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**HIROSHI SUGIMOTO: HISTORY OF HISTORY**  
*October 12, 2007–January 6, 2008*

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, JULY 11, 2007: The Asian Art Museum will present *Hiroshi Sugimoto: History of History*, a unique investigation into the experience of time and history from the perspective of internationally acclaimed artist Hiroshi Sugimoto, from October 12, 2007 to January 6, 2008.

Conceived and curated by Sugimoto, the exhibition is co-organized by the Japan Society and the Freer Gallery of Art & Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. In conjunction with *History of History*, the Asian Art Museum will also present *Stylized Sculpture*:

*Contemporary Japanese Fashion from the Kyoto Institute*, featuring more than twenty original works of Japanese fashion by five leading designers, as well as new photographs by Sugimoto. The Asian Art museum will be the sole venue for *Stylized Sculpture*, and the final stop of an international tour for *History of History*.

Comprised of over 80 works, *History of History* juxtaposes Sugimoto's own photographs, selected from the artist's well known series of seascapes, natural history dioramas and wax museum figures, with an enormous range of traditional Japanese and East Asian artworks, as well as prehistoric, ancient, and medieval religious and ritual artifacts, all drawn from Sugimoto's private collection. The exhibition's juxtapositions of past and present add a new dimension to Sugimoto's photography, which the artist has famously described as "time exposed." Employing tools and techniques that recall 19<sup>th</sup> century photography—an 8 x 10 view camera designed expressly for the artist, low-sensitivity film, hand-printed, black and white images—Sugimoto's photographs suggest the uncanny persistence of the eternal in the present with their powerful sense of calm and strange, fragile stillness. In *History of History*, Sugimoto's preoccupation with



*Time's Arrow*, 1987. By Hiroshi Sugimoto. Seascape 1980, reliquary fragment, Kamakura Period, 13th century). Gelatin silver print, gilded bronze, 3.3 in. Image courtesy of Hiroshi Sugimoto.

the passage of time takes on concrete, multiple forms, as he places photographs from his various series in the context of the history of Japanese art and civilization—more precisely, in proximity with the aesthetic, sacred and geological objects that he has collected over the past decades.

Beginning with prehistoric fossils of plant, animal life and geological formations, the exhibition offers a tour of history that includes ritual objects from Japan's Jomon and Kofun periods (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.); religious reliquaries, textiles, mandalas and other Buddhist paintings, sutras, and sculpture from the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup> century; and, a number of recent assemblages in which the artist has combined ancient works or fragments with his own photographs and other contemporary objects. The exhibition embraces an immense span of time, materials, and representational processes, from fossilized accretions to mechanical reproductions; ritual objects and sculptures hewn from recalcitrant stone or cast in bronze, to silver-gelatin apparitions on paper. The resulting presentation is a precisely staged, richly evocative construction of history: not history as a remote past or as a set of static objects, but as a process that unfolds through attentive experience, a continual discovery of the past in the present and the present in the past.

The *History of History* presentation at the Asian Art Museum is the only installment to include a series of nine hanging scrolls with fragments of a renowned 8<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of the *Flower Ornament Sutra*, rarely on view outside of Japan. Known as the *Nigatsudo Yake-kyo*, this sutra was miraculously recovered from the ashes of a 1667 fire that destroyed the Nigatsudo Hall at the great temple of Todai-ji in Nara, Japan. Remarkably, the wavy burned edges as well as the unusual brilliance of the silver characters have given these surviving manuscripts—the only existing sutra in silver on blue indigo-dyed paper—a unique and haunting allure.

### **About Hiroshi Sugimoto**

Born in Tokyo in 1948, Sugimoto graduated from St. Paul's University, Tokyo, in 1970 and left Japan for the United States to study at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, earning a B.F.A. in 1972. There he absorbed the tenets of Conceptualism and Minimalism, which continue to inform the technical and intellectual rigor of his work. In 1974 he moved to New York City and became a dealer and collector of Japanese and East Asian Art in 1979.

Sugimoto's frank veneration of classical Japanese concepts of beauty and his deep respect for traditional arts and religious practices would seem to set him apart from dominant trends in contemporary art and photography. Yet like many contemporary photographers, Sugimoto views history as a dynamic process and productive "problem" for photography, not as a given that photography simply records, captures or reflects.

Working in series, Sugimoto is deeply interested in the interconnections between modern and ancient worlds and the ways in which time, an abstraction, is perceived and represented. Following an early series of time-lapse photographs of old movie theater interiors, he began to photograph museum exhibits, and created a series of impeccably detailed wax human figures and dioramas of early humans from museums of natural history. Devoid of any details such as exhibition furniture or gallery space to indicate the fabricated character of these beings and environments, the photographs seem eerily real and unreal at the same time.

Since 1980 Sugimoto has traveled throughout the world to photograph seascapes devoid of human incident. Boldly minimalist at first glance, these exquisitely precise, nearly symmetrical images invite close scrutiny, revealing subtle difference in tonality, horizon line, and atmospheric conditions, despite their initial appearance of sameness or emptiness. Notions of timelessness and the fragility of the natural environment seem to interact as the viewer reflects on these hazy projections of an apparently infinite space. Sugimoto has discussed these works in terms of a distant human past that endures in the process of contemplation, "I thought about our ancestors who first saw the sea and gave it a name... Without language, the separation between the inner and outer world needs not be so apparent. In the Seascapes I was thinking about the earliest experiences of mankind, about the time when the first people named the world around them, and named the sea."

Other themes explored in Sugimoto's serial work include modern architecture and modern mechanical structures.

#### **Exhibition Catalogue**

Written by Hiroshi Sugimoto and translated by Alfred Birnbaum, a fully illustrated, bilingual catalogue was published by Rikuyosha Co., Ltd. in 2004. Available in hardcover only, the 165-page publication contains an introductory statement, an outline of Japanese religious history, extended catalogue entries by Sugimoto, and lists of selected solo and group exhibitions. Price: \$65.00 plus tax.

#### **Acknowledgments:**

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#### **Media Preview:**

A media preview for *Stylized Sculpture* will be held in conjunction with a preview for *History of History* on Thursday, October 11, 2007, from 9:30 AM to 1:00 PM, with a gallery walk-through at 10:45 AM led by members of the curatorial team. Complimentary refreshments will be served. Please RSVP to [pr@asianart.org](mailto:pr@asianart.org) or call (415) 581-3713.

#### **About the Asian Art Museum**

The Asian Art Museum is a public institution whose mission is to lead a diverse global audience in discovering the unique material, aesthetic, and intellectual achievements of Asian art and culture. Holding nearly 17,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history, the museum is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. Once located in Golden Gate Park, the

museum now resides at its new, expanded facility at Civic Center Plaza. An architectural gem featuring a dynamic blend of beaux arts and modern design elements, the museum's new home is the result of a dramatic transformation of San Francisco's former main library building by renowned architect Gae Aulenti (designer of Paris's Musée d'Orsay) into a showcase for the museum's acclaimed collection and exhibitions.

- **Information:** (415) 581-3500 or [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org).
- **Location:** 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.
- **Hours:** The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, with extended hours until 9:00 pm every Thursday.
- **Admission:** \$12 for adults, \$8 for seniors, \$7 for youth 13–17, and free for children under 12. Thursday evenings after 5 pm admission is just \$5 for all visitors except those under 12 and members, who are always free. **Target Tuesdays:** The museum offers FREE admission to all on the **first Tuesday** of every month, courtesy of Target Stores
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.

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