

Worlds in Wood: Exploring the Work of Louise Nevelson

Inspiration: Louise Nevelson (American, b. Ukraine, 1899–1988). *Sky Enclosure* (detail below), 1973. Painted wood. Gift of John I. H. Baur, 1985 (85.16.1). © 2020 Estate of Louise Nevelson / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York.

Ages: 5+ (through adult)

Duration: Open-ended

Materials needed: Found and/or everyday household objects; recycled materials (cardboard boxes, tubes, jars, etc.); paint (if available but not required); glue or tape; optional: natural materials.

Introduction: Sculpture is a three-dimensional art form that can be created through a range of processes—carving wood, chiseling stone, casting (forming) and/or welding (joining) metals, molding with clay or wax, assembling a variety of materials, etc. Twentieth-century artists experimented with the concept and process of making sculpture. As a result, the material, shape, color, size, and location of the sculpture itself became as important as the “finished” piece. If “art” can be judged on the basis of material, process, and purpose, as well as a finished work, then “art” can be a lot more complex or nuanced than traditionally assumed. The work of art becomes “conceptual” as well as “actual.”



Look

Take a close look at Louise Nevelson's *Sky Enclosure*.

- What's going on in this work?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Think

- What materials were used to create this piece?
- How are color, shapes, line, form, and space used in the work?
- How does the title of the sculpture affect your understanding of/ response to the work?

Connect

Louise Nevelson was an American sculptor best known for her large-scale wooden works that take up entire walls of a room or are located in outdoor spaces. As a young girl Nevelson immigrated to the United States from Ukraine and grew up in Maine, where her father worked in the lumber industry. She moved to New York City in her twenties, began studying art, and eventually dedicated her practice to sculpture.

At first, Nevelson struggled financially and couldn't afford to purchase materials for her works. The "original recycler," she often used found objects from building demolition and construction sites in the city, collecting scrap wood, old furniture, and other discarded items as the raw material for her sculptures. She was drawn to working with wood due to her time spent in Maine and because of her father's career in the lumber industry. Her works combined these materials in puzzle-like ways and are monochromatic, or one color, with spray paint further disguising parts from their familiar everyday appearance. *Sky Enclosure* is a great example of Nevelson's use of found materials and work process.

Do

1. Look around for materials that you wouldn't usually use in art-making. Recycled materials, random objects or toys, or even natural materials like rocks or sticks are all examples.
2. If you have access to a box (shoebox, storage box or bin, leftover delivery box, etc.) you can use it to frame your work. You can also work on a flat surface to create a temporary sculpture—a tabletop or desktop is perfect.
3. Begin to experiment with combining found objects by shape, color, depth, and surface texture in different ways.
4. You can keep your assemblage free-form, or you can glue or tape each found object to your box or chosen surface. If you have access to paint, you can unite the different parts into a whole by applying a monochromatic paint color over all the different surfaces.

5. You can make as many sculptures as you like, taking inspiration from Nevelson and making them in a range of sizes, and even creating, or placing them, outside.

Reflect

How did the process of finding and selecting objects, arranging and rearranging them, and/or considering how the parts relate to the whole feel? Did you have a theme or idea of what you wanted to show in mind when you began? Did it change as you worked? Was your process open-ended?

Share

Take a photo of your work and post it to Instagram using the hashtags #LouiseNevelson and #MuseumFromHome, and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.

