

Zurich, October 2012

Press release: Between the Lines. Series of Graphics by Louise Bourgeois

7 November 2012 – 18 January 2013

Opening: 6 November 2012, 18.00

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) moved between different worlds during her lifetime. “Although I am French, I cannot imagine creating any of my works in France. All are American, from New York.” Born into a bourgeois and artistic family of tapestry dealers, she received an excellent education and knew the Paris Surrealists from a young age, leaving this formative milieu for the USA only after her marriage in 1938. Bourgeois’ lines in her 1947 diary show that the move was a profound crisis for her. The same year she translated her loneliness and isolation in post-WWII New York as an artist and as the mother of three small children into a seminal print project: *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* – the ‘drama of the self’, an illustrated book with nine etchings and nine parables by the artist. Bourgeois never abandoned its central theme: her works oscillate between deep intimacy and loud extroversion. In this they represent a transition from the language of abstract form to the narrative currents of the 1980s. Her life moving between different worlds is a constant thread in her work: “Has the day invaded the night, or has the night invaded the day?” – she asks rhetorically in her diary on 7 February 1995. Four years later she juxtaposed this question, as an aphorism, onto a plate overlaid with a fernlike structure and used this as one of nine dyptichs in the series *What is the Shape of this Problem?* (1999).

In the 1990s her activity was almost excessive, in both her sculptures and installations – the famous *Cells* – and in the area of prints. Her international fame now reached its highest point. Here Bourgeois remained true to the print medium, and over the years put together several outstanding portfolios with leading publishers such as Benjamin Schiff, Peter Blum and Jean Frémon. Just as in her prints Bourgeois deployed a significant range of formal criteria and demonstrated great technical accomplishment, her work – in the surrealist tradition – had a wide-ranging literary component. A notable number of graphic series are accompanied by her own texts, in various constellations: text and image can emerge either simultaneously or independently of one another. Here the plates represent independent formulae for the frequent theme of human fear in the texts, and never simply ‘illustrate’. No series is like another in appearance; each is carefully drafted according to its own principle and forms a unique unit. This is another indication of Bourgeois’ position as an artist at the threshold of the critical-of-tradition modern and the pluralistically-determined postmodern. All her stories play in the background of Bourgeois’ own biography. With her image-narratives, however, she never tries to convey a direct, pure message. On both the textual and the image levels, an enigma is always present.

After purchasing the important artist book *The Puritan* (1990) in 2010, the Collection of Prints and Drawings planned this exhibition to present the key printed works of Louise Bourgeois. Seven suites from 1947 to 2007 are shown, created using various techniques and mostly combined with the artist’s texts. Among them, thanks to the support of the Louise Bourgeois Studio, are found rarely-shown masterpieces and works from public and private collections in Switzerland and the USA. A rich programme of events accompanies the exhibition: guided tours are complemented by a talk by the famous Bourgeois expert Christiane Meyer-Thoss, and a staged reading of selected Bourgeois texts by Graham F. Valentine is planned.

A publication accompanies the exhibition: *Between the Lines. Graphikfolgen von Louise Bourgeois* [Beiträge aus der Graphischen Sammlung der ETH Zürich, Vol. 9], Text by Alexandra Barcal, Basel: Schwabe Verlag AG, 2012; 60 pages, with ca. 30 colour images, CH 20.-, ISBN 978-3-7965-2892-7. In German, with a summary in English.

For further information and visual materials:

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