

MISA SHIN GALLERY

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Press Release
September 2013

TOMATSU Shomei **Afghanistan 1963**

Date: Thursday, September 19 - Saturday, November 2, 2013

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 19 18:00 - 20:00

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday (Closed on Mon, Sun, public holidays) 12:00 - 19:00

MISA SHIN GALLERY is pleased to present "Afghanistan 1963," an exhibition of photography by Tomatsu Shomei.

One of Japan's best known photographers, Tomatsu Shomei (1930-2012) focused his keen eye on themes with social impact in post-war Japan, including U.S. military bases, Nagasaki, and Okinawa. This exhibition comprises fourteen monochrome prints, digital prints of photographs taken by Tomatsu in 1963 while traveling in Afghanistan.

In August 1963, Tomatsu visited Afghanistan as a correspondent of the magazine *Taiyo*, published by Heibonsha. Both his first trip abroad as well as his first trip to Afghanistan, for the thirty-two year old Tomatsu, the experience was a series of surprises—the white parched landscape and intense sunlight, the lifestyles of the nomads who had no permanent homes, the people who gathered at the bazaars, and the women wearing the chadri (burqa).



TOMATSU Shomei, *Afghanistan*, 1963/2009

The two hundred odd photos taken on this journey show the lifestyles and culture of the people before Afghanistan was drawn into war. Tomatsu self-published his work in 1968 as *As-Salamu Alaykum* (Peace Be With You). This was later published by Asahi Sonorama in 1978 as *Kingdom of Mud*.

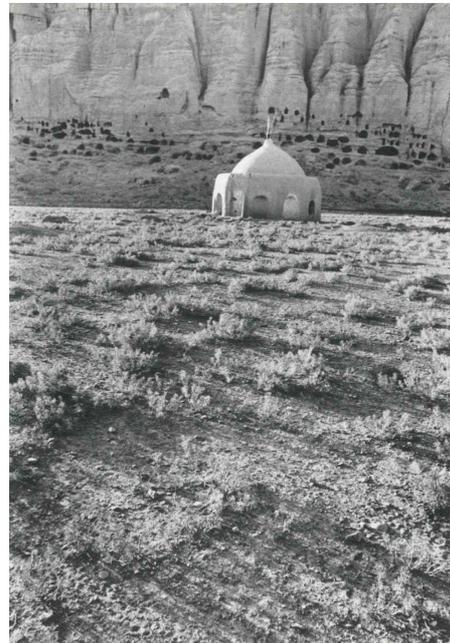
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Rather than adopt a curious or romantic perspective towards an exotic culture, the young Tomatsu's photos represent cutouts from the lives of Afghan people living under harsh natural conditions. His attempt to get at the true nature of the subject by placing himself in the subject's position can be seen as the very essence of a photographer's work. This is a perspective that appears consistently in his later photographs of Shinjuku, Okinawa, and Southeast Asia, and similarly posed poignant questions for contemporary society.

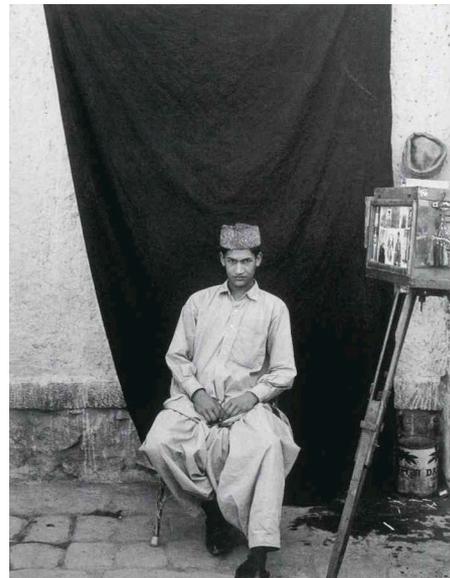
In the foreword to *Kingdom of Mud*, Tanikawa Koichi comments, "These pictures of Afghanistan already display signs of the critique of civilization that became such a conviction for Tomatsu in his key series of works published under the title *Pencil of the Sun* in 1975—namely, a conscious approach or methodology of using a remote frontier to throw light on the civilized Japanese society of the post-war years."

Even after half a century, these photos taken in Afghanistan still strike us as works of amazing originality. This exhibition is a precious opportunity to explore the origins of the coherent thread that runs through Tomatsu's life as a photographer.



TOMATSU Shomei

(1930-2012) Tomatsu was studying economics at Aichi University when he started taking photographs. After working at Iwanami Shashin Bunko (Iwanami Photograph Publicity), he began working as a freelance photographer in the 1950s. Recent major exhibitions include "Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, 2004), "Tokyo Mandala" at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography (Tokyo, 2007), "The Chiseling of Time" at the Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum (Nagasaki, Japan, 2010), "Tomatsu Shomei: Photographer" at the Nagoya City Art Museum (Nagoya, 2011), and "Shomei Tomatsu: Island Life" at the Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, 2013).



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TOMATSU Shomei, *Afghanistan*, 1963/2009