

galerie gmurzynska

Art Kabinett at Art Basel Miami Beach 06 Nevelson and Schwitters

“Nevelson extended the legacy of collages and the readymades of Duchamp, already major modernist tendencies, into architectural scale. Total environment as an art experience was initiated in the monumentally encompassing work of Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, and in the architectural spaces of other artists, including The van Doesburg and Mondrian. However, with the exception of Schwitters, these environments were tangential to the major tendencies of these artists’ works and not representative of their total oeuvres. When Schwitters constructed the *Merzbau*, it was the culmination of his history of color and collage. In 1920, Schwitters wrote in the introduction of his catalogue for the exhibition *Merz*: “I have taken a step in advance of mere oil painting for in addition to playing off color against color, line against line, form against form, etc., I play off material against material, for example wood against sackcloth”.

Although it is tempting to extrapolate a conscious influence of Schwitters on Nevelson, it is likely that she was not even aware of his work. (Nevelson does not admit to conscious influences, and she does not even remember if she even knew the work of Schwitters.) Nevelson is a three-dimensional artist; Schwitters was a two-dimensional one whose orientation was color and painting. Nevelson shares the playing off of texture against texture with Schwitters, but Schwitters reveals the human association of his images and symbolically freezes and bonds the moment with its internal human relationships. He said the Merz meant “I”, and he became the builder of a work that encompassed with himself all of his friends. If a friend left his shoes, socks or tie, they were incorporated into Schwitters work and his being. Nevelson uniquely creates an “I” or self-extending piece that excludes other people and encompasses that space within which she functions.

While Schwitters and Duchamp preserve the found or natural condition and life of their elements, Nevelson completely eradicates previous history. In 1913, Duchamp created the first totally free-standing collage object by mounting a metal-wire bicycle wheel on a wooden stool. Nevelson could never leave unchanged the natural state of the component images. Instead, by cleansing her forms with the application of a new color, she restores their virginity and by painting, she sculpts them into existence. There is a need to remove all frame of reference, and finally, within the finished assemblage, she accomplishes an isolation and freshness indicative of a new experience and unfamiliar landscape. Unlike Schwitters, Nevelson theoretically works new elements; the incarnation of past existences.

The poem that Arp wrote to Nevelson also made an association between her work and Schwitters’ by designating Schwitters as her spiritual grandfather.

*(...) Louise Nevelson a un grandpere sans
probablement le connaitre: Kurt Schwitters.*

Specific accomplishments in art produce new territory and experimentation just as the discovery of scientific truths or answers give rise to new questions. Nevelson and Schwitters were both, at different times, receptors of Picasso’s influence conducted by similar sensibilities. Both artists were inspired by the same source, however, the specific internal and external stimuli are contaminated by their own personal histories and private reactions. An elaborate evolutionary puzzle of occurrences directed Nevelson to exclude the objects’ personal history from her work.”

Excerpts from: “Louise Nevelson” (by Arnold B. Glimcher) E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. New York 1972. S.91-93



1 Kurt Schwitters *Composition*
Assemblage on wood. 26,2 x 20,8 cm
1942-1945

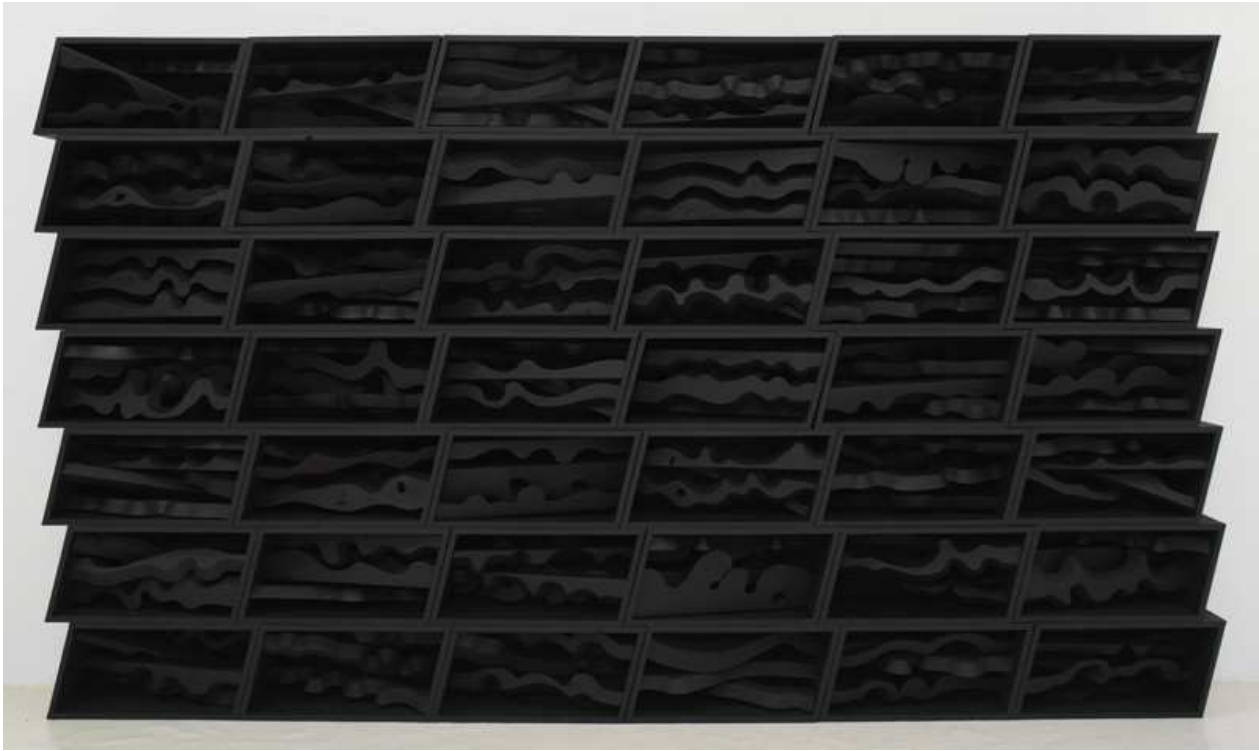


2 Louise Nevelson *Untitled*
Metal, paint and wood. 196 x 136,5 x 16,5 cm
n.d.



3 Louise Nevelson *Moon Spikes*
Wood, painted black
57,8 x 126,4 x 19,7 cm
1953

4 Kurt Schwitters *Sword*
Wood, painted white 82,5 x 10 x 10 cm
1930/1935



5 Louise Nevelson *Untitled*
Painted wood. 213 x 376 x 28 cm
Ca. 1970-1975



6 Kurt Schwitters *Three Triangles*
Oil on wood. 61 x 50 x 2 cm
Ca. 1938