



LOUISE BOURGEOIS

THE SPIDER, THE MISTRESS AND THE TANGERINE

A FILM BY MARION CAJORI AND AMEI WALLACH

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

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A FILM BY MARION CAJORI AND AMEI WALLACH

FILMMAKERS

Directed by

Marion Cajori and Amei Wallach

Edited by

Ken Kobland

Cinematography by

Mead Hunt

Ken Kobland

Additional photography by

Nick Blair

Marion Cajori

David Leitner

Kipjaz Savoie

Produced by

Marion Cajori and Amei Wallach

Executive Producer

George Griffin

The Art Kaleidoscope Foundation

Line Producer

Kipjaz Savoie

FEATURING

Louise Bourgeois

WITH

Jean-Louis Bourgeois

Jerry Gorovoy

Guerilla Girls

Charlotta Kotik

Frances Morris

Robert Storr

Deborah Wye

Interviewer

Amei Wallach

cover:

Louise Bourgeois with Spider IV in 1996.

Photo: Peter Bellamy

Some people are so obsessed with the past that they die of it. If your need is to refuse to abandon the past, you have to recreate it. You have to do sculpture.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS



SYNOPSIS

Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, The Mistress and The Tangerine is a film journey inside the life and imagination of an icon of modern art. As a screen presence, Louise Bourgeois is magnetic, mercurial and emotionally raw. She is “the real McCoy,” as Jerry Gorovoy, her assistant of 30 years, puts it. There is no separation between her life as an artist and the memories and emotions that affect her every day.

As an artist she has for six decades been at the forefront of successive new developments, but always on her own powerfully inventive and disquieting terms. At the age of 71, in 1982, she became the first woman to be honored with a major retrospective at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. In the decades since, she has created her most powerful and persuasive work.

Louise Bourgeois in 1966 with “The Blind Leading the Blind” (1947-49). Photo by Peter Moore © Estate of Peter Moore /VAGA, New York

As director/producer Amei Wallach notes: “We filmed intense, and sometimes hilarious, encounters with Louise and her work in both her Brooklyn studio and Manhattan home starting in 1993. We videotaped conversations where she trusted us with the childhood sources of her pain and invited us into the ritualistic process by which her memories become embodied in objects and installations. We filmed her friends and her work here and abroad through the autumn of 2007.”

This film is a drama of creativity and revelation. It is an intimate, human engagement with an artist’s world. It builds to a searing climactic scene, then rebounds in joy and reconciliation.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

On the morning of May 28, 1993, Marion Cajori and I arrived at Louise Bourgeois's Brooklyn studio to begin the first day of shooting. Marion was an award-winning filmmaker who had recently debuted her film portrait of the painter Joan Mitchell. As an art critic, I had written about many of the great artists of our time, including Louise. But neither Marion nor I was prepared for the electricity of the artist's first encounter with the camera.

On that very first day, dressed in blue, haloed in the white light pouring through her studio window, Louise spoke with mesmerizing passion and spontaneity:

My emotions are inappropriate to my size, so they bother me and I have to get rid of them. My emotions are my demons.

Over the years she revealed to us on camera just what that meant, both in the beauty and aggressiveness of her sculpture, and in how she related to us and the world.

I can think of no other artist with either Louise's screen presence or her generosity in sharing the deepest roots of her anguish and her art. As filmmakers we had the good fortune to experience the full force of her personality and the process by which her unconscious connections become works of art.

This is Louise's story, in her actions, her art and her words.

There is nothing quite like seeing art in a museum or gallery. But the camera has a special relationship to the work, particularly if it is as fraught and mysterious as Louise Bourgeois's. Through film, it is possible to experience the range and depth, up close and



personal. The camera has the privilege of traveling over, through and into her installations and sculptures, and cinematographers Mead Hunt and Ken Kobland have taken dazzling advantage of this opportunity. We filmed her work in New York, Madrid, Milan, Venice and London, sometimes spending all night to light a particular shot and capture the magic.

In August 2006, Marion Cajori died of cancer at the age of 56. It became my task to complete the film. This would have been impossible for a first time director and producer without Marion's remarkable example, the extraordinary editing talents of Ken Kobland, the production wizardry of Kipjaz Savoie or the wisdom of George Griffin, representing the Art Kaleidoscope Foundation as executive producer.

Amei Wallach
co-director, co-producer

Louise Bourgeois in 1997. Photo: Sylvia Plachy

THE ART OF LOUISE BOURGEOIS

At the age of 96, Louise Bourgeois is regarded as one of the most important artists working today. In October 2007, a retrospective of her work opened at Tate Modern in London. The exhibition is traveling to the Centre Pompidou in Paris (March 5 through June 2, 2008), the Guggenheim Museum in New York (June 27 through September 28, 2008), the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (October 26, 2008 through January 26, 2009) and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. (February 28, 2009 through June 7, 2009).

Through her daring journey into her own psyche, she produces astonishing new forms in painting, sculpture, prints, drawings, collage, installation and monumental constructions. She is as apt to carve undulating folds out of marble as to stitch a hanging sculpture out of her mother's old dress, or recycle a Shalimar perfume bottle or an antique electric chair. Few artists have taken the outrageous risks with materials that she has. But it is never the materials that interest her; it is the exorcism she is able to enact by manipulating them. Her art is a response to the historical and personal transformations of our time.

Art is the definition of sanity.

It is the definition of self-realization.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

For Bourgeois, the past lives in the day-to-day present, in a never-ending spiral of emotion, betrayal and loss. Her concerns are the universal ones of childhood and family: how to transmute anger, heal wounds, quench jealousy, parent one's own children and transcend the limitations of old age.

She has subverted any tradition in art-making that's served her purpose, taken it apart, turned it inside out, reversed and radically re-invented it. And that means

*"Maman," 1999, in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2003.
Photo: Jens Fredericksen*



Michelangelo, it means Breughel, Brancusi, Picasso, Duchamp and Warhol.

Her art shows us what it is to be a human being who inhabits a body – a body that is born in trauma and is prey to the thoughts, fears, fantasies, desires and conflicts of biology, history and family life. She makes her art out of it all, sometimes as abstract as a sphere, sometimes as specific as a spider. The payoff for us, the viewers, is that we become unhinged and uneasy in the presence of her work. We're implicated, as in a dream, into a startled confrontation with our own present, our own past and the infinite possibilities and dire predicaments of art and life.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS BIOGRAPHY

Childhood

Shall we go back to the beginning? I was born in Paris at 174 Boulevard Saint Germain. The house still exists. I had a nice family. Everybody has a nice family. The trouble with us was that I was born at the outbreak of the 1914 war.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS,
1975 VIDEO DATA BANK INTERVIEW

Born to privilege, to Joséphine and Louis Bourgeois on Christmas Day, 1911, she spent her haute bourgeois childhood in a succession of grand houses, where her parents repaired and sold tapestries.

Louise Bourgeois was not quite three when World War I began and her father enlisted in the French Army. She was three when he was wounded and her frantic mother took her along to visit the hospitals where wounded poured in hour after hour, day after day. She experienced her father's absence as an abandonment and a wound—that has been a recurring theme in her work.

When the war was over, he had changed: He was going to enjoy himself. He went after women. Men are frantic and women are sad.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

Louise was 71 before she made public the story of her father and his mistress in a video slide show that accompanied her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Many people have since assigned the story of the mistress a central role in understanding the art. But it is only one of the many vagrant memories and complex themes that instigate Bourgeois's quest to overthrow old forms and investigate new ways of artmaking.

*Louise Bourgeois with her mother Joséphine in 1914.
Photo: Louise Bourgeois Archive*



The mistress was Sadie. Louise's debonair, domineering father had hired the young English woman, ostensibly to teach English to Louise, her brother Pierre and her sister Henriette. Sadie lived in the house with the family for 10 years, without too much fuss from Louise's mother. To Louise, it was a triple betrayal: by father, mother, and tutor.

Part of the explanation for the presence of the mistress may lie in the fact that Louise's mother, Joséphine, had contracted emphysema as a result of the devastating worldwide flu epidemic that followed the First World War. She was virtually an invalid until her death in 1932. Louise took care of her, and traveled with her to spas in the South of France.

Always, her mother would take along tapestries to repair, or work on them at home. Louise's first drawings when she was 12, were to fill in the feet that were always the first to go in tapestries that reached to the ground. It made Louise feel useful. Once a week the seamstress came to sew pants for the father of the house, underwear for Louise, or care for the designer clothes her parents bought her by Chanel and Poiret.

At Sunday dinners, with a large audience of family and friends, Louise's father would tease her cruelly.

SCHOOLDAYS

In 1932, Bourgeois entered the Sorbonne to study calculus and geometry, subjects she finds calming to

this day. She received her Bacculaureate in Philosophy from the University of Paris, writing her dissertation on Pascal and Kant.

By 1933, however, she was ready to begin studying art in artists' studios around Montparnasse and Montmartre. She studied with Paul Colin, Roger Bissière, Orthon Friesz and Rodin's assistant Charles Despiau. It was Fernand Léger, in 1938, who prophetically informed Louise that her sensibility was the three-dimensional one of a sculptor. That same year, she exhibited a painting at the Salon des Indépendants, and rented her own apartment in a building where the surrealist theoretician André Breton had a gallery. There she had daily contact with the work of Arp, de Chirico, Dali, Duchamp, Giacometti, Miró, Picasso and Man Ray.

She was studying sculpture at the Academie de la Grande-Chaumière in 1937, when the photographer Brassai shot pictures of her at work reflected in a mirror. So we have a good idea of how striking she was when Robert Goldwater, an American in Paris working on his ground-breaking Ph.D. in "Primitivism and Modern Art," met her the following year.

NEW YORK

By 1938 there was fear of war all over Europe, as Hitler's armies became increasingly belligerent, and many Americans left France. Goldwater, however, refused to leave without Louise. They were married and she moved to New York, where Goldwater taught at New York University and Queens College.

The couple adopted a war orphan in 1939. Michel Olivier was three years old. Their first biological son, Jean-Louis, was born in New York on July 4, 1940, not quite three weeks after German troops marched into Paris. On November 12, 1941, less than a month before Pearl Harbor, Bourgeois gave birth to another son, Alain Matthew Clement.

Bourgeois knew first hand what war was like, as she followed the course of this new one from the safety of New York. That would have been occasion for guilt enough, but her brother Pierre, whom she had assigned herself to protect, was a soldier in this war. He suffered shell shock and was never able afterwards to accommodate himself to life. When she speaks of him now, sometimes she weeps.

Throughout the war, her paintings were shown in galleries, as well as in group shows at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art. Her initial foray into sculpture at the end of the war, she has said, was to banish despair after her husband and sons had left for the day. She created a studio out of the rooftop of the building in which she lived. Here she became a sculptor, creating elongated, forms assembled from scavenged wood, roughly the height of a human being. As Personages, as they are called, they are gaunt, and emaciated, like the last man standing in a devastated world. They are solitary, existential figures. But when she installed them for her first exhibition at the Peridot Gallery, she grouped them so that they related to one another and animated the entire space.

I re-created all the people I had left behind in France. They were huddled one against the other, and they represented all the people that I couldn't admit I missed.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

The Goldwaters knew everybody who was anybody in the world of art and culture in New York, from Willem de Kooning to John Cage and Philip Johnson. Bourgeois showed with the Abstract Expressionists, sometimes the only woman to do so. She was a link between the New York art world and the European Surrealists who had been driven West by the Nazi's advance: Max Ernst, Duchamp, Breton, Matta, Miro. But she loathed them all. They were father figures to her and she had not made peace with her own father.



*Louise Bourgeois photographed by Brassai at the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière, Paris 1937.
Photo: Louise Bourgeois Archive*

Her father died in 1951, their relationship unresolved, and Bourgeois sank into a depression. She stayed in bed for weeks on end. For a decade, she stopped showing her work, nearly stopped making it. She opened a bookstore, taught in the public schools. Then in 1964, she exhibited a new body of work at last. The sculptures were spiraling, fleshy and confrontational. She began working in marble and bronze after a trip to Italy in 1967.

Robert Goldwater died on March 26, 1973, as Bourgeois was preparing breakfast. She had been the wife of the great scholar, a mother, a hostess who entertained in their brownstone. She turned the dining room into an office/studio, tacked notices, postcards, posters to the wall, let everything go. The house, where she still lives, and where some of the film was shot, has not been painted since.

A new group of friends gathered around her, from punk kids who took her to clubs to the young Museum of Modern Art curator Deborah Wye and the writer and artist Robert Storr. She had not been showing much, but a fledgling artist and gallerist, Jerry Gorovoy, sought her out to include her in an

exhibition, and became her assistant and manager. Deborah Wye organized the Bourgeois retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art.

The art world had been dominated by theories that prized the form of the work above everything, and though Louise is a master at form, it is the emotions out of which a sculpture evolves that interest her. She was largely ignored in this period. But her new generation of friends was interested in Bourgeois because of how biography, biology, memories and dread were encapsulated in the work. The Feminist Movement made a heroine of her, though she herself always insisted she was an artist, not a woman artist.

In 1980, she got her first studio, at 475 Dean Street in Brooklyn, after having worked at home for so many years. The studio, where some of the film's most compelling scenes were shot, was huge, and the work grew too. She began making "cells," walk-in installations of found and sculpted objects that are like dreamscapes.

The Guggenheim Museum opened its SoHo branch in 1992, with an exhibition, "From Brancusi to Bourgeois." She represented the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1993. She has had numerous retrospectives around

the world. When Tate Modern opened in 1999, the museum commissioned Bourgeois as the first artist to tame the vast Turbine Hall with three 40-foot towers that visitors climbed to discover sculptural experiences within. In 2001 she became the first living artist to be honored with a retrospective at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

Her massive spiders – “my most successful subject,” she calls them – have dominated Rockefeller Center and the downtowns of Tokyo, Copenhagen, Seoul, Havana and St. Petersburg, Russia.

She was designated an Officier de L’Ordre des Arts et Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture in 1983, received the Skowhegan Medal of Sculpture in 1985, was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Clinton in 1997 and became an Academician of the National Academy in 1998.

She turned 96 on Christmas Day, 2007. She continues drawing and making sculpture.

FILM SOURCES

In addition to a rich trove of first-hand encounters with the artist, the filmmakers have been able to draw on a comprehensive film and video archive to illuminate the autobiographical and historical aspects of Bourgeois’s art. The filmmakers shot nearly her entire body of work (1938-2007) at exhibitions in the U.S., Italy, Spain and England, beginning with the Guggenheim Museum’s 1992 group exhibition, “From Brancusi to Bourgeois.”

The filmmakers also conducted in depth interviews with her friends, as well as curators and art historians. In the interest of an engrossing film experience, however, they kept these to a minimum. Participants include Charlotta Kotik (curator of the Venice Biennale exhibition), Robert Storr (art historian), Deborah Wye (curator Museum of Modern Art, New York), Francis Morris (curator Tate Modern), and Jerry Gorovoy (Bourgeois’s long time assistant). Archives include films of WWI soldiers suffering from post traumatic stress

and disfigurement, as well as the artist’s family’s photo albums, childhood diaries, and footage of performances from the seventies and eighties.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Marion Cajori, Director and Producer

Marion Cajori was an independent filmmaker who founded the non-profit Art Kaleidoscope Foundation in 1990 to produce in-depth cinematic portraits of individual creators and their art. Her film, **Joan Mitchell: Portrait of an Abstract Painter**, won the prestigious 1993 Pratt-Whitney Grand Prize at the International Film Festival for Films on Art in Montreal and was cited as “One of the Ten Best Films of 1993.” In 1998, PBS/WNET broadcast her Emmy-nominated special, **Chuck Close: Portrait in Progress**. A few weeks before her death at the age of 56 in August, 2006, she completed a full-length feature about Close and the community of artists he is associated with. **Chuck Close** opened at Film Forum in New York on December 26, 2007 and received rave reviews in publications from *The New York Times* to *Newsweek*. The film profiles Elizabeth Murray, Tom Friedman, Klaus Kertess, Robert Rauschenberg, and Kirk Varnedoe, among many others, as Close completes a painting from beginning to end, with a miniature camera attached to his brush.

Amei Wallach, Director and Producer

Amei Wallach is an art critic, commentator and curator. This is her first film. She is currently directing her second film, on the internationally celebrated, Soviet-born artists Ilya & Emilia Kabakov, as they prepare for their first Moscow exhibition, a massive retrospective in four venues, including the Pushkin Museum. She was for many years chief art critic for *New York Newsday* and on-air arts commentator for the “MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour.” Her articles have appeared in such publications as *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Nation*, *Smithsonian*, *New York Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, *Architectural Digest*, *Art in America* and *ArtNews*. She has written or

contributed to 11 books, including, **Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away** (Abrams, 1995), a psychological portrait of daily life in the Soviet Union; **Louise Bourgeois** (Storm King, 2007); **Gee's Bend: Architecture of the Quilt** (Tinwood, 2006), **Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life** (The New Press, 2001). She won a 2006 Best Show award from the International Art Critics Association/USA for her recent exhibition *Neo-Sincerity: The Difference Between the Comic and the Cosmic Is a Single Letter*. She speaks and organizes panels at museums and universities in this country and Europe.

Ken Kobland, Editor

Since 1975, Ken Kobland has produced independent film, video and media art works, including a number of performance/media pieces for theatrical presentation in collaboration with The Wooster Group, New York based experimental theater. His work has been included in such film and video festivals as: Ann Arbor, CinemaTexas, Bellevue, Sinking Creek, Athens (Ohio), Atlanta Film Festival, American Film Festival (Film-as-Art), San Francisco Film Festival (Golden Gate Awards), Black Maria Film/Video Festival, Montreal, Oberhausen (West Germany), Hyeres (France), Melbourne (Australia), Montbeliard (France), Rotterdam, Video Week (Geneva), World-Wide (Holland), Lucarno (Switzerland), VideoKunst (Karlsruhe), the New York Video and Film Festival, and at the Berlin Film Festival - International Forum. Kobland was fine cut editor, post-production producer and a cinematographer on **Chuck Close**.

Kipjaz Savoie, Line Producer

Kipjaz Savoie has worked in nearly all aspects of documentary production since leaving pastoral New England for New York City over a decade ago. In recent years, he has acted primarily as a producer and cinematographer, with additional credits as a multimedia creative director. While focusing on documentary film, his work has taken him from Panama to Pakistan and has been featured on PBS, HBO, Discovery, Bravo, A&E, and the BBC among others.



Louise Bourgeois working on "Sleep II," Pietrasanta, Italy, 1967. Photo: Studio Fotografico, Carrara

Mead Hunt, cinematographer

Mead Hunt has been working as a cinematographer in the documentary field for over 25 years. Primarily shooting documentaries on cultural subjects, he has worked on many award winning programs including "Toth" the Academy Award winning short and the Emmy winning series "Broadway: The American Musical."

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