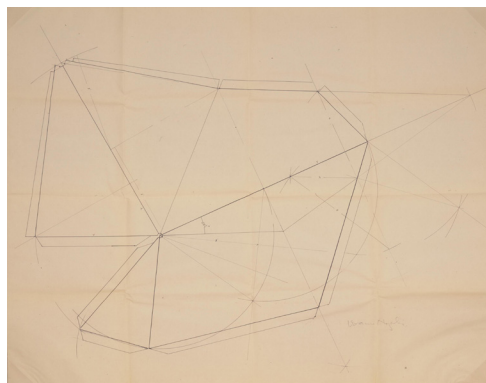


The Noguchi Museum Shop Presents
The New Reality: Noguchi and Aluminum in the 1950s

A presentation coinciding with the launch of a new edition of Prismatic Tables by Vitra
 The Noguchi Museum Shop
 October 18–November 5, 2023



LEFT Isamu Noguchi, Prismatic Tables, 1957/2023. Photo courtesy of Vitra. RIGHT Isamu Noguchi, Template for Prismatic Table, c. 1956. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 06958. Gift of Nicholas J. Sands. Photo: Kevin Noble. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)

New York, NY — **The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum** and **Vitra** are pleased to reintroduce Isamu Noguchi's **Prismatic Table** in three new color variations, now available for sale worldwide. To coincide with the launch of the tables, The Noguchi Museum Shop presents ***The New Reality: Noguchi and Aluminum in the 1950s***. This archival presentation will highlight the history of the folded aluminum table originally designed by Noguchi in 1956 and its lasting influence on his practice, incorporating ephemera from the Museum's archive and three small folded aluminum works created by Noguchi at Edison Price's studio in the late 1950s.

The new Prismatic Tables by Vitra will be available for order online (shop.noguchi.org) and for purchase in-store in the Museum Shop beginning on Wednesday, October 18. The tables are available in three different three-tone variations: light grey, grey, and dark grey. For more information about purchasing the Prismatic Tables, contact akari@noguchi.org.

A new digital feature on noguchi.org, launching on October 18, will also examine the period in more detail. In addition, a related art-making workshop for families with children of all ages, **Open Studio: Prismatic Pattern**, will be held on Saturday, October 21, 11 am–2 pm.

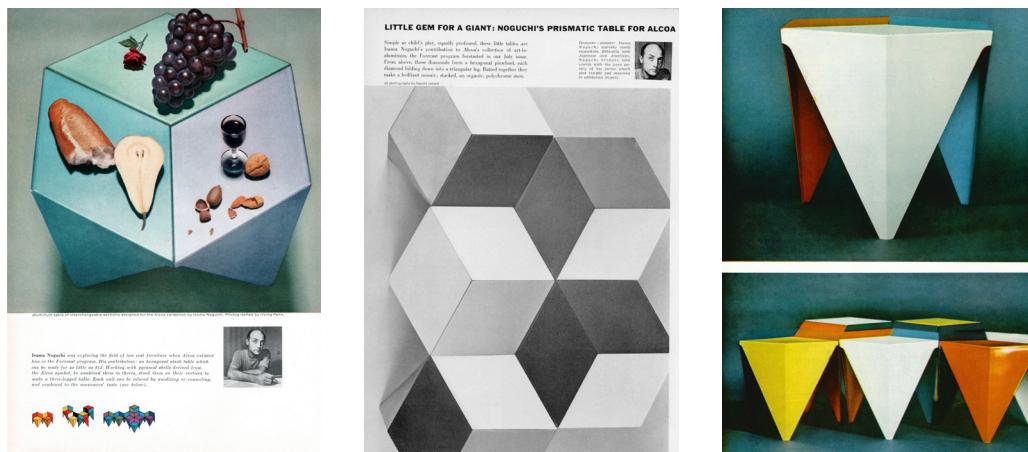
ARCHIVAL PRESENTATION

In the mid 1950s, aligning with the tail end of Isamu Noguchi's (1904–1988) most productive period of realized industrial designs, interior design was well into its modern era, pushing sleek and inexpensive materials like aluminum to the forefront of the domestic realm. Alcoa (Aluminum Company of America)—

founded in 1888¹ after co-discovering a new, cost-effective manufacturing method for the material—was in 1956 interested in continuing to transform the way the public saw aluminum, creating and substantially investing in a promotional program called Forecast, with advertising slogans such as “FORECAST: There’s a world of aluminum in the wonderful world of tomorrow...”²

Among the twenty prominent architects and designers of the time tapped by Alcoa to create illustrations, spaces, and prototypes for the program was Isamu Noguchi, who designed a side table composed of three folded pieces of aluminum fastened together to create a hexagonal top form that transitions directly into the three legs of the table. Noguchi was influenced partially by Alcoa’s pyramidal logo and, by his own admission, by friend and mentor R. Buckminster Fuller’s work with the natural strength of arranged geometric forms, which Fuller called Energetic-Synergetic geometry³ and made famous with his geodesic dome designs.

Noguchi named his creation the Prismatic Table, a reference to both its tessellated geometric forms and the way that its variously colored elements could be combined to create an array of patterns. A handful of variations of the prototype were produced: one was photographed by Irving Penn for an advertisement in *Industrial Design*, July 1957⁴ (the colors of this one are perhaps artificially enhanced), and a group of five were featured in an article in a November 1957 issue of *Interiors*⁵ photographed by Harold Corsini.



LEFT TO RIGHT Advertisement for the Prismatic Table, 1957. “Designed for the Alcoa collection by Isamu Noguchi, photographed by Irving Penn.” *Industrial Design*, July 1957. The Noguchi Museum Archives, B_JOU_2000_1957. “Little Gem for a Giant: Noguchi’s Prismatic Table for Alcoa.” *Interiors* 117, no. 4 (November 1957): 116-117. The Noguchi Museum Archives, B_JOU_0606_1957. © INFGM/ARS

At the conclusion of the Forecast program, Alcoa expressed an interest to Noguchi in facilitating a production run of the tables with a separate manufacturer⁶ but it was never realized, leaving the work in its prototype phase for nearly fifty years. However, for Noguchi the piece acted as a precursor to a burst of prolific experimentation with aluminum and its manufacturing techniques.

By 1958, Noguchi’s social and professional network had already led him to Edison Price, possibly the most transformational American lighting designer of the 20th century, and his studio in Manhattan. Noguchi began working out of Price’s space, procuring large, flat sheets of aluminum from both Alcoa and Price, and experimenting with the folding and cutting of them. He worked after-hours with industrial tools at the unionized workshop, together with Shoji Sadao, whom Noguchi met in 1955 and had quickly become one of his most valued confidants and collaborators. Often starting from small

cardboard models, within months he became skilled enough to create large-scale aluminum works, like the dizzying, monumental *Noh Musicians*⁷ and numerous smaller examinations of cut and folded form.⁸ Similar to his interest in other materials such as stone and paper, he showed a curiosity in the limitations of the medium, like the cutting and folding of a single sheet of aluminum, and its relationship to the force of gravity. He would complete over twenty works out of aluminum by the close of the 1950s.

Noguchi writes of this period in his 1968 autobiography, *A Sculptor's World*: “Sculpture in the traditional sense, is, by definition, something with built-in values of permanence, ‘forever beautiful,’ something of shape and material and that ‘defy time.’ But then there is the other reality of the evanescent new—that truth born of the moment... Now back in New York after nearly two years of work on the UNESCO garden, I was acutely conscious of these disparities, and of the need to associate myself with the new reality, being born without me. After all, New York was my reality, the surroundings familiar, the materials available common to my living. It seemed absurd to me to be working with rocks and stones in New York, where walls of glass and steel are our horizon, and our landscape is that of boxes piled high in the air.”⁹



LEFT TO RIGHT Isamu Noguchi working at Edison Price workshop, 1958. Photo: Jun Miki. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03834. © INFGM / ARS
Isamu Noguchi, *Untitled*, 1958–59. Aluminum, gold finish. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York, 479. © INFGM / ARS
Isamu Noguchi and others at Edison Price workshop, 1958. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03836. Photo: Jun Miki. © INFGM / ARS
Isamu Noguchi, *Baby Figure*, 1958. Aluminum. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York, 462B-3. © INFGM / ARS



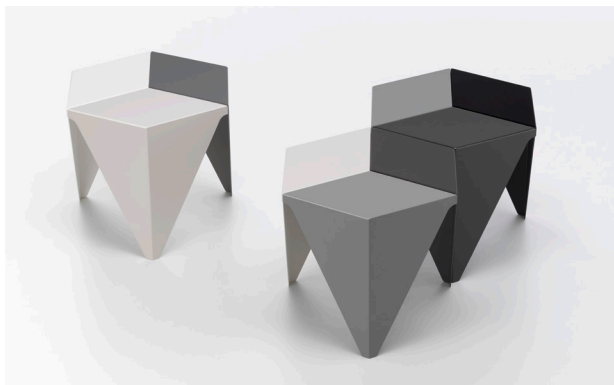
LEFT TO RIGHT Isamu Noguchi with works at Edison Price workshop, 1958–59. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 03841. ©INFGM / ARS
Isamu Noguchi, *Orpheus*, 1958. Aluminum. Photo: Kevin Noble. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York, 468.
Isamu Noguchi, *Noh Musicians*, 1958. Aluminum, paint. Photo: Kevin Noble. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York, 466.

1 <https://www.alcoa.com/global/en/who-we-are/history>, and <https://carnegiemuseums.org/magazine-archives/2000/novdec/cma.html>
2 <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/archival/100559>
3 R. Buckminster Fuller, *Synergetics: Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking* (Macmillan Publishers, 1975/79)
4 <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/archival/99350>

5 <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/archival/93002>
6 <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/archival/85471>
7 <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/artwork/5902>
8 <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/artwork/8669>
9 Isamu Noguchi, *Isamu Noguchi: A Sculptor's World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 35.

Nearly fifty years later, in 2002, Vitra Design Museum, as part of a major initiative that also included an international traveling exhibition and catalogue, breathed life back into the Prismatic Table with a two-color production run,¹⁰ in all-white and all-black.

The new 2023 edition of Prismatic Tables more closely reflects the tri-color versions of Noguchi's design first advertised by Alcoa. Each of the three tables contains its own set of three monochromatic hues, ranging from white to black.



Isamu Noguchi, Prismatic Tables, 1957/2023. Photos courtesy of Vitra.

The tables will be available for order online (shop.noguchi.org) and for purchase in-store in the Museum Shop beginning on Wednesday, October 18. The tables are available in three different three-tone variations: light grey, grey, and dark grey. The list price is \$1015 USD per table. For more information about purchasing the Prismatic Tables, contact akari@noguchi.org.

Learn more about the presentation at The Noguchi Museum and visiting The Noguchi Museum Shop: noguchi.org/shop/prismatic-tables.

The New Reality: Noguchi and Aluminum in the 1950s is organized by **Evan Scott**, Manager of Retail and Merchandising at The Noguchi Museum.

EDUCATION PROGRAM

Open Studio: Prismatic Pattern

Saturday, October 21, 11 am – 2 pm

Families with children of all ages are invited to a drop-in art-making workshop taking inspiration from the special presentation of Isamu Noguchi's tri-tone Prismatic Tables in the Museum Shop. Create paper models exploring the design possibilities of folded shape, form, and pattern with artist and educator **Harumi Ori**. This program is free with Museum admission; no advance reservations are required.

noguchi.org/museum/calendar/event/2023-10-21-1100-open-studio-prismatic-pattern

DIGITAL FEATURE

A new Digital Feature launching on October 18 on the Museum's website (noguchi.org/digital-features) will examine in more detail this period of Isamu Noguchi's life and work, focusing on Noguchi's relation-

¹⁰ The Isamu Noguchi Catalogue Raisonné,
<https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/artwork/98134>

ship with metal as a medium, Alcoa's Forecast program, and subsequent sculptural works in aluminum completed at Edison Price's studio in the years that followed.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Noguchi Museum, 9-01 33rd Road, Long Island City, New York 11106

Hours: Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 am–6 pm.

Admission to The Noguchi Museum is \$12 general / \$6 students and seniors / free for members, children under age 12, NYC public school students, SNAP benefits recipients, and other free partnership programs (see full list at noguchi.org/visit).

ABOUT THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM

Founded in 1985 by category-defying Japanese American sculptor 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 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 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 collection, together with diverse special exhibitions and collaborations with practitioners across disciplines, offer a multifaceted view of Noguchi's art and illuminate his enduring influence. noguchi.org | [@noguchimuseum](https://twitter.com/noguchimuseum)

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