

BIJUTSUSHI

Journal of Japan Art History Society

186 Vol. 68 No. 2 pp. 265–282

UCHIYAMA, Naoko. A View of the Anti-Lynching Movement: Sculptural Modernism and Racial Representation in Isamu Noguchi's *Death (Lynched Figure)*

This paper examines the formal features of the sculptural installation *Death (Lynched Figure)* (1934) by Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) and considers in what ways its features worked in tandem with his awareness of the artist's social engagement. In particular, the artist's interpretations of the potential referential images are examined, because the ways in which he engaged with the existing images have not been thoroughly discussed in earlier studies, many of which have rather emphasised the racial discrimination that Noguchi had faced in the US art world.

During the Great Depression, artists in the USA were exploring ways to engage with society through making art. It was a time when people were concerned about intensified racism and an accompanying increase in lynching incidents, in the South in particular, as a serious domestic social issue comparable to the racist policy of Hitler's Nazis in Europe. Within this cultural context, Noguchi produced *Death* based on an actual lynching in Texas. In 1935, *Death* was showcased in two anti-lynching exhibitions in New York in addition to the solo exhibition of Noguchi's work.

Many critics chastised Noguchi for the subject matter he chose—the body of a lynching victim—and for the sense of 'reality' that the work communicated despite its semi-abstracted figuration. While arguing that a racist perspective towards Noguchi might underlie critics' responses, earlier studies pay little attention to the way in which the abstracted figure of *Death* was able to bring a sense of 'reality' to the viewers.

The artist has confirmed that the suspended figure of *Death* was based on a photograph reproduced in the left-leaning magazine *Labor Defender*. Additionally, a fresco panel in New York titled *Modern Industry* (1933) by Diego Rivera cannot be ignored as a potential reference. In the process of making *Death*, however, Noguchi added several alterations to the referenced images. Noguchi stripped the victim of identity and erased the social context of the lynching incident. Furthermore, several experiments of modernist sculpture-making can be observed, such as the use of colour, the mix of materials, and, most notably, the decision to suspend the figure from a stand instead of placing it conventionally on a plinth. By interpreting the referenced images using these alterations, *Death* not only depicts the tragedy of this particular lynching incident, but also brings the fear of lynching to the viewers physically by paralleling the acts of looking at the work and of viewing a lynching.

At the two anti-lynching exhibitions in which *Death* was showcased, the 'backwardness' of the South was addressed as a major cause of lynching, along with the racial conflict caused by unrest in capitalist American society. Noguchi's *Death*, however, replaced the tree that typically represents the Southern setting of a lynching with a rather neutral metal stand that is often identified as a gallows. This work betrayed the assumption of Northern viewers that the brutal act of lynching could happen only in the South. It can be inferred that Noguchi's *Death* induced in the anti-lynching movement the self-reflective awareness that supporting opponents' criticism was generally based on the typical consideration of the South as the 'other'.

THE JAPAN ART HISTORY SOCIETY

March 2019

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