

The Art of Swiss Animation

It is at once remarkable and astonishing that the largest presentation of the Swiss animation film scene ever should not be taking place in its homeland, but rather at the 11th International Animation Festival in Hiroshima. The invitation to this extensive presentation came from Sayoko Kinoshita, director of the festival. Since the founding of this prestigious festival 22 years ago, it has always granted an international forum for the art of animation from the Swiss provenance. In the context of "Animated Switzerland", eight programmes with approximately 90 animation films will be screened, offering the audience the unique opportunity to get to know the artistic diversity of Swiss animation filmmaking and to meet the artists personally.

That this exhibition so far away from home was even possible is much to the thanks of SWISS FILMS, the film promotion agency in Switzerland. Upon initiating the idea, SWISS FILMS bore the responsibility of fostering it and providing assistance with every necessary means, including the financial support required for organizing this unique presentation of current Swiss animation films. A special thanks also goes to Sabina Brocal, who was the driving force at SWISS FILMS. Finally, we would also like to thank all the artists and filmmakers who contributed their films.

The manifold beginnings of Swiss animation date back to the 1920s. Over the course of its history many remarkable films have been produced. Outstanding personalities - such as Rudolf Pfenniger, Charles Blanc-Gatti or Julius Pinschewer - take their undisputed place in animation history today. However, in the early stages of compiling this programme, the selection of films soon came to focus on works from 1970 to the present. This was due to the fact that the preparation did not leave sufficient time for historical research. In addition, it would have been close to impossible to find copies of films that represent these earlier periods. Moreover, the fact that Switzerland has always discounted commissioned films rendered their exclusion from the programme easier, which means that only artistic films will be screened.

The selection for "The Art of Swiss Animation" is subjective and asserts no claim as regards objectivity, especially because something like that cannot exist in art. The films shown here however do reflect a creative variety and reveal the wealth of forms on the Swiss animation scene.

Almost all of the films shown in the programme are works of individual authors who exceed with their artistic, stylistic and technical know-how. "Except for the fact that they all share the same nationality, the only other common denominator is their incomparableness." (Jonas Raeber). The richness in form and the proverbial headstrongness of the artists form the basis of the artistic vibrancy of Swiss animation film.

Four retrospectives highlight the work of Gisèle and Ernest Anserme, Georges Schwizgebel, Claude Luyet and Isabelle Favez, who have for years attracted and enjoyed international attention and recognition with their outstanding films. Sadly, this fact can rarely be shared in their home country. These films are characterised by subtle humour, graphic finesse, dignified poetry and masterful animation. Their aim is not just to entertain an audience but also to provoke thought.

The programme presenting the work of students of the animation department at the Lucerne School of Art and Design provides a glimpse into professional education in filmmaking. Diploma and study films illustrate the noteworthy quality of works which have emerged from the only school in Switzerland to offer special education for animation.

An inherent quality of animation is its ability to transcend language and cultural barriers by means of visual communication. This fact, especially in a multilingual country such as Switzerland, lends animation special significance. Thus, this potential can ideally convey to the audience in Hiroshima the Swiss artists' view of the world, their own country and the views of its people. "Animated Switzerland" is also a sincere invitation to embark on an adventurous journey to the animated heart of Switzerland—a Switzerland beyond clichés affected by the media.

Otto Alder (Festival catalogue, July, 2006)