



## Louise's Last Year

Hugely prolific, eternally provocative, and considered by many to be the greatest female artist of the 20th century, Louise Bourgeois died this past May at age 98. During the last year of her life, photographer Alex Van Gelder shot hundreds of pictures of Bourgeois in her New York town house. "It wasn't just a matter of taking a portrait," says the Dutchman. "Louise saw it as an extension of her work." Seen here for the first time—along with tributes from friends and admirers—Van Gelder's intimate, unvarnished photographs were the last taken of Bourgeois. "It was a great honor and a great responsibility," he says. "I wanted to demonstrate her strength and her beauty—both of which she held on to until the very, very end."

Photographed by Alex Van Gelder

September 2010



August 2009

"When family members or loved ones traveled, Louise would open the atlas and find exactly the place where the person was going. She'd study which rivers were nearby, which mountains, which towns. If she loved you, she needed to be able to locate you in physical space."  
—Deborah Wye, curator of MoMA's 1982 Louise Bourgeois retrospective



*October 2009*

“About 10 years ago I went to one of the famous Sunday salons at Louise’s house on 20th Street. One artist brought a small sculpture, and Louise questioned its purpose, destroying it completely. By the time it was my turn, I was ready to flee, but she happened to like one of my pieces very much. She said, ‘Yes, that’s right.’ I felt incredibly relieved, as if I had passed the exam of my life.” —**artist Guillermo Kuitca**

“The first time I had dinner at Louise’s house, the appetizer was a bed of lettuce with pieces of octopus and banana sprinkled on top, followed by ham hocks, and a Klondike bar with alcohol poured over it for dessert. I had expected the conversation to be memorable, but it’s the menu that’s stayed with me to this day.” —**Wendy Williams, managing director, Louise Bourgeois studio**



*October 2009*

“Collaborating with Louise was a massive privilege, like holding hands with history. She proved that while most male artists reach their peak when they’re 40, 45—it’s a bit like sex, one big ejaculation—women keep coming. Louise just kept coming and coming and coming, right until the end.” —**artist Tracey Emin**





*January 2010*

“Louise was an incredibly careful listener, and she expected you to listen carefully as well. She would not repeat herself or explain things to you. You either got it or you did not. And if you did not, that was your problem.” —**Charlotta Kotik, curator of “Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, works 1982–1993”**



*October 2009*

“When I first met Louise, in 1997, my car stopped in front of her town house. She was waiting at the top of the steps. ‘Bonjour, Helmut —welcome!’ she said, and kissed me. It took only this one moment to know that we had similar souls, and that this would be the beginning not only of our collaboration but of a long friendship.” —**designer Helmut Lang**

“I once spent time with Louise on her couch, along with a stuffed pink Bourgeois giantess sculpture. Nearby was a red wax animal ear, or maybe a human shoulder blade. I was half apologizing about an obsession with the perfect blue, but Louise said, ‘Of course you must work until you have the right blue.’ I felt professional then and not crazy.” —**artist Jenny Holzer**

Photographed by **Alex Van Gelder**



*January 2010*

“Louise always gave me art when I came to her home—a sculpture, a drawing, a little painting or print. I began to think that I shouldn’t visit her so much because it might seem like I was coming to get a gift. For a little bit, I stayed away, but I missed her too much.”  
—collector **Agnes Gund**



*August 2009*

**“Louise had a direct access to her unconscious that only great artists and madmen have.” —Amei Wallach, codirector of Louise bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine**



*August 2009*

**“Like many great artists, from Picasso to Hockney, Louise retained the show-and-tell charm of childhood well into her 90s. Once, she invited me down into the lairlike basement of her Manhattan town house. There, in the dark, she slipped into my pants pocket a slender carving of a pair of eyes. I was flattered, surprised, stimulated—and her art will no doubt continue to do the same for many others.” —John Cheim, co-owner, New York’s Cheim & Read gallery**