



## Haruka's Pottery

ハルカの陶

2019/119min/Colour/English Subtitles

Distributor: Phantom Film Co. LTD

Director: SUETSUGU Naruhito

Cast: Nao, HIRAYAMA Hiroyuki, MURAKAMI Jun, SASANO Takashi

### Online screening information:

**Sat 20 Feb** 48 hour rental window from 10.00am

**Mon 8 Mar** 48 hour rental window from 6.00pm

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The film *Haruka's Pottery* by the Director Suetsugu Naruhito is set at the present day in the town of Bizen, which is located in a long coastal valley of the Okayama Prefecture on the coast of Japan between Kobe and Okayama.

The film opens in Tokyo. A bored young woman is resentfully following her mother around a department store. She wants to be somewhere else, doing something else and getting on with her own life. We see a little of her life in Tokyo, and it turns out that isn't all that satisfying to her. The girl works in an office, doing routine modern tasks along with hundreds like her. It all seems very familiar.

Things change for her when she comes across something in the department store which would be less familiar to us in Britain. She sees an exhibition of artists' ceramics. Europe doesn't really exhibit pots in the way that you see then on display in Japan. We think of galleries or exhibitions in museums as places where we see art, but not department stores. In Japan, however, things are quite different. It's entirely normal for even very well-known artists, particularly potters, to exhibit their work in department stores. The young woman, who turns out to be the main protagonist in the film, sees a particular plate and falls in love with it.

To anyone familiar with Japanese pottery, it's clear that she is looking at *Bizen-yaki*. It couldn't really be anything else. We see all the hallmarks of the Bizen style: brown unglazed pottery with striking *hidasuki* flame marks across pale *bota mochi* marks. *Bota Mochi* means "red bean-covered rice cake" and refers to round red, brown or light-coloured marks of bare clay that has been protected from molten fly ash during the firing. The plate that the girl sees on display quite rightly captures her imagination. So much so, it turns out, that she gives up her job and leaves the big city on a whim to go and search out the potter who made the plate that she saw in the store. The rest of the film is an exploration of what happens when she tracks him down to Bizen and tries to get him to take her on as an apprentice. It's not all plain sailing.

The filming on location in Bizen is wonderful. Having worked there myself with the potters and the kilns, it was a joy to be transported back to that wonderful place once again, and to see some of the familiar locations. Imbe – the pottery town of Bizen - isn't a large place, so it's all very recognizable. The woman meets various characters, some of whom are based on real living people; and from her various setbacks and triumphs, a story builds up that gives us a surprisingly realistic look inside a working pottery workshop. I wouldn't say it was a typical view of a pottery in Bizen, because there is no such thing as typical Bizen potter. Every workshop is different. Every potter is different. Every kiln is an individual thing personal to the potter or the community that built it.

What this film shows is the struggle that sits behind the creating of works of art. It gives a good sense of what we have to give up if we want to try to follow certain

paths, and it gives a wonderful sense of what we might hope to gain in its place if we are fortunately enough and tenacious enough in following the desperately hard path of the artist.

The film is loosely based on an unlikely-sounding manga book about woodfired pottery that I remember being given a copy of to read when I was in Bizen. Director Suetsuga has done a magnificent job in transforming the original. He has really brought the story to life, and created a believable place that feels as if it actually exists. And of course, it does. Bizen *is* a very real place, and its potters are very real people. This film captures the air of that far-off valley on the edge of the sea, surrounded by small mountains that we would otherwise miss out on if we only knew about Bizen from exhibitions of its pottery in formal galleries and museums.

**Dr Robin A. Wilson**

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