

December 25, 2018

# Changing and Unchanging Things: Noguchi and Hasegawa in Postwar Japan

## Rediscovering Japanese Aesthetics in the 1950s

**Venue:** Yokohama Museum of Art

**Dates:** January 12 (Sat.) - March 24 (Sun.), 2019

Sculptor Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), of Japanese and American ancestry, sought to reintegrate art into people's daily lives, as it was in the prehistoric or ancient remains he saw in his travels through Europe and Asia since 1949, while Saburo Hasegawa (1906-1957) was a leading figure in Japanese prewar abstraction as a painter, and as a theorist he studied Western modern art movements and the traditional arts of Japan, finding aspects common to both in abstract art. In May 1950 Noguchi set foot on Japanese soil, as the final destination of his travels, for the first time in 19 years, and had a fateful encounter with Hasegawa, who had known Noguchi's work since 1948 and was so eager for dialogue that he planned to establish correspondence with the sculptor. They found astounding similarities and a powerful resonance between their shared interests and respective visions.

After this they became close friends, and Hasegawa served as an incomparable guide to the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Japan, including architecture, gardening, calligraphy, painting, archaeological artifacts, the tea ceremony, Zen, and haiku, playing a crucial role in forming Noguchi's understanding of the essence of Japanese aesthetics, while dialogues with Noguchi encouraged Hasegawa to extend the frontiers of his abstract art by working in traditional Asian media such as sumi ink, rubbings, and woodblocks.

This exhibition focuses on the friendship between these two artists, exploring what they saw, thought about, and aspired to do, through approximately 50 works by Noguchi and 70 by Hasegawa, particularly from the years of their association in the 1950s.

\*Some works will be replaced with others while the exhibition is on view, for conservation purposes.



Isamu Noguchi,  
*Calligraphics*, 1957,  
iron, wood, rope, metal,  
178.8×43.5×40.6cm,  
The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and  
Garden Museum, New York  
©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and  
Garden Museum, New York/ARS-JASPAR  
Photo: Kevin Noble

## What Noguchi and Hasegawa Sought: Synthesis of “the Old East and the New West”

In 1950, the year Noguchi and Hasegawa met, Japan entered its fifth year of occupation by Allied forces and was still in the midst of a massive and daunting postwar reconstruction. It was also a time when, under the new Japanese Constitution enacted in 1947, the nation was on the threshold of long-awaited independence and a return to the international community as a peaceful state, culturally rich if still economically impoverished. In the art world, there were growing expectations for new international exchange, and Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi was welcomed enthusiastically when he arrived. Noguchi met important artists and architects such as painter Genichiro Inokuma, architect Kenzo Tange, and designer Isamu Kenmochi, but Saburo Hasegawa was a figure of unique significance to him.

The goal Noguchi and Hasegawa shared can be described as the synthesis of “the old East and the new West,” reflecting Hasegawa’s own words. How could the art of the coming era balance tradition and modernity, indigenous culture and foreign influence? An ongoing interest in this challenging question characterizes the two artists’ work. Hasegawa went to the United States in 1954 and was warmly welcomed in New York, where Japanese culture was in vogue, practicing the tea ceremony and lecturing on Taoism and Zen while producing and exhibiting abstract paintings in sumi ink, and associating with Franz Kline and other American abstractionists. After temporarily returning to Japan and then immigrating to San Francisco in 1955, Hasegawa made an impact on young writers and artists of the Beat Generation with his lectures at California College of Arts and Crafts and the American Academy of Asian Studies. In addition to Hasegawa’s best-known 1950s works in Japanese collections, this

exhibition presents many works produced in the US, quite a few of which have never been shown in Japan. Meanwhile, Noguchi’s works from the 1950s when he was traveling back and forth between the US and Japan, including sculptures in ceramic, stone, aluminum, cast iron, bell bronze, and balsa wood, and his extensive series of *Akari Light Sculptures*, show essential aspects of the traditional cultural heritage of Japan that Noguchi viewed with Hasegawa, and of Zen Buddhism and other East Asian philosophy, his understanding of which deepened during their dialogues. His works embody these qualities in the language of abstract art, but do not fall into a specific style or a superficial imitation of any Japanese object. Noguchi’s works in this show, which range widely in materials and sizes, from the small ceramic *Face Dish* to the larger than life size aluminum-plate *Sesshu*, the philosophically titled balsa wood *Mortality* and the carved stone *Garden Elements* with a height of 2.6 meters, reflect his ambitions to make a world art that addresses all people beyond temporal and cultural boundaries. At the same time we can say that the essence of Noguchi’s art as we perceive it today was forged during this period of engagement with Japan.



Saburo HASEGAWA,  
*Untitled*, 1954,  
ink on paper, 138.8×70.0cm,  
KONAN GAKUEN Saburo  
Hasegawa Memorial Gallery

## Highlights

### 1. Many of Noguchi's and Hasegawa's most admired works, as well as many never shown in Japan before

In addition to many of Hasegawa's best-known sumi ink works, prints, and rubbings from the collections of Japanese national and public museums, this exhibition features *Garden Elements* (1958), one of Noguchi's most important stone sculptures, made in Japan, exhibited in the US, and then never seen in public for many years, as well as many pieces exhibited in Japan for the first time, including sumi ink paintings, photograms and other previously unknown works produced by Hasegawa after he moved to the US.

Through about 120 works – paintings, sculptures, prints, photographs, calligraphy and more – this exhibition traces both the creative trajectories and the deeply fruitful friendship of Noguchi and Hasegawa.

\*Before this exhibition, Isamu Noguchi's *Garden Elements* (1958) is shown in the Grand Gallery of the Yokohama Museum of Art starting in late November 2018.

### 2. Exhibition held jointly in the US and Japan. 33 works will be shown only in Yokohama

This exhibition was jointly organized by the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York and the Yokohama Museum of Art.

Most of the featured works will travel to the Noguchi Museum (New York) and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco after being shown in Yokohama. In addition to these, the Yokohama Museum of Art will exclusively exhibit 33 works, including prewar abstractions and photos such as the painting *Locus of a Butterfly* (1937), that illustrate Saburo Hasegawa's role as a pioneer of Japanese abstract art.

Also on view will be Noguchi's plaster model for his proposed *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima* (1951-52), only shown to the public in recent years, alongside Noguchi works from the Yokohama Museum of Art collection.



Isamu NOGUCHI,  
*Face Dish*, 1952,  
ceramic, 30.8×27.3×2.9cm,  
The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York  
©The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum,  
New York/ARS-JASPAR  
Photo: Kevin Noble

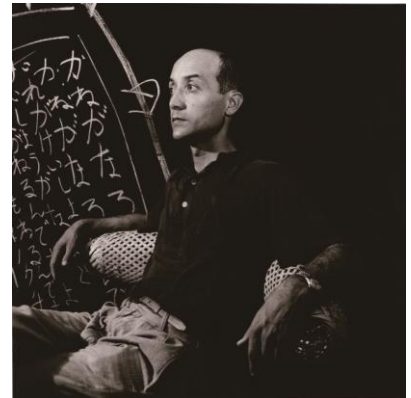


Saburo HASEGAWA,  
*Nature*, 1953,  
two-panel folding screen, ink on paper, each 135.0×66.5cm,  
The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

## Biography

### **Isamu Noguchi (1904 – 1988)**

Isamu Noguchi was born in Los Angeles as the son of Japanese poet Noguchi Yonejiro and American writer and teacher Leonie Gilmour. His earliest years were spent in Japan but he was sent back to the United States at the age of thirteen. When he set his mind on becoming a sculptor, he had the opportunity to apprentice with Brancusi. In 1929, he moved to New York and based his activities there. He made his living with portrait busts, but at the same time produced abstract sculpture and did public park planning, stage set design, and other projects. He returned to Japan in 1931, after a gap of 13 years, and visited Kyoto and Nara. During World War II, he voluntarily entered a relocation camp for Japanese Americans. There he planned landscape designs for park and other areas inside the campgrounds. He traveled to Europe and Asia in 1949, in search of connections between art and society in earlier ages, and arrived in Japan, his final destination, in 1950. Noguchi met Hasegawa Saburo and explored cultural heritage sites together with him. He began designs for the Hiroshima Peace Bridge railings (completed in 1952) and for a memorial (unrealized) for atomic bomb victims. Noguchi's understanding of traditional Japanese aesthetics was deepened through his dialogue with Hasegawa on subjects such as Zen, Japanese tea ceremony, calligraphy, etc., that greatly influenced his thought and the subsequent development of his art.



Isamu NOGUCHI, 1950  
Photo: Jun Miki  
Photo courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

### **Hasegawa Saburo (1906 – 1957)**



Saburo HASEGAWA, ca. 1956  
Photo courtesy of KONAN GAKUEN Saburo Hasegawa Memorial Gallery

Hasegawa Saburo studied oil painting under Koide Narashige when he was a student at Konan High School. He went on to major in art history at Tokyo Imperial University and quickly became versed in both art technique and theory. Studying art in Europe for three years, starting from 1929, he made up his mind to devote himself to painting. He started creating abstract oil paintings in 1936 and was among the founders of the Association of Free Artists (*Jiyu Bijutsuka Kyokai*). He also produced photographic works from the time of the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937) until the end of World War II (1945). With increasingly severe suppression of speech and expression, he turned to studies of haiku, Zen, and tea ceremony. After the war, he resumed his activities as a painter with the Modern

Artists Association of Nippon, founded in 1947. Meeting Isamu Noguchi in 1950 and traveling together with Noguchi in Kansai region, Hasegawa gained confidence in his long-held premise of a relationship between Abstract Art and traditional Japanese aesthetics. He shifted from oil painting to rubbings and ink painting. In 1954 he was warmly welcomed in New York, in the midst of a 'Japan boom' at the time. After briefly returning to Japan, he moved to San Francisco where he had an appointment as a professor and significantly influenced young artists until he passed away in 1957.

**Event**

Changing and Unchanging Things—Noguchi and Hasegawa in the 1950s: Lectures by Curators

Date: Sunday, January 13, 2019

Time: 13:30-16:00 (Doors Open at 13:00)

Speakers: Matthew Kirsch (Curator, The Noguchi Museum)

Mark Dean Johnson (Professor of Art, San Francisco State University)

Naoaki Nakamura (Senior Curator, Yokohama Museum of Art)

\*Japanese-English consecutive interpretation available

Venue: Lecture Hall, Yokohama Museum of Art

Capacity: 220 seats (Pre-registration necessary / First-come, first-served basis)

Admission: Free

Booking: Pre-registration

URL: [https://f.msgs.jp/webapp/form/17066\\_kgz\\_216/index.do](https://f.msgs.jp/webapp/form/17066_kgz_216/index.do)

\*Deadline for pre-registration: January 12, Saturday, 2019, 17:00 (The form will be closed after reaching full capacity.)

**Admission**

<b>Adults</b>	<b>¥1,500 ( 1,300/ 1,400)</b>
<b>University and high school students</b>	<b>¥ 900 ( 700/ 800)</b>
<b>Junior high school students</b>	<b>¥ 600 ( 400/ 500)</b>
<b>Children under 12</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Seniors (65 and older)</b>	<b>¥1,400</b> *ID required. Only available at ticket counter in the museum.

\*(/)=Advance / Group of 20 or more.

\*For a group of 20 or more, reservation is required in advance.

\*Advance tickets are available until January 11 (Fri.), 2019 at the Museum Shop, through Seven-Eleven ticket or eplus ticket.

\*Free admission for high school students and younger with valid IDs on Saturdays.

\*Visitors with disability and one person accompanying them are admitted free of charge.

(Please present certificate at the entrance.)

\*The ticket also gives admission to the Exhibition of the Museum Collection for the same day.

**General Information**

Title: Changing and Unchanging Things: Noguchi and Hasegawa in Postwar Japan

Dates: January 12 (Sat.) - March 24 (Sun.), 2019

Open hours: 10:00-18:00

\*Open until 20:30 on March 2 (Sat.), 2019

\*Admission until 30 minutes before closing.

Closed: Thursdays (Except March 21), March 22, 2019

Venue: Yokohama Museum of Art

3-4-1, Minatomirai, Nishi-ku, Yokohama 220-0012

TEL: +81(0)45 221 0300 FAX: +81(0)45 221 0317

URL: <https://yokohama.art.museum/eng>

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## **Contact**

Mizutani(Mr.), Fujii(Ms.), Isshiki(Ms.), Umezawa(Ms.)

Public Relations, Yokohama Museum of Art

3-4-1, Minatomirai, Nishi-ku, Yokohama. 220-0012 JAPAN

TEL:+81(0)45 221 0319 FAX:+81(0)45 221 0317 **E-mail: [pr-yma@yaf.or.jp](mailto:pr-yma@yaf.or.jp)**