**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

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**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.

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

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

Aluminum


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

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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


Lyre for Orpheus, 1948. Resin, balsawood, wood, paint. New York City Ballet Archives, Ballet Society Collection 277


Maquettes for Orpheus, 1948. Photos: Rudolph Burckhardt. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 12861, 12862, 12863, 12864, 12865

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

Read on noguchi.org
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
p581

The Seed, 1946.
Marble
p247

p1067

Bronze
p140

Seen and Unseen, 1962 (cast 1963). Bronze
p528


p519

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
Various bases for Akari light sculptures, 1952–84

Fudo, 1966–67. Granite, stainless steel #593

Two Stones, 1982. Granite, steel #1003

Untitled, 1978. Granite, aluminum #905

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

Life of a Cube #5, 1968. Basalt #632

Base of From Mud Mountain, 1967. Pine #616

This Place, 1968. Granite #637

This Place, 1968. Granite #637

This Place, 1968. Granite #637

Various bases for Akari light sculptures, 1952–84

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

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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 #198

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

Life of a Cube #5, 1968. Basalt #632

Base of From Mud Mountain, 1967. Pine #616

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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  \#514


In Dream – Abacus, 1970. Bardillo marble, Portuguese rose Aurora marble  \#682

Serpent for Martha Graham’s Cave of the Heart, 1946 Magnesite, fabric, wire mesh, plywood, wood  \#221

Little She, c. 1969 / 1988 (unfinished). Marble  \#660


Fishbone, 1952. Seto stoneware, black iron glaze  \#342


Erosion, 1969. Marble  \#667

Untitled, 1982. Mikage granite, steel  \#1011


Downward Pulling #2, c. 1972. Spanish Alicante marble, Marquina marble  \#678


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