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Tsuma wa kokuhaku suru (A wife confesses), Masumura, Yasuzo, 1961

Hanaoka Seishu no tsuma (The wife of Seishu Hanaoka), Masumura,
Yasuzo, 1967

Danryû (Warm current), Masumura, Yasuzo, 1957

Senbazuru (Thousand cranes), Masumura, Yasuzo, 1969

Hyoheki (The precipice), Masumura, Yasuzo, 1958



Scene from Kisses

YASUZO MASUMURA RETROSPECTIVE

April 18-June 27, 1997



Director Yasuzo Masumura (1924-1986) is little known outside Japan. This first ever U.S. retrospective of 15 of his films is an effort to remedy that undeserved neglect.

After studying film at Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, Masumura made his first film in 1957; he made his last in 1982. All are marked by keen observations of human nature, rapid-fire dialogue, lack of sentimentality and quick pacing. In his 57 movies, two themes emerge again and again: his condemnation of the conformist nature of Japanese culture and of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. In the 1950s, studying film in Rome was an unusual choice for a Japanese filmmaker, and Masumura's lifelong commitment to individualism, often seen as a Western value, may have sprung from this period in his youth.

To express his admiration for individualism, Masumura often chose as the heroines of his films single-minded, lustful women struggling to escape societal restrictions. He believed it necessary to fully understand sex and violence in order to understand human nature. As a result, many of his movies contain graphic sexuality and violence.

Masumura was an intellectual who wrote many essays on cinema and was conscious of his place in cinema history. He is known for his film adaptation of books and stories by Yasunari Kawabata, Junichiro Tanizaki, Kenzaburo Oe and other literary stars. At the same time, he was a versatile, commercially successful filmmaker who launched a number of popular series at Daiei Studio. His films deserve international attention both for their cinematic flair and iconoclastic outlook.

Friday, April 18 6:30 pm

Kisses (Kuchizuke)

Masumura was hailed by critics as a major new talent upon the release of *Kisses*, his first film. It tells the story of a young man and woman who meet and fall in love while visiting their fathers in prison. Masumura rejected the sentimentalism then pervasive in Japanese cinema and instead emphasized the couple's determination to overcome their obstacles. Today, the film is considered a precursor of the Japanese New Wave.

1957, 74 min., b&w, 35mm. Screenplay by Kazuo Funahashi, based on a story by Matsutaro Kawaguchi. With Hiroshi Kawaguchi, Hitomi Nozoe, Masuko Mimasu, Eitaro Ozawa. **New York premiere.**

Friday, April 25 6:30 pm

Warm Current (Danryu)

In this classic melodrama, a working-class nurse competes with the daughter of the hospital's chief executive for the love of a hospital administrator. Masumura champions the working class in his study of the gutsy heroine. The novel was previously adapted for the screen by Kozaburo Yoshimura in 1939.

1957, 94 min., color, 35mm. Screenplay by Yoshio Shirasaka, based on the novel by Fumio Kishida. With Jun Negishi, Hitomi Nozoe, Sachiko Hidari, Toranosuke Ogawa.

Friday, May 2 6:30 pm

The Precipice (Hyoheki)

Popular movie star Fujiko Yamamoto plays a married woman loved by two young men. One of the men is killed while the pair is mountain climbing, and the survivor is blamed for his rival's death. This drama examines the complexities of human relations as the woman tries to find happiness with the surviving lover despite societal censure.

1958, 97 min., color, 16mm. Screenplay by Kaneto Shindo, based on the novel by Yasushi Inoue. With Fujiko Yamamoto, Kenji Sugawara, Hitomi Nozoe, Keizo Kawasaki, Ken Uehara. **New York premiere.**

Friday, May 9 6:30 pm

Built-Up
a.k.a. Giants and Toys
(Kyojin to gangu)

In this story about the fierce competition among advertising men who sell sweets, Masumura caricatures capitalism, consumerism and people's fear of standing up to the system. To underscore the pace of corporate life, Masumura directed the actors to deliver their lines at rapid-fire speed "like bullets."

1958, 96 min., color, 35mm. Screenplay by Yoshio Shirasaka based on the novel by Ken Kaiko. With Hiroshi Kawaguchi, Hitomi Nozoe, Yunosuke Ito, Hideo Takamatsu.

A False Student
(Nise daigakusei)

Masumura adapts Kenzaburo Oe's novel about a young man who pretends to be a student and gets caught up in the maelstrom of student protests. He gains the trust of other students but comes under suspicion as a spy when police try to take advantage of his dubious identity to break up the student movement.

1960, 94 min., b&w, 16mm. Screenplay by Yoshio Shirasaka, based on a novel by Kenzaburo Oe. With Ayako Wakao, Jerry Fujio, Eiji Funakoshi, Ichizo Itami. **New York premiere.**

Tuesday, May 20 6:30 pm

The Wife's Confession
(Tsuma wa kokuhaku suru)

Through her love for a young man, Masumura's passionate heroine tries to break out of her socially confining position as the wife of a university professor. When her husband dies in a mountain climbing accident, she is accused of having caused his death in order to save her lover, who was his student.

1961, 91 min., b&w, 35mm. Screenplay by Masato Ide, based on a story by Masaya Maruyama. With Ayako Wakao, Hiroshi Kawaguchi, Jun Negishi, Eitaro Ozawa. **New York premiere.**

Friday, May 23 6:30 pm

A Black Test Car
(Kuro no tesuto kaa)

The cut-throat world of industrial espionage is the subject of this popular thriller in which the young hero competes to sell a new model of sports car. The commercial success of this film led Daiei Studio to launch the "Black" espionage-corruption series. Ultimately, Daiei made 11 "Black" films, three of which Masumura directed.

1962, 95 min., b&w, 16mm. Screenplay by Kazuo Funahashi and Yoshihiro Ishimatsu, based on a story by Toshiyuki Kajiyama. With Jiro Tamiya, Junko Kanou, Eiji Funakoshi, Reiko Shirai. **New York premiere.**

A Super-Express
(Kuro no chotokkyu)

A *Super-Express*, the last installment of the popular "Black" series, is set in the period when Japan's bullet train lines were being laid. A young realtor fights a lone battle against the greedy schemes of a powerful developer.

1964, 96 min., b&w, 35mm. Screenplay by Masumura and Yoshio Shirasaka based on a novel by Toshiyuki Kajiyama. With Jiro Tamiya, Yukiko Fuji, Eiji Funakoshi, Daisuke Kato. **New York premiere.**

The Yasuzo Masumura Retrospective was originally presented by The Japan Foundation in Rome in 1996.

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Acknowledgements: All the titles are shown with permission from Daiei, Co. Ltd. except *Lullaby of the Earth*, which is shown with permission from Kimura Productions. The Japan Foundation, Kawakita Memorial Film Institute and Pacific Film Archives kindly loaned their prints. This series is presented thanks to invaluable collaboration with Tomozo Yano and Marie Suzuki of The Japan Foundation. We would also like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their generous assistance: Kanako Hayashi (Kawakita Memorial Film Institute), Mona Nagai and Jon Shibata (Pacific Film Archive), Yumiko Takahashi (Daiei), Motoyasu Kimura (Kimura Productions), Keiko I. McDonald (University of Pittsburgh), GERALYN HUXLEY and Amy Wilson (Carnegie Museum of Art), James Quandt (Cinematheque Ontario), Dennis Bartok (American Cinematheque), Isao Tsujimoto (The Japan Foundation) and Akira Tochigi.

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Friday, May 30 6:30 pm

Manji

Masumura tackles the taboo subject of lesbianism in his adaptation of Junichiro Tanizaki's erotic novel. The wife of a lawyer experiences a sexual awakening when she falls in love with a young woman. The two women begin a relationship; soon, the lawyer husband and the young woman's male lover become involved.

1964, 91 min., color, 16mm. Screenplay by Kaneto Shindo based on the novel by Junichiro Tanizaki. With Ayako Wakao, Kyoko Kishida. Eiji Funakoshi, Yusuke Kawazu. **New York premiere.**



Scene from Manji

Friday, June 27

Play (Asobi)

After her father is killed in an accident, a teenage working-class girl is about to become a bar hostess to support her mother and ailing sister. She finds true love with a young yakuza. Through their discovery of sex and love, the couple finds courage to face poverty and the conventions of society.

1971, 90 min., 35mm. Screenplay by Masayoshi Imako and Masahiro Ito, based on a novel by Akiyuki Nosaka. With Keiko Sekine, Masaaki Daimon, Asao Uchida, Tokuko Sugiyama. **New York premiere.**

Lullaby of the Earth (Daichi no komoriuta)

In one of only four independent films that Masumura directed in his long career, *Lullaby of the Earth* shows the director returning once again to a favorite preoccupation: though the deck is stacked against her, a spunky young heroine bravely fights severe odds. Teenager Mieko Harada, who plays a poor girl sold into prostitution, won critical acclaim for her performance.

1976, 111 min., 35mm, color. Screenplay by Yoshio Shirasaka based on Kukiko Moto's novel. With Mieko Harada, Yusuke Sato, Natsuko Kahara, Kinuyo Tanaka. **U.S. premiere.**

Tuesday, June 10 6:30 pm

The Wife of Seishu Hanaoka

(Hanaoka Seishu no tsuma)

In the late Edo period, Dr. Seishu Hanaoka conducted the world's first operation with total anesthesia. This film reveals the personal anguish behind the doctor's scientific triumph—the battle between his wife and his mother for his affection. Both women volunteered to be subjects for his medical experiments.

1967, 100 min., b&w, 35mm. Screenplay by Kaneto Shindo based on the novel by Sawako Ariyoshi. With Raizo Ichikawa, Ayako Wakao, Hideko Takamine, Yunosuke Ito.

Friday, June 13 6:30 pm

Vixen (Jotai)

Ruriko Asaoka stars as a tenacious girl living in poverty and fighting to survive. She is raped by the son of a prominent man, a university board director, and demands compensation. When the board director's son-in-law comes to negotiate, she seduces him and embroils him in a scandal over university entrance exams.

1969, 95 min., color, 35mm. Screenplay by Masumura and Ichiro Ikeda. With Ruriko Asaoka, Eiji Okada, Kyoko Kishida, Eiko Azusa. **New York premiere.**

Warehouse (Moju)

A fashion model is kidnapped by a blind sculptor and imprisoned in his studio to serve as an inspiration for his art. The young woman tries to get the sculptor's mother to sympathize, however, to her own surprise, the model ends up siding with her captor. Together, they venture into the realm of extreme carnal desire.

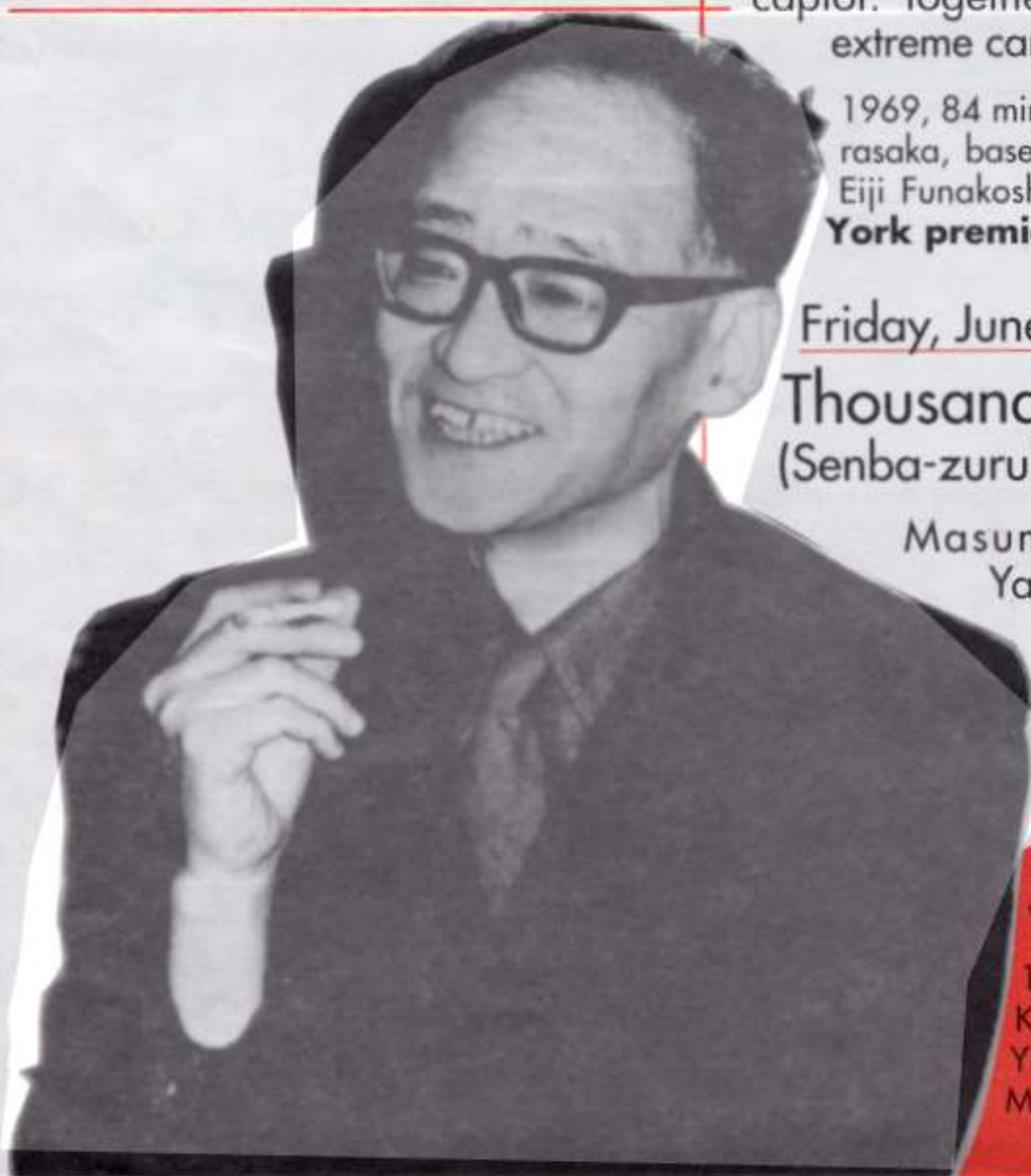
1969, 84 min., color, 35mm. Screenplay by Yoshio Shirasaka, based on the story by Rampo Edogawa. With Eiji Funakoshi, Mako Midori, Noriko Sengoku. **New York premiere.**

Friday, June 20 6:30 pm

Thousand Cranes (Senba-zuru)

Masumura adapted for the screen Yasunari Kawabata's book (it had been previously filmed by Kozaburo Yoshimura in 1953) about the entangled relations of a seductive tea ceremony teacher with the women in his life. He recollects his father's affairs and begins liaisons with some of the same women.

1969, 95 min., color, 16mm. Screenplay by Kaneto Shindo, based on the novel by Yasunari Kawabata. With Ayako Wakao, Machiko Kyo, Mikijiro Hira, Eiko Azusa.



Eiji Okada
Natsuko Kahara
Mieko Kaji

All films are in Japanese with English subtitles. Films from the 1950s and 1960s are somewhat faded. Viewers may be disturbed by sexual and violent content of some of the films; parental discretion is recommended.

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