It is well worth noting that Oda serves as cinematographer, editor, and sound designer on her films, and that goes some way in accounting for the immersiveness of her work despite the purportedly minimal concept. For *Cenote* is in many ways a maximal film, in its sensory affect and evocation of the at-times otherworldly nature of the sinkholes. At the same time, Oda's ultimate achievement is to situate them in a real, tangible place, in a conception of culture that still manages to accurately reflect the unique blend of happenstance, tradition, and myth that form human experience. A uniformly, often eerily beautiful film, *Cenote* understands that the meaning and effect of a place is often immeasurably influenced by the point of view: a camera and light pointed there, a story told there. ◆

Coming soon to Acropolis:

- *Death Has No Master* (Dir. Jorge Thielen Armand, 2026)—Los Angeles premiere, December 2 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with Armand and actress Asia Argento in person
- *The Day She Returns* + *The Day He Arrives* (Dir. Hong Sangsoo, 2026/2011)—Double feature, December 15 at 2220 Arts + Archives

Acropolis Cinema presents:



November 18, 2026 – 2220 Arts + Archives

ABOUT THE FILM

In the northern Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, there is an abundance of cenotes - underground springs that flow into caves. In the ancient Mayan empire, these were the only source of water, and they were also where ceremonies were held to pray for rain. This film tells the story of the people, past and present, whose lives intersect with the cenotes, which are believed to be the connection between this world and the next. Swimming fish, children, elders, festivals, bull fights, faces... In this bewitching film of light and darkness, flowing together with the water we hear the echoes of ancient memories, the voices of spirits, and lines from ancient Mayan plays. *Co-presented by the Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities.*

TRT: 75 min
In person: Kaori Oda

Toward a Common Tenderness
by Aiko Masubuchi

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published by MUBI Notebook, March 17, 2020

Spending time with filmmaker Kaori Oda, you often hear her reminding herself to thank those who have helped her. In a director's comment, Oda states that showing her debut feature, *ARAGANE* (2015) is her way of repaying the generosity of the Bosnian miners who showed her their work. Experiencing her films which so far have all been shot, edited and (except for one short film) sound-designed by Oda herself, Oda is clearly a gifted artist but it seems just as true that her work is made to be a gift to the people she worked with.

Her gifts are deservedly being recognized. One notable collaborator is her mentor Béla Tarr, who she studied under at the Hungarian filmmakers' short-lived film school, film.factory. *ARAGANE* was made during her time at the film school in Sarajevo and since its release, Oda has drawn other heavyweight fans including Apichatpong Weersathakul, and critic Jonathan Rosenbaum (the latter who has continuously, on numerous occasions, vocally praised her work). Domestically too, Oda just won the inaugural Nagisa Oshima Prize for exciting new filmmakers whose jury was headed by Ryuichi Sakamoto and consisted of Keiko Araki, the director of Pia Film Festival, and Kiyoshi Kurosawa.

When asked at International Film Festival Rotterdam about how she feels about her most recent work *Cenote* being categorized as a documentary, Oda responded that she likes to call her work "films" but for the sake of clarity, she sometimes explains that her films are "experimental documentaries." Oda's oeuvre of three features and four short films to date, are certainly far from the conventional talking head documentary. Her first film, the 38 minute long *Thus a Noise Speaks* (2010), which won the Audience Award at Nara International Film Festival, employed reenactments by her family members, two weeks after her coming out to them about being gay. *ARAGANE* was mostly wordless and filled with the clanging sounds of metal and the hammering of drills echoing through a Bosnian mine. In 2017, she used the film medium to reflect on her actions as a filmmaker and cameraperson, producing an essay film just as probing and poetic as its title, Toward a Common Tenderness. Formally, *Cenote,* shot in Super-8mm and an iPhone X, lands somewhere between her last two features. It is at times observational, accompanied only by the sound of bubbling water and at others, overlaid with an evocative voice-over by a girl reciting lines from ancient Mayan poetry and lines that Oda had scripted based on her research and experiences of the natural sinkholes in Mexico called cenotes. [...]

Cenote
by Ryan Swen

The following article was originally published by Screen Slate, February 16, 2021

In the span of three features, Kaori Oda has established herself as one of the foremost practitioners of the kind of immersive documentary filmmaking pioneered, at least in part, by the Sensory Ethnography Lab, with films like *Sweetgrass* and *Leviathan*. Her debut film, *Aragane* (2015), is one of the most compelling digitally shot films of the past decade, unfolding mostly in the near-darkness of a Bosnian coal mine and transforming the setting, the workers, and the tools into a disconcerting, wondrous dance of shadows and headlamps. After 2017's *Toward a Common Tenderness*, a more personal essay film, Oda's *Cenote* (2019) returns to this experimental mode, albeit with significantly more formal variations. The documentary plunges into the deep, intricate Mexican sinkholes that give it its name; cenotes were water sources for the Mayans and were believed to act as conduits between the world and the afterlife. Today, they still exert a pull on the tropical jungle communities, especially physically. Because the pits possess strong, unexpected currents, many people have fallen in and drowned, accidentally or intentionally.

That sense of intertwined culture and danger is central to the structure of Oda's film. Eschewing the strictly observational stance of *Aragane*, *Cenote* moves fluidly between modes over the course of its 75 minutes. After an extended opening that features cacophonous, near-abstract flows of water, sunlight, and figures both amphibian and terrestrial, the film alternates between underwater iPhone footage — which glides through the dark channels of a number of different cenotes — and Super-8mm footage of the surrounding communities, observing festivities, cemeteries, and, above all, faces. Over all of this, voiceover fades in and out, freely mixing interviews with residents, recited lines from ancient Mayan poetry, and scripted lines written by Oda herself.