Japanese-American artist Jimmy Mirikitani is the subject of a documentary film being shown at the Art Center Cinema, 150 S. Santa, beginning today. Mirikitani was found living on the streets of New York City and was befriended by retired KU art professor Roger Shimomura and filmmaker Linda Hattendorf.

Retired KU professor and artist Roger Shimomura will discuss the documentary film “The Cats of Mirikitani,” which examines the life of a Japanese-American artist he considers to be a ‘kindred spirit’ it to survive.”

Mirikitani also was befriended by New York documentary filmmaker Linda Hattendorf, who in 2002 helped Mirikitani apply for Social Security benefits and found him a home at an assisted-living retirement center.

Hattendorf made a film about Mirikitani’s life, “The Cats of Mirikitani.”

Shimomura, who appears in the film, will be in Salina to discuss the film and his friendship with Mirikitani at 4 p.m. Sunday at the Salina Art Center, 242 S. Santa Fe. Admission is free.

The documentary will be shown today through Thursday at the Art Center Cinema, 150 S. Santa Fe.

When Shimomura met Mirikitani, he found they had a lot in common besides their Japanese ancestry and shared art. They both survived the trauma of being relocated to American internment camps during World War II and said that deeply influenced their art.

Shimomura, who was interned with his family in Idaho when he was 5 years old, grew up to become a revered artist, whose highly political
paintings addressed racial inequalities and socio-political issues of Asian Americans.

He has had more than 100 solo exhibitions at galleries in New York City, Minneapolis and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and was an art professor at KU from 1969 to his retirement in 2004.

Mirikitani, who was 18 when he was interned in northern California, worked odd jobs, including jobs as a cook at local resorts and summer camps, throughout his life. Beginning in the late 1980s, he chose to live on the streets and sell his artwork to survive.

Although their lives took different turns, Shimomura, 67, said he feels a deep connection to the now-87-year-old Mirikitani that goes beyond their cultural similarities. The work of both artists is proof of the power of art to heal.

"We're really kindred spirits," he said.

**War and racism**

Although Mirikitani paints whimsical canvases of cats (thus inspiring the title of the documentary), his work often is fueled by the injustices of war and racism. His art has depicted the bleakness of the internment camps and the devastation caused by the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945.

Shimomura's work also has explored racism and injustice. His paintings are a blend of the American pop cartoon style pioneered by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein and Japanese ukiyo-e, or "floating world" graphics.

Through his art, Shimomura depicts the exaggerated bucktoothed, slant-eyed, yellow-skinned Japa-

nese stereotypes created during World War II, as well as "Jap-hunting licenses, Slap-a-Jap cards and movie posters featuring yellow-face actors," Shimomura said.

Many paintings were inspired by Shimomura's own life. While in high school in Seattle in 1958, a white girl Shimomura was dating asked to be let out of his car a block from her home. Her father, she said, didn't want her dating "Oriental people" and would kill him if he came to the door.

Years later, Shimomura painted himself as "the Jap" the father saw. His painting of the incident depicts a cool blonde smuggling up to a yellow-skinned demon who licks her with an enormous tongue while a shotgun is at his back.

In a later painting, Shimomura, disgusted with the old slur "Jap" being used as a reference to a "Jewish-American princess," responded with a painting called "Kike," which depicted a kinky, immature, kimono empress wearing a crown and admiring herself in a mirror.

Shimomura's art may look like it is fused with anger and frustration, but he insists he paints with a dispassionate attitude.

"My emotions aren't in the painting — it's almost like reporting," he said. "This is what's out there."

**No preaching in artwork**

Shimomura doesn't want his art to preach about the social injustices dealt to his people.
"West Seattle Shotgun," by Roger Shimomura, (2003), acrylic on canvas, 20 inches by 24 inches

SHIMOMURA ON MIRIKITANI
- EVENT: Discussion with artist Roger Shimomura on the documentary film "The Cats of Mirikitani."
- WHEN: 4 p.m. Sunday
- WHERE: Salina Art Center, 242 S. Santa Fe.
- ADMISSION: Free.
- INFORMATION: 827-1431.

"The Cats of Mirikitani" will be shown at 5 and 7 p.m. today; 2, 5, 7 and 9 p.m. Saturday; 2, 5 and 7 p.m. Sunday; and 5 and 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday at the Art Center Cinema, 150 S. Santa Fe. For information, call 452-9868 or go online to www.salinaartcenter.org.

To learn more about Jimmy Mirikitani and to see images of his work, visit www.thecatsofmirikitani.com.
Art / Artist travels often but calls Kansas home

"To have a major American artist of Japanese ancestry here talking about a lesser-known Japanese-American artist is a real coup for the art center."

- HEATHER FERRELL, Salina Art Center executive director

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"I have to sell my work, and this is an extremely difficult subject that can turn people off if you preach to them," he said. "I'm sometimes amazed that whenever I exhibit I haven't been booed offstage."

Heather Ferrell, director of the Salina Art Center, met Shimomura while working several years ago at the Boise Art Museum in Boise, Idaho. Shimomura was exhibiting a series of paintings entitled "American Diaries," based on a personal diary kept by his grandmother during her relocation to the Idaho internment camp.

The content of his work is very evocative in its sense of line and beauty, but also important is his knowledge and experience of history," Ferrell said.

Ferrell said she is looking forward to seeing Shimomura talk about his experiences filming "The Cats of Mirikitani."

"To have a major American artist of Japanese ancestry here talking about a lesser-known Japanese-American artist is a real coup for the art center," she said.

Shimomura said moving to the Midwest, specifically Kansas, was an important step in developing his art.

"There are very few Asian people here," he said. "Being here was a constant reminder that I was in a culture that was extremely Anglo."

That said, Shimomura said he has enjoyed his nearly four years in Kansas and stays in contact with many of his former students. Since his retirement, Shimomura has been traveling and lecturing extensively. He also is preparing a new exhibition on internment camps, which he plans to unveil in November.

Although he has homes in Seattle and New York, Shimomura said he has no plans to leave Lawrence.

"I built a studio house here," he said. "It's a good place to be."

Reporter Gary Demuth can be reached at 822-1405 or by e-mail at sjgdemuth@saljournal.com.
"December 7, 1941" (1997), acrylic on canvas, 11 inches by 14 inches

SEATTLE (DIARY TRANSLATION):
"When I came back from church today, I heard the dreamlike news that Japanese airplanes had bombed Hawaii. I was shocked beyond belief. I sat in front of the radio and listened to the news all day. They said that at 8 a.m. Japan declared war on the United States. Our future has become gloomy. I pray that God will stay with us."

"April 8, 1942" (1997), acrylic on canvas, 11 inches by 14 inches

SEATTLE (DIARY TRANSLATION):
"Today most of the stores in the Japanese section of town closed down. In this manner, our community of 40 years has come to a profound end. Reminiscing over the past, my eyes filled with tears. I had high blood pressure again, so I received a second injection. I stayed in bed and rested, but my heart was filled with deep emotions thinking about the future."

"April 26, 1942" (1997), acrylic on canvas, 11 inches by 14 inches

CAMP HARMONY ASSEMBLY CENTER, PUYALLUP, WASH. (DIARY TRANSLATION):
"At last, the day had arrived. It was time to leave Seattle, the city where we have lived for such a long time. Even though I tried not to cry, the tears flowed. Our group of 370 working people departed at 9:30 a.m. in a long string of cars and buses. We arrived at Puyallup at 11:30 a.m. We settled into our assigned place, A-2, number 27. We were all very dissatisfied with our army cots and cotton mattresses. Until late at night, we heard a mixture of hammering and the crying voices of children. With much difficulty, I was eventually able to fall asleep."

"October 21, 1942" (1997), acrylic on canvas, 11 inches by 14 inches

CAMP MINIDOKA (DIARY TRANSLATION):
"The wind started to blow in the morning. I took my blood pressure in the evening. Though I didn't feel any symptoms, it was 185/100. It seems that it has been high ever since we moved into this camp. I'm starting to feel that I would like to work with sick people since I myself am in such bad condition. Whether it was the change of the weather or not, I couldn't fall asleep again."

— This series, "American Diaries," by Roger Shimomura, was painted from diary entries his grandmother wrote during his family’s internment during World War II.