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ISAMU NOGUCHI: A STUDY OF THE SCULPTURE

*City University of New York*

PH.D. 1983

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ISAMU NOGUCHI: A STUDY

OF THE SCULPTURE

by

NANCY GROVE

A dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty in Art History  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, The City  
University of New York.

1983

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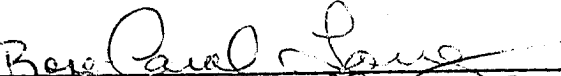

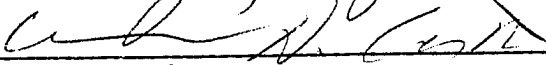
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The City University of New York

Abstract

ISAMU NOGUCHI: A STUDY OF THE SCULPTURE

by

Nancy Grove

Advisor: Rosalind Krauss

Isamu Noguchi is the greatest living American sculptor. During the past sixty years he has produced seven hundred studio sculptures in stone, wood, clay, metals, plastics, and mixed media, as well as hundreds of designs for lamps, furniture, interiors, plazas, playgrounds, sets, gardens, and unrealized projects. His experiments with neon and with earthworks antedate other artists' interest in those media by more than thirty years. His involvement with theater and with the articulation of large-scale public spaces has provided an ongoing example of an artist concerned with restoring sculpture to its ancestral role as an active part of daily life.

Though he has become one of the most visible, Noguchi has remained one of the least understood of artists. Critics and historians alike have had difficulty understanding his variety of materials and approaches and his ever-changing styles, as well as the meaning of his work and its extra-sculptural sources. This study is the first to address the oeuvre as a whole. It uses examples drawn from different

periods, media, and modes--figural, nonfigural, and environmental--to elucidate both the profound unity of Noguchi's work and the variety of strategies he has evolved to convey his complex of archetypal meanings. Those strategies include the development of archetypal male, female, child, and family images, as well as images of archetypal forms and forces: the moon, the sun, voids, cubes, helixes, gravity, weightlessness, and energy. All these strategies come together and interact as conjunctions of horizontals, verticals, and water in his sets and environments.

The study also examines Noguchi's sources in poetry, science, and myth, beginning with his poet father and continuing with extended discussions of his relationships with Buckminster Fuller and Martha Graham. His relationship to Brancusi is also discussed, as are his connections (or lack of connections) to his artistic peers and his impact upon younger artists. It is important to understand Noguchi now, for his work, although decisively different from that of any other artist of this century, offers a humanistic alternative pointing to the future.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the generosity of Isamu Noguchi. He gave me virtually free access to his studio and files and allowed me to ask him about his past (like all vital artists, he much prefers the future). He has been most cordial in his encouragement, though he will undoubtedly be dissatisfied with both the form and content of the result.

I am most grateful to my advisor, Professor Rosalind Krauss, whose kindly criticisms were of crucial importance throughout the preparation of this work. Many thanks also to Professors Rose-Carol Long, William Gerds, and Willi Rotzler, who read the manuscript thoughtfully and provided insights which have proved most illuminating.

My deepest debt of gratitude is to Ralph Carlson, whose encouragement, patience, and forbearance have been extraordinary. All my thanks and love, which he has now and always, cannot encompass what he has done for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	viii
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I. METAPHOR AND MEANING . . . . .	22
II. FIGURAL SCULPTURE: PORTRAITS TO PRESENCES . . . . .	34
III. NONFIGURAL SCULPTURE: ENERGY, GRAVITY, AND WEIGHTLESSNESS . . . . .	71
IV. ENVIRONMENTS: SETS, FOUNTAINS, HORIZONTALS, VERTICALS, AND INTEGRAL SPACES . . . . .	113
CONCLUSION . . . . .	172
ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	191
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	269

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure

1. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound, 1914, stone, Estate of Ezra Pound.
2. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Red Stone Dancer, 1913, Mansfield Stone, 17 inches high, Tate Gallery.
3. Isamu Noguchi, Martha Graham, 1929, bronze, 15 inches high, New School for Social Research.
4. Isamu Noguchi, Buckminster Fuller, 1929, chrome-plated bronze, 13 x 8 x 10 inches, R. Buckminster Fuller.
5. Isamu Noguchi, Kintaro (Erai Yatcha Hoi), 1931, bronze, 22 x 15 x 8 inches, Collection of the artist.
6. William Blake, The Dance of Albion, ca. 1794, color print.
7. Isamu Noguchi, Miss Expanding Universe, 1932, aluminum, 40-7/8 x 34-7/8 inches, Toledo Museum of Art.
8. Isamu Noguchi, Death, 1934, Monel metal, 39 x 29-1/4 x 21 inches, Collection of the artist.
9. Isamu Noguchi, Birth, 1934, marble, destroyed by artist except for head, 14 x 23-1/2 x 23-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
10. Isamu Noguchi, History Mexico, 1936, cement with pigment, 66 feet long, Abelardo Rodríguez Market, Mexico City.
11. Isamu Noguchi, News, 1939-40, stainless steel casting, 20 x 17 feet, Associated Press Building, Rockefeller Center, New York.
12. Isamu Noguchi, The Kiss, 1945, alabaster, 8-1/2 x 12 x 10 inches, Collection of the artist.

Figure

13. Isamu Noguchi, The Bed, 1946, African Wonderstone, 8 inches high, Present whereabouts unknown.
14. Isamu Noguchi, Lunar Infant, 1944, magnesite, electricity, wood, 12 inches high, Collection of the artist.
15. Isamu Noguchi, Humpty Dumpty, 1946, black slate, 58-3/4 x 20-3/4 x 18 inches, Whitney Museum of American Art.
16. Isamu Noguchi, Kouros, 1944-45, pink Georgia marble, 117 inches high, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
17. Isamu Noguchi, Avatar, 1947, pink Georgia marble, 78 x 33 x 24 inches, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller.
18. Isamu Noguchi, Orpheus, 1948, set and costumes. Choreography: George Balanchine.
19. Isamu Noguchi, 1950's Child, 1950, terracotta, wood, 18 inches high, Present whereabouts unknown.
20. Isamu Noguchi, The Apartment, 1952, terracotta, 36-3/4 x 10 x 6-1/2 inches, Gordon Bunshaft.
21. Isamu Noguchi, The Self, 1956, iron, 33-7/8 x 8-1/4 x 9 inches, Tate Gallery.
22. Isamu Noguchi, Atomic Man, 1952, Kasama ceramic, 20 inches high, Present whereabouts unknown.
23. Isamu Noguchi, Woman with Child, 1959, Greek marble, 44 inches high, Cleveland Museum of Art.
24. Isamu Noguchi, Soliloquy, 1962, bronze, 69-1/2 x 8 x 5-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
25. Isamu Noguchi, Vertical Man, 1964, black green serpentine, 24-1/4 x 6-3/4 x 14-1/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
26. Isamu Noguchi, White Prophetess, 1964, marble, 14 inches wide, Arne Ekstrom.
27. Isamu Noguchi, Mitosis, 1962, bronze, 15 x 22 inches, Museum of Modern Art.
28. Isamu Noguchi, To Love, 1970-71, Rose Aurora and black Porticoi marble, 12-1/4 x 9-1/8 x 8-1/4 inches and 3-5/8 x 9 x 12 inches, Collection of the artist.

Figure

29. Isamu Noguchi, She, 1970-71, Rose Aurora and black Porticoi marble, 46 x 13 x 22 inches, Collection of the artist.
30. Isamu Noguchi, Ding Dong Bat, 1968, white statuary and pink Portuguese marble, 23-1/4 x 92 x 14-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
31. Isamu Noguchi, Little Id, 1970-71, bronze, 23-1/4 x 10-3/4 x 17 inches, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Levinson.
32. Isamu Noguchi, Childhood, 1970, Aji granite, 34 x 36 x 31 inches, Collection of the artist.
33. Jean Arp, Human Concretion, 1935, cast stone, 19-1/2 inches high, Museum of Modern Art.
34. Isamu Noguchi, Sphere Section, 1927, marble, 16 inches diameter, Lost.
35. Isamu Noguchi, Abstraction in Almost Discontinuous Tension, 1928, brass, 50 inches high, Collection of the artist.
36. Isamu Noguchi, Positional Shape, 1928, brass, 23 x 21 x 8-3/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
37. Isamu Noguchi, Power House, 1928, zinc, 14 inches high, Lost.
38. Isamu Noguchi, Leda, 1928, brass, 23-3/8 x 14-1/4 x 11 inches, Collection of the artist.
39. Constantin Brancusi, Leda, 1925, polished bronze, 21 inches high, Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne.
40. Isamu Noguchi, Infant Tree, 1928, wood and zinc, 9-7/8 inches high, Lost.
41. Isamu Noguchi, Infant Flower, 1928, brass, 15-3/4 inches high, Lost.
42. Isamu Noguchi, Foot Tree, 1928, brass, 22-1/8 x 13 x 6 inches, Collection of the artist.
43. Isamu Noguchi, Bird Cry, 1928, wood, 23-5/8 inches high, Lost.
44. Isamu Noguchi, Béguine, 1928, black marble, 23-5/8 inches high, Lost.



Figure

45. Isamu Noguchi, Musical Weathervane, 1933, plaster and magnesite model, dimensions unknown, Present whereabouts unknown.
46. Isamu Noguchi, Abstractions and Lanterns, 1944-51, plastic, plexiglass, paper, and metal, dimensions unknown.
47. Isamu Noguchi, Katchina, 1943, wood, paper, twine, 22-1/4 x 5 x 2-1/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
48. Isamu Noguchi, Lunar Landscape, 1944, magnesite, cement, cork, fishing line, electric lights, 34-1/2 x 24-3/4 x 7-7/8 inches, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.
49. Isamu Noguchi, Lunar Voyage, 1947, magnesite, 8 feet high, Destroyed.
50. Isamu Noguchi, American Stove Company ceiling, 1948, plaster and electricity, American Stove Company.
51. Isamu Noguchi, Time-Life Building ceiling, 1947, materials unknown, Destroyed.
52. Isamu Noguchi, Akari, 1952, installation photograph, exhibition at Kamakura Museum, 1952.
53. Isamu Noguchi, Solar, 1958, aluminum, painted black, 96-1/4 x 29 x 7-1/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
54. Isamu Noguchi, Variation on a Millstone #1, 1962, granite, 24-3/4 diameter x 4 inches deep, Mrs. Robert M. Benjamin.
55. Isamu Noguchi, Variation on a Millstone #2, 1962, granite, 25 x 26 x 3-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
56. Isamu Noguchi, Variation on a Millstone #3, 1963, granite, dimensions unknown, Present whereabouts unknown.
57. Isamu Noguchi, Variation on a Millstone #4, 1963, granite, 6 x 21 x 18-1/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
58. Isamu Noguchi, Variation on a Millstone #5, 1967, granite, 25 inches diameter x 3 inches, Armand Bartos.
59. Isamu Noguchi, Studies for the Sun, 1959-63, travertine, iron, and bronze, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza Art Collection.

Figure

60. Isamu Noguchi, Beinecke Library Garden, 1960-64, marble, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
61. Isamu Noguchi, Sky, 1964, marble, 29 x 29 x 3-1/2 inches, Robert W. Sarnoff.
62. Isamu Noguchi, White Sun, 1966, white Italian Saravezza marble, 28-1/2 inches diameter, Princeton University Art Museum.
63. Isamu Noguchi, Grey Sun, 1967, Arni marble, 41 x 40-1/2 x 18 inches, National Museum of American Art.
64. Isamu Noguchi, Sun, 1966, black granite, 37-1/2 inches diameter, Charles Benenson.
65. Isamu Noguchi, Black Sun, 1960-63, Tamba granite, 30 inches diameter, Estate of Nelson Rockefeller.
66. Isamu Noguchi, Black Sun, 1969, black Brazilian granite, 9 feet diameter, Seattle Art Museum.
67. Isamu Noguchi, Sun at Noon, 1969, French red and Spanish Alicante marble, 61 inches diameter, Collection of the artist.
68. Isamu Noguchi, Sun at Midnight, ca. 1973, granite, 61 inches diameter, Collection of the artist.
69. Isamu Noguchi, Man Walking, 1959, anodized aluminum, Art Institute of Chicago.
70. Isamu Noguchi, Red Untitled, 1965-66, red Persian Travertine, 64-1/2 x 23-5/8 x 22-3/4 inches, Honolulu Academy of Art.
71. Isamu Noguchi, In Stillness Moving, 1970, white statuary marble, 64 x 20 x 15 inches, Security Pacific National Bank.
72. Isamu Noguchi, In Silence Walking, 1970, Bardillo marble, 62-5/8 x 25-1/4 x 18-3/8 inches, Collection of the artist.
73. Isamu Noguchi, The Void, 1970, Portuguese Rose Aurora marble, 75 x 49-1/2 x 21-1/4 inches, Collection of the artist.

Figure

74. Isamu Noguchi, Walking Void #2, 1970, black Swedish granite, 68-1/4 x 31-1/2 x 25-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
75. Isamu Noguchi, Energy Void, 1971, Swedish granite, 10 feet high, Collection of the artist.
76. Isamu Noguchi, Portal, 1976, steel pipe, 35 x 40 feet, Cuyahoga Justice Center, Cleveland, Ohio.
77. Isamu Noguchi, The Ring, 1945-48, black Swedish granite, 12 x 22 x 22 inches, Whitney Museum of American Art.
78. Isamu Noguchi, Cave of the Heart, 1946, set element. Choreography: Martha Graham.
79. Isamu Noguchi, This Earth, This Passage, 1962, bronze, 8 x 42 inches, Collection of the artist.
80. Isamu Noguchi, Downward Pulling, 1970, Alicante and Marquinia marble, 14-1/4 x 35-1/2 x 28 inches, Collection of the artist.
81. Isamu Noguchi, Magic Ring, 1970, red Persian Travertine, 96 inches diameter x 7-7/8 inches high, Collection of the artist.
82. Isamu Noguchi, Sacred Rocks of Kukaniloko, 1976, plaster model, Collection of the artist.
83. Isamu Noguchi, Sky Gate, 1976-77, painted steel, 24 feet high, Honolulu Municipal Building, Honolulu, Hawaii.
84. Isamu Noguchi, Dodge Fountain, 1972-79, stainless steel, 30 feet high, Philip A. Hart Plaza, Detroit.
85. Isamu Noguchi, The Seed, 1946, white Italian marble, 13 x 24 x 12 inches, Collection of the artist.
86. Isamu Noguchi, Aphrodite, 1962, bronze, 13 x 3 inches and 6 x 2 inches, Collection of the artist.
87. Isamu Noguchi, Adjustable Sculpture, 1962, bronze, 7 x 5-1/2 inches and 7 x 7-1/2 inches and 5 x 4-1/2 inches and 8-3/4 x 6-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
88. Isamu Noguchi, Lessons of Musokokushi, 1962, bronze, 26 x 25-1/2 x 5 inches and 22 x 20 x 6 inches and 26 x 28 x 11 inches and 20 x 23 x 16 inches and 28 x 22 x 17 inches, Collection of the artist.

Figure

89. Isamu Noguchi, Floor Frame, 1962, bronze,  
15 x 42 x 28 inches and 7 x 14 x 6-1/2 inches,  
Collection of the artist.
90. Isamu Noguchi, Seen and Unseen, 1962, bronze,  
19-1/2 x 27 x 24 inches and 6-1/2 x 27-1/2 x 26 inches,  
Collection of the artist.
91. Isamu Noguchi, Origin, 1968, black African granite,  
23 x 30 x 32 inches, Collection of the artist.
92. Isamu Noguchi, The Wave, 1968-72, Swedish granite,  
dimensions unknown, Collection of the artist.
93. Isamu Noguchi, Wet Stone, 1970, granite, 5-1/2 x 42 x  
33-1/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
94. Isamu Noguchi, Landscape Sculpture, ca. 1968, granite,  
40 inches diameter x 7 inches high, Collection  
of the artist.
95. Isamu Noguchi, Round-Square Space, 1970, granite,  
38 inches diameter x 2-3/4 inches high, Collection  
of the artist.
96. Isamu Noguchi, Another Land, 1968, granite, 51 x 49-3/4 x  
9-3/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
97. Isamu Noguchi, This Place, 1968, black granite,  
43 x 42-1/2 x 6 inches, Collection of the artist.
98. Isamu Noguchi, Shodo Shima, 1978, granite, 9 x 53-1/2 x  
24-1/2 inches and 8 x 53 x 33-1/2 inches,  
with six stones, Walker Art Center.
99. Isamu Noguchi, Tao-tieh, 1978, granite, 20 x 79 x 57 inches,  
Collection of the artist.
100. Isamu Noguchi, Monument to Heroes, 1943, wood, paper,  
bones, 28-1/4 x 15-1/2 x 14 inches, Collection  
of the artist.
101. Isamu Noguchi, Bucky, 1943, wood, wire, 9 x 5 x 3 inches,  
Collection of the artist.
102. Isamu Noguchi, Cronos, 1947, balsawood, 85-1/2 x 23 x  
20 inches, Walker Art Center.
103. Isamu Noguchi, The Cry, 1959-63, balsawood, 84 x 30 x  
20 inches, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Figure

104. Isamu Noguchi, Shodo Hanging, 1960-62, bronze, 82 inches high, Cultural Arts and University Museum, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.
105. Isamu Noguchi, Shodo Flowing, 1960-62, bronze, 76-1/4 x 12 x 12 inches, Collection of the artist.
106. Isamu Noguchi, Solitude, 1962, bronze, 75-3/4 x 11-3/4 x 11-3/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
107. Isamu Noguchi, Mortality, 1959-62, balsawood, dimensions unknown, Present whereabouts unknown.
108. Isamu Noguchi, The Inhabitant, 1962, bronze, 54 x 15 x 16-3/4 inches, Norton Gallery and School of Art.
109. Isamu Noguchi, Stone of Spiritual Understanding, 1962, bronze, 53 x 55 x 14 inches, Collection of the artist.
110. Isamu Noguchi, Shinto, 1974-75, stainless steel, dimensions unknown, formerly Bank of Tokyo Building, New York.
111. Isamu Noguchi, Night Wind, 1966-67, black marble, 11 x 15 x 12-3/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
112. Isamu Noguchi, Spirits Flight (#1), 1969, green and pink Serpentine and Carrara marble, 94 x 5-3/4 x 5-3/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
113. Isamu Noguchi, Spirits Flight (#2), 1970, Belgian black and white Carrara marble, 93 x 3 x 3 inches, Estate of Mrs. Harry Lynde Bradley.
114. Isamu Noguchi, Bow(A), 1970, yellow Siena marble and black Petit granit, 54 x 17-1/2 x 31 inches, Neuberger Museum.
115. Isamu Noguchi, Bow(B), 1973, yellow Siena marble and black Petit granit, 38 x 29-3/4 x 20 inches, Collection of the artist.
116. Isamu Noguchi, Bow(C), 1973, yellow Siena marble and black Petit granit, 58-1/2 x 35 x 16 inches, Collection of the artist.
117. Isamu Noguchi, Life of a Cube, 1962, black granite, 12-1/2 x 12-1/2 x 12-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.

Figure

118. Isamu Noguchi, Life of a Cube #2, ca. 1962, black granite, 12-1/2 x 12-1/2 x 12-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
119. Isamu Noguchi, Red Cube, 1968, steel, painted red, 24 feet high, Marine Midland Bank Building, New York.
120. Isamu Noguchi, Sculptures, Bayerische Vereins Bank, 1972, black and white granite and aluminum, 8 feet to a side of each cube, Computer Center, Bayerische Vereins Bank, Munich, Germany.
121. Isamu Noguchi, Cube Root, 1967, black granite, 10 x 12 inches, Mrs. Richard Rodgers.
122. Isamu Noguchi, Life of a Cube #5, ca. 1968, granite, 15-1/2 x 24 1/4 x 17 3/4 inches, Collection of the artist.
123. Isamu Noguchi, Expo '70 Fountains, 1970, stainless steel, dimensions unknown, Expo '70 site, Osaka, Japan.
124. Isamu Noguchi, Cubic Pyramid, 1969, black granite, 36 x 53 x 53 inches, Collection of the artist.
125. Isamu Noguchi, Skyviewing Sculpture, 1969, steel, painted black, 10 feet to a side, Western Washington State College, Bellingham, Washington.
126. Isamu Noguchi, Monument to Ben Franklin, 1933, photostat from lost original drawing, Collection of the artist.
127. Isamu Noguchi, Monument to the Plow, 1933, photostat from lost original drawing, Collection of the artist.
128. Isamu Noguchi, Play Mountain, 1933, plaster model, Collection of the artist.
129. Isamu Noguchi, Frontier, 1935, set. Choreography: Martha Graham.
130. Isamu Noguchi, Appalachian Spring, 1944, set. Choreography: Martha Graham.
131. Isamu Noguchi, Herodiade, 1944, set. Choreography: Martha Graham.
132. Isamu Noguchi, Dark Meadow, 1946, set. Choreography: Martha Graham.

Figure

133. Isamu Noguchi, Errand into the Maze, 1947, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
134. Isamu Noguchi, Cave of the Heart, 1946, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
135. Isamu Noguchi, Night Journey, 1947, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
136. Isamu Noguchi, Diversion of Angels, 1948, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
137. Isamu Noguchi, Seasons, 1947, set and costumes.  
Choreography: Merce Cunningham.
138. Isamu Noguchi, Orpheus, 1948, set and costumes.  
Choreography: George Balanchine.
139. Isamu Noguchi, Judith, 1950, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
140. Isamu Noguchi, Seraphic Dialogue, 1955, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
141. Isamu Noguchi, King Lear, 1955, set and costumes.  
Royal Shakespeare Company, Director: George Devine.
142. Isamu Noguchi, Embattled Garden, 1958, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
143. Isamu Noguchi, Clytemnestra, 1958, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
144. Isamu Noguchi, Acrobats of God, 1960, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
145. Isamu Noguchi, Alcestis, 1960, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
146. Isamu Noguchi, Phaedra, 1962, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
147. Isamu Noguchi, Cortege of Eagles, 1966, set.  
Choreography: Martha Graham.
148. Isamu Noguchi, Swimming Pool for Josef von Sternberg,  
1935, plaster model, Collection of the artist.
149. Isamu Noguchi, Ford Fountain for World's Fair, 1938,  
magnesite, dimensions unknown, Destroyed.

Figure

150. Isamu Noguchi, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company Garden, 1956-57, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, Bloomfield Hills, Connecticut.
151. Isamu Noguchi, UNESCO Garden Fountain, 1956-58, granite, ca. 10 feet high, UNESCO Building, Paris.
152. Isamu Noguchi, 666 Fifth Avenue Wall, 1957, stainless steel, 666 Fifth Avenue Building, New York.
153. Isamu Noguchi, Mississippi Fountain, 1961-62, granite, 16 feet high, Kaig and Besthoff Building, New Orleans.
154. Isamu Noguchi, Water-Source Sculpture, 1960-65, Elath granite, Billy Rose Sculpture Garden, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
155. Isamu Noguchi, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza Garden, 1961-64, Black River stone, granite, Chase Manhattan Bank Building, New York.
156. Isamu Noguchi, IBM Garden of the Future, 1964, painted cement, granite, IBM Headquarters, Armonk, New York.
157. Isamu Noguchi, IBM Garden of the Past, 1964, granite, IBM Headquarters, Armonk, New York.
158. Isamu Noguchi, Expo '70 Fountains, 1970, stainless steel, dimensions unknown, Expo '70 site, Osaka, Japan.
159. Isamu Noguchi, Intetra Fountain, 1974-76, stainless steel, 24 x 18 feet, Society of the Four Arts, Palm Beach, Florida.
160. Isamu Noguchi, Supreme Court Building Fountains, 1974, granite, dimensions unknown, Supreme Court Building, Tokyo, Japan.
161. Isamu Noguchi, Heaven, 1977-78, granite, Sogetsu Flower Arranging School, Tokyo, Japan.
162. Isamu Noguchi, Friendship Fountain, 1976, wood dowels and metal model, proposed height 150 feet, Collection of the artist.
163. Isamu Noguchi, Bicentennial Fountain, 1976-77, granite and stainless steel, 40 feet high and 40 feet long, Ferguson Monument Fund, Chicago.



Figure

164. Isamu Noguchi, Contoured Playground, 1941, plaster model, Collection of the artist.
165. Isamu Noguchi, Jefferson Memorial Park, 1945, plaster model, Lost.
166. Great Serpent Mound, prehistoric American Indian mound, Ohio.
167. Isamu Noguchi, Sculpture to be seen from Mars, 1947, sand model, Destroyed.
168. Isamu Noguchi, Park for Gandhi's Burial Place at Raj-Gat, 1948, plaster model, Present whereabouts unknown.
169. Isamu Noguchi, UNESCO Garden, 1956-58, UNESCO Building, Paris.
170. Isamu Noguchi, Jerusalem Garden, 1960-65, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
171. Isamu Noguchi, Octetra, 1968, fiberglass with gel coat, each element is 51-3/4 x 59-1/2 x 59-1/2 inches, Collection of the artist.
172. Isamu Noguchi, Memorial to Gandhi, 1948, bronze model, proposed height 50 feet, Lost.
173. Isamu Noguchi, Bell Tower for Hiroshima, 1950, model in white terracotta with wood frame, proposed height 70 feet, Lost.
174. Isamu Noguchi, Memorial to Buddha, 1957, bronze and plaster model, Collection of the artist.
175. Isamu Noguchi, Project for Lever House, 1952, second plaster model, Lost.
176. Isamu Noguchi, Bird Song, 1958, Imperial red Swedish granite and Greek marble, University of Nebraska Art Galleries, Sheldon Art Gallery.
177. Isamu Noguchi, Bird C (Mu), 1952-58, Greek marble, 22-3/4 x 8-1/8 inches, Museum of Modern Art.
178. Isamu Noguchi, IBM Sculpture, 1964, iron, IBM Headquarters, Armonk, New York.
179. Isamu Noguchi, Pylon, 1972-79, stainless steel, 120 feet high, Philip A. Hart Plaza, Detroit.

Figure

180. Isamu Noguchi, Pylon, 1977-78, granite, dimensions unknown, Sogetsu Flower Arranging School, Tokyo, Japan.
181. Isamu Noguchi, Project for Lever House, 1952, first plaster model, Lost.
182. Isamu Noguchi, The Family, 1956-57, Stoney Creek granite, 16 feet, 12 feet, and 6 feet high, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, Bloomfield Hills, Connecticut.
183. Isamu Noguchi, First National City Bank Sculptures, 1960-61, Tsukuba granite, 20 feet, 12 feet, and 6 feet high, First National City Bank Building, Fort Worth, Texas.
184. Isamu Noguchi, Landscape of Time, 1975, granite, tallest element ca. 8 feet, Federal Office Building, Seattle, Washington.
185. Isamu Noguchi, Momo Taro, 1977-78, granite, Storm King Art Center.
186. Isamu Noguchi, Readers Digest Garden, 1951, Readers Digest Building, Tokyo, Japan.
187. Isamu Noguchi, Shin Banraisha Faculty Room and Garden, 1951-52, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan.
188. Samrat Yantra, astronomical observatory, 1724, Jaipur, India.
189. Isamu Noguchi, Riverside Playground, 1961-66, bronze model, Collection of the artist.
190. Isamu Noguchi, U.N. Playground, 1952, bronze model, Collection of the artist.
191. Isamu Noguchi, Kodomo No Kuni Playground, 1965-66, plaster model, Destroyed.
192. Isamu Noguchi, U.S. Pavilion for Expo '70, 1968, painted plaster model, Collection of the artist.
193. Isamu Noguchi, Playscapes, 1975-76, basswood model, Collection of the artist.
194. Isamu Noguchi, Playground Equipment for Ala Moana Park, Hawaii, 1940, metal model, Lost.
195. Isamu Noguchi, Philip A. Hart Plaza, 1972-79, Detroit, Michigan.

## INTRODUCTION

Isamu Noguchi is an American sculptor born in Los Angeles in 1904 to an American mother and a Japanese father. His background includes a Japanese childhood, a midwestern adolescence, and a crucial sojourn in Paris. Eastern, American, and European cultures are all part of his consciousness. He has produced, over the past sixty years, some seven hundred studio sculptures in stone, wood, clay, metals, plastics, and mixed media. He has also produced hundreds of designs for lamps, furniture, interiors, plazas, playgrounds, sets, gardens, and unrealized projects of all kinds. The enormous variety of his work has staggered the imagination of critics and historians attempting to deal with this oeuvre. The two most common difficulties have been (1) the sheer range of materials and forms, together with a lack of recognizable personal style, and (2) the fact that so many of his works--the sets, the lamps, and the public spaces, for example--are not located within the museum/gallery context by which sculpture of the last hundred years or so has largely been defined. Thus, the very real problems of definition which plague anyone attempting to come to grips with Noguchi also reflect interestingly upon the assumptions underlying much recent critical comment.

From the time of his first one-man show in 1929, critics have responded to his ever-changing materials and forms with astonishment.

As one reviewer noted, "The artist seems to be equally at home in any medium he uses."<sup>1</sup> The wide range of materials was at first attributed to differences of content: "He works in different mediums . . . according to the subject which he develops."<sup>2</sup> By 1932, however, when he exhibited portraits, abstractions, and brush drawings at the same time, his "virtuosity" and "cleverness" were being ascribed to "impulsiveness" and "lack of profundity."<sup>3</sup> When Julien Levy wrote the first long article on Noguchi's work in 1933, he organized his remarks around the sculptor's "bi-polarity" of approach, which involved "understanding the limitations of . . . different mediums and keeping them separate, but for his own benefit always maintaining the separate activities in one parallel direction."<sup>4</sup> Though the article remains one of the very few insightful appraisals of Noguchi, others failed to benefit from Levy's observations. The sculptor was accused of "increasing absorption . . . in the bizarre and the experimental."<sup>5</sup> After unfavorable responses to his 1935 one-man show at the Marie Harriman Gallery, he "determined to have no further truck with either galleries or critics,"<sup>6</sup> and worked outside the gallery system until 1949. During

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<sup>1</sup>"Exhibition at Marie Sterner Gallery," Herald Tribune, February 9, 1930.

<sup>2</sup>"Japanese Artists," Chicago Evening Post, April 8, 1930.

<sup>3</sup>"Noguchi's Double Art Life," Art Digest, March 1, 1932.

<sup>4</sup>Julien Levy, "Isamu Noguchi," Creative Art, January 1933, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup>Edward Alden Jewell, "Noguchi's Sculpture in Metal Exhibition," New York Times, January 31, 1935.

<sup>6</sup>Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 23.

those fourteen years he worked on public projects and private portraits, contributing an occasional sculpture to a group exhibition. In 1946, however, a second long article on him appeared. Written by Thomas Hess, the article reviewed Noguchi's career in terms of the artist's psychological grounding in alienation: "Noguchi, half Japanese and half Scotch-American, has carried his exile inside him like his skeleton."<sup>7</sup> As Levy had once made a virtue of Noguchi's changeability, Hess made a virtue of his distanced stance, seeing his "exile" as a tool for overcoming "the obstacles of his facility and his fashionableness."<sup>8</sup> By making the artist an existential hero, Hess shifted critical emphasis from Noguchi's protean virtuosity to his personality, an approach which has become increasingly popular, though few other writers picked it up at the time.

In 1949 Noguchi had a one-man show at the Egan Gallery, and critical comment seemed to pick up where it had left off in 1935. Though some reviewers saw him as "a major American sculptor"<sup>9</sup> or "one of the most important American sculptors living,"<sup>10</sup> Clement Greenberg did not. He criticized Noguchi for his "excessive taste . . . excessive polish and smoothness of surface, an excessive clarity and precision of

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas Hess, "Isamu Noguchi '46," Art News, September 1946, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>9</sup>Christopher Fremantle, "New York Commentary," Studio, July 1949, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>E. K. (Elaine de Kooning), "Isamu Noguchi," Art News, March 1949, p. 52.

drawing."<sup>11</sup> Greenberg thought the works would have been better left half-finished--"one wished he had . . . had the courage to stand on his conceptions as conceptions"<sup>12</sup>--and would have been better made of metal or wood rather than stone. As they stood they represented "miniature grace on a large scale . . . where is strength? where are profundity and originality?"<sup>13</sup> The article represented an implicit attack on Noguchi's distance from New York School sculptural strategies of rough finish, rugged materials, and grandiose themes. From then on, however, followers of Greenberg would find fault with Noguchi's "tastefulness." Meanwhile, the distance between him and other New York School sculptors increased.

By the time the Greenberg article appeared, discussions of Noguchi's work had begun to surface outside standard art publications. First in reviews of dance performances, then in magazines such as Interiors, House and Garden, and Architectural Forum, his sets, furniture designs, and environmental projects were enthusiastically received. Throughout the 1950s Interiors consistently applauded his light fixtures and akari, while Aline Louchheim (later Saarinen) wrote about his environmental projects for the New York Times. Her perceptive comments on his 1951 Readers Digest garden included the following: "nature itself was again the sculptor's medium . . . but ordered into an entity which, like

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<sup>11</sup>Clement Greenberg, "Art," The Nation, March 19, 1949, p. 341.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

modern architecture and like Noguchi's sculpture, has no single, static axis-oriented point of view, but is composed of a succession of changing spatial relations."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it might be said that during the 1950s and 1960s there was more insightful commentary on Noguchi in architectural and design publications than anywhere else.

In 1954, for example, the ceramic pieces he exhibited at the Stable Gallery were received as examples of "high unseriousness."<sup>15</sup> Time called them "the gingerbread cookies of a playful and somewhat inebriated baker."<sup>16</sup> Another reviewer described them as "humorous . . . playful . . . charming . . . decoration."<sup>17</sup> He did not have another show for five years; meanwhile, articles on him appeared in Newsweek and Fortune.<sup>18</sup> The latter was probably a result of his involvement with projects for Readers Digest, Lever Brothers, and Connecticut General Life Insurance; illustrations for the article were mostly of functional objects or environments. Equally tellingly, the works illustrated in the third long article on his career were all studio sculptures. Written in 1956, the article, by Addison Franklin Page, postulates three stages in the artist's "development": "the search for

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<sup>14</sup>Aline Louchheim, "Noguchi and 'Sculptured' Gardens," New York Times, September 30, 1951.

<sup>15</sup>H. K. (Hilton Kramer), "Noguchi," Arts, December 1, 1954, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup>"Eastern Yeast," Time, January 10, 1955, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup>Otis Gage, "Art," Arts and Architecture, February 1955, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>"Back to Clay," Newsweek, December 6, 1954, p. 83; Herryman Maurer, "Isamu Noguchi," Fortune, September 1955, pp. 116-21.

an adequate mode of formal expression," "the conscientious effort to relate his creative activity to the needs of human life," and, finally, "increasing absorption of and identification with Japanese traditions."<sup>19</sup> The first stage lasted, according to Page, until the mid-1940s; the second stage included sets for Martha Graham and projects in Japan, while the third consisted of the clay works of the early 1950s. The implication was that the first and second stages--representing Noguchi's enormous range of materials and forms, together with his environmental concerns--were passing fancies in the artist's "progress to final integration and authenticity."<sup>20</sup> Page's view of Noguchi's oeuvre as a series of evolutionary phases may have been one of the factors in the artist's decision to exhibit marble, granite, bronze, and iron pieces (no clay sculptures) along with a selection of models for public projects at his show at the Stable Gallery in 1959. This show was taken seriously, and there was much comment about his "fabulous virtuosity"<sup>21</sup> and about his importance as "one of the very few major sculptors we have."<sup>22</sup> One reviewer, however, raised the Greenbergian complaint about "taste," damning the work for "the frequent triumph of

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<sup>19</sup>Addison Franklin Page, "Isamu Noguchi . . . The Evolution of a Style," Art in America, Winter 1956-57, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Marvin Schwartz, "Noguchi at the Stable Gallery," Apollo, August 1959, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup>Dore Ashton, "Isamu Noguchi," Arts and Architecture, August 1959, p. 14.



aestheticism at the expense of real sculptural ideas."<sup>23</sup> As American crudeness (for which read vigor) was then being pitted against European refinement (decadence), this was really a complaint that Noguchi, with his ties to Paris and Japan, was not American enough. (More recently that same reading of his background has counted for him rather than against him.)

During the 1960s, when Noguchi exhibited regularly, this same complaint would be raised again and again. The "weightless" pieces in his 1961 Cordier and Warren show were seen as "enormously civilized and immaculate,"<sup>24</sup> or were compared to "the beautifully barbered and anointed face of a very rich man."<sup>25</sup> Two years later his bronze "gravity" sculptures suggested to one reviewer a "maximum effort to transcend the fashionable . . . [by attempting] to give an awkward ingeniousness to his forms."<sup>26</sup> Needless to say, the reviewer found the attempt unsuccessful. When some of these pieces were shown, along with earlier metal works, at his only one-man show in Paris (galerie Claude Bernard, 1964), a French critic deplored "his extreme good taste which forbids him the least false step."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Sidney Tillim, "In the Galleries," Arts Magazine, June 1959, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup>L. C. (Lawrence Campbell), "Isamu Noguchi," Art News, Summer 1961, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup>Vivien Raynor, "In the Galleries," Arts, September 1961, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup>Barbara Rose, "New York Letter," Art International, May 25, 1963, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup>D. C. (D. Chevalier), "Les expositions à Paris," Aujourd'hui, October 1964, p. 46.

Against this tide stood Annette Michelson's catalogue essay for that show, which commended the work for "A constancy of formal expression . . . an attempted reconciliation of immanence and transcendence."<sup>28</sup> By this she meant that Noguchi's endeavor was formulated around the reconciliation of "respect for the hard, concrete, irreducible, self-justificatory object" with "a tradition which places upon the work of art the burden of ritual."<sup>29</sup> She noted themes, such as weight and lightness, openness and motion, that have preoccupied Noguchi, and she alluded to his environments while suggesting that the importance of his collaboration with Martha Graham "cannot be too strongly stressed."<sup>30</sup> She accounted for the diversity of his oeuvre as expressing "the shifts, displacements, modifications, the changing contours of a long voyage."<sup>31</sup> The essay was reprinted in Art International, but it seems, like the earlier articles of Levy and Hess, to have had little effect upon other critics.

The only other writer who appreciated and understood Noguchi's work during the 1960s was Dore Ashton. Beginning in 1959 with a review of the Stable exhibition, she regularly praised his "great gift for finding simple, apposite shapes"<sup>32</sup> which carried within them "cues to a vast

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<sup>28</sup>Annette Michelson, Isamu Noguchi (Paris: Galerie Claude Bernard, 1964), unpagued.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Dore Ashton, "New York Report," Kunstwerk, July 1964, p. 40.

culture of past sculptural achievements, present problems, and a kind of openness to . . . the future."<sup>33</sup> She often referred to his involvement with theater and design, and hailed his "instinctive feeling for topography"<sup>34</sup>--one of her articles is just on the Beinecke and Chase Manhattan gardens. She would continue her partisanship into the 1970s, writing a particularly insightful article on Noguchi's striped marble sculptures in 1972. In the course of that discussion she noted that "Noguchi has always been exceptionally responsive to the peculiarities of place . . . his work frequently reflects the strong influence particular sites have had on him."<sup>35</sup> She also concluded, however, that "The symbol, no matter how sublimated, is the thing for Noguchi."<sup>36</sup>

Hilton Kramer, who also regularly reviewed Noguchi's work during the 1960s and 1970s, was not impressed by the environments, feeling that "the beauty rigorously contained in his small sculpture is somehow dissipated when translated into public discourse."<sup>37</sup> He found the artist capable only of "small marvels."<sup>38</sup> His response to the Whitney

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<sup>33</sup>Dore Ashton, "Isamu Noguchi," Arts and Architecture, June 1963, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup>Dore Ashton, "New York Report."

<sup>35</sup>Dore Ashton, "Noguchi's Recent Marbles," Art International, October 1972, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>37</sup>Hilton Kramer, "The Craftsman Noguchi," New York Times, April 8, 1967.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Museum's 1968 retrospective of eighty Noguchi sculptures was even more negative. He summarized it as the anthology of "an artist of superlative craft . . . and a highly refined sensibility . . . indebted to traditions and to sentiments that have outworn their relevance to contemporary experience."<sup>39</sup>

That retrospective--the only one so far organized by a New York museum--revealed the range of Noguchi's materials and forms to a new generation of critics, and they responded much as had their counterparts in the 1930s. His sculptures were likened to those of Brancusi, Arp, or the Constructivists, and some reviewers found them "primitive and sophisticated, as basic and dynamic as the processes of nature,"<sup>40</sup> while others focused on "the artist's seemingly abrupt changes in direction."<sup>41</sup> The catalogue for the show had an essay by curator John Gordon that stressed the connections between Noguchi and other artists and added no new insights into the works. The works were almost exclusively studio sculptures, which may be why several critics found Noguchi "old-fashioned" or even "obsolete."<sup>42</sup> A New York Times Sunday magazine article occasioned by the show was called "Noguchi, a Kind of Throwback," and it defined the artist as "basically a carver" whose

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<sup>39</sup>Hilton Kramer, "Isamu Noguchi: A Selective Anthology," New York Times, April 21, 1968.

<sup>40</sup>David Shirey, "Noguchi," Newsweek, April 29, 1968, p. 94.

<sup>41</sup>Mahonri Sharp Young, "Letter from the U.S.A.," Apollo, August 1968, p. 143.

<sup>42</sup>Gordon Brown, "Month in Review," Arts, May 1968, p. 53.

sculpture "means everything and nothing. . . . It means whatever the viewer wants it to mean."<sup>43</sup> Thus, at the moment when a forty-year career might have begun to be put into perspective, critics were still floundering in Noguchi's diversity or were dismissing him for failing to connect with current sculptural trends.

The situation did not improve in the years immediately following the retrospective. By then, his works were in museums and spaces all over the world, his sets had been seen by millions of people over the years, and he had begun to turn up in histories of art. (He has not been included in the survey books, however; Janson and Gardner mention only David Smith and Alexander Calder, of the sculptors of his generation.) Histories of modern art mentioned him briefly;<sup>44</sup> books on modern sculpture and/or twentieth-century American art usually had more to say. There was a rash of such books in the late 1960s and early 1970s; they defined Noguchi's importance either in terms of his personality or in terms of the formal aspects of his work.

The first or personal approach employed the "argument from origin," maintaining that the artist's work is unique because of his dual heritage, because it combines Western forms with Eastern mysticism, Brancusi with Zen. An example of this approach is the statement that Noguchi's work "belongs in a class by itself . . . forged from an

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<sup>43</sup>Harold Schonberg, "Noguchi, A Kind of Throwback," New York Times, April 14, 1968, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup>See, for example, George Heard Hamilton, Painting and Sculpture of the 19th and 20th Centuries (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 419, or H. H. Arnason, History of Modern Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 426.

Occidental-Oriental heritage into a 20th century form of expression."<sup>45</sup> Recently, another writer has maintained that Noguchi "managed to combine in triumphant synthesis important features of both Eastern and Western traditions. The sculptural resolution of his conflicts became the trademark of a unique sensibility in American art."<sup>46</sup> The emphasis on Noguchi's background comes from a wish to read his works as extensions of his personality, and thus as immediate expressions of his individual problems. The careers of many twentieth-century artists can and perhaps should be read this way, but it is more difficult to do so in Noguchi's case, for he is rarely even remotely autobiographical.

The second general approach employed the "argument from form." The critics who leaned in this direction sought formal affinities between Noguchi's works and those of other sculptors. Finding the greatest number of these in the 1940s, they identified his contribution as having been made during those years, specifically to and through Surrealism. Sam Hunter, for example, thought his "interlocking systems of flattened biomorphic forms derived from Arp or Miro."<sup>47</sup> Wayne Andersen, on the other hand, saw strong formal links between Noguchi and Tanguy, Matta, Giacometti, and Ernst. Andersen also included some discussion of the artist's work in the 1930s, but most of those who concentrated upon form

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<sup>45</sup>Wayne Craven, Sculpture in America (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1968), p. 650.

<sup>46</sup>Sam Hunter, Isamu Noguchi (New York: Abbeville Press, 1979), p. 24.

<sup>47</sup>Sam Hunter, Modern American Painting and Sculpture (New York: Dell, 1959), p. 183.

(and there are many more of them) mentioned Noguchi only in chapters or sections on the 1940s.<sup>48</sup> Although there is a sense in which a collective style does derive from shared morphological characteristics, the implication was that Noguchi's sculpture was interesting or relevant to modern art only in that brief moment of shared forms. Some writers presupposed that it is only by means of form that a "contribution" can be made, and that it is only from other art (or artists) that such forms can come. That may or may not be true but, again, it is a Procrustean bed for Noguchi, for the other fifty years of his career have been filled with works that bear little formal similarity to those of his peers.

Thus, the "argument from form" tended to be too specific, singling out an aspect of artmaking with which (as an end in itself) Noguchi has been singularly and steadily unconcerned. The "argument from origin," on the other hand, was too general. The artist's concerns have been shaped not only by America and Japan, but also by experiences in Paris, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Bali, India, and China, to name only a few. A third definition of Noguchi's importance was advanced by Dore Ashton:

Noguchi's singular contribution to American sculpture lies in his power as a sculptor of integral spaces--whether they be spaces of the theatre or of the open terrain, or carved from within architectural behemoths. He has also preserved the traditions of the ancients, and

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<sup>48</sup>Wayne Andersen, American Sculpture in Process: 1930-70 (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), pp. 49-50. For other examples, see Rosalind Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 148, and Whitney Museum of American Art, 200 Years of American Sculpture (Boston: David Godine, 1976), pp. 176-77.

of Brancusi, in his search for pure form, finding a contemporary language to sustain the time-honored monolith.<sup>49</sup>

This definition encompassed more of his major concerns than the other two approaches did, and located his originality in an area which is neither personal nor strictly formal. Though this view was presented in a well-illustrated survey of modern American sculpture, it did not win over other critics at the time. Indeed, critical commentary on Noguchi in the early 1970s actually became more general rather than focused on the specifics of his career.

In 1978, ten years after the Whitney retrospective, the Walker Art Center organized an exhibition which should have begun to redress the balance. It stressed the sets, environments, and unrealized projects, and included only a handful of studio sculptures. The catalogue had essays on each of the areas stressed in the show and a section noting recurrent aspects of the artist's formal vocabulary--circles, cubes, pyramids, columns, and voids were among the forms pointed out. The exhibition traveled through the mid- and far West and appeared, in abridged form, at the Whitney Museum in New York. It generated a number of reviews and articles but, as at the time of the 1968 retrospective, they tended to be laudatory and general instead of critical or insightful. The more of Noguchi that is revealed, the less critics seem to have felt able to encompass or define him, except as "multiple." On the problem of multiplicity one reviewer wrote, "It is as if there are too

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<sup>49</sup>Dore Ashton, Modern American Sculpture (New York: Abrams, 1968), p. 28.



many Noguchis to hold in the mind."<sup>50</sup> He perceived "a profound intellectual and stylistic consistency in the work"<sup>51</sup> but did not elucidate the nature of that consistency in the course of an otherwise intelligent article. Another critic, on the other hand, asked himself "Is there no underlying unity here?" and, after noting some of the artist's diversities, answered, "I am finally inclined to think not, not even at the level of meaning and motive."<sup>52</sup> At best, this reviewer found him dualistic, expressing "his own two-fold national heritage"<sup>53</sup> in geometric or organic forms.

Sam Hunter also saw Noguchi's career in terms of ongoing alternation between geometric and organic forms. In his 1979 monograph on the artist--the first and, so far, only full-length study to appear--Hunter went on to say that "It is characteristic of Noguchi to alternate between purely sculptural ideas, environmental design, and utilitarian objects."<sup>54</sup> Alternations of form and mode reflect alternating swings toward East and West, and are in turn part of a larger goal: "a comprehensive integration of the arts."<sup>55</sup> Hunter offered a

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<sup>50</sup>Benjamin Forgey, "Isamu Noguchi's Elegant World of Space and Function," Smithsonian, April 1978, p. 46.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>52</sup>Franz Schulze, "Noguchi's Multiplicities," Art in America, January-February 1979, p. 131.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Sam Hunter, Isamu Noguchi, p. 76.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

sympathetic general chronological survey of Noguchi's art; it has not been followed up by more specific studies. Thus, at an age when most well-known artists' careers have been thoroughly dissected and documented, the shape of Noguchi's undertaking either eludes critics altogether or is understood only in general terms. His diversity and his environmental activities are more accepted than they were fifty years ago, largely because of the experiments of recent sculptors. This has helped Noguchi's reputation but it has also encouraged the use of "multiple" or "protean" as definitions of what he does rather than as clues to further investigation.

Investigation has certainly been hindered by the nature of the work itself. It is physically scattered and stylistically diffuse. Moreover, much of it was conceived for and/or realized in nongallery, nonmuseum spaces, so that people using a bank in Fort Worth, a library in New Haven, or an office building on Wall Street see a Noguchi every day, but the critic has to make a special effort to have the same experience. Photographs, of course, are of limited use, and encourage superficial critical response. It is interesting that the problem of access is reversed in Noguchi's case; usually it is the public that has to make an effort to see sculpture in galleries, museums, or private collections. Even when the work was seen, it has consistently had qualities--human scale, sophistication, refinement, elegance, and beauty--that have evoked a particularly (but not exclusively) American critical bias in favor of that which is huge, crude, bold, rough, and ugly, i.e., "non-European." Noguchi is also suspect, in those terms,

by birth and by association (with Paris). It is curious that Noguchi, born in America of an American mother, seems never to have been considered as "American" as the Armenian émigré Gorky or the Dutch émigré de Kooning. One could see in this either unconscious prejudice urging that to be half Eastern is to be non-Western, or else reverse snobbism maintaining that no one who is half Eastern would want to be Western. Whatever the cause, a feeling that Noguchi is not really American has contributed to critical shyness in coming to grips with him.

Those who have tried have mostly taken a chronological approach, surveying the works in historical sequence. This yields a series of changes of place, style, material, and project type, promoting a tendency to focus on the process of change as the essence of Noguchi's work, and obscuring any other kind of coherence it might have. A second approach is to organize the work by project type or material. Noguchi himself did this in his autobiographical A Sculptor's World, and the Walker Art Center catalogue followed that lead. The problems with this approach are that it gives very little sense of how sets, for example, affect playgrounds and vice versa, and that when extended to the studio sculpture it yields categories of materials--marble, aluminum, wood, and so on--that may be used only once every twenty years. A third approach has been to group the work descriptively, usually into "opposites" such as "geometric" and "organic." While this avoids some of the pitfalls of the other two approaches, it yields only a superficial set of characteristics which are, moreover, often integrated in individual Noguchi sculptures.

Given the complexity of Noguchi's work, no one approach will be entirely satisfactory. For my purposes, I have found it most expedient to discuss separately those works which involve some notion of the figure, those which involve nonfigural forms, and those which involve the articulation of space. While this division may at first seem as superficial as "geometric" and "organic," I have found that these three modes of realizing three-dimensional form have represented, for Noguchi, three separate but equal (he often works in all three modes concurrently) ways of saying what he wants to say. As meaning is of paramount importance to him, I have included a brief section on the origins of his symbolic system in the myths and metaphors that were a vital part of his heritage.

Within each of the three main chapters a sequence of works is examined chronologically and subdivided, where appropriate, by project type or important recurrent form. The purpose of this internal organization is to demonstrate the vital unity of Noguchi's work through time and countless changes of material, context, and scale. Works have been chosen for their formal importance in Noguchi's development and/or for their thematic resonance. The chapter on his figural sculpture examines the sources for and development of figural themes and strategies through a series of portraits, reliefs, assembled, modeled, and carved figures dating from the late 1920s to the early 1970s. It also deals with the historical relationship between Noguchi's figures and those of other twentieth-century sculptors, particularly his mentor Brancusi. The historical relationship between Noguchi and other abstract sculptors is

examined in the next chapter, and the sources for his nonfigural forms are located in his involvement with science and, most particularly, with Buckminster Fuller, whose relationship to Noguchi is discussed in detail. Works ranging in date from 1928 to 1976 are analyzed in relationship to the themes that occur again and again in his nonfigural work.

The last chapter is concerned with the environments, which for Noguchi have always meant the articulation of nongallery, nonmuseum spaces. The meaning which this term has had for other modern artists is examined, particularly in terms of set design, a field where Noguchi has been especially active. In that context, his crucial relationship with Martha Graham is discussed in detail. The meanings of and interrelationships between particular forms within his environments are examined through sequences of works spanning fifty years. The impact of the major environments in situ is also discussed.

Implicit throughout these chapters, and explicitly discussed in the Conclusion, are the interconnections between figural, nonfigural, and environmental pieces. Thematically, Noguchi's figural repertory focused around images of males, which came to be associated with metal, technology, modernity, and the mind, and images of females, which developed associations with stone, nature, the past, and the emotions. The third term in this archetypal duality was the hero-child, who integrated and transcended both male and female. As the artist developed a nonfigural vocabulary he found a corollary to the hero-child in the radiant, integrative energies of light, and an equivalent for the male/female

duality in a dialogue between weightlessness and gravity. In his environments, arrangements of vertical and horizontal elements carry on the weightlessness/gravity dialogue, while integrative energy is provided by water, rather than light.

The sources for this archetypal yet, in Noguchi's hands, uniquely modern symbolism have not lain primarily in his associations with other artists, though he has known them all over the world. Indeed, his internationalism and lack of "fine arts" prejudice have meant that artists who have been important to him include not only Constructivists, Social Realists, and Surrealists, but also Japanese gardeners, Native American mound builders, and Balinese dancers. His most important and long-standing relationships have been with poets and poetry, and with Buckminster Fuller and Martha Graham, who showed him, respectively, the benign, integrative possibilities of scientific inquiry and the expressive, emotional potential of physical movement.

If, as I believe, poetry, science, and dance have contributed more to Noguchi's development than contemporary art movements, then the critic's traditional problems with this artist--his diversity and "extrasculptural" concerns--would seem to be compounded. Once these sources have been investigated, however, and put in context with his thematic continuities and three concurrent ways of realizing three-dimensional form, Noguchi's work begins to emerge as not only immensely coherent but also truly original in intent, meaning, and form. His sculpture speaks clearly but it speaks only in the aggregate, so that a study of one mode, or theme, or source within his oeuvre would not yield

that sense of understanding which, once established, can lead to infinite numbers of more focused studies.

"Understanding," however, must remain a relative term. Not only is the artist alive and well and constantly changing, but anyone who can operate simultaneously in three very different sculptural modes, creating different types of archetypal images inspired by various "extrasculptural" sources in an enormous variety of materials, will elude even the most widespread methodological net. If my approach does not encompass every aspect of Noguchi, I hope that he will not feel that it does him too great an injustice.

## CHAPTER I

### METAPHOR AND MEANING

Noguchi's preoccupation with meaning is a result of both his background and his friendships. His crucial friendships with Brancusi, Buckminster Fuller, and Martha Graham will be examined in subsequent chapters. Here we will inquire into the background he brought to those friendships. First of all, Isamu Noguchi is the child of poets. His father, Yone Noguchi, published his first book of poetry at age twenty-one. Yone wrote exclusively in English, and his poetry was influenced by Whitman and Poe; he became known, in fact, as the "Oriental Whitman." He spent much of his time in the United States and Europe, where he associated with Imagists and admired the French Symbolists, particularly Verlaine. The Imagists were a group of poets that included Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, and H. D.; they advocated pared-down free verse confrontations with the real world. Like them, Yone Noguchi wrote nonrhyming poems concentrated on specific details of Nature. As with some Symbolists, the mood of his verse is lonely, tearful, and ecstatic:

Alas, my soul is like a paper lantern, its pastes  
wetted off under the rainy night, in the  
rainy world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Yone Noguchi, Seen and Unseen (San Francisco: Gelett Burgess and Porter Garnett, 1897), p. 12.



Some of his images are extraordinarily vivid: "Gossamer-surgin,  
pleasure-foamed,/ dream-bodied seas of reverie"; or "The flat-boarded  
earth, nailed down at/ night, rusting under the darkness"; or "Older  
than love and tears/ Birds of silence born before the world and wind  
were made."<sup>2</sup> In the 1940s Isamu Noguchi produced a sculpture named  
after his father's "To the Sunflower":

Thou burstest from mood  
How sad we have to cling to experience!  
Marvel of thy every atom burning in life,  
How fully thou livest!  
Didst thou ever think to turn to cold and shadow?  
Passionate liver of sunlight,  
Symbol of youth and pride;  
Thou art a lyric of thy soaring color,  
Thy voicelessness of song is action,  
What absorption of thy life's meaning,  
Wonder of thy consciousness--  
Mighty sense of thy existence!<sup>3</sup>

Yone Noguchi met Leonie Gilmour in New York, where she had been  
born and raised. He had advertised in the Herald for someone to correct  
his English compositions and she answered the ad. They met in 1901 and  
married two years later, but they had separated before their son Isamu  
was born in 1904. They were reunited for a time in Japan, but the  
reconciliation was brief, and Noguchi knew his father mainly through his  
poems. Through them he would have been impressed with the importance of  
metaphor and of direct, intense communication of universal truths--  
aspects of his father's work which became important to him too.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 15, 20, 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

His mother was the first major influence on his world view. She was the daughter of a journalist, a literature major at Bryn Mawr who became a writer, teacher, and translator. Strong-minded and independent, she was determined that her son would be an artist. As she wrote to Yone when Isamu was two: "I would like to put him to an art school somewhere, where he will have eye and hand trained to express his idea."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, she tutored him herself much of the time and raised him on poetry, myth, and folktales. Besides Greek myths, "Chaucer, Uncle Remus, and Lady Gregory were about equally mixed"<sup>5</sup> in his education. Chaucer's bawdy pilgrims and Uncle Remus' antics represented lively folk traditions, while the Greek myths and the ancient Irish heroes of Lady Gregory presented the child with a magical world of larger-than-life gods and deeds.

And then there was William Blake--"my first awareness of poetry."<sup>6</sup> The first poem Noguchi remembered was "Ah Sunflower":

Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,  
Who countest the steps of the Sun,  
Seeking after that sweet golden clime  
Where the traveller's journey is done:

Where the Youth pined away with desire,  
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow,  
Arise from their graves, and aspire  
Where my sun-flower wishes to go.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ikuko Atsumi, ed., Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters (Tokyo: The Yone Noguchi Society, 1975), p. 196.

<sup>5</sup>Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Selected Poetry and Prose of William Blake (New York: Modern Library, 1953), p. 44.

The Blakean sunflower, unlike Yone Noguchi's, aspires beyond a "mighty sense of existence" to something else. Blake defined, through his poetry, four levels of human existence to which individuals might aspire. They were: Ulro (hell), "the savage and lonely world of unworked nature"; Generation (experience), ordinary life; Beulah (innocence), "the life of expanded and released desire"; and Eden, the life of "Wisdom, Art, and Science."<sup>8</sup> There are parallels between Noguchi's system of symbols and Blake's categories of experience. Noguchi's earthbound "female" sculptures express ideas associated with Blake's level of Generation; his child-heroes (or light or water projects) might be the products of Blake's Beulah; his "weightless" pieces could find a place in Blake's Eden. Noguchi's environments combine all these elements in the belief that experiencing them together will enable one to "see a World in a Grain of Sand/ and a Heaven in a Wild Flower." That is, such a combination will let us apprehend the infinite interpenetration of finite and infinite, of seen and unseen. For Noguchi, as for Blake, everything visible and invisible is here and now and must be pointed to through art.

After a childhood immersion in poetry and myth, Noguchi was sent to a progressive school in Indiana that emphasized the arts. However, the

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<sup>8</sup>Northrop Frye, introduction to Selected Poetry and Prose of William Blake, p. xxvii.

school closed shortly after he got there and for four years he attended a local high school and boarded with a Swedenborgian minister's family. Emanuel Swedenborg was an eighteenth-century scientist, philosopher, and theologian who held that all living experience had its counterpart in spiritual experience. His "doctrine of correspondences" held that all created things are the effects of divine causes and so correspond, on a material level, to spiritual realities.<sup>9</sup> His writings contained vivid, poetic descriptions of those spiritual realities: the trinity of love, wisdom, and activity which constituted God. Swedenborg did not preach or found a church, but after his death a number of followers founded one in his name. It gained many adherents in the nineteenth century, and his ideas were particularly popular among late-nineteenth-century writers and artists, who were drawn to them by Swedenborg's imagery and by the notion of the interpenetration of the spiritual and material realms. Noguchi's exposure to Swedenborgian thought would have confirmed the idea, drawn from Blake, of the immanence of the infinite in the finite.

Ten years later Noguchi discovered a memoir of sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska written by poet Ezra Pound, who had known his father. As Noguchi later wrote, the memoir, written in 1916, "entranced me, a young sculptor seeking guidance from the life of another who had died so young. Ezra Pound's book has the special interest of being the appre-

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<sup>9</sup>C. S. Sigstedt, The Swedenborg Epic (New York: Bockman Associates, 1953), p. 167.

ciation by a poet of a sculptor. My father was a poet and this had a great meaning for me."<sup>10</sup> The meaning was threefold. First, Noguchi appreciated Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture, which he had first heard of on a trip to London in 1927 and first seen on a subsequent visit in 1933. Later he would search out the Gaudier-Brzeska collections at the Musée de l'Art Moderne in Paris, the Tate Gallery in London, and the museum established by James Ede in Cambridge. The significance of Gaudier-Brzeska's work for Noguchi was that, like Brancusi's, "it emerged just at that time when sculpture was first breaking away from plastic expression, best expressed by Rodin, and was seeking a more direct and honest relationship to structure and material."<sup>11</sup>

Certainly Gaudier-Brzeska was an apostle of direct carving: "The sculpture I most admire is the work of master craftsmen. Every inch of the surface is won at the point of the chisel--every stroke of the hammer is a physical and mental effort."<sup>12</sup> His own sculptures were, with the exception of the large Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound, wrested from small bits of found or donated stone with homemade tools. The Head (fig. 1) was carved in two months from a half ton of stone Pound bought for him:

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<sup>10</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "On Gaudier-Brzeska," typescript, July 7, 1975, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Ezra Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 31.

The incised narrow eyeslits gaze, without pupils, on the invisible; the asymmetric rhombic nose carries its flat thrust upward to the plane of the brow, overlapped by a flame-like forelock; the broad mouth is calm; the formalized goatee, as if clapped on, is from Egypt, as are the truncated shoulders rising as through illimitable sand.<sup>13</sup>

The vertical rise of the bodiless head was associated in Gaudier-Brzeska's mind with Egypt: "Religion pushed [man] to the use of the VERTICAL which inspires awe. His gods were self made, he built them in his image."<sup>14</sup> Noguchi too would come to associate the vertical with man and religion: the new religion of science, which emphasized the mind and the future. Gaudier-Brzeska believed that the sphere had been man's original formal invention: "The driving power was life in the absolute--the plastic expression the fruitful sphere. The sphere is thrown through space, it is the soul and object of the vortex."<sup>15</sup> Paleolithic man, the ancient Chinese, and the peoples of Africa and Oceania shared a predilection for the sphere or, in the case of the latter, for the cylinder, "the vortex of fecundity."<sup>16</sup>

Many of Gaudier-Brzeska's sculptures are spheroid or cylindrical in shape. Stags represents two stylized reclining animals so intertwined that they become a cohesive, knobbed lump. Fawn, like a Stone Age bone carving, contains head and feet within its circular outline.

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<sup>13</sup>Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 256.

<sup>14</sup>Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

Gaudier-Brzeska rejected only the Greeks and their heritage, for their sculpture contained nothing of either god or nature: "The fair Greek saw himself only. He petrified his own semblance. HIS SCULPTURE WAS DERIVATIVE his feeling for form secondary."<sup>17</sup> The modern sculptors, rejecting the Greeks, "have made a combination of all the possible shaped masses . . . we have crystallized the sphere into a cube."<sup>18</sup>

Birds Erect combines the vertical and the cylindrical in a compact mass of folded-wing forms with open-beaked heads raised to the sky. It is an image of both earth-generated growth and aspiration beyond gravity. Red Stone Dancer (fig. 2) is a mixture of vertical and spherical forms; its topheavy precariousness is offset by coiled, self-contained movements. Gravity-defying verticality, earthbound horizontality, and circular, self-contained energy also became a part of Noguchi's formal vocabulary.

Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture was only a beginning, for he was killed in World War I at age twenty-three. Noguchi, however, saw in it also "a search for the deeper meaning of sculpture which is universal . . . a finding . . . a world viewpoint which has since encompassed the world."<sup>19</sup> That viewpoint had been succinctly expressed in "Vortex," published in Pound's Blast in June 1914. Parts of it have already been quoted, but its most famous passage was the first three sentences:

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>19</sup>Noguchi, "On Gaudier-Brzeska," p. 3.

Sculptural energy is the mountain.  
 Sculptural feeling is the appreciation of masses in relation.  
 Sculptural ability is the defining of these masses by planes.<sup>20</sup>

With this poetically concise definition, Gaudier-Brzeska evoked worlds of past, present, and future sculpture; metaphor, again, served as the direct bridge, the link of meaning. "Vortex," which asserted the universal, archetypal, crucial relationship between sculpture and cosmos, and which defined the role of the sculptor as the making of that meaning manifest through direct, respectful interaction with matter, was as important to Noguchi as Gaudier-Brzeska's work. Many years later he was still accepting the earlier sculptor's definition--though with his own addition--when he said, "If sculpture is the rock, it is also the space between rocks and between the rock and a man."<sup>21</sup>

The third aspect of Gaudier-Brzeska that intrigued Noguchi was his special relationship to Pound. Noguchi met Pound when the poet was old and ill, yet he treated the younger artist with a consideration which Noguchi felt must be due to his memory of Gaudier-Brzeska. He asked Noguchi to design a pedestal for the Head, which was to mark his grave. Ultimately, he was buried beneath a copy of it which Noguchi had had made and which he placed on a circular marble disc, "an indication of Pound's universality."<sup>22</sup> Pound had met Gaudier-Brzeska at an art show

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<sup>20</sup>Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture," Art News, March 1949, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup>Noguchi, "On Gaudier-Brzeska," p. 3.



at the Albert Hall in 1913; he promptly invited the sculptor to dinner, bought several of his works, and read him his poetry. "I was interested and I was determined that he should be."<sup>23</sup> He published the sculptor's statements, helped him find patrons, posed for him, and wrote him regularly when he enlisted in the French army. The year after Gaudier-Brzeska's death, Pound published a memoir which begins, "I have known many artists. I am not writing in a momentary fit of grief or of enthusiasm. I am not making phrases."<sup>24</sup> The memoir is a rambling, irreverent account, laced with the sculptor's writings and letters, but containing little biographical material. Pound says nothing, for example, about Gaudier's "sister" Sophie Brzeska, the older woman whose name he took and with whom he lived. There are many anecdotes but no elegy--only anger at the unfairness of the sculptor's death: "The real trouble with war (modern war) is that it gives no one a chance to kill the right people."<sup>25</sup>

He does not analyze Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture. At a certain point he says, "As to Brzeska's work itself: what more can I say of it? That I like it; that I believe in it; that I have lived with it; that its 'definition of masses' seems to me expressive of emotional and intellectual forces."<sup>26</sup> Much of his discourse concerns his own educa-

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<sup>23</sup>Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

tion by the sculptor in matters of sculptural form. He stresses the fact that most people have little sense of form, particularly in three dimensions, and he defines the artist's task as that of enlightenment:

It is the painter's or the sculptor's business so to use his planes, his colours, his arrangements that they shall cast a more vivid, a more precise image of beauty upon the mind of his spectator, than the spectator can get of himself or from a so different department of art.<sup>27</sup>

The prerequisites for a sculptor wishing to achieve this goal were, according to Pound, a sense of form and the great physical energy needed to wrest those forms from matter.

For Noguchi, the poet's prescriptions for great art were rather less important than his very real support of and respect for the sculptor himself. Further, Pound's feelings were expressed in a vivid, personal, oblique memoir which bore no relationship to art criticism, yet brilliantly conveyed the essence of Gaudier-Brzeska's art. That art, in turn, confirmed for Noguchi the idea that modernist sculptural activity not only could be reconciled with archetypal meanings, but that it might be the heart and soul of such an endeavor.

By that time he was himself committed to modernism, but he remained equally committed to meaning. The myths and poetry of his childhood had taught him that past and present were full of meanings which could be gotten at by metaphor. Blake and Swedenborg's "universe in a grain of sand" drew his attention to the idea that those meanings were spiritual and/or cosmic and that they were immanent. The sculptures and sta-

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

tements of Gaudier-Brezska, together with Pound's memoir of the sculptor, showed him how art could manifest those meanings and how the interaction of different art forms could expand and enrich both.

He would go on from there to develop his own unique ways of manifesting meaning in three-dimensional form, as well as his own unique system of symbolic associations for those forms. Brancusi, Buckminster Fuller, and Martha Graham would all make crucial contributions, as we shall see in the following chapters, to his developing ideas. But his obsession with meaning immediately set him apart, and kept him apart, from the majority of his artistic peers, and so it is vital to understand the sources from which this distinguishing aspect of his work proceeded.

## CHAPTER II

### FIGURAL SCULPTURE: PORTRAITS TO PRESENCES

Noguchi has come to be identified as a nonfigural sculptor.<sup>1</sup> He made his entrance with abstractions (at the Eugene Schoen Gallery in April 1929) and critics believed that "Abstraction is his only concern."<sup>2</sup> Further, he has characterized his more obviously figural works of the 1920s and 1930s as dictated by financial considerations: "It was a matter of eating, and this was the only way I knew of making money."<sup>3</sup> Yet figural elements inform approximately one-third of his oeuvre; many of the pieces date from as late as the 1960s and early 1970s, and the list includes some seventy portraits, done between 1928 and 1950.

Brancusi had once congratulated him on being young enough to start from pure abstraction rather than from nature, but Noguchi, like most of the generation that included Moore, Hepworth, Giacometti, Calder, Hare,

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Jacques Schnier, Sculpture in Modern America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), p. 51; John I. H. Baur, Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 76; Wayne Craven, Sculpture in America (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1968), p. 653; A. M. Hammacher, Evolution of Modern Sculpture (New York: Abrams, 1969), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup>(Untitled), New York Times, April 14, 1929, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 19.

Cornell, Smith, Roszak, Lipton, and Ferber, did not abandon the figure. Like them, he sought instead to align this most traditional sculptural subject with the post-"early modern" situation. Rodin, Maillol, Matisse, Picasso, Boccioni, et al. had "shifted [sculpture's] focus from the actions and feelings of the subject to those of the sculptor."<sup>4</sup> The object now embodied the processes of its own making and/or the personal concerns of its maker.

"Process" could mean the inclusion of the marks of the sculptor's manipulations in the "final" image (see Rodin's Walking Man). It could be expressed as a series, like Matisse's Jeanette I-V, which is "a presentation of steps in an object's formation."<sup>5</sup> The formation of an object could, equally, be realized as an annealing of components in hyperspace, where the viewer is everywhere all at once (Cubist and Futurist sculpture). Or, as in Constructivism, the object could be seen as a situational convening of materials whose separate properties directly inform the image.

On the other hand, the "feelings of the sculptor" might be expressed as an aspiration to the "purity" of another time and/or place: archaic Greece for Maillol, tribal Africa for Modigliani, the "Gothic" for Lehmbruck. They could also be shaped by an obsession with private fantasies, like Lachaise's pillowy woman, or with public provocation--the

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<sup>4</sup>Albert Elsen, Origins of Modern Sculpture (New York: George Braziller, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Rosalind Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 37.

ephemeral masks and objects of the Zurich Dadaists were made to irritate and confound in the context of the Gesamtkunstwerk. The anti-expressive, antiprocess strategies of Duchamp and Brancusi<sup>6</sup> began to be widely influential only in the late 1950s, when the post-early modern generation's stylistic idioms were well developed. (Even Noguchi, who had worked with Brancusi, did his most Brancusi-esque pieces between 1956 and 1959. His rediscovery of Brancusi's sculptural values at that time significantly affected the direction of his figural work.) By then Surrealism was also an important source. It provided artists with models for transformational operations. Objects would be lifted from their meanings and conjoined according to the dictates of dreams, fantasies, or chance. Or they could be made deliberately ambiguous, suggesting continuous erotic/organic metamorphoses. The results of these operations looked different but had a similar effect: the work of art was distanced from both the immediacy of personal expression and from purely formal preoccupations.

The problem, for sculptors who began working with the figure in the 1920s and 1930s, was to bring an ancient sculptural subject into the emerging modernist mainstream and, at the same time, exploit the figure's accessibility as a means for transmitting values--personal, political, or aesthetic. One oft-relied upon strategy might be called "defamiliarization." The early modern sculptors had established the pars pro toto (the partial figure as an expressive whole), the exemplary

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 69-103.

figure and the evocative head<sup>7</sup> as means of deflecting the viewer's attention from the figure's identity and focusing it on the body as form. Younger artists carried the process further by developing other kinds of equivalences: the body as "disembodied" line (Calder's wire figures), as object (Giacometti's Spoon Woman), or landscape (see any of Moore's Reclining Women). Creating analogical relations in which figural elements are recognized by the viewer helps establish the notion of the body as a set of Gestalten which can occur separately, in widely varying contexts (figures can be, literally, "spread around") and still retain meaning--even gain it.

Another strategy was "invention": the creation of a body image from nonfigural elements. Unlike "defamiliarization," this approach began with Cubist collage; the principle of assembling a figure from materials or objects not designed for that purpose was adopted by Constructivists and Surrealists alike. Gabo's 1917-20 Head of a Woman, Pevsner's 1924-26 Torso, Miro's 1931 Personnage au parapluie, and Magritte's 1959 The Woman are all examples of invention: bodies conjured by means of bits of celluloid or plastic, by furniture frames, or by a bottle. Welding, introduced by Picasso and Gonzalez, provided a closer synthesis: the image could be visually and structurally unified. Exploration of metals' conjunctive possibilities followed rapidly, particularly among younger American sculptors such as Lipton, Ferber, and,

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<sup>7</sup>Elsen, Origins of Modern Sculpture, pp. 26-35 and pp. 49-52.

<sup>8</sup>Rosalind Krauss, in Whitney Museum of American Art, 200 Years of American Sculpture (Boston: David Godine, 1976), p. 167.

most importantly, David Smith. The list of experimenters pointedly did not include Noguchi.

A third approach to the figure in twentieth-century art has been "dematerialization." In this approach, the making of objects is eliminated; art consists rather of activities carried out by or with the body of the artist. Recent (Acconci, Wilmarth, etc.) except for Futurist and Dada evenings, "dematerialization" was not a strategy adopted by Noguchi or his generation.

Within the general approaches outlined above, each sculptor developed a particular response to the problem of the figure. Giacometti, Hare, and Cornell, for example, aligned themselves most closely with Surrealism. Between 1929, when he joined the Surrealist group, and 1935, when he was expelled from it, Giacometti pursued a kind of phenomenology of desire, methodically making images of dream dislocations and painful erotic fantasies. By "caging" these objects or making them in "board game" format, Giacometti discovered a unique way of "projecting the Unconscious outward, of demonstrating how it is experienced."<sup>8</sup> The figure became for him a simulacrum of lived psychological reality; he forced the viewer to reexperience the artist's feelings as he had looked at it. After 1935, as his feelings became increasingly those of isolation, estrangement, being "out of touch," the figures retreated to near immateriality and immeasurable distance, holding their own as presences shadowing or "doubling" reality.<sup>9</sup> Giacometti's work was important to

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<sup>9</sup>Reinhold Hohl, Giacometti (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 31.



Noguchi, demonstrating as it did a way of dealing with the figure which was neither autobiographical nor conventional, but a replication of archetypal encounters with the self and others.

Narrative, implicit in Giacometti's work, is dominant in Hare's hybrids--Magician's Game combines table, body, and still-life in a self-played "game"--and in Cornell's allusive constructions. Cornell's boxes are small theaters of the mind where images, extracted equally from art, ephemera, and natural history play, in every sense of that word, together. Perhaps because of their more private, self-referential character, neither artist's work held any deep interest for Noguchi.

Others of his contemporaries approached the figure as a "natural object" freely generated by the sculptor rather than copied. The human body, rhymed with plants, clouds, or unicellular life, could demonstrate processes of growth, change, and morphological interaction. Resembling landscape elements shaped by natural forces--wind, water, weather--figures by Arp, Moore, and Hepworth were, nevertheless, skillful orchestrations of voids and masses, "skin" and matrix. Surfaces were especially important, for they could evoke sensual identification between viewer and sculpture. The pullulating lumps and hollows of Arp's Human Concretion seem to demand human touch; the eye glides like a hand over, under, around, and through the Moebius curves of a Moore Reclining Woman or Hepworth's Pendour.

Calder, a friend from Paris days when Noguchi assisted at performances of the Circus, was an indirect influence. His playful, inventive approach to materials encouraged Noguchi to experiment with suspension,

balance, and the creation of a sense of imminent motion--strategies he rehearsed with figures but used more successfully in other contexts (see Chapter III). Yet Calder also contributed to figural solutions in the twentieth century. His mobiles are "a metaphor for the body as it displaces space [and also] . . . become images of the body's response to gravity, of the internal source of its opposition in its determination to move."<sup>10</sup>

The twentieth-century debate about the figure's continued viability also raised the problem of materials. How could the artist be "true" to their inherent properties and, at the same time, create an image of a human body? "Carve-direct," the one-to-one interaction of sculptor, tool, block, and idea, seemed to offer an "ethical" compromise. Martha Cheney described the process somewhat breathlessly:

Sculptural form appears characteristically when the artist selects a block of wood or stone suitable for the realization of his idea and, without losing the conception of pure form, cuts away the material to develop broad volumes, working out the elements of his design in terms of these volumes.<sup>11</sup>

Vigorously propounded in theory and example by Zorach, Gross, de Creeft, Flannagan, and others, this approach became a credo for many American sculptors in the 1930s: "If it wasn't directly carved you were an s.o.b."<sup>12</sup> Figures by "carve-direct" sculptors tended to be

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<sup>10</sup>Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture, p. 216.

<sup>11</sup>Martha Cheney, Modern Art in America (New York: Whittlesey House, 1939), pp. 152-53.

<sup>12</sup>Isamu Noguchi in an interview with Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, 1973.

compact, traditionally scaled, and decorously "abstracted." They eschewed the emotional or sensual intensity of Giacometti or Moore, favoring relatively bland imagery that would not distract from the viewer's primary appreciation of the material.

At the same time, in the early 1930s, Picasso and Gonzalez were confirming their experiments with welding pieces of sheet metal together to form figures. The technique, based on the meltability of metals, offered a way out of the one-block-one-image dictum, but kept the intimacy between maker and material. Sculptors such as Ferber, Lipton, Roszak, and David Smith quickly adopted welding, each to his own purpose. Roszak created swooping, prickly nightmares of wartime horror; Ferber's figures, such as He Is Not a Man, were arid, eroded totems of the atomic age; Lipton's sharp-edged lead figures are brutally skeletonized or explosively caged. The images are variously Surreal, mythic, tragic, or frenzied. Only David Smith understood the revolutionary possibilities of welding for "drawing in space," for creating a three-dimensional object inimical to touch, for exorcizing personal demons through "an imagery devoted to violent possession and its abjuration."<sup>13</sup> Smith dislocated the body from psychological or sensual implications, reconstituting it as an object of sight.

Noguchi has been neither so passionate nor so renunciative, and he has never been attracted to the complete imaginative license granted by welding. He likes to work with a given, with what already exists but

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<sup>13</sup>Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture, p. 165.

not, until touched by the artist, significantly. This is one of the reasons for his long-term interest in the figure. It links him philosophically with the "carve-direct" school and the transformative approach of Moore or Giacometti, though he has also invented figures from bones, string, paper, and sheets of stone. What makes Noguchi's figural sculpture unique is, first of all, its veiled but archetypal content and, second, the fact that both its themes and formal strategies adumbrate, at their most literal or accessible level, the concerns and approaches underlying his nonfigural and environmental work.

Content has not been, recently, a popular critical topic. Many of those who perceived it in Noguchi's work dismissed it as irrelevant. Thus Barbara Rose: "Adapting his forms from the organic shapes of the Surrealists, Noguchi purged them of much of their mythic content, using them instead as a point of departure for highly sophisticated and refined works."<sup>14</sup> More recently, his work has been defined as essentially ambiguous: "his forms are so elusive and generalized that they invite a variety of interpretations."<sup>15</sup>

On the contrary, Noguchi's iconography has been relatively clear-cut. The frame of reference within which he realizes his figures has spiraled outward from personality to presence, from individual identity to the human condition, but his vocabulary and strategies have been

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<sup>14</sup>Barbara Rose, American Art Since 1900 (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 259.

<sup>15</sup>Martin Friedman, Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1978), p. 23.

quite consistent. His earliest figural works (apart from the 1923-26 "student" pieces) are the portraits, his main source of critical attention and income between 1929 and 1934. In those five years--part of which he spent abroad--he produced some fifty "heads." They were exhibited up and down the East Coast, as well as in Chicago, California, Hawaii, Canada, and London. They were universally well received, and he was praised for his ability to combine "modernism" and recognizability: "As a portraitist, while still true to the fundamental principles of abstraction, Noguchi ranks with the best."<sup>16</sup> The artist himself later confessed interest in portraiture, seeing in it "the confluence of personality and sculpture . . . of sensibility and type."<sup>17</sup> It offered, in fact, the most immediate way of confronting and transforming a given--an individual face.

His formal strategies promoted the portrait toward the autonomy of "the hard, concrete, irreducible, self-justificatory object."<sup>18</sup> Eyes, which might involve the viewer in "the force of human regard," are down-cast or eliminated. Skulls are smoothed toward geometry and poised on rounded, truncated necks; hair, when present, is reduced to a symmetrical cap; features are simplified. Surfaces are nondescriptive: they are so continuously modulated as to provide visual interest inde-

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<sup>16</sup>Edward Alden Jewell, "Work by 6 Japanese Artists," New York Times, February 9, 1930.

<sup>17</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup>Annette Michelson, Noguchi (Paris: Galerie Claude Bernard, 1964), unpagged.

pendent of the "subject," or they are so highly polished as to disperse the image in its (reflected) environment. Final versions are mostly executed in metals--bronze, iron, stainless steel, chrome plating--from clay or plaster originals, a few of which survive. There are several terracottas (Uncle Tagaki, Tsuneko-san) and wood carvings (Jane Grant Mason, Lillian Palmedo), but stone pieces are rare. In all cases, the individual properties of the material are emphasized.

The subjects of these portraits are equally individual: men and women active in the arts and sciences, in politics or in business. Some, such as Gershwin, Corbett (one of the architects of Rockefeller Center), Enters (a famous mime), or Thornton Wilder, were well-known figures; others--Buckminster Fuller, Martha Graham, Claire Boothe Luce, or Orozco--have become so. Many were inventors, dreamers, revolutionaries of form or ideas whose discoveries predicted the future. Noguchi's portraits convey a strong sense of inwardness--"closed-eye" vision--and determination. Such "psychological" traits should be at odds with formal autonomy but, in his best work, are not.

Two such pieces are Martha Graham (fig. 3) and Buckminster Fuller (fig. 4), both done in 1929, in bronze and chrome-plated bronze respectively. They are of equal height, supported by necks resting--Fuller's solidly, Graham's poised on a small bronze wedge--on square wooden bases. Graham has a masklike flatness and frontality, an archaic severity. The gaunt and dreamy face has heavy-lidded eyes, prominent cheekbones, and a high forehead. Behind the face the skull, with its thin coating of hair, recedes into insubstantiality, yet the whole head

gives the impression of a bud too heavy on its stalk--of mass precariously poised. Cast-marks and irregularities in the plaster original have been retained in the final bronze; the surface is matte, "crude," deliberately "earthy." Noguchi had met Graham that same year, in the spring of which she premiered Heretic. It was a ritualized elemental encounter, conveyed in "clusters of gestures [and] . . . clumps of movements,"<sup>19</sup> between a rebel outsider and society. The dance emphasized structure and straightforward movement for its own sake. Noguchi and Graham were to have a long and fruitful friendship (see Chapter III); for him her starkness and her sense of ritual came ultimately to be identified with the past, with the earth, and with a kind of "female principle."

Noguchi also met Buckminster Fuller in 1929. Fuller had already "conceived a world full of houses like telephones: simple, functional, ubiquitous, mass-produced, components in a system and rented."<sup>20</sup> As befits a visionary, the eyes are deleted from the chrome-plated portrait of Fuller; reflections puddle in the smooth, hollowed sockets. The clear curves and clean surfaces of the head allow maximum light refraction and mesh the object with its surroundings; it has the look of a machine-made, mass-produced invention. The bull-necked, firm-jawed, crew-cut image also radiates determination, energy, and intelligence.

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<sup>19</sup>Don McDonagh, Martha Graham (New York: Popular Library, 1975), p. 65.

<sup>20</sup>Hugh Kenner, Bucky (New York: William Morrow, 1973), p. 201.

Intellection, inventiveness, diffraction, and futurity are qualities Noguchi came gradually to invest most heavily in male figures. Fuller is hollow-looking, expansive, streamlined as an airplane; Graham is massive, self-absorbed, earthily textured. Dualities of enclosure/extension, massiveness/fragmentation, and rootedness/flight will inform his work more clearly in the 1930s.

To an emerging male/female dichotomy he added a third image: the child. In 1931 he had returned to Japan, the land of his childhood. There he discovered haniwa, cylindrical clay figurines which had guarded, picket-fence fashion, the tumuli of pre-Buddhist Japanese rulers. They were an indigenous art form, appealing to the modern eye with plain surfaces, simple poses, and "abstract" anatomy--an arm might be a roll of clay stuck to a torso. The images of the haniwa are formal, serene, rather remote; identities are generalized rather than specific. Noguchi invested most of the terracotta figures he made during his stay--Chinese Girl, Tamanishiki, The Queen--with these same qualities. One of them, Kintaro (fig. 5), proved generative in both form and theme. It, in turn, was a rethinking of a 1930 piece called Glad Day. The title and the image were taken from a William Blake print now reidentified as The Dance of Albion (fig. 6). The print and the 1930 sculpture show a male youth with hands and feet extended in an attitude of "exaltation and/or crucifixion" which also resembles the posture of da Vinci's "Vitruvian" man.<sup>21</sup> Blake's figure stands poised on a

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<sup>21</sup>Milton Klonsky, William Blake: The Seer and His Visions (New York: Crown, 1977), p. 33.



mountaintop--the dawn/sun radiating vigor and warmth. Noguchi's figure hangs in space, supported by an armature; its hands are fisted and the huge head, atop a muscular torso, is thrown back, its eyes closed ecstatically. Kintaro is similarly supported, but the body has been flattened and simplified. The legs are in the splayed crouch of a Sumo wrestler; the arms curve inward in the hands-on gesture of an alert fighter. The huge head faces expressionlessly forward. This rigid, doll-like, yet powerful child is Kintaro, the Japanese Hercules, a fatherless boy raised in the forest whose legendary feats of strength and derring-do formed the basis for many tales. (Note that Noguchi's childhood was fatherless, and that he became self-supporting at age thirteen, an art "hero" at twenty.) The appearance of the hero-child, self-contained but isolated, powerful but dangling, marks the beginning of more radical transformations of the figure. The child as such did not resurface until the 1940s, but its weightless dynamism informed other images.

One of these was Miss Expanding Universe (1932) (fig. 7). It was provoked by Ruth Page, for whose The Expanding Universe Noguchi designed a seamless jersey costume in which the dancer stretched and twisted. The sculpture takes the same outflung pose as Glad Day and Kintaro but the body has been even more simplified: the tiny head is featureless and the arms and legs taper, like wings, to points. It is suspended from the wall at an angle, so that it seems to swoop from above like a vision of the future. It is made of aluminum, whose polished gleam, like Fuller's chrome, allows the environment to invade and supercede the

image. The flattened, hourglass body swells at breast and belly like some aerodynamic fertility goddess: the cosmos expanding. Despite its modernity, Miss Expanding Universe was not popular. One critic compared it to a "sublimated scarecrow going through setting-up exercises."<sup>22</sup>

In fact, Noguchi had become concerned with the context of his figures, with their human location. His expanding awareness of social space was due, in part, to his visits to the house of David Burliuk, where he encountered Arshile Gorky, John Graham, the Soyers, Chaim Gross, Philip Evergood, and others. Burliuk tried "to bring art truly among the people. To him, art should be a part of life . . ." <sup>23</sup> Noguchi began to tackle themes which would be not only universal but "relevant." In 1934 he reevoked the male/female duality and produced Death and Birth, both drawn from specific occurrences. Death (fig. 8) came from a photograph, published in the International Labor Defense, of a lynched and burned Negro man. Noguchi's figure is sexless, almost featureless; it is crumpled to a height of less than three feet and has sinewy limbs that curl in like the edges of charring paper. Its size invests it with a childlike haplessness--an effect Noguchi heightened by suspending the figure from a metal armature by a real rope knotted around its neck. It is made of polished monel metal, an image of modern, man-made horror, of the destructive energy of "civilization."

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<sup>22</sup>Edward Alden Jewell, "Noguchi's Abstract Sculpture at Reinhardt Gallery is Puzzling but Indicative of his Brilliance," New York Times, December 17, 1932.

<sup>23</sup>Katharine Dreier, Burliuk (New York: Société Anonyme, 1944), p. 128.

Violence was also the theme of Birth (fig. 9), which was inspired by an actual birth the artist witnessed at Bellevue Hospital. In its original form--it exists now as a fragment--it was a heaving mass of marble thrusting upward from a head whose only feature was a howling mouth reminiscent of Brancusi's Newborn. The bulging, writhing form, slightly under life-size, had distinguishable breasts and legs, but resembled a human earthquake. Noguchi eventually came to feel that the idea of birth could be expressed more succinctly by the head and shoulder alone. He lopped off the rest of the figure; it now reads simultaneously as mother-in-pains-of-labor and baby-in-throes-of-birth. Made of stone rather than metal, earthbound rather than airborne, female rather than male, its polar relationship to Death was deliberate, and both were deliberately sensational.

The association of man-made materials with unnatural events and males, of natural materials with natural events and females was becoming stronger in Noguchi's work, and increasingly associated with social polarities. In 1936, disturbed by negative critical reaction to an exhibition which included Death and Birth, he went off to Mexico City, where his friendships with Covarubbias and Diego Rivera led to his being given the walls of a covered market for his History Mexico (fig. 10). It is a sixty-six-foot-long relief done in colored cement: a survey of modern society as seen from Mexico at that moment. It reads from right to left (symbolic political directions), running around three walls, each of which has a window which Noguchi uses as part of the design.

The right corner of the right wall is occupied by a Greek temple, church steeple, and skyscraper, symbols of "civilization." Buildings in the foreground topple, smashing moneybags whose owner, a "fat capitalist," is being murdered, above the window, by a skeleton. The capitalist's huge hand still cracks a whip over bayonets and faceless armies marching under a swastika on the center wall. Sinewy, faceless bodies writhe under the yoke of the church, and a despairing figure dies alone (to the right of the window), crushed by a block incised with a robot-shaped "mold." A worker to the left of the window drags a fallen comrade from underneath it, and looks toward a vision of social harmony: derricks, tilling tractors in a spacious loamy field, a factory dominated by a huge clenched fist, a sprouting crop, and a Chi-Rho of crossed pitchfork, shovel, and hoe. Lest the future be totally agrarian, the left wall shows scientific equipment and a youth reading the inscribed formula " $E=MC^2$ ." Over the window sprawls a naked woman, so foreshortened that she is reduced to mounds of knee and breast, between which clings a splayed baby. Its outstretched pose resembles Kintaro, but the autonomous hero-child is here enfolded by a landscape-mother.

Away from the New York art world and financial exigencies, Noguchi felt free to express his feelings directly. The resulting condemnation of capitalism, religion, and war, along with his celebration of socialism, agrarianism, and science, is ambitious. The ideas were and are, however, very close to Noguchi's heart. In History Mexico he was able to integrate his dualistic imagery with his social idealism to com-

municate his sense of the dynamics of history vividly and symbolically.<sup>24</sup>

It is instructive to consider History Mexico in relation to Noguchi's most publicized work from the later 1930s: the Associated Press (fig. 11) plaque (called News) which he did for Rockefeller Center. (The artist's model for the piece, executed in three days, won out over 188 other entries.) Both are reliefs; both are, for their respective sizes, packed with figures; both use simplified muscular bodies, broad gestures, and crisscrossing diagonals which create a sense of urgency and tension. Both represent unique and dramatic aspects of the modern world: global political struggle and worldwide communication networking. History Mexico, however, encompasses past, present, and future, while News addresses itself exclusively to the future. (And one is made of cement and the other of cast stainless steel; one has male, female, and infant figures, while the other uses exclusively male figures.)

The five figures of News are clumped in the upper left corner. They dart off in different directions, with, respectively, a camera, reporter's pad, telephone, and teletype machine. The fifth figure,

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<sup>24</sup>There was much mural painting being done at the time, but monumental, symbolic reliefs were less common. The W.P.A. and F.A.P. encouraged plaques and friezes with imagery specifically attuned to the schools, housing projects, libraries, and government buildings where they were placed. An example is Cesare Stea's relief for the Bowery Bay Sewage Disposal Plant: a very realistic scene of four men checking and repairing pipes. On the other hand, reliefs generated by architectural projects leaned heavily to the classical. See, for example, Elie Nadelman's scantily-draped construction workers for the facade of New York's Fuller Building (1930-33), or Gaston Lachaise's nude male symbolizing "The Conquest of Time and Space" (1933) for the Chicago World's Fair.

looking over the teletypist's shoulder, is an editor. The "lines of force" which run from upper left to lower right corner were originally intersected by a sixth, cringing figure: the public, overwhelmed by the onslaught of information. Noguchi deleted this figure from the final version. The other five resemble one figure split into five different, simultaneous activities: an explosion of new careers created by new technology. Though the sculpture weighs nine tons, it seems to hover lightly above the doorway, an evocation of the airborne (male) future-oriented communications system.

In the 1940s Noguchi began to assemble (as well as carve and cast) figures from wood, paper, bones, string, and slabs of stone. As if the parts from which they were assembled were interchangeable, the continuing male-female dichotomy began to include metamorphoses or transformations between them, and the locus of interchange shifted from personality to archetype, from society to sexuality, and, formally, from simplification to symbolism.

Two 1945 stone sculptures demonstrate this development. The Kiss (fig. 12) is a small alabaster piece of "interlocked" horizontal and vertical elements. The horizontal part is a rounded oval flattened across the top, and has a single, protruberant round eye. The vertical half, triangular in shape, wedges a square-edged "nose" into the horizontal element. It also has a round eye--the eyes are reminiscent of Brancusi's 1911 Kiss and 1914 Two Penguins. The elements resemble heads kissing and/or bodies locked in intercourse; from above (it is a floor piece) it could be a cell in process of replication. Noguchi merges

biology and sexuality, differentiating between male and female, but seeing them both as outgrowths of a single form.

The Bed (fig. 13) is a slab of African Wonder Stone; its surface is a matrix from which male and female forms erupt or in which they are embedded. The woman is one with this natural "bed": her head is an oval scooped from it, her genitals a slit through it, her breasts and belly rounded "mountains" emerging from it. The man is separate: his lozenge-shaped head with rectangular eye/mouth (the woman is featureless) is raised above the surface and projects outside the framing edge of the slab. His torso/penis is enclosed within a wedge-shaped depression. Since there is no link between him and the lower edge of the slab, he "floats," self-enclosed, within the stone plane. The two sexes are distinct, and distinctly sexual, but their common "ground" is also a part of the image. The slab format enabled Noguchi to integrate and enrich his figural dualities; body parts take on the presence of archetypes.

His single figures during this period are usually male, and the fragmentation, isolation, and suspension of the man in The Bed are all-pervasive. One of the earliest was Lunar Infant (fig. 14), in which the hero-child reappears as the child-victim. The figure is a lobed lump of whitish magnesite (a mineral compound) with a split, featureless head and rudimentary legs. It dangles within an open wooden framework, which is itself suspended from the ceiling. Twice removed from stability and from human reach--it is caged and hangs at eye, rather than hand, level--the piece is literally, paradoxically self-illuminating. Lunar

Infant conceals a light bulb, which glows dimly around the edges of the segmented body--a heroic small light in a dark world.

In a 1946 catalogue statement, Noguchi spoke of the need for "constant transfusions of human meaning into the encroaching void."<sup>25</sup> He symbolized the emptiness and dissociation of postwar human life in fragmented figures assembled from thin sheets of slate and marble. They embody both the endurance and the fragility of existence in the new atomic age. Noguchi's conscience had deepened and widened through the war; his concern now was for humankind rather than society. His internalized figures of the early 1940s represented a temporary withdrawal occasioned by the war and by his encounters with exiled Surrealists in New York. For him Surrealism served ultimately, as "carve-direct" had in the 1930s, as a jumping-off point for an even more nonpersonal form of expression. Giacometti's erotic fantasies, for example, provided a new formal strategy--the "board game"--but no iconographic impetus.<sup>26</sup> Nor did he pursue (after a few experiments in 1942) conjunctions of disparate objects or materials. Sexually suggestive metamorphosis did, as we have seen, become a part of his vocabulary, but he employed it for the conjuring of mythic presences rather than for the recording of dream

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<sup>25</sup>Fourteen Americans (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), p. 39.

<sup>26</sup>The Museum of Modern Art had owned The Palace at 4 A.M. since 1936 and Noguchi could have seen more recent Giacomettis at two Surrealist exhibitions in New York in 1942 (at the Art of This Century gallery and at the Reid Mansion). That year there was also a show of his 1931-35 works at the Art of This Century. In 1945 Cahiers d'Art published fifteen pages of photos of recent Giacomettis, and in 1948 he had a major show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, with a catalogue essay by Sartre.



visions. His involvement with myth came mostly from his interaction with Martha Graham: between 1944 and 1950 he designed eight sets for her. Her dances during this period were vivid rituals drawn from folklore and Greek myth.

Many artists were, at that moment, rediscovering the iconic power of "primitive" art: American Indian, pre-Columbian, prehistoric. Noguchi drove to Ohio to see the Great Serpent Mound, and he was a more active participant in New York art life than ever before or since. He took part in group exhibitions and had his first one-man show in fourteen years. He lectured and wrote articles. In a 1949 article he defined the situation of the sculptor vis-à-vis the world: "Our reality is the space between; it is the world of the atom and the random element. . . . Our existence is precarious, we do not believe in the permanence of things. The whole man has been replaced by the fragmented self."<sup>27</sup>

The fragmented self was represented in a series of stone slab sculptures. They were informed by the confident presence of the portraits, by the dynamism of the 1930s reliefs, and by the sexuality and solitude of the early 1940s figures. Working from small cardboard models, Noguchi cut and carved stone sheets, notching and slotting each piece so that the figure could be quickly assembled by locking the pieces together. The sculpture was equally demountable. Life observed sarcastically that

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<sup>27</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture," Art News, March 1949, p. 15.

"Noguchi's conception of man's existence . . . can be dismantled in three minutes."<sup>28</sup> The sculpture could be stored or shipped flat, and the sculptor was intrigued with the illusion of three-dimensionality conjured from two-dimensional elements. Pieces in the group--there are about fifteen of them, not counting subsequent bronze castings--have titles such as Effigy, Ikon, and Man Ideograph, which point to the archetypal locus of the imagery.

Humpty Dumpty (fig. 15) evokes both the ritualized, precarious world of childhood and the human impact of nuclear fission, which "all the king's horses and all the king's men" couldn't undo. Constructed from five pieces of black slate, it is human-sized (sixty-six inches tall) but refuses the immediate identifiability of earlier figures--even Lunar Infant. It is thematically and formally discontinuous. On the formal level, it avoids, like David Smith's 1949-50 Blackburn, "a predictable relationship between front and profile view."<sup>29</sup> The frontal plane consists of a single upright piece of stone, shaped like a cross between an egg and a horseshoe. It is pierced by an "eye" and a larger, egg-shaped void. From the front, the other four pieces, looped over and/or butting through that plane, appear or disappear according to their angular deviation from it. The piece which, set at right angles to it, provides the third supporting leg for the figure also projects through it and

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<sup>28</sup>"Japanese-American Sculptor Shows Off Weird New Works," Life, November 11, 1946, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup>Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture, p. 163.

becomes phallic when seen from the side. From the front a comma-like piece arcing diagonally through a hole and coming up between the figure's legs echoes the association. Another C-shaped element loops over the top of the piece and down through the center hole; a third slices the plane above the hole and reemerges in it. These pieces suggest imploding egg/atom bits or extrudent anatomy: hair, nose, tongue, etc. From the side the figure bristles calligraphically in visual disjunction, impossible to anticipate from the self-contained sexual suggestiveness of the frontal view. The figure had become for Noguchi, as it had for Picasso in 1907, a set of "movable signs"<sup>30</sup> parsable for maximum formal disunity and thematic multiplicity. Humpty Dumpty is fat and thin, playful and menacing (especially its flat, dull, dark surface). Its fragility, "weightlessness," and aggression place it unambiguously in Noguchi's "male" province, but it transcends sexuality to become a symbol of ultimate creation and destruction.

Similarly, in Kouros (fig. 16), the "bounded" male of Lunar Infant and The Bed becomes himself a set of boundaries, an open grid occupying but not displacing space. The figure is composed of three main verticals crossed with shorter horizontals. The material--veined pink marble--makes the piece "warmer" than Humpty Dumpty, but its totemic height (ten feet) distances it as effectively from human touch. Like Humpty Dumpty it has no core, but is a series of planes lying behind,

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<sup>30</sup>Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 166.

before, next to or at right angles to other planes. Two of the dominant verticals "face" front: a neck-to-rib piece and a torso which begins midway down to the right of the first piece and continues to the floor. They are offset by two small but important horizontals: the head (which closely resembles that of The Bed's male figure) and a projecting phallus/ellipse. In profile the third vertical emerges as an independent figural entity with head, thorax, penis, and forward foot. (From the side it can also be seen that in its right hand the figure holds a small vertical crescent like that held by the prehistoric Venus of Laussel.) Like Humpty Dumpty, Kouros is formally discontinuous, but it is not a symbol of dissolution. Rather, it seems a heroic pulling-together of elements in defiance of "the encroaching void": existential man creates his own being out of nothingness. Through the hourglass contour of the torso, the front-profile dichotomy, the rigid arms, and the forward foot, Noguchi raises the conventions of Greek archaic sculpture, and, with them, the association to heroism commemorated. Kouros is a precarious balance of preclassical totem and/or existential hero, a blend of ritual distancing and situational responsiveness (it was made in 1945, when the heroes came home). Thematic and literal multiplicity interlock here as closely as the figure's seven pieces of stone.

Most of the slab sculptures sit on small, relatively stable tripods. In Avatar (fig. 17), three-leggedness predominates and, as in the sacred tripods of Greek oracles, becomes the vehicle of revelation. Slightly over life-size, the piece consists of four interlocked marble elements, three of which spring up and in from the ground plane to form

an open isosceles triangle. Their three upper ends terminate in a bony knob, a horizontal extension, and a pendulous flap. The end of the extension slots into the knob, and the flap interlocks midway along the extension, which also has a hole through which the fourth element, shaped like a C with a handle, is looped. Two of the legs have phallic shoots; the third has a vulvar pair.

All of these details add up to, variously, a male and a female view of the sculpture. From one side the C-shaped element, the flap (breast), and the vulva align from front to back, while the other elements, seen end on, become negligible. Noguchi's designs for Balanchine's 1948 Orpheus (fig. 18) show that he had come to regard the C-shape as a visage/mask/head. (The device was used by Picasso from the late 1920s on, particularly for women's heads, where it could also be read as an omnivorous vagina. See, for example, his 1930 Seated Bather in the Museum of Modern Art.) In a second view, ninety degrees to the right, the female parts disappear seen end on, and the full breadth of the horizontal extension appears. Phallic in its thrust, it ends in a "nose" and has a dangling flap; the vertical leg from which it juts also has a single, pointed shoot. It is at once body, head, and genitals; all of a piece, sustaining and sustained by the scattered female elements.

"Avatar" means archetype or incarnation; in Hindu mythology it usually refers to the epiphanies of Vishnu the Preserver. (Noguchi has said that at that time, "the winds of the imagination blew on me with

force from the East."<sup>31</sup> Going beyond the apocalyptic Humpty Dumpty and the existential heroism of Kouros, Noguchi developed a transcendent stability. Distilling and transforming the sexual couplings which preoccupied him in the early 1940s, he created an archetypal androgyny which imparts a sense of ritual revelation and psychic renewal.

In 1949 Noguchi, horrified by the recent suicide of his friend Arshile Gorky and fascinated by "primitive" and non-Western cultures, had left New York. Traveling on a Bollingen fellowship, he spent most of that year and the next gathering materials for a not-yet-written book on the physical environment of "leisure." The journey led him back to Japan, where he spent much of 1950-52. During those years he made a series of terracotta and ceramic figures whose relaxed playfulness contrasts sharply with the sober monumentality of the slab pieces. They are the most intimate (though not necessarily autobiographical) of Noguchi's works; they reflect a mood of freedom and celebration and a sense of integration. Their spontaneity is partly a result of his handling of the clay: he did not model it, building and refining surfaces with human touch, but cut or rolled it from sheets, as a potter might construct the walls and handles of a vessel. This approach affirms the clay's malleability--the sheets may be wrapped, stuck to each other, scratched into--but also, since the surface is unmodulated, confirms its independence.

Of the sixty-odd pieces he made during those two years, some thirty

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<sup>31</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 29

are figures--the rest are plates, vases and animals. Most of the figures are small, and their titles--Marriage, Ghost, Mother Goddess--are a mixture of personal (he married Yoshiko Yamaguchi in 1952), oneiric, and archetypal concerns. There are several children--his first since Lunar Infant--notably Big Boy, which repeats the spread-eagle pose of Kintaro (here muffled in a huge kimono) and 1950's Child (fig. 19), a fragmented Miss Expanding Universe. Her torso and leg-bits are skewered on twin poles; her head dangles from a string running over the tops of the poles and down to her outflung hands. Symbols of the post-Hiroshima years, his children are withdrawn, disjunctive, wistful. Cold-war alienation and postwar angst inform his work as had leftist enthusiasm and existentialist ennui earlier.

One of the most interesting of the clay pieces is The Apartment (fig. 20), a complex response to both interior and exterior situations. On the back of a photograph of it Noguchi wrote: "its secret and real name is 'The Life of the Artist.'" Thirty inches high, it resembles a small stack of shelves or an open-ended dollhouse. It has three compartments which are occupied, like the areas of Giacometti's Palace at 4 A.M., by oneiric objects and figures. The lowest, largest compartment has no human figures, but contains a growth mushrooming from the floor, a snakelike form winding back and forth through the wall, and crossbeams hung with knives and/or blades. These Edenic/organic, sexual/violent shapes form a substratum (or subconscious) above which rises a second, integrative level. It is occupied by a female form, a hatchet jammed through the wall, and a ladder which pokes through to the upper story.

The hatchet integrates snake-activity and knife-shape into an intrusive, emphatic, flying male object. It confronts the female figure, a rooted, curvaceous, tiny-headed creature who dominates the space. The ladder presents the possibility of transcendence or of escape from this duality/confrontation to, literally, a higher level. That compartment contains a single figure with outflung arms (a familiar gesture by now in Noguchi's iconography) and face upturned to a circular hole in the roof for further illumination. Like id, ego, and superego, The Apartment's three levels are parts of a single whole presided over by the hero-child--here an exalted, priestlike figure who aspires beyond the confines of the personal to the suprapersonal.

By the mid-1950s the informality of clay had been superceded by the rigidity of cast iron or stone, and the portrait of the artist as integrator of human situations gave way to the oblique isolation of pieces such as The Self (fig. 21). From this time on Noguchi uses the figure as referent rather than as symbol; rather than embodying meanings, it points to them. The Self is an example of this process of synthesis and extrapolation. The same height as The Apartment but supported by an armature, it too encloses space: a void bounded by a tall closed loop of iron. The edges of the loop are banded at intervals by six bulges; they have the gestural quality of fingers gripping the upright ellipse. In this squeezed phallic presence Noguchi distills the essence of his caged, "weightless," machine-made male. The image is at once heroic and hieratic, gravity-defying and self-generating. But it has also been reframed in terms of the man-made world of atomic fission.



The form is very similar to an earlier clay piece called Atomic Man (fig. 22): a hollow, stretched ellipse banded and isolated like split particles in a reactor. In The Self fragile clay walls are replaced by dense, weighty, light-absorbent iron, creating a sense of primal, protean mass.

The iron sculptures were exhibited first in 1959, as part of a large exhibition at the Stable Gallery. The show also included a number of stone carvings and unrealized architectural projects; it did not include cut and bent sheet aluminum sculptures that he had started doing in 1958. (According to Noguchi, Eleanor Ward thought them too "commercial" looking; they were shown at Cordier and Warren in 1961.) Some critics favored the iron works, other the stone carvings, which "at once deflect light and absorb it; displace space and absorb it; expand in their sinuous profiles and close in on themselves in their inner structure."<sup>32</sup>

Drama and dynamism had, in fact, begun to give way to concentrated stillness and purity. Noguchi had begun working with stone again in the mid-1950s, perhaps freed by Brancusi's death from his need not to be "Brancusian." The austere, minimalized pieces which resulted might have come from Brancusi's "laboratory for distilling basic shapes."<sup>33</sup> In 1959 he created a rooted, naturally generative female correlate to the quintessentially male Self. Woman with Child (fig. 23), made in Greek

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<sup>32</sup>Dore Ashton, "Noguchi," Arts and Architecture, August 1959, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup>Julien Levy, "Noguchi," Creative Art, January 1933, p. 31.

marble, is a reworking of a theme introduced in the 1930s. In History Mexico mother and child were presented as an undulant landscape enfolding a tiny flying figure. By 1959 Noguchi was shaping actual landscapes, and what remained of the "earth mother" was a disembodied principle of natural growth. The mother is a smooth, round, firmly based stalk. Her slender shaft is reminiscent of Brancusi's Bird, but instead of turning and tapering into space it is blunt and leans only slightly, as though countering the weight of the child. It is a small, pointed shoot, bound against her side like a papoose in a carrier or a Japanese child riding an obi. Mother and child are tied together by an umbilical band of roughhewn stone. The bands constraining The Self augured a closed system of self-absorption; this one assures nurturance and support from a sturdy other. The Self was onanistically isolated; Woman with Child is serenely self-sufficient.

By the early 1960s Noguchi's images of the figure had become even more oblique; the human body is alluded to in consequence of an idea (such as "mortality" or "solitude") which is of human concern. He had once sought to communicate such concerns via the figure; now they become the means by which an object can be associated with a human identity. For, committed though he has been to modernism, meaning has been still more important to him.

His long-standing dualities continued, in a general way, to inform the new works. Soliloquy (fig. 24) and Vertical Man (fig. 25), for example, demonstrate "weightlessness," a principle associated with (masculine) intellection. Soliloquy was originally carved from

balsawood, though it was subsequently cast in bronze. It has three sticklike verticals, pegged together but swinging freely through space. From the head the other two verticals swing freely, clanking against the central pole. It is a kind of loose-limbed totem, ritually aloof and magically gravity-defying.

Vertical Man, a chunk of green serpentine astride a stainless steel stele, is as top-heavy as Humpty Dumpty. The bifurcated stone mass perches precariously on its planar "base." The polished surface of the stainless steel and the geometric facets of the stone identify the object as invented, man-made, machine-tooled.

The natural counterparts to the above sculptures were pieces such as Mitosis and White Prophetess. These low, ground-hugging shapes were informed by a concern for visual acknowledgement of and acquiescence in the pull of gravity (see also Chapter III). White Prophetess (fig. 26) is bifurcated, like Vertical Man, but has no head and does not fly. It is a flattened stone oval with short, conical, twin funnels. The Temple of Apollo at Delphi housed a sacred stone "of a rounded conical shape"<sup>34</sup> which was believed to mark the navel--the omphalos--of the world. (When Noguchi cast White Prophetess in bronze he called it Omphalos.) The Delphic priestess squatted on her tripod over a fissure in the earth, and the god prophesized through her: woman as blind transmitter of natural energy. White Prophetess' double mesas rise from

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<sup>34</sup>Compact Oxford English Dictionary (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), vol. 1, p. 1987.

its mounded surface like future mountains rising from old ones. Their upward-spreading movement is like the upward thrust of the 1934 Birth. That sculpture was occasioned by a specific birth; this one crystallizes and ritualizes the idea of birth.

Mitosis (fig. 27) is also, in a sense, a return to the theme of mother and child. In all his earlier versions the two are bound intimately together. Here they have become a larger and a smaller spheroid whose "nozzles nuzzle."<sup>35</sup> Mitosis is the process of cell division, and the two forms may be read equally well as two units on the point of separation. "Parent" and "daughter" cells replicate each other; intellect can understand but not duplicate this blind, incessant creativity.

By the late 1960s, figures were less frequent in Noguchi's work. Increasingly, he invested his energies in nonfigural or environmental projects--alternative modes for expressing the same ideas. Thus his Whitney retrospective of 1968, which was devoted almost exclusively to studio sculptures, was not really representative of his current concerns. Of the sixty-eight pieces shown, roughly half were figural, and many of the works were of stone, though Noguchi had worked in a wide variety of other materials.

Actually, he was in the process of becoming more of a carver than he had ever been before. Throughout the 1960s and the early 1970s he

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<sup>35</sup>Vivien Raynor, "In the Galleries," Arts Magazine, May-June 1963, p. 106.

worked on a group of marble sculptures in Italy, near the Carrara stone quarries. From the late 1960s on he has spent part of each year carving granite and basalt on the Japanese island of Shikoku. He has said that as he has gotten older he has become less and less interested in people and more and more interested in stone.

Between 1968 and 1973 in Italy he executed a series of marbles which were cut from different-colored blocks and fastened together with a system of interior rods which Noguchi calls "post-tensioning." Though the means of their adhesion is hidden and they form a continuous contour, the separate blocks are announced by changes of color; thus the pieces are anti-illusionistic even while they celebrate technological manipulation. Combining natural and man-made materials and techniques, they also synthesize Noguchi's old dichotomies of male and female, weightlessness and gravity, biology and geometry.

They share a sense of architecture--a look of block and beam, pipe and girder. (Dore Ashton has associated the works with "The striped interiors and arches in the cathedrals of Pisa and Siena; the intarsia floors; the clustered pillars with their wild patterns of black and white."<sup>36</sup>) To Love (fig. 28) resembles a section of pink-and-black striped column split in two lengthwise; one half remains vertical while the other lies next to it. The horizontal half has accommodated its half-barrel shape to gravity by sloping at one end; its other end has been sliced open so that a diagonal projection from the vertical half

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<sup>36</sup>Dore Ashton, "Noguchi's Recent Marbles," Art International, October 1972, p. 38.

slots into it. There were interlocking pieces in the 1940s, but the straightforward sexuality of To Love is very different from the allusive, ritualized, metamorphic eroticism of those earlier works. Here sex becomes pure function, an image of formal connectedness, an exteriorization of the holes and rods that actually hold the piece together. There are other images of intercourse among his previous works, but each time Noguchi returns to the image it is further removed from the personal, until it becomes a visual definition of the verb.

She (fig. 29) represents a similar development in Noguchi's images of females. His representations went from portraits to presences; here he synthesizes the essence, for him, of femaleness. The piece consists of a pink-and-black striped slab slanting upward at a thirty-degree angle, grounded or buttressed by a short, angled-in leg under the higher end. That end, however, juts beyond its support with a sense of cannonlike trajectory which is reinforced by the rounded shape of the "barrel." Where a cannon's fuse would be, Noguchi has carved a raised, undulant pair of lips, at once osculatory and labial. She's eruptive sexuality is offset by stable form: the open triangle formed by the inclined slab, the leg, and the ground plane. The piece's slow lift from that plane and sense of down-pulling toward it are reminiscent of Rodin's The Earth--a figure dragging itself up from primal mud. The Rodin is faceless and sexless; the Noguchi is blunt and charged, quintessentially his idea of the earthy, gravity-bound, fiercely generative female.

The male counterparts to She are Ding Dong Bat (fig. 30) and Little

Id (fig. 31). The former is a pink-and-white, eight-and-a-half-foot-long phallus that is positioned parallel to the ground plane but not in contact with it. It rests precariously on two small bases, one under each end. It "floats" amiably, without the aggressive thrust of She, though its title suggests its alternate identity as a weapon. Like the giant lips of She, the scale of Ding Dong Bat is a kind of ironic comment on the fantasy of supermaleness. Little Id is its whimsical opposite: a two-foot-long phallus that hangs from a back plane to the ground. Noguchi made two versions of it in black-and-white marble, and one in shiny, smooth bronze. The bronze version in particular seems the quintessence of the fragmented, isolated, dislocated, technology-produced male.

Primal humanness is alluded to in another work from the early 1970s, one of the granite pieces done in Japan. (The materials and their place of origin are, as is by now abundantly clear, extremely significant.) The granite piece is called Childhood (fig. 32) and it crystallizes, as do To Love, She, and Little Id, a recurrent image in Noguchi's sculpture. The powerful/powerless hero-child had appeared as Kintaro, Lunar Infant, and in The Apartment; here it assumes archetypal shape and sense. Like Brancusi's Beginning of the World it at first resembles a found object: a small, rough-textured boulder placed on a high wooden base. The sculptor's interventions here were minimal but vital. He played the gentle, regular bulge of three sides against the flatness of a hidden fourth side, of the underside, and of the top for a sense of both compression and organic growth. He set rough texture

against smooth in order to lead the eye down the front bulge to a tiny nose/penis protruding between the two slightly lifted halves of the bottom edge, so that the piece would have a foetal ambiguity, a paradoxical sense of self-enclosed emergence. The formless but sharply bounded, determinative but bewildering experience of childhood is evoked. Noguchi extrapolated from the earlier, more personal meanings of the image to its universal, essential, human meanings.

This is the direction of all his work: a slow outward spiral from immediacy to universality, from the challenge of likeness versus art in a portrait to the challenge of the autonomous object versus humanist meanings in Childhood. Figural themes and strategies are important to any discussion of Noguchi's sculpture because they establish the direction of his concerns. At the same time the figural works are only one part--though a large one, and to many people the most meaningful one--of a complex career in which the scope of his ideas carried Noguchi far beyond the limits of sculpture's most traditional subject.



### CHAPTER III

#### NONFIGURAL SCULPTURE: ENERGY, GRAVITY, AND WEIGHTLESSNESS

Abstraction was an important issue for Noguchi and for his generation of European and American sculptors. Applying for a Guggenheim fellowship in 1926, Noguchi wrote:

It is my desire to view nature through nature's eyes, and to ignore man as an object for special veneration. . . . An unlimited field for abstract sculptural expression would then be realized. . . . Indeed, a fine balance of spirit with matter can only occur when the artist has so thoroughly submerged himself in the study of the unity of nature as to truly become once more a part of nature--a part of the very earth, thus to view the inner surfaces and the life elements.<sup>1</sup>

Sculpture would communicate itself not through the human figure but directly; it would become itself an equivalent for natural forms and forces which had traditionally been represented or symbolized by the figure. Noguchi had not yet realized his ambition, but he was well aware of "abstract" sculpture: he had been enthralled by the 1926 Brancusi exhibition at the Brummer Gallery, and he frequented Stieglitz' Intimate Gallery (Stieglitz wrote him a recommendation for the Guggenheim) which featured the work of European and American moderns.<sup>2</sup>

The currents of European abstraction in the late 1920s and early

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<sup>1</sup>Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Other sculptors whose work he could have seen in large, unjuried exhibitions like the Salons of America, and in galleries (Kraushaar, Downtown, Whitney Studio, Société Anonyme) were Laurent, Nadelman, Zorach, Nakian, Storrs, and Flannagan. See Rutgers University Art Gallery, Vanguard American Sculpture 1913-1939 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1979), pp. 17-18.

1930s included Brancusi's unique distillation of natural forms and events, experiments with kineticism, and the making of sculptures which demonstrated either the processes of nature or the principles of thought. Those concerned with kineticism included Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, whose 1921 Nickel Construction was "conceived as a statement of balance between dynamic and static forms."<sup>3</sup> His 1923-30 Light Prop (or Light-Space Modulator) was a motorized assembly of steel, plastics, and wood that functioned as "an on-stage projector, weaving around its turning center a widening fabric of patterned light and shadow."<sup>4</sup> In 1920 Naum Gabo had made a steel spring Kinetic Sculpture that vibrated, creating a transparent aura of form. By the early 1930s Jean Peyrissac and Alexander Calder were experimenting with suspended sculptures whose free-floating elements created constantly changing configurations. At Duchamp's suggestion, Calder called his celebrations of actual, natural, continual motion "mobiles."

The third approach to abstraction is represented, at one extreme, by the work of Jean Arp. Arp had been making collages and wooden reliefs since the days of Zurich Dada; in 1931 he began producing free-standing sculptures. Arp's reliefs were random, "automatic" forms generated without conscious thought. They were given titles reflecting their ambiguous biomorphic presences: Plant Hammer (1917), Leaves and Navels

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<sup>3</sup>Margit Rowell, The Planar Dimension (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979), p. 127.

<sup>4</sup>Rosalind Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 207.

(1929), or Hand Fruit (1930). "Art is a fruit," Arp later said, "that grows in man, like fruit on a plant, or a child in its mother's womb."<sup>5</sup> Growth is the operative word, for Arp's free-standing sculptures demonstrate natural, axiomatic processes of growth. Human Concretion (1935) (fig. 33) was originally carved from plaster (later translated into cast stone); the lumps and hollows of its soft white surface and its curled, bulging form suggest a developing foetus. Growth (1938) is an undulant shoot with nodes sprouting in all directions; its forked upper end is in process of rigorous mitosis. Arp was interested in developing sculptures that represented the processes of organic transmutation "naturally" and concretely; such objects might allude to known forms but would be in no way abstracted from them.

The other extreme of this attitude is found in the work of Max Bill, a Bauhaus student who subsequently became an architect, designer, writer, and sculptor. For him sculpture was "an analytic object . . . modeling, by reflection, the analytic intelligence of both viewer and maker."<sup>6</sup> Sculptural objects were to demonstrate the working principles of knowledge universally and concretely; Bill saw "geometry, the mutual relationships of surfaces and lines, as the primary foundation of all form."<sup>7</sup> Rhythm in Space (1947-48) is, like Arp's Human Concretion,

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<sup>5</sup>Jean Arp, Arp on Arp (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 241.

<sup>6</sup>Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup>Carola Giedion-Welcker, Contemporary Sculpture (New York: George Wittenborn, 1960), p. 226.

carved in plaster, but there the resemblance ends. Bill's sculpture is a tall ribbon that twists and loops, narrows and widens, and encloses space without suggesting any natural form. Authoritative rather than suggestive, matte-surfaced rather than tactilely bumptious, it resembles a visualization of a theorem in topology. Endless Ribbon from a Ring I (1947-49) is even more Moebius-strip-like: a horizontal loop of gilded copper that looks like a prototype for mathematically generated, mass-produced objects of the future. Bill uses sculpture as "an investigatory tool in the service of knowledge";<sup>8</sup> his works are concretions of abstract thought.

All the currents of European abstraction came together in Abstraction-Creation, an international artists' group organized in 1932 for the promotion of nonfigural art. Calder, Arp, and Bill all became members, along with Gabo, Pevsner, Vantongerloo, Herbin, and Mondrian--some four hundred sculptors and painters joined. The group, which lasted until 1936, held exhibitions, issued an annual publication, and was of great importance for younger artists looking for alternatives to Surrealism or social realism.

Noguchi did not join; indeed by 1932 he had already passed through a first phase of abstraction which began when he was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship and went to Paris in 1927. One of the first people he met there was Brancusi, whose studio assistant he became for six months. Noguchi remembered him thus:

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<sup>8</sup>Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture, p. 67.

His attire was always white, his beard already white and white dust covered the studio with its blocks of marble. Two massive round tables in plaster served as bases and there was a white stove in which he cooked his famous steaks, and there were two white dogs to which he fed milk in a washbasin.<sup>9</sup>

By the time Noguchi met him, Brancusi was withdrawing more and more into his studio. His supporter John Quinn had died in 1924; his friend Eric Satie in 1925. He was in the middle of the litigation with the United States Customs Office over his Bird in Space; the issue would not be resolved until 1928. Noguchi remembered seeing another Bird in Space in the studio, along with the Cock, the Cup, an "Egg," and a section of the Column of the Kiss, which Brancusi would use later at Tirgu Jiu.

Noguchi polished the bronzes, such as the Leda, cut bases, and learned to carve stone. During his apprenticeship he made no sculpture of his own, but immediately afterward he carved his first nonfigural piece: Sphere Section (fig. 34), which he considered merely an exercise, for Noguchi found that "pure abstractions left me cold"<sup>10</sup> and collected books on paleontology, botany, and zoology, seeking a new, nonfigural morphology.

In 1928 he did three nonfigural sculptures which are among his most interesting works. Abstraction in Almost Discontinuous Tension (fig. 35) consisted of "two pieces balanced in air, not touching, but balanced in tension."<sup>11</sup> His friend Calder was still playing with his Circus in

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<sup>9</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "Recollections of Brancusi," paper presented at Brancusi Conference, Fordham University, February 20, 1976.

<sup>10</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

1928, but, like the later "mobiles," Noguchi's piece was kinetic, changing as it was moved by invisible energies of air. Positional Shape (fig. 36) was also changeable. It could be balanced on different edges, and each rearrangement (by human intervention) made the piece look entirely different: shape determined by situation. The third of the highly experimental works of 1928 was Power House (fig. 37), a study for a never-realized neon tube sculpture. This was Noguchi's first attempt at light-as-sculpture; he would realize the idea (in a different form) only in the 1940s. He did not experiment with kinetic or situational forms again until the early 1960s.

Many of the other abstractions he did in 1928 suggest human, animal, and plant forms. They reflect his association with Brancusi, but only one of them--Leda (fig. 38)--is a direct reworking of a Brancusi image. (Other sculptures which may have been suggested by Brancusi are Globular and Fish Face; see the older artist's Eileen II and Cock.) Brancusi had seen the sexual conjunction of woman and bird as a wing wedged into a long ovoid; the wing also seems to emerge from the ovoid like a chick hatching from an egg (fig. 39). The ambivalent form suggests both a swan gliding forward and also (as Geist says the artist described it<sup>12</sup>) Leda kneeling and leaning back. Noguchi's Leda also glides forward and rears up, but his egg is a thin, angled ring from which a flanged embryo emerges. Noguchi stresses generation rather than violation; formal ambivalence lies rather in the hatching foetus/chick.

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<sup>12</sup>Sidney Geist, Brancusi (New York: Grossman, 1968), p. 76.

There are several other human/animal (or plant) combinations among the 1928 works. Infant Tree (fig. 40) is a wedge of wood with a metal ring through it and two notches along one edge; it suggests both childish head and budding root. Infant Flower (fig. 41) is a petal/wing of brass with an open "eye" through which a metal shoot passes. Infant Tree is bulky natural matter; Infant Flower is planar man-made antimatter. Matter and mind, gravity and weightlessness will become major issues later in Noguchi's work, interacting with his interest in change and energy.

In Foot Tree (fig. 42), gravity and weightlessness are played off against each other. Like Infant Flower, it is made of polished brass, but it is a stout column rather than a thin sheet. Like Infant Tree, it "grows" vigorously upward, but is even more precariously balanced on its base. Other columnar abstractions from 1928 include Anna Livia<sup>13</sup> (Noguchi's only reference to James Joyce) and Bird Cry (fig. 43). Both are primarily of wood; both rear up from bulbous, rootlike lower sections; both have mouth-shaped notches. Bird Cry also has a wedge-shaped "head" perched atop a long stalk.<sup>14</sup> Columnar birds will recur at

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<sup>13</sup>Anna Livia Plurabelle was published by Crosby Gaige (New York) in 1928; the complete Finnegan's Wake was not published until 1939. In 1929 Brancusi did a "symbol of Joyce" as frontispiece for another excerpt from Finnegan's Wake. Joyce and Brancusi were probably introduced by Robert McAlmon, who also introduced Noguchi to Brancusi.

<sup>14</sup>By 1927 Brancusi had produced more than 20 bird sculptures in marble, bronze, and wood, beginning in 1910 with the big-bellied Maiastra. By 1918 the slimmer, more vertical Bird had appeared, and 1923 saw the first Bird in Space. During the 1920s he also made several versions of the Cock and of Little Bird. Noguchi's Bird Cry combines the material of Cock (wood) with the verticality of Bird in Space. Its bulbous root and sliced "mouth" are also reminiscent of Maiastra and Little Bird.

steady intervals until the 1950s when, after Brancusi's death, Noguchi explores the image in depth and eventually transforms it into an even more primal symbol of nature: the helix (see Chapter IV).

Except for Sphere Section and its spinoff Section from Sphere, marble sculptures are, like bird images, sparse in Noguchi's oeuvre until after Brancusi's death. Béguine (fig. 44) is the only example from 1928. A faceted, notelike shape, it is made of black marble, a material Brancusi was using at the time to carve his Portrait of Mrs. Eugene Meyer, Jr., finished in 1930.

Noguchi's abstractions were obviously stimulated by his association with Brancusi, but they were just as obviously conscious departures, for the most part, from both the materials and images of the master. His use of sheet metals, for example, may owe something to Picasso's contemporaneous experiments with welding iron; his planar elements reflect knowledge of Constructivist sculptures. Yet his concerns, not yet formulated, were already different from those of the kineticists, the "artfruit" makers, or the sculptor-epistemologists. Change and motion could never be the main point of a Noguchi sculpture; nature is his subject, but neither its laws nor its products interest him--the one is too abstract, the other too specific. Like Arp and Bill, he uses the strategy of demonstration, but he uses it to explore the interface between humans and certain forces of nature: energy, gravity, and space.

The 1928 abstractions were received with critical caution<sup>15</sup> and

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<sup>15</sup>See "Two Cryptic Artists," New York Times, April 14, 1929: "a very young sculptor who works with familiar metals, but with unfamiliar forms . . ."



public indifference when he exhibited them in New York in 1929. Feeling financially and spiritually straitened--"I was too poor inside to insist upon it [abstraction]"<sup>16</sup>--Noguchi turned to portraiture, and much of his work until the 1960s would be figural or figure-derived (see Chapter II). Thus, by the time many artists of his generation were beginning to discover abstraction, Noguchi had turned away from it. In the 1940s, however, he did begin to do abstractions again--in the form of sculptures incorporating their own sources of energy.

#### Energy: the Lunars

The self-lighted abstractions of the 1940s had two important ancestors: the 1928 Power House and the 1933 Musical Weathervane (fig. 45). Also known, prophetically, as Lunar Weathervane, it was a never-realized design for an electrified, kinetic, sound-producing metal sculpture. Its streamlined shape was fluted to produce a variety of tones as the weathervane turned with the wind. It may have been inspired by the Chinese custom of tying hollow gourds to pigeons,<sup>17</sup> more importantly, it was a useful, mass-producible object. Making energy visible has often meant, to Noguchi, making it accessible to a wider audience.

In 1944 he produced his first commercial lamp prototypes and/or his first self-illuminated sculptures. The Three-legged Cylinder Lamp con-

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<sup>16</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

sisted of a paper cylinder wrapped around three metal rods, while Lunar Lights were hourglass, canopy, and triangle-shaped plastic shades supported by metal rods. For two of the Abstractions and Lanterns (fig. 46), he created plexiglass and metal "cages" surrounding the shades. Noguchi had first used an enclosure for Katchina (fig. 47), a 1943 wooden figure in a paper and wood dowel box. For the Pueblo Indians of Arizona, where he had just spent six months in a Nisei relocation camp, a katchina is an incarnation of a beneficent nature spirit. He used a similar wooden form enclosed in tetrahedrons for a portrait (his only second portrait) of long-time friend and beneficent nature spirit Buckminster Fuller. Bucky was designed to hang, weightless, from a wall; Lunar Infant (fig. 14) dangles within a wooden frame hung from the ceiling. Made the year after Bucky and Katchina, it is a more disturbed and disturbing image: an electrified magnesite mutant hung in a cage.<sup>18</sup> "Lunars" as lamps/sculptures were formally coextensive for Noguchi. His lunar wall reliefs (or "panels," as he called them) also fell somewhere between the two. He made a number of them between 1944 and 1948; the first was probably Lunar Landscape. At the same time, wall reliefs like My Arizona, This Tortured Earth, and Yellow Landscape combine bomb/flare colors with target/blast hole shapes. Lunar Landscape is a rectangular magnesite wall relief whose surface undulates

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<sup>18</sup>Noguchi could have become aware of the cage/enclosure strategy through Giacometti's Palace at 4 A.M. (1932-33), but he could also have been cognizant of the experiments of his contemporaries in the 1940s. In his 1944 Arachnide, for example, Ibram Lassaw strung skeins of plastic across steel grids. Peter Grippe's Symbolic Figure #4 (1946) consisted of enclosed anatomical/organic bits, while Seymour Lipton's Imprisoned Figure (1948) was a Giacometti-like cage filled with spiky and ovoid forms.

with forms suggesting male and female parts; the lumps and hollows also read as the mountains and fissures of a moon- or warscape. This metamorphic human/moonscape is strung with bits of bobbing cork--satellite moons or dropping bombs--and is illuminated by concealed red, white, blue, and yellow lights. Asked by the present owner to comment on the piece, Noguchi said: "What I was interested in was the reflected light of which man was not a part. He does not participate within the illumination but is an observer outside."<sup>19</sup> This statement is reminiscent of his 1926 Guggenheim application, in which he spoke of wanting to ignore man and sculpt nature instead: in this case the moon, whose light is reflected and which man could then observe only from afar. Lunar Landscape was made to hang on a wall; one of the Lunar Lights does also, and he made other lunar wall panels in 1944 and 1945. In 1947 he incorporated Lunar Voyage (fig. 49) into a stairwell on the Home Lines' S.S. Argentina. The piece was destroyed when the ship was scrapped in 1959, but it was an eight-foot-high magnesite relief with mountain, crater, star, and target shapes illuminated by hidden lights. Lighting the stairs and itself at the same time, Lunar Voyage was the perfect lighted sculpture/sculpted light fixture.

In 1947 Noguchi also did two lighted, sculpted ceilings. His ceiling for the lobby of the American Stove Company (fig. 50) provided indirect lighting and also directed traffic--via several flowing,

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<sup>19</sup>Smithsonian Institution, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (New York: Abrams, 1974), p. 730.

carved-out shapes--toward a hidden bank of elevators. A photograph of this ceiling was shown (along with Lunar Landscape) in MOMA's 1951 Modern Relief exhibition. Noguchi's Time-Life Building ceiling (fig. 51)<sup>20</sup> was also for a public space: a waiting room cum reception area. This ceiling had one attenuated, free-form shape arrowing toward the reception desk and it was punctuated by a small crater over the desk itself. Both the ceiling designs subtly, even subliminally reshape the spaces beneath them. In contrast, Noguchi was, at the same time, using lunar ideas aggressively, even radically, in his theater work (see Chapter IV).

In the late 1940s sculptors were just beginning to become aware of the sculptural possibilities of light. Umberto Boccioni had advocated the use of incandescent light as a sculptural material in his 1912 Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture but never made any works incorporating actual light. During the 1920s several artists used light as part of a performance: Wilfred used projected light as the vehicle for a continuously changing ballet of color in Lumia, Moholy-Nagy directed beams of light through a rotating stage construction called Light Prop (or Light-Space Modulator), and Picabia constructed a drop curtain of 370 spotlights for the ballet Relâche. The effects created by the three artists differ vastly, from the romantic to the mechanistic to the confrontational, but they all thought of light as a temporary performer, a kinetic presence acting within a larger context.

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<sup>20</sup>According to Time-Life, Inc., their ceiling has been destroyed. I have not yet been able to ascertain whether the American Stove Company ceiling is extant.

During that same period, however, another type of lighting had made its appearance: tubes filled with a mixture of gases (including neon, discovered in 1898) that emitted radiation when an electric current passed through them. The inner walls of these tubes were coated with a material that fluoresced (lighted up) when bombarded by the radiation from the gases. The cool, clear, long-lasting light of fluorescent tubes, along with their flexible shapes, made them ideal for commercial lighting and signs, for which they were beginning to be used in the 1920s. Noguchi's is far and away the first study (fig. 36) for a neon sculpture; the medium's potential was not fully realized until the 1960s.

As early as 1951, Lucio Fontana designed a ceiling for the entrance hall of the ninth Triennale in Milan which consisted of "small, circular holes . . . arranged in the polished ceiling; out of some of these strips of neon were suspended at angles."<sup>21</sup> Ten years later he would use 6000 feet of vertically suspended neon for Italy's exposition hall at Turin. By the late 1950s Europeans such as Otto Piene and Nicolas Schöffer were also becoming involved with fluorescent and incandescent light. Piene created a Light Ballet and Schöffer an ensemble luminodynamique (Lux I); the dynamic, temporary performance of light (even Fontana's were temporary installations) was still being emphasized.

Noguchi's Power House had used light as form--steady, stable, three-

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<sup>21</sup>Jack Burnham, Beyond Modern Sculpture (New York: George Braziller, 1969), p. 294.

dimensional form. It was not until younger American artists began experimenting with neon in the early 1960s that the potential of light as form began to be fully realized. The sculptures of Dan Flavin, Chryssa, Martial Raysse, Billy Apple, and others differed widely, but none of them presented the viewer with a light show. Many of them exploited the flexible shape of the neon tube (as had Noguchi) in order to create pieces whose shapes were suggested by typography, commercial signs, or fantasy. Some of Flavin's early works--the "icons" of 1961-64--may have arisen out of his Jesuit background. From 1964 on, however, Flavin used standard length tubes and their fixtures as independent sculptural units which he grouped within specific spaces to create unique light environments. In 1968 Noguchi exhibited his akari at the Cordier and Ekstrom gallery; the event pointed up the difference between him and other artists working with light. Flavin used an ordinary industrial object as sculpture: a fluorescent fixture became, by virtue of context and composition, an art object. Noguchi made sculptures that were ordinary industrial objects: mass-produced paper lamp shades.

Noguchi's interest in functional, mass-producible light sculpture had begun, as we have seen, in the late 1940s. Early in the 1950s he sojourned in Japan and visited the paper-lantern-making town of Gifu, where he conceived the idea of akari. In Japanese the word means "light-as-illumination"; for Noguchi, it also signified lightness (as opposed to weight). The akari's "very lightness questions materiality, and is consonant with our appreciation today of the less thingness of

things, the less encumbered perception."<sup>22</sup> When he had an exhibition of new work at the Kamakura Museum of Modern Art, he included a number of akari (fig. 52). Some of their shapes echoed traditional Japanese lanterns; others, the hourglass, box, and cylinder lamps of the 1940s. In the early 1960s he added spiral column and stacked-cube akari to his repertoire. He was just then beginning to explore the cube in his studio sculpture--the spiral would not emerge there until the late 1960s. He also made another lighted-sculpture-as-part-of-architecture: Akari to cover ceiling. The new shapes were exhibited at Bonniers and, in 1968, at Cordier and Ekstrom. He titled the show "Shapes of Light" and, in the catalogue, claimed the akari "as valid expressions of sculpture--no longer an extravagant claim to make for a bit of paper, air, and light, for an object which is not an object."<sup>23</sup> His Whitney Museum retrospective of that same year had not included akari; ironically, his only MOMA retrospective has been of furniture, industrial designs, and akari (Noguchi: the Sculptor as Designer, 1978). Nevertheless, the akari are ongoing, for they are a way of integrating sculpture with environment and, more importantly, a way of making sculptures out of and about energy (as light).

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<sup>22</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup>Isamu Noguchi, catalogue statement, "Shapes of Light" (New York: Cordier and Ekstrom Gallery, 1968).

Energy: Solars

The shift from reflected-light sculptures (lunars) to radiant light sculptures (akari) occurred in the mid-1950s; at that time Noguchi also became concerned with the radiant energy of the sun. The first sun piece was made in 1958. As in Lunar Infant and lamps from the 1940s, the central element--a pierced disk--of Solar (fig. 53) is suspended weightlessly between poles. Made, like many of the 1928 abstractions, of sheet metal, it represents a human-invented image of the sun as elevated planar disk: the sun as object, as matter. Four years after Solar, Noguchi carved a thin piece of granite into a pierced disk, placed it on a tall base and called it Variation on a Millstone #1 (fig. 54). The millstone is a human-invented object which, inverted and elevated, becomes a sunlike image. Variation on a Millstone #2 (fig. 55) has even greater surface variety (energy as matter) and is impaled on a single slender support (matter dematerializing). The next year he carved Variation on a Millstone #3 (fig. 56) and Variation on a Millstone #4 (fig. 57). In each of these two works the disk-piercings have melded into a central "keyhole" from which lines of force radiate outward to the squared-off edges of the disk. He tried returning #4 to its "natural" horizontal position, but in the last Variation (fig. 58) he reverted to precariously balanced verticality. All the Millstones are of textured granite: a natural material used for a human invention inverted into a "natural" image--matter as "sun."

Between Solar and the first Millstone, Noguchi was asked to design a sunken garden for Yale's Beinecke Library. He envisioned a triad of pyramid, cube, and "sun"; between 1959 and the completion of the garden



in 1964 he made ten studies for the sun element. Three of them (fig. 59) can now be seen together in a public, outdoor setting. They represent Noguchi's three ways of thinking about the sun: as matter, as energy, and as light. A more sunlike object than the Millstones, Study for the Sun (right) was cast in yellow bronze. Its stepped, textured surface is like that of the scored disk Noguchi designed for Martha Graham's 1960 Alcestis. Commenting on that set, Noguchi noted that "the circular stone is the door opening both to life and to death. The sun that creates, then destroys."<sup>24</sup> The other two Studies for the Sun also represent creativity and destructiveness; unlike the yellow bronze version, however, each is in the shape of a ring rather than a pierced disk. The travertine version (left) is a light-colored, smooth-surfaced ring whose large, off-center opening makes the piece seem to radiate energy continuously. The third study is made of cast iron (center). Its dull, light-absorbing surface and bulkier proportions create a somewhat more ominous presence. The Beinecke sun (fig. 60) has some of the texture of the yellow bronze versions combined with the bulkiness of the cast iron study and the light color (it is, like the other elements, white marble) of the travertine version. And Noguchi saw it as a multi-valent symbol: "A ring of energy . . . the coiled magnet . . . the source of all life . . . the zero of nothingness from which we come, to which we return."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 129.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

The artist would explore each of the image's meanings separately and in overlapping ways during the 1960s. An example of the "white suns"--symbols of radiant creativity--is the 1964 white marble Sky (fig. 61). Like a Millstone, it sits atop a high, narrow base, its height emphasized by its vertically elongated open center. Although it is only fractionally smaller than the travertine Study for the Sun, it is much thinner, so that it appears weightless and fragile as an akari, and as generative of pure white light. The 1966 White Sun (fig. 62) is even smaller, but it is pillowier and more undulant of surface. (The piece's suggestive bulges and the vulvar "nick" along its lower edge hint at an identification of primal creativity with the feminine.) The 1967 Grey Sun (fig. 63) also bulges slightly, but its unnicked surface has the radiating lines of the Millstones; that is, it is a blend of matter-as-sun and sun-as-light. Its color--a blend of black and white--also symbolizes its inbetweenness. Much of the surface of the black granite Sun (fig. 64) also reads as grey, because the stone was left unpolished except around deeply incised force lines. This gritty, lumpy, bulky piece suggests volcanic energy rather than smoothly radiant light; the black suns are incarnations of implosive voids.

The image first emerged as one of the studies for the Beinecke sun (fig. 65). The original was of black Tamba granite; the stone was, as with Sun, most highly polished in the crevices radiating from a small, off-center void. Eleven plateaus and hollows alternate around the void, suggesting the face of a clock: a cosmic time bomb, a black hole. Later in the 1960s, as Noguchi began to think about his first major

piece of publicly funded sculpture, he carved a copy of Black Sun and had it cast in bronze (to which he gave a black lacquer finish). The Black Sun (fig. 66) that the city of Seattle acquired in 1969 through the N.A.H. is a nine-foot diameter enlargement of the earlier image. Seattle's Black Sun is located in front of the Art Museum; the sculpture sits on a low base on the edge of a hill overlooking the city and Puget Sound. Noguchi called it the complement to Beinecke's white sun: "in his scheme the white sun belongs to the East where it rises, and the black sun in the West where it sets."<sup>26</sup> The white sun represents creativity and light; the black sun its implosive negation. Noguchi had characterized the hole in the center of the Beinecke sun as "the abyss, the mirror, the question mark."<sup>27</sup> Asked about the ring shape of Black Sun, he responded: "What could be more vital than nothing?"<sup>28</sup> His last two solar images were the 1969 Sun at Noon (fig. 67) and the circa 1973 Sun at Midnight (fig. 68). One is orange and red marble, the other grey and black granite; both are thin bands of stone encircling space, nothingness, the void.

#### Energy: Voids

In 1970, the year after the Seattle Black Sun, Noguchi carved a marble Void and a granite Walking Void #2. Their common ancestor is Man

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<sup>26</sup>Sally Hayman, "A 'Black Sun' Rises Over Seattle," Seattle Post-Intelligencer, September 28, 1969.

<sup>27</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

Walking (fig. 69), a sheet metal piece made, along with the first Solar, in 1959. Like Solar, it consists of two vertical supports with a disk between them. One of Man Walking's "legs," however, steps forward, carrying the disk with it and necessitating an internal twist for balance. (For its ancestor, see Rodin's Walking Man, a study for St. John the Baptist Preaching, which Elsen discusses in terms of "complex kinetic change" and "the powerful transfer of energy enacted within the body."<sup>29</sup>) Next come the 1964 Of Weight and Motion and Vertical Man. Both are raised on metal supports, but the main element in each is now a bifurcated, twisted chunk of stone. The development of the voids runs parallel to that of the suns.<sup>30</sup> 1964 was the year of Sky, and in 1966, the year of Sun and White Sun, Noguchi produced Red Untitled (fig. 70). It is a tall, squared loop of red travertine with a bulge and a lower-edge notch which echo those of White Sun. Four years later Noguchi carved his only white void, a "feminine" image of pure, self-enclosed energy. In Stillness Moving (fig. 71) is a tall, slender marble loop that "steps" sideways ninety degrees. One of its verticals is softly rounded, and there is a notch along the inner edge, features which the artist repeats with In Silence Walking (fig. 72), a black marble version. The dark stone, like that of the black suns, is light-absorbing, negative, void-directed.

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<sup>29</sup>Albert Elsen, Rodin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1963), p. 27.

<sup>30</sup>Asked about the significance of his titles, Noguchi said, "They're after the fact, after you've done it and you want to suggest something of what you had intended. . . . It's a kind of identification instead of just a number. You might start people thinking in that direction instead of in some other direction. Some sort of identification of your intention." (Interview with Paul Cummings, Archives of American Art, 1973.)

Motion around a void is the theme of these works; The Void (fig. 73) reduces the number of internal turns to one along the bottom, increasing the resemblance to the single-twist, continuous energy band of a Moebius strip. Walking Void #2 (fig. 74) tightens and energizes the form even further, for it is trapezoidal rather than rectangular. Its title combines In Silence Walking and The Void; its color is closer to the former, for it is made of black granite, a material already associated in the artist's mind with the energy-implosive black suns.

In 1971 Noguchi made the black granite Energy Void (fig. 75); it is a foot taller than the Seattle Black Sun. Its form derives from Walking Void #2, but the huge scale focuses attention more clearly on the space framed by the heavy, dark, slowly shifting loop. The sense of self-contained, rotating energy pulls one into "the abyss, the mirror, the question mark." Study for Energy Void and Void are smaller versions of the large piece; the Study is, like Red Untitled and Void, made of red stone, while the small Void is of bronze. Bronze has always been a secondary medium for Noguchi--a way of fixing fragile forms. Yet metal endures, and when he was asked to design a large sculpture for Cleveland's new Cuyahoga Justice Center in 1976, he produced Portal (fig. 76), a steel pipe void. (Between Portal and the mostly studio-scale voids of 1970-71 falls Energy Void. It is fourteen feet high and made of black granite--the last of the stone voids.) Cleveland's Justice Center houses courtrooms and offices. It is an undistinguished modern building that occupies a city block and consists of two high-rise

units connected by a low section in which is the entrance. Like many of Noguchi's large-scale pieces, Portal relates to the site both formally and symbolically. (The relationship may be conjunctive or disjunctive--see Shinto [fig. 110] for an example of the latter.) Viewed from inside the entrance or directly in front of it, the sculpture forms a square loop framing the view out or in. Seen from the side (the natural approach here), it is an open-centered trapezoid angling in toward the building. It frames and directs traffic toward the entrance; it also serves as a symbol of inpulling energy, a force pulling people toward the unknown of justice. (From some angles it resembles a lasso or noose.) Portal is the largest of the voids to date. It combines the rectangular twistiness of In Silence Walking et al. with the trapezoidal precariousness of Energy Void and the others. The voids as a whole stand for the almost gravitational pull (on the human imagination) of the energies of the unknown.

#### Gravitational Energy: Earth Rings

Each time Noguchi has developed a new image of cosmic energy--lunar, solar, void (the unknown)--he has also felt the need of a corresponding image of earth-born energy. In 1945, when he was making lunars and lamps, he began carving The Ring (fig. 77). It is a small, low, black granite piece that sits directly on the floor, its unpolished surface bulging with biomorphic sprouts. (In 1942 he had made Leda, an alabaster floor piece in which he reenvisioned the 1928 egg-and-embryo as a cell in process of mitosis.) While working on Ring (finished 1948), he

did the set for Martha Graham's Cave of the Heart. One of the elements was a "volcanic shape like a black aorta of the heart"<sup>31</sup> (fig. 78). Made of painted magnesite, this low, bulging floor piece acted as a gravitational pulse, an earth magnet to which the heroine Medea was drawn and from which she emerged to slay her rival.

In 1962, in the midst of his ten studies for the Beinecke sun, Noguchi produced This Earth, This Passage (fig. 79), a flat, lumpy bronze floor piece. It was modelled, like many of the other "gravity" sculptures he made that year (see next section), of clay which he worked with his feet. The dark, rough, unpolished surface looks like volcanic slag surrounding a newly formed crater pushed through the earth's surface by unseen energies.

In 1970, the year in which he made the last solar and the first voids, he carved two stone earth rings. Downward Pulling (fig. 80) is a low coil made of twelve alternating chunks of white and black marble. White and black stand for positive and negative energies; here they represent a balance between gravitational pull and upward-spiralling growth. Magic Ring (fig. 81) also spirals upward/pulls downward. It is a wide, low floor piece made of nine pieces of red travertine (he had used travertine for one of the solars and for a void prototype). Magic Ring is red as the earth from which it--like all the earth rings--"grows" directly. Four years later Noguchi proposed a monumentally scaled ring made entirely of earth. The unrealized Sacred Rocks

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<sup>31</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 126.

of Kukaniloko (fig. 82) would have enclosed the rocks among which Hawaiian queens traditionally gave birth within a sloping ring of grass-covered earth.

The earth rings always functioned as images of the volcanic/magnetic power of our planet: antidotes to the cosmic energies of the lunars, solars, and voids. However, Noguchi's most recent horizontal rings have levitated. Sky Gate (fig. 83) and the "Dodge Fountain" for Detroit's Philip A. Hart Plaza (fig. 84) are raised above the earth on, respectively, three and two legs. In spite of that, and in spite of the fact that they are fabricated of steel rather than carved from stone or earth, these two rings represent a further "growth" upward of earth-generated forces. The upward thrust of the "Dodge Fountain" is such that even though the ring is solidly planted on two sturdy legs, it appears to be projecting skyward with enormous energy, an effect that is enhanced by upward-pulsing water jets. Sky Gate (which was begun the year Portal was made) also focuses attention upward. The undulant ring (see the 1942 Leda) which crowns the angled legs has a circular seat directly beneath its center, inviting contemplation of the heavens from within the heart of an earth-born form.

#### Gravity

Earth-born forms recur at intervals in Noguchi's work, and represent an Antaeus need to renew contact with the earth, over whose surface we move "like filings on a magnet."<sup>32</sup> The sky-directed earth rings evi-

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 40.



dence one aspect of this interest; his other ways of thinking about gravity proceed from an image of the earth as the matrix of form. At times he has emphasized processes of growth/transformation emanating from this matrix; at other moments he has sought to raise visual "consciousness of sheer invisible mass"<sup>33</sup> itself. Some of the 1928 sculptures--Infant Tree, Bird Cry--belong to the first category, as does the 1942 Leda. In 1946 came The Seed (fig. 85), another image of organic fecundity: two long marble shoots pushing through a planar element. This element creates a sense of "above" and "below" ground, so that the sculpture is partly "hidden."

Noguchi did not pursue this idea until the early 1960s when, after several years of "weightless" sculptures, he began a series of "gravity pieces." In the 1950s his craving for earth had been satisfied by making gardens and by working with clay; the 1962 pieces were also of clay, kneaded with the feet (but immediately, and uncharacteristically, translated into bronze). Some of these works are reminiscent of the cellular sexuality of the 1940s: Mitosis, Aphrodite, and Scorpion in particular. Aphrodite (fig. 86) is made of two elements: a long, penile form and a "double-breasted" shape. The two elements are separate and may be repositioned in relation to each other by the viewer--an idea adumbrated by Positional Shape in 1928. Rearrangeable sculpture points to invisible determinants of physical position rather than to organic/sexual processes of transformation. The 1962 Adjustable

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Sculpture (fig. 87) consists of four small chunks of bronze that do not suggest human, plant, or other organic life. Rather, their cubic, individualized forms seem to emerge only partially from the ground plane on which they sit directly. In Lessons of Musokokushi (fig. 88), also 1962, the five elements resemble rocks embedded in the ground. Musokokushi was a garden master who specialized in rock environments: "In Japan the rocks in a garden are so planted as to suggest a protruberance from the primordial mass below."<sup>34</sup>

Nothing suggests this better than the 1962 Floor Frame (fig. 89). Its two beamlike elements are separate and realignable; whatever the arrangement, the sculpture seems to be struggling to emerge from the floor, and to have parts locked deep beneath the plane. It not only frames the floor, but calls attention to the "sheer invisible mass" of the ground itself, and to its role as the matrix of matter. Ground plane and forms together make one continuity; as Noguchi said, "The whole garden may be said to be a sculpture, whose roots are joined way below."<sup>35</sup> Seen and Unseen (fig. 90) has only two "islands": a flattened, round one and a tall, smooth one whose shape is prophetic of his 1968 Origin.

With the 1962 Seen and Unseen (the title of his father's first book of poetry), Noguchi intensified the dialogue between plane and protrusions. This Earth, This Passage represented a surrender to gravity, to

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

the formlessness of primal earth; Origin (fig. 91) is a priapic bulge arising from and sliding across the earth. It is made of black granite, a material Noguchi was then using for the Seattle Black Sun. Of the material the artist said: "It is a direct link to the heart of matter-- a molecular link. When I tap it, I get the echo of that which we are-- in the solar plexus--in the center of the gravity of matter."<sup>36</sup> In the center of the gravity of matter beats a pulse which proceeds, wavelike, from the center outward into form. The Wave (fig. 92) is a black granite plane from which a bulbous protruberance arises and through which it pushes, creating a trough. Noguchi has done four versions of this image: one each in 1968, 1970, 1972, and 1975. Of the four only the first sits directly on the ground and it is the only one with an earthbound title: the artist recently retitled one version The Planet in Transit and another Wave and Space (the fourth version is a small Wave in Space). Detached from the ground plane, the image obviously becomes, for the artist, associated with motion through a void rather than a countergravitational push.

Between 1968 and 1970 Noguchi made ten more planes with landscape or architectural elements rising from them. Most are made of granite, but none are made to sit directly on the ground, so they remain landscape sculptures rather than earthscapes. Some of them--Wet Stone (fig. 93), for example--owe their rising, sliding-forward, wavelike bulges to Origin. Others, such as Landscape Sculpture (fig. 94) derive from the

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<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Sally Hayman, "A 'Black Sun' Rises Over Seattle."

"islands" of Seen and Unseen. Only Round-Square Space (fig. 95) (formerly Untitled) eschews mesas and bulges; the surface of the round granite plane has itself been divided into checkerboard areas of rough and smooth.

In 1968, while he was developing the landscape sculptures, Noguchi did two sculptures which related more directly to his craving for gravity. Conjoining the low, rough, concave surface of This Earth, This Passage with the discrete elements of Adjustable Sculpture he produced Another Land (fig. 96) and This Place (fig. 97). Both sit directly on the ground plane, and each is made of seven pieces of granite fitted together like puzzle pieces to form a cracked, craterlike plane. Both are broken-off bits of primordial mass. He returned to this idea in 1975 with Shodo Shima (fig. 98) (the title means Shodo Island, one of the artist's sources for stone). Like the 1968 stonescapes, it is made of separate granite elements which gather on the ground to form a plane. The eight elements are not, however, fitted tightly together; two "V" shapes frame and incompletely enclose six rounded "boulders," suggesting the island's stony matrix from which rocks are born.

Tao-tieh (fig. 99) was made the same year as Shodo Shima. It consists of five chunks of granite pushed close together on the ground; fissurelike spaces have been left between elements and they have been gouged to suggest the features of the mythical monster after which the piece is named. A part of the decor of almost every Shang and Chou bronze, the t'ao-t'ieh had important ritual significance (now unknown) for the Chinese. The great mask, appearing from earth in Noguchi's

piece, also recalls the Chinese image of the earth as a dragon--another mythical monster. Maxine Hong Kingston's image of the dragon-earth evokes the beast:

Dragons are so immense I would never see one in its entirety. But I could explore the mountains, which are the top of its head. . . . I could understand that I was a bug riding on a dragon's forehead as it roams through space, its speed so different from my speed that I feel the dragon solid and immobile. In quarries I could see its strata, the dragon's veins and muscles; the minerals, its teeth and bone. I could touch the stones . . . its bone marrow. I had worked the soil, which is its flesh and . . . climbed the trees, which are its hairs.<sup>37</sup>

Noguchi's gravity sculptures proceed from his same immediate, sensuous, poetic sense of the earth and humans' relation to it. At the same time, he has always been interested in an antidote to our gravity-bound insignificance, in escape from the matrix, in weightlessness.

#### Weightlessness

Weight is determined by gravity; lack of weight is proportional to distance (metaphorical or actual) from the earth. As Noguchi has repeatedly felt the pull of gravity, so he has also repeatedly concerned himself with strategies for achieving weightlessness. His first approach was via suspension: the 1928 Abstraction in Almost Discontinuous Tension (fig. 35). Had Noguchi made more such dangling, wind-moved sculptures he, rather than his friend Alexander Calder, might be credited with the invention of the mobile, for Calder did not make

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<sup>37</sup>Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 34.

his first one until 1931. But Noguchi did not use the idea again in a nonfigural work until 1943, when he made Monument to Heroes. By that time suspension had become, via the gruesome Death (fig. 8) and the ominous Lunar Infant (fig. 14), symbolic of "our precarious and pendulous existence."<sup>38</sup> Monument to Heroes (fig. 100) is a black-painted cardboard cylinder from which bones and carved bits of wood dangle and protrude. The suspended elements are attached to each other with string, a device he also used that year to hang a bobbin and pennant from a wall piece called The World is a Foxhole. The 1944 Lunar Landscape (fig. 48) is also a wall piece and has bomblike wooden bobbins strung across its surface.

The lightness of wood was also exploited in Portrait of Bucky (fig. 101): an hourglass-shaped wooden figure (a kind of three-dimensional infinity sign) dangles from the wall within a network of open tetrahedrons. In 1947 Noguchi made his first balsawood piece. He had used the material for many of the stage objects he designed for Martha Graham during the 1940s; Cronos (fig. 102) is related to the mythic beings she celebrated in her dances. It is a tall arch with five separate elements hanging within it; "the image was that of the falling tears, or the limbs, of his sons devoured by the Titan."<sup>39</sup> (Of Cronos' children only Zeus escaped, by running away. It is interesting to note that in 1947 Noguchi's father, whom he had not seen since 1931, died.)

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

Cronos was the delayed progenitor of a series of balsawood works done between 1959 and 1962. (Between 1958 and 1962 he did five sets for Martha Graham--their most intensive work together since the 1940s.) The first of the series was The Cry (fig. 103), a tall pole topped by a "head" with open "mouth" (see Brancusi's Newborn). Alongside it is a second, shorter pole which appears to hover weightlessly, hanging in the air. The illusion "of floating in a gravitational field"<sup>40</sup> is offset by the visibility of the pin joining the elements. Shodo Hanging (fig. 104) and Shodo Flowing (fig. 105) also have one main vertical with which other "free-floating" elements associate, but the parts hang closer together and are more mutually supportive. Both sculptures are further stabilized by footed bases. Soliloquy (fig. 24) is visibly impaled on a sturdy metal stand, and its elements are even more closely cohered.

The human resonance which weightlessness has for Noguchi is alluded to by titles like "Soliloquy" and "Spirit"; in addition, two of the 1962 series are literally sonorous. Soliloquy (fig. 106) is squarely capped and footed (i.e., self-contained/isolated). Two "arms" dangle freely from the top element; they clang against each other suggesting, to one critic, "the ticking of a cosmic clock."<sup>41</sup> Noguchi has compared the fixed elements of the other weightless pieces to "arrested pendulums," which he associates with his "preoccupation with time."<sup>42</sup> Mortality (fig.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>41</sup>Dore Ashton, "American Mutations, Cimaise, July-October 1964, pp. 39-40.

<sup>42</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 38.

107) sums up this concern with existential existence. It is a tall stanchion with a flat base and a flat cap from which five pendulums are suspended. In the original balsawood version the hanging elements bang together like the hollow reeds of a wind chime; in the bronze version the sound acquires a more ominous reverberance.

All the weightless pieces were immediately cast in bronze, a medium which the artist was also using at that time to finalize his clay gravity sculptures. In 1962 he also began a closer dialogue between the inertia of matter and its levitational aspirations. The Inhabitant (fig. 108) consists of "elements like turds that penetrate enclosures where 'the inhabitant' and his house are one."<sup>43</sup> The house is a vertical metal corner; the rough bronze earthbound inhabitant is pilloried by it like an offender in a Puritan community. (Base and sculpture, inside and outside, earthiness and weightlessness are likewise interchangeable.) The Stone of Spiritual Understanding (fig. 109) is similarly transfixed--"mortified by time," as Noguchi put it.<sup>44</sup> Impaled by a crossbeam resting on sheet metal verticals, the potato-shaped chunk of rough bronze does not float or dangle, but hovers above the void, combining the "tension of levitation"<sup>45</sup> with a menacing sense of gravitational pull. (It is interesting to note that 1962, the year of many of these works, was the year of the first manned orbital flights by U.S. astronauts.)

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.



By the mid-1960s, Noguchi had begun to focus on weightlessness as levitation rather than as suspension. (His last use of the latter approach was for Shinto [fig. 110], an aluminum sculpture suspended from the ceiling of the main office of the Bank of Tokyo in New York. Customers and staff found its rhomboidal shape so menacing that the bank dismantled the work in 1980. It may be reconstituted in another location, an idea to which the artist is bitterly opposed.) Between 1963 and 1967 he made a number of sculptures in each of which a single stone element balances precariously on a vertical "base"--"the thin edge of gravity."<sup>46</sup> The stone of Vertical Man (fig. 25) is vigorously twisted, so it appears to be straining upward, while Night Wind (fig. 111) is a piece of black marble that seems to be on the verge of levitating entirely. Two years after Night Wind Noguchi made The Spirits Flight (#1) (fig. 112). It is a tall column composed of serpentine and white marble cubes stacked "precariously"--it is 94 inches high and 5-3/4 inches wide--and dynamically (for the column, like some of the 1963-67 pieces, twists energetically). The 1970 Spirits Flight (#2) (fig. 113) is even more dramatic, for it is only three inches wide. When it is photographed against the sky its seven white marble elements almost disappear, leaving the six black marble cubes like weightless vertical dots and dashes. (For the further evolution of the column, see Chapter IV.)

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

Alternating different colors of marble is Noguchi's way of acknowledging the method of construction. Like the visible pin in the 1962 series, the colors announce that this is a fictional object, a product of modern human ingenuity. One other of the striped sculptures of 1968-73 deals with the "tension of levitation": The Bow. Constructed of cylinders of yellow and black marble, it is more sinuous and "earthy" than Spirits Flight, for its angled vertical rises from a snaky base. Each of the versions is different, but Bow(A) (fig. 114) and Bow(B) (fig. 115) offer a simple balance between light and dark, vertical and horizontal, sky and earth. Bow(C) (fig. 116) is taller and more nearly vertical; at the same time its horizontal section curves more strongly and more weightily, since black marble blocks predominate. The higher the reach, in other words, the stronger the pull of gravity and the greater the tension between the two.

Most of Noguchi's weightless works of 1962-73 derive from organic (often human) models, but there is one other major form which he uses during those same years as a vehicle for the expression of weightlessness: the cube.

#### Weightlessness: Cubes

"In the sixties the cube became for sculptors what concentric circles were to field painters, an archetypal icon. Boxes in modern art are traceable back to Marcel Duchamp's Green Box."<sup>47</sup> The link

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<sup>47</sup>Nicolas Calas and Elena Calas, Icons and Images of the Sixties (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1971), p. 258.

between Duchamp and artists such as Robert Morris, Donald Judd, and Sol LeWitt seemed to be the search for "an analogy with inert matter . . . elements into which content of a specific kind had not been built."<sup>48</sup> As is by now abundantly clear, Noguchi is concerned with content, and the cube did have meaning for him. Its meaning was not as primary or minimal form; as a long-time friend/student of Buckminster Fuller's, he considered the tetrahedron "the minimum space enclosure, with four identical sides; nothing simpler can be envisaged."<sup>49</sup> The cube, on the other hand, is complex, unstable, but (or perhaps because of this) a favorite form in art and science. Its inherent properties and ubiquitousness in the man-made environment could therefore symbolize the dialogue between nature and human aspiration.

The Life of a Cube (fig. 117) appeared in 1962. It is a black granite block whose dimensions--12-1/2 inches cubed--are small (almost "human") and slightly arbitrary. Life of a Cube #2 (fig. 118) has the same dimensions but was made to balance on one corner. The cube en pointe is an exercise in the "tension of levitation": a lump of matter aspiring (precariously) to weightlessness. The first Life of a Cube has subtly softened edges and surfaces; the second is skewed, with clearly curved surfaces and non-right angles, as though the form were in process of creation or decomposition.

The third cube, an eight-foot block en pointe of notched white

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<sup>48</sup>Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture, pp. 249-50.

<sup>49</sup>Hugh Kenner, Bucky (New York: William Morrow, 1973), pp. 64-65.

marble, appeared in 1964 as part of the Beinecke Library garden (fig. 60). It signified "chance, like the rolling of dice . . . the human condition . . . that man-made pile of carbon blocks by which he has learned to stimulate nature's processes."<sup>50</sup> The large-scale, precariously balanced cube appeared twice more among Noguchi's public sculptures, both times in settings attuned, like Beinecke Library, to mind rather than nature. The 1968 Red Cube (fig. 119) stands in front of the Marine Midland Bank building in New York's financial district. The earlier cubes had been solid stone, but Red Cube is fabricated of steel plates, with a hole deliberately punched through its center to emphasize its hollowness. The hole also acts as a telescope--but one focused on the man-made structure behind it rather than on the stars. Its color further identifies it as an "unnatural" object, and its tilt demonstrates Noguchi's belief that "in the West the ideal was to triumph over gravity."<sup>51</sup>

Mind over matter is also the theme of the sculptures he did in 1972 for the Computer Center of the Bayerische Vereinsbank in Munich (fig. 120). The two elements of the sculpture are binary as computers: one is stone, the other metal. One is en pointe, the other is "sunken"; one is matte black and white, the other shiny aluminum. The larger element is composed of three black granite cubes en pointe bearing aloft a fourth, white granite cube. (The black and white, like the stripes of

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<sup>50</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

the 1969-73 studio sculptures, identifies it as an invention--a fictional object.) The smaller element is an aluminum cube partially "sunk" into the ground plane. The ancestor of this element was the 1962 Floor Frame; its most immediate predecessor was the 1967 Cube Root (fig. 121). This was a small black granite piece that appears to be embedded in the floor and to have been wrenched out of geometric alignment by its attempt to free itself from gravitational pull.

At the same time, Noguchi was carving Life of a Cube #5 (fig. 122), which is far less violently skewed, perhaps because it is separated from the floor by a cruciform base. Two years later he levitated the cube still higher. Among his twelve fountains for Expo '70 at Osaka, Japan (fig. 123) were three cubes made of perforated metal plates--they appear "empty" and weightless--raised on tall poles. The levitated cube combined with the cube en pointe to produce Cubic Pyramid (fig. 124). It is made of three black granite planes whose apexes form a pyramid and whose lowest points touch down on three marble cylinders. A raised, planar canopy, it is a disembodied cube--matter precariously dematerialized.

Even less "solid" was Skyviewing Sculpture (fig. 125), a black-painted steel sculpture which Noguchi did in 1969 for the campus of Western Washington State College in Bellingham. Sited in a brick courtyard enclosed by buildings (the same kind of hermetic, intellectual environment as at Yale), the piece is a large-scale version of Cubic Pyramid with, however, a large round opening in each of its three planes. Descendants of the Red Cube's "telescope," these holes do focus

on the sky. From inside the sculpture the "frames" block out the low buildings and direct the gaze upward; they symbolize antigravitational aspiration as the black color reminds us of its (and our) rootedness in matter.

Human inventiveness and human rootedness in primal matter have been two key preoccupations of Noguchi's friend Buckminster Fuller. Confronted with a cube in geometry class, Fuller demanded, "How long has the cube been there? How long is it going to be there? How much does it weigh?"<sup>52</sup> Much of Noguchi's profound confidence in the efficacy of science was a result of his association with Fuller, as was his conviction that sculpture could demonstrate the working of invisible forces--energy, gravity, and time--while symbolizing man's place in the universe. Noguchi and Fuller met in 1929 in a Greenwich Village bistro named Romany Marie's where artists, writers (such as Eugene O'Neill), and prophets met, ate, and talked. When they met, Fuller, nine years older than Noguchi, was giving a series of lectures on "utilizing the new technology to improve the environmental conditions of the human race."<sup>53</sup> Subsequently the lectures were given also at Yale and Princeton, at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Chicago Arts Club, and Carnegie Institute. Fuller and Noguchi drove together to many of these occasions, ferrying Noguchi's sculptures and Fuller's Dymaxion House models

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<sup>52</sup>Robert Marks and Buckminster Fuller, The Dymaxion World of Buckminster Fuller (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), p. 12.

<sup>53</sup>Alden Hatch, Buckminster Fuller (New York: Crown Publishers, 1967), p. 109.

and talking all the way. To Noguchi, Fuller's solid New England roots were enviable; Fuller envied Nouchi's mixed, emigratory heritage, for it made him "a founding member of an omni-crossbred world society."<sup>54</sup>

Fuller's American roots did indeed go deep--the first Fuller graduated from Harvard in 1760--but they were shot through with radicals, the best-known of which was his great-aunt Margaret Fuller. Before her death at age forty, she had published the feminist Woman in the 19th Century, coedited (with Emerson) The Dial, astonished men and women alike with her immense erudition in a series of "conversations," and become the first woman on the staff of the prestigious New York Tribune. As a Transcendentalist she believed in the preeminence of that knowledge which lay beyond the limits of experience; Buckminster Fuller's intuitive understanding of the design principles of the universe bears out that belief. He also shared a gift for prophecy with her. In his autobiographical Ideas and Integrities Fuller published an 1842 essay by Margaret Fuller in which, "Not only did Margaret envision the coming and the important significance of industrialization, but she stated also the realization that it would bring a great cross-breeding of man."<sup>55</sup>

Buckminster Fuller's prophesizing began early: in kindergarten he constructed a tetrahedral octet truss from dried peas and toothpicks--sixty years later he would patent the design as the basis of his famous

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<sup>54</sup>Buckminster Fuller, foreword to Isamu Noguchi's A Sculptor's World, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup>Buckminster Fuller, Ideas and Integrities (Toronto: Collier Books, 1969), p. 68.

"domes." There are two features of this discovery which are important to Fuller's subsequent history. First, the discovery was "synergetic." Fuller defines synergy as "the unique behavior of whole systems, unpredicted by behavior of their respective sub-system events."<sup>56</sup> In other words, Fuller had made an intuitive leap far beyond the specific problem to an entirely new set of relationships. Second, the "Octet" proved to be a natural system with unlimited usefulness. Usefulness has also been an important consideration for Noguchi.

Fuller's career has been a synergetic search for design principles which will "promote the total use of total technology for total population."<sup>57</sup> His discoveries have become, among other things, maps, houses, cars, hangars, playpieces, and bathrooms. He has been called an architect, an engineer, an inventor, but such terms are too circumscribed to define what he does. (He, for example, calls Noguchi a "visio-tactile formulator."<sup>58</sup>) In 1927 he produced drawings and models of a 4-D House, a lightweight hexagonal structure hung from a central mast which contained electricity, heat, and plumbing. When the model was displayed at Marshall Field department store in 1929, a publicity person coined the term "Dymaxion" to describe it. The house grew out of many years of thinking about "shelter"; he was also thinking about "transport" and by 1932 he had invented the Dymaxion car, a super-

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>57</sup>Marks and Fuller, The Dymaxion World of Buckminster Fuller, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup>Fuller, foreword to A Sculptor's World, p. 7.



streamlined shape on three wheels. A prototype of the car was realized, but in 1933 it was involved in a collision which killed the driver, and the bad publicity forced Fuller to shelve plans for production, though several revised versions were later made. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Fuller worked on refinements of his shelter and transport projects and began experiments in cartography--his Dymaxion World Map was published in Life in 1943, the year Noguchi was beginning to think about landscapes seen from a great distance (the lunars).

Another Fuller idea that took shape in the 1940s was "tensegrity," a system that would enable the building of lightweight structures whose supporting members did not touch (discontinuous composition) but were locked together (continuous tension) by connecting units. Noguchi would use something of this idea in his 1962 weightless sculptures. One of the first tensegrity structures (a Mast) was made in 1949 by Kenneth Snelson, Fuller's student at Black Mountain College. Fuller had taught at the College's Summer Institute of 1948, along with Josef Albers, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Theodore Dreiser, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Richard Lippold. That year he and his students built the first big "geodesic" dome.

In mathematics, an arc of a great circle is called a geodesic--it implies something larger than itself. The geodesic dome, which Fuller defines as "the most economical momentary relationship between separate events,"<sup>59</sup> is a system of construction which yields the most structure

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<sup>59</sup>Marks and Fuller, The Dymaxion World of Buckminster Fuller, p. 44.

for the least weight and smallest quantity of material. Its shape grows from the earth and implies it, for the structure uses principles-- derived from the octet truss and tensegrity--which are nature's own. In that sense the domes are kin to Noguchi's gravity pieces of the 1960s. During those years Noguchi also began making solars; it has been said of Fuller that "His most important model for reality is energy radiating from a center, and being restrained."<sup>60</sup> The 1960s also made both men world famous, Noguchi through his exhibitions and environmental projects, Fuller through the rapid proliferation of domes.

Yet both men have remained largely unclassifiable for critics, colleagues, and the public. They have been friends for more than fifty years because they share an abiding faith in science, a belief in the profound meaningfulness of the natural forces at work in the universe, and a concern that technology and/or art can and must improve the human environment. That moral imperative, together with a love of nature and science and an acute responsiveness to the tragedies and triumphs of the human endeavor translates, in Noguchi's work, into unique images of cosmic energies, earth's magnetic force, and humans' attempts to overcome nature. He has not used nonfigural sculpture to express himself or as an epistemological tool or even as a way of essentializing things seen, but as a modern way of balancing spirit with matter, a way of creating great symbols of the universe at work and our place in it.

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<sup>60</sup>Kenner, Bucky, p. 93.

## CHAPTER IV

### ENVIRONMENTS: SETS, FOUNTAINS, HORIZONTALS, VERTICALS, AND INTEGRAL SPACES

Two of the three strands that are interwoven throughout Noguchi's oeuvre are his archetypal human figures and his images of archetypal energies shaping (and being shaped by) the human situation. The third strand is his concern with reshaping the human situation itself. For sculpture, as he sees it, must be not only the rock (the object), but also "the space between rocks and between the rock and a man, the communication and contemplation between."<sup>1</sup> Contemplation (visual/mental) of and communication (physical interaction) with one's environment have been Noguchi's goals since he produced his first designs for spaces in 1933-34. As his concerns with energy, gravity, and weightlessness grew from the abstractions of 1928, so these first environmental designs form a core of ideas around which later works will take shape.

Two of the four seminal designs he produced in 1933-34 were submitted to the United States government in fulfillment of his obligation as an artist employed by the Public Works of Art Project (the pilot program for the W.P.A.'s art projects). Both designs celebrated American inventiveness and energy; otherwise they are as different as

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<sup>1</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture," Art News, March 1949, p. 16.

possible. Monument to Ben Franklin (fig. 126) was intended for a square in Philadelphia, while Monument to the Plow (fig. 127) was meant for the geographical center of the United States. Franklin is a tall stack of wire tetrahedrons, while Plow is a low, solid earth tetrahedron.

Franklin, with its resemblance to a radio tower and its metal kite at the top, symbolizes the urban, technological future. Plow, topped by an oversize replica of the object in question, evoked Native American mounds. It was intended to change with the seasons (one side would be left as is, another would be plowed, and a third planted with wheat) and would commemorate the agrarian, "natural" past.

Franklin and Plow were both meant to be contemplated from a distance rather than physically interacted with. In contrast, Noguchi's other two early environments were designed around specific human activities. Play Mountain (fig. 128) was for climbing and sitting on; it also incorporated a slide for sleds, a swimming pool, and a bandstand. In site and materials it resembled Franklin, for it was planned for a New York City lot (it was rejected by Robert Moses) and was to be made of concrete. Its form, however--a low, stable tetrahedron whose top softens into a spiral--recalls the "natural" Plow.

The fourth project also combined aspects of the Monuments, and it was also created with a specific activity in mind. In 1934 Martha Graham asked her friend Noguchi to design a set for Frontier (fig. 129). It was the first time she had used a set and the first time he had designed one. The dance "celebrated the vigor, the tenacity, and the

character of the settlers of the West."<sup>2</sup> The theme, as in Franklin and Plow, was American ingenuity; the (hypothetical) setting was the Old West. Noguchi used a natural, flexible material to create a linear, dematerialized setting--in contrast to Play Mountain, where he used an industrial material to create a solid, "natural" form. He simply stretched two ropes from the rear floor, center stage, to the top ends of the proscenium, "bisecting the theatre-box in such a way as to create a terrific sense of dimension."<sup>3</sup> With a section of log fence in front of it, Noguchi's minimal décor managed to suggest the boundless horizons of the prairie.

Frontier was the only one of the four early environmental projects to be realized (in 1935). Between 1935 and 1950 Noguchi would produce nine more unrealized environmental designs; only in his theater work would he see how space could actually function as "a volume to be dealt with sculpturally."<sup>4</sup> From 1950 on, however, he has used elements from his earlier works, together with newer developments, for gardens, plazas, playgrounds, and fountains. As with the earlier projects, high-tech sites are associated with man-made materials and vertical, dematerialized, modernistic forms; "natural" sites are associated with traditional materials and solid, primeval forms. His most ambitious

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<sup>2</sup>Don McDonagh, Martha Graham (New York: Popular Library, 1973), p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>"Noguchi," Art Voices from Around the World, December 1962, unpagued.

<sup>4</sup>Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 125.

environments--the sets and the "integral spaces"--consist of symbolic conjunctions of vertical and horizontal elements. (Water may mediate between or reinforce the past/future dichotomy--but there are also independent high-tech and primeval "water environments.") Like Franklin and Flow, many of the later projects are to be looked at only; like Play Mountain and Frontier, others are experienced through physical activity. In the sets, for example, the elements acquire identity (meaning) for the audience only through the activity of the dancers.

### Sets

In our century artists' involvement with theater has been of major importance. The contributions of the Futurists and the Dadaists to the history of "performance art" are well documented, while the revival of plays such as Kandinsky's "The Yellow Sound" and Malevich's "Victory over the Sun" and "Parade" shows the continuing importance of these works. "Artists' theater" reached a high point during the 1920s, in terms both of the number of leading artists involved and of the number of productions. Picasso, Matisse, Gris, Braque, Léger, Derain, Delaunay, Klee, Moholy-Nagy, Mondrian, de Chirico, and Kokoschka were among the collaborators. The experiments of the Constructivists and the theatrical workshop of the Bauhaus were especially innovative.

In 1929, however, Diaghilev died, and his Ballets Russes, for which Bakst, Larionov, and Picasso, among many others, had worked, was fragmented into several smaller, less internationally influential companies. In France, the void was partially filled by the activities of

the Surrealists, particularly Cocteau and his disciple Bérard. By the mid-1930s any international exchange of avant-garde theatrical ideas was being heavily curtailed by repressive politics. Futurists such as Severini and Prampolini could work under Fascism, but their designs were rarely seen outside Italy. In Russia, Constructivist activities were banned, while the Nazis closed the Bauhaus and drove artists into exile outside Germany. In the increasingly nationalistic climate of countries such as the United States, "foreign" ideas did not flourish.

By the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, exiled Surrealists had begun to congregate in New York, among them Salvador Dali, who did sets and costumes for three productions during the war years. Labyrinth, which was performed in 1941, was described as looking like "a milling Times Square subway platform on New Year's Eve."<sup>5</sup> Three years later his Mad Tristan: the First Paranoiac Ballet, Based on the Eternal Myth of Love in Death appeared. The music was by Wagner, the choreography by Massine; the costumes, stage effects, and backdrops were described as "fantastic." From photographs the backdrops, with their huge horses' heads protruding from mountains crowned with classical ruins, appear overwhelming. In 1941 there had also appeared The Golden Fleece, an Alchemistic Fantasy, which was a collaboration between Hanya Holm and Surrealist Kurt Seligmann. The dancers wore "crowns of electric-light bulbs, clothes of kitchen-ware with culinary trimmings, and other

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<sup>5</sup>Edwin Denby, Looking at the Dance (New York: Horizon Press, 1949), p. 258.

extraordinary apparel."<sup>6</sup> Like Dali's works, the Seligmann-Holm piece was conceived as a unique event (in an almost Dada sense) rather than as a repertory item.

Most stage design was, at that time, far more orthodox. The leading modern designers were Eugene Berman, Pavel Tchelitchew, and Oliver Smith. Berman was a Russian-born neo-Romantic painter who specialized in décors full of "ropes and tattered draperies, pyramids and obelisks, antique columns and arches, or crumbling stairways and balconies."<sup>7</sup> Tchelitchew, also Russian-born, produced lyric, fantastic sets for his countryman Balanchine's dances from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s. Smith, trained as an architect, created airy, elegantly structural sets for Agnes de Mille and Jerome Robbins.

Avant-garde or orthodox, all these painter-designers produced painted backdrops and costumes rather than three-dimensional stage objects. Sculptors had rarely been involved with theater, either because of their reluctance to have their works experienced solely as part of a larger human ensemble, or because of performers' reluctance to encumber the stage with additional objects, or both. Arp had designed masks for Dada performances, and Moholy-Nagy had made Light Prop (Light-Space Modulator) to be an active stage presence, but sculptor-performer collaborations remained rare. In 1936 Martha Graham, who

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<sup>6</sup>Margaret Lloyd, The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance (New York: Knopf, 1949), p. 168.

<sup>7</sup>Donald Oenslager, Stage Design (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 238.



usually worked with professional scenic designer Arch Lauterer, asked Alexander Calder to produce a décor for her group dance Horizons. She had used a few of his mobiles the year before in Panorama, but this time she found his designs "so unsatisfactory that she never again collaborated with Calder (she once mentioned his name slightly to Lauterer in telling him what to avoid in designing)."<sup>8</sup> Calder had already devised his own theater--the celebrated Circus (1926-32)--and would later experiment again with stage design. In 1952 he designed an H-shaped ramp with mobiles suspended over it for Henri Pichette's drama of nuclear disaster Nucléa and in 1963 he created a series of metal stabiles for Pierre Halet's La Provocation.

In the 1950s and 1960s a few other sculptors did involve themselves with theater. Barbara Hepworth created geometric, architectural settings for English productions of Electra in 1950 and Midsummer Marriage (Tippett) in 1955. Henry Moore contributed some existing pieces to performances of Don Giovanni at Spoleto in 1967; Manzu contributed a spiky collection of "archeological objects"<sup>9</sup> to Stravinsky's L'Histoire du Soldat in 1966, and that same year saw the famous "9 evenings: theatre and engineering," in which sculptors Robert Rauschenberg and Steve Paxton, among others, were involved more as performers than as contributors of forms. Earlier in the decade, sculptors such as Red Grooms and

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<sup>8</sup>McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 114.

<sup>9</sup>Henning Rischbieter, ed., Art and the Stage in the 20th Century (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968), p. 216.

Claes Oldenburg had participated in the creation of ongoing events and/or environments which came to be known as "happenings," while others, such as Otto Piene or Nicolas Schöffer, made works that acted themselves as complete performers, generating sound, light, and movement. This trend toward sculptor-as-performer or sculpture-as-performance coincided with the end of Noguchi's long-standing involvement with theater, a preoccupation which predated even his 1935 collaboration with Martha Graham on Frontier.

Noguchi has always been uniquely aware that "theater is a ceremonial; the performance is a rite."<sup>10</sup> Whether a rite of passage, of self-discovery, or of expiation, in stage space sculptural elements can regain their birthright as magical, transformative objects.

Noguchi's closest connection to the theater has always been dance. One of his first friends in New York was the Japanese dancer Michio Ito, friend of Yeats and Pound and teacher of a generation of "modern dance" pioneers. Indeed, Noguchi's first stage designs were papier-mâché masks for Ito's performance of Yeats' Noh-form "At the Hawk's Well" in 1926. Martha Graham was another early friend; they met in the late 1920s. Graham was ten years older than Noguchi, but they shared Irish ancestry (the Grahams and the Gilmours were nineteenth-century immigrants), a craving for "great symbols," and personal intransigency.

Even as Noguchi was being ejected from the P.W.A.P. for submitting symbolic monuments and refusing to do "work of a more purely sculptural

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<sup>10</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 174.

character,"<sup>11</sup> Graham was acquiring the reputation of a heretic. She had been born near Pittsburgh to a doctor specializing in mental disorders who taught his eldest daughter that movements reveal inner states of being. It was an idea she was to take as a credo. During her California adolescence she saw a performance by Ruth St. Denis and decided, despite her puritan mother's protests, to become a dancer. Trained by St. Denis and William Shawn, she quickly became a star in the Denishawn company, but rebelled against their Eastern exoticism and developed an antilyrical, antiromantic style of movement whose abruptness and straightforwardness could more directly convey universal ideas and emotions. Like Noguchi she was interested in the sacred and the sexual, in sky and earth, and in our shifting location somewhere between the two. In the first dance that brought her critical acclaim, for example, one dancer "salutes the sky and the other the ground, and together they form the parameters within which the initiate moves."<sup>12</sup> ("The floor is a direction,"<sup>13</sup> she declared, and Noguchi would echo the idea in his 1962 gravity pieces.) The "initiate" was Graham, dancing a solemn, ecstatic rite of passage with a small group of female dancers, among them Noguchi's sister Ailes. At the time, Primitive Mysteries (1931) was seen as having "translated religious [Catholic]

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<sup>11</sup>Letter from Mrs. Juliana Force (head of the P.W.A.P.) to Isamu Noguchi, March 2, 1934 (Archives of American Art).

<sup>12</sup>McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 79.

<sup>13</sup>Walter Terry, Frontiers of Dance: The Life of Martha Graham (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1975), p. 53.

myth into stark movement."<sup>14</sup>

The 1934 Frontier (it premiered in 1935) marked the beginning of a ten-year "American" period which ended with Appalachian Spring and included American Document (1938)--her first use of male dancers--Letter to the World (1940) (about Emily Dickinson), and the flag-waving Land Be Bright (1942). Graham was, like Noguchi, responsive to the fierce Americanism of the Depression years, and, like him, she was socially conscious. In 1936 she choreographed Chronicle, a dance about the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. (This was the year of Noguchi's melodramatic History Mexico.) The set consisted of "a series of circular, silver-colored pedestals . . . [which] was rearranged into a flight of steps for the second section."<sup>15</sup> This was Noguchi's first use of a set of stairs/islands/pedestals; it became a familiar motif in his set designs. Graham and Noguchi evolved a unique method for working together--the only one possible, perhaps, for two such strong-willed individualists. Graham would outline the "story" and the movements to Noguchi, most often without the music. He would work up the elements on a miniature stage in his studio and present them to her; she would then modify her arrangements to suit his objects. They repeated this process twenty-one times, with almost invariably satisfactory results.

Graham experimented with other designers in the late 1930s, but returned to Noguchi in 1943 for a trilogy of dances which were first

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<sup>14</sup>McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup>Lloyd, The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance, p. 59.

performed at the Library of Congress in 1944. They had been commissioned by the Coolidge Foundation, which also commissioned the scores by Darius Milhaud, Paul Hindemith, and Aaron Copland. (The Copland subsequently won a Pulitzer Prize.) Imagined Wing, set to the Milhaud music and choreographed for the company without Graham, was the least successful of the three and was subsequently dropped; Noguchi's set was not remarked upon by reviewers. Appalachian Spring (fig. 130), by contrast, was immediately popular and became an enduring classic in Graham's repertory. Noguchi's planar set consisted of a section of fence, a framework of wall and beams suggesting a house under construction, a silhouette of a rocking chair, and a low, tilted pedestal. The fence was not placed at the back of the stage, as in Frontier, but at the front, with the prairie "beyond" (toward the audience). The dance was not about the lonely struggle of the pioneer; rather, it was a drama of the conflicts, compromises, and joys of human society. The four main characters--Husbandman, Bride, Pioneer Woman, and Revivalist (originally danced by Merce Cunningham)--served as interacting archetypes of love and faith, past and future, community and freedom.

The upbeat energy of Appalachian Spring contrasted sharply with the third dance of the trilogy, Herodiade (fig. 131), a meditation upon age. (Graham turned fifty in 1944.) Noguchi designed three objects for the set: a pedestal chair with a stalklike back, an X-shaped clothes rack, and a huge, spiky, "biomorphic" mirror. Graham danced the aging Salome who discovers her mortality in the objects around her. In her mirror she sees "her bones, the potential skeleton of her body. The chair is

like an extension of her vertebrae; the clothes rack, the circumscribed bones on which is hung her skin."<sup>16</sup> Herodiade (set to Hindemith music) received mixed reviews; some critics also found the set "intrusive." For both Graham and Noguchi, however, Herodiade marked an important turn toward inner experience and imagery.

In 1945 Graham was separated from her long-time lover Erick Hawkins. She undertook a year of Jungian analysis which radically deepened her understanding of the workings of the unconscious. She became interested in archetypes, particularly as embodied in the tragic heroines of Greek myth. She had always been drawn to the Greeks; the angular severity of her style of movement had been compared to Archaic sculpture, and she had called early dances Dithyrambic (1931) or Ekstasis (1933). In 1933 she had choreographed Tragic Patterns, which had choruses for Suppliants, Maenads, and Furies, a forerunner of the "Greek" dances of the 1940s.

Noguchi meanwhile was meeting, through friends Jeanne Reynal and Margaret LaFarge Osborn, André Breton and other Surrealist exiles. Noguchi may have seen the Dali and Seligmann performances; if so, their sets had no impact upon him. Indeed, nothing being done by painter-designers (there were no other sculptors doing sets in the early 1940s) or professional designers seems to have influenced his work. This is not to say that his sets were not influenced by Surrealist painting; the bony biomorphic forms of Picasso, Miro, Tanguy, and Gorky were, along

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<sup>16</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 125.

with early Giacometti sculptures, an important part of his consciousness. But the only immediate example of an innovative approach to space was provided by architect Frederick Kiesler, whose theories about the flexibility and organic unity of stage spaces sound like recipes for Noguchi stage objects:

The obsolete formula of a monolithic construction, suddenly solidified and permanent and fictitiously thrust upon the scene, is out of the question. The changing demands of stage productions and need for proper correlation between actors and audience make necessary a flexible ephemeral construction and a building technology best achieved through tensional structures. . . . Method of construction: Prefabrication, assembled. Flexible joints. Demountable.<sup>17</sup>

The gallery space Kiesler articulated for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century in 1942 uses many ideas that Noguchi had or would come to share: stretched burlap backdrops, "V"s of rope (on which artworks hung), and lightweight, organically shaped "furniture" that could also serve as pedestals or sculpture. While Scenic Director at the Juilliard School of Music, Kiesler had produced stage designs, such as the one for Helen Retires (1934), that used planar stage objects which became an integral part of the dramatic action. In 1948 he created sets and costumes for Cocteau and Stravinsky's Oedipus Rex; the spiky, skeletal "house," tilted platforms, and suspended "star" are much like elements from Noguchi's sets for Appalachian Spring (1944) and Errand into the Maze (1947). Both Kiesler and Noguchi believed in the articulation of spaces with flexibly practical forms that were, at the same time, mysteriously

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<sup>17</sup>Frederick Kiesler, Kiesler (Innsbruck: Peter Weiermair, 1975), p. 22.

evocative. Kiesler's interior elements suggest mazes and primordial dream forms; Noguchi's suggested to Nicolas Calas, whose 1947 "Bloodflames" exhibition he participated in, "forms dictated by desires of the unconscious."<sup>18</sup>

In 1946 Graham and Noguchi collaborated on Dark Meadow (fig. 132). An "abstraction," it was an exploration of "a world of great symbols, the place of experience, the Dark Meadow of Ate."<sup>19</sup> One critic likened Noguchi's set to a "biomorphic Stonehenge"<sup>20</sup> and three of the four "primordial shapes" (as he called them)<sup>21</sup> did in fact resemble erect monoliths. The fourth element was a low mound from which the dance began and to which it finally returned. Two of the vertical shapes carried a cross and a seven-branched "tree," further reinforcing the dualistic ceremonial of the dance and the primal landscape in which it was set. The characters were called "She who seeks," "She of the ground," "He who summons," and "They who dance together." One critic compared the work to "an ancient ritual, the participants engaged in a ceremony so old that they had forgotten its meaning but still believed in its magical efficacy."<sup>22</sup>

Graham and Noguchi's second voyage of self-discovery was the 1947

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<sup>18</sup>Nicolas Calas, Bloodflames (New York: Hugo Gallery, 1947), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>Program notes for Dark Meadow, June 4, 1977.

<sup>20</sup>McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 187.

<sup>21</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 126.

<sup>22</sup>Terry, Frontiers of Dance, p. 102.



Errand into the Maze (fig. 133). It was loosely based on the Greek legend of the Minotaur, but in Graham's version it is Ariadne--not Theseus--who conquers the monster (her own fear). For the dance Noguchi created a landscape of the mind: a V-shape "like suppliant hands, like pelvic bones"<sup>23</sup> through which Ariadne entered and departed; a web of "lunar" and linear shapes suggesting mazelike interior space; and a length of rope with which Ariadne struggles. There was a kind of literalness to Graham and Noguchi's symbolism in the 1940s: the rope in Frontier created limitless, impersonal space, while the one in Dark Meadow represented the umbilical thread of self which, followed inward, leads to illumination.

Errand into the Maze was not Graham's first use of Greek myth in the 1940s; four months after Dark Meadow she had premiered Cave of the Heart (fig. 134). It dealt with Medea's murder of the princess to whom her lover Jason had become engaged (subsequently she slew her two children by him as well). Noguchi created a series of stepping-stone "islands" that served as stages on Medea's journey into the "black aorta of the heart," symbolized by a low, dark, volcanic-looking stage object (fig. 78). The third element was a coiled green snake (the dance was originally called "Serpent Heart") to which a branching golden cage attached. At the end of the dance bloody-handed Medea puts on this "dress" and is transformed and, finally, consumed by its fiery rays.

The transformative consequences of passion formed one of Graham's

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<sup>23</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 126.

major themes in the late 1940s. In 1947 she danced Night Journey (fig. 135), the tragedy of Oedipus and his mother/wife Jocasta reenvisioned by the queen just before she hangs herself. Noguchi again articulated the stage space with a set of five stepping-stones: "spirits of ancestors"<sup>24</sup> leading, this time, to a bed formed of conjoined male and female parts. As in Herodiade, there was an hourglass-shaped ("female") stool; as in Errand into the Maze there was a length of rope, an "umbilical cord" binding the incestuous lovers together. In Keeping with her drive to express universal emotions as directly and powerfully as possible, Graham introduced a new movement in Night Journey: "a head-high kick as the body began to lean forward in a perilous response to the pull of gravity while the lowering leg reached out to carry the body into a split on the floor."<sup>25</sup> Asked about its origin, Graham answered: "I felt that when Jocasta became aware of the enormity of her crime, a cry from the lips would not be enough. It had to be a cry from the loins themselves, the loins which had committed sin."<sup>26</sup> Sex and self, male and female, transformation and tragedy, love and hatred are inextricably interwoven in the Greek trilogy of 1946-47 announced by Dark Meadow. Through Graham's intense exploration of myth Noguchi rediscovered his own past. As a child, his mother had read him Greek legends so often that "I believed in Apollo and all the gods of Olympus

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Terry, Frontiers of Dance, pp. 106-07.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

long before I knew of any other";<sup>27</sup> now another woman reimmersed him in the ancient stories. The stage objects he produced for Graham were sculptural invocations of the process of self-discovery; the Titan Cronos, for example, became an image of his creative/destructive father, who died in 1947 (see Chapter II).

In 1948 he produced the most adventuresome, "abstract" set he would do for Graham. It perfectly symbolized the dance, which was about the "quick joy and quick sadness of being in love for the first time";<sup>28</sup> Graham called it Diversion of Angels. For this dance about the changeableness of love, Noguchi designed a set (fig. 136) which consisted of a "large burlap cloth that was held taut by rope threaded through the edges. Behind this set dancers with long poles pushed the tightly stretched cloth into peaks during the course of the dance."<sup>29</sup> There were no stage objects, only a constantly changing vertical landscape. Unfortunately, but predictably, Graham found the set too distracting and discarded it.

He had created an equally kinetic set for Merce Cunningham's 1947 Seasons (fig. 137). There was a static "landscape" of low mounds over which played ever-changing nuances and moods of light achieved with a light-projecting machine. There were no archetypal props, but the identity of the stage environment was constantly redefined--resculpted--with

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<sup>27</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup>Program notes for Diversion of Angels, June 1, 1977.

<sup>29</sup>McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 209.

light. Like the Diversion of Angels set, the light effects of Seasons were short-lived: the dance was performed only three times.

The next year he became deeply involved with sets and costumes for George Balanchine's more successful Orpheus (fig. 138). The archetypal artist whose magic could vanquish even death, Orpheus' is a story of love and doubt, of the mortality of the individual and the immortality of art. It had an even more personal significance for Noguchi, for that year his close friend Arshile Gorky committed suicide. Noguchi envisioned Orpheus as "blinded by his vision"<sup>30</sup> and devised a mask that wrapped around his eyes. Its U-shape was echoed in Orpheus' lyre and bow (all reminiscent of elements for Cronos). The fringed and wrapped costumes suggested shamanic transformations into birds and snakes; even the three rocks "levitated" and became lanterns. Like Gorky's hybrids, these ambivalent objects had multiple, open-ended identities. Orpheus was, in part, a ritual of expiation, of exorcism for Noguchi.

The first, most intense, most productive phase of Noguchi's theater activity ended in 1949, with his set for Graham's Judith (fig. 139), which was performed in 1950. The original décor combined elements from Herodiade (the crossed spears of Holofernes' tent) and Orpheus (Judith's lyre and chair). (Five screens were added in 1957, a period when Noguchi was involved with calligraphy and cut-out sheets of metal.) In 1949 Noguchi received a grant from the Bollingen Foundation to study "leisure": moments when the mind is detached and is therefore able to

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<sup>30</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 131.

participate in a "ritual of communion with the spirit."<sup>31</sup> He had thus far realized such moments only in the theater, but after an around-the-world trip he ended up in Japan, where he accomplished his first actual gardens.

He would continue to design stage environments for Graham and others until 1966, but at the rate of one every two or three years rather than eight in four years. And whereas planar and volumetric elements were combined in the sets of the 1940s, in the 1950s sets planar shapes (perhaps as an antidote to massive earth-moving projects) predominate.

The most linear of Noguchi's sets was for Graham's 1955 Seraphic Dialogue (fig. 140). At that time he was using metal rods as supports for sculptures and, grouped together, as frameworks for furniture. For this dance about Joan of Arc he raised a shining brass-rod construction that spectacularly evokes the tracery of a stained-glass window; the audience still gasps when the curtain goes up. Noguchi likens the edifice to the church steeple he had designed for Ruth Page's 1944 The Bells and sees it as "a cathedral that fills Joan of Arc's consciousness entirely."<sup>32</sup> It is made of interlocked circles, diamonds, and triangles, forms which are also prominent in his other 1955 set: for George Devine's production of King Lear (fig. 141), starring John Gielgud. The backdrop was a constantly shifting composition of diamonds, triangles, rectangles, and ellipses. The stage objects con-

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

sisted of triangular platforms, bone-shaped benches, and pierced screens bearing solar, calligraphic, and figural symbols.<sup>33</sup>

Most of Graham's dances up until the 1950s had been virtuoso performances for herself and, perhaps, a male protagonist, with the company as backdrop. But she was now in her sixties, and she began to choreograph for an ensemble. After Judith, in which she danced the avenging Old Testament heroine, she began to concentrate on teaching and lecturing. Often she did not dance at all, in Seraphic Dialogue, for example, or in the 1958 Embattled Garden (fig. 142), for which Noguchi created a very simple set: a flanged, planar tree and a tilted, sprouting platform served as environment for the primal struggle of the first woman and the first man.

At the same time she was becoming, like Noguchi, an international figure. Beginning in 1955, her company made highly successful world tours, bringing to non-Western audiences what were to them "familiar ceremonies of good versus evil, of passions disrupted by fate, of antagonists and protagonists reenacting the eternal conflicts that beset men and gods."<sup>34</sup> At home, however, such dances began to seem old-fashioned when compared, for example, to the "abstract" dances of Merce Cunningham, which were about movements rather than passions.

As if in answer to all this, Graham conjured another tragic queen

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<sup>33</sup>A fascination with screens was also evident in the 1956-57 theater curtain Doncho and the 666 Fifth Avenue ceiling and wall.

<sup>34</sup>Terry, Frontiers of Dance, p. 120.

for the first evening-length modern dance, which she premiered in 1958. She danced the lead role of Clytemnestra herself; the work is in four acts, during which the queen, shunned even by the damned of Hades, reflects upon her husband Agamemnon's murder of her daughter, and on the subsequent murder of Agamemnon. The events are acted out by younger versions of herself, while Clytemnestra watches. Noguchi's set (fig. 143) had isolated objects which served the flashback scheme well: "a time change could be effected merely by having a character move to a different area of the stage."<sup>35</sup> The objects--a cut-out throne, crossed swords, and a cloak hanging in the air--had multiple purposes within the plot.

Acrobats of God (fig. 144), which premiered in 1960, was, like Clytemnestra, a dance in which Graham had a leading but not very active role. She was the Choreographer who, seated on a stool and partially hidden behind a hanging screen, directs a group of dancers--"divine acrobats," as she called them--who do hilarious inversions of dance exercises at a huge, boomerang-shaped barre. Dancers and Choreographer alike are goaded by the whip of the Ringmaster--dance as religion.

That same year she created another Greek dance, this time about Alcestis, a queen who died to save her husband Admetus and was then wrested from death by Hercules. Unlike most of the works in this vein, Alcestis had a happy ending, and Noguchi's set (fig. 145) celebrated the return of life. He made three bulky, crudely geometric objects, which

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<sup>35</sup>McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 250.

he compared to the three elements of the Beinecke garden (begun 1960). The circle is "the sun that creates, then destroys. The home is the right angle. Hercules drags the bed from the fear of death to an area of life."<sup>36</sup> The solar circle, precarious right angle (cube), and earthbound ramp (pyramid) also appear at Beinecke. In both environments they signify energy, precarious human (male) achievement, and primal (female) nature; in Alcestis they also stand for the three main characters: Hercules, Admetus, and Alcestis.

Two years later Graham choreographed an even stronger dance, this time for four characters. Phaedra (fig. 146) was so frank a study of frustrated lust that even in 1962 audiences were slightly shocked. Sexually scorned by her young stepson Hippolytus, Phaedra (danced by the sixty-eight-year-old Graham) writhed suggestively on her tilted, bench-like bed in center stage. From stage left Aphrodite, enfolded in a vulvar pink shrine,<sup>37</sup> goaded her on, while Artemis watched frigidly from a stool stage right. Near her appeared her acolyte Hippolytus, enclosed in a blue capsule--"the cosmonaut weary of this world"<sup>38</sup>--that revealed only glimpses of his flesh. The set, like the dance, was violently dualistic: "The man's and woman's area, right and left, droit

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<sup>36</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup>For Graham's Voyage in 1953 Noguchi had originally produced "a garishly vulgar design in which the portal, lit up with naked light bulbs, resembled the female genitals." (McDonagh, Martha Graham, p. 223.)

<sup>38</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 129.



and maladroit, the unknown, sinister."<sup>39</sup>

In 1966 Graham presented Cortege of Eagles, the last dance in which she premiered the lead, her last dance drawn from Greek myth, and the last dance for which Noguchi provided a set (fig. 147). Once again the heroine was an aged queen, but Hecuba's tragedy was not unrequited love but the annihilation of family and state. In this drama of despair, loss, and death, the disintegration of Hecuba's mind and heart was symbolized by a series of masks; planar, kitelike forms shifted about to indicate the destruction of Trojan civilization. Cortege of Eagles seemed, like the sets of the 1950s, essentially planar--perhaps as an antidote to the rocks and earth of Noguchi's most intense period of garden making (1960-66).

The environmental activity, however, has gone on, while Noguchi has steadfastly refused to involve himself further in the imaginary spaces of the theater. It seems to have been identified, for him, primarily with Martha Graham, and primarily with her dances based upon Greek myths. The making of stage objects provided Noguchi with a first understanding of the sculpting of space. As he began, in the 1950s, to make real gardens, plazas, and playgrounds, he became more excited about the possibilities for resonant, multivalent, and imaginative groupings of elements outside the "hypothetical perfect space"<sup>40</sup> of the stage. Yet he made sets until 1966. His interest in theater became another

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>"Noguchi," Art Voices from Around the World.

strand, another theme woven into all his work and, indeed, at least two of the later sets--Seraphic Dialogue and Phaedra--rank (along with Appalachian Spring, Cave of the Heart, and Night Journey) among his very best. As he moved away from the special space of the theater he began to experiment with elements which could be used very theatrically, but not within a theater. Water was the most important of these.

Water: Wellsprings and Water Machines

Except for a four-year interlude in Indiana, Noguchi has always lived near the sea. His first sculpture, made at age four or five, was in the shape of a wave. Since 1933, most of his environmental projects have included still or moving water; he has also designed separate pools and fountains. He has consistently used water as a humanizing element, but its presence may symbolize either the "natural," primeval past or the technological, scientific future (and each of these types is associated with different materials and forms). This dualistic approach was worked out during the second phase of Noguchi's dealings with water. In his early years he had many ideas but little actual experience with this element; in recent years he has realized many water projects and exploited its full dramatic impact on an environment.

The first phase, which lasted from 1933 until 1954, began with Play Mountain (fig. 128), which included a waterfall and a swimming pool. During most of this period, however, Noguchi envisioned either a sculpted pool or a pool-plus-sculpture. An example of the first approach is his 1935 design for a Swimming Pool for Josef von Sternberg

(fig. 148): a series of lapping and overlapping organic curves. The second approach is represented by his 1938 Ford Fountain for World's Fair (fig. 149): a magnesite "chassis" placed in a pool with bubbling water jets. It remained his only realized water project during this period. Most of his other unrealized environments from the 1940s and early 1950s had "free-form" pool sculptures. For his realized or nearly realized environments, however, he used the pool-plus-sculpture approach.

Between 1954 and 1956 Noguchi created no public spaces, but worked on a personal space for himself and his wife at Kitakamura, Japan. Commuting between there and New York, he reabsorbed the closely integrative Japanese approach to environments. When he began making gardens again, pool/sculpture and pool-plus-sculpture merged into fountain-as-sculpture, and he started to use water as a more dramatic element within a space.

At the beginning of this second phase, Noguchi undertook two ambitious projects: a patio and four interior gardens for Connecticut General Life Insurance Company (fig. 150) and a patio (later expanded into a garden) for the new UNESCO building in Paris (fig. 151). In both projects he paid homage to the East. In one of the Connecticut General gardens, water (a pool) and land interlock to form a squared yin-yang shape; the fountainhead suggests a ritual bronze vessel. UNESCO's fountainhead consists of two granite slabs which, in profile, resemble the Japanese character for "man." The front slab is carved with the character for "peace" and water wells from within the character. Struck

from the heart of primeval rock by a word, the water trickles into a sunken pool, then stairsteps down to a lower garden and spreads into a pool filled with goldfish, crossed by stepping-stones, and flanked by a bench (all symbols of harmonious civilization). Water unites, humanizes, and enlivens the two areas of Noguchi's garden, acquiring its own "history" and symbolism as it goes.

The primeval fountain became one of Noguchi's main ways of using water; his second approach developed at the same time. In 1957 he designed a "Waterfall Wall" for the 666 Fifth Avenue building (fig. 152). (He also did the rippled ceiling of the lobby.) It forms part of a public passageway through the interior of the building, and its elements--undulating vertical louvers--were borrowed from an unrealized 1952 design for a bank interior. When trickling water was added to a "waterfall" of polished, rippling stainless steel louvers, the effect was refreshing but not archaic; materials and site created a sense of high-tech modernity. Noguchi has always been extraordinarily sensitive to site: the Connecticut General building is isolated meditatively deep in the countryside; the UNESCO building is in Paris, and the 666 Fifth Avenue building in New York.

Between 1960 and 1966 Noguchi's environmental activity escalated. Of the seven projects he worked on during that period only one did not include water, and one was a pure water design: the 1961-62 Mississippi Fountain for the John Hancock Insurance Company building in New Orleans (fig. 153). It is a twelve-foot-high fluted granite column rising directly from the paving of a raised terrace in front of the building.

The "capital" of the column is a horizontal half-moon from the center of which water trickles downward to pool at the base of the column. As with the UNESCO fountainhead, the roughhewn granite--quarried in Minnesota, where the Mississippi rises--embodies origin and ancientness. The pathway followed by the water symbolizes the river's flow to the delta, and the half-moon is a link with primordial lunar cycles of ebb and flow.

In 1960, when he began the New Orleans fountain, Noguchi also started working on the Billy Rose Sculpture Garden for the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. On the highest of the five earth and stone ramparts he raised at Jerusalem sits a Water-Source Sculpture (fig. 154). It is a squared log of red granite from Elath; water wells from inside the rock and flows over its surfaces directly into the rocky rampart. It lacks the Eastern or classical allusions of the UNESCO and New Orleans fountains, and its horizontality ties it closely to the rough sweep of the surrounding landscape, so that it could be the original rock from which Moses struck water. It is the earthiest, most "natural," and most evocative of Noguchi's fountains.

At the same time he was at work on the most "unnatural" of his water projects: the Sunken Garden, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza (fig. 155). For the site--a semi-public plaza between high-rise buildings in New York's Wall Street district--Noguchi provided a circular sunken garden in which rocks emerge from water, rather than vice versa. The garden is inverted in another sense as well: the "pool" of mounded granite paving is carefully sculpted, while the "sculptures" are seven natural rocks

perched "weightlessly" atop the mounds. Noguchi has called it "my Ryuanji"<sup>41</sup>--the Ryuanji of the future, in which rocks appear to be levitating rockets rather than sunken islands, and their setting is actively bubbling water jets rather than symbolically raked sand. The Chase Manhattan garden is "an unnatural thing of will, as is our whole technological age."<sup>42</sup>

Technology is also the theme of one of the two gardens he did for IBM Headquarters in Armonk, New York, in 1964. Each of the two interior, rectangular gardens has a fountain, and each fountain is an excellent example of Noguchi's modernistic and primeval approaches to water. The modernistic fountain (fig. 156) is a circular, sunken red concrete pool with a five-pronged metal fountainhead jetting water into its center. (In his explanatory blurb for the garden, the artist said the energies of water symbolize "antennae seeking answers.") The garden of the past (fig. 157) has a rough, vertical fountainstone down which water trickles into a rocky pool. The garden of the past has benches near the fountain--a place for human beings--while the garden of the future has none.

A second hiatus in Noguchi's environmental activity occurred between 1966 and 1970. He was writing his book, preparing for the 1968 Whitney retrospective, and concentrating on studio sculptures. Some of these had water imagery, and when he returned to water projects it was with an

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<sup>41</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 171.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

even bolder way of creating "waterscapes" and with an even broader sense of water as a prime symbol of natural or technological energies.

At the beginning of this third phase Noguchi was asked to create twelve stainless steel fountains (fig. 158) for the Japanese area of Expo '70, held at Osaka. (Earlier, his design for a high-tech U.S. Pavilion had been rejected.) The twelve fountains were placed in three pools surrounded by ultramodern Japanese architecture. All twelve were based on the column, the cube (fig. 123), the dome, and the ring--familiar shapes in Noguchi's work. The forms were deliberately kept simple because, as the artist said at the time, "The object-nature of the fountain must not be strong enough to overshadow the water-nature itself--which must be emphasized."<sup>43</sup> Water movement was as varied and energetic as possible, and was reinforced by sound and light effects. The perforated cubes dropped sheer sheets of water, while water jets danced around one low dome. The other dome, set on a post, sprayed water in all directions, as did the ring. The columns rotated, creating continuous spirals of water around themselves. Dropping, spouting, spraying, and swirling, water was the main performer. Dramatic, dynamic, and modernistic, these remain Noguchi's most spectacular fountains--a high-tech environment that spawned several other designs in the 1970s.

The most immediate successor to the Expo '70 fountains was the

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<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Makoto Suzuki, "Fountain and Sculpture," Japan Architect, May-June 1970, p. 162.

1972-79 stainless steel Dodge Fountain for Detroit's Philip A. Hart Plaza (fig. 84). Though he eventually sculpted the entire eight-acre plaza, Noguchi was originally asked to do the fountain only. He described it as "an engine for water"<sup>44</sup>--an appropriate form for Detroit. It consists of a horizontal ring held aloft over a circular stone cairn by two angled stainless steel posts. The trapezoidal space between ring and posts can be read as a truncated pyramid. It is a form, repeated in other elements of the plaza, which the artist intended to suggest the Native American mound-building past. On the other hand, the fountain is keyed to a computer, and can be programmed to produce any of eighty combinations of changing lights and falling and/or rising water. Water playing within the ring looks like an atomic rush of sheer energy--an image of the technological future.

The Dodge Fountain implies the past and dramatizes the future; the 1974-76 Intetra (fig. 159) does just the opposite. The design was submitted to a competition held by Palm Beach's Society of Four Arts and, though Robert Morris' entry won, the Society elected to realize Noguchi's fountain instead. Almost as large as the Dodge Fountain and, like it, made of stainless steel, Intetra is in the shape of a tetrahedron with triangular openings in each side. In the Dodge Fountain the basin sat between the splayed legs of the fountainhead; Intetra literally internalizes it, for water jets mist only the interior of the

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<sup>44</sup>"Fountain and Plaza Await Approval in Detroit," Progressive Architect, May 1973, p. 38.



tetrahedron except when breezes blow puffs of vapor out the openings. The vapor puffs make the fountain look like a spaceship about to take off; at the same time it appears as solid as the pyramids at Gizeh. (It is hieratically set between symmetrical rows of palm trees in a rectangular space defined by three low buildings and a lagoon.) Noguchi said of it: "although it rises out of the earth, it escapes from it. . . . it is self-contained, and, in a sense, self-energized."<sup>45</sup> It is as though the tetrahedron itself is generating the water: a secret wellspring in the heart of futuristic form.

In 1974, when he began Intetra, Noguchi also did six fountains for Japan's Supreme Court Building (fig. 160) in Tokyo. These fountains are literally secret, for they are set within a sunken, sealed courtyard located deep within the building. The six black granite forms are aligned in a row through the middle of two stone-floored courtyards. The formality and symmetry are reminiscent of Intetra's setting, but these fountains are a kind of antidote or counterpoint to the high-tech Palm Beach tetrahedron. Their octagonal shapes are deliberately derived from the chozubachi, the old stone water holder that was an important element in the traditional Japanese garden. Water wells from an invisible source under the "lid" of each fountain and trickles down its sides into a sunken, gravel-lined basin. Gravel and stone and slow-sliding water create a natural, austere, contemplative environment.

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<sup>45</sup>Quoted in Grace Glueck, "Three Sculptors win \$40,000 in Contest Prizes," New York Times, January 9, 1975.

Three years later Noguchi created an even more cerebral marriage of stone and water for Tokyo's Sogetsu Flower Arranging School. Like the 1974 fountains, Heaven (fig. 161) is an interior environment: a multi-level landscape in the building's lobby. On the top level water wells quietly from a granite "cup" and drips into a sunken stone basin; from there it trickles down into a square "chozubachi" on the next level. On the third level a second wellspring generates a fall of water to the fourth level, where it becomes a sunken stream and a water slide to ground level. Once again, water is born from the heart of rock and impelled by natural forces (gravity) into varied and quietly refreshing configurations. It is a project organized around the idea of water as a source of serenity.

Water may be used "naturally," as part of a contemplative setting of rocks and plants, or it may be used dramatically, as an element of a modernistic scheme. Noguchi's two most recent designs for American fountains demonstrate this duality once again. In 1976 he made models of a Bicentennial Friendship Fountain (fig. 162) intended to stand in the Missouri River between Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Omaha, Nebraska. It was to be a one-hundred-fifty-foot-high openwork steel tower (a stack of tetrahedrons) with a windmill-like rotor spinning five hundred gallons of water a minute from its top. The source of and "basin" for the water would be the river itself, and the fountain would symbolize ingenious human use of a natural resource and, at the same time, its spectacular energy potential. Noguchi said this water machine was inspired by prairie windmills and center-pivot irrigation systems. The

hydraulics involved were complicated, and by the time they were worked out Bicentennial fever (and funds) had abated, and the project was never realized.

However, Noguchi was simultaneously working on a Bicentennial fountain for Chicago (fig. 163), and that design was executed. It consists of two elements placed in a narrow pool against the reflective glass facade of the new building of the School of the Art Institute. The low building faces park and lakefront, but is also just south of the super-tall Sears Tower. The northernmost of the two elements is a forty-foot-high right angle made of granite. It is deliberately not aligned with the skyscraper beyond, and given horizontal striations to counteract the vertical lines of the Tower, but its verticality descends from the UNESCO fountainhead and, like it, it is a symbol of man and his precarious inventions. The other element is a forty-foot-long round granite bar raised slightly on metal legs; it echoes the low building behind it and the tree trunks of the park around it. It is descended from the primordial, horizontal wellspring at Jerusalem and here, as there, water comes from within the rock. Water also trickles down the inner face of the horizontal element, for this fountain is about "natural" and "man-made" wellsprings, as distinct from water machines like the Friendship Fountain, the Dodge Fountain, Intetra, and Expo '70.

The Chicago fountain is a balance of natural and man-made, horizontal and vertical, round and square--a balance that Noguchi has sought also in larger contexts with a variety of elements that group themselves around these dualities. As with water, the evolution and meaning of

each of these basic types of element needs to be looked at separately before its role in the larger context can be fully appreciated. Horizontal forms, for example, are among the most recurrent in Noguchi's environments, and they recur specifically as mounds or as tetrahedrons.

Horizontals: Mounds and Tetrahedrons

Like wellsprings and water machines, mounds and tetrahedrons represent, among other things, past and future. Moreover, most of the mounds have been made of natural materials, while most of the tetrahedrons have been of man-made substances. Noguchi's first mound was, in part, an anti-tetrahedron. Since the 1934 Play Mountain (tetrahedral, concrete) had been rejected, the 1941 Contoured Playground (fig. 164) was to be made entirely of earth packed and shaped into undulant mounds. He had dreamt of shaping earth for the 1934 Monument to the Plow, but his most significant involvement with mounds (as with sets) came in the 1940s, though none of his designs were realized.

In 1945 he collaborated with architect Edward Durrell Stone on a competition project for St. Louis' Jefferson Memorial Park. In their design (fig. 165), the architecture was to be underground and the park was to be dominated by earth mounds. Thomas Jefferson, of course, was one of the first excavators of American Indian mounds, and St. Louis was known, until Saarinen's arch, as "the Mound City," after the large numbers of mounds in its vicinity. Noguchi, who is himself part American Indian, had recently made a pilgrimage to Ohio's Great Serpent Mound (fig. 166), which inspired some of the shapes at St. Louis.

Two years later came Sculpture to be seen from Mars (fig. 167), a project which, like the effigy mounds of Ohio and Wisconsin, would have been best (indeed only) comprehended from high above. It was a human face made of huge conical and ovoid mounds (with a one-mile-long tetrahedral nose) and it was intended, as its original title Memorial to Man indicates, as a commemoration of the past. That is, by the time light carried the image to Mars, atomic man might well have blown himself to bits.

Early in 1948 Gandhi was assassinated, and in commemoration, this time, of a specific man, Noguchi designed a Park for Gandhi's Burial Place at Raj-Gat (fig. 168). It consisted of paths and ponds ringing a grass-covered, truncated pyramid--a "world mountain" like the ancient Indian stupa and a symbol of the universality and significance of the man. That year he also produced two sets based on mounds: the low landscape of Cunningham's Seasons and the kinetic mounds of Diversion of Angels. Except for the sets, the 1940s remained a period of imaginary mound projects; when Noguchi began, in the early 1950s, to make actual environments, the mounds (with one exception) ceased to be projects in and of themselves. He used excavation dirt for "mound-formed landscaping"<sup>46</sup> in the 1951 Tokyo Readers Digest Garden, but the space included sculpture and a fountain as well. By the time of the UNESCO garden, mounds had assumed a broader meaning--they were symbolic of the earth itself--within a complex of forms, and they were, as he created

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<sup>46</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 163.

more public spaces, more often made of durable materials.

In the 1956-58 UNESCO garden (fig. 169), a stone-paved mound forms the starting and ending point for viewing and exploring the lower garden. The whole garden radiates from its rings of paving stones; Noguchi likens it to the "'Happy Land' . . . the land of voyage, the place for dancing and music."<sup>47</sup> Mounds paved with concentric rings of stone are also the basis of the 1961-64 Chase Manhattan garden, the "land of voyage" from which rocks are launched into outer space. The 1960-65 Jerusalem garden (fig. 170) consists of five enormous earth-and-stone ramparts raised against the sky: a million-ton sculpture, a reshaping of a piece of the very earth itself, from the heights of which the sky seems a little closer. In the same spirit Noguchi noted that a black-painted mound in the IBM Garden of the Future (fig. 156) signified "man emerging from the earth to explore the universe."<sup>48</sup> During the 1960s, of course, the artist was also exploring the notion of emergence from earth in his studio sculpture, particularly in the gravity pieces of the early 1960s.

In 1976 he returned to the pure mound designs of the 1940s. He envisioned a circular, grass-covered mound to enclose and protect the Sacred Rocks of Kukaniloko (fig. 82), among which Hawaiian queens traditionally gave birth. The huge, sloping mound had stepping-stones across at two points to allow access to the ring, but the rocks themselves were

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>48</sup>Quoted from blurb at IBM Building (written by Noguchi).

raised on an inner, irregular mound--enshrined on and within a natural pedestal/frame. All the associations with earth and origin, past history and preservation are simply but clearly invoked here; like the 1940s mounds, it has gone unrealized.

The tetrahedron was also, in the beginning, an element in unrealized projects. Noguchi's interest in this form arose from his friendship with Buckminster Fuller. Fuller maintained that the four-sided triangle, or tetrahedron, is a basic unit of matter. Affording maximum stability with minimum form, it was a perfect module for future, man-made structures that would be built according to nature's principles. Noguchi's tetrahedral Play Mountain of 1934 demonstrated the future of urban public spaces, while his tetrahedral Monument to the Plow celebrated the triumph of agrarian know-how.

Fuller believed fervently in aviation: "The airplane era laid a new cosmic egg in the nest of everyday reality, integrating all the previously separate civilizations' experiences in one history and geography."<sup>49</sup> In 1935 Noguchi had an idea (which did not get as far as models or sketches) for "a ground sculpture covering the entire triangle in front of Newark Airport, to be seen from the air."<sup>50</sup> Two years after airplanes dropped bombs on Hiroshima he envisioned the end of mankind and sought to erect a memorial which could only be seen from

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<sup>49</sup>Buckminster Fuller, in Foreword to A Sculptor's World, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 23.

outer space: the human face with tetrahedral nose which he called Sculpture to be seen from Mars (fig. 167).

Mounds and tetrahedrons were used together in Mars; they continued to balance each other in environments of the 1950s and early 1960s. Both are found, for example, in all the unrealized playgrounds of those years; certainly past and future are most in need of each other in that context. They also appear in conjunction in the 1964 IBM Garden of the Future (fig. 156), where a black dome is joined by a dark, stone-covered tetrahedron symbolizing an "atomic fuel pile--the power of the future."<sup>51</sup>

In 1968 Noguchi combined playground designs with the tetrahedron to produce Octetra (fig. 171), a red-painted cement play-piece for a piazza in Spoleto. It is a pile of truncated tetrahedrons with holes punched through each of their sides so that the object can be crawled over, under, around, and through. That was also the year of the Red Cube, and it too had a hole punched through it. The association of tetrahedron and cube became, in 1969, Cubic Pyramid (fig. 124), a stone "tent" formed of three diamond-shaped planes levitated (like the cubes--see Chapter III) on three stone cylinders. And that became Skyviewing Sculpture (fig. 125), which had the same three supports and same three planes, though now each is, like the units of Octetra, opened up (here in two senses). Made of metal and located on a college campus, it speaks to the future and the cosmic aspirations of mankind.

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<sup>51</sup>Quoted from IBM blurb.



Again in the 1970s, studio sculpture served as a lead-in to a large-scale tetrahedron: a small 1970 Intetra points to the 1974-76 Intetra fountain (fig. 159) with its stable but spaceshiplike form executed in gleaming stainless steel. Slightly levitated above earth, but born of it, it is the most recent of Noguchi's public sculptures in which he makes important use of his horizontal symbols of past and future: the mound or the tetrahedron.

#### Verticals: Towers, Helixes, and Stonescapes

Noguchi's vertical elements are, literally and figuratively, less tied to nature, to the earth, than are his horizontals. They may, like the mounds and tetrahedrons, serve as monuments in and of themselves or function with other elements within a larger environment. They may appear singly or in groups. Wherever and however they are used, their reference is specifically to human situations--whether marvelous or horrible--and human achievements, both scientific and spiritual.

The earliest verticals are a group of single towers, beginning with the 1934 Monument to Ben Franklin (fig. 126). The man whom it commemorated was a modern hero: a unique combination of scientist and philosopher. In 1948 Noguchi imagined a monument to another unique hero; his Memorial to Gandhi (fig. 172) was to be a fifty-foot-high, Giacometti-thin arm with an outstretched hand at the top. The outstretched hand was that of humanity, whose cause the recently slain Gandhi had so nobly championed.

Humanity, however, could be destructive as well as noble. During World War II Noguchi had constructed a surrealistic Monument to Heroes

(fig. 100) out of cardboard, bones, and string: a dark, skeletal memorial to the dead. A few years later he visited Japan and proposed a Bell Tower for Hiroshima (fig. 173). He made two models in terracotta and wood for the seventy-foot-high tower. Each is an openwork frame from which symbolic fragments--sun, moon, helmets, bells, and "bones"--are suspended, as though collected randomly after an atomic explosion.

His last commemorative spire was the 1957 Memorial to Buddha (fig. 174), which he developed with several young Japanese architects. (Earlier he had worked with Kenzo Tange on the unrealized Hiroshima Memorial to the Dead.) They submitted the model to a competition for a monument to be erected on the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism; it did not win. It consisted of a lotuslike enclosure, from the center of which rose a bronze, seventy-foot-high "nine-bulbed spire, somewhat like the lotus root, each section of which is perforated by six apertures in the form of lotus petals."<sup>52</sup> The symbolism was that of rebirth and spiritual awakening, and was intended to remind us that "the spirit is paramount."<sup>53</sup>

Formally, the Buddha tower is kin to the columnar element in his second design for the courtyard of Lever House (fig. 175). He had begun working on the project in 1952 and his first design showed a "family" of granite columns. In 1953 there were ten major works by his master

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<sup>52</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 168.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

Brancusi in the Museum of Modern Art's Sculpture of the 20th Century exhibition; as if in homage the second design's major elements are a marble birdlike form and a column whose rhomboidal rhythms are reminiscent of the Endless Column. Later these two elements were realized, half scale, as Bird Song (fig. 176).

Bird images recur in Noguchi's work as they do in Brancusi's; for both the bird represented imagination, the flight of the human spirit. In 1958, the year after Brancusi's death, Noguchi released a flock of marble birds. In keeping with his insistence, at the time of the Buddha tower, that "the spirit is paramount," Bird Cry (fig. 177) was also known as Mu, a Zen state of blissful nothingness. Columnar birds in the group included Bird B and Pregnant Bird, while others--Bird D, Bird E, and Recurrent Bird--introduced the cubic forms that he would explore in the 1960s (see Chapter III). Bird B and Bird C were double-pronged, a shape which reappeared in a sculpture which formed part of the IBM Garden of the Future (fig. 178). Noguchi described it as "two interlocking helix, the code of life."<sup>54</sup> Articles were then beginning to appear about the cracking of the genetic code by Watson and Crick, although Watson's book, The Double Helix, would not be published until 1968. Noguchi used the helical twist for a Bird in 1966, and in 1969, after two horizontal experiments, the helix joined forces with the tower in Spirits Flight (fig. 112). The idea of flight derives from the birds, but it is the flight of the human imagination toward outer space

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

and the infinitesimal workings of the cosmos that is celebrated in this slender, twisting column of marble "dots and dashes." Spirits Flight (#2) (fig. 113) is even taller and thinner, even more a dematerialized commemoration of human achievement, like the original Monument to Ben Franklin.

Moving toward monumental scale, the helix was easily transposed into an environment: the Pylon (fig. 179) for Detroit's Hart Plaza is a 120-foot-high, aluminum-clad version of Spirits Flight. It guards the entrance to the plaza and is its most highly visible element. It was finished in 1977, the year Noguchi began creating an interior garden for the Sogetsu Flower Arranging School; a helical granite pylon marks the entrance to the school (fig. 180). And the next year saw the third Spirits Flight, further separated from the earth by impalement on a metal support. The helix, and the tower before it, represent anti-terrestrial, antimaterialist human aspiration and invention.

Even more "human," at least at the beginning, were Noguchi's groups of vertical elements. His first design for Lever House (fig. 181), for example, had been three granite columns placed together in a pool. The tallest has a double-horned "head," the second has rounded, "feminine" curves, and the smallest has outstretched arms that echo the "father's" horns. (The smallest column derives quite clearly from The Apartment [fig. 20], an important ceramic piece also done in 1952.) The space they were intended to occupy is an open courtyard within a low wing of the Lever House building on Park Avenue. The three columns responded to the height of the adjacent skyscraper, but also to the consumer's asso-

ciations with the company--maker of laundry products and other "family" items.

For another "family"-oriented business--Connecticut General Life Insurance-- he created another group of three sculptures. Originally intended for a terrace along one side of the building, they "outgrew" it and were eventually placed on a rise some distance away in the rolling countryside (fig. 182). Bulkier and more "crudely" carved than the Lever House group, they look like the remnants of a Neolithic stone circle. The group was originally called Family. The T-shaped father is sixteen feet high and has lunar and solar symbols carved into its three granite blocks. The twelve-foot-high, four-block mother stands at right angles to the father and her top block is softened into a half-moon. The six-foot-high child is oriented like the father, but shaped like a combination of the two parents: half-moon "head" and rough, columnar base.

The last of the monolithic families was created for a plaza in front of the First National Bank building in Fort Worth (fig. 183) in 1960-61. The tallest of the three Tsukuba granite sculptures is made of alternating blocks of rough and fluted stone. It is shaped like a right angle on a pedestal, and it points East. The middle-sized element points West, and is an inverted right angle without a base. (Noguchi said of a similar element in his 1960 Alcestis set [fig. 145], "The home is the right angle."<sup>55</sup>) The smallest piece stands apart from the

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

others in a bed of native West Texas plants. It is square-"headed" like the mother, but round-"eyed" like the father, and it faces South.

Noguchi is the least autobiographical of artists, but his three families of 1952-61 are echoes of his own childhood as well as embodiments of the era of togetherness. During that same period, however, he was beginning to use larger groups of rocks, and these eventually replaced the monolithic nuclear families. The first environment in which he used a rock composition was the 1956-58 UNESCO garden (fig. 169). Noguchi shipped eighty-eight tons of natural Japanese rocks to Paris for his homage to a Japanese garden. They are grouped along paths and pools, in gravel beds and up and down an artificial hill--the Horai, or sacred mountain, of a traditional stroll garden.

In 1963 he shipped seven Black River rocks from Japan to New York, this time for a reversal of tradition rather than homage to it. In his sunken garden for the Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza (fig. 155), the seven stones were poised on mounds of granite paving, their positive, irregular shapes played off against the negative, geometric shapes of eight drain holes. There is a large vertical rock and a large horizontal one, with two medium and three small boulders. The two large and two medium stones form a rough square and the smaller rocks serve as visual stepping-stones between the two sizes, but not between the vertical and horizontal boulders.

In 1962, while he was working on the Chase Manhattan garden, Noguchi did a number of gravity sculptures, among them Lessons of Musokokushi (fig. 88); five rearrangeable bronze "rocks." Musokokushi was a late-

thirteenth- to early-fourteenth-century Japanese garden maker. Arrangements of rocks were his specialty: "a symbol of Musokokushi's spiritual victory over the misery of the world [was] the stone garden on the hill."<sup>56</sup> Certainly Noguchi intended his 1964 IBM Garden of the Past (fig. 157) as a spiritual antidote to the Garden of the (technological) Future. Using rocks blasted from the earth for the building's foundation, he created a three-zone garden using the three types of stone groups he had been involved with.

At one end of the garden is a "family" of three boulders: vertical, horizontal, and in between. The middle section has an artificial hill (like UNESCO's Horai) with six rocks and a fountain which, as at UNESCO, gushes from a standing stone. The third section, which is closest to the Garden of the Future, has a shaped granite pool (see Chase Manhattan) with rocks around and, more importantly, within it. It is as if the "ages preceding the Industrial Revolution" proceeded from tribe to civilization to superrefinement and control. From there it is but one step--literally, metamorphically--to the computer and the atomic pile.

There are no stone groups within environments between 1964 and 1974, but there are studio "stonescapes" (see Chapter III), and through those the artist began to think of stone as a landscape in itself rather than an element in a larger context. In 1974, through the G.S.A., Noguchi

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<sup>56</sup>Nasao Hayakawa, The Garden Art of Japan (New York: Weatherhill, 1973), p. 64.

was awarded money to create a sculpture for a new federal office building in Seattle. The result was Landscape of Time (fig. 184), five granite rocks placed in an open ring on a raised brick plaza in front of the building. There are two vertical elements, two horizontal, and one of medium height; each is notched and gullied so that the ring looks ancient, eroded--a small urban Stonehenge. And that is its problem, for against the textured brick and bland skyscraper facade, Landscape of Time has less than monumental impact. The rocks belong where they were quarried, on the Japanese island of Shikoku, where the artist photographed them in his ancient, outdoor studio, looking magnificent against the sky.

Perhaps that was why Noguchi, asked to do a sculpture for Storm King Art Center in 1977, first built an artificial hill which he then crowned with rocks, so that the piece is seen against trees and sky. The sculpture is called Momo Taro (fig. 185), after the Japanese legend of the boy-hero born from a peach pit. Its two dominant rocks resemble halves of a sphere; one is hollowed out, while the "inner" surface of the other is smoothly polished. The polished half is balanced, mostly from behind, on two long, horizontal blocks, so that from some angles it appears to hover over the hill. There are two narrow, notched, horizontal blocks radiating from/arrowing toward the smooth half over the curved brow of the hill. The hollow half sits directly on the ground and has three low, flat, roundish slabs between it and the smooth half. Each of these has carved-out "water" channels, suggesting that they, like the hollow stone, are rain basins, as opposed to the "dry," shiny,



radiant "sun" stone. The center stone is the smallest, and it is invisible from a distance: a hidden reservoir, guarded by other stones like the "heel" stone of a modern cromlech. Indeed, people freely poke about among the nine elements as though among prehistoric megaliths. They sit, stand on and lean against the rocks with none of the stand-backness so often inspired by sculpture.

The other rock environment he was working on in 1977-78 was much more formal, but no less inviting. Into the lobby of the Sogetsu Flower Arranging School (fig. 161) protruded the zigguratlike roof of a basement theater; Noguchi transformed it into a granite mountain/garden. Called Heaven, it has, like the great temple of Borobodur, a vertical path of ascent through various levels (four here), balanced by horizontal terraces with low slabs and benches. As at Storm King, the mountain is artificial, but "the space between rocks and between the rock and a man" is real. Groups of stones that started out in almost human forms have evolved into stonescapes symbolizing humanity as a whole, in all its variations, as well as places to contemplate the human situation from a comfortable rock.

#### Integral Spaces: The Environments

In environments which use combinations of horizontal and vertical elements, plus water, the dualities of Noguchi's single forms are played off against each other, balanced, finally integrated into a constellation of humanistic meanings. The 1934 group of monuments/environments

were designed around clear dichotomies of past and future, nature and man, earth and metal, rural and urban, invisible and visible. The imagined projects of the 1940s maintained the split, leaning heavily to the past/earth/etc. side of the equation; and those were the years of his only collaboration with a woman--with Martha Graham on sets for her evocations of primordial myths.

But when he first began to actually shape spaces it was in postwar Japan, and it was in a spirit of reconciliation, even expiation, so that it was harmony he was seeking rather than high drama.<sup>57</sup> His Readers Digest garden (fig. 186) had mounds but also a tall iron sculpture; its water bubbled from jets but was contained within a simple pool. The easy dualistic balance of the garden was symbolized by Kokeshi, a doll-like couple he carved for it (they were refused). At the same time he was working on the Shin Banraisha garden and faculty room for Keio University (fig. 187). It was commissioned by the University as a memorial for Noguchi's father, who taught there for many years. When he died Noguchi had not seen him for sixteen years; the Keio project was a way of reconnecting himself to part of his heritage. Interior and exterior, man-created and natural shapes, horizontals and verticals were neatly balanced throughout and were symbolized by a stone sculpture called Mu and an iron sculpture called Student. The former represented solid primal matter; the latter, disembodied human aspiration.

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<sup>57</sup>By way of expiation for being half-American, he contributed two concrete Bridges to Hiroshima's Peace Park. Their endposts are based on the Japanese characters for "to build" and "to depart"--a call to put the past behind the survivors (as well as the perfect definition of the artist's activity at the time).

Four years after he finished the Keio project, he expanded the balance and the harmony, bringing East and West together by creating a Japanese garden in the heart of Paris. The UNESCO project (fig. 169) began as an assignment to do the triangular "Patio des Délégués" at one end of the Breuer building. It is a sunny, out-of-the-way corner intended as a kind of outdoor conference room. Noguchi put in low round and square concrete seats in conversational groups interspersed with low tables. The seats and tables are reminiscent of Brancusi's Table of Silence at Tirgu Jiu. The long wooden bench made from a single split log also recalls Brancusi's handmade studio furniture; the master died while Noguchi was working on the garden.

Eventually the commission expanded to include the space between the main building and an auxiliary structure, and here Noguchi created, with gifts of rocks and other materials from Japan, an homage to the traditional Japanese garden. A long ramp connects the two buildings, with a water trough stairstepping beside it from the standing stone fountainhead on the patio. From the ramp an arched stone bridge angles off into the center of the garden. The center is a stone-paved mound from which one can descend to look at "old" chozubachi or discover stepping-stones at the edge of the adjoining pool that lead across it to a low stone bench from which one can contemplate the artificial hill. This heap of earth and rocks suggests the distant view of a high, holy mountain--the Horai of the Japanese stroll garden.

But it is a very modern, and a very personal garden--a sculptor's garden (as opposed to, say, a painter's garden like Monet's at Giverny)

with bold contrasts of texture and mass, and a reshaping of the site itself that prefigures his great earthwork at Jerusalem. UNESCO is a private garden, viewable only by passing through the tight security of the building, and it is an anonymous one, known to the guidebooks simply as the "jardin japonais"--no artist's name attached. Invisibility and anonymity are attributes which Noguchi has not sought to avoid in his environmental work.

The UNESCO garden attracted attention among architects and planners, and in 1960 began Noguchi's second intense period of planning spaces, this time almost all actual ones. He was asked to design a sunken garden for Yale's Beinecke Library and a sculpture garden for Jerusalem's Israel Museum; he also began collaborating with architect Louis Kahn on models for a playground in Riverside Park. The next year Chase Manhattan Bank asked him for a sunken garden; three years later IBM wanted two enclosed gardens for their new headquarters in Armonk. And, though the Riverside Playground was ultimately rejected (by whom is not clear), Noguchi realized at least part of his ambition to produce a playground in the Japanese Kodomo No Kuni of 1965-66. Within six years he sculpted four major spaces, part of a fifth, and made many models for a sixth. The three earliest projects are all accessible to the public and associated with public buildings: a library, a museum, and a recreation facility; all three are (or would be) experienced anonymously. Beinecke is cerebral, hermetic, experienced through the eye and mind rather than through touch. Jerusalem is spiritual, invisible, shaped to enhance contemplation of everything in and around it but

itself. Riverside Playground was to be physical, useful, available for a wide variety of large-muscle activities; it was the only design to include both mounds (past) and tetrahedrons (future). (Beinecke has a pyramid and Jerusalem is made of mounds.) Beinecke and Jerusalem have vertical elements; only Beinecke has no water.

Beinecke (fig. 60) is made entirely of white marble. Each of its three main elements--cube en pointe, solar ring, and pyramid--has, as we have already seen, a separate meaning within Noguchi's work. The effect of the garden as a whole is, however, more than the sum of earth (pyramid), energy (ring), and human ingenuity (cube). It is also a function of their immediate and general setting. The three elements are set into marble paving which, at the pyramid end of the rectangular garden, is rectangular. Between the ring and the window wall opposite it (behind which is the reading room), the paving becomes a series of concentric rings radiating from ring and wall like magnetic fields or like latitudinal lines (crossed by longitudinal ones). Apart from this gravitational vibration stands the cube, a precarious observer and combination of the other two elements: at once geometric and organic, dynamic and stable, symmetrical and skewed.

The cube is also one of the basic units of the low, rectangular building behind it. Designed by Gordon Bunshaft of SOM, it is subdivided into cubic modules framing white marble "windows"; the whole structure rests on pyramidal piers. It is pure, strict, and hermetic, and the garden at first seems an extension of it. Noguchi, however, eschews strict geometry--not even the sides of the pyramid are equal--

and establishes (especially when seen, as it most often is, from above) a magnetic, energetic, cosmic triologue. Among other things, Beinecke is a sculptor's subtle comment on the limitations of architecture.

Beinecke the mindscape and Jerusalem the soulscape are at the farthest remove from each other. It was Billy Rose who persuaded Noguchi to create a five-acre sculpture garden around the new Israel Museum being built by Alfred Mansfield atop a hill in Jerusalem. The garden (fig. 170) is not integrated with the museum building but it, like Beinecke, is defined by walls. But here the walls are the sculpture: five curved (both in plan and section) stone rubble retaining walls thirty feet high and collectively one hundred feet long. They are placed on different levels and filled with earth: "a sculpture . . . weighing a million tons . . . a piece of the earth itself, extending all the way to China."<sup>58</sup>

Each of the arc/mounds rises above the landscape like the prow of a great ship. The sculptures perched atop each look like figureheads, and on the crest of the highest arc sits the Fountain-Stone--the source of water (life). Noguchi likens the mounds to "the hills of Judea . . . the wings of prayer touching the sky" and the garden as a whole to "an acropolis of our times."<sup>59</sup> Like a good acropolis, the garden has vertical structures: walls and enclosures (some roofed) whose geometric shapes--triangles, rectangles, arcs--derive from elements of the great

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<sup>58</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 174.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

eighteenth-century Indian astronomical observatory Samrat Yantra (fig. 189). There the forms functioned as giant instruments for calculating the movements of sun and stars; at Jerusalem they serve as stagelike settings for sculptures. But the symbolic links to Stonehenge and to Greek pre-temple rites on the tops of hills are there, for Jerusalem is, above all, a place for the soul--for a dialogue between stones and sky, between the ancient landscape and the modern visitor.

The third project on which Noguchi worked between 1960 and 1965 was the unrealized Riverside Playground (fig. 189). The collaboration with Louis Kahn was a happy one for, as Kahn recalled, "I did not speak in terms of architecture. He did not speak in terms of sculpture. . . . [We have] the same sense of order. . . . We agree that a playground in a park must give itself to the park and its natural characteristics."<sup>60</sup> In five years they patiently produced five very different models that attempted to satisfy their sense of order as well as the community's demand for unobtrusiveness. They tucked a recreation facility into a hillside and recontoured existing features into a series of mounds, tetrahedrons, pools, walkways, and play pieces. Early models use elements Noguchi had proposed for the unrealized 1952 U.N. Playground (fig. 190). Stacked triangles, arches, and circular depressions were gradually replaced by a much bolder sculpting of the terrain itself. In the later models it shifts continuously from terrace to mound to pool to maze to stairs. (Some of the shapes were derived, like the geometric

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<sup>60</sup>Louis Kahn, "Remarks," Perspecta 9-10 (1965): 303.

elements at Jerusalem, from Samrat Yantra.) These designs, even more than his later realized playgrounds, satisfy Noguchi and Kahn's belief that "play must be free and uninhibited in spaces to be discovered with shapes not imitative of nature yet unrestrained in their making."<sup>61</sup> A playground was not to be looked at (Beinecke) or felt (Jerusalem), but to be used, and so must provide, above all, a constellation of physical possibilities. Noguchi's first (partially realized) playground was made in Japan in 1965-66. Kodomo No Kuni (Children's Land) (fig. 191) used many of the ideas developed for Riverside: contoured terrain and minimal structures providing maximum play possibilities. The projected mounds and pyramids would also have provided a visual link with Japan's prehistoric past. The only elements actually built were a tri-lobed sandbox (whose interior wedge dividers again recall Samrat Yantra) and a cluster of hexagonal roofed structures sheltering seats, sandboxes, pools, and a perforated climbing mound.

Mounds also played a major role in the 1961-64 garden Noguchi did for the Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza (fig. 155). This was another collaboration with Gordon Bunshaft, and the garden is, like Beinecke, sunken, hermetic, viewable from above and below, and made entirely of rock. The Chase Manhattan building was one of the first attempts to "underbuild" a site--leave as much ground space as possible for free human use--but the structure itself is a strict geometric-module skyscraper. Once again, the sculptor's garden is a wry comment on the architect--this time on

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.



the fantasy of nature in an unnatural setting (the Wall Street area of lower Manhattan). Noguchi provided seven natural rocks that sit on an unnatural (man-made) base of granite paving stones. As at Jerusalem, it is the "ground" that is sculpted into mounds and hollows (drain holes). Concentric rings of paving stone radiate from the center to the circumference of the circular space, but this regularity is interrupted by smaller circles radiating from five of the seven rocks and from seven of the eight drain holes. No two of the smaller circles are the same size, and they overlap each other like ripples from a handful of pebbles thrown in water. The turbulence is further increased by wavy scoring that flows around and between raised and hollowed areas. From this seascape "immobile rocks take off for outer space"<sup>62</sup>--natural rockets from a man-made ocean.

Noguchi's last project with Bunshaft was the making of two symbolic gardens for the IBM Headquarters in Armonk. The three-story, rectangular building is set in the rolling hills of northern Westchester but faces into two rectangular interior courtyards. The Garden of the Past (fig. 157) is made of earth, rocks, and water (see previous section) and symbolizes pretechnological eras. The Garden of the Future (fig. 156) emphasizes man-madeness with geometric forms--tetrahedron, circle, half-circle--and nonnaturalistic colors (red concavity, black dome.) The significance of the tetrahedron, the concavity/fountain, and the double-helix sculpture have already been noted. The dome, related

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<sup>62</sup>Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, p. 171.

to Noguchi's mound, has carved "diagrams of nuclear formations, stellar constellations, and computer circuitry."<sup>63</sup> A marble half-circle carries formulas relating to developments in science and business technology. The setting for these elements is a bleak bed of gravel, with a few rocks and trees. Asked years later how the garden might be improved, he said he thought it would be better without the natural elements, for, like Beinecke, it is fictional, intellectual, utterly man-made.

Much the same approach is evident in the U.S. Pavilion Noguchi designed for Osaka's Expo '70 in 1968 (fig. 192). The model was called "Abstract Moonscape" and it showed a sunken exhibition building on top of which was a contoured landscape filled with play objects. The objects and the surface on which they sat were to be made of artificial materials painted bright, primary colors. The pools, arches, mounds, and benches were similar to Riverside elements; new forms included spiral ramps, piled cubes, hollow spheres, and an Octetra. The entrance was marked by a large tetrahedron--symbol of the future--and a huge space balloon was to be anchored two hundred forty feet above the exhibition building. World's fairs traditionally showcase architecture, while Noguchi's design (clearly a result of the Kahn collaboration) literally submerged it. It was rejected, though he did ultimately do a series of fountains--for Japan.

His only fully realized playground is Playscapes (fig. 193) in

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<sup>63</sup>Quoted from IBM blurb.

Atlanta's Piedmont Park. The park is a beautiful space in the middle of an area of "urban revitalization"; the playground was done as a Bicentennial project in 1975-76, sponsored by the High Museum of Art, which runs it. It uses many of the same elements as the U.S. Pavilion: spiral slide, cubic playblocks, climbing dome, and circular sandbox. The diagonally supported swings were first introduced in the 1940 Playground Equipment (fig. 194); the wedge-shaped jungle gyms again recall Samrat Yantra; a square, roofed area provides seating and shade, as at Kodomo No Kuni. The low sections of wall running along a rise at one end of the space recall the Jerusalem ramparts. All the play elements are painted bright colors and are extra large, as though emphasizing their presence as sculpture: a dictionary of primary forms to be read as much as swarmed over. It is playground-as-sculpture rather than, as at Contoured Playground and Riverside, sculpture-as-playground.

Noguchi's other recent American environment is the 1972-79 Philip A. Hart Plaza (fig. 195) in Detroit. It is an eight-acre riverfront site next to the Renaissance Center, a circular, glass-skinned skyscraper. Circularity is echoed in the horizontal-ring "water machine" which forms the focal point of the plaza, as well as in the "invisible" sunken amphitheater. The tall, slender, helical pylon seconds the Center's verticality. But Noguchi also drew upon Native American sources: there is a truncated pyramid of seats, and the form is repeated "invisibly" in a sunken theater and in the space between the legs of the fountain. Because of the repeated pyramidal shapes "the whole will be seen as a

low mound."<sup>64</sup> Yet the plaza's connection with the artist's mound environments is not immediately clear, for the most highly visible shapes are the fountain and the pylon, both high-tech forms. But much of the plaza is underground: a sunken amphitheater and theater, and a complex of lower-level spaces and roadways that are invisible (except for sculpted vents) from the upper surface. When the plaza has been fully experienced, it becomes clear that, as Noguchi hoped, the effect is "American unlike anything elsewhere."<sup>65</sup> That is, visibly and invisibly it symbolizes the high-tech, high-energy American future as well as its native sculptural past, while allowing room (the underground spaces are for ethnic festivals) for its unique diversity of heritages.

While working on Detroit, Noguchi also did (perhaps as antidote) a quintessentially Japanese environment for the Sogetsu Flower Arranging School (fig. 161). It was as different as possible from Detroit: interior rather than exterior, vertical rather than horizontal, small-scale rather than huge, made of rock rather than metal (even the helical pylon outside the building's entrance is of granite). There are four levels of stone slabs, benches, water troughs and planters that the sculptor created to transform an awkward and intrusive architectural element into a garden and showcase for the school's products. Ascending the stone steps, contemplating the exquisite flower arrangements,

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<sup>64</sup>Quoted from "Design for Detroit Civic Center Plaza Focuses on Fountain of Jetting Water," A.I.A. Journal, August 1973, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

listening to the cool drip and splash of water descending, the visitor may meditate upon the subtle beauties of nature in a context of complete control. Noguchi had likened it to a large-scale tokonoma, the niche in a traditional Japanese house that holds ever-changing, symbolic displays of scrolls and flower arrangements.<sup>66</sup> The artist calls it Heaven (tengoku)--"a sacred spot"--and it is an environment whose levels, like those at the great temple of Borobodur, themselves symbolize the journey of the spirit toward tranquility and, perhaps, enlightenment.

The restoration to sculpture of a sense of the sacred, as well as its reintegration with society and its spaces, are two of the great goals of Noguchi's environments. His two most recent projects demonstrate the range of forms and symbols at his command, as well as his ability to integrate them with each other, with the spirit of the space as a whole, and with the culture of which that space is a part. He, of course, is an important part of both cultures, and dualism is a constant in his work. Within his environmental oeuvre there are single imaginary elements and there are huge, complex projects. There are spaces for communication--sets and playgrounds--for contemplation (Beinecke and Chase Manhattan, for example), and for communion: see Jerusalem and Sogetsu. And within any or all of these he may counterpoint, balance, or integrate horizontals, verticals, and water (or its absence) to make spaces more primordially meaningful for human beings.

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<sup>66</sup>Discussed in Martin Friedman, Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1978), p. 85.

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters Noguchi's vast oeuvre has been broken down by strategy--figural, nonfigural, and environmental--and, within those categories, by such specific developments as, among others, portraits, lunars, solars, voids, sets, fountains, and integral spaces. Many works in each category and subcategory were examined in order to substantiate each development as an important element of Noguchi's formal vocabulary. Because, for him, form is inseparable from content, the growth of a system of symbols was also discussed in relation to specific sculptures, as were important sources of imagery and ideas. A close survey of his career in terms of strategies, symbolism, and sources is the key to understanding Noguchi. Equally important, however, is a sense of the unity, scope, and impact of his endeavor. This is more difficult to arrive at, for the artist's strengths lie equally in unity and diversity, in a single-minded pursuit of meaning and in its manifestation through an extraordinary range of materials and forms.

Materials, indeed, form a major unifying concern throughout his work, for the medium conveys a large part of his message. At his studio the works are recorded and filed by medium--marble, granite, aluminum, bronze, wood, clay, etc.--because that is the way he remembers them. Most sculptors are content to be known as welders or carvers or casters or modellers; most spend their careers exploring the possibilities and

problems inherent in a very few materials. But Noguchi has always had the ability to pick up a material--fluorescent light, cast stainless steel, balsawood--that few if any other sculptors had even thought about at that moment and use it innovatively and in a way which is appropriate to its own qualities. Further, he has the remarkable ability to then move on to explore some other material.

Noguchi's unique sensitivity to the sculptural possibilities and inherent properties of materials is a heritage from two sources. First, his childhood in Japan immersed him in a culture for which even the most ephemeral materials of daily life--food, wrappings for gifts, odd bits of paper--are treated respectfully, as potential means to art, or at least to aesthetic living. Aesthetic living, or the bringing of art before a wider public via spaces and manufactured objects, has continued to be one of Noguchi's main goals. Likewise, the Japanese

have abolished the boundaries between art and life. Their everyday habits and gestures, all their conditions of living, must be art. Consequently, any given object of daily use is artistically formed . . . moreover, the individual arts approach one another closely or even merge, so that frontiers between them are, so to speak, effaced.<sup>1</sup>

Those frontiers have only been sealed off in Western art since the Industrial Revolution. Many artists involved with the Arts and Crafts movements and with manifestations of Art Nouveau had tried to break down those boundaries, experimenting equally with paint and paper, iron and

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<sup>1</sup>Toshimitsu Hasumi, Zen in Japanese Art (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 66.

stone, glass and ceramics, textiles and architecture. Noguchi, who grew up surrounded by the artifacts and publications of that period, has tried all those media, too.

When he was ten, for example, he helped his mother build, in good Arts and Crafts fashion, a small wooden house for their family. He had been apprenticed for a time to a Japanese carpenter, and had learned the Japanese way of working with wood, which proceeds from their ancient veneration for the tree. They use no nails and notch the logs only as far as necessary to help them support each other. Years later, when he began assisting Brancusi (the second major source of his attitude toward materials), the older artist insisted that wood "had to retain the quality of wood, the working on it was the process which made this possible."<sup>2</sup> Brancusi stressed the importance of a one-to-one confrontation with materials:

The way things were made was important, the difficulty of making, the limits imposed by the medium to which in turn his concepts must fit. . . . Out of the limitations of matter and the working of it came the essence of his sculpture. The images nestled within the medium. The concept was not imposed but was inherent within the relationship of artist to his material. There was a communion with nature, the nature of materials.<sup>3</sup>

Brancusi's sensitivity to materials reinforced Noguchi's ideas, but did not limit his imagination. Buckminster Fuller, whom he met a short time

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<sup>2</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "Recollections of Brancusi," lecture given at Brancusi Conference, Fordham University, February 20, 1976,

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



later, provided Noguchi with an example of a man eager to work with any material, from toothpicks and dried peas to whole ecosystems, and to tackle any field, from aeronautics to cartography, from physics to plumbing. Coming when this lesson did, immediately after those of his childhood and of Brancusi, it again reinforced Noguchi's sense of absolute freedom with regard to materials. Brancusi had worked in traditional sculptural media: stone, wood, and bronze. Noguchi began making sculptures in sheet metals and, within five years of his Brancusi apprenticeship, had also experimented with terracotta, wood, stone, bronze, cast iron, ceramic, aluminum, monel metal, and stainless steel. He had also planned projects involving earth-moving and electricity.

Yet all of the single pieces from that period were executed in a single material, with the image (usually a portrait) suited to the inherent qualities of the medium. Materials, however, had not yet become deeply symbolic for him; only in the allocation of images are there hints of what will develop. Early in the 1940s he stayed in a Nisei camp in Arizona, where materials of any and every kind were lacking. This reinforced his inventiveness and, back in New York, he worked with driftwood, string, feathers, bones, paper, cork, plastic, magnesite, and electricity. Each element was treated as a separate identity within an assembled composite image. He made no attempt to glue or meld components together, but tied, strung, or wrapped one from or around another. Likewise, when he began using sheet stone in 1944, the sheets were notched like Japanese logs to interlock without other support or adhesive. The sheets of slate and marble had been intended

as facing on buildings, and their machine-tooled thinness and polish were associated, for Noguchi, with the ambitious, high-tech atmosphere of New York. His association of place and medium has always been extraordinarily strong; part of the reason why he has taken up so many materials is that he has lived in so many places.

In Japan, where he lived intermittently in the early 1950s, he concentrated on clay. This was a result both of the dearth of other materials immediately after the war and also of his sense of clay's appropriateness to a place attuned to nature. He met the famous contemporary potter Rosanjin Kitaoji, and lived for a time on his land, working with clay the potter gave him and firing the pieces in his kiln. He also did series of cast iron pieces inspired by his admiration for "the old iron pots to be found in Japan."<sup>4</sup> The simple and massive forms of the iron pieces were utterly unlike the small, spontaneous shapes of the clay sculptures.

On trips between New York and Japan he began stopping in Greece and having roughed-out blocks of marble shipped to him in New York. Marble was to endure as his favorite (though never exclusive) medium for about twenty years. At first he finished the blocks in New York, and the images combined classical simplicity with the sleekness and coolness of the city. Later he worked in Italian marble quarries, where the pieces became chunkier, more colorful, and full of *contrapposto*. But he has

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<sup>4</sup>Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 35.

constantly sought a balance or dialogue of man-made and natural materials, or planar and volumetric shapes, of small and large-sized sculptures. So while carving marble he also did (thirty years after the Paris sheet metals) a set of sheet metal sculptures. Metal, like marble, became a staple material: his output of cast iron, aluminum, bronze, and stainless steel pieces has been steady since the mid-1950s. The bronzes, however, are usually translations of earlier wood and fragile clay pieces, and the stainless steels translate earlier sheet metals. The bronze castings were done in New York, France, and Italy (the last two for convenience in shipping works to exhibitions in Paris, London, and Zurich); bronze casting is a skill which he associates with the manipulative, intellectual, male West. The stainless steels, which look very "American," were all cast in the United States. Further, his large-scale sculptures and environments here have been increasingly made of metals, often brightly painted or dazzlingly polished.

He does no stoneworking in New York now, and has not since the late 1950s. He has increasingly associated stone with granite, and granite with Japan, particularly with the island of Shikoku, where he has had a studio since 1968. And the granite itself has become more and more the subject of his recent sculptures: its colors, textures, volume, and density, together with the marks of the tools used to shape it, have superseded even the consistent, persistent symbolism which informs virtually all his earlier work. In Noguchi's case, when the balance between material and meaning tips toward material, something central to his endeavor is lost, for he has been the most systematic, sometimes the most literal, of symbolists.

Like his respect for materials, a preoccupation with meaning has informed all his sculptures since he began making them in 1924. His search for universal meaning has progressed rapidly and virtually simultaneously in his figural, nonfigural, and environmental work. By the early 1930s, for example, his portraits, such as Martha Graham and Buckminster Fuller, associate modernistic forms with males and earthier images with females, associations he confirmed in the bulging stone floor piece Birth and the angular dangling metal sculpture Death. The hero-child, such as Kintaro, integrated the two and stood for radiant change. In his nonfigural work, energy/change had already become an issue: the 1928 Power House was about light and Positional Shape was rearrangeable. The series of pieces done that year also involved duality--not male-female but, in Infant Flower, Infant Tree, and others, opposing forces of gravity and weightlessness, matter and mind.

By 1932 he had begun to extend his search for meaning even farther.

He wrote:

The universe flows through the self for expression. All emotions I suppose are part of the emotions of the universe, and inasmuch as the man is attuned does he reflect the "spiritual longings" of the times. "Self-expression" has no meaning in art, great art is selfless. Art for art's sake has no meaning. As a result of our contact with, and feelings for, life, art reminds those, whose minds are clear, of a truth.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Quoted in R. Buckminster Fuller, "Colloidals in Time: Isamu Noguchi," Shelter, November 1932, p. 111.

Within three years he designed four anonymous, public environments/monuments--Play Mountain, Monument to the Plow, Monument to Ben Franklin, and Frontier--that extended his symbolic dialogue to dichotomies of urban/rural, future/past, technology/nature, vertical/horizontal, and communication/contemplation. Into one of these designs he introduced the playful, integrative energy of water; the other three involved change--through human movement, mechanical devices, or natural cycles.

By 1935 he had established his three ways of realizing sculptural ideas and the set of meanings embodied in each mode; the three have continuously informed and enriched each other ever since. Each decade has added another dimension to this already complex system. In the 1940s, for example, psychological rather than social conflict became the focus of his symbolism. His figural sculptures became embodiments of male-female encounters that assumed archetypal dimensions. Body parts served as symbolic sexual units, merged in lust or metamorphosing in godlike epiphanies. (See The Bed or Avatar.) Mythic presence also characterized single figures, such as Kouros or Humpty Dumpty, whose fragile verticality invoked existential heroism.

At the same time he was making nonfigural objects that reflected archetypal conflicts and situations of humankind. In the self-illuminating "lunars" and in Memorial to be seen from Mars, for example, Noguchi saw the war-torn planet and its precarious future as though from another world. By pointing out our relative position in the universe and making visible invisible cosmic energies (like those of light), the

artist wanted to demonstrate that "Our reality is the space between; it is the world of the atom and the random element. . . . We verge on the impalpable secrets of matter and life."<sup>6</sup>

His environmental projects in the 1940s also concerned themselves with archetypal realities. His unrealized projects, such as Jefferson Memorial Park, and his sets for Martha Graham and others invoked primordial landscapes of myth, dream, or prehistory, in which the integration or alienation of the individual and the cosmos might be realized or refuted. It was at that time that he wrote: "I think of sculpture especially as the art of order--the harmonizer and humanizer of spaces."<sup>7</sup>

In the 1950s Noguchi's sculpture acquired the added dimension of self. Until then, his work had been consciously nonpersonal, dealing with themes drawn from society or from the collective unconscious. During the era of atomic isolation and the nuclear family, however, he often tapped his own feelings and incorporated them, obliquely, into his art. His figural sculptures included images of children, of couples, and of families--see, for example, Big Boy, Marriage, and the three sculptures made for the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company. Among the clay pieces of the early 1950s there are several house-type structures, most notably The Apartment, with its three levels of sym-

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<sup>6</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture," Art News, March 1949, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

bolic figures and objects comprising "the life of the artist." There are also figures, such as The Self and Mother and Child, which embody opposites of (male) alienation and (female) self-sufficiency.

In his nonfigural work he became concerned with radiant, rather than reflected, light and developed akari, which could be inexpensively manufactured and were thus available to virtually any household. The akari represented formal invention--he even made up the word--and a non-materialistic use of "nonsculptural" materials, together with a personal desire to bring humankind into closer contact with the invisible cosmic energies that surround us.

Many of his environments from the 1950s also had a distinctly personal note, for many of them took the form of commemorations. The Keio University garden was done in remembrance of Noguchi's father, while the atomic dead of Hiroshima were memorialized in his Bridges, Bell Tower, and Memorial to the Dead. The UNESCO garden was his homage to Japan; there was also an unrealized Memorial to Buddha.

The 1950s were characterized by a preoccupation with personal and commemorative symbols, and by an interest in integrating, rather than explicating, dualities. The 1960s reflected Noguchi's increasing concern with transcending the social, the psychological, and the personal through works that involved general human, cosmic, and spatial situations. During that decade the figure became, for him, a reference rather than a starting point, a formal device by means of which an idea, such as Mortality or Mitosis, could be associated with general human identities. Those identities continued to be, as they had been all

along, male and female, and they continued to carry associations of, respectively, verticality, precariousness, and modernity, or horizontality, stability, and ancientness.

During the 1960s, he moved even farther away from the figure by (1) summing up primal "maleness," "femaleness," and "childness" in the metal Little Id, the striped marble She, and the granite Childhood, and by (2) generalizing human identities to the point where they merged with the cosmic concerns of his nonfigural work. This had begun to happen during the 1960s--Mitosis, for example, can be read either in human terms or as a general principle of growth--and it has meant that in the last few years Noguchi has rarely given any piece a title that even suggests the human.

Meanwhile those cosmic concerns--gravity, weightlessness, and energy--that had always informed his nonfigural work involved him very deeply throughout the 1960s and 1970s. There was a kind of explosion of new variations on those themes, beginning with the "solars" of 1959-69. The Studies for the Sun, the Millstones, the white, grey, and black "suns" were all part of that series, symbolizing different combinations of radiant, creative energies and implosive, negative energies. The "solars" led to the "voids," in which energy, exerting an almost gravitational pull on the human imagination, flows around an open core, symbolizing the unknown. The 1970 Void was the first of this set of images; the 1976 Portal is the most recent, but it is a theme which is of ongoing interest to the artist.



As Noguchi began working intently on the "solars," he also intensified the dialogue between gravity and weightlessness. In 1962 he did a series of "gravity pieces" which surrendered unconditionally to that universal force. This Earth, This Passage and Lessons of Musokokushi, among others, are low lumps of "mud" (clay translated into rough bronze) that sit directly on the floor, calling attention to the invisible mass from which they partially emerge. Later in the 1960s he would create broken-off bits of the primordial mass itself in Another Land and This Place, floorscapes assembled from chunks of stone. And the more recent Tao-tieh, a huge "mask" emerging from earth, relates the force of gravity to the power of mythical, generative beasts.

In the early 1960s human beings were also, through science, beginning to free themselves from the archetypal beast of gravity. In 1962, as Americans launched their first manned space flights, Noguchi produced a whole series of "weightless" pieces. At first sculptures such as Solitude combined columnar forms with dangling elements: weightlessness as levitation combined with weightlessness as suspension. Later, in works such as The Stone of Spiritual Understanding and Spirits Flight, the artist concentrated on weightlessness as levitation, and on its accompanying tension. The helically twisted Spirits Flight also owed much to an earlier series of "bird" sculptures, and to the environmental "towers," such as Memorial to Gandhi, which Noguchi had occasionally proposed. In the 1970s he merged this "weightless," helical image with his environmental concerns to create pylons for Detroit's Hart Plaza and Tokyo's Sogetsu Flower Arranging School.

The cube also "grew," in Noguchi's hands, from studio-scale into

environmental project. The form, symbolizing the precarious dialogue of mind and matter, was first used in a series of small sculptures called Life of a Cube in the early 1960s. Within a few years it had developed into, among other pieces, the monumentally scaled, en pointe Red Cube and the hollow, pierced Skyviewing Sculpture. Some of the solars and the gravity pieces also achieved monumental scale, as Noguchi began to conjoin the forces of his nonfigural and environmental approaches.

The decade of the 1960s was a period of exploration and development of new, mostly nonfigural forms, but his nonfigural concerns often overlapped and merged with his environmental ideas, for those years also saw the artist's most intense involvement with the articulation of large-scale public spaces. He had already worked out the symbolic importance of individual elements in separate projects and proposals. The verticals, as in the "towers" and the Lever House designs, stood for our spiritual aspirations and societal constellations. The horizontals, usually in the form of mounds (see the UNESCO garden) and tetrahedrons, as in the IBM garden, represented the natural past and the technological future. Integration would be provided by the free energies of water, flowing from wellsprings like the Mississippi Fountain, or water machines like the "Waterfall Wall" at 666 Fifth Avenue. The first water-form was used in the Jerusalem garden, the second in the IBM garden, two of the great "integrative spaces" Noguchi created during the 1960s. In those works, and in the Beinecke and Chase Manhattan gardens, and the designs for Riverside Playground, Noguchi truly realized his ambition to transcend personal, psychological, and social meanings and reintegrate spaces with the human spirit.

In the 1970s and 1980s, environmental projects have become his chief form of activity. His recent fountains--for Osaka's Expo '70 and Tokyo's Supreme Court Building, as well as Palm Beach's Intetra and Chicago's Bicentennial--continue the wellspring-water machine duality in more spectacular form. His three most recent environments are Atlanta's Playscapes, Sogetsu's Heaven, and Detroit's Hart Plaza, which provide, respectively, landscapes for play, for meditation or for a combination of both. Their components realize complex formal dialogues of future and past, technology and nature, contemplation and communication which were adumbrated in the unrealized projects of the 1930s.

The environments are Noguchi's most recent, and most original, vehicle for conveying meanings which have always had to do with dualities and their integration or transcendence. That, in this formalist time, he should regard meaning as of such importance is a result of both his background and his friendships. Steeped in his father's poetry and the myths his mother told him, he grew up convinced of the expressive power of metaphor and archetype. The poetry of William Blake also had an important effect upon the direction of Noguchi's work, for in it he found symbolic categories of human experience upon which Blake built epics of heroic progress toward enlightenment. Further, Blake believed in the immanence of the infinite in the finite, of the universal in the infinitesimal, and in the power of art to make that truth visible.

He was then exposed to the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century scientist who had seen a higher reality in every

discrete natural phenomenon. Swedenborg's "doctrine of correspondences," which had been of importance to many late-nineteenth-century artists, postulated a one-to-one ratio between the visible and the invisible. Later, when he met Buckminster Fuller, Noguchi came into contact with a mind immersed in "the truth of structure which circumvented questions of art."<sup>8</sup> Searching, "in a continuous state of dialectic creativity,"<sup>9</sup> for the design principles of the universe, Fuller came up with visionary, synergetic solutions for eternal human problems.

Through the poet Ezra Pound, Noguchi had also discovered the sculpture and writings of Gaudier-Brzeska. They were important to him because they proved that modernist sculptural activity, with which Noguchi had by then allied himself, could and should be combined with archetypal meanings. The metaphorical "Sculpture is the mountain . . ." became, in turn, a metaphor for Noguchi's endeavor. Further, the poet's championship of the sculptor combined with the sculptor's visual educating of the poet provided an example of how the arts could illuminate and enrich each other. It was, perhaps, with this in mind that he began to collaborate with other artists. The most successful of his collaborations have been with architects and dancers and, of these, the most important was his thirty-year interaction with Martha Graham. She

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<sup>8</sup>Isamu Noguchi, "Reminiscence of Four Decades," Architectural Forum, January-February 1972, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

shared his belief that the job of the artist is to articulate the authentic universal form of human experience. The archetypal intensity of her dances taught Noguchi the importance of primal human feelings, and, through the sets he did for her, he learned to choreograph space and objects for the articulation of those emotions and aspirations.

Thus, dance, science, and poetry have all influenced his work profoundly--much more profoundly than concurrent developments in sculpture and painting (always excepting Brancusi). Like Picasso, Noguchi has borrowed a number of stylistic "fashions" but committed himself to none, since his deepest allegiance has been not to form but to his "passionate insistence that the perfect form expresses something beyond its esthetic perfection."<sup>10</sup> In turn, it is logical to ask what impact this "passionate insistence" has had on concurrent or subsequent developments in sculpture and painting. The answer, I believe, is: very little if any. Certainly some of his experiments and activities anticipate recent directions in sculpture: Power House, for example, his 1928 study for a neon tube sculpture, antedates Dan Flavin's neon pieces by more than thirty years. Similarly, his 1934 Monument to the Plow is the first design for what has been known since about 1968 as an "earthwork." His sets for Martha Graham and others provided a unique example of a sculptor's successful interaction with theater throughout the 1940s and 1950s; from the 1960s on younger sculptors have gotten involved with

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<sup>10</sup>Dore Ashton, Modern American Sculpture (New York: Abrams, 1968), p. 26.

"happenings," performance art, and other kinds of theatrical events. Noguchi's steady engagement with the articulation of large-scale public spaces also provided an ongoing example of the only sculptor since Bernini to be deeply concerned with monumental projects. His willingness to take on corporations and government in order to bring sculpture back before the general public has helped promote that reciprocal public interest in the arts which has been manifested recently in generous funding and patronage. Further, his insistence on respect for and direct involvement with materials seems to be increasingly reflected in the work of young, post-Minimal, post-Modern sculptors.

Yet few if any of them--or, for that matter, of the neon or performance artists, the "earthworks" sculptors, or those concerned with public sculpture--would acknowledge a debt to Noguchi. The reasons for this are, I believe, threefold. First, because the majority of his work has appeared outside gallery or museum spaces, widespread knowledge of its existence (to say nothing of its meaning) has been dependent upon critical and historical attention which has not been forthcoming. For reasons having, as we saw in the Introduction, as much to do with their own predilections and preconceptions as with his work, critics' and historians' responses to Noguchi have been almost entirely superficial. This, in turn, has led to widespread ignorance--on the part of artists and public alike--about what he has been or is doing.

Added to this (and creating even more critical hesitancy) must be a second factor: the nature of the man himself. He has consistently

refused to be consistent. Each time fame seemed even vaguely possible, he changed materials, and/or style, and/or modus operandi, and/or habitation. Thus, his versatility with materials has become, cumulatively, distracting; his stylistic "eclecticism" frustrating; his modes confusing; and his places of residence elusive. Why has he avoided fame as assiduously as others have sought it? The ultimate answer may lie somewhere deep inside his psyche; more importantly, it also lies in the nature of his endeavor. For, and this is the third factor that has militated against greater recognition of his achievement, he is trying to do something no other modern sculptor is trying to do.

In this century of self, he has experimented so widely with materials and styles as to remain historically unclassifiable. In this age of gallery-museum monopoly of art consumption, he has devoted himself to sculpture which is experienced domestically, momentarily, or anonymously. That is, anyone can have a Noguchi (lamp) in the house; anyone can see a Noguchi, perhaps inadvertently, when they go to the theater. Even people who have no interest in sculpture experience Noguchis daily where they work, bank, study, or shop. (His most recently completed project is a sculpted space in a shopping mall in Costa Mesa, California.) In other words, he is trying to make different kinds of sculpture as widely accessible as possible to the greatest number of people possible. This, however, is only part of what he is trying to do. His underlying intention is to give sculpture back, in the most modern way possible, its birthright: a meaningful place in human life.

He has illuminated our environment with lamps, so that we may see where and who we are, and where we should be going. He has given us magical spaces to look at from afar, in a darkened theater or as a cloistered garden, so that we may meditate upon civilization and its discontents (and achievements). He has given us objects and spaces that teach us our freedoms--of movement, imagination, and aspiration--and/or remind us of our origins in the earth and its forces and energies. "All sculptors are optimists,"<sup>11</sup> he once said, and his work is aimed at improving the future of humankind. For, like Blake, he believes in "the human shape of reality,"<sup>12</sup> and it is this he has expressed, at first literally, later in sculptural metaphors large and small made of every conceivable material, as though to prove the point inescapably.

Until now, the point has managed to escape an astonishing number of people. Perhaps now that we can begin to understand the modes, the meanings, and the metaphysical intent involved in his sculpture, we can better evaluate his contribution to--if not this century, from which he stands decisively apart--precisely that humanistic future which is envisioned in his work.

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<sup>11</sup>Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture," p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>Northrop Frye, introduction to Selected Poetry and Prose of William Blake (New York: Modern Library, 1953), p. xxviii.



**ILLUSTRATIONS**



Fig. 1 Gaudier-Brzeska,  
Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound,  
1914, stone



Fig. 2 Gaudier-Brzeska, Red  
Stone Dancer, 1913, stone



Fig. 3 Noguchi, Martha Graham, 1929, bronze



Fig. 4 Noguchi, Buckminster Fuller, 1929, chrome-plated bronze

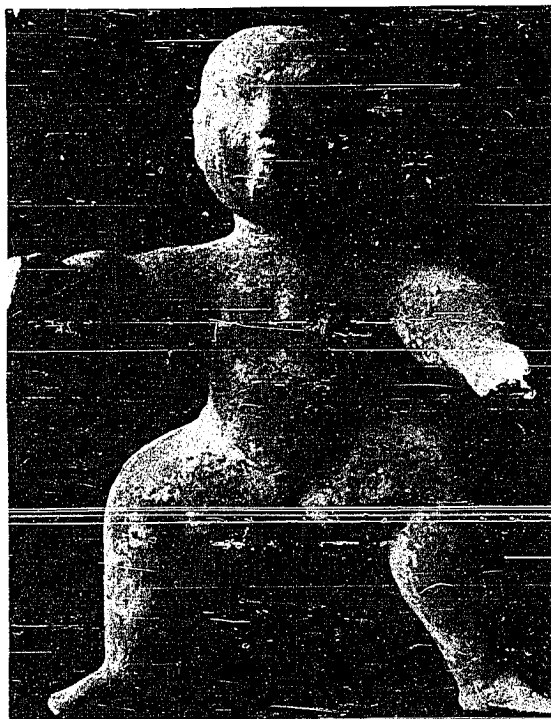


Fig. 5 Noguchi, Kintaro, 1931, bronze

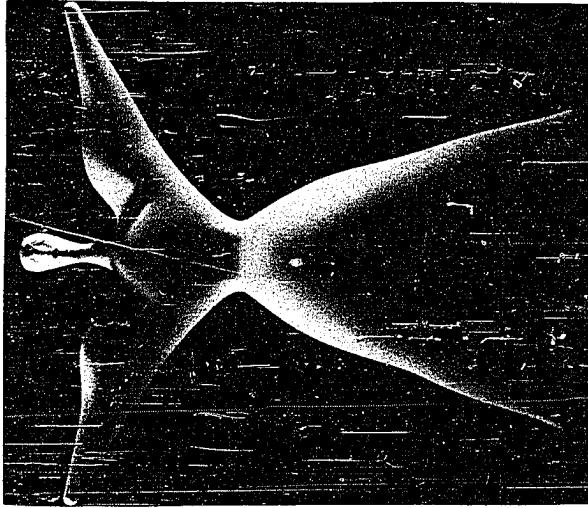


Fig. 7 Noguchi, Miss  
Expanding Universe, 1932,  
aluminum

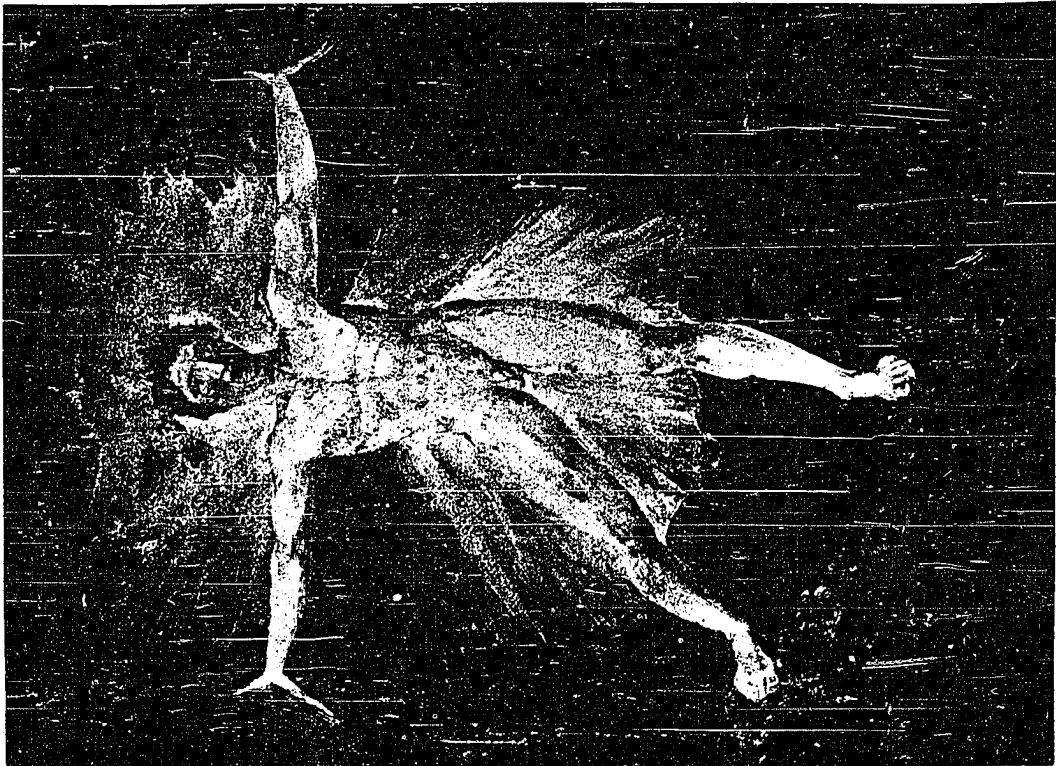


Fig. 6 Blake, The Dance of  
Albion, ca. 1794, color print



Fig. 8 Noguchi, Death, 1934,  
Monel metal



Fig. 9 Noguchi, Birth, 1934,  
marble

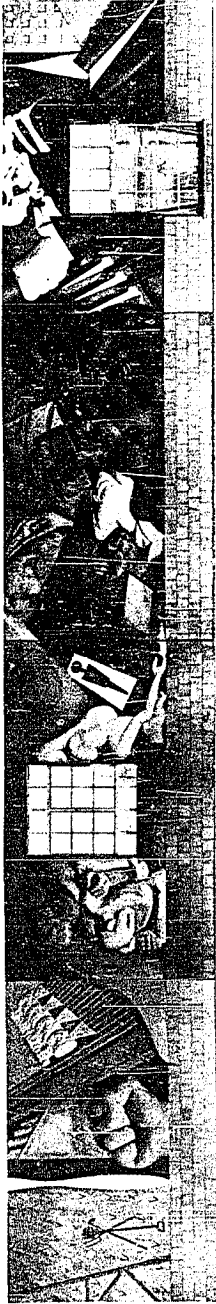


Fig. 10 Noguchi, History  
Mexico, 1936, cement with  
pigment

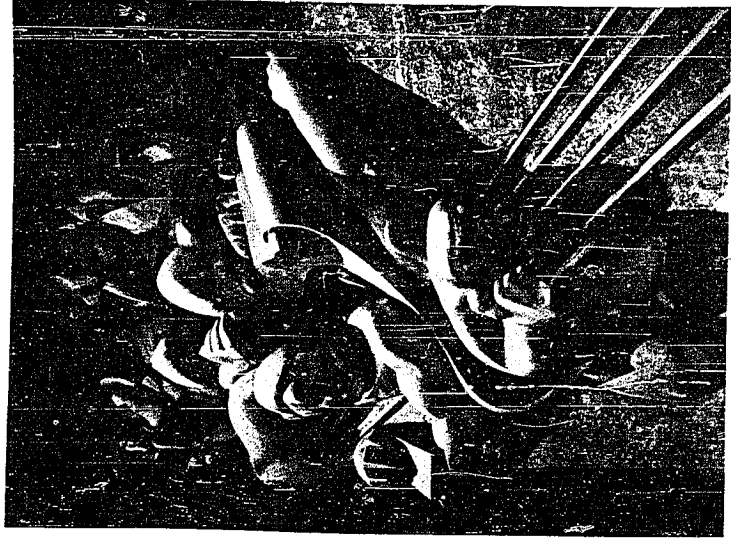


Fig. 11 Noguchi, News,  
1939-40, stainless steel  
casting

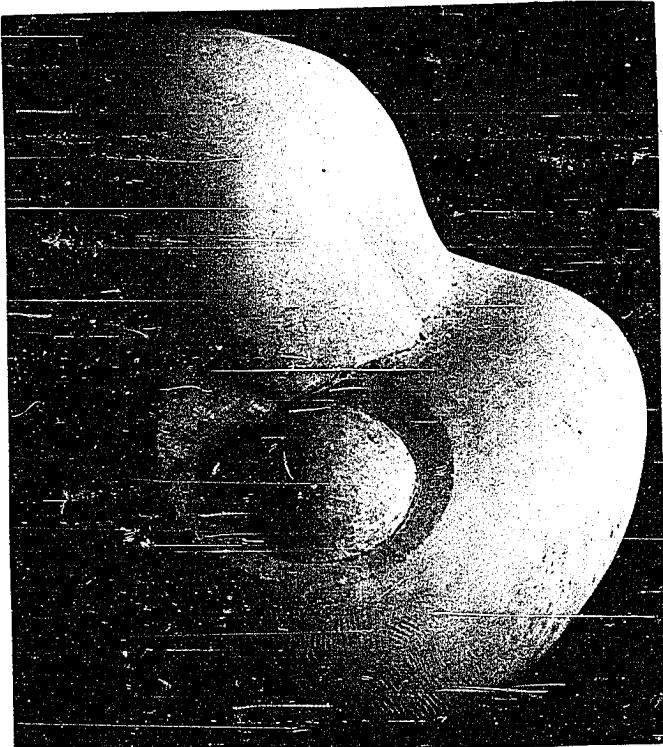


Fig. 12 Noguchi, The Kiss,  
1945, alabaster

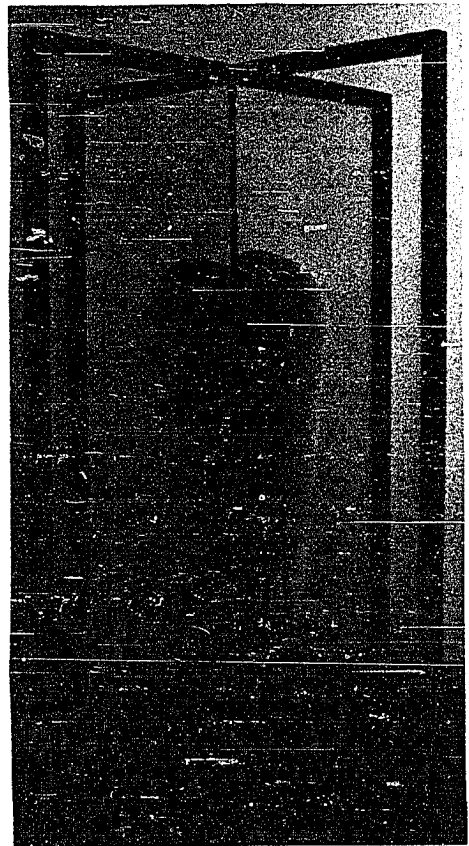


Fig. 14 Noguchi, Lunar  
Infant, 1944, magnesite,  
electricity, wood

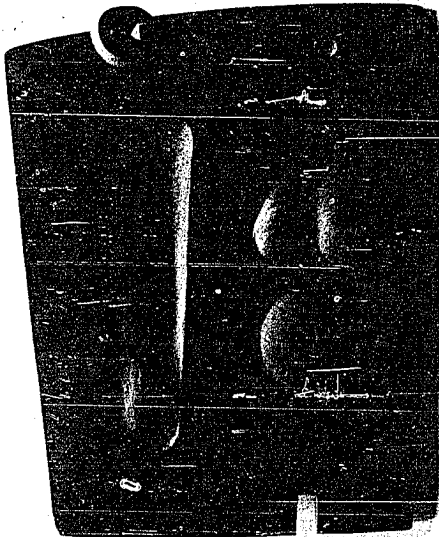


Fig. 13 Noguchi, The Bed,  
1946, African Wonderstone

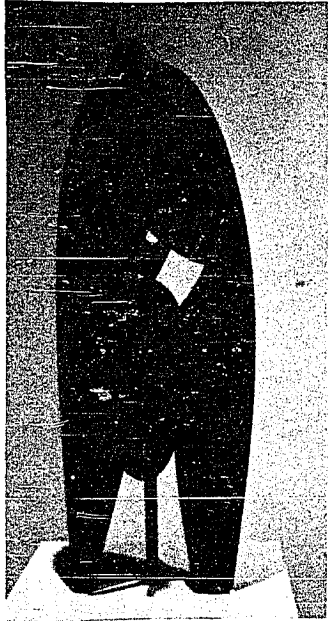


Fig. 15 Noguchi, Humpty-Dumpty, 1946, black slate

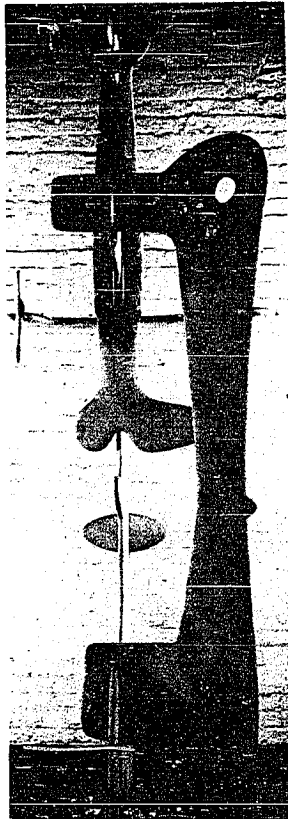


Fig. 16 Noguchi, Kouros, 1944-45, pink Georgia marble



Fig. 17 Noguchi, Avatar, 1947, pink Georgia marble





Fig. 18 Noguchi, Orpheus,  
1948, set and costumes

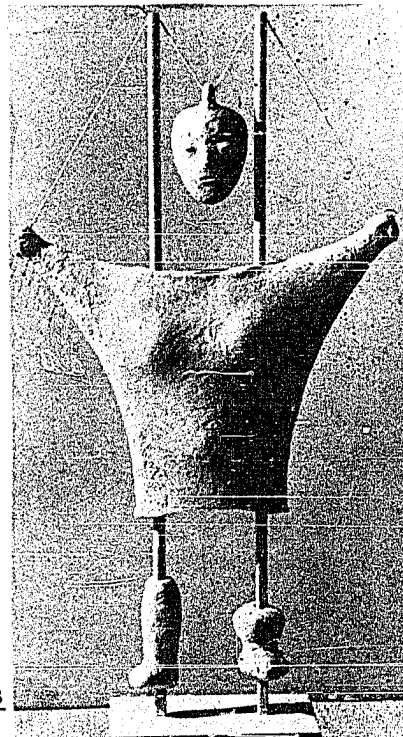


Fig. 19 Noguchi, 1950's  
Child, 1950, terracotta,  
wood

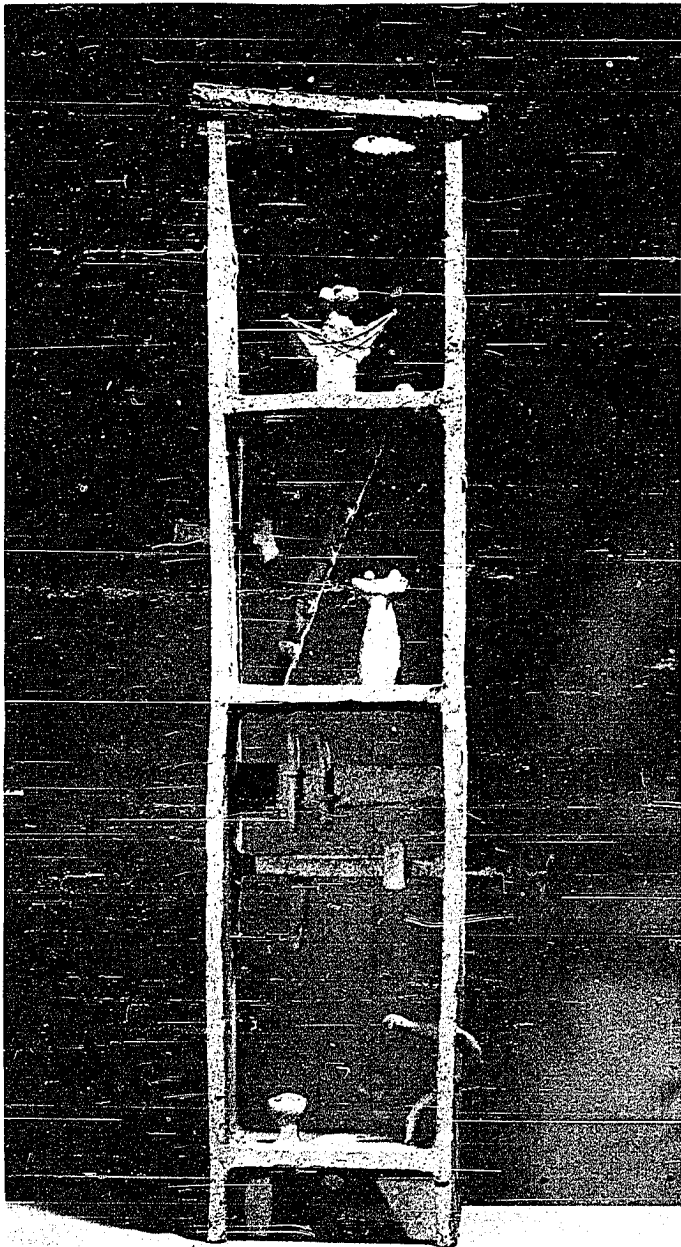


Fig. 20 Noguchi, The Apartment, 1952, terracotta

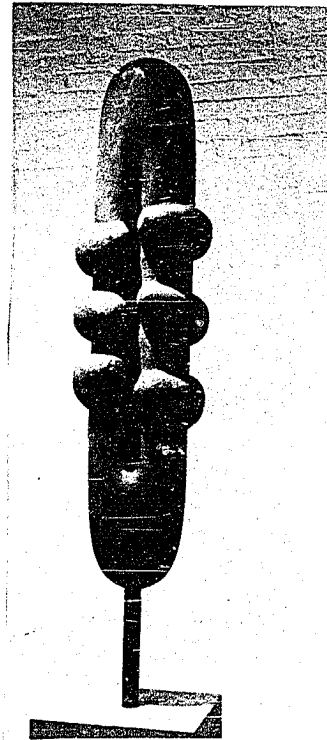


Fig. 21 Noguchi, The Self, 1956, iron



Fig. 22 Noguchi, Atomic Man, 1952, Kasama ceramic



Fig. 23 Noguchi, Woman with Child, 1959, Greek marble

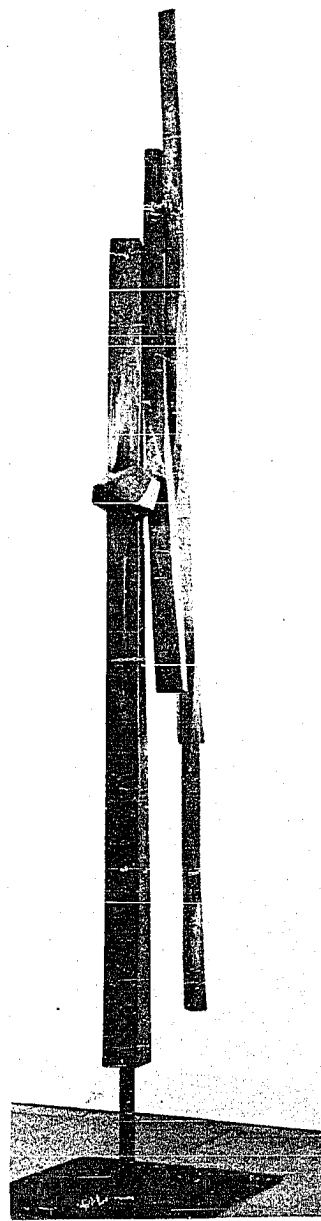


Fig. 24 Noguchi, Soliloquy, 1962, bronze



Fig. 25 Noguchi, Vertical Man, 1964, black green serpentine

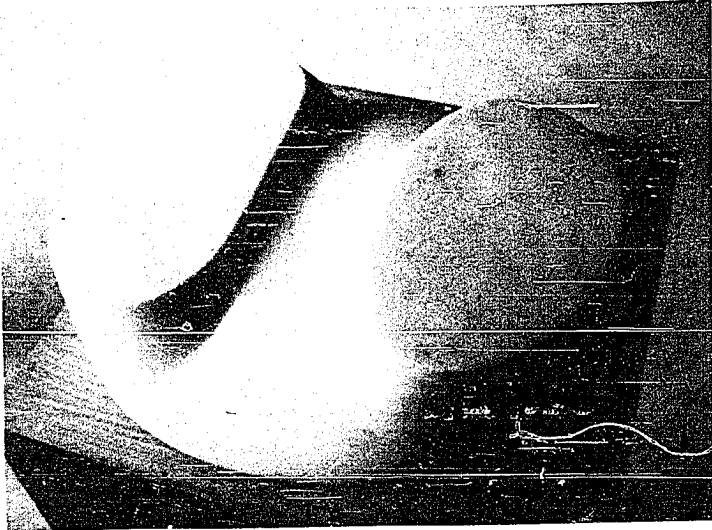


Fig. 26 Noguchi, White Prophetess, 1964, marble

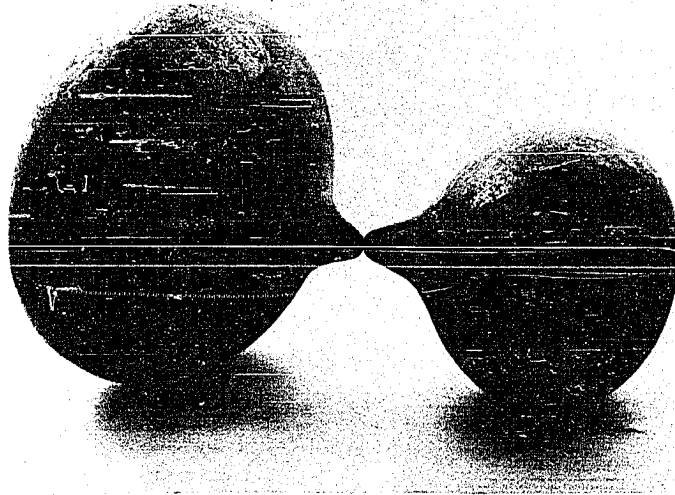


Fig. 27 Noguchi, Mitosis, 1962, bronze



Fig. 28 Noguchi, To Love, 1970-71, Rose Aurora and black Porticoi marble

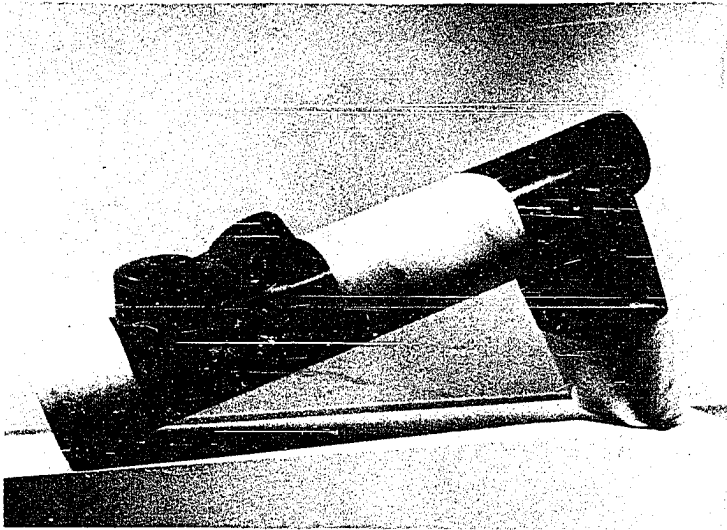


Fig. 29 Noguchi, She,  
1970-71, Rose Aurora and  
black Porticoi marble

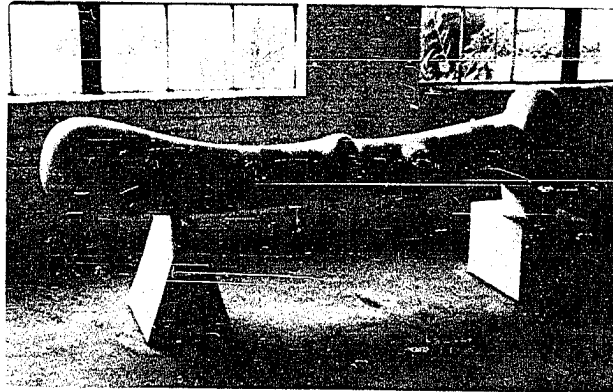


Fig. 30 Noguchi, Ding Dong  
Bat, 1968, white statuary and  
pink Portuguese marble

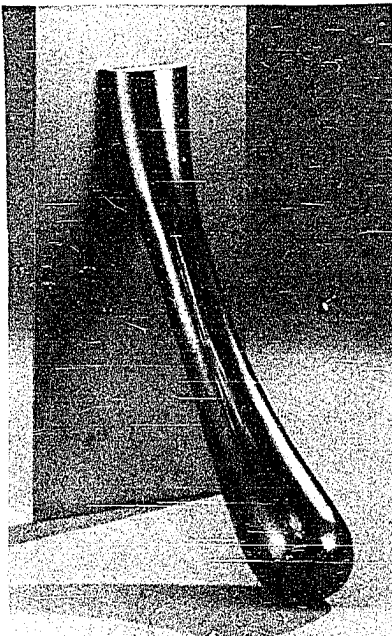


Fig. 31 Noguchi, Little Id,  
1970-71, bronze

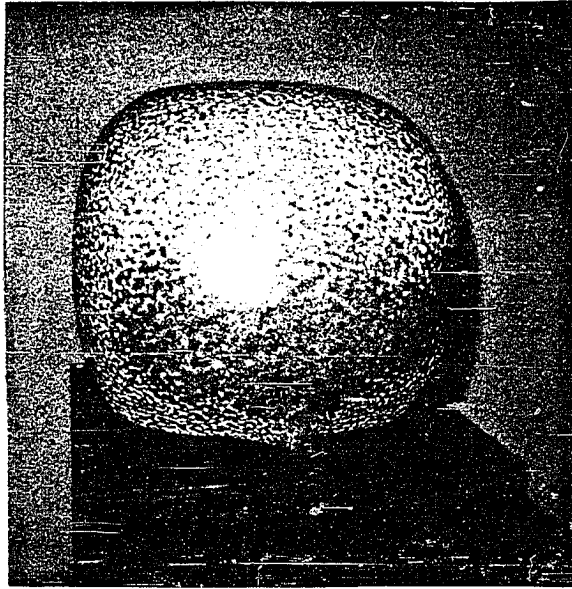


Fig. 32 Noguchi, Childhood,  
1970, Aji granite

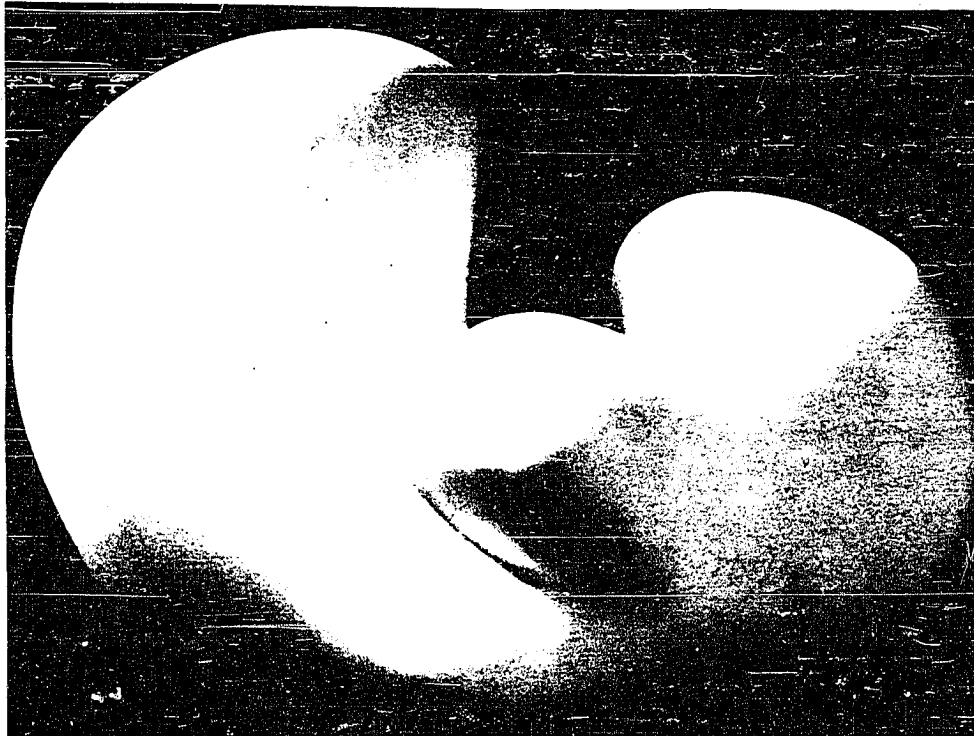


Fig. 33 Arp, Human  
Concretion, 1935, cast stone

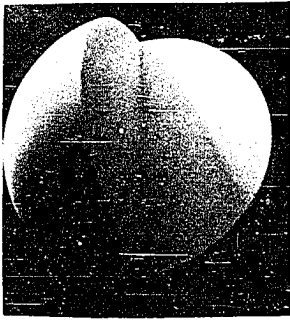


Fig. 34 Noguchi, Sphere  
Section, 1927, marble

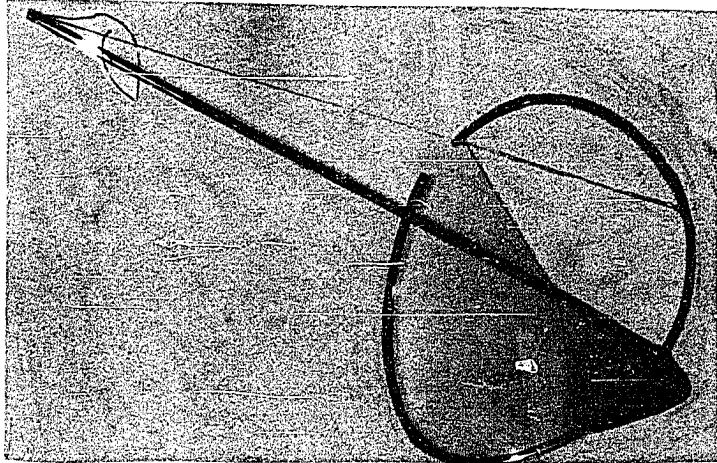


Fig. 35 Noguchi, Abstraction  
in Almost Discontinuous  
Tension, 1928, brass

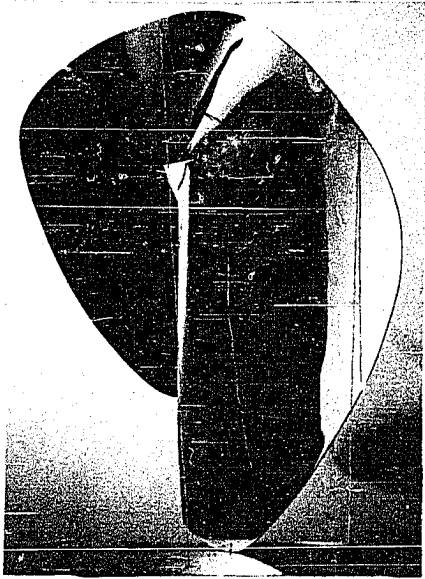


Fig. 36 Noguchi, Positional  
Shape, 1928, brass

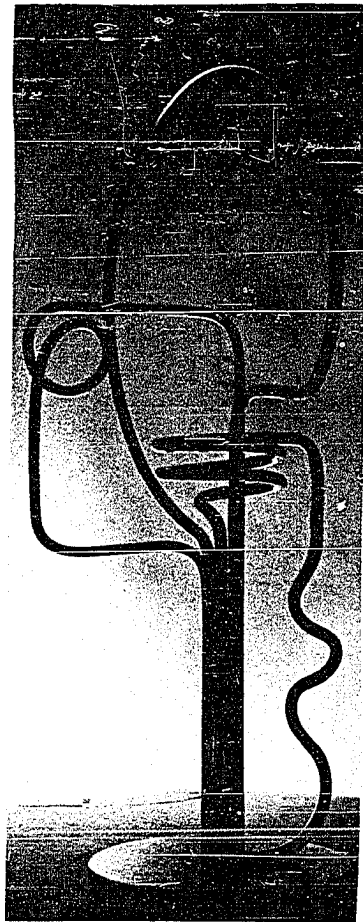


Fig. 37 Noguchi, Power  
House, 1928, zinc



Fig. 38 Noguchi, Leda, 1928, brass



Fig. 39 Brancusi, Leda, 1925, polished bronze



Fig. 40 Noguchi, Infant Tree, 1928, wood and zinc



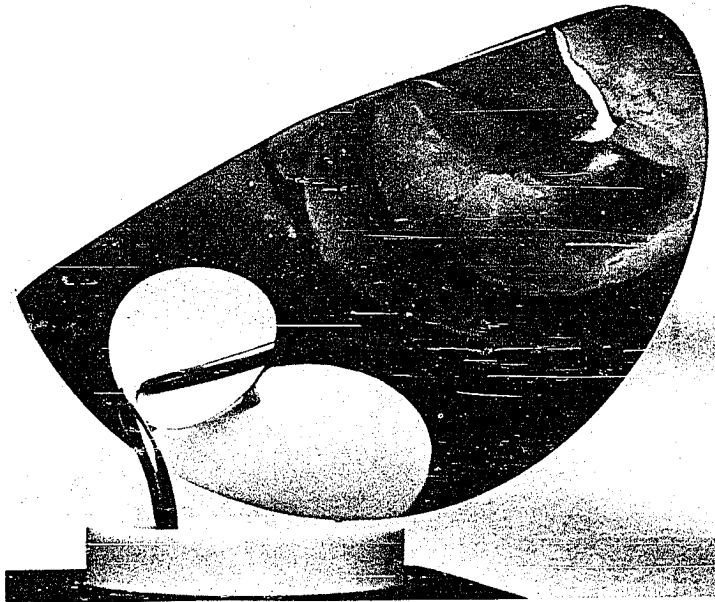


Fig. 41 Noguchi, Infant Flower, 1928, brass



Fig. 42 Noguchi, Foot Tree, 1928, brass



Fig. 43 Noguchi, Bird Cry, 1928, wood



Fig. 44 Noguchi, Béguine, 1928, black marble

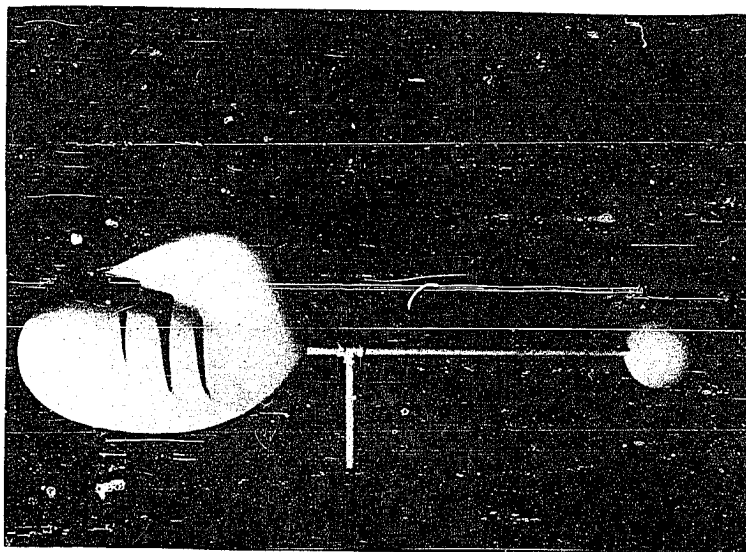


Fig. 45 Noguchi, Musical Weathervane, 1933, plaster and magnesite model

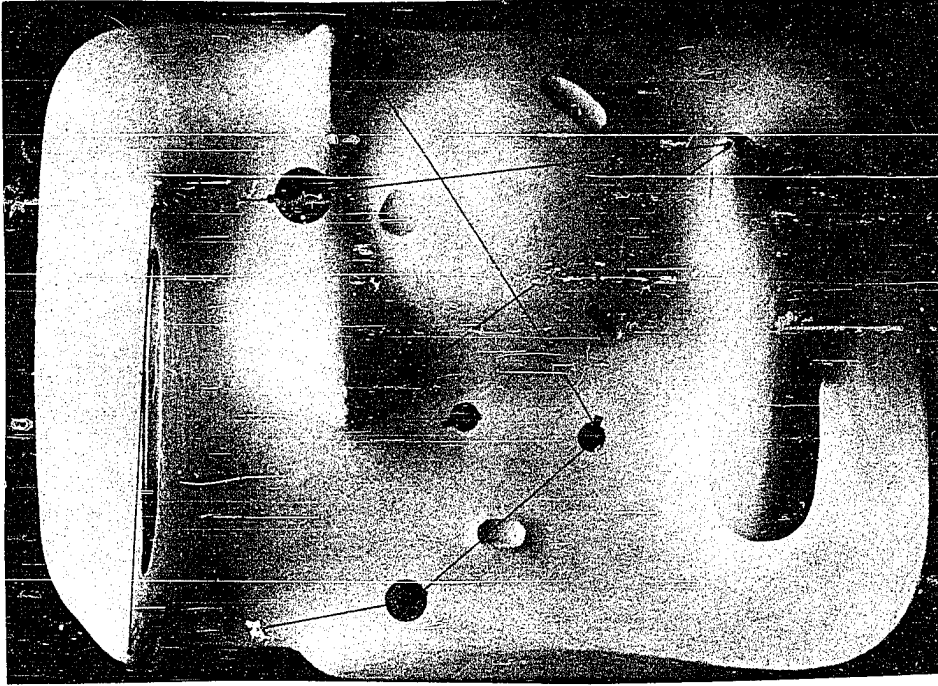


Fig. 48 Noguchi, Lunar Landscape, 1944, magnesite, cement, cork, fishing line, electric lights

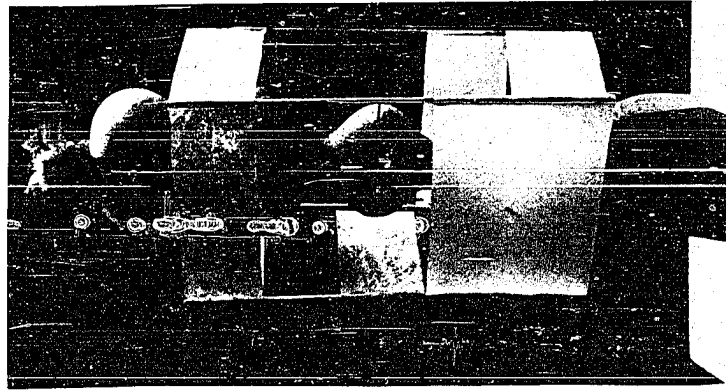


Fig. 47 Noguchi, Katchina, 1943, wood, paper, twine

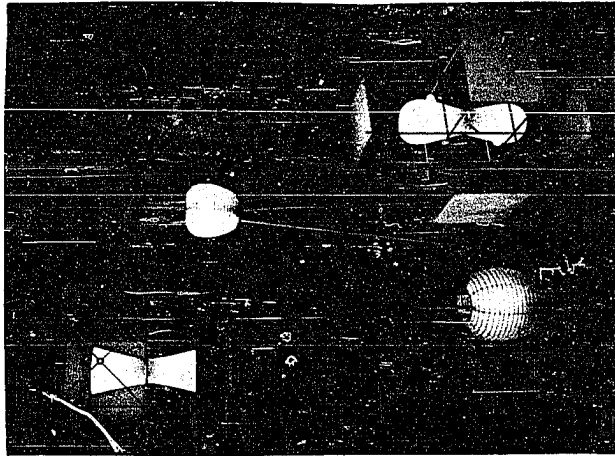


Fig. 46 Noguchi, Abstractions and Lanterns, 1944-51, plastic, plexiglass, paper, and metal



Fig. 49 Noguchi, Lunar Voyage, 1947, magnesite

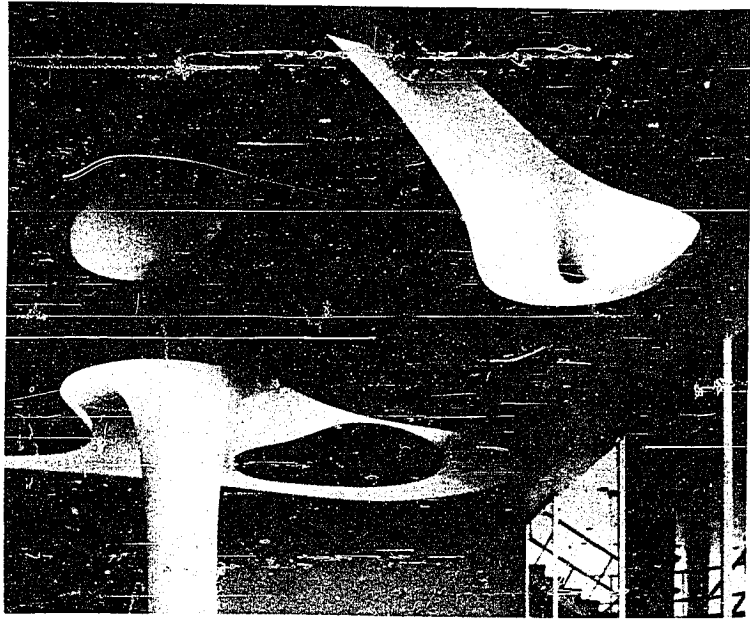


Fig. 50 Noguchi, American Stove Company ceiling, 1948, plaster and electricity



Fig. 51 Noguchi, Time-Life Building ceiling, 1947, materials unknown



Fig. 52 Noguchi, Akari,  
1952, installation photograph

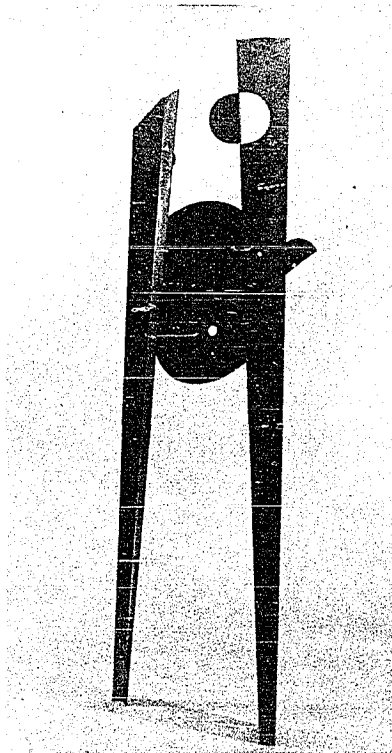


Fig. 53 Noguchi, Solar,  
1958, aluminum, painted black

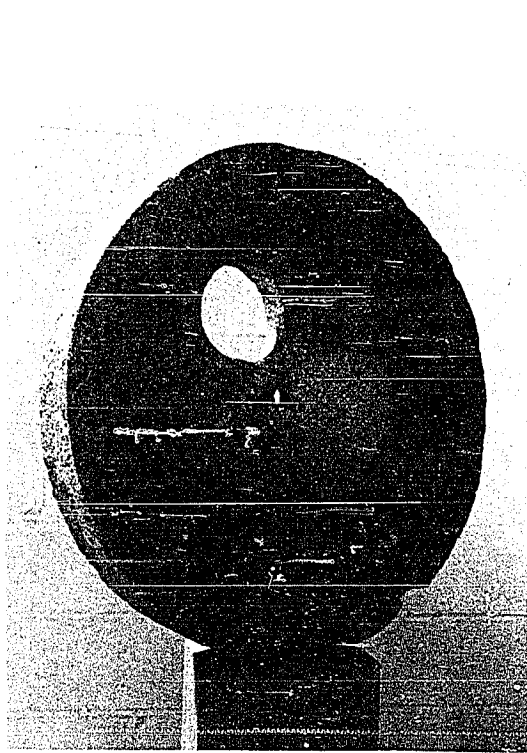


Fig. 54 Noguchi, Variation  
on a Millstone #1, 1962,  
granite

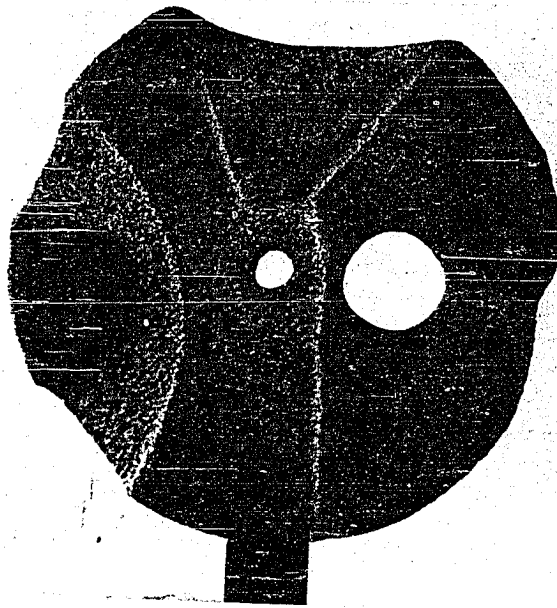


Fig. 55 Noguchi, Variation  
on a Millstone #2, 1962,  
granite

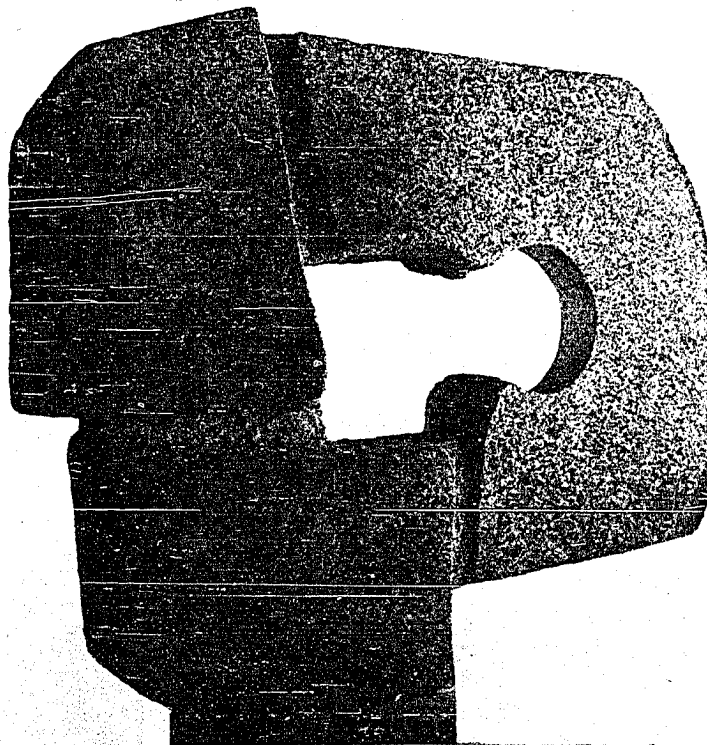


Fig. 55 Noguchi, Variation  
on a Millstone #3, 1963,  
granite

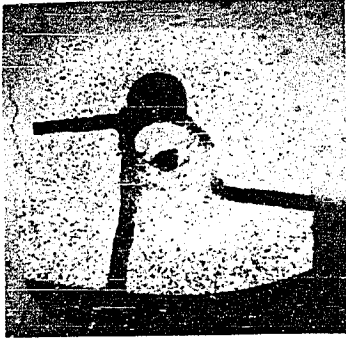


Fig. 57 Noguchi, Variation on a Millstone #4, 1963, granite

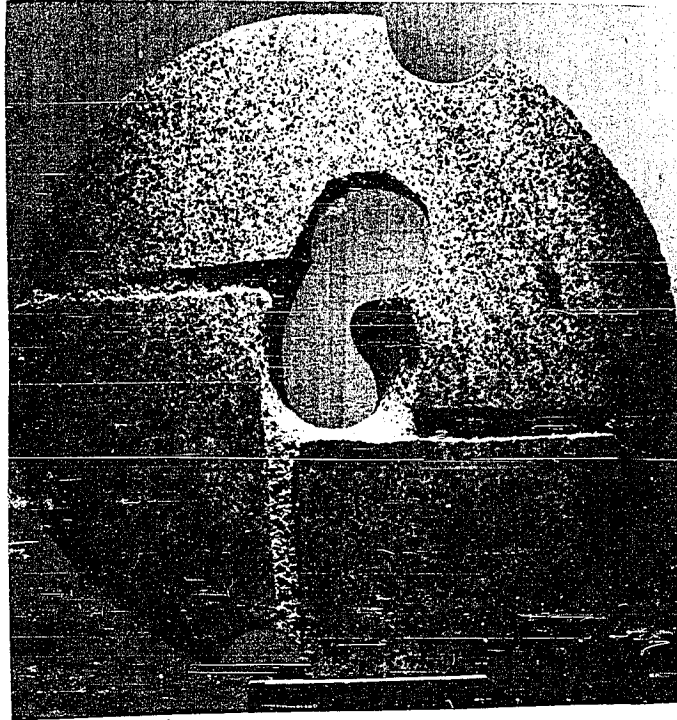


Fig. 58 Noguchi, Variation on a Millstone #5, 1967, granite

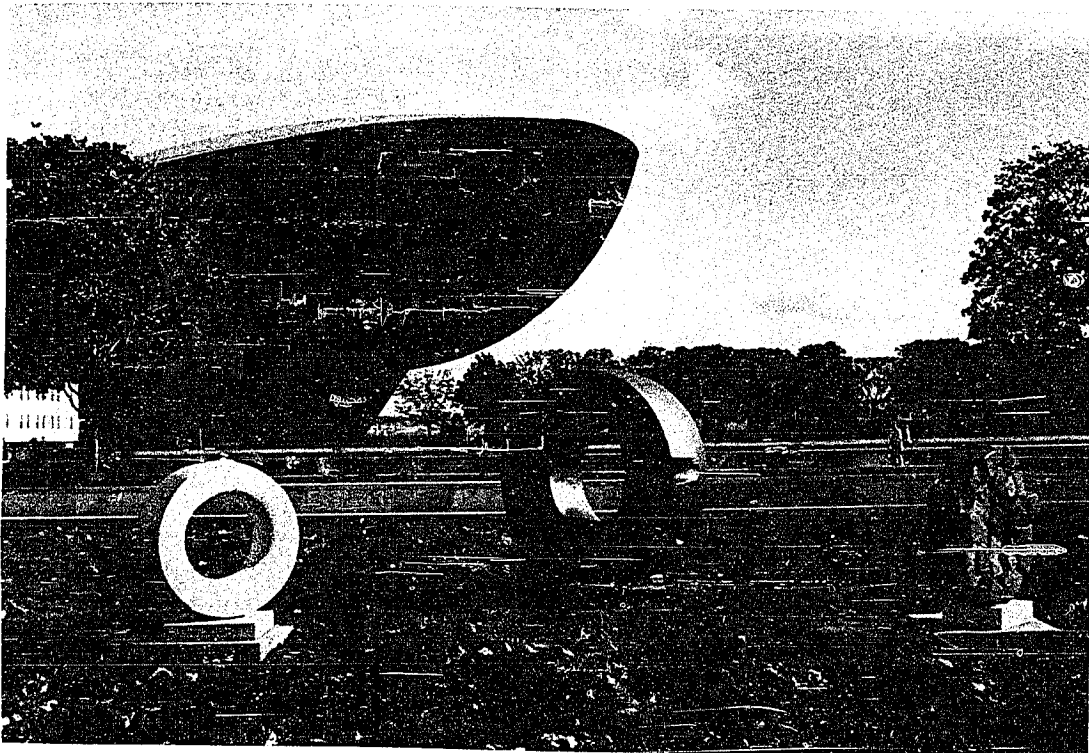


Fig. 59 Noguchi, Studies for the Sun, 1959-63, travertine (left), iron (center), and bronze (right)

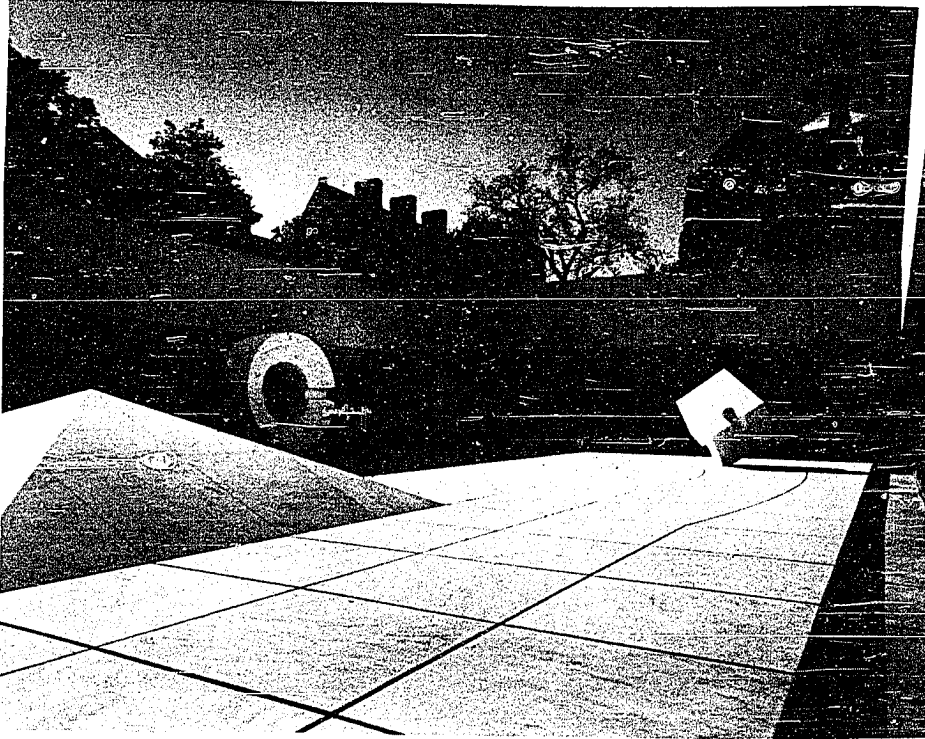


Fig. 60 Noguchi, Beinecke Library Garden, 1960-64, marble

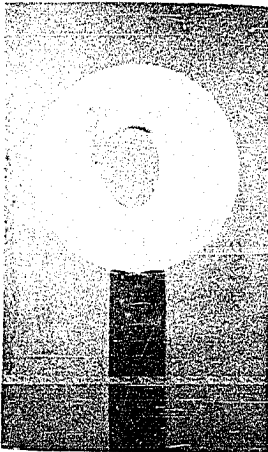


Fig. 61 Noguchi, Sky, 1964, marble

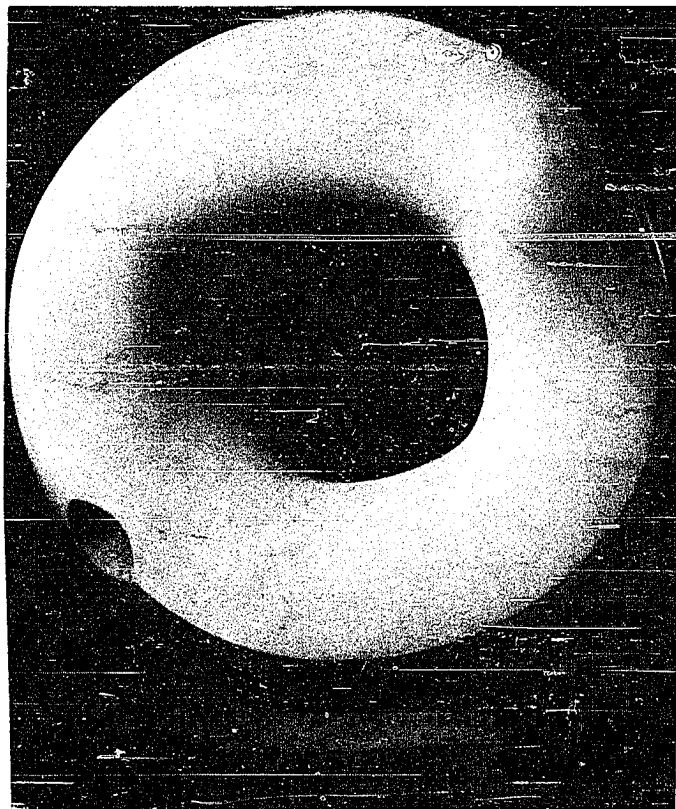


Fig. 62 Noguchi, White Sun, 1966, white Italian Saravezza marble



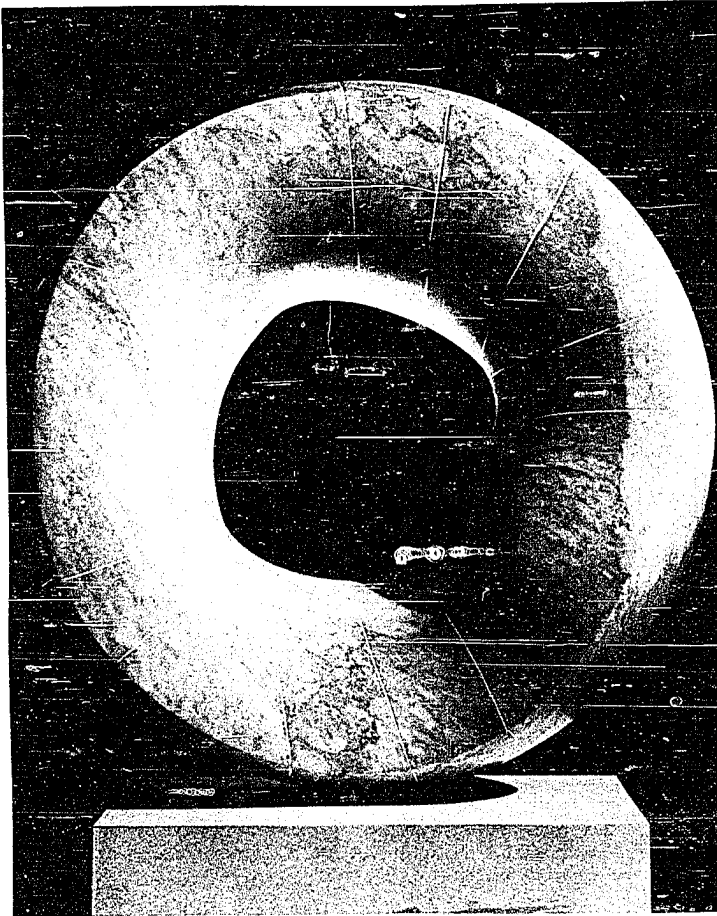


Fig. 63 Noguchi, Grey Sun,  
1967, Arni marble



Fig. 64 Noguchi, Sun, 1966,  
black granite

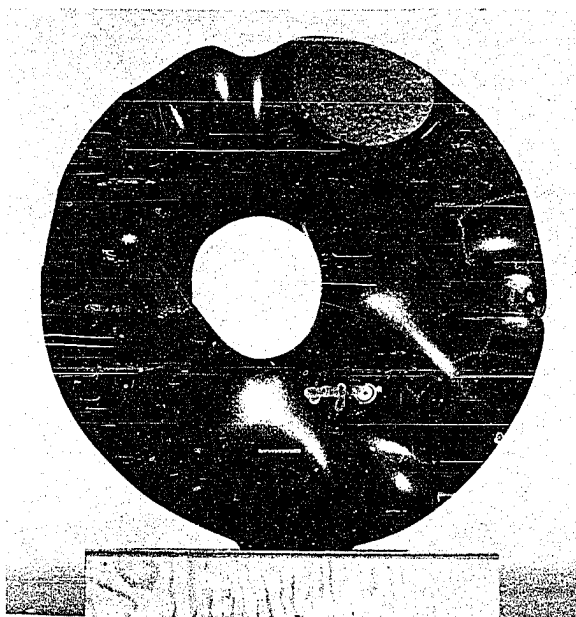


Fig. 65 Noguchi, Black Sun,  
1960-63, Tamba granite

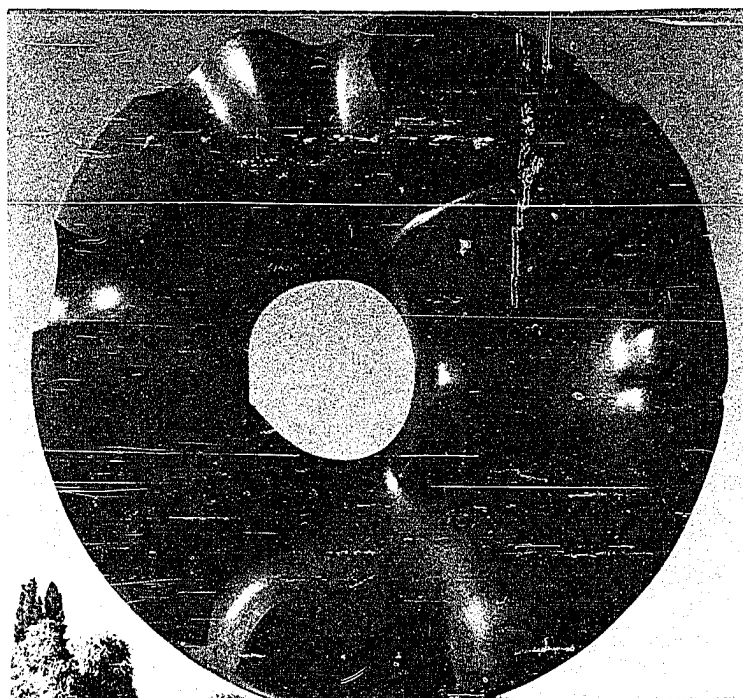


Fig. 66 Noguchi, Black Sun,  
1969, black Brazilian granite



Fig. 67 Noguchi, Sun at Noon, 1969, French red and Spanish Alicante marble

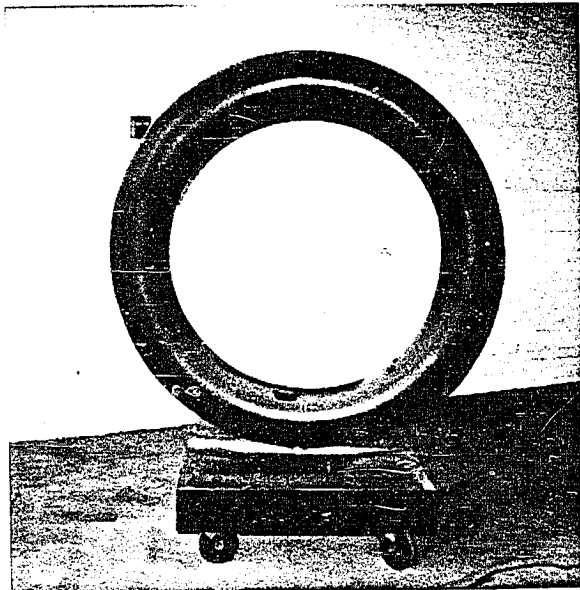


Fig. 68 Noguchi, Sun at Midnight, ca. 1973, granite

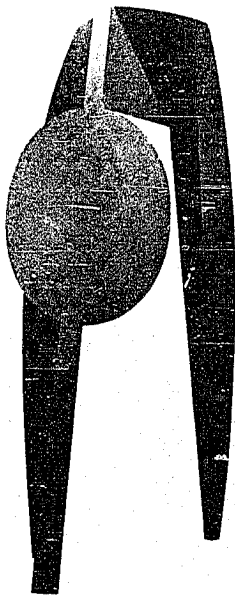


Fig. 69 Noguchi, Man Walking, 1959, anodized aluminum



Fig. 70 Noguchi, Red  
Untitled, 1965-66, red  
Persian travertine

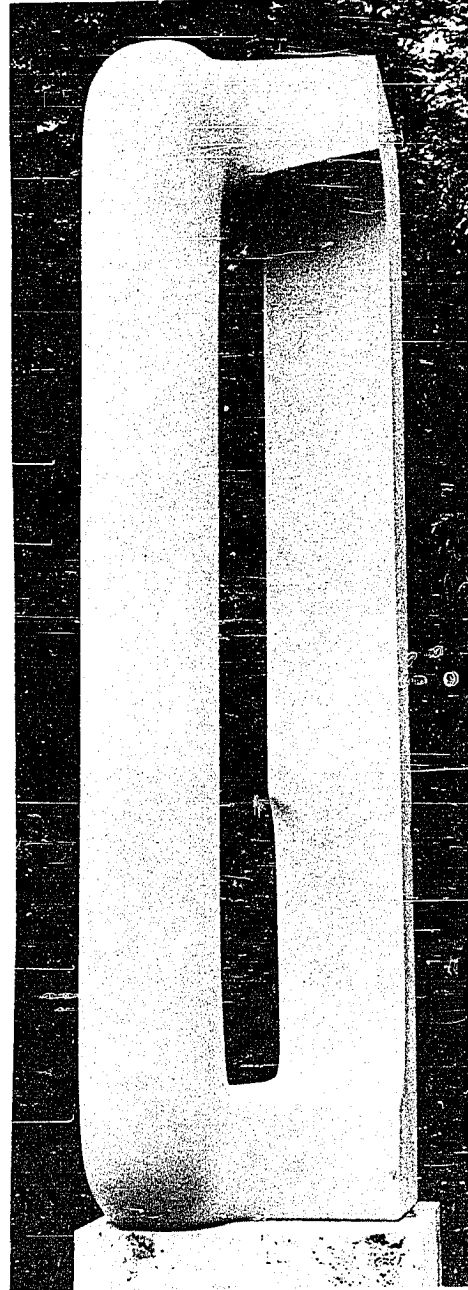


Fig. 71 Noguchi, In  
Stillness Moving, 1970, white  
statuary marble

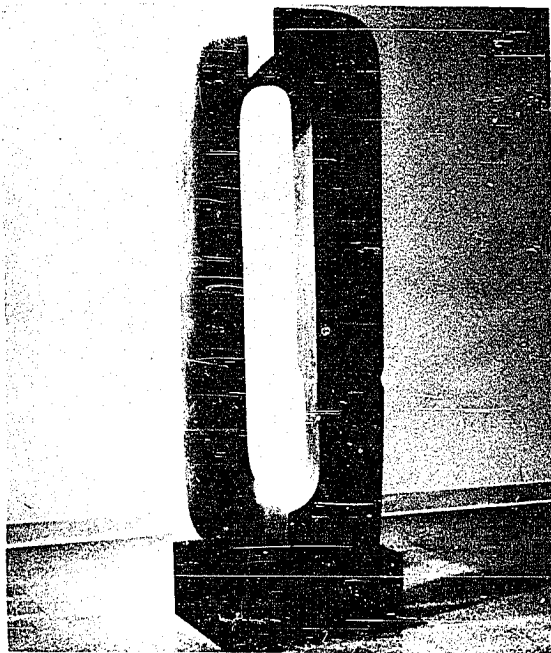


Fig. 72 Noguchi, In Silence  
Walking, 1970, Bardillo  
marble

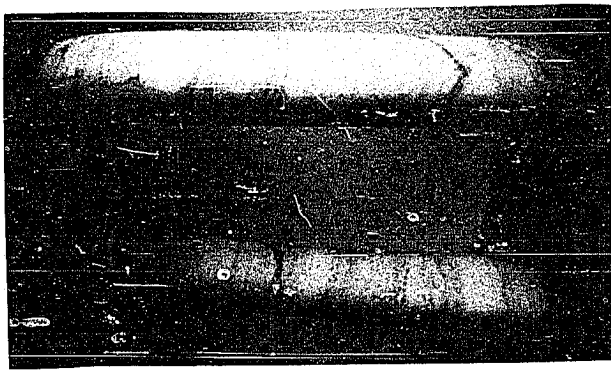


Fig. 73 Noguchi, The Void,  
1970, Portuguese Rose Aurora  
marble



Fig. 74 Noguchi, Walking  
Void #2, 1970, black Swedish  
granite

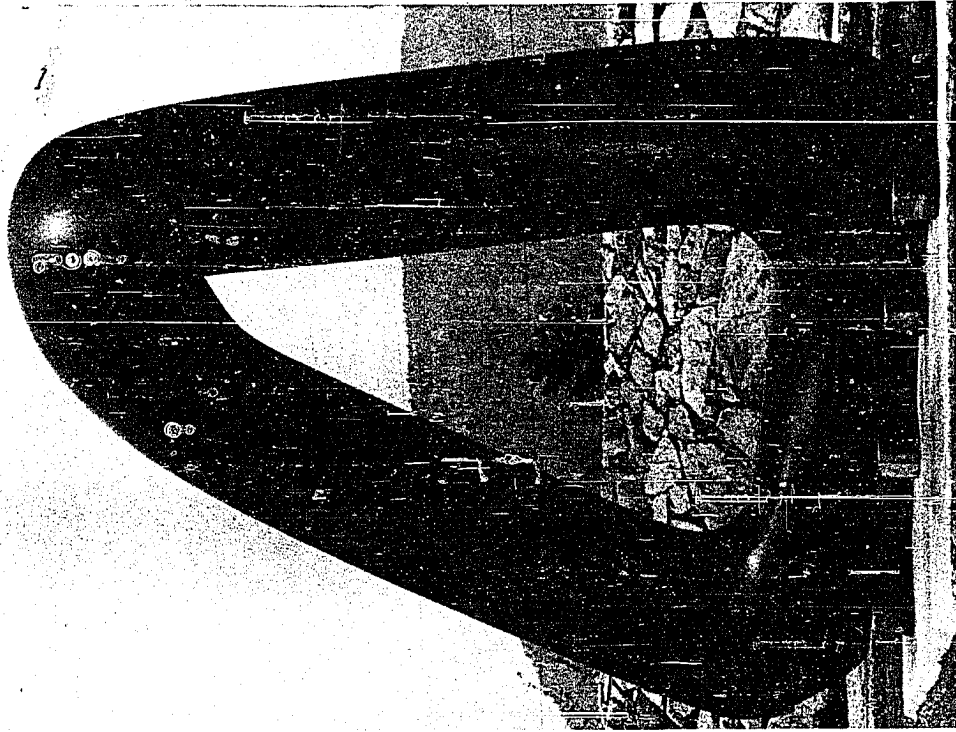


Fig. 75 Noguchi, Energy  
Void, 1971, Swedish granite

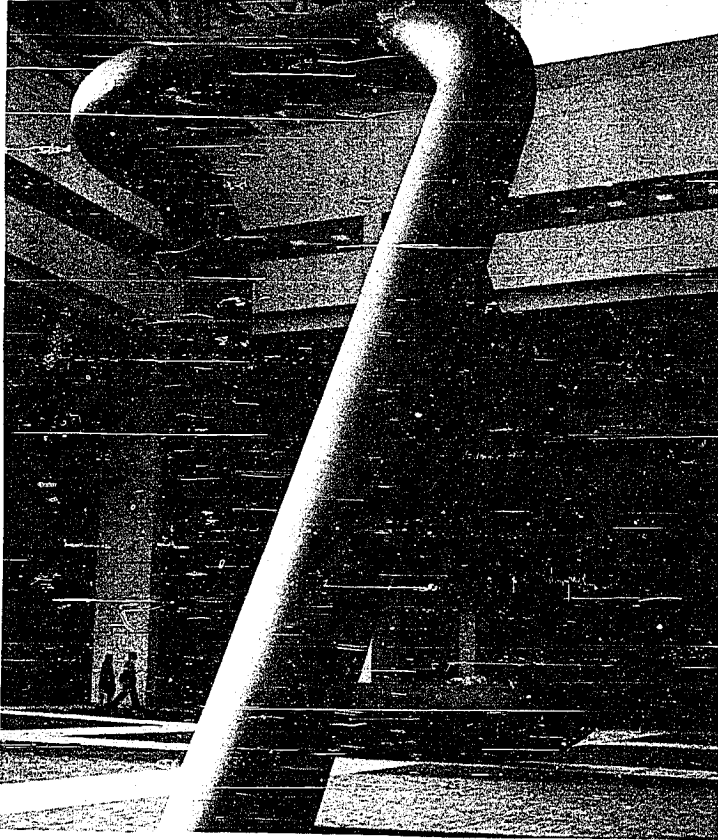


Fig. 76 Noguchi, Portal,  
1976, steel pipe

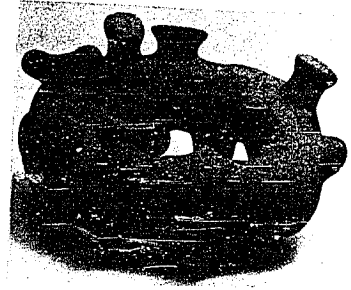


Fig. 77 Noguchi, The Ring,  
1945-48, black Swedish  
granite



Fig. 78 Noguchi, Cave of the  
Heart, 1946, set element



Fig. 79 Noguchi, This Earth, This Passage, 1962, bronze

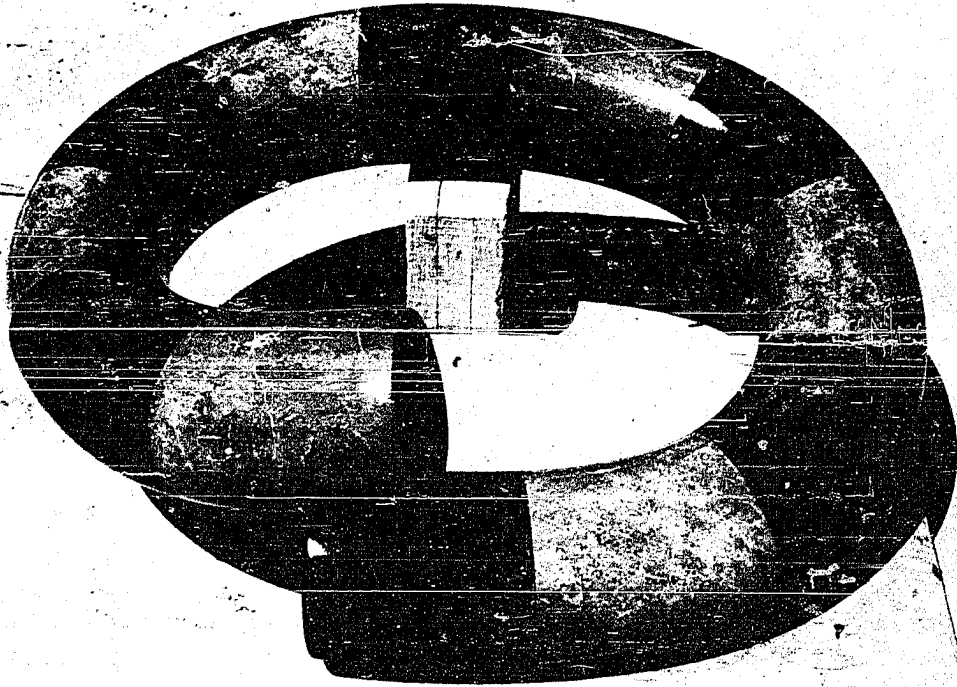


Fig. 80 Noguchi, Downward Pulling, 1970, Alicante and Marquina marble

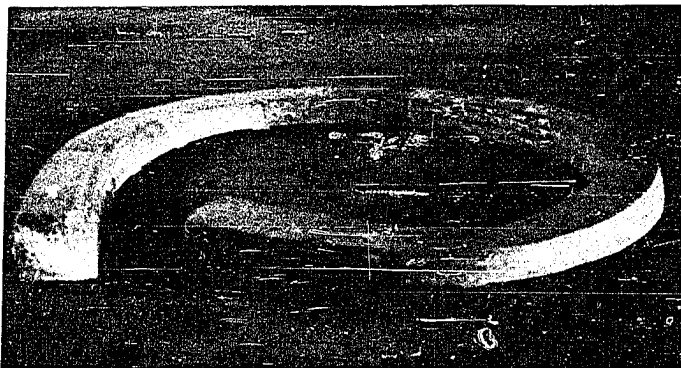


Fig. 81 Noguchi, Magic Ring, 1970, red Persian travertine

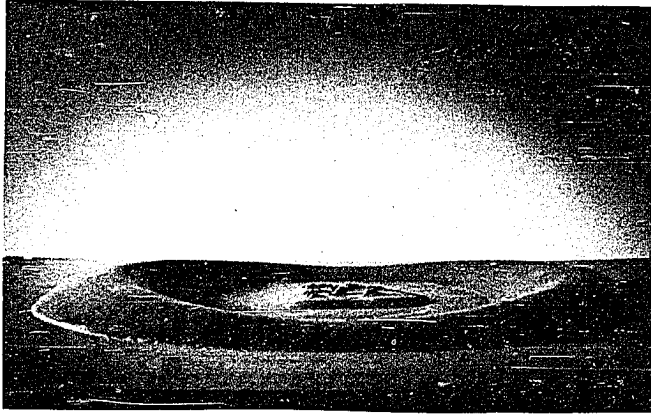


Fig. 82 Noguchi, Sacred  
Rocks of Kukaniloko, 1976,  
plaster model

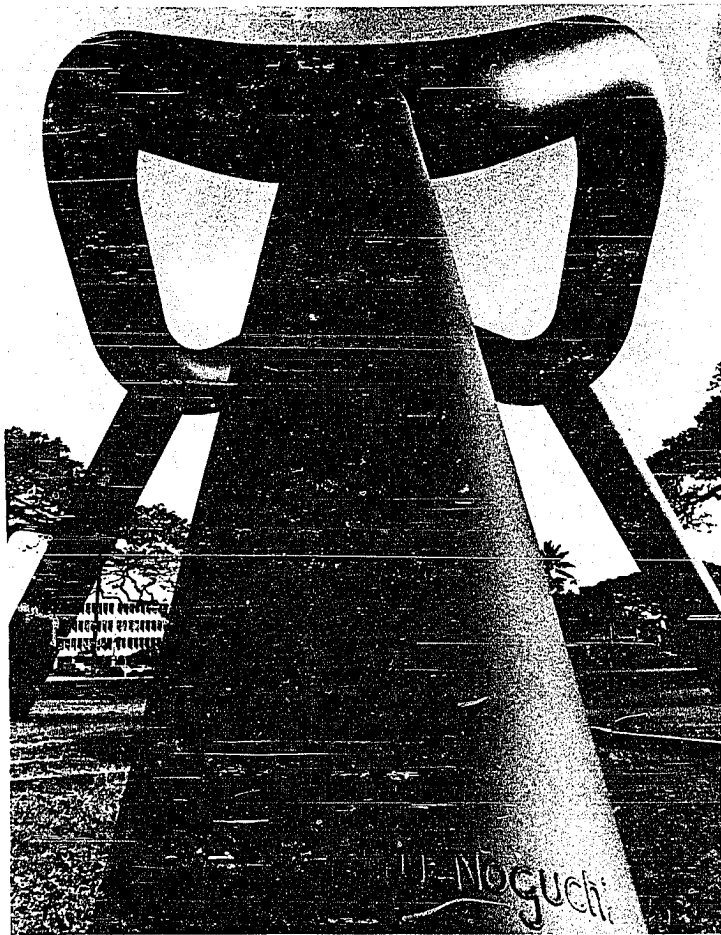


Fig. 83 Noguchi, Sky Gate,  
1976-77, painted steel



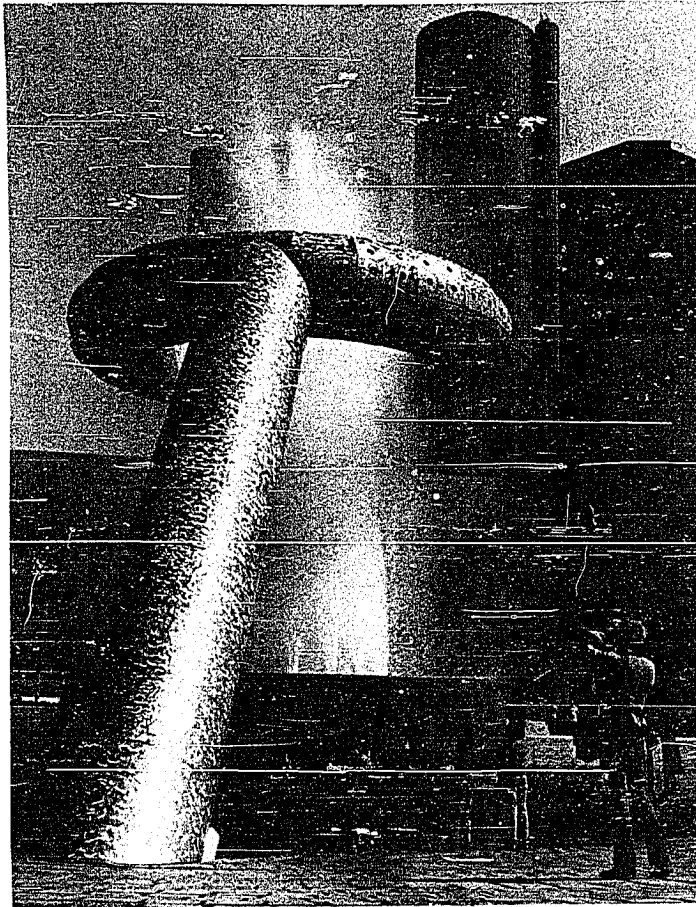


Fig. 84 Noguchi, Dodge  
Fountain, 1972-79, stainless  
steel

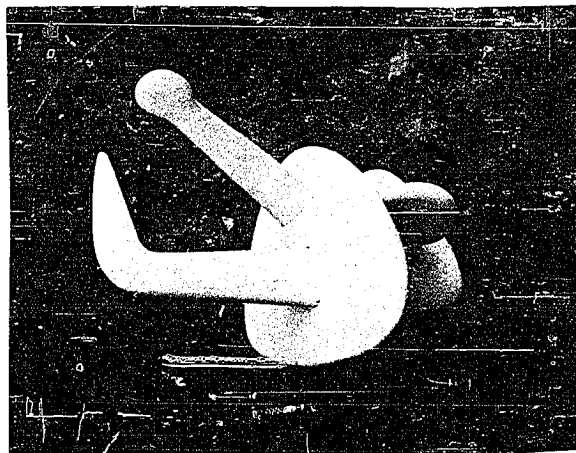


Fig. 85 Noguchi, The Seed,  
1946, white Italian marble



Fig. 86 Noguchi, Aphrodite,  
1962, bronze



Fig. 87 Noguchi, Adjustable  
Sculpture, 1962, bronze



Fig. 88 Noguchi, Lessons of  
Musokokushi, 1962, bronze

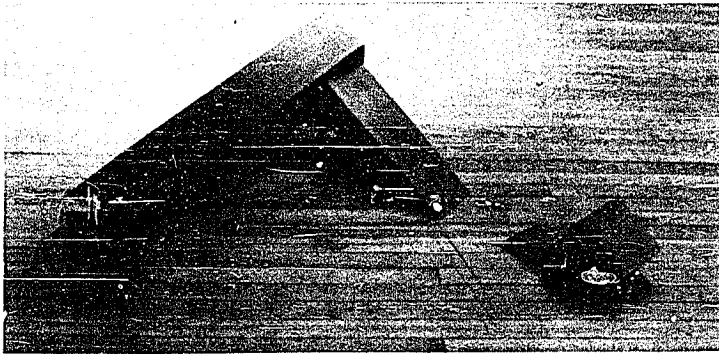


Fig. 89 Noguchi, Floor  
Frame, 1962, bronze



Fig. 90 Noguchi, Seen and  
Unseen, 1962, bronze



Fig. 91 Noguchi, Origin,  
1968, black African granite

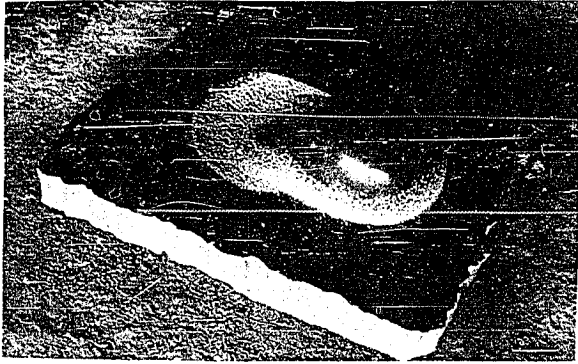


Fig. 92 Noguchi, The Wave,  
1968-72, Swedish granite

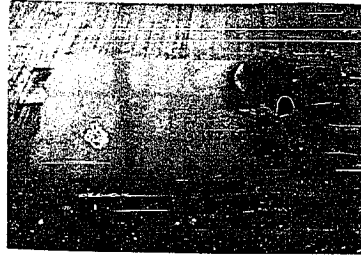


Fig. 93 Noguchi, Wet Stone,  
1970, granite

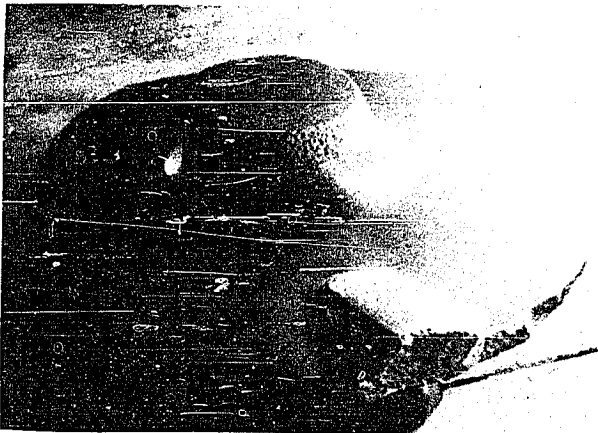


Fig. 94 Noguchi, Landscape  
Sculpture, ca. 1968, granite

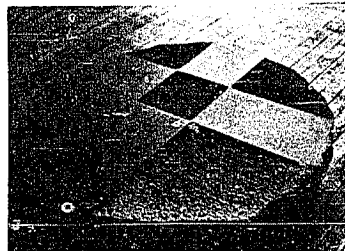


Fig. 95 Noguchi, Round-Square  
Space, 1970,  
granite



Fig. 96 Noguchi, Another  
Land, 1968, granite



Fig. 97 Noguchi, This Place,  
1968, black granite

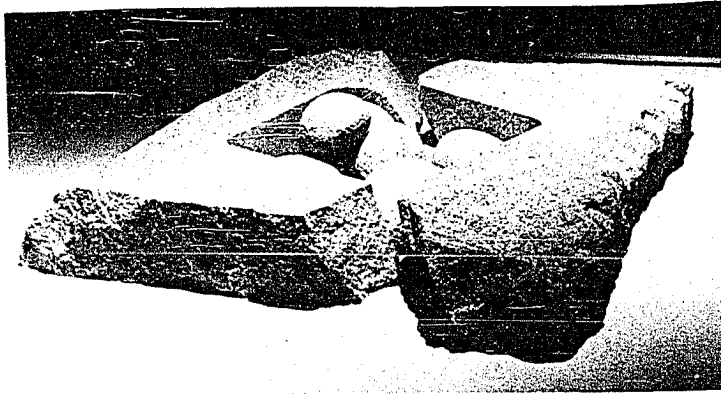


Fig. 98 Noguchi, Shodo Shima, 1978, granite

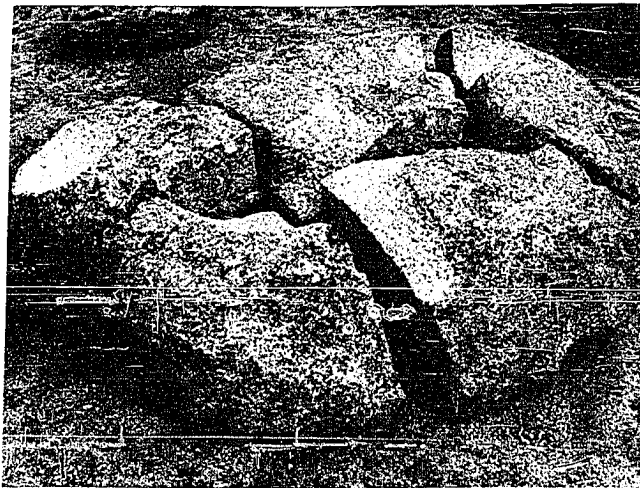


Fig. 99 Noguchi, Tao-tieh, 1978, granite

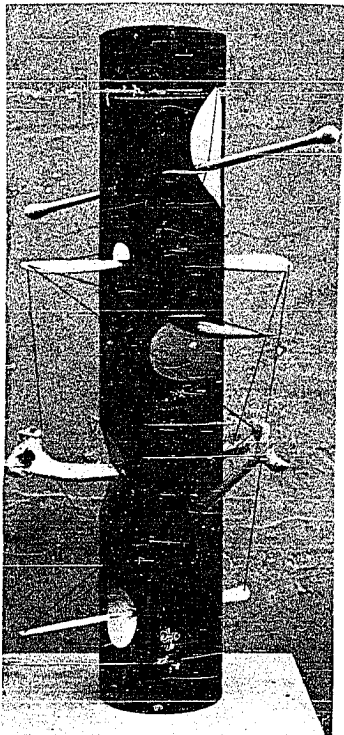


Fig. 100 Noguchi, Monument to Heroes, 1943, wood, paper, bones

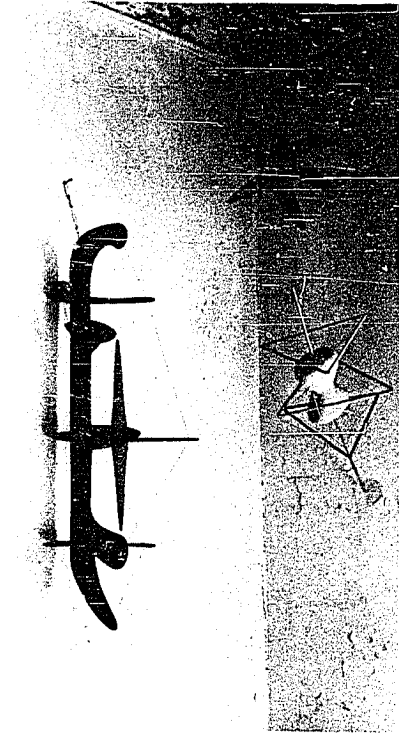


Fig. 101 Noguchi, Bucky (far right), 1943, wood, wire

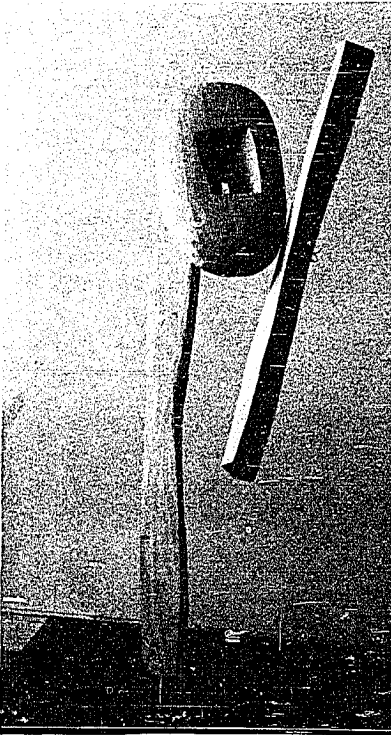


Fig. 103 Noguchi, The Cry, 1959-63, balsawood

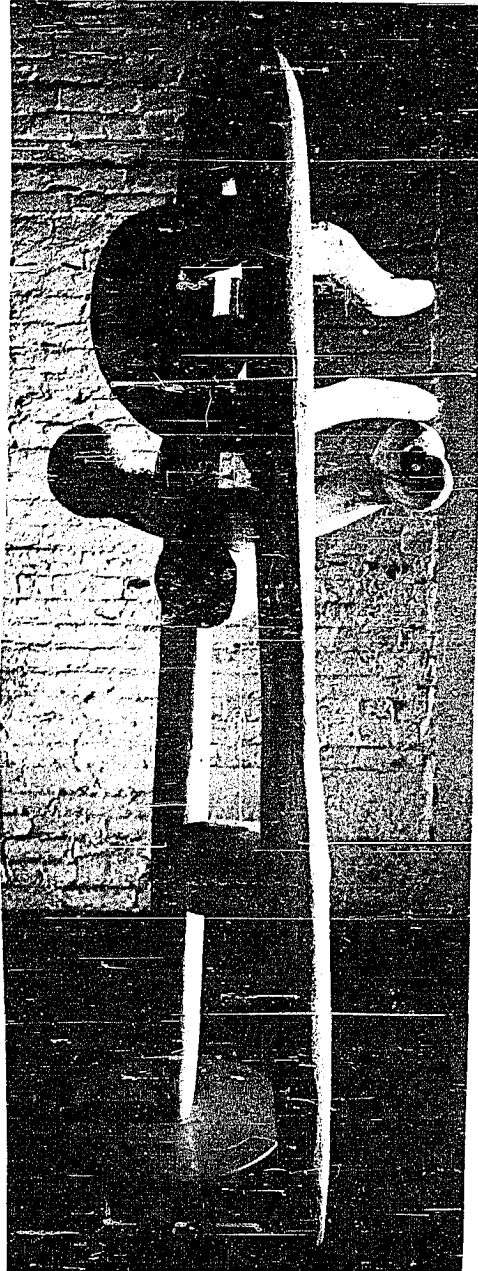


Fig. 102 Noguchi, Cronos, 1947, balsawood



Fig. 104 Noguchi, Shodo  
Hanging, 1960-62, bronze



Fig. 105 Noguchi, Shodo  
Flowing, 1960-62, bronze

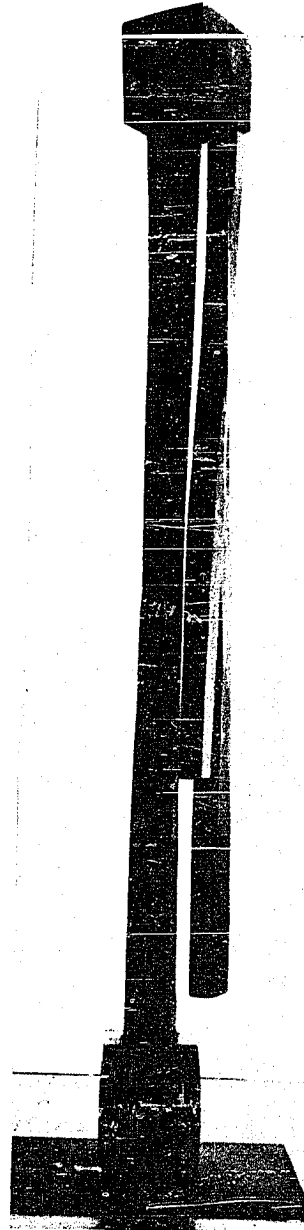


Fig. 106 Noguchi, Solitude,  
1962, bronze



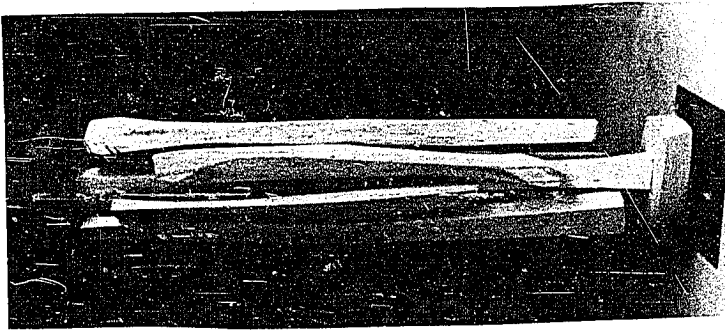


Fig. 107 Noguchi, Mortality,  
1959-62, balsawood

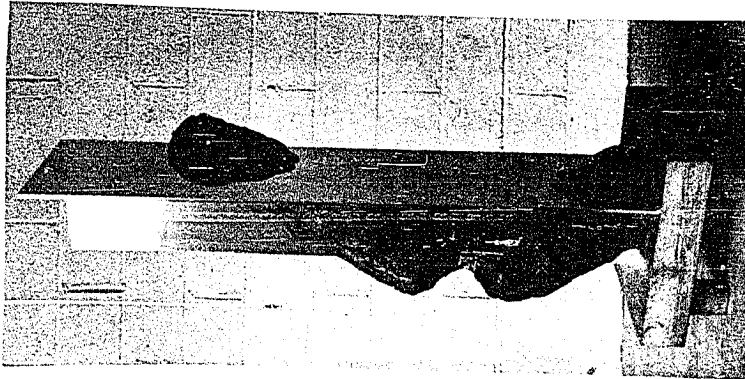


Fig. 108 Noguchi, The  
Inhabitant, 1962, bronze

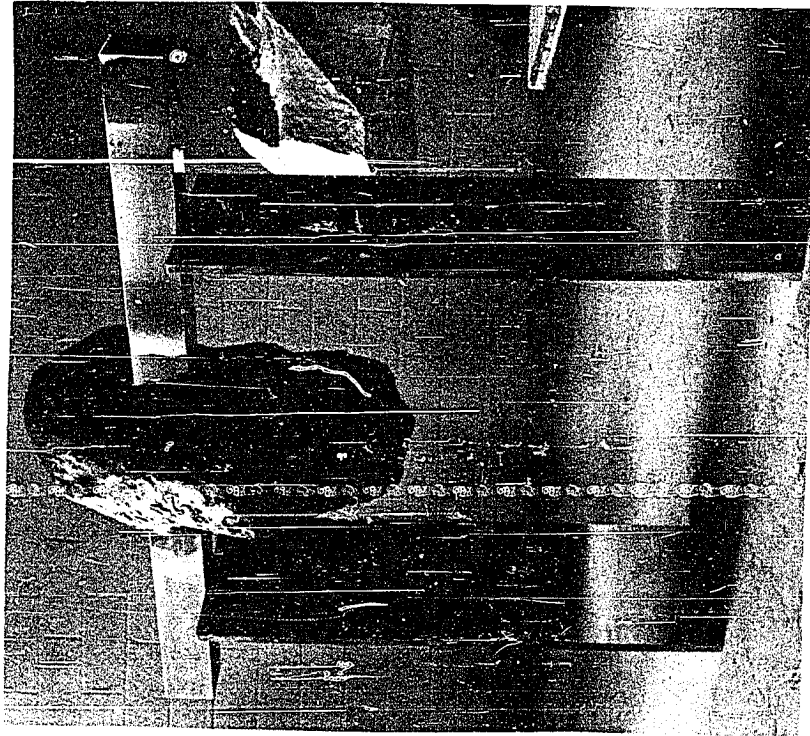


Fig. 109 Noguchi, Stone of  
Spiritual Understanding,  
1962, bronze

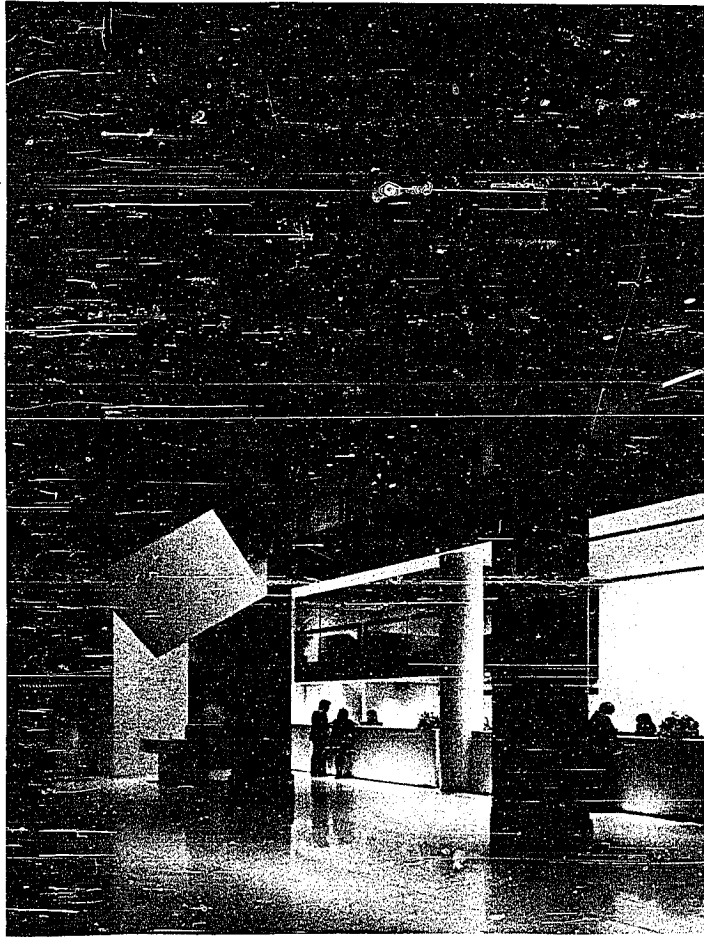


Fig. 110 Noguchi, Shinto,  
1974-75, stainless steel,

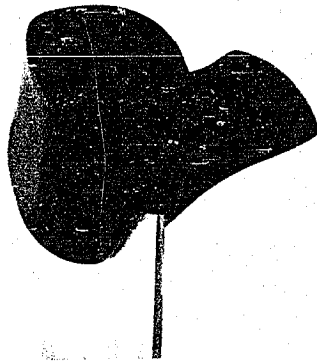


Fig. 111 Noguchi, Night  
Wind, 1966-67, black marble

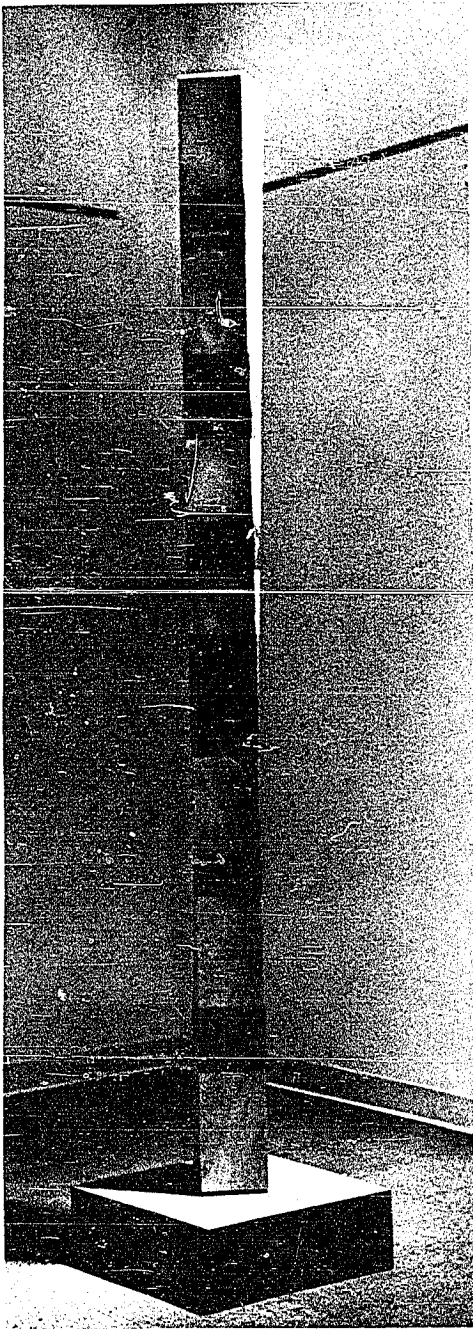


Fig. 112 Noguchi, Spirits Flight (#1), 1969, green and pink Serpentine and Carrara marble

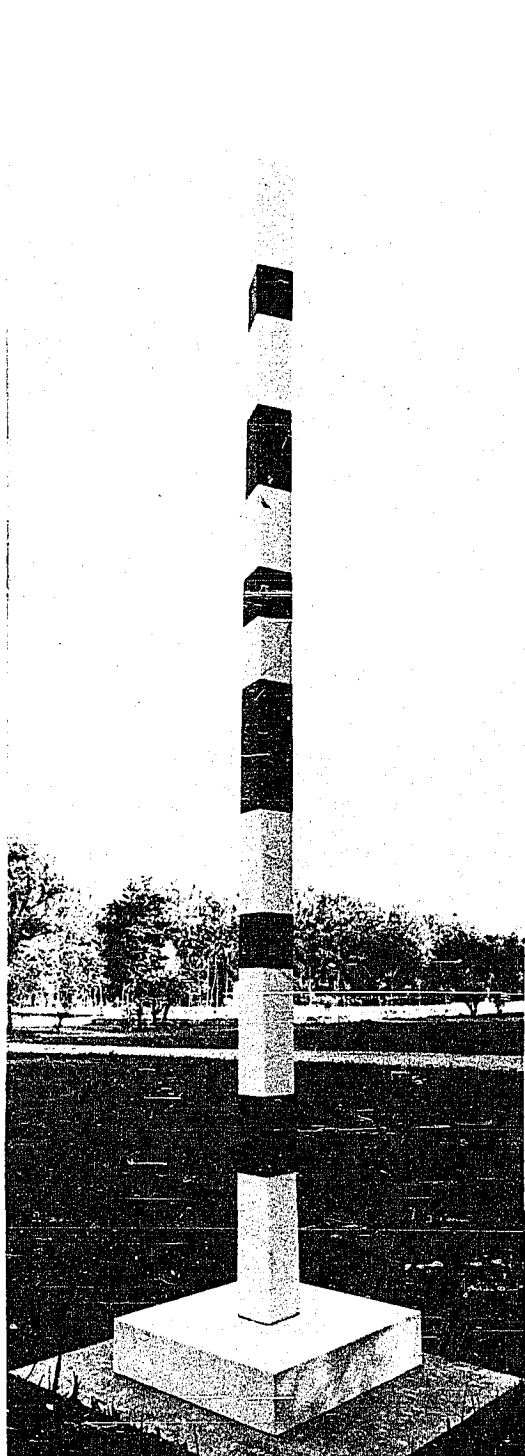


Fig. 113 Noguchi, Spirits Flight (#2), 1970, Belgian black and white Carrara marble

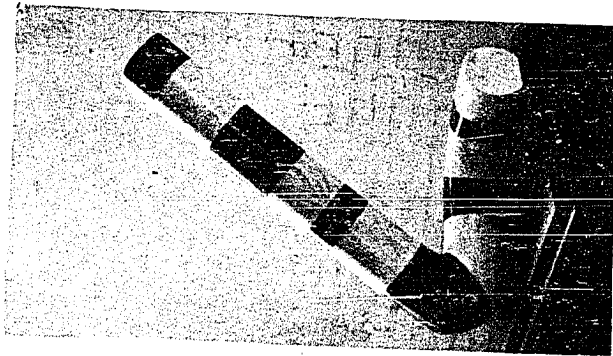


Fig. 115 Noguchi, Bow(B),  
1973, yellow Siena marble and  
black Petit granit

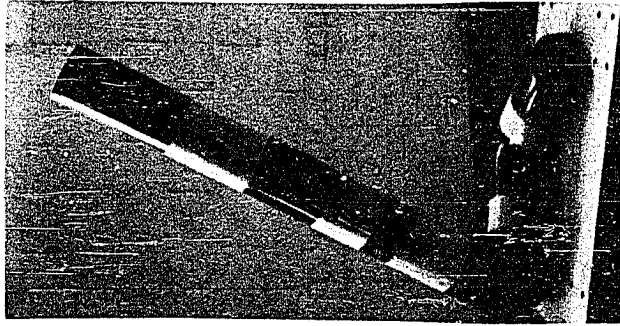


Fig. 116 Noguchi, Bow(C),  
1973, yellow Siena marble and  
black Petit granit

Fig. 114 Noguchi, Bow(A),  
1970, yellow Siena marble and  
black Petit granit



Fig. 117 Noguchi, Life of a Cube, 1962, black granite

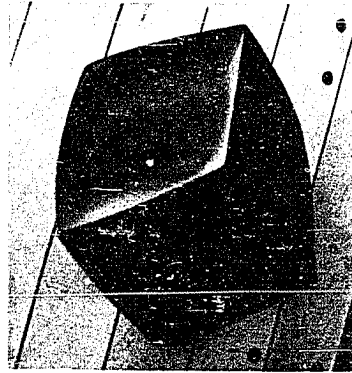


Fig. 118 Noguchi, Life of a Cube #2, ca. 1962, black granite

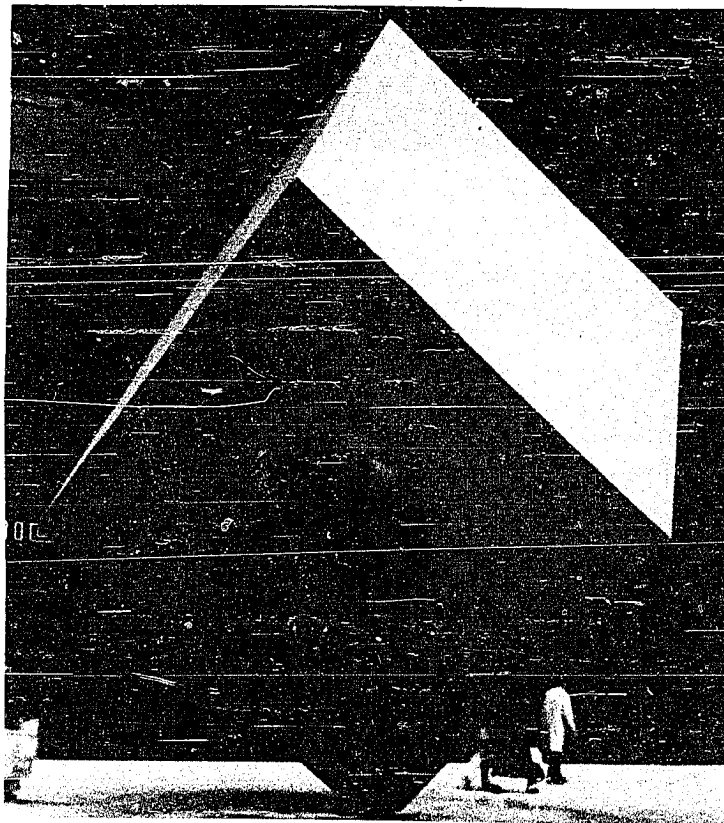


Fig. 119 Noguchi, Red Cube, 1968, steel, painted red

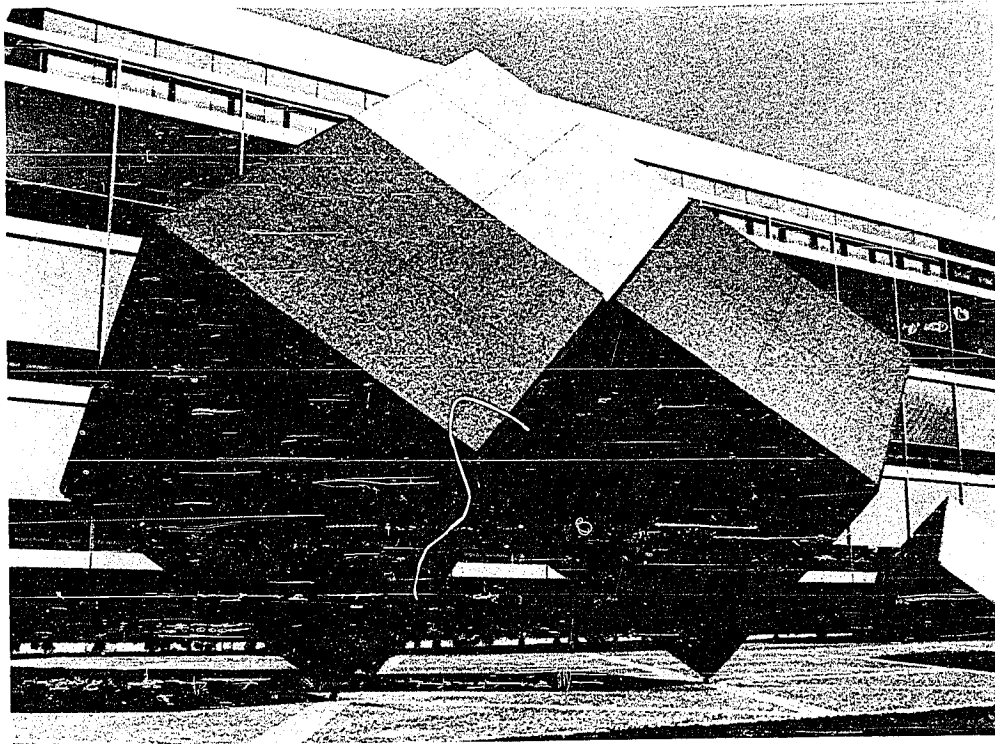


Fig. 120 Noguchi,  
Sculptures, Bayerische  
Vereins Bank, 1972, black and  
white granite and aluminum

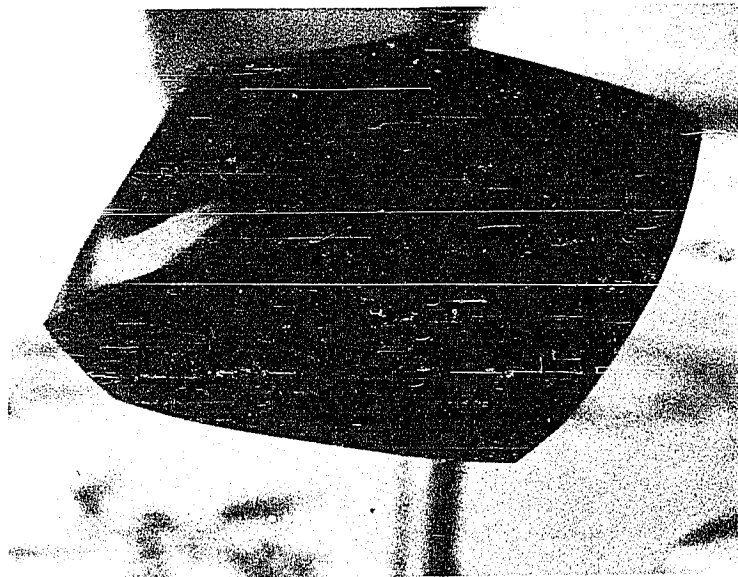


Fig. 121 Noguchi, Cube Root,  
1967, black granite

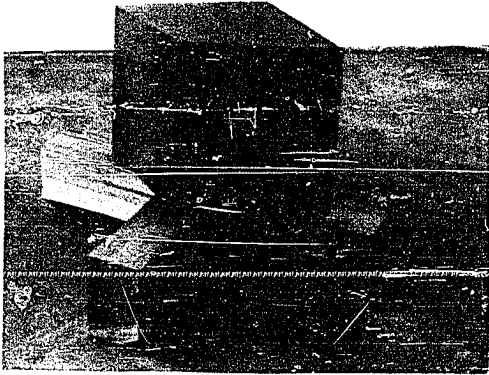


Fig. 122 Noguchi, Life of a Cube #5, ca. 1968, granite

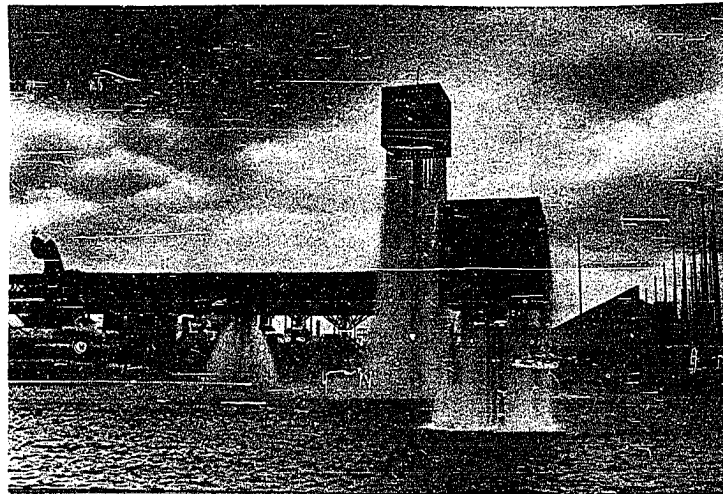


Fig. 123 Noguchi, Expo '70 Fountains, 1970, stainless steel

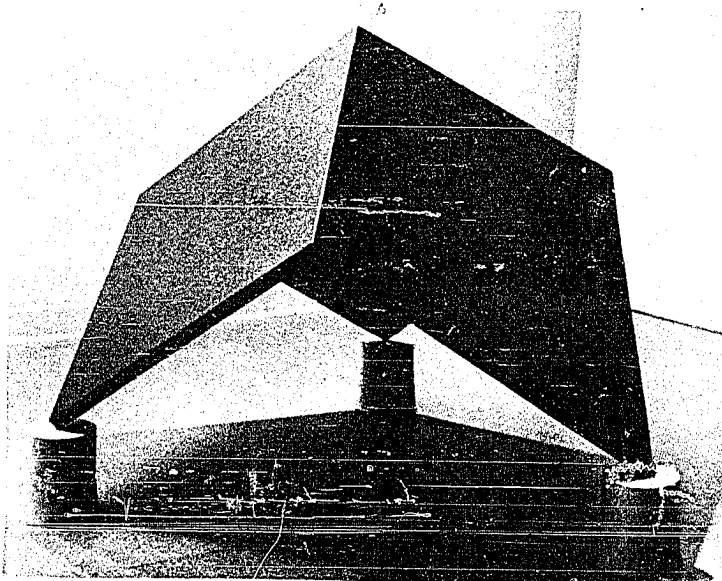


Fig. 124 Noguchi, Cubic Pyramid, 1969, black granite

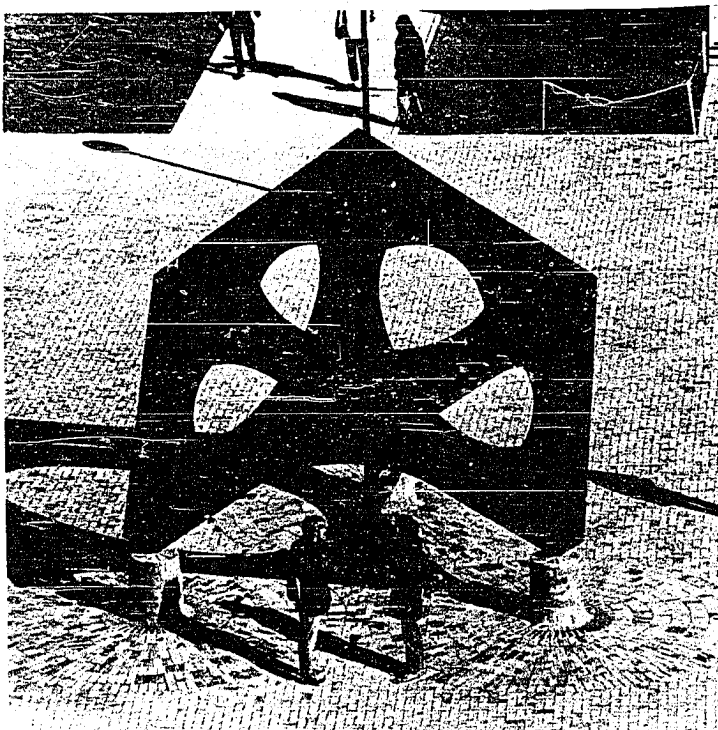


Fig. 125 Noguchi, Skyviewing Sculpture, 1969, steel, painted black

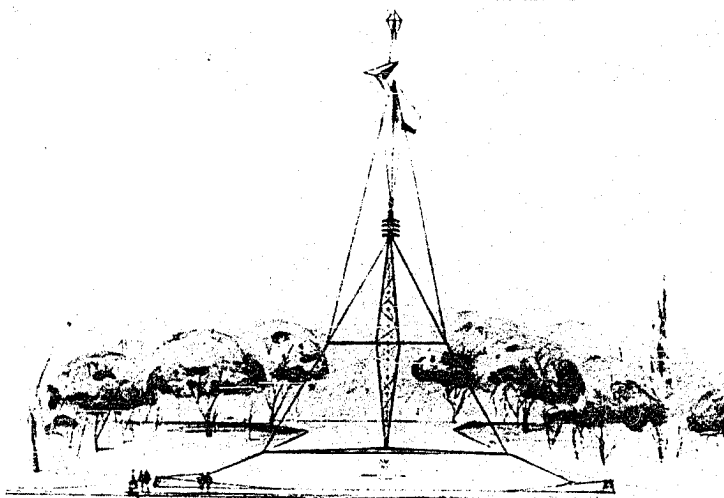


Fig. 126 Noguchi, Monument to Ben Franklin, 1933, photostat from lost original drawing



Fig. 127 Noguchi, Monument to the Flow, 1933, photostat from lost original drawing

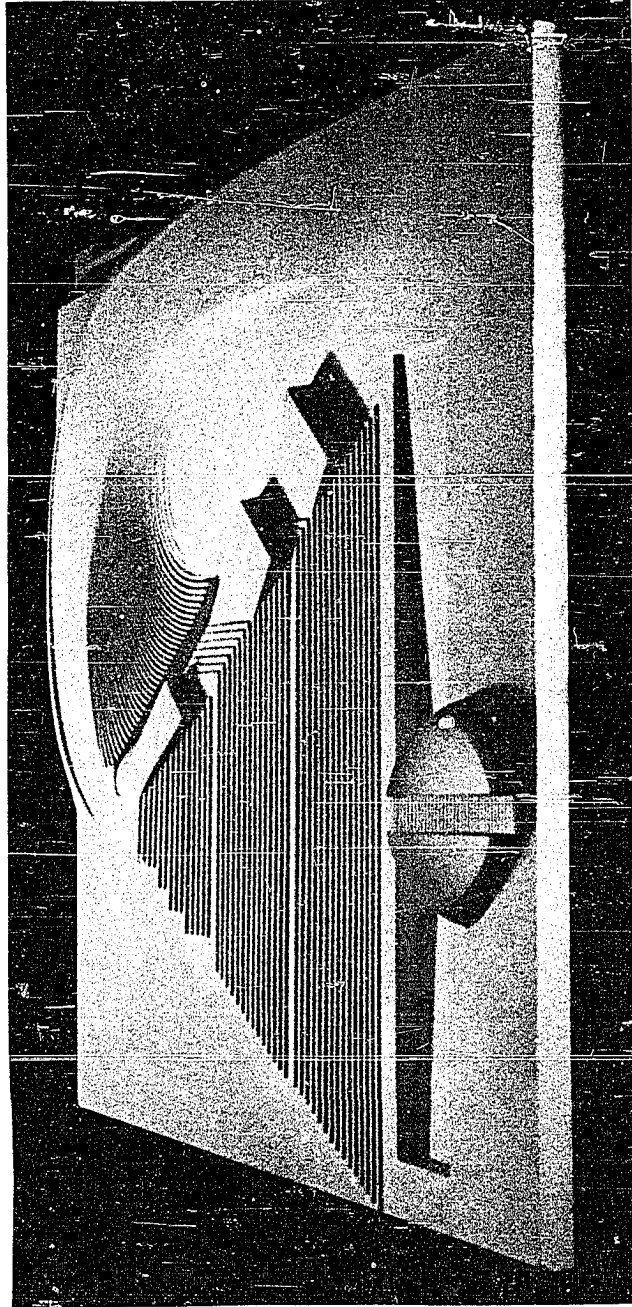
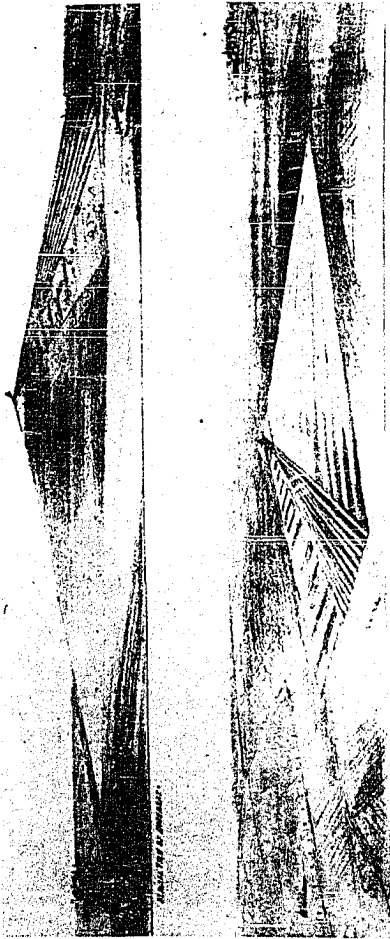


Fig. 128 Noguchi, Play Mountain, 1933, plaster model

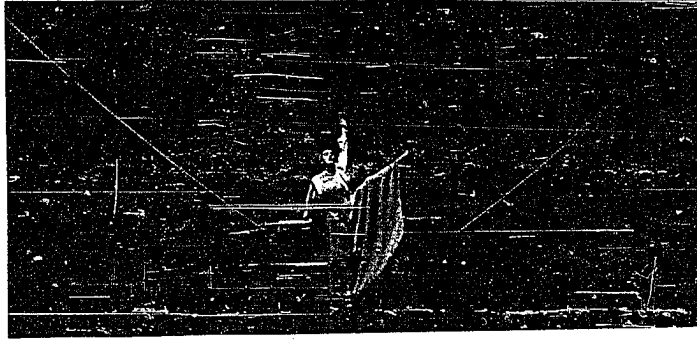


Fig. 129 Noguchi, Frontier, 1935, set

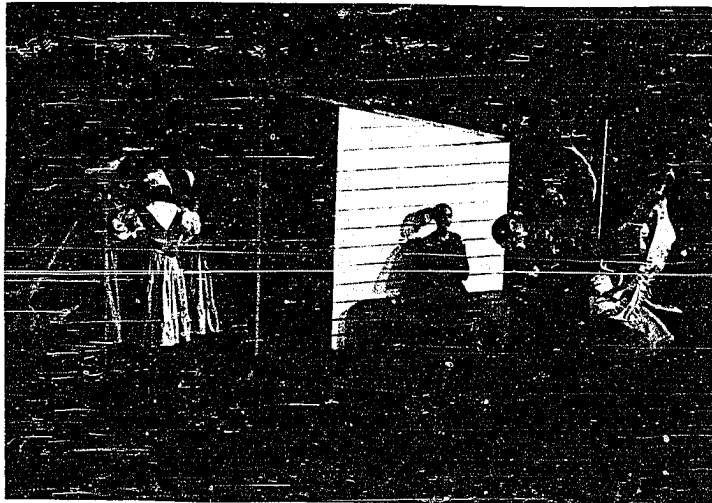


Fig. 130 Noguchi, Appalachian Spring, 1944, set

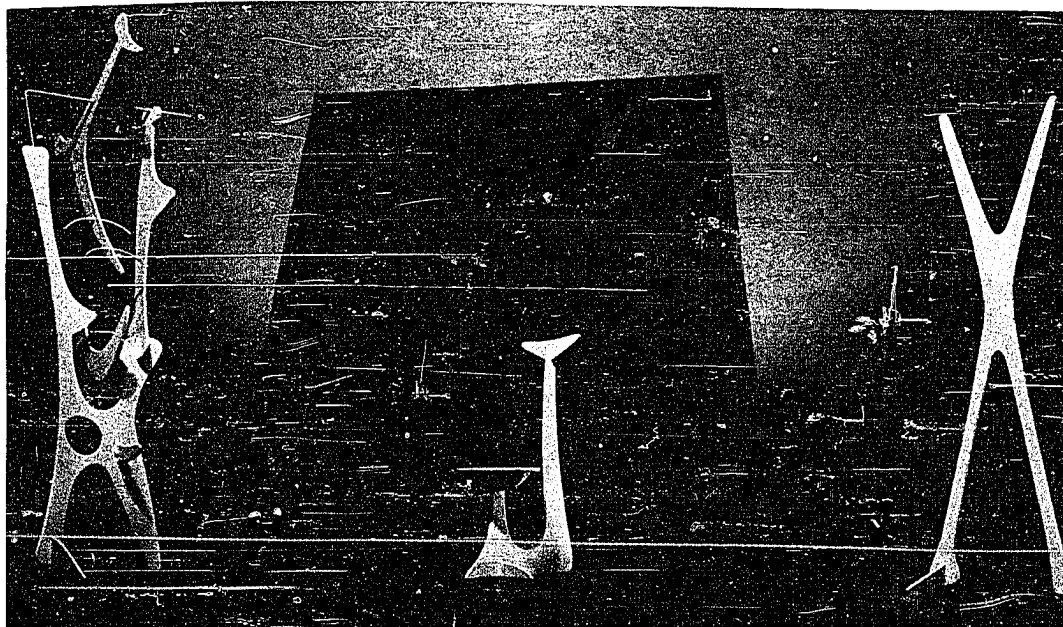


Fig. 131 Noguchi, Herodiade, 1944, set



Fig. 132 Noguchi, Dark Meadow, 1946, set

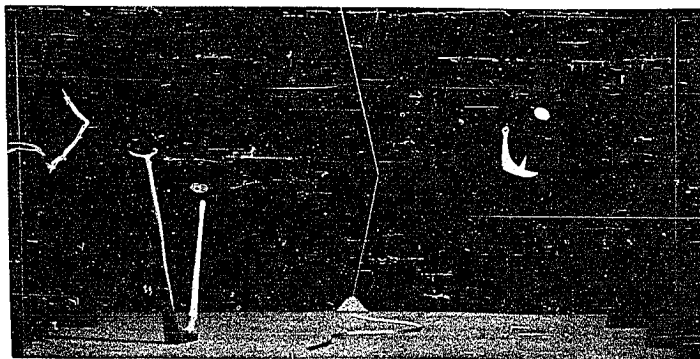


Fig. 133 Noguchi, Errand into the Maze, 1947, set

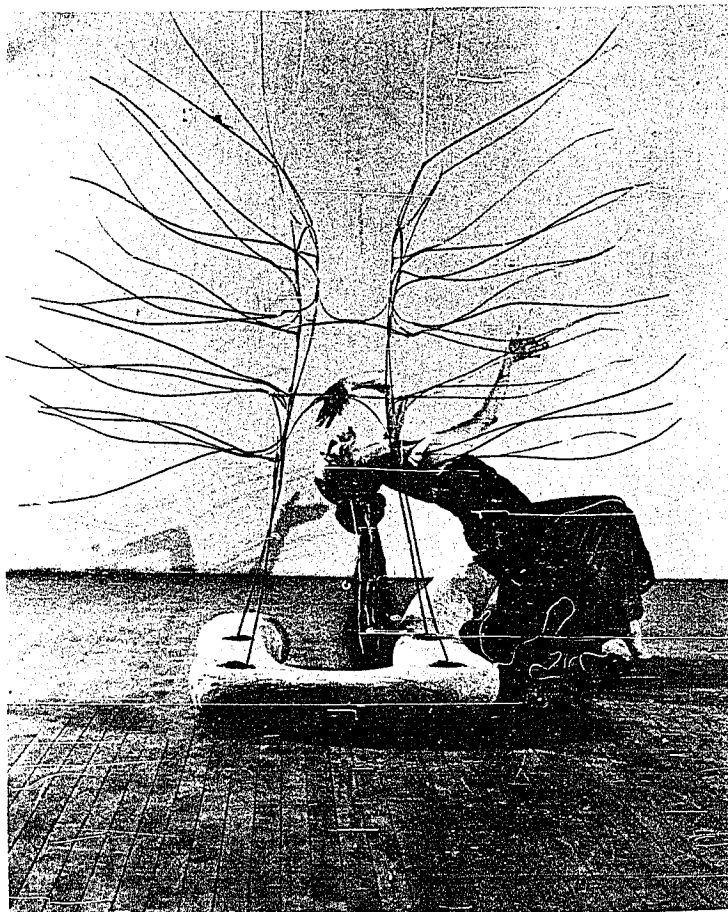


Fig. 134 Noguchi, Cave of the Heart, 1946, set



Fig. 135 Noguchi, Night Journey, 1947, set

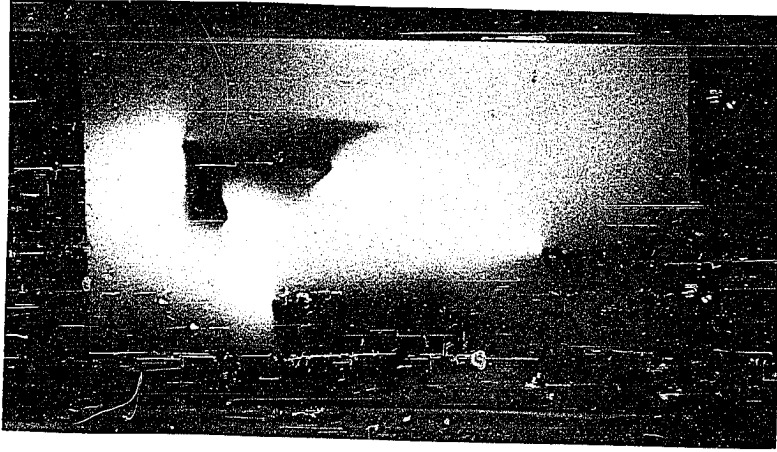


Fig. 136 Noguchi, Diversion of Angels, 1948, set



Fig. 137 Noguchi, Seasons, 1947, set and costumes

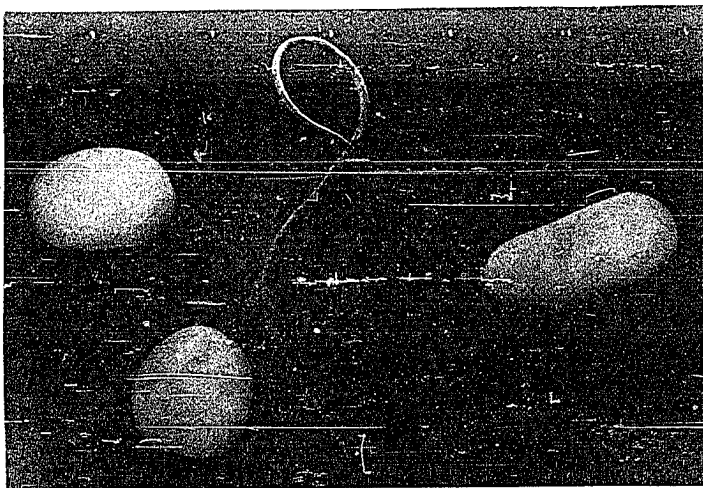


Fig. 138 Noguchi, Orpheus, 1948, set and costumes

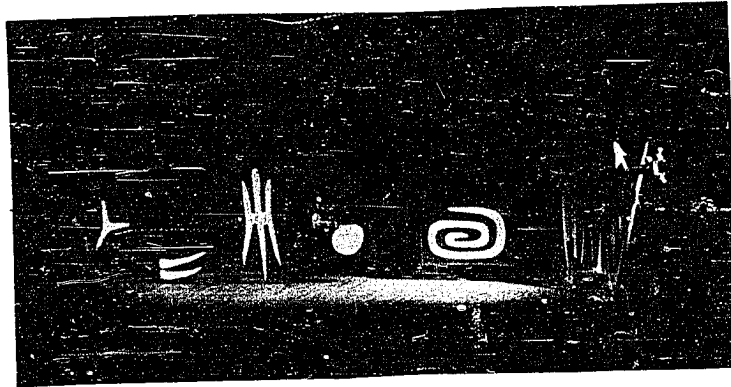


Fig. 139 Noguchi, Judith,  
1950, set



Fig. 140 Noguchi, Seraphic  
Dialogue, 1955, set



Fig. 141 Noguchi, King Lear,  
1955, set and costumes

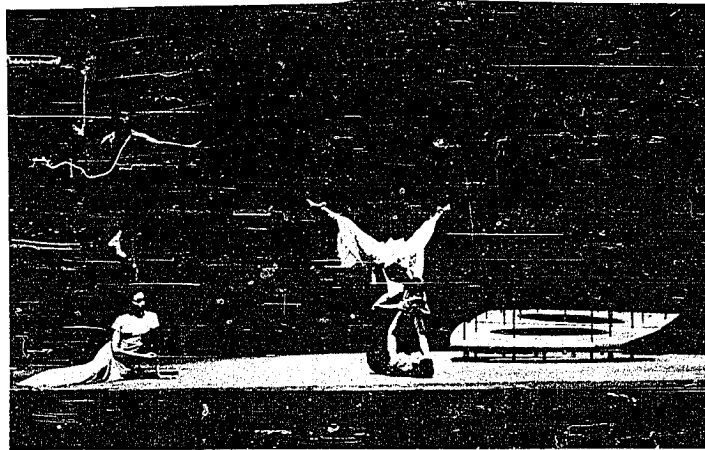


Fig. 142 Noguchi, Embattled  
Garden, 1958, set

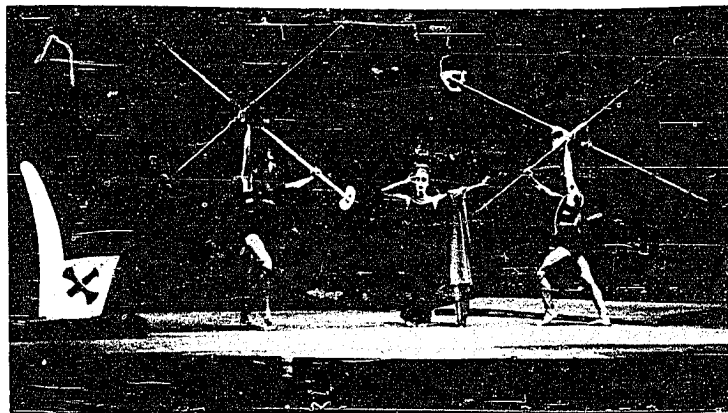


Fig. 143 Noguchi,  
Clytemnestra, 1958, set

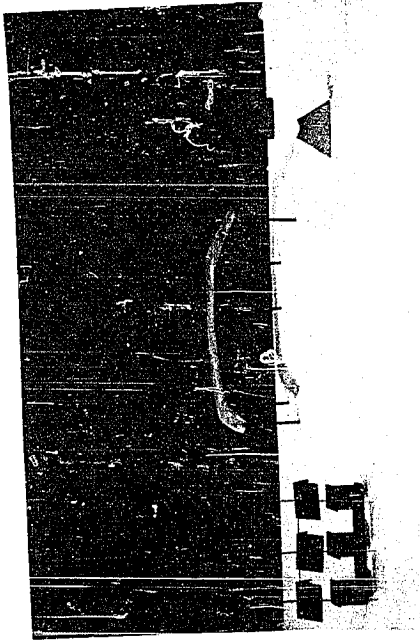


Fig. 144 Noguchi, Acrobats  
of God, 1960, set

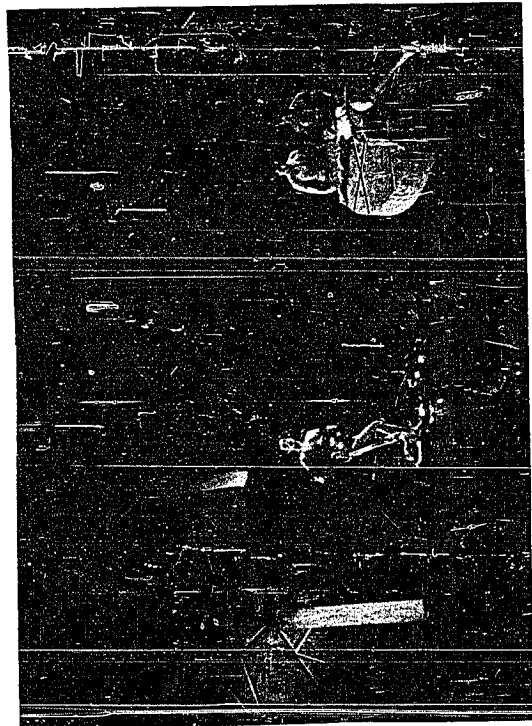


Fig. 145 Noguchi, Alcestis,  
1960, set

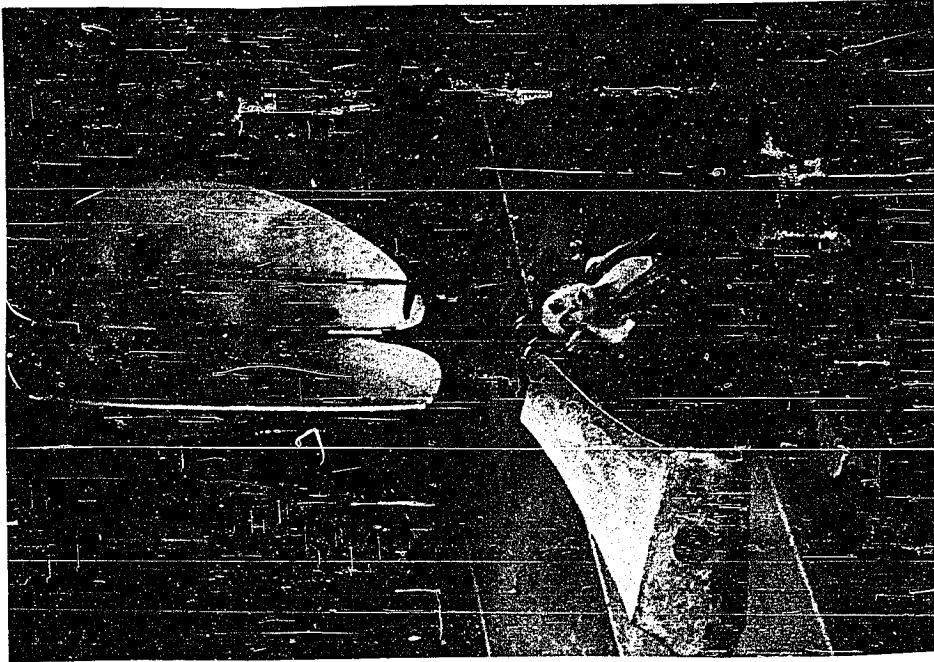


Fig. 146 Noguchi, Phaedra,  
1962, set



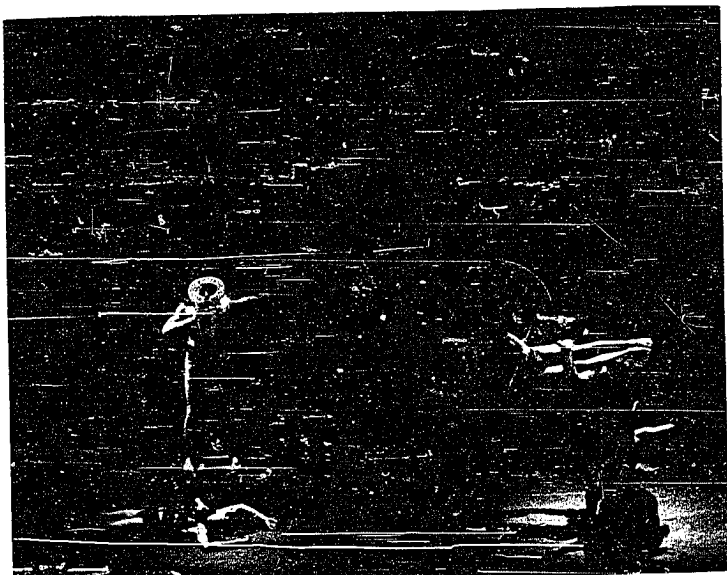


Fig. 147 Noguchi, Cortege of Eagles, 1966, set

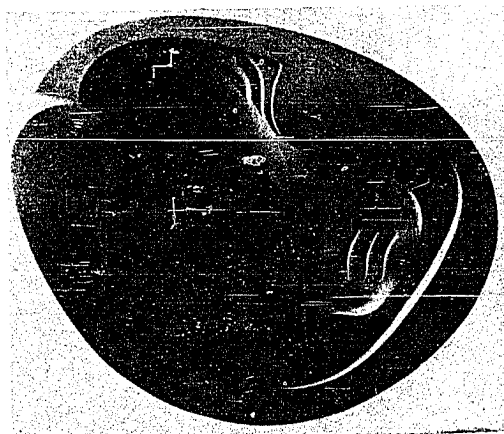


Fig. 148 Noguchi, Swimming Pool for Josef von Sternberg, 1935, plaster model

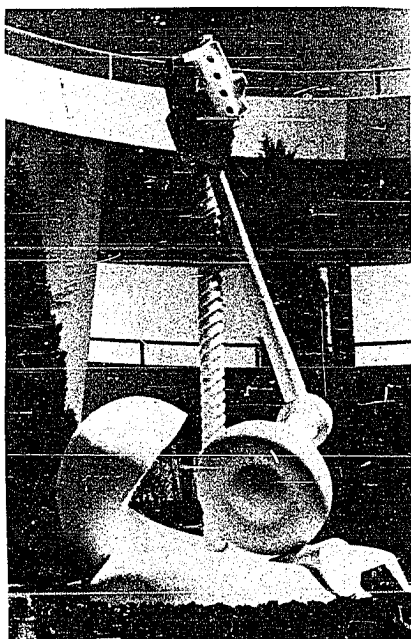


Fig. 149 Noguchi, Ford Fountain for World's Fair, 1938, magnesite

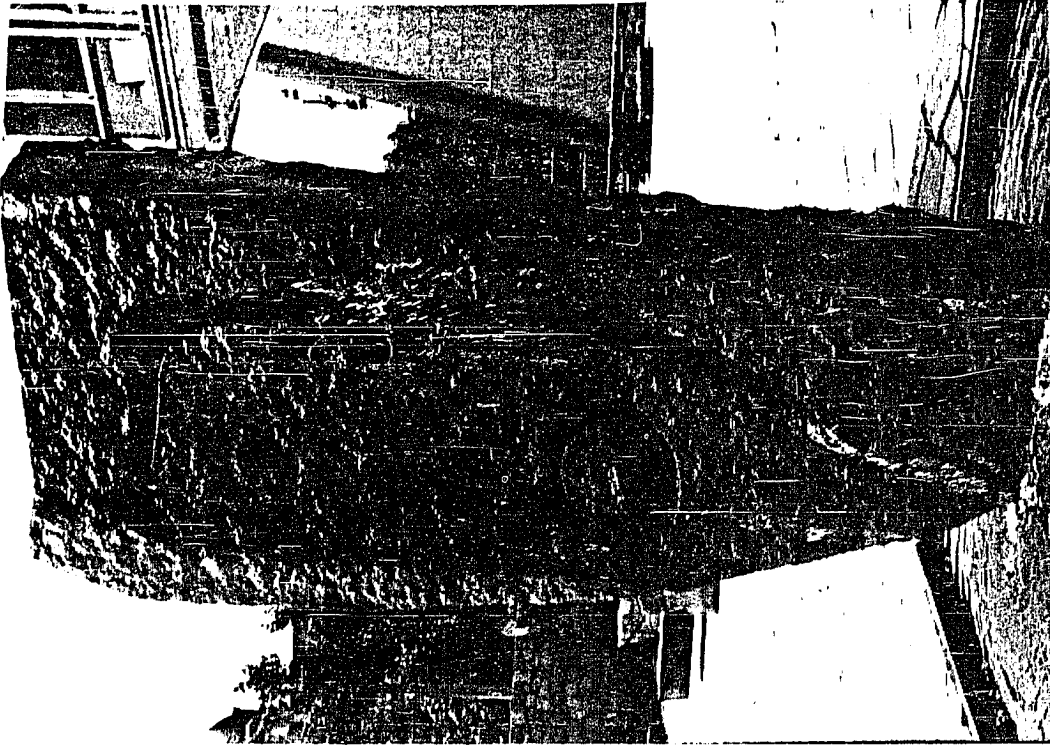


Fig. 151 Noguchi, UNESCO  
Garden Fountain, 1956-58,  
granite

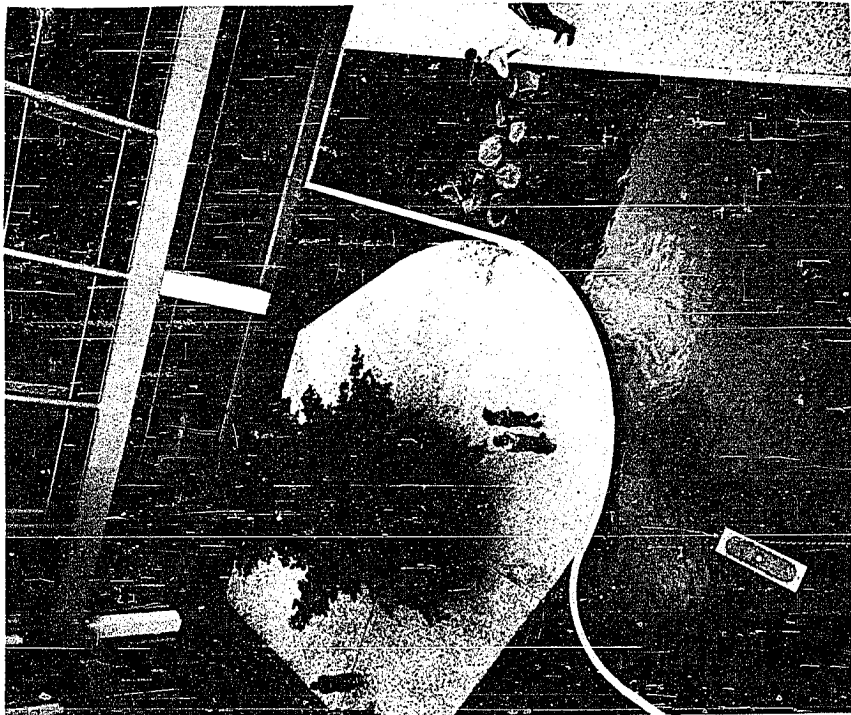


Fig. 150 Noguchi,  
Connecticut General Life  
Insurance Company Garden,  
1956-57

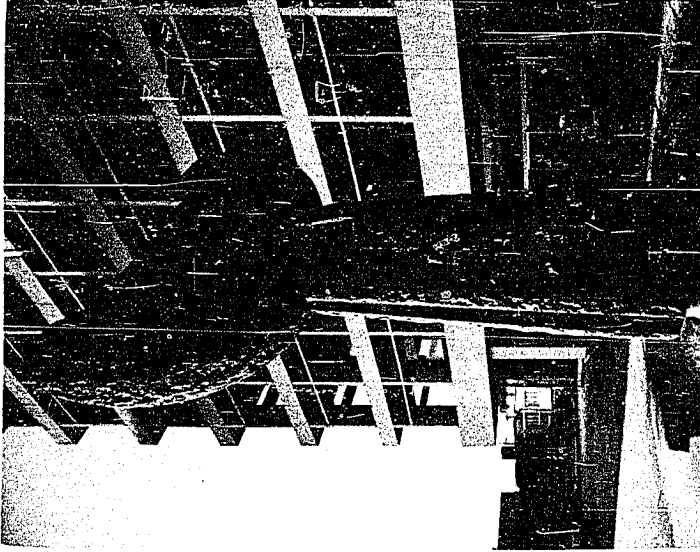


Fig. 153 Noguchi,  
Mississippi Fountain,  
1961-62, granite

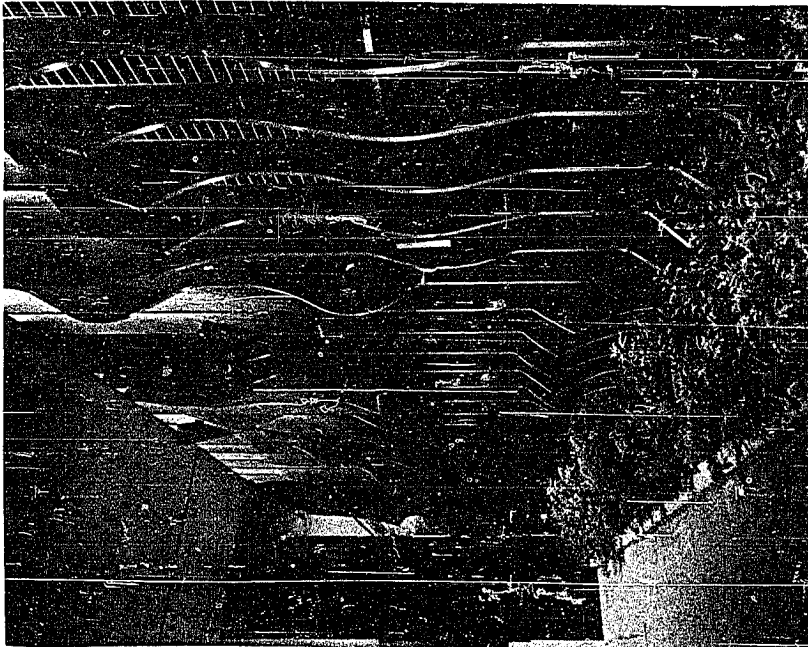


Fig. 152 Noguchi,  
666 Fifth Avenue Wall,  
1957, stainless steel

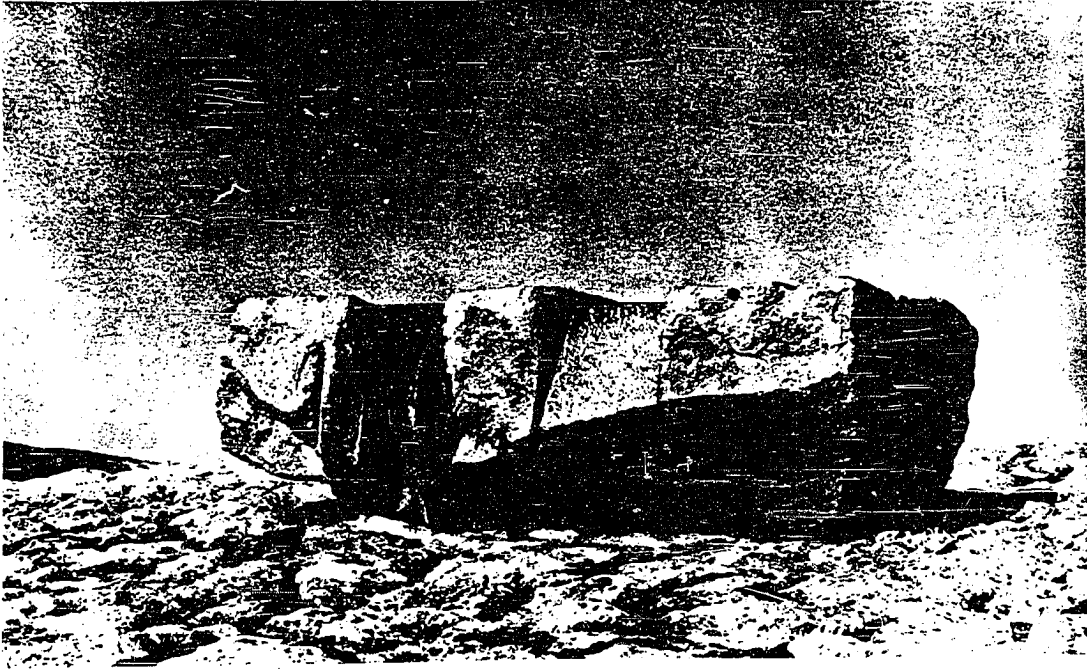


Fig. 154 Noguchi,  
Water-Source Sculpture,  
1960-65, Elath granite

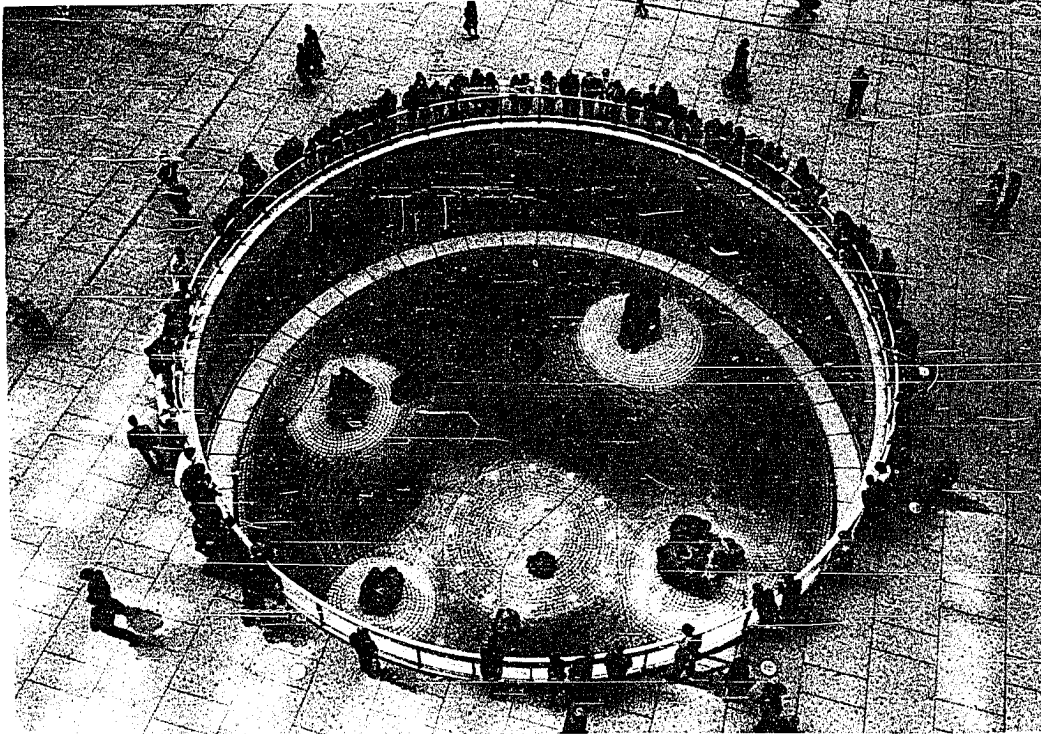


Fig. 155 Noguchi, Chase  
Manhattan Bank Plaza Garden,  
1961-64, Black River stone,  
granite

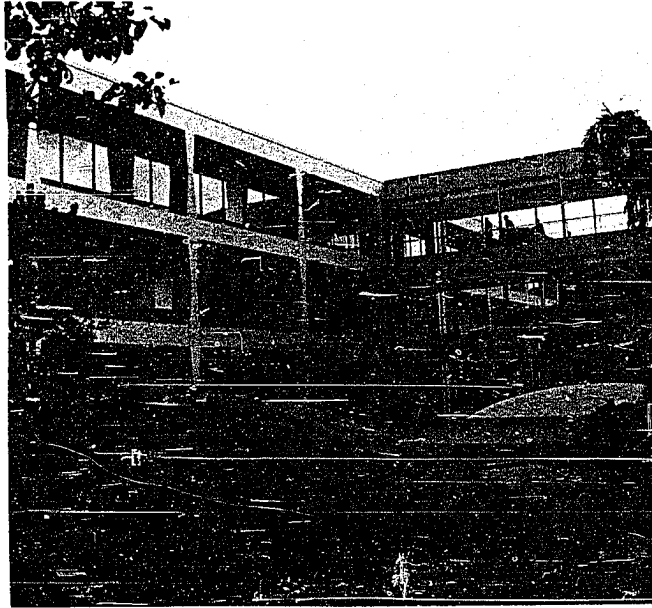


Fig. 156 Noguchi, IBM Garden  
of the Future, 1964, painted  
cement, granite

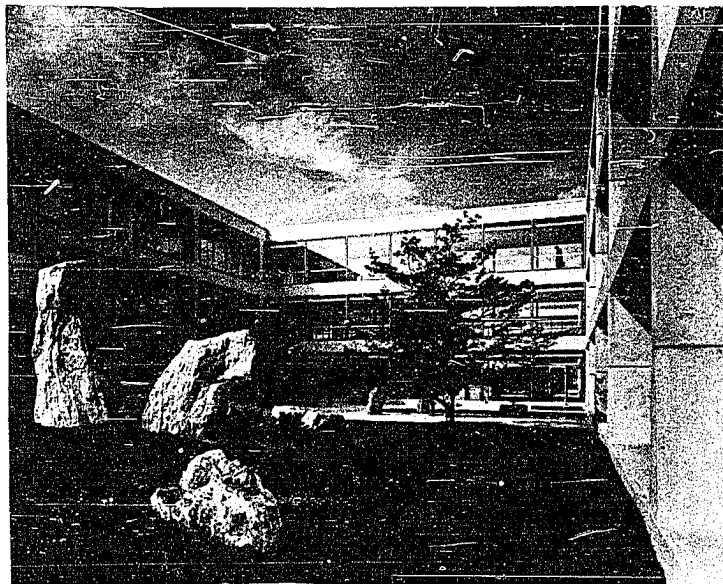


Fig. 157 Noguchi, IBM Garden  
of the Past, 1964, granite

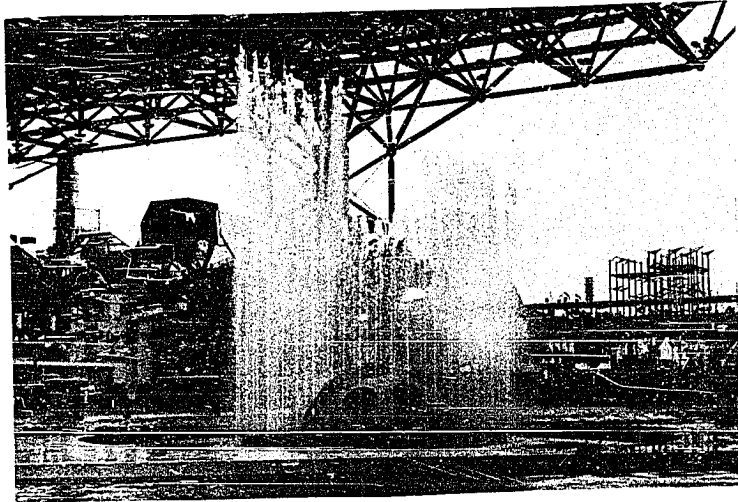


Fig. 158 Noguchi, Expo '70  
Fountains, 1970, stainless  
steel

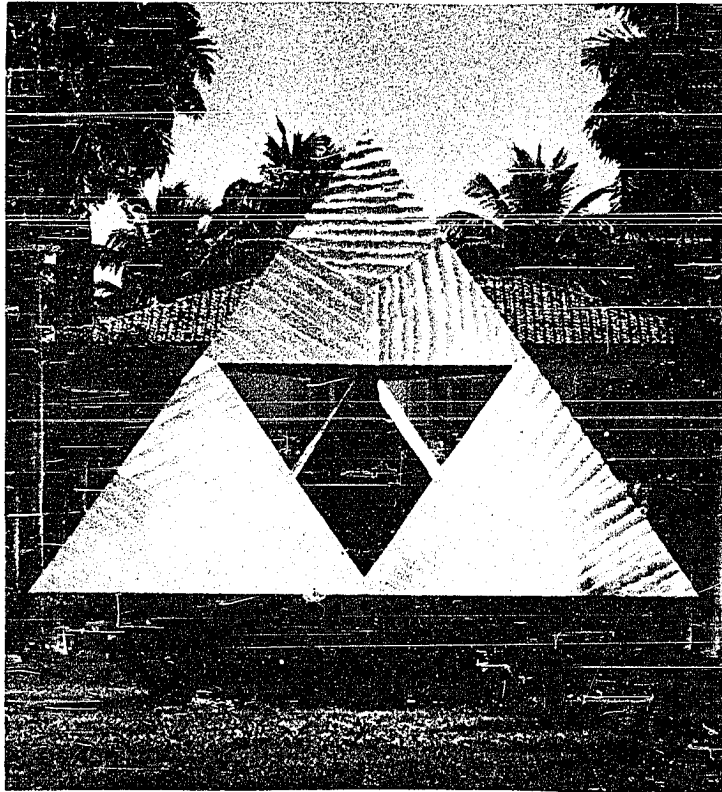


Fig. 159 Noguchi, Intetra  
Fountain, 1974-76, stainless  
steel

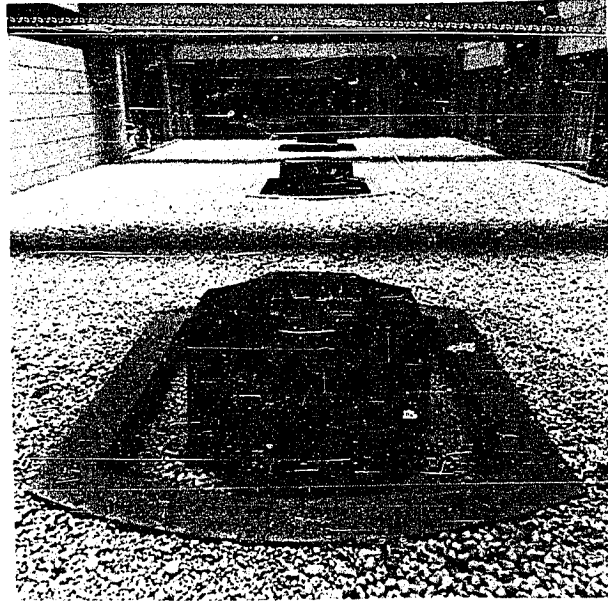


Fig. 160 Noguchi, Supreme  
Court Building Fountains,  
1974, granite

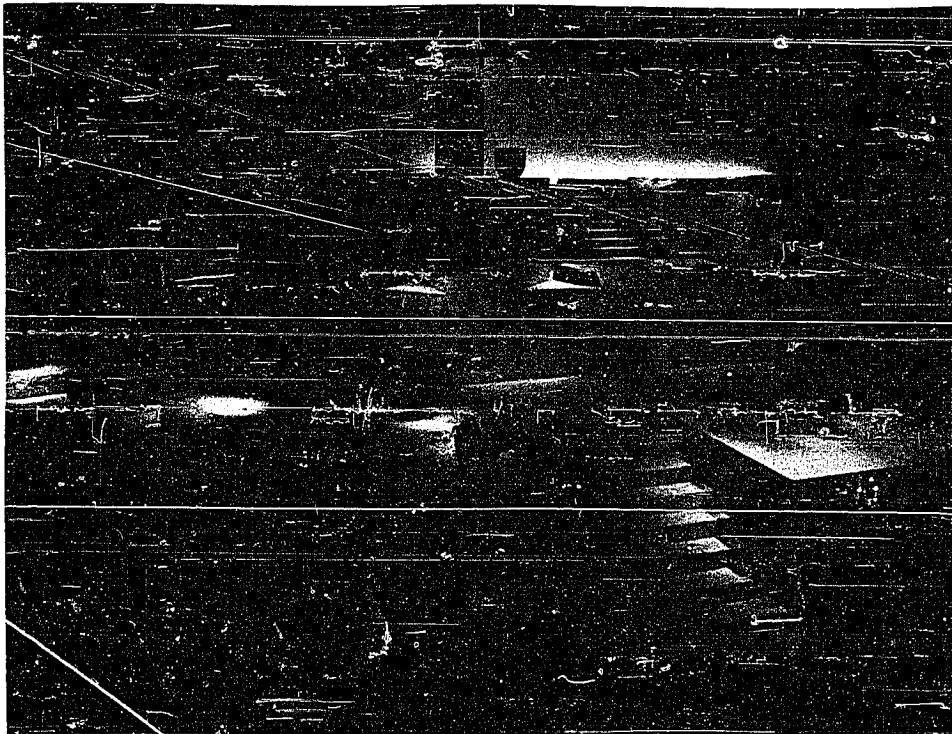


Fig. 161 Noguchi, Heaven,  
1977-78, granite

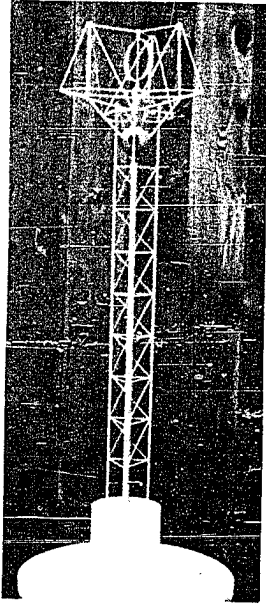


Fig. 162 Noguchi, Friendship Fountain, 1976, wood dowels and metal model

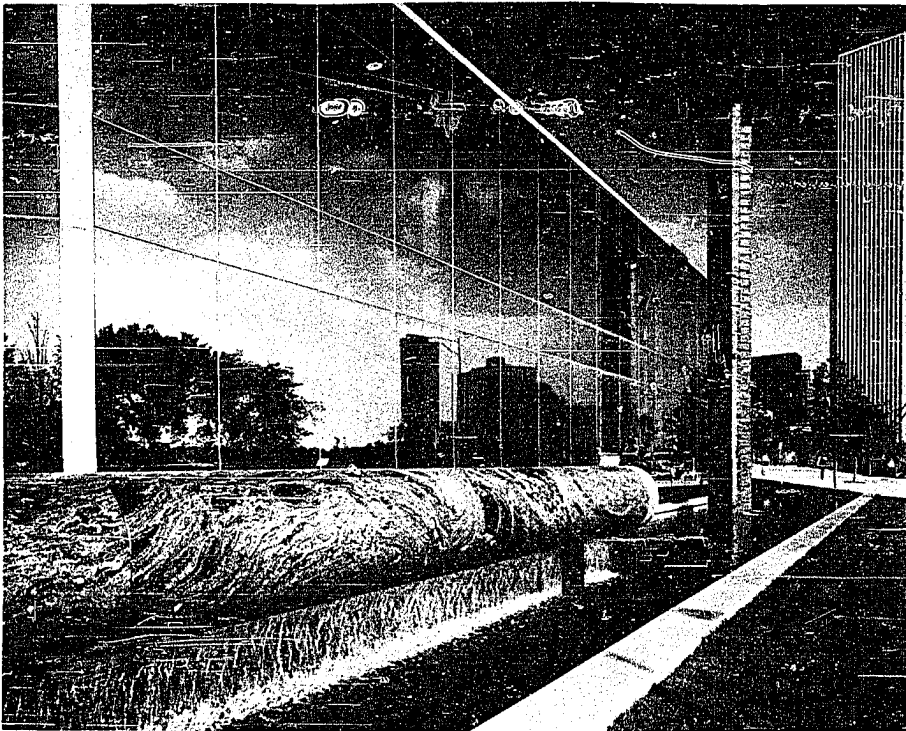


Fig. 163 Noguchi, Bicentennial Fountain, 1976-77, granite and stainless steel



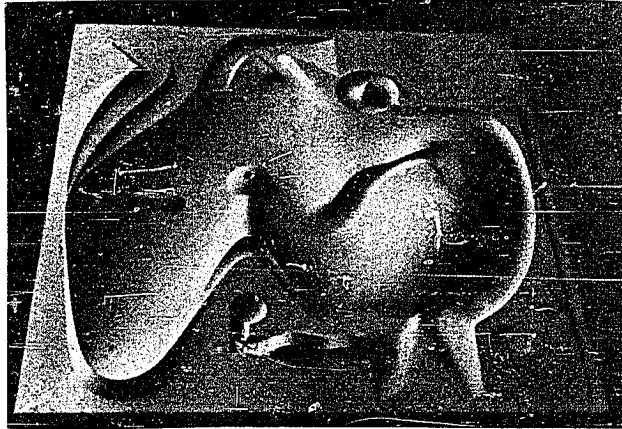


Fig. 164 Noguchi, Contoured  
Playground, 1941, plaster  
model

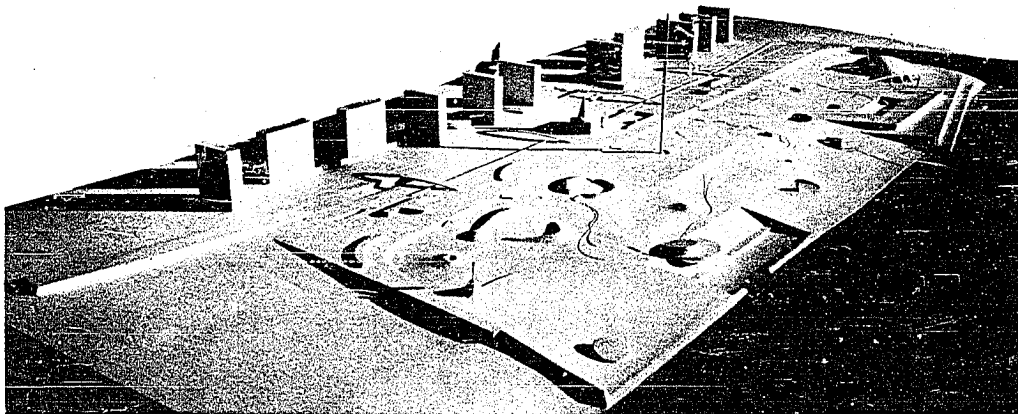


Fig. 165 Noguchi, Jefferson  
Memorial Park, 1945, plaster  
model

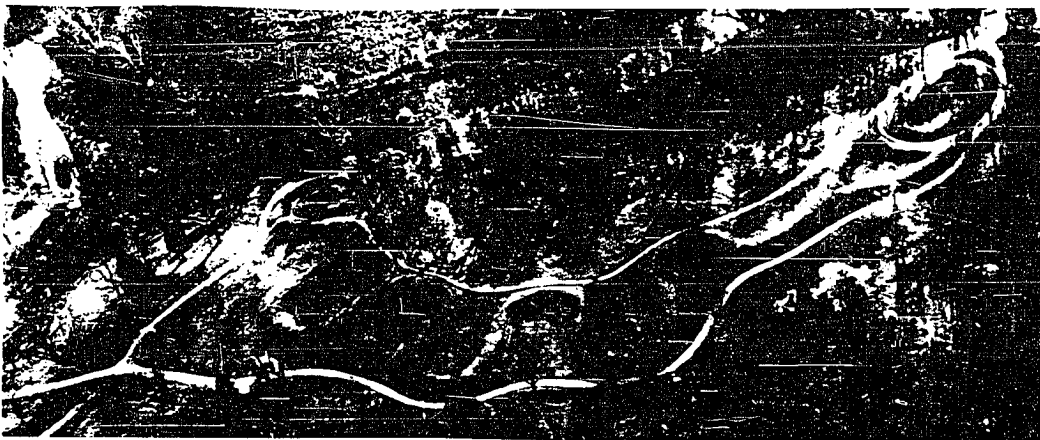


Fig. 166 Great Serpent  
Mound, prehistoric American  
Indian mound, Ohio

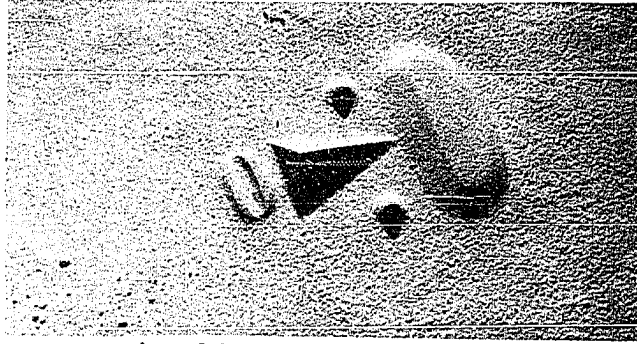


Fig. 167 Noguchi, Sculpture  
to be seen from Mars, 1947,  
sand model

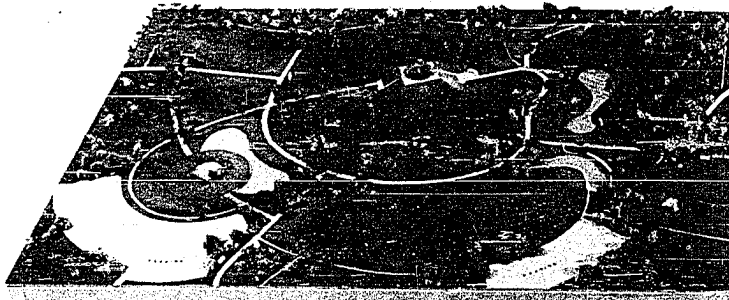


Fig. 168 Noguchi, Park for  
Gandhi's Burial Place at  
Raj-Gat, 1948, plaster model

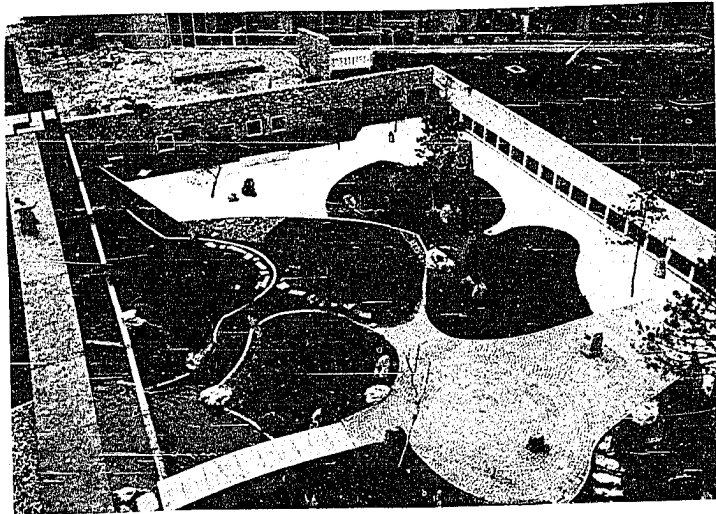


Fig. 169 Noguchi, UNESCO  
Garden, 1956-58



Fig. 170 Noguchi, Jerusalem  
Garden, 1960-65

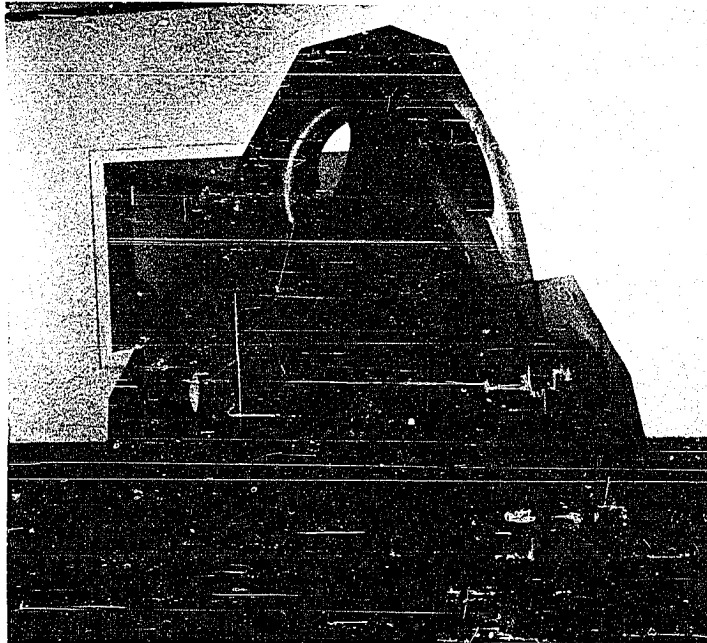


Fig. 171 Noguchi, Octetra,  
1968, fiberglass with gel  
coat



Fig. 172 Noguchi, Memorial to Gandhi, 1948, bronze model

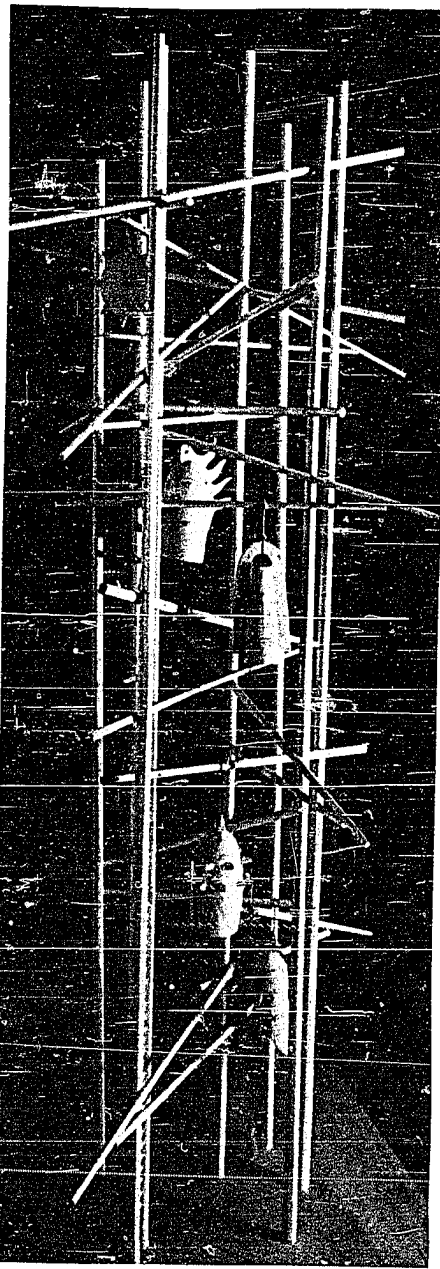


Fig. 173 Noguchi, Bell Tower for Hiroshima, 1950, model in white terracotta with wood frame

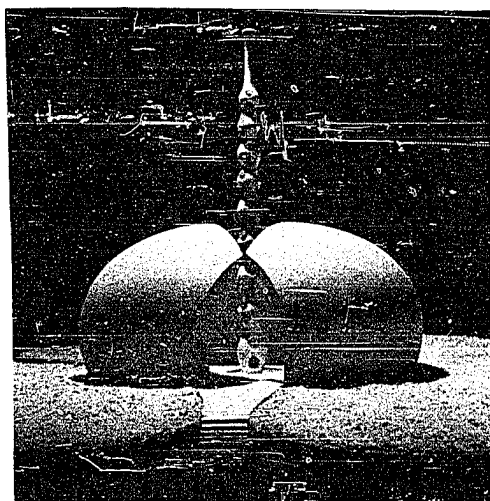


Fig. 174 Noguchi, Memorial to Buddha, 1957, bronze and plaster model



Fig. 175 Noguchi, Project for Lever House, 1952, second plaster model

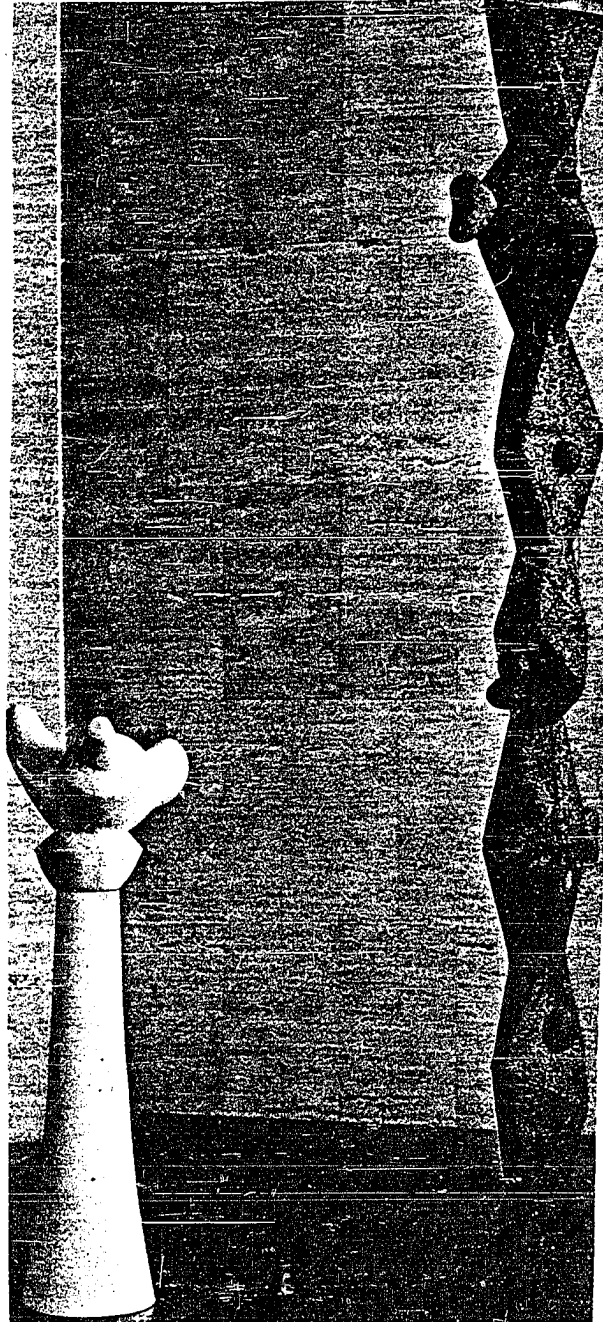


Fig. 176 Noguchi, Bird Song, 1958, Imperial red Swedish granite and Greek marble

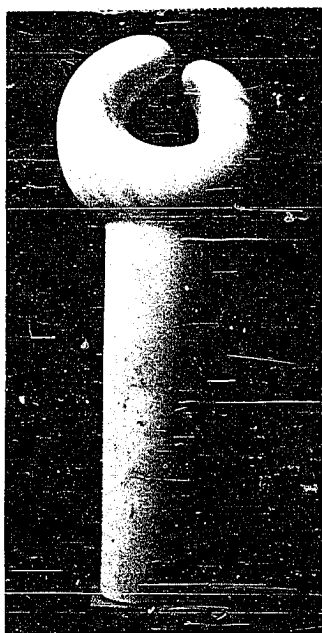


Fig. 177 Noguchi, Bird C  
(Mu), 1952-58, Greek marble

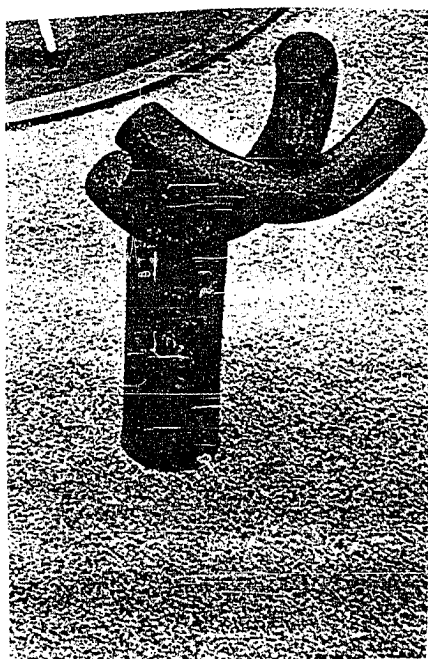


Fig. 178 Noguchi, IBM  
Sculpture, 1964, iron

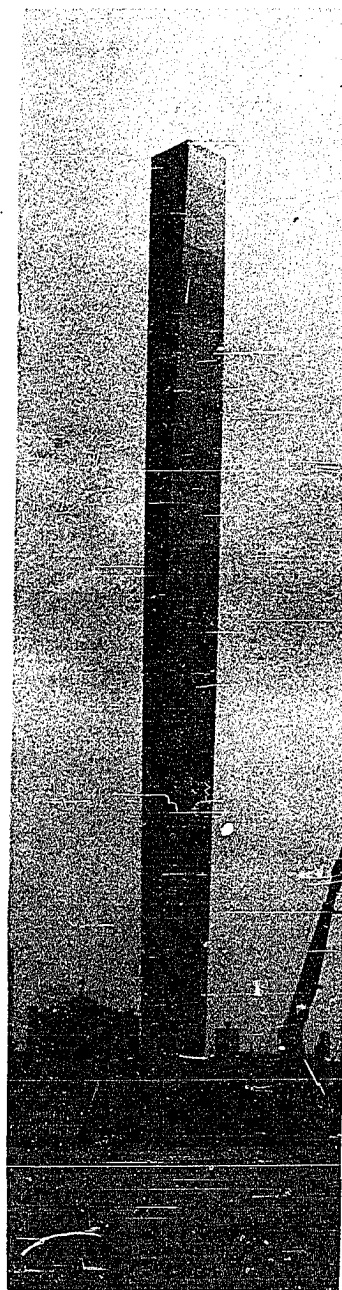


Fig. 179 Noguchi, Pylon,  
1972-79, stainless steel

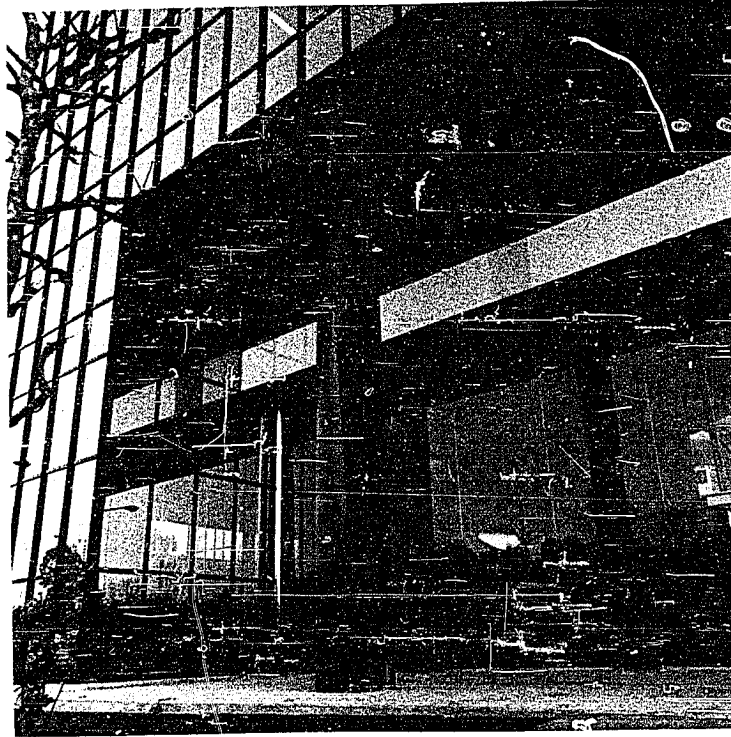


Fig. 180 Noguchi, Pylon,  
1977-78, granite

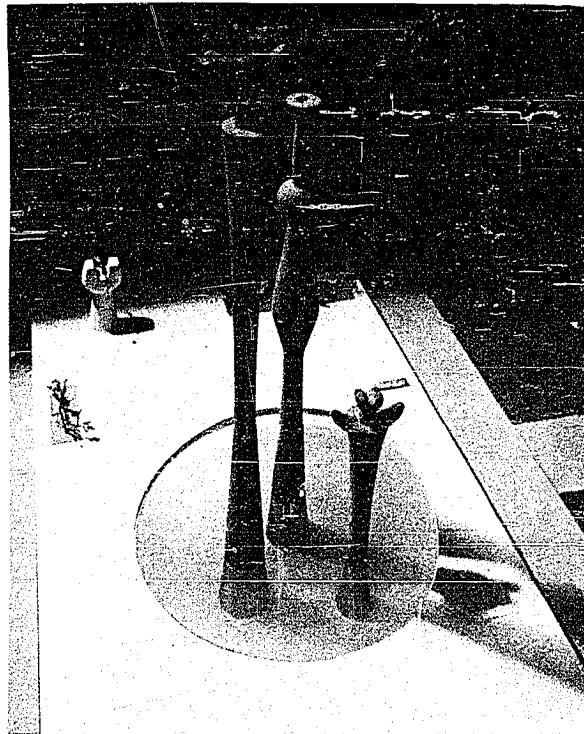


Fig. 181 Noguchi, Project  
for Lever House, 1952, first  
plaster model



Fig. 182 Noguchi, The Family, 1956-57, Stoney Creek granite

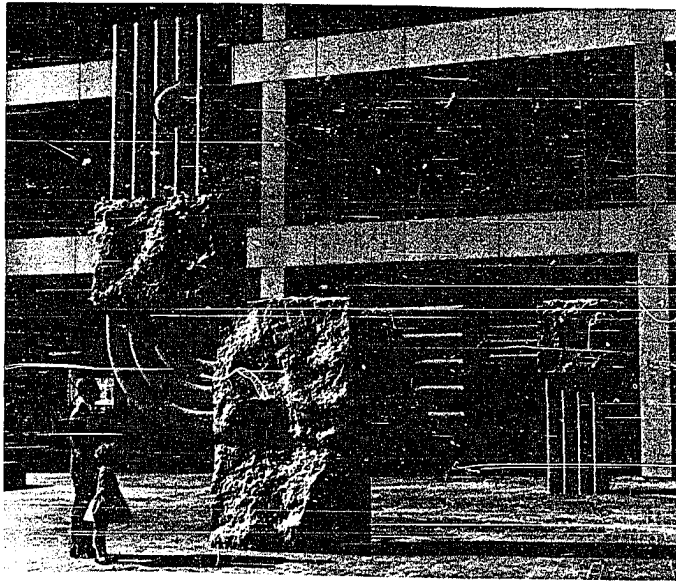


Fig. 183 Noguchi, First  
National City Bank  
Sculptures, 1960-61, Tsukuba  
granite



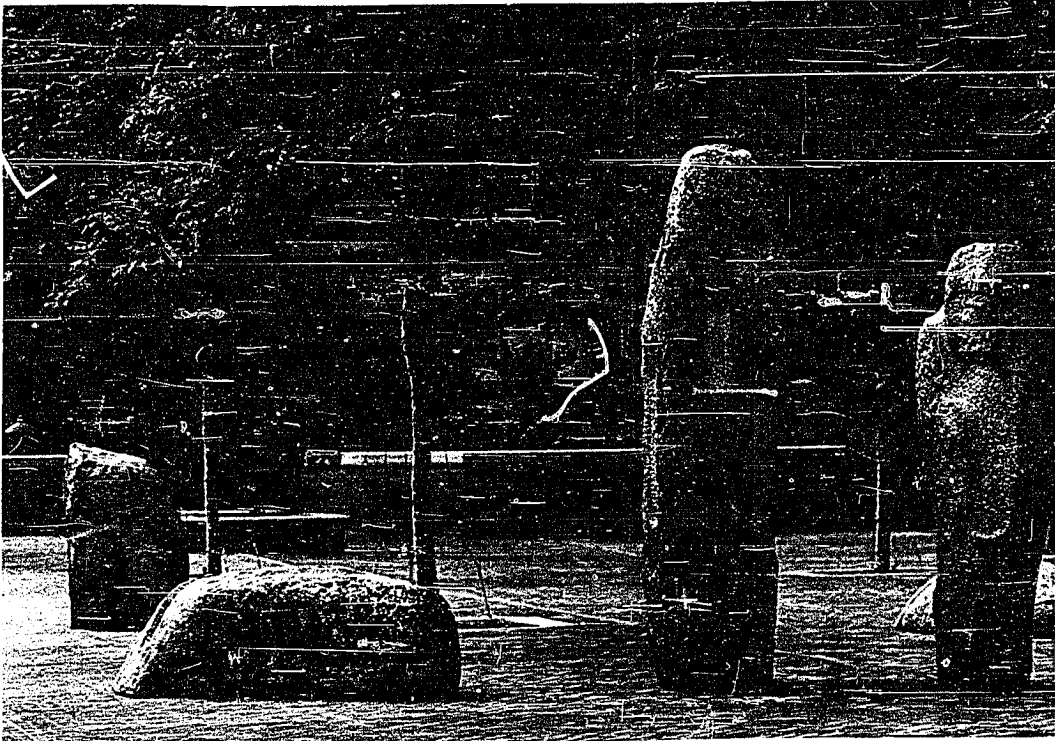


Fig. 184 Noguchi, Landscape  
of Time, 1975, granite



Fig. 185 Noguchi, Momo Taro,  
1977-78, granite



Fig. 186 Noguchi, Readers  
Digest Garden, 1951



Fig. 188 Samrat Yantra,  
astronomical observatory,  
1724, Jaipur, India

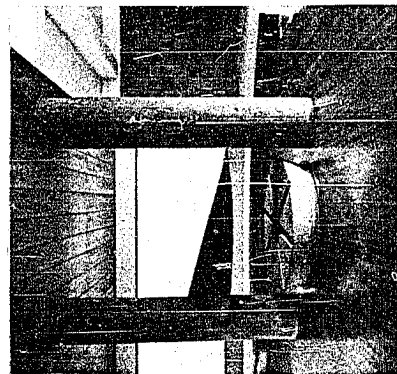


Fig. 187 Noguchi, Shin  
Banraisha Faculty Room and  
Garden, 1951-52

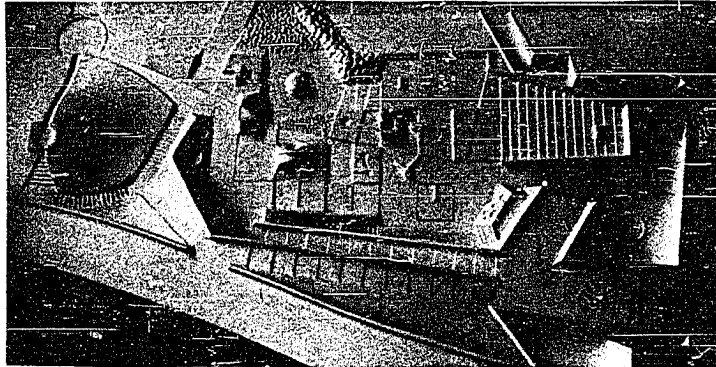


Fig. 189 Noguchi, Riverside  
Playground, 1961-66, bronze  
model

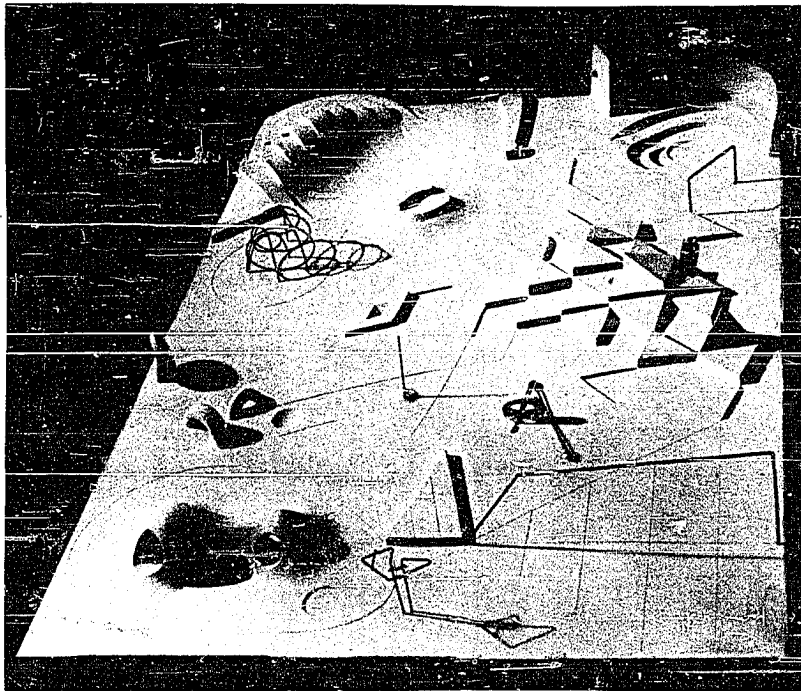


Fig. 190 Noguchi, U.N.  
Playground, 1952, bronze  
model

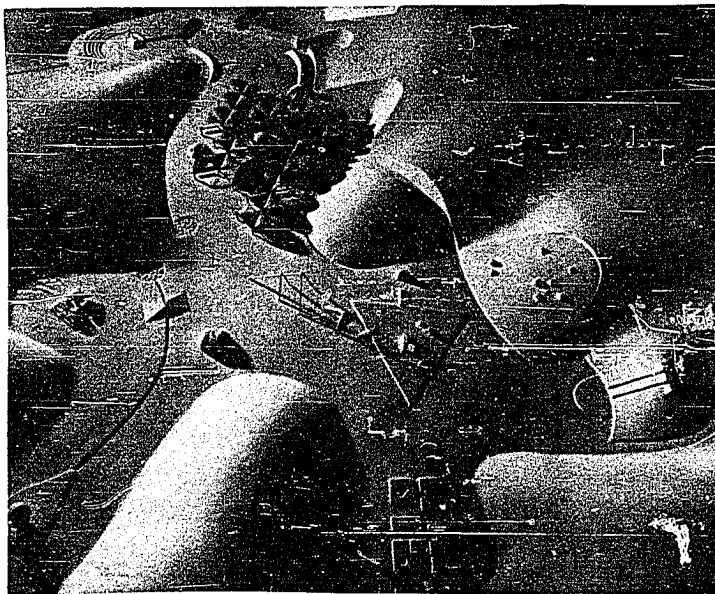


Fig. 191 Noguchi, Kodomo No  
Kuni Playground, 1965-66,  
plaster model

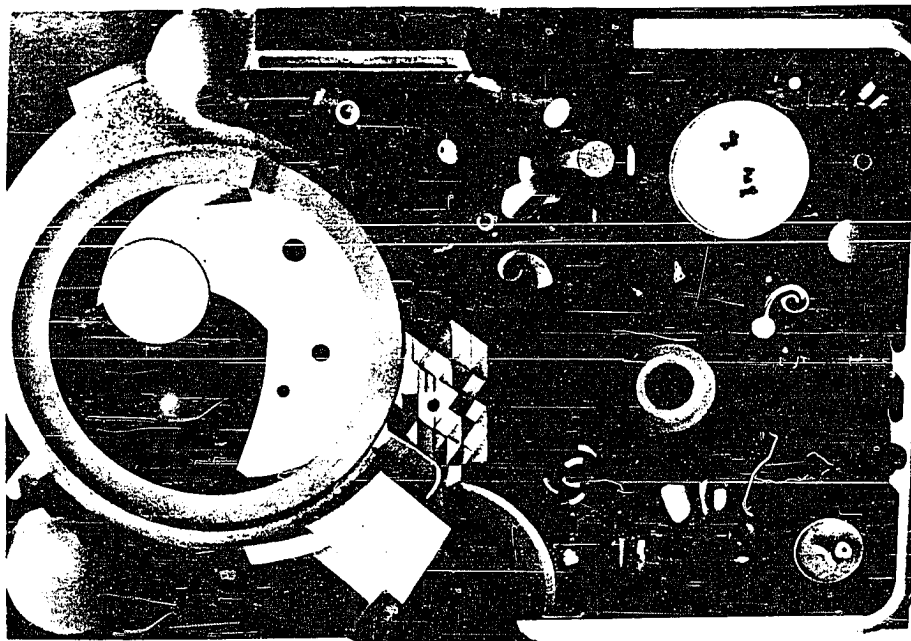


Fig. 192 Noguchi, U.S.  
Pavilion for Expo '70, 1968,  
painted plaster model

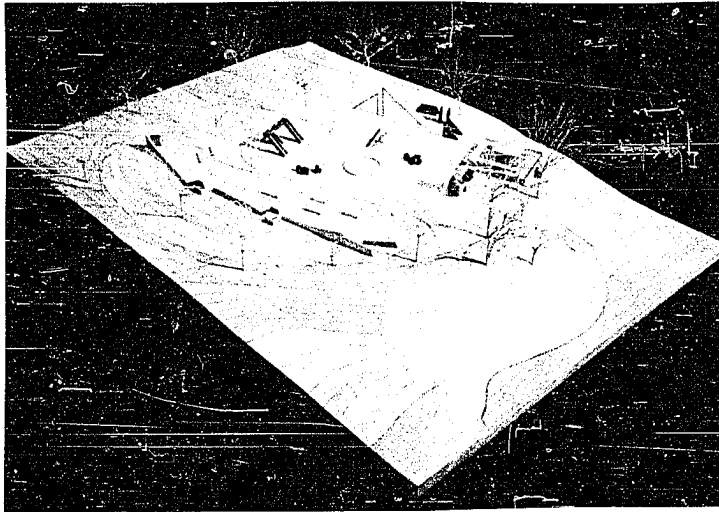


Fig. 193 Noguchi,  
Playscapes, 1975-76, basswood  
model

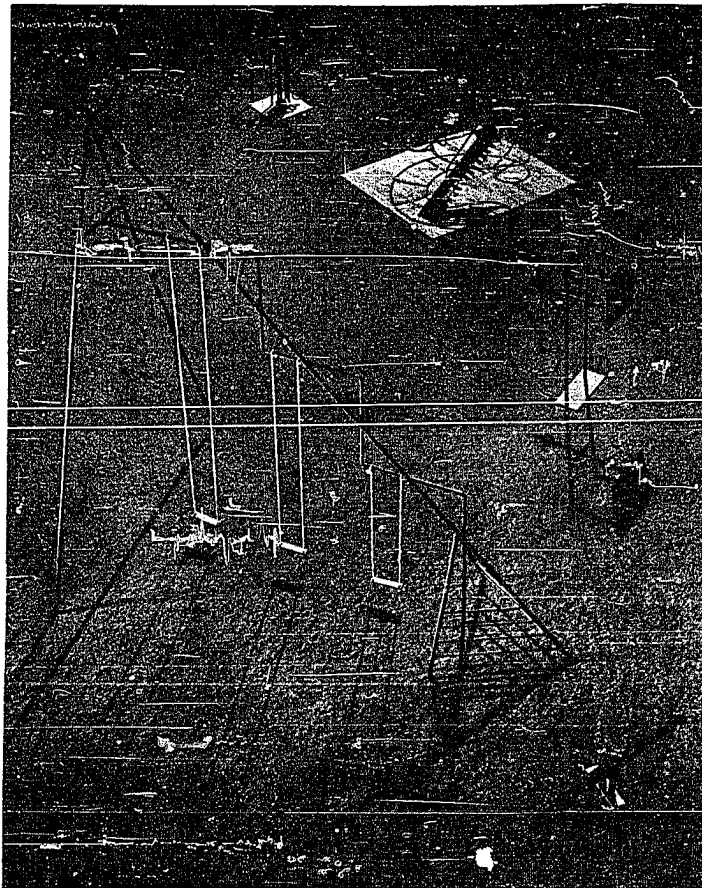


Fig. 194 Noguchi, Playground  
Equipment for Ala Moana Park,  
Hawaii, 1940, metal model

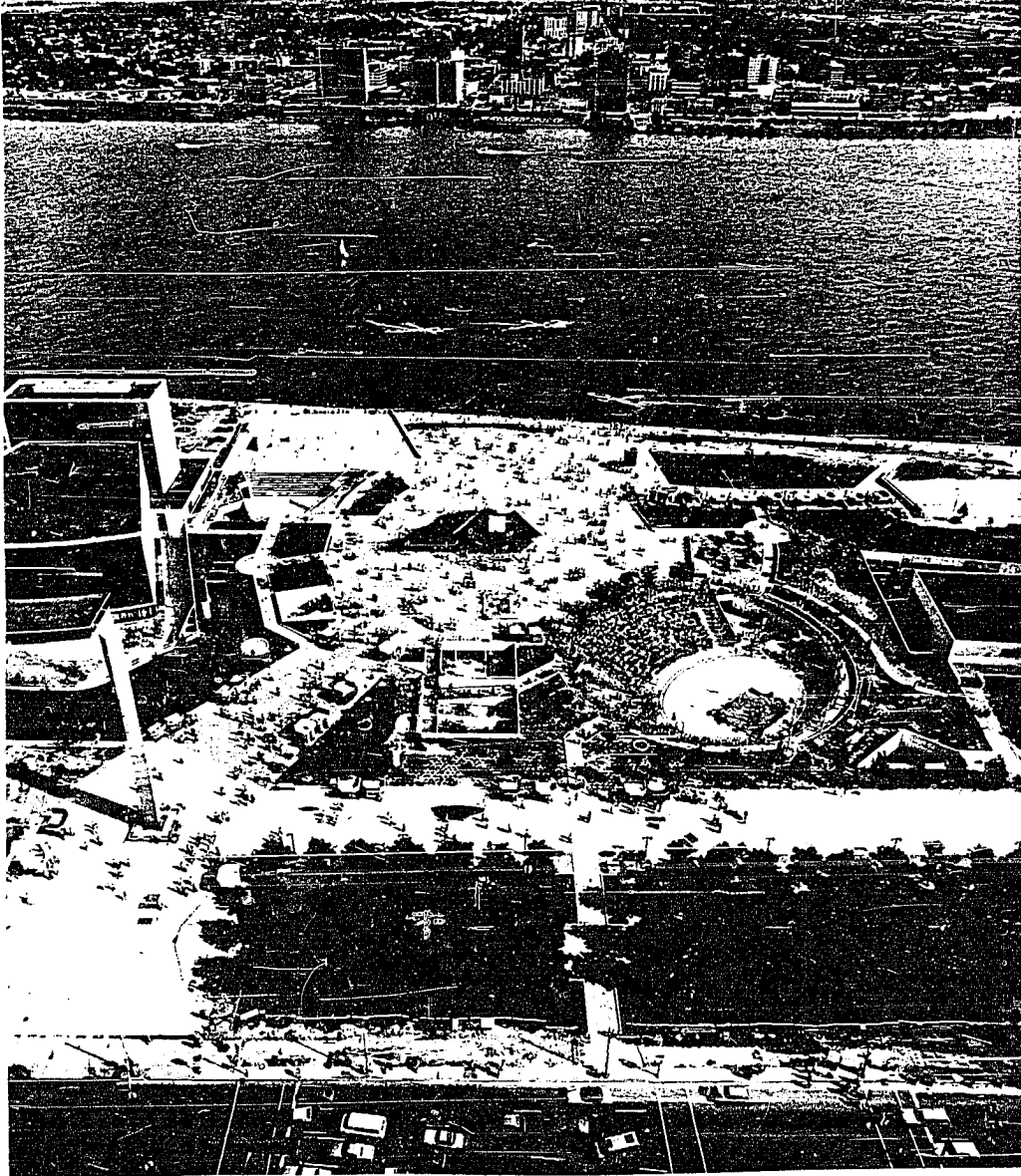


Fig. 195 Noguchi, Philip A.  
Hart Plaza, 1972-79

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