

Isabelle Bscher On New York Artist Louise Nevelson's Trailblazing Style

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I write about the crossover between fashion and pop culture.



Gallerist Isabelle Bscher at Galerie Gmurzynska New York NADJA SAYEJ

We might know Louise Nevelson as one of the most successful women artists of her time. But this 20th century sculptor was also a style icon.

Nevelson was known for her eccentric fashion sense, whether it was her enormous hats, bold, black eyeshadow, or long coats.

“When it comes to Louise Nevelson, I always think about fashion, and all the amazing outfits she wore,” said gallerist Isabelle Bscher, co-owner of [Galerie Gmurzynska New York](#), a third-generation gallerist of the gallery founded by her grandmother in 1965.

“She always felt like one needed to make an impression when one came into a room.”

A solo exhibition featuring the artist’s work called [Louise Nevelson - The Way I Think is Collage](#), runs until November 29 at Galerie Gmurzynska in New York City. It features untitled wall works from the 1960s through the 1980s, which are made of cardboard, paint, metal, and wood. The gallery will also feature a piece from “The Dawn Series,” which is traveling from Switzerland, and remains one of the artist’s most monumental sculptures.



Sculptor Louise Nevelson photographed in her New York City studio in 1983.

Nevelson has always been a style icon, at least to fashion insiders. Fashion publications like *W Magazine*, *CR Fashion Book* and *Another Magazine* have revered her outspoken style, while simultaneously carving out her own path in the male-dominated art scene of the 1930s, fighting for recognition—which her fashion sense would help ultimately get her.

“She always wore these crazy beautiful head pieces, some of which looked like turbans, and headdresses,” said Bscher. “She was very creative, and it wasn’t just her art, but her closet, as well.”



Isabelle Bscher, gallerist of Galerie Gmurzynska New York

When dressed up in her own subtle style, Bscher has trotted the globe’s art fairs, from Miami to Hong Kong and Switzerland, mingling alongside some of the world’s most sought after stars, from Susan Sarandon to Sean Combs, Cuba Gooding Jr., Paris Hilton and Chanel Iman, among others. Last year, she was included as one of *Town & Country’s* [rising creative stars](#).

Up-and-coming brands are taking notes from the art world (one brand is even called [Art Dealer](#)), proving that “art world style” is still on the rise. This past year has seen a flurry of fashion guides on [how to dress like an art world insider](#), with some fashion experts noting that art world style has become [the look of the decade](#).

Bscher’s own style is influenced by Nevelson’s eclectic fashion sense, specifically her mix of high and low items. “She would find items and put together outfits herself, mixing high and low,” she adds. “Nevelson was a true style queen.”

Bscher, who is a noted style icon in her own right, has spent the past decade trailblazing art world style. She loves mixing high and low items, to blending casual with formal items, like Levi’s jeans with Celine blazers, to sparkly accessories and statement boots. “I’m often so busy, I don’t have time to think too much about what I wear to openings or events,” she says. “But I do love of fashion and use it to express my own personal taste, which is so key to my job. Louise Nevelson was unapologetic about her style choices, which were bold.”



American artist
Louise Nevelson
(1900 - 1988),
June 1980.

Nevelson is known for her abstract sculptures, mostly wall assemblages from found objects, like scrap wood, tape, and colored paper.

She would cover them in one hue like black, or brown, and would put these found objects together like a perfectly puzzle-fit outfit from her closet.

But it wasn't decades later until her work was recognized, and that came with her fashion sense—from wearing enormous patterned coats in photo shoots, to being featured in *Vogue* and attending New York City's most prominent parties.

“She was enigmatic, she wore colorful clothing everywhere,” adds Bscher. “She wore a lot of big jewelry and over the top pieces that would get her noticed.”



Isabelle Bscher,
gallerist of
Galerie
Gmurzynska New
York wearing a
Celine necklace

The artist was born in Kiev, grew up in rural Maine, and got the nickname “The Hat,” for her penchant for wearing elaborate hats. She also loved fur coats, sculptural jewelry, and dense, false eyelashes. In one interview, Nevelson said: “Every time I put on clothes, I’m creating a picture.”

She had a vast collection of silk scarves that she would wrap around her head, pulling back her hair, and she loved riding hats. Nevelson would spray paint her shoes gold, too, and created her own handmade jewelry, everything from wood to metal slats, and loved anchor motifs.

She loved to layer her necklaces filled and loved pieces with loops and round shapes. Her eye makeup was wild and artistic—she would smear black eyeshadow like charcoal, something that is back in style, [thanks to Julia Fox](#).



American sculptor Louise Nevelson in her SoHo studio, New York, New York, 1979.

She also wore Western shirts, oversized plaid shirts in the studio, and loved black so much she once said: “You take any material and when you convert it to black. It’s so distinguished.” She would wear a black suit skirt and corset to the beach, too. She claimed that black is the “essence of the universe.”

In 1977, art critic [Robert Hughes](#) noted Nevelson's style when he called her: "The dandy of American art is a woman."

In New York City, she befriended artists who were part of the intelligentsia at the time, like Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Diego Rivera (who she previously worked for as an artist assistant for his WPA murals) and Frida Kahlo, but she didn't immediately skyrocket to global fame like her peers.

"All the other artists of her time, like Ellsworth Kelly and Willem de Kooning, would always comment on how she was always so incredibly dressed," said Bscher. "Even Hedi Slimane said she was an incredible style icon."



Louise Nevelson (1899-1988) Untitled, 1960 Foil, paint, paper, and wood on board 31 1/8 x 41 inches

Slimane, who is the artistic director of French fashion brand Celine, honored the artist with a limited-edition necklace called the [Celine Nevelson Project Necklace](#), which sold for \$5,300 each. Only 50 pieces were made of this wearable work of art, which launched in 2021.

Nevelson loved vintage boutiques and traveled the world, searching them out. She visited countries like Japan, India, Iran, Morocco, Guatemala, and Mexico, and she would always collect jewelry from her travels and made her own talismans, which were like mini sculptures. “She was very glamorous, she had pieces by Schiaparelli,” notes Bscher.

Nevelson wore New York’s top fashion designers and made Eleanor Lambert’s International Best Dressed List of 1977. Nevelson also attended high-profile events like Dianan Vreeland’s Costume Institute Gala in 1982 and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's opening of their Yves Saint Laurent exhibition in 1983 (this year, Bscher wore Saint Laurent on the blue carpet of the amfAR Gala in Cannes).



American sculptor Louise Nevelson in her SoHo studio, New York, New York, 1979.

She graced the cover of *Life Magazine* in 1958 and became one of 16 artists featured in the Museum of Modern Art's "Sixteen Americans" exhibit in 1959 (she was one of two women artists, alongside Jay DeFeo).

Another career highlight of Nevelson was when she represented the US at the 31st Venice Biennale in 1962. When it comes to fashion world credos, Nevelson was profiled in *Vogue* in 1976, and in 1985, was awarded the National Medal of Arts. She passed away in 1988.

“Even now, people are looking back on how Nevelson dressed, and are inspired by her style,” said Bscher. “The movement to support women artists that has been burgeoning over the past decade has certainly helped.”



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gallerist of Galerie
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York NADJA SAYEJ



Louise Nevelson, Dawn's Presence – Two (1969-1975)



Installation view of the exhibition Louise Nevelson - The Way I Think Is Collage