

## CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An independent film club based in Chelmsford

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### **Kumiko The Treasure Hunter** (22 March 2016)

**Dir:** David Zellner USA 2014 105 mins.

**Script:** David & Nathan Zellner

**Cast:** Rinko Kikuchi (Kumiko); Nobuyuki Katsube (Sakagami)

Shirley Venard (Older Woman); David Zellner (Policeman); Nathan Zellner (Robert)

In November 2001 a young Japanese woman was found frozen to death in Detroit Lakes, about fifty miles from Fargo. A policeman she had met thought she had been searching for a buried suitcase full of cash – hidden treasure! Yes, in the Coen brothers' now cult movie *Fargo*, Steve Buscemi's hired assassin buries just such a suitcase of loot. Rumour quickly spread that the 28 year-old woman, Takako Konishi, had taken the tale to be true.

Paul Berezeller, a New Yorker living in London, realised a short documentary in 2003 about this incident. But the Zellner brothers have now delivered a full-blown drama exploring the 'urban myth', which developed around Takako's journey from Japan and her sad end.

The first 45 minutes are set in Tokyo and explore the loneliness and increasing isolation of the Kumiko character. To her mother's continuing disappointment, Kumiko is still an 'office lady' at the advanced age of twenty-nine, and single. She doesn't share the same interests as the other women in the office and her discovery of the Coen brothers' film, still on an old VHS tape (notice her frustration when the tape begins to unravel), enables her to take refuge and escape into a wider, more adventurous world. When she is caught trying to steal a huge world atlas from the library she passionately explains: "I am like a Spanish conquistador, retrieving untold treasures." Above all, it seems, she must escape the demands of her overbearing mother.

The last hour of the film takes place in the USA and captures perfectly the mood of the frozen tundra and the ambience of the *Fargo* film. As Kumiko wanders through the snowy fields we can begin to feel that the boring, humdrum world she has left behind may have held some advantages. Rather than finding herself, and leaving the drudgery and ennui of her Tokyo life behind, she becomes increasingly lost and vulnerable. The super-realism of *Fargo* may have been more convincing than the Hollywood myths created by Tinseltown, but it is still a myth, and more dangerous if pursued. For these final sequences, no words need to be spoken.

The instrumental soundtrack to the film has had positive reviews, performed by Austin-based indie band 'The Octopus Project'. David Zellner has said that he didn't just want *Kumiko* to be a homage to *Fargo*, but rather, though respectful of it, he wished to use one interpretation of an urban myth as a conduit for his and his brother's own explorations into the human condition: exploring a context in which the world was a more mysterious place than it is now, where there were some "uncharted lands". And note a continuity issue: Bemidji, Minnesota, where Kumiko visits the statue of Paul Bunyan and Babe, his blue ox, is in Beltrami County: the police car that pulls up has 'Tyrrell County' printed on it. Does it matter? Paul Bunyan must have cut down all the trees in North America: he and Babe can also be found on the side of the road in Northern California.

Next film: ***The Tribe*** on Thursday 7 April. Do please continue to leave your response slips and/or register your comments on our website.