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FORMERLY ART & MAN



LOUISE NEVELSON

Working with Found Objects

PLASTER CYC

 SCHOLASTIC



COVER: Louise Nevelson with her sculptures.  
Photograph © 1983 Jack Mitchell.

SCHOLASTIC

ART

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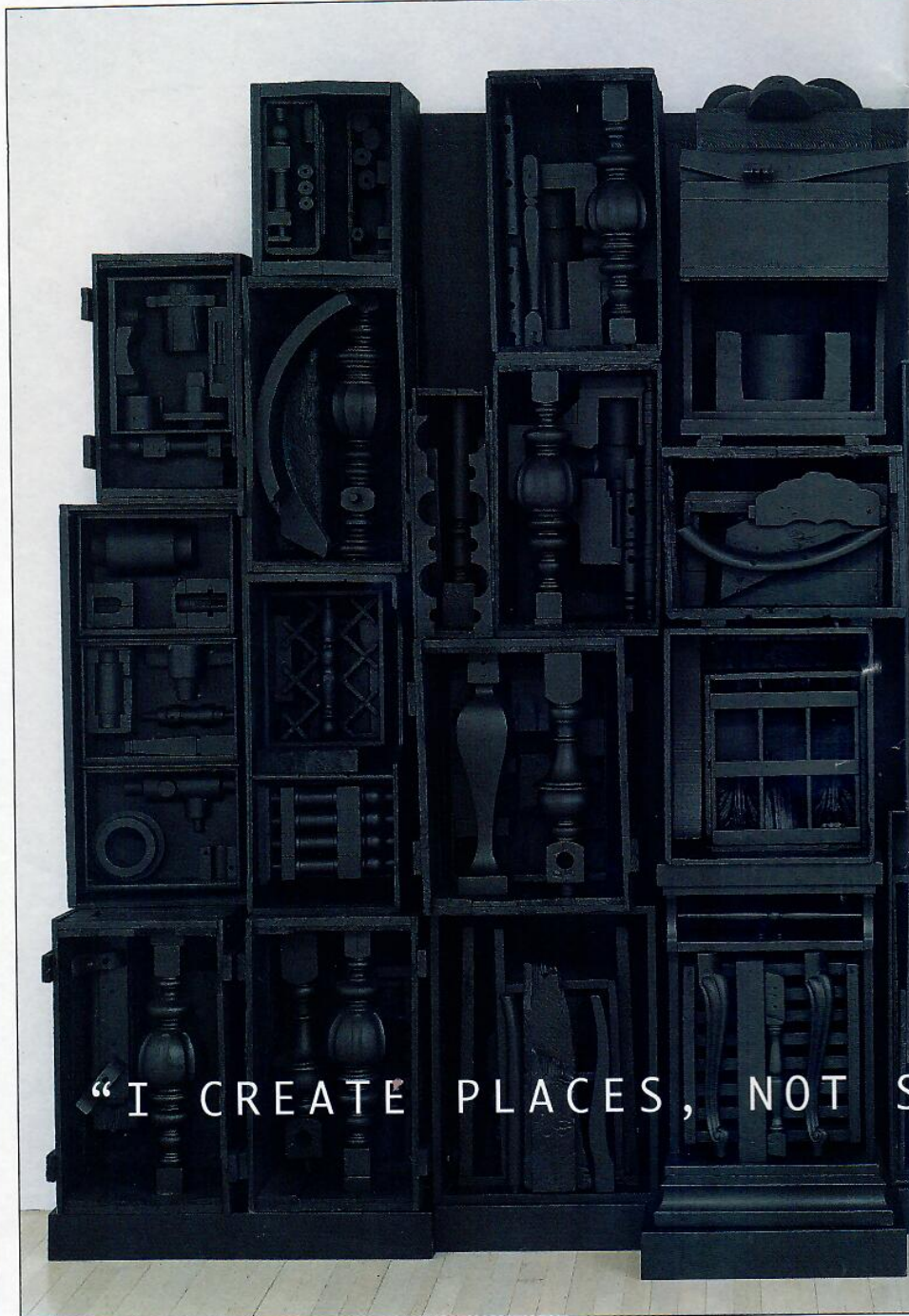
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# Louise Nevelson's S

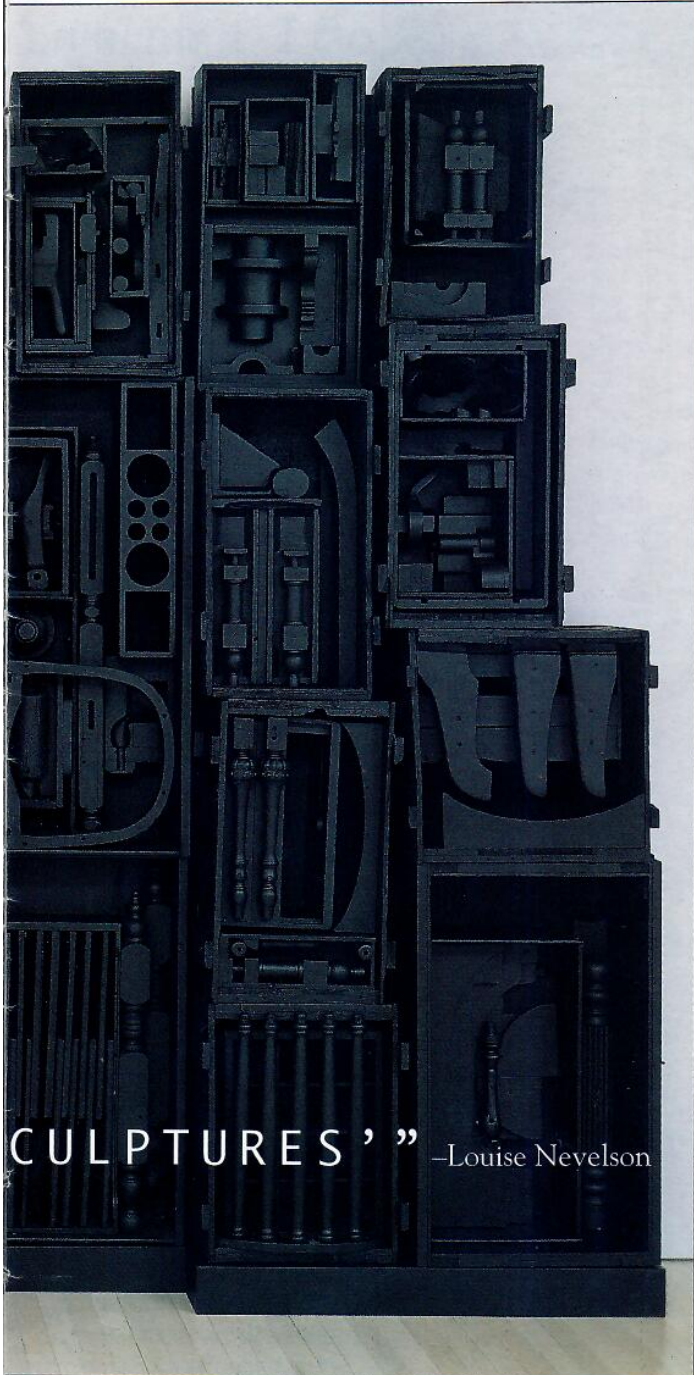


"I CREATE PLACES, NOT S

In wall-sized works like her series called *Sky  
Cathedrals*, Louise Nevelson created a unique new form  
of environmental sculpture.

Louise Nevelson (1899-1988). *Untitled*, 1964. Wood painted black. 103 3/4"  
x 130 3/4" x 20 1/2". Photo by Bill Jacobson. The Pace Gallery, NY, NY.

# ky Cathedrals



CULPTURES ' ' —Louise Nevelson

Compare Louise Nevelson's work above with the 13th-century cathedral on the right. In what ways are the two structures similar?

Wells Cathedral, England, 1184-1339.

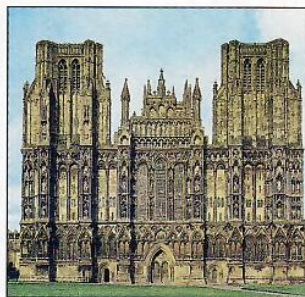
You have come to see a new art exhibit, but the gallery is nearly dark, bathed in an eerie, blue light. As your eyes adjust, you notice you are surrounded by massive walls and shadowy forms. Shapes constantly change as you move through the rooms as if you were traveling through a strange, new universe. The monumental walls with their deep shadows remind you of buildings you may have seen—houses, cities, palaces, churches.

The work on the left—one of a series of sculptural "environments" called *Sky Cathedrals*—was created in 1964 by American artist Louise Nevelson. If you look carefully, you'll see that the structure is made of dozens of wooden boxes filled with shapes. Nevelson originally built each box as a separate work. As their numbers grew, she stacked them against her studio walls, constantly rearranging them—large on the bottom, small on top—to fit more in. Nevelson realized her storage arrangement was coming to life as a larger work—the artist had created her first "wall" sculpture.

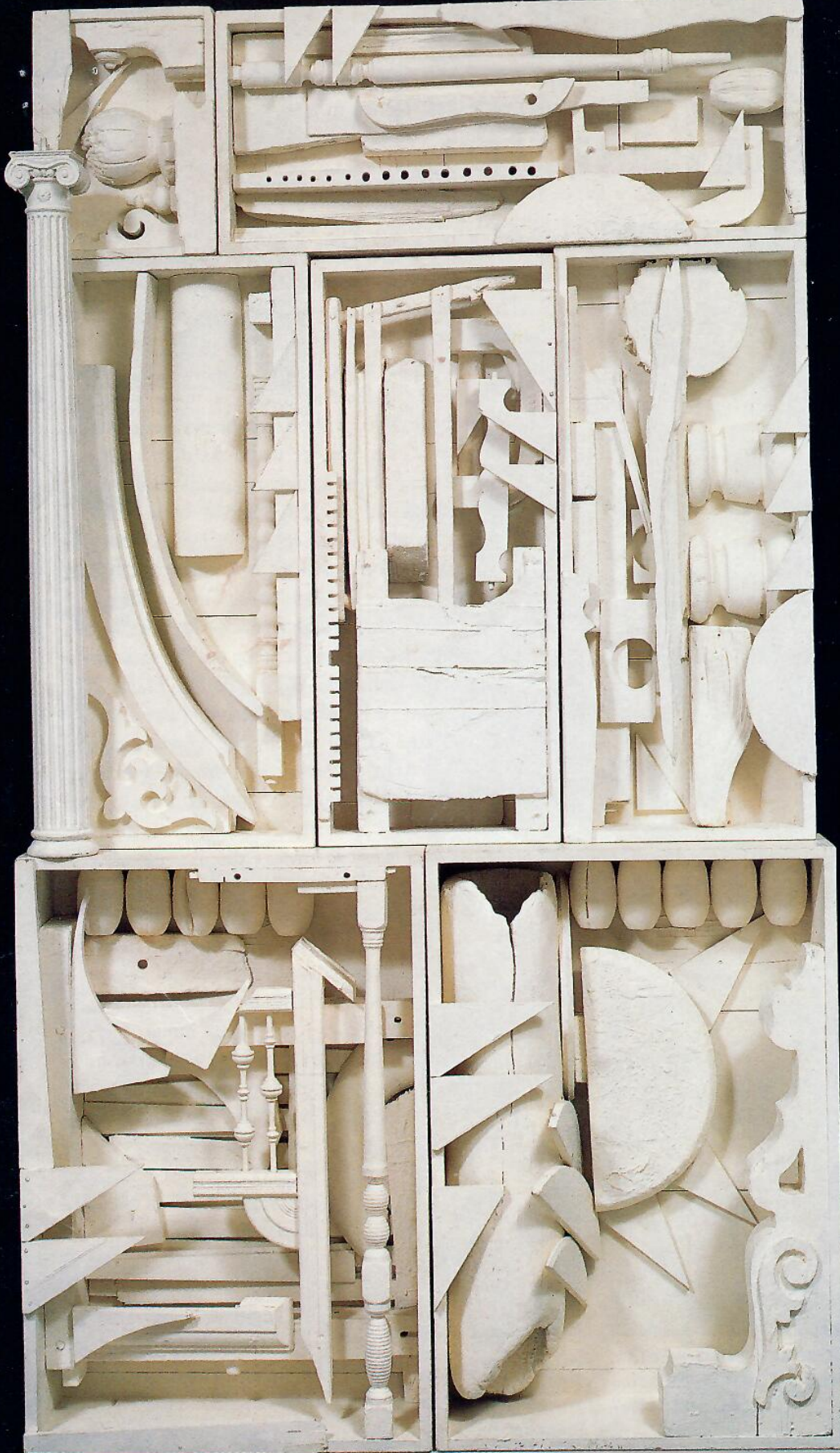
In Nevelson's *Sky Cathedral* series, the boxes grow smaller as they near the top, echoing the shape of a real cathedral. Wells Cathedral (below), built in England in the 13th century, is broad and massive at the bottom. The towers grow narrow as they rise toward heaven, symbolizing the religious feeling that inspired people in the Middle Ages to construct great churches. The cathedral's elaborate arches and recessed spaces holding sculptures direct the eye toward the sky. Nevelson's wall also contains *indented* rectangles filled with sculptures. *Organic* (curved) and *geometric* (straight) shapes lead the eye up—like the cathedral's arches. To *unify* the sculpture and emphasize the *contrast of light and shadow*, the artist has painted the entire work black.

Nevelson's works are *three-dimensional* but are meant to be viewed only from the front. They extend mainly

in *two dimensions*: *height* and *width*. The *third dimension*, *depth*, is usually only a foot or two. Another dimension—*time*—is also an important element in Nevelson's work. Viewers are not meant to see her works all at once. This is why the artist insisted that



they be shown only in near-darkness. Since viewers "journey" through her environments, experiencing many different sensations, Nevelson's work might be considered theater as well as sculpture.



# Build It

“I didn’  
I wanted

**Louise Nevelson’s “walls” have been called visual poems composed of boxes rather than verses. These boxes are filled with shapes instead of words.**

*Dawn’s Wedding Chapel I, 1959. Wood painted white, 90” x 51” x 6”. Photo by Bill Jacobson. The Pace Gallery, NY, NY.*

**Constructed of boxes and wood scraps, the early Nevelson sculpture on the right contains many of the qualities that would make her later work famous.**

*Forgotten City, 1955. Wood construction, 85 3/4” x 30 3/4” x 11 1/4”. New York University Art Collection.*

# ng A World of Her Own

t want to make things.  
to build an empire.”

—Louise Nevelson

From the time three-year-old Louise Berliawsky (Burr-lee-OW-skee) arrived in the United States from Russia in 1904, she felt out of place. Her family spoke little English, and there were hardly any other Jewish families in Rockland, Maine. Her father quickly established a successful lumber business; her mother was a fashionable woman who dressed her children in beautiful clothes. But this set them apart from their classmates. When Louise wore her expensive dresses to school, it made the other girls jealous. Besides having few friends, Louise had difficulty with reading. Except for art and sports, she did not enjoy school.

At home, she created her own fantasy world. She loved to paint, make costumes, and put on plays. Piano and art lessons took the place of companionship. From the time she was six, Louise built things from the wood scraps in her father's lumberyard.

In 1920, Louise married Charles Nevelson, whose family ran a shipping business, and the couple moved to New York City. She studied voice, dramatics, and art but soon found that her marriage interfered with her artistic ambitions. In 1931, Nevelson left her husband, sent her son to live with her parents, and left for Europe to study art.

When she returned to New York, Louise Nevelson had gained confidence in her

work. In 1936, a gallery exhibited her wood sculptures and a number of critics were impressed by their **simple, abstract shapes**. During the 1930s and '40s, women artists were not taken seriously; Nevelson often felt discouraged but, as she said, "I was my own person; that kept me going." Dissatisfied

with traditional artistic techniques, the artist kept working toward the creation of her own visual language.

In the 1950s, Nevelson began painting her sculptures **one solid color**—black, white, or gold. *Dawn's Wedding Chapel I*, (far left) is based on the rectangular shapes she used in her *Sky Cathedrals*. Painted white, its **ornate lines and curves** suggest wedding images—churches, cakes, candles, lace, balconies.

**Recessed shapes** contrast deep shadows with white highlights.

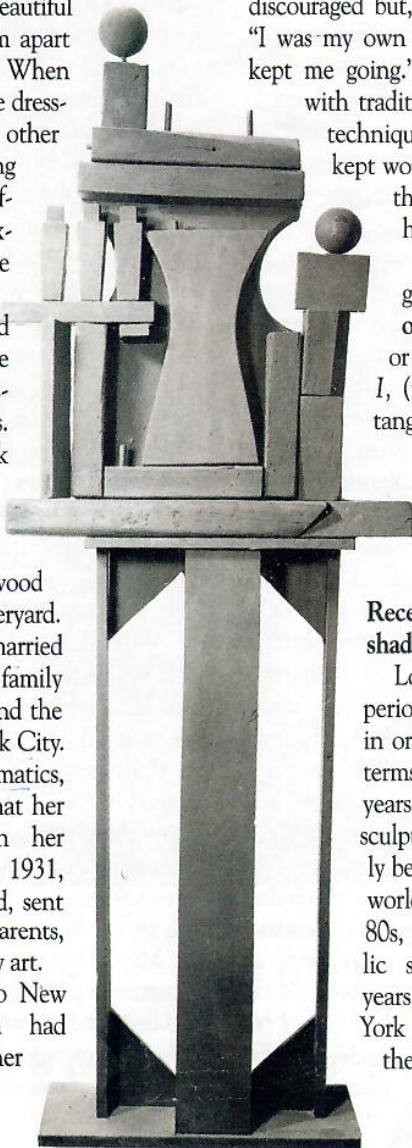
Louise Nevelson endured long periods of poverty and frustration in order to create art on her own terms. She was an artist for 30 years before she began to sell her sculpture, but Nevelson eventually became a major force in the art world. She worked on into her 80s, and created many large public sculptures during her later years. Nevelson died in her New York City apartment in 1988, at the age of 89.



"Women at that time were supposed to look pretty and throw little handkerchiefs around . . . well, I couldn't play that role."

—Louise Nevelson

Louise Nevelson in 1921.





How would any of the sculptures shown here look if each piece of wood had been painted a different color?

*Untitled: Columns*, 1976. Wood painted white. 95" x 94" x 20". Photo by Ellen Page Wilson. The Pace Gallery, NY, NY.

# A New Visual Language

Why do you think Nevelson painted the work above gold instead of black or white?

*Half Moon I*, 1961. Wood painted gold. 28" x 48 1/2" x 4". The Pace Gallery, NY, NY.

No matter how geometric or mathematical the shapes on these two pages look, you can be sure they are based on something you can easily see, hear, feel, or touch. The titles of Louise Nevelson's sculptures usually give the viewer good insight into the work's meaning.

Nevelson's sculptures are works of **abstract art**. Abstract works **represent** or **suggest** an object or concept instead of portraying it realistically. Nevelson developed her own **visual language** in which certain shapes and their arrangement symbolized buildings, plants, gardens, rooms, or natural forces. Most of Nevelson's work includes **found objects**, items that once served another purpose, such as table legs, bowling pins, musical instruments, chair backs—even toilet seats. When Nevelson used a found object in a sculpture, its "former life" was not important. She was interested only in the object's **shape**, **texture**, and the **shadow** it would cast. Because all the surfaces of Nevelson's works are painted one solid color, **lighting** is a vital part of her sculptures. Shapes **extend**, **overlap**, or are **recessed**, creating the **shadows** that give Nevelson's works a sense of mystery, magic, and a feeling of deep space.

In her visual language, Nevelson used **circles**, **curves**, and **semicircles**—such as those in the work above, *Half Moon I* to stand for moons, plan-

ets, or suns. In this piece, the artist contrasts **smooth** and **rough textured surfaces**. Nevelson considered chips, flaws, knotholes, and gouges in the wood "part of the life" of her work. **Horizontals** play against **verticals** and **curved forms** contrast with **straight lines**, giving this piece its **visual rhythm**. Its reflective gold surface resembles soft moonlight.

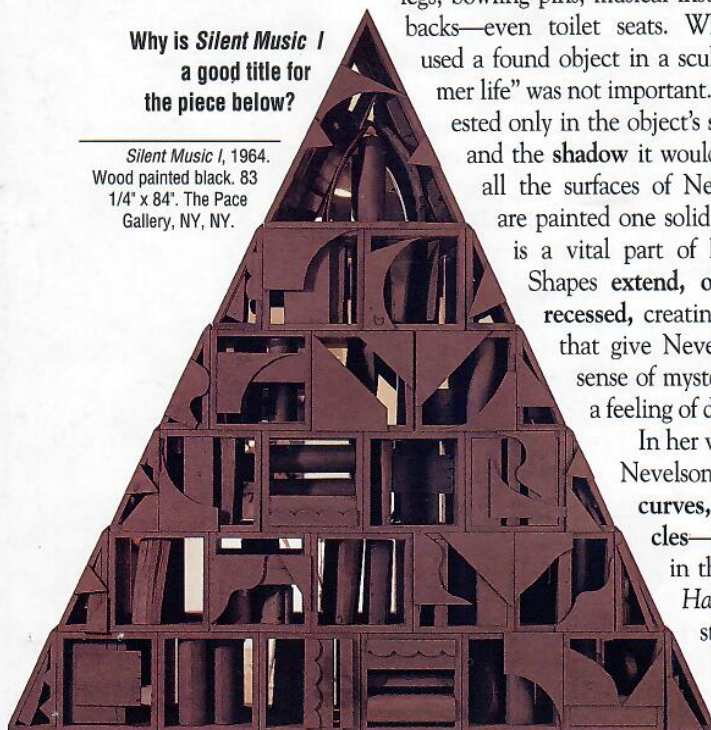
Compare the sculpture on the right, *Untitled: Columns* with some of the classical Greek buildings you may have seen in a previous issue of *Scholastic Art* (Nov. 94). **Strong verticals** and **columns** were devices Nevelson used to create structures suggesting cathedrals, monuments, or ancient temples. Graceful, curving shapes and a smooth white surface give this large, monumental work a surprising feeling of "lightness."

Which of Nevelson's works on these pages most resembles a silent, mysterious stringed instrument? *Silent Music I* (below left) is a large triangle made up of square box-like shapes, **varied** and **repeated**. Its **massive size** and **symmetrical composition** (the same on each side) give it the calm, eternal presence of an ancient Egyptian pyramid.

Can you pick out any recognizable found objects in the works on these two pages or in *Mirror Shadow XXXXIII* on pages 8-9? *Mirror Shadow* is nearly as large as *Silent Music*, but which seems lighter and more active? By placing two ordinary bed headboards at an angle in *Mirror Shadow*, Nevelson has given the sculpture a feeling of motion. Its **strong diagonal lines** and **asymmetrical composition** (each side is different) make this work seem as if it could almost soar off the wall.

Why is *Silent Music I* a good title for the piece below?

*Silent Music I*, 1964. Wood painted black. 83 1/4" x 84". The Pace Gallery, NY, NY.



MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH

*Preview*



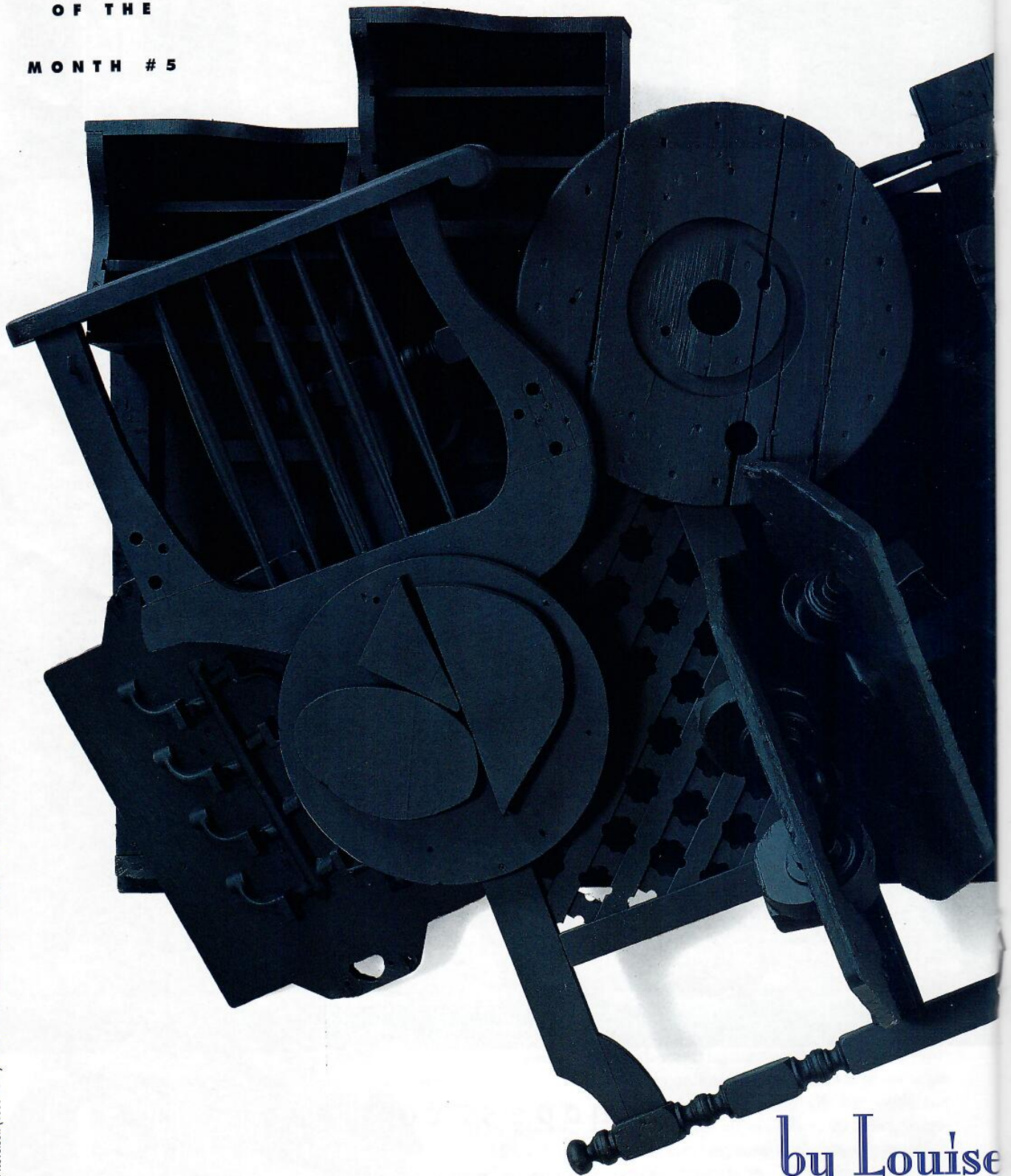
"I use shapes to create my  
own universe." —Louise Nevelson

# Mirror Shadow

MASTERPIECE

OF THE

MONTH # 5



Louise Nevelson (1899-1988). *Mirror Shadow XXXXII*, 1987. Wood painted black, 56" x 93" x 16". The Pace Gallery, NY, NY.

by Louise

"When you put together things that other people have thrown away - a spiritual life that surpasses the life of the body."



OW XXXXIII

SCHOLASTIC  
ART



Nevelson

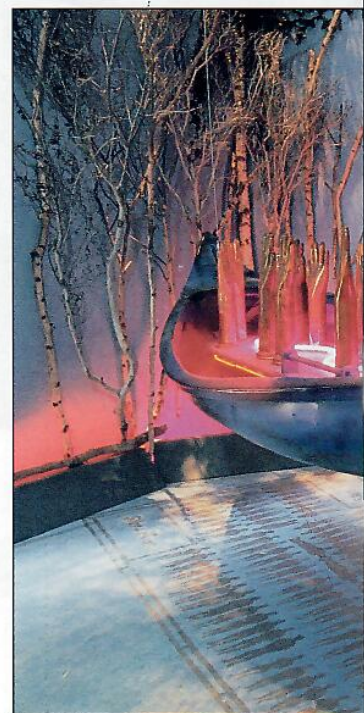
ve thrown out, you're really bringing them to life  
hey were originally created for." -Louise Nevelson

## WORKING WITH FOUND OBJECTS: Three artists who have transformed ordinary objects into works of art.

### *Readymade Art*

Today, *assemblage* (as-SEM-blage—working with found objects)—is an accepted form of sculpture. But that wasn't always the case. At the beginning of the 20th century, Europe was undergoing an industrial revolution—machines and factories were replacing handcrafted materials—and on the verge of the first modern world war. Artists of the time rebelled against conventional values and their work reflected the political and social upheavals of the time. In 1913, French artist Marcel Duchamp (Doo-SHOMP) shocked the art world by placing a bicycle wheel on a stool (left), titling it *Bicycle Wheel*, and entering it in an art show. Duchamp began hanging objects he called “readymades” on gallery and museum walls.

These readymades were any useful, manufactured object—a shovel, a window, a comb—whose shape interested the artist. With these sculptures, Duchamp extended the concept of art, demonstrating that artistic creation does not have to conform to established rules.

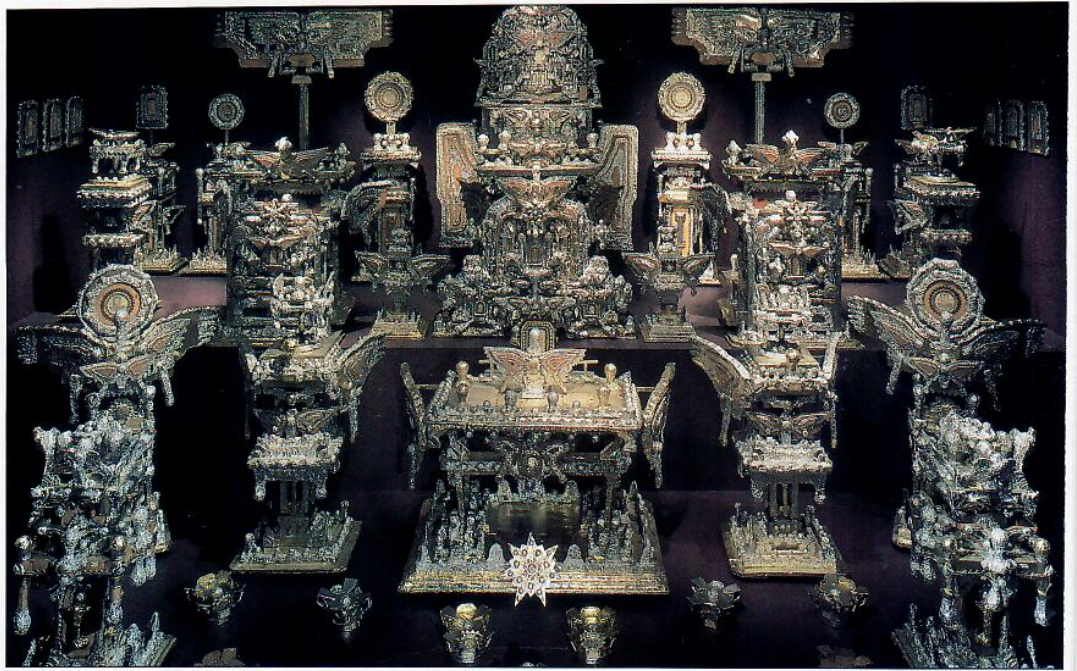


***Bicycle Wheel*, constructed in 1913, was one of the first works of art created with found objects.**

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). *Bicycle Wheel*, ready made. Original version, 1913. Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY.

## Heavenly Objects

Have you ever heard of an artist who became famous for creating only one work of art? African-American artist James Hampton spent 14 years constructing his masterpiece, *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millenium General Assembly* (right), an environmental sculpture that fills a whole room. This arrangement of nearly 200 glittering objects suggests a Christian church; it includes an altar, a throne, and pulpits. Hampton, who worked as a janitor and lived alone in a small Washington, D.C., apartment, devoted every free hour to his "vision." Objects usually considered "junk"—old furniture, insulation, jelly glasses, used light bulbs, mirror fragments, cables, and other discarded items—became part of Hampton's vision. The artist transformed these objects and unified his composition by covering each piece with silver and gold tinfoil.



This heavenly vision was created out of discarded "junk."

James Hampton (1909-1964). *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millenium General Assembly*, 1950-64. Mixed media. 10 1/2' x 27' x 14 1/2'. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Photo, Art Resource.



## Nonobjective Art

The sculpture (left) titled *In Troubled Waters* features a life-size canoe filled with handlike shapes. How does this work make you feel? Does it suggest any particular theme to you?

African-American artist Betye Saar creates her sculptures and environments from found objects, and includes elements of African art and culture. Most of her sculptures contain an underlying political message. In this large installa-

tion, the artist suggests a Native-American stereotype—an Indian brave paddling down a river in a birchbark canoe. But Saar has made her version from 20th-century materials—aluminum, latex, vinyl, and neon—and has juxtaposed her images in surprising and provocative ways. What do you think about the contrast of these manufactured products with the real—but dead—birch trees in the background? Are the hands coming out of the canoe waving, drowning, reaching toward the sky, or raised in a symbolic gesture? What do you think the title—*In Troubled Waters*—might mean?

What found objects has artist Betye Saar used in this work?

Betye Saar b. 1926. *In Troubled Waters*, 1993. 12' x 15' x 15'. Yerba Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Photo, Bob Hsiang.



# Seth Cohen: SCULPTING ENVIRONMENTS

**We select** our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic art and writing award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the following program for entry deadlines and rules books:  
**Scholastic Art and Writing Awards**  
555 Broadway  
New York, NY 10012

*Scholastic Art* magazine does not have a separate competition.

■ **How did you first get interested in art?**

Probably because art is a requirement at school. But I can pick and choose the kind of art I want to do—in my freshman year I took photography and this year I'm working with ceramics. I like working in three-dimensions. Last year, I took a wood class—that's when I made this piece.

■ **How did you get the idea for this award-winning sculpture?**

In wood shop the assignment was to make some kind of a lamp using only right angles. We also had to somehow get light to shine through the wood. This piece was meant to be a sculpture using light. It just seemed to evolve into this kind of shape.

■ **How did you create your sculpture?**

I began by building a four-sided

box and then put a light bulb in it. I wanted light to come through the sides. When I added legs, then light could also come through the bottom. Right away, that added more character to the piece. I didn't want people to see the light bulb inside, so I needed to design a top for the box. A flat top wouldn't be very exciting, and I had to figure out a way to get some light to come out of the top. I knew I couldn't do a dome because we were only allowed to use right angles. So I decided to give the top a rounded look by using wood slats of different heights. The slats also allowed light to come out through the top.

■ **Then what did you do?**

I still had to work on the sides. Using a table saw and a radial-arm saw, I cut vertical and horizontal lines until they met at the middle of the box, creating

a hole for light to come through. The vertical slats line up with gaps in between the horizontal slats inside the lamp. The lamp was actually glued, so the gold screws don't hold the pieces together. They're part of the design—I needed them to contrast with the light color of the pine.

■ **Does your work have a title?**

It's officially untitled. I actually never saw that the lamp looked like a building until people started telling me they thought it did. So, now that I think about it, a title like "city lights" might be appropriate.

■ **Were you satisfied with this work after it was finished?**

I think this piece was successful because, not only did it meet all the requirements of the assignment, I think it works visually also. It's intriguing to look at from all different

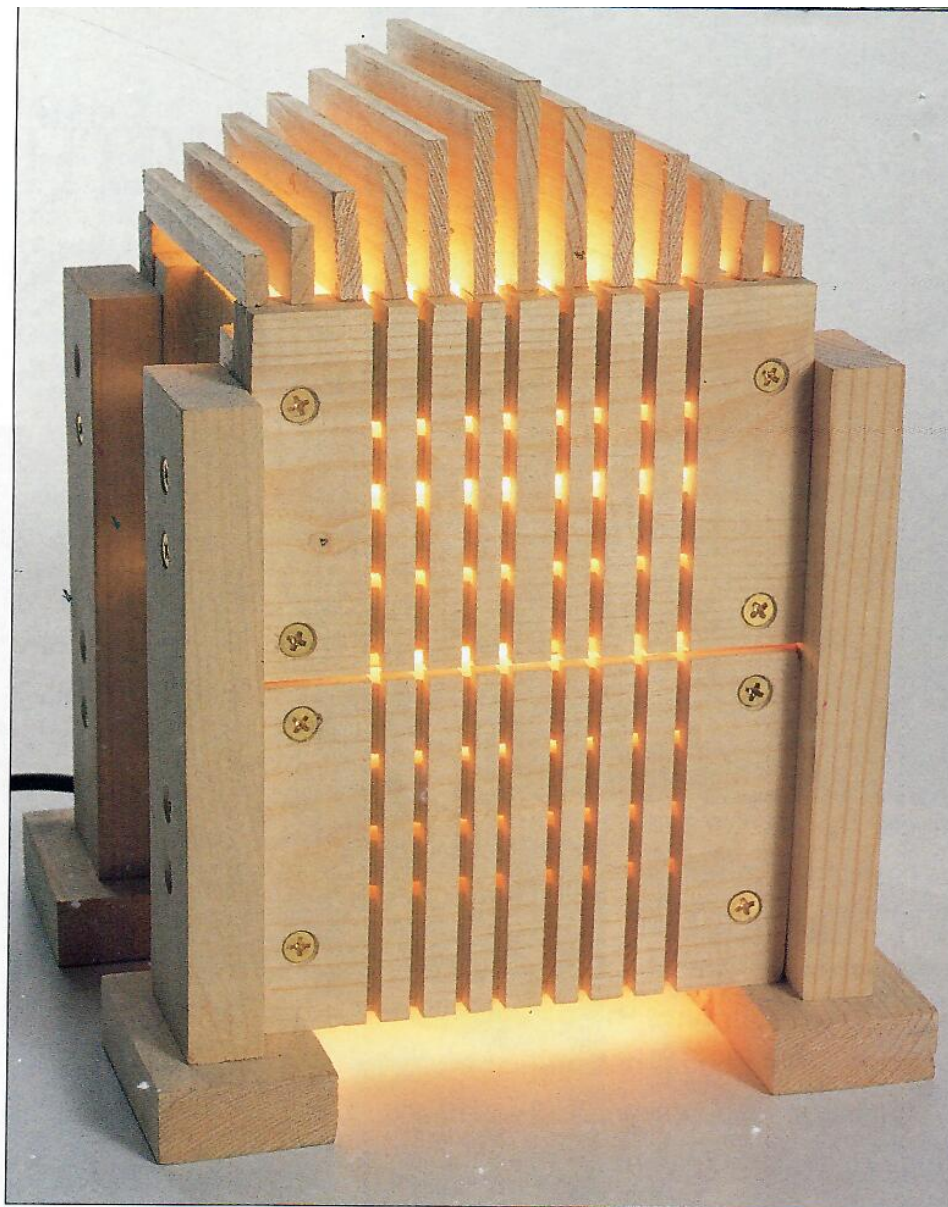
angles. And when the light is on, the shadows this lamp casts are incredible.

■ **Do you do much sculpture?**

I've done a lot in wood and right now I'm working with ceramics and clay. But the aspect I like best about working in three dimensions is capturing patterns of shadow and light. This lamp has a lot of those qualities interwoven in it.

■ **Do you have any advice for other aspiring artists?**

One of the most important things I've learned is not to follow other people's artistic advice. You have a picture in your mind of what you want to do, and someone else will probably have a totally different picture. If you're sure of what kind of art you want to do, don't let someone else's ideas influence you. Stick to your own ideas. Also, don't be afraid to change direction if you don't like the way something's working out. You can make a complete turn and do something totally different. Don't be afraid of your materials either. Make your own art—do what you want to do.



***“If you're sure of what kind of art you want to do, don't let someone else's ideas influence you. Stick to your own ideas.”***

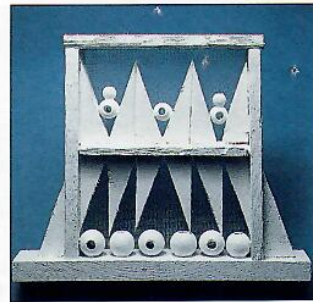
Seventeen-year-old Seth Cohen, who created the sculpture above, likes to work with light and shadow. Seth did this unusual Scholastic Art-Award-winning lamp during his sophomore year at the Rivers School in Weston, Massachusetts. Seth enjoys art but he spends most of his time right now preparing for college. He's not sure where he's going just yet—probably a school with a good arts program. Seth is also interested in sports, science, English-related subjects, and acting.



*“When you put together things other people have thrown out, you're really bringing them to life.”*

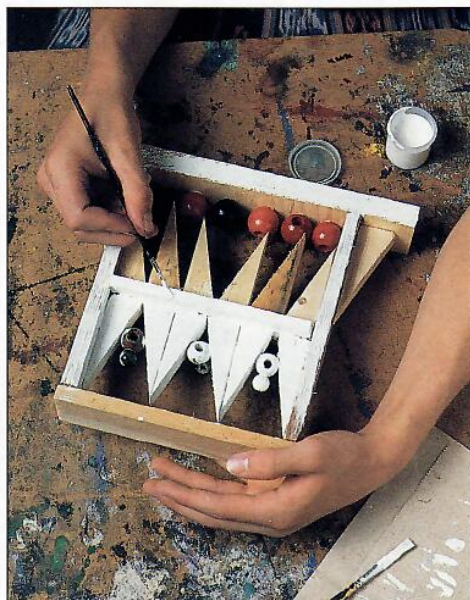
# SCULPTING WITH FOUND OBJECTS

—Louise Nevelson



In this issue, you've seen the kinds of mysterious and imaginative environments Louise Nevelson was able to create simply by using old and discarded objects. It is the artist's careful arrangement of all the pieces that makes these works so powerful. And because they have been painted one single color, we see the shapes in Nevelson's sculptures not as separate pieces, but as one unified whole.

In this workshop, you'll work with found objects—"bringing them to life" by combining them in new and different ways.



## SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP

### Materials

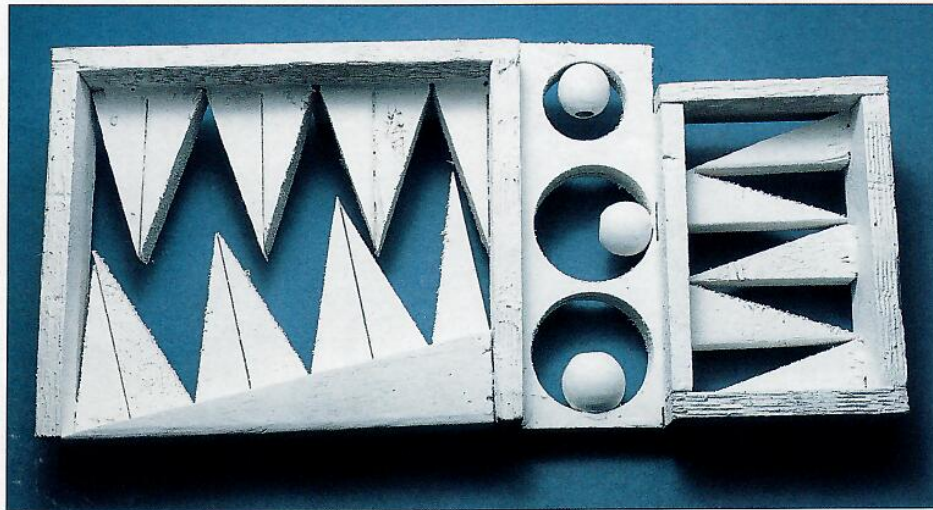
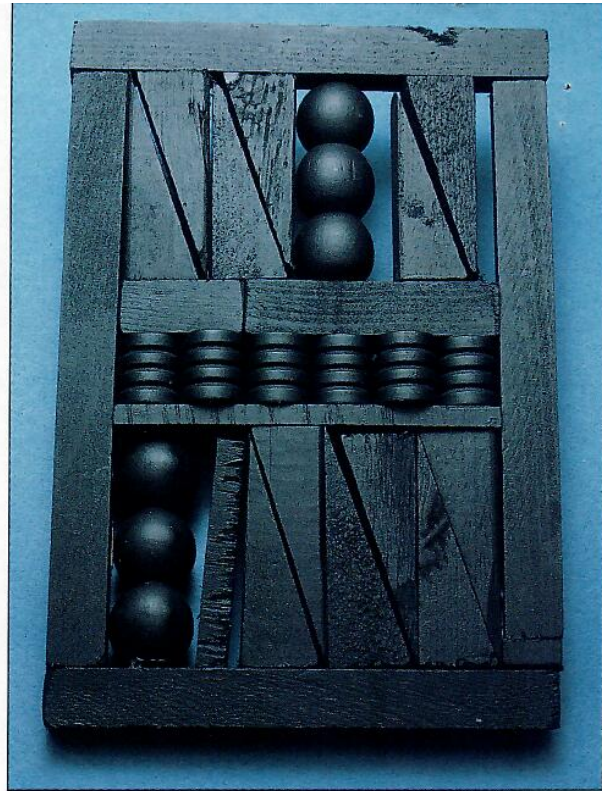
- Variety of small wood scraps no longer than 15"
- Variety of small found objects
- Elmer's Glue-All
- 18" ruler
- Masking tape
- Black and white tempera paint
- Paintbrushes
- Sandpaper
- Newspapers
- Coping or jig saw (optional)

## Starting Out

1. Several weeks before beginning this sculpture, start to collect any small objects (wood, metal, plastic, etc.) and wood scraps you might like to include in your assemblage. When you are ready to do this project, spread everything out on a table and select shapes you think might work together. You can base your assemblage on a theme or idea, but abstract or nonobjective compositions work best. Keep your arrangement simple; avoid complex arrangements.

## Step 2

Begin constructing a small (no bigger than 15" in any direction), boxlike assemblage. Arrange and rearrange pieces within the box. You may want to divide your box into smaller compartments. Contrast wood pieces with other objects; consider whether your box will be in high, middle or low relief. Lighting is very important. Incorporate dark spaces, highlights, and shadows into your piece. Try to establish a visual rhythm as you arrange your forms into a balanced composition. You can stack compartments with small objects, tightly fill each compartment or balance your composition with compartments that contain a single small object.



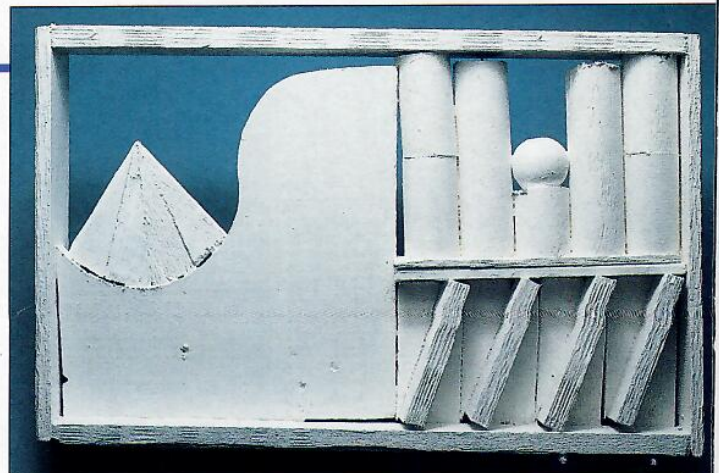
## Step 3

When you are satisfied with your arrangement, use a ruler to measure distances, square your frame, and accurately line up various parts. Sand the pieces you wish to be smooth before gluing. (Masking tape will help hold pieces together while glue sets.) Choose the one single color you'd like to use to unify your sculpture. After glue has dried, place assemblage on newspapers and paint it. Paint top and sides first and let dry, then do inside.

## Some Solutions

Your construction can be horizontal, vertical, or square. Will your frame be thick, thin; or of varying thicknesses? Shapes can extend beyond the frame; parts of the composition can become part of the frame. Will your compartments be of equal or different sizes? Will the objects and wood-

en shapes in your compartments be big or small; straight or curved; flat or rounded; smooth or rough; dull or shiny? Will you use positive and negative versions of the same shape? Your shapes can repeat, touch, overlap, or contain other shapes inside. Will your composition be symmetrical (the same on both sides) or asymmetrical (different on each side but visually balanced)?



## ARTS ALIVE

Two  
American artists  
who use found  
objects in very  
different ways.



Artist Beverly Buchanan recycles parts of real Southern shacks to create smaller versions like the one on the left.

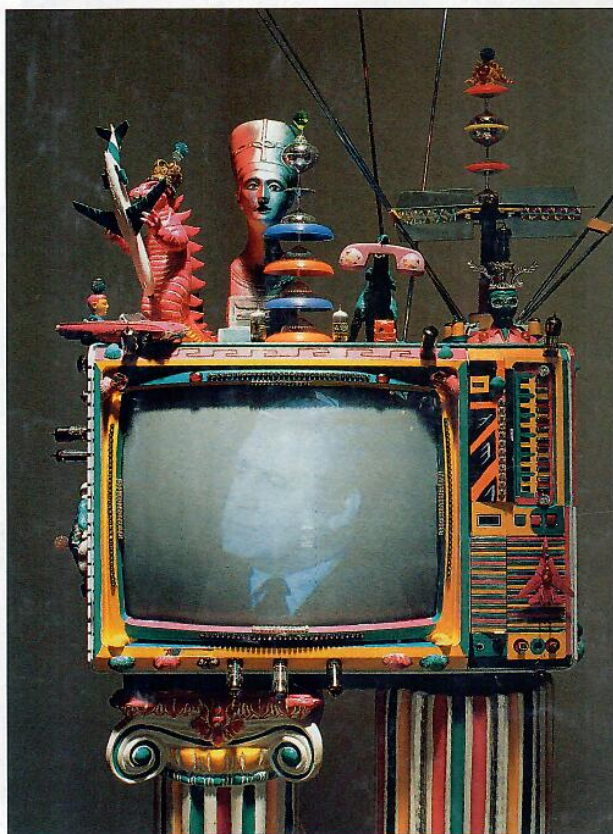
Beverly Buchanan b. 1940. *Frank Owen's Blue Shack*, 1989. Acrylic on wood, 18" x 8" x 11". Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C. Richard Samuel Roberts Minority Artists Purchase Fund.

## Memory Objects

African-American artist Beverly Buchanan uses found objects to create powerful statements about survival in America. The artist constructs small sculptures based on the simple shacks she remembers from her childhood in rural South Carolina. She puts together scraps of worn, weathered, burnt wood and covers them with bits of tin or tar paper. The shacks are often windowless, the doors too narrow, symbolizing the restricted and desperate lives of the people who lived in them. Buchanan sometimes paints her small houses—like *Frank Owen's Blue Shack* (left)—bright colors to suggest the warm family life that went on inside them.

## Fantasy Objects

In his cartoon-like paintings, contemporary Los Angeles artist Kenny Scharf has always celebrated the fantasy world of television, especially animated cartoons, situation comedies, and game shows. In the sculpture (right), called *Extravanza Televisione*, Scharf combines a number of found objects to create a fantastic and slightly sinister commentary on today's mass media. A brightly painted television set, decorated with jewels, shells, fingernails, and old glass tubes, is mounted on a pair of classical columns. Plastic characters from a Saturday-morning television world—monsters, fast cars, masked figures—seem to emerge from the set. The combination of images, shapes, and garish colors, suggests the violence and gadgetry that dominates much of today's media.



Can you identify any of the found objects in the contemporary sculpture on the left?

Kenny Scharf b. 1958. *Extravanza Televisione*, 1984. Mixed media. Tony Shafrazi Gallery, NY, NY.