

EDWARD ALLINGTON

FLASH 500

LUNCH WITH LOUISE

My garden is full of spiders, every day I walk through their webs; they often bite me. Once, I walked into another web, it was a small piece of paper. I don't have it any longer, the gallery owner kept it. Then there was the art critic. I know both their names. Then the phone call. I made the phone call, and as a result I found myself knocking on the door of a brownstone in Chelsea on New York's west side. It was 1994. The door opened and I met a man. I knew his name was Jerry Gorovoy. He led me down a dark hallway into a room lined with books; next to this room was a small kitchen. Light came through the windows, and in the light I could see a small woman, she was old even then. Her name was Louise Bourgeois; she was, in my opinion, the greatest living sculptor in the world.

She made me lunch, a simple dish of pasta in olive oil and butter with herbs. It was delicious. She asked me about my sculpture, I told her. I asked about hers, but somehow she eluded my questions. Jerry Gorovoy sat with us protectively. I wanted to look around the room, but I couldn't, I was transfixed by her. I could understand now why they said that wherever she went she was surrounded by adoring young men. The telephone kept ringing. Jerry would answer it and pass it to her if she agreed. She looked at me while she talked; it seemed as if her gallery was organising a charity exhibition. She said very little, but as the afternoon progressed I realised she had completely changed its direction. She told me Marcel Duchamp was impotent. I couldn't help wondering how she knew? Perhaps she had once graced his bed, perhaps not. It became apparent it was time for me to leave. I stood up and she asked me to kiss her, she said I must kiss her as if she were Charles de Gaulle. I had never kissed Charles de Gaulle, so I didn't know what to do. She led me through the kissing, it was a three cheek number. I left, the door closed behind me. It was a wonderful day.

I walked downtown to the gallery where her Red Rooms were being shown for the first time. I was the only visitor, the first space of the gallery was empty and in the second were the Red Rooms, the father and the mother. If you see them now they are cordoned off, then you could walk into them. Despite my happiness I found myself crying. Don't underestimate the power of objects, and the spider, she has made a lot of spiders. They are self-portraits.

The gallery owner was Diane Brown. The art critic Stuart Morgan died in 2002 aged 54. Louise Bourgeois died in 2010 aged 99. Jerry Gorovoy was her principal assistant. It is 2013 I am still alive.