“Sayonara Speed Tribes” is a documentary film about the life of Hazuki (above photo), a member of Japan’s legendary “Bosuzoku” biker gangs, produced by American film maker and producer Jamie Morris. JSNW member Graham Worth interviewed Jamie on Skype recently and the following article is a summary of the interview, outlining Jamie’s experiences during the ten years he lived in Japan and his connection with a wholly unique part of Japanese sub-culture.

Bosozoku culture first emerged in the 1950’s, gangs growing in number until 1982 when total membership peaked at 42,000. Gang members rode motorbikes modified to produce maximum noise by removing baffles from exhaust pipes; identities emerged using dress codes including long coats and leather jackets covered in Kanji, proclaiming the beliefs of their fraternity. They were famed for fighting rival gangs and the police, brazenly breaking traffic laws, and riding in large groups of up to 100 where they caused mayhem on the streets and expressways.
There is evidence some gang members were connected with the Yakuza (Mafia). The general population was not involved other than being inconvenienced by the Bosozoku’s extraordinary highway antics. However, their notoriety piled pressure on the police to take action and in 2004 the government gave the police new powers to arrest bikers riding recklessly in groups. Bosozoku membership and activity went into a sharp decline, a trend that continues to this day.

I first met Jamie Morris in 2013 in Tokyo whilst he was making a series of short films with my wife, Sheila Cliffe. He described a project he had been working on for a number of years, focusing on the Bosozoku biker gangs in Japan. I was curious, as the only references I had were the scenes in Black Rain where biker gangs carried swords and were connected with the Yakuza.

In part this image was false, as I later discovered the gangs do not carry swords. I discussed with Jamie the possibility of interviewing him for the JSNW newsletter but by the time I next visited Japan he had gone back to the USA. However, we agreed to do the interview using Skype. What follows is not a transcript but a summary of the interview describing some of Jamie’s experiences in Japan and his connection with the Bosozoku.

Jamie arrived in Japan in 2002 and began teaching English in what he described as the “McDonalds of English language schools” for a year and a half. I was curious to know how he picked up Japanese language and his simple answer was “Visiting bars and talking to people”, although he also hired translators to help him out at times.

Once settled in Japan he started to become aware of loud motorbike-revving noises during the night (especially after midnight) in the street outside his apartment. When he asked Japanese friends about this the slightly embarrassed reply was that these were the Bosozoku (‘Speed Tribes’ in English), best avoided and famous for fighting and blocking traffic. He was strongly advised not to get involved with these people. His curiosity was, however, aroused and Jamie decided he had to make a film about these rebellious young men.

After a year and a half in Japan teaching English he moved back to L.A. to try and obtain funding and equipment for the project, unfortunately without much success. He then returned to Japan where he came across an exhibition showing the work of photographer Masayuki Yoshinaga, who was interested in engaging and visually recording Japanese sub-cultures. Jamie made contact with Yoshinaga, who told him he would have to move to Japan permanently if he wanted to make contact with the gangs.
To Jamie’s mind this was a Japanese cultural test to see if he, Jamie, was really serious about the project. Determination kicked in and Jamie made the move. “Within a month I was chasing bikes in the Yokohama area with my camera”. He was especially drawn to the clothing of the gang members, which was intended to proclaim both the name of the gang and their beliefs. Much of their clothing was covered in Kanji. According to Jamie “The boy’s outfits were called Tokkofuko (Battle uniforms) and were decorated with Kiku (the Japanese Emperor’s gold crest) and sported various incarnations of the Japanese flag”. There is also a suggestion they imitated both the dress code and the beliefs of the Kamikaze pilots of WW2, although this might just be a respectful appreciation of what the pilots sacrificed in defense of their country.

Much filming followed, and afterwards extraordinary amounts of time and pain editing precious footage (Jamie commenting you have to be ruthless during editing- “kill the babies” in his words). During years of filming Jamie witnessed the gradual decline of the Bosozoku, and the efforts made by the police to close them down.

The outcome of Jamie’s many years of documenting the Bosozoku was the “Sayonara Speed Tribes” DVD, now available online. A preview can be found on Youtube- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-ggpnkqTJU

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As Jamie developed a relationship with the gangs he realised he needed a ‘hook’ or storyline for the film. This came to him during his discussions with Yoshinaga, who told him one of the leading members of a biker gang in the Tokyo area was about to retire. As a result the story of Hazuki, a relatively old biker and head of the Narushino (Chiba)-based Specter Gang, became the main focus of Jamie’s film- the film documenting Hazuki’s past and gradual retirement from the fraternity, whilst taking up kick-boxing as an outlet for his energy.

The DVD (which has extra footage) is available at- https://www.reelhouse.org/jamiemorris/sayonara-speed-tribes

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Article Graham Worth, images Jamie Morris.
JSNW Needle Felting and Furoshiki Workshop, Padgate

On Saturday 7th February Japan Society North West hosted a needle-felting and furoshiki wrapping workshop, which was excellently run by none other than our very own Membership Secretary, Sally Myers. Admittedly I turned up with little knowledge, but was ready for the challenge!

Sally began by talking about all aspects of needle felting, a craft in which characters are created using wool and barbed needles. She included details of the cost of materials, where you can buy them, and which are the best materials to use. The required starting equipment and material was already laid out for participants- carded (rough) wool, and a felting (barbed) needle pushed into a styrofoam safety mat.

Sally explained that there are 3 methods of needle felting, getting participants to try method 2 (intermediate) so everyone gained useful experience without being pushed too hard. Sally told us once you’ve had plenty of practice you can use several needles bunched together, but since most of us hadn’t done needle-felting before each of us used only one needle.

Of course before you create something, you need to know what it is you want to make. This caused no problems for our new and enthusiastic needle-felters, however, who chose a variety of options including penguins, owls, sheep and by far the most popular choice, "Totoro" from Studio Ghibli’s "My Neighbour Totoro". Once we’d decided on our project we were free to start, taking the rough wool and beginning to form the basic shape for our animal. The first wool we used was rough/cheap, as this was the “stuffing” so to speak. The best wool, which you can see and touch, is saved for the outer layer.

To form the basic character shape we rolled the rough wool up and began the felting process, which involves repeatedly poking the felting needle in and out of the wool ball. The needles are barbed so each poke pulls the wool fibres down, compressing and matting them together, but since they are only barbed in one direction this only occurs when the needle is pushed into the wool and not when it is pulled out. As you rapidly continue to poke, the basic shape starts to form- if it isn’t quite right, poke in a different place. As it’s a repetitive action, we needed to take breaks every 15 minutes to give ourselves a rest. I found it a relaxing experience although you do need to concentrate or you will stab yourself repeatedly, as a few found out.
Needle Felting and Furoshiki

During our short rest breaks, Sally took the time to demonstrate furoshiki wrapping and showed us how to wrap various different types and numbers of items in this beautiful cloth. The items wrapped included one book, then two books (this wrapping looked almost like a handbag), a box, a large box and lastly two wine bottles. Apart from protecting and embellishing the contents, the clever wrapping also ended up providing a useful carrying handle. Of course we were invited to try ourselves, with Sally on hand to support.

After this artistic demonstration it was back to stabbing ourselves in the finger. Once our basic needle-felt character shape was complete, we moved onto the more expensive wool to give the correct colouring for our animals. This was more needle-felting, but it was exciting seeing your shaped wool now gain recognisable features. We learnt how to make ears, tails and arms, and how to fix them to the body. Last of all was to fix the eyes (which consisted of little pins). Our animals were complete and had come to life!

While I had no experience at this sort of thing, it was great to learn new skills and meet people with similar interests. The same can be said for any of our events, so please come and say Hi!

Article by Paul Regan, photos Kevin Howes.

"Who Killed Yukio Mishima?"
A Talk by Damian Flanagan

On Saturday 28th February Japan Society North West welcomed award-winning author and translator Damian Flanagan to Liverpool’s World Museum, where he presented his fascinating analysis of the life and death of one of the most internationally acclaimed Japanese authors of the 20th century: Yukio Mishima (1925 – 1970).

Damian explained how Mishima’s prolific work as author of classic novels e.g. “Confessions of a Mask” and short stories and 80 plays- including stunning modern “Noh” plays e.g. “Sotoba Komachi”—was his legacy, making him a fully worthy candidate for the Nobel Prize. His other talents ranged from movie actor, martial arts devotee and body builder to world traveller. Mishima was also a political campaigner for constitutional reform in modern Japan, forming a private army called the ‘Shield Society’ to protect the austere and martial Japanese values and traditional role of the Emperor to which he was so attracted.

We were also given an insight into Mishima’s experiences as a youth, his sexuality and attraction to blood and death and his obsession with time and time-keeping devices. His extraordinary personality, experiences, hidden traumas and strong beliefs were thought to have driven him to perform his explosive and very public act of ritual self-annihilation in Tokyo on 25th November 1970.

Damian’s talk, illustrated by original photographs, sparked a fascinating Q&A session, which included - Mishima’s ideas and ideals – what happened to the surviving members of his ‘Shield Society’ - related Japanese films/directors, etc....

Damian Flanagan’s biography, ‘Yukio Mishima’, is available from Reaktion Books- www.reaktionbooks.co.uk

Article by Joyce Ellis
April (四月：shigatsu)
The season for a new beginning.

April is such a special month for Japanese because many things start newly in April. In Japan, clocks do not go forward in spring nor do we have Easter, but April itself is enough to make you feel that new things are starting.

In Japan, the school year starts in April. So if you are in Japan on April 1st or early April, you will see many young children dressed up in a brand-new uniform, often complete with a cap with a school crest, walking proudly with their mother. The mother is also dressed up, sometime in a proper kimono, because they have just attended an entrance ceremony (入学式：nyugakushiki) for their child.

You will also notice that those children are bearing the same big, colourful leather bag on their back, just as big as, or often bigger for the first grader, than their own back. This bag is called ランドセル (ran-do-sel). What does this word mean? It is believed to have come from the Dutch word “randsel”, which means a back pack. The wearing of randsels is believed to have started around the end of 19th century, and they are still widely worn by primary school children (小学生：sho-gaku-sei).

Traditionally, randsels are red for girls and black for boys, but now there are more colour variations. A ランドセル is one of the favourite presents from grandparents to their grandchild when they are starting school. Department stores start to display a wide range of ランドセル shortly after New Year.

I used one back in my schooldays. I did not enjoy using it, as it was very heavy, and it was too hot on my back during summer. I remember my back was wet with sweat under the ランドセル. For me, April reminds me of cherry blossoms and the smell of new leather of brand-new ランドセル.

Another thing you might see on April 1st is young men and women wearing brand-new suits, looking a bit uncomfortable in them. They are new graduates who have just started working for a company. Many Japanese new graduates, who have graduated from university in March, start working from April 1st (This is true mainly for big companies: 大企業 dai-ki-gyo). There is a big ceremony called 入社式 (nyu-sha-shiki) on April 1st, where a company president will give them a pep-talk. Right out of universities, they are often not “useful” enough from the start, so they attend training sessions (研修：ken-shu) that usually require extreme hard work to go through them. They are a sort of an induction process, and they are tested if they could survive it!
Often hotels are booked up at the beginning of April because companies book a large number of rooms for their new employees (新入社員: shin-nyu-shain) to stay and attend the training sessions. Sessions include practice in 敬語 (keigo: honorific language), as the proper use of 敬語 is crucial for the business world.

Thus, they will be shaped into サラリーマン (salary-man), with a bitter-sweet realization that they are no longer 大学生 (daigakusei: university student).

I hope April will bring an exciting new beginning to you also!

Article by Yuko Howes, photo Kevin Howes

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### Member’s Recommendation; “In the Footsteps of a Master”, Manchester City Art Gallery

Until June, there is a fascinating exhibition at Manchester City Art Gallery in which the latest digital technology is used to re-work images by the famous Japanese artist, Hiroshige.

Utagawa Hiroshige, an artist in the ukiyo-e tradition, was born in 1797 and died in 1858. He painted and printed images of landscapes, travel scenes, beautiful women, Japanese legends and sumo wrestlers, which were collected by wealthy merchants or bought as single sheets by the less wealthy in Edo. He is regarded as a master printer and is the “Master” at the heart of this exhibition.

Emily Allchurch, an English artist born in 1974, specialises in creating complex photographic collages that she displays as transparencies on light boxes, the lightboxes giving the backlit images tremendous clarity and vitality. In 2011 Allchurch produced a set of images entitled “Tokyo Story”, taking as her inspiration the prints of Edo produced by Utagawa Hiroshige.

Hiroshige produced “One Hundred Famous Views of Edo” between 1856 and 1858, the final years of his life. Allchurch visited Tokyo and took thousands of photographs, many from the viewpoints Hiroshige had used. She then manipulated and edited the photographs into a set of collages entitled “Tokyo Story”, the collages giving a modern digital twist to the views Hiroshige captured with paper and ink.

Emily Allchurch’s collages capture the abstraction and vividness of Hiroshige’s prints and blend in images from contemporary Tokyo with great digital sharpness. In 2013, Allchurch was invited by the Shizuoka Tokaido Hiroshige Museum to adopt a similar approach to Hiroshige’s print series known as “Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido”, the old route from Edo to Kyoto. Allchurch’s images not only show changes to the places that Hiroshige painted, but also to people and their lives.

The digital images are shown alongside a selection from Manchester City Art Gallery’s collection of original Hiroshige woodblock prints. There are also some Hiroshige prints from the Whitworth Art Gallery.

Further information about the artist and exhibition can be found at [www.emilyallchurch.com](http://www.emilyallchurch.com) and [http://www.manchestergalleries.org/whats-on/exhibitions/emilyallchurch.html](http://www.manchestergalleries.org/whats-on/exhibitions/emilyallchurch.html)

Article by Ged Hynes

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Visit our web site at jsnw.org.uk
Future JSNW Events

Tea Ceremony

Saturday 25th April, 1.30pm to 3.00pm
Padgate Community Centre

An authentic tea ceremony demonstration will be presented by Mrs Mari Isobe.

Mrs Isobe will start by talking about the tea ceremony, its history and spirit. She will take us through the tea ceremony, giving a detailed explanation of every step. She will then go through the ceremony once again, this time without the explanation. After the conclusion of the tea ceremony, there will be an opportunity to be served tea by Mrs Isobe.

The cost is £4 for JSNW members, £8 for non-members. If you would like to attend please e-mail yuko@jsnw.org.uk

Kodomo-No-Hi (Children’s Day)

Saturday 9th May, 1.00pm to 4.00pm
Liverpool World Museum

Can you write in Japanese, make origami animals from paper or would you like to try the chopstick challenge?

Join us at the World Museum in Liverpool on Saturday 9 May between 1pm and 4pm for a great fun afternoon of Japanese-related activities.

This is a free to enter event, you can just turn up on the day.

Japanese Social and Conversation Evenings

These are held every month alternately between Liverpool and Manchester. Hosted by experienced Japanese tutors they are fun, sociable and educational events, so please come along! Please check our website for details.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.JSNW.ORG.UK, WE ARE ALSO ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER.