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Kentaro Kumon *Nemurushima* *The Sleeping Island*

Texts by Matthias Harder, Kentaro Kumon
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Visually stunning portrait of a nearly abandoned Japanese island

Teshima is one of the 28 islands of the Shiwaku Islands in Japan. In former times the island has been famous for its navy, and the island's shipbuilding and ship handling skills were valued and played a major role in maritime distribution. Today, there are only a dozen or so islanders living on Teshima. The terraced fields that once covered the mountains have been swallowed up by bamboo forest, including the stone walls that had been left. The island's last fisherman passed away at the end of last year, and his fishing boat remains tied up in the harbor, swaying in the waves. Listening to the island's quiet sleep without disturbing it will lead us to face the present situation of Japan as an island nation.

From the essay by **Matthias Harder**:

Japan officially comprises more than 6,800 islands, most of them very small; only about 400 are inhabited. Local farmers and fishermen supply the country with food from the land and the sea, and the volume of fish caught is one of the world's highest. It is a technologically advanced nation, despite having a rapidly aging population. Yet little of this is visible in award-winning photographer Kentaro Kumon's Nemurushima series of photographs taken on the remote, tiny island of Teshima, famous centuries ago for shipbuilding and shiphandling. Today, only a few scattered, albeit quite stately, houses bear witness to that past.

(...)

In the opening images of this book, we see a modern ferry sailing away from Teshima in the rain. The shot has the air of an emotional farewell scene, yet for the photographer and us viewers, this is in fact the start of an adventure, a new exploration of unfamiliar terrain in a self-contained world unknown to us and through which we can learn a lot about Kumon's home country.

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The photographer takes us on a tour of the island, his camera focused, in contrast to earlier work, more frequently on the island's interior than on the liminality of its coastline; we gaze over roofs in the morning light and witness rusty gates, crumbling farmsteads, and cars overgrown with weeds, alone in Kumon's company until eventually we encounter the first person in the series, a man crossing a small bridge with the archipelago as stunning backdrop.

Japanese photographer **Kentaro Kumon** (b.1981) focuses on reportage and portraiture in a wide range of fields, including magazines, books, and advertising. He takes a special interest in landscapes shaped by human activity. Recent works include *Tagayasu Hito* (Cultivators), photographs of agricultural landscapes across Japan; *Koyomi-gawa*, which explores the relationship between people and rivers; and *Hikari no Chikei* (Terrain of Light), featuring the diverse landscapes, cultures, and lifestyles on the peninsulas of Japan. In 2012, he was awarded the Photographic Society of Japan's Newcomer's Award for *Goma no Yohinten* (The Haberdashery of Goma).

www.k-kumon.net

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