

Louise Bourgeois at Heide

Louise Bourgeois: Late Works

Exhibition dates: 24 November 2012 to 11 March 2013

Curator: Jason Smith

Louise Bourgeois and Australian artists

Exhibition dates: 13 October 2012 to 14 April 2013

Curator: Linda Michael



Louise Bourgeois: Late Works installation view
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Photograph: John Gollings, 2012

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Introduction

Louise Bourgeois: Late Works assembles 23 of the most important of Bourgeois' works from 1996 to 2009. It is only the second significant survey of Bourgeois' work in Australia. The first was organised by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1995 and travelled to the MCA in 1996. That first exhibition, simply titled *Louise Bourgeois*, included works from two critical decades in her career: the mid 1940s to mid 1950s, when Bourgeois first exhibited her personages sculptures; and the mid 1980s to early 1990s, the years following her acclaimed 1982 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art In New York.

Heide's 2012 exhibition has been curated to follow on from the 1995 exhibition with a tightly selected group of works that are central to Bourgeois' late oeuvre, and which represent the diverse subjects and forms produced in the last years of her life.

Bourgeois was one of the most influential, inventive and provocative artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and her work continues to expand the scope of subject matter and source material for contemporary art practices. The familial stories and biographical episodes that inspired the foundation of and provided life-long fuel for Bourgeois' art are routinely cited and well-known: her parents' tapestry workshop in which she learnt the usefulness of art as a form of reparation; her father's public infidelity and betrayal of her mother; her mother's early death; her complex sense of abandonment; her constant analysis of self; her belief in art as an exorcism of demons and as a potential means of reconciliation with the past.

Louise Bourgeois: Late Works focuses on Bourgeois's use of fabric in sculpture and what she termed 'fabric drawings'. A preoccupation with memory and time, human relationships, fear and its annihilation, sexuality and the erotic body, are all emphases of Bourgeois' final works.

In the fabric works the processes of deconstructing and reconstructing, are applied to the contents of Bourgeois' closets. The recycling of her garments, collected textiles and tapestry fragments intensifies her work's expression of self-portraiture, and the profound personal experiences that defined her life and art.

One of the artist's major Cells, dominated by one of her famous gargantuan spiders, is central to the exhibition. Bourgeois created her powerful spider works partly in tribute to her mother, saying: 'Like a spider, my mother was a weaver ... spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother'. The female body and female subjectivity are concentrations in the exhibition.

Louise Bourgeois: Late Works is a major undertaking for Heide. Its aim is to extend our interaction with this profoundly important artist's work, and introduce it to new audiences and generations.

Louise Bourgeois and Australian artists looks at relationships (both real and imagined) between the art of Louise Bourgeois and that of ten Australian artists, in the rare context of a solo Bourgeois exhibition at Heide. Some pay direct homage to Bourgeois' work or consider similar themes, while the connection of others registers more instinctually, on the level of a shared psychological intensity. Many of the works are rooted in memory and emotion, with a core that remains indecipherable—they do not illustrate or explain.

Forged regardless of fashion or fortune, Bourgeois' oeuvre gave several artists in this exhibition the impetus to use personal subject matter as a creative source in the late 1980s and 1990s, an era when a cool, detached conceptualism dominated. Many share Bourgeois' subjective focus and use the human body as a vehicle for self-expression, while for others her work's formal precision and constant reinvention inspire. All respond to the exemplary fusion in Bourgeois' art between inner compulsion and formal discipline, instinct and intelligence.

The Australian artists represented in this exhibition are Kathryn Del Barton, Pat Brassington, Janet Burchill, Carolyn Eskdale, Brent Harris, Joy Hester, Kate Just, Patricia Piccinini, Heather B. Swann and Kathy Temin.

Louise Bourgeois' biography

An account of Louise Bourgeois' biography is essential to our understanding of the situations and emotional forces that gave rise to her art. Bourgeois repeated across her lifetime that her childhood had 'never lost its magic ... never lost its mystery, and never lost its drama. All my work of the last fifty years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood'.¹ Her obsession with the past and with eliminating painful memories from her psyche was, for Bourgeois, defining of art practice. Artists, she said, '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'.²

Bourgeois was born in Paris on 25 December 1911. Her parents Louis and Joséphine Bourgeois ran a tapestry gallery near their home on Boulevard Saint-Germain. Bourgeois' mother and grandmother had been raised in Aubusson, the southern French town settled in the sixteenth century by tapestry makers from northern Europe because the level of tannin in the water of the Creuse River made woollen tapestries washed in it especially receptive to natural dyes. Tapestry-making was the family tradition and its business. Bourgeois' grandmother established her own commercial studio making tapestries and passed the labour-intensive skills of production and repair onto her daughter Joséphine, who would eventually specialise in the repair of pre-1830 Aubusson tapestries, favouring their woollen medium in contrast to later cotton weaves for which chemical dyes were required.

From 1912 to 1917 the Bourgeois family lived in Choisy-le-Roi, in outer suburban Paris, in a property that extended to the Seine River and that had a house with a two-storey atelier for a team of tapestry workers. The First World War interrupted family life: Bourgeois' father was wounded in fighting and after recovering in Chartres, relocated his family in 1919 to an extensive house, gardens and tapestry atelier in Antony on the banks of the Bièvre River, again taking advantage of the tannin content of the water for dyeing wool.

The idyll of Antony was for Louise Bourgeois broken by the arrival of Sadie Richmond, who was employed by Bourgeois' father to teach his children English. Sadie swiftly became his mistress and a deep sense of betrayal took root in the young Louise. It is her father's betrayal of her mother, Sadie's betrayal of Louise, and all the adults' ignorance of the child Louise's seething anger and confusion that would provide a foundation for Bourgeois' work throughout her life. Bourgeois saw her mother as rational, patient and stoic in her nurturing, in contrast to the temperament of her father who she regarded as irrationally emotional, unreasonable and capable of psychological cruelty. Bourgeois became aware at an early age that she was living in a time and social environment in which women and their identities were subordinate to men. As a daughter she felt she was a disappointment: 'My father provoked in me a continual loss of self-esteem. My mother represented self-confidence'.³

By the age of twelve Bourgeois was sketching feet and other missing elements for cartoons that guided the re-weaving of fragments within ruined historical tapestries. This effort and activity had an enduring influence on Bourgeois' understanding of her usefulness and the usefulness of art. At this time the productive act of making became embedded in Bourgeois' psyche as a way of dealing with anxieties and eliminating destructive impulses. As she recalled: 'My mother would sit out in the sun and repair a tapestry or a petit point. This sense of reparation is very deep within me'.⁴ Writing and the keeping of diaries became an essential means of self-awareness at the age of twelve, and Bourgeois maintained written and visual diaries throughout her life.

By the age of eighteen Bourgeois was taking drawing lessons at the École National des Arts Décoratifs after an education interrupted by her mother's illness with Spanish flu and the necessity for Louise to assist with her care.

¹ Louise Bourgeois, cited in Frances Morris (ed.), *Louise Bourgeois*, p. 81.

² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³ Louise Bourgeois, cited in Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall*, Ammann Verlag, Zurich, 1992, p. 187.

⁴ *Ibid.*

In 1932 Bourgeois studied mathematics at the Sorbonne, developing a particular interest in geometry. Geometry's lexicon of coordinates, lines, planes, circles and the relationship of elements in space, points towards Bourgeois' later work in sculpture. In contrast to the relative chaos of her early life, geometry offered ordered systems where certain rules were unchanging and relations could be anticipated.

Bourgeois' mother's death in 1932 precipitated depression and the abandonment of mathematics to study art. From this time until 1938, when she married the American art historian Robert Goldwater (1907–1973), Bourgeois studied or worked in various institutions or artists' studios, including the Académie Ranson with Roger Bissière, the École du Louvre, the École des Beaux-Arts, the studios of Othon Friesz, André Lhote and, in 1938, prior to her departure that year to live in New York, with Fernand Léger, who encouraged Bourgeois to recognise that her sensibility was more attuned to working in a sculptural space than within the limitations of painting's two-dimensional plane.

Around 1996, aged 85, Bourgeois began to mine her closets for the garments and textiles that she had worn, collected and stored over a lifetime, and use them to make sculpture and 'fabric drawings', continuing her lifelong recall and articulations of familial dysfunction, desire and fear, anger and remorse, isolation and connectedness. Bourgeois regarded these as her 'eternal' themes, and in her late works—the focus of this exhibition—they were reiterated in degrees of figuration and abstraction to define an intensely personal narrative. By weaving, stitching and sewing she threaded the past through the present, and enacted a process of repair and reconstruction.

Louise Bourgeois' practice was an elaborate articulation of an existence in which the sculpting world and the living world were one. Her late works summoned the past and confronted the present, and the passage of time, by using the very garments in which the experiences of her life, loves and longings resided. Bourgeois' work is in the collections of major museums around the world. Bourgeois lived in New York, where she passed away in May 2010 at the age of 98 years.

Jason Smith

Curator *Louise Bourgeois: Late Works*
Director/CEO, Heide Museum of Modern Art



Louise Bourgeois, 2009
photo © Alex Van Gelder



Throughout this resource you will notice this image of a visual diary. Beside it are suggested activities and provocations for you to explore that will assist you to come to your own interpretations of the artworks on display in this exhibition. Write your responses in your own visual diary.

Materials and process

From an early age, Louise Bourgeois worked in her family's tapestry restoration studio, assisting the weavers by drawing the outlines of figures for them to follow. A constant theme she refers to is 'doing', 'undoing' and 'redoing'. The work of the tapestry restoration studio—stitching and repairing—becomes a metaphor: it has the potential to heal wounds. It can also be undone. The artist has said, "If I am in a positive mood, I'm interested in joining. If I'm in a negative mood, I will cut things." Similarly, she considers carving and modeling as destructive and assembling as reparative. Bourgeois' whole persona went into making these artworks.



Discuss your own experience of making things, whether in art, cooking, gardening, DIY (do-it-yourself) activities or even dancing. How does the way you *feel* influence what you do, and why?

Femme Maison 2001



Louise Bourgeois
Femme Maison 2001
fabric, steel
35.6 × 38.1 × 66 cm
Courtesy Cheim & Read and Hauser
& Wirth

The hybrid form of *Femme Maison*—with its dual translations to 'woman house' or housewife—appeared in drawings, paintings and sculpture, and in degrees of abstraction and figuration, from the mid 1940s onwards. In this key late work the textured fabric affirms the central relationship of woman with the domestic space. Stories of the house and the home defined Bourgeois' identity. The architectural house and its contents—especially the table, bed and chair—and the familial home and its occupants, were the structures that shaped Bourgeois' unstable sense of self, and her relationships with others. This work plays on the house literally growing out of the woman's body (the nurturing mother) or, conversely, pinning her dismembered body to the ground, registering the paralysing power of fear, and recalling a painful childhood.

Femme Maison (2001) was a motif that Louise Bourgeois returned to many times between 1945 and 1994. She made several versions as paintings, and then later in marble. This particular version is constructed of steel and fabric.



In your visual diary describe how the formal elements (line, colour, tone, texture, shape, form and space) in this sculpture have been applied? How do these elements contribute to the meanings and messages of the work? Many artists use everyday life as the basis of their work, to communicate personal and political issues. Louise Bourgeois has sometimes been labeled by writers as a feminist artist. Still looking at *Femme Maison* (2001), describe how Bourgeois has taken personal experience to make a political, feminist statement. Do the materials used and the technical skills shape or effect your interpretation?

Note that *Femme Maison* and other artworks are encased in 'cells'. In one sense, the cell encases and protects the artwork; however, Louise Bourgeois' intention was to use the cell also as a way of containing the memory held within the work.



How else might you view the cells? What other works in this exhibition are contained in cells? Notice the range of materials they are made from, and speculate where they might have come from. How do they make you, the viewer, feel?

House of memories activity

The idea of the childhood home is important to many people and the house is the ideal container of memories. For Louise Bourgeois, some of her childhood memories were unpleasant. Her family life was turbulent and she had a difficult relationship with her father. It was these memories that continually inspired Bourgeois to create art. In many different ways, artists tell their life stories in visual language, through images and objects.



Think about a room you spend a lot of time in at home. How would you recreate it to be a container of memories, like Louise Bourgeois does with her Cells? Would you block, move or change any windows, doors or walls, or would they stay where they are? What special objects or materials would you bring into your new room? Which objects would you keep that are already there? What colour scheme would you select? Why? Do these have particular importance to you and your memories? Draw your room, or 'cell', in your visual diary. What is the title of your new room or cell? Find samples and swatches of different materials to support this activity and to build up a picture of your new room. Annotate your drawing.

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.

Louise Bourgeois 1992

Cinq 2007

Louise Bourgeois
Cinq 2007
fabric, stainless steel
61 × 35.6 × 35.6 cm
Courtesy Cheim & Read and Hauser
& Wirth

Fragmented bodies activity

Have you ever heard of the parlour game 'exquisite corpse'? It is a collaborative drawing game, invented by the early Surrealist artists. It is played by several people, with each drawing a section of a figure, then concealing their part to the others, and passing it on to the next player for their contribution to the image. The only rule for the game is that each participant is unaware of what the other has added, thus producing a surprising or absurd drawing or cartoon. Making an 'exquisite corpse' is a great way to collaborate with other artists, and to free you from any imaginative constraints or habits.



To try this drawing game, take a sheet of cartridge paper and fold into thirds. On the top section draw a head and neck, then fold it under so the next person to add to the drawing cannot see what you have drawn. Leave a few marks visible and pass to the next person to draw a torso. Fold over so the only the bottom third of the paper is now visible and pass to the next person to draw the legs and feet. Flatten the paper to reveal a completed hybrid body.

- Change the activity by drawing in some objects, such as a shoe or table to see what can evolve.
- You could follow up this activity by making objects from paper or cardboard boxes to attach to the different parts of the body.

Blue Days 1996



Louise Bourgeois
Blue Days 1996
cloth, steel, glass
292.1 × 205.7 × 241.3 cm
Courtesy Cheim & Read and Hauser & Wirth

You can retell your life ... by the shape, weight, colour and smell of those clothes in your closet. They are like the weather, the ocean, changing all the time.

Louise Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois could not bear to throw anything away and would store things she no longer used in her closets and attic. When she was 85 years old she pulled out her old clothes and other textiles that she had worn, collected and stored over a lifetime and used them to make sculpture and fabric drawings.

While Louise Bourgeois' sculptural works in this exhibition often concentrate on the body, she was also interested in the clothes that cover and protect it. In *Blue Days* (1996), Bourgeois stuffed and shaped her dresses and shirts and suspended them around a red glass that appears to be a nucleus or single blood cell around which the new sculptural bodies circulate. Clothes are powerful triggers of memory. Do you have any particular items of clothes that you couldn't bear to throw out because they remind you of a special event in your life, or perhaps a special person?

Use the See, Think, and Wonder Thinking Strategy from Artful Thinking to help you carefully observe the work *Blue Days*.

SEE What do I see?	THINK What do I think?	WONDER What do I wonder?



Write your observations and ‘wonderings’ in your visual diary and discuss with your class. How might you interpret this particular piece? What relationship does the artwork have to the artist’s life and experiences? What visual evidence supports this reading?

The Waiting Hours 2007



Louise Bourgeois
The Waiting Hours 2007
sewn fabric
12 parts, (4 shown)
each 38.4 × 31.1 cm
Courtesy Cheim & Read and
Hauser & Wirth



Look very carefully at the sequence of *The Waiting Hours*. Consider how colour, line and shape have been used in each panel. What do each of these separate elements mean to you? List your thoughts in the table below. What might the panels represent? Does it suggest a narrative or story to you?

Colour	Line	Shape



Sewing and working with fabric has traditionally been thought of as 'women's work'. How is this artwork linked to people, places or experiences of personal significance for Louise Bourgeois? Write your thoughts in your visual diary.



Louise Bourgeois
Untitled 2005
fabric, thread, rubber,
stainless steel, wood, glass
241.3 × 200.7 × 109.2 cm
Courtesy Cheim & Read and Hauser
& Wirth

Word link activity



List each of these words in your visual diary:

Stack, pile, thread, stretch, balance, rest, ink, mould, join, combine, fold and suspend.

Look closely at the artworks on display and to find a link between each word and works of art. Explain what the link is and how it applies.

Spider 1997



Louise Bourgeois
Spider 1997
 steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric,
 rubber, silver, gold, bone
 449.6 × 665.5 × 518.2 cm
 The Easton Foundation, New York,
 NY

Photograph: John Gollings 2012

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.

Louise Bourgeois, from Ode to my Mother, 1995

The vast scale of this work plays with our emotional responses. What would normally be a small insect creeping along the ground has been scaled up into a solid structure that literally towers over us. Repulsion and attraction mix with excitement and curiosity. A spider draws out a thread from her body to create a web structure of immense beauty in order to capture and kill her prey. How can something as potentially horrific as a giant spider be identified with the idea of a nurturing mother? In creating *Spider*, Bourgeois has captured and entertained us, but she is also demanding that we question and think.



Notice that the spider is protecting a cell filled with the artist's artefacts. Move around the work and note down all the objects you see. Many of them recall the artist's childhood memories. Other objects are repeated in other works and have symbolic value. For example, note the three eggs in the spider's nest (Louise Bourgeois was one of three children, and also had three children herself). What might be the story Louise Bourgeois is telling? What relationship does the artwork have to the artist's life and experiences? What visual evidence supports this reading?

Spinning a yarn



Imagine you are sitting in the chair, in the Cell, under the Spider sculpture and telling a tall tale. A very tall tale! Do this as an individual activity with each person making up their own story. Or make up a group story with each member adding a new section as you go around in turn. Start off with a simple lead-in such as 'Once upon a time.... You could put words onto cue cards to serve as a prompt when building your story, for example, '... there was a... and a... it went... then... soon after'. Record your story in your visual diary. Make a story board for it or illustrate your story.



Louise Bourgeois
Spider 1997 (detail)
steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric,
rubber, silver, gold, bone
449.6 × 665.5 × 518.2 cm
The Easton Foundation, New York, NY

Photograph: John Gollings 2012



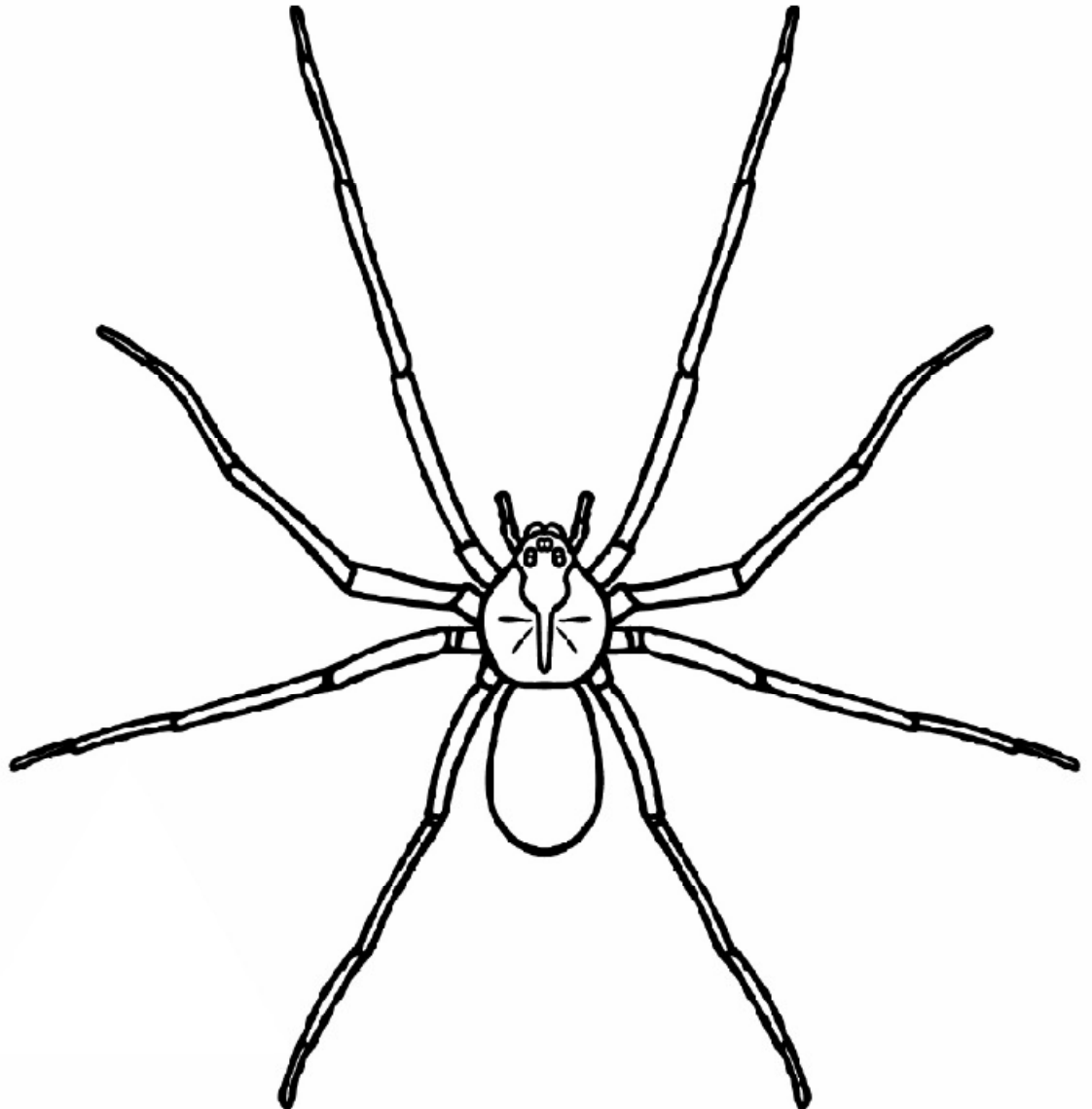
Louise Bourgeois
Spider 1995
drypoint printed on Hahnemhle paper
Published by Peter Blum Edition Printed by Harlan
and Weaver Intaglio, New York Edition of 35 + 10
Roman numerals
Private collection, Melbourne

Spidergraph

On the spider diagram below, between the legs on the left side write what you 'see' (the visual evidence) in the artwork (e.g. the spider has three eggs in a nest). Between the spider legs to the right of the spider write what you think about, are reminded of or wonder when you look at *Spider* (1997). You might refer to the evidence contained in the information at the beginning of this pack to help you interpret the evidence.

What I see

What I think



Why do you think Louise Bourgeois named her various spider sculptures (as in the central room) *Maman* (mother)? How might a spider be considered a metaphor for a mother? What creature or object would you use to represent your own mother?

What counts, our whole purpose, is to try to understand what we are about, to scrutinize ourselves ... every day you have to abandon your past or accept it, and then, if you cannot accept it, you become a sculptor.

Louise Bourgeois

Shaping feelings activity



Louise Bourgeois always placed her emotional life at the centre of her art. Try making 'shapes to describe feelings' using clay, soft modeling material or papier-mâché. You could start off by making a list of words to describe a wide range of different feelings. Experiment with lighting your work with desk lamps or torches to create atmosphere and to reveal shadows and highlights. Take photographs to record the process.

Memory and the unconscious as a source and subject of creativity

Sigmund Freud was a medical doctor who lived in Vienna, the capital of Austria, from 1859 until 1938. At university Freud studied neurology, the study and treatment of the brain and the nervous system. Freud was particularly interested in the unconscious mind (that is processes, motivations and urges that are outside of our conscious awareness). He believed that the unconscious is full of memories, feelings and thoughts from early childhood, but they are 'repressed' and made unconscious because they are things we don't want to think about, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. Freud said that dreams contain unconscious thoughts that have been disguised or encoded in order to make them acceptable to consciousness (and to other people). To Freud there was great similarity between neurosis and creativity. He felt both originated in conflicts associated with wish fulfillment and biological drives.



Louise Bourgeois art has been described as largely preoccupied with autobiographical themes and complex self-portraiture. Which work in this exhibition best demonstrates this? Do you consider that creative processes, such as making artworks, can be a way to reveal or make apparent our unconscious thoughts and desires?

Are there works in this exhibition that remind you of dreams or could be described as being 'dream-like' scenarios? Select an artwork that seems to be 'dream-like' according to you. Describe the artwork in your journal and the qualities that cause it to appear this way. You may wish to write a brief story or poem inspired by this artwork.

The use of symbols



A symbol is something that represents or stands for something else. For example, a person may be described as being like a 'rock' because they are strong and dependable, or someone else may use 'rock' to describe a person who is very fixed and does not change their mind easily. Make sketches and notes of any images and objects from the exhibition that you think could have a symbolic meaning. When you have collected several examples, speculate what these objects might symbolise to Louise Bourgeois and then what they may symbolise to you. Is your interpretation of the symbols the same or different as that of your peers? The ambiguity of some symbols, or their openness to different interpretations, can make an art work more interesting or enduring.

Have you ever considered using symbols in your artworks to represent aspects of your life or identity? What symbols might be meaningful to you and how would you use them in your art making?

Knife Figure 2001



Louise Bourgeois
Knife Figure 2002
 fabric, steel, wood
 22.2 × 76.2 × 19.1 cm
 Courtesy Cheim & Read and
 Hauser & Wirth



Look closely at *Knife Figure* (2002). What do you think Louise Bourgeois is trying to convey in this work? What makes this work confronting? What symbolic meanings could the knife have?

Art is a way of recognizing oneself.

Louise Bourgeois

Keeping a visual diary

Louise Bourgeois kept written and visual diaries throughout her life. In her diary, she recorded her *pensees plumes* (feather thoughts). These were drawings or sketches—visual ideas that she captured on the page. These ideas often gave rise to sculptures. Many artists, regardless of their preferred medium, keep a diary, journal or scrapbook in which they record their observations, ideas, designs, emotions, inspirations and anything that will help them in their artistic process. Some are very elaborate; others are basic. What matters is that artists keep drawing and/or writing, recording their environment, feelings and experiences, without the demand of making a finished artwork. This frees up the creative process and provides source material for developing future artworks – because it becomes an unselfconscious process over time, it can lead to some surprising discoveries.



Commit a regular time each day to making notes in your visual diary for a two-week period; in the journal, collect written and visual information about your experiences, conversations and general observations over that time. At the end of the two weeks, reflect upon the information you have collected; create a visual response in an art form of your choice that picks up on something that you have discovered by keeping a journal. Reflect upon your response using the Formal Framework and the Personal Framework from the VCE Study Design.

Louise Bourgeois and Australian artists

Louise Bourgeois has had an influential presence in the recent history of Australian art museum collections, and her story, practice and attitudes provide ongoing inspiration for contemporary Australian artists across generations.



Louise Bourgeois and Australian artists installation view
Heide Museum of Modern Art

Consider the artists and artworks that have been selected to be part of this exhibition. Are there any particular artists who inspire you and the way you make your artwork? What is it that you admire about their artistic practice and, style? In what ways have their artworks had an impact on you and how you make art (that is, your subject matter, your focus and/or your ideas)?



Can you think of any other Australian artists whose work could have been included in this exhibition? Which of their artworks would best fit within the curatorial premise of this exhibition as having a connection to Louise Bourgeois? Write an extended wall label for the artwork you selected. Where would it be shown in Heide II and how would you display it?

I had a weak-at-the-knees, tingle-all-over moment when I saw Louise Bourgeois' work for the first time about fifteen years ago in Los Angeles. Yes I am a CRAZY fan. And, yes, it's true I lay under her big spider in Tokyo and cried...

These are the releases I hope for in our vast world of art. Encounters when the artwork is somehow so inexplicably intimate, so beyond, so seemingly effortless that there can be no defence. In these moments there is an opening-up within the body, the mind, within all the senses ... an experience of recognition, relief and awe that informs one's deeper creative makeup.

Del Kathryn Barton



Del Kathryn Barton
no other side 2012 (one part)
 dupion silk and embroidery cotton
 9 parts, each 42 × 45 cm
 in collaboration with Karen Barton
 Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn
 Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Fabric was important to Louise Bourgeois, who grew up in her parents' tapestry making business. In 1996, in her mid-eighties, Bourgeois began to transform the garments and textiles that she had worn, collected and stored over a lifetime into sculptures and 'fabric drawings'. For her, sewing was an act of healing or reparation, linked to memories of her mother who 'would sit out in the sun and repair a tapestry or a petit point', an image of calm amid more distressing family dynamics.

In 2007 Del Kathryn Barton saw Bourgeois' fabric book *Ode à l'Oubli* (2004) at Kaliman Gallery in Sydney, and was strongly attracted to its intricate geometries, its material inventiveness, and the history imbued in the fabrics. Barton had grown up with her mother's sewing but until seeing this work had not found a way to incorporate a love for fabric into her art. She has since collaborated with her mother in making intricate quilted works that share the dense, kinetic, kaleidoscopic patterning of her paintings, and link to the domestic iconography of her drawings.

The grid is a very peaceful thing, because nothing can go wrong... everything is complete. There is no room for anxiety ... everything has a place. Everything is welcome.

Louise Bourgeois



Look closely at Del Kathryn Barton's *no other side*. What materials and techniques have been used? What Louise Bourgeois work is it most reminiscent of and why?

Louise Bourgeois is an artist with whom I really didn't concern myself until I saw an amazing exhibition of her sculptures, environments and drawings at the Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, in 1996. It was there that I saw her quite singular wood and bronze polychrome sculptures in the real, including The Blind Leading the Blind. Seeing this work got me thinking that I would like to return at some point to an earlier strand of my own work where I had produced several painted wooden sculptural objects. This was not necessarily to reference her, but as it happened circumstances in Australia made that so.

Returning to Australia in 1997 was to be plunged into a particularly conservative social and political ambience: Pauline Hanson was in full swing, Howard was being belligerent in terms of reconciliation questions and Wik land rights issues. This atmosphere prompted me to begin a new series of sculptures and paintings titled Following the Blind Leading the Blind. These works were a collision between ideas, works and influences from Berlin and the context to which I had returned: one in which I sensed the unheimlich qualities of the familiar. Hence my sculpture's use of picket fencing as its 'legs'. I hope that my version of Louise Bourgeois' The Blind Leading the Blind retains something of the totemic presence which is so evident in her sculpture.

Janet Burchill



Janet Burchill
Following the Blind Leading the Blind 1997
synthetic polymer and enamel paint on
wood
144.6 × 142.6 × 29.8 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased 1999



Louise Bourgeois
C.O.Y.O.T.E. 1941–48
painted wood
137.4 × 214.5 × 28.9 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1981

Bourgeois made five distinct versions of her sculpture *The Blind Leading the Blind*, the first three of which were made of wood in the 1940s. One of these, originally painted black and red, was repainted flesh-pink in 1979 and retitled C.O.Y.O.T.E (after Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, a prostitutes' collective), and is now held in the National Gallery of Australia. In characteristic fashion, Bourgeois linked this abstract, anthropomorphic sculptural form to a number of utterly different narratives: from the Biblical reference (And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?) to a Brueghel painting of the same title, from the conformity of McCarthyism to the solidarity of a women's collective, from the childhood memory of observing her parents while hiding underneath the family dinner table to the idea of pontificating old men leading her over a precipice.

What materials has Burchill used to make the sculpture *Following the Blind Leading the Blind* (1997)? What possible meanings could the use of this material imply? What do you consider that the artist's point of view might be?



What materials might an artist use today to make a sculpture with the same title? What if the artist were to create a painting with people in modern clothing? How would that be interpreted in today's society? Would it be referring to any broader societal issues?



Pieter Bruegel the Elder
The Blind Leading the Blind 1568
tempera on canvas
86 cm × 154 cm
Museo di Capodimonte, Naples



Use the VCE Art Analytical Frameworks to analyse and interpret Louise Bourgeois' *C.O.Y.O.T.E* (1941–48) and Janet Burchill's *Following the Blind Leading the Blind* (1997). Compare and contrast the meanings and messages of these two works.

I guess every artist has other practices that they aspire to. Louise Bourgeois' practice—by which I mean the combination of the works, the way that they were made, the artist and the way that she conducted herself—is such a practice for me. The way that she worked for so long, and continued to develop her work in good times and bad, as well as the way that her works are so much of their times but at the same time not quite in sync with them inspires me. The fact that I hardly know the work she made prior to her fifties demonstrates the truth of the idea that art is a lifetime project that can continue to evolve as an artist matures. And then, of course, there is the work itself.

Patricia Piccinini



Patricia Piccinini
Nectar 2012
 silicone, fibreglass, human hair,
 refrigerator
 edition 1/6
 83 × 48 × 51 cm
 Courtesy of the artist, Tolarno
 Galleries, Melbourne, and Haunch
 of Venison, London and New York

Taking her cue from the vague boundaries of the biotech world, 'where it is difficult to figure exactly where the good becomes tainted and the bad becomes justifiable', Piccinini considers her own hybrid creations, however abject or grotesque, as lovable, associated with fecundity, growth and optimism. Like Bourgeois, she presents strange couplings of the animal and the human, that despite their deformations always convey intimacy and warmth. Here the title *Nectar* suggests that there may be something nourishing in what might otherwise appear as a failed experiment.



Create a collage using magazine cut-outs to rework a familiar object into an imaginative new life form. Describe its function or purpose.

Within her long life Louise Bourgeois made powerful statements through meaningful and provocative art works that reflected her interior life. Through this process she paved the way for my own artistic freedom and for other female artists to have long careers. Her practice and longevity also represents an important alternative to the artist who becomes mythologised because their life was cut short either by their own hand (Sylvia Plath) or by illness (Eva Hesse).

I first saw Louise Bourgeois' work at the Venice Biennale in the American Pavilion in 1993. She represented the body in abstract sculptural forms and I remember thinking about the gravity and grace of her work that seemed solid and grounded yet poetic and personal. Since then I have seen many of her works that engage with universal themes, including childhood memory, intimacy, sexuality, motherhood, trauma, the body and the home.

Kathy Temin



Kathy Temin
Large Orange Ball Tree 2012
 synthetic fur, mdf, synthetic filler, steel
 230 × 58 × 58 cm
 Collection of Danielle and Daniel Besen

Materials and the way they are stitched together are at the core of Kathy Temin's art, and for her the process of making is what 'gives clarity to what I am thinking'. Her father was a Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor, a tailor who lived through the incarceration period by sewing together soldiers' uniforms. This is an interesting parallel to Bourgeois' own history as a child repairing tapestries in her parents' workshop, and her consequent regard for the reparative power of the needle (see her adjacent portfolio *La Réparation*) and the creative process of making, unmaking and remaking. Temin displaces the human figure into animals and trees as a way of transforming emotions and creating space for fantasy.



Look closely at *Large Orange Ball Tree* 2012 by Kathy Temin. How are the stylistic qualities and compositional arrangement of the artwork similar to Louise Bourgeois' *Untitled* (2005; p. 10) and Temin's other work *Cream Dis-play* (1995). Compare and contrast works by these two artists, noting similarities and differences. Can you find links between Temin's work and other Bourgeois works in both exhibitions? What do they share?

I met Louise Bourgeois in 1989 when I was in New York for a month. With James Mollison, I made a visit to Robert Miller's gallery, Bourgeois' dealer at the time. Following this, James was invited to visit Louise and her assistant Jerry Gorovoy at her house, and I was fortunate to be included. On arrival we moved into the main living space at the back of the house, which looked out over a garden, [...]. It was a fascinating encounter for me, as she seemed a very powerful, small person and had a charismatic personality.

Brent Harris



Brent Harris
Sleep no. 6 2003
 oil on linen
 58 × 43 cm
 Collection of James Mollison AO

In the early 2000s Brent Harris's art shifted from a formalist orientation to become more subjectively focused and figurative. Bourgeois' work, particularly her sculpture *The Destruction of the Father* (1974), was a strong catalyst for this change, giving Harris license to exorcise his own personal demons in a painting series he began at this time, *Grotesquerie*.

As in memory or dream, the curvilinear forms in these paintings push forward and recede, appearing as figure or ground depending on how we look at them. They are bounded by finely tuned contours that compress emotional energy, delineating bodies set in opposition though tied together: father and child, man and woman, the cowed and the dominating. Black and white dominate a minimal palette, yet the relationships between things are grey: innocent curve morphs into threatening hand, a man's red bodice becomes a group of figures that read as the bloody legacy avenged by his slit throat. The emotive impact of such images is stronger for their ambiguity, which seeks correspondence in our own memories and experiences.



Look closely at *Sleep no. 6 2003* by Brent Harris. The artist wrote, "... Bourgeois' example empowered me to revisit troubled emotions, and through visualising these feelings [...] difficult personal subject matter has been brought to the surface for self-examination". Describe the formal elements of line, colour, tone, texture, shape and form. How has Harris given form to feelings and emotion? How might the work lift away from the personal and embrace a more universal human experience?

I own up to an inevitable strand of autobiographical source material in the themes and figuration in some of my works. In pieces like Cambridge Road, In My Father's House and in My Mother's House the declaration is there in the titles and this despite a general preference for ambiguity.

Pat Brassington



Pat Brassington
The Guardian 2009
 pigment print on paper
 edition 6/8
 112 × 87.5 cm
 Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
 Purchased with funds from the Robert Salzer
 Foundation 2009

Pat Brassington uses visual techniques that emerge from surrealist collage: things touch where they normally would not; images are pressed close to the surface; motifs, spaces and patterns reappear and conjoin in new configurations as they do in memory or dream.

In addition to drawing from Surrealism, Brassington and Louise Bourgeois share an interest in psychoanalysis (Bourgeois once enrolled in university with the twin aims of fuelling her art and training as a child psychoanalyst) and both masterfully control an artistic process that presents pain and also obscures that presentation. In Brassington's images the splicing of images often cuts deep, and nameless terrors seep through drab interiors in which bodies are pressed into corners or onto the floor, and cut off, masked or distorted. Limbs, appendages and orifices lead us into or away from figures that metamorphose from one state to another and slide around an unrepresentable core, never taking definitive shape or identity.



At first glance *The Guardian* (2009) appears to represent something rather ordinary. However, on closer inspection it does not appear so straightforward. List the things in this image that look strange or peculiar and consider how they influence your interpretation of the work. What do you imagine the figure is guarding? Discuss your speculations with other class members.

Exhibition reflection activities

Now that you have spent time experiencing the two Louise Bourgeois exhibitions at Heide what makes you Think, Puzzle and Explore!

What do you <u>think</u> you know or what have you discovered about artist and her about artwork?	What questions or <u>puzzles</u> do you have about artist and her artwork?	Is there a particular artwork or aspect of the artist that you want to <u>explore</u> or know more about?

Louise Bourgeois 9 card sentences

Teachers: This activity enables students to demonstrate their conceptual understanding of Louise Bourgeois’ work and it aims to provide a structure for showing the relationship among key concepts embodied the works included in this exhibition.

Cut out the nine cards below. The student then shuffles the cards and deals them out randomly in three rows of three. The student is then asked to think about then write out or say aloud a single statement connecting each group of three words across, down and diagonally, resulting in eight separate statements demonstrating the relationships between these concepts or terms.

subjective	symbol	materials
woman	object(s)	emotion
memory	childhood	sculpture

Find someone who...

Step 1: Find another student and find out if they know an answer to any of the questions on the sheet. Write the answer in your own words and have your partner sign the sheet in the appropriate space. Give that student an answer you know to one of the other questions.

Step 2: Form new pairs when you get a match. Try to get signatures from different students in your class.

	Answer	Signature
Name four different materials Louise Bourgeois worked with.		
How many children did Louise Bourgeois have?		
What was an important motif in Louise Bourgeois' work?		
In what country was Louise Bourgeois born?		
Name three themes explored of Louise Bourgeois' work.		
How did Louise Bourgeois view her childhood?		
Name two Louise Bourgeois artworks.		
What do the 'Cell's in Louise Bourgeois' works mean?		
How did Louise Bourgeois learn to sew?		

An interview with curator Jason Smith

Did making art make Louise Bourgeois feel happier?

In an interview with Tate Modern curator Frances Morris, Bourgeois stated that in making her art she 'turned hate into love'. The making of art was always about dealing with complex emotions, so I am not sure 'happy' is the right word. It certainly enabled Bourgeois to live and have a sense of self worth and self awareness.

How did Louise Bourgeois learn to sew?

Bourgeois learned to sew by watching her mother.

There is a lot of old tapestries in this exhibition, where are they from? Why did Louise Bourgeois keep them?

They are fragments from her parents' tapestry studio.

What do the heads without bodies and bodies without heads mean?

In short they reflect a violent impulse, a destructive impulse. They also reflect bodily and emotional vulnerability.

How did Louise Bourgeois make the spider? Why did she make the spider so big? What stops it from falling over?

The spider was made by Bourgeois and an assistant who welded steel tubing under Bourgeois instruction. Various lengths of steel tubing were placed by Bourgeois to model and structure each of the individual legs. The welder would add more weld to the 'joints' or musculature of the legs to give each one volume and form. The scale of the spiders varies from the quite small to the gargantuan, such as the huge *Maman* (mother) that Bourgeois created for the opening of Tate Modern in London. The spider stands on its feet, as the sheer mass of the object is dispersed across the span of the legs.

How did you get the spider into the gallery?

The spider arrived in the gallery in eleven enormous crates. Each of the legs is a single unit and therefore each requires its own enormous crate. The legs detach from the body, which itself is in two parts – the stomach and the head. Each of the legs are bolted one through eight to the stomach and the head is then placed. Then the cell is constructed around the spider, the objects are placed inside and the door partially closed.

Was Louise Bourgeois a sad and angry person?

She was a person dominated by anxiety and a lifelong confrontation with a sense of abandonment. Her art reflects a life of emotional extremes. She knew happiness just as well as she knew sadness.

Did Louise Bourgeois align herself with a particular art movement? (For example, *Knife Figure* seems 'surreal' to me).

No, she did not. She said her work was not about any particular mode or fashion or movement: it was 'about life' and that summed it up.

Why does Louise Bourgeois enclose her sculptures in cells/cases?

The Cells are a form of architecture that she is able to control in terms of their contents and structure. They are containers of memory.

Aren't the artworks from other countries? How did you get them here?

They are all from the Louise Bourgeois Trust in New York. Since her death in 2010, the Trust has administered the works in Bourgeois' Estate.

What's your favourite work in this exhibition?

Blue Days (1996).

Do you like *all* the artworks in this exhibition?

Yes. I am a devotee of Bourgeois' work.

Further reading about Louise Bourgeois



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Heide Education

Heide's offers a range of education programs that draw on its unique mix of exhibitions, architecture and landscape to provide a rich learning experience that goes beyond the classroom.

A visit to Heide:

- provides a stimulating environment which helps to put learning into context, and promotes an understanding and appreciation of our rich, cultural heritage
- encourages motivation, by stirring curiosity and developing an intrinsic fascination for art that can only be satisfied by firsthand experience
- supports students to make cross-curricular links between different subject areas
- greatly benefits students who learn best through kinaesthetic activities
- nurtures creativity and enables social learning
- provides learning through experience and interaction which encourages students to build on prior expectations and beliefs to create new realities
- is a cultural experience that all pupils can enjoy

Looking at original works of art with a suitably trained educator also encourages the development of the following skills:

- **literacy:** by encouraging discussion and extending vocabulary
- **observation:** by focusing concentration on detail
- **critical thinking:** by demanding questions and informed conclusions
- **reflection:** by considering rationales behind thinking processes

All education programming and resources at Heide align with the VELS curriculum frameworks and VCE Study Designs. Further information about curriculum links is available at heide.com.au/education/school-visits/curriculum-links/

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Heide Museum of Modern Art
7 Templestowe Road
Bulleen VIC 3105
T 03 9850 1500
heide.com.au
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