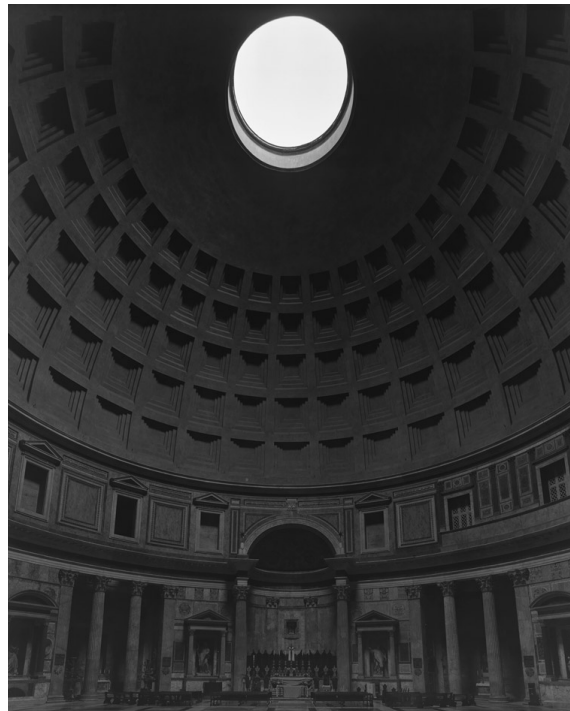




# Hiroshi Sugimoto retraces one of the earliest encounters between Japan and the West

ART / 18 OCT 2017 / BY CHARLOTTE JANSEN



*Pantheon, Rome, 2015, by Hiroshi Sugimoto, gelatin silver print. © The artist*

#### INFORMATION

'Gates of Paradise' is on view 20 October - 7 January 2018. For more information, visit the [Japan Society website](#)

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There's always been something otherworldly in Hiroshi Sugimoto's [photography](#). Whether it's the ethereal glow of his empty European theatres, the haunting spirituality suspended in *Acts of God* (2014), or the serenity of his seascapes – the interplay of shadow and light means much more to the photographer than the juxtaposition of contrasts and colour.

In his latest exhibition, 'Gates of Paradise', opening tomorrow at the Japan Society Gallery in New York, the artist addresses the divine directly. Inspired by the four Tenshō embassy boys (the *quattro regazzi*) who were sent as Catholic converts to Europe to experience Western Christianity first-hand in 1582.



*Unidentified artist. A Portuguese Trading Ship Arrives in Japan, Momoyama to Edo period, early 17th-century, by unidentified artist. Courtesy of Feinberg Collection. Photography: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution*

Sugimoto – who himself has travelled through Italy in 2015 to shoot [new additions](#) for his [Theatres series](#) – visited sites the Japanese missionaries stopped on their journey in the 16th century, including the Duomo in Florence, the Pantheon in Rome and the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

The story retraces the historical and religious links between Japan and the West brought to the mainstream attention by Martin Scorsese's *Silence*, taking place after the suppression of Japanese Roman Catholics during the Shimabara Rebellion that would follow a century after the Tenshō teenagers' mission. This little known period of history sheds new light on the relationship and cultural exchange between Japan and the West.



*Gates of Paradise 9 - David, 2016, by Hiroshi Sugimoto, gelatin silver print. © The artist*

Sugimoto's imposing black and white photographs, often shot from below to suggest the smallness of mankind, will be presented alongside Japanese *nanban* masterpieces from the 16th and 17th century – a style of East-West hybrid art, produced in Japan following exposure to traders and missionaries from Europe, in particular from Portugal. Other works date back as far as the 13th century.

Sugimoto has also redesigned the garden at the Japanese Society, with large bonsai and ceramic tiles imported from Kyoto; between 3-5 November, he will be staging his own Noh play in the auditorium.

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