



PRESS KIT

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CSUN CINEMA Presents

# IKIGAI

A short film by **Maren Emiko Elardo**

2024 - 16 minutes - Los Angeles, CA, USA - English



Directed by MAREN EMIKO ELARDO  
Produced by MAREN EMIKO ELARDO,  
MAYA TYDOR and MATEO SIMON  
A CSUN Cinema Production

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## MAIN CREDIT

A **CSUN CINEMA** Production

Written and Directed By **MAREN EMIKO ELARDO**  
Starring **JULIA SAITO, NATSUKO AOIKE**  
**BRIAN YUICHI TAKAHASHI**  
**BECCA BELL, MARY LAPARI**  
**SULLIVAN LAPARI**  
Producers **MAREN EMIKO ELARDO**  
**MAYA TYDOR, MATEO SIMON**  
Directors of Photography **PRIYA BURLESON, JOSHUA RATTÍ**  
Editors **CESAR DE LUNA, MATTHEW ALLEY**  
Sound **TZU NI GUO, NATHAN ARELLANO**  
**SAMANTHA ZAN, TRENT X. POWELL**  
Production Design By **CHLOË BENZ**  
Composer **TADATO MILLER**

## TECH INFO

Format **DCP**  
Shooting Format **DIGITAL**  
Aspect Ratio **2:39:1**  
Sound **5.1 CH**  
Frame Rate **24FPS**  
Running Time **16 MIN.**  
Color **COLOR**  
Language **ENGLISH**





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## SYNOPSIS

In the mid-1970s, a nine-year-old Japanese American girl starts her first week of third grade at a predominantly white school. Her first day of school brings the challenge of feeling different from her classmates and the anticipation of a new show-and-tell presentation. As she prepares for her presentation, her mother plans a surprise visit to her daughter's class.





## SHOOTING LOCATIONS

Los Angeles, California, USA

San Jose, California, USA



## ARRI FRANK WEISER GRANT RECIPIENT

Camera **ARRI ALEXA MINI LF**







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## DIRECTOR



### MAREN EMIKO ELARDO

Maren Emiko Elardo is a Japanese-Italian American filmmaker from San Jose, California. Graduating in under three years, Maren is a recent alumna from California State University, Northridge, specializing in Film Production with a focus in editing, complemented by a minor in Photography & Video.

Her journey into creative expression began by collaborating with her two older sisters, crafting stop-motion Barbie films, music videos, and imaginative skits for her family to enjoy. In school, she naturally gravitated towards video projects, discovering the impact storytelling can have on emotionally moving viewers.

She hopes that her diligent work ethic and diverse talents will be woven into her life's work, leaving a positive and impactful legacy that resonates with a broader audience beyond her peers. Her passion extends to elevating Japanese American stories and nurturing creative opportunities for fellow artists, a testament to her profound dedication and alignment with her ikigai. In January of 2023, Maren's script "Ikigai" was selected by California State University, Northridge's Cinema and Television Arts film program, earning her the esteemed Golden Globe Foundation Fellowship. In her debut as both a writer and director, "Ikigai" highlights a Japanese American narrative inspired by the childhood experiences of Mayumi Elardo, Maren's mother.





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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Growing up, I was often caught between two worlds, feeling the pull of my Japanese heritage on one side and my Italian roots on the other — a common struggle for many mixed-race children. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I spent a lot of time with my mother, and it was then that she shared stories of her childhood with me. Through these conversations, I learned about the isolation and insecurity she experienced due to her Japanese identity. Attending a predominantly Caucasian elementary school, she faced frequent bullying and microaggressions because of her appearance. This led her to feel a deep-seated resentment towards her cultural background.

These revelations resonated deeply with me because I had struggled with similar feelings, though not as intensely as my mother experienced in the 1970s. Over 30 years later, society had evolved, finding more insidious ways to perpetuate racism. It's as if overt racist comments had been replaced with more subtle, masked forms of prejudice. As a child, I often denied my Japanese heritage, claiming to be fully white whenever someone commented on my Asian appearance.

This denial was a way to protect myself from the stereotypes and negative connotations that society and media often associate with Asian Americans. The stories my mother shared ignited an urge to explore these themes through storytelling. I wanted to capture the essence of this shared experience — the sense of isolation, the internalized prejudice, and the journey towards self-acceptance. “Ikigai” is an attempt to voice the internal battles faced by many Asian Americans and to challenge the stereotypes that have been deeply ingrained in our society. It is a tribute to my mother, to all those who have felt the sting of cultural alienation, and to the resilience it takes to reclaim and celebrate our identities.

Film and television are incredibly influential platforms, capable of moving and inspiring people for better or worse. The portrayal of Asian Americans, particularly Japanese Americans, in media has historically fueled racism and discrimination in real life and we should recognize that we now have the opportunity to tell a new story.

**MAREN EMIKO ELARDO**  
*Writer | Director | Producer*



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## CONTACT INFORMATION

### PRODUCER CONTACT:

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### CSUN PROFESSOR CONTACT:

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## SOCIAL MEDIA

INSTAGRAM   FACEBOOK

TIKTOK   YOUTUBE

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