

DISOBEDIENT FILMS PRESENTS

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GHOST TOWN

A film by Katharine Round

UK | 2026 | 64'



PRESS NOTES

Producer

She Makes Productions

Laura Shacham

laura@shemakesproductions.com

+44(0) 7912 675 959

International Publicist

NOISE Film & TV

Mirjam Wiekenkamp

mirjam@noisefilmpr.com

+31 6 2865 2249

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LOGLINE

In a Japanese coastal town haunted by the 2011 tsunami, the filmmaker installs her camera inside the city's taxis to capture conversations between the living and, it turns out, the dead.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In a Japanese coastal town still haunted by the 2011 tsunami, a taxi becomes a moving confession booth. Over the course of one night, a series of conversations between drivers and their passengers reveal how those who survived live with the dead - as ghostly tales, dreams and everyday life merge in a magical drift between reality and imagination.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Fifteen years after the 2011 tsunami, taxi drivers in the Japanese port town of Kamaishi began picking up passengers who didn't exist. Using rigged cameras, the taxi is transformed into a moving confession booth. Over one night, residents talk - extraordinary conversations that drift between everyday mundanities and magical dreamworlds. A driver dreams of a white horse; another swears the phone box is full of ghosts trying to get through. Some passengers recall premonitions that saved their lives, others talk of the ordinary ache of living on. The car drifts through the night, headlights sweeping empty streets where deer watch like sentinels. Back at the depot, a driver checks the horse-racing listings, while a phone box rings unanswered in the darkness.

Between silence and conversation, myth and memory, Ghost Town inhabits a liminal space between documentary and dream. It reveals a community suspended between the visible and invisible - a portrait of life lived alongside its ghosts.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

A few years ago a newspaper article caught my eye: in the north-eastern reaches of Japan, taxi drivers were picking up passengers that turned out not to exist. Almost fifteen years after the tsunami, it seemed the dead had found a place amongst the living. A friend of mine had recently, and suddenly, passed away and the idea captured me as I grappled with my own loss.

I tend to believe it is the quieter, more reluctant voice that often has the most to say, so the idea of “shared encounter” became crucial. I wanted to see how film could open a space for stories of loss, memory, and imagination that might otherwise remain unspoken - a kind of slow haunting, where grief and the everyday intermingle. I also wanted to create something that could embrace an expanded sense of reality - a world where ghosts and spirits simply are.

The local taxi firm became a kind of mobile confession booth. We rigged a cab with cameras and invited residents to take a ride, sharing whatever was on their mind as the city passed by: a phone box filled with spirits, deer in the gardens, a gambling addiction, a karaoke song, dreams, regrets, and fragments of ordinary life sparked by the view from the car window. The conversations were completely spontaneous and that mattered. They created a space that felt magical and the film unfolds as its own dreamworld — somewhere between memory and imagination — where stories drift and intertwine like shadows on the road.

Journalist and filmmaker Shiori Ito was part of our team from the start, working with the people of Kamaishi to help instigate a participatory process that reimagined the usual boundaries between filmmaker and subject. On location, it soon felt essential to see the town through an outsider's eyes, and Shiori stepped into that role of visitor. Only later, in the edit, did I realise the deeper significance of her presence: someone who illuminates unspoken traumas. In the film she occupies an

ambiguous space, part real, part symbolic, holding open the threshold between the seen and unseen.

Filmed mostly at night, the taxi became a moving theatre where different planes of reality - past and present, living and dead - could coexist. Where the unconscious is as real as what's in front of your eyes. One passenger says "I only dream when I'm awake, not when I'm asleep" - and in the face of horror, that sense of contemplation is what was most beautiful for me. In the end, ***Ghost Town*** is not a film about ghosts, but about what haunts us - grief, memory, and the fragile traces of community - and how storytelling makes the unseen visible again.





ABOUT THE DIRECTOR - KATHARINE ROUND

Katharine's films are driven by a deep curiosity towards "ordinary" human beings: our contradictions, humanity and fallibility as we attempt to make sense of the world. Her recent work focuses on *the encounter* — the moment of meeting — and what happens when that meeting is allowed to unfold over time.

She has made work for, and had support from, the Arts Council, BFI, Creative Europe, Forma Arts, CPH:LAB, Dartmouth Films, Passion Pictures, the Guardian, Serpentine Galleries, among others.



After directing a wide range of non-fiction for broadcast, her first feature-length film *The Divide* (2016) was supported by the BFI and Creative Europe, premiered at Sheffield Doc/Fest to critical acclaim, had a national theatrical release across 200+ UK cinemas, and is now streaming on Netflix and Sundance Now. She went on to reinvigorate the “symphony film” genre as producer of the Michael Powell Award-nominated *London Symphony* (2017) and through her own “live documentaries” *Twelve Thousand Years in Fragments* (2020) and *Anthropocene in C Major* (headline selection, CPH:DOX Interactive 2021). She is currently in production on a trilogy of films exploring the car as a site of encounter - *Ghost Town* is the first in this series.

Katharine is the co-founder of the filmmakers’ collective Doc Heads (est. 2009) and teaches on the MA Ethnographic and Documentary Film at UCL. She has also taught and given masterclasses at Royal Holloway, the London Film School, Four Corners, Sheffield Doc/Fest, BAFTA, and the Roundhouse.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

Filmography as Director:

About Time (2024, 7'39" mins)

Anthropocene in C Major (2021, 40')

Twelve Thousand Years in Fragments (2020, 40')

A Stranger Comes to Town (2019, 13')

The Trip (2018, 6'58')

The Appointment (2018, 15'45")

The Walled-Off Hotel (2017, installations of varying lengths)

Dearborn, Michigan (2017, 16'17")

Flatline (2017, 3'30")

A Tale of Two Lands (2016, 7'29")

The Divide (2016, 77")

The London Recruits (2014, 60' interactive)

Transplant (2011, 60', tv film)

Mum & Me (2011, 60', tv')

The Truth About Parenthood (2005, 60', tv)

As Executive Producer:

1001 Days (2023, 90').

The Mortician of Manila (2019, 25')

Salma The Boxer (2018, 25')

London Symphony (2017, 72' producer)

Listen to Britain: Learning to Swim (2017, 10'20")

Some Will Forget (2016, 14'58", story editor, co-executive producer)

Nightcrawlers of Phnom Penh (2016, 11")

CREDITS

CREW

Director Katharine Round
Cinematography Jamie Quantrill
Editors John Mister, Katharine Round
Sound Design Simon Panayi
Producers Katharine Round (Disobedient Films)
Laura Shacham (She Makes Productions)
Shiori Ito

STARRING

Drivers Toru KONNO
Yoshiji IWASAKI
Fumio GOTO
Masaaki KOIKE

The Controller Yoichi MATSUDA

Passengers Pastor Yusuke YANAGIYA
Nodoka KIKUCHI
Akiko IWASAKI
Shiho DOBASHI
Sueko KAWARADA
Shinichi KUWAHATA

and Shiori ITO as “The Visitor”

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