

PEDER LUND

Shomei Tomatsu – Photographs

Peder Lund has the pleasure of inviting to an exhibition with the Japanese artist Shomei Tomatsu (1920-2012). The exhibition, which was organised in collaboration with the artist, is made up of 22 black-and-white photographs, taken between 1959 and 1971, which belong to different series and periods of Tomatsu's oeuvre. Of the 22 photographs on display, 15 are on loan from Norwegian collections, whereas the remaining seven have come directly from Shomei Tomatsu.

For over 50 years Shomei Tomatsu documented Japan with his personal and characteristic expression. Whilst a student in the 1950s, Tomatsu worked as a photographer for different Japanese magazines. In 1959 he was one of the founders of the photography cooperative *Vivo*, where the members' common denominator was the wish to confront and showcase the changes that were taking place in modern Japanese society.

Vivo came to an end in 1961, at which point Tomatsu had been hired to photograph for the Japan Council Against A and H Bombs, as part of the Council's campaigns. The result was published in the book *Hiroshima-Nagasaki Document*, wherein Tomatsu's photographs depicted the consequences atomic bombs had had in Japan.

In the years that followed, Tomatsu continued to be interested in the rapid changes in society and the dynamic that characterised the Japanese cityscape after the War. Based in Nagasaki, he documented the people, events and objects that crossed his path. The next book Tomatsu published: *11:02 – Nagasaki*, from 1966, portrays the fatal consequences the disaster had had for Japanese people.

In 1967 Tomatsu published the book *Nippon*, in which he with both text and images narrated the cultural changes that had become visible in the years following the War. *Nippon* displays a faceted Japan; everything from Americanisation and the entry of Western products, objects from and traces of the War, and depictions of Japanese traditions and cultural history, are displayed in order to reveal the great contrasts in Japanese society.

Tomatsu's interest in both society and individuals is made evident in the book *Oh! Shinjuku* from 1969. Here Tokyo's streets and underground milieu is illustrated in what seems to be a city in constant flux. Pictures from amongst others the series *Eros, Tokyo* and *Protest, Tokyo* are printed in this book, portraying prostitutes and student riots in the street. The exclamation Oh! in the title underlines Tomatsu's wish to capture the ephemeral spirit of time, which is constantly changing.

In 1969 and the early 1970s, Tomatsu took a number of photographs on the island Okinawa, where the landscape had changed dramatically. Americans had used the island as an Air Force base during the War and the upheavals that followed. The photographs from this period were published in the book *Okinawa Okinawa Okinawa* from 1969, and in the award-winning book *The Pencil of the Sun* from 1975, where Tomatsu's experiments with colour film are included.

Shomei Tomatsu has been of great importance for Japanese photography in the Post-War period, and has had an appreciable significance in the documentation of the War's aftereffects on Japanese society. Despite Tomatsu's many pictures documenting contemporaneous society and history, his expression is not typically documentary. Contrasts between light and shadow give his motives drama and tension. Tomatsu's pictures can seem abstract and to be filled with an underlying symbolism. The frames and motives are often unexpected or atypical in comparison to classical documentary photography.

Tomatsu's art has also been significant and influential outside Japan's borders. His work was exhibited and publicised in Europe from the 1980s and -90s; through exhibitions at MoMA in 1965 and 1974, he was presented to an American public. In 1974 John Szarkowski described Tomatsu in the book *New Japanese Photography* as "the pivotal figure of recent Japanese photography".

Over the last decade, Western interest in Tomatsu's photographs has materialised with exhibitions such as *Skin of the Nation*, a large retrospective organised by San Francisco MOMA, which traveled to The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, the Japan Society in New York and the Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland. On occasion of this exhibition, a comprehensive book about Tomatsu's art and oeuvre was published in English for the first time.

The critically acclaimed exhibition *Everything Was Moving* at the Barbican Art Gallery in London (9/2012-1/2013) places Tomatsu in relation to other international artists and the number of ways 1960s and -70s photography documented historical events. Tomatsu is also one of the most prominent figures in the exhibition *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*, which is on display at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, until 25 February 2013.