

NOGUCHI *Subscapes*

All works by Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988)
Collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden
Museum, New York, unless otherwise noted.

The Noguchi Museum, New York
June 15, 2022 – May 7, 2023
noguchi.org/subscapes

AREA 13 Introducing the Subscape

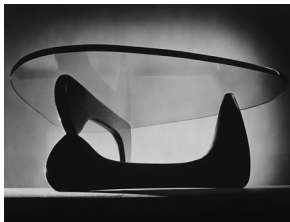
“Subscapes” is a rubric for exploring Isamu Noguchi’s interest in things below the grade of our conscious awareness. His preoccupation with reorienting our perspective towards the unseen is exemplified by his iconic glass-topped coffee table, which is a window onto the largely unexplored domestic universe below the level of chair seats and tabletops. Noguchi developed his own point of view in what he called “the space between,” as well as around palpable yet invisible empirical realities such as gravity and the psychology of space.



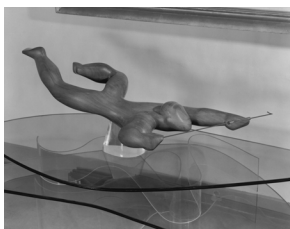
Coffee Table (IN-50)
for Herman Miller, 1944
(manufactured 1947–73,
1984–present).
Wood, glass
♾803



Photograph of Rocky
Stensrud, Jr., playing under
Coffee Table (IN-50), *LIFE*,
October 18, 1948. Photo
© Joseph Scherschel / The
LIFE Picture Collection /
Shutterstock



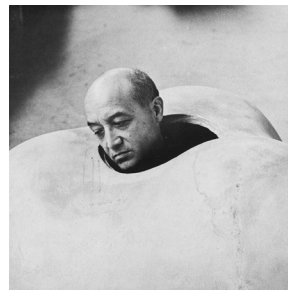
Photograph of Coffee Table
(IN-50). Photo: Ezra Stoller.
The Noguchi Museum
Archives, 02232



Photograph of
Spearfisherman, c. 1939–40.
Milo wood, metal, cast resin,
glass, lucite. Hawaii State
Foundation on Culture and
the Arts. Photo: The Noguchi
Museum Archives, 151601
♾160



Origin, 1967–68.
Aluminum
♾613



Isamu Noguchi looking
through *Origin* (1967–68),
Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc.
exhibition brochure, c. April 1967.
Photo: Niki Ekstrom. The
Noguchi Museum Archives,
MS_EXH_081_002



Photograph of Noguchi’s
Boy Looking Through Legs,
1933. Pear wood, blue
beads. Photo: Kevin Noble.
The Noguchi Museum
Archives, 147079
♾112

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AREA 12 Set for *Orpheus* (1948)

In sets for Martha Graham ballets such as *Cave of the Heart* and *Errand into the Maze*, Noguchi was often asked to create spatial equivalents to the inner recesses of the heart, mind, and spirit: full of things buried, hidden, and repressed. In making a set for George Balanchine and Igor Stravinsky’s *Orpheus*—which follows the Greek hero who fails to recover his wife Eurydice from Hades—Noguchi had the opportunity to animate a journey into a literal underworld. Noguchi was attracted to Orpheus’ story in part because of the universality of myths (which exist in many cultures) in which Earth’s surface and interior, representing the known and unknowable, allow for explorations of the relationships between life and death.



Listen to Noguchi
interviewed about *Orpheus*

“Interview with Isamu Noguchi,
1979,” New York Public Library
Digital Collections



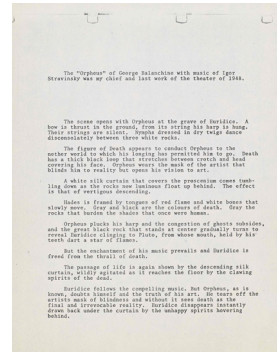
Set for *Orpheus*, choreographed
by George Balanchine with
music by Igor Stravinsky, 1947
(reworked 1972). Mixed media.
Collections of New York City
Ballet and The Isamu Noguchi
Foundation and Garden Museum



Lyre for Orpheus, 1948.
Resin, balsawood, wood,
paint. New York City Ballet
Archives, Ballet Society
Collection P277



Promotional still from George
Balanchine’s production of
Christoph Willibald Gluck’s opera
Orfeo ed Euridice for the
Metropolitan Opera with sets and
costumes by Pavel Tchelitchew,
1936 (printed 1985). Photo:
George Platt Lynes. Photogravure.
The Noguchi Museum Archives



“Notes on Orpheus,” n.d.
The Noguchi Museum
Archives, MS_BOL_016_003



Read on noguchi.org



Lyre for Orpheus, 1948
(cast 1985). Bronze



Performance still from *Orpheus*
with sets and costumes
by Isamu Noguchi, 1948. The
Noguchi Museum Archives,
06666



Promotional still from George
Balanchine’s *Orpheus* with
sets and costumes by Isamu
Noguchi, 1948 (printed 1985).
Photogravure. Photo: George
Platt Lynes. The Noguchi
Museum Archives



Promotional still from George
Balanchine’s *Orpheus* with
sets and costumes by Isamu
Noguchi, 1948 (printed 1985).
Photogravure. Photo: George
Platt Lynes. The Noguchi
Museum Archives



Robert Tracy, “Orpheus,”
*Spaces of the Mind: Isamu
Noguchi’s Dance Designs*
(New York: Proscenium
Publishers Inc., 2001).



Maquettes for *Orpheus*, 1948.
Photos: Rudolph Burckhardt.
The Noguchi Museum Archives,
12861, 12862, 12863, 12864,
12866



Mobile Guide
9000

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AREA 12 Unseen Structures

What does a mermaid's grave look like? is not a question to which most sculptors would address themselves. But Noguchi was interested in the nature of spaces we can't see but might imagine, from invertebrate civilizations (*Worm Pyramid*) to the root systems of large organisms (*Floor Frame*). As the literal tip of an overlooked iceberg, *Worm Pyramid* is typical of the zones into which Noguchi hoped to push our awareness—including sunken gardens and womb-like interiors. Such imaginings fueled his thinking about how to redefine and expand sculpture's proper domain.



Worm Pyramid, 1965.
Granite
♾581



The Seed, 1946.
Marble
♾247



The Mermaid's Grave,
1983. Basalt
♾1067



*Swimming Pool for
Josef von Sternberg*,
1935 (cast 1977).
Bronze
♾140



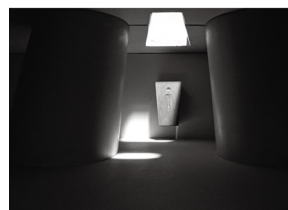
Seen and Unseen, 1962
(cast 1963). Bronze
♾528



Isamu Noguchi at
construction of the *Sunken
Garden for Chase Manhattan
Bank Plaza*, 1963. Photo:
Arthur Lavine. The Noguchi
Museum Archives, 03930



Floor Frame, 1962 (cast
1984). Bronze. Fabricated
by Fonderia D'Arte Tesconi,
Pietrasanta
♾519



Interior of the underground
repository of names in Noguchi's
unrealized model for *Memorial
to the Dead, Hiroshima*, 1952.
Photo: Isamu Noguchi. The
Noguchi Museum Archives,
08838.3

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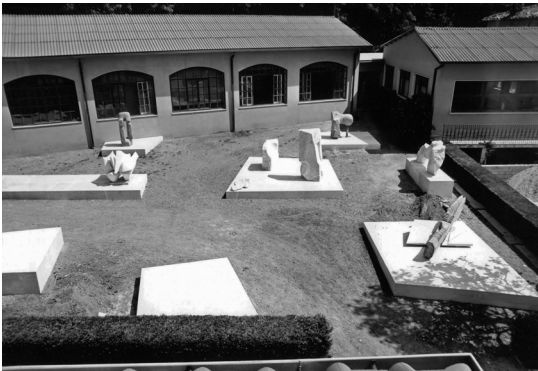
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AREA 11 A “Garden of Bases” with “Bases”

The way that a base changes the relationship between an object and the world was one of the variables that informed Noguchi’s expanded conception of sculpture. This is clear in his glass-topped coffee table, the collapsible frames and bases of his Akari lanterns, as well as in his sculptures that could be bases and ones in which the base is integral to the work. The arrangement of plinths here is inspired by a “garden” of nine irregular marble platforms Noguchi designed for the headquarters of Henraux (a stoneworking company in Querceta, Italy), on which his own and others’ sculptures were made and displayed.



“Garden of bases” designed by Isamu Noguchi at Henraux, Querceta, Italy, c. 1966. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03260



Untitled, 1943 (partially reconstructed 1995).
Wood ρ198



Life of a Cube #5, 1968.
Basalt ρ632



Base of *From Mud Mountain*, 1967. Pine
ρ616



This Place, 1968.
Granite ρ637



Fudo, 1966–67.
Granite, stainless steel
ρ593



Two Stones, 1982.
Granite, steel
ρ1003



Untitled, 1978.
Granite, aluminum
ρ905



Noguchi’s Kamakura studio in Japan, overlooking ceramic sculptures and a patio, 1952. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03232



Interior of Noguchi’s Kamakura studio in Japan, 1951–52. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03225



Various bases for Akari light sculptures, 1952–84



Zig-Zag Table, 1984.
Hot-dipped galvanized steel
ρ1050



Rocking Stool, 1954.
Originally manufactured by Knoll Associates, reissued by Vitra. Wood, chrome-plated steel
ρ814

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AREA 11 Architects of the Subscape

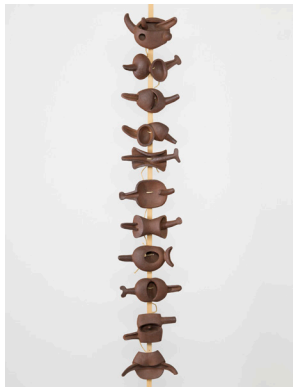
Noguchi’s nonconformist sensitivity to the world’s in-between places extended to an interest in creatures and forces outside the scope of most people’s daily awareness. These included the makers of parts of the world we generally don’t see: snakes, worms, centipedes, and even merpeople, as well as the invisible shapers of what we do see, such as tectonic shift, erosion, and gravity.



Spin-off #1 from Sunken Garden, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, 1961–64.
Naturally-shaped Uji River basalt ρ514



Fishbone, 1952. Seto stoneware, black iron glaze ρ342



Even the Centipede, 1952. Kasama stoneware, hemp. The Museum of Modern Art, New York; A. Conger Goodyear Fund, 1.1955.a-k ρ335



Isamu Noguchi at construction of *Sunken Garden, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, 1963.* Photo: Arthur Lavine. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03927



In Dream – Abacus, 1970. Bardillo marble, Portuguese rose Aurora marble ρ682



Erosion, 1969. Marble ρ667



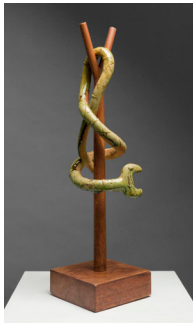
Serpent for Martha Graham's Cave of the Heart, 1946
Magnesite, fabric, wire mesh, plywood, wood ρ251



Untitled, 1982. Mikage granite, steel ρ1011



Little She, c. 1969 / 1988 (unfinished). Marble ρ660



Snake, 1952. Shigaraki stoneware, glaze. Private collection, courtesy Nicholas J. Sands & Company Fine Art, New York ρ375

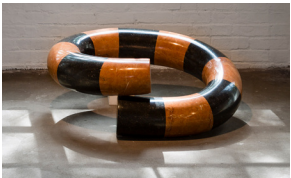


Untitled, 1952. Seto stoneware, white Seto glaze, wood, wire.

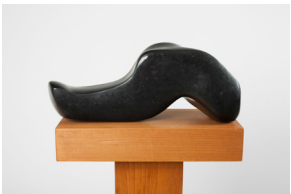


Untitled, 1952. Kasama stoneware, iron glaze, wood, metal, wire.

Collections of ceramic “beads” strung with metal elements and wired for display on wood ρ346



Downward Pulling #2, c. 1972. Spanish Alicante marble, Marquina marble ρ678



Slowly Slowly, 1966–67. Basalt ρ606