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LOUISE NEVELSON: ICONOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

by

LAURIE WILSON

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Art History
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Abstract

LOUISE NEVELSON: ICONOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

by

Laurie Wilson

Adviser: Professor Rose-Carol Washton Long

This dissertation identifies and describes the major monuments which constitute Louise Nevelson's exhibitions and sculptural work of the fifties which, by the end of the decade, culminated in the walls of black boxes and her stylistic maturity. An examination of Nevelson's biographical history and of the artistic milieu in which her work evolved provides the foundation for a set of hypotheses that explain the personal meaning of Nevelson's signature style, and place her achievement within the context of American sculpture at mid-twentieth century. The importance of theatre, dance, and pre-Columbian art to Nevelson's development is considered. Numerous interviews with the artist, her family, colleagues, and friends, as well as a rich fund of archival material collected by Nevelson, served as documentation for the iconographic hypotheses.

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Fig. 180 Louise Nevelson. Voyage, (White room at Venice Biennale), wood painted white, 1960.

Fig. 181 Louise Nevelson. Bride of The Sea, tattistone, c. 1948, 20 x 8". (Photo: Jeremiah Russell).

Fig. 182 Nevelson and Bride of The Sea.

Fig. 183 Greta Garbo as the Swedish Sphinx, photomontage, c. 1930, (Photo: Penguin).

Fig. 184 Louise Nevelson. The Wedding Bridge, wood painted black and black velvet, 1956, 5 x 96 x 5", (Collection: Arnold and Milly Glimcher). (Photo: Al Mozell).

Fig. 185 Louise Nevelson. Black Wedding Cake, wood painted black, 1956, 38 1/2 x 24", (Collection: Dorothy H. Rautbord).

Fig. 186 Louise Nevelson. First Personage, detail, wood painted black, 1956, (Collection: Brooklyn Museum).

Fig. 187 Louise Nevelson. Moon Lady (Face in The Moon), etching, 1953-55, 17 1/2 x 20 3/4", edition 20, Baro no. 17.

Fig. 188 Marcel Duchamp. The Bride, oil on canvas, August 1912, 35 1/4 x 21 5/8", (Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection).

Fig. 189 Max Ernst. Chemical Nuptials, oil on canvas, 1947-48, 58 1/2 x 25 3/4", (Collection: Private).

Fig. 190 Louise Nevelson. Mrs. N's Palace, wood painted black, black mirror floor, 1964-1977, 140 x 239 x 180", (Collection: the artist), (Photo: Tom Crane).

Fig. 191 Louise Nevelson. Mrs. N's Palace, detail, man and woman, wood painted black, 1964-1977, (Collection: the artist), (Photo: Tom Crane).

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INTRODUCTION

Louise Nevelson's mature style evolved rapidly over a four-year period from 1954 to 1959. After working primarily in terra cotta and plaster for nearly twenty years, she returned to work with found wood, a material she had used very briefly in the early forties. Beginning again in 1954 with black-stained processional cityscapes and personages, her wood constructions grew in a cumulative fashion both vertically and horizontally until the winter of 1958-59, by which time her exhibitions had become thematically titled environments consisting of walls, columns, and relief plaques. The walls were made of stacked boxes, each containing a wood relief construction, while the columns were either free-standing four-sided reliefs or large vertical boxes, often with doors left open or ajar, revealing the internal relief. These walls and columns have remained the signature style of Louise Nevelson since the late 1950's.

The impulse toward environmentally scaled work was a general phenomenon in the New York art world of the fifties. Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, and Mark Rothko had been producing very large paintings since the forties. Alberto Giacometti, who had created and populated interior landscapes with his sculpture, was well known in New York by the end of the forties. Frederick Kiesler had been applying similar ideas to the design of theatrical sets and interior architectural space for three decades.

In January 1958 Nevelson's landmark exhibition, Moon Garden + One

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opened and demonstrated that Nevelson was not only a part of this general trend, but also had been able to crystallize the latent elements of her individual style by creating a sculptural environment which represented considerably more than the sum of its parts. Critical reaction was characterized by astonishment and praise, but the iconographic content of Nevelson's works could not be read since the form of these works continued to be abstract. The combination of suggestive thematic titles and ostensibly nonobjective pieces promoted the air of mystery which surrounded them. What was the meaning of these large black walls?

This dissertation attempts to solve some of the iconographic enigmas residing in Nevelson's walls of black boxes. The major monuments in her stylistic development are identified and described. An examination of her biographical history and of the artistic milieu in which her work evolved provides the foundation for a set of hypotheses that explain the personal meaning of Nevelson's signature style and place her achievement within the context of American sculpture at mid twentieth century.

Before pursuing the questions of iconography and stylistic development, Nevelson's key works are identified. There were seven exhibitions that can be seen in retrospect as a series leading directly to the artist's mature style. The first show was held in 1943 and the remaining six were given between 1955 and 1960. All of these exhibits were thematically titled and consisted largely of wood constructions. The critical response to each of these shows is discussed and the literature on Nevelson is examined in light of the basic questions posed by this dissertation. It becomes readily apparent

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that neither the critics nor the authors of later monographic studies and articles seriously dealt with iconographic issues. They provided some astute formal analysis, suggested a few of Nevelson's antecedents, and, for the most part, supported the artist's attempts to draw a veil over the underlying meaning of her walls of black boxes. These authors also did not succeed in placing Nevelson firmly within the context of her times, since they were often concentrating their efforts upon establishing her unique contribution.

It has been occasionally noted that the mystery in Nevelson's work may be attributed to the deeply personal meaning it has for the artist. In concurring with this idea, I have explored Nevelson's childhood and young adulthood through her own recollections and those of her immediate family and close friends. Sufficient information and understanding emerged through these composite memories to form the foundation for later iconographic interpretations.

Nevelson's relationship to the artistic milieu in New York from 1933, the outset of her professional career as an artist, to 1958, the year of Moon Garden + One, her first fully environmental exhibit of dimly lit black walls, is scrutinized, particularly for the association her stylistic development may have had to the major artistic currents of the time. The impact of surrealism and geometric abstraction is examined, as is the widespread interest in American indigenous art that was part of the New York art scene. The consequences of Nevelson's interest in specific European and American artists are suggested and begin to provide a broader base for the interpretations that follow.

Louise Nevelson has often stated that she built an empire.

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In this dissertation her environmental work is related to this claim, and her personal needs, both practical and emotional, are examined and correlated to the emerging tendency toward large-scaled work of the late forties and fifties.

Thomas B. Hess compared Nevelson's Moon Garden + One to the work of Pollock, Rothko, Still, and Newman because of its environmental aspects, but he differentiated Nevelson's work by calling it theatrical, artifical, and sculpturesque.[1] Here, Nevelson's association with the world of theatre and dance is explored, and evidence is presented to demonstrate how the lives and works of Martha Graham, Isamu Noguchi, Frederick Kiesler, and Louise Bourgeois affected Nevelson's art in surprisingly personal ways. Nevelson's own experiences as a student of dramatics and dance for a twenty-year period are shown to have significant impact upon the development of her style.

Finally, the three principal themes which animate Nevelson's mature work are analyzed and linked to each other and to both the internal and external forces in the artist's life. Royalty, death, and marriage in their recurring manifestations and multilayered meanings are seen as the keys which unlock the mystery of Louise Nevelson's shadowy oeuvre.

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[1]Thomas B. Hess, "Nature in Abstraction," Art News, 56, no. 10 (February 1958) 60.

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CHAPTER I

MAJOR MONUMENTS AND CRITICAL REACTION

In 1935 Louise Nevelson began her professional career as an exhibiting sculptor. Until 1943 she worked primarily in clay for plaster and bronze, and her first two one-woman exhibitions in 1941 and 1942, which were held at the Nierendorf Gallery, had consisted of work in those materials.

In 1943 and 1944 Nevelson exhibited wood sculpture. Her next one-woman show in 1946 consisted entirely of works in bronze. Between 1946 and 1954 Nevelson worked primarily in terra cotta and exhibited only in group shows. In 1954 she showed terra cottas and etchings in two one-woman exhibits. Beginning in 1955 Nevelson annually exhibited wood sculpture in dramatically titled one-woman shows through 1960, by which time both her reputation and artistic direction were firmly fixed. The first of the thematically titled exhibits in wood was held in 1943 and stands as an isolated precursor of a stylistic development that would not unfold until 1955.

It is primarily in the work of her one-woman exhibitions during the latter half of the fifties that one can trace the development of Nevelson's signature style. The significant aspects that they share in common are the use of wood, the organization around a dramatic theme, and the gradually increasing accumulation of parts which would finally lead to Nevelson's walls of black boxes.

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Initially the critics did not clearly see or understand the key works of this stylistic development. They did perceive that she had created a "shadowy world" of her own which had caught the imagination of the New York art public. Now, in retrospect, one can see beyond the shadows to discover the formal and iconographic logic of this development.

In April 1943 Nevelson first exhibited her sculpture in wood as part of a show entitled Circus at the recently opened Norlyst Gallery. Eleanor Lust and Jimmy Ernst, co-owners of the gallery, asked Nevelson to include her new wood sculpture as a complement to a display of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century circus posters they had just obtained. Nevelson's sculpture was placed together and organized into three groups with the overall title The Clown is the Center of His World. The three groups were subtitled: The Circus, The Menagerie, and The Crowd Outside. According to a gallery list, the figures in The Crowd Outside group surrounded the title piece The Clown (fig. 1). The press release, written by Jimmy Ernst, suggested that the purpose of the show was to provide the spectator with an aesthetic experience that was also profound psychologically.[1]

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[1]Circus New Animals by Nevelson: The Clown is the Center of His World. New York, Norlyst Gallery, April 1943.
The impetus for this exhibition was the acquisition by Eleanor Lust of a large poster collection. Lust and Jimmy Ernst began planning an exhibition of these posters, and the circus topic evolved naturally out of the character of the collection. Louise Nevelson's humorous animal sculpture appealed to Ernst and Lust and they decided that its inclusion would enliven the exhibit (Jimmy Ernst, interview, East Hampton, New York, 29 July 1976; press release, gallery announcement, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art). The gallery announcement lists the titles of each piece included in the exhibit and groups them into the three categories.

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Among the more than twenty-five crude but cleverly constructed wood figures which made up this show were various performers and creatures not always associated with the circus: The Ferocious Bull (fig. 2), The Wondrous Fishes and Balancing Seals (fig. 3), The Thin Man (fig. 4), The Philosopher, and The Riders of the Temple of Life. Jimmy Ernst recalls The Ferocious Bull as the best and most memorable piece and as the probable inspiration for Nevelson's inclusion in the show.[1] This sparingly assembled and extremely evocative piece was made of a bedstead, chair back and some extraneous pieces of wood for legs. The tail and the head were movable. Other interesting pieces in the exhibit were the Menagerie Animals (fig. 5) and the Audience Figures (fig. 6).

The title piece, The Clown is the Center of His World (fig. 1), around which Nevelson had grouped the Crowd pieces, was an assemblage of wooden parts built up to form a pedestal table surface on which sat a plaster clown's head and which was surmounted by a large cutout and painted tin sign of a key, scissors, and saw. This incongruous combination is preserved in a postcard and stands apart from the other pieces in the show whose separate elements are better integrated.

The idea for the title of this show was in part derived from Nevelson's study of "metaphysics" with her dance teacher Ellen Kearns. From Kearns she had learned the "metaphysical" concept that each person is the center of his own world and that the world is merely a projection.[2] Thus, in her first thematically titled exhibit,

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[1]Jimmy Ernst, interview, East Hampton, New York, 29 July 1976.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, New York, 7 July 1976.

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Nevelson may have been tentatively trying to create a world of her own.

The smaller pieces in the exhibit were meant to be moved and certain parts of the larger pieces had moveable parts, an enticement to engage the viewer. The larger pieces had wheels and pull strings (fig. 5) and the smaller ones were designed for play as blocks or toys (fig. 3).

These whimsical pieces--Wondrous Fishes and Balancing Seals (fig. 3)--were included both for their charm and as the most saleable items. They were publicised as educational toys in the press release written by Jimmy Ernst:

> From an educational point of view, the sculpture points out a new path for toys, and play things for children. "The Wondrous Fishes" and "The Seals" are all simplified forms designed to have spatial relationships, one with another. Thus, in playing with these "Blocks" a child learns, all unconsciously that beautiful forms exist in certain relationships to each other. Further, a child may recognize these shapes later on in other Art forms, and may, by this recognition, become open to new creative trends. It is a democratic and progressive idea which employs the artist to the best of his ability to shape a new and beautiful and more tolerant world.[1]

The emphasis on the usefulness of these pieces stemmed from Nevelson's recent participation in the Arts in Therapy competition exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1943. Her prize-winning piece for that show was a child's wooden seat (fig. 7) that was vaguely horse-shaped and in the same style as the group of animal pieces in the Circus show two months later. Some equally light-hearted pieces by Alexander Calder were also in the Museum of

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[1]Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

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Modern Art exhibit--Animal Toys (fig. 8) and Doll doing Splits (fig. 9)--and Calder's pieces may have inspired Nevelson to add wheels and string to the toy-like works of the Norlyst show.

The entire Circus exhibit was conceived and presented in an arch and playful manner. Nevelson's ideas of movable parts and rolling sculpture were in tune with the times. Equally modern, and significant in light of her later development, was her decision to cover the floor of the gallery with marbles and sand which encouraged the viewer to experience the exhibit as a unified environment through the simulation of the sawdust-covered dirt ground of an actual circus. The critical reaction to this exhibition was mixed, with most writers taking the cue from Jimmy Ernst's press release and describing the works as therapeutic and amusing. The harshest indictment came from Edward Alden Jewell who in his initial review called the pieces "queer contraptions" which "might mark the onset of the 'Silly Season.'" Five days later Jewell made a remarkable gesture and reviewed the show a second time. Somewhat kinder this time, he called the works "very queer objects. . . with assorted gadgets calculated to assist in creating a bizarre soupçon of versimilitude," and termed Nevelson's contribution to the show "a sculptural three-ringer." Maude Riley, writing in Art Digest, was much more positive, acclaiming the Nevelson animals "entrancing, . . . humorous, and basically very good."[1]

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[1]Edward Alden Jewell, "Louise Nevelson," review, New York Times, 18 April 1943; idem, "Art World Victim of Circus Fever," review of Nevelson exhibit, New York Times, 23 April 1943; Maude Riley, "Irrepressible Nevelson," review, Art Digest, 17, no. 14 (15 April 1943) 18.

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It is not clear whether Nevelson expected these works to be taken more seriously as art, but her disappointment after the exhibit closed with no work sold was such that she destroyed the pieces and did not again attempt anything so audacious for eleven years.

After her discouragement following the Norlyst show, Nevelson had one more exhibit of wood sculpture in 1944 at the Nierendorf Gallery where she had already shown works in terra cotta and plaster in 1941 and 1942. The 1944 exhibit, entitled Sculpture Montages (fig. 10), included abstract wood constructions. Perhaps noting the critics' remarks about the roughly hammered style of the Circus show, Nevelson included carefully constructed pieces of a different character in the Sculpture Montages exhibit.[1] Here, finely sanded and smoothed pieces of wood are joined more subtly with dowels and recessed nails. Examples of this are Time and Space (fig. 11) and Three-Four Time (fig. 12).

Sculpture Montages was not warmly received as an exhibit, but several pieces such as Time and Space and Three-Four Time were highly praised.[2] Although Nevelson did not exhibit work in wood again for eleven years, she saved these two pieces and used

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[1]One can imagine that Karl Nierendorf, a man of meticulous taste and culture, while admiring the wit of the earlier Circus pieces, might have found their crudeness repugnant and welcomed the more refined works that followed.

[2]Howard Devree, "A Reviewer's Notes," review of Nevelson exhibit, New York Times, 29 October 1944; Emily Genauer, review of Nevelson exhibit, New York World Telegram, 28 October 1944.

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parts of them when she began again to show wood sculpture in 1954. Although it is difficult to know precisely why Nevelson did not continue to exhibit work in wood during this period, the poor critical reception of these two early exhibits containing wood sculpture was probably the reason that she returned to work in terra cotta, plaster, and bronze. This is suggested by the preservation of the two pieces singled out for praise from the 1944 exhibit.

Three-Four Time (fig. 12), the most commended piece in the Sculpture Montages show, was evidently kept intact until some time in 1954 when Nevelson dismantled it to use the base and four furniture legs as the setting for the carved figure, Bride of the Black Moon (fig. 13), the central piece of Ancient Games, Ancient Places, her first thematically titled exhibit since 1943.

Two other elements from Three-Four Time, a circular tire shape and an upright knob with three balls, reappear in Winged City (fig. 14), a piece exhibited in the outdoor exhibit of the Sculptors Guild, summer, 1955. These elements had been stained black and were now accompanied by two red-winged griffins.[1]

In January 1955 Ancient Games, Ancient Places, Nevelson's second thematically titled exhibition, was held in her new gallery,

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[1]This piece, Winged City, although submitted for exhibit and illustrated in the catalogue, is not mentioned in the reviews because it appears to have been replaced by two other wood pieces illustrated in the review: Little City at Dawn, Personages in the Black Forest (Frank O'Hara, "Sculpture 1955," Art News, 54, no. 5 [September 1955] 51; Robert Rosenblum, "Sculptors Guild," Arts Digest, 29, no. 19 [1 August 1955] 28). The piece was very important to the artist and Dido Smith remembered the dramatic moment when Nevelson flung open the door of the upstairs room that contained this new work (Dido Smith, telephone interview, 21 June 1977). For Nevelson's essay explaining the symbolic meaning of this piece, see below, p. 177.

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Grand Central Moderns. This exhibition included a number of large terra cotta figures made of interchangeable parts, a group of constructed wood landscapes, and a series of etchings completed several years earlier at Atelier 17.[2]

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[1]Nevelson: Sculptures, Sculpture-Collages, Etchings, Grand Central Moderns Gallery, 8-25 January 1955. Nevelson's affiliation with the gallery evolved gradually and she exhibited in this show as a "guest sculptor" (gallery announcement, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[2]A year earlier Nevelson had exhibited some of these etchings along with a few pieces of sculpture at the Lotte Jacobi Gallery, 5-23 January 1954. The etchings were done some time between 1952-54. Atelier 17 was the graphic workshop set up in New York in 1940 by Stanley William Hayter on the model of Hayter's already famous Atelier 17 Paris. Through 1950 Hayter was the presiding presence at the workshop and Nevelson's brief attempt to work there in the late forties did not prove successful, partly because Hayter was not responsive to women artists, and also because Nevelson felt too restricted by his emphasis on technique (Diana MacKown, Dawns and Dusks: Louise Nevelson, taped conversations with Diana MacKown [New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1976], p. 107; hereafter referred to as Dawns and Dusks).

When the more gregarious sculptor, Peter Grippe, took over the Atelier in 1952, he began to invite women artists to use the workshop (Worden Day, interview, New York, 1 September 1976; Minna Citron, interview, New York, 26 June 1976). In the informal workshop atmosphere of the Atelier, Nevelson was taught the fundamental techniques of etching by Grippe and Leo Katz, both of whom served as directors in Hayter's absence. Grippe's hospitable attitude created a comfortable setting for Nevelson and she produced thirty etchings in a series of short, intense periods of work between 1952 and 1954. (See the Brooklyn Museum, Louise Nevelson: Prints and Drawings, 1953-1966 [New York: Shorewood Publications, Inc., 1967]; Gene Baro, Nevelson: The Prints [New York: Pace Editions, Inc., 1974]; Leo Katz, "Atelier 17, Though Small in Size, the Studio's Contribution to Engraving and Many Other Art Forms Was Enormous," Print, 14, no. 1 (January-February 1960) 52-57; Peter Grippe interview, Orient Point, New York, 5 August 1976.) (See also "Atelier 17," clipping file, print room, New York Public Library.)

The dates and general facts relating to Nevelson's and Grippe's association with Atelier 17 were confirmed and clarified for me in a letter from Joann Moser, Curator of Collections, University of Iowa, Museum of Art.

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Only a part of this exhibition was entitled Ancient Games, Ancient Places, and the central figure of this part was The Bride of the Black Moon (fig. 13), that composite of previous works now brought together and adorned with fabric and a poem. The poem, written by Nevelson, had been typed and pasted to the platform on which stood The Bride, a carved wood female nude wearing a black crown and a cloth veil.

On the platform to the left of The Bride is a black sphere, presumably the moon. Behind the sphere stand four furniture legs in natural wood color surmounted by four black oblong knob shapes. The poem rests on the platform between the sphere and the four vertical elements.

A FAIRY TALE

The Bride
of the Black-Moon
goes to many continents
She plays games
She sees the Sphynx [sic]
Prometheus
The images on the wall are images she remembers
She is soon to take another voyage
She will have seen
more, and more, and more...
And she hopes to communicate to you
New scenes and new images.[1]

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[1]This version of the poem was attached to the base of the sculpture (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art, unfilmed material). A somewhat different version is included in Collette Roberts' monograph, Nevelson (Paris: The Pocket Museum, Editions Georges Fall, 1964) p. 19.

A Fairy Tale

The Bride
of the Black-Moon
goes to many continents

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Though no installation photograph of this show exists, Nevelson recalls that this sculpture was surrounded by at least four other black-stained wood pieces representing landscapes. They were: Cloud City (That Silent Place) (fig. 15), Night Scapes (Black Splendor) (fig. 16), Forgotten City (fig. 17), and Black Majesty (Savage Majesty)(fig. 18). The artist remembers that these pieces were meant to be continents or the four corners of the earth visited by The Bride.[1] The words of the poem, "The images on the wall" refer to the etchings in this exhibition whose titles suggest memories of Nevelson's recent trip to Central America. Some of these were: In the Magic Garden, The Ancient Garden (fig. 19), In The Far Away Land, In the Stillness of the Jungle, Ancient City, Into the Depths of the Forest, Lady in the Moon, Moon Goddess, and Stone Figures that Walk at Night (fig. 20).[2]

She plays games
She sees the Sphynx [sic]
Prometheus
Images she remembers from travels
She is soon to take another voyage
When you next visit her she will have seen
more, and more, and more...
And hopes to communicate to you
New seeing and new images.
The Bride of the Black Moon.

[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 131. The titles of these pieces were evidently drawn from a handwritten list made by Nevelson and categorized as "cities": "Portrait of a City in + [sic] Night Savage Majesty, Floating City, The City That Turned Black at Noon, The City in + [sic] Sea, Sea City, The Forgotten City, The Silent Place" (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[2]Many of these etchings bear several titles, as indicated by Baro's catalogue list of the collection given by Nevelson to the Brooklyn Museum. In addition to the different titles which appeared on various proofs from the same plate, two lists of titles for etchings in Nevelson's handwriting add still more variations (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art). In some instances the difference in titles is minor; in others, vast, e.g., Baro no.17, "Moon Lady," "The Face in the Moon," "The Lady in the Moon;" Baro no. 26, "The Stone Figures That Walk at Night," "The Colored Jungle," "In The Land Where The Trees Talk."

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The mysterious murkiness of the etchings and their titles are meant to evoke images of lost worlds in antique lands. The inky black of the prints which had seemed excessive to some fellow printmakers at the Atelier had begun to spread to the sculpture which was stained black for this exhibit.[1]

These black terra cotta figures, called Game Figures, were ingeniously designed in three levels and made by Nevelson so that the middle and top parts could either rotate or be removed from the brass mounting rod and be interchanged from piece to piece. One such work was Walking Woman (fig. 21). Both the graphic work and the sculpture in this exhibition share the stylistic combination of cube-like forms and incised surface markings. Scratching lines in the terra cotta was a simple procedure, but Nevelson had continued to incise faces and designs of meandering lines in the wood pieces using various tools in an attempt to obtain the ease of linear movement

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[1]Dido Smith, "Louise Nevelson," Craft Horizons, 27, no. 3 (May-June 1967) 75; Jan Gelb, interview, New York, 27 June 1976; Dido Smith, telephone interview, 21 June 1977.

Some of Nevelson's colleagues at the Atelier were both astounded and perturbed by her unorthodox use of the medium. For what were practically her first attempts at etching, she worked on large plates, used enormous amounts of ink, and employed lavish fabrics and crude tools, such as can openers, to work the plates. In addition, Nevelson had the audacity to exhibit these initial works in a new medium immediately. She showed first with a group that included other members of the Atelier ("Graphic Art Today," Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, 22 April-17 May 1953, #60 In The Forest). Also in this show were works by Peter Grippe, Minna Citron, Dorothy Dehner, and Stanley W. Hayter (catalogue, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art, unfilmed material). In January 1954 she had a one-person show of these etchings at the Lotte Jacobi Gallery (see p. 12, note 2).

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possible in the clay.[1]

The dark megalithic quality of the Four Continents and Game Figures inspired the reviewers' allusions to Stonehenge, black magic, and jungle temples which they usually related to Nevelson's interest in ancient or primitive art.[2] The gallery announcement provided them with the necessary evidence by stating that "she . . . owes much to her archeological studies in Central America." Emily Genauer even connected the primitive aspects of Nevelson's work with "the elemental quality and mystery which Martha Graham projects in her dancing."[3] But beyond a description of the work or allusions to primitive mystery, no one attempted to assign any specific meanings to the show or to individual pieces. Indeed, it was felt that the truest meaning was formal. "Because these shapes, carefully fashioned and stained a funereal black, have the air of having once been part of a functional whole, their present assembly, meaningless except aesthetically, strikes one as strangely poetic."[4]

The Four Continents with their multiple titles were the pieces in this exhibit which would lead in the most fruitful direction for Nevelson. This series of horizontally aligned wood blocks expanded

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[1]Dido Smith tried to help Nevelson in this pursuit by giving her a wood-burning tool (Dido Smith, interview, 21 June 1977). Aside from the numerous examples of painted and incised antique and pre-Columbian sculpture available to Nevelson as inspiration for this approach, she would also have been aware of such sculptors as Miro, David Smith, and Mirko (Basadella) who paid close attention to surface effects.

[2]Emily Genauer, "Nevelson Exhibit," review, New York Herald Tribune, 15 January 1955.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Stuart Preston, "Abstract and Figurative," review of Nevelson exhibit, New York Times, 16 January 1955.

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in all directions, accumulating and overlapping like the crowded urban architecture of New York. Some of these pieces, like Little City at Dawn (fig. 22), were exhibited in group shows during the mid fifties; others, like Little Mansions, were on regular exhibit in Nevelson's home (fig. 23). In time this collection of cities increased to a volume that could rightly be called an empire.

Nevelson's next one-woman exhibition, in February 1956 (figs. 24, 25, 26), was entitled Royal Voyage and both stylistically and conceptually it may be seen as a continuation of her previous show at the Grand Central Moderns Gallery with a few innovations.[1] Both shows included a mix of black-stained terra cottas and wood constructions with incised linear markings. In the latter exhibit the proportion had changed and the majority of pieces were wood with all but three being completely black. A piece having the same horizontal format as the Four Continents is here called Personages at Sea (fig. 27), and the major formal development in this show consists of extensions in height, breadth, and number of elements in the individual pieces. The Undermarine Scapes (figs. 28, 29) are the most innovative works in the exhibit. A mixture of natural, stained, and painted wood elements are enclosed in hinged glass cases combining raw scrap wood with finished found elements and some delicate reedlike pieces. They sit somewhat incongruously amidst the more stolid surrounding sculptures. Both pieces also contain driftwood, one material absent from almost all earlier Nevelson work.[2]

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[1]The Royal Voyage: Sculptures by Louise Nevelson, Grand Central Moderns Gallery, New York, 18 February-8 March 1956.

[2]One exception is City in the Sky, a wood assemblage which Nevelson included in the Annual Exhibition of the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, Riverside Museum, New York, 13 November-4 December 1955. Review, Arts, 30, no. 3 (December 1955) 48.

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As the titles suggest, the narrative theme of the show was a sea voyage made by a totemic King (fig. 30) and Queen (fig. 25) to distant and mythical lands and undersea kingdoms. These two tall figures consisted of thin wood planks standing upright on narrow bases. The subtle variations in shape, surface, size, and perforations differentiated the taller King from his consort who faced him across the room. These figures were accompanied on their voyages by processions of personages (fig. 27), an Indian Chief (fig. 31), and some terra cotta shapes piled on benches entitled Gifts (fig. 26). Here it seems that the voyages initiated by the Bride of the previous year's exhibit are continued now by the Queen.[1]

Critical response to this exhibit once again ignores the issue of iconography, and the question of the Queen's true identity or possible relationship to the artist was not raised. Instead, the critics concentrated on evaluating Nevelson's formal achievements, i.e., the delicate and subtle handling of surface and contour which sets the mood of poetic mystery. Her "aesthetic task . . . is one of selecting, shaping and grouping."[2] Dore Ashton states in her New York Times review that the royal theme adds another dimension with its rich associations evoking "a pleasing mixture of satire and untrammeled fantasy."[3]

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

[2]Carlyle Burroughs, "Organized Sculpture," review of Nevelson exhibit, New York Herald Tribune, 26 February 1956.

[3]Dore Ashton, "Louise Nevelson Shows Wood Sculptures," review, New York Times, 21 February 1956.

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Contrary to later assessments by authors seeking a historical pattern, Royal Voyage does not present a unified environment on the visual evidence of installation photos. However, the thematic concept of the exhibition does permit the artist and spectator to impose a unified atmosphere upon the works. Once the viewer is informed of the artist's central idea and the titles of the pieces, the environmental nature of this exhibition, which can now be seen in retrospect, may also have been evident during the exhibit. However, no reviewer mentioned any such experience, but rather concentrated on the delicacy of grouping achieved in the individual pieces.[1]

Nevelson's next one-woman exhibit at Grand Central Moderns Gallery was entitled Forest. Continuing the installation format from the previous year's exhibition, images representing aspects of the Forest stand in a broad circle around a group of pieces representing the village[2] (fig. 32). Of these latter nine pieces, five are in the now familiar horizontal format and are gathered on a table in the center of the room. On the floor around the table are four more pieces related to the village including a "seascape." It is no coincidence that the village group directly confronts the monumentally-sized First Personage (fig. 33). This piece, given by Louise Nevelson's

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[1]See "Louise Nevelson," Art News, 54, no. 10 (February 1956) 48-49; James P. Mellow, review of Nevelson exhibit, Arts, 30, no. 5 (February 1956) 52.

[2]The Forest: Recent Sculptures by Louise Nevelson, Grand Central Moderns Gallery, New York, 4-23 January 1957 (gallery installation list, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

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brother to the Brooklyn Museum, was the subject of an interview with Louise Nevelson done at the Museum several years after the gift. At that time Nevelson stated that it was a private representation of herself, the frontal carved slab presenting a quiet exterior of repose while the constructed spike-filled pole which peeps out from behind the slab represents the "dynamics" of the internal being.[1]

Some of the other large carved pieces which stood in the circle had such evocative titles as Tender Being (fig. 34) and Love Leaves (fig. 35). Others, Cathedral (fig. 36) and Nite Totem (fig. 37), were assemblages which would lead to Nevelson's next exhibit, both in style and thematic content.

Again, reviewers concentrated on the formal elements of Nevelson's work,discussing expressive silhouettes and subtle relationships of parts. Only Dore Ashton's New York Times review notes the metaphorical use of forest imagery for human presences.[2]

Hilton Kramer wrote a lengthy review of this exhibit. He found and praised in the work two elements which almost immediately became Nevelson's trademarks--architecture and shadow. ". . .these forms have taken on a more architectural character, abandoning their descriptive functions to participate in a pure abstract conception of sculpture as a mysterious orchestration of light and shadow, sculpture as a plastic embodiment of shadow."[3]

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview with Arlene Jacobwitz done at the Brooklyn Museum originally for use in the Museum's "Listening to Pictures" Gallery, 3 May 1965 (transcript, p. 2, Brooklyn Museum Library).

[2]Dore Ashton, "Art Forest Sculptures," review of Nevelson exhibit, New York Times, 8 January 1957.

[3]Hilton Kramer, review of Nevelson exhibit, Arts, 31, no. 4 (January 1957) 47.

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No doubt delighted by the warmth and length of the review, Nevelson sent Kramer an etching and proceeded from this time hereafter to call herself an architect of shadow.[1] It cannot be completely coincidental that her next one-woman show, Moon Garden + One, contained an entire wall and was initially installed to be seen in almost total darkness.

The possibility that critics influence the direction of an artist's work may always be considered. At the very least, an encouraging response to a new direction may play an important role. This was in fact suggested by Carlyle Burroughs in his review of Forest in the Herald Tribune.[2] However, Kramer's concentration on the architectural aspects of Nevelson's work must have struck an already primed and respondent chord which would lead to the crystallization of her mature style the following year.

The astonished art world greeted Nevelson's next Grand Central Moderns show, Moon Garden + One, with enthusiasm. Some walls of the gallery were entirely covered with the sculpture Sky Cathedral (fig. 38), and others were partially lined with variously grouped vertical boxes (fig. 39 and 40). As with the previous two thematic exhibitions, a group of pieces were gathered in the center of the room. On this occasion the pieces were reliefs of different shapes and height and had their own columnar bases on which they were arranged at several levels.

With the exception of these central pieces, almost all

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[1]Letter from Hilton Kramer thanking Nevelson for the etching, February 1957 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[2][Carlyle Burroughs], review of Nevelson exhibit, Grand Central Moderns, Herald Tribune, 14 January 1957.

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the works in this exhibit were boxes, hinged or doorless, containing found wood relief groupings. The entire exhibit was lit by a few blue lights which created an eerie air of mystery and, for some, consternation about the difficulty of seeing the separate elements that had been melted into the ensemble. The show was immediately labeled an environment--"a world all her own where the major issues are the control of light and the secrecy of enclosure."[1]

The interested viewer was told that the artist's first work with boxes began a year earlier.[2] Among the several stories about Nevelson's first use of the box are the gift of a liquor box, Christmas 1957, and the discovery on the street of rug boxes.[3] Whatever the precipitating factor, the impulse toward enclosure was ripe in the winter of 1957-58, and soon many pieces which had been made as reliefs were encased in boxes (Shadow Image, fig. 41 and fig. 42). Buoyed perhaps by the immediate convenience of this ready-made framing device, Nevelson produced an enormous number of works in the year between her two last Grand Central Moderns exhibits. Initially for convenient storage, and then for design, the boxes were stacked and leaned against the walls in her Thirtieth Street home until they showed greater resemblance to the many tall cabinets in this house than to her earlier sculpture (figs. 43-47).

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[1]Colette Roberts, press release, "Recent Sculpture by Louise Nevelson, 'The Moon Garden + One'" (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[2]Ibid.

[3]For the stories about Nevelson's early use of boxes see Roberts, Louise Nevelson, p. 21; Arnold B. Glimcher, Louise Nevelson 2nd ed. rev. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1976), p. 78; Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976.

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The theme of a garden at night was not uncommon in the art world, and Louise Bourgeois' Garden at Night, 1953, (fig. 48) was among the recent precedents. Nevelson's garden seemed to exist in a specific locale. Adjacent to a cathedral containing a Heavenly Gate (fig. 39) and a Cross, surrounded by upright coffin-shaped boxes and bathed all in black, Nevelson's Moon Garden might be viewed as a sacral cemetery visited after dark. The artist, however, avoided this interpretation and preferred a more generalized notion: "This is the universe, the stars - the moon - and you and I, everyone. . . . This is Cathedral in the Sky, man's temple to man. And over there is the Moon Dial, the clocking of man's eternal search for the serene"[1] (fig. 40 front center).

The reviewers perceived the show in a similar way and called it a "dark place of dreams and loneliness."[2] Almost all critics described this exhibit in terms of its mysterious and irrational character, and Stuart Preston, in his New York Times review, sees a connection here with surrealism. Lost cultures, nether worlds, and the theatre are all mentioned, but no attempt to specify a personal meaning for the artist is made.[3]

The thematic complexity of this exhibition is suggested by the presence of royal figures, King II (fig. 49) and the Court. Perhaps the artist had unknowingly achieved some actualization of a complex fantasy. This fantasy may have been sensed though not

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[1]"One Woman's World," review of Nevelson exhibit, Time (3 February 1958) p. 58.

[2]Emily Genauer, "Abstract Art with Meaning: Another World," review of Nevelson exhibit, Herald Tribune, 5 January 1958.

[3]Stuart Preston, "The Rising Tide of Exhibitions," New York Times, 1 December 1957.

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understood by the spectators of Moon Garden + One, and it moved them in some mysterious way. Understood or not, the exhibit was experienced as a whole world, and many who entered those darkened rooms felt that they had to abandon their view of reality at the door and accept the imposition of the artist's creation.[1]

Following the critical success of Moon Garden + One, Nevelson was occupied in 1958 with moving to Spring Street, changing galleries from Grand Central Moderns to the Martha Jackson Gallery, and continuing with work in the style of Moon Garden + One. Parts of Moon Garden became walls which were titled Tropical Garden I and II (figs. 50 and 51) and Night Cathedral. They contain some of Nevelson's most eloquent pieces, and unlike much of the work which followed, they seem to have been done in an unhurried manner which allowed for restraint and selection.

In 1959, Nevelson had to prepare for two major shows simultaneously--Sky Columns Presence and Dawn's Wedding Feast--since they would be held only a month apart in November and December of that year. In addition, affiliation with the Jackson Gallery brought new pressures for increased production, since Nevelson's boxes were now a valuable commodity on the art market. Sky Columns Presence (figs. 52 and 53) was a black show continuing in the spirit of Moon Garden. It opened at the end of October at the Martha Jackson Gallery, and the press release announced the key words "mysterious," "poetic," "magic world," "traces of surrealism . . . now confirmed by a certain orderly mysticism."[2]

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[1]Emily Genauer, "Abstract Art,"

[2]Press release, Sky Columns Presence (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

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As in Moon Garden + One, a gallery wall is completely lined with a wall of black boxes. Facing this along the other walls of the gallery are groups of tall columnar reliefs which vary in height and width (fig. 53). In the center of the gallery an enclosed relief tondo stands on a pedestal entitled Sun (fig. 54). Elsewhere in the exhibit a similarly designed Moon (fig. 55) is prominent. Unlike Moon Garden, the lighting of this exhibit has been professionally designed by Schuyler Watts to create a unified atmosphere and promote an air of mystery.[1]

Again the critical reaction was favorable, and in the New York Times Dore Ashton calls Nevelson the "grand mistress of the marvelous." Ashton explains that the strength of Nevelson's work is derived from "her ability to sense and fulfill emotional needs. . . ." She sees the boxes as "irreducible archetypal symbols" which "create visual similes for a specified état d'âme."[2] However, the reviewer does not specify either the emotional needs of the état d'âme, thus allowing the mystery to persist. But Ashton here has come the closest of any critic to the suggestion that there may indeed be specific personal meanings embedded in Nevelson's mysterious world of shadow boxes.

The next major exhibit, Dawn's Wedding Feast, was designed as a surprise. Dorothy Miller, assistant to Alfred Barr, the Museum of Modern Art's director and curator of painting and sculpture, had

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Dore Ashton, "Art: Worlds of Fantasy," review of Nevelson exhibit, New York Times, 29 October 1959.

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been director of a series of exhibitions devoted to newcomers or the not-to-well-known artists on the American scene. Sixteen Americans, planned for December of 1959, was another in the series. Though she and Barr had been acquainted with Nevelson's work since the forties, Miller had not been able to persuade Barr either to purchase a Nevelson piece or to include her in an important show.

Now, on the heels of Nevelson's success, Miller asked her to be a part of this show. Somewhat to Miller's surprise, since a number of the artists in this exhibit were completely unknown, Nevelson accepted immediately and proposed the astonishing idea of a white rather than a black show.[1]

Working simultaneously on the two shows, Nevelson rented a separate studio to prepare the work in white and also in part to keep this new development a secret until the opening. The exhibition was installed at the museum in four hours on the afternoon before the opening. The largest room in the exhibit had been reserved for Nevelson, and she placed a sixteen-foot-long wall of boxes against most of the back wall of the room. This section was called Dawn's Wedding Chapel (fig. 56). Embedded in the center of this section was a box enclosing a composition organized by a large oval frame encircling a toilet-seat cover. This piece was titled Dawn's Wedding Mirror (fig. 57). To the right of the large sculpted wall were two platforms forming an "L" against the back and

[1]Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 10. See also Dorothy Miller, interview with Paul Cummings, April 1971, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, p. 299. Miller evidently did not appreciate the accumulated intensity behind Nevelson's twenty years of waiting for a serious offer from MOMA.

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side walls (fig. 58). Groups of tall, thin, encrusted columns stood near the wall on each platform. In front of one group lay a step-like set of boxes called Dawn's Wedding Pillow (fig. 59). Two large columns (fig. 60) stand on a platform in front of the Wedding Chapel wall. Several hanging columns and a few more boxes make up the remainder of the exhibit (fig. 61).

The critics were indeed surprised by the change, and the reaction was mixed. Thomas B. Hess called these white pieces "catalogues of obsessions," and Dore Ashton was again both enthusiastic and sharply perceptive. She saw Dawn's Wedding Feast as a gay fantasy from Victorian New England, and related it to Emily Dickinson. "The baroque finery--lacey and latticed like a small Victorian town with its wooden houses and daintily fenced garden. . . ."[1] Clearly the critics had caught the mood of the exhibit, but they had not divined its underlying meaning.

What is evident from this overview of the critical reaction and description of Nevelson's seven thematically titled one-woman exhibitions between 1943 and 1959 is the critics' inability or reluctance to explain her work. They often described it with care, but they almost always noted and promoted its mystery. They never attempted to explain such recurring themes as royalty, voyage, and marriage.

A similar unwillingness to deal with explanations of Nevelson's thematic content is also present in the monographs and longer articles

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[1]Thomas B. Hess, "16 Americans," review, Art News, 58, no. 9 (January 1960) 57; Dore Ashton, "Louise Nevelson," Cimaise, ser. 7, no. 3 (April-June 1960) 36.

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that make up the literature on Nevelson's work. A review of this literature will clarify the extent to which such questions have been addressed.

The first book published on Nevelson was written by her friend and former dealer, Colette Roberts, director for many years of the Grand Central Moderns Gallery in New York. Published in 1964, it is written by someone both sympathetic to and familiar with the artist. In a poetic chronology Roberts traces Nevelson's development, liberally citing the artist and various critics. The major point Roberts seeks to make about Nevelson's work is that the artist fulfilled her lifelong dream to create a total world with her sculpture which represents an "elsewhere," a remote place of timelessness, a nonfactual reality, another state of mind. She acknowledges, as do most writers on Nevelson, that her work is architectural and has been influenced by the pre-Columbian and American Indian art she had seen. The author refers to the stylistic influence of Mondrian, Klee, and surrealism, after outlining the development of constructive or additive art as seen in the work of Gonzales, Schwitters, Arp, Ernst, Calder, and Stankiewicz.

Commenting on her fascination with the theatre, Roberts cites Nevelson's recollection of Shakespeare's influence on her. His conception of walking trees in Macbeth, and Hamlet's "kingdom of infinite space in a nutshell"[1] are related by Roberts to Nevelson's "shadow boxes." These boxes are understood by the author as Nevelson's means of protecting her creation, that nonfactual reality to

[1]Roberts, Nevelson, p. 15.

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which the artist had devoted her entire life.

In this monograph, Roberts often provides intriguing clues about the underlying meanings in Nevelson's work. For example, she includes the poem that Nevelson had written and attached to the central figure of the exhibition, Ancient Games, Ancient Places, the artist's first thematically titled show in the series that led to her mature style.[1] In addition, she quotes without commenting, an article by Dore Ashton in Cimaise 1960, "Nothing exists for her that is unrelated to something else and when it is all added together, it is a total environment of which she is queen. . . ."[2] Likewise, she cites George Mathieu's text for the catalogue of Nevelson's exhibit at Daniel Cordier, Paris 1960, "When enclosing her creation in a little box, Nevelson gives its drama all the attributes of totems, which stand for all taboos and sanctuaries. . . . From the beginning, man has had the need to protect, to hide. . . . All these boxes, all these worlds, bear witness to the attempts of a tormented conscience to conquer. . . . ."[3]

Colette Roberts knew Nevelson very well, especially during the period in which she consolidated her style. However, this short monograph does not address itself to unravelling the meaning of the black walls; it simply provides the first eye-witness account of the artist's development.

The most extensive written work on Louise Nevelson is a monograph written in 1972 and revised in 1976, by Arnold Glimcher,

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[1]Ibid., p. 19. [2]Ibid., p. 76. [3]Ibid., p. 24.

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her close friend and dealer since 1964.

Using a chronological format and including numerous quotations from Nevelson gathered from interviews, Glimcher sets forth the inevitability of her development as an environmental artist. As her friend and dealer, Glimcher is largely uncritical of his subject, and he not only accepts her assertations of ignorance about the work of Giacometti and Schwitters until the late fifties, but he sees her studios and the first conventional exhibits of her sculpture on pedestals as clear examples of total collages and deliberately created environments.

Rightly describing the 1943 Norlyst Circus exhibit as Nevelson's first environmental exhibit, he incorporates Nevelson's recollections of the show in his description of it, but this description does not match photographs of the pieces actually in the show.[1]

Glimcher quotes the loquacious artist about her empire-building illusion and her acknowledgment of her father's influence. "I always say I built an empire. . . . I wanted to build a universe. . . .[2] My father was a builder and he knew materials, not only wood. Now I didn't want to imitate him, but I think it's in the genes. . . . I might have rejected a lot of things about my parents, but genetic programs can't be rejected. . . . I somehow identify very closely to architects. . . ."[3] Glimcher does not, however, connect the two ideas of empire and influence of Nevelson's father, but explains her environments in terms of psychological alienation. Again, by agreeing with Nevelson about her identification of her art as her life,

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[1]Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 53. [2]Ibid., pp. 23, 29. [3]Ibid., p. 185.

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he puts forth the following propositions on the first page of his text:

> Nevelson's life in itself is her greatest work of art. . . .
> Even as a child, Nevelson was prematurely aware of her own isolation, and the intense loneliness that she continues to suffer is depicted in her works, with their illusive imagery and space. She is uncompromising in her order of priorities, because, she says, she has already been compromised by life itself. This strong resentment has directed the development of an aesthetic dedicated to satisfying her search for shelter by the construction of a universe of her own. The edifices of that universe,unfamiliar and disorienting, mirror the morals and values that govern her life.[1]

This tantalizing statement is never clarified, and the reader is left wondering what reasons the young girl had for such strong resentment and why she had a need for shelter.

Glimcher has, however, made a link between the artist's private need and her public acts of making and exhibiting sculpture. In discussing the 1958 exhibit Moon Garden + One he states, "Nevelson sought to establish an unfamiliar landscape that would disorient the viewer and question the sufficiency of his perception. . . . This was a magic window that allowed the viewer to walk through into a private universe."[2]

In one statement, he carries the proposition of private need further to include the concept of her work as a shield. "They [her work] were the disguise she wore to protect herself and that has always been one of their purposes."[3]

By stating that her life is her greatest work of art, Glimcher turns around Nevelson's own many assertations that art is her life.

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[1]Ibid., p. 25. [2]Ibid., pp. 79, 84. [3]Ibid., p. 146.

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"I needed something to engage me and art was that something . . . it was my entire life.[1] Philosophically, let's say my way of living, or what accommodates me to fulfill myself, are things that I have made . . . . I feel that work is basically fulfilling my awareness of life. My whole work constitutes a total world."[2]

The author's change of meaning is not an unimportant one because without stating it, it shifts the attention of the reader to Nevelson as the performing artist rather than Nevelson the driven creator. This shift seems significant not because the views are opposite, but because it suggests a change in perspective. A close observer of the artist's living and working practices might see Nevelson as the consummate performer whose creations are important because she made them. In contrast, the vantage point of the artist herself is different. Nevelson repeatedly insists that it is her work which both drives and defines her.

Glimcher's conception of the theatrical qualities in Nevelson's work is complex. He compares her work to film, again using the collage and environmental aspects to do so. Speaking of her experience with movies in Vienna during the winter of 1931, he says, ". . . it was the frontality of the sets, the illusion of space, and the arresting of time on celluloid frames that most strongly impressed her. . . . What Nevelson was reacting to was her first involvement in an art the very nature of which is collage. The multi-elements, synthetic and organic, being directed into a total work corresponded to and indeed may have led the way to the technical evolution of Nevelson's work process; for her mature art parallels cinema in that it is cellular, additive

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[1]Ibid., pp. 19-20. [2]Ibid., p. 193.

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and an illusionistic projection of space whose very scale rivals the cinema screen. Most of all, it is an art of collage and environment."[1]

Elsewhere in the book Glimcher makes the additional point about the temporal nature of Nevelson's work, "Time is integral to these ephemeral experiences, making it impossible for the viewer to leave with a total formal image of the work. The impression exists only during the period of contact, and in this manner, her work approximates theatre."[2]

The formal points made by Glimcher about this relationship are in part persuasive. The scale, illusionistic, and temporal qualities of Nevelson's work are indeed theatrical. However, his remarks about the cellular and additive aspects seem forced. Perhaps most important is the fact that the author does not attempt to explain why Nevelson would be attracted to the theatrical. While he must certainly be aware of her histrionic tendencies, he does not connect them to her aesthetic choices. Neither does he relate the theatrical nature of Nevelson's work to the various trends in twentieth-century European and American art permeated with the ideas of the total work of art. The only acknowledgment of a related influence is Glimcher's comment on the "surreal tableaus of isolation that could be found in window displays."[3]

Glimcher's subjective and supportive relationship to Nevelson again blinds him to the importance of the exhibitionistic elements

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[1]Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 35. [2]Ibid., p. 89. [3]Ibid., p. 53.

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in Nevelson's involvement with dance. He quotes and reports the artist's revealing statements and actions, without connecting the underlying meaning:

"Dance fascinates me because I don't think we know how to control our bodies. . . . I love dance because I think that it freed me."[1]

"When she was finished installing Moon Garden Plus One, her 1958 exhibition, Louise started to dance. . . . It was really like a ritual dance, with slow hieratic gestures." What the author concludes from all of this is based on another statement of Nevelson's, and deals with an entirely different aspect. She says, "Dance made me realize that air is a solid through which I pass, not a void in which I exist." He then interprets, "For Nevelson, the negative does not exist, shadow and solid, visible and invisible, are positive and equal."[2]

While he alludes to Nevelson's awareness of the relationship between modern dance and "primal instincts in ritualistic celebration," he does not place her involvement with dance in either the context of the American art scene or her more general interest in primitive culture and art.

Nevelson's interest in the primitive is revealed in Glimcher's book through extensive quotes, photographs, and descriptions of her collection of African, pre-Columbian, and American Indian Art, discussion of her travels in Mexico, as well as by a few interpretive comments. He ascribes stylistic influence to the surface calligraphy,

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[1]Ibid., p. 20. [2]Ibid., p. 41.

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geometric imagery, and the large scale of pre-Columbian art. However, the major point he attempts to make of her interest is his contention that primitive art inspires her to create illusory worlds. "Perhaps her affinity for ancient or alien civilization is based upon her ability to see their active life as a mysterious reconstruction or an illusion."[1] When Nevelson says, "The [American Indian] sand paintings are made in a religious context, and they only exist until the wind blows them away," Glimcher writes, "Although her own works are physically permanent, their visual experience is ephemeral."[2] He does not discuss the ceremonial parallels between Nevelson's work and the Indian art and people with which she identified. Neither does he set this interest of hers in the context of the development of modern American art where it had a long and continuously important history. His reluctance to place her totemic images in the context of American or European sculpture is particularly striking. He calls her columns "like all of Nevelson's work . . . architectural," and relates them only to the work of Gaudi.[3]

The major stylistic contention of Glimcher's book is his attempt to place the work of Louise Nevelson within the vanguard of abstract expressionism and to put forth the idea that her work "destroys the boundaries between painting and sculpture" through "the extension of sculpture into the realm of illusion, a territory previously reserved for painting."[4]

The most obscure hypothesis he proposes on this topic is the idea that the "real third dimension in Nevelson's work is

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[1]Ibid., p. 65. [2]Ibid., p. 41. [3]Ibid., p.99.

[4]Ibid., pp. 86, 181.

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illusion" and that this illusion is created by "a dichotomy between the restricted delineated space that reveals each physical level and the possible illusion of infinite space established by the infinity of reflected shadow."[1] Placing her with David Smith and Alexander Calder, he suggests that she is responsible for the renaissance of sculpture in American art. In order to support this contention, Glimcher, very much like his subject, claims a select few artists, mostly painters, as sources, and denies the most obvious predecessors. Like Robert Rosenblum, he sees the work of Rothko, Still, Newman, and Pollock as primary sources for Nevelson's walls. The scale of all four, the allover pattern of Pollock, the monochromatic black of Still, and the outward thrust of Rothko are the aspects he specifies.

In addition, he sees the apprenticeship with Rivera, Picasso's cubism, Mexico's architecture, and Nevelson's film career as crucial in the formation of her style.

Glimcher's denial of Schwitters' influence upon Nevelson is couched in terms which contradict Glimcher's main hypothesis that, "Nevelson is a three-dimensional artist and Schwitters was a two-dimensional one . . . ."[2] He concedes only that both Nevelson and Schwitters were influenced by Picasso.

Glimcher succeeds in this book in conveying a sense of the artist as she sees herself and her career, but it would be extremely difficult for a dealer to remain completely objective and impartial about the work and life of one of the more important and successful

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[1]Ibid., p. 89. [2]Ibid., p. 92.

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artists in his gallery.

Nevelson's own book, Dawns and Dusks, published in the fall of 1976, is in the same myth-creating tradition as the two previous monographs by her dealers. Using the format of conversations, taped and edited by Nevelson's assistant, Diana MacKown, the book adheres to the same basic tenets found in the previous works: Nevelson's early perception of herself as a sculptor, her laborious and penurious struggle, and her present apotheosis as America's great, if not greatest, twentieth-century sculptor. The book differs from Glimcher's by the inclusion of more biographical reminiscences, anecdotal material, a greater proportion of comments pertaining to Nevelson's philosophy of creation and of life in general, and the absence of aesthetic theory building.

Since much of the material in this book will be treated as primary evidence for support of the hypotheses in this dissertation, the present discussion will be limited.

Nevelson is voluble on the topic of her relationship to her work and she explains again and again the various ways it sustains her emotionally. She often mentions her wishes and accomplishments concerning the construction of an empire, her sense of herself as an architect, and her feeling about wood as a material.

In this book, however, she disclaims any influence from her father. "In an article written not too long ago it said that I picked up things in my father's lumber yard. He had lumber and he had maybe a lumber yard, but it was a little out of Rockland itself and I never bothered. I just want to make it clear for the future so that students must not think because their father

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has a grocery store they're going to make groceries!"[1] Perhaps the greatest irony of this denial is the fact that her father had, among his many other real estate holdings, a grocery store in which Louise's sister Anita worked during high school.[2] At no point in the book does the author relate her work to that of other sculptors or artists who worked environmentally. Indeed, she again disclaims knowledge of Schwitters: "I didn't even know there was an artist by the name of Schwitters until Arp came and saw my piece (in 1958) and compared it to his work."[3]

She does, however, claim all of New York City as a source for her work. ". . . I see New York City as a great big sculpture!!! Thinking of these great buildings and the scale of everything and my own energy, it was just a natural. . . . Many of my works are real reflections of the city."[4]

Another facet of Nevelson important to her work revealed at length in this book is her attitude about her dramatic appearance. "For me clothes and presentation of self is a projection of a total personality."[5]

Nevelson's sense of herself as an attractive and theatrical presence, which is clearly articulated in this book as well as in other interviews, will be seen in the course of this dissertation to have a

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[1] MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 10.

[2] Anita Berliawsky, interview, Rockland, Maine, 12 July 1976. It might also not be too far-fetched to see some traces of the walls of shelved merchandise in Nevelson's later sculptures.

[3] Ibid., p. 33. [4] Ibid., p. 112. [5] Ibid., p. 187.

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significant bearing in the development of Nevelson's sculptural style. While she is conscious that her current style of clothing is related to her art work, she is not aware of the various implications and manifestations of that relationship. "My whole life is one big collage. Every time I put on clothes, I am creating a picture, a living picture, for myself."[1] Related to these interests is Nevelson's enthusiasm about modern American dance and her awareness of its importance in the cultural milieu of the thirties, forties, and fifties. However, while she speaks of Martha Graham, she never alludes to the pioneering set designs of her fellow sculptors like Isamu Noguchi, and Frederick Kiesler.

Like a sleep walker who speaks the truth but does not hear it consciously, Nevelson gives voice to her fears and fantasies about some work she did in 1956-57, that critical moment before she enclosed the works in boxes and stacked them to become walls. "At that time I was so geared that I made a black wedding cake. I'm always taking these trips, and I suppose this trip I didn't have a bridegroom, but I had a wedding cake. If you're going without a bridegroom, naturally it's going to be a black wedding cake . . . then I made a bridge to cross over."[2] In this and other passages in the book, Nevelson touches upon themes without seeming to understand their importance in her total oeuvre. These themes are marriage, death, and royalty.

Articles, critical reviews, and exhibition catalogues make up the majority of the remaining serious literature on Louise Nevelson. In addition, there are numerous newspaper interviews with the artist in connection with her burgeoning national and international exhibition schedule in the sixties and seventies.

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[1]Ibid., p. 184. [2]Ibid., p. 128.

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The reviewers and authors who were not close friends of the artist focus either on the information revealed to them by Nevelson or on what could be concluded through observation of the works themselves. Thus, the themes most often discussed are the architectural quality of the work; the development of an environmental style beginning in 1943 with the Norlyst show Circus...; the general acceptance of cubism, surrealism, and pre-Columbian art as major influences; Nevelson's parallel development to American abstract expressionist painters in terms of scale, overall pattern, grid framework; and interest in totemic and archaic themes.

Absent from most of these studies is any serious attempt to find iconographic meaning in the works rather than to make astute or poetic formal analysis. Typical of the approach is Martin Friedman's catalogue, later published as a book for the Nevelson exhibition originating at the Walker Art Center in 1973.[1]

Friedman describes Nevelson's development, mentioning sources such as Picasso, Arp, Miro, African and pre-Columbian art, David Smith, surrealism in New York, new American painting with its pictographic grid-like qualities and its reliance on myths and the world of dreams. He compares Nevelson's work with this painting, citing sequences of visual and psychological free associations. He mentions the spectral grotto-like quality of the show Moon Garden + One, and cites the surrealistic interiors of Giacometti and Miro. He compares the columns to trees and towers and calls them anthropomorphic. After

[1]Martin Friedman, Nevelson: Wood Sculpture, exhibition organized by Walker Art Center, 1973-1975 (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1973).

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describing and listing particular pieces and general characteristics of several categories of wood pieces--boxes and reliefs, columns and walls--he concludes his discussion with a statement about meaning: "Nevelson's sculpture is about the revelation of daily existence. She is not a literary or historically minded person, nor is she interested in creating descriptive or symbolic forms. Her work is a distillation of impressions and experiences of life and embodies the forms and energies that surround us. In her art, these qualities are translated to an abstract level, with occasional clues in the form of recognizable objects, to a reality we all share."[1]

Critics in the late fifties such as Hilton Kramer (Arts 1958) and Robert Rosenblum (Arts Yearbook 1959) noted the relationship of the walls both to architectural scale and abstract expressionist painting, and Rosenblum specified the work of Rothko, Still, Newman, and Pollock.[2] Kramer noted the plastic function of the black paint that covered all Nevelson's work at the time and called her a notable graphic artist.

Interestingly enough, it was three women authors whose comments shed some light on the understanding of Nevelson's environmental works as a constructed empire. The first was Dore Ashton whose quote from an article in Cimaise 1960 was included in Colette Roberts' monograph: "Like certain other sculptors, among them Giacometti, her space is a thronged space. By first making an enclosure and then filling it - whether it be a single-unit box with its half-revealed

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[1]Ibid., p. 31

[2]Hilton Kramer, "The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson," Arts, 32, no. 9 (June 1958) 26-29; Robert Rosenblum, "Louise Nevelson," Arts Yearbook 3 Paris/New York (1959), pp. 136-139.

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contents or an entire room - she creates a royaume, and it is absolutely a hermetic royaume."[1]

Dorothy Gees Seckler, in an article based upon an interview written for Art in America, February 1967, quotes Nevelson, "To have an empire, dear, you have to build one," and then explains that Nevelson has built a surrogate empire "presumably in protest against the inadequacies of the real world. . . ."[2] She goes on to mention Nevelson's fascination with Hamlet's walnut shell universe, a story Seckler may have gotten from the Roberts monograph or from Nevelson herself, since most interviews with the artist tend to be based upon a relatively limited number of stories explaining her life and work.

The third article published in Craft Horizons, 1967, was written by Dido Smith, a woman who had been friendly and familiar with Nevelson's art and life for many years. Her more detailed knowledge of Nevelson's life through close association during the fifties prompted her to write one of the most astute articles published on the artist.

Smith places the development of Nevelson's box enclosures and walls in the context of the artist's imminent forced removal during the late fifties from her house by the city, whose plans to build the Kips Bay project included the gradual demolition of the neighboring buildings.

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[1]Dore Ashton, "Louise Nevelson," Cimaise , p. 26.

[2]Dorothy Gees Seckler, "The Artist Speaks: Louise Nevelson," Art in America, 55, no. 1 (January-February 1967) 38.

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"With a time limit on her stay, she hunted for another studio while working with desperate urgency to finish the pieces for her Moon Garden Plus One show in 1958. The enclosure became her obsession, and the architectural ambiance increased. As she was losing one shelter she constructed a hundred others from the many mansions of a creative consciousness. She packed for moving, throwing or giving away the furniture of the past, making room so she could see to build with the boxes that held her future."[1]

In fact, as early as 1955, Nevelson was aware of the need to find a new home, and this factor may well play a very important role in her development.[2]

Both Smith and Seckler noted the theatrical nature of Nevelson's work and Smith went so far as to describe the walls of the early sixties as "a series of stage sets, her mute and maimed objects mime the discontinuous dramas of dream."[3] Smith also fills in several important details usually not mentioned in Nevelson's chronology. She states that the Bride of the Black Moon of 1955 was understood by Nevelson as a self-representation, and that her experience with etching at Atelier 17 in 1953 initiated the extensive use of black in her work.

This last point was also noted by Wayne Andersen in American Sculpture in Process: 1930/1970. While he cites the usual sources for Nevelson's work--Picasso, cubism, African and pre-Columbian art, Cornell, Giacometti, and Calder, he specifies, in addition, the surrealist tableaus seen in gallery installations and window displays

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[1]Smith, "Nevelson," p. 76.

[2]Mike Nevelson, letter to Louise Nevelson, 15 November 1955 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[3]Smith, "Nevelson," p. 78.

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by such artists as Frederick Kiesler. Andersen also attempts to establish the influence on Nevelson of Louise Bourgeois' work, which was shown in 1949 and 1950 at the Peridot Gallery. He does this by implication rather than through discussion of their friendship and collaboration. He further adds the additional sources for Nevelson's grid format by mentioning Adolph Gottlieb's and Peter Grippe's box-like divisions of canvas and etching plate.[1] Andersen, like most of the other authors who deal with Nevelson's work, makes no attempt to interpret what he calls "her dream-world environment."[2] This may have represented a desire to leave a succesful aesthetic solution undisturbed by interpretation, or it may have been the acknowledgment of insufficient information for a coherent and significant interpretation. Ashton's suggestion of a deeply personal meaning in her 1959 review of Sky Columns Presence, and Glimcher's assertion that Nevelson's life is a work of art, intimates that any study which attempts to interpret Nevelson's work must also seriously consider the artist's personal life and history.

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[1]Wayne Andersen, American Sculpture in Process: 1930/1970 (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), pp. 95-100.

[2]Ibid., p. 97.

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CHAPTER II

PERSONAL HISTORY

Early childhood experiences and family relationships have lasting effects and do much to shape the nature of adult life, and in the instance of Louise Nevelson, whose relationship to her immediate family has remained unusually close throughout her working life, a more extensive than usual study of those experiences and relationships is warranted in order to interpret her mysterious world of shadow boxes.

Louise Nevelson was born in Kiev in 1900, the second child of the Berliawsky family. Her father, Isaac Berliawsky, came to America in c. 1902 shortly after his own father died of cancer. He was the last of his brothers to leave Russia, having stayed on to care for his parents. He left behind his mother, a young wife, and three small children, Nathan, Louise, and Anita. In Russia he had worked with his father in the combined enterprise of manufacturing vodka and the lumber business. Since Jews were generally restricted from the ownership of land, the lumber business consisted of buying crops of trees on the land, then processing and transporting the lumber. The Berliawskys in Russia were an educated family. Isaac Berliawsky's father was the town scribe and one of his older brothers was a student of the Talmud when he came to America at age twelve. Another elder brother, one of the first to emigrate, came through Canada to Waterville, Maine, where he prospered and eventually owned several factories.

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It was here that the younger Berliawsky brothers began their adjustment to American life. Most did not stay long in Waterville, resisting what they felt was exploitation by their older brother. Isaac Berliawsky also came through Canada to Waterville, but soon departed. He went by train to the coastal town of Rockland, Maine, which he thought would be a way station for a later move to New York once he had earned enough to bring the last of his family over from Russia.[1]

Rockland at the turn of the century was a coastal port, population c. 10,000, with three thriving industries, lime, granite, and ship building.[2] It was an old New England Yankee town which did not warmly receive the very small immigrant community of about twenty-five Jewish families that had settled there in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries.

Arriving in his early thirties, Isaac Berliawsky lived at first in a poor waterfront area which his son later called the

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[1]The information about the Berliawsky family and Louise Nevelson's childhood in Maine comes from a series of interviews conducted by the author in Maine, New York, and Connecticut with all of Louise Nevelson's immediate family. The material thus gathered expands upon, and in some cases, corroborates information already provided by Louise Nevelson. Though one cannot assume absolute reliability of such material, the numerous instances of agreement in the recollections of family members suggest either that the memories are accurate, or that the family has agreed to the same distortions in recall. For a complete listing of these interviews, see bibliography.

[2]Extensive information about the history of Rockland in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is contained in the Bicentennial Issue of the Courier-Gazette, Rockland's local newspaper (Courier-Gazette [Rockland, Maine] 20 March 1976.

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Ellis Island of Rockland. In about two years he was able to bring over his family,and after the birth of another daughter, Lillian, they moved to an old house on Linden Street in the south end of town very near the water and one of the large shipyards. By this time he had begun to work in real estate, contracting and building. Gradually he bought ever largeramounts of land and kept building houses until he was the fourth highest taxpayer in Rockland.

Having learned the lumber business from his father in Russia, but having the opportunity to buy land as his father had not been able to do, Isaac Berliawsky was constantly at work buying, building, and mortgaging to buy more. Never rich, since all his property was mortgaged, he is described by his son Nathan as a manipulator: fast, smart and remarkably honest. Much of the land he owned was woodland and the lumber was milled and stacked during the winter to be used for building in the warmer weather. He eventually built a house for his family next door to the one already on Linden Street. All the children were taught how to judge the value of houses and to understand their mode of construction. He would often send his two oldest girls, Louise and Anita, to see a house he was considering for purchase to have them judge its worth.

The houses built by Isaac Berliawsky were not grand or elegant, but they were numerous, solidly constructed, and his children were made aware of the breadth of his activities. For himself, he wanted to build or buy a large,impressive home, but his wife's modesty and fiscal caution restrained him.[1]

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[1]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, Cushing, Maine, 14 July 1976.

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A very energetic and ambitious man, he prospered in Rockland and decided to stay there. His generosity to the community, both Jewish and Christian, eventually earned him a great deal of respect in the town. Though he lost a great deal during the Depression, he gave much of what he had to help those in more straitened conditions. Curious, bright, self-educated,with a great love and respect for cultural life, he persistently provided opportunities for the betterment of his family. Because of his love of music, all three daughters were given piano, voice, and violin lessons. One of the first Victrolas in Rockland was at the Berliawsky home, and the latest Caruso and Galli-Curci records were always purchased. Music filled the house and the children were given antiques for toys. He developed almost a mania for antiques and built storehouses to keep his collection. His wife, more conservative and with less developed artistic taste, would only allow "new" furniture at home. Isaac Berliawsky's sensitivity and appreciation of artistic things were most certainly passed on in varying degrees to his children.

All of his children perceived him as a high-strung, very hard-working artistic man with enormous ambition and self-confidence. They were sometimes afraid of him and even now speak of his ferocious temper and the care they would take to avoid exciting it. Like many immigrants, he tried to provide the best possible opportunities for his children's advancement in American life. They were to be given the "best" clothes and to go to the "best" teachers.

Tall and aristocratic-looking himself, he was very proud of his beautiful wife and daughters, and enjoyed walking down the streets

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of Rockland with them, doffing his hat to his many friends and acquaintances, proudly accepting their praise of his handsome family.

His drive to succeed in the not-overly-receptive New England community was apparently not motivated by personal ambition, and he denied himself much in the way of personal comfort, working very long hours, eating only after the family had finished, and spending so little money on himself that his wife had to buy him new clothes and burn his old ones.

While he was well-liked and respected for his integrity in the small Jewish community of Rockland, he was known for his outspoken views and frequent disagreements. One of these disagreements led him to build a separate cemetery for his own family. Isaac Berliawsky was not a particularly religious man, but rather a typical first-generation immigrant. No more or less observant than other Jews in Rockland, he was probably more knowledgeable and comfortable in this new American setting than they.

If Isaac Berliawsky made a surprisingly good adjustment to the American setting, his wife, Minna Zeisel, did not. No doubt some of this was due to the difference both of their past experiences in Russia and of the circumstances surrounding their departure. Isaac grew up near Kiev and was more accustomed to city life, and was also the last of his family to leave, bringing his mother, the only remaining member of the Berliawsky family, with him. For Minna Zeisel it was totally different. She was a farmer's daughter from a poor family and grew up in a tiny village on the Dnieper River.

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According to her daughter Louise, she married Isaac Berliawsky with great reluctance at a very young age and was forced to leave her entire family behind when her husband sent for her in 1904. During her two last years in Russia, while he was finding his way in Rockland, Mrs. Berliawsky lived with her young children in her parents' home, and the final separation from them seems to have been a trauma from which she never recovered. Arriving in America, she became chronically depressed and almost an invalid. She was frequently confined to bed with undiagnosable symptoms, and her children remember her crying for years about the mother she would never see again. No medical care seemed to affect her severe headaches and backaches.[1]

Adding to her sense of isolation was the anti-Semitic atmosphere in Rockland. There were very few activities in which she could participate, since a woman's life outside the house in this New England town was centered in the church. Participation in Jewish communal life was made difficult by the location of the Berliawsky home at the opposite end of town from most of the Jewish families in the north end. She had no close friends and stayed mostly at home, tending house and caring for her children.

However, in the light of her very provincial background, she had several unusual characteristics. The one that was most striking to her children, particularly the girls, was her sense of style and fashion. Fastidious in her selection of clothes, she would buy the highest quality and often most expensive dress and hat available

[1]Anita Berliawsky, interview, Rockland, Maine, 12 July 1976.

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in Rockland or Boston and then preserve it in perfect condition for many years. Preparing for her infrequent forays into the main part of Rockland, she would spend many hours dressing, but the final effect was apparently quite stunning, and she had the reputation of being one of the most beautiful women in Rockland. She extended the same care to keeping house and her tidiness was proverbial. Far more conservative than her husband, who thrived on risks and ventures, she preferred a more moderate position on most issues. Mr. Berliawsky admired his wife and feared her displeasure and therefore would concede many decisions to her. The children turned to her for advice, knowing that her approval would be automatically seconded by him. Both parents were ambitious for their children and somewhat permissive, though the rigors of growing up in an alien community set its own kind of limits. The children perceived their mother as understanding and supportive with a well-developed and sometimes sardonic sense of humor. She had an innate brightness and worldly common sense, apparent in her management of the household, that must have contrasted strongly with her husband's more fanciful high-keyed nature.

Rockland was a somewhat unusual New England coastal town, since it was the focal point for wealthy families on their way to summer holidays in Maine. During the summer there was a feverish coming and going of these large entourages arriving by ship or train from Boston and all parts of the United States. The local shops were prepared to provide the latest New York fashions for the ladies, and the young Berliawsky family had frequent opportunities to see and

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even meet with people of great wealth and social importance. This tangible evidence of a larger, more exciting world must have added fuel to Louise Berliawsky's desire to make her way out of Rockland.

Life in the Berliawsky house seems to have been relatively peaceful. The children had their chores, music lessons, and school work. Nate accompanied his father when he supervised work in the woods with the lumber. Anita was the family baker or helped out in her father's grocery store, and Louise cleaned and rearranged furniture while Lillian did the sewing. Nate played baseball with his friends in the neighborhood or spent time at the YMCA. But the three sisters did not have close friendships outside the family. Anita, the most inclined to books, concentrated on her school work or kept busy studying violin, piano,singing,and elocution. Louise also studied singing, elocution, and piano, and occasionally the two girls performed in local recitals.

In the warm weather all the children would play by the beach near the house or sit watching the large wood ships being built at the shipyard around the corner. The special festivities of a launching were frequent occurrences. Most entertainment was in the home with the girls playing and singing and neighbors coming in for cookies and tea. Like their mother, the girls could not have a large circle of friends because most of Rockland's social life was restricted to Christian families; but neighborhood children, not being of the upper class,accepted them. Of all the Berliawsky children, Louise seems to have felt this exclusion most keenly. Her sisters explain that she was a very pretty girl, open and friendly, and would have been very popular if only she hadn't been Jewish. She

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remembered Russia, while her younger sisters did not, and only she always felt like a stranger, both in Rockland and in America. Her sisters claim that it became easier for each of them because she softened the burden of social ostracism.

Nevelson's devotion to her mother obscured an objective understanding of her, but had lasting effects on both her life and work. She recalled her mother's unhappiness and credited it to an inability to adjust to American life and her marriage to a man she did not love:

> I adored my mother. She was a brilliant woman, and she was a most beautiful woman. When we were growing up in Rockland, she dressed like for New York. She used to rouge her face and everything when they didn't do it. She brought that from the Old World. She had a great flair. But I knew she was very unhappy. I had great sympathy for her, because she was misplaced--on land, misplaced socially. She was misplaced in every conceivable way. She didn't want to get married either. Marriage made her very unhappy. So there was misplacement of love; misplacement of land, altogether. She just never adjusted. And she was sick all her life.
>
> She was so ill-adjusted and was so beautiful that I never shed a tear when she passed away. I never felt that she was happy on earth. I never saw her happy. But I always felt so sympathetic to her that I was determined to open every front door. . .and to walk right through the door I didn't care if I had to build the house myself.[1]

Isaac Berliawsky maintained long-lasting liaisons with other women in Rockland, perhaps due to his wife's antipathy. This too had its effect on Nevelson's subsequent development and helped to form her ambivalent view of marriage and general distrust of men.[2] In any case, she has clearly identified with

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 10-13.

[2]Mike Nevelson, interview, Fairfield, Connecticut, 29 July 1977.

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her mother's sense of fashion and personal presence, and she enters a social gathering with the same proud stance her mother carried down Rockland's main street.

Minna Berliawsky's inability to adjust must have rendered her in many ways unavailable to her daughters and forced them to find adult models outside the house. Anita developed an attachment to her school principal, an older woman whom she adored and to whom she turned frequently for guidance, knowing her mother's incapacities. This must have been equally true for Louise. Her sisters remember that,in the very earliest years in school, she had to fight to persuade her art teacher, Miss Cleveland, that the drawings she brought in were indeed freehand; but once that battle was won, this teacher became her staunchest supporter and ultimately her friend and ideal. Miss Cleveland encouraged her in every way and told her that she would be a great artist, spurring her on to win all the competitions in the art classes throughout her school years in Rockland.[1] This teacher would frequently announce to the class that Louise Berliawsky would make a name for herself as an artist.

As Nevelson recalled in her autobiography:

> So I loved this particular teacher. Her name was Miss Cleveland, and she came from Camden. I think she also went to Pratt. A woman about fifty-five. Never married. Conventionally she certainly wasn't beautiful, she was an old maid and behaved like it, yet she had something that no one around me had. She was gracious. And what appealed to me even then was, she had a beautiful purple hat and purple coat. For Rockland, that was something.[2]

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[1]Nathan Berliawsky, interview, Rockland, Maine, 12 July 1976. Louise Nevelson's recollection of early signs of her artistic abilities is corroborated by testimony from a fellow classmate, Edgar Crockett, who remembers that the art teacher in school "thought a lot of Louise and said many times that she'd make a name for herself" (Edgar Crockett, interview, Rockland, Maine, 15 July 1976; Louise Nevelson, interview, New York, 8 January 1976).

[2]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 24-25.

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Her admiration for her art teachers was related to their appearance. As a young girl she noted that they "looked different" and had a "distinction about their clothes."[1]

The young Louise Berliawsky noted an analogous difference about the appearance of the native Indians in Maine who could be seen in town or on nearby reservations. Their picturesque looks appealed to her and she identified with the unconventionality of their appearance and social position in the provincial town. That was the beginning also of her interest in American Indian art which could be seen in the antique shops catering to the wealthy summer visitors.[2]

From her earliest years in school, Louise's capacities and interest in art provided a kind of solace and identity for the young girl, and she developed a close bond to her art teachers whose encouragement must have greatly eased the burden of cultural alienation. Even as a youngster she had the same avid interest and drive as her father for the cultural life, and her brother remembers her as the primary force in the pursuit of all cultural things.

Knowing that she was the star pupil in art gave her confidence. Her parents did not discourage her and must have been pleased that she had found an outlet for her abundant energies. Her mother allowed her an additional freedom in the house which can be seen as part of the same drive--the constant rearrangement of furniture in all the rooms of the house. This activity was apparently so all-absorbing

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[1] Ibid., p. 24.

[2] Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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that it was carried on even outside the home. Louise developed the habit of peering through the windows of other people's homes and rearranging their furniture in the her imagination.[1]

This remarkable behavior persisted into adulthood. Nevelson's son recalls that, each summer when he and his mother went to Maine to visit the Berliawskys, upon arrival his mother would begin moving and arranging all the furniture in the house, including the piano.[2] This habit, which has continued throughout Nevelson's life, could be seen both as a special gift for spatial arrangements as well as a need to control or create the immediate environment.

Louise Nevelson's interest in furniture and the design of interior space was fostered at school and at home. The assignments for art class included numerous depictions of period furniture and interiors (figs. 62 and 63). The careful detailing of antique furniture parts, no doubt required for the assignments, was to have telling results forty years later when transformed fragments of such furniture appeared as part of Nevelson's sculpture.

Contrary to later statements by Nevelson, she believed as a child and throughout her school years that she would be a painter, not a sculptor. There was in fact little or no opportunity in art classes to do sculpture.[3]

In the spring of Louise Berliawsky's last year in high school she met Bernard Nevelson, the elder brother of her future husband.

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[1]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976.

[2]Mike Nevelson, interview, 29 July 1977.

[3]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976; Edgar Crockett, interview, 15 July 1976.

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Working as a legal stenographer as part of the secretarial training course in high school, she was bold enough to speak in Yiddish to the fine-looking gentleman who had come into the Rockland lawyer's office for documents pertaining to his shipping business. Quite taken with this attractive young woman, he met her family and went back to New York, telling his younger unmarried brother about her. Undoubtedly encouraged by the warm reports, Charles Nevelson soon after came up to Maine to meet her.[1]

Having appeared at a fortuitous moment in her life, and being warmly received by the Berliawsky family, Charles Nevelson provided Louise with an opportunity few country girls would resist. Though he was almost fifteen years older than Louise and considerably shorter, he was from New York, very wealthy, and educated to be a gentleman. Furthermore, her parents were very fond of him. After two years of courtship and preparation, Louise Nevelson married and moved to New York.

As a child, Louise Berliawsky had received the normal cultural training mated out for young ladies at the end of the Victorian era. Her enthusiasm for music and art were, as we have seen, encouraged by her family and by her academic dissatisfactions. Once she had married Charles Nevelson and moved to New York and a life of ease and wealth, Louise Nevelson had opportunities to continue the pursuits of her choice. She began almost immediately to study voice with

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[1]This account of Bernard and Charles Nevelson's earliest meetings with Louise Berliawsky differs from that of Louise Nevelson's in her autobiography (MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 30). I have based my account on interviews with Anita Berliawsky, 12 July 1976; Lillian Mildwoff, 14 July 1976; Nathan Berliawsky, 12 July 1976.

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Estelle Liebling and a few years later, in 1926, she studied acting with Princess Norina Matchabelli. She attended Saturday afternoon classes at the Art Students League with Ann Goldwaithe in 1924, and had private painting lessons briefly with Theresa Bernstein in 1926.[1]

All of this was well within the realm of an upper-middle-class matron's life. Louise Nevelson's strongest cultural interest at this time seem to have been devoted to the theatre and voice, and her sisters felt at that time that, had she been allowed freer rein by her husband, she would have had a career on the stage. Her husband's jealousy and somewhat rigid standards of his wife's duties led him to discourage most of her attempts to pursue seriously any creative career.[2]

Charles Nevelson's set standards of "correct" behavior weighed heavily upon Louise Nevelson, who had grown up with considerable freedom of expression. Furthermore, the birth of a son, Michael, in 1922, severely restricted the young woman's opportunities for study until the child reached school age.

Throughout these years Louise received moral support and regular companionship from her two sisters, Anita and Lillian, who moved to New York and lived alternately in the Nevelson household

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[1]Nevelson studied for a few months with Theresa Bernstein, wife of William Meyerowitz (Louise Nevelson, interview, 8 January 1976).

[2] Lillian Mildwoff and Anita Berliawsky said in an interview (13 July 1976) that when their sister, Louise, left Maine at twenty, she was more interested in singing and acting than art.

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or nearby.[1] They would accompany her to museums, galleries, concerts, or shopping expeditions. She introduced them to the cultural life of New York as she had encouraged this same pursuit in Rockland. If she took singing lessons, so did Lillian. This closeness extended to the care of her son, and Lillian was Mike's teacher in kindergarten at the private school in Brooklyn near her home in 1927-28.

In 1926 Nevelson visited the International Theatre Exposition held at Steinway Hall. This exhibit of the most avant-garde examples of set design was organized by Frederick Kiesler. It included many examples of Russian constructivism and futurism, almost twenty pieces by Picasso, and the work of Picabia, Tzara, and Moholy-Nagy. The exhibition created a sensation and was held over an extra week.[2] Shortly afterward, Louise Nevelson enrolled as a student in the International Theatre Arts Institute, a school organized by Kiesler and Princess Norina Matchabelli, that was to be a laboratory of the modern stage. The school was located in Brooklyn, and here she studied acting with Princess Matchabelli for several years, during the time that the

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[1]The Nevelsons moved a number of times during the twenties. One of their most magnificent homes was a "mansion" in Mount Vernon where they were living in 1924. Anita stayed with them here for a period of time until they moved to Brooklyn, about 1927-28, where Lillian stayed with them, while Anita lived in a nearby apartment with her husband. The move to Brooklyn was presumably caused by gradually diminishing finances. Their next move was to 108 East Ninety-First Street in 1929-31, again followed by Anita's move to an apartment on Eighty-Ninth Street (Anita Berliawsky, Lillian Mildwoff, interview, Cushing, Maine, 13 July 1976).

[2]International Theatre Exposition: New York, 27 February-15 March 1926. This exhibition was arranged by Frederick Kiesler and Jane Heap. Several versions of the illustrated catalogue appeared, one of which was published in the Little Review, 11, 2 (Winter 1926). A rare copy of the other is in the theatre division of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.

Nevelson's two sisters remembered accompanying her several times to this exhibit (Lillian Mildwoff, Anita Berliawsky, interview, 13 July 1976).

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Nevelson family lived in Brooklyn. This study was probably terminated in 1929 when the Nevelsons moved to Ninety-First Street in Manhattan. In her autobiography Louise Nevelson relates an incident that seemed a turning point in her life. It followed a period of depression and feeling of emotional paralysis which appeared to coincide with her residence in Brooklyn.

Shortly after the move to Manhattan, Louise Nevelson visited an exhibition of Japanese Noh robes at the Metropolitan Museum (November 1928-winter 1929). The impact of this intense visual experience brought Nevelson to tears and broke the paralysis she had been feeling: "I went home and it gave me a new life."[1] In the fall of that year she began full-time study at the Art Students League.

It is probably no coincidence that when her son reached school age in 1929, Louise Nevelson enrolled for the first time as a regular student at the Art Students League. At first she attended only morning classes with Kenneth Hayes Miller, but gradually added afternoon drawing classes with Kimon Nicolaides.[2] She remained in Miller's class for two entire years, through May of 1931, and established a friendship with him that continued through the thirties.[3]

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 37. The exhibit took place during the winter and spring of 1928-29, opening in November, and consisted of loans from the collection of Louis V. Ledoux. For this information I am indebted to Barbara Teague and J.C. Rengstoff of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[2]Precise information regarding Nevelson's attendance is contained in the student files at the Art Students League, New York.

[3]Correspondence from Kenneth Hayes Miller to Louise Nevelson (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

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Nevelson recalls Miller as "very sympathetic."[1] In retrospect one can see much in his philosophy and teaching methods that would have appealed to her and had lasting effect. As a teacher Miller put great emphasis on each student finding his or her own artistic self. By de-emphasizing technical instruction and encouraging the students to develop their own intuitive experiences and responses, he stated that:

> . . . constant emphasis was placed on the concept of art as experience: each painting was a plastic experience, complete in itself and not dependent for its life on whatever model may have been used in the creative process. The artist must form it in terms of his own intuitive experience of the material, inflected by the human experience of functioning in relation to his environment. The beholder, in turn, must submit his senses to the totality of this proffered experience so that he may recapture all the things that happened for the artist in the process of creating the work.[2]

Possibly even more important for Nevelson was Miller's ability to inspire in his students total devotion to art as a way of life. One student recalls: "More than any other teacher, [he] made me feel that painting should be given consideration above our personal lives; yet how important our personal lives were in our painting!" Miller himself was a perfect example of such devotion and could always be found working.

Another facet of his teaching which may be seen as significant for Nevelson's later development was his interest in the sculptural qualities of painting. "His insistence on finding aesthetic reality or the bulk and structure of the figure as well as the more obviously sensuous qualities of light and color; his urging to 'reach around'

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 8 January 1976.

[2]Lincoln Rothschild, To Keep Art Alive: The Effort of Kenneth Hayes Miller, American Painter (1876-1952) (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1974) p. 58.

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the object, all suggested the three dimensional medium of sculpture." One of his students later stated, "I do not know why he was a painter and not a sculptor--all his teaching led in that direction."[1] A number of Miller students, including Nevelson, eventually turned to sculpture as their chosen direction.

Louise Nevelson's experience as a Miller student is something she rarely refers to as important, but it may be that this experience gave her confidence and determination to become an artist. Ten years of marriage with someone to whom she felt culturally and socially inferior and who discouraged any attempt to build a life using her own resources had taken its toll. A teacher such as Miller, whose total devotion to art had brought him great prominence in the world of art, could have restored the earlier self-confidence nurtured by Miss Cleveland.

By the end of Nevelson's period of study with Miller and Nicolaides, she had come close to making a decision to commit herself fully to a career as an artist. Despite later avowals of her early artistic certainty, Louise Nevelson's life during the twenties shows no clear pattern of decision. More than anything else she appeared to be a society matron with diverse cultural aspirations. Thus, her experience at the Art Students League became critical for her final choice of career.

By the late twenties Miller's class was considered by many students to be a dull place, and students were frequently sent to him by Kimon Nicolaides in order to "tighten up" and learn something

[1]Ibid., pp. 60-63.

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of the classical tradition of painting.[1] Nicolaides had gained repute as a teacher of drawing and was considered one of the most popular teachers at the League. He attracted many students eager to learn about the latest events in modern art. Dorothy Dehner remembers him alerting students to the most exciting and avant-garde exhibits in the city.[2] One could find a great variety of students in the Nicolaides class: on the one hand the more conservative Miller students and on the other the followers of Jan Matulka, the Czech painting teacher recently returned from Europe. It was probably as a result of contact with the students in Nicolaides' class that Louise Nevelson decided to go to Munich for study with Hans Hofmann. She recalls having learned of him in New York as the only person who could explain and teach cubism, Picasso, and Matisse.[3]

Having determined to go to Munich in the fall of 1931, Louise Nevelson went back to Rockland with her son. Her family agreed to finance the trip and take over the care of her son while she was

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[1]Dorothy Dehner, interview, New York, 4 December 1975. Dehner recalls that Nicolaides insisted that she attend Miller's class for this reason. Nicolaides had studied with Miller, Sloan, and Bridgeman at the League, where he himself began to teach in 1923. He taught drawing both from life and from antique casts. His teaching methods are clearly revealed in his book that was published shortly after his death--The Natural Way to Draw (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941). See also "The Art Students League," Part I, editor Paul Cummings, Archives of American Art Journal, 13, no. 1 (1973) 21-23.

[2]Dorothy Dehner, interview, New York, 5 December 1975.

[3]See Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 32. See also "The Art Students League Part II," editor Paul Cummings, Archives of American Art Journal, 13, no. 2 (1973) 1-3.

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away. Although the Depression had reduced her father's resources, her brother's hotel business was thriving. The major obstacle was her mother's illness and impending operation. At this crucial turning point in her daughter's life, Mrs. Berliawsky gave her full encouragement not only to leave her marriage, but to leave for Europe. Trying to calm her daughter's doubts, Mrs. Berliawsky told her, "If I die what's the difference; if I live I'll see you when you get back."[1] The combined separations from husband, child, and family weighed very heavily upon the young woman; nevertheless Louise Nevelson left for Germany at the ominous moment in which Hitler's emergence as a major force in German politics ushered in a period of violence and disorder.

She began to attend the small drawing classes daily at Hofmann's school. Hofmann by this time was making his final plans for emigration, having spent part of 1930 and the summer of 1931 teaching in California. She recalls that he paid attention only to the students who could help him with emigration.[2] This would have been discouraging enough, but Hofmann added a more devastating blow. He asked Louise Nevelson to leave the class, telling her not only that she would never be a great artist, but that she would never be an artist.[3] Heartbroken and miserable, she brooded over this rejec-

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[1]Anita Berliawsky, interview, 12 July 1976.

[2]Louse Nevelson, interview, 7 July 1976.

[3]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976; Anita Berliawsky, Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 13 July 1976. Nevelson went to Munich in the winter of 1931-32 to study painting and drawing with Hofmann. His renown in America as a teacher in the modern style was spread by former students such as Glenn Wessels who invited him to teach at the Univiversity of California in 1930, two years before Hofmann emigrated permanently. His teaching was much talked about at the Art Students

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tion for years, but had the courage and determination to go back to Hofmann for a few months of study at the League in the fall of 1932.

Evidently, after Hofmann's rebuff, Louise Nevelson turned to the career she had previously pursued in New York with Princess Matchabelli--singing and acting. In Munich she had been spending her evenings in cafes and night clubs and was frequently invited to sing the then popular American songs: spirituals, jazz, and ballads. Her vocal and acting talents were soon recognized and she was offered opportunities for a movie career by theatrical friends from the cafes. Seeing this as the means of earning her passage back home, she played

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League and articles by him appeared in The Art Digest, "A Review of the Field in Art Education: Art in America," 14, no. 19 (August 1930) 27. In this article Hofmann discussed the importance of the fourth dimension in art. "All profound content in life originates from the highest phenomenon of the soul: from intuition, and thereby is found in the fourth dimension. Art is the expression of this dimension realized through the other dimensions." It may be that Nevelson found such a statement compatible with her recent dramatic studies with Princess Matchabelli who also emphasized the fourth dimension. The instruction Nevelson received from Hofmann during her several-month stay in Munich was life drawing in charcoal. Carl Holty referred to this aspect of Hofmann's teaching from his own experience in Munich. In 1926 [we were doing] "crude charcoal drawings à la Matisse but clumsy, . . . dirty" (interview with Paul Cummings, New York, September-October 1968, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art transcript, no. 120, p. 65). Nevelson's brief study with Hofmann in Munich was followed by three more months in his class at the Art Students League, October-November 1932, March 1933 (student records, Art Students League, New York). Nevelson has said that she studied with him in order to learn more about cubism. "Hofmann at that moment was the only teacher who could try to explain the cubists, Picasso, and Matisse" (Louise Nevelson, interview, 27 July 1976). For accounts of Hofmann's teaching, see "Hans Hofmann Student Dossier," Museum of Modern Art; Irving Sandler, "Hans Hofmann: The Pedagogical Master," Art in America, 61 (May-June 1973) pp. 48-57; Hans Hofmann, Search for the Real, edited by Sara T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (rev. ed., Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1967). See also MacKown, Dawns and and Dusks, p. 44.

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small parts in Munich and then went to Vienna for a brief period of time. Her confidence somewhat restored, she travelled on to Italy and finally to Paris. In Italy she visited Rome, Pisa, and Florence, admiring such artists as Giotto whose work she had studied in Miller's class. Anxious to return home and feeling guilty about having left her son and mother, she stayed briefly in Paris, visiting the Louvre the the Musée de l'Homme.

After returning to Maine to find her son well and her mother recovered, she decided to make a return trip to Paris during the summer of 1932.[1] By that time the break with her husband was nearly complete, and when she came back to New York in the fall, they separated, but once again she attended classes at the League. There she met Marjorie Eaton, a young woman from a wealthy California family whose interest in all the arts paralleled Nevelson's. Though Marjorie Eaton would shortly select the theatre as her major interest, at the time of her meeting with Nevelson, she was caught up in the pursuit of painting and was able to introduce Nevelson to Diego Rivera when he arrived in New York in the Spring of 1933. Rivera later invited both women to assist him on the murals done during the summer and fall of that year for the New Workers school. He also helped them to find a studio on the first floor of the building on Thirteenth Street, into which he and his wife Frida had moved after the Rockefeller mural fiasco.[2]

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 8 January 1976; Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 35.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 7 July 1976; Marjorie Eaton, telephone interview, 25 August 1976. For an account of Rivera's Rockefeller mural, see Sidney Geist, "Prelude: The 1930's," Arts, 30, no. 12 (September 1956) 54-55; and Bertram Wolfe, Diego Rivera (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1939) pp. 323-38.

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Thus by the late spring of 1933, Louise Nevelson was finally living independently of her husband, sharing a studio and residence with Marjorie Eaton, and had plunged fully into the world of struggling artists in New York. In the meantime, Nevelson's sister, Lillian, had married a young artist in New York, Ben Mildwoff, and during the lean years of the thirties their home was a meeting place for their artist friends.

Nevelson participated as one of the many assistants who helped in the technical and research facets of Rivera's New York murals. Her experience with him, however, was more significant in its social aspects for the development of her values and goals as an artist.

His fresco technique at the time did not appeal to her, but at a critical moment in her life she had found someone with whom she could identify; someone whose life style and personality she admired tremendously. Rivera's admirers saw him as the leader of a new Renaissance in mural painting equal to Giotto's, and the young and fervently leftist artist and intellectual community saw him as a rallying point for the Communist cause and freedom of artistic expression.

At the center of all of this was the man—ebullient, gregarious, generous to a fault, possessed of enormous energy and zest, personable, a raconteur of great wit,and totally devoted to "Art." Through him, Nevelson met and made friends with many artists, writers, dancers, and musicians, such as Lion Feuchtwangler, John Flannagan, Boris Margo, and Ernst Bloch.

This brief but most dynamic episode in her life had many reprecussions. First of all, she never again faltered in her

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decision to be an artist. Secondly, her taste for pre-Columbian and Indian art was encouraged. Thirdly she learned from Rivera to look at everything, following one of his favorite maxims that bad art was more educational than good art. And finally, though eschewing his devotion to politics, she admired and adopted his social egalitarianism.[1]

It is worth noting that Nevelson finally achieved the celebrity accorded to Rivera when she made work that equalled the scale of his murals.

The Riveras left for Mexico in December of 1933, and Marjorie Eaton had returned to Mexico via Taos in the late summer of that year, leaving Louise Nevelson alone in the Thirteenth Street studio. For the first time in her life she was truly on her own as an artist and as a woman. She would never again intentionally allow her personal life to impede her career as an artist. But twenty-five years would pass before Nevelson found her style, and with it the acclaim and stature she had assumed would be her due since childhood.

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[1]Marjorie Eaton, telephone interview, 25 August 1976; David Margolis, interview, New York, 11 June 1976.

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CHAPTER III

ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Nevelson's long period of maturation from 1933 to 1958 coincided in several ways with the germination and blossoming of American art at mid-century. Nevelson, like many artists of the "New York School," was sustained in the thirties by the WPA, subject to the strong European currents of abstraction and surrealism throughout the thirties and forties, intrigued and inspired by indigenous and exotic primitive sources, and ultimately found a way to integrate all these influences into an idiosyncratic style in the fifties. For Louise Nevelson the WPA would mean study with Chaim Gross and other training in sculptural techniques; the European artists whose work would most affect her would be Frederick Kiesler, Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, Hans Hofmann, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Klee. Wolfgang Paalen and his articles on primitive art in Dyn would have their lasting consequences; and like Alexander Calder and Joseph Cornell, Nevelson would create a world of objects whose wit and mystery would ultimately bring her renown. A brief tracing of Nevelson's artistic development during these formative years will provide the context for specific interpretations of her major exhibitions in the 1950's.

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In April 1934 Nevelson moved into a small studio at 51 West Tenth Street, a well-known building of artists' studios. Here she continued painting and drawing, and some time during the year she began to sculpt. Meeting Chaim Gross at the home of her sister, Lillian Mildwoff, she was invited by the rising young sculptor to attend his classes at the Educational Alliance.[1] Nevelson's and Gross's accounts differ markedly about the length of time she studied with him, varying from two months to two years, but Gross recalls that her talent in sculpture was evident from the first evening in class.

The sculpture class at the Alliance met twice weekly and the students worked in clay from a model. Gross recalls telling Nevelson that she was very talented and would be a great artist.[2] Evidently she found something sympathetic in Gross's chunky, somewhat cubistic clay work of the mid-thirties (fig. 64) which was characteristic of the "modern" style of American sculpture at the time. Her choice of Gross as a teacher was probably occasioned by several factors. During the mid-thirties, Gross was considered one of the major young talents on the New York art scene. He had had several one-man exhibitions and had received a Tiffany Fellowship. His work was increasingly reproduced in periodicals.[3]

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[1]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 June 1976.

[2]According to Louise Nevelson (interview, 7 July 1976), her studies with Gross lasted two months; according to Chaim Gross (interview, 1 June 1976), the duration was two years.

[3]Gross was awarded the Tiffany Fellowship in 1933 and his work appeared in Alec Miller, "Sculpture in Wood," The American Magazine of Art, 21, no. 6 (June 1930) 329-334; L.R. Davis, "American Wood Sculpture," The Studio, 108, no. 501 (December 1934) 278-81. See Frank Getlein, Chaim Gross (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974).

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Furthermore, he had almost single-handedly revived the art of wood carving. Although Nevelson worked only in clay in his classes, her family's interest in wood may have struck a respondent chord that would be borne out in her own work many years later. It is also probable that the very low fees and Gross's generosity toward students played a role.

Nevelson's transition from painter to sculptor occurred over a period of years. Though she developed rapidly enough as a sculptor to exhibit some sculpture at the newly formed Gallery Secession in 1934 and again in May of 1935 at the Brooklyn Museum Young Sculptors exhibition, her first assignment in March of 1935 on the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration, the immediate predessor of the WPA,was as a teacher of mural painting at the Flatbush Boys Club.[1]

Contrary to Nevelson's later testimony that she only joined the WPA late in its existence, it is clear from her employment record that she participated on it from its inception in 1935, employed primarily as an art teacher of children and adolescents, but also working independently as a painter and sculptor.[2] The ease with

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[1]Nevelson's first recorded exhibit was at the Brooklyn Museum, Sculpture: A Group Exhibition by Young Sculptors, 1-7 May 1935. Her contribution was a piece in plaster entitled Two Figures (which is probably fig. 65), (Catalogue in Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.) The piece is also reproduced in Glimcher, Nevelson, no. 8. For Nevelson's account of her experience teaching children, see Louise Nevelson, "Art at the Flatbush Boys Club," Flatbush Magazine (June 1935) p. 3.

[2]Employment transcript, Louise Nevelson, General Services Administration, Artists' File, New York WPA/FAP, Archives of American Art. Nevelson was employed as part of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration and the WPA continuously from 12 March 1935-27 July 1939.

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which an artist on the Project might switch media or even categories such as painter-teacher-sculptor had to do with the informality of the actual if not official arrangements made by supervisors.[1]

In July 1936, Nevelson exhibited paintings at the tenth show of the Temporary Galleries of the Municipal Art Committee in its first year of existence.[2] In September of the same year her sculpture and drawing was selected by a jury for honorable mention in a show sponsored by the American Artist Congress and held at the ACA Gallery. Her work was well-reviewed and though two critics, including Emily Genauer, mistook the sculpture medium as wood, Howard Devree accurately perceived that it was colored plaster[3] (figs. 66, 67, 68). "Now at that time I did figures that were mostly painted plaster. I was really searching for forms. I painted each plane a different primary color so that the form would be as clear a line as architecture."[4]

Exhibiting this type of work again at the second annual event run by the American Artists Congress at ACA in June 1937, she apparently continued to work in this style throughout the decade, and exhibited some of these pieces in her first one-woman show at the Karl Nierendorf

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[1]Francis O'Connor, telephone interview, 16 August 1976. According to Francis O'Connor, the teaching would have taken up about fifteen to twenty hours a week and would have left the remaining time free.

[2]"Artists Take Part in New City Show," New York Times, 1 July 1936. Nevelson submitted watercolors for this show in which her sister, Lillian Mildwoff, also participated. (Paul Bodin, interview, 2 September 1976).

[3]Emily Genauer, "Wooden Sculptures Lauded," review of ACA exhibit, New York World Telegram, 12 September 1936; Howard Devree, review ACA exhibit, New York Times, 13 September 1936.

[4]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 59.

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Gallery in 1941.[1]

The WPA years were highly productive and stimulating for numerous American sculptors, particularly those in New York City. The technical innovations and stylistic experimentation of this time broke the long period of stagnation for American sculpture. Special demonstrations of new sculptural techniques, put on either at WPA project workshops or sponsored by the Artists' Union, were frequent occurrences.[2] It was in one such government workshop on Thirty-Ninth Street, run by Louis Basky, that Nevelson claims to have learned the techniques of sculpture as part of her training in the WPA. Basky ran a foundry and provided much of the technical expertise and labor for sculptors in the thirties and early forties. He fired clay pieces, did plaster castings, and along with his apprentice, Alexander Tatti, developed new techniques and aggregates for casting in both plaster and metal. Nevelson's association with Basky and Tatti continued into the sixties and she consistently relied upon them for technical advice and labor.[3]

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[1]Because of the lack of time before the show, no catalogue was printed, but one can determine from reviews that the exhibit included the polychromed plaster pieces discussed above (see MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 75).

[2]See Robert Cronbach, "The New Deal Sculpture Projects," in The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs, ed. Francis O'Connor (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972) p. 137.

[3]Alexander Tatti, interview, New York, 18 August 1976; Louise Nevelson, interview, 7 July 1976. Tatti took over Basky's workshop and has run it to the present under the name Alexander.
See also Francis O'Connor, "Questionnaire for Artists Employed on the WPA Federal Art Project in New York City and State," Artists' File WPA/FAP, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

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Nevelson's involvement with the project came at a time of personal distress. Leaving her husband in the midst of the Depression and once again dependent upon her parents for financial support, she floundered and continued to experience doubts and severe depressions throughout the thirties and early forties. In reaction to the social restrictions of her previous married life, she became promiscuous socially, in part seeking to escape from loneliness, and in part motivated by curiosity.[1] The drastically changed economic situation of the times had suddenly leveled social barriers which permitted an exceptional sense of freedom and exploration, as well as a nearly complete lack of stability. Nevelson's principal refuge seemed to be in the intense concentration upon her work, and she spent most of her time and continuously precarious finances on her painting, drawing, and sculpture. It would seem that outside of her family, her work became the only constant companion she could tolerate. Though surrounded by the political ferment of the times, she remained aloof and chose to attend the forums and demonstrations that pertained most to cultural life, husbanding her energy and finances solely for her work. Even in these difficult years she delegated at great cost the noncreative aspects of sculpture to others, using Basky and later Alexander Tatti for most of the casting and firing. From her family and friends she consistently solicited financial aid to pay these expenses.

From the mid 1930's through the early 1940's, Nevelson was experimenting both socially and artistically. She had moved at least

[1]Louise Nevelson, interviews, 7 July 1976; 27 July 1976.

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three times between 1934 and 1939, living first on West Tenth Street, then Bleecker Street, then on East Fifteenth Street. By the summer of 1939, she had moved into a three-room railroad flat at 311 East Twenty-First Street, and her son Mike was living with her while he attended high school in New York. After his graduation in 1940 and a brief stint at New York University in the winter of that year, he left for Maine and then joined the Merchant Marines in the spring of 1941. Evidence from Mike's letters to his mother, and recollections of her friends at the time, indicate that this was a most difficult period for Nevelson, both psychologically and financially. She complained of her lot to her son and made dramatic threats of suicide. He, in turn, admonished her to be reasonable and sent her a monthly allowance from his earnings.[1]

In 1940, Nevelson had exhibited only twice in group shows and had been rather poorly reviewed. Since the summer of 1939 when her WPA employment was terminated, her financial situation had grown increasingly desperate. By the summer of 1941 her mother was again ill, and her son with whom she had been living departed literally for points unknown. The threat of United States involvement in the European War hung in the air and she had not yet exhibited in any show during 1941.

Finally activated in early September of that year by her reactions to a day spent with a wealthy distant relative, she presented herself at Karl Nierendorf's gallery on Fifty-Seventh Street. She later recounted the story. Sitting on Nierendorf's desk with legs crossed, she had asked him to give her an exhibit, and invited

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[1]Mike Nevelson, correspondence with Louise Nevelson, 1940-41. (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

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him to her studio the next evening. He was obviously captivated by her audacity and charm, and pleased enough with her work not only to offer her a show within three weeks, but also to buy a piece.[1]

Their relationship soon became intimate, and for the next six years until Nierendorf's unexpected death in 1947, he encouraged and partially supported her, both morally and financially. He lent her large sums of money, bought her clothes for the openings of each of her five one-woman shows and two group shows in the next six years, and constantly supported and praised her artistic talent.[2]

Her first show at Nierendorf's opened on 22 September 1941. The arrangements had been made hurriedly and Nevelson chose from pieces that she had recently retrieved from the WPA. By October of the following year, 1942, at Nevelson's second exhibit with Nierendorf, her work had moved in several new stylistic directions simultaneously. No longer do the reviews mention polychromatic pieces, and an installation shot (fig. 69) and accompanying photos of individual pieces show works in plaster or tattistone, all painted monochromatically white or a uniform dark color.[3] She continued to work with simplified cubed masses as a formal vocabulary, and some of the pieces are made up of fragmented parts meant to represent heads,

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[1]See Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 47; MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 75; Anita Berliawsky, Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 13 July 1976.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Arnold Glimcher, 8 December 1970; Collection Arnold Glimcher. See also Karl Nierendorf, letter to Louise Nevelson, 10 September 1941 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[3]Sculptures by Nevelson, Nierendorf Gallery, New York, 6-25 October 1942 (Catalogue, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

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torsos, and limbs reassembled in sometimes clever and even comical ways. In at least one piece (visible in the installation photo), there are parts that may be adjusted by the viewer.

This use of movable parts in sculpture was to reappear the next year in her Circus exhibit at the Norlyst Gallery. That show, which contained so many new and audacious elements, was actually an isolated event in a decade of relatively conservative work. It was soon followed by a return to work in clay and plaster for bronze as Nevelson prepared for what would be her last show at Nierendorf's gallery in 1946.[1] In the midst of these preparations, she moved in 1945 into a house on Thirtieth Street which had been purchased by her family to provide her with stable living and working quarters. The following year her father died, and a year later Nierendorf had also passed away.

Nevelson's subsequent depression followed by a hysterechtomy temporarily reduced her desire to work, but in 1948, after a brief trip to Europe with her sister Anita, Nevelson entered a highly prolific period of work in terra cotta and stone, using the facilities of the Sculpture Center for both production and exhibition purposes.[2]

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[1] Bronzes by Nevelson, Nierendorf Gallery, New York, 15-27 April 1946 (no catalogue).

[2] The Sculpture Center, formerly called the Clay Club, was, from its beginnings in 1928, a combination school, workshop, and gallery for sculptors. Membership was open to all and during the forties the opportunity to work in clay, stone, or metal, with space and assistance readily available, appealed to many sculptors. The possibility of exhibiting regularly in the annual group shows attracted such sculptors as David Smith, Alexander Calder, Jose de Creft, Jose de Rivera, Ibram Lassaw, Isamu Noguchi, and Theodore Roszak (see Saul Swarz, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Exhibition-Sculpture Center, 15 March-18 April 1953, exhibition catalogue). Nevelson's association with the Sculpture Center extends from 1948 through 1950. (Saul Swarz, interview, 1 September 1976). See also Glimcher, Nevelson, pp. 60-63.

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Maternity (fig. 70), Two Faced Clown (fig. 71), and Mountain Women (fig. 72) are a few of the several hundred works from this period.

In 1950 Nevelson and her sister Anita made two trips to Central America. In October of 1949, Anita had come from Maine for an extended visit, intending to move permanently to New York. Her presence and offer to finance a vacation for the two of them was probably the inspiration for these trips.[1] In addition, the Sculpture Center, where Nevelson had been working almost daily, was in the process of moving to new quarters, which made steady work there difficult. On the first trip in the spring of 1950 the two sisters visited Mexico City and principal Mayan sites in the Yucatan. They traveled to the relatively well-known sites of Uxmal and Chichen Itza, and near Oaxaca they went to see the archeological ruins of Mitla and Monte Alban. In Mexico City they met with the Riveras, who had extensive knowledge about the archeology and art of ancient Central America, and who advised the two women on their travel plans. As usual on their travels they had some romantic adventures, but the most dramatic moments were the visits to the Mayan ruins. The site which would prove to be most significant for Nevelson's art was Quiriguá, a small ceremonial center in Guatemala near Copén. Quiriguá was the object of the sisters' second trip.

The stimulus for this trip was not a particular exhibition of Mayan sculpture at the Natural History Museum, as Glimcher states.[2] In fact, the only change in the Museum's exhibition of pre-Columbian art had occurred in 1944 when an installation of the New Hall of

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[1]Anita Berliawsky, interview, 12 July 1976.

[2]Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 71.

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of Mexican and Central American Archeology placed its fifty-year-old collection of art and artifacts before the public in a refurbished and more attractive manner. Included in this collection were two thirty-foot replicas of Mayan stelae from Quiriguá [1] (fig. 73). Inspired by these monumental pieces on a visit to the museum in 1950, Nevelson decided to visit the barely accessible original site, which turned into an adventure for the two women who, after a trip on a private train, found themselves in possession of a house and servants for as long as they wanted to remain deep in the jungle silence of the magnificent site.[2]

These visits to the Mayan ruins stirred Nevelson's already lively interest in pre-Columbian art which had initially been stimulated by her friendship with the Riveras in the early thirties. Nevelson was not the only artist to be fascinated by ancient American art, and New York's museums and galleries provided the interested viewer with many opportunities for exposure to this indigenous tradition. The great collections of primitive and early American art at the Brooklyn Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Museum of the American Indian had been on continuous display since they had been formed at the turn of the century, and more works

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[1]Paul Kelemen, "America's Middle Ages Seen Anew," Art News, 43, no. 3 (March 1944) 8-9, 24. Nevelson has explained that after seeing the replicas of these columns, she decided to visit the original site. For a detailed description of the site, see Sylvanus G. Morley, Guidebook To The Ruins of Quiriguá (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1935). For a photographic record, see Alfred P. Maudsley, Archeology. Biologia Central -Americana (London 1899-1902). See also C. Bruce Hunter, A Guide to Ancient Maya Ruins (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976) chap. 4.

[2]Anita Berliawsky, interview, 12 July 1976.

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could be seen at the Gallery of the American Indian during the thirties.[1]

The fashionable interest in the modern Mexican muralists such as Rivera and Orozco was extended to include their ancestors, as can be seen from the 1933 Museum of Modern Art show, American Sources of Modern Art: Aztec, Mayan, Incan, which included not only examples of Mayan, Aztec, and Incan works, but also work by modern artists under its influence: Flannagan, Rivera.[2] This interest appeared sporadically through the thirties, but burst out with renewed vehemence during the forties, again heralded by two shows at the Museum of Modern Art: 20 Centuries of Mexican Art--1940[3] and Indian Art of the United States--1941.[4]

This latter exhibit was probably the most spectacular celebration of American Indian art and culture New York had or would see in decades. The exhibit ran for three months and included not only art and artifacts, but spectacles as well. Costumed natives danced and demonstrated the delicate art of sand painting. Even before entering the museum, the visitor was confronted with a huge totem pole (fig. 74) which stood outside at the entrance just like the house poles of the Northwest coast tribes whose sculptural work rapidly became the

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[1] The Gallery of American Indian Art was listed in Art Digest throughout the thirties.

[2] 8 May-1 July 1933.

[3] 15 May-30 September 1940.

[4] 22 January-27 April 1941.

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aesthetic and moral model for American avant-garde painters.[1]

Americans were not the only artists to be intrigued with this native tradition. The newly arrived surrealists had for decades been enamored of ethnic and primitive art, including numerous illustrations in their periodicals and adopting some of their "naive" modes.[2] Max Ernst's "discovery" of the charm of Southwest Indian Kachinas was typical of the European arrivals, and James Soby's photograph of Ernst surrounded by his Kachina collection (fig. 75) was aptly titled "Max among some of his favorite dolls" when it appeared in the surrealist journal View in 1942.[3]

The enthusiasm of these eminent Europeans for native American art probably sparked the renewed interest among American artists which was to have complex repercussions. The Europeans brought a tradition of philosophical and psychological inquiry along with their interest in exotic artifacts. Both Freudian and Jungian approaches had already been used for decades in the interpretive studies of individual artists and of ancient and ethnic art.[4]

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[1]For a discussion of the importance of Northwest coast Indian art to American painters in the forties, particularly Barnett Newman, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko, see Barbara Reise, "Primitivism in the Writings of Barnett Newman: A Study in the Ideological Background of Abstract Expression," M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1965; and Irving Sandler, The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970) chaps. 4, 13, 14, 15.

[2]Both Minotaure and Cahiers D'Art carried numerous articles on these topics.

[3]View, 2, no. 2 (April 1942) 29.

[4]Some of the best known among these studies are Freud's work on Leonardo da Vinci (1910), Michelangelo (1914), Jung's various studies of symbolism such as "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" (1939), and Otto Rank's early book Art and Artist: The Creative Urge and Personality (1907), Charles F. Atkinson, trans. (New

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A man crucial to the development of these interests on the American art scene was Wolfgang Paalen. An accepted member of the surrealist group in Paris during the thirties, Paalen was unique among these artists for the seriousness of his interest in the art and ethnology of the American Indian. A long visit to the Northwest coast tribes of British Columbia resulted in some creditable articles on their art and life. Paalen's equally strong interest in pre-Columbian culture led him to settle in Mexico in 1939 where he rapidly became an informal dealer, guide, and publicist for these early American civilizations. In the early forties he spent considerable time in New York, and through his friendships with Matta, Julien Levy, Robert Motherwell, and Kurt Seligmann, he managed to inspire discussion of his ideas. In 1942 he founded his magazine Dyn, which regularly included articles on American Indian art by leading archeologists and artists, noting and illustrating the traditions and some startling new discoveries of this art. In addition, examples were illustrated of avant-garde American painting and sculpture, some of which had been influenced by primitive art and myth, such as works by Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, David Smith, and William Baziotes. Articles about cogent issues

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York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932). See also Martin Grotjahn, "About the Representation of Death in the Art of Antiquity and in the Unconscious Expression of Modern Men" in Psychoanalysis and Culture, ed. George Wilbur and Warner Muensterberger (New York: International Universities Press, 1951) pp. 410-24. For a more complete bibliography on the subject, see Normal Kiell, Psychiatry and Psychology in the Visual Arts and Aesthetics: A Bibliography (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965).

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in modern art by Paalen and Motherwell were also published.[1]

Paalen's New York dealer was Nierendorf, and on the occasion of his one-man show in New York in 1946, Paalen stayed for several months in the house that Nevelson had recently obtained.[2] This visit may have reinforced Nevelson's interest in pre-Columbian art and whetted her appetite for a future visit to Mexico.

The artistic results of Nevelson's two trips to Latin America appeared at first in her terra cottas and a few years later in the series of etchings done in 1952-54. Nevelson's prodigious creative activity which had preceded these two voyages continued unabated after her return, and in 1954 she turned again to work in wood, partly because the low cost and abundance of this material allowed her to work almost without the limitations usually imposed upon sculptors by the expense of materials and space. In the same year that she returned to wood, she was notified by the city of their intention to purchase her property. She managed, however, to remain in her house for another five years, and during this time she developed the signature style that culminated in her characteristic walls of black boxes. The outlines of this development have already been sketched in Chapter I, and here we may turn to her efforts devoted to building a career.

After losing Nierendorf as a dealer and a friend through his

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[1]The table of contents of Dyn, issue no. 6 (November 1944), includes such pieces as "On The Meaning of Cubism Today" by Paalen; "The Modern Painter's World" by Robert Motherwell; "The Eye's Journey" by Anais Nin; and "La Venta-Colossal Heads and Jaguar Gods" by Miguel Covarrubias.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 27 July 1976.

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untimely death in 1947, Nevelson was without an exclusive gallery connection until 1955. In the early fifties she concluded that the way to build a career was to flood the market with her work, and she set out to do so. She began to join groups of artists and exhibited with each, showing as many pieces as would be allowed.[1] She worked willingly and hard for these groups and was often made an officer because of her evident lack of interest in gaining power within the group itself. She showed in any gallery and with any group available, convinced that it was more important to have the work seen and noticed than to wait for an acceptable gallery offer. Sidney Geist recalled: "She was a little whirlwind of her own, trying to make it here and there. At the time she said she'd show anywhere and everywhere. 'I don't care whether it's prestigious or not. I'll flood the market with my work 'til they know I'm here.'"[2]

It is clear that at some point in the late forties or early fifties, Nevelson made a conscious decision to present her work to the world in quantity because she perceived that to be considered a great artist, one had to produce and exhibit a large volume of work.

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[1]Nevelson's friends and acquaintances watched this activity with a mixture of admiration and dismay (Minna Citron, interview, 26 July 1976; Anna Walinska, interview, New York, 25 July 1976; Helena Simkhovich, interview, New York, 5 May 1977; Dido Smith, interview, 21 June 1977). The groups in which Nevelson was active in the early fifties included: Artists Equity; Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors; Sculptors Guild; New York Society of Ceramic Arts; Creative Arts Associates; New York Society of Women Artists; National Association of Women Artists; League of Present Day Artists; and American Abstract Artists.

[2]Sidney Geist, interview, New York, 19 July 1976.

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She had observed that artists with great ambitions could no longer afford the luxury of a carefully winnowed number of select pieces in their oeuvre. The exemplar in the twentieth century of the prolific artist is Picasso. In this regard, Nevelson may well have seen him as the model of the artist whose enormous output imposes a new vision of the world on the viewer. Her whirlwind attempt to be recognized also extended to other activities, and she would appear, invited or not, to as many openings and parties connected to the art world as possible. She offered her house as a meeting place to many groups of artists, such as the Four O'Clock Forum and Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors.[1]

Previous to this period of intense public activity, Nevelson had led a more private life. Nevertheless, since the mid 1920's she had been acutely aware of any developments in the art world, scouring galleries, museums, and periodicals for the latest news. Indeed, Nevelson's involvement with the two major stylistic currents of the time--surrealism and cubist-inspired geometric abstraction--may be clearly discerned in an examination of her activities and work of the thirties and forties. It will be evident that she was not only aware of the current developments in the art world, but that she was an active participant and sought to be considered part of the "modern"

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[1]For a brief discussion of the Four O'Clock Forum, see Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 73. See also the article by Gordon Brown, one of the sponsors of the group, for some of the artistic positions and opinions of its most vocal members, e.g., Steve Wheeler, Will Barnet, and Peter Busa, "New Tendencies in American Art," College Art Journal, 3, no. 2 (Winter 1951-52) 103-109. Press releases and notices of some of the groups' meetings may be found in Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art. For a brief history of the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, see Dore Ashton, "The Federation in Retrospect," in 35th Anniversary Exhibition: The Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, New York State Council on The Arts, 1976.

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movement.

One of Europe's most advanced movements at this time was surrealism, and its influence in New York grew steadily during the thirties to reach its peak in the forties. Julien Levy had been exhibiting surrealist art at his Fifty-Seventh Street gallery from the time he opened in 1931. He mounted the first important surrealist exhibition in New York in January of 1932—The Surrealist Group Show--a large exhibit of fifty works which had been shown the previous winter at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut. Throughout the thirties he continued to show major surrealist artists such as Dali (1934), Ernst and Giacometti (1934); he provided showings of surrealist films such as Andalusian Dog by Dali and Buñuel, and published not only his own major treatise, Surrealism, in 1936, but also Dali's book, Conquest of the Irrational, in 1935.[1] In addition, he discovered and regularly exhibited the works of Joseph Cornell, including him in two group shows in 1932 and giving him his first one-man show in 1939, his second in 1940.

The major landmark of surrealism in New York during the mid-thirties was the Museum of Modern Art exhibit, Fantastic Art, DAda, Surrealism, held midwinter 1936-37.[2] This huge exhibit caused great

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[1]Julien Levy, Surrealism (New York: The Black Sun Press, 1936) (see particularly the exhibition list and bibliography compiled by Levy, pp. 31-32); Salvador Dali, Conquest of the Irrational (New York: Julien Levy, 1935); See also Rudi Blesh, Modern Art USA: Men, Rebellion, Conquest 1900-1956 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956) p. 176; Dore Ashton, The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 94-98.

[2]7 December 1936-17 January 1937. See Blesh, Modern Art USA, pp. 177-178. As outrageous as many of the pieces in this exhibit may have seemed to the public, the installation of the show was quite traditional, with none of the theatrical effects of later surrealist exhibits in New York.

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controversy in the press and was well attended by New York avant-garde artists, but the impact of surrealist ideas was not fully to be felt until later in the decade. The Museum of Modern Art exhibit appeared at a time when the project was in full swing and New York artists were just beginning to feel a sense of community and an acceptance in their own land. The ironic and irreverent nature of surrealism ran counter to the political mood of the mid-thirties. Not until the effective if not actual end of the project in 1939 was the influence of surrealism to take root in New York.[1]

Dali's highly publicized antics and window displays of 1939 were closely observed, particularly by Nevelson, an inveterate window-watcher.[2] From this year onward she also noted the European artists,

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[1]For a general discussion of surrealist impact on American art, see William Rubin, Dada and Surrealist Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968), p. 342 ff.; Ashton, The New York School, p. 85 ff.; Sandler, American Painting, p. 29 ff. See also "Concerning the Beginnings of The New York School: 1939-1943; An Interview with Peter Busa and Matta, conducted by Sidney Simon in Minneapolis in December 1966," Art International, 11, no. 6 (Summer 1967) 17-20; "Concerning the Beginnings of The New York School: 1939-1943, An Interview with Robert Motherwell, conducted by Sidney Simon in New York in January 1967," Art International, 11, no. 6 (Summer 1967) 20-23.

[2]On 15-16 March 1939, Dali designed and installed two window displays called Day, (Narcissus) and Night, (Sleep) for Bonwit Teller. Adverse public reaction provoked the store to change part of one of the displays, Day. Dali's immediate angry response led to an altercation on the spot, and both he and a Bonwit's employee came crashing through the windows on to the street accompanied by a fur-lined bathtub. (Blesh, Modern Art USA, pp. 167-170; Rubin, Dada and Surrealist Art, p. 468). Nevelson vividly recalls these windows in an interview with Arnold Glimcher, "Once I was feeling a little sad and my great joy at the time, up to about 1940, would be to walk up Fifth Avenue and window-shop or look. At that time Dali had his things in Bonwit's and there were beautiful window displays. . . ." (Louise Nevelson, interview with Arnold Glimcher, New York, 1 June 1970; transcript, p. 12, Collection Arnold Glimcher).

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both abstract and surrealist, arriving in ever-increasing numbers--Matta, Tanguy, Man Ray, Ernst, Masson, Seligmann, Breton. By 1942 New York had replaced Paris as the center of the surrealist movement. In the early forties the European surrealists were masters of the scene and a number of European galleries such as Nierendorf and Buchholz tried unsuccessfully to win them into their stables.[1] The Museum of Modern Art continued to mount major shows of surrealist masters--Miro and Dali in 1942--and a group of surrealist periodicals burst upon the scene: View in 1940; VVV and Dyn in 1942.

Until late 1942 Nevelson's association to surrealism was like that of many other New York artists--ambivalent. At first she distrusted it, finding it too literary in nature. Many years earlier she might have heard a similar assessment from Hofmann who disliked it intensely. According to Carl Holty, one of Hofmann's students, "he had a horror of all literature in art and resented and feared surrealism as a reactionary phase of the modern movement."[2] Later, as Nevelson learned more about it, she found certain of its ideas useful and sympathetic. Evidence of her early, if desultory, interest in one of the surrealists' major preoccupations was a small notebook of her dreams that she recorded in 1936. The notations are very brief and she persisted for only two months.[3]

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[1]Nierendorf was friendly with Seligmann and Wolfgang Paalen, publishing the etchings of the former and exhibiting the works of the latter. However, his affiliation with the German expressionists made him unacceptable to the French surrealists (Jimmy Ernst, interview, 29 July 1976).

[2]Hans Hofmann Student Dossier, n.p.

[3]Louise Nevelson, "Notebook of Dreams," 1936 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art, unfilmed material).

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Beginning early in 1943, Nevelson exhibited work she had constructed in wood in the previous year. This change to a new unconventional material was inspired largely by the lively whirl of surrealist activities in the New York art world which had culminated in 1942 with two exhibitions which were to have a profound effect on Nevelson's development toward an environmental style. Throughout the spring and summer of 1942, New York was bursting with plans for two major surrealist exhibits. The first to open was the First Papers of Surrealism organized by Breton and and Duchamp, and held at the Whitelaw Ried Mansion on Madison Avenue from 14 October-7 November. Two miles of twine installed by Marcel Duchamp crisscrossed the huge ballroom in which it was held(fig. 76). On opening night a group of children were invited to play ball, skip rope, and play hopscotch in between the bewildered guests.[1]

Shortly afterwards in the same month, Peggy Guggenheim opened her new museum and gallery, Art of the Century Gallery (fig. 77). It was designed by Frederick Kiesler whose extraordinary innovations created an instant sensation. Unframed paintings, projected away from curved walls on wooden brackets, were the major feature in the surrealist gallery; in other rooms a slowly revolving wheel with seven Klees was activated by an electric eye, and Duchamp's Valise could be seen through a peephole. Numerous ingenious devices and lighting techniques were used to enhance the gallery visitor's

[1] A rare copy of the catalogue for this exhibit is in the Museum of Modern Art library (First Papers of Surrealism, 14 October-7 November 1942, New York,Hanging by André Breton; his twine Marcel Duchamp). For a description of the opening night's events, see Blesh, Modern Art USA, pp. 199-202. See also William S. Rubin, Dada and Surrealist Art, p. 342 ff.

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active role in experiencing art.[1] Kiesler and Duchamp had known each other since 1925 in Paris, and Kiesler had been suggested by Breton to Peggy Guggenheim as the designer of her new gallery.[2] The installations of these two important exhibitions point to the congruence of Kiesler's lifelong dreams as a designer-architect and surrealism's penchant for offbeat theatrical involvement of the spectator.

Nevelson had known Kiesler from the time of his arrival in New York in 1926. Throughout their long friendship he shared with her, as he did with everyone, his innovative ideas on art, design, and architecture. In fact, Nevelson's work, particularly with regard to the creation of an environment, contains remarkable parallels to Kiesler's ideas and productions.

The concept which underlies much of Kiesler's thinking is exemplified by the term he coined—corealism. An extremely articulate and gregarious man, Kiesler wrote and spoke about this idea often, and it may not be mere coincidence that, on two occasions, articles by Kiesler about display and exhibition techniques appeared several months before Nevelson exhibitions which demonstrated major stylistic changes, i.e., Circus April 1943, and Moon Garden + One, January 1958.

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[1]For Miss Guggenheim's description of this unconventional gallery, see Peggy Guggenheim, Out of This Century: The Informal Memoirs of Peggy Guggenheim (New York: The Dial Press, 1946), pp. 318-321. See also "New Display Techniques for 'Art of This Century' Designed by Frederick J. Kiesler," Architectural Forum, 78, no. 2 (February 1943) 49-53; Cynthia Goodman, "Frederick Kiesler: Designs for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery," Arts Magazine, 51, no. 10 (June 1977) 90-95.

[2]Goodman, "Kiesler," p. 94; Jimmy Ernst, interview, 29 July 1976.

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The first set of articles was related to Kiesler's design of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery. One appeared in Architectural Forum and the other in VVV, a major surrealist periodical in New York. Here Kiesler states:

> Design - Correlation as an approach to architectural planning . . . to unify in one structurally continuous building the visionary magic of the theatre, the cinema and sports and currently, the galleries of Peggy Guggenheim's "Art of the Century," I utilized it again to break down the physical and mental barriers which separate people from the art they live with, working toward a unity of vision and fact as prevailed in primitive times, when seemingly conflicting experiences existed in complete harmony. . . .[1]

In the other article the author points out that this new method of display in space is not a freak invention but a technique developed twenty years earlier, and that modifications of this method had been appearing in museum displays and department store windows for a long time.[2]

Nevelson's friendship with Kiesler provided her with more than just ideas and theories in the early forties. He introduced her to some of his friends and acquaintances, including Jimmy Ernst, Peggy Guggenheim, and Mondrian. At the time of this meeting, Jimmy Ernst was very close to Kiesler who acted as a kind of surrogate father for the young man freshly arrived from Europe. It is likely, however, that Nevelson and Ernst's association was not a close one until 1942 when he and Eleanor Lust began to make plans for the opening of their

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[1]Frederick Kiesler, "Design Correlation as an Approach to Architectural Planning. . .," VVV, nos. 2-3 (March 1943) p.76.

[2]"New Display Techniques," Architectural Forum, p. 49. The author of this article is referring to Kiesler's experience designing store windows for Saks Fifth Avenue during the twenties and to his book, Frederick Kiesler, Contemporary Art Applied To The Store and its Display (New York: Brentano's, 1930).

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gallery--the Norlyst--and Nevelson was included in the opening show in March, 1943. The guardian spirit of Kiesler might well have endorsed the general mood of high jinks that pervaded the Circus show later that year. Kiesler's sense of humor was well known and his relationship to Nevelson often was characterized by a light-hearted banter.[1]

While Nevelson never became part of the surrealist inner circle, her close friendship with Kiesler provided her with a first-hand accounting of the myriad activities and ideas that were to be crucially important in her development. Clearly, the atmosphere of surrealism had a liberating effect on Nevelson, and she recalls: "During the time that Peggy Guggenheim came to New York in the forties and came with these people, it was almost like you were breathing the air of surrealism."[2]

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[1]Jimmy Ernst, interview, 29 July 1976.

[2]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 88. Peggy Guggenheim's collection of abstract and surrealist art was on permanent display. Part of the museum was reserved for temporary exhibitions which for the next five years provided the leading avant-garde New York artists with consistent and exceptionally favorable opportunities to be seen and to see. Peggy Guggenheim sat in the front room, accessible to all visitors, and the gallery with its many openings and parties became a focal point during the years of gestation and first flowering of The New York School. "Here . . . in Peggy Guggenheim's sublimated dollhouse, we saw the noble toys of a whole generation" (Blesh, Modern Art USA, p. 220). See also Ashton, The New York School, pp. 118-122.

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Perhaps the incident which best characterized Nevelson's enthusiasm and perception of surrealism at this period is her discovery of "Joe Milone's Shoe Shine Box" in December of 1942 (fig. 78). Attracted by an unusual decorated box of the local shoe shine man in her neighborhood, she found in his home an extraordinary piece of folk art--an extravagantly decorated shoe shine box and stand done entirely for his own pleasure. She immediately called her new acquaintance, Dorothy Miller, at the Museum of Modern Art, and transported the box and Joe Milone in a taxi she could ill afford to the Museum within a half hour. Since she appeared with it shortly before Christmas, Alfred Barr willingly agreed to put it on display for the holiday season.[1]

In an "exclusive" interview with a reporter from Corriere d'America, Nevelson expressed her enthusiasm for and conception of surrealism. She called the box:

> The first subconscious and surrealistic primitive that had reached America in its pure stage. . . . Sophisticates do it consciously but Joe Milone created it purely out of his head in his desire to find beauty. [It is] an epic, a landmark. The most beautiful object in the world. . . . It could only have been created by a man such as Joe Milone whose simplicity, pureness and integrity combined with the sensitive inner feelings of the man's soul and heart inspired him to build out of nothing, both in mind and in matter, this superbly elegant work of art.
>
> . . . It was impossible to analyze or define the symbolism. . . . He had developed no mental picture of the finished product as is done by sophisticates. In fact, Joe Milone may still see fit to add a few more baubles and patterns to the shine-box to suit his fancy . . . and this . . . is the essence of surrealism. Purely imaginative art without forethought or conclusion. . . .[2]

Joe Milone, the shoe shine box, and Louise Nevelson received a great deal of publicity in the press, with articles in the major New York papers.

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[1]Dorothy Miller, telephone interview, 2 September 1976.

[2]Lou Nappi, "Great Contribution to Surrealist Art, Says Noted Woman Sculptor of Joe Milone's Odd Shoe-Shine Box," Corriere D'America (New York, 10 January 1943).

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Following her discovery of Joe Milone and his shoe shine box, the year 1943 was a very active and productive one for Nevelson, beginning with her inclusion in Peggy Guggenheim's 31 Women exhibition, a prize-winning entry in the Museum of Modern Art's Arts in Therapy exhibit, a group show at Norlyst, as well as the Circus show there a month later, and two exhibits at the Nierendorf Gallery.

The first exhibit in chronological order was Peggy Guggenheim's 31 Women exhibit, and the pieces had been selected by a jury composed of Miss Guggenheim, Andre Breton, Howard Putzel (Miss Guggenheim's secretary), Max Ernst, James Johnson Sweeney, and Marcel Duchamp. Most of the women were relatively unknown and the general tone of the works was surrealist, including Meret Oppenheim's Fur Tea Cup and works by Frida Kahlo, Leonore Carrington and Lenore Fini.[1]

According to reviews of the show, Nevelson's piece, Column, sounds astonishly like one of her works from the late fifties, but there are unfortunately no photographs to bear this out. The reviews describe it as "a wooden 'Column' of Dadaistic character, a three dimensional Schwitters" and "a 'Column' (you could call it sculpture I guess) . . . which can be dismantled at will and put together again."[2] This piece may have borne some resemblance to the works shown at Norlyst a few months later.

Nevelson's prize-winning entry for the Museum of Modern Art Arts in Therapy exhibit, February-March, 1943, was a child's wooden

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[1] 31 Women, 5-31 January 1943, Catalogue list, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art; Press Release, Art of The Century Gallery Pamphlet Box, New York Public Library.

[2] Ben Bindol, "Art Events," review of 31 Women, Aufbau (New York 15 January 1943; Edward A. Jewell, "31 Women Artists Show Their Work," New York Times, 6 January 1943.

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seat (fig. 7) and her participation in this show was as a contestant in the nationwide competition co-sponsored by the Museum and Artists for Victory. Other notable entrants were Alexander Calder, Andre Masson, and Louise Bourgeois.[1] Then in April she was in two shows simultaneously. The first to open was a drawing exhibition at Nierendorf's followed two days later by the Circus show at Norlyst.[2] The occasion of the two simultaneous shows is explained differently by Nevelson and Ernst. She states that having first arranged the adventuresome Norlyst show, she requested from Nierendorf a more conservative drawing exhibition to balance the daring presentation of her new sculpture.[3] Ernst recalls however that Nierendorf would not exhibit her new sculpture and only reluctantly agreed to show her drawings at this time.

Some of the animal pieces in the Circus show like Ferocious Bull (fig. 2) remind the viewer of Picasso's bicycle seat Bull's Head (fig.79) executed in Paris during the same year. The wood figures of Picasso (fig. 80), Miro's painted objects and relief constructions such as Rope and People I (fig. 81), which had been included in his 1941-42 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, and numerous other Dada and surrealist

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[1]The Arts in Therapy, 3 February-7 March 1943. The February issue of The Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art, 3,no. 10, was entirely devoted to the arts in therapy.

[2]Nevelson Drawings, Nierendorf Gallery, 12-30 April 1943.

[3]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 93.

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constructions and assemblages could have served as inspiration.[1] However, the charm and effectiveness of Nevelson's Circus pieces owe more to her own wit and invention than to any particular source. The liberating effect of her recent experiences teaching children on the WPA was reinforced by the continuous interest in children's art and therapeutic aspects of art as seen by the Museum of Modern Art exhibition calendar, as well as by the surrealists' lively respect for the naive and playful spontaneity of both child art and primitive art.[2]

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[1]The collage works, in particular those of Picasso, Miro, Arp, Schwitters, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and Arthur Dove, were increasingly visible in New York galleries and museums during the thirties and forties. Collages or constructions by all of these artists were included in the two Museum of Modern Art landmark exhibitions of 1936, Cubism and Abstract Art, 2 March-19 April 1936, and Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism, 7 December 1936-17 January 1937. In the same year, Miro was given a retrospective at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, 30 November-26 December 1936, and another retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, 19 November 1941-11 January 1942. Both exhibits included a number of his recent painted objects and relief constructions such as Rope and People I (fig. 81), 1935. The combination of crude collage elements with the large loose linear style of Nevelson's wall piece [fig. 4] is reminiscent of many of Miro's works from 1928-35. In the decade between 1932-42, Miro was given six large exhibits at the Pierre Matisse Gallery: 1932, 1933, 1935, 1936, 1938, 1940--see William Rubin, Miro in The Collection of The Museum of Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973); Jacques Dupin, Miro (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1962).

[2]The interest of artists in the freshness and spontaneity of children's art goes back at least to the middle of the nineteenth century, as evidenced by Courbet's inclusion of a child and his drawing in his monumental work, The Studio, 1855. This same interest led Paul Klee and other members of the Blaue Reiter to examine carefully child art and incorporate childlike elements in their own work. Two notable twentieth-century instances in which child art was placed on a par with the art of adults are Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, eds., Der Blaue Reiter [Almanac] (1912; reprint ed., Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1967), p. 27, and the Museum of Modern Art exhibit, Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism, catalogue edited by Alfred H. Barr (1936; reprinted New York: Museum of Modern Art), p. 227. The interests of the surrealists in

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The whimsical nature of the pieces included in this exhibit are, of course, reminiscent of Calder's earlier circus pieces, and though she may not have actually seen Calder's circus until his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in September 1943, she had seen some of Calder's toy pieces (figs. 8, 9) in the Arts in Therapy exhibition.

Nevelson's comical constructions of scrap owe a great deal to the presence of so many surrealist examples of found-object sculpture, not the least of which were the Cornell exhibit at Art of the Century Gallery in December 1942 or the Schwitters Merzbild constructions at

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child art was clearly a late stage in a long-developing trend. Robert Goldwater has discussed the importance of child art in the twentieth century and particularly in the work of Klee and Miro (Robert Goldwater, Primitivism in Modern Art, 2nd ed. rev. [New York: Vintage Books, 1967], pp. 192-215). Nevelson's remarks about her first teaching experience on her initial assignment to the WPA in 1935 reveal a similar enthusiasm for child art. "I joined the Flatbush Boy's Club staff a few months ago . . . since then I have a continuous flow of artistic material; youngsters from 7 to 17 - searching for bigger selves, for self-expression. I won't call it teaching to let children express themselves in a natural way . . . the greatest surprise of my life has come to me in these six or seven weeks with these children which has opened up a new world to me. . . . How I wish people could retain some of that certain indefinable urge for self-expression that seems to be a child's inheritance, and only too many of us shed for the more material things of life" (Nevelson,"Flatbush Boy's Club," p. 3). The influx of artists into the schools, boys' and girls' clubs, and hospitals, which resulted from WPA assignments, fueled the nascent curiosity of the American art world about the art of children and the insane. It cannot be merely accidental that this coincided with dramatic changes in art education and the development of the new fields of music, dance, and art therapy (see Loretta Bender, Child Psychiatric Techniques, [Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1952]). Beginning in 1938 the Museum of Modern Art gave regular and frequent exhibition space to child art and to the use of art for therapy. See Appendix 1 for a listing of the Museum of Modern Art exhibitions devoted to child art between 1938-1948.

This trend continued for another twenty years, sometimes reaching peaks of six to eight child-centered shows a year, e.g., 1948, 1949.

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the opening exhibition of the Peggy Guggenheim collection.[1] Both Cornell and Schwitters were empire builders themselves; one on a small scale, and the other on a larger but no less claustrophobic scale. Even though Nevelson was an early admirer of these two artists, their influence on her own work came to fruition over a decade later. Indeed, Nevelson had liked Cornell's work since the thirties.[2] They had some of the same habits and many of the same inclinations. Cornell's reputation in the art world as a forager was established by the early thirties, and his obsession with female stars of the performing arts, like Maria Taglioni, Fanny Cerrito, and Hedy Lamarr, served as a fertile source of subjects and themes for his works. His collection of dance memorabilia earned him a job on Dance Index, and he designed a remarkable photomontage of Loie Fuller for the March 1942 cover [3] (fig. 82). The grid format of this cover was used relatively often by Cornell in his shadow boxes, e.g., Multiple Cubes (fig. 83), 1946-48. Like Nevelson's circus pieces, but earlier, he had created "Toys for Adults" in his first one-man exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1939.[4]

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[1]Objects by Joseph Cornell, Box-Valise by Marcel Duchamp, Bottles by Lawrence Vail, Art of This Century Gallery, New York, December 1942 ("Catalogue List of The Permanent Collection," Art of This Century Gallery, Pamphlet Box-Art of This Century, nos. 129, 130, New York Public Library).

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Colette Roberts, 1968 (Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, transcript 207, p. 10).

[3]Dore Ashton, A Joseph Cornell Album (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), pp. 63; 71-72; 129-153.

[4]Ibid., p. 5.

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In spite of these similarities and the obvious fact that they both make sculpture in boxes, their intentions and the consequent appearance of their sculpture are quite different. Cornell's works rely on a delicate process of association based on the original identities of the juxtaposed objects, whereas Nevelson seeks to obliterate the initial coherence of the objects she uses by fragmenting them and imposing a monochrome hue. Nevelson elects the epithet architect and Cornell sees himself rather as a magician who creates life and does hommage to the past by letting fragments spark in each other's presence. It was this magical quality that Nevelson most admired in Cornell's work, but his obeisance to beautiful or talented women whom he honored with his boxes must also have struck a chord.[1] Interestingly enough, the one show of Cornell's that Nevelson remembers liking most seems to have been a true precursor of her own Moon Garden + One exhibit. In 1946 he staged an exhibition called Portraits of Women at the Hugo Gallery, in which he commemorated a number of his Golden Age favorites. There he displayed his homage to Taglioni in a setting of draped velvet, with a large lithographic portrait above, bathed in blue light. He took over the small back room of the gallery and transformed it into a Cornell habitat, filled with flowers, live songbirds in cages, draperies, and objects--a boxed offering to a prima ballerina. It was this roomful of Cornell's that made Nevelson feel she was "in the presence of greatness."[2] Nevelson herself kept drawers and cabinets

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview with Colette Roberts,1968, p. 10.; cf. Ashton, Album, pp. 4-5.

[2]Ashton, Album, pp. 31-32; Louise Nevelson, interview with Colette Roberts, 1968, p. 10.

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filled with antique laces, beaded bags, and various trinkets which have the same fragile qualities found inside Cornell's boxes.[1] Unlike him, however, Nevelson put out for viewing not these private precious goods, but fragments of harder and more common substance, saving the delicate pieces for her personal use only.

One last intriguing set of coincidences are Cornell's thematic titles for his exhibitions in the late forties and the first half of the fifties: Aviary--Egan Gallery 1949; Night Songs and Other New Work--Egan Gallery 1950; Night Voyage-Egan Gallery 1953; and Winter Night Skies-Stable Gallery 1955. In some way, perhaps, Cornell's Night Voyage helped to precipitate Nevelson's Royal Voyage out of the solution of her own consciousness. His suggestive titles could have appealed to Nevelson's sense of the poetic, and her respect for Cornell as an artist may have inspired her to seek poetic titles for her own one-woman shows in the fifties.

Surrealism played a fundamental role in the development of Nevelson's wood sculpture of 1942-44. We should not, then, be surprised to find that it continued to have an important effect on her work and that it would reappear most forcefully when she returned to work in wood over a decade later. But, at a conscious level, Nevelson says that she owes the greatest stylistic debt to cubism.

Her early studies with Hans Hofmann in Munich and New York in 1931-32, her life-long admiration for Picasso's cubist works, and her friendships with founding members of the American Abstract Artists like Ralph Rosenborg combine to explain the geometric abstract elements in her style. During the thirties and early forties, in her own

[1]Mike Nevelson, interview, 29 July 1977.

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most formative years, geometric abstraction, an offshoot of cubism, vied with surrealism for position as the most advanced style on the New York scene.

Judging from the few extant examples or photographs of Nevelson's sculpture of this period,it is clear that she was attempting to be part of the modernist group in New York, and her sources, like theirs, were coming from Europe, in particular from the abstractionists gathered in Paris and the late synthetic cubist works of Picasso. This had been the major thrust of Hofmann's teaching and was echoed by fellow artists like Arshile Gorky, whom she met frequently at the home of her sister, Lillian Mildwoff, or at the Art Students League, where she continued to attend sketch classes.

Titanic as he seemed to European artists, Picasso loomed even larger to the American art world. He single-handedly had changed the image of a modern artist through his prodigious capacity for invention and production. Whenever Nevelson is asked about her sources, she cites Picasso as either the most important or the only influence upon her. She claims she perceives him as a kindred spirit, and she clearly identifies herself with him. "Picasso and I work on the same wave length, I didn't have to study so much, I think it's in us."[1] Indeed, she describes him with the same terms she uses for herself. "His search for balance in the end is architecture."[2] She perceives herself to be a master of the horizontal and vertical in sculpture, with a talent akin to Picasso's gift as a cubist painter.

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 27 July 1976.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Tal Streeter, 25 November 1959 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art, transcript, p. 7).

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The formal structure of Nevelson's sculpture is not truly cubist, and her attempt to define and accentuate the planar divisions by painting them may be seen as a wish to take Hofmann's dictums about the plastic structure of an object into the field of sculpture.[1] By painting each major surface plane a different primary color, Nevelson attempted to work with the vocabulary of synthetic cubism, but had only superficially absorbed its aesthetic.[2] This can be seen in three of Nevelson's works from the late thirties--Dispositional Traits (fig. 66), Mother and Child (fig. 67), and Cat (fig. 68). Indeed, if these works of Nevelson's are compared with the cubist works of Lipchitz: Bather, 1923 (fig. 85), or Laurens: Woman with Mandolin, 1919 (fig. 86), the difference is immediately apparent. Instead of restructuring the object by reassembling planes in complex juxtaposition, Nevelson simply finds some surface planes and flattens them, reducing the structure of the figures to a relatively small number of cuboid shapes.

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[1]Carl Holty, a Hofmann student in 1926-27, recalled, "While I was in the school, Hofmann concentrated his teaching and thinking on a description of the plastic structure of the object" (Hans Hofmann Student Dossier, Museum of Modern Art, p. 163).

[2]A review by Emily Genauer describes the polychromatic character of these pieces, but mistakenly assumes that they are wood rather than plaster (Emily Genauer, "Wooden Sculptures Lauded"). It would appear that most of the pieces that date from the mid to late thirties have been reworked, either painted over or cast with a patina so that the "cubist" effect noted in reviews from this period is largely lost. Compare, for example, the WPA photograph of Cat (fig. 68) in painted plaster, and Cat of the Night (fig. 84) in cast stone. The major planes of Cat's body are delineated with a dark line and painted different colors. Cat of the Night, which seems to be the same piece, has had these planimetric divisions eliminated by a solid-color patina and a smoothening of the surface.

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This misreading and simplification of cubist sculpture was common in American sculpture in the mid-to-late thirties Robert Cronbach has described the WPA sculptural style: "A number of sculptors fascinated by cubism and abstract sculptural qualities and at the same time wishing to project a clear, obvious, dramatic image, tried to evolve a synthesis based on Lipchitz's work of the thirties." Cronbach cites his own work and that of Harold Ambellan, Milton Hebald, and Herzl Emanuel as examples. One could also add Joseph Konzal, Max Baar, Aaron Goodleman, and Cesare Stea to this list.[1] Goodleman's Homeless (fig. 87), c. 1936, is characteristic of this style. Cubist work of the Paris school had been available to New York artists from the time of the Armory Show. However, a renewed interest in the style was probably in part a result of the Museum of Modern Art exhibition, Cubism and Abstract Art of 1936, as well as shows by Laurens, Lipchitz, and Archipenko. The exhibition, Cubism and Abstract Art included works by artists representing all the major abstract groups such as constructivitist works by Tatlin, Pevsner, and Gabo; De Stijl and neo-plastic pieces by Mondrian, Vantongerloo, and Van Doesburg; and cubist works by Archipenko, Picasso, Duchamp-Villon, Lipchitz, and Laurens.[2]

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[1]Robert Cronbach, "Sculpture Projects," p. 141. For illustrations of work by Konzal, Baar, Goodleman, and Stea, see Eleanor M. Carr, "The New Deal and The Sculptor: A Study of Federal Relief to The Sculptor on The New York Federal Art Project of The Works Progress Administration, 1935-1943" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1969, Figures: 54, 55, 82, 83, 91, 93, 111-115).

[2] 2 March-19 April 1936, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Cubism and Abstract Art (1936; reprint ed., New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1974).

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Works by these and many other abstract artists could be seen in New York during the thirties and early forties at several places other than the Museum of Modern Art. Albert Gallatin's Museum of Living Art at New York University, and Solomon R. Guggenheim's Museum of Non-Objective Art, were two show places for modern abstract art. In addition, a number of small galleries, usually run by European dealers, kept the most important and often the latest works of abstract art on view. Some of these were Brummer, Buchholz, Curt Valentin, J. B. Neumann, Nierendorf, and Rosenberg. Lipchitz was given three one-man shows between 1935 and 1943, and Laurens had his first major New York show in 1938.[1]

As had been true with surrealism, the arrival in New York in this period of major abstract artists such as Mondrian, Leger, and Lipchitz spurred great interest among New York painters and sculptors. Groups of American artists such as the American Abstract Artists were encouraged by the presence of these mentors. Even though Peggy Guggenheim was surrounded by the surrealist group in New York through her husband, Max Ernst, as well as through her friendships with Duchamp and Breton, she was scrupulously fair in her collecting and exhibiting practices. She bought and showed both abstractionists and surrealists, and it was indirectly through her efforts in New York that Mondrian and Ernst became good friends, thus ending years of hostility between the two groups.[2]

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[1]For a useful discussion of this period, see John Elderfield, "The Paris-New York Axis: Geometric Abstract Painting in The Thirties," in Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Geometric Abstraction: 1926-1942, 7 October-19 November 1972. See also Sandler, American Painting, chapter 1. Lipchitz's three New York exhibits were: Brummer Gallery, 1935; Buchholz Gallery, 1942, 1943. Laurens showed at the Brummer Gallery in 1938.

[2]Jimmy Ernst, interview, 29 July 1976.

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Thus, abstract and constructivist work had been available for New York artists to study from early in the thirties. By the fifties it had long been absorbed; nonetheless, a number of exhibits in the early fifties put the work of de Stijl and the constructivists before the New York art world in greater quantity than usual. In 1951 there was a Mondrian retrospective, a Van Doesburg exhibition, and a show at the Janis Gallery in mid-year entitled, "Painters of De Stijl."[1] In 1953, following the large Museum of Modern Art de Stijl exhibit at the beginning of the year, there was a Vantongerloo show at Rose Fried Gallery in April and a Naum Gabo show at Pierre Matisse Gallery in the spring.[2]

The affinity Nevelson must have felt with this kind of work, particularly the sculpture of Vantongerloo, can be seen in a comparison of one of her blocky constructions of this period (fig. 88) and a Vantongerloo (fig. 89). Nevelson had already worked in this style in the mid-forties when she returned to clay for bronze after her two first shows in wood, as can be seen in The Castle (fig. 90), 1945.

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[1]Sidney Janis gave three large Mondrian exhibits at his new gallery between 1949 and 1953: Piet Mondrian, 1910 through 1944, 10 October-12 November 1949; Piet Mondrian, 5 February-17 March 1951; 50 Years of Mondrian, 2-30 November 1953. Painters of De Stijl, Sidney Janis Gallery, 7 May-2 June 1951. Belle Krasne, "New York Meets Non-Objective Pioneers," review, Art Digest, 27, no. 16 (15 May 1953) 19. See also J. J. Sweeney, "Mondrian, The Dutch and 'De Stijl,' "Art News, 50, no. 4 (June-July-August 1951) 25-27, 62-64.

[2] De Stijl, Museum of Modern Art, 16 December 1952-15 February 1953; Georges Vantongerloo, 9 May 1953; Naum Gabo, Pierre Matisse Gallery, 16 May 1953; Sidney Geist, "Two Pure," review, Art Digest, 27, no. 15 (1 May 1953). See also Thomas B. Hess, "The Dutch, This Century," Art News, 51, no. 9 (January 1953) 23-25, 62-63.

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Because of de Stijl's importance in the history of architecture, a considerable portion of exhibits on this movement was usually devoted to architecture, and here the importance of Kiesler on Nevelson's career reappears. His City in Space (fig. 91), the ninety-foot-long Austrian Pavilion designed for the Decorative Arts Exposition in Paris, 1925, was often illustrated and reproduced.[1] Kiesler's large, impressive cityscape made out of cubic elements may well have inspired Nevelson's later sculptural landscapes.

In Nevelson's urban landscapes of 1955 and 1956, such as Little Mansions (fig. 22) and City in the Sky (fig. 92), one can see a close connection to the work of artists who had absorbed the lessons of cubism. One such artist was Paul Klee whose work was very well known to Nevelson through her association with his American representative, Karl Nierendorf, and she owned some of his work during this period. Nierendorf's extensive collection of Klees and great esteem for his work led him to keep a number of Klee's paintings on permanent exhibit, to publish his writings, and to astonish the art world by giving over eight consecutive months of gallery space to a continuous one-man exhibition of Klee in 1942. Klee had strong appeal for many American artists because of his ability to create a private world, utilizing what appeared to be the essence of both cubist and surrealist styles. His work was shown in New York continuously, from the late thirties throughout the fifties.[2]

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[1]Hess, "The Dutch," p. 25.

[2]Rosamund Frost, "Klee: Pigeons Come Home to Roost," Art News, 41, no. 8 (June, July 1942) 24-25; Andrew Kagan, "Paul Klee's Influence on American Painting: The New York School," Art Forum, 12, no. 3 (November 1973) 36-42; Jeffrey Wechsler, Surrealism and American Art: 1931-1947, Exhibition Catalogue, Rutgers University Art Gallery, 5 March-24 April 1977, p. 32. For a listing of Klee exhibitions, see Will Grohman, Paul Klee (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1955) pp. 440-445.

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Between Klee and Nevelson there are a number of similarities. They shared a preference for several themes such as whimsical cats, birds, clowns, and cityscapes. Though it is hardly unique to Klee's work, the continuous interest in primitivism, particularly in the childlike, is a characteristic which also appears in Nevelson's work throughout her career. These similarities are apparent in a comparison of Nevelson's etching, Goddess from the Great Beyond (fig. 93), and Klee's painting, Ceramic Erotic (fig. 94).

The continuous linear accents found throughout Klee's oeuvre are equally omnipresent in Nevelson's work through the mid-fifties. See, for example, Nevelson's untitled drawing (fig. 95) and Klee's Family Outing (fig. 96). Perhaps inevitable for anyone adopting a cubist manner, the grid format present in much of Klee's work of the teens and twenties and insistently found in his cityscapes appears for the first time in Nevelson's sculpture of the mid-fifties, and a comparison of such a piece as The Little Mansion (fig. 22) and Klee's Beginning Coolness (fig. 97) is illuminating. Here in wood appears one of the Swiss painter's beloved devices, the arrow; the title itself bespeaks the miniature world of the painter rather than the empire-sized realm of the sculptor. Like Klee, Nevelson was able to use the structural grid of cubism as a foundation for a more idiosyncratic style whose wit, whimsy, and mystery have much in common with surrealism.

Nevelson's maturation as a sculptor occurred within the context of these several stylistic currents. Like other American artists of her generation, she had first to absorb the lessons of the contemporary modern masters before she could build a world that would be her own.

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CHAPTER IV

EMPIRE

The desire to create an entire world of one's own through the construction of very large works of art was an emergent phenomenon in New York during the forties and fifties. Painters, such as Rothko, Still, Pollock, and Newman, formed the vanguard of this impulse toward environmental work. Sculptors, like David Smith and Louise Bourgeois, inspired by Giacometti, also responded to this current. Frederick Kiesler carried the trend into the realm of design, architecture, and theatre. For Louise Nevelson, these developments in the art world synchronized with her personal needs, touching areas of an immediate and practical nature, as well as some pre-existent and more profound hopes and wishes. Her signature style, which was the creation of an empire of black walls and columns, came to its first fruition in January 1958 through the exhibition entitled Moon Garden + One.

Nevelson's attempt totally to engage the spectator in the artist's world was not new to the New York scene or to the recent history of art. The fact that there was a generic relationship between Nevelson's Moon Garden + One exhibition and the work of some abstract expressionist painters was immediately noted by Thomas Hess:

> Art has a lion's share of the modern artist's nature, and, in certain cases, art has become nature itself. In André Masson's phrase, the painter does not paint, "he natures." The one-man exhibitions of Rothko, Still, Pollock, Reinhardt, Newman have, in a sense, been entities, atlases of the personality. The pictures

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> together created a new ambiance, an environment that had the sufficiency and interior logic of a place--a new place in which to live, an art-nature. In Rothko's studio, his paintings can surround you like a horizon. Louise Nevelson's recent exhibition . . . is another example of the abstract artist making his world. Hers is more theatrical and artificial, or sculpturesque, than the environments of Rothko, Pollock or Reinhardt, but perhaps because of this it is more easily seen as a place where art and nature become indistinguishable from each other.[1]

The size, scale, overall pattern, and desire to recreate their own worlds was shared by all these artists. Though Nevelson remained aloof from affiliation with any clique or group in the art world, she was an active and eager participant of the New York art scene and was therefore aware of the work of these artists.

Even closer than painting to the experience of the Moon Garden + One exhibit were the exhibitions of several sculptors in the late forties and early fifties. Giacometti's shows at the Matisse Gallery in 1948 and early 1950 as well as a retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in June and July, 1955, provided the viewer with the experience of walking amidst a world already occupied and defined by the artist's tall presences.[2] Many years earlier Giacometti had already made landscape a legitimate subject for sculpture. His Palace at 4 A.M. (fig. 98) was known in New York from 1936 when it was shown in the large Museum of Modern Art exhibition, Surrealism and Abstract Art, and purchased by the museum. Other works like Model for a Garden (fig. 99) could be seen at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery during the forties, and when Giacometti's works in his new style, Composition with Seven Figures and a Head (fig. 100) and City Square (fig. 101) were first seen in 1948

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[1]Hess, "Nature in Abstraction," p. 60.

[2]Alberto Giacometti, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 7 June-17 July 1955. A review of Nevelson's exhibit makes a similar connection to Giacometti's work by referring to his "populated space," "another world," Arts and Architecture, 75, no. 3 (March 1958) 33.

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and 1950 at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, they caused reverberations in American sculpture for over a decade.[1]

While many sculptors were sufficiently moved by these assemblies of silent vertical presences to produce single totemic figures, a few American artists, such as David Smith (Sacrifice, fig. 102) and Louise Bourgeois, created significant groupings of these figures. The exhibitions in 1949 and 1950 (fig. 103) at the Peridot Gallery of Louise Bourgeois' solemn, slender, vertical sculpture evoked similar sensations of an environmental surround. "These simply carved wood figures are inhabitants of a private world through which the sculptor has attempted to express a conception of human relationships as well as spatial relations."[2] Nevelson's friendship with Bourgeois, dated at least to the mid-forties, and their close association during the period in which Bourgeois was developing her early style must in part account for Nevelson's later receptivity to the idea of environment.[3]

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[1]Art of This Century Gallery, "Catalogue List of The Permanent Collection," 1942, #58, Giacometti, Model for a Garden; Giacometti: Exhibition of Sculptures, Paintings, Drawings, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 19 January-14 February 1948, Exhibition Catalogue with introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre, autobiographical text with sketches by Giacometti; Giacometti: Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, November 1950, Exhibition Catalogue with notes and sketches by Giacometti; see below, pp. 203-204; Giacometti, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 7 June-17 July 1955.

In the summer of 1948, when Nevelson and her sister, Anita Berliawsky, were traveling in Europe, they sat next to Giacometti in a Paris cafe. Nevelson was bold enough to ask him if he would like to come to the United States (Anita Berliawsky, interview, 11 July 1976).

[2]Pesella Levy, "Louise Bourgeois," Art Digest, 25, no. 1 (1 October 1950) p. 16.

[3]Louise Bourgeois, interview, 25 July 1977. The influence of Louise Bourgeois upon Louise Nevelson has been discussed by several scholars: Wayne Andersen, American Sculpture in Process: 1930/1970 (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975) pp. 92-95; Rosalind E. Krauss, "Magician's Game: Dacades of Transformation, 1930-1950," in 200 Years of American Sculpture (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, David R.

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In a similar fashion, awareness of Schwitters' earlier attempts to build a personal world with his Merzbauen in Germany and England must have registered on Nevelson's highly visual memory.[1]

The idea of environment was not by any means the exclusive domain of painters and sculptors. Architects and designers of interior space, including museum and gallery installations, could more justifiably lay claim to this domain. Once again, Frederick Kiesler appears in both of these roles at a timely moment with regard to Nevelson's development. As the architect and designer of a new art gallery, he reiterated his clearly environmental theories in print. The article by Kiesler which appeared in the October 1957 issue of Art News was entitled, "The Art of Architecture for Art." The recent design of a new New York art gallery, World House Gallery, was the stimulus for this piece. Even if Nevelson did not read it, she would have heard directly from Kiesler such ideas as were contained in it:

> . . . The first consideration in conceiving the gallery must be a design that would make conducive a meeting between painting and visitor. It would have to be a sort of planetary system, a world of its own (within the big wide world) where the latent potentialities of both are freed to act on each other. . . .[2]

Godine, 1976) pp. 168-174. Andersen's discussion suffers from inaccuracies in dating both Nevelson's and Bourgeois' work. Evidence that Nevelson was both aware and enthusiastic about Bourgeois' work exists in a letter from Mike Nevelson to his mother in which he responds to her questions about the wood pieces she had recently seen at Bourgeois' 1949 Peridot exhibit (letter from Mike Nevelson, 5 October 1949, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art). For a more thorough discussion of the Bourgeois-Nevelson connection, see below, pp. 200-202.

[1]Photographs and descriptions of Schwitters' Merzbau construction in Hanover appeared in the Museum of Modern Art's Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism exhibit and catalogue, pp. 28-29, 244, 259, 262. Schwitters' work had been shown previously at exhibits sponsored by the Société Anonyme.

[2]Frederick J. Kiesler, "The Art of Architecture for Art," Art News, 56, no. 6 (October 1957) 50.

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Kiesler was not alone in the attempt to provide suitable and more interesting settings for art. Throughout the fifties, various exhibiting groups and museums experimented with some of the ideas thrown out by the surrealists and radical constructivists in the forties. One example is the Museum of Modern Art show Textiles USA, 29 August-9 November 1956. Installation shots reveal the innovative techniques used in this exhibit (fig. 104). Theatrical lighting, combined with walls of fabric hung at dramatic angles, created unusual spatial environments for the spectators.

Black walls and the hanging of artifacts or sculpture from ceilings were exhibition techniques that gained currency during the forties. Exhibits in New York were held in gardens, on rooftops, and in vacant lots in the attempt to increase the artist's visibility to a newly aroused public. Examples of this are the Sculptors Guild Exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History in 1952 (fig. 105) and the Sculpture in a Garden show at Helena Simkhovich's home in 1954 (fig. 106).[1]

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[1]An examination of installation photographs of the Museum of Modern Art's exhibitions reveals growing use of dark walls. By the fifties dark backgrounds were used at least as frequently as light ones. The Sculptors Guild mounted an exhibition in the American Museum of Natural History, March 1952, collaborating with architects and decorators especially to complement the sculpture (Margeret Breuning, "Sculpture in Situ," Art Digest, 26, no. 11 [1 March 1952] 16). Two years later Nevelson and her close friend, Helena Simkhovitch, planned an exhibit of their sculpture in Simkhovitch's backyard garden. This exhibit, which included work by Sidney Gordon, Ibram Lassaw, Louise Bourgeois, and Jose de Rivera, was well-received and was followed by a number of other garden exhibits (Sculpture in a Garden, 48 West Tenth Street, New York, May 3-26, 1954, review, Art News, 53, no. 3 [May 1954] 61-62; Art Digest, 28, no. 16 [15 May 1954] 26). The Sculptors Guild had its sixth outdoor exhibit in 1955, and on this occasion it was held in a grassy lot next to the Guggenheim Museum, June-September 1955. Louise Bourgeois first showed her sculpture informally to a group of friends, including Nevelson, on the roof of her building in the late forties (Helena Simkhovitch, interview, 5 May 1977; Louise Bourgeois, interview, 25 July 1977).

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The more direct architectural references in Nevelson's Moon Garden + One exhibit might imply a more acute than usual receptivity to architectural sources. In fact, three weeks before Nevelson's show, an impressive exhibition of Antonio Gaudi's architectural work opened at the Museum of Modern Art. On display were a number of photographs of La Sagrada Familia (fig. 107), the extraordinary cathedral Gaudi never completed in Barcelona. Both Arts and Art News-January 1958 carried extensive articles on the exhibition and on Gaudi's work.[1] While the curvilinear art nouveau style may not have held great fascination for Nevelson, the eerie surrealistic quality of the Spanish architect's work appealed to her. The massing and accumulation of richly detailed parts, which were organized into a facade of compartments, in many ways resembled Nevelson's Sky Cathedral (fig. 38), which was also an interior facade made of elaborately filled boxes.

Another architect whose work could have seemed suggestive to this American "architect of shadows" was Le Corbusier. In 1955 the much-heralded church, Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp was completed and was discussed widely in the literature of art and architecture. Among the outstanding features of the church was the remarkable window treatment which permitted a shimmering but mysterious inside illumination[2] (fig. 108).

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[1]Gaudi, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 18 December 1957-23 February 1958; Edith Burkhardt, "The Unfinished Cathedral and Antonio Gaudi," Art News, 56, no. 9 (January 1958) 36-37; Anthony Kerrigan, "Gaudianism in Catalonia," Arts, 32, no. 3 (December 1957) 21-25.

For Nevelson's expressed interest in Gaudi, see Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 99.

[2]Sigfried Gideon, "Le Corbusier's Church: A New Era?" Art News, 54, no. 7 (November 1955) 32-33.

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In the same year two articles were published in Art News announcing the architecturally related work in stained glass of two painters. In March, Adolph Gottlieb's glass facade of the Milton Steinberg Memorial Center (fig. 109) in New York was extensively illustrated. The enormous grid design of this facade serves as an interesting precursor for Nevelson's walls. The author of the article, Dorothy Seckler, makes the comment: "Coming into the interior one no longer sees color but experiences it, startling but subdued, as an environment."[1] The earlier pictographic grid paintings of Adolph Gottlieb may also have played a part in encouraging aesthetic tendencies already latent in Nevelson's work. The later article in October illustrates and discusses Fernand Leger's stained glass windows (fig.110) done for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Audincourt, France. While different in style from either Le Corbusier or Gottlieb, this work, like theirs, created a unified atmosphere through the manipulation of light and shadow.[2]

These developments in the art world provided both inspiration and support for Nevelson's work of the late fifties. There were, in addition, personal motivations and needs that prompted her to move toward the creation of a sculptural environment.

One of the motivations which played an insufficiently recognized

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[1]Dorothy Gees Seckler, "Adolph Gottlieb Makes a Facade," Art News, 54, no. 1 (March 1955) 44.

[2]James Johnson Sweeney, "Fernand Leger: Simple and Solid," Art News, 54, no. 6 (October 1955) 30.

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role in the development of her style was Nevelson's house on Thirtieth Street.

After fifteen years of unsettled residence in at least six different places, Nevelson convinced her family to buy her a five-story brownstone on East Thirtieth Street in 1945. The basement, garden, and first floor were used for working and storage, with a combination living room-studio area on the first floor. The top few floors were either rented or kept for friends and relatives.[1] Nevelson had wanted a house in New York for many years and was disappointed when her husband did not buy one for her. While the ownership of a house solved a number of practical problems for the prolific sculptress, it also seemed to speak to a deeper need which became apparent when Nevelson was threatened with the loss of this house.

Sometime in 1954 Nevelson was informed by New York City of its intention to buy her property and build the Kips Bay project.[2] Gradually the buildings on her block were emptied and an ultimatum by the city grew more likely. She procrastinated and remained in the building until 1958, seemingly paralyzed by indecision and by the need to resolve with her family what provisions they were willing to make for her habitation, since the deed was in their name.[3]

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[1]The house was bought in the name of her sister, Anita, presumably to protect Nevelson from the vagaries of an artist's lot and to guarantee her a home (Anita Berliawsky, interview, 12 July 1976; Nate Berliawsky, interview, 12 July 1976; Louise Nevelson, interview, 7 July 1976).

[2]Mike Nevelson, letter to Louise Nevelson, 18 March 1954 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[3]Louise Nevelson, interview with Arnold Glimcher, New York, 12 August 1970; Anita Berliawsky, Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 13 July 1976; Mike Nevelson, letter to Louise Nevelson, 15 November 1955 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

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Dido Smith has already noted the importance of Nevelson's imminent move upon the development of her style:

> With a time limit on her stay she hunted for another studio while working with desperate urgency to finish the piece for her "Moon Garden + One" show in 1958. The enclosure became her obsession and the architectural ambiance increased. As she was losing one shelter she constructed a hundred others from the many mansions of creative consciousnes.[1]

Without doubt the loss of the house which had been Nevelson's home for many years precipitated a number of stylistic changes. Nevelson returned to wood as a medium for sculpture and selected cityscapes as a preeminent theme during the year she was notified by the city of their intention to tear down her building.

Also notable is the frantic quality of her behavior in the year before her move out of the house in 1958. This was manifest first in the removal of almost all her furniture, then in the nearly obsessive accumulation of found wood fragments, and finally in the extraordinarily prolific production of work in 1957, which in itself forced Nevelson to stack and arrange the separate pieces as compositions just to make working space. She had managed just before departing to create her own imaginary habitation with the detritus of the world which was forcing her out of her real home.

This remarkable behavior raises questions about the nature of Nevelson's less immediate and more profound hopes and wishes which impelled her to create an empire of her own. The history of her development as an artist reveals the successive attempts to match her wish for an hermetic world with the real structures that would surround her with a reassuring self-reflection:

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[1]Dido Smith, "Louise Nevelson," p. 76.

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> In the forties . . . I was working quite desperately. Now [1976] I feel better . . . only for one reason--that I have made a reality that is a personal reality. Since I did not find a reality . . . on the outside, I have built a whole reality for myself.[1]

Speaking to her friend and dealer, Arnold Glimcher, about her sculpture, she said: "I built an empire, it is my home, it is my empire, it is my life."[2]

When an artist pours her entire life into her work, the work itself tends to replace external reality. This is particularly true for Nevelson, whose dissatisfaction with the external world motivated her to create a new world for herself. The anti-Semitism of Rockland, the unhappy marriage of her parents, her unwillingness or inability to sustain a loving relationship with a man, her many years of little or no success in the art world, and finally the forced removal from her home all contributed to her wish for a better world--one which she could entirely control.

By the late 1950's Nevelson had successfully constructed this new world with her walls and columns of black boxes. As both architect and ruler of this empire, she had, in effect, brought a childhood fantasy into the light of a present-day reality. The public success of Moon Garden + One confirmed her internal sense of having met a long-unsatisfied need. Through a partial identification with her father, the builder, she had developed a clearer sense of herself and her sculptural style.

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 95.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Arnold Glimcher, New York, 1 June 1970 (Arnold Glimcher Papers, transcript pp. 5-6).

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Since the late fifties Louise Nevelson has referred to herself as an architect, sometimes specifying "architect of shadows, light, or reflections." It seems to be the appellation which best suits her self-image, and she uses it freely and often. Nevelson uses the term architect in its conceptual sense to designate a designer of an aesthetically and structurally sound object. About Dawn's Wedding Feast she said:

> It was already in my mind that I had given myself the title "architect of shadow," then I suppose another thing opened up and I said, "Oh, I'll be an architect of light" . . . . I take light which is fleeting. . . . But I give it solid substance. I give it architecture.[1]

Her sister, Lillian, recalled:

> . . . Architecture was like second nature to her, like in all of us . . . the way we see architecture--the way we're always looking for houses. . . . I feel that was either in our bringing-up or born in us because my father would always say, "look, isn't this beautiful--isn't this house great--look how this house was made."[2]

However reluctant to admit direct influence from her father, Nevelson herself states her identification with his work: "Somewhere in my inner being I'm a builder; now a builder doesn't necessarily mean a house, to build a house there is something about the builder that it had to be right."[3] This deep-seated feeling for architecture is largely the result of Isaac Berliawsky's influence. For many

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 138. See also ibid., pp. 59, 64, 184; Louise Nevelson, interview with Colette Roberts, New York, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, transcript 207, p. 11; Louise Nevelson, interview with Dorothy Seckler, New York, May-June 1964, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, transcript 208, p.4.

[2]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976.

[3]Louise Nevelson, interview with Dorothy Seckler, New York, 14 January 1965, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, transcript 207, p. 16.

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years Nevelson denied any influence from her father in spite of the growing acknowledgment that his lumber business must have had its effect on her work. Now claiming that the feeling for wood must run in her family, she is also willing to see that other, less direct, but no less crucial influences stem from her father. "It isn't so much the wood. He wanted an empire and, indirectly, I've done the same."[1]

Nevelson's identification with her father is most apparent in her relationship to her work; however, it is also evident in other aspects of her life. The driving ambition, a capacity for sustained hard work, the high level of nervous energy, and the commitment to a cultural and artistic life are the crucial points of similarity. Both father and daughter put these characteristics to similar ends: the construction of a vast array of wood structures that represented a personal empire for each builder. Interestingly enough, both enterprises do not properly deserve to be called architecture, and yet both sculptors and contractors have traditionally maintained an uneasy subservience to architecture. It has been the ambitious upstarts of both fields that have sought to to claim the title of master builder for their own.

The most frequently noted link between Nevelson and her family is her use of wood as a material. Every male in her immediate family had been involved with wood in some way--her grandfather as a dealer, her father as a builder and owner of timberlands and lumber yards, her brother, who, during her youth in Rockland, was an assistant to her father and even more proficient as a craftsman than he, and finally her son Mike, who learned the craftsmanship from his uncle and grandfather

[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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with whom he lived as a boy and young adult. In fact, her son's affinity for wood appeared even before Louise Nevelson's separation from her husband in 1930, and, as a boy, Mike was using his father's razor to whittle small animals in wood. Mike Nevelson continued throughout his youth and young adulthood to seek mastery as a craftsman of wood, apprenticing himself to various carpenters, furniture and frame makers until he had attained sufficient skill to be considered by his family as one of the best wood craftsmen in New England. It is no wonder that Nevelson's sister Lillian would say, "it's a natural thing for her to go into wood, it's in the family somehow. . . my father owned one-half of the woodlands in Rockland . . . we all knew wood."[1]

When Nevelson speaks of wood, her depth of feeling for this material is striking:

> Basically my memory is for wood, which gives a certain kind of form--it isn't too hard and it isn't too soft. . . . So each individual has awareness for the things they truly identify with. Identification is love. What is love? Love is recognition. When you love, you're so close with it, it's a oneness. It was always a relationship--my speaking to the wood and the wood speaking back to me.[2]

Her initial efforts in the use of wood for constructed pieces were in the works which became the basis of the 1943 exhibit at the Norlyst Gallery, Circus: The Clown is the Center of His World. She did not pursue this mode of work, and later gave the tools to her son. Only on rare occasions did she carve or file wood, preferring the immediacy of the constructive process. The degree of craftsmanship

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[1]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976.

[2]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 86, 120.

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required for this latter process more closely approximated the carpentry skills of her family.[1]

In October of 1942 she met Ralph Rosenborg at her Nierendorf exhibit, and thus began one of the longest romances of her life. She associates him with the beginning of her work in wood and recalls that he taught her to use dowels and make frames for her collection of Elshemius paintings. By November of that year she had begun to work in wood, and both Dorothy Miller and Jimmy Ernst remember visiting her Tenth Street loft and finding remarkable wood sculpture. Miller recalls Giacometti-like table pieces and Ernst remembers the beginning of the animal group which was to become her Circus show at his new gallery, the Norlyst.[2]

In retrospect, it is apparent that Nevelson's selection and use of found wood as her medium was crucial in the development of her style. The fact that this decision had to be made twice--first in 1942 and again in 1954--seems significant and warrants examination. The decision to use wood for sculpture in 1942 was motivated by somewhat different sources than the selection of wood as a material in 1954. We have noted that the choice of odd scraps of wood and metal for sculpture in 1942 probably was partly motivated by the lively activities of the surrealists in New York. The fact that this material did not persist in Nevelson's oeuvre for more than one-and-a-half years seems to imply

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[1]Nevelson's earliest work with wood was conventional carving. Her son recalls her carrying a block of wood in her bag on a weekend visit to him in high school in 1937. From this block he remembers that she was carving a primitive oceanic figure (Mike Nevelson, interview, 29 July 1977).

[2]Dorothy Miller, telephone interview, 2 September 1976; Jimmy Ernst, interview, 29 July 1976.

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both her internal unreadiness to stay with a truly unconventional medium and her response to external events, i.e., both the passing of the rage for things surrealist and the unenthusiastic reviews of her two shows of wood sculpture in 1943 and 1944.[1] Furthermore, the fact that she destroyed all the works from the Norlyst show when she moved in 1945 into her new house, which certainly could have accommodated them, indicates a dissatisfaction.[2]

Nevelson's return to wood after a decade seems to have grown in part out of financial exigency. Whereas in the early forties, during the war years, lumber of any kind was very difficult to obtain, the situation was quite different ten years later. In the early fifties, on the crest of the post-war boom, the streets of New York were littered with discarded wood, crates, furniture, etc. In addition, the number of small local lumber yards had multiplied to satisfy the booming construction. What couldn't be found on the street could be readily picked up at the scrap pile of the local lumber yard.

Numerous friends and all her family testify to Nevelson's financial impoverishment during these years and the drain on her meager funds through the cost of clay, firing, and mounting expenses. They all recall prowling the streets at night and dragging various wood pieces up to her house when they visited.[3] In such times and with such abundance,

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[1]See, for example, Edward Alden Jewell, "Louise Nevelson," New York Times, 18 April 1943; idem, 23 April 1943; Jon Stroup, "Tunnard and Nevelson," Art Digest, 19, no. 4 (15 November 1944) 14; Howard Devree, "A Reviewer's Notes," New York Times, 29 October 1944.

[2]Glimcher, Louise Nevelson, p. 54.

[3]Lillian Mildwoff, Ben Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976; Dorothy Dehner, interview, 5 December 1975. It was not until the sixties that Nevelson could afford to have either boxes or specific wood shapes made for her (Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 136; Dido Smith, telephone interview, 21 June 1977).

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Nevelson could afford to be selective. She accumulated vast amounts of wood, and then, with great care, selected combinations of compatible scrap, rearranging them to create a new structure. This activity soon grew and matured into the creation of sculpture that culminated in the walls of black boxes.

Evidently Nevelson's return to the use of wood for sculpture in 1954 occurred not only because discarded wood was available on the streets of New York, nor simply because she had received notice from the city that she would have to move. Perhaps some combination of events, both external and internal, took place which allowed this renewed and ultimately very fruitful identification to occur with her father, the constructor of empires in wood. Two more aspects of this identification must be explored before we can have a more complete understanding of this complex process.

Fueling all the activities and inclinations which led to Nevelson's creation of an empire is her prodigious energy. Sharing this feature in common with her father, it seems to have been an active element in her entire artistic career with very few interruptions. At first it was exercised in the production of drawings and paintings, and then in the almost continuous production of sculpture. Nevelson's output appears only to be limited when finances or lack of available materials prevent her from working uninterruptedly. Illness and severe depression have also occasionally inhibited her regular work habits. While evidence from remaining photographs suggests that this production was accelerated in the late forties and fifties, this appearance of an increase in her productive capacity may be due only to the relatively small number of photographs of her early work.

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An example of the quantity Nevelson was able to produce in a short period is the nearly approximately thirty wood pieces she made in a few months for the Circus exhibition in 1943. Since the thirties, friends, relatives, and acquaintances have been pressed to provide storage space for this kind of output, and no one who visited her house on Thirtieth Street came away without the impression of an overflowing quantity of work. Shelves had been built in her own basement and in her sisters' to house the hundreds of terra cotta pieces she produced at Sculpture Center between 1948 and 1950. Knowing that she must somehow accommodate her own flow of energy, she was constantly seeking methods or materials that would allow her to work without interruption.[1] She has said:

> I think that there is basically such a thing as energy, creation overflowing and other processes that I don't think I ever planned. They grew, like things in nature. . . . I have this great energy and it was bound to sort of burst at the seams, so that it automatically took its place with a mind like mine.[2]

The rediscovery of found wood as a medium was exactly the trigger needed to set off an explosion of productive energy, and from 1954 to 1958 Nevelson's wood pieces proliferated in such quantity that they practically forced, by their very number, the idea of environment on their creator. She explains:

> I attribute the walls to this. I had loads of energy . . . and loads of creative energy. And no matter how much space . . . if I'd had a city block it wouldn't have been enough. . . . I had this energy that was flowing like an ocean into creativity. . . . I identify with the ocean. So I did begin to stack them. . . . It was a natural.[3]

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[1]Jan Gelb, interview, New York, 27 June 1976; Sidney Geist, interview, New York, 19 June 1976.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Colette Roberts, New York, 1 May 1964. (Done as part of New York University's "Meet The Artist" Program, Howard Conant Papers, transcript p. 2.)

[3]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 130.

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It is clear that Nevelson experiences this unusually large amount of physical energy and stamina as a special endowment of nature:

> I'm prolific, just prolific, that why . . . I built an empire, that isn't boasting, it's a fact of energy . . . it had nothing to do with intellect, I have a creative energy that flows. . . . All my life if I get one thing I would like to encompass the whole thing.[1]

On the other side of this prodigious productivity stands the impulse to collect, another feature that Nevelson shares with her father. Isaac Berliawsky filled warehouses with antique furniture and toys that his wife would not allow in the house. In much the same way his daughter collects pieces of wood and then saves them for years until they are incorporated into a piece of sculpture.

Nevelson's inclination for collecting is not limited to wood. For all of her adult life in New York she has habitually scoured antique shops for treasures. She has bought old lace and fabric, antique furniture, bags, clothing, objets d'art, African and American Indian artifacts,and almost anything that pleased her eye (fig. 111).

By nature a collector, Nevelson has been unable to resist the pull of accumulation:

> Truly by nature I didn't want to be a collector but my kind of . . . communication with these things somehow just comes to me, and before I know it there's a collection. . . . I have even tried not to collect but then someone will give me something because somehow we attract certain things by our nature and so it's just sort of a natural for me.[2]

This characteristic has been present throughout her life,and her son recalls the trips back to New York after summers in Maine

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 8 January 1976.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Dorothy Seckler, May-June 1964, p. 16.

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during his childhood as caravans of miraculously multiplied belongings that dismayed his father each year. To Nevelson's family, the source for this penchant for collecting was clear. Her sister Lillian remembered:

> Louise always used to keep pebbles and marbles. . . . Anything she'd find she'd put it on the floor or find a way of hanging it. She was always collecting things. I always said just like my father and his antiques.[1]

A feature related to Nevelson's propensity for collecting is her mania for the boxing and containment of trinkets, baubles, and costly items in sets of drawers and cabinets. These tendencies to collect and contain, as they appear in her sculpture, partly account for the multiplication of containers and particularly with regard to the walls which are prototypical repositories.[2]

There is, in these collections of fragments, an unspoken content. The acts of fragmentation, recoloring, and rearrangement serve not only to create a new unity, but also as a mockery of the original purposes of each fragment. To destroy intentionally antique furniture, and then to cover the patina'd wood with black paint, is enough to send chills down the spine of the usual collector. Yet Nevelson, herself a collector, makes her sculpture through this process of destruction, rearrangement, and reconstruction. By this act she mocks the collector as well as the homemaker, who would also shudder

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[1]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 June 1976.

[2]In the great hunt for explanations as to why Nevelson makes walls of boxes, her son suggested this connection. It should be noted that his sculpture is made of wood and usually contains many drawers, thus satirizing both the craftsman at work and his mother's containers (fig. 112), (Mike Nevelson, interview, 29 July 1977).

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at the sight of broken furniture. This trait may also be seen in the garden of Nevelson's Thirtieth Street house which she called "The Farm" (figs. 113-116). Here she planted row upon row of cooking utensils and wooden spoons. Dorothy Dehner, her friend, who photographed the house and its garden in late 1957, described this scene: "She stuck all the kitchen utensils in the garden like flowers, egg beaters, spatulas, etc., laid out in rows. She herself rarely cooked, saying of the planted utensils, 'That's what you do with them.'"[1] Along with these womanly tools one sees the utensils of her profession also stuck in the ground--files and calipers.

However seriously Nevelson takes herself as an artist, she does not extend this respect to the conventional methods and tools of sculpture. Notoriously unconventional in her methods, she will cut wood with a scissors and scratch an etching plate with a can opener, thus reversing the sacred division of home and studio.[2]

There is an implicit mockery of the bourgeois world of her parents underlying Nevelson's treatment of the objects that had first to be dismantled before she could use them to create her empire. Thus it seems that her image of herself as a builder like her father contains a twist. The world she built of wood constructions can house only the dreams and fantasies of the artist and her public. Artists often substitute a world of their own invention for the given realities which surround them. But the new artistic development to which

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[1]Dorothy Dehner, interviews, 4 December 1975; 17 June 1977. Nevelson described this garden to her dealer, Arnold Glimcher, in an interview, New York, 8 December 1970 (Arnold Glimcher papers, p. 30).

[2]Mike Nevelson, interview, 29 July 1977.

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Nevelson belongs involves the imposition of that surrogate world upon the viewer through its amplified dimensions which approximate the magical recreations of life common to the theatre.

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CHAPTER V

THEATRE AND DANCE

One feature noted in nearly all reviews of Moon Garden + One was the theatricality of this exhibit. The near total darkness, the colored lights, and the sense of a surrounding backdrop created by the walls of relatively shallow boxes all contributed to the stage-like atmosphere. These characteristics have continued to be features of Nevelson's style, and many of her works are deliberately installed both in museums and private residences in darkened rooms flat against the walls (Sky Cathedral, fig. 117). This perception of Nevelson's work as a sort of sculptural set design suggests that the artist may see herself and her spectators as the performers of some mysterious drama. Both Nevelson's biography and events in the art world support this argument.

As a young woman Nevelson was attracted to the study of dance and drama. From her teachers, Princess Norina Matchabelli and Ellen Kearns, she sought the freedom to tap her inner strengths and to develop the spontaneity she sensed that she needed as an artist. The appeal felt by American artists for modern dance during the thirties, forties, and fifties was avidly shared by Nevelson, whose admiration for Martha Graham may have influenced her own development in a variety of ways. Nevelson's close observation of the set designs for dance done by other New York artists such as Isamu Noguchi, Kiesler, and Bourgeois

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also contributed to her rapidly maturing style in the fifties. All of this was set within the context of the surrealists' interest in theatre, evident in their large exhibitions during the forties and visible through such latter-day exponents of the surrealist notions that the artist and the spectator were performers, as Georges Mathieu, Allan Kaprow, and the Gutai group. It appears that Nevelson's personal needs for self-dramatization coincided with an historical moment in the art world that promoted such inclinations.

Louise Nevelson's renown as a strikingly handsome, even beautiful woman has persisted, and now, at seventy-seven, she carries herself with the same presence which usually attends women known as beauties throughout their lives. This proud carriage she noted in her mother, the woman to whom she claims to have dedicated her life. Conscious of her own appearance, and never forgetting her mother's beauty, Nevelson continued to be fascinated by beautiful and dramatic women, with some of whom she identified. Such was the case with the Princess Matchabelli whom she placed next to Greta Garbo as one of the two most beautiful women she'd ever seen.[1]

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 8 January 1976. Her admiration for these two women extended to their sense of fashion. Both were famous for wearing large hats, and Nevelson adopted and continued this characteristic until long after it was out of fashion. She was known by many people in the art world as "the Hat," and most recollections of her begin with a description of her large, floppy Garbo hats (Anna Walinska, interview, 25 June 1976; Dorothy Dehner, interview, 5 December 1975; David Margolis, interview, 11 June 1976). She found elegant accessories to be the height of glamour, and her only extravagant purchases unrelated to her sculpture were very expensive hats or bags. Her interest in fashion was such that she often selected movies on the basis of the elegance or exotic nature of the costumes (Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976).

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Both Matchabelli and Garbo had earned their fame as actresses, and Nevelson may have contemplated such a career for herself during the twenties when she studied acting with Princess Matchabelli. She had come to these studies after attending the widely publicized International Theatre Exposition which Kiesler had designed and brought to New York in 1926. When Kiesler and Matchabelli decided to organize a school, they modeled it after the Theatre Arts Institute which had been founded by Richard Boleslavsky in Manattan in 1923 and went on to become the relatively well-known American Laboratory Theatre. Nevelson learned of the venture through the abundant advance publicity during the spring and summer of 1926.[1]

Opening in October, the school attracted very few students, and the faculty discovered major discrepancies in their points of view. According to Lillian Kiesler, Princess Matchabelli was very much involved at this time in metaphysics and the study of spiritualism. Apparently her wish to imbue the school's teaching with this approach partially created the rift between her and Kiesler.[2] Matchabelli had

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[1]John Mason Brown, brochure of American Laboratory Theatre (New York: Stillson Press, 1927). Kiesler's and Matchabelli's new school received a great deal of advance publicity and all the clippings and printed material are in the Frederick Kiesler Papers, Archives of American Art. Kiesler was to be an artistic director and to teach stagecraft and theatre architecture. Princess Matchabelli was to be the other artistic director and to teach acting. Edwin Strawbridge and Alexander Gavrilou would teach dance, Dr. Bess Mensendieck would teach body education, John Mason Brown was to lecture on the history of the theatre, and Windsor Daggett would teach diction.

[2]Lillian Kiesler, telephone interview, 17 June 1976; Louise Nevelson, interview, 8 January 1976. To add to these troubles, the school's major financial and political sponsor, Otto Kahn, deserted the project after the fall elections, and by February, Brown and Daggett, two of the more prestigious faculty members, had allied themselves with the competition and had accepted positions at Boleslavsky's Theatre Arts Institute in Manhattan. Kiesler also moved on to other projects, partly out of disagreement with Princess Matchabelli's metaphysical leanings.

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developed ideas which related the theatre to the concept of the "fourth dimension":

> The idea [she said] is to have all the elements of the theatre function toward the fourth dimension. The fourth dimension is the will and emotion, a purely subjective thing to be thrown out as radio waves. Another fourth-dimension conception is that it is the intellectualization of the flesh, involving scientific transmission of body movements and a thorough knowledge of the origin of these.[1]

Louise Nevelson stayed on with a small group of students to study with Princess Matchabelli, and although Nevelson claims to have studied only dramatics with her, it is probable that that the teaching was heavily weighted toward a metaphysical approach. Princess Matchabelli eventually became a disciple of the Parsee teacher, Meher Baba, and went to live at his ashram in India.[2] Louise Nevelson's experience with Princess Matchabelli must have made a deep impression on the young woman and probably introduced her to what be-

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[1]"Audience are Actors in Newest Theatre," New York Evening Post, 15 March 1926. By the time the plans for the school had coalesced in August, this type of discussion was squelched and there was no longer a psychological department. In print, at least, Princess Matchabelli was simply to teach Acting, Expression, Improvisation, and Pantomime. Her statements in a printed speech at a dinner in June, publicizing the school, reveal only a tinge of her deep commitment to metaphysics: "The ideal is to develop the power of a methodical will to modify and multiply human forces. It shall be a school of sincerity and simplicity: to vitalize and stimulate imagination and free creative powers; to waken the authority of instinct and intuition, an exultation in art, intellectual subtlety and sensibility, physical skill and agility, and consciousness of soul, brain and body in a coordinated whole. Thus sensitized, and if possible, sublimated, he will fulfill his high mission" ("Princess Matchabelli Speaks for the International Theatre Arts Institute, Independent Theatres Dinner, 3 October 1926; Frederick Kiesler Papers, Archives of American Art).

[2]"Princess Matchabelli, Actress and Performer," obituary, Herald Tribune, 17 June 1957.

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came a lifelong interest in the study of metaphysics.[1]

Matchabelli had originally achieved recognition as an actress in the part of the Madonna created for her by her first husband Karl Volmoeller in Max Reinhardt's 1911-12 production of The Miracle in London. She performed the role throughout Europe numerous times and continued to work for Reinhardt for a number of years using the name Maria Carmi. She also played leading parts in plays by Pirandello and Marinetti. In 1917 she married Prince Georges Matchabelli, Russian ambassador to Rome before the revolution. Afterwards she lived for a period of time in Italy and eventually came to the United States in 1924 to recreate the role of the Madonna in a Morris Gest revival of The Miracle. Because Gest had invited another actress to play the same part, an altercation ensued and after a brief period of alternating performances in the role she became indignant, quit, and found herself stranded in New York with a husband whose fortunes had declined and whose resistance to her resumption of a theatrical career seemed to have been justified. It is easy to imagine Louise Nevelson identifying with the older more sophisticated Princess, since her situation was similar.[2] This experience occurred at a time when Louise Nevelson was

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 8 January 1976. Lillian Kiesler states that Princess Matchabelli was a follower of Gurdieff, and that all of her students were taking classes in meditation and became equally devoted to his principles (Lillian Kiesler, interview, 17 June 1976). It is probable that Nevelson's interest in the "fourth dimension" developed under the tutelage of Matchabelli. See also, Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "A New Facet of Cubism, the fourth dimension and non-Euclidian geometry reinterpreted," Art Quarterly, 34, no. 4 (Winter 1971), 410-433.

[2]The only performances that resulted from Nevelson's theatrical studies were the public productions put on by Matchabelli's class. Her sister Anita recalled seeing her in a production of "Carmen" held in Brooklyn (Lillian Mildwoff, Anita Berliawsky, interview, 13 July 1976).

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feeling constrained by family life and both socially and culturally inferior to her husband's family and circle of friends.

Although Kiesler did not stay on to teach at the proposed school, his friendship with Nevelson dates from this time, and he spoke to her about his new ideas of the "endless" house which he had first designed for use as a space theatre three years earlier in Berlin.[1] As artistic director and architect of several international exhibitions on new theatre techniques, Kiesler had established a reputation as one of Europe's most imaginative and acclaimed young designer-architects. By the time he arrived in the United States in 1926, he had already formulated the ideas which he would continue to expound for the rest of his career.[2] The principles of continuity

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[1]Lillian Mildwoff, Anita Berliawsky, interview, 13 July 1976.

[2]Kiesler received his training as an architect and designer in Vienna at The Akadamie der Bildender Künste und Technisishe Hochschule before the First World War. In 1920 he worked with Adolph Loos on housing projects in Vienna, and by 1925 he was selected by Josef Hoffmann to design the Austrian exhibit of The International Theatre for the Exposition International des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris. Living among the community of artists which congregated in the cafes of Vienna after the war, Kiesler heard and participated in the numerous lively discussions which touched on all aspects of modern life and art. In architecture, the debate raged around the subject of decoration and ornament, with Hoffmann and Loos taking opposite positions. With the waning influence of art nouveau in Vienna, the newer, starker aesthetic principles of De Stijl, and what would eventually be called functionalism, found many adherents among the avant garde. Kiesler's work with Loos, as well as his own forward-looking temperament, placed him firmly in the most modern camp. When his remarkably innovative theatrical designs were first seen in 1923 in Berlin for Eugene O'Neill's The Emperor Jones and for Karel Capek's R.U.R., Van Doesburg, Schwitters, Richter, Moholy-Nagy, and Lissitzky came backstage in a group to meet him and invited him to join De Stijl ("Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," interview with Thomas H. Creighton , Progressive Architecture, 42, no. 7 [July 1961] 109). Europe was receptive to Kiesler's ideas and innovations which included the use of motion pictures for backdrops; inclined, curtainless stages as that part of a continuously moving set with sides and ceiling that could revolve or be transparent in order to create the illusion of continuous space; and theatre in the round. Kiesler's concern with space

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between actors and audience, inhabitants and environment that were exemplified by the "endless house" (fig.119) and "space-stage" (fig.120) were ideas that clearly sprang from theories about the total work of art so popular in Europe at the turn of the century. Indeed, the two fields which made most frequent use of these ideas were theatre and architecture. Wagnerian ideas on total theatre and art nouveau's commitment to design principles which would unify all the elements of modern life continued to exert their fascination for architects and designers of the newer persuasions--expressionist, futurist, and constructivist. Architect-designers as diverse as Henry Van de Velde, Rudolph Steiner, and Theo van Doesburg were all concerned with the creation of organically unified structures, and while their styles were diametrically opposed, many of their basic aims were the same.[1]

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was again exemplified two years later by his City in Space exhibit (fig.91) for the Paris World's Fair in 1925. The exhibit was mounted on a large three-dimensional structure made of interlocking squares and rectangles, and the whole thing was suspended from the ceiling. It won great praise from Mondrian, Van Doesburg, and Tristan Tzara (ibid., p. 110; see also Goodman, "Frederick Kiesler," pp. 90-91). It is interesting to note that photographs of Kiesler's set design for R.U.R. and Emperor Jones (1923) Berlin, as well as his space-stage (1924) Vienna, were included in the Museum of Modern Art exhibit, Cubism and Abstract Art (1936), nos. 364-366.

[1]Kiesler's daring projects of the mid-twenties included an "Endless House" which was to be a double-shell building of cast glass with a capacity of ten thousand to serve as a showplace, including a theatre, a music center, hotels, gardens, and a parking lot ("Kiesler's Pursuit," p. 110). Such visionary and grand plans were common among the expressionist and futurist architects, and Kiesler acknowledged his debt to Sant' Elia, Paul Scheebart, and even Marinetti. It is easy to see how Scheebart's glass cities could have inspired certain aspects of Kiesler's "Endless House." Some of the utopian and often mystical tones which underlie the design work of Henry Van de Velde, William Morris, and Rudolph Steiner continued in the work of later designer-architects. Van Doesburg, the Bauhaus school, and many of the new International Style architects dreamed also of saving the world, but now with simple, straightforward, clean design, which was to be applied to all aspects of society. Some of these ideas are discussed in Dennis Sharp, Modern Architecture and Expressionism (New York: George Braziller, 1966); Reyner Banham, Theory and Design in The First Machine Age (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1960); and Eugene Santomasso, "Origins and Aims of German Expressionist Architecture," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1973).

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Nevelson's very early contact with Kiesler and the theatrical world around him was prophetic and certainly an important influence on her later artistic development. Her first serious connection to artists in New York came about as a result of Kiesler's International Theatre Exposition which she visited at least three times. Nevelson may have observed and concluded that the relationship between art and theatre was a very close one for some of the outstanding "modern" artists. In addition, Kiesler's enthusiasm for the interrelationship of the arts must have been communicated to the young woman either by Kiesler or through the extensive literature about the Exposition and school, and this became an early and integral part of her conception of modern art.

After Nevelson completed her extended period of theatrical study with Matchabelli, she started classes at the Art Students League in 1929 and began her turn toward the serious pursuit of an artistic vocation. Her next experiences as a performer occurred in Europe during the winter of 1931-32. Her brief experience as an extra in German movies was not satisfying for Nevelson because so much time was spent passively waiting for directions. She was too energetic to tolerate such inactivity, and she recalls that she would have preferred the combined role of creator-director.[1]

Although Nevelson never again involved herself in any organized theatrical activity, she did embark on a twenty-year study of dance and movement shortly after her return to New York.

In the late twenties and early thirties dance in America was undergoing a revolution. The pioneers of the modern movement had thrown off the fetters of both the balletic tradition and the exotic

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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manner of Denishawn. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Helen Tamiris, and Edwin Strawbridge were developing and presenting to a small but wildly enthusiastic audience their new vision of dance with its freedom to explore and express the "drives, desires and reactions of alive human beings," unencumbered by decorative conventions.[1] Some of the most ardent supporters of the new directions in dance were the visual artists, particularly those based in New York, who had the greatest opportunity to observe and participate in the new art forms.

One indication of the degree of interest in dance and theatre in the New York art world during the forties is the large number of exhibits devoted to these topics at the Museum of Modern Art during that decade. Eighteen shows between 1940 and 1948 illustrated, described, and generally educated the museum-going public about these two performing arts. These museum exhibitions made available to American artists the full range of work done for the stage by artists of the past half century. On exhibit were the works of Picasso, De Chirico, Masson, Matisse, Eugene Berman, Gonthcharova, Chagall, Tchelitchew, Pierre Roy, Leon Bakst, Ernst, Seligmann, Leger, Dali, and Rivera.[2]

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[1]Walter Sorell, The Dance Through The Ages (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1967) p. 189. Cf. Don McDonagh, The Complete Guide to Modern Dance (Garden City: Doubleday Co., 1976). McDonagh's compilation includes a discussion and choreochronicle of all the major modern dancers of this century, describing many of their most important pieces and tracing the development of the art.

[2]See Appendix 2 for a complete list of exhibits. In addition to this large number of exhibits devoted to dance and theatre, live performances occasionally accompanied Museum of Modern Art exhibitions. Thus, native Indian dances were performed as part of the 1941 exhibit, Indian Art of The United States, 22 January- 27 April.

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Even if members of this community were not already attending the dance concerts and theatre, they were made aware of the principal performers through such photographic displays as Modern American Dance, 1945, a compendium of the pioneers and founders of this new art by its best-known photographer, Barbara Morgan.[1] A regular feature of these exhibitions was the didactic approach, and there were a number of small-scale shows which illustrated and explained the step-by-step process of stage set design, starting with the initial sketch and finishing with scale models.[2]

Nevelson recalls in her autobiography:

> And at that time dance was a vital force. It was like dance was carrying America at that time. Martha Graham, by the nature of her spirit, by the nature of her energy, by her presence and

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[1]Modern American Dance, Museum of Modern Art, 28 March-29 April 1945. Included in this exhibit were fifteen photographs of Martha Graham's company and examples of works by Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm, Charles Weidman, Helen Tamiris, Merce Cunningham, and others. Barbara Morgan, along with John Martin, dance critic of the New York Times, wrote explanatory texts which accompanied the photographs.

[2]Designing a Stage Setting, Museum of Modern Art, 1 July-15 July 1941. This brief exhibition included detailed instructions for each of the steps in the process (World of Illusion: Elements of Stage Design, Museum of Modern Art, 14 October 1947-4 January 1948). This exhibit contained examples of some outstanding European and American set designs, e.g., Kurt Schmidt's Mechanical Bullet, Weimar, 1923; Lothar Schrek von Trapp's Angeina, Darmstadt, c. 1930; and Isamu Noguchi's Errand into The Maze, New York, 1947. In the text accompanying this exhibit the visual elements, such as contour, volume, color, and light, were discussed separately, and the remarks made about lighting could have struck a responsive chord in Nevelson: "Lighting may be termed the fourth dimension of the stage and its magic qualities should be explored and employed as imaginatively as the examples indicate. In the extreme, lighting alone can make a complete set," (installation photographs, Museum of Modern Art). See also Emily Genauer, "Modern Art and the Ballet--The Trend is Toward Separation," Theatre Arts, 35,no. 10 (October 1951) 16-17, 75-77.

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> intensity, reflected our times. Graham was undoubtedly movement of the twentieth century. She was a pioneer.[1]

Nevelson's enthusiasm for modern dance inspired her not only to attend dance concerts weekly, but also to take up the study of this new art form. It was not the mastery of technique that intrigued her, but rather the promise of freedom that modern dancers held out to their devotees. Fundamental to all modern dance is this concept of freedom which developed partly in reaction to the rigidly formal balletic tradition and partly in response to the individualistic philosophy inherent in the new art form. "Modern dance in its strongest impulses looks within the individual whose expressive needs then determine the types of gesture that will emerge when the dancer starts to move."[2]

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 67; Dorothy Dehner, interview, 5 December 1975; David Margolis, interview, 11 June 1976. Both recalled the intense interest they had in modern dance in the thirties, and how they and many other artists would regularly attend concerts. The WPA was a factor in these interrelated interests, and artists and dancers would frequently be teaching or working in the same institutions, e.g., YMHA's and hospitals. See, for example, the catalogue for the YMHA on Ninety-Second Street, 1938-1939 Educational Bulletin. As part of their WPA assignments, Ibram Lassaw and Louise Nevelson were teaching sculpture and painting respectively. Martha Graham, Agnes de Mille, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm, and Anna Sokolow were teaching dance and giving concerts there in the same year (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art). Dorothy Dehner had developed her enthusiasm for modern dance in California where she had studied it. Like Nevelson, who later became a friend, Dehner continued to dance for many years, which may in part explain the presence of numerous dancing figures in the oeuvre of her first husband, David Smith.

[2]McDonagh, Modern Dance, p. 1. In Martha Graham's movie, A Dancer's World, 1957, she states that the central goal of the dancer is to "Submit yourself to the demands of your craft so that you may finally be free. The dancer's goal is freedom through discipline" (Dance Division, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center Division).

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It is no accident, then, that Martha Graham was Nevelson's favorite among the pioneers, for she perceived this devoutly serious dancer as someone who, unlike herself, had never compromised in her pursuit of personal freedom and artistic achievement. In an interesting lapse of memory, Nevelson once stated: "It takes a Martha Graham who never married and never had children to control her body. . . ." In fact, Martha Graham did marry at mid-career, the first man she included in her company--Erick Hawkins.[1]

However great was Nevelson's admiration for Miss Graham, she selected for herself a very different sort of teacher--Ellen Kearns, a woman whom she met through Diego Rivera and John Flannagan in 1932.

Ellen Kearns had studied and worked with Edwin Strawbridge, had also been trained in physical movement, and was a skillful masseuse. In her classes she taught students to relate body movement to expressive emotional content, attempting to free them both physically and psychologically.[2] Nevelson recalls: "Now Eddy Strawbridge taught modern

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview with Arnold Glimcher, n.d. Arnold Glimcher Collection; Don McDonagh, Martha Graham: A Biography (New York: Popular Library Praeger Publishers, 1973-75), p. 210. Graham's total devotion to her work was legendary and had been noted by her colleagues and teachers at Denishawn. Her marriage to Hawkins enhanced rather than interrupted Graham's career. Hawkins proved to be an able teacher, administrator, and fund raiser, and their liaison inspired some of her greatest pieces: Deaths and Entrances, Appalachian Spring, Cave of the Heart, and Night Journey (ibid., see below, pp.

[2]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 65. Ellen Kearns was known only to her small circle of faithful students and never performed publicly. The only printed record of her existence during her lifetime was a small notice in Dance Events:

> "Ellen Kearns, former assistant of Edwin Strawbridge, has been getting much praise from physicians for her corrective work. She believes that when the body has been corrected, there is life and joy and one wants to dance" (December 13, 1932, p. 14).

Her students were mostly women and included among them Nevelson's sister Lillian Mildwoff, Francis Herridge, later a dance critic for the New

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dance and Ellen always claimed she didn't teach dance, she taught eurhythmics. The difference being--dance has a form and eurhythmics touches the life force and is freer. It is inner rhythm."[1]

Kearns seems to have been a combination dance teacher, dance therapist, and spiritual advisor. Some of her ideas,taken from teaching notes, were recently published in a book by a former student, Blanche Howard--Dance of The Self--and are worth examining, since they appear to have deeply impressed Nevelson, Kearns' student, assistant, and personal friend for twenty years.

Much of Kearns' teaching comes out of Eastern philosophy and concerns the dualism of flesh and spirit:

> In man's physical body reside all the glories attainable in his long, unending pilgrimage of evolution. In it are stored all the possibilities of the spirit. . . . By way of the glorification and the spiritualization of the flesh, man may achieve oneness with the divinity within himself, and so with the divine life of the world. The body reflects the spirit. The body must be the spirit's channel of release, not its prison.

The aim of her method is to arouse or release the "flow of rhythm" that is contained within the body. "The mind must be trained to relax, renounce, and abandon itself to the pattern. Only then will the unscheduled, unplanned . . . come into being and use the body to express its own fulfillment, peace, poise, and joy."[2]

York Post, and Mary Farkas, later an exponent and teacher of Zen Buddhism at the first Zen Institute in New York (Mary Farkas, telephone interview, 17 August 1976).

[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 66.

[2]Blanche Howard, Dance of The Self: Movements for Body, Mind, and Spirit (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), pp. 15-16.

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One further idea significant for Nevelson's later artistic development concerns the kind of spatial flow which results from her environmental exhibits of the late fifties. "When the rhythmic pattern has been established for some time, the very walls of the instrument [body] seem to fall away and the space inside joins the space in the room. Then the room space joins the outside space which joins the sky."[1]

What follows is a description of Kearns' classes and of Louise Nevelson by Mary Farkas, a fellow Kearns student during the late thirties:

> We would start with certain exercises that were very valuable. . . like stretching your arms up without bringing them down for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. The movements were done slowly. . . . There were other types of relaxation exercises which you would do in a descending spiral and might take three-quarters of an hour to do, or hanging over from the hips doing things that would eventually lead to jumping, running, or leaping. The movements were very slow and often self-initiated, with an emphasis on waiting, moving slowly, and developing ways of moving in a freer way spontaneously. Classes were small and the students frequently stayed for many years working both individually and with Ellen in groups. Louise was a serious student and benefited very much. She became much freer. She [Louise] had an interesting body, rather like what we used to think of as modern sculpture at that time--very heavy--not fat--sort of an earthy quality. Many of the movements which were done were very deep to the ground and Louise was very good at that.[2]

Nevelson recalls the personal benefits that her study of dance seemed to provide:

> I became aware of every fiber, and it freed me, so that if I pick up a cup, or if I put on something--that livingness is all with the same kind of thinking that I put in my work. Now this was all new to me--modern dancing and the vitality. And I question whether I'd have had the energy I have without studying with her that we can tap and regenerate our own energy. I think physical activity can be a great source of intelli-

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Mary Farkas, interview, 17 August 1976.

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> gence. Modern dance certainly makes you aware of movement and that moving from the center of the being is where we generate and create our own energy.[1]

In time Kearns became more involved in the study of metaphysics and tried to become a spiritual healer, selecting certain students such as Nevelson as assistants in this quest. Kearns studied with Georgia Perkins and Irwin Seal, the latter an advocate of New Thought, a branch of Christian Science.[2]

Since Nevelson began her extended period of study with Kearns in 1933, at precisely the time in which she was floundering in both her personal and artistic life, it is likely that these studies had a profound and lasting effect on the development of her philosophy and upon the nature of her work. It is even possible that this intense concentration on her own body and its movements in space was an important factor in her decision to turn to sculpture which might be seen as the concrete residue and tracing of the temporary positions taken by the body as it moves through space. Several pieces of Nevelson's sculpture done in the late thirties or early forties are examples of this. Both are entitled Dancer (figs. 120, 121). Mike Nevelson confirmed this hypothesis in an interview when he said that the sculpture his mother made in the thirties and early forties was consciously

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 65-66. Nevelson's admiration of modern dance coincided with her esteem for Picasso, and she combines the two in a curious statement: "Picasso is a true dancer; even the most abstract piece is involved with proportion and rhythm; he does not even have to dance" (Louise Nevelson, interview with Tal Streeter, New York, 25 November 1959; Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art, transcript, p. 7).

[2]Mary Farkas, interview, 17 July 1976.

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derived from her studies with Ellen Kearns.[1]

The many years of study that Nevelson devoted to dance and dramatics were primarily dedicated to her own personal and spiritual growth rather than to the development of marketable skills as a performer. Thus, it was generally only in the privacy of her home that she performed or danced, often with her assistant Ted Hazeltine.[2] The nature of the dance that she had learned from Ellen Kearns was not public. "The dance, being a private or communal ecstasy, is not widely known. Its devotees have seldom used it for concert purposes, for the act of exhibiting takes away from its interiorality."[3]

It is not difficult to see in retrospect that the spiritual goals inherent in the teachings of Kearns and Matchabelli found their

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[1]Mike Nevelson, interview, 29 July 1977. Nevelson's continued interest in dance is reflected in the title of one work done in 1945, a bronze, Modern Dance, exhibited in 1946 (Edward Alden Jewell, "Inness, an Annual, Modernism," New York Times, 21 April 1946), and another done later in 1953, the etching, Dancing Figure (Baro no. 5). This latter piece may also have been influenced by Nevelson's recent exposure to American Indian dances (see above p. 80). Nevelson's enthusiasm for dance was also expressed in poetic fantasy, and she often referred to dreams or daydreams in which she saw her own sculpture dancing:

> "My head is in a whirl
> a swing and a dance
> My figures are coming,
> going where?
> Their [sic] light and their [sic] bright
> I love them so there,
> My figures are dancing and
> going and where?"

(Undated poem, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.)

[2]Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 14 July 1976.

[3]Howard, Dance of Self, p. 16.

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way into Nevelson's sculpture and into her understanding of the creative process. Her conception that the glorification of self was the primary aim in life and art was an idea catalyzed by Kearns' exhortation that her students must get in touch with the divinity within themselves. This kind of thinking encouraged the same type of self-aggrandizement evident in the surrealist approach to life and art, and one can easily see how the surrealist artists' understanding of themselves as performers would have seemed compatible to Nevelson.

The surrealist penchant for self-dramatization has been admirably expressed in a recent book by Nahma Sandrow, Surrealism: Theatre, Arts, Ideas:

> . . . . in art as in life surrealists were constantly engaged in dramatizing themselves. They were constantly performing, reading writings aloud, exhibiting paintings and sculpture as part of performances, bending efforts in painting and sculpture deliberately toward scenery and costumes for performances. . . . And the surrealist artist's own personality, dramatized, generally dominated his own work.[1]

The antics of Dali and Duchamp come to mind as examples.[2]

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[1]Nahma Sandrow, Surrealism: Theatre, Arts, Ideas (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 35.

[2]Marcel Duchamp is perhaps the prototypic artist with regard to self-dramatization. The identification of an ordinary object as a work of art, through the mere addition of a signature, is a perfect example of this attitude as revealed in Duchamp's Readymades. The idea for these, as well as other aspects of his exhibitionistic behavior, followed from the irreverence of the Dada years. So, too, did Duchamp's many photographs and references to himself as Rose Sélavy. The appearances of both Dali and Duchamp in films and performances with shocking content or style, e.g., Relâche, 1924, Entr'acte, 1924, Le Chien Andalou, 1929, L'Age d'Or, 1930, are also examples of this attitude. In America, Dali was the surrealist who received the most public attention. "The surrealists' impact is popularly likely to be measured by the antics of Dali, who moved with reporters and photographers frothing in his wake. For a dozen years his bizarre and sensational actions were flooded by the light of publicity"(Blesh, Modern Art, p. 167 ff. See also Werner Bokelberg, Salvador Dali,

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Nevelson's years of studying drama and dance encouraged her receptivity to the notion of the self-dramatizing artist. We have already noted that aspect in her first thematically titled show, Circus: The Clown is the Center of His World, in 1943. The placement of the clown (an arch surrealist subject in itself) as the central focus of the exhibit may be seen as a glorification for the performer who not only sets the stage, but is the principal presence within it.[1] Nevelson, in seeing herself as the central figure of this circus, may also have been remembering Martha Graham's very successful recent dance, Every Soul is a Circus. When Graham premiered this work in New York in December, 1939, it was her first light-hearted piece, and her second in thirteen years to include male dancers. Like Nevelson's Circus, Graham's dance was an anomoly in her stylistic development. Making herself empress of the arena, she also satirizes the character of a silly woman who has difficulty choosing between two men. Also similar to Nevelson's format, Graham includes in the pieces dancers who represent spectators as well as performers.[2] The works

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Dada Dali [Bremen: Walther H. Schünemann, 1966]). As surrealism grew away from Dada, the public expressions of a theatrical sort appeared more frequently within the context of exhibitions, e.g., International Surrealist Exhibition, Paris 1938; First Papers of Surrealism, New York, 1942 (see Rubin, Surrealism, pp. 268-277).

[1]The clown motif appealed to the surrealists for several reasons. It matched their interests in costumes, the ridiculous, practical jokes, and all types of humor (see Sandrow, Surrealism, p. 28). A few years later Nevelson used the clown theme again in a bronze entitled The Clown with The World in The Palm of His Hand (fig. 122). In both instances the titles reflect Nevelson's grandiose conception of the clown.

[2]McDonagh, Martha Graham, pp. 142-143.

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in Nevelson's show which represent performers are The Blues Singer, The Trapeze Artists (fig. 123), The Juggler, Brother Act (fig. 124), and The Luna Man. The spectators are The Lonely Child, The Truckman, The Philosopher, and The Forsaken Man. These four were put together in a composite piece also called Audience Figures[1] (fig. 6).

The next self-image that Nevelson places at the center of an exhibit is The Bride of The Black Moon (fig. 13) from Ancient Games, Ancient Places in 1955. That she perceived herself to be The Bride is confirmed by the fact that she willingly accepted that appellation in letters from friends at the time.[2] In the instance of this exhibit, several remarkable coincidences suggest the importance of dance, and Martha Graham in particular, as influential to Nevelson. Nevelson's continuing discomfort about her personal life, and the difficulties and uncertainties of being above all other things a professional artist, stimulated in her a great curiosity about the personal and professional lives of prominent American women, particularly those in the arts. Her admiration for Martha Graham was enormous, and having closely followed Graham's career from the twenties, she would have been alert to any important developments, either personal or professional.

In 1940, after two years of collaboration, Martha Graham began living with Erick Hawkins, the dancer she placed opposite her in the many pieces she designed around their relationship. These works, now

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[1]See above, p. 6, note 1. On the evidence of photographs taken by John Schiff at the time of the exhibit, it appears that the composite piece represented the four spectators included within the category: "The Crowd Outside."

[2]Dido Smith, interview, 21 June 1977.

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famous, which explored both the joy and pain inherent in the subject, often included sets designed by Isamu Noguchi--Appalachian Spring (fig. 125) 1944, Dark Meadow 1946, Cave of the Heart (fig. 126) 1946, Night Journey 1947. In 1948 Hawkins and Graham were married and by 1950 they had separated. For ten years Graham had lived with Hawkins, a man fourteen years her junior.

Although he had choreographed some dances while part of the Graham company, Hawkins did not produce his first truly independent pieces until 1952 when he did a concert of three new dances at the Hunter Playhouse. The first of these was entitled The Bridegroom of The Moon (fig. 127), and the set was designed by Louise Bourgeois. Hawkins had been moved by the looming vertical wood pieces of Bourgeois which he had seen at her exhibit in 1950 at the Peridot Gallery[1] (fig. 103). Nevelson, a good friend of Louise Bourgeois since at least 1944, would have been likely to attend this dance program designed by the former husband of one of the women she most admired. Surely the similarity in titles cannot be accidental. The unattainable moon serves equally as spouse for Hawkins and Nevelson. Nevelson never did design sets for dance or theatre. She claims that she was not sufficiently prominent as an artist to be chosen, however much she would have liked the opportunity.[2]

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[1]Program of New Dances, Program of Erick Hawkins Concert, Hunter Playhouse, New York, 19 January 1952 (Louise Bourgeois Collection, Archives of American Art). The only one dance which seems to have survived this performance is Openings of The Eye, with designs by Dorazio. Hawkins' choreochronicle does not include the other two dances--Bridegroom of The Moon and Lives of Five or Six Swords (see McDonagh, Modern Dance, p. 302, and M. L. Gordon Norton, ed., Five Essays on The Dance of Erick Hawkins [New York: Foundation for Modern Dance, n.d.]).

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 27 July 1976. Nevelson's interest in designing for dance is revealed in a pencil drawing dated 1937 and titled "For Dance Design" (fig. 128), The Collection of the Whitney

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The theme of Nevelson's next show at the Grand Central Moderns Gallery, Royal Voyage, may also be related to a Martha Graham work. In 1947 Graham choreographed one of her most famous dances, Night Journey. The theme of this piece centers on Queen Jocasta's discovery of her true relationship to Oedipus and her consequent suicide. In 1953 Graham introduced a new work, Voyage, which was basically an erotic frolic with three men a great deal younger than she was. Isamu Noguchi designed the sets for both of these dances.[1]

Nevelson's Voyage is ostensibly a trip to unknown lands by way of the sea. However, the presence of a King and Queen suggests that the theme of the exhibit may not be that distant from that of Graham's dance. At the very least, Nevelson placed herself in a starring role in both this and the previous show and, as in Graham's work, the female characters carry more weight and substance than do those of the male. Nevelson's personification of herself as the Queen in this exhibit was confirmed in a recent interview where she also related her childhood dreams of glory to placing herself at the center of her work.[2] The exhibition in which Nevelson's interest in the performing arts was clearly revealed was Moon Garden + One. Until this exhibit the evidence

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Museum of American Art . The figures depicted show some resemblance to Kachinas and probably reflect the popularity of American Indian art during the thirties (see above, pp. 79-83).

[1]McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 223. Night Journey was one of the very few pieces Graham allowed to have filmed (ibid., p. 200). The sets and costumes by Isamu Noguchi have been frequently illustrated, and the stylized bed (fig.129), which resembles Noguchi's Kouros 1945, was successfully integrated into the dance and frequently served as a support or central focus for the performers.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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of such an interest was subtle or indirect, probably the result of its not being consciously perceived by the artist. But in Moon Garden these influences coalesced in such a way as to turn the installation into a theatrical setting. Nevelson originally wished to use no lights at all for the show, but the ingenious solution of the gallery's owner, Edwin Barrie, prevailed several hours before the opening. Sympathetic to the effect she was seeking, Barrie suggested colored light, and demonstrated by throwing a blue scarf over a lamp. Nevelson acceded and the installation was then lit with a small number of blue lights.[1]

The theatrical nature of this solution was evident to all, but it clearly suited the artist's intentions. Once the pieces had been set in their final arrangement and the lighting was determined, Nevelson and her assistant, Ted Hazeltine, proceeded to do what they did frequently at home at the end of a day's work--they danced. On this occasion, she removed her blouse and the two of them did what seemed like a ritual dance in front of the sculpture.

Ted, her devoted young helper for twelve years, was a dancer before coming to work for Nevelson and, interestingly, bore some resemblance to Erick Hawkins. She and Ted would occasionally dance in the evening for friends who came to visit. After his death in 1964 she almost completely stopped dancing.[2] Undoubtedly the presence in her household of a young man devoted to dance reinforced Nevelson's long interest in that art. Some sense of this was communicated through her sculpture, and critics such as Emily Genauer, in 1958, had noted

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[1]Colette Roberts, interview with Arnold Glimcher, New York, 1 June 1970 (Arnold Glimcher Papers, transcript, p. 27).

[2]Colette Roberts' interview with Glimcher, 1 June 1970, pp. 6-7.

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qualities reminiscent of Martha Graham in relating "A Cave of the Heart" to Moon Garden + One.[1]

Nevelson's interest in the work of Martha Graham alerted her to the set designs of Isamu Noguchi, one of the prominent young modern American sculptors during the thirties and forties. Through his work for Martha Graham he had become the sculptor most closely related to dance in America. By 1958 he had done thirteen sets for Graham and two for Hawkins. Then he made one for Merce Cunningham, and one for Yuriko, both former members of Graham's company. In addition, he created the controversial sets for King Lear in the Stratford Shakespeare Theatre production in 1955. His work for dance and theatre was frequently illustrated and discussed in art periodicals.[2]

In the forties, at the height of his collaboration with Graham, Noguchi did a series of sculptures called Lunars. These pieces were landscapes, lit with electrical bulbs hidden within the work. One such work, Lunar Landscape (fig. 131), was included in his only one-man show in New York during the forties at the Egan Gallery in 1948. The relationship of these works to Noguchi's work in theatre was a conscious one for the artist and obvious to the rest of the art

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[1]Emily Genauer, "Abstract Art with Meaning," 5 January 1958.

[2]See, for example, Judith Kaye Reed, "Noguchi Sets The Stage for Martha Graham," Art Digest, 19, no. 17 (1 June 1945) 13; idem, "Art on Stage," Art Digest, 20, no. 10 (1 February 1946) 10; Alfred Frankfurter, "The Controversial Noguchi Sets for Lear," Art News, 54, no. 8 (December 1955) 42-43. See Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Thomas B. Hess, "Isamu Noguchi '46," in "An Art News Contemporary Contour," Art News, 45, no. 7 (September 1946) 50; Doris Hering, "American Dance: a 'growing up,'" Dance Magazine (January 1957).

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world as well.[1] It is probable that the theme and the mood of this series played some role in Nevelson's design of the Moon Garden + One exhibition.

In addition, Noguchi's interest in creating sculpture for gardens and gardens for sculpture may also have influenced Nevelson. We have already noted her suggestibility with regard to themes treated by artists and performers she admired. During the two years immediately preceding Nevelson's landmark show, Noguchi was in Paris working on the well-publicised Unesco sculpture garden, and he had recently created a sculpture garden in Hartford, Connecticut.[2] Perhaps Nevelson felt the wish to create a garden of her own that would bring her the recognition accorded to a fellow sculptor.

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[1]Noguchi's friendship with the inventive Kiesler was an additional spur to such a theatrical device. No doubt Noguchi, as well as Nevelson, was also acquainted with the slightly earlier use of light in sculpture by Ibram Lassaw in his several shadow boxes entitled Compositions with Light, 1938 (fig. 131) (Communication with Nancy Grove, 6 November 1977.) See Irving Sandler, "Ibram Lassaw," in Ferber, Hare, Lassaw: Three American Sculptors, E. C. Goossen, R. Goldwater, I. Sandler (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959), p. 49. See also Noguchi's statement on Lunar Landscape in Abram Lerner, ed., The Hirshhorn: Museum and Sculpture Garden (Smithsonian Institution, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), p. 730.

[2]Noguchi's first gardens were done in Tokyo at the Kieyo Universith in 1951-52. See "Projects: faculty retreat building, Kieyo University; Garden and sculpture for Reader's Digest Office, Tokyo." Arts and Architecture, 69 (June 1952), pp. 24-26. They were followed by a series of four interior gardens for the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company Building in Hartford in 1956-57. See "Sculpture for the New Connecticut General Life Insurance Building," Craft Horizons, vol.19 (January-February 1959) p. 11. Noguchi's sculptural work for gardens culminated in the Unesco commission. Six of the world's most famous sculptors were selected to design sculpture for the newly constructed Unesco Building in Paris. They were: Picasso, Miro, Arp, Calder, Moore, and Noguchi. See Aline Saarinen, review of Unesco sculpture, New York Times, 13 June 1956; J. E. Buchard, "Unesco House Appraised: The Noguchi Garden," Architectural Record, vol. 127 (May 1960), p. 156.

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Noguchi was not the only sculptor to work for Martha Graham. Calder had done one set in 1936 and Frederick Kiesler did two in 1951 and 1952 when Noguchi was in Europe and Japan.[1] Kiesler's experience as noted above goes back to the twenties, and among his varied pursuits he continued this involvement with theatre in America, serving as director of scenic design at Juilliard School of Music from 1934 to 1937, and designing a number of sets for both Julliard and the Metropolitan Opera Company. As with Noguchi's work for the theatre, Kiesler's also was reported and illustrated in art periodicals[2] (figs. 132, 133, 134).

Even a cursory comparison of Noguchi's and Kiesler's sets with the Moon Garden installation (figs. 38-40) indicates the difference in style and conception of that exhibit from true set design. Noguchi's

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[1]Calder's contributions to the design for Panorama, 1936, were decor elements rather than the whole set. He created some overhead discs which moved when the dancers pulled lines attached to their wrists and also connected to the discs. The dance was reviewed as a failure after its first performance in Vermont, and Graham did not rework it. She also linked its lack of success partly to Calder, and never again invited him to design for her (McDonagh, Graham, pp. 108-110). For Kiesler's design work for Graham, see McDonagh, Graham, pp. 219-220.

[2]An excellent bibliography on Kiesler was compiled by Lucy Lippard for the catalogue, Frederick Kiesler: Environmental Sculpture, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1964. Specific articles related to Kiesler's work for theatre include: Frederick Kiesler, "Notes on Improving Theatre Design," Theatre Arts Monthly (New York) 18, no. 9 (September 1934) 726-728; Frederick Kiesler, "Mozart: 1956-1756," Art News, 54, no. 9 (January 1956) 22-25, 58; Kiesler, "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," Progressive Architecture; "Costume Designs [and settings] by Frederick Kiesler for 'Helen Retires,'" Theatre Arts Monthly, 18, no. 5 (May 1934) 358-359; "Stage Scenery," Architectural Record, 81, no. 484 (March 1937) 142-144; "Kiesler's 'Endless Theatre,' Demountable Tent with Flexible Stage for Ellenville Empire State Festival," Interiors, 116, no. 2 (September 1956) 114-116.

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expressly spare sets have a strong evocative power in spite of the restraint in number and size of the elements he uses. This reserve on the part of the sculptor provides the dancer with opportunities for expressive interaction with the setting. Kiesler's work is considerably less austere, and from photographs (figs. 133, 134), the performers seem somewhat overwhelmed by the dramatic effects of the sets themselves.

Closer to Kiesler than Noguchi, Nevelson's installation appears as an interminable accumulation which, like the forest at night, threatens to engulf the spectator. Her intention of opening the exhibit without lights perhaps indicates that she alone need know the terrain, since she, not strangers, will inhabit it.

This conception of the artist as a performer in a world of his own making was, as we have seen, a common surrealist notion. It was also one of the ideas which most appealed to American artists who, through the evolution of "action painting" carried the dramatic and often anarchic stunts of the surrealists to a new plateau where the props were brushes, paint, and canvas rather than the string, bouncing balls, or raining taxis which the surrealists had included in their large exhibitions of 1938 and 1942.[1]

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[1]See above p. 89 for discussion of the 1942 exhibition. Dali's "Rainy Taxi" was a shocking feature in the 1938 Paris International Surrealist Exhibition at the Galerie Beaux Arts (see Rubin, Surrealism, p. 268, 285, 416n.). Both Sandrow and Kirby make this connection between the surrealist gesture and action painting:

> "The dissolution of distinctions between life and art helps explain a phenomenon which we have already observed in connection with the surrealist artist's life style: 'gestures' or 'manifestations' of behavior were equivalent to art works. . . . The merging of life and art also led to a kind of theatricalization of art. Action paintings, for example, offer for the spectator's view the action as well as the canvas - the verb 'painting' as well as the noun...." Sandrow, Surrealism, pp. 66-67; see also Michael Kirby, Happenings

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We have already noted the probable influence of leading abstract expressionists on Nevelson's enlarged scale, but it would be interesting to explore the possible correlation of the work and ideas of GeorgesMathieu, a French descendent of the American school, who was brought to Nevelson's studio in October 1957, three months before her new show.[1] His admiration of her work may have had to do with the recognition of a kindred spirit. His own flamboyance, evident both in his painting and publicity stunts, won him a notoriety during the fifties both in Europe and the United States with articles in Time Magazine as well as Art News.[2] The feverish reenactment of scenes from history, including costumes and audience, were part of his "painting methods." In retrospect this seems like the ultimate surrealist mockery of an American progeny which took itself very seriously. Thus, splashing and dripping paint a la Pollock, he completed his canvas, The Battle of Bouvines (fig. 135) purportedly in the same length of time and with some of the same gestures as had occurred during the actual battle.

(New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1965) p. 26 ff. Nevelson's conception of art bears resemblance on this point to both surrealist and action painters. "I was dedicated, and art and creation was not art and creation, but it was a place to live in and breathe in" (Louise Nevelson, interview with Arnold Glimcher, 30 January 1973. Oral History Program, Archives of American Art). A reference to artist-performers appears in Judith Kaye Reed's review of Kiesler's unusual installation of the exhibit, "Bloodflames 1947," at the Hugo Gallery. This exhibit included works by David Hare, Isamu Noguchi, and Matta at the height of their surrealist inclinations ("Kiesler, the Tent-Maker, Does Modern Decor," Art Digest, 21, no. 12 [15 March 1947] 15. See also Ashton, New York School, p. 115).

[1]Roberts, Nevelson, p. 74. Mathieu was the first European artist to buy Nevelson's work and he was instrumental in creating interest in Europe about her and her work (ibid., pp. 23-24).

[2]"The Fox of Paris," Time Magazine, 7 March 1955.

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Nevelson may well have been encouraged by the theatricality of her new supporter to take the step which launched her own dramatic entrance as an art-scene star. The unorthodox lighting and presentation of Moon Garden + One were theatrical gestures that were immediately recognized as such by the art world.

Mathieu's influence and the general interest in the artist as performer extended beyond the confines of Europe and America. In the mid-fifties Mathieu made a whirlwind publicity tour to Japan which included a very popular television appearance in which he was seen "rushing furiously up ladders in costume to paint a huge mural." By 1956 a group of Japanese artists, calling themselves Gutai, had been formed and began to stage a series of events that demonstrated their uninhibited and expanded use of action in painting, such as painting with their feet (fig. 136) or throwing bottles of paint at canvases. These artists were responding to the most daring aspects of artist performances on the contemporary scene. They later invited selected abstract expressionists such as Pollock, De Kooning, and Kline to participate in their exhibitions and be represented in the periodical which reported their activities, Gutai.[1]

Like the Gutai, Nevelson was able to adapt the surrealist concept of artist as performer to suit her own needs and style. The concomitant surrealist notion of spectator, or viewer, as performer was not so compatible to Nevelson and required some revision. One of the

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[1]Kirby, Happenings, pp. 28-29; Ray Falk, "Japanese Innovators," New York Times, 8 December 1957. See also Gutai, the periodical published in Japan which reported on the activities of this group and their international colleagues.

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aims of surrealist artists was the creation of basic oneness of artist and audience. Sandrow uses Marcel Duchamp's definition to explain this: 'Surrealist art was an act which must be completed by the spectator. . . . Art should break down the association between the object and onlooker and in breaking down these limitations free the spirit of man."

Sandrow elaborates: ". . . The thrust of every surrealist art work is toward forcing artist and audience into instantaneous temporary personal union."[1]

Although this was certainly not Nevelson's approach to her work, there are aspects of her sculpture that bear some resemblance to this notion. As early as 1942, Nevelson made sculpture with movable parts. In the Norlyst Circus show a year later, she included several pieces with movable parts (fig. 2), provided wheels and pull strings for another group (fig. 5), and designed some small pieces to be played with as blocks or toys (fig. 3). The spectator at the Norlyst show was actively encouraged to participate by moving and playing with the pieces. In addition, he must have felt included in the environment as he walked around on sand and marbles.

This type of participation is very similar to the behavior expected from the spectator at the two famous surrealist installations the previous year. The boys playing ball in the midst of the string-crossed room at the First Papers of Surrealism could not have seemed more incongruous, and the viewer who had to use peepholes and turn wheels to see art

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[1]From Katherine Dreier and Matta Echaurren, Duchamp's Glass: An Analytic Reflection (New York: Societé Anonyme Inc., Museum of Modern Art, 1944) n.p., in Sandrow, Surrealism, pp. 79-80.

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works at The Art of the Century Gallery was invited to be equally active.

The next occasion on which Nevelson exhibited pieces with movable parts was in 1954 when she exhibited some of the game pieces (fig. 21) later included in the Grand Central Moderns show, Ancient Games, Ancient Places. These pieces, with rotating interchangeable parts, were to provide spectator and artist with the option to move or to change the sculpture. "I wanted to move around and have things moving. . . . Also one person could have many images from one piece if they wanted it,"[1] said the artist of this show.

In Nevelson's 1957 Forest exhibit the spectator also had an opportunity to participate. Nevelson recalls that at the entrance to the exhibit there was a tray of abstract wood forms with which the viewer could play and compose. A confidential checklist of the Forest show included the following statement: "Near the entrance (right) is YOUR GAME. The onlooker can make it his own by assembling the pieces as he sees fit."[2] This token gesture, made to involve the spectator, is reminiscent of Nevelson's inclusion of small, wood block toys in the Circus show. Leaving the bulk of work undisturbed, the viewer is invited to play at the sidelines. It is as though the voice of Kiesler gently reminds her not to forget the audience while she builds her world.

A certain aspect of audience participation extended to Nevelson's walls of boxes for the first few years of their manufacture. Any customer who bought more than one was free to arrange and reposition them

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 131.

[2]The Forest, Gallery Installation List, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

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as he pleased. Nevelson, herself, constantly rearranged them, and photographs of the early walls show a number of different combinations for the same walls. Elements from different parts of Moon Garden + One (figs. 38, 39) have been incorporated into Sky Cathedral (fig. 117), at the Museum of Modern Art, and the two versions of Tropical Garden (figs. 50, 51).

Nevelson's penchant for games and movable game pieces was probably inspired, or at least encouraged, by similar surrealist inclinations. Numerous examples of these interests were known to American artists. The most prominent was Marcel Duchamp's fascination with chess, the game which had purportedly replaced his desire to make art objects.

This cerebral pastime seemed the perfect surrealist occupation. With its symbolic regal and courtly figures and its complex maneuvering, it appealed both as an activity in itself and as a subject for art to a number of surrealist artists. Julien Levy found a sufficient number of works related to this theme to put on an exhibition entitled Imagery of Chess at his gallery in 1944. The work of Max Ernst dominated this show, as he had included the large sculpture The King Playing with the Queen (fig. 137), a set of chess pieces, and Vox Angelica. Other works on the chess theme by Duchamp, Kay Sage, Dorothea Tanning, Julien Levy, Man Ray, Leon Kelley, and Harold Steiner were included. André Breton and Nicolas Calas had set up an incongruously dadaist table of variously filled glasses and bowls and, true to form for a surrealist exhibit, the lighting of Ernst's horned sculpture was perceived as eerie by reviewers.[1]

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[1]For a discussion of the exhibit and events leading up to it, see J. G. "Presenting the Imagery of Chess," Art Digest, 19, no. 6 (15 December 1944) 11; Julien Levy, "A Summer in Long Island," in

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At the end of the fifties, after a decade of relative quiet on the surrealist front, unusual multimedia events began to occur on the New York cultural scene with growing frequency. These were eventually called "happenings" by the prime mover in this scene, Alan Kaprow, a young artist-art historian. Kaprow's shows in New York at the Hansa Gallery presented works done with increasingly crude materials and treatment through 1957. In May of 1958, Kaprow put on an untitled event which included sound and light. Kaprow had been studying with John Cage of the New School since 1956 and was undoubtedly aware of a similar event which had been staged in 1952 at the Black Mountain College with Cage, Charles Olsen, Merce Cunningham, and David Tudor as participants.[1]

Michael Kirby has traced the origins of this movement in his book Happenings.[2] His discussion ranges widely through all the arts including music, dance, cinema, and theatre, and most of the major art movements of the twentieth century. He traces the strands of collage back to the futurists and forward through Schwitters to Rauschenberg. But he places the major responsibility for the rise of happenings on dada and surrealism's partiality for mixed media

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Homage to Max Ernst: Special Issue XX Siecle (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1971) 60-62. See also Rosalind Krauss' discussion of board games strategy in sculpture in "The Magician's Game," pp. 166 ff.

[1]"Kaprow," review, Art News, 57, no. 3 (May 1958) 14. For a description of the Black Mountain event, see Kirby, Happenings, pp. 31-32.

[2]See also Adrian Henri, Total Art: Environments, Happenings, and Performance (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974); Allen Kaprow, Assemblages, Environments, Happenings (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966); Pasadena Art Museum, California, Alan Kaprow Exhibition Catalogue, 1967.

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performances, whether at gallery installations, in the theatre, or on the street. The specific connections to Kaprow go back through Cage to Erik Satie. Curiously, the one person Kirby does not mention is Frederick Kiesler, though he discusses the "Total Theatre" designed but not built by Gropius in 1926 which postdates Kiesler's space stages of 1923 and 1924. Kirby also sees the action painting in abstract expressionism and Georges Mathieu as significant precursors.

What Kirby's review of the origins of happenings makes evident is the timeliness in context of Nevelson's Moon Garden + One exhibition. She shared some of the same sources with Kaprow, i.e., the style of surrealist exhibitions, but she was not interested to an equal degree in spectator participation or mixed media. Her focus was the provision of an appropriate setting for herself as the star performer with a minimal amount of spectator contact.

The One which was added to the Moon Garden was indeed the spectator, but the Plus was an invitation for only a brief entry into the world of its hostess.

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CHAPTER VI

THE CEREMONIAL: ROYALTY, DEATH, MARRIAGE

Royalty

"Theatre is a ceremonial; the performance is a rite. Sculpture in daily life could or should be like this."[1] This statement of Noguchi's could easily apply to Nevelson and to much American sculpture of the mid-twentieth century. A ceremony is a special act which, by its formal character, distinguishes certain events and certain people from the ordinary. The theatre creates the illusion of ceremony about both the ordinary and the extraordinary. Nevelson's conception of herself as an extraordinary person appears in her mature art through the omnipresent sense of ceremony. Royalty, death, and marriage are the three themes in Nevelson's work which provide a framework for her ceremonial style.

The resolution of fantasies formed in childhood underlie the evolution of Nevelson's mature sculptural style, and an investigation of the dynamic and symbolic meanings of these themes will lead to a more profound understanding of her artistic achievement.

Nevelson's insistence that she has created an empire leads one to conclude that she must see herself not only as the architect, but also as the reigning monarch of this realm. Regal fantasies

[1] Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 123, in Krauss, "Magician's Game," p. 177.

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are not uncommon for children, usually as a means of escape from less palatable realities; however, they ordinarily lose their importance in the course of maturation. The adult world's realistic appraisal of life usually contributes to this change. If we consider the actual life of the Berliawsky family in Rockland, Maine, we might understand how much Louise Nevelson's parents may instead have confirmed her childish fantasies.

In Nevelson's childhood, the isolated state of the family, the mother's personality, as well as the father's ambitions, may have given additional food and substance to her juvenile grandiose fantasies. The life of Nevelson's mother was in many ways confined to reverie, in part due to the circumstances of her life in Rockland, and in part to her temperament. Her diffidence in public contrasted strongly with her imperious and often scornful demeanor at home. Her frustrations and unrealized ambitions were felt deeply by her oldest daughter who, in idealizing her mother, identified with her grandiose fantasies. About her mother she said, "a woman who should have been in a palace. I think that's my idea for myself."[1]

When the entire Nevelson family walked into downtown Rockland, dressed with meticulous care in the finest attire available in New England, this sight must have seemed anomolous to the townspeople. The unmasked delight of Isaac Berliawsky in the respectful glances and comments made by his acquaintances as they passed embarrassed his wife who, holding her head even higher, retreated behind her proud carriage. As is often the case with first-generation immigrant

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 6.

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families, the Berliawskys tried to provide opportunities for their children to receive the best that the new land had to offer, and something of the same tradition which has created the concept of the "Jewish Princess" was passed to Louise Nevelson through her parents' hopes and ambitions. It is no surprise, then, that she unhesitatingly accepted the proposal of marriage from Charles Nevelson shortly after their first meeting when she was eighteen.

Compared to the semi-rural quiet of Rockland, life in New York as the lady of a large and luxurious home must have seemed to Louise Nevelson a great step on the road to her goal. Tales of potential wealth and power circulated among the Nevelson brothers' shipping firm, particularly during their association with the White House during the First World War, when they helped to provide ships for the Navy. Louise Nevelson's subsequent disappointment with both the intimacies and social obligations of marriage and motherhood induced a retreat similar to her own mother's, and in the mid-twenties she was frequently stricken with bouts of sciatica and other nameless ailments that would confine her to bed for long stretches of time.[1]

Charles Nevelson's resources declined, and his wife Louise found that the vicarious enjoyments of the cultural scene permitted to women of her social position did not provide adequate satisfaction of her need to act out or display her own capabilities. Her husband's jealously and discretion thwarted even the outlet for exhibitionistic display that had been available to her mother, and

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[1]Anita Berliawsky, Lillian Mildwoff, interview, 13 July 1976; Mike Nevelson, 29 July 1977. The psychogenic nature of these ailments may be inferred from their general absence after the dissolution of her marriage.

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he often forced her to return new articles of clothing which displeased him.[1] This need, thus frustrated in the real world, soon found its outlet in the study of dramatics which began in 1926. Through this, and her later identification with Garbo and Matchabelli, Nevelson could picture herself as star and queen of an illusory realm. It should be noted that she was not alone in her susceptibility to movie star mania, a growing phenomenon since the twenties.[2]

The immensity of Nevelson's need for self-expression led to her eventual separation and divorce, and finally to total devotion to her art. She has expressed some of these needs in poetry:

> The world is built for one
> Two is a jungle
> The world is built for one.
>
> Oh did it take too long to know myself
> Did it take the world, the whole wide world
> to make me see, myself, the self of me . . .[3]

A number of years passed before Nevelson's vocation as a visual artist was firmly established, and the self-doubt expressed in the poetry written in Paris in 1931 and 1932 conveys her state of indecision:

> Why should he who independent be
> Go through the universe at sea?
> Searching from port to port at sea
> Forever for the spot where he belongs.
> By every fiber of his being
> he searches always where he can
> And search for the home that is my destiny.[4]

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[1]Anita Berliawsky, interview, 12 July 1976.

[2]See Richard Schickel, The Stars (New York: Bonanza Books, 1962).

[3]Undated poetry, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

[4]Glimcher, Nevelson, pp. 36-37.

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Nevelson's admiration for some of the artists she met when she returned to New York was partly motivated by her perception of the success they had achieved. Marjorie Eaton's aristocratic bearing, family background and determined self-confidence appealed to Nevelson. But it was not until she saw Diego Rivera lionized by the social elite of New York and Europe that she fully understood the enormous potential for realizing her parents' dreams of glory through a career in art. "I was never in a home like Diego's. Princesses and Queens . . . one lady richer than God. And workmen, laborers. He made no distinction."[1] Nevelson's fascination with aristocracy appears also as one of the motivating factors in her appreciation of Elshemius, and any discussion of him and his work centers on her remarking at length about his distinguished family background.[2]

Nevelson's personal manner and life style have always manifested a combination of regal and earthy qualities. This may be seen not only in her erect carriage, her household of servitors, her captivating and commanding presence, but also in certain elements of her speech. Her notable use of the pronoun "We" instead of "I" seems often to be a usurpation of the royal prerogative. Her friend and dealer in the fifties, Colette Roberts, wrote a short unpublished piece on "Nevelson's We." Roberts recalled Nevelson's use of "We" from their earliest meetings, and analyzed it variously to mean "the desire to be one with those who contribute to the making of her sculpture"; or "the modest way to hide the ego perhaps because the creation and creator are both two

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 57.

[2]Ibid., pp. 39-40. Nevelson owned many works by Louis Elshemius (1864-1941), the American painter "discovered" in 1917 by Marcel Duchamp and admired during the 1930's by the surrealists.

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and one."[1]

Nevelson has made clear her identity as queen and star of her work in a number of ways. As the artist, performer, and creator of an empire, she sees herself at the center of her work. Indeed, she has put representations of herself at the center of a number of exhibitions. The Clown, the Bride of the Black Moon, and the First Personage are examples. In a painting done in 1938 entitled Self Portrait (fig. 138), we see a woman with a hat surmounted by several stars. A few years later Nevelson made a bronze female figure with a star atop its head entitled Female Figure with Star on Her Head (fig. 139), and in 1957 Dorothy Dehner photographed an untitled, undated, reclining figure with a star on its head (fig. 140), in the style of the earlier piece. Unquestionably the identity of all three figures is Nevelson herself. About the star she says, "it could be a crown, five points, I've always felt like star material."[2] The six-pointed star on the head of the reclining figure might refer to Nevelson's Jewish heritage.

When asked to write a statement about herself for the brochure of a show called The Private Myth at the Tanager Gallery in 1961, Nevelson responded with a poem which begins and ends with the words "Queen of the black, black." This matches Nevelson's perception of her favorite color, black, as "the most aristocratic--the color of royalty."[3] Thus, all the pieces fit together. It is no wonder then that the theme of

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[1]Colette Roberts Collection, Archives of American Art; courtesy of Richard Roberts.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

[3]"The Private Myth," catalogue, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art; Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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royalty is pervasive in her oeuvre.

The key to the meaning of this theme can be found in her exhibit Ancient Games (in) Ancient Places, and particularly in the fairy tale poem and the etchings on the walls. In Nevelson's poetic fairy tale, "The Bride of The Black Moon":

> Goes to many continents
> She plays games
> She sees the Sphynx [sic]
>
> Prometheus and the images on the walls
> are images she remembers . . .
> She is soon to take another voyage . . .[1]

On a conscious level, the voyages to which Nevelson refers are her recent trips to Mexico and Guatemala in the spring of 1950 and the winter of 1951, and the etchings make clear references to the jungle locale and archeological sites.

As we noted earlier, the inspiration for the second trip, this time to Quirigua, was the two thirty-foot stelae from that site at the American Museum of Natural History. Standing beneath these enormous carved figurative columns (fig. 141) in the confined space of the museum gives the observer the unmistakable sensation recalled from childhood of looking up at awesome adults.

The impulsive decision to return to Mayaland only a few months after the previous trip must have been precipitated by such a sensation, because the direct artistic outcome of the second visit was the series of etchings which included numerous images of august or majestic

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[1]Colette Roberts noted the importance of this poem in the proofs for her monograph on Nevelson. "Such a fairy tale tells more of Louise and The Bride of the Black Moon than any book can convey." These proofs were not utilized by the editor, and corrections, such as the above quote, did not appear in the published book (Colette Roberts Collection, Archives of American Art, courtesy of Richard Roberts). The insertion of "(in)" in the title of the exhibit also appears in the proofs.

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figures: Majesty, Royalty (fig. 142), King and Queen, The West Queen (fig. 143), Flower Queen, Moon Goddess and Goddess from the Great Beyond (fig. 93). From Nevelson's handwritten lists of projected, but unused, titles for these etchings come several more provocative captions: Royal Family, Royalty from the Archeological Family, Her Majesty, and The Ancient Queen.[1]

The ruins in Quiriguá are situated on the Motoqua River in the midst of thirty acres of rain forest set aside as an archeological zone by the former owners of the surrounding banana plantations--The United Fruit Company. The ever-present mist at Quiriguá makes the encroachment of the jungle forest which surrounds the manicured archeological park a constant problem.[2] Nevelson's etchings convey both the mist and jungle closeness. The meandering lines and heavily inked surfaces which partially obscure the etched images are like the trailing vegetation and moist air which veil the ancient stone carvings.

The nine stelae which dominate the site were carved in red-brown sandstone. Each stela has a figure carved in low relief on front and back, with the head done almost in the round and set in deep relief near the top. On the sides of each shaft are the glyphs in Maya, which indicate the specific five-year period or "hotoun" which the stela was built to commemorate, e.g., stela F (fig. 144). The figures are now known to represent the most pervasive deities in the Mayan pantheon--the deities of time and number--which were used by the theocratic rulers to celebrate the accurate recording of the Mayan calendar.

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[1]Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

[2]Hunter, Maya Ruins, p. 112.

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Because of the central significance of this calendar in Mayan life, the principal deities were those related to the marking of time, e.g., the sun god, the moon goddess, and the four sky gods, "Bacabs," who represented the four sides of the world, each with its own color and direction.[1]

At the time Nevelson and her sister visited the ceremonial center, the identity of the figures on the stelae was uncertain, as was much of the Mayan cosmogony, excepting the lunar and solar deities. But Nevelson might have heard or read about the sun god through Wolfgang Paalen, whose articles in Dyn, the surrealist periodical of the mid-forties, frequently discussed the mythology and archeology of American Indian civilizations. One such piece was included in the "Amerindian Number" of December 1943, an issue that remained in Nevelson's possession until 1965. The one-page article by Paalen was called "Birth of Fire: A mythological hypothesis suggested by the appearance of a new volcano." Paalen relates Nanauatzin, a volcanic deity in the Mexican solar cult, and Quetzalcoatl to Prometheus, the Greek god of fire. He does this through an intriguing discussion of their masculine nature which centers on their ability to ravish the earth mother who "keeps the fire in a subterranean place, a cavern, a box, if not under her skirt or quite simply between her legs."[2]

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[1]For an excellent and extensive discussion of Maya life and religion, see J. Eric Thompson, The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization, 2nd ed. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 263 ff. A sight similar to the grouping of stelae at Quiriguá is the Temple of Warriors at Chichen Itza. There, the visitor finds the main temple building flanked by platforms with hundreds of square columns depicting standard bearers carved in low relief.

[2]Dyn, 4-5 (December 1943) p. 71. This is one of the very few periodical issues in the Nevelson archives that does not have a reference to Nevelson or her work.

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One can well imagine how this hypothesis could have made the rounds in surrealist circles in New York and might have served as explanation for Nevelson's otherwise baffling inclusion of Prometheus in her fairy tale poem.

Returning to the puzzling identity of the figures at Quirigua, the one hypothesis that was absolutely ruled out at the time of Nevelson's visit was the conception of these figures as secular rulers. In a guidebook on the ruins which Nevelson and her sister carried with them, the archeologist, Sylvanus Morely, clearly states that "the Maya inscriptions do not recount kingly conquest, imperial deeds. . . . They do not exalt or aggrandize. . . ." Morely was insistent on this point, and only very recently have archeologists begun to change that assessment as they decipher Maya glyphs and establish the identity of these carved figures as secular rulers.[1]

Thus, we must understand Nevelson's depiction of royal figures as a product of her own imaginings and fantasies. It is even possible to see how she might imagine herself as queen of this jungle realm. Taller than all the native population and even towering over her sister, she may have identified momentarily with these regal images in stone. Indeed, some of the etched figures in her prints show a certain similarity to photographs of Nevelson at the time. In comparing the photograph of Nevelson and her sister in Mexico (fig. 145) and the etching West Queen (fig. 143), we can see that the overall squarish shape of the

[1]Moreley, Guidebook, p. 161. This recent development was explained to me by Dr. Gordon Ekholm of the American Museum of Natural History.

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head and body of both figures show resemblances, and the full cupid's-bow mouths are very close in shape. Furthermore, it is probably not coincidental that the West Queen is associated with Nevelson's favorite color--black--through Mayan lore.[1]

This hypothesis does not, however, resolve the identity of the five sets of royal couples. For a tentative explanation, I believe we have to look further afield. Kings, queens, and ruling majesties are accepted psychological symbols for parents.[2] It is possible that the two Berliawsky sisters, in the jungle silence, looking up at these towering figures, could have recalled childhood memories of their parents who seemed so stately to the young girls as they proudly paraded through the tree-lined road on their way to Rockland's main street.[3]

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[1]It should also be noted that this is the only royal figure in the series of etchings to be accompanied by a child. Another version of this print obliterates the image of the child and seems to have been attacked with pencil markings (Figure (fig. 146), Brooklyn Museum, Print Collection, no. 65.22.27).

[2]Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis 1953),vol.5, pp. 353-354. It is intriguing to note that the surrealists, who were well acquainted with this work of Freud's, would have been aware of the symbolic meanings of royal couples.

[3]Nevelson vividly recalls this road in her autobiography (MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 14-15), and at least two of her 1953 series of etchings which contain images of trees refer to this Maine landscape, i.e., Trees in Circle (see Baro, Nevelson: The Prints, pp. 34-35). Another etching which may contain associative links between the Mayan jungle and the Maine landscape is alternately titled In The Land Where The Trees Talk, Stone Figures That Walk at Night, and Colored Jungle, Baro #26 (fig. 20). Three female figures who bear a slight resemblance to Nevelson and her two sisters are represented. Even without the resemblance, this grouping of three female figures is unique in the series of etchings, and the titles suggest childhood fantasies.

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The memories of Quiriguá of Nevelson's fairy tale, Bride of the Black Moon, may be like the screen memories of a dream which hide the older and deeper impressions from childhood.

The second interpretation supports the first, as we have already seen that Nevelson identifies with both her mother and her father in the roles of beautiful woman and empire builder. Thus, she may be seeing her parents as the royal couple and at the same time may imagine herself to be a queen, in this way combining two early childhood fantasies.[1]

The use of imagery from the archeological past, and particularly the use of such terms as ancient and archaic, often serves as a veil, conscious or unconscious, for the fantasies of childhood.[2] This is especially so when the fantasy includes royal figures, since the childhood perception of parents as infallible quickly fades into distant memory when the truth about their human fallibility is painfully discovered. The frequent appearance of royal figures in Nevelson's œuvre suggests that her childhood perceptions of her parents and herself were not entirely relinquished and even retained enough force to appear symbolically in her work.

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[1]The sun and the moon deities in Mayaland are called by the native Indian population by such familiar terms as lord, lady, our father, our mother, our grandfather, or our grandmother (Thompson, Maya Civilization, p. 263). It is still the current custom in Mexico among the Indians to address friends and strangers by the family appellation suited to one's age. Thus, all children are called son, or daughter, etc.

[2]The analogy which relates archeological excavations to psychoanalysis is used in several places by Freud, e.g., in Delusions and Dream in Jensen's 'Gradiva,' Standard Edition, vol. 9, pp. 5, 40n.,51, 83-85. See also Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). Bettelheim discusses the underlying or unconscious content of some of the many fairy tales dealing with royal figures.

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About her childhood desires to be a star or a queen, Nevelson has recently said:

> I wanted nothing less . . . there's a place where you can shine, I know I'd like to be a great star . . . I probably dreamt, not dreamt, I probably figured even as a young child--I think I came with what I call ready-made, everyone has dreams of beyond this, but I thought I could fulfill my dreams and they weren't day dreams, I haven't done it so the only thing I've done is my work to a degree.[1]

The royal family theme, apparent only indirectly in the 1956 exhibit, Ancient Games, Ancient Places, becomes the central subject of Nevelson's next show, Royal Voyage. In an interview with Dorothy Seckler, done for the Archives of American Art in 1964, Nevelson refers to this exhibit as The Royal Family, "and that was also a show that I called 'The Royal Family' . . . it was rather big and I used beams from big houses for Kings and Queens. . . ."[2]

The totemic style of the monumental King (fig. 30) and Queen (fig. 25) clearly evolved out of the columnar elements in the four cityscapes which had represented the four corners of the earth in the previous exhibit. Several of their titles, e.g., That Silent Place (fig. 15) and Forgotten City (fig. 17), again suggest their archeological origins. It is entirely fitting to Nevelson's way of thinking that the columnar elements which made up both the real ancient cities in Mayaland and their imaginary descendents in her own work were also figurative and could be transformed into royal images. Not only King and Queen bore this resemblance to the earlier cityscapes, but also The Personages at Sea (fig. 27) could hardly be differentiated from

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Dorothy Seckler, May/June 1964, p. 12.

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a piece like Nightscapes (fig. 16).

It almost seems gratuitous at this point to note that the presence of an Indian Chief on the Royal Voyage is one more instance of the effect of Nevelson's travels to Central America. So, too, may be the "gifts" of the King and Queen. Nevelson had probably heard many stories about the offerings the Mayan people had to make to their deities. While this tradition is common to many ancient cultures, her most recent experience with a culture of this kind had already proved to be the inspiration of both thematic and formal developments in her work.

Although the iconography of the King and Queen in Nevelson's work seems fairly comprehensible, the meaning of the voyages taken by the principal characters in the first two shows is much less clear. Obvious references to specific voyages in Nevelson's life no doubt play a part. These include her two trips to Central America and her three trips to Europe. Perhaps in the case of Royal Voyage, some relationship may exist between the idea of the King and Queen at sea and her parents' immigration. Predisposition to such imagery seems natural in the work of an artist who grew up down the street from a shipyard in a coastal town and whose son spent many years in the Merchant Marines.[1]

It is probably a mixture of all these factors plus an overlay of Nevelson's "metaphysics" that can aid the spectator in a comprehension of this idea. Since Nevelson was an assiduous nonreader and

[1]In the light of these biographical connections with the sea, the visual similarities of the vertical uprights in a local Maine pier (fig. 147) and a row of Nevelson boxes leaning against the studio wall (fig. 44) may not be a mere accident of photography.

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might even be called anti-intellectual, she turned for solace and mental nourishment when necessary to various "comparative religions." After each period of depression she tended to try a new sect, sampling in time a great number, including Scientology, Dianetics, Christian Science, New Thought,Zen, the teachings of Edwin Burnell and Gurdieff and Krishnamurti. This searching began as early as the mid-twenties under the tutelage of Princess Matchabelli, and was continued for another twenty years with Ellen Kearns whom Nevelson accompanied to lectures given in New York by prominent exponents of mystical beliefs. During the fifties the presence in her house of Ted Hazeltine, whose own zeal for Zen and metaphysics was quite strong, helped to sustain her interest. She claims in retrospect that she turned to each of these disciplines seeking relief from the severe depressions she suffered periodically.[1]

In any case, several ideas which appear in her work seem to arise from this amalgam of "metaphysical" studies. Two crucially important related ideas which appear in her first thematic show of the fifties are "The Voyage" and "The Great Beyond." We have already seen that the Bride, King, and Queen all go on voyages in search of something new. In this first show Nevelson also introduced a goddess, not from the Mayan pantheon, but from her own studies: The Goddess from the Great Beyond (fig. 93). The female figure depicted is like the one other goddess in this series of etchings, Goddess I (fig. 148) (Moon Goddess), and looks distinctly less human and more ethereal than the royal figures in the series.

The identity of The Goddess from the Great Beyond would be completely mysterious were it not for some undated writings by Nevelson

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 7 July 1976.

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that help unravel her signficance. Two of the writings are poems and the third is a statement written about a piece of sculpture which was made in late 1954 or early 1955, and exhibited for the first time in summer 1955 at the Sculptors Guild Annual. The sculpture entitled Winged City (fig. 14) has already been discussed in terms of Nevelson's use of wood elements from an earlier piece. The statement is an explanation of the symbolic meaning of the sculpture and contains ideas which may also refer to its companion piece, Bride of The Black Moon (fig. 13), as well as to the etchings from which both sculptures derive.

Because of their importance I shall quote the statement and the two short poems verbatim:

"The Winged City" (Sculpture Collage)

Time is forever present. We live with the awareness of all past, present, and certainly project ourselves into the "Great Beyond" breaking all time forever. From the very beginning, I believe the first consciousness, the first human was aware of flight. All our heritage thru the ages, expressed in literature, spiritual messages, mythology, the visual arts has been winged, has had flight, expressed from multiple directions, all going to just that one place. Some call that God. "Winged City" is elevated on three spheres-worlds. Three represents the three dimensional world which represents thinking, thinking is circular (t circle) the fourth elevation is straight. Four is the cube the fourth dimension. Four represents reason. Three is action, Four is meditation. Four arrests action and thinking, into that quiet place (peace), in that place we arrive at flight. we transcend weight, measure, all substances and come to the one substance. the Great consciousness.

The Griffins that I have used as our worldly symbols for flight. The round object in back represents the sun. The tall object the cold seasons (barrenesss). The rounded object t warm season. fruition and I believe totally and completely that we are forever aware of flight in our very being.

"Winged City" should be placed on a pedestal 42 inches from the floor to give it a feeling of flight.

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A Voyage

A voyage not on Land or Sea,
only t Supreme Power
can take you there.
No ship is big enough
Man has not yet build
that carrier _____
only t Great Beyond
can take you to that
great Beyond.

The Great Beyond

The Great Beyond is calling me
The more aware I am of her
The more aware I am of there
The Great beyond is calling me.[1]

When the artist was asked directly about the purpose of the Royal Voyage, Nevelson answered, "She [the Queen] is going to different parts of this great world. . . she didn't have to go to Europe, that's only a local place. . . . There are great beyonds. . . ."[2]

In spite of the non sequitors common in Nevelson's verbal productions, it is possible to discern some underlying significance in her idea about "The Great Beyond." It seems to stand for a transcendent spiritual place of refuge, above and beyond the material world of the here and now. Nevelson has also used the concept of the "fourth dimension" to indicate this idea. Colette Roberts referred to it as Nevelson's "Elsewhere." The fact that the ruling deity of this place is female and that the first two guides along Nevelson's path toward it were women, Matchabelli and Kearns, might imply something about the underlying dynamics of Nevelson's life.

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[1]Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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Jung has observed that "travelling or voyaging is an image of aspiration, of an unsatisfied longing that never finds its goal. . . and that this goal is in fact the lost mother."[1] This hypothesis of Jung's happens to fit Nevelson's instance, since we know that Mrs. Berliawsky was largely unavailable to her children and that Nevelson nevertheless dedicated her own life to her mother. In her own words she has stated, "I adored my mother. As a matter of fact I dedicated my life to her."[2]

We must ask what it really means when Nevelson says that she dedicated her life to her mother. It certainly did not mean nursing her when she was ill, or staying physically close to her. Indeed, Nevelson left for Europe during one of her mother's critical illnesses and did not even attend her funeral. More probably the meaning that dedication had for Nevelson was the fulfillment of her mother's innermost desires. She has stated that she felt deeply sad about her mother's self-imposed limitations and confinements, and "always felt so sympathetic to her that I was determined to open every front door . . . and to walk right through the door I didn't care if I had to build the house myself."[3]

Most parents have subtle ways of conveying both the nature of their own unfulfilled wishes and the hope that their children will fulfill them.

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[1]Carl Gustav Jung, Symbols of Transformation, Volume 5 of The Collected Works of Carl Jung (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), cited in J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 157. In a discussion of dream symbolism, Sigmund Freud relates journeys and departures to dying, but connects water with the relation of mother to child (Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis [1915-1917] Standard Edition vol. 15, pp. 153, 160-161).

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview with Tal Streeter, 25 November 1959, p. 11.

[3]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 10-11.

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It might be that Nevelson's statement of dedication of her life to her mother represented the younger woman's striving to conduct her life in the image of her mother's wishes as she perceived them in her childhood. Thus, she could describe her mother as "a woman who should have been in a palace. I think that's my idea for myself."[1] If validity is granted to these hypotheses, it might then be possible to understand Nevelson's walls as the creation of a realm or palace that could provide solace and freedom for Nevelson's mother, a woman who had not been able to accept such comfort from her husband.

Nevelson's motivation for the use of royal figures in her work was sufficiently complex and personal not to require external stimulus from the art world. That stimulus, however, did exist in the work of four major twentieth-century artists, Alberto Giacometti, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and Henry Moore. Giacometti's enormously influential tableau sculpture, Palace at 4 A.M. (fig. 98), 1933, had exerted its spell on numerous American sculptors and painters since it had been shown in the 1936 Museum of Modern Art Dada and Surrealism exhibit. Most of these artists had responded to the formal influence of its mysteriously theatrical appearance, while a few like David Smith and Nevelson might also have been attuned to the regal implications of the palatial setting.[2]

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[1]Ibid., p. 6.

[2]In his monograph, Reinhold Hohl discusses some sources for Giacometti's Palace at 4 A.M. He explains that its basic structure, derived from a set design done in 1922 for the Meyerhold Theatre in Moscow, accounts for its resemblance to a stage set (Alberto Giacometti [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 197], p. 83). For a discussion of the tableau format in American sculpture, see Joan Seeman, "The Sculpture of Theodore Roszak: 1932-1952," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1978, footnote 73.

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Giacometti's deliberately garbled and obscure explanation of its meaning and origins had appeared twice in print, and Nevelson is likely to have heard at least vague murmurings about Giacometti's earliest memories of his mother serving as inspiration for the presiding female presence in the sculpture. His statement about this work was entitled 1 + 1 = 3..., a title format Nevelson was to borrow on several occasions, the most notable being Moon Garden + One. Giacometti's statement appeared first in Minotaure number 3, 1936, and later in English in Transformation 1, number 3, 1952. The pertinent part of his statement was:

> On the other side came to be placed the statue of a woman, in which I discover my mother the way she impressed herself on my earliest memories. The long black dress that touched the ground disturbed me with its mystery; It seemed to be part of her body and this caused in me a feeling of fear and confusion; . . . I cannot say anything about the object in the center, lying on a small board it is red; I identify myself with it.[1]

One can imagine what effect such a statement might have had on Nevelson who seems to have been receptive to the idea of including herself and her mother symbolically in her work. Giacometti's imagery, like Nevelson's recalls a child's vision of a parent, awe-inspiring and undifferentiated.

David Smith's Royal Bird, (fig. 149), 1948, and Royal Incubator, (fig. 150), 1950, surely owe some of their inspiration to the skeletal bird in Giacometti's Palace. Both of these works were exhibited in New York, and several illustrations appeared in art periodicals.[2] David Smith's relationship to Nevelson is a complex one, with most of the influence going from Smith to Nevelson. However, there are occasions

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[1]Alberto Giacometti, "1 + 1 = 3...," in Lucy Lippard, ed., Surrealists on Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), pp. 144-145.

[2]The Royal Incubator was illustrated in Art Digest, 24, no. 15 (May 1950) 11, when it was in a Smith exhibition at the Willard Gallery.

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when it is possible that this movement was reversed. Smith's Detroit Queen, 1957, may owe more stylistically to Moore's recent King and Queen, but he might have felt some catalytic effect of Nevelson's royal figures. His first wife, Dorothy Dehner, who became a close friend of Nevelson's in the fifties, remembers his awareness and admiration of Nevelson's work from the early forties when Smith's gallery, Willard, was across the street from the Nierendorf Gallery.[1]

The derivation for a different sort of royal imagery is the game of chess celebrated in the work and life of Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp's painting The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes (fig. 151), 1912, and the studies for it, were part of the series of paintings that included the notorious Nude Descending a Staircase. They were inspired by Duchamp's already entrenched obsession with chess. The royal chess figures of the painting were infused with the machine imagery which was to preoccupy both Duchamp and Picabia for the next several years. The images of the "king" and "queen" have already been interpreted as totemic and mechanical parent figures, while the "swift nudes" are seen to represent the Duchamp children.[2] While Nevelson was probably not aware of the iconographic significance of these works, she certainly must have seen them either in the Philadelphia Museum or in illustrations of them when the Arensberg Collection was given to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Her enthusiasm for these semi-cubist works of Duchamp was such

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[1]Nevelson's King and Queen were mentioned in all the reviews of her exhibition, and Smith was an avid reader of art periodicals (Dorothy Dehner, interview, 4 December 1975).

[2]Rubin, Dada and Surrealist Art, p. 33; Robert Lebel, Marcel Duchamp (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 13.

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that she recalled dreaming about The Nude in her autobiography.[1]

Duchamp's lasting fascination with chess was indirectly the source for Max Ernst's large sculpture The King Playing with the Queen, (fig. 137), 1944. Responding to Julien Levy's request for a handmade chess set in 1944, Ernst's interest in sculpture was again stimulated after a lapse of some nine years. His earlier close association with Giacometti in the thirties could explain the stylistic similarity between the queen in this sculpture and the armless mother figure in Palace at 4 A.M. (fig. 98). Ernst was working on sculpture in 1934 and 1935 with the encouragement of his next-door neighbor, Giacometti, who had recently completed the Palace at 4 A.M.[2] Ernst's reacquaintance with this piece on his arrival in New York almost a decade later seems to have stirred memories of the earlier piece, and his own humorous and light-hearted work combines the somber mystery of Giacometti's Palace and the chess imagery of Duchamp's painting and preoccupation. While the horned king has no echoes in Nevelson's work, the stylized queen, with her feminine bulges, bears some resemblance to the etched image of The Goddess From the Great Beyond (fig. 93).

It is difficult if not impossible to read parental symbolism

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 38-39.

[2]Duchamp had made his own chess set as early as 1918-19 in Argentina (Marcel Duchamp, catalogue of exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, eds. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, New York and Philadelphia, 1973, no. 129, Chessmen, p. 288). Julien Levy and Max Ernst shared some of Duchamp's interest in chess, and during a summer vacation in 1944 on Long Island, both Levy and Ernst made chess sets, one of which directly led to Ernst's King Playing with the Queen (see Levy, "Summer," pp. 60-62; see also John Russell, Max Ernst: Life and Work [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967], p. 204).

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into the king and queen figures of Ernst's sculpture. The more usual interpretation associates the horned king with Ernst himself, and the smaller, and by implication younger, female figure with the new young woman in his life, Dorothea Tanning. The sculpture says much about Ernst's complicated personal life, and the horned king seems to represent both the cuckolded husband and the potent lover.[1]

Henry Moore's monumental bronze King and Queen (fig. 152), 1952-53, was first seen in New York at an exhibit at the Curt Valentin Gallery in November 1954. Cast in an edition of four, this five-foot sculpture caused a minor sensation when it was ousted from its temporary home in the lobby of a Madison Avenue office building and was then purchased by Joseph Hirshhorn.[2] The sedately seated couple is reminiscent of the many seated family groups done by Moore in the preceding years, such as the Family Group (fig. 153) of 1945-49 at the Museum of Modern Art (fig. 154). One could hardly fail to make the iconographic connection between the two subjects, and Nevelson was certainly aware of this aspect of Moore's work. Sharing with him an interest in pre-Columbian art, some of her early pieces, like Ancient Figure (fig. 154), resemble Moore's reclining figures of the late twenties, e.g., Reclining Figure (fig. 155). Both groups are inspired by Mayan and Aztec Chacmols which were often reproduced in Cahiers D'Art (fig. 156). As we noted before, Nevelson could have seen this kind of work at the Natural History Museum or at one of the several galleries in New York which were

[1]Russell, Ernst, pp. 136-140; see also Guggenheim, Century, pp. 325-329.

[2]Lerner, The Hirshhorn Museum, p. 275.

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devoted to American Indian art. Though Nevelson denies knowledge or influence of Moore, it is probably fair to say that the appearance of Moore's monumental Royal Family exactly two years before Nevelson's Royal Voyage was in part instrumental or at least supported her inclinations to memorialize her own "Royal Family." Thus, we see that the royalty theme, with its specifically personal iconographic meaning for Nevelson, also served other artists of the period as a vehicle for individual content.

Death

It is evident that Nevelson's trips to Mexico and Guatemala had profound effect on her work. Not only did she absorb some important lessons about formal aesthetic matters, but also the pervasive religious and sacramental attitude toward life of the ancient Mayan artists stirred some deep-seated feelings and memories in her. This trip occurred at the end of a troubled decade that had brought much grief and anxiety to the entire world. While Nevelson had not lost anyone close to her through the war, three important people in her life died within a four-year period in the mid-forties. Her mother was the first, in March 1943, after three months in a hospital stay in Massachusetts. Then in October, 1946, her father died suddenly in Rockland. The following year the most unexpected blow occurred: Karl Nierendorf, her dealer, died in October, a day before she was to see him after his long absence in Europe.

Frequently people do not react in expected ways to the loss of loved ones, and Nevelson's behavior is an example of this. She claimed several times not to have attended her mother's funeral. "I adored my

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mother. As a matter of fact I dedicated my life to her. She died, so to speak, and I've never given it a thought.[1] We have our own cemetery in Maine. I've never gone back there. . . . I never saw her happy, I was very pleased that she had some rest."[2] In a similar type of denial, she refused to believe that Nierendorf had died until she read it in the newspaper.[3] Yet the solicitude of both of these people had meant much to her, and their memory sustained her faith in herself through years of failure, loneliness, and depression.

In the six years during which Nierendorf was Nevelson's dealer, he encouraged and supported her in many ways. She has referred to him ever since as her spiritual father, and she has often recalled a statement he once made to her, "You will have every wish in your creative life." These words would come back to sustain her whenever she later became discouraged.[4] She recalled that he never refused any of her requests, and in this regard, he must have indeed reminded her of her own father.

Her apparent indifference to the actual events surrounding the deaths of her parents and Nierendorf is an example that indicates something of her wish to avoid the feelings of loss that normally accompany such events. The strength of her desire to avoid them as well as their underlying existence will be seen in her ambivalent

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview with Tal Streeter, 25 November 1959.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

[3]Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 60.

[4]Louise Nevelson, interview with Arnold Glimcher, 1 June 1970.

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relationship to the color black which she still insists is not a color of sadness.

Shortly after Nierendorf's death, Nevelson herself was ill, and following a six-to-seven-month period of depression and inactivity after Nierendorf's death and her operation, she burst into an incredible spurt of productivity which she sustained for about a year and a half. During this time she made nearly ninety pieces in terra cotta and a number of stone carvings.[1] She then went twice to Central America, and on the second visit stayed at Quiriguá. It was after her return from this trip that Nevelson set out on a determined campaign to create a successful career for herself and began on the stylistic path which was to lead to her mature work.

Beginning with the totemic game figures (fig. 21) and the etchings (figs. 19, 20), both of which were derived from her experience in Central America, she rapidly passed through an iconographic and stylistic development that culminated in the epochal Moon Garden + One exhibit.

The obvious sepulchral character of Moon Garden + One and Sky Columns Presence, the two dimly lit all-black shows of 1958 and 1959, should raise the question of what personal meaning these remarkable exhibits had for the artist. Since the enveloping darkness made the actual pieces of Moon Garden + One almost impossible to see, one can believe the artist when she says, "It was not really for an audience,

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[1]Handwritten list of eighty-nine terra cotta and stone pieces with sketches of each dating from June 1948 to c. May 1950 (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

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it was really for my visual eye. It was a feast--for myself."[1]

In an earlier discussion in Chapter I, it was suggested that the environment envisioned by the artist was a churchyard cemetery, a relatively common sight in New England. The evidence which led to that conclusion is provided by the titles and placement of certain pieces in the show. On one side of the room was the wall of boxes entitled Sky Cathedral or Cathedral in the Sky (fig. 38). Made up of various-sized units, it resembles the many niched cathedral and chapel altars found throughout Catholic Europe and Latin America, and particularly noticeable in Mexico, where these places of worship still tower over most other buildings. In the space adjoining Nevelson's Cathedral, a piece entitled Heavenly Gate (fig. 40, center) seems to separate the open or partially open vertical boxes from the facing wall, thus suggesting the churchyard cemetery which lies near the church itself.

But most significant for the establishment of a coherent iconography for this exhibit is the presence of a half-open box enclosing a thin semi-figural relief entitled King II (fig. 49). The image of a long narrow rectangular black box containing a figure is funereal, and this piece sets the tone of the show.[2] The importance this piece had in Nevelson's eyes is evident from the fact that she submitted it later in the year to the Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture.[3] Building from the earlier hypothesis

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 133.

[2]Stuart Preston, in his New York Times review of this exhibit, finds "narrow coffins and shadow boxes made like traps" (1 December 1957).

[3] 5 December 1958-8 February 1959.

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that the King and Queen represent parental figures, we may now see this somewhat chilling piece as a father interred.

Nevelson's father, in one of his typical fits of annoyance with the small Jewish community in Rockland, had determined to create a family cemetery. Using a piece of his own land, he walled off a field and planted a surrounding row of trees on a plot of ground just outside of Rockland. Here, he and his wife were buried, along with some distant relatives. His daughter, Louise, no doubt disliking the stark reality of death which is confronted at funerals, claims never to have been to this cemetery.

However, one can imagine how knowledge of its existence and some discomfort about not having attended to the formal filial duties of respect could summon up phantom images of the place and the ceremony never seen in actuality. It is easy to see how such an image could be conjured up in the jungle darkness of a moonlit visit to Mayan ruins. These dead ceremonial centers of the past readily evoke ghost tales and Gothic stories in the visitors' imaginings. The striking visual similarities between Nevelson's tall four-sided columns in low relief (fig. 157) and the monumental stelae of Quiriguá and Chichen suggests that the imaginings and evocations begun at the Mayan site had come to sculptural fruition eight years later. Some of the stelae (fig. 158) from Quiriguá are themselves strongly suggestive of coffins, since the heads carved in high relief appear encased within the stone, the rest of which is carved in low relief.

The huge size and awesome spectral quality of the Mayan pieces, with their vacantly staring gazes, reinforces this association to

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funereal figures. We have already seen that these large figures had the power to evoke parental imagery. It takes a very short step to the perception of these columnar reliefs as entombed ancestors; in the case of the Mayans, as revered ancients or deities, and for Nevelson, as recently deceased parents.

In a remarkable anecdote included in her autobiography, Nevelson reveals her early sensitivity to the theme of death and funerals. Recalling her intense reaction to the sight of the horse-drawn funeral cortege with five black hearses that contained the father and children of an English family who had emigrated to Rockland, she described the scene as "pure unadulterated tragedy."[1] The father of this family had killed himself and his four children in a despondent state after the death of his wife. Both Nevelson and her mother were apparently shocked by the force of the young girl's feeling:

> I recall that I didn't get too involved emotionally in local color. I knew I was very emotional, but I guess my emotions were in another place. . . . I was interested in art. I was interested in music. . . . Somehow I was removed as I was growing up. So I guess my mother had never seen me get too involved over people's feeling. . . When I got in the house after seeing the funeral cortege , I just shed a ton of tears. And my mother couldn't believe it. She was overwhelmed to see my power of feeling. [2]

One can see how Nevelson's personal fears and fantasies about death in her own family might have provoked this torrent of tears.[3]

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 27. [2]Ibid.

[3]A related anecdote is told by Anna Walinska, a painter and a friend of Nevelson's during the 1950's. Shortly after Walinska's mother died, she and Nevelson exhibited in an important group show at the Riverside Museum. Walinska's work had been prominently placed, and at the opening of the show Nevelson turned to her and "with tears rolling down her cheeks she said 'if only your mother could have seen this.'" Walinska immediately understood and reminded Nevelson that she was crying for her own mother as well (interview, 25 June 1976).

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Nevelson's disavowals not withstanding, black is the color associated with death in Western civilization. In fact, the terms shade and shadow connote the spirits of the deceased. Thus, a sculptor who calls herself the architect of shadows unwittingly connects herself with images of death. The etching Shadow City (fig. 159), also called Ancient City, bears intimations of both cemetery and ghost town, and at the same time looks like the parades of black vertical blocks which Nevelson called cityscapes and personages in the mid-fifties[1] (figs. 15, 16, 27).

When she is not coyly claiming that her sculpture is neither black nor made of wood, Nevelson's expressed ideas about black, the color she uses for most of her work, turn out to be rather traditional. When asked directly if her use of black was connected with death, and whether the walls of the late fifties were a memorial, she replied, "yes . . . if you want to get philosophical . . . death means peace, completeness . . . black--it's only an assumption of the western world that it means death, for me it may mean finish, completeness, maybe eternity. . . .[2]

It is intriguing to note that Nevelson's use of black as the predominant color for her work began during or after her series of etchings, the imagery of which was related to her recent trip to Quiriguá. She must have quickly recognized a personal affinity for this color as she sketched her own features on the Queen of the West (fig. 144)--the direction in Mayan mythology associated with black.

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[1]Cf. Solid Reflections (fig. 19), an etching alternately titled The Ancient Garden and In The Jungle, for funereal imagery. Some figures look like headstones.

[2]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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"There was something in me drawing me to the black. I actually think that my trademark and what I like best is the dark, the dusk. . . ."[1]

Another aspect of Nevelson's affinity for black, the color of perpetual mourning, is her association of darkness to the concept of merging. An undated two-line poem in her papers expressed this succintly:

Daylight has form
Darkness is oneness.[2]

This has overtones both of transcendental yearnings and the child's wish to be united with the original source of warmth and safety--the mother. Nevelson's repeated avowals of adoration for her mother and denials of feelings of loss at her death lend some support to the latter interpretation. Another telling remark supporting this idea is Nevelson's response to the question about her feeling for her mother, "If my mother told me to jump out the window, I would jump. She was the closest thing in my life.[3] The underlying persistence of Nevelson's strong feelings for her mother, plus her inability to express overtly the grief she must have felt at her death, are probably important factors in both the frequent presence of funereal references in her artistic work and the lack of open acknowledgment of them.

We are probably safe in assuming that Nevelson's Sky Columns Presence which followed Moon Garden + One carried the same sort of content as the previous show. Again there is a wall of open black boxes and a series of very tall totemic columns standing next to the

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 145.

[2]Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

[3]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

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other walls of the room (figs. 39, 40). Whereas in Moon Garden + One these vertical boxes against the walls had the sculptural relief only on the interior which was revealed either by an absent or open door, in Sky Columns Presence (figs. 52, 53), all the boxes are closed and the relief is relegated to the outside of the box. This had been true only of some of the pedestal columns in the middle of the room in Moon Garden. The effect of this decision is to render Nevelson's Sky Columns (fig. 53) even more similar to Mayan stelae, and some of the calendar glyphs on the sides of the Mayan stelae (fig. 158) seem to have been transmuted into Nevelson's delicately collaged wood reliefs.

Another telling indication of this show's Amerindian ancestry is the presence of the sun and moon emblems. These two prime deities of pre-Columbian culture appear to have been incorporated into Nevelson's formal and symbolic vocabulary. It would have been impossible to visit Mexico or leaf through an issue of Dyn and remain ignorant of the huge pyramids built to celebrate these deities.

Earlier in this chapter we had noted a possible interpretation for Nevelson's persistent voyage imagery. Using her poetry and statements as a guide for the interpretation, the object of the voyage seemed to represent a transcendent spiritual place of refuge. Because of the ambiguity of the image itself, and also because of its frequency in Nevelson's pictorial or verbal productions, we may surmise that the voyage theme carries multiple meanings for the artist. The fact that her first all-black show was titled Royal Voyage, and that within several years the black shows came to represent funereal monuments, suggest that on some level the idea of death may be linked with the concept of voyage.

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Indeed, a transcendent spiritual place of refuge sounds like Nevelson's idea of death. This is also suggested by the phrase, "Great Beyond."

Psychologically the voyage, and particularly when related to black, is considered to be a symbol for death. Common verbal expressions such as the "one-way trip" and the "last journey" convey the general acceptance of this imagery.[1] An interesting parallel is Martha Graham's Night Voyage, a dance certainly known to Nevelson, since it was one of Graham's most famous pieces. In the dance, Queen Jocasta, as the central character, relives in her imagination the tragic events of her life and ends by killing herself.

A more prosaic link of the idea of voyage with death is the perennial danger which confronts the seafarer. Louise Nevelson had grown up within yards of the sea and had lived through two wars; the first with a brother on a Navy gunboat, and the second with a son in the merchant marines.[2]

In Nevelson's exhibition, Royal Voyage, the largest pieces

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[1]"Departure in dreams means dying. So, too, if a child asks where someone is who has died and whom he misses, it is common nursery usage to reply that he has gone on a journey. . . . The dramatist is using the same symbolic connection when he speaks of the after-life as 'the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns.' Even in ordinary life it is common to speak of the 'last journey.' Everyone acquainted with ancient rituals is aware of how seriously (in the religion of Ancient Egypt for instance) the idea is taken of a journey to the land of the dead. Many copies have survived The Book of the Dead, which was supplied to the mummy, like a Baedeker to take with him on the journey. Ever since burial-places have been separated from dwelling-places the dead person's last journey has indeed become a reality" (Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Standard Edition, vol. 15, p. 161).

[2]Nathan Berliawsky, interview, 12 July 1976.

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in the show are the King (fig. 30) and Queen (fig. 25). They are also her first frankly totemic pieces and presage a stylistic development that would shortly overtake all the other sculptural formats with which she had been experimenting. We shall see that in light of the surrounding cultural scene, Nevelson must have been well aware of the thanatoid associations to totemic figures.

The artistic crystallization of the underlying death theme can be seen in Nevelson's 1957 exhibit, Forest (fig. 32). Here, for the first time, the artist includes in the exhibit a piece entitled Nite Totem (fig. 37).

As was often the case with Nevelson's work, this piece carries an alternate title--Ancient Figure. During the year preceding this show, Nevelson had increasingly turned to this vertical format and a greater number of large pieces with figurative associations appeared in her oeuvre, e.g., Tender Being (fig. 34). However, the most compelling reason to conclude that this exhibit marked some inner consolidation of the death theme was the existence, in it, of a piece called Forest Christ. Since there are no photographs of this work, we must rely on Colette Roberts' recollections. Roberts was aware of the stylistic turning point marked by this work, and mentioned it in her monograph on Nevelson:

> Pieces no longer in the round, hanging reliefs such as the impressive "Forest Christ," appeared here for the first time. Some were made of wood, or driftwood, others of geometric lumberyard remnants, all were dipped in a mat black mixture before they were assembled. These wooden reliefs were the point of departure for the new venture.The reliefs were to be walled in.[1]

[1]Roberts, Nevelson, p. 21.

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Roberts continued to emphasize the crucial role of Forest Christ, and she included a slide and a discussion of it in her standard lecture on Nevelson--"Nevelson's Elsewhere." She always specified that it was one of Nevelson's first pieces to be enclosed in a custom-made box.[1] The image of a Christ figure enclosed in a box is undeniably funereal and provides a natural link to the enclosed King II (fig. 49) found the following year in Moon Garden + One.

Louise Nevelson's interest in the totemic figure did not arise suddenly in the mid 1950's. We have already seen that her introduction to American Indian art came during her childhood in Rockland when some select native artifacts could be seen in the antique shops that flourished each summer throughout Maine. Once Nevelson had moved to New York, her opportunities to see such work increased. She had access to the large museum collections and could also take advantage of the growing interest in the early art of the Western hemisphere. We have observed that Wolfgang Paalen was an important source of information and interest about this indigenous art, using his periodical, Dyn, as a vehicle for communicating his ideas and observations.

In December 1943 Paalen put out a special Amerindian number of Dyn. The major piece in this issue was his own long and profusely illustrated article on "Totem Art." He surveys the history and the art of the Haida and Kwakiutl tribes (fig. 160) in British Columbia and Alaska, showing their relationship to the pre-Columbian civilizations of Central and South America. More importantly for his readers in

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[1]Unfilmed material in the Colette Roberts Collection, Archives of American Art, courtesy of Richard Roberts.

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the New York art world, he discusses some of the meanings of totems and totemism.[1]

He explains that the totems of these Indian tribes were rooted in ancestor cults and were seen by them as memorial columns.

> The family crest was shown at the top and sometimes also at the base and throughout the length of the pole, but generally the intermediate figures illustrated a legend, a hero tale of early life, or some important family happening.[2]

He then attempts to synthesize the current sociological and psychological understanding of totemism, discussing, in turn, pre-individualistic mentality, affective mimetism, and totemic identification wherein the individual can as readily identify himself with a dead ancestor as with a tree or a bird.[3] Nevelson, who may not have met Paalen until he stayed in a room in her house in 1946, owned this issue of Dyn and kept it and the following number in her possession for twenty years.

As early as 1943 Nevelson had composed a piece of sculpture with a vertical piling up of heads, Audience Figure (fig.6) in the Norlyst Circus show. Then in the mid-forties she did a number of paintings and drawings with similarly piled heads (figs.161, 162, and 163). The drawing with three female heads on the left (fig. 161), and the painting with three cats piled at the side of the child (fig. 162), show the use of this motif as a kind of framing device for the central figure. Nevelson's most striking use of these totemically piled heads is the painting of three dark-haired women (fig. 163), whose vertically organized heads are surrounded with a blue-grey stone-like slab which sets them off

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[1]Wolfgang Paalen, "Totem Art," Dyn, 4-5 (December 1943), p. 30. This essay was meant to be a preliminary for a book, La Rencontre Totémique.

[2]Ibid., p. 12, from George T. Emmons, The Chikat Blanket (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1907).

[3]Paalen, "Totem Art," pp. 18-25.

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from a more brightly colored background of red, brown ochre and blue-green shapes. The torsos of the two uppermost women frame the heads of the women below them. This painting is signed and dated 1946.

Wolfgang Paalen's presence in Nevelson's home in the same year, and his espousal of the ideas presented in his writings on totemism, may have been the immediate stimulus for the totemically piled heads in the 1946 painting. These ideas might have seemed especially significant to Nevelson, since Paalen's visit occurred less than two months after her father's death.[1] However, at this time, Nevelson's pictorial treatment of this motif was literal and the aesthetic effect was superficial. It was not until seven years later, after her own personal confrontation with Mayan totems, that she was able to create works conveying the spirit rather than the letter of totemism.

Paalen's stand on primitive art was squarely in the middle of a controversy brewing in New York between European surrealists and some young American artists--Gottlieb, Rothko, and Newman. The ensuing polemics concerned the appropriateness and use of myth for art. Primitive art and the ideas of Freud and Jung were brought as evidence for differing approaches, but accompanying this polemic were a growing number of paintings and sculpture which owed much to both ancient and modern mythology.[2]

Themes related to totems and ancestor worship were prevalent. Jackson Pollock was one of the earliest to use such themes for subjects in the forties, probably because of his personal involvement in Jungian treatment since 1939. Pollock's first two one-man shows at Peggy

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[1]Nevelson's father died 10 October 1946, and Paalen's exhibit at the Nierendorf Gallery began on 9 December 1946.

[2]See Reise, "Primitivism"; Sandler, American Painting, chap. 4; and Ashton, New York School, chap. 8.

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Guggenheim's Art of The Century Gallery in 1943 and 1945 included works whose titles or imagery revealed his interest in totems: Male and Female (fig. 164), Guardians of the Secret (fig. 165), Totem Lesson I, Totem Lesson II, Night Ceremony, and Night Magic.[1]

In Nevelson's 1943 Norlyst Circus exhibit, she included two thin figurative vertical pieces of sculpture (figs. 4, 166) which bore strong resemblance to the plank-like totemic images in Pollock's Male and Female (fig. 164) and Guardians of the Secret (fig. 165). These two wood pieces by Nevelson transformed Pollock's mythic images into comical figures, once again demonstrating that Nevelson's use of totemic images at this period was light-hearted as well as literal, unlike many of the New York painters who were seeking deeper levels of meaning through these mythic effigies. The fact that Nevelson not only did not make other totemic pieces at this time, but also did not long continue to work in wood, is evidence that she was not yet ready to incorporate her knowledge of totemic art in a deeply felt personal way.

However, the general fascination with totemic art was reaching its height in New York, and by mid-decade there were at least five more

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[1]The possibility of Pollock's influence upon Nevelson is apparent when the titles and themes of Pollock's paintings from the forties are compared to titles and themes of Nevelson's work in both the forties and fifties. Nevelson's first two pieces with lunar titles, Moons and Half Moon, appear in her 1944 Nierendorf exhibit less than a year after Pollock's first one-man show at the Art of the Century in November 1943, in which he showed Moon Woman Cuts the Circle and Mad Moon Woman. For a discussion of this theme in the context of Jungian symbolism, see Judith Wolfe, "Jungian Aspects of Jackson Pollock's Imagery," Artforum, 11, no. 3 (November 1972) 65-73. Other Pollock titles of the late forties which may have been suggestive for Nevelson are: Troubled Queen, 1946, Little King, 1946, Enchanted Forest and Cathedral of 1948.

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exhibitions including examples of totems from North and South America.[1] It was almost as though Americans were attempting to counter the weight of European tradition, now seen live on their shores, with this florid display of indigenous riches.

The looming vertical presences visible in the work of advanced painters on the scene--Pollock, Still, Gottlieb, and Lam--appeared only in the work of sculptors close either to these painters or to the European surrealist group gathered in New York. Thus, the works of David Hare and Isamu Noguchi, such as those seen in the Museum of Modern Art's 14 Americans exhibit in 1946 (Young Girl, fig. 167; Young Man, fig. 168; Kouros, fig. 169; and Effigy, fig. 170) appeared several years in advance of what would become a flood of sculpted totemic personages at the end of the forties.[2] Both Hare and Noguchi had already demonstrated their interest and debt to American Indian art earlier in the decade.[3] An example is Noguchi's Katchina of 1943 (fig. 171).

In 1946 two painters who were friends of Nevelson at the time

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[1]Widely reported and illustrated was a new installation of the pre-Columbian collection of the American Museum of Natural History in the spring of 1944; Wakefield Gallery's exhibition of Pre-Columbian Stone Sculpture in May-June 1944; and Betty Parson's Gallery exhibit of North West Coast Indian Painting in September-October 1946, and Grand Central Galleries large-scale exhibit, Arts Fiesta of The Americas, May 1945, followed the next year by a large show of Mexican art in May 1946.

[2]For a discussion of totemic figures, see Andersen, American Sculpture, chap. 2, 3; Krauss, "Magician's Game," p. 176 ff.; Seeman, "Roszak," footnote 292.

[3]Noguchi's American Indian ancestry and his sister's marriage to Joseph Spinden, an anthropologist who did pioneering work on the Maya, predisposed him naturally to this interest. I am indebted to Nancy Grove for this information.

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produced work that was similar to both her tall figures from the Circus show and the totemic planks of Pollock, Still, and Gottlieb. The first was Louise Bourgeois, whose series of nine etchings, He Disappeared Into Complete Silence, was published the following year with accompanying surrealist titles and poems.[1] The second was Attilio Salemme, a young man who had worked with Mike Nevelson and Theodoros Stamos at Herbert Benavy's frame shop. This shop was next door to Bourgeois' home and studio and Salemme was a frequent visitor during the time Bourgeois was working on this series of etchings.[2]

A comparison of Salemme's early De Chirico-derived landscapes (Echo of a Dream, fig. 172, and Secret Mission, fig. 173) and Bourgeois' etchings of the Woolworth building (fig. 174) suggests a relationship between these artists. Salemme's lonely landscape columns may have become figurative architectural elements with the stimulation of seeing Bourgeois' work develop in this direction, as, for example, Louise Bourgeois' etched flyer for her Norlyst exhibit 1947 (fig. 175). Salemme's colorful and populous interior landscapes were well-known to Nevelson, who could have seen four of them in her sister Lillian's home, or at one of Salemme's seven one-man shows between 1945 and 1955.[3]

The question of influence between Nevelson and Bourgeois is complicated by the intense rivalry that later developed out of an earlier close friendship between the two. Here, as with Bourgeois and Salemme,

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[1]Louise Bourgeois, He Disappeared Into Complete Silence (New York: Genar Press, June 1947) 44 numbered copies.

[2]A review of Salemme's 1946 exhibit at Winfield Gallery refers to Salemme's "totemic figures" (Art News, 45, no. 5 [July 1946] 47).

[3]Attilio Salemme, exhibition catalogue, Whitney Museum—New York, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 14 April-30 May 1959.

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there was probably a mutual influence, dating back to their friendship from the mid-forties. Bourgeois' professional association with the Norlyst Gallery seems to have begun a year after Nevelson's Circus exhibit, and it is possible that Bourgeois might have seen Nevelson's earliest "environmental" show in 1943 which included the two vertical standing pieces discussed above. However, the creation of a sculptural environment was not a direction that Nevelson would pursue again for at least another decade. In 1947 Bourgeois began to make sculpture, and within two years her work had become a highly personal expression of an environmental idea. Only recently has Bourgeois come to realize that her first recorded work in sculpture, Visitors Arrive (fig. 176) and the pieces which inhabited her two shows in the Peridot Gallery (fig. 103) in 1949 and 1950 stood for the family she had left behind in France and then sorely missed.[1]

Many of these works are strongly reminiscent of Max Ernst's Lunar Asparagus (fig. 177), which was shown at the Museum of Modern Art during an exhibit of the Museum collection in July, 1946. The tense grouping of slim listing verticals with small head-like protrusions is the factor these pieces share in common. This feature is also apparent in a work by Nevelson from 1954-55, Personages in the Black Forest (fig. 178).

While it may be true, as she claims, that Louise Bourgeois had never been interested in primitive art, it is impossible to believe that, as the wife of Robert Goldwater, director of the Museum of Primitive Art and author of Primitivism in Modern Art published in 1938, she was

[1]See Susi Block, "An Interview With Louise Bourgeois," Art Journal, 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976) 370-373; Louise Bourgeois, interviews, 18 July, 25 July 1977.

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not very familiar with the primitive art available in Europe and the United States.

Thus, we see that Nevelson and Bourgeois were responding to similar sources, including the ideas on totems and totemism in the writings of Wolfgang Paalen. For both of these artists, such ideas probably influenced their creation of vertical totemic sculpture which unconsciously represented beloved family members who were now absent. Work of this sort occurred in Bourgeois' oeuvre in the late forties, but another five years would pass before Nevelson made sculpture with a similar underlying content.

An additional source for both artists appeared in January, 1948, when the Pierre Matisse Gallery opened a show of work by Giacometti from a twenty-year period. Many modern sculptors in New York were once again confronted with the very pieces to which they owed the greatest debt for the development of their own styles: The Palace at 4 A.M., Slaughtered Woman (Woman with Her Throat Cut), and Hands Holding the Void. In addition, they saw, for the first time in a dozen years, new works by this legendary master. The emaciated Tall Figures (fig. 179) at first looked "like fugitives from Dachau, then rapidly they turn into attenuated and elusive embodiments of grace, dignity and silent movement."[1] Shocking as these figures must have seemed, they had arrived in New York already stamped with the imprimatur of approval evident from the lavish catalogue with its lengthy introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre.[2]

I believe that these haunting images were the catalytic force

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[1] Jo Gibbs, "Attenuated Beauty," Art Digest, 22, no. 9 (1 February 1948) 13.

[2] See above, p. 110, note 1.

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which quickened the pace of the latent totemic current in American sculpture. In the next seven years dozens of totems, personages, and striding men and women were to appear on the scene. Smith, Roszak, Lipton, Ferber, Hare, Bourgeois, Geist, Dombek, and eventually Nevelson, all produced variations on these themes. As mentioned above in Chapter IV, the majority of the sculptors who produced totemic figures in the forties and fifties created single images rather than groups, whereas some works of Bourgeois, Smith, and Nevelson came closer to Giacometti's haunting imagery of assembled figures.

Andersen's interpretation of this development does much to explain it and its popularity at a particular moment in history.

> The concept of the mysterious totem or personage distinguished by its undefined sense of presence emerged in the late forties in American sulpture. The sense of presence, or of personal power implicit in the way a person or the image of a person appears, is historically bound to the Archaic Greek Kouros. In the mid-forties Noguchi's Kouros . . . and Lippold's Primordial Figure . . . responded to the personage idea that Ferber, Lipton, and Smith would develop at the turn of the decade. Infused with the Surrealist concept of the undifferentiated and the undefinable--the power of the unconscious and the dream--the totemic personage idea proliferated among American sculptors, incorporating the sense of loneliness and alienation that had been conditioned by post-Second World War psychology. This notion marked an apparent return to the idea of heroic imagery--or sculpture as statue--but the concept of heroism was unlike anything that sculpture had addressed itself to before. The whole idea of what heroism now meant, considering the nature of modern warfare, had shifted the emphasis to the unknown person. Heroes were no longer specific, nor for that matter were the vanquished. The "Unknown Political Prisoner" international sculpture competition sponsored in London in 1953 was a collective metaphor of the personage concept, just as the frequent images of anguished anatomies within geometric frames or cages were the sculptural equivalent of the Second World War spectre of concentration camps and prisoner-of-war compounds. With the personage concept of the figure, the literalness of most sculptural imagery of the forties became subordinated to a formal generalization of a pervasive mood, generated by a sense of presence rather than emotional display.[1]

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[1]Andersen, American Sculpture, p. 87.

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These monuments to the horrendous mass suffering of the past decade provided a context in the fifties for the monuments which Nevelson erected to commemorate her own losses.

Marriage

In 1959, Nevelson had been chosen by her friend and staunch supporter, Dorothy Miller, to be part of the Museum of Modern Art's 16 Americans exhibit. In contrast to her previous black shows, Nevelson designed a white environment specifically for her one allotted room at the museum. This environment was called Dawn's Wedding Feast (figs. 56-61), and it was Nevelson's first nonblack show in five years. Two years later many of the works from this exhibit were the basis of one of the three rooms Nevelson was given at the 1962 Venice Biennale. Here, too, she created a white environment, but titled the room Voyage (fig. 180).

The continuity in Nevelson's thematic development is intriguing. The black crowned Bride (fig. 13) of Ancient Games, Ancient Places has finally made a real, not imaginary, Voyage to Venice, now as a representative of the United States and one of its leading sculptors. Keeping in mind Nevelson's antipathy to marriage, the most interesting question here is why she would select, over and over, to deal with the wedding theme in her major shows.

The ostensible but incomplete answer that Nevelson gives is that the theme expressed her marriage to her work. A close study of the instances in which this theme appears might lead the observer to a more profound conclusion. The first bride figure to appear in Nevelson's oeuvre is called Bride of the Sea or Proud Lady (fig. 181).

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Nevelson's attachment and interest to this earlier piece is evident from the fact that she selected it for one of the rare photographs of herself with work (fig. 182) in the early fifties.

This tattistone piece was made in the early fifties and was also cast in bronze. It was called totemic when first shown in 1952, and it bears some resemblance to the archetypcal armless female figures of Ernst and Giacometti, as well as to Nevelson's etched Goddess from the Great Beyond (fig. 93).

Its barely visible features convey not pride but rather extreme timidity and a certain awkwardness. Nevelson's next sculpted bride--Bride of the Black Moon (fig. 13) shows a similar timorousness and passivity, with her arms held tightly at her sides and her impassive mouthless face.

The two titles of the earlier piece, Bride of the Sea and Proud Lady could suggest both the artist and her mother as well as an abstract conception of a woman willing to wait and wed the unattainable. The first title is a mythical and impersonal one, consonant with the idea of marriage to one's art. The other, Proud Lady, is more specific, lying in the everyday realm of human life. It could point to a personal connection with Nevelson's mother and herself as women whose mixture of timidity and pride determined their individual destinies.

Nevelson had, in fact, waited two long years before she married the man whose proposal she had accepted shortly after their first meeting. However, like her mother, whose marriage was never satisfying to her, Nevelson did not find fulfillment in her own marriage. Indeed, later in her life she has repeatedly stated that she has never found the

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happiness of true love, "I have never reached a point where I feel that I was rich enough or free enough to give myself to love - it's a full time job."[1] Wherever this happiness might reside, it was evident to Nevelson that for her, it was not in marriage. She discovered or rather decided that this was equally true for the women she most admired--Matchabelli, Graham, and Garbo.[2]

A large part of the fascination for Garbo resided in the myth of her ambivalence--"the love goddess from the icy north, distant yet passionate, the sphinx who came from the cold."[3]

Graham also had a similar myth, beginning her career as the puritan "iron maiden" who in later years could reveal the secret recesses of intense and often illicit desires.[4] It is worth noting again that Nevelson's need to see her heroine in this light was great enough to cause a memory distortion about Graham's marital status, and that this lapse concerned Graham's husband, Erick Hawkins, the very man whose dance, "Bridegroom of the Moon" appeared shortly before Nevelson's sculpture Bride of the Black Moon (fig. 13).

We have already observed that the Bride of the Black Moon is a voyager to distant and exotic lands where she found royal images and

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview, 19 July 1977.

[2]Nevelson came to a similar conclusion about her friends and was closest to women who were estranged or single. Several of her friendships did not survive her attempts to spring the women from their bonded relationships with men (Mike Nevelson, interview, 29 July 1977; Helena Simkhovich, interview, 5 May 1977).

[3]See Robin Livio, Greta Garbo (Paris: E. P. Denoël, 1972), p. 194.

[4]McDonagh, Graham, chap. 4.6.

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goddesses reminiscent of parental figures. The Sphinx and Prometheus images she recalls in the fairy tale poem could also be seen in this light. Exotic, and therefore safely distant, they could represent the male and female qualities she recognizes in herself, her parents, and her ideal models. The wise, silent, and enigmatic female is the Sphinx. Not incidentally, the prize-winning entry for an MGM contest to describe Garbo was the Sphinx of the Twentieth Century[1] (fig. 183). On the other hand, Paalen's article designated the god-like and sexually active male as Prometheus.

The Bride of the Black Moon of 1955 sees these two figures transformed into the King (fig. 25) and Queen (fig. 30) on her next voyage--The Royal Voyage of 1956. The bride reappears in the following show The Forest of 1957 as The First Personage (fig. 33). This piece was accompanied by two others which Nevelson found so distressing that she excluded them from the exhibit at the last moment.[2] One was entitled Wedding Bridge (fig. 184), a five-inch-wide rod that was eight feet long with small blocks at either end representing clustered villages.[3] It was originally intended as a means of cutting the space of the recently enlarged Grand Central Moderns Gallery. According to Nevelson's later explanation, her imagined fear of falling from the bridge she had made to certain death made its removal necessary. The other excluded piece was Black Wedding Cake (fig. 185). Nevelson's recollections and associations to this show and these three pieces twenty years later give clear

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[1]Ture Sjolander, Garbo (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 170-171. Cf. John Bainbridge, Garbo (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), pp. 12, 119.

[2]Wedding Bridge and Black Wedding Cake were included in the press release for the exhibit, but did not appear in the later gallery list or installation photograph (Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art).

[3]Communication with Arnold Glimcher.

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hints of the underlying meanings:

> I made a black wedding cake . . . this was on 30th Street. You know that great big piece that's in the Brooklyn Museum? That's one of the first major pieces, it's called First Personage--1956. What happened was, I acquired those planks and things and I got so involved in my work that I really was creating a novel, because I had myself being the bride . . . it was my autobiography in that sense. So I did then First Personage, and that must be at least six and a half feet tall and it's two inches wide--thick. In width it's about two and one-half feet but I mean in depth it's only about two inches. The interesting thing, while I was filing and working away at it there was a knot where the mouth was supposed to be, just a plain knot, and I, being so concentrated, all of a sudden I saw this knot, mouth moving. And the whole thing was black by then and it frightened me. At that time I was so geared in that I . . . made . . . a black wedding cake. I'm always taking these trips, you see, and I suppose this trip I didn't have a bridegroom, but I had a wedding cake. If you're going without a bridegroom, naturally it's going to be a black wedding cake. Then I made a bridge to cross over. The bridge was a single two-inch lath, but it was about six or seven feet long and I put a few little so-called houses . . . a couple of little wood blocks on either end. To change the texture of light I glued a one-half-inch-wide ribbon of black velvet to one edge of the lath. See, I'm returning to that period. There's a certain virility there and simplicity, you know.Anyway . . . I crossed that bridge. I was caught in that state of mind and then I was coming out of it. I realized you couldn't go on that bridge, that it was impossible for a human to go on that bridge and that there are no black wedding cakes and that personage was sculpture. But they had all become realities. And so I had to fight to come back. . . .
>
> I had been through it, and I didn't want those pieces around me, so I gave them all away as fast as I could. I couldn't have lived with them being in the house. Now, of course, I'm divorced from them.[1]

The degree of danger and implied sexuality represented by these pieces seems to have been the cause of their expulsion. We shall soon see how these pieces came to symbolize the artist's innermost fears.

The exhibition for which these crucial pieces were created was entitled The Forest (fig. 32). This show, with its many sea, village and forest-scapes recalls Nevelson's home territory of Rockland, Maine, and the black color of the wedding pieces may well refer to both Nevelson's

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[1] MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 127-128.

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and her mother's failed marriages. The tale of the bridge might remind any reader of Nevelson's autobiography of the story the artist tells of her mother's betrothal:

> My mother lived in the country in a small town near Kiev where my father's family owned land.[1] And my father went to this village--he was a bachelor in his twenties, and his brothers had already come to America--and he was on a white horse. And he sees on the street this beautiful girl. She was only sixteen. And he sees her and he never wanted to marry, but he took one look and he found out who she was and where she lived and he fell desperately in love with her. Nothing on earth could stop him.
>
> She liked another boy and she didn't want to get married because he pursued her so desperately, but he just was not going to take no for an answer. She had an older sister that lived in another small town and there was a river between them, the Dnieper, and that river froze so they could go over the ice. And this was the one year in one hundred years that the river didn't freeze, so she couldn't get over on the other side. So anyway she married my father and then was unhappy with him.[2]

This fragment from her mother's past assumed such importance in her own memory that she once considered using it as the title of an exhibition "the body of water never froze"--"direct birth, accidental birth."[3]

The ice bridge that would have provided escape for her mother seems here to be transformed into the long narrow black lath with wood "houses" on either bank, separated by black velvet "water."

The relationship of The Wedding Bridge (fig. 184), Black Wedding Cake (fig. 185), and First Personage begins to come clear. The fact that Nevelson was frightened by the moving mouth (fig. 186) of The First Personage (a bride-self representation), and has associated that fear

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[1]Louise Nevelson's memory on the subject of family-owned land in Russia differs from her brother's and sisters' recollections.

[2]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, pp. 4-6.

[3]Poetic fragment, Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

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with two more pieces related to marriage, suggests that the knot (mouth) may also represent a vagina and therefore appear as a symbol for the bride's quivering trepidation and sexual fantasies. Thus, it seems that a sudden outburst of her fears and pessimism concerning marriage coalesced and compelled her to remove the cues which set off these fantasies. The strength of these fears and fantasies was enough to impell her to enclose her future work in boxes in an effort to clothe these imaginings with some semblance of privacy.

In an interview done eight years later, Nevelson was able to articulate this realization about the importance of the First Personage:

> Well, I suppose really I have a private concept of it, meaning that this big thing is somewhere identified with myself. And we could go on and on and speak also about the second piece with it, because there we have the horizontal and the dynamics and the tension and so as I will repeat the front piece was more in repose than the other. And somehow the two sort of make a total being really. The front when you meet a person and then all the dynamics that you don't meet. Certainly not all at once.
>
> Also, that this piece was I think one of the very last pieces that I did in what I call in the round. I wanted to be more secretive about the work and I began more or less working in the enclosures, and I have never felt the need not to work in enclosures. There's something more private about it for me and gives me a better sense of security. So you see this piece sort of cured me from trying to do something in the round.[1]

Nevelson's response to the emotions aroused in her by this piece helps to explain an aspect of the stylistic development which followed almost immediately--the walls. We can now see that her desire for privacy and the need to shield her inner feelings could lead beyond the enclosed boxes to the construction of a wall behind which the artist could take refuge. Ironically, these walls consisted of open boxes

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[1]Louise Nevelson, interview with Arlene Jacobowitz, 3 May 1965, pp. 1-2. Cf. Louise Nevelson, interview with Colette Roberts, 1968, pp. 19-20.

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which, like Nevelson, appear frank and outspoken while keeping the true self always in hiding.

The subsequent exhibition Moon Garden + One finally revealed Nevelson's mature style and brought her the long-desired public acclaim. The next appearance of the marriage theme was the exhibit devoted entirely to the bride--Dawn's Wedding Feast (figs. 56-61), at the Museum of Modern Art. Nevelson has recently explained her remarkable shift to white sculpture after five years of work in black, acknowledging that Dorothy Miller's invitation to show at the Museum of Modern of Art was the stimulus for her choice of theme.

> Dorothy Miller called and invited me to dinner. So I went to dinner, and she asked me if I would be in "Sixteen Americans." I guess I was so taken by storm and surprise about the whole thing--I'd never had an environment there--that without thinking I said that I would do a white show--Dawn's Wedding Feast. . . . And that's how it happened. You know, sometimes if you're highly surprised, I think the human mind begins to spark. And when she asked me, in a way it was an homage to her. I had a white wedding cake. A wedding mirror. A pillow. It was a kind of wish fulfillment, a transition to a marriage with the world.[1]

In the light of this statement one can expect to find a work in this exhibit which represents the bride, but the few titled pieces in the show do not locate it. In front of the Wedding Chapel wall, a platform with two large totemic columns (fig. 60) was placed on a diagonal axis in relationship to the Chapel wall. The columns were unmistakably figurative, with their larger lower sections and their heavily encrusted narrow upper parts. To each column was attached a round shield bearing a low relief. On the biggest shield, which was attached to the larger of the two totemic columns, the relief elements

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 138.

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were emphatically vertical. The tondo on the smaller column bore three square frames, each enclosing a delicate relief.

The central figures of this exhibit are the two large columns on the platform in front of the wall. They have not been given titles, nor have they been discussed in terms of content. In describing them, Glimcher mentions that they both are adorned with "shields and moons."[1] I believe it might be more accurate to see the shields as differentiated, the larger representing a sun and the smaller one a moon.

These two shields are similar to the Sun (fig. 54) and Moon (fig.55) pieces from Sky Columns Presence. The differences in size and design of both sets not only indicate the different solar bodies, but also suggest the difference of gender associated with each. Thus, the black Moon (fig. 55) from the Jackson Gallery show has wood fragments that appear like a woman's hair surrounding an encrusted circular "face." Like the two columns in Dawn's Wedding Feast, the Sun and Moon pieces in Sky Columns Presence are placed in the center of the room as focal points (fig. 52).

If this hypothesis is valid, and the two large columns in Dawn's Wedding Feast carry the respective shields of the moon and sun, then their presence at the wedding feast might imply that they are the feted couple in whose honor the other columnal figures have gathered at the chapel. Since we have noted before the particular care Nevelson takes in the installation of her shows, more can be said about the placement of these columns. An examination of the photographs reveals that the smaller or moon column is facing the Chapel wall. The sun column faces

[1]Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 108.

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away from both the Chapel and the other column, and looks toward the hanging columns and the doorways. This suggests that the moon column is in closer contact with the Mirror (fig.57) in the wall toward which she is facing than with the sun column with whom she is presumably to be united. Although she does not precisely face the mirror, she is aimed in its direction. It should also be noted that the Pillow (fig. 59) looks hard and uninviting, with a large, sharp triangle in the center that would divide any couple brave enough to rest their heads there.

Looking back at the sequential development of Nevelson's thematic exhibitions, we find that the moon makes its first appearance in Ancient Games, Ancient Places in the form of etchings--Moon Goddess (Goddess I, fig. 148) and Moon Lady (fig. 187). Part of the aesthetic merit and iconographic fascination of both etchings is the obscuring darkness, in one case achieved through the heavy overlay of lace fabric. This appears to be another instance in which a mythical and impersonal figure is used to symbolize a more personal representation of Nevelson and her mother. Mrs. Berliawsky was at times distant and unavailable, like the black moon rapt in her mourning. At other times she sparkled and shined in all her finery, indeed like a goddess to a young girl. The appearance of lunar deities on the first voyage of the Bride of the Black Moon connotes the complexity of their significance. On the one hand, the Bride is to marry the moon, and on the other, the moon goddess traditionally protects and sponsors the young bride. Similarly, Nevelson, as a young child, had sought in vain to be close to her mother; then as a young bride she must have looked to her mother for guidance. Thus, the Moon Goddess could be simultaneously the distant wished-for

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mother of childhood and the model of womanly behavior of young adulthood.

The monumental size and square-columned nature of the two shield-bearing central figures in Dawn's Wedding Feast now may be perceived as recollected images, first from Quiriguá, and second from childhood. The Sun God and Moon Goddess, so pivotal in the Mayan Pantheon, have returned to Nevelson's oeuvre for a celebrated marriage feast. As the early-rising Nevelson greets the dawn, that union of light and darkness, she creates a magnificant white environment using artistic means to effect a partial resolution of a personal conflict.

The invitation to this wedding was proffered by Dorothy Miller, representative of "MOMA," and accepted by Nevelson whose continuing perception of herself as the bride reappeared in her spontaneous response at the airport on her way to the Venice Biennale in 1962. Selected by the Museum of Modern Art to represent the United States, Nevelson was accompanied to Venice by Dorothy Miller. Her exhibition was made up of remnants from Dawn's Wedding Feast and Sky Columns Presence, and the new white wall which emerged in the installation was retitled Voyage[1] (fig. 180). The remarkable statement she claims to have made upon arrival at the airport in Venice is the clearest instance of Nevelson's relationship to the theme of the bride in her work.

Discovering that her suitcase had not arrived, and that the airport officials were not willing to act quickly to resolve the problem,

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[1]Glimcher, Nevelson, p. 59.

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she spoke up:

> 'Now I'm getting married tomorrow and I've got to have my trousseau. My white wedding dress is in it!' Well, of course I was already sixty-two years old and that was the last thing on my mind.[1]

This remark and Nevelson's continued avowal that the marriage theme represents for her a union with her work, or the world in general, discloses both the truth and a denial of the complex significance of this theme for the artist. Nevelson was not unique in her ambivalent personal and artistic relationship to this theme. The twentieth-century artist whose work is most closely associated to the idea of the bride is Marcel Duchamp. He is also the European artist whose presence in America, along with Frederick Kiesler and John Graham, has had the greatest impact on the development of American art. His master work, the enigmatic Large Glass, otherwise known as The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even, was made in New York,and mere knowledge of its existence had thrown decades of artists into a tizzy.

As we have seen, Duchamp's periodic presence in New York had already had repercussions in Nevelson's work, when his unorthodox installation with miles of twine of The First Papers of Surrealism in 1942 (fig. 76) helped embolden her to unify the environment of her Circus show the following year.

Duchamp's preoccupation with the theme of the bride, beginning around 1911 and lasting to the end of his life, was a matter of common

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[1]MacKown, Dawns and Dusks, p. 147. One more instance of the complexity of Nevelson's double identity is her remark upon learning that Giacometti won first prize at the Biennale: "Always the bridegroom, never the bride," ibid., p. 148.

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knowledge. Julien Levy selected Duchamp's 1912 painting, The Bride (fig.188), along with two studies for The Large Glass and a statement by the artist about the bride theme for his entry on Duchamp in his seminal book, Surrealism. This book has been, from its publication in 1936 to the present, a staple for New York artists interested in surrealism. Important examples of surrealist art and samplings of its literature are presented in a colorful format, and Levy's imaginative and lively text appealed more to the artist's sensibility than the usual academic treatise. In any case, the fragment of Duchamp's text on the bride touches upon the salient ideas of Duchamp's concept:

THE BRIDE

In general, if the Bride motor must appear as an apotheosis of virginity, that is to say of ignorant desire, white desire (with a touch of malice) and if it (graphically) does not need to satisfy the laws of balance, nevertheless a gallows of shining metal might simulate the attachment of the maiden to her friends and relations. . . . .

Basically the Bride is a motor. But more than being a motor transmitting its timid-power, she is the timid-power itself. This timid-power is a sort of essolene, essence of love. When distributed to the virtue-frailty cylinders, and within range of the sparks from her constant life, it causes the expansion of this virgin, now come to the state of her desire. . . .

This cinematic expansion is commanded by the electric undressing. . . .

This cinematic expansion expresses the moment of undressing. . . .

This cinematic expansion (commanded by the electric undressing) is the whole importance of the picture (graphically, as surface). It is, in general, the glory of the Bride, the whole of her splendid vibrations: graphically, it is not a question of symbolizing, in an ecstatic painting, this happy-desire state of the Bride; it is only that, more clearly, amidst all this expansion, the painting may be an inventory of the elements of this expansion, the elements of sexual life imagined by the Bride-desirous.

The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Own Bachelors--fragment
translated by J. L.[1]

[1]Julien Levy, Surrealism, p. 126.

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Ironically, Nevelson's husbandless or disunited brides have much in common with Duchamp's virgin version. They remain locked in the realm of fantasy, endlessly imagining anticipated pleasures. While Duchamp's brides are mechanical and beset by numerous bachelors with tricky devices, Nevelson's brides tend to stand alone or to turn their backs on potential spouses. Nevelson's use of this theme was intensely personal, and for many years it was a fertile source for her art. However, one can see that Duchamp's work and interest on the topic might have had an occasional catalytic effect on Nevelson. One such instance could be the show of Duchamp's work at The Janis Gallery in April 1959, seven months before Dawn's Wedding Feast. Included in the exhibit were the third version of Nude Descending a Staircase and the 1912 Bride, both from the Arensberg Collection.[1] Another opportunity to see these works was the opening of the Arensburg Collection with its forty-three Duchamps in 1954, the year before the appearance of Nevelson's Bride of the Black Moon. This event was discussed at length in art journals. While Nevelson was not part of the Duchamp circle until the sixties, she would have been kept aware of Duchamp's work and activities through their mutual friend from the twenties, Frederick Kiesler.[2]

Few other artists in the twentieth century have attempted to deal with this theme since Duchamp's early claim upon it. His friend and fellow surrealist, Max Ernst, occasionally attempted it. One example is Chemical Nuptials (fig. 190). But in American art, only Nevelson

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[1]"Marcel Duchamp," review of exhibit at Janis Gallery, New York, 6 April-2 May 1959, Art News, 58, no. 4 (May 1959) 59.

[2]Jimmy Ernst, interview, 29 July 1976.

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had made this theme a central part of her oeuvre.

Coda

What should be evident from this analysis of the three ceremonial themes which run like threads through Nevelson's oeuvre is the complexity of the underlying meanings of the walls and environments which became her signature style in the late fifties. In sculptural and graphic works, exhibitions, and in the artist's statements, the themes of royalty, death, and marriage are interlaced, appearing and reappearing in different guises with subtle shifts of significance throughout Nevelson's career.

It appears that many, probably most, of the deeply personal meanings of these three themes are not consciously known to Nevelson. We have seen the strength of her powers of psychological denial and how often she has escaped from personal problems through a total "marriage" to her work. Like many artists she is both reluctant and perhaps incapable of explaining her work, preferring to rely upon ambiguous comments about mystery and poetry.

Attempts to unravel the "true meaning" of a work of art or an oeuvre are fraught with difficulties, since there are usually so many meanings which may be both applicable and contradictory. Like the artists who produce the work, the end results are the products of a lifetime of conscious and unconscious motivations.

In the case of Nevelson, this study has been an attempt to select the principal meanings in her work. What follows is a brief reconstruction of Nevelson's six thematic exhibitions between 1955 and 1959,

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focusing on the biographical underpinnings of the three interlaced themes: Royalty, Death, and Marriage. The first hypothesis on which the remaining propositions rest is that Nevelson's trips to Mexico and Guatemala in 1950 and 1951 recalled childhood memories and fantasies which would be expressed and played out in her art for the next decade, and that these recollections constituted a psychological shift which would culminate in Nevelson's discovery of her style. It must be repeated that these recollections may not have been consciously known to the artist.

The first of these shows, Ancient Games [in] Ancient Places (figs. 13-21), represents Nevelson's fantasy voyage of herself as the Bride of the Black Moon (fig. 13) to the presumed safety of early childhood and her mother, The Goddess from the Great Beyond (fig. 93), The moon, on this occasion, is the Moon Goddess--simultaneously a symbol for the distant mother of childhood and the model adult woman who instructs the young bride. This bride has no adult male spouse, since the moon here is female. The symbol for the father is Prometheus in the poem, and the Sphinx represents a third aspect of her mother as silent, impassive, and enigmatic. The number of royal couples in the etchings on the wall of this exhibit support this interpretation. Through these symbolic equivalents, Nevelson reveals both her intense devotion to her mother and the painful memory that her mother was often distant and emotionally unavailable to her as a child.

In Royal Voyage (figs. 24-31), the second thematic exhibition of the fifties, the underlying focus remains on the parents who are symbolized by the royal couple (figs. 25, 30), Nevelson's first truly

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totemic figures since 1943. Here begins the memorializing of Nevelson's deceased parents who have taken the long voyage to the netherworld. Also included here is Nevelson's identification with both parents, first as the Queen mother who carries gifts and surveys her domain, and second as the King who has built the empire. The exotic and fantastic locale which disguises this content is suggested by the Undermarine Scapes (fig. 28, 29), the Indian Chief (fig. 31), and Forgotten City (fig. 17).

The next exhibit, Forest (fig. 32), 1957, takes place in Maine with its Village, Island, and seascapes. While the memorializing continues with the inclusion of Forest Christ, Totem (fig. 36), and Cathedral (fig. 37), the major theme here is the fatal risk involved in marriage. We noted before that the reference was to her mother's marriage, thus explaining the Maine locale, but that it applied equally to Nevelson's. The severity of Nevelson's fears and anxiety about marriage combined with a slight lifting of the repression of those fears, causing the precipitous expulsion from the show of the pieces related to marriage, The Wedding Bridge (fig. 184) and Black Wedding Cake (fig. 185). Nevelson's self-representation in this show as First Personage (fig. 33), the huge slab which almost hides the sharply stabbing, fragmented "feelings," may be an indication of how close to consciousness were some of those inner feelings. The tension experienced by the artist in relation to this exhibit was resolved with extraordinary results in her following show, Moon Garden + One (figs. 38-40).

It seemed that the mourning process for her parents and Nierendorf, long denied by Nevelson at a conscious level, had finally received symbolic expression through her creation of a funereal environment consisting

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of coffins, totems, and a holy sepulchre. The internment of the king within the province of the moon serves as a clue to the presence of parental imagery. The fact that this exhibit culminated in a crystallization of Nevelson's formal style suggests the importance the incompleted mourning process had played in her life and work, and indicates how her preference for black might have been a persistent, nagging hint of the constant tension of this unresolved issue. The momentary peace which followed the resolution underlying this exhibit is perceptible in the two Tropical Gardens (figs. 50, 51). These two eloquently peaceful works represent a moment of calm before Nevelson's next manic high.

In Sky Columns Presence (figs. 52, 53) of 1959, Nevelson continued in the funereal mode of Moon Garden, but the obsessive accumulation of closed, vertical, totemic boxes seemed to indicate that some underlying conflict was still unresolved. The appearance of sun and moon as central works in this exhibit recalls the Mayan scene and parental imagery. The enclosure of these pieces in boxes and the elation Nevelson experienced as a result of this aesthetic decision may point again to the symbolic equation of these solar deities with parents who had in reality been enclosed in boxes at the funerals Nevelson did not attend.

The reappearance of the sun and moon a month later in Dawn's Wedding Feast (fig. 60) as the bridal couple indicates the complexity of these personal symbols. Nevelson's unexpected shift to a white environment seems in retrospect to be another resolution of underlying conflict. Envisioning herself as the bride, Nevelson's identification with the moon-mother figure is repeated, and while this show brings the symbolic marriage ceremony closest to fruition, the bride still stands alone,

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facing her own reflection in the mirror rather than a true partner. Thus, Nevelson once again symbolizes in her work the strength of the ties she felt for her own mother, and the impediment this created for anything but a narcissistic relationship. The words of Nevelson's undated poem Narcissus express far less aesthetically, but perhaps more revealingly, this sentiment:

Narcissus

I dared to look
I like what I see
Good i good i good i for me
I like what I see
Good i good i good i for me
I like what, I see[1]

[1]Louise Nevelson Collection, Archives of American Art.

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EPILOGUE

Several Nevelson exhibitions in the seventies point to the relevance of material presented in this dissertation. After nearly a decade of exploring such diverse materials as brass, aluminum, Plexiglas, and lucite, Nevelson has returned by the mid-seventies to wood as her predominant material. Gathering the thematic threads of her works from the late fifties, she has titled recent pieces Dawn's Presence and Moon Gardenscape. This recapitulation of earlier motifs, expressed through the medium of black-painted wood, culminated in an exhibition in 1977 called Mrs. N's Palace,[1] in which the title piece was a 20-foot by 15-foot by 12-foot room constructed almost entirely of black wood (fig. 191). Just inside the entrance of this uncanny, evocative work is a pair of male and female figures (fig. 192) made many years earlier, but kept by the artist until a suitable enclosure could be built for them. The continuing presence of royal couples, fixed in black wood surroundings, suggests the tenacious hold and fascination this theme continues to have for Louise Nevelson.

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[1]Louise Nevelson: Mrs. N's Palace, Pace Gallery, New York, 26 November 1977-7 January 1978.

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APPENDIX I

Exhibitions Devoted to Child Art at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1938-1948.

Children's Work, 4-22 April 1938.

Creative Growth, Childhood to Maturity, 1 November 1939 - 7 January 1940.

Mexican Children's Art, 15 May - 30 September 1940.

Student Work from Fourteen High Schools, 11 November - 23 December 1940.

Children's Festival of Modern Art, 11 March - 10 May 1942.

Anti-Hoarding Pictures by New York School Children, 13 May - 8 June 1942.

Paintings from the Class for Members' Children, 25-31 May 1942.

Children's Painting and The War, 18 November - 13 December 1942.

Children's Festival of Modern Art, 16 December 1942 - 17 January 1943.

The Arts in Therapy, 3 February - 7 March 1943.

Paintings from the Class of Members' Children, 7 April - 9 May 1943.

Children's Artwork from the Holiday Circus, 2-17 February 1944.

Understanding the Child Through Art, 23 February - 2 April 1944.

Chinese Children's War Pictures, 5 April - 4 May 1944.

Soviet Children's Art, 19 September - 19 November 1944.

Work from the Children's Holiday Circus of Modern Art, 16 January - 18 February 1945.

Development in Children's Art, 14 March - 13 May 1945.

Teaching Elements of Design to Children, 16 May - 10 June 1945.

Children's Art, 20 June - 20 August 1945.

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Young People's Art, 23 August - 13 September 1945.

Creative Art by American Children, 15 January - 3 March 1946.

Work from Children's Classes Conducted under The Educational Program, 12 March - 10 April 1946.

Children's Holiday Fair of Modern Art, 3 December 1946 - 5 January 1947.

Art Work by Children and Young People from The Classes of the Educational Program, 20 May - 13 October 1947.

Art Materials for High Schools and Colleges, 15 October - 24 November 1947.

Children's Holiday Fair of Modern Art, 2 December - 4 January 1948.

Paintings by French Children, 13 January - 21 March 1948.

Young People's Work from an English School, 16 March - 18 April 1948.

Art Work by Children of Other Countries, 23 April - 23 May 1948.

Children's and Young People's Art Work from The Classes of The Educational Program, 19 May - 22 August 1948.

Paintings by Children 4-12 Years from New York City Public Schools, 12 October - 31 October 1948.

Children's Holiday Fair of Modern Art, 8 December 1948 - 16 January 1949.

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APPENDIX II

Exhibitions Devoted to Dance and Theatre at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1934-1948.

International Exhibition of Theatre Art, 15 January - 25 February 1934.

Preview: Dance Archives, 6 March - 7 April 1940.

Forty Years of the American Dance, 23 October - 19 November 1940.

The Ballet Today, 14 November 1940 - 6 March 1941.

Pavlova Memorial Exhibition, 7 January - 6 March 1941.

Designing a Stage Setting, 1-15 July 1941.

Isadora Duncan: Drawings, Photographs, Memorabilia, 21 October 1941 - 10 January 1942.

Dancers in Movement: Photographs by Gjon Mili, 13 January - 9 April 1942.

Dance and Theatre Design in Art in Progress: 15th Anniversary Exhibition, 24 May - 17 September 1944.

Modern American Dance, 28 March - 13 May 1945.

Stage Design by Robert Edmund Jones, 11 April - 24 June 1945.

Works from the Museum Collection of Dance and Theatre Design, 2 May - 1 August 1945.

Stage Designs by Joan Junyer, 10 July - 17 September 1945.

Costume Carnival, 19 September - 25 November 1945.

Portrait of Ondine; Dance and Theatre Design, 28 November 1945 - 3 February 1946.

Ballet Drawings by Franklin C. Watkins for "Transcendence"; Model by Eugene Berman for "The Island God," 18 June - 25 August 1946.

Scenic Design by Arch Lauterer, 27 August - 7 November 1946.

"Le Tricorne" by Picasso, 19 November 1946 - 13 January 1947.

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The Theatre of Eugene Berman, 21 January - 9 March 1947.

Boris Aronson: Stage Designs and Models, 24 June - 10 October 1947.

World of Illusion: Elements of Stage Design, 14 October 1947 - 4 January 1948.

Stage Designs for The Ballet Society, 20 January - 18 April 1948.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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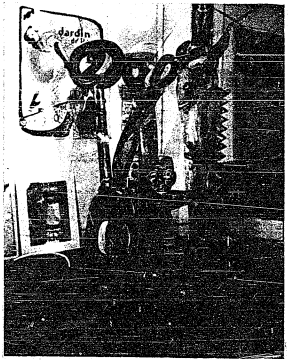


Fig.1 Louise Nevelson. Clown, mixed media wood, plaster, tin, 1942-43.

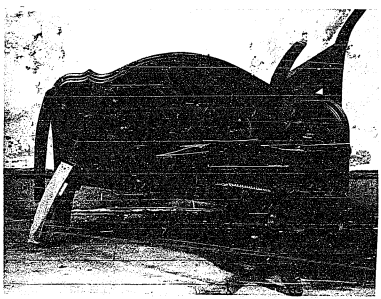


Fig. 2 Louise Nevelson. Ferocious Bull wood, metal, 1942-43.

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Fig. 3 Louise Nevelson. Wonderous Fishes and Balancing Seals, wood, metal, 1942-43.

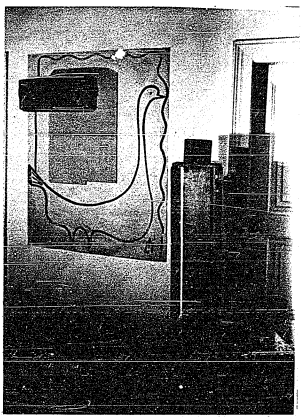


Fig. 4 Louise Nevelson. Thin Man, wood, 1942-43.

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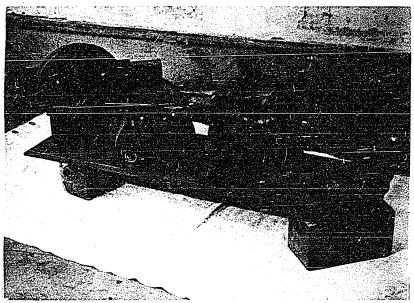


Fig. 5 Louise Nevelson. Menagerie Animals, wood, metal, 1942-43.

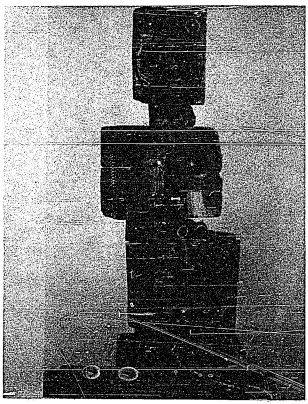


Fig. 6 Louise Nevelson, Audience Figure, wood, metal, 1942-43.

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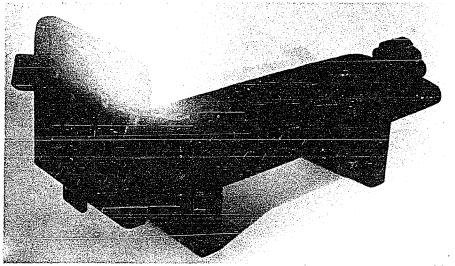


Fig. 7 Louise Nevelson. Stool, wood, 1943.

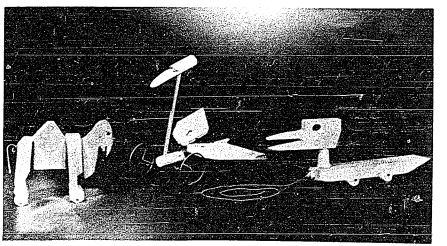


Fig. 8 Alexander Calder. Animal Toys, wood, metal, 1943.



Fig. 9 Alexander Calder. Doll Doing Splits, wood, cloth, 1943.

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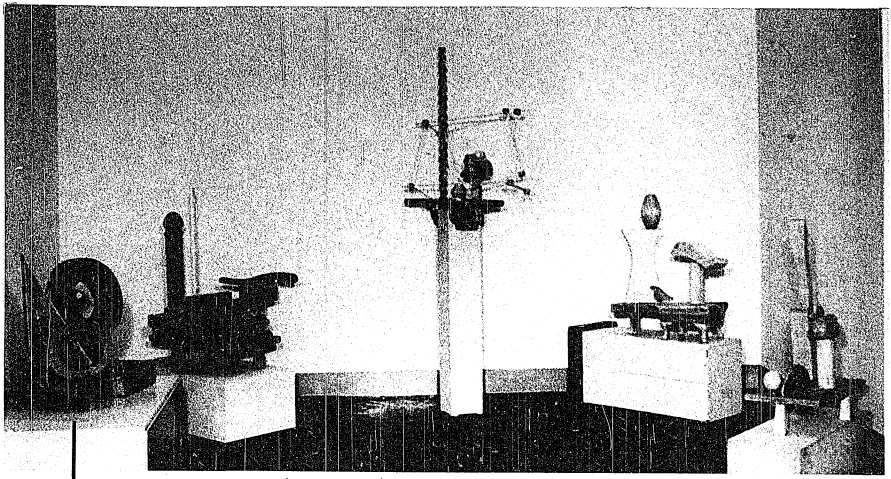


Fig. 10 Louise Nevelson. Sculpture Montages, Nierendorf Gallery Installation, 1944.

Time and Space

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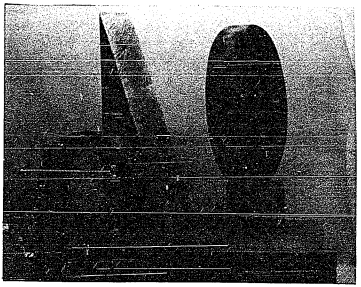


Fig. 11 Louise Nevelson. Time & Space, wood, 1944.

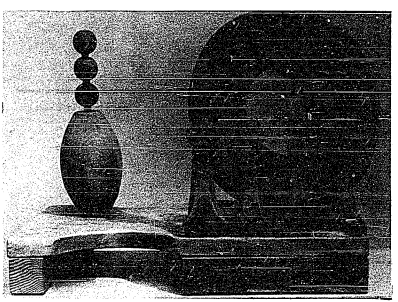


Fig. 12 Louise Nevelson. Three Four Time, wood, 1944.

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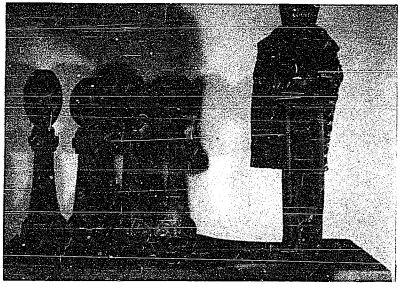


Fig. 13 Louise Nevelson. Bride of The Black Moon, wood, 1955.

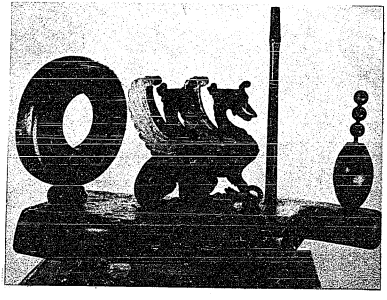


Fig. 14 Louise Nevelson. Winged City, wood, 1954-55.

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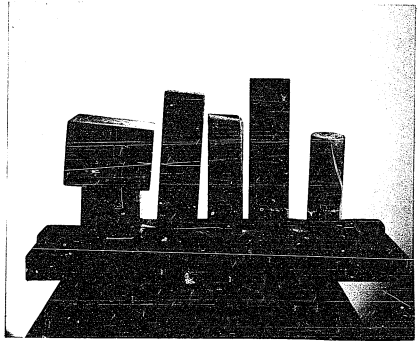


Fig. 15 Louise Nevelson. Cloud City (That Silent Place), wood stained black, 1954-55.

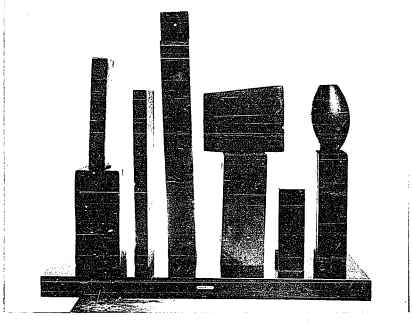


Fig. 16 Louise Nevelson. Night Scapes (Black Splendor), wood stained black, 1954-55.

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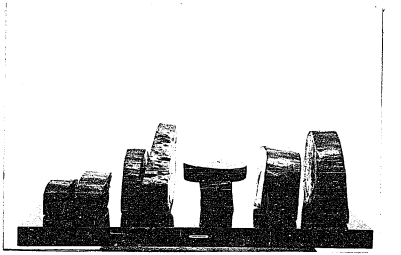


Fig. 17 Louise Nevelson. Forgotten City, wood stained black, 1954-55.

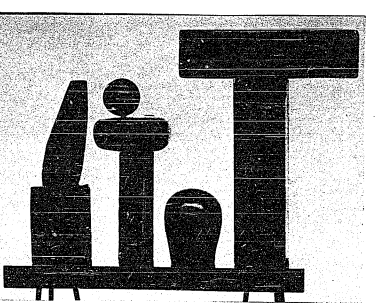


Fig. 18 Louise Nevelson. Black Majesty, wood stained black, 1954-55.

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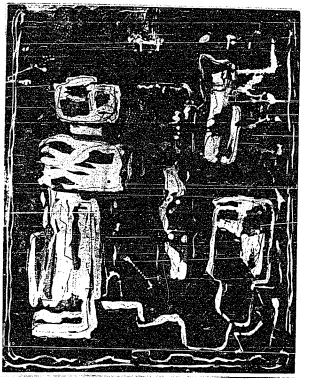


Fig. 19 Louise Nevelson. Ancient Garden (Solid Reflections, In The Jungle), etching, 1953-55.

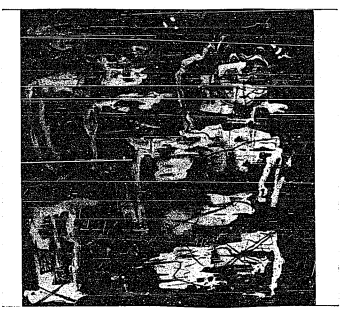


Fig. 20 Louise Nevelson. The Stone Figures That Walk at Night (The Colored Jungle, In The Land Where The Trees Talk), etching and drypoint, 1953-55.

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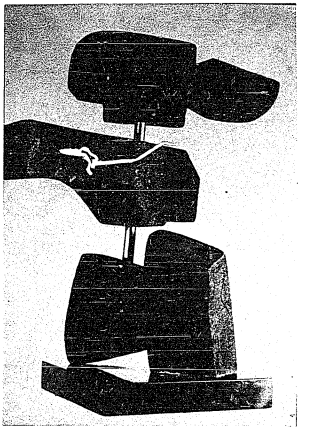


Fig. 21 Louise Nevelson. Walking Woman (Game Figure V, Moving Static - Moving Figure), terra cotta with metal tubes, 1953-55.

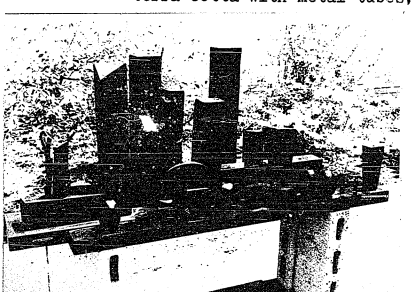


Fig. 22 Louise Nevelson. Little City at Dawn, wood painted black, 1955.

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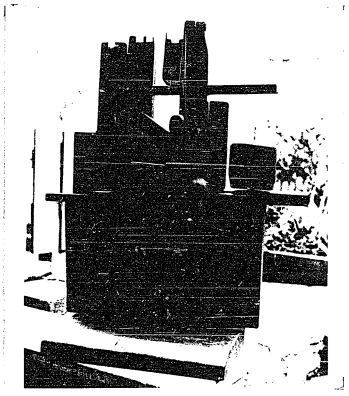


Fig. 23 Louise Nevelson. The Little Mansion, wood painted black, 1955-56.

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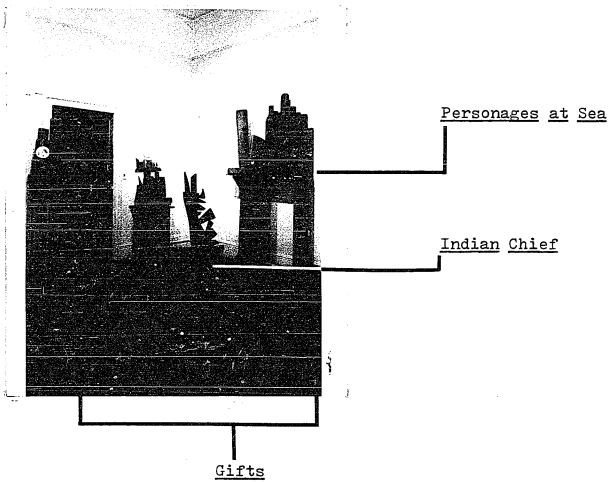


Fig. 24 Louise Nevelson. Royal Voyage, Grand Central Moderns Gallery Installation, 1956.

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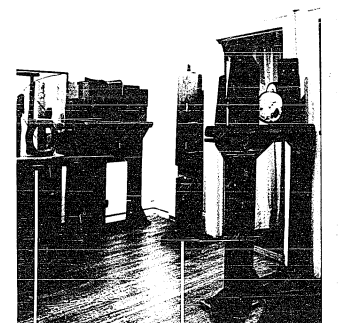


Fig. 25 Louise Nevelson. Royal Voyage, Grand Central Moderns Gallery Installation, 1956.

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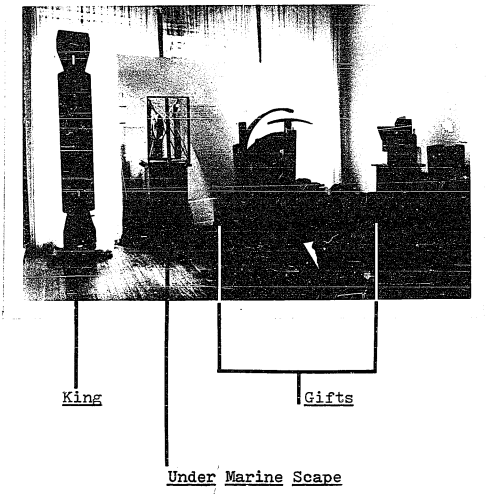


Fig. 26 Louise Nevelson. Royal Voyage, Grand Central Moderns Gallery Installation, 1956.

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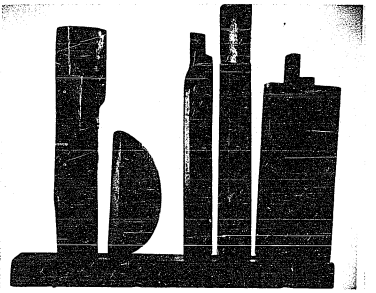


Fig.27 Louise Nevelson. Personages at Sea, wood painted black, 1956.

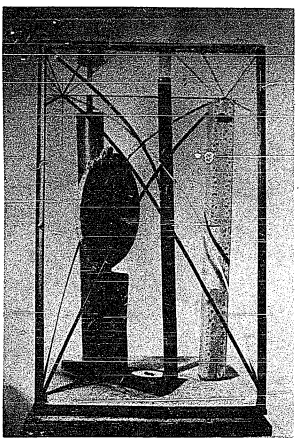


Fig. 28 Louise Nevelson. Undermarine Scape, wood,metal and glass, 1956.

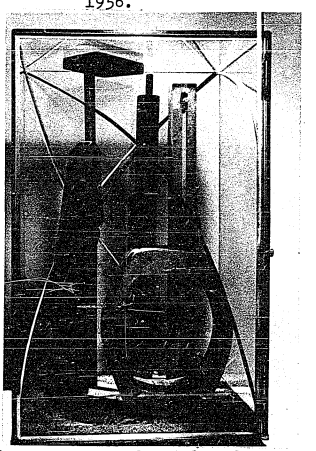


Fig.29 Louise Nevelson. Undermarine Scape, wood,metal and glass, 1956.

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Fig. 30 Louise Nevelson. King, wood painted black, 1956.

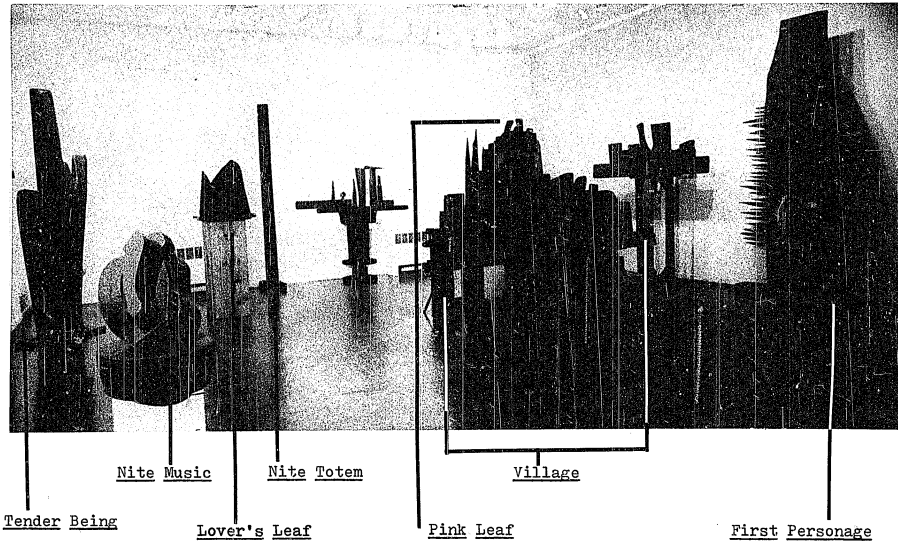


Fig. 31 Louise Nevelson. Indian Chief, wood painted black, 1955-56.

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Fig. 32 Louise Nevelson. Forest, Grand Central Moderns Gallery Installation, 1957.



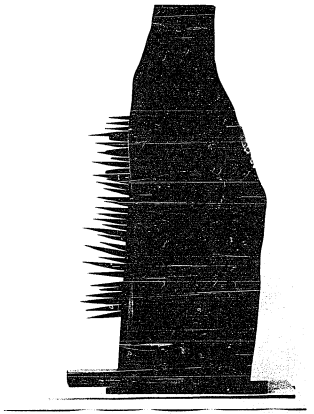


Fig. 33 Louise Nevelson. First Personage, wood painted black, 1956.

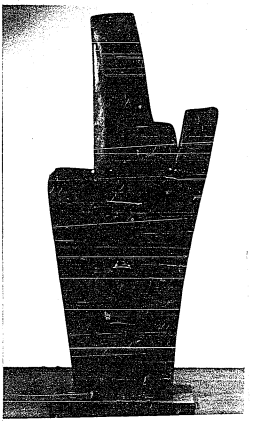


Fig. 34 Louise Nevelson. Tender Being, wood painted black, 1956.

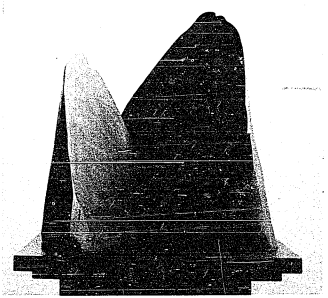


Fig. 35 Louise Nevelson. Lover's Leaf, wood painted black, 1956.

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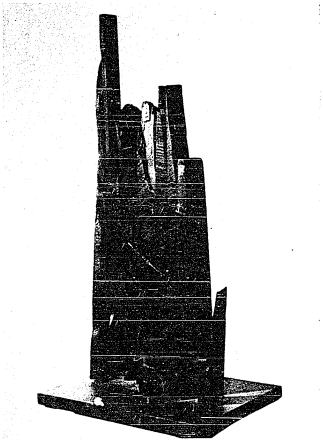


Fig. 36 Louise Nevelson. Cathedral (Distant Cathedral), wood painted black, 1956.

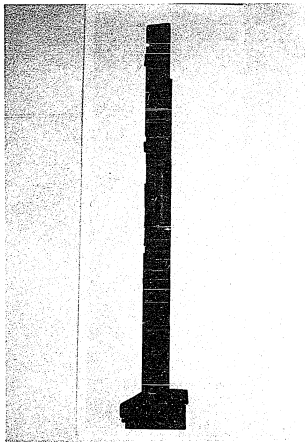


Fig. 37 Louise Nevelson. Nite Totem (Ancient Figure) wood painted black, 1956.

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Fig. 38 Louise Nevelson, Moon Garden + One, Grand Central Moderns Gallery Installation, 1958.

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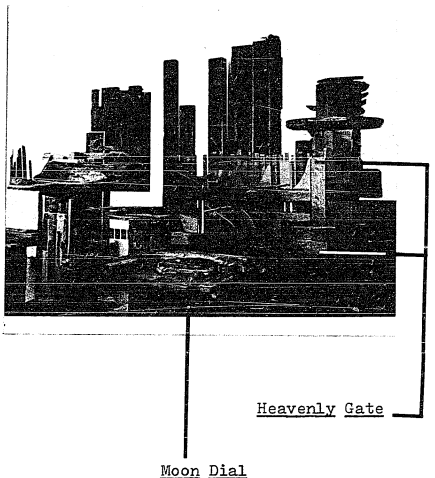
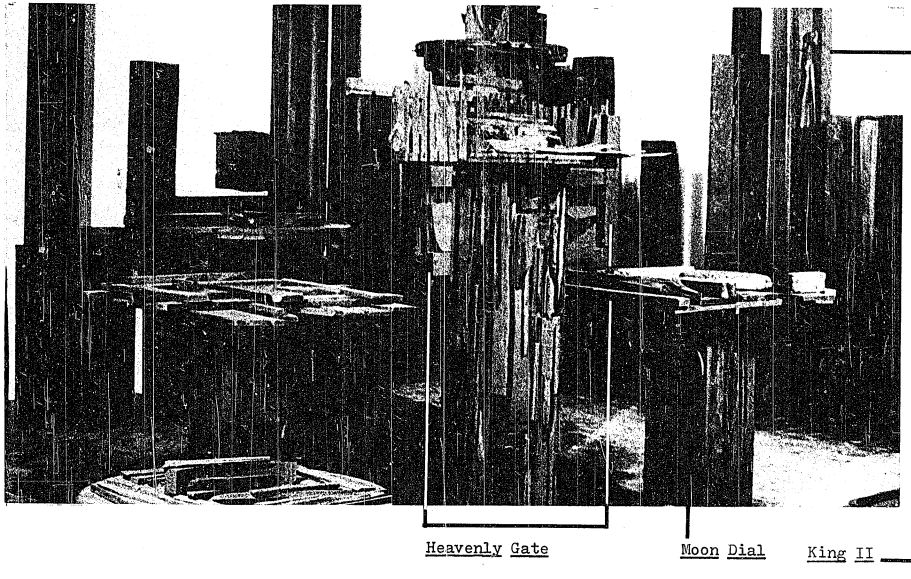


Fig. 39 Louise Nevelson. Moon Garden + One, Grand Central Moderns Gallery Installation, 1958.

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Fig. 40 Louise Nevelson. Moon Garden + One, Grand Central Moderns Gallery Installation, 1958.



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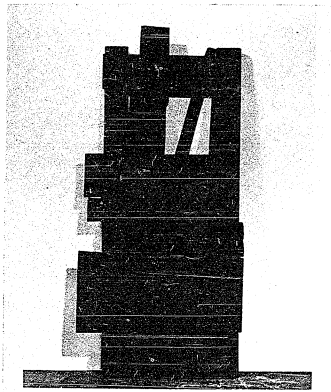


Fig. 41 Louise Nevelson. Shadow Image, wood painted black, 1958.

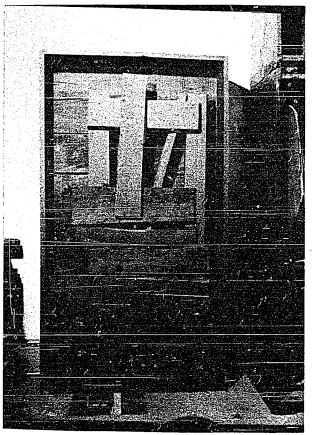
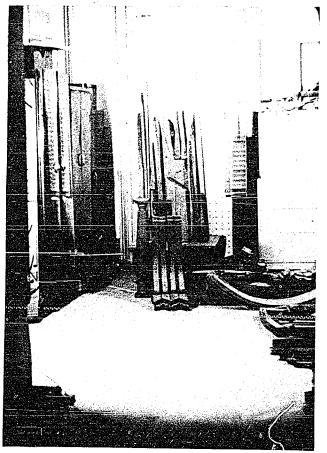
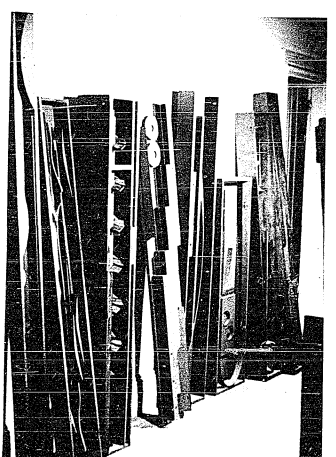
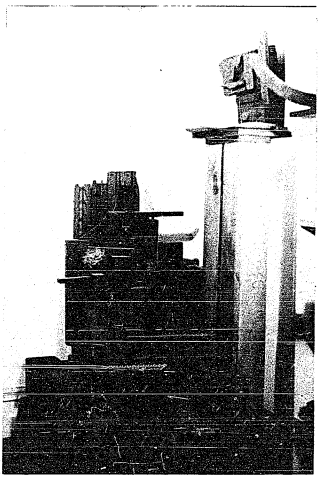


Fig. 42 Louise Nevelson. Shadow Image, enclosed, wood painted black, 1958.

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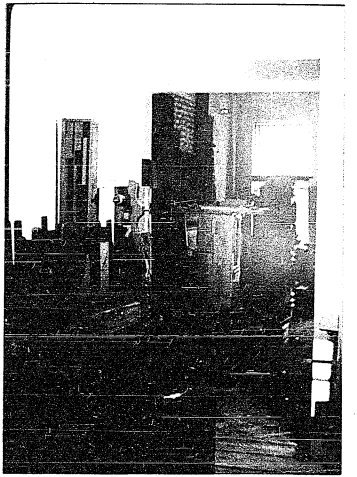




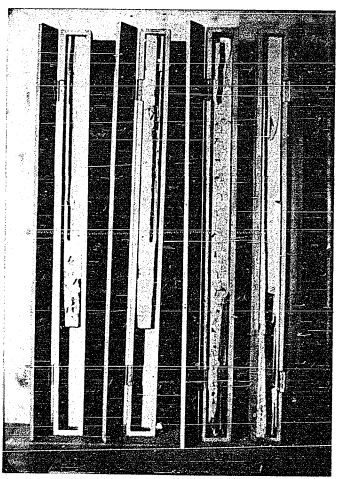


Figs. 43-45 Louise Nevelson's Thirtieth Street House, Interior, 1957-58.

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Figs. 46-47 Louise Nevelson's Thirtieth Street House, Interior, 1957-58.



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Fig. 48 Louise Bourgeois. Garden at Night, wood painted, 1953.

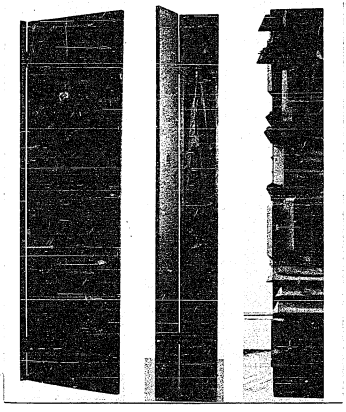


Fig. 49 Louise Nevelson. King II, wood painted black, 1957.

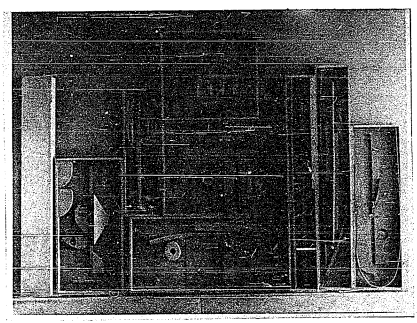


Fig. 50 Louise Nevelson. Tropical Garden I, wood painted black, 1958-59.

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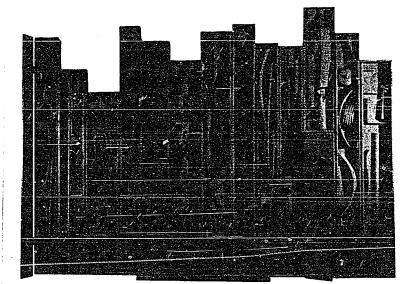


Fig. 51 Louise Nevelson. Tropical Garden II, wood painted black, 1958-59.

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Fig. 52 Louise Nevelson. Sky Columns Presence, Martha Jackson Gallery Installation, 1959.

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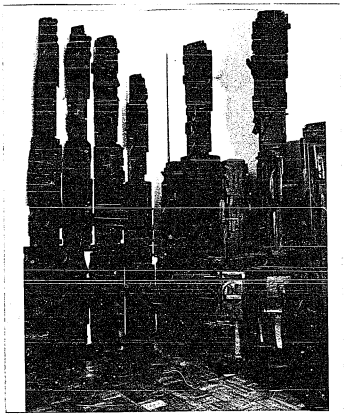


Fig. 53 Louise Nevelson. Sky Columns Presence, Martha Jackson Gallery Installation, 1959.

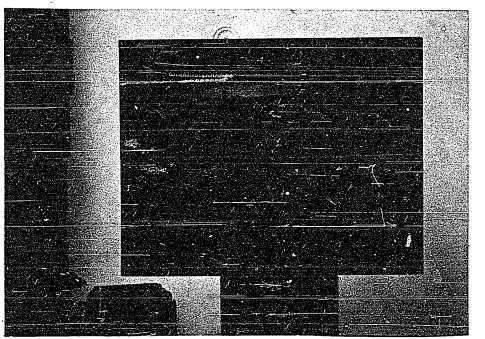


Fig. 54 Louise Nevelson. Sun, wood painted black, 1959.

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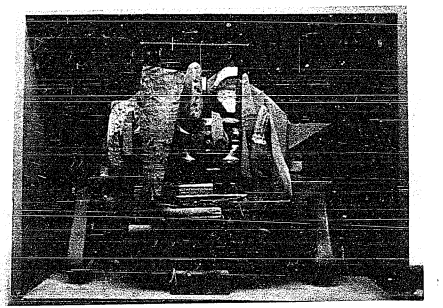
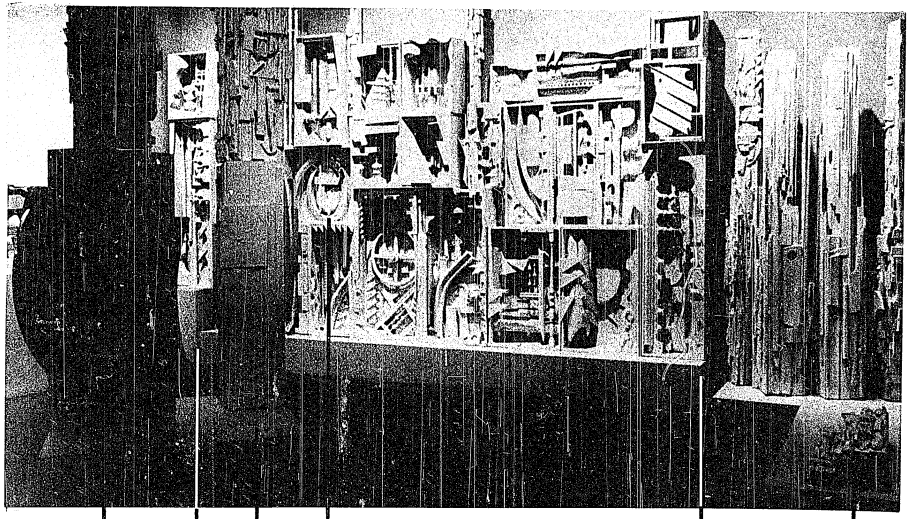


Fig. 55 Louise Nevelson. Moon, wood painted black, 1959.

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Fig. 56 Louise Nevelson. Dawn's Wedding Feast, 16 Americans Museum of Modern Art Installation, 1959.



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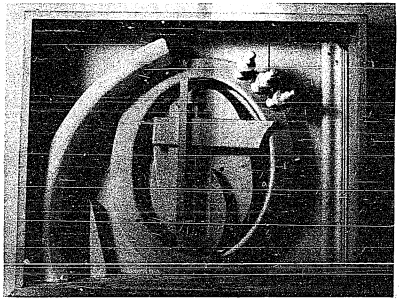
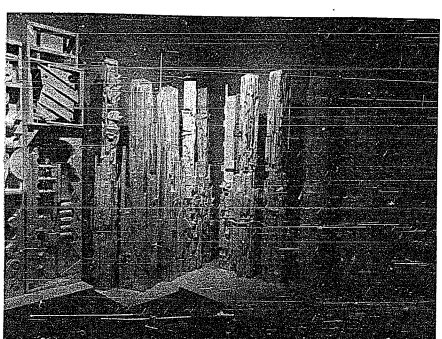


Fig. 57 Louise Nevelson. Dawn's Wedding Mirror, wood painted white, 1959.

Fig. 58 Louise Nevelson. Dawn's Wedding Feast, 16 Americans Museum of Modern Art Installation, 1959.



Columns

Wedding Pillow

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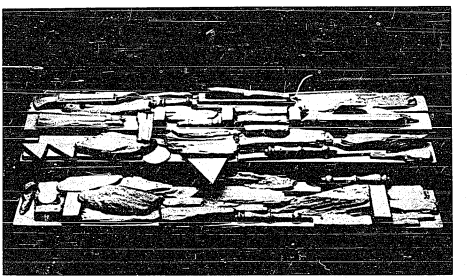


Fig. 59 Louise Nevelson. Dawn's Wedding Pillow, wood painted white, 1959.

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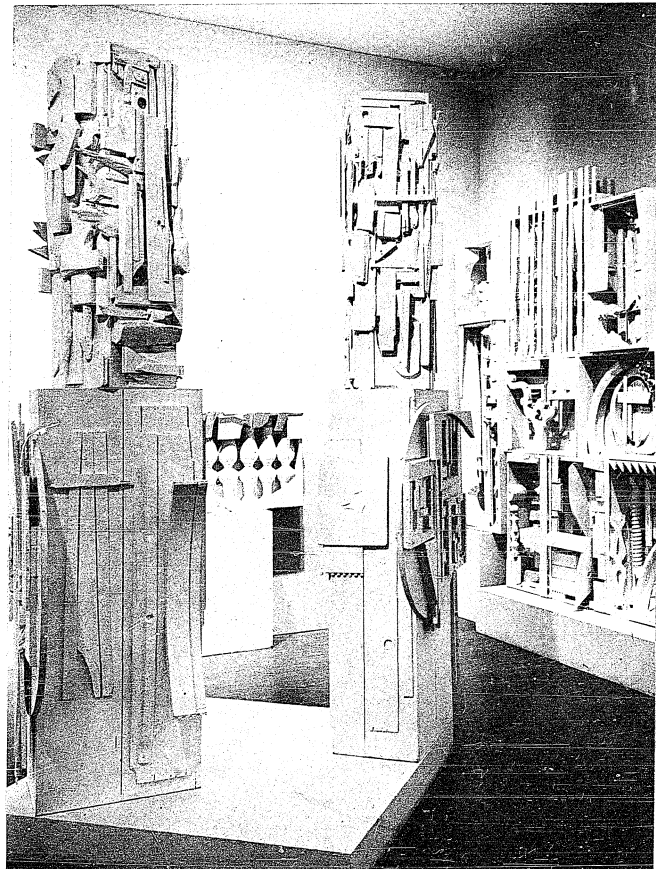


Fig. 60 Louise Nevelson. Totem Columns from Dawn's Wedding Feast, wood painted white, 1959.

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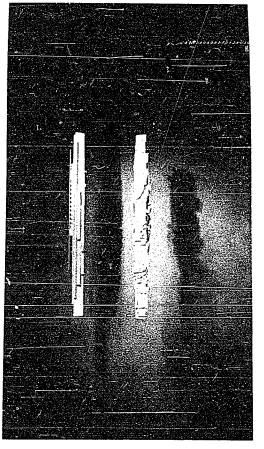


Fig. 61 Louise Nevelson, *Hanging Columns*, from *Dawn's Wedding Feast*, wood painted white, 1959.

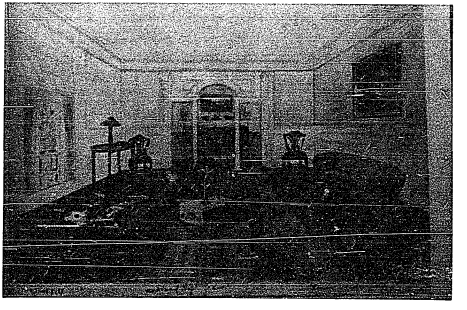


Fig. 62 Louise Berliawsky. *Interior*, watercolor, 1918.

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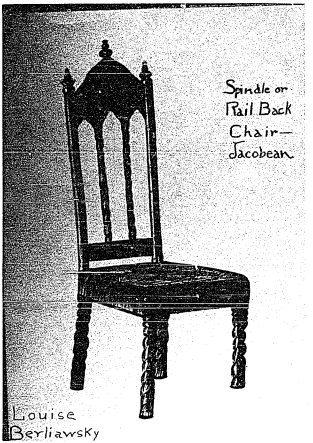


Fig. 63 Louise Berliawsky. Jacobean Chair, ink on paper, 1916-18.

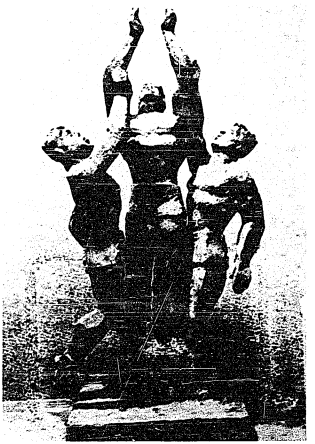


Fig. 64 Chaim Gross. Basketball Players, plaster model, n.d.

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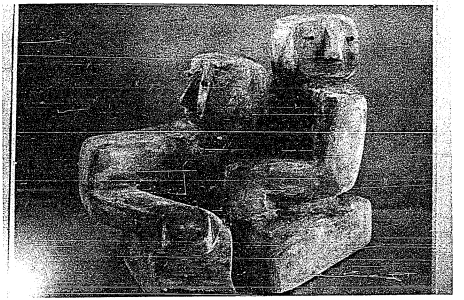


Fig. 65 Louise Nevelson. Two Figures, plaster with tacks, c. 1934.



Fig. 66 Louise Nevelson. Dispositional Traits, polychromed plaster, c. 1935-40.

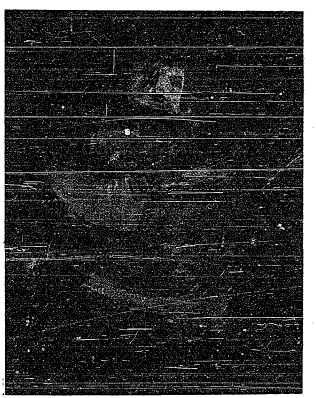


Fig. 67 Louise Nevelson. Mother and Child, polychromed plaster, c. 1939.

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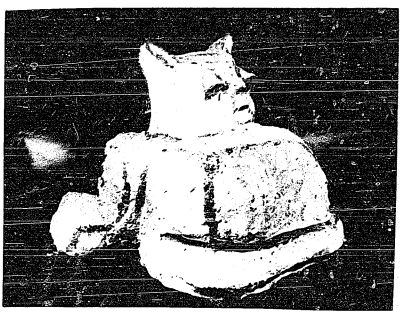


Fig. 68 Louise Nevelson. Cat, polychromed plaster, c. 1939-40.

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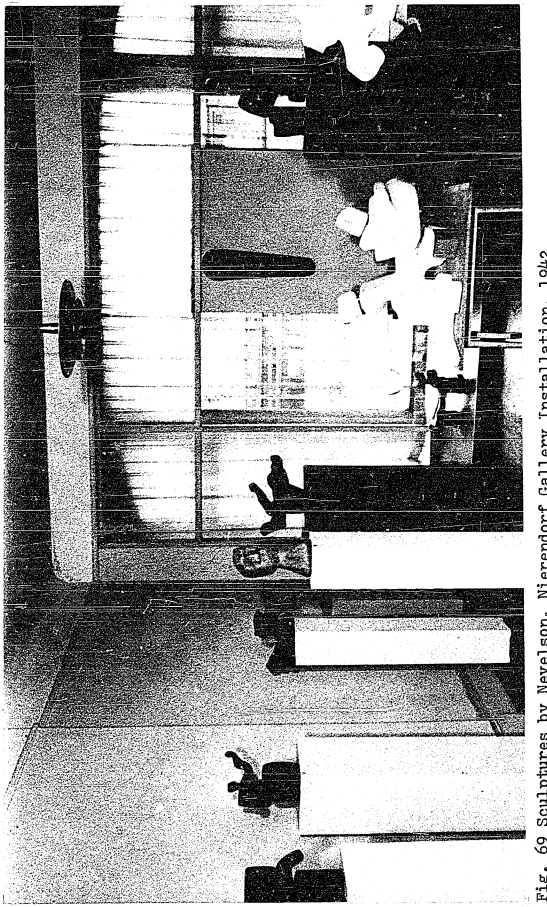


Fig. 69 Sculptures by Nevelson, Nierendorf Gallery Installation, 1942.

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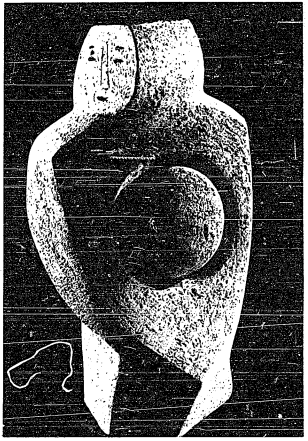


Fig. 70 Louise Nevelson. Maternity (Fertility), terra cotta, 1950.

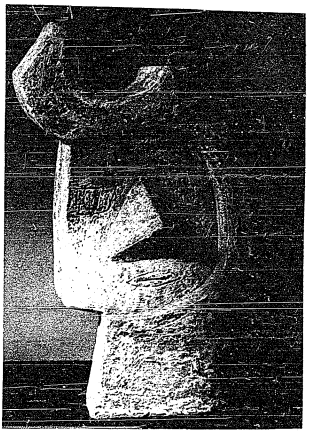


Fig. 71 Louise Nevelson. Two Faced Clown, terra cotta, 1948.

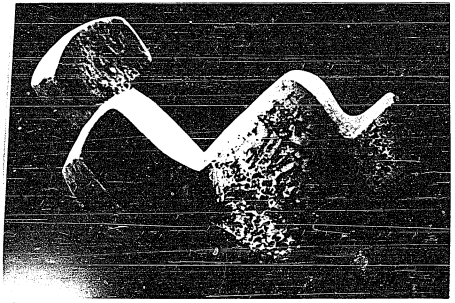


Fig. 72 Louise Nevelson. Mountain Woman, aluminum, 1948.

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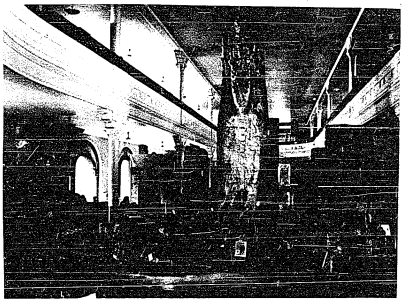


Fig. 73 American Museum of Natural History - Hall of Mexican Anthropology with two stelae from Quiriguá.

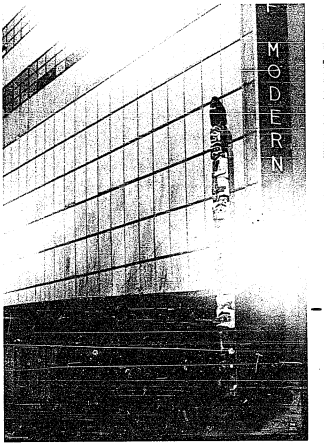


Fig. 74 Totem Pole in Indian Art of The United States Installation, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1941.

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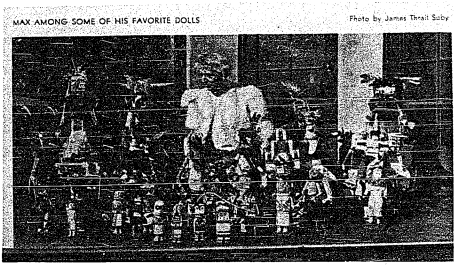


Fig. 75 James Thrall Soby. Max Among Some of His Favorite Dolls, photograph in View, April 1942.

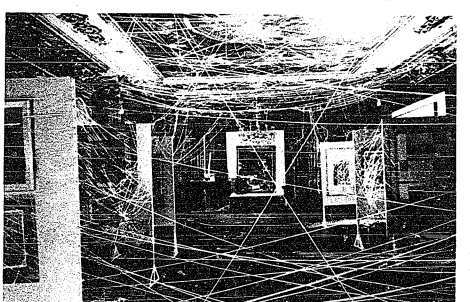


Fig. 76 First Papers of Surrealism, Whitelaw Reid Installation, New York 1942.

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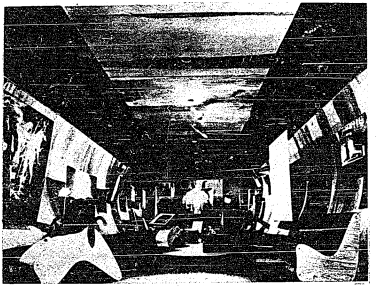


Fig. 77 Frederick Kiesler. Surrealist Gallery in Art of The Century Gallery, New York, 1943.



Fig. 78 Joe Milone and Shoe Shine Stand, 1942.



Fig. 79 Pablo Picasso. Head of a Bull, bronze, 1943.



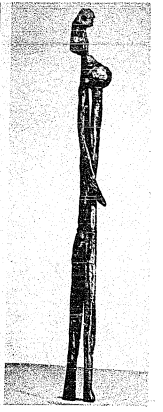


Fig. 80 Pablo Picasso. Women, carved wood 1931.

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Fig. 81 Joan Miro. Rope and People I, Oil on cardboard mounted on wood, with coil of rope, 1935.

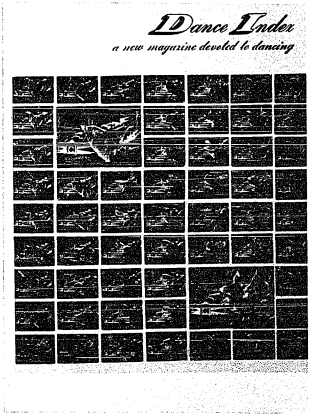


Fig. 82 Joseph Cornell. Loie Fuller Montage designed for cover of Dance Index, March, 1942.

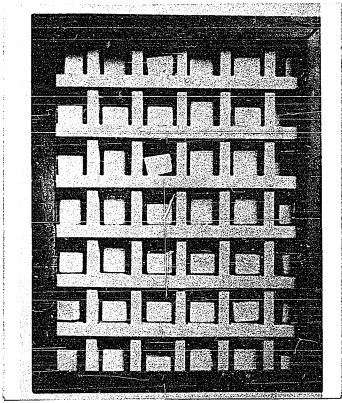


Fig. 83 Joseph Cornell. Multiple Cubes, wood, 1946-48.

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Fig. 84 Louise Nevelson. Cat of The Night, cast stone, c. 1932.

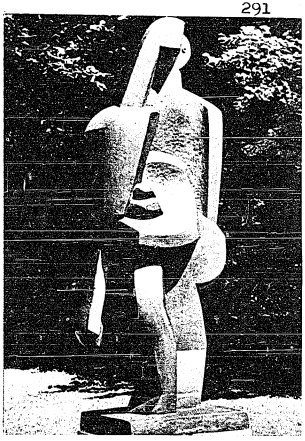


Fig. 85 Jacques Lipchitz. Bather, bronze, 1923-25.



Fig. 86 Henri Laurens. Woman with Mandolin, wood, 1919.



Fig. 87 Aaron Goodleman. Homeless, cast stone - original plaster, c.1936.

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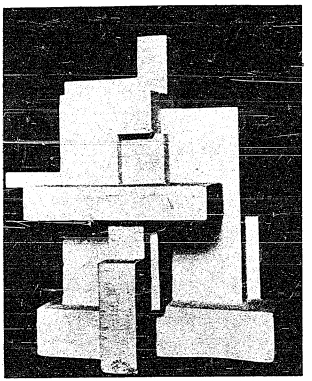


Fig. 88 Georges Vantongerloo *A Construction In an Inscribed and a Circumscribed Square of a Circle*, cement, 1924.

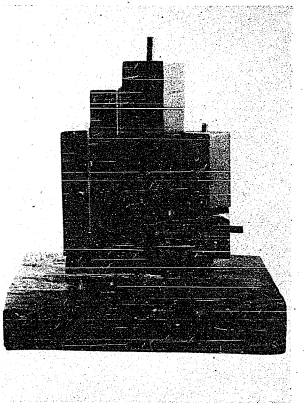


Fig. 89 Louise Nevelson. *Untitled*, wood, painted black, 1955-56.

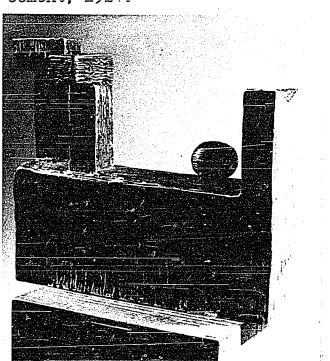


Fig. 90 Louise Nevelson. *The Castle (Duck Form)*, bronze, 1945.

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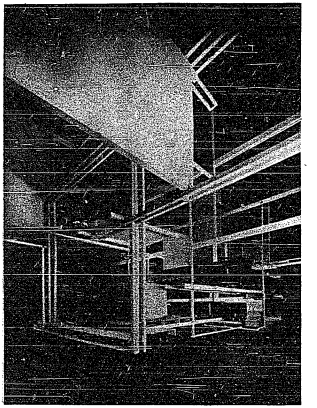


Fig. 91 Frederick Kiesler. City in Space, in Decorative Arts Exposition, Grand Palais, Paris, 1925.

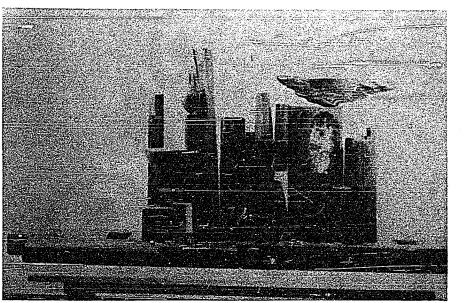


Fig. 92 Louise Nevelson. City in The Sky, wood painted black, 1955.

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Fig. 93 Louise Nevelson. Goddess from the Great Beyond, etching and aquatint, 1953-55.



Fig. 94 Paul Klee. Ceramic-Erotic-Religious (The Vessels of Aphrodite), watercolor, 1921.

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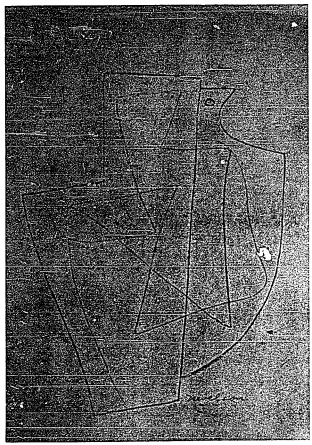


Fig. 95 Louise Nevelson. Untitled Drawing, pencil on paper, n.d.

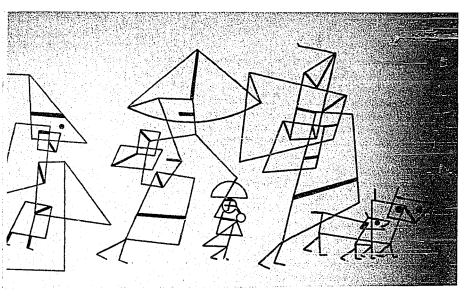


Fig. 96 Paul Klee. Family Outing, ruling pen and ink on paper, 1930.

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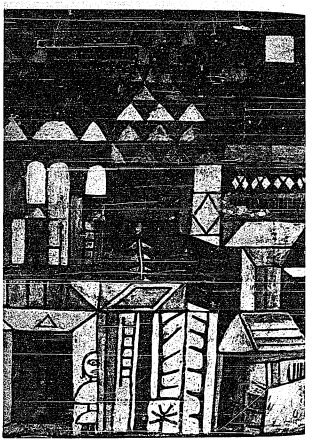


Fig. 97 Paul Klee. Beginning Coolness (Early Chill), panel, oil, 1937.

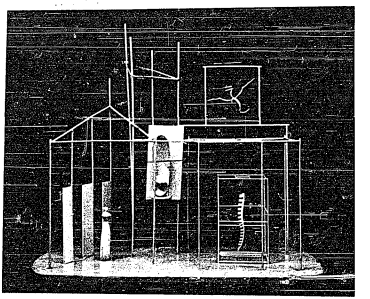


Fig. 98 Alberto Giacometti. Palace at 4 A.M., wood, wire, glass, and string, 1933.

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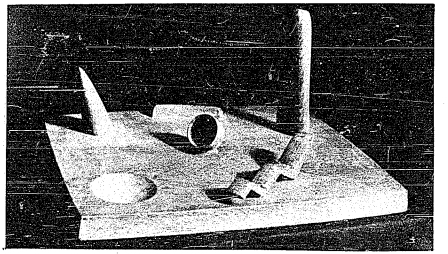


Fig. 99 Alberto Giacometti. Model for a Garden, wood, 1932.

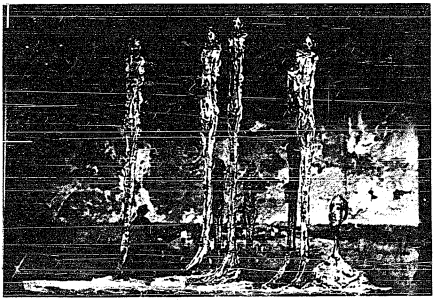


Fig.100 Alberto Giacometti. The Forest (Seven Figures, One Head), painted bronze, 1950.

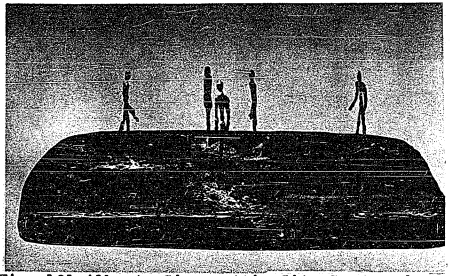


Fig. 101 Alberto Giacometti. City Square, bronze, 1948.

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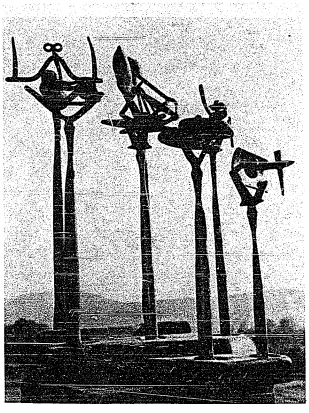


Fig. 102 David Smith. Sacrifice, steel painted red, 1950.

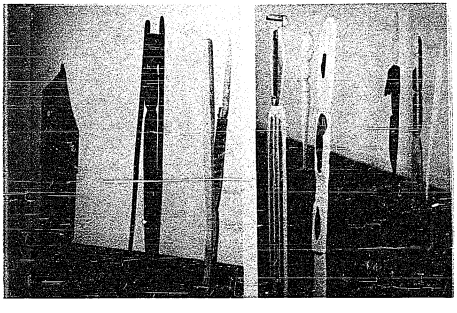


Fig. 103 Louise Bourgeois. Peridot Gallery Exhibition Installation, 1950.

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Fig. 104 Textiles USA, Exhibition Installation, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1956.



Fig. 105 Sculptors Guild Exhibition, Installation, American Museum of Natural History, New York, March, 1952.

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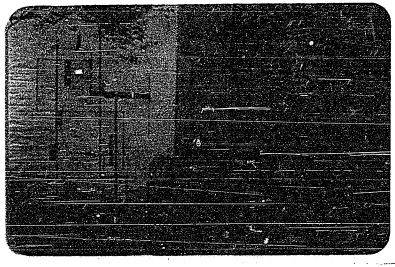


Fig. 106 Sculpture in a Garden, Installation, Helena Simkhovich Garden, New York, May 1954.

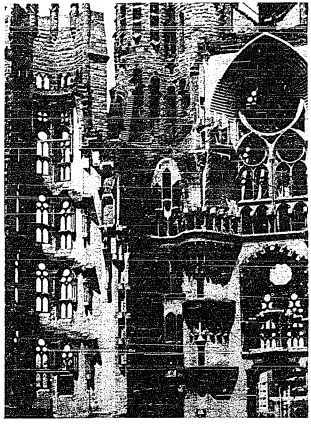


Fig. 107 Antonio Gaudi. Expiatory Temple of the Holy Family, facade, Barcelona, 1883-1926, in Art News, January, 1958.

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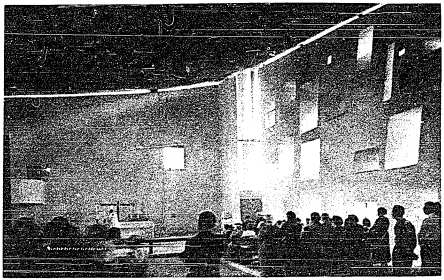


Fig. 108 Le Corbusier. Notre Dame du Haut, interior, Ronchamp, in Art News, November 1955.

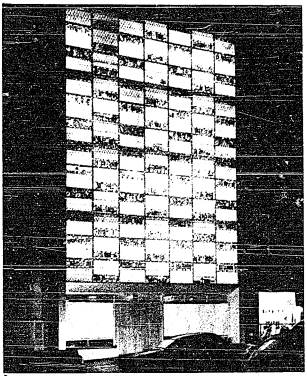


Fig.109 Adolph Gottlieb. Milton Steinberg Memorial Center, stained glass wall facade, New York, 1954.

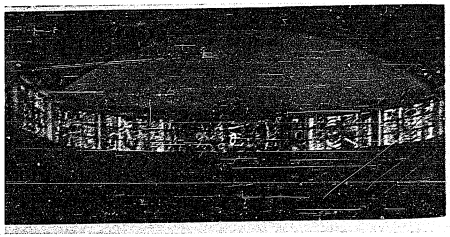


Fig. 110 Fernand Leger, Church of The Sacred Heart, stained glass windows, Audincourt, in Art News October 1955.

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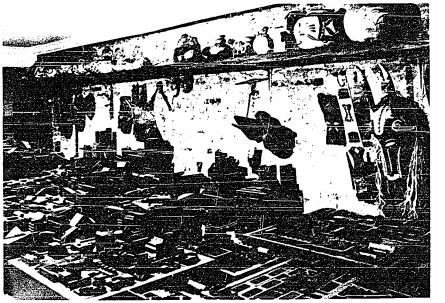


Fig. 111 Louise Nevelson's Spring Street House, Living Room, New York.

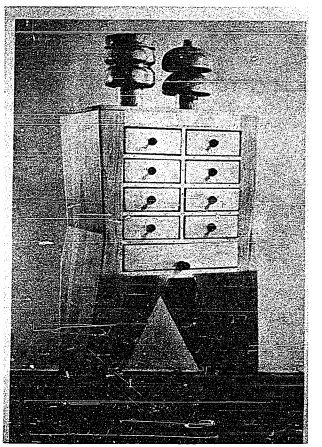
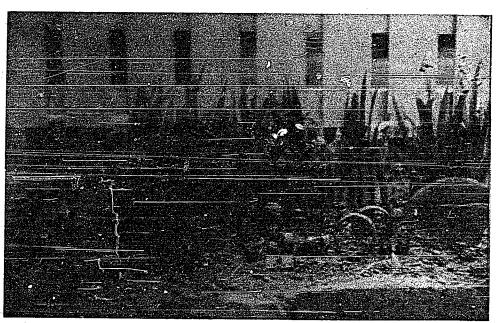


Fig. 112 Mike Nevelson. Mr. and Mrs. Collector, wood.

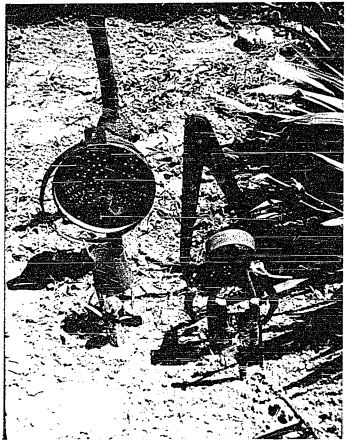
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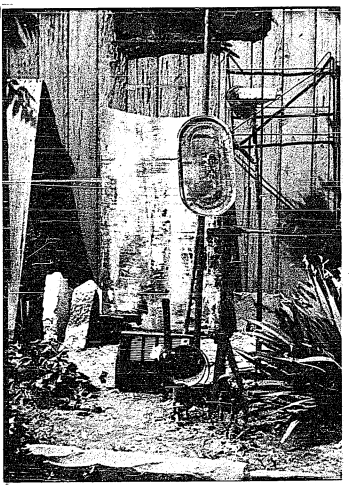


Figs. 113-114 Louise Nevelson's garden, Thirtieth Street House, c. 1957.

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Figs. 115-116 Louise Nevelson's garden, Thirtieth Street House, c. 1957.



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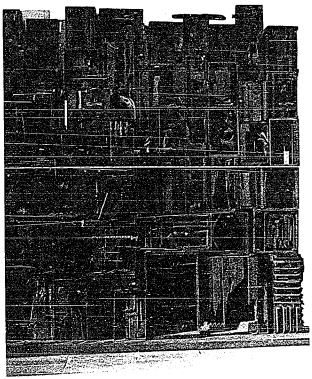


Fig. 117 Louise Nevelson. Sky Cathedral, wood painted black, 1958.

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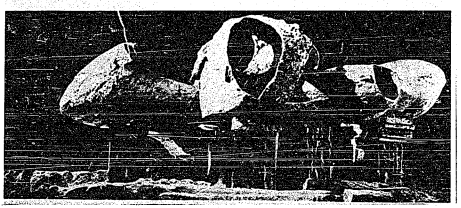


Fig. 118 Frederick Kiesler model. "Endless House", wire mesh, 1959-61.

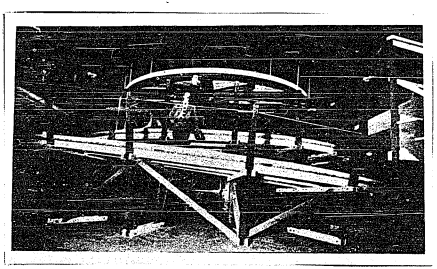


Fig. 119 Frederick Kiesler. Space Stage, 1924.

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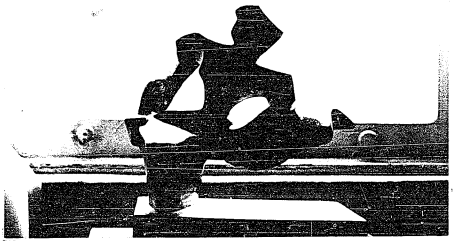


Fig. 120 Louise Nevelson. Dancer, bronze, c. 1942-44.



Fig. 121 Louise Nevelson. Dancer, bronze or plaster, c. 1944.

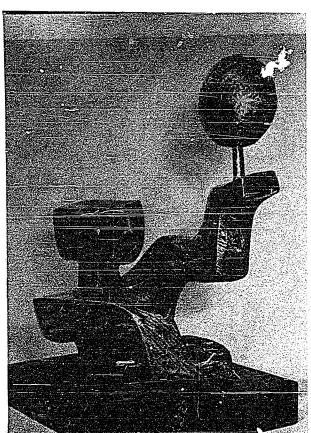


Fig. 122 Louise Nevelson. The Clown With The World in The Palm of His Hand bronze, 1955.

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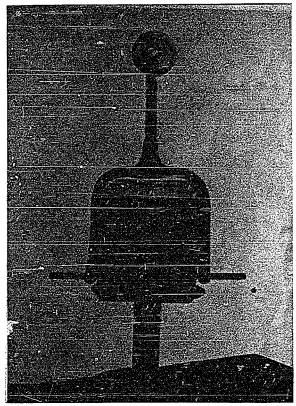


Fig. 123 Louise Nevelson. The Tightrope Walker (Trapeze Artist), wood and metal, 1942.

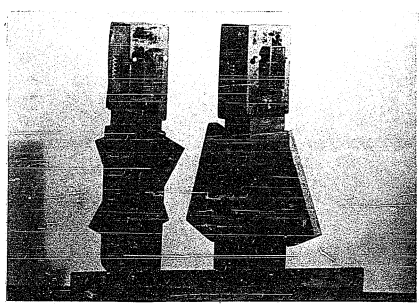


Fig. 124 Louise Nevelson. Brother Act, painted wood and metal, 1942.

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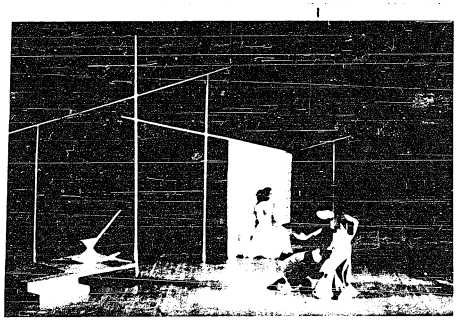


Fig. 125 Isamu Noguchi. Dance Set,"Appalachian Spring," designed for Martha Graham, 1944.

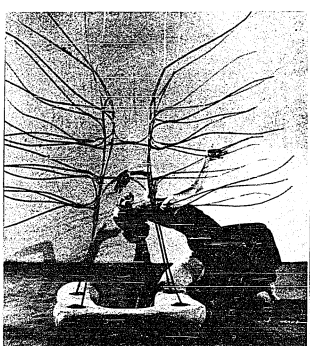


Fig. 126 Isamu Noguchi. Dance set detail,"Cave of The Heart," designed for Martha Graham, 1944.

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Fig. 127 Louise Bourgeois. Dance set detail, "Bridegroom of The Moon," designed for Erick Hawkins 1952.

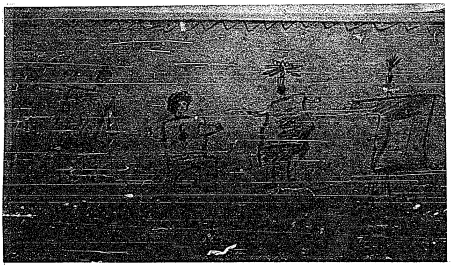


Fig. 128 Louise Nevelson. For Dance Design, pencil on paper, 1937.

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Fig. 129 Isamu Noguchi. Dance set detail, "Night Journey," designed for Martha Graham, 1947.



Fig. 130 Isamu Noguchi. Lunar Landscape, magnesite, cork and string electrified, c. 1944.



Fig. 131 Ibram Lassaw. Composition with Light, wood and wire painted, 1938.

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Fig. 132 Isamu Noguchi. Dance set detail, "Herodiade," with Martha Graham and May O'Donnell, 1945.



Fig. 133 Frederick Kiesler. Dance set, "Magic Flute," designed for Juilliard School 1956.

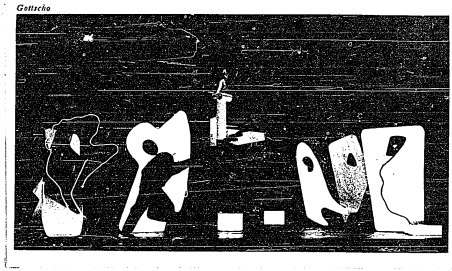


Fig. 134 Frederick Kiesler. Dance Set, "Helen Retires," designed for Juilliard School, 1934.

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Fig. 135 Georges Mathieu painting The Battle of Bouvines, in Time, March 1955.

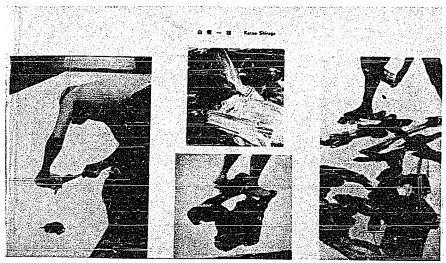


Fig. 136 Katzuo Shiraga walking on canvas, in Gutai, April 1957.

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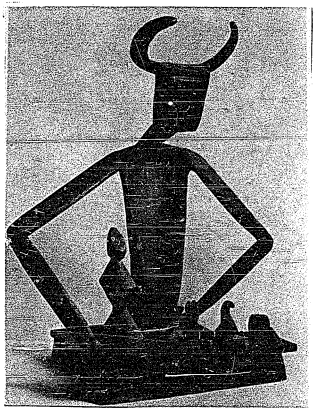


Fig. 137 Max Ernst. The King Playing with The Queen, bronze , 1944.



Fig. 138 Louise Nevelson. Self Portrait, oil on canvas, 1938.

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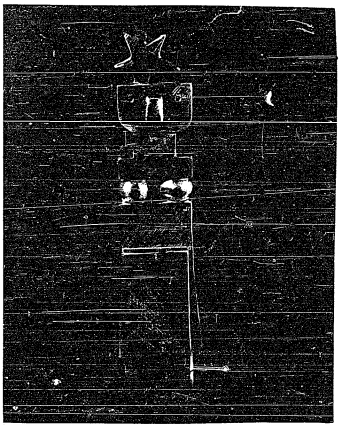


Fig. 139 Louise Nevelson. Woman with a Star on Her Head, bronze, c. 1948.

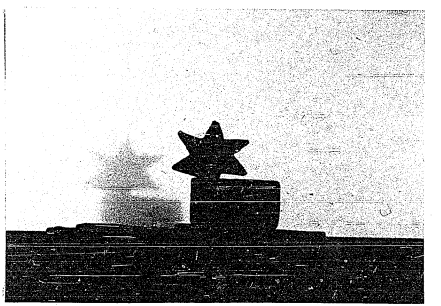


Fig. 140 Louise Nevelson. Untitled Figure (with a Star on its Head), n.d.

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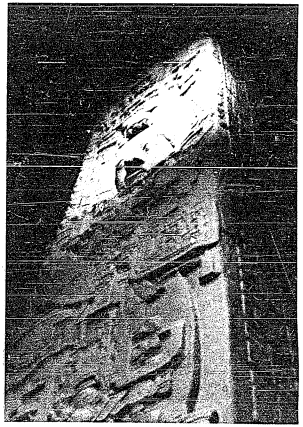


Fig. 141 Stela E, plaster cast of stela from Quiriguá, Guatemala.



Fig. 142 Louise Nevelson. Royalty (Portraits), etching, 1953-55.



Fig. 143 West Queen (Figure) etching and drypoint, 1953-55.

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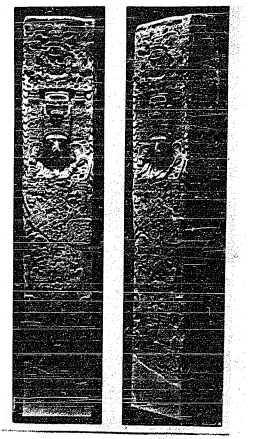


Fig. 144 Stela F. Quiriguá Guatemala sandstone, 24' high, 761 A.D.

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Fig. 145 Louise Nevelson and Anita Berliawsky in Mexico, 1950.

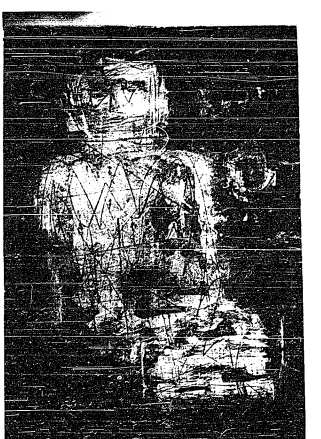


Fig. 146 Louise Nevelson, West Queen (Figure), etching, 1953-55.

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Fig. 44 Louise Nevelson's Thirtieth Street House, Interior, 1957-58.



Fig. 147 Pier, Rockland, Maine.

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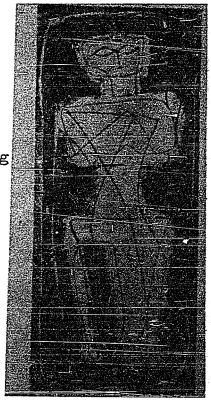


Fig. 148 Louise Nevelson. Goddess One (Moon Goddess), etching and drypoint, 1953-55.

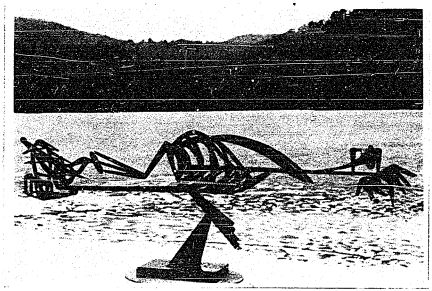


Fig. 149 David Smith. Royal Bird, steel, bronze, stainless steel, 1948.

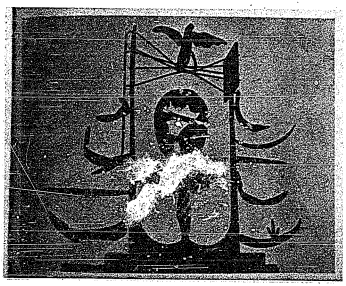


Fig. 150 David Smith. Royal Incubator, steel, bronze, silver, 1950.

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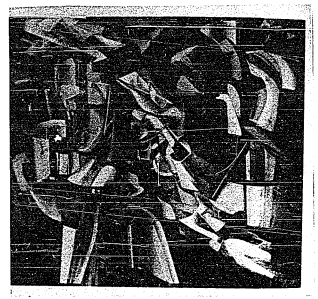


Fig. 151 Marcel Duchamp. The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes, oil on canvas, 1912.

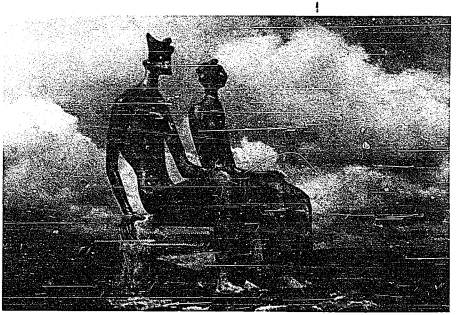


Fig. 152 Henry Moore. King and Queen, bronze, 1952-53.

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Fig. 153 Henry Moore. Family Group, bronze, 1945-49.

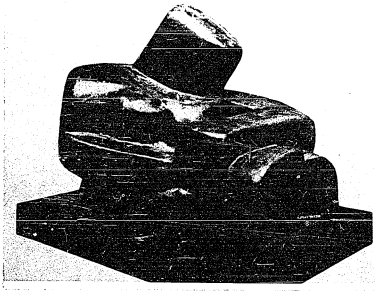


Fig. 154 Louise Nevelson. Ancient Figure, plaster, 1935-40.

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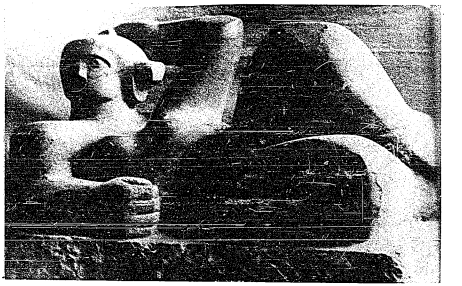


Fig. 155 Henry Moore. Reclining Figure, brown Horton stone, 1929.



Fig. 156 Chacmol, limestone, Mexico City.

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Fig. 157 Louise Nevelson. Untitled Column, wood painted black, 1959.

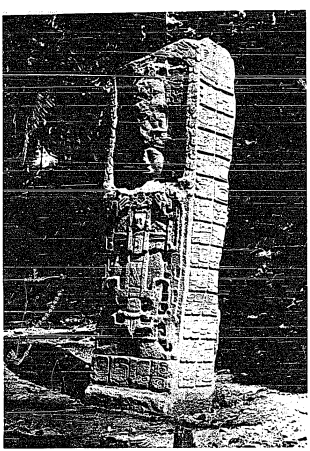


Fig. 158 Stela C, Quiriguá, Guatemala, sandstone, 775 A.D.

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Fig. 159 Louise Nevelson. Ancient City (Shadow City), etching and drypoint, 1953-55.

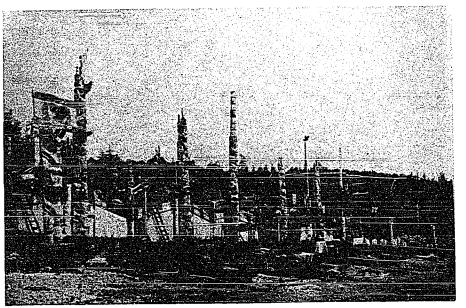


Fig.160 Skidegate in 1878, photograph in Dyn, December 1943.

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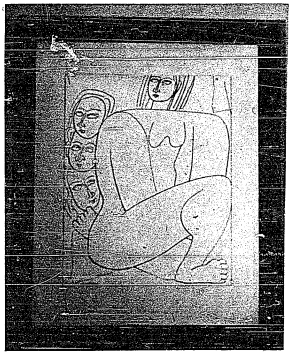


Fig. 161 Louise Nevelson. Untitled, drawing, (figure and three female heads), ink on paper, n.d.

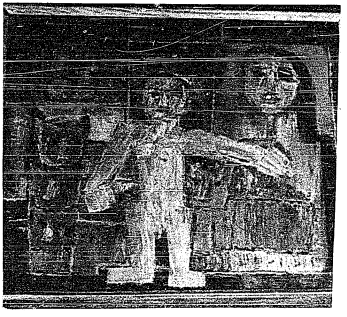


Fig. 162 Louise Nevelson. Untitled (female figure, child and 3 cats), oil painting, 1946.



Fig. 163 Louise Nevelson. Untitled (3 female heads), oil painting, n.d.

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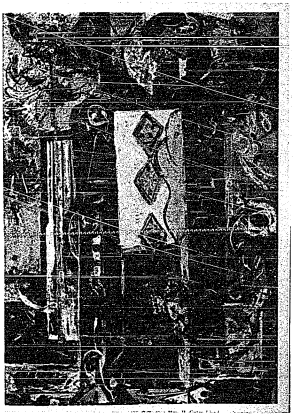


Fig. 164 Jackson Pollock. Male and Female, oil on canvas, 1942.

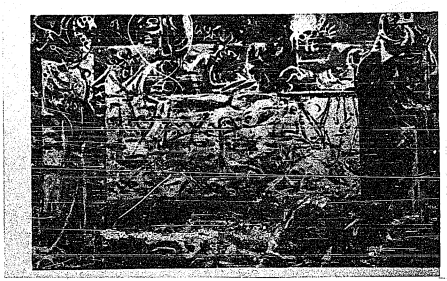


Fig. 165 Jackson Pollock. Guardians of The Secret, oil on canvas, 1943.

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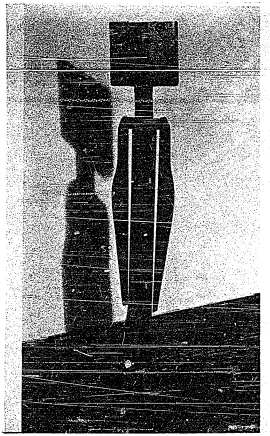


Fig. 166 Louise Nevelson. Untitled Figure in Circus, wood and metal, 1943.



Fig. 167 David Hare. Young Man, cement, 1945.

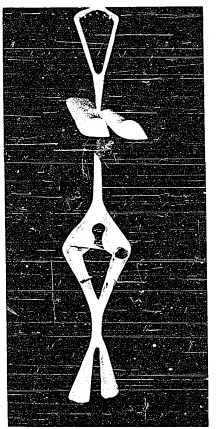


Fig. 168 David Hare. Young Girl, cement, 1946.

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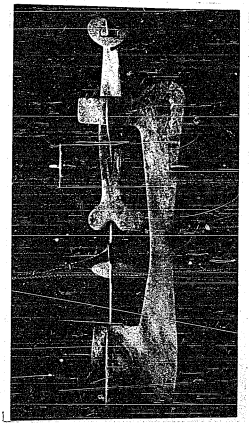


Fig. 169 Isamu Noguchi. Kouros, Georgia Pink Marble, 1945.

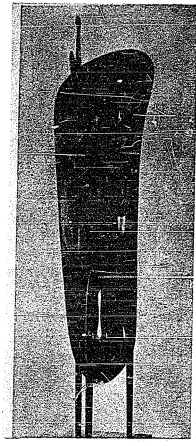


Fig. 170 Isamu Noguchi. Effigy (Gregory), bronze (from Purple Slate original), 1945.

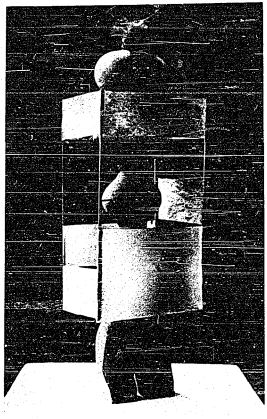


Fig. 171 Isamu Noguchi. Katchina, wood, paper, feathers, 1943.

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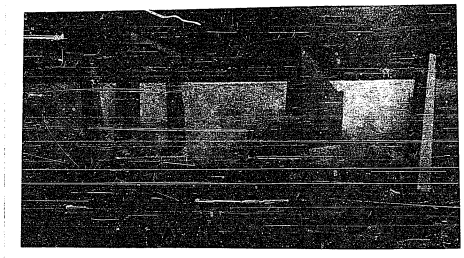


Fig. 172 Atillio Salemme. Echo of a Dream, 1945.

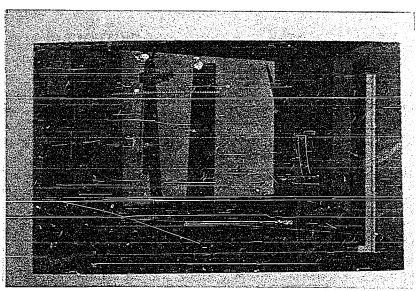


Fig. 173 Attilio Salemme. Secret Mission, oil on canvas, c. 1946.

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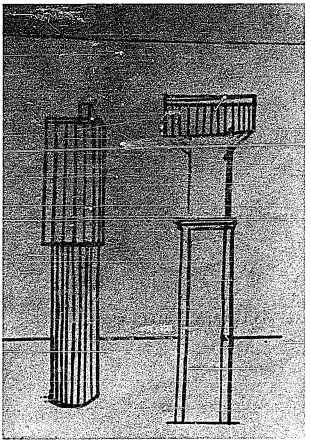


Fig. 174 Louise Bourgeois. The Solitary Death of The Woolworth Building from He Disappeared into Complete Silence, engraving, 1946.

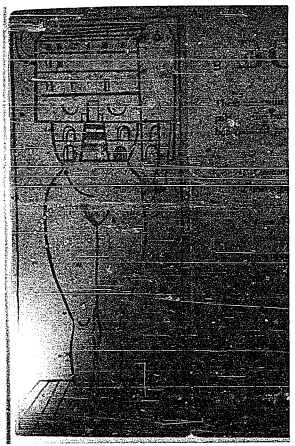


Fig. 175 Louise Bourgeois. brochure of Norlyst Gallery, 1947.

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Fig. 176 Louise Bourgeois. The Visitors Arrive at The Doors, wood 1947.

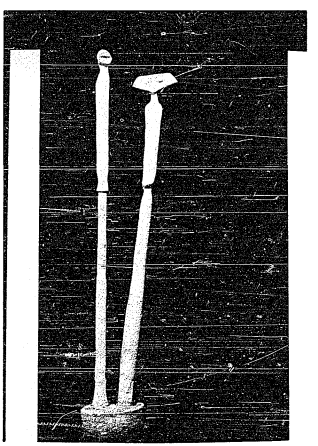


Fig. 177 Max Ernst. Lunar Asparagus. plaster, 1935.

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Fig. 178 Louise Nevelson. Personage in The Black Forest, wood painted black, 1954-55.

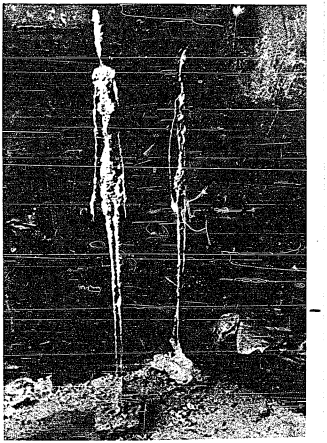


Fig. 179 Alberto Giacometti. Tall Figure, (The Burglar), plaster, 1947.

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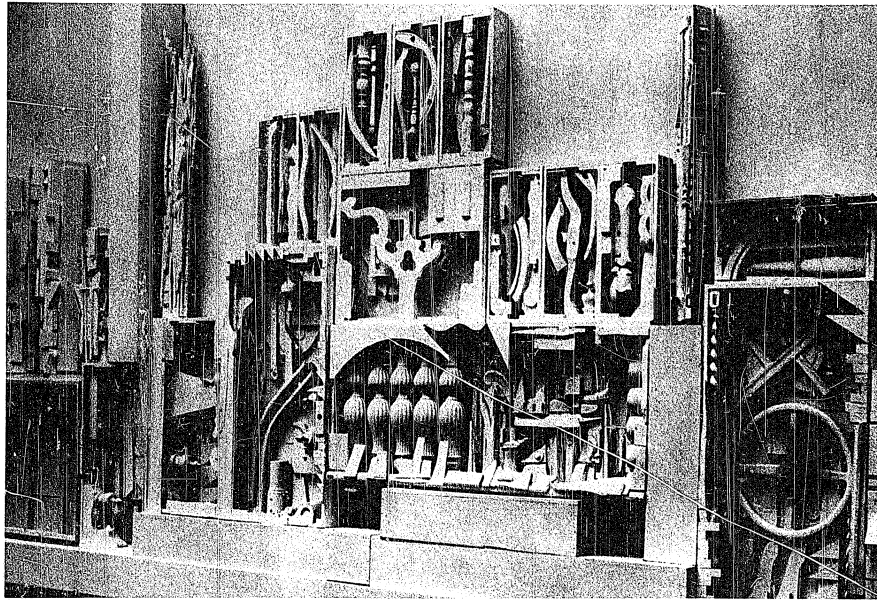


Fig. 180 Louise Nevelson. Voyage, (White room at Venice Biennale), wood painted white, 1960.

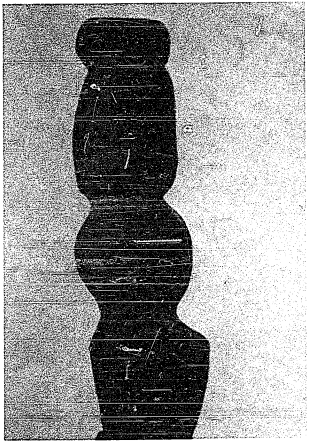


Fig. 181 Louise Nevelson. Bride of The Sea, tattistone, c. 1948.



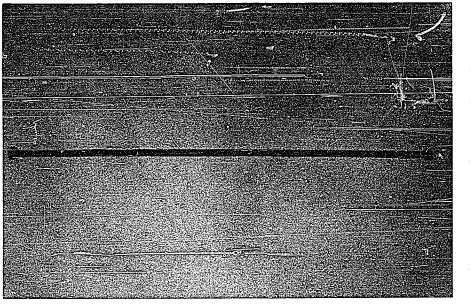
Fig. 182 Nevelson and Bride of The Sea

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Fig. 183 Greta Garbo as The Swedish Sphinx, photo-montage, c. 1930.

Fig. 184 Louise Nevelson. The Wedding Bridge, wood painted black and black velvet, 1956.



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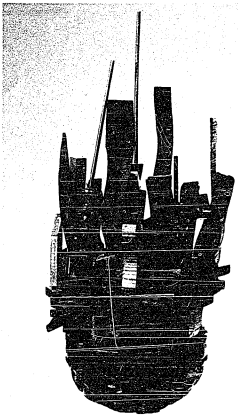


Fig. 185 Louise Nevelson. Black Wedding Cake, wood painted black, 1956.



Fig. 186 Louise Nevelson. First Personage, detail, wood painted black, 1956.

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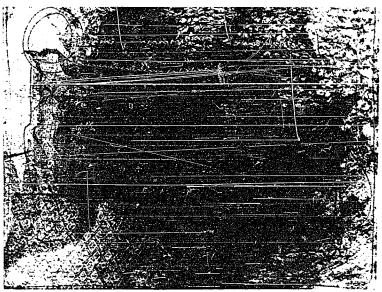


Fig. 187 Louise Nevelson. Moon Lady (Face in the Moon) etching, 1953-55.

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Fig. 188 Marcel Duchamp. The Bride, oil on canvas, August 1912.

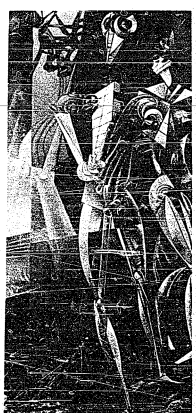


Fig. 189 Max Ernst. Chemical Nuptials, oil on canvas, 1947-48.

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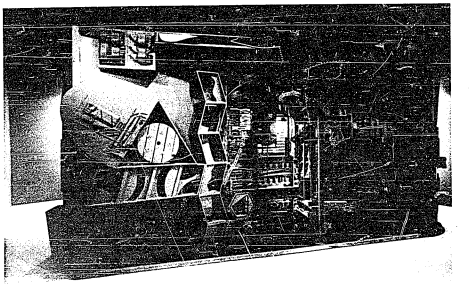


Fig. 190 Louise Nevelson. Mrs. N's Palace, wood painted black, black mirror floor, 1964-1977.

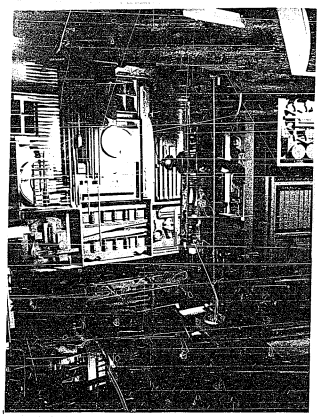


Fig. 191 Louise Nevelson. Mrs. N's Palace, detail, man and woman, wood painted black, 1964-1977.

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