



# Artists Speak: Hiroshi Sugimoto

**Born**  
1948 Tokyo, Japan

**Education**  
BA, Saint Paul's University,  
Tokyo, Japan

BFA, Art Center College of  
Design, Los Angeles, CA

**Lives and Works**  
New York, NY

**Media & Materials**  
Photography, Architecture

**Biography**  
Central to Hiroshi Sugimoto's work is the idea that photography is a time machine, a method of preserving and picturing memory and time. This theme provides the defining principle of his ongoing series including, among others, *Dioramas* (1976-); *Portraits* (1994-); and *Conceptual Forms* (2004-). Sugimoto sees with the eye of the sculptor, painter, architect, and philosopher. He uses his camera in a myriad of ways to create images that seem to convey his subjects' essence, whether architectural, sculptural, painterly, or of the natural world. He places extraordinary value on craftsmanship, printing his photographs with meticulous attention to detail.



*Permian Period*, 1992. Gelatin-silver print, 20 x 24 inches. Edition of 25. Courtesy the Artist.

*"Memory, and replica. Photography is a system of saving memories. It's a time machine, in a way...to preserve the memory, to preserve time."*

*"Fossils work almost the same way as photography...as a record of history. The accumulation of time and history becomes a negative of the image. And this negative comes off, and the fossil is the positive side. This is the same as the action of photography...A fossil is made over four hundred-fifty years– it takes that much time. But photography, it's instant. So, to me, photography functions as a fossilization of time."*

*Devonian Period*, 1992. Gelatin-silver print, 20 x 24 inches. Edition of 25. Courtesy the Artist.



*"I was very bad in mathematics when I was a high-school student. I found that I was a visual person. I had to confirm everything by eye, not by abstract thinking. Once a mathematical theory got abstract, my eyes couldn't visualize it. So I just gave up trying to understand perfectly. I could sense with my brain, 'Maybe this functions....,' but I just felt uncomfortable not having confirmed it with my visual understanding. So I became more like a visual artist, not an abstract thinker."*

*"The mathematical models are very fragile pieces, so I set up my small studio in the Tokyo University Art Museum and we spent a couple of weeks, bringing them in one by one. The lighting is very primitive, straightforward, against the black back-ground. These white, models floating in the darkness. This is very similar to what I did for the wax figures in London. Most of the wax figures look very waxy and fake...but I brought a dark black background. It's life in front of my camera, against black, black background."*



*0004 Onduloid: a surface of revolution with constant non-zero mean curvature*, 2004. Gelatin-silver print, image size: 58 3/4 x 47 inches, frame size: 71 x 60 inches. Edition of 5. Courtesy the Artist.



*Henry VIII*, 1999. Gelatin-silver print, image size: 58 3/4 x 47 inches, frame size: 71 x 60 in. Edition of 5. Courtesy the Artist.

*"I found this form in Tokyo in a complete set of German-made cast models for the study of mathematics. It's a very artistic sculpture, but actually it was made to show students that three-dimensional theories can be seen in three-dimensional models. It's such an irony that mathematicians made more interesting sculpture than artists!"*

*"This is the image of a mathematician's thinking. No such thing actually exists in nature; it's purely what the human mind comes up with—this kind of theory. I don't know whether these carry emotions for mathematicians, but as an artist I project my own vision onto these mathematical, purely abstract forms. You know, we want to see things the way we want to—so this is the beginning of the art here, and we can shape...how we want to see."*



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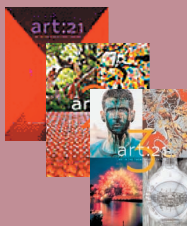


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