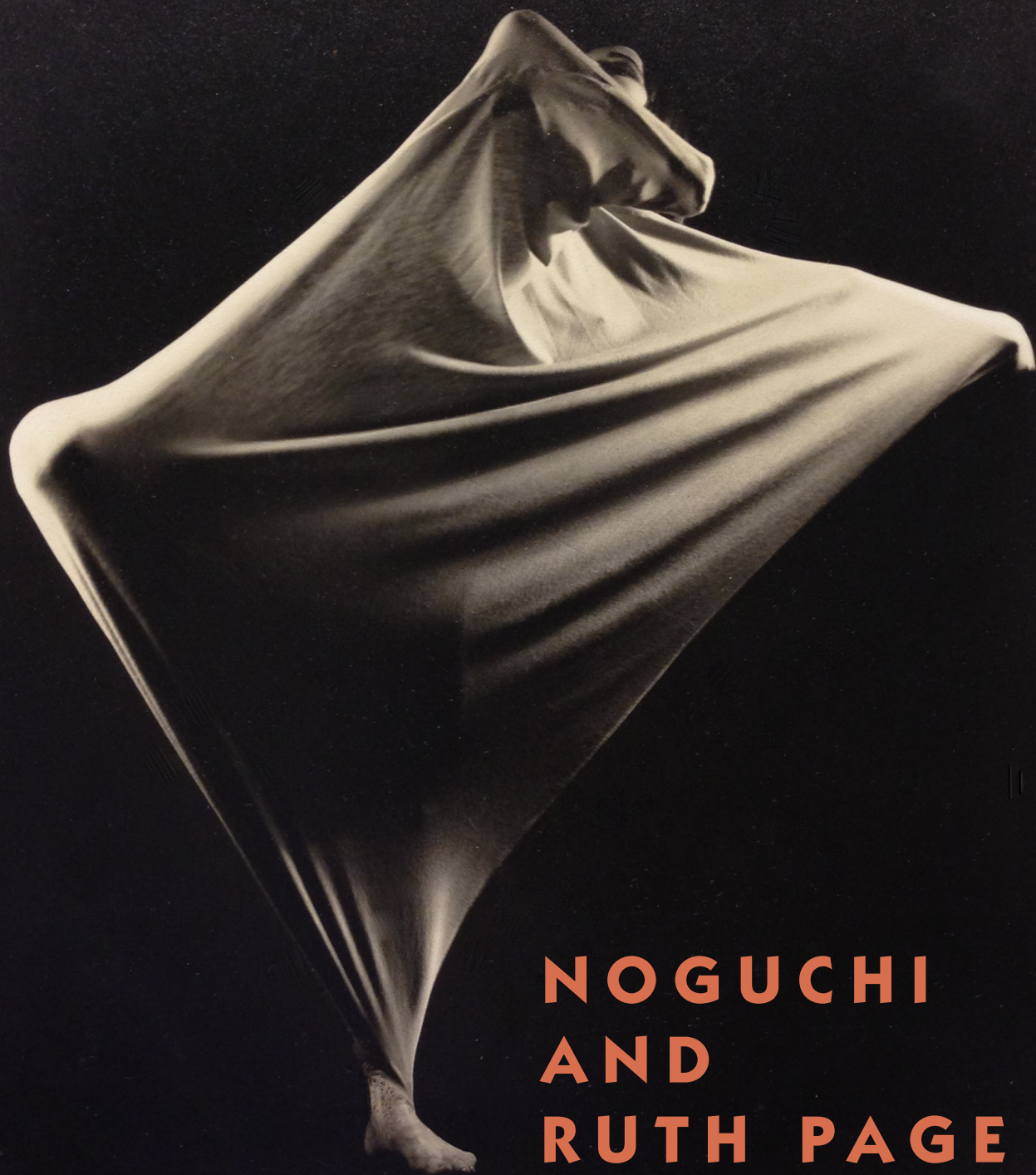


SPACE, CHOREOGRAPHED



NOGUCHI
AND
RUTH PAGE



Fig. 1. F. S. Lincoln, Noguchi with *Miss Expanding Universe*, 1932.



Fig. 2. Berenice Abbott, Noguchi with *Glad Day*, c. 1930.

Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) and the American dancer-choreographer Ruth Page (1899–1991) met at a concert in Chicago in March 1932.

Later she remembered him sitting in front of her, “being the most beautiful thing” and wearing “a lost faraway look that was irresistible.”¹ Noguchi was in town for an exhibition at the Arts Club of Chicago of drawings and sculpture he had made on an extended stay in China and Japan the year before—one stop on an extended road trip with his best friend, the eccentric futurist genius Buckminster Fuller.² The exhibition was Noguchi’s second at the club in two years. In 1930, he’d shown a group of portrait busts of prominent New Yorkers—sitters calculated to generate attention and more commissions.

Fresh from “the Orient” and the studio of the Chinese painter Qi Baishi, already linked with the Romanian modernist sculptor-mystic Constantin Brancusi, and exhibiting a stunningly provocative nude, Noguchi created a stir in Chicago. Page wasn’t the only one taken with the idea of his exoticism. In a review of the exhibition, the *Chicago Evening Post*’s Inez Cunningham characterized Noguchi as “an artistic orchid of a strange and fascinating variety, a plant without roots which gets its life from spiritual ether and yet whose strength is self-evident.”³

Noguchi and Page were instantly attracted to each other and immediately began an affair. Fuller’s influence on their initial connection was more than incidental. It would hardly be an exaggeration to call him the guiding spirit of their mutual understanding, and he would remain a touchstone of their rapport and their correspondence. Their intimate relationship—mostly long distance after those first few weeks in Chicago—lasted approximately a year. In a letter from late October 1932—as the first of their working collaborations was ready for its public premiere—Noguchi wrote:

I keep thinking of my beloved incessantly—I do feel closer to you than ever—So now I know you as an artist equal to great enthusiasms—now we see eye to eye—and we will be thrilled both by the same song, the same flicker of an eyelid. You I view now as my queen I your king—I your sun and you my moon—you my darling dove.

And at the beginning of the new year in 1933, more pointedly, “I also have lived sufficiently to recognize in you the *necessary* counterpoint.”⁴

At the time of the affair, Page had been married for six years to Tom Fisher, a successful lawyer from a prominent family who had already proved an exceptional partner: handling the business side of Page’s proliferating artistic endeavors, providing an indomitable source of financial and moral support, and putting her career first. The nature of Fisher and Page’s partnership had been established early on, when in the middle of their honeymoon in Monte Carlo, she accepted Serge Diaghilev’s offer of a position in the Ballet Russe (she was the first and only American

he ever hired), which necessitated Fisher returning to Chicago, and their new life together, alone.

Without a personal benefactor, Noguchi, was living the life of a semi-itinerant bohemian: subsisting from one portrait commission to the next, scrambling for funds to make work and travel, and regularly moving his studio.⁵ To survive and succeed on the fringes of New York society, he had already become an audacious operator. One of his first letters to Page after the affair ended, and he and Fisher had made peace, was to ask the Page-Fishers to finance a trip to Paris so that he might cut his sculpture *Lady for a Garden* (1932, lost) in marble and sell it to them.⁶

Noguchi and Page shared a remarkable amount in common. It’s easy to imagine the Chicago air crackling with kismet when the two globe-trotting artists, among the earliest Americans to consider themselves world citizens, first realized they’d spent a significant portion of their teenage years just 150 miles apart, in Indiana. When they met, Noguchi’s interest in dance was already profound and growing, and Page, the only Western artist to perform at Hirohito’s investiture as Emperor, was already an enthusiastic Asiaphile. Both came from complicated, high-achieving families; had been plucked from obscurity and mentored to the brink of artistic distinction by eminences in their respective fields; were prodigies in traditional forms who’d resolved to do what it took to “go modern”; and were already well on their way to becoming international icons. Page had performed all over the world, been profiled in *Time* magazine, and made the transition from ballet to modern dance and from prima ballerina to dancer-choreographer. Already well ensconced with the avant-garde in New York, Noguchi was on the cusp of synthesizing his paradoxical heritage, influences, and experiences into a unique artistic vision.

In the year they were together, Noguchi proposed, and Page seriously considered leaving Fisher to marry him. But ultimately they realized that they were not well-suited to be life partners. By May 1933 the love affair was over, and Noguchi, having had it out with Fisher, was writing (in satirical legal jargon) of their intent to “remain friends as per agreement and sanction [Fisher’s].” Page returned to developing her career, which would have been difficult with the penniless artist, and Noguchi to his work, as well as to the many other paramours whose existence had given Page pause.

Although the intensity of their attraction may have surprised them both, from the start, Noguchi and Page seemed to understand that their physical and emotional chemistry was secondary to a deep creative empathy. It was their shared passion for experiment, invention, and success, and their belief that like-minded artists, constituting something of a world apart, should support each other, that spawned the two constellations of collaboration that are the subject of this exhibition: *Miss Expanding Universe* (1932–1934)—and its offshoots, Noguchi’s *Sack Dresses* and Page’s *Expanding Universe*—and Page’s ballet *The Bells* (1945–1946).

EXPANDING UNIVERSE (1932-34)

Miss Expanding Universe

Exhibited in December 1932 at the Reinhardt Gallery in New York, the original plaster *Miss Expanding Universe* (Fig. 1, lost) was not particularly well received. Noguchi's early supporter, the dealer Julien Levy, while recognizing Noguchi's ambition and lauding him for it in a feature for *Creative Art*, nevertheless viewed the three figurative sculptures in the Reinhardt exhibition, including *Miss Expanding Universe*, as "only half-realized, amorphous."⁷ The *New York Times* referred to the sculpture as a "strange creation" and the "most debatable" of his abstractions.⁸ "A figure such as this may just as well as not be accepted as a symbol of the universe," Richard Jewell wrote in a full review of the show for the paper, "at any rate until something more satisfying has been produced. The scientists might tell us that no universe ever looked like that. But the scientists don't know everything, and besides, this is an abstraction."⁹

While its exhibition is well documented, the process by which *Miss Expanding Universe* developed is not as clear. In his autobiography, *Isamu Noguchi: a Sculptor's World*, Noguchi says that he started the piece immediately upon returning from Japan and securing a studio, which would have been fall 1931 into the winter of 1932. But he didn't meet Page, as far as we know, until March 1932.

It is likely that upon returning from Japan Noguchi began working on a feminine counterpoint to his ecstatic, spread-eagled figure *Glad Day*, 1930 (Fig. 2), a futurist Eve to that sculpture's Adam. *Glad Day*, which Fuller owned, was Noguchi's actualization of his friend's concept of a universal man, channeled through Blake's *Albion Rose* and Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. As the photograph in Figure 1 suggests, it is a conception with which Noguchi closely identified.¹⁰

Miss Expanding Universe's streamlined, aluminum body and hanging installation bring to mind not just Fuller's influence as a futurist designer but his oft-repeated story of how he found his sense of mission. One day while contemplating suicide on the shores of Lake Michigan, he claimed he had been levitated, surrounded in "a sparkling sphere of light," and given a message: "[...] You do not belong to you. You belong to Universe [...] you may assume that you are fulfilling your role if you apply yourself to converting your experiences to the highest advantage of others."¹¹

Miss Expanding Universe a perfectly progressive, highly intellectualized, abstract alternative to the conservative ideal of American womanhood exemplified in the Miss America pageant (established

a decade earlier), is exactly the sort of angel one might conceive to effect such a salvation. And whether Noguchi began the sculpture before meeting Page and then came to associate it with her, or began it after meeting her, it is clear that by the time he finished the piece, and Fuller chose its name, all three of them identified Page as *Miss Expanding Universe* and the sculpture with her.

The title *Miss Expanding Universe* derives from a lecture Sir Arthur Eddington gave in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in September 1932, as well as on American radio, and published the following year as the book *The Expanding Universe*. The Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* or Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* of its day, the book is a sophisticated explanation, for a lay audience, of the nature and implications of Edwin Hubble's proof of the French physicist Georges Lemaître's postulation that the universe is not only not fixed but that it is rapidly expanding. Caught up in the wider contemporary mania for creatively misunderstanding and misapplying Einstein's theory of relativity, Noguchi, Fuller, and Page were each professionally preoccupied with space, so it is no wonder that *Miss Expanding Universe* would become a leitmotif of their relationship.¹²

Noguchi and Page's love letters are full of doting references to the sculpture, often in affectionate shorthand. Noguchi: "I'm glad to know you are still keen on Ex Uni. The clippings you sent amused. To have the statue cast suits me perfect."¹³

The Sack Dresses

Which still leaves the question of *Miss Expanding Universe* as a portrait. It doesn't look like something for which Page, or anyone, could usefully and meaningfully have posed. It seems to fit squarely in the tradition of biomorphic abstraction; *Time* called it "something like a starfish and something like a woman."¹⁴ But look more closely and it is apparent that it depicts a woman in a dress. And in fact, at some point in the spring or summer of 1932, Noguchi did design a sack dress for Page (Fig. 3). The creation of these two objects has never been properly synchronized because that first sack dress exists only in photographs and has long been conflated in the literature with a second, quite different dress, a version of which still exists (Fig. 4).¹⁵

In comparing the two dresses with *Miss Expanding Universe*, the correlation between the sculpture and the first dress becomes inescapable. They share the same nipped-in waist and the complete encapsulation of the hands and feet. The logical conclusion is that *Miss Expanding Universe* is a portrait of Page in the first dress. That is the only way that the sculpture makes sense as an object for which Page could have posed, as both artists always said she had. But without more information, whether that dress was an effort to turn Page into a living, breathing, mobile *Miss Expanding Universe* or the sculpture was simply intended to immortalize Page in it will remain a question of the



Fig. 3. F. S. Lincoln, Ruth Page in Noguchi's first Sack Dress, 1932.



Fig. 4. Ruth Page in Noguchi's second Sack Dress, c. 1933, from one of Page's scrapbooks. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.



Fig. 5. Unidentified news clipping, c. 1932-33. The Noguchi Museum.



Fig. 6. Isamu Noguchi, Ruth Page in Noguchi's second *Sack Dress*, 1934. Ruth Page Center for the Arts.



Fig. 7. Attributed to Andre Delfau, Ruth Page in Noguchi's second *Sack Dress*, c. 1970s. Ruth Page Center for the Arts.



Fig. 8. Herta Moselsio, Martha Graham performing *Lamentation*, c. 1930. Library of Congress.

chicken or the egg. In either case, Noguchi's feelings for his Galatea could hardly have been more clear (Fig. 1).¹⁶

It is important to clearly distinguish between the two dress concepts.¹⁷ The first, while it made for good posing, was difficult for Page to move in, and it is unlikely that she ever performed in it. It was more an act of sculpture than a costume. The second dress, a true sack, was an open volume without internal structure or definition; it cinched at the ankles, wrist, and neck, leaving Page's hands and feet free. Where the first dress gave Page a fixed shape very like *Miss Expanding Universe*, in the second she could create, as she put it in a program note for *Figure in Space No. 2*, "different sculptural ideas."¹⁸

An undated and unaccredited, but clearly contemporaneous, newspaper clipping in the archives of The Noguchi Museum (Fig. 5), which Page must have sent Noguchi at the time, describes the creation of the second dress: "Miss Page, as she is known professionally, asked him to make a costume for her. After some study, Noguchi created the sack. It was then up to her to think of a dance to go with it." The implication, given the accompanying cartoon, which clearly shows the second dress, is that Page's decision to choreograph the dance that became *Expanding Universe* followed the creation of the second version of the dress. In retrospect this makes the first dress a more independent work of art and Page in it an important work of kinetic sculpture and performance art.

A number of the "sculptural ideas" Page explored in the second dress are captured in photographs, as well as four ink wash drawings (owned by the Page Center for the Arts) that Noguchi likely made for her on a visit to Chicago in 1933 (Fig. 6). The drawing in Figure 6, which is etched on Page's gravestone, is particularly interesting in that it shows the dress pushed to an abstract, aerodynamic extreme that recalls both Brancusi's *Birds in Space* and *Miss Expanding Universe*. The second dress, with Page seemingly in full-flight, is also the subject of a provocative watercolor likely made by Page's longtime collaborator and eventual second husband, Andre Delfau (Fig. 7). The painting is the best single depiction of the dress if for no other reason than that it reminds us to remember it in a brilliant royal blue.

The idea for a sack dress was not a wholesale invention. As Robert Tracy noted, Martha Graham, in her long woolens period, had worn an all-encompassing, tube-like purple sack dress in *Lamentation* of 1930 (Fig. 8).¹⁹ Noguchi's sister Ailes, who served as a live model for the development of at least one of Noguchi's sack dresses, was dancing in Graham's company at the time.²⁰ The conception and intent of Noguchi's second dress however turn Graham's inside out.²¹ Where *Lamentation* dramatizes an internal struggle with a universe of grief conducted within the confines of the self, Page's dance *Expanding Universe* is an extroversion of human

aspiration on a cosmic scale. Much later, in a 1979 interview, Noguchi recalled: "Martha Graham used to say that in dancing she never opens her hand *out*, she closes it *in*, and this retains the energy. It doesn't flow out indiscriminately, it flows back into her."²² The release of energy into the universe is of course exactly what Noguchi and Page were after.

As symbols of the universe, the difference between the sculpture and Page's dance in the second dress is the difference between a cosmos composed of tidy, fixed concentric spheres (the ancient Ptolemaic model) and the big, amorphous, rapidly expanding, post-Hubble void we now accept as fact. Where the first dress turned Page into a vessel capable of moving through space, the second allowed her to become a dynamic visual metaphor for this revised mental model of the universe itself.

Expanding Universe, Figure in Space No. 1, and Figure in Space No. 2

Page took the dance she created with the second dress—titled *Expanding Universe*, at Noguchi's suggestion—on tour in fall 1932.²³ Before she set out, Noguchi ended a letter expressing his pleasure at learning that she would be "attempting my dances" with this postscript: "In the meantime dear heart work hard, dance beautiful dances. I shower you with 1000000000000 kisses." That's at least a trillion. It's impossible to know exactly how many because the line of zeroes trails off into a receding infinity of little swirls—a playful illustration of how integral the notion of space on a cosmic scale was to their relationship.²⁴

Another, an undated single-page scenario for *Expanding Universe* in Page's handwriting, beautifully summarizes the progressive, pseudo-scientific, Fullerian fog in which the collaboration subsisted: "Ex-Uni is based upon non-Euclidian-cosmic-relativity Einsteinian geometry; the 4th dimensional tension dance must superceed (sic) and in all ways be opposite to the theory that the world is flat. / relations + properties of solids, surfaces, lines + angles—the theory of space or of figures in space."²⁵ On October 30, 1932, from a Western Union office in Fargo North Dakota, Page sent Noguchi a telegram, care of Fuller: "OUR UNIVERSAL CHILD SOMEWHAT STARTLED THE NATIVE IOWANS LAST NIGHT BUT THEY LIKED IT STOP [...] HAPPY OVER OUR EXPANSION= RUTH."

By the time Page's 1933 tour with Harold Kreutzberg began, their "universal child" seems to have been supplanted by a pair of related dances, *Figure in Space No. 1* and *Figure in Space No. 2* (Fig. 9). In program notes compiled in 1933 and 1934, presumably for that tour, Page described both dances:

"Figure in Space" is danced entirely inside a jersey sack designed for Miss Page by the Japanese-American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi, son of the poet, Yone Noguchi. To those who are plastically-minded the dance will seem to be a

series of startling poses—new inventions in design and ever-remindful of Twentieth Century sculpture in its most abstract and fourth-dimensional imagery. To those who are philosophically-minded the dance will seem to be the continuous struggle of mankind, through calmness and strife, to expand into new ideas and new forms ending in the complete mystery which is the universe. But for this dance each must make his own interpretation [...]

"Figure in Space No. 2" is also danced entirely inside of a jersey sack—using different forms and different sculptural ideas but reaching always towards the same infinity of space and form.

In the same undated newspaper clipping Page sent Noguchi, we learn that the idea was to perform *Expanding Universe* against a dark background with "flickering" lights, creating a galactic background. At the end of that article, she said tellingly, "Now that I've learned how, I really feel more at ease dancing inside a sack than out of one."

EXPANDING UNIVERSE-ERA DANCE STUDIES

Page was not Noguchi's only dance subject; there was Ailes, of course, and The Noguchi Museum holds dozens of studies of dancers that are unrelated to his relationship with Page. Every one of them demonstrates his interest in how the body moves and how the nature of its motion might be used to abstract it.

Among Noguchi's published critics only Levy recognized that there was a relationship between the ink wash drawings Noguchi made under Qi Baishi's influence and the abstract figurative sculptures, like *Miss Expanding Universe*, that he began making on his return from Asia in 1931—and which he showed together in 1932. While most reviewers focused on the dissimilarities between Noguchi's different modes—the ink wash drawings, the portrait heads, and his increasingly abstract sculpture—Levy intuited the relevance of calligraphy to the sculpture, calling Noguchi's work in the two media "separate activities in one parallel direction," in which "a skeleton of abstraction qualifies all the representational elements."²⁶ Figure Study (Fig. 10) is an excellent example of just such an armature of abstraction; its subject is not anatomy but torsion and mechanical stress. This is the body post-tensioned by dance: a demonstration of what Natsu Oyobe calls the liberation of line that came out of Noguchi's experience with Qi.²⁷

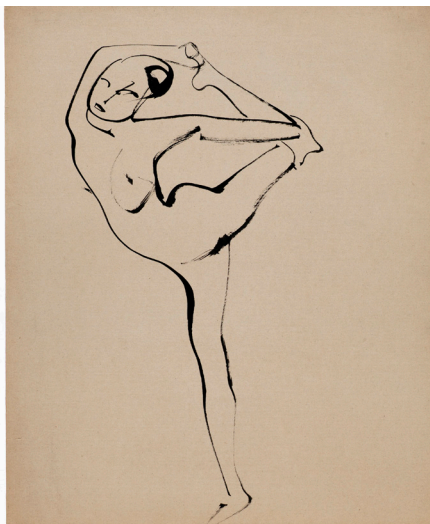


Fig. 10. Isamu Noguchi, *Figure Study*, c. 1933. The Noguchi Museum.

THE BELLS (1945-46)

The Bells, Noguchi's and Page's second major collaboration, developed in the immediate aftermath of World War II, is based on Edgar Allan Poe's nebulously portentous poem of the same name.²⁸ Page, a poet and poetry aficionada, almost certainly also had John Donne's *Meditation XVII* in mind when she conceived the ballet. *Meditation XVII* is the source of the phrase Ernest Hemingway made famous as the title for his anti-heroic Spanish Civil War novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a reflection on the unjustifiability of killing even in a "righteous" war. Donne wrote, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee." As sobering as this sentiment is, it is barely even a starting point for the hopelessness of Page's conception.

The production brought Noguchi and Page together again at the end of World War II, more than a decade

after the collaborations surrounding *Expanding Universe*. They ran into each other at a party in New York, and on the spur of the moment, Page asked him to design the ballet. Busy with Martha Graham at the time, Noguchi initially demurred and suggested Marc Chagall as an alternative, agreeing to Page's offer only after Graham's production was delayed.²⁹ Once on board Noguchi filled the role of creative partner and production designer. Much of the look and feel of the ballet in its first incarnation came out of his imagination, closely following the most comprehensive of the early concept sketches he gave Page (Fig. 11).³⁰ The best interpretation of this disturbing drawing comes in the final two lines of Page's program notes:

The curtain falls upon the complete triumph of the King of the Ghouls, whose destructive power is epitomized by the collapse into ruin of the church, the symbol of Truth and of Morality. Only the sad beauty of death and disintegration remains.

The difference between Poe's Romantic notion that there is beauty to be found even in death and the triumph of the King of Ghouls in Page's ballet is that incongruously *The Bells* premiered very close to a year to the day after the death and defeat of Hitler, the true King of Ghouls.

Noguchi's other concept studies (Fig. 12) show a range of options for costumes and include many visual cues that

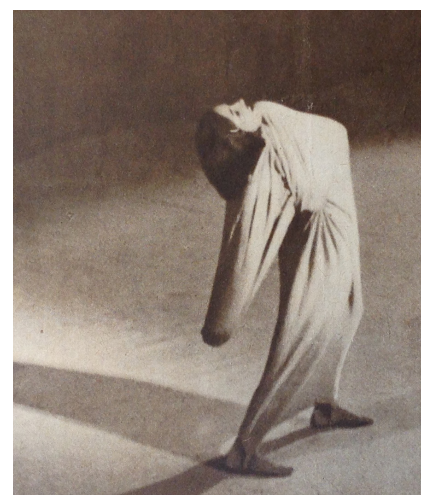


Fig. 9. Ruth Page on stage in Tokyo performing *Figure in Space*, c. 1934, from one of Page's scrapbooks. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

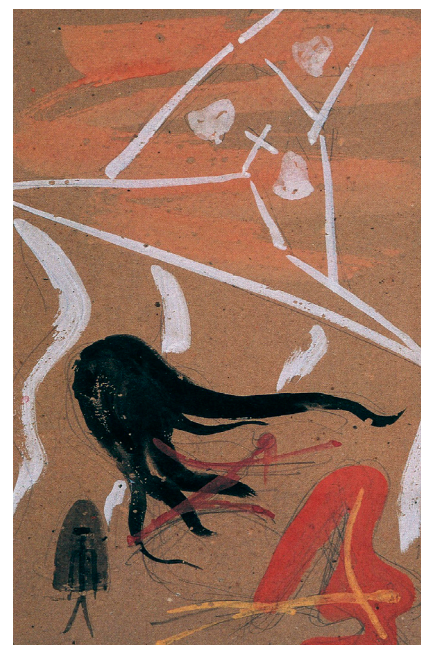


Fig. 11. Isamu Noguchi, *Study for 'The Bells'*, c. 1945. Collection of Nicholas J. Sands, New York.



Fig. 12. Isamu Noguchi, Study for "The Bells", c. 1945. The Noguchi Museum.



Fig. 13. Attributed to Yuji Ito, Working Study for Noguchi Costume for The Bells, c. 1945-46. Ruth Page Center for the Arts.

demonstrate just how attuned he was to Page's scenario and the tenor of various scenes. Even in what amount to glorified stick figures he manages to convey the attitude and role of each of the principals: the Bride, the Groom, and the King of Ghouls, with incredible precision.

Also on loan from the Page Center for the Arts is a group of costume sketches, possibly made by Yuji Ito, the costume designer Noguchi hired to produce them.³¹ They provide great insight into what it took to translate Noguchi's concepts into executable garments.³² Noguchi was particularly happy with how the black bells worn by members of the corps de ballet turned out—by which they were transformed into dancing chorus of doom (Fig. 13).

The ballet had its first performance in Chicago on April 26, 1946, just two weeks before the first anniversary of VE Day, marking the end of hostilities in Europe. It is almost impossible to imagine conceiving, much less actually mounting, an American ballet on the premise that love and society, truth and morality stand no chance against the forces of disintegration, decay, death, destruction, futility, doom, decadence, depravity, sorrow, violence, and chaos (all vocabulary from Page's program notes) in the early stages of reconstruction from a war we had won.³³ There is no mention of the war or real events in Page's program; all is generalized, which is true to the poem; but the unambiguously dark allegory of the ballet's storyline represents a level of abstraction that seems more than slightly macabre.

The ballet received mixed reviews and receptions from audiences in Chicago, at Jacob's Pillow dance festival, and in New York in its initial runs, but it nevertheless entered the Page Company's repertoire. Noguchi's set was generally praised; the costumes, even after substantial revisions, were not. By the time of the company's 1950 Paris tour, Noguchi's designs had been replaced by more conventional, oddly romantic, satin and velour ballet costumes.

The despair innate to *The Bells* couldn't be further from the incredible ardor and optimism of *Miss Expanding Universe*. The brutal economy of Noguchi's collapsing church, which in seconds reprised the razing of Europe and Japan, is still shocking, even in theory. For Noguchi in particular, the dark primal scream *The Bells* represents is unusual, but given the context, perhaps understandable. He voluntarily entered an internment camp for Japanese-Americans in Arizona at the beginning of the war and had faced the virulently racist atmosphere in San Francisco, where he had an exhibition in the summer of 1942, by assuming a mantle of ultra-patriotism. A man of two nations and two cultures, between 1941 and April 1946, he watched both of them abuse humanity in ways almost beyond comprehension. When that first concept drawing was made (Fig. 11) the American firebombing of Japan (conducted in preparation for an invasion in which it was assumed millions could die), and the atomic strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, just months past, must have been fresh in his mind.

As a collaboration, *The Bells* demonstrates that, after more than a decade without much interaction, Page and Noguchi were still in sync, both having made the same enormous shift from the unalloyed and unabashed belief in the unlimited potential of the American dream they shared in the early 1930s to an almost complete, if still universal, disillusion. Their belief in themselves and each other, remarkably, seeming to have survived even their total loss of faith in mankind. And for all of the ups and downs both had experienced in the interim, they remained united in their appetite for genuine artistic risk. Not many artists, in the immediate aftermath of the Allies' victory, were making work as excruciatingly fatalistic as this.

C O D A

There are two copies of *Miss Expanding Universe*. Page owned both of them. She bought the first by paying to have it cast in aluminum in 1933. By the late 1930s the sculpture had become an icon of modernism and was often requested for exhibition. Most of the requests went through Noguchi, as did the piece. After one such show, *Sculpture Today* (1947–1948), the Toledo Museum of Art inquired whether Noguchi would be willing to sell the piece. He was, and he did, without telling Page.

He then sent her a breezy letter with a check for the amount he thought equal to what she had originally paid to have the piece fabricated.³⁴ Fisher's response (on Page's behalf), given that he had only recently endured the onerous process of producing *The Bells* (Noguchi and Page were impossible and impractical about money), was remarkably restrained. He was, he wrote "somewhat baffled" because "Ruth is certainly the owner of 'Miss Expanding Universe,' and naturally you could not sell her except for Ruth and on her behalf, with her approval."³⁵

After offering numerous excuses and seeming only barely chagrined, Noguchi had a second aluminum cast made. He paid to have it packed but sent it COD. That second *Miss Expanding Universe* hung in Page's apartment until her death, when The Ruth Page Foundation gave it to The Art Institute of Chicago, where it is on view today.

Noguchi and Page reconnected in the late 1970s, when various projects to chronicle their lives and consider their legacies were underway. The effort to comprehensively catalogue Noguchi's work began with letters to everyone in his acquaintance, including Page. John Martin, the *New York Times* dance critic and a champion of modern dance who had originally reviewed *The Bells*, was working on his biography of Page, which entailed an (unsuccessful) appeal to Noguchi for permission to reproduce parts of the love letters. In his letter of regret, Noguchi wrote, "This is not to say that I do not wish it known that Ruth and I loved each other. It is simply that the letters reveal an all too familiar pattern of my character which I would just as soon keep in a closet...I appreciate very much you giving me the opportunity to veto the letters, much as I hate to be a censor."³⁶

Between 1979 and 1985 Noguchi and Page exchanged a series of nostalgic notes, in which she says he was the “Big Love of my life!” and he says he remembers her with fondness, admiration, and love, calling her “one of the real genuine people I’ve known.”

Page’s Christmas card for 1981 is a snapshot of the eighty-one-year old seated six feet off the ground, in the lap of a monumental stone statue of Ramses II in Egypt—begging the question of how she got there. The note on the back reads: “This is my new BOYFRIEND RAMSES II—we both wish you Happy Holidays and love.”

If there’s one thing that emerges clearly from Noguchi and Page’s collaborations— from the forward looking and sanguine *Miss Expanding Universe* to the existential crisis and collapse of *The Bells*—it is that neither was afraid to swing for the fences of time.

—Dakin Hart
Senior Curator, The Noguchi Museum

ENDNOTES

1 John Martin, *Ruth Page: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Marcel Dekker Inc., 1977) 80. In later interviews, Page would sometimes say she had always known Noguchi, or that she had met him through the sculptor Sandy Calder.

2 Page had nearly as much in common with Fuller as she did with Noguchi. Her brother-in-law Howard Fisher was an up-and-coming architect whose firm, General Houses, Inc., was one of a handful of companies developing a modular, prefabricated house of tomorrow, a prototype of which Page and Fisher occupied in Hubbard Woods, Illinois. (“HOUSING: Prefabrications,” *Time*, March 27, 1933.) At the same time, Fuller was extrapolating ideas from his *Dymaxion House* for hyper-modernizing American life, such as designs for modular kitchens and bathrooms, and the three-wheeled Dymaxion Car (1933), the shape of which Noguchi helped model.

3 Inez Cunningham, “Noguchi as Master of Long Scroll,” *Chicago Evening Post*, March 8, 1932.

4 In assorted correspondence, dated “Monday,” MGZMD D-16-32C2, Ruth Page Collection, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

5 While in Chicago, Noguchi received a telegram from his mother informing him that he’d received an eviction notice.

6 In a telegram in The Noguchi Museum archive, Noguchi exhorts the Page-Fishers not to miss this tremendous opportunity.

7 Julien Levy, “Isamu Noguchi,” *Creative Art*, January 1933, 35.

8 “Art Roster: New Exhibitions,” *New York Times*, December 18, 1932, 10.

9 Richard Jewell, “Art in Review: Noguchi’s Abstract Sculpture at Reinhardt Gallery Is Puzzling but Indicative of His Brilliance,” *The New York Times*, December 17, 1932, 20.

10 The contemporaneous connection between *Glad Day* and *Miss Expanding Universe* is strong; almost as soon as *Miss Expanding Universe* was completed, Fuller linked them on the front and back covers of the second issue of his *Shelter* magazine (November 1932).

11 Lloyd Steven Sieden, *Buckminster Fuller’s Universe: His Life and Work* (New York: Basic Books, 1989) 88.

12 In 1928, more than three years before she met Noguchi and Fuller, Page choreographed a piece called *Through Space* (to music by Busoni) and danced in a Greek chiton) based on a Native American allegory of spiritual development in which the Thunderbird character wheels chaotically through space until, calmed by the benign influence of Rainbow, he learns to soar. The scenario is explained in the program for performances at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo, from October 1 to 25, 1928 (The Noguchi Museum). At the same, Noguchi was working on an idea for a performance in which Graham would use the avant-garde composer and inventor Léon Theremin’s rods as an interactive, electronic-music-producing set [*Isamu Noguchi: A Sculptor’s World* (New York: Steidl, 2004, reprint of Harpers & Row, 1968) 21].

13 Page and Fisher paid to have the sculpture cast in aluminum in 1933. In assorted correspondence, dated “Sunday,” MGZMD D-16-32C2, Ruth Page Collection, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

14 “Sport: Third Noguchi,” *Time*, October 10, 1932.

15 A version of Noguchi’s second sack dress is in the collection of the Chicago History Museum.

16 Page later choreographed *Pygmalion* as an opera ballet.

17 In an annotation on a copy of love letter from Noguchi to Page (originals in the New York Public Library, annotated copies in the Noguchi Museum), Martin notes that there were three dresses, one covering the feet and hands and two leaving them free.

18 Various program notes, undated, D-16-P18, Ruth Page Collection, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

19 Robert Tracy, *Spaces of the Mind: Isamu Noguchi’s Dance Designs* (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 2000), 22.

20 In an undated love letter to Page that included a couple of small sketches, Noguchi describes how “When Ailes was trying out postures for me she evolved some really beautiful ones.” This letter is reproduced in Amy Wolf, *On Becoming an Artist: Isamu Noguchi and His Contemporaries, 1922–1960* (New York: The Noguchi Museum, 2010), 52.

21 Katherine Crockett, a recent soloist for the Martha Graham Dance Company, is well known for her performances of *Lamentation*. Of wearing that dress, she has said, “You begin to feel that the tube is your flesh, and that you’re trying to get out of it as relief from your pain. That effort creates internal tension. It’s almost as if you are in a womb.” Valerie Gladstone, “When the Costume Comes First: Dancers and Choreographers on Working with Wearable Art,” *Dance Magazine*, vol. 83, no. 10 (October 2009).

22 “Artists in Their Own Words: Isamu Noguchi by Paul Cummings,” in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and Bruce Altshuler, eds., *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations* (New York: Abrams, 1994) 143.

23 Noguchi makes the suggestion in an undated letter on letterhead from Structural Study Associates, one of Buckminster Fuller’s organizations. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, D-16-32C2.

24 This letter is held in the Ruth Page Collection in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. It is reproduced in Amy Wolf, *On Becoming an Artist: Isamu Noguchi and his Contemporaries, 1922–1960* (New York: The Noguchi Museum, 2010), 52. Anyone who remembers how ruthlessly Carl Sagan was lampooned in the 1980s for the phrase “billions and billions of stars” will catch the significance of Noguchi’s use of what is often known as an “astronomically large” number.

25 Ruth Page, statement about *Expanding Universe*, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, D-16-M28. Reproduced in Wolf, *On Becoming* 51.

26 Levy, *Isamu Noguchi* 34–5.

27 Natsu Oyobe, “Isamu Noguchi in China: Sotokichi Katsuzumi, Qi Baishi, and the Reinvention of Abstraction in the Peking Scroll Drawings,” *Isamu Noguchi / Qi Baishi / Beijing 1930* (New York: The Noguchi Museum, 2013) 13–32.

28 For the best overview of Page’s work in this period, see Joellen A. Meglin, “Victory Garden: Ruth Page’s Danced Poems in the Time of World War II,” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, 30.1, 2012: 22–56.

29 The Page Collection in the Performing Arts Division of the New York Public Library includes a voluminous correspondence relating to the development of *The Bells* and its production, much of it contentious.

30 This entire account comes from John Martin, *Ruth Page: An Intimate Biography* (New York: John Dekker Inc. 1977) 115–20.

31 Although the sketches are executed in a style that bears many of the hallmarks of a professional fashion or costume design illustrator, it is possible that they are Noguchi’s work.

32 Because the ballet underwent several significant revisions, including to the costumes, it is possible that this group of costume design sketches represents a stage in which Noguchi’s ideas were revised, refined, and brought to a higher state of finish than they had been in the first round of design.

33 The complete program text is printed in Robert Tracy, *Spaces of the Mind: Isamu Noguchi’s Dance Designs* (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 2000), 66.

34 The letter is in the Ruth Page Collection at the New York Public Library, D-16-47C32.

35 Letter from Tom Fisher to Isamu Noguchi, January 10, 1948, The Noguchi Museum.

36 Letter from Isamu Noguchi to John Martin, April 12, 1976, The Noguchi Museum.

Noguchi spent 1930-31 in China and Japan, predominantly in Beijing and Kyoto. It was the first time he had spent time in Asia since he had left as a boy of thirteen in 1918. Returning to the United States, he did not continue to make the scroll drawings he had been working on previously; nor did he continue to work in clay. Yet a continuum can be seen, beginning with his development of line in the Peking Drawings and extending to his work with the dancer Ruth Page. Seeing this thread is what initially intrigued Senior Curator Dakin Hart and spurred the development of an exhibition focused on the Noguchi/Page collaboration as a complement to *Isamu Noguchi and Qi Baishi: Beijing 1930*. When one looks at the photograph of Ruth Page in the *Miss Expanding Universe* costume Noguchi created for her, the forms of the figures in the Peking Drawings come to mind. Such an image underscores Noguchi's uncanny ability to transform two dimensions into three.

The Noguchi Museum both sees as part of its mission and has the unique ability to demonstrate Noguchi's protean production. *Space, Choreographed: Noguchi and Ruth Page* confirms Dakin Hart's premise and also illustrates Noguchi's initial forays into theatrical design, a precursor to the large body of work he went on to realize with Martha Graham.

We are particularly grateful to the Ruth Page Center for the Arts and Thea Flaum for supporting this endeavor and being such wonderful partners, and to The Newberry Library for a gift of essential ephemera.

Jenny Dixon
Director, The Noguchi Museum

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Cover: Ruth Page in Noguchi's second Sack Dress, c. 1933, from one of Page's scrap-books. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

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Production still from "The Bells," c. 1946. The Noguchi Museum.

***Space, Choreographed: Noguchi and Ruth Page* on view at The Noguchi Museum, September 24, 2013 to January 26, 2014.**

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

FIRST FRIDAYS

The Museum offers extended evening hours on the first Friday of each month, from 5:00pm to 8:00pm. *First Friday* programming includes "Center of Attention," an extended conversation around a single work of art, at 6:00pm, followed by curated films at 7:00pm. *First Fridays* also feature pay-what-you-wish admission and a cash bar with wine and beer.

FILMS

October 4 | Routes: The Spiritual Odyssey of Chinese American Artists: Zhang Hongtu and Cui Fei

November 1 | A compilation of footage of Sumi Ink Club

December 6 | Routes: The Spiritual Odyssey of Chinese American Artists: Shen Ruijin and Zheng Lianjie

January 3 | The Lost Magic of the Shanghai Art Studios (2007)

SECOND SUNDAYS

Second Sundays is an ongoing series of public programs developed to enrich the experience of The Noguchi Museum and its exhibitions.

October 13 | Peking 1930: Isamu Noguchi and his Encounter with China's Cultural Capital and Avant Garde Milieu, with Paul French

November 10 | Skyscrapers, Sacks, and Sticks: Ruth Page's Experiments with Abstraction in the Early 1930s, with Dr. Joellen Meglin (Associate Professor, Dance, Temple University)

December 8 | Culture, Collaboration, and Identity: Noguchi in the 1930's and 40s, with Amy Lyford

January 12 | Building an exhibition: Isamu Noguchi and Qi Baishi: Beijing 1930, with Alexandra Snyder May, Curatorial Advisor and conceptualizer of the exhibition and Jenny Dixon, Director, The Noguchi Museum