



## FORMULAS AND VARIABLES: FILMS BY TOMONARI NISHIKAWA

Wednesday, November 13<sup>th</sup> | 7:00pm  
Keefe Campus Center Theater | Amherst College  
Free Admission | Artist in person

Tomonari Nishikawa's films are meticulously-crafted containers for the uncontainable. Distinguished by their intricate and mesmerizing imagery, his films are based on complex formulas that Nishikawa develops to guide his production practices, which – when followed in the manner of a script or a score – result in densely-patterned compositions and sequences that reflect the artist's deep commitment to aesthetic order. Yet Nishikawa executes these formulas in environments that are brimming with variables. Shot in a variety of public spaces devoted to transit, leisure, commerce, and ritual, his films document the quotidian movements and occurrences that animate these environments, registering the ordinary unpredictability of the world. His work is both rigorous and playful, staggering and thrilling, a cinema of structure that is also a cinema beyond control.

Examining Nishikawa's exploration of form, process, location, and environment, "Formulas and Variables" will feature eleven experimental documentary shorts that Nishikawa shot in locations throughout the U.S., Japan, and Thailand between 2005 and 2019. The program combines early "sketch films" with works made on commission, and a range of independently-produced projects, including the award-winning *sound of a million insects, light of a thousand stars* (2014). Featuring Nishikawa in person, the screening will be followed by a conversation with the artist.

Program:

***Sketch Film #1* (2005, super-8mm, silent, b&w, 3 min.)**

As a painter carries a sketchbook and practices drawing, I carried a Super 8 camera and shot frame by frame, as an everyday exercise to make animations of lines and shapes found in the public space. The entire film was edited in camera and hand-processed afterwards.

***Sketch Film #2* (2005, super-8mm, silent, b&w, 3 min.)**

The second film in the series, showing my study especially in apparent shapes – a shape that cannot be seen in a single frame but only through a series of consecutive frames when projected. It was edited in camera and hand-processed afterwards.

***Market Street* (2005, 16mm, silent, b&w, 5 min.)**

All images were shot on Market Street, one of the main streets in San Francisco. I used *Sketch Film #1* and *Sketch Film #2* as reference to make a plan of the film structure, and the visual was carefully composed frame by frame, while shooting on the street. This project was commissioned by Exploratorium and San Francisco Arts Commission for the outdoor screening event, *A Trip Down Market Street 1905/2005: An Outdoor Centennial Celebration*, at Justin Herman Plaza in San Francisco on Sep. 25, 2005.

***Lumphini 2552* (2009, 35mm on video, sound, b&w, 3 min)**

It was shot through a still camera at Lumphini Park in Bangkok, Thailand. The hand-processed visual shows the organic patterns found in this monumental park, constructing the systematic yet emotional rhythm and pace on the screen, accompanied by the sound from the visual also captured through the still camera on the optical soundtrack. Lumphini is named for Lumbini, a Sanskrit word of the birthplace of the Buddha in Nepal, and 2552 is the year on the Buddhist calendar for 2009.

***Tokyo - Ebisu* (2010, 16mm, sound, color, 5 min)**

JR (Japan Railway Company) Yamanote Line is one of the Japan's busiest lines, consisting of 29 stations and running in a loop. The film shows the views from the platforms of 10 stations in Yamanote Line, from Tokyo Station to Ebisu Station clockwise. The in-camera visual effects and the layered soundtracks may exaggerate the sense of the actual location, while suggesting the equipment that was used for capturing the audio and visual.

***Shibuya - Tokyo* (2010, 16mm, sound, color, 10 min)**

As a sequel to *Tokyo - Ebisu*, this film shows the views around the exits of 20 stations in JR Yamanote Line, from Shibuya Station to Tokyo Station clockwise.

***45 7 Broadway* (2013, 16mm, sound, color, 5 min)**

This is about Times Square, the noise and movements at this most well-known intersection. I used a color separation technique – it was originally shot on black and white film through color filters (red, green, and blue), then optically printed onto color film through these filters. The layered images of shots by the handheld camera would agitate the scenes, and the advertisements on the digital billboards try to pull ahead of others.

***sound of a million insects, light of a thousand stars* (2014, 35mm on video, sound, color, 2 min)**

I buried a 100-foot (about 30 meters) 35mm negative film under fallen leaves alongside a country road, which was about 25 km away from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, for about 6 hours, from the sunset of June 24, 2014, to the sunrise of the following day. The night was beautiful with a starry sky, and numerous summer insects were singing loud. The area was once an evacuation zone, but now people live there after the removal of the contaminated soil. This film was exposed

to the possible remaining of the radioactive materials. This project is made possible with funds from the Media Arts Assistance Fund, a regrant program of the New York State Council on the Arts, Electronic Media and Film, with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; administered by Wave Farm.

***Manhattan One Two Three Four* (2014, super-8mm, silent, b&w, 3 min)**

A study in visual rhythm with images of architecture in Manhattan, New York, using the technique I did for the first sequence in *Sketch Film #3*. All edited in-camera and hand-processed afterwards. This film was commissioned by Echo Park Film Center for the celebration of its 12th anniversary.

***Ten Mornings Ten Evenings and One Horizon* (2016, 16mm, sound, color, 10 min)**

It displays bridges on Yahagi River, which runs near where I was grown up in Japan. I shot each bridge twice, first in the morning and second in the evening of the day. It was exposed one-sixth of the frame at a time and the result would show the sense of the sun rising or setting.

***Amusement Ride* (2019, 16mm, sound, color, 6 min)**

Shot with a telephoto lens from inside a cabin of Cosmo Clock 21, a Ferris wheel at an amusement park in Yokohama, Japan. The distorted image shows the structure of the Ferris wheel, focusing on the intermittent vertical movement, which resembles the movement of a film at the gate of a film projector or camera.

**Tomonari Nishikawa** is Associate Professor of Cinema at Binghamton University. His films have been screened at numerous film festivals and art venues, including Berlinale, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Hong Kong International Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, London Film Festival, Media City Film Festival, New York Film Festival, Singapore International Film Festival, and Toronto International Film Festival. In 2010, he presented a series of 8mm and 16mm films at MoMA P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, and his film installation, *Building 945*, received the 2008 Grant Award from the Museum of Contemporary Cinema in Spain. He served as a juror for the 2010 Ann Arbor Film Festival, the 2012 Big Muddy Film Festival, and the 2013 dresdner schmalfilmtage. He is one of the co-founders of KLEX: Kuala Lumpur Experimental Film and Video Festival and Transient Visions: Festival of the Moving Image. He lives in Japan/USA.

Support for this program is provided by the Amherst College Department of English, Film and Media Studies Program, and Department of Asian Languages & Civilizations, as well as by the Arts at Amherst Initiative, and the Lucian Root Eastman 1895 Fund. All descriptions courtesy of the artist. Still from *Ten Mornings Ten Evenings and One Horizon* (2016), courtesy of the artist. This program is curated by Josh Guilford.