

Artist Resources – Lee Bontecou (American, b. 1931)

[Bontecou at MoMA](#)



Bontecou, 2003
Photograph: Josh Titus

Bontecou was one of very few women artists to receive critical attention in the 1960s, exhibiting alongside Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Robert Rauschenberg at Leo Castelli Gallery. See [installation views](#) of a solo exhibition at the famous gallery in 1960.

Bontecou retreated from public view in the 1970s and rarely showed work until *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective* organized by the [Hammer Museum](#) in 2003. The exhibition traveled to the [Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago](#) and the [Museum of Modern Art](#). Read the [exhibition brochure](#) from the MoMA edition and a Los Angeles Times article about the [controversy](#) over one of the catalogue essays. An article in [Smithsonian Magazine](#), “Lee Bontecou’s Brave New World” discusses the artist’s return to public exhibitions. Also read “Lee Bontecou Doesn’t Care What You Think” in the [Chicago Tribune](#).

Listen to a [rare oral history interview](#) with the artist in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

In 2010, the Museum of Modern Art organized a retrospective entitled [All Freedom in Every Sense](#), spanning Bontecou’s oeuvre from 1959 until 1998. Read more about the exhibition’s [featured sculpture](#), *Sputnik 1*, and watch a [video interview](#) with Veronica Roberts, curator of the exhibition.

[The Menil Collection](#) organized *Lee Bontecou: Drawn Worlds* in 2014, which traveled to the [Princeton University Art Museum](#). Read an [extended text](#) about the exhibition and Bontecou’s work on the Princeton website. The accompanying catalogue included an essay by artist and writer Joan Banach, one of Bontecou’s students in the 1970s. Read an [interview](#) with Banach about the work in this exhibition.

In 2017, the [Kunstmuseum Den Haag](#) in the Hague organized *Lee Bontecou*, a major exhibition of the artist’s work including a new site-specific installation, *Untitled (Sandbox)*.

[Into the Void: Prints of Lee Bontecou](#) was on display at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2019. The exhibition included over 100 objects including prints, proofs, variant states, drawings, etching plates, and other ephemera related to the artist’s practice. Read a [review](#) by Elaine Szewczyk in Nad Now, The Journal of National Academy of Design.



Bontecou in her studio, 1964
Photograph: Ugo Mulas



Lee Bontecou (American, b. 1931)

Untitled, 2006

Wire, welded steel and canvas

Private Collection; L2023:9.1

Lee Bontecou pursued sculpture at an early age and learned to weld at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. In 1959, she started making the wall-mounted steel-and-canvas sculptures that defined her career. **Untitled** is one of the first examples of this series, which often used discarded canvas from a laundry below Bontecou's apartment in New York's East Village neighborhood. The gaping holes and organic forms reflect the artist's interest in the natural world; at the time, this imagery was informed by the Space Race and launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957. Bontecou once reflected: "I had a joy and excitement about outer space – nothing was known about the black holes – just huge, intangible, dangerous entities, and I felt great excitement when little Sputnik flew."

On view February 15 – May 21, 2023

Lee Bontecou (American, b. 1931)

Untitled, 1958

Soot on paper

Private Collection; L2022:27.1

Sculptor and printmaker Lee Bontecou began her practice at the Art Students League of New York in the early 1950s. **Untitled** is from the first decade of the artist's career, before she turned to the wall-works and sculptures that established her reputation in the 1960s. While living in Rome with a Fulbright scholarship, Bontecou discovered that her welding torch produced soot when the oxygen levels were turned down. The resulting series of "soot drawings" were made by scraping off layered soot with a razor blade and softening with the artist's fingers. This style of abstract, quasi-organic forms and dark, gaping holes continued to appear in drawings, sculptures, and prints that span Bontecou's seven-decade career.

On view May 25 – August 28, 2022

