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Eye Filmuseum puts Akira Kurosawa's films back on the big screen

Nationwide releases of *Seven Samurai*, *Ikiru*, *Yojimbo* & *High and Low*

After an absence of more than 30 years, Eye Filmuseum is bringing the films of one of Japan's greatest filmmakers, Akira Kurosawa, to the big screen again, some in digitally restored versions. In his films, Kurosawa blends Japanese history and culture with literary and cinematic influences from the West. Eye is making Kurosawa's work accessible to a new generation of film lovers by screening classics such as *Seven Samurai* and *High and Low*, as well as films never before seen in the Netherlands. Akira Kurosawa – Back on the Big Screen, 26 June – 10 September in Eye Filmuseum, IJpromenade 1, Amsterdam, eyefilm.nl; previews from 5 June

To coincide with the start of the retrospective on 26 June, Eye is releasing 4K restorations of *Seven Samurai*, *Ikiru*, *High and Low* and *Yojimbo* in Dutch cinemas. Distributor Odyssey is releasing *Ran* (also 4K) on 7 August. This summer also sees the release of Spike Lee's *Highest 2 Lowest*, an adaptation of Akira Kurosawa's *High and Low*, with Denzel Washington in the role played by Kurosawa's regular actor Toshiro Mifune in the original 1963 film.

Two more of Kurosawa's films (*I Live in Fear* and *Rhapsody in August*) are currently topical as they deal with the impact of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki exactly 80 years ago, on 6 and 9 August.

Truth and lies

Akira Kurosawa brought Japanese film to the attention of the West with his drama *Rashomon*, which was awarded at the Venice Film Festival in 1951. *Rashomon*, screening exclusively in Eye in a new 4K restored version, is a treatise on lies, opportunism and the impossibility of knowing the truth: universal themes that speak to our imaginations today as powerfully as ever.

Vice versa, Kurosawa was also hugely inspired by Western culture – from Shakespeare's tragedies and Dostoyevsky's novels to the westerns of John Ford, American pulp and detective novels and the films of William Wyler and Frank Capra. At the same time, Kurosawa's films are deeply anchored

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in Japanese culture and history; this is most visible in his historical films (*Seven Samurai*, *Kagemusha*), but also in those films set against the backdrop of post-war Japan, such as *Ikiru* and *High and Low*, which explore themes including honour, loyalty and individual moral responsibility.

It was this mix of East meets West, storytelling derived from classic Hollywood films and his dynamic visual style – featuring huge close-ups and tense tracking shots – that made Kurosawa popular with international audiences and fellow filmmakers alike, from Scorsese and Coppola to Tarantino and Kore-eda. Steven Spielberg has called him ‘the pictorial Shakespeare of our time’. Peter Jackson was inspired by Kurosawa’s dramatic use of rain in *Seven Samurai* for the set-piece battles in *The Lord of the Rings*. The makers of award-winning hit series *Shogun* were inspired by Kurosawa’s samurai films.

Film programme

The film programme encompasses Kurosawa’s most significant films, from restored classics from the fifties such as *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai* to his later work, with highlights including the full-length version of *Kagemusha*, never before seen in the Netherlands, and the 4K restoration of *Ran*. Eye is screening digital restorations as well as rare 35mm prints from the collections of Eye and other film archives.

Several of Kurosawa’s films had been remade, either in Hollywood or in Europe: *Seven Samurai* (*The Magnificent Seven*), *Yojimbo* (*A Fistful of Dollars*, *Last Man Standing*) and more recently *Ikiru* (*Living*). George Lucas has cited *The Hidden Fortress* as a major source of inspiration for *Star Wars*. Remakes are screening in Eye in double bills alongside the original films, Koolhoven & Simons are dedicating an evening to the *Yojimbo* remake *Last Man Standing* and Eye on Sound is devoting attention to the role of sound and music in Kurosawa’s films – he worked with composers including Toru Takemitsu (*Ran*).

There will also be a screening of the restored silent film *Three Bad Men* (1926) by John Ford, an archetypal western that shows striking similarities to Kurosawa’s *The Hidden Fortress*; in addition, the influence of Kurosawa’s films on contemporary visual culture will be examined. A couple of documentaries are also screening: Chris Marker’s *A.K.*, about the shooting of *Ran*, as well as the Toshiro Mifune documentary *The Last Samurai*.

Ikiru – what can we learn from Kurosawa?

This is the question central to an evening all about the philosophy behind his films. *Ikiru* is more than a film title: it’s also a Japanese concept, which could be translated as ‘life’ or ‘living one’s life’. In *Ikiru* the film, a terminally ill bureaucrat wonders how he can still give his life meaning and

impact even as he stares death in the face. A theme that has only gained in currency in the turbulent world we inhabit now, dominated by uncertainty, where the political arenas in some countries are beginning to show alarming similarities to those of Kurosawa's feudal warlords.

Eye Film Player and posters

The films getting a cinematic release *Seven Samurai*, *Ikiru*, *High and Low* and *Yojimbo* can also be seen on the Eye Film Player, and there is an exhibition of Kurosawa posters on the wall close to cinemas 2 and 3. These are rare, original posters from Eye's film-related collection, some of which come from Japan, Poland and the Soviet Union.

Programme highlights

Directed by Akira Kurosawa

<i>No Regrets For Our Youth</i>	(1946)
<i>Drunken Angel</i>	(1948)
<i>Stray Dog</i>	(1949)
<i>Rashomon</i>	(1950)
<i>Ikiru</i>	(1952)
<i>Seven Samurai</i>	(1954)
<i>I Live in Fear</i>	(1955)
<i>The Hidden Fortress</i>	(1958)
<i>Throne of Blood</i>	(1957)
<i>The Bad Sleep Well</i>	(1960)
<i>Yojimbo</i>	(1961)
<i>Sanjuro</i>	(1962)
<i>High and Low</i>	(1963)
<i>Red Beard</i>	(1965)
<i>Dodes'ka-den</i>	(1970)
<i>Dersu Uzala</i>	(1975)
<i>Kagemusha</i>	(1980)
<i>Ran</i>	(1985)
<i>Dreams</i>	(1990)
<i>Rhapsody in August</i>	(1991)
<i>Madadayo</i>	(1993)

Inspired by Kurosawa

The Magnificent Seven (John Sturges, 1960)
A Fistful of Dollars (Sergio Leone, 1964)
A.K. (Chris Marker, 1985) – documentary about *Ran*
Last Man Standing (Walter Hill, 1996)

Mifune: The Last Samurai (2015) – documentary on regular actor Toshiro Mifune
Living (Oliver Hermanus, 2022)

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Note to editors (not for publication)

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