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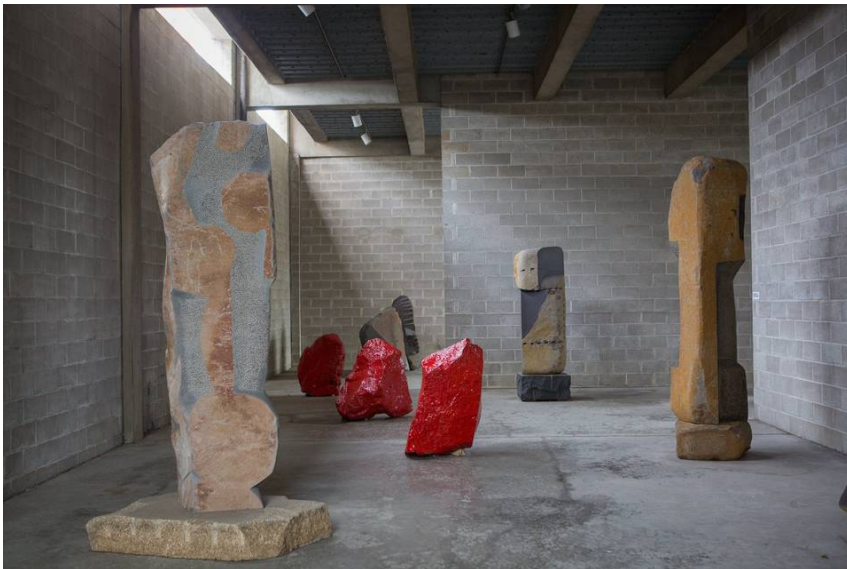
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An Exhibition Where Rocks Get Respect

After 30 years, the Noguchi Museum launches a multi-artist show, 'Museum of Stones'



The Noguchi Museum during the installation of the multi-artist exhibition 'Museum of Stones' PHOTO: CASSANDRA GIRALDO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

Oct. 5, 2015 6:23 p.m. ET

To many people, rocks are just rocks. To the famed mid-20th-century sculptor Isamu Noguchi, they were the “primary matter of the universe” and gateways to “an art of meditation.”

Both of those ideas come from the artist’s own introduction to the Noguchi Museum in Queens, home to dozens of his large-scale sculptures since opening in 1985. Now, after 30 years of focus on Noguchi’s own art, the meditative space is coming in for an update with the ambitious multi-artist exhibition “Museum of Stones.”

The show, starting Wednesday and running into January, invites 30 other artists into

the home that Noguchi designed and built himself in Long Island City, just a few years before his death in 1988.

Many of his own artworks remain, including large, abstract sculptures made with rocks that were carved, polished and sometimes left raw. They will have company in the form of other art that addresses the subject of stone in sometimes shifty, playful and conceptual ways.

“His interests were incredibly diverse,” Dakin Hart, the Noguchi Museum’s senior curator, said of the Japanese-born artist who also worked as a designer of everything from furniture to lighting to gardens. “So this show is geological, scientific, pseudoscientific, literary.”



Dakin Hart, senior curator at the Noguchi Museum *PHOTO: CASSANDRA GIRALDO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Noguchi’s relationship with rocks was physical—he studied the finer points of stone-carving with modernist master Constantin Brancusi as well as with Gutzon Borglum, the creator of Mount Rushmore. But it was metaphysical too, with a deep appreciation for the eons-spanning life cycles of rocks.

“The working history of sculpture is 10,000 years long,” Mr. Hart said. “For Noguchi, stone was a way of connecting to the planet. It’s fundamental.”

The art in “Museum of Stones” ranges from historical relics to contemporary creations, all engaged with ideas about the distinction between rock and stone.

“Rocks are what nature makes and stones are what we make out of them,” said Mr. Hart. “We’re trying to look at things at that peak moment when they’re flipping between

‘rocks’ and ‘stones.’ ”

Among the historical offerings are Chinese “scholars’ rocks” used for contemplation, on loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And in a testament to rock’s functional use, there is an original foundation stone from the Jerusalem fortification wall from 70 A.D.

Newer works include an installation by Jimmie Durham called “The Dangers of Petrification,” which lays out carved and shined pieces of stone that look uncannily like bacon, cheese and bonbons. A more conceptual piece by Lawrence Weiner, calling on the imagination, features nothing but words on a wall: “A Stone Installed (In the Absence of Wind).”

Some of the art in “Museum of Stones” echoes Noguchi’s work directly.



Artist Rupert Norfolk’s ‘Wall,’ an installation of 125 carved limestone rocks, at the Noguchi Museum *PHOTO: CASSANDRA GIRALDO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

“He treated rocks with a lot of respect and I admire that,” said Bosco Sodi, a New York artist whose large sculptures, rising up from the floor, share certain contours with some of Noguchi’s work. Mr. Sodi’s are different, though: He sourced rocks from a volcano in Mexico, covered them with glaze and fired them in a kiln, creating red boulders with a shiny ceramic-like surface.

“The point,” said Mr. Sodi of a process that upends the way in which rocks are made when lava cools, “is to take the rock and the energy it has and turn it inside-out.”

For her sculpture “And,” Janine Antoni shaped two large pieces of limestone by turning them with a long pole five hours a day, every day, for six weeks. Her aim was to meld the two parts together smoothly, but the rocks’ wild cragginess proved too much to tame.

“There comes a point when you’re not sure if you’re making the sculpture or if the sculpture is making you,” she said.

“Museum of Stones” is the first of several new initiatives for the museum on the occasion of its 30th anniversary. It just announced its first single-artist show that isn’t Noguchi-oriented, scheduled for next March: a spacious installation devoted to Japanese tea ceremonies by artist Tom Sachs. Activity already under way this year includes a new book of photographs of the museum published by Phaidon and, on view into December, an exhibition of 18 Noguchi sculptures installed around the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

“You’re not supposed to go there and trudge from object to object,” Mr. Hart, the curator, said. “It’s really about how they disappear into the environment.”

Something similar happens at the Noguchi Museum itself: “You go there feeling frantic and overburdened and you suddenly find this whole other world,” said Hayden Herrera, author of the recent Noguchi biography “Listening to Stone.” “It’s almost like going to another country.”

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