

Last Chance: *Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within* at The Noguchi Museum

The major retrospective closes on July 28, and then tours nationally



Installation view, *Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within*, The Noguchi Museum, New York, March 20–July 28, 2024.
 Photo © Nicholas Knight. Artworks © Family of Toshiko Takaezu

New York (July 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 — has organized a major touring retrospective and monograph centered on the life and work of artist **Toshiko Takaezu** (1922–2011). Presented first at The Noguchi Museum from **March 20 to July 28, 2024**, *Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within* is the first nationally touring retrospective of Takaezu’s work in twenty years. The new monograph co-published with **Yale University Press**, also titled *Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within*, represents the most ambitious monograph on an American ceramic artist to date.

The retrospective is organized by The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum with assistance from the **Toshiko Takaezu Foundation** and the Takaezu family. It is co-curated by art historian **Glenn Adamson**, Noguchi Museum Curator **Kate Wiener**, and composer and sound artist **Leilehua Lanzilotti**. The exhibition was conceived and developed with former Noguchi Museum Senior Curator **Dakin Hart**. The show at The Noguchi Museum features approximately 200 works from private and public collections around the country. Following its presentation at The Noguchi Museum, the exhibition will travel to several additional venues across the United States.

Planned venues include the **Cranbrook Art Museum** (October 9, 2024–January 12, 2025), the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** (March 2–May 18, 2025), the **Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison** (September 8–December 23, 2025), and the **Honolulu Museum of Art** (February 13–July 26, 2026).

Of Okinawan heritage and born in Hawai‘i, **Toshiko Takaezu** was a groundbreaking twentieth-century abstract artist most celebrated for her prolific output of expressively glazed “closed form” ceramic sculptures that ranged in scale from palm-sized works to immersive sculptural environments. Seeking to harness the expressive potential of both abstract painting and sculpture, Takaezu radically reimagined the vessel form as a pliable three-dimensional canvas and as site for limitless experimentation. Takaezu’s phenomenal hybrid practice, which was informed both by her cross-cultural heritage and deep appreciation for the living environment, also included innovative work in painting, weaving, and bronze-cast sculpture. She often displayed these varied works alongside and in productive dialogue with her ceramic forms to create captivating environments. Similar to her friend Isamu Noguchi, Takaezu’s boundary-crossing practice defies limiting art historical categorization and stands as an endlessly creative and inspiring model for making and being.

This retrospective aims to trace the evolution of her practice and reframe Takaezu as one of the most compelling and conceptually innovative American artists of the last century. It considers the range, depth, and development of Takaezu’s work with a particular focus on the worlds she conjured within individual forms and in stunning environmental installations. The title of the show is meant to evoke the vital sense of resonant space expressed in Takaezu’s work and alludes to her assertion that the most important aspect of her closed forms is “the dark space that you can’t see” — the hidden worlds within.

Exhibition co-curator **Kate Wiener**, Curator at The Noguchi Museum, states, “In studying the innovative works and installations that Takaezu created in the course of her lifetime, we can chart a path of extraordinary innovation and growth. We hope to give viewers space to immerse themselves in Takaezu’s practice and an opportunity to appreciate the artist’s phenomenal capacity to conjure the intimate and infinite sublimity of nature in her work.”

As exhibition co-curator **Glenn Adamson** comments, “It is particularly fitting to present Takaezu’s work at The Noguchi Museum, founded by another artist who ranged across genres and mediums, and had a powerful sense of how art could shape time and space. Her ceramics, weavings, paintings, and sheer presence are extraordinarily resonant in the austere beautiful surroundings of the galleries and garden.”

Darlene Fukuji, President of the **Toshiko Takaezu Foundation** and grandniece of the artist, states, “The Toshiko Takaezu Foundation is dedicated to preserving and promoting the artistic legacy of Toshiko Takaezu and educating the public about her work and teachings. We are thrilled to be collaborating with The Noguchi Museum on this exhibition and monograph, which introduces new audiences to her exceptional art and legacy. On a personal note, I grew up in Hawai‘i hearing about my great aunt’s dear friend Isamu Noguchi, and it’s a great honor that her work is presented in the museum he founded and designed.”



Toshiko Takaezu working on ceramic Trees in Quakertown, New Jersey, 1984. Photo © Walter Chandoha/Trunk Archive. © Family of Toshiko Takaezu



Toshiko Takaezu, Moon, 1980s. Stoneware, 13 × 13½ in. (33 × 34.3 cm). David Owsley Museum of Art, Ball State University, gift of the artist, 2006.013.005. © Family of Toshiko Takaezu



Toshiko Takaezu, Untitled, 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 35 × 35 in. (88.9 × 88.9 cm). Private Collection. Photo: Nicholas Knight. Courtesy The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. © Family of Toshiko Takaezu

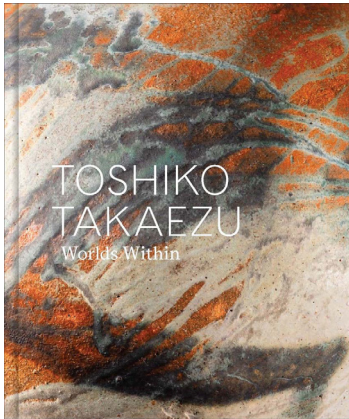
EXHIBITION

Featuring approximately 200 objects from public and private collections across the country, *Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within* presents a comprehensive portrait of Takaezu’s life and work. This chronological retrospective charts the development of Takaezu’s hybrid practice over seven decades, documenting her early student work in Hawai’i and at the Cranbrook Academy through her years teaching at the Cleveland Institute of Art and later at Princeton University. To represent this evolution, the show presents a series of installations loosely inspired by ones that Takaezu created in her own lifetime: from a set table of functional wares from the early 1950s to an immersive constellation of monumental ceramic forms from the late 1990s to early 2000s.

The exhibition includes a vast collection of ceramic sculptures including her signature “closed forms,” Moons, Garden Seats, Trees, and select monumental works from her late masterpiece, the *Star Series*. It features a broad selection of her vibrant and gestural acrylic paintings and weavings, many of which have rarely been seen, as well as a bronze bell. Sound also plays an important role in this exhibition as many of Takaezu’s closed ceramic forms contain unseen “rattles.”

The exhibition includes a range of videos, programs, and an interactive installation that allows visitors to explore these interior soundscapes firsthand. Composer, sound artist, and exhibition co-curator **Leilehua Lanzilotti** (finalist for the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in music) developed a concert program, a stand-alone video installation, and a series of demonstration videos centered on the hidden element of sound in Takaezu’s works. Lanzilotti’s new concert and installation works have been recently released as an album centered around Takaezu’s work on Innova Recordings, the label of the American Composers Forum.

Exhibition co-curator **Leilehua Lanzilotti** writes, “It is a joy to illuminate the hidden sonic landscapes of Takaezu’s closed forms through my involvement both as an artist and a co-curator on this project. On a personal note, having grown up around Takaezu’s work at The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu, I’m honored to respond to her closed forms with this series of multimedia and musical works for the exhibition. Bringing my own perspective as a Kanaka Maoli artist to the colors and textures that inspired Takaezu as a child, I hope these additions to the exhibition inspire viewers to meet her work with childlike wonder and curiosity.”



MONOGRAPH

To accompany the exhibition, The Noguchi Museum, in association with Yale University Press, has published a new monograph on Toshiko Takaezu, also titled ***Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within***. This comprehensive exploration of Takaezu is the first to be developed with full access to the artist's newly digitized papers in the Archives of American Art, and represents an extraordinary depth of research and range of perspectives. The volume, edited by Glenn Adamson, Dakin Hart, and Kate Wiener, features nine new essays on Takaezu's life and work by leading scholars, curators, and artists including Adamson, Wiener, Ai Fukunaga,

Nonie Gadsden, Diana Greenwold, Laura Kina, Leilehua Lanzilotti, Margo Machida, Laura Mott, and Katy Siegel. The monograph also features insightful reflections from a group of Takaezu's former apprentices; writing by Takaezu; an updated chronology, exhibition history, and bibliography; and close to 300 images including newly commissioned photographs of Takaezu's work and a trove of archival photographs. The monograph stands as the most ambitious study of an American ceramic artist to date. 368 pages, 294 color and black-and-white illustrations. Hardcover, 9¼ x 11 inches. \$65. ISBN: 978-0-300-26740-2 | <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300267402/toshiko-takaezu/>

RELATED EXHIBITION & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

In conjunction with the exhibition at The Noguchi Museum, **Leilehua Lanzilotti** presented a concert program featuring a world premiere of Lanzilotti's piano trio inspired by the sonic landscapes in Takaezu's work performed by the New York-based ensemble **Longleash** on March 24, 2024.

Princeton University presented a concert program featuring a world premiere of **Leilehua Lanzilotti's** percussion quartet inspired by the sonic landscapes in Takaezu's work performed by **Sō Percussion** on February 4, 2024.

Dana Tai Soon Burgess Dance Company presented a newly commissioned dance performance inspired by Takaezu's life and work, performed accompanying **Leilehua Lanzilotti's** composition for string orchestra *with eyes the color of time* on June 14–15, 2024 at The Noguchi Museum.

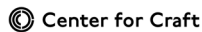
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston is presenting a complementary exhibition, ***Toshiko Takaezu: Shaping Abstraction***, on view September 30, 2023–September 29, 2024. The MFA holds a significant collection of Takaezu's works — more than twenty examples are featured alongside loans from private collections. Highlights also include a large-scale weaving that has been recently acquired by the MFA and a grouping of works that explores the artist's cross-cultural interactions with contemporary Japanese ceramicists during her pivotal eight-month trip to Japan in 1955–56. Challenging traditional presentations of American abstraction, the exhibition celebrates the extraordinary range of Takaezu's work — aiming to make her contributions more widely known. *Toshiko Takaezu: Shaping Abstraction* was developed in collaboration with the Toshiko Takaezu Foundation and The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. mfa.org

SUPPORT

Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within would not have been possible without the leadership support of the Terra Foundation for American Art and the Henry Luce Foundation.



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ABOUT TOSHIKO TAKAEZU

Toshiko Takaezu (1922–2011) was one of the twentieth century’s greatest abstract artists. Gifted with prodigious drive and vision, she combined inspirations from her own cultural background with currents from contemporary painting and sculpture, arriving at a unique expressionist idiom. Takaezu was born in Pepe‘ekeo, Hawai‘i, to Okinawan émigré parents, and received her early training in ceramics, weaving, and sculpture in Honolulu, as a student at the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa (1948–51) with teachers including Claude Horan. She continued her studies at the Cranbrook Academy of Art (1951–54) under the instruction of Maija Grotell, who would become a mentor of profound influence, as well as Marianne Strengell, and Bill McVey. In her early career Takaezu expanded the possibilities of the vessel, exploring multiple spouts and lobed forms, and made plates that were essentially canvases for freeform composition. Though made using traditional pottery techniques of wheel-throwing and glazing, the innovative ceramic works that she soon developed, and for which she is best known—the closed forms—are best understood as sculptures, or perhaps as paintings-in-the-round. Through her expressive brushstrokes, dynamic glazes, exploration of sound, and trust in chance, Takaezu imbued clay with a life that existed far beyond when it emerged from the kiln. Across her seven-decade career, Takaezu also pursued media apart from ceramics, including large-scale textiles, acrylic paintings, and cast-bronze sculpture, which extended her vocabulary of vivid abstraction. During her lifetime, Takaezu was also a profoundly influential teacher and mentor, who trained generations of younger artists at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, The University of Wisconsin, the Cleveland Institute of Art, and Princeton

University, and other institutions. Her legacy lives on in these students and apprentices, and above all in her own work, which both exemplifies and transcends the ideals of modernist ceramic art. Another testament to her legacy, Takaezu was named a Living Treasure of Hawai'i (1987), received the Gold Medal Award from the American Craft Council (1994), and the Konjuhoshō Award (2010), conferred by the emperor of Japan on individuals who have made significant contributions to Japanese society, as well as many other accolades.

ABOUT GLENN ADAMSON

Glenn Adamson is a curator, writer, and historian based in New York and London. He has previously been Director of the Museum of Arts and Design and Head of Research at the V&A. Dr. Adamson's publications include *Thinking Through Craft* (2007); *The Craft Reader* (2010); *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion* (2011, with Jane Pavitt); *The Invention of Craft* (2013); *Art in the Making* (2016, with Julia Bryan-Wilson); *Fewer Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects* (2018); *Objects: USA 2020*; and *Craft: An American History* (2021). Dr. Adamson is editor of *Material Intelligence*, a quarterly online journal published by the Chipstone Foundation, and curator-at-large for LongHouse Reserve. His next book, *A Century of Tomorrows*, will be out with Bloomsbury in December 2024.

ABOUT LEILEHUA LANZILOTTI

Leilehua Lanzilotti is a Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawai'ian) composer and sound artist dedicated to the arts of our time. A "leading composer-performer" (*The New York Times*), Lanzilotti's work is characterized by expansive explorations of timbre. Lanzilotti's practice explores radical indigenous contemporaneity by integrating community engagement and ways of knowing into the heart of projects. Lanzilotti was a finalist for the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Music for *with eyes the color of time* (string orchestra), which the Pulitzer committee called, "a vibrant composition ... that distinctly combines experimental string textures and episodes of melting lyricism." Additional honors include a 2023 MacGeorge Fellowship as University Guest Academic within Fine Arts and Music at University of Melbourne, and the 2021 McKnight Visiting Composer among other accolades. As a recording artist, Lanzilotti has played on albums from Björk's *Vulnicura Live* and Joan Osborne's *Love and Hate*, to Dai Fujikura's *Chance Monsoon* and David Lang's *anatomy theater*. Dr. Lanzilotti also served as the Curator of Music at The Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center from 2019–21. leilehualanzilotti.com | [@annezilotti](https://twitter.com/annezilotti)

ABOUT KATE WIENER

Kate Wiener is a Curator at The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum in Long Island City, New York, where she is involved with exhibitions, public programs, and publications. Recent curatorial projects at The Noguchi Museum include *A Glorious Bewilderment: Marie Menken's 'Visual Variations on Noguchi'* (2023–24), and the co-organized exhibitions *Noguchi Subscapes* (2022–23), *Noguchi: Useless Architecture* (2021–22), and *Noguchi's Memorials to the Atomic Dead* (2021). She has contributed to numerous publications, including *Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within* (Yale University Press, forthcoming 2024), *Looking Up: The Skyviewing Sculptures of Isamu Noguchi* (Giles, 2022), *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon* (New Museum, 2017), and *Out of Bounds: The Collected Writings of Marcia Tucker* (Getty Research Institute/New Museum, 2019).

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)

ABOUT THE TOSHIKO TAKAEZU FOUNDATION

The Toshiko Takaezu Foundation was founded in 2015 to preserve and promote the legacy of renowned abstract sculptor Toshiko Takaezu (1922–2011) and to educate the public about her work and teachings. Her art was deeply influenced by nature, her experiences in Hawai'i and New Jersey, as well as her travels around the world, particularly in Japan and Okinawa. The Foundation facilitates exhibitions, supports research projects, provides access to archives, and ensures public awareness of Takaezu's artistic contributions. toshikotakaezufoundation.org

ABOUT THE TERRA FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART

The Terra Foundation for American Art, established in 1978 and having offices in Chicago and Paris, supports organizations and individuals locally and globally with the aim of fostering intercultural dialogues and encouraging transformative practices that expand narratives of American art, through the foundation's grant program, collection, and initiatives. terraamericanart.org

ABOUT THE HENRY LUCE FOUNDATION

The Henry Luce Foundation seeks to deepen knowledge and understanding in pursuit of a more democratic and just world. Established in 1936 by Henry R. Luce, the co-founder and editor-in-chief of Time, Inc., the Luce Foundation advances its mission by nurturing knowledge communities and institutions, fostering dialogue across divides, enriching public discourse, amplifying diverse voices, and investing in leadership development.

A leader in art funding since 1982, the Luce Foundation's American Art Program supports innovative museum projects nationwide that advance the role of visual arts of the United States in an open and equitable society, and the potential of museums to serve as forums for art-centered conversations that celebrate creativity, explore difference, and seek common ground. The Foundation aims to empower museums and arts organizations to reconsider accepted histories, foreground the voices and experiences of underrepresented artists and cultures, and welcome diverse collaborators and communities into dialogue. hluce.org

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