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# Shomei Tomatsu: Plastics

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### Shomei Tomatsu: Plastics



Nonaka-Hill is pleased to present the first Los Angeles solo exhibition of photographs by Shomei Tomatsu.

### Shomei Tomatsu: Plastics

Born in Nagoya in 1930, Tomatsu was a teenager during WWII. Ignoring the air-raid sirens, Tomatsu positioned a mirror so that he could witness the B-29 bombers, "a feast of metallic beauty", as they destroyed 90 percent of built Nagoya. This memory of a nocturnal "pageant of light" in the sky influenced the compositions of his 1960s "Asphalt" series, a format that Tomatsu revisits in the "Plastics" series, on view here.

Shomei Tomatsu is widely regarded as a preeminent photographer of Japan's post-war period. In a life work chronicled six decades of a changing Japan, he produced several of his country's best-known, often poignant images. Tomatsu began taking photographs in 1950, and by 1952 he had received praise from established photographers Ken Domon and Ihei Kimura. Initially working as a photojournalist, Tomatsu's images were more staged and poetic than the refined objectivity seen in the work of his predecessors. Between 1959-61, Tomatsu founded the legendary VIVO photographic agency (with Kikuji Kawada, Akira Sato, Akira Tanno, Ikko Narahara and Eikoh Hosoe) and founded the "Workshop" photography school (with Nobuyoshi Araki, Masahisa Fukase, Eikoh Hosoe, Daido Moriyama and Noriaki Yokosuka). In 1958, Tomatsu began his "Chewing Gum and Chocolate" series, in which he studied the impact of American occupation on Japan. And, in 1961, Tomatsu co-authored the acclaimed "Hiroshima-Nagasaki Document" with Ken Domon, which exposed the lingering effects of the atomic bombs, 16 years after the events. Photographer and essayist, Leo Rubenfien described Tomatsu's Nagasaki photographs as "sad, haggard facts", noting that, as Tomatsu wandered with his camera, "beneath the surface there was a grief so great that any overt expression of sympathy would have been an insult." Of his experience, Tomatsu explained:

"In 1945, its cities devastated, Japan was inundated with American soldiers," he wrote. "We were starving, and they threw us chocolate and chewing gum. That was America. For better or worse, that's how I encountered America."

Through his his widely published works and engagement in the photographic community, Tomatsu's expressionistic stance influenced the younger generations, including photographers of the "Provoke era", Nobuyoshi Araki, Takuma Nakihara and Daido Moriyama, who said: "For me as a photographer, without a doubt, everything began with Tomatsu." Tomatsu's work was first seen in the United States in 1974, when Museum of Modern Art, New York presented New Japanese Photography\*. The exhibition co-curator, John Szarkowsky referred to Tomatsu as "the pivotal figure of recent Japanese photography", whose images are "an intuitive response to the experience of life itself". Szarkowski also explained "It was not the rejection of traditional journalism, but the acceptance of a larger and more difficult problem, that defines Tomatsu's identity as a photographer."



Shomei Tomatsu, "Sasebo, Nagasaki", 1966 © Shomei Tomatsu -INTERFACE / Courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film



Plastics, Kujukuri Beach, Chiba, 1988-89/1989 Chromogenic print 42 x 42 cm 16.54 x 16.54 inches

Shomei Tomatsu produced his "Plastics" series in 1987-89, and seven examples are on view here. Tomatsu, in middle-age at the time, was recovering from heart surgery, walking the beaches near his home in Chiba, Japan. His camera captured random bits of colorful detritus, set against the black, glistening sands. These photos recall Tomatsu's Asphalt series from 1960, made in his youth while walking the streets, photographing lost and fallen shiny objects imprinted into soft black asphalt, appearing almost as fossils, or the night-time sky of his war-time youth. Both series document the imprints of human activity, and evoke the artist's existential considerations. In 1992, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York presented "Photographs by Shomei Tomatsu: Sakura + Plastics", the museum's first exhibition dedicated to the work of a living Japanese artist. The two series, shown together, project the artist's bittersweet relationship with his nation, which saw massive cultural change in his lifetime. Sakura (cherry trees) have been celebrated annually for thousands of years with ritual "Hana-mi" (flower viewing), and remain a symbol of Japanese cultural identity, though the military's sakura emblem was retired with the war defeat. Tomatsu's images of the iconic Sakura subject range from intoxicating florals to abject compromise. For his book: "Views of Japan: Tomatsu Shomei", the artist selected the "Plastics" series as the volume's sole imagery.

After "Plastics", Tomatsu moved to Nagasaki and to Okinawa, returning to the places where the black and white photographs of his youth were taken. He explored Japan's southern Ryukyu islands, home to so much American military, coexisting with native islanders, flora and fauna, and produced vividly colorful photographs, recently exhibited at Art Institute of Chicago in Shomei Tomatsu: Island Life. Shomei Tomatsu, born 1930, Nagoya, Japan, died 2012, Naha, Okinawa, Japan

Major solo exhibitions include: "Shomei Tomatsu: Island Life", Art Institute of Chicago (2013), "Tomatsu Shomei: Photographs," Nagoya City Art Museum (2011), "Tomatsu Shomei: Tokyo Mandala," Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography (2007), "Aichi Mandala: Tomatsu Shomei's Landscape," Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Nagoya (2006), "Okinawa Mandala," Urasoe Art Museum (2002), "Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation" organized by San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, touring venues in America and Europe (2004-2007), "Interface," The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto (2004), "Nagasaki Mandala," Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum (2000), "Traces: Fifty Years of Tomatsu's Work," Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography (1999)

Among his major awards are the Japan Photo Critics Association Newcomer's Award (1958), the Japan Photo Critics Association Artist Award (1961), the Mainichi Art Award (1976), The Minister of Education, Science and Culture's Art Encouragement Prize (1976), The Medal with Purple Ribbon (1995) and The Photographic Society of Japan Distinguished Contributions Award (2005).

"A photographer looks at everything, which is why he must look fron the beginning to end, face the subject head-on, stare fixedly, turn the entire body into an eye and face the world." – Shomei Tomatsu



Shomei Tomatsu: Plastics-Exterior view



Shomei Tomatsu: Plastics-Installation view



Shomei Tomatsu: Plastics-Installation view



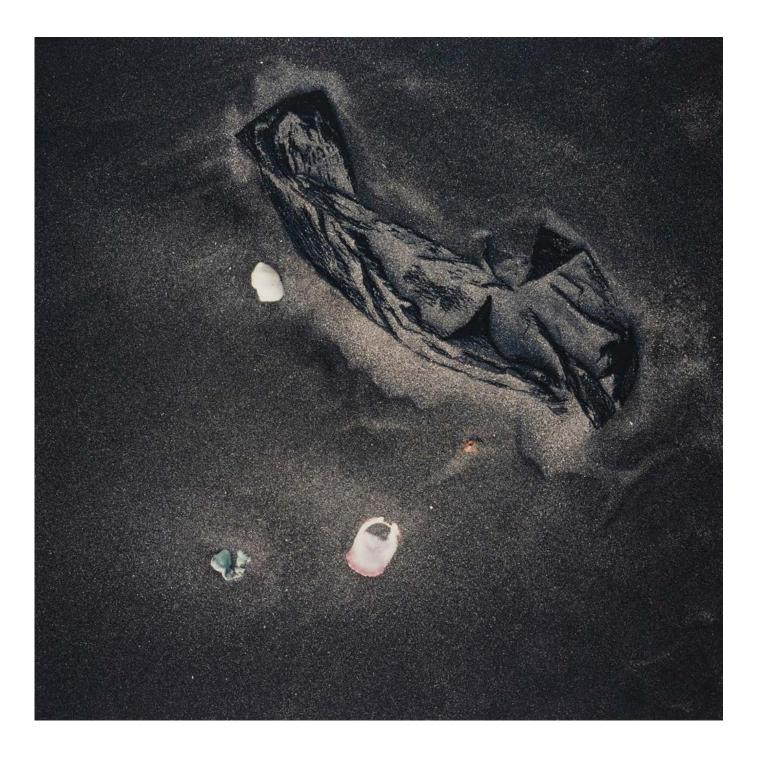
Shomei Tomatsu: Plastics-Installation view



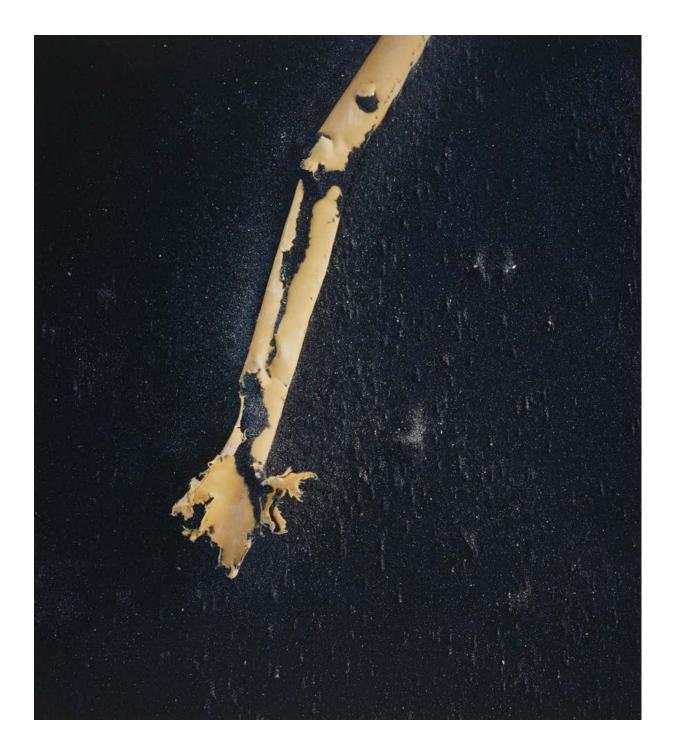












### Not in exhibition



Shomei Tomatsu, "Ironic Birth, Nagoya", 1950



Shomei Tomatsu, "Asphalt, Tokyo", 1960

All images © Shomei Tomatsu - INTERFACE / Courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film

### Not in exhibition



Shomei Tomatsu, "CoCa-Cola, Shinjuku, Tokyo", 1969



Shomei Tomatsu, "Koza, Okinawa", 1978

All images © Shomei Tomatsu - INTERFACE / Courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film

Biography		Shomei Tomatsu was born in Nagoya in 1930, and passed away in 2012. He began photographing while at Aichi University, and before long he would become recognized as a pivotal figure in the post-war photography world of Japan. Beginning with a series that observes the people and scenery around American Military bases ("Occupation") and moving towards a recollection of the atomic bomb (11:02 Nagasaki, 1966), Tomatsu looked at the situation of his day with a sharp eye, while also opening up new possibilities for photographic expression. In 1969, after visiting Okinawa for the first time, he developed a deeper interest not just towards bases, but also towards natural beauty. This interest guided the production of his 1975 book The Pencil of the Sun, which won the Mainichi Art Award and The Minister of Education, Science and Culture's Art Encouragement Prize. In 1999, he moved to Nagasaki, also setting up a residence in Okinawa and producing work at a steady clip.
Selected Solo Exhibitions	2018 2016 2015 2013	Plastics, Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, USA Shomei Tomatsu: Nagasaki, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, JP Chewing Gum and Chocolate, Misa Shin Gallery, Tokyo, JP Afghanistan 1963, Misa Shin Gallery, Tokyo, JP

- 2013 Afghanistan 1963, Misa Shin Gallery, Tokyo, JP
   Shomei Tomatsu: Island Life, The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA
   Tomatsu Shomei and plants in Okinawa, Okinawa Prefectural Art Museum, Okinawa, JP
   Toki-wo-kezuru, Mitsubishi-Jisho Artium, Fukuoka, JP
   Tomatsu Shomei Photographs, Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum, Nagasaki, JP
   Nagasaki 11:02, Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, Nagasaki, JP
   Shomei Tomatsu: The Pencil of the Sun, Canon Gallery, Tokyo, JP
- 2012 Tomatsu Shomei Photographs, Tonami Art Museum, Toyama, JP
- 2011 Shinjuku Turmoil, Misa Shin Gallery, Tokyo, JP Tomatsu Shomei. Okinawa Photographs - Love Letter to the Sun, Okinawa Perfectual Museum & Art Museum, Naha, JP
- 2010 Tomatsu Shomei: Photographs, Nagoya City Art Museum, Nagoya, JP
- 2009 Nagasaki 11:02, Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, Nagasaki, JP
- 2007 Tomatsu Shomei: Tokyo Mandala, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, JP
- 2006 Aichi Mandala: Tomatsu Shomei's Landscape, Aichi Prefectural 2 Museum of Art, Aichi, JP
- 2005 Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California, USA Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., USA
- 2004 Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation, Japan Society, New York, USA
- 2003 Shomei Tomatsu: Three Decades in Color, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, JP

#### Shomei Tomatsu

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions 2002 Okinawa Mandala, Urasoe Art Museum, Okinawa, JP 2000 Nagasaki Mandala, Nagasaki Prefectural Museum, Nagasaki, JP 1999 Traces: Fifty Years of Tomatsu's Work, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, JP 1998 Shomei Tomatsu: Cherry Blossoms, Niitsu City Art Museum, Niigata, JP Character P: The Final Abode, epSITE Gallery, Tokyo, JP 1997 Shomei Tomatsu, Mutsuzawa Town Hall, Chiba, JP 1996 Nagasaki 11:02, Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, Nagasaki, JP Interface, Ginza Nikon Salon, Tokyo; Osaka, JP Nikon Salon Interface: Shomei Tomatsu, National Film Center, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, JP 1995 Shomei Tomatsu: The Light and Shadow of Postwar Japan, Naha Citizens Gallery and Taira Central Community Hall, Okinawa, JP The Nagasaki Survivors, Trinity College, Vermont, USA 1994 Kyoto/Cherry Blossoms-The Original Image of The Japanese Nation, Konica Plaza, Tokyo, JP 1993 Shomei Tomatsu: New World Map + Golden Mushroom, Inax Gallery, Tokyo, JP Southern Island Journal- The Ryukyu Archipelago, Konica Plaza, Tokyo, JP 1992 Shomei Tomatsu Photographs, Gallery Emon, Nagoya, JP Photographs by Tomatsu: Sakura + Plastics, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA 1991 Shomei Tomatsu: Weathering Time, Maikata Citizen Gallery, Osaka, JP 1990 Shomei Tomatsu, Perspektief Centrum Voor Fotografie, Rotterdam, NL Cherry, Cherry, Cherry, Umeda Loft, Osaka, Japan 3Yamagataya Cultural Hall, Kagoshima, JP 1989 Plastics, Parco Galleries, Tokyo Sapporo, and Osaka, JP 1988 The Colors Blossom, Scatter, and Fall, Polaroid Gallery, Tokyo; Picture Photo Space, Osaka, JP Shomei Tomatsu: Japanese Landscapes, Toyonaka Central Public Hall, Osaka, JP 1986 Shomei Tomatsu: Nagasaki, Liberty Osaka, Osaka, JP 1984 Shomei Tomatsu: Japan, 1952-1981, Fotogalarie im Forum Stadtpark, Graz, AT; Traklhaus, Salzburg; Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna, AT; Kornerpark Galarie, Berlin, DE; Fotofourum, Bremen, DE; Stadtische Galarie, Erlangen, DE; Museet for Fotokunst, Odense, DK 1981 What Now!! Japan through the Eyes of Shomei Tomatsu, Yatsushiro Municipal Parking Garage Hall, Kumamoto, and twenty -nine other Japanese venues 1978 The Pencil of the Sun, Nihon Seimei Hall, Nagoya, JP

Selected Solo Exhibitions	1964	Kingdom of Mud, Fuji Photo Salon, Tokyo, JP
	1962	11:02 Nagasaki, Fuji Photo Salon, Tokyo, JP
	1959	People, Fuji Photo Salon, Tokyo, JP
Selected Group Exhibitions	2017	20 Year Anniversary TOP Collection: Tokyo Tokyo and TOKYO, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Tokyo, JP
	2016	<i>Provoke: Between Protest and Performance</i> , Photography in Japan 1960- 1975, Albertina, Vienna, AT; Fotomuseum Winterthur, CH; Le Bal, Paris, FR; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA
	2015	For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968-1979, The Museum of Fine Arts, Texas, USA; Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York, USA; Japan Society Gallery, New York, USA The 70th Anniversary of the Atomic Bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: War and
	2015	<ul> <li>Peace, Hiroshima Prefectural Museum and Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum, JP</li> <li>Collection Exhibition 2015-16, National Museum of Modern Art Kyoto, JP</li> <li>Conflict, Time, Photography, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Dresden, Germany;</li> <li>Museum Folkwang, Essen, DE; Aichi Notes – Clay, Ceramics, Landscape and Memory,</li> <li>Aichi Prefectural Ceramic Museum, Aichi, JP</li> </ul>
	2014	<i>Conflict, Time, Photography</i> , Tate Modern, London, UK The Provoke Era: Japanese Photography from the Collection of SFMOMA, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California, USA
	2013	1968 -Japanese Photography, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, JP Memories of the Town: Yokosuka via Photography and Art, Yokosuka Museum of Art, Kanagawa, JP
	2012	<i>Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde</i> , The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA Everything Was Moving: Photography from the 60s and 70s, Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK <i>Busan Biennale 2012 – Garden of Leaning –</i> , The Busan Biennale 2012, Busan, KR
	2011	Breaking News – Fukushima and the consequences –, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, DE
	2008-09	
	2003	Japan 1945-1975: A Photographic Renewal, Patrimonie Photographique, Paris, FR The History of Japanese Photography, Museum Fine Arts, Houston, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, USA

Selected Group Exhibitions	2000	How You Look at it: Photographs of the Twentieth Century, Sprengel Museum,
	1000	Hannover, DE
	1999	Memories of Twentieth-Century Japan: Ten Photographers' Visions, Tokyo Metropolitan
	1005	Museum of Photography, Tokyo, JP
	1995	After Hiroshima: The Message from Contemporary Art, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, JP
		The History of Contemporary Photography: The Documenting and Creative Eye,
		Mitsukoshi, Tokyo; Nabio Art Museum, Osaka, JP
		The Half-Life of Awareness: Photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Tokyo
		Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, JP
	1994	Scream Against the Sky: Japanese Art After 1945, Yokohama Museum of Art, Kanagawa,
	1774	JP; Guggenheim Museum Soho, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San
		Francisco, USA
		Neo-DaDa Exhibition, Fukuoka City Art Museum, Fukuoka, JP
	1993	Modern Japanese Art, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, JP
	1775	Photographs from the Real World, Lillehammer Bys Malerisamlung, NO; Bergen
		Kunstforening Museum, NO; Copenhagen Photography Museum, Copenhagen, DE
	1992	More Than One Photography, Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
	1991	The Toppan Collection, International Center of Photography, New York, USA
		Innovation in Japanese Photography in the 1960s, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of
		Photography, Tokyo, JP
	1990	The Past and Present of Photography, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; National
		Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, JP
		Photographs of the 1940s and 1950s, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
	1989	Eleven Photographers in Japan 1965-75: Has Japanese Photography Been Changed?,
		Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art, Yamaguchi, JP
		Photography Until Now, Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Cleveland Museum of
		Art, Cleveland, USA
		150 Years of Photography, Konica Plaza, Tokyo, JP
		Japanese Photography, Museum Voor Fotographie, Chaleroi, BE
	1986	Avant-Garde Art, Japan: 1910-1970, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, FR
	1985	Paris, New York, Tokyo, Tsukuba Photography Museum, Miyagi Prefectural Art Museum,
		Miyagi, JP
		The Incredible Image: Photographs of War, 1846 to the Present, Grey Art Gallery and
		Study Center, New York University, New York, USA; Institute for the Arts, Rice
		Museum, Houston, Texas, USA; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., USA

Selected Group Exhibitions	1985	<i>Black Sun: The Eyes of Four</i> , Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK; Serpentine Gallery, London, UK; Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA; University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, USA; Japan House Gallery, New York, USA; Museum of Contemporary Art, 6 Los Angeles, USA; Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland, USA
	1982	Twentieth-Century Photography from the New York Museum of Modern Art, Seibu Art Museum, Tokyo, JP
	1979	Japan: A Self- Portrait, International Center of Photography, New York, USA
	1976	New Photography from Japan, Kulturhausder Stadt, Graz, AT
	1975	The History of Modern Japanese Photography, Seibu Art Museum, Tokyo, JP
	1974	New Japanese Photography, Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Denver Art Museum, Colorado, USA; Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri, USA;
		Minneapolis Institute of the Arts, Minneapolis, USA; Winnipeg Art Gallery, Manitoba, CA; Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign, Illinois, USA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, USA; Seattle Art Museum, Washington, USA; Portland Art Museum, Oregon, USA
	1963	Contemporary Photography Exhibition 1961-62, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, JP
	1962	Non, Matsuya, Tokyo, Japan 1957,'58,'59 Eyes of Ten, Konishiroku Photo Gallery, Tokyo, JP
	1956	Five Photojournalists, Matsushima Gallery Tokyo, JP
A 1	2005	
Awards	2005	The Photographic Society of Japan Distinguished Contributions Award
	1995	The Medal with Purple Ribbon from the Japanese government
	1976 1976	The Minister of Education, Science and Culture's Art Encouragement Prize The Mainichi Art Award
	1970 1961	The Japan Photo Critics Association Artist Award
	1901	The Japan Photo Critics Association Newcomer's Award
	1700	The Japan Thoto Critics Association Newconier's Award

Permanent Installations,	Art Institute of Chicago, USA		
Museum and	Harvard Art Museums, USA		
Public collections	Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum, JP		
	National Gallery of Art, USA		
	Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, JP		
	Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA		
	San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, USA		
	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA		
	The Museum of Modern Art, USA		
	The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, JP		
	Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, JP		
Selected Bibliography	- The Pencil of the Sun: New Edition, Tokyo: Akaaka Art Publishing Inc., 2015		
	- Chewing Gum and Chocolate: Photographs and texts by Shomei Tomatsu. Leo Rubinfien		
	and John Junkerman, New York: Aperture, 2014.		
	- Tokyo Mandala: The World of Shomei Tomatsu, Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2007.		
	- Aichi Mandala: The Early works of Shomei Tomatsu. Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art and Chunichi Shinbun, 2006.		
	- Nagasaki mandara: Tomatsu Shomei no me 1961 Nagasaki: Nagasaki Shinbunsha, 2005.		
	- Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation. Leo Rubinfen, Sandra S. Phillips, John W Dower,		
	Preface by Daido Moriyama. San Francisco Museum of Art / Yale University Press, 2004.		
	- Shomei Tomatsu (Phaidon Tomatsu 55s) Ian Jeffereys. London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2011.		
	<ul> <li>Tomastu Shomei: Nagasaki Mandara, Nagasaki: Nagasaki Prefectrural Museum, 2000.</li> <li>Tomatsu Shomei 1951- 60, Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2000.</li> </ul>		
	- Traces: 50 years of Tomatsu's works, Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of		
	Photography, Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, 1999.		
	- Tomatsu Shomei. Nihon no Shashinka 30, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999.		
	- Ueno Koshi, Shashinka: Tomatsu Shomei (Shomei Tomatsu, Photographer). Tokyo: Seidosha, 1999.		
	- Visions of Japan: Tomatsu Shomei, Kyoto: Korinsha, 1998.		
	- Toki no Shimajima (Island of Time). With text by Ryuta Imafuku. Tokyo: Iwatani Shiten, 1998.		
	- Shomei Tomatsui Interface, Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, 1996.		

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