

Louise Nevelson

PACE GALLERY | 534 W. 25TH STREET
534 W. 25th Street
January 24–February 28

Louise Nevelson, we are told, was never one to shy from theatricality. In photographs she appears, long-limbed and frontal, all angles and kohl and cultivated style. Pace's latest foray into Nevelson's oeuvre reveals an artist of softer, more scumbled contours. The show collects nearly twenty untitled collages, most made between 1956 and 1965, coextensive with the more explicitly sculptural work for which she is best known. All are small in scale and mounted on wood board. Their components—doilies, newsprint, paper bags, chamfered cardboard, bits of foil—are untransformed and betray signs of past use: here, the impress of a cup; there, the plan of a tissue box. Color is local and muted, limited to beiges, peats, and boggy grays. When paint appears, it's sprayed or sloppily brushed on, less a gesture of expressivity than an abstraction of the same.



Louise Nevelson, *Untitled*, 1959, cardboard, wood, paper collage on board, 36 x 48".

Nevelson described her first encounter with Picasso as epiphanic, and her debt to his brand of collage is everywhere evident. (In this context, her use of cheap wood seems a relay to *faux bois*.) Yet if Cubism was obsessed with justifying, by literalizing, the picture plane, Nevelson's collages take the flatness of their support as a given. Framing, not flatness, emerges as a key concern, as in a 1959 example, which interleaves its elements with sheets of black paper and cardboard. Clausal coordination coincides with list-like accretion. It's a logic parallel to that of her assemblages, which often build from small, recessed enclosures. A continuous line develops: a collage aesthetic traversing the whole of Nevelson's practice. Perhaps more interesting, however, is to think of Nevelson's assemblages outside the formalist confines of "pictorial sculpture." In this attempt, her early collages, dispersive and self-differing despite their containment, offer an opening.

— Courtney Fiske