

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

Bio: Tatsuya Nakadai

With a career spanning nearly six decades, Tatsuya Nakadai (b. 1932) is one of Japan's most celebrated screen actors. Legend has it that he was discovered while working as a clerk in a Tokyo shop when his classically handsome looks caught the attention of director Masaki Kobayashi; yet, even by that moment in 1953, Nakadai was a trained stage actor, specializing in Shingeki (the Japanese New Theater movement, which embraced Western "realism" over classical Kabuki or Noh styles). Nakadai was signed as a contract player to Shochiku. His breakthrough role came in Kobayashi's epic trilogy *The Human Condition* (1959–1961), as a moral man amidst the upheavals of World War II, garnering the actor international acclaim. Throughout his career, Nakadai has played police detectives, gangsters, businessmen, and most famously samurai fighters and warlords in historical epics, among other roles, and came to be known for both his versatility and the psychological depth he brought to his characters. "The qualities that truly define him are those that seem sprung from electrifying forces deep within—a stentorian baritone that might belong to the devil's own ventriloquist dummy, and a pair of orb-wide eyes, as alabaster as snake's eggs, so eerily inner-illuminated they threaten to rupture into liquid light...[H]is extraordinary versatility across performative styles and mannerist methodologies, and his specialization in the superelastic changeability of visual demeanor from one role to the next remains the cornerstone of his cinematic career," wrote critic Chuck Stephens. Arguably, Nakadai's best known roles outside of Japan are those he created for Akira Kurosawa: the thief who impersonates a warlord in *Kagemusha* (1980) and the aging warlord who gives away his fiefdom to ungrateful sons in *Ran* (1985). Other notable film appearances include Kobayashi's *Harakiri* (1962), *Kwaidan* (1964), and *Samurai Rebellion* (1967); Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961) and *Sanjuro* (1962)—in both, playing opposite his friend and frequent on-screen rival Toshiro Mifune; Hiroshi Teshigahara's *The Face of Another* (1966); Kon Ichikawa's *Enjo* (1958) and *Odd Obsession* (1959); Mikio Naruse's *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (1960); and Kihachi Okamoto's *Kill!* (1968) and *Sword of Doom* (1966). In total, Nakadai has appeared in more than 140 films. His most recent film is *Yakusoku* (2013), directed by Masaru Okunishi.

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