

SFMOMA unveils kite canopy, artist's largest-ever installation

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Visible from Howard Street, “Giant Arc” will showcase kites Jacob Hashimoto has made throughout his 30-year career.
Courtesy Tobin Rogers

SFMOMA visitors will soon be standing under an enormous, wall-to-wall kite canopy as part of the biggest site-specific project of one artist’s career.

The museum will on Thursday debut *Jacob Hashimoto: Giant Arc*, an installation by the titular multimedia artist. “Giant Arc” will suspend nearly 75,000 of Hashimoto’s handmade paper kites above the admission-free Roberts Family Gallery.

Visible from Howard Street, the installation will showcase kites Hashimoto has created throughout his 30-year career alongside new ones inspired by Northern California plants and wildlife.

To celebrate the launch of *Giant Arc*, Hashimoto will visit SFMOMA on Thursday for a conversation with Joseph Becker, the museum’s curator of architecture and design. Their free 6 p.m. talk in the Phyllis Wattis Theater requires no RSVP and will be followed by a live performance from experimental composer Nico Georis.

The museum said Hashimoto will discuss how physicality and meditation influence his designs, as well as what it is like to increase the scale and size of an everyday object such as a kite.

Hashimoto said in an interview that *Giant Arc* gave him a newfound appreciation for his old creations while also creating a chance to bring a reflective environment to the museum gallery.

Hashimoto said he wants the installation to “provide a respite in the midst of the frenetic city.”

He described it as “this calm, meditative space, where people can chill out and think about what this means and what their presence in it means, because it’s an artwork in itself — but it’s also a stage.”

Becker said Hashimoto came onto his radar last year, and he arranged a visit to Hashimoto’s New York studio shortly thereafter. He said SFMOMA was looking for artists who could effectively utilize the Roberts Family Gallery’s cavernous space.

SFMOMA Director Christopher Bedford said that *Giant Arc* will appeal just as much to passing pedestrians as to museum patrons.

He said the approach illustrates SFMOMA's mission of "radical hospitality for all," which at times includes "filling over 45,000 square feet of free public space with irresistible contemporary art."

Becker said it will make the Roberts Family Gallery "a site of gathering and welcome, where people can come to the museum and acclimate, pause or surrender to the power of the artwork."

Giant Arc will showcase pieces that Hashimoto has made over the years for museums like Santa Maria della Scala in Italy, Nordiska Akvarellmuseet in Sweden, and the Boise (Idaho) Art Museum. He has also made permanent installations for the Stanford University Graduate School of Education and the U.S. Embassy in Namibia.

Some of the kites included in the exhibit will commemorate icons such as the dahlia — San Francisco's official flower — and the Sonoran blue butterfly, an insect found along the state's coast.

Hashimoto said *Giant Arc* gave him a chance to "bring a whole bunch of these disparate projects together to make a super-piece out of this series of big projects that I had done for the last few years."

"It's kind of a retrospective, but it's also a completely new object because it's never been configured this way, and it looks like nothing else I've ever done," Hashimoto said.

Becker said he considers the scale of *Giant Arc* to be "immediately striking, not just because of the way it occupies space, but also because of the sheer accumulation of elements that go into creating the artwork."

Many of Hashimoto's kites are patterned with cut and layered collage paper. The effect of viewing the designs at once "can be overwhelming and mesmerizing at the same time," Becker said.

Hashimoto said that when he attends the museum on Thursday, he will be actively encouraging visitors to interact with the installation as they move through the gallery.

Whether a patron is four feet tall or seven feet tall, Hashimoto said, every visitor will come away uncovering different aspects of *Giant Arc*.

"It's rare that we have artworks that depend on their audience to activate it," he said.