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National College of Art and Design
Faculty of Design
Craft Department

East Meets West -
The relationship between Isamu Noguchi and traditional Japanese
Aesthetics.

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Introduction

The study of traditional Japanese culture has long been a subject of fascination to many in the Western World. Although today Tokyo is one of the most urbanised, cosmopolitan cities in the world, on the whole Japan is still quite conservative, bound by a strict social framework. However the use of traditional aesthetics values is still alive today, evident in the modern manipulation of colour and form in the creation of sophisticated, miniaturized products.

First and foremost, aesthetics is a word used to describe things perceptible by the senses. In Japan they are a system of principals for the appreciation of the beautiful. This extended to the arts, which in Japan are includes everything from, paintings and ceramics. Japanese aestheticism evolved out of an appreciation of nature and respect for natural form and materials.

Shintoism and Zen Buddhism were instrumental in the promotion of reverence for nature. In contemplating nature the Zen practitioner was reminded of its beauty and his close connection with it. This helped him to find his inner spirituality and to achieve his ultimate goal of enlightenment. The appreciation of nature on this level was achieved through a number of aesthetic values principally based on simplicity, self-knowledge and naturalism, especially illustrated in the ritual practice of the tea ceremony.

Isamu Noguchi, a Japanese American sculptor, shared this appreciation of nature and aesthetics. He is generally considered to be a citizen of the world, and ambivalent about his cultural identity. Noguchi traveled the artistic world without national attachment exploring new forms of cultural expression. He searched for a more meaningful sculptural purpose, and a sense of belonging to the world. Sam Hunter, a writer on the life of Noguchi promotes the notion that Noguchi,

Turned the sense of non-belonging in fact, into a series of courageous and aesthetically viable acts of repossession and managed to combine in triumphant synthesis important features of both Eastern and Western traditions (Hunter, 1979, p.24).

This thesis aims to explore the diversity of Noguchi's work as he searched to identify with Japan through the use of Japanese aesthetics. Duality is also an important feature as it explains the obvious contrast of two opposing cultures. This is evident in the way he played with notions of weight and weightlessness.

Chapter One

The Japanese are continually admired for their exciting innovation in design. In a recent U.K. survey 72% of those questioned described Japanese produce as “good value”, “well designed”, and “attractive looking”. In 1989 the commercial value of Tokyo’s produce alone was more than that of the whole British Isles. The key to understanding Japanese success essentially lies in the meaning of the phrase, “mono no aware” which means “to understand and respond to the appeal of objects to the human heart” (Evans, 1991, p.8). This ideal is a Japanese concept, appealing to the aesthetic sensibilities of the consumer.

In general products appeal to us through the image of ourselves we wish to portray. In Japanese products emotive intentions are embedded within, appealing to the consumer on a more personal level. This is translated through the use of colour, form and size. For example, the colour black indicates to the consumer that the product has a serious sophisticated use. Other objects such as everyday items have ordinary colours, so as not to distract the consumer from its’ function. Their forms tend to be simple and lucid, allowing the consumer to understand a product’s purpose.

The use of miniaturization displays the complexity and the technology used to create compact, efficient, space saving products. The roots of these ideas can be found in traditional Japanese arts and crafts, from

the way they organize interior and exterior space, to the natural spiritual status attributed to tea bowls used in the tea ceremony. Such designs were deliberately simple and manipulated to appeal emotionally. Today the same ideals are adapted to the most common of urbanised products in a less profound manner.

Isamu Noguchi, a Japanese American sculptor displays a lot of emotive ideas in his work through the use of traditional Japanese aesthetics. This is evident in his use of materials, which he has claimed had an inner spiritual purpose of their own, when he said, "...your hands think and follows the thoughts of the material..." (Threlfall, 1992, p.79).

Noguchi's first encounter with these strong aesthetic traditions was during his childhood years in Japan. On his return visits throughout his life he became much more intrigued with aesthetics.

In Japan Noguchi was considered to be a westerner, he knew his identity went much deeper as he proclaimed, "...my father Yone Noguchi, is Japanese and has long been known as an interpreter of the East and the West through poetry. I wish to do the same with sculpture..." (Hunter, 1979, p.34).

Noguchi aspired to unite two vastly different cultures in sculptural harmony as his father had achieved through poetry.

This was not going to be an easy task. Western artists were encouraged to be innovative and individual in their work. Japan on

the other hand, praised group identity and rejected individualism as an expression of egotism. In the West man was master over nature, whereas in the East man was seen as equal to or level with nature. Torn between two contrasting cultural influences, Noguchi was often criticized for his paradoxical works.

Before launching the main discussion, it is important to give a brief history to understand the roots of the strong aesthetic tradition of Japan and its lack of regard for the industrialised West. In 1637, having seen how contact with the West had contaminated life in China and India, the Japanese decided to completely end communication with the outside world. A strict code of behaviour was imposed for example, according to one's social standing one was obliged to wear clothes in particular colours. A uniform of social class, so to speak. If anyone attempted to move to a higher social standing, the punishment was severe.

Contact with the outside world was ignored for two whole centuries. During this time the Japanese operated a self-sufficient social hierarchical country. A country built on respect from child to parent, from student to teacher and so forth. In return, care extended downwards, power meant responsibility, which could never be abused.

During these years of isolation the arts flourished. Craftsmen and artists alike became perfectionists of their trade. Without outside influence, they searched within their own country for inspiration,

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which they derived mainly from nature. Their regard for beauty and aesthetic values was weaved into every practice within daily living. In a country preserved from the pollution of industry and technology, nature was given enormous respect and value.

However, existing as if the rest of the world did not, Japan had to face facts; they were ill-equipped to defeat military force; and they had no choice but to open their ports to trade. To justify the industrialisation of their country the Japanese derived knowledge and technology from the West to compete on equal terms. For ordinary citizens this was too much to grasp. They began to re-evaluate their once precious heritage with the fear that they were becoming too Western. This resulted in a new sense of nationalism and aesthetic pride.

By the mid 1930s Japan aimed to become a military world power. Economically, they were already competing on a large scale. In their ship building industry, they ranked the third largest producers in the world. However war started in 1941, by 1942 it became clear that defeat was the inevitable outcome. To surrender was not considered honourable and the war was eventually ended by two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Japan was totally devastated, their industries lay in ruins. Noguchi reported in 1950 how the war had had a profound effect on Japan. He stated, "...when all the possibilities of modern technologies are lost, one returns once more to the basic things, to basic materials, to basic thoughts..." (Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P. 94).

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Artists and craftsmen realized once again the importance of their aesthetic values and principles that had once been a major part of every practice within daily living. Noguchi, coming from a successfully industrialized America found in Japan the freedom to express himself in mediums that allowed him to work without restriction. Japan gave Noguchi the freedom to work expressively in clay, paper, wood and especially stone, a freedom he could not realize in an urbanized New York environment where. "It seems absurd to be working with rocks and stones...where walls of glass and steel are our horizon, and our landscape is that of boxes piled high in the air"(Hunter, 1979, P.112).

Born in Los Angeles in 1904, Noguchi grew up in Japan until the age of thirteen when he was sent to America to be educated. He received almost no support emotionally or financially. Adopted by an American family during his education in Indiana. Noguchi learned to support himself selling newspapers or packing furnaces. He graduated from La Porte High School in 1922 and went to New York. After an unsuccessful attempt to train with the monumental sculptor Gutzon Borglum, Noguchi decided on a career in medicine. During this time his mother arrived in New York after many years of absence and led Noguchi back into art, determined that he would be a sculptor.

In 1927, he received the Guggenheim Fellowship which allowed him to travel to Paris. In Paris, he had the fortunate experience of meeting and working with his most recent hero Brancusi. Noguchi spoke of him as being, "...like the Japanese..." in the way he would "...take

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the quintessence of nature and distill it.” Brancusi taught Noguchi “The truth of materials...” and “...never to decorate or paste unnatural materials” on to his sculptures but rather to “...keep them undecorated like the Japanese house” (Cappadona, 1981, P.79).

Brancusi was obviously influenced by Japan, and was instrumental in reawakening Noguchi’s heritage and respect for nature’s purity and beauty. Noguchi proclaimed the desire, “...to see nature through nature’s eyes, and to ignore man as an object for special veneration”(Altshuler, 1994, P. 105). So intimate was his relationship with nature that his life’s work was a manifestation of his ambition.

The Japanese people had a great respect for nature. This is obvious in their treatment of natural materials. One main belief of the Shinto religion was that when a person dies, their spirit left their body and wandered the earth, living in trees, plants and stones. When selecting materials for the interior of the home the Japanese select woods with matching grains and colours. These pieces would be simply planed and varnished. Most were included almost completely in their natural state. This serves a psychological role within the home, reminding the occupants of the natural environment to which they are closely connected.

It was important not to change the natural form of the material too much in case the religious spirit or God as it was often known, of the pieces was disturbed. This spiritual nature of the material was often cited by Noguchi, particularly when he expressed, “...sometimes out

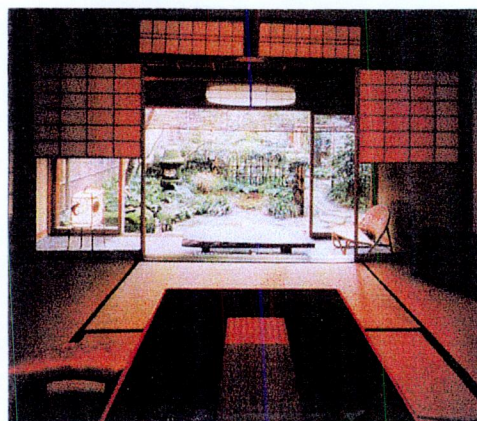
of despair when we have given up, the stone itself sends a message”(Noguchi, 1987, P.44).

On this account Japanese aesthetics take the form of an appreciation of nature, it's beauty and spirit.

If one was to ask a Japanese person why their home was cold in winter and warm in summer it would be explained that it has been historically adopted to change with the seasons. If asked why they don't use furniture but instead kneel on a mat, they reply that the mat is more comfortable. If one inquired why they sleep on a mattress on the floor, the answer would be that the floor provides better rest.

Thomas Hoover, author of the book *Zen Culture* explains,

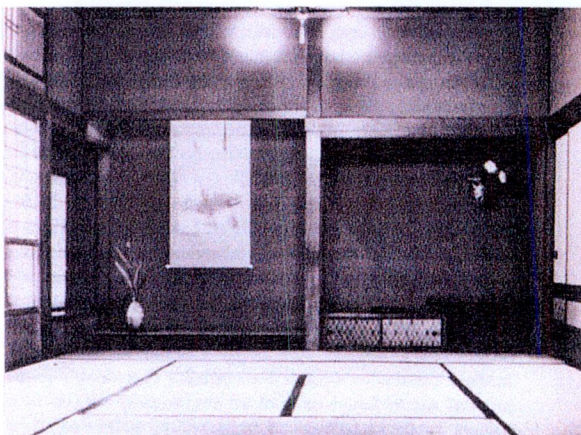
What he will not say since he assumes a Westerner cannot comprehend it is that through these seemingly physical privations, he finds shelter for the inner man...
(Hoover, 1989, P.131).



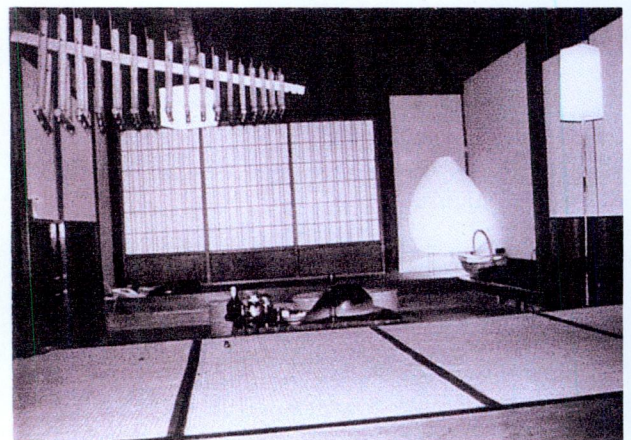
(Figure 1) Traditional Japanese interior and garden.

The house situated in the natural surroundings must look as if it is part of that environment, hence the strong emphasis on natural materials. In Zen philosophy, the garden is considered to be an extension of one's inner self. Therefore the integration of exterior and interior is extremely important (Figure 1). Rice paper was stretched over the windows creating semi-transparent screens allowing natural light to penetrate the interior. Japanese interiors on the whole convey an image of neutrality and harmony within simplicity, therefore not allowing man to dominate but rather become one with his natural surroundings.

Noguchi understandably wanted to create a Japanese style house (Figure 2) to live in with an affection for the natural light projected through rice paper screens and for hard surfaces. Noguchi set up a Japanese style apartment for himself in New York, then in the late 1980s he built a home in Mure on the Japanese island of Shikoku (Figure 3). His homes were distinctly Japanese with everything accessible from a ground floor level.



(Figure 2)
Traditional Japanese interior.



(Figure 3)
Noguchi's interior.

When working natural materials such as clay, the Japanese respected the purity of the material. Like Brancusi, it seemed wrong to paint or decorate its surface. Having learned it first from Brancusi, Noguchi later pursued this ideal in relation to ceramic traditions on his initial return to Japan since his childhood. He connected with the sensuousness of the clay and how fast and freely work could be produced.

During the industrialisation of Japan in the 1870s many ceramic traditions declined until almost out of existence. Some ceramic wear traditions survived because of their role in the tea ceremony. Out of the many pottery traditions Raku became the most profound, playing a vital role in the tea ceremony. Raku basically means 'pleasure' or 'comfort'. In this tradition imperfections on the surface of the piece were welcomed. The natural texture and rough surfaces of objects were a sign of strength and freedom.

During the tea ceremony, whilst drinking out of Raku vessels, the shape, form and texture is contemplated while held in the hand. Such imperfections illustrated how the maker worked intuitively with the material respecting its natural expression. As John Ruskin stated in regard to this tradition, "...imperfection is in some sort essential to all we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body...to banish imperfection is to destroy expression" (Hoover, 1989, P.195). Considering Ruskin was an English critic, this was a bold statement in the nineteenth century western art world where the,

“...perfect symmetrical polished form was the aesthetic ideal...”
(Hoover, 1989, P.195).

Raku pieces were fired in kilns at high temperatures. Cracks and burns on the surface were not regarded as mistakes or poor craftsmanship but rather as the materials process of purpose. Noguchi's first opportunity to work successfully with clay came in 1930 in Kyoto Japan, under the stewardship of Jimmotsu Uno. While working with Uno, Noguchi lived in the small ditch-diggers cottage. It was a humble existence that tied him closer to nature, which supplied the raw material for his work.

It was during his second visit to Japan some twenty years later that Noguchi's ceramic work reached its full potential. He met and worked with Rosanjin Kitoaji, one of Japan's most popular ceramists. The two artists shared similar ideas and an appreciation for nature. Kitoaji gave Noguchi a cottage to live in with his new wife, Shirley Yamaguchi, a famous Japanese actress. He allowed Noguchi to use his kilns and his clay. Here on a hillside with a spectacular view of the rice fields, Noguchi built a studio integrated with the land, made mainly from mud and wood, once again in accordance with Japanese tradition. It was here that Noguchi felt completely one with nature as he explained:

...each day a wonder of discovery to me. So intimate is nature here, not only before the eye, it invades one's being till the memory of all its various sites are like a symphony to be heard at all time...
(Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P.101).

1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject of the study.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the methods used in the study.

3. The third part of the report is a discussion of the results of the study.

4. The fourth part of the report is a conclusion and a list of references.

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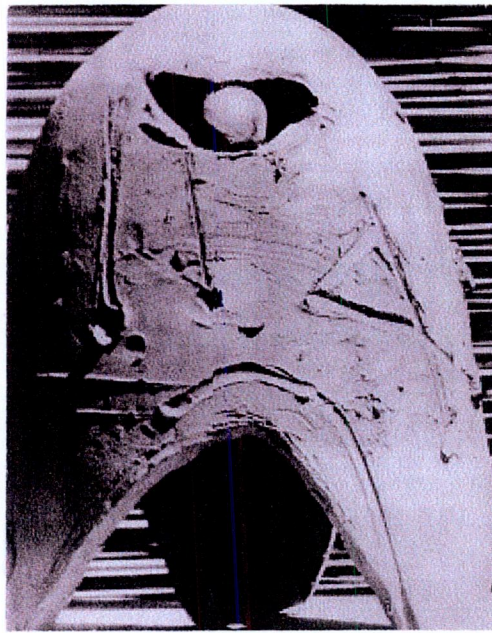
Noguchi often spoke of childhood memories in Japan and how close he was to nature then but he explains, "...to know nature again as an adult, to exhaust one's hand in its earth...one has to be a potter or a sculptor and that in Japan..." (Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P.101).

What Noguchi achieved through the use of clay could have been experienced in no other place than Japan, as it was his familiarity with the land, the people and traditions that allowed his work to be so free in expression.

Noguchi believed that clay was central to his becoming a sculptor as he found in the material a spirit he would carry through his life's work. In his exploration of clay Noguchi discovered the sensuousness of the material and the "truth of materials" as spoke of by Brancusi. Through clay Noguchi was able to identify his affinity with nature and rediscovered a part of his Japanese heritage he had lost. Nature was now a characteristic of his work, as he stated,

...whatever quality my work now has, is I hope at of nature, that is to say the result of our communication...the medium which is the earth itself has its own way – and the fires of the kilns burn away my petty prides...
(Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P.101).

During this time spent with Kitoaji, Noguchi created "Mr. One Man" (Figure 4) a ceramic terracotta piece approximately 30 centimeters high. It looks like a vessel overturned. Its surface is rough and scratched with regular images as is characteristic of traditional Japanese pottery. Its surface is left free of artificial colour allowing the natural quality of the material to expose itself.



(Figure 4) "Mr One Man"

Another piece, "Curtain of Dream" (Figure 5) also displays aesthetic characteristics of rough edges and irregular pattern and form. In this piece the glaze didn't evenly reach all areas. It was burned and scorched by the kiln's heat. This is an obvious characteristic of Raku vessels (Figure 6), as Thomas Hoover reports on the glaze of some Raku pieces, "...the glaze...never manages to reach and it is uneven, marred by cracks, lumps, scratches and foreign contaminants..." (Hoover, 1989, P.196).



(Figure 5) "Curtain of Dream".



(Figure 6) Raku vessel.

Whilst under the stewardship of Kitoaji, Noguchi was encouraged to create utilitarian objects such as vessels and dishes. It was an attempt to make sculpture more accessible to ordinary people. Noguchi used frog, centipede and natural grass imagery on these forms. He described these functional forms as, "Sculpture that lay down" (Hunter, 1979, P.100).

In 1954 on his return from Japan, Noguchi exhibited these works in New York's Stable Gallery. On the whole critics were unable to understand these pieces which were very inaccessible to Western living. They were thought of as humorous and described as "cute". As a result not a single piece was sold. Such criticism allowed Noguchi to reassess exactly what he was trying to achieve by fusing function with sculpture.

More importantly, Noguchi's identity with clay lay the aesthetic foundation of his life's work and the desire, "...To see nature through nature's eyes..." (Sheffield, 1980, P.72). Clay was just the beginning of an enthusiastic aesthetic journey to achieve beauty through the expression of sculpture.

1. The first part of the report discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that this is essential for the proper management of the organization's finances and for ensuring compliance with relevant regulations.

2. The second part of the report provides a detailed overview of the current financial position of the organization. It includes a summary of the income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow statement, highlighting key trends and areas of concern.

3. The third part of the report outlines the proposed budget for the upcoming year. It details the expected revenue, expenses, and capital expenditures, and provides a justification for the proposed allocations.

4. The fourth part of the report discusses the proposed changes to the organization's financial policies and procedures. It includes recommendations for improving internal controls, enhancing transparency, and ensuring compliance with best practices.

5. The fifth part of the report provides a summary of the key findings and recommendations. It emphasizes the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the financial performance, and for regular communication with the board of directors and other stakeholders.

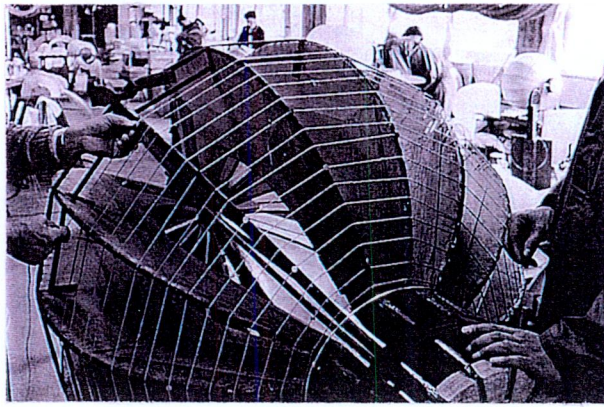
6. The final part of the report includes a list of references and a glossary of terms. It also provides a brief overview of the organization's financial history and a list of the key personnel involved in the preparation of the report.

Chapter Two

Noguchi believed in the direct interaction of sculpture in everyday life. He challenged western customary beliefs in the relationship between art and life and he continually sought a way of integrating the useful with the purely aesthetic. In Noguchi's eyes, functional objects were sculptural if their presence indulged that environment with aesthetic beauty.

During Noguchi's second visit to Japan in 1951, he travelled to the town of Gifu where he became acquainted with the tradition of lantern making. In ways this was the next development stage to his lunar sculptures of the 1940s which contained an internal light source. Noguchi was not content with artificial light illuminating his sculptures. He discovered a way of integrating the light source with the work, giving it greater emphasis. Noguchi was invited to Gifu by the city mayor in the hope that he would give new life to this tradition.

The lanterns were made from fine rice paper and a spiral bamboo structure (Figure 7). When not in use they could fold away into an envelope. The original lanterns were illuminated by candlelight and its exterior was often painted with common scenery, they were only brought out on festive occasions. Noguchi did not decorate his lanterns in the traditional fashion and adopted an electric light source so that the lamps could be used on a daily basis.



(Figure 7) Traditional lamp.

Noguchi's design could be folded and packed away like the traditional lanterns, making his work highly functional. In the traditional Japanese interior nothing is shelved apart from a hand painted scroll or a vase with a flower in it. This idea, 'Shibui' comes from Zen which mainly means the exclusion of all that is not in use or immediately essential. Everything is packed away until needed, Noguchi's design was applied to this idea.

He called his new designs 'Akari',

...in Japanese means 'light' as illumination just as our word 'light' does. It also suggests lightness as opposed to weight, the ideograph combines that of the sun and moon, the ideal of Akari is therein exemplified with lightness (as essence) and light for awareness...
(Noguchi, 1987, P.33)

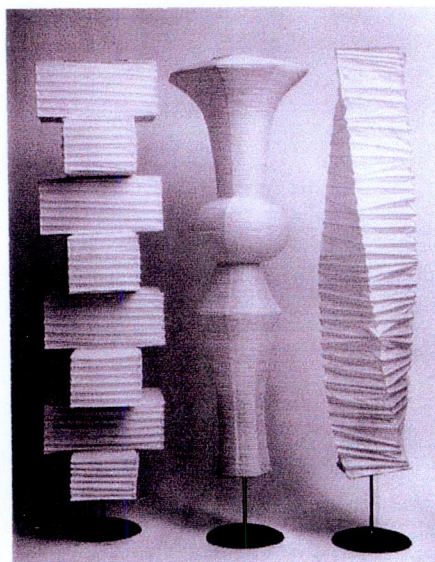
Functionality of the Akari was important. Noguchi was also concerned with the quality of light that was shed. He felt in the handmade paper there was an air of human warmth, which lacked in machine-made modern materials. Even though the candles were gone, the warmth remained in the textured paper and the bamboo. Noguchi explained; "...as a foil to our harsh mechanized existence,

they recall an older quieter time to relax us..."(Cappadona & Alshuler,1994, P.104).

Noguchi also expressed a notion that he had been inspired by the way light penetrated the Shoji (screens) in the traditional homes, as he said

I think this sort of thing comes from my recollection of Japan and the Shoji and the light coming from outside inside, so eventually you end up inside the light...
(Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P.148).

Noguchi brought his first two Akari back to New York where he began to arrange them for manufacture and distribution. He continued to produce Akari for the next twenty-five years, experimenting with the more complex shapes and forms. In 1962 he adopted the florescent tubes as a light source but later dropped it from the line of production because it proved to be too bright. Noguchi created a freestanding lamp that would remain standing, it had a metal base and rods to fold the form and once again was covered with rice paper (Figure 8).

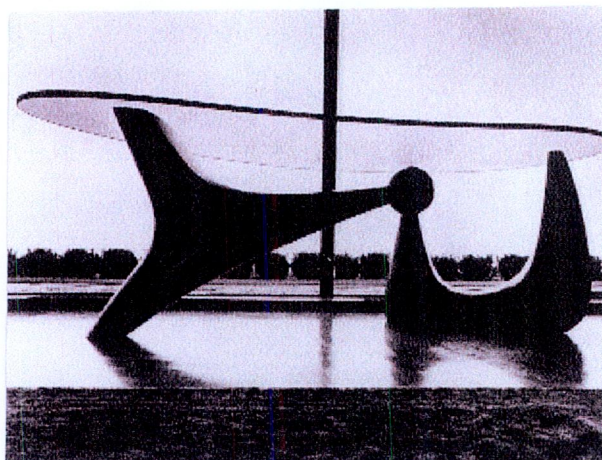


(Figure 8) Freestanding lamps.

He was often troubled by cheap imitations of his work so he continued to develop the Akari in an attempt to leave the imitators behind. Towards the end of the 1960s, Noguchi created a limited edition of thirty unique pieces which were more expensive. Through the creation of Akari, Noguchi was able to create unique interiors giving them a quality of human warmth. He successfully achieved his goal of integrating function and sculpture, bringing it in an acceptable way into the lives of many. Noguchi believed that everyone who possessed an Akari also owned a piece of art,

“...so long as it's useful, it's lacking in that quality of art. When it becomes useless, it becomes art. The Akari, if it didn't have a bulb in it could be mistaken for art...”
(Cappadona and Altshuler, 1994, P.140).

So therefore when it is switched off it is a piece of art, when it is illuminated, it's a lamp. Illustrated in figure 8 it is obvious what Noguchi means by this statement as the lamps are very sculptural in nature.



(Figure 9) Table commission.

1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject.

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4. The fourth part of the report is a conclusion and a list of references.

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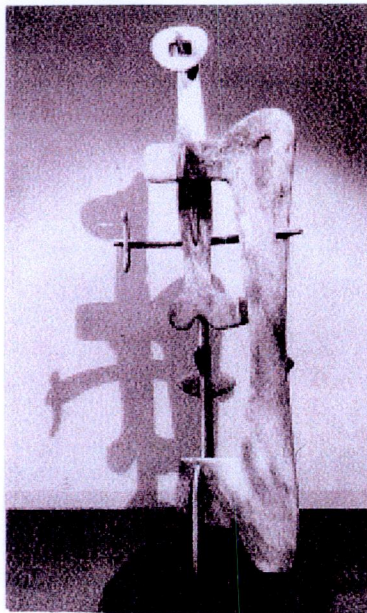
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Noguchi designed a range of other functional items prior to the Akari. In 1939, he designed his first piece of furniture commissioned by the president of the Museum of Modern Art. It had a low glass top with wooden three-dimensional supports (Figure 9). By 1944 the design was redeveloped and it was manufactured in 1947, which resulted in a commercial success.

Noguchi also made many attempts to create a sculptural environment for the exterior as well as the interior. This begun with functional playground designs for children. These sculptural ideas were never really accepted or appreciated. The criticism Noguchi received during these years drove him further away from the world of commercial art to find a more satisfying sculptural means of expression.



(Figure 10) "Kouros"



(Figure 11) Japanese Calligraphy.

Noguchi did not adhere to any strict stylistic category. However between 1944 and 1947, Noguchi produced a series of stone carved

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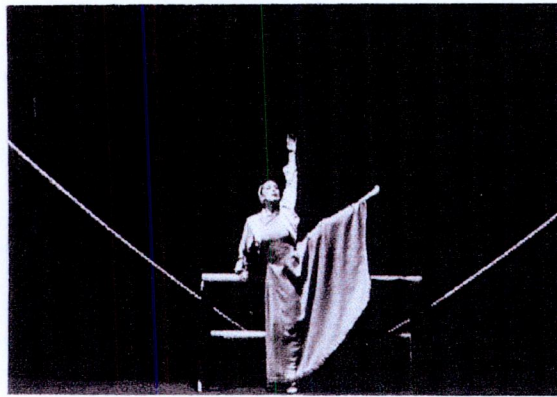
balancing structures, such as 'Kouros' (Figure 10), these pieces were constructed without the use of adhesives and slotted together in defiance of gravity. Such works established him a major figure in American art. It is argued that these balanced sculptures were influenced by Picasso, however Cappadona, a writer on the life of Noguchi also puts forward the argument that they were influenced by Japanese calligraphy (Figure 11).

It may seem contradictory to tar Noguchi with the brush of commercialism and stylistic quality but Noguchi was influenced by Western ideals. Living mainly in New York, the urbanized center of the art world Noguchi was most definitely influenced by modernism, mass production and his western artistic peers, regardless of his strong eastern sensibilities.

During the 1930s while visiting Japan Noguchi discovered the Zen gardens. He admired how cleverly space had been manipulated, and was inspired by the organization of shrubs and rocks which draws the viewer in, evoking an immediate response to the infinite space reserved for nature alone. In the stillness and tranquility of the Japanese garden, Noguchi found an obvious continuation of his work on a deeper level of understanding with Japan. This he did not explore to its full potential until his return visit in 1950.

Unable to find any other sculpture related traditions, Noguchi returned to New York in 1932. On his arrival, he began designing dance sets for Martha Graham. With the characteristics of the Japanese garden

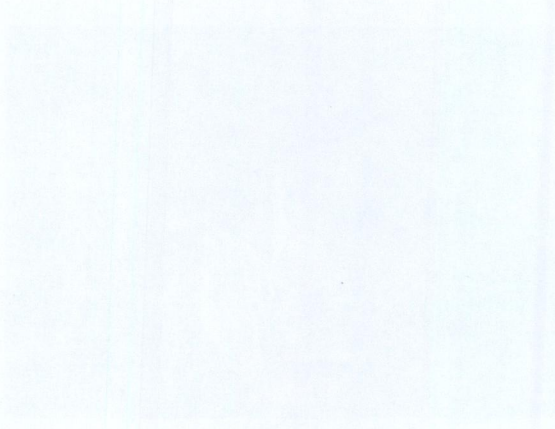
in mind, he set about using the stage space in a simple yet complex manner. The first set Noguchi completed was the 'Frontier' (Figure 12), on this occasion he stretched a rope across the stage in a 'V' form. This was instrumental in drawing the set to a center point creating imaginary space beyond its physical boundaries.



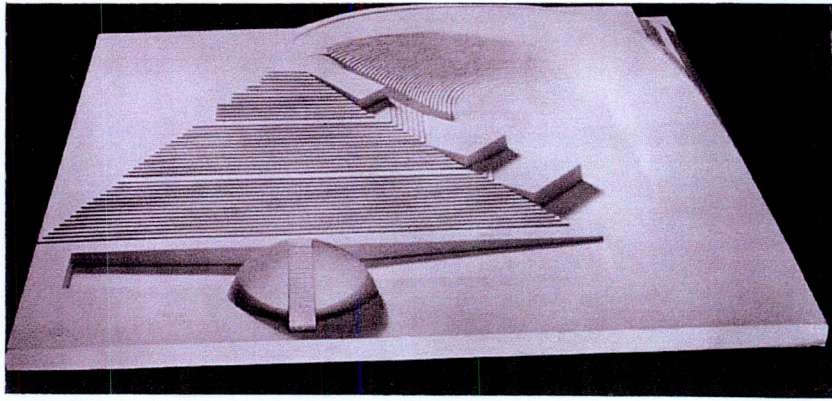
(Figure 12) "The Frontier".

Noguchi advised young artists to create work for the public and not for the egotistical needs of the artist. This indeed was the way in which the Japanese viewed Western art, as an expression of egotism. The next development in Noguchi's efforts to incorporate sculpture into public life resulted in 'Monument to the Plow' which was to be a mountain of earth with a stainless steel plough on top. Following its rejection Noguchi went on to design 'play mountain' (Figure 13). As a child growing up in Japan Noguchi remembered the play areas as vastly empty threatening spaces. Now in his maturity, he wanted to develop a play space that children might enjoy without fear or reservation.

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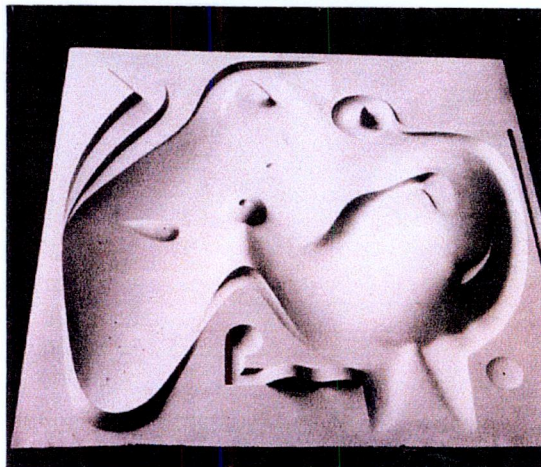


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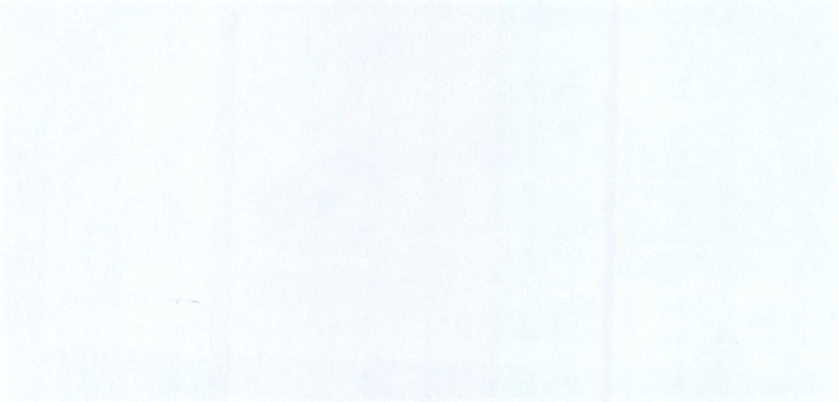


(Figure 13) "Play Mountain".

'Play Mountain' was modeled for a city block in Manhattan. The project contained swimming pools, skating facilities, a gym and a general play area. Noguchi showed his model to the New York commissioner who completely rejected the work without reservations. Essentially it laid the foundation on which Noguchi would build his many gardens. 'Play Mountain' was redesigned into a more realistic plan for a smaller ground area with a more functional use 'Contoured Playground' (Figure 14). This piece was modeled for Central Park but like the others it was never taken seriously.

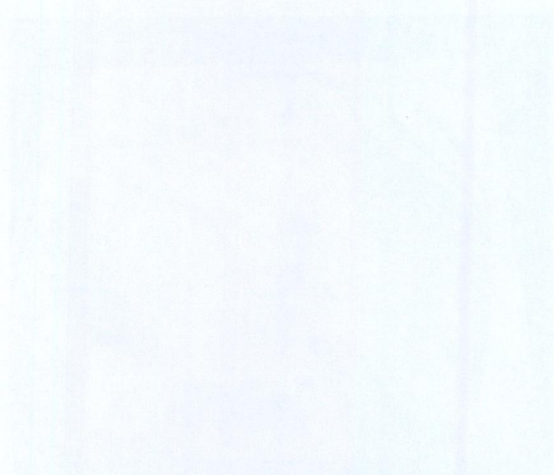


(Figure 14) Contoured Playground".



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture
for the Year 1908
Published by the Government Printing Office
Washington, D. C.
1909



Despite Noguchi's many efforts to construct a playground, it all seemed in vain. A modified version of his design was approved by the Mayor Robert Wagner, but it fell short of election promises. However unsuccessful his ideas were at the time, they were later appreciated when functional sculptural environments became more acceptable.

In 1947 Noguchi designed a piece of work created by earth mounds and impressions which resembled the human face entitled, 'Memorial to Man'. During this time Noguchi had grown very disillusioned with the US government after the war and the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945. 'Memorial to Man' (Figure 15) aims at foretelling the result of the next atomic bombing. Its title was later changed to 'Sculpture To Be Seen From Mars' intended for an airport site. It hinted to others (aliens) that a civilized race had once existed on earth.



(Figure 15) "Memorial to Man".

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 1, 1861. It is a very important document, as it sets out the President's policy for the new year. The President states that he is proud to have been elected to the office, and that he is determined to uphold the Constitution and the rights of the people. He also mentions the recent election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States, and expresses his confidence in Lincoln's ability to lead the country.

2. The second part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury, dated January 1, 1861. It provides a detailed account of the financial state of the United States at the beginning of the year. The report states that the Treasury has received a large amount of money from the sale of public lands, and that the government is in a strong financial position. It also mentions the recent election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States, and expresses confidence in Lincoln's ability to lead the country.

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In 1948 a close friend of Noguchi's Arshile Gorky committed suicide. Noguchi felt his death was a consequence of the pressures of the art world success. He described this period of his life as the "...darkest period of uncertainty..." (Hunter, 1979, P. 60). Disillusioned by government war tactics, his friend's death and being the subject of much criticism and disapproval in his sculptural endeavours, Noguchi was determined not to be a victim like his friend. He applied for a travel grant and received it from the Bollington Foundation.

Noguchi's travels took him to many countries including England, Italy and India to mention only a few. He settled once again in Japan. In 1946 Noguchi had been asked to dedicate a piece of work in memory of his father at Kiev University where he had taught for several years.

In June 1951 Noguchi visited the city of Hiroshima at the Mayor Shinzo Hamai's request. Having expressed an interest in taking part in a memorial piece in Hiroshima, Noguchi received a commission a month later to design the railings for the bridge leading into the Peace Park. One side was a circular disk form representing the rising sun and life giving energies. It was called 'Tsukuru' meaning 'to build'. The other side faced the setting sun, it was entitled 'Yuku' suggesting departure from this world. The handrails took a form similar to ancient Egyptian funeral boats. The railings (Fig. 16 A/B) were cast in concrete in 1952 displaying at large Noguchi's functional public sculpture.



(Figure 16A) “Tsukuru”.



(Figure 16 B) “Yuku”.

The architect Kenzo Tange who was planning the Peace Park requested Noguchi to design a second piece, a memorial sculpture. Noguchi felt that this was an opportunity to heal the wound of abandonment by his Japanese father and to seek forgiveness, as an American for the devastation inflicted on the country that was his motherland. However his design exceeded the available funds so Noguchi was asked to design a structure less financially straining. In the last days the commissioners rejected his design, claiming the form was too abstract. Sam Hunter puts forward the point that some believed it was rejected because the design was too sombre. Noguchi, on the other hand, believed that it was, “...because of the fact that I was an American – the worm of nationalism...” (Hunter, 1979, P. 93). This could also be true as it would have seemed inappropriate to allow an American to construct a monument in honour of those who died at the hands of an American bomb.



1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 1, 1861. It is a very important document, as it contains the President's message to the Congress at the beginning of his first term. The letter is written in a formal, dignified style, and it is one of the most important documents in American history.

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5. The fifth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Navy, dated January 1, 1861. It is a very important document, as it contains the Secretary's report to the Congress on the state of the Navy at the beginning of his first term. The report is written in a formal, dignified style, and it is one of the most important documents in American history.

Chapter Three

Moving between East and West Noguchi reaped the benefits of two different cultures. On the Western side, Noguchi was able to mass produce his designs and experiment with designs that were functional yet possessed aesthetic values. In the East, Noguchi was able to explore the garden and stone sculpture in a way he had not known existed. Together they were instrumental in Noguchi's development as an artist in a unique way.

Noguchi had always been aware of the garden's role in public sculpture. In 1950 once again in Japan, he decided the time was right to build a garden of his own based on Japanese aesthetics and the knowledge he derived from the Zen gardens. One garden in particular, the 'Ryoan-Ji' inspired Noguchi the most.

Firstly it is important to examine and explain the aesthetics of the Japanese garden to understand Noguchi's desire to create his own garden. Essentially the Japanese copied China in the production of medieval gardens. In Japan they became symbolic of the search for inner knowledge. From the sixth until about the ninth century in China, poets and philosophers had turned to nature for artistic inspiration. Nature untamed possessed a free spirit which they were able to preserve in gardens, the Shinto nature worshipers in Japan identified with this idea, recognizing the similarities between beliefs and so set about creating a natural environment for Japanese

contemplation. During the tenth century the Japanese began to evolve a garden of their own with aesthetic characteristics derived from cultural beliefs.

A Japanese landscape garden is viewed from one point only, the viewer is drawn in from this point. It did not allow for human interaction, this harmonious infinite environment was in a sense a picture to be admired. With human activity the illusion of space and manipulation of distance would be destroyed.



(Figure 17) Typical Japanese garden, displaying infinite space.

The Japanese were very clever in their use of space. They performed many psychological tricks to break the physical boundaries of the measurable area. They also covered their human marks so that the garden appears as if it had existed for years, untamed or untouched by the human hand. In order to enhance the space provided, objects in the distance were deliberately smaller, darker and less detailed than those to the front of the garden. A path of stepping stones leading through the gardens curved and swayed disrupting the viewer's eye as

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4. The fourth part is a conclusion and a list of references.

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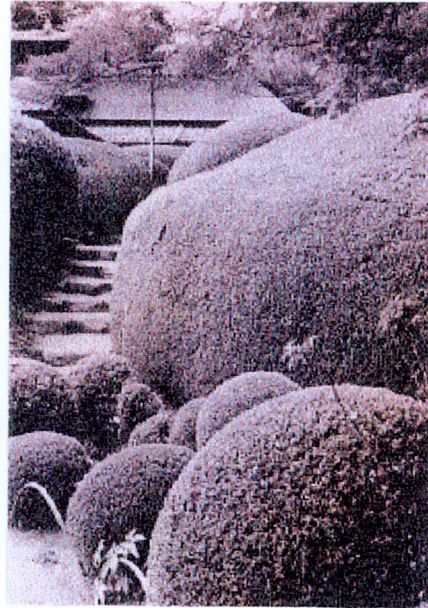
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it traveled through the scene (Figure 18). Eventually, the path disappeared out of sight behind rocks or shrubs alluding the viewer to assume that the path leads to an unseen part of the landscape (Figure 19).



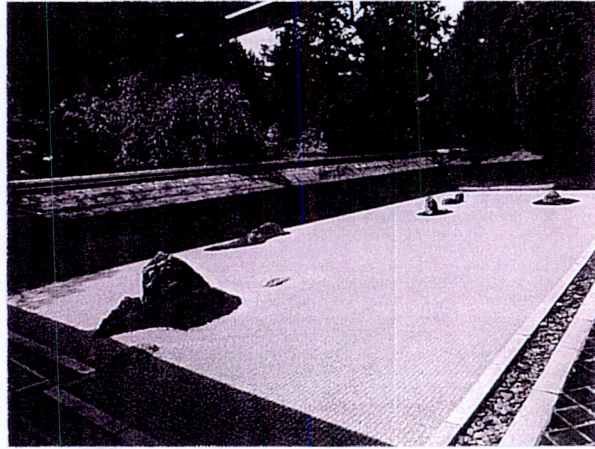
(Figure 18) Stepping stones.



(Figure 19) Illusion of hidden space.

Japanese Zen stone gardens were constructed for meditation purposes. The use of stone arrangements and sand surfaces created an infinite god-like space. The 'Ryoan-Ji' Garden (Figure 20) appears today to be strikingly modern with its abstract arrangement of stones and sand. It is internationally accepted as the very essence of Zen. Most people have found it almost impossible to describe. In the Ryoan-ji garden the stones are grouped together in small piles, lacking vegetation apart from the moss that grows on them. The small grouping of stones suggest islands in the sea. It is believed that it contains almost a

visual landscape of the Zen concept of nothingness and non-attachment.



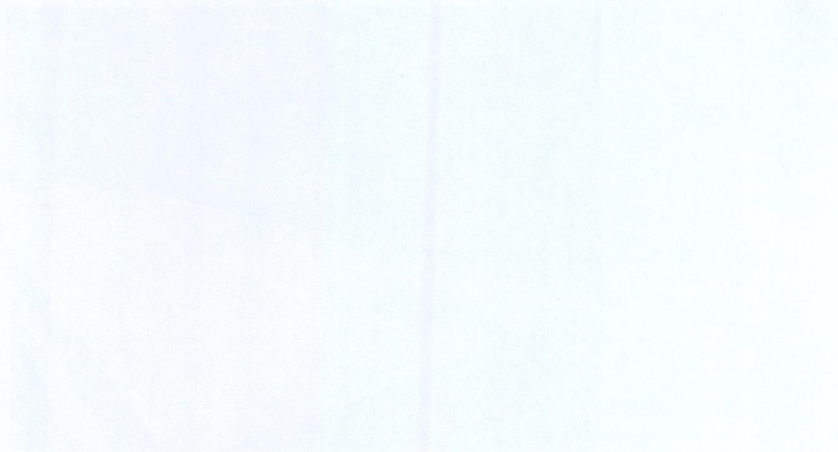
(Figure 20) "Ryoanji garden, Kyoto.

However first and foremost, it is important to explain the relationship between Shintoism, Buddhism and Zen. Shintoism was the most commonly practiced religion in Japan until the sixth century. Such practitioners were nature worshipers. With the introduction of Buddhism, the two fused together and co existed rather than conflicted. Many religious people in Japan today would consider themselves to be both Shintoist and Buddhist.

Zen is a branch of Buddhism, specializing in self-discipline and meditation in the hope of one day reaching the spiritual being of enlightenment. Zen is considered to be more a philosophy than an actual religion. It is integrated into the lives of many through the means of aesthetic practices. Zen comes from the word 'Dhyana' meaning 'right-thinking'. It pays homage to nature as an extension of our own inner selves. Zen beliefs manifest in the ritual practice of the

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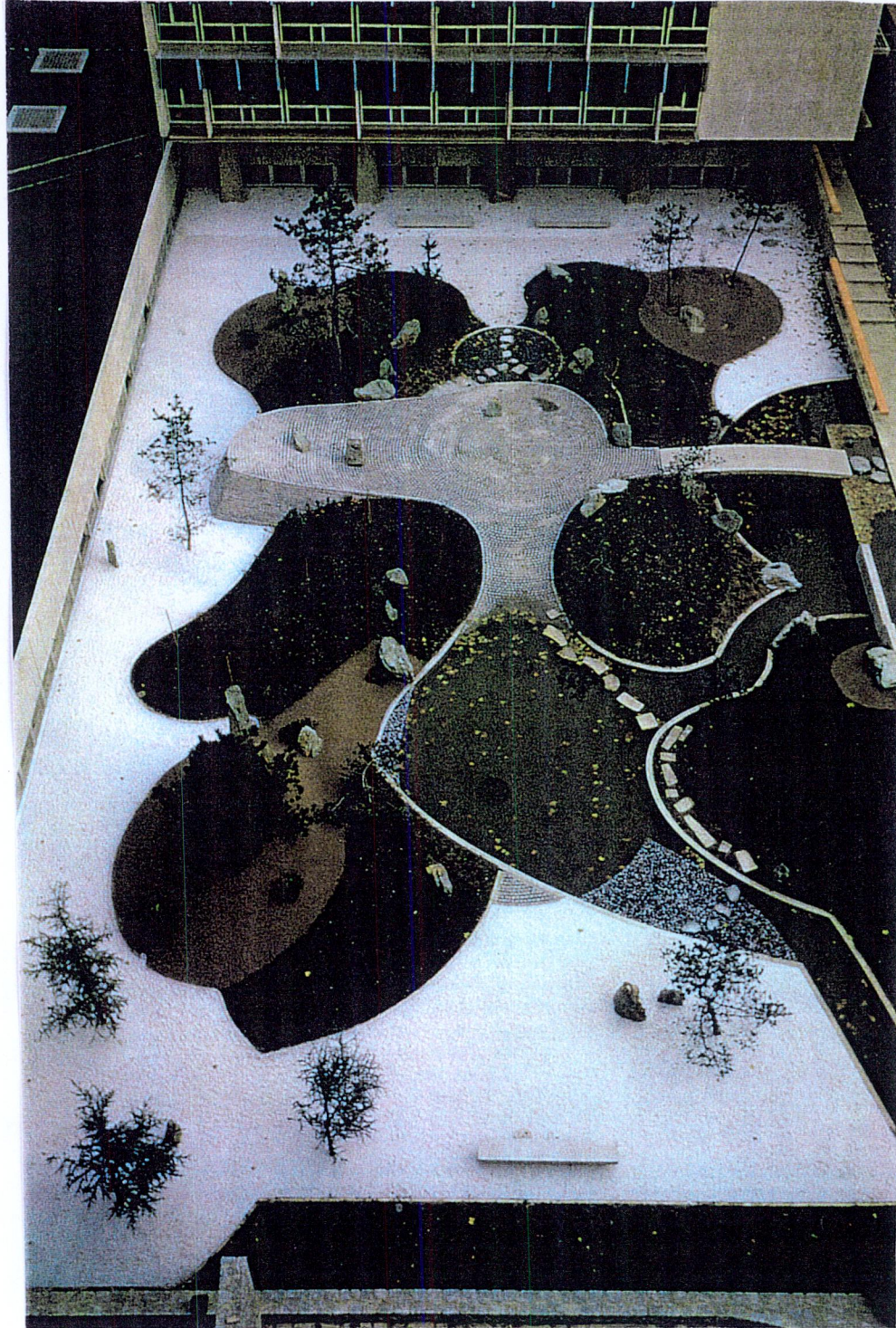
tea ceremony with nature strongly implicated. Every step of the ritual has been thought out to comply with the principles of simplicity, naturalness, asymmetry to mention but a few.

Zen is not something that can be explained easily. It is argued that it is the religion of the counter-mind. Zen is a religion of tranquillity, a life long search in meditation to achieve peace and harmony in one's life. Thomas Hoover puts forth the argument that Zen masters would have you treat the physical world the way some Westerners treat the spiritual world, with little regard for its existence. Noguchi had a good knowledge of Zen and its aesthetic traditions. He had once lived in a tea house and had taken part in the ceremony, so he was aware of the messages it subtly conveyed.

In 1951, Noguchi proposed his first garden for the Tokyo building of the Readers Digest. This was Noguchi's first opportunity to work with stone in a public space and to use the knowledge he obtained of the Zen gardens.

In 1956 the architect Marcel Breuer asked Noguchi to design a delegate's patio for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris. After visiting the site, he convinced officials to construct a small-scale garden. For the project, Noguchi imported eighty-eight tones of stones from Japan along with foliage and gardeners to aid him. In a traditional Japanese garden, the rocks provide the bones on which the foliage is placed in and around.

This was the structure with which Noguchi would also built his garden (Figure 21).



(Figure 21) UNESCO gardens, Paris.1958.

At first glance, the UNESCO garden appears to be a reproduction of a Japanese garden (Figure 22/23). This was the nature of the commission. However Noguchi changed many features making it his own. During its construction, Noguchi and the master gardener argued continually as Noguchi refused to stay within the strict confines of the traditional Japanese manner.

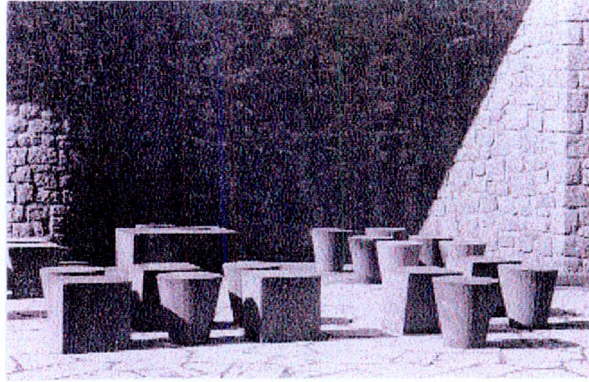


(Figure 22)
The stone garden at Daisen-in.



(Figure 23)
Detail of UNESCO garden.

The main centrepiece in this garden is the delegate's patio, a seating arrangement which is often referred to as a modern place setting for the tea ceremony (Figure 24). It contains a simple arrangement of cubic and asymmetrical shaped seats. Simplicity and asymmetry are strong characteristics of Zen aestheticism, which Noguchi continually refers to in his work. This area he described as the typical style Japanese veranda, from which the garden constructed on a lower level can be viewed.



(Figure 24) The delegate's patio.

The tea ceremony is central to Zen culture having been described as a form of early group therapy, Zen monks were brought together in the drinking of tea as a proud celebration of their faith. It was considered so important, that a small shed was constructed at the end of the garden for its purpose.

A person attending the ceremony wore specifically requested plain clothes. On arrival at the ceremony participants waited in a shelter designed to encourage a relaxed mind on the quest for Zen tranquillity. On the host's invitation, guests would proceed through the garden, on route a carved stone water basin was to be found in which guests would wash their mouths out in before drinking tea. In the main garden area of the UNESCO garden, Noguchi installed two old traditional water basins, making a direct reference to the tea ceremony.

On entering the tea house, one observes its small rustic exterior which usually has a thatched roof. Where the doorway should be, a small square opening is found. Guests entering the tea house have to climb

on their knees to get in. This is intentionally designed so that all worldly ideals are left outside, only the humble may enter.

The tea ceremony is intended to engage all the senses with burning incense, a vase of one flower, the humming of the wind through the pines, sounds from the boiling kettle caused by bits of iron attached to the bottom of the vessel.

The tea is blended and prepared and each guest drinks from the tea bowl, complimenting the host. After the second preparation of tea, the guests are at liberty to relax and discuss Zen aesthetics, the focus of conversation is usually on the tea bowl which is admired at great lengths. The world outside is forgotten, never entering conversation.

Two essential characteristics of the tea ceremony are 'sabi' and 'wabi' which explain more fully the aim of such a ritual. Sabi extends to objects old and worn with age. This includes qualities of loneliness and melancholy as things aged are left behind as time progresses. New objects take over, being more striking in their modern design. To the Japanese, old objects are more precious because their age rewards them with character and respect. Sabi displays the essences of beauty in withered objects such as the rusty kettle and decaying flowers. Sabi is a non-emotional, non-involving experience of loneliness as the item which has lost its youthful beauty still contains the beauty of age and character, yet at the same time it is dying, slowly decaying.

Wabi basically explains the qualities of poverty evident in the tea ceremony, such as the run down, rustic, old thatched tea house. Wabi is best described in this poem by the Japanese poet Kikyu, "...how much does a person lack himself who feels the need to have so many things..." (Hoover, 1989, P. 183).

In this sense Wabi represents insufficiency and imperfection to those who regret the involvement of Western living on their traditional values.

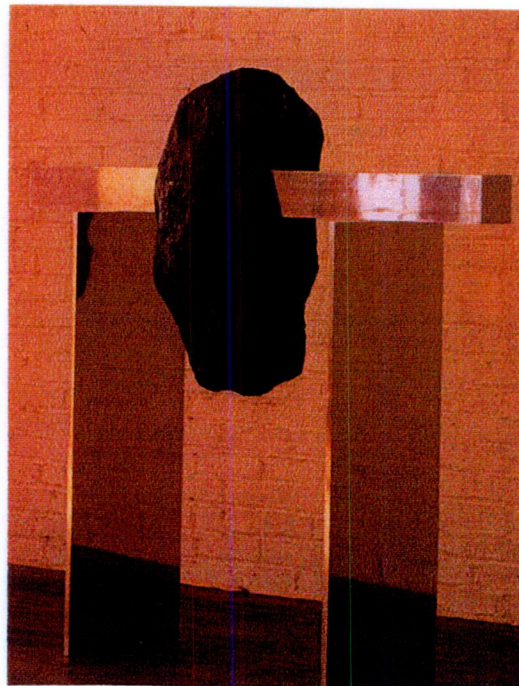
The tea ceremony is an aesthetic appreciation of poverty, human experience and humbleness, allowing one to accept oneself poor or imperfect. With *sabi* and *wabi* combined, they evoke an experience of inner contentment in the face of beauty which aids a person in facing the troubles of the modern world. In the light of this knowledge, one may look again at Noguchi's setting of the modern tea ceremony in the UNESCO garden and see how time has aged the irregular seats that lack detail in form and decoration, denoting a sense of humility.

If one is to consider Noguchi's treatment of stone, it is true to say that like the Japanese, Noguchi respected old things as having been characterized with time. Noguchi has been quoted numerous times as speaking of the quality of stone, especially when he said; "I love the use of stone...The whole world is made of stone. It is nothing new. It is our fundamental"(Hunter, 1979, P. 121).

Stone itself is cold and hard matured through centuries of time, the medium itself evokes a cold feeling of loneliness, poverty and

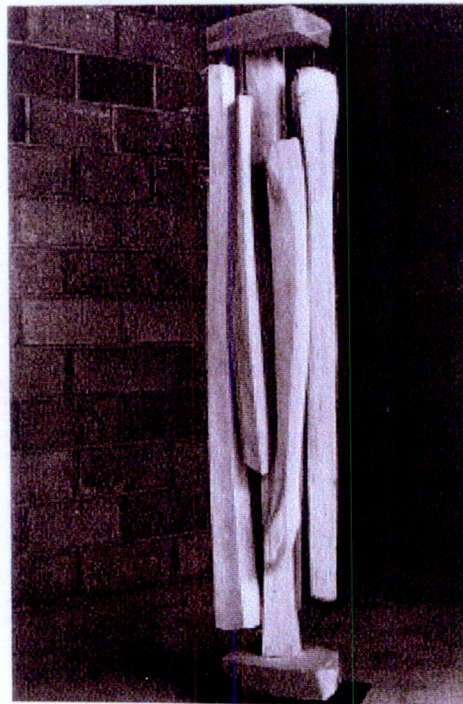
nothingness, elements explicit in the tea ceremony. Noguchi, like the Japanese, sees the beauty in its aged body and respects its character. In an interview with Catherine Kuh, Noguchi was asked what kind of art he admired. He explained that the older it was, the more he liked it, "...the more archaic and primitive, the better I like..." (Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P. 135). This statement enhances the idea that Noguchi believed that the old and matured possessed a timely character, distinctly its own.

Noguchi's knowledge and understanding of Zen and the tea ceremony is obvious in his piece: 'The Great Rock of Inner Seeking' (Figure 25). This piece resembles a rock cast in bronze, it is mounted on alluminium supports. One support goes through the centre of the piece, holding it in suspension. This inner seeking is the hopeful achievement of the Zen practice of the tea ceremony.



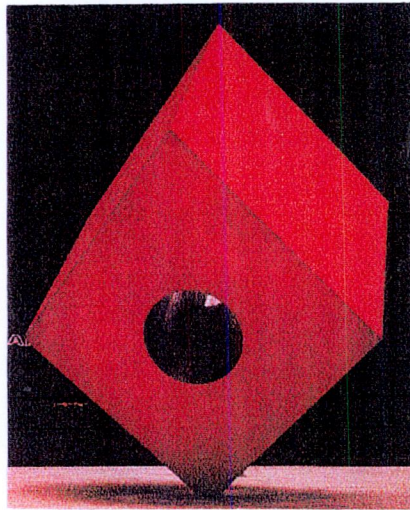
(Figure 25) "The great rock of inner seeking".

In the tea ceremony light objects are handled as though they were heavy and vice versa. This notion plays an important role in the sculptural work of Noguchi. In an exhibition in 1962, Noguchi displayed three balsa wood sculptures. Balsa wood is a light-weight material. One piece entitled 'Mortality' (Figure 26) was made with balsa. It consisted of a group of suspended, rough lengths of wood which made a hollow sound when banged together. In this Noguchi clearly illustrated his concern with weightlessness as he had done when making his Akari lamps. At a later date these balsa pieces were cast in bronze, declaring the Japanese contradictory use of heavy and light materials. Noguchi explains "It is weight that gives meaning to weightlessness...I decided to have the sculptures cast in bronze, letting bronze supply the extra element of weight..." (Hunter, 1979,P.126).



(Figure 26) "Mortality". 1959. Balsa wood.

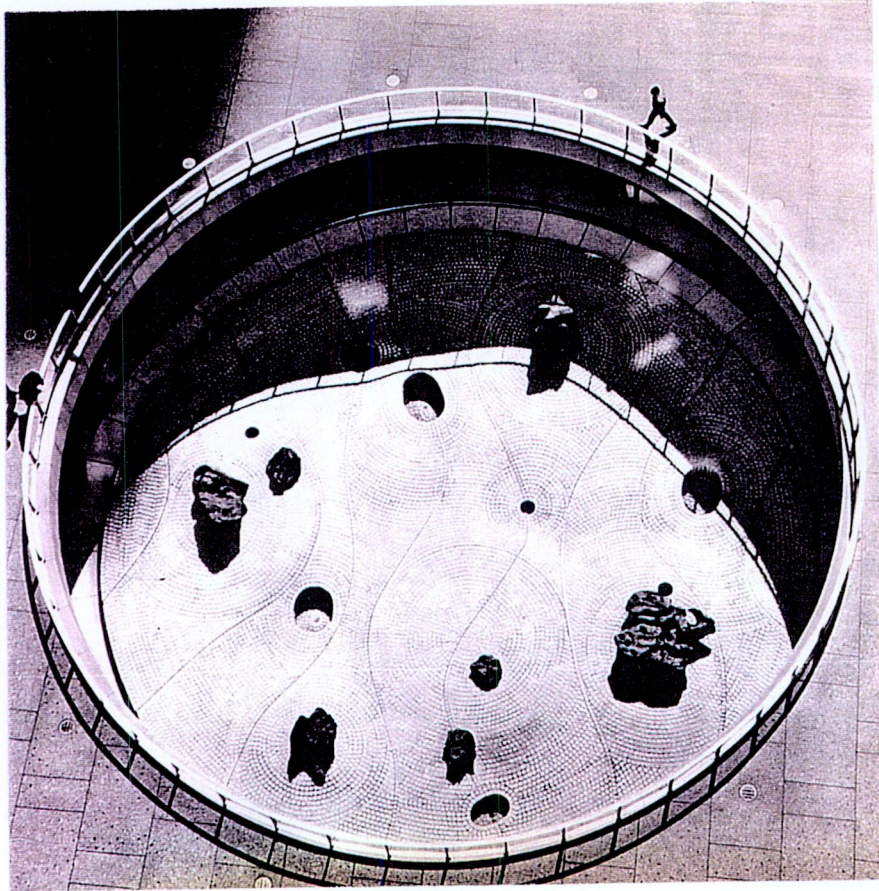
This notion of duality, of light and heavy was again illustrated in a striking piece of public sculpture 'The Red Cube' (Figure 27) created in 1969 for the Marine Midland Bank in New York. In this a large cube was constructed from sheet metal giving the appearance of a solid form. It stands on one point just as if it is caught in motion rolling across the ground.



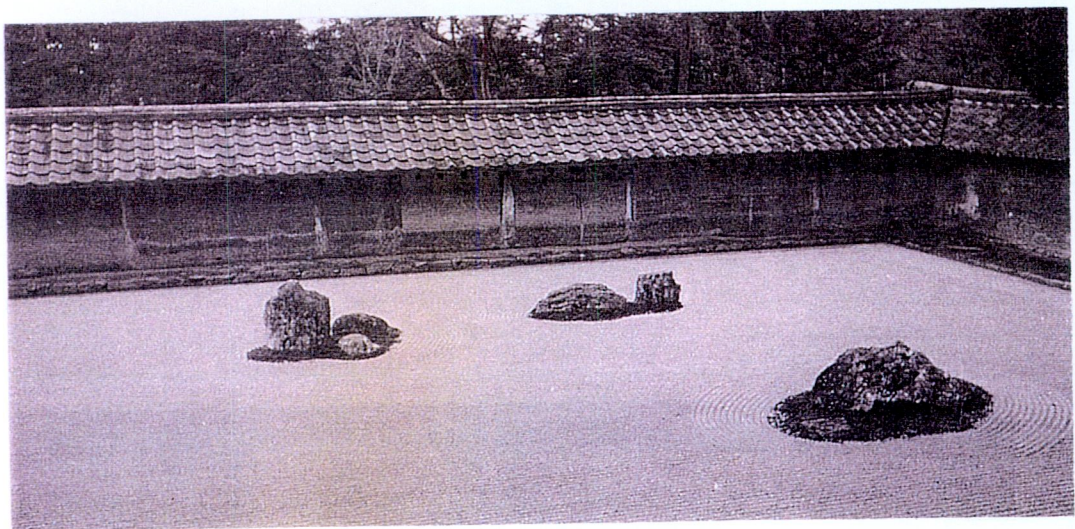
(Figure 27) "The red cube". (7.31m).

On the completion of the UNESCO garden Noguchi admitted that while, "...the spirit of the garden comes from Japan...the actual composition...the natural rock... is my own..." (Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P.61/62). Considering the nature of the commission was to construct a Japanese garden in Paris, Noguchi still managed to maintain a certain style in the construction. Noguchi used bridges as they had been used in Japan, symbolizing one's spiritual being progressing from one level to the next. He also introduced bridge-like benches made from cement which signified the transition from a meditative space to a social space. This was an important time for Noguchi to learn about the construction of a Japanese garden from the

master gardener. The knowledge he gained during these years working with stone, he carried through his life's work.

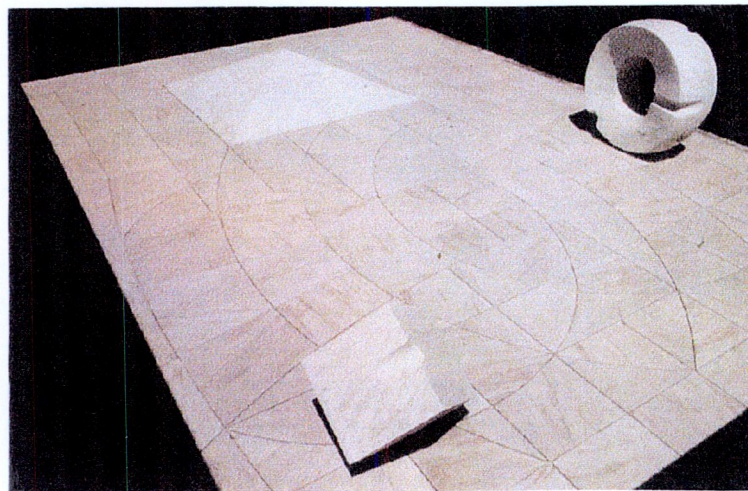


(Figure 28) The Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza garden. 1961-64.



(Figure29) Ryoan-ji garden. Kyoto.

In 1961 Noguchi was commissioned to create a basement garden for the Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza in New York (Figure 28). This particular garden paid homage to the aesthetic stone gardens in Japan. Noguchi called it 'My Ryoan-Ji', the great Zen garden that had originally inspired him (Figure 29). Now he was taking its ideals to a modern setting in an urbanised environment. Like the Ryoan-ji garden, the stones sit in isolation without shrubs or plants to adorn them. The seven stones Noguchi used in Manhattan were dragged from the bottom of the Uji river in Japan, they remain completely in their natural state. These rocks sit above the ground and appear to be levitating. In the Zen stone gardens, stones were half buried, giving the impression that they were there for a long time. The surface on which the stones are set resemble the raked grounds of the Ryoan-ji garden in a permanent design on the concrete. Through the use of Japanese aesthetics, Noguchi conveyed his messages of contentment and peace within the chaos of an urban centre.



(Figure 30) Beinecke Library garden, Yale University, New Haven. 1960-64

Another project undertaken at this time was an enclosed garden for Yale University (Figure 30). Like the traditional Japanese garden, it was supposed to be viewed, not explored. Its walls are made from granite with the floor and its attachments made from white marble. In this project, Noguchi best explains his concern with the universe and the continuity of life and its purpose. The garden contains a circular wheel-like structure which symbolises the sun's energy, the source of all life. Parallel to this, a cube stands on a point as if in motion, representing modern time and standards. It also signifies change. At the forefront of the garden a pyramid form seems to melt into the ground, it symbolises the slow decay of things past and gone. This piece expresses Noguchi's concern with the Universe as he aimed through art...of bringing order out of chaos, a myth out of the world, a sense of belonging out of our loneliness..." (Althulster, 1997, P.101). Noguchi, like the Japanese, creates divine space for the imagination. The contemplation of these simple austere forms represent life and our position in the world, an obvious concern of Noguchi's.

It is vitally important to remember that Japanese aesthetic beliefs are a manifestation of religious practices and based on a profound respect for nature. This too is the key to understanding the work of Noguchi. He brought his reverence for nature to a more abstract level, to express a universal concern. However Noguchi continually sought a means of harmonising opposite forces, East and West, man and nature, art and function, and the inner spirit with the outside world. The evidence of duality in Noguchi's work, can be attributed to his dual cultural heritage, he belonged to a Western world concerned with

modernism and technology and an Eastern world which is, "...much more aware of nature, its details an insect, a leaf, a flower, nature is very close, a foot away..."(Cappadona & Altshuler, 1994, P.130).

Chapter Four

Isamu Noguchi travelled a long artistic road using many diverse materials. However stone was of greatest importance as it best suited his aesthetics needs and concerns than any other medium. Noguchi felt that stone itself had a voice, and a certain amount of control. Although the artist held the hammer, the stone controlled the break. A break that was permanent, unlike other mediums such as clay that could be shaped and reshaped.

Noguchi proclaimed the desire to "...find the stone within the stone, and to know the stone from the inside out..." (Cappadona & Alushlter, 1994, P.106)

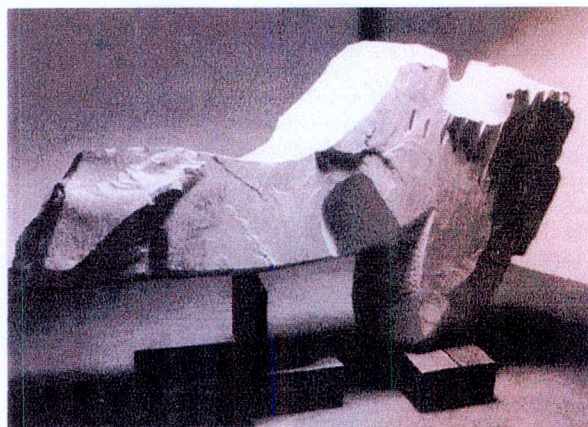
This statement is in keeping with the Zen concern of finding one's inner spirit. This is evident in pieces entitled, 'The Rock of Inner Seeking' and 'The Stone of Spiritual Understanding'. Noguchi was obviously concerned with inner knowledge and spiritual understanding. He once said, that creating art was like having a conversation with yourself, an expression of one's inner thoughts and feelings so to speak. It is certainly accepted by critics today that stone was the medium Noguchi felt most comfortable with, to express his life long search for identity whether it be physically or spiritually.

Noguchi's freestanding sculptures of the last twenty years of his life display all the knowledge he acquired through his artistic life.

Working exclusively in stone, Noguchi was now able to demonstrate

his concern with eastern sensibilities, in a style distinctive of his immense knowledge of the craftsmanship of stone. Noguchi had never abandoned individual sculptural works, now however he felt confident to work in stone alone creating one off pieces for public and private exhibition.

Noguchi began working in Italy in 1962 and most of the work created here reflect a Japanese influence, paying homage to the Zen master gardener, Musokukoshi. He also paid his respects in a piece to his father entitled, "Seen and Unseen", which was the title of Yone Noguchi's first book. During this time he played with notions of gravity again as he had done in the 1950s. Now Noguchi was able to go a step further in creating, 'The Roar' (Figure 31), a large white marble block which Noguchi cut half of the lower part from, holding it horizontal with a stainless steel post in defiance of gravity. The main body is chiseled and scored with deep incisions of different sizes and depths, creating an interesting illusion of lighting.



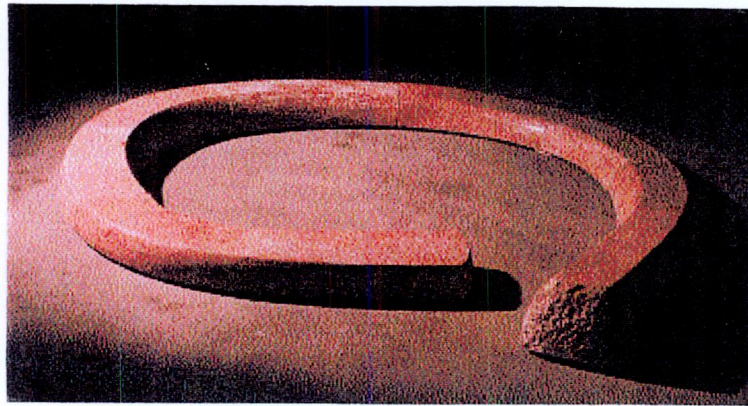
(Figure 31) "The Roar"1966. White Arni Marble.

In 1969 Noguchi established a studio on the island of Shikoku at Mure, in Japan. It was no accident that the location possessed extreme natural beauty along with reasonable isolation. At Mure Noguchi was introduced to Masatoshi Izamu who gave him stone, workers and technology for further sculptural development. Izamu's knowledge of stone and technical skills was vital to Noguchi's sculptural success during this period. Working once again in a natural environment in Japan Noguchi began to explore stone with great symbolic and ceremonial reference, using the characteristics of Zen and nature.

Noguchi took geometric form, which is mainly considered Western for its perfection of angles, such as the cube, triangle, or the circle and distorted them. By doing so, Noguchi created irregular organic pieces which were Eastern in reference, illustrating the duality of cultural forms. In Zen philosophy by going beyond perfection, and creating the irregular, one reveals a greater mystery. This was the idea Noguchi had in mind. After the Yale University garden, which consisted of a cube, pyramid and a circular form, Noguchi attempted no other geometrical work explaining; "The geometrical things remove themselves from chaos too obviously. I prefer my forms which are closer to the unknown and the imperfect" (Sheffield, 1980, P. 69).

Asymmetry, irregularity and the imperfect are all characteristics of Noguchi's work at this time. These aesthetic principles are deeply rooted in Zen art, Zen artists deliberately imperfected the surface of

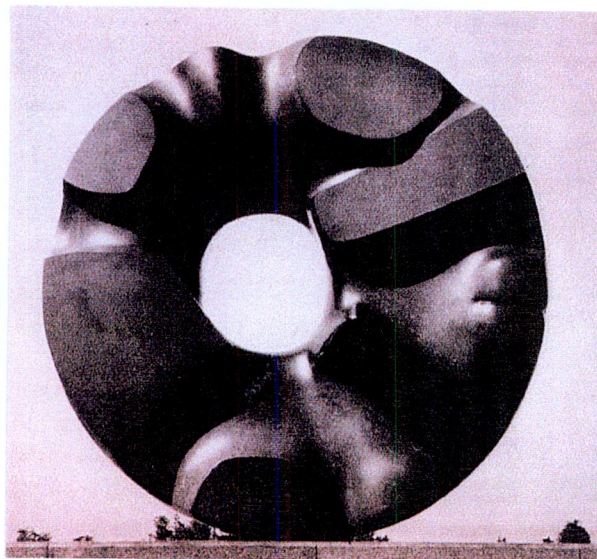
their creations to make the form more interesting in an organic way. The appearance of the organic and irregular in Zen art has previously been discussed in the tradition of Raku pottery which evolves from the same principle. In Zen paintings nothing seems to be centred or perfectly rounded which makes the viewer more aware of the art. The audience is drawn in, past the surface of the canvas to embrace the individuality of the work.



(Figure 32) "magic ring" 1969. Persian Travertine stone.

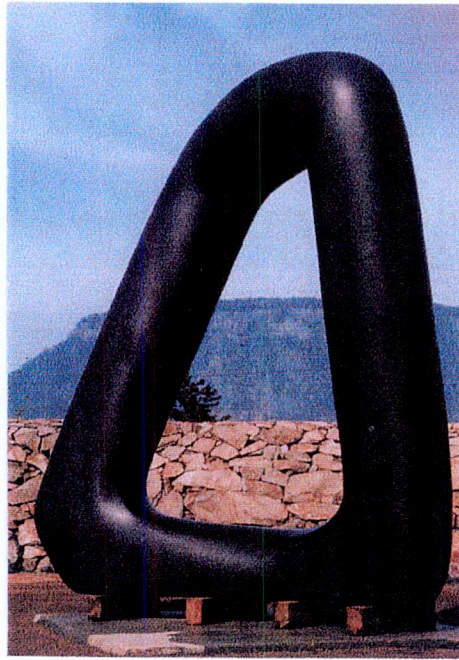
Noguchi often draws on these strong traditions, especially in the 'magic ring' (Figure 32) created in 1969. The form is circular but irregular, made from Persian Travertine stone it consists of nine parts. The circle is incomplete or broken; as it progresses from the start it thickens where it meets the roughness of the stones end. Its' surface and sides are smooth and flowing. The magic in the piece is suggested in its irregularity, referring to the mystical and the unknown that Noguchi spoke of.

The circle is a dominant form used in the work of Noguchi, symbolizing the sun, moon, everlasting change and the continuity of life. In Zen calligraphy, the circle or 'Enso' signified life's journey to eternity and beyond. Noguchi pays particular homage to this idea in 'Black Sun' (Figure 33), a large Brazilian granite piece. The form is circular and subtly irregular, symbolizing the cosmos and infinity, with no beginning and no end.



(Figure 33) "Black Sun". 1969. Brazilian granite.

In the 1970s, Noguchi began creating a series of work called the 'Black Voids'. In this he used the same idea as the circle of continuous contained space, however it took its own slant. In 'Energy Void' (Figure 34) Noguchi takes a triangular form and slightly distorts it. The piece is composed of several interlocking parts, which come together to create a circular flow of energy again with no beginning or end.



(Figure 34) “Energy Void”. 1971. Black Swedish granite.

This idea of contained negative space, comes from the Zen concept of emptiness or ‘Mu’ meaning ‘nothingness’. In ‘Energy Void’ negative space was used as a positive expression of our physical reality, our ever changing lives. Speaking on the concept of emptiness Noguchi expressed, “The absence of anything is very beautiful to me. That is to say emptiness is very beautiful to me. And to describe that emptiness with anything takes nerve...” (Esterow, 1986, P. 108).

This is also in keeping with the Zen concept of the exclusion of all that is not essential. Allowing pure form, the truth of the material and honest structure to penetrate in a strong, aesthetic manner.

“Energy Void” was originally commissioned for a sculpture park in Purchase, New York. However the risk of exportation of this twelve feet high, seven part, structure was too high, so Noguchi kept the

piece for his own private collection. Instead he constructed another five part, piece which was successfully assembled in Purchase. The voids were all technically refined and polished, displaying Noguchi's concern fine craftsmanship and truth of the material.

Noguchi was a master of stone, he knew when to highly finish a piece, or when to leave it completely natural, and when to drill or chisel the rock. As seen in his gardens Noguchi entertained the natural look of the stone. Often times he recreated the stone's natural surface by working a rough textured finish. Dore Ashton, one of Noguchi's most prominent critics explained, "...stones East or West, are stones but cultural attitudes differ..." (Hunter, 1979, P.140\1).

This is evident in his gem like treatment of some stones, giving them a very modern presence. In contrast the stone is deliberately rough; austere and natural, more Eastern in its irregular organic form.



(Figure 35) "Myo".

In 'Myo' (Figure 35) the artist illustrated his concern with naturalness, and the Shinto belief in the spiritual inhabitation of the stone. The piece was started in 1966, after cracking the large rock open, Noguchi couldn't work on it for the next five years, explaining it seemed, "...an act of blasphemy..." (Sheffield, 1980, P.70), so he needed to wait this long to decide what to do with it. However he did believe that breaking the stone, "...introduced an element of accident, like the first bang of creation. Something has to go wrong, like the break, in order to start the creative process going..." (Sheffield, 1980, P.69).

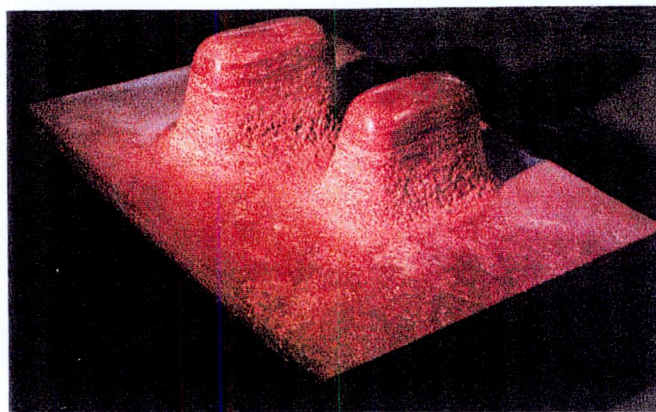
The idea of accidental art is a strong element in Zen art and pottery as a sign of beauty and strength. The breaking of the stone opened up new possibilities revealing an interior quality that had been hidden. In keeping with Zen philosophy Noguchi intuitively worked with the accident of the stone, allowing the process of reconciliation guide the art.

Having broken the 'myo' stone open, Noguchi left one side of the piece completely in its natural state. He opened the top and worked the other side, creating a natural appearance on the surface of the stone. The reassembled piece illustrated strongly Noguchi's concern with the natural aesthetic. As well as being preoccupied with the external beauty of the stone, Noguchi was also concerned with its interior beauty. This is best illustrated in his table landscape sculptures.

In the landscape sculptures Noguchi played with Eastern and Western notions of the vertical and the horizontal. As the pieces that sit flat on the ground embody form that rise like a landscape. Noguchi was concerned with the molecular existence of the material. As the landscape rising, seems to be slowly growing, evolving. Noguchi best explains this movement when he stated;

It's not movement going anywhere, but motion of a different sort. Inside matter there are atoms constantly in motion. If we could hear the action, we would probably hear a continuous sound... (Sheffield, 1980, P.70).

These works are probably his most elegant sculptures. 'Double red Mountains' (Figure 36) produced in Persian red travertine stone was created in 1969. Mountain relating to Noguchi's belief that stone is as a "...old as the hills. It is our fundamental...It does not pollute. It merely goes back to the earth naturally..."(Hunter, 1979, P.121). This elegant sculpture appears rough and charred towards the base of the piece. The top of the mounds are very finely finished and polished. Although the piece has an aged appearance of having being weathered by the elements, it also seems to be growing or increasing in size.



(Figure 36) "Double Red Mountains".

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As is evident in his life's work Noguchi never used a lot of colour or decoration. He preferred the natural look of the material. His forms were simple and minimal with slight twists, or chiseling or deep scores. This approach left room for suggestiveness, without fully stating the artistic intention, the viewer can draw their own conclusions. D.T. Suzuki points out that this is a characteristic of Japanese art, as he explained:

In any event Japanese artists more or less influenced by the way of Zen tend to use the fewest words or strokes of brush to express their feelings. When they are too fully expressed no room for suggestion is possible... (Cappadona, 1981, P.82).

Noguchi was aware of the Japanese use of simplicity and humble forms of expression. By the exclusion of the non-essential a clearer picture of the artist's intention projected.

Conclusion

Isamu Noguchi, throughout his life executed many diverse projects and designs working in a variety of materials and without adherence to any set stylistic criteria. He received much criticism from the art world, which caused him to move further away from Modernism and from his western peers. In the Orient he found the tranquillity of the Zen gardens to be a much more appetizing sculptural ideal.

“Psychologists may attempts to explain Isamu’s creativity as resulting from an endless search through his bi-cultural origins for his true identity...” (Grilli, 1992, P.5). This idea is a topic of much debate. Noguchi identified with nature through his search in the Orient. It began with the reverence for nature that he inherited through his childhood years that he spent in Japan. This respect for nature was reinforced by his apprenticeship under Brancusi in 1928. He experienced this time and time again on return visits to Japan. Initially he identified with Japan and it’s strong traditions through the natural medium of clay. This was only the beginning of an enthusiastic journey in search of the essences of sculpture.

It is clear that Noguchi possessed a profound knowledge of Japanese culture from the practises of the Shinto nature worshipers to Zen Buddhism. This is evident in his use of the Zen ideals of nothingness and non-attachment, particularly in reference to the tea ceremony.

Noguchi's understanding of nature and Zen manifested in his work through characteristics of simplicity, asymmetry, self-knowledge, 'The Great Rock of Inner Seeking' and naturalism.

Throughout his life's work, Noguchi eagerly sought a way of uniting East and West, man and nature, art and life. Whether it was playgrounds for children, gardens private or public, stage sets, fountains, portrait sculpture, or accessible household lamps, Noguchi passionately desired to weave beauty into everyday life. By taking the traditional Japanese lamp (Akari) and redeveloping it for mass production Noguchi successfully integrated eastern tradition with western interiors. This was also a way of uniting art and function as Noguchi believed that each Akari was an art form.

His ultimate achievement was in stone. In the last two decades of his life, Noguchi recreated nature as an art form like never before. Paying close attention to the nature of sacred Japanese rocks, and confident in the knowledge of craftsmanship he had carried through his life, Noguchi created many splendid pieces of aesthetic sculpture. In Japan the worship of stones developed into a deep appreciation of nature. Noguchi reported that his "...search for the essences of sculpture seems to carry me to the same end" (Hunter, 1979, P.111). Noguchi's sculptural career extended over sixty-five years until his death in 1988. Through the exploration of many influences and mediums Noguchi succeeded in uniting East and West and can truly be described as a citizen of the world.

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