

Spider II

Read the myth about Arachne and Athena on the other side of this card. Next, read about *Spider II* below. Louise Bourgeois created this spider to honor her mother. Does that seem odd to you? What connections can you find between the two stories?

Artist Louise Bourgeois' family members are an important part of her artwork. She has said that her best friend was her mother and that her mother was, "clever, patient, soothing, reasonable, dainty...neat and as useful as a spider. She could also defend herself." Louise's mother ran the family's fabric repair workshop and Louise admired her, but was also a little frightened by her. For Louise, the spider became a good symbol of her smart, fussy, and sometimes fearsome mother. Sewing needles represent both her mother's work, and repaired damage, or forgiveness. With *Spider II* Louise created a lively creature that looks both mechanical and natural walking up the gallery wall on needle feet.



Louise Bourgeois, *Spider II*, 1995, Cast bronze, 22 1/2 x 73 x 73 in., Museum Purchase, 99.43

Arachne the Weaver and Athena: The Origin of Spiders

Arachne was a girl who lived in Greece a long time ago. She was a very good weaver and spinner. People from all around the world admired her work. Arachne liked to boast about her skill. She began telling people she was better at spinning and weaving than Athena, the goddess of war, wisdom, learning, and also art crafts such as weaving.

Athena challenged Arachne to a weaving contest. They set up their looms in the same room and worked all day and into the night. Athena's cloth illustrated the gods and goddesses on Mt. Olympus doing good deeds for people. Arachne's cloth made fun of the gods and goddesses, she showed them drinking too much wine and behaving poorly. Still, hers was made of beautiful cloth and the quality of the weaving was better than Athena's work.

Athena became very angry about Arachne's picture on the cloth and jealous that Arachne's weaving was better. Athena pointed her finger at Arachne and turned her into a spider (Arachne means spider in Greek), saying "You want to spin, go ahead and spin!"

The story of Arachne helps us to appreciate the skill that spiders display through the intricate webs they weave.



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