

MINING ART:  
BASALT, GRANITE, MARBLE

# MINING ART: BASALT, GRANITE, MARBLE

WHAT ARE SOME PROPERTIES OF ROCKS?

WHAT CAN AN ARTIST DO WITH A ROCK?

This guide was written to complement the tour theme of “Mining Art: Basalt, Granite, Marble” at The Noguchi Museum. Both the tour and this guide are recommended for students in grades K–5. We have left them as open as possible, in order to encourage teachers to adapt them to meet the needs of their students.

Each of the three sections in this guide includes: images of one or more artworks; information about the piece; and a suggested writing, art, or discussion activity. The information in the “About” section is intended for teacher reference, although it may certainly be shared with students during or after the activity. The quotations from Isamu Noguchi are included to offer educators connections with and insights into the artist’s thought process.

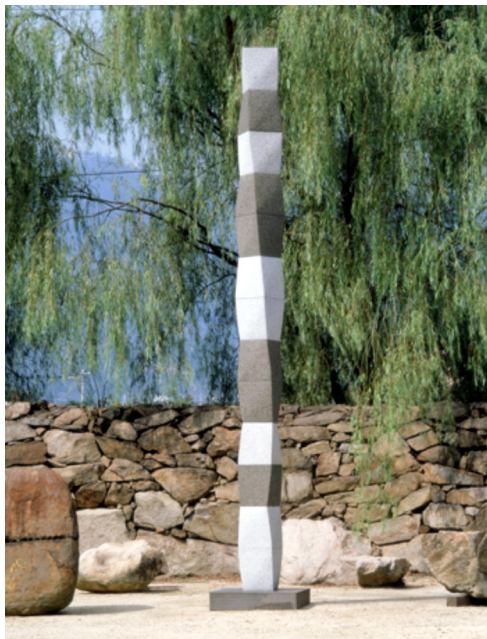
The artworks featured in this guide are:

- *The Well* (1982)
- *Helix of the Endless* (1985)
- *Magic Ring* (1970)
- *To Bring to Life* (1979)
- *Worm Pyramid* (1965)
- *Variation on a Millstone #2* (1962)
- *Downward Pulling* (1970)
- *Round Square Space* (1970)
- *The Mountain* (1964)
- *Untitled* (1982)
- *The Roar* (1966)
- *Narrow Gate* (1981)
- *Woman* (1983-85)
- *Pink Jizo* (1960)

We welcome your feedback on this guide or about educational resources and programs at The Noguchi Museum. Please feel free to contact us at [education@noguchi.org](mailto:education@noguchi.org).



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8



9



10



11



12

- 1. The Well (Variation on a Tsukubai)**  
1982  
Basalt
- 2. Helix of the Endless**  
1985  
Aji granite and basalt
- 3. Magic Ring**  
1970  
Red Persian travertine
- 4. Round Square Space**  
1970  
Indian granite
- 5. To Bring to Life**  
1979  
Basalt
- 6. Worm Pyramid**  
1965  
Granite
- 7. The Mountain**  
1964  
Red Persian travertine
- 8. Variation on a Millstone #2**  
1962  
Granite
- 9. Downward Pulling**  
1970  
Spanish Alicante and Marquina marble
- 10. The Roar**  
1966  
White Arni marble
- 11. Narrow Gate**  
1981  
Basalt
- 12. Untitled**  
1982  
Marble, glass, and wood

# SELECTIONS FROM THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM



*“The beauty of a particular stone can only be seen when found.” — Isamu Noguchi*

## ABOUT

All of the artworks at The Noguchi Museum are by one artist: Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi was a sculptor, and stone was one of his favorite materials. He used many different kinds of rock to create sculptures. Earlier in his career he more often used softer metamorphic rocks, like marble and slate, and occasionally sedimentary rocks, including limestone and travertine. As Noguchi matured as an artist, he sought the challenge of working with hard igneous rocks, like granite, andesite, and basalt. Noguchi bought the building that would later become The Noguchi Museum in 1974 as a place to store his large rock sculptures. Acting as a curator, Noguchi considered the best ways to display his rocks and arranged them in a variety of ways according to material, size, date, and subject. Noguchi opened his Museum in 1985, and much of his original layout is still in place today.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: ROCKS ON DISPLAY

**Materials:** Images of Noguchi’s artwork; glue sticks; cardstock or other heavyweight paper for a collage base; colored pencils

**Look.** The artist Isamu Noguchi said, “The beauty of a particular stone can only be seen when found.” Noguchi made these selected artworks from different stones that he found and worked with. Choose one artwork. What makes this artwork beautiful or interesting? Describe its properties to a partner. See if they can guess which artwork you described.

**Research.** List some of the properties you used to describe the artwork you choose (for example, color, size, shape, or texture). What are some ways you could sort or group these objects? Come up with at least five ways.

**Create.** Imagine Noguchi asked you for your help in arranging the artworks in his museum. How might you arrange the artworks? Would you like to sort the artworks in one of the five ways you came up with as a class? Or would you like to sort these artworks in a new way? Use scissors to cut out the 12 Noguchi artworks included in this guide. Create a collage that shows how you would like to arrange the artwork.

**Reflect.** How did you sort your images? Why did you sort your images in this way? What other decisions did you make to create your collage?

**Resources:** Learn more about curating and museum display:  
<http://callitsculpture.org/2012/10/31/what-does-a-curator-do/>





**Woman**  
1983–85  
Basalt  
66" high  
Collection of The Noguchi Museum

# WOMAN



*"If you break a piece of stone, it's stone revealed. And if you polish it, another quality is revealed." — Isamu Noguchi*

## ABOUT

*Woman* is made from large pieces of basalt. Basalt is an igneous rock formed from molten lava. It is a very hard stone, unyielding to many carving techniques. Noguchi approached the stone carefully when sculpting. In order to reshape without destroying the whole, Noguchi would look for natural cracks in the stone and would extend them. He would use special tools, including diamond-cutting saws, to work with basalt. Noguchi often used basalt native to Japan; there, it is called *dorokaburi*, which translates as "covered with mud," referencing the rust-colored exterior of the stone. Because basalt contains large amounts of iron, its surface oxidizes to create a rough, red-brown surface that shields the dark interior of the stone. Noguchi was attracted to the dramatic difference between the interior and exterior of the stone, and often highlighted it in his artworks.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: BIOGRAPHY OF A ROCK

**Materials:** Image of *Woman*; colored pencils; paper folded in book form or comic strip template.

**Look.** What do you notice? Look carefully at the markings on the rock. What markings do you think were created by nature? What markings do you think were created by Noguchi? How can you tell?

**Research.** Noguchi said, "If you break a piece of stone, it's stone revealed. And if you polish it, another quality is revealed." As he created this artwork, Noguchi made changes in the basalt. What do you think this rock might have looked like before Noguchi began to work with it?

**Create.** Using both words and pictures, tell this rock's story. The provided "comic strip" template has three squares. The first square should show this rock's life before Noguchi. Where did the rock live? What did it look like? The second square should show Noguchi and the rock together. What changes did Noguchi make? How do you think he made them? The last square should show what happens next. What changes would you like to make to the rock?

**Reflect.** Share the life story of your rock with a partner. Where does your story begin? What happens next? What else could you add to your story?

**Resources:** Learn more about how artists alter stone:  
<http://callitsculpture.org/2012/07/17/stone-carving-process/>







**Pink Jizo**

1960

Pink Portuguese marble and brass; limestone base

23 ½" high

Collection of The Noguchi Museum

# PINK JIZO



*“There is an excitement to a new and fresh way of doing things, which in turn suggests other possibilities.” — Isamu Noguchi*

## ABOUT

Noguchi experimented with new materials throughout his career. Early on he used clay, and went on to use wood, metal, plastic, glass, paper, water, and stone. He created sculptures using many different kinds of metal, including bronze, brass, aluminum, and steel. He also used many different kinds of stone: alabaster, andesite, basalt, granite, marble, obsidian, onyx, slate, and travertine. He explained: “As a sculptor I always try to expand the possibility of sculpture. Being tied to one material limits me.” In his own work, Noguchi aimed to honor the natural properties of each material. In the artworks where he combines more than one material, Noguchi uses the juxtaposition to showcase the contrasting properties of each.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: MIX AND MATCH

**Materials:** Image of *Pink Jizo*, small stones, and additional everyday materials.

Additional materials might include: tinfoil, cotton balls, large paperclips, heavyweight paper, cardboard, leaves, etc.

**Look.** What do you notice? Noguchi used two rocks (marble and limestone) and metal (brass) to make this artwork. Make a list of properties for each material. What properties do they share? How are they different? How has Noguchi combined these materials?

**Research.** Look at the artworks found under Selections from The Noguchi Museum (pages 2 & 3). What other artworks can you find that incorporate more than one material? How are those materials combined? Noguchi loved to experiment with different materials. He said: “There is an excitement to a new and fresh way of doing things which in turn suggests other possibilities.” What are some materials you think would be new and exciting to use?

**Create.** Choosing from a selection of everyday objects, choose one material to combine with a rock. Think about the differences between the materials. How would you like to combine the two?

**Reflect.** What two materials did you choose? How did the properties of each material affect the way you chose to combine them? (How would your sculpture be different if you had chosen a different material?)

**Resources:** Learn more about different types of rocks:  
<http://callitsculpture.org/2012/10/25/599/>