



Address:  
9-01 33rd Rd.  
(at Vernon Blvd.)  
Long Island City, NY

Hours:  
M, Tu: Closed  
W, Th, F: 10a - 5p  
Sa, Su: 11a - 6p

## ISAMU NOGUCHI: SECRET GARDEN

"If sculpture is the rock, it is also the space between rocks and between the rock and a man, and the communication and contemplation between."

-Isamu Noguchi



Noguchi's interest in rock was essentially boundless, encompassing all of its manifestations on earth, and off: in our structures and adornments, religions and myths, the tools we have developed trying to understand and manage our place in the world, and in our imaginations and languages.

An object we often use to explain the layered quality of Noguchi's perspective is *The Well (Variation on a Tsukubai)*, a traditional Japanese water basin in form, which Noguchi modernized (and westernized) by adding a recirculation pump to turn it into a fountain, much as he added electricity to the traditional paper lantern to create Akari. Examine *The Well* and in any given moment, stone appears to be the sculptor and water the material. But step outside the transience of human perception and it is clear that over the long term water is the sculptor and stone its material. Nevertheless, Noguchi thought of stone as the "unassailable absolute" of sculpture, and it is—despite its relative fragility—the universe's most useful time capsule, as well as its most resolute occupier of space, if one is interested in such things.

Musing on one of the dichotomies in his makeup, the desire to maintain one foot in the past and one in the future, Noguchi said "Ultimately, I like to think that when you get to the furthest point of technology, when you get to outer space, what do you find to bring back? Rocks!" This same juxtaposition: between the Space and Stone Ages, the industrial and the organic, is to be found in his *Sunken Garden, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza*. There he buried an arrangement of floating, naturally-formed Japanese river rocks in a light well at the base of an archetypal aluminum and glass skyscraper, hoping, as he said, to produce an explosively volatile, expanding-universe moonscape with its origins in Japan but linked to a distant star.

A near-random partial catalogue of the forms in which rocks populated Noguchi's imagination might include: the spinning ball of iron and nickel at the Earth's core that makes it not just a rock but a giant magnet; the sharp chunk of desert with which David slew Goliath; expressions like 'stone deaf' and 'rock solid'; the water-sculpted rocks Chinese scholars have coveted, admired, and farmed for 1,000 years; the craggy, microcosmic peaks in Zen gardens and paintings; geodes and tree-split rocks; the spot between a rock and a hard place, and the stones people living in glass houses shouldn't throw; disused millstones returning to nature in gardens from Kyoto to Surrey; the pebbles used to vote and figure in the ancient world (calculi in Latin); the ragged end pieces left over from squaring blocks of stone in quarries everywhere; things made to last; glacial erratics in all of their miraculous manifestations; any stone with a distinctive character and qualities; birth stones, beheading stones, kissing stones, and wishing stones; the sheet rock used to clad skyscrapers before the advent of the glass curtain wall, which inspired Noguchi's interlocking sculptures; scree, talus and moraine; the wrapped stone Cronos was fooled into eating in place of his son Zeus; henges, megaliths, dolmens, and cairns; obsidian, which isn't stone but glass and can be ground or broken but not carved; the entire Neolithic Era; hearts made of stone and heads full of rocks; the 382 kg of lunar rock NASA delivered to earth via Apollo; and the moon itself, a rock so massive even the earth's oceans can't resist its pull.

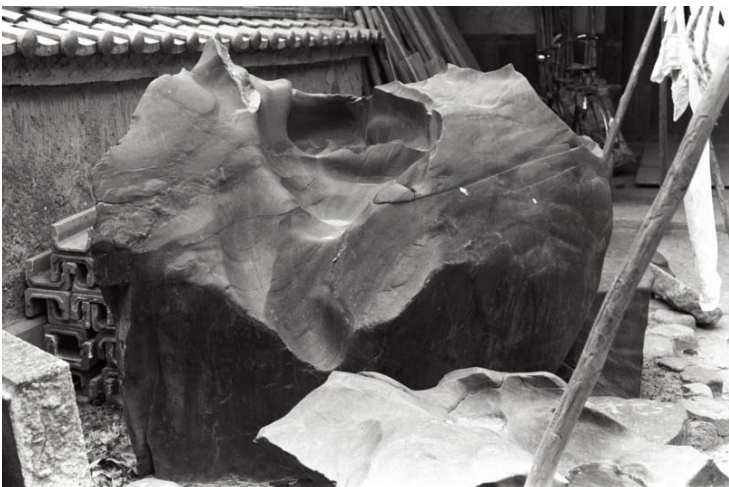


The Noguchi Museum is a museum of stones, which—not coincidentally—is the title of a major temporary exhibition we are mounting this fall (opening October 7). It is also, in Noguchi's conception, an oasis of serenity on the edge of a black hole (Manhattan)—as simultaneously outside time and space, while being exceptionally representative of them, as an asteroid. Our hope for Secret Garden is that it will produce a similarly tranquil eddy within the Fair.

Top left: Noguchi in Japan working with stones for his UNESCO garden (Paris), c. 1956; Bottom right: *Lessons of Musokokushi*, with a flip-flop, in Noguchi's Long Island City studio, c. 1962.



Noguchi (prone) installing a stone for *Sunken Garden*, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, NYC, c. 1964, Photograph: Arthur Lavine



A stone for *Sunken Garden*, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, NYC, c. 1960  
Photograph: Isamu Noguchi

## Object List

### ENTRY GROTTO

Akari [25A], c. 1953, Paper, bamboo, metal

### SUNKEN GARDEN OVERLOOK

Spin-off #3, *Sunken Garden*, Chase Manhattan Bank, 1961 – 1964, Naturally-shaped Uji River basalt

### SUNKEN GARDEN

Spin-offs 1, 2 and 4, *Sunken Garden*, Chase Manhattan Bank, 1961 – 1964, Naturally-shaped Uji River basalt

Akari [21N], 1969, Paper, bamboo, metal

Akari [16A], 1953, Paper, bamboo, metal

### STROLL GARDEN

*Lessons of Musokokushi*, 1962, Bronze, Variable installation

*Sacred Rocks of Kukaniloko*, 1976 (cast 1977), Bronze

### FLOATING GARDEN

*Untitled*, 1943, Driftwood, wood, wire

*Untitled*, 1981, Obsidian, stainless steel, wire, wood

Akari [16A], 1953, Paper, bamboo, metal

*The Philosopher's Stone*, 1982, Granite, steel

*Magritte's Stone*, 1982 – 1983, Hot-dipped galvanized steel