



Humanity captured with humility

■ PHOTOGRAPHY

THE ISLAND OF THE ANCIENTS

Mayu Kanamori, Customs House, Circular Quay
 Until September 28

Reviewed by Robert McFarlane

THE Japanese-Australian photographer Mayu Kanamori performs the simplest act of witness in these colour photographs of the women and men of Sardinia, who are among the longest-lived people in the world. Showing little attempt to enshrine her subjects with evidence of their great age, her quiet, naturally observed moments are essentially a spontaneous dialogue with her subjects, most of them women.

Looking at Kanamori's gentle observations, it is hard to resist this photographer's approach to her subjects. In pictures such as that of Raffaella Monne's 109th birthday party, the photographer sees her subjects as symbols of renewal, surrounded (as with Mrs

Monne) by the abundance of a large family.

In this selection, whose able curator is ARTHRE's Sandy Edwards, we see great age as a daily reality. Kanamori provides visual evidence that the ancients of Sardinia flourish primarily because of caring family and friends. Humour and affection are everywhere, from a quiet kiss between 100-year-old Efisio Piras and his 98-year-old wife Silvia, to the alert, smiling centenarian Rita Lobina.

Kanamori reveals a society in which age is clearly revered and nourished. There is no sign of centenarians receiving institutional care, and her subjects' good humour remains a constant.

Kanamori captures something else in her pictures which I found quite touching. Perhaps with the clarity of an outsider, she is able to see evidence of her subjects' youth, despite their age. In her simple, veiled portrait of 100-year-old Gonaria Soro, Kanamori reveals much more than a smiling woman, untouched by senility. There is

just enough residual girliness in Soro's smiling profile to glimpse her distant youth.

Kanamori demonstrates a splendid humility in these pictures, avoiding any superficial ambition to make "great photographs" of her ancient subjects. Instead she is content to allow her camera to receive subtle, natural images from her centenarians, recording them with grace and accuracy.

The photographs from *The Island Of The Ancients* are published in a book of the same name by the *Herald* writer Ben Hills (Murdoch Books 2008).



Raffaella Monne's 109th birthday party (detail). Photo: Mayu Kanamori