



Louise Bourgeois, *Altered States*, 1992
Coloured ink, graphite pencil and ballpoint on paper, 48 x 60.5 cm
© The Easton Foundation / Adagp, Paris
Photo © Centre Pompidou, MINAM-CCI/Jean-Claude Planchet / Dist. Grand Palais Rmn

PRESS RELEASE | EXHIBITION

LOUISE BOURGEOIS, EXTREME TENSION

DESSINS ET GRAVURES*

20.10.26 → 21.02.27

* Drawings and prints

Bibliothèque nationale de France | Richelieu site
Galerie Mansart - Galerie Pigott

Exhibition co-organised by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and Centre Pompidou

Curated by

Head curator

Honorary General Heritage Curator
Marie-Laure Bernadac

Assistant curators

Head Curator, Head of the Collections of 20th and 21st-Century Prints BnF, Prints and Photography Department
Cécile Pocheau-Lesteven

Curator, Graphic Arts, Musée national d'art moderne - Centre Pompidou

Anne Monfort-Tanguy

Presented by Centre Pompidou and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, an exhibition dedicated to the graphic work of Louise Bourgeois will bring together the two institutions' collections for the first time. It is also the first exhibition dedicated to the artist in a Parisian public institution since 2008.

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) is a major figure in contemporary art, who constructed her body of work on the margins of the major movements that marked the 20th century – surrealism, abstract expressionism, minimalism and so on. She developed a profoundly personal language that still exerts a major influence on many artists.

Bourgeois moved to New York in 1938 and discovered printmaking in Atelier 17 with Stanley William Hayter – a technique that would become an essential part of her entire body of work, along with drawing. Printmaking, drawing and sculpture fed into one another; words joined images, movements were repeated like rituals.

In 1995, the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou and Bibliothèque Nationale de France devoted two distinct exhibitions to her graphic work, with drawings on one side, and prints and books on the other.

For the occasion, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France received an exceptional donation from the artist: some 100 plates covering the entirety of her production, a set of works that were subsequently enriched by regular gifts from Friends of the BnF.

As for Centre Pompidou's Graphic Art Office, it acquired recent drawings, mainly from the 1990s, to which were added multiple consecutive gifts from the artist, the Clarence Westbury Foundation and the American Friends of Centre Pompidou.

Today, Centre Pompidou holds 91 works (drawings, prints, sculptures and installations) and the BnF over 100 prints and eight artist's books. By bringing together these two complementary collections for the first time, the exhibition demonstrates how drawing and printmaking are interdependent for Louise Bourgeois and highlights the main themes throughout her work.

A chronological layout

The exhibition opens with her 1942 *Self-Portrait*, then presents her first prints from the 1940s, including the foundational portfolio *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947): short texts and printed images, between absurd tales and mental architecture.

Then come the labyrinth drawings with layers of black lines, evoking networks of nerves and muscular fibres ; followed by anthropomorphic architectures like *La Femme-Maison* (Fallen Woman) and organic forms, where anatomy and plants combine.

In the centre of the exhibition, the monumental *Extreme Tension* (2007) combines print, drawing and handwriting. The 11 large sheets deliver a poignant testimony on the ageing body, pain and existential anxiety. In direct resonance, the huge plates of *Turning Inwards* (2007) are presented to a French audience for the first time.

The exhibition closes with a series of works in red ink and fabric dye – the red of flesh, blood, embrace and motherhood – with pregnant figures that could be male or female, blurring the lines between genders.

Artist's books (*The Puritan*, *Ode à ma mère* [Ode to my mother], *Homely Girl*, *A Life*) and sculptures (*Janus*, 1968; *Topiary*, 1999; *Pregnant Woman*, 2003) are scattered throughout, a reminder of the close connection between drawing and sculpture.

Centre Pompidou Communication and Digital Media Department

Director
Geneviève Paire

Head of the Press Unit
Dorothée Mireux

Attachée de presse
Inas Ananou
inas.ananou@centrepompidou.fr

BnF

Director of Communications
Patrick Belaubre

**Head of the Press, Shoots and Media
Partnerships Department**
Elodie Vincent

Press Officer
Marie Borgen
marie.borgen@bnf.fr

centrepompidou.fr
[@CentrePompidou](https://www.instagram.com/CentrePompidou)
[#CentrePompidou](https://www.facebook.com/CentrePompidou)

See all our press kits and releases in
our online [press area](#)

bnf.fr
[@labnf](https://www.instagram.com/labnf)
[#labnf](https://www.facebook.com/labnf)
<https://www.bnf.fr/fr/presse>