



# Sea of Japan, Hokkaido 1

Hiroshi Sugimoto

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**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Sea of Japan, Hokkaido 1

**Artist/Maker:** Hiroshi Sugimoto

**Born:** 1986

**Object Type:** Photograph, Print

**Technique:** Silver gelatin printing

**Measurements:** Framed: h. 655 x w. 831 mm

**Accession Number:** 976

**Historic Period:** 20th century

**Production Place:** Asia, East Asia, Japan

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Hiroshi Sugimoto (b.1948) is a multidisciplinary artist, who is best known for his photography and architecture. Throughout his career, Sugimoto has used the camera to investigate the passage of time and to raise questions about the nature of perceived 'reality'. For Sugimoto, 'photography functions as a fossilization of time'. [1]

This silver gelatin print from Sugimoto's enigmatic *Seascapes* series is titled *Sea of Japan: Hokkaido 1* (1986). Beginning in the 1980s, Sugimoto embarked on an ambitious project to document the rhythmic waves and glacial stillness of bodies of water at various locations around the world. To capture the rippling motion of the waves, Sugimoto used a large format 8 x 10 inch camera set to a slow shutter speed for a lengthened period of exposure. All images from this series were taken from the shore. In *Seascapes*, the artist offers the viewer a sublime encounter with elemental nature, which transcends geographic and cultural boundaries.

In each photograph, a horizon line bisects the composition, dividing sea from sky. Variations in light and environmental conditions serve to sharpen or blur the boundary, subtly altering the viewer's emotional connection with the distant horizon. Blending scientific enquiry and spirituality, Sugimoto's photographs are meditations on eternity.

Produced over a period of three decades, *Seascapes* became a photographic obsession that resonated with the artist at an instinctual level. For Sugimoto, the experience of photographing *Seascapes* was profound — a study of deep time: 'I start feeling that this is the creation of the universe and I am witnessing it.' [2]

I have always been enthralled by the sea. The sea is my first memory. In the sea I can find vestigial memories of our race — no, memories of life itself — lingering faintly in the flow of the blood. To me, the sea is amniotic fluid. It was in the sea that life first came into being three billion years ago. Five hundred million years ago life emerged onto dry land from the sea's womb. [3]

In this quotation, Sugimoto refers to the primordial sea in which living cells first appeared, heralding the beginning of life on this planet. Through the medium of photography, Sugimoto invokes individual and collective memories that enable the viewer to connect with the past, by 'remembering where we came from and how we came about'. [4]

Hiroshi Sugimoto was born in Tokyo, where he studied politics and sociology at Rikkyō University. He left Japan in 1972 in order to pursue a degree in Fine Arts at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, CA. After graduation he settled in New York City, where he worked as a dealer in Japanese antiquities. Sugimoto currently lives and works in New York and Tokyo.

Vanessa Tothill, January 2022

[1] <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s3/hiroshi-sugimoto-in-memory-segment/>  
[Accessed 5 January 2022]

[2] <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s3/hiroshi-sugimoto-in-memory-segment/>  
[Accessed 5 January 2022]

[3] Hiroshi Sugimoto, 'Time's Yardstick' from *On the Beach* (Tokyo: Amana, 2014).

<https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/copy-of-on-the-beach> [Accessed 6 July 2021]

[4] Quotation by Hiroshi Sugimoto from 2002

<https://www.artbook.com/catalog--photography--monographs--sugimoto--hiroshi.html> [Accessed 5 January 2022]

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## Further Reading

Ahrenberg, Staffan, Sam Keller, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, eds, Hiroshi Sugimoto. 38th Year (Paris: Cahiers d'Art, 2014)

Bonami, Francesco, and Marco de Michelis, eds, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Architecture (New York: D.A.P./Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2003)

Brougher, Kerry, and David Elliott, eds, Hiroshi Sugimoto (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2005)

Hrankovic, David, ed., Hiroshi Sugimoto: Glass Tea House Mondrian (Cologne: Walther König, 2015)

Müller-Tamm, Pia, Hiroshi Sugimoto (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010)

Rousmaniere, Nicole, ed., Hall of Thirty-three Bays (Norwich: University of East Anglia, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 1999)

Schneider, Eckhard, ed., Hiroshi Sugimoto: Architecture of Time (Cologne: Walther König, 2002)

Spector, Nancy, and Tracey Bashkoff, eds, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Portraits (Berlin: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2003)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, and Hans Belting, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Theatres (Cologne: Walther König, 2006)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, *On the Beach* (Tokyo: Amana, 2014)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Dioramas (Bologna: Damiani, 2014)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, and Klaus Ottmann, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Conceptual Forms and Mathematical Models (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2015)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, and Munesuke Mita, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Seascapes (Bologna: Damiani and Matsumoto Editions, 2015)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Theatres (Bologna: Damiani and Matsumoto Editions, 2016)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, Iran do Espírito Santo, and Philip Larratt-Smith, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Black Box (Madrid: Aperture/Fundación Mapfre, 2016)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, and Jonathan Safran Foer, Hiroshi Sugimoto: The Long Never, Lightning Fields 289 (Bologna: Damiani, 2016)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, and Jonathan Safran Foer, Hiroshi Sugimoto: The Long Never, Lightning Fields 304 (Bologna: Damiani, 2016)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Snow White (Bologna: Damiani and MW Editions, 2017)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Portraits (Bologna: Damiani and MW Editions, 2018)

Sugimoto, Hiroshi, Hiroshi Sugimoto: Architecture (Bologna: Damiani and MW Editions, 2019)

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