

HASSAKU LABS, SURVIVANCE

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FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2026 OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION

NAGI NOTES

A film by
Koji Fukada

Official screening: May 13th, 3:00pm, Grand Théâtre Lumière

US PRESS

CINETIC MEDIA

Courtney Ott

courtney@cineticmedia.com

Layla Hancock-Piper

layla@cineticmedia.com

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

CLAUDIATOMASSINI+ASSOCIATES

Claudia Tomassini: +49 173 2055 794

claudia@claudiatomassini.com

Paola Schettino Nobile: +39 340 304 1792

paola@claudiatomassini.com

INTERNATIONAL SALES

mk2
films

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director

fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com

Emmanuel Pizarra, Head of Acquisitions

emmanuel.pizarra@mk2.com

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales

quentin.bohanna@mk2.com

Elise Cochin, International Sales

elise.cochin@mk2.com

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager

anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com

Mathilde Martin, Head of Marketing

mathilde.martin@mk2.com

Lucia Nani, Senior Marketing Manager

lucia.nani@mk2.com

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SYNOPSIS

Yoriko, an artist living in rural Nagi, is haunted by a former love affair she cannot bear to mourn. When Yuri, a recently separated architect, travels from Tokyo to visit her friend and former sister-in-law, both women find themselves at a crossroad, each searching for ways to let go of the past and define their identities. Yuri's brief escape from the city settles into a quiet confrontation of loss and probing for the two women in bucolic Nagi.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KOJI FUKADA

What led you to spend eight years exploring Nagi, a remote village in the mountains of western Japan, and to set this film there?

There were two sources of inspiration for this film. The first was Nagi, the village itself. The second was a play called *Tokyo Notes* by the Japanese playwright Hirata Oriza [first staged in 1994, and itself inspired by Yasujiro Ozu's film *Tokyo Story* (1953)]. The play consists of short scenes set in a museum in Tokyo while war breaks out in Europe, ed.]. In 2017 Oriza Hirata invited us to Nagi to adapt *Tokyo Notes* at the museum, as he was teaching theatre at the junior high school there and serving as a cultural advisor to the town hall. However, as soon as we arrived, we became entirely fascinated by the town's scenery. In the play, a family from rural Japan finds itself in Tokyo, in a museum. I wondered: what if the characters travelled from Tokyo to this less represented rural Japan instead? We started traveling back and forth right after our very first visit to Nagi. Even during the periods when we couldn't go there physically (during COVID, for example), we continued conducting online interviews with the villagers. The first step in my process was simply to live there, to walk the streets, get a feel for the distances and the rhythm of daily life. Then I conducted interviews and gathered numerous accounts to flesh out the story.

Yoriko, an artist living in Nagi, reconnects with Yuri, her brother's ex-wife, an architect, who has come to Nagi to pose for a sculpture. Meanwhile, we also follow two young boys from Nagi, Keita and Haruki, one of whom is about to leave the town. How do these two stories echo one another?

In Japanese society, when a woman marries, she becomes part of her husband's family. But in the event of a divorce, she is no longer part of it, she becomes a stranger again. It is difficult for friendship to endure beyond those family ties, because these ties are considered stronger and more important than friendship. In the film, Yuri and Yoriko reconnect nonetheless. I wanted to explore that choice and raise awareness on the pressures placed on women in this kind of patriarchal system.

And then there are these two boys, Haruki and Keita. Of course, this patriarchal society also imposes expectations on men. They are expected to marry, have children, ensure a lineage and carry on the family. In rural areas, there is also the pressure to maintain the family farm, which Haruki is particularly exposed to in the film. These two teenagers become aware of their identity. They realise their sexual orientation is at odds with what society expects of them. They consider breaking free from it, something that Yoriko, belonging to a different generation, was unable to do. The way she reacts to them running away is one of the film's key themes.

Keita describes the landscape of Nagi that he loves, with the "funny pattern" on Mount Nagi, the green paddies, the rivulets, and the glittery solar panels. Where do you think this 'funny pattern' comes from? What interests you about it?

Keita is referring to something we don't see in the film. Mount Nagi, which serves as a training ground for the Japanese Self-Defense forces, and where missile-firing exercises take place.

Because of these military activities, the trees have been cut down on the mountainside, leaving only a bare surface. When I saw Mount Nagi for the first time, it made me think of a kind of monster. I thought perhaps this boy, who is the son of an army member, had had the same thought when he first saw this landscape. As I was preparing the film, the war in Ukraine had just begun. There is always a war somewhere. In Nagi, the presence of the military base is a reminder that these wars are never truly far away, that they affect us no matter what.

In your films (Hospitalité, Harmonium...), there is often a mysterious outsider who enters a group, reveals something unexpected, and alters the dynamics of relationships. In Nagi Notes, one gets the impression that it is the opposite: the community comes and unsettles Yuri.

I like to introduce a form of otherness into my stories, because I think it's impossible to fully understand another person. In cinema, the simplest way to make that otherness emerge, is to introduce an outsider, a character from outside a community, and observe their effect. This time, Yuri is definitely the one who changes. The film's structure rests on the contrast between Tokyo and rural Japan. Of course, that opposition exists in other countries too, but in Japan, this distinction is very pronounced. Tokyo is generally seen as progressive, and the countryside is seen as lagging behind. As someone living in Tokyo, I can say that it is true, there are more opportunities here, more choices. But in speaking with the people of Nagi, I realised that, while they have fewer material options, they also lead calmer lives, there is a freedom in that. In Tokyo, it's difficult to feel that same sense of freedom. I asked myself: who really needs to change? Perhaps staying in a place like Nagi can offer the possibility of transformation.

But I also wanted to avoid the widespread stereotype of the city dweller who goes to the countryside and is transformed overnight. I didn't want a character embodying Tokyo, and another representing an idealized and fantasized rural life. I simply imagined two women, Yuri and Yoriko, trying to free themselves from a patriarchal society by connecting with one another as equals.

Nagi Notes seems to pay close attention to fragments, sketches, and all the attempts that lead to the creation of an artwork. How important are these stages in your own creative process?

Of course, when I make a film, it matters to end up with a finished, accomplished piece. But what matters most to me lies in the process. I often reflect on what it means to create. For me, it allows you to see more deeply. If an artist decides to paint a flower in a vase, from the moment they pick up the brush, they begin to see it with heightened acuity. To paint, they have to count the petals, absorb the color, understand the shape and the shadows. They have to look very closely. Creating demands greater insight. It's the same in cinema. When I turn my camera on, I see the world with greater clarity. And that is what happens in Nagi Notes. The idea is to arrive at a clearer vision by filming the artistic process. When Yoriko creates a sculpture of Yuri, it is her way of observing her more closely, of trying to understand her. That is why we do not see the finished sculpture at the end. It is an encounter that is still unfolding.

In the relationship between Yoriko and Yuri, between artist and model, one senses that dialogue and encounter are central to the creative process. How does this need for exchange, openness, or even co-creation, echo your own work?

As a sculptor, Yoriko isn't simply seeking to represent her model's face or body, she wants to capture her character, her personality. That is why she insists on speaking with her while sculpting her. In a way, it resembles the relationship I try to build with actors when I make films. It is important to me that they don't simply portray the character only as I wrote it. I want them to bring a great deal of themselves to it. It becomes a new character, born out of an encounter between the actors and me.

You chose to show drawing and sculpture, manual forms of art. Why?

Before deciding to become a director, when I was a teenager, I was part of an art club and wanted to be a painter. The idea of looking at a subject and representing it by hand is very familiar to me. That is why, in the film, we see the relationship between the artist, the model, and the intermediary, the canvas or the sculpture. It's a very cinematic relationship. Jacques Rivette filmed this beautifully in *La Belle Noiseuse*, adapted from Honoré de Balzac, which was a major inspiration for me.

The shot in which Keita tells Haruki he loves him, while looking at a blurred, upside-down landscape through the peephole of a camera obscura, is one of the most beautiful and powerful images I have seen recently.

The camera obscura features in the play *Tokyo Notes*. The object itself doesn't appear there, but the museum curator explains its history. I also teach film history, mainly to high school students and during these classes, we sometimes create a camera obscura. It is, in a way, the ancestor of cinema, so it relates directly to its history. But beyond that, I quite simply find that the world viewed through a camera obscura, is very beautiful.

In Nagi Notes, artworks are also traces of the past. In Yoriko's studio, Yuri comes across a sculpture of her ex-husband and wonders whether she might have stayed with him if he had kept that face. How does art resist time?

The relationship between art and time is fundamental. When you think about why human beings create, why we paint, why we sculpt, it's because our lives are finite. We are born, we die, and we cannot stop time. It keeps moving forward. And because we can't stop time, we feel the need to record something. Before photography or cinema existed, drawings, paintings and other forms of art were made to preserve the image of something that is ultimately going to disappear. This desire to leave a trace, to become eternal in a way, is, I believe, one of the deep driving forces behind artistic creation.

In the film, Keita asks: "Do we have to understand people who don't understand us?" What's your answer?

Minorities, including LGBTQ+ communities, have always been forced to explain themselves, to justify their existence to people who do not understand them. That creates enormous pressure. There is a form of fatigue and frustration in the face of that demand. My answer would be: you do not need to force yourselves. You do not need to force others to understand you. And above all, you do not need to force yourselves to understand them. And this concerns not only sexual orientation or gender expression; it also can apply to other marginalized groups such as women, people of minority ethnicities, disabled people etc. The forms of oppression they endure are still not fully understood by those who do not share their struggles. They too have

had to constantly explain the mechanisms of oppression, and explaining is difficult and exhausting. Keita's line expresses that weariness in the face of the constant injunction to be accountable.

BIOGRAPHY

Kōji Fukada

Director, screenwriter

Born in 1980 in Tokyo, Fukada entered the fiction section of the Film School of Tokyo (Eigabigakkō) in 1999. In 2005, he joined the directing department of the Seinendan theater company, directed by Oriza Hirata. In 2010, his film *Hospitalité* won the Best Film Award in the "Japanese Eyes" section at the Tokyo International Film Festival, as well as the Best Asian Film Award at the Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival. In 2013, *Au revoir l'été* was doubly awarded at the Festival des 3 Continents in Nantes, winning the Golden Balloon (Grand Prix) and the Youth Jury Prize. In 2015, *Sayonara*, based on the work of Oriza Hirata, received the Días de Cine Award for Best Film at Filmadrid. In 2016, *Harmonium* won the Jury Prize in the "Un Certain Regard" section at the Cannes Film Festival. After *The Man from the Sea* in 2018, he was named Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France. His other credits include *A Girl Missing* (2019), *The Real Thing* (2020), a film version of the television series of the same name (2019), *Love Life* (2022), and *Love on Trial* (2025).

FILMOGRAPHY

2026 – Nagi Notes

Festival de Cannes – Official Selection - Competition

2025 – Love on Trial

Festival de Cannes – Official Selection - Cannes Première

2022 – Love Life

Venice Film Festival – Competition

2020 – The Real Thing

Festival de Cannes – Official Selection 2020

2019 – A Girl Missing

Locarno Film Festival – Competition

2018 – The Man from the Sea

2016 – Harmonium

Festival de Cannes – Jury Prize Un Certain Regard

2015 – Sayonara

2013 – Au revoir l'été

2010 – Hospitalité

2009 – Human Comedy in Tokyo

WHAT IS NAGI?

■ **The origin of "Nagi" and "奈義"** The fictional village of "Nagi", where the film is set, is inspired by Nagi (奈義), a real village of 5,400 inhabitants located in the mountains of western Japan. The story of *Nagi Notes* was conceived after eight years of field research, and most of the filming took place in the village itself. There is no railway connection; as Yuri says at the beginning of the film, "It's further than going abroad," as it takes more than six hours to get there from Tokyo. Nagi is characterized by wide-open landscapes, with no large mountains to obstruct the view. This magnificent panorama is made possible by its cone-like topography, which slopes gently south from the top of Mount Nagi, the symbol of the village. In addition, 109 water reservoirs dot its 69.52-square-kilometer area, giving the entire village a unique, light-filled beauty. In Japanese, 'Nagi' also evokes the character 凪 (nagi), which describes a suspended moment when the wind stops blowing, leaving the surface of the sea perfectly smooth and without a ripple.

9 PLACES AND MOTIFS APPEARING IN NAGI NOTES

■ **Mount Nagi / Jabuchi Waterfall** On a Sunday morning in spring when Yuri and Yoshihiro go hiking, they go to Mount Nagi (1,255 m high). On a clear day, you can take in the Sea of Japan to the north and the Seto Inland Sea to the south in a straight line from the summit. During the ascent, Yuri dips his hands in the murmur of the stream and sings the Taiwanese nursery rhyme "Ti O O" very close to the Jabuchi waterfall, which consists of three levels on a 20-meter drop. It is a beautiful and mysterious place, surrounded by a primary forest, where the legend survives that the master of this pool was a giant snake, the mother of Sanbutaro, the protagonist of a folk tale by Nagi.

■ **The Hirotokaze wind** The wind that blocks Haruki and Keita's path at the end of the film is inspired by the "Hirotokaze", a strong wind that beats down on the foothills of Mount Nagi, an essential part of the village's identity. It is a specific weather phenomenon, known throughout the country as one of the "three great local winds of Japan". The Hirotokaze occurs locally only when very specific weather conditions are met. To prevent houses from being washed away, windbreaks called "Kosegi" are planted to the north of each property, which also characterizes the landscape of Nagi.

■ **The Reservoirs (Tameike)** The scene of the reservoir where Keita goes to draw wild birds was filmed at Dodoguchi Pond. As Keita's line to Yuri illustrates: "*There are not many birds in the reservoirs near the mountain*". Nagi is dotted with 109 reservoirs, most of which were built before the Edo period, making its landscapes particularly striking.

■ **The camp of Nihonbara** Keita, a middle school student, moved to Nagi five years ago, following the transfer of his father, a member of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSF). The uniforms and vehicles he passes in the village, the noise of the drills, as well as the radio alerts announcing them, are part of Nagi's natural daily life. The mountain motifs that Keita loves are the areas where the projectiles have hit, where trees have been cut down, leaving the rock bare: landscapes secretly cherished by the locals.

■ **Cattle farms** Yoriko, the sculptor, makes a living by helping out on her family's dairy and cattle farm. Cattle ranching is one of Nagi's signature industries, and barns can be seen everywhere. As Yoshihiro reminds Yuri in the middle of the story, "Cows don't fly away." Cattle farming has been able to grow as a key industry precisely because it is relatively safe from the destructive winds of the "Hirokaze," which usually ravage crops.

■ **The Municipal Disaster Prevention Radio** The announcements from the village of Nagi, delivered morning and evening to Yoriko's house by the voice of Yoshihiro: in the real Nagi too, radio receivers are installed free of charge in every home. This broadcasting system serves as an infrastructure for transmitting information. Just like Yoshihiro in the film, municipal employees pre-record the messages in reality, broadcasting various information: event announcements, local news, agricultural information, JSF exercise notices, to emergency broadcasts such as alerts and evacuation orders.

■ **Nagi Museum of Contemporary Art (Nagi MOCA)** A golden cylinder and a square building suddenly popping up in the peaceful landscape at the foot of Mount Nagi: this is the museum that Yuri, an architect active in Tokyo and Taiwan, absolutely wanted to visit. It was built according to the concept of a "third-generation museum" proposed by the world-renowned architect, Arata Isozaki. The idea was not to first build a box and then exhibit works in it, but rather to have three groups of artists create works in situ and then design the architecture to envelop them.

■ **Nagi Terrace** At the very beginning of the film, a man tunes a piano in a small modern building at the bus stop. It is the gateway to Nagi, serving as both a tourist office and a waiting room, a place popular with locals under the name "Nagi Terrace", a space for intergenerational exchanges.

■ **The Nagi Child Home** Although it lasts only one shot, the scene where a little girl awkwardly turns the pages of an ephemeral calendar was shot at the Nagi Youth House (a local family support center). It is the pillar of "community-wide support" for Nagi, hailed nationally as a "miracle village" after reaching a fertility rate of 2.95 in 2019. The main purpose of this place is to provide a "gathering place" for intergenerational exchanges, creating an environment where young parents are not isolated.

CAST

Yoriko Endo	Takako Matsu
Yuri Sakashita	Shizuka Ishibashi
Yoshihiro Iguchi	Ken'ichi Matsuyama
Haruki Iguchi	Waku Kawaguchi
Keita Higashi	Kiyora Fujiwara
Sanae Iguchi	Sawako Fujima
Taichi Higashi.....	Long Mizuma
Curator of the «camera obscura» studio.....	Suhkye Shin

CREW

Direction, screenplay.....	Koji Fukada
Director of Photography	Hidetoshi Shinomiya
Light.....	Daiki Kato
Sound.....	Hiroaki Masuko
Set Design.....	Yukari Otsuki
Sculptures	Ami Yoshida
Hair and Make-Up	Miwako Sugawara
Stylist.....	Yoshie Araki
Costumes	Shoko Watanabe
Editing.....	Sylvie Lager
Casting.....	Takefumi Yoshikawa
Assistant Director.....	Hirofumi Kagawa
Location Manager	Wataru Yamamura
Special Effects	Koji Hirano
Color Grading	Sorawich Khunpinij
Score.....	Lee Pei-Chin
Mixing Engineer	Olivier Goinard
Original Song	Enno Cheng
Producers	Atsuko Ohno, Ryo Nagai, Michiaki Tsunoda
Co-producers.....	Terutarō Osanai, Carine Chichkowsky, Tan Si En, Hisashi Satō
Associate Producers	June Wu, Shoko Akamatsu