

**noguchi**

**BRENDAN FERNANDES:  
CONTRACT AND RELEASE**



SEP 11, 2019–MAR 8, 2020

# BRENDAN FERNANDES: CONTRACT AND RELEASE

*Brendan Fernandes: Contract and Release*, which takes its title from a foundational Martha Graham technique, builds on and complements the Museum's current thematic collection installation *Noguchi: Body-Space Devices*. Both exhibitions were born out of conversations with Brendan Fernandes about Isamu Noguchi's ballet sets and props for Graham and—following Noguchi's talent for engaging the whole person through sculpture—what it takes for an object to motivate and mediate movement.

Noguchi long underestimated the nature of his work with Graham. For the first two decades of their collaboration he considered it an unrelated, extra-sculptural sideline. He eventually came to realize how generative it had been in providing the theoretical framework he needed to rethink sculpture's place and purpose in society. In particular, making sets and props that were responsible for constituting and defining the natural laws and culture of entire imaginary universes gave him the opportunity to learn how to make devices: active objects capable of moving humanity to live in synchrony with this world.

Noguchi was a social activist, before social activism became an accepted subdiscipline of art making, and before the terminology and theory to explain what that might mean had been developed. As a result, most of his efforts to shape society were indirect and abstract—which was his natural inclination anyway: to aim for the universal. His consideration of how children play—the multiple attempts he made to build nature-inspired playgrounds and nondirective, but physically pedagogic play equipment—is an example of this. The plaything (his term) called *Play Sculpture* (on view and available for play here), which offers 540 degrees of curve to cover 360 degrees worth of ground, is a physical philosophy lesson. It encourages one to prioritize the journey over the destination; to see the body in motion as inherently meaningful; and to understand circularity as a paradigm of progress every bit as valid as a vector. In the context of socially active art making, Noguchi's work is a product of its time that virtually everyone—particularly those in the creative and technical professions—intuits as profoundly ahead of its time.

Synthesizing dance performance and sculpture in what is now a greatly expanded field, Fernandes (whose next exhibition in this series of autobiographical explorations of movement is rooted in *shibari*, the Japanese art of rope bondage), is working at a time when we are in the process of becoming finely attuned to the social content of art and increasingly conversant with the language and concepts to explain it. While maintaining the basic, universalizing, poetic, and elliptical qualities that have given Noguchi's

work such great staying power, Fernandes's social content is more explicit and more specific. Of his recent work, Fernandes has written:

**I am returning to my past life as a dancer. I aim to highlight the various meanings that the body can encapsulate: it is both a kind of object, endowed with cultural meaning, viewed by others and labored on by ourselves. It is also our expressive access-point to the world, constitutive of our subjectivity and selfhood. I investigate how movement techniques are recalled in the body via muscle memory and explore this phenomenon through cultural dance, ballet, and the languages that prescribe directions for dancers to move ... I look at movement through queer and laboring bodies as it relates to the construction of gender roles and physicality. As such, this work continues to engage with the transitional nature of identity, while exploring how this is enacted and experienced on the level of embodiment.<sup>1</sup>**

Noguchi understood that museums are not neutral spaces for bodies or objects. Fortunate at the end of his career to be in a position to exercise an unusual degree of control over how his identity, work, and values would be framed, Noguchi made his own. Fernandes, who is at an earlier stage of his career, has developed strategies—rooted in institutional critique—for engaging with museums through dance-based encounters between different kinds of active viewers and charged objects. The sophisticated but accessible conversations about authority, subject and object position, otherness, and appropriation that he initiates—while emphasizing how agency and self-determination are interdependent—constitute a powerful new discipline.

We often refer to Noguchi as a permanent voluntary exile from the dominant culture of his time. Given the complexity of the interactions Fernandes creates in institutional contexts in service to “transitional and transnational identities”<sup>2</sup>—which often requires operating in the semi-enemy territories of received prejudice and structural injustice—we hope that this extended collaboration with Noguchi has provided something like a homecoming.

*Contract and Release* will be regularly activated with dance performances over the course of the exhibition using six versions of a training device for dancers that Fernandes modeled on the (non-rocking) rocking chair Noguchi created for Graham's *Appalachian Spring*, and a supplementary group of Noguchi sculptures as devices.

DAKIN HART, SENIOR CURATOR, THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM

## TRAINING DEVICES

Courtesy of Brendan Fernandes and  
Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.



Brendan Fernandes  
*Still Release I*  
2019  
Walnut



Brendan Fernandes  
*Still Release II*  
2019  
Walnut



Brendan Fernandes  
*Still Release III*  
2019  
Walnut



Brendan Fernandes  
*Still Release V*  
2019  
Walnut



Brendan Fernandes  
*Still Release IV*  
2019  
Walnut



Brendan Fernandes  
*Still Release VI*  
2019  
Walnut

## WORKS BY ISAMU NOGUCHI

The following works have been added to  
*Noguchi: Body-Space Devices* for the  
duration of *Brendan Fernandes: Contract  
and Release*. All works are Collection of  
The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden  
Museum, New York, unless otherwise noted.



*Cage Vase*  
(*Kago [Basket]*)  
1952  
Shigaraki stoneware  
Private collection



*Swimming Pool*  
for Josef von  
Sternberg  
1935  
Plaster, paint, wood



*Akari UF3-U*  
1985  
Paper, bamboo,  
metal



*Zazen*  
c. 1982–83  
Hot-dipped  
galvanized steel



*Leg Up*  
1969  
Carrara marble,  
stainless steel



*Wrapped Figure*  
1962  
Botticino marble



*Set element (unused) for*  
*Erick Hawkins's dance*  
*"Stephen Acrobat"*  
1947  
Plastic  
Gift of Erick Hawkins



*Large Rocking*  
*Stool (Knoll 86T)*  
1955–60  
(Vitra reissue 2002)  
Chrome-plated steel  
wire, maple



*Magnet*  
(*Fields of Flow*)  
1966–67  
Granite



*A Feeling*  
1961–65  
Mannari granite



*Small Rocking*  
*Stool (Knoll 85T)*  
1954–60  
(Vitra reissue 2002)  
Chrome-plated steel  
wire, maple

<sup>1</sup> Brendan Fernandes,  
"Artist Statement,"  
brendanfernandes.ca  
(August 2, 2019).  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





**Noguchi: Body-Space Devices** is a selective survey of the strategies that Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) used to connect the body to space in his work.

**Brendan Fernandes:**  
**Contract and Release** reconfigures *Noguchi: Body-Space Devices* as the site of a multidisciplinary collaboration with Brendan Fernandes (b. 1979), a choreographer, sculptor, and dancer trained in Martha Graham and ballet techniques, as part of his ongoing exploration of the roots of his own vocabulary of movement.

#### COVER

Brendan Fernandes, concept drawing and photomontage for *Contract and Release*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

#### LEFT

Isamu Noguchi, *Hot Day (Atsui Hi)*, 1950. Seto stoneware, wood, fiber. The Noguchi Museum Archive.

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## PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Performances are unseated, will move throughout Areas 11 and 12, and last approximately one hour.

### Saturdays, 1:30 pm and 3 pm

September 14 and 28, 2019

October 5, 12, 19, and 26, 2019

November 2, 9, 16, and 23, 2019

December 7 and 14, 2019

January 11, 18, and 25, 2020

February 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29, 2020

Closing performance:

March 7, 2020, time to be announced

## CAST

The six dancers who perform *Contract and Release* are:

**Héctor Cerna**

**Violetta Komyshan**

**Victor Lozano**

**Tiffany Mangulabnan**

**Oisín Monaghan**

**Amy Saunder**

Costumes by **Rad Hourani**

Scaffolding by and exhibition design developed in collaboration with **Norman Kelley**

Training devices fabricated by **Jason Lewis**

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### The Noguchi Museum

9-01 33rd Road, Long Island City, NY [noguchi.org](http://noguchi.org)

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