

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of relations between Japan and Italy

KEN DOMON

Master of Japanese Realism

Museo dell'Ara Pacis

27 May – 18 September 2016

For the first time ever outside Japan, an exhibition of work by **Ken Domon** (1909–90), recognized as a master of realism and one of the most important figures in the history of modern Japanese photography, is being held in Rome at the Museo dell'Ara Pacis.

It features about **150 photographs** taken in black and white as well as colour between the 1920s and the 1970s, which illustrate the author's **path towards social realism**. From the first shots of the period before and during World War II, which display a vision linked to photojournalism and propaganda, through photography of the social sphere, the exhibit **follows Ken Domon's production** up to the crucial work documenting the tragedy of Hiroshima, which the photographer undertook as though in response to a call and a humanitarian duty.

Promoted by **Roma Capitale – Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali** with the support of the **Bunkacho** (Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs) and the **Japan Foundation**, and organized by **MondoMostre Skira** with **Zètema Progetto Cultura**, the event is curated by **Prof. Rossella Menegazzo**, lecturer on the history of East Asian art at Milan University, and **Takeshi Fujimori**, artistic director of the **Ken Domon Museum of Photography**. The exhibition is held in collaboration with the Ken Domon Museum of Photography in Sakata and the **city of Sakata** under the sponsorship of **Nikon**, the make always connected with the master's work, and the technical sponsorship of **Fujifilm**, which is responsible for printing the photos.

Regarded as an **absolute master of Japanese photography** and initiator of the realistic movement, Ken Domon marked a pivotal chapter in the history of post-war Japanese photography, laying the foundations for contemporary photographic production and remaining a constant point of reference for Japanese enthusiasts. According to Domon, "The fundamental gift of quality work lies in the direct connection between the camera and the subject." The master's aim was indeed always to capture a wholly realistic image devoid of drama. Against the background of the renewed spirit of the post-war period, he focused on society in general and everyday life: "I am immersed in the social reality of today but at the same time in the classical culture and traditions of Nara and Kyoto. This twofold

involvement has the common denominator of a search for the point at which the two realities are linked to the destinies of people, the anger, sorrow and joy of the Japanese people."

The **realistic photograph**, described as "an absolutely non-dramatic snapshot", therefore plays the leading part in an exhibition thematically laid out to illustrate the master's vast production, transversally encompassing the whole of Japanese culture. From the early work of a photojournalistic nature and at the service of pre-war **propaganda** and the cultural promotion of Japan overseas (**Photojournalism and Pre-War Propaganda; The Post-War Period: Towards Social Realism**) to a focus on recording everyday life and the city's transformation and westernization with ever-greater attention to social themes. His **social realism** is expressed in particular through two series emblematic of this period, namely *Hiroshima* (1958), regarded by the Nobel laureate Kenzaburō Ōe as the first great modern work of Japan, and *The Children of Chikuhō*, a series on poverty in the mining villages of southern Japan with a broad range of lively portraits of children encountered in the streets. This is followed by **Portraits**, comprising photographs of famous figures in the worlds of art, literature, culture and science such as Yukio Mishima, Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, Tarō Okamoto and Yusaku Kamekura. The final section is devoted to his most important series, ***Pilgrimage to Ancient Temples***, photographs of Buddhist sculptures, buildings and treasures as well as views of landscapes taken on journeys throughout Japan in search of the beauty of the sacred places of the past. Landscapes that conjure up the fascination of cultural diversity and the exotic.

Ken Domon's work can be described as **autobiographical**, documentation that is private rather social, always selected on personal criteria that transform the shot into a moment of dialogue with the subject. His vision of the subject, be it a landscape, a sculpture, a person or an object, is a vehicle of the universal beauty seen through the lens, which does not omit the physical characteristics of the form captured.

A multifaceted figure whose photography embraces the whole of Japanese culture before and after the war, Ken Domon is also the first photographer to have a **personal museum** devoted entirely to his vast work in his hometown of Sakata, inaugurated in 2003. Together with friends and other leading figures in the Japanese world of art, he initiated the cultural renewal that enabled Japan to emerge definitively from the defeat in war and led to the contemporary aesthetic that is still a point of reference for the entire world.

The show is part of a **vast programme of events** that will represent the cultural and technological world of Japan in Italy **all through 2016**: major exhibitions of art, productions from the great tradition of Noh and puppet theatre (*bunraku*), concerts, performances of modern and traditional dance, film festivals, exhibits of architecture, design, comics, literature, sport and so much else. The occasion is the celebration of the **150th anniversary** of the **first treaty of friendship and trade between Italy and Japan**, signed on 25 August 1866, which initiated diplomatic relations between the two countries.

2016 will also offer an opportunity to **develop cultural, economic, political and social exchange** between Italy and Japan. A rich programme of events and celebrations selected in Italy by the committee for the 150th anniversary of relations between Japan and Italy with the precious collaboration of many public and private bodies, including the Japanese Embassy in Italy, the General Consulate of Japan in Milan, the Japanese Institute of Culture in Rome, MondoMostre Skira, Milan University and many others. As the ambassador Kazuyoshi Umemoto observes, "Let us hope that initiatives of exchange encompassing spheres as far apart as politics, the economy, culture, science and technology, tourism and education will foster further progress in the mutual understanding between the two countries and their citizens, and that this will provide an opportunity to open up new horizons for our bilateral relations. The relations between two countries are ultimately nothing other than relations between human beings."

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INFO SHEET

<i>Exhibition</i>	Domon Ken
<i>Venue</i>	Museo dell'Ara Pacis Lungotevere in Augusta, Rome
<i>Opening hours</i>	27 May – 18 September 2016 Every day from 9.30 to 19.30 (no tickets sold during the last hour)
<i>Info</i>	060608 (every day, 9.00–21.00) www.arapacis.it, www.museiincomuneroma.it Twitter: @museiincomune
<i>Charges</i>	Full price € 13; reduced € 11 (exhibition + Museo dell'Ara Pacis) Free admission for all categories specified under current regulations
<i>Promoter</i>	Roma Capitale – Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali
<i>Organizer</i>	MondoMostre Skira with Zètema Progetto Cultura
<i>Sponsor</i>	Nikon
<i>Technical sponsor</i>	Fujifilm
<i>Media Partner</i>	Il Messaggero