

PRESS RELEASE

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO RECEIVES THE HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL AWARD IN PHOTOGRAPHY, 2001

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation has selected Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto as the winner of the 2001 Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography. The prize, consisting of SEK 500,000 and a gold medal, will be awarded at a ceremony held in Göteborg, Sweden on October 20, 2001. A new exhibition of Hiroshi Sugimoto's work, curated and organized by the Hasselblad Center, will be opened in conjunction with the ceremony.

The Foundation's decision to award the 2001 prize to Hiroshi Sugimoto was motivated with the following statement:

"Hiroshi Sugimoto is one of the most respected photographers of our time. In his main photographic themes - the interrelated disciplines of Art, History, Science and Religion - Sugimoto combines Eastern meditative ideas with Western cultural motifs. In the past 25 years Sugimoto has reached audiences around the world with his distinctive, carefully composed series in black and white. Inspired by Renaissance paintings and early 19th century photography, and using a large format camera, Sugimoto achieves a wide range of tones in a body of work that reflects his great love of detail, his outstanding technical mastery and - above all - his fascination with the paradoxes of time".

The Jury for the 2001 Award, which submitted the proposal to the Board of Directors of the Foundation, consisted of: Mr. Hasse Persson, (chairman) photographer, Hyssna, Sweden, Mr. Régis Durand, curator, Paris, France, Professor Tuija Lindström, Göteborg, Sweden, Mr. Shimizu Toshio, curator, Tokyo, Japan and Ms. Hripsimé Visser, curator, Amsterdam, Holland.

Hiroshi Sugimoto was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1948. He received his education at St. Paul's University in Tokyo. In 1970 he left Japan to study photography at the Art Center of Design in Los Angeles, California. This was at a time when Minimalism and Conceptual Art - both of which influenced Sugimoto's work - reigned. As his own technique developed, Sugimoto came to conceive of subjects in such conceptual depth that they have continued to merit his attention ever since. Taking photographs

for his *Dioramas*, since 1976, in a number of natural history museums, Sugimoto has concentrated on illusionistic three-dimensional displays, designed for the benefit of children and adults - to bring life to the evolutionary years.

For the *Theaters* (begun in 1978) Sugimoto spent several months in American movie houses built in the 1920s and the 1930s as well as in the drive-in theaters that opened later. Keeping the shutter of his camera open throughout the whole movie Sugimoto at the same time recorded both the screens and the architectural surroundings. The resulting photographs show the screen as a bright, white gateway to infinity.

Sugimoto's third focus of interest has been his *Seascapes*, dating from 1980 and onwards. In photograph after photograph Sugimoto has captured seascapes all over the world. Whether photographing the Caribbean, the Baltic Sea or the Dead Sea the horizon line precisely bisects the image, dividing two basic elements - water and air - into two optically equal but not identical halves.

In his seascapes Sugimoto creates images of great spiritual value. His photographs of the sea show a time existing beyond our own sense of time. The seashore has not changed for millions of years. What we see today in photographs is the same view our forefathers saw millions of years ago - and coming generations will see thousands of years from now.

As mentioned in the Foundation's citation, Sugimoto has been able to communicate his imagery to audiences all over the world. His photographs of famous people in the *Wax museum 1* and 2-series, that Sugimoto began in 1976 are, of course, easy to relate to from a Western standpoint. Here he travels between centuries, photographing Napoleon Bonaparte on his deathbed (1821) and Sophia Loren in a 1960s movie in super-realistic scenes that look particularly lifelike in Sugimoto's black and white photographs.

In his *Architecture*-series, begun in 1997, Sugimoto re-interprets eminently familiar buildings, subverting his signature of clarity, deliberately blurring the images to create a different kind of precision. Out of the fog, the buildings rise like beautiful objects occupying the landscape. The blur slows time down and evokes the more subtle nature of architecture. It seems as if the photographer has gone backwards in

time to recreate the visionary stages of these world-famous architectural masterpieces.

Hiroshi Sugimoto's latest series, *Portraits*, from 1999, presents life-size photographs of mostly historical personalities - Henry VIII and each of his wives, Benjamin Franklin, Vladimir Lenin, Sir Winston Churchill, Emperor Hirohito and recent political figures such as Yasser Arafat and Fidel Castro - photographed in wax museums. They are all isolated against a black background and dramatically lit, creating hauntingly beautiful images. The series which also includes a 25-foot photograph of a wax version of Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, emulates the grand tradition of portraiture and recalls the wax figures' sources in famous paintings by David, Van Dyck, Vermeer and others.

Time is what fascinates Hiroshi Sugimoto the most, and *Time Exposed* (Thames and Hudson, 1995) is also the name of his first book. His most recent book, *Portraits*, was published in 2000 by the Guggenheim Museum.

Hiroshi Sugimoto travels most of the year looking for new motifs for his ongoing series of photographs. When he is not on the road, he shares his time between New York and Tokyo.

THE ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation was instituted by a bequest from Erna and Victor Hasselblad. The purpose of the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and photography. A number of projects are granted funds annually, amounting to approximately SEK 16 million. One of the awards, the annual international award for outstanding achievement in photography, being given this year to Hiroshi Sugimoto, has come to attract a great deal of media attention.

In 1989 the Foundation opened the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Photographic Center (the Hasselblad Center) in Göteborg, Sweden. The Center maintains an ongoing exhibition and lecture program. In January 1996 the new exhibition hall housed within the Göteborg Museum of Art was inaugurated. A photographic research and reference library, open to researchers and students, is in the process of being established, as is a collection of photographs including photos by all the Hasselblad Award winners and others. The exhibit of Hiroshi Sugimoto's work to be opened on the occasion of the award ceremony will be organized by the Hasselblad Center.

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