

Document Citation

Title	The films of Kenji Mizoguchi : Utamaro and his five women
Author(s)	Tom Luddy
Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Utamaro o meguru gonin no onna (Utamaro and his five women), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1946

THURSDAY, APRIL 15

THE FILMS OF KENJI MIZOGUCHI

UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN 7:00, 9:50

The film's subject is the great woodblock printer (1753-1805) who broke with conventional nature subjects to concentrate on portraits of geishas. Yoshikata Yoda, the director's habitual collaborator, suddenly realized, while keeping notes for the screenplay, that he was drawing a portrait not only of Utamaro but of Mizoguchi as well. The completed film stands along with Renoir's *FRENCH CANCAN* as a director's meditation on his art: "Utamaro, as a woodblock printer, is an artisan and not a 'house artist' in the service of a rich samurai. He is a strong, savage man, who controls himself in front of rich men and samurai, but inside is contemptuous of them. He is never humiliated. He detests flattery. He is a proud man, with precise ideas about his work, even if he never exposes them publicly. . . . Utamaro dedicates all his efforts to the painting of women. He wants to seize feminine beauty in eroticism, where it shines with its most striking and mysterious fire. . . . Utamaro is a painter, a popular artist. But this is an objective judgment. Was he aware of it himself? It would be absurd to think he wanted to reveal beauty to the people. He lived quite simply with the people, as one of the people. . . . Utamaro suffused in the feminine. He shortens his life in order to dedicate all his energy to women. But this life he has squandered on them, for them, is restored in his painting. . . . As a real popular artist, he tattooed an "Oiran" (geisha of the first rank). He was drawn by the beauty of her flesh, and his pleasure came from the act of painting on living skin. He didn't think that painting on canvas or paper was a principle to be strictly respected, or that painting on a woman's skin was a contemptible technique, or that it was in bad taste. For him, his painting lived on her, with her: it was a true creation." —translated by Peter Scarlet. Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. Screenplay by Yoshikata Yoda, Kenichiro Hara, based on the play by Seiko Mayama. With Utaemon Ichikawa, Isamu Kosugi, Minnosuke Bando, Kotaro Bando, Kinuyo Tanaka. (1946, 90 mins, 35mm, English titles)
