

ECHO

WRAPPED IN MEMORY

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

SIMONE ROCHA

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER

Lannoo



Jean Paul Gaultier's teddy bear Nana, 1957

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SIMONE ROCHA
Spring-Summer 2022

FOREWORD

KAAT DEBO

DIRECTOR MOMU — FASHION MUSEUM ANTWERP

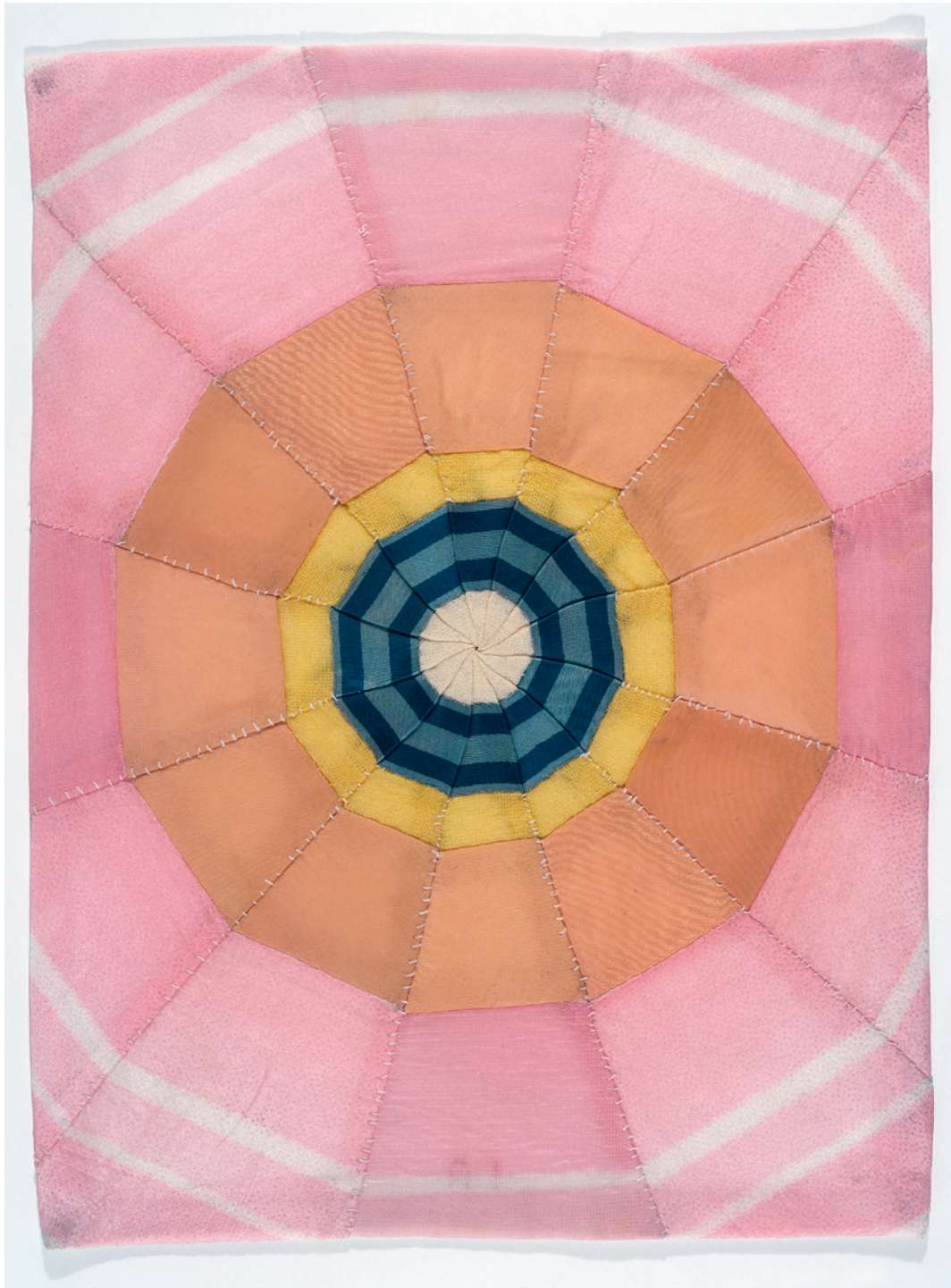
ECHO. Wrapped in Memory explores the relationship between clothing and memory, drawing on the work of Louise Bourgeois, Simone Rocha and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. Clothing is one of the most intimate things in our lives. It is what we wear closest to our bodies. We allow few other items to come into such direct contact with our skin. Our memories, too, are intimate, personal and subjective. They are tinted by positive or negative emotions, sometimes also by trauma, loss or fear, and can be evoked by smell, colour or tactility. All of this is why clothing is an ideal carrier of and portal to our memories.

Working every day with a collection of more than 38,000 objects gives MoMu's curators and researchers access to the echoes of a myriad of personal histories and events. Smells, stains and tears in clothing, or the way certain garments were altered or repaired in the past, are an inexhaustible source of stories and embody the passing of time. Contradictorily, museums typically prefer displaying objects considered to be of museum quality. In doing so, we frequently conceal the inescapable processes of ageing, and everyday wear and tear, as if these are things to be scrupulously hidden. *ECHO* features a unique selection of objects from the MoMu collection in different stages of degradation with their flaws, discolourations and traces of damage, and with just as many intriguing stories.

Since early childhood, all three protagonists in *ECHO* have had a personal connection with clothes, textiles or fashion. Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker recalls the bolts of fabric in the living room of her childhood home, and the annual visits to the dressmaker with her mother and siblings.

But also, how clothes were passed on and reused between the sisters of the family. One of Simone Rocha's earliest memories plays out in the fabric archive of her father, the designer John Rocha. The aura of domesticity of crafts like embroidery and knitting, very present in her Irish childhood, still shines through in her work today. Louise Bourgeois also grew up in a textile family. Her parents had a carpet restoration workshop. She recalls hiding in the rolled-up carpets as a child, an echo of a past when, in old castles and mansions, enormous carpets and tapestries served as room dividers, creating what Bourgeois so beautifully describes as flexible architecture. This concept finds its translation in the beautiful scenography Janina Pedan designed for the exhibition *ECHO*. Integrating curtains and fabric walls, combined with lighting by Chris Pye and graphic design by Paul Boudens, her design immerses the visitor in an intimate and sensory journey.

We were able to realise this exhibition thanks to the loyal cooperation of the Easton Foundation, Xavier Hufkens and the archives of Rosas and Simone Rocha. My special thanks to their respective teams. Thanks to Elisa De Wyngaert, the curator of *ECHO. Wrapped in Memory*, for her unique research and passionate work on this exhibition and book. My sincere thanks also to the loaners, artists, designers, photographers, and authors whose work contributed significantly to this ambitious project. I am particularly grateful for the additional support of Naomi Milgrom of the Naomi Milgrom Foundation and Tanguy Van Quickenborne of the firm Van Den Weghe. Finally, I would like to thank the entire MoMu team who, as always, gave their best.



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
Dawn (detail), 2006

WRAPPED IN MEMORY

LOUISE BOURGEOIS
SIMONE ROCHA
ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER

ELISA DE WYNGAERT

“[...] you can retell your life and remember your life by the shape, the weight, the colour, the smell of the clothes in your closet. Fashion is like the weather, the ocean — it changes all the time.”¹

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

Jokingly, I have described this exhibition and accompanying publication as the closing chapter of a trilogy that started in 2021. The past few years have been an emotional turmoil for most of us, which is why psychology and emotions sat at the heart of these exhibitions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, I curated *E/MOTION. Fashion in Transition*, a show that explored how fashion has always been in dialogue with, and has even anticipated, different crises and transitions. Fashion, like no other medium, can magnify and reflect the raw emotions within a society.² In 2022, *E/MOTION* was followed by *MIRROR MIRROR. Fashion & the Psyche*, in which we traced the connections between fashion, psychology, self-image and identity.³ *ECHO. Wrapped in Memory* closes the trilogy by reflecting on the intimate connection between clothing and memory. To me, *ECHO* is the sensitive, associative and tactile sister.

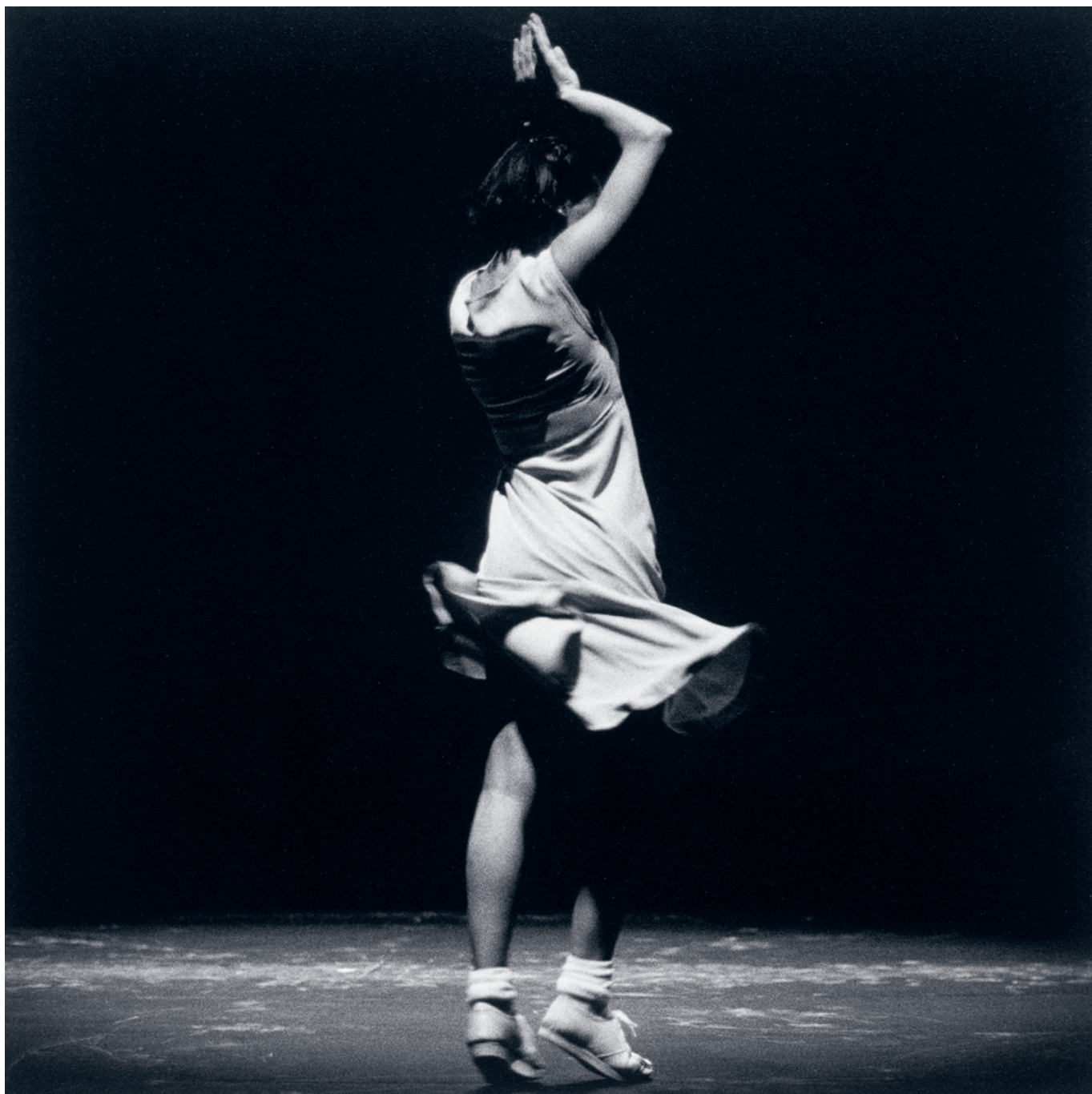
Artist Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), fashion designer Simone Rocha (°1986) and choreographer and dancer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (°1960) will guide this story. Three women, working in different disciplines, who, to me, have always shared the astonishing quality of evoking and embracing echoes of the past in their work. In their own unique ways, they weave memories of clothing and textiles into their artistic language. What they create comes from a personal and emotional place, but the effects reach beyond the personal and touch many facets of the human experience.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker established the dance company Rosas in Brussels in 1983, while creating the work *Rosas danst Rosas*. It is well known that De Keersmaeker takes music as the blueprint for the choreography, but less well known is how essential clothing is to her, not only during the performance, but to the dancers and the choreography too. Some of her past choreographies even started from a garment. For example, her first solo in 1982, *Violin Phase*, was inspired by the movement of a rehearsal dress she had worn in the studio, which twirled pleasantly when she spun around. First there was the dance, then the choreography.

I am in no doubt that I (and probably many others) would be able to recognise a Rosas production only by looking at a lineup of dressed dancers. However subtle, there is an artistic consistency that is hard to pin down. Is it the flowing knee-length skirts and dresses? Is it the gender-nonconforming silhouettes? Is it the slightly ill-fitting jeans and colourful trainers? Does it lie in the vulnerable but seductive play of hiding and revealing? The sudden laying bare of just one shoulder? The cotton briefs, the act of dressing and undressing? To me, Rosas' stage clothes have come to embody a sense of purity, realism and subdued elegance. Recent productions are an ode to streetwear.

Clothing, accessories and shoes are treated with the utmost care in the Rosas archive, where pieces are repeatedly restored and reused until they are beyond repair. The archive holds memories of De Keersmaeker's circle of people: dancers and collaborators. Over the years, costumes have been created in tandem with trusted individuals like Martine André, Aouatif Boulaich, Inge Büscher, An D'Huys, Nathalie Douxfils, Elizabeth Jenyon, Lila John, Anne-Catherine Kunz, Carine Lauwers, Ester Manas, Fauve Ryckebusch, Rudy Sabounghi, Dries Van Noten, Tim Van Steenbergem and Ann Weckx.⁴ But although she actively seeks out and values dialogue and co-creation, when it comes to the costumes, she wants to be in control. De Keersmaeker knows that she is directional when it comes to the costumes and values people who understand her vision without needing too many words: a shared sensitivity for the quality of fabrics, for the way clothes flow, the right balance between opaqueness and transparency, hiding and revealing. As such, many of her own garments end up being used or replicated in the performances. Her deep respect for craftsmanship and craftspeople is felt in the frequent use of both historic and vintage garments, which are often adapted to the dancers' bodies, or form the basis from which replicas are made.

“Clothing is also an exercise of memory.
It makes me explore the past: how did I feel when I wore that.
They are like signposts in the search for the past.”⁵



ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER/ROSAS
Fase, Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich, 1982
Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
Pink Days and Blue Days, 1997

Over decades, fearful of throwing anything away, Louise Bourgeois accumulated not only a collection of her own garments, dating back to childhood, but also clothing that belonged to family members:

“It gives me great pleasure to hold on to my clothes, my dresses, my stockings,
I have never thrown away a pair of shoes of mine in 20 years [...] The pretext is that they are still good — it’s my past and as rotten as it was I would like to take it and hold it tight in my arms.”⁶

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

Then, one morning in the mid-1990s, when she was already well into her eighties, Bourgeois asked her long-time studio assistant Jerry Gorovoy to bring the contents of the upstairs wardrobes down to her basement studio. There, she suspended the clothes from hangers on the pipes on the ceiling and arranged them into colours. This exercise opened up a new, intimate dialogue with her memories. From these clothes and textiles, she developed an extensive new body of sculptures, installations, drawings, collages, books and prints. The garments that had a specific memory associated with them, or that were evocative of certain people or places, were kept intact and used in sculptural installations. Her more contemporary garments, as well as her household napkins, table linens, handkerchiefs, old towels and, later, tapestry fragments, were used less delicately. From these, Bourgeois made works that involved cutting up or altering, reconfiguring and stuffing the fabrics to create a range of expressive figurative forms, abject and distressed states of being. According to Gorovoy, Bourgeois’s deep urge to embark on this new body of work came from her getting older and wondering what would happen to all the objects she had saved throughout her life. These fabric works were a way of processing her memories and experiences, thereby helping her to understand the sources of her anxieties and fear of abandonment. Like the pages of a diary, they allowed her to preserve significant people, places and events.

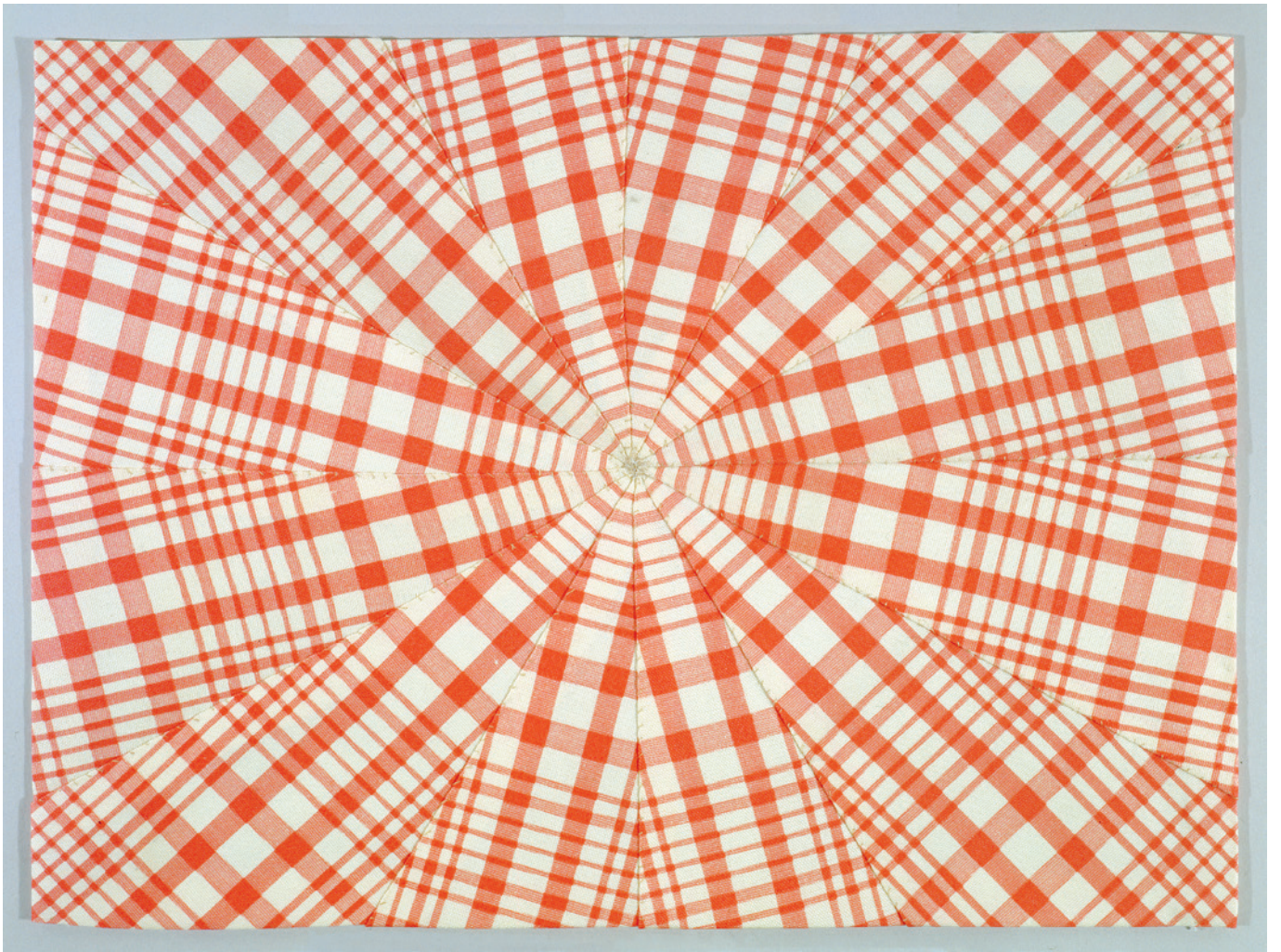
I can recognise a garment by Simone Rocha from across the street. Just like Bourgeois and De Keersmaeker, Rocha has a powerful, yet delicate, artistic language, with recurring motifs: references to children's clothing and historic dress, signature pearl and crystal embellishments, broderie anglaise, gilt brocades, ribboned lace, Alice bands, Aran knitting, chunky shoes and ballerinas. Her work speaks to the female gaze and there is a cheeky seduction in that. She designs for all genders and ages and, in doing so, embraces all things that would 'traditionally' be considered 'feminine'. Her world is filled with frills, tulle, lace, pastels and ruffles, but in this softness lies a twist, a darker edge; there is a more subversive side for those who care to see it. In these layers and juxtapositions, there is a kinship between Bourgeois, Rocha and De Keersmaeker.

Rocha clearly remembers seeing Bourgeois's work for the first time when she was 16 years old and visited the *Stitches in Time* exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. Even as a teenager, Bourgeois's work resonated deeply with her. Bourgeois's motifs and use of textiles changed the way the young Rocha looked at art, fashion and her future. In her early twenties she moved from Dublin to London to complete her fashion design MA at Central Saint Martins where she graduated in 2010, the same year Bourgeois passed away. Not long after launching her own fashion house, Rocha saw her dream come true as she went from being an admirer to a collaborator with Louise Bourgeois's foundation, The Easton Foundation. Over the years, not only has Bourgeois's work been on display in Rocha's stores, but her spirit also continues to emanate from Rocha's designs. Her most direct references include the intricate spiderweb prints and embroideries of Bourgeois's late fabric works in the Autumn-Winter 2019-20 collection and a limited-edition series of *Spiral Woman* earrings in collaboration with Hauser & Wirth. But Bourgeois never leaves the collections. She is there in the subtleties too: in a specific pink hue, in the natural fibres against the man-made, in the tapestries from her childhood, the blood-red threads. If you know her work, you understand how Bourgeois's legacy is at home with Rocha.

These artists' echoes of personal memories do come with a freshness, an almost childlike perspective. What they each create, eventually takes us back to early life. As Siri Hustvedt writes so eloquently, 'Femininity and childhood have been continually linked in Western culture as conditions of shrunken intellect and dependence. And yet, the dependent child lives on in the adult, in every adult, in memory that is more feeling than autobiographical image.'¹⁰



SIMONE ROCHA
Autumn-Winter 2019-20



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
Untitled, 2003



SIMONE ROCHA
Autumn-Winter 2019-20

One of five siblings, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker was born in 1960 in Wemmel, not far from Brussels. Her parents had a farm where, in the 1960s-70s, she grew up surrounded by cows, horses, pigs, sheep, chickens, wheat, beets, potatoes, milk and butter: ‘As a young girl, I was there all seasons. In winter to help cut beets and feed the cows in the barn. In summer to help bring in the harvest, plough with the tractor, and in the field illegally learning to drive a van when I was 12.’¹¹ When she was ten, she took her first class at her village’s ballet school and, thanks to her inspirational teacher, she instantly fell in love. Today, De Keersmaeker still moves with the disarming energy, care and attention of that young girl. Thanks to her childhood, her work is authentically in tune with nature. Her dance vocabulary is minimalistic and unpretentious, intriguingly mundane. From her first choreographies, such as *Fase, Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich* (1982), there is a childlike quality in the short and sharp movements, in the turning, jumping, swinging and waving of arms, in the twisting of skirts — movements children would make if you asked them to dance:

“It’s a vocabulary which will make the audience members believe they’ll be able to do, too — movements people can see themselves doing as non-dancers. Very often you see people quietly trying the material of *Fase* at the bus stop after a performance. That potential for imitation is important, it is an important way for dancers to make a connection with their audience.”¹²

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER

The clothes, too, evoke a sense of nostalgia for childhood, explains close collaborator An D’Huys: ‘There are the school uniforms (*Rosas danst Rosas*, 1983), the pleated skirts (*Bartók/aantekeningen*, 1986), the laced boots with clean schoolgirl socks, but there are also the clothes from her own childhood and those of the adults around her, like the dresses from the 1950s and 1960s, men’s suits in stiff wool with straight legs.’¹³

Sometimes, you swear you can sense some romanticism in the unexpected princess dress. One would never describe De Keersmaeker’s work as sentimental, but like Bourgeois and Rocha, there is a tenderness to the way she cherishes the memories held in garments. ‘Newness’ is not an aspiration either; rather, she lives in tune with nature, believing that objects and clothing should live a long life. As D’Huys explains, ‘this is beautifully symbolised by the rib-knitted vests from her youth (some with holes) that have been repeatedly darned and mended and that continue to be worn in her productions (like recently in *Forêt* at the Louvre).’¹⁴



Thierry De Mey & Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker
Rosas danst Rosas, 1997, 35 mm, 57 min, colour
Samantha Van Wissen, Anne Mousselet, Cynthia Loemij, Sarah Ludi



SIMONE ROCHA
Autumn-Winter 2018-19
Braiding hair series by Petra Collins



LOUISE BOURGEOIS
Follow the Child within You, 1999

“My childhood has never lost its magic, it has never lost its mystery, and it has never lost its drama. All my work in the past 50 years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood.”¹⁵

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

Bourgeois used her art to work through difficult childhood memories, which stemmed from the complex relationships and family dynamics at play. She was born in 1911 in Paris into a family of tapestry restorers. Her mother, Joséphine Bourgeois, ran the atelier in the suburbs of Paris, along the banks of the River Bièvre, while her father, Louis Bourgeois, sold the restored tapestries out of a gallery in Saint-Germain-des-Près. As a girl, she assisted her mother by drawing in the missing feet of figures in damaged tapestries. Her late-career fabric works, the techniques and the textiles, are her most direct return to childhood.

Rocha also grew up surrounded by textiles; her father is the designer John Rocha, who was born in Hong Kong. One of her first vivid memories is being in her father’s Dublin studio, walking through his fabric room: ‘A big, long room with doors at both ends — almost like a corridor — with rows and rows of material... I remember everything being extremely physical and tangible’. But Ireland is where she was born in 1986, and it is where she grew up — the birthplace of her mother, Odette Rocha. Each year she travels to Hong Kong to spend time with the family. Her memories of childhood rituals and ceremonies, from both places, are at the root of her work: ‘Ireland to me is home, and home is where the heart is. Hong Kong is family far away but always by my side.’¹⁷

As expats, Bourgeois and Rocha experienced homesickness for their native countries. During lockdown, Rocha, isolated in London, felt herself yearning for Ireland:

“I’ve been thinking about it a lot, the people, the smell — of the wet ground, of hops — the sense of humour but also the narratives that come from the craft, the techniques and the history. My Great-Uncle Barney passed away a few days ago and the funeral tradition of Ireland is so amazing. It’s such a moment of coming together, of family. It’s always uplifting and ceremonial.”¹⁸

SIMONE ROCHA