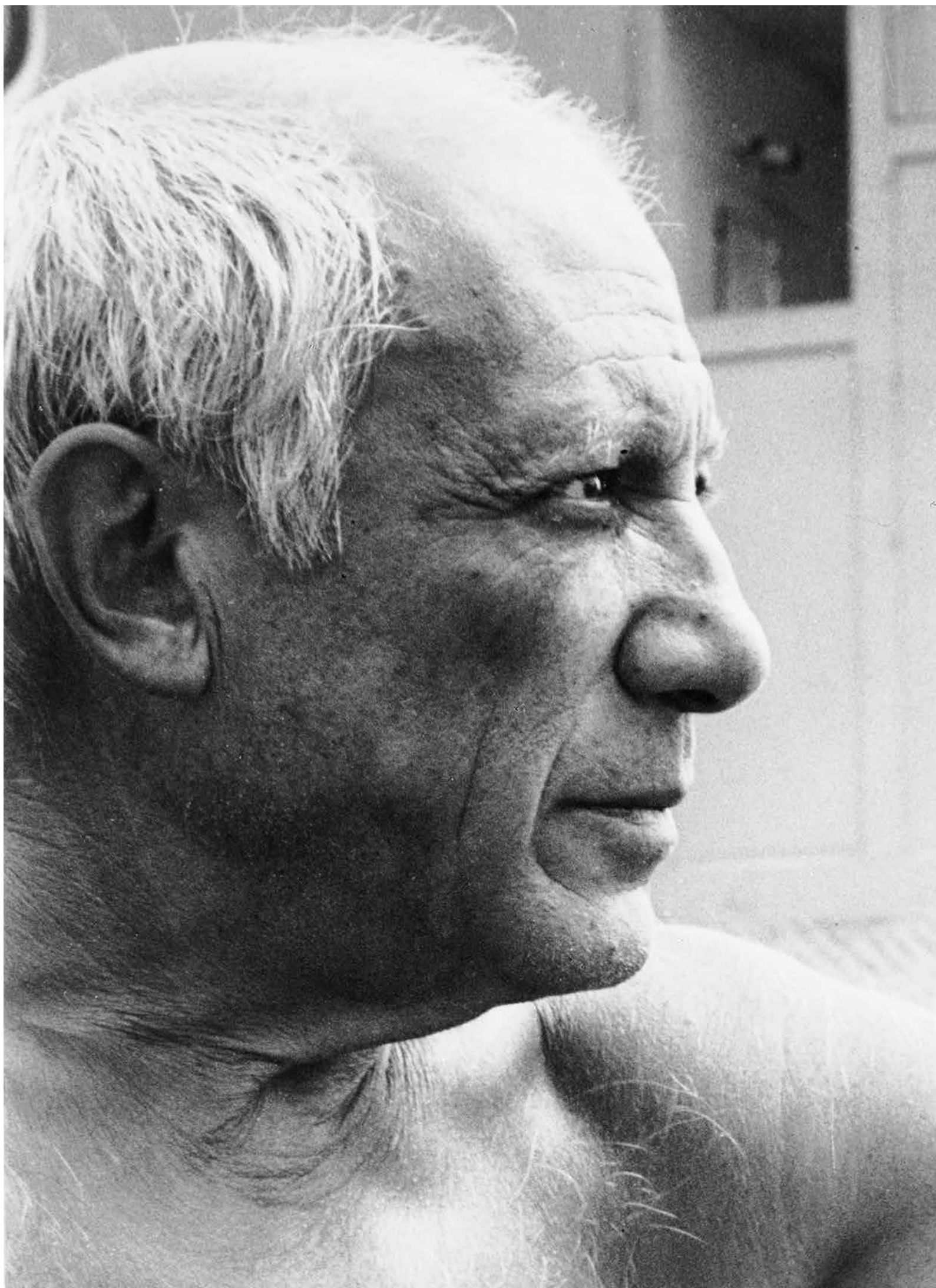


BOURGEOIS  
& Louise  
Pablo PICASSO









PABLO PICASSO *Tête (Head)*, 1972



LOUISE BOURGEOIS *Self-Portrait, 1947*

## Pregnant women

Pregnancy appeared in Bourgeois's oeuvre as early as 1947 with *Pregnant Woman* [P. 107], a schematic, hieratic figure in wood and plaster, like some primitive idol; then came a small, bronze figure with protuberant belly and nourishing breasts (*Fragile Goddess*, 1970) [P. 111]. Finally, in the early 2000s there were the figurines in pink fabric [P. 109]. The infant was sometimes positioned on the outside of the mother's belly, enclosed in a transparent, tulle, womb-like sac to convey its fragility.

For Bourgeois, pregnancy, like delivery, was an ambivalent condition simultaneously difficult (the woman who fears falling) and erotic.

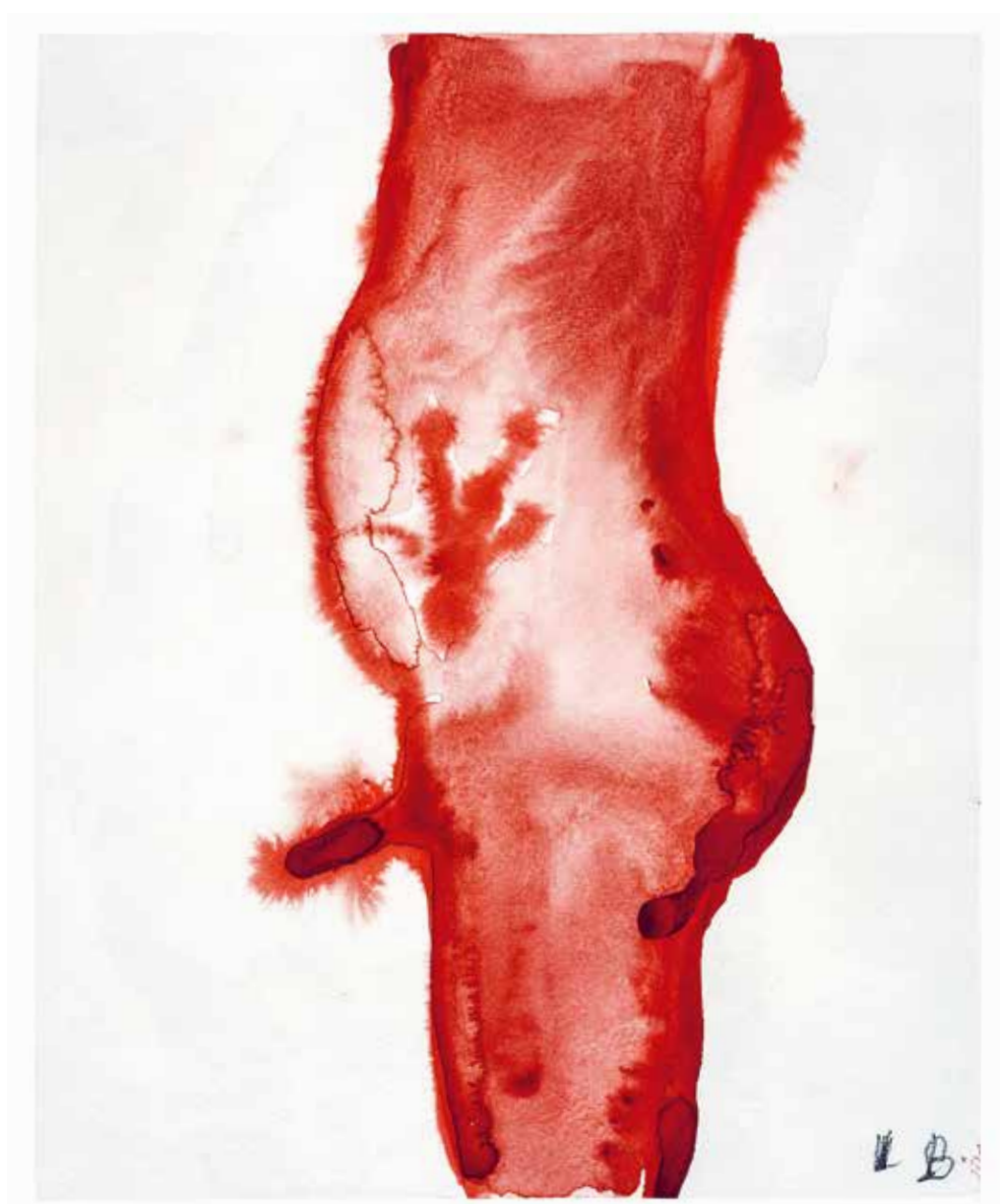
Few artists dealt with the scene of childbirth in such a recurrent, explicit fashion—the infant exiting the womb or clinging to its umbilical cord. These late depictions are a metaphor of rebirth, of creative power, and the cyclical return, in old age, to the condition of a newborn, as superbly shown in the large, red gouaches done at the end of her life [P. 35].<sup>57</sup> Overflowing breasts, couplings, embraces, swollen bellies sheltering an infant, multiple teats ringing a baby, and a child exiting its mother's vagina, legs spread: all these images—so moving in their quivery handling yet also



LOUISE BOURGEOIS *The Feeding*, 2007

radical in their assertion of a certain vision of fertility—are allegories of life and death. The maternal belly that we leave at birth is also a tomb within the earth, to which we return once we are dead. In English, womb closely rhymes with tomb. It is therefore no coincidence that motherhood returned in so precise and regular a manner at the end of Bourgeois’s life. For her it represented a capital, crucial event profoundly related to artistic creativity. And, finally, she felt pregnancy was erotic, because it concerned relations between the sexes.<sup>58</sup>

Picasso depicted pregnancy several times,<sup>59</sup> either in a realistic manner, such as the *Femme enceinte* (*Pregnant Woman*) of 1950—whose belly and breasts in the original plaster were made from terra-cotta vases—or else in a more abstract, geometric



LOUISE BOURGEOIS *The Maternal Man*, 2008



PABLO PICASSO *Mère et enfant (Mother and Child)*, 1921





PABLO PICASSO *Femme enceinte (Pregnant Woman)*, 1949



Louise Bourgeois in her studio, ca. 1946

in her arms in front of Robert Mapplethorpe’s camera in 1982 [p. 205]. This belated triumph of Bourgeois, her success as a mature woman, proves Françoise Héritier right when she formulates the following observation in the essay “Masculin/Féminin”:

. . . it appears generally in anthropological accounts, when women are at issue, that their individual status tends to change in their old age, to put it clearly, when they are menopausal, or if they are sterile, that is to say, in conditions where women are not capable or are no longer capable of conceiving.<sup>4</sup>

Thus among the Piegan Indians in Canada, the women with a “man’s heart” are in fact always aged women and they can enjoy masculine privileges, that is to say, more power. One cannot but be surprised then at the evolution of the way in which Bourgeois presents herself in her photographic portraits. Until the 1960s, the classical attributes of womanliness dominate, although a form of strangeness is sought: in front of her painting in 1946, her hair is carefully spread on her back echoing the interlaced organic forms on the canvas [p. 132]. Even in 1967, she is holding tenderly and delicately *Germinal* in her hands [p. 133]. However, in the 1990s she tends to play at, precisely, the Indian “matrons” and presents herself as a strong, provocative, not to say aggressive, woman—while at the same time focusing her

art on multiple childbirth scenes and pregnant women in the form of mannequins made out of fabric. The powerful, menopausal old woman thus tackles fertility tirelessly. As for Picasso at the same age, he does not cease to present himself in the guise of an eternally young man, and accompanied by young women and small children. In a way, both of them embody the inverted image, in relation to their gender, of the old artist in a patriarchal society, and play on it in a most conscious manner. This is the first sense in which both of them “return to birth as death draws near.”

We have a man whose private life we believe to know in all its particulars, and whose work is often explained through a biographical lens, a man about whom we think we understand what Eva, Olga, Marie-Thérèse, Dora, Françoise, or Jacqueline represented for him, since he never stopped representing them; and then we have a woman with whose traumas we imagine to be familiar in troubling detail, for since the 1980s Bourgeois has not stopped recounting them and associating them to her works in her statements, a woman whose father, mother, governess Sadie, son Jean-Louis, brother Pierre, and sister Henriette we feel we know. It is on this particular issue, of the relationship between the life and the work, of the manner in which “art



Louise Bourgeois contemplating *Germinal* (1967)



LOUISE BOURGEOIS *Arched Figure No. 3, 1997*



LOUISE BOURGEOIS *Untitled, 2002*



PABLO PICASSO *Sculpture: Tête de Marie-Thérèse (Sculpture: Head of Marie-Thérèse), 1933*



PABLO PICASSO *Personnage (Personage)*, 1958

LOUISE BOURGEOIS *Portrait of C.Y.*, 1947-49







PABLO PICASSO *Femme au chapeau vert et à la broche* (Woman with Green Hat and Brooch), 1941



PABLO PICASSO *Tête de femme* (Head of a Woman), 1931