

**JAPAN SOCIETY PRESENTS HIROSHI SUGIMOTO: GATES OF PARADISE  
IN CELEBRATION OF ITS 110-YEAR ANNIVERSARY**

October 20, 2017—January 7, 2018

Press Preview: Tuesday, October 17, 10 am



Left (detail): Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948), *Gates of Paradise 1 Adam and Eve*, 2016. Gelatin silver print. 44.9 x 35.8 in (114 x 91 cm). Private collection.

Right (detail): Unidentified artist, *The Arrival of Westerners in Japan*, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Pair of six-panel folding screens; ink, color, and gold on paper. MOA Museum of Art.

**New York, May 8, 2017**—On the occasion of its 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary, marked May 19, 2017, Japan Society is pleased to announce the world premiere of *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Gates of Paradise*, an exhibition commemorating one of the earliest documented moments of cross-cultural exchange between Japan and the West. On view from October 20, 2017 to January 7, 2018, the inspiring exhibition will unveil a new series by the artist while also juxtaposing his monumental black-and-white photographs of early modern European art and architecture with traditional Japanese artworks lent from the world’s top collections. Together, this innovative display will illustrate the captivating story of four boys who, in the late sixteenth century, were among the first Japanese to travel to Europe.

Sugimoto’s meticulous practice defines what it means to be a multi-disciplinary artist working today. His world renowned photographs—widely lauded as iconic meditations on time and history— capture the perfect visual analogy for the Japan Society anniversary in a way that parallels the Society’s mission since its founding in 1907. “As we celebrate our 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there could be no more appropriate reflection on the institution’s mission to deepen mutual understanding across cultures than with *Gates of Paradise*,” says Motosatu Sakurai, President of Japan Society. “We owe our sincerest appreciation to Sugimoto, a true Renaissance man, for conceiving this exhibition.”

*Gates of Paradise* revives a near-forgotten moment in global history: the so-called “Tenshō Embassy,” conceived by the resident Jesuit missionary Alessandro Valignano in collusion with local ruling elites, which brought four Catholic-convert Japanese boys to Europe to experience Western Christianity. On the eight-year voyage, the boys were transported through the papal and princely courts of western Europe as well as key cultural destinations such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Pantheon in Rome. In the spring of 2015, nearly 500 years later, Sugimoto was traveling through Italy when he came across a fresco documenting the Japanese envoy in 1585, leading him to investigate the boys’ journey in greater detail. Sugimoto soon realized that he had photographed many of the sites that the boys had visited in their European sojourn, and from that moment he endeavored to capture the remaining locations, carefully crafting his own travels in their footsteps.

The boys' journey to Europe was part of a broader program of religious, economic, political, and cultural interchange, spurred by the Jesuit Mission in Asia. One result of the Jesuits' efforts was the development of a new, short-lived genre known as *nanban* art, in which European and Christian themes were executed by Japanese artists using traditional techniques. *Gates of Paradise* includes key masterpieces of *nanban* art, including several six-fold painted screens (one of which is designated as an Important Cultural Property by the *Bunka-cho*, Japan's Ministry of Culture). These works provide greater context for the boys' journey, inviting visitors to experience a pivotal episode of cross-cultural exchange between East and West and to consider the significance of global travel and international dialogue at the dawn of the early modern age.

"We are thrilled to introduce this new project by Hiroshi Sugimoto, which transects history by juxtaposing two distinct bodies of work: the artist's own newly photographed works and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century classical masterpieces from Japan," says Yukie Kamiya, Director of Japan Society Gallery. "With *Gates of Paradise*, Sugimoto explores a fundamental question, 'What is the West?,' while visualizing a nascent moment of cross-cultural exchange, directly in line with Japan Society's mission of exploring the inextricable links connecting Japanese culture to a larger global dialogue."

In conjunction with the exhibition, Japan Society's Performing Arts Program will present a newly conceived *noh* play by Hiroshi Sugimoto titled *Rikyu – Enoura* on November 3-5, 2017, as part of its 2017-18 Season. Co-produced by Japan Society and Odawara Art Foundation in Japan, this new play recounts the tragic suicide of Sen-no-Rikyu (1522-1591), master of the Japanese tea ceremony, who established the "way of tea" in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century during the period when Christianity flourished among the samurai warrior class. *Rikyu – Enoura* features esteemed *noh* actors Kanze Tetsunojo and Katayama Kuroemon and *noh* musician Kamei Hirotada. Sen So'oku, direct descendant of Sen-no-Rikyu and heir to the Grand Master of the Mushakouji Senke tea school, appears on stage to offer a tea ceremony as an homage to the late great master.

*Gates of Paradise* is conceived by Hiroshi Sugimoto and organized by Japan Society. A catalogue is being published in conjunction with the exhibition in October 2018 by Skira Rizzoli. It will be 216 pages, with over 100 full color images, as well as essay contributions by Hiroshi Sugimoto, Ryuji Hiraoka, Ph. D. (Associate Professor of the Faculty of Letters, Prefectural University of Kumamoto), Mark K. Erdmann, Ph. D., Monsignor Timothy Verdon (Director of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence) and Yukie Kamiya (Director, Japan Society Gallery).

#### **ABOUT HIROSHI SUGIMOTO**

Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948, Tokyo, Japan) has defined what it means to be a multidisciplinary contemporary artist, blurring the lines between photography, painting, installation, and most recently, architecture. His iconic photographs have bridged Eastern and Western ideologies, tracing the origins of time and societal progress along the way. Preserving and picturing memory and time is a central theme of Sugimoto's photography, including the ongoing series *Dioramas* (1976–), *Theaters* (1978–), and *Seascapes* (1980–). In 1999, Deutsche Guggenheim commissioned and presented an exhibition of his series *Portraits* (1999–). Sugimoto has organized and curated several exhibitions of his own work as well as traditional Japanese art, sometimes juxtaposing the two bodies of material in single exhibitions, such as *History of History*, which was co-organized with Japan Society (on view from September 23, 2005, to February 19, 2006) and the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. His work is held in prestigious museums and collections worldwide, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; National Gallery, London; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; Tate, London; and Smithsonian Institute of Art, Washington, D.C., among numerous others. The artist current institutional exhibitions include 'The Sea and the Mirror,' at Chateau La Coste, France, May 9 – September 3, 2017 and 'Le Notti Bianche' at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Italy, May 16 – October 1, 2017.

## **ABOUT JAPAN SOCIETY**

Since 1971, Japan Society Gallery has been the premier institution in the United States for the display and interpretation of Japanese art and culture. Through groundbreaking exhibitions and related programs, the Gallery cultivates a broader understanding and appreciation of Japan's contributions to global artistic heritage; explores the artistic interconnections Japan shares with its Asian neighbors, the U.S., Latin America, and Europe; and celebrates the diversity of Japanese visual expression from prehistoric times to the present day.

Founded in 1907, Japan Society in New York City presents sophisticated, topical and accessible experiences of Japanese art and culture, and facilitates the exchange of ideas, knowledge and innovation between the U.S. and Japan. More than 200 events annually encompass world-class exhibitions, dynamic classical and cutting-edge contemporary performing arts, film premieres and retrospectives, workshops and demonstrations, tastings, family activities, language classes, and a range of high-profile talks and expert panels that present open, critical dialogue on issues of vital importance to the U.S., Japan and East Asia.

During the 2017-18 season, Japan Society celebrates its 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary with expanded programming that builds toward a richer, more globally interconnected 21<sup>st</sup> century: groundbreaking creativity in the visual and performing arts, unique access to business insiders and cultural influencers, and critical focus on social and educational innovation, illuminating our world beyond borders.

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## **DIRECTIONS:**

Japan Society is located at 333 East 47th Street between First and Second Avenues (accessible by the 4/5/6 and 7 subway lines at Grand Central or the E and M subway lines at 53rd St. and Lexington Ave.)

## **HOURS AND ADMISSION:**

Japan Society Gallery hours: Tuesday-Thursday, 12 Noon – 7:00 pm; Friday, 12 Noon – 9:00 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11:00 am – 5:00 pm; the Gallery is closed on Mondays and major holidays. Admission: \$12/\$10 students and seniors/FREE Japan Society members and children under 16. Admission is free to all on Friday nights, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm. Docent tours are available free with admission Tuesday-Sunday at 2:30 pm (English), and Fridays at 6:00 pm (Japanese) and 7:00 pm (English); no reservations are necessary except for group tours.

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Exhibitions and Arts & Culture Lecture Programs at Japan Society are made possible in part by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund, the Mary Griggs Burke Endowment Fund established by the Mary Livingston Griggs and Mary Griggs Burke Foundation, Chris A. Wachenheim, and Friends of the Gallery. Additional support for Arts & Culture Lecture Programs is provided by the Sandy Heck Lecture Fund.

For further information, please visit [www.japansociety.org](http://www.japansociety.org).

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