



In the opening shot of the 1969 film *Funeral Parade of Roses* by Toshio Matsumoto, a man's bare chest crosses a white background. With only the edge of his chest in focus, his pale skin cuts across the frame like the first line of a drawing. A long-haired second figure, shown from the rear, traces an arc across his chest, and slowly turns to face the camera. The striking features of a beautiful transvestite come into view. The camera languorously hovers over his face, his high cheekbones, long eyebrows, and pearl-like skin all projecting the glamour and august self-assurance of a '60s cover girl.

Ostensibly a re-telling of the myth of Oedipus, *Funeral Parade of Roses*, Matsumoto's first feature film, follows the drag queen Eddie's rise in Tokyo's underground gay scene, culminating in the disastrous resolution of a love triangle with a double suicide. The film is a ceaseless, energetic mosaic of style; scenes are arranged out of order; at times the film is sped up, at others still photography is used, and documentary footage is interwoven throughout the film with little distinction. Flashes of newsreel images of student unrest, and frantic parties reflect the chaotic ethos of the film's moment.

Like much of Matsumoto's work, its vigorous re-appraisal of the definition and function of documentary, and the apparatus of cinema as a whole, supersedes its historical moment. A year prior to the release of *Funeral Parade of Roses*, Matsumoto had debuted with his short *For the Damaged Right Eye* (1968) at the "Expose 1968" at the Sogetsu Art Center, an important space for the avant-garde in Tokyo throughout the '60s. The short is in many ways an abbreviated version of *Funeral Parade of Roses*—a tri-partite

Toshio Matsumoto (Japanese, b. 1932) is a film director and video artist.

A focus on Matsumoto's work was recently presented by Postwar Japan Moving Image Archive, a non-profit organization aimed to preserve and present postwar Japanese experimental cinema.

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Images:  
*Atman*, 1975 (up)  
*Funeral Parade of Roses*, 1969 (down)

overlapping projection of images of Tokyo's underground. Visual art of Matsumoto's contemporaries, flashes of popular television, images of a four-day-long hostage crisis that sensationalized Japan, snippets of the drag scene, and frenetic psychedelia, all are displayed in a dizzying sequence set to a blaring soundtrack. It resonates heavily with much of the work being done with experimental film in America at the time.

An accomplished theorist as well as filmmaker, Matsumoto published the essay "On The Method of Avant-Garde Documentary Film" ten years before. He writes that, "The word 'document' has a new meaning today. It denotes the documentation of the actual material reality of fact as fact and, at the same time, the scrupulous documentation of the corresponding inner reality. Taking the documentation of the external reality as a primary moment, the process is the dialectical unification of the outer and inner worlds."

It is a constant through Matsumoto's work that the subject of documentary becomes not only what is directly in front of the camera, but also what is behind it, and the social and psychological relationship between the two. The exploration and violent culmination of that relationship allows the filmmaker to use many unorthodox tools. At one moment in *Funeral Parade of Roses*, in the ecstatic climax of a lovemaking scene, the shot pulls back, and suddenly the lights, cameraman, Matsumoto and his crew are visible. The actors break character, they dress, and Matsumoto can be overheard insisting to interview one of the actors about what they just shot. The camera angle shifts, someone claps a clapperboard, and the film proceeds with the interview. ☹

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