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FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2025 OFFICIAL SELECTION
SPECIAL SCREENING



LITTLE AMÉLIE

a film by
Maïlys VALLADE and Liane-cho HAN

Adapted from the novel
THE CHARACTER OF RAIN
by Amélie NOTHOMB

INTERNATIONAL PR
MARTIN MARQUET
martin.marquet@me.com
CELIA MAHISTRE & CILIA GONZALEZ
cc.bureaupresse@gmail.com

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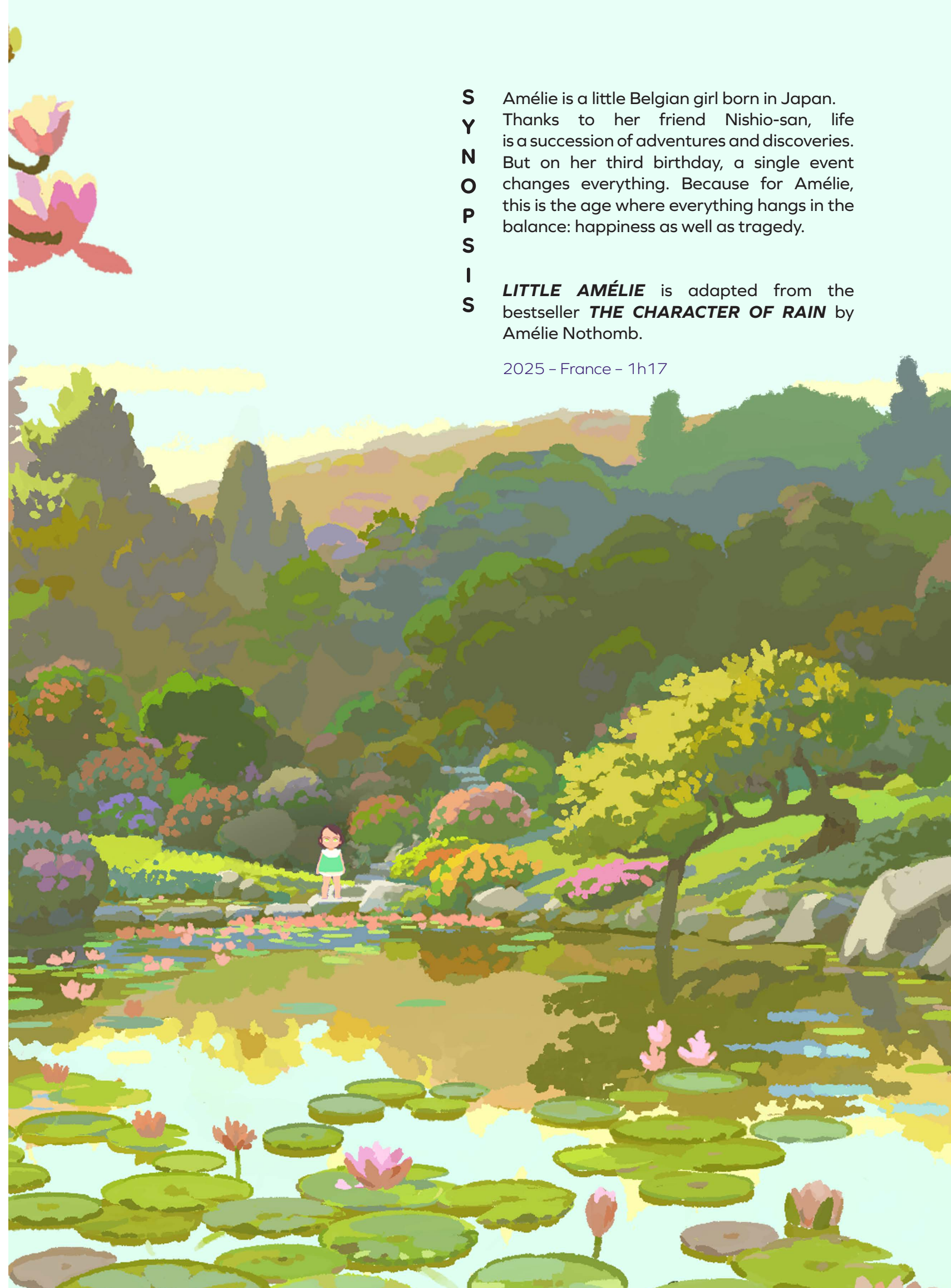
FRENCH RELEASE
JUNE 25TH 2025



S Amélie is a little Belgian girl born in Japan.
Y Thanks to her friend Nishio-san, life
N is a succession of adventures and discoveries.
O But on her third birthday, a single event
P changes everything. Because for Amélie,
S this is the age where everything hangs in the
I balance: happiness as well as tragedy.

LITTLE AMÉLIE is adapted from the
bestseller **THE CHARACTER OF RAIN** by
Amélie Nothomb.

2025 - France - 1h17





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Did you ever imagine that one day you would see Little Amélie Nothomb as a film?

No, I never imagined such a thing.

Which emotions did the film evoke when you saw it?

Wonder, nostalgia, joy, gratitude.

Did the film offer a new perspective on the events of your childhood in Japan?

Yes, I had never given much thought to the importance of Obon (the Japanese festival of the dead) which plays a significant part in the film. Even though I did celebrate Obon as a child and it surely must have taught me a lot.

Amélie Nothomb



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Xavier Kawa-Topor: *Mailys and Liane-Cho, how did you meet?*

Liane-Cho Han: We both studied at the Gobelins Paris School. But it wasn't until we worked together on Mark Osbourne's film **THE LITTLE PRINCE**, under the supervision of Bob Persichetti, that we really got to know each other.

Mailys Vallade: It was an incredible learning experience; we were given the freedom to invent and reinvent scenes within the storyboard, to actively participate in the scene settings and the story telling and to make proposals which influenced the screenplay.

L-C.H: It was almost as though we were directing our own sequences: this experience radically changed our approach to storyboarding.

M.V: We realised that not many of us in our profession had had this dual skill set of being both storyboard artists and screenplay writers...

L-C.H: ... meaning we did not approach the sequence in isolation but rather made it fit in with the narrative arc of the film as a whole, the character development and the unfolding of the story.



M.V: After this experience I was contacted by Rémi Chayé to work on his first feature film, **LONG WAY NORTH**. So I told him about Liane-Cho...

L-C.H: And we started to form a creative trio. Then Eddine Noël joined us and our "family" developed around Rémi.

M.V: This is how we became graphic and visual co-authors with Rémi, establishing a strong team spirit, while fully respecting his vision, where each one of us enriched the work of the others. And for **LITTLE AMÉLIE** we wanted to continue working in this same way.

How did the project to adapt Amélie Nothomb's novel come about?

L-C.H: I read the book **THE CHARACTER OF RAIN** when I was 19, I wasn't a huge literature fan but this book in particular deeply moved me. That's when the dream of adapting it began to take root.

M.V: And in 2018, when we were working together again on **CALAMITY**, Liane-Cho gave me the book as a gift.



L-C.H: In a moment of almost naive enthusiasm, I wrote to Amélie Nothomb, attaching some visual research and images from **A LONG WAY NORTH**. And a few weeks later we received a reply from her publishers, Albin Michel; Amélie Nothomb was very interested! We talked to Maybe Movies, Rémi Chayé's film production company, and to Ikki Films.

M.V: Then things moved very fast. Eddine Noël and Mariette Ren joined us to create the graphic bible and we shot a pilot.

In Amélie Nothomb's book, the relationship between Amélie and Nishio-san forms the central axis of the film

L-C.H: Absolutely. But I would also say that it is the relationship to Japan itself, through Nishio-san, which acts as the catalyst for the evolution of Amélie - from her birth to the mourning represented by the departure.

M.V: What fascinated me in the book was how Amélie perceives everything around her, how she sees and experiences things in such a sensitive, expansive way, through the eyes of a very small girl , with all the emotional intensity that is typical of a child of this age. And Amélie herself is an extraordinary child! Her astonishing view of the world gives the story its poignancy and emotional richness. The challenge was how to translate that singularity into images and animation: to stay close to Amélie, to experience everything with her, at her level, letting everything flow naturally through her perception.



Focusing upon details in particular, just as children do, became our narrative thread. It helped us to shape the storyline, excluding scenes which did not serve this artistic choice.

Our decision to centre on Amélie's relationship with Nishio-san, the themes of death, and transience, sometimes forced us to let go of certain aspects of the book which we were nevertheless very attached to, such as the relationship with her father Patrick. We also had to merge characters to streamline the story. It was essential to focus on visual storytelling with the storyboard at the heart of the writing process.

The voice-over plays an important part. Was this a decision that felt necessary from the start/beginning ?

M.V: Yes. For this we started off with a precise analysis of the text where the author adopts three different narrative voices, alternating between storyteller, commentator in the present day with a child's perspective, and philosopher.

Next we had to find our own position. What would this voice-over become in the film? How would it convey that unique perspective that gives the work not only its caustic humour but also its philosophical dimension and astonishing view of the world.

We wanted the character's reflections to flow naturally in the way that children jump from one thought to another, reacting immediately to whatever sparks their curiosity. "What is it?" "What does this mean to me on a deeper level?"

This voice-over needed to subtly intertwine with the character's perception, expressing how she sees things. But should it be a child's voice or an adult's voice? What type of distance?



It seemed obvious to us that this voice-over should not be a “present” voice but rather that of a storyteller, introducing a layer of perspective.

L-C.H: A voice coming from the future, which already knows the story but tells it from a different angle than the one we see on screen. It was crucial to maintain a clear distinction between Amélie’s spoken lines and the voice-over. Obviously the same actor could not play both roles. Even though Amélie’s lines are sparse and often subtle, capturing the tone of a 2-and-a-half-year-old child was a delicate task, requiring very close collaboration between several actors.

Was your portrayal of early childhood influenced by your own experiences?

M.V: Yes definitely. We drew on our childhood memories as well as our perspective as animators, which led us to “capture” the attitudes of our own children and those around us. Observing a ladybird, seeing the world as a bigger place than it really is, riding emotional rollercoasters... This close-up, intimate perspective allowed us to stay close to Amélie, at her level.

L-C.H: When reading Amélie Nothomb’s novel for the first time I found extraordinary the idea that a child could believe herself to be God. We all go through this existential crisis from the toddler years to childhood when we discover that the world does not revolve around us and that we are just a part of it. This influenced how I saw the potential adaptation of the novel.

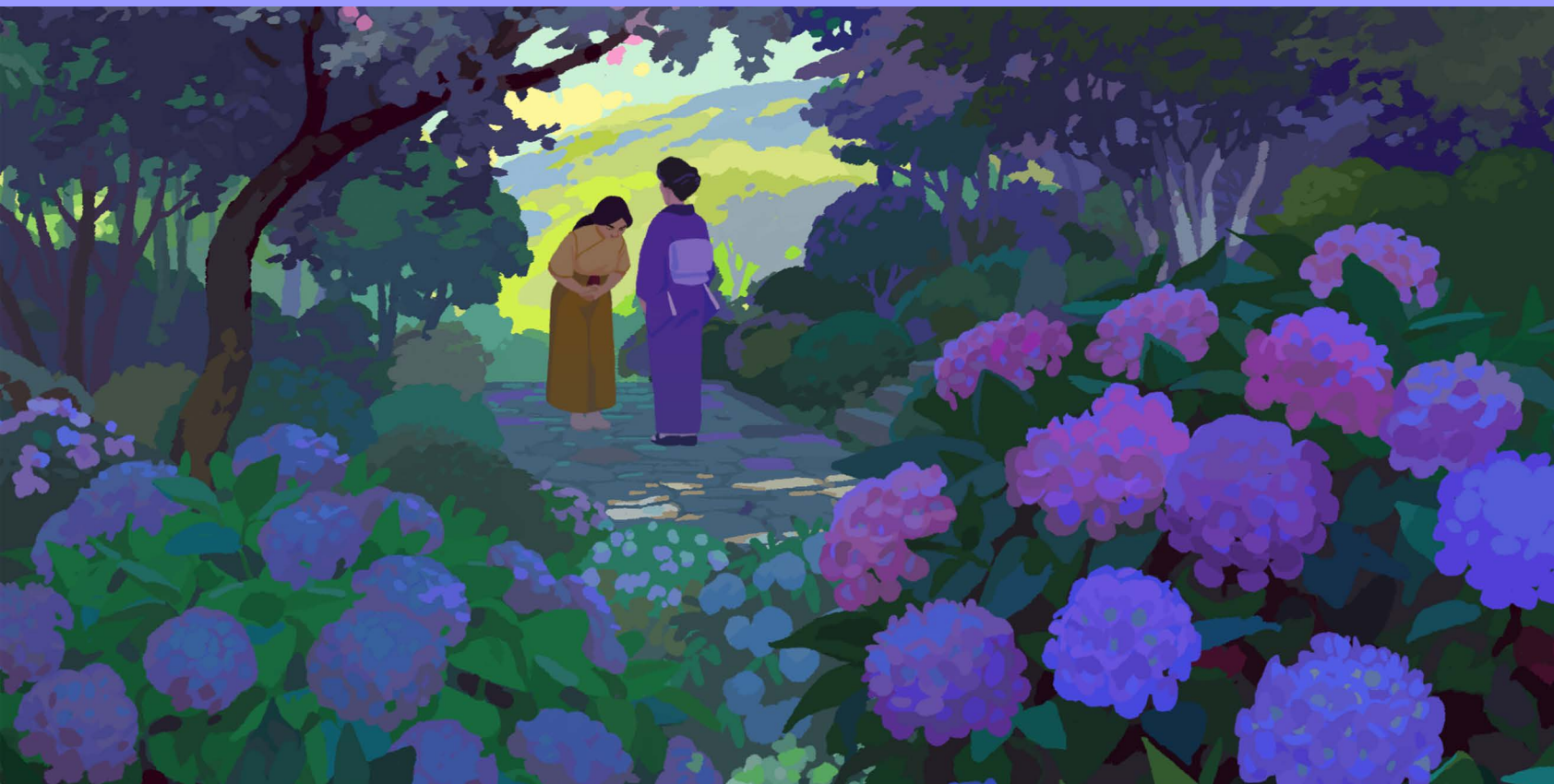


Visually, is there a kind of aesthetic continuity between your film and those of Rémi Chayé, which feature a graphic style without outlines?

M.V: Indeed. It is a style which our entire team is familiar with - a well-oiled working method, developed together on Rémi’s films. We wanted to continue this method, in the style of the Japanese studios, allowing us from film to film to optimise and push our work even further.

L-C.H: For this film we wanted rounder shapes, more textured colours with more pastel tones and experiment with proximity or distance blurring, and transparency. The choice of our team was a determining factor: with Eddine Noël, the film’s art director , we carried out early research on the film’s colour palette and visual direction. Marietta Ren and Marion Roussel did some beautiful early character designs in line drawings and watercolour. And even though the film is fully digital, we have tried to preserve this handcrafted freshness. In the same way, although background colour creation usually comes at the end of the production chain, our lead background colour artists, Justine Thibault and Simon Dumonceau, joined the project very early on in order to take the lead and actively contribute to this part of the creative process.

M.V: In this way they were able to showcase all their “plein-air painting” artistry in the depiction of seasons, interiors and exteriors. They managed to bring this fabulous textural quality to the film, composed of fine, flat areas delicately layered with small digital touches. This creates an effect reminiscent of gouache painting, thanks to the meticulous work of the entire background colour team, who are all painters themselves.



What was the main challenge for you in representing Japan on screen? What degree of realism were you looking for?

L-C.H: Eddine Noël, the production designer but also the artistic director, graphic co-author and also co-writer of the screenplay placed immense importance on credibility and realism. He took meticulous care in recreating details namely regarding the Kobé region in the 60s and 70s and the house in which Amélie's parents lived in. However it's important to remember that the film is an adaptation of Amélie Nothomb's novel: the Japanese reality depicted in the film is seen through the subjective eye of the author, who is between two worlds.

M.V: It was both good and bad luck that Amélie Nothomb's childhood home no longer exists. Therefore we had to propose a reconstruction which was as accurate as possible, which demanded a long period of research. Our focus was to capture the special atmosphere of this traditional Japanese house, inhabited by Belgian expats. It was one of the essential keys to the story. The attention to detail was extremely important for the emotional feel of the film, and extended right down to the sound design, where we thought carefully about every tiny creak from the wooden floors which the children run and slide across...

Was there the same attention to detail in portraying the Japanese characters?

M.V: Body language conveys so much cultural nuance - a Belgian person is very different from a Japanese person. For example, Nishio-san's character was developed both in relationship with Amélie and her Belgian family and in contrast to Kashima-san. While Kashima-san's body rigidity is representative of the very traditional side of Japanese society, Nishio-san belongs to the



more open younger generation. She is more flexible in the way she thinks and moves, and in her interaction with the other characters. Not only does she have no cultural barriers but she also develops a powerful bond with Amélie. It was very important that everything which Nishio-san represents - her warmth towards Amélie, her candour, her generosity - is projected through her silhouette. We worked to shape her character's curves so that they formed a constant, gentle smile.

Together with Eddine we made a deliberate artistic choice to assign each character a signature colour so that the spectator can instantly connect with them throughout the film. The yellow of the sun for Nishio-san, the purple of melancholy for Kashima-san, red for André, light blue for his little sister, the pale green of water for Amélie.

L-C.H: We should also highlight the outstanding work of Juliette Laurent, our animation supervisor, and her entire team, as well as the posing lay-out work supervised by Marion Roussel and Hanne Galvaz: there is high level of expertise in body language and gesture which we have carried over from **LONG WAY NORTH**. Our guiding principle is to move the audience emotionally rather than to impress with technique.

Have any Japanese animation filmmakers had a particular influence on you? I'm thinking of Isao Takahata specifically in terms of the quest for realism in animation.

L-C.H: The films of Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki are of course woven into our creative DNA. For me **GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES** is a key work and together with **PRINCESS MONONOKE** has profoundly influenced the way in which I view animation, just as I think it has for most of the animators of my generation.

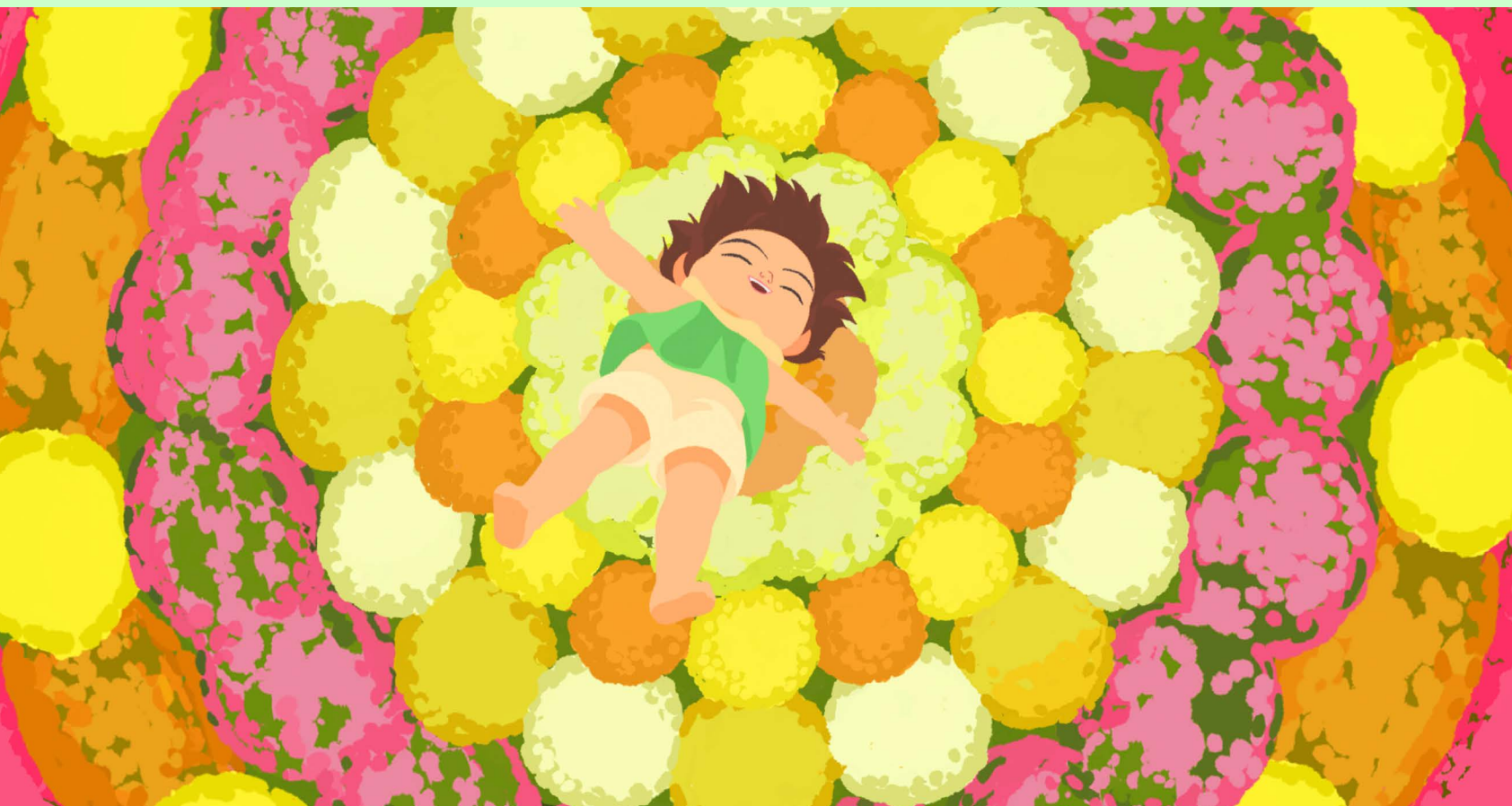


M.V: In the film there are a few intentional nods to these two filmmakers, like “cameo” appearances. I would also mention Sunao Katabuchi, the director of ***IN THIS CORNER (AND OTHER CORNERS) OF THE WORLD***, whose meticulous reconstruction of the pre-war daily life of a young housewife in the Hiroshima region is strikingly accurate. The realism in ***LITTLE AMÉLIE*** is in the same vein. This is particularly relevant in the portrayal of the war, a traumatic memory which punctuates the narrative. In a film which is aimed at a family audience, we could not replicate the direct approach which Amélie Nothomb adopts in her novel in this respect. We had to find the right tone. We tried to be as respectful as possible, while avoiding any appropriation of a story which is not our own or putting ourselves in the place of the characters. Rather than showing an accumulation of explicit images of bombings, death and destruction, we chose to evoke the past through a sudden flash of memory in a mundane everyday moment, while Nishio-san is cooking, leaving the talking to the character. Associating the evocation of war with cooking creates the necessary emotional distance, softens the narrative and affirms life: it places the spectator and the character on the side of resilience. Obviously, it is a very delicate balance. And that is the line we walk all the way through the film, which seeks to strike an equilibrium between Amélie’s keen perception of reality and the restraint we wished to apply. For instance, we used symbolic visuals to express without explicitly stating: thus the scene of the confrontation with Kashima-san takes place by a dried-up river bed - a metaphor for the character’s emotional rigidity, barrenness and withdrawal.



Let us pause for a moment on the return from the beach sequence which, to me, is one of the most poignant and rich moments of the film.

M.V: Because the film is seen from a child’s perspective, our challenge here and throughout the film was to blur the line between reality and imagination. In this sequence we wanted to explore how memory transforms into phantasmagoria, i.e. translate Amélie Nothomb’s literary treatment into a visual one. In the book it says that Amélie goes into the sea without Nishio-san at the very spot Nishio-san visited as a child. We wanted to convey this absence, this deep inner void, at a pivotal moment of Amélie’s growth and her growing bond with Nishio-san. We imagined Amélie unsure of what she was searching for on the beach, unconsciously drawn by the void left by Nishio-san. She comes back with an empty jar. She opens this jar and all the memories come pouring out but in a gentle and luminous manner. For with the memories of Nishio-san, something very personal and intimate is at play. These flashbacks, and the symbolic encounter between the two little girls, intuitively convey to the spectator that Nishio-san has become Amélie’s soul sister. The jar becomes a visual metaphor, crystallising this unique, boundary-defying relationship. These kinds of visual ideas reoccur throughout the film - strong images, which serve the same aim: how to convey through cinema what the book expresses in a very literal way, through the introspective lens of early childhood.



The film also plays with time in a very unusual way: it juxtaposes the vivid sensations of the present as experienced by a child with an accelerated, almost poetic, chronology of events...

M.V: The edit was built rigorously right from the start of the storyboard process, for we knew that emotional pacing would be essential. Ludovic Versace played a crucial role in this respect: an editor who brings an animator's sensitivity to the table. We wanted the scenes to "dance" with one another, to create a dialogue between recurring symbols - especially the theme of death. For example, the buddhist festival of Obon where ancestors' spirits are honoured does not figure in Amélie Nothomb's book, but we used it as a visual marker to express Kashima-san's inability to grieve. As a counterpoint, we gave the main characters time to evolve emotionally. For example we had Amélie's father go to Belgium for two months in order to allow the bond between Amélie and Nishio-san to develop. In short, the film is very segmented: each scene has its own tempo, shaped by Amélie's feelings and emotions. The challenge was to capture the vitality of this small child in a confined setting, sometimes synching precise musical rhythms "à l'image" as we say.

The film is also extremely visual in its use of light and colour.

M.V: Light is indeed a narrative device in its own right. Think of the scene in the library where the yōkai Otoroshi appears in the doorway and a single beam of light cuts across his silhouette.



Or in Amélie's bedroom, where a hidden creature is hiding under the bed and is revealed by the light filtering through the fabric. Much of the story unfolds indoors, so designing the interior light was essential. To achieve this, Eddine Noël took inspiration from Junichiro Tanizaki's "In Praise of Shadows". He designed the house which was then modelled in 3D as a reference for the storyboard artists. More importantly, the film's dramaturgy follows the passage of the four seasons. This is why the orientation of the house was designed so that the spectator would be sensitive to both the heat of the summer sun and the shadows of colder mornings.

L-C.H: That was crucial because we wanted Amélie's emotions to evolve with the seasons. If you remember, Amélie first "awakens" in early spring, when her grandmother visits from Belgium and gives her a bar of white chocolate. This marks the peak of her happiness with Nishio-san. It is springtime: Hanami, cherry blossom time. But things gradually deteriorate culminating on her third birthday, when her world falls apart with Nishio-san's departure and she learns that eventually her family will leave Japan. We mirrored this emotional shift with colour: vibrant and saturated at first, then the palette gradually fades, moving towards realism. The backgrounds evolve too - as Amélie grows, her field of vision broadens. So at the beginning of the film we cannot even see the edge of the garden. But as Amélie begins to understand that she is part of a wider world, elements of the town begin to appear.



How did Mari Fukuhara’s music find its place in such a precisely paced and visually detailed film?

L-C.H: For me it was a dream come true to work with a Japanese composer. Of course, we all know the extraordinary music of Joe Hisaichi for Studio Ghibli, but I am also a huge admirer of Yoko Kanna. Eddine Noël introduced us to Mari Fukuhara through Yoriko Mizushiri’s short film **FUTON**, which used one of her pieces: **DARK END**. To begin with we contacted her for the pilot. In spite of the language barrier, it immediately became clear that she had managed, in a very intuitive way, to develop a powerful musical identity in perfect harmony with the film we wanted to make.

M.V: What was extraordinary was how Mari Fukuhara replied to our very demanding brief, while still creating an original work. All through the production, right up to the final cut, we worked with temporary scores to shape our intentions precisely “à l’image” as I said earlier. We had very eclectic references: Yoko Kanno, Dan Romer, traditional Japanese nursery rhymes such as “Takedo No Komori Uta” and Ravel’s **JEUX D’EAU**... In the midst of all these references and constraints, Mari Fukuhara pulled off something phenomenal by delivering something very personal and authentic. Her skills as a composer and as a pianist were essential: she even performed the Ravel piece herself. She rose to meet every challenge, stepped out of her comfort zone many times, and made inspired proposals which responded exactly to our wishes, such as the choice of the young singer Machiko Yanagisawa. As a guide, we had sent her not only the sequence outline and the list of our requests but also the colourscript, so that she could immerse herself in the tone and colors of each sequence. Using a musical palette



ranging from very light motifs with varied instrumentation — as in some of the family scenes — to much deeper and darker themes that she performs solo on the piano, Mari Fukuhara managed to give each scene its own identity with her unique touch, and all in record time. The orchestral recording of her compositions in Tokyo added a magnificent final touch to this musical journey.

Finally, how did Amélie Nothomb react to your adaptation of her novel?

L-C.H: Amélie Nothomb sees her books as her children, and the adaptations of her books as her grandchildren. And in her view, it is not the grandparents’ role to raise their grandchildren! So she chooses not to intervene in any way in the adaptations of her work. However she did send us a voice message to tell us how thrilled she was with the pilot, and loved the finished film just as much.

M.V: It was an incredible privilege that Amélie Nothomb gave us free rein to adapt this work, especially given its autobiographical nature, even though her personal story has been fictionalised. We can’t thank her enough! It created the ideal conditions to craft a story like ours, which takes a number of liberties with the novel’s structure in order to serve it more effectively, using the unique medium of animation. And we are also very fortunate that she liked the finished film, and that she appreciated and understood our choices during a special private screening when the film had only just been completed!



B **Mailys Vallade, Director**

I Mailys is a director, story artist, animator, and visual designer of characters and backgrounds for both 2D and stop-motion animated films. From a very young age, she began drawing and inventing small stories for characters and puppets she built alongside her father.

O
G In high school, she pursued Applied Arts at the Lycée de Sèvres. In 2006, she continued her studies at EPSAA (École Professionnelle Supérieure d'Arts Graphiques de la Ville de Paris), where she earned a degree in Graphic Arts. She completed her training at the Gobelins, majoring in Animation Film Design and Directing, graduating in 2009. During her time at the Gobelins, she directed three short films.

R
A
P Passionate about experimental short films, she explored various techniques including traditional 2D animation, paper cut-out, and stop-motion. However, her desire to direct longer-format films soon took precedence. She joined the feature film **ADAMA** to develop the visual world and storyboard concepts. Later, she worked on **ERNEST & CELESTINE**, animating the characters in 2D.

H
Y A true all-rounder, Mailys has particularly distinguished herself in storyboarding, contributing to **THE LITTLE PRINCE**, **LONG WAY NORTH** (where she also worked on character layout and 2D animation), **A MAN IS DEAD**, **THE SWALLOWS OF KABUL** (also contributing to background design), **I LOST MY BODY**, **CALAMITY** (as co-author of both characters and backgrounds), **SÉRAPHINE** and **FLEUR** (handling character design as co-author).

LITTLE AMÉLIE marks her debut as a feature film director and screenwriter.

B **Liane-Cho Han, Director**

I Liane-Cho is a director, story artist, and animation supervisor. A graduate of the Gobelins in Paris (class of 2007), he began his career as a key animator on features such as **GO WEST! A LUCKY LUKE ADVENTURE** and Sylvain Chomet's **THE ILLUSIONIST**. He then became a senior animator on **ZARAFÀ**, directed by Rémi Bezançon and Jean-Christophe Lie.

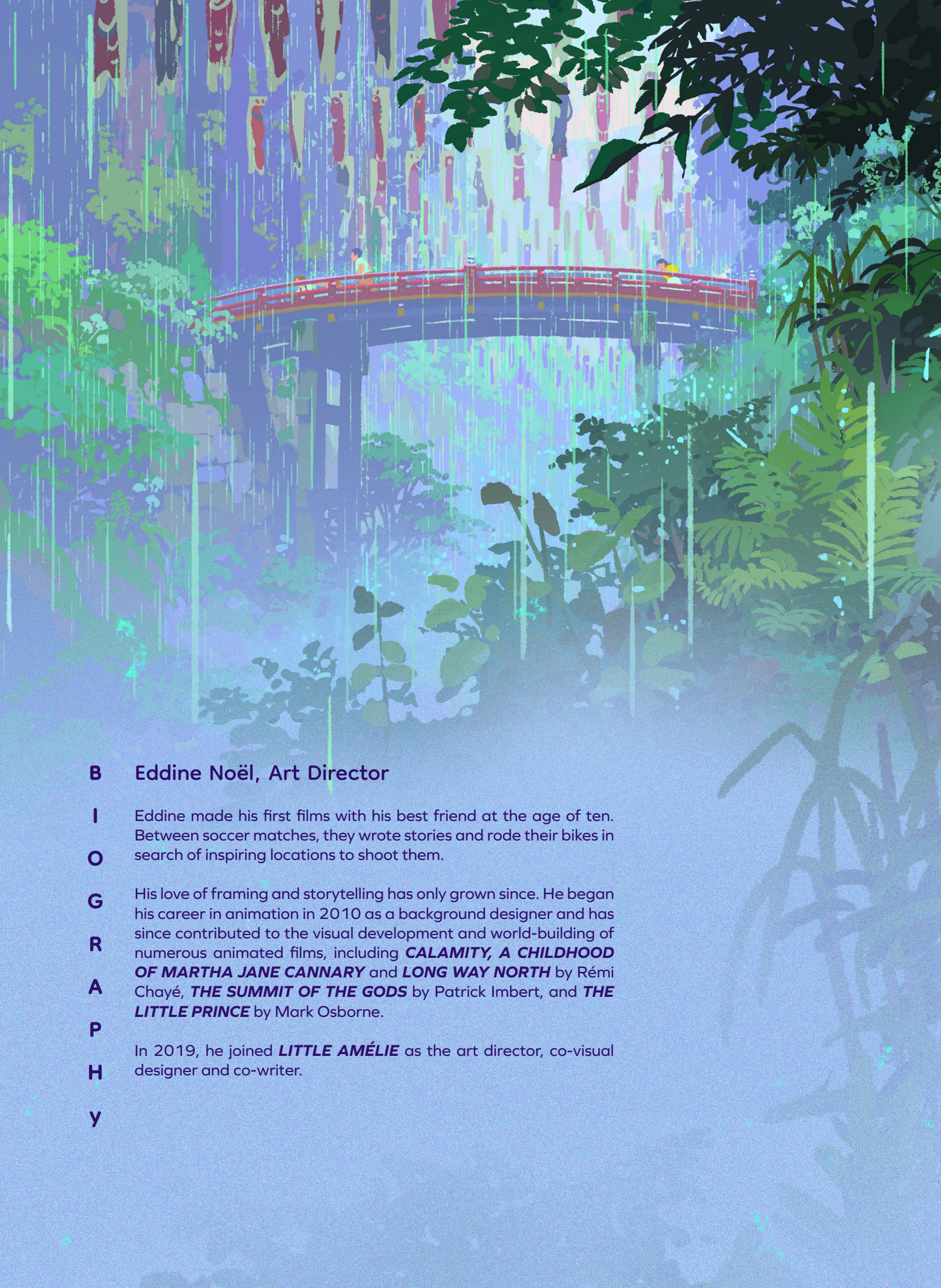
R
A Drawing on his animation experience, Liane-Cho transitioned into storyboarding, contributing to films like **ASTERIX: THE MANSION OF THE GODS** by Alexandre Astier and Louis Clichy, **THE LITTLE PRINCE** by Mark Osborne, and **LONG WAY NORTH** by Rémi Chayé, where he also served as animation director.

P
H From 2018 to 2020, he worked again with Chayé on **CALAMITY, A CHILDHOOD OF MARTHA JANE CANNARY**, as both storyboard artist and animation director.

y Since 2017, Liane-Cho has collaborated regularly with Sun Creature Studio as animation director on various commercial films (**A COKE IS A COKE**, **TRAVEL OREGON**, **LEAGUE OF LEGENDS: THE PATH AND IONIAN MYTH**, **TRAVEL OREGON 3**, **INITIAL D X TOYOTA GR86**).

LITTLE AMÉLIE marks his debut as a feature film director and screenwriter.





B Eddine Noël, Art Director

I Eddine made his first films with his best friend at the age of ten. Between soccer matches, they wrote stories and rode their bikes in search of inspiring locations to shoot them.

G His love of framing and storytelling has only grown since. He began his career in animation in 2010 as a background designer and has since contributed to the visual development and world-building of numerous animated films, including **CALAMITY, A CHILDHOOD OF MARTHA JANE CANNARY** and **LONG WAY NORTH** by Rémi Chayé, **THE SUMMIT OF THE GODS** by Patrick Imbert, and **THE LITTLE PRINCE** by Mark Osborne.

H In 2019, he joined **LITTLE AMÉLIE** as the art director, co-visual designer and co-writer.

Y



A C R E D I T S

Amélie
Nishio-San
Kashima-San
Claude, the grandmother
Patrick, the father
Danièle, the mother
Juliette
André
Doctor and radio voice

Loïse CHARPENTIER
Victoria GROBOIS
Yumi FUJIMORI
Cathy CERDA
Marc ARNAUD
Laetitia CORYN
Haylee ISSEMBOURG
Isaac SCHOUMSKY
François RAISON

Casting and Voice Direction

Céline RONTÉ

