

# LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

## Hiroshi Sugimoto: *Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form*

15 November 2024 – 11 January 2025  
1037 N. Sycamore Ave, Los Angeles

Opening: 15 November, 6 – 8pm

Lisson Gallery is pleased to announce a new exhibition by multi-disciplinary artist Hiroshi Sugimoto, marking his first show in Los Angeles in over a decade. The presentation, titled *Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form*, showcases Sugimoto's investigation of the visible and invisible world through the forms of photography, architecture, sculpture and the written word. At its core is the American debut of *Brush Impression, Heart Sutra* (2023), accompanied by iconic photographs from the artist's *Sea of Buddha* series and a new mathematical model based on Kuen's Surface.

Upon entering the space, visitors are immediately introduced to the rear side of a large-scale, curved wall, constructed of exposed lumber and visible studs, providing a contrasting and tactile introduction to the 288 unique gelatin prints of Kanji characters hung on its opposing side. *Brush Impression, Heart Sutra* (2023) presents The Heart Sutra, a central scripture of East Asian Buddhism—read from right to left, top to bottom—offering a powerful meditative experience that envelops viewers. The work features large-scale calligraphic strokes meticulously developed using photographic methods akin to Sugimoto's traditional process. Though the piece lacks a camera in the conventional sense, the interaction of light and a photochemical reaction evokes the essence of photography itself. The exhibition's title, *Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form*, is a direct quote from the Heart Sutra and refers to the transient nature of all things—nothing has inherent substance or permanence and form is no other than emptiness as emptiness is no other than form. This line is the most quoted of the Heart Sutra, and an apt verse through which to understand the work of Sugimoto which is about capturing that which is at the edge of perception, challenging what we understand as truth and giving form to the intangible.

Surrounding the monumental piece are seven works from Sugimoto's *Sea of Buddha* series, six individual photographs and one large-scale central figure, capturing the Buddha statues from the revered Sanjūsangen-dō shrine in Kyoto. These statues, each unique, were photographed at dawn, using only natural light—a process that saw Sugimoto eliminate all late medieval to early modern embellishments and turn off the contemporary fluorescent lighting. This approach allows viewers to experience the Buddhas as they would have appeared centuries ago, bathed in morning light. The imagery evokes a spiritual timelessness, drawing connections between past and present, tradition and artistry.

Also in the gallery will be a new mathematical model, an extension of Sugimoto's ongoing fascination with form and perception. In this work, the artist transforms mathematical equations for Kuen's Surface into a tangible object made of pure stainless steel. The creation of these models is inspired by the legacy of figures like Isaac Newton, whose pioneering work in mathematics and investigations into humanity's understanding of the world have been a source of guidance to Sugimoto throughout his career. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, mathematicians and artisans sought to give physical form to complex geometric ideas, crafting mathematical models by hand in plaster. Sugimoto's new work continues this tradition through a modern technological lens, taking on a curvilinear horizontality that invites reflection on the convergence of abstract theory and material reality.

### 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 form 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); Honkadori, Himeji City Museum of Art (2022). The previous decade saw important solo exhibitions including: Post Vitam, Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art, Kyoto, Japan (2020); Hiroshi Sugimoto, 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, Le Stanze del Vetro, 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); Hiroshi Sugimoto, 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 spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. 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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