

SPOTLIGHT: Louise Nevelson

Title of Piece: "Dark Presence III"



El Presenter: Margaret Leutzinger

Date: November 4, 2008

Artwork Title: "Dark Presence III"

Year created: 1971

Artist: Louise Nevelson

Five most essential aspects of this work of art:

1. Louise Nevelson is known for her abstract expressionist boxes and assemblages that she constructed from discarded everyday objects, some of which she actually retrieved from dumpsters. Some were as large as three stories high. "When you put together things that other people have thrown out, you're really bringing them to life-a spiritual life that surpasses the life for which they were originally created. She was born in Kiev, in Czarist Russia, in 1899. Her father immigrated to the US in 1902, leaving behind his family and in so doing traumatizing Louise so badly that she didn't speak for six months. The family was reunited in 1904 in Maine where her father had become a successful businessman
2. Louise realized she wanted to be an artist at an early age. After graduating from high school in 1918 she met a married Charles Nevelson. They moved to New York, and she began to study drawing, painting, dramatics and dance. In 1922 she gave birth to her only child, Myron, who later became a famous sculptor. Louise's passion for art was not shared by her husband, who expected her to lead a conventional upper-middle class life. When they separated in 1931, Louise took Myron to Maine, left him in the care of her parents and went off to Europe to continue her

art studies. No obstacle was great enough to keep me from my art," she would explain later. There, she was introduced to the work of Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso and briefly attended Hans Hofmann's school in Munich, until it was closed by the Nazis.

3. She returned to New York in 1932 and assisted Diego Rivera on murals he was executing under the WPA federal arts project. Soon thereafter, she turned to sculpture. Between 1933 and 1936, her work was included in numerous group exhibitions. The first public showing of her sculpture was in 1933 and in 1935, some of her work was part of an exhibit in the Brooklyn. As her reputation grew, she was able to survive off the sales of her work. She also joined the WPA as a teacher for the Educational Alliance School of Art.
4. Her first solo show took place in 1941, and her stature grew from then on. She made her first shadow boxes and constructed her first wall in 1957. Her first important museum exhibition was at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959 and in 1962 she was included in the Venice Biennale. Her first major museum retrospective took place in 1967 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Princeton University commissioned her to create a large outdoor steel sculpture in 1969 and in subsequent years she had major shows at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Whitney again and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.
5. Louise had a decades-long friendship with playwright Edward Albee and they occasionally went dumpster diving together in the Little Italy district of New York scavenging for discards she could use in her assemblages. Her appearance at all times was very dramatic and very feminine. "I have always felt feminine. . .very feminine, so feminine that I wouldn't wear slacks. I didn't like the thought, so I never did wear them." She would sometimes drape herself in sarongs and was even known to have worn two rows of mink eyelashes.

Suggested questions:

1. How does this piece make you feel?
2. Can you see different shapes and shadows? (Talk about positive and negative space)
3. Can you recognize any of the things that make up this piece?
4. Where do you think she found all these different things that make up the sculpture?
5. Do you think you could find cast off things or junk to use to put together an art piece? Where would you look for these things?

Tour Types: Learning to Look

