

Louise LeBourgeois

Towards Horizon

Dolby Chadwick Gallery

Essay by Frances Malcolm

April 3 — 26, 2014



Water: Edge #508, 2013 | Oil on panel | 30 x 60 inches

Dolby Chadwick Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new oil paintings by Louise LeBourgeois, on view April 3–26, 2014. LeBourgeois has called Chicago home for the past thirty-six years, and Lake Michigan—located mere blocks from her house—has served as her primary muse for the last twenty. Yet each painting is dramatically different than the next, evidence of the lake’s inexhaustible potential as a subject of inquiry. *Water, Frisson #500*, for instance, captures a still, almost glass-like Lake Michigan in what appears to be the mysterious cast of moonlight. Hovering low above the lake’s surface, an illuminated corona of water vapor augments the painting’s preternatural effect. On the other hand, the combination of water, sky, and horizon reveals itself much differently in *Water, Tempest #506*. Here, the agitated waves are either roiling with energy

fueled by an impending storm, or retiring to a calmer state following the tempest. The tinge of the grey sky beyond the thick clouds and the deep blue streak of the horizon are further evidence of animation and tumult. Despite the great variety of her paintings, a certain mood pervades most. Remarking on an observation offered by a friend, LeBourgeois notes that her paintings are “like coming to a place of peacefulness and tranquility after going through something really difficult. They’re a place of respite.”

LeBourgeois began focusing on water in graduate school in order to teach herself to paint something that wasn’t still. She closely studied water while standing on a beach or pier, looking out and taking note of patterns produced by waves and the effects of the sun. These aspects are still of vital importance to her, but as an avid swimmer, capturing the feel of the water has also become a central concern. Waking up early to swim in Lake Michigan’s waters three or four times a week during the warmer months, LeBourgeois carries her body’s memory of the water’s movement with her into the studio. The emphasis on the corporeal is further centered by the increasing size of her paintings. With panels as big as three-and-a-half by seven feet, she is forced to utilize her entire body—including her larger muscles—in order to build up layers of paint across their surfaces. For LeBourgeois, this relationship with the body is just as important to her as her relationship to the visual: the waves look a certain way, yes, but they also feel a certain way and carry a certain weight and energy. LeBourgeois is attuned to these nuances, which she brings to her practice and embodies while painting.

In 2011, LeBourgeois began pursuing an MFA in creative nonfiction writing. This program has helped crystallize her ability as a painter to translate experiences and stories into a visual medium. Sky and water have consequently come to serve as important references for how she begins her paintings; that is, her paintings are not photorealistic renderings of natural landscapes, but prompts for opening up the repository of memory and accessing recollections both real and imaginary, visual and tactile, sensory and emotional. Her concern is not with the accuracy of memory, but rather the

experiences and the depth of awareness that memory can activate. As such, her paintings can be seen as abstractions in a nontraditional sense. Though we are often able to identify their physical referents, they are unique in that they keep us on our toes, asking us to dive deeper and consider the many dimensions of what they represent both to the artist and to ourselves.

Born in New Orleans in 1964. Louise LeBourgeois earned a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a MFA from Northwestern University. In addition to exhibiting nationally and internationally, LeBourgeois—a faculty member at Columbia College Chicago—has also had art acquired by numerous public and private collections. She is a recipient of an Artadia Grant, was awarded residencies at the BAU Institute in Otranto, Italy and at the Ragdale Foundation, and earned a commission from the 17th District Police Station in Chicago. This is her third solo show at the Dolby Chadwick Gallery.