introduce God. So who do we have to be thankful for? That is the basic question. Well, there is no answer. We don't have to be thankful. The feeling of gratitude almost forces us to invent a god, but this is self-indulgence. Who are *you* to feel grateful. It is much better to feel lucky.

On the treatment of sex at the family dinner table in New York:

When Cosimo entered the dining room and had an erection, and we were flabbergasted, then the remark was, "Don't worry, it is only a physiological thing." You can't argue with that. It was a total condemnation of sex.

Because it meant it had nothing to do with thinking. My children thought, therefore, that it couldn't be dangerous, but it showed a kind of terror. . . .

Sex didn't exist. We lived above these things, we lived for ideas. We were interested in the truth. Not the good; the truth.

Of life at home with Robert Goldwater in New York:

I lived in a bath of history. We talked of nothing but history. I had nothing against it, but it is not real stuff. It's not what art is made of.

On going through old drawings:

When a woman is pictured as evil, it bothers me.

Hair is simply protection women are wrapped in. Hair is like a caterpillar in a cocoon. But hair is more friendly in that the cocoon eliminates the subject. Silk, hair, wool are everywhere. Skeins are put together in a methodical fashion, whereas hair is unruly and free. It has to be restrained or braided.

Symbols of power that I avoid?—I am very ashamed or afraid of power—I don't drive, I don't handle keys, I don't handle money, I leave it to the authority figure. I do trust, rightly or wrongly, the authority figures. The artist is in a passive position, they [*sic*] abdicate symbols of power. . . . Mistrust happens in the rat race. It's a predatory thing. They are the brothers and sisters who barge in. You draw your strength from your loving someone—not the other way around. You have to find something that is lovable, some people who are lovable. Success is sexy. It's ridiculous but it's true. It makes men protective—of the girl-woman. It means the artist has remained a child and is perceived as such.

“The female spider” has a bad reputation—a stinger, a killer. I rehabilitate her. If I have to rehabilitate her it is because I feel criticized.

Loneliness comes from one person.

Recollections of a conversation with Willem de Kooning in the 1950s regarding influence and imitators:

LB: You know they copy you. (You know he got furious when this was said too much.) You let yourself be gobbled up.

WdeK: No, I won't let them. I copy them right back.

What is important is not so much where my motivation came from has how it managed to survive. The primary task of the artist is concentration—to achieve a total, friendly silence. This I learned in the academies of Paris where one drew all day long from the model. In that environment I was able for the first time to concentrate and to be certain of my vocation. But I was also there in search of ideas—and so I pursued them by going from one academy to the next, and one teacher to the next. Some of them were known as artists but most of them have been completely forgotten. And—this is unheard of today—I loved them for the faith they gave me in myself. And I still have a soft spot for them.

It was not my classmates I liked it was all the teachers. I had complete confidence in them; it was my teachers who replaced my family.

Remarks prepared for art students at Rutgers University:

What has kept me going and still keeps me going is the knowledge that being an artist is a privilege. And the second thing—which is a consequence of the first—is that one must not ask too much. Well, what do I mean by that? Simply that the pursuit of happiness is fine—we all want to believe in it—but most of the time it is just that, a pursuit. Now the privilege of being an artist consists of three things. First, to have something of

your own to say. And then—and this is a fight to the finish—to be able to communicate that to people. At best a school can help you with the second part, but it is obviously up to you what you are going to say, what spark you have, what subject. Now what does this all have to do with making a living? I do not know. When you start to define being an artist in those terms—as a profession like any other profession—you place yourself on a downward spiral. You begin to think: “How am I going to survive?” “I hate my job.” “I am a prisoner of the people who depend on me, of people’s expectations for my success.” “I know that there is loads of money out there but the system is so crooked none of it is going to come my way.” “I know there are hundreds of galleries in New York and I have a right to be in one but I’m not—or I’m not in the one I want to be in.” The important thing about all these statements is that they are all true—or could be true. But the mistake is to confuse art with a “right” at all. One has no birthright to be an artist. One is lucky to be one and that is all. So why have I mentioned these pessimistic things? Well, in fact, it is to say—as I have said—that things really are not so bad all the same. You are privileged to be what you are, and you have your whole life—fifty years—to figure out how it will be. But if this seems too general, all I can say is that after fifty years as an artist it is *my* privilege to say it just the same. That is all.

I cannot speak of style in general terms. I can only speak of mine, and my style is dictated entirely by the life I lead. That is to say by what I do—and I have a very hard time doing it. It is dictated by how much I am able—this is the dangerous thing—how much I am able to deprive myself. In other words style deals with limitations, and I am afraid we have to talk of discipline. You are made, you are forged by what you can resist and by your failures. My style, the way I work comes from all the failures, all the temptations I have resisted, all the fun I didn’t have, all the regrets. Style is made like a statue that you hack away at—and its made by all the things you have given up. All the things that you intensely desire to which you say, “No.”

It is not that something is wrong with me, but guilt because I *did* something wrong. I was guilty about being successful and afraid to be unsuccessful—both fear and guilt.

I want to be the owner of my own trouble.

Text prepared in 1985 for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge:

It is not the appearance of the body that interests me—clothed or unclothed. I want to know how things work—and why. That applies to the workings of the body as to the workings of the stars—the moon and the sun. This applies to the question of the joint which I am now using in my sculpture. The joint is something inside—something hidden which nobody sees. The curiosity with the erotic and the sexual has to be satisfied before being aroused—and it is a proven fact that I will fall in love with people in proportion to their intelligence, in reaction to the intrinsic quality of what they say, what their interest is. That this mechanism of attraction takes place in the nude rather than being covered up with seven veils is obvious. I fall for witty people because their wit relaxes me and puts me at my ease, which is not so ordinary since the opposite operates more often. Some people are afraid of witty people and it puts them on the defensive, but for me it means that they understand something I do not understand and so I trust them. I like people who are of a finer organization than I am. As a result, I am dreadfully afraid of the ignorant and very specially of the superstitious. This comes through in visual terms in my latest piece. It is a she and she is called the *She-Fox* or the *Tenet*.

I am not interested in the body; I am interested in the mechanism. The way people move their heads on their necks, the way they dismiss someone with a shrug of their shoulder, the swing of their hips, the way they throw their feet forward to walk, and sometimes the swing of a dis-jointed hip. The way articulation does or doesn't work is a sign of the way people move together or against each other, the way they relate to each

other. It doesn't have to have sexual connotations. Well, the fact is that it is completely sexual—but in an indirect way.

As a result of this interest in the mechanism of behavior, the articulation of the body, I easily dislocate members of the body. I now have in the study a seven-foot leg. There is the joint of the hip, the back and forth of the knee, and the full circle rotation of the foot. Seven feet is not too much to satisfy my curiosity. The legs in *Blind Leading the Blind* [see p. 102] are all seven feet.*

There is no feminist esthetic. Absolutely not! There is a psychological content. But it is not because I am a woman that I work the way I do. It is because of the experiences I have gone through. The women got together not because they had things in common but because they *lacked* things—they were treated the same way. I think this is the story of all minorities. Because when you get in the group there was so much rivalry.

Space does not exist, it is just a metaphor for the structure of our existence.

A spiral is completely predictable. A knot is unpredictable.

When you are angry you become not sinful but ugly—take out a mirror.

*The legs in the sculpture *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1947–9) are actually 5 ½ feet long, but there are seven pairs of them.

Statement: Documenta IX

First published in 1992 by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, and Edition Cantz, Stuttgart, in the exhibition catalog for *Documenta IX*, Kassel (13 June to 20 September 1992), where Bourgeois exhibited *Precious Liquids*, 1992.

I remember when we were living at Stuyvesant [Folly].
There were two young girls who lived in the building. The mother was drunk and the father had died.
The girls were loose in the building, looking for other children to play with. They rang our bell and my husband opened the door. Suddenly there was a puddle on the floor.

She fragmented . . .

Loss of control means fragmentation. Are you together?
Find yourself. Be in synch.

Self-expression is Sacred and Fatal

Select statements first published in 1992 by Ammann Verlag, Zurich, in *Louise Bourgeois: Designing by Free Fall* by Christiane Meyer-Thoss, pp. 177–202.

1

My early work is the fear of falling. Later on it became the art of falling. How to fall without hurting yourself. Later on it is the art of hanging in there.

4

When I was growing up, all the women in my house were using needles. I've always had a fascination with the needle, the magic power of the needle. The needle is used to repair the damage. It's a claim to forgiveness. It is never aggressive, it's not a pin.

5

My knives are like a tongue—I love you, I hate you. If you don't love me, I am ready to attack. They're very double-edged.

8

Color is stronger than language. It's a subliminal communication.

Blue represents peace, meditation, and escape.

Red is an affirmation at any cost—regardless of the dangers in fighting—of contradiction, of aggression. It's symbolic of the intensity of the emotions involved. Black is mourning, regrets, guilt, retreat.

White means go back to square one. It's a renewal, the possibility of starting again, completely fresh.

Pink is feminine. It represents a liking and acceptance of the self.

9

The spiral is an attempt at controlling the chaos. It has two directions. Where do you place yourself, at the periphery or at the vortex? Beginning at the outside is the fear of losing control; the winding in is a tightening, a retreating, a compacting to the point of disappearance. Beginning at the

center is affirmation, the move outward is a representation of giving, and giving up control; of trust, positive energy, of life itself.

10

Spirals—which way to turn—represent the fragility in an open space. Fear makes the world go round.

11

Several years ago I called a sculpture *One and Others* (1955). This might be the title of many since then: the relation of one person to his surroundings is a continuing preoccupation. It can be casual or close, simple or involved, subtle or blunt. It can be painful or pleasant. Most of all it can be real or imaginary. This is the soil from which all my work grows. The problems of realization—technical, and even formal and esthetic—are secondary; they come afterwards and they can be solved.

16

If I'm in a positive mood I'm interested in joining. If I'm in a negative mood I will cut things.

17

In a refusal to come to grips with the problem you project yourself at the horizon. The landscapes explode in a desire to escape, to distance yourself and dissolve the anxiety. Terror is turned outward toward the understanding of the universe. The introjection of the landscape is the lair.

20

The phallus is a subject of my tenderness. It's about vulnerability and protection. After all, I lived with four men, with my husband and three sons. I was the protector. I was also the protector of my brother; he knew it, acknowledged it, and used it.

Though I feel protective of the phallus, it does not mean I am not afraid of it.: "Let sleeping dogs lie." You negate the fear like a lion tamer. There is danger and the absence of fear. There is no danger and yet no thrill with women.

21

Janus (1967) is a reference to the kind of polarity we represent. . . . The polarity I experience is a drive toward extreme violence and revolt . . . and a retiring. I wouldn't say passivity . . . but a need for peace, a complete peace with the self, with others, and with the environment.

25

Confrontation (1978) represents a long table surrounded by an oval of wooden boxes, which are really caskets. The table is a stretcher for transporting someone wounded or dead. So, there is one personage on one side, and one on the other. One creature is old, and as you can see by the shape, they are crinkled, they are definitely wrinkled and old. The other is absolutely fresh representing youth. Now, we are used to having stories and romanticism about the obsession of age with youth. That is to say, the falling in love of an old person with a young person. And when this happens, since love is never fulfilled, it always ends in death. Usually, we have the state of affairs where someone dies of passion for someone younger than himself, passion that is never achieved, never consummated. However, I assume and want to prove that the opposite is equally true, that a lot of young people are obsessed with the past, or with age, or with an older person, and they die of it. It's the young who just lose themselves. So there is an element of madness. It is the young who ask to be stricken by madness because they refuse to leave the past.

Each of these boxes represents one of us. We have to stop running and take our places in the circle and face ourselves in front of each other. That is to say, to face how limited and uninteresting we are. Every one of us has to do this in front of everybody else. At that point, we have grown up. Nothing can let us escape this confrontation.

We have to come to terms with ourselves, with how bad we are, how limited we are, how short our life is.

[From an unpublished interview with Laura Tennen, 1982]

29

I need my memories. They are my documents. I keep watch over them. They are my privacy and I am intensely jealous of them. Cézanne said, "I am jealous of my little sensations." To reminisce and woolgather is negative. You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you. If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are the seeds for sculpture.

31

There was a *grenier*, an attic with exposed beams. It was very large and very beautiful. My father had a passion for fine furniture. All the *sièges de bois* were hanging up there. It was very pure. No tapestries, just the wood itself. You would look up and see these armchairs hanging in very good order. The floor was bare. It was quite impressive. This is the origin of a lot of hanging pieces.

34

A daughter is a disappointment. If you bring a daughter into this world, you have to be forgiven, the way my mother was forgiven because I was the spitting image of my father. That was my first piece of luck. It may be why he treated me like the son he always wanted. I was gifted enough to satisfy my father. This was my second piece of luck.

All daughters hate their mothers. In Freudian terms the daughter blames the mother for the loss of the penis. They blame the castration on the mother. I am deeply grateful not to have gone through this ordeal. I would have been totally unable to deal with the criticism of a daughter. Sons are always partial to their mother unless their mother was unfair to them. That is to say asked too much from them so they collapse. A lot of parents make a career out of having children. They live through the child and destroy him. It is better to have parents who use their children as unpaid labor.

36

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

I break everything I touch because I am violent. I destroy my friendships, my love, my children. People would not generally suspect it, but the cruelty is there in the work. I break things because I am afraid and I spend my time repairing. I am a sadist because I am afraid. Yet the reconciliations between people never really stick.

37

When I was afraid of my mother dying, a challenge I could not meet, the warding off of her death, not to let her disappear, I made a vow. I swore to myself if my mother survived that morning I would give up sex.

38

In France, the woman is always a mother. Most men remain children and marry mother figures. For eroticism, they have mistresses.

Physically, my father was too afraid or guilty to make love to my mother. My father was promiscuous and it had a profound effect on all of us.

39

I still feel today I do not deserve to go back to France. I felt like I had abandoned them and yet no one from the family is still there. How do you explain I had abandoned people who are not there anymore? So people never disappear, they never leave for good, and always the guilt and reparations.

44

I organize a sculpture the way we organize a treatment for the sick. You'd better know what you're doing. You have to have a strategy to get the wanted results. My sculptures are infallible equations. Equations have to be tested. Does the tension go down, is the compulsion eliminated, is the pain gone? Either it works or it doesn't work.

45

I am an addictive type of person and the only way to stop the addiction is to become addicted to something else, something less harmful.

What the substitute is is the body of my work. The sculptures reveal a whole life based on eroticism; the sexual or the absence of sex is everything. The desire to succeed and to know how to succeed is everything.

One must differentiate between sex, which is a function, and eroticism, which encompasses so much more. First, eroticism can be real or imagined, reciprocated or not. There is the desire, the flirtation, the fear of failure, vulnerability, jealousy, and violence. I'm interested in all these elements.

49

If a person is an artist, it is a guarantee of sanity. He is able to take his torment.

52

I'm afraid of power. It makes me nervous. In real life, I identify with the victim, that is why I went into art. In my art, I am the murderer. I feel for the ordeal of the murderer, the man who has to live with his conscience.

The process is to go from passive to active. As an artist I am a powerful person. In real life, I feel like the mouse behind the radiator.

It is mind over matter. You transcend real life in your art.

53

By withdrawing, by recognizing you have no power, you become more than yourself. You get ideas which never would have occurred to you. In my art, I live in a world of my own making. I make decisions. I have power. In the real world, I don't want power.

54

Self-expression is sacred and fatal. It's a necessity. Sublimation is a gift, a stroke of luck. One has nothing to do with the other.

I am saying in my sculpture today what I could not make out in the

past. It was fear that kept me from understanding. Fear is the pits. It paralyzes you.

My sculpture allows me to re-experience the fear, to give it a physicality so I am able to hack away at it. Fear becomes a manageable reality. Sculpture allows me to re-experience the past, to see the past in its objective, realistic proportion.

Fear is a passive state. The goal is to be active and take control. The move is from the passive to the active. If the past is not negated in the present, you do not live. You go through the emotions like a zombie, and life passes you by.

Since the fears of the past were connected with the functions of the body, they reappear through the body. For me, sculpture is the body. My body is my sculpture.

55

The life of the artist is the denial of sex. Art comes from the inability to seduce. I am unable to make myself be loved. The equation is really sex and murder, sex and death.

56

The fear of sex and death is the same. Attraction and fear move back and forth. Which is the cause and which is the effect? It's important to know.

Turenne was standing on his horse ready to go to battle. He said to his horse, which was really his unconscious, "You tremble, carcass, but you would tremble even more if you knew where I am going to take you."

It is at this moment, the thrill of danger, that the erotic impulse is activated. The thrill is an erotic presence, that all-or-nothing feeling. You either resist or let go. If it terrorizes you, it means the resistance is too much. There is the refusal to go to battle with the unconscious. I become paralyzed by the fear.

In a woman, sex comes when she loses control. In a man, it comes from asserting his control. In sex you lose control and it can be terrifying. By extension, the relationship of Turenne to his horse is an S & M image.

Turenne was the artist. The artist is a sadist and afraid of his own sadism, of inflicting death. Is it murder or suicide? It depends on how you feel. Think of the bird ensnared by the snake. Nobody has ever proved that the bird suffers from his fear. Who says that the bird doesn't enjoy it, that there's not a sexual thrill? That there's not ecstasy in death? That the bird dies fulfilled, as he's gobbled up. One way or the other, the ransom of fear is death.

Don't forget the masochist loves a sadist and the sadist loves a masochist, and the prisoner is so helpless and desperate that all he has left is to fall in love with the jailer.

72

The intensity of Francis Bacon's works moves me deeply. I react positively. I sympathize. His suffering communicates. The definition of beauty is a kind of intimacy in the visual. I feel for Bacon even though his emotions are not mine.

The physical reality of his works is transformed and transcended. His room does not obey the laws of perspective. To look at his pictures makes me alive. I want to share it. It's almost the expression of love..

74

Charcot was modest. He was only a scientist and not a theorist. Lacan was a *guérisseur*, through charm and through the verbal. He was not a scientist. He was a con man. Freud and Lacan did nothing for the artist. They were barking up the wrong tree. They don't help any. I simply can't use them.

Breton's teacher was really Bousette. Bousette was interested in the grandiose style and social connections—that search for the grandiose and the religious. Breton, Lacan, and Freud disappointed me. They promised the truth and just came up with theory. They were like my father: to promise so much and deliver so little.

75

Breton and Duchamp made me violent. They were too close to me and I objected to them violently—their pontification. Since I was a runaway, father figures on these shores rubbed me the wrong way. *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1947–9) refers to the old men who drive you over the precipice.

78

The literature of women is concerned with men, the inability to deal with them. They are desperate to come to terms with, to please, to manipulate, to seduce. I identify with them because I feel as limited as they are. I don't need them. They are like sisters. You don't learn as much, and I have no taste for victims.

If I'm with a man I love, I have to be on guard, I don't trust them. I feel they want to steal him.

79

The Existentialists disappeared when the Structuralists came in. Lacan came in. The Structuralists were interested in language, grammar, and words. Whereas Sartre and the Existentialists were interested in experience. Obviously, I am on the side of the Existentialists. With words, you can say anything. You can lie as long as the day, but you cannot lie in the re-creation of an experience.

As La Rochefoucauld said, "Why do you talk so much? What is it that you have to hide?" The purpose of words is often to hide things. I want to have total recall and total control of the past. Now what would be the sense in lying?

On Cell (You Better Grow Up)

First published in 1993 by Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux in *Et vous changent le monde*, edited by Marc Dachy, the exhibition catalog for the Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon, pp. 236–7, and in 1994 by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory 1982–1993*, the catalog for a solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York.

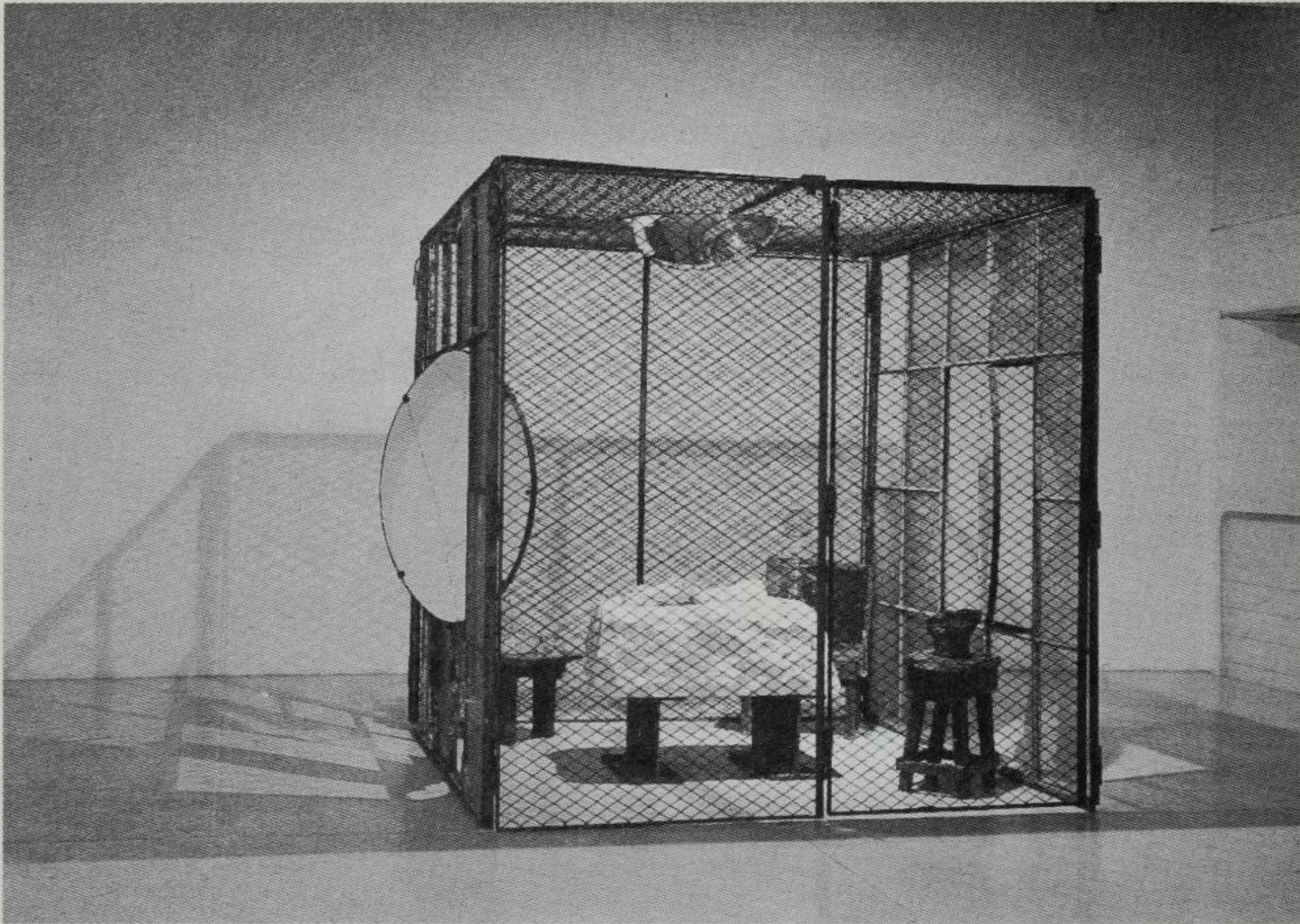
The piece is a cell, a seven-by-seven-by-seven-foot cube. It has overtones of a jail and its occupant, of the inescapable; it also has overtones of the biological cell. Its sides are made of woven iron bars and glass. Mirrors, which pivot vertically or horizontally, have been inserted in the ceiling and on two sides. Inside is a block of pink marble. Three hands are carved in the stone. Sitting on three pieces of wooden furniture are objects: a glass tower and three perfume bottles, a ceramic container with three openings, and a stack of glass shapes.

The three hands are a metaphor for psychological dependency. The one large hand is holding the two small childlike hands as if to protect them. It is the hand of a mentor or guide, of an active, compassionate, reasonable adult. The little hands are helpless and dependent. They are in a state of fear and anxiety, which makes them passive. They long for inner peace: for the guarantee of acceptance and love, for the instant reassurance, for the absence of fear. Eternally acting out their terror, they have no control, no understanding of what the fear consists of.

First there is fear, the fear of existence. Then comes a stiffening up, a refusal to confront the fear. Then comes the denial. The terror of facing ourselves keeps us from understanding and subjects us to the repetition of acting out. It is a tragic fate.

The mirrors superimpose on one another. They interact, giving a multiple view of the world. The mirrors reflect the many difficult realities, one worse than the next. To the child, the world they show seems distorted and disordered. To the reasonable adult, the view they give is not a frightening one, because the mechanism of the hinge is obvious.

Through self-knowledge we recognize and understand the mecha-



Cell (You Better Grow Up), 1993, steel, glass, marble, ceramic, and wood, 210.8 × 212 × 82 cm.

nisms of our fears. We cease being dependent on the unknown and the acting out stops. The goal is to become active, and to take control. Until the past is negated by the present, we do not live.

The perfume bottles put us in a nostalgic mood with the powerful recall of smell. In our refusal to confront our fear, we retreat into nostalgia. Fear condemns us to a rejection of the present. The present is kept intolerable. We must call for help from the past to solve the problems of today.

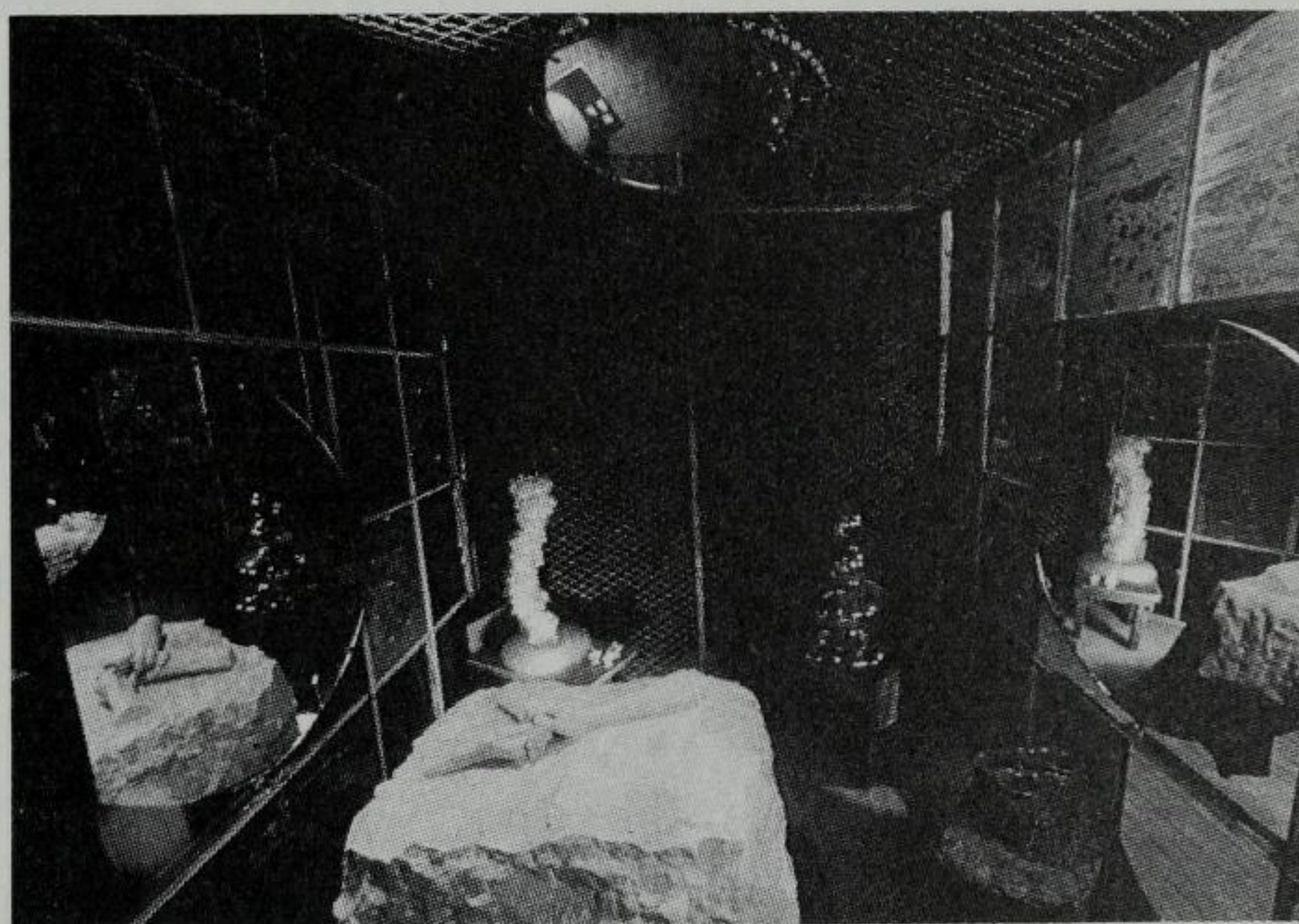
The self-indulgent shapes in glass and in ceramic are a form of romanticism, a state of abandon, a *laissez-faire* attitude, a childlike dream. They are the things we do without having to face the consequences.

The artist, like the child, is passive. The artist remains a child who is no longer innocent yet cannot liberate himself from the unconscious. The acting out of his terror is self-involved and pleasurable. Some artists

act all their lives instead of thinking. Self-expression excludes learning. Sublimation is a fantastic pleasure but also a fantastic privilege. Sublimation is living in heaven with the permission of your conscience. But the price of this sublimation, this acting out, is the absence of self-understanding or even of the desire for it. It is humiliating to be a toy in the hands of a fear that grips you so tightly.

Some people have declared that if artists were analyzed they would stop being artists. I disagree. Self-knowledge makes artists better artists. The process does not destroy the ability or the wish or the need to self-express. Ignorance is bliss, but its ransom is to keep you a prisoner of your own fears.

The tiny figure inside the stacked glass shapes is cut off from the world. That's me. The little hands are mine. They are self-portraits. I identify with the dependent one. The world that is described and realized is the frightening world of a child who doesn't like being dependent and who suffers from it. So the moral of this Cell is, you better grow up.



Cell (You Better Grow Up)(detail), 1993.

Mortal Elements: Pat Steir Talks with Louise Bourgeois

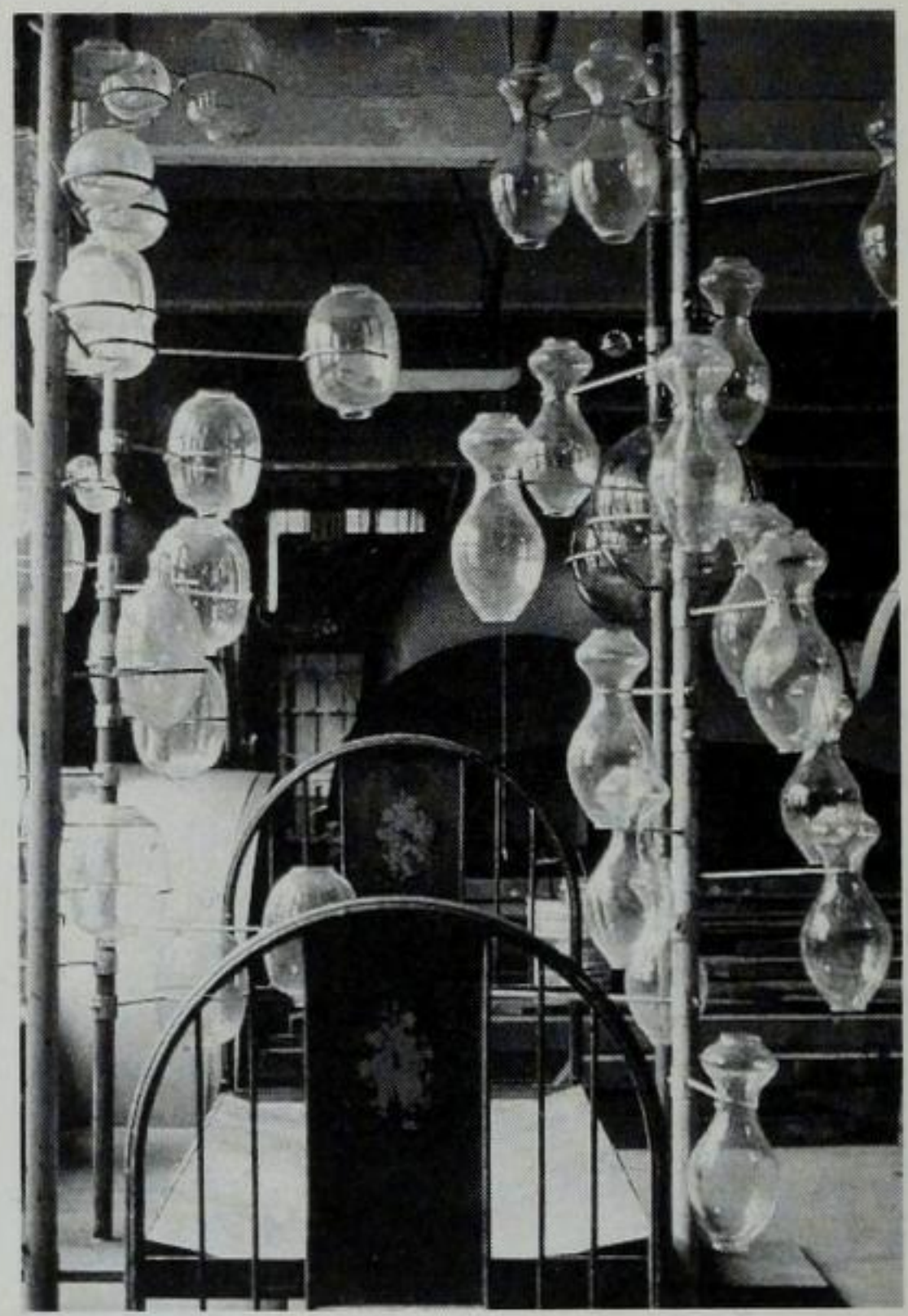
First published in 1993 in *Artforum*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 86–7, 127.

Like ancient sites abandoned for centuries, Louise Bourgeois' sculptures remind me of the basic fact of impermanence, yet they can feel as familiar as a recurring dream suddenly recollected. In her installations, psychological relationships among objects are as important as formal ones: this work is sculpture but it is about memory, and the fragility and isolation of the individual—how even a heart of stone is as fragile as a bubble of glass, at the core nothing more than air and dust. Through her use of materials—found objects along with made sculptural elements—Bourgeois creates physical order out of emotional disorder. This is art, not as therapy, but as a transformation of emotion into physical form.

In the conversation that follows, conducted on 18 March at her New York studio, Bourgeois discusses both the work that will be unveiled at the Venice Biennale this summer and the 1992 Documenta installation that preceded it.

* * *

All of you interviewers flock upon me like birds—to say what? My work is finished; I can't go through this again. During the BBC film [see pp. 253–62], there were six people around all day. Finally, I've succeeded in totally exhausting myself. This is completely unjustified. You people want me to do all the work.



Precious Liquids (detail), 1992, cedar wood, glass, alabaster, fabric, and water, 427 × 442 cm. Collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

That's what an interview is . . .

I'm a sculptor, not an entertainer. Or rather, I have discovered that I am an entertainer despite myself. People actually laugh at me, God bless them; I'm rather flattered, but there is a limit.

The piece you displayed last year at Documenta is titled Precious Liquids (1992).

Actually the piece has two titles. Welded in steel over the entrance to its interior is an inscription that says, "Art is a guarantee of sanity." I did not say that it was *the* guarantee of sanity. There are lots of others. Art is just one way of reaching an equilibrium—of becoming a sociable person.

What about the bed with the little puddle on it and the glass shapes hovering near it?

Here we are dealing with bodily functions; when we are in a tense state, our muscles tighten; when they relax and the tension goes down, a liquid is released. Intense emotions become physically liquid—a precious liquid. That's where the title comes from. So it is all a matter of being in touch with that flowing of liquids. I could give you a dozen examples—if you are terribly hungry saliva comes at the sight of a lamb chop. In this piece the liquid is suggested by the glass shapes; some are closed like drops and others, open like funnels, are metaphors for the muscles of the body.

What about the tall coat and the little coat?

The coat represents, you might say, the tragedy of the voyeur.

The flasher, in English?

The French do not have that beautiful word. But yes, he refuses to get out of the place. He's not a casual presence. He's a very pestering presence. Inside the flasher's coat there is a little white dress—the dress of, say, a twelve-year-old girl. That little female presence probably has to do with certain memories of mine. Actually, the person who enters the piece should open the coat and see what is in there. On the little dress there's the embroidery "mercy *merci*" . . . at that point we are done with the flasher. He is a compulsive creature.

Precious Liquids is very claustrophobic and dark inside; in the Venice pieces nothing is hidden.

But there is a relation between the new work and *Precious Liquids* in terms of subject matter; they both involve the story of the unconscious—you have to bear it and, if you are gifted and generous enough, and if you like yourself enough, you will come to terms with it.

One way or the other.

The point is that the unconscious is there to stay, bothering you all the time. But you have to make peace with it. In *Precious Liquids* the girl, for her own protection, for the sake of her own sanity—we go back to sanity—has to come to terms with the flasher. So she closes her eyes, refuses to see him, and turns the matter around by taking refuge in his coat. This is the metaphor for the artist. If the artist cannot deal with everyday reality, the artist will retreat into his or her unconscious and feel at ease there, limited as it is—and frightening sometimes. But since love excludes fear—this is the deepest interpretation—suddenly if you are in love, you are not afraid anymore. This is amazing, but it is true. The little girl has taken the unconscious, not as an enemy, but as a refuge.

I was interested that the figure in Cell (Arch of Hysteria) (1992) is male. It is unusual, because the hysteric was always a woman.

This goes back to *Precious Liquids*, because this is really about tension, the body. The fact that it is a man is not terribly important. It is a remark about the hysterical, and in the time of Jean Martin Charcot, any ill, any disease, was attributed to hysteria, to be precise, and hysteria was attributed to women, which was absurd. This is all it means.

So it's just a little feminist humour on the way. But I'm still curious about the hysteric as a man.

Yes, well, you are asking too much. If you say, Louise, How is it that this is next to that; what's the relation? if you ask me precise questions about the visual, I prefer this to the interpretive attitude of the art critic. It's very rare to find somebody who is able to bring a piece alive, through description, instead of making pronouncements. So it's art journalism that I respect. I'm all in favor of art journalism. [Laughter]

You're really an inquisitive person. So I'll tell you first of all that the

large object in *Cell (Arch of Hysteria)* is a saw; you know arms were cut, heads were cut, we needed a saw for that, right? And you don't have to know exactly what, but something vibrates in you; you see that everything has been cut, so you cut the poor creature, because you have been cut off from your past. It is a move from the passive to the active. In my art I'm the murderer. You understand? Besides, this disease (hysteria) was in fashion at the time of the Industrial Revolution.

I want to know why the objects in the found chairs in Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands) (1992–3) are glass bubbles and not figures. There are so many figures elsewhere in your work.

The glass suggests the infinite fragility of the human person. The artist retreats into the handling of materials, because any materials—marble, bronze, plaster, wax, plastic—are less fragile than human relationships. If I talk to you, I may break everything. But, that's not my fault; I can be very, very sorry afterwards. But a break in a piece of glass can never be hidden. [Laughter]

They are transparent bubbles. They're enclosed; you do not get at them. They are sealed off without the possibility of communication and yet they are together. This is a very pessimistic situation. Suppose I want this person to love me and—they're a bubble, I have no access; I'm unable to make myself heard or loved. *Family of Five* is also like a school, a learning situation. Well, this is personal, because I have taught, you know, and that has been my experience.

And the marble hands?

I clasp my hands in despair. Artists are not taught, they are made, they happen by accident; so I despair because I have no impact on them.

When I first saw Cell (Choisy) (1990–3) [see p. 256], I thought that the house was mounted on a sewing-machine stand.

It's a nineteenth-century workbench. I find this period of the end of the nineteenth century—the period of Charcot, the Salpêtrière, you know—mysterious. You find these beautiful machines abandoned here in New York: I like the connection, because it is, in a way, a historical piece,

I was wondering also about the house itself. Is it your childhood home?

Yes.

How did you choose pink marble?

Because its color suggests flesh. The marble in many of my recent pieces relates to flesh. It is very difficult to get pink marble. It's called *portugalo*, and usually the pink color is ruined by green veins. I can't accept that. So, this marble is very special.

Are there rooms inside?

Yes, this is an *exact* reproduction. I could show you where my parent's room was, with the terrace. I could show you my room, which wasn't so nice.

You have the guillotine here over the house.

The house represents the past. I go there, it's demolished. It was replaced by the Paul Eluard theater. The mayor of the little city said, Louise, I am going to put your piece in a park near the town hall; the French government placed a commission with me. It is a tiny place, but at least nobody's going to come and replace it with a high-rise. The demolition of the house means that the present destroys the past—cuts it, breaks with it. Oh yes, the idea of cutting is terrible. The guillotine appears all the time in my work—remember that poor guy the hysteric; he had no more arms, nothing.



Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands), 1992–3, glass, marble, wood, metal, and fabric, 218.5 × 218.5 × 211 cm. Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.

Interview with Douglas Maxwell

First published in a longer version in Summer 1993 in *Modern Painters*, vol. 6 no. 2, pp. 38–43.

What is a typical day like for you?

My life has been regulated by insomnia. It's something that I have never been able to understand, but I accept it. The rhythm of my work follows the rhythm of the day. That is to say, the appearance of fatigue, the total exultation you feel when you wake up and it is another day; the feeling of gratefulness—what is another word? Thankful? My father used to say, you have to be thankful for *me*. I brought you into the world. I gave you milk croissants . . .

I was going to ask you about your childhood. You were born in France . . .

I still talk about it. I was brought up by somebody who believed in what we call in America “tough love.” There is a story about *le chien de Camus*—do you know it? I put myself in the place of the dog. He was given a little bit to eat in the morning, then he was slapped back and forth by his master, who kept telling him: “Ha! that was a good breakfast and I made it for you.” All day long he was told that he owed so much to the master. The dog became thinner and thinner because the breakfast was smaller and smaller, and finally he could hardly walk. One day he was starving, but he was not stupid, as Ross Perot would say, and he sneaked out of the door, went straight to the garbage, and ate and ate. So, he escaped death and starvation. Now that is the point of view of the dog, but I am talking about the master who represents my father. He says: “I've lost my dog—it was all I had in the world. I lived for that dog. You cannot imagine how piqued and hurt I am that he deserted me.” Put the two together and that is the definition of “tough love.”

Your father didn't see that at all?

My father thought *he* was the victim; that he had been abandoned by that dog that he *loved* so much. You see at my age I still talk like a little daughter.

So you had a very tough, hard childhood. Can you tell me more about it?

Well, a second important fact is that my father loved the English. I do not want to go into religion, but he loved them because in England you didn't have to go to confession. The English were wise and honest; confession for him was a pack of lies. The English were courageous; they did not hide behind confession. The English could do no wrong; so sure enough his mistress was English.

Was he happy with his mistress?

I care only about what he did to me. I am not a judge. The poor guy, he did what he could. I am only interested in what he did to me, and what he did in relation to my work today. I still work on this subject.

What is your earliest childhood memory?

It was during the war, when my father was in the trenches. It was in Paris and I lived on the third floor. My mother worked in tapestry. When my father was away she was there with three children. She ran the roost; she had to make money for us. One day the janitor rang the siren and everybody was supposed to go downstairs—you went down into the subway in England, into the cellars. Anyway, the janitor came up and said to my mother, "Let me take her down"—my sister was old enough to walk, and my mother was holding me. The janitor put his hands on top of her hand and I felt that he was making a pass at her.

Even at that age?

I was conscious of that. He just put his hands flat on top of hers. She was giving him something to handle that was very precious to her. I was just a pawn. I am going to be nice to *her* (me) because I love *you*—something like that, I thought his motive was. I was absolutely repulsed by this. That is my first memory. I think I was about three years old. I understood that he made a pass at her. I assumed that she liked it, because if a man makes a pass at a woman it is a compliment.

Today, it is called sexual harassment.

In that case, women are dishonest. They love it. In some ways I am a femi-

nist, but not in that way. When it comes to sex, somebody who makes a pass at you likes you—that is a fact. In fact, it is the only thing that is true in life.

People communicate with the eyes and the hands. That is why my work is full of eyes and hands.

How would you describe yourself as a child?

I would describe myself as being desperate to please—even people that I really didn't like too much. Because when my mother had her hands touched like this, I detested them. Later on, Marcel Duchamp—I knew the people of that generation very well—Duchamp, he didn't say very much, but he was a good listener. I told Duchamp how once in the garden—I was fifteen or sixteen, no older than that, and nature meant a lot to me—I was digging, and I found two snails completely joined together. I looked at them and there was revulsion. It was too much to take. I detached them and threw them down, and I ground them under my foot. Duchamp said: "Please do not exaggerate, Louise." I said: "Marcel, I do not exaggerate. Maybe the emotion was too strong then, but it is still with me: do not thrust, you were so terrified yourself by your wife that you could not fuck, so please now do not judge me, and tell me that I am unreasonable." So he said: "Let us not be too intellectual." I said: "There is nothing intellectual about that." He did not want to talk about his sex, and the secret of Marcel Duchamp, as everybody knows today, is that he was married to a peasant girl from Normandy and he started to talk to her and be clever, and she would not take it. "Look here," she said, "we are here to fuck, don't tell me stories, just shut up," and then he was reduced to impotence and she left him. He was absolutely crushed. What happened after that? He lived with Mary Reynolds when we knew him.

When did you first become interested in art, was it part of your background?

Art was appreciated in my house, since my parents used draftsmen from the Gobelins to repair the antique tapestries. There is a long story about this as I am having a show at the Gobelins. The reason I have remained an

artist for so long, without much recognition, is that I was brought up with the idea that to be an artist is to be useful, because my parents worked very hard. They needed draftsmen, beautiful draftsmen, to repair the tapestry. But my father hated those pretentious people who want to be artists. He would say to me: never talk to me about artists—they are parasites. But when Gounod, the draftsman, did not show up, they called on me. I would not say that I was as good as he was, but I wasn't bad. I was a useful person. I never asked to be paid.

Was this your first contact with art?

When my parents asked me to replace Gounod, it gave dignity to my art. Dignity: that is all I ask.

What were you like as a student?

I was terribly competitive. I was a long-distance runner.

Where did you go to study art?

Well, at that point my mother had died, that was a big trauma . . . I studied art in all the studios in Montparnasse. This brings back such a feeling of loneliness, it chokes me. I went from studio to studio. My father's "tough love" meant I had no money. He hung on very strongly to the money because he wanted me to get married. I was totally unable to conceive of getting married. I wanted an art education, and I didn't want to go into the government schools; my way of doing it was to go from studio to studio. Let us say there were twelve—I went to every one of them, with an iron will that I was going to understand something that I couldn't understand. But someone like André Lhote did not want people coming into his studio, because the poor man made a living at it—he taught. He wanted the people who were there to paint and pay! People like Bonnard and Vuillard had some income from their families; the same applies to Renoir. Those who did not have money in the family had to open a school and let the Americans come in. I crept in as a French girl and they discovered I could speak English (badly, as you can witness today). It came in handy. Especially with Fernand Léger who could not understand a word of English—he was a peasant from Normandy. So there was an opportunity

for me straight away. I said to Monsieur Léger: "If you let me sit down and work with you I will translate anything." It was a fantastic piece of luck.

So, some benefit came of your father's great love of England.

Absolutely! For years Fernand Léger was my best teacher.

How did he teach you?

He was a stormy person, very massive, and since he was a very bad talker he said: "I don't know why you paint, Louise. Let me show you something." So he took a shaving of wood and he hung it under his shelf and said: "Look, the wood turns around like this. This is *sculpture*." So I made some drawings of it. He said: "Louise, you are not a painter, you are a sculptor."

He determined that from looking at your drawings?

Right! The passion for the third dimension and the idea of volume came from him. It was an idea which he was expressing himself in two dimensions. He was expressing the roundness.

What else do you remember as important?

What I remember is that Léger did not pay his rent! He never paid his rent. The result was that we moved from one place to another all the time. When he came here, for reasons of his own, he had an attraction for rich women—I know what they all did—because he couldn't make a living.

That is extraordinary . . .

Incredible. So finally we ended up on the Rue Blumet on the fourteenth floor of a skyscraper—this was in the 1930s. It was a penthouse where the water poured in, so nobody would have it. But the light was fantastic. So, Fernand took the place and I translated.

After that the same thing happened at the Louvre. I was very hard-working. The Louvre accepted me as a *daucent*.

Because you spoke English?

That is it. I'd taken my degree in Art History at the Ecole du Louvre. That is one of the reasons they took me as a *daucent*. It was very *recherché* as a job, but I found it very exhausting to talk really loud to crowds of people, and I had nowhere to eat.

So they said it would be less tiring for you if you ate at the Louvre in the cafeteria?

It really was something: they tolerated me in the cafeteria of the gods! It was a very old structure. Inside it was like the Bruegel picture of the people who carry the food. And I was the only woman. To get a job in a museum in those days you had to be amputated; if you were wounded in the war you were entitled to a job. All of them were crippled in some way. It made a very big impression on me—I couldn't take it, again I couldn't take it.

So you left?

No, I got married. [*To Robert Goldwater, in 1938. He died in 1976, and I assume they stayed married, though LB said very little about her husband throughout the interview.*]

He was an art historian—an American wasn't he? Did you get married in France?

What, go to America without being married? Good God, my father wouldn't have let me! We were married in France. They detested each other on the spot.

What was your first impression of coming to America?

It was the difficulty of relating to other people.

Did you go back to college?

I spent my time at the public library going back to the history of art. Our apartment was just two rooms, so small that I could not do anything there.

Were you drawing then?

Yes. Because if you have ideas to make a sculpture, it is a big deal, a big physical event. You cannot sleep in the night, so you make drawings. If you have fears, you express them in drawings and then they disappear.

Can you remember your first sculpture?

Yes, my first sculpture was a woman with hair. It is going to be shown in Paris—*Twisted Spiral*. One of my most important subjects is Sadie Gordon Richmond. She was the mistress. I have a lot of photographs of Sadie. Sadie was the unhappy teenage English girl—eighteen or

twenty—who thinks about going to the Riviera and being paid. She has no money and she goes there *au pair*; she became part of the family.

In many ways—more than you ever thought . . . Is there anybody else in your past who has profoundly influenced you?

This is a matter of evanescence. It's very sad. People you have been in love with. You fall in love and you fall out of love. You have to recognize that. This has to do with that equilibrium which always comes back, again and again. Everything is ambivalent, it is not stable. You fall in love but suddenly it is horrible, you fall out of love. Nothing can be done.

You had a go at Freud once—not the artist, the “psychoanalyst.”

Yes, in an article [see “Freud's Toys,” p. 186]. That ass suddenly wanted to become a visual judge!

I think you called him a folklorist. Was Freud important to you?

Oh yes, because I live for improvement—and only Freud can do that.

Have you been through analysis yourself?

No, but I have spent a lifetime in self-improvement—self-analysis, which is the same thing. My husband said: “We love you when you work”—that is to say work is a kind of voyage toward self-improvement. If you reach compassion then everybody is going to love you, because you are lovable.

Where does your inspiration come from?

It comes from the fact that I want to please somebody. *Le désir de plaire.*

Are you pleased when people are pleased with your work?

That depends who. When somebody that I love is pleased with my work I am rewarded.

Most people have had a turning point in their lives when something really crucial happened to them—have you had one?

What you are really asking me is: “What are the traumas that you underwent?” Why in the world should I tell you about my demons, which are numerous, if you do not see it in the work? My demons are in my work.

Of course a lot of what you are about is in your work.

Everything, everything! My work is a series of exorcisms. This touches the motivation of the work. While every day I am ready to run again, I am still

exorcizing some trauma—the word is not too strong. But it is not a subject of conversation, it is a subject of realization.

The questions you are asking me are extremely personal. They are, of course, the subject of my work, but they are also the subject of my concerns about my son, who sits here, and after a long time, I get out of him the fact that he feels that I like his brother more than himself. I rack my brains to try to explain to him that it is not true. “Alain, you believe that you experienced at my hands your trauma of abandonment.” He is a criminal lawyer; he used to be a judge and had middle-career trauma, and he abandoned his judgeship, because the American justice system did not agree with him. What else could he do? He abandoned everything because he had been abandoned. I will never make him understand. I make work with my concerns. I make work with all my failures. When I say the trauma of abandonment, I really mean what I say.

Now I offer you some tea to pacify you. I ask myself: What for? Louise, you are afraid of this man.

You are afraid of me?

I am afraid of everything. This is the difference between men and women. Women accept the fact that they are afraid. Look at the work behind you.

[Lengthy silence]

Passion . . . I don't need a shrink. Of course, I am not understood. Mystery or no mystery, I am not understood—and I do not mind terribly much. You were asking about—?

A turning point . . .

A turning point. When I was born, they abandoned me flat. I was born on Christmas Day; my mother was very apologetic and the doctor said: “Madame Bourgeois, really you are ruining my festivity.” I mean who is born on Christmas Day? I was a pain in the ass when I was born. To all these people, they had their oysters and champagne and there I came . . .

I find it difficult to believe that you felt this that young.

I don't say that. Today I can visualize this ridiculous event. There is no mystery anywhere, but there is an inability to set things straight—an

inability on my part. I'm not accusing anybody. So it is a feeling of defeat that motivates the work, and to repair the damage that has been done. What is funny about that is that these horrible feelings turn out to make work which people find very happy. This is a transformation.

When I see them I say: Louise, you turned a trauma into a very human, a very happy person. I am not complaining. I turn it into a sense of humor. So you have this one in the pink, and there she is, obviously so obsessed by the past, and by the house, she does not even know she is naked.

Coming back to this business of abandonment . . .

It is not fear, but the trauma of abandonment. I have carried it on through my friends; I have carried it on to the point of serving tea. It has perverted even the smallest, social things, absolutely everything—

—In your life?

In my life. My children fight because one feels that I have abandoned him—what can I do?

But still you have found a way—with your art—of dealing with it.
I have fun instead of pain. I have fun doing the work. I love to work.

You work all the time?

All the time, and more and more. I become more skillful, clearer, so there is an increasing pleasure. I don't want to be vulgar, but in French there is an expression—if you piss in the violin it doesn't make much music!

A Conversation with Bernard Marcadé

Excerpt from an interview for the film *Louise Bourgeois*, by Camille Guichard, Terra Luna Productions, Paris, 1993. Translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt.

When you created this work [Cell (Choisy) (1990–3), see p. 256], you relived the time you had spent in the house. I imagine you found this a moving experience. Did you also mix real and imagined memories?

It is very difficult to re-create the past, because the past has two aspects, one positive and one much less so. Not very long ago someone said to me: “But Louise, you had a glorious childhood!” It is ridiculous to say that. It was glorious in some respects, but it was painful in others. Within the family there was a kind of virus that was really traumatic for us—not only for me, but for my brother and sister as well—we suffered from a terrible split in the family unit, caused by my father bringing his mistresses into the house. It was his business, I’m not judging him, but that was the trauma we went through.

That kind of primal scene looms very large for you; without attaching Freudian significance to the words, it was something very fundamental for you, something fraught with drama.

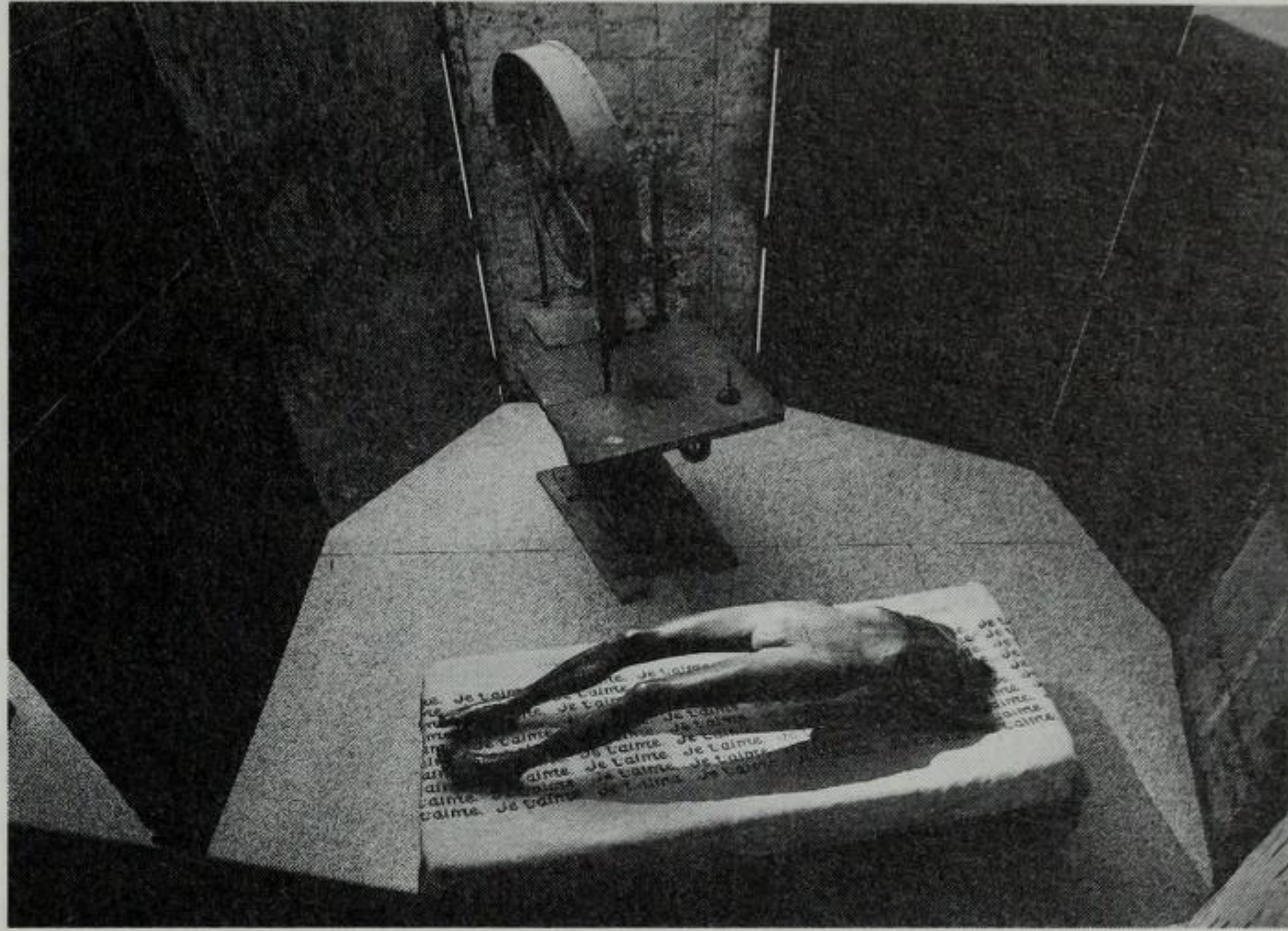
That’s right—with some very affectionate memories and some horrible ones.

So the guillotine’s there to convey that aspect, too?

Yes, to demonstrate how people destroy themselves within the family, to show that cruelty is not only an effect of the past—of the past guillotined by the present—but that the guillotine is also at work within families.

In families everything seems to be under wraps; everything seems calm. So there exists a lurking violence that dare not speak its name, a terrible cruelty, which does not show itself, but which you wanted to depict?

Which does not show itself, and which is impossible to forget. That’s why it is necessary to re-create the past, to try to be objective enough to shake it off.



Cell (Arch of Hysteria), 1992, steel, bronze, cast iron, and fabric, 302.5 × 368.5 × 305 cm. Collection: Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo, Seville.

Do you think it is possible to shed the past?

Yes, but that's very difficult.

Is it the job of art to make it easier?

It is a kind of escape mechanism that makes a “process” possible; “process” means elimination.

* * *

Do you think art has anything in common with medicine, or therapy?

My mother had emphysema, a chronic lung disease, and I treated her with cupping and poultices. Hence my obsession with the business of medical treatment. There's a whole series of sculptures of cupping glasses, which I place on Jerry's back, as an exorcism. It was in the same context that I became interested in the “arch of hysteria” of the period of Charcot and Gilles de la Tourette. Except that in my *Arch of Hysteria* (1992) it's not a hysterical woman—that's a nineteenth-century misconception—but a hysterical man. That's why Jerry lent me his anatomy. To show the arch, I did not need to clutter the picture with unnecessary items, so the arm and the head were cut off. Which means that I used the

cutting instrument, which belongs firmly to the twentieth century, and which is also part of the sculpture. . . .

This piece makes explicit reference to the hysterical postures analyzed by Charcot, but it also goes back to some types of religious sculpture. I'm thinking of the Pietà sculptures in which Christ's body is arched over his mother's knee.

You're right, in the Avignon Pietà the body is completely arched. But, you know, I'm not religious, and this is not really what interests me. I'm interested in knowing how the ills that afflict people can be cured. I'm interested in proving that a cure is possible, that things can get better, that one can learn to become more self-sufficient.

In some ways that's what you wrote on the front of Precious Liquids, the piece you made for the 1992 Documenta: "Art is a guarantee of sanity."

Yes, that's true. In other words: Art will keep you on the level, right! Art will keep you from going to extremes or going out of context. . . .

The important question this piece asks is about the difference you establish between the physical and the mental. The piece stands at the crossroads between two realities.

It's neither mental nor physical, it's nervous!

In this piece you establish a kind of tensing of the body of your model, the body of your assistant Jerry, who plays an important part for you—

Don't try to define Jerry.

No, that's a bit difficult.

That is a bit difficult.

At any rate, he is someone—

—important. Not only is he someone important, he's also someone kind, because he cooperated with all these contrivances. He cooperated, and allowed his body to be used—

But cutting off his head is a highly symbolic gesture, isn't it? Not to say fundamental?

No, that's personal! You're making too much of it! It's personal! We can

actually go and get his arms, because his arms exist, don't they? [Turning to Jerry] Can we get the arms?

His arms exist, but you don't show them here. They are absent, as with your "armless" women in the past.

My poetic license is to remove the arms, to remove the head and then, if I want, to fetch them back, get the arms and put them on again— and to consider them, to consider all these things. [Jerry comes back into the room with the casts of his arms.] We can put it there, look! He can be put back together. There you go! Consider the version "without" and consider the version "with." And then there's the other arm, too. It will all be cast in bronze.

Bronze matters to you?

Absolutely. Bronze has two qualities: first its durability, second its polished, reflective quality.

You mean it's a kind of mirror?

That's right! I love polished bronze. And Jerry was delighted—
—*to lend himself, in every sense of the word—*

Yes, because it makes him part of History, part of Eternity.

But headless, all the same!

Well, he can't have everything.

* * *

Let's come back to your distinction between the physical, the mental and the nervous. For you, these are three levels of reality.

Completely different levels.

And the one you are most interested in, of course—
—the nervous.

This seems to be your special way of accessing the unconscious.

The unconscious is my friend. I trust the unconscious.

You don't access it via your dreams. You have often said that you don't dream?

Yes, that's true. What happens is an affective communication with people who play along with me.

So play comes into it?

Certainly, there's an exchange, a game, an exchange . . .

In Charcot's work at La Salpêtrière there was a kind of theater. Is that so here?

No, not at all. Charcot was basically a "scientist," and in a sense he did not like his patients. He used them, you see. He used them the way I used my teachers.

You mean you don't use your model?

No, not at all.

And you don't put him on stage?

No, he is part of a drama, he's part of a two-handed drama, but he's not in a theater.

We're not really on stage here, are we?

No, it's more like a "psychodrama" in the style of Moreno.

But a psychodrama has its own theatricality, surely?

Yes, but the drama takes place between the actors; there is no audience. There are only—I was about to say—there are only victims, that's it. Your life is your own drama, it's not a drama for your friends. It's your drama, yours alone. Unfortunately. . . .

It's not a theatrical scene, but it is a cell. I don't consider that it's a neutral experience to see that body posed there, under extreme tension.

Art is the experience, the re-experience of a trauma. But what I am also saying is that it's a temporary state. He'll *recover*, he'll *come out of it*.

Don't you save the situation by using a kind of tragicomedy, even burlesque?

There's humor in it, certainly.

And malice, sometimes?

I'm not sure about malice, but there is humor.

Arena

Edited transcript of interviews with the artist from the 1993 documentary film directed by Nigel Finch for Arena Films, London, and broadcast by BBC2.

[Text scrolled on screen and read aloud by the artist:]

The Contract

Notwithstanding any other provision in the contract which refers to editorial control, it is understood that the artist shall have the final authority to include, expunge, revise, or otherwise change any statement made by her, and or any image of her, without qualification, with the artist having the final right of approval.

Well, I can't agree to that.

Don't be like that. Don't say that. You're just trying to make a fool of me.

No, I'm not.

Yes, you are, you are not succeeding but you are trying.

What I don't understand is, and I'm going to say it again . . .

But if you don't understand something, don't put it completely on me.

Maybe you cannot understand. Don't make me say it six times. I repeat myself all the time.

What it is I'm trying to understand is what it is you're so worried about. What it is you're resisting, really.

[Bourgeois holds up a sign:] "NO TRESPASSING"

* * *

I'm not a person of pure color any more. The change happened in 1993, when I realized that life was not a matter of black and white, of pure blue and pure red. Life is a matter of giving in as you know. I've just given in to you. So I am just an example of what I say. As I always say I am not what I say, I am what I do.

[Setting a moderate rate on a metronome in the artist's studio] I find this completely relaxing, that this is my rhythm today, at this time of the day. It is eleven o'clock [in the morning] and since I have an hourly rhythm, eleven

o'clock is my best time and the rhythm is this, quite fast. Now, when you're sick and tired of the whole day—you see how tired the rhythm is? [Slowing the metronome]—and when you have a cup of coffee or something to eat of some kind, you hear [Speeding up the metronome], that's awful. At eleven o'clock that's awful, so [the metronome] allows me some self-knowledge. I just put it on and I find my rhythm. This is it [Returning to a moderate rate], at this level we are in business, you can talk to me.

* * *

[In the studio, after smashing a ceramic vase on the floor, the artist stamps on the broken pieces.] This is this, yes? You make yourself understood, right? Look at this here. So you start to exist then. [Pause] Way back I could never fight an argument with my father, because either he made fun of me, of my being only a girl, or he made fun of me—just a minute now—he made fun of me because he had a cruel sense of humor and I could not answer it. I could not make myself understood, and I could not answer him. And the frustration, instead of turning into a running-away masculine thing, the frustration was a kind of stiffening, like this [Clenching fist], and keeping the resentment inside and twenty-five years later I have not come to terms with my resentment which is there forever.

[Begins stamping again] That's it. Now if you do not let me have the last word at least once in a while, then everything goes. [Pointing to broken pieces on the floor] Doing that gives me pleasure, there's no nonsense about that. I'm sorry later, but on the spot it does give me pleasure. [Picking up metal object] Now something that you *cannot* destroy, you know that? You want to break this? [Throws object across the floor] It does not break! You *never* have the last word. OK. That's it. [Bourgeois leaves the interview.]

* * *

Tell me about the significance of cutting for you.

Cutting—it means being in total control. Accepting the total control of whatever happens and it is quite aggressive and sometimes I wake up in

the morning and I do not feel up to cutting. And I do not feel up to dealing with the machinery. Then I will draw, you have to be quite sure to operate mechanical tools, electric tools.

Does this relate in some way to the Cell (Arch of Hysteria) (1992)? What do you mean by that? I guess you mean something. What do you mean?

I'm interested in the ...

Well, you certainly cannot be hysterical and use—if you want to keep all your fingers—and use power tools.

Because cutting seems an act of violence in a lot of your work. You cut arms off, you cut heads off, you dismember.

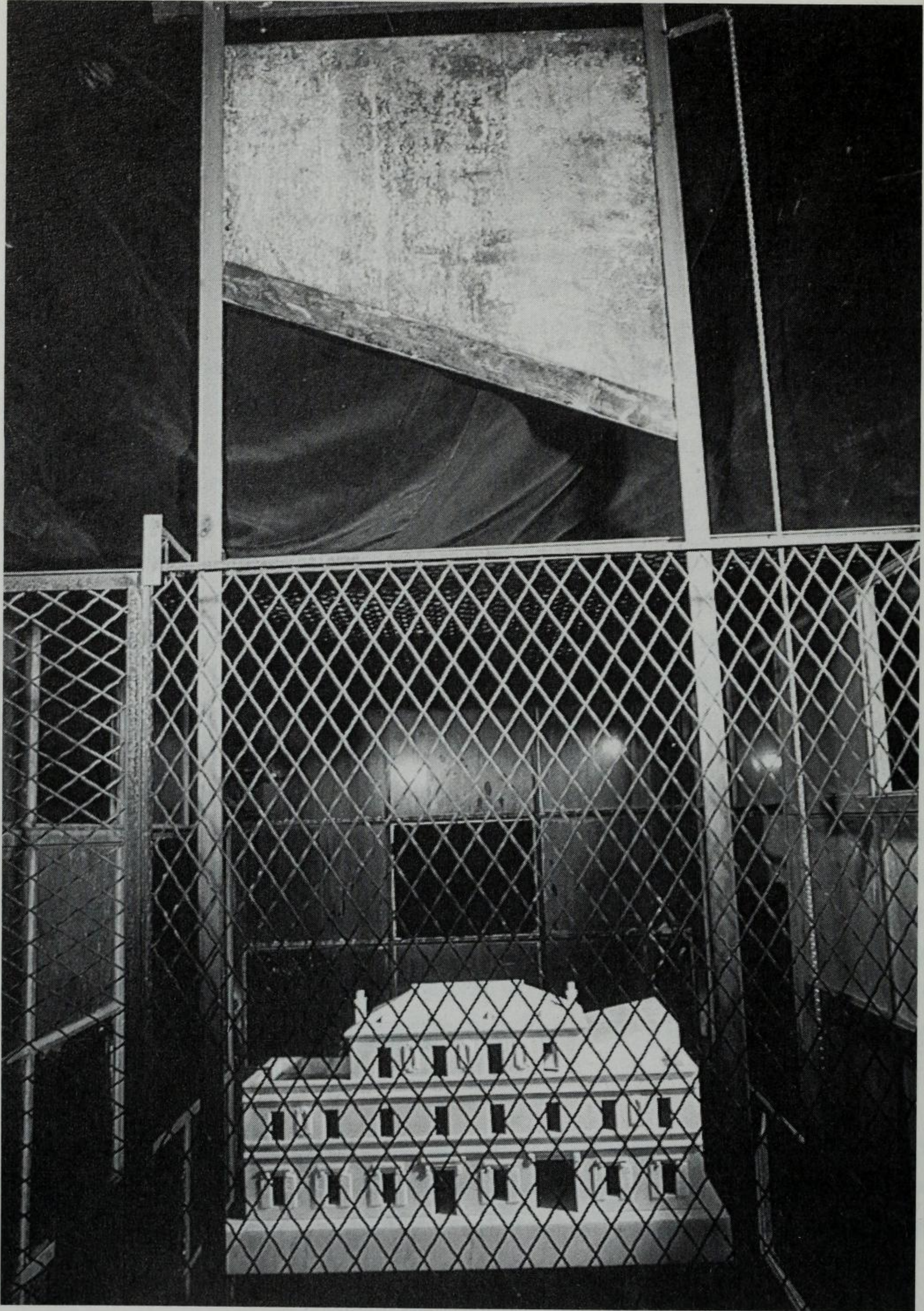
Don't you cut your lunch up when you're ready to eat it? Is that a crime? I'm a vegetarian, but you're not a vegetarian, no, you have lamb chops over and over again. Prawns, these prawns that you ate the other day without even noticing that they were not too good, so you were quite ...

They made me ill?

That's right. You were too clever for your own good. What I enjoy also, which is not aggressive, it is not protective, it is just inventive ... for instance, here [Referring to a sculpture in the studio] you have two dimensions, that is to say you have the height and you have the width. And why not add an extra dimension which would make it better, which would make it richer, and which is so terribly simple that a child could do it? I'm not going to destroy this piece to show you what I mean, but all that is done is this. All that is done is to open it up like this, and you have a sphere, suddenly you have a sphere, whereas you only had a circle before. This is why I could not be a painter. The two dimensions do not satisfy me. I have to have the reality given by the third dimension.

* * *

We have the sweat, the tears, the snot, the saliva, the ear lubricant, the bile, the urine, the milk, the pus, the semen, and the blood. The piece *Precious Liquids* (1992) is about a girl growing up and finding passion



Cell (Choisy), 1990–3, metal, glass, and marble, 302.3 × 368.3 × 304.8 cm. Collection: Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto.

instead of terror. She stops being afraid and she knows passion. The little dress taking refuge in the big coat represents the child who has undergone strong and frightened emotions. The big coat is a metaphor for the unconscious. She takes refuge the same way that artists take refuge in the unconscious. I feel at peace with my unconscious. I trust it, I may find it embarrassing, but I cannot go wrong.

[On *Cell (Choisy)* (1990–3):] This is the house in Choisy. This is the house where we lived and where the tapestry workshops occupied the second wing of the house here and there were twenty-five *petits mains*, which worked on the tapestry. The family lived there and today, today, of course it was demolished, and it became for me the symbol, as you see up there, of the past being gotten rid of by the present. The present destroys the past every day. And that cruelty is expressed by the guillotine.

Why is the house in this enclosure, Louise? Why are there all these enclosures?

It is enclosed because it belongs to a certain little section of the past and for this past to be eradicated. To have really gone through an exorcism, in order to liberate myself from the past, I have to reconstruct it, ponder about it, make a statue out of it and get rid of it through making sculpture. I'm able to forget it afterward. I have paid my debt to the past and I'm liberated.

But this is like a prison . . .

Yes, it is. It is because I'm a prisoner of my memories. I have been a prisoner of my memories and my aim is to get rid of them.

* * *

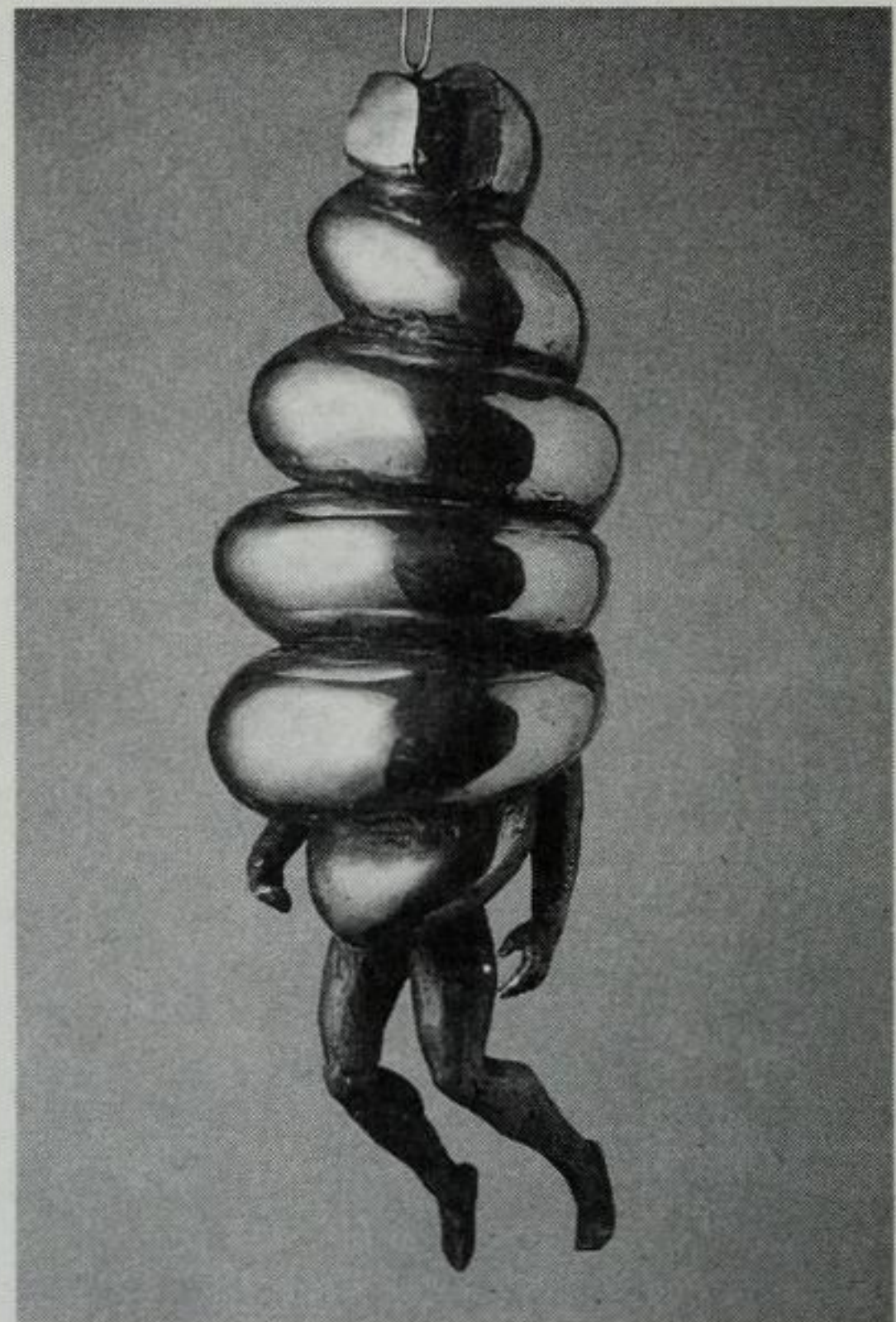
[Holding up a small new sculpture, made in the kitchen of the artist's home, similar to *Spiral Woman* (1984)] This is a figure, the head is here, the head fell off. It doesn't matter. It falls off, I put it back. The little legs hold like this here, there it is, you see the little figure emerging. So this little figure is supposed to hang, and this little figure is disoriented. This is what it means:

She hangs up in the air. She turns around and she doesn't know her left from her right. Who do you think it represents? It represents Louise. This is the way I feel. It doesn't mean that she is ugly, right? It doesn't mean that she is bad. It doesn't mean that she is useless. It just means that she is herself, hanging, waiting for nobody knows what. But it still has a value because for me it gives me the means to say what I feel like, what it is to be a widow, for instance. So you have all these tools, you get to be very good at it, you know, you get to do what you want to do. You get to say what you want to say. You remember "the pushover"? Well, when I deal with this I am not a pushover any more.

* * *

The whole performance [*A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts*, Hamilton Gallery, New York, 1978] was about being abandoned. It is the voice of an older person who has been abandoned by their children, left alone by their children. But it is also the opposite: it is the abandonment of the very young child by the elders. And it is here the second interpretation. It is that Sadie was called in to take care of me and she came under false pretence and she was not interested in me at all. She was interested in sleeping with my father, and I experienced the tragedy of the abandonment.

Lots of parents feel abandoned, right? Which is something that I do not know. This is not in my experience. I experience the other one. I experienced being abandoned as a child. [Sings] "She abandoned me." One day I will sing it.



Spiral Woman, 1984, bronze, 35.5 × 11.4 × 13.9 cm. Private Collection.

* * *

[In the studio, with a plaster cast of *She-Fox* (1985)] I want to destroy it, completely deconstruct it. But believe it or not, it is not going to break. I have to do it six times! I cannot pretend that it doesn't give me pleasure. It gives me a *lot* of pleasure. Except that there is a time for everything. First it gives me pleasure, then I fall into a depression. [Violently pushes sculpture off its table and it crashes on the floor] There it is! And dealing with depression is something that we really ought not to talk about.

Do you use anger in a creative way?

I use anger and it is a raw emotion. It is my way of defending myself. Sometimes it frightens people, but it really doesn't frighten people. People take you for a pushover, do you see? You can always destroy her by making her angry and then you get what you want. Now without being personal, I would say that Nigel Finch has done it to me. He made me angry when it was the time to talk about the contract. He pushed me so much that I did get angry and then he got what he wanted, that is to say, the absence [of a contract]. So I am a real pushover, but I know that, which doesn't fix things; it makes things even worse. [Leaving the studio] So do you know that I don't have a contract? I come back to say that because now the anger has gone and things are smashed so I can talk nicely. I work with Nigel, who is a friend of mine, without a contract, right? He took me for a pushover and I was a pushover. That's because I am sorry to have been angry. Do you understand or do you want me to say it again?



Susan Cooper sings "She Abandoned Me" during the performance *A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts* (in the artist's installation *Confrontation*) at the Hamilton Gallery, New York, 21 October 1978.

* * *

So many times in my work I have tried to devastate a man who is called *l'homme à femme*. That is to say, a man who gets ahead in life through women. I've something against them. I don't know what it is, but I have something against them, and I want to prove that they are fools, they are damn fools. That is why the work looks the way it does. What I have against it is that they really do enjoy themselves, they really do have a good time.

Who are these l'homme à femme?

L'homme à femme, l'homme à femme, that is to say, the man—I'm sorry, I don't know how to translate it.

A man and woman, but who are they?

No, *L'homme à femme* means . . . the Don Juan complex, that's it, and at the end of his life—I don't know my literature in [this subject] too well—but I think at the end he is not satisfied. Doesn't he burn in hell or something? Well he should. I won't be sorry for him.

I sometimes think you don't like men very much.

Well, that is your interpretation. You are entitled to your interpretation, right? Why should I say that I disagree? What for? So, I'll say talk for yourself. [Holds up mirror in front of interviewer's face] Talk for yourself.

You use that as a defense each time.

Absolutely. Who are you to ask me? Who are you? Do you think you're God or something?

* * *

Can I ask you about mirrors, Louise?

Right.

Why are mirrors so important to you?

Mirror means the acceptance of the self. So, I have lived in a house without mirrors because I couldn't stand, I couldn't accept myself. The mirror was an enemy. Now, the mirror cannot be your enemy, the mirror has to be your friend, otherwise you are badly off. So instead of seeing the mirror as a symbol of vanity—no danger there—I saw the mirror as a symbol of acceptance. So that when I hold the mirror to you, when the critics and

the interviewers and the film-makers come and they ask me inappropriate questions, I take my mirror and I hold it up to them and I say don't project on me. You see this mirror here? It is not out of vanity—it is a deforming mirror. It doesn't reflect me, it reflects somebody else. It reflects a kind of monstrous image of myself. So I can play with that.

* * *

*Are these eyes that you are leaning on [Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)
(1989–93)]?*

Whether they are eyes that see the reality of things or whether they are eyes that see your fantasy . . . A second symbol is the rock: not only is it marble—marble is sugar really in terms of stones; these are granite. So the quality of your eyes and the strength of your eyes are expressed here in granite. Nobody is going to keep me from seeing what is, instead of what I would like. And that includes you. That is all I want to say, thank you.

* * *

All my work is suggestive; it is not explicit. Explicit things are not interesting because they are too cut and dried and without mystery. All this is subject to your interpretation, to your vision. [Looking at a sculpture in progress] This is a very important piece for me. . . . I do not have artists come here because any artist worth his salt will look at this and think, "Gee, there is something cooking here. I don't know what she means, I don't know what it means, but there is an energy. There is an energy here that I can feed upon." I put such value and such energy and such work that I don't want any creepers to come and be inspired by my work. I don't need that, I don't need admirers, I don't need fans. That's not my bag. I don't want to be disturbed, you understand. If I am in the process of working on this theme, I do not want to be disturbed. That's all I say. I cannot afford to be disturbed. I am a long-distance runner. It takes me years and years and years to produce what I do. I am a long-distance runner and I am also a lonely runner and that's the way I want it.

The work is being shown in Venice. Is the Venice Biennale an important exhibition for you? Personally?

Personally? Personally, no exhibition is important. The progression in the work is important. The self-knowledge that I get and that all artists get—I'm not special—the self-knowledge is its own reward. A show is just a show. As proven by the fact that much as I like my dealer in Paris, you know that character, Karsten Greve. Well I like him very much. Everybody likes him. But when he said you have to come to my show, he said, "I want you at the show," and I said, "What for? The show is not me. The show is the work, right?" So he pushed an ultimatum on me. He said if you do not come to the show I'm going to do this, and this, and I said, "OK, if you want to commit suicide over the show, go ahead." I cannot be responsible for his problems and I didn't show up. And in Venice, if you tell me, I'm not going to Venice. What for? It's all in a day's work. What is important is that we are *ready* for Venice. That is important, that things are finished, polished, perfect. But to be there as a fashion plate? I am not a fashion plate.

Have you finished now?

Yes, I am finished, thank you. [Smiling, looking towards window] The light is nice here.

In a Strange Way, Things are Getting Better and Better: Interview with Francesco Bonami

First published in January 1994 in *Flash Art*, vol. XXVII, no. 174, pp. 37–9.

So today is the middle of January and the studio is very cold. You are going to ask me questions. I don't like questions very much, I dislike the answers even more, but you are welcome to look through the studio, and according to what you see I'll talk if you want me to. But being so three-dimensional and tangible, I am interested in a three-dimensional reality much more than theories. As far as theories go I am interested in the differences between things. So I try to be completely analytical, even though my nature is rather the opposite. I am in constant conflict between the conceptual and the three-dimensional reality of things. But look through the studio: the studio is really the self-portrait and I don't have to say anything.

Well, I will try not to ask questions.

I don't like them but I will tolerate them.

Are these drawings on the wall a passage from conceptual to three-dimensional reality?

Right now I am working on this drawing, a Saint Sebastian, and the Gobelins in Paris is making a tapestry of it. I mention the Gobelins because I come from a background of tapestry people. So this work will stay in its two-dimensional state.

Is the title a big part of the work?

A title ... is unnecessary. The emotions come first, the compelling need to say something. Titles are needed only for identification purposes. For me, a title is something to communicate with the audience, but I could have ten titles. Some people love titles. This gate is called *Sunrise*, which refers to art deco. When I was ten or fifteen I discovered art deco; I loved it because it was a step against what I was used to. What we are doing today is very far from art deco. All these works are "Cells." Now a cell can be that of a prison but it can be also a cell of your blood.

[I follow Louise Bourgeois in silence as she enters one of these welded structures, a "Cell" which invades the entire space of her studio-factory. A small, marble model of a French maison stands on the table. She is so eager to explain it that I wonder whether she is just warding off my questions.]

... There is also a different kind of cell, the habitat. This is the house I lived in Choisy-le-Roi.

The idea of cells is that they are absolutely distinct from each other. It has to do with the analysis of what the difference is between you and me and other fellows. This is what makes us worthwhile ... how different we are from each other.

Autonomous.

Exactly, autonomous, absolutely! In this other cell the glasses are the family. One, two, three, four, five, we were five and we all live in a different world, and the bubbles are the form of an autonomous creation.

Differences are so important. In one of my shows the emphasis was to "defy," "defiance," which means how you can put something like this stone next to something as fragile as glass. The defiance of granite and the right of a mirror not to be broken, the right to exist as fragility. The mirror, with its power to reflect and deform you, is a very powerful mode of expression.

"Autonomous" also means "private." I have many doors in my studio; they express the fact that when you want your privacy you close your doors.

But they are more like gates, with some space in the middle. You can look through them and something could pass through them, also.

That's true; birds can come in, cats can come in, mosquitoes can come in.

You allow them to enter your privacy.

I don't think a man could come in.

Small things can come in. This studio is very big; you could get lost.

I can't get lost but I can hide here if I want, hide from the others and from myself.

Some of your works seem to indicate the power of our minds and our emotions over our bodies.

Our emotions can twist us like a pretzel.

You use emotions to start your work but, later, these emotions use us as material.

Emotions are the primary subject of my work.

Do you feel compelled to work?

I am compulsive about it, I would be a very, very mean and wild person if I didn't work.

It's a cure?

A cure? No, it's not a cure because troubles keep coming back all the time. It alleviates momentarily a state of pain.

It's a sedative.

Yes, a sedative, but it doesn't last very long.

So you need more and more.

Every day. Every day the need comes back.

You seem to make sculptures from within your memory, molding and power?

What power? Can you tell me what an artist's power is?

The power of seduction.

This is not one of my vices; I am not vain! No, no, my work has never been seductive. People never told me that they liked what I do. But I never noticed, never! I don't think people like me so much. I am very suspicious when someone says he likes my work. "Now don't lie to me!" I say.

So the work has only to convince you.

It never does. The work can convince me if I realize that it has convinced you. But the fear of being hurt and rejected makes me blind. And you can't love if you are afraid.

You are not afraid of the materials you choose.

I look for a material that allows me to say what I want; that is the most important part of my work. If cast iron doesn't work, I use marble. If it doesn't say what I need it to say then I choose something else, granite or glass or wood.

"Hanging" is very important for you.

“Hanging” is important because it allows things to turn around. It is very helpless, it changes the hierarchy of the work; the base disappears.

Do you consider yourself an American artist?

Absolutely. When I arrived in the United States from France I found an atmosphere that allowed me to do as I wanted. I feel that in Europe I was overeducated; here I was able to say “no” to my education. I was free to be as wild as I wanted. In America I found my independence. Here, if you keep repeating the same thing over and over you can convince them, but in Europe this is not possible.

At the opening show of the Guggenheim in SoHo they put your work in the same room with Beuys’s work. How did you feel about that? Do you feel any affinity with his work?

To tell you the truth, I didn’t know his work that well. I knew him as a person when he came here to give some lectures. I was very impressed by the way he acted—he was very much an actor—the way he was dressed, the way he wore his hat. I thought he was very funny, and he enjoyed his success immensely. But I was not familiar with his work. He was very vulnerable, people attacked him. The feminist groups attacked him, it was very funny. I enjoyed that.

Were you a feminist in the 1970s? Are you a feminist?

I am not altogether a feminist. I am a woman, but I am not so sure I am a feminist.

Do you think men and women experience art and fear in different ways?

They are very, very different. The differences between the two is what interests me. I was the daughter of a macho father and I found it difficult to relate nicely to men. If you have a macho father you think that men will ruin your life. But I don’t like macho men; I like men who are totally intellectual, reasonable, dependable. No emotion and bullshit, I don’t want too much of that.

Was Beuys macho?

Yes, very much. You could see it from the position he took. You should see

how he came to his lecture, he thought he was good and the rest of humanity was at his feet . . . very macho. I met him later, and his preoccupation with himself bothered me. Also his accent bothered me.

Could you maintain your secrecy even in the 1970s, with all the political turmoil?

Yes, partly because I was not successful then. Not to be successful in a strange way is hype, if you believe in yourself. When you are successful people imitate you, and this is terrible and very disturbing. Success is not that important. It is very, very nice, of course.

Did you experience the political changes of the 1970s?

It was wonderful. It is much better to live today than thirty years ago. In a strange way, things are getting better and better.

How do you think that we can define our identities?

I cannot answer that question, but I can tell you that I really believe that my legacy is my work. This has allowed me to be a very nice mother.

Did you like being a mother?

Very much, but you'd have to ask my children about that.

Do they think of you as an artist?

Not at all. One thing I told my children was not to become artists. You are an artist if you can't help it.

Is it a way out?

Absolutely! It is a way to be forgiven.

Is your work about fighting specific fears?

I would say so.

Being an artist is a way to survive.

Yes it helps to survive, but it's not a profession.

But maybe a profession doesn't help to fight fears.

I don't know about that. A profession, a job, doesn't make you happy.

Can an artist teach something?

The work can teach something, not the artist. A lot of artists are very stupid, you know.

Duchamp said the same thing. You were friends with him, weren't you?

Yes, very much. He was a great intellectual but he suffered very much. He suffered from the fact that he was unable to make love with his wife. He would talk to her, but she was a peasant girl and she couldn't understand what he was saying, and no amount of talk could have made her like him. All his life he felt that he could not have made a woman sexually happy. He was terribly unhappy. He was not macho at all.

Did he help you when you arrived in America?

He helped me when I talked to him. He was very strange.

He had a very jaded view of life.

He was a sexually destroyed person. He was rejected at a very, very low level, the sexual level.

So sex plays a major role in our lives.

You see! I didn't say that! You see how you distort it. I just said that it destroyed Marcel Duchamp. I didn't talk about you or me!

What is happiness?

It is a very good word; happiness means a certain kind of equilibrium. It means that you can reach a certain acceptance of yourself and of other people.

Can we transform rejection into something positive?

You must be strong enough to reject rejection. It is possible if we start from our mouse size and from that point we try not to be rejected. It is better to be a living mouse than a dead lion, but very few people understand that.

It is possible to transform death into a positive experience?

Yes, if you are able not to be afraid of others, then you are able to love. I believe that is the only way, but it's very difficult not to be afraid every day.

Are you afraid of something?

I am afraid of everything ... everything.

A Conversation with George Melrod

Extract (amended here by the artist) from an interview first published in October 1994 in *Atelier*, no. 182, pp. 32–44.

Are you optimistic about relationships?

I have to be. That's how I keep on going. I really feel like Albert Camus, that tomorrow will be better. Otherwise, what's the use? I mention Camus because people talk about my work as Surrealist. It is not Surrealist at all, it is Existentialist.

Some of your works with the staircases are called No Exit. Seeing some of these cells, I think of Sartre's play No Exit, of people in a room together, in a purgatory, who are unable to understand each other.

Yes, although "No Exit" is also a ready-made sign seen all across America. The difference is that Jean-Paul Sartre was a pessimist. He said, "Hell is other people." But it is really the opposite. The hell is inside you, not with other people. The trouble is not with you if you come in and I start to scream. It is with me.

Many of your works seem to have dichotomies of both threat and vulnerability.

Yes, right. Very true.

Do you see these as representing a woman's feelings? Or a more general human state?

I am a woman! How can I have the feelings of a man? For me you are an unknown, right? I can talk about my own way, and improve myself so that we can get together. But I have never, never, never pretended to talk for a man. That would be very presumptuous.

* * *

Who are some of the artists who inspired you?

My favorite artist is Bacon. I like the way he talks and I like his kind of subjects, and I like his rendering. It's simply true.

Some of your early work almost looks like Miró.

Well, my relation with Miró . . . my dates, you see, have allowed me to know these people personally.

Was Miró a likable guy?

He was a naive person. Bacon was not naive at all. Bacon had a solid intellect, and he loved courage.

I read somewhere that you knew Duchamp.

Yes, right. Duchamp did not trust his emotions. He worked very hard at looking cool. I don't think that he felt cool. He wanted to put up a good front.

He seemed sexually confused in his work.

Well, let's not talk about that. [Pause] I think Duchamp, if you had asked him that question, he would have said: "Well, why talk about sex? Is that important?" He would not have admitted that it was terribly important. But he was very witty, and people would have accepted this answer. Bacon, if you had asked the same question, would have said: "My God, I'm dying of it! I'm dying of too much passion!" Pierre Bonnard would have responded: "Do you want to make me cry?" And Miró would have said: "Oh it's amusing." If you would ask Louise Bourgeois: "Sex? What do you mean, it does not exist."

Native Talent

First published in January 1994 in *Artforum*, vol. 32, no. 5, pp. 73–4, on the occasion of the Joan Miró centenary exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Louise Bourgeois, Joan Miró, with his wife, Pilar, and daughter, New York, 1947.

I first encountered Joan Miró in Paris in the early 1930s. He did not know me, as I was only a student at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and he was already famous, a protégé of Picasso, exhibiting at the Galerie Pierre. This space was located at the corner of the Rue des Beaux-Arts and the Rue de Seine, only a few steps away from the Ecole. I was living at 31 Rue de Seine, where André Breton held court at his Gradiva gallery, and where Isadora and Raymond Duncan lived and had a gallery also.

While attending the Ecole, I walked by the Galerie Pierre every day on my way to lunch. I came to know Miró's works quite well. They were a wonderful esthetic shock for me—a liberation, because they were so

different from what was taught at the Ecole. After going to the Beaux-Arts in the mornings I was at the Grande Chaumière, in Montparnasse, in the afternoons, where I was in charge of hiring the models. Miró would come there to sketch.

In the 1920s, Miró had been part of a Spanish enclave that gathered in a modern cast-cement building on the Rue Blomet, behind the Gare Montparnasse. All the artists in the Spanish community followed Pablo Picasso wherever he went; Picasso helped Miró tremendously, but did not influence him. Later, when Miró was established, Picasso was no longer a god to him. Miró loved to be told that he was greater than his master.

I would come to know Miró personally in New York, years later, when we saw each other again at Hayter's engraving workshops in 1947. Miró was in America to work on a commission. We would dine together at Pierre Matisse's, on East 96th Street, along with Matta, Le Corbusier, the filmmaker Thomas Bouchard, Rufino Tamayo, the composer Edgard Varèse and his wife Louise (the translator), and José Luis Sert. Miró would hardly say a word, and when he spoke it was in broken French.

There is a type of artist who wants to appear naive—Alfonso Ossorio, for example, or Jean Dubuffet, or even Philip Guston. Whereas the genuine naive, though truly talented, is helpless, the *faux* naive is a crafty one. Anything will do to serve his ambition to seem naive. It is rare but not painful to have talent; you either have it or you don't. It is, however, laborious and painful to want to seem to have talent. The risk is great: the *faux* naive may fail to convince, may be perceived as coy. Dubuffet is not Adolf Wölfli—one is a put-on and one is genuine.

Miró was a true naive, trusting, unable to take two steps without his supporting family. When I knew him he always replied to every question, "I'll have to ask Pilar," his wife. His large brown eyes were innocent and serene. He was a truly naive person in the best sense of the word: someone who could not grow up. He was what he was and did not pretend or want to be anybody else. He believed in himself, and that is a great compliment. He really accepted himself. In the true naive there is no discrep-

ancy between the person and the work. Miró *was* his work.

In fact he was a prolific workaholic. However, he was also sensitive and vain. He was surrounded by people who praised him, and he liked that. When they told him what he was doing was marvelous, he went on doing it, like a good student. Miró wanted to be encouraged, and when he was encouraged he was like a child. His move to Paris was not altogether positive; in his early Catalan landscapes and portraits, and his very early abstract work, there was a deep emotion that seems to be lacking in his later years. We know that he was strong enough to shake off the hold of Breton—that he objected to anyone dictating his style. But he was susceptible to flattery, and may have been sensitive in this way to the influence of the critics, poets, and dealers.

The person who is eager to please becomes an overachiever. He is not an ambitious person, for he has no relationship to a larger context, to the world of ideas. He has nothing to do with the Olympus complex; he has no notion of “pie in the sky”; the people he wants to please are those he knows and loves. His intensity is ferocious but localized, and therefore safe. Miró was successful. He found a formula and went on doing it for fifty years. After all, he had to sell. It was the dealers who turned him into a sculptor, which he was not—Miró sculptures are not thought through. In going from two to three dimensions, a cutout taken from a painting is not enough. There is more to sculpture than a blob of clay with a fork in it. Miró was too successful for his own good. In making sculpture he went out of his league.



Louise Bourgeois and Joan Miró, New York, 1947.

In her catalog essay for the MoMA show, Carolyn Lanchner, the show's curator, belabors the idea that Miró was cold-blooded and calculating, as his abstract pictures show. Nobody disagrees. But when Miró was doing the portraits, landscapes, and still lifes in his early realistic manner, he was deeply involved and original. Only when he turned to abstraction did his paintings become predictable and repetitive. His later use of French vocabulary was acquired; it's touching but not convincing. I like the work before it becomes abstract and French-speaking. It's like Robert Motherwell using "*Je t'aime*" when he barely spoke French.

The taste for the naive, *art brut*, and the art of the insane was in part created by the interest of certain writers of the 1920s and 1930s in primitive art and aboriginal art. The hard-up literary intelligentsia are intrigued by success, and have a fascination with the market; but then and now, they respond condescendingly to art. Obviously, the literary endorse only what they can perceive. They want to be part of the art scene and influence the market by becoming arbiters of taste; the trouble is they have no eyes. They like illustrative art and *faux* naive art.

Instead of counting on the literary world, the art community today should join hands with the scientific community. In viewing the Miró show at the Museum of Modern Art, for example, one should not lose sight of two earlier exhibitions, the Picasso and Henri Matisse retrospectives. The three shows complete one another; they are perfectly good historical shows. But they are stuck in the past, and are limited in appeal to us today. The museums should see that the field they have not explored is the inward vista, by which I mean an interest in and a contribution to the behavioral sciences. Their ambition should be to equip us better to understand *why* we do what we do.

Collecting: an Unruly Passion

Artist's review of the book *Collecting: an Unruly Passion* by Werner Muensterberger (Princeton University Press, 1993) first published in Summer 1994 in *Artforum*, vol. 32, no. 10, p. 11.

This book, *Collecting: an Unruly Passion*, is really about Mr. Muensterberger himself as a collector. It takes one to know one. Mr. Muensterberger's book is highly readable and a serious collection of endless facts (biographies and bibliographies), lists, footnotes, and indexes on the subject. But what of it? It is totally uninspiring. Where are the ideas? Where does it constitute a progress?

I knew a young child who had a dominion over three armies of lead toy soldiers. At the age of eight he was a military strategist! I was in total admiration of his seriousness, his logic, and his passion. The need to be a collector is to be omnipotent in a little area. Rather than be passive to anxiety, you become a manipulator.

There is nothing wrong with fears, just know them better than they know you. Without fear nothing in the world would ever be done. Any precaution is born of fear. Fear of famine made good cooks in France in the sixteenth century. To alleviate anxiety we retreat from the world to the comfort of the object; and to this object we attribute great value and power.

Mr. Muensterberger is a name dropper. He could use analysis himself. Let us look at his droppings. For the most part I wonder why he is so interested in the titled, social prestige, the *richissime*, and the English aristocracy? In his book, he collects collectors, and the richer, the better.

The most important thing is the value we attribute to a collectable. What collecting is to a child and what it is to Mr. Muensterberger, is really not that far apart. It is not the process of collecting which is so rare or interesting. It is the different value that is attributed to the objects. Collecting is a mirror of the collector.

What Mr. Muensterberger doesn't explore in the scale of collecting

and which is much more mysterious is the disinterested collector; such as the scientist, the researcher, and the social worker. They don't do it for social reasons, prestige, or money. They have nothing to gain. You might even include artists. I obey sleeping memories that are triggered only by a living person. I am a collector of spaces and memories.

One of my favorite collectors collected white stones, each the size of a pebble and each representing a beautiful moment. These stones had a mysterious value to him and to no one else. Some people collect good luck charms like a penny on the street. Every time they find one they get titillated.

Is the social worker collecting a collection of saved lives? What about the need to collect friends? What about diaries? My diaries are a form of collecting and they have no use to anybody but me.

The only saving grace of collecting is its transitional value. Mr. Muensterberger does not explore how we collect different things at different times. How our persistence, our need, our taste, and energy to collect will remain the same but the object will change. Hopefully there is a transition from the world of the object to the world of ideas.

Collectors are arrested characters. The ransom of collecting is that it does not liberate your mind for better things. It is not open to discovery and meditation. Meditation means freedom. Collecting holds you. What are we holding on to—maybe life itself?

Louise Bourgeois: Album

First published in 1994 by Peter Blum Edition, New York, in a limited edition of 850 copies in which each text is printed opposite a photograph from the artist's personal archive, and based on the 1983 film *Partial Recall*, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

A lot of people are so obsessed by the past, they die of it. This is the attitude of the poet who never finds the lost heaven, and it is really the situation of artists who work for a reason that nobody can quite grasp. Except that they might want to reconstruct something of the past.

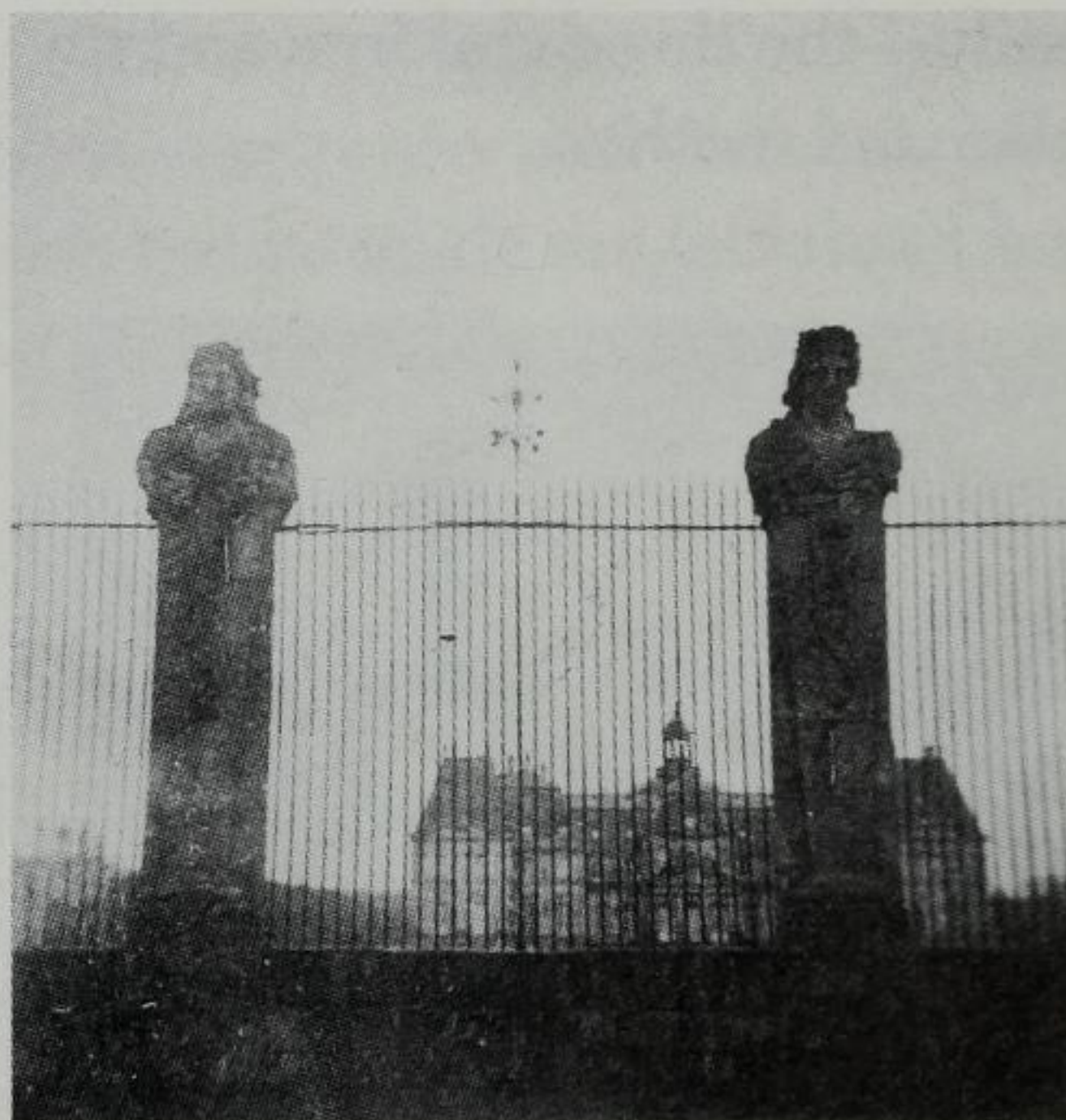
It is that the past for certain people has such a hold and such a beauty ...

* * *

My name is Louise Josephine Bourgeois. I was born 24 December 1911, in Paris. All my work in the past fifty years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood.

My childhood has never lost its magic, it has never lost its mystery, and it has never lost its drama.

This picture is very important for me. What is special about this is that it is a kind of symbol of the nostalgia and distance of childhood. It has a kind of decrepit splendor, which is far away behind this ironwork. The two figures on the high posts preside over reality in their forbidding way and they establish a very real distance between today and the past. And how we see the past.

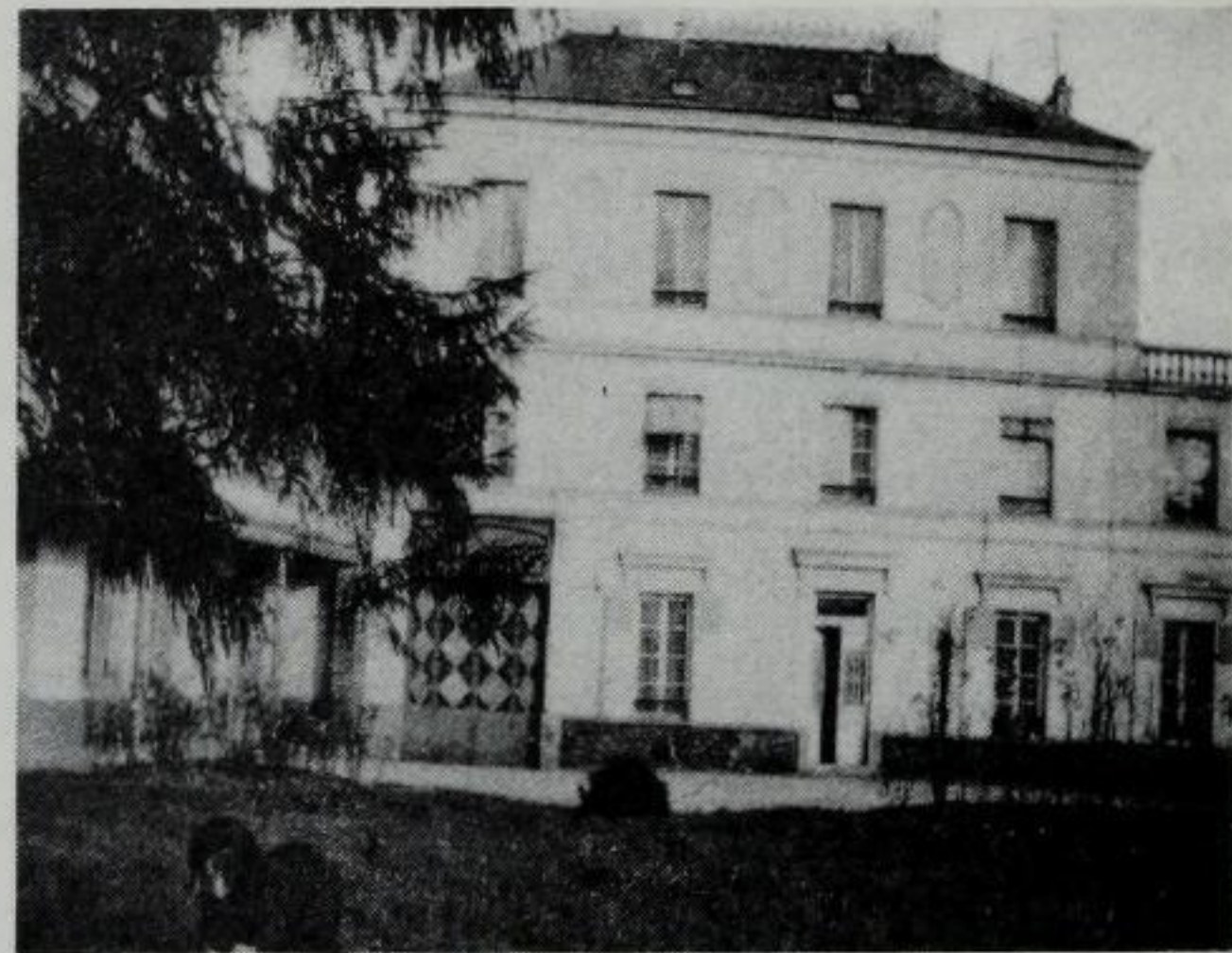




This is Sceaux, which is sitting in between Choisy-le-Roi and Clamart. My family is buried there. We were familiar with the Château de Sceaux, because we saw it all the time.

This is Choisy-le-Roi on the Seine River. And we lived there until 1917. I was then six years old.

Choisy was the site of my parents' business, repairing tapestries. The fact that it was quite so large is explained by the work itself: there were about twenty-five girls working on the tapestries, so it was much more than a house to live in. There were about thirty people working together there, plus the family—the three children and my father and mother.



This is a portrait of my mother when she was very young.

My father is the young man in the front seat. He is being pushed around by his future brother-in-law, who says: "You are just a kid. Look here, kid, you're nineteen, why don't you mind your own business, you don't need our sister, she's an older woman—going on twenty-four. Just get lost."

But this was not my mother's idea. She loved my father. So as I said, they eloped. They just left.

So they were not married. They lived together, and sure enough they had a child. My father, he was quite macho, and unfortunately the child was a girl. I am sure my mother was embarrassed, even though she was a strong feminist. The embarrassment did not last too long, since the child died.

They proceeded to have another one, who was, by God, it was another girl! It was Henriette.

Then they had another brat, named Louise . . . It was me! So you understand that when I came I was a sharp disappointment and my mother must have thought, "How am I going to keep my man, presenting him with three girls in succession?"

She was not without imagination and she said, "Don't you see, this little girl, we are going to name her for you. Do you know that that child is your spitting image?"

And my father said, "Gee, it is true. She is very pretty and she's just like me." So this is the way I made it, you see, but he made me feel that I was supposed to fulfill his dreams of having a successful descendant.

I was supposed to make myself forgiven for being a girl. My brother came later, of course.

This is my brother Pierre, on the left, holding onto my hand and looking up to me.

He kind of dictated my taste in men, in a sense that I fall for good-for-nothings that expect me to help them, in fact all the men in my family expected their women to look up to them and work for them.

These men were very charming. The women in the family were the strong ones.

My mother's mother, she was hard-working. She worked like a slave and she was not unhappy. She was a tapestry woman, in Aubusson. My mother was also a tapestry woman.

My mother was a perfectionist, repairing her tapestry with fast colors, vegetable colors that she dyed herself.

This is why we lived on the Creuze, in Aubusson, and later on the Bièvre, near the Gobelins tapestry manufacturers—because the common denominator of these two rivers is that the water is full of tannin, which is indispensable as a biting agent for the fibers.

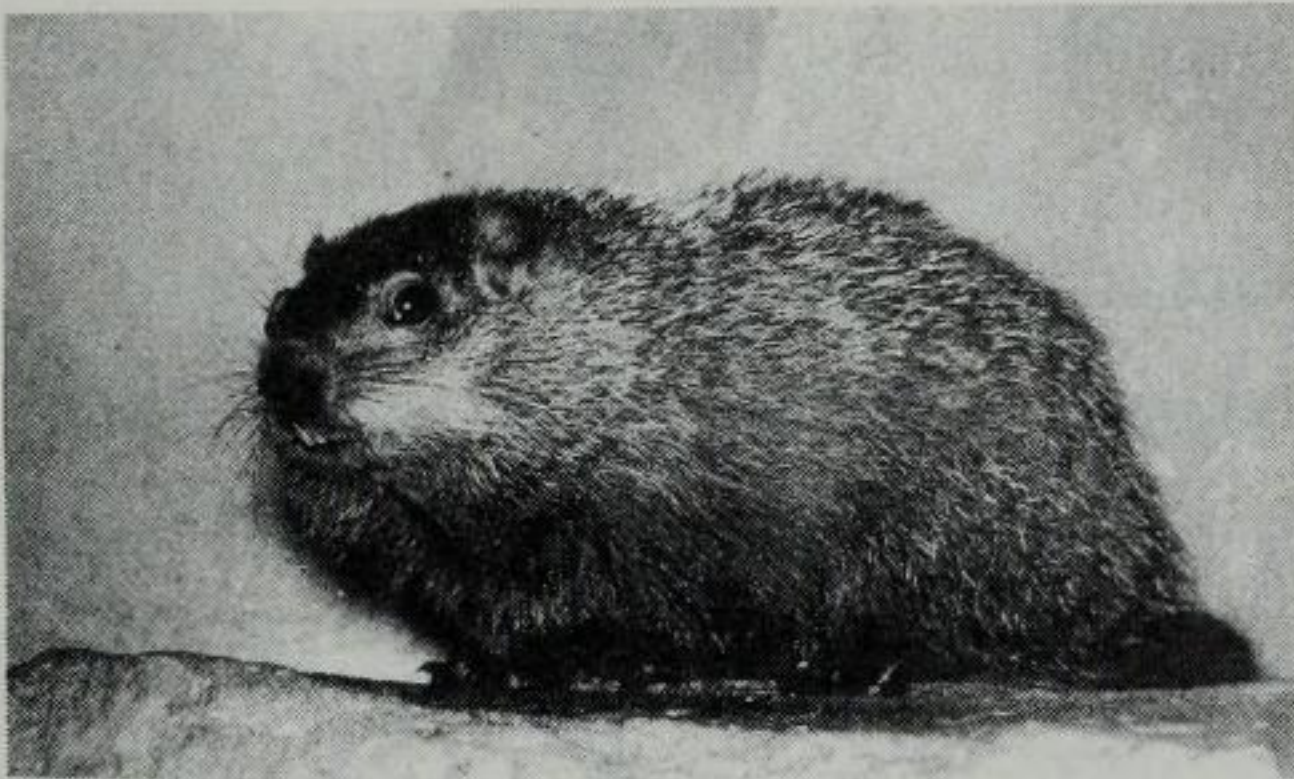
So this is the *lavoir*, it's a little house, you can wash there when it rains.

This is the kind of tapestry we dealt with. When it was washed, it was lifted up, and then two on one end and two on the other would twist the tapestry, and it was then set to dry and then repaired. But you can see that the water was needed first for the washing and then for the dyeing of the wool.

This is a very nice picture. It shows how sentimental my father was. He really liked his brother. On the right, that is my father, and he is holding his brother, Désiré. They are quite different: Désiré was older and he already had two boys. He was taken in the army and that supposedly called for a celebration—explaining the flower. Well, Désiré, the stupid man, he got himself killed in the first week of the war.

He had two boys—one was Jacques and one was Maurice. They were immediately taken in by my father, suffering terribly much from his brother's death. So it is the story of an invasion.

The two kids came in—and really barged in, if you ask me. And there they are. We never accepted them. They were just cousins, no mistake about that. It's not charitable, but that is the way it is.



This is a welcome relief! Because sometimes I can get very excited over the past. I find this very embarrassing and then, instead of turning against my irrepressible self, you see, I turn against the poor people that are no more. I turn against my family. I say

damn them. And this rat—you see his queer little eyes there?—is a welcome relief. He seems to me as if to say, "I know what you mean, I have gone through that myself." You have a right to be fed up and you have a right to be a rat once in a while. You don't have to be good all the time!

I said that Désiré was killed the first week of the war. That did something to my father. I don't quite know how it determined his volunteering himself. Well, anyway, he left.

My mother got hysterical as soon as he was gone. She proceeded to follow him from camp to camp and she dragged me along.

He got himself wounded and landed in Chartres at the hospital which is here. Now a new phase appeared in my mother's life.

She became jealous of the nurses at the hospital. And I felt that. I felt great tension between them.

In the early 1920s, when finally my father came back, they resumed their work on the tapestries. And they needed to be on the Bièvre, the second river in my life, and they bought a property in Antony. And the Bièvre was flowing through the garden.

There were all kinds of animals. There was a donkey, there was a pig. It was full of guinea hens that always flew—you couldn't get them back—ducks, and families of rabbits. And all these animals.

The point of it was to show that all animals can live together in peace and harmony.

This appeared in my father's philosophy after the war. He had to believe that the Germans and French could live at least next to each other, and this has been translated in personal terms by buying all these animals, putting them together, and proving to his children that if properly educated, the dog and the chicken can live together.

It was a completely luxurious life, you know.

Actually, you led a life which I do not envy. Because there is so much privacy in this set-up. You don't have to communicate—not even with the members of your family. This will show in my work. Today I would say that most of my sculptures are made of people nestling against each other. And it is a reaction against the loneliness you felt in that set-up.

This is my father when he was about fifty, he was reasonably successful and very pleased with himself.

This is my mother with her tapestry. She was well-off and didn't have to work but it was a great pleasure for her to sit out in the sun and repair a tapestry or repair petit-point. She just loved it.



There is a very nice thing about my parents—that they were not social climbers, they were perfectly satisfied with their status. In these days it is very refreshing, and there was no outlandish ambition in my family. There was no rat race, you see. They wanted to be independent. That was the password.

Well, I have inherited this. In my work I am very proud when people say, “She can not be pigeonholed. She is just herself.”

This is the mistress, showing off all in white. She appeared right after the war, you know, she was here in 1922. She was introduced into the family as a teacher for Pierre and myself.



And she slept with my father. The thing about Sadie is that she lived in the house. And she stayed for ten years—the formative years of my sister and myself. The story of Sadie is to me almost as important as the story of my mother in my life. The motivation for the work is a negative reaction against her.

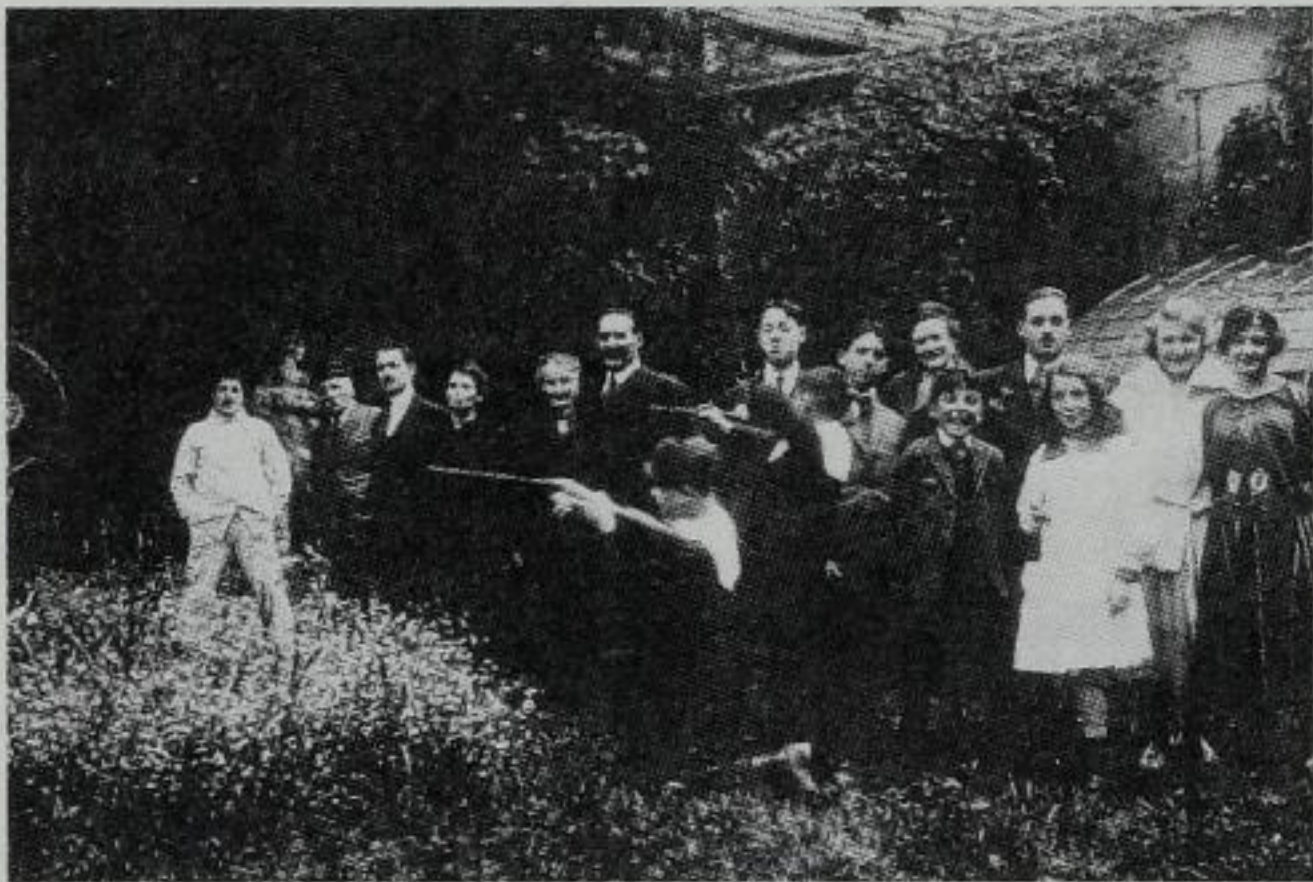
It shows that it is really the anger that makes me work. I'm not very good at talking about the mistress because by now, half a century later, I have overcome the effect she had on us and I can take her now with a little grain of salt. So, I can not be terribly passionate or excited about her.

Sadie, if you don't mind, was engaged to teach me English. I thought she was going to like me. Instead of which, she betrayed me.

Now you will ask me: How is it that in a middle-class family this mistress was a standard piece of furniture? Well, the reason is that my mother **tolerated** it! And this is the mystery.

I was betrayed not only by my father, dammit, but by her too. It was a double betrayal. I'm sorry to get so excited but I still, I still react to it.

My father betrayed me by not being what he was supposed to be. First of all by abandoning us to go to war and then by finding us another woman and introducing her to us. It is just a matter of—there are rules of the game. And in a family, the rules of the game are such that a minimum of conformity is expected.



In this photograph, it is about one o'clock in the afternoon and it is Sunday brunch. You see him here. He just got up so he is in one of his *négligés*, of flannel, white flannel, there on the left. And he is teaching his children how to use a gun.

The fact is that his children are not doing anything. Pierre is there next to me, on the right. So it's the two cousins who use the guns.

Now the whole family is gathered and the mother is not there. Sure enough, I guess that she's seeing that the food is being prepared.

But Sadie is there, in white. You see that pussycat face on the right? And I am right next to her. But you see how everybody is proper and well dressed—except him.

So if you say, why do I object to my father's behavior, it's that he broke the rules all the time. All I say is that it is **disturbing**. It presents a kind of injustice.

This, I love this! One of Sadie's duties was, as I said, to teach us English and polish the car, drive my mother around. That was the pretext for her being there. Now my mother didn't like that very much.

My mother liked **my** company. And she said, "On the day you are eighteen, you get your driver's license and we will be on our own." So that is what it represents: I am eighteen and I am in charge. She's in the back. So we emerge in a kind of independence from Sadie.

So in all this talk, what is apparent is that I refuse to let go of that period. Because as painful as it was in certain respects, it was life itself.

In 1955 or 1956 I went back. I had to see the house again. And I found it. It was completely—the character had changed—fifteen or twenty different families had lived in it.

I can't say that it was sad. It was just different.

I went back with my own children and—I felt better. I had wanted to see it, I had **needed** to see it, and I did visit it and I felt better. That's it. You see, the world goes on and there is nothing we can do.

Today in my work there is a strong emotional motivation, but it is held in a kind of formal restraint. The two things have to be together. The motivation is emotional and murderous or whatever you call it, but the form has to be absolutely strict and pure.

It is not conscious motivation. It is unconscious motivation. After a work is finished, then you say, Ah my God! **This** is what I meant!

* * *

You can not arrest the present. You just have to abandon every day your past. And accept it. And if you can't accept it, then you have to do sculpture! You see, you have to do something about it. If your need is to refuse to abandon the past, then you have to re-create it.

Which is what I have been doing.

Dominique Bozo: a Possible Portrait

Text written in memory of Dominique Bozo, friend of Louise Borgeois and former Director of the Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, then President of the Centre Georges Pompidou/Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, and first published in 1994 by the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in *Dominique Bozo: Un possible portrait*. Translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt.

D. B. The Good Public Servant

D. B. came to see me with Patrick Marandel twenty-six years ago. They were both on Focillon scholarships at Yale. We've been friends ever since. D. B. attends Focillon lectures. He is usually as solemn as a judge, but just once in his life he made us laugh by addressing an audience of well-heeled suburban matrons as *Messieurs*.

When I think of D. B. I can't help being sarcastic. He was a public servant, but he was also a highly catholic collector. I had learned not to expect anything of him; and yet I liked him.

Why did you like him?

The heart has its reasons that reason knows not of.

Perhaps I liked him for esthetic reasons. He had a fine face, and his body was not bad either (legs too short).

I was certainly aware that he relied on charm. I liked that, but I am no pushover. Don't underestimate me. I don't suffer Don Juans lightly. I've been told that he was a loyal friend, and that he believed only in amorous friendship.

D. B. was the only man I ever saw blush.

Interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist

Previously unpublished, January 1995. Translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt.

Could you say something about the peripheral figure?

To illustrate the way these peripheral figures have been stripped of importance—they have sunk into oblivion, then quite suddenly they re-emerge—I'm talking about a character who appears in one of my works [of the 1940s] with the title of *Portrait of Catherine Yarrow*. I haven't thought about Catherine Yarrow in twenty years. Then a young historian finds out what the two letters (CY) stand for, and we reconstruct the personality of Catherine Yarrow. The peripheral figure now becomes central.

She was latent.

I had almost forgotten her until the historian saw a photograph in a book of a very old piece called *Catherine Yarrow*, full of nails. So the peripheral figure becomes visible. There is a need to "investigate" her true identity and find out the importance of her role. Catherine Yarrow was never anyone's wife, because she is defined solely by the effect that I had on her and she had on me; this belongs to the same theme as Eugénie Grandet, who for me is the prototype of the unfulfilled woman. She is *impossibility to go out*. Eugénie Grandet is a character in Balzac; she is the prisoner of her father, who needed a domestic servant. Catherine Yarrow represents the destiny of a woman who has never had the opportunity to be a woman. I met her at a time when I had three young children, and I made a huge impression on her because I was the pregnant woman. Perhaps I provoked such a great reaction because she wanted to be pregnant. I don't know. As a result, Catherine Yarrow made a desperate effort to be kind, to be sociable, to be acceptable, but the tension under which she lived made her hysterical.

Hysteria is always a representation. Was her hysteria manifested in any way?

Yes, violently so. She was completely impossible to cope with. As a result,

Catherine Yarrow was a peripheral person who occupied an important place in my life at a certain time.

This idea of a peripheral figure is very interesting: the oscillation between center and periphery, between appearing and disappearing.

Yes, good. It should be noted here that we reconstruct these peripheral figures by way of our desire to rectify. I have a passion for rectification, which I see as a way of making amends.

These peripheral figures: how would you see them in relation to other people you knew a long time ago?

Peripheral figures form a kind of network among themselves; the network has to do with a certain date because it was all together, one stitch links into another. If you pull, it comes undone, like lace.

All the people you met years ago: people like Léger. Is he part of this peripheral world, or is he in the center?

No, that's different, because there I feel an affection. I have a wide acquaintanceship, and I have many memories of my teachers, I loved my teachers. Those other people were not on the same level at all. Catherine Yarrow was a society woman. I met her socially. She had no connection with my serious, professional life. She had a kind of position in the artistic community because she typified a certain hobbier who circulates in the art world. It gives her a *raison d'être*.

So, with the peripheral figures, would you say that they were people you met by chance?

Not at all. I met her because she was at loose ends. She was flabbergasted by the physical proximity of a pregnant woman. She made her damn crockery.

From one moment to the next, something insignificant can acquire great importance.

Absolutely. That's when an exhibition opening turns into a street event, a public event. There is another peripheral figure, called the Albino. An albino is someone whose color, whose pigmentation, has been affected by his or her genes. The pigmentation of the skin, the hair, and the eyes are

red. There was a peripheral person around me who was an albino. The Albino's name was Yvonne, the chambermaid. I like to remember the way the light affected her; when she wanted to see something small, she had to turn her head at a certain angle, depending on where the light was coming from. Her eyes were red; she always made me think of a white rabbit. She was extremely healthy and vivacious. She seduced my brother, she was attracted to him, and then she drove him so wild by clinging onto him that he gave her a push on the stairs and she fell all the way down.

And lost her baby.

I don't recall. Did she lose the baby, or didn't she lose the baby?

So she's another peripheral figure, even though you were so close.

She got so close to our family that she became part of it. I haven't given her a thought for twenty-five years; she's got a slew of children now. That's why I forgot the first one, it's of no importance whatever, she had three more.

Thomas Pynchon recounts the urban myth of the alligators in the New York sewers. Because they never see daylight, they turn into albinos.

"Why is the smell of Paris inscribed in my memory as a smell of drains?" It's true, I don't deny it, I can even explain it to you. At a difficult time in my life, it was at exactly the time when the Albino appeared, and she was helping us in the house at Antony. The drainage system of the ville d'Antony underwent a radical change when the discharge into the river Bièvre was finally stopped. Our garden was seated next to the river. The Bièvre was tiny and could no longer take the contents of everyone's drains. So one day in 1934 a man came around from the sanitation department and said: "Mademoiselle Bourgeois, we are cutting off the drains that discharge into the Bièvre, and from now on you will be connected to the main sewer." The cost was enormous. I was the owner of the house and thought I would go bankrupt.

From the nineteenth century onward, these smells began to disappear from towns. There is a book on the history of sewage. The nineteenth century decided that public space should be hygienic, with no more

smells. After that, sterile cities were constructed, with no odors of any kind.

Thinking about this question of drains, I thought it might have come from the smell of the mud in the Bièvre. Upstream from Antony, the river ran through soil that tended to dissolve into the water. The Bièvre needed to be dredged every year. All the men from the engineer's department went down to the banks of the Bièvre with long shovels, dug out the mud, and threw it on to the bank. It's unbelievable, but it's true. I thought it might be the smell of the mud, but I was wrong, because mud has a different smell, it's just earth mixed with water. The smell reminds me of a certain period, and also of a little example of corruption. We had some neighbors who lived in a tiny house. Their names were Monsieur and Madame Legrand. Their daughter was married to a certain Monsieur Cotance, and this Madame Cotance worked for my parents repairing tapestries. They were harness-makers. My parents never reported them to the municipality, but their house was so small that the men from the sanitation department didn't notice it. It was just an oversight. As a result of this official oversight, Monsieur and Madame Legrand continued to discharge into the Bièvre, although it was illegal and they were neglecting their civic duties. That's why there was a very strong smell of drains in my bedroom, which adjoined the Legrands' house.

When did this smell return?

It came back with something of a shock when I returned to Cannes in 1990 after an exhibition I'd been having at the Musée d'art contemporain in Lyon. We revisited Le Cannet and went back to the Hôtel de la Grande-Bretagne, which made me realize that buildings and places can be peripheral too. When I was a child, the Hôtel de la Grande-Bretagne was a three-star hotel. I think by the 1940s there was no further demand for it. So the Hôtel de la Grande-Bretagne that you see on the old postcards was completely demolished and replaced by a much less salubrious hostelry. It was just chance that we went there. Anyway, believe it or not, the drainage system in the bathrooms was not entirely satisfactory. The

window always had to be left open. It was so extraordinary when the smell reappeared.

The same smell?

The same smell pursuing me. That was when I realized that there are peripheral buildings as well as peripheral people.

Of all the elements, water fascinates me the most. Everything is always connected with water. The dangerous aspects of water are ice and flooding, and the benefit of water is life itself. All architecture depends on the flow of water: roofs, gutters, gargoyles, they are all connected with the channeling water. Ice is very important. I'll show you drawings for a book we are about to publish called *Insomnia*. It contains more than 200 drawings, and a lot of them are concerned with water and fear, fear of the harm that water can do, floods, freezing, and the satiation that can cause you to die of thirst.

We have always regarded water as an infinitely available resource, but now it's becoming scarcer and scarcer.

It's harmful when there is none, and when there is too much, and it's a pity to think of the role water plays. When you hear about floods in California, the people who are flooded out are never the ones who live in the mountains. The mountains belong to the rich. There's no danger. It's always the housing projects where the poor people live that get flooded.

Now that our conversation is nearly at an end, could you sum up the peripheral person for me again?

I envisage the peripheral person as a person awaiting her turn, or her day. For me, this is a metaphor of the female personality. She waits, and, as the wisdom of the world has it, "Man proposes, woman disposes." In fact, it's the opposite. Woman proposes, man disposes. This is why peripheral people are usually females who are awaiting germination, awaiting the arrival of a masculine metaphor. All these peripheral people are women waiting to be fertilized by the historian that will discover them, as I am at present rediscovering the faint figure of Jean Gerard Matisse for the benefit of John Russell's book.

You might say that with peripheral people there is always the idea of latent potential?

Potential, that's right! Maybe it will work, maybe it won't, it all depends on potential. So the woman who waits is a metaphor: "ladies in waiting."

You described a third peripheral figure.

Raoul was another peripheral figure. Raoul Kanoui, who lived on Rue du Ranelagh in the 16th Arrondissement of Paris. He was the brother of one of my school friends. He was a highly important peripheral person, but he was sent away quite soon because he had tuberculosis. It was a death sentence, because tuberculosis was incurable at that time. He went to a sanitarium in Leysin, Switzerland.

You went there regularly.

Just to visit him. He used to talk to me about René Crevel. He told me that, as soon as the visitors had left, the patients started up a furtive, highly intense sex life. Tuberculosis patients are very highly sexed.

Was Raoul Kanoui an artist?

No, he was a writer. He knew he was going to die, that's why his last letters were so cherished by me. I still have them.

Interview with Marie-Laure Bernadac

First published in 1995 by Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in the catalog for the artist's drawings exhibition *Pensée-plumes* (1 February to 10 April), pp. 73–81.

I'd like to talk about the drawings.

What counts is the specific nature of each drawing: today, New York, eleven o'clock, it's *specific*. Another thing that's specific is the nature of the interlocutor, who comes from another world. I need things to be specific, it's a way of eliminating rivals. The drawings must be seen in series, in sequences attached to days, to circumstances. They all have an interlocutor, they say something.

I'd like to start with your first drawings.

I find it difficult to talk about the past. I can't go back to it. I live in the present, and that takes all my attention. The past frightens me. I draw a lot, day after day; I repeat things because I am not satisfied with them. If it's not convincing, I keep trying. I want to be convincing. It's my passion to make myself heard. Behind my demure exterior, there's a desire to please.

There are two types of drawing here, geometric abstract and figurative.

I prefer abstract drawings. They're more legible than representational forms.

You once said that drawings were "thought feathers"?

Yes, drawings are thought feathers, they are ideas that I seize in mid flight and put down on paper. All my thoughts are visual. But the subjects of my drawings are often not translated into sculpture until several years later. As a result, there are a lot of things that appear in drawings but are never explored further.

There seem to be two categories of drawing: drawings for sculpture and ones that count as autonomous?

Yes, but that's not intentional, it's purely for lack of time. I always feel that I'll never have enough time to say everything I want to say.

So there some subjects are dealt with only in drawings, and not in any other medium?

That's right. But because the subjects recur, what is expressed in a drawing is very likely to have been expressed in the past in some other fashion. The themes are the same as in sculpture.

In your early years you did several self-portraits—

A youthful aberration. I'm not very interested in my face.

What about this one, with a hat (fig. 1)?

Yes, that one is a bit better. But, taken as a whole, the self-portraits are not beautified: they are fairly critical.

Do you remember this image with two profiles and a child in the middle (fig. 2)?

It shows that we are really conditioned by what our parents were. A child is just what the parents poured into the little vessel.

This other image of the mother and child (fig. 3)?

Yes, you could say that's a self-portrait, but I'm in a really difficult position. It's not flattering, and it's not simple.

Is it a birth?

Yes, it is.

In another drawing, the child is in the mother's mouth (fig. 4).

When the children exasperate me, I turn into a—a cannibal? No, it's just that children are too demanding.

You don't seem to be eating the child; the child is coming out of your mouth. Isn't there a link with language?



Fig. 1 *Self-portrait*, 1943, ink on graph paper, 21.5 × 27.9 cm.

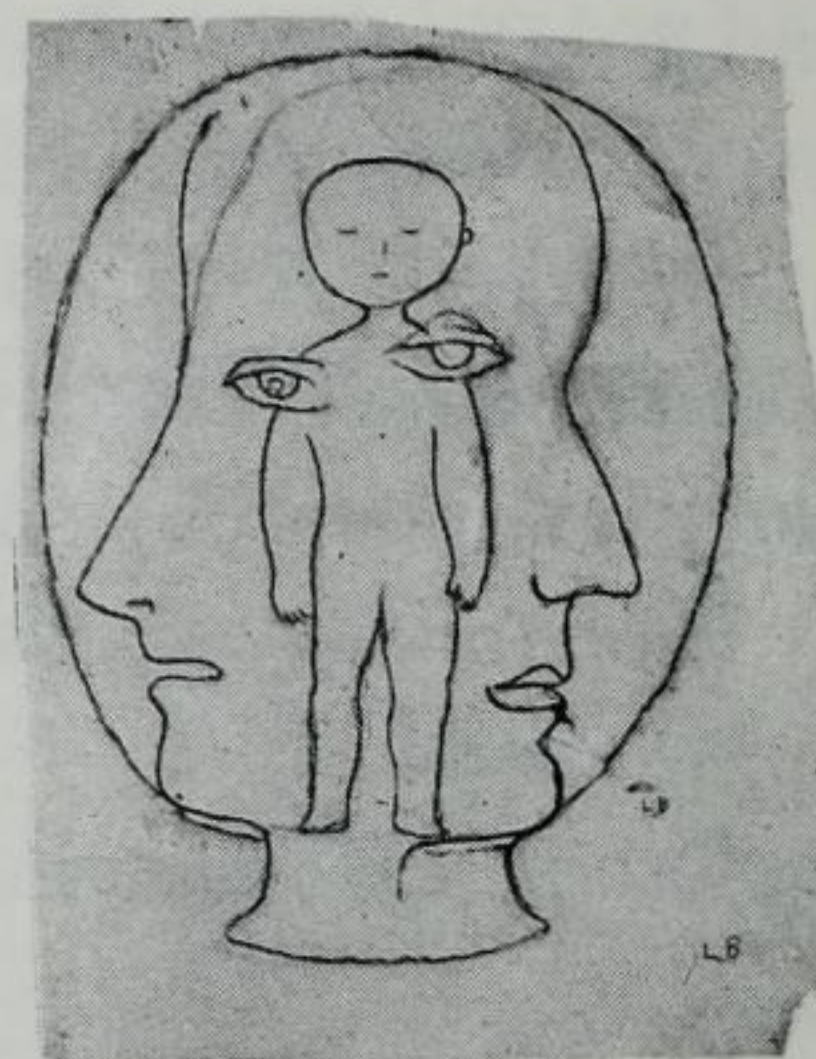


Fig. 2 *Untitled*, 1940, pencil on paper, 22.2 × 27.9 cm. Private Collection, Australia.

No. We ought to come back to that. But there are a lot of drawings that I should never have shown. My friends the dealers found them. There are a lot of things I should have weeded out.

Were they intimate, personal notes, for your eyes only?

Yes, they shouldn't have been published.

At the same time, you went along with it?

No, I never did go along with it. I had no choice. Now we are getting onto the subject of the BBC film [1993, see pp. 253–62]. There are some people who just do what they like with me. When someone tries to “take me over,” I get furious, there's an explosion. Then the Protagonist says to me: “Now, Louison, why are you angry, what's up? You're getting ideas.” “Listen,” I say, “I won't be made a fool of.” This fellow's sharper than I am, he's like my father. He says: “No need to fuss, it doesn't suit you. You look ugly when you get angry”—he brings me a little mirror—“do you want to look ugly like that?” So he bamboozles me, I don't know what I'm doing, and I start apologizing to everyone. But that doesn't mean that I forgive anyone. I don't forgive. It's true that I try to eat my children when they irritate me, but I don't want to show that in public. I want to hide that cannibalistic, aggressive side of me.

Isn't the child coming out of the mouth in this drawing?

No, I'm eating it, I'm stuffing my face with it, because I don't know what to do with it.

Like Cronos or Medea.

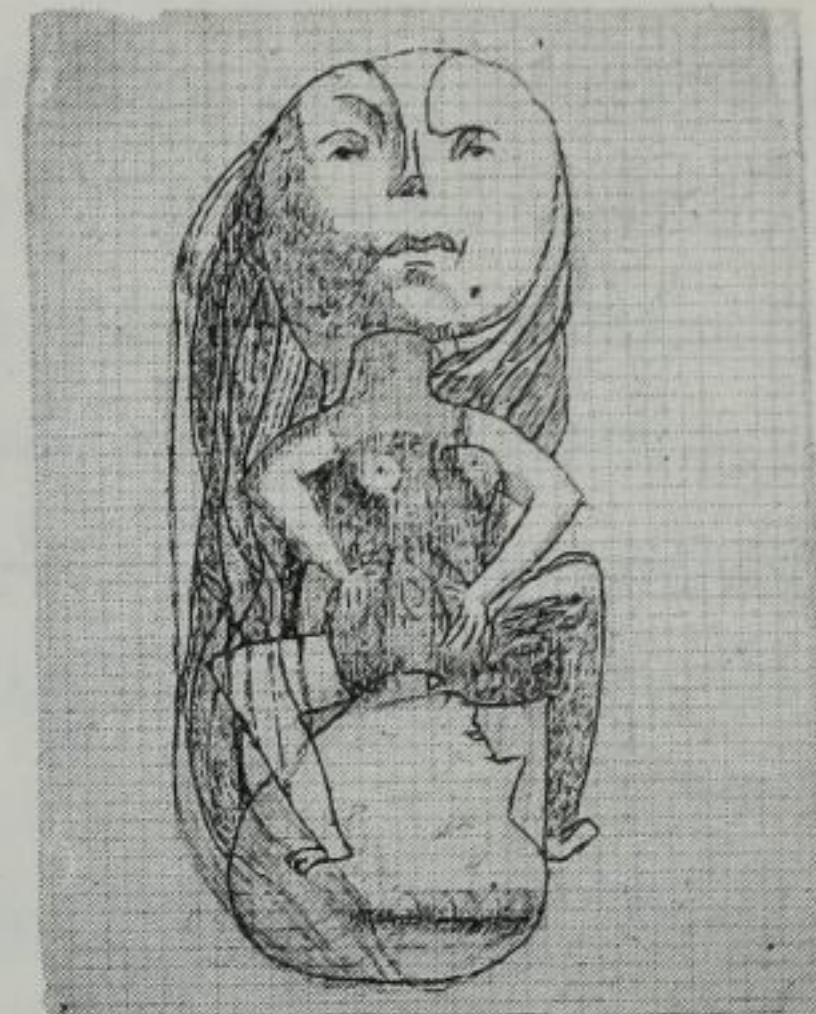


Fig. 3 *Untitled*, 1941, ink on graph paper, 21.5 × 27.9 cm.

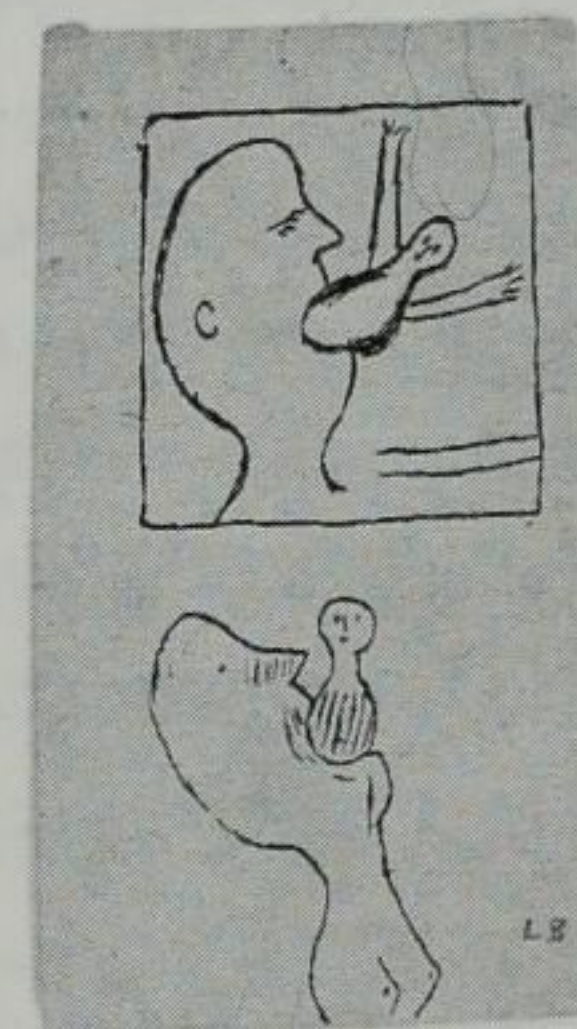


Fig. 4 *Untitled*, 1943, ink and pencil on grey paper, 21.5 × 27.9 cm. Private Collection, Zurich.

I don't want to be pedantic, but Medea killed her children as an act of revenge. I want to abolish them, because they are a fact, because they are such a huge burden. The only way of making them disappear is to eat them, the way spies during the war used to get rid of evidence by swallowing it.

Nevertheless there are numerous allusions to motherhood and fertility in your work.

I'm against children, but at the same time I think they are the most beautiful thing in the world. For example, here's a mother wrapping her coat around her children: "Suffer little children to come unto me."

There's the good mother and the bad mother. One is always a bit of both. What about these drawings with the knotted hair (fig. 5)?

This is the image of a person as a knot that can't be untied. The image that goes with it is the image of a pretzel, those crackers you eat with beer.

Sometimes there are flying figures.

That's high spirits. Independence. This one shows people drowning. It all takes place in water, a bit like Ophelia.

This drawing conveys the idea of children clinging to their mother.

And those are tears. There is always this idea of swings and roundabouts; children cost us their weight in tears.

What about this little person semi-obliterated by her long hair (fig. 6)? Did you have very long hair?

When you have something to hide, hair comes to the rescue. This one is

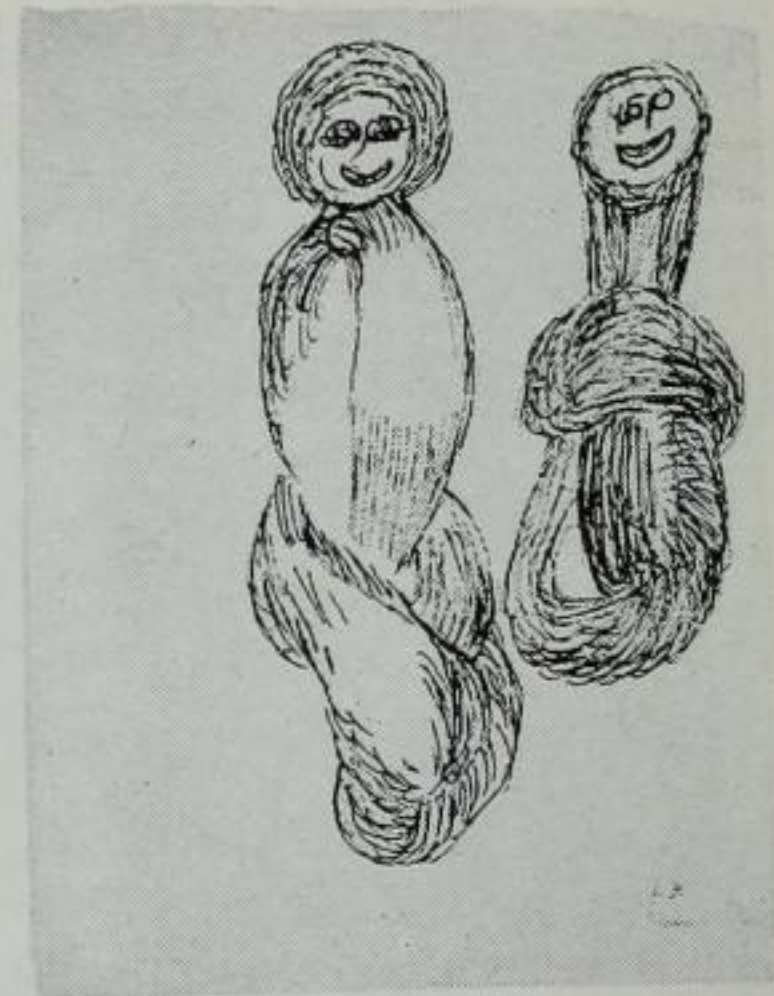


Fig. 5 *Skeins*, 1943, ink on gray paper, 22.8 × 30.4 cm.

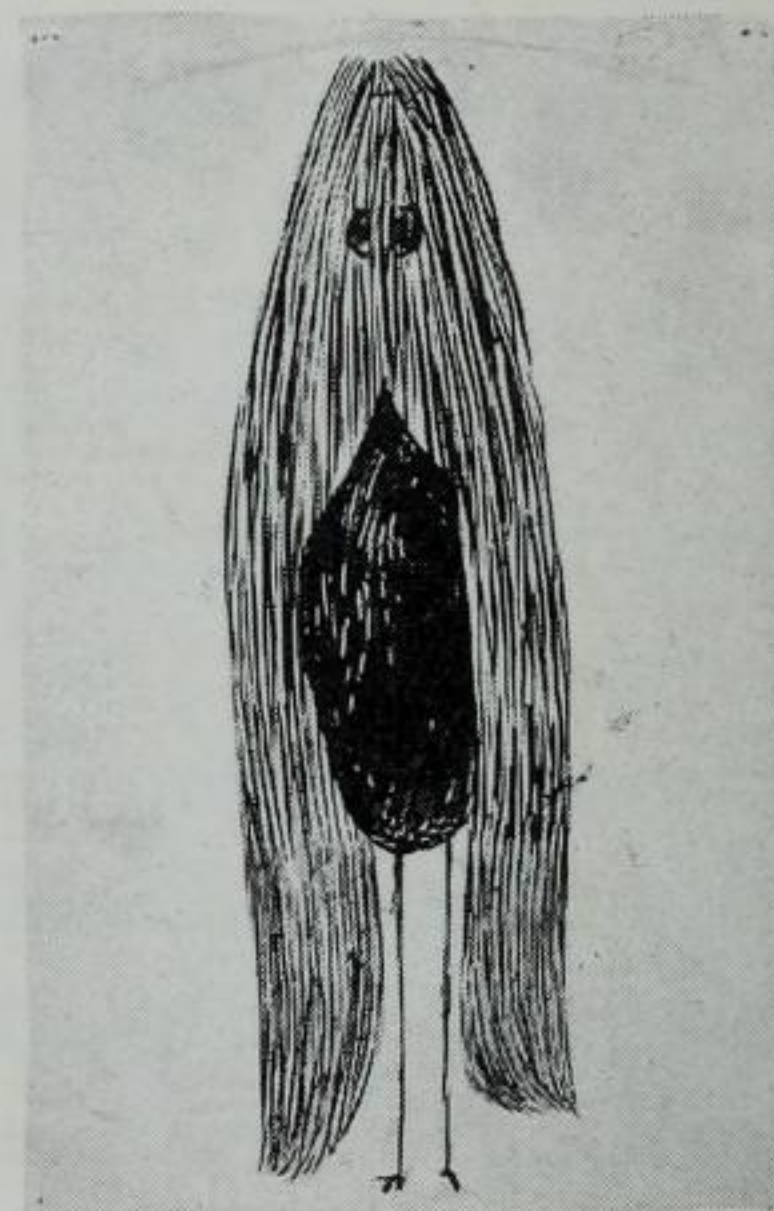


Fig. 6 *Untitled*, 1947-50, ink on paper, 19 × 25.5 cm. Private Collection, Milwaukee.

the first *Sainte Sébastienne*, with nails; she is trying to protect herself. In this house there is a woman on wheels, so she can make a quick getaway. These drawings are linked to prints. Deborah Wye [Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, where in 1982 she organized the first retrospective of work by Bourgeois; author of the *catalogue raisonné* of the artist's prints] could show them to you. The copper plates are all lost. It's a form of self-destruction.

The matrix of the image has disappeared.

Yes, without trace; as a result I don't know what it means. Unconscious destruction. There's a book by Camus that means a lot to me—the one with the story about the dog. Do you know it? It describes the kind of relationship that I might have, that my father had with me, or that I might have with my work. It's a very accurate transcription, in fact, because my work is all I have, I have nothing else. Anyway, the character in Camus feeds his dog every morning, gives him his breakfast, and then gives him a good hiding. The dog wonders what he's done to deserve it. Every day the breakfast gets a bit smaller, and when the dog is reduced to skin and bone it makes off down the stairs. The man says to himself: "What am I going to do? I loved that dog." He curses the dog: "I fed you for twenty years (no, seven years), every day, and what did you ever do for me? Nothing, absolutely nothing. You were a burden to me." As night falls, he feels a terrible anguish, and confesses his love by starting to cry. That's all.

Does that describe your relationship with your work?

I hope not. I have that kind of relationship with my friends, but not with my art. There is a difference. I destroy my work, but then I piece it back together. I lose control when I feel that people are sharper than I am.

What about this drawing with knives in it?

It's a machine. There's a shoulder here. It is about learning self-defense. To return to the history of France, this is the child who says: "Father, look out to the right, look out to the left." But I think the drawings say more about themselves than I can ever say.

Some of them certainly speak for themselves.

You see how free I am becoming in the drawings, a real liberation has

taken place. And yet you can destroy them, obliterate all trace of them, whereas with things you say—

Here is a small tree either going into a woman's body or coming out of it.

It's going in, not coming out.

It's like Twosome: it goes in and comes out alternately.

Oh yes, *Twosome*, that's my latest piece, my favorite [see p. 209]. I have a very special feeling for *Twosome*, and I'm very grateful to the Museum [of Modern Art]. It used to keep stopping, the electricians and engineers rushed to the rescue, and it turned out that there wasn't enough current.

Aren't there a lot of hanging objects in your drawings?

That is a childhood memory, from France. I think my parents were ashamed of having such a beautiful garden. They thought it was their duty to make it useful. They used to make *eau-de-vie* from pears, and they bottled things for the winter. There were ropes of onions and green beans hanging in the shed. My father also hung up furniture in the attic: chairs and armchairs. It all comes from that. It reminds me of Balzac, *Cousin Pons* or *Eugénie Grandet*. They say that if girls obey their fathers they turn into victims, like Eugénie Grandet. I have a great longing for revenge against my father, who tried to make me into an Eugénie Grandet. My mother was a feminist. She never argued with her husband, but she used to say to me: "You must go to school, that's what counts. Otherwise your father will turn on you and say: "You're useless, and you're not even married." He did say that, but on the other hand every time a man came on the scene, good-looking or not, my father couldn't stand him.

This little face peeping round a curtain (fig. 7)?

That's fear. The person isn't watching or spying, it's someone hiding. The curtain is like the

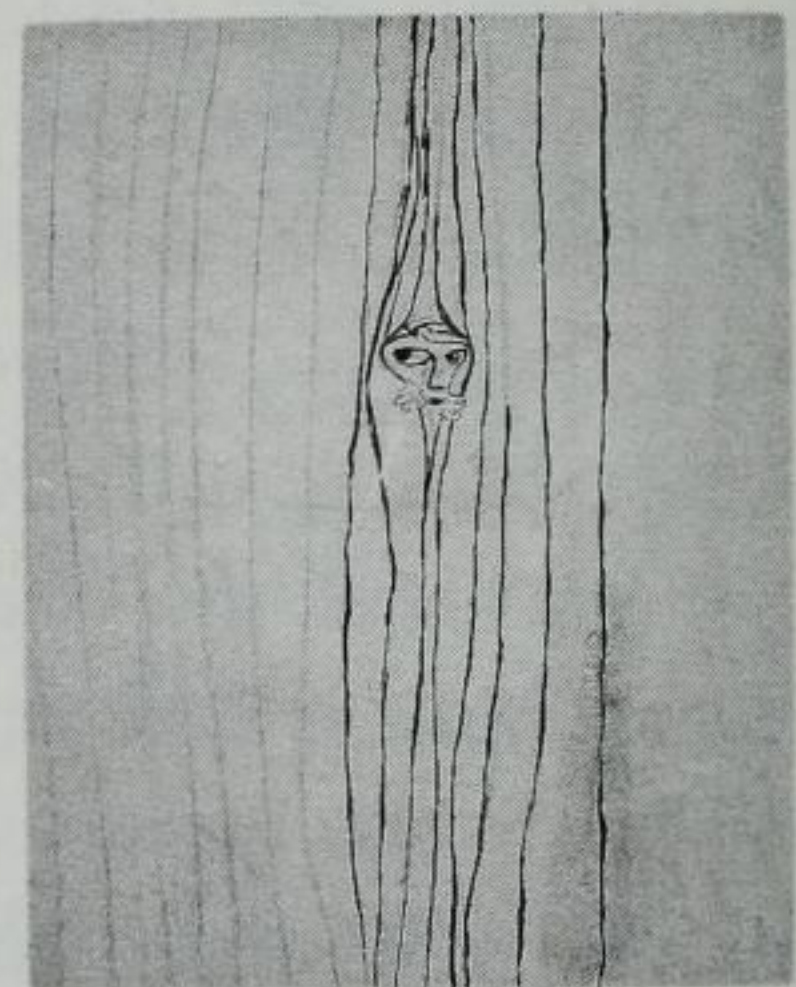


Fig. 7 *Untitled*, 1950, ink and charcoal on paper, 27.9 × 35.6 cm.

shutters in the South of France, which keep the sun out. You can see out, but you're hidden from view.

Who is this monstrous figure (fig.8)?

That's the good mother, resting. Those are her breasts.

What about this series of very dark, cloudy drawings (figs. 9, 10)?

Oh yes, I know what that is. It's ceaseless rain. That's another childhood memory. On the farm at Antony, we had some dogs. This picture could be called *Pyrame*. One day Pyrame died. My father didn't dare tell me to go and bury the dog, because my mother would have thought it too cruel. He felt ashamed in front of her. So off he went into the garden. But because he was so incurably idle he just dug a hole in the dung heap. It rained for a whole week, and the dog reappeared. That was the fate of Pyrame. You can see him there, that little spot.

And the little girls with their Claudine collars?

It's nice to have nice clothes. It's the same with men, too. There are some things that can be obliterated, like Pyrame the dog. We had dogs, but we also kept pigs. The last pig was called Pontchartrain. I hated it when the pigs were slaughtered. I thought it was terribly cruel. We loved Pontchartrain, he had his own collar, and then he was killed. It was



Fig. 8 *Untitled*, 1948, ink on paper, 16.5 × 32.3 cm.

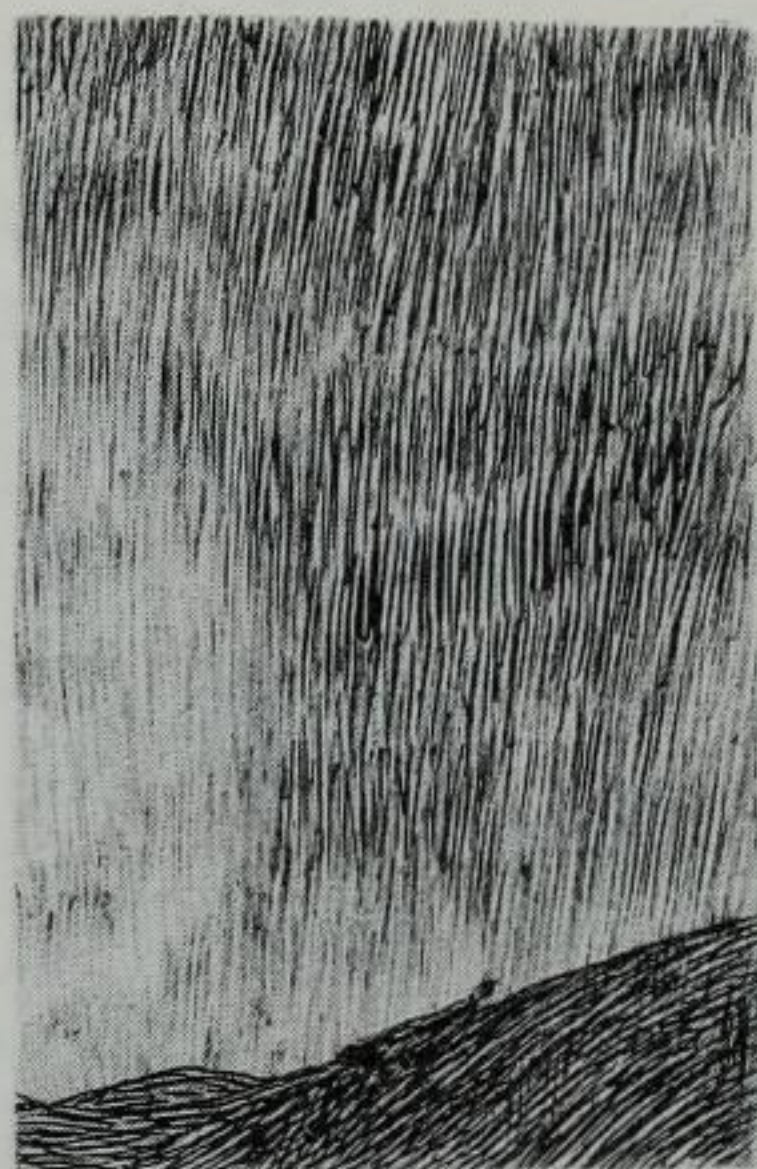


Fig. 9 *Untitled*, 1951, ink on paper, 36.7 × 48.2 cm.

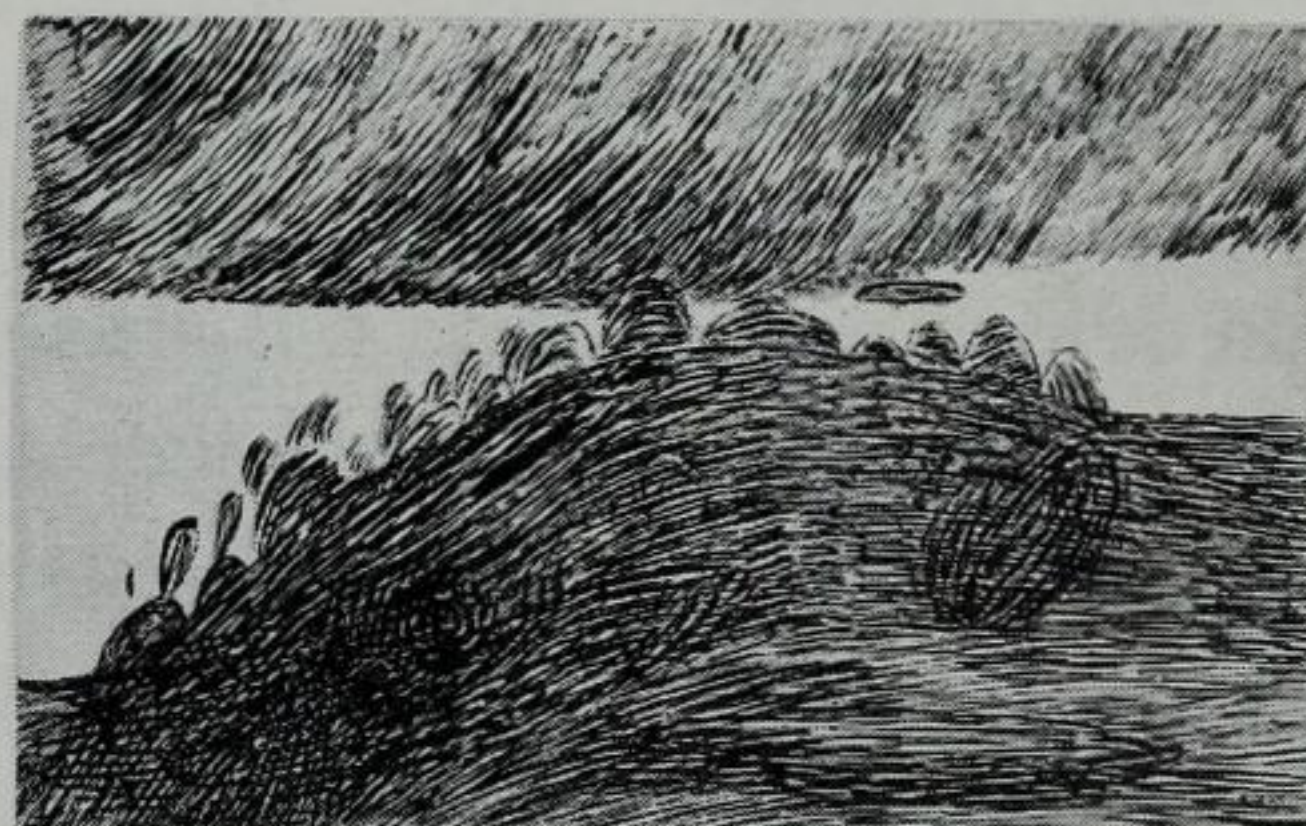


Fig. 10 *Death of the Dog*, c. 1950, ink on paper, 36.1 × 57.1 cm. Collection Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

the same with the pigeons; they're beautiful, and then from one day to the next they're popped into the oven and eaten. I couldn't do that. I still can't eat poultry. Don't you think it's cruel? You eat animals who are your friends.

The drawing with the spinal column?

That one's nice—it's in color. It's a rib cage, too.

Like your sculpted self-portrait. Why do you like that part of the body?

I like the way it expands and contracts. Breathing and breath come from there. You know what a stitch is? I still get them, and it's very painful.

What about this series of drawings in red ink (fig. 11)? In one of them you have torn and sewn the paper with a needle and thread, in another you have burned its edge.

I don't remember that. Oh yes, it was an edition for the magazine *Parkett*. I did the drawings and Jerry tore them.

There's a bit of leakage in my work, but I get on well with my galleries all the same; that's so important. I let them do

what they want. They do rip me off a bit. It's not that I forgive them, I really don't care. That red spot is blood. Red covers everything. It's not passion, it's blood.

And the scissors?

That's a very aggressive one. It's a way of saying: you think I'm stupid, but I can defend myself. It's a self-affirmation. I'm trying to frighten people. These threatening-looking objects are the tools from my studio—secateurs, pliers. The small pair of scissors hanging from the large pair are myself and my mother. I'm very sorry to be like that, but that's the way I am.

Here's Sainte Sébastienne again, with two faces, a woman's face, and a cat's face.



Fig. 11 *Untitled*, 1989, red ink and blue ink on paper, 29.8 × 22.9 cm.

It's the same thing again. Instead of being someone friendly, it turns into someone defensive.

On this schoolgirl page you've written "je t'aime" hundreds of times over [see p. 108].

"I love you" is part of the Whole. I want to be forgiven; I say to the man, "I love you" (I don't know whether it's true), but I want him to forgive me for my aggressive side. Take two hundred lines—a school punishment. It's also written on the bed in the sculpture of the man in *Cell (Arch of Hysteria)*.

You have given this the title Desire.

Yes, because desire is forbidden; you have to be punished for it.

Your drawings often contain images of circles and spirals (fig. 12).

Yes, but in this last one it's not round, it's an oval. It's not a target. Instead of one center, there are two. Hence the oval shape; an egg is richer than a circle.

What are your favorite drawing materials?

Ink and charcoal. That's the best box there.

Charcoal is so precious that I keep even the tiniest stubs. Razor blades and erasers are indispensable too, you can rub anything out. Ink is permanent: actually not quite, because the best ink of all is the white ink that lets you cover and obliterate. If I want to erase something, I put

on some white. The negative is more important than the positive.

What about paper?

In general I try and find good paper, but I also use anything that comes to hand—envelopes, cardboard, printed paper etc.

When you do highly colored drawings, aren't you tempted to use paint?

No, they are sculptures. Painting is a waste of time. I don't waste my time.

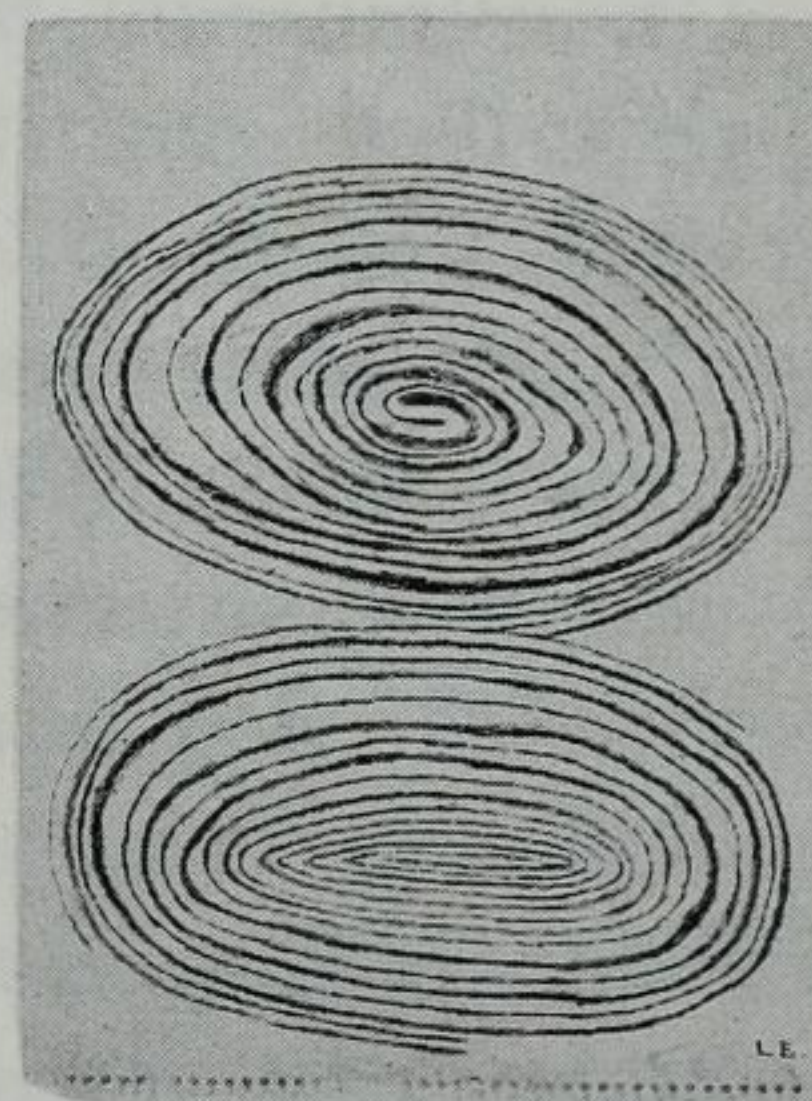


Fig. 12 *Untitled*, 1969, peach and crayon on paper, 22.8 × 30.4 cm.

What about engraving? How do you switch from one to the other? That's absolutely historic. If you use a *burin*, an engraving tool—nearly all my engravings are done with the *burin*—you need a lot of strength, it's very difficult. There's no English word for *burin*. Not many people know this, but it's the engraver's best friend. It's not woman's work, though, you have to be really strong.

What about this woman with the arched body of a child between her legs (fig. 13)? It's an image that you repeat in a series of prints.

That's my finest drawing. I gave it to Josef [Kunstmuseum, Bern]. I let it go; I ought to do it again. It's a man, woman and child.

There's some ambivalence between the man and the woman, and the child is like a phallus.

It's funny, you ask me what I think of it, but what counts is the effect it has on others. The first time these drawings went on show, the viewers weren't scared. They thought they were drawings by children. They are not children's drawings. I'd like to tell you something—I'm sorry, but it's important. Rosalind Krauss, who is a great Francophile, has got it into her head that I'm a Surrealist. I'm a bit embarrassed by that, because I'm bending over backward to explain to you that I'm an Existentialist. What do you think of my French? It's very important to me. I haven't had much chance to use it.

Your French is perfect, classical and rich in expressions, and your accent is beautiful. It's the old French that our grandmothers speak.

Do you write your diary in French or in English?

[Reading from her diary, in French:] "Only my drawings, engravings, and statues have any redeeming value. The rest of my occupations, 'topiary,' 'collecting,' 'furnishing,' 'socializing,' 'visiting' [All five terms given in

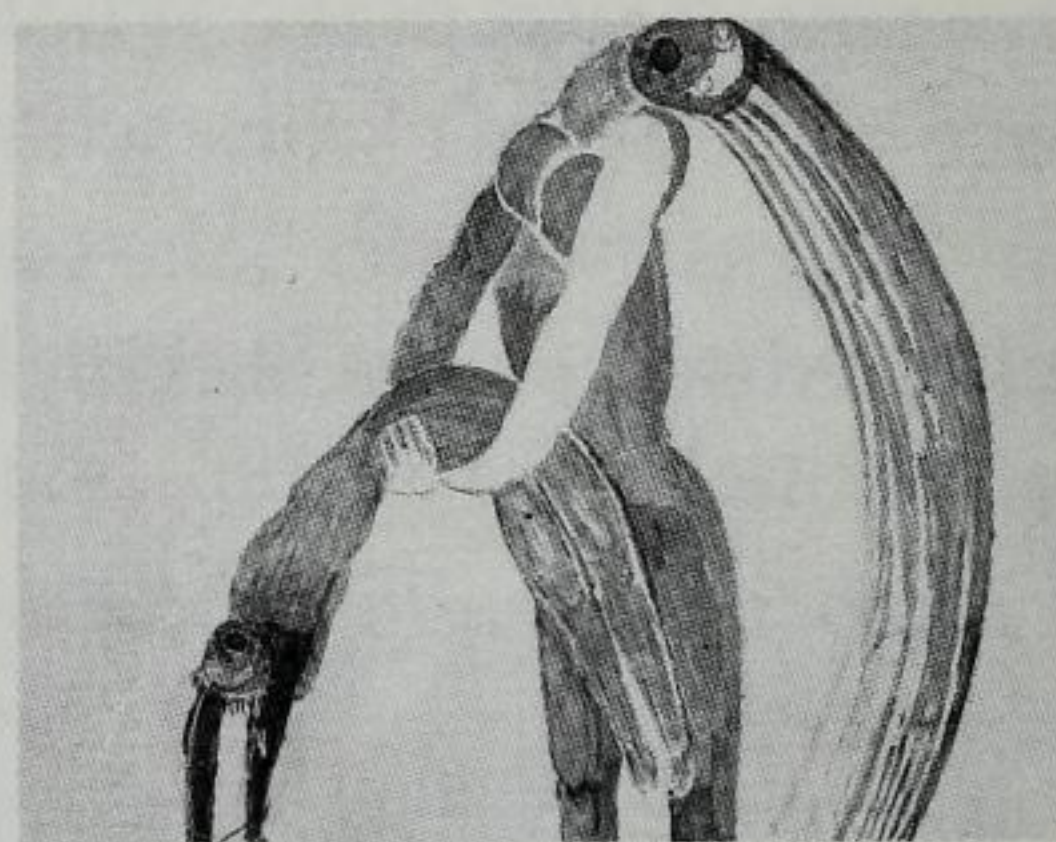


Fig. 13 *Altered States*, 1992, gouache, ink, pen, and pencil on paper, 48.2 × 60.3 cm.

English], have no redeeming worth for me. They are self-indulgence. Chatting away at top speed, with duplicity and complicity, to Pierre Matisse, Jacques Soullilou, or Bernard Marcadé, I suddenly suspect myself of self-indulgence.” It comes of not having been able to talk French in the past. That really used to make me miserable. Pierre Matisse was the only Frenchman around. Miró spoke French very badly. Matta had a terrible accent; so did Sert.

So plenty of people come to New York nowadays?

Yes, but in some ways we have nothing to say to each other. Chatting means exchanging memories. My favorite possession is my address book. You can see how nice it is, in spite of my awful behavior. For a long time I used to enjoy reading it. It’s my favorite book. That means a lot to me. It’s the forbidden fruit again.

Why do you like your Twosome so much?

It’s a work of the unconscious. Visitors see different things in it. Even I interpret it in different ways at different times. There are several levels of interpretation in it. The deepest, most secret level is about pleasure. And pleasure is erotic. That’s why work is always erotic, even though it involves all those admirable qualities of stoicism and masochism. At the root of it all, there’s a return to what is forbidden—the erotic. I didn’t intend to admit this, but you can see it in the work. If you talk to me about it, I’ll deny it, but if you look you can see that it’s there. A work of art is about pleasure. You do what gives you pleasure, but talking about it scares me. Talking to someone scares me.

Why do you give so much importance to the eyes in your drawing and sculpture?

Because the eyes never lie. If a woman doesn’t look you in the eye, it’s an admission that you are having an effect on her. Her eyes would betray her. That’s how demure women behave. They are the interesting women.

Tender Compulsions

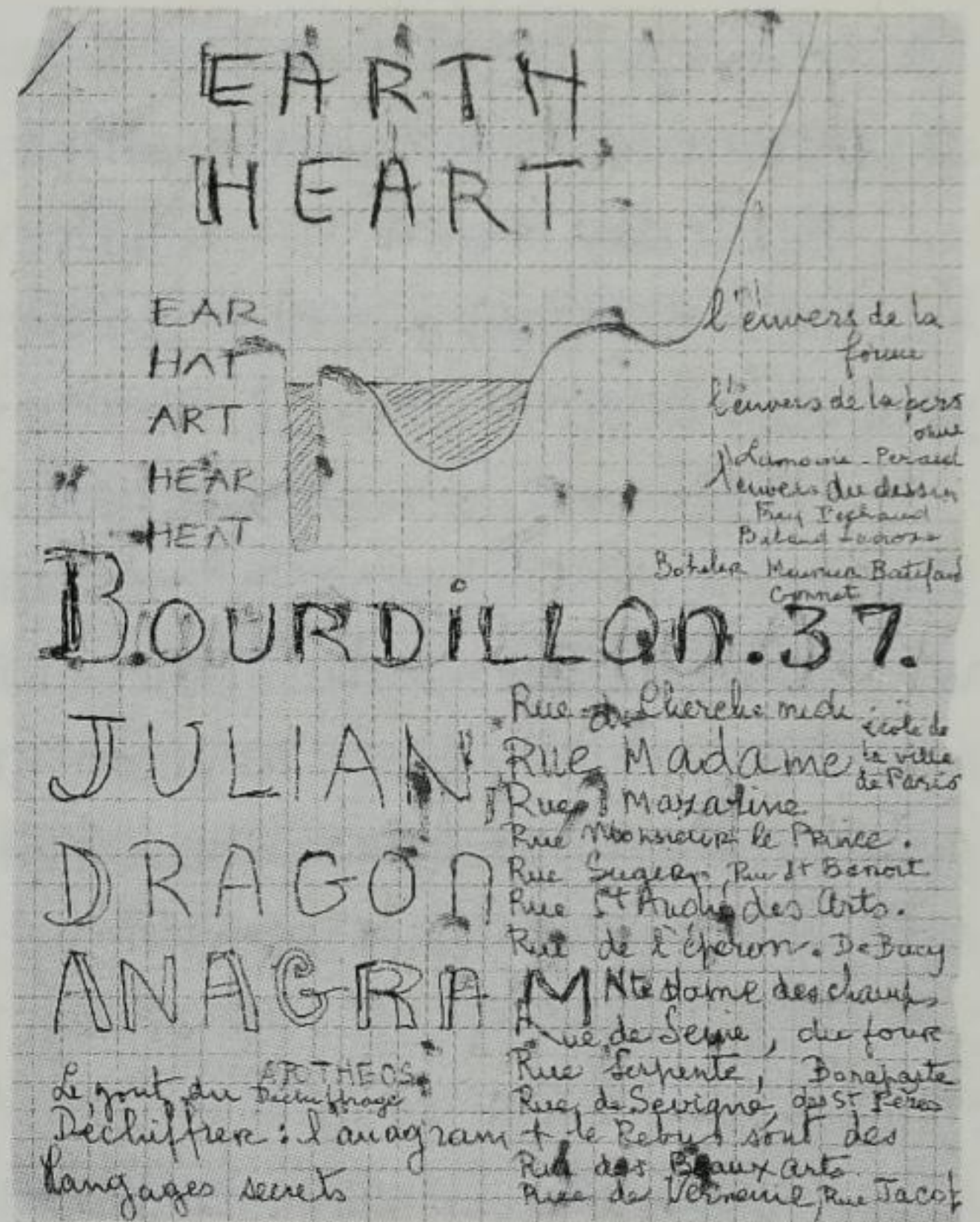
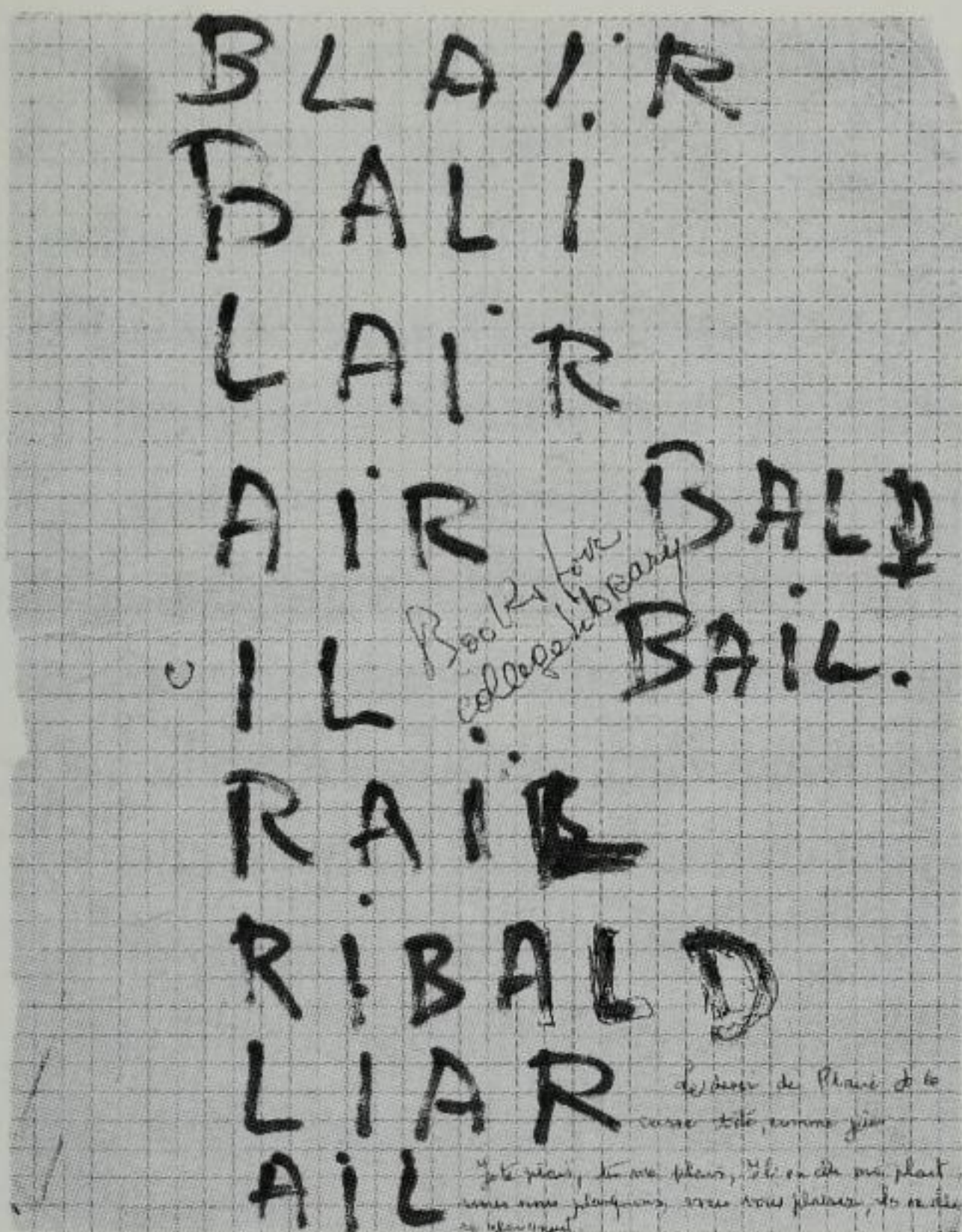
First published in February 1995 in *World Art*, no. 2, p. 108.

I have kept diaries all my life, ever since I was a child, ever since I could look someone in the face—and catch visual emotions and remember my own. The diaries are for my private reflections. If they contain names, they are names of people I love (and perhaps would like to love me—although making someone love you is impossible). There are no glamorous names. I put down stories of the day, and what goes through my mind. Sometimes, without my knowing it, they are funny. When you try to be funny, you never are.

Now, I am not talking about diaries that record the trivial aspects of life: whether you had dinner and with whom, or the art openings you went to and the famous people who were there. I was recently asked to review a book of diaries by a certain writer who also composes music. It seemed to me that his “diaries” were kept for the sole purpose of boasting about the celebrities he met, the grand houses he visited, and all the titled people—real or imagined—that he seduced. I *abhor* this kind of “diary.” It is a record of the non-essentials, a handbook of artificiality: what to wear, where to go, when to leave, all mixed with the suggestion of scandal. These publicized “memoirs” make me think of wilted orchids worn by a silly goose.

My written diaries are never destroyed, but they are not looked at either. If I had enough courage, I might look at them. But I don't want to. I'd be horrified by the things I said. For example, when I meet a person, perhaps I'm not sure the person likes me. There is a desire to please. In French, the phrase “desire to please” has a special flavor, suggesting civility and gentility. My “desire to please”—my analysis of the other person—goes into the diary along with an analysis of myself at that moment. Now you understand why I don't want to look at what I've written. It becomes a closed book.

I keep three kinds of diaries: the written, the spoken (into a tape



Notes, late 1980s.

recorder), and my drawing diary, which is the most important. Having these various diaries means that I like to keep my house in order. They must be up-to-date so that I'm sure life does not pass me by. Most people visit me, and I like to record our conversations or our dialogs.

But the only diary that counts is the drawing diary. I do the drawing during the night when I'm propped up in bed with pillows. There may be a little music, or else I simply listen to the hum of the traffic on the street. I preserve my drawing "diaries" most preciously. They relax me and they help me fall asleep.

I make the drawings on notebook-sized paper that is comfortable to manage in bed. Sometimes the drawings are on plain lined paper, or else I use the gridded paper of a French notebook [see illustrations]. The grid is very peaceful. I enjoy the different qualities of paper. Quietly, I prepare my images. The images are personal: the tree, its branches, a sort of landscape rising and falling and whirling and spinning into spirals. Especially, I recollect the life I led near the water, in both France and New York.

I have always lived near the river. The murmur of the water, the memory of that musical murmur, is calming.

Each day is new, so each drawing—with words written on the back—lets me know how I'm doing. I now have 110 drawing-diary pages, but I'll probably destroy some. I refer to these diaries as "tender compulsions."

Often, my diaries reflect an obsession of mine about being useful. Way, way back—I mean a long time ago—when a baby girl arrived, she was not considered useful, in some circumstances. And I would silently ask: "Do you like me? Do you approve of me even though I am a girl?" For years, these concerns bothered me. Keeping a diary, finally, helped me resolve some of these questions.

Transcendence: Interview with Gary Koepke

First published in 1995 by SoHo Partnership in *SoHo Journal* 1995–1996.

How would you characterize the relationship between art and transcendence?

I consider transcendence a gift. The gift of inspiration, which allows artists to do more than they think they can do. For instance, the artist has the capacity to communicate directly with his or her unconscious. This is a mystery—a beneficial mystery, a very rare, evanescent one. It's a gift from above . . . very close to love. For instance, you meet a man who suddenly appeals to you. Why? He's a good-for-nothing; he doesn't know his right hand from his left . . . and somehow this is the one you want. This is the one who makes you tick. It's not up to you; it's up to something above. You can't do anything about it; you can only witness it. It's like a miracle.

And that moment in artistic creation—that's when beauty happens.

Absolutely. For instance, show a work of art and many people will say, "I see nothing." Then someone is struck by the beauty of it. And that feeling stays there; the mode of experiencing that feeling remains twenty, fifty years later . . . this is the one; this is the one who makes me tick. What has happened is that the artist saw something other people weren't quite prepared to see. The artist made a connection that other people hadn't.

A gift from above.

Yes. But that's not all of it. Basically, I think of transcendence as knowledge of yourself. When Montaigne said, "*Connaîs-toi toi-même*," he meant that the only useful approach to life is to know yourself. What you experience on the outside is actually what you experience on the inside. I have a quotation [for you] that relates to this idea: "I don't like the cutting, I like the cutter. I don't like the doing, I like the doer. I don't like the subject, I like the teacher. I don't like the art, I like the artist."

How is this inner understanding found?

Through waiting. Patience. Silence. They go together. They're very different things, but they go together. You may decide that the waiting is in

vain; that's up to you. But if you exercise patience and silence, the waiting will not be in vain.

You have faith.

Yes. Faith in the Self. The notion of waiting implies faith. Both patience and silence imply faith, because they indicate that you're isolated from others. And what's the use of talking, if you already know that others don't feel what you feel?

Does fear work into this?

Yes, there's fear. It's not real, but there's fear.

You're an insomniac. You stay up at night free associating and drawing, as if you were writing down the thought process as it occurred [see p. 363]. Would you comment on how you do this?

Discipline. I believe in discipline. How can you become a musician if you're not disciplined? Discipline is a matter of understanding yourself as well. And resisting temptation, resisting demons.

I recently spoke with Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian writer, and he mentioned demons as well. Where do you think demons come from?

From fear. Demons come from fear. This brings up the idea of *le Toi et le Moi*. During the night, there is this experience of *le Toi et le Moi*—"the Thou and the I." So let's go back to what I said before—"I don't like the cutting." And consider: *I don't like the subject, I like the teacher*. It's the teacher, not the subject, that determines our choice of a course. But you may insist on fooling yourself; you may not want to admit you're attracted to the teacher. You pretend that you're attracted to the subject. That's when things begin to go bad. You are one with the demons.

And in the middle of the night, in this time of peace and dreams, when you're drawing . . . how would you characterize this mystery that goes on inside the head?

The mystery for me is limited to why I can't transcend sleep. This is a mystery I've never resolved.

You don't sleep at all?

Yes, I sleep. I'm not talking about the absence of sleep. I don't have a

problem with that. I'm talking about a lack of transcendence over sleep.

If sleep were considered a refuge, then you'd have to know how to manipulate around it. It's a total, total mystery to me why I can't transcend it.

Do you ever dream?

Never.

I once visited Robert Monroe, the author of Journeys Out of the Body. He died about a month ago. He would frequently go into an alternate state of mind, and time travel and visit other souls. A lot of people questioned that, but he was certain he was experiencing it. Do you believe that if you experience something, it's true?

It depends on what you want to prove. I know what I want to prove. Basically, I want to prove I'm a reasonable, likable person. And it's my belief that if I could get rid of my demons, everyone would love me. So when I question myself, and I go through the doubts and the fear and the risk that I'm too negative, I feel I know myself better, and that other people will like me. This is my ulterior motive. It all falls back on reason. As with Voltaire, Nietzsche, the eighteenth-century philosophers. The belief in Reason.

And when the end of all this comes . . . what about your own personal death? Beyond the need for respect and love . . .

I don't think about it all that much. It's really a religious matter.

It goes back to faith, personal faith.

And when it comes to religious faith . . . you know, my father was in denial of religion for a very good reason. He resisted religion because he was betraying his wife. And religion wanted him to confess it. So he denied his religion, because confession wasn't reasonable.

Because religion no longer allowed him to be a human being.

Exactly.

One last question: what about feminism? What's your response to it, your role in it? Would you care to comment on that?

I have no comment. I'm a woman, so I don't need to be a feminist.

Interview with Vincent Katz

First published in July 1995 in *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, vol. XXVI, no. 3, pp. 86–90.

I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the difference for you between drawing and doing a print.

Yes, well there is a great difference. It's that printmaking is an ongoing process. That is to say, you have a chance to keep some stages of the drawings. In drawing, you actually lose your original idea, your original rendering, unless you make several drawings in succession. If you keep working on one drawing, you are left with one version. With the print process, you have all the steps.

When you draw, do you tend to subtract from the drawing frequently? Or is it just a process of addition?

Oh, no, no. First, you have to have something to work *on*. First, it is a pouring out of information. And then you subtract, and the latest drawing or the latest print is the sparsest, the purest. So there is a back and forth movement. The first movement is to add and add and then—to ponder, wait, change the sheet. And then you subtract.

*How about the materials of printmaking? How do they affect you? For example, you use a beautiful chine collé in *The Puritan series* (1947/90).*

That is the printing of a finished subject. I am more interested in the making than in the producing. In fact, the two are completely different. Somebody else will produce, but it is the original work that presents a problem for me.

So it's more in the concept?

Yes, right. First the concept, and then the rendering, and then the working again on making the concept intelligible. I want to be understood. I don't want to be mysterious. I want to be understood without any equivocation. Right.

How about the process of working with other people? When you do

your big sculpture, you also have assistants.

Absolutely, absolutely, this is intolerable to me. I do not work with other people—I work by myself.

So when you do a print, you give them the image and say, “Do the print of it.” You might have corrections later on, but you’re not involved in the proofing stages.

In the producing? No, the producing is a different world.

No, I said “the proofing”—when you have to proof a print.

But this is the producing stage.

Right. So you don’t get too involved in that?

I will get involved if I have to, but this is not my main interest.

You leave that to the printer because that’s his expertise?

I do. I do. Right. Even though, for many years, I had a printing press. My early work was done at home, and it was all part of the process.

What type of printing press was that?

This printing press, which has been kept religiously, I entrusted to my printer Harlan & Weaver.

It’s a small handpress?

Yes, a handpress, with a solid roller. I started to work at the Gemor Press, which in the old days was founded by Anaïs Nin. Anaïs Nin has become well known. She owned the press; she was in business with her husband. Right here, on West 17th. All the original copperplates were lost.

So first you worked with Anaïs Nin and then with S. W. Hayter?

Anaïs Nin’s business was just a printing press. I never worked with her: I never even saw her.

But you did prints at that location.

Yes. It was not commonly known that she had a business. But today it is known.

What is the difference for you between your graphic work and your sculpture? What does each allow you to express the other cannot?

The printing and the drawings represent two-dimensional work. To express what I want to say, I need three dimensions. As I’ve told you

before, since some of my latest sculpture is on computer, not only does it become a movable sculpture, it is a sculpture that moves on a computer. In that work, which was first shown at the Museum of Modern Art and will be shown again at the Pompidou in the *Feminin-Masculin* show this fall, the computer adds a great deal, because it adds an element of time and an element of space. The space moves back and forth, back and forth like a clock and *c'est le mouvement perpetuel*. It works night and day.

What is the name of this piece that you're describing?

Twosome (1991). That is to say, it is an exchange between two people.

Is that with an actual video monitor, the sculpture? Or do you just use the computer to help you program it?

No, no, the computer is used to control the movement and the light, both. There is a light that flashes back—the light is on, and then the light is not on—like a traffic light, and there is a sculpture that moves at the same time. So it is quite intricate.

What about your lithograph Overseas Letter (1943–5)?

This was so long ago! This is dated.

But you have talked about la profondeur, and here I see a lot of that — it's a very clear space. I was wondering how interested you are in that type of spatial displacement today in your graphic work. Or is that something you were more interested in at that time?

So this is a deep space, right? Definitely. It is a thing in perspective. Deep space means that there is a perspective.

You've said, "It is always the same subject. I am waiting and listening. It is as if a metronome is ticking." I like that.

Yes! So you see, the metaphor of the metronome is amazing. It's already there. Yes, it is already there, ticking. The metronome is really everything.

It even relates to what you were just saying about the computer—the time element in this new computer piece.

Yes, right. The computer is eternal as long as electric power comes in.

Right. The trouble with all these pieces is that the electric power failed us. It failed us at the Museum of Modern Art because we underestimated

the amount of power needed.

How much of your work would you say is self-portraiture? I was thinking specifically of this drypoint, Morning, from 1944.

All the work of an artist is the realization of a self-portrait. But very often it is unconscious. Very often, you do not realize that you reveal yourself that much. It is only afterwards that you see the work, and you say, "Oh, my goodness! I know what I meant. This is simply very revealing. It is a self-portrait." Now, to reveal oneself is always embarrassing. Some people refuse to reveal themselves.

How does it feel when you have that realization? Is it shocking?

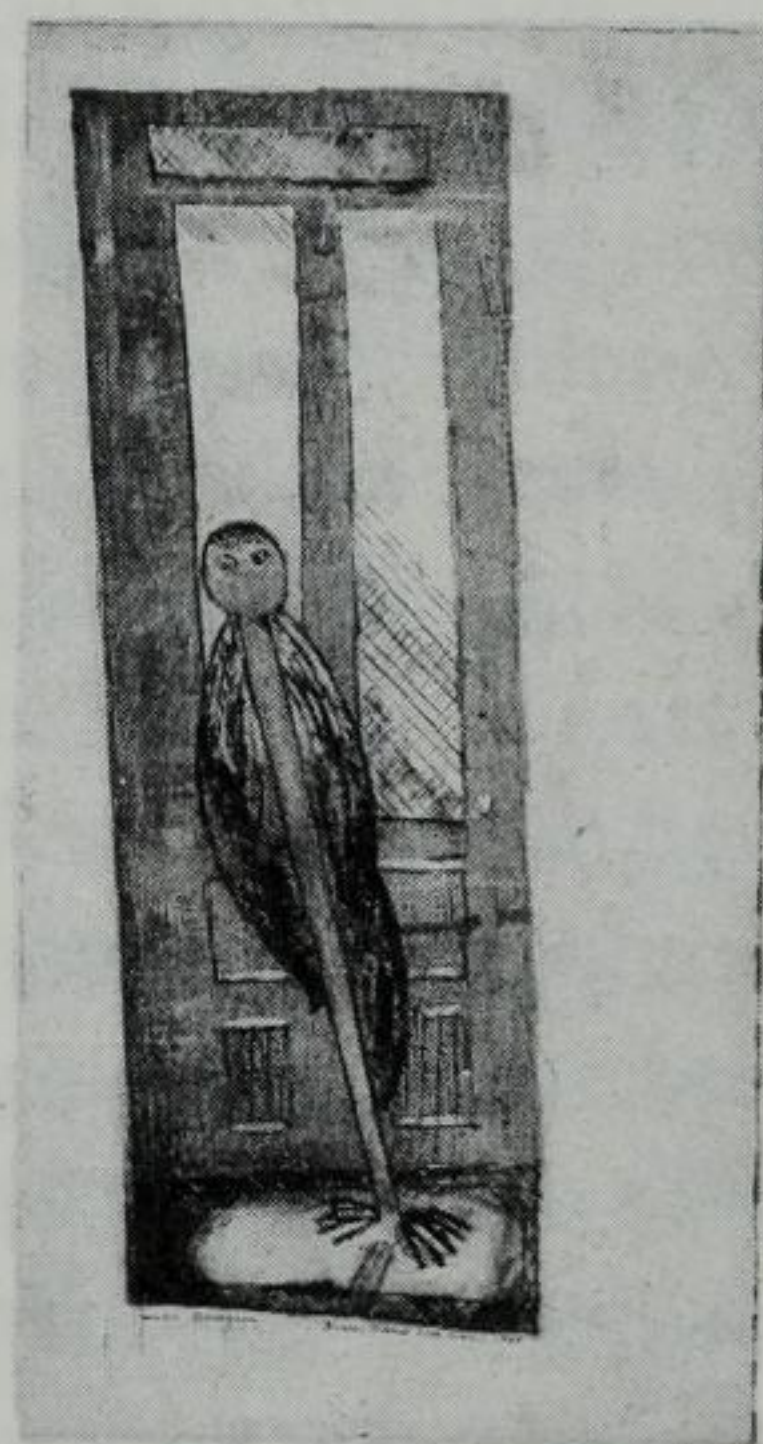
You feel embarrassed! And you *rougir*, that is to say your face becomes completely red, even though *rougir* is a nineteenth-century phenomenon, and you stiffen up, or you will die of embarrassment. Yes, that's true.

That's true. My whole life is organized like a metronome. For instance, every Thursday at eight in the morning, every Thursday, for years and years and years, every Thursday at eight in the morning, Bernard Pivot, who is a French—it is not a chain, it is a program—that program would come at that particular time. So there is a jingle—is that a good word, a jingle?—there is a jingle, and if I'm upstairs on the fourth floor, I hear the jingle and I know that it is Bernard Pivot. You see, my life is completely organized around the time of the day. Every week is the same, every year is the same, and this is a familiarity that I have with time, which helps me considerably.

An early print that interested me a lot, Thompson Street (1945–8), seems like a classic image of somebody in a doorway.

That's a prostitute.

A prostitute, right. That I couldn't tell from



Thompson Street, state IV, 1945–8 (1990 reprinting), soft-ground etching and engraving, sheet size 47.3 × 33 cm.

the image. But it reminded me a lot of literary images that get carried into the world of musicians—a lot of record covers have used this type of imagery. It's the availability of a prostitute, but with a kind of intrigue, a coming outside the house, or being outside.

No, this is taking cover against the rain in a doorway.

It seems like an unusual image in your work.

Well, it is a recurrent image because, in the Paris of the 1940s, the prostitutes were very present in the art world. I think I have said that before and I'm sure it's written here that as a *massière* for the Grande Chaumière, I had to hire the models, and many were also prostitutes. So this is why the subject of the prostitutes comes back all the time, because I saw them, I worked with them.

But this image of Thompson Street was in New York?

Yes, this is in New York, but it is an image and a concern that I had from before. In effect, *par le truchement du terme "modèle."* I knew the prostitutes because in Paris they were models. In America, there was no connection between the two.

Another thing I wanted to ask you about—I know we discussed your writing, and you said you're not a writer—but I enjoy your writing. I'm interested in your combination of text and image, for example, He Disappeared into Complete Silence (1947). Do you write that just off the top of your head?

Yes, right, right. It's very easy for me and I don't pay much attention to it. But my style is not purple.

It's not purple prose?

No. It is a prose which is very, very *saccadé* and very *syncopé*. Right.

What is saccadé? I don't know what that means.

Saccadé is—the French language is *saccadé*. Staccato. *Par exemple*, if you read *He Disappeared* . . . It's difficult for me to read.

Do you want me to try? I think I can read it.

That is fantastic.

I know. "Once a man was waving to his friend from the elevator."

So *saccadé* would mean, “Once—a man—was—waving—to his friend—from the elevator.” Full stop. A long stop. “He was laughing—so much—that—he stuck his head out—and the ceiling—cut it off.” So there is a *saccadé*—staccato—and there is sometimes a *syncopé* effect.

Syncopation. Something that really intrigues me—and I don't even want to go into why—is that you didn't do prints for about twenty-five years. How did it feel when you started again? You had changed a lot as an artist.

No, but the printing process is so elementary. It started with the revelation that carbon paper was a print; there is no mystery to it.

When did you have that revelation?

This was always used, carbon paper. It takes the mystery out of the printing.

But how did you feel when you started making prints again, in the 1970s? Was it a different experience from before?

Well, for one thing, I was able to enter the art field through the prints, because the Brooklyn Museum organized this show of prints every year. So it was an easy beginning, to have your name printed.

You're speaking of the 1940s?

Yes. The Gemor Press published *He Disappeared* in 1947.

And in those days you did a lot of prints, right? You did several editions a year.

I did it for exposure.

And why did you start doing prints again in the 1970s?

Oh, the 1970s, that is different. In the 1970s and later, it is because the market asked me to do it. The galleries said, “Why don't we make a set of prints?” It was a different reason. At that point, I had declared that prints are totally useless. I said that, “totally useless.” It's not true, it's not quite true. It was a pun.

You said that in the period when you were not making prints?

That's right! That's right! I said, “To make prints is a waste of time.”

Because it's so much easier, for me, to draw, it's so much easier to talk, and it's so much easier to record.

Is it easier for you to make a sculpture?

Yes, the sculpture very especially. I told you, the most recent sculptures are a total experience, and print is not a total experience, really. It is a doodle or note-taking.

What do you mean by a total experience?

That I feel gratified after the finishing of a sculpture. The rest is—I'm wasting my time. It is really an obsession, the obsession of the fear of wasting your time. I have that obsession.

I can see that maybe you got into printmaking because someone suggested it, but surely when you started doing series like Anatomy (1990), with ten drypoints, an etching, and even a multiple, you must have felt that that was a full experience.

Yes, right, right.

It led you to different areas.

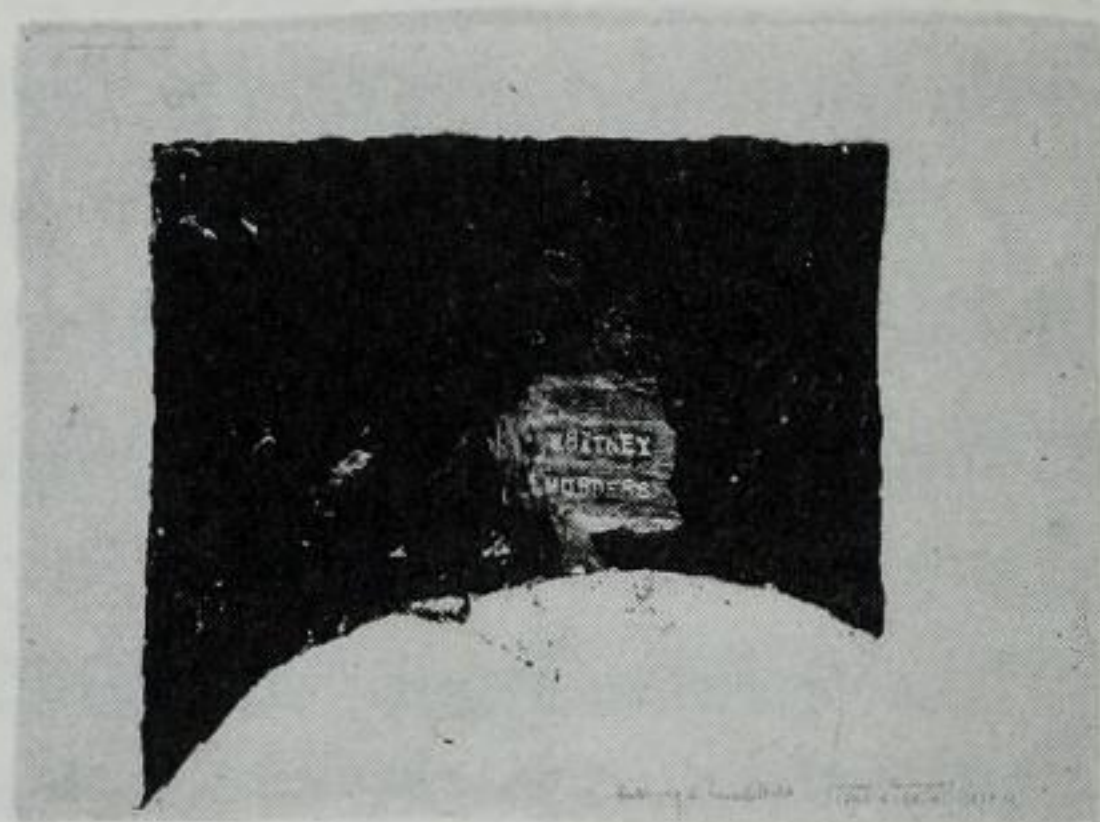
Yes, right.

And I always like your political prints like Whitney Murders, that stencil and rubbing from 1978. What was it about?

Yes, that was a matter of exposure. That is to say, that the Whitney had a competition. Yes, the impetus and the violence came from the fact that I was put in a situation of rivalry with a lot of my colleagues. Right. A certain number of people would be taken, and either you were in or you were out. Well, this was a fantastic experience. For me, it's a devastating experience, to be put in competition with others.

What do you think of the Whitney Biennial process?

It depends who selects. And today it is totally political. It's very, very subtly political. It is funny that the selection of this year's Whitney Biennial was subject to so much inquiry. It's an important thing, you see, to be shown. A lot of artists will do anything for exposure.



Whitney Murders (I), fourth version, 1978, lead rubbing, sheet size 32.1 × 42.8 cm. Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Especially a younger artist, I guess.

But the older, too, because the older is connected with the market. I haven't read it yet, but *Artforum* has conducted a great *enquête*. Inquiries, dingy and poor as they are, are always cold. *Les grandes enquêtes* are always glorified by the market. But of course, the *enquête* depends on whom you contact, and I don't think that a single person—I have to go back and see—understood the real machination, since there is a great deal of machination, behind the Whitney show this year. But then we are talking about art politics, now, and we are not talking about prints.

Yeah, but it related to Whitney Murders.

Ah, "Whitney Murders" meant that I resented so much the whole thing, because I was not in. You see? That I was ready to murder everybody, right?

But that's great, that you put that into an artwork.

That shows what the artwork does for me. To tell you the truth, I don't remember who was the culprit.

You got it out of you, and now it doesn't matter who it was anymore.

That's right, people laugh at this. However, I still stick with it.

You use some different materials, when you do your prints. For example, maybe this was just a one-shot thing, but that piece you did, The Age of Condom Come (1989), that latex—I like that piece a lot. And you did some where you punched holes in the plate, if I'm not mistaken. I was wondering if you have any future ideas for using unusual materials to make multiples like that.

The wonderful word there is the word "multiples." But you can make multiples in any kind of material. For instance, there was a material that I have used because I have a feeling for the material, which is an embossed metal, soft metal, that at one point covered ceilings. It still covers the ceiling of the basement here, in this house. It is produced in thousands of yards, and you hang it. You nail it on the ceiling.

The ceilings are tin, right, usually?

Embossed tin. If you want the technical word, I have to find it.

Do you think in the future you might want to use different materials, like latex or anything like that?

No, I don't think so, because in a strange way the embossing is as old as the world. It is just the applying of pressure on the soft material. Well, you use that in cookie-making, right? No, now I'm inclined to use modern modes of expression. The most modern interests me, because what I do today—for instance, the computer—could not have been done twenty-five years ago.

Your drypoint Dismemberment Anatomy (1990) struck me as a deconstruction of the print we were looking at earlier called Morning.

There's a similarity between these two, but whereas the early one was very lyric and flowing, and everything was together and where it was supposed to be, in the one you call Dismemberment, you have this dislocation. I was wondering if you were thinking back to that earlier image. Would you say you could have made Dismemberment earlier in your life, in 1944?

No, no, no. Absolutely not. No, no, no.

Why not?

I was not sophisticated enough then. You know, artists improve. I mean, we are supposed to be better today than we were twenty years ago.

Otherwise, what's the use of working?

But that's what I'm interested in asking you, what would you say is the difference between these two prints, looking at them today?

Well, the difference is in the context, the difference is not in the form. The form is very similar, but it means different things. I'm able to express here something that I was not able to express there. That has to do with the motivation. If we did not hope to be better today than we were yesterday, why in the name of heaven should we work? This is where the impetus comes.

And do you always feel the impetus to do something different than you've done in the past?

No, not different! Better!

The same thing, but better.

Yes, the same subject, I love my subject. I always go back to the subject. But it has to be better! This is the impetus—I am better today than I was yesterday. Otherwise I wouldn't work, I wouldn't even get up.

Well, I know we've discussed that before in terms of getting better. For example, with The Puritan, you can't simply say, "Oh, I was just trying to do the same thing," because you have so many different images, so I was wondering what is the power of the series for you, the collection of images? Why do you have Anatomy and The Puritan?

Yes, *The Puritan*, first of all, was never done before. The idea of the progression—you start by the base, of course—all sculptors start a work by the floor. Obviously. This is a *donné*. So you start at the bottom, and as you go, for instance, if this is time—here is today, up here is two days from now, up here is four days from now, so it is a coordinate. You have two coordinates. I don't know if I succeeded—it means I will have to go back to it—but what I wanted to do is, through perspective, I would have what is called a puritan, through perspective you have the eye level, right? And suppose if you look at this library, the shelves here, which is a perfect example. At this eye level, you see the underneath of the third element, but if you look at it in a different way, you can see at the eye level, the top is this area, the bottom of the number two or the top of number three. So it is a very visual experience. Now, as I say, as you go up the time coordinate, as the years go by, you become bigger—this is the motivation of the whole thing. But on top of that, there is the visual experience of the perspective and what can be done with the perspective.

What do you mean by "you become bigger"? You become wiser?

No, you become better. And you become better in every way, morally, intellectually, physically—no, not physically. You become better, which is really the Chinese philosophy—the wisdom of the elders.

Now The Puritan has a text as well, and that is an older text, from 1947. So do you still write? I mean, I know you write, but you do write with an intent to publish or put into a project like this?

Today I write as a release. But in a strange way, today the situation has changed completely, because what I write can be published. I don't even care so much, but there is a market for—there is a demand, right. So, the law of “offer” and demand?

Supply and demand.

Supply and demand, right. Supply and demand. I like that term. So today, for me, the law of supply and demand has changed, you see? Before there was no demand whatsoever, and today there is too much demand! Right? So you have to adjust for that, and this is why I am not in Prague, which opens tomorrow; I am not in Paris, for the Pompidou today; and I have no time to travel like this, because the demand has become such that I don't care about it.

Is the Pompidou a retrospective?

There are several things. There was the publication of the Flammarion book—a book on drawings by Marie-Laure Bernadac—and the drawings at the Pompidou, and the big show there this fall, which will be called *Feminin-Masculin*. And my prints at the Bibliothèque Nationale and my show at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris. So all these shows are coming—this year is the year of the French—and there is the commission for the new Bibliothèque, so all this is fine, but obviously I cannot go. And Prague at the same time!

How do you feel knowing that these shows are going on in these different countries?

Fine, fine! But it doesn't touch the motivation. It doesn't touch my work.

Ode à ma mère

Text from a suite of nine etchings first published in 1995 by Editions du Solstice, Paris.
See following note for full English translation.

The friend (*l'araignée-pourquoi l'araignée?*)
parce que my best friend was my mother and she
was deliberate, clever, patient, soothing, reasonable,
dainty, subtle, indispensable, neat, and useful as an
araignée. She could also defend herself, and me, by
refusing to answer “stupid” inquisitive embarrassing
personal questions.

Je ne me fatiguerai jamais de la représenter.
I want to: eat, sleep, argue, hurt, destroy ...
— Why do you?
— My reasons belong exclusively to me.
Le traitement de la Peur.

*Pour mon goût, l'araignée est un petit peu trop
fastidieuse. Elle a ce côté français, de tripoteuse,
raisonneuse, tricoteuse (Xavier Tricot), de remail-
lage de plus en plus précis et ténu, elle n'en finit
jamais de couper les cheveux en quatre. Cette
analyse interminable est fatigante et visuellement
peut être réductrice. J'ai envie de me sauver dans
la rue et de respirer à pleins poumons. On n'en a
pas fini avec les analyses, questions à l'intérieur
des questions—mincing away.*

*Pour une fois cette araignée admet qu'elle est
fatiguée. Elle s'appuie sur le mur (voir la prostituée
qui épie le client, dans l'ombre de la porte, contre la
porte des années).*

To analyze and mince away is one thing but to make a decision is something else (a choice, a judgment of value.)

Caught in a web of fear.

La toile d'araignée.

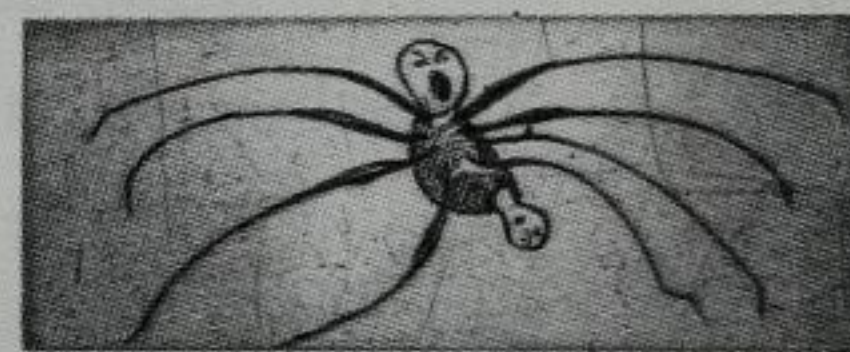
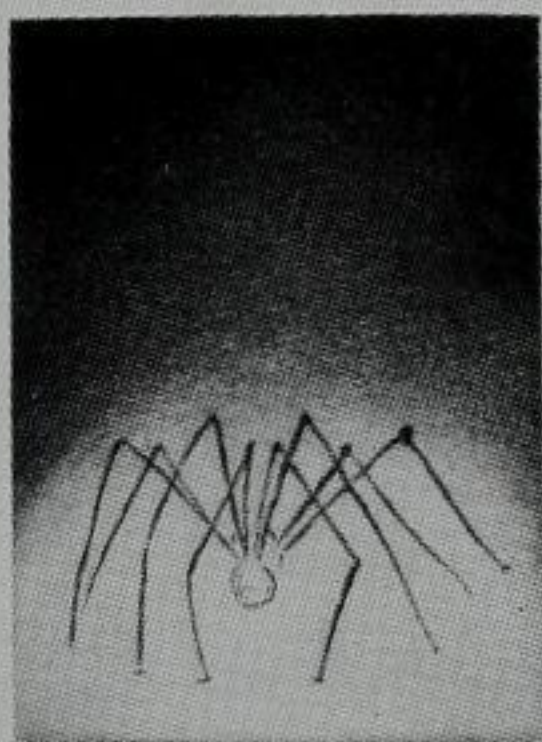
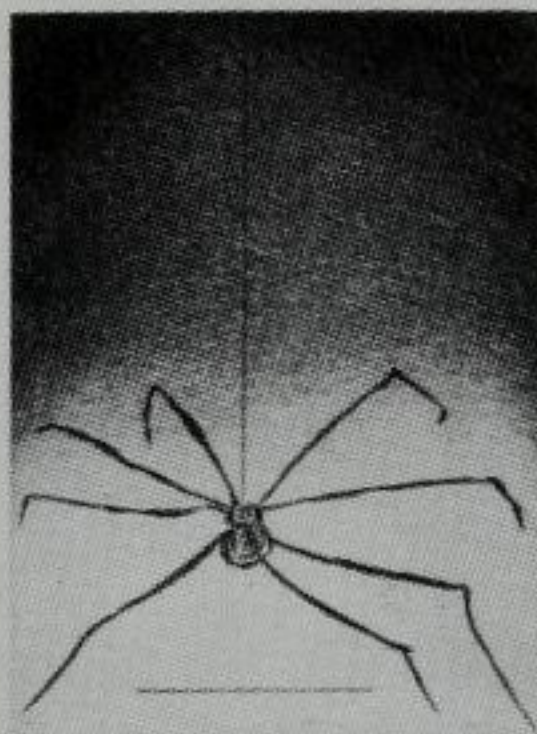
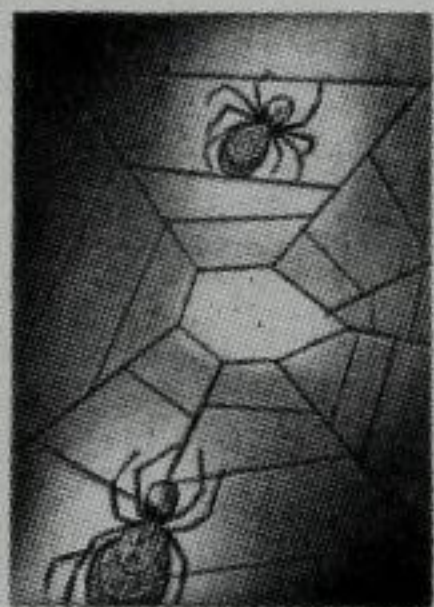
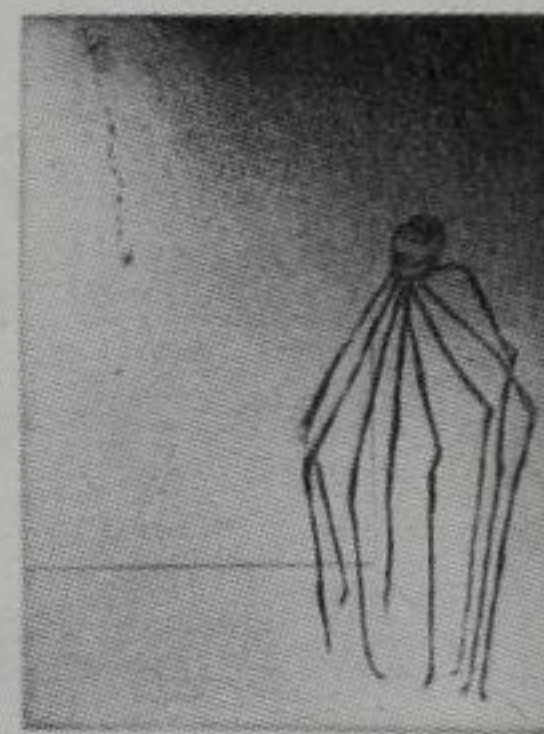
The deprived woman.

Je n'ai aucun espoir, aucune force, aucun pouvoir, aucun intérêt, rien, je n'ai rien, je ne possède rien, pas de temps, pas de pensées, pas d'espoirs, pas d'émotions, pas de désir, pas de besoins, pas d'opinions, pas de plan de futur, pas de revendications, claims, je n'ai, je ne possède rien.

Rien à dire, rien à quoi m'exciter, rien à expliquer, rien à prouver, rien à demander, rien à défendre, rien à vendre, rien à montrer, rien à cacher, rien à épier, rien à envisager, rien à conserver, rien à garder, rien à laisser aller, rien à anticiper, rien à perdre et rien à gagner. Rien à être cachottière, rien à jouer la mystérieuse, la séductrice, la sainte Nitouche, la petite secrète.

Je n'ai rien à critiquer, à juger, à me mêler, rien à abandonner ou désespérer, rien à ramasser, collectionner, rien à me souvenir, rien à vouloir, rien à appréhender, anticiper, redouter, rien à espérer ainsi: rien à regretter, ainsi: rien à craindre.

La peur n'existe pas.



Ode à ma mère, 1995, suite of nine drypoint etchings with text in a box, sheet size 30.4 × 30.4 cm.

*Le blâme, la faute.
Blâmer qui? Personne.
Ni vous, ni lui, ni elle, ni eux. Simplement personne.
Personne, sinon toi.
Sinon toi-même.*

*En conséquence, donc,
je donne pour reprendre.
Je promets beaucoup
pour changer d'avis.
Je laisse à entendre,
je laisse à comprendre
pour mieux décevoir.*

*C'est la faute à papa.
C'est la faute à Nanny.
C'est la faute à Pontchartrain,
un coup de pied dans les reins à l'âne et à son foin.
Je m'en lave les mains
jusqu'à demain matin pot de grain.
C'est la faute à Pyrame et ses cent kilogrammes,
au père Lhangard (vieux lard). C'est la faute aux
têtards dans la mare à Clamart.
Il chahute il culbute il trébuche, zut. Fini on rit.
Get a kick out of it.
Je me suis endormie la tête sur la table
La tête en avant. Maman, qui ment?*

*Petite maman, dis-moi qui ment
Je me lasse du passe-passe. Qui ment?
Ne te laisse pas glisser sur l'échelle glissante
des agrès, les anneaux, la balançoire et*

*le pas de géant. Qui ment?
On sèche et pète au trapèze:
qui baille, travaille, qui dort oublie, qui rit oublie.*

*Le vocabulaire en l'air, l'odeur de la noix
de coco, Rico, Rico s'ennuie. Rosamonde:
autour du monde elle s'endort.*

*Voyages, souris sage
sur la planche à repasser souris blanche.
Défricher la cour, ou le jardin
déchiffrer un message, une personne.*

*Fanfaron: le désinvolte m'exaspère, il est faux.
La tante Madeleine qui coupe la laine, qui coupe
la robe qui coupe le cou.
Elle enrobe la robe dans une toile à voile, elle en-
robe le poisson dans la feuille de glaïeul, le dérobe,
le dévore. Poisson joli dans sa feuille de glaïeul,
biroeil a l'oeil bleu fourre dans le vase fêlé, brûle
cache dans le vase enfoncé dans la vase.
Crocheteux, boiteux, injurieux, furieux, lis-la donc
Louison la voix de la raison. Pâmoison.
La Ritournelle Paternelle. Poison, unisson, punition,
pas de pardon et pas de rédemption.
putaine, punaise, putain, putaine, punaise,
foutaise, obscène.
Rosemonde femme du monde, entends-moi!
Remède archimède qui m'aide. La mystérieuse,
la gueuse, oiseuse, fâcheuse et creuse farceuse.*

*La Vire craintive et vive.
Colin Maillard (blindman buff) n'aie pas peur des*

*gens qui ont besoin de toi. Gaelle de Charenton
n'abandonne pas tes frères dans le besoin.
Tout ce qu'ils veulent de toi est que tu sois toi-
même sans honte et sans fausse honte.*

*Poltronne, madame, permets-leur d'avoir confiance
en toi. C'est tout, ne les abandonne pas quand tu
abdiques toi-même. Idiote, capote, sanglote.
Echos du matin, retour de la lumière, qu'est-ce
qu'ils foutent ces tourtes? Ils se déchirent un
oiseau encore dans son oeuf tombé du nid, aplati,
englué, endormi, péri.*

*Je m'excuse (oiseau bouffé) je ne savais où aller.
Pardonne-moi, maman, qui ment, qui ment, je
mens, je croyais savoir, je n'étais pas au courant
maman.
Attends-moi, ne cours pas, j'arrive.
J'ai besoin de toi.*

[*Ode à ma mère* with French passages translated into English by Caroline Beamish and David Britt. Words shown here in italic are in English in the original:]

Ode to My Mother

The friend (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. She could also defend herself, and me, by refusing to answer “stupid,” inquisitive, embarrassing, personal questions.

I shall never tire of representing her.
I want to: eat, sleep, argue, hurt, destroy ...
Why do you?
My reasons belong exclusively to me.
The treatment of Fear.

To my taste, the spider is a little bit too fastidious. There is a very French, fiddly, overly rational, “tricoteuse” side to her (Xavier Tricot), with her ever more precise and delicate invisible mending; she never tires of splitting hairs. This endless analysis is exhausting, and visually it can be reductive. It makes me want to rush out onto the street and fill my lungs with air. Analyses without end, questions within questions—*mincing away*.

For once, this spider admits to being tired. She leans against the wall (see the prostitute who eyes her client from the shadow of the doorway, against the door of the years).

To analyze and mince away is one thing but to make a decision is something else (a choice, a judgment of value).

Caught in a web of fear.

The spider's web.

The deprived woman.

I have no hope, no strength, no power, no interest, nothing, I have nothing, I possess nothing, no time, no thoughts, no hopes, no feelings, no desire, no needs, no opinions, no plans for the future, no *claims*, I have, I possess nothing.

Nothing to say, nothing to get excited about, nothing to explain, nothing to prove, nothing to ask for, nothing to defend, nothing to sell, nothing to show, nothing to hide, nothing to look out for, nothing to conserve, nothing to keep, nothing to let go, nothing to anticipate, nothing to lose, and nothing to gain. Nothing to be secretive about, nothing to get all mysterious about, to be the seductress, the demure, the secretive little thing.

I have nothing to criticize, nothing to judge, interfere, nothing to abandon or despair of, nothing to pick up, collect, nothing to remember, nothing to wish for, nothing to apprehend, anticipate, dread, nothing to hope for. Therefore nothing to regret, therefore nothing to fear.

Fear does not exist.

Blame, fault.

Blame who? No one.

Neither you, nor him, nor her, nor them. Simply no one.

No one but you.

But yourself.

Consequently,
I give and then I take back.
I make promises
And then I change my mind.
I drop hints,
I imply things,
The better to deceive.

It is Papa's fault.
It is Nanny's fault.
It is Pontchartrain's fault, a good kick in the pants
The donkey's fault, and his hay.
I wash my hands of it
Till tomorrow morning
It's the fault of Pyrame and his hundred kilograms,
Of old man Lhangard (tub of lard). It's the fault of
The tadpoles in the pond at Clamart.
He kicks up a ruckus his heels falls flat. Whoops. Finished, everyone laughs.
Get a kick out of it.
I fell asleep with my head on the table
Head first. Maman, who's lying?

Little Maman, tell me who's lying
I'm getting tired of conjuring tricks. Who's lying?
Don't slip on the sliding scale
Of the apparatus, the rings, the swing, and
This giant stride. Who's lying?
You pine and fart on the trapeze:
Who yawns, works. Who sleeps, forgets. Who laughs, forgets.

Airy vocabulary, smell of coconut
Coco doodle-doo, Dude's bored. Rosemonde:
Around the world she falls asleep

Voyages, meek mouse
On the ironing board white mouse.
Clear the yard, or the garden,
Decipher a message, or a person.

Braggart, he's so casual he exasperates me, he's false.
Aunt Madeleine who cuts the wool, who cuts the dress, who cuts the throat. She coats the dress in veiling, she wraps the fish in a gladiolus leaf, steals it, devours it. Fish, pretty in its gladiolus leaf, blue-eyed \biroeil stuff into the cracked vase, burn hide in the vase sunk in the mud.
Picklock, cripple, abusive, furious, will you read her,
Louison, the voice of reason. Swoon.
The Paternal Ritornello. Poison, unison, castigation, no pardon, no redemption.
Whore, louse, whore, louse,
Fuck-all, obscene.
Rosemonde, woman of the world, hear me!
Remedy, Archimedy, who helps me. The mysterious,
Beggarly, lazy, annoying, hollow jokeress.

The traverse, afraid and alive.
Colin Maillard (*blind man's buff*) don't be scared of people who need you. Gaelle de Charenton, don't leave your brothers in the lurch.
All they want from you is to be yourself without shame and without false shame.

Coward, madame, allow them to trust you. That's all, don't abandon them when you abdicate yourself. Idiot, hood, sob.
Morning echos, return of daylight, what are they up to, those dumb broads? They are tearing apart a bird still in the egg that has fallen out of the nest, flattened, trapped, asleep, perished.

I am sorry (eaten bird) I didn't know where to go.
Forgive me, Maman, who lies, who lies, I lie, I thought I knew, I was out of it Maman.
Wait for me, don't run, I'm coming.
I need you.

elle est petiotte c'est une fille petiotte
poulotte, elle rotte et crotte, et
grignotte des biscottes, ^{en} matelotte,

Elle est la mascotte des
parlottes et gargottes des
myopes de Treppes. ^{la motte}
avec sa toque capotte de ^{piquet}
culotte et bottes elle ^{cheviotte}
siflotte et gigotte
qd on la friotte, alors

elle chuchotte, quelle veit vote
quecote pelotte.

queson pottle la pelotte, la Rigolotte.
Ca la Ravigotte, tripot tripette.
garçon, garenne.

C'est une matelote de l'otte en cocotte
onne, otte, ^{son} est des suffixes diminutifs, avec redoublant
depricatifs.

les pigeons pipotent, faquottent
leers bébes et trucotte leurs culotte.
la lumiere est folotte sous la hotte
syncope photte de la cheminée, teapot

Otte

Conceived for and first published in 1995 in the catalog for the group exhibition *Feminin-Masculin: le sexe de l'art* at the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, (17 October 1995 to 8 January 1996). This "poem" is part of a selection made by the artist, Marie-Laure Bernadac, and Bernard Marcadé from a great number of notes (*brouillons*) on French words invented by attaching the suffix "otte." When added to a noun, adjective, or verb, "otte" contributes a pejorative and dismissive tone to a word's original meaning. Much is lost in the translation of this word-play, so only the original French text is provided.

**IL DÉCOUVRE
UNVACCIN
ELLE DÉGOTTE
UN CANAPÉ À L'HÔTEL DES VENTES**

IL EST UN DISEUR, ELLE CALEMBOURGEOTTE

IL PARLE, ELLE PARLOTTE

IL JOUE À LA BOURSE, ELLE BOURSICOTTE

IL CUISINE, MAIS ELLE POPOTTE

IL TRANSPORTE, ELLE FOURGOTTE

ILSIFFLE, MAIS ELLE SIFFLOTTE

IL TOUCHE, ELLE TOUCHOTTE

IL TOUSSE, ELLE TOUSSOTTE

IL BOUQUINE, ELLE BOUQUINOTTE

IL VIT, ELLE VIVOTTE

POUR SON POTE ELLE EST IDIOTE
AVEC SON POTE, ELLE DANSOTTE

JE SUIS UN BEAU VIELLARD, MAIS TU ES VIELLOTTE

*LA LITTOTE A ÉTÉ LA BOUEE DE SAUVETAGE DE LISOTTE
LOUISE EST UNE MOMOTTE (ELLE FAIT DES MOTS)
CRÉOSOTTE (LOUISE JOUE SUR LES MOTS, ELLE CREE, DONC ELLE EST
UNE CRÉOSOTTE)*

CHARLOTTE À LA CRÈME/CHARLOTTE À LA CROTTE
NOTES SUR CHARLOTTE.

QUI EST CHARLOTTE? UNE IDIOTE

IL ESCAMOTE LES CROTTES CONTRE LES CAROTTES
DES BÉCOTTES

IDIOTE SANS DOT, ELLE SE FAGOTE, SE CHAPOTTE
ET SE CULOTTE COMME UNE COCOTTE

DANS SA COCOTTE, ELLE FRICOTTE, ELLE POPOTTE
DES COMPOTES

LES CLOPORTES DE LA POIVROTE TROTTENT ET ROTENT

CHARLOTTE, L'IDIOTE, VIVOTE ET SOUFFROTTE,
ELLE SE FAGOTE ET SE CHAPOTTE
COMME UNE BERLINGOTTE,
ELLE BOURSICOTE DES ÉCHALOTTES
DANS SA GNOGNOTTE
ELLE NE MANGE PAS, ELLE CHIPOTTE

LA FEMME DE L'AMIGO EST UNE AMIGOTTE
LA FEMME DE L'AMIGO EST UNE AMIGOTTE

LA CRAPOTTE EST LA FEMME DU CRAPAUD
LA CHAMOTTE EST LA FEMME DU CHAMEAU

Looks and Words

Previously unpublished transcript of an extract from the documentary *Chère Louise*, directed by Brigitte Cornand for Canal+, 1995. Translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt.

Nowadays it's a matter of looks and words, as you observe. Looks are far more important between us than words. Looks cannot deceive. You can fib all day with words, and no one will know.

It's a dialog [referring to the text "*Otte*," see previous pages]. People talk about a man and a woman. You know what men are—for instance, people talk about a man who discovers a vaccine, a great man, huh? And her? She picks up a little sofa at the auctioneers. That's the juxtaposition. If you're not convinced, I can give you other examples. For example, when he talks, the world stands still. And as for her? She chatters. When it's lunchtime, he cooks some fantastic meal. She putters in the kitchen.

When he feels good, he whistles, he has a fine whistle, he whistles like a blackbird. She just whistles under her breath. When he is feeling good he touches you, doesn't he? She fumbles, to no effect.

That's what the piece is saying. It's to prove the macho in men, to prove how big he is when he is alive, it's a man who is alive, life is all. As for her, she exists, under a table somewhere. That's what this is about.

* * *

Jerry [Gorovoy] will tell you that I have lived in seven houses, and the seven houses were always in town. I have always lived in town. But I have always lived in a town with a river. At Aubusson there was the Creuze, then the Seine, the Hudson, the Bièvre—especially the Bièvre. All these rivers worked out differently. The one that worked out best of all was the little Creuze. The Creuze flowed along between rocky cliffs and never flooded anyone out, nor did it ever dry up. When we lived at Antony, the Bièvre was very unpredictable in its behavior. Sometimes the waters rose, sometimes they fell—they still do the same today. My brother's job was to

go down to the sluice gate—there was a sluice at one corner of the house, of the garden—and when he raised the sluice gate that made him important. He was the one who opened and closed the sluice gate. As a result we were never flooded out, because we were protected by the sluice. You have to protect yourself as best you can, obviously.

There is another way of protecting yourself from floods, by A + B, by logic, step by step. You have a guiding thread that helps you to get out of it . . .

It was you who put it there.

Yes. It's a concept that helps you sort things out; not only your ideas, but your emotions as well. Instead of being frightened, you can say to yourself: there's no reason to be frightened. All you need to do is to think about the situation. As a result I try and behave like a rational person. You understand? I try to ignore my fear, to overcome my fear by being very rational. These drawings are very rational. They are guiding threads. Like Tom Thumb when he was lost in the forest. His guiding thread a trail of little pebbles.

It started with the fear of water. You remember Ophelia, in Shakespeare, she was washed downstream by the current. Take this theme, which is a very sad one. Ophelia might have been rescued from the water, like the other one, but by whom? Classically feminist! Not feminism again! She's rescued by a handsome young man. Then the image changes into Ophelia and her reflection in the water. There are two characters. There is Ophelia herself, and there is the reflected character, who is a shadow, a kind of shadow. So there's a transformation. It's a confusion of genres. You can confuse genres, because artists have poetic license. And women, who are not altogether logical, possess a feminine logic. I mean logic that is not logical. It's a personal logic. So why not, in this logic that women claim to possess, Ophelia's reflection has turned into a young man. The young man will be tied to Ophelia, although she would like to escape. They are going to tie themselves together. So the tying up starts right here; then, when Ophelia returns to consciousness, she's going to cling on to her young man; she's not a fool. That's how it ends. There they

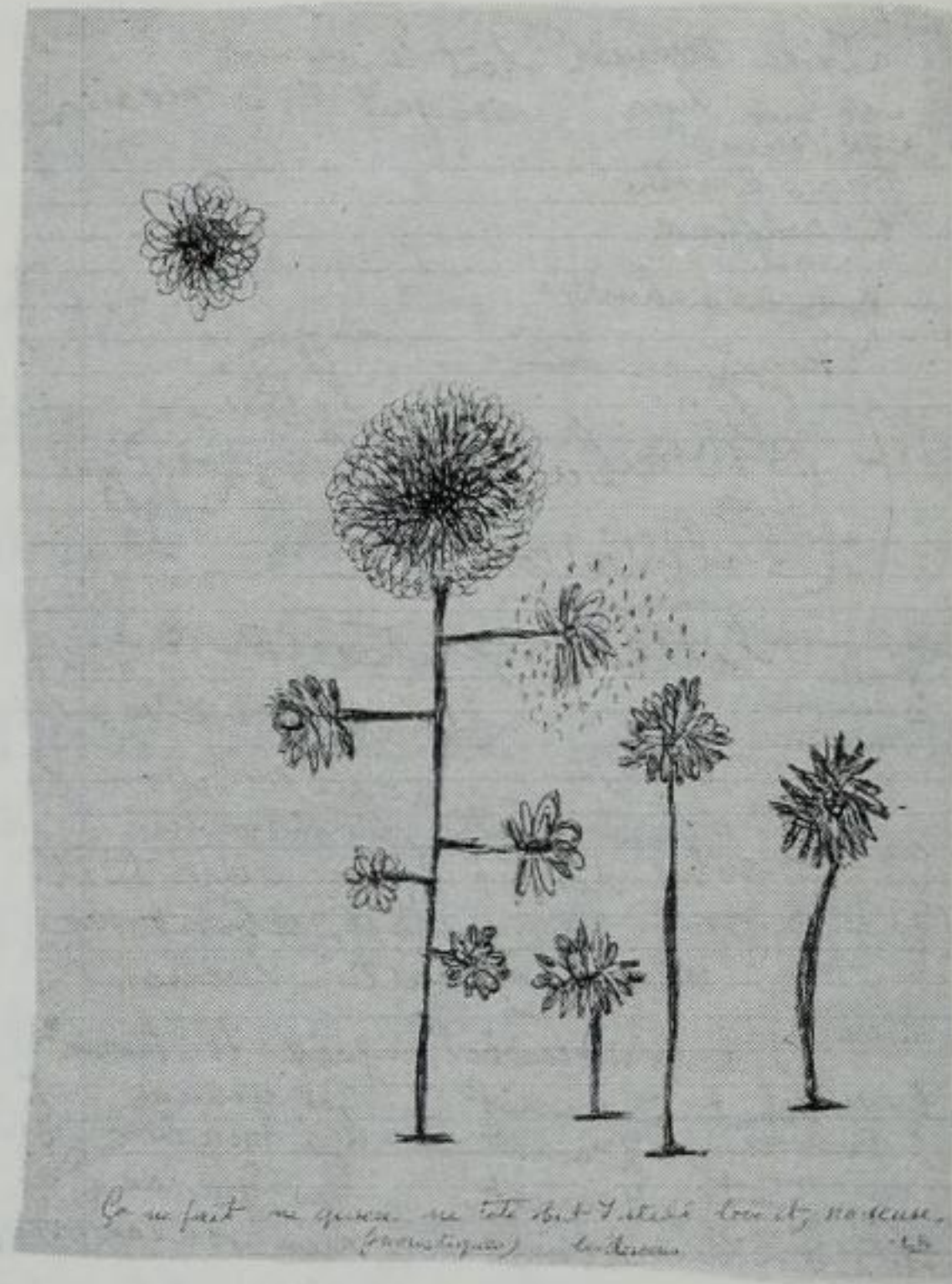
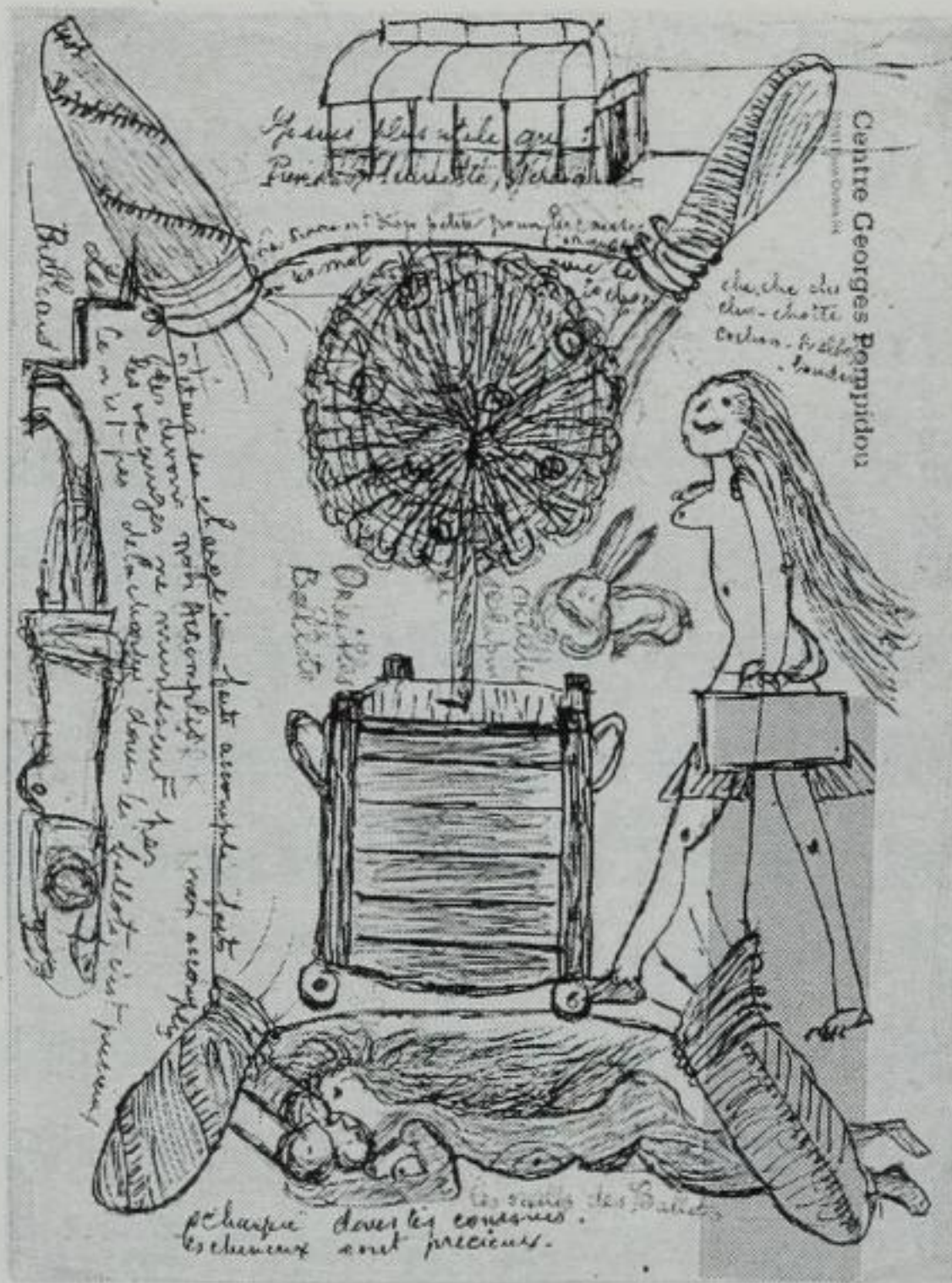
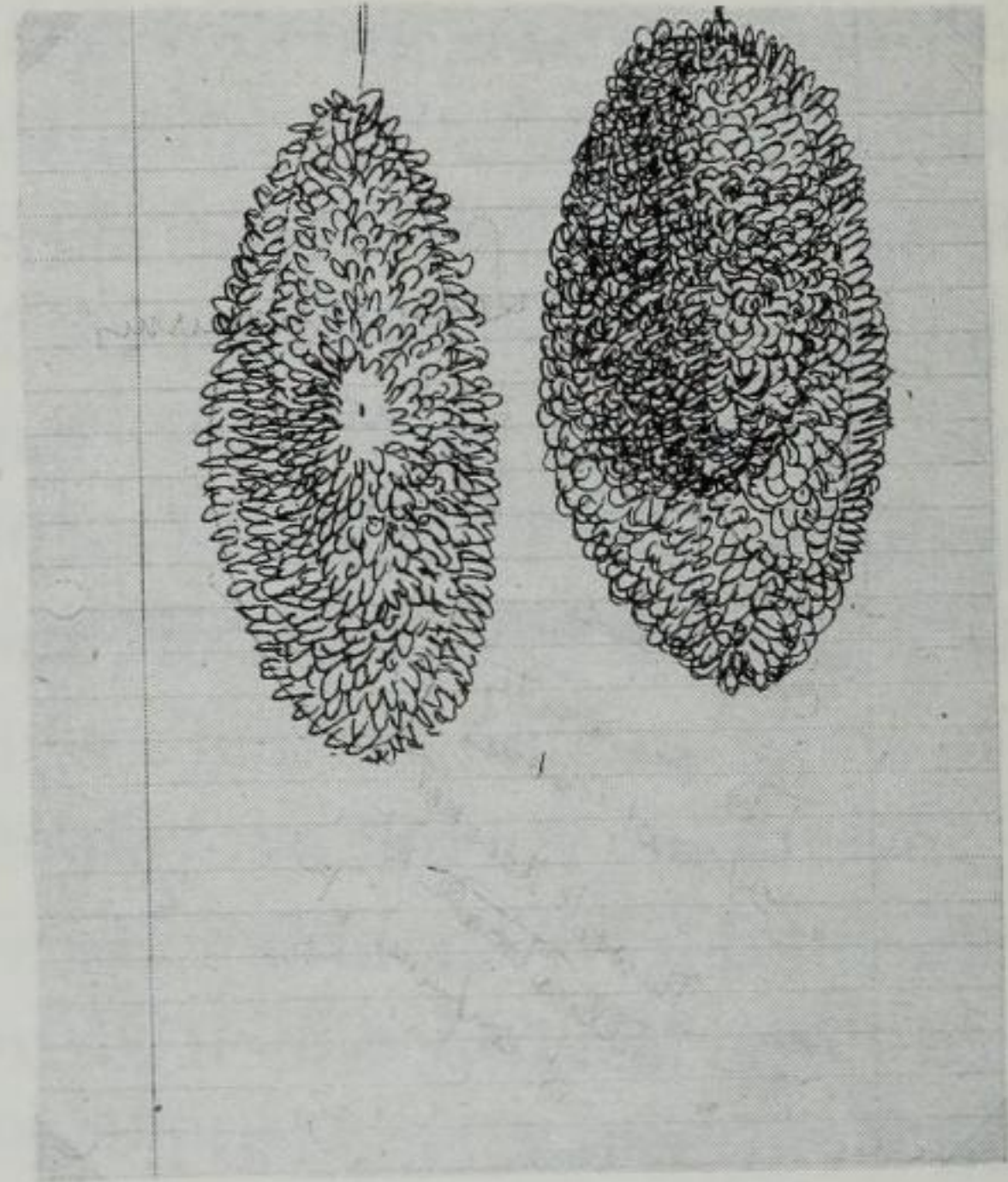
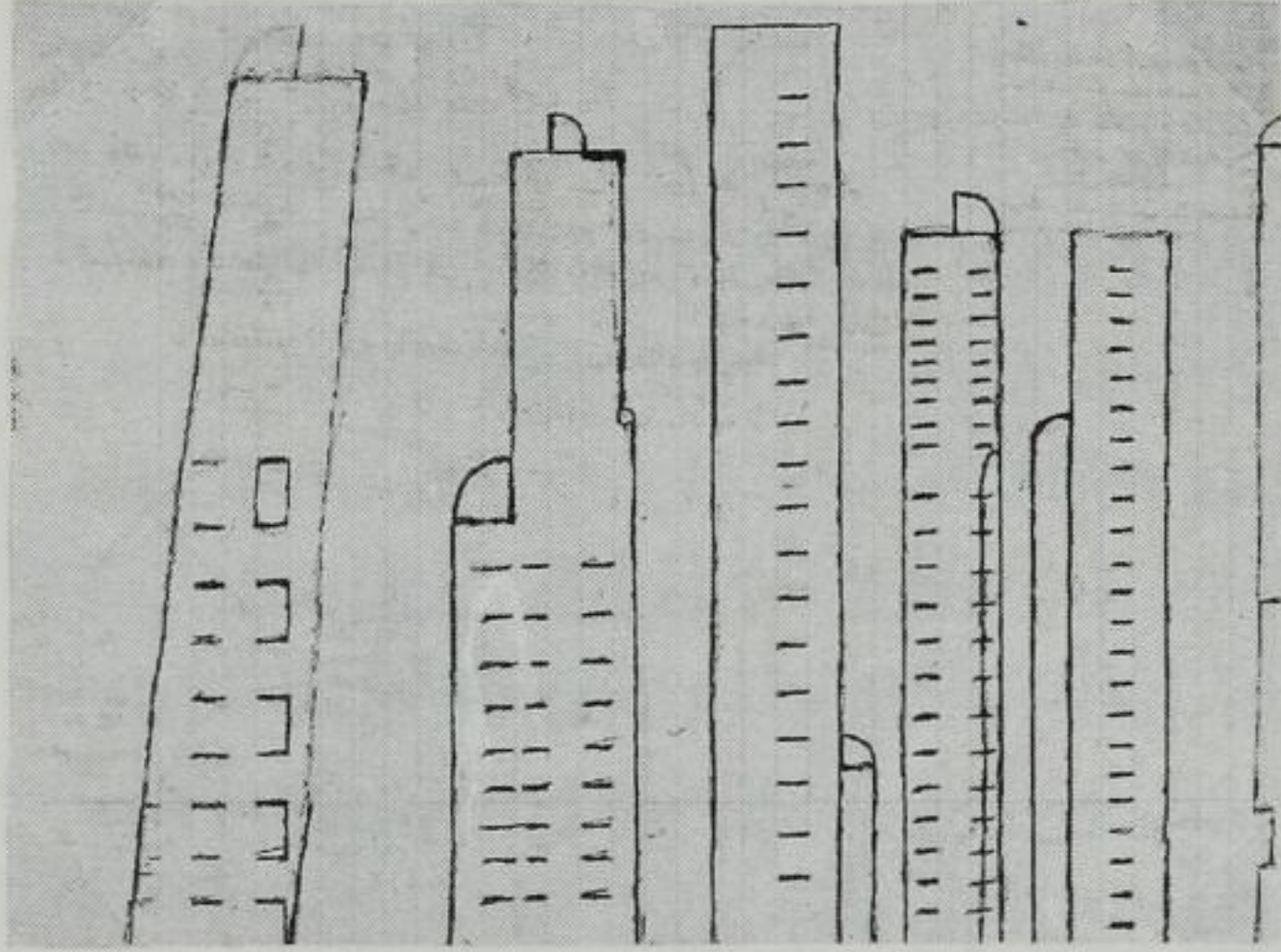
both are, and, my God, are they tightly tied together. But some people are like Doubting Thomas. My father used to say: "I'm like St. Thomas, I believe only what I see." It was a traditional expression, a catchphrase he had adopted: "I'm like St. Thomas, I believe only what I see." That satisfied him, he was happy. We were happy too. And I don't believe the tying up is going to hold. I need convincing proof that things are firmly fixed. I mean, when you have a button, and there is a good buttonhole, it's not going to come undone. So that's what this represents. It represents today, yes, it's overdoing it a bit, but you never know, accidents can happen. It represented Jerry's journey. He's always traveling—to Australia—to Helsinki—the last trip, which corresponds to this, was to Helsinki. It went on for ever. It seemed as if the trip would never end. So I said it annoyed me.

When was that?

It was last week, a couple of weeks ago. All this has to do with very real events. Highly contemporary.

* * *

We could talk about time, particularly about the measurement of time. That is, systems of oscillation that are basically a measure of time: beating time. Making *a rap session* out of it. For instance, if we listen and look, and if we observe that measure of time as a lullaby, we can have it in various directions and in various materials. Whether it is the sound of waves on the shore, or a lullaby for rocking a child to sleep, or it might be this thing that rotates, it always involves progression through space at a certain speed. Obviously, with speed there is distance. Here the distance is very, very small. Or the thing can be changed. And when you listen long enough, you finally perceive the speed that corresponds to our own speed. The speed of our own thoughts. Whatever thoughts flit rapidly across your mind: Have we got a cup of coffee? Are we cross? Are we feeling crazily energetic? Or we might be resting, and eventually fall asleep. And she manages to immobilize herself; and he may stop. And so you can influence time, enormously. And measure it.



Insomnia drawings, 1994–5, ink on paper.

Insomnia Drawings

During nights of insomnia, Louise Bourgeois draws and writes on whatever kind of paper is to hand. Between December 1994 and May 1995, the artist made more than 200 of these drawings, many of which have various kinds of texts written on the back: poetical texts, lists, diary notes, memories of childhood, all written with a sense of urgency and compulsion. The complete group of drawings will be the subject of a forthcoming facsimile edition, edited by Marie-Laure Bernadac. We have selected here only a few examples, which are numbered according to the artist's archive and translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt. The original French versions are also provided to clarify certain untranslatable plays on words.

Number 2366

[written on Centre Georges Pompidou envelope]

Value evanescent illusory

Flea market (flea market)

Lint (proof that you still exist)

End of the bus line (London?)

Madame du Deffant. Review

The proof that she still exists
 that he still exists
 that we still exist
 that they still exist
 that I still exist
 that the day still exists
 that the night will end
 that the fire goes out and you
 light it again
 The control of the ashes
 Believe in the resurrection
 I deny, deny, deny, deny
 The nest makes its nest

Untranslatable, French symbolism
I can deny, because I make nests
I am entitled to deny, it's an accomplished fact

The bales of lint = old hag*
You overdo it with the lint
The Bièvre bears a corpse
Hag Rag Pick
Picks at her food won't eat
Louise the picky, the testy, the talkative
It's not the first time he's done that, the beast
Cardboard, dungeon, cochineal, tooth,
Puppy, shithouse, balled, black pudding
Picky one, *schalotte*, shawl, snivel,
Chatillon
Reconciliation means: I spend my time denying
Making nests

[*Valeur évanescence illusoire/Marché aux puces (flea market)/Charpie (preuve que tu existes encore)/Fin du parcours de l'autobus (Londres?)/Madame du Deffant, Review/La preuve qu'elle existe encore/qu'il existe encore/que nous existons encore/que vous existez encore/qu'ils existent encore/que j'existe encore/que le jour existe encore/que la nuit va finir/que le feu s'éteint et tu/le rallumes/Le contrôle des cendres/Croire en la résurrection/Je nie, nier, nier, nier/Le nid fait son nid/Symbolique intraduisible, française/Je puis nier, puisque je fais des nids/J'ai le droit de nier, c'est un fait accompli/Les balles de charpie = chipie/Tu charries avec la charpie/La Bièvre charrie un cadavre/Chipie Chiffonne Chipote/Chipoteuse faire des refus de manger/Louise la chipoteuse, la coléreuse, la bavardeuse/Il est coutumier du fait, salaud/Carton, cachot, cochenelle, chocotte,/Chiot, chiotte, balled, boudin/Chipoteuse, schalotte, châte, chialer,/Chatillon/ Réconciliation veut dire: je passe mon temps à nier/à faire des nids]*

* Translators' note: as well as the play on *nier* and *nid* (see above), the second half of this text plays on French words beginning with "ch."

Number 3205

[verso of skyscraper drawing; see illustrations]

The sluice open

The sluice closed

The conquest of anxiety

Seek your element

On the dial from less to more

The 4 elements air water air fire earth and water

The best plus the plagues

Air, fire, earth and water (mosquitoes)

Control of water is impossible, there I'm in my element

Control of wind impossible, slams the doors, awful

Speed of wind

Skyscrapers lean slightly.

[*La vanne ouverte/La vanne fermée/La conquête de l'angoisse/Chercher son élément/Sur le cadran du moins au plus/Les 4 éléments l'air l'eau l'air le feu la terre et l'eau/The best + les fléaux/L'air, le feu, la terre et l'eau (moustiques)/Contrôle de l'eau est possible, j'y suis dans mon élément/Contrôle du vent impossible, fait taper les portes, awful/Vitesse du vent/Les gratte-ciel s'inclinent légèrement.*]

Number 3229

What're you doing

—I'm walking at night

—You're afraid?

—No, I'm getting used to it, because nobody knows (that I can't see anything) I'd rather not see anything

(what sort of a blind person have we here)

In the car the driver:

Don't be afraid, do the same as me: close your eyes among friends that's the way! This is a good car

I believe, rock solid, in the form of a journal, diary, now I can reread it
You wake up the mule (Buridan's ass crosses the river), or the clam (of Le Corbusier)

In view

[Qu'est-ce que tu fous/—je marche dans la nuit/—tu as peur?/—non je m'habitue, car personne ne le sait (que/je ne vois rien) j'aime mieux ne rien voir/(quel genre d'aveugle nous avons là)/Dans l'auto le conducteur:/n'aie pas peur, fais comme moi: ferme les yeux avec des amis comme ça! on est bien/montés./Je crois, dur comme fer, au format journal, diary, je peux maintenant le relire/You wake up the mule (l'âne de Buridan traverse la rivière, or the clam (of Le Corbusier)/en vue]

Number 3224

[verso of drawing of the flower-tree; see illustrations]

Gobs of spit

castrati

mosquitoes

spiders

snakes

hysterics

eunuchs

try to yodel Texas-style

put the notes together

Jean Clair (Venice Biennale)

La Tourette and the eunuchs

[*Les crachets/castra/moustiques/araignées/serpents/hystériques/ennuques/
chercher yodels Texas/mettre les notes ensemble/Jean Clair (Venise
Biennale)/La Tourette et les ennuques*]

* * *

Resurrection

I spend my time denying,* making nests

I deny, you deny, he denies

We deny, you all deny

They deny

Time to stop

Denying, I no longer deny

You no longer deny, he

No longer denies, we no longer

Deny, you no longer deny

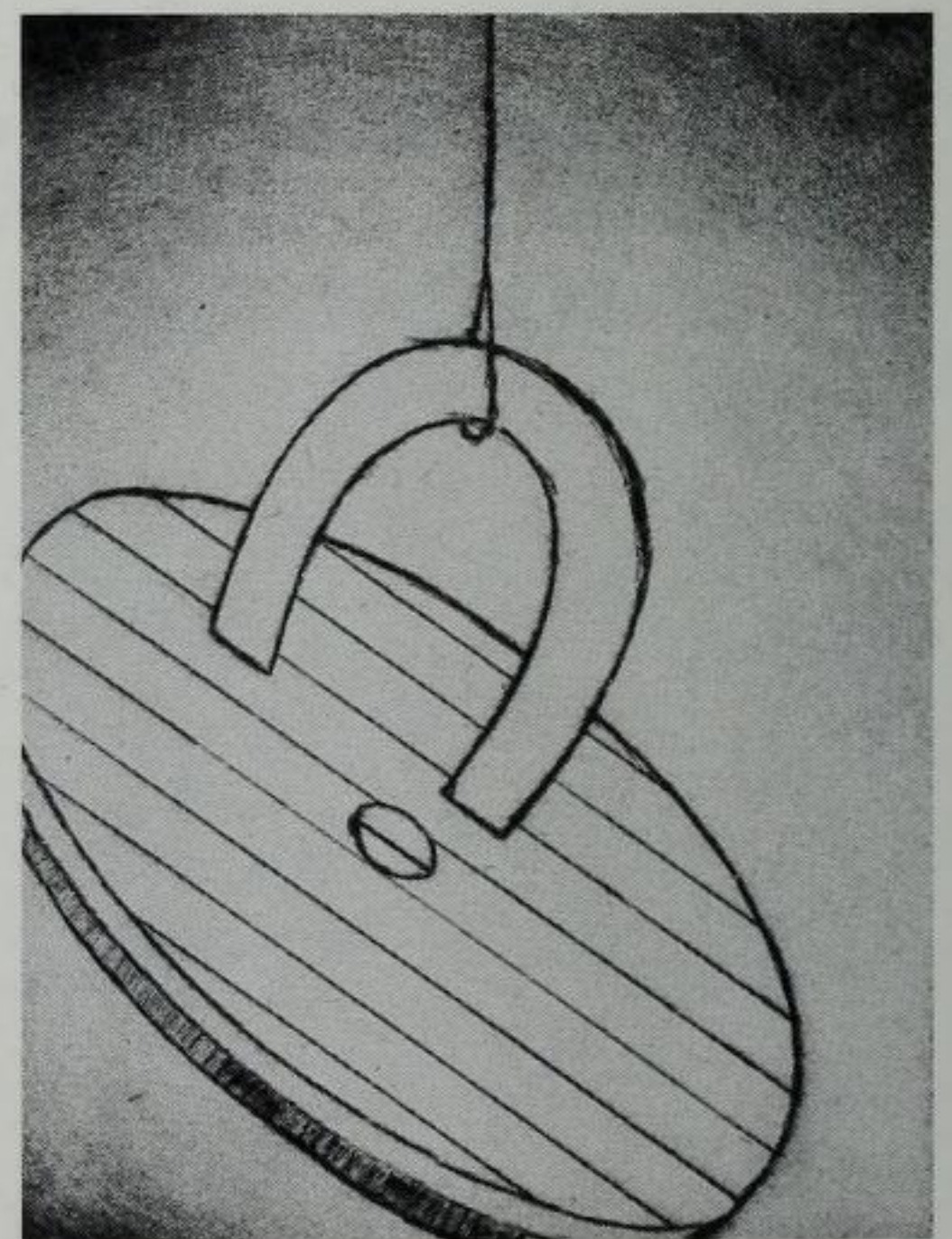
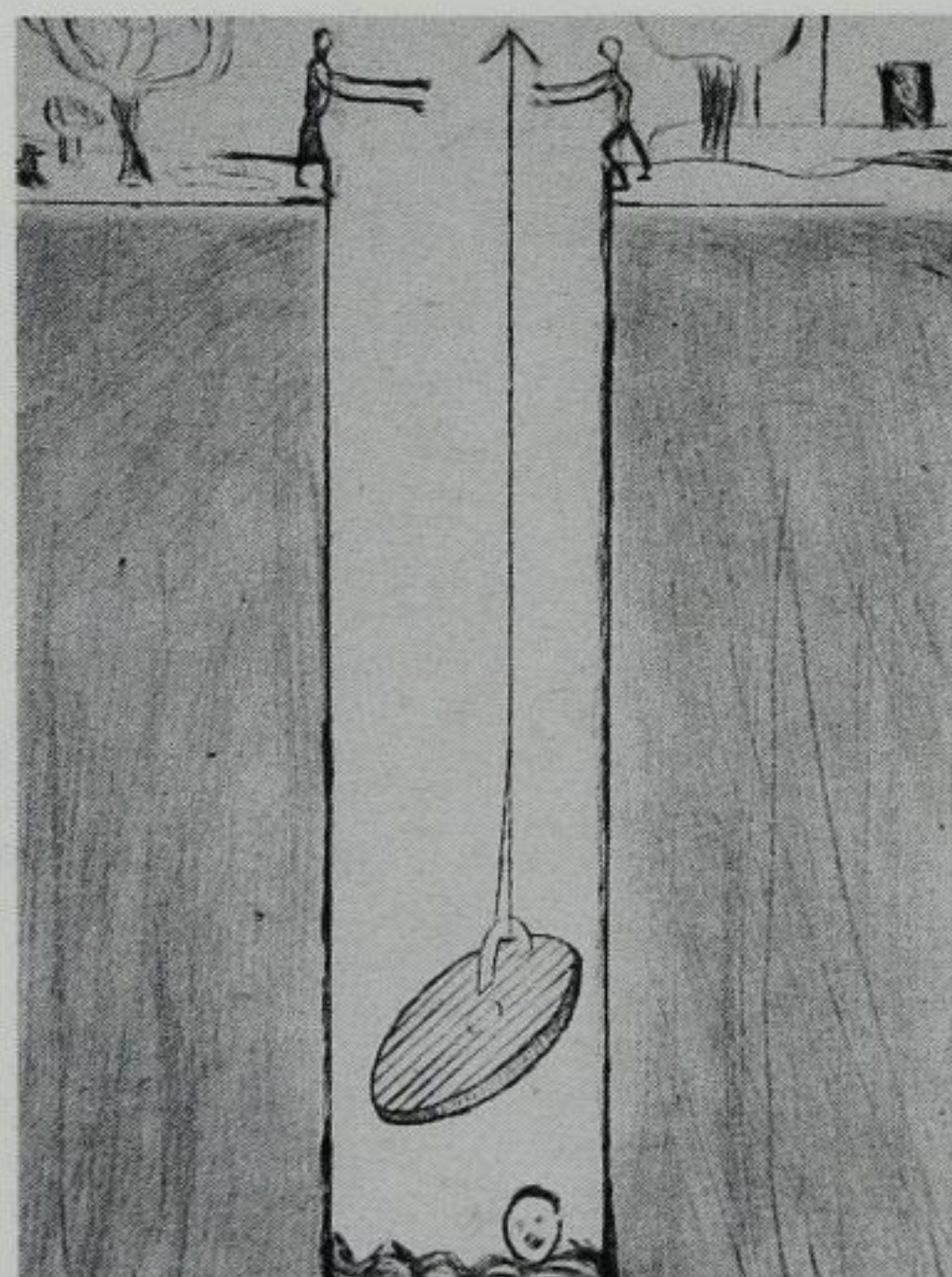
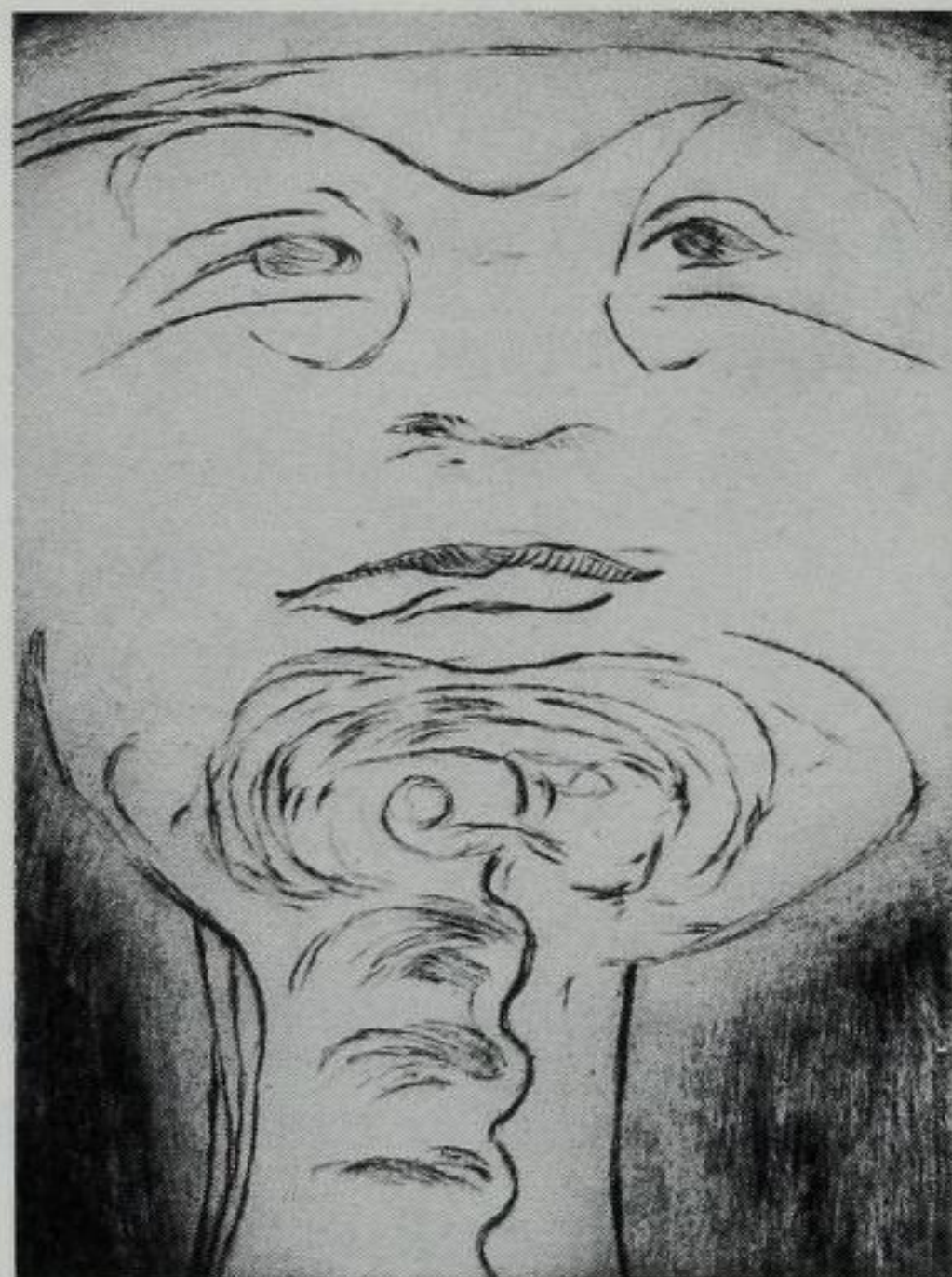
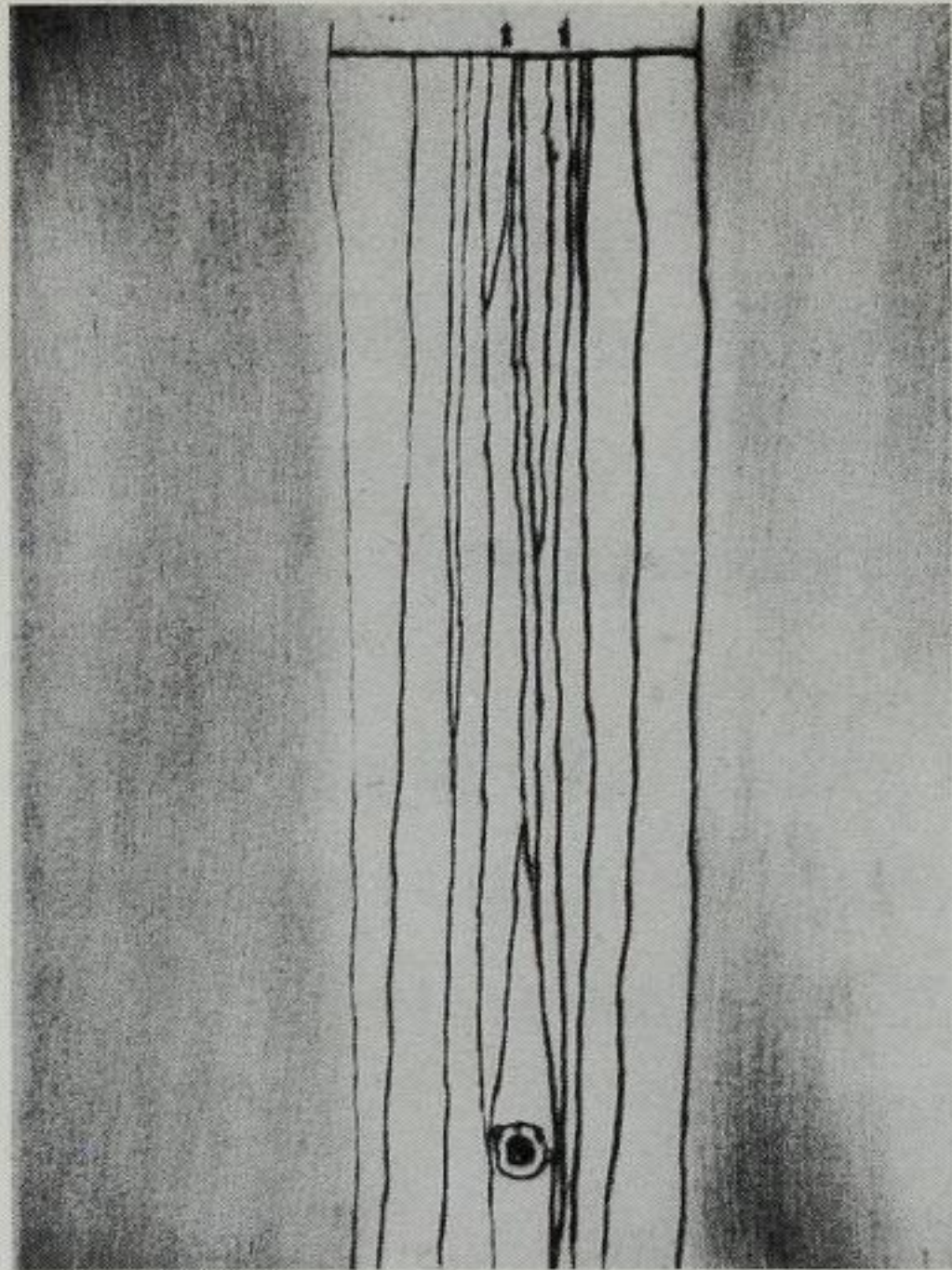
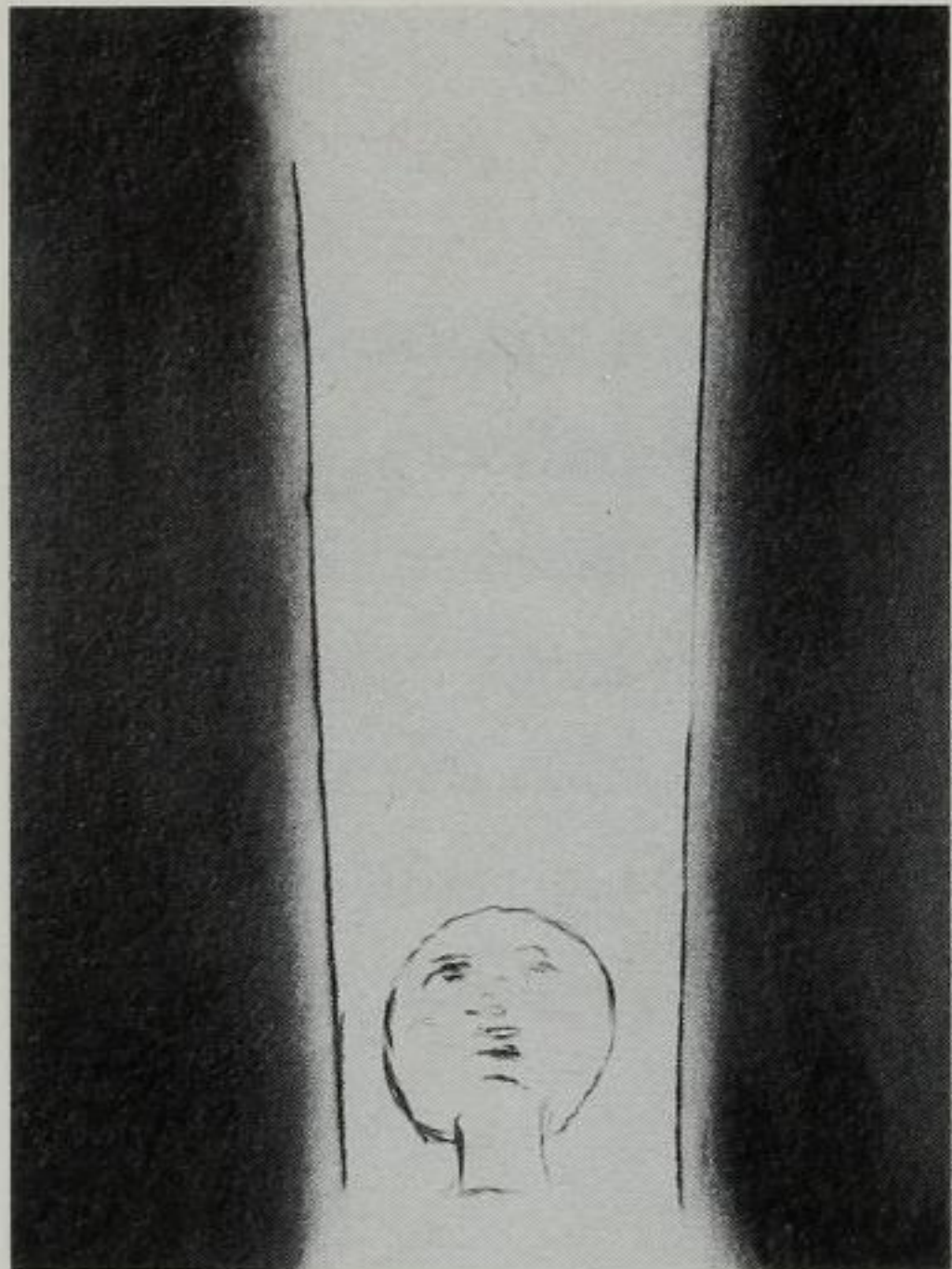
They no longer deny

That she was afraid

Of the night night

[*Résurrection/Je passe mon temps à nier, à faire des nids/Je nie, tu nies, il
nie/Nous nions, vous niez/Il s'agit, elles s'agit/Il est temps de ne plus/nier,
je ne nie plus/tu ne nies plus, il ne/nie plus, nous ne nions/plus, vous ne niez
plus/Il s'agit plus/Qu'elle avait peur/de la nuit nuit*]

*Translators' note: there is an untranslatable play on words here, *nier*, to deny, sounds like *nid*, nest. See also Number 2366, above. This drawing is not numbered in the artist's archive.



The View from the Bottom of the Well

A text from the 1960s first published in 1996 by Peter Blum Edition, New York, in a print portfolio of nine etchings (reproduced opposite).

I cannot concentrate on the “hear” and now. I cannot concentrate on the here and now. On you. I cannot concentrate on the hear and now, be *concentrique*. You cannot concentrate on the “hear” and now. You are not looking at me. Your eyes are trembling. You are trembling. Your gaze is nowhere. Your hands are trembling, your legs are cold, and your eyes are trembling more and more. I want to concentrate on your fearful face because I feel you trying to escape, to get into orbit, and to leave, but there is nowhere to go.

I cannot concentrate because I just hate it, anywhere but here. Is it fear? Fear of what? I am not actively or passively fearful, I am as tight as a knot and as hard as stone. I know enough not to talk. What for? Talk at the antipodes of what I want? No thank you. The humming bird is my friend. I am a humming bird. The present minute is all important, but I do not care. I want out. That is why I cannot concentrate. From inside I feel propulsed out. Anything, anyone, anywhere will do, in order to be away ... from what? From yourself, a thought, a wish, a need, a must of some kind. This revelation is anti-object. In that state if I call you I do not relate to you (any phone number would do). I relate to the avoided. I write this as an escape from expectation.

I cannot get out of the house. I want to. I have to. I would like to. I was planning to, but I gave up at the last minute. It would help to be completely ready, waiting by the door, it would make things easier: some nice feelings will help, familiar, friendly place to go to, no trust, no lift, the disappearance of the love object.

First I cannot be *concentrique*. Second I cannot be *eccentrique*, no energy. The writing of this was very *concentrique* but showed misconcentration.

What can I do for you? This is the password.

What can I do? What can I do for you? Dialog, listen, listen and learn. I have fallen from Grace. I panic in my fear of not being able to help. I panic, I am afraid, made frantic in my despair or desire or desperate wish to help. I want I want I want I want at all cost to impress the person who needs help. It is indispensable to understand the challenge, the irresistible want or need, to absolutely prove that I can save a soul from suffering. This is it: the challenge to defend someone. *Père gardez vous à droite. Père gardez vous à gauche. J'acheverai mon salut en sauvant quelqu'un. Peut-être en sauvant un ou une perdue, damnée, blessée, mourrant je suis la serveuse et c'est mon destin. Le remplirai-je ou non l'évangélisme est mon salut. Incroyable mais vrai. Do you hear, parle français, l'appel au secours, sauvez-moi, c'est le cri qui me challenge, c'est derrière l'attrait de la restauration, réparation, self-defeatism. Sauvez-moi du suicide, sauvez de la noyade, sauvez-moi s'il vous plaît de ces mauvaises habitudes, de mes fautes, de ma maladie, de ma défaite, de mon malheur, de mon destin. Je vous aimerai et je vous sauverai de votre propre pessimisme. C'est le prix du self-estime, c'est la rançon du pardon, vous serez pardonnées vous mériterez votre salut si vous sauvez une autre. Vous voyez les reverberations de cette admission de peine je suis tombée en disgrâce, c'est le pire, c'est la chute, c'est fini, sauve moi. Un éclair une décharge électrique me passe entre les deux tempes et la challenge est expérimentée comme une terreur, c'est la chapitre de la Peur qui me revient la peur ou plutôt la terreur me terrasse, me confuse et me rend spinning around et totalement dépourvue. Il n'est pas question d'apprendre car je suis totalement détruite par le peur, je suis agressée par la devorante, c'est incroyable mais c'est vrai. A ce moment je veux compenser et impressionner les gens, je suis de l'autre côté du désespoir, et cela m'arrive quatre fois par jour, j'en ai marre, je veux abandonner et ne voir personne, fuir, boucle, bonsoir:** The system.

I learn. I learned, I learned, I learned, I learned, I learned, I learned, you blew it. I learned a lot. I learned something, I did learn. Did you? I learned today, and it made my day. I learned a lesson, I feel better, to learn. I learn, you learn, he learns, you learn, we learn, they learn, we

learn together, and we begin to understand each other. Make no demand on me the way I make no demand on you. Let us just learn a little every day, try to. It is so difficult to learn. What keeps us from learning? Be in a learning spirit, do not be afraid to spend time learning. You have lots of time, I have lots of time, we have lots of time. If we just learn nothing will go wrong. Just be receptive, just be accepting, just be tolerant, just be self-loving, not self-indulgent, not selfish, but self-respecting, self-forgiving, self-relating, self-undemanding, self-repeating, self-unafraid, self-trusting, and learning will be less difficult. Do not pass judgment, wait and see. Give it a chance, try again, so many chances, so much time, so much patience, give yourself a chance, as you give them a chance, endless chances, every day is a new chance, tomorrow too a whole lifetime of chances, no reason to despair, no reason to be finding complaining, pushing, wanting, extracting from the others or yourself. The others do not judge you, they do not even know that you are there, no one is against you, do not worry, you are not that compelling. Who are they to judge you? They do not know enough, they are going to learn about you, and so they will begin to understand you. To understand is to forgive—no problem—but you certainly have to learn, to understand and that is truly difficult—whether it is mysterious, complicated, heavy duty, or weird. To learn is difficult, but it is rewarding. Try again, and start again tomorrow and cry if you have to. Learn to learn. Do you like to learn? Are you good at it? Do you get there? Learn for the sake of learning for itself, be crafty at it. Do you have the knack to learn to discover, to uncover, to turn upside-down and side-up again. To deconstruct and reconstruct, to make sense out of the unlikely, learn to answer, to question to make out the other one for the sake of discovering, not telling anybody that you progressed step by step, from position to position, you put the puzzle together. You learn for yourself not for the others, not to show off, not to put the other down. Learning is your secret, it is all you have. It is the only thing you can call your own, nobody can take it, and remember ignorance is no excuse, you better learn or else.

*"Father, look out to the right. Father, look out to the left. I shall accomplish my salvation by saving someone. Perhaps by saving a lost soul, someone damned, wounded, dying I am the waitress and that is my destiny. Whether I fulfill it or not, evangelism is my salvation. Incredible but true. *Do you hear*, speak French, the cry for help, save me it's the cry that challenges me, it's behind the appeal of restoration, reparation, self-defeatism. Save me from suicide, save from drowning, save me please from those bad habits, from my faults, from my illness, from my defeat, from my unhappiness, from my destiny. I will love you and save you from your own pessimism. That is the price of self-esteem, the ransom of pardon; you will be pardoned, you will deserve your salvation if you save someone else. You see the reverberations of that admission from torment I fell into disgrace, that's the worst, that's the fall, it's over, save me. A flash of electrical discharge passes between my two temples, and the challenge is experienced as a terror, it's the chapter of fear that comes back to me fear or rather terror lays me low, *confuses* me and leaves me *spinning around* and totally bereft. There's no question of learning, because I am totally destroyed by fear, I am assailed by the devourer, it's incredible but it's true. At this moment I want to make it up to people and impress them, I am on the far side of despair, and that happens to me four times a day, I've had enough, I want to give up and see no one, run away, wrap up, good night." [Translated by Caroline Beamish and David Britt]

Interview with Jerry Gorovoy and Marie-Laure Bernadac

First published in April 1996 by Direction régionale des affaires culturelles d'Ile-de-France (Ministère de la culture) in *Louise Bourgeois: les bienvenus à Choisy-le-Roi*, to accompany the installation of the artist's sculpture of the same name at Le Parc de la mairie, Place Gabriel Péri à Choisy-le-Roi.



Les Bienvenus à Choisy-le-Roi, 1996, two parts: cast aluminum, suspended from a linden tree in Le Parc de la mairie de Choisy-le-Roi, female element 155 × 109 × 81 cm (100 kg), male element 160 × 176 × 112 cm (86 kg).

Together we're going to try to work out a presentation of *Les Bienvenus*, to explain what it's trying to say and to give it a meaning. It is located in the park of the town hall, and is addressed to newly married couples: the ceremony has just taken place and it's time to take photographs of the event. The two newlyweds will sit down on the bench beneath this piece which shelters them and helps make it understood that we're all happy for them. Who is going to be married in Choisy? Maybe immigrants from the four corners of the earth: they'll have a new identity card which will guarantee that the fruit of these weddings, the children, will be French. I can easily identify with immigrants because I found myself in the same situation when I arrived in America. I'm very conscious of the question, "Are you *welcome* or are you foreigners whom people want to get rid of?" This is

something which has political implications: my goal here is to celebrate people who love each other and are loved. I'm participating in the celebration today because I spent the early years of my life in Choisy, at number 4, Avenue de Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. My childhood in France shaped my adult psychology and therefore my art.

Why is the sculpture suspended? Is it a nest?

The fact of hanging the work from a tree supposes that a marriage is a fragile thing which hangs on a thread. This object has the look of a big heart; it implies a certain attitude, an attitude of pure and simple love. All marriages need balance, tenderness, and confidence.

One of the forms seems to be male, the other female ...

It's clear. You can see it. It's an entity of two human beings who look at each other sometimes, who turn around, just as we all turn around psychologically throughout each day. We have moods, we have degrees of affection, degrees of revolution, but we're always there together. We spend our lives together, we spend our lives with the possibility of looking at each other and loving each other.

What do you have to say about the spiral form?

It's not completely spiral. It's something that turns to the left, attains a point of stability and then turns to the right; the two members of the couple look at each other, turn back to back, don't look anymore, then look at each other from different angles, because there are so many ways to get along together, to contemplate a landscape, to see things.

You already did a hanging piece, in 1965 I believe, for the Rodin museum?

Yes, *La Fée couturière* was exhibited at the Rodin museum as part of the Salon de la Jeune Sculpture; it hung from a tree in the garden, but it was all alone. There's a big difference between being all alone or being two. The Museum of Modern Art in New York has a hanging work with the same inspiration.

Let's look back over your origins and your childhood in Choisy. How long did you live there?

The whole family occupied this house from 1912 to 1918.

The Choisy house was the first of your childhood?

That's right.

Your parents left the house in 1918. Why?

When my father came back from the First World War my mother caught the flu that was ravaging Europe, and she was a long time getting over it. We looked for a piece of property along the river Bièvre where we could wash the tapestries from our restoration business, and we found one in Antony, upstream of Arcueil and Cachan. Antony replaced Choisy. When I returned to see my house in Choisy it had disappeared. It had been replaced by the Paul Eluard theater.

In the end you have quite good memories of Choisy?

Oh yes, very good memories.

So what is the meaning of the work you created with a guillotine on top of the house in Choisy [Cell (Choisy) (1990–3)]?

It indicates that the present has guillotined the past and that I could not find my house in Choisy again.

After primary school in Antony you went to Lycée Fénelon, then you studied mathematics at the Sorbonne. What brought you to art? Did you draw for the tapestry business?

Yes, I drew, and I saw I had a certain knack for drawing. That's when I realized I could be useful to my parents. It's a crucial revelation, the feeling of being indispensable. As for mathematics, I gave it up for art when I realized there were no certainties in mathematics: you're told that two parallels never meet, and then you learn that in a non-Euclidean geometry they can easily come together. I was disappointed and deeply disturbed, and I turned toward the certainties of feeling rather than those we are taught. If you accept inner certainties you become responsible for your own fate, you no longer depend on directives from the outside.

And after mathematics?

After that I no longer believed anybody, not anybody. I went to a string of schools, one after the other. The fact that I could speak English made

things easier: I could once again make myself useful, it was very important. That was my mother's idea: you shouldn't worry about any particular job or relationship, just make yourself indispensable. But how do you make yourself indispensable?

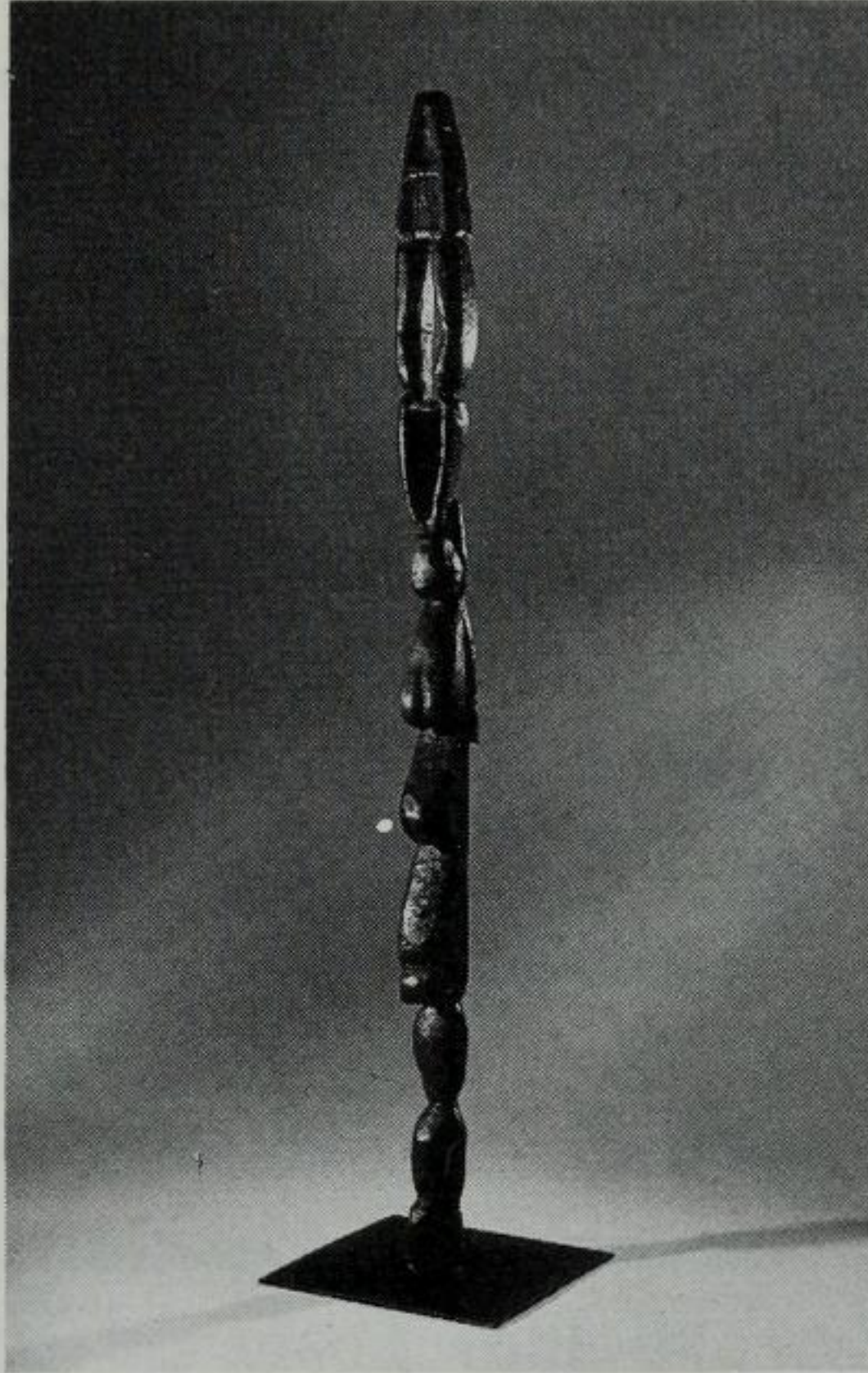
Wasn't it Buffon who said, "the style makes the man?" It means that the way you do something is more important than what you do. The way you do something signals you as an entity. You are the only one who does it that way.

Les Bienvenus will be installed in Choisy in April. Why did you give them that title?

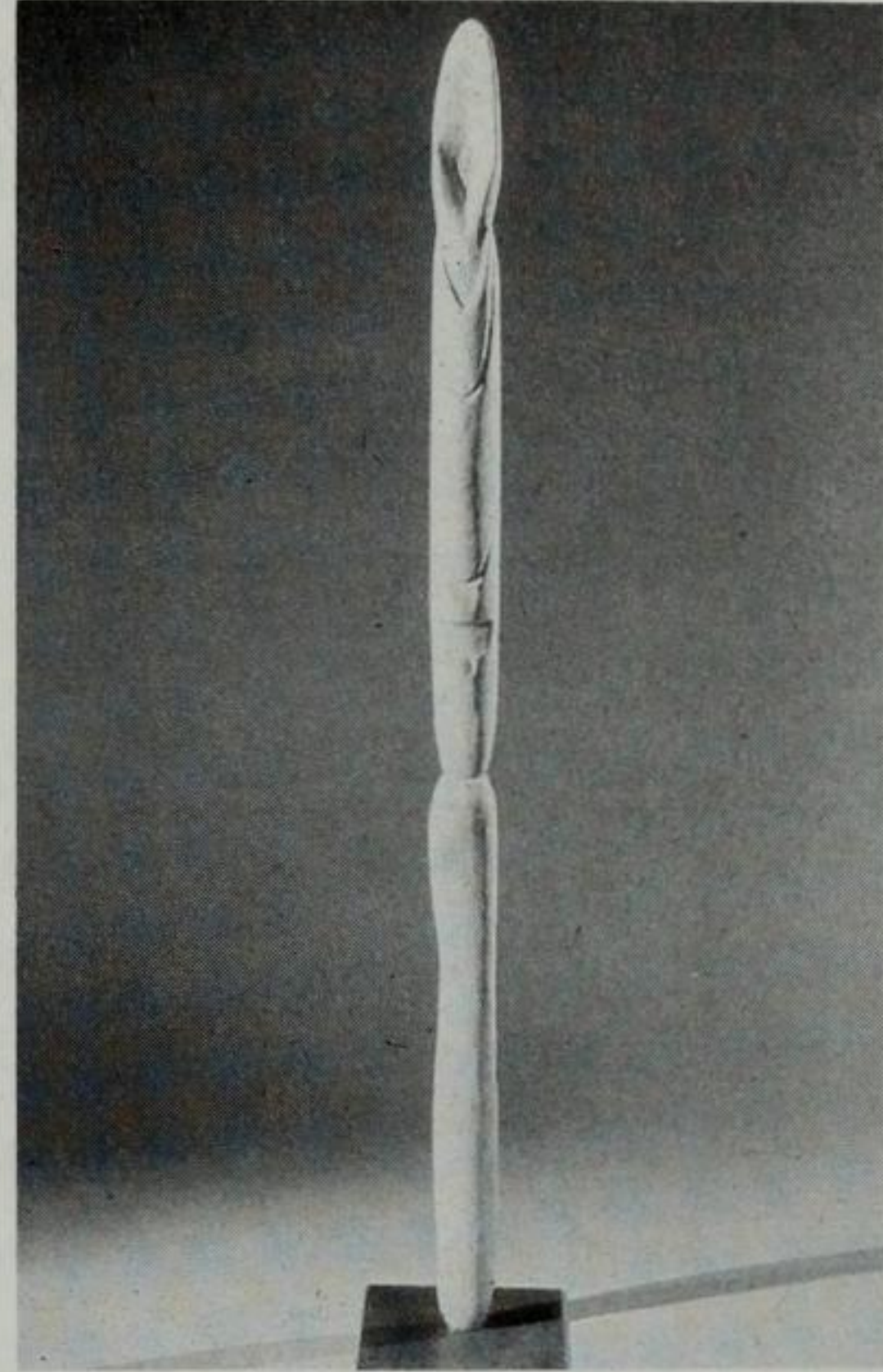
I call them *Les Bienvenus* because they bring us something: a new way of seeing, of communicating, a new way of loving.

Interview with Michael Auping

Previously unpublished, 25 October 1996.



Depression Woman, 1949–50,
bronze (white patina),
189.2 × 30.4 × 30.4 cm.



Breasted Woman, c. 1949–50,
bronze, 137 × 30.5 × 30.5 cm.

Where do these sculptures fit into your forty-year career?

They are from some of my very first shows [Peridot Gallery, 1949, 1950, 1953]. You can see how they had no bases and they all just lean or stand.

That was a very dynamic time in the New York art world. It was the height of Abstract Expressionism.

Yes, but I don't know what that has to do with me. My association with these works is people, real people. Art is interesting, of course, but for me people are more interesting—people, friends, personalities. The people I knew at the time explain the sculpture. They are about people I knew or remembered. Their spirit came to me while I was working the sculpture. Or sometimes the memory came later and I connected it to the sculpture. When I work, the symbol is mostly unconscious, you see. What is impor-

tant is that they are called *Personnages* because they are about people that were in my mind.

Specific people?

Yes, of course. But it wasn't just about individuals, it was about relations between people. For that first show, I made a social gathering of people. I tried to make them relate to each other, so that they would have a dialog in their different forms and personalities. Some are a trilog—it's a word I invented—which means three people relating. The trilog is usually the nostalgic overtones of the child with the two parents. Three is a good number to create relationships, generally more interesting than just two.

So the whole installation of sculptures is like a party or an art opening.
Oh yes. They turn around on their bases. They can look all around the room, but usually they look at each other. Another point is that the early Peridot exhibitions were conceived as a four-sided room. The early Peridot show was an installation, not just a group of things. The idea of making sculpture as a space, as a large entity, with no pedestals, was not really done at that time.

What do you remember about Depression Woman?

It's from the first show. I used to call it *Spoon Woman* and then changed it to *Depression Woman*.

You wanted to carve a spoon?

Oh no, a spoon-like shape. Well, a spoon-like shape when you are used to carving wood, is not a rare shape. It is something that you're gouging, and that comes naturally. It is not an elaborate thing. It's a simple thing. It's natural—what I call emotional geometry. It gives a good feeling when you are making it. But as you are making it, it takes on other qualities that have to do with emotions and memories.

Who is Depression Woman?

That is not so important to know. It is only important that through the form a personality can stand on its own, be a presence in the world for its own sake. The important thing is that what they all have in common is a strange projection. Maybe they are also self-portraits, and this is the way

I feel. I would not usually do that consciously, but sculpture takes time, carving is slow. One starts with a model and then the model becomes the maker. Some people don't understand it, but sculpture is an emotional medium. Otherwise it is just another thing. So there is that fragility, a great, great fragility, and the fragility is the personality of the object.

When I first saw the white shape of Depression Woman, I didn't read it as a spoon. When you tell me that, now I see it as a spoon.

But it's also a head.

I read it as a lily, as a flower . . .

No.

. . . because of the way these things emerge, you see. It comes out like a bud?

Very interesting. So you have me mixed up with the Santa Fe girl.

Georgia O'Keeffe?

Yes, you have me mixed up with her. [Laughter] No, no, no . . . They are all people. They move and can turn around. Now, I had a difficulty with the gallery about that because I wanted to nail them into the floor so they could rotate. The director said, "No, no. I do not want any nails in my oak floor. You are not touching my floor." So this guy was more interested in his floor than in my sculpture. That's that! That is why some of them were placed against the wall. I wanted them like a group of people at a party, all in the center. This is what I wanted, but it's not what I got.

I see. I'm sure you've been asked this question before, but I'll ask it again. What relationship, if any, do you see between your Personnages and Giacometti's standing figures?

I did not know Giacometti at the time. You have to be very careful about that. The work is very different if you really look. His works are not so fragile. It is not a criticism, but they are more . . . distant, aloof. His bases—the feet of his sculptures are massive. They get thinner and thinner from the base. The *Personnages* go the opposite way. They get thinner toward the base. They are delicate on their feet. They are not monuments. It is a more fragile balance. Physical and psychological presence is a bal-

ance. That is the tension of being human, the fragility of people. We are always afraid of falling so we balance ourselves. The main resemblance between Giacometti and me is that we make vertical figures. There are too many more differences. My figures are very portable. I carried them around with me. They are not bronze. They were like companions. I don't think you could pick up a Giacometti. Also, Giacometti's things are always walking away, and mine are there for ever—immobile, because I don't want them to move away. I want to keep them all right there. I want them close. One of them is my brother. It's very personal, and an immense feeling of possessiveness in what I did with the *Personnages*. I don't want them to walk away. I want them to stay there for me. Some have no arms. They're standing there for ever. Not walking away.

Are we looking at Breasted Woman?

Yes. It's a woman, and all these little appendages here are things that she possesses, namely what I possess—a family with three children. So I'm there with my belongings, right? I'm not walking away. I'm there forever. In spite of the precariousness, I'm there. It's a search for identity.

Let me ask you—and this may be a very male question—but if you didn't call that Breasted Woman, how would I know it's a woman?

By the openness of the gesture—she's completely open—and all her appendages. You see, I'm very proud. It's very strange, but I'm very proud of what I possess. Physically and personally; the children, the house, and the friends.

What is the symbolism of Breasted Woman, which is dark-colored mostly and then on the back just a little patch of red?

It is not geranium red, which means blood. It is a little fantasy. It ferments beauty. Maybe the spider, the black widow spider? Again, the ambivalence—beauty, danger, a protection of the possessions. It's difficult to say.

Violence, danger, not the passion of the heart?

Not at that period. The passion comes later. The passion comes . . . well, let's not talk about that, it's another subject. [Laughter]

Although I often hear your work associated with American Minimal-

ism—a more personal or content-based Minimalism—your work seems to me better related to European sculpture, perhaps Brancusi.

I knew Brancusi, you know. But you see, the generations aren't the same. I met Brancusi because—this may not interest you—I met him in his studio, and I had a chance to enter the temple when I was a girl. And when he looked at me, he thought I was a collector. I was introduced by mistake. He had not seen my face and when I entered the room he was a little puzzled. His room was full of wood beams, and I can tell you where he got them. The big boats would come from Dakaar, Africa, and those beams were the ballasts for the big African boats going back and forth. The beams were often left on the banks of the River Seine. They wanted to get rid of them. And artists were invited to take those things. This is where Brancusi got his material and his inspiration. But I think his work had very different overtones. Mine were personal and family overtones.

Were you interested in African sculpture?

Not at all. I was haunted by the dialog of people. Do you like me or don't you like me? My forms have always been very personal and emotional. I haven't changed so much. A more personal influence was Fernand Léger. Léger was very important to me.

What did you see in Léger?

In Léger I saw the courage he had to transform the figure into what he wanted to see, his personal vision.

I see. But somewhat geometric and rigid.

Very, very rigid. He was very rigid, very limited. But he could find emotion in that geometry. Léger could be hard and intimate at the same time.

Do you remember any other strong influences?

A man called Roger Bissière, a tapestry maker. The people who most influenced me were my teachers. I am actually talking to the Bissière family today. Paris was full of academies, which is a very interesting subject. In my furious desire to express what I wanted to say, I went from academy to academy. I became disgusted with the Beaux-Arts and the academic schooling, so I wanted to go off the roadway, off school, and be rebellious.

I ended up with l'Académie de la Grand Chaumière, l'Académie Othon Friesz, l'Académie Bissière, l'Académie André Lhote, and Paul Colin and A. M. Cassandre, who were both poster makers. I was running, running like a rabbit from one to the other in search of being able to express what I wanted to express. That is to say, my fear of life itself—*la peur de vivre*. And I made myself useful because I had a friend called Paul Jouvét, the theater man, and he kept saying: "Make yourself useful, dear." And I kept that, and would always think to make myself useful, but how was I going to do that? "Make yourself useful." I don't know what to do! [Laughing] So I kept this in mind, and I said, "I will become a student of this great man, you see, if I make myself useful." My father used to say, "Be grateful," which sometimes made me angry, but I later understood. So now I have the two important things I need to know. Be useful and be grateful. For me it was always a relation to the elders, to the father, to the people who knew things. They influenced me. This is where my gratitude lies.

What did you mean by trying to express your fear of life. Is that what you said? Your fear of life?

Yes, right.

Is that still a part of your work?

Mais oui. That is why I am conscious about it long ago. I'm still interested today in my distant past. Has your life been significant? It's an anxiety. Are you still grateful for what you got? There is an anxiety behind the word grateful.

In the beginning, many young people are afraid of life. I know I was. Absolutely. There is a book called *La Peur de vivre*. Don't ask me who wrote it. But, *La Peur de vivre*—the fear of life.

But as I get older I'm more afraid of death than of life.

Oh no, you cannot admit that. You have to repress that. You jump ahead. You say much more than I do. You cannot admit that.

Well, sometimes it's good to admit it, I think, to say it out loud.

Well, you are more advanced than I am. I don't admit that.

On Beauty: a Conversation with Bill Beckley

Extracts from interviews which took place in July and August 1997 and first published in February 1998 by the Allworth Press and The School of Visual Arts, New York, as "Sunday Afternoons—A Conversation: Louise Bourgeois and Bill Beckley and Remarks on Beauty by Louise Bourgeois" in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, edited by Bill Beckley with David Shapiro.

In my sculpture, it's not an image I'm seeking, it's not an idea.

My goal is to re-live a past emotion. My art is an exorcism, and beauty is something I never talk about.

My sculpture allows me to re-experience fear, to give it a physicality, so that I am able to hack away at it. I am saying in my sculpture today what I could not make out in the past. It allows me to re-experience the past, to see the past in its objective and realistic proportions.

Fear is a passive state, and the goal is to be active and take control, to be alive here and today. The move is from the passive to the active, for if the past is not negated in the present, you do not live.

Since the fears of the past are connected with functions of the body, they re-appear through the body. For me, sculpture is the body. My body is my sculpture.

In relation to viewing as opposed to creating, I experience beauty in an oscillating manner. First, I see beauty in the intellectual operations of the mind—perfection in logic, learning, understanding, and convincing. Second, the pleasure principle can produce beauty through the body, the heart, and our five senses. For example, the flirtatious gaze or the touching of the skin can generate an almost electric current. There is also the smell of the garden in the rain. In music or in someone's voice an echo may re-enact an emotion of a distant past. These rare memories may also be beauty.

As my brain experiences the duality of subjective and objective, my sense of beauty swings between the two. I refuse to choose. I am a woman of emotion who still pines to be a woman of rationality. I am torn between the two, and I have learned to accept them both. To seduce is a harmo-

nious merger of the two, and it is the greatest art of all. Sculpture, which is my *raison d'être*, is motivated by my obsessive, unsuccessful attempts to seduce.

Uncontrollable beauty is in the effort to seduce one through my sculpture. It is *le désir de plaire*. Art comes from the inability to seduce. I am unable to make myself loved. I am still motivated by an attraction to "the other," which is a mysterious beauty. Seduction is a form of convincing. I am the indefatigable seducer. Beauty is the pursuit of "the other."

* * *

Beauty? It seems to me that beauty is an example of what the philosopher's call reification, to regard an abstraction as a thing. Beauty is a series of experiences. It is not a noun. People have experiences. If they feel an intense aesthetic pleasure, they take that experience and project it into the object. They experience the idea of beauty, but beauty in and of itself does not exist. To put it another way, experiences are sorts of pleasures that involve verbs. The fallacy occurs in taking the experience, "I like X" and referring to "X" as beauty. The process is similar to what T. S. Eliot said of Wordsworth: "Wordsworth found in stones the sermons he had planted there." In fact, beauty is only a mystified expression of our own emotion.

That's very well said.

You don't have to thank me, because it was said by art historian Jean-Louis Bourgeois. But the thanks is justified, in any case. I have here a demonstration, a visual, tangible demonstration of what I meant when I said beauty is learning, understanding, solving problems, and a reward of effort. So I am going to show it. Obviously we have no visual record, so I will have to . . . [Arranging letters of the alphabet on a table] This is an "L," this is an "O," this an "U," this is an "I," this is an "S," this is an "E." Its spells "LOUISE." So there is meaning in this pile of letters. It has a symbolic value and it is a recreation of the past. You see that it says Louise, but it first spelled, in fact, "LOUIS." It was something that was important in my

childhood, because these letters formed the name of my father, and they were put on the door—Louis Bourgeois. This is not “LOUISE,” it is “LOUIS.” And every time you wanted to talk to my father, you would see this on the door.

Do you remember the address of this door?

Yes, 174 Boulevard St. Germain, which is next to Les Deux Magots and Café de Flore, right there. This a reconstructed past. So you see, when they are all together they mean something, and they have to find their own place. For me it shows that beauty is an intellectual thing, but it is also very visual. So you cannot say that when all this is mixed it is only a mess. It has the possibility of meaning. Proust said on Sunday mornings, when eating a *madeleine*, memories came back to him. It was the smell, the sweet smell and the taste of the *madeleine* [*the little scallop-shell of pastry, so sensual under its severe, religious folds—B. B.*] that made them come back. But, of course, music is terribly important also. In hearing, there is also the sense of touching, in the sense that the piano player touches the keys. Hearing has the most power. A king of Spain, who was a little insane, could only be brought to reason by listening to the very high voice of a certain male singer—a castrato. Beauty of the ear kept him sane, well, perhaps not really sane, but at least not dangerous. But, for me it is the visual that counts most. In the visual you have the symmetrical and the asymmetrical, very important. Color comes later. I make a drawing and then I discover what I meant in the drawing. It is the opposite of imitation. You don't have a conscious intent when you start out. No, it is totally unconscious. I am a sculptor. You can have blind sculptors, because touch is so important.

* * *

There is quote from Breton, “Beauty will be convulsive, or won't be.”

I consider this remark a pun, or in any case, not serious.

You have used sexual metaphor in you work, haven't you? You have used imagery that is very phallic. I mean this in a positive sense, though there has been much suspicion of the phallic as of late. You

claimed it as your territory, in your sculpture as well as in that beautiful portrait by Robert Mapplethorpe where you are holding a hairy black phallus [Fillette (1968)].

This is an unconscious part of me. I don't know it well, but my unconscious is pretty wild. And that is why at a conscious level I am so much in love with rationality. That is the economics.

* * *

What would a feminist have to say about beauty?

First I must ask you some questions. What do you mean? Do you mean passive or active beauty? There is a difference between the two—being looked at because you are beautiful is one thing, but as an artist, you must create beauty.

Perhaps we have been under the mistaken perception that if you are beautiful it is difficult to make beauty.

Sure, that's a problem. Just look at Cyrano de Bergerac. He was ugly as sin. But he had the talent to write all those beautiful love letters. Ugly as sin—that's probably a very puritanical concept. But I will give you another example: Beauty is the ability, through your talent, to please the man you love. But it depends on a very important condition. That condition is that the talent exists. I had a friend, I can't remember his name at the moment, but it will come to me. He said he took an art class with thirty other students. All his life he had wanted to make a difference. After a while he realized that some of the students in the class were much better than he was. When he came to this conclusion, he decided to take another path. He became an art dealer. And here is another example, *le désir de plaire*, the desire to please. And what about your child? He wants to please you to show that he loves you. If he knows you like the color blue, he will put the color blue all over his drawings.

I guess part of the confusion is that beauty can describe both art and people. Some people don't want to be thought of as objects d'art.

Yes, and you can have a beautiful dog too.

* * *

Keats wrote of "Beauty and Truth." Thomas Mann linked beauty with death. With what do you associate beauty?

Well, first it is much bigger than that. It goes back to Shakespeare, doesn't it? Even further? You should get the quotes from Shakespeare. What about Romeo and Juliet, and all the others?

Do you associate sex with death?

Never. I associate that idea with repression and guilt. Beauty is associated with love, isn't it? Maybe it's a religious thing. Christ died because of his love. Perhaps it is a religious tragedy.

Blue Days and Pink Days

Statements first published in 1997 by Fondazione Prada in *Louise Bourgeois: Blue Days and Pink Days*, edited by Jerry Gorovoy and Pandora Tabatabai Asbaghi, the catalog for the artist's exhibition at the Fondazione Prada, Milan (15 May to 20 July 1997). The final three statements are from interviews with Paulo Herkenhoff, quoted in his catalog essay, "Louise Bourgeois, Femme Temps."

Time—time lived, time forgotten, time shared. What does time inflict—dust and disintegration? My reminiscences help me live in the present, and I want them to survive. I am a prisoner of my emotions. You have to tell your story, and you have to forget your story. You forget and forgive. It liberates you.

* * *

The couple copulating is seen through the eyes of a young girl. Are they fighting? Are they enjoying themselves? Is one killing the other? It refers to the age when I could not understand what they were doing, what they saw in each other, and what they were pursuing in each other. It is the question of an arrested traumatic experience.

The prosthesis refers to the people who are handicapped. They would like to love, but cannot succeed. Everything they do, they fail. I'm afraid that they fail even in making love. And yet, they try. Black is sad. The color of mourning. The headless figures are wishful thinking on my part. Black is the color of resented authority . . . I am an existential maker. Unconscious guilt makes you cruel.

* * *

The physiological problems explored in my work are those of a young girl.



The Couple II, 1996, fabric and knee brace, 68.5 × 152.5 × 81 cm.

My traumas happened long before I was married. They happened in my teens, and I go back to that period. There is a fatal attraction for men who are married. This becomes a very dangerous situation. If you have low self-esteem you compare yourself to girls, and you are jealous of girls who have made it, who have gotten married. The consequences, this girl Lison, turns around couples, like a sick dog. She sees a couple and she has a fatal attraction not towards one or the other, but to the phenomena of copulation. She is haunted by that, and she turns around them with curious eyes, not envious eyes, but curious and inquisitive eyes. What are they doing? Why does he stay with her? I am exasperated by the vision of the copulating couple, and it makes me so furious, it upsets me so much, that I chop their heads. This is it. When a person is under such anxiety, I turn violent. I cut the heads of everybody . . . The sewing is a defense. I am so afraid of things I might do. The defense is to do the opposite of what you want to do. I would never separate a couple.

* * *

I make drawings to suppress the unspeakable. The unspeakable is not a problem for me. It's even the beginning of the work. It's the reason for the work; the motivation of the work is to destroy the unspeakable.

Clothing is also an exercise of memory. It makes me explore the past: how did I feel when I wore that. They are like signposts in the search for the past.

Time is a tributary of light, of twilight, of the night and dawn. And full daylight. That's my *madeleine*. That's what I say to myself when time has passed. It's mostly a function of the eyes, of light. It could be a function of the heat that rises into the radiator. It could be the smell of a good meal. Or it could be the music of Mozart that filters throughout the house. That is, it's a function of the five senses.

Select Diary Notes 1991–1997

Previously unpublished. Certain passages translated from the French by Caroline Beamish and David Britt.

18 November 1991

The precipitation of an anxiety attack—if not jotted down on the spot it would be impossible to trace back—only a “poet” could get the notations.

8 January 1992

The sculpture speaks for itself and needs no explanation. My intentions are not the subject. The object is the subject. Not a word out of me is needed.

27 March 1992

Sexuality is sublimated in the intensity of effort necessary to learn, to understand, to connect, to associate in creation, in triage, symbolize, or join, to orient to achieve, to make yourself understood, to convince, to defend yourself.

13 June 1992

The value of this sculpture does not stem from what it means to me. I have nothing to prove to other people. Self-expression is the motivation. Acting out is it. To be allowed to act out is a privilege.

5 January 1993

A catastrophic view of the world before it is conscious. Today, here and now, I was totally unconscious—explains in retrospect the sleepless (totally) night of yesterday.

When I was born my father and mother were fighting like cats and dogs. And the country was preparing for war, and my father who wanted a son got me, and my sister had just died. Please let me breathe.

27 April 1993

Realization is a pursuit going faster and faster towards an accurate goal. The goal is the *exact* transfer of a need to express a thought more than an emotion.

20 August 1993

Art comes from a need to express—an idea or a concept—cutting, mutilation, self-mutilation. Pruning, control. How to prove to yourself. How to achieve sainthood, health, star status, self-knowledge, the curative aspect of Art, usefulness, how to prove to yourself that you are lovable. Make people love you through your art.

14 January 1994

Bliss. The bliss of saying no; the bliss of freedom, of creation—bliss, bliss, bliss. It disappears after two hours or one hour. The joy of living, of understanding, the revelation of centuries followed by a feeling of confusion, and a certain fear—fear of what? Every time I moved house hope was renewed: Rue de Seine, Rue Royer-Collard, Avenue d'Orléans, Rue Mazarine, behind the shop Hôtel Montalembert, Hôtel des Gds-Augustins, 63 Park, 333 E 41, 142 E 18, 335 W 22, 347 W 20 . . . 475 Dean. Broken Promises. I've paid my debts and I can go: bliss.

7 February 1995

Has the day invaded the night or has the night invaded the day?

2 December 1996

The Runaway Girl who never grew up.

I need no support nor comfort.

I need no safety net, no breakfast.

No lunch or tea, no visitors, no telephone calls nor little messages.

No little concerts, no hype, nor encouragement for big projects.

No ambitions, no spying on my neighbors.

I need nothing . . . I can wait, I am not afraid, I am an adult.
Nothing is lacking.

13 October 1997

I am held accountable for my gift. My food is a gift, my jam and tea is a gift, my health, my disposition (smiling today), the sun coming into the room is a gift, my friend's phone call is a gift, the satisfaction of having done one's duty; its accomplishment, is a gift. My sky blue shirt is clean and is a gift, very especially the weather, outside, and furnace is a gift, the state of my stomach, gift from above, the presence of my loved ones.

Be ready to pay for your gifts in art.

Be ready to pay for your debts in art.

You are sacrificing your freedom for art.

12 December 1997

The power of integration, connect together, is enormous, overpowering—but evanescent. One responds to a need—are you together? Yes I am. I am a puzzle with all my forty-four pieces. *Tabula rasa* is needed. A map is an object of study, take your time. I am a map. You are a different map.

Art is Sanity

Statements from a film-in-progress by Marion Cajori and Amei Wallach, an Art Kaleidoscope Foundation production to be released in 1998–9.

First Visit

The connections that I make in my work are connections that I cannot face.

They are really unconscious connections.

The artist has the privilege of being in touch with his or her unconscious, and this is really a gift.

It is the definition of sanity.

It is the definition of self-realization.

Fifth Visit

My emotions are inappropriate to my size. So they bother me!

And I really have to get rid of them.

My emotions are my demons. The intensity . . .

It's not the emotions themselves, it's the intensity of the emotions—much too much for me to handle.

And that is why I transfer them. I transfer the energy to sculpture.

This applies to everything I do.

It has nothing to do with the craft.

It has nothing to do with the skills.

It has nothing to do with how to manage materials.

Materials are only materials, nothing more.

Materials are not the subject of the artist.

The subject of the artist is: Emotions . . . and ideas . . .

Both.

Louise Bourgeois

- 1911 Born in Paris, France
1938 Moved to New York

Education

- 1932–5 Sorbonne, Paris
1936–7 Ecole du Louvre
1936–7 Atelier Bissière
1936–8 Ecole des Beaux-Arts
1937–8 Académie de la Grande Chaumière
1938 Fernand Léger
1939–40 Vaclav Vytlacil

Select Individual Exhibitions

- 1945 *Paintings by Louise Bourgeois*, Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New York
1947 Norlyst Gallery, New York
1949 *Recent Work 1947 to 1949: Seventeen Standing Figures*, Peridot Gallery, New York
1950 *Sculptures*, Peridot Gallery, New York
1953 *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings for Sculpture and Sculpture*, Peridot Gallery, New York; Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago
1959 *Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois* (one of five exhibitions that were part of “Festival of Contemporary Arts”), Andrew D. White Art Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
1963 *Recent Drawings by Louise Bourgeois*, Rose Fried Gallery, New York
1964 *Louise Bourgeois Recent Sculpture*, Stable Gallery, New York
1974 *Sculpture 1970–1974*, 112 Greene Street, New York
1978 *Triangles: New Sculpture and Drawings, 1978*, Xavier Fourcade,

- New York; "New Work," Hamilton Gallery, New York
- 1979 *Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture 1941–1953, Plus One New Piece*, Xavier Fourcade Gallery, New York; *Louise Bourgeois: Matrix/Berkeley 17*, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, California
- 1980 *Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture—The Middle Years 1955–1970*, Xavier Fourcade Gallery, New York; *The Iconography of Louise Bourgeois*, Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York
- 1981 *Louise Bourgeois: Femme Maison*, Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago
- 1982 *Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture and Drawings*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
- 1982–3 *Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, traveled to Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Akron Art Museum, Akron, Ohio
- 1983 Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco
- 1984 Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco; *Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
- 1985 Serpentine Gallery, London; *Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective 1947–1984*, Maeght-Lelong, Paris and Zürich
- 1986 *Eyes*, The Doris Freedman Plaza, New York; *Louise Bourgeois: Sculptures and Drawings*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York; Texas Gallery, Houston
- 1987 *Paintings from the 1940s*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York; *The Louise Bourgeois Exhibitions*, Yares Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona; The Art Museum of Florida International University, Miami; *Sculpture 1947–1955*, Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco; *Paintings and Drawings*, Janet Steinberg Gallery, San Francisco
- 1987–9 The Taft Museum, Cincinnati, traveled to The Art Museum of Florida International University, Miami, Laguna Gloria Art

- Museum, Austin, Texas, Gallery of Art, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse
- 1988 *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings 1939–1987*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York; *Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois*, Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, Texas; *Louise Bourgeois: Works on Paper 1939–1988*, Museum Overholland, Amsterdam
- 1989 *Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York; *Louise Bourgeois: Progressions and Regressions*, Galerie Lelong, New York; *Louise Bourgeois: Works from the Fifties*, Sperone-Westwater Gallery, New York; *Louise Bourgeois: Dessins 1940–1986*, Galerie Lelong, Paris; *Louise Bourgeois: 100 Zeichnungen 1939–1989*, Galerie Lelong, Zürich; *Louise Bourgeois: Selected Works 1946–1989*, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; *Louise Bourgeois: Works from the Sixties*, Dia Art Foundation, Bridgehampton, New York; *Recent Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois*, Art Gallery of York University, North York, Ontario
- 1989–91 *Louise Bourgeois: A Retrospective*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, traveled to Städtische Galerie, Lenbachhaus, Munich, Riverside Studios, London, Musée d'art contemporain, Lyon, Fondacion Tàpies, Barcelona, Kunstmuseum Berne, Kröller-Möller Museum, Otterloo, The Netherlands
- 1990 *Louise Bourgeois: Bronze Sculpture and Drawings*, Linda Cathcart Gallery, Santa Monica; *Louise Bourgeois: Druckgraphik, Zeichnungen*, Barbara Gross Galerie, Munich; *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings*, Karsten Schubert Ltd, London; *Louise Bourgeois 1939–89: Skulpturen und Zeichnungen*, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna; *Bourgeois: Four Decades*, Ginny Williams Gallery, Denver; *Bronzen der 40er und 50er Jahre*, Karsten Greve Gallery, Cologne
- 1990–1 *Louise Bourgeois: Skulpturen und Zeichnungen*, Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne

- 1991 *Louise Bourgeois: Recent Sculpture*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York; *Louise Bourgeois: l'oeuvre gravée*, Galerie Lelong, Zürich
- 1992 documenta 9, Kassel; Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto; *Louise Bourgeois: C.O.Y.O.T.E.*, Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York; *Currents 21: Louise Bourgeois*, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee; *Louise Bourgeois Drawings*, Second Floor, Reykjavik; *Louise Bourgeois, Prints 1947–1991*, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston; Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris; National Gallery of Art, East Wing, Washington, D.C.; *The Fabric Workshop's 15th Anniversary Annual Benefit Honoring Louise Bourgeois and Anne d'Harnoncourt*, The Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia
- 1993 Linda Cathcart Gallery, Santa Monica; Ginny Williams Family Foundation, Denver; *The Locus of Memory*, United States Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, travelled to The Brooklyn Museum, New York, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montréal; *Louise Bourgeois Personnages, 1940s/Installations, 1990s*, Laura Carpenter Fine Art, Santa Fe; *Louise Bourgeois: Etchings*, Jan Weiner Gallery, Topeka; Galerie Ramis Braquet, Monterrey
- 1994 *Louise Bourgeois: Skulpturen und Installationen*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne; *Louise Bourgeois: The Personnages*, The St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; *Louise Bourgeois Skulpturen*, Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover; *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, traveled to Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Musée du dessin et de l'estampe originale, Gravelines, The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht; *Louise Bourgeois: The Red Rooms*, Peter Blum, New York; Locks Gallery, Philadelphia; *The Louise*

- Bourgeois Papers: A Promised Gift to the Archives of American Art*, Archives of American Art, New York
- 1995 Ecole nationale des beaux-arts de Bourges, France; *Louise Bourgeois: Pensées-Plumes*, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, traveled to Helsinki Art Museum; *Louise Bourgeois—Dessins pour Duras*, Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, Paris; MARCO, Monterrey, traveled to Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo, Seville, al Museo Rufino Tamayo, Ciudad, Mexico; *Louise Bourgeois: Sculptures, environnements, dessins 1938–1995*, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Mitsubishi-Jisho Artium, Fukuoka, traveled to Walker Hill Art Center, Seoul; *Louise Bourgeois: Hommage à Duras*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne; The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, traveled to ORIEL, The Arts Council of Wales' Gallery, The Friary, Cardiff; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, traveled to Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- 1996 *Louise Bourgeois. Der Ort des Gedächtnisses. Skulpturen, Environments und Zeichnungen 1946–1995*, Deichtorhallen Hamburg; *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings*, University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley; traveled to The Drawing Center, New York, The List Visual Art Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco; Installation of *Les Bienvenus*, commissioned by the town of Choisy-le-Roi, France; *Louise Bourgeois: Arbeiten auf Papier*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne; Service municipal d'arts plastiques, Choisy-le-Roi; *Louise Bourgeois: Spiders*, Baumgartner Galleries, Inc., Washington, D.C.; Galerie Samuel Lallouz, Montreal; Rupertinum, Salzburg; *11th Mostra da Gravura de Curitiba/Mostra América*, Fundação Cultural de Curitiba-Museu da Gravura, Curitiba; Galeraí Soledad Lorenzo, Madrid

- 1997 *The Drawings of Louise Bourgeois*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil; *Ode à ma mère*, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; Fondazione Prada, Milan; Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama (travels to further venues in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan)
- 1998 Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux, travels to Serpentine Gallery, London, Centre Culturel de Belem, Lisbon, Konsthall, Malmö; "Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture," North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Kyungki-do

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- United States pavilion at the Venice Biennale and The Brooklyn Museum, 1993
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- . *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall*, Zürich, Ammann Verlag, 1992
- Miller, Arthur, and Louise Bourgeois. *Homely Girl. A Life*, New York, Peter Blum Edition, 1992
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- . *Louise Bourgeois: Recent Work 1984–89* (catalog), London, Riverside Studios, 1990
- Pagé, Suzanne, and Béatrice Parent. *Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture, environnement, dessin 1935–1995* (catalog), Paris, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris/Editions de la Tempête, 1995
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- . *Dislocations* (catalog), New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1991
- Strick, Jeremy. *Louise Bourgeois: The Personnages* (catalog), St. Louis, Missouri, St. Louis Art Museum, 1994
- Weiermair, Peter with Lucy Lippard, Rosalind Krauss, et al. *Louise Bourgeois* (retrospective catalog), Frankfurt, Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1989 (subsequent editions published by further exhibition venues: Lyon, Musée d'art contemporain; London, Riverside Studios; Barcelona: Fondacion Tàpies)
- Wye, Deborah. "Louise Bourgeois," in *From Women's Eyes* (catalog), Waltham, Massachusetts, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 1977
- . Introduction in *Matrix/Berkely 17: Louise Bourgeois* (catalog), Berkeley, University Art Museum, University of California, 1978
- . *Louise Bourgeois* (retrospective catalog), New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1982
- Wye, Deborah, and Carol Smith. *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1994

Select Public Collections

Allbright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
Australian National Gallery, Canberra
British Museum, London
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Denver Art Museum, Denver
Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa

Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit
 Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts
 Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna
 Guggenheim Museum, New York
 Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.
 Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern
 Kunstmuseum Lucerne, Lucerne
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
 Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris
 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
 Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
 Museum of Modern Art, New York
 Museum of Modern Art, Vienna
 New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans
 New York Public Library, New York
 Olympic Park, Seoul
 Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
 Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine
 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence
 St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri
 Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, Nebraska
 Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York
 Tate Gallery, London
 Ulmer Museum, Ulm
 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Film and Video

- 1975 *Louise Bourgeois*, Lynn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield (inter view), Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
 1983 *Partial Recall*, The Easton Foundation/Museum of Modern Art, New York

- 1987 *Louise Bourgeois*, Tape no. 27, Art/New York
- 1989 *Louise Bourgeois in Lenbachhaus*, Videotechnik B. Gürter, Munich
- 1992 *Sculpture of the 1980s*, Business Arts, Inc.
- 1993 *Louise Bourgeois*, Bernard Marcadé and Jerry Gorovoy (produced by Camille Guichard), Terra Luna Films/Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; *Louise Bourgeois*, Nigel Finch, Arena Films/The Easton Foundation, BBC, London
- 1994 *Studio Visits with Louise Bourgeois*, Marion Cajori and Amei Wallach, from a film in progress, Mario Cajori Films/Christian Blackwoods Productions, New York 1995 *Chère Louise*, Brigitte Cornand, Canal+/Parigi; *Louise Bourgeois at Close Quarters*, Rosamond Bernier, Metropolitan Museum, New York
- 1996 *Artcity*, Chris Mayback and Paul Gardner, Twelve Films
- 1997 *Travaux en cours*, Brigitte Cornand, Film du Siamois

Awards

- 1943 Award for the exhibition "The Arts in Therapy," Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1973 Grant from National Endowment for the Arts
- 1977 Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Yale University, New Haven
- 1979 G.S.A. Commission for public sculpture, Manchester, New Hampshire
- 1980 Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Visual Arts from the Woman's Caucus for Art
- 1981 Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Bard College, New York; Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences of Boston
- 1983 Fellow of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York; Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston
- 1984 President's Fellows Award from the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore; Order of Arts and

- Letters, French Ministry of Culture
- 1985 Skowhegan Medal for Sculpture, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine
- 1987 Honorary Doctorate from the New York School, New York; Gold Medal for Excellence in Art from the National Arts Club of New York
- 1989 Creative Arts Award Medal for Sculpture, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts; Distinguished Artists Award for Lifetime Achievement from the College Art Association, New York; Neptune Award for the Arts, Snug Harbor, Staten Island, New York
- 1990 MacDowell Medalist, The MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire; Sculpture Center Award for Distinction in Sculpture, Sculpture Center, New York
- 1991 First artist to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Sculpture Center, Washington, D.C.; Grand Prix National de Sculpture from the French Department of the Arts
- 1993 Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York; Mayor's Award for Art & Culture from the City of New York; Maison Française prize from New York University
- 1994 Norddeutschen Landesbank Kunstpreis, Germany
- 1995 Biennial Award from the Ueno Royal Museum of Tokyo and from the Hakone Open-Air Museum of Kanagawa-ken, with the acquisition prize for *Cell (Arch of Hysteria)*; Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts, Art Institute of Chicago
- 1996 First Annual Urban Glass Award for Innovative Use of Glass by a Non-Glass Artist; commission for Battery Park by the City Authority for the Robert F. Wagner, Jr. Park, New York
- 1997 United States National Medal of Arts (presented by President Clinton at the White House, Washington, D.C.)

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Louise Bourgeois DESTRUCTION OF THE FATHER
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE FATHER
WRITINGS AND INTERVIEWS 1923–1997

Edited by Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist

*“My early work is the fear of falling. Later on it became the art of falling.
How to fall without hurting yourself. Later on it is the art of hanging in there.”*

*“I have kept diaries all my life, ever since I was a child, ever since I could look
someone in the face—and catch visual emotions and remember my own.”*

*“Every day you have to abandon your past or accept it and then if you cannot
accept it, you become a sculptor.”*

Since the age of twelve, the internationally renowned sculptor Louise Bourgeois has been writing—writing and drawing. First a diary precisely recounting the everyday events of her family life, then notes and reflections. *Destruction of the Father*—the title comes from the name of a sculpture she made following the death of her husband in 1973—contains both formal texts and what the artist calls “pen-thoughts”: drawing-texts often connected to her drawings and sculptures, with stories or poems inscribed alongside the images.

For Bourgeois, writing is a means of expression that has gained increasing importance over the years, particularly during periods of insomnia. The writing is compulsive, but it can also be perfectly controlled, informed by her intellectual background, knowledge of art history, and sense of literary form (she has frequently published articles on artists, exhibitions, and art events). Bourgeois, a private woman “without secrets,” has given numerous interviews to journalists, artists, and writers, expressing her views on her oeuvre, revealing its hidden meanings, and relating the connection of certain works to the traumas of her childhood. This book collects both her writings and her spoken remarks on art, confirming the deep links between her work and her biography and offering new insights into her creative thinking and process.

Marie-Laure Bernadac is chief curator of CAPC Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux. She is the author of a monograph on Louise Bourgeois and the editor of *The Writings of Picasso*.

Hans-Ulrich Obrist is a curator at ARC Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris, and at the Museum in Progress, Vienna. He has edited writings by Gerhard Richter, Leon Golub, and Gilbert & George.

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Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation

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During the 1930s and 1940s, women artists associated with the Surrealist movement produced a significant body of self-images that have no equivalent among the works of their male colleagues. Many of the representational strategies employed by these pioneers continue to resonate in the work of contemporary women artists. This book explores specific aspects of the relationship between historic and contemporary work in the context of Surrealism. The contributors reexamine art historical assumptions about gender, identity, and intergenerational legacies within modernist and postmodernist frameworks.

Cover photograph by Claudio Edinger, 1988

Cover designed by Peter B. Willberg

Printed in Italy

The MIT Press
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142
<http://mitpress.mit.edu>

BOUDP

0-262-52246-2

