



Louise Nevelson. Persistence

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Organized to mark the 60th anniversary of Louise Nevelson's landmark presentation in the American Pavilion of the 31st Venice Biennale in 1962, this exhibition focuses on the genre that would prove to be Nevelson's most definitive contribution to twentieth-century art: assemblage. Bringing together more than sixty works spanning thirty years of production, the exhibition underscores the artist's extraordinarily inventive combining of materials, including well-known monumental black gridded walls and smaller, lesser-known collages that feature a range of colors and were made with everyday stuff like newsprint, flattened bits of metal, cardboard, foil, sandpaper, and fabric. Collectively, these works demonstrate a remarkable persistence: Nevelson's brave commitment both to her steadfast aesthetic and to an ethics of reuse.

The exhibition's title also alludes to Nevelson's unique status as one of the most influential figures in the history of modern art. In an essay published the same year as the Biennale, Italian art critic Carla Lonzi, who later became an important feminist activist, described "a new, proliferating presence of a totally female ambiguity" in Nevelson's work. Nevelson herself would describe her process in similarly gendered terms, explaining that "the word *creation* is like the earth, the volcanoes, the mother who has her labor pains...." Nevelson's use of "low," throwaway objects—and her repurposing of familiar items like wooden headboards, brooms, chair legs, and dust pans—evoked the domestic sphere, but also had special resonance in Italy during the emergence of *Arte Povera* in the 1960s. Today, Nevelson is widely acknowledged as a foremother of many feminist artists who recycle scavenged domestic things.

Though the immediate critical reception of her environments in the American Pavilion was mixed, the 1962 Biennale marked a definitive turning point in Nevelson's career. Reflecting on this exhibit sixty years later gives us an opportunity to reconsider her prescient use of immersive environments and her ground-breaking incorporation of gendered objects. Installed non-chronologically to highlight the overarching continuities in her practice around assemblage, *Persistence* affirms Nevelson's ongoing relevance for contemporary audiences.