

# MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

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## MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE PRESENTS FIRST MAJOR U.S. RETROSPECTIVE OF JAPANESE DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER NORIAKI TSUCHIMOTO

Featuring a dozen films spanning three decades, including Tsuchimoto's masterful trilogy of films chronicling mercury poisoning in Minamata and rare archival prints presented with new English translations

November 12–27, 2022



Astoria, New York, October 20, 2022 — At a time when nonfiction films are experiencing an extraordinary renaissance, Museum of the Moving Image is pleased to present a long overdue retrospective of Japanese documentary filmmaker Noriaki Tsuchimoto, who made films that are revelatory in their patient pursuit of humanity. Tsuchimoto is best known for his series of films set in the town of Minamata, which earned him a quiet reputation as the preeminent chronicler of life in the wake of industrial disaster, but his oeuvre also took him throughout Japan and to Siberia and Afghanistan in a career spanning the 1960s through 1980s. MoMI will present the first ever U.S. retrospective of Tsuchimoto, featuring twelve films, including his monumental Minamata trilogy—anchored by his supreme masterpiece *The Shiranui Sea*—and other rarely shown works. Many of the films are imported archival prints and six will be presented with newly translated English subtitles.

“Greatly admired by his contemporaries Claude Lanzmann and Shinsuke Ogawa, Noriaki Tsuchimoto was considered to be, along with Ogawa, one of the two most important figures in the history of Japanese documentary,” said guest curator Max Carpenter, who organized the retrospective. “I am thrilled that Museum of the Moving Image will be honoring Tsuchimoto with this program, bringing his vital work to New York audiences.”

Emerging on the world cinema scene in 1964 with the subversive tour de force *On the Road: A Document*, which marked him as a strident formal innovator and firebrand leftist, Tsuchimoto gradually pared down his personal style and ceded his works to their surroundings. This change in approach is evident in his masterful trilogy of 1970s films that grapple with the outbreak of Minamata disease, the result of industrial mercury poisoning, in the eponymous town of Minamata—*Minamata: The Victims and Their World*, *Minamata Revolt: A People's Quest for Life*, and *The Shiranui Sea*. A perennial Marxist, he was distinctly mindful of the “original sin” at the heart of his vocation—that films almost always benefit filmmakers more than their subjects—and a keen awareness of this imbalance fueled much of Tsuchimoto’s work. He was never satisfied if his films did not also function as chronicles of their own making or question the ultimate efficacy of art and communication, and these preoccupations guided Tsuchimoto toward a rarefied grace in the face of an often brutal reality.

Among his other works, *Exchange Student Chua Swee-Lin*, with its focus on a Malaysian expat student at a Japanese university, and *Prehistory of the Partisans* capture the activism of students in the late 1960s.

The series is co-organized by The Japan Foundation and supported through the JFNY Grant for Arts & Culture.

Films in the series Noriaki Tsuchimoto are: ***Tokyo Metropolis*** (1962), ***On the Road: A Document*** (1964), ***Exchange Student Chua Swee-Lin*** (1965), ***The World of the Siberians*** (1968), ***Prehistory of the Partisans*** (1969), ***Minamata: The Victims and Their World*** (1971), ***Minamata Revolt: A People's Quest for Life*** (1973), ***The Shiranui Sea*** (1975), ***My Town, My Youth*** (1978), ***The Minamata Mural*** (1981), ***Umitori: Robbing the Sea at Shimokita Peninsula*** (1984), and ***Afghan Spring*** (Dirs. Hiroko Kumagai, Abdul Latif, Noriaki Tsuchimoto, 1989). Descriptions and schedule are included below and online at [movingimage.us/series/noriaki-tsuchimoto](http://movingimage.us/series/noriaki-tsuchimoto).

### **NORIAKI TSUCHIMOTO, NOVEMBER 12–27, 2022**

Unless noted, tickets (required for each program) are \$15 (\$11 seniors and students / \$9 youth ages 3–17 / \$7 for Museum members. All screenings take place in the Sumner M. Redstone Theater or the Celeste and Armand Bartos Screening Room at Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35 Ave, Astoria, New York.

**Tokyo Metropolis** and **On the Road: A Document**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1:00 P.M.

**On the Road: A Document**

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1964, 54 mins. 35mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. In 1964, Tsuchimoto directed the 54-minute traffic documentary *On the Road: A Document* via a commission from the Tokyo police. A stunning and explorative adventure in cinematography and docufiction, *On the Road* found Tsuchimoto collaborating intensely with a taxi drivers' union, much to the chagrin of his funders. The film played in Edinburgh and Florence and marked Tsuchimoto's rise as a formidable new talent in global cinema. Preceded by **Tokyo Metropolis** (1962, 29 mins. 16mm-to-digital), Tsuchimoto's never-aired depiction of Tokyo's restive youth for the half-hour educational travelogue series *Discovering Japan* (other editions were contributed by Susumu Hani and Kazuo Kuroki). Backed by an eclectic jazz soundtrack, a roving, omnivorous camera follows young lives through a rapidly industrializing Tokyo, passing from homes to workplaces to restaurants and nightlife. Total runtime: 83 mins.

**Exchange Student Chua Swee-Lin**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2:30 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1965, 51 min. 16mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. Tsuchimoto's first independently produced film focuses on a captivating Malaysian expatriate student (seeking refuge at Japan's Chiba University) whose political outspokenness has raised the specter of deportation. Tsuchimoto follows the titular Swee-Lin as his case intersects with Japan's burgeoning student activist movement and the contemporary politics of Japan and Asia writ large. In a case of art influencing life, *Exchange Student Chua Swee-Lin* catalyzed a campaign—eventually successful—to keep Swee-Lin in Japan. A trenchant record of student organizing, the film exerted a powerful influence on Tsuchimoto's revolutionary-minded peers, notably Shinsuke Ogawa.

**The World of the Siberians**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 4:00 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1968, 99 min. 35mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. In 1967, Tsuchimoto embarked on a five-month journey from the Soviet port city of Nakhodka (on the coast of the Sea of Japan) to Moscow, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Beautifully shot in color, *The World of the Siberians* meanders among weddings, official parades, and portraits of everyday life, focusing especially on the goings-on of Siberia's youth. The film—which feels remarkably of a piece with the meditations of Chantal Akerman's post-USSR road-trip portrait *D'Est*, filmed 25 years later—was televised in Japan with the tagline “Tokyo to Moscow is a 10,000 Kilometer Drive,” but this theatrical version was never released publicly.

**Prehistory of the Partisans**

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1:00 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1969, 120 mins. 16mm-to-digital. In Japanese with English subtitles. In 1969, Tsuchimoto linked up with student demonstrators who had barricaded

themselves inside the offices of Kyodai University in Kyoto, mostly in protest of the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Funded by Ogawa Productions, *Prehistory of the Partisans* is a remarkably lived-in and focused document of the era of student revolutions that swept Japan and the world toward the end of the 1960s. As a former communist guerrilla, Tsuchimoto took a seasoned long view of the film's often violent conflicts: "Where will they go from here?," he posed rhetorically in a later interview. "I wanted to show that future space."

### ***The Shiranui Sea***

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 3:30 P.M.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1:00 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1975, 153 mins. 16mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. *The Shiranui Sea*, the third entry in what is often dubbed the Minamata Trilogy (after *The Victims and Their World* and *Minamata Revolt*), is the culmination of several years of working with patients afflicted with Minamata disease. After the first round of compensations have been paid to victims by the Chisso corporation, Tsuchimoto turns to the polluted sea and the fishing communities it has sustained for generations, as people's stories and routines continually redirect the narrative. Adopting a more reflective tone than its predecessors, *The Shiranui Sea* documents daily human resourcefulness in tragedy's wake. It is widely regarded as his supreme masterpiece.

### ***Minamata: The Victims and Their World***

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 6:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1:00 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1971, 147 mins. 16mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. In 1932, fertilizer manufacturer Chisso began dumping mercury-heavy wastewater into the surrounding sea, and continued to do so for decades, contaminating the water and eventually killing close to a thousand people while leaving thousands more permanently brain-damaged. It is the worst industrial disaster in Japan's history, and its painful reverberations continue to this day. *Minamata: The Victims and Their World* is the result of an immersive and devoted production process that involved months of patiently speaking with ailing victims and their families and grew to encompass protests and physical altercations between Minamatans and Chisso representatives. A monumental achievement in documentary history and a triumph of independent film distribution (Tsuchimoto personally presented the film across Japan and the world, including on a hundred-plus day tour of Canada, whose indigenous communities were found to be stricken with Minamata disease), Minamata brought global awareness to the scope and perils of the disease and led to hundreds of diagnoses. Speaking to the singular power of the film in the 1990s, *Shoah* director Claude Lanzmann declared that "no metteur en scène of fiction will ever achieve the force and imaginative inventiveness, the empathy displayed by Tsuchimoto."

### ***Umitori: Robbing the Sea at Shimokita Peninsula***

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1:30 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1984, 103 mins. 16mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. *Umitori* introduces a tiny fishing village along Japan's Shimokita Peninsula which was rapidly developing into a government-ordained hotspot for nuclear energy and being considered as a permanent port for *Mutsu*, a nuclear-powered ship which had leaked radiation in its previous port. Focusing on the local fishermen and their stories, Tsuchimoto and his crew highlight the theft of their waters by giant business conglomerates, with locals no longer able to use the sea. *Umitori* muses on the threat of "societal progress" to small communities, and Tsuchimoto devotes attention to idiosyncrasies that emerge, such as the performances of a local stage actor as he recounts his family's history, often in character as his mother. It is a rich encapsulation of Tsuchimoto's work: clear-headed in its staunch staredown of corporations and government, transcendent in its lighthearted openness to people.

***Minamata Revolt: A People's Quest for Life***

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 4:00 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1973, 108 mins. 16mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. In a spiritual continuation of the anguished confrontations that close out *Minamata: The Victims and Their World*, *Minamata Revolt* captures the direct negotiations that took place between the Chisso corporation and the Minamata disease victims after a court ruling ordered the company to compensate them and their families. Patients who had self-organized to demand the company for direct payments and lifelong medical care stare down and scream in the faces of Chisso's spokespeople, who effortlessly embody the chillingly staid evil of corporate greed. The second, and most rarely screened, entry in Tsuchimoto's Minamata Trilogy, *Revolt* is a gripping indictment of modern industry and a testament to human resilience.

***My Town, My Youth***

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1:00 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1978, 43 mins. 16mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. Twenty-two years after the official discovery of the Minamata disease, a group of young Minamatans, many of whom were diagnosed in the womb, decide to organize a concert for their fellow bedridden Minamata patients featuring the popular enka singer Sayuri Ishikawa. The concert is seen as an opportunity to bring national attention to the patients' continued struggle, and its planning and preparations ignite many patients-turned-volunteers with a sense of purpose for the first time in their young lives. *My Town, My Youth* is a soul-stirring reflection on art's relation to what Susan Sontag called "the kingdom of the sick."

***The Minamata Mural***

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 5:00 P.M.

Dir. Noriaki Tsuchimoto. 1981, 111 mins. 16mm. In Japanese with English subtitles. Tsuchimoto revisits the subject of Minamata through the eyes of the husband-and-wife painting duo Iri and Toshi Maruki. He follows the Marukis from their quaint homestead studio, where they paint psychotropic mural panels depicting the effects of Minamata disease, to the streets of Minamata, where they meet and create portraits of several

victims of mercury poisoning. Tsuchimoto puts Iri and Toshi's riveting process on full display, combining exacting focused brushstrokes from Toshi with bouts of spontaneous ink-and-water slatherings from Iri. *The Minamata Mural* is a rich depiction of art-making and a mature meditation on the limits of art, featuring a wrenching strings-and-shakuhachi score from Toru Takemitsu.

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Top image: *Minamata: The Victims and Their World*(1971) / courtesy of Siglo Inc.

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**MUSEUM INFORMATION**

**Museum of the Moving Image** ([movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)) advances the understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of the art, history, technique, and technology of film, television, and digital media. In its stunning facility—acclaimed for both its accessibility and bold design—the Museum presents exhibitions; screenings of significant works; discussion programs featuring actors, directors, craftspeople, and business leaders; and education programs which serve more than 50,000 students each year. The Museum also houses a significant collection of moving-image artifacts.

Hours: Thurs, 2:00–6:00 p.m. Fri, 2:00–8:00 p.m. Sat–Sun, 12:00–6:00 p.m.

Museum Admission\*: \$15 adults; \$11 senior citizens (ages 65+) and students (ages 18+) with ID; \$9 youth (ages 3–17). Children under 3 and Museum members are admitted free. General admission is free every Thursday.

\*Beginning November 4, admission will change to \$20 adults, \$12 senior citizens (ages 65+) and students (ages 18+) with ID, \$10 youth (ages 3–17). General admission will continue to be free every Thursday.

Film Screenings: Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and as scheduled. Unless otherwise noted, tickets: \$15 adults, \$11 students and seniors, \$9 youth (ages 3–17), free or discounted for Museum members (depending on level of membership). Advance purchase is available online.

Location: 36-01 35 Avenue (at 37 Street) in Astoria.

Subway: M or R to Steinway Street. N or W to 36 Ave or Broadway.

Program Information: Telephone: 718 777 6888; Website: [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)

Membership: [movingimage.us/join-and-support/become-a-member](http://movingimage.us/join-and-support/become-a-member) or 718 777 6877

Museum of the Moving Image is housed in a building owned by the City of New York and has received significant support from the following public agencies: New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; New York City Council; New York City Economic Development Corporation; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature; Institute of Museum and Library Services; National Endowment for the Humanities; National Endowment for the Arts; and Natural Heritage Trust (administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation). For more information, please visit [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us).