

CONTROVERSIAL JAPANESE FILMMAKER NAGISA OSHIMA
TO INAUGURATE HIS RETROSPECTIVE AT
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Japanese filmmaker Nagisa Oshima will make his first visit to the United States to inaugurate a two-week retrospective of his work beginning Thursday, April 20, at The Museum of Modern Art. Sixteen films by Oshima, acknowledged to be a cinema revolutionary, the most iconoclastic and protean of the Japanese cineastes, have been selected by Donald Richie, Curator of the Department of Film, an authority on the cinema of Japan. The films were made during the past 12 years and represent many different cinematic modes--narrative realism, surrealist fantasies, documentary compilations and agit-prop stories. The director's most recent film, "The Ceremony" (1971), will initiate the retrospective April 20, at 8:00 p. m., when Mr. Oshima will make a personal appearance and address the audience. "The Ceremony" is a chronicle of a Japanese family from the end of World War II to the present, observed by the camera only on ceremonial days.

Though his styles vary, Oshima has been characterized as a Japanese Godard because he maintains a consistently radical, anti-Japanese-establishment stance in his films. Oshima always takes a personal position, independent of any one party, and his work is infused with a skepticism defying any too-simple solutions to a problem. Among the issues Oshima raises are prejudice against Koreans, whose situation might be compared to blacks in the United States or Algerians in France; the rebellion against tradition and authority; the subject of poverty; the Chinese Cultural Revolution; and the exhaustion of the radical impulse.

Oshima's own place within the Japanese film industry reflects some of the problems raised by his work. He began his career with the Shochiku Studio, after joining with other young directors to convince the studio that young filmmakers could lift it out of its financial depression. After two successful Shochiku productions, Oshima made "Night and Fog in Japan," a political film the release of which coincided with the assassination of the Chairman of the Socialist Party. Immediately, the film was withdrawn from the theatres and relations between Oshima and the studio officials deteriorated until he was forced to leave and start his own company.

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The resistance of the system to criticism and controversy became a reality to Oshima and influenced his career as well as the theme of all his later work. One might add that the success of Oshima's films in Japan, and the low quality of studio-made films there today, suggest that radical aims can only be accomplished by the independent filmmaker.

One of Oshima's best-known films in this country, and one typical of the director's thematic concerns, is "Boy" (1969). It is the story of a young boy trained by his parents to throw himself in front of automobiles in order to receive compensation for feigned injury. While the parents were caught, the boy could not be induced to confess.

Another film known in this country is "Death by Hanging," again dealing with the problem of poverty and the idea that it transcends conventional standards of good and bad, a recurring theme in Oshima's work.

Among the documentary films to be shown in the series is "The Diary of Yunbogi," in which excerpts from the diary of a poor Korean boy are heard on the sound track accompanying images of poverty-stricken children taken by Oshima in Korea's large cities. "Mao Tse-Tung and the Cultural Revolution" is another documentary comprised of stock footage shot in China, with Oshima's own commentary, which addresses itself, sometimes critically, directly to Mao. "The Pacific War," with the original sound and footage, conveys attitudes held by the Japanese during World War II. "Youth in the Ice" is a study of the futility of the existence of a group of poor, young fishermen. "The Forgotten Army" tells of the neglect of those Koreans drafted into the Japanese army during World War II. "A Tomb for Youth," filmed in Korea, again focuses on that nation's problems.

"The Diary of a Shinjuku Thief," though ostensibly fictional, provides a documentary picture of Shinjuku, Tokyo's busiest section, and conveys the often aimless energy of the radical student movement, which was active during the shooting of the film in 1968.

Other purely fictional films, such as "Cruel Stories of Youth," "Violence at Noon," "The Catch," and "The Pleasures of the Flesh," never fail to comment explicitly on aspects of Japanese society, such as the anti-foreign sentiment of Japanese farmers, the failure of radical political solutions, and the perils of Japan's suddenly acquired wealth.

For Oshima, the great Japanese directors such as Kurosawa, Mizoguchi and Ozu are

past glories. His work is bound to the Japan of today for, as Japanese critic Tadao Sato has written, "For that smaller number who feel hope and excitement at the prospect of the new Japanese films, Oshima is the social representative as well as the spokesman and leader for the best part of the Japanese film."

The schedule of the Oshima Retrospective follows:

- Thurs, Apr 20 (2:00, 5:30, 8:00) THE CEREMONY. 1971. In Japanese; English titles. 122 min.
Mr. Oshima will be present at the 8:00 p. m. showing.
- Fri, Apr 21 (2:00, 5:30) THE DIARY OF YUNBOGI. 1965. Japanese commentary; French titles. 24 min. CRUEL STORIES OF YOUTH. 1960. In Japanese; English titles. 96 min.
- Sat, Apr 22 (3:00, 5:30) BOY. 1969. Written by Tsutomu Tamura. In Japanese; English titles. 97 min.
- Sun, Apr 23 (3:00, 5:30) DEATH BY HANGING. 1968. In Japanese; English titles. 117 min.
- Mon, Apr 24 (noon) MAO TSE - TUNG AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. 1969. English commentary. 49 min.
- Tues, Apr 25 (5:30) THE PACIFIC WAR. 1968. Japanese commentary; no English titles. 60 min.
- Wed, Apr 26 (noon) MAO TSE - TUNG AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION (see Mon, Apr 24).
(2:00) YOUTH IN THE ICE. 1962. Japanese commentary; no English titles. 30 min. THE FORGOTTEN ARMY. 1963. English commentary. 30 min.
(5:30) A TOMB FOR YOUTH. 1964. In Japanese; no English titles. 45 min. MAO TSE - TUNG AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION (see Mon, Apr 24).
- Thurs, Apr 27 (2:00) THE SUN'S BURIAL. 1960. In Japanese; English titles. 87 min.
(5:30) THE FORGOTTEN ARMY. 1963. English commentary. 30 min. THE PACIFIC WAR. 1968. Japanese commentary; no English titles. 60 min.
(8:00) THE SUN'S BURIAL (see 2:00)
- Fri, Apr 28 (2:00, 5:30) VIOLENCE AT NOON. 1966. In Japanese; English titles. 99 min.
- Sat, Apr 29 (3:00, 5:30) THE MAN WHO LEFT HIS WILL ON FILM. 1970. In Japanese; English titles. 94 min.
- Sun, Apr 30 (3:00, 5:30) THE CATCH. 1961. In Japanese; French titles. 105 min.
- Mon, May 1 (noon) THE PLEASURES OF THE FLESH. 1965. In Japanese; English titles. 90 min.
- Tues, May 2 (5:30) THE DIARY OF A SHINJUKU THIEF. 1968. With Tadanori Yokoo. In Japanese; English titles. 94 min.
- Wed, May 3 (2:00) THE DIARY OF A SHINJUKU THIEF (see Tues, May 2)
(5:30) THE PLEASURES OF THE FLESH (see Mon, May 1)

Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7296.