



Berlin 8.3.2012
Pressemitteilung

Kunstabibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Museum für Fotografie

Jebensstr. 2, 10623 Berlin-Charlottenburg
Öffnungszeiten der Ausstellung: Di – So 10 – 18 Uhr, Do 10 – 22 Uhr

Metamorphosis of Japan after the War. Photography 1945–1964
Die Metamorphose Japans nach dem Krieg. Fotografie 1945–1964

An exhibition of the Japan Foundation in collaboration with the Art Library
kindly supported by the Japanese-German Center Berlin

Opening: Do 8. März 2012, 19 Uhr, EG, Foyer

Speakers

Moritz Wullen

Direktor der Kunstabibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Tokiko Kiyota

Frau Kiyota ist Mitglied des Direktoriums The Japan Foundation Köln

Miyoshi Mari

Gesandte der Botschaft von Japan in Berlin

Ludger Derenthal

Leiter der Sammlung Fotografie, Kunstabibliothek – Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin

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On August 15th, 1945 the Pacific War came to an end and with it fourteen years of bombings, of deprivation and of great sacrifice for the Japanese people. The collapse of Japanese militaristic rule and the arrival of the US occupation forces thrust the nation into a new and uncertain era. It was in this context that photography took on a central role in the nation's rediscovery of self and it soon became a vital contributor to Japanese society in the immediate postwar years. *Metamorphosis of Japan after the War. Photography 1945 - 1964* reveals the changing face of life in Japan from the end of the Pacific War in 1945 to the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964 through photographs by 11 of Japan's leading post-war photographers. By observing the role of photography in the evolution of post-war Japan, this exhibition shows how photography was able to play a crucial role in the search for the nation's new identity. The works of these 11 photographers are an extraordinary document of the birth of a new Japan and of a new photographic generation whose dynamism and creativity laid the foundations for modern Japanese photography. The exhibition is divided into 3 thematic sections based around the major periods of the postwar years:

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The aftermath of war

With the end of the war magazines and newspapers flourished as years of censorship gave way to an editorial boom. Publications that had been banned during the war resurfaced just as new ones went to press for the first time. Improvements in printing techniques also allowed the mass production and distribution of publications containing photographic reproductions. Photographs played a central role in this information boom, as people sought objectivity in the place of the military propaganda that they had been subjected to for several years. People turned to photography to find the 'truth' that they sought. This photographic explosion brought about a profound reflection on the nature of the medium and on its role in society. The public's demand for objectivity led to the emergence of a powerful social realism movement in the immediate post-war years. The atrocities of the war and the massive physical destruction of the country led photographers to adopt a direct approach and to focus on bearing witness and documenting what they saw around them. Photographers abandoned pictorialism and the propaganda techniques of the wartime years to immerse themselves in reality. Of those photographers who had already been active in the pre-war years including Domon Ken, Hamaya Hiroshi, Kimura Ihee and Hayashi Tadahiko, Domon became the leading proponent of the photo-realism movement. He advocated "the pure snapshot, absolutely unstaged" and urged photographers to "pay attention to the screaming voice of the subject and simply operate the camera exactly according to its indications". As a regular contributor to *Camera* magazine, he became very active in the world of amateur photography and encouraged camera club members to follow this realist path.

Tradition versus modernity

Despite its predominance in the immediate post-war years, the social realist movement was not to last. It captured a specific moment in time when the nation needed to take stock of the Pacific War and of its consequences. Photographers increasingly began to view the movement as too rigid and heavily politicised. Hamaya for instance chose to break away and adopted a new approach, both in terms of style and subject, when he began his work on the coast of the Sea of Japan, leading to the series *Yukiguni* (Snow country) and *Ura Nihon* (Japan's Back Coast). In these series Hamaya displayed a more humanist approach than seen in social realism and chose to focus instead on a timeless aspect of Japanese rural society, rather than on the social issues linked directly to the immediate post-war. By the mid 1950s many photographers were turning away from documenting the destruction of the war to focus on the stark contrast between 'traditional' Japan and the modernisation of Japanese society associated with the American occupation. The hardships of the 1940s were rapidly replaced with rapid industrialisation and economic growth as Japan was modernised. These changes had a deep impact as Japan's complex social structures were thrown into upheaval with the country's economic transformation. Photographers focused not only on capturing the emergence of this new economic and social paradigm in Japan's cities, but also sought to document those areas of Japan which were less affected by modernisation and offered a window onto the country's past.

A new Japan

In addition during the second half of the 1950s a new generation of photographers was coming of age. They had grown up during the war but were only beginning to find their photographic eye during the post-war

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years. From this generation, a new photographic approach referred to as 'subjective documentary' was born. In 1959, the most innovative photographers of the time founded the agency Vivo which, despite its short lifespan, was to become a key contributor to the evolution of Japanese photography. With photographers such as Narahara Ikko, Tomatsu Shomei, Kawada Kikuji or Hosoe Eikoh, Vivo put forward the idea that personal experience and interpretation were essential elements in the value of a photographic image. These photographers developed a particular sensibility influenced by 'traditional' Japan as well as by the turbulence of post-war reconstruction and the explosion of economic growth. Their photographic eye turned both to the past, to the Japan of their childhood that they saw disappearing, and to the future and the ever-increasing modernisation that was transforming Japanese society. Over 10 years after the atomic bombings, this new generation of photographers also began to engage with the legacy of these events and their future significance, both for Japan and for all of humanity. The series that emerged including Kawada's *Chizu* (The Map), Hosoe's *Kamaitachi* and Tomatsu's *Nagasaki 11:02*, are amongst some of the most powerful statements in twentieth century photography.

Author: Marc Feustel

Marc Feustel is photography researcher in Paris. He curated the "Japan: A Self Portrait" exhibition that was the archetype for the current exhibition, in which he also cooperated.

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