

OLLI Spring 2022: The Compassionate Cinema of Hirokazu Kore-eda

Course Facilitator/Instructor: Karen Davis

Dates/Times: Thursdays 10am-noon JUNE 9, JUNE 16, JUNE 23 and JUNE 30

Course Description:

This series of films offers a deep dive into the oeuvre of one of contemporary Japanese cinema's most compassionate and humanistic auteurs, whose films have touched the hearts and stimulated the minds of audiences and critics throughout the world. Kore-eda's beautifully understated narratives embrace and expand our notions of family and community, and offer us ways to reflect on the power of forgiveness as an essential key to our survival and well-being. Students are expected to screen the films before each class session, and course consists of lecture and facilitated discussion. Published essays on each film and interviews with the director will be distributed before each class, to enhance the viewing experience and the comprehension of narrative themes, cinematic style and approach.

JUNE 9

MABOROSI (*Maboroshi no Hikari*, 1995) 109 mins

Yumiko, a troubled young woman, believes she is responsible for the death of her grandmother as well as the suicide of her first husband, Ikuo. Five years after Ikuo's death, she is happily remarried but her guilt and sorrow are never far away. Returning to her home town, she is drawn to a clifftop by the tolling of funeral bells—and by the siren call of the *maborosi*, a beautiful light that lures people into the sea. "The film is a document of the 'light and shadow' which flicker inside a woman," Kore-eda said of his stunning debut feature, which evokes the universal experience of mourning and regeneration with subtle precision. (Film note courtesy of the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive)

JUNE 16

AFTER LIFE (*Wandafuru Raifu*, 1998) 118 mins

An original, humorous, and inspired meditation on life, memory, and happiness. Here, passage into the afterlife begins at a combination guidance school and movie set. As soon as a new group arrives, they are assigned counselors who help them choose one special memory to cherish for eternity. The memory, once picked, will be re-created by the staff, then captured on film for the dead to take into paradise. Over the course of one afterlife week, the latest arrivals—assisted by their earnest, at times exasperated, guides—select and retrieve their happiest moments. Mixing professionals with nonactors expressing their unscripted personal memories, the film combines genial, documentary-style conversations with poignant, resonant moments of discovery and magic as each person reveals a private paradise and then watches as a crew gathers to reenact it. Entwining documentary and reality within re-creation and reenactments, *After Life* becomes, as the director stated, "a film about memory, and also a film about what it means to make films." Simple, serene, yet emotionally, vibrantly complex, it unveils the mysterious power of memory in re-creating our lives, passions, and private heavens. – Jason Sanders . (Film note courtesy of the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive)

JUNE 23

OUR LITTLE SISTER (*Umimachi Diary*, 2015) 126 mins

Three sisters grieving their father's death decide to "adopt" the teenage half-sister they've just met in Kore-eda's captivating exploration of sibling ties, female relationships, and the passing of time, set in the idyllic, enchanting seaside town of Kamakura, Japan. As in much of the director's work, the plot itself soon pleasurably dissolves in a string of documentary-like moments—family meetings, strolls around Kamakura, quietly overheard conversations—with a focus not on emotional fireworks, but rather on the everyday sensation of a family (in this case, a family of women) simply being. "What interests me is not only the beauty of the scenery of Kamakura," Kore-eda explained, "but also . . . the beauty that arises from the realization . . . that the town, and the time there, continue even when we are gone." – Jason Sanders (Film note courtesy of the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive)

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JUNE 30

SHOPLIFTERS (*Manbiki Kazoku*, 2018) 121 mins

Master filmmaker Hirokazu Kore-eda often focuses on the tenuous bonds of family in his intimate dramas, but that theme has rarely been expressed as beautifully as it is in this quietly devastating gem. The winner of the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or, *Shoplifters* concerns Osamu (Kore-eda regular Lily Franky), a kindly, middle-aged patriarch living in poverty who steals to make ends meet. When he and his son stumble upon a scared, abused little girl, Osamu decides to take her into his makeshift home—but is it a kidnapping or a rescue? The film wrestles with that question as it explores each member of Osamu's extended "family", showing how no two characters' relationship is the same. Fans of Kore-eda's hushed storytelling style will find a movie that's uncommonly lovely and bittersweet, and for the uninitiated, *Shoplifters* is a marvelous place to become acquainted with one of international cinema's most compassionate voices. — Tim Grierson (Film note courtesy of Mill Valley Film Festival)