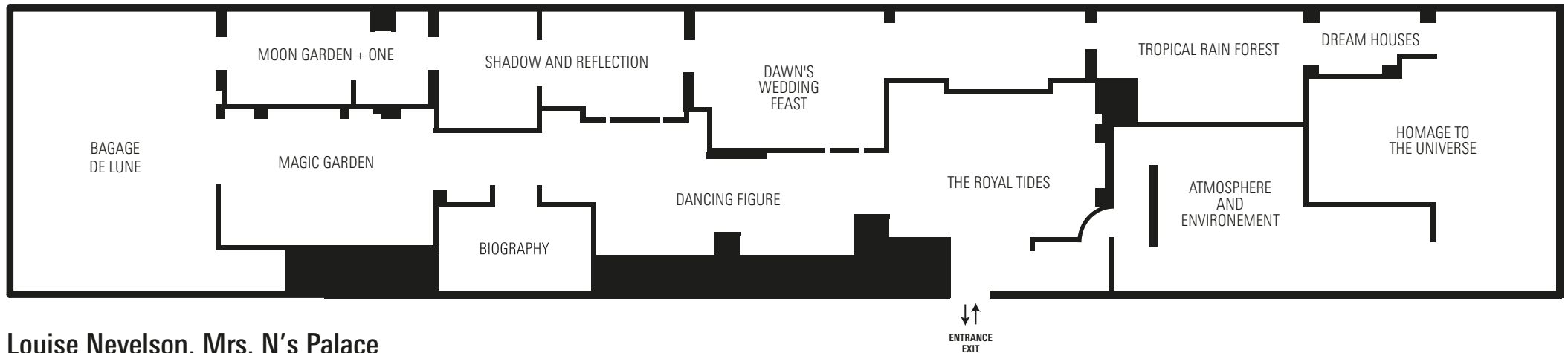


# **LOUISE NEVELSON**

## **MRS. N'S PALACE**

## GALLERY 2



### Louise Nevelson. Mrs. N's Palace

24.01 → 31.08.26

Curated by: Anne Horvath,  
Head of Programming, Centre Pompidou-Metz

Louise Nevelson (born Leah Berliawsky) was an American sculptor of Ukrainian origin, born in 1899 in the Kyiv region. She emigrated to the United States in 1905 and grew up in Maine before moving to New York where she studied at the Art Students League. She also spent time in Europe—particularly Paris and Munich—where she became familiar with principles of Cubism that she would later adapt in her own unique manner. The exhibition Louise Nevelson. Mrs. N's Palace pays tribute to an artist at the forefront of installation art, and to her practice of monumental, almost theatrical sculpture. Her relationship with modern dance, which was emerging in the United States at the time, and her particular interest in eurythmy are highlighted in the exhibition and its accompanying programme.

Reconstructing Louise Nevelson's work presents a challenge because her sculptures function as ensembles, assemblages that she frequently arranged for display, but also occasionally dismantled or even destroyed. Entering her world, her fictions, and her "environments" is akin to experiencing an art that was intended to be all-encompassing, uncompromising, enveloping, and sometimes mystical; like a grand palace imagined by an artist whose sole ambition was to inhabit her own creation.

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### THE ROYAL TIDES

Presented during the reactivation of *The Royal Tides* environments in the exhibition *Louise Nevelson: Atmospheres and Environments* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1980, this sculpture illustrates the almost alchemical power of Nevelson's work, capable of transforming society's detritus gleaned from the streets of New York, into works of art. After a decade of experimentation, her gilded wooden "walls" show a formal evolution with their arrangement now organised according to a grid design that informs the entire construction.



*An American Tribute to the British People, 1960-1964*

### Merce Cunningham Performed by: Thomas Caley

Dance is a natural mode of communication for Nevelson—a way to resonate with her own body and appropriate space. It is a true "celebration," as she proclaims in a poem dedicated to her friend, the choreographer Merce Cunningham, entitled "Merce the Magician". Echoing the reactivation of *The Royal Tides* environment, his presence manifests itself as an apparition, perceptible through several of his solo performances.

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## DANCING FIGURE

While gravity is generally perceived unconsciously, modern dance makes it a conscious experience that paves the way for profound transformations in the conception of forms, space, and movement. These articulated sculptures seem to suspend the body in a succession of postures, each defying the laws of gravity in a gesture undoubtedly inspired by the many performances by Martha Graham that Nevelson attended in the 1930s.



*Moving-Static-Moving Figure*, circa 1945

### ***The Technique of Martha Graham, 1975*** **New York, Martha Graham Resources**

For choreographer Martha Graham, movement originates in the breath through bursts of contraction followed by states of release. In this approach that merges the physical and the emotional, the technique developed by Graham in the 1930s is based on the center of the body, which she locates at the level of the vagina where vital and creative energy is concentrated. These same plays of tension are found in Nevelson's early terracotta sculptures.

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## MAGIC GARDEN

*Black Majesty*, like the *Ancient Games* and *Ancient Places* environment for which the work was originally conceived, is imbued with the monumentality and spirituality of pre-Columbian temples that Nevelson discovered in Mexico in 1950. These evoked, for her, a "world of Geometry and Magic." This figure is also distinguished by its anthropomorphic character that places it within the tradition of surrealist dreamscapes.



*Black Majesty*, 1955

Nevelson's entire universe seems to spring from the imaginary shores that she sketches, with incised lines, in her early etchings. Created in the early 1950s following her first trip to Mexico and her pivotal discovery of Mayan art, they are presented alongside her sculptures in *Ancient Games* and *Ancient Places*. Here, we encounter a *Goddess of the Great Beyond*, a *Sunken Cathedral*, and even an *Enchanted Garden* submerged in the depths of the sea. Nevelson went on to transform this body of work into sculptural forms in wood that Colette Roberts would describe as "Nevelson's Elsewhere."

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## BAGAGE DE LUNE

Never exhibited during Nevelson's lifetime, this work illustrates the ambivalent relationship to the object that runs through all her sculpture, oscillating between abstraction and figuration and here, between appeasement and threat. The artist transforms artillery crates found at a flea market by decorating them with pieces of furniture, thus substituting the lethal potential of weapons for the harmlessness of domestic artifacts. Their arrangement, reminiscent of an urban island, invites the viewer to peer inside these enigmatic chests as if spying through the window of a building.



*Artillery Landscape*, circa 1985

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## MOON GARDEN + ONE

For our exhibition, *Tropical Garden II* plays a central role in the reactivation of the *Moon Garden + One* environment. These totems, brought together within a single sculpture, seem to open up a multitude of possible worlds: each box conceals its secrets and offers a depth that changes depending on the shadows cast upon it. Are we looking at dense trees in the heart of a dark forest, tightly packed skyscrapers evoking the New York cityscape, or intertwined plants in a tropical garden?



*Tropical Garden II*, 1957

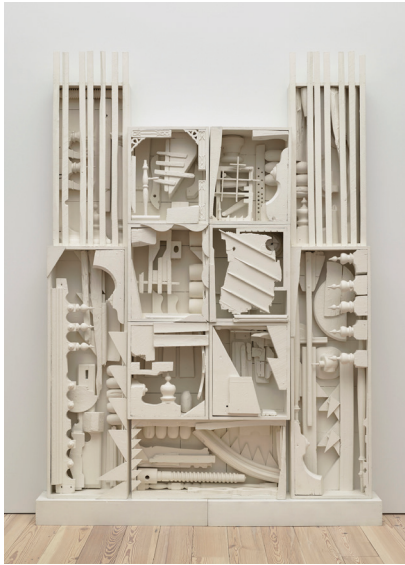
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## SHADOW AND REFLECTION

Like *Dark Sound*, *Silent Music* reflects Nevelson's synesthetic thinking. She willingly uses musical metaphors to describe her creative process, which she describes as unfolding in a balance between action and counteraction. The title of this sculpture may also contain an implicit homage to her friend John Cage's historic piece, *4'33* (1952), an entirely silent composition based on the ambient sounds produced in the concert hall.



*Silent Music II*, 1964



*Dawn's Wedding Chapel II*, 1959

## DAWN'S WEDDING FEAST

An architect of shadows, Nevelson also explores the potential of light. After its presentation in *Dawn's Wedding Feast*, she reworked this sculpture, organizing it according to a symmetrical grid reminiscent of the monumental towers of Notre-Dame de Paris. It evokes a spirituality and contemplation that foreshadow the white, architecturally-scaled *Chapel of the Good Shepherd* environment at Saint Peter's Church in New York City, which Nevelson created in 1977 — her only remaining installation on permanent display.

After a museum once again failed to acquire the entire installation, Nevelson responded to its dismantling by orchestrating its resurrection. At the 1962 Venice Biennale, she reassembled a white environment using elements salvaged from *Dawn's Wedding Feast*. From 1969 to 1975, she began arranging new monumental pieces from the same corpus, reinventing their compositions with a new complexity, while striving for formal rigor.

## DREAM HOUSES

As shown in a photograph where she is seen on the threshold of one of her "Dream Houses," Nevelson deliberately envisaged her quasi-habitable sculptures as being on the borderline between shelter and self-disclosure in the public sphere; as an alternative vision of domestic space, conducive to creation and breaking with all norms, where dreams and the power of imagination can be fully expressed.

Louise Nevelson photographed  
by Marvin W. Schwartz, 1972

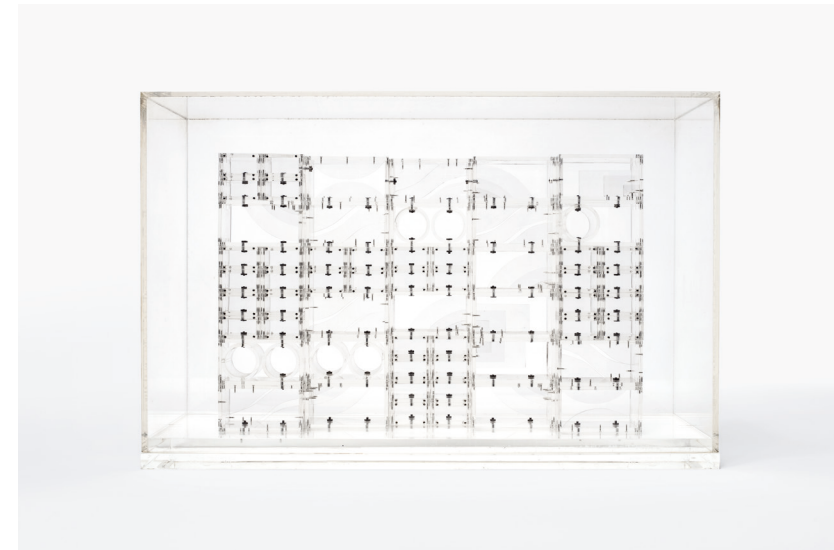


## HOMAGE TO THE UNIVERSE

Directed by her longtime collaborator Diana MacKown, this experimental film paints a portrait of Nevelson through a jerky montage of superimposed shots, reflecting the collage process that guided her entire body of work. The artist even went so far as to declare: "My whole life is one big collage." The film also reveals the symbiotic relationship she had with New York City, where Nevelson spent her life and which fascinated her as much for its vitality as its sculptural qualities.

## ATMOSPHERE AND ENVIRONMENT

Between 1966 and 1968, Nevelson produced several series in Plexiglas where its transparency allowed her to explore new dimensions of light. This industrial material provided her with a novel approach in her quest for immateriality, infinitely multiplying the effects of reflection and depth. At the same time, she continued to use wood to create monumental "walls", as seen in *Homage to the Universe* from 1968.



*Canada Series IV*, 1968



Louise Nevelson, *An American Tribute to the British People*, 1960-1964  
Wood painted gold, 311 × 442.4 × 92 cm  
London, Tate, T00796

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Photo: © Tate, Londres, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Tate Photography

Louise Nevelson, *Moving-Static-Moving Figure*, circa 1945  
Terracotta painted black, brass tube, and steel tube  
64.6 × 38.6 × 29.2 cm  
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 69.159.2a-c  
© Estate of Louise Nevelson.  
Licensed by Artist Rights Society (ARS), NY/ADAGP, Paris  
Photo: © Digital image Whitney Museum of American Art / Licensed by Scala

Louise Nevelson, *Black Majesty*, 1955  
Wood painted black, 71.1 × 97.2 × 41 cm  
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 56.11  
© Estate of Louise Nevelson.  
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Louise Nevelson, *Artillery Landscape*, circa 1985  
Wood painted black, 144.8 × 386.1 × 271.8 cm  
Courtesy Pace Gallery, New York  
© Estate of Louise Nevelson.  
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Photo: © Courtesy Pace Gallery, New York

Louise Nevelson, *Tropical Garden II*, 1957  
Wood painted black, 229 × 291 × 31 cm  
Paris, Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, AM 1976-1002  
© Estate of Louise Nevelson.  
Licensed by Artist Rights Society (ARS), NY/ADAGP, Paris  
Photo: © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Jacqueline Hyde

Louise Nevelson, *Silent Music II*, 1964  
Wood painted black with mirror, 213.4 × 150 × 45 cm  
Collection Alejandro Freites  
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Photo: © Rafael Guillén

Louise Nevelson, *Dawn's Wedding Chapel II*, 1959  
Wood painted white, 294.3 × 212.1 × 26.7 cm  
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 70.68a-m  
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Louise Nevelson photographed by Marvin W. Schwartz, 1972  
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art  
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Louise Nevelson, *Canada Series IV*, 1968  
Plexiglass, 30 × 45.5 × 17.5 cm  
Courtesy galerie Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris / Lisbonne  
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Photo: © Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris-Lisbonne / Jean-Louis Losi

# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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Every day, except Tuesdays and 1st May

## SCHEDULE

1st november to 31 march

Monday → Sunday: 10-18:00

1st april to 31 october

Monday → Thursday: 10-18:00

Friday → Sunday: 10-19:00

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**Louise Nevelson**  
**Mrs. N's Palace**

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