

The Noguchi Museum Announces *Against Time: The Noguchi Museum 40th Anniversary Reinstallation*

Against Time presents a reinstallation of Isamu Noguchi's sculptures and project models from the permanent collection
August 28, 2024 – September 14, 2025



Isamu Noguchi gives a tour of The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum in 1988. Photo: Eugenie Coumantaros. The Noguchi Museum Archives, 04285. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)

New York (June 2024) — **The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum** — the first museum in the United States to be established, designed, and installed by a living artist to show their own work — announces *Against Time: The Noguchi Museum 40th Anniversary Reinstallation*, a selection of Isamu Noguchi's sculptures and project models from the permanent collection curated by Matthew Kirsch, Noguchi Museum Curator and Director of Research. In anticipation of **The Noguchi Museum's 40th anniversary in 2025**, these pieces from the original second floor installation will return to those galleries for the first time since 2009. The exhibition will be on view from August 28, 2024 to September 14, 2025.

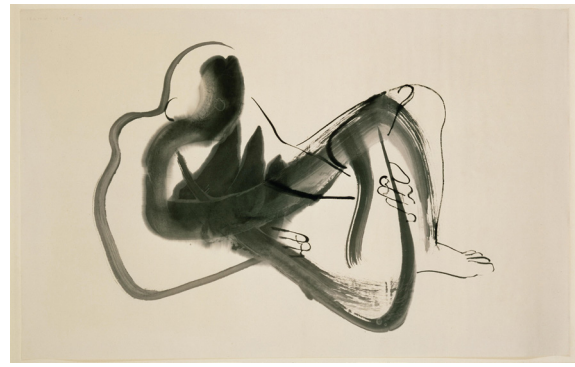
Against Time uses as its basis the catalogue *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), written by Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) as a guide to works in the Museum in place of traditional wall labels, which was in turn used to define the Museum's permanent collection after his death in December 1988. This original installation consisted of sculptures that had accumulated before and after Noguchi's move to his 10th Street studio in Long Island City in 1961. Noguchi considered a number of these to be personal breakthroughs, works that represented significant turns and returns within his cyclical practice over the course of six decades.



Isamu Noguchi, *Foot Tree*, 1928. Brass. 24 1/8 x 12 1/2 x 6 7/8 in. (61.3 x 31.8 x 17.5 cm). Photo: Kevin Noble. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)



Isamu Noguchi, *Uncle Takagi (Portrait of My Uncle)*, 1931. Terra-cotta. 12 3/8 x 8 3/4 x 8 1/2 in. (31.4 x 22.2 x 21.6 cm). Photo: Kevin Noble. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)



Isamu Noguchi, *Peking Brush Drawing*, 1930. Ink on paper. 35 1/8 x 57 1/2 in. (89.2 x 146.1 cm). Photo: Kevin Noble. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)

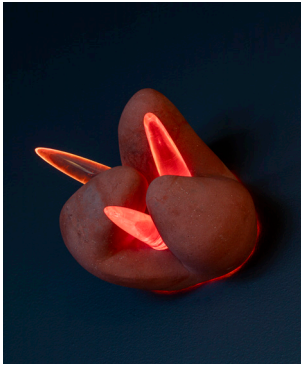
Noguchi purchased the former print engraving factory across the street from his studio for a storage and display space in 1974. Installing this space that would evolve into his Museum in the early 1980s, Noguchi was intent on presenting himself as a vital, working artist. He dedicated its first floor galleries to his most recent sculptures: the granite, basalt, and marble works he was passionately undertaking at studios in Japan and Italy. The second floor galleries presented an exercise in looking backward. Noguchi conceived of this second floor installation as telling a parallel story of his practice, with galleries devoted to his designs for theater sets and environmental spaces, representing a “vision that the frontiers of sculpture might open up by relating it to the land and to real walkable space,”¹ while other galleries traced the individual sculptures he produced from the 1920s to the 1980s.

Against Time could never replicate Noguchi’s exact vision for these galleries, as they have since been repartitioned after renovations in the early 2000s. Rather, this installation is a distillation of various phases from 1985–88, adapted and reimagined according to archival photographs documenting how Noguchi assiduously arranged and rearranged his works in different constellations in the first years of the Museum.

Matthew Kirsch, Curator and Director of Research, describes, “Noguchi intended for these second floor galleries to give context for the environment that he created with this Museum. His installations were less of a chronological retelling of his career than an inventory of the themes that continually threaded his work—transformation, mortality, vulnerability, weightlessness, erosion, humanity’s coexistence with nature—as well an implication that his many unrealized environmental, park, and garden projects were a well of ideas that he refined, adapted, and improved within later realized projects.”

The reinstallation will encompass more than 60 works, including examples of Noguchi’s first forays into abstraction with brass and wood sculptures dating from 1928, just after his short stint as an assistant in Constantin Brancusi’s studio in Paris, alongside three portrait busts that Noguchi made in the 1930s, a practice that Noguchi returned to intermittently out of financial necessity. A selection from Noguchi’s 1940s MacDougal Alley studio era will include interlocking sculptures in slate and

¹ Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 143.



Isamu Noguchi, *Red Lunar Fist*, 1944. Magnesite, plastic, resin, electric components. 7 1/8 x 8 3/8 x 8 3/4 in. (18.1 x 21.3 x 22.2 cm). Photo: Nicholas Knight. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)



Isamu Noguchi, *Contoured Playground*, 1941 (cast 1963). Bronze. 2 3/4 x 26 1/4 x 26 1/4 in. (7 x 66.7 x 66.7 cm). Photo: Bill Taylor. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)



Isamu Noguchi, *Dance Platform for Martha Graham's Embattled Garden*, 1958. Paint, canvas, wood, rattan rods. Photo: Nicholas Knight. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS)

marble (along with later bronze reproductions), experiments with lit elements concealed within molded magnesite which Noguchi called Lunars, and carved onyx and alabaster works. An array of Noguchi's project models, rarely shown as a group, will include unrealized designs for monuments and memorials, and formative playground concepts with later models of realized indoor and outdoor environments. These will be paired with set elements from three of Noguchi's enduring and transformative collaborations with the choreographer Martha Graham, illustrating how these exercises in the partitioning and punctuation of space expanded outward.

The sheer variety of materials and modes of sculpture and Noguchi's fluid definition of its scope lend some truth to Noguchi's half-joking estimation: "I'm older than most artists, and I've probably gone through, at some point, the stages that all artists eventually go through. So in a sense, I am the history of art today, in my own person."²

ABOUT ISAMU NOGUCHI

Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) was one of the twentieth century's most significant sculptors, yet his resolute redefinition of the art form led to a practice spanning gardens, playgrounds, public projects, furniture, lighting, and set design. He believed strongly in the social role of art and dedicated much of his life to creating public works such as parks, plazas, and fountains. Born in Los Angeles to a white American mother and a Japanese father, Noguchi felt a lifelong sense of never really belonging anywhere, and channeled this into his artistic vision and philosophy, aspiring to be a citizen of the world. In 1985, Noguchi opened the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, now known as The Noguchi Museum, in Long Island City, New York. In 1986, he represented the United States at the Venice Biennale. In accordance with his wishes, his studio in Mure, Japan, became the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum Japan in 1999. Noguchi received the Edward MacDowell Medal for Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to the Arts in 1982; the Kyoto Prize in Arts in 1986; the National Medal of Arts in 1987; and the Order of the Sacred Treasure from the Japanese government in 1988. He died in New York City in 1988. Learn more about the life and work of Isamu Noguchi: noguchi.org/biography.

² Isamu Noguchi, statement on "What is Sculpture?," c. 1986. The Noguchi Museum Archives, MS_EXH_252_001.

ABOUT MATTHEW KIRSCH

Matthew Kirsch is Curator and Director of Research at The Noguchi Museum, where he is involved with exhibitions, public programs, publications, and editorial projects. He has been a major contributor to internationally renowned exhibitions and monographs, including as co-curator for the traveling exhibition *Changing and Unchanging Things: Noguchi and Hasegawa in Postwar Japan* (2019) and associate editor of its companion monograph, and co-editor for the publication *The Saburo Hasegawa Reader* (both published by University of California Press). He provided research support to the recent European touring retrospective *Isamu Noguchi* (2021–23). Kirsch has curated numerous in-house and off-site exhibitions including *Salvaged Time* (2022), *Noguchi as Photographer: The Jantar Mantars of Northern India* (2015), *Hammer Chisel Drill: Noguchi's Studio Practice* (2012–13), *Tracks: Animal Drawings from Noguchi's Travels* (2011), and *Isamu Noguchi: We Are the Landscape of All We Know* at the Portland Japanese Garden (2013). He co-curated *Isamu Noguchi* (2013) at Instituto Tomie Ohtake in São Paulo, Brazil. In addition, he has written, edited, and overseen articles exploring various facets of Noguchi's work and life for the Digital Features online journal on The Noguchi Museum's website, noguchi.org.

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 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 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 practitioners across disciplines, offer a multifaceted view of Noguchi's art and illuminate his enduring influence. noguchi.org | [@noguchimuseum](https://www.instagram.com/noguchimuseum)

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