

K A S A M A Y A K I
(M A D E I N K A S A M A)



Directed by Yuki Kokubo

78 minutes • English & Japanese with English subtitles • HD Color • Japan & USA • 2014

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KASAMAYAKI (MADE IN KASAMA)

SYNOPSIS

Shaken by the Japanese tsunami, earthquake and nuclear disasters, a young woman returns from New York City to Kasama to make sense of her family's troubled past. In a rural artist community 90 miles south of the Fukushima nuclear reactors, she turns the camera on her aging parents, who live a lifestyle centered on art and nature. Meditative moments at the pottery wheel punctuated by tense family conversations, sudden earthquakes, and radiation level readings, KASAMAYAKI exposes the bittersweet process of coming to terms with an imperfect life, and the healing power of creativity.



RELEASE DATES

DOC NYC (Viewfinders Competition)

November 16, 2014

New York, NY, USA

Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival

March 2015

Thessaloniki, Greece

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was born in a rural artist community in the city of Kasama, a few hours north of Tokyo. When I was eight years old, my parents and I moved to fulfill their dreams of living as artists in New York City. But it was very difficult to make ends meet. By the time I was sixteen, our family life was in shambles and my parents returned to Japan while I remained in New York. As the years passed, our relationship further disintegrated and we saw each other less and less.

The 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters changed everything. I suddenly felt compelled to be close to my family, and to document what was going on in Japan. However, as I began interviewing my parents about the disasters, I slowly came to realize why I was really there – to find out who my parents were, and why our family had fallen apart. The camera became a powerful tool, as it allowed me to broach difficult topics that we had long avoided.

The result is a story of two tragedies: one about a broken family, and the other, about a nation grappling with catastrophic disasters – woven together in a way to seek meaning amongst the wreckage. Through the making of KASAMAYAKI my parents showed me how they use their creativity to overcome difficulties in life, and I came to understand that I could make a film to heal our family.

Although exploring and revealing my family's story has been at times, tremendously difficult, I hope that KASAMAYAKI will inspire others with painful stories to find healing in their own lives.

- Yuki Kokubo



BIOGRAPHIES

YUKI KOKUBO

DIRECTOR/ CINEMATOGRAPHER/ EDITOR

Yuki is a documentary filmmaker and photographer based in New York City. Raised in an artists' community in rural Japan, Yuki's family relocated to New York City in 1986. She began photographing as a teenager and attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to study fine art photography. More recently, she attended School of Visual Arts to study Social Documentary Film. After the Japanese earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters of 2011, Yuki began working on her first feature length documentary, KASAMAYAKI (MADE IN KASAMA). In 2013, KASAMAYAKI received funding from the Jerome Foundation, and was selected as one of ten documentary films for IFP's Independent Filmmaker Labs. In 2014, Yuki received an Individual Artist Grant from the New York State Council on the Arts for her work on KASAMAYAKI.

KEIKO DEGUCHI

CONSULTING EDITOR

Keiko Deguchi has edited over thirty feature-length films including award-winning documentaries such as Jeremiah Zagar's IN A DREAM, Linda Hattendorf's THE CATS OF MIRIKITANI and Jason DaSilva's WHEN I WALK. Deguchi's narrative film credits include Patrick Stettner's THE BUSINESS OF STRANGERS, Steven Shainberg's FUR: AN IMAGINARY PORTRAIT OF DIANE ARBUS and Bette Gordon's HANDSOME HARRY. She is the recipient of James Lyons Editing Award at Woodstock Film Festival in 2008.

JESSE PETERSON

ORIGINAL MUSIC

Jesse Peterson is a musician living in Los Angeles. He writes and performs music that will brighten your day, or give you solace in times of trouble. His collaborations with Carlos Niño have recently been released under the name Turn On The Sunlight. He has performed solo and with TOTS in the US, Japan and Europe. He is currently working on a record with his wife, singer-songwriter Mia Doi Todd.

GRANTS & FELLOWSHIPS

Jerome Foundation
New York City Film & Video Grant (2013)

Independent Filmmaker Project
Independent Filmmaker Labs (2013)

New York State Council on the Arts
Individual Artist Grant (2014)

CREDITS

Directed by **Yuki Kokubo**
Featuring **Katsuji Kokubo**
Featuring **Shigeko Kokubo**
Executive Producer **Anneliese Popescu**
Associate Producer **Andrew Kwon**
Director of Photography **Yuki Kokubo**
Original Music **Jesse Peterson**
Editor **Yuki Kokubo**
Consulting Editor **Keiko Deguchi**
Creative Consultant **Lindsay Lindenbaum**
Creative Consultant **Michel Negroponte**
Proposal Development **Fernanda Rossi**
Consultant **Marlo Poras**
Consultant **Jason Goldman**
Subtitles **Sahe Yoshioka**
Title Animation **Jeffrey Chuang**
Post Production Services **Goldcrest Post Production Facilities, Ltd.**
Colorist **John J. Dowdell III**
Online Editor **Michelle Ambruz**
Technical Supervisor **Timothy Spitzer**
Digital Intermediate Producer **Jeanne Sison**
Supervising Sound Editor & Rerecording Mixer **Michael Suarez**
Dialog Editor **Krissopher Chevannes**
SFX Editor **Mark Amicucci**
Special Thanks **Milton Tabbot**
Special Thanks **Rose Vincelli Gustine**

JANUARY 14, 2015

Behind the Camera and on the Screen, Women Thrive at DOC NYC 2014

BY WANDA BERSHEN

SHARE:

Now in its fifth year, **DOC NYC** bills itself as the largest documentary festival in the US. Expanding the roster to 155 films and events, the 2014 edition saw record-breaking ticket sales, a 28 percent increase in attendance, more than 50 sold-out screenings and close to 25,000 attendees. Clearly, New Yorkers like docs.

Althea, about African-American tennis star Althea Gibson, tells a fascinating story about a little known pioneer who was nearly penniless in later life. Against all odds, she became the first African-American to win the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open. Not just a bio pic, the film, by Rex Miller, is an in-depth tale of the high level of racial prejudice that Gibson faced in the 1940s and '50s, as well as the class divisions in the tennis world. Despite its quintessential "whiteness," Gibson persevered over many years, managed to ignore direct slurs, and ultimately won two Wimbledon championships. A street kid from New York City who worked hard to hone her athletic skills, she also had to learn to modify her behavior in order to function effectively in the genteel world of competitive tennis. Mentored by several renowned coaches in black tennis circles, she became a tough, aggressive and eminently graceful player. Since there was little money for tennis players in that era, she later became a singer and recorded albums, as well as a successful golfer, competing in professional tournaments throughout the country.

In addition to its fascinating stories, *Althea* is elegantly structured with archival material, including home movies and photographs by Gordon Parks and Genevieve Naylor, Gibson's appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and an interview with the legendary Edward Murrow. *Althea* is a quintessential American story about a difficult chapter of our history, and a woman who was clearly an iconic figure.

A portrait of cross-cultural coming-of-age, Norah Shapiro's *Miss Tibet: Beauty in Exile* is the story of Tibetan-American teenager Tenzin Khecheo, who travels to India to compete in a "beauty pageant with a difference." The founder, Lobsang Wangyal, sees his Dharamsala event as an opportunity for exiled Tibetan women to both immerse themselves in Tibetan culture and contribute to the fight for a free Tibet by using the pageant as an unlikely political platform. Tall and energetic, Wangyal dresses like the quintessential TV dance show host, right down to the shiny suits and large shades. The pageant itself includes the requisite catwalks, bathing suits and evening gowns to complement its political undercurrents, resulting in a mashup of Miss America and Live Aid. Right after the pageant, the women discover that part of the voting was secret. When they confront Wangyal, he storms off. Tenzin and her family prepare to leave for home feeling conned. Later she realizes she has learned a lot, and decides to continue her support for Tibetan freedom.

Two other films that dealt with issues of complex cultural identity included Yuki Kokubo's *Kasamayaki* and Adam Zucker's *The Return*. Kokubo grew up in the US from age 7, although her parents returned to Japan when she was 16. This was the occasion of a major family rift, which kept them apart for many years. Kasama is a rural artists' community a few hours north of Tokyo, where her parents now live and where Kokubo was born. Following the 2011 tsunami, she felt compelled to return to Japan and make her film. Her parents run a small pottery business with a workshop in the yard behind their home. Taking on the rhythms of that life, the film is reflective and measured with beautiful images of the light, the landscape and her parent's daily lives. Woven into that are the encounters, often quite painful, as Kokubo tries to get them to talk about their feelings and to find a way to relate to them as an adult. Her mother is very attached to cats and there are four living on the property as well as two dogs. We see the cats in their elegant poses often sitting in windows, sleeping on the worktable and wandering through the workshop. Her mother also sculpts large cats for sale, which seem to be quite popular. Kokubo tells us she sees the cats as substitutes for her mother's "lost" child. Slowly there is some mutual reconciliation, sketched in small intimate scenes, with both parents. Suffused with stylistic delicacy, *Kasamayaki* is a touching, almost elegiac family portrait.

In Adam Zucker's *The Return*, four young Polish women have only recently learned that they have Jewish backgrounds. Raised in a predominantly Catholic country, Kasia, Tusia, Katka and Maria know little about Jewish history and culture and must learn from scratch. The lively Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Krakow offers music, arts, holiday events as well as classes in language and history. Maria, a single mother, has always known she is Jewish, and in the course of the film marries an Orthodox Jew and moves to Israel. Kasia only discovered her family's Jewish roots after the political explosions of 1989 and is looking for a way to mesh her Jewish identity with her feminism and queer activism. Katka was raised as a secular Catholic in Slovakia and now has an increasingly committed orthodox boyfriend. She has decided to explore Jewish life in Warsaw and by the end of the film also converts to Orthodox Judaism. Tusia has dual US and Polish citizenship, lives in Brooklyn and is pursuing a graduate degree at NYU. Her Polish fiancé is not quite ready to abandon his homeland, while she finds being a Jew in Poland somewhat burdensome. Each of the women is thoughtful and engaging. Interviews woven throughout the film with a wide range of Jewish leaders provide an important context for the women's stories. Asked about anti-Semitism after the screening, Zucker claimed that "philo-Semitism"—an almost fetishistic embrace of all things Jewish—was more noticeable. He went on to explain that anyone can just walk into the JCC at Krakow (there's no metal detector)—unlike in other countries in Europe. By the end of the film we understand the assertion by Konstanty Gebert, a journalist and longtime Jewish activist, that "Nobody is representative for wider Polish Jewry. It is a shifting, changing, multi-faceted phenomenon."

*Wanda Bershen is a consultant on fundraising, festivals and distribution. Documentary clients have included Sonia, Power Trip, Afghan Women, Trembling Before G*D and Blacks & Jews. She has organized programs with the Human Rights Film Festival, Brooklyn Museum and Film Society of Lincoln Center, and currently teaches arts management at CUNY Baruch. Visit www.reddiaper.com.*

DOC NYC Women Directors: Meet Yuki Kokubo - 'Kasamayaki'

By [Alice Thorpe](#) | Women and Hollywood
November 13, 2014 at 9:00AM



'Kasamayaki'

Yuki Kokubo is a documentary filmmaker and photographer based in New York City. Raised in an artists' community in rural Japan, Kokubo and her family relocated to New York City in 1986. She began photographing as a teenager and attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to study fine art photography.

After the Japanese earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters of 2011, Kokubo began working on her first feature-length documentary, *Kasamayaki* (*Made in Kasama*). In 2013, *Kasamayaki* received funding from the Jerome Foundation and was selected as one of ten documentary films for IFP's Independent Filmmaker Labs. In 2014, Kokubo received an Individual Artist Grant from the New York State Council on the Arts for her work on *Kasamayaki*. ([Ocarina Media](#))

Kasamayaki will play at DOC NYC on November 16.

W&H: Please give us your description of the film playing.

YK: *Kasamayaki* is a personal film about my family and the disasters in Japan. In the wake of the 2011 tsunami, earthquake, and nuclear disasters, I returned to Japan to reconnect with my estranged parents, who had abandoned me in New York City at the age of sixteen. It takes place in the city of Kasama, specifically in a rural artists' community a few hours north of Tokyo, where I was born and where my parents now live.

The filmmaking process began as a personal exploration of my roots, and this is reflected in the questions I ask my parents about the disasters, and what it means to be Japanese. However, as I continued on, I realized that I was more interested in finding out why our family fell apart. The result is a story of two tragedies: one about a broken family, and the other, about a nation grappling with catastrophic disasters, interwoven in a metaphoric way.

Shot in an observational style, *Kasamayaki* uses many static frames that allow action to slowly [unfur] on screen. In contrast to the quietness of the visuals, the emotional narrative remains strong throughout, carried by the unfolding conversations between my parents and myself. In a nutshell, *Kasamayaki* is a meditation on family, life, and the healing power of creativity.

W&H: What drew you to this story?

YK: When the Japanese earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters occurred, I felt devastated. I had an almost uncontrollable urge to go back to Japan to be there with my country and my family. I was in film school at the time and, as a filmmaker, I wanted to record the experience of being in post-disaster Japan.

When the film changed course to focus more on my family, I became intrigued by what kind of people my parents are and the interesting qualities they have as characters. It was kind of fascinating to take that kind of perspective on family members. By modern standards, my parents live an impoverished lifestyle. But as I looked closer, I was able to see how their lives are richly entwined with nature. They make a living using materials dug from the ground, much of their food comes from their garden, and they are always surrounded by the sights, smells, and sounds of nature. Having been born in the country and really missing that in my life in New York, I was really drawn to observing their lifestyle.

W&H: What was the biggest challenge in making the film?

YK: The biggest challenge in making this film was the emotional exhaustion I experienced from difficult conversations I had with my parents about our dysfunctional history. Although it brought us closer in the end, it was hard to ask these questions and sometimes to hear the answers.

Another challenge was the external pressure I felt to make the film as objective as possible. As documentary filmmakers, I think we are programmed to make films that tell all sides of the story. I tried many approaches, like at first incorporating every feedback I got, and even trying out an assistant editor. In the end, I decided it was my story told from my perspective, and it took a while to convince myself that was okay.

DOC NYC Women Directors: Meet Yuki Kokubo - 'Kasamayaki'

By [Alice Thorpe](#) | Women and Hollywood
November 13, 2014 at 9:00AM



W&H: What do you want people to think about when they are leaving the theater?

YK: I think most people have difficulties in their family relationships, and sometimes we feel at a loss of what to do. When there are major chasms between ourselves and the people we are supposed to be closest to, it makes us feel helpless. When they are leaving the theater, I want people to feel like there is always a way to connect, to reach out. And even if it doesn't turn out the way you'd always dreamt it would, life goes on and things will be okay.

W&H: What advice do you have for other female directors?

YK: Be true to your vision. Don't feel like you have to be polite and accept everyone's suggestion. Especially because I was partially raised in Japan, I've always struggled with the [expectation] that I should always be polite and do as others say. Even with this project, it was a long process for me to accept that I had my own vision and that it was okay for me to stick to it. In the end, I decided, what is the purpose of making artwork if you're not following your own vision?

W&H: What's the biggest misconception about you and your work?

YK: That it's a film about the Japanese disasters. Partially, it's my own fault, as that's how the film began. There have been so many films made about the disasters. Obviously, it was a tragic event of great magnitude, and it had such an impact on the emotional psyche of so many, not just in Japan but also around the world. But *Kasamayaki* is a film born as a result of the disasters. The heartbreak I felt as a Japanese person compelled me to reconnect with my estranged family, and the film is a result of that process.

W&H: How did you get your film funded?

YK: Funding for *Kasamayaki* came from various sources, including grants, crowd-funding, and personal financing. My first trip to Japan -- as well as basic equipment (camera, tripod) -- came out of pocket. After I cut a sample reel, I was able to raise about \$16,000 on Kickstarter, which funded two subsequent trips and allowed me to purchase some additional equipment.

After I began editing, I was selected for the IFP Filmmaker Labs, which provides amazing education for first-time filmmakers. Further into post, I received grants from the Jerome Foundation and an Individual Artist Grant from the New York Council on the Arts. Those grants allowed me to pay for a composer, a consulting editor, post-production, and festival applications.

W&H: Name your favorite woman-directed film and why.

YK: One of my favorite films directed by a woman is *Bombay Beach* by Alma Har'el. The film is an exploration of a forgotten town told through the viewpoints of three residents. What I love about the film is its dream scenarios, which were made in collaboration with the characters. I think much of life is about dreams -- of what we strive for, what we fantasize about, and how we individually perceive reality. *Bombay Beach* puts less emphasis on what documentaries normally call "reality" to focus on what is in the hearts of the characters. In some ways, I think that's more telling than a bunch of facts.

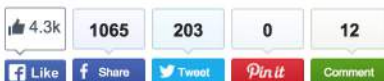


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16 Documentaries To Watch Out For This Year

The Huffington Post | By Katherine Brooks

Posted: 11/10/2014 11:17 am EST | Updated: 11/10/2014 4:59 pm EST



If you've begun to notice an abundance of socially-conscious filmmakers gathered together in lower Manhattan this week, first of all -- you're wonderfully observant. Secondly, there's a reason for it. This week marks the beginning of DOC NYC, the two-week long festival devoted to documentary storytelling of all kinds. From humor to reportage, memoirs to historical portraits, the cinematic bonanza covers everything new and noteworthy in the world of documentary filmmaking.

This year's calendar includes submissions from around the world, diving into things cultural -- the life of a rural artist community in post-tsunami Japan, the impact of Juilliard's Music Advancement Program for inner-city youth, the songs of Central African Republic's Bayaka pygmies -- and political -- the concept of equality in transnational LGBT marriage immigration cases, the realities of Jewish communities in modern day Poland, the publishing history of the National Enquirer.

There are over 150 films screening at DOC NYC, so we've compiled a guide to some of our our favorite selections. Check out our abbreviated list of must-see submissions, and make sure you check out the full schedule [here](#).

7. Kasamayaki



"Kasamayaki" explores the lives of two elderly parents living in a rural artistic community in Japan after the 2011 tsunami. More than that, the film dives into the relationship between director Yuki Kokubo and the mother and father who abandoned her as a teenager in New York City.

(5:00 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 16 @ IFC Center)

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Our Top 6 Discoveries of DOC NYC 2014

by Daniel Walber on November 21, 2014

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Ocarina Media

DOC NYC is a massive festival. The largest of its kind in the country, this thriving downtown Manhattan event featured well over 100 films this year. It included 20 world premieres and seemingly countless premieres of various types. The program also offered a revival series, special programs for local docs, music docs, sports docs and the prestigious Short List program of films soon to be in awards contention. It was a wild mix of exciting debuts and 2014 festival mainstays, with many more films than any one person can really comprehend.

As such, it would be impossible to write a list of the best films of the festival. The names at the top would also likely be similar to those at the top of Sundance or SXSW, True/False or Hot Docs. A number of our favorites of the year took another bow in New York City, from awards juggernauts like *Citizenfour* and *Life Itself* to smaller triumphs like *Cairo Drive* and *Song from the Forest*. So instead of spending more time raving about films we already know are wonderful, let's focus on some of the festival's most promising discoveries. Here are six of the best, running the gamut from an overlooked classic to a promising world premiere.

Kasamayaki (Yuki Kokubo)

Kasamayaki is a beautifully crafted film about artisanship that had its world premiere at the festival. Yuki Kokubo's parents are artists who moved from Japan to the United States in 1986. They raised her there but have since returned to the town of Kasama, in a region now affected by the nuclear disaster at Fukushima. The film is the result of a trip Kokubo took to visit her parents. Scenes of the aging couple at work, making pottery and sculpture, are coupled with intense discussions about how they have lived their lives. Folded into this personal and artistic milieu is the odd stasis given to this home by its radioactivity, strong enough to affect those living in it but not so soon that the elderly couple will experience it themselves. All of these themes are expertly woven into a quiet art object as beautiful and enigmatic as Kokubo's mother's clay cats.



02:00 HD vimeo