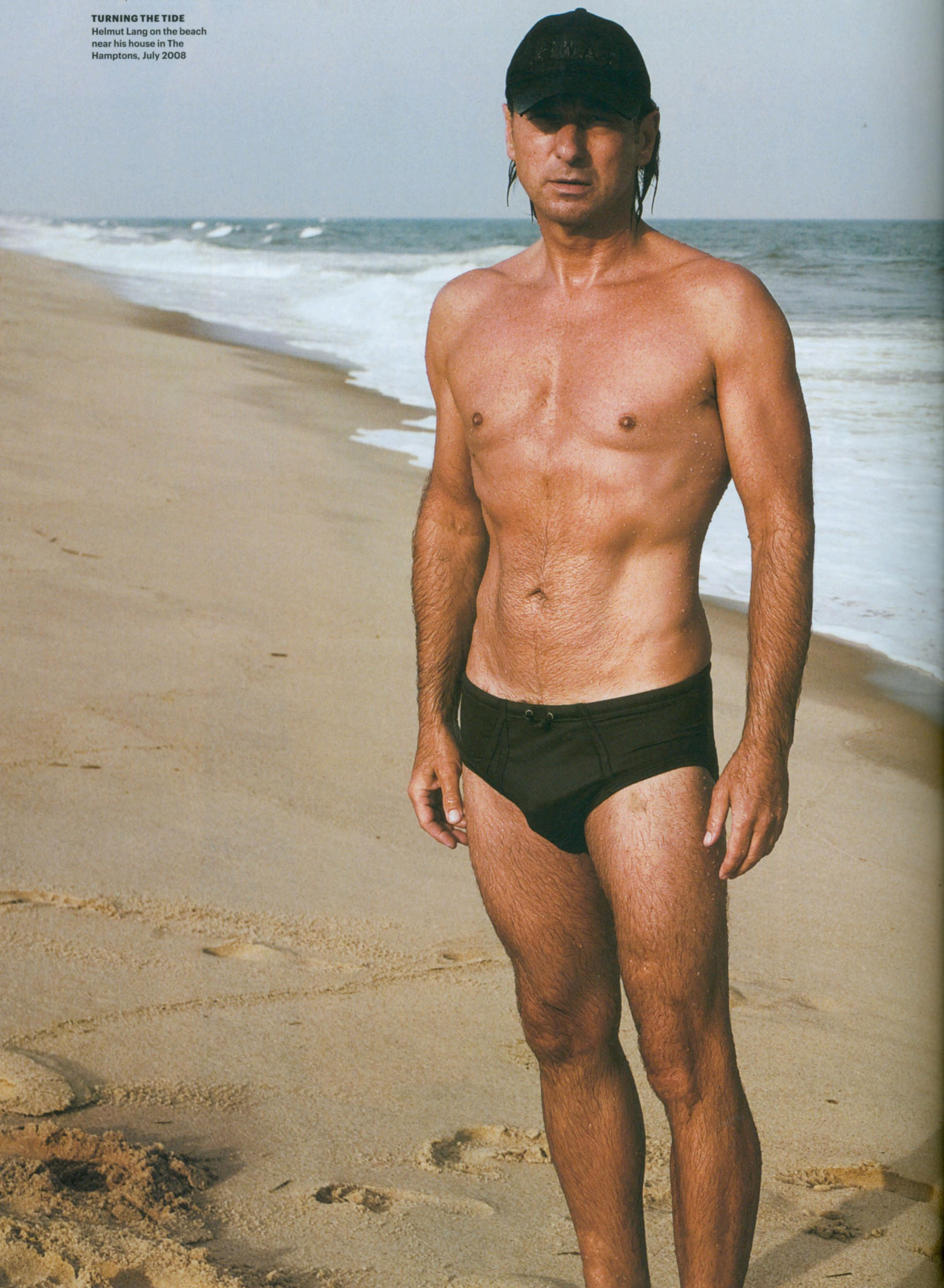



TURNING THE TIDE
Helmut Lang on the beach
near his house in The
Hamptons, July 2008





**'Helmut went to the ocean
to gather his thoughts.
Inspiration comes from retreat'**

Louise Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois on...

HELMUT LANG

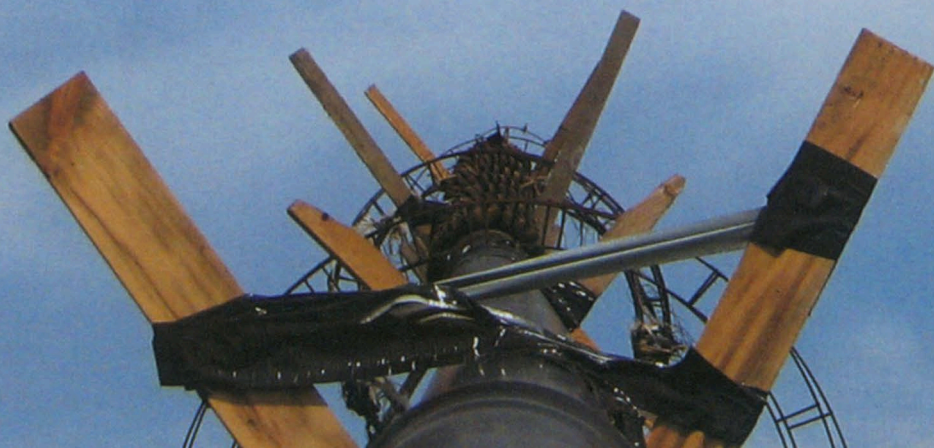
One of the most influential fashion designers of the last 25 years, Helmut Lang mixed radical cuts with innovative fabrics, revolutionised fashion branding along the way, and famously used a picture of Bourgeois to advertise his clothes. In 2005, he left fashion and moved near the ocean to work on his art. Here, Bourgeois curates a retrospective of Lang's work, a tribute to her friend's long journey (see page 347 for Lang and Bourgeois in conversation)

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ELFIE SEMOTAN

Wallpaper*

ARBOR, 2008

By Helmut Lang
Oak, iron, rubber, PVC,
1,234.4cm x 518cm
x 442cm. Photographs
courtesy of hi-art







SÉANCE DE TRAVAIL, 2004-2005

By Helmut Lang

Photographed by Juergen Teller

Wallpaper*

ARBOR, 2008
By Helmut Lang
Oak, iron, rubber, PVC,
1,234.4cm x 518cm x
442cm. Photograph
courtesy of hl-art



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ARBOR, 2008

By Helmut Lang

Oak, iron, rubber, PVC,
1,234.4cm x 518cm
x 442cm. Photograph
courtesy of hl-art





SÉANCE DE TRAVAIL, 1997-1998
By Helmut Lang
Photographed by Juergen Teller

Wallpaper*



TOR, 2008

By Helmut Lang
Pine, tar, steel,
457.2cm x 182cm x
2.5cm. Photograph
courtesy of hl-art



BOURGEOIS & LANG

In conversation

Time, tradition, transcendentalism – the grande dame and the designer-turned-artist talk creative ebb and flow

LB: I grew up near rivers as they were important to my family's business of tapestry restoration. How does living by the ocean affect you?

HL: I also grew up by a small stream that ran behind my grandparents' house. The stream was my teacher and my playground when I was a child. Being near the ocean is an ongoing experience of the natural flow of life. The ocean is one of beginnings and conclusions.

LB: Does the ocean make you think that you are part of a larger force in which you have no control?

HL: Yes it does, but I'm comfortable with that feeling. I think that it puts life in the right perspective.

LB: Do you believe in destiny?

HL: Yes, to a certain degree. I do think that you can influence destiny if you're strong and intuitive.

LB: Does the water connect you to the passing of time?

HL: I feel that the water gives me a sense of endless time. I find this feeling reassuring and continuous.

LB: Does time seem to go more quickly?

HL: Definitely; I remember in school that the days would never end.

LB: Does the idea of time appear in your new work?

HL: It always takes either a past experience or a non-experience as a starting point to be able to redefine current thoughts. I'm aware of time and equally ignorant about time.

LB: What exactly do you mean by a 'non-experience'?

HL: It can be a thought or an imaginary idea or an emotion, which has not been lived and therefore remains innocent, waiting to be explored.

LB: Do you have access to your unconscious through the work?

HL: I have not thought about that, but you may have hit on something there. It would certainly explain why I have to do certain things a certain way.

LB: How important are your childhood memories to you?

HL: My childhood experiences shape the way I work and live now. They are a part of me and therefore also my work.

LB: Was there a specific incident in your childhood that transformed you, that was so overwhelming that you never recovered from it?

HL: I have learned to accept the good and the bad and to make it better.

LB: What do you fear most?

HL: Oddly, having my picture taken.

LB: What do you obsess about?

HL: The appearance of surfaces and the right context of things.

LB: What was it that brought you to designing clothes?

HL: I had something made for myself in Vienna about 30 years ago and quite a few people asked me who designed it and wanted [me to make] something similar. As I hadn't yet decided exactly what I wanted to do, but had to earn money, I fulfilled their request and got stuck with it. Before that, I never thought that I would work in fashion at all.

LB: Did you feel that you exhausted all the ideas that you wanted to express in designing clothing?

HL: Yes and no. There's always evolution in every field, but it's more that my priorities have changed.

LB: Both clothes and art reflect their moment of creation but, supposedly, art transcends it

LB: Why the shift in form?

HL: I was always interested in materials and how to use them and I felt strongly that I wanted to go further than was possible with the human body. There's a greater freedom in the starting point and the expression of the end result.

LB: When did you decide to be an artist?

HL: I always tried not to put a title to what I do, in the same way I see life and work as one. I landed by accident in fashion, but I always worked on art too, and a few years ago I decided to dedicate myself fully to art. I guess it was like a thread throughout my life, which I'm now beginning to weave into rope.

LB: How do you see the continuity from fashion design to sculptures?

HL: I'm still expressing what's important to me with appropriate form, content and context, but through different media.

LB: What are the major differences in your mind from the construction of clothes to the construction of sculpture?

HL: The construction of sculpture needs probably more physical strength and is not limited by weight or dimensions and the need to move or to expand – unless one works with fabric, as you also do.

LB: Fashion is about sexuality. Did you include sexuality in your new work?

HL: Fashion has a sexual side, but equally important is the need to define oneself or the best representation on a social level. I feel that in my new work, occupation with human interaction and also emotions of any kind are equally important.

LB: Is the idea of audience different in the fashion world from in the art world?

HL: I never had an idea of the audience. I always hoped if my work is good, it will find people who are interested in it.

LB: Both clothes and art reflect their moment of creation but, supposedly, art transcends it. What are your thoughts?

HL: I try not to be too concerned with my own legacy. I guess it's true, but it also depends on the audience's interests.

LB: Are you interested in fashion now?

HL: I look at fashion in a non-competitive and non-comparative way. I'm interested in fashion the same way as I am in social, ecological, political and cultural issues.

LB: Do these issues enter your work?

HL: I think all information is responsible, among other things, for how I make conscious or unconscious decisions.

LB: What is the function of the mirrors on your new piece, *Gatework* (on display at the Kestnegergesellschaft in Hanover)?

HL: The mirrors are a kind of plane Janus surface. I use them as an abstraction for the face that looks back and forward.

LB: Some of your new work references maypole ceremonies and rituals. Why?

HL: I like to start with a classical, pagan, or traditional thought and then explore it, which always leads to the impulse to implement changes and the creation of new forms and meanings. The maypole also has a horizontal and vertical experience, which I find interesting.

LB: I see your sensibility consistently throughout what you do, both before and now. Could you articulate it?

HL: I'm not sure. I think I have no other choice than to be myself, but I take it as big encouragement if you think so. ★

*Interview conducted by e-mail,
Monday 21 July, 2008*