

The Museum of Modern Art

Kenji Misumi's Sword Trilogy

March 27–April 2, 2024

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

Kenji Misumi's so-called Sword Trilogy is a revelation. Made in rapid succession between 1962 and 1965—and recently restored in 4K by the Kadokawa Corporation—*Kiru* (1962), *Ken* (1964), and *Kenki* (1965) brought a thrilling vitality to a familiar Japanese genre, and helped launch the career of Raizo Ichikawa, Japan's answer to James Dean, a tough, soulful actor who, like his American counterpart, died tragically young. Misumi, a prolific filmmaker who brought an idiosyncratic style to popular Japanese genres like the *chanbara* (sword fighting film) and *jidai-geki* (period piece), was a former Soviet prisoner of war in Siberia and an assistant to Teinosuke Kinugasa on *Gate of Hell* (1953) who later became internationally famous for his movie adaptations of the wildly violent and successful *Lone Wolf and Cub* manga.

In *Kiru*, the tale of a master samurai who discovers his parents' violent past, we find Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* laced with a darkling Oedipal eroticism. The film is notable for a screenplay by Kaneto Shindo (*Kuroneko*, *Onibaba*) and claustrophobic cinematography by Shōzō Honda (who excelled at *chanbara*). *Ken* is an adaptation of Yukio Mishima's sadomasochistic short story of the same name, shot in stunningly precise widescreen black and white. A contemporary drama infused with ancient samurai traditions of martial discipline and spiritual self-abnegation, the film is set in a *kendo dojo* (martial arts school) where Raizo Ichikawa and a fellow apprentice swordsman engage in a vicious contest of wills. And while *Kenki*, Misumi's film about a "sword devil," was a box office disappointment, it nonetheless furthers a tradition of strong but silent avengers that hearkens back to Gary Cooper and anticipates Clint Eastwood's *Man with No Name* and Forest Whitaker's *Ghost Dog*. Shot in almost unreal color, the film centers on Raizo Ichikawa as a shy, sensitive cultivator of flowers who restores peace in shockingly violent ways. All films are courtesy of Kadokawa Corporation and Janus Films.

Organized by Joshua Siegel, Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art. Special thanks to Miki Zeze.

SCREENING SCHEDULE:

Kiru (The Sword Cut/Destiny's Son). 1962. Japan. Directed by Kenji Misumi. Screenplay by Kaneto Shindo, based on the novel by Renzaburo Shibata. With Raizo Ichikawa, Shiho Fujimura, Mayumi Magisa. 4K restoration courtesy of Kadokawa Corporation and Janus Films. In Japanese; English subtitles. 71 min. Kenji Misumi's so-called Sword Trilogy is a revelation. Made in rapid succession between 1962 and 1965—and recently restored in 4K by the Kadokawa Corporation—*Kiru* (1962), *Ken* (1964), and *Kenki* (1965) brought a thrilling vitality to a familiar Japanese genre, and helped launch the career of Raizo Ichikawa, Japan's answer to James Dean, a tough, soulful actor who, like his American counterpart, died tragically young. Misumi, a prolific filmmaker who brought an idiosyncratic style to popular Japanese genres like the *chanbara* (sword fighting film) and *jidai-geki* (period piece), was a former Soviet prisoner of war in Siberia and an assistant to Teinosuke Kinugasa on *Gate of Hell* (1953) who later became internationally famous for his movie adaptations of the wildly violent and successful *Lone Wolf and Cub* manga. In *Kiru*, the tale of a master samurai who discovers his parents' violent past, we find Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* laced with a darkling Oedipal eroticism. The film is notable for a screenplay by Kaneto Shindo (*Kuroneko*, *Onibaba*) and claustrophobic cinematography by Shōzō Honda (who excelled at *chanbara*).

Wed, Mar 27, 4:30 p.m. (T2)

Thu, Mar 28, 7:00 p.m. (T2)

Sat, Mar 30, 2:00 p.m. (T2)

Mon, Apr 1, 4:30 p.m. (T1)

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11 West 53 Street
New York, NY 10019

Tue, Apr 2, 6:30 p.m. (T2)

Ken (The Sword). 1964. Japan. Directed by Kenji Misumi. Screenplay by Kazuo Funahashi, based on the novel by Yukio Mishima. With Raizo Ichikawa, Yukiko Fuji, Yusuke Kawazu. 4K restoration courtesy of Kadokawa Corporation and Janus Films. In Japanese; English subtitles. 95 min.

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Fri, Mar 29, 4:30 p.m. (T2)

Sat, Mar 30, 4:00 p.m. (T2)

Sun, Mar 31, 4:00 p.m. (T2)

Tue, Apr 2, 4:00 p.m. (T2)

Kenki (The Sword Devil). 1965. Japan. Directed by Kenji Misumi. Screenplay by Siji Hoshikawa, based on the novel by Renzaburo Shibata. With Raizo Ichikawa, Michiko Sugata, Goro Mutsumi. 4K restoration courtesy of Kadokawa Corporation and Janus Films. In Japanese; English subtitles. 83 min.

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SPONSORSHIP:

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