

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

NO. 104
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

285

JANANESE ANIMATORS ON VIEW IN SPECIAL 3 DAY SHOW

The Museum of Modern Art will present a unique three-day program devoted to Japanese animated films never before seen in the United States on Thursday, January 6, Friday, January 7, and Saturday, January 8. The program consists of thirteen animated films that were presented at the International Festival of Animation at Annecy, France, and features three leading exponents of the art of animation in Japan: Yasuji Murata, represented by six films made between 1924 and 1929; seven works by Noburo Ofuji, one as recent as 1956; and several others by Wagoro Arai, a former dentist in a small town, who made animation his hobby until his work was given professional recognition.

This program of pioneer Japanese film animators was organized by Adrienne Mancia, Associate Curator in the Department of Film, with the cooperation of the National Film Center in Tokyo, the Japan Film Library Council, and the Japan Society in New York. The program, which presents an important area in the history and development of animation, will travel to many institutions in the United States and Canada after its New York showing.

The first animated Japanese film appeared around 1913. By the '20s, animation in Japan had become the "eighth art," subject to two major influences; Japanese prints and American cartoons. Most of the Japanese who worked in the medium were then considered "animalists" and the films they made were frequently peopled by monkeys. Monkeys, in fact, even play a role in "Octopus Bone" made by Murata in 1927, though in 1928, intrigued by mischevious frogs, Murata made the prize-winning "A Frog is a Frog" and in 1929 he created "The Two Worlds" a Japanese version of La Fontaines' "The Cicada and the Ant." In his films Murata worked with monkeys, pigs, bats, and ducks; no animal was too insignificant to be within his artistic domain.

Also represented on the program is Noburo Ofuji, who entered silent films

(more)

in the mid '20s and became an early innovator of cut-out animation, made from patterned Japanese art paper. His films include "The Whale" first made in 1927 and remade twenty-five years later with transparent cellophane sheets. The result was still another innovation, with accolades at Cannes from Pablo Picasso. A later film, "The Phantom Ship," repeated the technique and was awarded a prize at the Venice Film Festival.

The work of Wagoro Arai, also part of this series, include two Japanese versions of well-known tales; one of "Jack and the Beanstalk" and the other "The Fantasy of Madame Butterfly." For the most part, the subjects of the animated films are universal, with the exception of Zenjiro Yamamoto's "Mountain of Abandon-the-Old," a 1924 adaptation of an authentic Japanese legend.

The schedule follows:

Program I - January 6 at 6:00, January 7 at 2:30 and January 8 at 2:30.

Six films by Zenjiro Yamamoto, Yasuji Murata, Kenji Masaoka (1924-1930).
Silent, ca 65 min.

MOUNTAIN OF ABANDON-THE-OLD. 1924. By Zenjiro Yamamoto.
OCTOPUS BONE. 1927. By Yasuji Murata.
BUNBUKU CHAGAMA (from a Japanese folk tale). 1928. By Yasuji Murata.
A FROG IS A FROG. 1928. By Yasuji Murata.
THE TWO WORLDS. 1929. By Yasuji Murata.
THE MONKEY'S ISLAND. 1930. By Kenji Masaoka.

Program II - January 6 at 8:30, January 7 at 2:30 and January 8 at 5:00

Seven films by Noburo Ofuji, Wagoro Arai, Kosei Seo (1930-1956).
Silent and sound, ca 65 min.

A GOLDEN FLOWER. 1930. By Noburo Ofuji. Silent.
MONKEY SANKICHI. 1935. By Kosei Seo.
JACK AND THE BEANSTALK. 1938. By Wagoro Arai. Silent.
FANTASY OF MADAME BUTTERFLY. 1940. By Wagoro Arai.
PRINCESS KAGUYA (excerpt). 1940. By Wagoro Arai. Silent.
THE WHALE. 1952. By Noburo Ofuji.
THE PHANTOM SHIP. 1956. By Noburo Ofuji.

Most prints with either Japanese intertitles or Japanese soundtracks.

December 1976

Additional information available from Michael Boodro, Assistant, or Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Tel. 956-7504; 7296.