

DEVALS

Biography

It was my goal to visualize the ancient layer of human memory with the means of photography.

— Hiroshi Sugimoto

Born in Tokyo in 1948, Hiroshi Sugimoto is an artist whose practice traverses photography, sculpture, installation, architecture, landscape design, collecting, writing, and the performing arts. Across these disciplines, he has developed an exacting meditation on time, perception, memory, and the human impulse to give form to experience. His work brings Japanese aesthetic traditions into sustained dialogue with Western philosophy, the history of science, modernist architecture, and the technologies of image-making. Photography remains the conceptual fulcrum of this expansive practice: through the disciplined manipulation of exposure, focus, light, and perspective, Sugimoto investigates how images shape our apprehension of reality and how the past persists within the present.

After graduating from Rikkyo University in Tokyo in 1970, where he studied politics and sociology, Sugimoto pursued photography at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles before moving to New York in 1974. Immersed in the intellectual and artistic ferment of the city, he began developing the sustained photographic series that would establish his international reputation. His first solo exhibition took place in Tokyo in 1977, followed by a New York presentation at Sonnabend Gallery in 1981.



Fig. 1 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Self Portrait*, 2003
Courtesy Hiroshi Sugimoto

Beginning in the mid-1970s, *Dioramas* transformed exhibits at natural history museums into meticulously composed images of seemingly living worlds. By photographing taxidermied animals and reconstructed prehistoric environments, Sugimoto examined the persuasive mechanisms through which museums construct visions of nature and historical time. Developed from 1976, *Theaters* extended this inquiry into cinema: by exposing film for the full duration of a motion picture, he condensed an entire screening into a single photograph, its luminous white screen becoming an index of elapsed time.



Fig. 2 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Carpenter Center, Richmond*, 1993
Courtesy Hiroshi Sugimoto

In 1980, Sugimoto began *Seascapes*, an enduring series depicting oceans across the globe through a rigorously reduced horizon of water and sky. These elemental compositions evoke a primordial landscape shared across human history, locating the act of looking within a continuum that reaches far beyond individual memory. Together, these early series established the defining terms of Sugimoto's practice: duration, visual knowledge, the artifice of representation, and the extraordinary capacity of photography to render time perceptible.



Fig. 3 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Caribbean Sea, Jamaica*, 1980
Courtesy Hiroshi Sugimoto

During the 1990s, Sugimoto widened his investigation of cultural representation and historical consciousness. *Chamber of Horrors* (1994–99) revisited wax figures and the theatrical staging of historical personages, probing the uneasy proximity between portraiture, simulation, and the construction of collective memory. *Sea of Buddha* (1995) photographed the thousand gilded statues of Kannon at Sanjūsangen-dō in Kyoto, transforming a sacred ensemble into a study of repetition, spiritual presence, and the sculptural image. In *Architecture* (1997–2002), Sugimoto photographed seminal modernist buildings with deliberately defocused precision, bringing their familiar forms into the realm of mental image and architectural memory.

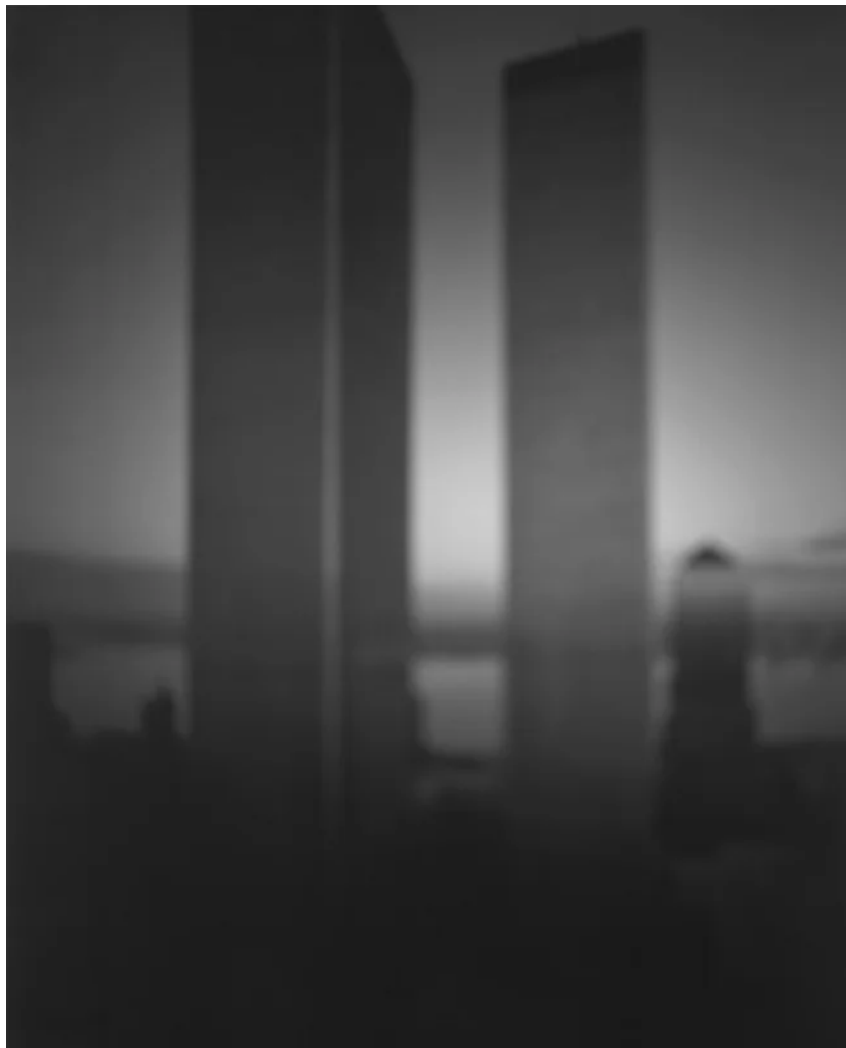


Fig. 4 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *World Trade Center*, 1997
Courtesy Hiroshi Sugimoto

At the turn of the millennium, Sugimoto increasingly explored the relationship between photographic images, sculptural form, and intellectual abstraction. *Conceptual Forms* (2004–) presents nineteenth-century mathematical models as tangible manifestations of abstract thought, bringing scientific pedagogy into dialogue with the history of sculpture.



Fig. 5 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Dini's Surface: a surface of constant negative curvature obtained by twisting a pseudosphere*, 2004
Courtesy Hiroshi Sugimoto

In 2007, he began *Lightning Fields*, a radical extension of his photographic practice in which high-voltage electrical discharges act directly upon photographic film or plates, producing intricate, branching forms through controlled experimentation. The resulting images occupy a fertile threshold between natural phenomenon, scientific investigation, and abstraction. Across these bodies of work, Sugimoto approaches the camera and the photographic surface as instruments for examining the conditions through which images emerge.

Architecture and cultural stewardship have become equally consequential dimensions of his career. In 2002, his *Appropriate Proportion* project for the Go-ō Shrine on Naoshima reimaged a Shinto sanctuary through a new stone approach and a subterranean glass structure, joining contemporary architectural intervention to the ritual and historical character of the site. In 2008, he established New Material Research Laboratory with architect Tomoyuki Sakakida, developing an architectural practice grounded in traditional Japanese materials, artisanal techniques, and their dialogue with contemporary construction. Their projects include the renovation of the MOA Museum of Art in Atami, completed in 2017, where the reconfiguration of the entrance, circulation, and exhibition environment places the visitor's encounter with art at the centre of the architectural experience.

In 2009, Sugimoto founded the Odawara Art Foundation to support Japanese cultural heritage and foster exchanges between classical performing arts and contemporary artistic practice. Its principal undertaking, Enoura Observatory in Kanagawa Prefecture, opened to the public in October 2017.

His engagement with performance has followed a similarly interdisciplinary course. Sugimoto has developed projects involving traditional Japanese theatre, including *Sugimoto Bunraku Sonezaki Shinjū*, his interpretation of the classical puppet-theatre work *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*. In 2019, he directed and designed the staging of *At the Hawk's Well*, W. B. Yeats's modernist Noh-inspired drama, presented at the Opéra national de Paris. These projects bring his interest in historical transmission, theatrical artifice, and the relationship between image and presence into a live, temporal medium.

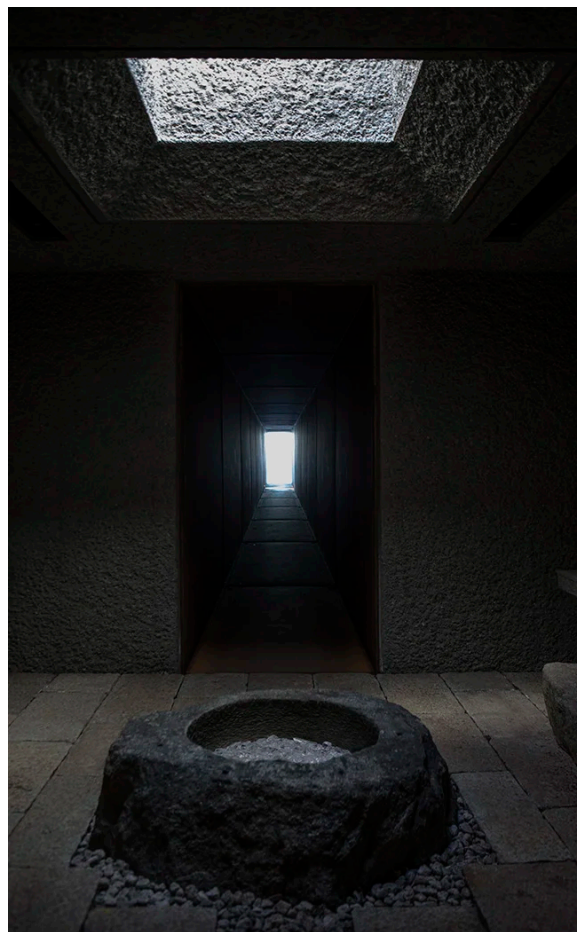


Fig. 6 Winter Solstice Light-Worship Tunnel, Enoura Observatory, Odawara Art Foundation, Odawara-shi

Courtesy Enoura Observatory & Hiroshi Sugimoto

Sugimoto's work is held in major public collections worldwide, including The Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, Tate in London, and leading institutions in Japan and Europe. His distinctions include the Mainichi Art Prize (1988), the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography (2001), the Praemium Imperiale in the category of painting (2009), Japan's Medal with Purple Ribbon (2010), the French distinction of Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2013), the Isamu Noguchi Award (2014), and recognition as a Person of Cultural Merit in Japan (2017). In 2023, he was elected a member of the Japan Art Academy.

SELECTED PUBLIC & INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIONS

Auckland Art Museum, Auckland
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
The Bates College Museum of Arts, Lewiston, ME
Benesse Art Site, Naoshima
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Cal Cego - Colección de Arte Contemporáneo, Barcelona
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO
Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, IA
Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Milwaukee Museum of Art, Milwaukee, WI
Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Mori Art Museum, Tokyo
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Chicago IL
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, MA
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
The National Gallery, London
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON
The National Museum of Art, Osaka
New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ
Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Saint Louis Museum of Art, Saint Louis, MO
Sammlung Hoffmann, Berlin
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt
Tate Gallery, London
The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY



Fig. 7 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Woodland Chapel (Eric Gunnar Asplund)*, 2001, installation view, Courtesy DEVALS & Hiroshi Sugimoto.