

**Press release**March 19th  
May 7th, 2022Opening  
Saturday, March 19th  
from 11am to 8pm

# *Shifting Atmospheres*

## Hiroshi Sugito

It's all a question of atmosphere. Hiroshi Sugito's painting, whether it's abstract or semi-figurative—a notion we'll discuss a little later—conveys a feeling of haziness as soon as the eye attempts to grasp its outlines, content or density. In terms of color, we are struck by the fact that overly assertive tones are eschewed in order to leave space for more supple hues that may sometimes appear almost washed out and are certainly never overpowering nor triumphant. This subdued chromatic palette goes hand in hand with the impression of something happening or of a potential development that is however always contained.

For here, everything is in slow motion. All action appears suspended and an almost floating atmosphere envelops the canvas. It is as though too strict a definition of the motif, a delineation that is too marked or forms that are too sharp or well-defined, might be detrimental to the very realization of the painting, both in terms of its resolution and its revelation.

This deceleration is however not only apparent on the surface of the painting. For the informed observer, versed in the exercise of discovery and constantly excited at the idea of exploring new pictorial realms, it is striking to realize that from the very first second, it is the painting that sets the tempo. The "mechanism" employed is one in which the oeuvre somehow compels contemplation, since it is not simply a question of looking or visual perception but one of an almost imperious need to take one's time, to accept a certain form of detachment from the object one is observing, in order to better approach it and penetrate its secrets. In relation to this notion of inclusion, it is worth noting that Sugito's art, as well as being evidently attached to elements of architecture and landscape, is itself sometimes constructed, using structures built on wooden frameworks, which unfold three-dimensionally and impose on the spectator yet another new experience of painting.

Although the artist's paintings remain within the classical bounds of the canvas, the attention paid to landscapes and architecture often translates into the inclusion of various layers of visual effects, which accumulate and generate a complexity that is much greater than a quick glance might suggest.

Even when the painting is completely abstract, its surface is always animated by an assembly of forms, which if they are by no means perfect in the sense that the pictorial zones are not always defined with absolute rigor, they are nonetheless solidly constructed, carefully thought out, arranged and organized. To such an extent that the asymmetry that often governs them is never detrimental to the remarkable balance that emanates from the paintings.

Whether a painting is more or less abstract—and sometimes they are quite frankly so—or whether it reveals clues to a more figurative oeuvre—the outline of a building, a pair of eyes that seem to look out towards the spectator, or perhaps a vague silhouette or maybe a tree...—a strange paradox is at work in Sugito's painting. Whatever the "formula" the painter adopts, it somehow seems to decelerate any movement of attraction towards the painting. Is this a means of keeping the viewers at a certain distance and forcing them to adjust their gaze? Perhaps. A device to prevent the painting from being too easily read? Quite probably.

A fundamental characteristic of Sugito's painting is that although it has

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something to say, it does not discourse. Although it may sometimes seem to subtly lay down a few outlines of a possible narrative, no real story is ever made apparent. An indefinite, fluctuating territory is revealed that occasionally seems almost abyssal; its shifting nature, while not unstable, might easily lead to a certain incomprehension. This incomprehension however, should be seen in a positive light, as it is a guarantee of a certain richness of meaning and discursive openness, rather than a closed book.

One of the appeals, or even the strengths of this work, is that it never allows itself to be fully or instantaneously grasped, like an object whose instable surface defeats any attempt to take hold of it.

Seen in this light, could Hiroshi Sugito's painting be ultimately considered as a shifting entity? Certainly, in that it is not easily defined or categorized. Probably, in that as the eye drifts over its surface, the purchase it finds is always shrouded in a certain mystery. Definitely, in that the mind never has the impression of being confronted with absolute certainty.

The high point for the spectator, is the visual and intellectual satisfaction of dealing with impressions rather than certainties.

Frédéric Bonnet

Frédéric Bonnet is a Paris-based art critic and curator. He has contributed to publications such as *Le Journal des Arts*, *Vogue France*, *L'Œil*, *Art Press*... and was a radio journalist for France Culture between 2011 and 2020. Notable exhibitions he has organized include, *Sheila Hicks* at the Bass Museum, Miami Beach in 2019 and the Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico in 2017, *AA Bronson & General Idea* at the Esther Schipper Gallery, Berlin in 2018, *General Idea* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto in 2011. Since 2013 he has been a member of the Selection Committee for the Jean-François Prat Prize, devoted to emerging painting.