

Gonzalo Fonseca's Mini-Architecture Gets a Moment in the Spotlight

The Noguchi Museum presents a retrospective of the conceptual sculptor



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On a rainy afternoon in Long Island City, Queens, a quarry of stone sculptures still manages to play with light and shadow. Several of the deftly chiseled hunks have congregated under a corrugated steel roof in The Noguchi Museum's "Area 1," an open-air pavilion that, today, showcases a rare union of two artists—Isamu Noguchi and his peer and fellow sculptor Gonzalo Fonseca.

While Noguchi is acclaimed for his mastery in abstract stone works, Fonseca's sculptures stand out in their own right, perhaps a combination of their scale and detail. Slabs of travertine, brownstone, and limestone bestrewn with inlaid treasures—mini-staircases, etchings, ubiquitous egg-shaped characters who call the spaces home—urge viewers to peek ever closer. When you're watching spectators, the attraction to Fonseca's work is evident: Observers often view a sculpture from all angles, spinning around it as if tied to a central magnet.



There's always a secret detail to be discovered. A retrospective of the Uruguayan-born artist will be on view here until March 11, 2018, as *The Sculpture of Gonzalo Fonseca*, which showcases around 80 objects in the space.

Noguchi and Fonseca had an unusual bond, rooted in their shared artistic beliefs and practice in stone. Senior curator Dakin Hart, who organized the exhibition, explains that the pair both used stone from the same quarry and worked with the same stone laboratory in Italy. (Each also brought his practice to New York—Fonseca even used brownstone salvaged from demolition sites.) "They both came out of similar environments, and are very specific yet otherworldly at the same time," says Hart.

Exhibiting a Fonseca retrospective at the Noguchi Museum is a remarkably good fit. Admittedly, these straightforward connections are unusual in a museum dedicated to the work of a single artist. This exhibition is the museum's first which devotes entire rooms to an artist that is not Noguchi. While the outdoor pieces in Area 1 are blended with Noguchi works, upstairs and inside, they have a room of their own. "We're always trying to figure out which spaces to use, how to use them sensitively, and how to integrate them in a way that adds layers to the Noguchi story," Hart says.



A work by Gonzalo Fonseca in Area 1 .

Originally, Fonseca aspired to be an architect, not a sculptor. But after starting his architecture studies at university, he left to join the studio of Joaquín Torres-García, the famed theorist, painter, and fellow Uruguayan. After ten years creating paintings with Torres-García, Fonseca struck out on his own, turning primarily to sculpture. Given this background, his adept plays on structural forms are unsurprising. And sketches on the gallery walls show his draftsmanship savvy, a skill honed at architecture school, no doubt.

In the upstairs museum galleries, dozens of architectonic pieces on pedestals, shelves, and along the floor all stand as individual mini-universes. Though they look architecturally sound, upon inspection the models and sketches are mind-bending, toying with reality and scale. A stone boat shaped like an egg sliced lengthwise is peppered with tiny, not-quite-identifiable forms. Questions arise: Are they passengers? Just details? How many people can ride this boat? "You get a sense of the scalelessness of his thinking about things," Hart says. "He's always trying to place you in an environment that's quite destabilizing. You never really know how big you're supposed to be."

The enduring allure of Fonseca's style is his fascination with detail. His sculptural works are packed with secret compartments and engraved with seemingly indiscriminate gestures—perhaps the outline of a ladder from one pocket to another. Hart points to the back of a sculpture seated on the gallery floor. A tiny door, no taller than a finger, and knob are traced into the limestone. "Gonzalo's works are full of secrets," Hart says. "And that's the whole point—it's an invitation to travel somewhere."