

November 16, 2005

Contact:

Sandra Farish Sloan, 415.357.4174, ssloan@sfmoma.org

Libby Garrison, 415.357.4177, lgarrison@sfmoma.org

Robyn Wise, 415.357.4172, rwise@sfmoma.org

**SFMOMA PRESENTS A MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF
PREEMINENT PHOTOGRAPHER SHŌMEI TŌMATSU**

From May 13 through August 13, 2006, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Shōmei Tōmatsu: Skin of the Nation*, a major retrospective of the preeminent postwar Japanese photographer Shōmei Tōmatsu. The exhibition offers a comprehensive survey of Tōmatsu's work, exploring his position within the postwar Japanese avant-garde and his influential and critical role in the development of modern Japanese photography. The title of the exhibition is a literal and metaphorical reference to the surfaces that have appeared in countless pictures throughout Tōmatsu's career. For the artist, the skin is more than just a surface, it is a kind of map in which one can read the story of Japan.



Shomei Tomatsu, *Eiko Ōshima, Actress in the Film Shiiku (Prize Stock)*, 1961, printed 2003; promised gift of Shirley Ross Sullivan to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; © Shomei Tomatsu

Shōmei Tōmatsu: Skin of the Nation is drawn largely from Tōmatsu's personal collection and features approximately 260 photographs spanning fifty years of the artist's poignant examination of the people, cities, and rural landscapes of postwar Japan. The exhibition is co-organized by Sandra S. Phillips, SFMOMA senior curator of photography, and writer and photographer Leo Rubinfien, current fellow at the International Center for Advanced Studies at New York University.

The exhibition is divided into ten thematic sections—Après-Guerre, Before, The Americans, A-Bomb, Americanization, I Am a King, Underground City, The South, The Post-Postwar, and The Skin of the Nation—and features famous images from each of Tōmatsu's major series, including works from the iconic *Nagasaki 11:02*, a historic documentation and humanistic exploration of the lives of A-bomb survivors in Nagasaki, and *Chewing Gum and Chocolate*, an impressionistic record of Americanization in postwar Japan that includes conflicting seductions of military threat and Hollywood glamour. The presentation begins with photographic essays on the fragmentary vestiges of old Japan and concludes with pictures of Japan's transformation, its huge economic success, and the political and cultural changes and challenges that accompanied that success. The series was originally published as

more

photo essays in magazines; the photographs were meant to be seen and appreciated in a serial, almost cinematic, format.

“Shōmei Tōmatsu has been extraordinarily influential in Japan as the signal figure of a generation, and the incredible depth, variety, and intelligence of his work is virtually unknown outside of his country,” says Phillips. “It is a great honor for us to have this opportunity to present him to the international art community.”

Born in 1930 in Nagoya, Japan, Tōmatsu is internationally recognized as that country’s most innovative and important photographer of the postwar period (1950–70s). His work was central to the landmark 1974 exhibition *New Japanese Photography* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as well as the 1979 exhibition at the International Center of Photography, *Japan: A Self-Portrait*. He has been recognized and celebrated in many exhibitions within Japan and has been widely published there. He is the author of more than twenty books, including *11:02 Nagasaki* (1966), *Nippon* (1967), *I Am a King* (1972), *Okinawa, Okinawa, Okinawa* (1969), *The Pencil of the Sun* (1975), and *Oh! Shinjuku* (1969).

Despite this substantial record of exhibitions and publications, no Western museum has given Tōmatsu’s large body of work sustained attention until now. In 1999, the Japan Society and SFMOMA jointly presented *Stray Dog*, a critically praised retrospective of the work of Tōmatsu’s best-known protégé, Daidō Moriyama. The current Tōmatsu project follows directly from the Moriyama exhibition and is one of this decade’s most important Western presentations of a modern Japanese artist’s life work. Together, the two retrospectives represent the most significant critical work of individual Japanese photographers to be shown outside Japan.

Tōmatsu made his first pictures on aerial reconnaissance film that his brother, a military journalist with the Japanese imperial army in China, brought back in a looted cache of army photographic supplies. During the early 1950s, he produced small photographic books and essays on the impoverished life of the postwar period in which his characters were wounded soldiers, potters, flooded-out peasants, and the students at a school for the children of garbage-bargemen. His work was first interpreted as close to photojournalism, but Tōmatsu chafed against the genre’s narrative conventions and quickly moved toward creating images of mysterious, symbolic power that would bring about a radical turn in Japanese photography and emphasize the value of art over journalism, humanity over ideology.

At the end of the 1950s, Tōmatsu participated in the seminal *Junin no Me* (Eyes of Ten) exhibitions and founded the photographic agency Vivo with Kikuji Kawada, Eikoh Hosoe, and others. Vivo created the most fertile, inventive energy in camerawork of the coming decade, and the Vivo photographers were published several times each year in the great photographic magazines of the period. Shoji Yamagishi (1928–1979), editor of *Camera Mainichi*, became a passionate champion of the agency’s work and its most important critic.

By the mid-1960s, Tōmatsu emerged as one of the most important figures in a new school of contemporary Japanese photography that included Moriyama, Masahisa Fukase, and Eikoh Hosoe. Others that developed in Tōmatsu’s circle of influence include his friends and protégés Nobuyoshi Araki, Kikuji Kawada, Takuma Nakahira, and the younger Miyako Ishiuchi. This generation of photographers, born in the 1930s, was raised under Japan’s militarist regime and came of age amid war, defeat, and devastation; Tōmatsu would later speak of himself as a member of a “belieflless generation,” holding contempt for Japan’s past and despair for its future. His colleagues in

other media have included the filmmaker Nagisa Oshima, the theater director Shuji Terayama, the butoh dancer Tatsumi Hijikata, and the novelist Kobo Abe.

Tōmatsu's work is distinguished by its fascination with immediate experience, a passion for the tangible and physical that amounts to a belief that we can only trust what we can hold in our hands and a fierce rejection of sentimental pieties and received ideas. Though his work has documentary aspects, it is far more concerned with evoking the anxiety, exhilaration, surprise, and sorrow that pervades everyday life in an ever-changing Japanese landscape. Combining his original surrealist and realist impulses into a single creative stream, Tōmatsu creates images both lyrical and uncanny, and strongly connected to the larger avant-garde culture and the dramatically changing social and political scene.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated 224-page catalogue with essays by Phillips; Rubinfiel; and John W. Dower, professor of history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author of *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (1999), a cultural history of postwar Japan that won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. The preface is written by Tōmatsu's protégé Moriyama. Published by SFMOMA in association with Yale University Press, the catalogue is available in cloth cover at SFMOMA for \$45.

Shōmei Tōmatsu: Skin of the Nation is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with the Japan Society, New York. This exhibition is generously supported by Linda and Jon Gruber, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Bob and Randi Fisher, the Blakemore Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. William S. Fisher, Prentice and Paul Sack, Ellen Ramsey Sanger, The Japan Foundation, and Fuji Photo Film Co., Ltd. This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Ellen Ramsey Sanger.

After its SFMOMA presentation, the exhibition travels to the Fotomuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland (September 1–November 19, 2006) and Galerie Rodolfinum, Prague (January 12–April 8, 2007).

* * *

Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a private, not-for-profit institution supported by its members; individual contributors; corporate and foundation support; foreign, federal, state, and city government grants; and admission revenues. Annual programming is sustained through the generosity of Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Koret Foundation Funds. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic. Reduced admission for seniors is sponsored by SBC.

* * *