

Louise Bourgeois, Freud's Daughter
Verbal Descriptions

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Conscious and Unconscious

2008

Fabric, rubber, thread, and stainless steel

69 × 37 × 18.5 in. (175.3 × 94 × 47 cm)

This sculptural piece, which consists of two composite vertical forms enclosed in a large glass vitrine, is titled *Conscious and Unconscious*. It was created in 2008. The dimensions of the vitrine, which has a wooden frame, are 88.5 inches high, by 37 inches wide, by 66 inches deep. The two figures inside the vitrine, which are made of fabric, rubber, thread, and stainless steel, are attached to a single rectangular stainless-steel base.

I'll now describe the two distinct sculptural components, which are displayed side by side. On our left is the tallest component. It consists of a tall metal pole with six protruding arms, similar to a hat rack. From the rod closest to the top of the pole hangs a light blue teardrop-shaped form, which is approximately one third as long as the metal rod. The blue form is smooth and convex, like the carapace of a beetle, and is narrow at the top and more bulbous at the bottom. The five other metal rods below are thinner and of varying lengths. They jut out from the pole at odd angles. The end of each rod is attached to a metal disc, which holds a spindle. Each spindle holds thread of a different color, all muted – purple, teal, red, grey, and black. A thread extends outwards from each spindle back towards the blue teardrop, drooping gently in the middle. A threaded needle at the end of each one pierces the teardrop to hold the thread in place.

Now, I'll describe the vertical sculpture on the right. Its exterior is white and textured like a winter sweater, making it feel warmer and less austere than its counterpart. This sculpture is made up of a tower of lozenge-shaped fabric bundles. Each lozenge rests perpendicularly on the one beneath it, bowing slightly in the middle as if compressed by the weight of the stack. If you looked at this piece from above you might see a white X. The elements get larger as they ascend upwards, ranging from a small circle at the bottom to a piece about the size of two clasped human hands. The overall impression is like that of a spinal column, or other bone-like structure.

Arched Figure No. 3

1997

Fabric and steel

20 × 14 × 49 in. (50.8 × 35.6 × 124.5 cm)

This work is titled *Arched Figure No. 3*. It was created in 1997. The materials are fabric and steel. The artwork object is about the size of a medium-sized dog on its haunches—and it is enclosed in a rectangular glass vitrine with a squared wooden frame. The vitrine is 69 inches long by 30 inches wide and 65 inches in height. The work is placed near the soft light grey wall.

The sculpture is stylistically abstracted. As the title suggests, the form resembles a human figure in the throes of a deep back arch, but its limbs and head are either absent or truncated. We'll start from the right side of the sculpture and move towards the left, as the sculpture arches.

On our right is a rectangular chunk of steel, about the length of a large human foot. The bottom and two sides of this metal piece are flat, and it rests firmly on the bottom on the vitrine. The steel surface is a silvery grey with hints of rusted brown, almost appearing dappled in color. The uneven surface makes the metal look aged and dingy, as if this were part of an ancient tool or well-worn piece of machinery.

Moving from right to left, the top of the steel dips down and then arches up as if it were a toy train track, climbing a hill. About halfway through the arch the steel thrusts into the fabric component of the sculpture, which hugs it tight like a bandage and continues its steep swoop upward. The matte black fabric is stretched taut over its stuffing like skin over muscle. As we move toward the left, the stuffed fabric form continues upward, crests, and then slumps down. It flows towards the base of the pedestal without quite touching it. The impression is of a horse's hoof curving in motion.

This bumpy fabric form has visible, roughly sewn seams and ridges, like the piping of a glove or edge of a pocket. It ends, on the left, with a pair of conjoined bulbous forms, rounded like the lumpy roots of a tree. The piece creates union from remarkably different materials. Though texturally dissimilar, they are bound together in the dynamic motion of the sculpture.

Ventouse

1990

Marble, glass, and electric light

34 × 78 × 32 in. (86.4 × 198.1 × 81.3 cm)

This sculpture is titled *Ventouse* and was made in 1990. The materials are marble, glass, and electric light. The dimensions are 34 inches tall, by 78 inches long, by 32 inches deep. This piece rests directly on the gallery floor, without a platform or a case.

This sculpture is carved from large, dark grey slabs of marble. The material is a sooty color, like charcoal. The general form of the sculpture consists of a thick, rectangular base, with a smaller rectangular form resting on top. While the base is about a foot thick, the slab of the second tier is a foot and a half thick. The overall impression of the form is that of a tombstone sitting on a small hill, or perhaps of a sarcophagus.

Unlike the smooth marble we might be used to seeing in artworks, and especially in funerary monuments, the texture of *Ventouse* is mottled, full of craters. We can imagine Bourgeois hitting her chisel hard, directly into the stone, over and over, to form pock-marked and cratered sides. In some areas, especially the corners of the base, large irregular chunks have been removed, taking away any sharp corners or strictly geometrical feel.

In contrast to these textured surfaces, the top of the smaller marble rectangle is relatively smooth and level. Emerging from round holes in the top of the sculpture are approximately 25 bulbous, clear glass pieces, like small, rounded cups placed upside down. Each one is roughly a few inches in diameter. Viewed from above, they are irregularly scattered but evenly spaced over the surface of the piece. The glass pieces are actually cupping jars, tools used in a number of traditional medicines. Their inclusion is rooted in Bourgeois' biography: she used them herself to relieve muscle pain in her ailing mother. They are an example of Bourgeois' use of found objects; these she bought at a flea market.

Passage Dangereux

1997

Metal, wood, tapestry, rubber, marble, steel, glass, bronze, bones, flax, and mirrors
104 × 140 × 345 in. (264.2 × 355.6 × 876.3 cm)

This large installation called *Passage Dangereux* was made in 1997. The work is roughly 8.5 feet deep, by 11.5 feet high, and 31 feet long. It is placed in the center of the room and dominates the space. It would take about twelve steps to walk the length of the installation. The materials include metal, wood, tapestry, rubber, marble, steel, glass, bronze, bones, flax, and mirrors. Dramatic lighting gives an immediate sense of moodiness or apprehension.

The installation is made up of a series of chambers or rooms. They're structured to display a series of vignettes inside. The walls, floors, and ceilings of the chambers are made of chain-link fence. Although you can walk around this piece, I'll be describing it with the long side facing toward you as you enter this gallery space.

The piece has a metal frame completely covered by chain-linked metal, thin crisscrossed bars spaced about an inch apart. The metal is rusted, with a grayish patina.

This "cell," as Bourgeois called it, is made up of seven rectangular bays, bisected down the middle by a 3-foot-wide passageway. It gives the impression of rooms emerging on either side of a hallway, or chapels off the nave of a church. There are niches between the chambers large enough for a person to stand inside. If you were walking inside this piece you could wander from one chamber to the other, freely exploring all of the elements inside.

Each chamber contains a different vignette, which for Bourgeois described elements of psychological development. We'll start from the protruding chamber all the way on our left, and work our way to the right.

The first chamber might make us think of moments of a childhood, oscillating between familiar and tortured. Closest to us, there are three wooden chairs, arranged in a semi-circle. They are blocky, made of thick, weathered, roughly hewn pieces of wood. On each chair rests objects, including a glass box with a large,

irregularly shaped object—perhaps a tree gall—inside, and a glass orb containing bones. The chairs seem to be arranged to be viewers of the rest of the chamber. Hanging against the back wall of the opposite chamber is a worn and faded tapestry, about the size of a child's mattress. In front of it hangs a wooden swing with arms and a slatted back, the kind a small child might use. In the chamber, to the left of this, there is a large pink marble slab resting on short metal legs. The marble slab is slanted, so it looks a bit like a ramp. It has two rabbit-ear-like protrusions emerging from the top. Other objects are positioned around the cell: glass animals on a shelf in one corner, for example, and round mirrors placed at angles along the wall.

A chamber to the right is sparse by comparison. The focus is a dark brown wooden electric chair placed in the back. The chair is large and upright with a squared, slatted back. It has straight wooden arms with a circular strap at the end of each, which would have been used to secure someone's hands. In the chamber opposite the electric chair are four small wooden chairs holding large green glass orbs. These chairs face one another, forming a tight circle. One of the three is larger than the others.

Another chamber at the right centers on a bare metal mesh mattress, which is low to the ground. It extends from our viewpoint towards the back of the cell. On the mattress are positioned two pairs of wooden feet at the end of metal poles. Their positioning recalls two people engaged in sexual intercourse. Flanking this bed are a child's school desk and another small chair. More weathered, wooden chairs are suspended from the ceiling at all angles. They give the impression that the couple is surrounded and being observed.

Taken together, these cells describe the relationship between the child and parents as well as the outside world, a child learning about punishment, and sexual life as the end of childhood. For more on Bourgeois engagement with psychoanalysis, listen to the curator's audio track on this work.

Janus Fleuri

1968

Bronze, gold patina

101/8 × 121/2 × 83/8 in. (25.7 × 31.8 × 21.3 cm)

Bourgeois made this sculpture, entitled *Janus Fleuri*, in 1968. Cast in bronze, it has a rich gold patina. The dimensions are roughly 10 inches high by 12 inches wide by 8 inches deep. Its general form recalls a croissant; its texture is both layered like a croissant and wrinkly like a walnut shell. It is suspended from the ceiling by a single taut wire. The bottom of the sculpture is approximately five and a half feet from the floor.

The overall bronze color echoes earth metals, recalling the toasted golden brown of an ancient coin, with hints of darker tones in the crevices.

This hanging sculpture's style is both abstract and realistic, evoking both male and female bodies. Its symmetrical form resembles a pelvis, a chunky crescent-like shape that bulges with unresolved yet potent corporeality. It's almost like we are looking at the hips or midsection of a human body devoid of its torso and limbs. The metal flesh resembles a coat of armor, smooth and polished at the ends, and furrowed in the center.

At the same time, the sculpture resembles two stubby phallic or breast-like forms mirroring one another as they curve downwards in opposite directions, ending slightly below the middle section of the piece. You might think of them as the horns of the croissant. Here, the bronze is smooth, with a few ridges where the rounded protuberances meet the central body of the piece. The texture of the metal at the center of the piece is rough and riddled with dents, with a vaginal slit meandering down the middle.

As the viewer circles around the object, it seems to hover in biomorphic in-betweenness. The title, *Janus Fleuri*, refers to the Roman god Janus who is usually depicted with two faces, one looking back into the past and the other forwards into the future. Janus is the god of gates, thresholds, and starts and stops, a force of duality. It's much like the multi-gendered form we see here.

The Destruction of the Father

1974

Latex, plaster, wood, fabric, and red light

935/8 × 1425/8 × 977/8 in. (237.8 × 362.3 × 248.6 cm)

We are looking at a sculptural installation titled *The Destruction of the Father*. The work was made in 1974. The materials are latex, plaster, wood, fabric, and red light. The dimensions of this work are roughly 93 inches high by 142 inches wide and 97 inches deep, somewhere between the size of a single and double car garage. These dimensions describe a rectangular space that protrudes from the back of the gallery like an enormous fireplace, with the front wall left open for the viewer to gaze into. This work can only be viewed from the front. As the viewer stands before this open space, she is able to peer deep inside as if looking onto the stage. This imposing life-size diorama seems to invite you inside. The room smells of old latex.

The installation contains numerous abstracted biomorphic forms. Inside, a deep red light bathes the space, which seems to glow like embers. On the floor, a sea of velvety black fabric curls and crests up against twelve bulbous sculptural forms that bob like buoys within these folds of fabric. These rounded blobs are a ruddy beige color and resemble the size of a floor cushion or ottoman. The semi-rigid mounds emerge from the cloth at slightly varying heights. Their latex material appears both soft and firm, recalling the surface of leather upholstery. It's firm, but with a slight dimpling to remind you of its stuffing.

These organic mounds encircle a large central platform of about the same height topped with an assortment of smaller irregularly shaped stuffed latex forms. Similar in surface and under the same lurid red light, these more spindly forms recall chicken legs and animals parts, or hunks of meat.

The ceiling of the room almost mirrors the floor. A dozen mounds descend from folds of draped black fabric, protruding down like stalactites in a cave and looming above the central platform. As if peering inside an oven window or fireplace, the viewer experiences a sense of increasing heat and an eerie glow.

These blob-like sculptural forms create a mysterious and charged space that suggests the body without a figure in sight. The organ-like roundness and the dimly lit bloody glow suggest an interiority, whether bodily or psychological.

The title, 'The Destruction of the Father', evokes a deadly familial scene. The artist has described the origin of this work as a childhood fantasy in which mother and children killed and consumed her father at the dinner table.