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Amy Lyford

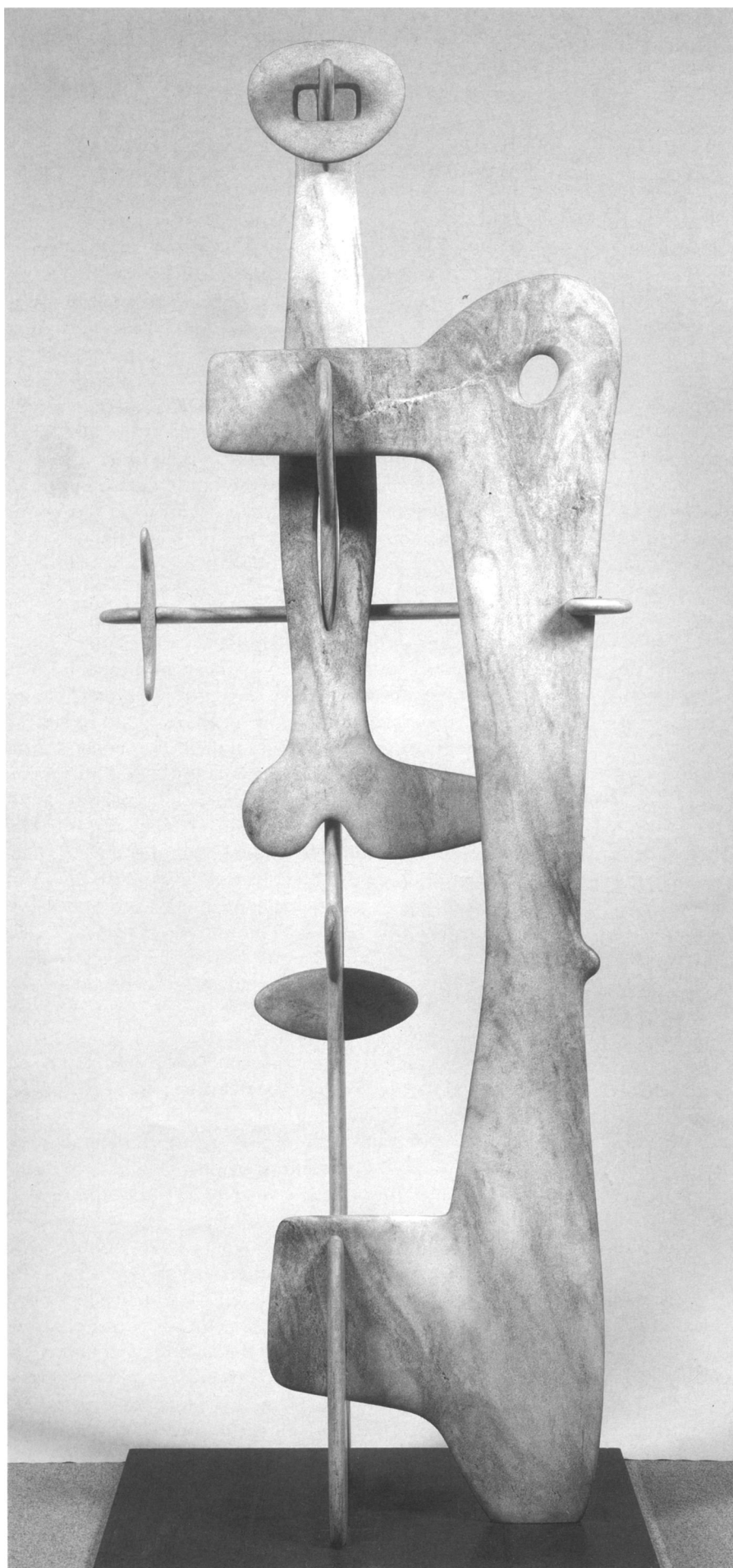
In 1946, a little more than a year after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi was selected to participate in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art called *Fourteen Americans*. One of a series of exhibitions showcasing the diversity of recent American art, the show was billed as offering a window onto contemporary art in the United States. After a ten-year absence from the New York exhibition scene, Noguchi presented fifteen works, including a monumental marble sculpture entitled *Kouros* that he had completed in 1945 (Fig. 1). In light of the recent war with Japan and the federal government's internment of Japanese Americans during the conflict, the decision to include Noguchi in the show suggests that the museum hoped to promote a kind of artistic democracy by embracing artists of varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds whose work defied the notion of a single, overarching artistic trend.¹ As the show's curator, Dorothy Miller, explained in her preface to the exhibition catalogue, "these artists are concerned with communication even more than esthetics. . . . the idiom is American but there is no hint of regionalism or chauvinistic tendency." She continued, "On the contrary, there is a profound consciousness that the world of art is one world and that it contains the Orient no less than Europe and the Americas."² Noguchi's presence, one might imagine, was part of Miller's effort to create a world of art in the exhibition, as his work likely conjured forth a range of associations with "the Orient" of which she hoped the exhibition would speak.³ Noguchi's career also seemed to reflect the diversity Miller wanted the show to highlight because it encompassed a variety of media and approaches to art making that referenced many cultures simultaneously. With works entitled *Kouros*, *My Pacific* (1941), and *Katchina* (1943), Noguchi's practice easily jumped between the traditions of Europe, the Pacific, and the Americas in ways that underscored Miller's pluralistic agenda. Significantly, however, it was the *Kouros*, over nine feet tall, that mainly captured the critics' attention. *Kouros* was ambitious not only in its huge scale but also in its direct reference to the tradition of the heroic male figure from ancient Greece, a tradition that was on view uptown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 2).⁴

It is not hard to see Noguchi's smooth marble work as a descendant of its ancient Greek namesake, for his sculpture's vertical, organic form possesses a vestigial head and superhuman scale. Yet if Noguchi's *Kouros* follows the Greek tradition in terms of its size, verticality, and name, it diverges from that tradition because it is a conglomerate of visibly interconnected parts rather than a single, unified form. Built of interlocking slabs of marble rather than carved from a single block of stone, Noguchi's sculpture reinterprets the kouros figure as an attenuated skeletal form; it enframes space, instead of displacing it, with an open, polished ribcage.

Noguchi's *Kouros* is also more pointedly pessimistic in tone: the work's evacuation of matter at its center and the open, skeletal structure suggest that the ideal kouros figure has been eviscerated. This difference reveals Noguchi's modernist sculptural technique—the reduction of the body to a system of interlocking parts, for example—while the work's multipart, interlocking structure gives it a portability that was never a characteristic of the ancient Greek kouros. This mobility is critical to the work's difference from the Greek tradition, because Noguchi's *Kouros* and the other interlocking sculptures could be taken down in just a few minutes.⁵ A mobile monument, Noguchi's *Kouros* thematizes the heroic male nude as a movable effigy, and, as I will argue, it does so in ways that subtly mimic (if unconsciously) the sculptor's own relocations during the late 1930s and early 1940s, which included stints in Mexico City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and an Arizona internment camp for Japanese Americans.

If, as Frantz Fanon argues, "to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax . . . to grasp the morphology of this or that language . . . but . . . above all to assume a culture," then Noguchi's mobilization of the iconic kouros form aligns his work with European culture.⁶ Yet his version reinvents this antique cultural signifier of a universal "Man" in order to raise questions about the viability of the liberal ideal of a universal humanity embodied in the ancient tradition. His critique of the liberal ideal follows the enforced relocation of Japanese Americans by the United States government, a policy that clearly demonstrated that such universality would have a difficult time crossing the racialized lines within American culture, lines that were deepened by the exclusion of all residents of Japanese descent from the western United States during World War II.⁷

The racialization of American culture did not stop when the war ended, however, as is made plain in much of the criticism written about Noguchi's work in 1946, much of which emphasized the sculptor as a figure who blended the (apparently opposing) traditions of Europe and Asia in his art and his life. In an article on Noguchi's sculpture that appeared during the run of *Fourteen Americans*, Thomas Hess (editor of *Art News*) described Noguchi's *Kouros* as a poetic fusion of East and West. "Deriving from the opposing influences of archaic Greek sculpture and Oriental calligraphy," Hess wrote, "it [*Kouros*] is an expression of Noguchi's optimism for humanity—capturing the mood of certainty an earlier civilization had that it could walk upright under the sky in a world it could explain."⁸ If Noguchi's *Kouros* expresses something powerful about the nature of humanity in 1945, it does so by subtly revising that ideal. Noguchi's version of the subject challenges the relevance of a liberal view of a universalizing humanity in the wake of World War II. Less a celebration of the ideal humanism that Hess envisions—what he calls the fusion of East and West—*Kouros*

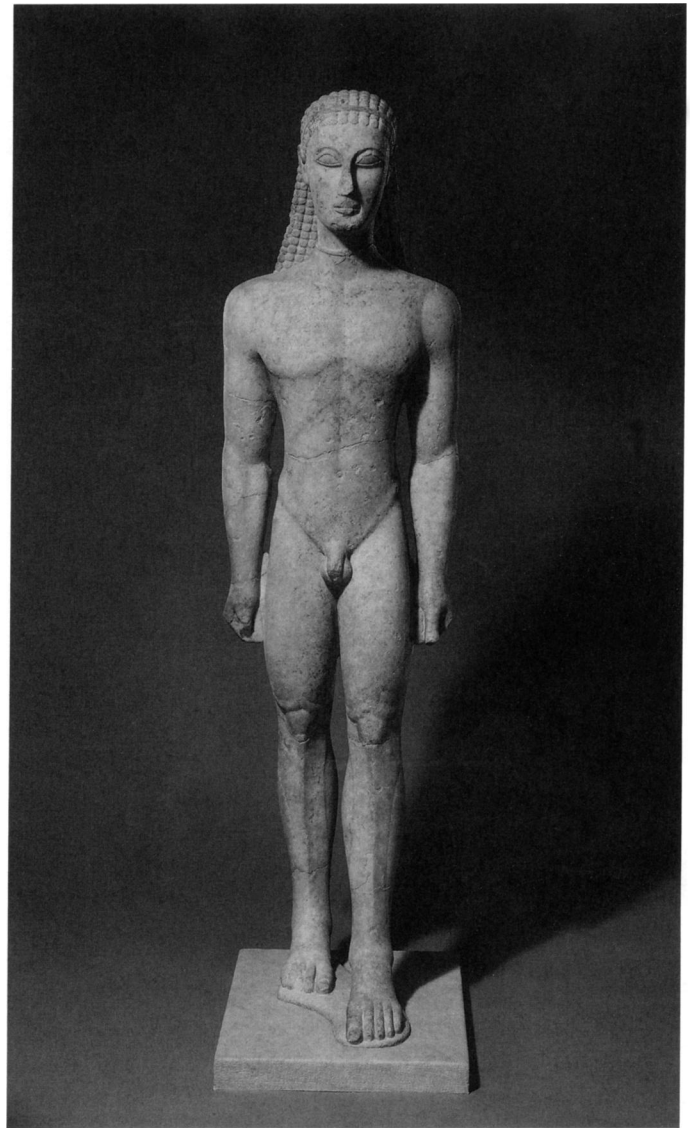


1 Isamu Noguchi, *Kouros*, 1945, pink Georgia marble, height 117 in. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1953 (photo: © 1995 The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

reinterprets the stable, ancient form as a movable effigy whose multiplicity of parts and mobility of structure reinvented the modern man as a mobile figure whose body achieves form through a balance of disparate, yet interlocking parts.

In addition to representing an ideal male figure as a movable effigy, *Kouros* exemplifies a tendency in Noguchi's work of the early 1940s to represent the process of transformation itself. Indeed, a number of Noguchi's abstract sculptures of the early 1940s make vivid the process by which identities become visible as processes of cultural transformation rather than static, fixed givens within a system of rigid hierarchies. Through its interlocking formal arrangement and its portability, *Kouros* (and some of the other interlocking pieces Noguchi made in the mid-1940s) references process and mobility in ways that resonate both with the peripatetic nature of Noguchi's experience and his multiethnic background (his father was Japanese, and his mother was Euro-American, of Scottish and Native American ancestry).⁹ That is, *Kouros* reconsiders the degree to which the image of a stable, universalizing man could be relevant in a world where migration, dislocation, relocation, and exile had become models for twentieth-century man's existence.

In order to make sense of the varied ways in which *Kouros* seems to be the embodiment of a process of transformation and dislocation, this essay will draw a sculptural road map that shows how Noguchi's abstract sculptures of the early 1940s often materialize the space between things to produce visibly hybrid forms—forms that articulate the process of becoming as their key conceptual gesture. As Noguchi described modern sculpture in 1949, "we [sculptors] are now more concerned with the relationship of things than with things themselves. Our reality is the space between. . . ."¹⁰ Such a conception of sculpture resonates with the process-oriented nature of the artist's wall-mounted and interlocking slab pieces—works that refuse easy categorization, preferring to inhabit positions *between* competing conceptions of the body and spatial location. Yet Noguchi's early 1940s abstractions do not just reveal something about the history of modern art. In addition to proposing a sculpture concerned with relations between things, these works question the assumptions embedded in American culture about how identities might (or might not) be negotiated and positioned within the racialized cultural matrix of the United States after Pearl Harbor. Key to Noguchi's figuration of such intersections was his turn to abstraction in the early 1940s. For it is the works' abstract language that enables them to suggest multiple meanings, by intermixing diverse formal and cultural points of reference. Noguchi's abstraction was thus not predominantly a move to participate in contemporary debates about the nature of Abstract Expressionism. In the wake of a particularly nasty 1935 review of one of his sculptures for what the critic saw as its overt political content, abstraction not only gave Noguchi a way to communicate his commitment to the process of artistic and cultural transformation but also offered a means to evade the label of "sensationalist" propaganda leveled at him by a hostile critic in 1935. Noguchi's emphasis on hybrid forms may have seemed just the approach to take after the personal attacks (which highlighted

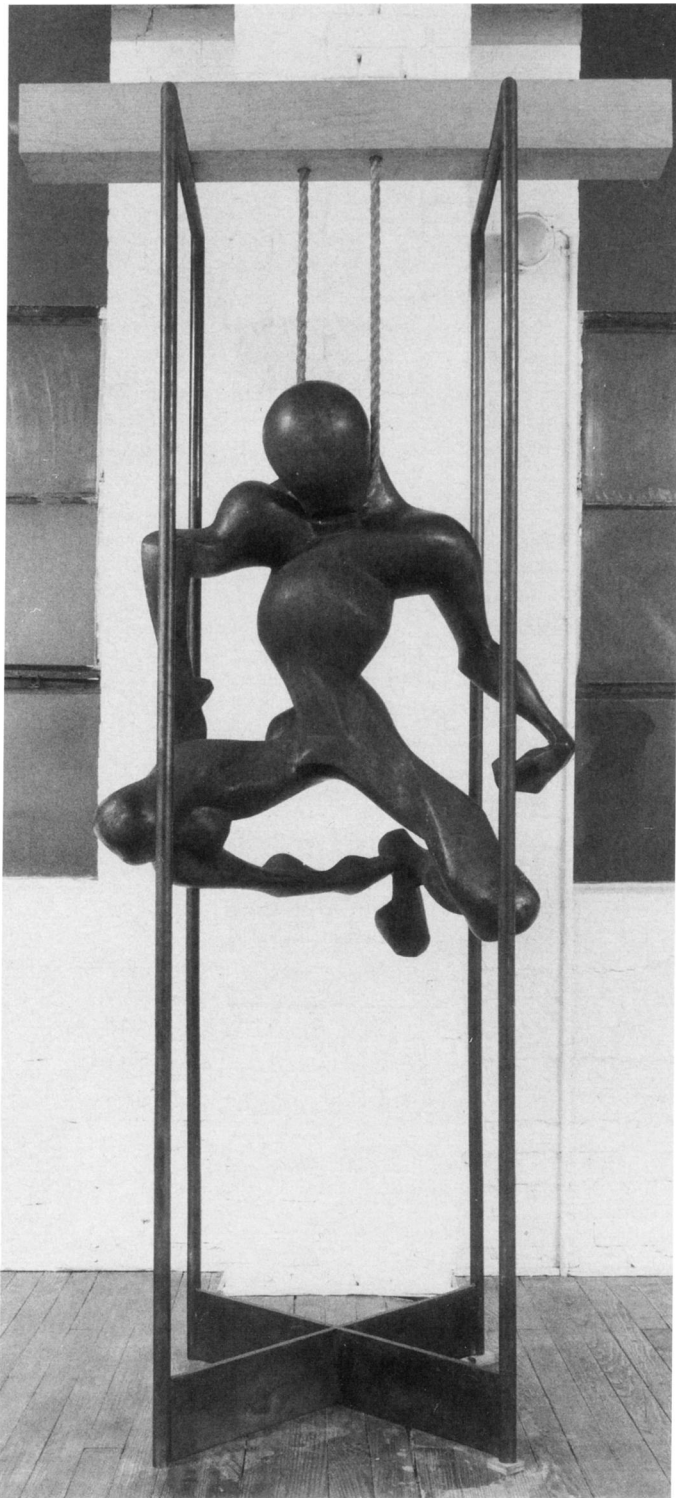


2 Statue of a kouros, ca. 590–580 B.C., Naxian marble, height 76 in. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1932

his Japanese identity), from which he recoiled, when he exhibited his work *Death* in the spring of 1935.

Race, Nationality, and Art in the 1930s

When Noguchi completed *Death* in 1934, he did so with skill and purpose: to give visceral, sculptural form to the practice of lynching (Fig. 3). Exhibited in New York three times early in 1935, *Death* attracted attention because of the directness with which it embodied the physical and psychic endgame of racial hatred.¹¹ For Edward Alden Jewell, critic for the *New York Times*, the piece was gruesome and artless. Jewell thought the agonized figure, suspended from the neck by an actual rope "drawn sickeningly taut by the weight of the lynched figure," a disaster. Repelled by the work's disturbing effects, he emphasized that Noguchi had designed the work as a protest against lynching. "As a work of art," Jewell wrote, "it seems merely sensational and of extremely dubious value." Similarly, the *Art News* critic M.M. saw the work as "macabre" and "bizarre" and claimed that its representation of a body in



3 Noguchi, *Death*, 1934, Monel metal, wood, metal, and rope, height 89¼ in. Long Island City, N.Y., Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum

the “knotty agonies of death” was nothing more than “aesthetic opportunism.” Henry McBride, writing for the *New York Sun*, had exceptionally harsh words for the piece, claiming that “the grewsome [*sic*] study of a lynching, with a contorted figure dangling from an actual rope, may be like the photograph from which it was made, but as a work of art it is just a little Japanese mistake.”¹² McBride bristled at Noguchi’s

grisly approach to his subject, apparently most disturbed by the work’s realist bent, as if the sculpture’s translation of a photograph of a lynched and burned body pushed it too close to the real thing for the critic’s comfort.

In addition to questioning the sculptor’s artistic ability in his review, McBride claimed that the work was a failure and that Noguchi was an insidious presence in contemporary American culture:

You cannot deny that Isamu Noguchi, the Japanese-American sculptor now exhibiting in the Marie Harriman galleries, has grand ideas. I hate to apply the word “wily” to anyone I so thoroughly like and respect as I do Mr. Noguchi, yet what other word can you apply to a semioriental sculptor who proposes to build in the U.S. the following gigantic monuments. . . .¹³

Clearly, McBride had a problem with Noguchi’s multiracial identity. His evident distrust of Noguchi’s “semioriental” heritage does not simply underscore his discomfort with miscegenation, McBride’s hostility specifically crystallizes around the fact of Noguchi’s Japanese American identity. Worried about the “wiliness” of a Eurasian artist like Noguchi, McBride assumes that a Japanese American artist could not produce art that was truly “American.” Although McBride may not have been consciously aware of Noguchi’s identification with the plight of African Americans in the production and exhibition of *Death*, it is hard to imagine that McBride’s venom was wholly disconnected from the prospect of an alliance between two oppressed minorities who appeared bent on fighting the practice of lynching that continued to be a part of life in the United States.¹⁴ By attacking *Death* as the “mistaken” product of a “wily” Japanese American artist, McBride, in revealing his racism, shifted attention from the work’s meaning to the identity of its maker. McBride’s review attacked Noguchi’s artistic reputation by insinuating that *Death*’s failure as a work of art stemmed from the sculptor’s Japanese identity.

McBride’s text demonstrates the prevalence of anti-Japanese rhetoric in 1930s American culture.¹⁵ For his part, and to raise awareness of this disturbing trend, the prominent art historian Meyer Schapiro worried publicly about the racialization of contemporary analysis of “American art” in a 1936 essay entitled “Race, Nationality, and Art.” Published in *Art Front*, the journal of the progressive Artist’s Union,¹⁶ Schapiro argued that racism was a serious threat to the health of art in the United States:

It is taught that the great national art can issue only from those who really belong to the nation, more specifically, to the Anglo-Saxon blood; that immigration of foreigners, mixture of peoples, dilutes the national strain and leads to inferior hybrid arts; that the influence of foreign arts is essentially pernicious; and that the weakness of American art today is largely the result of alien influences.¹⁷

For Schapiro, race was too often the primary basis for defining and, thus, purifying national culture. In his view, the willingness of many critics and historians to link race and national identity to the strength of American art was simply

part of a broader thrust in contemporary American society to attack racial and ethnic minorities in order to justify their oppression.¹⁸ A key component of Schapiro's text that sheds light on the meaning and context of McBride's diatribe against Noguchi is Schapiro's recognition that many in the United States thought that "the immigration of foreigners, mixture of peoples, dilutes the national strain and leads to inferior hybrid arts." Noguchi offended critics by actively critiquing the practice of lynching; more important, as a "semioriental" artist whose work, as Schapiro points out, was seen by many (including McBride) as a "pernicious" influence that had "weakened" American art, he disturbed them.¹⁹

Noguchi's abstract sculpture of the early 1940s grapples, if at times indirectly, with these issues of race and national identity. Rather than emphasizing essential personal or national character, Noguchi's abstraction articulates hybridity—sculptural and cultural—as a central visual metaphor.²⁰ Such an approach did not necessarily read as a positive development at the time, as is clear from Schapiro's worried account of the linkages often made between race, nationality, and art. In the analysis of a group of sculptures by Noguchi from the early 1940s that follows, I aim to show the ways in which the sculptor investigated the nature and meaning of hybridity as a fundamental component of contemporary experience. By representing states of transition and the process of transformation in his sculpture of this period, Noguchi imagined some alternative approaches to communicating ideas about the construction of national identities. While Noguchi was not one to discuss issues of race and personal identity in public—in the slender file of his existing written work, he almost never discusses race overtly—in a number of his works of the early 1940s he seems bent on representing the in-between or the hybrid as key visual concepts. In one of the rare instances in which the sculptor spoke directly about the issue of race in art, Noguchi argued that racial and cultural hybridity were essential to the future of American democracy:

To be hybrid anticipates the future. This is America. The nation of all nationalities. The racial and cultural intermixture is the antithesis of all the tenet [*sic*] of the Axis Powers. For us to fall into the Fascist line of race bigotry is to defeat our unique personality and strength.²¹

Noguchi's words reframe the discourse of hybridity—or "intermixture"—in ways that counter the bigotry that concerned Meyer Schapiro and that lay bare his agenda for sculptural and cultural change. Noguchi argues for a reading of hybridity as an idealized intermixture in which the oppositions traditionally presumed between races and cultures could be reformulated as interpenetration and intermixture. Although such thinking remained tied to the idea of cultural difference, in the context of American policy to evacuate and intern all West Coast Japanese Americans in 1942, it was clearly hopeful, proposing hybridity as the foundation for a truly multicultural, democratic society.

Noguchi, Double Consciousness, and Japanese American Internment

When people ask me why I, a Eurasian sculptor from New York, have come so far into the Arizona desert to be locked up with the evacuated Japanese from the West coast, I sometimes wonder myself. I reply that because of my peculiar background I felt this war very keenly and wished to serve the cause of democracy in the best way that seemed open to me. At other times I say that I felt sympathy for the plight of the American-born Japanese, the Nisei, or else that relocation offered a passage [*sic*] of inevitable social change in which I wished to take part.

All of this is true. But I might also have said that a haunting sense of unreality, of not quite belonging, which has always bothered me made me seek for an answer among the Nisei.²²

When Noguchi heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, he was living in California. As he remembers it, he had turned on the radio while driving to San Diego in search of a piece of onyx and heard about the Japanese attack on Hawaii. "Oh my God," he remembers thinking, "I'm a Japanese or I'm a Nisei at least; I'd better get in touch with other Nisei and see what's going to happen."²³ When he returned to Los Angeles, he contacted the Japanese-American Citizens League in order to find out how Japanese American organizations were responding to the attack. Says Noguchi of that time, "I felt I ought to be able to help in some way. . . . I felt that I ought to be contributing something."²⁴ After President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 (an order demanding that all residents of the West Coast who were of Japanese descent be relocated to camps in the nation's interior), Noguchi began to organize other artists and writers in a group called Nisei Artists and Writers Mobilization for Democracy (NAWMD).²⁵ By February 1942, this San Francisco-based group had drafted a plan for an art and craft program that would be developed at the relocation centers, a program that would help the "evacuees," as they were called, by offering them a way to be productive and creative during the period of their relocation.²⁶

In March the NAWMD plan was submitted to high-level federal officials (including Secretary of State Milton Eisenhower), and then, in April, Noguchi traveled to Washington, D.C., and presented the plan for a "Government Sponsored Farm and Craft Settlement for People of Japanese Parentage" to John Collier, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and chief administrator of the Colorado River Relocation Center (then being built on Indian land) near Poston, Arizona. At that meeting it was decided that Noguchi would enter Poston voluntarily in order to set up and oversee the Farm and Craft program for internees. Noguchi's role in developing such a plan, presenting it to the federal government, and then working to move out to Poston to run an art program in the relocation centers seems to parallel the structure of the Federal Art Program's Community Art Centers, centers developed in the mid-1930s to stop the flow of artists away from indigenous regions to the metropolitan centers of the United States. Even so, Noguchi's NAWMD program also appears to have been a means to concentrate Japanese cultural tradi-



4 Evacuees stuffing mattresses, Poston, Arizona, May 1942. Washington, D.C., United States National Archives, from the still pictures collection, RG 210 (negative 210-G-5A-144)

tions in order to preserve those traditions, as well as to keep them from spreading during the war.²⁷

On May 12, 1942, Noguchi arrived at Poston I, a camp that when linked to its two neighbors, Poston II and III, eventually housed almost twenty thousand evacuees.²⁸ At that time, the camp was still under construction (it officially opened on May 8, 1942), and evacuees were put to work building the camp structures and stuffing their own mattresses (Fig. 4).²⁹ Because camp planning and construction were behind schedule when Noguchi arrived, it is not surprising that his art program never really got off the ground. Noguchi rapidly saw that the program was doomed, and after only a few weeks at Poston he asked for permission to leave. Although he had entered the camp voluntarily, his request was repeatedly denied—largely because of questions about his loyalty and citizenship that arose when it was learned that he had spent part of his childhood in Japan. It was not until November that Noguchi left Poston on a temporary leave pass, one he acquired after making an application for leave on the basis of a recently instituted loophole for evacuees of “mixed race” parentage to be eligible for release. On November 11, 1942, a visibly relieved Noguchi returned to his home in New York on that temporary pass. He never returned.³⁰

In late 1941 and early 1942, Noguchi apparently “became aware” (as he had never been before) of his identity as a Nisei. When he wrote the manuscript “I Become a Nisei,” it was early October 1942, and he was writing from his quarters at the Poston internment camp, intending to publish his text in *Reader's Digest*. Writing to a friend on the same day that he mailed the manuscript, Noguchi revealed that although he thought the text was “a bit too personal,” it seemed the “best way to make my contribution, which I think important to ‘the unity of all races under democracy.’”³¹ In this text, Noguchi argues that American democracy ought to be built on the basis of cultural and ethnic hybridity. Quite poignantly, the text also describes the process by which Japanese American internment, and in particular his internment in Arizona,

made him “aware of a color line I had never known before.”³² In an interview of 1973 with Paul Cummings in which he was asked about his internment, Noguchi implicitly linked the powerful experience of becoming “Nisei” as a “mixed blood” individual to that of African Americans. Noguchi stated that he believed that people of “mixed blood” would tend to pass (or not) depending on “convenience” or when one’s “associations make it so that you don’t have to think about it.” “But if you’re forced into thinking about it,” Noguchi suggested, “most people take the side of the less privileged.” Asked by Cummings if that was really true, Noguchi replied, “I think so. I mean, I think you find it among blacks too. The blacks despise people who pass.”³³

As Bert Winther-Tamaki reminds us, however, Noguchi had certainly thought about the issue of cultural identity before the outbreak of war, as he consciously reoriented his identity, both national and cultural, by changing his surname from Gilmour to Noguchi in 1923.³⁴ Yet the emphasis of “I Become a Nisei” on a newly visible “color line” underscores a shift in his awareness of racialization in the United States after internment. His words project a powerful, and apparently sudden, realization of becoming Japanese American in a way that recalls W.E.B. Du Bois’s eloquent description of the “double consciousness” that often shapes African American experience:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings. . . .³⁵

In his 1973 interview with Paul Cummings, Noguchi alluded to the ways that the war and his own internment pressed him to think about his racialized identity within American culture, an identity that Japanese American relocation and his own ordeal with internment brought into an even sharper focus than had his experiences as a child in Japan or the negative review from Henry McBride.³⁶ To complicate matters further, when Noguchi arrived at the camp, it became clear that he held an ambiguous position there as well, largely because of two factors: he was much older than the other Nisei in camp, and he had visible ties to the camp’s administration.³⁷

“I Become a Nisei” stresses the problematic but critical nature of this liminality, particularly in terms of how Noguchi and his fellow internees apprehended the transformation of their own identities as a matter of racialized representation. The “average Nisei . . . seems to take race differences as a matter of course,” he wrote, yet others avoided both “the Japs and also the whites; . . . ‘I am an American,’ they say, ‘not used to so many Japanese faces.’”³⁸ The shifting allegiances and different positions with which to identify clearly concerned Noguchi at the time, as his text foregrounds the Nisei’s intermediary position in the camps and produces an image of how internment was experienced by the Nisei from an uncertain, unstable position:

I begin to see the peculiar tragedy of the Nisei as that of a generation of transition accepted neither by the Japanese

nor by America. A middle people with no middle ground. His future looms uncertain. Where can he go? How will he live? Where will he be accepted? Will he be permitted to remain? He fears to become wards of the Government. Outside in Washington, D.C. and California a few people are plotting against his citizenship.³⁹

To read Noguchi's essay is to begin to grasp the degree to which the process of becoming aware of one's racialization marked social identification during the war. To define the self as the product of racial and cultural admixture, as Noguchi apparently did, might offer the possibility of seeing oneself as a symbol of the allied fight for democracy: the multi-racial individual would be an embodiment of the fight against fascism. On the other hand, to define oneself as a racialized subject could also pose terrific problems, problems that might serve to emphasize the racialized fault lines in American society. While on the one hand, Noguchi's essay argues for amalgamation as key to the creation of a truly democratic nation, his essay also underscores how assumptions about racial difference in the United States made it terribly difficult to create that ideally hybrid culture, that "nation of all nationalities."

Art and Politics in the 1940s

As recent scholarship on the artistic culture of the United States during the 1940s reveals, this was a period of exceptional richness, complexity, and contradiction in the visual arts.⁴⁰ Not only were cultural workers, critics, and politicians attempting to create an image of United States art as fundamentally democratic in nature and intent, but also artists themselves worked in ever more public ways to articulate the need for a new visual language to communicate to and about modern society. Noguchi's own practice and, more particularly, his *Reader's Digest* manuscript attest to the power of such an approach to the production of democratic cultural forms. And many artists found in abstraction a form of visual production capable of both evading direct connection to specific political agendas because of its lack of realist cues and offering an apparently universal visual language with which to communicate new ideas about social change.

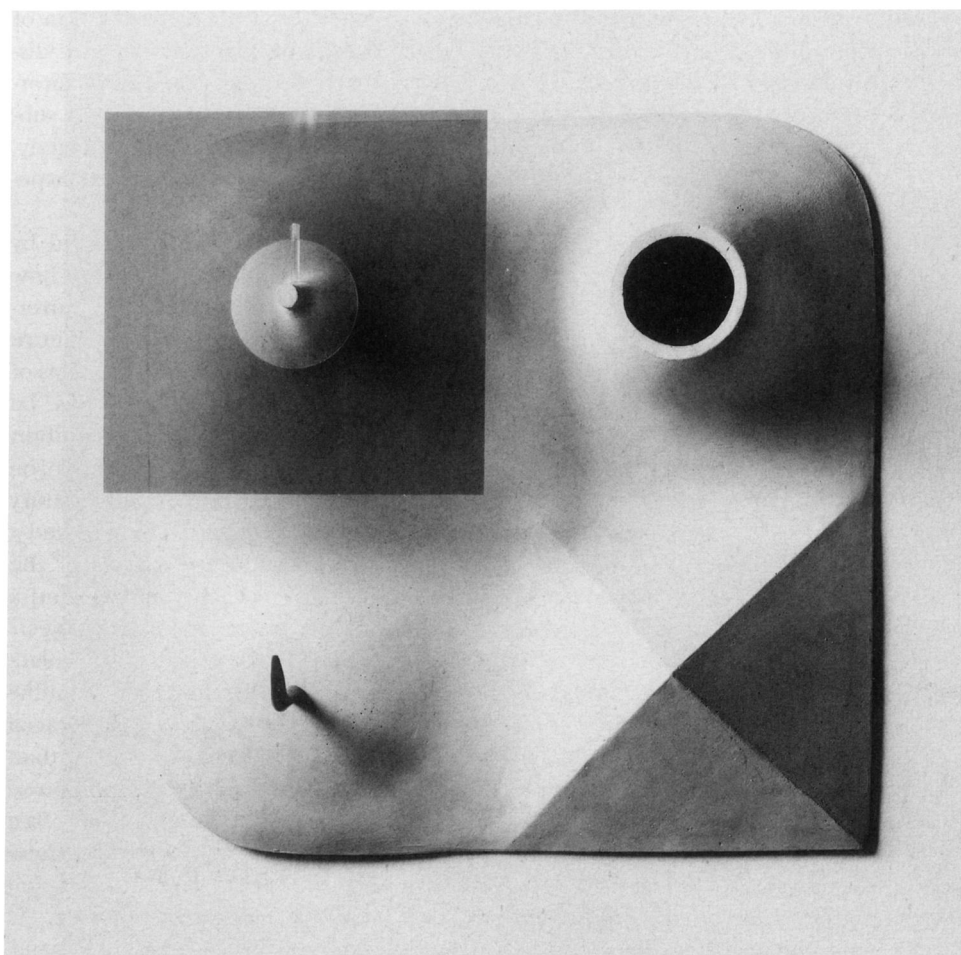
At the same time, American visual culture in the 1940s was permeated by some strong and long-held ideological assumptions about the relations between American individuality, democratic collectivity, and the notion of a universal humanity—in the realms of both art and politics. As Michael Leja's work on the New York School reveals, a number of cultural and political agendas shaped artistic and critical discourse about American culture in the mid-1940s, much of which revolved around the following issues: an increasing emphasis on cultural primitivism, which appeared to be a means by which to cross cultural lines quite easily; the relations between gender politics and cultural politics in the construction of a new breed of heroically individualistic artists; and the explicit politicization of exhibitions showcasing abstract painting. Many abstract artists of the New York School seemed to exemplify American "freedom" and individuality in that their deployment of diverse, unconventional, and generally abstract formal languages represented their independence from the kind of state-sponsored propaganda that

many in the United States associated with the production of artists in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany. Within this discourse that pitted American freedom against Axis dictatorship in the late 1930s, artists of the New York School subscribed to the idea that all human beings shared in tragedy, and that primitive and modern man expressed similar experiences in their art.⁴¹

The specific forms of universal humanism promoted by New York School artists and critics demand that we ask how race and racism inflected the discourse about artistic universality during World War II, a period in American culture when questions of race and nationality were crucial aspects of the government's decision to intern Japanese Americans. To what degree did such humanistic rhetoric muffle recognition of how artistic production had been and continued to be linked to the specificity of race in early twentieth-century American culture? Might the concept of "race" have played a role in debates about what was "American" in art of the United States during the 1940s in ways that went beyond a liberal approach to the idea of a universal human subject? Noguchi's sculpture of the mid-1940s worked to articulate how multiple subjectivities might be produced simultaneously. Yet his work of the early 1940s also reveals how racial and cultural hybridity remained largely an *ideal*, rather than a fact, of cultural life in the United States. Although discourse about the creation of a truly democratic "American" art often elided race in order to stress universal humanism, Japanese American artists such as Noguchi had to face the fact that after Pearl Harbor, "race" would not be easily forgotten.

Between 1943 and 1945, when Japanese American evacuation and internment became unavoidable public issues in the United States, Noguchi's abstract sculptures began to explore how identity emerges in culture (Fig. 5). In their abstraction, Noguchi's sculptures of the war period avoided the shrill immediacy of anti-Japanese images such as Thomas Hart Benton's painting *Exterminate!* a work published widely and exhibited in March 1942 (Fig. 6).⁴² Unlike *Exterminate!* (although perhaps the "spectacle" of Noguchi's *Death* might also come to mind as a work that approaches the propagandistic tone of Benton's painting), Noguchi's work employs an abstract visual language, thus evading propagandistic usage and articulating a process of *becoming* a body in the world rather than exploiting the specificity of the body as a political tool. A number of the works Noguchi produced between 1943 and 1945 momentarily visualize the nearly complete (yet unfinished) integration of identities within a single sculptural object. It is as if these sculptures reveal the process of amalgamation in concrete, material terms. Yet these works also reveal how hard that process would be. If internment made the inscription of racial and cultural difference concrete by institutionalizing racial segregation, Noguchi's wartime works highlight the process of hybridization by showing palpable connections between the individual, the landscape, and the social body.

My Arizona (1943, Fig. 5) offers several views of the relations between landscape, nation, and embodiment. By directly naming the state in which Noguchi was interned, as well as the ship that had been sunk by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, *My Arizona* suggests a diversity of landscapes, both physical and political. From a hill-like rise at left to the



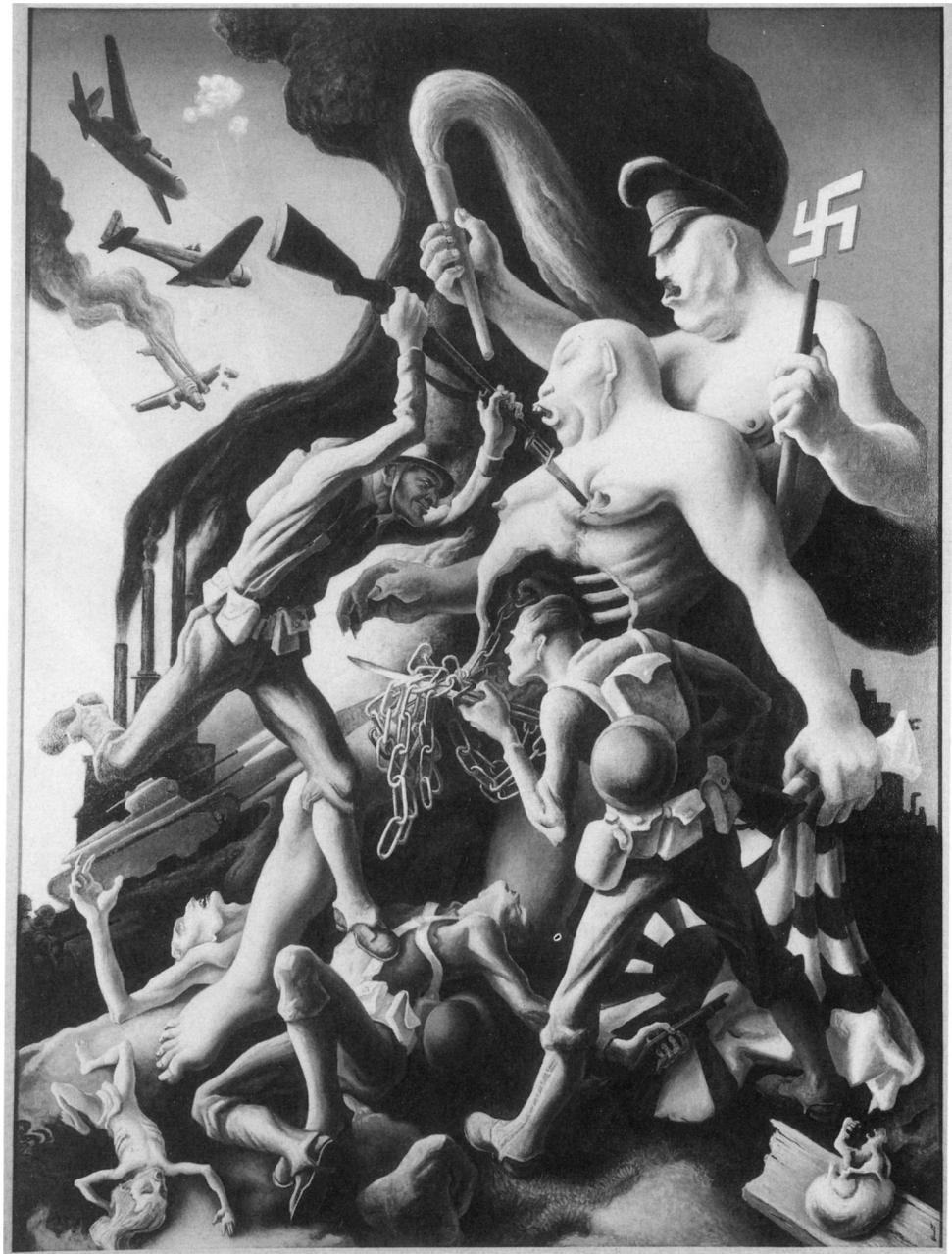
5 Noguchi, *My Arizona*, 1943, magnesite, wood, plastic, diameter 18 in. Long Island City, N.Y., Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum

pyramidal structure and round-lipped concavity on the right, the work does so by emphasizing this Arizona as a feminized site. Although the landscape depicted is forbidding in its crisp, white geometry, the hook at lower left seems to suggest some bodily metaphors: a lone figure, perhaps, or, alternatively, a nipples breast. This stark surface with its bodily references functions as a metaphor for the alienation of the body in the world—echoed ironically by the title's reference to the USS *Arizona* and the literal displacement of the nation's anxiety about Japanese aliens from the waters of Pearl Harbor to the Arizona desert. The magenta plastic sheet hovering above the relief seems to recall the desert environment that had been Noguchi's home in 1942, its color perhaps an attempt to embody the 130-degree summer heat about which Noguchi complained bitterly in letters written from Poston.⁴³

Although a second landscape relief that Noguchi completed in 1943 does not bear such a specific reference to a geographic location like Arizona, it is clear that the bronze relief entitled *This Tortured Earth* (1943, Fig. 7) extends *My Arizona*'s exploration of the relations between landscape and body. Compared with the gridlike organization of *My Arizona*, the roiling surface of this bronze piece suggests another approach to how man and nature might be connected to one another. As in *My Arizona*, the work's orientation—a landscapelike surface hung vertically on the wall like a painting—confuses our usual relation to the horizontal surface of the

earth that appears to be the subject of the piece. Whereas *My Arizona* appeared controlled, however, *This Tortured Earth*, with its spreading, bulging surface, exudes a violent physicality that confounds order instead of demonstrating it. *This Tortured Earth* disrupts a sense of the world's natural order. Its surface seems pulled and lacerated by war machines rather than architects. (In fact, Noguchi said that he made the piece after seeing an aerial photograph of a North African desert that had been riddled with bombs.⁴⁴) This earth has been torn and gouged repeatedly, and its stretched and bulging forms suggest an affinity with the earth (to use a trope of the earth as the body of nature) as a violated female body; the carefully incised, flat-lipped openings of Noguchi's object mimic the shape of a vagina, a vagina whose distorted, distended form maps war and its violence directly onto the body of nature, onto the landscape. These sculptural references to the physicality of the female genitals—sites of reproduction—are uncanny recollections of the equation so often made between the female body and the earth. In *This Tortured Earth* body and landscape have become one, and both are torn by violence. In what ways, this piece seems to ask, is one a product (or a producer) of the landscape that he or she inhabits? Can the body be read—physically, geographically, or materially—in terms not only of gender but also of location or place, the same way that a particular river, or mountain, or rock formation might be?

Noguchi's 1945 slate sculpture entitled *Effigy* (Gregory)



6 Thomas Hart Benton, *Exterminate!* 1942, oil on canvas. Columbia, Mo., State Historical Society of Missouri

presses us to consider the integration of allegedly opposing natural and cultural forms, whether painting and sculpture, landscape and body, or male and female, in an even more explicit way (Fig. 8).⁴⁵ Here, the gouged forms of *This Tortured Earth* have been turned into a standing figure. The shift in orientation from horizontal to vertical also seems to have generated a shift in the piece's gender: whereas *This Tortured Earth* embodied a feminized, horizontal landscape, the vertical position and smoother, vaguely columnar shape of *Effigy (Gregory)* suggest a move toward the masculine. A liminality of gender and spatial position is thus articulated in this work's mixing of conventional signifiers for sex and location. Noguchi's interest in making a work that figures the process of becoming—rather than the experience of being—is thus abstractly embodied in this freestanding sculptural form.

Effigy (Gregory) is made from thin slabs of slate that were originally cut in sheets and sold (relatively cheaply) for use as

architectural facing. Noguchi cut and polished this piece using power tools outfitted with grinding and cutting attachments. While retaining a pattern of perforations that visually quote the forms of *This Tortured Earth*, *Effigy (Gregory)* smooths over the violence of the previous work; it is as if *This Tortured Earth* might have sprouted limbs and pulled itself erect.⁴⁶ The deeply pitted incisions have been transformed by the medium of slate into attenuated, sculpted teardrops (Fig. 9). The brittleness of slate is obviously a part of this shift, as the material must be carefully worked in order to avoid flaking and fracture. Noguchi evidently took great care in the execution, and in this way *Effigy (Gregory)* materially inverts the violence with which the artist approached the earlier bronze relief. By reworking the sculptural grammar of *This Tortured Earth* into a slate *Effigy (Gregory)*, a careful elision has been made: violence in *this* embodied landscape has been recast in a texture of delicacy and fragility, as if the merging of land



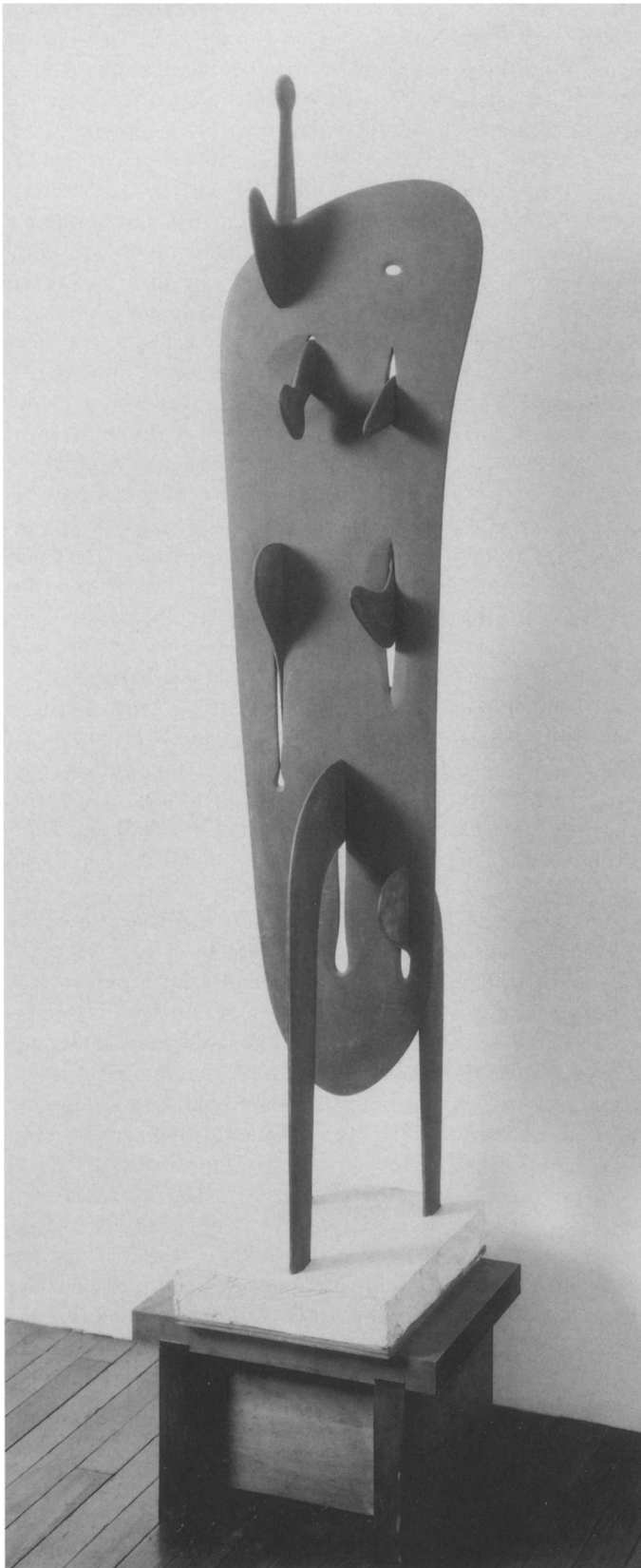
7 Noguchi, *This Tortured Earth*, 1943, bronze, diameter 28 in. Long Island City, N.Y., Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum

and figure will be won only at the cost of a precarious material and conceptual unity. This is a balancing act that is underscored by the work's double title (a double consciousness), a title that evokes both a generalized body (*Effigy*) and a particularized one (*Gregory*). With that second name, Noguchi tells us something more about the precariousness of embodiment, for he meant the name Gregory to refer to the antihero of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa.⁴⁷ Just as Gregor Samsa woke up one day as an insect instead of a human, so *Effigy (Gregory)* is transformed from a landscape into a body, from one species into another. At the same time, *Effigy (Gregory)* retains subtle reminders of its origins in the previous work. The sculptural quotation pressed into *Effigy (Gregory)* indicates that perhaps this more fragile slate figure represents a sculpted equivalent of the body's evasion of a direct identification with a specific place—that is, the body's presence nearly overrides its specific connection to the earth. Yet if the body will always appear marked with the traces of its geographic origins, perhaps there is no way to evade the violence implied in the stretched and fragile teardrops. Through the sequence presented here, Noguchi stresses the body's complex and fragile relation to its environment. A quick blow to this slate effigy would be its end. Might Noguchi's work be suggesting that the equation between place and identity—geography and body—is also terribly fragile?

To look again at *Kouros* in light of the ways in which hybridization was thematized in *My Arizona*, *This Tortured Earth*, and *Effigy (Gregory)* is to see how Noguchi's account of

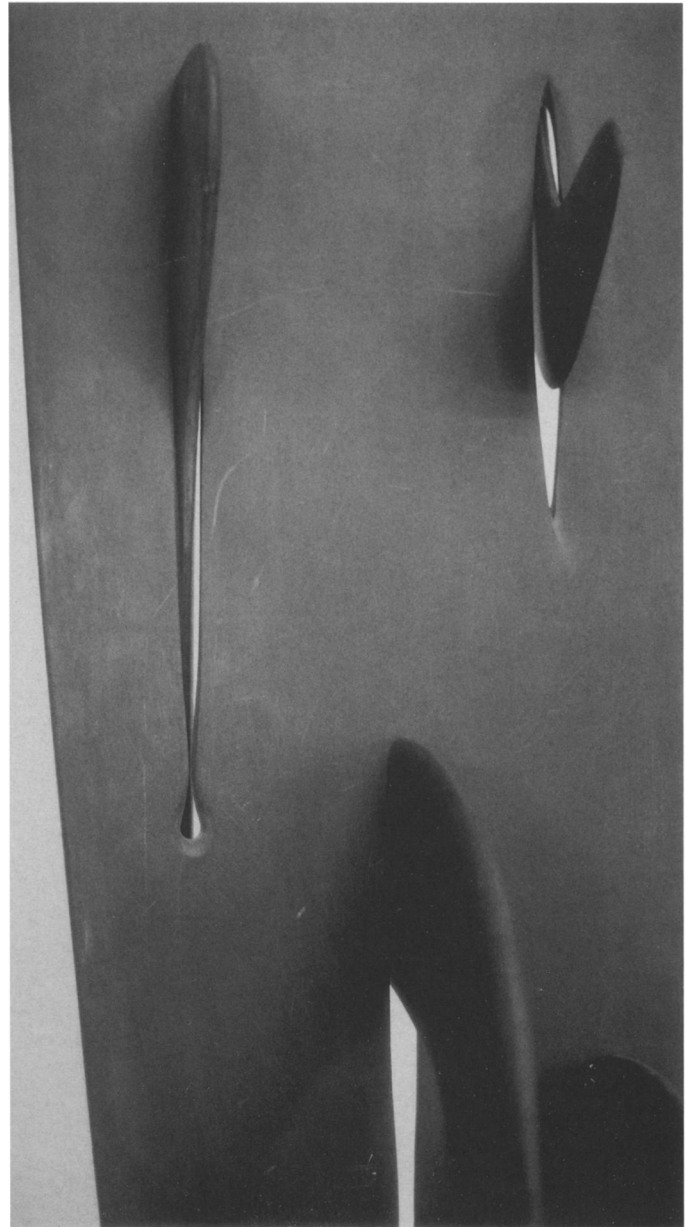
the Western art historical tradition emerged out of a critical engagement with the relations between landscape and identity (Fig. 1). *Kouros* not only announces Noguchi's relation to art history, it also proposes that an ideal humanity might be impossible in 1945. As noted previously, Thomas Hess described the work as a fusion of East and West; the title is drawn from Greek art, and, as he put it, the "scheme of construction" is inspired by "Oriental calligraphy." While the notched construction seems to mimic Japanese construction techniques, it is difficult to see the nearly ten-foot-high sculpture as simply a dramatically inflated linguistic character. Yet in his analysis of *Kouros*, Hess insists on this linguistic marking of the piece, and he uses the calligraphic reference as proof of Noguchi's "oriental" identity. Thus, for Hess the sculpture literally inscribes otherness onto the artist's body, even as it proposes a fusion of Eastern and Western cultural forms. As he continues this line of reasoning in his essay, Hess soon begins to reference Noguchi's race as an essential source of cultural alienation. Using James Joyce as his point of departure for his discussion of Noguchi's alienation, Hess articulates Noguchi's race in several ways, one universal and the other perilously specific:

The strategy of the artist in the twentieth century has been defined by James Joyce—to forge, with the tools of exile, silence and cunning, the uncreated conscience of his race. Isamu Noguchi, half-Japanese and half-Scotch-American, has carried his exile inside him like his skeleton. . . . In his



8 Noguchi, *Effigy (Gregory)*, 1945, purple slate, height 69 in. Long Island City, N.Y., Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum

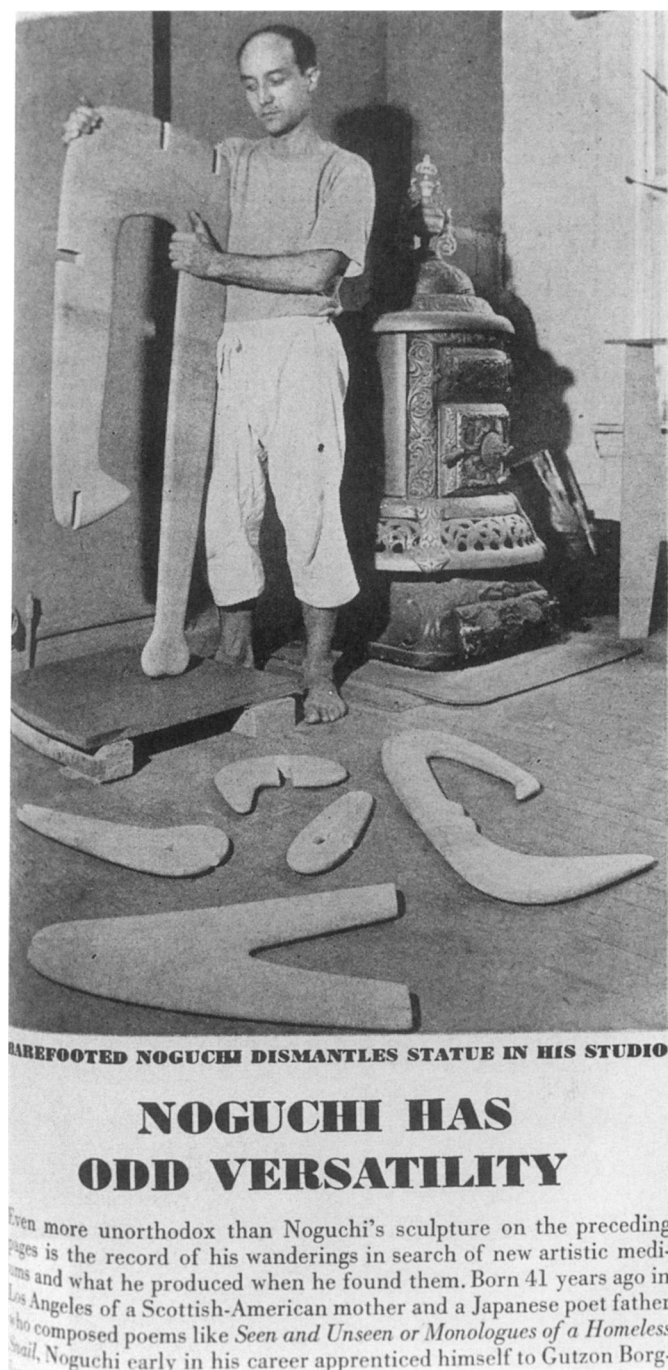
exiles, both voluntary and involuntary, this artificer has fashioned a conscience for a greater race than either of his own, humanity, and has fused in his art the East and the West as they were fused in his body.⁴⁸



9 Detail of Fig. 8 (photo: author)

As Hess would have it, Noguchi's specifically Japanese and Scottish-American racial makeup functions as a genetic expression of liberal democracy's hopes for cultural assimilation in the 1940s. Noguchi's race remains in his body like his skeleton, alienating him and yet forging an assimilationist model for the future, one in which racial and cultural difference will be fused in America just as it is quite literally fused in Noguchi's flesh. If one follows Hess's argument, *Kouros*, like Noguchi himself, figures the universal postwar Man in this attempt to amalgamate East and West.⁴⁹

Although Hess's account of Noguchi's "race" and "exile" might conjure up the mythic, existential hero that was a staple of the New York art world of the mid-1940s, the sculptor's recent experience of racialized exile may not have appeared to him in that light as he worked on the monumental *Kouros* figure in 1945. As I learned through the process of filing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to review



10 Noguchi with sculpture (*Figure*, 1946), published in *Life* magazine, Nov. 11, 1946, 12 (photo: Julie Wolf)

the contents of Noguchi's FBI file,⁵⁰ Noguchi's life was full of risks and uncertainties in the years after he left Poston. According to documents obtained through an Administrative Appeal of my FOIA request, Noguchi was under apparently continuous FBI surveillance from December 12, 1942, until late 1945. After his return to New York in November 1942, the FBI actively monitored his movements and personal associations. In 1945, to his great surprise, he was "excluded" from the West Coast by the War Relocation Authority and asked to report to Manzanar (in east-central California) for internment. After repeatedly trying to satisfy the Western Defense Command that he should not be evacuated and

interned again, Noguchi finally received clearance to remain in New York in late February 1945 (with the help of ex-Poston head John Collier and a lawyer who belonged to the American Civil Liberties Union). While Noguchi does not appear to have been aware of his surveillance by FBI agents between 1943 and 1945, the released FBI reports make it clear that his postal carrier was interviewed by the FBI in 1943. From January to June 1945, Noguchi exchanged correspondence with officials of the Western Defense Command in San Francisco in order to request a hearing regarding his recent exclusion. He also wrote to Carey McWilliams about the exclusion order, and McWilliams wrote back in February suggesting he contact Roger Baldwin, president of the ACLU, for advice. The former head of the Poston internment camp, John Collier, also wrote to the Department of the Interior on Noguchi's behalf in order to attest to Noguchi's democratic inclinations.⁵¹ As this paper trail suggests, Noguchi had become ambivalent about his previous social activism. His activism and "voluntary" internment had put him at great personal risk throughout 1945. Larry Tajiri, a close friend who served as the editor of the *Pacific Citizen* (the Salt Lake City-based publication of the Japanese-American Citizens League), believed that the new exclusion order was "ridiculous." Yet in a letter written in February 1945, Tajiri chillingly proposed the idea that "your name may have been on one of the Japanese government's lists of American citizens of Japanese ancestry whom they would accept for exchange with American nationals held in the Orient." In this letter Tajiri also noted that the United States Army had

set up other arbitrary rules by which candidates for exclusion are determined. These include the matter of close relatives in Japan and the number of years a person may have spent there. . . . The Army's action leaves you no alternative but to demand clearance and satisfaction. Acceptance of the verdict would be tantamount to acceptance of a tag of disloyalty. If the hearing board is negative, your recourse will be to take the matter to the courts, even though you may never want to set foot on the sacred soil of California. . . ."⁵²

Given the context of the risk of a renewed order for "evacuation" and Noguchi's struggle to keep himself from being interned in Manzanar in 1945 (after he had already spent six months at Poston in 1942), the pessimism embodied in a work such as *Kouros* makes sense. While the sculpture may well reveal its reverence for the humanist tradition that its name references, *Kouros* is also intended as a critique of that ideal: it looks more like a polished, bony relic of the past than a figure striding toward the future.⁵³ Significantly, *Kouros* was completed in 1945, the year that the United States bombed Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki and the year of Noguchi's attempt to evade internment in Manzanar. With such events in mind, we might read the work as a sign of Western culture's *lack* of humanity. Hess, however, turns *Kouros* into the sculptural symbol of the artist's fusion of a binary opposition between East and West. Hess saw *Kouros* as a smooth resolution of what the critic deemed to be an opposition between Japanese and American cultures (even if Hess held a liberal humanist view of the benefits of integra-

tion). Yet Hess's account also shows how race was a strangely literal category of analysis at the time. *Kouros* proposes itself as a symbol of mankind that moves between liberal humanism and racial essentialism. It symbolizes a culture that understood racial difference as something to be *contained* by American democracy rather than something that might *critique* that democracy.

With Hess's account in mind, it should not be surprising to find *Life* magazine focusing on the intersection of Noguchi's race and his sculpture in an article on the sculptor published in November 1946. *Life* also called *Kouros* a "representation of mankind," noting that the piece's most "unique feature" was its construction technique; because Noguchi had built the work out of eight separate but interlocking pieces, he could dismantle the entire sculpture in two minutes (Fig. 10).⁵⁴ Titled "Japanese-American Sculptor Shows Off Weird New Works," the *Life* text emphasized the facts of Noguchi's months of residence, at his own request, in an "alien Japanese camp." "Now," the article continued, "he works in a studio in New York where he patters happily about in his bare feet, cutting up marble slabs to fashion even more statues like those on the preceding page."⁵⁵ Setting aside the racialized, condescending reference to Noguchi's pattering bare feet, the writer's subsequent remark that the piece could be packed up in two minutes seems a prescient, if ironic, analysis of Noguchi's updated *Kouros*. For the *Life* article puts its finger on exactly how the *relocatability* of the work mimics—if unconsciously—the actual relocation that Japanese Americans endured during World War II. Noguchi's unique, movable sculptures may have proved just the thing for a modern culture that was on the move, whether "relocating" to a different state for work or for other, more overtly political reasons. *Life's* photograph of Noguchi with one of his works that dismantle (the work depicted is entitled *Figure*, 1946; the text discusses both *Kouros* and *Figure* as examples of this ingeniously portable new sculpture) is a poignant example of a practice that foresees its own relocation—a relocation whose facts are materially encoded into the structure of these interlocking figures. Consequently, *Kouros* not only may stand as Noguchi's claim to a piece of Western art history, it also may represent an approach to sculpture that gave form to the realities of Japanese American relocation: the ideal man as a movable sculptural effigy.

Noguchi's *Kouros* attempts to evade racial inscription by using an abstract visual language. At the same time, the piece *reenacts* the process of Japanese American internment each and every time it is exhibited. *Kouros* offers the idea of universal humanity as a construction while framing that tradition as empty. Although Noguchi's voluntary internment in no way entailed the same risks that so many Japanese Americans endured during the war, *Kouros* speaks of the risk and difficulty caused by the linkage of race and artistic identity within United States cultural discourse in the mid-1940s. This was, after all, a culture in which Noguchi and 110,000 residents of Japanese ancestry were relocated to the deserts and mountains of the American West solely because of their race.

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masculinity. This essay is part of a new project on Noguchi, American art, and the politics of race in the 1930s and 1940s [Art History and Visual Arts, Occidental College, Los Angeles, Calif. 90041].

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Notes

Many thanks to the individuals who have helped to shape this essay: Anne Wagner, Patricia Hills, Robin Greeley, Frances Pohl, Stacy Garfinkel, Charlotte Eyerman, and Jean Lyford. I also wish to thank Perry Chapman, Lory Frankel, and the anonymous *Art Bulletin* readers for their conceptual and editorial help in the preparation of the final manuscript. Finally, I want to thank Amy Hau of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation Archives and Museum, whose generosity and professionalism have made the research process a pleasure.

1. The exhibition ran from September 10 to December 8, 1946. The fourteen artists included in the show were David Aronson, Ben L. Culwell, Arshile Gorky, David Hare, Loren MacIver, Robert Motherwell, Isamu Noguchi, I. Rice Pereira, Alton Pickens, C. S. Price, Theodore J. Roszak, Honoré Sharrer, Saul Steinberg, and Mark Tobey. Although an effort was clearly made to select artists of different stylistic tendencies as well as ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the show did not include any women, and most of the work on view was abstract.

2. Dorothy C. Miller, preface to *Fourteen Americans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 8.

3. One cannot help but sense the resonance of the word "Orient" with Edward Said's articulation of the ways in which the concept of the Orient is a fiction through which the West constructs itself via the image of an "Oriental" other, especially as his concept of Orientalism is crystallized in the introduction to *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1–14.

4. Although Noguchi first exhibited his *Kouros* at the Museum of Modern Art, it was the Metropolitan Museum of Art that purchased the work in 1953. Because the Metropolitan's 6th-century B.C. *Kouros* and Noguchi's 1945 *Kouros* are currently housed in the same collection, comparing their two approaches to the representation of the heroic male body is today a natural act that was only implicit at the time of the *Fourteen Americans* exhibition in 1946.

5. In her commentary on *Kouros* and the roughly fifteen stone-slab sculptures of the 1940s, Nancy Grove points out that the pieces that were notched and slotted together were produced initially as small cardboard maquettes. When finished in stone these interlocking slab works "could be quickly assembled by locking the pieces together . . . [and they were] equally demountable." She goes on to note that these works "could be stored or shipped flat," a description that alludes yet again to their low-profile portability. Nancy Grove, *Isamu Noguchi: A Study of the Sculpture* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1983), 55–56. *Life* magazine's 1946 account of Noguchi's work, "Japanese-American Sculptor Shows Off Weird New Works," *Life*, Nov. 11, 1946, 12–13, 15, also focused on this aspect of his production.

6. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 17–18.

7. Étienne Balibar argues for viewing this universalizing impulse as an effect of theoretical racism in ways that are provocative for the arguments about race and nation put forward in this essay on Noguchi's art and the politics of Japanese American internment. See Balibar, "Paradoxes of Universality," in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 283–94.

8. Hess, 50.

9. In his work on Noguchi, Bert Winther-Tamaki makes a powerful argument for the ways in which Noguchi was invested in "particular cultural locales," to the extent that he created "places" rather than figuring "space." Like Winther-Tamaki, I want to complicate the notion of Noguchi as an East-West fusion of art and body by focusing on how some of his sculptures of the early 1940s complicate, and indeed foreground, the process by which we might understand identities to be formed, situated, and disseminated. For

more on Noguchi and the problems of nationalism and identity, see Winther-Tamaki, 110–17.

10. Isamu Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture," *Art News* 48 (Mar. 1949): 15.

11. *Death* was a well-known piece of sculpture at the beginning of 1935, for it was exhibited three times in just three months: first at a solo exhibition of Noguchi's work at the Marie Harriman Gallery (January 28–February 19); twice in February, as part of the NAACP-College Art Association's *An Art Commentary on Lynching* at the Arthur U. Newton Galleries (including works by John Steuart Curry, Thomas Hart Benton, Reginald Marsh, and George Biddle), and at an antilynching show put up concurrently with the NAACP exhibition called *The Struggle for Negro Rights*, sponsored by the John Reed Club, the Artist's Union, the Artists' Committee of Action, the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the International Labor Defense, and the Vanguard. It appears to have been on view first at the *Art Commentary* show, and then for a longer period at the *Struggle* exhibition. Both exhibitions aimed to focus attention on the practice of lynching in the United States and to emphasize the need for antilynching legislation. On the two different antilynching shows, see Marlene Park, "Lynching and Antilynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s," *Prospects* 18 (1993): 311–65; Margaret Rose Vendries, "Hanging on Their Walls: An Art Commentary on Lynching, the Forgotten 1935 Exhibition," in *Race Consciousness: African-American Studies for the New Century*, ed. Judith Jackson Fossett and Jeffrey A. Tucker (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 153–76; Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints," *American Art* 13 (spring 1999): 10–39; and Patricia Hills's introduction to *Social Concern and Urban Realism: American Painting of the 1930s* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983).

12. Edward Alden Jewell, "Noguchi Sculpture in Metal Exhibited," *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1935, 17; M.M., "Art Commentary on Lynching: Arthur U. Newton Galleries," *Art News* 33 (Feb. 23, 1935): 13; Henry McBride, "Attractions in the Galleries," *New York Sun*, Feb. 2, 1935, 33.

13. McBride (as in n. 12), 33. The monuments in question included Noguchi's designs for *Monument to a Plow and Play Mountain*, both of which were submitted to the New York WPA (but which were ultimately rejected).

14. Fear of a growing alliance between Japanese and blacks was, it appears, of real concern to both the Justice Department and American military intelligence as early as the 1920s. Central to the government's concern over the growing strength of such an alliance was the apprehension that the "colored races of the world" would join together to challenge white supremacy. See George Lipsitz, "'Frantic to Join . . . the Japanese Army': Black Soldiers and Civilians Confront the Asia-Pacific War," in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, ed. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 355–56. John W. Dower also notes that many whites, particularly in the South, feared a Japanese-black alliance in the 1930s. With such anxieties prevalent in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, it may be that McBride's attack on Noguchi's *Death* was the result of the critic's own misgivings about the sculptor's apparent identification and critique of the plight of African Americans. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 173–78.

15. Langa (as in n. 11), 16–17, notes that many of the mainstream art journals of the 1930s and early 1940s frequently deployed racial stereotypes, both "positive" and "negative," in order to establish the idea of a homogeneous style attached to racialized categories.

16. Noguchi was a member of the Artist's Union throughout the 1930s and early 1940s and published an essay entitled "What's the Matter with Sculpture" for the September–October 1936 issue of *Art Front*. The Artist's Union worked hard on behalf of both Chinese and Japanese artists during the 1930s. While Chinese immigrants had been excluded in the late 1880s, it was not until 1924 that the Japanese were excluded from immigration, and in no case could anyone in either group of immigrants become citizens. In an October 1937 issue, *Art Front* addressed the problematic, reactionary legislation barring Chinese and Japanese artists from the WPA; in two different essays, it promoted the liberalization of laws regarding both citizenship and work on the WPA, "Flag-Waving vs. Art," 3–4, and "Chinese and Japanese Artists," 22, *Art Front*, Oct. 1937.

17. Meyer Schapiro, "Race, Nationality, and Art," *Art Front*, Mar. 1936, 10.

18. *Ibid.*, 10.

19. In both chaps. 1 and 4 of his exceptional account of the intersections between Japanese and American art and artists of the 1950s, Bert Winther-Tamaki astutely points out how the notion of "hybridity" (with, as he remarks, its contemporary meaning as a term that shows the way toward a challenge to racial stereotypes) in the 1940s and 1950s was not necessarily the positive term that it is today in some circles, one that blurred distinctions between East and West or between apparently native and alien differences. Indeed, as Winther-Tamaki argues, "the pervasive ideology of nationalism exerted a powerful disciplining force on the potential of hybrid art forms to effect a blurring of the difference between Japanese and American art" (5). In this essay I hope to recover some of the ways in which the concept of hybridity was both a mobilizing and disciplining force in the work of Noguchi and his contemporaries.

20. My use of the term *hybridity* signals my interest in Noguchi's use of the word in his 1942 manuscript "I Become a Nisei." It is also informed by the subtle distinctions within the term's elaboration in the 20th century, partic-

ularly in the work on language, colonialism, and race by figures such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Homi Bhabha, and Kobena Mercer. Also see Robert J. C. Young's astute analysis of the state of and stakes involved in the theorization of hybridity as "double-voiced," *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 20–26.

21. Noguchi, 1942, 1.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Noguchi, 1973, 74. The term *Nisei* is used to describe first-generation Japanese Americans born in the United States of émigré parents, or Issei.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Noguchi was not the only Japanese American artist who became politically and socially active in early 1942. The Japanese painter Yasuo Kuniyoshi involved himself with United States government propaganda and participated in the New York-based Japanese-American Committee for Democracy. By 1944, the JACD also included Noguchi on its membership list. The fact that Noguchi's archives also include a December 12, 1942, text produced by "A Committee of Japanese Artists Resident in New York City" that was signed by Kuniyoshi and six other Japanese artists suggests that he was also aware of the activities of other artists during this period. In addition, a letter from Noguchi to Miss Lucy Adams, dated June 15, 1942, and written from Poston notes that Noguchi had attended a meeting at Kuniyoshi's studio "at which was discussed the desire that so many creative people of Japanese extraction felt in wanting to do something to help in the camps. They all wanted to be able to participate as visiting artists, teachers, or lecturers. On the other hand," Noguchi continued, "they saw no point in risking incarceration, as I have done." (Noguchi Archives.) As early as January 30, 1942, Kuniyoshi was enlisted by the coordinator of information for the United States government to write a script for shortwave broadcast to Japan. Like Noguchi, Kuniyoshi was anxious to help in the war effort, and to this end he tried to convince some of his friends who belonged to the Committee for Democratic Treatment for Japanese Residents in Eastern States to write similar scripts. (Kuniyoshi to Mr. Bruce, Jan. 30, 1942, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Forbes Watson Papers, Roll D56, Frames 244–45.) By February 1942, Kuniyoshi was in the midst of organizing the Japanese-American Committee for Democracy. Kuniyoshi was among the advisory board members for the group, along with Galen M. Fisher of the Northern California Committee on Fair Play for Citizens and Aliens of Japanese Ancestry; the Rt. Rev. Edward L. Parsons of the Diocesan House in San Francisco; and Chester H. Rowell of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Excerpted by Kuniyoshi in a letter dated February 24, 1942, the goals of the JACD were stated in the preamble to the constitution of the JACD as follows: "In order to: mobilize all loyal American citizens of Japanese ancestry and Japanese residents of our community loyal to the United States for the defense of American Democracy; establish better understanding between the Japanese community and the greater American public and thus facilitate our participation in the full scheme of American public life; promote the economic, social, and cultural status of our community. . . ." (Kuniyoshi to Henry Schnakenberg, Feb. 24, 1942, in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), Yasuo Kuniyoshi Papers, Roll P11, Frame 284.

26. There is a growing literature on Japanese American internment during World War II. Key texts include Richard and Maisie Conrat, *Executive Order 9066* (Los Angeles: California Historical Society, 1972); Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972); Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitano, eds., *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1986); Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Meyer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987); Allen H. Eaton, *Beauty behind Barbed Wire* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952); Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis, *The Great Betrayal: The Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans during World War II* (London: Macmillan, 1969); Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); Karin Higa, ed., *The View from Within: Japanese American Art from the Internment Camps, 1942–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992); Bill Hosokawa, *The Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow, 1969); Yuji Ichioka, ed., *Views from Within: The Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study* (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, University of California, 1989); Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice: Japanese-Americans; Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945); Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945–1960* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); Edward H. Spicer et al., *Impounded People: Japanese-Americans in the Relocation Centers* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1969); John Tateishi, *And Justice for All: An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps* (New York: Random House, 1984); United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (Washington, D.C.: Civil Liberties Public Education Fund and the University of Washington Press, 1997); and David K. Yoo, *Growing up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture among Japanese Americans of California, 1924–49* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000). For more general studies of Asian American experience in the United States, see Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

27. On the ideological position of the Community Art Centers, see Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 44–63.

28. Poston I had 9,500 evacuees, Poston II and III roughly 4,500 each.

29. Interestingly, Noguchi's plan described the ways in which these planned communities of citizens of Japanese ancestry should be populated first by those who were knowledgeable and trained in techniques of construction and engineering. Isamu Noguchi for the Nisei Artists and Writers Mobilization for Democracy, "A Plan for Government Sponsored Farm and Craft Settlement for People of Japanese Parentage," National Archives, Washington, D.C., John Collier Papers, RG 75, 4.

30. Documents pertaining to Noguchi's request to leave and his eventual success in acquiring a temporary pass to leave Poston can be found in Noguchi's evacuee case file from Poston. Noguchi's evacuee case file paperwork from Poston indicates that he was still a member of the Artist's Union and the American Artists Congress in 1942 when he filled out his application to leave the camp. A copy of Noguchi's Poston paperwork can be found in the artist's Poston case file. See National Record Center Annex, Suitland, Md., Evacuee Case File: Isamu Noguchi, WRA papers, RG 210. For a more complete chronology of Noguchi's voluntary internment at Poston, see Amy J. Lyford, "My Arizona: Isamu Noguchi and the Internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II," M.A. thesis, Boston University, 1989; and Robert J. Maeda, "Isamu Noguchi: 5-7-A, Poston, Arizona," *Amerasia Journal* 20, no. 2 (1994): 61–76.

31. Isamu Noguchi to Mrs. Atherton Richards, Oct. 5, 1942, written at Poston. A letter to DeWitt Wallace of the *Reader's Digest* dated Oct. 5, 1942, makes it clear that Noguchi mailed the text the same day. Both letters are in the Noguchi Archives.

32. Noguchi, 1942, 3.

33. Noguchi, 1973, 78.

34. Winther-Tamaki, 111–12. The account of Noguchi's name change cited and analyzed by Winther-Tamaki was originally published in Noguchi, 1968, 15. In the course of this autobiography, Noguchi mentions Poston and his internment only briefly. That Noguchi downplayed the impact of the internment on his life in the early 1940s spurred me to investigate this period of his life.

35. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 11. Provocative with respect to the analysis of Du Bois's double consciousness is what Paul Gilroy sees as the problem of "racialised ontology and identity—the tension between being and becoming black" within modernity's shared experiences of displacement and migration. See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 116.

36. In this interview, Noguchi periodically raised the issue of how he experienced racialization in both Japan and the United States. Specific reference to his experiences with internment and his own process of "becoming" Japanese American is found on 74–79. Earlier in the interview, Noguchi noted that he had initially gone to the State Department in Washington, D.C., to see what he could do to help. "No, go away," he recalls being told at the time, "there's nothing you can do; you're the last person we want to see; you're a half-breed; what do we want with you?" Noguchi, 1973, 75.

37. In Noguchi, 1968, 25, Noguchi admitted that it had been hard to negotiate his relations with the camp administration: "There could have been some question of my position, whether on the side of the administration or of the internees, but with the harness of camp life came a feeling of mutuality, or identity with those interned and against the Administration, in spite of personal friendships." The federal government actively encouraged situations such as Noguchi's liminal position in the camp with respect to other internees and the camp administration in order to collect information on the nature of Japanese culture. Anthropologists used internees as cultural informants on a regular basis, not only to help define wartime camp policies and practices but also to prepare for the reassimilation of the internees back into mainstream American culture at the war's conclusion. On this aspect of internment policy and practice, see Simpson (as in n. 26), 43–75, esp. pp. 48–52, on Poston and the use of internees as "informants on Japanese culture."

38. Noguchi, 1942, 3–4.

39. Ibid., 5.

40. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); and Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Also important are the following essays, collected in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985): Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," Serge Guilbaut, "The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America," and David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting."

41. Leja (as in n. 40), 93. Of the artists associated with Abstract Expressionism, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Adolph Gottlieb, and Jackson Pollock

all created images in the early 1940s that conjured up iconic ancient forms that presupposed a kind of universal humanism, such as Rothko's 1946 painting *Tiresias*, Gottlieb's "ideographic" paintings of the mid-1940s, or Pollock's oblique references to the mythologies of ancient Rome and the American Southwest in works like *She-Wolf* and *Guardians of the Secret*. Winther-Tamaki, chap. 2, discusses Abstract Expressionism's relation (and opposition) to the "Japanese-ness" of the work of postwar Japanese and American artists like Noguchi, Mark Tobey, and Franz Kline in ways that expand our understanding of the New York School's investments in the archaic, the primitive, and the universal.

42. Benton's series of paintings (to which *Exterminate!* belongs), created in order to drum up support for the war and to whip up anti-Japanese sentiment, was part of the book and exhibition *The Year of Peril*, a title that seems designed to resonate with the anti-Japanese hysteria in which claims of an encroaching "Yellow Peril" permeated the West Coast. The series of paintings, including *Exterminate!* was exhibited first at the Associated American Artists' Gallery in New York. The paintings were reproduced later that year in the varied formats of stamps, stickers, newsreels, and a book. See *The Year of Peril: A Series of War Paintings by Thomas Hart Benton* (Chicago: Abbott Laboratories, 1942), with a foreword by Archibald MacLeish; Barbara J. Carr, "Thomas Hart Benton's Year of Peril," M.A. thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1981; and Doss (as in n. 40), 282–89. For a more comprehensive account of the intersections between fascism, antifascism, and American art, see Cécile Whiting, *Antifascism in American Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

43. Noguchi penned letters to Man Ray and to his sister Ailes about how hard he found camp life during 1942. These and other letters are in the Noguchi Archives.

44. Noguchi later recalled his conception for *This Tortured Earth*: "The idea of sculpting the earth followed me through the years, with mostly playground models as metaphor, but then there were others. *This Tortured Earth* was my concept for a large area to memorialize the tragedy of war. There is injury to the earth itself. The war machine, I thought, would be excellent equipment for sculpture, to bomb it into existence." Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 152. If he envisioned the work as a bronze "model" for a large-scale earth sculpture, however, the work never was completed; it hangs like a picture (as does *My Arizona*) in the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum's collection—a collection organized and installed by the sculptor.

45. Although the Noguchi Museum catalogue (as in n. 44) dates *Effigy* (Gregory) to 1946, there is ample evidence to suggest that Noguchi completed the piece in 1945. When it was exhibited in the 1946 show *Fourteen Americans* at the Museum of Modern Art, the catalogue published the work as dating to 1945. This, coupled with the visual character of other works from 1945, including *Kouros*, as well as a number of the drawings Noguchi completed during that year, have convinced me that the work was completed in 1945, and that the 1946 dating is mistaken: 1946 is the date of the work's first exhibition rather than its execution.

46. Noguchi discusses this technique in Noguchi, 1968, 27–28, as well as in Noguchi (as in n. 44), 248. In his essay on Noguchi, Hess, 50, notes a visual connection between *This Tortured Earth* and *Effigy* (Gregory).

47. Noguchi (as in n. 44), 248.

48. Hess, 34.

49. Drawing on Hess's argument, it seems to me, Dore Ashton has explored the binary operations of East and West in Noguchi's art in her recent book *Noguchi, East and West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

50. A file whose existence I discovered while going through his Evacuee Case File (as in n. 30) at the National Record Center Annex, in which a memo dated December 12, 1942, reads as follows: "It was alleged by a confidential informant on April 1, 1942, that one Isamu Noguchi, formerly of 52 West 20th Street, New York City, was an artist, a Communist, and anti-Japanese."

51. Regarding his 1945 exclusion order (no. 8096) from the Western Defense Command, San Francisco, letters in Noguchi's Evacuee Case File (as in n. 30) and the Noguchi Archives dated between February and June 1945, both to and from Noguchi, indicate the following chronology: Noguchi wrote to the Western Defense Command in San Francisco on January 30, 1945, to request a hearing about his exclusion. He apparently contacted Carey McWilliams about the order, for McWilliams wrote back to him on February 1, 1945, suggesting he contact Roger Baldwin, president of the ACLU, for advice. John Collier wrote to the federal Department of the Interior on Noguchi's behalf on March 5, 1945, attesting to Noguchi's democratic inclinations. Copies of all of these letters are held in the Noguchi Archives.

52. Larry Tajiri to Isamu Noguchi, Feb. 6, 1945, Noguchi Archives.

53. Two drawings related to the form of *Kouros* from 1945 suggest Noguchi's vision of his interlocking sculpture as a disemboweled or opened-up figure even more so than does the finished work. See his drawing catalogued as "2 Ideas for sculpture, 1945" (7586, Neg: DINV36-4) in the collection of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation.

54. "Japanese-American Sculptor" (as in n. 5), 13.

55. Ibid., 12–13, 15.