

The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum Presents *Temitayo Ogunbiyi: You will wonder if we would have been friends*

First U.S. Solo Exhibition by Lagos-Based Artist Temitayo Ogunbiyi
Opens June 18, 2025



Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *You will follow the Rhein and compose play (playground)*, 2024. Steel, rubber, concrete, manila rope. Commissioned by the Museum Tinguely and the Bundeskunsthalle. Photo: Courtesy of Temitayo Ogunbiyi

New York (February, 2025) – The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum is pleased to announce *Temitayo Ogunbiyi: You will wonder if we would have been friends*, the first solo museum exhibition in the United States by Nigeria-based artist Temitayo Ogunbiyi (b. 1984). On view from June 18 to November 2, 2025, the exhibition will feature sculptures, paintings, and drawings installed throughout the Museum’s first-floor galleries and garden.

This exhibition takes place in a milestone year for The Noguchi Museum, as the institution celebrates its 40th anniversary. For four decades, the Museum has been a space of exploration, reflection, and dialogue through Isamu Noguchi’s (1904–1988) legacy and its ongoing programming. In this spirit, Ogunbiyi’s work—focused on the intersection of play, community, and global histories—provides a poignant continuation of Noguchi’s belief in art as a tool for physical engagement and shared experience.

Ogunbiyi’s work responds to global events, anthropological histories, design, and botanical cultures, forging dialogues between these themes. Increasingly focused on the role of play in society, Ogunbiyi has drawn inspiration from Isamu Noguchi’s exploration of open-ended, non-directive play to expand sculpture’s civic potential. For this exhibition, Ogunbiyi will create site-specific



Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *You will make wishes for your neighbor (54 days)* (detail), 2024. Copper alloy, laterite, concrete. Commissioned by the Middelheim Museum. Photo: Léonard Pongo



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interactive installations for play, sculptures for music making, and an outdoor installation incorporating input from the Museum’s greater community.

Curated by Matthew Kirsch, Curator and Director of Research at The Noguchi Museum, the exhibition spans four of the Museum’s galleries and features a diverse selection of works, including sculptures, drawings, and maquettes.

The work and interests of Ogunbiyi align with various facets of Noguchi’s own practice, from an interest in the world of discovery through play, to the reinvigoration of time-tested materials and methods, and a broader exploration of the artist’s place within both their community and nature. Ogunbiyi has created two distinct series of works that will engage in a direct conversation with Noguchi’s permanent display. One of these includes a cluster of seven bronze musical sculptures, which will occupy the indoor/outdoor galleries (Area 1), as well as a series of copper alloy grinding stones that will be installed within Noguchi’s tranquil garden (Area 2). Each grinding stone was cast from a well-worn example used by, and passed down within, the families of friends of Ogunbiyi’s. For Ogunbiyi this once ubiquitous tool holds both familial specificity and universal value. They represent shared investments of dreams, labor, and intentions for future generations. For the first time, Ogunbiyi has invited members of an exhibiting institution’s community to contribute written messages that will be engraved upon the stones. This installation highlights the multi-lingual borough of Queens.

“How can we exist with deeper presence while striving for more?” says artist Temitayo Ogunbiyi. “My practice explores the tension between similarity and difference—how those before us and those we encounter shape our sense of self and aspirations. I often begin with botanical observations, hair textures, disrupted patterns, and omitted personal archives that challenge dominant narratives. Studying Japanese from an early age shaped how I engage with materials, and living in Lagos has led me to reflect on the intersections of Yoruba, Edo, and Japanese cultures. Returning to New York, a city I once called home but now feel distant from, reminds me that our unique experiences can help us navigate shared human connections. Isamu Noguchi, deeply engaged in play and interactivity, seemed caught between cultures, seeking ways to connect across geographies. I, too, see the U.S. as a platform for broader conversations—ones that go beyond ancestry and borders. It’s an honor to share my work here and now, and I hope it sparks dialogue that resonates.”



Temitayo Ogunbiyi, *You will play in the nuance and grow community*, 2023. Instrument. Brass, wood, stainless steel. Commissioned by the Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Boudewijn Bollmann



Isamu Noguchi, *Slide Mantra Study*, c. 1985. Marble. Photo: Kevin Noble. © The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum / Artists Rights Society

In addition to these works, Ogunbiyi has reimagined her recurring sculpture series *Sweet Mother* (2022–25) for the factory environment of the Museum’s interior galleries (Area 5), where it will coexist with a selection of drawings and paintings referencing plant-life and hair-threading techniques made over the past decade. Elsewhere, in Area 6, Ogunbiyi has created a three-piece steel interactive sculpture and seating area designed to engage the visitor. Notably, Isamu Noguchi’s play models and maquettes—specifically the *Riverside Playground Study* (c. 1961) and *Slide Mantra Study* (c. 1960s)—will be displayed outside of Area 6, further expanding the dialogue between Ogunbiyi’s contemporary work and Noguchi’s innovative designs for play and interaction.

The distinctive outlines of the individual bar elements making up the interactive and musical sculpture groupings in the indoor/outdoor gallery trace pathways that Noguchi likely traveled between important sites from his personal biography. Ogunbiyi researched these routes by walking in Queens, using personal navigation apps—both methods she has used to determine the shapes of her other site-specific interactive sculptures, in each instance visualizing historical and/or contemporary migration routes taken by indigenous, itinerant migrant or immigrant communities. These contoured elements invite open-ended play and, less overtly, suggest finding one’s way in the world.

This dynamic interplay between past and present, nature and the built environment, invites the viewer to reconsider how art can transcend traditional boundaries, inviting both physical interaction and intellectual reflection.

“Temitayo Ogunbiyi’s work offers a compelling dialogue with Isamu Noguchi’s legacy, bridging his interests in play and nature and his contemplation of a civic role for sculpture through a contemporary lens,” says Matthew Kirsch, Curator and Director of Research at The Noguchi Museum.

“Ogunbiyi considers how art can foster connection—between individual people and their environments and with generations past. The installation of her sculptures in the setting Noguchi created, and alongside his play models and maquettes, is not only a conversation across time but also an invitation to re-engage with the world through touch, movement, and reflection.”

Born in Rochester, New York, in 1984 and raised outside Philadelphia, Ogunbiyi is an artist whose work explores themes ranging from Yoruba hairstyling and Victorian hairwork to botanical forms and transnational movement. Currently living in Lagos, Nigeria, Ogunbiyi's focus on playground design stems from raising her children in a city with limited public play spaces. Influenced by her upbringing as a first-generation immigrant to the United States, born to Jamaican and Nigerian parents, Ogunbiyi creates public play sculptures that emphasize play and exercise as universal rights.

"Temitayo Ogunbiyi's work draws deeply from Isamu Noguchi's exploration of play, offering a contemporary interpretation of his belief in the power of sculpture to invite physical interaction and creative discovery," says Amy Hau, Director of The Noguchi Museum. "By reimagining play as both an artistic and communal act, Ogunbiyi not only honors Noguchi's legacy but also expands it, creating pieces where viewers can engage with art in a way that bridges cultural, historical, and personal connections."

LOCATION

The Noguchi Museum
9-01 33rd Road (at Vernon Boulevard)
Long Island City, NY 11106
Tel: 718.204.7088
noguchi.org/events

SUPPORT

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ABOUT TEMITAYO OGUNBIYI

Born in Rochester, New York, in 1984, Temitayo Ogunbiyi grew up in the outskirts of Philadelphia. Her work explores influences ranging from Yoruba hairstyling and Victorian hairwork, to botanical forms and transnational travel. Now living in Lagos, Nigeria, Ogunbiyi's interest in playground design developed through her experience raising her children in this city of over 20 million people, where she struggled to find public playgrounds. This, coupled with her own experiences growing up as a first generation immigrant in the United States born to Jamaican and Nigerian parents, influences her creation of public play sculptures. These aim to present play and exercise as a right for all children and adults. Past playground projects include *You will find Lagos in London Living* (2023) at South London Gallery in London, England; *You will forge paths beyond your grandmother's imaginings* (2023) at Haus der Kulturen de Welt in Berlin, Germany; *You will follow the Rhein and compose play* (2023) at the Museum Tinguely in Basel, Switzerland; *You will play in nuance and grow community* (2022) at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands; *Giocherai nel quotidiano, correndo* (*You will play in the everyday, running*) and *Suonerai nel quotidiano*,

accelerando (You will play in the everyday, accelerating) (2020) at the Madre Museum in Naples, Italy; and *You will find playgrounds among palm trees* (2018) at Freedom Park Playground in Lagos, Nigeria. Upcoming projects include solo exhibitions at the Arts Club of Chicago (September 2025) and the Wexner Center for the Arts (2026).

ABOUT THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM

Founded in 1985 by category-defying Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988), The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum (now known as The Noguchi Museum) in Queens, New York, was the first museum in the United States to be established, designed, and installed by a living artist to show their own work. Itself viewed as among the artist’s greatest achievements and holding the world’s largest collection of his works, the Museum features open air and indoor galleries in a repurposed industrial building and a serene outdoor sculpture garden. Since its founding, it has served as an international hub for Noguchi research and appreciation. In addition to managing the artist’s archives and catalog raisonné, the Museum exhibits a comprehensive selection of Noguchi’s material culture, from sculpture, models, and drawings, to his personal possessions. Provocative installations drawn from the collection, together with diverse special exhibitions and collaborations with practitioners across disciplines, offer a multifaceted view of Noguchi’s art and illuminate his enduring influence. **noguchi.org** | **@noguchimuseum**

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