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General admission:
\$6 for one film,
\$7.50 for double bills

A Lunatic Cry: Ideas and Passions of Yasuzo Masumura

Screening schedule: Date, time, title, (alternate title, year of release)
All films directed by yasuzo Masumura and produced in Japan.

Sunday, March 7

5:30 pm **Kisses** (*Kuchizuke*, 1957)

7:00 pm: **Blue Sky Maiden** West Coast Premiere! (*Aozora musume*, 1957)

Sunday, March 14 — Cosponsored by NAATA/ San Francisco Asian American International Film Festival

5:30 pm: **Seisaku's Wife** (*Seisaku no tsuma*, 1965)

7:20 pm: **Nakano Spy School** West Coast Premiere! (*Rikugun Nakano gakkoo*, 1966)

Sunday, March 21

5:30 pm: **A False Student** (*Nise daigakusei*, 1960)

7:20 pm: **Black Superexpress** West Coast Premiere! (*Kuro no chotokkyu*, 1964)

Sunday, March 28

5:30 pm: **Red Angel** West Coast Premiere! (*Akai tenshi*, 1966)

7:20 pm: **Blind Beast** (*Moju*, 1969)

**This series is presented with the cooperation of The Japan Foundation
and Daiei Co., Ltd.**

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A Lunatic Cry: Ideas and Passions of Yasuzo Masumura

"My goal is to create an exaggerated depiction featuring only the ideas and passions of living human beings."—Yasuzo Masumura

When this country saw its first extensive Yasuzo Masumura retrospective, in 1997, the critical reaction was a lot like that which greeted this maverick director when he came on the scene in Japan forty years earlier. At that time, Nagisa Oshima recalled, "I felt now that the tide of the new age could no longer be ignored by anyone, and that a powerful and irresistible force had arrived in Japanese cinema." In San Francisco, writer Chuck Stephens called Masumura "one of the...greatest, gravest social satirists [of the fifties and sixties]...seriously berserk and sumptuously nihilistic....Miss any one of these masterworks at your peril." Chicago critic Jonathan Rosenbaum wrote, "It was like discovering Sam Fuller or Frank Tashlin for the first time."

We are delighted to further delve into the richly evocative cinema of Daiei studio's resident intellectual and renegade social critic, as we combine gems from the PFA Collection with three spectacular West Coast premieres courtesy of The Japan Foundation. In explicit dramas and subversive satires, Masumura examined individual identity in a society mechanized by tradition, war, and postwar economics. Masumura was a brutal humanist—that is, without a shred of sentimentality, but rather with the daring it takes to break the mold in a culture that emphasizes conformity. The weight of the institutions makes the necessary gestures of rebellion in his characters more extreme. "There is a secret song that lies unvoiced in the heart of every Japanese that I want to express in my films with a boisterous, even lunatic cry," he said. And Oshima notes: "Masumura achieved shocking effects by creating characters with completely free hearts and bodies."

[JAPAN FOUNDATION LOGO] This series is presented with the cooperation of The Japan Foundation and Daiei Co., Ltd. The series is programmed at PFA by Mona Nagai.

SUNDAY MARCH 7

Kisses 5:30

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1957)

(*Kuchizuke*). Masumura's debut film was about restless youth not so much alienated as abandoned by an avaricious older generation. In its unsentimental lyricism, *Kisses* broke with the past, and in its fresh (in both senses) style, it was a forerunner (lately called the "missing link") to the New Wave. Kinichi

(Hiroshi Kawaguchi), a taciturn lad, and Akiko (Hitomi Nozoe), a struggling artists' model, meet at the prison where both their fathers are serving time. On a borrowed motorcycle on borrowed time, they spend a day at the races and the beach, lose and find each other, while for both, the specter looms of papa's bail and the sacrifices they will have to make for it. Life, as Kinichi bravely ventures, may be "boring," but this film never is, with asymmetrical urban framing and a camera on the run ("Let's crash!"). (JB)

• Written by Kazuo Funabashi, based on a novel by Matsutaro Kawaguchi. Photographed by Joji Ohara. With Hiroshi Kawaguchi, Hitomi Nozoe, Aiko Mimasu, Eitaro Ozawa. (74 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, From The Japan Foundation, permission Daiei)

Blue Sky Maiden 7:00

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1957)

West Coast Premiere!

(*Aozora musume*). Early Masumura is contemporary with late Douglas Sirk— both harnessed garish fifties modernism for a scathing, full-color portrait of ambition in the new middle class. In *Blue Sky Maiden*, Ayako Wakao plays good-natured Yuko, the illegitimate daughter of a well-off executive, raised in the country by relatives. Journeying to Tokyo she finds Father's Western-style house to be a nest of vipers straight out of *There's Always Tomorrow*, replete with Terrible Children, a housekeeper who sees all, and a dog named Cal with his own doghouse. But Yuko meets it all with aplomb; she's interested in one thing only, finding her real, cast off mother. While digging *Blue Sky Maiden's* *echt*-fifties Japan (look for the Sun Tribe-following big brother, and the nightclub singer's hand-print frock), we experience what James Quandt meant when he said, "Even at its most berserk and genre-bound, Masumura's cinema is semiotically rich and sophisticated." (JB)

• Written by Yoshio Shirasaka. Photographed by Michio Takahashi. With Ayako Wakao, Keizo Kawasaki, Kenji Sugawara. (89 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, Color, 35mm, From The Japan Foundation, permission Daiei)

SUNDAY MARCH 14

Cosponsored by NAATA/ San Francisco Asian American International Film Festival.

Seisaku's Wife 5:30

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1965)

(*Seisaku no tsuma*). The transgressive nature of desire itself makes woman the source of life in Masumura's films. Ayako Wakao interpreted this idea better than anyone, and she is fascinating in this antimilitarist drama, an engrossing portrait of village life that links blindness, war, and *l'amour fou*. The period is that of the Russo-Japanese War. Okane is a pariah in her small farming village. Sullen, depressed, having been abused most of her short life, she is brought around by the unlikely attentions of Seisaku (Takahiro Tamura), the local "model youth," on his return from the army. "The Imperial prescript says to love one another," and so he begins a love affair with Okane that eventually will render him as marginal as she. The beautifully choreographed sensuality of the rebel lovers contrasts profoundly with inexorable militarism made palpable. Loneliness has made Okane an agent for her own compelling passion; looking forward to Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses*, she commits the ultimate antiwar act. (JB)

• Written by Kaneto Shindo, based on a story by Kojiro Yoshida. Photographed by Tomohiro Akino. With Ayako Wakao, Takahiro Tamura, Yuka Konno, Yuzo Hayakawa. (93 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, B&W, 'Scope, 35mm, PFA Collection, permission Daiei)

Nakano Spy School 7:20

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1966)

West Coast Premiere!

(*Rikugun Nakano gakkoo*). How a young second lieutenant becomes your basic Bond is the subject of this spy-vs.-spy noir set in 1938 at the start of the Sino-Japanese War. Jiro (Raizo Ichikawa) leaves his fiancée for a mysterious military assignment—he and a few good men are to be trained as special agents at the newly established Nakano Spy School, based on the British model. (The girlfriend, meanwhile, becomes involved in the machinations of the British themselves.) A True Fiction-style narrative offers both lessons *in* spying (bring your notepad, and a sense of humor) and the lessons *of* spying: for all its worldly ideals, and even without uniforms, the Spy School is a microcosm of a closed society. This is the beauty of Masumura's ultra-dry voice. "The director's implication comes through the very restrained dialogue, the underplaying of all important scenes, the carefully drab photography, and a plot so cunningly wrought that the conclusion he desires—all patriots are monsters—is inescapable." (*Variety*) (JB)

• Written by Seiji Hoshikawa. Photographed by Setsuo Kobayashi. With Raizo Ichikawa, Daisuke Kato, Mayumi Ogawa, Sachiko Murase. (95 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, B&W, 'Scope, 35mm, From The Japan Foundation, permission Daiei)

SUNDAY MARCH 21

A False Student 5:30

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1960)

(*Nise daigakusei*). Based on a novel by Kenzaburo Oe, this is a fascinating picture of anomie and conformity in the context of the pressures of Japanese society. A young man, Otsu (Jerry Fujio), is determined to fulfill his mother's desire that he go to college, but repeatedly fails the entrance exam. After years of studying, he cannot give up on her dream, which has become his own. He convinces himself and others that he is a student. Very soon Otsu is caught up in the politics of a Maoist study group whose young adherents have all the pretensions and cruelty of their self-serving elders. Things take an extraordinary and gruesome turn when Otsu is thought to be a police informer and the comrades take matters into their own hands. Masumura films this tragedy with just the mixture of distance and curiosity our intelligent compassion requires; anything more intimate would be excruciating. (JB)

• Written by Yoshio Shirasaka, based on a novel by Kenzaburo Oe. Photographed by Hiroshi Murai. With Ayako Wakao, Jerry Fujio, Eiji Funakoshi, Ichizo (Juzo) Itami. (94 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, B&W, 'Scope, 35mm, From The Japan Foundation, permission Daiei)

Black Superexpress 7:20

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1964)

West Coast Premiere!

(*Kuro no chotokkyu*). The deeply cynical finale to Daiei's popular "Black" film series on industrial espionage and corrupt business tactics, *Superexpress* unveils a Japan of schemers, con men, and blackmailers, with the only difference between heroes and villains a question of scale. Tamiya, a rural real-estate agent looking for quick money, discovers a suspicious land deal involving a crooked developer, the government, and a new railway line. Unruffled by any thoughts of morality or civility, Tamiya merely wants to make a profit out of his knowledge, preferably through blackmail and intimidation. He soon realizes, though, that the graft extends to individuals far more powerful, and far more intelligent, than he is. Framing each scene with claustrophobic, unsentimental precision, Masumura perverts Tamiya's "lunatic cry" into \$\$ in a mundane world of cluttered motel rooms and windowless

offices—a repetitive, uneasy vision of society where the statement “mercy won’t get you big money” is depressingly, obscenely verified.—J. Sanders

• Written by Yoshio Shirasaka, Masumura, based on a story by Sueyuki Kajiyama. Photographed by Setsuo Kobayashi. With Jiro Tamiya, Yukiko Fuji, Eiji Funakoshi, Daisuke Kato. (93 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, B&W, 'Scope, 35mm, PFA Collection, permission Daiei)

SUNDAY MARCH 28

Red Angel 5:30

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1966)

West Coast Premiere!

(*Akai tenshi*). A fresh young nurse sent to the front in China finds herself the nighttime prey of hungry soldiers. But Nurse Nishi is less naive than she seems (this is an Ayako Wakao specialty), and before long she finds a way to harness her own desire and compassion to awaken the dead hearts of two soldiers—one, an amputee, the other, a morphine-addicted surgeon. The latter’s makeshift surgery gives graphic meaning to the wartime euphemism “theater of operations.” Masumura is working in the Fuller mode here, with a few skilled setups to suggest the field of wounds, moments of shocking tenderness amid bloody hell, and dialogue that hurls pointed missiles. The invasion of China is portrayed as a nightmare where Japan’s folly meets China’s manpower. Soldiers are the arms, and when the arms are (literally) amputated, the men are retired, far from scandalous view. But the pulse still beats. “Through the fierceness of its expression, sex becomes the symbol of the will to live,” eminent critic Tadao Sato wrote of this controversial film. (JB)

• Written by Ryoza Kasahara, based on a story by Yoriyoshi Arima. Photographed by Setsuo Kobayashi. With Ayako Wakao, Shinsuke Ashida, Yusuke Kawazu, Jotaro Senba. (95 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, B&W, 'Scope, 35mm, From The Japan Foundation, permission Daiei)

Blind Beast 7:20

Yasuzo Masumura (Japan, 1969)

(*Moju*). Where many films about artists offer up the creative impulse as a substitute for worldly experience, Masumura’s fetishistic extravaganza goes beneath experience to the senses themselves. Michio, a blind sculptor, kidnaps a young model, Aki, who has gained notoriety for a series of sadomasochistic photos. In Aki’s curvaceous body, Michio believes he has found the perfect torso for his masterpiece of “tactual art,” a sculptural form to be caressed not viewed. Aki is held captive in his studio, a cavernous room decorated with huge mockups of female anatomy—lips protrude from one wall, breasts and ears from others. Aki eventually succumbs to her imprisonment as Michio, in his Braille-like tactile probings, transposes her every pore to a mound of clay. But soon the pleasures of the creative act prove limited, so, abandoning art for its own sake, Michio and Aki descend into an erotic frenzy that leads not to the gallery but to oblivion. Based on a story by Edogawa Rampo, Japan’s “Edgar Allan Poe.”—Steve Seid

• Written by Yoshio Shirasaka, based on a story by Rampo Edogawa. Photographed by Setsuo Kobayashi. With Eiji Funakoshi, Mako Midori, Noriko Sengoku. (84 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, Color [slightly faded], 'Scope, 35mm, PFA Collection, permission Daiei)