

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO

23 JUNE TO 25 SEPTEMBER 2016

OPENING	21 June
PRESS CONFERENCE	21 June at noon in the Auditorio Recoletos (Paseo de Recoletos 23)
DATES	23 June to 25 September
VENUE	Sala Recoletos (Paseo de Recoletos 23)
CURATOR	Philip Larratt-Smith
PRODUCTION	Exhibition produced by Fundación MAPFRE
WEBSITE	exposiciones.fundacionmapfre.org/hiroshisugimoto
Facebook	facebook.com/fundacionmapfrecultura
Twitter	twitter.com/mapfreFcultura
Instagram	instagram.com/mapfrefcultura
Hashtag	#expo_sugimoto

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From 23 June to 25 September 2016, Fundación MAPFRE is presenting an exhibition in its Madrid exhibition space in Paseo Recoletos 23 on the Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto, offering a survey of his work through his best-known series.

The exhibition is divided into five sections devoted to the artist's major series: *Theaters* (1976-present); *Lightning Fields* (2006-present); *Dioramas* (1976-2012); *Portraits* (1994-1999); and *Seascapes* (1980-present). On display are a total of 41 large-format works that offer a survey of the artist's last forty years of artistic activity while also looking forward to future creations, given that some of these series are still ongoing.

Born in Tokyo in 1948, Hiroshi Sugimoto moved to the USA in 1970 to study photography. A multi-disciplinary artist, he works in sculpture, architecture, installation and photography and in the latter field is considered one of the most important creative figures working today. Sugimoto's work is represented in international collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Smithsonian in Washington, and the National Gallery and Tate Modern in London.

A notably intellectual artist, Sugimoto's work contains a highly meditated conceptual element that encourages the spectator towards philosophical reflection and which the artist has used to reinterpret some of the principal genres in the classic tradition of photography. Sugimoto is also a master craftsman and has rejected digital technology in favour of traditional methods.

Finally, these images are characterised by great visual beauty and notable technical virtuosity, emphasised by his habitual use of large formats. Taken as a whole, Hiroshi Sugimoto's work constitutes a profound meditation on the nature of perception, illusion, representation, life and death.

With this exhibition, Fundación MAPFRE is once again presenting the work of a great master of photography as part of an ongoing exhibition programme that has been presented at its galleries since 2009.

The exhibition**1. Theaters**

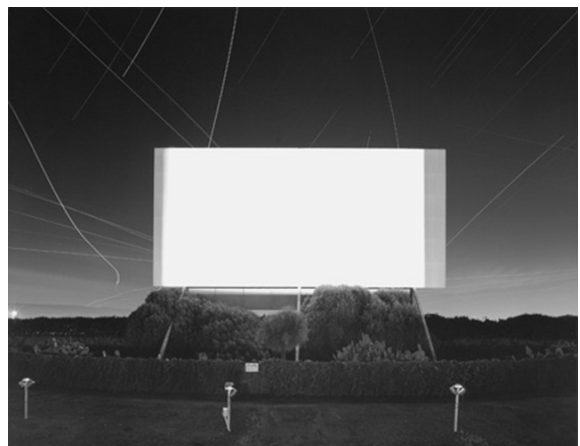
Theaters (1976-present) comprises photographs taken at classic movie palaces and drive-in theaters. To make these works, the artist left open the shutter of a large-format camera during the entire showing of full-length films: a simple but radical procedure in which the length of the film determines the exposure time.

This deliberate overexposure of the negative allows for capturing the light that has accumulated on the screen during the entire projection of the film, which takes shape as an empty, white, glowing rectangle, flooded with a luminosity that can be read as a representation of death.

In its entirety, *Theaters* brilliantly captures the immensity of various concepts relating to time: the long *durée* of the film is compressed into an instant while the accumulated repertoire of fleeting, animated images becomes abstract and at the same time intensely concrete. It also refers to Sugimoto's interest in architecture and the aesthetic stylings of time past.

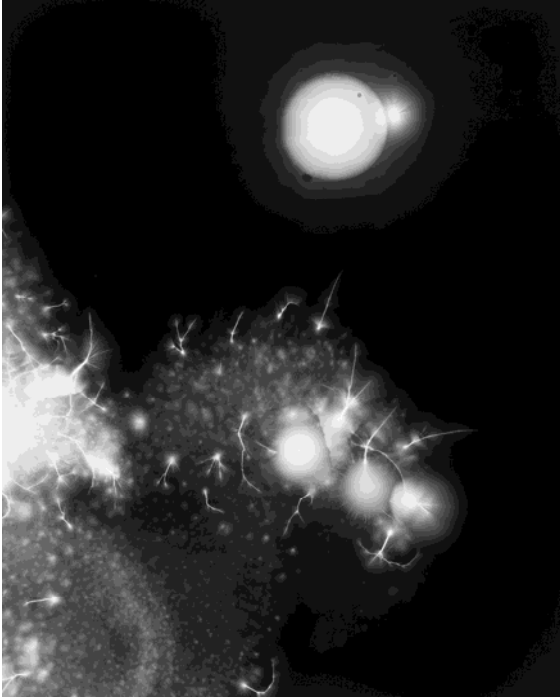


U.A. Playhouse, New York, 1978.
Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto



Union City Drive-in, Union City, 1993.
Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto

2. *Lightning Fields*

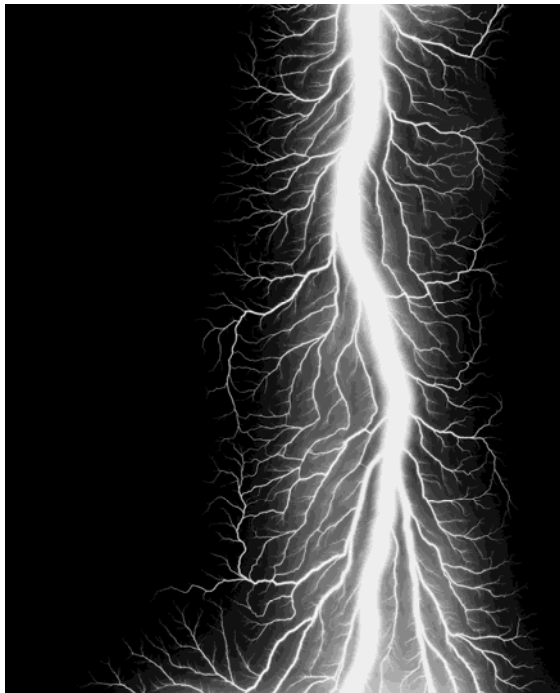


Lightning Fields 258, 2014.

Gelatin silver print.

© Hiroshi Sugimoto

Created without a camera, *Lightning Fields* (2006-present) registers the effects of electrical discharges on photographic negatives. In some cases the formal beauty of these patterns suggests river forms or the night sky, but also engages with the history of abstract photography.



Lightning Fields 327, 2014.

Gelatin silver print.

© Hiroshi Sugimoto

Lightning Fields reveals Sugimoto's fascination with science and natural phenomena, highlighting the connection that exists between the experimentation characteristic of scientific methodology and the methods of early 19th-century photography. To achieve this, Sugimoto recreates those experiments in his dark room, in particular paying tribute to the scientist and photographer William Fox Talbot, a pioneer in positive-negative photographic representation.

3. *Dioramas*

Dioramas (1976-2012) comprises photographs of *tableaux* of pre-historic landscapes, mostly taken at New York's American Museum of Natural History. These are images of stuffed animals and models of primitive human beings which seem deceptively real and are used by the artist to call into question our perception of reality and the reliability of photography as evidence.



The photographs are particularly good examples of Sugimoto's interest in locating the viewer on the borderline between the animate and the inanimate through the way he gives a disconcerting verisimilitude to figures and landscapes that are slightly remote from the contemporary imagination.

Birds of South Georgia, 2012.

Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto

This was Sugimoto's first photographic series but it already contains many of the characteristics and methods that subsequently recur throughout his *oeuvre*: the inventive use of the technical possibilities of the camera; a penchant for working from found objects and given situations; the combination of conceptual rigour and exquisite craftsmanship; and the potential of black and white to simultaneously enhance and undermine the illusion of reality.

Dioramas brilliantly expresses Sugimoto's conviction that the camera is a "time machine" capable of transporting us to distant moments in geological time and human history.



Alaskan Wolves, 1994.

Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto

4. Portraits



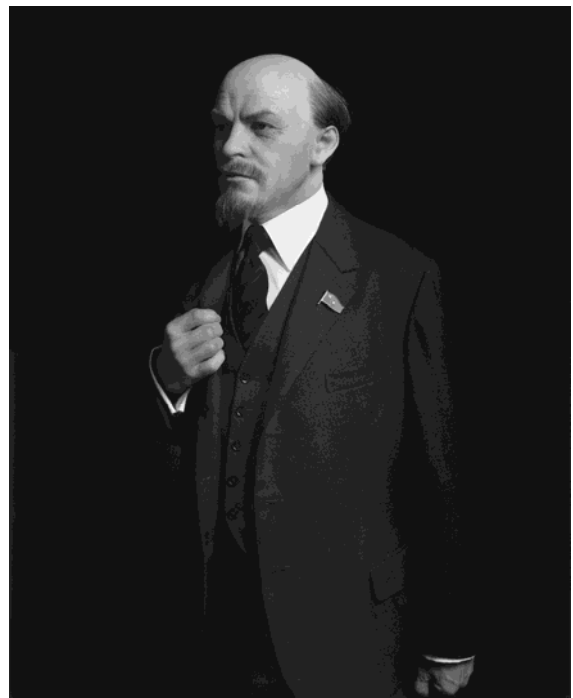
Henry VIII , 1999.
Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto

He also used a large-format black and white negative to achieve a definition in the details and tones that elevates these photographs to the level of painted historical portraits.

Despite their heightened realism and impeccable clarity, these portraits of figures who, in most cases, died long ago, are impossible, and it is the tension between counterfeit and real, animate and inanimate, life and death that gives these effigies their peculiar uncanny charge.

Portraits (1994-1999) comprises studio photographs of historical figures made in wax. The centerpiece depicts Henry VIII of England with his six wives, but the series extends to more recent political and religious figures like Yassir Arafat and Pope John Paul II.

These works are highly meditated constructions: in his studio the artist located the wax models against a black background in order to give them an archetypal, larger-than-life appearance.



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1999.
Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto

5. *Seascapes*

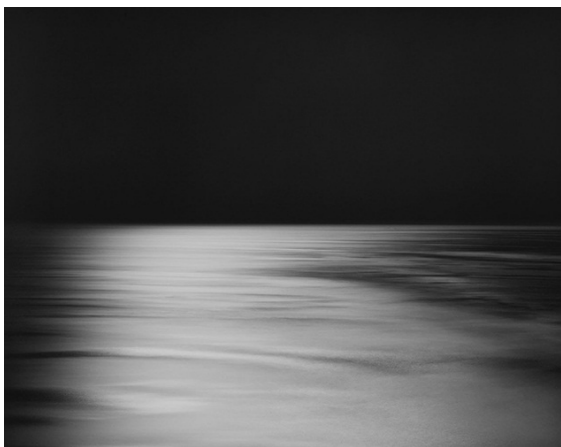
The exhibition opens with this series which was started in 1980 and is still in progress today. It features photographs of the primordial landscape of sea and sky taken at various locations around the world and combining representation and abstraction.



Aegean Sea, Pilon, 1990.
Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto

Despite the romantic and almost mystical effects of these works, their titles are factual and documentary, in keeping with the artist's roots in Conceptual Art.

As the artist has explained, with these images he aimed to capture scenes that a primitive man could have recognized and to reflect on what we share with those visions today.



Bay of Sagami, Atami, 1997.
Gelatin silver print.
© Hiroshi Sugimoto

As such, they offer a good example of the way Sugimoto understands the camera as a device possessed of a particular capacity: that of representing the sense of time. It is a quest for origins which, in temporal terms, locates the viewer in the realm of the eternal.

THE CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue which includes an interview with the artist by the exhibition's curator Philip Larratt-Smith. This interview covers the essential keys to interpreting Sugimoto and as such will become an important documentary source for an understanding of the artist's work. Also contributing to the catalogue is the Brazilian artist

Iran do Espírito Santo with an essay that offers his particular interpretation of Sugimoto's work.