

ECHIZEN, Toshiya
“Reconsidering Isamu Noguchi’s *Hiroshima Memorial to the Dead*”

This essay newly clarifies Isamu Noguchi’s intentions for the production of his never realized *Memorial to the Dead of Hiroshima* (known as *The Hiroshima Memorial*), through its use of detailed examination and analysis of primary materials to consider existing theories.

The author clarifies that by sometime in 1951 Noguchi had already completed models for *The Hiroshima Memorial*, which the artist’s own records noted was commissioned in the spring of 1952, and indicates the commonalities between those models and *The Shin Banraisha* at Keio University that he produced during this same period. Further, he clarifies that the radiating grid pattern on the base of *The Hiroshima Memorial* made up of aboveground monument and belowground space represent energy, and that the aboveground area was the focal point of that energy. A further comparison with other works indicates that the depicted energy is nuclear energy.

Based on Noguchi’s own statements, the form of the aboveground monument was previously thought to derive from “the roof of a house-shaped *haniwa*, a grave figure made in ancient Japan.” However, the author’s analysis of previously unpublished materials indicates that the artist intended both an evocation of ancient Japan, and at the same time, an image of “the bomb blast mushroom.” Thus it is extremely meaningful that this clarifies that the aboveground section shows both nuclear energy and radiating lines from “the bomb blast mushroom,” in other words, evoking the atomic bomb blast at Hiroshima.

The author investigated three publications by Noguchi with photographs of *The Hiroshima Memorial* that were published in the year and a half after his 1952 plan was rejected, and also conducted a detailed analysis of 40 contact print photographs taken of the model owned by the Noguchi Foundation. This analysis revealed the differences in lighting and the human figure incised on the container of the list of victims in the belowground space is projected by the light of the sun streaming through the skylight, and thus was intended to show the deceased people who were reduced to shadows by the atomic blast. The light from the skylight moves depending on the time of day or season, and the author compellingly argues that this feature creates a dualistic space in the underground space that is at once “meditative space in which ephemeral light pierces the gloom” and “metaphorical space in which the strong light evokes the tragic moment.”

The author concludes that in the montage photo of *The Hiroshima Memorial* published 15 years later in 1968, Noguchi realized the creation of his art work that stands a visualization of his prayer for the rebirth of the dead of Hiroshima, whose death he had previously lamented through meditation and metaphor.

In this manner the essay critically investigated previous theories on the subject, conducted a detailed analysis and consideration of materials from the period as it clarified various facts about the work. There is also great meaning in his clarification of Noguchi’s unknown creative intentions based on these facts. Further, the author concluded that the photographic prints themselves were Noguchi’s art works, not just materials that show the plans for an unrealized work, and this conclusion is deeply meaningful and stimulating material for art historical research.

For these reasons we hereby award the Bijutsushi Prize to Echizen Toshiya in recognition of his achievement.