

# FRÆNKEL

49 GEARY STREET SAN FRANCISCO 94108 415 981 2661

For immediate release:



## HIROSHI SUGIMOTO

October 26 – December 22, 2023

Fraenkel Gallery is pleased to present the U.S. debut of two important new bodies of work by Hiroshi Sugimoto. In both series, the artist incorporates photographic techniques and materials into classical Japanese art forms, producing works that draw from the country's spiritual history. Two immense folding screens, known as byobu, feature photographs of Japanese landmarks of sacred significance, delicately printed onto rice paper. The graphically striking series *Brush Impression* presents cameraless, one-of-a-kind calligraphic photographs made by painting Japanese characters onto light sensitive paper using photographic chemicals. Sugimoto's ever-evolving artistic career has spanned nearly five decades, and this exhibition will be his sixteenth with the gallery since 1991. Concurrently, the Hayward Gallery in London will present a major retrospective of the artist's work, on view from October 11, 2023, until January 7, 2024.

Two large folding screens anchor the exhibition. Representing revered locations, these works feature photographic pigment prints made on traditional Japanese Washi paper. An eight-paneled screen, nearly 24 feet long, depicts a view of Tateiwa Rock, a volcanic formation in Kyoto Prefecture that has featured in folkloric legend. An 18-foot, six-paneled screen depicts wisteria vines in bloom at the Kasuga-Taisha

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Shinto shrine in the ancient city of Nara, where the exhibition *Hiroshi Sugimoto – The Descent of the Kasuga Spirit*, curated by Sugimoto, took place earlier this year. This screen was included in the exhibition, which paired Shinto and Buddhist antiques, some from the artist's personal collection, alongside contemporary artworks.



In *Brush Impression*, Sugimoto creates kanji, the form of Japanese language based on Chinese pictograms, and hiragana, phonetic characters used in Japanese. Rather than using ink, Sugimoto paints with darkroom chemicals on silver gelatin paper to produce black and white or subtly warm-toned works, which range in size up to nearly 40 by 30 inches. The study of calligraphy has long been an interest of Sugimoto's—each unique piece records the movement of his large brush across the surface of the paper, producing gestural shapes as well as splashes, bubbles, and traces of bristles. The kanji characters he selects represent words for elemental forces such as fire and water, and the meaning of each word is heightened and reinforced by the expressive qualities of each piece. An orange glow suffuses *Brush Impression 0810 (Moon)*, suggesting the rich color of a blood moon, while erratic splatters and drips surround the

character for madness. *Brush Impression (Iroha Song)*, a set of 48 smaller works written in hiragana, transcribes an eleventh-century Japanese poem. Famous in part for its pangramic inclusion of each symbol that makes up this form of the language, the poem has served as a sort of alphabet.

Hiroshi Sugimoto was born in Japan in 1948. Starting in the 1970s, he worked primarily in photography, eventually adding performing arts production and architecture to his multidisciplinary practice. In 2023, his 69-foot sculpture *Point of Infinity* was installed on San Francisco's Yerba Buena Island, commissioned by the Treasure Island Arts Program in partnership with the San Francisco Arts Commission. The exhibition *Hiroshi Sugimoto Honkadori Azumakudari* is on view at the Shoto Museum of Art in Tokyo until November 12, 2023.

Sugimoto's work is held in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Tate Gallery, London, among countless others. His work has been the subject of numerous monographs. In 2009, he founded the Odawara Art Foundation, dedicated to traditional Japanese and international contemporary performing arts. Sugimoto is the recipient of the National Arts Club Medal of

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Honor in Photography; The Royal Photographic Society's Centenary Medal; Isamu Noguchi Award; Officier de L'ordre des Arts et des Lettres; Praemium Imperiale Award for Painting; PHotoEspaña Prize; and the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography, among others.

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Images: TOP: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Tateiwa*, 2022

BOTTOM: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Brush Impression 0897 (Fire)*, 2023

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