

# Louise Bourgeois

Born 1911, Paris, France; died New York, New York, U.S., 2010





**Louise Bourgeois** was born on Christmas Day in Paris, France, and immigrated to the United States as a young adult in 1938. Throughout her seventy-year career, she wove her own childhood memories into her work. She made various types of artworks, including sculptures, installations, paintings, and drawings, and used many different kinds of materials.

Bourgeois is perhaps best known for her sculptures of spiders. She made many spider sculptures—from small-scale to large outdoor pieces that measure over three stories high. *The Nest*, seen below, was one of her earliest spider sculptures, and was made when the artist was in her eighties. It features a cluster of spiders nestled together.



Louise Bourgeois, *The Nest*, 1994

## Fun Fact!

Bourgeois's family restored **tapestries** (heavy cloths with designs or pictures woven into them). Before she became a famous artist, Bourgeois worked in her parents' tapestry workshop, drawing on the cloth (or sometimes weaving new fabric) to fill in the designs where they had become worn.

There is a connection between Bourgeois's childhood experiences working with tapestries, her choice of subject matter, and certain art-making practices. Bourgeois once said: "What is a drawing? It is a secretion, like a thread in a spider's web . . . It is a knitting, a spiral, a spider web, and other significant organizations of space."

## Explore

Describe the lines and shapes that you see in *The Nest*. For example, "I see a thin, curving line." Sketch a few of those lines and shapes in the space below.

## Create

When Bourgeois was young, her family's property was filled with animals of all kinds—including ducks, dogs, pigs, and a donkey. Her work often features animals, insects, and spiders.

To Bourgeois, the spider is a symbol of a motherly protector. She selected it as a symbol to represent her. What figure would you choose to represent you? Why? Make some sketches of your symbol below.



Front cover image: Louise Bourgeois, *The Nest*, 1994 (detail); collection SFMOMA, purchase through the Agnes E. Meyer and Elise S. Haas Fund and the gifts of Doris and Donald Fisher, Helen and Charles Schwab, and Vicki and Kent Logan; © 2021 The Easton Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

For more information about this work, watch *The Country Dog Gentlemen Travel to Extraordinary Worlds* at [sfmoma.org/countrydog](https://sfmoma.org/countrydog).