LOUISE NEVELSON'S CHAPEL OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD IS A UNIQUE, COMPREHENSIVE SCULPTURAL ENVIRONMENT CURRENTLY UNDERGOING RESTORATION AT SAINT PETER’S CHURCH.

PRESS KIT

*Louise Nevelson, 1977*
Photograph by Hans Namuth
Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
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Nevelson Chapel is the only remaining, permanent, fully intact sculptural environment by Louise Nevelson. Nine wall-mounted sculptures, a tranquil white-on-white presentation accented with gold-leaf and enhanced by the play of shadow and light from a single window, the Chapel is an incomparable example of this 20th-century art form which is intended to involve or encompass visitors. Nevelson was instrumental in the conception and introduction of the form, which “sought to break down the historical dichotomy between life and art.”

More than an artwork, the Chapel is a place of spiritual engagement. Drawing from the deep Jewish roots of the artist, incorporating the themes and images of Christian traditions, the Chapel transcends any singular interpretation in its sacred expression.

At the Chapel’s dedication in 1977, the late John Dillenberger, historian, theologian and Union Seminary Professor, wrote of her work:

Louise Nevelson has created many walls, and her sculptures grace many spaces. This meditation chapel, however, is the only work in which she has had the opportunity to form the total environmental ambience. One is surrounded by her arresting, symbolic creations, true to the inheritance of the theological tradition, but freed of the iconographic literalness. It was her genius to take the perceptions of her own spirit, nourished out of, but not identical with, her Jewish inheritance, and relate them sensitively to the symbolic import of the chapel which is essentially Christian.

One of a handful of 20th century chapels by great artists, Nevelson Chapel, stands in the hallowed company of Henri Matisse’s Chappelle du Rosaire de Vence and Mark Rothko’s chapel in Houston, Texas, the only chapel of its kind in New York City.

From its dedication, the Chapel of the Good Shepherd has been heralded as a jewel in New York. An “oasis,” as the artist defined it, providing solitude and respite from the harried pace of the city.
Chellis Baird  
*Meditative Motions*  

November 14 - February 20, 2020  
Opening November 21, 2019, 5pm- 8pm  

In *Meditative Motions*, Chellis Baird paves the entryway of Nevelson Chapel with her exhibition of sculptural paintings, on display from November 14, 2019 to February 20, 2020, at the Narthex and Living Room Galleries of Saint Peter’s Church, 54th Street at Lexington Avenue in Midtown Manhattan.

Baird’s work lies at the intersection of painting, sculpture, and textiles. She believes that through texture, evidence of the human hand, and the emotional sensations of color, the viewer can disconnect from screens to move back into the physical world. Much like the sculptural environments created by Louise Nevelson, from whom Baird draws inspiration, Baird transforms materials to celebrate the transition from the mundane to the sacred, using shadow and light to sculpt her own visual language of texture. The repetitive patterns in her work ground and invite the viewer into physical spaces.

Included in the exhibition is *Caress, Collide, Crescendo, Cambre, Chasse, Connect, Cloud, and Coupe*, a series of eight white-on-white works that pay respect to Nevelson’s use of white in Nevelson Chapel. The works explore how contrasting gestures intertwine or dissolve within themselves or together to offer moments of tethered relationship. Similarly, the use of vermillion orange in *Reclaim*, inspired by Baird’s visit to the Torii Gates and Japanese shrines, pay respect to other cultures’ sacred spaces and underscore the importance of learning and sharing among different cultures.

Originally from Spartanburg, South Carolina, Baird has studied at the Art Students League and Rhode Island School of Design, from which she received a BFA in textiles. Since moving to New York, Baird has over ten years of experience in sculpting the human form in fabric as a fashion designer. Her work, deeply rooted in the textiles of her hometown, has appeared in the 5-50 Gallery, the 326 Gallery, the Plaxall Gallery, and the Google Headquarters in New York City. A ballet dancer since the age of five, Baird has collaborated with choreographer Roberto Lara for a dance performance at Saint Peter’s.

Fostering the creative and performing arts is one of the longest continuous mission commitments of Saint Peter’s Church, a welcoming and diverse evangelical catholic communion nourished by God and publicly engaged with others in creatively shaping life in the city. Saint Peter’s hosts a rich collection of sculpture, textiles, paintings and fine objects including Nevelson Chapel, the only remaining intact sculptural environment created by the extraordinary Louise Nevelson, one of the 20th century’s premier abstract expressionist sculptors.
Some fifty years ago Elaine de Kooning began curating a gallery in the parish hall of the “old” Saint Peter's Church. That tradition continues today in two modern spaces: the Narthex Gallery and the Living Room Gallery. Baird's exhibition in these galleries is part of Saint Peter's program of rotating art installations alongside Nevelson Chapel, which aims to bring contemporary artists into regular conversation with the general public.

Works on Display

The saturated vermillion orange of the Torii Gates and Japanese shrines, seen during a recent trip to Japan, inspired Baird to create *Reclaim*. To Baird, the intensity of color “radiates like a cloak of protective fire” and conveys strength and power. The Torii Gates symbolize the transition from the mundane to the sacred and, in presenting this work in the more familiar space of Saint Peter's, underscores for Baird the importance of learning and sharing among disparate cultures.

In *Impression*, Baird paints fabrics using the “encaustic monotype” process, an early form of painting discovered in ancient Egyptian tombs, and nods to the history and process of painting by taking ownership over each of the elements of a gallery painting—wood, fabric, and paint. This technique is evidenced in Baird's work where she used stretcher bars as brushstrokes in the composition to move beyond the square.

*Caress, Collide, Crescendo, Cambre, Chasse, Connect, Coupe, and Cloud*—a series of white-on-white works that pay respect to Nevelson's use of white in Nevelson Chapel—explore how contrasting gestures intertwine or dissolve within themselves or together to offer moments of tethered relationship. Each work is meant to hang individually so as to express the interconnectedness between recto and verso. As such, the series examines and celebrates communities of connection between individuals.

Inspired by her life-long love of dancing, *Extend* celebrates the moments that dancers suspend their bodies and spirits in space. Nevelson was an active modern dancer and believed the act of dancing was imperative to her practice as a sculptor.
Echo uses a spinning reference point to force the eye to move in a contrasting, organic circular path. *Echo* uses diagonal stretcher bars composed in a turning movement while being wrapped and woven in a linear path. The repetitive forms of these and other works—as with Nevelson’s use of repetition—creates a comfort that allows viewers to digest Baird’s process and delve deeper into the depths of her work.

Quake emphasizes two contrasting themes in each work: the organic and the geometric. Baird pushes the boundaries of these two themes in creating a sculptural form that challenges her use of negative space. This negative space expressed through shadow gives substance to the fleeting nature of light, allowing the viewer to embrace it.

About the Artist

American artist Chellis Baird blurs the intersection of painting, sculpture and textiles. Baird explores the elements of painting by reconstructing handwoven canvases from a unique perspective. Her bespoke process begins with woven structures as her base. Each canvas starts with neutral toned materials that are then painted, dyed and sculpted into dimensional brushstrokes. She creates tangled compositions through a series of twists, knots, and upcycled textiles. Baird’s background in fashion allows her to dress the canvas with imagination. Not unlike a garment, she uses color to emphasize the authenticity and body of each piece. Baird received her BFA in textiles from Rhode Island School of Design and studied studio art at the Art Students League in New York City. Born in Spartanburg, SC, Baird now lives and works in New York City.

**Chellis Baird**  
Born on March 14, 1983, Spartanburg, SC

**EDUCATION**  
2005 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, BFA with honors

**SOLO EXHIBITIONS**  
2020  Sager Braudis Gallery, June, Columbia, MO
Louise Nevelson Chapel
619 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10022
Sunday - Saturday
8:30am - 8pm

2020 Kate Oh Gallery:
April 9 - 19th, UES, NY

2019 Meditative Motions,
Narthex Gallery:
Louise Nevelson Chapel restoration project, Saint Peters Church, NY, NY

2018 Becoming Encounters, 5-50 Gallery, LIC, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2019 HUE: Curated by Trotter & Sholer, Studio 525 Gallery, Chelsea, NY
These Times are Racing: Highline Nine Gallery, Arison & Murphy, Chelsea, NY
GUT: Women in the Arts, Curated Nelsena Burt-Spano, Parkslope, BK
Twist & Twine: Paradise Palase Summer Exhibit, ChaShaMa Space, LIC, NY
Materials and Geometries, East End Culture Club, South Hampton, NY
Tenet Shop, East Hampton, NY
Paper, Silvermine Arts Center, New Canaan, Connecticut
Twisting Fibers: An Art for All Reasons Exhibition, Art League Rhode Island, RI

2018 Green, Webster Arts, Saint Louis, MO, Juried Exhibition
Viridian Artists Gallery, Juried Show by Johanna Burton, of the New Museum, NY, NY
29th Annual International Juried Exhibition, Viridian Artists Gallery, Included in Panel Discussion led by Johanna Burton
Evening Red, Lilac Preservation: Curated by MW Projects, Pier 25, NY
Light, Church of Heavenly Rest on 5th Avenue, NY, NY, Juried Exhibition
Open Studios LIC, Reis Studios Experimental Space, LIC, NY, Curator: Julian Calderon
Abstraction at Large, Site Brooklyn Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, Juror: Eleanor Heartney of Art in America
Between the Seam, Woman's Made Gallery, Chicago, IL, Juror: Nnenna Okore
Pop-Up On & Off the Wall, First Street Gallery, New York, NY, Juried Exhibition

2017 - 2018 Small Works, Citi De Ford Gallery, LIC, NY, Juried Exhibition
2017 500th Reformation of Lutheran Church, Dance Collaboration with choreographer Roberto Lara, St Peter's Church, NY, NY
Fear, Plaxall Gallery, LIC, NY, Juried Exhibition
Google Manhattan, NY, NY, Curator: Megan Green
Conference Board - British Embassy, Exhibition Outreach NY, NY (10 paintings)

2016 Group Show at Art Students League Mixed Media, Winiarski
2005 Fashion & Textiles, Woods Geary Gallery, Providence, RI

PUBLICATIONS / MEDIA
2019 Art News: Sammy's Beach Quote Elaine De Kooning House
Arch Digest: An Art Lover's Guide to the Hamptons This Summer: East End Culture Club
Guest Juror for Conception Arts Pop up: www.conceptionarts.com
Save the Loom Art Blog Feature: Instagram @savetheloom
WoArt Blog Feature: Instagram @WoArt
Selected for Carla van de Puttelaar project: Women in the Arts: www.womenintheartworld.com
At Beach Magazine: East End Culture Materials and Geometrics Opening Coverage

2018 Vast and Rook: Interview for Becoming Encounters Exhibition: http://www.vastandrook.com
Ante Magazine: Temporal Escape: 326 Gallery Empowers the Feminine in Contemporary Art by Audra Lambert

2017 Long Island City Arts Commission Instagram: Featured Artist / Day of an Artist, LIC, NY
Art Blog: Art Ruby featured artist for show at Google, NY, NY, Editor: Olga Rei
LINEA ASL online catalogue painting featured: Blind

2016 LINEA ASL online catalogue painting featured: Quilt
2014 Nordstrom Anniversary Book, Dress Design
2010 Oprah Magazine, Ralph Lauren Dress Design
2006 Elle Magazine, article by Jenny Feldman on textile designs like Jackson Pollock
Women's Wear Daily, quoted from Premiere Vision article by Daniela Gilbert
2005 New York Times Article Designing as Fast as they Can, by Cathy Horyn
2005 WWD, Featured inspiration collage for Spring 2006 Tuleh Collection

AWARDS
2004 Echo Design Scholarship Recipient

2003 Textron Scholarship Recipient 2001-2003 RISD Scholar

www.chellisbaird.com

Louise Nevelson (nee, Leah Berliawsky) fled pogroms in her native Ukraine to become the 20th century’s premier sculptor of the Abstract Expressionist movement. With her unique approach to cubism and surrealism, Nevelson translated her
particular experience as a refugee, with an appreciation of materials discarded from everyday life, into groundbreaking sculptural environments—like the one still extant in Nevelson Chapel.

Nevelson was brought by her parents from Ukraine to Rockland, Maine. But, her heart, from an early age, was set on New York City. She managed to find her way to New York during her marriage to Charles Nevelson, from whom she was later divorced. Her relationship with New York City was one of lifelong devotion. Even in the city’s dark times, Nevelson saw its power and beauty. Hence her commitment to the Chapel project that would be a defiant spark of urban renewal as the city faced bankruptcy in the 1970s.

Best known for her wooden assemblages of discarded objects found on the streets of New York, Nevelson would use black or white paint to emphasize the interplay of light and shadow along the contours of each piece.

Gold spray paint—or in the unique case of Nevelson Chapel, gold leaf—was also used by Nevelson to accentuate certain elements, capturing light in a different way.

She established her trademark style in the 1950s, expanding and experimenting until her death nearly forty years later. With her Moon Garden + One installation at the former Grand Central Moderns Gallery, Nevelson invented the idea of sculpture presented as complete environment and burst onto the international stage, never to retreat.

Nevelson championed public art. She never lost sight of the depression-era WPA initiatives that provided some of her earliest artistic outlets. Although Nevelson coexisted with the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, she didn’t consider herself “a feminist.” Rather, when asked about her relationship to the movement, Nevelson replied, “I am feminism.”

Ultimately, Nevelson allowed the boundaries between herself, her beliefs and her art to become porous, reinventing herself with a persona that embodied and transcended a life lived on a grand scale.
While public recognition of Nevelson’s genius came later in her career than most, it came to her with intensity and to the end of her life. In 1983 Nevelson received the Gold Medal for Sculpture from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1985 she was one of the first recipients of the National Medal of Arts. John Russell, The New York Times, wrote in the Nevelson obituary: “Mrs. Nevelson was... among the most arresting women of her time and a pioneer creator of environmental sculpture who became one of the world's best-known artists.”

As today’s art historians re-examine lost greats of the modern era, Louise Nevelson is continually referenced as a model artist of the 20th century, someone who includes in her oeuvre the great value and energy in the life of the city, and an equal value and importance in the human aspect of that life.

Nevelson created Chapel of the Good Shepherd in 1977 as a commissioned piece for the “new” Saint Peter's Church at Citigroup Center (now 601 Lexington Avenue) in Midtown Manhattan. In so doing she built a human-scaled space of quiet contemplation among the impersonal skyscrapers of the modern city. Today, as historians of art and architecture are recognizing the gradual loss of our cities’ human-scale spaces to an urbanism focused on security and pressured by commercialism, Nevelson’s legacy offers respite and inspiration.

Maintenance to the painted sculptural surfaces began less than five years after installation, setting off a twenty-year process of repeated paint application. However well-intentioned, this maintenance is one of the main contributors to the visible and invisible deterioration of the work.

Comparisons with contemporary white Nevelson installations indicate that the original paint color was a warm cream white, characteristic of oxidized alkyd paints. Correspondence housed in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art in New York document Nevelson’s instructions to repaint the surfaces when they were dirty or damaged. The restored, cool white presentation surface applied 1986-2000 is now chipped, streaked with brown stains and thick, uneven paint application.

Much damage can be attributed to the interaction between the restoration paint and the original paint. Restoration paint is lifting off in sheets, and is, in several instances, pulling original paint up with it.

In certain other areas, restoration paint has been applied directly to the exposed wood, where the original paint had been previously lost. Much of the restoration paint is tenting and peeling.

By 2012, it became evident that a robust restoration was needed to properly preserve Nevelson’s sculptures. An initial study identified factors that caused deterioration ranging from lack of environmental control to poor adhesion of the original paint.

Treatment considerations have included extensive paint analysis by chemists at MoMA and Pratt Institute to identify the original color, composition of the original and subsequent paint layers, and methods of application. The process has involved an extensive collaboration among painting and object conservators, painting chemists, engineers, Nevelson’s assistant, and Saint Peter’s conservation committee to arrive at the best approach for preserving the sculpture and the Chapel as a beloved public space.
PRESS

2019

Prattfolio
Pratt practitioners and students help restore Louise Nevelson’s New York City landmark.
Clinton Krute

Faith and Form
Louise Nevelson’s Chapel of the Good Shepherd at Saint Peter’s Church...a place of encounter...a living communion.
Judith Dupré

Buildings Magazine
Nevelson Chapel’s new lighting to mimic the old to preserve the quality of light and shadows and to create a renewed experience.
Sarah Kloepple

2018

NYC Arts
Video segment including interviews by Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Senior Curator of Madison Square Art at Madison Square Park Conservancy, The Reverend Jared R. Stahler, Associate Pastor Saint Peter’s Church, and Laurie Wilson, Nevelson Biographer.

Interiors + Sources
Exploring how the restoration of Nevelson Chapel maintains the cultural and historical relevance the Chapel.
Kadie Yale

Curbed, NY
Highlighting Nevelson Chapel as an urban respite in New York City.
Allison D. Meier

The Architects Newspaper
Considering Nevelson Chapel’s role as privately owned public space.
Jack Balderrama Morley

Architectural Digest
Featuring the Chapel in the context of artists’ chapels around the world.
Elizabeth Fazzare

Forbes
Discussing the importance of restoring and preserving Nevelson’s masterwork.
Regina Cole

Ozy
Looking at the artist voice that shaped the Chapel.
Thia Reggio

Art Daily
Heralding the awarding of two major gifts to the Chapel restoration.
Archidust
Reporting from India for a global audience, this article provides an overview on the Chapel restoration.
E-architect
For the UK and the world, announcing progress on the Chapel. Adrian Welch

NYREJ
Highlighting the conservators and architects at work on the Chapel.

www.nevelsonchapel.org

Chellis Baird
Echo, 2018
Pigmented Wax, Fabrics, Wood, Wire
74 X 40 X 2 5/8 in
© Chellis Baird / Photo: by artist
Chellis Baird
Duet 2019
Fabrics, Wood, Wire, Acrylic
50 X 65 X 6in
© Chellis Baird / Photo: Bill Kontzias

Chellis Baird
Mirror 2019
Aluminum, Fabrics, Pigmented wax, wood
46 X 65 X 4 in
© Chellis Baird / Photo: Bill Kontzias

Chellis Baird
Extend 2019
Pigmented wax fabric, wire, plaster, glue, acrylic, gesso
46 X 65 X 4 in
© Chellis Baird / Photo: Bill Kontzias

Chellis Baird
Crescendo 2019
Fabrics, acrylic, gesso, plaster, wire, thread
51 X 36 X 5 in
© Chellis Baird / Photo: Bill Kontzias

Chellis Baird
Cambre 2019
Fabrics, acrylic, gesso, plaster, wire, thread
51 X 36 X 5 in
© Chellis Baird / Photo: Bill Kontzias