

JFLA LECTURE SERIES 11 AND SPECIAL FILM SCREENING

EVENT REPORT

by [Colin Marshall](#)



Behind every great man, so they say, you'll find a great woman. Hisako Matsui's film *Leonie* contends that behind two particular great men, one Japanese and the other Japanese-American, you'll find one particularly great American woman. Not only did the titular Leonie Gilmour edit the work of poet and novelist Yone Noguchi, she raised the sculptor and architect Isamu Noguchi, her son by Yone. At a special screening of this historical drama at the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles, we watched Gilmour, played by Emily Mortimer, earn distinction at Bryn Mawr College, develop an interest in Japanese culture, win Yone Noguchi an Anglophone audience, give birth to Isamu Noguchi, move with her son all the way to Japan, "tutor" English and thereby learn the ways of Japanese life from Tokyo University students, break her dependence

on Yone, build a house in Chigasaki designed by the young Isamu, and return to America where she would live out her years.

According to the film, much if not all of Gilmour's interest in Japan had its origin in a chance meeting with an important Japanese activist and educator, and both of them would make their marks on the world in the struggles for women's rights in America and an opening to western influence by the Meiji government in Japan. At Bryn Mawr, Mortimer's Leonie Gilmour befriends Umeko Tsuda, then a graduate student, but one who would, on the strength of her drive to advance for her gender, go on in 1900 to found what would become the private women's Tsuda College. Before the screening, the Japan Foundation treated us to a lecture from Tsuda College's former president Masako Iino, who told us of Matsui's quest to fund and produce *Leonie*, an effort that ultimately required seven years, thirteen trips around the world, and the support of over 3,000 women.

To this work Matsui tirelessly dedicated herself after reading about Leonie in Masayo Duus' *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey Without Borders*. Describing *Leonie* as "a work of imagination built on a foundation of fact," the director intertwined the paths of Leonie and Umeko more tightly than did actual fate. Iino noted, for instance, that, despite Bryn Mawr's small size, the two probably did not first meet there. But these lives, as the film portrays them, make for parallel cross-cultural stories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "new woman" who cultivated her independence by resisting established conventions and expectations, and improving (even creating) institutions and clearing p

for the future achievements of others like her. To properly depict and honor Leonie and Umeko's roles in these societal changes, it naturally took an independent female filmmaker — independent in every sense of the word.



PIONEERS IN COURAGE: INDEPENDENT WOMEN BRIDGING CULTURES AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY LECTURE BY MASAKO IINO, FORMER PRESIDENT OF TSUDA COLLEGE, AND SCREENING OF HISAKO MATSUI'S LEONIE

Date: July 13, 2013 (Saturday) 3:00p.m.

Venue: JFLA Conference Room

Capacity: Limited to 40 Guests

Speaker: Masako Iino, Former President of Tsuda College

Audience favorite film *Leonie* from our Japanema matinee series is back by popular demand, to be preceded by a special lecture by Professor Masako Iino, former President of Tsuda College.



Like Leonie Gilmour, mother of the cosmopolitan Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi, Umeko Tsuda lived from the late 19th into the 20th century, a period of dramatic changes in both Japan and the United States. A pioneer of women's education, Tsuda established Tsuda College, a private school for women in Tokyo. Professor Masako Iino, former President of Tsuda College, will unravel the momentous era through which these two brave women lived.

STARRING: EMILY MORTIMER (*"THE NEWSROOM"; HUGO, SHUTTER ISLAND, LOVELY AND AMAZING, LARS AND THE REAL GIRL*) SHIDŌ NAKAMURA (*LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA, FEARLESS, RED CLIFF*)

Director/Co--Writer/Producer: Hisako Matsui

2010, Runtime: 102 Minutes

Synopsis:

In the lush tradition of the glorious films of Merchant and Ivory, comes the true life story of Leonie Gilmour (Emily Mortimer), whose life crossed continents, wars and cultures, embodied with courage and passion in search of art and freedom. A tender and inspiring story of a remarkable woman who nurtures the amazing artistic talent of her son who has only one way to succeed and one person to guide him, as he grows into the world renown artist, Isamu Noguchi.



JAPANEMA = Japanese Cinema

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Rental Exhibitions

Past Events: Lecture Series



JFLA Lecture Series 60

JFLA Lecture Series 59

JFLA Lecture Series 58

JFLA Lecture Series 57

JFLA Lecture Series 56

JFLA Lecture Series 55

JFLA Lecture Series 54

JFLA Lecture Series 53

JFLA Lecture Series 52

JFLA Lecture Series 51

JFLA Lecture Series 50

JFLA Lecture Series 49

JFLA Lecture Series 48

JFLA Lecture Series 47

JFLA Lecture Series 46

JFLA Lecture Series 45

JFLA Lecture Series 44

JFLA Lecture Series 43

JFLA Lecture Series 42

JFLA Lecture Series 41

JFLA Lecture Series 40

JFLA Lecture Series 39

JFLA Lecture Series 38

JFLA Lecture Series 37

JFLA Lecture Series 36

JFLA Lecture Series 35

JFLA Lecture Series 34

JFLA Lecture Series 33

JFLA Lecture Series 32

JFLA Lecture Series 31

JFLA Lecture Series 30

JFLA Lecture Series 29

JFLA Lecture Series 28

JFLA Lecture Series 27

JFLA Lecture Series 26

JFLA Lecture Series 25

JFLA Lecture Series 24

JFLA Lecture Series 23

JFLA Lecture Series 22

JFLA Lecture Series 21

JFLA Lecture Series 20

JFLA Lecture Series 19

JFLA Lecture Series 18

JFLA Lecture Series 17

JFLA Lecture Series 16

JFLA Lecture Series 15

JFLA Lecture Series 14

JFLA Lecture Series 13

JFLA Lecture Series 12

JFLA Lecture Series 11

JFLA Lecture Series 10

JFLA Lecture Series 09

JFLA Lecture Series 08

JFLA Lecture Series 07

JFLA Lecture Series 06

JFLA Lecture Series 05

JFLA Lecture Series 04

JFLA Lecture Series 03

JFLA Lecture Series 02

JFLA Lecture Series 01

Past Events: Exhibitions

Past Events: Others

Past Events: Japanema

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