



GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA

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HIROSHI SUGIMOTO

The First Encounter
Italy through eyes of Hiroshi Sugimoto and Tenshō Embassy

Opening: Saturday 27th October 2018, via del Castello 11, 18.00-21.00
Until Sunday 13th January 2019, Monday to Sunday, 10.00-13.00 / 14.00-19.00

Galleria Continua is delighted to welcome “*The First Encounter*” – the latest solo show by Hiroshi Sugimoto, who is considered to be one of the most acclaimed and respected of modern artists.

From the Seventies to the present day the artist has produced a body of highly recognisable photographs – silent images with a predilection for the essential, snatched from the flow of time, that catch the eye as archetypes of a civilisation still pervaded by a sense of eternity. The “*The first encounter*” that Sugimoto presents in the exhibition spaces of San Gimignano sets out from the interiors of several historic cinemas, including those of Florence, Siena, Mantua and Ferrara – places of remembering par excellence, where collective experience multiplies and explodes in individual memories – and ultimately retraces in part the Italian stops along a famous journey, that of the “*quattro ragazzi*” (four young men), known also as the Tenshō Embassy (*Tenshō ken’ō shōnen shisetsu*, literally “European mission of the men of the Tenshō era”).

In 1978, Sugimoto began his theatre series, consisting in extremely long exposure images of drive ins, movie halls of the 20s and 30s, and cinemas of the 50s, taken during the projection of a film. Indeed, the exposure time is equal to that of the duration of the film’s projection in each case, which allows him to capture the subject for the duration of the entire film in one shot. The darkness of the auditorium is delicately illuminated by light reflected from the screen: the artist succeeds in expressing the durational nature of the projection via the richness of the tonal transition from light to dark – the modulation of the greys. In 2013, after a nearly 15-year interval, Sugimoto took up his work on theatres again. For the first time he would include the stalls and gallery in his shots, previously having focused mostly on the illuminated screen. In this way he would extend what is seen to include the public space. The works exhibited in the gallery include those born out of this more recent exploration.

In the summer of 2015, Hiroshi Sugimoto was in Italy to continue work on his theatres project. Whilst visiting the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza he came across the “*quattro ragazzi*” of the Tenshō Embassy, or rather their portraits, in one of the frescoes that adorn the ceiling of the building. The Tenshō Embassy was the first diplomatic mission sent by Japan to Europe, conceived by the Jesuit missionary Alessandro Valignano and composed of four very young Japanese noblemen, converts to Christianity. Valignano hoped that the mission would increase Japan’s standing within the higher clerical circles of Europe, as well as putting paid to certain stereotypes that existed about Japan. The journey began on 20th February 1582, when the group set sail from the port of Nagasaki on a Portuguese ship, and came to its end on 21st July 1590, when it docked in the same city. The “*quattro ragazzi*” visited Portugal, Spain and Italy, meeting King Phillip II of Spain, Francesco I de’ Medici, Pope Gregory XIII and his successor, Pope Sixtus V, along with numerous politicians, clergymen and prominent figures of the time. As early as the end of the second half of the 19th century, this mission would attract the attention of various scholars; still today it is considered one of the most important examples of encounter and dialogue between European and Japanese culture.

Sugimoto decided to follow in the footsteps of the “*quattro ragazzi*” – to see what they had seen and to feel the same sense of wonder at their extraordinary adventure. “*I immediately felt a great interest in the journey of the quattro ragazzi in Europe,*” recounts the artist. “*I started to investigate their travels and found that after disembarking at the port of Livorno they journeyed through Pisa, Florence and Siena to Rome, and then visited Assisi and Venice. I photographed the Pantheon in Rome, the Leaning Tower in Pisa and the Duomo in Siena – all buildings already in existence when the quattro ragazzi were in Italy (...). I was seeing the same buildings that they had seen, and it was as if voices spoke to me saying: ‘We want you to see through your eyes the same European scenes that we once saw’. Perhaps the voices came from the after world, rather than some forgotten corner of my mind; they blended with one another, resonated... they only let themselves be heard by me, like an echo. Having followed for such a long time almost by chance in the footsteps of the quattro ragazzi, I made a conscious decision to visit and photograph all the other places they had been*” (from “Hiroshi Sugimoto: Gates of Paradise”, Skira Rizzoli, 2017). This gave rise to a new series of photographic works which are brought together in part by the exhibition at San Gimignano.

Hiroshi Sugimoto was born in Tokyo in 1948. In 1970 he graduated from St Paul’s University in Tokyo and then, in 1974, from the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. That same year he moved to New York, the city where he still lives and works today. A multi-talented figure, his artistic practice has centred on photography, but has also included sculptural objects, architecture, installations, and producing performing arts projects. Sugimoto has exhibited in museums all over the world and his works are found in highly prestigious collections, including: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; the Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Gallery, London; the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; MACBA, Barcelona and the Tate Gallery, London. Among his most important solo shows figure those organised in conjunction with the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels (2018); the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2017); the Multimedia Art Museum of Moscow (2016); the Fondazione Fotografia Modena (2015); the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2014); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013); the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2012); the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2011); the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2008); the de Young Museum, San Francisco (2007); the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C. (2006); the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2005); the Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain, Paris (2004); the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao / Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2000) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1995). In 1988 he received the Mainichi Art Prize, and in 2009 was awarded the Praemium Imperiale Award by the Japanese Art Association. In 2001 his work was recognised with the prestigious Hasselblad Foundation International Award; in 2014 with the Isamu Noguchi Award; in 2017 with the Centenary Medal of the Royal Photographic Society and in 2018 with the National Arts Club Medal of Honour in Photography. From October 16, the Palace of Versailles will host a solo exhibition of Sugimoto, which includes photographs, architecture, video installation, and performing arts.

For further information about the show and for photos:
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