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火 Hee

Kaori Momoi

Producer Hidesuke Kataoka, Kazuyoshi Okuyama, Tadashi Nakamura, Chikako Nakabayashi. **Production companies** Katsudo Co. (Tokyo, Japan), Yoshimoto Creative Agency (Tokyo, Japan), Booster Projects (Tokyo, Japan). **Director** Kaori Momoi. **Screenplay** Miyuki Takahashi, Kaori Momoi, Daisuke Kamijo. **Director of photography** Gints Berzins. **Editor** Naoki Watanabe, Kaori Momoi, Daisuke Kamijo. **Music** Yohei Shikano. **Sound** Ian Kragen. **Art director** Kaori Momoi, Jake Wilkens. **Production design** Rachel Lee Payne-Darrow. **Costumes** Kaori Momoi. **With** Kaori Momoi (Azusa), Yugo Saso (Sanada), Ayako Fujitani (Mrs Sanada), Chris Harrison (John), Brian Sturges (detective), Natalie Miles (Kako), Marion Fisher (Sam), Janilee Svärdstål (patient), Sarah Kei Brooks (nurse), Osode Momoi (dog), Melody Thi (Miku), Mimosa Pagkaliwangan (Yume).

DCP, colour. 72 min. Japanese, English.

Premiere 12 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

World sales Free Stone Productions

Years after she related to him the story of her parents' death in a fire, for which – rightly or wrongly – she feels responsible, Japanese psychiatrist Dr. Sanada meets his former patient Azusa once again. Back then, she lambasted him for being wrong for the job. Back then, he let slip that she isn't actually crazy. Now she's a prostitute living in precarious circumstances in Los Angeles and is accused of murder, with her memories once again moving inexorably towards a fire. Sanada assesses her in the presence of an investigator who appears not to understand Japanese. Is Azusa now mentally ill for real? Was she back then? And why does the description of her tormentors upset him so?

Kaori Momoi's film, which is based on elements of a story by Fuminori Nakamura, cannot be reduced to just one single narrative. It is a performance: incomplete, one-sided, contradictory, with an actress directing herself in a ruthlessly self-destructive manner, an actress that forces us to listen, to watch, to doubt. Faced with her challenging fragmentary montage in which the soundtrack permanently contradicts the text, the only certainty here is uncertainty.

Christoph Terhechte

From face to face

When I read Fuminori Nakamura's original story, for some reason the first thing that came to mind was the image of a female death row prisoner who keeps talking to pictures she's drawn on the walls of her prison cell.

The woman in this film just talks and talks. Without trusting anybody, and with no reason for her to speak, she says things without any value. As she alone moves closer to the truth, she becomes a pitiful figure. However, she's in some sense enviable, and could be viewed as a fighter.

'You and I committed the same crime. You look at me so I am being seen. The person looking and the person being seen should face each other with equal sincerity!'

When an actress absorbs large quantities of continuous dialogue, the appetite only grows. But what kind of transformation will staying on that path lead to? During the ten-day shoot, that's what I observed as a director. As the female protagonist says, we faced each other with the same sincerity.

Kaori Momoi

Just spoken words

This film is based on the short story 'Fire' by Fuminori Nakamura, which was published along with his debut novel, 'The Gun'. 'Fire' revolves around a woman who is possibly mentally ill. She shares her life story with a psychiatrist. When I first read the story, it was like the author had a mission. It's a monologue of one woman speaking. From the first page until the end, it has only her spoken words.

What I had to make was a movie that no editor could cut, even if they wanted to. The character's long lines have to be the driving force in this film. That was the least I could do. Considering the original story, respect demands I do so. Then we made a draft. If a normal person directed it, it would become a normal film. If an up-and-coming filmmaker like me did that, I'd lose. I couldn't make a polished film anyway. But why add another 'normal' film to the world? If that were my goal there'd be no point. I'd disappoint all of those who've gone before me if I made a polished film. Japan's already full of good directors. They know all the techniques. But this is my film. And I don't study. Another point is that I have to make a movie that can only be made 'now.' No other director could make something so messed up. That's another thing I have to make people think with this film. That's my moral obligation as a creator.

A cool semi-retirement

All the independent films I've worked on were... Of course I have to do mainstream work to survive, but I thought 'I have to quit being "Kaori Momoi"'. I felt really strongly for a while that it was time to quit. Fading into retirement is OK, and to be honest I'm already semi-retired. But if you want to fade away out of the limelight, this is a nice way to do it. The idea just hit me. In Los Angeles, I'm a nobody. They look at me as an actress, or as a woman, or as some creature from Japan. And they say, 'This old lady's cool'. It's a response that comes from not expecting anything. I hadn't had that feeling since I first started being 'Kaori Momoi'. It gave me a rush I could get carried away with.

Kaori Momoi



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Kaori Momoi was born in Tokyo (Japan) in 1952. After training for three years at the Royal Ballet School in London, she returned to Japan, where she studied acting at the Bungakuza School of Dramatic Arts. Since then, she has acted in more than sixty films, including Yoji Yamada's *The Yellow Handkerchief* (1977), Akira Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* (1980), Rob Marshall's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), and Alexandr Sokurov's *Solntse/The Sun* (2005). Kaori Momoi is also active as a singer, writer and as a visiting professor at Japan's Joshibi University of Art and Design. She has been living in Los Angeles since 2005. In 2007, Kaori Momoi made her writing and directing debut with *Faces of a Fig Tree* (Berlinale Forum 2007). *Hee* is her second film.