

**Aspects of the Work of
Isamu Noguchi**

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ISAMU NOGUCHI.

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With thanks to my Tutor Joan Fowler and my Sister Patricia.

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INTRODUCTION.

The art of Isamu Noguchi is as diverse as it is prolific. In his long career (he is now 83) he has undergone many stylistic and formal changes and has been much criticized for his eclecticism and seemingly erratic changes of direction and his emphatic egoism.

It is not the intention of this study to justify this stylistic and formal diversity but rather to find and follow a thread of development which leads through these various changes.

These changes are a result of Noguchi's restless search for a personal and artistic identity. His aim has not been simply to acquire a style for he has frequently discarded styles and dismissed their critical acclaim. Noguchi has constantly sought creative renewal. This drive for an aesthetic direction is fuelled by his dual cultural background.

As a child Noguchi saw little of his father having apparently been rejected by him at an early age. He was also estranged for years from his mother and it is this loneliness and confusion of childhood which may account for his obsessive quest for identity through sculpture.

Noguchi's early childhood was spent in Japan where he was reared as a Japanese child. After intervening years in which he was Americanized in the United States he would return to his

cultural roots and reassimilate this early cultural sensibility.

Having spent the later half of his childhood in the United States Noguchi discovered he had a talent for sculpture. He quickly became accomplished at clay modelling in an academic style and was much lauded for it. He soon became tired, however, with this facility and after his introduction to Modernist sculpture he began to strive towards a more meaningful personal expression away from the "easy naturalism", as he saw it, of the academy.

At an early stage (age 21) Noguchi had a surprisingly clear sighted ambition to "view nature through nature's eyes". Already, although he was infected and excited by the possibilities of Modernism, his Eastern sensibility was beginning to come through. Having spent time apprenticed to Constantin Brancusi he began, with trepidation at first, to aspire to more than the purist reductionism of Brancusi and the early Modernists.

Before the war, much of his energy was devoted to child centred environments. Here began Noguchi's singular struggle to find a metaphorical "place" in the world. He identified strongly with the child and its world, perhaps reliving the time spent, in his childhood, in a rock garden of his own making. But it was not until after World War II and a world trip of discovery in the diversity of sculptural practice that he would finally realize this "place".

This world trip had taken him back again to Japan where he sought a reconciliation, with his heritage, when he would

rediscover the Japanese arts of Ceramics and Gardening. This, in turn, would re-inform his search for the fundamental purpose of sculpture.

With the commission for the U.N.E.S.C.O. garden in Paris, Noguchi finally realized an outdoor environment and brought to it the Zen qualities of tranquility, contemplativeness and spirituality, qualities which he saw as necessary for the humanization and harmonization of public spaces.

The medium which forms the centre of Noguchi's art is stone. To him stone is the quintessential stuff of the Earth and a universal metaphor. He refers to it as providing the continuity of a long sculptural tradition and a link with nature.

This sensibility has become more and more apparent as Noguchi matures and is evident in the more personal stone carvings of his later career. These carvings further distill the essential Japanese qualities of simplicity and spareness and serve to resolve Noguchi's search for the timeless, the infinite and the universal.

CHAPTER I

At the age of 22 Isamu Noguchi was awarded the newly founded Guggenheim Fellowship. In his statement of application he showed a clear sighted view of the direction he wished to take in his art practice.

"It is my desire to view nature through nature's eyes, and to ignore man as an object for special veneration. There must be unthought of heights of beauty to which sculpture may be raised by this reversal of attitude."

An unlimited field for abstract sculpture expression would then be realised in which flowers and trees, rivers and mountains as well as birds, beasts and man, would be given their true place. 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". <1>

Noguchi had begun his formal art training under the director of the Leonardo da Vinci Art School, Onorio Ruotolo, a well known academic sculptor. Ruotolo had discovered and nurtured Noguchi's talent and persuaded him to work at sculpture full-time. Within a very short time Noguchi was "producing" a prodigious amount of work with astonishing ease. Within three months he held his own show at the Leonardo school and within a year had his own studio and exhibited at the National Gallery and the Grand Central Art Galleries. <2>. But he became disenchanted with his florid style and later repudiated his work of this time. "I would say I

was extremely facile" <3>.

His exposure in New York to the not-too-frequent exhibitions of modern art, which was just beginning to come in from Europe, changed his mind as to the direction his own work would take. He saw, as he later wrote, that Rodin's work had exhausted the possibilities of realism and forced sculpture beyond.

"...his (Rodin's) style was soon changed by his followers into the technique and easy naturalism of the academy". <4>

And it was this "easy naturalism", which Noguchi had attained that he now rejected.

It was Noguchi's good fortune on arriving in Paris to begin his fellowship studies to meet, and be taken on as assistant to Constantin Brancusi. Noguchi had admired Brancusi's work in New York and now, working with him, began to explore the possibilities of abstraction. He saw that Brancusi's abstraction was based in nature. However, instead of imitating natural things Brancusi was fusing his ideas with the substances of his sculpture. He did not use bronze, wood, and stone to merely symbolize but exploited their own qualities as matter. The concept was not imposed on the material but was inherent within the relationship between the artist and his material. Out of the limitations of the material and the working of it came the essence of his sculpture. <5>

Brancusi's practice was a revelation to Noguchi "I was transfixed by his vision". <6> And much of his later work would show the influence of Brancusi's practice. Whereas, Brancusi had had to begin by imitating nature and then break new ground by

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abstracting, he considered the new generation of sculptors, including Noguchi, lucky in being able to carry on into pure abstraction" <7> Noguchi remembers being sceptical.

"Pure abstraction or at least those geometrically derived left me cold and I was always being torn between Brancusi's admonition and my desire to make something more meaningful to myself. That is not to say that I thought of deriving anything from the figure. But I craved a certain morphologic quality" <8>.

Later in his career and after the Second World War Noguchi would reassess his position in relation to Modernism <9> and the early abstractionists such as Brancusi. He argued that with the success of the early Modernists, a material revolution had taken place. Brancusi and his followers of the early Modernist period reflected the ultimate realization of the freedom and independence of the individual. But "the credo of the complete individual" as he saw it epitomized in Brancusi's work was undermined by the war in the horrors of Buchenwald and Heroshima and "our faith in the right and possibilty of personal freedom and independence from society has been considerably shaken". Experimentation in itself and revolt against naturalism were no longer adequate to the needs of a post-war society whose values were fragmented and torn <10>. He argued for a new anti-materialist revolution. This was not to retire into "yogihood" but to reply to the challange of re-creating meaning and order - since man had always used his imagination, religion and art to reply to this challange. <11>

"If religion dies as dogma it is reborn as a direct personal expression in the arts. I do not refer to work done in churches such as Assy, but to the almost religious quality of ecstasy and anquish to be found emerging here and there in so-called abstract art. Using the evermore perceptive truths of nature's structure, the invocation is still to God. I see no conflict between spirituality and Modern Art...." <12>

He would later pursue this spiritual aspect of his work but, for the moment, having finished his sojourn in Paris he returned to New York and found himself forced to continue carving and modelling portraits in order to make a living.

Also in his application statement for the Guggenheim Fellowship, Noguchi expressed the wish to travel to Japan.

My father, Yone Noguchi, is Japanese and has long been known as an interpreter of the east to the west through poetry. I wish to do the same with sculpture." <13>

FOOTNOTES

1. Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World, P.16
2. Sam Hunter, Isamu Noguchi, P.32-33
3. Ibid. P.32
4. Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture"
Art News March 1949 P.13
5. Isamu Noguchi, "Noguchi on Brancusi",
Craft Horizons August 1976 P.29
6. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.16
7. Ibid. P.18
8. Ibid. p.18
9. Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture"
Art News March 1949 PP.13-15
PP.64-65
10. Ibid. P.16
11. Ibid. P.17
12. Ibid. P.17.55
13. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.17

CHAPTER II

Noguchi's background as half-American, half-Japanese is central to the consideration of the development of his work in later years. He was born in the United States in 1904 of Yone Noguchi, a well known Japanese poet, and Leonie Gilmour an American writer of Irish decent. After he was born his father returned to Japan and two years later the young Noguchi and his mother followed. But his father meanwhile had married, and on their arrival he divested himself of responsibility for his first family.

Noguchi was first reared as a Japanese child but seems to have encountered considerable hostility being of mixed perentage in the deeply conservative imperialist Japan of the time. His early childhood was a solitary and confused one. He had little contact with his farther and while his mother worked he was most often alone <1>. He recalls in his autobiography:-

"(My mother) would come home at evening to my infinite relief. How I lived in fear of losing her!" <2>

Perhaps a sign of his later preoccupation with gardens and playgrounds was shown in his devotion to a garden which he built using the overflow from a pump and setting stones among the plants. In writing of Brancusi later in his life, Noguchi emphasised the importance of the sculptor's identification with his roots in his own cultural and the strong empathy he felt with

his Modernist master.

"he brought with him something more than learning: the memory of childhood, of things observed not taught, of closeness to the earth, of wet stones and grass, of stone buildings and churches, hand-hewn logs and tools, stone markers, walls and gravestones. This is the inheritance he was able to call upon when the notion came to him that his art, sculpture, could not go forward to be born, without first going back to beginnings" <3>.

"Brancusi carried his memory all the way from Rumania by foot, "Who is no longer a child is no longer an artist" he said. All his work has the innocence of childhood, Without it he dies" <4>.

The appreciation of nature is fundamental to the traditional Japanese arts and Noguchi would have imbibed their qualities of gracefulness and balanced assymetry while growing up. In his decidedly Modernist intention of "viewing nature through nature's eyes" <5> we can also see his childhood contact with the Japanese sensibility coming through.

In 1953 he wrote :

"If anyone should ask me what is characteristic of my development now I think it is my discovery of this ultimate nature which I have almost forgotten since childhood. It is anybody's childhood to know nature in this way. Yet to know nature again as an adult to exhaust one's hands in it's earth..... one has to be a potter, or a sculpture, and that also in Japan <6>.

Noguchi went on to spend his later childhood years in Japan at the English speaking St. Joseph's College in Yokohama and at the age of 13 his mother, deciding he might live a more "normal" life there, sent him to a progressive Montessori school in the United States. Shortly after his arrival, however, the school closed and became an army camp. Having nobody to claim him Noguchi was adopted as a sort of camp mascot and for the rest of

his youth he was looked after and schooled by sympathetic guardians. <7>.

This rootlessness in Noguchi's childhood is continued in his wide travels as an artist. His travels can be seen as a search for a culture and an identity. Having no "place" of his own much of his art is a struggle to create one. Being set adrift in the world at such an early age he has attempted, consciously or unconsciously to recreate the ideal space of childhood <8>.

These attempts include many proposals for playgrounds.

"For me playgrounds are a way of creating the world. It's not a job. Its a way of creating an ideal land on a small scale..... a land in which one can run around three feet high..... The very restrictions make room for the more intense experience of childhood - where the world is newer, fresher, and where you have a kind of geometric confrontation with the world" <9>.

His first proposal for a play environment was made in 1933. Called Play Mountain he made a model in relief (Fig. 1). Play Mountain would consist of a rounded amphitheatre and a gently sloped tiered pyramid. The project was intended to fill an entire city block in new New York and was designed as a communal playground. The pyramid would include a pool and gymnasium. <10>

Noguchi attempted to interest the Parks Commissioner Robert Moses and his staff in the project but the unconventional use of concrete forms and disdain for traditional playground equipment disturbed their bureaucracy and the plan was rejected.

He again approached the Parks commissioner with designs for slides and swings for a proposed park in Central Park. These

were rejected as too dangerous for children to climb on. Noguchi responded by designing his Contoured Playground. (1940) (Fig. 2).

The project was an objectless playground. He eliminated sharp projections in favour of curves and limited the height of the forms to prevent accidents. Some interest was shown in the Contoured Playground but with the outbreak of war the proposal was rejected. <11>.

Of the wonder and innocence of childhood which motivated his interest in designing, first of all, playgrounds and then more ambitious environments for adults, he wrote;

"Children, I think, must view the world differently from adults, their awareness of its possibilities are (sic) more primary and attuned to their capacities. When the adult would imagine like a child he must project himself into seeing the world as a totally new experience. I like to think of playgrounds as a primer of shapes and functions, simple, mysterious, and evocative: thus educational. The child's world would be a beginning world, fresh and clear." <12>

Noguchi's preoccupation with play environments and his persistence in proposing them again and again at this time in his career demonstrates his commitment to his vision which would not come to fruition until years later. He described Play Mountain as the prototype or "kernel" for all his subsequent explorations "relating sculpture to the earth". <13>

FOOTNOTES

1. Sam Hunter, Isamu Noguchi P.25
2. Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.12
3. Isamu Noguchi, "Noguchi on Brancusi"
Craft Horizons August 1976 P.29
4. Ibid. P.29
5. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.16
6. Ibid. P.21
7. Hunter, P.30
8. Ibid. P.24

9. Sam Hunter, "Isamu Noguchi"
Art News May 1978 P.31
10. Hunter, Isamu Noguchi PP.56-57
11. Ibid. P.58
12. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.161
13. Ibid. P.22

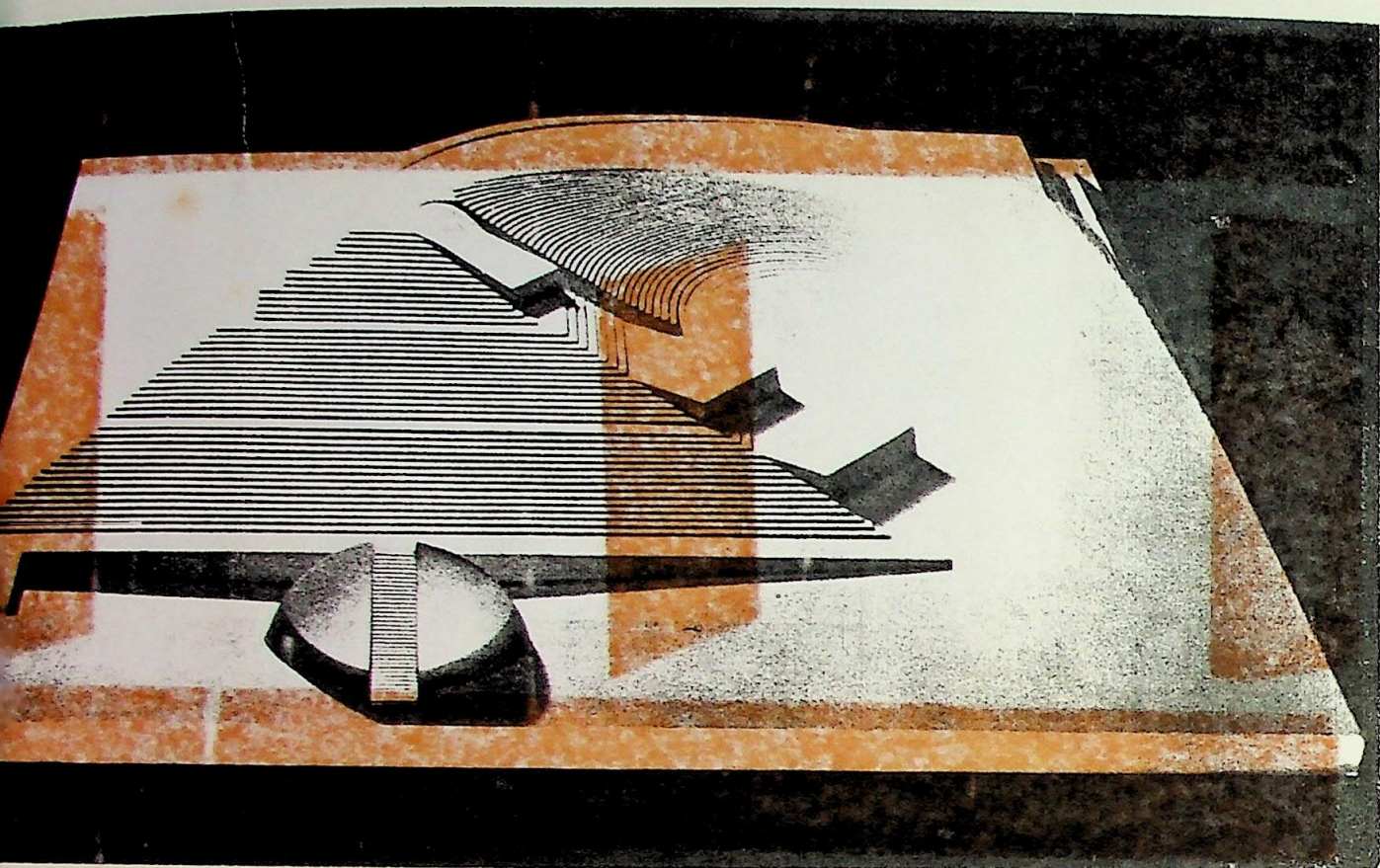


Figure 1. Play Mountain (1933) Isamu Noguchi
Plaster model H. 5", L. 29 1/4", W. 25 5/8".



Figure 2. Contoured Playground (1940) Isamu Noguchi
Plaster model H.3", L. 26 1/8", W. 26 1/8".

CHAPTER III

In addition to the child centred aspect of the proposals of the 1930's, Noguchi was also seeking a wider social application of his art. He wrote that he sought :

"other means of communication - to find a way of sculpture that was humanly meaningful without being realistic, at once abstract and socially relevant".<1>

After World War II in the spring of 1949 he departed on a world trip which would take a full year. He had the idea of researching a book <2> on the subject of leisure and for this purpose he was commissioned by the Bolingen Foundation.

"I devised a plan of action to find out, if possible, what sculpture was fundamentally about, to see for myself its relation to people, to space and its uses in the past. Sculpture I felt had become captive, like the other arts, to coterie points of view. There must be some larger, more noble, and more essentially sculptural purpose to sculpture." <3>

He began his journey of education by visiting the prehistoric Dolmens and Menhirs of England and France. From there to the Piazzes and gardens of Italy and to Gaudi in Barcelona. He next went on to Greece and "Up the Nile" but his trip focused on the Far East. He spent six months wandering "as a pilgrim" in India and South East Asia. He discovered in the temples and monuments of the past a new source of inspiration and confirmation of his own search for public values in sculpture.<4>

He writes,

"The evidence of the past attests to the place of sculpture in life and in the ritual of communion with spirit, with tranquility" <5>

Finally after absorbing the impressions of sculptural practice in diverse times and cultures he returned once more to Japan.

Noguchi's first return to Japan since his childhood had been in 1930. He had effected a tenuous reconciliation with his father who had disapproved, at first, of his return. he become apprenticed to the famous potter Uno Jinmatzu. While working on his terra cottas he lived in a humble ditchdiggers cottage. He recalls his time there:

"I have since thought of my lonely incarceration then, and my close embrace of the earth, as a seeking after identity with some primal matter beyond personalities and possessions" <6>.

At this time Noguchi studied the sculpture of Japan but the iconic tradition of temple statuary did not interest him. His interest in the garden art of Japan, however, was growing. He found in this form a concept of articulated space, a "totality" which appealed to him. The garden was composed in a measurable, defined space, but the accents of rocks, walks and greenery redefined the space so that it became more than the sum of its dimensions.

Now returning once more to Japan in 1950 Noguchi again turned to gardens.

"I asked the artist Hasegawa Saburo to help me travel and re-experience the beauty of ancient temples and gardens and to imbibe the tranquility of Zen". <7>

Over the next three years Noguchi spent most of his time in Japan working with clay, pursuing his own private interests and working on his first ever realized outdoor environmental project, a garden for the new Reader's Digest building. This was his initiation into landscape work. He learned the rudiments from the common Uekiya, the professional Japanese gardener. He discovered the principals of rock selection and composition according to the Japanese principals of Shin, Gyo and So which identify the formal, in between and informal character of their arrangement.<8>

In 1956 Noguchi was recommended by the architect Marcel Breuer to do a garden for the new U.N.E.S.C.O. Headquarters being built in Paris. The project was to take two years and it involved several trips between New York, Paris and Japan.

He had originally been asked to do a small Patio des Delegates, intended as a sort of outdoor meeting room, situated in a roughly triangular area, immediately adjacent to the building. He saw that this was in difficult relation to the buildings but on the other side, towards another building, was a sunken area for which a Calder mobile had been intended. Noguchi pressed for a better correlation of the spaces and it was agreed that he make a model for submission. This was accepted and he proceeded to organize the work. As he became more involved in the project he resolved that the lower area could be transformed into a "major sculptural effort through the introduction of rocks and so forth" <9>.

The lengths to which Noguchi went in the fulfillment of the commission attests to its importance to him. This was to be his

first major outdoor environmental work. He had strived for years to realize one and now came the opportunity in the city of his apprenticeship and the birthplace of Modernism.

As his ambition for the work grew so did the task of organizing its elements. It was suggested that he himself approach the Japanese government for a gift of rocks and stone. He travelled to Japan and with the willing help of the Japanese he began the selection.

"Finally I was introduced... to Shigemori Mirei, a man of tea (reflective taste), of knowledge (twenty volumes on gardens), and a master garden designer. He took me to a mountain area on the island of Shikoku (along the river Ayu—Kui—Gawa, 'the river of eating ayu fish', the source of the stone called Io-No-Ao - (the blue stone of Io). Inside a ravine in a brook in the mountains there, I selected each stone..." <10>

The rocks were bought together in a trial area in Tokushima. Also water basins (chozubachi) and stepping stones from Kyoto. A fountain stone was quarried in Okayama. The stone bridge, stone lanterns and various stepping stones were quarried and carved on Shodo shima island. Noguchi remarks how smoothly the whole operation went. Finally eighty-eight tons of stone were shipped to Paris.

Things did not go so smoothly in Paris. The work went slowly. The French riggers might be able to handle marble statuary but Noguchi employed two Japanese gardeners to man-handle his rocks in the rough terrain. A third arrived with saplings and plants.

The entry point of the work is the Delegates Patio. This is a paved area which extends around a corner of the main building.

placed around it are various concrete tables and stools. (Fig. 3) Also placed on the upper paved level is the large, two stone fountain which is the lead-in point to the lower level . The stones were quarried in Japan and carved on site. They are large, thick, irregularly shaped slabs which rest against each other, one appearing to act as a support for the other as a front piece. On this front piece is carved the Japanese calligraphic symbol for peace (Hei Wa) but backwards and so distorted "as in the the best Japanese tradition" (Fig. 4) <11>

From the top of this stone the water splashes down over the symbol and collects at the bottom to form a stream. This stream flows like a mill race over a series of weirs side by side with a footpath which descends into the lower garden proper. (Fig.5) To the right of the footpath is a semi-circular dry pebbled area in which is placed two of the rocks which were selected and brought from Japan. Also placed here is a small incized wheel form sunk into the pebbles. (Fig. 6) To the left the visitor crosses a stone bridge into the larger part of the garden, (Fig. 7) the centre of which is a large mound paved with cobbles in the style of the surrounding Parisian streets. At the centre of the mound Noguchi has placed one of his stone lanterns. Surrounding the central mound the terrain alternates between ponds with stepping stones and gravel footpaths. Stone seating is placed from time to time to the sides and the natural selected rocks of blue stone rest among cherry trees, dwarf bamboo, camelias and maples. (Fig.8)

Although the project has become known in Paris as the "Jardin Japonais" Noguchi emphasises that it is not a true Japanese garden. But its similarities are so obvious that it

hardly needs saying that the Japanese sensibility is essential to it. This sensibility is the sensibility of Zen.

FOOTNOTES

1. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.21
2. The book has never been written although Noguchi did collect a large number of photographs and notes. Leisure, he wrote, "allows for meditation on the meaning of form in relation to man and space."
3. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.30
4. Ibid. P.30
5. Ibid. P.31
6. Ibid. P.21
7. Ibid. P.31
8. Ibid. P.21
9. Ibid. P.166
10. Ibid. P.166
11. Ibid. P.167
12. Ibid P.167.
Noguchi remarks that the planting is too much and this indeed is borne out by the visitor. Some pathways have become inaccessible by the growth of the trees which appear too large. Greater care might be taken in the maintenance of the garden. But this may be symptomatic of the U.N.E.S.C.O. institution and its premises. Access to the building is difficult, the visitor being veted and having to pass through several security gates to gain admission. The impression is not very welcoming.

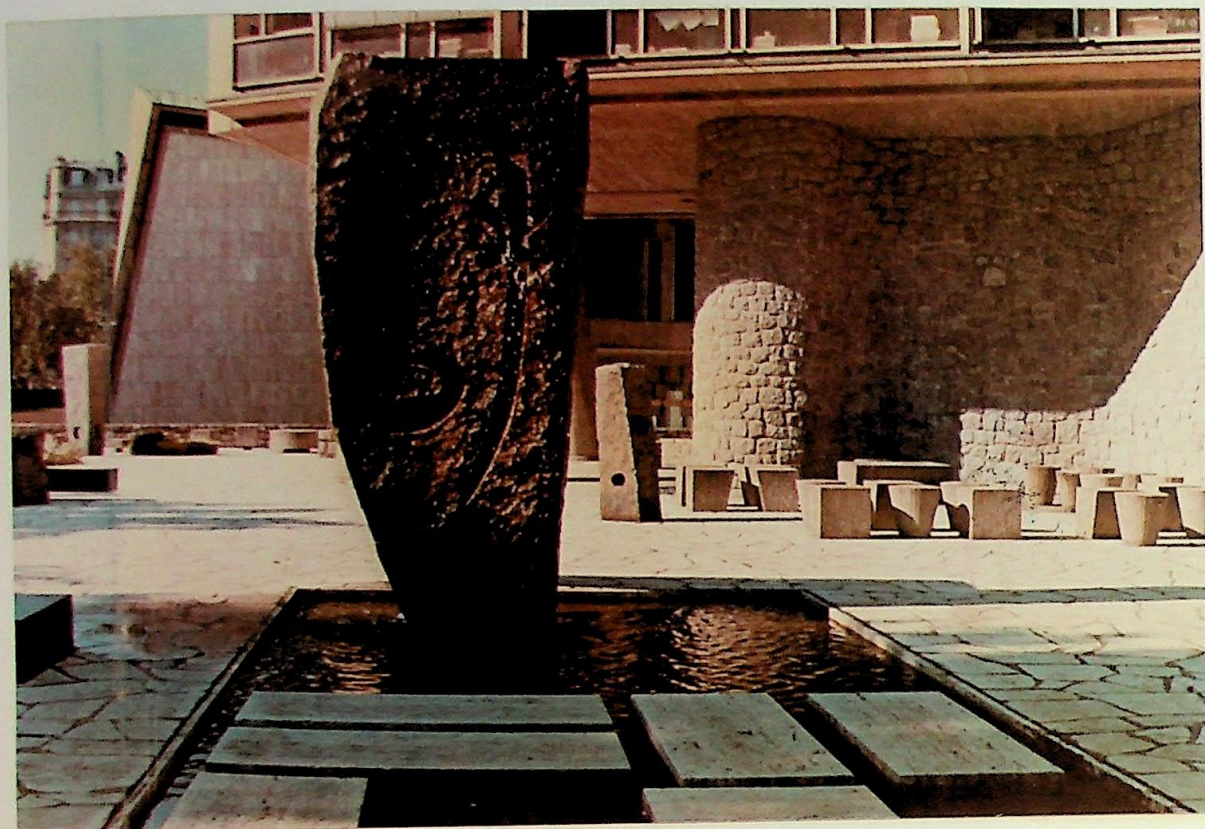


Figure 3. Patio Des Delegates (1956-58) Isamu Noguchi
Concrete

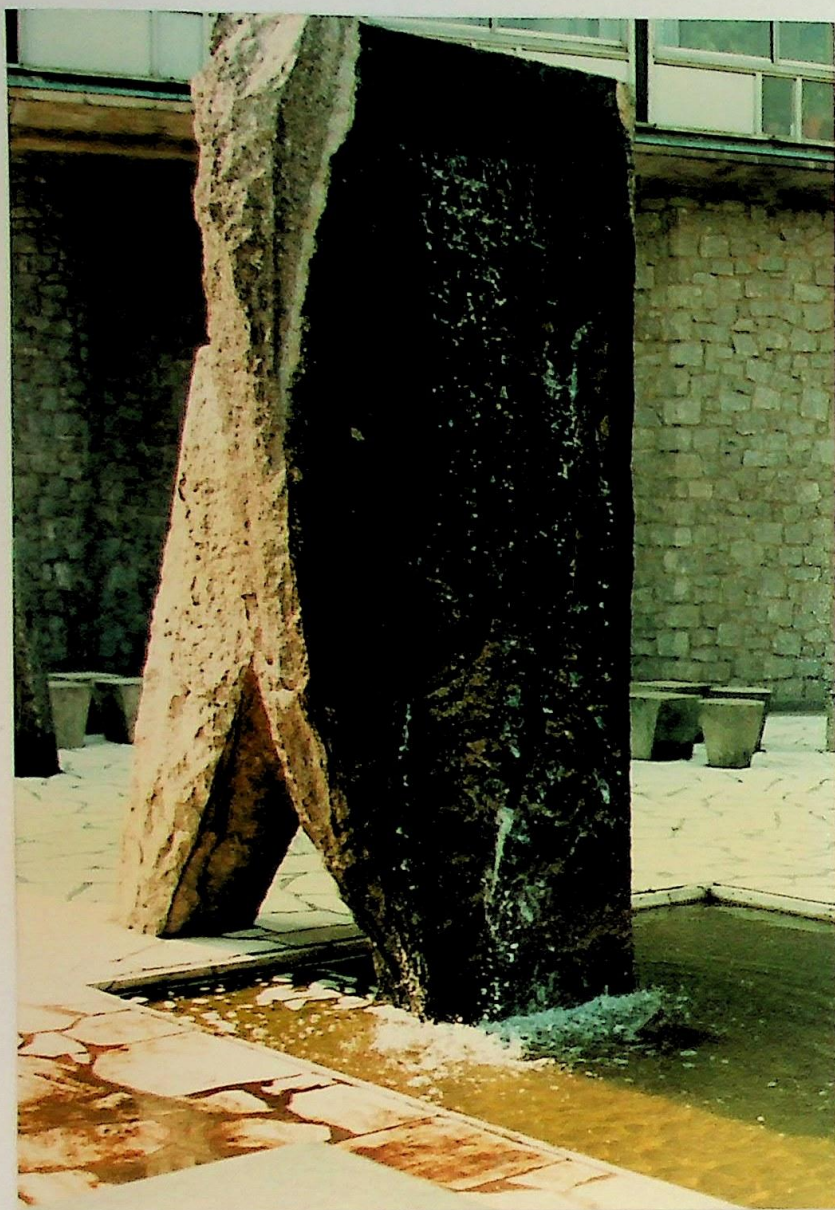


Figure 4. Jardin Japonais (1956-58)
(Detail showing Fountain Stone)

Isamu Noguchi

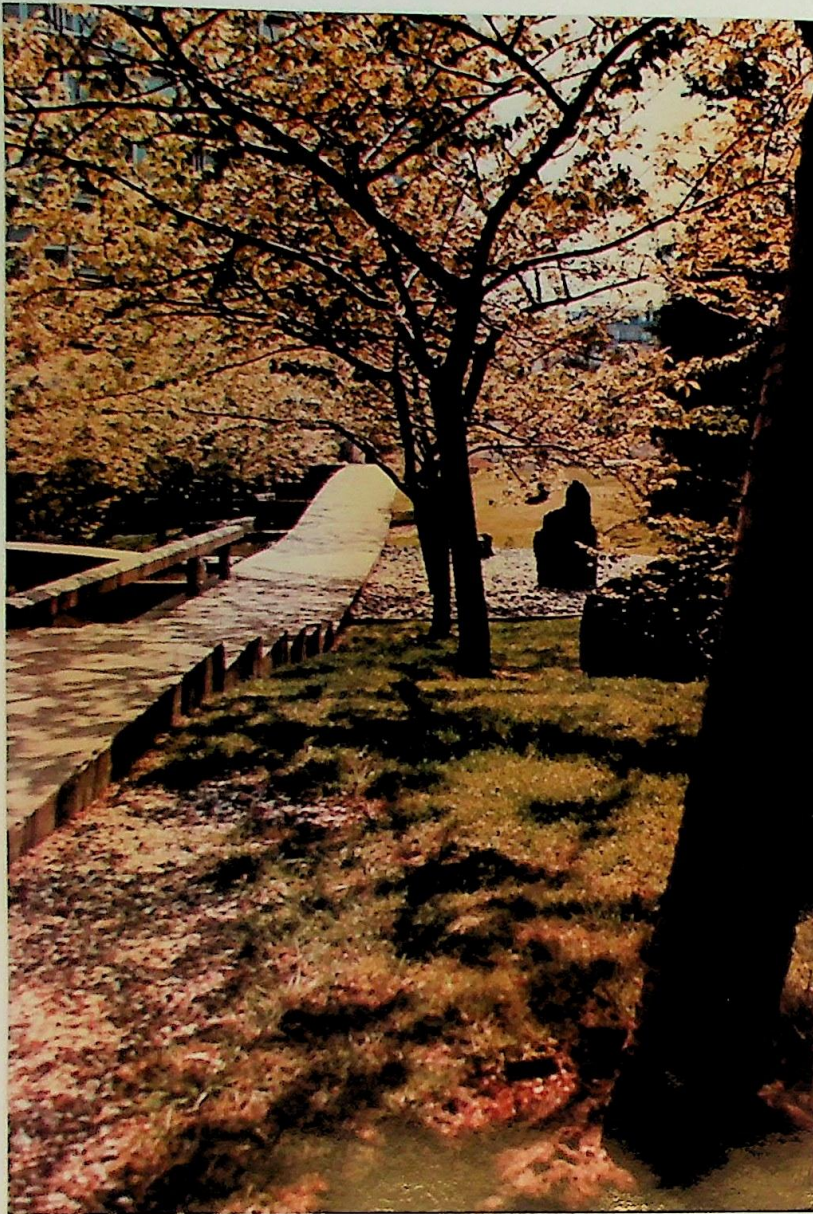


Figure 5. Jardin Japonais (Detail) (1956-58) Isamu Noguchi



Figure 6. Jardin Japonais (Detail) (1956-58) Isamu Noguchi

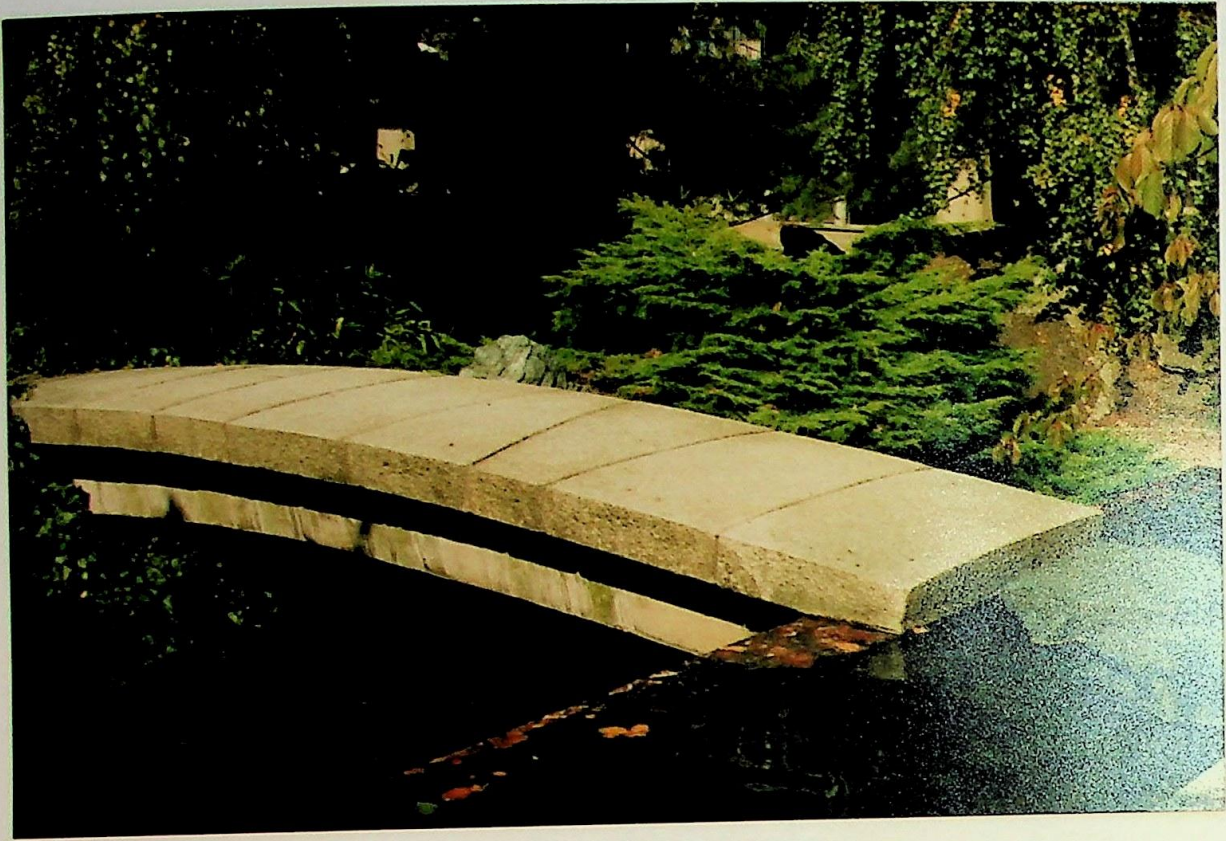


Figure 7. Jardin Japonais (Detail)(1956-58) Isamu Noguchi



Figure 8. Jardin Japonais (Detail) (1956–58) Isamu Noguchi

CHAPTER IV

In order to assess the Japanese influence on Noguchi's work and his orientation towards natural forms and materials, we must examine the basis of the preoccupation with nature in the traditional Japanese arts. In order to do this it is necessary to have some understanding of the philosophy which informs the Japanese aesthetic. That philosophy is "the way of Zen."

Zen Buddhism was introduced to Japan from China in the 12th Century by the Monk Eisai and within a relatively short time, was assimilated into all areas of Japanese culture.

Eisai had travelled to China to join the Buddhist sect Cha'n (later to become Zen in Japanese). This sect had reacted against the highly formalized orthodox Buddhism with its emphasis on scripture and elaborate ritual. It held that, paradoxically, nothing could be taught, that knowledge came only by ignoring the intellect and heeding the instincts, the intuition. Zen's premise is that true reality is the fundamental unity of mind and matter, inner spirit and external world. Life is a whole and all dualities are illusory. Zen points to a fundamental holistic truth which it asserts is impossible to define rationally since words and symbols are abstractions and impede any perception of this truth. Satori or awakening is the perception of this truth. The traditional Japanese arts, therefore, tend towards being an

aid to this awakening. By contrast to the western tradition they seek to subvert intellectual evaluations and to encourage an instinctive and intuitive identification of the self with nature. Ideas and concepts are anathema since they are the products of the rational mind: abstract and illusory. The Japanese arts under the influence of Zen are not merely picturesque, pastoral or decorative, but strive to cultivate an atmosphere of tranquility and contemplation by which the self and the world, the particular and the universal, are unified.

An instructive illustration of Zen influence on the arts is its embodiment in the Tea Ceremony and the interrelation between the Ceremony and the Japanese arts of ceramics, painting and gardening.

The Tea Ceremony is a secular ritual evolved over many centuries involving the highly formalized making and drinking of tea. Its importance for our purpose is its place as the embodiment of Zen's aesthetic principles. The utensils and surroundings of the ceremony have become refined in accordance with these aesthetic principals. These utensils, (the tea bowl for example) and the surroundings (tea house and garden), in turn, have informed their respective art forms in general artistic practice in Japan. Two of the most fundamentally principals are Sabi and Wabi. The term "Sabi" denotes objects agreeably mellowed with time. It evokes melancholy overtones of loneliness, of age left behind by time. While new objects are assertive and striving for attention, old worn objects have the quiet peaceful air that exudes tranquility, dignity and character.

The quality of Wabi on the other hand was a reaction to the ostentation which crept into the Tea Ceremony as a result of the snobbery attached to the oldness of the utensils and surroundings. Wabi is a deliberate restraint and poverty, insufficiency or imperfection <1>

"Wabi is that quality of beauty arising out of the life spirit hidden beneath rustic surfaces which is capable of withdrawing from ordinary human emotions to allow for the experience of the supra-personal and universal." <2>

No hint of wealth is displayed by the participants in the Tea Ceremony and the art objects and forms should display this austerity and humility.

Thomas Hoover describes the Tea Ceremony thus:

"The Tea Ceremony is the great parable of Zen Culture which teaches us by example that the material world is a thief depriving us of our most valuable possessions - naturalness, simplicity, self knowledge" <3>

Noguchi's sculptural efforts can be seen partly in this light: as an attempt to repossess these qualities which the modern alienated urban environment steals from us.

The tea bowl is the most important utensil of the Ceremony. Its value, as an art object, is measured according to how it embodies the principals of Sabi and Wabi. It is usually coil built or carved in rough assymetrical proportions. The glaze is rough, running and fitted. It has a look of the spontaneous and accidental. It seems imperfect and unpretentious. But these qualities are highly contrived and required particular control for their achievemnt. The artist's task is to express an unnatural naturalness, an illusion of artlessness. (Fig. 9).

The same principals are also displayed in the surroundings of the Ceremony: the tea house and garden. The tea house is built in a rustic style with a thatched roof and rough unpolished wood. The most important element, however, from the point of view of Noguchi's practice is the tea house garden or "dewy path" as it is known. (Fig.10) The garden exists as a kind of transition or symbolic journey from the Confucian <4> world of everyday life and care to the contemplative and spiritual world of the tea house.

Noguchi remarks on the arrangement of the concrete tables and stools on the upper "Delegates Patio" (Fig. 3) in the U.N.E.S.C.O. garden as a "new and formal variation on the tea ceremony" <5> and many of the elements of his garden are borrowed from the tea house garden. In common with the "dewy path" Noguchi has included stone lanterns, stone water basins (chuzobachi) and stepping stones. Noguchi intends that the delegates might leave the world of work and enter a more spiritual one in his garden.

The tea house garden is a miniature of the Japanese landscape garden proper and the treatment of space and the natural elements of rocks, water, trees etc. in the Japanese garden has informed Noguchi's thinking and practice as a Modern artist.

The treatment of space in the Japanese garden and indeed the whole garden form evolved from Chinese Sung painting. The garden began, in fact, as a three dimensional representation of landscape painting <6>. But it is important to note that the object of these art forms is not so much nature as naturalness. The object

is not the creation or representation of a pastoral idyl but the evocation of the reality of nature by a kind of short circuiting of the intellect. The Zen ink painters method demonstrates this.

The Sumi (ink) painter studies for years, building his technical proficiency in the handling of brush and black ink. Only after this facility and total mastery is achieved does the real process of painting begin. Given the type of paper and ink used, no painting over or erasure is possible. The painter must first compose himself in a oneness of self and materials. The technique must flow thoughtlessly. Since the artist's mastery of technique is complete the technicalities require not thought and the painting expresses the inner sense. (Fig. 11)

Hoover writes:

"The purpose of Zen painting is to penetrate beyond the perceptions of the rational mind and its supporting senses to show not nature's surface but its very essence" <7>.

The painter rarely works from an actual landscape and the early Zen painters often worked from Chinese Sung paintings.

The Chinese Sung paintings included the elements of mountains, trees, rocks flowing water etc. Figures were often included to add a sense of scale. But scale was primarily suggested by the conventional perspective. This perspective device consisted of dividing the picture into three distinct tiers; foreground, middle distance, and distance; each divided by washed and blank areas, left in such a way as to suggest mists and fogs breaking up the panoramic views. Those blank or washed areas are suggestive of great distance and space. (Fig. 12) These

conventions were adopted by the Zen painters, the spatial devices being suggestive of the infinite especially suiting their Zen sensibility.

The three dimensional representation of Sung paint evolved, then, into two main types of landscape garden. The first conventional landscape garden, most familiar in the West and a second "Kare Sansui" or dry garden style.

The discovery of perspective in Europe during the Renaissance coincided with the same discovery and its application in landscape gardening in Japan.

The early gardeners learned to suggest distance through the manipulation of the characteristics the eye uses to scale a scene.

In "Zen culture" Thomas Hoover divided this manipulation of perspective into roughly three main categories:

"..... the creation of artificial depth through overt foreshortening, thereby simulating the effects of distance...; the use of psychological tricks that play on our instinctive presumptions regarding the existence of things unseen; and the masterly obliteration of all evidence of artifice, thereby rendering the deception invisible". <8>

If the garden is thought of as a three dimensional painting its elements must be arranged from a single vantage point. The Zen gardeners discovered that, by placing larger rougher rocks nearer the viewing point and smaller smoother ones further from it, they created the illusion of a greater distance than in fact existed. They later learned to use trees with larger light-coloured leaves in the front and smaller darker and

sometimes dwarfed trees at the back. The illusion of distance is further enhanced by making the winding pathways grow progressively narrower towards the back while using progressively smaller paving stones.

Psychological deception is often achieved by having a pathway or stream disappear behind a growth of trees leading the viewer to assume it continues into further unseen parts of the landscape. Vacant uncluttered areas seem to expand the vista. Flowers are never included because they would destroy the subtle tricks of perspective.

These tricks and manipulations of perspective are all carefully disguised by giving the elements of the garden the appearance of naturalness and age. Everything is placed asymmetrically as in nature. The garden has a slightly unkempt appearance further encouraging the instinctive association with a natural scene. Noguchi has borrowed from this style. The stone bridge, waterfall, ponds, stepping stones and plantings are all taken directly from it. Again, he emphasises, that his garden is not a true Japanese garden but an attempt to give the Japanese elements a personal twist and link them to our modern times and needs <9>. By providing changing vistas, as a person walks through the garden, he sees the garden as activating the space it occupies. This space becomes, as the Japanese discovered, more than the sum of its dimensions.

However, the style to which Noguchi owes most and from which he has borrowed most is the Kare Sansui or dry garden style. The two most notable examples of this style are the temple gardens of Daisen-in and Ryoan-ji both in Kyoto.

Daisen-in is attributed to the well known Sumi painter Soami and is a perfect simulation of a Sung painting. The focus of the work is two head high rocks which represent mountain peaks from the base of which appears white sand. The "water" flows down to a lower level through carefully chosen and carefully placed rocks. (Fig.13).

The most successful, however, of the dry gardens from a contemplative point of view, is the Temple Garden of Ryoan-ji. (Fig. 14). The garden is situated in the temple grounds but is set aside behind enclosing walls. The visitor enters the temple and passes through to a viewing veranda. The garden is about the size of a tennis court and is surrounded on three sides by a wall. Fifteen stones are set in 5 clusters in a bed of white raked sand. No trace of vegetation is in evidence except for the moss which grows on and around the clusters of stones. The sand is raked lengthwise and concentric circles are traced around each of the stones to give an illusion of ripples. The stones in each cluster are chosen and set intuitively to balance one another and each cluster is likewise set in the expanse of the the brilliant sand. The arrangement at Ryoan-ji is not primarily a symbolic one as it is at Daisen-in. There is a suggestion of islands in a sea but that is as far as the symbolism extends. The spareness and apparent simplicity of the scene rather evokes a feeling of infinity in a strictly confined space. The garden is a "lesson in the Zen concept of nothingness and nonattachment". <10>

Noguchi speaks of the rocks of the temple gardens as being;

"so planted as to suggest a protuberance from the primordial mass below. Every rock gains enormous weight and that is why the whole garden may be said to be a sculpture whose roots are joined way below" <11>.

The "blue" rocks in the U.N.E.S.C.O. garden are variously distributed and rest in beds of dry gravel. In the Japanese manner their distribution and shape appears random but Noguchi has employed the "artlessness" of Zen. The rocks are, in fact, scrupulously and meticalously selected and placed in such a way as to make them appear natural and random and to disguise the care with which they were chosen and placed. The rocks conform to the Zen aesthetic principals of Sabi and Wabi being worn by time and being simple and undecorated.

Noguchi also selected and placed natural rocks for a work in the Chase Manhattan bank plaza in New York City. (Fig. 15). This work shares many similarities with the garden at Ryoan-ji. Being set below ground level, it may not be entered but only viewed from the offices below ground level or from above on the Plaza. Weathered, natural rocks were selected and placed on the undulating paved ground of a shallow circular pool. The selection of these natural eroded rocks and those at the U.N.E.S.C.O. garden has its precedent in a similar long Japanese tradition. Natural rocks, which the Zen gardeners judged to possess the qualities of Sabi and Wabi were highly prized and sought after. The rocks at Ryoan-ji are said to have been recovered from earlier gardens destroyed in the Onin War which is a measure of their high value to the Japanese. Noguchi has borrowed heavily from this tradition in his efforts to create contemplative and spiritual spaces in the modern urban environment.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas Hoover, Zen Culture
2. Diane Apostolos Cappadona, "Stone as Centering: the Spiritual Sculptures of Isamu Noguchi", Art International March/April 1981 p. 84
3. Hoover, Zen Culture p. 181
4. Confucianism, in its original Chinese form taught a respect for learning, the ready acceptance of a structured hierarchy and unquestioning obedience to authority. When transferred to Japan, however, Confucianism became the basis of a caste system. Every person has his status according to this system. In the Tea Ceremony, in theory at least, individuals became equal regardless of his or her status within the caste system.

Confucianism also denotes the pragmatic and wordly aspects of life which could be left outside while participating in the Ceremony.

5. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.167
6. Hoover, P.89
7. Ibid. P.114
8. Ibid. P.114
9. Noguchi, P.167
10. Hoover, P.110
11. Noguchi, p.40



Figure 9. Amagumo Hon'ami Koetsu (1558-1637)
H. 8.8cm., D. 12.3cm.



Figure 10. Tea House Garden



Figure 11. Hoboku Landscape (Detail) (1495)

Sesshu Toyo
(1420-1506)

H. 149cm., W. 33cm.



Figure 12. Singing and Dancing in the Spring

May Yuan
Sung Dynasty
(960-1279)

Hanging scroll, ink and slight
colour on silk.
H. 75 3/4"., W. 43 3/4".

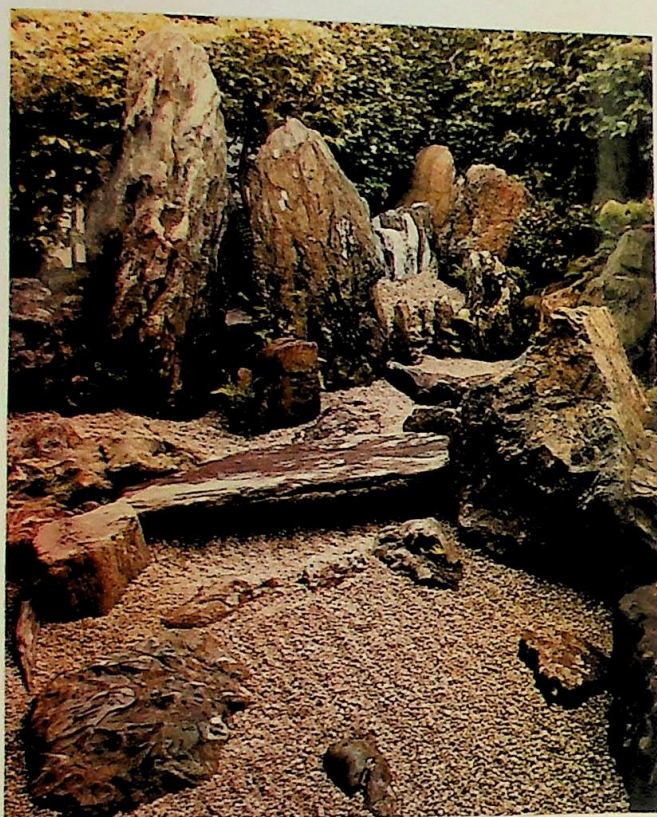


Figure 13. Temple Garden of Daisen-in
Kyoto (1513)

Soami (1475-1525)
(attributed)

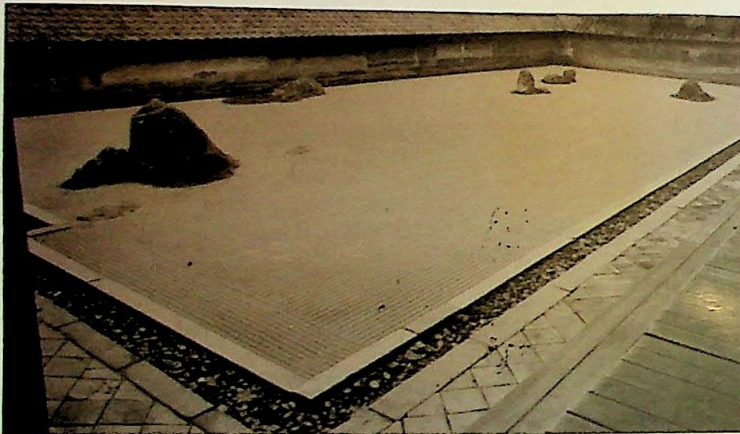
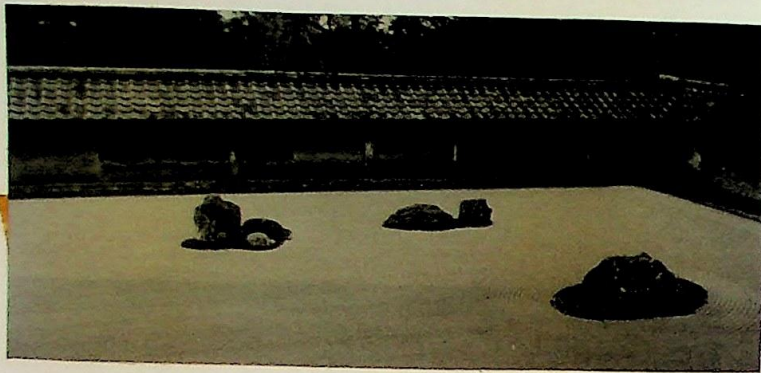


Figure 14. Temple Garden of Ryoan-ji
Kyoto (1490)



Figure 15. Sunken Garden (1961-64) Isamu Noguchi

CHAPTER V

With the completion of the U.N.E.S.C.O. garden we can see the extent to which Noguchi has distilled the influences of the Japanese artistic tradition and its inseparable Zen component. The U.N.E.S.C.O. garden is, in part, a resolution of his efforts to relate sculpture to modern life.

Other areas of his thought and study are also brought to bear in the garden. His study of ancient sculptural spaces and their relation to people and collaborative aspects of architecture, and sculpture also manifest themselves.

The Delegates Patio in the upper part of the garden, with its concrete stools and tables is reminiscent of part of Brancusi's outdoor work at Turgu-jiu? in Bulgaria. (Fig.16) Brancusi arranged stone stools around a large circular stone table and, although Noguchi's arrangement is asymmetrical (in the Zen tradition) the similarities are notable.

In Brancusi, Noguchi recognized potentiality of a great architectural sculptor and he speaks with regret that Brancusi never worked with architects, and only realized one outdoor

environmental work. He wonders whether Brancusi's purity of purpose had excluded the possibility of collaboration. <1>

The U.N.E.S.C.O. garden was the first of many collaborations which Noguchi undertook with architects, Through these innovative collaborations he was able to realize his thinking on sculptural space.

His earlier attempts at making play environments were the first stirring of this concern with spaces. But his concern with the imagination of the child and its explorations and discoveries extended as he matured, to a concern with the quality of leisure.

It was this concern which first prompted him to undertake his world trip under the sponsorship of the Bolingen Foundation. Noguchi had journeyed to rediscover the ancient uses of sculpture. He found in these uses a concept of sculptural space which had been forgotten in Modern practice. He saw that, compared with ancient societies modern practice merely embellished or contrasted with already fully conceived and finished buildings.

In this practice, as with the sculptures of Henry Moore for instance, the work of sculpture only refers to itself and its own autonomy and remains a closed entity. It does not succeed in activating the surrounding space. It does not act in conjunction with the building against which it is set. <2>

"If sculpture is the rock", Noguchi said, "it is also the space between rocks and between rock and the man and the communication and contemplation between". <3>

His world journey took him back to Japan where he found, in

the garden tradition, a solution to this problem of activating space. he saw that the Japanese by their manipulation of perspective and breaking up of vistas had managed to make a space of the garden which was more than the sum of the dimensions of its boundaries. He began to see the garden and related forms as a means of sculpturing space.

"I like to think of gardens as....: a beginning, and a groping to another level of sculpture. Scale and meaning enter when some thoughtful object or line is introduced". <4>

The issues of collaboration in public sculpture are discussed by Tim Threlfall in an essay on the subject <5>. Threlfall points to a schism which took place, at first, in painting, during the early Modernist period. Painters reacted against restrictive academic principals. But this reaction, while allowing for a new freedom of individual creative expression, also cut the early Modernists off from the academy and the main sources of patronage. Modernist practice, including sculpture in the 20th C., therefore, became obsessively privatist. In this spirit Brancusi told Noguchi that he belonged to a new generation who could go directly to abstraction without first having to abstract from nature as his (Brancusi) had done. <6> But Noguchi was sceptical. "Was pure abstraction really an advance?" <7> He was already beginning to react against this purist reductive aproach. This reaction is illustrated again by his argument for what he called an anti-materialist revolution in which he saw no conflict between spirituality and modern art. That is not to say that Noguchi by any means abandoned the private pursuit of sculptural expression.

"After each bout with the world I find myself returning chastened and contented enough to seek, within the limits of a single sculpture, the

world" <8>.

His collaborative efforts, his vision of sculpture as the "harmonizer and humanizer of spaces" is supplimented by his obsessive relationship with his main chosen medium, stone.

FOOTNOTES

1. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.160
2. Tim Threlfall, "A movement for a Realignment in Contemporary Sculpture and some Implications for Art and Design Education", Journal of Art and Design Education Vol.1 No.1 1982 P.99
3. Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture" Art News March 1949 P.55
4. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World p.161
5. Threlfall.
6. Isamu Noguchi, "Noguchi on Brancusi" Craft Horizons August 1976 P.29
7. Ibid. P.29
8. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.40
9. Noguchi "Meanings in Modern Sculpture" Art News. March 1949 P.55



Figure 16. Table of Silence (1937) Constantin Brancusi

Stone
H. 31 1/2", D. 18'.3".

CHAPTER VI

Noguchi's relationship with stone is central to his philosophy of life and art. In particular a series of carvings he made during the late 1960's and 1970's known as the "table tops" serve to illustrate the maturation of his distance aesthetic outlook.

Noguchi first learned the rudiments of stone carving from Brancusi <1> and first became acquainted with "taille directe", the interaction of sculptor and tools and material. In "taille directe" Noguchi found the "communion with nature, the nature of materials" <2> which he was seeking.

He speaks of natural materials such as wood and stone, being alive before man was and as having,

...."the greater capacity to comfort us with the reality of our being. They are as familiar as the earth, a matter of sensibility". <3>

And his love of the use of stone has to do with its being the very stuff of the earth old, flexible and meaning impregnated.<4> Its oldness and long tradition of use for him are a contact with history,

"with everything I know and can call sculpture, that is to say, nature, the wind and the stars,..... where we come from, where we go.... Ecology, anthropology all of the factors which have to do with our being on earth, are to me, close to stone." <5>

In ancient Japan stones were worshipped and this reverence, in time, evolved into a special appreciation of nature <6> manifest especially in the Zen landscape gardens and stone gardens. Noguchi's regard for stone as the basic element of sculpture, he relates to his involvement with gardens. As with stone he speaks of returning, with zest, to this most physical involvement with earth <7>.

In 1967 Noguchi made a stone sculpture, Origen (Fig. 17) which was to be the beginning of a series of a kind of small scale landscape table with distinctive echoes of his involvement with the Zen garden. The antecedents of this sculpture type are his "Contoured Playground (Fig. 2) of 1940 and Night Land (Fig. 18) and Table (Fig. 19) of 1947+48 respectively. In the 40's he had turned to furniture design and had designed a table which was a sort of cross between function and abstraction "Night Land", and Table (1948) as can be seen, are an extension of this theme with the functionalism of the table sub-ordinated and become only thematic. The surface of the tables become worked with motifs and iconographic symbols. Origen then recalls the stones of the Zen temple garden. Without base it appears to rise as a mound from the earth. The surface is treated with contrasting high polish and scoring, the scoring resembling the ancient moss which grows around the base of the rocks at Rhyoan-ji.

Like Origen, the other works in the series are given this minimum of surface treatment, having only two or three variations in polishing and scoring. They are made in the form of a table raised on stone slabs. They have gently modelled depressions and eminences. The effect is of a highly cultured nature,

miniaturized versions of the Zen gardens with suggestions of mountains and water. <8> Both Double Black Mountain (1970) (Fig. 20) in black granite and Double Red Mountain (1970) (Fig. 21) in travertine distill the mountains of Desain-in for example to a concentrated expression of the universality of "mountain". Landscape sculpture 1970 (Fig. 22) and Water Table (1970) (Fig. 23) also share the Zen aesthetic qualities of Wabi and Sabi by their simplicity of treatment of natural elements and their austerity and restraint they seek to transcend the specifics of time and place to achieve the contemplativeness and tranquility of the infinite and the universal.

FOOTNOTES

1. Isamu Noguchi, "Noguchi on Brancusi",
Craft Horizons August 1976 P.27
2. Ibid. P.28
3. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.39
4. Sam Hunter, "Isamu Noguchi"
Art News May 1978 P.126
5. Ibid. P.128
6. Noguchi, A Sculptor's World P.167
7. Ibid. P.38
8. Sam Hunter, Isamu Noguchi P.180



Figure 17. Origen (1968) Isamu Noguchi

Black African Granite
23", x 30", x 32".

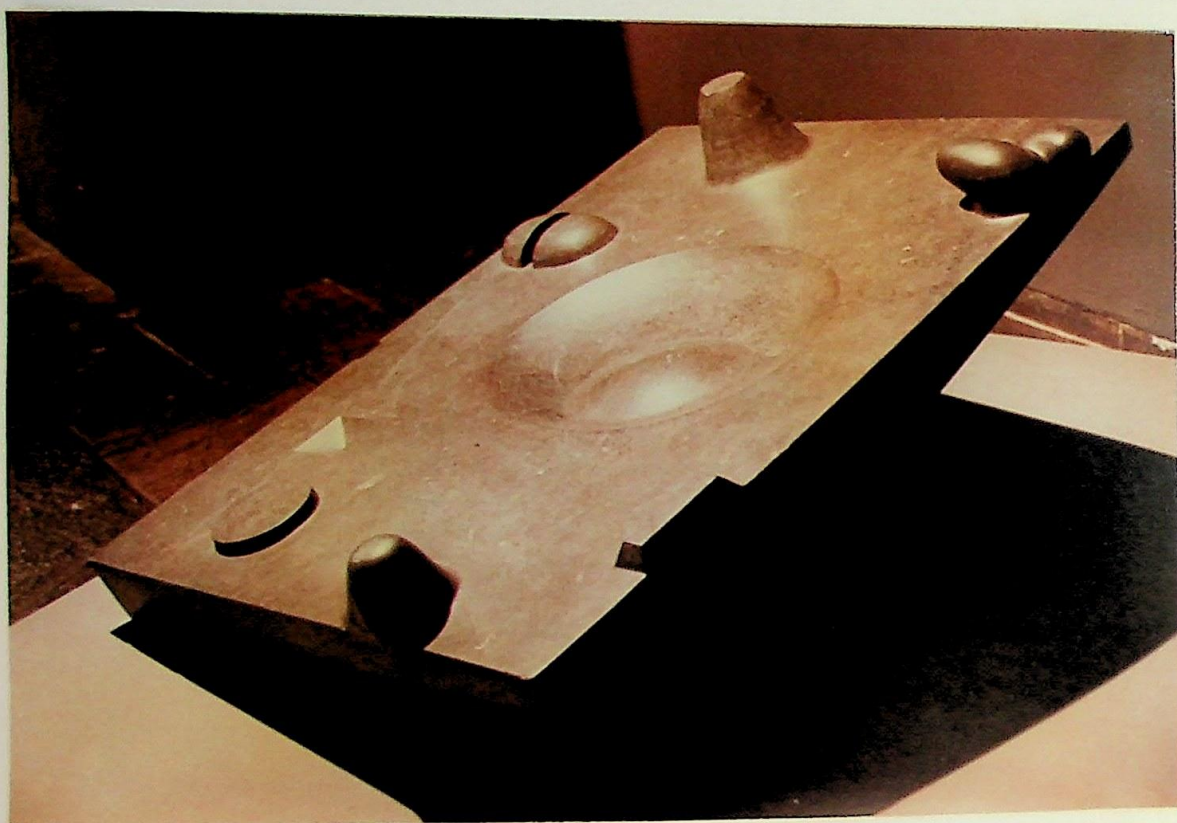


Figure 18. Night Land (Night Voyage) (1947) Isamu Noguchi

York Fossil Marble
14", x 45", x 35"



Figure 19.

Table (1948)

Isamu Noguchi

York Fossil Marble
16" x 44".

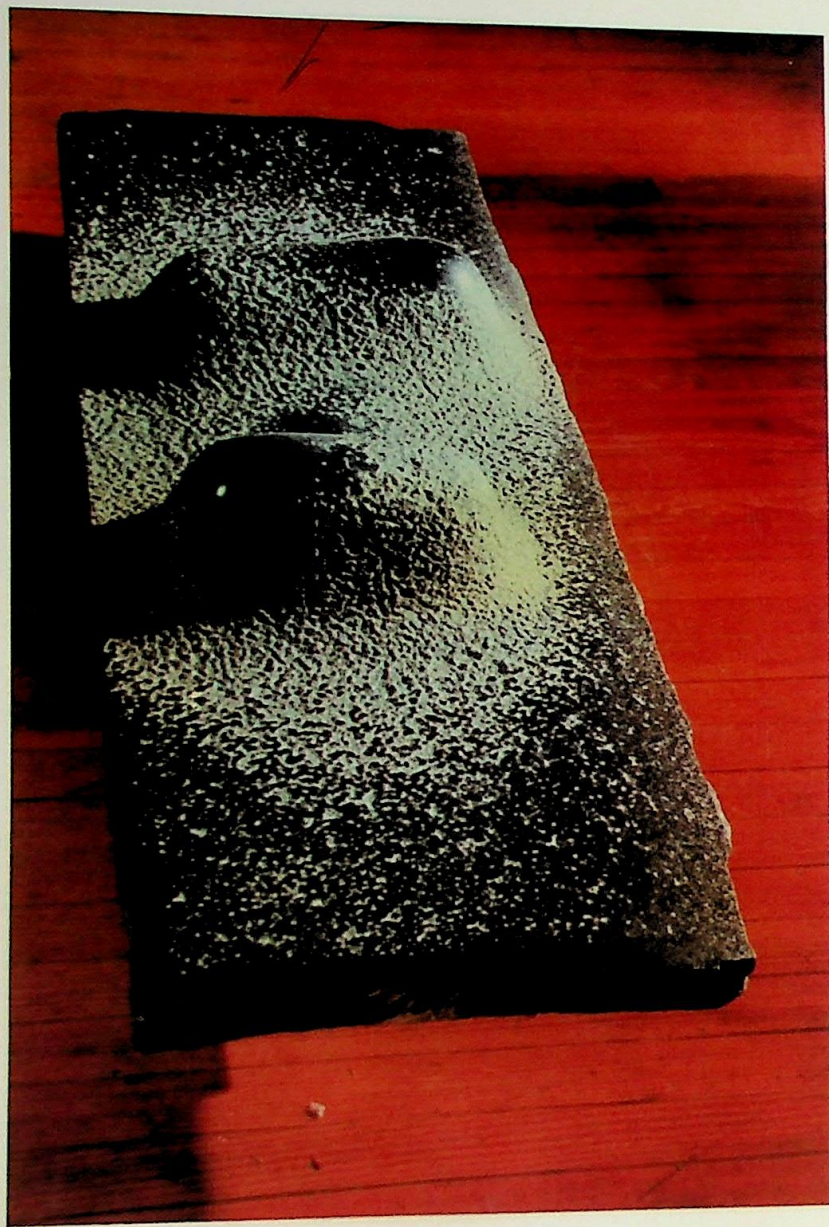


Figure 20. Double Black Mountain (1970) Isamu Noguchi

Black Granite
8", x 15 1/2", x 17 3/4".



Figure 21. Double Red Mountain (1969) Isamu Noguchi
Persian Red Travertine
13", x 40", x 30".

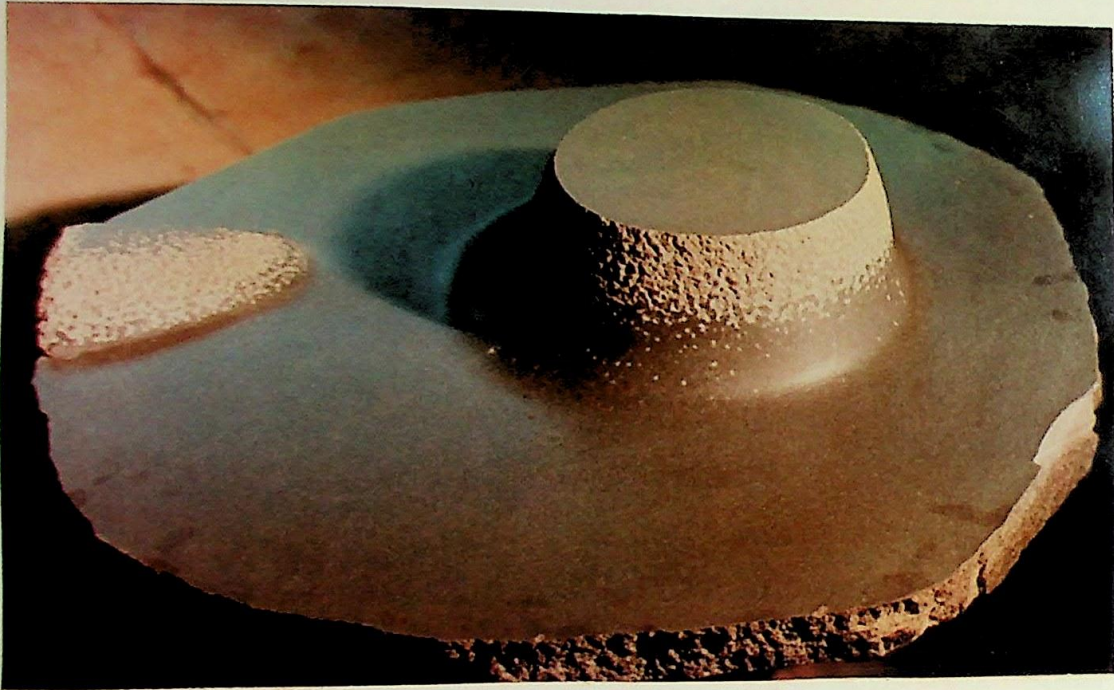


Figure 22. Landscape Sculpture (1970) Isamu Noguchi

Granite
D. 40"., H. 7".

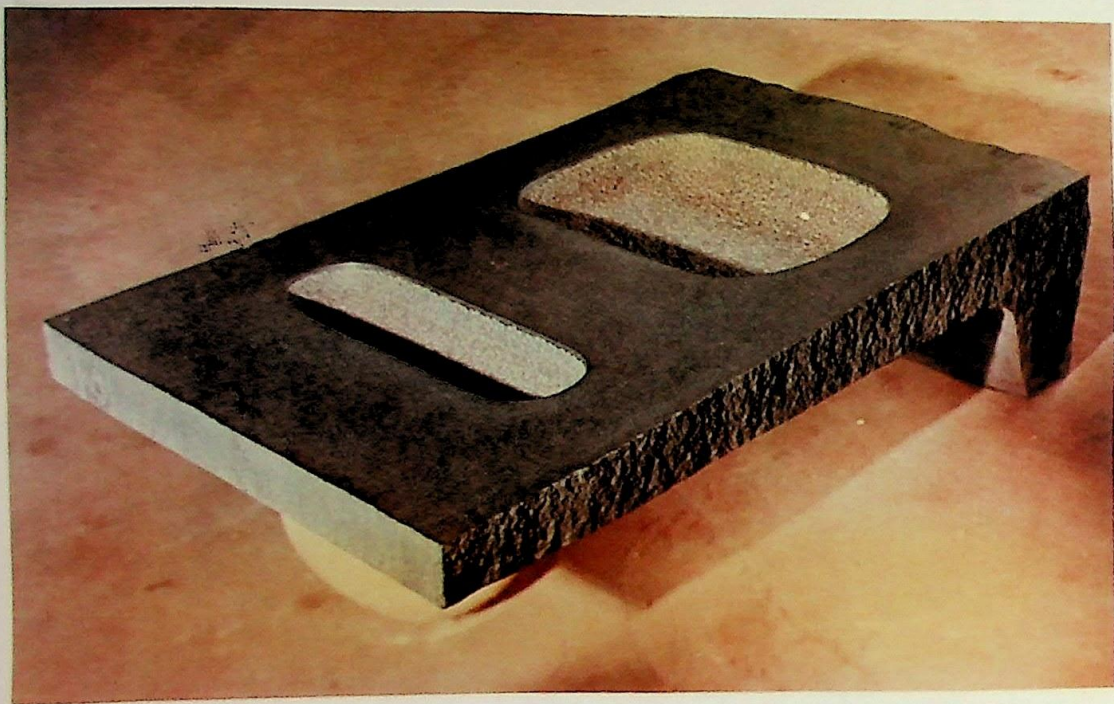


Figure 23 Water Table (1968) Isamu Noguchi

Black Granite
14 1/4" x 51" x 31 1/2".

CONCLUSION

In his book on Noguchi Sam Hunter wrote:

"Noguchi's particular goals in art may well have derivied from an unconcious effort transposed to the sphere of values and esthetics to unravel the rejections of a troubled childhood" <1>

This seems a plausible theory. From the thread of activity and aspiration which I have isolated we can see that Noguchi's art and life is a restless search for place and identity. His efforts to create child centred environments and the evolution of these efforts toward the humanization of spaces in the form of gardens and outdoor works.

This search has involved the evolution and combination of aspects of his activity and thinking. These, aspects, have necessarily, overlapped and intertwined, but they include several important areas. Firstly, there are his efforts to create child-centred environments partly in response to the social deprivations of the 1930's. These efforts, in time, evolved into a concern for the quality of leisure and the humanizing of public spaces. Noguchi's exploration of Japanese culture and his own Zen sensibility must be added and his wide travels also indicate his obsessive quest. Most important is his relation to stone as

his chosen medium.

Stone, for Noguchi, is the element which provides a continuity between ancient sculptural practice and his own aspiration for sculpture in modern and future times. During his travels he had seen how ancient societies had used stone as the centre of their now forgotten rituals and communal values.

He may have been longing for a return to communal values when he wrote:

"When the culture has really arrived at a point where there is no such thing anymore as art, in capital letters, but art pervades all life, that is the time when there is real culture. When art is a commodity as it is today, art has not really permeated life. It is still an odd thing which people buy as an oddity. One of these days, somewhere, art will become art. It will become a vital part of life."<2>

In order for art to become a vital part of life Noguchi has called for the re-unification of art and spirituality.

Tim Thelfall's example of the Romanesque church is a case in point. He argues that the church's overall harmony is a product of the individual creative interpretations of the artisan/sculptors who recognized the cultural framework, a spiritual one, in which they worked. <3>.

This cultural framework, however, does not exist in our pluralist, fragmented society and we witness alienated individuals striving for expression without this holistic model from which to draw.

Noguchi's contribution to the resolution of this alienation and fragmentation is twofold and encompasses the insight he

brings from his dual cultural heritage. Firstly he asserts, by his example, the artists need to pursue private concerns and secondly he combines his awareness of the modern bind with his roots in Zen.

For him Zen provides a secular holistic model, free of the connotations of dogmatic religion, by which we can order, humanize and harmonize human interaction with, and life in, the world.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sam Hunter, Isamu Noguchi P.24
2. Sam hunter, "Isamu Noguchi" Art News
May 1978 P.126
3. Tim Threlfall, "A movement for a Realignment in
Contemporary Sculpture and some
Implications for Art and Desgin
Education", Journal of Art and
Design Education Vol.1 No.1 1982 P.92

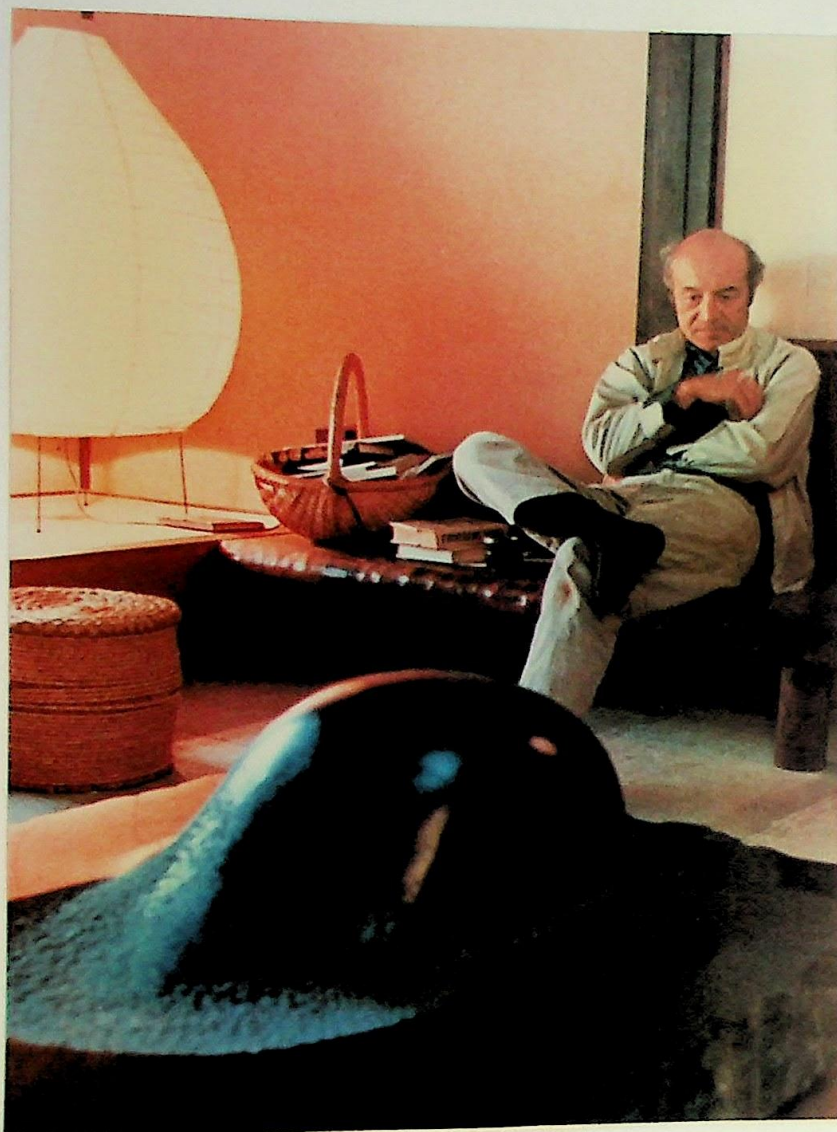


Figure 24. The Wave. (1968) (with artist) Isamu Noguchi
Swedish Granite

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