

## Press Release



### **Masterpieces by Okamoto Kihachi at the Forum**

Screening nine film classics by Okamoto Kihachi from the 1950s and '60s, the *Forum* once again devotes a focused programme to a Japanese old master.

Okamoto (1924-2005), one of the pioneers of the new Japanese cinema, remained largely unknown internationally. Along with his outstanding samurai and gangster films, he also shot modern war films.

He was lastingly influenced by his experiences in World War II, like many others of his generation, and concern with violence and conflicts is a theme running through much of his cinematic oeuvre. Okamoto's stylistic spectrum thereby ranges from monumental commissioned works to idiosyncratic low-budget productions, from serious historical dramas through fast-paced action to comedies reminiscent of musicals. As a big John Ford fan, Okamoto inserted elements of the western in almost all of his films. Today, his often humorous stories, breathtaking camerawork, and rapid, rhythmic montage enjoy cult status as the "Kihachi touch".

After the end of the war, Okamoto initially worked as a director's assistant in the Toho Studios before he was able to shoot his own films there, beginning in 1958. Later, he also realized independent productions and, in 1974, founded his own production company, Kihachi Productions. His oeuvre comprises 39 films. The *Forum* is showing a selection of nine films from Okamoto's early and middle periods that were also shown in a retrospective at the Tokyo Filmex Festival in 2006. Together with some of the director's co-workers, Okamoto's wife Minako, who produced some of his films, will present the series in Berlin.

In the action grotesque *Desperado Outpost (Dokuritsu gurentai, 1959)*, Okamoto transposes a western plot to the Manchurian front in World War II. *The Last Gunfight (Ankokugai taiketsu, 1960)* entertainingly tells the story of a detective caught between the lines of two powerful gangster clans. *Procurer of Hell (Jigoku no utage, 1961)* is a stylish film noir in which an elegant small-time crook and a femme fatale shine. *The Elegant Life of Mr. Everyman (Eburiman shi no yuga na seikatsu, 1963)* portrays the everyday life of a simple office employee who is rewriting his life into a novel. Daring cuts and animated passages make this comedy a masterpiece of the "Kihachi touch".

With *Sword of Doom (Daibosatsu toge, 1965)* Okamoto successfully re-filmed, in perfect form, the eponymous novel about a cold-bloodedly killing, masterless samurai, the ghosts of whose past finally catch up with him. With its magnificent fighting scenes, it is a must for all fans of samurai films.

The monumental historical drama *The Emperor and a General (Nihon no ichiban nagai hi, 1967)* reconstructs the events of "Japan's longest day", August 15, 1945, at whose end the Emperor announces the country's capitulation. Intra-government conflicts of loyalty and an attempted coup d'etat precede the radio speech. Another anti-war film, but much different from the expensive Toho commissioned work, emerged only a year later: in the satirical/poetic low-budget film *Human Bullet (Nikudan, 1968)*, a young soldier is used as a "human bullet" in a kamikaze attack on a US ship. During his mission, he reflects on his short youth.

*Kill (Kiru, 1968)*, an amusing sword fighting drama, narrates the encounter and alliance between a failed samurai and a young, ambitious peasant; it is a critical reflection on the samurai code and the societal order.

57. Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
08. - 18.02.2007

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Kulturveranstaltungen des  
Bundes in Berlin (KBB) GmbH

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## *Press Release*



The costume film *Red Lion (Akage, 1969)* tells of the revolutionary ambitions of the tragicomic protagonist – played by a brilliant Toshiro Mifune, who appears in eight of Okamoto's films.

The programme is supported by the National Film Center Tokyo, which has provided new, English-subtitled copies, the Japan Foundation, Tokyo Filmex, and Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen.

After the conclusion of the Berlinale, the series will be repeated at the Kino Arsenal.

Press Office  
December 18, 2006