

Louise Nevelson
Sky Cathedral, 1958

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ARTS 1641
February 12, 2002

Louise Nevelson's *Sky Cathedral*, 1958, is one of the best-known and most representative works of this Russian-born American sculptor. This sculpture wall, measuring 115" high x 135" wide x 20" deep in the configuration shown, was a major component of Nevelson's third exhibition, "Moon Garden Plus One" at the Grand Central Moderns Gallery in New York.

Nevelson created *Sky Cathedral* as a massive assemblage of wooden fragments, many found but others created to her specification, arranged in a grouping of wooden boxes stacked atop one another. Wood, particularly found pieces, was a common choice of medium for Nevelson, at least in part because she could obtain it for free, or at a very low cost.

The inspiration for this work came from her use of boxes to contain her smaller assemblages -- as she created more and more small assemblages and stored them, it became necessary for her to begin stacking the boxes atop one another. The form thus created intrigued her to the point that she began to deliberately construct a massive version of this idea for the above-mentioned exhibition.

Nevelson chose to paint all the surfaces, those of the boxes themselves and of the wooden fragments contained within, black. This use of color unifies the disparate components of the piece as well as allowing, through lighting, the contrast between positive and negative space to define the

By creating *Sky Cathedral* as a sculpture wall (although it was free-standing), Nevelson created essentially a relief work rather than an in-the-round work. While the piece can certainly be viewed from all sides, the primary interest is in the front view. The boxes are not see-through, so the back of the piece would appear as a modular wall of flat

wooden pieces without the contours and lines that define the image as seen from the front.

One of the most intriguing things about this piece is how it forms a cohesive whole, yet each individual box can each be taken as a sculptural work on its own. Different themes and ideas are expressed by the shapes and arrangements in each different component, yet all unified with Nevelson's view of the mysteries of shadow and space.

References

<http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Nevelson.htm> (image of Sky Cathedral)

Peterson, Karen, & J.J. Wilson. *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal From the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*. Harper Colophon Books, 1976.

Rubenstein, Charlotte Streifer. *American Women Artists*. Avon, 1982.