

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

NEW YORK CULTURE

NY CULTURE | NOVEMBER 19, 2011

Witness to Bonds of War

BY WILLIAM MEYERS

Hiroshi Sugimoto: Lake Superior
Pace/MacGill Gallery

32 E. 57th St., Ninth floor
212-759-7999

Through Dec. 3

In 1934, Robert Frost pretty much said everything you need to know about these Hiroshi Sugimoto pictures, even though they were taken in 1995 and 2003. The 11 black-and-white prints from the "Lake Superior" series all have the same format; the horizon is in the middle of the frame with sky above and water below. That's it. Mr. Frost's "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep" describes "people on the sand," apparently mesmerized, who "look at the sea all day." Mr. Sugimoto must feel that attraction, because he has taken similar pictures of bodies of water all around the globe, meaning to hold us transfixed by the meeting of air and water at the horizon.

Where so much is alike, minor differences count for a lot. The pictures are lighter or darker according to the time of day they were taken. Wind conditions vary the texture of the surface of the water, and Mr. Sugimoto's large-format camera captures these delicate distinctions. On clear days the horizon is as straight as a ruler; on hazy days the sky and water meld at some indeterminate point in the distance. But, really, we are no more capable of understanding what it all means than Mr. Frost's people: "They cannot look out far. / They cannot look in deep. / But when was that ever a bar / To any watch they keep?"