

Press Release

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LANDMARK ISAMU NOGUCHI EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY THE HIGH TO TOUR NATIONALLY

Sweeping design retrospective will feature rare and important works spanning his career,
including some never exhibited

**“Isamu Noguchi: ‘I am not a designer’”
April 10-Aug. 2, 2026**



Louise Dahl-Wolfe (American, 1895-1989), “Isamu Noguchi,” 1955, gelatin silver print. © Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents. © 2026 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

ATLANTA, Feb. 19, 2026 — Although Isamu Noguchi declared in 1949, “I am not a designer,” the internationally acclaimed artist’s work exemplifies the broadest definition of design, including sculpture, furniture, lighting, playgrounds, landscapes and theatrical sets. In spring 2026, the High Museum of Art will debut **“Isamu Noguchi: ‘I am not a designer’” (April 10-Aug. 2, 2026)**, the artist’s first design retrospective in nearly 25 years, featuring many never exhibited and rarely seen works spanning all facets of his creative output. After the exhibition closes in Atlanta, it will travel to the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts (Sept. 19, 2026-Jan. 3, 2027), and the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York (Feb. 13-June 6, 2027).

Noguchi (American, 1904-1988) is widely regarded as one of the 20th century’s most accomplished and renowned artists and known for his innovative sculptures, public art and

designs. Born in Los Angeles to a Japanese poet father and an American writer mother, Noguchi spent parts of his youth in both Japan and the United States, a bicultural upbringing that deeply influenced his aesthetic. Throughout his career, he deeply engaged with the role of art in public life, creating plazas, playgrounds, gardens and memorials that harmonize art, architecture and nature. His industrial and commercial designs, including famed Herman Miller furniture and “Akari” light fixtures, continue to stand out among the most well known and celebrated in the field.

“The High has a long and unique history with Noguchi, having sponsored what became his only playground built in the United States during his lifetime: ‘Playscapes,’ which opened in 1976. Located in Atlanta’s Piedmont Park, just a few minutes’ walk from the museum, that project has been beloved by the city’s residents over the past 50 years,” said the High’s Director Rand Suffolk. “This touring exhibition is an incredible opportunity to bring so many of his rare and important works together and to share them with Atlantans, who have directly benefited from his community-oriented design for decades.”

Creating art with civic purpose was of central importance for Noguchi, who over the course of his career blended the aesthetic and utilitarian to address the social concerns of the day. This exhibition seeks to reposition his design practice, sometimes considered ancillary to his “real” work, to reinforce that it was not merely a backdrop for his sculpture. The diverse, interactive presentation will explore works that embrace function to understand Noguchi as a multinational, interdisciplinary designer who shaped a more open, inclusive world.

Cocurated by the High’s Curator of Decorative Arts and Design Monica Obniski and independent curator and sculpture scholar Marin R. Sullivan, the exhibition is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach — Noguchi’s preferred mode of working — and will feature nearly 200 objects from an international array of institutional and private lenders. Highlights include sculptural models of potential and unrealized designs, including “Play Mountain” (1933), tables designed with manufacturers including Knoll and Herman Miller, and a model of a house Noguchi designed in collaboration with architect Kazumi Adachi. The exhibition will also feature large-scale installations, notably the spectacular stage set for choreographer Martha Graham’s very rarely performed “Seraphic Dialogue” (1955) and the interactive “Play Sculpture” (designed ca. 1966-1976), one of Noguchi’s pieces of play equipment. The exhibition’s accompanying 383-page catalogue, published by Rizzoli Electa in association with the High and edited by Obniski and Sullivan, will feature expansive, original research on Noguchi’s life and career by an international contingent of scholars and curators.

“Today we think about design as expansively as Noguchi thought about sculpture during his lifetime — or put another way, what Noguchi broadly classified as sculpture is something far closer to what we now understand as design,” said Obniski. “By exploring Noguchi’s work holistically, but intentionally from a design perspective, this exhibition offers a revisionist history that more fully accounts for the diversity of his projects and the crucial role collaboration played across this practice.”

Sullivan added, “Noguchi’s significant contributions to 20th-century sculpture have long been heralded. This exhibition, however, not only expands our understanding of how important design was to Noguchi throughout his career but also demonstrates how generative and interconnected the two disciplines were to his practice as a whole.”

Exhibition Sections

Organized thematically, the exhibition will begin with an **introductory gallery** featuring the never-before-loaned “Song of the Bird” (1958). Noguchi based this showstopping pair of marble and granite sculptures on a pivotal unrealized design for Gordon Bunshaft’s Lever House.

The opening section, **“Making Multiples,”** explores how reproducibility is central and inherent to design production yet has a more ambiguous status in the realm of “fine art.” Objects include:

- Many examples of Noguchi’s experimentation with industrial design, alongside work for magazines like Harper’s Bazaar as well as other early design endeavors.
- Well-known designs such as “Radio Nurse” (designed 1937), the ubiquitous Herman Miller coffee table (IN-50, designed 1944) and the Knoll-manufactured rocking stools (designed 1954-1955).
- Archival findings related to these designs, which contextualize them (and many others) within Noguchi’s broader creative practice and his work with early collaborators including R. Buckminster Fuller, Edison Price, Jeanne Reynal and Edward Durell Stone.

“Elements of Architecture” follows the expansion of Noguchi’s design thinking to the scale of inhabitable interiors, his reimagination of architecture’s elemental principles (the “language” of architecture) in sculpture and his many collaborations in the architectural field. Highlights include:

- Maquettes, sculptures and examples of his Lunar lighting designs, which introduce his interest in the essential elements of architecture — columns, walls and ceilings.
- Drawings related to Noguchi’s architectural projects for Hiroshima’s Peace Memorial Park, a key collaboration with Kenzō Tange.
- “Architecture” he created for the stage, including the set for “Seraphic Dialogue,” which has not been seen since the 1960s.

The exhibition’s last section, **“Shaping Spaces,”** aims to demonstrate how Noguchi’s built utopian spaces positively impacted their inhabitants and highlights an aspect of these projects conspicuously absent from existing scholarship. These galleries will feature:

- A robust selection of models, drawings and visual materials that show how Noguchi shaped social and public spaces, notably the playgrounds he began designing in the 1930s and would see come to fruition in the final decades of his career, including Atlanta’s “Playscapes.”
- Works examining how he experimented more broadly with landscape design, beginning with UNESCO’s “Jardin Japonais” (1956-1958), and civic plazas, including a decade-long redevelopment of eight acres on Detroit’s riverfront.

- A film created by the architecture studio Spirit of Space that will capture the sights and sounds of three of Noguchi's most important garden and public commissions and bring them to life in the galleries.

"Isamu Noguchi: 'I am not a designer'" will be presented in the Cousins Family Special Exhibition Galleries on the Second Level of the High's Wieland Pavilion.

Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive 383-page catalogue edited by Obniski and Sullivan, designed by Miko McGinty Design and distributed worldwide by Rizzoli Electa. The book features 23 texts reflecting original research by an international contingent of 17 scholars and curators, including Obniski and Sullivan in addition to Glenn Adamson, Amy Auscherman, R. Ruthie Dibble, Deborah A. Goldberg, Holly Gore, Christina Hiromi Hobbs, Matthew Kirsch, Marci Kwon, Alexandra Lange, Amy Lyford, Emily E. Mangione, Naoaki Nakamura, Sanae Nakatani, Ken Tadashi Oshima and Marc Treib.

Exhibition Organization and Support

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About the High Museum of Art

Located in the heart of Atlanta, the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast and around the world through its distinguished collection, dynamic schedule of special exhibitions and engaging community-focused programs. Housed within facilities designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High features a collection of more than 20,000 works of art, including an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American fine and decorative arts; major holdings of photography and folk and

self-taught work, especially that of artists from the American South; burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, new media and design; a growing collection of African art, with work dating from prehistory through the present; and significant holdings of European paintings and works on paper. The High is dedicated to reflecting the diversity of its communities and offering a variety of exhibitions and educational programs that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit www.high.org.

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