

Study Resource

In the Studio: Louise Bourgeois

What is the book about?

Written by curator and writer Justin Paton, 'In the Studio: Louise Bourgeois' brings readers into the deeply personal and creative world of Louise Bourgeois, one of the most important and influential artists of the last century.

The book contextualizes Bourgeois's prolific career and carries the artist's voice and spirit in a number of ways—from images of artworks, quotes showcasing her thoughts on artmaking, photographs of her home and studio spaces, and archival material from throughout her life. Taking Bourgeois's studio as a point of entry, Paton traces the fierce creative will through which she transformed grief, desire and memory into art of enduring force.

Who is it for?

This book is for anyone who has a creative spirit and is interested in learning more about the artist's work and how specific artworks connected to different stages of her life or the various studio spaces she had. Bourgeois's approach to art making inspires resilience and persistence—it was not until later in her career that she worked in a conventional studio, yet she always created work wherever she could. More broadly, this book is for people who want to know how Bourgeois's creative process unfolded.

Why is it great for learners?

Overall, Bourgeois is an inspiration for creatives of all kinds to connect with themselves through art making. This book is suitable for students and everyday learners because it provides insight into Bourgeois's influences and motivations. It explores the development of some of her most well-known works (like the spiders and the Cells), while also sharing more intimate, personal views on what it takes to be an artist. Learners will also understand the impact Bourgeois continues to have on a wide range of contemporary artists, including Richard Serra, Tracey Emin and Jenny Holzer.

What will you learn?

Readers will have an in-depth understanding of Bourgeois's early family life in France and her transition to becoming an artist in New York. Learners will witness her sense of humour, alongside her endurance and perspective on art as a vehicle for processing and understanding pain and love. She once stated 'You cannot arrest the present. You just have to abandon every day of your past. And accept it. And if you can't accept it, then you have to do sculpture!' (page 54).

Discussion Questions

Inner Imagery and Memory

- Refer to pages 49–52. Some of Bourgeois's early work includes her Personages sculptures; vertical, thin and singular, these forms held a deep physical and psychological power. For the artist, they were 'badly missed presences' (Paton, 50) of the family and friends she had left behind in France. What role does memory play in Bourgeois's work? What is the significance of giving memories and lived experiences a physical form? As a creative, what materials do you use that reflect your lived experiences?
- Refer to pages 103–109. Bourgeois's Cells series reflects the artist's interest in opposing characteristics—that which is protective, yet threatening, sheltered yet restricted. What comes to mind for you when you look at these psychological worlds that Bourgeois constructed? Compare and contrast Bourgeois's Articulated Lair (1986; pages 100–101) and Passage Dangereux (1997; pages 106–107). In each work, how is Bourgeois's interest in 'castoff' or found objects reflected? How is she bringing elements of her past into the present via these materials? (Paton, 103). If you created a space or piece of work for objects that hold significance in your life, what would you include?
- Refer to pages 125–131. In many of her fabric works, Bourgeois used an 'unconscious collection' of leftover garments and fabrics from her past. She stated, 'It's my past...I want to take it and hold it tight in my arms' (Paton, 125). In your creative life, do you ever reuse materials from the past to create a new work? How does this affect your perception of time and past experiences in your practice or everyday life?
- Refer to pages 117–120. Bourgeois's spiders represent a maternal figure which can be seen as both aggressive and protective or nurturing, especially in her monumental sculpture Maman. What qualities does the medium of metal evoke? What connections can you make between Bourgeois's spider sculptures and her earlier work? How does the scale of this sculpture influence how you experience the work?

Analysis of an Interior World

- Refer to page 133. Bourgeois heavily relied on what Paton describes as the 'studio and its routines,' which led her into moments and 'spells' that fueled play, imagination and freedom. (Paton, 133). Are there routines or processes that you follow to get into creative modes? What is it about these routines that bring about a creative flow?
- In many of Bourgeois's works, the artist gives voice and form to fears and anxieties that have affected her throughout her lifetime. How and why do you think creating allowed Bourgeois to bring her internal experience into an external space? How closely do you relate to your own emotional world as you make work? Is your own work reflective of your lived experiences?

Lasting Legacy

- Refer to pages 120 and 143. I Do, I Undo, and I Redo (1999–2000) are the titles of three monumental artworks by Bourgeois, yet these words also represent her way of thinking, making and being in the world. What significance do these statements hold for you in your lived

HAUSER & WIRTH

experiences? How has Bourgeois's creative philosophy and spirit affected the way you see your own work?

- Refer to page 143. Bourgeois held Sunday salons during which younger artists would share their work with her (and other visiting artists) in her home. Bourgeois was always interested in what younger generations were thinking about. Her work has continued to influence countless artists. What does legacy mean to you? What of Bourgeois's practice do you think will stay with you after reading this book and why?