



The Leading Hand

The Leading Hand

Masahiro Muramatsu

JAPAN, 1996

30 minutes ■ Colour/16mm

Bird Watching

Shinobu Yaguchi

JAPAN, 1996

15 minutes ■ Colour/16mm

Okke-ke Bibirobos

Takuji Suzuki

JAPAN, 1996

19 minutes ■ Colour/16mm

Brain Holiday

Hineki Mito

JAPAN, 1996

21 minutes ■ Colour/16mm

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This collection of funny, charming short films combines familiar themes of recent young Japanese cinema, like romantic infatuation, wide-eyed existentialism and a strange, absurd sense of humour, into perfectly compact, elegant little packages. Most of them have been shepherded through production by the Pia Organization, at first a small festival for experimental Super-8 work, now a major showcase for rising independent filmmakers. For the last few years, Pia has been producing one feature film a year from its past prize-winners including celebrated films such as Shinobu Yaguchi's *Down the Drain* and Ryosuke Hashiguchi's *A Touch of Fever*. This programme gives a taste of what we might expect from the youngest generation of this increasingly re-invigorated national cinema.

The Leading Hand is a quiet mood piece in which a young man and woman are delivering a bookshelf and get lost. The young man, Sakai, insists that an invisible hand in the middle of the road will help them find their way. The woman is incredulous. A diffuse, grainy camera adds to the eerie tone.

Returning to his oddball youth vernacular of *Down the Drain*, Shinobu Yaguchi tells the tale of a young woman who steals a video camera from a trusting bird watcher. She shows it to her girlfriends and then goes to the bathroom. Her "friends" then trash her, while the camera runs.

Shinobu's creative collaborator, Takuji Suzuki, also delves into girlspeak for his all-girl rock band tale, *Okke-ke Bibirobos*. A big black lump in the road makes two band members late for a band meeting. The

subsequent audition reveals them to be a kind of grunge Shonen Knife.

In the very funny and beautifully photographed *Brain Holiday*, an accident triggers a man's memories of his parents and girlfriend. Simultaneously morose and sarcastic, but with a bittersweet romantic edge, *Brain Holiday* is especially poignant. It is a characteristic example of a certain innocent nihilism found in Japanese cinema's newest wave.

■ Noah Cowan

Masahiro Muramatsu was born in 1972. He studied at Tokyo Zokei University. His first film, *Life Cycle*, was produced at Inter-College Techno Art Works. Films include: *Life Cycle* (94) and *The Leading Hand* (96).

Shinobu Yaguchi was born in 1967. He launched his career as a filmmaker at the Tokyo University of Art and Design, where he worked as an assistant to the production designer. He won the Grand Prize at the Pia film festival with his first work, an 8mm film, *Rain Woman*. Filmography: *Rain Woman* (90), *Down the Drain* (93), *My Secret Cache* (96) and *Bird Watching* (96).

Takuji Suzuki was born in 1967. He won the Special Judges award of the Pia film festival in 1988 for his 8mm work, *Niji*. An accomplished actor, Suzuki also wrote the screenplay to *My Secret Cache* (96). Films include: *Niji* (88) and *Okke-ke Bibirobos* (96).

Hineki Mito was born in Hokkaido, Japan in 1969. He won the Pia film festival Grand Prize for his first film, *Strange High*. In 1991 he joined Filmworks, and has been a principal member since. Films include: *Strange High* (93) and *Brain Holiday* (95).

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