

DR. T. L. BILZ



INTERNATIONAL MOTION PICTURE CO., INC.

Tokyo, Japan.

Cable: IANMUTSU Tokyo

TEL: 563-1341~4

Japan Screen Topics

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HANDCRAFTED IRON WARE

145.4 feet 4 min.

1. (MORIOKA) Ever since iron ore was discovered in abundance here in Morioka more than 300 years ago, the area around the Kitagami River has been famous for its handcrafted cast iron ware. First supplying cannons to feudal lords, the cottage industry soon expanded to the production of hanging bells for temples and the still much in demand utensils used in the formal practice of the tea ceremony.

2. (SHOPFRONT) One of the best-known of the area's artisans is Ichiro Naganuma, who after studying under the master craftsman, Morihisa Suzuki, for 15 years began his own work over 30 years ago. Naganuma, like all craftsmen, is fighting the forces of mass production and inflation by producing unique, detailed designs which, due to the time and labor put into them, fetch a healthy price on the marketplace.

3. (WORKSHOP) It is in this workshop that mere designs on paper are transformed into one-of-a-kind pieces. First, the templates are made with which to form the basic shape of the clay mold. Then any exterior designs desired on the kettle or other piece are meticulously etched, in reverse, and this step alone sometimes takes more than a day to execute. The delicate handwork completed, the mold is then fired and made ready for casting. Then the molds, both internal and external, are assembled into one unit.

4. (IRON INGOTS) After iron ingots are melted down in a furnace at temperatures ranging from 1,200 to 3,000 degrees centigrade, the molten iron is then poured by hand into the open molds. The molds are then set out to cool, which usually takes from 15 minutes to an hour, and when this process is completed, it is time to disassemble the mold. The useless mold is then thrown away, and the one-of-a-kind piece is ready for handfinishing.

5. (KETTLE BEING FINISHED) Finishing is an important step in the production process. Rough edges must be hand-filed and lacquer must be applied to bring out the lustre and natural sheen of the metal as well as provide rustproofing.

6. (HOUSE - CHASHITSU) Mr. Naganuma's commitment to his craft extends beyond the boundaries of his shop. Here at a tea ceremony house in the neighborhood, he gets together regularly with others who share his interest in the art of the tea ceremony. The principal pot used by the group was made by Mr. Suzuki, Mr. Naganuma's "sensei" or teacher.

7. (POTS) But as with most handicrafts, skills are not being passed on to younger generations. If this trend continues, the works of Naganuma and other artisans will be seen only in museums.

RUBBER WOOD

66 feet 1 min. 50 sec.

1. (FOREST) If we want to describe a person as stiff and inflexible, it would not be unusual to describe him as wooden; till now, that is.

2. (KYOTO) Here at Kyoto University's research laboratories, natural laws are being bent out of shape. Although it was always known that wood was porous and somewhat malleable when soaked, researchers here have gone a step further.

3. (SOAKING WOOD) First the wood is submerged in water until nearly waterlogged. Then it is placed in a microwave oven for 2 to 3 minutes. By doing this scientists have demonstrated that wood can be made to be as bendable as rubber and in this state can be twisted and turned into an almost infinite variety of shapes. It will not hold these shapes however, unless completely dried; then it will retain its new shape indefinitely. This radical alteration of a natural property of what was once considered a basic element has imponderable ramifications. The scientific explanation of how this newfound pliability is achieved would be incomprehensible to the layman, but one thing is certain, countless Potters, Sculptors, Furniture Designers Architects, and Hobbyists will undoubtedly be purchasing microwave ovens in the near future for more than just cooking a quick dinner.

WILD BOAR CIRCUS

88 feet 2 min. 27 sec.

1. (SHUZENJI) Here in Shizuoka Prefecture, known for its native population of wild boars, is a hot spring area called Shuzenji. Shuzenji is also known as the home of Wild Boar Village where the animals perform circus tricks for audiences young and old.

2. (CHIEMI GOTO) Their trainer is Miss Chiemi Goto, a 23 year old junior college graduate who returned from the big city of Tokyo after a stint as a department store sales girl to look for work in her rural hometown. Her workday is a long one. First she must buy "reward" fruit and vegetables for the boars, and prepare it for feeding.

3. (GROOMING) One of the most important aspects of a trainer's work is building up trust with the animals, and much time and energy must go into it. Although the park has more than 130 wild boars to care for, only 14 are in the show and here she is brushing their coats. These 14 are Miss Goto's constant companions and it is obvious she is their favorite human.

4. (TRAINING) Although it takes the wild boars a while to catch on, once they have learned a trick - with enough reward and repetition - they will retain it. At times the trainer's patience seems superhuman.

5. (SHOW) Finally, amidst the applause of the crowd, the boar gets a chance to ham it up, getting his nose into everything. But what goes up must come down although some of the tricks really put him through his paces. The audience's laughter doesn't always help his concentration though, and occasionally he falls off his pedestal. Undaunted, the hero rolls out the barrel and, gentleman that he is, bows in thanks to his fans.

BIZARRE BICYCLES

69 feet 1 min. 55 sec.

1. (JUDGING) Three years ago the Kansai Cycle Sports Center in Osaka began soliciting ideas for unusual bike designs from people all over Japan. Since then ideas have been pouring in. A team of judges reviews everything from detailed drawings of design engineers to rough sketches from children and rank amateurs alike.

2. This model is sure to keep its rider's heart pumping, although she may want to take a load off her feet.

3. This tri-seater caters to those who think three isn't a crowd.

5. For carousel fans, this contraption assures great highs and lows and goes by the name of the "Up Down cycle". It's obviously a good place to play middleman.

6. For geometry students, this triangle-cycle is just the thing, all things being equilateral.

7. This Mother Goose Mobile assures the grownup in the group a clear overview of the situation.

8. For those who can't stop thinking about the energy crisis, this "Oil Shock" Drumcan Van is ideal.

9. This push-pull hand peddler is reminiscent of a particular animal out of Doctor Doolittle's stories for children.

10. The royal cycle is obviously reserved for those who don't mind feeling a little hemmed in.

11. Whether you like to keep your feet on the ground or fly high, there's no doubt that Osaka's bike playground is fun-on-wheels.

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