

A monumental steel sculpture on Shoemaker Green

'Atmosphere and Environment XII' by artist Louise Nevelson was moved to Penn's campus in 2019.



The monumental steel sculpture *Atmosphere and Environment XII* by Louise Nevelson is located on Shoemaker Green near The Palestra. Photo by Eric Sucar

As the Quakers take on their Ivy League rivals this basketball season, fans who approach The Palestra at Penn can view “Atmosphere and Environment XII” by Louise Nevelson, an artist known for her wall-like sculptures incorporating a myriad of abstract forms. An immigrant to the United States from present-day Ukraine, Nevelson was one of the most influential artists in the years after World War II, and one of the few women of her time to create outdoor sculptures. One of a series, the towering sculpture on Shoemaker Green consists of 30 open, rectangular cubes made of weathering steel, each weighing 500 pounds, stacked and bolted together. The six columns of five cubes are 18 feet high and 10 feet wide. Within each cube are additional geometric shapes that create interesting shadows as the sun hits the steel. The sculpture was purchased by what is now the Association for Public Art in 1971 and installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s West Entrance in 1973. In July 2019 “Atmosphere and Environment XII” was relocated to Penn. Also relocated from the Museum was “Social Consciousness,” a



The sculpture *Atmosphere and Environment XII* was reassembled cube by cube as part of the move to Penn's campus from the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2019. Photo by Eric Sucar

bronze sculpture by Jacob Epstein similarly on loan from the Association for Public Art, to the Memorial Walkway next to the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center.

“As I look at it from this angle, I love it here,” said former University Curator Lynn Marsden-Atlass on the day it was installed, noting that the curves echo the arches in Franklin Field and The Palestra. Asked more recently about the piece, Marsden-Atlass said, “Nevelson was a pioneer as a 20th-century woman artist in doing monumental sculpture. In “*Atmosphere and Environment XII*” she references the built urban environment with its vertical steel grid. Looking through the open cubes from different angles reveals the natural world of Shoemaker Green and the sky.”