



paper city

One night. 100,000 dead.

a documentary about the firebombing of Tokyo

 ABC
COMMERCIAL

HOW COULD THE WORLD'S LARGEST CITY HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT A QUARTER OF IT WAS DECIMATED IN A SINGLE CATAclySMIC EVENT?

Just after midnight on March 10, 1945, the US launched a massive air raid on Tokyo, unleashing a firestorm on this dense area of wooden and paper houses. By sunrise, more than 100,000 people were dead, and a quarter of the city destroyed – making it the most destructive air raid in history.

Unlike their loved ones, Mr Hoshino, Mrs Kiyooka and Mr Tsukiyama emerged alive. For years they have campaigned for a public memorial, a museum, and some token compensation for civilians who lost everything. But the Japanese government has refused to formally acknowledge their appeals, and after seven decades, they find themselves cast aside – while former soldiers have been treated generously by the state.

Paper City follows the survivors as they launch a final campaign to leave behind a record of this forgotten tragedy – before the last of them passes away. Weaving harrowing testimonies, rarely-seen archive, and modern-day advocacy, it's an exploration of trauma, remembrance and the state's role in gatekeeping accounts of history.

Deeply significant, the documentary 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 three survivors to be heard; *Paper City* passes down their voices and their memories, so that a part of history can be recovered, and remembered.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS

Melbourne International Film Festival 2021:
Australian Premiere

**International Documentary Festival
Amsterdam (IDFA) 2021:**
Online Documentary Market

Nippon Connection Japanese Film Festival 2022:
Official Selection

Santa Barbara International Film Festival 2022:
International Premiere

Full Frame Documentary Film Festival 2022 (US):
Official Selection

REVIEWS

Jim Schembri,
Melbourne International Film Festival PICKS



'Absorbing, deeply unsettling, historically responsible.'

'An extraordinary documentary that pits the atrocities of war against the bureaucratic obscenity of denying the suffering of innocent people who, in the final days of their lives, want nothing more than recognition and respect that was due them more than 70 years ago.'

'Far from being a dry or academic history lesson, *Paper City* should prove as compelling to those with scant interest ...as it will no doubt be to war buffs.'

Screenhub



'Francis observes his subjects respectfully... *Paper City* is less concerned with conveying horror than it is with honouring, in its own modest way, the survivors' collective wish for their history to be recorded and remembered.'

As much as it is a heartfelt appeal not to forget the past, *Paper City* is a touching record of the filmmaker's efforts to better understand a place and a people he has come to know – and a history he was never taught.'

REVIEWS

‘With *Paper City* Francis gives a lasting voice to the survivors, a message we need to hear as civilian-targeted bombings rage on in Syria, the Gaza Strip, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.’

– **Artscape Japan**

‘Storytelling like this, in the hands of a skilled and empathetic artist like Francis, is one of the most cogent means we have toward effecting a more equitable, just, and humane society.’

– **Artscape Japan**

‘By emphasising the activists’ work, the film ultimately respects their desire to universalise what they endured.’

– **Metro Magazine**

‘A thoughtful, considered, and crafted piece of non-fiction filmmaking – one that has much to teach us, not only about history, but about what societies choose to remember, and aim to forget, and what the consequences of that are.’

– **Melbourne International Film Festival**

‘Honest and fascinating.’

– **Australian International Documentary Conference**

TOKYO PREMIERE SCREENING: VOX POPS

February 2022

That was truly a great film. Very moving and has sparked a great conversation.

There were so many things that I learned today about Tokyo’s history even though I’ve lived here almost my entire life.

It was deep and moving, yet beautiful and poetic. It was great to feel your sense of beauty in the shots too.

I just wanted to thank you for giving me such an amazing opportunity to learn about Japan’s history and the significance of carving the names of those who died in the air-raid instead of recording it on paper (because as you said paper is fragile and destructible.)

Congratulations. That was outstanding. If there’s a way to buy or share the film itself, I’m very interested.

You had tons to juggle, and not easy with three different protagonists, but the storytelling came thru really powerfully and clearly.

What a magnificent film. Seven years in production has yielded something truly special! Can’t wait to share it with other friends as well when it picks up some more speed.

Well done! It was the best documentary I’ve ever seen! It’s still lingering in my mind. Thank you.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

ADRIAN FRANCIS

Like many Australians of my generation, I grew up with stories 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 Japanese civilians experienced the war.

When I first learned of the Tokyo firebombing, I began to wonder about the survivors. Were they still alive? Did they want to talk? Would they prefer to forget?

I began to do some research and found a small private museum dedicated to the air raids. I also contacted a survivors' group, which for years had been campaigning for the building of a memorial and peace museum, as well as reparations for what civilians had lost.

The thing that first struck me was that many survivors are deeply compelled to speak about what happened – the problem is few want to listen. *Paper City* focuses on three 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.

In the end, they just want to leave behind an imprint on the public memory that will outlast their own lives. That desire to leave something behind resonates very strongly with me as a filmmaker, but is fundamental to all of us – to be heard, to be known, to be remembered. I think their greatest fear is that if they don't pass their stories on, the firebombing will soon slip from our consciousness – effectively as if it never happened.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER'S STATEMENT DAVID FEDMAN

Assistant Professor of History, UC Irvine

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.



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