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**UN CERTAIN REGARD**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

**WAKAMATSU PRODUCTION PRESENTS**

# 11/25 THE DAY MISHIMA CHOSE HIS OWN FATE

directed by  
**KOJI WAKAMATSU**

2011 • JAPAN • JAPANESE • 1H59M • COLOR  
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## SYNOPSIS

*"If we value so highly the dignity of life, how can we not also value the dignity of death? No death may be called futile."*

- Yukio Mishima

On November 25th 1970, a man committed ritual suicide inside the Tokyo headquarters of the Japan Self-Defense Forces, leaving behind a legacy of masterpieces and a controversy that echoes to this day. The man was Yukio Mishima, one of Japan's greatest and most celebrated novelists. With four members of his own private army - the Tatenokai - Mishima had taken the commandant hostage and called upon the assembled military outside the Ministry to overthrow their society and restore the powers of the Emperor. When the soldiers mocked and jeered Mishima, he cut short his speech and withdrew to the commandant's office where he committed *seppuku* - the samurai warrior's death - tearing open his belly with a ceremonial knife before being beheaded by one of his colleagues.

What was Mishima truly trying to express through his actions? And what did he witness during his final moments?

## DIRECTOR'S INTENTION NOTE

The 1960s saw an international surge of protest against the 1951 Japan-US Security Treaty. Student activism for social change in Japan was also gathering momentum, and gaining widespread support from farmers and laborers. Conservative students also mobilized themselves to oppose their left-wing counterparts. It was from the ranks of these latter activists that Mishima formed his private militia - the Tatenokai (Shield Society). Who were the Tatenokai really fighting? And what was the meaning of Mishima's extraordinary final gesture?

In this film, I decided to focus on the opposite side of 1960s to the one I explored in **United Red Army**. Both Mishima and the left wing radicals were struggling to alter Japan for the better; time has allowed us to see that in our society nothing changed.

What were they fighting for? Who was the real enemy? Why did Mishima decide to end his life as he did? How should humans live and die? And why? Questions raise further questions - it never ends. This is why I had to make this film.

- Koji Wakamatsu 2012

## PRODUCTION NOTE

In recent years, Koji Wakamatsu has directed a number of controversial films that boldly reveal the heart of Japan during the Showa period (1926-1989), including **Caterpillar** (2010) and **United Red Army (Jitsuroku Rengou Sekigun: Asama Sanso e no michi)** (2007). Now he turns his eye to the subject of Yukio Mishima.

Numerous books and films have offered a variety of critiques and analyses of Mishima. However, Koji Wakamatsu has chosen to focus on his subject's humanity rather than limiting himself to the simple retelling of his well-known life story. Wakamatsu draws not only on Mishima as an isolated human being, but also on the young members of the Tatenokai, as well as a period of significant change and seismic events in Japan: the February 26 Incident (an attempted coup d'etat carried out by Imperial army troops in 1936); Japan's defeat in World War II; the assassination of the head of the Socialist Party in 1960; 1968's Kwon Hyi-Ro Incident (in which a second-generation Korean Japanese man killed two gang members and took 18 people hostage in protest against the ill-treatment of Koreans in Japan), and the Tokyo University Conflict of 1969, which saw violent confrontation between student radicals and the police.

Since the 1960s, Koji Wakamatsu has continuously devoted himself to an exploration of the energy, explosive intensity and fragility of the young generations.

The actions of the officers involved in the February 26 Incident made a profound impression on Mishima, who was just a boy at the time. What Otoyama Yamaguchi experienced when he assassinated Inejiro Asanuma, chairman of the Socialist Party, in 1960; the agonized soul of Masakatsu Morita, who consecrated his life - and death - to Mishima; we find echoes of these experiences Wakamatsu's **Portrait of 17** or **United Red Army**. The passionate, intense and often irrational impulses of the young irrigate films such as **Yuke Yuke Nidome no Shojo (Go, Go, Second Time Virgin)** and **Okasareta Hakui (Violated Angels)**. And it is this spirit that continues to inspire Koji Wakamatsu's heartfelt cry of the soul.

## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

At the end of the 1950s, the young Koji Wakamatsu spent six months in jail – the experience ended his career as a yakuza but acted as the spur for a new vocation. Having “discovered how the authority of power imposed itself in a repressive and brutal fashion” the small-time gangster, who had been handling “shooting permits” in Shinjuku, decided to become a filmmaker as an act of resistance against authority. His decision would find its expression in a very particular genre: pink cinema. Shot over a few days, with non-professional actors and on very tight budgets, these erotic B-movies were the object of regular scandal and embodied the underground spirit of the era. Takechi Tetsuji was the first to give an overtly political dimension to the genre with **Black Snow** (1965), which showed a naked woman crossing a US military base, and a G.I. being shot in the head. The government had him arrested for indecency. The trial that followed became one of the landmark battles for freedom of expression in Japan and brought pink cinema to the notice of anti-establishment students. Militating against the perpetual renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty (in reality, a humiliating enforced trusteeship), they recognized themselves in the films of Nagisa Oshima, Susumu Hani and Toshio Matsumoto, but also in the violence and darkness of pink cinema.

In 1965, Wakamatsu set up his own production company, Wakamatsu Production, and directed **Affairs Within Walls**, which provoked widespread scandal, and above all a diplomatic incident between Japan and

Germany when it was selected for the Berlin Festival that year. His camera became a political offensive weapon, denouncing the failings of a hypocritical government and establishing itself above all as the voice of a youth in the grip of a cataclysmic identity crisis, as portrayed in **Go, Go, Second Time Virgin** (1967) or **Sex Jack** (1970) - films which belong more to underground or new wave than to pink cinema.

Usually written with Masao Adachi and filmed at a manic pace (often twelve in a year), at first glance simplistic, with their stripped down direction that recalls Jean-Luc Godard, but possessing an excess of sex and brutality that leads back to exploitation cinema, his films are virulent anarchist manifestos that even today set the teeth of the Japanese authorities grinding and have and have seen the director banned from visiting the U.S. or Russia.

Albeit that he had embarked upon a poetic and symbolist path, Wakamatsu's cinema nonetheless never relinquished its connection with hard reality. Operating outside the enclosed studio community, the director naturally adopted the gestures of the New Wave: his cinema inhabited the present, the streets of Tokyo, and featured the youth who roamed Shinjuku or occupied the universities. In the style of the revolutionary news footage of the Newsreel collective, he began **Shinjuku Mad** (1970), **Sex Jack** and **Running on Madness, Dying in Love** (1969) with footage of violent confrontations between the National Guard and Zenkyoto demonstrators – left-wing student demonstrators. Students, who

formed the greatest part of Wakamatsu's audience, could take part in a demonstration and discover themselves shortly after in a pink cinema screening.

In 1971, Wakamatsu found international recognition when he was invited to the Cannes Film Festival Directors' Fortnight with **Violated Angels** (1967) and **Sex Jack**. At the same time he began to slow down his rate of production.

Five years later, he was reunited with Nagisa Oshima, for whom he acted as executive producer on **In the Realm of the Senses**.

Wakamatsu's explosive **United Red Army** - a study of a doomed branch of the Japanese Red Army, a terrorist organization active during the 1970s - was awarded at the Berlin Film Festival in 2008, and screened at many of the world's most prestigious international festivals.

In 2010, Koji Wakamatsu returned to the Berlin Film Festival in Official Competition, 45 years after **Affairs Within Walls**, with **Caterpillar**, the story of a Japanese soldier returning home from the second Sino-Japanese War in 1940 having lost all his limbs. The film won Shinobu Terajima the Silver Bear for Best Actress for her portrayal of the soldier's wife.

Thanks to Stephane du Mesnildot

## YUKIO MISHIMA - BIOGRAPHY

Yukio Mishima (1925-1970) was a Japanese novelist, playwright, actor, film director, and poet. Three-times nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature, Mishima achieved international fame and is generally agreed to be one of the most significant Japanese authors of the twentieth century. Vastly prolific, his creative output includes one film as director, one libretto, eighteen plays, twenty books of essays, twenty books of short fiction and forty novels. His most significant work united modern literary stylistic devices with traditional Japanese elements. He also addressed very modern configurations of sexuality and mortality in his writing. Mishima was awarded, among others, the Shincho Prize, the Kishida Prize for Drama, and the Yomiuri Prize for Literature (Best Novel and Best Drama).

Yukio Mishima was born Kimitake Hiraoka on January 14, 1925, in the Yotsua district of Tokyo. His father worked as a government official. As a child his life was dominated by his grandmother, Natsu, who separated him from his family for several years. Natsu had grown up in the household of Prince Arisugawa Taruhito and this upbringing gave her aristocratic pretensions, despite the fact that her husband was a bureaucrat who made his fortune on Japan's colonial frontier. Natsu prevented the young Mishima from participating in sports, leaving him to play with his girl cousins. Fearing that his son was becoming overly feminine, Mishima's father would often destroy the boy's early attempts at literature, viewing such endeavors as 'unmanly'. Mishima entered the elite Peers School when he was six years old, by

which time he was already an avid reader. He immersed himself in classic Japanese literature, but was also fascinated by the works of Rainer Maria Rilke and Oscar Wilde. Inspired by the poet Michizo Tachihara, the boy wrote *waka* style poems - Mishima's first published works were in this classical style. His short story "The Forest in Full Bloom", written for the Peers' School literary magazine, so impressed his tutors that they encouraged him to seek publication in the journal *Literary Culture*. The nom-de-plume "Yukio Mishima" was devised by his teachers to protect the boy from ridicule from his schoolmates.

At the beginning of World War II, Mishima was called up for the draft of the Imperial Japanese Army. Ill when he appeared before the medical board, he lied to the doctors, telling them he had signs of tuberculosis, and was declared unfit for military service. Mishima began studying at the University of Tokyo. Although his days were devoted to his academic pursuits, his nights were spent writing. Shortly after his graduation in 1947, he took a post in the Finance Ministry but exhausted himself within the first year and resigned to focus on a literary career.

The writing from this post-war period included serialized novellas, short fiction, essays, novels and contemporary versions of Kabuki and Noh drama. In 1948, he published the semi-autobiographical **Confessions of a Mask**, a powerful novel of a young man who must navigate between the dictates of mainstream society and his homosexual desires. The book was wildly successful and by the age of 24, Mishima



had become a celebrity. Many of his works were translated into European languages and he swiftly gained a reputation as a significant talent in both Europe and America.

In 1952, having long desired to see the seat of Classical Western culture, Mishima traveled to Greece. This trip, coupled with the legend of Daphnis and Chloe, inspired his novel **Sound of the Waves**. (1954). Mishima's writing also often drew from contemporary events: his novel **The Temple of the Golden Pavilion** (1956), for example, was heavily inspired by the burning of the famous Kyoto Temple.

Mishima started weight training in 1955. His rigorous weekly regime continued until his death. He also became an avid and skillful practitioner of the martial art *kendo*. Despite his earlier flight from military service, Mishima would be known for his political support for a re-militarized Japan, joining the Ground Self Defense Force and undergoing training in 1967. In 1968, Yukio Mishima uses his reputation and his martial training to found the *Tatenokai* or Shield Society, a paramilitary organization whose members swore loyalty to the abstract notion of the Voices of the Heroic Dead. Mishima supported Japanese Nationalism but was greatly angered by Emperor Hirohito's renunciation of imperial divinity. In fact, the writer's radical political beliefs were deeply idiosyncratic. Left wingers detested his commitment to his interpretation of the samurai code, *bushido*, while the Right were contemptuous of his declaration that Emperor Hirohito should have resigned from the Chrysanthemum Throne.

In 1958, Mishima married Yoko Sugiyama. The following year she gave birth to a daughter named Noriko and, four years later, a son named Ichiro. Although Mishima often frequented gay bars, many (including his widow and children) have tried to obscure the fact of his homosexuality - an attempt that has failed to prevent many of the writer's male lovers from coming forward.

In 1960, Mishima made his film debut in Yasuzo Masumura's **Afraid to Die**, a role he followed with appearances in **Yukoku** (1966), **Black Lizard** (1968), and **Hitokiri** (1969). Mishima also worked as a photographic model, most famously for Eikoh Hosoe's "Ba-Ra-Kei: Ordeal by Roses". Mishima also modeled for Tamotsu Yato's "Otoko: Photo Studies of the Young Japanese Male" and "Young Samurai: Bodybuilders of Japan".

On November 25, 1970, Mishima led four Tatenokai members to the Ichigaya Camp of the Self-Defense Forces of Japan, in Tokyo. He was allowed access to the camp in the belief that he was going to a meeting with the camp commander. Once inside, the five men bound the commander to his chair and unfurled a banner listing their demands. Mishima had prepared a manifesto to clarify their political beliefs and wanted to inspire the soldiers to rise up and overthrow the government. However his address was greeted with mockery and jeers from the assembled soldiers. Finishing his speech after only a few minutes, Mishima returned to the commander's office and committed ritual suicide or *seppuku*. Shield Society member Masakatsu Morita was supposed to perform the role of *kaishakunin*, but was unable

to perform his task, leaving his comrade Hiroyasu Koga to complete the beheading of Yukio Mishima.

Yukio Mishima had planned his extraordinary final act for over a year. The Shield Society members who accompanied were chosen for their unswerving loyalty; Mishima had ensured that their legal defense fees would be paid.

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

### **ARATA IURA as Yukio Mishima**

Arata Iura was born in 1974 in Tokyo.

### SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 1998** **After Life**  
Koreeda Hirokazu
- 2001** **Distance**  
Koreeda Hirokazu
- 2008** **United Red Army**  
Koji Wakamatsu

### **SHINNOSUKE MITSUSHIMA as Masakatsu Morita**

Born in 1989 in Okinawa, he is the brother of leading Japanese actress Hikari Mitsushima.

Mitsushima began his acting career when he appeared on stage in Jean Cocteau's **Les Parents Terribles** (2010). MISHIMA is his movie debut.

## CAST & CREW

Director  
**KOJI WAKAMATSU**

Screenplay  
**MASAYUKI KAKEGAWA**  
**KOJI WAKAMATSU**

Cast  
**ARATA IURA - Yukio Mishima**  
**SHINNOSUKE MITSUSHIMA -  
Masakatsu Morita**  
**SHINOBU TERAJIMA -  
Yoko Mishima - wife**  
**SORAN TAMOTO - Otoya Yamaguchi**

DP  
**TOMOHIKO TSUJI**

Original Music  
**FUMIO ITABASHI**

Editor  
**KUMIKO SAKAMOTO**

Producers  
**NORIKO OZAKI**  
**(SKHOLE CO. LTD)**  
**KOJI WAKAMATSU**  
**(WAKAMATSU PRODUCTION)**

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