

Japan Society presents

MISHIMA: LEGACY

Keiichiro Hirano and Susan Napier in Conversation

Thursday, November 6 at 6:30 pm

Yukio Mishima Centennial Series: *Emergences* – Artist Talk

The **Yukio Mishima Centennial Series: *Emergences*** is supported by Doug and Teresa Peterson.

2025—2026 Performing Arts Season Support

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ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Keiichiro Hirano is a Japanese novelist who has written more than 16 novels since publishing his debut work *Eclipse* in 1998, for which he won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize at the record age of 23. His deeply psychological fiction explores profound and universal themes like self-love, relationships and acceptance, spanning short stories, historical novels, essays, love stories and literary sci-fi. As a cultural envoy to Paris appointed by Japan's Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Hirano traveled throughout Europe giving lectures. Many of his books have been translated and are widely read in the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, China, Korea and other countries. In his widely viewed TED talk, he discusses what it means to truly love oneself, arguing that it's not easy to holistically love ourselves without knowing all our "selves," good and bad, but we can discover the "self" we like with the help of the person we love. Building on this theme, his novel *At the End of the Matinee* became a runaway bestseller in Japan and was adapted into a film released in November 2019. His work continues to come to life on screen, with recent film adaptations of his stories including *A Man* and *Heart of Hearts*. In 2023, his 20-year project *Theory on Yukio Mishima* was finally published. Based on a thorough reading of four of Mishima's novels, the book examines both Mishima as a literary figure and his personal life through his novels.

Susan Napier was born and raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts and went to Japan for the first time at the age of 17. She has lived in Japan eight years in all, and tries to visit at least once a year. Currently, she is the Goldthwaite Professor of Rhetoric and Japanese at Tufts University. Previously she held the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Chair at the University of Texas. She has also taught at the University of London and been a visiting professor at Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, the University of Sydney and a visiting scholar at Keio University in Tokyo. Next spring, she will serve as a Visiting Academic at Oxford University for six months. She is the author of five books, the most recent of which is *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art*, published in 2018 by Yale University Press, which has been translated into fourteen languages. She is also the author of several books related to Yukio Mishima, including *Escape from the Wasteland: Romanticism and Realism in the Fiction of Mishima Yukio and Oe Kenzaburo* and *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The*

Subversion of Modernity. Napier is currently finishing a book comparing Walt Disney Studios with the Japanese animation studio, Studio Ghibli. On Nov. 3, 2025, Napier was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon from the Government of Japan in recognition of significant contributions to the understanding and dissemination of Japanese culture abroad.

ABOUT YUKIO MISHIMA

Yukio Mishima (1925 – 1970), born Kimitake Hiraoka, was a Japanese author, poet and playwright. He is considered one of the most important postwar stylists of the Japanese language, and was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature five times in the 1960s. An avid enthusiast of Japanese traditional arts and theater, he also incorporated classic Japanese plays and themes as a basis for several of his own works. In his later years, he acted in his own plays and modeled for photography, and grew increasingly active as an ultra-nationalist – culminating in an attempted *coup d'état* of the Japanese government that ended with Mishima's *harakiri* suicide. For more information about Mishima, please refer to the timeline below.

YUKIO MISHIMA TIMELINE

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mishima's Life</u>	<u>Historical Events</u>
1925	Kimitake Hiraoka (known by his pen name Yukio Mishima) is born. Taken to live with his aristocratic grandmother Natsuko, who raises him in strict isolation.	Passage of the Peace Preservation Act in Japan. This law gave the Japanese police widespread power in curbing dissent.
1926		The emperor Yoshihito dies, marking the end of the Taisho period. His son, Hirohito, becomes the new emperor; Japan's Showa period begins.
1931	Admitted to the Gakushuin, a private school established to educate the children of Japan's nobility, including the Imperial Family. Begins to develop an interest in poetry and haiku.	Japan begins military aggression in Manchuria.
1936		The February 26 Incident takes place, in which a group of young Imperial Japanese Army officials attempts to overthrow the Japanese government. Although several officials are assassinated, the coup d'etat fails. The incident inspired Mishima to write a famous short novel, <i>Patriotism</i> , published in 1961.
1937	Enters Gakushuin's middle school and returns to live with his immediate family.	Sino-Japanese War begins.
1938	Writes his first short novels, <i>Zazen Monogatari</i> (<i>Tale of Zazen</i>) and <i>Sukanpo</i> (<i>Sorrel Flowers</i>), which are published in Gakushuin's school fan-zin, <i>Hojin-kai</i> . Has his first experience seeing a kabuki play (<i>Chushingura</i>) and a noh play (<i>Miwa</i>) with his grandmother Natsuko. This has a profound impact on Mishima, who becomes a frequent attendee of traditional Japanese theater throughout his adult life.	

1939	Grandmother Natsuko dies.	World War II begins.	1950	Begins work on his first modern adaptation of a traditional noh play, <i>Kantan</i> . Publishes <i>Thrust of Love</i> , which later became a movie produced by film studio Nikkatsu in 1966.	Korean War begins. On July 2, a young novice monk burns down Kinkaku-ji, a Zen Buddhist temple in Kyoto, in an intentional act of arson.
1941	First publication of his short story, <i>Hanazakari no Mori</i> (<i>Forest in Full Bloom</i>), at 16. Uses the pen name "Yukio Mishima" (adopted in part to avoid backlash from his father, who disapproved of his writing).	Soviet-Japanese nonaggression pact signed in April. Japan attacks Pearl Harbor in December. The U.S. declares war on Japan.	1951	Publishes his novel <i>Kinjiki</i> (<i>Forbidden Colors</i>). Visits gay bars while working on the novel. Takes his first trip abroad. Writes his second modern adaptation of a traditional noh play, <i>Aya no Tsuzumi</i> .	American occupation of Japan ends, and Japan's sovereignty is restored.
1944	Graduates from Gakushuin's high school, delivering the valedictorian speech. Receives a draft notice for the Imperial Japanese Army and barely passes his conscription examination. Enrolls in Tokyo University (in the Faculty of Law, at his father's behest).	The United States detonates two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrenders to the United States, ending World War II / the Pacific War. American occupation of Japan begins.	1952	Writes his third modern adaptation of a traditional noh play, <i>Sotoba Komachi</i> .	
1945	In February, misdiagnosed with tuberculosis and fails his medical check on convocation day; declared unfit for service and sent home. In June, receives his first fee for publishing with the short story <i>Esugai no Kari</i> (<i>Esugai's Hunting</i>), published in <i>Bungei</i> magazine.		1954	Publishes <i>Shiosai</i> (<i>The Sound of Waves</i>). Falls in love with Sadako Toyoda, who becomes a model for several characters in his writing, including within <i>Hashi-zukushi</i> (<i>The Seven Bridges</i>). Writes his fourth modern adaptation of a traditional noh play, <i>Aoi no Ue</i> (<i>The Lady Aoi</i>).	
1946	Meets Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata (1899—1972), who becomes a critical mentor and friend for the remainder of Mishima's life.	Many nationalist literary figures are branded "war criminal literary figures," and many officials are purged from public office.	1955	Completes his fifth modern adaptation of noh play, <i>Hanjo</i> , and publishes all five plays in the collection <i>Five Modern Noh Plays</i> . Begins a rigorous program of bodybuilding and martial arts training to create a "perfect" physical body, maintaining this training regimen throughout the rest of his life.	
1947	Goes to work for the Japanese Ministry of Finance.		1956	Writes and publishes <i>Kinkakuji</i> (<i>The Temple of the Golden Pavilion</i>), based on a real 1950 arson incident. Mishima's short story <i>The Seven Bridges</i> has its first publication. <i>The Sound of Waves</i> becomes the first of Mishima's novels to receive an English translation, and is published	
1948	Resigns from his job at the Ministry of Finance and decides to support himself through writing. Publishes his first play, <i>Kataku</i> (<i>Burning House</i>). Begins work on the semi-autobiographical novel <i>Confessions of a Mask</i> .				
1949	Publishes <i>Confessions of a Mask</i> , exploring themes of identity and sexuality, which made him a celebrity (at the age of 24). <i>Kataku</i> is premiered in Tokyo.				

	by New York's publishing house, Alfred A. Knopf. The collection <i>Five Modern Noh Plays</i> is published shortly after, with an English translation by Donald Keene.			the Shimanaka Incident due to a rumor that Mishima recommended Fukazawa's short story for publication and receives hundreds of death threats. Mishima denies the claim and criticizes the assassin as unpatriotic.	Fukazawa publishes a short story in the magazine <i>Chuo Koron</i> which features a dream sequence depicting the beheading of the Emperor; a young man breaks into the home of the <i>Chuo Koran</i> president, murdering his maid and severely wounding his wife. In response, literary and artistic depictions of the Emperor become "taboo" among writers and the mass media.
1957	Invited to the United States by the book publisher Alfred A. Knopf. Writes a modern adaptation of the kyogen play <i>Busu (Poison)</i> at the request of an American producer, but the play is never performed in Mishima's lifetime. Relationship with Toyoda ends.				
1958	Mishima marries Yoko Sugiyama, the daughter of a well-known Japanese traditional painter. Develops a dance drama based on <i>The Seven Bridges. Enjo (Conflagration)</i> , a film adaptation of <i>The Temple of the Golden Pavilion</i> , is released.		1962	Son Iichiro is born.	
			1963	Begins modelling, featuring as the photo model in the photographer Eikoh Hosoe's book <i>Bara-kei (Ordeal by Roses)</i> . The novel <i>Gogo no Eiko (The Sailor Who Fell From Grace with the Sea)</i> is published. Leaves theater troupe Bungakuza after actors refuse to perform his play <i>The Harp of Joy</i> for its anti-communist views. He forms his own troupe with politically disaffected members of Bungakuza, called the Neo Littérature Théâtre. First Nobel prize nomination.	
1959	Daughter Noriko is born. Mishima publishes <i>Kyoko no Ie (Kyoko's House)</i> , one of his most ambitious works to date, but the novel is widely panned, becoming his first major professional setback.				
1960	Publishes commentary on the Anpo protests in the <i>Mainichi Shinbun</i> newspaper, entitled "A Political Opinion," critical of leftist protestors. Mishima's writing becomes increasingly overtly political over the following decade. Stars in his first major film, <i>Karakkaze Yaro (Afraid to Die)</i> , for which he also sings and writes lyrics for the main theme song.	The Anpo protests take place in response to the United States —Japan Security Treaty, which would allow the United States to maintain military bases in Japan. On June 15, hundreds of thousands of protestors march on the National Diet and are attacked by ultranationalist counter-protestors. A young Tokyo University student protestor is killed.	1964	Second Nobel Prize nomination.	The Olympics are held in Tokyo.
			1965	Mishima's all-female play <i>Madame de Sade</i> is premiered in Tokyo. Third Nobel Prize nomination.	
			1966	Writes and directs the film <i>Patriotism</i> , based on his short story of the same name, which becomes a huge success in Japan.	
1961	Publishes one of his most famous short stories, <i>Yukoku (Patriotism)</i> , based on Japan's February 26 Incident in 1936. Embroiled in	The right-wing terrorist attack known as the Shimanaka Incident takes place. After Japanese author Shichiro	1967	Completes the first book in his <i>The Sea of Fertility</i> tetralogy, <i>Haru no Yuki (Spring Snow)</i> . Fourth Nobel Prize nomination. Undergoes some basic training in Japan's Self-Defense Forces in secret. Starts practicing karate.	

1968

Establishes the Roman Theater troupe after a schism occurs in Neo Littérature Théâtre. Forms the Tateno Kai (Shield Society), a private militia of young men dedicated to defending traditional Japanese values. Fifth Nobel Prize nomination; regarded as a major contender, but the Prize is instead awarded to his mentor Yasunari Kawabata.

1969

Publishes *Honba (Runaway Horses)*, the second book in the *The Sea of Fertility* tetralogy.

1970

Publishes *Akatsuki no Tera (The Temple of Dawn)*, the third book in the *The Sea of Fertility* tetralogy. On November 25, Mishima delivers the fourth and final manuscript of the tetralogy, *Tennin Gosui (The Fall of the Angel)* to his publisher. On the same day, he leads an attempted coup of the Japanese government with four members of the Tateno Kai, kidnapping a Japanese army commander and attempting to rally troops at a military base. After his impassioned speech is met with indifference, he commits ritual suicide (*seppuku*).

"New Left" activists engage in major protests at Japanese universities, which continue through the following year.

The Japan World Expo, Osaka, opens in March. The United States-Japan Security Treaty is renewed in June, which draws a series of Anpo protests but on a smaller scale compared to the 1960s.

The Yukio Mishima Centennial Series: *Emergences* continues with:

CONTEMPORARY DANCE | WORLD PREMIERE

The Seven Bridges (Hashi-zukushi)

Saturday, November 15 at 7:30 pm

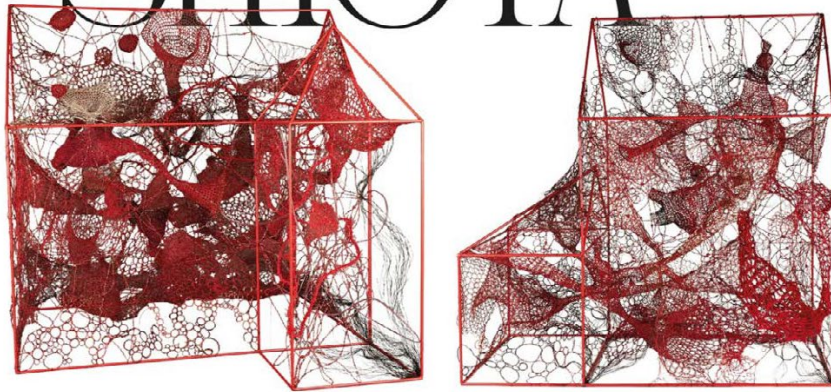
Sunday, November 16 at 2:30 pm—Followed by an Artist Q&A



Acclaimed for converting great authors' novels into disarmingly charming-yet-satirical performances told almost entirely through movement, Tokyo-based **CHAIROIPLIN** (a pun on Charlie Chaplin's name) takes on Yukio Mishima's little-known short story for its North American debut. In *The Seven Bridges*, following a fanciful superstition that crossing seven bridges without conversing with anyone on a full moon night will make their wishes come true, four women set out on a journey under the watchful gaze of the Moon. Obliterating the line between dance and theater, CHAIROIPLIN, founded and led by young choreographer **Takuro Suzuki**, infuses eye-popping color, catchy music, arresting movement and slapstick humor into Mishima's compact reflection on ritual and desire. Which woman will cross the seventh bridge – and, for what kind of wish?

塩田千春

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Cover Image: Yukio Mishima on the roof of the Bungeishunju Building in Tokyo, 1956
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