

EXHIBITION EXPLORES NOGUCHI'S EXPERIENCE IN JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT CAMP

Self-Interned, 1942: Noguchi in Poston War Relocation Center

Opens January 18, 2017

The Noguchi Museum presents *Self-Interned, 1942: Noguchi in Poston War Relocation Center*, an exhibition marking the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066, the notorious wartime directive that authorized the internment of Japanese citizens and American citizens of Japanese heritage living on the west coast. The exhibition examines Isamu Noguchi's extraordinary decision to voluntarily enter the Poston War Relocation Center, in the Arizona Desert, despite being exempt from internment as a resident of New York. In Noguchi's words, "Thus I willfully became part of humanity uprooted."

Self-Interned, 1942 brings together about two dozen works from the Museum's collection, dating from before, during, and after Noguchi's time at Poston, along with a substantial selection of archival documents. Together these evoke this harrowing moment in the history of American democracy, while revealing the impact that his experience at Poston had on Noguchi's art. Curated by Noguchi Museum Senior Curator Dakin Hart, the exhibition is on view from January 18, 2017–January 7, 2018.

Noguchi's decision to enter Poston derived from his desire, as a Japanese-American citizen, to contribute something positive to the forcibly displaced community of Japanese Americans, to which he had never felt more connected. Moreover, he had hoped that by remaking the camp into a more humane environment—with baseball fields, swimming pools, and other amenities—it would become an active center of loyal, patriotic Japanese-Americanism. Yet despite promises to the contrary, he received no support from Poston officials, the War Relocation Authority, or the War Department, and it quickly became clear that his plans would never materialize. He began trying to extricate himself from the camp after two months, but it would ultimately take seven to get out. In the interim, he walked the desert, wrote to friends, did what work he could, and generally despaired.



Untitled, 1943.

Self-Interned, 1942: Noguchi in Poston War Relocation Center opens with a roughly chronological installation of about a dozen sculptures dating from 1941, the year before Noguchi entered the camp, to 1944, the year after he returned to New York City. Together, these trace the development of his work during the crucial period when he made the transition from his early figurative work to the modernist style for which he became known. The earliest work here is a portrait bust of Lily Zietz (1941), made at a time when Noguchi was supporting himself by creating portrait heads of the rich and famous, from Ginger Rogers to Fernand Leger. Zietz, a theater actress, is emblematic of the world of boldface names in which he was circulating following the successes of the fountain he made for the Ford Motor Company's World's Fair pavilion and his relief for the Associated Press building at Rockefeller Center. (The last thing he was working on before entering Poston was Ginger Rogers' portrait, while staying at her home in Hollywood.)



Lily Zietz, 1941.

Later works in this section show the impact that Noguchi's time at Poston had on his art. While there, for example, he explored working in wood, one of the few materials that was both readily available and workable with limited equipment. Other works here show how, during the years immediately following his release from the camp, Noguchi vacillated between excoriating satire—as in *This Tortured Earth* (1942–43) and *Yellow Landscape* (1943), the latter of which implicates the entire planet in the toxic anti-Asian stereotyping that swept the United States following December 7, 1941—and such consolatory subjects as *Mother and Child*, a simple, near-abstract work in onyx from the last years of the war—but before August 6, 1945.



Yellow Landscape, 1943.

Self-Interned moves on to a display of a variety of documentary materials that span the immediate pre- and postwar period. Drawn from the Museum's vast archives, these include a number related to Noguchi's position as chairman of Nisei Writers and Artists Mobilization for Democracy and his unofficial role as a national spokesperson for the Japanese-American community, as well as items like a letter to Man Ray in which Noguchi describes the surreal nature of his position in Poston, and a 1943 editorial published in *The New Republic* on unrest in the camps. Blueprints show some of the improvements that Noguchi hoped to make at Poston, including park and recreation areas, as well as a design for a cemetery that features a major sculpture along the lines of an aspirational stainless steel piece he had made in 1939 called *Man Aviator*, which in this context becomes a kind of spirit of transcendent ascension.

The exhibition concludes with "Gateways," and "Deserts," side-by-side displays of works dating from the mid-fifties to mid-eighties that testify to the enduring impact of Noguchi's experience as a wartime internee. "Gateways" comprises about six of the artist's signature voids, doorways, and donut-shaped suns: literal and psychological portals that he hoped would offer transport

to alternative perspectives and other states of mind. These include an extraordinary model used to create two different suns, made in resin-coated styrofoam and recently gifted to the Museum by one of Noguchi's former assistants, and *Void* (1971), made during the time when Noguchi (like much of the nation's counterculture) was reading consciousness-expanding literature like Carlos Castaneda's *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations With Don Juan* (1971).

"Deserts" examines the ways that the fundamental qualities of the desert landscape—stripped down, flat, and deceptively simple—became integral to landscape references in Noguchi's art. Works such as *Cactus Wind* (1982–83), for example, show him working low to the ground in an ascetic, wind-and-sand-scoured mode that is near impossible not to understand as relating to a state of mind; while *Double Red Mountain* (1969), a table sculpture in Persian travertine, demonstrates his talent for essentializing the way the desert isolates and de-scales its major physical features, an approach that became a blueprint for Noguchi's later microcosmic landscapes.



Double Red Mountain, 1969.

About The Noguchi Museum

Founded in 1985 by Isamu Noguchi (1904–88), one of the leading sculptors and designers of the twentieth century, The Noguchi Museum was the first museum in America to be established, designed, and installed by a living artist to show his or her own work. Widely viewed as among the artist's greatest achievements, the Museum comprises ten indoor galleries in a converted factory building, as well as an internationally acclaimed outdoor sculpture garden. Since its founding, it has served as an international hub for Noguchi research and appreciation. In addition to housing the artist's archives and the catalogue raisonné of his work, the Museum exhibits a comprehensive selection of sculpture, models for public projects and gardens, dance sets, and his Akari light sculptures. Provocative, frequently-changing installations drawn from the permanent collection, together with diverse special exhibitions related to Noguchi and the context in which he worked, offer a rich, contextualized view of Noguchi's art and illuminate his enduring influence as a category-defying, multicultural, cross-disciplinary innovator.

The Noguchi Museum is located at 9-01 33rd Road (at Vernon Boulevard), Long Island City, New York. It is open Wednesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11 am–6 pm. General admission is \$10; \$5 for seniors and students with a valid ID. New York City public high-school students, children under 12, and Museum members are admitted free of charge. Admission is free on the first Friday of every month. Public tours in English are available daily at 2 pm, and in Japanese on the first Friday and second Sunday of every month. **718.204.7088** or **noguchi.org**

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(Image captions on following page)

Image Captions

Page 1 Isamu Noguchi. *Untitled*, 1943. Wood, string. 23 1/4 x 5 3/8 x 3 1/2 inches (59.1 x 13.7 x 8.9 cm). ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York/ARS. Photograph by Kevin Noble.

Page 2 (top) Isamu Noguchi. *Lily Zietz*, 1941. Plaster. 15 1/4 x 7 x 9 3/8 inches (38.7 x 17.8 x 23.8 cm) [base: 10 x 7 x 7 in. (25.4 x 17.8 x 17.8 cm)]. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York/ARS. Photograph by Kevin Noble.

Page 2 (bottom) Isamu Noguchi. *Yellow Landscape*, 1943. Magnesite, wood, string, metal fishing weight. 30 1/2 x 32 5/8 x 6 3/4 inches (77.5 x 82.9 x 17.1 cm). ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York/ARS. Photograph by Kevin Noble.

Page 3 Isamu Noguchi. *Double Red Mountain*, 1969. Persian red travertine on Japanese pine. 11 1/2 x 40 x 30 1/4 in. (29.2 x 101.6 x 76.8 cm) [base: 24 x 37 1/8 x 17 5/8 in. (61 x 94.3 x 44.8 cm)]. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York/ARS. Photograph by Kevin Noble.