

The multiple talents of the famous Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto, a photographer who has become an architect

Hiroshi Sugimoto is one of the most established artists on the contemporary photographic scene. If he has made a name through photography, the artist has realized a multifaceted work so far to become a talented architect. There are images of the artist - in black and white - of "drive-in" or former theatres in the Italian style transformed into cinemas, operas or even seascapes, that are exhibited in the largest museums of the world. Hiroshi Sugimoto was born in Tokyo in 1948 and moved to New York in 1974. The artist started to be known in 1976 with his series "Dioramas", for which he photographed displays in natural history museums. With his series "Theatres" in 1978, he set on films 20th century cinemas, mostly abandoned, reviving them; he currently organizes screenings of films in these places. With his "Portraits" Series, started in 1999, he substituted photography for painting, using wax figures from the Madame Tussauds Museum. In the early 2000s, he created another Series devoted to architecture 'The Architecture Series', photographing architectural buildings of the 20th century all over the world. Hiroshi Sugimoto seems obsessed with the passage of time: "we must first look back before imagining the future", he explained. Forty years after the beginning of these series, Hiroshi Sugimoto showed a great interest for Italian operas; this passion for these imposing places led him to turn towards architecture, for a second part of his career.

At the end of 2013, the Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent Foundation offered Hiroshi Sugimoto a "carte blanche". For the event, the artist made a video work of the thousand statues of Bodhisattva of the Sanjûsangendô, a temple of Kyoto dating from the XIIIth century.

Design, architecture, theater Nô, Hiroshi Sugimoto excludes nothing: he is currently working with a choreographer and a ballet creator influenced by the Nô Theater, commissioned by the Paris Opera. He is also preparing a Bunraku, a Japanese puppet show, to be scheduled at the Lincoln Center in 2018. He already staged "Double suicide in Zônesaki", a Bunraku show, at Theatre de la Ville in Paris, in 2013.

At the age of 69, Hiroshi Sugimoto defines himself as an "unlicensed architect" or a "very young, coming-up architect." He received his first commission in 2002 when he was hired to adapt a 15th century Shinto Shrine for the site of the Benesse Art on the island of Naoshima. Since then, he has been involved in design projects such as the Izu Photo Museum or Christie's offices in Tokyo. For his projects he has relied on the New Material Research Laboratory, which he co-founded with architect Tomoyuki Sakakida in 2008. In recent years, his orders have extended to the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, the Japan Society in New York City and a private residence in Manhattan. But his biggest achievement is his 'Enoura Observatory', located in a small town on the east coast of Japan. The complex is a traditional Japanese style structure: it includes a tea house, an exhibition area and two outdoor theatres. After ten years of work, it opened in 2017. "I started thinking about the after Sugimoto," he said. "I thought it was somewhat negative to think about this, then I started to enjoy it".

Hiroshi Sugimoto is honoured today in France with the exhibition 'The Sea and the Mirror', at Château Lacoste, from 8 May to 3 September 2017: a selection of 8 works from the iconic Seascapes series, chosen to create a poetic presentation resonating with the architecture of the Pavillon of Photography of the famous architect Renzo Piano.

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