

Noguchi Museum 2020 Benefit Auction

This year's auction takes place online starting Monday, November 9, at 8 am EST.

Bidding will close on Monday, November 16, at 8:30 pm EST.

noguchi.org/auction



Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988)

Linga

1987 (fabricated 1988)

Muntz metal

35 1/2 x 19 x 13 3/4 inches

(90.2 x 48.3 x 34.9 cm)

Stamped on lower back: I.N. A/P

Unique AP

Starting bid: \$125,000



Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988)

Messenger 2B

1960/1972/1987 (fabricated 2020)

Silicon bronze plate, constructed

57 1/2 x 14 1/2 x 18 5/8 inches

(146.1 x 36.8 x 47.3 cm)

Number 2 in an edition of 6 with 2 APs

Starting bid: \$90,000



Linga

The best place to start understanding *Linga*, a dense synthesis of universal and idiosyncratic allusions, is to recognize it as part of Isamu Noguchi's delight in playing with the mores of the table. Over his career Noguchi made many self-reflexive tables, almost always scaled, sized, shaped, configured, and/or finished to defy categorization and use (e.g. side, end, coffee, dinner, console, mesa). Like the bed, which also greatly interested him, a table has the great benefit of being a theater of mundane and ubiquitous (and therefore fundamental) operations and expectations: place, base, and thing all in one.

Linga, more than any other table/not-table, departs from the core tenet of tableness by the simple fact of having been stood up. That it is meant to be intuited as a table, or parts of a table, is clear from the size and configuration of its two parallel surfaces, which recall a bi-level end table. Its rendered uselessness of course takes it into the realm of the symbolic, where the title comes into play.

In Indian and Hindu traditions the linga has a history and meanings as complex and contested as the cross in the Mediterranean basin. But to massively oversimplify, it is an abstraction representing cosmic generative forces: often used as a non-representational cult image in Shiva temples. Noguchi's example—with its two planes: one sharp and square, the other soft, rounded, and polished—alludes to a common tradition in lingas of combining representations of the masculine and the feminine. Interestingly, in traditional lingas with these two elements, the female element generally serves as a base or basin, from which, or atop which, the male principle protrudes. Synthesizing as always, Noguchi presents the masculine and feminine not as sculpture and base, but as a kind of standing aniconic couple, with the position and roles contingent, precarious, and ambiguously beautiful.

Linga is from a series of constructed bronzes Noguchi made at the end of his life to help support his foundation and the Museum. It exists in three versions. *Linga A*, the first and smallest, was fabricated in bronze plate and is unique. It is in the collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. For versions B and C Noguchi shifted to muntz metal, an industrial, corrosion-resistant form of brass. Noguchi chose B as the basis for the edition. C, being auctioned, is slightly larger than B, and is also unique.

Dakin Hart
Senior Curator



Messenger 2B

Isamu Noguchi initially conceived this form around 1960 when he was working in sheets of cut, scored, and folded aluminum—then the material of the future—given to him by Alcoa (Aluminum Company of America). In 1972 he executed a version in burnished stainless steel for a show at Pace Gallery. He returned to the idea in 1987 when he became excited about challenging market expectations with sculptures constructed from sheet bronze, a commercially available industrial product that bears little more than a chemical relationship to the hoary tradition of bronze casting.

Messenger 2B is one of a handful of constructed bronzes Noguchi made that are not derived from his earlier series of sheet metal editions in hot-dipped galvanized steel for Gemini G.E.L., produced just a few years before. The addition of “2B” to the original title *Messenger*, which the earlier piece carried, is studio nomenclature signifying a second version, 2, executed in a second material, B. The addition also produces a neat pun. This is not a messenger per se, but a messenger to be, at some unspecified time, and under as yet undefined conditions, in the future, making its impact oddly fugitive—flighty even.

An abstract figure created with a few cuts and bends in a single piece of sheet metal, *Messenger 2B* explicitly evokes ancient votive offertory sculpture and divine heralds. It would not be a great stretch to call it neoclassical: Noguchi’s economy with curves an analogue to the treatment of drapery in authentic high classical Greek sculpture. Only here, in a peerless example of his pleasure in making something from nothing, a complete environmental situation from flat materials, Noguchi has given us the structure of a garment, or of a message, and nothing else: a simple unfolding into existence and meaningfulness, like the opening of a letter.

Two artist proofs and one numbered example from the edition of six were made in Noguchi’s lifetime. As with his larger editions for Gemini G.E.L., Noguchi created the series of constructed bronzes from which *Messenger 2B* comes to support his foundation and this Museum after his death. In returning to produce the unfabricated examples of these pieces, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum follows his express wish. This example was produced for the Museum by the original fabricator, with whom Noguchi collaborated actively in the final seven years of his life.

Dakin Hart
Senior Curator