

PRESS KIT

Feature Documentary, 80 mins

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LOG LINE

The line between life and death was paper-thin.

ONE LINE SYNOPSIS

In a society rapidly forgetting, three elderly survivors of the 1945 firebombing of Tokyo fight to leave behind a public record of their experiences before they pass away.

SYNOPSIS

Just after midnight on March 10, 1945, the US carried out a massive incendiary air attack on eastern Tokyo, unleashing a firestorm that devastated this densely urban area of wooden and paper houses. By sunrise, more than 100,000 people had been killed, and a quarter of the city wiped off the map—the most destructive air raid of any war in history. Yet it is barely spoken of in Japan or abroad. Why is it largely absent from our collective memory of World War II?

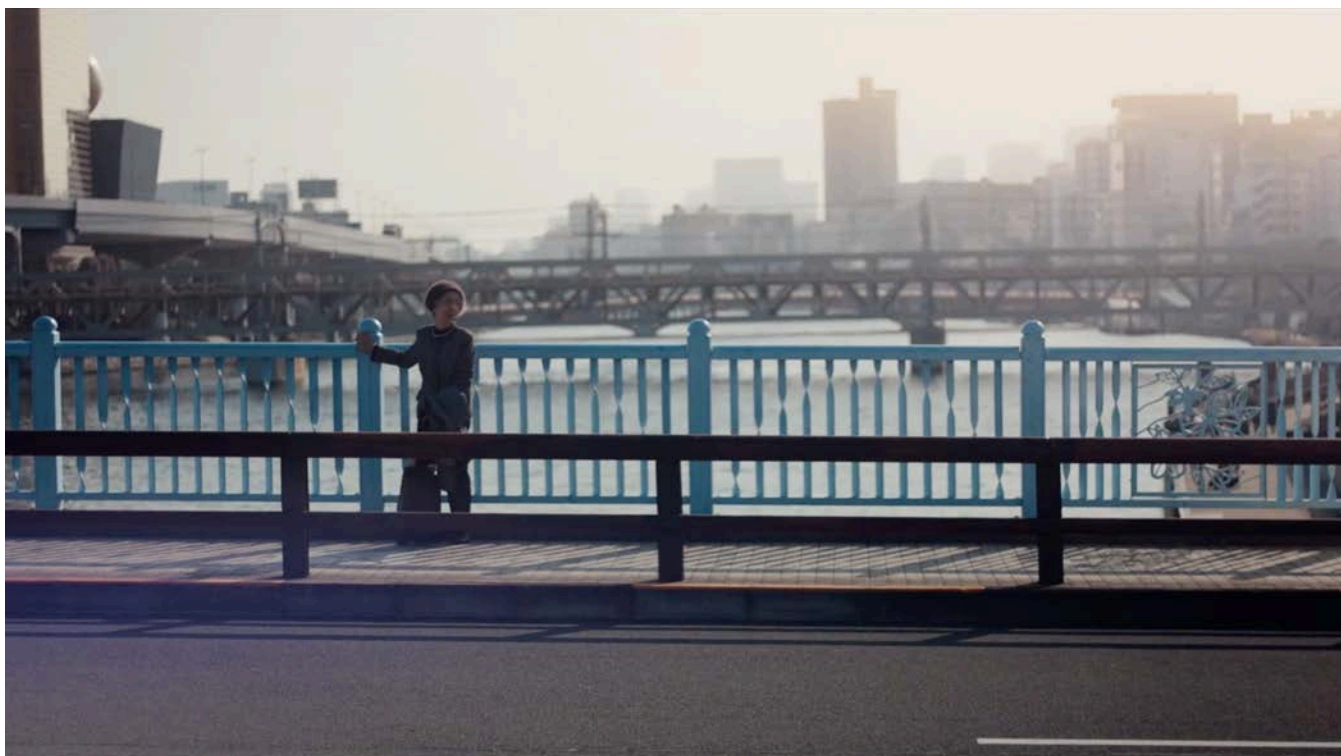
For years the survivors have campaigned for a public memorial and museum, and for some token compensation for the loss of their homes, loved ones and livelihoods. But the Japanese government continues to ignore their appeals, and after seven decades, they find themselves cast aside—and on the verge of being effectively erased from historical narratives. In contrast, former soldiers have been treated generously by the state.

Paper City tells the story of three survivors as they launch one final campaign to leave behind a record of this forgotten tragedy—before the last of them passes away. Using paper as a central metaphor—a means of documenting the past that is as fragile as life itself—*Paper City* explores the power and frailty of memory. And in giving a voice to the firebombing survivors, the film shines a light on the devastating and lasting impact of civilian-targeted air strikes, which continue around the world to this day.

BACKGROUND: CIVILIAN VICTIMS IN JAPAN

As WWII came to a close, Japanese civilians were focused on immediate concerns—food, shelter, and the search for lost relatives. As a defeated Japan began to rebuild, the nation looked firmly to the future, rather than deal with the complex mix of guilt, shame and complicity of its war memories. The Vietnam War changed this. For many survivors, the images of carpet-bombing and napalm flashing across their television screens dredged up memories of their own experiences—and the similarities between the old war and the new. For some, this was the beginning of their political awakening, and rather than be intimidated into silence, they began to speak out. They knew a painful truth—that if not for their own government’s belligerence in the war, Japanese cities would never have been bombed.

Most famous of these are the survivors of the atomic bombings, some of whom are recognized by the Japanese government with a medical allowance and a specific term—the hibakusha. Their fight for recognition has been championed internationally by human rights groups, politicians and artists, and depicted in films such as Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain* and Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour*. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki continue to carve new names each year into their respective memorials. But in Tokyo (and 65 other Japanese cities hit by incendiary and conventional bombs) the survivors have been ignored—and now, decades later, find themselves effectively erased from national and international historical narratives. The US too, is complicit in this silence, content that bombings of Japanese cities be brushed aside as a necessary part of “The Good War”.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT by Adrian Francis

Like many Australians of my generation, I grew up with anecdotes of the cruelty suffered by allied civilians and POWs at the hands of the Japanese military. But apart from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I was taught nothing about how ordinary Japanese civilians experienced the war. This changed when I saw Errol Morris' documentary *Fog of War*, which in a brief sequence, shows the devastation of bombed-out Tokyo. At this point I had already been a Tokyoite for several years, but had never seen any physical traces or heard stories of what happened—nothing in the city had pointed me to it. I couldn't help thinking that if a similar attack had taken place in an Australian city, it would now be part of our collective memory, like the attacks of September 11, or the atomic bombs themselves.

So why don't we remember the Tokyo firebombings? What happened to the survivors? Are they reluctant to talk? Would they rather forget? As I began to meet survivors, I saw that nothing could be further from the truth. For them, remembering is not passive—it is an action, a verb. They are deeply compelled to speak about what happened; their problem is few want to listen. I decided I wanted to tell the story of the firebombing from their point of view. But with many survivors already in their eighties and nineties when we began research, we knew recording their stories was a matter of urgency. *Paper City* focuses on three survivors in particular—Mr Hoshino, Mrs Kiyooka, and Mr Tsukiyama. Over a shooting period of two years, they invited us into their homes, lives and memories. As a filmmaker, I feel privileged to have their stories entrusted to me. With only a handful of survivors left alive, *Paper City* might be our only chance to hear these testimonies firsthand.

CHARACTER PORTRAITS by Adrian Francis

**Mr Hoshino**

On March 10, 1945, Hiroshi Hoshino was only 14 years old. He remembered the canals nearby where Tokyo Skytree now stands, choked with corpses. In the cleanup, he and his classmates were ordered to fish these bodies out by the military police. After the war, when he heard former soldiers talking about the hardship of fighting

abroad, the teenage Hoshino reminded them that civilians had also suffered their share of horrors. But the veterans rebuked him. The burning sense of injustice he felt at this denial never left him. Unlike the generous support given to soldiers and their families after the war, he was indignant that civilians have all but been forgotten. Since retiring, he devoted himself to the civilian cause, still far from being won—to ask the Japanese government to build a memorial and a museum, and to recognize its responsibility in the catastrophic human toll of March 10, 1945. More than anyone, Mr Hoshino helped to deepen my understanding of the firebombing, because he could see it from so many angles: personal, historical, military and political. But each time we met, I couldn't help but glimpse him as that 14-year-old boy, forced to drag the dead from his broken city.

Mrs Kiyooka

Each time Michiko Kiyooka addressed an audience of schoolchildren, she told them she would never forget the stench of charred human flesh. With the city in flames, her family took refuge in the Sumida River, beneath Kototoi Bridge. The 21-year-old Kiyooka clung to a wooden pole in the icy



water until dawn. Days later, when she found her sister and father buried in a shallow grave, their bodies were intact and identifiable—unlike most of the dead, burned beyond recognition. For her, it was a small blessing in her misfortune. She saw it as her duty to tell young people about the horror of war. The first day I met Mrs Kiyooka, she trusted me implicitly, inviting our crew to her home. On filming days, she proudly told friends about our project. I think she saw that I would take care of her story when she no longer could—and as a non-Japanese filmmaker, someone not afraid to address Japan's uncomfortable truths.



Mr Tsukiyama

Minoru Tsukiyama, 16 at the time, thought his district—with no military targets—would be spared from US attack. But that night he witnessed its utter devastation; 80% of its inhabitants perished there, including his brother and two sisters. After the war, the surviving members of Mr Tsukiyama’s community wrote the

names of each of their deceased neighbours on a paper scroll, which they have preserved for decades. But with fewer survivors left, Mr Tsukiyama worries if young people will continue to carry on this local tradition. Devoted to his community, he still runs a small store on the spot he has lived since childhood. At first more reticent to speak than the others, Mr Tsukiyama wanted to share his story in his own way—encouraging me to read a handwritten he published 40 years ago. Eventually I convinced him to read it aloud for the camera—the first time he had ever done so. In his nervous eyes, I often wonder if he is replaying images that haunt him from that night.

DRAMATIC / THEMATIC INTENTIONS by Adrian Francis

Facts alone cannot begin to convey what it was like to be on the ground that night. For each of our three protagonists, Mr Hoshino, Mrs Kiyooka and Mr Tsukiyama, March 10, 1945 defined them—everything they have experienced is measured in relation to it. As the city was swallowed by fire, and escape routes were cut off, a left turn might have meant death; a right turn, survival. How did they manage to emerge from this chaos when so many others were lost? As Mrs Kiyooka says, “The line between life and death was paper thin.”

Now in the twilight of their lives, the survivors feel this more than ever. It is why they continue to fight, fearful of disappearing before they accomplish the passing on of memory. Their desperation—borne of the fact that old age will soon take its toll and their opportunity will be lost—is deeply poignant, and informs the simple dramatic arc of this film about life and death. From the opening of the film, it is on the horizon, bringing the story its universality. What does it mean to realize you can’t finish what you’ve been fighting for? That everything was in vain? This metaphysical despair has preoccupied me since I began this project. As the film unfolds, and we begin to understand that the characters may die without realizing their quest, we must ask ourselves what role we can play in keeping these stories alive after the survivors have passed away—in the transfer of memory. Storytelling is not a substitute for democracy, but it is one way to remember the otherwise forgotten.

In weaving the stories of three characters whose fates are inextricably linked by the firebombing, *Paper City* presents a picture larger than the sum of its parts—suggesting that behind a tragedy like this, there are a million individual tales of survival and loss, each unique and yet sharing common threads. Although their personal stories are about Tokyo, the film shows us a more universal truth: that although governments make war, it is civilians who endure it—whether on the side of the victim or the aggressor. We will also see how the past reverberates in the present—as air raids have continued to target and kill civilians in other locations—Vietnam, Cambodia, the West Bank, Syria. And as with Tokyo, for survivors, the psychological scars of these more recent atrocities will remain long after the physical ones have disappeared. Many of the psychological wounds that were opened in WWII continue to fester—causing pain to individuals, and impeding the development of strong and trusting relationships between nations. Between Japan and the US, now two great allies, there has never been a full reckoning of the mass bombing of civilians in Tokyo and dozens of other cities. We want our film to contribute to an honest and open dialogue, and finally help put some of these ghosts of the past to rest.

STYLE & APPROACH by Adrian Francis

**Paper memories**

The metaphor of paper infuses the whole film, giving our story its texture, colour and fragile poetry. Paper refers to the highly flammable building materials used in most homes during the wartime era, but also the city maps, paintings, scrolls and photographs that our three characters handle respectfully throughout the film—to invoke the ghosts of the city before, during and after the bombing. Of course these documents merely freeze the truth of what happened in physical and palpable form—it is our characters that revive them through their stories. But while paper is a medium to conserve the past, it is brittle and soon disintegrates. The survivors seek to set these fragile memories in something more permanent—in stone.

We are excited to have collaborated with Japanese artist Hiromi Edo on the film, repurposing the ancient art of calligraphy on Japanese *washi* paper to develop the idea of recording memory. The act of writing brings a visual style that is organic, physical and powerful.

Intimate rhythms

Without being able to see what our characters experienced, I wanted to establish an immediate and intimate relationship between them and our camera—near their bodies, near the heart. The handheld camera's physical proximity to our elderly characters captures the rhythms and details of their slow-moving world. We linger on textures that tell their own silent stories—the emotions imprinted on their lined faces and parchment skin. Each gesture is deliberate, as if they are conserving time or energy. Sometimes they speak candidly, at other times they fall silent—as they retreat into memory, or when words cannot convey what they saw.

Private / public memory / spaces

The fourth character is Tokyo itself. If the Japanese have a tendency not to dwell in the past, nowhere is this truer than in the capital—an amnesiac city of neon and white noise, constantly in flux, where homes and streetscapes are continuously destroyed and rebuilt. It is also a city of migrants from across Japan, who have no connection to the place or its past. But in eastern Tokyo—where the bombing was concentrated, and where *Paper City* is set, time seems to move more slowly, and the people are more anchored to the past—through the oral transmission of memory. Much of the film takes place in interiors here, between walls made of rice paper and wood, in the homes, office and stores that our characters inhabit. These

interiors represent their inner life and the memories they share with us, the audience, as well as their confinement in a memory that they cannot fit into the public space.

Each character makes a pilgrimage to their own site of emotional significance—Mr Hoshino, to Kinshi Park, where he carried corpses to mass graves; Mrs Kiyooka, to the river under Kototoi Bridge; and Mr Tsukiyama, to the overhead railway where his family sought refuge in an air raid shelter. The characters become our conduits between the invisible world of memory—and the physical space of the city, where nothing of the past has survived. They haunt these places like ghosts, the camera capturing their fragile presence reflected in water or mirrors, or as the shadows they cast. Engulfed by memory, they engage with the camera, as with a trusted confidant.

We have woven some archive into the film, which gives brief glimpses of Tokyo before and after the devastation. For the film's opening sequence we managed to track down some rare archive of the bombing itself—taken by US planes as the city burned below. To the best of our knowledge this is the only footage that exists of the attack. Most civilians couldn't afford cameras at the time—and that night they were busy running for their lives.



PRINCIPAL CREW BIOS

Writer & Director—Adrian Francis



Originally from Australia, Adrian has lived and worked in Tokyo for 15 years. He majored in documentary film at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne. Working with producer Melanie Brunt, Adrian directed the award-winning documentary short, *Lessons from the Night*, about an immigrant cleaner, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and won several prizes at the International TV Festival in Montenegro, including

the Grand Prix. His short films have screened at major international festivals including AFI Docs, Karlovy Vary, Melbourne and Edinburgh International Film Festivals, Visions du Reel, and Los Angeles Film Festival. Adrian was one of five international directors asked to make a short film for the 5x5x5 project at the 2011 Winterthur International Short Film Festival. He was invited to participate in the Berlinale Talents at the Berlin Film Festival, where he began developing the project that would become *Paper City*—his first feature-length film.

Details Full name: Francis, Adrian Peter
 DOB: September 2nd, 1974
 Place of Birth: McLaren Vale, South Australia

Filmography	2008	Lessons From The Night	Short Documentary
	2011	Forest of Things Left Unsaid	Short Documentary

Producer—Melanie Brunt, Feather Films



Melanie is a producer of thoughtful, character-driven short films across fiction, animation and documentary categories through her company Feather Films. Her films, including *The Orchestra*, *Dugong* and *Lessons From The Night*, have won over 50 awards and screened at 150+ festivals—including Sundance, Tribeca, Karlovy Vary, Edinburgh, Palm Springs International ShortFest, Aspen Shortsfest, Sitges Film Festival and AFI Docs. Her films have

been nominated for 4 AFI/AACTA Awards. Melanie has 10+ years experience working as line producer and post-production supervisor on scripted productions, and she was a producer on the multi-award winning, ABC series *Wrong Kind Of Black* for Princess Pictures, which was nominated for an International Emmy in 2019.

Director of Photography—Brett Ludeman

Brett is a Director of Photography and Editor residing just outside Melbourne, specialising in documentary, commercial and online content. Brett spent many years working as a Director with Exit Films, then working as a freelance Director of Photography and Videographer with groups such as Finch Company, AKA Media, Otto and most recently, as senior content creator with The Australian Ballet. Brett's proudest work has been documenting real

people, pressing stories, in faraway places, with a camera on his shoulder. *Paper City* is one of those stories that will never leave him, and hopes never leaves the audience.

Sound Designer—Emma Bortignon

Emma Bortignon is an award-winning Sound Designer/Supervisor of Feature Films, Documentaries, Short Films and TV Series. Emma has won two AACTA/AFI Awards for her acclaimed work on the feature film *Noise* (2007) and on the feature documentary *Murundak: Songs of Freedom* (2011) and has received numerous AACTA/AFI nominations. Most recently, Emma won Best Sound Design at The Melbourne Web Festival 2019 for the

web series *Over & Out*. As a respected senior member of the Australian Film Industry, Emma mentors emerging filmmakers and regularly lectures in Sound Design at Melbourne's pre-eminent tertiary film courses. In her spare time she is a multi-instrumentalist for the seminal Melbourne band *Underground Lovers*.

Composer—Simon Walbrook

An AACTA winning sound designer and composer, Simon has worked on over 50 films, feature documentaries and television series in Australia, Bolivia, France, Germany and Spain. His music has appeared in museum shows and exhibitions including for Australia's largest museum The National Gallery of Victoria. Most recently his score and sound design for VR project "Prison X" premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival.

Calligraphy Artist—Hiromi Edo

Hiromi has been studying traditional Japanese calligraphy for over 20 years, exploring the three Japanese writing systems—Hiragana, Katakana & Kanji—as well as abstract writing, under the tutelage of elderly Japanese masters. Her work has been exhibited in Spain and Japan, and she is a member of several prominent calligraphy organizations. She teaches and produces work from her home studio in Kamakura, just south of Tokyo. *Paper City* is her first collaboration with filmmakers, and an opportunity for her to be part of discovering and documenting the story of the Tokyo firebombing.

Executive Producer—Sophie Hyde



Sophie Hyde is a founding member of film collective Closer Productions. She lives and works on the lands of the Kurna people in South Australia and makes provocative and intimate films and television. Her debut feature drama *52 Tuesdays* (director/producer/co-writer) won the Directing Award at Sundance and the Crystal Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. She directed and produced the Australian/Irish co-production *Animals* starring

Holliday Grainger and Alia Shawkat, which premiered in Sundance 2019 and won a BIFA for Best Debut Screenplay. She created, produced and directed episodic series *F*!#ing Adelaide*, which premiered in competition at Series Mania and screened on ABC Australia. She created, produced and directed (EP4) the 4 x 1-hour series *The Hunting*, which won two Australian Academy Awards for *Best Screenplay in Television* and *Best Supporting Actor for Richard Roxburgh* and the Australian Writers Guild award for Best Series. It is network SBS's highest rated commissioned program to date. Sophie was nominated for two Australian Directors Guild awards in 2020 for feature film *Animals* and *The Hunting*.

Sophie's feature documentaries include *Life in Movement* (producer /co-director), winner of the Australian Documentary Prize, *Shut Up Little Man! An Audio Misadventure* (producer) and *Sam Klemke's Time Machine* (producer), which both premiered at Sundance Film Festival and *In My Blood It Runs (Producer)* which premiered at Hotdocs, had a very successful cinema run, and has screened on PBS (USA), ABC (Australia) and will soon screen on ARTE (France and Germany). In 2021 she will direct the Emma Thompson starring *Good Luck To You, Leo Grande*.

Executive Producer—Rebecca Summerton

Rebecca is a producer and is co-owner of the award-winning screen production company Closer Productions. Her feature film credits include break out low budget feature *52 Tuesdays*, which won the directing award for World Cinema at Sundance and the Crystal Bear at Berlinale, and feature documentary *Sam Klemke's Time Machine* which premiered at Sundance and in Official Selection at HotDocs and Rotterdam. Her most recent feature,

Animals, is an official Irish/Australian co-production based on the acclaimed novel, which premiered at Sundance 2019.

For television, Rebecca has made numerous documentaries including Dendy Award-winning *I Want To Dance Better At Parties* and 3-part Arts series *Hannah Gadsby's Oz*. Her television drama credits include the 6-part online series *F*!#ing Adelaide*, which premiered at Series Mania and was the most watched ABC iView Original in 2018. She also produced *The Hunting*, a 4 x 1 hour drama series which premiered on SBS Television in August 2019 and was SBS' most successful commissioned drama ever. Rebecca recently completed *Aftertaste* a new 6 x 30 comedy drama for the ABC which premiered on ABC TV in February 2021.

Executive Producer—David Fedman

David Fedman is Assistant Professor of Japanese History at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author, most recently, of *Prospecting the Ruins: Memory and Meaning in Japan's Scorched Earth of World War II*. Together with Cary Karacas, he is also the co-curator of JapanAirRaids.org, a bilingual digital archive dedicated to disseminating information on the firebombing of urban Japan during WWII. His research has been supported by fellowships and grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Society, the Japan Foundation, and the Social Science Research Council, among others.

QUOTES

"Paper City stands to shed light on a formative moment in the rise of American air power: a strategic bombing campaign that in many ways informed the bombing of cities and civilians in North Korea, Vietnam, and, more recently, the Middle East. By raising unsettling moral questions about the targeting of civilians during WWII, the film challenges prevailing American narratives of the 'Good War.' *Paper City* will force us, at long last, to reckon with the experiences of the civilian population on the ground, most of them women and children."

—David Fedman, Executive Producer & Assistant Professor of History, UC Irvine

"This film is very important because it deals with a unique event in history that has been neglected, forgotten, and erased, by both the United States and Japan. It is crucial for the voices of these three people in the film to be heard, for they survived the horror of the Tokyo firebombing of March 10, 1945. This film will pass down their voices and their memories, so that a part of history can be recovered, and remembered."

—Michael F. Lynch, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Kent State University