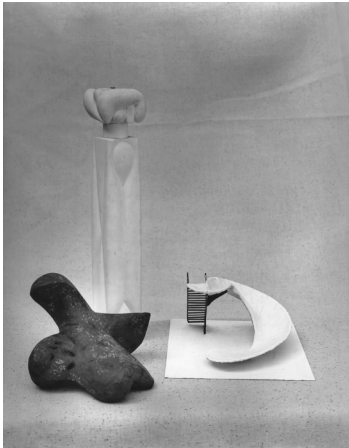


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*Capital, Maquette
for a Slide, and
an unknown piece,
c. 1939.*
The Noguchi Museum
Archives, 01534



*Riverside Playground,
Amphitheater Study,
1961-62*
Plasticine, plywood



*Riverside Playground,
1965*
Plaster

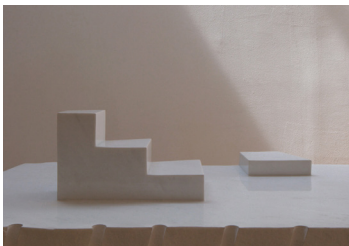
RUINS (AREA 12)



Capital, 1939
Georgia marble
The Museum of
Modern Art, New York;
gift of Miss Jeanne
Reynal, 561.1941



Capital #2, 1942
Marble
Private Collection



Ziggurat, c. 1968
Seravezza marble



*Figure Portion of
Composition for Arrivals
Building, Idlewild Airport,
1958 (later broken)*
Greek marble



Becoming, 1966-67
Marble

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RUINS (AREA 12)



Unfinished work,
n.d.
Marble



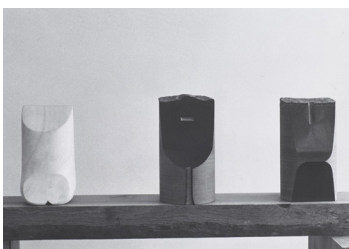
Akari UF4-31N,
1984
Paper, bamboo, metal,
electrical components



Sentry, 1958
Anodized aluminum
Private collection



Wrapped Figure,
1962
Botticino marble



Small Torso, 1958–62
Greek Marble

Core Piece #1, 1974
Basalt

Core Piece #2, 1974
Basalt



Unfinished work,
n.d.
Marble



Unfinished fragment,
n.d.
Marble



Unfinished work,
n.d.
Marble

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RUINS (AREA 12)



Unfinished work,
n.d.
Marble



Asleep in a Rock,
c. 1966
Marble



Unfinished work,
n.d.
Marble

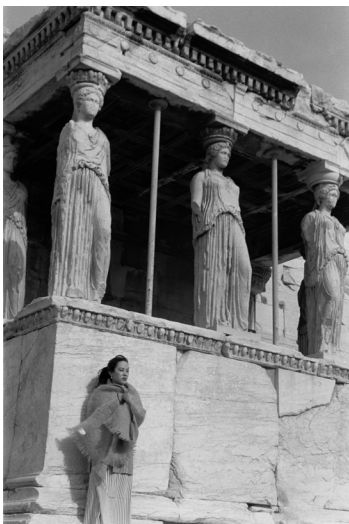


Temple of Apollo at
Delphi, Greece, c. 1949.
Photo: Isamu Noguchi.
The Noguchi Archives,
04391



Unfinished work,
n.d.
Marble

Four unfinished works,
n.d.
Granite

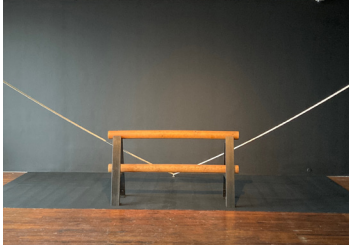


Yoshiko (Shirley)
Yamaguchi in front of the
Erechtheion, Athens,
Greece, 1953.
Photo: Isamu Noguchi.
The Noguchi Archives,
08272.2

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THEATER SPACE (AREA 12)



Set design for Martha Graham's *Frontier*, 1935 (fabricated 2021)
Wood, rope



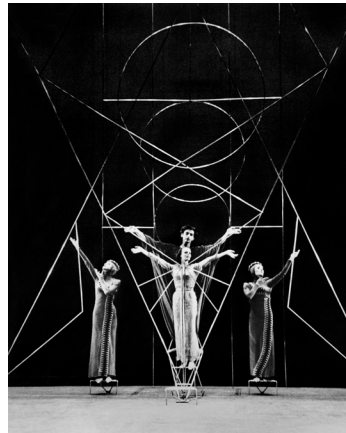
Martha Graham in *Frontier*, set by Isamu Noguchi, 1935.
Photo: Barbara Morgan.
The Noguchi Archives, 01508



Set design for Martha Graham's *Embattled Garden*, 1958
Paint, canvas, wood, rattan rods



Martha Graham, *Embattled Garden*, set by Isamu Noguchi, 1958.
Photo: Martha Swope.
The Noguchi Archives, 01846



Martha Graham, *Seraphic Dialogue*, set by Isamu Noguchi, 1955.
Photo: Martha Swope.
The Noguchi Archives, 06757

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ARCHITECTURAL METAPHORS (AREA 11)



Shaft & Root, 1974–75
Hot-dipped
galvanized steel
Gift of Gemini G.E.L.,
2019



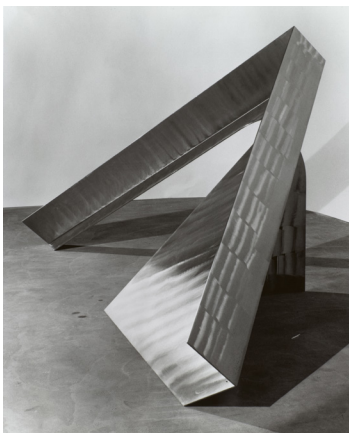
Personage I, 1984
Andesite



Emergent, 1971
Aji granite



Round Square Space,
1970
Indian granite



Roof Frame, 1974–75
Stainless steel



Cubic Pyramid, 1969
Granite



Cross Beam, 1970
Swedish granite



Costume for a Stone,
1982
Granite, hot-dipped
galvanized steel

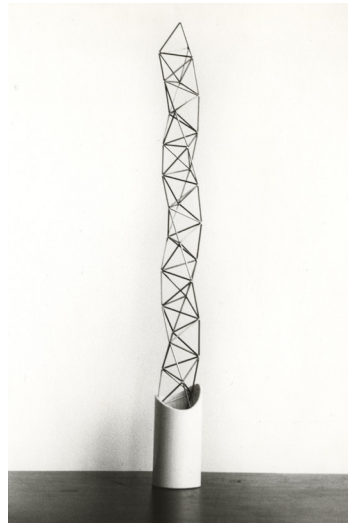
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ARCHITECTURAL METAPHORS (AREA 11)



Horizon Stone, 1982
Granite, steel



Model for Challenger Memorial, 1985–87
Steel rods, plastic, masking tape



The Opening, 1970
French rose marble, Italian white marble



Reborn Stone, 1982
Granite, COR-TEN steel



Untitled, 1982
Aji granite, hot-dipped galvanized steel



On the Perch, 1978
Basalt, stainless steel



Rigid Figure, c. 1963
Sienese marble



Triple Nest, 1979
Aji granite

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ARCHITECTURAL METAPHORS (AREA 11)



Black Cores Recumbent,
1978
Swedish granite



The Angle, 1969
Marble



Sculpture A, 1984
Hot-dipped galvanized
steel

TERRACES AND PANORAMA (AREA 11)



After Isamu Noguchi
Terracing based on
Riverside Playground
model, c. 1961
(fabricated 2021)
MDF



*Riverside Playground:
Play Terrace Study*,
c. 1961 (cast 1963)
Bronze



Pylon Maquette,
*Model for Pylon for
Philip A. Hart Plaza*,
Detroit, c. 1972
Aluminum

Untitled (waterfall study),
c. 1962
Granite

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TERRACES AND PANORAMA (AREA 11)



Folding In & Out,
1982–83
Hot-dipped
galvanized steel



Model for Slide Mantra,
1966
Plaster



Model for Slide Mantra,
1966
Plaster



*Chase Manhattan Bank
Plaza: Model element,*
c. 1961–64
Bronze, patina



Model for The Bow,
c. 1970–1973
Plaster

Various maquettes for
sculpture, 1950–70s
Plaster



Castle, 1967
Iron



*Model for Expo '70
Fountains, 1970*
Plaster

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POSTMODERN AKARI (AREA 13)



Akari UF5-32N,
c. 1983
Paper, bamboo
and metal



Akari 25N, c. 1968
Paper, bamboo
and metal



Akari YP1, c. 1964
Paper, bamboo
and metal



Akari 24N, c. 1968
Paper, bamboo
and metal



Akari 45X, c. 1968
Paper, bamboo
and metal



Akari 2N, c. 1968
Paper, bamboo
and metal



Akari 5X, c. 1964
Paper, bamboo
and metal



Akari 30A, c. 1954
Paper, bamboo
and metal

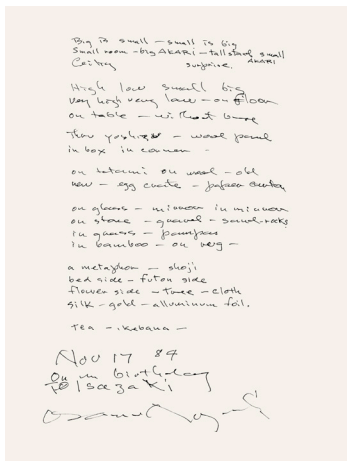
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POSTMODERN AKARI (AREA 13)



Untitled (Tsukubai),
c. 1960
Granite



Birthday poem by
Isamu Noguchi to
Arata Isozaki,
November 17 1984.
The Noguchi Museum
Archives,
MS_AKA_014_004

Unfinished fragment,
n.d.
Marble

ENDS (AREA 8)



End Pieces, 1974
Swedish granite



Secret, 1982-83
Hot-dipped
galvanized steel

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Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) articulated his vision for sculpture in a constellation of overlapping metaphors. One summary is his now well-known statement: “If sculpture is the rock, it is also the space between the rocks and between the rock and a man, and the communication and contemplation between.”¹ The great epiphany of Noguchi’s career was the realization that he could directly address the core of what it means to be human on Earth by exploring this Gordian Knot of relationships. Which he then expanded to include every empirical reality within the universe of our awareness. What he hoped to achieve was nothing less than a reset of our relationship with nature, which he believed had gotten out of scale, the atomic bomb being the most egregious, but not the only example of how. One of the most complicated issues he had to contend with—besides figuring out how to evoke a philosophy of environmental being in an object—was establishing a working relationship with architecture, the lead discipline in managing the spaces of civilization.

Noguchi: Useless Architecture was directly inspired by Noguchi’s characterization of a campus of architectural-scale astronomical devices created by the eighteenth-century Maharaja Jai Singh II (1688–1743) in Jaipur, India as “useless architecture or useful sculpture.”² He meant that as a compliment, which we know because he goes on to praise the Jantar Mantars (as they are known), for being, whether intentionally or not, “an expression of wanting to be one with the universe.” He had attempted just such an aspirational architectural effect with *Frontier* (1935), his first set for Martha Graham (1894–1991). In this prototypical example of what Noguchi would come to mean by sculpture, a single length of rope evokes the entire history of linear perspective to create a spatial metaphor for infinity with the elegant simplicity and yearning of the imperfectly rendered architecture in Giotto’s *Arena Chapel* (1305–06). Even so, Noguchi was not advocating the creation of literally useless architecture. Fascinated by structures that had been rendered useless by time and circumstance, or which had been designed without an architectural purpose, from

abandoned spaces and ruins to actual follies, he simply fell in love with the potential of stairways to nowhere, unenterable rooms, and windows onto nothing.

This exhibition surveys a range of the structural tropes and spatial metaphors Noguchi harvested from architecture—as he also did from nature—to lend a broad-based universality to his efforts to shape the built environment. “Beyond architecture, the rational function and empty space,” he went on in that passage about the nexus between rock(s), space, and us, “are those energy concentrations, irrational but meaningful, which constitutes the aesthetic of sculpture.” The phrase “useless architecture or useful sculpture” describes the ambiguous target zone Noguchi identified—which much of his work would come to occupy—as most likely to produce those “irrational but meaningful” “energy concentrations.” What he discovered as he assayed examples of world architecture was that making objects with architecture in their DNA was an effective way to imply usefulness without having to achieve it. A column, for example, without architectural connotations doesn’t have the same resonance as one that evokes the building blocks of civilization. A good example of a borrowed trope of this kind are the steel beams used to tie a building’s superstructure to its foundation, which is a form of rooting. Noguchi viewed stone as a connective tissue. His monoliths are columns, of course, but they are also metaphorical piers reaching for bedrock. He explored this metaphor from an organic perspective as well in pieces such as the galvanized steel *Shaft & Root* (1982–83). Essentially an I-beam that has produced a root to more fully extend itself into the Earth, much as a tree would do, it is an inorganic excerpt from architecture reverse cyborged into something living. Another example are the simple kinds of stairs and terraces he designed into many of his play and public spaces. They imply not only the architecture of platforms and pyramids all over the world, but also the most basic forms of earth shaping, such as the agricultural terracing to be found at sites such as Machu Picchu.

¹ Isamu Noguchi, “From an Interview with Isamu Noguchi,” *The League Quarterly*, 20, No. 3 (1949), 8. Noguchi’s photographs of the Jantar Mantar complexes were published in Alexey Brodovitch’s *Portfolio: A Magazine for the Graphic Arts* (1951), *Perspecta 6: The Yale Architectural Journal* (1960) and on the cover of *Arts & Architecture* (March, 1965).

² Isamu Noguchi, “Astronomical City,” *Portfolio: A Magazine for the Graphic Arts*, 1, no. 3, 115. This campus is one of five Singh built, two of which Noguchi visited. They were conceived to be more accurate than tabletop devices, but as soon as it was discovered that they were not, they became effectively useless.

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Noguchi's relationship with architects and architecture was contentious but phenomenally productive. As he points out in his 1968 essay "The Sculptor and the Architect," this was rare among his contemporaries, most of whom he recalls despising architects and architecture's success at monopolizing the management of public space.³ But by tacitly accepting this state of affairs (and the inherent power imbalance) and by focusing on architecture's leftover fringes (e.g. playground and set design), rounding error budget lines (e.g. landscaping and interiors), and material scraps (e.g. beams, frames, structural members), he was able to co-opt its core function, the creation of human-feeling space, in a way that he would not have been able to do had he had to assume architecture's responsibilities.

I always prefer gardens, because I can work there without pressure from anyone. You know how selfishly architects claim the most important role in a building project for themselves. They see our contribution as secondary and they limit our freedom. Which is why landscaping a garden is a solution of sorts.⁴

What Noguchi meant by sculpture as a kind of useless architecture was not the equivalent of architecture without a function but architecture shaping the use of space without a specific, narrowly defined job. Why assume the difficult, but often rote, task of designing cookiecutter offices, services, and circulation, "the mechanics of shelter and so forth,"⁵ as he says, if instead you can create environments that make everyone want to be outside?

Dakin Hart
Senior Curator

³ Isamu Noguchi, "The Sculptor and the Architect," *Studio International* 176.902 (July/August 1968), 18.

⁴ Catherine Frantzeskakis, "The American-Japanese sculptor Isamu Noguchi talks about Greece," *Zygos* no. 17 (March 1957), 20.

⁵ "The Sculptor and the Architect," 20.