

FUTURA AKARI

Mobile
Guide
#2000

When retail sales of his Akari lanterns began in 1952, Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) was already well into his career-long effort to remake sculpture into “a vital force in our everyday life.”¹ Akari were conceived to function as miniature suns: sources of life and local generators of the environmental situation we call home. In doing so, they have become among the most transformative, ubiquitous, and influential sculptures ever devised. Like so much of what Noguchi produced operating in nature’s wake, they seem to be impervious to taste and fashion: their natural phenomenon-like universality making them limitlessly adaptable.

Though Akari were not as successful financially as artistically in Noguchi’s lifetime, he nevertheless found ways to demonstrate their commercial extensibility. He distributed and sold them globally. He showed them in galleries while selling them in shops. He made them a defining feature of his efforts to make sculpture socially significant. And he endorsed their customization by others. In Paris in 1970, he allowed Galerie Steph Simon, which featured Akari alongside the designs of Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand, to organize an auction of twenty-nine one-of-a-kind, hand-painted examples by well-known artists such as Roberto Matta, Arman, Cesar, Pierre Soulages, and Noguchi himself, to benefit a hospital.

In the automotive world, it took time for the dynamics of customization to become clear. But it now goes without saying that chopping, hot-rodding, and custom painting a Model T is an act of love and respect not vandalism. Even those for whom originality is everything understand what a community of customization adds to the overall culture of appreciation, and the cultural reach, of specific models and brands of car, as well as to the phenomenon of the automobile generally. Over nearly four decades Noguchi worked steadily at making Akari a diverse and modular ecosystem—against the remorseless forces of commercial standardization. The lanterns’ natural affinity for customization, and their inherent openness to change, are not coincidental.

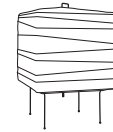
In recognition of the desire Akari inspire in so many people to contribute creatively to what Noguchi called their “self-generative cycle,”² the Museum invited FUTURA2000 (b. 1955)—New York-born action painter, seminal figure in the history and culture of graffiti, and, like Noguchi, an open-to-the-world boundary-crosser—to hand paint a group of them. Futura’s early moves into gallery painting in the 1980s, when he still didn’t consider himself an artist, just happen to have coincided with Noguchi’s final efforts to put Akari at the center of his sculptural legacy. We are very pleased to show the products of Futura’s after-the-fact collaboration with Noguchi in the expanded field of artmaking, here in the temporarily decommissioned Museum shop, which was—not coincidentally—originally a gallery.

Dakin Hart
Senior Curator

¹ Isamu Noguchi, “Isamu Noguchi.” New York: Marie Harriman Gallery, 1935. Exhibition brochure.

² Isamu Noguchi, “Shapes of Light.” New York: Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc, 1968. Exhibition brochure.

Special thanks to FUTURA2000 and ICNCLST for making the exhibition possible.



3X
1963/2020



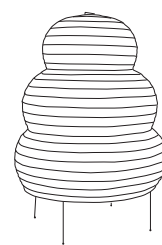
55D
1963/2020



1A
1952/2020



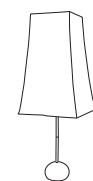
10A
1952/2020



25N
1971/2020

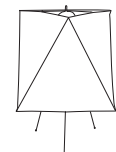


30P
1962/2020

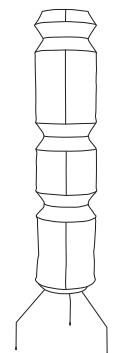


BB2-V1
1977/2020

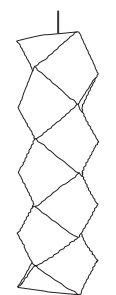
Isamu Noguchi
FUTURA2000
Hand-painted Akari
Paper, bamboo,
metal, and aerosol
Dimensions variable



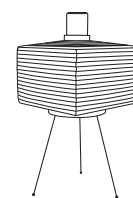
YA2
1980/2020



UF4-L6
1986/2020



35N
1969/2020



7A
1952/2020

ON WALLS

FUTURA2000
Downfall, 2014
Aerosol on canvas
55 x 55 in.
Collection of the artist

FUTURA2000
El Diablo, 1985
Spray paint on canvas
74 3/4 x 74 3/4 in.
Collection of KAWS