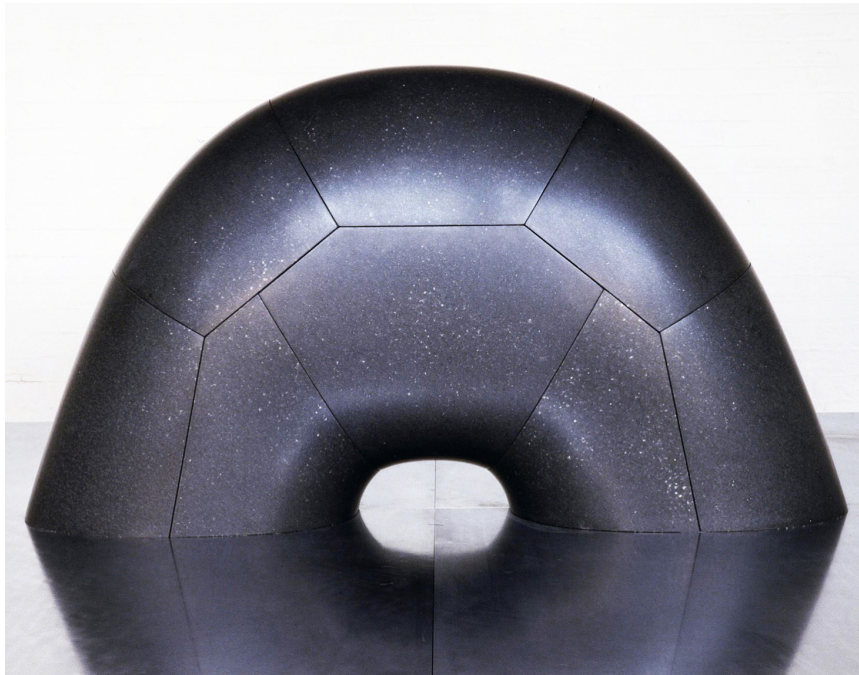


Noguchi Museum Presents
Noguchi's Memorials to the Atomic Dead

Two installations survey Isamu Noguchi's proposals for memorializing the use of atomic weapons against humanity in Hiroshima and beyond

June 2 – August 15, 2021



Isamu Noguchi, *Memorial to the Dead, Hiroshima*, c. 1982. Brazilian granite, stainless steel, wood.
©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum / Artists Rights Society

New York, NY (May 27, 2021) – The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum presents a return of Isamu Noguchi's unrealized model for a cenotaph memorial to the atomic dead, originally proposed in 1952 for Hiroshima Peace Park and re-envisioned in the 1980s, to its original installation in Area 6 of the Museum. Companion displays from the collection and archives survey Noguchi's proposals and sculptures exploring consequences of the use of atomic weapons against humanity in Hiroshima and beyond. These include *Sculpture to Be Seen From Mars* (1947, unrealized); *Bell Tower for Hiroshima* (1950, unrealized); and railings for the bridges connecting Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park to the rest of the city: *Tsukuru (To Build)* and *Yuku (To Depart)* (1952). noguchi.org/memorials

This exhibition coincides with and is a complement to *Christian Boltanski, Animitas*, which is on view May 5–September 5, 2021; and *Noguchi: Useless Architecture*, on view May 19, 2021–May 8, 2022.



Isamu Noguchi, "A Project: Hiroshima Memorial to the Dead." *Arts & Architecture* 70, no. 4 (April 1953), 16–17.
The Noguchi Museum Archives, BM_JOU_0257_1953. ©INFGM / ARS

EXHIBITION

The exhibition primarily occupies two galleries on the first floor of the Museum, with an additional three works added to the permanent installation in Area 3.

Area 6 is the space that Isamu Noguchi, in his original 1985 installation of the Museum, dedicated to presenting his unrealized 1952 concept for a cenotaph for the city of Hiroshima. This is represented by a later model in granite, *Memorial to the Dead, Hiroshima* (c. 1982). Another granite sculpture, *Vertical View*, a "landscape with morphological implications...rising as it were into another status as a free-standing sculpture" (Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987, 94) also occupies this gallery.

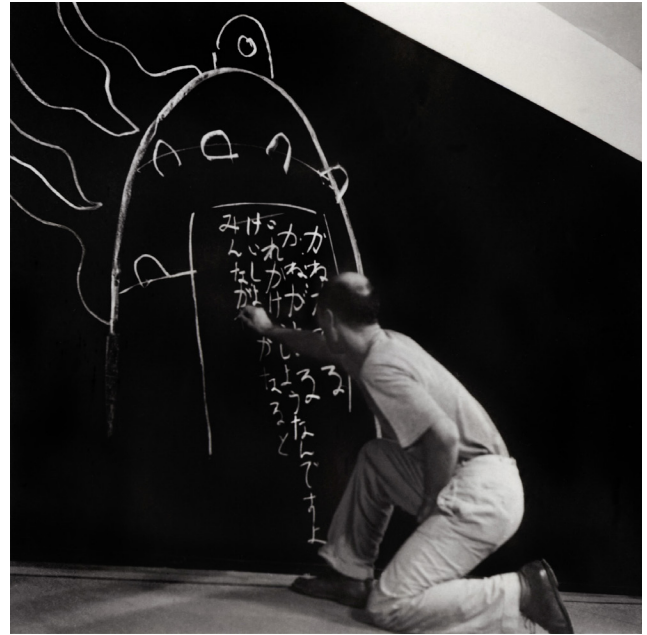
In Area 5, a companion display from the Museum collection and archives provides a broader conceptual survey of Noguchi's proposals for memorializing the use of atomic weapons against humanity in Hiroshima and beyond between 1945 and 1984.

In 1947, two years after U.S. bombs destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a deeply disillusioned Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) made a model in sand for a proposed cenotaph to humanity in the form of an abstract human face formed from earth and so large that it would be visible from Mars (*Sculpture to Be Seen From Mars*, 1947, unrealized). "A requiem," he called it, "for all of us who live with the atom bomb" (Isamu Noguchi, *The Sculpture of Spaces*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980, 18).

Three years later, in 1950, on his first trip to Japan in almost two decades, Noguchi was given the opportunity to hold an exhibition at Mitsukoshi Department Store's flagship location in the Nihombashi neighborhood of Tokyo. The exhibition he produced in just a few weeks of feverish work can be read as a comprehensive response to the first use of atomic weapons against humanity. The exhibition featured a garden of what might be viewed as deformed and mutant ceramics; maimed bodies, melted objects (*Love of Two Boards*), ghosts, and skeletons (*Cage Vase*);



Isamu Noguchi, Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tokyo, August 18–August 27, 1950. Photo: Isamu Noguchi. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 08819.6. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi writing his father's poem "Kane ga naru" at his exhibition at Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tokyo, August 1950. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03792. ©INFGM / ARS

a wall relief suggesting the remains of a lost civilization; and a sculpture entitled *Mu* ("Nothingness," 1950) intended for a garden designed to memorialize his recently deceased father Yonejiro Noguchi (1875–1947) at Keio University, Tokyo. On a blackboard on one wall of the gallery, Noguchi drew a fallen temple bell in flames and inscribed it with lines from a poem by his father, "Kane ga naru" ("The Bell Rings"):

*The bell rings
The bell rings
This is a warning!
When the warning rings,
Everyone is sleeping.
You too are sleeping.*

Yonejiro Noguchi's poem recalls both Edgar Allan Poe's "The Bells"—upon which Isamu Noguchi had recently based a dance with the choreographer Ruth Page—as well as its source, John Donne's "For Whom the Bell Tolls."

The other focal point of these meditations on death and destruction were two variations of a proposal for a monumental *Bell Tower for Hiroshima* (1950): one represented in a photograph and the other by a model. The model was made of dowels and small ceramic bells that look like streaking bombs suspended in the skeletal superstructure of a bomb-blasted building. The proposal was never realized, but it was seen. In the summer of 1951, Kenzo Tange (1913–2005), the architect responsible for



Isamu Noguchi, *Bell Tower for Hiroshima*, 1950 (partially reconstructed 1986). Terra-cotta, wood. ©INFGM / ARS

the master plan for Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, invited Noguchi to visit Hiroshima, “to which,” as Noguchi explained he was “drawn, as many Americans are, by a sense of guilt” (Isamu Noguchi, *Isamu Noguchi: A Sculptor’s World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1968; Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2004, 32). “I wished,” he went on, “somehow to add my own gesture of expiation.” On the basis of that visit, Tange recommended Noguchi to the Mayor of Hiroshima, Shinzo Hamai (1905–1968) to design handrails for two of the bridges connecting the island on which the Park sits to the rest of the city.

The bridges were approved and constructed quickly—due in large part to the fact that the access they provided were essential to the overall reconstruction effort. (Noguchi’s handrails were delayed somewhat by needing to be redesigned higher for safety.) The road of which the bridges were a part—a major new east-west artery authorized by the 1949 law laying out the reconstruction of the city—was named Peace Boulevard by popular vote, as were Peace Bridge and West Peace Bridge. Noguchi entitled the railings for the east bridge *Ikiru (To Live)* and the west bridge *Shinu (To Die)*. They were renamed *Tsukuru (To Build)* and *Yuku (To Depart)* partway through construction in order to disambiguate them from a new movie by Akira Kurosawa (*Ikiru*, 1952).

The handrails consist of stacked tubes that run the full length of each bridge, and then swoop around and down at the ends to terminate in the ground. Each end also features a finial that Noguchi shaped himself. The ends of the eastern bridge, *To Live/To Build*, are hemispheres that resemble the heads of heliotropic flowers turned to the sun. These Noguchi characterized as “round like a globe, or sun” (Katherine Kuh, “An Interview with Isamu Noguchi,” *Horizon* 11, no. 4, March 1960: 111). At the ends of the western bridge, *To Die/To Depart*, those same blossoms have died and dropped, or the sun has set, and all that’s left is a desolate stalk. Of these Noguchi said that “the one that looks like a skeletal boat derives from the idea of the Egyptian boats for the dead—for departing as we all must.”

In November 1951, presumably pleased with Noguchi’s fast, subtle work on the handrail designs, Tange and Hamai asked Noguchi to take on an additional task: the complex program for the design of the Park’s centerpiece, a cenotaph to the dead. (See Isamu Noguchi, “Isamu Noguchi, A Project: Hiroshima Memorial to the Dead,” *Arts & Architecture* 70, no. 4, April 1953, 16; for his account of the program and project.) Seeing the opportunity to use his extraordinary position as a human bridge between Japan and the United States, Noguchi threw himself into the project. In short order he had put together a concept for a ceremonial platform surmounted by a thick granite arch, the legs of which would extend underground, like part of an integrated circuit, into a chamber holding the cenotaph itself.



Isamu Noguchi, *Tsukuru (To Build)*, east bridge, Hiroshima, 1950s. Photo: Isamu Noguchi. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 08862.1. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Memorial to the Dead, Hiroshima* (unrealized model; detail of underground chamber), 1952.
The Noguchi Museum Archives, 08842.5. ©INFGM / ARS

A cave beneath the earth (to which we all return). It was to be the place of solace to the bereaved—Suggestive still further of the womb of generations still unborn who would in time replace the dead. Above ground was to be the symbol for ail to see and remember. (Isamu Noguchi, “A Project: Hiroshima Memorial to the Dead”)

The arch was conceived to evoke traditional Japanese funerary sculpture, but it also resembled the hemispherical shape of an atomic fireball in its first milliseconds. The plan was quickly rejected by the Hiroshima city council. Many reasons were given, and Noguchi had his own theories, but it is easy to see why it would not have been politic just six and a half years after the city was destroyed by an American bomb to hand the honor of designing a memorial to the dead to an American citizen, no matter how well-known or respected in Japan.

In place of Noguchi's rejected scheme an arch similar in conception to his but designed by Tange in the form of a concrete shell on a concrete platform without the underground component was erected. That shell, like many bare concrete structures, aged poorly over the years, and periodically friends of Noguchi's in Japan would ask him about revisiting his original idea to replace the Tange arch. The political will and funds never materialized, but in 1982 Noguchi did draw up plans for a replacement arch quite similar to the one in his original proposal.

About the same time Noguchi was approached about placing a memorial on a site in Washington, DC. Noguchi made a model for the project, reconceived as a *Memorial to the Atomic Dead*, which then became part of the original installation of his Museum in Area 6. Among the many possibilities Noguchi seriously explored at the time was to use *Memorial to the Atomic Dead* as part of a memorial to J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904–1967), director of Los Alamos Laboratory during the Manhattan Project and one of the creators of the atomic bomb. Oppenheimer's subsequent ambivalence about vesting humanity with such power, and

the political problems that created for him, made him a martyr to the anti-nuclear movement. In a 1965 television interview, Oppenheimer remembered the Manhattan Project team's reaction to the first atomic bomb test, code-named "Trinity":

We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried. Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita; Vishnu is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty and, to impress him, takes on his multi-armed form and says, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." I suppose we all thought that, one way or another. (J. Robert Oppenheimer on the Trinity test, 1965, Atomic Archive. Retrieved May 23, 2008.)



Isamu Noguchi, *Trinity*, 1945 (cast 1974). Bronze.
©INFGM / ARS

Noguchi's sculptures *Trinity* (1945), in Area 3, a planar, three-dimensional impression of matter atomizing, and *Vishnu* (c. 1960), in Area 3, which resembles the ball of plutonium-239 at the heart of "the gadget" (the Trinity test bomb design), attest to the depth of his concern for the Pandora's Box of atomic science. For Noguchi, that bomb, and the ever more terrifying proliferation of bombs that followed, became the ultimate symbol of his deepest fear: that we were forsaking our fundamental bond with nature.

Memorial to the Atomic Dead could still be realized. The bell still tolls. As Noguchi wrote to Peter Putnam, the principal promoter of the Washington, DC, plan, "All in all the times seem right for a good look at our position here in this world." (Isamu Noguchi, Letter to Peter Putnam, March 17, 1982, The Noguchi Museum Archives, MS_PROJ_067_006)

RELATED EXHIBITION

Christian Boltanski, Animitas

May 5–September 5, 2021

Christian Boltanski's *Animitas*, a sound work consisting of 180 small bronze bells on steel stems, fills the Noguchi Museum's garden with a "music of lost souls." Boltanski's twelve-hour video *Animitas, La Forêt des Murmures* (2016), which documents a permanent version of the work on the island of Teshima in Japan, is also on view.

LOCATION

The Noguchi Museum
9-01 33rd Road (at Vernon Boulevard)
Long Island City, NY 11106

Open Weds–Sun, 11 am–6 pm,
by advance reservation: noguchi.org/visit

Media Visits and all Press Inquiries:

Press Office: communications@noguchi.org

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SUPPORT

Noguchi's Memorials to the Atomic Dead is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

ABOUT ISAMU NOGUCHI

One of the most significant artists of the twentieth century, Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) was a future-focused idealist whose timeless work blended the ancient and modern. Noguchi began his career as a sculptor, yet his resolute redefinition of the art form led to a multidisciplinary practice spanning gardens, playgrounds, public projects, furniture, lighting, and set design. He believed strongly in the social role of art and dedicated much of his life to creating public works such as parks, plazas, and fountains. Born in Los Angeles to a white American mother and a Japanese father, Noguchi felt a lifelong sense of never really belonging anywhere, and channeled this into his artistic vision and philosophy, aspiring to be a citizen of the world. In 1985, Noguchi opened the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, now known as The Noguchi Museum, in Long Island City, New York. In accordance with his wishes, his studio in Mure, Japan, became the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum Japan in 1999. Noguchi's first retrospective in the United States was in 1968, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. In 1986, he represented the United States at the Venice Biennale. Noguchi received the Edward MacDowell Medal for Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to the Arts in 1982; the Kyoto Prize in Arts in 1986; the National Medal of Arts in 1987; and the Order of the Sacred Treasure from the Japanese government in 1988. He died in New York City in 1988. To learn more about Isamu Noguchi, visit noguchi.org/biography.

ABOUT THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM

Founded in 1985 by category-defying artist Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988), The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum (now known as The Noguchi Museum) in Queens, New York, was the first museum in the United States to be established, designed, and installed by a living artist to show their own work. Itself widely viewed as among the artist's greatest achievements and holding the world's largest collection of his works and his complete archives, the Museum features open air and indoor galleries in a repurposed 1920s industrial building and a serene outdoor sculpture garden. Since its founding, it has served as an international hub for Noguchi research and appreciation. noguchi.org | [@noguchimuseum](https://www.instagram.com/noguchimuseum)

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Press Images



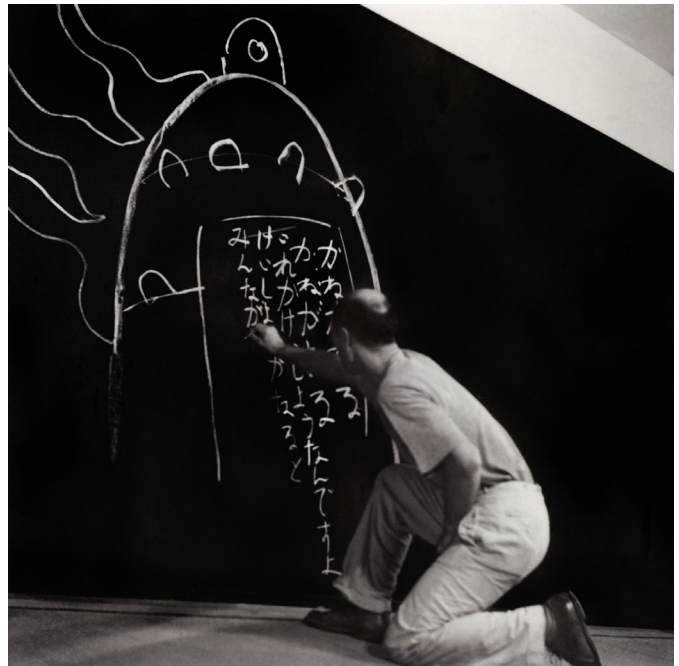
Isamu Noguchi, *Memorial to the Dead, Hiroshima*, c. 1982.
Brazilian granite, stainless steel, wood. ©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation
and Garden Museum / Artists Rights Society



Isamu Noguchi, "A Project: Hiroshima Memorial to the Dead."
Arts & Architecture 70, no. 4 (April 1953), 16–17.
The Noguchi Museum Archives, BM_JOU_0257_1953. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tokyo,
August 18–August 27, 1950. Photo: Isamu Noguchi.
The Noguchi Museum Archives, 08819.6. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi writing his father's poem "Kane ga naru" at his exhibition
at Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tokyo, August 1950.
The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03792. ©INFGM / ARS

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Isamu Noguchi, *Bell Tower for Hiroshima*, 1950 (partially reconstructed 1986). Terra-cotta, wood. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Tsukuru (To Build)*, east bridge, Hiroshima, 1950s. Photo: Isamu Noguchi. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 08862.1. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Memorial to the Dead, Hiroshima* (unrealized model; detail of underground chamber), 1952. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 08842.5. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Vishnu*, c. 1960
Mikage granite. Photo: Kevin Noble.
©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Atomic Haystack*, c. 1982–83 (fabricated 2019). Hot-dipped galvanized steel. Photo: Genevieve Hanson. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Trinity*, 1945 (cast 1974). Bronze. Photo: Kevin Noble. ©INFGM / ARS

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Isamu Noguchi, *Sculpture to Be Seen From Mars* (unrealized model), 1947. Photo: Soichi Sunami. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 01646. ©INFGM / ARS



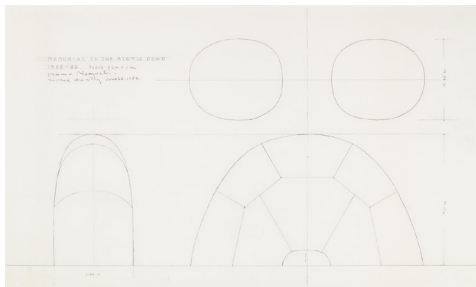
Isamu Noguchi in the ruins of Hiroshima, 1951. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 08846.1. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Okame (Atomic Head; Hiroshima Mask)*, 1954. Iron. Photo: Kevin Noble. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Love of Two Boards*, 1950. Seto stoneware. Photo: Kevin Noble. ©INFGM / ARS



Isamu Noguchi, *Memorial to the Atomic Dead*, 1952/1982 (Revised drawing June 26, 1982). Graphite on tracing paper. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 9949. ©INFGM / ARS