



WOMEN ON THE RISE!

TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS: Louise Bourgeois

THEMES:

- Art and childhood / gender
- Abstraction
- Struggles of women in the late 20th century art world
- Overcoming traumatic life events

FEATURED WORKS:

Sculptures, cells, and paintings such as *Spiral Woman* (various years), *Fallen Woman* (1981), *Oedipus* (2003), and *Femme Maison* (1946-47).

RESOURCES:

Links to images

- <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/bourgeois/index.html>
- http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_works_21_0.html
- <http://www.heimread.com/artists/louisebourgeois/?view=selected&subgallery=1>
- <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/louisebourgeois/furtherresources.shtm>
- <http://www.barbarakrowgalleries.com/contentmgr/showdetails.php/id/308>
- <http://www.recirca.com/reviews/louisebourgeois/index.shtml>
- [http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/search?query=Louise Bourgeois&category=multimedia](http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/search?query=Louise+Bourgeois&category=multimedia)

Books

- *Louise Bourgeois* by Robert Storr and Paulo Herkenhoff (2003): Phaidon Press
- (Grades 7 and up) *Runaway Girl: The Artist Louise Bourgeois* by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan (2003): Harry N. Abrams
- *Writing Your Way: Creating a Personal Journal* by Ellen Jaffe (2001): Sumach Press

DISCUSSION POINTS AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- View PSB Art 21 segment on Bourgeois (optional). Compose discussion points and questions based on the video.
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/bourgeois/index.html>
- (Based on *Femme Maison*) Why do you think Bourgeois attached a house to a female body? How would you describe the mood of the work? Describe the portrayal of space. Does it enclose the figure? Can it move around freely?

- What might have prompted Bourgeois to create this work? Do you think that other women may relate to it?
- (Based on *Spiral Woman*) Bourgeois has said that this work expresses her feelings toward her nanny? What is it expressing? How did Bourgeois achieve that affect?
- Can abstract art communicate emotion?
- (Based on *Fallen Woman*) How does the title of this work correspond to the image? Why do you think she has no body? How would you describe her expression?

MATERIALS FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT: Louise Bourgeois

Stocking Sculpture

- Stockings (various colors, types, and sizes)
- Filler (e.g. batting, cotton, plastic bags, fabric swatches, yarn, tinsel)
- Selection of buttons and beads
- Sewing needles
- Embroidery thread in various colors
- Scissors

PROCEDURE FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT:

Based on Bourgeois' fabric works and childhood experiences repairing tapestries, this project is concerned with reconstruction and mending. Inspired by pieces such as *Oedipus* (2003), participants will fashion human figures that function as self-portraits.

Oedipus (2003) is composed of a group of figures that embody the emotional charge of relationships.

- Each student selects a stocking shell
- Shells are stuffed using fillers
- The materials are twisted, tied, and / or sewn to create body parts or a whole human form
- Embellishments (beads and buttons) are sewn onto the form

APPLICABLE NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS (GRADES 5 -12):

- NA—VA.5-8.1 (9-12.1): Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- NA—VA.5-8.3 (9-12.3): Choosing and Evaluating A Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas



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STUDENT HAND OUT: Louise Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois (born 1911—Paris, France)

Louise Bourgeois' family ran a business that repaired old **tapestries**. Louise helped her family work on these tapestries and she learned to draw by repairing images that were torn in the fabric. She felt that sewing was like magic because she used needles and thread to bring broken things back to life.

Most of Bourgeois' work relates to her childhood experiences. The artist had a troubled childhood because her father, who gave her his name, would often say that he wanted a son, not a daughter. She often used her ability to draw to get the attention she needed from him. Their relationship became troubled when he became romantically involved with her nanny. The situation angered Louise because it hurt her mother's feelings and took away the attention that both her father and nanny gave to her. *Spiral Woman* (2003) expresses her feelings toward the nanny.

Louise began to study art in Paris in the 1930s. Her father refused to pay her tuition because he wanted her to get married and run the family business. Refusing to give in to his wishes, she paid for her studies by working as a translator. She then opened her own small art gallery and exhibited work by the most interesting artists working in Paris at the time.

She moved to New York City in the 1940s and began making **abstract** sculptures that explored her memories. Louise kept her art secret for many years because women were not encouraged to show their artwork in museums and galleries at the time.

However, things changed when in 1982 crowds were waiting in line to see a **retrospective** of her work at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. This was a huge event, as it was the first time the Museum had ever shown work by a woman sculptor in its 53-year history. Louise Bourgeois is now one of the most well-known, respected and important artists of our time. Although over the age of 90, she still continues to create powerful, magical works of art.

Vocabulary

Abstract - Abstract is a word used to describe artwork that does not have any recognizable images of people, places, or things.

