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Louise Bourgeois : Feminist Dimensions
By

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Detail of the base of the
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Andrea Mantegna

St. Sebastian 1455/60^C

(Panel 26 X 11 ins)

Kunsthistorisches, Museum, Vienna.

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Introduction

"She has disavowed interest in the political dimensions of art, yet her own work is profoundly political in the best sense, it draws us into a space in which the dynamics of power and surrender, of gender identity, the circumscription of the body, and the relation to the mother are unavoidable".

Adrian Piper, "Locust of Memory" 1994 p.79

Bourgeois' work is not issue based, she does not align herself with any political movement or feminist ideology. Yet as Adrian Piper points out in the above statement her work is "Political in the best sense".

Creating art for Bourgeois is an important way of coping with life and dealing with emotional tensions. She works from a personal perspective, drawing on her own consciousness to gain insights into emotional relationships. Bourgeois explores personal psychological and emotional states but her work goes beyond self expression and has implications for a broader perspective. I have chosen to focus on the implications that her art has for feminist discourse.

Although Bourgeois works from a subjective viewpoint, she is socially and politically aware and this comes across in her work. She was involved in the civil rights movement in America and engaged in feminist activities in the 1960s and 70s. Her awareness of contemporary social and artistic concerns filters through into her work.

The fact that Bourgeois' work is based on personal experience gives her the ability to deal with issues in a subtle and complex manner. Her portrayal of unconscious impulses is evocative and integral. She avoids an over intellectualised approach to the unconscious. Her subjective approach puts the viewer in touch with their own

experiences and as a result examines issues in a way that has a strong visceral impact.

Bourgeois in her work transgresses and breaks down barriers. Her work cannot be easily categorised as it crosses many stylistic boundaries. This thesis will look at the way she breaks down patriarchal boundaries. The first chapter will look at the way her work displays her rebellion against her father and all forms of patriarchal domination. Chapter two will examine how through recourse to the unconscious Bourgeois devises strategies which undermine phallogentric biases. The final chapter then looks at the range of images in Bourgeois work which deal with the relationship between women and their environment.

Chapter One

Rebellion against the Father

Over the past fifty years Louise Bourgeois has built up a body of work which subverts conventional notions of stylistic development. Her creations range from minimal abstract pieces to complex installation assemblages. It is an eclectic body of work drawing elements from abstract expressionism, surrealism and classical sculpture. Bourgeois' work incorporates a wide array of materials and sculptural techniques. Her versatility and technical proficiency is evident in the highly finished works she creates. Carving, assemblage, modelling and casting are just some of the techniques that she uses. The range of effects she achieves within a particular media also demonstrates her versatility.

Although there are dramatic variations in media and style in Bourgeois art there are thematic links which can be seen throughout her work. She explores again and again states of psychological anxiety through her art. A theme that recurs in her work is her discomfort with paternal authority which she continually questions and subverts. Her art can be interpreted as a form of rebellion against the oppressive authority of her own father. This rebellion however extends beyond Bourgeois' personal experience and through her art she is able to question patriarchal authority that is prevalent in society and to respond to the repressed role of women in society.

Bourgeois emphasises the autobiographical nature of her art. At the Locust Of Memory Exhibition in New York Bourgeois showed a film self portrait that she made using

Rebellion against the father

Over the past fifty years, female sculpture has been a body of work which has been a conventional part of artistic development. Her sculpture ranges from abstract pieces to complex installations in sculpture as a body of work drawing elements of abstraction, expressionism, surrealism and classical sculpture. Her work has produced a wide array of materials, sculptural techniques, and versatility and proficiency as evident in the highly textured work of bronze, carving, sculpture, modeling and casting. Just some of the techniques that she uses. The work she has achieved within a professional field is characterized by vast life.

Although there are dramatic variations in style, in sculpture and there are thematic links to the work throughout her work. She explores again and again with a psychological anxiety through her work. A theme of rebellion in her work is her relationship with authority which she continually questions and challenges. Her art can be interpreted as a form of rebellion against the oppressive authority of her own father. Her work has always extended beyond her personal experience through her art and is able to connect with a society that is resistant to society and to the oppressed role of women in society.

Her work has been the subject of numerous exhibitions. At the height of her career, she has been recognized as a leading artist in her field.

photographs from old family albums. This film highlighted the personal nature of her work. In the film she says "All my work over the past 50 years has found its inspiration in my childhood". She goes on to say that her childhood has not lost any of its magic, mystery or drama. In fact she deals with the unresolved psychological tensions stemming from her childhood.

Louise Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911. Most of her childhood was spent in Choisy-Le-Roi where her parents ran a business selling and restoring old tapestries. It was in the family business that Bourgeois first put her creative skills to work, doing drawings for the tapestries that were to be prepared.

Among the details of her childhood which she focuses on is her relationship with her father. She describes her father as a flamboyant and domineering person. She traces a great deal of repressed anxiety and anger back to her love/hate relationship with him. While asserting his position as head of the household and preaching about the virtues of marital life her father had an affair with her English governess who lived in the family home. In a recent BBC Arena programme Bourgeois talked about the intense sense of betrayal she felt as a result of the affair. She felt betrayed not only by her father but by her governess who was employed to take care of her but showed more interest in her father. But she also expressed her frustration at her mother's and her family's reaction which was to turn a blind eye to the affair. Bourgeois resentment towards her father was due not only to his infidelity but also due to the fact that he had a cruel sense of humour and derived pleasure out of embarrassing and belittling her. She says that he stripped her of her self esteem. (Meyer-Thoss, 1992, p.187)

Robert Stoor, Louise Bourgeois' biographer describes her art as a process of dealing with the fact that she experiences emotions of great intensity. Through her art she is able to turn passive anxiety into physical and intuitive expression. She is then able to examine and organise her feelings in a manageable form and purge herself of some of the emotional anxiety that she feels.

The process of making art is also a way for her to rebel against her father. It contradicts the passive and submissive role that he accorded to her and she is able to challenge and subvert his authority through the images that she creates. It is therefore interesting to look at her work in relation to Lacan and the "Law of the Father".

Lacan proposed that social and cultural factors influenced the development of a person's identity. (Gross, 1990, p.14) As society is organised in a patriarchal structure it is governed by the law of the father. After the resolution of the Oedipus complex, when the mother is perceived to have been castrated, the phallus becomes the signifier of authority around which language and society is organised. Those who have the means to represent the phallus are men, as they possess penises and so they assume power and society is governed by the law of the father. As women do not have penises they cannot enter into the law of the father but can only imitate male modes of expression. They do not exist as speaking subjects in their own right, but signify absence of phallus and consequent power. In the law of the father femininity is defined in terms of passivity and castration. Bourgeois' work is a rebellion against this passive and castrated image of women that patriarchy endorses. She asserts herself as an active and aggressive voice who rebels against the restraints that patriarchy tries to impose on her and other women. Through her art she questions and aggressively attacks male domination.

Louise Bourgeois uses her art as a means of fighting against the loss of self esteem which her father provoked. Through art she is able to turn away from the role of a dutiful daughter who submits to the law of the father and subvert her fathers authority. Two incidents which she recalls taking place at the family dinner table are relevant to an understanding of the role Bourgeois' art plays in her rebellion against paternal authority. The first incident Bourgeois recalls is an example of the way her father humiliated and belittled her sexual identity:

"My father cut the shape of a girl out of a tangerine peel, and then he held it up and said 'Look everybody this is Louise. She has nothing! All she's got between her legs is a couple of white threads'. Everybody laughed at me."

(Meyer-Thoss, 1992, p.53)

The second incident she recalls illustrates the way she used her creative imagination to respond to the resentment that she felt towards her father, who undermined her self esteem:

"Once when we were sitting together at the dining table, I took white bread, mixed it with spit, and moulded a figure of my father. When the figure was done, I started cutting off the limbs with a knife. I see this as my first sculptural solution. It was right for the moment, and it helped me. It was an important experience and it certainly determined my future direction."

(Meyer-Thoss, 1992, p.53)

Through the simple act of moulding and cutting a piece of bread, Bourgeois was able to channel her resentment and anger into a creative impulse. She could transform herself from being a passive victim of paternal authority into an assertive and aggressive person, who could defend herself against any act of humiliation and belittlement.

Bourgeois started her artistic career expressing herself mainly through painting and drawing. She started working in three-dimensional forms in the 1950's. The physical process and resistance of materials that sculpture entails is a more satisfying way of dealing with states of emotional tension for her. In sculpture the mass weight and density of materials has to be considered. She found that through manipulating the physical qualities of various materials she could evoke emotional states in a visceral manner. Working with three dimensional materials required an aggressive energy in order to impose her vision on the media. The physical act of manipulating and mastering technical problems paralleled the emotional struggle to release herself from oppressive anxious states and assume control.

"Resistance to materials - there is a redemptive quality in this. One has the right to be aggressive: to cut and break for useful reasons and to create beauty."

(Klrili, Arts Magazine, Vol.63, 1986, p.75)

Bourgeois made the above comment in an interview with Alain Klrili. This acknowledges the cathartic effect that the physical process of working materials has for her.

"Destruction of the Father" (Pl. 1) is a large latex structure which Bourgeois made in 1974. It is a more sophisticated form of the creative impulse that she expressed in her childish bread-figure. This work is also an aggressive rebellion against her father in which Bourgeois turns passive anxiety into a physical and aggressive presence. She made drawings of a figure devouring children. In "Destruction of the Father" the Saturn myth is reversed. The children here devour their father. This installation shows the aftermath of a family meal where the children decide that they cannot put up with the domineering authority of their father any longer and

...three-dimensional forms in the ... process and resistance of materials that ... is a more estivating way of dealing with ... emotional antagonist ... and density of materials has to be considered ... that through manipulating the physical qualities of various materials she could evoke emotional states in a ... manner working with three dimensional materials ... an aggressive energy in order to impose her vision on the world. The physical act of manipulating and ... technical problems paralleled the emotional struggle ... release herself from oppressive anxious states and ...

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...made the above comment in an interview ... This acknowledges the cathartic effect of the physical process of working materials for ... "Baptism of the Father" (1911) ... which Bourgeois made in 1941 ... articulated form of the creative impulse ... released in her children's work. However, the work ... an aggressive rebellion against her father ... Bourgeois turns passive anxiety into a physical ... aggressive presence ... she made drawings of ... devouring children. In "Baptism of the Father" ... Satan myth is reversed. The children are devouring ... This materialization shows the element of ... that where the children decide that they cannot ... the distinct authority of their father ...

devour him. Bourgeois depicts the scene after the carnivorous meal when all that remains of the father are mutilated body parts that the globular latex forms suggest.

It is through transforming internal psychological states into physical presences that Bourgeois is able to purge herself of their repressive elements and move from a state of passivity to a state of control and aggression.

"My sculpture allows me to re-experience the fear, to give it a physicality so I am able to hack away at it. Fear becomes a manageable reality. Sculpture allows me to re-experience the past to see the past in its objective, realistic proportion.

Fear is a passive state. The goal is to be active and take control. The move is from the passive to the active. If the past is not negotiated in the present, you do not live. You go through the emotions like a zombie, and life passes you by."

(Meyer-Thoss, 1992, p.195)

Bourgeois denies any interest in materials and techniques for their own sake. She is not interested in being true to materials. Technically she is very skilled. The process and finish of the work is important to her art. The choice of materials she uses to give expression to her ideas is also central to creating the impact she desires. She does not exploit the natural shape or innate imagery of material but projects her own vision on them and uses the qualities of obduracy or compliance that the materials have to channel her emotional energy.

"I avoid the grain and polish of wood because their romantic associations are disturbing. This kind of 'how wonderful nature is' attitude depends on the accidental, whereas the work of art is primarily voulu, and should be a matter of the artist's decision."

(Meyer-Thoss, 1992, 177)

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...kind of "how wonderful nature is" attitude
...depends on the accident. Whereas the work of
...is primarily visual, and should be a material
...the artist's decision."

(Meyer-Thoss, 1971, p. 107)

The aggressive physical energy needed to work hard materials such as marble can give vent to violent emotional impulses. There is also a fragility associated with working stone as it requires technical control in order to avoid creating fault lines which will destroy the work.

"Simultaneously frustrating to the sculptor's direct intention and hypersensitive to uncalculated gesture or unforeseen injury, stone in its very make-up thus invokes a dialectic of aggression and vulnerability that is Bourgeois' central pre-occupation."

(Stoor, 1989, p.207)

Robert Stoor highlights the importance of materials and the processes employed in Bourgeois' work. Just as marble is used to give expression to a polarity between aggression and vulnerability her choice of other media is determined by their potential to evoke visceral reactions. The liquid media such as latex which she uses in "Destruction of the Father" entails a pouring process and a transformation from a soft uncontrolled state to a hardened more resistant form.

It is not only through de-constructing images of the father figure that Bourgeois rebels against male authority which she finds oppressive. She attempts to subvert patriarchal authority through strategies of ridicule. Her versatility extends beyond working with physical materials into performance art. She devised several gallery performance pieces to work in conjunction with exhibitions she had. In these performances she introduces an element of ridicule.

She held a performance event called "A Banquet/Fashion Show of Body Parts" (Pl.. 2) in 1978 in conjunction with the installation "Confrontation". This installation was a later manifestation of the cannibal feast that "Destruction

The... also such... There is also a... working alone as it... avoid creating...

Simultaneously... direct intention... calculated... its very... progression and... central pre-occupation.

Factor, 1952, p. 12

Robert... processes employed... used to give... and vulnerability... by their potential... media such as... father's... a soft... form.

It is not only... figure that... and finds... authority... extends beyond... performance... pieces to work... these performers...

She held a... of Body... installation... level...

of the Father" depicted. The performance dealt with a sense of abandonment felt by young and old and recalled her childhood feelings of betrayal. She invited figures that represented male authority in the art world which she moved in to take part in the performance. Art critics, gallery owners and big collectors were among the performers who she dressed in costumes that represented the absurdity and tragedy experienced in abandonment. The globular latex forms on light fabrics that the performers wore rendered them ridiculous and grotesque. Robert Stoor commented that in a sense the critics and other performers were knowing victims but were not aware of how radical the performance would be and that in a way Bourgeois used the event in order to ridicule male authority that she found oppressive. 'Ridicule Kills' was her maxim (Finch 1994).

Even the critics and gallery people who were not involved in performing were subject to Bourgeois' ridicule. Surrounding the performance area were wooden structures that she described as symbolic caskets. The spectators were seated in these coffin like structures which related to death in abandonment. Bourgeois thus introduced a sense of ridicule and entrapment of the audience.

The pink rubber wall relief entitled "Mamelles" (1991) is also a work that uses ridicule to good effect. The piece displays a series of breast-like forms which are used to poke fun at "Le Homme Femme", a term Bourgeois uses to describe "men who get ahead in life by using women" (Finch 1994). The form of the work is based on a classical architectural frieze but just as in "Destruction of the Father" she subverts a classical narrative to rebel against male authority. Instead of a procession of heroic acts and warriors and Gods that classical friezes depict this frieze shows the breasts of all the women that a man has used and abused.

"'Mamelles' portrays a man who lives off the women he courts, making his way from one to the next. Feeding from them but returning nothing, he loves only in a consumptive and selfish manner"

(Kotik, 1994, p.24)

All of Bourgeois' work acts as a means of asserting herself and overcoming experiences of anxiety. Gerry Gorovoy, Louise's studio assistant described her process of working as an attempt to deal with daily anxieties which resulted in the creation of artworks (Finch 1994). For Bourgeois the act of creating is as important as the end result. Through her work she is able to examine uncomfortable feelings and memories and exorcise them. It is a process of rejecting a passive, powerless role that patriarchy accords to her and other women.

Her work is a way of empowering herself and reacting against that which she finds oppressive. She is able to organise her emotions by choosing metaphors which allow her to express and release feelings of anxiety and aggression.

Repetition is an important factor in her art. There are thematic links running through all her work and she often creates several versions of a piece. "The Confrontation" is a later version of "Destruction of the Father" which relates back to her childhood 'breadman'. Robert Stoor contends in the BBC Arena programme repetition is for Bourgeois a way of playing out 'seizure of emotions'. It is also a way of organising chaotic emotions in a structured and orderly way. She releases emotional tension in a positive and aggressive manner through physically working materials. The control and high level of craftsmanship which she exhibits in her methods is indicative of her determination to find emotional stability and power.

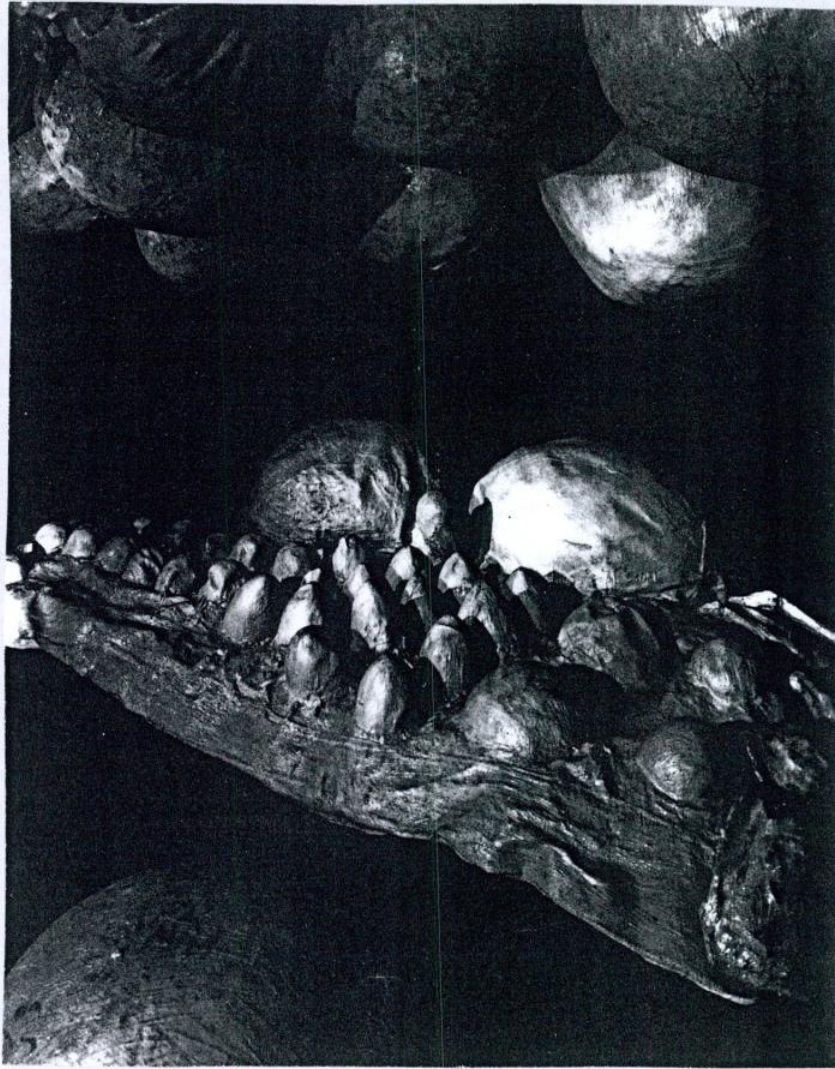


Plate 1

Destruction of the Father 1974
Latex, plaster, mixed media
(2378 X 303.3 X 248 cm)





Plate 2

The Confrontation (A Banquet/Fashion
Show of Body Parts) 1978
Performed Hamilton Gallery of
Contemporary Art, New York.



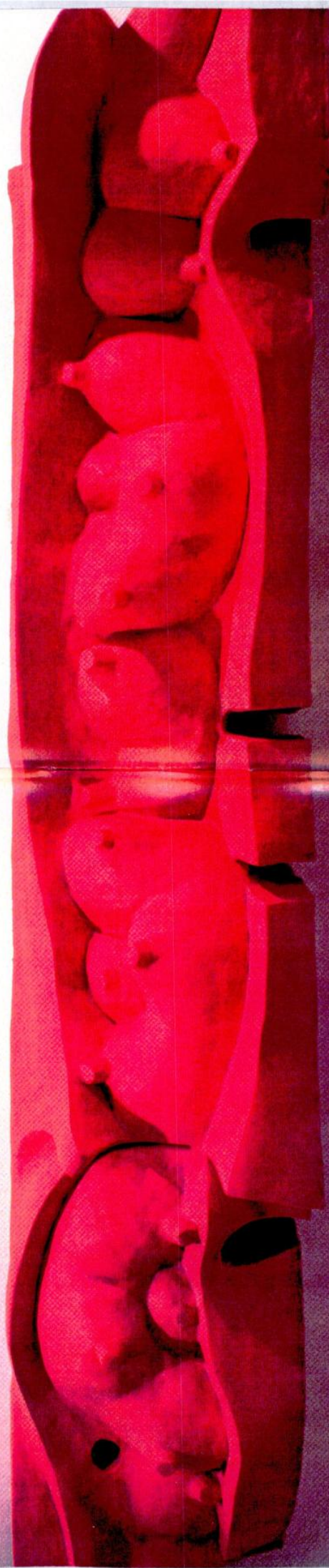


Plate 3

Mamelles 1991

Rubber

(48.2 X 303.8 X 48.2 cm)

Chapter Two
Transgressing Phallogentric Boundaries

Bourgeois draws on the unconscious to subvert phallogentric and patriarchal concepts. She challenges the phallogentric bias of the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan. She produces an alternative vision of sexuality that does not privilege either sex. She uses body fragmentation and abjection to draw attention to the splintered subjectivity of the human condition. By projecting the sense of the splintered subject in a continual process of re-formulating itself she subverts essentialist attitudes to subjectivity. Patriarchal ideologies are based on the idea that certain attributes are fixed according to gender and masculine attributes lead to man having an authoritative and privileged role in society. This essentialist attitude is undermined by probing into the unconscious and exposing the fact that there are many contradictory and subversive unconscious impulses which influence the way we react. It shows that we are not rational unified subjects with fixed attributes as patriarchy proposes but are constantly changing and re-constituting our sense of identity as unconscious impulses demand.

Most of Louise Bourgeois' sculptures in some way refer to the human body. Sometimes the references are direct, when she uses fragmented body parts which look like classical sculpture forms. In other of her works the references are more subtle, through forms that seem almost abstract she evokes a sense of the human body. The bio-morphic forms in some of her works suggest the internal body and in a sense all her work reflects the internal emotional life of the human body. It is both a physical and psychological

Merleau-Ponty's drawing of the relationship between the
 qualitative and quantitative aspects of the world is
 phenomenological in nature. He does not give us a
 and tacit. She proposes an alternative vision of
 that does not give us either. She says that
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 situated subjectivity of the human condition.
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Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the human body
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 the use of the human body parts which look like
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 evokes a sense of the human body. The
 some of her works suggest the lateral body
 all her work reflects the lateral
 human body. It is both a physical and

presence that Bourgeois creates through diverse sculptural forms.

The body has been conceived by many contemporary writers such as Foucault, Derrida (Kearney,1986) and Irigaray (Weldon,1989), as a political and cultural object through which relations of power and resistance are played out. Although Bourgeois is an artist who works from a personal perspective through her use of the human form she raises issues relating to gender, identity and sexuality. She tackles these issues from a female perspective which challenges patriarchal attitudes.

Patriarchy traditionally associated the female body with physical and sensual attributes and relegated it to an inferior position in relation to the mental and intellectual faculties which were associated with the male. Bourgeois' work transgresses binary divisions between intellectual and physical attributes of the body and between male and female. She challenges these polarities by drawing on psychoanalytic theories and imagery to reveal the unconscious drives that lie behind our conscious selves and lead us constantly to reformulate a sense of our identity.

Psychoanalysis conceived the human body as a biological entity but also a psychological, social and cultural entity. Psychoanalytical theory is based on the idea that beneath our conscious daily social interactions there exists a dynamic active play of desires that are inaccessible to our rational and logical selves (Gross,1990). Bourgeois' work reveals these desires.

The images that Bourgeois uses to express unconscious impulses relate to her personal experiences but they are also often images that relate to psychoanalytic theory and are accessible to the collective unconscious. Breasts,

...the body has been conceived by many contemporary theorists
such as Foucault, Barthes (Kleinman, 1988) and others
(Weidman, 1989), as a political and cultural object: a site
which relations of power and resistance are played out.
Although Foucault is an author who works from a post-
perspective through the use of the human form and related
issues relating to gender, identity and sexuality,
lacking these issues from a female perspective
challenges patriarchal attitudes.

Particularly traditionally associated with the male body,
physical and sensual attributes and related to
interior position in relation to the world,
intellectual faculties which were associated with
Foucault's work transgresses binary divisions
intellectual and physical attributes of the body
between male and female. She challenges these positions
by drawing on psychoanalytic theories and theory
the unconscious drives that lie behind our conscious
and lead us constantly to rearticulate a sense of
identity.

Psychoanalysts conceived the human body as a biological
entity but also a psychological, social and cultural
entity. Psychoanalytical theory is based on the
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exists a dynamic interplay of desires that
inaccessible to our rational and logical
(Garcia, 1990). Bourgeois work reveals these desires
the fact that Bourgeois uses to express unconscious
impulse relate to her personal experience but she
also often makes that relate to psychoanalytic theory
are necessary to the collective unconscious.

penises, eyes, ears and mouths are forms that re-occur frequently in her work and are parts of the body that are of great importance in psychoanalytic theory. They are erotogenic parts of the body where the internal and external body surfaces meet. At these junctions libidinal energy is evident as they are areas of the body where an attempt to satisfy needs and desires take place by either incorporating or expelling erotic objects. By focusing on the erotogenic zones of the body Bourgeois is able to draw attention to suppressed sub-conscious urges that lie behind conscious behaviour.

She, like earlier surrealist artists, sought to reveal primal urges in her art and subvert concepts of man as a rational being. Her work owes a lot to surrealism. She was influenced by the devices that early surrealists used to reveal unconscious urges. Like Bourgeois psychoanalytic theory was important to their understanding of the unconscious. Freud believed that the unconscious could only be revealed in distorted fragmented or censored forms as the unconscious was separated from consciousness by a barrier of censorship, (Freud,1978). This barrier comes into play with the resolution of the oedipal complex, when the superego represses a forbidden desire for the mother. Memory traces are laid down in this primary act of repression which then connects and associates with subsequent experiences.

The repressed impulses of the unconscious constantly strive to find a means of expression and to break through the barrier of censorship into consciousness. It was for this reason that Freud was greatly interested in dreams. In the relaxed state of sleep the barrier of censorship is not as strong and through distortion and disguise unconscious impulses can be expressed in dreams. Freud identified two primary means of disguise that the unconscious used to gain expression: condensation and displacement. In

... of the body where the energy is evident as they are aware of the body where an attempt to satisfy needs and desires take place by means of incorporating or externalizing stimuli objects by focusing on the erotic zones of the body. Freud's theory is also in line with attention to suppressed sub-conscious wishes that manifest in conscious behaviour.

She, like earlier surrealistic artists, sought to reveal primal urges in her art and subvert concepts of morality and rational being. Her work owes a lot to surrealism, which was influenced by the devices that early surrealists used to reveal unconscious wishes. Like Breton's psychoanalytic theory was important to their understanding of the unconscious. Freud believed that the unconscious could only be revealed in distorted fragments of dreams, as the unconscious was separated from consciousness by a barrier of censorship. (Freud, 1917). This barrier also plays with the resolution of the original conflict. The repressed wishes are forbidden desire for the repressed. Her traces are laid down in this primary and secondary repression which then connects and associates with subsequent experiences.

The repressed wishes of the unconscious constantly seek to find a means of expression and to break through the barrier of censorship into consciousness. It was for this reason that Freud was greatly interested in dreams, which are a relaxed state of sleep the barrier of censorship is weakened and through distortion and disguise unconscious wishes can be expressed in dreams. These wishes are the primary means of discharge that the unconscious seeks to find in the form of a dream and displacement.

condensation two or more ideas form a composite image. This composite image takes some features from each idea and excludes other features to disguise the impulse. Displacement is when ideas avoid censorship by transferring meaning to different images.

Andre Breton and the members of the Surrealist movement sought, through their art and lives to break down the barriers of censorship and release suppressed unconscious impulses. They hoped that through this liberating process the body and mind could be freed of the controls that social order and culture imposed on human behaviour. It was hoped that a new concept of man which subverted the idea of him as a unified rational being would be created. Freud's theories on the unconscious and dream interpretation were therefore of great interest to the Surrealists. Processes of condensation and displacement were incorporated into their work as a means of releasing unconscious impulses and creating a new reality which went beyond conscious reality: sur-reality.

Bourgeois' progressive form of surrealism also breaks down barriers of censorship and is influenced by the way earlier surrealists incorporated processes of displacement and condensation into their work. The latent forgotten significance of objects and repressed desires/needs are revealed through presenting objects and figurative elements in a way that divorces them from their natural function. Images that evoke new and unexpected presences are created.

Just as the earlier Surrealists drew on psychoanalytic theory and imagery Bourgeois also uses them in order to express unconscious impulses. She, however, always asserts an independent spirit and feels free to re-interpret, challenge and subvert psychoanalytic imagery .

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...other factors...
...displacement...
...meaning to different images.

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Challenging the Phallogentric

The psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan have defined female sexuality in terms of lack. Central to the process of forming a sexual identity in their work is the theory of castration. They proposed that a child perceives the anatomical difference between the sexes to be due to the fact that the female genitals have been cut off. A boy gives up his incestuous desire for his mother due to the perceived threat of castration from his father, while a girl recognises her castrated state and therefore identifies with her mother.

Within the feminist movement there has developed many diverse discourses which try to address questions of femininity, female desire and sexuality in a more positive light (Weldon, 1989 Ch.3). Psychoanalytic theories of human identity are important to feminism although they are phallogentric, because they acknowledge the social and cultural influences which affect the human psyche. Feminism therefore tries to break down the phallogentric bias that is pervasive in psychoanalysis and society.

Bourgeois in her work challenges phallogentric bias through the way she subverts phallic forms. In psychoanalytic theory the phallus represents male authority and superiority. In Bourgeois' work however the phallus is just another erotogenic zone which is no more important than any other erotogenic zone.

"Fillette" (Pl. 4) is a latex sculpture that Bourgeois made in 1968. At the time the direct erotic nature of this phallic form was considered shocking. The piece is a rough representation yet the title of this work translates as little girl. Bourgeois presented the work in two ways: hanging from a meat hook where it appears to be a repellent and frightening form. She also showed it as a form to be cradled in your arms, it then becomes an object of

is especially in terms of lack of... of forming a sexual identity in their work as the... contraction. They proposed that a child... anatomical difference between the sexes is... fact that the female genitalia have been cut off... given up his incestuous desire for his mother due to the... perceived threat of castration from his father who... girl recognizes her castrated state and therefore... identifies with her mother.

Within the feminist movement there has developed... diverse discourses which try to address questions... femininity, female desire and sexuality in a more... light (Weldon, 1988, Ch. 3). Psychoanalytic... human identity are important to feminist... phallicentric, because they acknowledge... cultural influences which affect... Feminist therefore tries to break down the... bias that is pervasive in psychoanalytic... and society.

Bourgeois in her work challenged phallic... the way she subverts phallic... theory the phallic represents male... superiority. In Bourgeois work however... just another eroticized zone which... than any other eroticized zone.

Phillips (1981) is a... At the time the... phallic form was considered... representation yet the... phallic girl. Bourgeois presented the work... ranging from a... and phallic form... in your... then become...

affection like a child's doll. Through the work Bourgeois expresses her mixed feelings towards the phallus and sexual relationships; feelings of fear and repulsion, but also affection and a desire to protect. The piece subverts Freuds' theory of female castration by inverting it. Freud proposed that the little girl's doll acted as a substitute for her genital deficiency. Here the phallus acts as a substitute for the little girl's doll. Bourgeois' use of the phallus is not as a privileged signifier but is a representation of male sexuality.

In works such as "Janus Fleuri" (Pl. 6) and "Hanging Janus" Bourgeois undermines the concept of the phallus as a signifier of authority by portraying the penis in the limp posture. The rounded forms of the "Janus" sculptures also suggest female sexuality. The phallus in these works like so many of Bourgeois' works is transformed into a hybrid form which denies the hierarchical position accorded to it in psychoanalytic theory.

"Blind Man's Bluff" (Pl. 5) is another example of how the phallus in Bourgeois' work becomes a cross gendered form. The rounded polished marble protrusions appear like emerging swollen fleshy forms and are breast like but also phallic in form.

In a review of "Locust of Memory" works 1982 - 1992 Mignon Nixon made the following comment:

"A number of works in the Brooklyn show, including "Blind Man's Bluff" (1984), "Nature Studies" (1984), "Mamelles" (1991) and "Untitled With Growth" (1989), like many of Bourgeois' earlier series employs strategies of conflation and doubling, splitting and multiplying to subvert the phallogocentric body by turning it into a multiple part object - body."

She goes on to say:

...theoretical, feelings of loss and desire to protect...
...theory of female castration by...
...proposed that the little girl's body is...
...for her desired femininity... Here the phallic...
...symbol for the little girl's body...
...the phallic is not as a...
...representation of male sexuality.

In works such as "James Elster" (1971) and "Hansel and Gretel"
... Bourgeois understands the concept of the phallic as
... symbol of authority by portraying the phallic in the
... posture. The rounded forms of the phallic...
... suggest female sexuality. The phallic in these works
... so many of Bourgeois' works is transformed into a hybrid
... form which denies the hierarchical position...
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"Blind Man's Bluff" (1971) is another example of...
... phallic in Bourgeois' work becomes a cross gendered...
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... phallic in form.

In a review of "Locust of Memory" (1982) Nixon...
... Nixon made the following comment:

"A number of works in the Brooklyn show...
... including "Blind Man's Bluff" (1971), "The...
... Progress" (1984), "Magical" (1971) and "United...
... With Growth" (1971). Like many of Bourgeois'...
... earlier series employ strategies of...
... and doubling, splitting and...
... suggest the phallic body by...
... a multiple part of her body.

"In Bourgeois' work the phallus becomes penis or in other words slips from its status as privileged signifier to be one more object of aggression and desire" (Nixon, Women's Arts Magazine, Sept/Oct 1994, p.22)

The hybrid phallic forms in Bourgeois' work evoke a sense of primal energy that fluctuates between anxious and tender urges. She creates forms which suggest a pre-Oedipal state, where polarities between male and female do not exist but there is a constant presence of libidinal energy and ceaseless yearning for gratification. Bourgeois breaks the barrier of censorship and enters into unconscious states. She also breaks down phallogentric biases and brings us back to a pre-sexual time where there is a fusion of male and female libidinal energy.

The Fragmented Body

The multiple and hybrid forms in Bourgeois' art undermines the sense of singular unified subjectivity that patriarchal ideologies depend upon. The fragmented body in her work also emphasises a splintered subjectivity.

Although most of Bourgeois' work refers to the human body it is never the entire body that is represented but a fragmented body. When removed from a natural context and presented in a de-constructed manner the body takes on new meaning.

In an essay in "Corporal Politics" Heleaine Posner said:

"The dismembered body is a sight for investigation for some of our most urgent contemporary concerns including sexism, sexual identity and reproductive rights".

(Posner, 1992, p.22)

The hybrid phallic form in Bourgeois' work... of primal energy that fluctuates between... states, where polarities between male and female... and constitutes yearning for gratification. Bourgeois... the barrier of masculinity and exists into... states. She also breaks down phallicentric... times us back to a pre-sexual time where there is... of male and female libidinal energy.

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Although most of Bourgeois' work refers to the female... it is never the entire body that is represented... fragmented body. When removed from a natural context... presented in a de-contextualized manner the body... meaning.

In an essay in "Corporal Politics" Helene Feuer...

"The fragmented body is a... investigation for some of our most... contemporary concerns including sexual... identity and reproductive rights."

Bourgeois' work touches on some of these issues. The fragmented body captures a sense of dislocation and isolation that people experience in contemporary society. Heleaine Posner also said that the use of the body to express disconnection is most often revealed in the work of women and gay men who are outside the white male power system. The objectification of women's bodies which pertains throughout Western culture is at odds with the average woman's life experience. Women therefore experience their bodies in a disjointed and non-holistic sense.

The fragmented body also serves a psychological purpose. It breaks down the illusion of the self as a unified whole which our conscious selves project and emphasises the fragmented nature of our unconscious. The fractured body highlights the physical realisation that we consist of numerous organs which each have their own needs and desires.

The part body-object evolved through surrealist reaction to Breton's call to 're-establish man as psychology instead of anatomy', (Balaktan, 1986, p.62). The fragmented body heightens the physical presence of various parts of the body and emphasises their psychoanalytic significance. Even in Bourgeois' most abstracted forms there is a strong sense of the corporeal body and in her figurative works the attention to detail accentuates their physical presence. Bourgeois like the Surrealists was not interested in transcending physical reality but wished to show how the physical and psychological aspects of the human body are inextricably linked at an unconscious level. The fragmented body breaks down the polarities between intellectual and sensual aspects of human existence. It displaces fantasy and desire from something that is cerebral and symbolic and places them in the domain of the

...the body is not just a passive object of scientific inquiry, but a site of power and resistance. The fragmented body also serves a political purpose, as it challenges the dominant narrative of the self as a unified, coherent entity. In this sense, the fragmented body is a form of protest, a way of saying 'no' to the idea of a single, stable identity. The fragmented body is also a site of desire, a place where the self is constantly in flux, always becoming something new. This is the body of the postmodern subject, a body that is always in the process of being made and remade.

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material. It emphasises the physical and emotional aspects of unconscious impulses:

"The part object body speaks of the impreciousness of the drives, to the rapacity of their demands, to the way the body can, in the grip of fantasy be driven, cannibalised and shattered."

(McEvelley, 1989, p.218)

Works such as "Untitled (With Growth)" (Pl. 7) captures the unconscious urges and impulses that the above quote references.

Among the most striking use of the fragmented body is "Nature Studies", (Pl. 8). The individual features of this sphinx-like creature seem to correspond to natural shapes yet the juxtaposition of both animal and human features and male and female attributes gives the piece a disturbing and surreal feel. The animal does not act as a symbol of authority as the ancient hermetic beasts did. This creature desperately tries to assert its self despite its headless state and a body weighted down by three sets of heavy breasts. The muscles in its body are tensed in a futile attempt to appear hostile. The beast seems to represent the confused, alienated and isolated experiences of contemporary existence in a world where there are no longer absolutes.

Through the fragmented body Bourgeois is able to transgress polarities between mental and physical attributes and therefore between masculine and feminine. In doing so she transgresses the boundaries in which phallogentric and patriarchal ideologies work and challenges them.

Abjection

Bourgeois also challenges polarities and boundaries of the phallogentric body through the introduction of the abject in her work. In "Power of Horror - An essay on Abjection"

Julia Kristeva describes abjection as the underside of Lacan's symbolic order. The symbolic order is formed through the suppression of unconscious impulses in order to create the illusion of a unified rational self. The subject disowns part of itself in order to gain a stable self. The symbolic is dependent on the oppositional relations between subject and object. Abjection however draws attention to the impossibility of forming clear-cut borders, between order and disorder. It emphasises the impossibility of transcending our corporal existence.

Bodily waste is one way that the abject manifests itself. Body fluids are produced through the natural biological process. There are a lot of social taboos and forms of censorship relating to them. An attempt is made to distance ourselves from our bodily functions as they draw attention to our corporal nature and the fact that we are made up of diverse impulses, all of which create waste products. The body's waste products cannot easily be defined as either subject or object. While they are by-product of the subject they are not acknowledged as an essential part of a person.

Bourgeois in her work does not engage in the denial of bodily functions. She is interested in breaking down polarities between the physical and psychological aspects of the body. Through her work she makes an analogy between times of intense emotional energy and body fluids. This is evident in the installation called "Precious Liquids" (Pl. 9/10) that she made for Documenta 9. She made this statement in relation to the work:

"Here we are dealing with bodily functions; when we are in a tense state, our muscles tighten, when they relax and the tension goes down, a liquid is released. Intense emotions become physically liquid. That's where the title comes from. So it is all a matter of being in touch with the flowing of liquids."

(Stier, Artforum Sept. 1994, p.86)

...the subject of itself in order to...
...the symbol is dependent on the...
...relationship between subject and object...
...the impossibility of forming...
...between order and disorder...
...necessity of transcending our corporeal...

body waste in one way that the subject manifests...
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process. There are a lot of actual bodies and...
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product of the subject they are not acknowledged as...
essential part of a person.

Biologists do not work does not waste as the...
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potentialities between the physical and psychological...
of the body. Through her work she makes an analogy...
lines of intense emotional energy and...
is evident in the installation called...
(1) With this and the documents...
statement in relation to the work.

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we are in a tense state, our muscles...
when they relax and the tension...
liquid is released. Intense emotions...
physically liquid. That's where the...
from. So it is all a matter of...
with the flowing of liquids.

In the centre of the "Precious Liquids" (Pl. 9,10) installation is placed a child's bed with a little puddle of water on it and a drain towards the foot of the bed. Above the bed on steel poles hang many glass objects. They represent the various liquids of the body: sweat; blood; vomit; urine, tears etc.. Some are closed like drops while others are opened like funnels and act as metaphors for the muscles of the body.

Bourgeois described the work as a child who knows only fear but grows up to find passion. She chooses to show this development through the liquids of the body as it can then be seen as both a psychological and physical journey and one that takes place both at a conscious and unconscious level.

The horror of 'signs of sexual difference' is another category of abjection that Kristeva outlines. It is represented through the cultural taboo of incest and the abhorrence of menstrual blood which exists in many cultures. Sexual difference focuses on the division between the subject and its body but also the merging of itself with others through sexual acts. Castration is an attempt to bring about a binary opposition that can expel any uneasiness about subject/object relations. Bourgeois in her work however breaks down divisions and merges the two sexes. She has no inhibitions about confronting sexual difference.

By confronting the abject in her work Bourgeois is able to move away from oppositional and binary attitudes to the body that phallogentric and patriarchal ideologies project. She refuses to deny the physicality of our existence and rejects the polarity between physical and psychological aspects of the body.

The various organs of the body are arranged in a certain order and are connected by a network of blood vessels. The brain is the center of the nervous system and is connected to the rest of the body by nerves. The heart pumps blood throughout the body. The lungs take in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. The stomach and intestines digest food. The kidneys filter waste from the blood. The skin protects the body from the environment. The muscles and bones provide support and movement. The reproductive system is responsible for the production of offspring.

Bohrer described the work as a child who knows only the difference between day and night. She chooses to stay in the dark. The development through the stages of the body and the mind is seen as both a psychological and physical journey. One that takes place both at a conscious and unconscious level.

The horror of signs of sexual difference is represented through the cultural codes of the body. The body is a site of resistance and difference. Sexual difference focuses on the division between the subject and the body. The body is not itself with others through sexual acts. Castro-Alamancos attempts to bring about a binary opposition that can exist in any uneasiness about subject-object relations. In her work however breaks down divisions and makes the two sexes. She has no taboos about confronting difference.

By confronting the subject in her work Bohrers is able to move away from oppositional and binary structures. The body that challenges and partitions ideological work. She refuses to deny the physicality of our existence. She rejects the polarity between physical and psychological aspects of the body.

"Arch of Hysteria" (Pl. 11) is a good example of how she deals with the abject body and undermines patriarchal biases. The hysteric is traditionally portrayed as a woman. In an interview with Pat Stier (Artforum, Sept 94, p.127) Bourgeois said that since the time of Jean Martin Charcot all disease was attributed to hysteria and hysteria attributed to women. Her work contradicts this tradition by portraying the hysteric as male. She has presented the arched body on a mattress with the inscription "J' t'aime" written all over it. Above the decapitated body is placed a fret saw. The juxtaposition of images of love and violence suggests sexual deviance and disease synonymous with contemporary horror of sexually transmitted diseases (for example the widespread paranoia relating to aids).

Around the outside of the "precious liquid" installation is the inscription "Art is A Guarantee of Sanity". For Bourgeois it is a guarantee of sanity because it allows for the expression of unconscious impulses which she sees as important. Through the exploration of the unconscious, insight into human motivation can be gained. This allows her to challenge values and codes of behaviour that she finds oppressive.

Bourgeois used fragmentation to express a connection between a corporal existence and our emotional and psychological entities. She also uses it as an expression of alienation and dislocation that people and in particular women experience in society. Their bodies in a patriarchal society have been portrayed as objects of desire for men and women's subjective experience is often at odds with the image purveyed.

Abjection is also a reflection of the lack of control and alienation that women feel in relation to their bodies in a patriarchal world. In works such as "Precious Liquids"

...with the body and mind were separated
...The hysteric is traditionally portrayed as a woman
...in an interview with her sister, Julia, and her mother,
...Bougeira said that since the time of Jean Martin, the
...all disease was attributed to hysteria and hysteria
...attributed to women. Her work contradicted this theory
...by portraying the hysteric as male. She has provided
...attached body on a mattress with the inscription
...at times, wiped all over it. Above the body
...body is placed a first bed. The juxtaposition of the
...love and violence suggests sexual deviance and the
...synonymous with contemporary notion of sexually transmitted
...disease (for example, the widespread paranoia
...atlas.

Around the outside of the "gradual liquid" hysteric
...the inscription "All is a guarantee of sanity" is written
...Bougeira it is a guarantee of sanity because it is
...the expression of unconscious impulses which are
...important. Through the explanation of the hysteric
...insight into human motivation can be gained. This insight
...her to challenge values and codes of behavior and the
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Bougeira used fragmentation to express a connection
...between a corporeal existence and an emotional
...psychological entities. She also uses it as an expression
...of alienation and dislocation that people and their
...women experience in society. Their bodies in a patriarchal
...society have been portrayed as objects of lust and
...and women's subjective experience is often at odds with the
...image portrayed.

Alienation is also a reflection of the lack of control
...alienation that women feel in relation to their bodies
...a patriarchal world. In works such as "The Gradual Liquid"

and "Arch of Hysteria" there is a sense of being out of control which is reflected through bodily processes. We are subject to intense emotional and physical urges over which we have little influence and this is conveyed in these works. This can be interpreted as a lack of empowerment that women feel. It also undermines the sense of order and structure that patriarchy tries to impose.

Bourgeois undermines patriarchy by subverting and contradicting the privileged position that the phallus has in patriarchal discourses. Sexuality is portrayed as a free flow of libidinal energy and a constant tension between intimacy and aggression in her work. Fragmentation and abjection are also used in her art to undermine phallogentric biases and break down polarities.

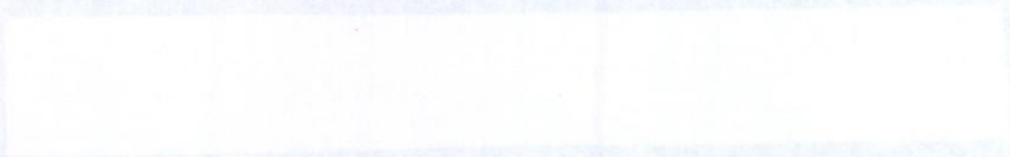
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Plate 4

Fillettes 1968
Latex



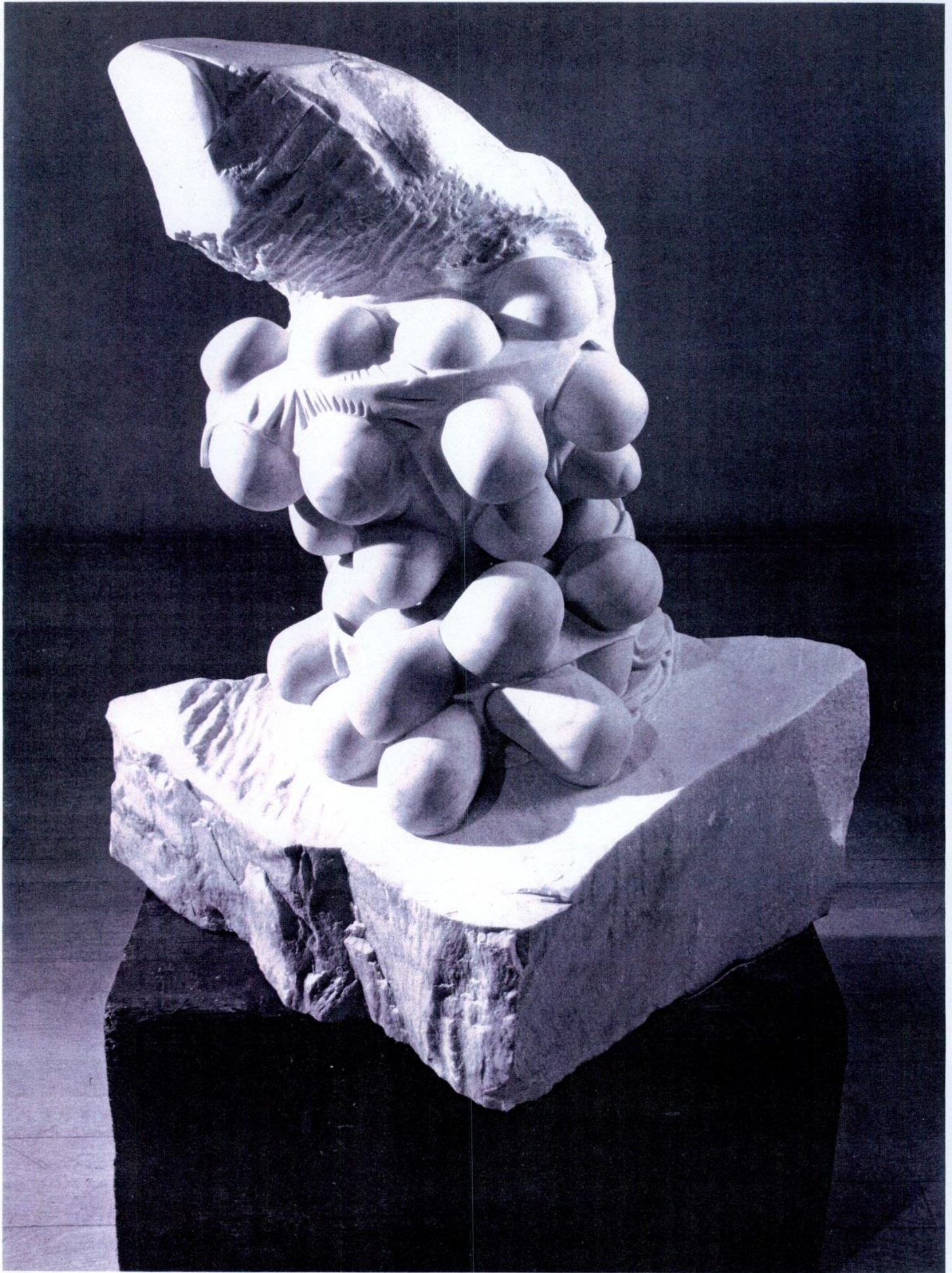
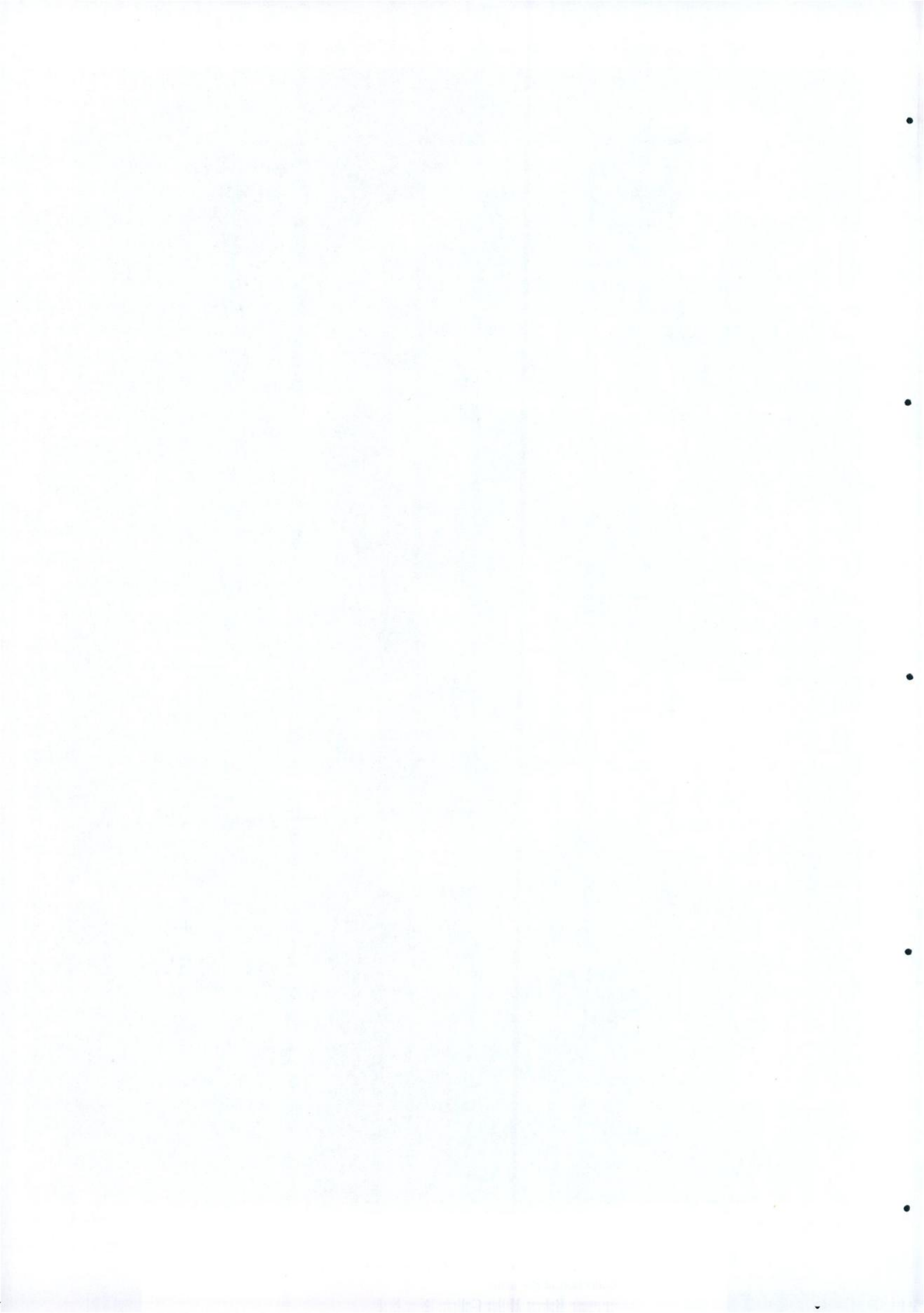


Plate 5

Blind Mans Bluff 1984

Marble

(92.7 X 88.9 X 63.5 cm)



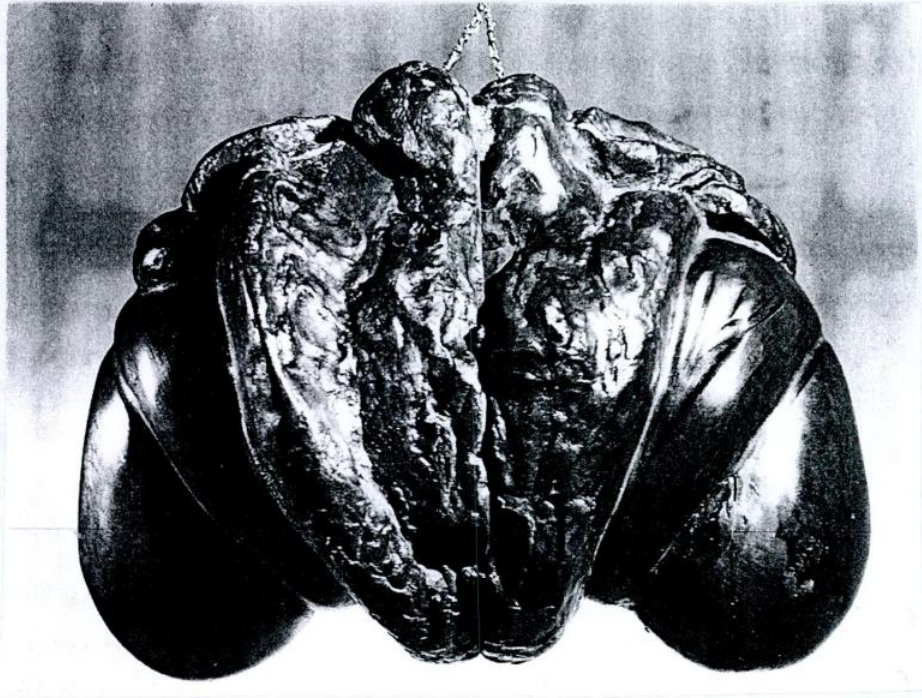
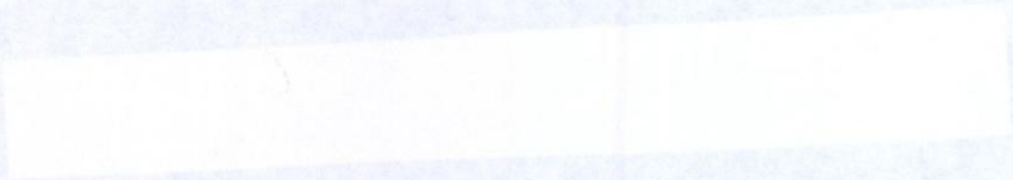


Plate 6

Janus Fleuri 1968
Latex



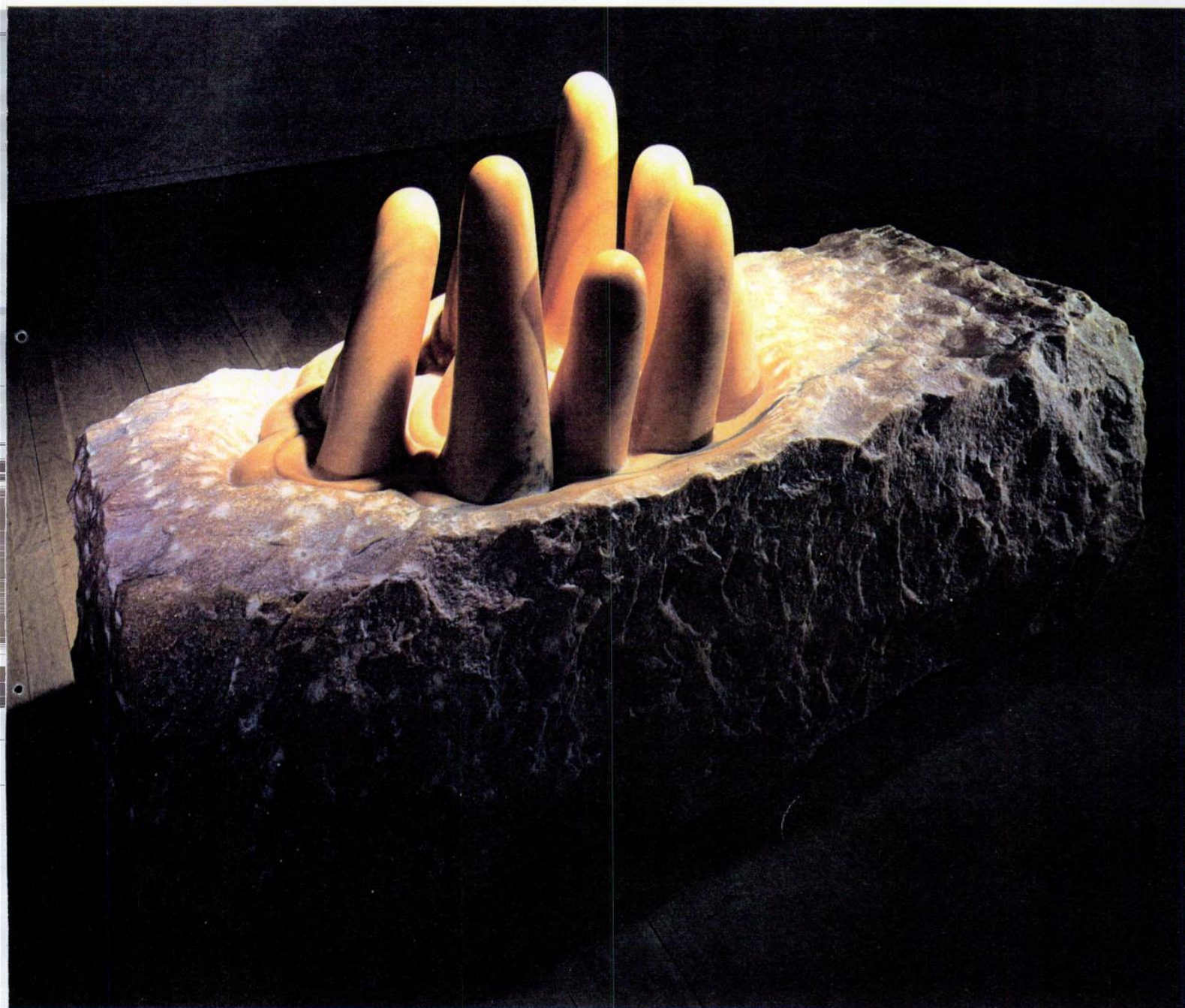


Plate 7

Untitled (With Growth) 1989

Pink Marble

(80 X 53.3 X 144.7 cm)

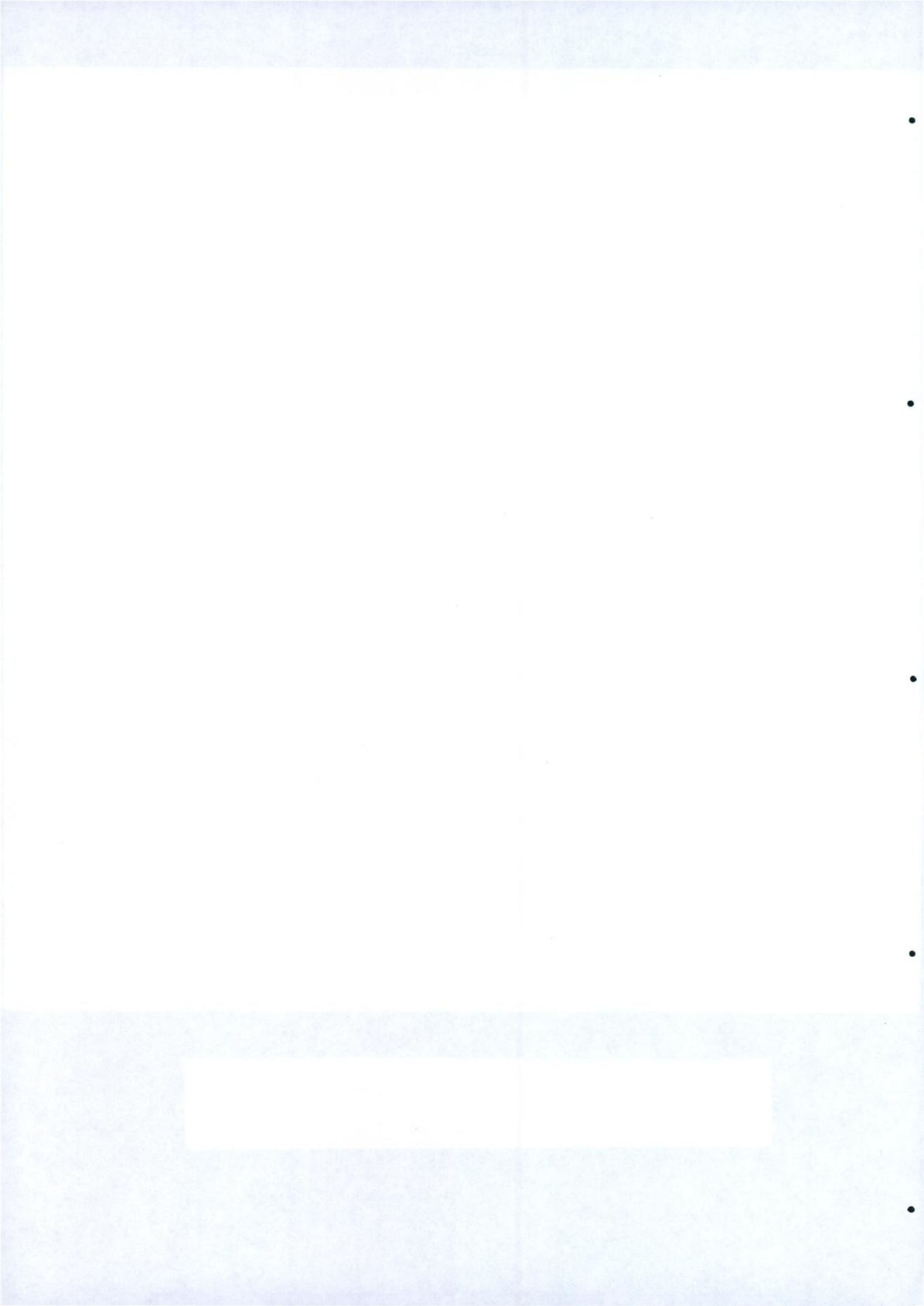
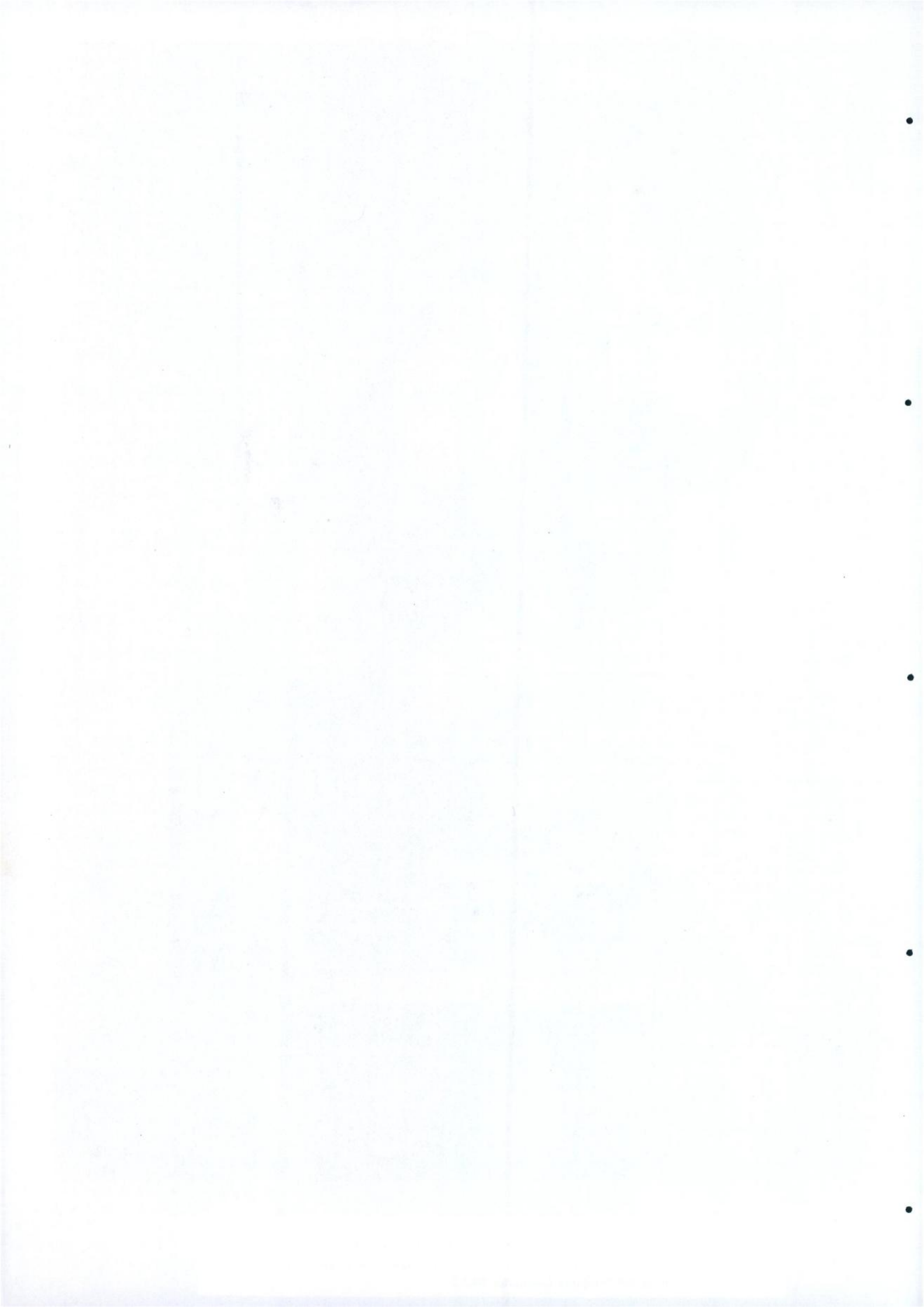
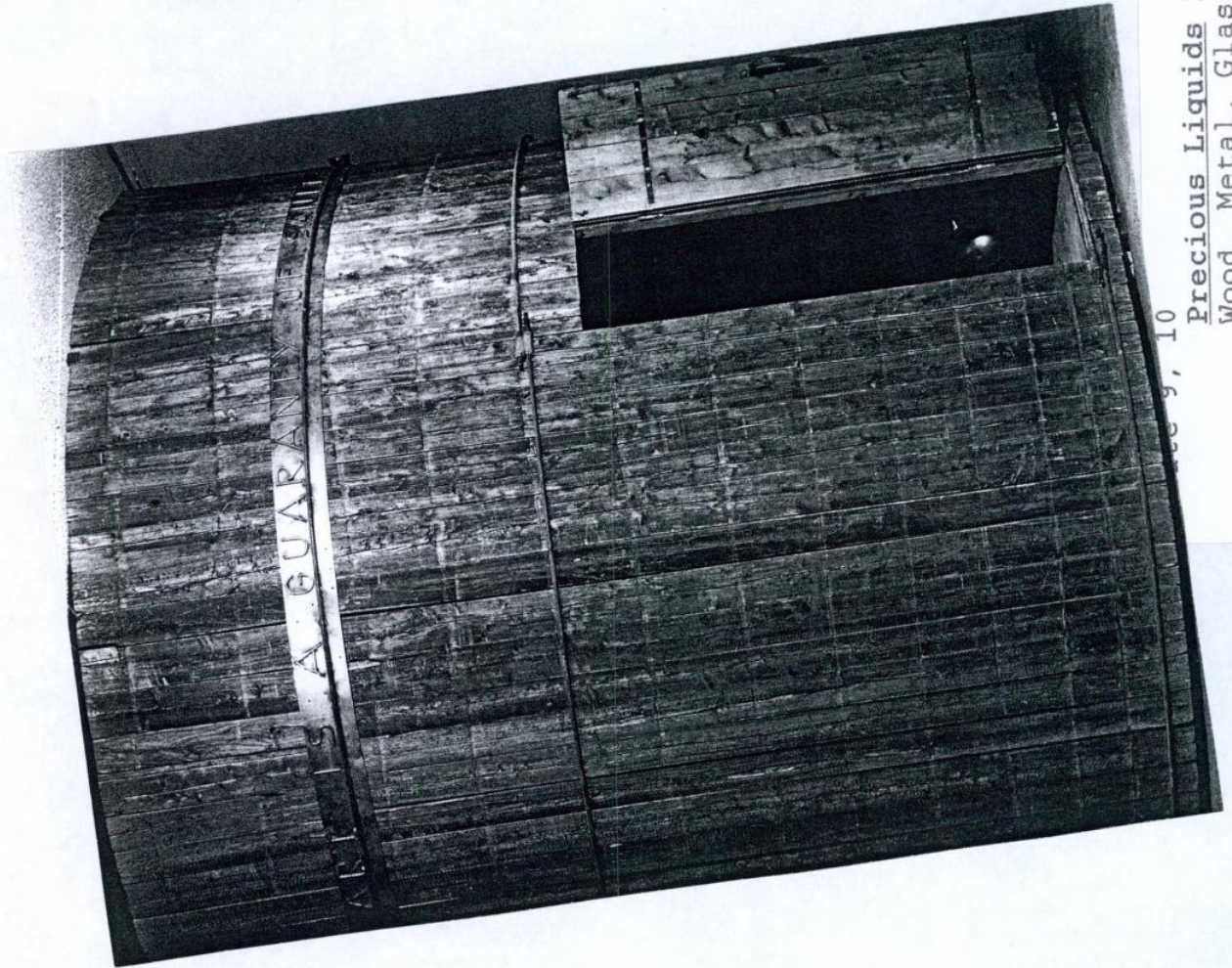
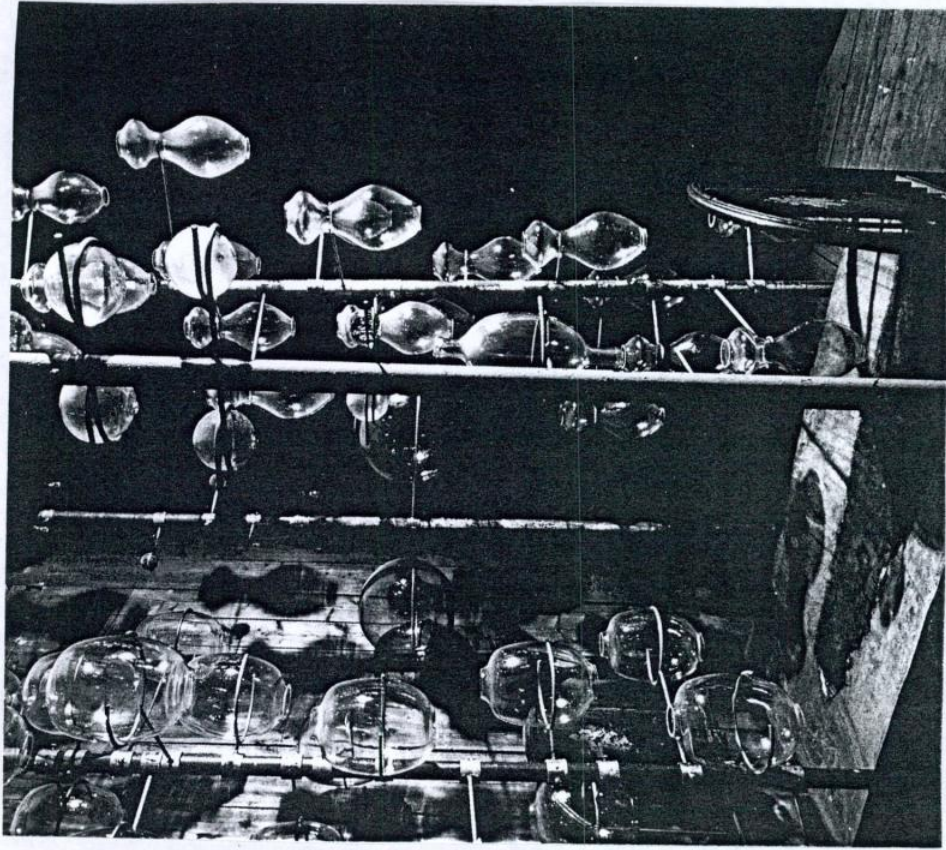




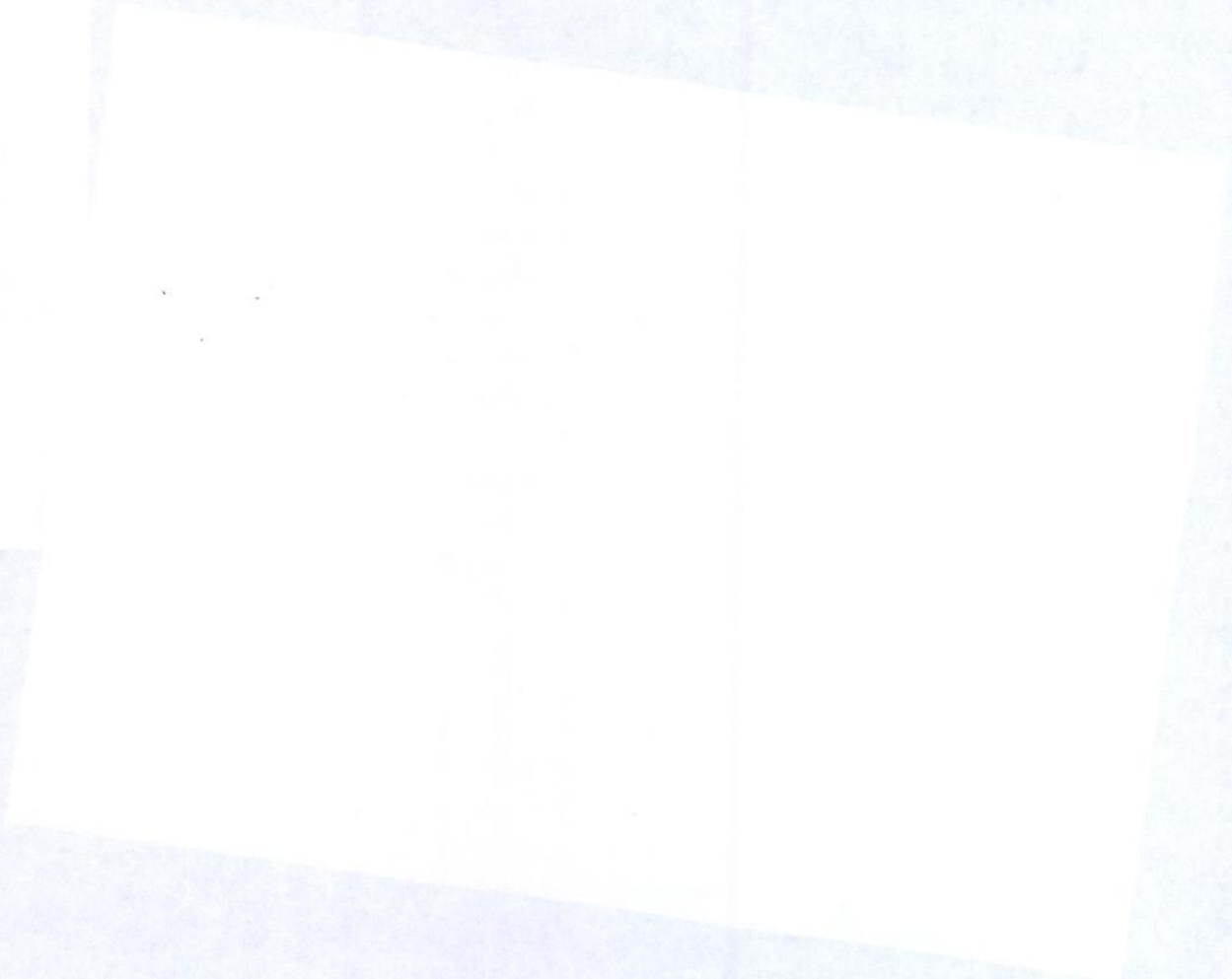
Plate 8 Nature Study 1984
Bronze
(104.1 X 38.1 X 59.8 cm)





see 9, 10

Precious Liquids 1992
Wood, Metal, Glass, Alabaster, Cloth
and Water.
(425 cm high, 145 cm Diameter)



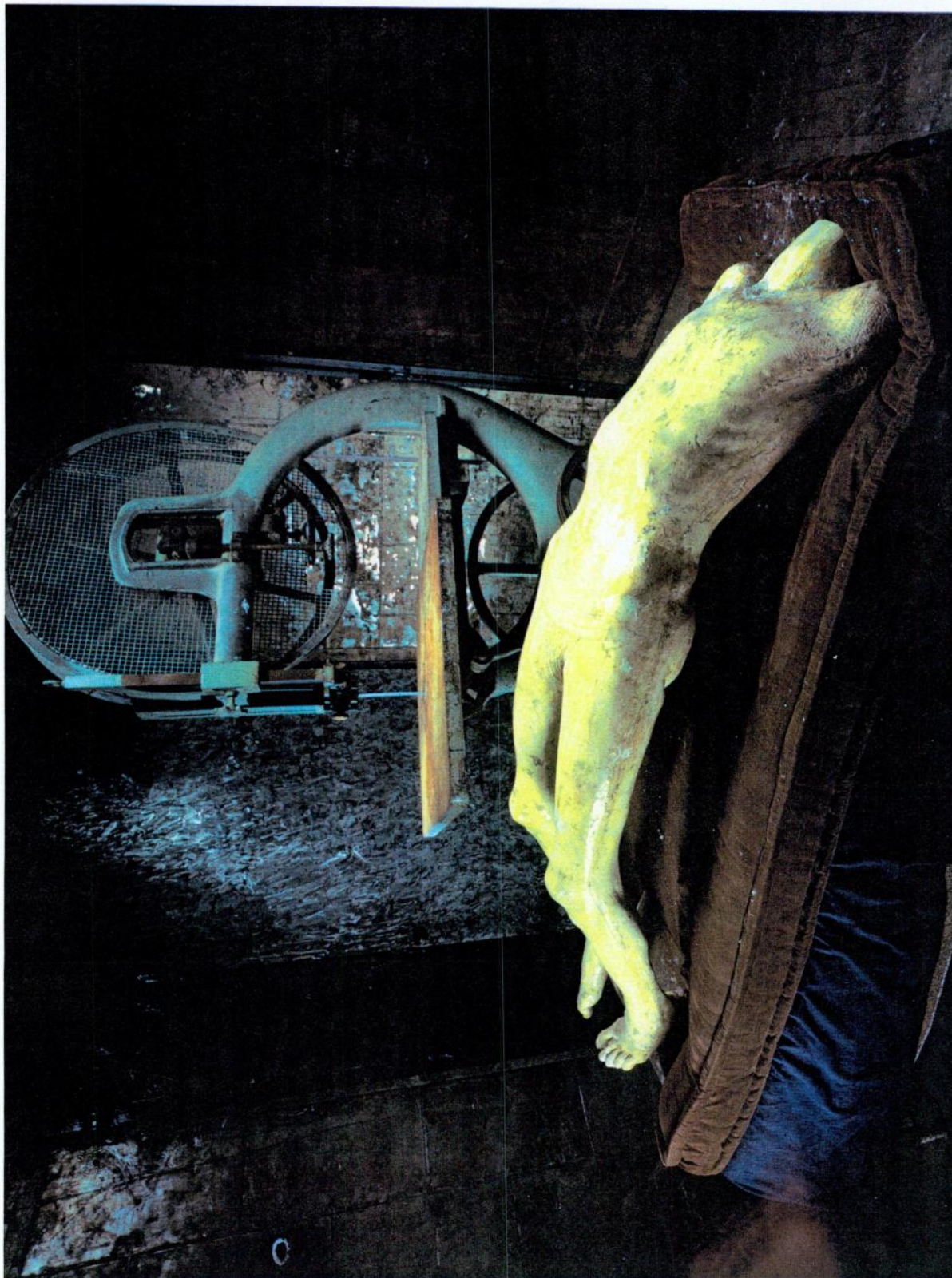
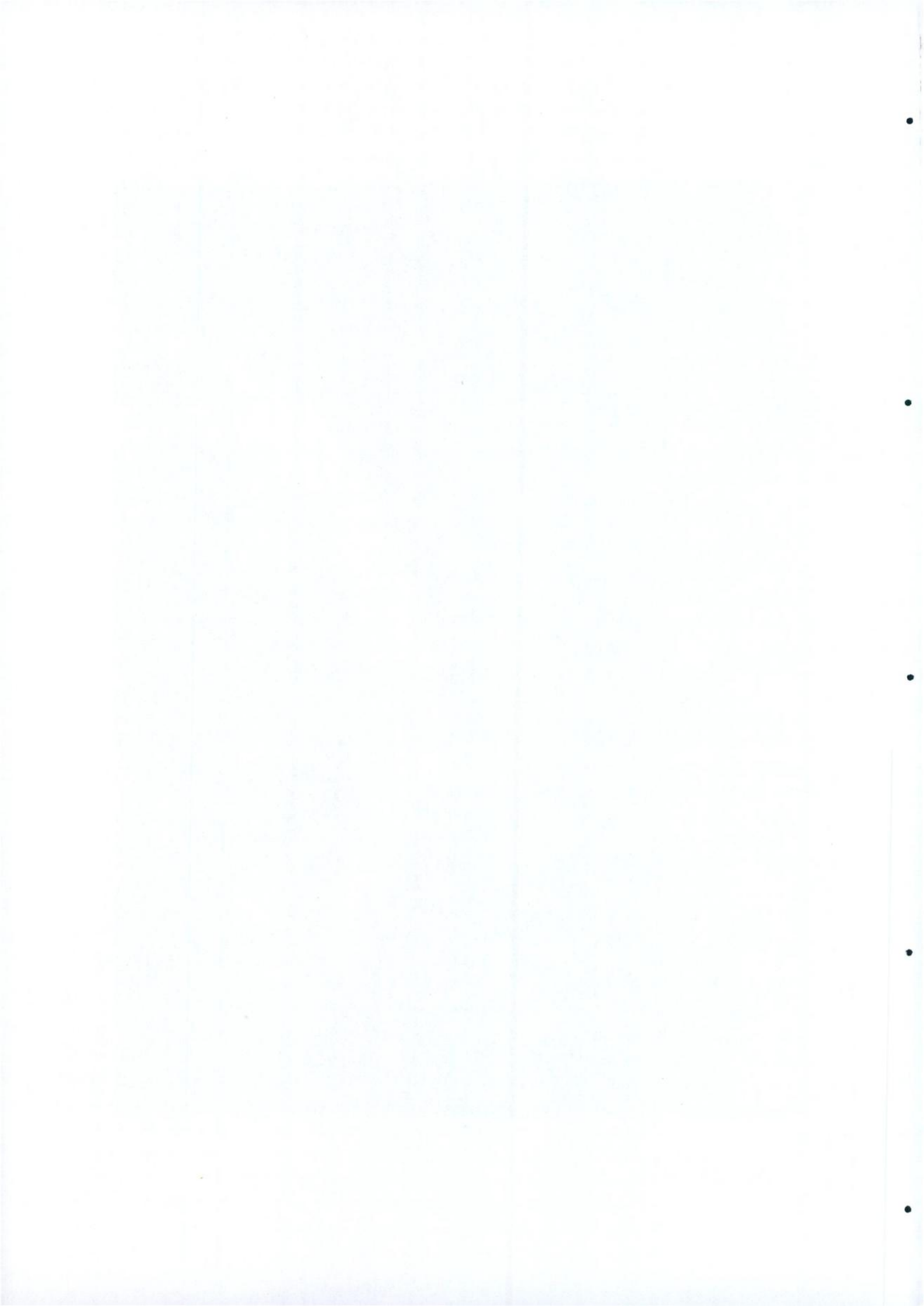


Plate 11

Arch of Hysteria 1992/3
Plaster, Steel, Cast iron, Fabric
(302 X 368.3 X 304.8 cm)



Chapter Three

Women and Their Environment

Women and their environment is a theme that Bourgeois approaches in many ways throughout her artistic career. She looks at women's relationship to domesticity, nurturing and sexuality. There is a strong sense of feminine anxiety running through Bourgeois' work. The vulnerability of women who struggle to survive in a hostile environment is a concern that she continually explores. Although her work conveys feminine vulnerability and fragility it does not reflect a masochistic view of women. She also portrays the strong and positive attributes of women, their tenacity, resilience and determination to protect themselves despite any obstacles they encounter.

Her drawings titled "St. Sebastienne" ridicule the idea of women as essentially masochistic, which Freud and many later psychoanalysts propounded.

"Although Freud wrote about masochism in both sexes, he explicitly said many times that masochism is feminine. Even masochistic behaviour in a man was labelled feminine by Freud, so that masochism which was not considered normal or typical in a man was thought to be both in a woman".

(Caplan, 1986, p.20)

The St. Sebastienne drawings are a parody of traditional portrayals of the male martyr St. Sebastian. Historically there were often masochistic connotations associated with images of the saint. He is often depicted as a scantily clad youth who derives erotic pleasure from the arrows which pierce his body, as in Andrea Mantegna's painting, (Pl. 23). Bourgeois female saint however tries to avoid the arrows that come at her from all angles. Her instinct is for self preservation not masochism.

Women and their environment

Women and their environment is a theme that has been discussed in many ways throughout history. The relationship between women and their environment is a complex one, and it has been discussed in many ways throughout history. The relationship between women and their environment is a complex one, and it has been discussed in many ways throughout history. The relationship between women and their environment is a complex one, and it has been discussed in many ways throughout history.

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Although it is often said that women are more sensitive to their environment, this is not always true. In fact, many studies have shown that men are more sensitive to their environment than women are. This is because men are more likely to be outdoors and more likely to be exposed to environmental factors.

The relationship between women and their environment is a complex one, and it has been discussed in many ways throughout history. The relationship between women and their environment is a complex one, and it has been discussed in many ways throughout history. The relationship between women and their environment is a complex one, and it has been discussed in many ways throughout history.

The totem-like figures that Bourgeois made in the 1940's and 50's out of soft impressionable stacks of balsa wood on thin metal supports look top heavy and fragile as though they are precariously balanced. Yet they stand firm and secure. The seemingly unstable and insubstantial structures of these works give them a poetic resonance and captures a sense of vulnerability but also resilience that Bourgeois associates with the female condition.

"Spiral Woman", 1951/52 (Pl. 13) shows a stack of curved spiralling wood pieces which suggest twisted vertebrae. It is as though the woman has to contort her body in order to keep her precarious balance on the thin steel support. This balancing act reflects women's attempt to reconcile what are often conflicting elements in their lives.

Before Bourgeois turned to sculpture she made a series of drawings and paintings in the 1940's which she called "Femme Maison". She later executed several sculptural versions of the same thing. The "Femme Maison" (Pl. 14,15) works explored the relationship between women and the domestic environment. The early drawings and paintings could be seen as surreal works. They are reminiscent of surrealist exquisite corpse drawings, which were a form of collective drawing that produced abrupt stylistic differences. Bourgeois' paintings and drawings depict the lower section of a naked female form. The body often is portrayed without any arms and the head is replaced by a house-like structure. When Bourgeois first exhibited these works in the 1940's the critics interpreted them as a celebration of women's domestic attributes. However the feminist implications of these works were later realised and appreciated. Lucy Lippard used one of the "Femme Maison" paintings for the cover of a book on women artists.

The "Femme Maison" works portray Bourgeois' ambivalent attitude towards domesticity. The works can be interpreted

...the metal supports look too heavy and they are precariously balanced as if they were about to fall. The seemingly unstable and unbalanced structures of these works give them a poetic resonance and evokes a sense of vulnerability but also resistance. It is precisely associated with the female condition.

"Spiritual Women", 1981/82 (Pl. 11) shows a black and white photograph of a woman which suggest twisted vertical lines as if through the woman has to control her body as if to keep her precarious balance on the thin vertical lines. This balanced and reflects women's attempt to find a way out of the conflicting elements in their lives.

Before Bourgeois turned to sculpture and made her own drawings and paintings in the 1940's which she called "Female Figures". She later executed several versions of the same thing. The relationship between domestic environment, the early drawings and paintings could be seen as surreal works. They are reminiscent of surrealist exquisite corpse drawings, which were a collective drawing that produced abrupt and surprising differences. Bourgeois' paintings and drawings depict a lower section of a naked female form. The body often portrayed without any arms and the head is replaced by a house-like structure. When Bourgeois first exhibited these works in the 1940s the critics interpreted them as a celebration of women's domestic attributes. However, feminist interpretations of these works were later rejected and appreciated. Lucy Lipard used one of the "Female Figures" paintings for the cover of a book on women artists.

The "Female Figures" works by Bourgeois, which are often towards domesticity. The works can be seen as a

as women either withdrawing into the house from a hostile environment or she can be seen to be imprisoned in the house. Her head, the part of her which holds her intellectual centre is hidden. She is not given a chance to reveal her personality in all its aspects and develop her full potential.

The women carry the full burden of nurturing and domestic responsibility. They are like classical caryatids who act as a support for the whole household. In a collection of work called "Lair" after an animal hiding place, Bourgeois deals with the tension between the desire to build a secure environment and the danger of isolation and confinement. The "Lairs" are a place of refuge from the rest of the world and are safe and secure environments but there is also a loss of freedom and outside contact.

The 1986 "Lair" (Pl. 16) is a suspended rubber structure. Suspended forms in Bourgeois' work indicate a state of uncertainty as they are not rooted but swing between different positions. The shape of this "Lair" also shows a tension between different states. The lozenge form is like a drop of water at its heaviest stage before it dissipates and the water runs loose. There is a fine line between connectedness and partition which Bourgeois expresses in these works. This tension relates to the sense of isolation but also refuge that the domestic environment can bring to women.

The later "Femme Maison" sculptures no longer contain figurative elements. These sculptural "Femme Maison" forms seem to be remote and dream-like structures. The 1981 "Femme Maison" is set on top of a mass of tentacle-like marble strands. At the front of the sculpture these forms seem to move in an harmonious motion while at the back the rhythm is disruptive. It is as though Bourgeois is

to reveal her personality in all her aspects and to reveal her will potentially.

The women carry the full burden of nurturing and supporting their children. They are like classical carved figures as a support for the whole household. In a certain work called "Laila" after an animal hiding place, the deals with the tension between the tension to build a better environment and the danger of isolation and confinement. The "Laila" are a place of refuge from the real world and the sea and hence environments but they are also a loss of freedom and outside contact.

The 1958 "Laila" is a suspended under the suspended forms in horizontal work landscape. They are uncertainly as they are not rooted but swing between different positions. The shape of this "Laila" is a tension between different states. The tension is like a drop of water at its heaviest stage. It disappears and the water runs loose. There is a tension between connectedness and partition which is expressed in these works. This tension is also a sense of isolation but also refuge that the environment can bring to women.

The later "Laila" sculptures no longer contain figurative elements. These sculptures seem to be remote and dream-like structures. "Laila" is set on top of a mass of white marble stands. At the front of the sculpture there is a move in an ambiguous motion while at the back rhythm is disrupted. It is as though to

symbolically portraying the fact that behind the harmonious exterior of domesticity there are often hidden problems.

In the 1983 "Femme Maison" the house is set on top of a marble mound which appears to be a pile of billowing drapery. This version evokes a sense of an old monastery or castle set on top of a cliff aloof and isolated but a sanctuary from the world. The later "Femme Maisons" show domestic harmony as a dream-like state associated with a desire for escapism.

In her installation works Bourgeois again deals with the domestic environment. The evocative surreal interiors of her "cell" installations portray psychological events that are based on unsettling memories. The word 'cell' suggests a sense of imprisonment and punishment but in the monastic sense they are also places of refuge and community. The cell as a reference to the human body is also contained in the title. In each cell Bourgeois evokes a childhood memory that she wishes to exorcise. Through a process of reconstructing and examining the memory she is then able to free herself from it.

In "Cell (with Glass Balls and Hands) (Pl. 17) there are five glass balls placed on old stools and on an old kitchen type table are a pair of clasped hands. Bourgeois explained this work as an evocation of the domestic environment of her childhood. Each glass sphere represents a member of the family. The family members are close and inhabit the same environment but like the glass bubbles are completely isolated from each other, there is not communication between them. They are closed forms. The joined hands on the table are clenched in a gesture of helplessness, despite a desire to get through to each other there is no communication. Each family member in a sense lives in isolation (Finch, 1994).

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main road which appears to be a fine old
property. This version evokes a sense of an old manor
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formed hands on the table are changed in a particular
relationship. Bourgeois's desire to get through to
other there is no communication. Each family member
seems lives in isolation (Irish 1994).

In relation to an earlier work called "Nest of Five" which also dealt with the domestic environment and family relations Bourgeois said of the various elements which represented the family members:

"They belong together but they do not communicate, because they have no power to choose. As you depend on your family that you did not choose" (Meyer-Thoss, 1992, p60)

Bourgeois presents an honest and personal view of domesticity drawing on her own memories. In one of her 1993 "Cells" (Pl. 18) she carved a perfect model of her childhood home at Choisy in pink marble. Above the pink marble house is an old guillotine which Bourgeois said symbolised how the present destroys the past with the passage of time. (The family home was demolished to make way for modern development) (Stier, Artforum Sept. '94). However, the attention to detail in this work, in producing an exact replica, shows how deeply rooted her early life memories remain.

In her work Bourgeois is able to focus on the actual and often conflicting elements of domesticity and their effects on women. She looks at the stifling and isolating aspects of an environment which was traditionally portrayed as the place where women could be most fulfilled. Bourgeois portrays the struggle for independence and autonomy with the desire for a nurturing and secure environment. The struggle to look after her own diverse needs and to accommodate the demands of her family are also evident in the "Femme Maison" works.

The female nurturing responsibility is also a theme that Bourgeois tackles in her work. Through a lot of her sculpture a sense of fecundity is evoked. Sprouting, germinating forms are abundant in her work. In her "Nature Studies" series the finger-like or intestine like

relationships, especially those of the various elements which
represented the family members.

"They belong together but they do not
communicate because they have no power to
choose. As you depend on your family that you
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Bontemps presents an honest and personal account
domestically drawing on her own memories. In one
1977 "Callie" (11, 18) she carved a perfect model of
this home at Chazy in pink marble. Above the
marble house is an old building which Bontemps
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Bontemps looks in her work. Through a detailed
narrative a sense of femininity is evoked. The
generating forms are abundant in her work.
"The Female Struggle" better the traditional

shapes suggest primitive life forms and also the internal body. They capture a sense of abundance and growth but are also imbued with an uncontrollable and smothering energy.

The anxiety and responsibility that goes with a woman's nurturing role is tackled in a lot of Bourgeois' work. "Couteau" or also titled "Knife Woman" (Pl. 19) portrays a pregnant woman who has the responsibility of carrying a child which causes her anxiety and fear. She tries to present herself in a threatening pose to ward off any danger to herself and her baby and also to hide her fear. The reclining swollen belly also suggests a dagger-like object.

The 1989 "Untitled (with foot)" also "Untitled (with hand)" (Pl. 20) are ambiguous works yet they seem to relate to nurturing and a mother child relationship. Out of a highly polished pink marble sphere protrudes a child's limb, either an arm or a leg. On the stone plinth beneath the sphere are inscriptions. "I Love You" or "Do You Love Me?" are written on these works. The ambiguous texts on these sculptures are foreshadowed by a 1977 drawing called "Je T'aime" which repeats the phrase "Je T'aime" in neat rows all over the page. It can be seen as a soothing mantra or a punishing detention exercise. This mirrors the dichotomy between the burden and fulfilment that the mother/child relationship brings.

"Venthouse" 1990 (Pl. 21) work relates to Bourgeois' relationship with her mother. As in the "Cell" installations light plays an important symbolic role and is an evocative element which creates an ambience of internal psychological states. Bourgeois made two "Venthouse" structures which are composed black marble with glass cup like objects that lie on top of the stone and house electric lights. "Venthouse" refers to the French cupping glass which was used in a popular medical treatment. The

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The 1989 "Untitled (with foot)" also "Untitled"
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to nurturing and a mother-child relationship. The
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"Vestibule" (1979) work relates to Bourgeois's
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that when was used as a popular medical term.

purpose of this treatment was to draw blood to the skin's surface. A flame was held momentarily inside the glass to create a vacuum while the venthouse was applied to the patient. The skin was then sucked up into a bulbous shape. The cluster of fleshy breast-like mounds that were created across the patients body are suggested in many of Bourgeois' sculptures. Again and again rounded bulbous clusters appear in her work symbolising fecundity and feminine elements. In the "Venthouse" sculptures Bourgeois returns to the source of these forms and to the childhood task she performed. She applied the Venthouse treatment to her mother in an attempt to cure her of emphysema.

Bourgeois made and exhibited two "Venthouse" pieces together. A big one and a small one suggesting the mother/child relationship. These enigmatic forms evoke many associations. The large "Venthouse" is reminiscent of a sarcophagus and the suggestion of drawing blood from stone evokes ideas of disappointed expectations and desires. There are also positive associations. The lit glass on the stone has a mystical and poetic connotation. The effervescent light under the glass produces a white milky tone suggesting the nurturing relationship between mother and child.

The small "Venthouse" is like a child's birthday cake, or a small tug-boat. There are multiple associations with the large and small structures which recall both anxious and positive memories. Bourgeois' works are never straightforward, through her evocative style she tries to capture the complexities of emotional bonds and experiences.

A desire for intimacy coupled with the fear of being overpowered by another, is central to the emotional relationships explored by Bourgeois. In works such as "Altered States"(Pl. 22) a 1992 drawing the dilemma is

...the mother in an attempt to care for an employee...

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A desire for intimacy coupled with the fear of being overpowered by another, is central to the relationships explored by Bourgeois. In works such as "Altered States" (1971) drawing...

depicted in the mother/child relationship. Both the mother and child are portrayed in a distressed state. The child struggles to free itself from the maternal grasp but the mother is not ready to let go. Along the side of the drawing is the inscription "I have a mother, I am a mother". Bourgeois knows the anxiety that both states bring. The struggle of both the mother and child occur in her work.

In the more abstract "Nature Studies" (Pl. 23) works there seems to be a struggle between opposite elements including a desire for union and a resistance to it. "Nature Studies" 1986 consists of a chubby horizontal fleshy form strangled by a coiled stringy structure which is wrapped around it. The elements seem involved in a primitive struggle that is both tender and aggressive. These sculptures can evoke multiple associations, both vegetative life and animal forms even a mixture of male and female characteristics. Bourgeois captures a primitive dynamic impulse that lies behind all living forms. She also suggests feminine intuitive and maternal instincts in these works. They capture the anxiety and mixed emotional states that maternal responsibility brings.

Works such as "Fallen Women" (Pl. 24) and "Spiral Woman" (Pl. 25) are aesthetically very beautiful but they focus on the darker angst ridden side of female existence. Both figures capture the essence of feeling out of control and having no influence over their own destiny. "Fallen Woman" is a small object which is reminiscent of a door knocker or a judges gavel. The face is of a beautiful but distressed female, the figure has no means of overcoming its fallen state as its body is a rounded shape which cannot stand upright.

"Spiral Woman" is a hanging figure, all that is visible of this female is her arms and legs which emerge through a

coiled structure that is entwined around her. It is a state of disorientation which Bourgeois represents and she says evokes her own experience of dislocation (Finch, 1994). These sculptures have a cathartic purpose, they are used to purge herself of feminine anxiety.

All the works which portray women and their relationships to their environment come out of Bourgeois' own experience. This enables Bourgeois to capture the authentic and complex nature of women's experience. She combines intuitive emotion with a sophisticated intellectual vision. Bourgeois' work gives an insight into contemporary women's issues and gives an honest appraisal of the emotional dilemmas that women experience.

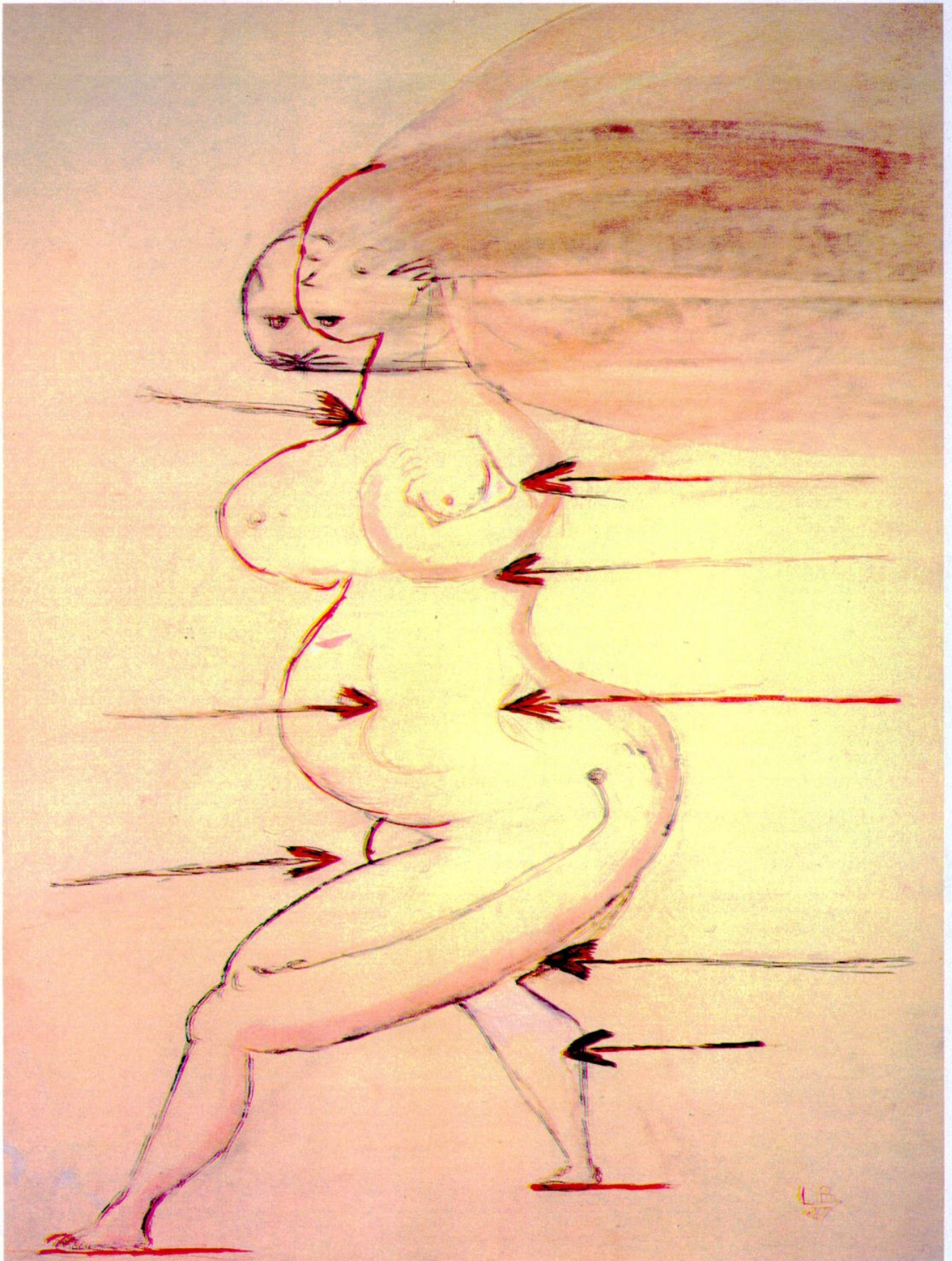
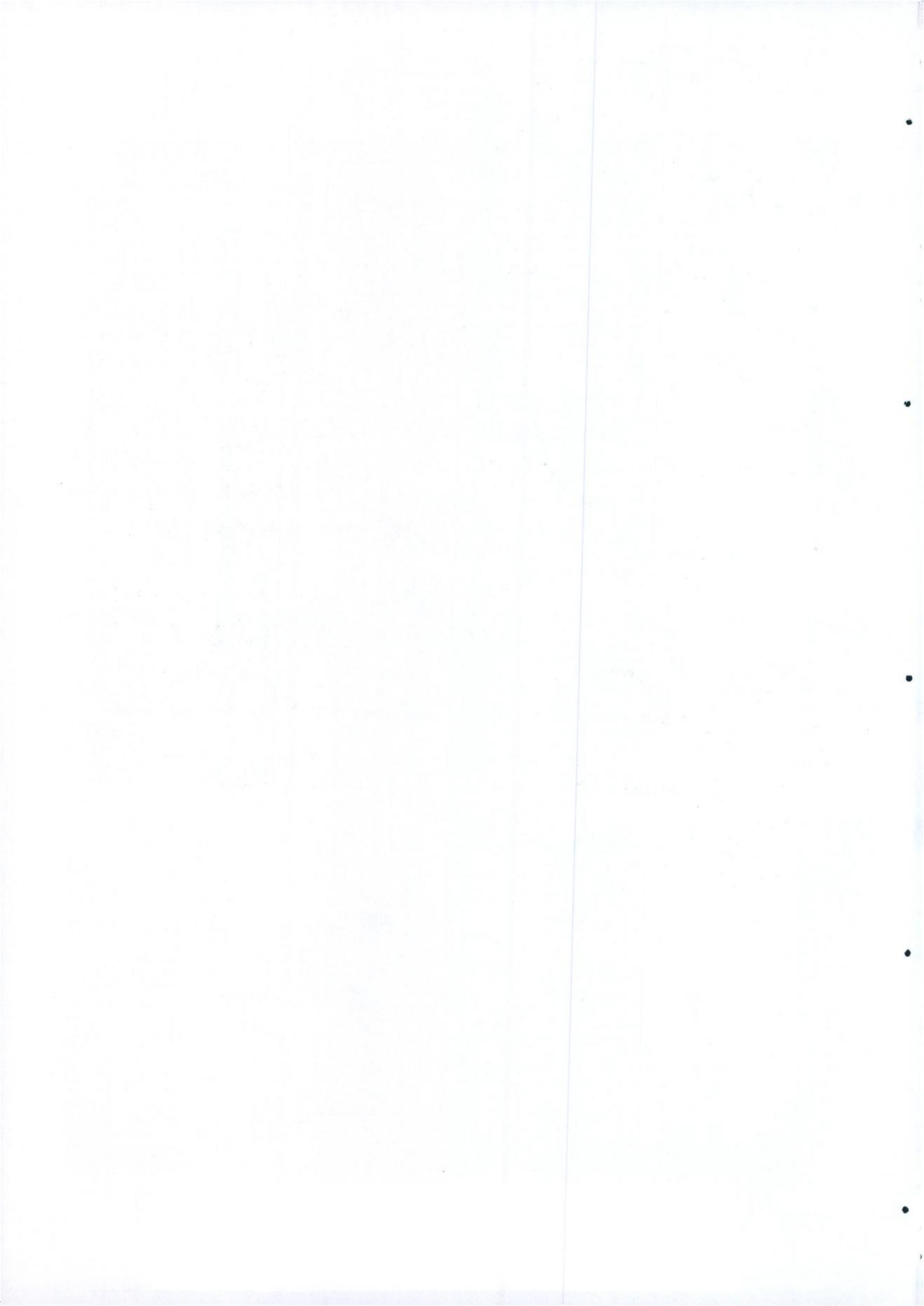


Plate 12

St. Sebastienne 1984
Ink, Watercolour, Pencil on Paper
(63.1 X 48.2 cm)



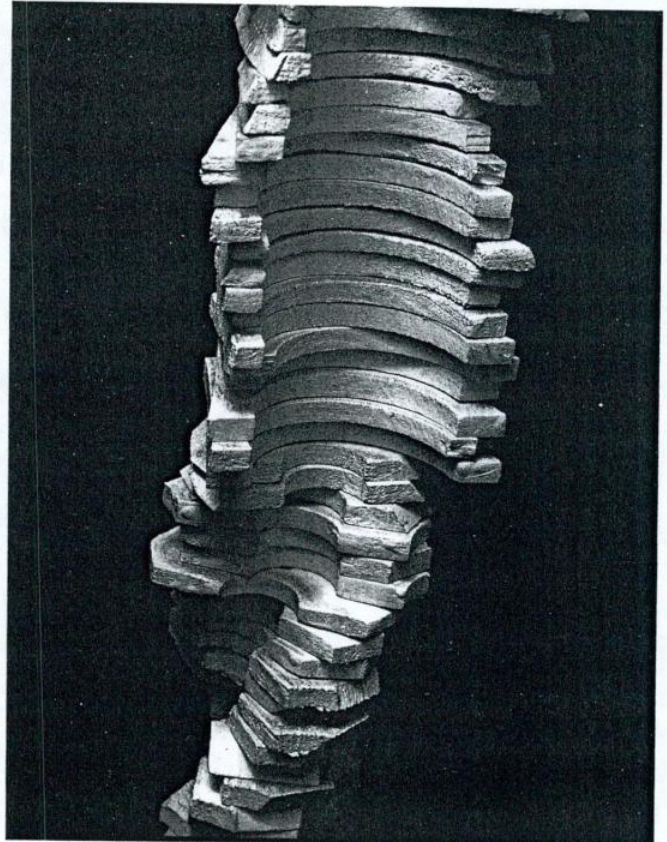
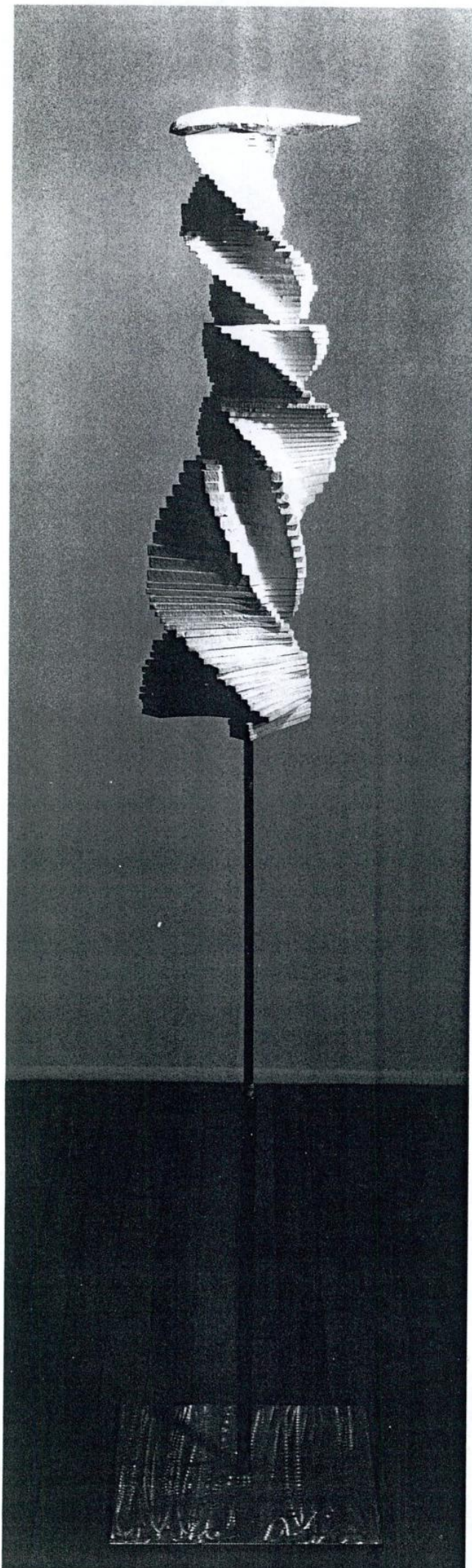
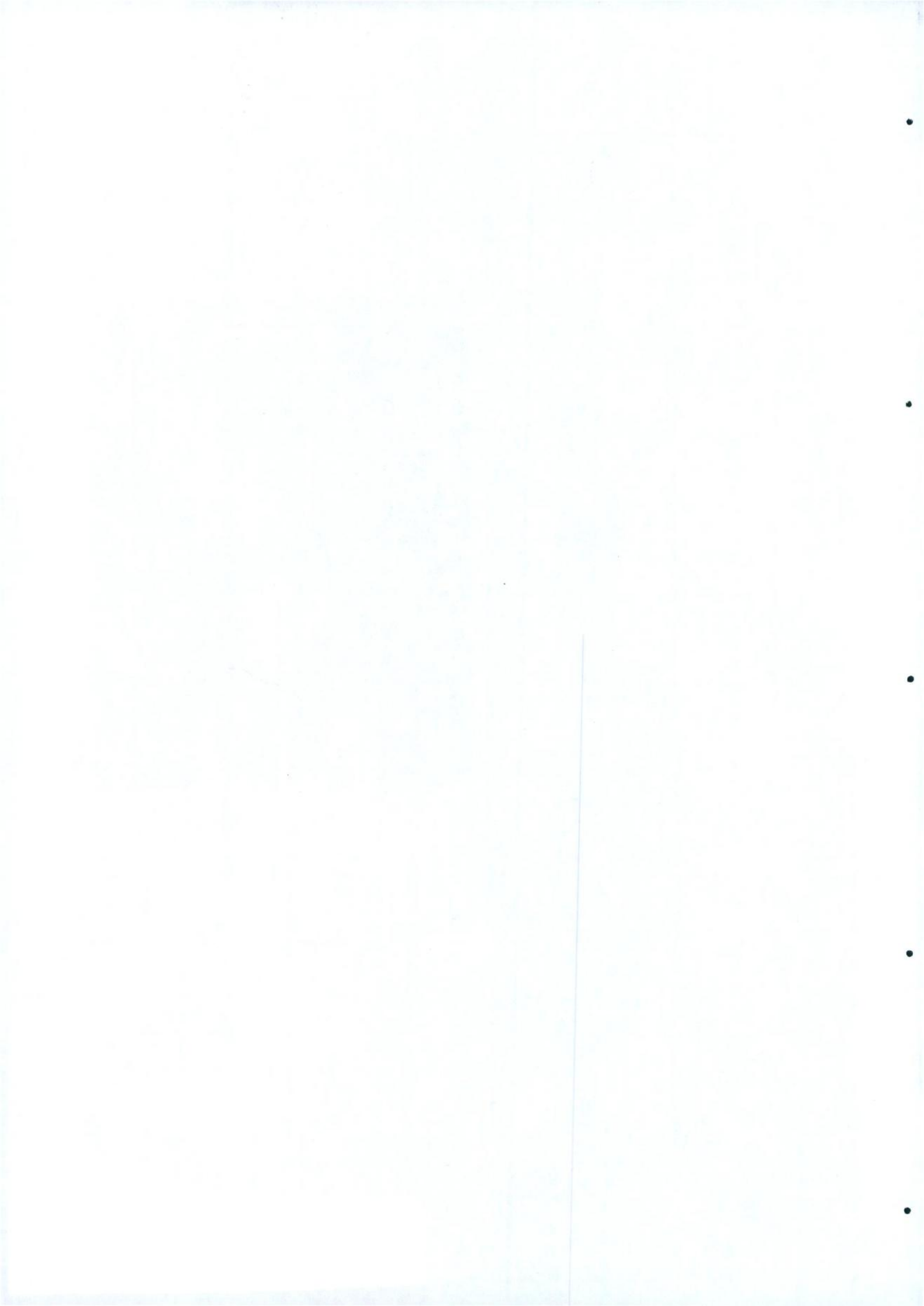


Plate 13

Spiral Woman 1951/2
Wood and Steel
(158.8 cm)



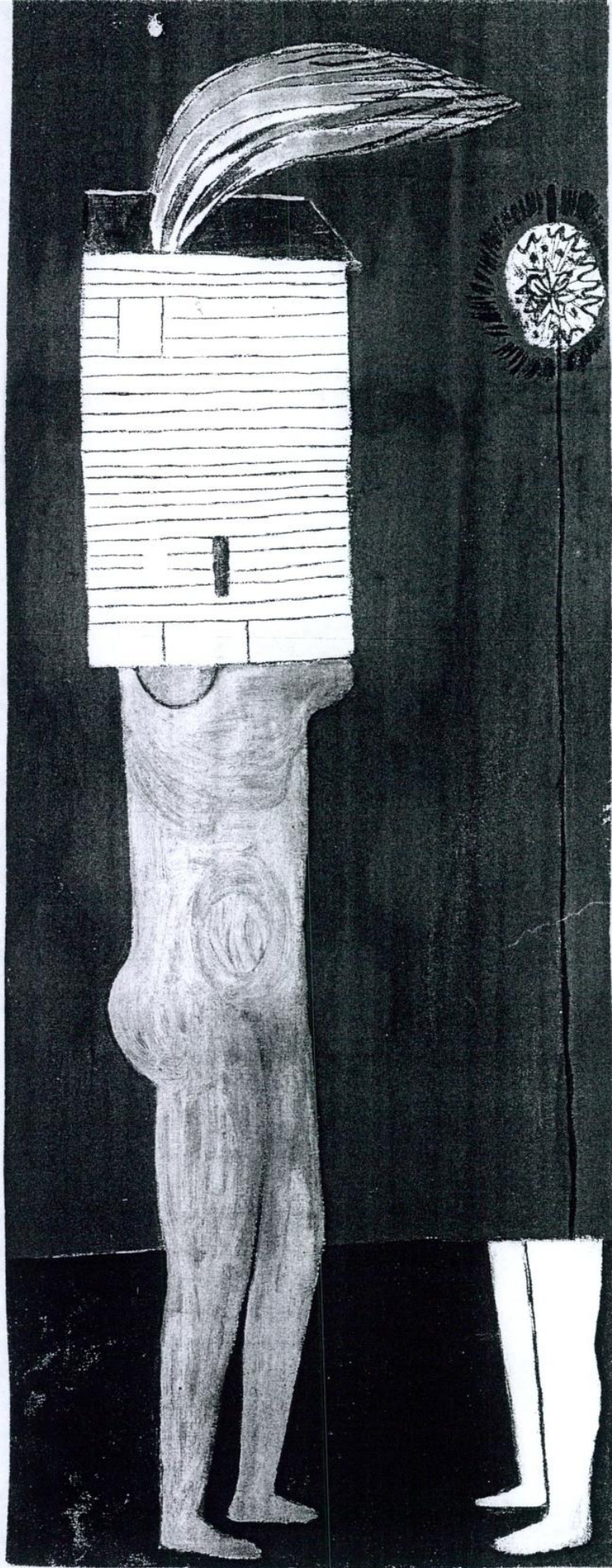


Plate 14

Femme Maison 1946/7
Oil and Ink on Linen
(36 X 14 ins)

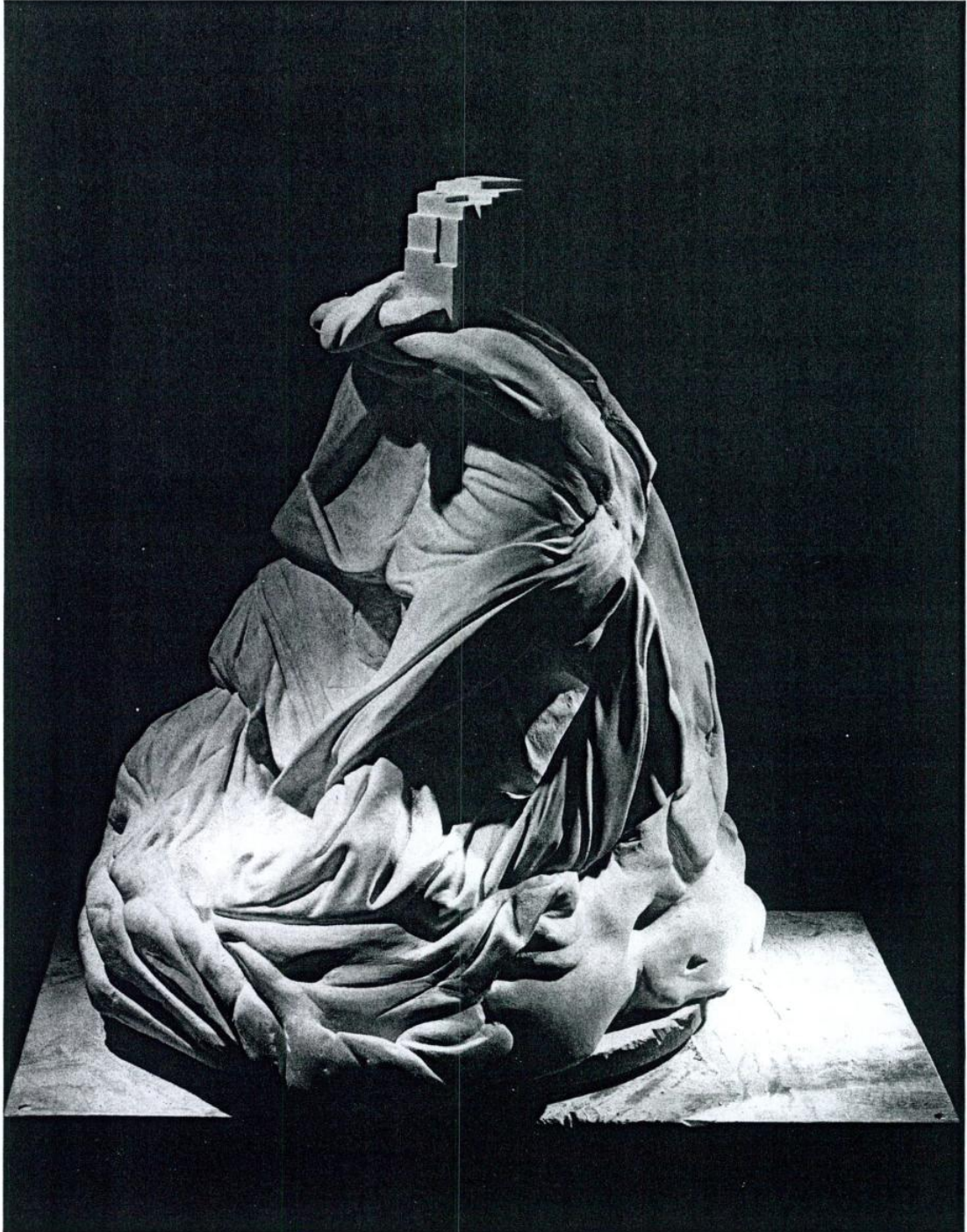
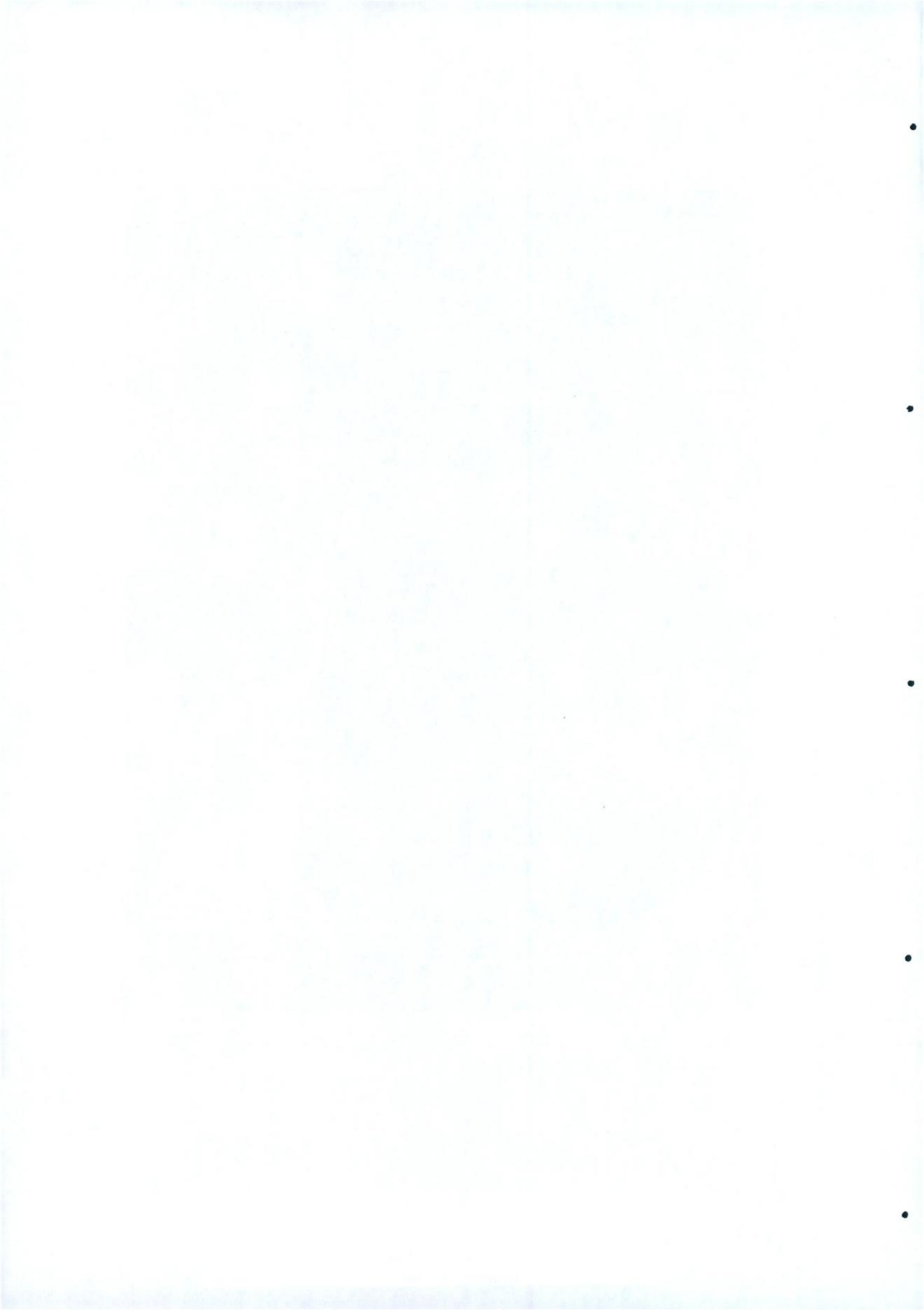


Plate 15

Femme Maison 1983

Marble

(63.5 X 49.5 X 58.5 cm)



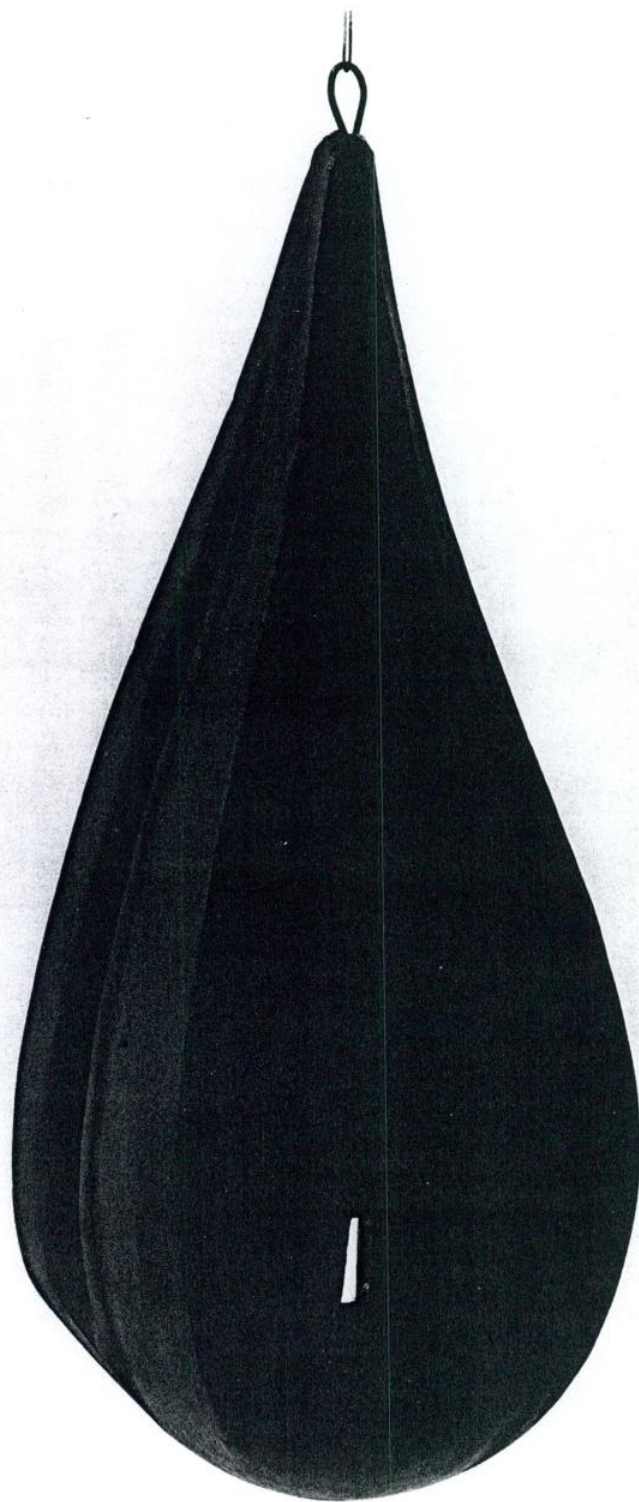


Plate 16

Lair 1986

Rubber

(109 X 53.4 X 53.4 cm)

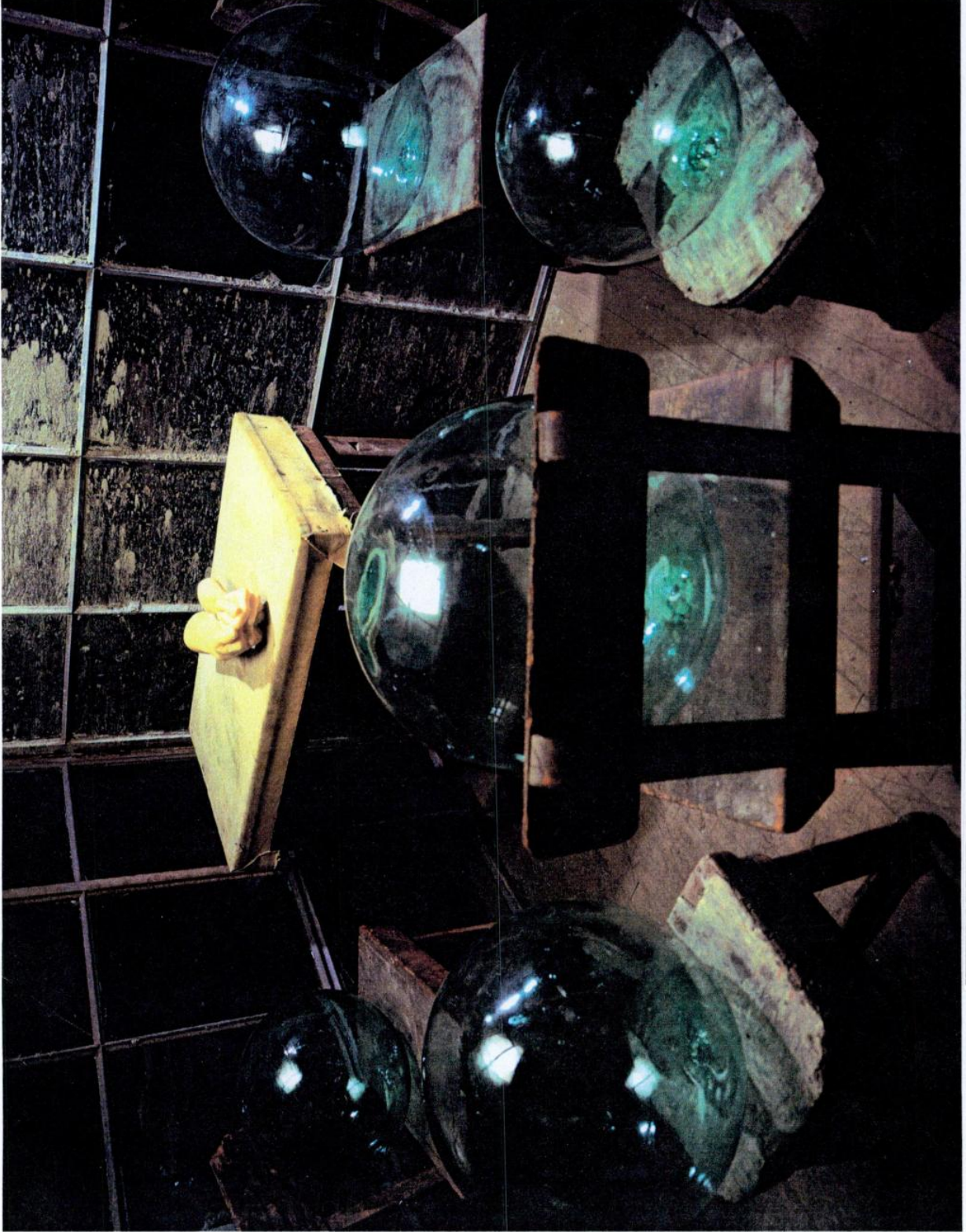


Plate 17

Cell (Glass Balls and Hands) 1990/3
Glass, Marble, Wood, Metal and Fabric
(218.4 X 218.4 X 210.8 cm)



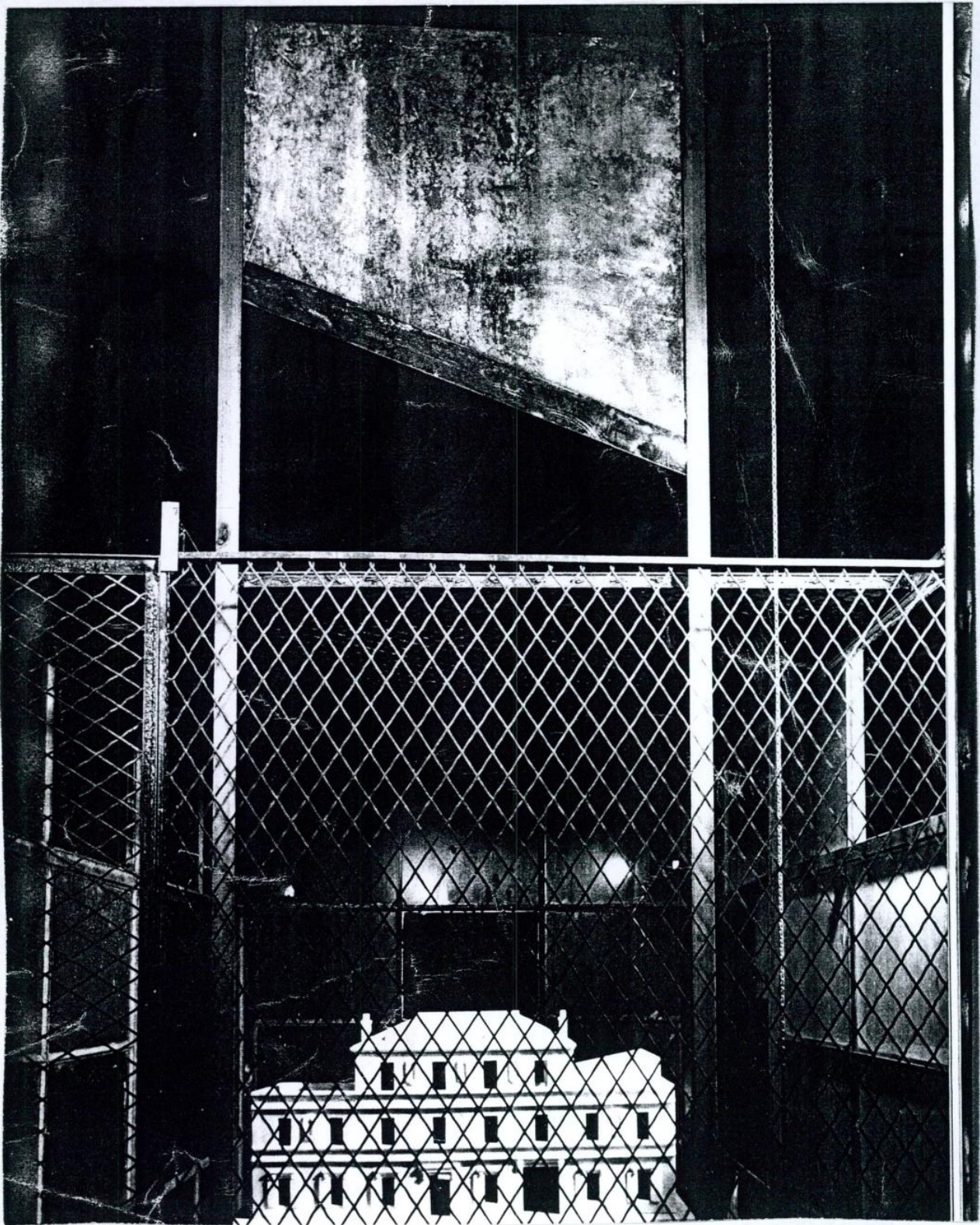


Plate 18

Cell (Choisy) 1990/3
Marble, Metal and Glass
(306 X 167.5 X 241.3 cm)





Plate 19

Femme Couteau 1982

Black Marble

(13.9 X 77.4 X 20.3 cm)



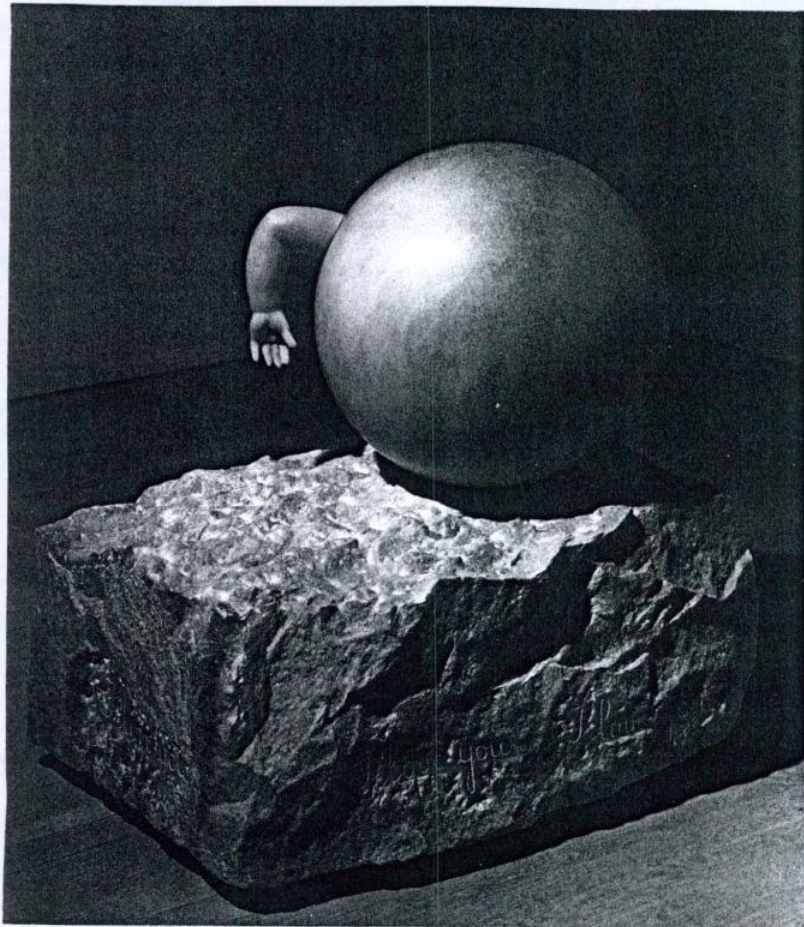
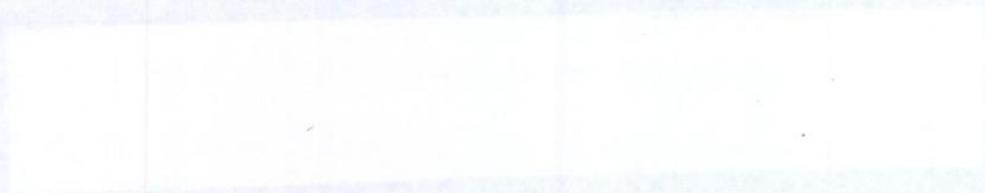


Plate 20

Untitled (with Hand) 1989

Marble

(78.7 X 77.4 X 53.3 cm)



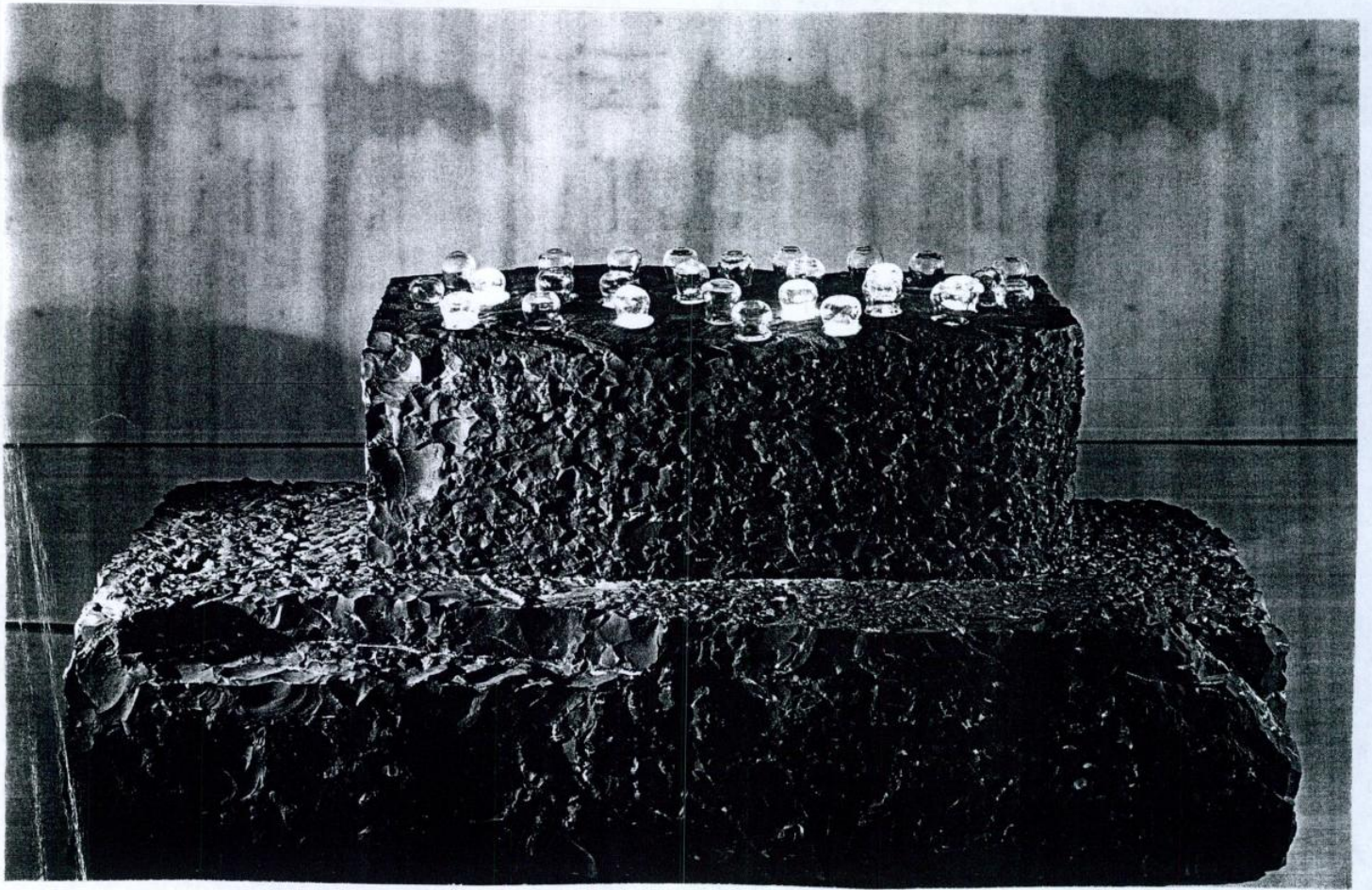


Plate 21

Venthouse 1990

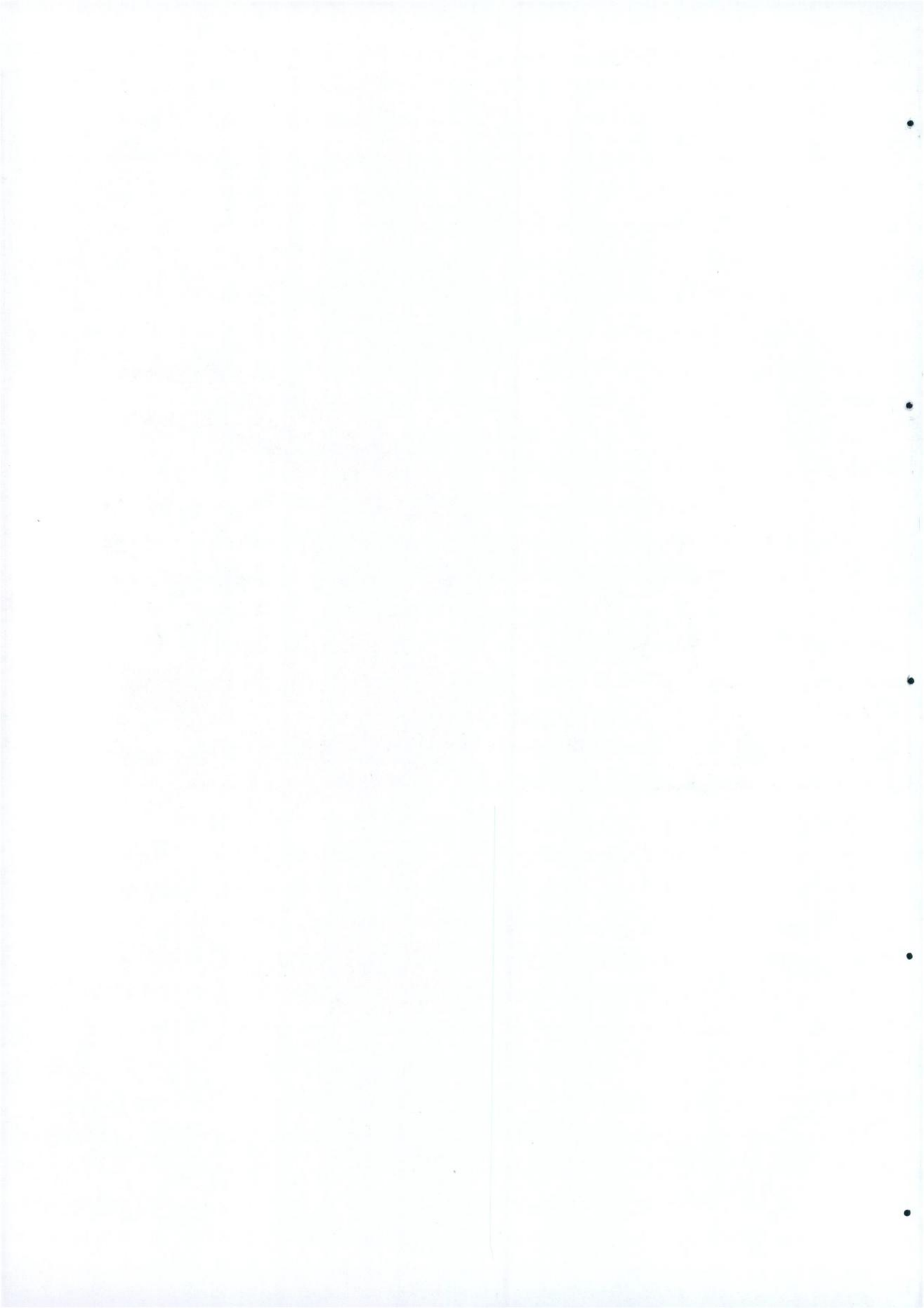
Black Marble, Glass and Electric Light





Plate 22

Altered States 1992
Gouache, Ink, Pen, Pencil on paper
(48.2 X 60.3 cm)



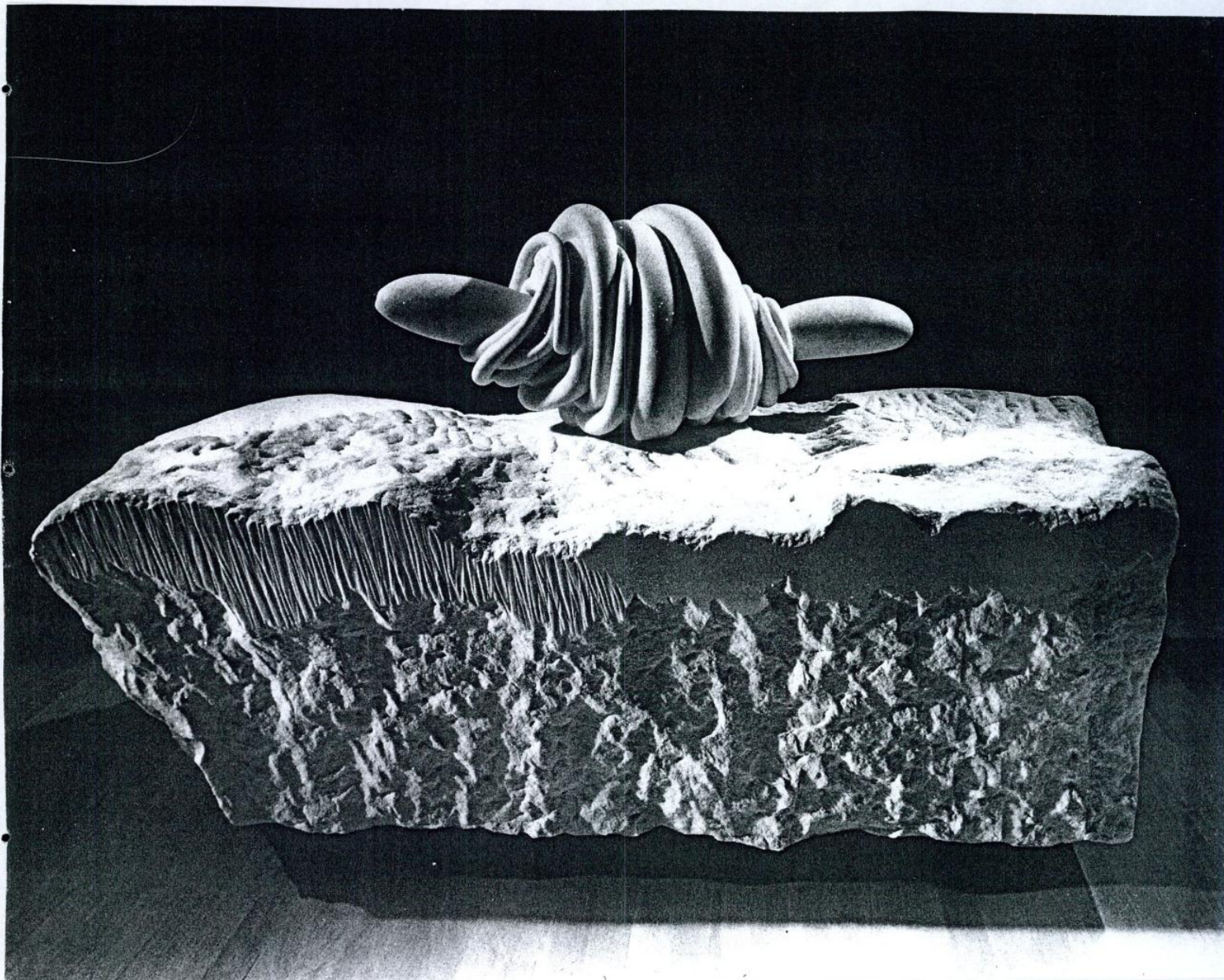


Plate 23

Nature Studies 1986

Marble

(88.9 X 155 X 75 cm)





Plate 24

Fallen Woman 1981

Marble

(9.5 X 10.2 X 34.3 cm)

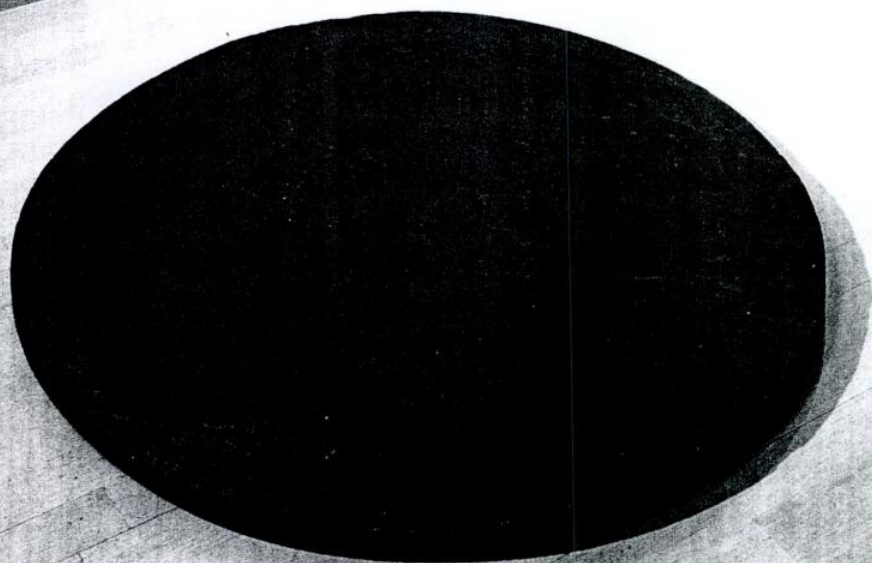


Plate 25

Spiral Woman 1984
Bronze, Slate disc
(29.2 X 8.9 X 11.4 cm)

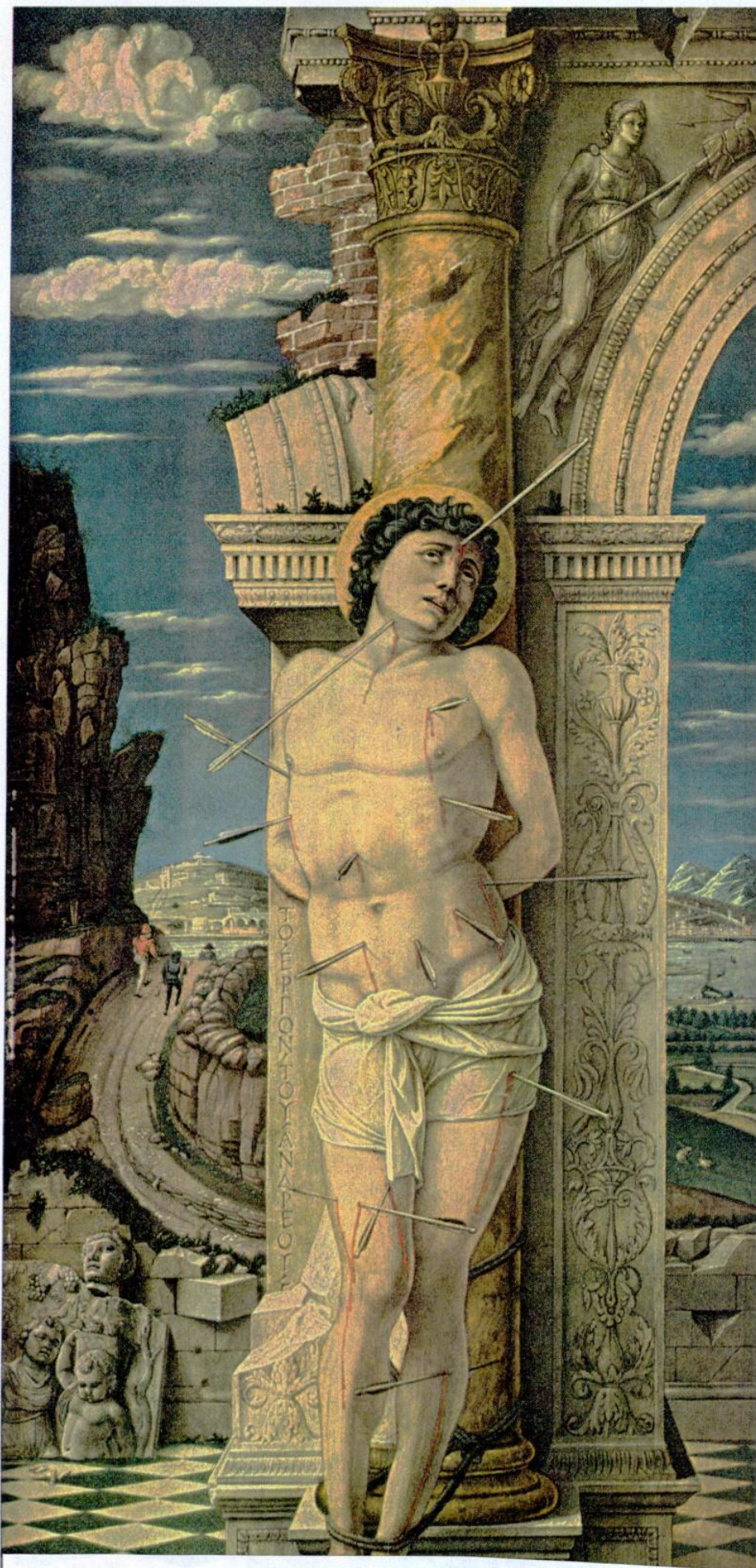


Plate 26

Andrea Mantegna

St. Sebastian 1455/60^c

(Panel 26 X 11 ins)

Kunsthistorisches, Museum, Vienna.

Conclusion

The Feminist implications of Bourgeois' work are wide ranging. The act of creating art has a liberating affect for her, it helps her deal with emotional anxieties. Through her work she asserted a strong and independent personality at a time when women had a restricted and passive role in both society and indeed art. She voiced her objections to, and challenged patriarchal ideologies to which she did not adhere.

Bourgeois adopts several strategies to undermine masculine biases. She ridicules male authority which she finds oppressive. Through subverting phallogentric and patriarchal images, she undermines the hierarchical structures that formed the basis of women's subjugation.

She presents a de-centred and amorphous vision of desire and pleasure. In doing so she moves away from attitudes towards gender and sexuality which preference a particular sex. Her work deals with issues relating to the body and sexuality in a way which is not salacious but captures the complex emotional and intellectual attitudes by which we define ourselves.

The fact that Bourgeois' work is drawn from her own experience and her recourse to unconscious impulses gives the work an authentic feel. The emotional energy that emanates from her work has a strong impact on the viewer. Her work illustrates experiences which are common to women and explores issues of femininity and sexuality that are central to all feminist discourse.

The feminist implications of this work are obvious. The act of creating art has a liberating effect for her, as help her deal with emotional and physical pain. Through her work she asserted a strong and independent personality at a time when women had a very passive role in home society and indeed art. Her work and exhibitions are, and challenged traditional roles in each and did not adhere.

Psychological issues have been discussed in previous articles. She exhibits male authority which in some ways is oppressive. Through her work she maintained the traditional values that formed the basis of her art and her life.

The artist's a de-central and emphatic vision of body and nature. In the act of the move away from traditional gender and sexuality which embraces a particular sex. Her work deals with issues relating to the body and sexuality in a way which is not obvious but suggests a complex emotional and intellectual attitude of which define herself.

The fact that her work is drawn from her own experience and her attitude to unconscious from her own work an artistic level. The emotional energy that emanated from her work has a strong impact on the viewer. Her work illustrates experiences which are common to many and exposes issues of femininity and sexuality. Her work is central to all feminist discourse.

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