

LISSON

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO Unnatural Habitat

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION DATES:
15 SEPTEMBER – 24 OCTOBER 2026
504 WEST 24TH STREET NEW YORK

OPENING: 15 SEPTEMBER, 6 – 8PM

Hiroshi Sugimoto's third solo exhibition at Lisson marks a resonant return to New York, tracing a fifty-year dialogue between the artist and the city that helped shape his vision. In *Unnatural Habitat*, Sugimoto revisits the body of work that first revealed his extraordinary ability to suspend both time and reality. Featuring photographs from the artist's *Diorama* series, some of which were created this past year through access to dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History, recently rediscovered negatives enlarged for the first time, and new washi paper screens that transform his images into luminous byōbu, this exhibition unites photographic and sculptural forms to explore perception, artifice and immersive pictorial depth. Together, these bodies of work affirm Sugimoto's enduring investigation into the poetic boundaries of lens-based media.

While visiting the American Museum of Natural History in 1975, two years after moving to New York, Sugimoto was struck by the lifelike qualities of its dioramas. Combining painted environments with taxidermied animals, these constructed habitats offered a means of representing nature through an inherently artificial form. The *Diorama* series emerged from this encounter and has remained an ongoing body of work since the mid 1970s. Sugimoto's return to the museum in 2025, fifty years after he first photographed there, extends this longstanding engagement, bringing together works spanning the history of the series. The dioramas on view at Lisson depict a range of subjects from lions, condors, jaguars and *Homo erectus* to expansive landscapes like the Rocky Mountains and a giant cactus forest. Among the earliest are *Polar Bear* (1975), the first image Sugimoto made as an artist, and *Hunting Dogs*, first photographed in 1980 and revisited in 2025 when Sugimoto adjusted an uneven area of sky caused by a burnt-out bulb within the original display. Collectively, these works demonstrate the enduring tension within the *Diorama* series between the preservation of a constructed reality and its transformation through photography.

The exhibition also introduces a further development through four new color diorama photographs presented as folding screens, or byōbu. Printed on washi paper and produced through traditional Kyoto craftsmanship, these screens constitute only the second major use of color in Sugimoto's photographic practice, following his *Opticks* series. The folding-screen format extends the photograph beyond the conventions of the framed image, giving the works a sculptural and spatial presence while recalling the painted surfaces and constructed perspectives of the dioramas themselves. Their use of color introduces a distinct visual register to a body of work historically defined by Sugimoto's precise black-and-white photography.

Unnatural Habitat is presented at a significant moment in Sugimoto's wider practice. In 2026, the exhibition coincides with a major solo presentation at the Singapore Art Museum and precedes the reopening of the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., designed by the artist.

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 colors, 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: Extinction, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan (2026); 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

Lisson is a global gallery dedicated to shaping the art of today. Creating meaningful dialogues and robust markets between artists and audiences across six venues in the UK, US and China, Lisson exhibits the most engaging and challenging work, adding value and narrative through decades of experience and innovation.

Building significance and reputation with our artists, Lisson nurtures and amplifies their vision at every turn, supporting opportunities to show beyond the gallery's walls in museums, the public realm and through international partnerships. The gallery's heritage and its foundational role in contemporary art since 1967, allows for a deeper perspective and more thoughtful relationships when furthering the career and voice of an artist.