Reconceiving the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi
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This thesis discusses the public spaces designed by Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi within the United States. Noguchi’s artistic career, including his sculptural explorations, playground proposals and theater set designs, greatly influenced his limited landscape work. His artistic elements set him apart from traditional landscape architects of his time, making his sites evocative, symbolic, and challenging to maintain and adequately interpret. The most vulnerable of these sites are his public plazas and parks, designed late in his career, which are subject to the whims of ever-changing political, cultural and economic factors. Through investigating Noguchi’s only extant public spaces in the United States, recommendations are set forth to encourage a broader understanding of the artist’s contribution to the urban fabric within the respective community to promote lasting preservation measures. Additionally, California Scenario (1982), often hailed as Noguchi’s landscape masterpiece, offers lessons in its ongoing care and preservation as a privately owned public space. Through archival research, site visits, and interviews with current stewards and stakeholders, each site has been thoroughly assessed for integrity, use and existing conditions, culminating in a context report of Noguchi’s public landscapes that examines both the individual and collective significance of the sites and identifies best practices for future interpretation and maintenance.

Sites:

   Detroit, Michigan

   Los Angeles, California

   Miami, Florida

   Costa Mesa, California