

# TATSUMI

*A FILM BY ERIC KHOO*



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
UN CERTAIN REGARD  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

# ***an animated tribute to the life and work of japanese comics artist yoshihiro tatsumi***



In the late 1950s, Yoshiro Tatsumi pioneered a breakthrough in Japanese comics, elevating the genre to a whole new level of creative expression influenced by adult themes. A tribute to an artist who sought to make comics cinematic, Eric Khoo's animated feature TATSUMI brings the manga legend's classic stories to the big screen for the first time.

## ***synopsis***

TATSUMI celebrates the life and work of Japanese comics artist Yoshihiro Tatsumi. In post-war occupied Japan, young Tatsumi's passion for comics eventually becomes a means of supporting his poor family. Already published as a teenager, talented Tatsumi finds even greater inspiration after meeting his idol, famous Disneyesque animator Osamu Tezuka. Despite his steady success, Tatsumi begins to question why Japanese comics should cater to children with cute and whimsical tales and drawings. In 1957, Tatsumi coins the term gekiga (dramatic pictures) and redefines the manga landscape by encouraging an alternative genre for adults. Realistic and disquieting, Tatsumi's work begins to grapple with the darker aspects of life...





## BELOVED MONKEY

A pet monkey is a lonely and alienated factory worker's only solace from the stress of city life. His frustration grows and he longs to quit his job, but an unfortunate accident renders him unfit to work. Jobless, he can no longer keep his beloved monkey...

In the ruins of the Hiroshima bombing, military photographer Koyanagi is moved by the shadows of victims etched onto a wall by the deadly flash: a son massaging his mother. Koyanagi's photo of the touching moment brings him money and fame. But a stranger's sinister truth behind the image will haunt Koyanagi for the rest of his life...



## HELL



## JUST A MAN

Hanayama will retire soon but dreads the prospect of spending the rest of his life with his unfaithful wife and greedy daughter who are only eyeing his pension. He decides to blow his savings and find satisfaction in the arms of other women...



## GOOD-BYE

Mariko is a prostitute serving American GIs. Her father is a drunk who mooches off her earnings. Mocked and despised by all around her, Mariko decides to sever all ties with men, beginning with her father...



## OCCUPIED

A writer of children's books has his contract terminated by his publisher because his works do not sell. Dispirited, he takes to frequenting public toilets where he derives great comfort from obscene graffiti scrawled on the walls. A strange obsession grows, one with dire consequences...



# comments from director eric khoo



**A DRIFTING LIFE** I have been a massive fan of the short stories of Yoshihiro Tatsumi for over two decades and I was overwhelmed after reading his 800-page autobiography, “A Drifting Life”. His life story was inspirational. I was extremely moved by the love and passion he has for his craft, and the trials and tribulations he went through in pursuit of it. At the back of the lovingly illustrated tome, I saw a photograph of the man himself, resting his cheeks in his palms. For many nights after that, his face appeared in my mind and I felt restless... and inspired. I felt compelled to re-read his short stories that were written in the late sixties and seventies. And the sense of wonderment and awe that enveloped me when I first read them all those years ago returned. Not only is Yoshihiro Tatsumi a consummate storyteller, he is also a brutally astute and honest observer of love, life and the human condition. And these observations remain as haunting and disturbing today.

**NEVER ADAPTED BEFORE** Yoshihiro Tatsumi’s works had never been adapted into a film before TATSUMI. Of course, there was interest over the years, but nothing ever materialized. When I went to Japan to meet Mr. Tatsumi, our first meeting was in the basement of an old coffeeshop. It had been arranged for him to see my films beforehand, and I was pleased when he told me that he could relate to my films and their characters. But I think that what made him feel most comfortable with me was when I showed him that I could draw. I had illustrated how I envisaged the film. We spent over three hours together and he gave me his blessing to make the film.



**ALL OF HIS STORIES ARE GEMS** Yoshihiro Tatsumi liked the idea of combining his autobiography “A Drifting Life” with his short stories. I laughed when he told me that if I would feature only his short stories, then people would commit suicide after watching the film! He was pleased with my selection of five stories and we proceeded from there. To me, all of his stories are gems, so it’s a pity we could not fit them all in. It just wasn’t possible for a feature under 100 minutes. If ever I do another animation feature, it will be with the stories of Mr. Tatsumi that I could not fit into TATSUMI.

**RISQUÉ AND CONTROVERSIAL** The stories used in TATSUMI are an example of how adult-oriented his work was then, and very risqué for the 70s. They were far from the usual kiddie manga fare. These stories were so controversial and shocked many back then. But there was also a growing number of alternative readers who fell in love with the stories he was telling in true gekiga fashion. Even writer Yukio Mishima was a fan of this new bold form of storytelling.

**DARK, SAD AND BEAUTIFUL** I love Mr. Tatsumi’s characters because they tend to be so everyday and realistic. There is something so dark and sad and beautiful in his work. And there is so much creativity riding through his very original story lines that are timeless because they deal with the human condition in a very unique way. I love how the intriguing story of HELL unfolds, slowly sucking you in. BELOVED MONKEY is probably the saddest story in the collection, and it happens to be Mr. Tatsumi’s favourite story featured in the film. JUST A MAN has everything all rolled up into one – humour, grief, drama. The protagonist in this story is a sad loser that you just want to champion for. The idea of being inspired by pornographic graffiti in OCCUPIED really got me going! I think that Tatsumi’s GOOD-BYE is the boldest and hardest story of them all. It is beautifully tragic and twisted. Because of its impact on me when I first read it over two decades ago, I decided to leave it as the last story for the film.





**ONE-COLOUR PRINTING TECHNIQUE** I told Phil Mitchell, the creative animation director, that, above all, the film had to remain faithful to Mr Tatsumi's artistic style. I wanted the film to have an old world charm about it, but to offer something fresh in the world of animation as well. I wanted his life story to be in full vivid colour and his stories to have individual colour tones inspired by the Japanese one-colour printing technique. We constantly asked for directions from Mr. Tatsumi every time we got stuck – right down to the basics of what was the colour of the train he took when he was a boy. Essentially we wanted TATSUMI to be as accurate as possible. We constantly had the great artist's feedback to help ensure that.

**A NEW VOICE** The animation team worked from Mr. Tatsumi's panels and his framings. He loves cinema, and he produced works that are more like storyboards for a film as opposed to the four-panel manga convention. All we really needed to do was stretch them out to a widescreen format. And give them multi-planes, like layers, so there would be more depth. Of course, certain things were tweaked, so I would say that, in being adapted for the cinema, Mr. Tatsumi's stories got a new voice.

**FROM HIS HEART** I wanted Mr. Tatsumi to do the voiceover for his life chapters. I felt that would give more meaning and also we could cover more ground from his heart. He's a very shy and humble man, so it took a lot of nagging for him to agree. Japanese actor Tetsuya Bessho brought the film to another level with his incredible voice projections. He's a very versatile theatre actor as well, so he was able to play many roles: two characters in HELL – the lead and the sick son, the lead in BELOVED MONKEY, the narrator for JUST A MAN, and the lead in OCCUPIED, as well as the publisher who fires him.







**THE MUSIC** My 13-year-old son Christopher composed the main theme and the music for the biographical sections of TATSUMI. We wanted something sweet, tender and yet strong. Christine Sham arranged his melodies and also composed distinct music for the stories. For HELL, I suggested music to help create a certain dark, moving and haunting atmosphere. I wanted BELOVED MONKEY to be more about sound design than score, so I asked my sound director Kazz to think industrial noise. JUST A MAN needed that smooth Chet Baker feel to it and with OCCUPIED, I was thinking of the scores of 70s softcore flicks like “Melody in Love.” I wanted no score for GOOD-BYE – I just wanted that song she sang about a prostitute.

**A COMICS BACKGROUND** I think having an artistic background gave me an eye for detail especially when it’s about comics. I used to draw comics for magazines and newspapers in the late 80s. I was approached by a major publishing house to come up with a graphic novel. The catch was that I had to complete it in 3 months, in time for the book fair or else I would have to wait another year. I had hit the wall and was out of ideas until a friend passed me Mr. Tatsumi’s book GOOD-BYE. I read it in one sitting. I was totally inspired and I was able to churn out all the stories for my book in two weeks and then took my time to draw them out. I made it in time for the book fair and all thanks to Mr. Tatsumi. I had to make a tribute film to Mr. Tatsumi because he had such a profound influence on me when I was a young comic artist before I became a filmmaker. When I look back at some of my earliest short films, I can see his influence written all over them. On a subconscious level, I was, and still am, so inspired by his tragic, powerful and yet humane tales.



# eric khoo *director*

TATSUMI marks Eric Khoo's return to Cannes after his last feature MY MAGIC was presented in Competition in 2008. Eric put Singapore on the international film map with his first feature film MEE POK MAN (1995), picking up prizes at Fukuoka, Pusan and Singapore. His second feature 12 STOREYS (1997) won several awards including the Golden Maile Award for Best Picture at the 17th Hawaii International Film Festival. 12 STOREYS was also the first Singaporean film to be invited officially to participate in the Cannes Film Festival. MEE POK MAN and 12 STOREYS have together been screened at over 60 film festivals, including Venice, Berlin and Rotterdam. Eric's third feature BE WITH ME was selected as the opening film for the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes 2005. The film has since won several awards overseas and has been invited to numerous festivals, including Toronto, Telluride and Pusan. In 2006 Eric was invited to direct for the Jeonju Digital Film Festival in Korea – NO DAY OFF, the story of an Indonesian maid.

Eric is a recipient of Singapore's highest arts honor: the Cultural Medallion by the President, and in 2008, he was awarded the "Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres" from the French Minister of Culture. Since 2007, Eric has been a board member of NYU Tisch School of the Arts Asia.

2011 TATSUMI 2009 Boo Junfeng's SANDCASTLE (producer) 2008 MY MAGIC 2007 Royston Tan's 881 (producer) 2006 NO DAY OFF (segment of omnibus feature DIGITAL SAM IN SAM SAEK 2006: TALK TO HER) 2005 Royston Tan's 4:30 (producer) 2005 BE WITH ME 2003 Royston Tan's 15 (producer) 2001 Khoo Koh's ONE LEG KICKING (producer) 1999 Bee Lian Teng's LIANG PO PO (producer) 1997 12 STOREYS 1995 MEE POK MAN



# yoshihiro tatsumi

Yoshihiro Tatsumi, born in 1935, is a Japanese comics artist who is credited with founding the gekiga style of alternative adult comics in Japan, having coined the term in 1957. Gekiga (literally "dramatic pictures") evolved and found mainstream acceptance by the 1970s, and has greatly influenced the manga landscape and comics artistry worldwide. The New York Times has hailed Tatsumi as "one of Japan's most important visual artists", and Time Magazine described his work as "tales of desperation that achieve a poetic sense of despair". His work has been translated into 17 languages.

In 2010, Tatsumi's autobiographic graphic novel, "A Drifting Life", won him multiple Eisner Awards, one of the comics world's highest honors. His monumental memoir begins with his experiences as a child in Osaka and follows him growing up as part of a country burdened by the shadows of World War II. Spanning fifteen years, from 1945 to 1960, the book chronicles how, as a child, Tatsumi had to face his father's financial burdens and his parents' failing marriage, his jealous brother's deteriorating health, and the innumerable obstacles that awaited him in the competitive manga market. He dreams of following in the giant footsteps of his idol, manga artist Osamu Tezuka (Astro Boy), with whom Tatsumi eventually became peers and, at times, stylistic rivals.

As a boy, Yoshihiro Tatsumi loved movies and harboured ambitions of becoming a director. But he preferred to sit alone facing a wall, making the stories that he dreamt up come alive on paper. Tatsumi's imagination was constantly stirred and inspired by the many movies he saw, and by the mystery novels he read. This spurred him to experiment with frames, perspectives and angles in his comics, to imbue psychological and dramatic depth to characters and stories.

Classic Tatsumi collections include "Black Blizzard", "Good-Bye and Other Stories", "Abandon the Old in Tokyo" and "The Push Man and Other Stories".



# phil mitchell creative animation director

Phil Mitchell is currently the Executive Creative Director at Infinite Frameworks (Indonesia & Singapore). He is involved in project development, client relations, and all production within the studio. He is also a member of the Executive Management team. Phil graduated with a B.A. (Honours) Degree in Graphic Design, specialization in Animation, Television and Film from the De Montfort University, Leicester, UK.

**May 1993 – October 2005:** One of the founders of Mainframe. Involved in the production of over 300 episodes of television, 17 direct-to-videos, two Imax Ridefilms, and numerous development projects over 12 years. **1993 – 2000:** One of the co-creators of REBOOT, the world’s first 100% computer generated series. During the 4 seasons of ReBoot, he worked as; animator, modeller, editor, director, art director, writer, supervisor, voice casting / director and post-production supervisor. He directed 4 episodes. **1995 – 1997:** Worked as Creative Consultant on 65 episodes of BEAST WARS, for Hasbro Toys. **1997 – 1999:** Creative Producer, WAR PLANETS TV series (26 episodes): Oversaw creative process for whole production; designed production pipeline; directed 4 episodes. **1999 – 2004:** VP Technical and Production Development: Participated on all aspects of production at Mainframe; designed production methodologies for productions; responsible for quality assurance on all productions; oversaw creative and technical development at Mainframe. Travelled extensively to research potential Overseas resources for the company. **Jan 2005 – October 2005:** VP Digital Development, & Department Head of the Digital Imaging Group (DIG): Oversaw methodology and pipeline development; set up and managed team of 60+ artists in Digital Imaging Group, who were responsible for all lighting, rendering, visual FX, and compositing at Mainframe. Managed, hired, mentored and reviewed members of the department.

# tatsumi a film by eric khoo

**TECHNICAL DATA** 2011 – SINGAPORE – 96 mins – 35 mm – Color – 1:1.85 – Dolby Digital – in Japanese  
**A PRODUCTION OF** ZHAO WEI FILMS (Singapore) – INFINITE FRAMEWORKS (Singapore) **WORLD SALES**  
THE MATCH FACTORY

**MAIN CREW** Director & Screenplay Eric Khoo Based on “A Drifting Life” and other works by Yoshihiro Tatsumi Creative Animation Director Phil Mitchell Supervising Animators Rafael Bonifacio – Jebbie Barrios Art Director Widhi Saputro Sound Director Kazz Music Christopher Khoo Music and Arrangement Christine Sham Producers Tan Fong Cheng – Phil Mitchell – Freddie Yeo – Eric Khoo Associate Producer Masato Yamamoto Animation Producer Esaf Andreas Sinaulan

**FEATURED VOICES** Tetsuya Bessho, Yoshihiro Tatsumi





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