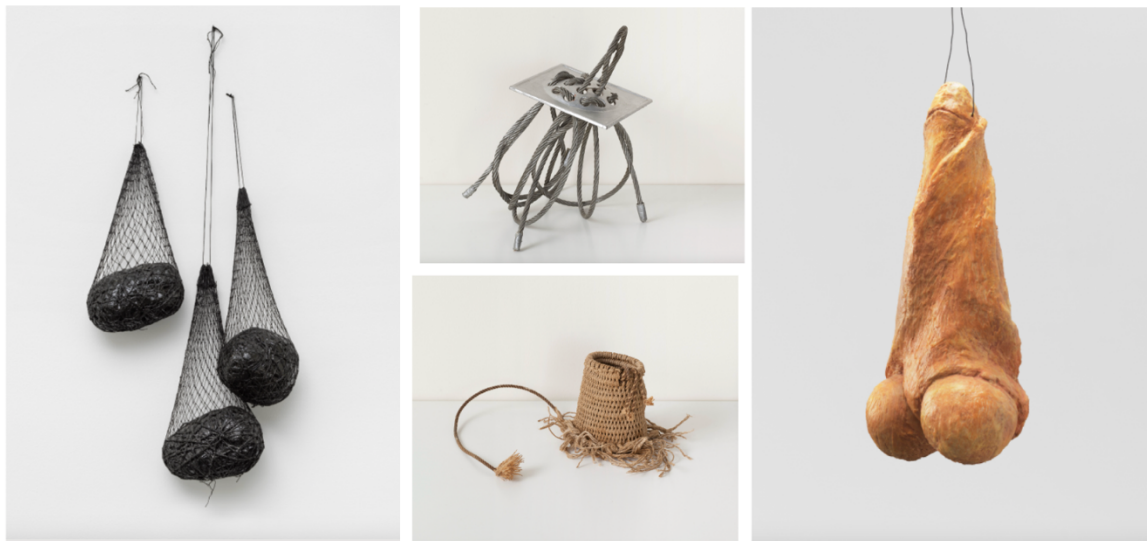


The Courtauld

Press Release

ABSTRACT EROTIC: LOUISE BOURGEOIS, EVA HESSE, ALICE ADAMS

Major new exhibition opens at The Courtauld Gallery 20 June 2025



Eva Hesse, *No title*, 1966. Private Collection. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth Collection Services © The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich.
Alice Adams, *Threaded Drain Plate*, 1964. Zürcher Gallery, New York. Courtesy of the artist and Zürcher Gallery, New York / Paris © Howcroft Photography, Boston
Alice Adams, *Sheath*, 1964. Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody © Howcroft Photography, Boston.
Louise Bourgeois, *Fillette (Sweeter Version)*, 1968-99 (cast 2006). The Easton Foundation, New York. © The Easton Foundation/VAGA at ARS, NY and DACS, London 2025. Photo: Christopher Burke

Press images: <https://tinyurl.com/Abstract-Erotic-The-Courtauld>

Abstract Erotic: Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Alice Adams will bring together work by three artists who pioneered a visceral and subversive reimagining of sculpture in the mid-20th century.

During the 1960s, Alice Adams, Louise Bourgeois, and Eva Hesse produced startling sculptures that combined humour, abstraction and eroticism, made from unconventional materials including latex, rubber, foam, fibreglass, and plaster forged into fleshy mounds, woven metal tangles, and sausage-like suspensions. Dubbed 'abstract erotic' by the influential American art critic Lucy Lippard, their radical new work was neither entirely abstract or modernist, figurative or surrealist. Rather their work offered an idiosyncratic, eccentric approach to sculptural form.

In 1966 Lippard staged the groundbreaking group exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* at the Fishbach Gallery in New York, bringing together work by eight contemporary artists using non-traditional materials, which went on to profoundly shape the language and legacy of post-war American sculpture. Bourgeois, Hesse, and Adams stood out as the only women in the show, united by their commitment to producing striking, sensuous sculptures that challenged established ideas about modernist form and minimalist geometric order.

Their work signalled an important shift in how sculpture was made. As Lippard later reflected, “I can see now that I was looking for ‘feminist art’”.

This major exhibition at The Courtauld will reunite these three artists for the first time since that important 1966 exhibition, offering a unique opportunity to experience their remarkable work together. The exhibition will feature 29 sculptures on loan from public and private collections, including Adams’ large-scale undulating suspended sculpture *Big Aluminium 2* (1965-2022) and Bourgeois’ bronze *Janus Fleuri* (1968) combining male and female anatomy.

Although of different generations, Bourgeois, Hesse, and Adams were all making art in the 1960s, living and exhibiting in downtown Manhattan. At the time of Lippard’s exhibition, Louise Bourgeois was already an established artist, and by the 1970s was being lauded by a younger generation of emerging female artists. When Eva Hesse died in May 1970 aged just thirty-four, she had already created a considerable legacy and significant body of work much of which is too fragile to travel. Now in her nineties, Alice Adams continues to make work in her native New York, having focused in the 1970s on undertaking major collaborative outdoor public commissions and architectural installations in airports, university campuses, and other urban sites. This will be the first exhibition of her work in the UK and her first ever in a museum context.

The exhibition is rooted in the research, teaching and writing of Jo Applin, Walter H. Annenberg Professor in the History of Art, and Director of the Centre of the Art of the Americas.

To coincide with the exhibition, in the Drawings Gallery, ***Louise Bourgeois: Drawings from the 1960s*** also co-curated by Jo Applin, will present a group of drawings by Bourgeois from The Easton Foundation, New York, revealing the central role of drawing in her work and its influence on her sculptural practice.

Abstract Erotic: Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Alice Adams will be accompanied by a catalogue with contributions by Lucy Lippard and art historians Jo Applin, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Briony Fer, and Mignon Nixon.

Abstract Erotic: Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Alice Adams

20 June – 14 September 2025

Denise Coates Exhibition Galleries, Floor 3

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/exh-abstract-erotic/>

Louise Bourgeois: Drawings from the 1960s

20 Jun – 14 September 2025

Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery, Floor 1

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/exh-louise-bourgeois-drawings-from-the-1960s/>

The Courtauld Gallery

Somerset House, Strand

London WC2R 0RN

Opening hours: 10.00 – 18.00 (last entry 17.15)

Friends and Under-18s go free. Other concessions available

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About The Courtauld

The Courtauld works to advance how we see and understand the visual arts, as an internationally renowned centre for the teaching and research of art history and a major public gallery. Founded by collectors and philanthropists in 1932, the organisation has been at the forefront of the study of art ever since through advanced research and conservation practice, innovative teaching, the renowned collection and inspiring exhibitions of its gallery, and engaging and accessible activities, education and events.

The Courtauld cares for one of the greatest art collections in the UK, presenting these works to the public at The Courtauld Gallery in central London, as well as through loans and partnerships. The Gallery is most famous for its iconic Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces – such as Van Gogh's Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Manet's A Bar at the Folies-Bergère. It showcases these alongside an internationally renowned collection of works from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance through to the present day.

Academically, The Courtauld faculty is the largest community of art historians and conservators in the UK, teaching and carrying out research on subjects from creativity in late Antiquity to contemporary digital artforms - with an increasingly global focus. An independent college of the University of London, The Courtauld offers a range of degree programmes from BA to PhD in the History of Art, curating and the conservation of easel and wall paintings. Its alumni are leaders and innovators in the arts, culture and business worlds, helping to shape the global agenda for the arts and creative industries.

Founded on the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to engage with art, The Courtauld works to increase understanding of the role played by art throughout history, in all societies and across all geographies – as well as being a champion for the importance of art in the present day. This could be through exhibitions offering a chance to look closely at world-famous works; events bringing art history research to new audiences; accessible and expert short courses; digital engagement, innovative school, family and community programmes; or taking a formal qualification. The Courtauld's ambition is to transform access to art history

education by extending the horizons of what this is and ensuring as many people as possible can benefit from the tools to better understand the visual world around us.

The Courtauld is an exempt charity and relies on generous philanthropic support to achieve its mission of advancing the understanding of the visual arts of the past and present across the world through advanced research, innovative teaching, inspiring exhibitions, programmes and collections.

The collection cared for by The Courtauld Gallery is owned by the Samuel Courtauld Trust.