

# The Museum of Modern Art

*Beyond Ozu: Hidden Gems of Shochiku Studios*

June 10–July 9, 2022

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

Founded in 1920 by a pair of peanut vendors who hoped to achieve the commercial success of Hollywood, the Shochiku film studio adopted Western methods of filmmaking (a training institute, a star system, a studio campus) and made Western techniques of storytelling (closeups, flashbacks, panning shots, dissolves, montage editing) into something distinctively Japanese. Thanks to the generosity of Shochiku, together with the National Film Archive of Japan and Japan Foundation, New York, MoMA presents a centennial selection of hidden treasures, most of them in archival 35mm prints, from the studio that gave us such masterpieces as Yasujirō Ozu's *Tokyo Story*, Keisuke Kinoshita's *Ballad of Narayama*, Nagisa Oshima's *Cruel Story of Youth*, and Masaki Kobayashi's *Harakiri*. This exhibition goes beyond these perennial favorites to deepen our appreciation of the history of Japanese cinema, allowing us to revel in newfound discoveries like Hiroshi Shimizu's *Eternal Heart* (1929), Kōzaburō Yoshimura's *Temptation* (1948), Tai Kato's *The Ondekoza* (1981), and Kōhei Oguri's *The Sting of Death* (1990). The exhibition opens on June 10 with the North American premiere 4K restoration of Masahiro Shinoda's *Demon Pond* (1979).

Moving beyond the traditional period film (*jidai-geki*), directors like Yasujirō Shimazu and Hiroshi Shimizu, perhaps the unsung heroes of this series, instead brought a more realist style to the lives of the lower working class, in a genre known as *shomin-geki*, while Yūzō Kawashima and Noboru Nakamura favored another popular genre, *gendai-geki*, finding bittersweet melodrama in modern cosmopolitan life. Shochiku's beloved "Ōfuna flavor," named after the town to which the studio relocated in 1936, enchanted Japanese audiences with its subtle blend of warmth, humor, and pathos. While Yasujirō Ozu mastered this style in the intimate family dramas he made for Shochiku, from his first true solo effort in 1928, *Dreams of Youth*, to his swan song in 1962, *An Autumn Afternoon*, this exhibition draws attention to two of Ozu's most devout successors, Minoru Shibuya (*Doctor's Day Off*, 1952) and Yoji Yamada (*Where Spring Comes Late*, 1970, and *My Sons*, 1990). It also celebrates the Chaplinesque graces of Kiyohiko Ushihara's *Why Do You Cry, Young People?* (1930) and Heinosuke Gosho's *Woman in the Mist* (1936)—Gosho is also represented with *Yellow Crow* (1957), *Northern Elegy* (1957), and *Hunting Rifle* (1961)—and the *nakanai* realism ("realism without tears") of Tadashi Imai's *Inlet of Muddy Waters* (1953) and *Night Drum* (1958).

With the passing of an earlier generation marked by Ozu's premature death in 1963, Shochiku encouraged younger filmmakers, including Nagisa Oshima and Yoshishige Yoshida, to confront taboo subjects in formally radical ways, much like their counterparts in France and the United States, giving rise to the Japanese New Wave of the 1960s and its descendants, including Takeshi Kitano, Takashi Miike, and Kinji Fukusaku. Radical from the start, Shochiku continued to produce daringly unconventional films like Eitarō Morikawa's *Tragedy of Bushido* (1960), Kiju Yoshida's *18 Roughs* (1963), Masahiro Shinoda's *Demon Love* (1979), and Shinji Sōmai's *The Catch* (1990), all ripe for rediscovery.

*Text by Joshua Siegel, Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art*

**MoMA**

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