

**The Noguchi Museum Presents**  
***In Praise of Caves: Organic Architecture Projects from Mexico by***  
***Carlos Lazo, Mathias Goeritz, Juan O’Gorman, and Javier Senosiain***

October 19, 2022 – February 26, 2023

Media Preview:

Monday, October 17, 12–2:30 pm & 4:30–6 pm

Tuesday, October 18, 12–2:30 pm & 4:30–6 pm

Private Opening Reception (media welcome):

Tuesday, October 18, 6–8 pm

RSVP: [noguchi@andreyandmelissa.com](mailto:noguchi@andreyandmelissa.com)



Architect and painter Juan O’Gorman (1905–1982) and his wife, botanist Helen O’Gorman (Fowler), play chess in their cave home Casa O’Gorman in Pedregal, Mexico City, c. 1959. Photo: Eliot Elisofon / The LIFE Picture Collection / Shutterstock

New York (August 17, 2022) – The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum – founded in 1985 by category-defying artist Isamu Noguchi – presents *In Praise of Caves: Organic Architecture Projects from Mexico* by Carlos Lazo, Mathias Goeritz, Juan O’Gorman, and Javier Senosiain, an exhibition spanning multiple galleries on The Noguchi Museum’s first floor.

The exhibition combines a selection of projects by Carlos Lazo, Mathias Goeritz, Juan O’Gorman, and Javier Senosiain that explore the adaptation of natural structures to modern living, the practical and environmental benefits of moving underground, and how humanity might reconnect with the

essential happiness of living in concert with nature. Under the broad rubric of organic architecture, these projects and site-specific installations reflect a coherent alternative paradigm for approaching the relationship between the human-made and natural environments that was developed in the middle of the twentieth century. As the climate crisis accelerates, along with other terrifying signs that we have fundamentally and perhaps irreparably broken our relationship with nature, the visions of these artist-architects have never been more relevant.

Together with the exhibition *Noguchi Subscapes*, these projects will temporarily turn The Noguchi Museum into a subterranean environment as a metaphor for contemplating and perhaps reassessing our place in the world.



Javier Senosiain, *El Nido de Quetzalcóatl* (1998–2007).  
Model fabricated by Enrique Cabrera. © Javier Senosiain /  
Arquitectura Orgánica

## EXHIBITION

The title *In Praise of Caves* is inspired by a chapter of that name in Bernard Rudofsky's *The Prodigious Builders: Notes Towards a Natural History of Architecture* (1977), a follow-up to his *Architecture without Architects* (1964). There is nothing primitive or backwards about living in caves, Rudofsky argues, as he introduces modern readers to examples of ancient and contemporary cave dwelling all over the world. The main thrust of his essay is that “the only way out of the human rabbit warren is, quite simply, down the rabbit hole.”<sup>1</sup> We will, he points out, eventually have to move back underground, once we have filled and despoiled the surface of our Earth.

It begins in the Museum's open air pavilion that Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) designed for his totemic basalt sculptures. An exhibition copy of *El Serpiente de El Eco* (*The Serpent for El Eco*; 1953) by Mathias Goeritz (1915–1990), a nearly 30-foot-long, 16-foot-tall snake that Goeritz designed for his museum El Eco (1952–53) in downtown Mexico City, will be installed in Noguchi's indoor-outdoor rock garden. In Goeritz's work the snake represents a path through the Earth and an avatar to be followed into a more ecologically sound future. As Goeritz remarked of the Escuela de Altamira, a movement he participated in forming in Spain just before his move to Mexico, “The painters of the School of Paris were the latest of yesterday. We of the Escuela of Altamira, the new prehistorics, are attempting to be the first of tomorrow.”<sup>2</sup> The large serpent will be complemented by a nest of snakes and a selection of other cave life in an adjoining gallery. A third space, acting as a cave mouth, will feature celestially-oriented works.

In the center of the main gallery of the Museum's first floor, Javier Senosiain (b. 1948) will install a large mosaic-covered serpent. Senosiain, leader of the second generation of Mexican organic architects, is also an important scholar of bio-architecture and the principal champion of his predecessors' legacy. Also on view is a selection of models for realized and unrealized projects, including the first home he built for himself, *Casa Orgánica* (1984–85, *Organic House*), later expanded by the addition of a second level, *El Tiburón* (1990, *The Shark*); and *El Nido de Quetzalcóatl* (1998–2007, *The Nest of Quetzalcóatl*), his vast residential park in Mexico City.

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Rudofsky, *The Prodigious Builders* (New York: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1977): 45.

<sup>2</sup> Sebastia Gasch, “Mathias Goeritz y la Escuela de Altamira,” *Destino* (VIII, 616, 28 May 1949).

Another gallery is devoted to architect Carlos Lazo's (1914–1955) modern cave home *La Casa-Cueva de la Era Atómica* (1948) in Lomas de Chapultepec, Mexico City, presented through archival photographs and a new model fabricated by Javier Senosiain's firm Arquitectura Orgánica. The model will be accompanied by a display of images of Lazo's other efforts to take modern living back to the future in his Civilized Cave project, which was to have included 110 homes fashioned from natural caves in a canyon wall. Working as an architect and urban planner throughout Mexico, but in particular in Mexico City, an exploding metropolis in an uncertain time, Lazo recognized the need to adapt to the existing topography and take advantage of every natural resource.

Juan O'Gorman (1905–1982) is well known for his allegorical apocalyptic paintings that deal with humanity's troubled relationship with the Earth. A selection of these, focusing on exploitation of the environment, are included. A new model of the home O'Gorman made for his family, which was built around a lava cave in the Pedregal neighborhood of Mexico City between 1948–54, will be the main focus of this installation, along with plans for and images of the house. It is in *Casa O'Gorman*, which the artist-architect famously likened to living in a laboratory, he and his wife Helen (a superb amateur botanist and botanical illustrator) attempted to study subterranean dwelling first hand. [noguchi.org/in-praise-of-caves](http://noguchi.org/in-praise-of-caves)

#### COMPANION EXHIBITION

*Noguchi Subscapes* is a survey of Isamu Noguchi's particular interest in the unseen and hidden: invisible forces, subterranean structures and their makers, spatial metaphors for the unknown and the inner recesses of the self. This series of installations of around forty sculptures and designs, mostly drawn from the Museum's collection and incorporating photographs from the artist's archive, occupies nearly the entire second floor. Learn more: [noguchi.org/subscapes](http://noguchi.org/subscapes)

#### ORGANIZATION

*In Praise of Caves* is organized by Dakin Hart, Senior Curator of The Noguchi Museum, with exhibition consultant Ricardo Suárez Haro.

#### SUPPORT

Special thanks to Ricardo Suárez Haro, whose idea it was to make an exhibition about organic architecture with these artist-architects, and Javier Senosiain / Arquitectura Orgánica, who are principally responsible for making it possible to do so.

#### LOCATION

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

Open Wednesdays–Sundays, 11 am–6 pm  
Advance reservations recommended: [noguchi.org/visit](http://noguchi.org/visit)

## MEDIA CONTACT

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## ABOUT MATHIAS GOERITZ

Mathias Goeritz (b. 1915, Danzig, Germany; d. 1990, Mexico City, Mexico) was a German-born painter, sculptor, architect, teacher, and theorist. After emigrating to Mexico in 1949, Goeritz became a naturalized citizen of the country and an important figure in the postwar modern art scene there. Goeritz developed a principle of “emotional architecture,” advocating for the construction of expressive spaces designed to encourage collaboration, freedom, creativity, and empathy. Goeritz is most well known for his short-lived experimental museum, Museo Experimental El Eco (1953), his large-scale collaboration with architect Luis Barragan *Five Towers* (1957–58), and other monumental sculptures, which are considered precursors of minimalist primary structures.

## ABOUT CARLOS LAZO

Carlos Lazo (b. 1914, Distrito Federal, Mexico; d. 1955, Distrito Federal, Mexico) was an architect and public official who, from 1952–55, served as the head of the Secretariat of Communications and Public Work (SCOP), overseeing state infrastructure projects. He designed the Banco de México building in the Port of Veracruz, oversaw the construction of Ciudad Universitaria of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and created a series of habitable subterranean spaces, which he called “Civilized Caves,” including *La Casa-Cueva de la Era Atómica* (1948) in Lomas de Chapultepec, Mexico City.

## ABOUT JUAN O’GORMAN

Juan O’Gorman (b. 1905, Coyoacán, Mexico; d. 1982, Mexico City, Mexico) was an architect and artist, known for his early functionalist and later organic architecture and often surrealist paintings, murals, and mosaics that had nationalistic and anti-fascist themes. O’Gorman was committed to the integration of art and architecture, and, along with his friend and collaborator Diego Rivera, to creating a vernacular Mexican architecture. His most celebrated works include the Library of the National University in Mexico City (1951–53), which is adorned with a mosaic facade representing the history of Mexican culture, and his now destroyed personal home *Casa O’Gorman* (1948–54, demolished 1969) outside Mexico City that integrated the surrounding lava-formed landscape.



## ABOUT JAVIER SENOSIAIN

Javier Senosiain (b. 1948, Mexico City, Mexico) is a renowned architect and historian. He is the founder and principal of Arquitectura Orgánica (Organic Architecture) in Mexico City, teaches an Architectural Design and Theory Workshop at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and has authored numerous publications including *Bioarquitectura* (2002) and *Arquitectura Orgánica* (2008). A pioneer of organic architecture, he has devoted his research and practice to exploring the relationship between habitable space and nature. [arquitecturaorganica.com](http://arquitecturaorganica.com)

## ABOUT THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM

Founded in 1985 by category-defying artist Isamu Noguchi, 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, 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. In addition to managing the artist's archives and catalogue raisonné, the Museum exhibits a comprehensive selection of Noguchi's material culture, from sculpture, models, and drawings to his personal possessions. Provocative installations drawn from the permanent collection, together with diverse special exhibitions and collaborations with contemporary practitioners across disciplines, offer a multifaceted view of Noguchi's art and illuminate his enduring influence as an innovator.

[noguchi.org](http://noguchi.org) | [@noguchimuseum](https://www.instagram.com/noguchimuseum)

## ***Notes to Editors:***

For further reading on Mathias Goeritz's Museo Experimental El Eco and the contemporary organization of that name, consult [eleco.unam.mx](http://eleco.unam.mx), and David Miranda, *La disonancia de el Eco*, 2017 ([PDF](#)).

To learn more about Javier Senosiain's *Casa Orgánica*, visit [casaorganica.org](http://casaorganica.org). To learn more about *El Nido de Quetzalcóatl*, visit [elnidodequetzalcoatl.com](http://elnidodequetzalcoatl.com).

The *Water Basin* and *Serpiente (Snake) Stone* included in the Juan O'Gorman installation are from *Casa O'Gorman* and belonged to the couple. Their exact maker(s) and dates are not conclusively known.

Isamu Noguchi is correctly "American" or "Japanese American," not "Japanese."

Isamu Noguchi can be said to be a sculptor, artist, sculptor and designer, landscape designer, architectural designer, etc; he was not a licensed architect.

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