



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Isamu Noguchi

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## Collection Overview

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| <b>Repository:</b> | Archives of American Art   |
| <b>Title:</b>      | Oral history interview with Isamu Noguchi  |
| <b>Identifier:</b> | AAA.noguch73   |
| <b>Date:</b>       | 1973 Nov. 7-Dec. 26  |
| <b>Extent:</b>     | 148 Pages (Transcript)<br>1 Item (Audio excerpt: 1 sound file (5 min. 29 sec.); digital) |
| <b>Creator:</b>    | Noguchi, Isamu, 1904-1988<br>Cummings, Paul  |
| <b>Language:</b>   | English .  |

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

These interviews are part of the Archives' Oral History Program, started in 1958 to document the history of the visual arts in the United States, primarily through interviews with artists, historians, dealers, critics and others.

### Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

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## Biographical / Historical

Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) was a sculptor from Long Island City, N.Y.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Isamu Noguchi conducted 1973 Nov. 7-Dec. 26, by Paul Cummings, for the Archives of American Art.

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## Scope and Contents

NOVEMBER 7, 1973 session: Noguchi discusses his family background; growing up in Japan; returning to the United States in 1917; his identity as an artist; Gutzon Borglum; Columbia University and studying pre-med; attending Leonardo da Vinci Art School; apprenticing to Onorio Ruotolo; quitting Columbia to become a sculptor; Guggenheim Fellowship in 1927; J.B. Neumann; Alfred Stieglitz; George Grey

Barnard; James Earle Fraser; Brummer and the Brummer Gallery; studying at Chaumiere and Collarosi; working with Brancusi; meeting Sandy Calder in Paris; Stuart Davis; Morris Kantor; Andrée Ruellan; his work, "Sphere"; reacting against Brancusi; Eugene Schoen's; his Carnegie Hall studio; Michio Ito; Martha Graham; Buckminster Fuller; traveling in China and Japan; meeting Chi Pai Shi; John Becker; his works, "Play Mountain," "Monument to the Plow," "Monument to Ben Franklin," and "Orpheus" for Balanchine; designing for the stage; Audrey McMahon; Harry Hopkins; Holger Cahill; Mexico; Diego Rivera; Miguel Covarrubias; and the Artists Union.

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## Scope and Contents

DECEMBER 10, 1973 Session: His reaction to the Spanish Civil War- avoided direct involvement; Stuart Davis; Gorky; Andre Breton; David Hare; Marcel Duchamp; John Graham; Julien Levy; his artist friends dying at the peak of their success; Leger; Stirling Calder; associating himself with the laboring class; Buckminster Fuller; being American; expanding the possibilities of sculpture; his Associated Press Building project in Rockefeller Center, it being done in stainless steel instead of bronze; John Collier; Japanese-American Citizens League; organizing Nisei Artists and Writers Mobilization for Democracy; Jeanne Reynal; going to Poston, Ariz. to assist with American Indian Service camp under John Collier and becoming an internee there; returning to New York in 1942; Bollingen Foundation; trip around the world in 1949; and Philip Guston.

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## Scope and Contents

DECEMBER 18, 1973 session: Best work in studio; reaction against expressionism; artists protesting against the Establishment; his objection to the WPA, influenced by William Zorach; exhibiting in group show called, "Fourteen Americans at the Museum of Modern Art"; show at Egan Gallery in 1949; accepting art in its most aesthetically pure form without reference to social issues; movement in Japan since war to get away from refinement of Japan; Yoshiro Hiro responsible for Gutai and the happenings; his work, "Monument to Heroes," using bones; his work takes years to do; materials used in his work; his work, "Cronos"; doing theater stage sets for the Library of Congress including, "Appalachian Spring" and "Herodiade"; wants a given space which he can call his own and do something with it, has to be a work of art.

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## Scope and Contents

DECEMBER 26, 1973 Session: Show with Charles Egan in 1948 arranged by de Kooning; applying to the Bollingen Foundation to write a book on leisure, which was never written; traveling to Italy, Egypt, and India for two years; being removed from the New York scene with Franz Kline and de Kooning; his light objects; sculpture as environment; respect for material; Mondrian and his art deriving from nature; his time in Japan in 1931; visiting Japan in 1951; working in stone; projects in Japan; Taniguchi; Antonin Raymond; designing Japanese gardens; discovery of Zen; Hasegawa Saburo; Skidmore; Hans Knoll; Edison Price; Italy in the 1960s; Peter Gregory; Henry Moore; Louis Kahn; UNESCO; Noguchi Foundation and Plaza Company; Shoji; Eleanor Ward; and his autobiography, "A Sculptor's World."

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## General

Originally recorded on 4 sound tape reels. Reformatted in 2010 as 7 digital wav files. Duration is 6 hrs., 25 min.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Asian American artists -- Interviews  
Gardens, Japanese  
Sculptors -- Interviews  
Sculpture, American  
Sculpture, Modern -- 20th century

Types of Materials:

Interviews  
Sound recordings

Names:

Artists' Union (New York, N.Y.)  
Barnard, George Grey, 1863-1938  
Becker, John Bruere, 1915-  
Bollingen Foundation  
Borglum, Gutzon, 1867-1941  
Brancusi, Constantin, 1876-1957  
Breton, André, 1896-1966  
Brummer Gallery (New York, N.Y.)  
Brummer, Joseph  
Cahill, Holger, 1887-1960  
Calder, Alexander Stirling, 1870-1945  
Calder, Alexander, 1898-1976  
Collier, John, Jr., 1913-1992  
Covarrubias, Miguel, 1904-1957  
Davis, Stuart, 1892-1964  
De Kooning, Willem, 1904-1997  
Duchamp, Marcel, 1887-1968  
Egan, Charles, 1911-  
Fraser, James Earle, 1876-1953  
Fuller, R. Buckminster (Richard Buckminster), 1895-1983  
Gorky, Arshile, 1904-1948  
Graham, John, 1887-1961  
Graham, Martha  
Gregory, Peter Ronald, 1947-  
Guston, Philip, 1913-1980  
Hare, David, 1917-1992  
Hasegawa, Saburō, 1906-1957  
Hopkins, Harry Lloyd, 1890-1946  
Itō, Michio, 1893-1961

Japanese American Citizens' League  
Japanese American Citizens' League  
Kahn, Louis I., 1901-1974  
Kantor, Morris, 1896-1974  
Kline, Franz, 1910-1962  
Knoll, Hans  
Leonardo da Vinci Art School  
Levy, Julien  
Léger, Fernand, 1881-1955  
McMahon, Audrey, 1900?-1981  
Moore, Henry, 1898-1986  
Neumann, J. B. (Jsrael Ber)  
Price, Edison A., d. 1997  
Raymond, Antonin, 1888-  
Reynal, Jeanne, 1903-  
Rivera, Diego, 1886-1957  
Ruellan, Andrée, 1905-2006  
Ruotolo, Onorio, 1888-1966  
Schoen, Eugene, 1880-1957  
Shoji, Sadao, 1937-  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill  
Stieglitz, Alfred, 1864-1946  
Taniguchi, Yoshirō, 1904-  
UNESCO  
Ward, Eleanor, 1912-1984  
Zorach, William, 1887-1966

Geographic Names:

Egypt -- description and travel  
India -- description and travel  
Italy -- description and travel  
Japan -- Description and Travel