



OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

WOWOW & COMME DES CINÉMAS PRESENT

STILL THE WATER

A FILM BY NAOMI KAWASE





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119 minutes / Color / 2.35 / HD / 2014



SYNOPSIS

On the subtropical Japanese island of Amami-Oshima, traditions about nature remain eternal. During the full-moon night of traditional dances in August, 16-year-old Kaito discovers a dead body floating in the sea. His girlfriend Kyoko will attempt to help him understand this mysterious discovery.

Together, Kaito and Kyoko will learn to become adults by experiencing the interwoven cycles of life, death and love.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The death of my foster mother

Last year, my dear foster mother, the woman who raised me instead of the parents I did not know, died. To those who stay behind, death brings solitude and restlessness. But this solitude teaches us tenderness. It allows us to better understand other people's pain and it warms the heart. The deeper the solitude, the greater the tenderness. But the rules of the universe transcend our solitudes. This is the reason why, even if my foster mother is dead, the sun still rises and the moon still appears, full. It is this greatness, nature's greatness, that I wish to express in this film to the fullest.

About the island of Amami-Oshima*, the location of the film

A few years ago, I learned that my ancestors were in fact from the island of Amami-Oshima. While on a trip with my biological mother and my foster mother, my grandmother revealed this to me. The blood that flows through my veins has its source on this island. During our trip to a spa, when I saw these three women wash each other's backs, I was overtaken by a feeling I had never known before.

This is where everything connected.

Transmission from mother to daughter, endlessly renewed, spans time. At the time of this trip, I was carrying a new life in my very own womb. This life, which had yet to see the light of day, would eventually carry my heritage. Several years passed. In 2008, I visited the island of Amami-Oshima for the first time. Before my departure, I studied a map of the island inside-out. On the southern coast, I saw the village of my ancestors. My heart leapt at the thought of what they might have lived through.

I arrived on their land and followed in their footsteps to this village, ten minutes from the airport. The morning after my arrival, I went there alone before sunrise. Like me, had they also heard the drone of waves as they ebb and flow?

In the blue light of the morning, I could still see the moon in the sky. Soon, the sun would be up, and a day resembling any other would begin. By coming here, I was quite possibly guided by something because, four years later, in 2012, I started to prepare a film on this island.

The inhabitants of Amami-Oshima worship nature as if it were a god. They say that beyond the sea is a country called *Neriyakanaya*, "source of abundance". That is where the soul goes after we die. Those who have left for this country most likely spend wonderful moments, lulled by the songs coming from the island.

The image one often has of Amami-Oshima is of the blue ocean surrounding the island. But green is more suitable, since the island is covered in mountains and forests. The inhabitants believe there is a god living in every tree, every rock, and every plant. They believe they are



protected by these elements of nature, and live in harmony with them. So much so, that they are able to leave their hearts wide open. When they witness the death of a loved one, instead of mourning, they see this separation as temporary in the overall flow of time. It is simply a soul that has departed. It will continue to live, happy and smiling, in the country of *Neriyakanaya*. This is how, in Amami-Oshima, the line between life and death is blurred. Life and death are connected through the gods of nature: the sea, the mountains, plants, rocks, or water... These silent gods could easily be killed in the name of "development" but we would have to deal with the painful consequences of this for many generations to come. Although it still is not entirely clear, it nevertheless occurred to me with certainty that the underlying theme of this project was "the murder of the gods." This is the backbone of the film.

I would like spectators to realize that we human beings are not the centre of all things. We are but one part of a cycle in nature. I must construct a story where the conclusion is that this immense cycle – inside of which all of us exist – is of divine essence. Our soul is complex, vague and unpredictable. With this story, I hope to see men and women mature through their contact with this god known as "nature." That the time spent in the presence of this film might enrich their soul.

For so long, the disappearance of people I love has brought its share of pain. But I chanced upon a means of expression through film, and believe I have found my place. This film is a turning point in my life and my career as a filmmaker. I am certain that I could only have made this film at this exact moment.

NAOMI KAWASE

* Japanese island with a subtropical climate, midway between Kyushu and Okinawa

INTERVIEW WITH NAOMI KAWASE

Although Still the Water is a fiction, the film has an enlightening documentary aspect about the spiritual life and rites of the inhabitants of Amami islands. Why did you choose to shoot your film in this specific unknown, remote place?

The island of Amami-Oshima where my ancestors had lived. It wasn't until about ten years ago that I first came to know about this family history. And my first visit was in the year 2008. Ever since then, I was determined to shoot a film there. In this sense, I could say it took about six whole years for this film in developing, preparing, and finally completing it. Since the very beginning of it all, my feeling for this island has always stayed closely within my heart. Up until then, I had always based in Nara to shoot all my films, but having the death of my foster mother, who served as my link and attachment to Nara, as a turning point, I started preparing for real and more deeply to shoot the film in Amami.

As you say, there are particular and unique customs and rites of the islanders such as the Yuta Gods' practice and the traditional dances like the August Dance. Also, the island has and is surrounded by its rich nature of the sea and the forests. What I was so convinced in making of this film from the beginning was that capturing these elements of the island that are all so overwhelmingly powerful and letting them exist realistically as they are on screen will create the strong basis of this film. I was convinced of this because I found so many elements that we, human, will be fascinated about in the life on the island.

Would you describe Still the Water as a continuation of the themes explored in your previous films?

Yes, for sure. The themes such as "life and death", "symbiosis between humans and nature", "the memories of a place", "the cycle of life that comes and goes one generation after another", these are present in my previous films as well as in this film. However, speaking of this film particularly, it was different in the sense that I found myself having almost no desire to force or control over something during the production. I never felt like, "this has to be this way" or "I want this no matter what". For some reason, this peaceful state of mind came down to me, calmly assuring me what we need will come down to us naturally as well.



The story is a very moving tale of coming of age with very subtle relationships between the characters. What main issues do Kaito and Kyoko have to face?

If I put it very simply, maybe it's their challenge to have their mind to believe in the world they exist in.

We humans have made countless number of horrible mistakes in the past. I feel they're the results of the fact that some of us have lost or forgotten the mind to believe in our world.

People in the past had always left their messages to us as the people in the future not to repeat the same mistakes through the art of writing, paintings, music, and so on. However, thoughtless human beings, including myself, still keep making the same mistakes.

This is my wish and hope for the future that I tried to reflect and pass onto these two characters as the "new people" in the next generation, who are both in the transitional process from being a child to an adult.

Learning how to accept the others, engraving the sorrow of life on our memories, but still possessing the mind to believe in this world as something irreplaceably beautiful. When human beings can do this, I believe we can elevate ourselves to live in the higher world we have not yet experienced. I question and wonder, as a person given my life to live in this time, if we are tested on what path we choose to take at the crossroad we face as human.



How did you cast the main characters of the film? Are there many non professional actors among the cast?

People often talk about how I cast non-professional actors in my films, but for this film, most of the actors are professionals.

As for the two young main characters (Kyoko and Kaito), we did audition and selected them, who were both inexperienced, especially Kaito, who never had acted before. What was crucially important in casting these two characters was their presence that could match with the overwhelmingly strong presence of the nature in Amami. They pulled the task and actually went beyond what I was expecting.

For their parents, I casted the professional actors and actresses that I'd been interested in. Fujio TOKITA, who played the role of Kamejiro, stayed in the island during the whole duration of shooting, even though he didn't have many scenes to be filmed. He spent days, picking up trash and fishing by the seashore, just like Kamejiro does in the film. He blended himself so naturally to the life on the island, that some tourists even came up to him one time and asked about the best spots for fishing on the island. He was casted in many films including Akira KUROSAWA's films but he's also one of the most well known voice actors for animations in Japan.





Under which circumstances did you manage to shoot the typhoon?

We were told the year we filmed (2013) was an unusual year to have many typhoons hitting the island one after another.

During the month of October, usually the island rarely has a typhoon, but somehow, as if it's meant for us to film it, the typhoon approached us right when we were there. The fact we could film the violent waves of the real typhoon was miraculous, as if it was almost something bestowed on us from up above. So the whole crew prepared fully to shoot in the hard rains and winds and pulled off the difficult shoot.

To what extent are some scenes improvised?

We had the screenplay to follow and we filmed in the exact order of the scenes that appeared in the script. Among the scenes that were improvised, we have the scenes such as the one for the August Dancing, the Yuta God, the death of Isa, and the typhoon. Also, the scene in the beginning of the film, where people gather at the crime scene by the seashore and the classroom that comes right after were also improvised without being given any script. Similarly, for the two scenes with the goats being killed, the actors knew the main flow of the scenes, but the camera movements and the actings were improvisational as well. So in this sense, maybe I can say half of the film was improvisational.



NAOMI KAWASE - DIRECTOR

Selective filmography (feature films)

STILL THE WATER (2014) Cannes Film Festival, in Competition

HANEZU (2011) Cannes Film Festival, in Competition

NANAYOMACHI (2008)

THE MOURNING FOREST (2007) Cannes Film Festival - Grand Prize

SHARA (2003) Cannes Film Festival, in Competition

HOTARU (2000) Locarno Film Festival - CICAIE Award & FIPRESCI Prize

SUZAKU (1997) Cannes Film Festival - Golden Camera

CAST

Kaito	Nijiro MURAKAMI
Kyoko	Jun YOSHINAGA
Isa	Miyuki MATSUDA
Tetsu	Tetta SUGIMOTO
Misaki	Makiko WATANABE
Atsushi	Jun MURAKAMI
Kamejiro	Fujio TOKITA

CREW

Production	WOWOW, COMME DES CINÉMAS
Co-production	ARTE France Cinéma, LUIS MIÑARRO, KUMIE, ASMIK ACE
Producers	Masa SAWADA, Takehiko AOKI, Naomi KAWASE
Co-Producers	Olivier PÈRE, Rémi BURAH/ARTE France Cinéma LUIS MIÑARRO, Masaki MIYATA/Asmik Ace Yuko NAITO/Kumie, Masahito MIZUGUCHI/Pony Canyon Nobuya WAZAKI/Wowow, Anne PERNOD/Comme des Cinémas
Executive Producer Japan	Reiji YAMAMOTO
1st assistant Director	Yuki KONDO
Director of Photography	Yutaka YAMAZAKI
Lighting	Yasuhiro OHTA
Art Director	Kenji INOUE
Editor	Tina BAZ
Music	HASIKEN
Sound	Shigeatsu AO
Sound Editor	Olivier GOINARD, Roman DYMMY
Sound Mixer	Olivier GOINARD
Sound Effect	Nicolas FIORASO

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