

## Idemitsu Mako What a Woman Made

Dates: Thursday, June 18, 2026 – Monday, September 21, 2026 (Public Holiday)



*Still Life*, 1993-2000, mixed media,  
Collection of Tokyo Photographic  
Art Museum, ©Mako Idemitsu  
Right only, photo: Akui Naganori

Idemitsu Mako (b. 1940) is a pioneering artist in the fields of experimental film and video art in Japan. She began creating art after spending time in the United States in the 1960s, producing works using film and early video that explored themes such as women's lives, family, and the relationship between media and society. In particular, her video works from the 1970s onwards incorporate the narrative techniques of television melodramas to depict themes such as mother-child relationships, marital dynamics, and women's social roles from a unique perspective. In recent years, amid growing international discourse on gender and the body, her practice has garnered renewed attention.

The Tokyo Photographic Art Museum acquired Idemitsu Mako's complete film and video works, as well as her major installation pieces, between 2016 and 2017. This exhibition is a large-scale retrospective that surveys the full scope of Idemitsu's artistic practice, including works that are being shown to the public for the first time since their acquisition. This comprehensive showcase presents the museum's entire collection of her works through both the exhibition and film screenings.

※The title of this exhibition, "What a Woman Made," is taken from the title of video artist Idemitsu Mako's first video work\* from 1973, which established her reputation. \*See Plate 05 on page 3.

### Idemitsu Mako

Born in 1940 as the fourth daughter of Idemitsu Sazo, founder of Idemitsu Kosan Co., Ltd. She attended the elementary, junior high, and high schools affiliated with Ochanomizu University before enrolling in the First Faculty of Letters at Waseda University. After graduating, she studied abroad in New York and married the abstract painter Sam Francis. She is the mother of two children. Driven by an irresistible desire for creative expression that transcended her roles as wife and mother, Idemitsu embarked on a career as a filmmaker. Drawing on her own experiences and grounded in feminism, she continues to explore themes such as the parent-child relationship within the family and the social resistance and opposition that women face as artists. Her publications include *What a Woman Made: The Autobiography of a Filmmaker and Video Artist* (Iwanami Shoten, 2003) and *White Elephant* (Fuunsha, 2011).



@Studio Idemitsu

## Highlights of the exhibition

### 1. A Major Retrospective of Idemitsu Mako, a Pioneer of Experimental Film and Video Art in Japan

Idemitsu began creating video works during the late 1960s in Santa Monica, California, where she was living at the time. Over the course of more than 30 years, she produced approximately 50 works that span the mediums of film, video, and installation. Our museum holds a collection of 43 works by Idemitsu, including installations. This exhibition combines exhibits and screenings to present these works in their entirety, offering a comprehensive overview of Idemitsu's artistic practice. Visitors will be able to explore her work in a systematic way, discovering pieces ranging from the film era to her unique visual world dating from the dawn of video art.

### 2. Reexamining Perspectives on Family and Society Through a Contemporary Lens

The year 1965, when Idemitsu married the painter Sam Francis and moved to the United States, was a time when the women's liberation movement was gaining momentum in America. While raising two children, Idemitsu continued to work on her artistic practice while grappling with the conflicts that arose between her social roles as a daughter, wife, and mother and her identity as an artist. With her keen eye for observation, she examined the routines of her own everyday life and society, depicting various phenomena such as male-dominated social structures and traditional Japanese family values. Even today, more than 30 years after they were initially exhibited, Idemitsu's works offer an opportunity to reexamine the nature of gender and society as they pertain to women.

### 3. From Film to Video—The Diverse Appeal of Visual Expression

Idemitsu expanded her medium from film to video, creating a diverse range of moving image works that leveraged the distinctive characteristics of each medium. Her 16mm film series *At* encompasses sensitive depictions of her own inner landscapes as she traveled back and forth between Japan and the United States. In her video works, on the other hand, she developed techniques unique to the medium, such as the "Mako Style," which involves capturing another monitor within the frame. Her video works from the 1980s, moreover, feature stronger narrative elements akin to those found in television dramas, allowing her works to take on a more directorial flair. This exhibition is structured to trace the evolution of these changes, as well as how Idemitsu's mode of artistic expression expanded and developed.

### 4. Five Installation Works on Display

Since 1976's *Grandmother, Mother, Daughter*, Idemitsu has created a total of eight installation works. This exhibition presents a total of five installations — three from the collection of the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum and two from the artist's private collection — both inside and outside the exhibition galleries.

### 5. 40 Works Screened in the Hall, Including 16mm Film Screenings from New Prints

40 of Idemitsu's works will be screened across nine programs in the first-floor hall (capacity: 190). Some works, such as *Woman's House* and *At Yukigaya 2*, are scheduled to be screened on 16mm film using new prints.

### 6. An exhibition catalogue covering the entirety of Idemitsu Mako's career

The catalogue includes interviews with the artist herself and Michael Goldberg, the Canadian video artist who supported her artistic practice from the 1980s onwards. Also featured are essays by film scholar and professor emeritus at Meiji Gakuin University Saito Ayako, photography critic and director of the Nagano Prefectural Art Museum Kasahara Michiko, as well as our museum's curators (some of which are excerpts), in addition to a list of works, a chronology, a list of exhibitions, and a bibliography.

## Exhibited Works (Excerpts)



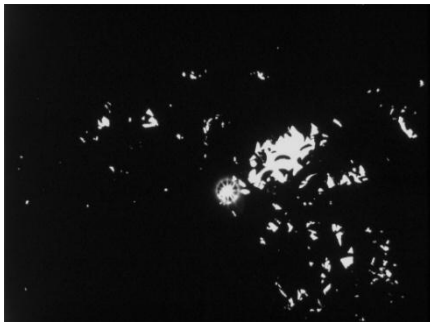
01 *Woman's House* (1972)

Idemitsu visited the "Womanhouse" exhibition, organized in 1971 by artist Judy Chicago and others, and filmed the event. She documented artists working in the exhibition space located in an old house they had renovated with the help of students, and completed the film as her first 16mm work after about a year of editing.



02 *Inner Man* (1972)

After moving to the United States, Idemitsu was exposed to Jungian psychology and used this work to depict the "animus," the inner masculine aspect of women. She employed the double-exposure technique to create an image in which the figure of a woman in a kimono overlaps with that of a naked man — a method of juxtaposing opposing elements that she also developed in her later works.



03 *At Yukigaya 2* (1974)

With two young sons to raise, Idemitsu had no time to go out and buy film, so she used high-contrast film meant for shooting movie titles and credits that she had at home. Taking advantage of the high sensitivity of this film, she captured fragments of glass reacting to light, sunlight filtering through the trees, and the lights of the Shinkansen bullet train, expressing a sense of her inner psychological state stranded between Japan and the United States.



04 *At Santa Monica 3* (1975)

This work also uses high-contrast film to capture the house in Santa Monica where Idemitsu lived for several years, as well as the scenery that surrounded it. By capturing movements of light and shadow, reflections on the surface of water, and the flickering of light, this film possesses a certain lyrical yet experimental quality. According to the artist, film creates a world distinct from that of everyday life, whereas video represents a reflection of it.



05 *What a Woman Made* (1973)

In the summer of 1973, upon returning to Japan, Idemitsu was asked to submit a work for a video screening and produced this, her first video piece. Using black-and-white open-reel equipment, she filmed a used tampon floating in a toilet. Having secured her first opportunity to screen her work, Idemitsu continued to produce art while traveling back and forth between Japan and the United States. This work is the first video piece (1973) that established Idemitsu's reputation as a video artist, and it serves as the title of this exhibition.



06 *Another Day of a Housewife* (1977)

Idemitsu herself appears in this film, which captures the daily life of a housewife through long takes. A giant eye appears on the monitor, constantly watching the subject — the housewife, who is Idemitsu herself. This film depicts how the socially constructed role of the housewife is not only shaped by the gaze of society: it is also internalized by her own inner eye. The nested structure of the monitors became a signature technique that came to be known as the "Mako Style."



07 *Hideo, It's Me, Mama* (1983)

Her collaboration with Canadian video artist Michael Goldberg began with *Shadow Part 1* (1980), while her subsequent video works are distinguished by a style that combines scripted direction with technical innovations that allow for the simultaneous recording of sound. This work depicts a mother obsessed with her independent son, raising questions about a particular dynamic in Japan where mothers themselves get in the way of their children's independence.



08 *Kiyoko's Situation* (1989)

Kiyoko, who aspired to be a painter, married at the insistence of her parents, and found her path to artistic expression blocked as she became overwhelmed by the responsibilities of housework and child-rearing. Depicted here is the inner turmoil and anguished cry of a woman who, unable to suppress her desire for self-expression, finds herself increasingly cornered. Dedicated to the director's eldest sister, who died suddenly in Paris after struggling to pursue her dream of becoming a painter, this film has won international acclaim.



09 *Kae, Act Like a Girl!* (1996)

This film depicts the struggles of an artist couple, focusing on the protagonist, who is overwhelmed by household chores and assisting her husband with his work, as she resists being oppressed and seeks to reclaim her own artistic practice. The film features Idemitsu's installation *Still Life* (1993–2000). By combining techniques explored in her previous works, such as the projecting of images onto objects, this work represents a culmination of her artistic practice.



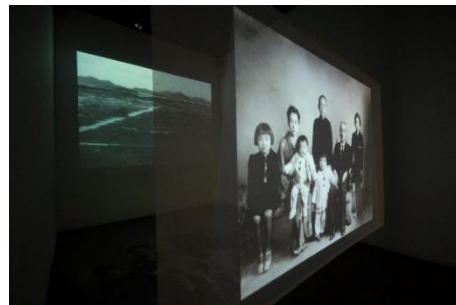
10 *Still Life* (1993–2000)

Video is projected onto two objects symbolizing male and female. The form of the anthurium flower evokes masculinity, while its counterpart represents femininity. The repetitive motif of peeling off petals and securing them with pins that was seen in Idemitsu's previous works, as well as the falling red petals, symbolize a kind of inner conflict, contradiction, and physicality. The sound was composed by contemporary musician Ayu Takahashi. (Photography: Akui Naganori)



11 *Real? Motherhood* (2000)

A work centered on the theme of motherhood. A photograph of the artist holding her own child is superimposed onto a glass crib, alongside a quotation from the philosopher Élisabeth Badinter's *The Myth of Motherhood*. A cross is placed on one side, while the other bears inscriptions of inner thoughts regarding "obsession" and "myth," giving the crib the appearance of a coffin. It is presented as a place where a woman's identity is laid to rest at the very moment of the birth of her child. (Image: Exhibition at Third Gallery Aya. Photo by Matsuoka Hiroki)



12 *The Past Ahead* (2004)

In this work, which explores the themes of family and war, photographs of Idemitsu's own family from her childhood are superimposed onto documentary images of war. Due to the father's dominance within the family, as well as patriarchal values and the fear of male supremacy, women are forced to abandon their individuality and conform to prescribed roles. By interweaving personal memories with social records, this work illustrates how this structure connects to the principle of war: that is, the domination of others through violence. (Image: Exhibition at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts. Photo by Takayuki Ichihara)

## Screenings

We will screen 40 works by Idemitsu Mako across 9 programs.

Screening Dates | June 18 (Thu) – 20 (Sat), July 9 (Thu) – 12 (Sun), August 27 (Thu) – 30 (Sun),  
September 17 (Thu) – 20 (Sun)

Admission (per program) | General/Seniors: 500 yen; Students and high school students and younger:  
Free

\*Holders of tickets for the main exhibition may view one program for 400 yen upon presentation of one ticket (limited to one use per ticket).

Venue | 1st Floor Hall, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum

Capacity | 190 people

The screening schedule and program details will be announced on the official website as soon as they are finalized.

## Guest Talks (Japanese only)

Saturday, June 20, 4:00 PM – Kasahara Michiko (Photography Critic, Director of the Nagano Prefectural Art Museum) × Kokatsu Reiko (Art History, Art Criticism)

Saturday, July 11, 4:00 PM – Saito Ayako (Film Scholar) × Kanno Yuka (Film Scholar, Professor at Doshisha University Graduate School)

Saturday, September 19, 4:00 PM – Yuzuki Asako (Novelist) × Ito Haruna (Editor, Writer)

Venue | 1st Floor Hall, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum

Capacity | 190 people

Admission | Free

\*Sign language interpretation and text display support provided

Numbered tickets will be distributed at the main reception desk on the 1st floor starting at 10:00 AM on the day of the event.

## Exhibition Overview

### Idemitsu Mako What a Woman Made

Dates: Thursday, June 18, 2026 – Monday, September 21, 2026 (Public Holiday)

Organizers: Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture)

Venue: 2nd Floor Exhibition Galleries, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum

1-13-3 Mita, Meguro-ku, Tokyo (inside Yebisu Garden Place)

Tel: 03-3280-0099 URL: <https://topmuseum.jp>

Hours: 10:00–18:00 (until 20:00 on Thursdays and Fridays); last admission 30 minutes before closing

\* From Thursday, August 6 to Friday, August 28, the museum will be open until 21:00 on Thursdays and Fridays for special evening hours.

Closed: Every Monday (If Monday is a national holiday, the museum will be open and closed the following weekday)

Admission Fees: General: 700 yen / Students: 560 yen / High school students and those aged 65 and over: 350 yen

\* To enhance your viewing experience, present your ticket from this exhibition to receive a 20% discount (group rate) on admission to the exhibition on a different day (limited to one use per ticket).

\* Admission is free for students and high school students, while general admission and those aged 65 and older may enter at the group rate (student ID or proof of age required) on Thursdays and Fridays from August 6 (Thu) to August 28 (Fri).

\*Please note that the details of this project are subject to change due to various circumstances.

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<https://topmuseum.jp/?lang=en>

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