Maternal Deities: Yasuo Higa Exhibition

January 23-May 8, 2011

Kudaka Island, Fubawaku, 1975
INTRODUCTION

Yasuo Higa is not only one of the most renowned photographers in Okinawa, but he is also famous for his significant contribution to the field of ethnography. After the B-52 crash at the Kadena Air Base in 1968, Higa resigned from his job as policeman and decided to become a photographer. He is a photographer who symbolizes Okinawa in a turbulent era when events such as the Vietnam War and the “Restoration” to Japan stirred the region.

Shocked by a religious ritual in Miyako Island which he encountered during his assignment work, Higa began to be intrigued by the old strata of Okinawan culture. He eventually produced an enormous amount of documents about the Ryukyu Islands, including Kudaka Island, which has been called the “Island of Deities,” and other islands such as the Yaeyama Islands in the south and the Amami Islands in the north. Until his death in 2000, Higa continued to search for the essence of spiritual culture in the Ryukyu Islands, by photographing rituals which were then becoming obsolete and the dignified women (the mothers) who conducted them. Captured in his photographs is a kind of rituals of the goddess worship and the maternal principle, which is unusual even from a global perspective, and some of the rituals are forbidden to men. This exhibition presents 162 photographs from his photography book *Haha tachi no kami (Maternal Deities)* which Higa edited by himself but never published. Many of the rituals, which were founded on nature and ancestor worship and conducted by each village, have already been transformed and some of them are now discontinued. However, his photographs help to capture and preserve the fertile world of the deities of the Ryukyu Islands.

This exhibition is a touring version of *Maternal Deities* organized by the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, held from November 2, 2010 through January 10, 2011.

“People believe in the immortality of the souls, believing that the place where the souls come back, a place of rebirth, exists in *nirâ harâ* far out at sea, and they ask the maternal deities to return to the sanctuary of the island so they can receive their protective powers. These ‘maternal deities’ are associated with the attributes of motherhood, such as giving birth, raising, and protecting.’ That is, they are ‘tender deities’ who are spontaneous, natural, and characterized by an affection for life. . . This culture of maternal principle will be an important clue to reflect on the contemporary society in which the paternal principle continues to advance, exposing a danger of catastrophe.”

* A synonym for *nirai kanai* Another world which is believed to exist far out at sea and where deities live.

--- Yasuo Higa, *Nihonjin no tamashii no genkô: okinawa kudakajima* (Ancestral Home of the Japanese Soul: Kudaka Island in Okinawa)
PROFILE

Yasuo Higa. Born in the Philippines in 1938. After WWII ended, moved to Okinawa. After graduating from Koza High School in 1958, assigned to the Kadena Police Department. First began to use a camera as a photographer for the crime laboratory investigation section. Retired from the job after the B-52 crush incident in 1968. Studied at Tokyo Shashin Sennon Gakkô and held a photography exhibition Umajima Okinawa (Okinawa: Land of my Birth) on his graduation in 1971. In 1974, joined the ethnographer Ken’ ichi Tanigawa’s research expedition as a field photographer and was shocked by a ritual called nyagan in Miyako Island. In 1975, After meeting a shaman named Shizu Nishime, visited Kudaka Island more than one hundred times, documenting rituals throughout the year. In 1976, awarded the Taiyo Award for Onna kami matsuri (Women, Gods, Festivals). In 1993, awarded the Annual Award of the Photographic Society of Japan, the Publishing Culture Award of the Okinawa Times, and other prizes for the series Kamigami no kosô (Ancient Strata of Gods). Died in 2000. In 2001, a retrospective exhibition on Higa entitled Hikari to kaze to kamigami no sekai (A World of Light, Wind and the gods) was held at the Naaha Civic Gallery. His books include Kamigami no shima: Okinawa kudakajima no matsuri (Isle of the gods: Festivals of Kudaka Island in Okinawa) (co-written by Ken’ ichi Tanigawa, Heibonsha, 1979), Ryoukusu no onnatachi no matsuri (Ryukyu Arc: Women’s Festival) (co-written by Ken’ ichi Tanigawa, Asahi Shimbunsha, 1980), Nihon no suiki (7) okinawa no seisuru shima (Sanctuaries of Japan Vol.7: The Sacred Islands of Okinawa) (co-written by Motoo Wakugami, Kôsei Shuppansha, 1982), Umajima okinawa: isle of my birth: from american rule to japanese rule (Niraisha, 1992), Kamigami no kosi (Ancient Strata of Gods) (12 volumes, Niraisha, 1989-1993), and Nihonjin no tamashii no genkyô: okinawa kudaka island (Ancestral Home of the Japanese Soul: Kudaka Island in Okinawa) (Shueisha, 2000).
Maternal Deities: Yasuo Higa Exhibition
January 23-May 8, 2011

Organized by: IZU PHOTO MUSEUM, Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, Okinawa
Prefectural Board of Education
In cooperation with: Executive Committee of Yasuo Higa Exhibition

<Special Events>
1) January 23, 2011 (Sunday)
Panel Discussion: Toyomitsu Higa, photographer, Ben Takara, poet, Naoki Onaga,
Deputy Director of the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum, and Masashi Kohara,
Researcher at the IZU PHOTO MUSEUM

2) March 27, 2011 (Sunday)
Conversation: Isao Nakazato, critic, and Masashi Kohara

3) April 10, 2011 (Sunday)
Talk: Toshimaro Ama, historian of religion, Professor Emeritus at Meiji Gakuin University

*Gallery talks by the curator are scheduled on weekends.

<Hours>
January 10:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
February and March  10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
April to August  10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
September and October  10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
November and December  10:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Last entry to the museum is thirty minutes before closing time.
The museum is closed on Wednesdays (or the following day when Wednesday falls on a holiday),
year-end and new year holidays.

<Admission>
Adults: ¥800
High school and college students: ¥400
Elementary and junior high school students may enter the museum free of charge.
Group Admission: For groups of twenty or more, adult admission is ¥700 and student admission is ¥300.

<For information contact>
IZU PHOTO MUSEUM
TEL +81(0) 55–989–8780    FAX +81(0) 55–989–8783

Telephone hours are the same as museum hours. Closed on Wednesdays (or the following day if
Wednesday falls on a holiday).
We have prepared visual materials below (digital data only). Please fill out and fax the form if you would like to use the materials. Note: Please check the visual materials to be used.

A) Kudaka Island, Fubawaku, 1975
B) Miyako Island, Karimata, Uyan, 1989
C) Iriomote Island, Sonai, Shitsu, 1974
D) Iriu Island, Imorigai, 1995
E) Kudaka Island, Fubo Utaki, Fubawaku, 1975
F) Kudaka Island, Kuba tree, Jan. 1978

Title of media ____________________________________________________________

Featured edition number ___________________________ Date of publication (YYYY/MM/DD) ___________________________

Company Name __________________________________________________________
Contact person __________________________________________________________

TEL __________________________________________________________ FAX __________________________________________________________

E-MAIL __________________________________________________________

Address (including ZIP) __________________________________________________

Date of Delivery: Materials to be delivered by (YYYY/MM/DD) __________________________

FAX. 055-989-8783

347-1 Higashino Clematis no Oka (Suruga-daira), Nagaizumi-cho, Shizuoka Japan 411-0931
IZU PHOTO MUSEUM Direct inquiries to Press: Nagahara, Okuyama
TEL. 055-989-8780