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## **Moju aka The Blind Beast**

(DAIEI; JAP) scope 84(80)min

This grotesquely fetishistic tale derived from a story by Japan's leading horror writer, Rampo Edogawa, was directed by the father of the Japanese new wave of the sixties. A blind sculptor, Michio (Funakoshi), with help from his mother (Sengoku), kidnaps a young model, Aki (Midori) and locks her up in a room decorated with large blow-ups of various parts of the female anatomy: one wall has nothing but photographs of eyes, one wall has lips, one has breasts, and so on. Gradually, Midori succumbs to the room's weird atmosphere and to the blind sculptor's tactile perversities. Imprisonment in the darkened room causes her to become blind as well, whereupon both enter into a deliriously sado-masochistic relationship which involves biting, whipping, cutting, until, in the escalating tactile frenzy, she agrees to become the 'perfect statue': he takes a meat cleaver and hacks off her arms and legs and reduces her body to a phallic lump. The psychotic Funakoshi then dissolves himself into maternal darkness by committing suicide.

Considered to be one of Masumura's most outrageous pictures and foreshadowing Oshima's *Ai no Corrida* (1976), the film's horror is grounded in the obscene immediacy with which it figures some of cinema's most fundamental fantasies: the image as source of erotic gratification; the fictional world evoked as a darkened, enclosed fantasy box. It exposes the foundation of scopophilia upon the very impossibility of tactile contact with an object of desire, the look substituting for touch, graphically and ironically represented in the film by a sightless couple wallowing in an orgy of touch which somehow never quite reaches what it looks for and the fetishization of the female body which underpins the star image. In fact, after the scene has been set and motifs announced in the opening sequences (Midori responds as Funakoshi caresses a statue she modelled for), the narrative virtually comes to a stop as a repetitiously oneiric logic takes over, replaying with increasing desperation the impossibility of conveying touch through sight. The only element that spoils this otherwise impeccably nightmarish picture is the superfluous dialogue.

*d* Yasuzo Masumura    *p* Masaichi Nagata    *s* Yoshio  
Shirasoka    *c* Setsuo Kobayashi    *lp* Eiji Funakoshi, Mako  
Midori, Noriko Sengoku