

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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1992 COLLECTORS COMMITTEE GIFTS ANNOUNCED

Washington, D.C. -- Four sculptures, part of a series of about sixty totemic works by American artist Louise Bourgeois, have been acquired for the National Gallery of Art by its Collectors Committee, Gallery director Earl A. Powell III announced today. The artist calls the works in this series personages, as each has a distinct personality.

Spring (1949), Mortise (1950), Untitled (1952), and The Winged Figure (1948, a gift of the artist cast in bronze in 1991) are vertical structures composed of painted blocks of carved wood or pieces of irregularly shaped wood or plaster elements that are stacked along a metal spine. Some measuring nearly six feet tall, the dramatic silhouettes and eccentric forms draw upon traditions of European surrealism, while anticipating minimal and post-minimal sculpture from the 1960s to the present.

"The personages series by Louise Bourgeois is among the most impressive achievements of American postwar sculpture, and we are elated to have this important, representative group," said Powell. "The sculptures are the first works of art by Bourgeois in our collection. At the age of eighty-one, this remarkable artist continues to blaze new directions in an extraordinarily productive and prescient career."

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Bourgeois has been exhibiting her art since the 1940s. This year her work appeared at Documenta, a major international exhibition of contemporary art in Kassel, Germany. Next year she will represent the United States at the Venice Biennale. Her sculpture was seen simultaneously last year in exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Carnegie International at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, and at a New York gallery. In these recent exhibitions, her materials and style ranged from marble and stone sculpture to multi-media environments called "cells."

Bourgeois traces the origins of her work and distinctive iconography to personal mythologies, symbols, and memories. The rounded, organic balsa wood shapes of Spring echo voluptuous, natural forms associated with regeneration. The abstract bronze extensions of The Winged Figure capture the sense of suspended flight of a bird or mythical being. A stacked painted wood column, Mortise relates to the constructivist tradition of sculpture, but also looks ahead to the minimalist movement of the 1960s. Untitled, three stacked, irregularly shaped plaster and wood columns, suggests anthropomorphic forms such as vertebrae.

Born in Paris in 1911, Bourgeois attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the Académie Julian, and the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière, where she worked with Fernand Léger, André Lhote, and Othon Friesz. In Paris she met the American art historian Robert Goldwater, a noted scholar of modern art. They married in 1938, moved to New York, and raised three sons.

Her first exhibitions were of paintings and drawings, initially in the late-cubist mode of her Parisian teachers. In the late 1940s Bourgeois gradually came under the influence of surrealism. In 1949, she held her first show of sculpture at New York's Peridot Gallery. Displayed were rough-hewn wooden planks and beams, described by critics as "introspective personages," "spare," and "starkly simplified."

The Gallery's personages sculptures will go on view in the East Building in mid-November.

In addition to donating major twentieth-century paintings and sculpture, the Collectors Committee has also established a curatorial discretionary fund for acquiring prints, drawings, and photographs. Gifts this year include photographs by Robert Frank, along with prints by Lucian Freud, Per Kirkeby, Alfred Leslie, and Cy Twombly, and illustrated books by Markus Lüpertz.

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