

## Shomei Tomatsu – *Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed (Okinawa Diary)*

Shōmei Tomatsu’s 『朱もどろの華—沖繩日記』 (*Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed – Okinawa Diary*) is one of the key photobooks from his long, immersive engagement with Okinawa. Published in 1976 by Sanseidō, the book combines photographs, diary fragments, personal notes, and reflective essays created during the early to mid-1970s, when Tomatsu was living between various islands in the Ryukyu archipelago. It stands today as one of his most intimate records of Okinawa.

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### Publication Details

- **Title:** 朱もどろの華—沖繩日記
- **English title:** *Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed – Okinawa Diary*
- **Photographer / Author:** Shomei Tomatsu (東松照明)
- **Publisher:** Sanseidō (三省堂)
- **Year:** 1976
- **Format:** Hardback, approx. 153 × 200 mm
- **Length:** ~238–240 pages
- **Contents:** 50+ black-and-white photographs accompanied by extensive written text

The book blends Tomatsu’s characteristic visual language—high contrast, texture, dramatic light—with his deeply personal writing. It reads as both a photobook and a journal.

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## Tomatsu and His Okinawa Years

Tomatsu first visited Okinawa in 1969 while the islands were still under U.S. occupation. What began as an assignment evolved into a lifelong relationship with the region. He returned repeatedly, documenting everything from military presence to daily life, rituals, landscapes, and the quiet intensity of island weather.

After the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japan, Tomatsu spent long stretches living on the islands, including Naha, Miyako, and Hateruma. This period produced some of his most poetic and contemplative work. Photobooks like *The Pencil of the Sun* (1975) and *Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed* (1976) mark a shift in his style—from direct postwar critique toward a slower, more lyrical approach to seeing.

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### **About *Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed***

This book focuses on one of Okinawa's symbolic natural elements: **akamo-doro**, a reddish seaweed that appears in Tomatsu's writing as a metaphor for endurance, memory, and the regenerative power of nature. The seaweed becomes an emotional thread running through the book, linking the physical coastline with the lived experiences of the people who inhabit it.

The images range from quiet coastal scenes to portraits of local residents, from weathered surfaces to delicate gestures. Tomatsu's sense of place is unmistakable—humid air, corroded metal, saltwater glare, shadows on limestone, and the calm after storms. Every photograph feels rooted in long observation.

The diary texts add another dimension. They include reflections on seasons, travel between islands, the passage of time, and subtle details of everyday life. The writing is spare but evocative, mirroring the rhythm of the photographs.

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## Why the Book Matters

*Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed* holds a special place in Tomatsu's body of work because:

- It reveals **a personal, lived-in Okinawa**, not a detached documentary view.
- It unites image and text in a way few photobooks of the era attempted.
- It marks **a turning point** in Tomatsu's style—toward introspection, softness, and patient seeing.
- It helps complete the arc of his Okinawa trilogy:
  - *Okinawa, Okinawa, Okinawa* (1969)
  - *The Pencil of the Sun* (1975)
  - *Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed* (1976)

Together, these books form one of the most important photographic meditations on place, memory, and history in postwar Japanese photography.

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## Full Photobook Flip-Through

Below is the complete flip-through of *Shomei Tomatsu – Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed (Okinawa Diary)*.

The goal is simple: to let the book speak for itself.

*(Embed your YouTube video here.)*

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## Closing Thoughts

Photobooks often become vessels for the spirit of a place. In *Flowers of Vermilion Seaweed*, Tomatsu captures Okinawa with a kind of reverence—neither romanticized nor critical, but deeply attentive. The seaweed of the title becomes a

symbol of what endures: color, memory, resilience, and the slow movement of time.

For anyone interested in Japanese photography, Okinawan history, or the evolution of Tomatsu's vision, this book remains essential.