

A WORK BY ... ISAMU NOGUCHI

WHO DOES THE JOB OF BEAUTIFYING THE CITY?

The Akari lanterns of Isamu Noguchi

Where has that little animal with stick legs come from, the one that has just jumped onto my lounge table and lit it up? And that kind of gentle cloud hovering at the top of the living room? And the other accordion-like column lighting up the corner? Ah! It's an Akari. Like fragile insects, like those little genies from traditional Japanese culture -similar to Pokemon, like electric fleas; or that other one like a ball of light, a lit-up potato; or like a sort of defenceless jumping bug. Cubes, cylinders, horns, or spheres. Round, small or long. They are Akari -with their discreet, inescapable presence. They are Akari! Incredible creatures!

The other day, to go no further, I discovered one hanging from the ceiling of the lounge, just above my head. I have to admit that I'm not a specialist in design or architecture. I thought that this kind of lamp had always been there, unnoticed, lighting all sorts of households everywhere as if created by the very flux of domestic culture -title and artist unknown. But no! They are Akari: those graceful sculptures of light that Isamu Noguchi designed using traditional Japanese lamp construction techniques. Bamboo, paper, a metal support, a bulb and electricity: Akari.

Noguchi said that a home was made with a room, a mat and a light. From this basic scenario (room, flooring, lighting) he developed a conception of the idea of landscape. Though greatly enlarged, it was for him no more than a demonstration to make us perfectly aware of our relationship to the domestic environment, the city and nature. Bringing light into the house is to consider awareness as the only creative matter of landscape. It was to this that Isamu Noguchi devoted his time for over sixty years: landscape projects, gardens, stage scenery, sculptures and drawings. And why not -Akari! Sculptures of light to keep you company at home.

These lights are in the form of a lamp that seems simultaneously substantial and fragile, quivery and playful, discreet and opulent. How is it that a lantern maker can remind us with his beautiful lights of the unavoidable relationship of awareness we should maintain with our environment, with our uses of reality, with our actions in the landscape? I don't know why the qualities of the Akari remind me so much of the human condition.

Only two facts about Noguchi's life. There is really nothing new about Muslims or citizens of Arab countries being singled out as suspects of conspiracy against the west after September 11th. More than sixty years ago, after the unexpected attack by Japanese planes on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour, Japanese nationals resident in the USA and even American citizens of Japanese descent were regarded as potential traitors. First submitted to police control, these persons were eventually confined in internment camps. Isamu Noguchi volunteered to live in one of these camps to attempt to ease the situation of those confined by designing recreational areas which would improve the day-to-day conditions of the prisoners. LIGHT. Isamu Noguchi collaborated on the Park of Peace project (Hiroshima, 1951) that commemorated the victims of the nuclear attacks on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. MORE LIGHT. Do enjoy these wonderful modern fireflies and may the light shine on you.

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