

= Louise Nevelson =

Louise Nevelson ( September 23 , 1899 ? April 17 , 1988 ) was an American sculptor known for her monumental , monochromatic , wooden wall pieces and outdoor sculptures .

Born in the Poltava Governorate of the Russian Empire ( present @-@ day Ukraine ) , she emigrated with her family to the United States in the early 20th century . Nevelson learned English at school , as she spoke Yiddish at home .

By the early 1930s she was attending art classes at the Art Students League of New York , and in 1941 she had her first solo exhibition . A student of Hans Hofmann and Chaim Gross , Nevelson experimented with early conceptual art using found objects , and dabbled in painting and printing before dedicating her lifework to sculpture . Usually created out of wood , her sculptures appear puzzle @-@ like , with multiple intricately cut pieces placed into wall sculptures or independently standing pieces , often 3 @-@ D. A unique feature of her work is that her figures are often painted in monochromatic black or white . A figure in the international art scene , Nevelson was showcased at the 31st Venice Biennale . Her work is seen in major collections in museums and corporations . Nevelson remains one of the most important figures in 20th @-@ century American sculpture .

= = Early personal life = =

Louise Nevelson was born Leah Berliawsky in 1899 in Perislav , Poltava Governorate , Russian Empire , to Minna Sadie and Isaac Berliawsky , a contractor and lumber merchant . Even though the family lived comfortably , Nevelson 's relatives had begun to leave the Russian Empire for America in the 1880s . The Berliawskys had to stay behind , as Isaac , the youngest brother , had to care for his parents . While still in Europe , Minna gave birth to two of Nevelson 's siblings : Nathan ( born 1898 ) and Anita ( 1902 ) . On his mother 's death , Isaac moved to the United States in 1902 . After he left , Minna and the children moved to the Kiev area . According to family lore , young Nevelson was so forlorn about her father 's departure that she became mute for six months .

In 1905 , Minna and the children emigrated to the United States , where they joined Isaac in Rockland , Maine . Isaac initially struggled to establish himself there , suffering from depression while the family settled into their new home . He worked as a woodcutter before opening a junkyard . His work as a lumberjack made wood a consistent presence in the family household , a material that would figure prominently in Nevelson 's work . Eventually he became a successful lumberyard owner and realtor . The family had another child , Lillian , in 1906 . Nevelson was very close to her mother , who suffered from depression , a condition believed to be brought on by the family 's migration from Russia and their minority status as a Jewish family living in Maine . Minna overly compensated for this , dressing herself and the children up in clothing " regarded as sophisticated in the Old Country " . Her mother wore flamboyant outfits with heavy make @-@ up ; Nevelson described her mother 's " dressing up " as " art , her pride , and her job " , also describing her as someone who should have lived " in a palace " .

Nevelson 's first experience of art was at the age of nine at the Rockland Public Library , where she saw a plaster cast of Joan of Arc . Shortly thereafter she decided to study art , taking drawing in high school , where she also served as basketball captain . She painted watercolor interiors , in which furniture appeared molecular in structure , rather like her later professional work . Female figures made frequent appearances . In school , she practiced her English , her second language , as Yiddish was spoken at home . Unhappy with her family 's economic status , language differences , the religious discrimination of the community , and her school , Nevelson set her sights on moving to high school in New York .

She graduated from high school in 1918 , and began working as a stenographer at a local law office . There she met Bernard Nevelson , co @-@ owner with his brother Charles of the Nevelson Brothers Company , a shipping business . Bernard introduced her to his brother , and Charles and Louise Nevelson were married in June 1920 in a Jewish wedding at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston . Having satisfied her parent 's hope that she would marry into a wealthy family , she and her new husband moved to New York City , where she began to study painting , drawing , singing ,

acting and dancing . She also became pregnant , and in 1922 she gave birth to her son Myron ( later called Mike ) , who grew up to be a sculptor . Nevelson studied art , despite the disapproval of her parents @-@ in @-@ law . She commented : " My husband 's family was terribly refined . Within that circle you could know Beethoven , but God forbid if you were Beethoven . "

In 1924 the family moved to Mount Vernon , New York , a popular Jewish area of Westchester County . Nevelson was upset with the move , which removed her from city life and her artistic environment . During the winter of 1932 ? 1933 she separated from Charles , unwilling to becoming the socialite wife he expected her to be . She never sought financial support from Charles , and in 1941 the couple divorced .

= = Artistic career = =

= = = 1930s = = =

Starting in 1929 , Nevelson studied art full @-@ time under Kenneth Hayes Miller and Kimon Nicolaides at the Art Students League . Nevelson credited an exhibition of Noh kimonos at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a catalyst for her to study art further . In 1931 she sent her son Mike to live with family and went to Europe , paying for the trip by selling a diamond bracelet that her now ex @-@ husband had given her on the occasion of Mike 's birth . In Munich she studied with Hans Hofmann before visiting Italy and France . Returning to New York in 1932 she once again studied under Hofmann , who was serving as a guest instructor at the Art Students League . She met Diego Rivera in 1933 and worked as his assistant on his mural Man at the Crossroads at Rockefeller Plaza . The two had an affair which caused a rift between Nevelson and Rivera 's wife , Frida Kahlo , an artist Nevelson greatly admired . Shortly thereafter , Nevelson started taking Chaim Gross 's sculpture classes at the Educational Alliance . She continued to experiment with other artistic mediums , including lithography and etching , but decided to focus on sculpture . Her early works were created from plaster , clay and tattistone . During the 1930s Nevelson began exhibiting her work in group shows . In 1935 , she taught mural painting at the Madison Square Boys and Girls Club in Brooklyn as part of the Works Progress Administration ( WPA ) . She worked for the WPA in the easel painting and sculpture divisions until 1939 . For several years , the impoverished Nevelson and her son walked through the streets gathering wood to burn in their fireplace to keep warm ; the firewood she found served as the starting point for the art that made her famous . Her work during the 1930s explored sculpture , painting and drawing . Early ink and pencil drawings of nudes show the same fluidity seen in the works of Henri Matisse . Nevelson also created terra @-@ cotta semi @-@ abstract animals and oil paintings .

= = = First exhibitions and the 1940s = = =

In 1941 , Nevelson had her first solo exhibition at Nierendorf Gallery . Gallery owner Karl Nierendorf represented her until his death in 1947 . During her time at Nierendorf , Nevelson came across a shoeshine box owned by local shoeshiner Joe Milone . She displayed the box at the Museum of Modern Art , bringing her the first major attention she received from the press . An article about her appeared in Art Digest in November 1943 . In the 1940s , she began producing Cubist figure studies in materials such as stone , bronze , terra cotta , and wood . In 1943 , she had a show at Norlyst Gallery called " The Clown as the Center of his World " in which she constructed sculptures about the circus from found objects . The show was not well received , and Nevelson stopped using found objects until the mid @-@ 1950s . Despite poor reception , Nevelson 's works at this time explored both figurative abstracts inspired by Cubism and the exploitative and experimental influence of Surrealism . The decade provided Nevelson with the materials , movements , and self @-@ created experiments that would mold her signature modernist style in the 1950s .

= = = Mid @-@ career = = =

During the 1950s , Nevelson exhibited her work as often as possible . Yet despite awards and growing popularity with art critics , she continued to struggle financially . To make ends meet she began teaching sculpture classes in adult education programs in the Great Neck public school system . Her own work began to grow to monumental size , moving beyond the human scale sized works she had been creating during the early 1940s . Nevelson also visited Latin America , and discovered influences for her work in Mayan ruins and the steles of Guatemala . In 1955 Nevelson joined Colette Roberts ' Grand Central Modern Gallery , where she had numerous one @-@ woman shows . There she exhibited some of her most notable mid @-@ century works : Bride of the Black Moon , First Personage , and the exhibit " Moon Garden + One " , which showed her first wall piece , Sky Cathedral , in 1958 . The 1958 series of exhibitions were described by critic Hilton Kramer as " remarkable and unforgettable . " That year the Museum of Modern Art purchased one of Nevelson 's Sky Cathedral works , and in 1959 Nevelson was included in MoMA 's Sixteen Americans exhibition . During this period , she painted her wood black and put on entirely black shows . In the early 1960s , she began creating white and gold pieces , and enclosing her small sculptures in wooden boxes . The change in scale of her sculptures , the influence of Latin American ancient art , and her gallery activity during this time is credited with bringing " Nevelson 's sculpture in league with the grand scale of Abstract Expressionist painting , as well as the earlier mural painting of Rivera . "

From 1957 to 1958 , she was president of the New York Chapter of Artists ' Equity and in 1958 she joined the Martha Jackson Gallery , where she was guaranteed income and became financially secure . That year , she was photographed and featured on the cover of Life . In 1960 she had her first one @-@ woman show in Europe at Galerie Daniel Cordier in Paris . Later that year a collection of her work , grouped together as " Dawn 's Wedding Feast " , was included in the group show , " Sixteen Americans " , at the Museum of Modern Art alongside Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns . In 1962 she made her first museum sale to the Whitney Museum of American Art , who purchased the black wall , Young Shadows . That same year , her work was selected for the 31st Venice Biennale and she became national president of Artists ' Equity , serving until 1964 .

In 1962 she left Martha Jackson Gallery for a brief stint at the Sidney Janis Gallery . After an unsuccessful first show in which none of her work sold , Nevelson had a falling out with gallery owner Janis over sums he advanced her and was unable to recoup . Nevelson and Janis entered into a contentious legal battle that left Nevelson broke , depressed , and at risk of becoming homeless . However , at this time Nevelson was offered a funded , six @-@ week artist fellowship at Tamarind Lithography Workshop ( now Tamarind Institute ) in Los Angeles , which allowed her to escape the drama of New York City . She explained , " I wouldn 't ordinarily have gone . I didn 't care so much about the idea of prints at that time but I desperately needed to get out of town and all of my expenses were paid . "

At Tamarind , Nevelson made twenty @-@ six lithographs and became the most productive artist to complete the fellowship up until that time . The lithographs she created were some of her most creative graphic work , using unconventional materials like cheese cloth , lace , and textiles on the lithographic stone to create interesting textural effects . With fresh creative inspiration and replenished funds , Nevelson returned to New York in better personal and professional circumstances . She joined Pace Gallery in the fall of 1963 , where she had shows regularly until the end of her career . In 1967 the Whitney Museum hosted the first retrospective of Nevelson 's work , showing over one hundred pieces , including drawings from the 1930s and contemporary sculptures . In 1964 she created two works : Homage to 6 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 I and Homage to 6 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 II as a tribute to victims of The Holocaust . Nevelson hired several assistants over the years : Teddy Haseltine , Tom Kendall , and Diana Mackown , who helped in the studio and handled daily affairs . By this time , Nevelson had solidified commercial and critical success .

= = = Later career and life = = =

Nevelson continued to utilize wood in her sculptures , but also experimented with other materials such as aluminum , plastic and metal . Black Zag X from 1969 , in the collection of the Honolulu

Museum of Art is an example of the artist's all @-@ black assemblages incorporating the plastic , Formica . In the fall of 1969 , she was commissioned by Princeton University to create her first outdoor sculpture . After completion of her first outdoor sculptures , Nevelson stated : " Remember , I was in my early seventies when I came into monumental outdoor sculpture ... I had been through the enclosures of wood . I had been through the shadows . I had been through the enclosures and come out into the open . " Nevelson also praised new materials like plexiglas and cor @-@ ten steel , which she described as a " blessing " . She embraced the idea of her works being able to withstand climate change and the freedom in moving beyond limitations in size . These public artworks were created by the Lippincott Foundry . Nevelson 's public art commissions were a monetary success , but art historian Brooke Kamin Rapaport states that these pieces were not Nevelson 's strongest works , and that Nevelson 's " intuitive gesture " is not evident in the large steel works .

In 1973 the Walker Art Center curated a major exhibition of her work , which traveled for two years . In 1975 she designed the chapel of St. Peter 's Lutheran Church in midtown Manhattan . When asked about her role as a Jewish artist creating Christian @-@ themed art , Nevelson stated that her abstract work transcended religious barriers . Also in 1975 , she created and installed a large wood sculpture titled Bicentennial Dawn at the new James A. Byrne United States Courthouse in Philadelphia . During the last half of her life , Nevelson solidified her fame and her persona , cultivating a personal style for her " petite yet flamboyant " self that contributed to her legacy : dramatic dresses , scarves and large false eyelashes . When Alice Neel asked Nevelson how she dressed so beautifully , Nevelson replied " Fucking , dear , fucking " , in reference to her sexually liberated lifestyle . The designer Arnold Scaasi created many of her clothes . Nevelson died on April 17 , 1988 .

At the time of his death in 1995 , her friend Willy Eisenhart was working on a book about Nevelson .

= = Style and works = =

When Nevelson was developing her style , many of her artistic colleagues ? Alexander Calder , David Smith , Theodore Roszak ? were welding metal to create their large @-@ scale sculptures . Nevelson decided to go in the opposite direction , exploring the streets for inspiration and finding it in wood . Nevelson 's most notable sculptures are her walls ; wooden , wall @-@ like collage driven reliefs consisting of multiple boxes and compartments that hold abstract shapes and found objects from chair legs to balusters . Nevelson described these immersive sculptures as " environments " . The wooden pieces were also cast @-@ off scraps , pieces found in the streets of New York . While Marcel Duchamp caused uproar with his Fountain , which was not accepted as " art " at the time of its release due to Duchamp 's attempt to mask the urinals true form , Nevelson took found objects and by spray painting them she disguised them of their actual use or meaning . Nevelson called herself " the original recycler " owing to her extensive use of discarded objects , and credited Pablo Picasso for " giving us the cube " that served as the groundwork for her cubist @-@ style sculpture . She found strong influence in Picasso and Hofmann 's cubist ideals , describing the Cubist movement as " one of the greatest awarenesses that the human mind has ever come to . " She also found influence in Native American and Mayan art , dreams , the cosmos and archetypes .

As a student of Hans Hofmann she was taught to practice her art with a limited palette , using colors such as black and white , to " discipline " herself . These colors would become part of Nevelson 's repertoire . She spray painted her walls black until 1959 . Nevelson described black as the " total color " that " means totality . It means : contains all ... it contained all color . It wasn 't a negation of color . It was an acceptance . Because black encompasses all colors . Black is the most aristocratic color of all . The only aristocratic color ... I have seen things that were transformed into black , that took on greatness . I don 't want to use a lesser word . " In the 1960s she began incorporating white and gold into her works . Nevelson said that white was the color that " summoned the early morning and emotional promise . " She described her gold phase as the " baroque phase " , inspired by the idea being told as a child that America 's streets would be " paved with gold " , the materialism and hedonism of the color , the sun , and the moon . Nevelson revisited

the Noh robes and the gold coin collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for inspiration .

Through her work , Nevelson often explored the themes of her complicated past , factious present , and anticipated future . A common symbol that appears in Nevelson 's work is the bride , as seen in *Bride of the Black Moon* ( 1955 ) . The symbol of the bride referred to Nevelson 's own escape from matrimony in her early life , and her own independence as a woman throughout the rest of her life . Her *Sky Cathedral* works often took years to create ; *Sky Cathedral : Night Wall* , in the collection of the Columbus Museum of Art , took 13 years to build in her New York City studio . On the *Sky Cathedral* series , Nevelson commented : " This is the Universe , the stars , the moon ? and you and I , everyone . "

Nevelson 's work has been exhibited in a number of galleries , including the Anita Shapolsky Gallery in New York City , Margot Gallery in Lake Worth , Florida , and Woodward Gallery in New York .

= = Legacy = =

Louise Nevelson constructed her sculpture much as she constructed her past : shaping each with her legendary sense of self as she created an extraordinary iconography through abstract means . ? The Jewish Museum , 2007

A sculpture garden , Louise Nevelson Plaza ( 40 @.@ 7076 ° N 74 @.@ 0080 ° W ? / 40 @.@ 7076 ; -74.0080 ) , is located in downtown New York City and features a collection of works by Nevelson . Nevelson donated her papers in several installments from 1966 to 1979 . They are fully digitized and in the collection of the Archives of American Art . The Farnsworth Art Museum , in Nevelson 's childhood home of Rockland , Maine , houses the second largest collection of her works , including jewelry she designed . In 2000 , the United States Postal Service released a series of commemorative postage stamps in Nevelson 's honor . The following year , friend and playwright Edward Albee wrote the play *Occupant* as a homage to the sculptor . The show opened in New York in 2002 with Anne Bancroft playing Nevelson , but it never moved beyond previews owing to Bancroft 's illness . Nevelson 's distinct and eccentric image has been documented by photographers such as Robert Mapplethorpe , Richard Avedon , Hans Namuth and Pedro E. Guerrero . Nevelson is listed on the Heritage Floor , among other famous women , in Judy Chicago 's 1974 ? 1979 masterpiece *The Dinner Party* .

Upon Nevelson 's death her estate was worth at least \$ 100 million . Her son , Mike Nevelson , removed 36 sculptures from her house . Documentation showed that Nevelson had bequeathed these works , worth millions , to her friend and assistant of 25 years Diana MacKown , yet Mike Nevelson claimed otherwise . Proceedings began about the estate and will , which Mike Nevelson claimed did not mention MacKown . There was talk of a potential palimony case , but despite public speculation that the two women were lovers , MacKown maintained that she had never had a sexual relationship with Nevelson , as did Mike Nevelson .

In 2005 , Maria Nevelson , the youngest granddaughter , established the Louise Nevelson Foundation , a non @-@ profit 501c ( 3 ) . Its mission is to educate the public and celebrate the life and work of Louise Nevelson .

= = Feminism and Nevelson 's influence on feminist art = = =

I 'm not a feminist . I 'm an artist who happens to be a woman . ? Louise Nevelson

Louise Nevelson has been a fundamental key in the feminist art movement . Credited with triggering the examination of femininity in art , Nevelson challenged the vision of what type of art women would be creating with her dark , monumental , masculine and totem @-@ like artworks . Nevelson believed that art reflected the individual , not " masculine @-@ feminine labels " , and chose to take on her role as an artist , not specifically a female artist . Reviews of Nevelson 's works in the 1940s wrote her off as just a woman artist . A reviewer of her 1941 exhibition at Nierendorf Gallery stated : " We learned the artist is a woman , in time to check our enthusiasm . Had it been otherwise , we might have hailed these sculptural expressions as by surely a great figure among

moderns . " Another review was similar in its sexism : " Nevelson is a sculptor ; she comes from Portland , Maine . You 'll deny both these facts and you might even insist Nevelson is a man , when you see her Portraits in Paint , showing this month at the Nierendorf Gallery . "

Even with her influence upon future generations of feminist artists , Nevelson 's opinion of discrimination within the art world bordered on the belief that artists who were not gaining success based on gender suffered from a lack of confidence . When asked by Feminist Art Journal if she suffered from sexism within the art world , Nevelson replied " I am a woman 's liberation . "