CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

LONGING FOR MAMAN:

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IMAGES IN THE OEUVRE OF LOUISE BOURGEOIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History

by

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DEDICATION

For Norman and Jonathan

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ABSTRACT

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Louise Bourgeois is one of the most fascinating and influential artists of the Twentieth Century. Still making art in her nineties, she continues to fascinate her viewers with drawings, graphic work, sculpture, and installations, all, she claims, rooted in the memories of her childhood. My research led me to focus on her autobiography as well as the female spaces in her work. In questioning the meaning or motivation behind this segment of her oeuvre, I honed in on the maternal nurturing spaces. Perhaps, this came from my own maternal and daughterly instincts or from the gender connection between us. Nevertheless, I did not find any texts that focused on this aspect of her work, and felt that there was a gap in the now extensive scholarship on Bourgeois.

My thesis is a discussion of the driving force behind the nurturing, enclosed, contained, maternal spaces and metaphoric imagery in Louise Bourgeois's oeuvre. I utilize the biographical material that has been provided by the artist, as well as that published by scholars, along with psychoanalytic and feminist theory to support my argument that yearning for the mother is a prevalent, yet at times subconscious force in her work, and can be seen in many of her drawings, sculptures, and installations. I argue

that she "longs for Maman," and make connections between the artist's story and the resultant artistic yield. Examples from her oeuvre are presented that are symbolic "portraits" of her mother as the spider, her own versions of the mother and child, images that relate back to nature implying the mother and the womb, the mother's nurturing body, and finally the house, and all its contents which further symbolize and represent the longing for maternal protectiveness. As a woman artist, as a mother, and as a daughter, Louise Bourgeois has and continues to produce mystifying, important, political, personal, and significant art works that address her personal needs as well as universal concerns.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> "When I first saw a sculpture by Louise Bourgeois I felt myself to be in the presence of something alive, organic, and erotic that would continue to transmute into yet further forms and essences as I looked at it; something that bespoke an intimacy so deep it made me physically and psychologically uncomfortable, as though my mother's breast and belly were beckoning me back to infancy."
>
> Adrian Piper[1]

Louise Bourgeois is an artist who since the late 1970s has spoken openly and frequently about her work. She affirms that all of her work is rooted in memory, especially of her childhood. Much of the scholarship written on Bourgeois emphasizes the autobiographical elements in her art, focusing on the aspects of her work that address the artist's anger about her father's adultery, particularly his sexual relationship with a live-in tutor (Sadie Gordon Richmond) he hired for his children.[2] For example, Deborah Wye, curator of two Louise Bourgeois exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, asserts that "[Bourgeois's] father plays the most catalytic role in her work."[3] More recent scholarship addresses other feelings in the artist's work; including those directed at

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[1] Adrian Piper in Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory [exhibition catalogue], eds. Charlotta Kotik, Terrie Sultan, and Christian Leigh (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 79.

[2] For example, her combination installation and performance piece entitled, *The Destruction of the Father*, 1974 is almost always included in the scholarship since that date. It is important to note that this installation was presented long before her public confessionals. Scholarship after 1982 almost consistently mentions the story of Sadie and the family betrayal, and mentions the father. For example, see Mira Schor, "From Liberation to Lack," Heresies 6, no. 4 (1989): 15-21; Julie Nicoletta, "Louise Bourgeois's Femme-Maisons," Women's Art Journal 13 (fall/winter 1992-3): 21-25. In addition, Paul Gardner, Marcia Pels, and others have focused on the Sadie affair, and explain the hostile quality in Bourgeois's work as that directed at her father and Sadie.

[3] Deborah Wye and Carol Smith, The Prints of Louise Bourgeois [exhibition catalogue] (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 18.

her mother.[4] However, as Hilary Robinson asserts, there has been very little mention of this dimension in Bourgeois's work to date.[5] In an article from 1987, Donald Kuspit begins an acknowledgement of the importance of the mother:

> "Bourgeois's entanglement with her mother, not her father, is becoming clear as the inner content of her work. She has filled the void of mother/artist in spirit as well as substance, and Oedipus replacing the mother instead of the father, a sphinx whose secret is that a story about a relationship to a father is really a story about a relationship to a mother."[6]

I address this developing area of inquiry in my study, expanding on the thesis that the mother is an important driving force in Bourgeois's work. The artist's constant nostalgic yearning for the protection of a mother, as well as ambivalent feelings for her can be seen throughout the oeuvre. These feelings are overt at times, and erupt from the unconscious at other times. Bourgeois acknowledges the power of the unconscious, and is cognizant that it affects her work.[7] Continually tapping into her memories of childhood, Bourgeois returns with notions of ambivalence, desire, anger, hate, love, comfort and rejection. "Nostalgia, noted Freud, was always to be connected to that impossible primal desire to return to the origin, to the womb itself."[8]

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[4] Bourgeois's mother, Josephine, was stricken with the Spanish flu shortly after her husband returned from the war (1919). Her weak condition, and what eventually became emphysema necessitated her daughter caring for her, and eventually the need for a live-in governess who became at times a surrogate, as well as her husband's mistress.

[5] Hilary Robinson, "Louise Bourgeois's Cells: Gesturing Towards the Mother," in Museum of Modern Art Papers, Volume One: Louise Bourgeois, ed. Ian Cole (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 21-30. In this article, Robinson reads the *Cells* through Luce Irigaray's essay "Gesture in Psychoanalysis."

[6] Donald Kuspit, "Louise Bourgeois: Where Angels Fear to Tread," Artforum International 25, no. 7 (Mar. 1987): 120. This is the conclusion to his article and not a starting point to enlightened discourse on the subject. Hilary Robinson suggests that this is perhaps because "a girl's relationship with her mother is seen as having less potential for scandal and tragedy, less glamour, and less scope for critical voyeurism." Robinson, 24.

[7] Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, eds., Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 303. In an interview with Pat Steir, Bourgeois explains: "The point is that the unconscious is there to stay, bothering you all the time....The little girl has taken the unconscious, not as an enemy, but as a refuge." Pat Steir, "Mortal Elements," Artforum 16, no. 10 (summer 1993): 127.

[8] James Lingwood, ed., House: Rachel Whiteread (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 72. For more on this see Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in On Creativity and the Unconscious (New York: Harper & Row, 1958),

I discuss various works from the artist's oeuvre, autobiographical statements as well as biographical accounts, psychological findings, and feminist theory in this study. After chapters on Bourgeois's personal history, her relationship to memory, and an overall discussion of her oeuvre, I explore my thesis that yearning for the mother is a significant driving force in the artist's oeuvre. An analysis of a selection of prints, drawings, sculptures, and installations highlights the numerous tropes Bourgeois has for representing her mother, as well as the longing for maternal safety, and further demonstrates this thesis. My contribution to the scholarship on Bourgeois provides a document that focuses solely on the works that demonstrate the significance of the mother in her oeuvre. As Bourgeois once affirmed: "When I am depressed I need to fold up, to find cover, and to find a mother..."[9]

122-161. In 1990, Bourgeois wrote a commentary on an exhibition of Freud's personal collections. "The Sigmund Freud Antiquities: Fragments from a Buried Past," curated by Lynn Gamwell for the University Art Museum of the State University of New York, Binghamton. Louise Bourgeois, "Freud's Toys," Artforum 28, no. 5 (Jan. 1990): 111-113.

[9] Paolo Igliori, ed., Entrails, Heads, and Tails (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), n.p. This statement by Bourgeois was included in a photo essay and conversation with the artist.

CHAPTER 2

"When Memory Speaks"[10]

"If I say everything about myself, everything will be right."

Louise Bourgeois[11]

Recent scholarship has challenged the notion of relying on an artist's biography to better understand their work, claiming that works of art should stand on their own.[12] Some scholars feel that the personal details of an artist's life are irrelevant and can even lead to misunderstandings of an artist's works. I challenge this perspective, certain that biography, and especially autobiography offers insights that enhance our understanding of art and the artistic process. Familiarity with artists' personal histories rarely explains all aspects of their works, because other, public histories intersect with their own. Yet, no artist is ever free of his or her personal history, and these personal experiences shape, to a greater or lesser extent, any artist's production.

Louise Bourgeois, since the late 1970s, has acknowledged that in her case the personal is particularly important. She has put an explicitly biographical twist on her work by sharing details about her childhood. At a 1979 lecture series at Columbia University, she alternated images of her work with those of her family.[13] In 1982,

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[10] I borrow this title from the book by Jill Ker Conway, When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

[11] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 71.

[12] I offer two examples, which argue against the psychobiographical approach. Michaela Unterdörfer, "Turning Doubt Into Certitude: Louise Bourgeois's Works in Marble" in Louise Bourgeois: Works in Marble, ed. Michaela Unterdörfer (Munich: Prestel, 2002), 7-25. Griselda Pollock also argues against psychobiography in, "Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses," Oxford Art Journal 22, no. 2 (1999): 71-100.

[13] "French Artists in New York Series" (lecture with slides) Maison Francaise, Columbia University, New York, Oct. 3, 1979. Cited in Deborah Wye, "One and Others" in Louise Bourgeois [exhibition catalogue]

speaking in conjunction with a retrospective of her work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in a photo/text piece she had prepared for publication in Artforum, Bourgeois provided autobiographical details that help explain the motivations behind her work.[14] (See Appendix B) By revealing family secrets, Bourgeois offered some explanation to her mysterious oeuvre and implied that the Freudian concept of a traumatized childhood was the catalyst for her artistic motives.

In this study, I employ the artist's public confessionals along with other biographical details and use them as filters with which to interpret specific key aspects of her oeuvre. This chapter considers key content in her public confessionals along with other biographical details to provide a ground for understanding aspects of Bourgeois's work that respond to her childhood, aspects that show her conflicting feelings and nostalgic yearning for the mother and the home.[15] Such works speak to the innocence, safety, refuge, shelter, and even entrapment that the maternal image is associated, imagined and romanticized. Bourgeois's intense but conflicted relationship to the mother and home creates feelings of betrayal and longing; of trauma, reparation, and a fantasy of security and safety that are deployed in the work. I develop a psychobiographical analysis of Bourgeois's oeuvre, and examine how this leads us to determine meaning

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(New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 34. Bourgeois was the first woman artist to get a full-scale retrospective at the esteemed museum.

[14] Louise Bourgeois, Jerry Gorovoy, and Danielle Tilkin, eds. Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture, [exhibition catalogue] (Madrid: Aldeasa, 2000), 296. The slide presentation for the exhibition was titled "Partial Recall." Louise Bourgeois, "Child Abuse," Artforum 20, no. 4 (Dec. 1982): 40-47. See Appendix B. Jon Bird poignantly describes this photo-text piece: " The whole pictorial essay alternates between the genres of autobiography and melodrama with the sculptural object positioned as witness to the psychic reality underlying the recollected images of family life, the eye that probes the façade of the idealized home displaces the everyday on to another register: the drama of separation, anger, and loss." Jon Bird, "Memory's Touch: The Art of Louise Bourgeois," in History Painting Reassessed: The Representation of History in Contemporary Art, eds. David Green and Peter Seddon (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), 116.

[15] The concept of the home or house as a representation of the mother will be discussed in Chapter 4.

according to the constructed narrative of her life. In doing so, I acknowledge the degree to which Bourgeois may be self-mythologizing in announcing her "trauma."

In her book, The Untouched Key, Alice Miller examines the work of several visual artists and hypothesizes that their creativity is often the result of childhood trauma.[16] She explains that people respond to childhood trauma either with destruction, or if they are fortunate enough to have warmth in their environment, with creativity. Bourgeois understood when she was quite young that her creativity was born out of pain. She offered the following: "The subject of pain is the business that I am in. To give meaning and shape to frustration and suffering. What happens to my body has to be given a formal aspect. So you might say that pain is the ransom of formalism."[17]

Given the artistic milieu in which Bourgeois was brought up and the warmth that she derived from her mother, one can better understand the need to resolve her emotional struggles through her art. On the verso side of an *Insomnia Drawing*(1995), which pictures a figure digging in the ground and pulling out long roots, Bourgeois writes: "the digging out of forgotten events, unconscious memories you dig out or else they keep bothering you."[18] (Fig. 1)

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[16] Alice Miller, The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness, trans. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum (New York: Doubleday, 1990) cited in Jane Piirto, Understanding Those Who Create (Scottsdale: Gifted Psychology Press, 1980), 159-60.

[17] Louise Neri, "The Personal Effects of a Woman With No Secrets," in Louise Bourgeois Recent Works [exhibition catalogue], ed. Henry-Claude Cousseau [exhibition catalogue, capcMusée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux] (Malmö, Sweden: Malmö Konsthall, 1998), 82. These words have been embroidered on mailbags that serve as pillowcases and mattress covers in *Cell I* (1991). See Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, The Secret of the Cells (Munich: Prestel, 1998), 122-23.

[18] Louise Bourgeois, Elisabeth Bronfen, and Marie-Laure Bernadac, eds., Louise Bourgeois: The Insomnia Drawings (Zurich: Daros, 1999), 19.

Psychobiography

In my opinion, the outspoken autobiographical content of Bourgeois's work calls for a psychobiographical reading. Psychobiography has proven to be a useful tool in creating links between an artist's life and work. Since its inception, this type of theory has been used to better understand creative impulses.[19] The biography (and in this case autobiography) of the artist forms the basis for the psychoanalytical art critic's investigations.[20] This is an appropriate methodology to use when investigating the underlying motivations for an artist's body of work because it utilizes many sources of information including monographs, the artist's recollections, letters and diaries of the artist, recorded interviews, as well as films and videos of the artist, which all offer information as support for the analysis.[21] "The material at the disposal of a psychoanalytical inquiry consists of the data of a person's life history on the one hand the chance circumstances of events and background influences, and on the other hand, the subject's reported reactions."[22] For a visual artist like Bourgeois, who in fact has also written songs, essays, and numerous diaries, her images may be her most "truthful" statements.

The psychobiographical approach began with Freud who employed biographical materials to psychoanalyze Leonardo da Vinci's art.[23] According to Laurie Schneider

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[19] Briony Fer, "The Work of Art, the Work of Psychoanalysis," in Gender and Art, ed. Gil Perry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 240.

[20] This is contrary to Lacanian theory "in which the individual is primarily an abstraction whose place in society is primarily determined by language..." Howard Risatti, Postmodern Perspectives 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), 217.

[21] Sources such as these have provided the basis for psychobiographies of artists such as Van Gogh, Delacroix, Picasso, and Leonardo. Laurie Schneider Adams, Art and Psychoanalysis (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 259.

[22] Peter Gay, ed., The Freud Reader (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1989), 479.

[23] Sigmund Freud, Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood, trans. Alan Tyson. (New York: Norton, 1964). Freud's 1910 study of Leonardo provides an introduction to the genre of psychoanalytic biography. According to Harry Trosman, M.D.: "A psychoanalytical approach reveals how the raw

Adams: "In Freud's scenario, the work of art is analyzed more as a product of neurotic (pathological) forces in the unconscious mind of the artist than of the artist's conscious intentions...the artist is reduced in this way to a kind of tool of forces beyond his or her knowledge or control..."[24] Freud's approach has been criticized because his "psychoanalytic account of artistic inventions deflects emphasis from the art object to hidden, unconscious subject matter."[25] In recent years, the psychobiographical method has been improved upon and used successfully, as it is advantageous in helping understand artworks, which are puzzling, troubling, and mystifying as in the case of Bourgeois.[26] With the information that the artist has provided, one can make links between her life experiences and her work. Psychoanalysis helps us to understand how images mobilize certain drives.[27]

According to Hans-Ulrich Obrist, one of the editors of Bourgeois's papers, the artist's narration is more about the emotional forces behind her work than its actual meaning.[28] There are numerous underlying psychological motivations in her work that are linked to childhood memories. The complexity of the psychobiographical approach is reinforced by Bourgeois, who reminds us that "an artist's words are always to be taken

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material offered by experience may be incorporated into creative work and how motive forces may arouse or interfere with creativity." Harry Trosman, M.D., Freud and the Imaginative World (New Jersey: The Analytic Press, 1985), 150-151.

[24] Risatti, 218.

[25] Ibid., 217. One of the problems with Freud's study of Leonardo lies in a mistranslation of a quote by Leonardo in reference to a childhood memory. Freud quoted the original Italian from the Codex Atlanticus, but his German text comes from Herzfeld (1906) and thus Freud perpetuated the error of translation the name of the bird (*nubbio*) in Italian as *Geier* or "vulture" rather than "kite." Freud's translation led him to interpret this as referring back to the experience of nursing at his mother's breast and a later fellatio fantasy. This, Freud concluded, resulted in Leonardo's passive homosexual attitude. Freud also continues to explain the mythological meaning of the vulture and ties this to Leonardo's close relationship with his mother. See Trosman, 159-160.

[26] For more current and favorable examples of the psychobiographical approach see: Ellen Handler Spitz, "An Insubstantial Pageant Faded: A Psychoanalytic Epitaph for New York City Subway Car Graffiti," Mary Matthews Gedo, "An Autobiography in the Shape of Alabama: The Art of Roger Brown," and Donald B. Kuspit, "Artist Envy" in Risatti, 217-264.

[27] Fer, 240.

[28] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 15.

cautiously."[29] When an artist presents their work as being autobiographical it becomes problematic in terms of allowing for a free reading or interpretation, as it is with Bourgeois's work. Filtered through the artist's life experiences, personality, temperament, time, and memory, Bourgeois's recollections from her childhood reveal a classic Oedipal dynamic of mother, father, and child. The trauma of conflict, competition and loss were severe, creating deep psychic wounds in the young Bourgeois.[30]

Bourgeois's Story

Louise Bourgeois has been extremely outspoken about her life and her work. In addition, developing a psychobiographical analysis of a living artist is quite different than, say, Freud's study of Leonardo or Houbraken's of Rembrandt.[31] Bourgeois, the middle child of three, was born in France in 1911 into a family of tapestry restorers.[32] Her father, Louis Bourgeois was a trained landscape architect, a glider enthusiast, a soldier in World War I, and professionally, an antique dealer responsible in part for the revival in the interest of Aubusson and Gobelin tapestries in the Twentieth Century.[33] At the time of her birth, Bourgeois's parents, Josephine Fauriaux and Louis Bourgeois had a tapestry gallery located at 174 Boulevard Saint-Germain in Paris. In 1912 they moved to large house outside of Paris in Choisy-le-Roi.[34] In 1919 they moved to Antony (several

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[29] Anne Wagner, "Bourgeois Prehistory or the Ransom of Fantasies," Oxford Art Journal 22, no. 2 (1999): 6.
[30] Robert Storr, Dislocations [exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art] (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 29.
[31] Schneider Adams, 266.
[32] Bourgeois often speaks of how the fact that she was not a boy was a disappointment to her father, yet she is his namesake and according to photos and the artist she looked like him. Bourgeois insists that she was named Louise after Louise Michel, a woman that her mother as a feminist and socialist admired. According to Bourgeois, all of the women in her mother's family were feminists and socialists. This detail also plays into the artist's life.
[33] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 92. The tapestries were displayed and sold in their Paris gallery.
[34] Cousseau, 109.

miles south of Paris) where they opened a tapestry restoration workshop.[35] They worked as a cooperative team: Josephine, who had learned the necessary skills from her mother and grandmother, ran the restoration workshop and Louis contributed by searching out antique tapestries in need of repair.[36]

At an early age, Bourgeois was enlisted by her mother to assist in the restoration of the tapestries.[37] Thus, she was surrounded by art since her youth, and encouraged to use her skills. For example, she was asked to draw in certain missing areas in the decaying works. She was exposed to the materials used in the restoration; yarns, spools and needles. The use of tapestry tools plays an important role in her memory and her work as an artist.[38]

The young Bourgeois was extremely intelligent, with a keen interest in mathematics and philosophy. In 1932, she studied both subjects at the Sorbonne in Paris, until she became disenchanted with the theoretical aspects of math.[39] Bourgeois has said that her attraction to mathematics had a lot to do with the finiteness, the exactness, which for her represented a sort of containment that was desperately needed by someone who felt so afraid.[40]

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Frances Morris, "A Family Affair," in Frances Morris and Marina Warner, eds. Louise Bourgeois [exhibition catalogue] (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000), 9. Bourgeois was actually their third daughter, as the second one died in childbirth. She had an older sister, Henriette who died young, and whose memories play an occasional role in Bourgeois's sculptural arrangements, and a brother, Pierre, (15 months younger than she). They can be seen in family photographs shared by the artist.
[37] Bourgeois quoted in Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 67. "My mother was of delicate health and she considered that I ought to become established in the profession as soon as possible."
[38] Munro, Eleanor, Originals: American Women Artists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 158.
[39] Marie-Laure Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 168.
[40] Paul Gardner, Louise Bourgeois (New York: Universe Publishing, 1994), 20.

Later in the year 1932, Bourgeois left her studies and became involved in the art world, studying in various ateliers.[41] She held a position at the Louvre as a docent from 1936-37; this experience had a great effect on her.[42] She studied with Fernand Léger, who helped her realize her ambitions to be a sculptor however up to this point only drawings and sketches were part of her repertoire.

In 1937, Bourgeois met Robert Goldwater, an American scholar who was in France working on his doctoral dissertation in Art History. She was attracted to his Puritanism, which she perceived as the opposite of her very French father, and has likened his qualities of rationality, loyalty, and calm to her mother.[43] In 1938 they were married, and moved to New York where he established an academic career. Goldwater's specialty was first centered around "Primitive Art" and its impact on Modern art. Later, Goldwater's scholarship both as a college professor and museum guest curator led him to famous and important publications in the field of Post-Impressionism.[44]

Goldwater and Bourgeois had three children. By all accounts, it appears that he was supportive in her career. Their first child, Michel, was adopted from France in

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[41] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 168-170. Among the artists that Bourgeois studied with in Paris in the 1930s were: Roger Bissière, Fernand Léger, Marcel Gromaire, Paul Colin, Othon Friesz, and André Lhote. She took art history classes at the Louvre, and studio classes at the École des Beaux-Arts and the Julian and Grande Chaumière academies. After arriving in New York, she enrolled at the Art Students League.

[42] Crone and Schaesberg, 31. In 1936/7, she worked at the Louvre as a docent and translator guide and came in contact (especially in the lunch room) with amputees or wounded from war. This memory may have contributed to her use of the body part in her work.

[43] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 31. In a letter to her friend, Colette Richarme, Bourgeois wrote that she had met her "life's companion."

[44] Among his publications is the extremely important Primitivism in Modern Painting (New York; London: Harper and Brothers, 1938) and What is Modern Sculpture? (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969). Additionally, Paul Gaugin (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983) and Symbolism (New York: Harper Collins, 1979). Goldwater's studies had to have had some impact on his wife; yet in all of her confessions, Bourgeois makes hardly any comments on the influence of African or Oceanic art on her work; in my opinion the quality and sources are there.

1940.[45] Bourgeois gave birth to two more sons: Jean-Louis in 1940 and Alain in 1941. She viewed parenting as a privilege and she looked at art-making in the same way. In 1973, her husband died. Bourgeois reflected that next to the death of her mother, this was the most significant and devastating event in her life.[46]

"Child Abuse" and Maternal Ambivalence

Bourgeois's father began his adulteress indiscretions during World War I. His continual unfaithfulness, and her mother's pained toleration of his behavior have had an intense impact on Bourgeois.[47] Particularly disturbing to Bourgeois was an intensification of this problem when she was around twelve years old. At this time, her father began a ten-year affair with the family's live-in tutor, Sadie Gordon Richmond.[48] Her father's betrayal of both her mother and, by extension herself is the core of Bourgeois's childhood "trauma."

According to the artist, this trauma informs much of her work. In her 1982 Artforum piece, she termed the betrayal by Sadie, her father, and her mother "Child Abuse."[49] In the photo/text piece Bourgeois used photographs of her family (which

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[45] Crone and Schaesberg, 32; Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 124-5. Bourgeois was fearful about her own fertility, which is why she adopted. Her other sons were born in the next two years, obviously dispelling her fears.

[46] Paolo Herkenhoff in conversation with Louise Bourgeois. Transcribed and edited by Thyrza Nichols Goodeve in Louise Bourgeois, eds. Robert Storr, Paolo Herkenhoff, Allan Schwartzman, and Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, 9. (New York: Phaidon Press, 2003).

[47] This practice, according to Bourgeois, began during the war when her father was serving his country and was then wounded.

[48] Crone and Schaesberg, 23. "Sadie Gordon Richmond was engaged to give English lessons to the children and spent ten years with the Bourgeois family." Richmond will be referred to as "Sadie" in this paper, for that is the way she is always referenced by Bourgeois.

[49] Anne Wagner has pointed out that Freud would not have considered Bourgeois's experiences in her parent's household as child abuse. "That he would not have said so is a function not of his own willful blindness, but of the language at his disposal. The phrase did not enter the diagnostic lexicon until shortly before Bourgeois herself found it could reorganize the tone and content of her autobiography." See Wagner, 7.

also included Sadie) to trigger the memory of her dysfunctional and unhappy childhood. She linked the family images with photographs of her sculptures that related to her childhood feelings.[50] (See Appendix B) Bourgeois included the following questions in the text portion of "Child Abuse":

> "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."[51]

It is important to note that at that time Bourgeois's mother was quite ill with the Spanish flu, which developed into emphysema. She was often weak and could not drive.[52] Bourgeois cared for her ailing mother, and was keenly aware that people treat one differently when one is sick.[53] She realized that her mother was, as she describes, "undesirable," as she was often coughing up blood, etc. Bourgeois testifies how she tried to protect her mother by hiding her illness from her father.[54] The effect of her mother's failing health coupled with her father's betrayal had quite an impact on the creative and emotional child. Bourgeois reflects on the situation:

> "In France, the woman is always the mother. Most men remain children and marry mother figures. For eroticism, they have mistresses...Physically, my

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[50] In addition to family photos, the following sculptures are interspersed with the artist's words: *Fillette* (1968), *Eyes* (1972), and *Fallen Woman* (1981). These sculptures all relate to the familial situation.
[51] Bourgeois, "Child Abuse," 44.
[52] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 163-4. Her mother was infected with Spanish influenza in 1918. Bourgeois explains: "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. 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."
[53] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 249. Bourgeois treated her mother's chronic lung disease with cupping and poultices. Bourgeois explains: "Hence my obsession with the business of medical treatment. There's a whole series of cupping glasses, which I place on Jerry's back, as an exorcism." Jerry Gorovoy is Bourgeois's assistant.
[54] Lynne Cooke and Mark Francis, Louise Bourgeois [exhibition catalogue, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh] (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 60; Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 208.

> 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."[55]

The deception and eroticism in her house had a deep psychological impact on Bourgeois who suffered from anxiety and was often wrought with fear.[56]

Bourgeois's mother played a very important role in her life. On the one hand, she was a role model who was respected and loved. Josephine Fauriaux Bourgeois has been described as nurturing, calm, and a clear thinking woman: "Bourgeois's childhood memories of her mother evoke tranquility, order, and a sense of respect in which she was held as the head of the family workshop for the restoration of tapestries."[57] On the other hand, the mother was a source of insecurity; inadequate as a "protector," she participated in what was fearful and confusing to the child. Bourgeois suggested that she sometimes feels that her mother "allowed" the "Child Abuse" or even contributed to it by tolerating her husband's infidelities in their familial dwelling.[58]

In this thesis I focus on Bourgeois's longing for her mother. Such longing is not only current, nor did it only begin upon her mother's death; more importantly it began when Madame Bourgeois was displaced from her position in the family, when Sadie appeared on the scene. This caused ambivalence and confusion in the

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[55] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 226.
[56] Neri, 81. She did not reveal her anxiety until much later in life.
[57] Wye, 14. This is in stark contrast to the powerful, volatile, anxiety producing man that her father is described to have been.
[58] Bourgeois, "Child Abuse," 40. "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." Additionally Bourgeois is quoted in Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 200: "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."

mother/daughter relationship for Bourgeois, and contributed to her anger, anxiety, and pain.

When her mother's condition worsened, Bourgeois so feared her mother's impending death, she swore if her mother survived on a particular day that she would swear off sex.[59] But she could not fend off the inevitable, and in 1932, when the artist was twenty-one, her mother died. On several occasions, Bourgeois has shared her feelings, shock and suffering:

> "When my mother died in 1932, this rage to understand took over me. I simply could not make out the why of the 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...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."[60]

That Bourgeois attempted suicide by drowning shortly after her mother's death perhaps attests to the wounds and conflicts of her childhood.[61] Bourgeois's panic shows her deep love of her mother and the way in which feelings of abandonment are part of her experience. Her mother's physical death was a repetition of the earlier trauma of loss, eliciting feelings of longing, abandonment, and fear. According to Julia Kristeva, " woman cannot properly mourn the lost object. She cannot get rid of the maternal body... she carries the maternal [thing] with her locked like a corpse in the crypt of her psyche."[62]

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[59] Christiane Meyer-Thoss, "I am a Woman with no Secrets: Statements by Louise Bourgeois," Parkett 27 (1991): 45.
[60] Cooke and Francis, 60.
[61] Crone and Schaesberg, 27. Several references to this can be found in her *Insomnia Drawings* (1994-95), where drowning people appear "La noyée dans la Bièvre." See Bourgeois, Bronfen, and Bernadac, eds., 15.
[62] Kelly Oliver, Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double Bind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 63. See also, Julia Kristeva, In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

Bourgeois's father ridiculed her for mourning this tragic occasion, but his ridicule could not lessen her suffering. Crone and Schaesberg assert "...she felt that her pain at her mother's death must surely abate with time. She was becoming increasingly subject to a specific form of disjointed memory that felt the need to realize in visual terms."[63] It was after her mother passed away that Bourgeois begins to actively pursue an artistic career, and it was at this point in her life that she began to seek out any artists were willing to take her under their wing.[64]

We can see the force of this personal, familial history in the way that Bourgeois has idealized her mother in her art, so in part of her memory she became the mythologized good mother, and in the other part sits disappointment.[65] Her anguish and anger at her mother for dying, for leaving her, and for not being able to protect her has proven to be one of the driving forces behind her artistic practices. Darian Leader discusses the drive to create art out of loss: "loss creates desire, the yearning to re-find something we believe we once possessed. Art provides a special place within civilization to symbolize and elaborate this search."[66]

Yet yearning appears conflictual for Bourgeois: she depicts ambivalence about how enclosed spaces, like the womb or the maternal embrace, are supposed to make her feel. In "Gesture in Psychoanalysis," Luce Irigaray explains that a girl who misses her mother will organize a symbolic space around herself in order to protect herself

[63] Crone and Schaesberg, 28-9.
[64] Ibid. See footnote 40.
[65] What I mean by the mythologized mother is that she became larger than life in Bourgeois's memory, as did perhaps her actions as well.
[66] Darian Leader, Stealing the Mona Lisa (New York: Counterpoint, 2000), 75.

from abandonment, depression, attack, and loss of self.[67] This can clearly be seen in Bourgeois's oeuvre, most especially in her installations, *The Cells.* The work manifests a constant struggle between the desire for home, memory, safety, protection and enclosure, and the compulsion to escape memories of her childhood—a childhood, in which she was betrayed, rejected and deceived.[68] Roszika Parker who has written an entire text on the subject of maternal ambivalence explains Freud's focus on the topic in "Mourning and Melancholia." Freud suggested that the conflict of ambivalence, "gives a pathological cast to mourning, and forces it to express itself in the form of self-reproaches, to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object, i.e. that he has willed it."[69]

Bourgeois expresses her cathartic tendencies verbally as well as visually: "No longer off limits, now confession is a marvelous panacea, its rectifying powers operating in direct proportion to its thoroughness: confession as both therapy and control."[70] In conclusion to the biographical information that I feel is crucial in understanding Bourgeois's work via psychological inquiry, I think it is important to include a list that declares the artist's "progress towards an existential lightness of

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[67] Luce Irigaray, "Gesture in Psychoanalysis," in Irigaray, Sexes and Genealogies, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 97-99. Hilary Robinson pointed me to Irigaray as a way to better understand Bourgeois.

[68] In 1978, in conjunction with her exhibition of *Confrontation* and the performance piece, *A Banquet: A Fashion Show of Body Parts,* one of the performers, Suzanne Cooper, sings "She Abandoned Me," a song written by Louise Bourgeois that makes reference to her mother. Bourgeois, Gorovoy, and Tilkin, 293.

[69] Roszika Parker, Mother Love/Mother Hate: The Power of Maternal Ambivalence (London: Virago Press, 1995), 15. See "Mourning and Melancholia," in The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Stachey et al (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-73) vol. 14, 251.

[70] Wagner, 7.

being. It is an ongoing deposition of her personal effects that Louise Bourgeois fulfils her claim to be 'a woman with no secrets'."[71]

"I have nothing
nothing to say
nothing to get excited about
nothing to explain
nothing to prove
nothing to ask for
nothing to tell
nothing to show
nothing to hide
nothing to plan for
nothing to keep
nothing to anticipate
nothing to lose
nothing to criticize
nothing to collect
nothing to remember
nothing to want
nothing to apprehend
nothing to expect
so
nothing to fear
so
nothing to regret."

Memory

Charlotta Kotik treats Bourgeois's work as the "Locus of Memory." [72] The phenomenologist, Gaston Bachelard, asserts that "we comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection," and that our memories must be stored in something that is closed, while at the same time leaving them their original value as images. "Memories of the outside world," he explains "will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams."[73] Louise Bourgeois has been tapping into her memory and giving it form as an artist for nearly seventy years. She continually employs formal processes to destroy and rebuild the emotional memory

[71] Neri, 86. Neri found this list during an interview in the artist's house, New York City, October 1997. A similar list can also be found in *Ode à ma mère*, a suite of drypoint engravings with accompanying text created by Bourgeois in 1995.
[72] See Kotik, Sultan, and Leigh.
[73] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 6. Bachelard embraces the very ideas of Bourgeois's work in his text. Bourgeois did not become familiar with his writings until her later years. Her *Femme-Maisons* were created long before his text. "I read Bachelard when I was over 75." Louise Bourgeois quoted in Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 142.

that is the source of her artistic vocabulary.[74] Her work demonstrates the powerful potential of certain objects, sights, sounds, and smells in triggering memory. Bourgeois's work is inspired by her memory, "not simply nostalgia for the past, but traumatic memory, the kind that requires courage to confront."[75] In his discussions of artists who tap into their childhood memories for inspiration, Anthony Vidler cites Mike Kelley:

> " I think the recovered memories are often times wish fulfillments not recovery at all. The past is actually a screen memory, a construction of present desires. Memories and desires are conflated—you can't actually separate them. As your desire changes, memory changes, and the 'facts' change to suit it."[76]

The same could apply to Bourgeois's work.

If Bourgeois's autobiography is the basis for her art, then one must consider how memory affects her life story. Bourgeois has kept diaries since the age of twelve. Her home is filled with numerous journals, which are carefully dated, preserved and organized.[77] Yet, close examination of her diaries, interviews, and notes reveals many contradictions.[78] As Jill Ker Conway asks, "Is autobiography just another form of fiction?"[79] Parts of Bourgeois's story of her dysfunctional family, could be an exaggeration, a myth or even an interpretation. Bourgeois tells us:

> "I need my memories. They are my documents. I keep watch over them. They are my privacy and I am intensely jealous of them...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.

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[74] Neri, 82.
[75] Sue Taylor, "Lessons of Hysteria: Louise Bourgeois in the Nineties," New Art Examiner 25, no. 4 (Dec.1997/Jan.1998): 26.
[76] Anthony Vidler, Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 163. In addition to Mike Kelley, Rachel Whiteread and Martha Rosler are among the artists whose work involves memory.
[77] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 18. "The diaries chart her days, her encounters and appointments, and transcribe her emotions and the movement of her thoughts."
[78] See Bernadac, Destruction of the Father.
[79] Conway, 11.

> Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are the seeds for sculpture."[80]

Memories are clearly extremely important to this artist, as demonstrated by her archives, statements, and art production. Her commitment to remembering and revisiting the past suggests that Bourgeois is unlikely to exaggerate events in the past. Her archives are a source of self-expression, a conduit to the past, and she works with memories and the past in a productive, and sometimes obsessive manner.

Bourgeois opened her family album to the public, after over forty years of art production, at a point when her achievements had been widely recognized. She hadn't spoken publicly about it, instead, she exorcised the tales from her past through her artistic production. Perhaps she was affected by long traditions regarding the culturally appropriate treatment of family privacy. "The bourgeois cult of privacy concerning the family and domestic life required women to be silent about their role in family dramas...Because they had to preserve family secrets, nineteenth century women wrote for themselves in diaries..."[81] The 1970s were a turning point for women's autobiographies, and with her husband's death in 1973, Bourgeois was given an environment in which she was alone with her memories.[82] Another interesting aspect of Bourgeois's cathartic tendencies was revealed in an interview with the artist conducted by Mignon Nixon. Nixon discovered Bourgeois's absorption in psychoanalytical texts in the 1960s and 1970s.[83] Bourgeois was fascinated with Melanie Klein's Love, Hate and

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[80] Quote by Bourgeois in Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 225. See footnote 17.
[81] Neri, 87.
[82] Carolyn Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 12-13. Prior to this period, it was basically unacceptable for women to write about their anger, perhaps Bourgeois was sensitive to this concept.
[83] Mignon Nixon, Louise Bourgeois and the Logic of the Part-Object, 1947-1982 Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1997 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1997), 88-90. Here, Nixon notes that during this

Reparation, which examines "the interplay of infantile destructive and reparative fantasies in adult life."[84] Psychoanalyst Klein contributed to the development of mother-centered theories. Nixon noted that Bourgeois was particularly drawn to Klein's use of psychoanalytic techniques in the treatment of children and psychotics, subjects whose inability to speak seemingly excluded them from the talking cure.[85] Nixon asserted the following:

> "Klein's analysis of the [intrication] of love and hate, and in particular her model of reparation as a means of psychically restoring an object damaged in fantasy, resonated powerfully with the artist's own conception of the physical processes of sculpture as enacting impulses of extreme aggression, as well as the desire to repair and nurture the objects of sadistic fantasy."[86]

Psychoanalytical sources, especially that of Klein, understood in conjunction with the contemporaneous feminist freedoms of the period, undoubtedly helped lead Bourgeois to her confessionals of the late 1970s and early 1980s.[87]

Perhaps, with an artist like Bourgeois who seems to reveal so much, it would prove more interesting to contemplate what stories are not being told. Such neglected tales may offer even more access to her subconscious efforts.[88] On the other hand, when Bourgeois quotes the 17th century French writer La Rochefoucauld: " Why do you talk so much? What is it that you have to hide?" she continues, " The purpose of words is often to hide things. I want to have total recall and total control of the past. Now what would

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period Bourgeois was reading works by Freud, Lacan, Riviere, Horney, Deutsch, Klein, Winnicott, and others.

[84] Nixon, Louise Bourgeois, 89. See Melanie Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation" in Melanie Klein, Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945 Vol. I (New York: Free Press, 1984), 306-343.

[85] Nixon, 89.

[86] Ibid., 90.

[87] Katy Deepwell, "Feminist Readings of Louise Bourgeois or Why Louise Bourgeois is a Feminist Icon," in Museum of Modern Art Papers, Volume I, 37-45. Eleanor Munro notes that the feminist movement gave Bourgeois a mandate to promote her work as well at about this same time. The socio-political climate of this era also provided a framework for a better understanding of her work within the feminist context. Munro, 156.

[88] I thank Prof. Kenon Breazeale for reminding me that there may be more to this story than we are told. 4/10/03.

be the sense in lying?"[89] Speculation on what passages may be missing from her story has no place in the context of this paper.

Freud reminds us "the mystery of human soul lay in the psychic dramas of one's childhood."[90] Bourgeois's childhood home is the source of her conflicted emotions involved in remembering. And as Laura Mulvey reminds us, the lost memory of the mother's body is similar to other metaphors of a buried past or lost history.[91] I accept that Bourgeois's mysteries lie in these tales from the past as filtered through her memory and artistic catharsis.

[89] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 230. The Duc de La Rochefoucauld was famous for his Maxims written in 1665, a collection of sayings written to expose the vanity and hypocrisy the author saw underlying behavior. Carol L Sherman, "La Rouchefoucauld" (World Book Encyclopedia, CD-ROM, Macintosh Edition, 1998). In 1997, Bourgeois created a watercolor and graphite image on music paper entitled, *Look: Nothing to Hide*, which is a sketchy nude self-portrait with her arms upright juggling round forms. See Lucy Daniels Inman, curator, Sacred and Fatal: The Art of Louise Bourgeois [exhibition catalogue] (No. Carolina Museum of Art, 1998), 26.
[90] Richard Osborne, Freud for Beginners (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1993), 33.
[91] As explained in Rosemary Betterton, Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body (London: Routledge, 1996), 176.

CHAPTER 3

Bourgeois's Oeuvre

> "When a woman is creative she brings forth something new from inside of herself. Just as the spider draws the material of her web from deep inside, the creative woman draws on inner resources, tapping that which is central to herself in the creation of something new and unique."
>
> Maxine Harris[92]

Bourgeois's oeuvre defies categorization. It doesn't defy categorization because of the time span (70 years), it does so because of the myriad forms she employs. This may also be because the designated art historical categories are derived from male artistic production. Since her very beginnings as an artist, she has remained "both independent and uniquely individual."[93] Bourgeois tells us: "I have met important figures from this century's art...I have lived next to the most radical art movements, but I have always tried to make art that was my own."[94] Her work is so multi-faceted that it can be situated in art historical discussions that include, but are not limited to artistic affiliations such as Surrealism, Feminist Art, Minimalism, and Abstract Expressionism.[95] Despite her early beginnings as a painter, as well as her numerous drawings, prints, and installations, she is mostly regarded as a sculptor.[96] In 1969, her husband, Robert Goldwater, used the term "assemblage" to explain the sculptural technique of her early career, and to answer the

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[92] Maxine Harris, Down From the Pedestal (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 183-4.
[93] Robert Brown, "Louise Bourgeois," Christies Magazine 20, no. 3 (May/June 2003): 38.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Alex Potts, "Sculptural Confrontations," Oxford Art Journal 22, no. 2 (1999): 37-53.
[96] Crone and Schaesberg, 15. "She has uniquely altered the definition and parameters of sculpture that had prevailed since the Renaissance, from Michelangelo, Bernini and Canova to Rodin and masters of the twentieth century—parameters which had confined it to the faithful portrayal of the human body, the image of man, the image of humanity per se." Robert Brown explains that Bourgeois gave up painting in the forties because, "she was not satisfied with its level of reality." Brown, 38.

question "What is Modern Sculpture?"[97] Her work encompasses drawings, paintings, printmaking, traditional sculpture in mediums ranging from hard surfaces such as wood, bronze and marble, to softer materials such as latex and fabric.[98] "Her sculptures may be poured, carved, modeled, or constructed, either figurative or abstract, overtly narrative or virtually mute."[99] For Bourgeois, the activities of cutting and stitching are the equivalent of sculpture techniques.[100] For her drawings, Bourgeois uses different types of papers, crayon, gouache, charcoal, ink and other materials; all "for their own intrinsic value and expressive force."[101] Bourgeois has produced hundreds of drawings, many of which serve as stepping-stones to her sculptures and others that may resemble the automatic writing process of the Surrealists. In 1999, she published The Insomnia Drawings, a two-volume text of over 200 drawings that record seven months of drawings and poetic thought during her sleepless nights.[102] Her installations incorporate her sculptures along with found objects and other artist-made creations and alterations such as tapestries and embroideries. Installation, in fact, has been among her aesthetic preoccupations from the

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[97] Goldwater, What is Modern Sculpture?, 97. Using *Quarantania I* (1950) by Bourgeois as an example, Goldwater explains how she takes the method of assemblage at its most literal. "Each of its wooden elements…is a separate unit anchored in a base that serves as common ground for a concentrated gathering of carved abstract shapes. Similar but not identical, their rhythms and relations give the work its formal interest." See also, Wagner, 8. Bourgeois explains that assemblage is different than carving; it is a coming to terms with things rather than an attack on things. As explained in Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 142.

[98] Munro, 154. Beginning in the 1940s, while artists such as Smith and Noguchi were working in stone and metal, Bourgeois worked in raw wood. "In the experimental 1960s, she took off on all sides: latex, plaster, wire, rope, rough-hewn wood for the shadows; polished marble for the light."

[99] Robert Storr, "Gender and Possession," Art in America 71, no.4 (April 1983): 132.

[100] Bernadac, "Behind the Tapestry," in Cousseau, 15.

[101] Louise Bourgeois with Lawrence Rinder, Louise Bourgeois Drawings and Observations [exhibition catalogue, University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley] (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.,1995), n.p.

[102] Bourgeois, Bronfen, Bernadac. Bourgeois is an insomniac; the artist uses this ailment as another opportunity to tap into her creative impulses. According to her assistant Jerry Gorovoy, the origin of her line quality comes from the tapestry restoration.

very beginning.[103] "The first step of Bourgeois's creative procedure typically involves choosing, or in the case of assemblage, taking possession of her materials. The second step is to recognize content latent in the particular form."[104] Bourgeois certainly does not privilege any one medium, or any one style over another.[105] Instead, she chooses the process that best responds to the urgencies of her emotional life.[106]

Surrealist or Existentialist?

Bourgeois's oeuvre has been discussed in relation to both Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism; many scholars cite the way her vocabulary has developed in the shadow of these prominent art movements.[107] Although Bourgeois shared the Surrealists' fascination with "primitive art" and with the unconscious, she dismisses Surrealism, and declares herself an Existentialist (the philosophy most closely aligned to Abstract Expressionism).[108] However, scholars Lucy Lippard and Whitney Chadwick insist on the connection to Surrealism, and provide valid support for their discussions. Chadwick included Bourgeois in her exhibition and accompanying text, Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation:

> "Louise Bourgeois is almost always positioned in some relationship to Surrealism, though she herself has disavowed the connection, stating in 1992 that she is an Existentialist not a Surrealist. The disavowal hasn't silenced speculation about her artistic roots. She has been placed within the Surrealist tradition for her

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[103] Storr, Dislocations, 30. Her first two solo exhibitions of wooden sculptures entitled *The Personnages* were both conceived as environments.
[104] Ibid., 31.
[105] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 162.
[106] Robert Storr, "The Matter at Hand," in Louise Bourgeois, ed. Peter Weiermair (Zurich: Edition Stemmle, 1995), 20.
[107] Daniel Robbins, "Louise Bourgeois at the Museum of Modern Art," Art Journal 43, no. 4 (winter 1983), 401.
[108] Kotik, Sultan and Leigh, 28; Rosi Huhn, "Louise Bourgeois: Deconstructing the Phallus within the exile of the Self," in Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine, ed. M. Catherine de Zegher (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1995), 137.

> psychological motivations, for her use of the dream and the unconscious, for her adherence to Georges Bataille's notions of the transgressive and the [sic] *informe* (his anti-rationalist, anti-idealizing embrace of the shapeless detritus of being human, of excrement, filth, and decomposition)." [109]

There are many factors that support her relationship to the Surrealists. She was acquainted with the Surrealist artists and poets in Paris and New York. She lived near André Breton's Gradiva Gallery, and probably attended the Surrealist exhibition of 1938.[110] It appears that she carefully selected and adopted the doctrines of Surrealism that she found appealing. "Bourgeois's work often draws on the unconscious, producing startling dreamlike images that coincide with the Surrealist aesthetic."[111] She incorporates disjunction, doublings and displacement in her art ideas, which are inspired by Surrealism, especially in her use of obsessive metaphors. A good example is seen in her *Femme-Maisons* (1945-47), which through her amalgamation of the female body and the house can be viewed, as exquisite corpses.[112] (Fig. 2 & 3) Additionally, Chadwick points to the link between André Masson's *Mannequin* (1938) from the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris and Bourgeois's *Femme-Maison* drawings.[113] (Fig. 4) In spite of her repeated denials, it is difficult to dismiss the fact that her work in

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[109] Whitney Chadwick, ed. Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 15-16.

[110] Jerry Gorovoy, "The Iconography of Louise Bourgeois," in The Iconography of Louise Bourgeois [exhibition catalogue, Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York] (New York: Xavier Fourcade,1980), n.p. In the 1930s as a student living on the Left Bank of Paris, Bourgeois resided in Isadora Duncan's house above "Gradiva," André Breton's first Surrealist gallery.

[111] Nicoletta, 21.

[112] This does not mean that the *Femme-Maisons* are Surrealist works; it merely explains the similarities and sources. Rosalind Krauss, "Portrait of the Artist as *Fillette*" in Louise Bourgeois, ed. Peter Weiemair, (Zurich: Edition Stemmle, 1995), 212. Krauss also addresses the relationship that she sees in Bourgeois's work with that of outsider art (art of the insane and schizophrenics). The exquisite corpse (*Le Cadavre Exquis)* is a Surrealist game of folded paper played by several people, who compose a sentence or drawing without anyone seeing the preceding collaboration. Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 93-95.

[113] Chadwick, 16. *Mannequin* (1938) is a department store mannequin whose head is encapsulated in a birdcage, is gagged, and whose armpits and pubic area are embellished with decorative hair. This work was photographed by Man Ray and displayed at the "Exposition Internationale du Surrèalisme," Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris, January-February, 1938.

many ways embraces Surrealist traditions. As Henry Geldzahler put it: "It is in her work's freedom from cant and its driving biological urgency that a cousinship to the Surrealists can be discerned."[114]

There also are echoes of Existentialism and Abstract Expressionism in Bourgeois's work. "Bourgeois evinced an awareness of alienation in the modern age through her confrontations with tension and anxiety," which reinforce this alliance.[115] And, according to Anne Swartz, "In her attention to her own activity as an artist, Bourgeois's concerns resemble those of the Abstract Expressionists. She is expressly interested in the process of art production, varying her media constantly to force herself to reinvent her vocabulary in slightly different modes and forms."[116] The cathartic process involved in these creations is crucial in her artistic exorcism. The artist often alludes to the physical manipulation of her materials; the acts of sculpting, twisting, arranging, repairing, etc. are likely more powerful for Bourgeois than the finished products. Her sculptural production processes the workings of her emotions; the act of creating in three dimensions is intense, more so than in painting, drawing, or even writing.[117]

Bourgeois began making art before the term "feminism" entered the cultural mainstream. Undeniably her work is shaped by the experience of being a woman and an artist in a patriarchal milieu. Ann Gibson explains how the reception of Bourgeois's art differed from that of her male counterparts in the New York art world of the 1940s and

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[114] Henry Geldzahler, Making It New: Essays, Interviews, and Talks (New York: Turtle Point Press, 1994), 283.
[115] Anne Swartz, Psychosexual Strategies of Enclosure and Entanglement: Re-Reading Bourgeois and Hesse, Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1996 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1997), 135.
[116] Swartz, 133.
[117] Meyer-Thoss, "I am a Woman with no Secrets," 43.

1950s.[118] She argues that critics such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg characterized the paintings of New York School artists Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko in masculine terms. This vocabulary put a focus on the size and aggressiveness of their work. Bourgeois's work has been included in journals and even exhibitions with these artists, however she (like an number of women artists) always found herself on the fringes of the dominant discourse. When she turned to sculpture, Bourgeois moved away from the Abstract Expressionist core. (Works in media other than painting or created by artists other than Euro-American men were not valued in the Abstract Expressionist movement.)[119]

Themes

Bourgeois's complex body of work does not have an immediate recognizable stylistic signature (such as that, for example, of Louise Nevelson.) It does however have certain recurring themes. Among these themes are: enclosure, claustrophobia, memories, protection, escape, anger, fear, anxiety, destruction, and reparation. Bourgeois also explores numerous binary oppositions in her work, such as: abstract/figural, inside/outside, male/female, damage/reparation, fear/mastery, and order/chaos.[120] There are ubiquitous references to the body, most often the female form, breasts, hands, legs, eyes, and torsos. Bourgeois explains, "Since the fears of the past were connected with the functions of the body, they reappear through the body."[121] In addition, the concept of

[118] Bourgeois's work has long been (now) part of discussions of women artists whose work was overlooked during this period. The reception of her work was long overdue and finally brought to attention with her retrospective at MOMA in New York, 1982 after decades of little attention.
[119] Ann Gibson, Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals (Ann Arbor: UMI Research, 1990, 57-58.
[120] For more on this subject see Deepwell, 37-45.
[121] Meyer-Thoss, "I am a Woman with no Secrets," 44.

the merging of the body and the house, the repetitive use of containers, of glass, wood, reclaimed objects, objects associated with the home such as beds, staircases, pillows, as well as those having to do with reflection, seeing, and voyeurism such as mirrors are familiar. There is an abundance of sexual references in Bourgeois's work. In her article, "Vaginal Iconology," Barbara Rose explains that "just because the art alludes to or depicts genital images does not mean that it is erotic."[122] Bourgeois acknowledges that the work can be read in such a manner, but chooses to deflect from engaging in a discourse that emphasizes the sexual or erotic quality of her work.[123] Metaphoric symbols for man, woman, parent, father, mother, child, and the other—in this case, the nanny—also abound. For Bourgeois, repetition is very important; "it has a significance that goes beyond formal aspects—it becomes the equivalent of emotions urgency."[124] It empowers her with the ability to emphasize the importance of her feelings.[125] It also gives a physical reality to experience. As Bourgeois explains, "To repeat, to try again, over and over again towards perfection."[126]

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[122] Barbara Rose, "Vaginal Iconology," New York Magazine 7 (Feb. 11, 1974): 59. Rose cites other female artists along with Bourgeois whose work references female genitalia. Among them are: Hannah Wilke's soft latex hanging pieces, Deborah Remington's precise abstractions, Miriam Schapiro's ring centered "Ox", and Judy Chicago's "Lifesavers" to name a few. Rose continues to explain: "By depicting female genitals, women artists attack one of the most fundamental ideas of male supremacy, that a penis because it is visible, is superior. At issue in vaginal iconology is an overt assault on the Freudian doctrine of penis envy, which posits that all little girls must feel that they are missing something." I have carefully chosen not to dwell on this aspect of the oeuvre as I find that it detracts from my argument.

[123] Igliori, n.p. Bourgeois comments: "My intention is never to be erotic; if people see it as erotic it is their input..." In Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 173, Bourgeois comments: "I am not particularly 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."

[124] Joseph Helfenstein, "Louise Bourgeois: Architecture as a Study in Memory," in Bourgeois, Gorovoy, and Tilkin, 23.

[125] Meyer-Thoss, Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free-Fall (Zurich: Amman Verlag, 1992), 127.

[126] Meyer-Thoss, " I am a Woman with no Secrets," 44.

A major trope embraced by Bourgeois is the female or feminized space.[127] These are spaces usually associated with woman such as the home, breast, crevice, nest, spiral, earth, and the womb.[128] Lucy Lippard explains that such images are often centrally focused, biomorphic in shape, and 'body identified'—"the inside refers to the female, the outside to the male."[129] Such spaces also function as metaphors for protection, leading back to the safety of the mother and the womb. In the early 1970s there was much artwork and discourse regarding what can be termed as feminine iconography. Such iconography, some of which resembled vaginal forms, for example, was used as a method of celebrating female identity. The female body has been celebrated in women's art practices through an exploration of pregnancy, childbirth, and menstruation.[130] Rosemary Betterton expounds on this type of imagery: "...represents what has traditionally been denigrated or hidden as pleasurable and meaningful for women. It can thus speak directly to women's experience, but defines that experience as biologically rather than socially formed..."[131]

As I have mentioned, Bourgeois's oeuvre includes paintings, drawings, engravings, sculptures, and installations filled with sculptures and *objet trouvés.* She began her sculptural repertoire with wood, then moved on to plaster, marble, and other hard surfaces, mastering the naturalness of her creations. More recently Bourgeois

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[127] Nancy Spector explains: "Reiterated over and over again..., the home is portrayed as a female site, the interstices of which encompass the pleasures and pains of woman's experience." Nancy Spector, in Kotik, Sultan, Leigh, 81. See also, Jessica Benjamin, "A Desire of One's Own," in Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986), 97. "...what is experientially female is the association of desire with a space, a place within the self, from which this force can emerge."
[128] These associations come from stereotypes, observations and interpretations in the dominant culture, and from things that I personally associate with the feminine and female that come from the aforementioned sources.
[129] Lucy Lippard, From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: Dutton, 1976), 74.
[130] Rosemary Betterton, ed. Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media (London: Pandora, 1987), 205.
[131] Ibid.

embraced more pliable materials such as latex. Her *objet trouvés* are carefully selected and positioned within her tableaux. There is nothing random found here, however their juxtapositions and relationships to other objects may recall similar dreamlike or uncanny feelings. Many items found in her tableaux have been weathered by time. Some come from her own closet of memories, others are collected with great scrutiny. Glass containers are ubiquitous and have multiple meanings. Although Bourgeois employs glass vessels as connections to the past, she completely avoids any pottery pieces. This is with good reason. According to the artist, her mother would provide a stack of plates or saucers for her father at the family dining table. Her father often expressed his anger by smashing the ceramic plates on the dining room floor.[132] Imagine the effect this type of behavior would have on the children gathered at the dinner table. This detail of Bourgeois's early childhood is an example of the relationship between her parents, and the efforts her mother must have made to spare the children.

A disturbing aspect to the oeuvre is that there is rarely a complete figure.[133] Bourgeois's sculptures are often reductive, which means for example, that a breast represents a female, a phallus could represent a male. Unlike many male artists who often break up the female form into parts in a degrading and violent manner, such as Hans Bellmer, Bourgeois is using these parts as suggestive of an organic whole in a more

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[132] Bourgeois describes this in a video: Chere Louise, courtesy Les Films du Samois; available from http://www.sfmoma.org/MsoMA/artworks.3296.html.

[133] See Freud, "The Uncanny," in On Creativity and the Unconscious. Freud discusses dismembered limbs, etc., and associates them with the castration complex. These sculptures are reminiscent of the work of Auguste Rodin. Although Bourgeois uses the body part in a different manner, she knew of Rodin's work, where the aesthetic of the fragment began. The town of Meudon was very close to Bourgeois's childhood home in Antony. This is where a large collection of Rodin's body fragments were studied, stored, and exhibited. In the 1930s, Meudon was the major center for the study of Rodin. Prof. Jean-Luc Bordeaux has made me aware of this connection between Bourgeois and Rodin. Bourgeois claims that her inclination for dismembering goes back to seeing washerwomen bent over when they did laundry in the Bièvre River; "[they] were visually cut in half." Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 34.

whimsical and surrealistic sense.[134] A good example of this is *Femme Couteau* (1969-70) where "the figure's shape suggests the phallic potential of the woman's body. Here a woman's body has functional and (simultaneously) menacing possibilities."[135] (Fig. 5) Bourgeois's forms do not intend to demean nor offend. "Her use of the female body—even in a dismembered state—is purposeful, where manipulations by male 20th century artists are generally not."[136]

As Bourgeois is first and foremost a sculptor, it is important to acknowledge the significance of this medium for the artist. Bourgeois explains it best: " Sculpture allows me to re-experience the past in its objective, realistic proportion...For my sculpture is my body...My body is my sculpture."[137]

[134] Chadwick, 15-19. Rosalind Krauss has also situated Bourgeois in her discussions on Surrealism. See Krauss, 51-74.
[135] Swartz, 150.
[136] Ibid., 149.
[137] Neri, 83.

CHAPTER 4

"Longing for Maman" in the Oeuvre

This chapter highlights those examples of Bourgeois's art that best support my thesis that longing for the mother is a major force in her oeuvre.. As Susan Rubin Suleiman asserts, explaining Melanie Klein's theory of artistic creation:

> "The mother—or rather, the mother's body—functions as a 'beautiful land' to be explored...the artist in general, is impelled by the 'desire to rediscover the mother of the early days, whom [she] has lost actually or in [her] feelings.' The work of art itself stands for the mother's body, destroyed repeatedly in fantasy, but restored or repaired in the act of creation."[138]

This is precisely what Bourgeois has done and continues to do in creating her art.

I have identified numerous tropes that Bourgeois employs to invoke the maternal figure and maternal feelings: Portraits of "Maman", Mother and Child, Home Sweet Home, Mother Earth, The Mother's Body, and the return home in the installations entitled *Cells*.

Portraits of Maman

> "An artist's portrait of his or her mother is a uniquely personal statement, one which may even rival a self-portrait in emotional significance."
>
> Barbara Coller[139]

Barbara Coller, in preparation for her exhibition of homages and portraits of artist's mothers, asked the artists about their motivations for producing maternal portraits.

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[138] Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood," in The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation, eds. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 357. Suleiman references Klein's work, Love, Guilt and Reparation, 334.

[139] Barbara Coller, The Artist's Mother: Portraits and Homages [exhibition catalogue] (Huntington, New York: The Heckscher Museum, 1987), 7.

She discovered that "the most frequent factors were either the fear of the mother's imminent death or a reaction to her actual death."[140] Many of the works in Coller's exhibition were created years after the mother's death, indicating that although the trauma can be enduring, the act of making an homage may help to resolve loss. Similarly, Bourgeois's continual artistic suggestions of returning to the mother and the womb may be attempts at resolving loss and assuaging trauma.

Pillar (1949-50) is a painted bronze sculpture (originally conceived in wood) from Bourgeois's *Personnages* series. *Pillar* is a tall slender abstracted human form with a cinched waist. (Fig. 6) Curator, Lucy Inman describes it as "fragile but resilient...It reminds me of those individuals on whom we can lean, people who may not give a great deal emotionally, but who are always dependable."[141] *Pillar* is a very early homage to Bourgeois's mother; like all of the sculptures in the *Personnages* series, which were tributes to the important people in her life.[142]

The spider is Bourgeois's most powerful maternal metaphor. "I'll never tire of picturing her," she wrote on the back of one of her spider drawings.[143] Bourgeois's spiders are often benevolent, and like her mother are orderly and conciliatory. For Bourgeois, the spider brings together the creative impulses of weaving, drawing, and sculpting and joins them with the qualities of patience, self-sufficiency, homemaking, and nourishment. In his essay, "The Fear of Spiders," Primo Levi offers this description:

> "The spider is the enemy-mother who envelops and encompasses, who wants to make us re-enter the womb from which we have issued, bind us tightly to take us back to the impotence of infancy, subject us again to her power; and there are

[140] Coller, 8.
[141] Inman, n.p.
[142] Gardner, 56. The *Personnages* were stand-ins for those people that she cared about.
[143] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 147.

> those who remember that in all languages the spider's name is feminine, that the larger and more beautiful webs are those of the female spiders."[144]

The *Spider* series includes drawings, prints, sculptures, and installations. "It is no coincidence that the spider is one of Bourgeois's recurrent images relating to the myth of Arachne where the girl's conflicts with her mother are dramatized."[145] There are numerous allusions to Arachne in her life and her work. Arachne, who according to Greek myth was the greatest weaver in the world, challenged the omnipotent Athena to a contest of the looms, and was eventually metamorphosed into a spider by her challenger.

> "For all its weakness the spider is one of the most powerful creatures in myth and symbolism. It depicts the Great Mother in her terrible aspect as weaver of fate. She is often shown as a huge spider and called the Great Spider, the Cosmic Spider of the Great Weaver. She is also a creator who spins the thread of life from her own body and attaches all men to herself by the umbilical cord, binding them and weaving them into the web of the world. At the core of her web she is the cosmic center and the rays of her web can be solar, lunar or the life and death cycle and the web of time."[146]

As early as 1947, drawings of spiders can be found in Bourgeois's oeuvre.[147] (Fig. 7) The spider is an emblem of maternal protection: a self-sufficient nurturer and protector, it is like Josephine Bourgeois, both a homemaker and a weaver. Bourgeois's relationship to the spider form has very deep roots—emotional, symbolic and physical. Bourgeois's *Ode à ma mère*, a suite of nine drypoint etchings with accompanying text from 1995, is a series of spiders in various positions. (Fig. 8) Bourgeois explains: "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,

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[144] Primo Levi, "The Fear of Spiders," in Other People's Trades, eds. Primo Levi and Giulio Einaudi (London: Abacus, 1995), 143-44.
[145] Schneider-Adams, 282.
[146] J.C Cooper, Symbolic and Mythological Animals (London: The Aquarian Press, 1992). Cited in Morris and Warner, 56.
[147] Bourgeois with Rinder, 78. This early rendering is reminiscent of a child's drawing.

and as useful as a spider..."[148] Aside from the obvious associations of her mother being a weaver (a spinner) like a spider, Bourgeois has found other similar characteristics between the two. They recall her mother's strength and fragility as well.[149]

For Bourgeois, the spider is a positive metaphor; she sees spiders as beneficial animals since they eat flies and mosquitoes, even though they symbolize fear of death and female genitals for some people. "For men, a spider is often imagined as a furry beast that lures victims into its web to devour them." [150]

Bourgeois has also created spider sculptures of varying dimensions, most with egg sacs indicating their gender and fecundity. A small bronze sculpture from 1962 entitled *Female Portrait* appears to be the earliest sculptural incarnation of this trope, and one can see how it is the starting point for the larger ones. (Fig. 9) Essentially this is a hybrid—part human/part arachnid. Here a small head is concealed within a web of arms enclosed by an armature of web-like forms.

In the 1990s, Bourgeois embarked upon a series of *Spider* sculptures, usually in steel or bronze. They range in size from very small to enormous, and vary in their textural surfaces as well. The smaller ones are often incorporated into installations and the larger ones (even when displayed alone) become installations as they take over gallery space. Furthermore, they can be viewed as architectural as their harrowing forms can encompass their viewers. Additionally, the spider sculptures guard the spaces they inhabit. My own encounter with one of these enormous *Mamans* was at the Museé d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. I could walk around the immense figure and also experience what it was like to be situated under her protective hovering appendages.

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[148] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 326.
[149] Bernadac, "Behind the Tapestry," 15.
[150] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 147.

Aside from the scale, which puts the emphasis on how mythologized the mother is, there was nothing menacing about this arachnid. On the contrary, I could feel the shielding efforts of this weaver through her shape and shelter.

Spider III (1995), a bronze arachnid, which is rather small (approx. 1'6" x 2'7" x 2'7"), has been sculpted in such a manner that the physical manipulation of the material exudes from the surface of the sculpture. (Fig. 10) All aspects—the legs, body and egg sac—are treated with the same texture, which emphasizes movement and results in a creature that looks as if it is at work spinning its web. Another much larger example (approx. 7'8" x 8' x 8') is *Spider* (1997). Its legs, which culminate in pointy toes, and torso are contorted as if it is dancing on a web. (Fig. 11) An additional example is *Spider* (1994), which is created out of steel, glass and mixed media. (Fig. 12) All of its surfaces are smooth, and seven of its legs bend to support its posture, the remaining leg curves in an arch for additional support. Six of the legs are quite geometric as they are finished off with pencil point sharpness. One leg terminates in a curl and another bends at its point. Its body is created out of a ball of steel sitting on its "torso" which is where its legs connect. *Spider's* egg sac is a glass jar filled partially with blue liquid.[151]

In 2000, the aging Bourgeois was photographed with one of her Mamans, a moderate-sized *Spider* (1994) of human scale. The artist leans on the sculpture and grasps the arch of two of its legs. (Fig. 13) This spider is fabricated out of rusted steel. Each of its legs are firm and geometric, lacking the textured sculptural quality often seen in her larger spider sculptures. There is no egg sac evident, and the spider's body is a bulbous form. The photographer, (Nancy Crampton) has positioned the artist as such that

[151] Bourgeois explains the significance of certain colors. "Color is stronger than language. It's a subliminal communication. Blue represents peace, meditation, and escape." See Louise Bourgeois, "Self-Expression is Sacred and Fatal," in Designing For Free Fall, Meyer-Thoss, 178.

the *Maman* facilitates a support or walking aide. The artist's pose is a testimony to her continual longing to commune with the symbol of her maternal figure.

The largest in the series of enormous spiders is *Maman* (1999), a thirty-foot tall example with a mesh-enclosed egg sac full of white marble eggs that hangs from her center.[152] (Fig. 14) In 2001, a trio of Bourgeois's bronze spider sculptures was installed at the foot of 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York. Here, the thirty-foot *Maman* was the centerpiece flanked by two smaller versions. (Fig. 15) *Maman* stands on her perfectly pointed legs, and with her body hovering above, spectators could promenade under her wondrous egg sac. The two smaller *Mamans* are positioned as guardians to the great mother. Griselda Pollock has added:

> "Spiders invoke home and the spinner theme evokes several diverse tropes of femininity: The mature wife Penelope, daily weaving and nightly undoing the image her threads created. Then there is Ariadne, the youthful keeper of the thread that enabled another to enter the Minotaur's rapacious labyrinth and return from that murderous encounter with the archaic and monstrous hybrid."[153]

Bourgeois's spiders are at times organic, and at others quite mechanical. Yet they conjure up the feelings of fear, safety, and ambivalence that have become integral to her narrative. Her insistence and obsession with the Spider trope reinforces the fact that her mother is an important force and presence in her oeuvre.

Torso (1997) is a surreal portrait of Maman. *Torso* is a soft sculpture with which Bourgeois tenderly demonstrates her longing for her mother.[154] (Fig. 16) It is an overstuffed pillow-like piece made of soft nurturing materials that include a blanket, a towel and chenille fabric. *Torso* suggests the maternal body in its materials, softness, and

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[152] Bourgeois installed this spider sculpture in the Turbine Hall as part of the opening exhibition at the new Tate Modern in London, 2000.
[153] Pollock, 73.
[154] This was one of eight mixed-media sculptures exhibited along with a series of drawings at the Arts Club of Chicago, 12 November 1997-3 January, 1998. Kathy Cottong, curator, "Louise Bourgeois: Surrogates and Sleepless Nights," in Louise Bourgeois [exhibition brochure] (Chicago: Arts Club of Chicago, 1997).

swollen appearance. The rectangular shaped sculpture is rather small (12" x 25" x 12"), and is like a stuffed animal or doll. It has breasts and a swollen abdominal center. Like many of Bourgeois's female forms there are no limbs, suggesting helplessness and ambivalence. The soft sculpture is crudely assembled with needle and thread, which further stresses the importance of restoration, as sewing serves as a metaphor for restoration and forgiveness in Bourgeois's work.[155] Sue Taylor offers this description:

> "*Torso* is a monument to the infant's need for the mother's body, a need that persists even as the child develops a conflicting desire of independence. Caught in this dilemma, the child discovers a substitute, a transitional object very much akin, in its physical qualities to *Torso*."[156]

Mother and Child

Bourgeois's images of mother and child could not be further from the traditional iconography of the Renaissance Virgin and Child or even those tender moments captured by Mary Cassatt in the nineteenth century. Usually in the treatment of this subject, a loving interrelationship is portrayed. Bourgeois's renditions reflect the rupture in the modernist treatment of the subject. Marie-Laure Bernadac points out that in the 1940s images that are linked to birth, childhood and motherhood dominate Bourgeois's work and that these point to life cycles.[157] Among these are untitled drawings that include a female giving birth, yet here the infant who has emerged from the womb is as large as the birthing mother. (Fig. 17) Later, Bourgeois created a drypoint etching based on this same image for her *Autobiographical Series* and titled it *Birth.* "It portrays the painful moment of separation as the infant leaves the mother's body: her difficulty in letting go is

[155] Giorgio Verzotti, "Louise Bourgeois: Fondazione Prada," Artforum 36, no. 3 (Nov. 1997): 107.
[156] Taylor, 27.
[157] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 16. Note: a similar and controversial image by Monica Sjoo entitled "God Giving Birth" (1968) comes to mind, as well as the famous birth giving Neolithic goddesses from Catal Huyuk (c. 6500-5800 BCE). Sjoo's work is illustrated in Judy Chicago and Edward Lucie-Smith, Women and Art: Contested Territory (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1999), 67.

suggested by the cocoon of her hair which encloses both of their bodies."[158] From 1986 there is *Untitled*, an extremely uncanny rendition of mother and child, a drawing of two pairs of scissors, one large pair looming above a smaller one. (Fig. 18) Shears would have been a part of everyday life in a tapestry restoration factory, so the association between her mother and this cutting instrument is well understood. Bourgeois explains how the drawing is related to the umbilical cord and confirms that the larger pair of shears is indeed her mother.

> "My mother was very very big. My trust in her was complete. All I wanted was to be like her. But I am a little shears, a tiny one, though in just the same shape—the same everything, and I was pleased with that. That she was a monstrous cutting instrument didn't matter to me. I like her the way she was: very dangerous. My mother appeared very strong to me. In my eyes she was perfect. I am not as good as she was, she was very diplomatic. The married woman in France has to endure her husband's mistresses, she must be very strong. And my mother was..."[159]

As the mother and child theme is found in several of Bourgeois's drawings beginning early in her career, it is significant to note that these drawings were not made available for public viewing until the 1980s. According to Stephan Kunz, Bourgeois's drawings were not intended to be public documents.[160] One cannot help but associate her exhibition of her drawings with her public confessionals. It obviously took Bourgeois several decades to feel comfortable enough to expose herself. Some of these drawings have been transformed into three-dimensional forms as sculptures, which in turn have been positioned in her installations.

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[158] Elizabeth Manchester, Louise Bourgeois's *Birth* [online] 8 Feb. 2001; available from http://www.tate.org.UK/servlet/Atext?id=21171&type=pit.
[159] Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free-Fall, 133.
[160] Stephan Kunz, Christiane Meyer Thoss, Beat Wismer, eds. Louise Bourgeois, Meret Oppenheim, Ilse Weber: Drawings and Works on Paper [exhibition catalogue, Aargauer Kusthaus, Aarau; Swiss Institute, NY] (Zurich: Unikate, 1999), 19.

An interesting sculptural example of the mother and child is *She Fox* (1985), an ambivalent representation of her mother with its young offspring sheltered under her right paw, which Bourgeois has confirmed is a self-portrait.[161] (Fig. 19) Carved coarsely in black marble, the six-foot tall creature has four breasts, and sits up on her hind legs with her chest upright. Her neck is long and rather geometric with an intentional slash at the throat. A tiny head attached to a pestle-like neck or body, which resembles Bourgeois's *Fallen Woman* (1981) sculpture, is held between her paws; surely a strange mother and child rendition. (Fig. 20) The violently executed portrait of her mother exhibits some of Bourgeois's repressed and hostile feelings. As the artist has stated:

> "The material was there taking all that room and bothering me, bothering me by its aggressive presence. And somehow the idea of the mother came to me. This is the way my mother impressed me, as very powerful, very silent, very judging, and controlling the whole studio. And naturally this piece became my mother. At that point, I had my subject. I was going to express what I felt toward her... First of all I cut her head, and I slit her throat...And after weeks and weeks of work, I thought, if this is the way I saw my mother, then she did not like me. How could she possibly like me if I treat her that way? At that point something turned around. I could not stand the idea that she wouldn't like me. I couldn't live if I thought that she didn't like me. The fact that I had pushed her around, cut off her head, had nothing to do with it. What you do to a person has nothing to do with what you expect the person to feel toward you... Now at the end I became very, very depressed, terribly, terribly depressed."[162]

She-Fox is a perfect example of the significance of the cathartic process for Bourgeois; in addition her commentary exemplifies her ambivalent feelings for her mother. The artist explains her anger:

> "For instance, if my mother did not do immediately what I wanted, I had images of twisting her legs, killing her. This is the subject of the work called the *She-Fox* whereby I would kill my mother every time she refused me something. But by

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[161] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 155. The artist notes here that upon close viewing you can see that the material has been hacked away with a pointed chisel, very carefully—it allows for extremes of tenderness and aggression; the smooth surface of the child is quite different in contrast.

[162] Bourgeois's account of *She Fox*, from a taped interview by Jennifer Dalsimer, April 9, 1986; Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Cited in Nixon, Louise Bourgeois, 322-23.

> the same token, five minutes later I said, 'Louise, you shouldn't have done that; now you better rebuild it because she might get angry at you.' So before she got angry at me, I rebuilt her. It is constant shifting from destroying to phoenix."[163]

An interplay of aggression and reparation in relation to the maternal body is described in her account of the sculptural process of creating *She-Fox.* Bourgeois portrays maternal contradictions: a mother who is both passive and aggressive, as well as nurturing and threatening, exactly the way she remembers *Maman.*

For the 2000 opening of the New Tate Modern Museum in London, Bourgeois was invited to provide the art for the massive Turbine Hall. Here, Bourgeois installed three enormous towers titled, *I Do, I Undo and I Redo*, which are accompanied by a gigantic spider entitled *Maman.* (See Fig. 14) The towers, which range in height from nearly thirty feet high to almost fifty feet, are made of stainless steel, fabric and mixed media. (Fig. 21) They involve many of the same themes found in her *Cells.* The towers however, are open environments, inviting the viewer to scale their staircases and engage intimately with the art; they offer a means of entry or escape and serve as a passageway between the public and private realm.[164] The three architectural structures are associated with waiting, watching, and warning. Each tower includes a small glass bell jar, which serves as an enclosure for a mother and child sculpture.[165] (Fig. 22) Bourgeois explains that the small glass worlds: " invoke the melancholy of containment, of being closed off to the outside."[166] The three types of maternal relationships that are represented at the

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[163] Louise Bourgeois in Igliori, n.p.
[164] Morris, 8. Ladders and towers can be found throughout the oeuvre, and allude to her existential philosophy as having "No Exit."
[165] Just as in Sylvia Plath's novel, The Bell Jar, the mother-daughter relationship is central and the jar, which intends to preserve its contents, on some level is also confining. Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar (London: W. Heinemann, 1963). Originally published under the pseudonym, Victoria Lucas.
[166] Jennifer Bloomer, "Passages Impliqués," in Bourgeois, Gorovoy, and Tilkin, 99.

Tate are described in detail by Bourgeois.[167] Each is a nude female form with a very small child, naturalistically represented with an emphasis on the mother's breasts, the source of nourishment. The materials used correlate to the feelings evoked. For example, in *I Do*, which Bourgeois describes as the "good mother," the sculpture is made of stuffed pink fabric scraps. (Fig. 23) The seated mother embraces the baby tenderly and softly. Bourgeois describes *I Do* as representing the concept of unconditional love: "It is the 'I Love You' no matter what."[168] In strong contrast is *I Undo*, with the figures cast in steel. The small young girl is embracing the leg of her mother who seems uninterested. In addition, the mother's engorged breasts are spraying milk indicated by the use of resin. The maternal bond has been broken, according to Bourgeois: "The *Undo* is the unraveling. The torment that things are not right and the anxiety of not knowing what to do...it's a total rejection..."[169] (Fig. 24) I *Redo*, also cast in hard material, is Bourgeois's "attempt to go forward...There is hope and love again." The mother sits passively and the child is connected to her by an umbilical cord which indicates the bond between them.[170] (Fig. 25) The glass-enclosed sculptures in the Tate Towers reinforce the obsessive feelings of longing for her mother that Bourgeois continues to address in her work.

A final example, which suggests the union of the mother and child, is the eerie *Twosome* (1991). *Twosome* is an enormous massive metal sculpture created out of lengths of ordinary pipe of decreasing diameters inserted into one another. (Fig. 26) Two cylindrical steel cells, one six feet in diameter which is illuminated inside serves as

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[167] Bourgeois has provided an accompanying text which is found in the exhibition catalogue for the exhibit.
[168] Morris and Warner, 32.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Morris, 12.

the receptacle for a slightly smaller one which is programmed by computer to slide in and out. Here we have a controlled interaction between two forces. Bourgeois describes this as a work of the unconscious.[171] Alex Potts offers up two diverse interpretations for this work suggesting that it is like a small child taking refuge inside its mother and yet it also can be seen as the relentless pumping of sexual intercourse.[172] Alternately, it may represent the safe rocking motion of a mother and child.[173] Even in this enormous metal sculpture created out of discarded pipes, the yearning for the mother can be found.

Home Sweet Home

> "Je dis ma Mère. Et c'est à vous que je pense, ô Maison! Maison des beaux étés obsurs de mon enfance. Mélancolie"
>
> Oscar V. Milosz[174]

In Bourgeois's memory and art, home plays a very significant role. It was the site of her betrayals, her pain, as well as her pleasures. She explains, "The house is my defense against the open road, the open world where you are likely to get pushed around. It is the center of my whole work."[175] It is no surprise that the home is an important central theme in Bourgeois's work as it is associated with comfort, protection, consolation as well as constriction. The house as an enclosed and interior space

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[171] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 303.
[172] Alex Potts, The Sculptural Imagination (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), 364-5.
[173] The action of *Twosome* resonates with Klein's account of a story told to her by an affectless boy named Dick. See Melanie Klein, Contributions to Psycho-Analysis (London: Hogarth Press, 1930), 242-3.
[174] Oscar V. Milosz (1877-1959) as cited in Bachelard, 45. Translation: "I say Mother. And my thoughts are of you, oh, House. House of the lovely dark summers of my childhood. Melancholy." Milosz was a French Lithuanian metaphysical poet.
[175] Judith Thurman, "Passionate Self-Expression in the Art of Louise Bourgeois," Architectural Digest 41 Nov. 1984, 236.

culturally and personally becomes a metaphor for the mother, the womb, and as a stand-in for the safety and protection associated with mother.[176]

The house as a metaphor for the mother is embraced by many cultures. In Chevalier's Dictionary of Symbols, he defines the house as a female symbol "in the sense of being a sanctuary, the mother, protection or the womb."[177] In Bourgeois's oeuvre, it certainly is the site of the artist's memories; both pleasant and traumatic. "The house, the stomach, the cave, for example, carry the same overall theme of the return to the mother. In this realm, the unconscious commands, the unconscious directs..."[178] The house/ the home is literally the object of nostalgia.[179] The house for Bourgeois is the site of infidelity, treachery and abuse as well as family protection, and it serves as a wonderful mnemonic device.

According to Bachelard, who analyzes the various meanings of houses, the chief benefit of the house is to shelter daydreaming, and the metaphorical notion of the home as womb places dreams and dreamer within maternal space.[180] He also reaffirms: "Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated."[181]

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[176] Sigmund Freud, On Dreams, ed. Peter Gay. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1952), 72-73. Freud determined that in dreams, spaces like boxes and rooms are metaphors for the womb.

[177] Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, Dictionary of Symbols, trans. John Buchanan Brown (London: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1994), 531.

[178] Anthony Vidler, Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 64.

[179] Bloomer, 90. Greek: *nostos*, the longing for home, and *algia*, pain.

[180] Bachelard, 6. Thanks to Julie Nicoletta for first leading me to this source in her article, "Louise Bourgeois's Femme-Maisons: Confronting Lacan." Robert Storr and Marie-Laure Bernadac along with Nicoletta are among the many scholars who have pointed to Bachelard as a useful tool in studying Bourgeois's work. See Robert Storr, "Louise Bourgeois: Gender and Possession," and Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois.

[181] Bachelard, 8.

Bourgeois's subject of the house began in the 1940s with her *Femme-Maison* series.[182] (See Fig. 2 & 3) These intriguing early paintings and drawings conflate the architectural structure of a house with that of a female figure.[183] These headless females are trapped within their dwellings; some wave their hands in a futile gesture to set them free, and some are armless. These women have no faces and no ability to speak their minds; they are helpless and unable to defend themselves. "Here (Bourgeois) universalizes women's domestic and societal roles and their place in the systems of communication."[184] The *Femme-Maisons* were created long before they appeared in feminist art. Beginning in the 1970s these images became symbols of the constricted woman, especially in discussions related to the Women's Movement. Her successful discourse with feminism in the seventies provided the Women's Art Movement with an excellent example of a female artist seemingly bypassed by a patriarchal art world.[185] Feminists embraced Bourgeois's imagery: there is a *Femme-Maison* on the cover of a book of feminist art criticism by Lucy Lippard; it reappears on a poster for a women in architecture exhibit.[186] Furthermore, the potency of the underlying concept was brought to life in "Womanhouse" (1972), a collaborative

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[182] A series of four 36" x 14" ink or oil and ink on linen paintings created between 1945-1947. For a complete discussion that focuses solely on these images, as well as a look at how Bourgeois's work critiques Lacan, see Nicoletta.

[183] The history of bodily analogy in architecture goes back to Vitruvius. Vidler, Architectural Uncanny, 70.

[184] Nicoletta, 22.

[185] Robert Radford, "Louise Bourgeois: Exhibition Review," The Burlington Magazine 114 no. 1151: 122. This does not diminish the delayed recognition of Bourgeois's work due to the dominant patriarchal artistic climate of the 1950s-1970s. During the 60s, male superstars dominated the art world and she did not feel comfortable pushing her work. In 1965, she was included in Lippard's "Eccentric Abstraction" exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery in New York. "Bourgeois was delighted to be called 'eccentric' because the word means 'away from the center' and the artist has always regarded herself as an independent, working outside the mainstream." Bourgeois did not have any solo shows from 1964-1974, but in the seventies, the women's movement opened up more opportunities. Rubinstein, American Women Sculptors, 326.

[186] Lippard, From the Center and "Women in American Architecture: An Historic and Contemporary Perspective," an exhibition organized by the Architectural League of New York and shown at The Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1977.

feminist effort in which an actual house was divided into "female spaces" by women artists and provided an environment where women's issues and identity could be addressed through artistic production.[187] Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein reminds us that the "motif of the house recurs in the works of women artists as a symbol of identity or conflict."[188] In addition to Bourgeois, Miriam Schapiro, Jennifer Bartlett and Alice Aycock have used the house as a female symbol.

The *Femme-Maisons* certainly can be read as representations of the housewife, as their title suggests, who is confined to her domestic surroundings and yearning to escape.[189] Many interpretations link Bourgeois's own situation as wife and mother of three young children at that time as the catalyst for such imagery. The stereotype of the housewife was emerging during that era.[190]

I suggest that these hybrid women can also be seen as depictions of her mother. Bourgeois describes the woman in her *Femme-Maison* series: "There is a loneliness, she is dignified, but she is alone, has no companion. The little hand is calling for help. She is not sexual at all. Her head does not know that she is naked..."[191] In addition, the house itself is a representation of the mother, of her protective, smothering, loving and menacing qualities. These women are enclosed or entrapped by their homes just as Josephine Bourgeois was in her situation, unable or unwilling to speak out or get out.[192]

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[187] The "Womanhouse" project of 1972 was led by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro and was part of the Feminist Art Project at Fresno State College.
[188] Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, In Three Dimensions: Women Sculptors of the 90s (New York: Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, 1995), 12.
[189] Gardner, 47. According to Gardner: "The English translation given is usually 'woman house', though 'femme' in French can be either 'woman' or 'wife'; it depends on vocal nuance and context."
[190] Bourgeois has described these as self-portraits. August 23, 1980 diary entry. Louise Bourgeois archive as cited in Beatriz Colomina, "The Architecture of Trauma," in Bourgeois, Gorovoy, and Tilkin, 41. "I experience my whole house as a trap.".
[191] Wye and Smith, The Prints of Louise Bourgeois, 148.
[192] Robert Storr, Dislocations, 37. Upon his return from the war, Louis Bourgeois began numerous affairs. According to Bourgeois, it was her mother who chose to keep a blind eye over her father's behavior.

The confinement (or containment) represented by architecture here becomes a prevalent thread of Bourgeois's (later) cathartic oeuvre. The *Femme-Maison* theme is a recurring and dominant motif in Bourgeois's work, and can be seen throughout the oeuvre as the artist goes from paintings to drawings, to sculptures, to the *Cells*. Donald Kuspit situates the *Femme-Maison* in a discussion about the modern fetish.[193] And according to Phyllis Greenacre, the fetish "can function as an amulet or magical object..."[194]

Bourgeois took her two-dimensional woman-house images and developed them into more sculptural forms over the years. Her exploration into new sculptural materials and the three-dimensional form was part of an subconscious expressionist desire to physically manipulate these forms as an extension of her desire to touch, to feel, to experience once again the memories of her early years. Her *Femme-Maison* sculpture from 1982 should not be looked at as a final tribute to the subject, but as a link from the past to the future. (Fig. 27) In *Femme-Maison* (1982-83), Bourgeois has sculpted in exquisite white marble, an erect rectangular edifice that protrudes from a mound of swirling drapery. Unlike other *Femme-Maison* incarnations, interiority is only implied: in the defined angles of the house suggesting doors and windows, and in and around the folds of the sculptural envelope. By expanding on the *Femme-Maison* theme in her work, Bourgeois protects and maintains the safe motherly space. A poem by Anne Sexton reinforces the concept:

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[193] Donald Kuspit, Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post-Modern Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 149.

[194] Phyllis Greenacre, cited in Kuspit, Signs of Psyche In Modern and Postmodern Art, 151. I suggest that *Fillette* could be part of this same discussion.

Housewife

Some women marry houses.
It's another kind of skin: it has a heart, a mouth, a liver and bowel movements.
The walls are permanent and pink.
See how she sits on her knees all day, faithfully washing herself down.
Men enter by force, drawn back like Jonah
Into their fleshy mothers.
A woman is her mother.
That's the main thing.[195]

The home is a dominant theme of Bourgeois's oeuvre and the enclosed dwelling becomes the metaphor for the mother in many works including the *Cells.* According to Bachelard, "The house is the human being's first world, the first universe. It is therefore a symbol of maternal refuge, of the protective warmth of childhood, of memory."[196] In her homage to one of her childhood homes, *Cell Choisy* (1990-93), Bourgeois has created an authentic yet miniaturized duplication in pink marble mounted on a nineteenth century workbench and contained by an enclosure of three glass paned sides and one side of woven iron.[197] (Fig. 28) "It seduces the viewer with promises of autobiographical disclosures, intimate confessions, recovered memories."[198] Some windows are broken and others missing. Remnants of soot and grime are evident across the exterior walls of iron and glass, creating an aura of times passed. A guillotine is placed above the dwelling within the *Cell,* and reminds us that home can be a

[195] Anne Sexton, "Housewife," in The Complete Poems (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981). Cited in Heilbrun, 113-14.
[196] Bachelard, 7.
[197] Bourgeois notes the selection of the 19th c. workbench has to do with her attraction to the mysteriousness of this period—"the period of Charcot, the Salpêtrière." The original dwelling no longer exists; it has been replaced by the Paul Éluard Theater; this house is a representation of the past. The pink marble that she uses here is very rare, called *portugalo.* Steir, 127. There is another version of *Cell Choisy* (entitled *Cell Choisy II*), which also features an enclosed sculpture of the home, this time juxtaposed with numerous mirrors.
[198] Spector, 81.

threatening place.[199] In addition to symbolizing threat, the guillotine is an indication that the past has been destroyed; it can cut us off from our own childhood memory, which is represented by this home.[200] Attached to this enclosure is a faded shop sign salvaged from her family's business, "Aux Vielles Tapestries," which reinforces the historical quality of the piece.[201] According to Charlotta Kotik, the flesh color of the marble used to create a childhood dwelling reinforces the house-body metaphor continually seen in Bourgeois's repertoire.[202] This eerie homage to home offers further evidence of the artist's ambivalent feelings about that sacred place where her mother provided her with nurturing and "Child Abuse."[203]

A final homage to her mother and home is *Venthouse* (1990). (Fig. 29) A carved rectangular chunk of coarse black marble is topped with a smaller rectangle of the same. On the "roof" of this impenetrable dwelling is an assortment of bulbous forms reminiscent of Bourgeois's breast/phallus imagery. These protuberances are actually the glass cupping jars once used by physicians for sucking blood to the skin's surface, like the ones Bourgeois used to help heal her ailing mother. "It symbolizes helping someone stay alive even when there is no hope."[204]

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[199] Terrie Sultan, "Redefining the Terms of Engagement: The Art of Louise Bourgeois," in Kotik, Sultan, and Leigh, 46. "The resonance of the guillotine as icon of the French Revolution is not lost on Bourgeois, and she enlarges its symbolism from the horribly misguided role it played in carrying out France's march toward *liberté, égalité*, and *fraternité* into a quotidian representation of all the cuts one must endure in life out of the need to break with present difficulties or the failures of the past."

[200] Paolo Herkenhoff, "L.B.: the Unmentionable, Blades, Fabrics and Fashion," in Cousseau, 100.

[201] Spector, 81.

[202] Charlotta Kotik, "The Locus of Memory: An Introduction to the Work of Louise Bourgeois," in Kotik, Sultan, and Leigh, 26.

[203] I do not use this term in the literal sense, but to make reference to Bourgeois's own description of her childhood disappointments.

[204] Gardner, 103.

For Bourgeois, the house as a mnemonic device, and as a metaphor for her lost mother, has proven to be an ubiquitous and useful trope that has allowed her to therapeutically explore unresolved feelings from the past.

Mother Earth: *Lairs*

In a diary entry from 1981, Bourgeois explains how the body can be seen topographically as " a land with mounds and valleys and caves and holes."[205] Bourgeois sees the body as " a figuration that appears in mother earth."[206] Bourgeois's *Lairs*, which are reminiscent of forms found in caves and the earth, represent her longing for her mother. The crevices and undulating forms of her *Lairs,* forms based on the motif of the landscape, recall a desire to return to the original sources of life; to the earth, to the womb, to the mother.[207]

According to the Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, the mythologized mother is an archetype, which lies in the collective unconscious. It is associated with locations and objects that stand for fertility and fruitfulness, such as gardens, ploughed fields, and cornucopia. Jung explains: "It can be attached to a rock, a cave, a tree, a spring, a deep well, or to various vessels... or even to vessel shaped flowers..."[208] Jung's theories of the collective unconscious seem appropriate to an understanding of Bourgeois and her art. He explains how the image of the mother is universal in folklore, but that the image

[205] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 126.
[206] Ibid.
[207] According to the Dictionnaire Littré, "In French, one historical meaning of 'nature' is the genital parts, especially of female animals." As cited in Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 119. "The symbolism of the mother is related to that of EARTH and the SEA, in the sense that all three are wombs and wells of life. Earth and sea are themselves symbols of the mother's body." Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 677.
[208] C.G. Jung, Aspects of the Feminine, trans. R.F.C. Hull (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 109.

is altered when it appears in the individual psyche.[209] Here the maternal figure becomes larger than life. He attributes this to "the archetype projected upon the mother, which gives her a mythological background and invests her with authority and numinosity."[210]

In the 1950s, Bourgeois visited the caves at Lascaux, France.[211] It seems that this visit may have inspired her to embark upon her *Lairs* series. These works as described by Eleanor Munro, provide yet another example from this oeuvre that embodies the desire and longing for the mother: "rough and ragged outside, but warm and completely 'safe' within these quiet places were 'a benevolent mother, a place to put a baby.'"[212] Women often identify their bodies with the undulations of the earth, as seems to be in the examples of Bourgeois's *Lairs.* As Lucy Lippard describes,

> "Our menstrual periods are moon-determined, therefore related to the earth's magnetic energies and to the ocean's tides. Our genitalia recall caves, cleft rocks, river beds—the cozy and fearful abysses culturally associated with the nourishing and with the fearsome, with the maternal and sexual, the regenerative and deathly aspects of Mother Earth."[213]

Bourgeois's interest in nature and biomorphic forms can certainly be seen as a desire to return to childhood, and to the maternal comfort she recalls and still yearns for. In, The Myths of Motherhood, Shari Thurer suggests: "Our ideas of the maternal are not reinvented anew in each era but are historically linked. For example, the symbols of the

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[209] Jung, 110.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Munro, 166. Anne Wagner makes a connection between Bourgeois's works of the late 60s such as *Soft Landscape, Unconscious Landscape, and Double Negative* and caves along the Dordogne, especially noting the cave at Cougnac. Wagner, 15-17.
[212] Munro, 166.
[213] Lucy Lippard. Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory (New York: The New Press, 1983), 42.

cave as female womb, mother as pregnant earth...have persisted some ten thousand years..."[214]

Bourgeois's sculptural forms often involve hidden interiors and protruding exteriors. She describes her *Lairs* as "a place you need to go, a transitory protection."[215] Works such as *Unconscious Landscape* (1967) fuse the theme of the body/architecture nexus that began with the Femme-Maisons, with the earth. (Fig. 30) In the 1960s much of her work was "... about possible sculptural pasts to be unearthed and recovered from sites where they lie concealed. There is the foundry, certainly, and the human body, even the body of the earth itself."[216] In *Soft Landscape I* (1967) and *Double Negative* (1963), Bourgeois has evolved natural forms into creatures with protuberances that pop up and orifices that swallow and evacuate.[217] (Fig. 31 & 32)

Adrienne Rich refers to work by Rachel Levy in which she discusses the types of tracings found in Neolithic caves:

> "She sees the female symbolism and images in many of these paintings some, linear, some fully painted and gloriously immanent with power—along with the female statuettes found in the caves, as suggesting not just a 'cult of the Mother Goddess' but a later identification of the caverns with body of Mother of Rebirth. She points out that cave was not simply a shelter in the secular sense, but a religious sanctuary; that its most exquisite and mysterious images are found, not in the general domestic dwelling area, but in labyrinthine corridors, difficult to reach, and clearly sacred zones. The cave itself as a whole was perceived as the body of the Mother..."[218]

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[214] Shari L. Thurer, The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 3.
[215] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 152.
[216] Wagner, 11.
[217] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 76-77.
[218] Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1976; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1977), 81.

In Bourgeois's *Lairs*, phallic and breast-like forms seem to merge with forms from earth's landscape.[219] Lippard also reminds us that "the dwelling, the interior space, is the classic symbol of the female body."[220] Bourgeois's associations between the body, Mother Earth, and the home are explored throughout the oeuvre. Bourgeois is not the only artist to address these ideas in her work. In 1966, another French artist, Niki de Saint Phalle created *Hon*, an enormous reclining female figure, in which visitors were offered access to its interior via a doorway situated at the opening to her vagina. Saint - Phalle offered an opportunity (like Bourgeois) to return to the womb and to the nurturing mother.[221]

Bourgeois's *Lairs* series focuses on cave and mound shapes with orifices, as well as teardrop-shaped sculptures, and these certainly can be seen as a further development of the *Femme-Maison.* Bernadac refers to these as "Organic Refuge," a poignant description for this body of work.[222] The oppositions of inside and outside spaces create a rhythm that signifies the threat of containment and enclosure, and at the same time the safety of the womb or nest. Deborah Wye has mentioned in her catalogue essay a link between Bourgeois's *Lairs* and her mother:

> "The world of nature, nurturing, and the profundity of maternal love belong to this end of the continuum of Bourgeois's artistic motivations. She remembers vividly being held closely by her mother and being comforted by her. She describes one of her "chances in life" as stemming from the fact that her mother loved her: 'I felt that what I represented was the true naked body of the child with mother. I can still feel her body and her love.' These experiences of maternal

[219] Michael Corris, "Fuzzy Bourgeois," in Museum of Modern Art Papers, Volume One, 18.
[220] Lippard, Overlay, 197. Here, Lippard includes a photo of Bourgeois's *Hanging Lair* (1963) juxtaposed with various Neolithic caves.
[221] *Hon* (1966), a collaboration between Saint-Phalle, Jean Tinguely and Per Olof Ultvedt, was part of an exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stokholm in 1966. See Chicago and Lucie-Smith, 64-65. Inside this enormous sculpture were rooms, especially notable was the room located in the breast area, where a milk bar was set up.
[222] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 65-87.

love and protectiveness are the underlying sources of such pieces as the nest-like *Lair* series…"[223]

Two examples of *Lairs*, *Fée Couturière* (1963), and *The Quartered One* (1964-65) are plaster tear-shaped dwellings, displayed hanging on small metal hooks. (Fig. 33 & 34) These dwellings have multiple orifices that allow for viewing their inside cavities which are composed of a labyrinth of corridors and form a "nest-like home."[224] The *Lairs* bear the suggestion of human contours as well as that of the earth's landscape. *The Quartered One* refers to a carcass such as those hanging in a butcher shop. It's elongated shape and irregular texture is completed with several pockets placed near the bottom of the sculpture creating even more protective places. According to Erich Neumann, the central symbol of the mother is the vessel.[225] *The Quartered One* is vessel- like in its form, and its pockets serve as vessels as well. Similarly, *Fée Couturière,* which translates to "Fairy Seamstress," is another reminder of the nest. This teardrop-shaped sculpture is highly textured and interspersed with crevices and holes into which a viewer can reach or look. The title and the space both imply a reference to Bourgeois's mother, the tapestry restorer, who always had a needle in her hand trying to repair, and of course to Bourgeois the idealized mother. Anne Wagner has made a direct comparison of the interior of *Fée Couturièr* and a photograph by Annette Laming of the main gallery at Lascaux.[226] (Fig. 35) According to Bourgeois, "a lair is a protected place

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[223] Wye, "One and Others," 15.
[224] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 70.
[225] Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of an Archetype, trans. Ralph Manheim 2nd ed. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1963), 39.
[226] Wagner, 16-18. Annette Laming, Lascaux, Paintings and Engravings (London: Pelican, 1959), as cited in Wagner. This comparison supports my argument.

you can enter to take refuge..."[227] *Fée Couturière* is metaphorically linked to the womb, to the home, and to the mother.

One can see how Bourgeois's dwellings of protection take on various forms throughout the oeuvre. Later in her career, *Femme-Maisons* and *Lairs* are further developed into major mixed-media installation pieces entitled *Cells*, and offer a view of what the interior of these former structures may have looked like for this artist.

The Mother's Body

Bourgeois's oeuvre, which is filled with biomorphic constructions made of clay, marble, latex and other materials, includes an abundance of works that resemble female body parts, especially breasts and wombs. Such works also refer to her longing for her mother. Breasts are the nurturing symbol of the mother, and their proliferation is yet another example of her underlying and perhaps unconscious desire to go back to that source. As I mentioned earlier, Bourgeois was quite interested in Melanie Klein's work, especially her "Object Relations Theory" in which the mother is moved to center stage, and the infant fantasizes the mother into part objects such as milk, feces, breast, penis.[228] An interesting example of her work that focuses on the theme of motherhood is *Mamelles* (1991). (Fig. 36) The rubber frieze of numerous pink protruding breasts demonstrates the artist's affinity for the nurturing powers of the mammary glands. Bourgeois's breast-like forms conjure up images of mother and child suckling at her breast, a place of safety and protection. The rubber mold also has small tunnels or openings that suggest interiority. Bourgeois explains this piece in her own words:

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[227] Meyer-Thoss, Designing For Free Fall, 136.
[228] Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, From Klein to Kristeva (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 9.

> "Well, just picture a female dog or 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."[229]

Bourgeois acknowledges her repetitive obsessive concerns. She affirms that sexual suggestiveness is found in her work, and realizes her involvement with female shapes.[230] Michaela Unterdörfer has pointed out: "Bourgeois's many-breasted forms seem to echo images of mythical fertility goddesses that served as idols of womanhood in early societies.[231]

Bourgeois's bronze statue entitled *Nature Study* (1984) is a combination female/male/human/animal. (Fig. 37) Its multiple breasts indicate a stronger identification with the female gender and her regenerative qualities. The artist declares that the animal represents her father:

> "Since I was demolished by my father, why shouldn't I demolish him? I take a really masculine animal and I give him breasts, in ridicule. And after having given him breasts, why not give him a second pair of breasts? And then I cut off his head. It's a way of teasing. As I was teased, so shall I tease."[232]

Michael Corris offers the following description of this unusual portrayal of the nurturing mother sculpture: "Here is the very parody of maternal generosity and charity; not a woman, but a multi-breasted, headless, creature goddess."[233] Bourgeois's insistence on the merging of the female anatomy with that of the male animal shows her subconscious return to that nurturing breast of her mother even here in what is proposed to be an angry representation of the father. Other sculptures such as *Blind Man's Bluff* (1984), and *She Fox* (1985) further emphasize my point. (Fig. 38 & 19) *Blind Man's*

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[229] A diary entry by the artist, 14 October 1981, cited in Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 126.
[230] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 101.
[231] Unterdörfer, 13. Artemis of Ephesus, Venus of Willendorf, and Pre-Columbian breasted vessels from Peru are recalled.
[232] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 105.
[233] Corris, 18.

Bluff is a mound of a rather phallic shape comprised of numerous protruding bulbous forms culminating in a rough-cut abstract head. This piece is carved in white marble with its breast-like forms highly and smoothly polished and its head more rough cut creating an interesting textural contrast suggesting various body parts. The entire piece erupts from a white marble slab that is juxtaposed atop a black marble rectangle.

Another example in this category which can also be viewed as a representation of the mother's body, is *Harmless Woman* (1969). (Fig. 39) This naturalistically rendered and exquisitely polished bronze sculpture has a gold patina and is less than a foot high; she is harmless and vulnerable because she has no arms or legs to mobilize her. Her female form has been reduced to a torso with only voluptuous breasts and abdomen reminding us of the fecundity of ancient goddesses such as the Venus of Willendorf. Her head has been left off (or removed) and she is left with the stump of a neck, which is phallic in its form. According to Robert Storr, the probe-like protuberance on her shoulders is the only thing she is left with to guide and protect her.[234] It has been suggested that she "personifies the paradoxical predicament of women throughout time" reminding me of a *Femme-Maison.*[235] This is another demonstration of the juxtaposition of opposites, such as power and helplessness, beauty and the grotesque.

Trani Episode (1971-72) is a pair of breasts created out of latex and hydrocal.[236] (Fig. 40) The sculpture exhibits a merging of the male and female, as well as the active and passive. Each breast is quite phallic in its shape. One breast lays perpendicular over the other in a gentle placement. Small protruding nipples create protrusions at both ends of the forms. On one level, *Trani Episode* implies a sense of harmony, yet on another an

[234] Robert Storr, "A Sketch for a Portrait: Louise Bourgeois," in Storr et al, 74.
[235] Inman, n.p.
[236] Trani is a location in Italy. Bourgeois offers no explanation for this title.

ambivalence is sensed in the merging of the male and female forms. Bourgeois's ambivalent depiction gives the female nurturing breast the power of the phallus. Finally, as Bernadac offers: "Bourgeois has managed to evoke the secret refuge of the maternal breast and the warmth of the bodies nestled together, for the swaying forms of *Trani Episode* suggest the rocking of the cradle.[237] Bourgeois has used female body parts in her work to evoke feelings that she longs for, mostly those associated with the comfort and ambivalence of mother.

Home Sweet Home, Again: *The Cells*

The *Cells* series of the 1980s and 1990s provide some of the finest examples that demonstrate Bourgeois's constant longing for *Maman.* The *Cells* offer elaborate visual references to her script. The artist takes the theme of home literally, creating rooms that "house" memories. "Like the cells of our bodies, each is connected to memories that drive us to an awareness that is larger than life." [238] These containers for memories are in many ways *Femme-Maisons* and become extensions of her "Child Abuse" text. The *Cells* themselves can be seen as homes, rooms, enclosures, and/or spaces of containment. At the same time, they are metaphors for the mother and/or the protective nurturing feelings that the artist yearns for. These installations do not tell a story with simple narrative. Careful deconstruction of their contents reveals the driving forces behind many of the artist's creative impulses. According to Mieke Bal, "The *Cells* are, or represent houses in the literal sense, in the enclosed shape and shelter they suggest."[239] I

[237] Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, 93.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Mieke Bal, Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 37.

reiterate that the enclosed or contained space can also be seen as a metaphor for the mother. Opposing forces are at work in these tableaux as they conceal while simultaneously reveal. Each *Cell* is an environment created through the use of aging doors, windows, and fencing to enclose the space.[240] Memory is triggered through the careful selection and placement of objects, some found and some created by Bourgeois. These mnemonic spaces include objects and sculptures that serve as stand-ins for the mother as well as objects that invoke her qualities. The use of empty chairs, beds, and other furnishings signal the emptiness felt by the artist in her childhood. Bourgeois controls these enclosed spaces in many ways, especially through their limited access and viewing opportunities. The *Cells* incorporate attention to all of the senses. They offer many layers of metaphoric meanings; their title alone conjures up numerous references including imprisonment, biological make-up, and the habitat as well. There are scientific connotations implying that they reveal something profound and hermetic. There are architectural references such as cloister, honeycomb, and prison. And there are abstract models. "By definition, the cell can be understood as the seed, the basic element, in some senses the tangible visualization of all life..."[241] The enclosures serve as rooms that store the memories and emotions of Bourgeois's recalled childhood. Jennifer Bloomer offers the following regarding this body of work: "Each of Louise's *Cells*...is a *celle*, the 'she' who is an interior, *une femme maison*...."[242] The following examination of a selection of Bourgeois's *Cells* demonstrates the extensive and pervasive presence of longing for mother in her recent oeuvre.

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[240] Some of her more recent *Cells* are installed as open environments without enclosures. For example: *Cell Clothes* (1996). See Neri, 84 for more on *Cell Clothes*.
[241] Crone and Schaesberg, 88.
[242] Bloomer, 100.

The *Cell, Spider* (1997) is an enclosed space in the shape of a closed circle created out of woven iron, partially covered with antique tapestry.[243] (Fig. 41) The work certainly belongs to the *Cells* series, but it could also be situated in Bourgeois's *Spiders* series. Here the artist uses her main metaphoric symbol for her mother, the spider, as a protective umbrella for her *Cell.* Using scraps of old tapestries, Bourgeois links the figure of her mother to her occupation.[244] The spider also has double meaning as a guardian and it protects its own eggs. The eight-legged bronze creature is a sculptural enlargement of the arachnid. Here, her curving appendages culminate in points like those of high-heeled shoes that rest on the floor.[245] This massive arachnid surrounds the circular enclosure comprised of woven iron; she watches over the shelter and yet creates her own habitat by the sheer nature of her own anatomy.[246] The spider's egg sack (which is also a metaphor for the womb) descends on the roof of the structure and rests in a circular opening in the woven iron. Her sack is filled with eggs, which in this case are lustrous glass spheres covered with nylon tights that look like thin rusted steel.[247] "The basket filled with eggs is both her body and her yield."[248] The egg sack brings together the ideas of enclosure, protection, home and womb—all relating to the mother. Now that the mother has planted herself in this position, the viewer is allowed access into the cell via one open segment of the ironwork, which is left ajar. And so the mother protects the habitat and yet allows strangers inside. Such an ambivalent message is reminiscent of the

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[243] In her book, Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art Writing, Mieke Bal analyzes this cell in great detail. She mentions some of the metaphoric elements that relate to Bourgeois's mother, but that is not the thesis of her text.
[244] Bernadac, "Behind the Tapestry," 19.
[245] These are extremely reminiscent of the work of Alberto Giacometti.
[246] *Cell Spider* was installed at the DIA Art Foundation, Beacon, New York earlier this year. It was placed in a crowded brick-walled gallery corner, which added to its feeling of enclosure. Richard Lacayo, "Let's Supersize It!" Time Magazine, 26 May 2003, 67-68.
[247] Bal, 25.
[248] Ibid., 45.

mixed messages Bourgeois received as a youth. The "door" is upholstered with a vintage tapestry, alluding to the family tapestry business and her mother's skill. As a child, Bourgeois recalls how she would hide among the tapestries with the other children, and that she sees them as a part of architecture.[249]

References to tapestry, wool, spindles, needles and repair are found throughout the *Cells*, and symbolize a period of stability in her life, a period when her mother was healthy and productive. An armchair covered in vintage tapestry is situated inside the circular domain as if awaiting its inhabitant. I would not describe this as a welcoming space, although the chair does attempt to offer some comfort. It is related to the way the artist felt about her own home—consoling, yet at times insecure and uncomfortable. Various tapestry fragments are strategically placed throughout *Cell Spider*. Bal proposes that the fragments should not be read only as memories of the family tapestry business but as the fragmentation of life.[250] The tactile and visual appeal of a weathered tapestry serves as a security blanket from the past. When one's mother's occupation is restoring tapestry, any exposure to one is bound to conjure up feelings of/for her.[251] Why couldn't the mother repair the family, and the pain and emptiness it left her daughter? The suggestion is that she was not healthy or strong enough to do so. We know that Bourgeois describes how her mother was vibrant and in control of the workshop and the

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[249] Colomina, 45.
[250] See Bal, 77-85.
[251] Jennifer Bloomer elaborates: "Louise's mother restored tapestries. She repaired images, bridging the gap between what is and what was by bridging the gaps of tears, her needle dipping in and out of the tapestry surface, its line of wool following behind, like a harpoon's shaft with its line of rope projecting ever forward to suture the gap between man and beast. In French, *faire une tapisserie* means to make a tapestry, and in its idiom, to be a 'wallflower,' a fearful one who hides against the wall (as if a tapestry). Like a spider, the epitome of the architect who works with thread. The Arachnid: industrious, silent, delicate, potentially deadly." Bloomer, 97.

family prior to her illness. Bourgeois must have resented her mother's condition and what it meant for her.

The tapestry-covered armchair in *Cell Spider,* is a spot where one can retreat or hide or seek comfort, as if in her mother's lap. The chair seat and back carefully covered in its antique garment poses other symbolic inquiries. Although much of it appears to have frayed, faded and decayed, one strategically placed element stands out. In the lower portion, positioned on the chair in the genital area is a phallic tassel, which hangs down off the edge of the chair. Off to each of the sides are snakes who provide a decorative enclosure to the sitter. Could these phallic images be references to her father? They are situated under the enclosure created through the fencing and the protective spider that engulfs the entire space.

Lurking throughout this *Cell* is a strange assortment of purposefully placed mementos reminiscent of a seventeenth century "vanitas."[252] Among these are amulets dangling from the roof by metal chains which include the following: an empty Guerlain Shalimar perfume bottle (Bourgeois's signature fragrance), various brooches and medals including a horseshoe, a gentleman's pocket watch, and a tiny locket with an ancestral photograph.[253] These all contain memories, and I insist that these memories all hearken back to the comfort of home, and her mother. "The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia."[254] Another

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[252] "Vanitas" paintings date back to 17th c. Dutch artists such as Maria van Oosterwyck (1630-93) and more currently in the work of Audrey Flack, ie. *"Marilyn"* 1977.

[253] "...the bottle of perfume is an overdetermined cultural signifier of the feminine as the embodiment of desire...Benjamin also attributes a special place to smell in the memoire involontaire: 'A scent may drown the years in the odor it recalls.' " Bird, 122.

[254] Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (London: Duke University Press, 1993), 135.

reminder of *Maman* is signified by three glass cupping jars that sit on a ledge. These are like the devices Bourgeois used to help heal her mother who had emphysema. Finally, there are two round bones (emptied of their marrow) like those found swimming at the bottom of a mother's soup pot. These bones are carefully embedded into sections of the woven iron walls, and look like eyes peering in and out. In her later works, Bourgeois frequently uses bones. With an aging body, she may be more in touch with her own decay and mortality. Another interpretation is that they represent the remnants of living organisms appropriately placed in this *Cell.*

Cell VII (1998) is another house of memories reminding the artist, and viewer, of *Maman.* (Fig. 42) It is a closed circular environment created through the use of eighteen old wooden doors.[255] This *Cell* involves the use of repetitive motifs seen in other works that assist in fulfilling Bourgeois's desire to return to her mother. Inside this enclosure is an assortment of *objet trouvés* as well as sculptural creations. A small bronze spider lurking to one side creates shadows with its spindly form. The human form is represented through its missing vestiges, through the use of worn intimate female garments hanging from metal hooks and billowing within the space. The clothing is yet another part of the inventory of her possessions, and serve as mnemonic devices.[256] Bernadac offers the following: "Clothing is also protection, a kind of shelter, a 'house-woman' as construed and perceived from the outside."[257] Among the garments are an aged white satin full-slip whose straps are hung on a pair of clean meat bones that hang

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[255] Some of these are solid-core and others have glass panels to allow for scrutinized viewing.
[256] Bernadac, "Behind the Tapestry," in Cousseau, 16. "A garment is a wrapping that bears a person's imprint, it is a relic which serves as a replacement like a stuffed animal or intermediate object, it represents a person, a mood, a place, an authentic feeling." Bernadac makes comparisons here between Bourgeois's use of clothing in her artwork and that of other artists such as Annette Messager and Christian Boltanski. Fashion and clothing are part of the cultural construction of femininity.
[257] Bernadac, "Behind the Tapestry," 15.

from the ceiling. These bones, according to Bourgeois, which serve as hangers, represent the bone of contention, the rivalry for her attention and affection by her parents.[258] In addition, two glass spheres carefully placed in this cell metaphorically represent two people, perhaps mother and child.

A small bronze replica of Bourgeois's childhood home at Choisy Le-Roi is placed on a glass surface. Adjacent to the bronze spider is a metal staircase (a miniature version of what was installed at the Tate Modern) whose landing serves as the pedestal for a miniature metal bed on which sits a textural wax blob pierced with three threaded needles. When Bourgeois was growing up all of the women in her house used needles; the young artist developed a fascination about the needle's magical powers.[259]

Bourgeois's needles symbolize reparation, such as that employed by her mother through her work and nurturing.[260] Bourgeois explains the importance of the needle and the pin as good omens in her work. She sees the safety pin as a stopgap measure of repair or connection: "Pins bring together...the pin arrests." [261] By contrast, she sees the needle as a facilitating connection: "The needle fixes up everything. It puts people together. It is a metaphor for reconciliation and bring together."[262] She also emphasizes the needle's ability to link: 'The needle is passage...in the biblical sense it is a rite of passage." The needle and the safety pin both recall Bourgeois's roots in tapestry production, but she

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[258] Cousseau, 7. "The ever-present theme of eroticism (deployed here in macabre fashion through the coupling of freakish, headless figures fitted with prosthetic devices) is now subtly combined with the subject of death (suggested by the solid presence of bones that serve as coat-hangers and by the ghostly presence of hanging garments that trigger recollections of the disincarnated weaver)." See also, Taylor, 29.
[259] Meyer-Thoss, "I am a Woman with no Secrets," 45. "The needle is used to repair the damage. It's a claim to forgiveness. It is never aggressive, it's not a pin." The needle could also be seen as a phallic form.
[260] Morris, 11.
[261] Swartz, 32. Bourgeois discussed the meanings of pins and needles in her work in a telephone conversation with Swartz, spring, 1994.
[262] Ibid.

converts them to symbols of power—either of preservation or destruction.[263] The strange assemblance of objects in this *Cell* creates a narrative for the artist's longing for her mother and once again her ambivalent feelings.

A final look inside Bourgeois's childhood home is seen in *Cell II* (1991), a hexagonal enclosure created with an assortment of six painted wooden doors retrieved from various abandoned sites. Three of the doors have small windowpanes and the others are solid. (Fig. 43) These doors are hinged together with only one opening that invites the viewer to enter. There are also spaces between the hinged doors that allow for more voyeuristic pleasures. The mixed-media installation includes two carved clasped marble hands placed on a round mirror-topped table. The table is created by placing a round vintage mirror on an old wooden plinth. On top of this surface are nine empty flacons of Guerlain's Shalimar perfume; they are carefully arranged with the very largest bottle at the top of the table composition, with smaller bottles that vary in size carefully placed in front of the grand bottle.[264] The evocation of scent is an extremely powerful reminder of past experiences and people.[265] Jon Bird describes the bottle of perfume as an "overdetermined cultural signifier of the feminine as the embodiment of desire," and explains that Walter Benjamin "attributes a special place to smell in the 'mémoire involontairé': 'A scent may drown the years in the odor it

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[263] Ibid.

[264] I am fantasizing that this was her mother's fragrance of choice. Shalimar is Bourgeois's signature fragrance; she uses these bottles in a few of her installations. Jacques Guerlain introduced the "creamy sweet vanilla" fragrance "Shalimar" at the Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1925. http: www.perfume2000.com/history.

[265] C.J.S. Thompson, The Mystery and Lure of Perfume (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1927. Detroit: Reissued by Singing Tree Press, Book Tower, 1969), 215. " 'Scents are surer than sounds or sights to make your heart-strings crack,' wrote Rudyard Kipling, and not one can doubt their power to recall memories of the past."

recalls.'"[266] The exquisitely carved pink marble hands are joined through fingers that intertwine and turn inwards—the hands may signify pain, however they seem so innocent resting on this reflective surface, which creates a duplicate pair beneath them. Perhaps they are the gentle touch she misses of her idealized mother. Hands are placed as a significant element in this and other tableaux that offer up the artist's feelings and memories. Hands express connections, dependency, grief, abandonment or at times rage.[267] According to Bird, "Hands signify both expressive potential of gesture as a synecdoche for the body as lived experience and personal history, and emphasize touch as fundamental to how we enter and embody the world."[268] *Cell II* is an intimate environment that serves as a reenactment of what might have been a tender moment between mother and daughter. The space once again emphasizes Bourgeois's longing for tenderness and protection that was lost or never experienced.

[266] Bird, 122.
[267] Kotik, "Statements by Louise Bourgeois," in Kotik, Sultan, and Leigh, 70.
[268] Bird, 114.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

> "It is not an image I am seeking. It's not an idea. It's an emotion you want to recreate, an emotion of wanting, of giving, and of destroying."
>
> Louise Bourgeois[269]

My thesis confirms that longing for the mother plays a significant role as a subject and source of inspiration in Bourgeois's oeuvre. The subject has been there from the very beginnings of her career. The continuing presence of the theme of the mother is evident in numerous examples of her works, and further supported by autobiographical, biographical, and psychological data. Metaphoric as well as abstract references to the nurturing, protective, and threatening aspects of the mother are prevalent. Bourgeois portrays her mother as larger than life, a nurturing, and yet threatening figure. She has in many ways immortalized *Maman* through her very personal expressions.

By exploring Bourgeois's oeuvre from the viewpoint I have offered, the importance of the mother/daughter relationship is reinforced. Acknowledgement of the significance of this relationship allows us to explore "a specificity of form, body, and meaning" that has become apparent in Bourgeois's work.[270]

The feminist movement of the seventies provided a political climate for Bourgeois to begin to share her family history, betrayals, and memories; the very things that inform her work. By doing so, she has invited a psychobiographical inquiry of her oeuvre. I have utilized such information to develop a better explanation of the various forms and manifestations in her artistic yield. I have focused on the many maternal

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[269] Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free Fall, 194.
[270] Robinson, 30.

images, and distinguished them as Portraits of *Maman*, Mother and Child, Home Sweet Home, Mother Earth and The Mother's Body. I have provided examples that include: the spider figure that has much in common with the artist's mother; the scissors associated with her mother's skills and occupation; the nurturing breasts of the female body; the organic sculptural lairs evoking the womb; and actual architectural spaces.

Memory, mourning, and nostalgia are important in Bourgeois's life and work. Jon Bird has pointed out that for Freud, mourning is a universal loss of the maternal object.[271] Bird asserts that in Bourgeois's oeuvre, longing is "transformed into an art of touch, a memory, and a resignification of the Other inscribed across objects and spaces that evoke a poetics of the body in all its facticity and desirous vulnerability to being in, and of the world."[272]

Bourgeois has continuously reached back into her childhood memories to create an oeuvre that expresses her many feelings about her mother. The examples that I have discussed demonstrate how memories of a confusing familial situation and the love and ambivalence she felt (and still feels) for her mother emerge through her artistic processes. Through her therapeutic creative practices, Bourgeois has attempted to resolve, repair, and ease the memories of her childhood, yet she insists that she "needs her memories."[273] She has also expressed the fact that she desires to make her private more public and by doing so lose it.[274] I would like to suggest that she may (unconsciously) be trying to keep the memories alive, as they are the motivations behind her will to create.

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[271] Bird, 128.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Bernadac, Destruction of the Father, 225.
[274] Ibid., 151.

Bourgeois's portraits of her mother have often been metaphorical. Using the spider as a major symbol, and making reference to the myth of Arachne, the artist refers to her mother's occupation as weaver. This can be seen in various drawings, prints, sculptures and installations. The best examples are her enormous bronze or steel *Mamans* that overpower their environments with their ambivalent auras of protection and threat.

Bourgeois creates mother and child images in works on paper, as well as sculptures. She emphasizes the ambivalent feelings that she has for her mother, while simultaneously presenting a tenderness that only a child can feel for their parent. In *Twosome*, for example, Bourgeois serves up the soothing rocking motion of a mother and child in an enormous mechanical device turned sculptural installation.

The body (and body part) is an important recurring theme in Bourgeois's oeuvre. The drama of confrontation that is so apparent in her work is intensified by Bourgeois's continuous use of the partial object. The use of breasts and breast-like forms is prevalent. In Kleinian object-relations theory, "it is the mother's breast that is the first object of aggression, of uncontrollable and greedy destructive impulses and phantasies that soon extend to a complex arrangement of part object." [275] I have suggested that her frieze of *Mamelles* may reveal her desire to commune with her mother's nurturing body.

Bourgeois's *Lairs* demonstrate the longing for *Maman* by conflating images of the landscape with those of the body. As I demonstrated in my discussion of the *Lairs,* the cave and undulations in the earth are metaphors for the female body, especially the womb. The forms of the *Lair* sculptures mimic the protrusions and openings seen in the

[275] Nixon, Louise Bourgeois, 317. Melanie Klein's object-relations theory has proven to be a suitable way to examine and understand the body part logic in Bourgeois's work as demonstrated by Mignon Nixon.

earth's surface. Bourgeois's *Lair* sculptures range from mound shapes with orifices to teardrop-shaped vessels such as *Fée Couturière.*

Since the beginnings of her career, the house has been a central theme in Bourgeois's oeuvre. She embraces architectural forms to capture childhood memories and invoke the maternal: her *Femme-Maisons* have provided a generalized image of the housewife, and at the same time serve as reminders of her late mother. Sculptural reproductions of her childhood dwellings assist in the mnemonic process and reference the mother as well. (I have explained how the house, or any enclosed space, can serve as a metaphoric symbol of the womb, and therefore the mother.)

The theme of the architectural dwelling has a constant presence in Bourgeois's oeuvre. The artist offers a look inside her memories and childhood spaces in her installations, aptly titled *Cells.* Built with historical materials, the *Cells* provide the viewer with enclosed spaces filled with *objet trouvés* and artistic creations that assist the artist in creating narratives unearthed from her memory. Bourgeois incorporates the five senses in her *Cells*, and creates dramatic spaces of refuge that recount her childhood reminiscences. The mother is referenced in many of the *Cells*; the mother is the central theme in the various examples cited in this thesis.

This study expands on the existing scholarship that gives mention to the role the mother plays in Bourgeois's work. The works of art discussed here are only part of an extensive oeuvre that is filled with works that make reference to, invoke, and express a longing for mother.[276] In the context of feminist artistic production in the twentieth (and now twenty-first) century, Louise Bourgeois has made a major contribution by situating

[276] I want to clarify that this is not the only significant driving force in her oeuvre, but one that deserves focused attention.

her mother at the center of her work. It has been suggested that perhaps the very self-conscious Bourgeois is quite aware of her importance and contribution to the history of women's art.[277] This awareness may very well have afforded her the opportunity to "write" the mother into art history as well.[278] A future inquiry of the aging Bourgeois (age 92 at the time of this publication) may reveal fears about her own mortality. An investigation into this aspect of her life may provide some additional explanation of her desire to immortalize her mother and hence herself.

Bourgeois has been best immortalized in a photograph taken of her by Robert Maplethorpe in 1982. The elderly artist wears a coat of monkey fur, accompanied by a wicked grin and her latex sculpture *Fillette* (1968). (Fig. 44) Bourgeois cradles the large ambiguous phallus under her right arm as if it is her transitional object. *Fillette* encompasses the oppositions of male and female, hard and soft, and power and weakness. Further confusion comes from pairing a large phallic object with the title which translates "little girl." Alex Potts explains the ambiguity of this sculpture: "The slippage between a phallic and a feminised erotic image might recall Brancusi's Princess *X*.... but.... *Fillette's* form may momentarily mutate into the stylized neck and breasts of a female figure..."[279] The psychosexual issues of Bourgeois's work have not been addressed in this study. However, an analysis of the repeated employment of phallic references in her oeuvre has been addressed by various scholars.[280] Bourgeois rejects the erotic readings

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[277] My observation of her self-consciousness comes from the way that she talks about her work, as well as the processes.

[278] I thank Prof. Kenon Breazeale for this possible interpretation, which certainly calls for a further study into Bourgeois's contribution to art history. Breazeale posits that Bourgeois may be making a political gesture against the Lacanian theories that so dominate French intellectual thinking. Discussion, 9/16/03.

[279] Potts, The Sculptural Imagination, 364.

[280] See Bernard Marcadé, "Le Devenir-Femme de L'art," in Féminmasculin Le sexe de l'art [exhibition catalogue, Centre Georges Pompidou], eds. Marie-Laure Bernadac and Bernard Marcadé (Paris: Gallimard/Electa, 1995), 33-34. See also, Krauss, 23-29.

of *Fillette*, yet acknowledges her desire for it as an object of security and comfort.[281] This reading reinforces the artist's continual quest for those feelings, as realized through her evocation of the maternal figure.

For seven decades, Bourgeois has used her memory, unconscious, and artistic talent to express her feelings about the psychologically traumatic atmosphere of her childhood. She has never lost the memory of feelings attached to the safety, comfort, protection, and confusion of her relationship to her mother. In her oeuvre, and in her heart, she continues to long for *Maman.*

POSTSCRIPT:

In a February 2002 review of Bourgeois's work on exhibit at Cheim and Read Gallery in New York, Ann Landi posits the following: "these latest offerings supposedly mark a shift in focus from the Father to the Mother." [282] I suggest Ms. Landi reconsider: the maternal focus has had a continuous presence from the beginning of Bourgeois's career.

[281] Mignon Nixon, "Pretty as a Picture: Louise Bourgeois," Parkett 27 (1991), 50.
[282] Ann Landi, "Louise Bourgeois: Cheim and Read," Art news 101, no. 2 (Feb. 2002): 125.

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APPENDIX A

Figure 1

Insomnia Drawing, Digging
1995

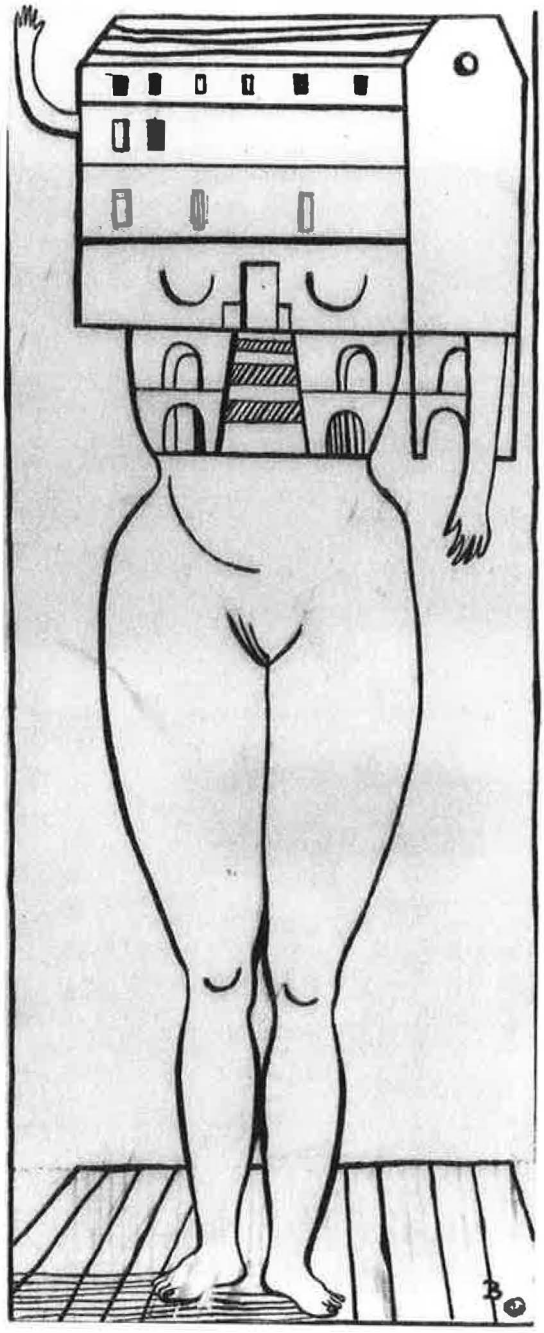


Figure 2

Femme-Maison
1945-47

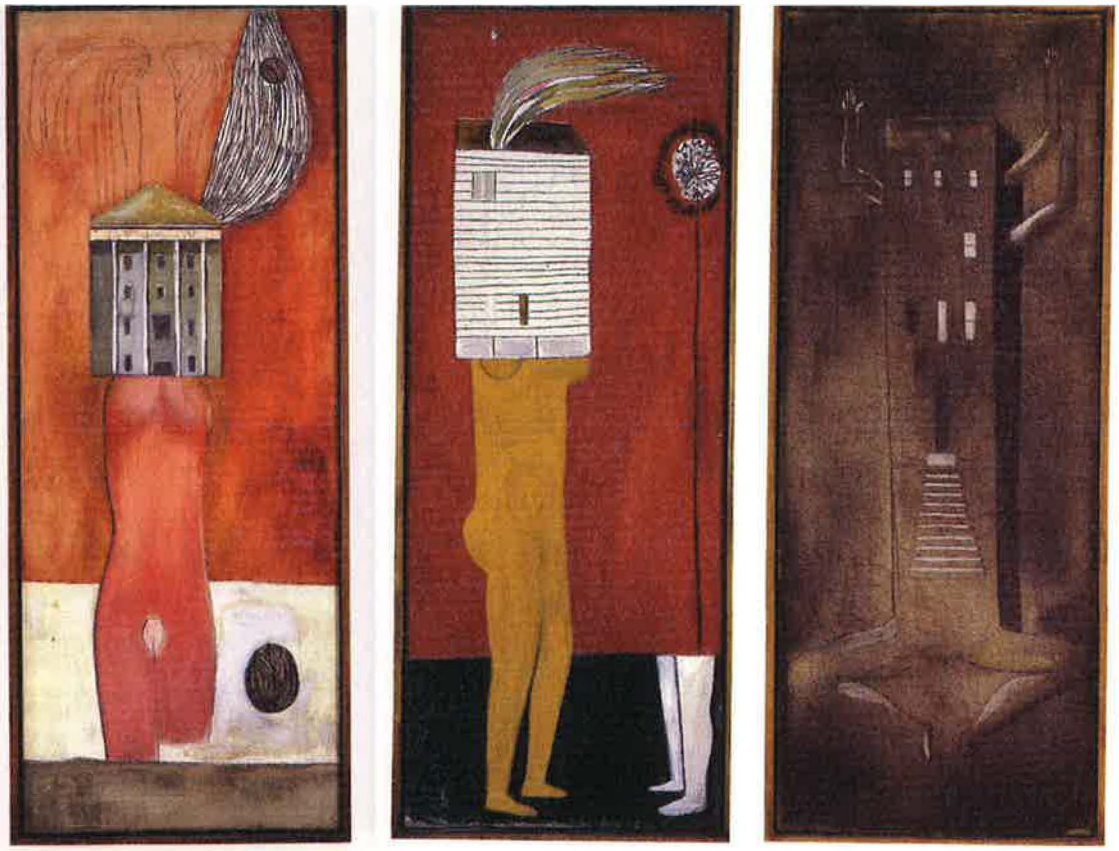


Figure 3

Femme-Maisons
1945-47

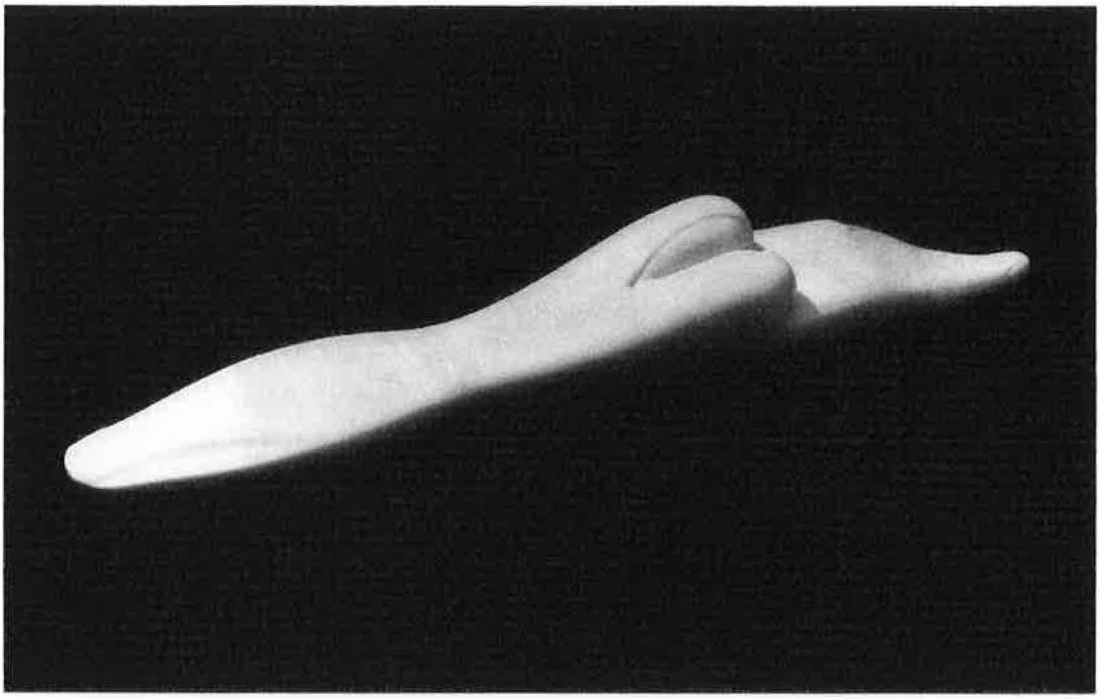


Figure 5

Femme Couteau
1969-70

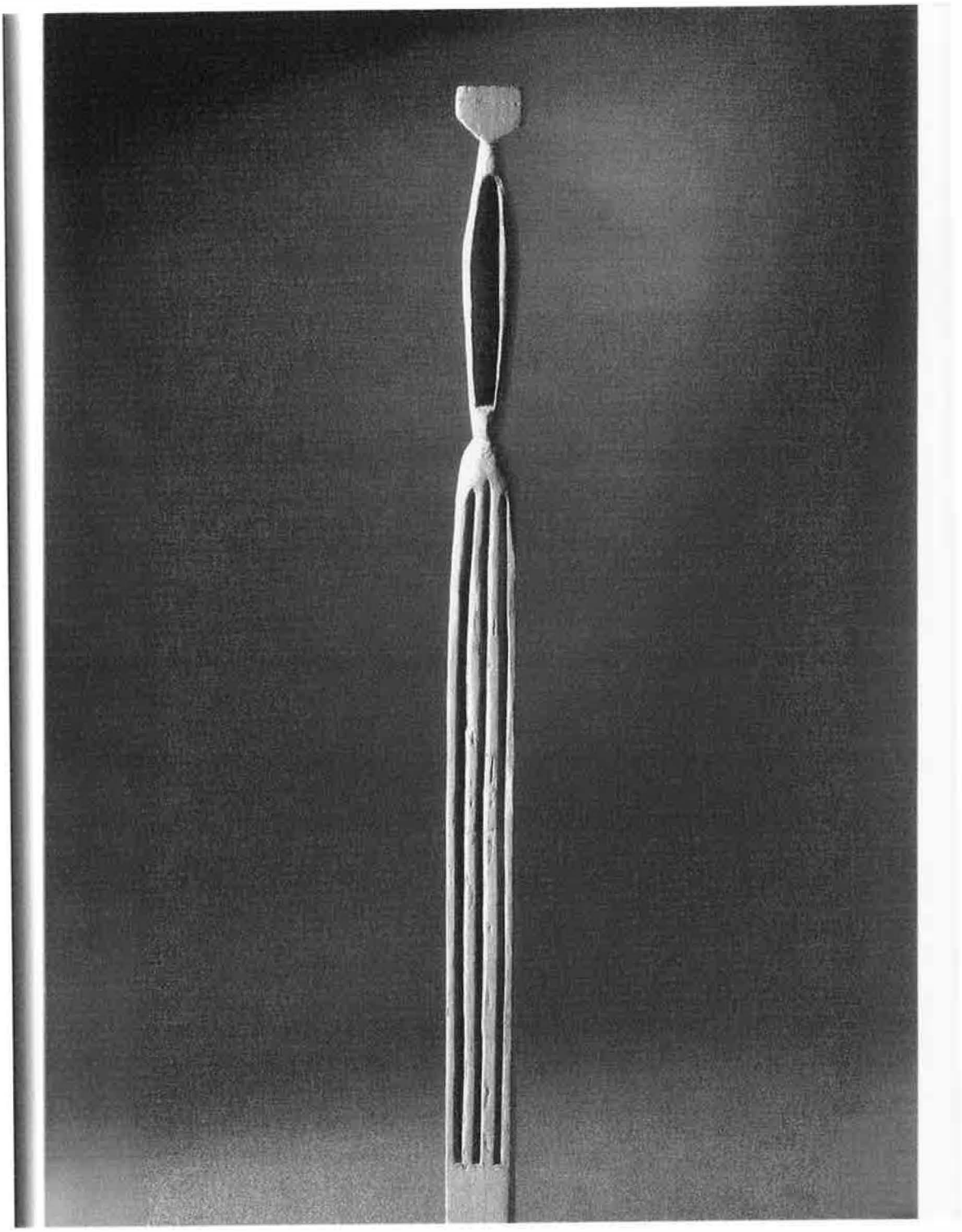


Figure 6

Pillar
1949-50

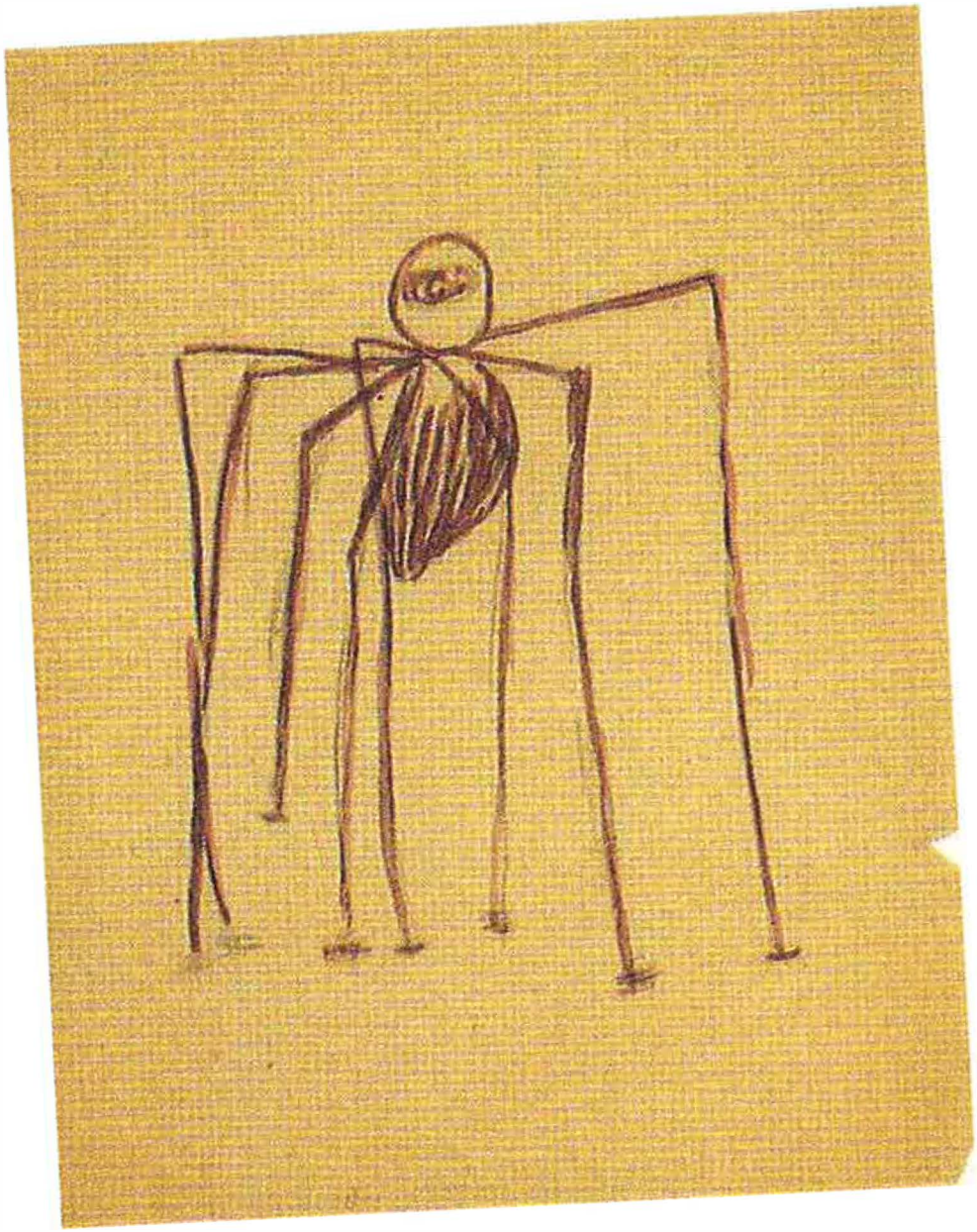


Figure 7

Untitled
1947

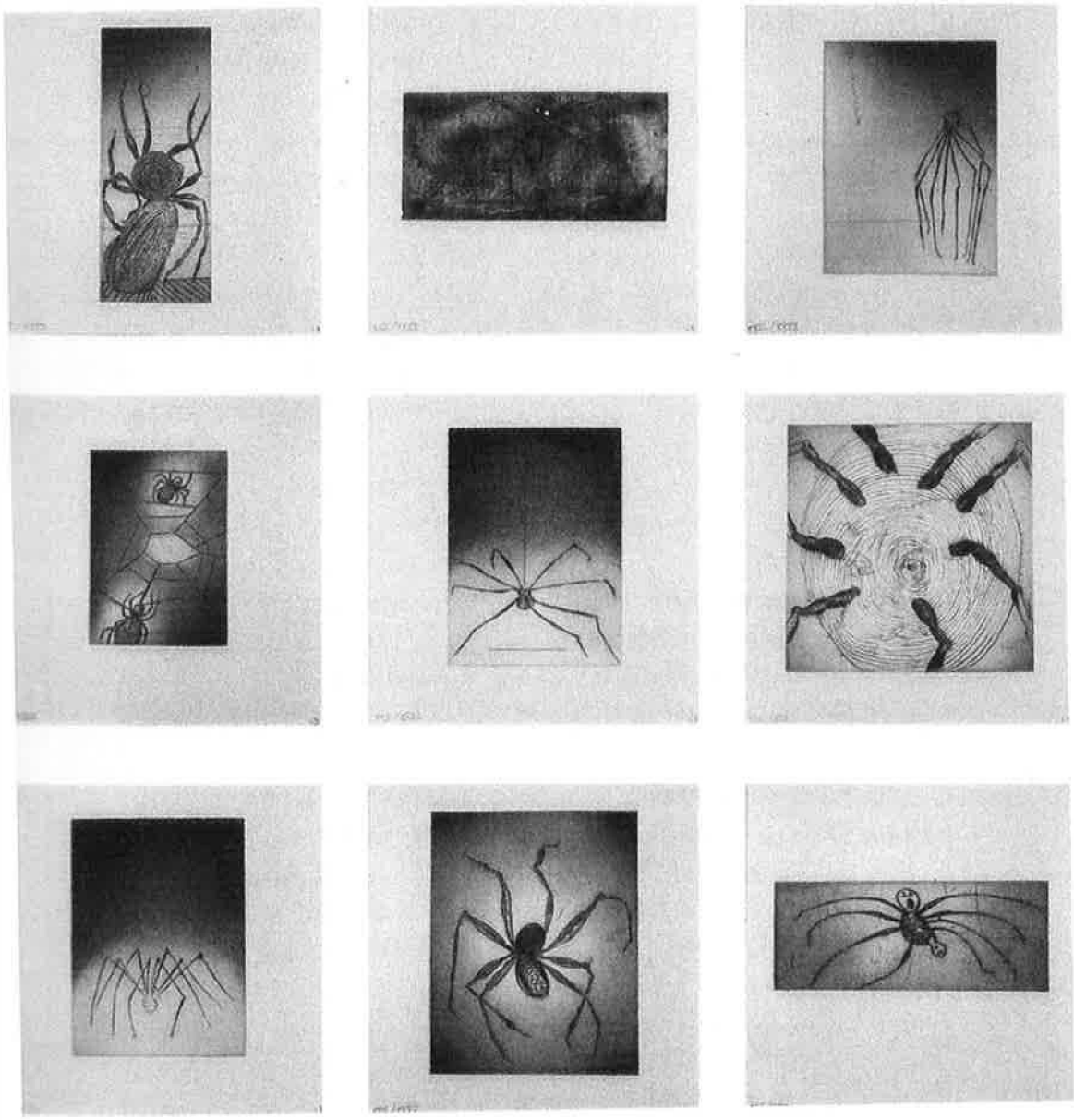


Figure 8

Ode à ma mère
1995

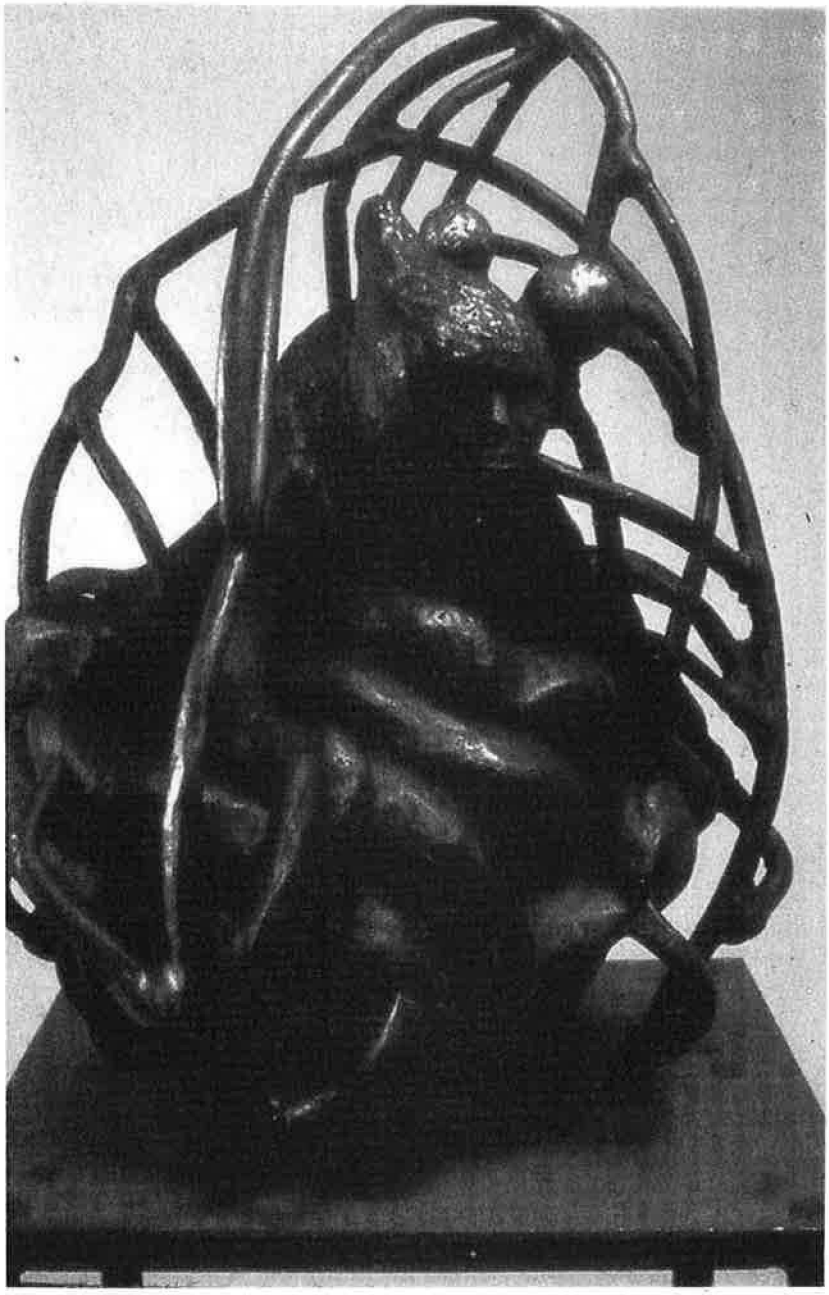


Figure 9

Female Portrait
1962

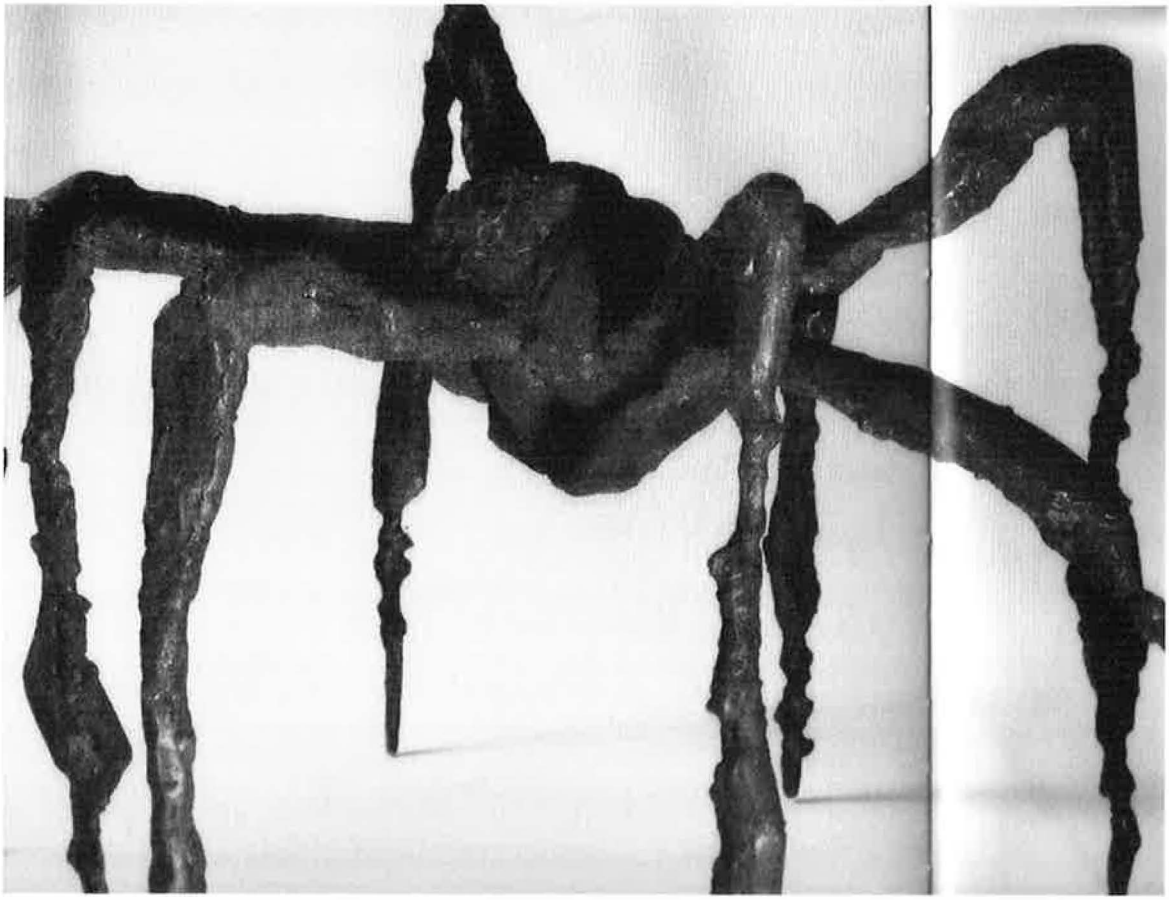


Figure 10

Spider III
1995

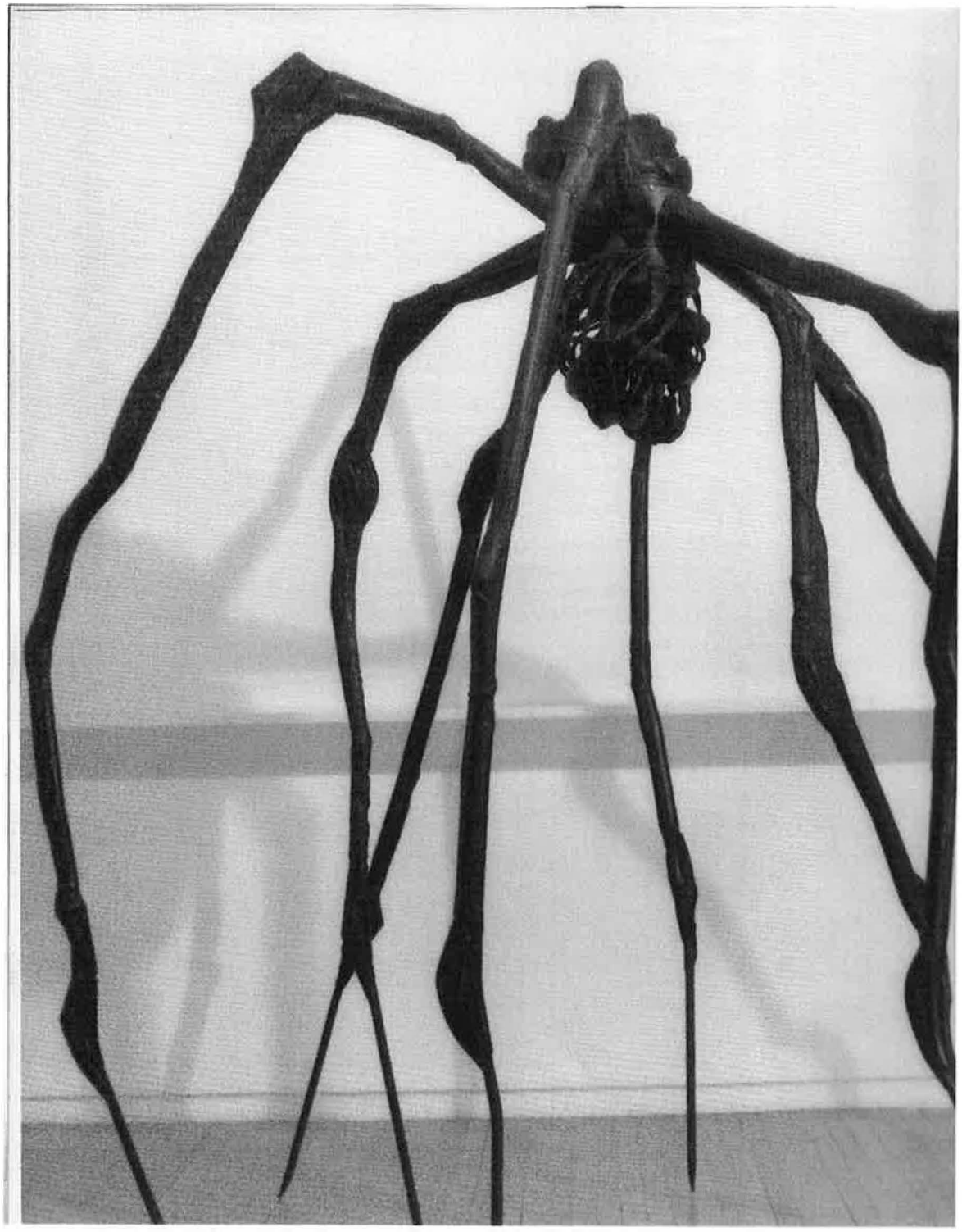


Figure 11

Spider
1997

Figure 12

Spider
1994

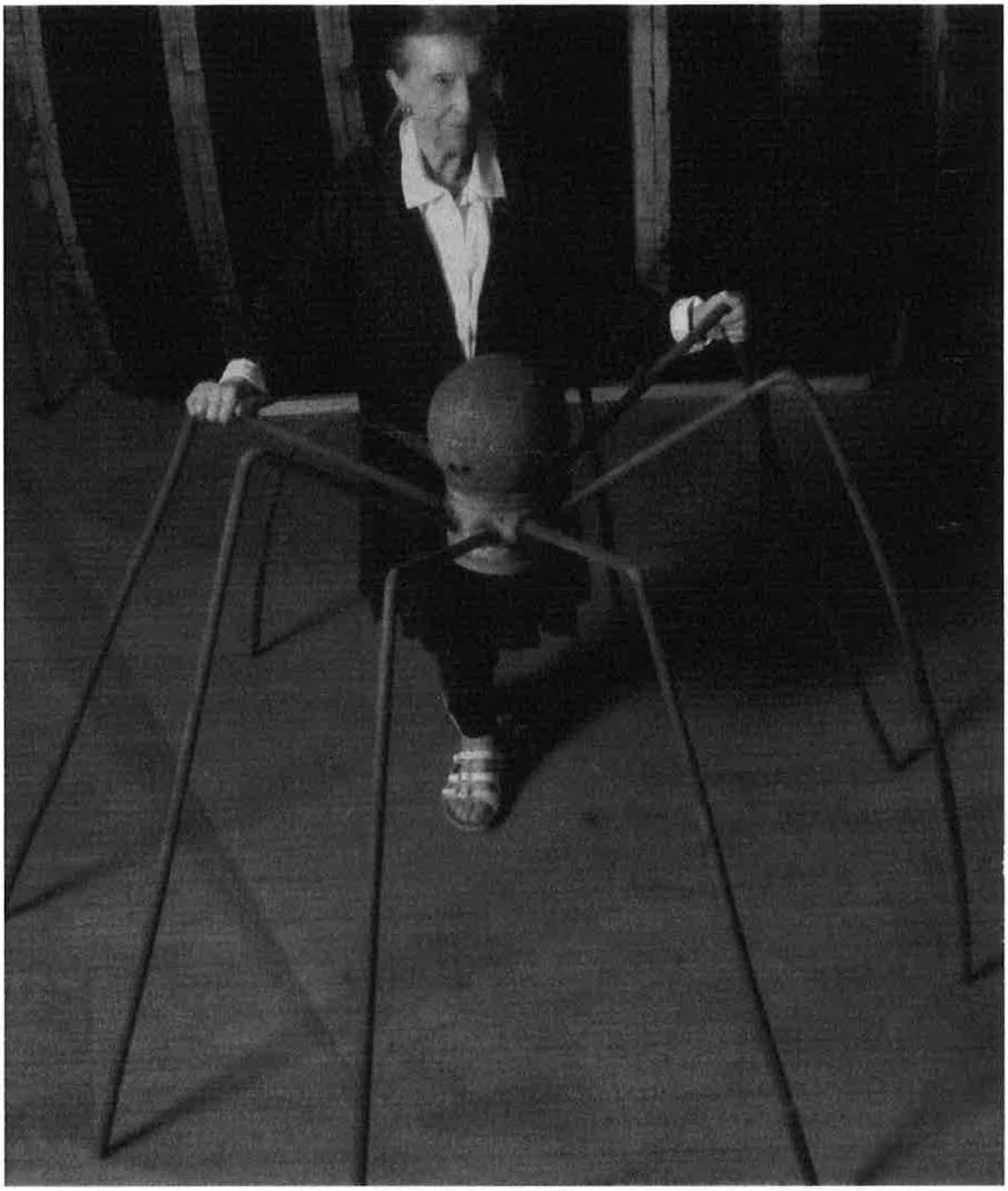


Figure 13

Photograph of Louise Bourgeois with Maman
1994

Figure 14

Maman
1999

Figure 15

Maman
1999

Figure 16

Torso
1996

Figure 17

Untitled
1941

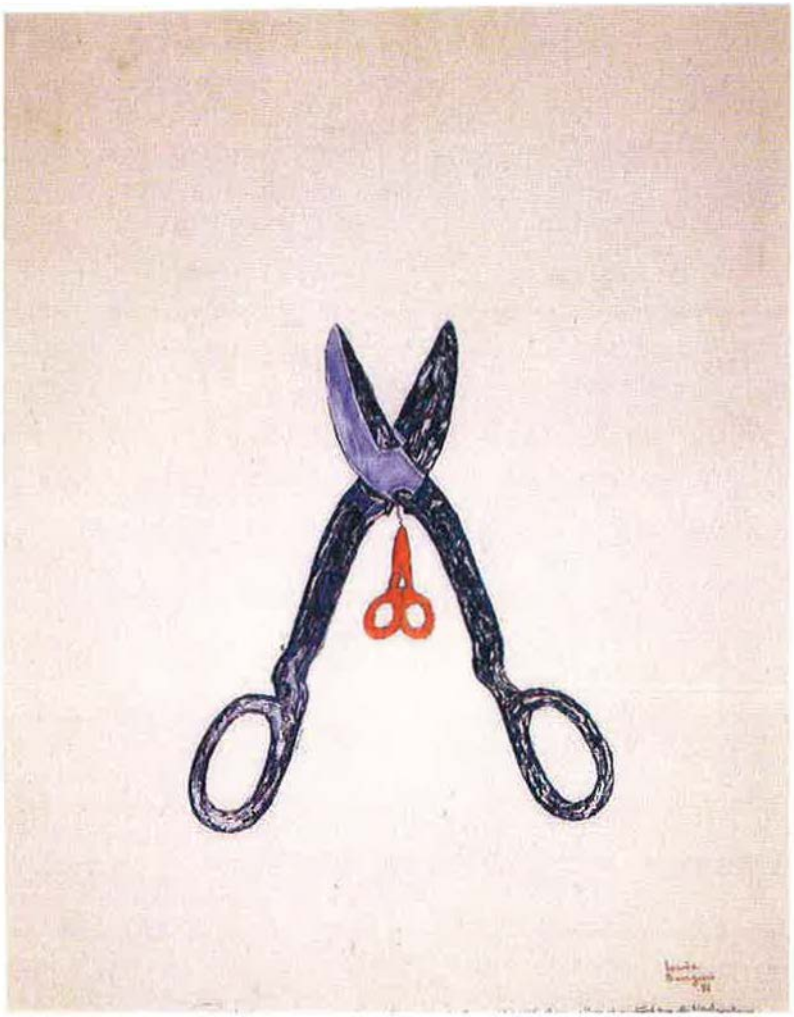


Figure 18

Untitled
1986

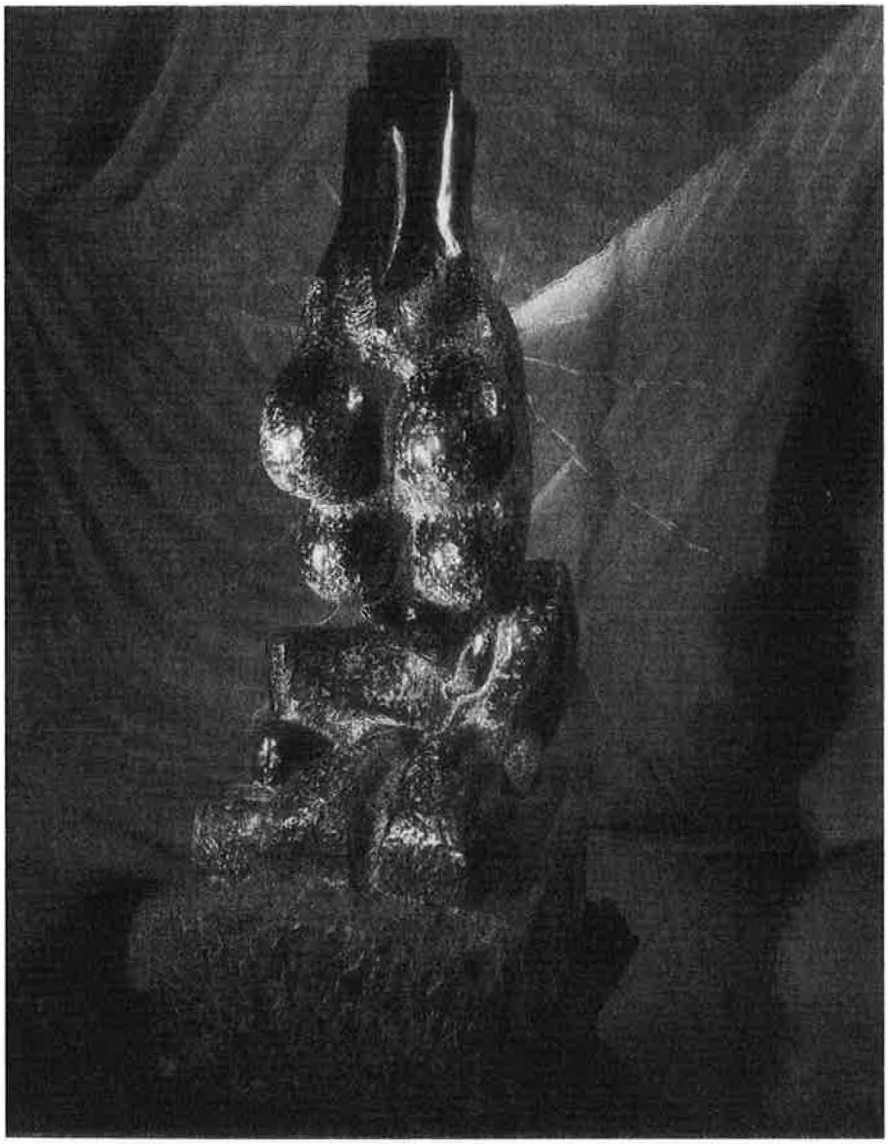


Figure 19

She Fox
1985

Figure 20

Fallen Woman
1981

Figure 21

I Do
1999-2000

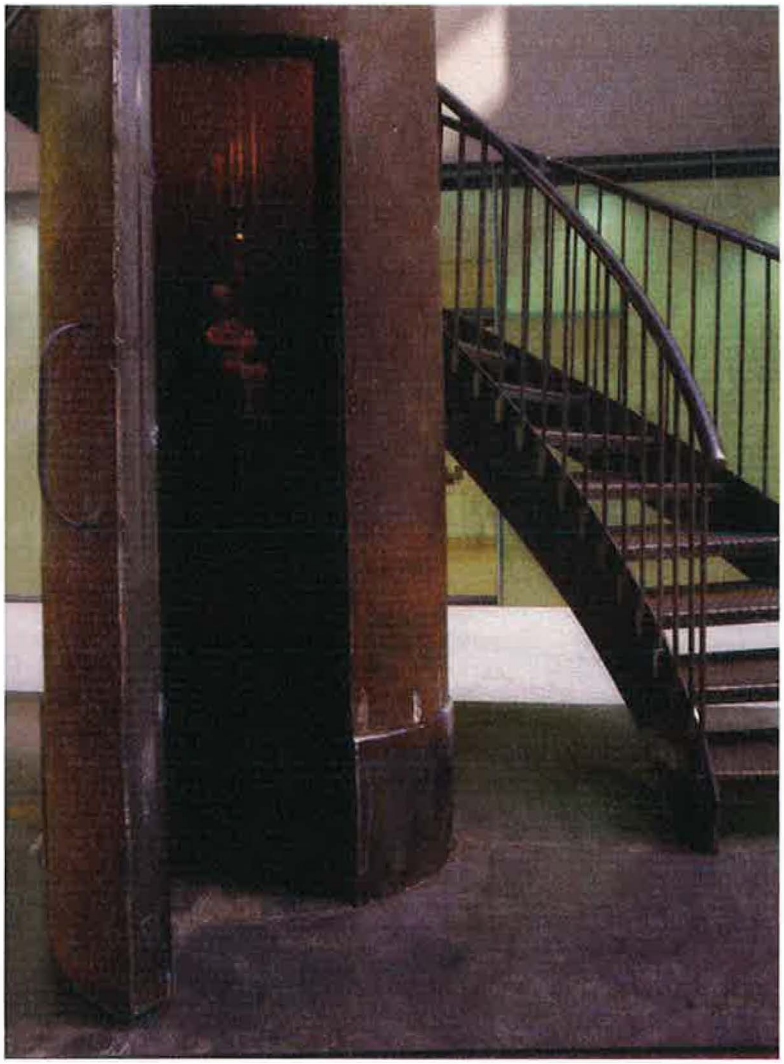


Figure 22

I Do
1999-2000

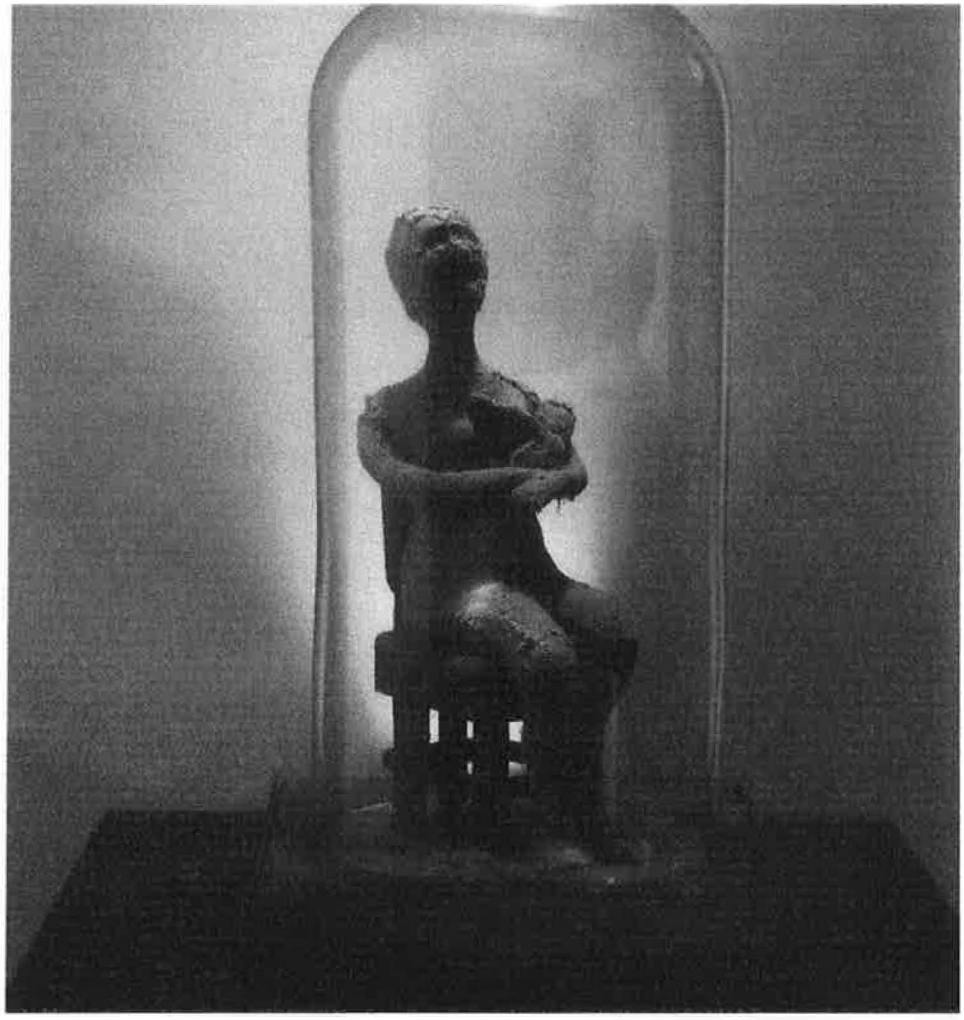


Figure 23

I Do
1999-2000

Figure 24

I Undo
1999-2000

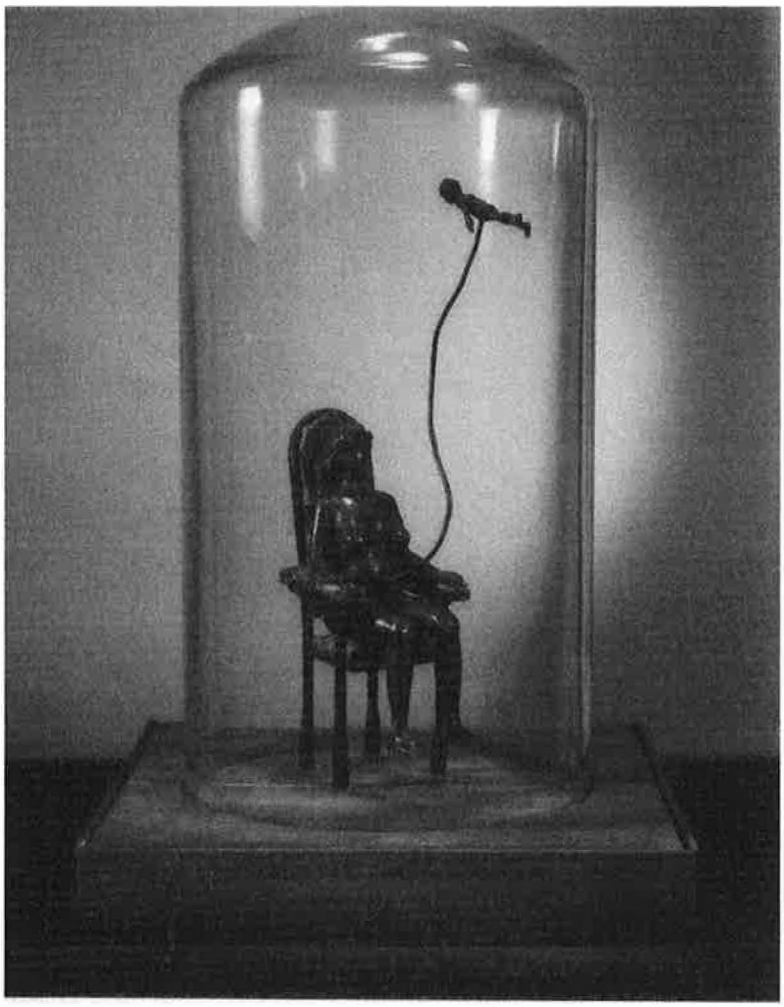


Figure 25

I Redo
1999-2000

Figure 26

Twosome
1991

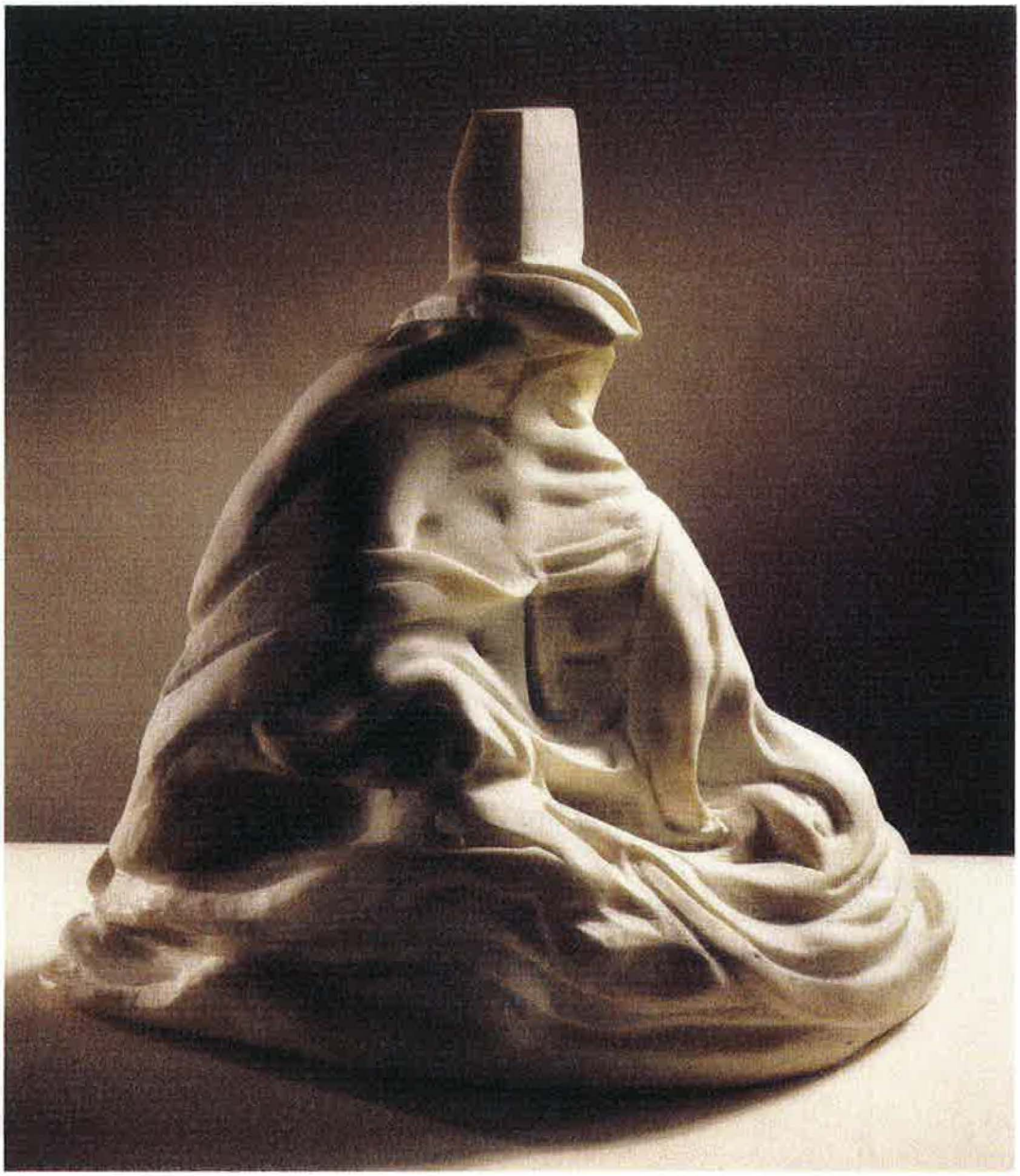


Figure 27

Femme-Maison
1982-83

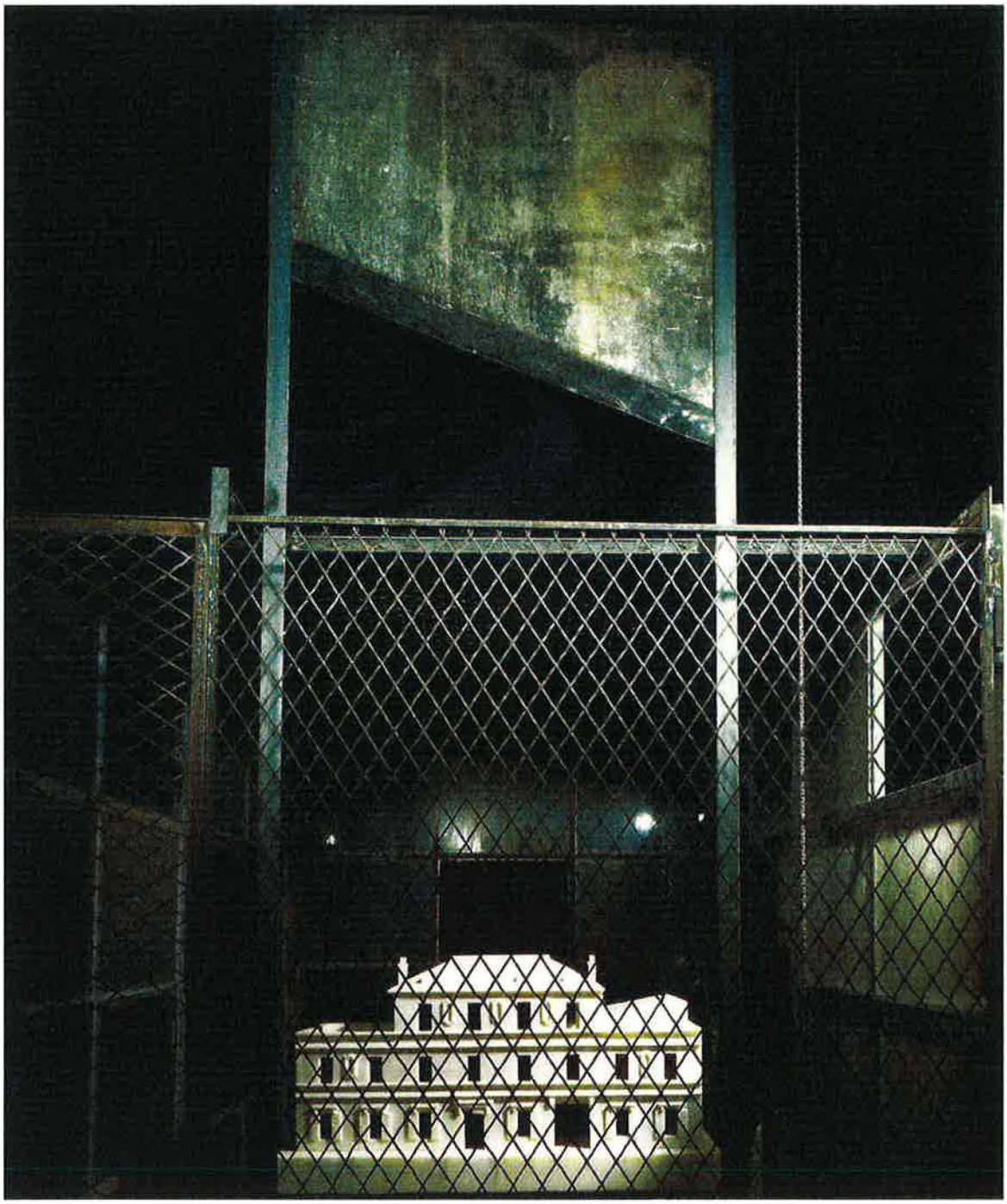


Figure 28

Cell Choisy I
1990-93

Figure 29

Venthouse
1990

Figure 30

Unconscious Landscape
1967

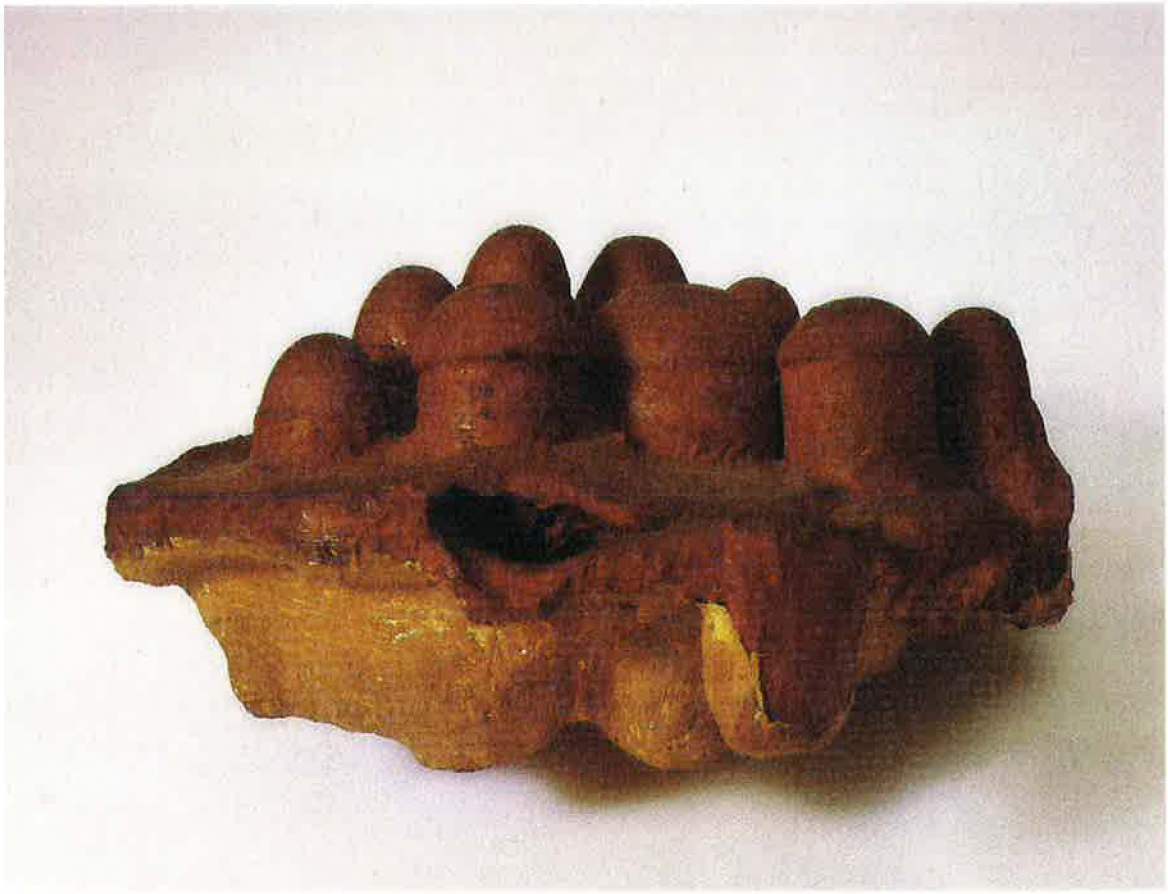


Figure 31

Soft Landscape I
1967

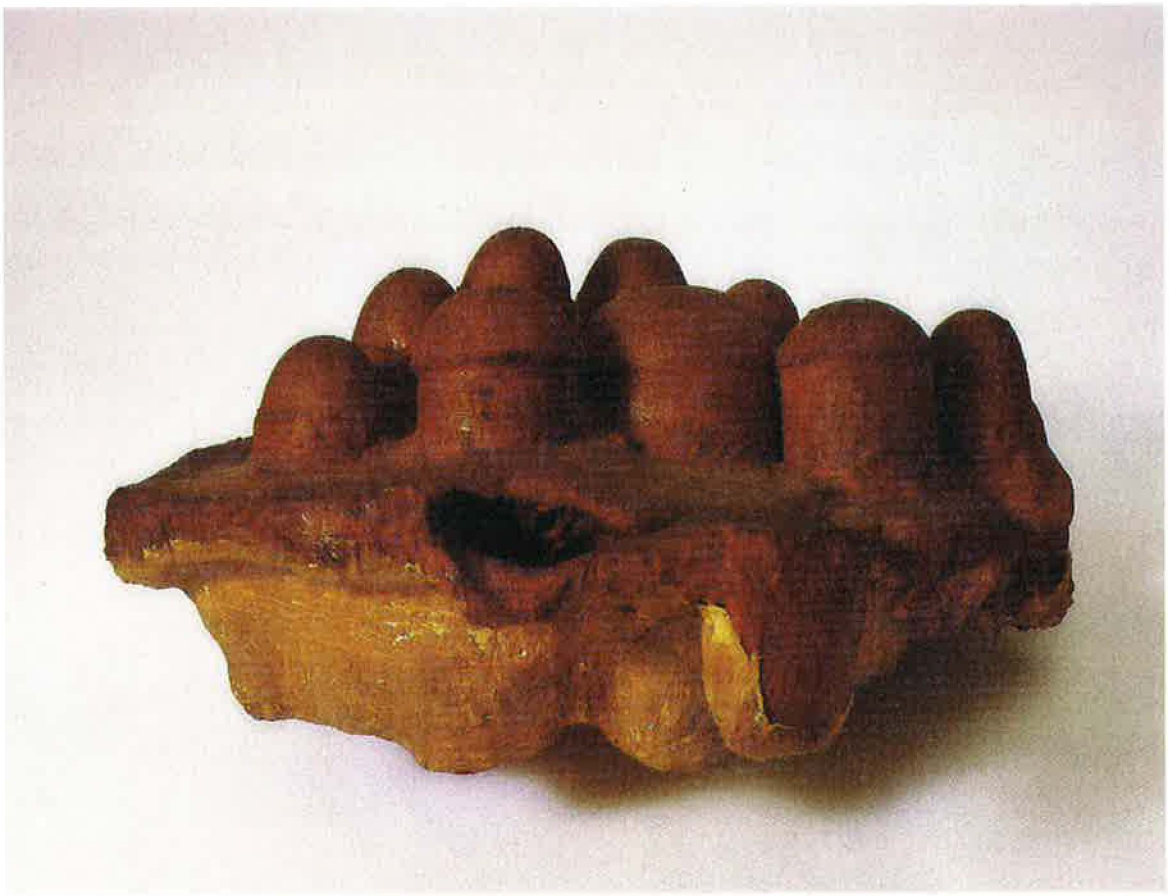


Fig. 32

Double Negative
1963

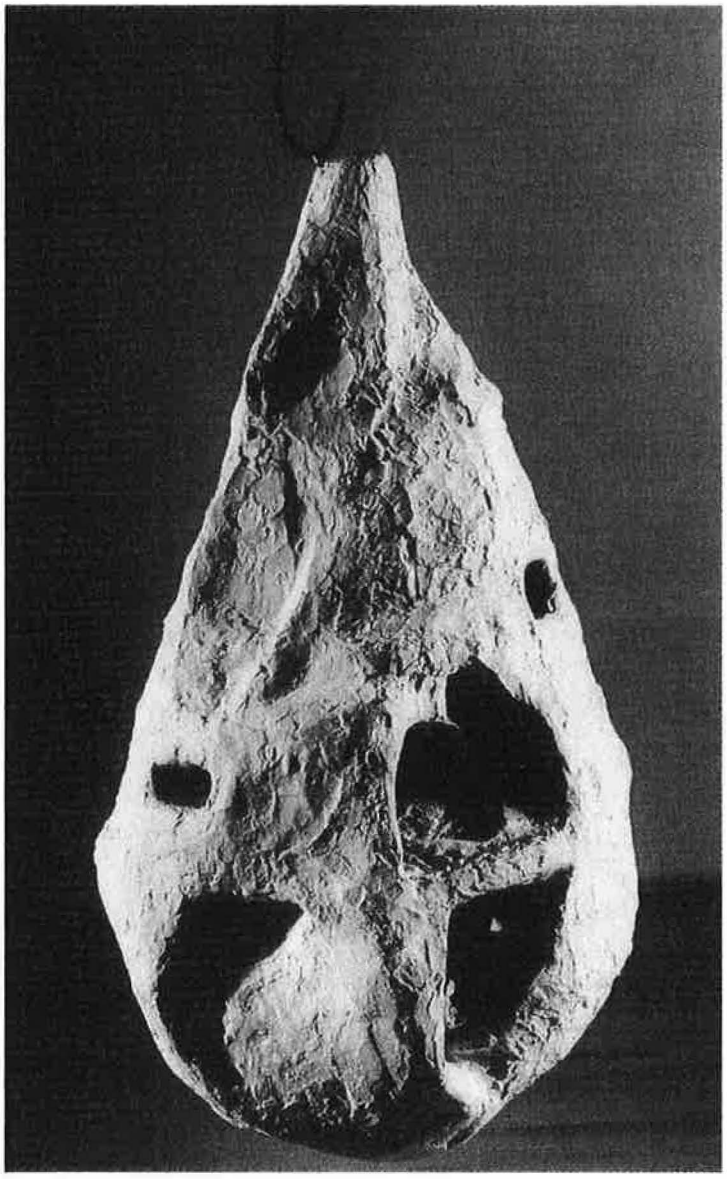


Figure 33

Fée Couturière
1963

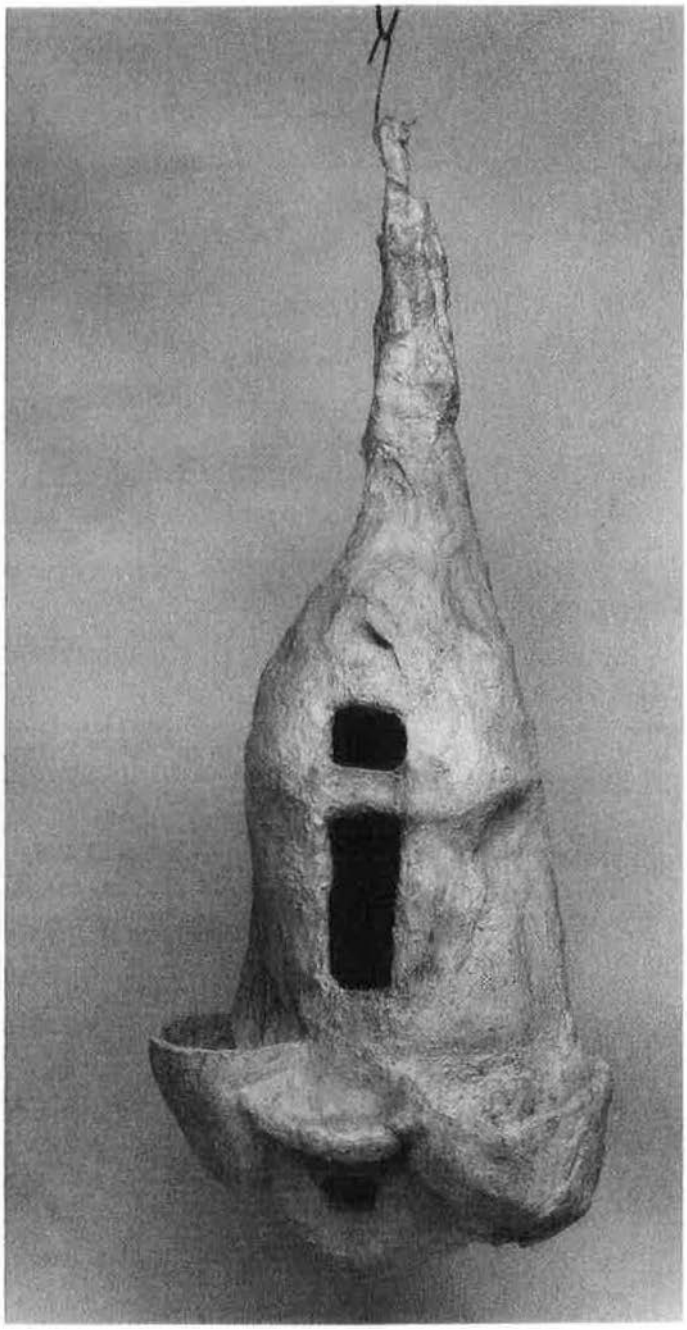


Figure 34

Quartered One
1964-65

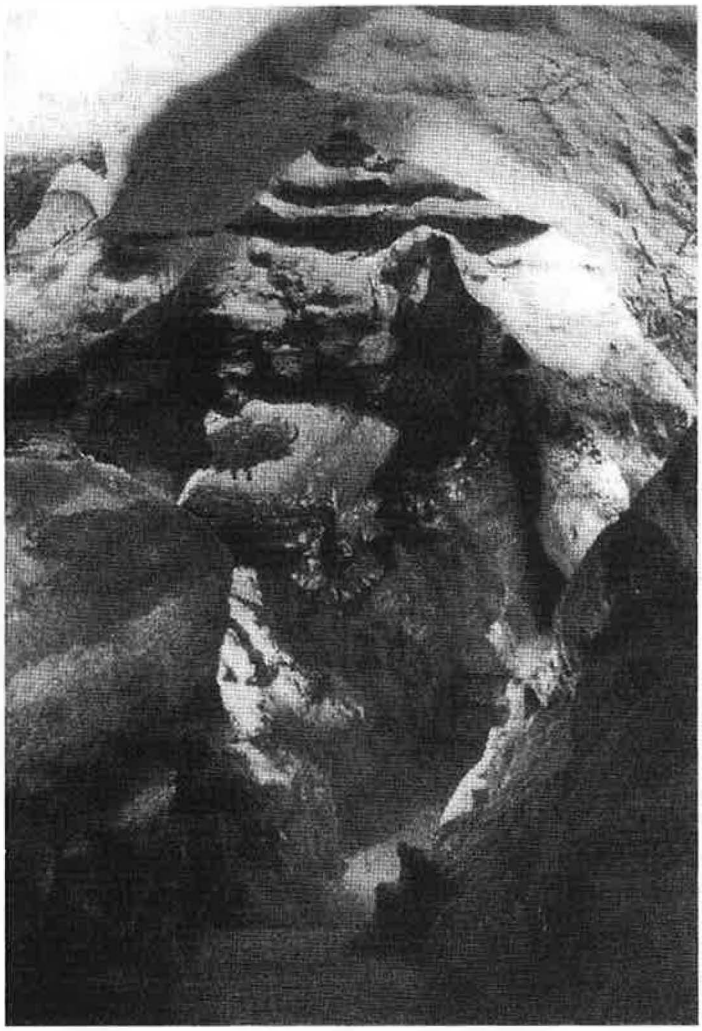


Figure 35

Photograph by Annette Laming
Lascaux, 1959

Figure 36

Mamelles
1991

Figure 37

Nature Study
1984

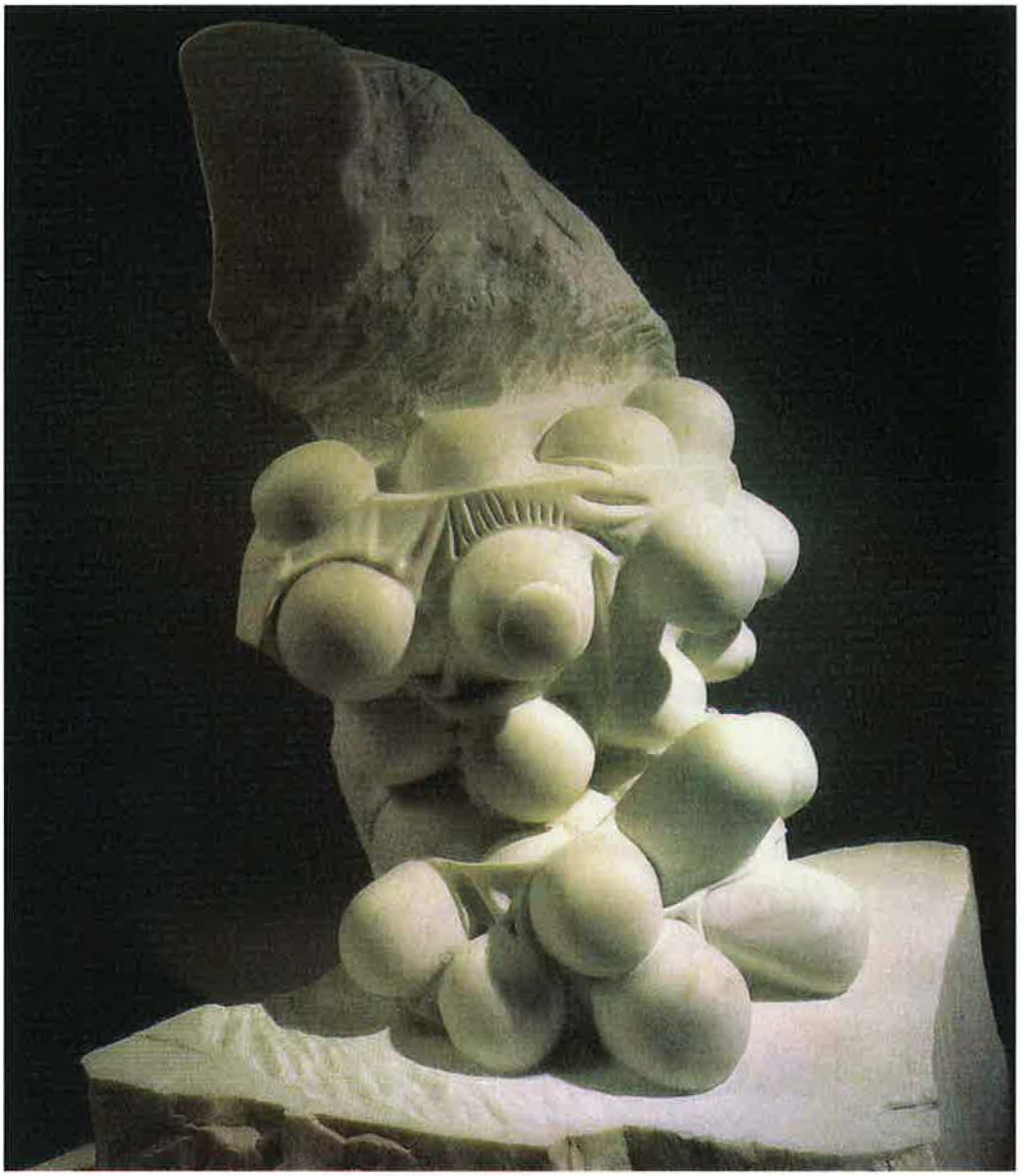


Figure 38

Blind Man's Bluff
1984

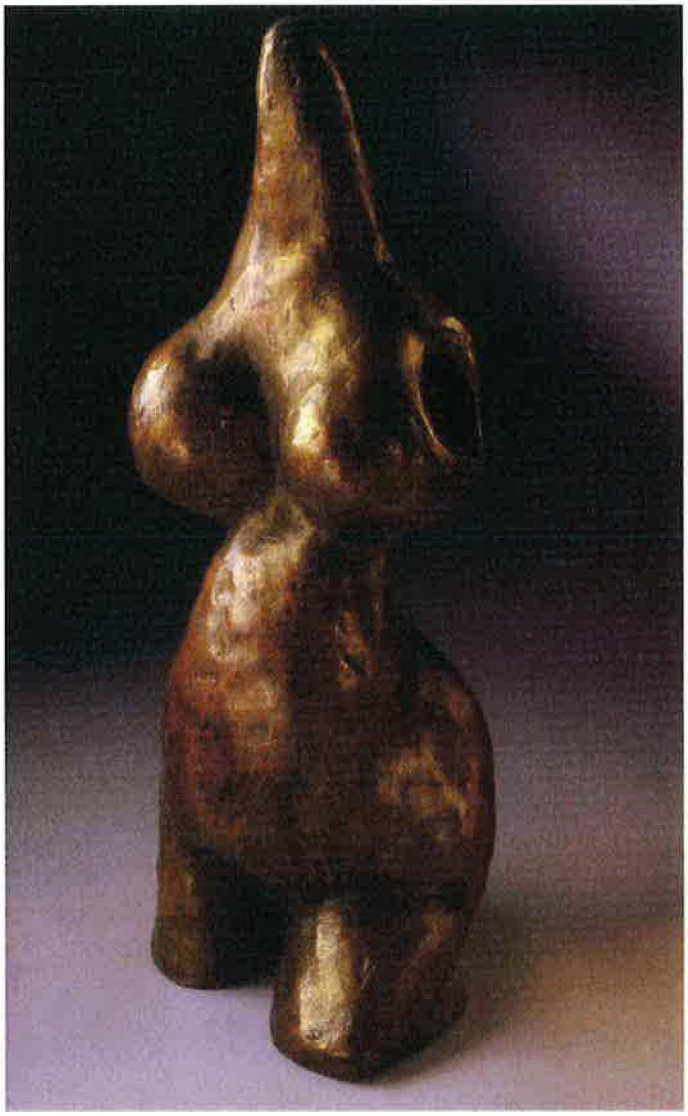


Figure 39

Harmless Woman
1969

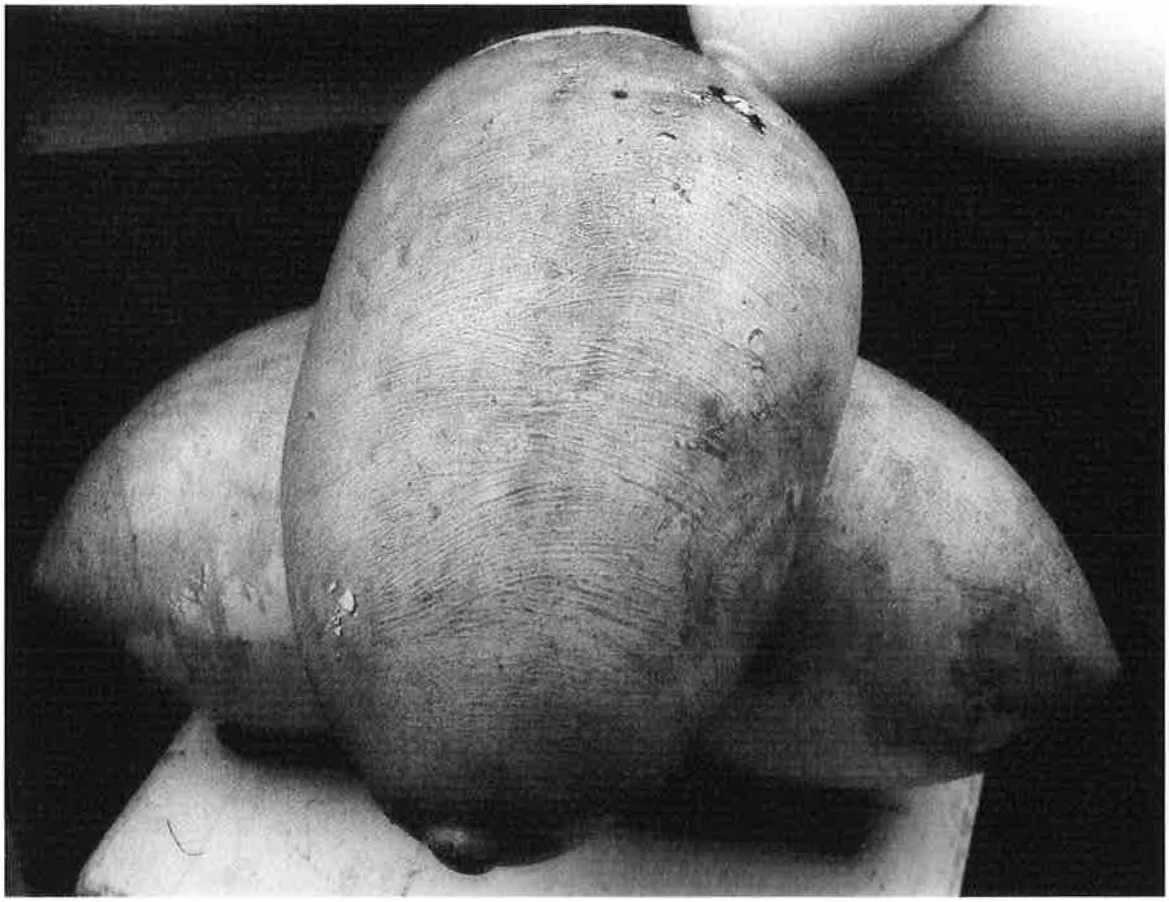


Figure 40

Trani Episode
1971-72

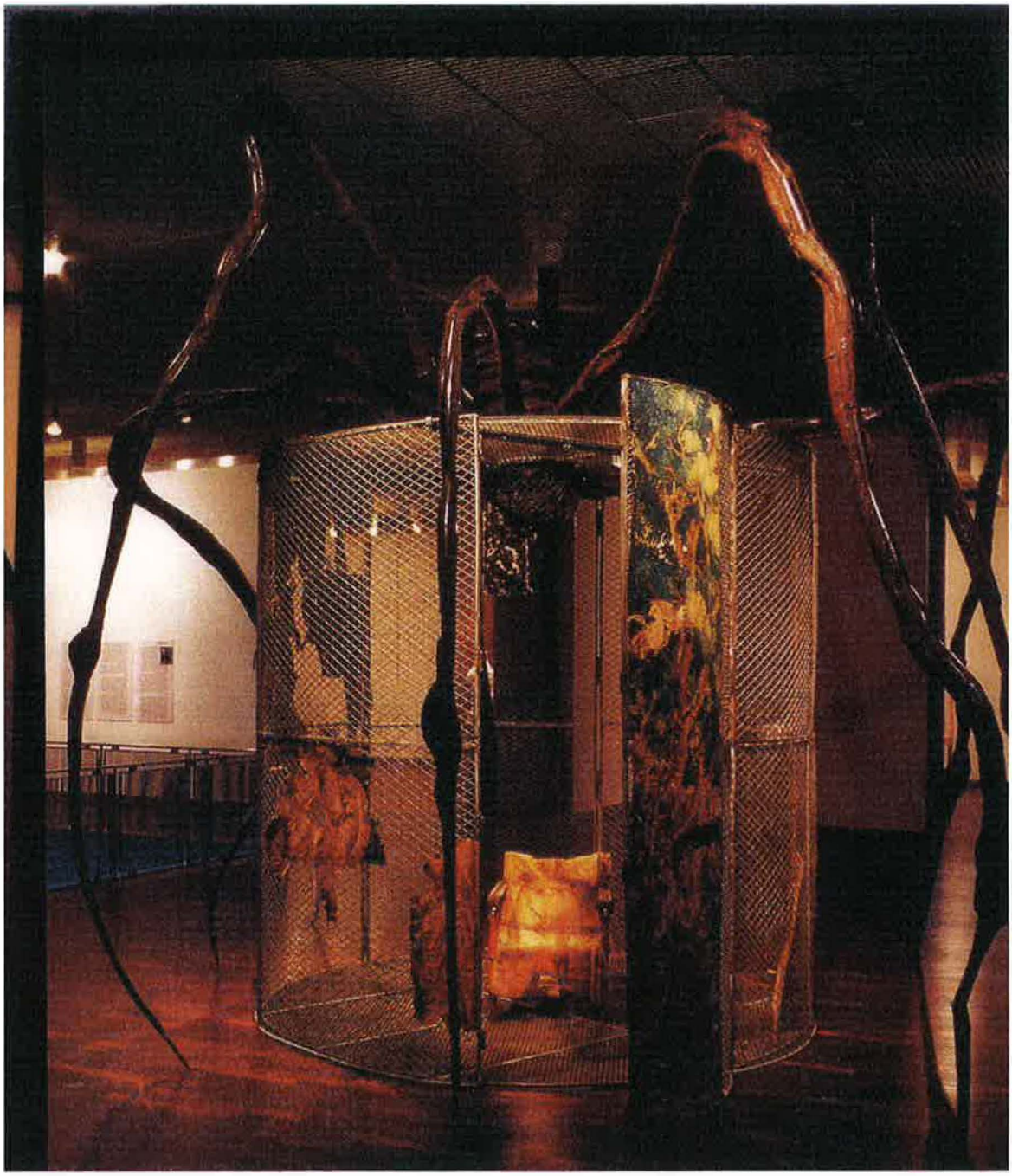


Figure 41

Cell Spider
1997

Figure 42

Cell VII
1998

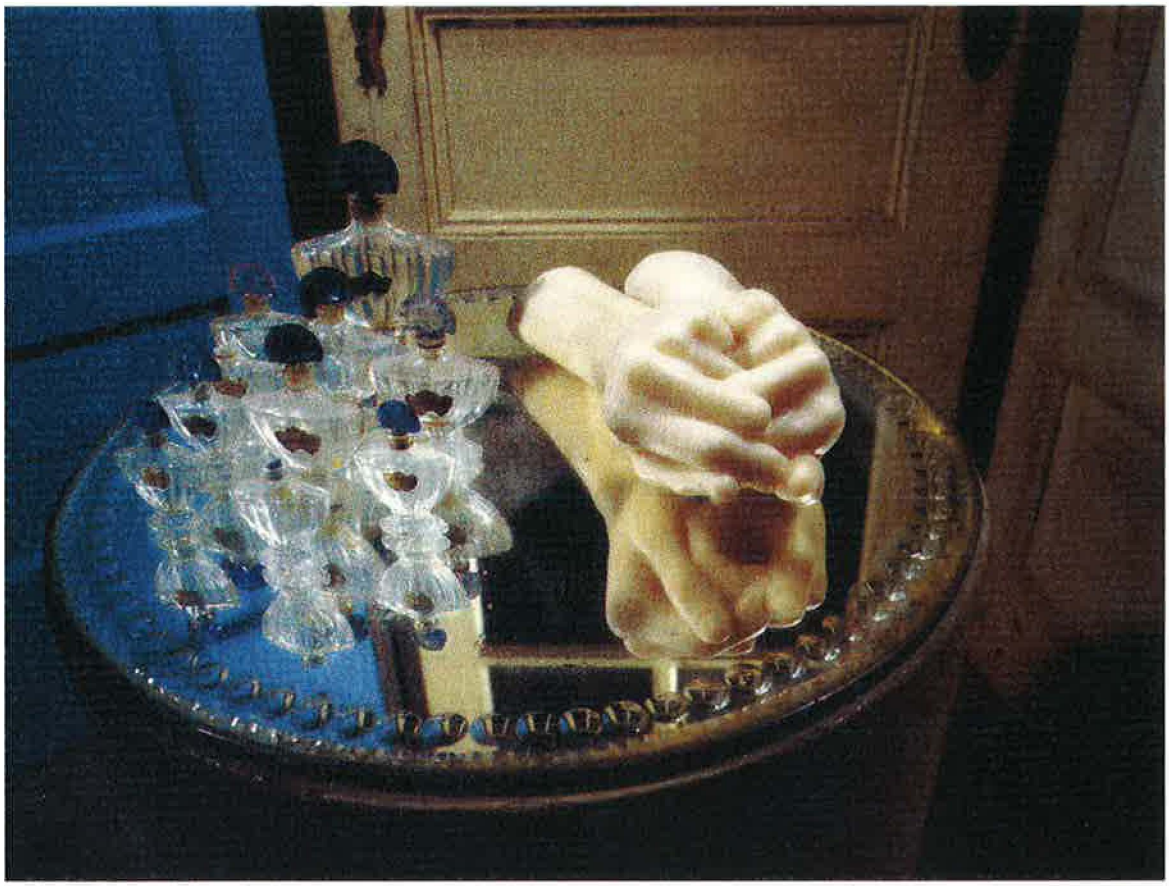


Figure 43

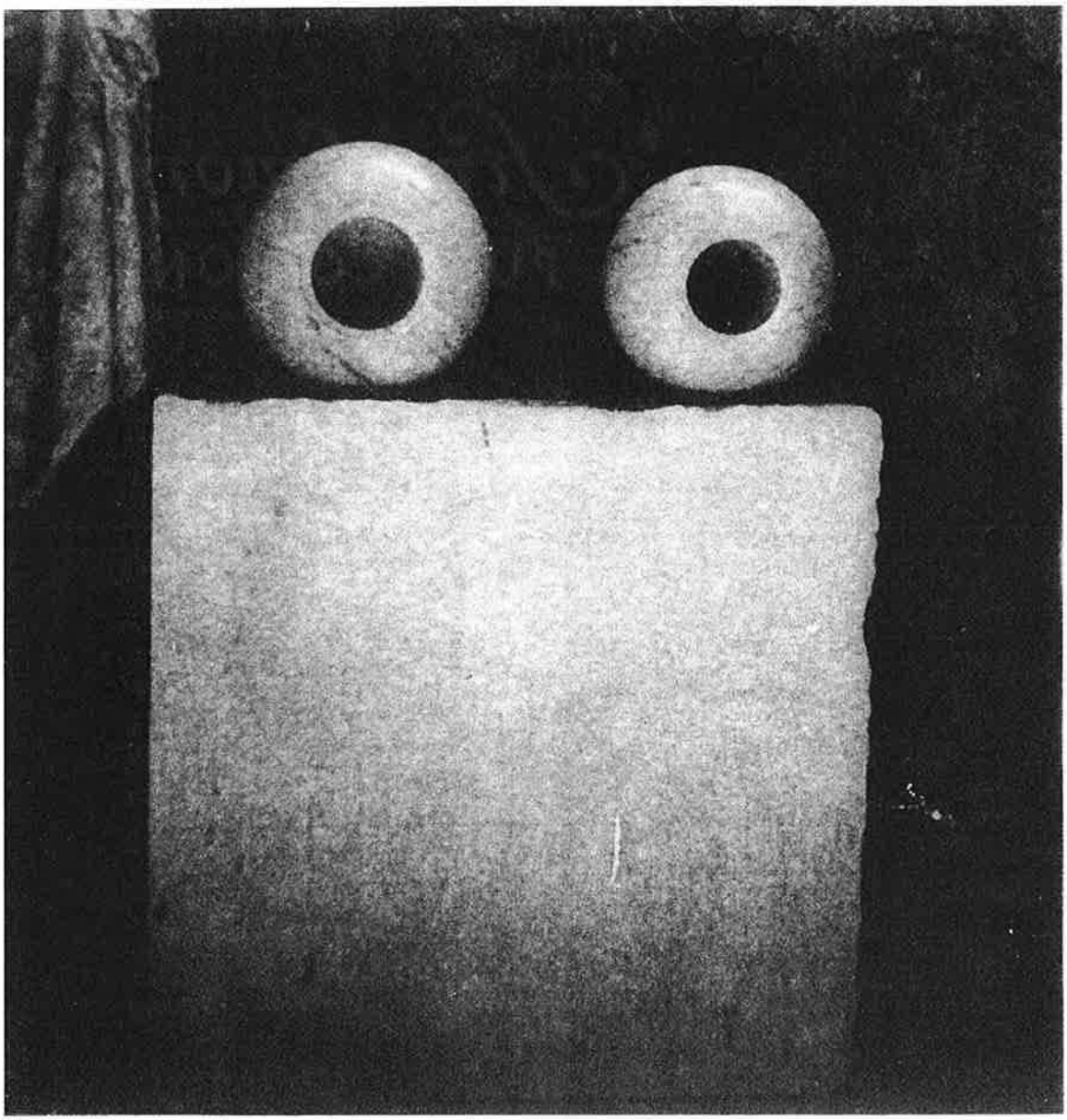
Cell II
1991

Fig. 44

Photograph of Louise Bourgeois (with *Fillette*) by Robert Maplethorpe
1982

APPENDIX B

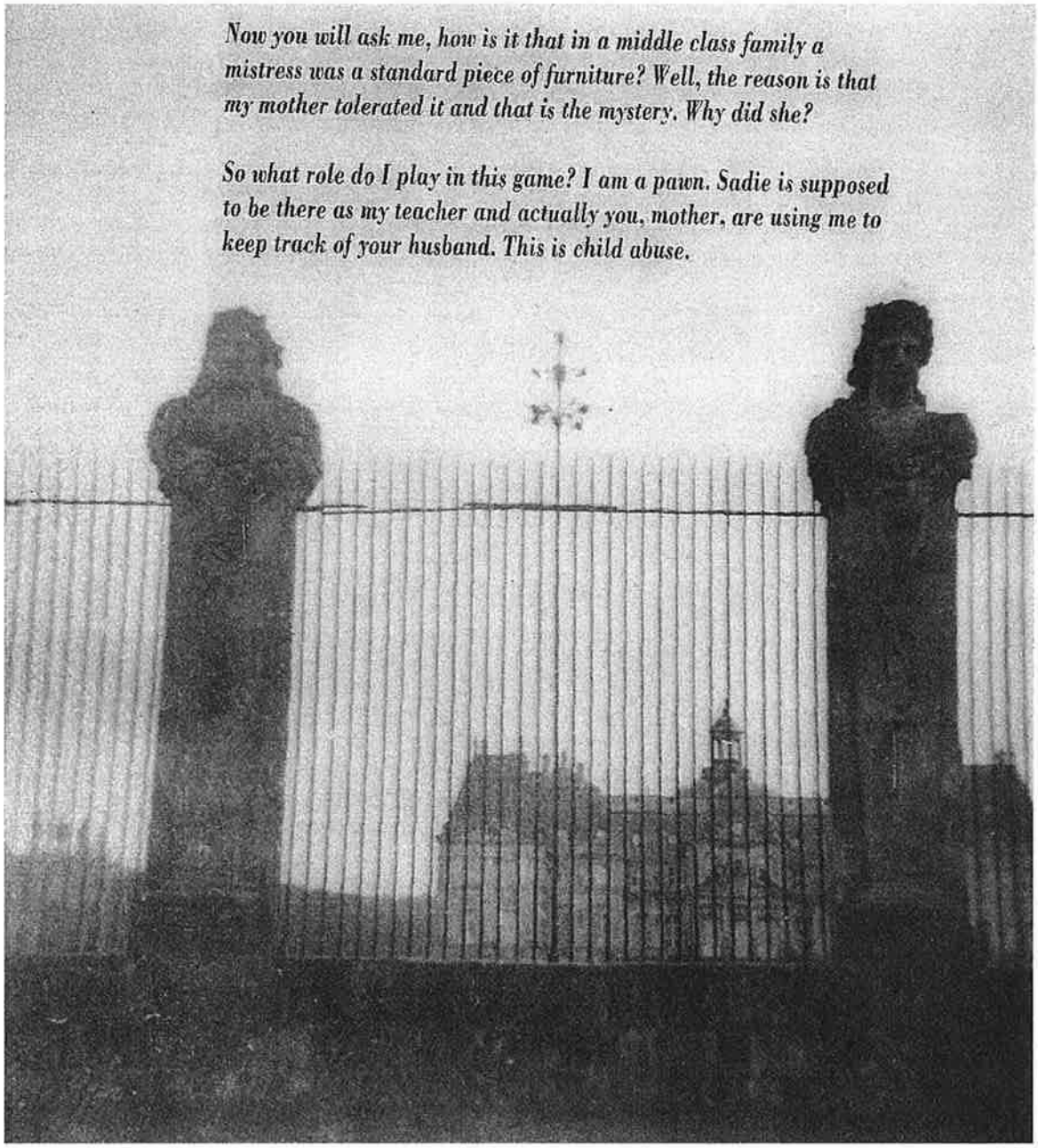
CHILD ABUSE
A PROJECT BY LOUISE BOURGEOIS
1982



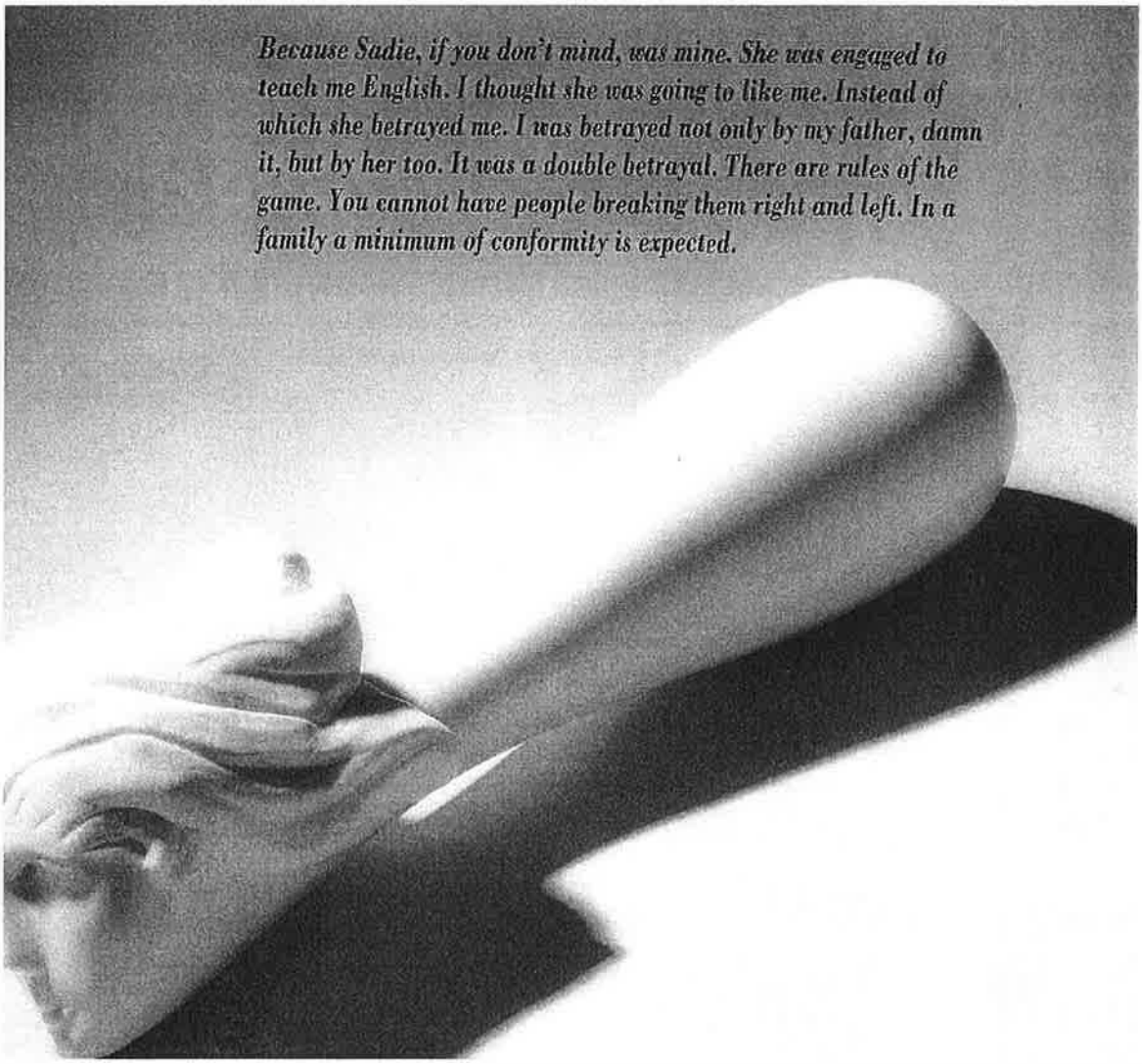
Some of us are so obsessed with the past that we die of it. It is the attitude of the poet who never finds the lost heaven and it is really the situation of artists who work for a reason that nobody can quite grasp. They might want to reconstruct something of the past to exorcise it. It is that the past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

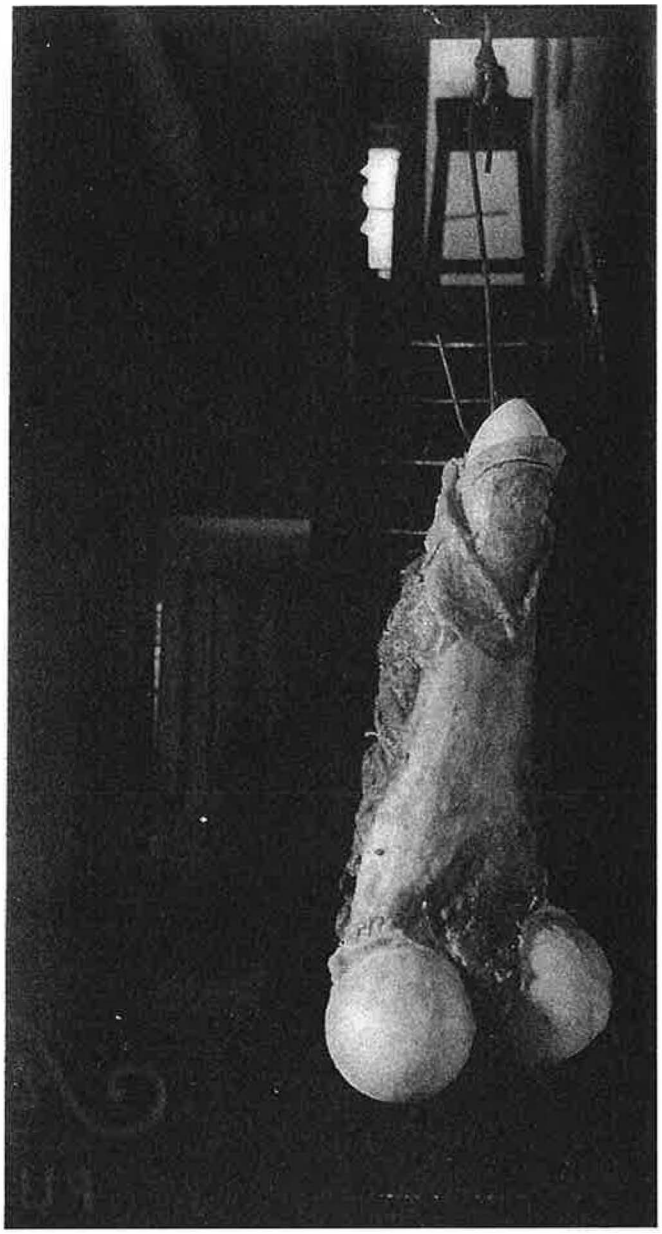
Everything I do was inspired by my early life.

On the left, the woman in white is The Mistress. 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.