

QI BAISHI: A MASTER OF MANY ARTS

Qi Baishi was equally renowned for his achievements in seal carving as for his contributions to modernizing traditional literati painting; he was also a master calligrapher and poet. He was born to a poor farming family in Xiangtan, Hunan Province, and learned Chinese characters from his grandfather, who used a stick to trace them in the dirt. Physically unsuited to farming tasks, he was apprenticed to a woodcarver, but at nineteen he came across a book that would change his life: the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual*, a classic early Qing dynasty (1644–1911) treatise illustrating traditional techniques of literati painting. Qi taught himself to paint from it, refining his skills and studying the arts of seal cutting, poetry, and calligraphy with the many teachers he met as an itinerant woodcarver. His life spanned a period of great upheaval and reform in Chinese culture, but his unique style and politically neutral subjects allowed him to remain in favor through different regimes and cultural shifts. At the end of his life, he was lauded as the “People’s Artist,” elected honorary Chairman of the National Association of Fine Arts, and given the International Peace Award by the World Peace Council. With the resurgence of interest in ink painting in contemporary China, Qi Baishi, sometimes referred to as “China’s Picasso,” is celebrated as one of the leading artists of the twentieth century and his paintings are highly sought after by collectors and museums.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Crabs

circa 1930

Album leaf, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,
1949/1.199

INSCRIBED:

To Mr. Katsuizumi. Qi Huang [Qi Baishi's pen name]

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Seated Female Nude: Scroll (Kakemono)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.331

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Seated Nude, with Hand over Face

circa 1929–30

Black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.298

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Crouching Nude

circa 1929–30

Black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.318

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Reclining Nude

circa 1929–30

Black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.324

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Crouching Nude

circa 1929–30

Black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.290

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Two Seated Nudes

1929

Sanguine crayon and sanguine and brown chinks on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.304

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Seated Nude, Back View

circa 1929–30

Sanguine crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.291

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Two Standing Nudes

circa 1929–30

Black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.316

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Standing Nude, with Arms Raised

1929

Black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.325

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Reclining Male Nude

1930

Ink and black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.302

While most of Noguchi's drawings from this period were done with crayons and pens, he also tried his hand at using ink and brush, the traditional tools of East Asian painting and calligraphy. Unlike in the later *Peking Drawings*, here he uses ink and crayon in a traditional Western manner, creating areas of shading that give his figures a sense of three-dimensional volume.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Seated Nude: Study in Black

circa 1929–30

Ink and black crayon on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.295

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Chinese Girl

1930

Plaster

The Noguchi Museum

This figure's sinuous posture anticipates Noguchi's exploration of the human body in the *Peking Drawings*. The small sculpture is modeled on the colorful *sancai* (tri-color) glazed tomb figurines from the Tang period (618–907) that Noguchi admired in the windows of Beijing antique shops. Because traditional sculpture materials were unavailable in the city, Noguchi had to improvise. *Chinese Girl*, the only work of sculpture he produced during his time in Beijing, was made using a soft dental plaster.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Two Wrestlers: Scroll (Kakemono)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.330

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Cabbage

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

INSCRIBED:

Requested by Mr. Noguchi, 1930. Baishi.

Noguchi probably requested that Qi Baishi make him this painting as a reminder of a work that particularly caught his eye on the night he first saw Katsuizumi's collection. As Katsuizumi later described this moment, "All of a sudden his bright eyes sparkled. He moved forward pointing his index toward the cabbage still fixing his eyes on it and exclaimed, "This is the real art.'"



Qi Baishi, *Cabbage and Mushrooms*, circa 1930, hanging scroll, ink on paper, private collection (formerly collection of Sotokichi Katsuizumi).

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Grasshopper

circa 1930

Album leaf, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,
1949/1.201

SIGNED:

Azhi [Qi Baishi's pen name]

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Duck

circa 1930

Album leaf, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,
1949/1.202

SIGNED:

Host of the Eight-inkstone Mansion [Qi Baishi's pen name]

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Wisteria

circa 1930

Album leaf, ink and color on paper

From the Katsuzumi Collection, Courtesy of Sharlynn and Andrew Circo

SIGNED:

Baishi

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (reclining female nude, holding head)

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (slouching monk)

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Plum Blossoms and Bird

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,
1949/1.192

INSCRIBED:

My disciples ask me how to paint plum blossoms. I say, you adhere to what the ancient painter tried to avoid. You then are not like ordinary people. To not have a method is actually to have a method. Painted and inscribed by Qi Baishi.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (robed monk)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Pine and Bamboo

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,
1949/1.191

INSCRIBED:

For some time, Mr. Katsuizumi has wanted to see me paint. This painting is given to him to look at. Written by Baishi.

Qi Baishi's painting of a more traditional literati subject—pine trees and bamboo—is in the long, hanging scroll format common in East Asian painting. Noguchi has adopted this vertical format in his depiction of a slender robed monk, originally mounted as a hanging scroll. This represents a significant change from his earlier drawings of human figures.

Favorite subjects for hanging scrolls by Chinese literati (amateur scholar-artist) painters were high mountain peaks and low streams or tall pine trees standing alone. Pine trees and bamboo signify a person who does not yield in the face of political and social hardships—pine trees because they remain green in the depth of winter and bamboo because it does not bend even under heavy snow.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (sleeping infant)

1930

Horizontal hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Rural Village

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuzumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,

1949/1.193

SIGNED:

Baishi

Qi excelled at using a thick brush and wet ink wash to add nuance and expressiveness to his subject matter. Here Noguchi may be seen adopting this technique: he envelopes the baby in thick, undulating lines, controlling the ink flow by changing the pressure of his hand on the brush.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Grapes and Vine

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

The Noguchi Museum

INSCRIBED:

Requested by Mr. Noguchi, fall 1930.

It's turning cool but not yet cold; best for painting. I waived my brush in the morning delight and there it is. The old mountain man, Baishi.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Chicken and Gourd Vine

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

The Noguchi Museum

INSCRIBED:

Grain is stored in our barn so no worry about hunger; the rooster has a beautiful cockscomb and bright eyes. The rooster crows and the world wakes up; the gourd and the chirping yellow-throated bunting signal the coming of autumn. Rich man with three hundred stone stamps [Qi Baishi's pen name] painted and inscribed this.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (man sitting)

1930

Horizontal hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Li Tieguai

20th century

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

Gift of Madame Fan T'chun-pi and her sons in memory of Dr. Tsen Tson Ming, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1980.104

INSCRIBED:

A portrait of the man holding an iron crane. Created by the Host of Xieshanyinguan [Qi Baishi's pen name].

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Frog

1927

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,

1949/1.195

INSCRIBED:

Giving voice. Winter 1927, Old Man Baishi.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing: “Ye Kau Jong” (robed man, sitting cross legged, resting on fist)

1930

Horizontal hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

East Asian painting is often distinguished by asymmetrical compositions and large voids—fertile expanses that can serve as water, sky, or the space of philosophical contemplation. This is a rare example of Noguchi, who selectively borrowed from this tradition, experimenting with leaving a large, empty space around the human figure.

Qi’s depiction of a frog is an excellent example of his masterful use of void and the vividness of his art. In this witty depiction, it is unclear whether the frog has just landed on the ground or is about to leap into the air. The inscription suggests that even the humblest creature can be given a voice, and it is as if we are able to hear the frog’s small utterance in the empty space.

Noguchi’s painting bears his signature seal, made and gifted to him by Qi Baishi, who said, “A painting...is incomplete without a poem and without a seal.” Indeed seals are not just a way for a painter to sign his or her name to a work; they are a part of the painter’s persona and an integral element of a painting.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Fish

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,
1949/1.194

INSCRIBED:

I once painted Three Fish and inscribed it; painting is what I did in the time remaining after work; poetry in the time remaining after sleep; and calligraphy in the time remaining after carving. This is what I call the three remaining [the words for remaining and fish are homonyms in Chinese].

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (tumbling male, ankles crossed)

1930

Horizontal hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Autumn Landscape with Cormorants

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

Collection of Tsao Family

INSCRIBED:

Old man Baishi can paint far more than fish, shrimp, chicken, and crabs, but loves these subjects and so has always painted them. The host of Xieshanguan [Qi Baishi's pen name] painted and inscribed this.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Red Camellias

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

Collection of Tsao Family

INSCRIBED:

The pine trees, bamboo, and plum blossoms are friends of a gentle man (junzi). Painted and reflected by Old man Baishi.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (standing female)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Unlike many elite painters of his time, who limited their palette to black ink and subtle colors to comply with upper-class literati tastes, Qi boldly applied bright red, pink, yellow, and green in his engaging depictions of the natural world. Here he vividly captures the bright red of camellias and the orange gradations in autumn leaves or the setting sun.

Though Noguchi was more interested in experiments with line than exploring the colorist side of Qi's art, he cautiously employed color in several of the *Peking Drawings*. For the most part, however, he adhered to a monochromatic palette of blacks, whites, grays, and browns, the colors of the natural materials (stone, clay, and metal) he preferred to use in his sculptural work.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (two nude wrestlers)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (boy with string)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Portrait of the Immortal Liu Haixian

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David M. Levitt, by exchange, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.255

SIGNED:

Baishi Qihuang [Qi Baishi's pen name]

Unlike Noguchi, Qi did not work from life in his paintings of figures. Rather he followed the conventions of painted portraits of Zen masters and patriarchs. Here the human body is rendered through the juxtaposition of fine lines for the facial features and thick lines for the clothes and body.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Seated Male Figure: Scroll (Kakemono)

1930

Horizontal hanging scroll, ink on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.332

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (nude man and boy, reclining)

circa 1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Two Crickets and Pea Plant

Early to mid-20th century

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

Gift of Anne and John Chew, San Diego Museum of Art, 94.106

INSCRIBED:

The Old Man of Jipingtang [Qi Baisihi's pen name] *Painted this.*

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Five Water Buffalo

circa 1937

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Robert Hatfield Ellsworth, in memory of La Ferne Hatfield Ellsworth, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986.267.219

INSCRIBED:

I painted buffalo for my disciples. However my family asked me to paint another, so I painted this one. This makes me sigh, because one should paint to amuse oneself. Baishi painted and inscribed.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (man and boy in circular tumble)

1930

Horizontal hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (three figures, one behind the next)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (man and boy tumbling)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Shrimps

1931

Album leaf, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1949/1.200

INSCRIBED:

As Mr. Katsuizumi is returning to his own country, I have painted this as a farewell gift. 1931, Qi Huang [Qi Baishi's pen name]

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Baby: Scroll (Kakemono)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Sotokichi Katsuizumi, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1949/1.190

INSCRIBED:

This for Sotokichi Katsuizumi my best friend in Pekin[g] for whom I have great affection. Isamu

These two works by Qi Baishi and Isamu Noguchi demonstrate their very different approaches to abstraction. In Qi's painting mere smudges of ink and a jumble of masterfully placed fine lines concisely convey the anatomy and movement of shrimps as they wiggle and bump against one another in the water. While his abstraction is used for representational ends, the sweeping line in Noguchi's drawing of a baby curled up and contentedly sucking its finger seems to take on a life of its own. Indeed the shape of the line resembles *ensô* (the circular form in Zen painting that denotes enlightenment and fulfillment), which would reappear in Noguchi's sculptural work after World War II. While it is not known if Noguchi intended to evoke this form in his drawing, it aptly suits the baby's state of mind.



Isamu Noguchi working on *Mu* (1950–51, sandstone, Keio University, Tokyo), 1950 (photo courtesy of The Noguchi Museum).

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (man reclining)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

In this drawing of a reclining man, Noguchi juxtaposes fine and thick lines to delineate the human body. In the center of the composition three broad, vertical brushstrokes create an abstract form that resembles the Chinese character for mountain, which Noguchi may have learned while studying Chinese in Beijing. The reclining man's stable pose certainly suggests the shape of the character.



Detail of Qi Baishi's *Grapes and Vine* (on view in another section of the exhibition) showing the Chinese character for mountain in cursive script.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (woman nursing baby, reclining on left arm)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (crying baby)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Infant in Arms: Scroll (Kakemono)

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Museum purchase, University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1948/1.329

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (baby in cutout)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Mother and Child

1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

From the Katsuizumi Collection, courtesy of Sharlynn and Andrew Circo

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Mother and Child

1930

Ink on paper

Collection of Samuel and Alexandra May

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Young Eagle on Pine

1939

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Collection of Tsao Family

INSCRIBED:

Dedicated to Mr. Fuchu. 1939, Old Man Qi Huang [Qi Baishi's pen name] at 80.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Seal Script

20th century

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Michael Gallis Collection

INSCRIBED:

The white horse and the golden saddle belonged to Emperor Wu of Han [156–87 BCE]; the emperor led a hundred thousand troops to rest at Changyang Palace. The girl with a zither sat singing by the balcony and saw the dust flying towards the far off Jianzhang Palace. The Old Mountain Man, Baishi [Qi Baishi's pen name]. [This inscription is a poem by the Tang dynasty (618–907) poet Wang Changling (circa 690–circa 756).]

Brushes

Wood or bamboo and animal hair

Early 20th century

The Noguchi Museum

These brushes may have been used by Isamu Noguchi to draw human figures in Beijing. The animal hair brushes employed in Chinese ink painting hold enough ink to allow a painter to produce long lines without having to redip the brush. They also respond to nuances in motion or pressure that can create both fine and heavy lines in a single brushstroke. Thicker brushes can produce the kind of wet, heavy brushstrokes often seen in the *Peking Drawings*.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Seal for Isamu Noguchi

circa 1930

Marble

The Noguchi Museum

Qi Baishi was an intense devotee of the art of seal carving and is considered one of its finest modern practitioners. This is the seal he created for and presented to Noguchi, who incorporated it into some of the *Peking Drawings*.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Letter to Sotokichi Katsuizumi

1931

From the Katsuizumi Collection, Courtesy of Sharlynn and Andrew Circo

Not long before Japan's invasion of Manchuria (September 17, 1931), Qi Baishi wrote this letter to Sotokichi Katsuizumi, who had recently transferred from his bank's Beijing office to its office in Yokohama, Japan. In it Qi conveys his desire to visit Tokyo and see his friends:

Dear Mr. Katsuizumi, when you were in the old capital [Beijing], I was not feeling well and I am sorry that I did not get to spend more time with you. Tokyo is a beautiful place and I would really like to pay a visit. Many friends have invited me, but I am over seventy and it is difficult for me to travel. The weather is getting cold, please do take care. Baishi.

Katsuizumi kept the letter in a scrapbook along with a few photos of Qi Baishi, his studio, scenery, family members, and colleagues. As far as we know the two had no communication after this.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Letter to Sotokichi Katsuizumi

circa 1930

From the Katsuizumi Collection, Courtesy of Sharlynn and Andrew Circo

Yesterday Mr. Shu Side wanted to come to my house to see paintings. Please come tomorrow afternoon (3rd, Tuesday), that will be best.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Letter to Sotokichi Katsuizumi

circa 1930

From the Katsuizumi Collection, Courtesy of Sharlynn and Andrew Circo

To Mr. Sotokichi Katsuizumi:

I have heard from you but haven't had a chance to reply. I thought you would come to my house but haven't seen you for many days. This upsets me. If you haven't left Beiping [an earlier name for Beijing] already, please pay me a visit. Mr. Bo told me that Mr. Shu Side left for Fengtian. After he returns to Beiping, maybe you can come together to my studio Xieshanguan.

Qi Huang [Qi Baishi's pen name]

Photo of Qi Baishi

1931

From the Katsuizumi Collection, Courtesy of Sharlynn and Andrew Circo

INSCRIBED ON REVERSE:

Mr. Sotokichi Katsuizumi smiled and we shook hands. Qi Huang [Qi Baishi's pen name] wrote this as a gift on April 7, 1931 in Beiping [an earlier name for Beijing].

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Solitary Bird Perched on a Banana Plant

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Katsuizumi Sotokichi, University of Michigan Museum of Art,
1949/1.196

INSCRIBED:

A farewell gift for Mr. Katsuizumi as he travels south. Baishi

Qi Baishi inscribed and gifted this painting of a lone bird and a banana plant to Sotokichi Katsuizumi before he returned to Japan in 1931. “South” in the inscription indicates Tokyo, which is south of Beijing.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Seated male figure

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of Andrew and Sharlynn Circo from the Katsuizumi Collection,
The Noguchi Museum

Noguchi gifted Katsuizumi this quiet work of a contemplative man, with an affectionate inscription: *Isamu Noguchi presents this to Mr. Katsuizumi so that he will on seeing it remember many pleasant walks together.*

Despite the fifteen-year age gap, the two men were very close and Noguchi considered Katsuizumi his “best friend in Beijing.” He may have seen in Katsuizumi an image of his estranged father, Yone Noguchi (1875–1947), who had, like Katsuizumi, travelled to the United States as a young man and made his own way through hard work. For his part, Katsuizumi recognized Noguchi’s frustration, anger toward, and yearning for the father who had recently rejected him. Noguchi, Katsuizumi said, “was the most lonely fellow I ever had known.” The friendship lasted throughout their time in Beijing.

Qi Baishi

China, 1864–1957

Daffodils

circa 1930

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

The Noguchi Museum

INSCRIBED:

Who says that plants have no passion; sometimes the opposite can happen. The old mountain man, Baishi.

Noguchi acquired at least four paintings from Qi Baishi, including this small painting of daffodils. He particularly cherished the inscription, which encourages artists to observe nature and learn even from humble creations.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (standing monk, right view)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Peking Drawing (female reclining)

1930

Ink on paper

The Noguchi Museum

When the *Peking Drawings* were first shown in New York they were a critical success. An *Art News* reviewer vividly described Noguchi's process of abstraction: "Sometimes he reinforces the thin, running line with supplementary washes that, like some sudden disclosure of the X-ray, give an inner sense of the design" Other writers praised his blend of Eastern and Western, ancient and modern aesthetics and methods. A *Creative Art* reviewer suggested "Isamu Noguchi became one with the Eastern part of his blood. There is no trace of Brancusi anymore. As if we are convinced that he was not a student of Brancusi, but of Katsushika Hokusai, Noguchi very naturally returned to the spirit of his ancestors."



Isamu Noguchi with a *Peking Drawing* at Demotte Gallery, New York, 1932 (photo courtesy of The Noguchi Museum).

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Mother and Child

1930

Ink on paper

Collection Lannan Foundation

Though this work is dated 1938, it is unmistakably one of the *Peking Drawings*, likely inscribed with a date when it was donated by Noguchi to a charity auction meant to raise funds for China's defense in the wake of Sino-Japanese War. Noguchi hoped to show, as a dashing young Japanese-American artist, that "not all Japanese are militaristic" and, by criticizing Japan, to demonstrate his allegiance to the United States, whose relationship with Japan was becoming increasingly tense. Noguchi inscribed the painting in Chinese with these moving words:

I am a follower of great China and I have learned from its great art. Today intruders are attacking the Asian continent, forgetting their cultural roots. I don't want to forget my art's teacher. Oh children of great China! You live in the most difficult of times, yet you can still nurture peace and resist violent attack; you are the makers of the future and builders of a new Chinese destiny. Written by Isamu Noguchi, 1938, March 9, NY

Although the inscription is signed with his name, it must have been translated and transcribed by a Chinese person since Noguchi never became fluent in Chinese. The seal made and gifted to him by Qi accompanies Noguchi's name.

Isamu Noguchi

United States, 1904–1988

Tamanishiki (The Wrestler)

1931

Terracotta

The Noguchi Museum

The *Peking Drawings* include several wrestlers, both alone and in pairs. This sculpture of the same theme was made in Japan, where Noguchi stayed for eight months in 1931 between leaving Beijing and returning to New York. In this period he continued to be interested in working with the human form, but largely abandoned drawing. This small terracotta sculpture is based on a drawing of the famous *sumô* wrestling champion Tamanishiki training in Tokyo.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CAREER OF ISAMU NOGUCHI

1925



Globular, 1928, polished brass, marble base, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York



Portrait of R. Buckminster Fuller, 1929, chrome-plated bronze, Collection of Alexandra and Samuel May

1930



Peking Drawing (man reclining), 1930, ink on paper, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York



Death (Lynched Figure), 1934, Monel metal, wood, metal, and rope, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

1935



"Radio Nurse" radio transmitter, 1937, bakelite, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York



News, stainless steel, Rockefeller Center (formerly Associated Press building), New York, 1938-40

1940



Kuros, 1944-45, marble, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Mother and Child, 1944, marble, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

1945



Coffee table, 1945, walnut, glass, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York



Dancer in Serpent and Spider Dress designed for Martha Graham's *Cave of the Heart*, 1946, bronze, brass wire, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

1950



Tiger, 1952, terracotta, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

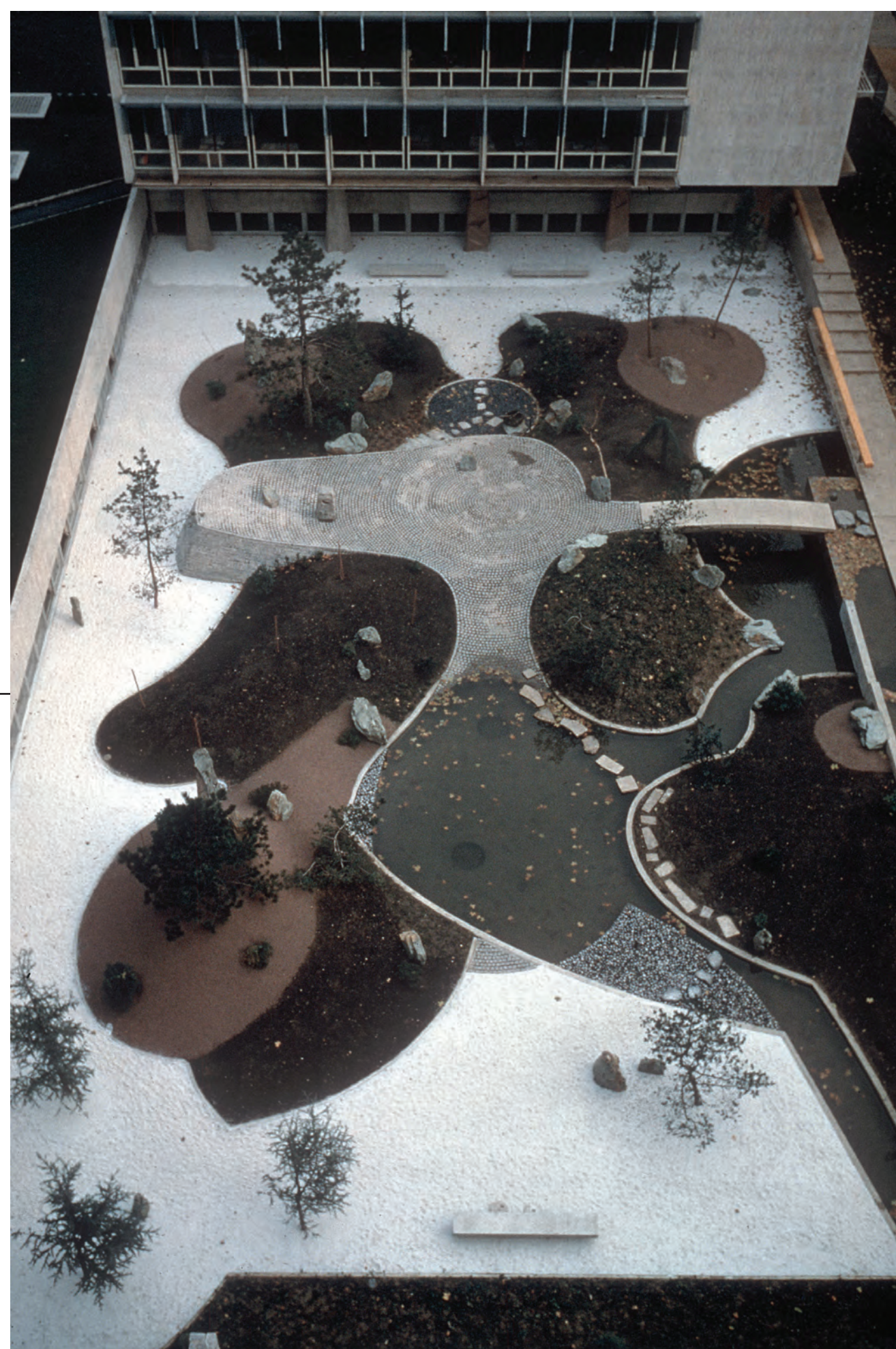


Mu, sandstone, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan, 1950-51



Two Bridges for Peace Park, stone, Hiroshima, Japan, 1951-52

1955



UNESCO gardens, Paris, France, 1956-58



Endless Coupling, 1957, iron, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

1960

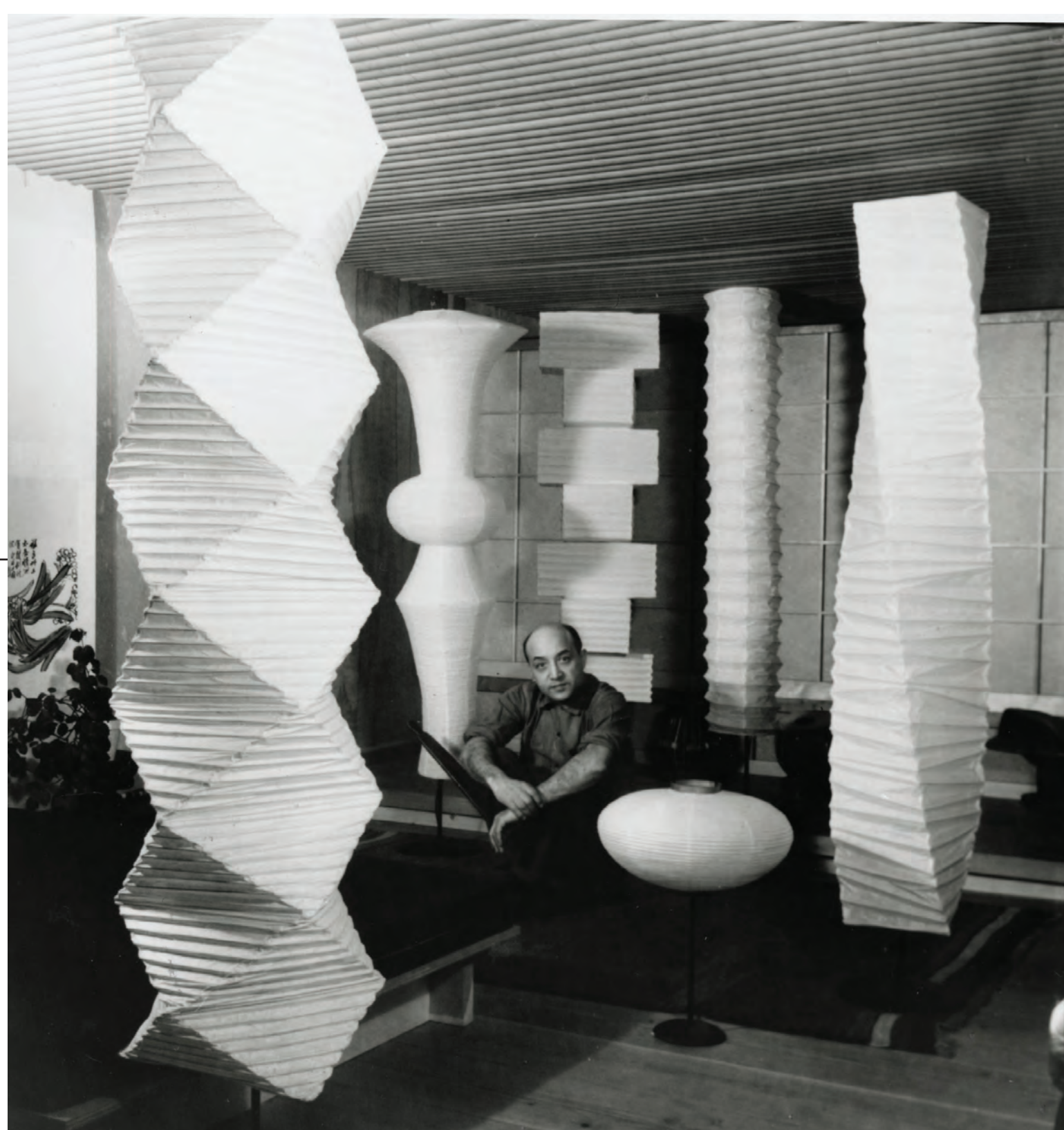


Lessons of Musokokushi, 1962, bronze, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

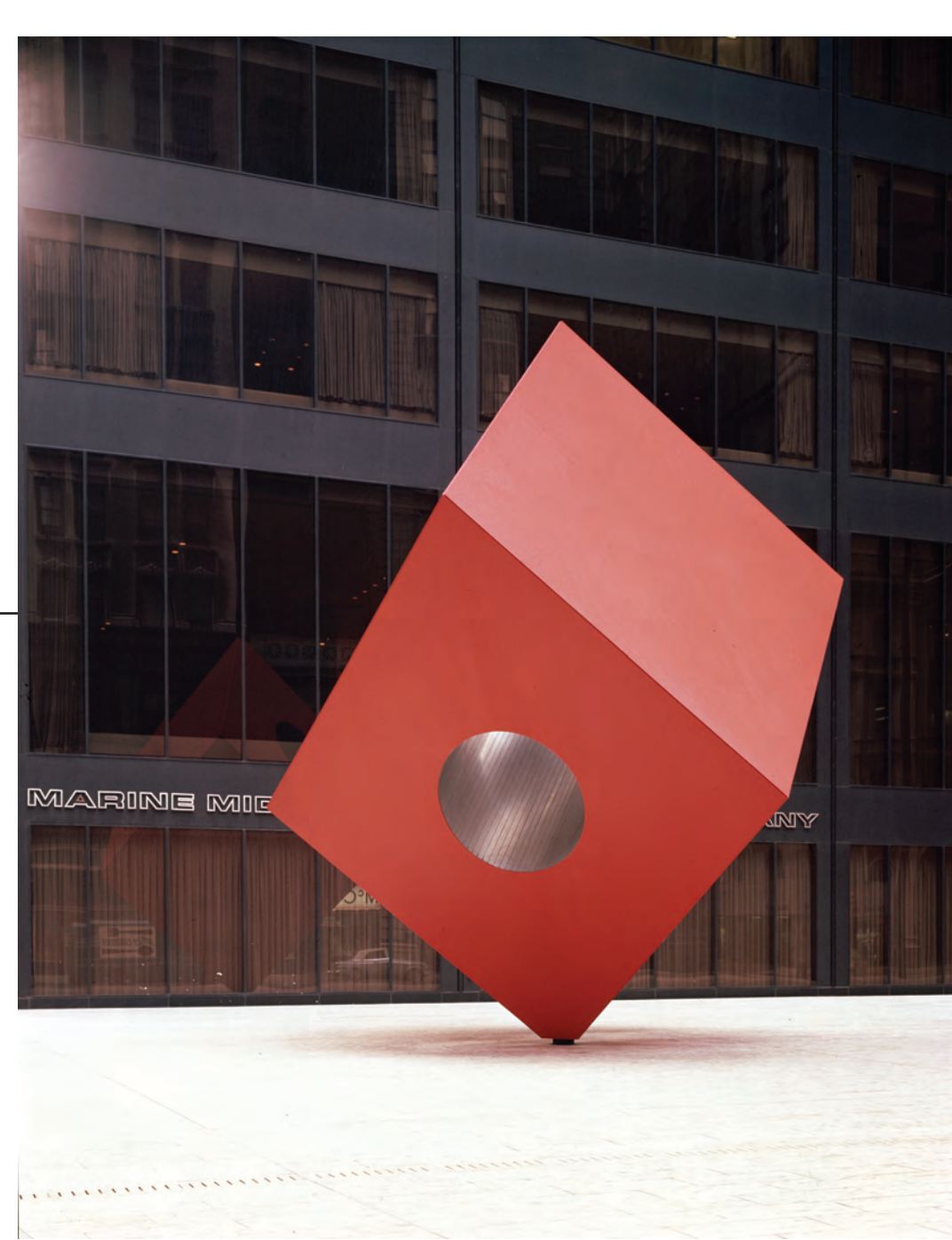


Subterranean water garden with Japanese stones, Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, New York, 1961-64

1965



Isamu Noguchi in the studio with his Akari Light Sculptures and a painting by Qi Baishi, 1960s.



Red Cube, painted steel, 140 Broadway, New York, 1968

1970



Philip A. Hart Plaza, Detroit, 1970-79



Expo '70 fountain, Suita, Japan 1970



Night Wind, 1970, black marble on stainless steel base, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York

1975



Playscapes, Piedmont Park, Atlanta, 1975-76



Sky Gate, Honolulu, 1976-77

1980



Venus, 1980, Manazuru stone, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York



Constellation (for Louis Kahn), Fort Worth, 1982

1985



Black Slide Mantra, black granite, Od-Dori Park, Sapporo, Japan, 1986