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Jakel of Echibitini

3-12-52

Playground for the United Nations Isamu Noguchi and Julian Whittlesey Model by Isamu Noguchi

This model of a children's playground, designed for the United Nations by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi and the architect Julian Whittlesey, is intended as a collection of ideas rather than a specific solution. The design was rejected by the Department of Parks.

The playgrounds authorized by the our park and recreation authorities are characterized by skillful engineering and landscaping, careful planning, and well-conceived commercial equipment. Although such playgrounds meet the requirements of safety and supervision while withstanding hard use, there have been few to go beyond solving mechanical and functional problems. Isamu Noguchi's studies of play forms set in sculptured landscapes (recalling the ancient sand and stone gardens of Japan) are designed to do this children's sense of color, space, and form. Noguchi's multiplelength swing, spiral slide, adjustable seesaw and "climbable plaything" are amusing and original examples. (Architectural Forum, October, 1940).

Most of these innovations are shown in the model, along with a sculpturally beautiful multiple slide. The tactile and color variations of the other shapes distributed around the playground are also designed to hold the attention of the children.

Julian Whittlesey's studies of children's play tendencies suggested some experimental playground designs for the New York City Housing Authority. Some of these forms, as designed and built by Whittlesey and other architects, are the "dodger" or "maze" for climbing and hide-and-seek, the turnet for king-of-the-castle, the tunnel for playing house, the boat and airplane for voyage and walls suggesting a miniature stage. It was observed that children like to find corners and play in them, go over simple obstructions, get into or over something, and play on steps --

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particularly little girls. These observations suggest innumerable ways of achieving the passive or quiet play appropriate to very young children, while at the same time requiring a minimum of supervision.

A rather close arrangement of these forms has been found most satisfactory. Because of x the close grouping, the attention of younger children -- generally short in duration -- is drawn successively from one object to another. Forms which are especially challenging or of any lasting interest to older and more active children are xx carefully avoided. Where no space is left for their active games, the older and larger children leave the younger ones to their own play. Such playgrounds, when carefully arranged, require no fencing and seem to run themselves.

The present model is a particularly striking illustration of these principles. It is to be hoped that the new and growing vocabulary of shapes at the disposal of playground designers will be used to enhance the child's play hours with esthetically stimulating color and form.