

# CEREAL

In this volume, we look to the restorative power of art and nature. We meet with artists **Torkwase Dyson**, **Edmund de Waal** and **Anish Kapoor**, visit **Hiroshi Sugimoto's** Enoura Observatory in Japan, and traverse the expanses of **Western Australia**, the **Atacama Desert**, and **Patagonia**.

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## WATER AND AIR

*Hiroshi Sugimoto's*

*Enoura Observatory*

words

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**HIROSHI SUGIMOTO** — *My goal in making this complex was to reconnect people, visually and mentally, with the oldest of human memories.*

Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto has long been preoccupied with the passage of time. His series 'Dioramas', begun in 1974, spans four decades, and captures uncanny portraits of waxwork animals and early humans, frozen in the prehistoric landscapes of their museum exhibits. Other series unfolded along similarly extended timespans. 'Theatres' consists of long-exposure shots of cinema interiors, condensing entire films into single frames of silvery light, illuminating rows of empty seats. But perhaps most emblematic of the theme of temporality is 'Seascapes': shot across the globe in exposures of two to three hours, and framed with the horizon in the dead centre, the compositions are equal parts water and air, suggestive of an abstract, timeless sea. "Long before civilisation, when humans first became conscious of being human, I imagined their vision of the world, and compared it to my own as a modern person," Sugimoto said in an interview with the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in 2018. "I wondered what kinds of scenery we could share, and realised they could not exist anywhere on land, where humans have cleared forests and changed the terrain. I thought, perhaps our shared vision could be found in seascapes."

Reimagining the perceptions of our prehistoric ancestors is at the heart of the most comprehensive project of Sugimoto's career: home to his Odawara Art Foundation, the Enoura Observatory sits on the outskirts of Odawara, around an hour's train ride from Tokyo. Built by New Material Research Laboratory — the architectural firm Sugimoto founded in 2008 alongside architect Tomoyuki Sakakida — the complex of galleries, viewing platforms, Noh stages, tearooms and other structures perches on a steep hill on the edge of the Hakone mountains, overlooking the quiet waters of Sagami Bay, surrounded by groves of bamboo and citrus trees.

The observatory is as much a piece of land art as it is a centre for arts and culture. A 100-metre gallery constructed of glass and stone balances on the tip of the hillside, pointing directly out to sea. The last few metres are cantilevered into empty space, acting as a viewing platform for the ever-changing seascape below. The building is aligned with the rising sun on the morning of the summer solstice, when the sun's first rays take several minutes to travel along the full length of the corridor. Beneath this gallery, intersecting it in a slanted 'X' shape, is a 70-metre steel tunnel, red with rust. The passage cuts below ground before opening to a view of the sea, which frames the sunrise of the winter solstice; at the opposite end, an ancient slab of jagged stone stands upright, waiting to catch the sun's luminance. Above the tunnel, a Noh stage constructed of optical glass is supported by a *kakezukuri* framework of Hinoki cypress, and encircled by a stone reproduction of a Roman amphitheatre from Ferento. The transparent stage illuminates as its glass edge catches the light of the low winter sun. 'Developing an awareness of how the sun rises and the seasons change was one trigger for humankind's acquiring of consciousness,' Sugimoto writes. 'My goal in making this complex was to reconnect people, visually and mentally, with the oldest of human memories.'

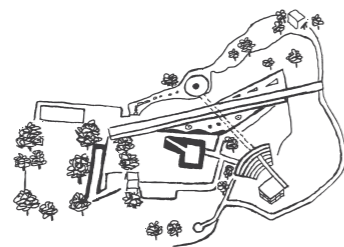


Hiroshi Sugimoto outside Enoura Observatory. In contrast with the philosophical introspection of his work, Sugimoto is said to have a keen fondness for jokes, especially puns. The name of his New York studio, Door Four, plays on the Japanese word *doaho*, which roughly translates as 'total idiot'.



Sugimoto also imagined how future humans might interact with the structures of Enoura Observatory once they are rendered ancient by the passage of time. Speaking to *Casa Brutus* in 2018, he said: “I wanted to build a ruin, to imagine what the building would look like 1000 years from now, in a state of decay.” At the age of 72, Sugimoto clearly considers the observatory part of his legacy; the complex encapsulates his life, with works from ‘Seascapes’ on display in the summer solstice gallery, and a stone chamber — surrounded by a henge of stones originally quarried for the construction of Edo Castle in the 15<sup>th</sup> century — houses his impressive collection of fossils. However, he is happy for his role in the building’s history to be forgotten: “In a way, it is beautiful and romantic to think of this place as simply existing, rather than having been created,” he says.

One thousand years from now, the roof of the summer solstice gallery will be gone. Some of the glass panes of the east wall may be broken, the others dark with algae and moss. Perhaps shrubs will obscure the underground tunnel of the winter solstice gallery, or instead, the hillside may be entirely cleared of vegetation, the bamboo forest and citrus groves disappeared. What will remain constant, though, is the view of the bay, the horizon line perfectly splitting sea from sky. •



#### ENOURA OBSERVATORY

An overhead plan of Enoura Observatory. The long summer solstice gallery intersects the shorter winter solstice gallery, which leads through the Roman amphitheatre to pass below and to the left of the glass Noh stage.





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