

JESSE NISHIHATA, filmmaker (1929-2006)

Jesse Nishihata is a Japanese Canadian pioneer in documentary filmmaking. From 1966-1978 Jesse worked as a contract producer with the *CBC-TV Public Affairs Department*. During this time he produced and directed a number of programs and documentaries, including such films as *Watari Dori: Bird of Passage* (1973), a story about the Japanese Canadians' WWII experience, framed around his own family history.

The films made during this time included some of Jesse's best works, such as *The Inquiry Film: A Report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline* (1977). The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry was a precedent-shattering examination of Native rights and economic development in Canada's North. The Inquiry Film documents and reveals the process of The Inquiry and humanizes a complex political and national issue. The Inquiry Film earned Jesse the *1977 Canadian Film Award for Best Documentary over 60 Minutes* and the *Golden Athena for Best Feature Documentary* at the *1978 Athens International Film Festival* in Ohio.

From 1979 into 1995, Jesse worked as an instructor in film and media studies at the Image Arts Department at Ryerson University. It was during this period that Jesse established himself as an independent producer and director.

Another of Jesse's seminal works is *Black Earth* (1980). A film-essay on the earth's body, *Black Earth* follows a woman's journey through time and space. The film's images and utterances and sounds poetically resonate the world as woman, a woman suffering the fate of humanity. *Black Earth* was filmed on location in India. The film was awarded a citation for *Personal Vision and Cinematography* at the *1988 Oakland International Film Festival*.

Other notable films include *Justice in Our Time: How Redress Was Won* (1989) which documents the Japanese Canadian fight for Redress, and *Catch the Spirit!* (1991) which documents the *1991 Earth Spirit Festival*.

From 1992-2000, Jesse worked as the Managing English Editor of the *Nikkei Voice*, a Japanese Canadian monthly publication. Jesse states that during his time at the *Nikkei Voice* he came to "understand and appreciate the dynamics of the Nikkei community in its many and varied aspects as it struggles to retain a semblance of integrity and identity."

Jesse's prolific career in film opened up doors for all Japanese Canadian artists and Canadian documentary filmmakers in general, as he continually brought pressing issues and interesting stories into the public consciousness.

Jesse passed away in 2006 after a long battle with Alzheimer's Disease.