

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Hiroshi Shimizu, Part I: The Shochiku Years

MAY 4–19, 2024

An unsung master of Japanese cinema, Hiroshi Shimizu (1903–1966) was highly regarded by contemporaries Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi for his seemingly effortless formal ingenuity, distinguished by his signature linear traveling shots and his naturalistic, open-air depictions of regional Japan. Shot on location and frequently employing non-actors, the loosely plotted, low-key tragicomedies that comprise his most characteristic work foregrounded the transient lives and hardships of everyday people with a marked regard for those pushed to the margins of society, including drifters, migrant workers, war veterans, persons with disabilities, outcast women, and especially children, in whom the director took a personal philanthropic interest and of whom he remarked: “They are natural. They breathe the air. Films must have humans who breathe the air.”

This two-part retrospective offers the first New York survey of the major yet often overlooked filmmaker in more than 30 years and the largest ever assembled in North America. Presented at the Museum, Part I: The Shochiku Years gathers the best extant films of Shimizu’s protean and varied career with the studio from his stark, strikingly modernist early melodramas, both silent and sound, through the lyrical tours of provincial life with which he would become chiefly associated. Highlights include the filmmaker’s best-known films in the United States (*Japanese Girls at the Harbor*, *Mr. Thank You*, *The Masseurs and a Woman*, *Ornamental Hairpin*) alongside rarer contemporaneous works that display the full stylistic and tonal range of this consummate craftsman’s accomplishments, including two of the director’s supreme masterpieces, *Children in the Wind* (1937) and its two-volume sequel *Four Seasons of Children* (1939).

All films will be presented in 35mm prints imported from collections and archives in Japan.

Part II: The Postwar and Independent Years opens at Japan Society on May 16 and will illuminate Shimizu’s output after his departure from Shochiku, particularly the trilogy of films he made with the orphans he personally adopted and brought up after World War II.

Programmed by Edo Choi, Associate Curator of Film, Alexander Fee, Film Programmer, Japan Society and Akinaru Rokkaku, Japan Foundation, New York

Co-organized with Japan Society, the National Film Archive of Japan, and the Japan Foundation, New York

Special thanks to Kate MacKay, Associate Film Curator at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Brian Belovarac of Janus Films, Yukiko Wachi of Kawakita Memorial Film Institute, Yoshio Yasui of Kobe Planet Film Archive, Kenta Tamada of the National Film Archive of Japan, and Hitomi Hosoda of Shochiku Co.

All Part I screenings take place in the Redstone Theater or Bartos Screen Room at Museum of the Moving Image. Tickets: \$15 with discounts for seniors, students, youth, and MoMI members. Purchase tickets online at movingimage.org/series/hiroshi-shimizu

Seven Seas: Chapter 1 – Virginit

With live piano accompaniment by Makia Matsumura

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1931, 72 mins.

Saturday, May 4, 1:00 p.m.

Seven Seas: Chapter 2 – Chastity

With live piano accompaniment by Makia Matsumura

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1932, 82 mins.

Saturday, May 4, 2:30 p.m.

35mm prints courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Hiroko Kawasaki, Joji Oka, Ureo Egawa, Sachiko Murase, Atsushi Arai. Scripted by Ozu's regular screenwriter Kogo Noda from a pseudonymous novel by the era's ubiquitous pulp writer Kaitaro Hasegawa, this harrowing, intricately plotted urban melodrama depicts the disgrace and subsequent revenge of Yumie (Kawasaki), a virtuous young woman from a traditional middle-class household, who suffers at the hands of Takehiko (Oka), the predatory scion of the wealthy, westernized Yagibashi family. A model of Shochiku's shomin-geki genre—tales of proletarian life—at a moment where, as Japanese scholar Tamaka Masazumi notes, “Hollywood and Marxism” had emerged as the studio's twin influences, Shimizu's film skillfully repurposes a fluid American-style *mise-en-scène* to express a class-conscious populism. This first chapter, titled *Virginit*, concerns the downfall of the heroine and her family, closing with her fateful decision to marry her abuser. This second chapter, titled *Chastity*, concerns the heroine's revenge on the dissolute Yagibashi clan and restoration of her family's honor.

A Hero of Tokyo

Saturday, May 4, 4:30 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1935, 63 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Mitsugu Fujii, Mitsuko Yoshikawa, Yukichi Iwata, Michiko Kuwano, Koji Mitsui, Tokkan-kozō. In just over an hour of tautly paced, plot-filled action—not unlike a William Wellman pre-code for Warner Bros.—Shimizu unspools the tragic generational tale of Kenichi, a boy whose backsliding father abandons him, his stepmother Haruko (Yoshikawa), and two stepsiblings when the schemer's mining concern is exposed as a fraud, forcing Haruko to open a brothel to support the family, a decision with far-reaching consequences for all involved. Often described as one of his darkest films, Shimizu's final silent represents a compact summation of the social realist themes, oppressive urban settings, and complex storylines that characterize the first half of his thirties output, where the family unit and its parental and filial bonds are twisted and hollowed out by mercenary self-interest and exploitation.

Japanese Girls at the Harbor

With live piano accompaniment by Makia Matsumura

Saturday, May 4, 6:00 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1933, 78 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with live English subtitles. With Michiko Oikawa, Yukiko Inoue, Ureo Egawa, Ranko Sawa. Shot and set between the industrial port cities of Yokohama and Kobe, Shimizu's most celebrated silent film tells of the jealousy that ensnares devoted Catholic schoolmates Sunako (Oikawa) and Dora (Inoue) as they both fall for the motorcycle-sporting playboy Henry (Egawa), whose own weakness leads Sunako down a forsaken path. Simultaneously expressing the angular modernism of Shimizu's early thirties films and the poetic realism that would take hold in the later thirties, the film toggles between lyrical exterior scenes that quiver with documentary life and spare, confrontational interior set-pieces carved in precisely mounted frames and movements.

Forget Love for Now

Sunday, May 5, 1:30 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1937, 73 mins. 35mm print courtesy of Japan Foundation. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Michiko Kuwano, Bakudan-kozō, Shūji Sano. Like the earlier *Japanese Girls at the Harbor*, this devastating story of a single mother Oyuki (Kuwano) who supports herself and her son Haruo (Bakudan-kozō) by working at a "chabuya," a hostess bar catering to foreigners, is set in the cosmopolitan harbor city of Yokohama. Bullied because of his mother's profession, Haruo becomes a pariah among his classmates, picking fights to defend her honor while befriending a gaggle of ostracized Chinese children in the seaside town's migrant community—a pointedly political gesture in the first year of the Second Sino-Japanese War. The film's sensitively observed scenes of children erecting self-contained worlds that naturally reproduce the oppressive stigmas of their parents' society lead to a tragic climax ranking among the director's finest sequences.

A Woman Crying in Spring

Sunday, May 5, 3:15 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1933, 96 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Den Obinata, Shigeru Ogura, Yoshiko Okada, Sachiko Murase. Shimizu's first talkie, completed the same year as *Japanese Girls at the Harbor*, enacts another tale of fallen womanhood and migrant struggle, but this time the regional setting is a remote mining town in Hokkaido, the snow-capped northern island of the Japanese archipelago. The beloved child actor Aoki Tomio (billed as Tokkan-kozō in films like *I Was Born, But...*) recalled that Shimizu, who briefly attended an agricultural college in the region, nursed a lifelong dislike for Hokkaido, which may account for the film's cold, bleak, nearly Chekhovian tone, unique among the director's surviving work. Yet the vividness of that tone is rendered by the director's remarkably assured, atmospheric use of sound, which his friend Ozu took as a challenge to embark on his own talkie experiment, *The Only Son*.

Mr. Thank You

Sunday, May 5, 5:30 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1936, 75 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Ken Uehara, Michiko Kuwano. With Ken Uehara, Michiko Kuwano, Mayumi Tsukiji, Kaoru Futaba, Reikichi Kawamura. This charming road movie follows a genial local bus driver (Uehara) along his route as he transports a group of travelers, comprising a microcosm of Japanese society, from the far reaches of the Izu peninsula to the train station that links it to Tokyo. Rediscovered in the 1970s, Shimizu's film, once judged as a failed experiment by a Kinema Junpo critic, is now recognized as a classic, incorporating all the hallmarks of his cinema: the tragicomic tone; the provincial setting; the loose, improvisational narrative; the naturalistic performances; the luminous plein-air cinematography; and the glancing but trenchant observation of social inequality. Shooting entirely on location in his cherished Izu, which he is said to have known "like the back of his hand," and using a redressed Shochiku studio van, Shimizu fashions a tour of depression-era Japan that deserves mention in the company of Ford's *Stagecoach* and Renoir's *The Crime of Monsieur Lange*.

Children in the Wind

Friday, May 10, 7:00 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1937, 86 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with live English subtitles. With Reikichi Kawamura, Mitsuko Yoshikawa, Masao Hayama, Takeshi Sakamoto, Bakudan-kozo, Fumiko Okamura. In Shimizu's most renowned and adored film in Japan, the idyllic country life of two brothers, older Zenta (Hayama) and younger Sanpei (Bakudan-kozo), is suddenly thrown into crisis one summer when their father is wrongly arrested for embezzlement. A frank, unsentimental portrait of innocence fading into experience, as well as a shimmering evocation of a Japanese provincial village, *Children in the Wind* counts among the great cinematic treatments of childhood.

Sayon's Bell

Saturday, May 11, 1:15 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1943, 74 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with live English subtitles. With Ri Kōran (Shirley Yamaguchi), Toshiaki Konoe, Kenji Oyama, Kinuko Wakamizu, Hatsu Shimazaki, Kenzo Nakagawa. This pure-grade piece of imperial propaganda, a vehicle for the Chinese-marketed Japanese idol Ri Kōran (later known to American audiences as Shirley Yamaguchi), draws on the then widely circulated story of a 17-year-old Taiwanese aboriginal girl whose patriotic zeal so gripped her that she drowned amid a storm while seeing off her Japanese teacher for the Chinese front. Shimizu's film dutifully carries off its disturbingly chauvinistic premise, while offering a rare, finely rendered glimpse of occupied rural Taiwan during the same period in which much of Hou Hsiao-hsien's 1993 film *The Puppetmaster* is set.

Four Seasons of Children: Spring/Summer

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1939, 70 mins.

Saturday, May 11, 3:00 p.m.

Four Seasons of Children: Autumn/Winter

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1939, 71 mins.

Saturday, May 11, 4:30 p.m.

35mm prints courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with live English subtitles. With Reikichi Kawamura, Mitsuko Yoshikawa, Masao Hayama, Jun Yokoyama, Takeshi Sakamoto, Fumiko Okamura. Singled out by several Shimizu scholars as a masterpiece, this two-volume sequel to *Children in the Wind* portrays the ongoing trials of boys Zenta and Sanpei as their family once again falls on hard times, while expanding the temporal scope of the earlier film from one summer to a full year. Anticipating both Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy and Hou Hsiao-hsien's 1980s films of youth, Shimizu's film delicately establishes visual motifs that dovetail the narrative's dramatic turns and gradually attain poetic significance, achieving a timeless storybook quality. This first volume, titled *Spring/Summer*, details the events surrounding the grave illness of the boy's father. This second volume, titled *Autumn/Winter*, picks up after the boys are taken in by their once estranged grandfather.

Ornamental Hairpin

Saturday, May 11, 6:15 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1941, 70 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Kinuyo Tanaka, Chishū Ryū, Tatsuo Saitō, Shin'ichi Himori, Hideko Mimura, Kanji Kawahara, Hiroko Kawasaki. Shimizu's plaintive romance turns on the encounter, again at a secluded mountain spa (as in *The Masseurs and a Woman*), between a convalescing soldier (Ozu stalwart Ryū) and a young woman (the great Tanaka, to whom Shimizu had been briefly married) fleeing

her sordid past. Shimizu surrounds them with a colorful supporting cast, including pedantic Professor Katada (Saitō), who lords over a meek young married couple (Himori and Mimura), an old man (Kawahara) with his two mischievous grandsons, and Emi's traveling companion, Okiku (Kawasaki). Upon its release in 1941, one critic complained of this seeming trifle: "Film stock is so precious in these times, yet Shimizu Hiroshi still comes up with such la-di-da stuff." But the subversive strength of this beautifully unhurried film lies precisely in its focus on the mundane, in its meandering, hesitant rhythms, melancholy cadences, and low comic digressions during a time of war.

Introspection Tower

Sunday, May 12, 1:30 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1941, 111 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with live English subtitles. With Shinyo Nara, Chishu Ryu, Kuniko Miyaki, Kimiyo Otsuka, Takeshi Sakamoto, Jun Yokoyama, Yuiko Nomura, Ryo Ofuji, Norio Otsuka. Of Shimizu's many films about children, *Introspection Tower* might be the most soberly realistic. This collection of vignettes set in the titular rural hilltop reformatory shows myriad ways a group of troubled boys and girls of differing class come into conflict with their caretakers and each other inside the school's confines. In the film's cathartic crescendo, which owes something to King Vidor's 1934 *Our Daily Bread*, Shimizu draws the varied strands of this narrative together in a thrillingly detailed display of cooperative labor, as the children must combine their efforts to construct a water path during a severe drought.

A Star Athlete

Sunday, May 12, 4:00 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1937, 64 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with live English subtitles. With Shūji Sano, Shinichi Himori, Yoshiaki Konoe, Chishū Ryū, Kenji Oyama. A favorite among film historians Noël Burch and David Bordwell for its virtuoso passages of camera movement, including a sublime 40-shot march along a country road that's pure back-and-forth axial motion, Shimizu's episodic sports comedy about a lackadaisical star runner named Seki (Sano) who jovially competes with his hard-working rival Tani (a fresh and spry Ryū, not yet the old man of Ozu's postwar films) in a days-long military jog that whimsically veers off the beaten path, perhaps winks at the director's own reputation as a lazy genius. Shimizu tossed off this "pet project" during a pause in production on his major critical success *Children in the Wind*, but today *A Star Athlete* stands as the euphoric acme of Shimizu's cinematographic achievements.

The Masseurs and a Woman

Sunday, May 12, 5:30 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1938, 66 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with live English subtitles. With Mieko Takamine, Shin Tokudaiji, Shinichi Himori, Shin Saburi. Shimizu's most eccentrically personal film, which he

conceived and wrote himself and shot on his favored Izu peninsula, opens on a pair of blind masseuses, Tokuichi (Tokudaiji) and Fukuichi (Himori), framed in one of his signature reverse tracking shots, as they stroll down a winding country road toward a hot springs resort nestled in the mountains. There, as in *Mr. Thank You* and the later, similarly set *Ornamental Hairpin*, they come across a variety of characters whose dilemmas range from tragic to comic, suggesting another of Shimizu's cross-sections of contemporary Japan. Tokuichi's stirrings of romantic longing for a mysterious young woman (Takamine) provide the wisp of a narrative that goes on to elegantly weave a series of fine-grained studies of lonely, transient souls seeking temporary refuge from society.

Notes of an Itinerant Performer

Sunday, May 19, 3:00 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1941, 97 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the National Film Archive of Japan. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Yaeko Mizutani, Ken Uehara, Hideo Fujino, Kyoko Asagiri, Reikichi Kawamura. Afforded the opportunity to work with Mizutani, a then-retired legend of the Japanese stage, Shimizu devised this story of a hard-up traveling singer who, taken in by a kindly old tea merchant, becomes devoted to his family upon his death. Largely due to its period setting in the late Meiji era and its theme of female self-sacrifice, and perhaps also its intricate deep focus staging, Shimizu's film has drawn comparison to similar works by Kenji Mizoguchi, but in contrast to the latter's stately tragic melodramas, this sad, often ambivalent, but ultimately optimistic work strikes a swift pace and matter-of-fact tone, placing it firmly within the former's poetic realist universe.

Children of the Beehive

Sunday, May 19, 5:15 p.m.

Dir. Hiroshi Shimizu. 1948, 86 mins. 35mm print courtesy of the Kawakita Memorial Film Institute. In Japanese with English subtitles. With Shimamura Shunsaku, Natsuki Massako, Goshō Shoichi, Kubota Shin-ichiro, Iwamoto Yutaka. The most celebrated of Shimizu's postwar films, *Children of the Beehive* is a momentous work depicting the shattered state of reconstruction-era Japan. A nameless soldier repatriated to his defeated and occupied country undertakes a cross-country odyssey to bring a ragtag band of orphans to the reformatory school of his youth, the *Introspection Tower* (the namesake of Shimizu's earlier 1941 feature). Cutting a winding path through the backwaters of the nation, along coastlines, railways, and mountain roads, Shimizu's wanderers embody the wretched yet resilient spirit of the Japanese underclass. Self-produced by Shimizu after his departure from Shochiku and featuring the orphans he had adopted during and after the conflict, the film is a heart-wrenching study of the cataclysmic effects of war at home.

MUSEUM INFORMATION

Hours: Thurs, 2:00–6:00 p.m. Fri, 2:00–8:00 p.m. Sat–Sun, 12:00–6:00 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$20 adults, \$12 senior citizens (ages 65+) and students (ages 18+) with ID, \$10 youth (ages 3–17). Children under 3 and Museum members are admitted free. General admission is free every Thursday, 2:00–6:00 p.m.

Film Screenings: Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and as scheduled. Unless otherwise noted, tickets: \$15 adults, \$11 students and seniors, \$9 youth (ages 3–17), free or discounted for Museum members (depending on level of membership). Advance purchase is available online.

Location: 36-01 35 Avenue (at 37 Street) in Astoria.

Subway: M or R to Steinway Street. N or W to 36 Ave or Broadway.

Program Information: Telephone: 718 777 6888; Website: movingimage.us

Membership: movingimage.us/join-and-support/become-a-member or 718 777 6877

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