



LOUISE NEVELSON

(Perejaslaw 1899 - 1988 New York)

Cloud II. 1984.

Wood, painted.

84 x 115 x 6.5 cm.

Provenance: - Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne (verso with the label). - Purchased from the above in 1986 by the present owner, since then private collection Switzerland.

Exhibition: - Lausanne 1986, Louise Nevelson. Galerie Alice Pauli, April - May. - Zurich 2010, Sammlung Sanduhr. J&P Fine Art, 10 March - 14 May 2010. Literature:

Exh.-Folder: Louise Nevelson. Sculptures and Reliefs, Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne 1986, no. 5 (with ill.). "Louise Nevelson has a grandfather, probably without even knowing it: Kurt Schwitters." (Hans Arp) Louise

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Nevelson was born Leah Berliawsky in 1899 in Kiev and emigrated with her parents in 1905 to Rockland/Main. In 1920 she married, taking her husband's surname and went with him to New York. In 1929/30 she studied at the Art Students League in New York and in 1931 began her studies under Hans Hofmann, first in Munich and then in New York. During her stay in Europe, she became familiar with African sculpture at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, which was to have a lasting influence. Back in New York, she worked as assistant to Diego Rivera. She had exhibitions early on, for example at Galerie Nierendorf in New York. In 1962 she took part in the Venice Biennale, and the documenta in Kassel in 1964 and 1968. The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York held the first comprehensive retrospective of her work in 1967. In 1983 Nevelson was awarded the "Gold Medal Sculpture" by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She died in New York in 1988. Louise Nevelson devoted her entire artistic oeuvre to sculpture. She first experimented with terracotta and bronze, until at the beginning of the 1940s wood became her material of choice. It was not the way in which wood could be shaped which interested the artist, but the life it had lived, and so it will come as no surprise that she collected wood which had been thrown away in the streets of New York and used it in her reliefs. She always worked in monochrome and almost always painted her sculptures black: "I don't think I chose for black. I think it chose me for saying something. You see, it says more for me than anything else. In the academic world, they used to say black and white were no color, but I'm twisting that to tell you that for me it is the total color. It means totality. It means: contains all." (Louise Nevelson) Her absolute commitment to monochrome was testament to Nevelson's total aplomb in her handling of sculpture, since she did not need colour in order to breathe life into her works, but just her masterly treatment of the wood. At first, she explored freestanding three-dimensional sculptures. However, since strictly speaking she produced just a front and perhaps a back, without the three-dimensional quality of a sculpture in the round, so Nevelson soon turned to wall reliefs. The idea of these condensed wall reliefs had its roots in Nevelson's studies under Hans Hofmann. She had a profound knowledge of European art and we find many instances of

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borrowing. The most formative was probably Cubism in the manner of Pablo Picasso, but the metaphysical painting of de Chirico and Morandi was also reflected in her work. Finally, Marcel Duchamp and Dadaism also played a major role. From all these influences Nevelson drew insights for her oeuvre, developed her sculptures and trod her own unmistakable path within the art of the 20th century. The two works offered here at auction from 1984/85 are typical examples of her mature work. The works are always strictly frontal, articulated within boxes, but with increasingly complex internal compositions, which recede a little into the background. The individual objects are placed next to and over each other to great effect, so that the selection and composition has something intimate and mysterious about it. "The City" (Los 3501) captivates with its depth, which at first sight may astonish the viewer; but as soon as the viewer finds the small opening compartments and doors, the work becomes clear. The title itself appears to make sense with these discoveries – as in an unfamiliar town, the viewer explores Nevelson's work and finds hidden doors and rooms. "Clouds II" is characterised by a flatter, but more lavish combination of individual pieces. It is almost as though the artist wishes to depict individual cloud formations. Always unconscious, but in her mature work quite consciously she creates "environments" with her reliefs. She herself explained: "Because art, sculpture in particular, is so lively, so full of life, you naturally want everything from life, so you create an environment, but even that environment becomes a sculpture. It is not really created for a public but for your own eyes. It is a party for myself." The viewer is drawn into this "environment" – there are many objects and details to be discovered, known elements but also objects which cannot immediately be classified. With time the viewer can begin to create correlations and connections between the elements and the work opens up with its own power of association. With her wall reliefs, Louise Nevelson created in the hitherto and even today almost exclusively male genre, an impressive self-sufficient oeuvre, which does not shy away from monumentality and which made her into one of the most important female artists of the 20th century.

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