

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Hiroshi Sugimoto: 'Optical Allusion'

May 2 – August 2, 2024
504 West 24th Street, New York

Opening: May 2nd, 6 – 8pm

"The profundity is overwhelming. I can see particles of light, each subtly different. Red to yellow, yellow to green, green to blue — they contain an infinity of tones and change every moment. I am engulfed in color."

For his first exhibition since joining Lisson Gallery, Hiroshi Sugimoto presents a new series of large-scale photographic prints, collectively titled *Opticks*, which rely on a prism to split 'white' light into its seven constituent colors and many more gradations and shades in between. Through the revelation of this hidden, polychromatic world that exists all around us, Sugimoto simultaneously creates stunning, abstract compositions worthy of modernist painting, despite each image depicting an entirely natural phenomenon. Sugimoto not only follows in the footsteps of Isaac Newton, who published his work *Opticks: or, A Treatise of the Reflexions, Refractions, Inflexions and Colours of Light* in 1704, but also realigns his practice from a photographer of black-and-white fields, forms and figures, towards a scientific surveyor of blazing color and invisible possibility.

"These are the first color photographs I have made. With the help of my prism, I created rainbows in the room and shot them every morning. This light had no shape or form. In a certain sense, it was pure. These were gradations of light that emerged out of the darkness and began to shift. Nothing is in focus, so there is this feeling of ecstasy or rapture."

Beginning with a series of Polaroids after being gifted the last Japanese batch of the film in 2009, Sugimoto isolated sections of visible, spectral light using a prism set up at home, often focusing on the edges where these glowing patches emerged or returned to darkness. For the first time, Sugimoto will present this prism apparatus in the space of this show, positioned to capture the light from the gallery's skylight at certain moments throughout the day. He began to further split the beam of light using a mirror he could rotate, in order to expand each color into further variations of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, even introducing second, third or more colors into a single image. After contemplating and finessing these studies for a decade, Sugimoto began to scan and enlarge the *Opticks* to make unique C-prints in 2018.

"Why must science always cut up the whole into little pieces when it identifies specific attributes? The world is filled with countless colors, so why did natural science insist on just seven? I seem to get a truer sense of the world from those disregarded intracolors. Does not art serve to retrieve what falls through the cracks, now that scientific knowledge no longer needs a God?"

The show's title, 'Optical Allusion,' relates to the idea that photography is ultimately a subjective version of the truth, given that every individual perceives color differently, whether physiologically or culturally. It also 'alludes' to the similarities between the scale, ambition and immersion of these photographic works with those of pioneering modernist abstractionists and contemporary color field painters. Ultimately, Sugimoto is depicting not only emotional states of mind but also intangible, otherworldly spectacles — abstract effects which he claims could even be achieved on another planet, independent of our earthly atmosphere, materials or landscapes.

"All my life I have made a habit of never believing my eyes — there has never been any guarantee that what I see is actually there."

A room dedicated to the *Opticks* is the culmination of Sugimoto's major retrospective, 'Time Machine' first seen at Hayward Gallery, London (October 11, 2023 – Jan 7, 2024) now at UCCA Beijing (until June 23, 2024).

About the artist

Through photography, sculpture, architecture and performance, Hiroshi Sugimoto manipulates the inexorable march of time and the vast mysteries of space, stalling the clock in order to create monumental forms from historically significant or fleetingly poetic moments. By approaching the artificial with an eye for the natural, in his realistic photographs of museum dioramas or waxworks, and vice versa, in his images of buildings or interiors that seem to melt all that is solid, Sugimoto proves his mastery as one of the world's greatest artists and innovators of lens-based media. This concept-driven approach begins with the ideation of an image and is only completed upon the work's execution, usually employing a large-format camera as his primary tool.

Sugimoto's rigorous and scientific approach to subject matter, whether capturing a bolt of electricity directly onto film or splitting light into its constituent colours, characterises his lifelong commitment to experimentation, which has seen the artist creating ambitious sculptural models and public commissions from seemingly impossible mathematical equations. His polymathic practice extends into architecture, through the New Material Research Laboratory he founded in 2008, producing innovative solutions for the future of the built environment using traditional means, methods and craftsmanship. In the following year, Sugimoto founded the Odawara Art Foundation with a similar aim, to further the heritage and appreciation of Japanese performing arts. In 2017 these multiple passions culminated in the Enoura Observatory, a site for performance, reflection and astronomical connection to the cosmos. This is also today the sole location of Sugimoto's series of Seascape photographs, which captures equal halves of sea and sky above and below the horizon line on New Year's Day, the only time in the calendar when no boats can be seen on the water.

Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948) lives and works between Tokyo and New York. Recent, major solo shows include Hiroshi Sugimoto: 'Time Machine', Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2023, touring to UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China, 23 March–23 June, 2024); 'Honkadori Azumakudari', The Shoto Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan (2023); 'The Descent of The Kasuga Spirit', Kasugataisha Museum, Nara (2022). The previous decade saw important solo exhibitions including: 'Post Vitam', Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art, Kyoto, Japan (2020); Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel (2018); 'Surface of Revolution', Château de Versailles, France (2018); 'Still Life', Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels (2018); 'Gates of Paradise', Japan Society, New York, USA (2017); 'The Sea and The Mirror', Château la Coste, Provence, France (2017); 'Conceptual Forms and Mathematical Models', Phillips Collection, Washington DC, USA (2015); 'Glass Tea House – Mondrian', Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice (2014); 'Modern Times', Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Palazzetto Tito, Venice, Italy (2014); 'Aujourd'hui, le monde est mort [Lost Human Genetic Archive]', Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2014); 'Past Tense', J. Paul Getty Museum at Getty Center, Los Angeles, USA (2014); Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea (2013); 'Accelerated Buddha', Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, France (2013). His awards include National Arts Club Medal of Honor (2018); Royal Photographic Society's Centenary Medal (2017); Isamu Noguchi Award (2014); Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2013); Praemium Imperiale (2009); PHotoESPAÑA Prize (2006); Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography (2001); ICP's Infinity Award (1999) and Mainichi Art Prize (1988).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, two in New York, one in Shanghai and Beijing, as well as a forthcoming gallery in Los Angeles, opening 15 April. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt and Richard Long. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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