



64<sup>e</sup> SEMAINE  
DE LA CRITIQUE  
CANNES 2025  
CLOSING FILM



# DANDELION'S ODYSSEY

By Momoko Seto



# Synopsis

Dendelion, Baraban, Léonto and Taraxa are four odd friends; four seeds which used to belong to the same dandelion. Rescued from a nuclear explosion that destroyed the Earth, they find themselves hurled into the cosmos, travelling through planets and constellations. When they land on an unknown land, they set off on an unforgettable adventure to find a new home and settle for good.

1h15

France and Belgium

Non-dialog

## **Production**

Miyu Productions, Ecce Films

## **Co-production**

Umedia Productions, Arte France Cinéma, CNRS

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# Putting Down Roots

## *Director's Statement of Intent*

My non-French-speaking parents chose to put me a French school in Tokyo. At age six, I found myself living between two countries. I was raised in the Japanese tradition, but I followed the same curriculum as little French children. I was neither a 'real' Japanese girl, nor was I French. Seeing me as being only 'half' in everything, my parents warned me against becoming an 'international wanderer'. They would often tell me that I had no stable roots. The Japanese language has an expression for that, an anthropomorphic plant metaphor to say that we gain stability both physically (by planting ourselves in a place) and psychologically (by putting down roots). I arrived in France in 2000, age 19. It's at that point in my life that I felt inspired to tell this story of being uprooted, of wandering, and of putting down roots.

In my previous short films from the series PLANET, I filmed plants, mushrooms, and other living organisms using technologies that allowed us to see their details and their behaviour (time-lapse, macro shots, or super-slow motion). The images were then repurposed to recreate a 'supernatural' universe where the real and the fake, fiction and nonfiction, the infinitely big and the infinitely small, are mixed. The result is neither an animal documentary nor a scientific film.

I wanted to push this reasoning further in this feature film by showing plants and living beings in a way that had never been seen before. From my sets built with minuscule things, I made gigantic landscapes. The real and the imaginary are indistinguishable from one another ... which plunges viewers into a secret, magnified natural universe and takes them on a journey into a wonderful ecological epic.

In a certain sense, the feature film Dandelion's Odyssey is the story of the geological evolution of the Earth – from the time when it was covered in ice until the present day, when the ground is no longer a free, fundamental, and obvious element – and asks the question where and how to live (or survive) on a damaged, if not destroyed world.

Momoko Seto



# The Achenes

The characters in the film are dandelion seeds, or achenes. They are tiny, very light, oblong cylindrical stems with spiky fruit. At the top is a pappus, a little puff of feathery hairs that enables optimal dispersion of the seeds by the wind.





# The Music

## *Composers' Statement of Intent*

We met Momoko and began discussions with her very early on in the project when the film was only in the animatic stage. We worked together on mood boards and organized some listening sessions to imagine what kind of atmosphere could define the film and the various universes that comprise it.

Our sound design is based on the idea of vignettes for each of the different environments through which our heroes pass. For each universe, there is a unique setting, a unique natural ecosystem, and thus, each one has its own specific music. We decided to use eclectic and unusual sounds for each part. For example, we combined the sounds of the shakuhachi (a traditional Japanese instrument) with a baroque flute. This combination allowed us to work on the notion of the breath the achenes lose as they cross the desert.

In different registers, the plant world is accompanied by synthesizers and instruments more associated with pop music, whereas the sequences in the cosmos call for a string orchestra and a gamelan (traditional Javanese percussive ensemble). First of all, the visual choices lead us to use a mix of different writing techniques to combine a variety of unusual sounds. Consequently, the production work in the studio

was as time-consuming as the recording of the instruments themselves. This dynamic of surprise and wonder is central to the film.

Beyond creating contextual elements of the planets, the music truly carries the subjective fate of the achenes—to that end we didn't hesitate to dive into certain adventure-story archetypes (such as a warriors' march, melodramatic harmonies, or the final waltz...) to fully immerse the audience in this epic.

We worked with great enthusiasm and genuine pleasure as we watched the film emerge and take shape. We wanted to create a unique, original work of cinematic art without losing sight of the idea that it should be a film people of all ages could enjoy.

Nicolas Becker and Quentin Sirjacq





# Inventing a Language

## *Sound design and animation*

What is the sound of a dandelion seed when it is concerned about the fate of other dandelion seeds? What is the sound of an enormous flying tadpole when it tries to swallow an achene? What does the voice of a giant slug sound like? ... These are the kinds of questions we asked ourselves to create the soundtrack with Nicholas Becker, a specialist in the art of inventing sound where no sound exists. Without dialogues, without narration, the sound effects, the sound design, the silence, and the music harmoniously weave a delicate fabric of sound in dialogue with the images.

All music was composed by Quentin Sirjacq, a talented and sensitive melodist who writes for orchestras but doesn't hesitate to use atypical instruments (Indonesian gamelan, Cristal Baschet, Ondes Martenot) to create scores in a particular genre.

Nicholas Becker is a sound artist who won the Oscar for Best Sound for Sound of Metal. Quentin Sirjacq has composed scores for several films selected at the Cannes International Film Festival and has worked with the National Orchestra of France, notably collaborating on Treasure Island.

How do you convey an emotion with a dandelion seed that has neither eyes, nor mouth, nor arms, nor legs? That was the starting point of our discussion with Guillonnet Leroy. The four achenes each have their own distinct personalities: Dandelion is the biggest, the wildest, and the most adventurous. He guides the others and gives them the courage to go on. Taraxa stands out through his slightly curved shape. He is a sensual, poetic dreamer. Leonto loses his pappi whenever he gets scared. He's the most fearful and anxious of the four. Lastly, Barbaran is unique in that he has a larger ventriculus than the others, which makes him grumpy and less agile.

These names will never be spoken in the film, but the characters will each embody their personality. To give more life and greater complexity to the characters, we worked with four actors who each interpreted an achene, and whose acting served as a reference for the animation. With their arms and legs tied together to give them a shape closer to that of the achenes, the dancer, film actress, theatre actor, and circus performer all tried to find physical expressions and original movements. While avoiding falling into an exaggerated cartoon style, we worked to find subtle yet sufficiently expressive ways for the characters to move, while avoiding cultural stereotypes. The animation production took a full year.







# Let There Be Nature

*Filming the living elements in time-lapse over 260 days.*

We set out to film all kinds of living things for 260 shooting days over the course of 2.5 years. These included dung beetles, moths, butterflies, slugs, tadpoles, frogs, praying mantises, but also tree mushrooms, moss, mould, and ferns... But as you can't film something you know nothing about, we consulted scientists to learn how to feed the animals properly during the shoot (in some cases, it took over a week to film a single sequence with an animal). We also need to learn how to make sure the plants would grow dynamically or quite simply how to go about finding them in nature.

Many of the animals we filmed were females, as they were larger than the males. The film also has a feminine slant as we portray several different births: a female sea urchin giving birth to the universe, female firefly squid giving birth to a planetary ring, a frog giving birth to tadpoles... These are actresses from nature playing themselves.

In our view, it was essential to capture life in its most natural state. Creating the film in 3D would have been imprecise and stripped of authentic nuances from real life. What interested me, was to show nature in all its complexity, not to make a stylized, artificial representation. For example, how does a tree mushroom form when it starts to eject its spores? How does a frog's egg turn into a tadpole? How does a plant decompose?

The film uses a great deal of time-lapse photography, which is precisely the art of compressing time. It involves filming a very slow natural phenomenon, often imperceptible to the naked eye, over a given period. By accelerating the movement of the thing we are filming, we can 'finally' see the invisible. This technique is then not just a tool to improve our capacity to see; rather, it reveals what is on the other side of the visible world. To launch a time-lapse, it is of crucial importance to have thorough knowledge of the behaviour of the subject you are filming: how tall will the plant grow? What colour will it be in a few days' time? How will it move?

By modifying the speed of growth and the scale, the subject is redefined. Thus, a tree mushroom filmed from a low angle and accelerated becomes a constantly evolving architectural monument. Mould filmed from the front on and accelerated looks like a field of flowers. A fern unfurls like an animal waking up in the first ray of sunlight. Plants turn into animals. Rocks turn into plants. Thus, the parts of nature we thought were background elements become veritable actors of life.

For Dandelion's Odyssey, we filmed succulents, mosses, ferns, mushrooms, and dandelions in time-lapse for nine months with 17 cameras. Certain shoots lasted for more than four weeks.







# Filming

Three weeks in Iceland, 12 weeks in Japan, three weeks in Roscoff (France), 35 weeks in Burgundy (France). From glaciers and icebergs affected by climate change, on the riverbanks made of volcanic rocks, inside an ice cave, on a subtropical island in the Pacific, in a bay where firefly squid beach themselves after spawning, on a 19th-century naval base, in a castle covered in peonies...

From robotics to sentient life forms, the film brought together a botanist, a set designer, engineers, naturalists, scientists, beekeepers, horticulturists, woodworkers, and a very large but enthusiastic film crew. Throughout the shoot, we filmed empty backgrounds, imagining the characters that would be integrated into the image in post-production and dreaming of an emotional story and living characters.

The film takes shape gradually, over time, like an image printed on baryta paper revealing itself little by little in the developer bath. Every image is a superposition of the sum of all these shoots, these fragmented moments, filmed with patience.





Preparation of maquettes  
at Rambuteau Castle for  
filming with slugs.



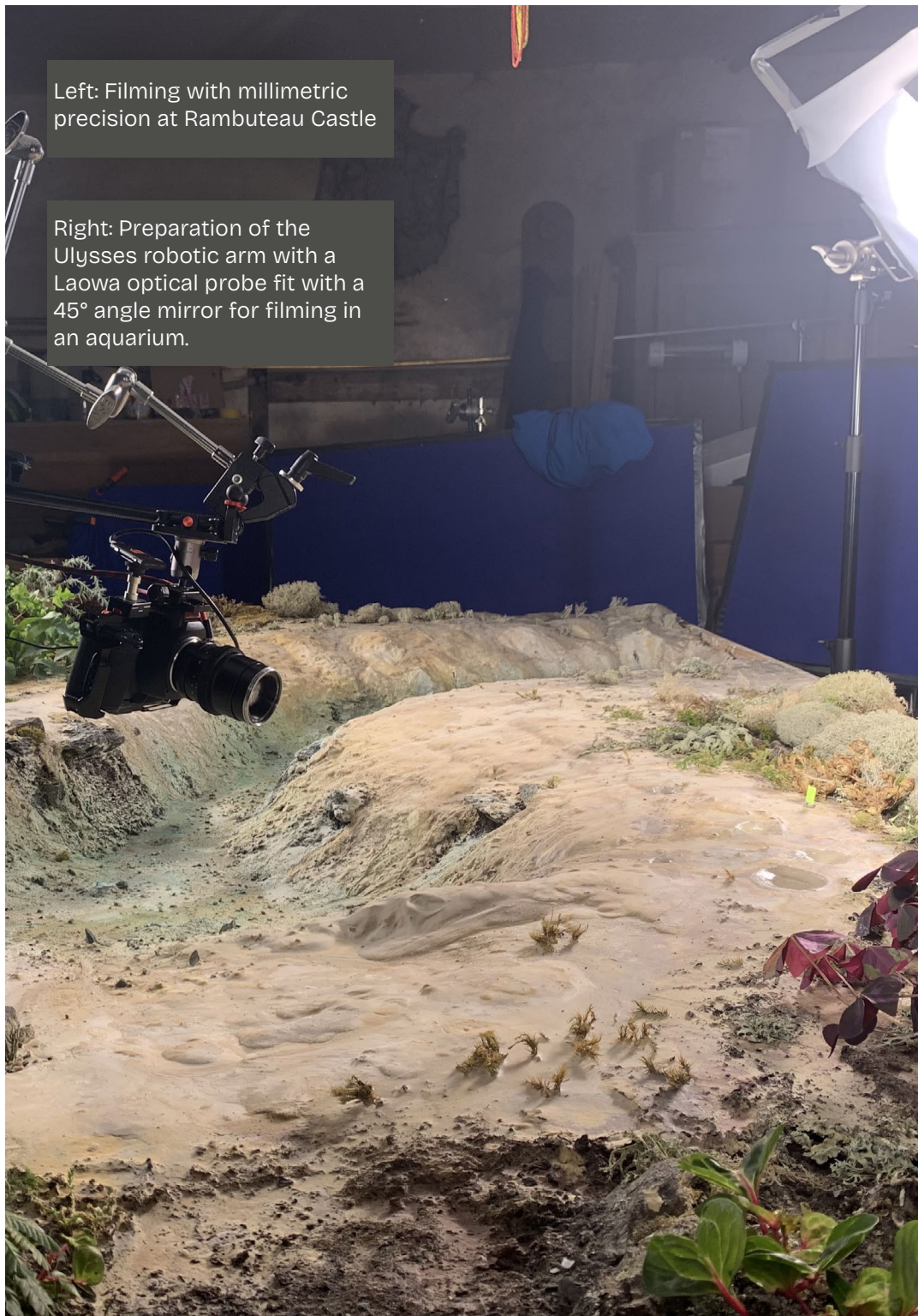
Fabrication of stalagmites  
in natural transparent resin  
to create the frozen world  
backdrops.





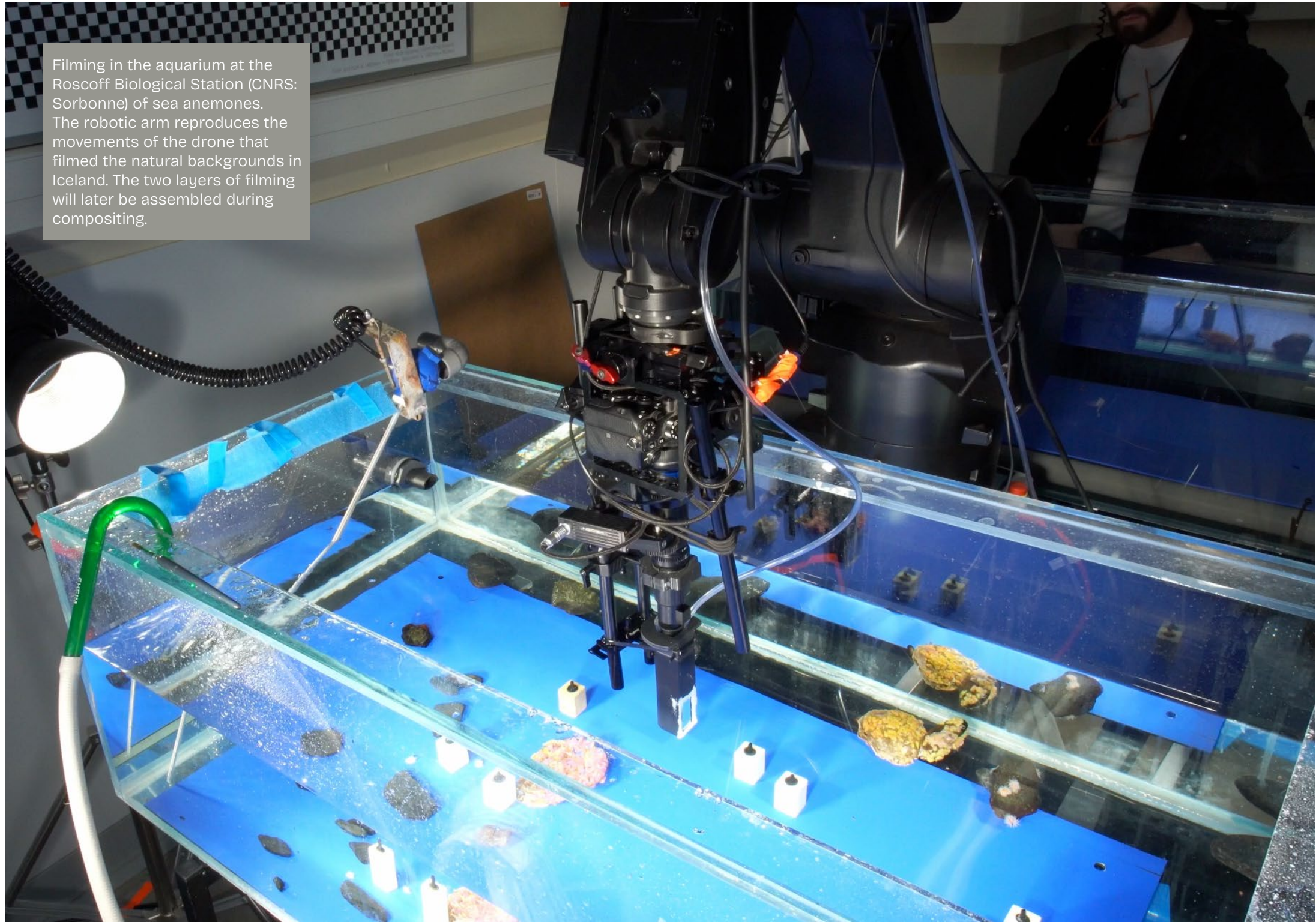
Left: Filming with millimetric precision at Rambuteau Castle

Right: Preparation of the Ulysses robotic arm with a Laowa optical probe fit with a 45° angle mirror for filming in an aquarium.





Filming in the aquarium at the Roscoff Biological Station (CNRS: Sorbonne) of sea anemones. The robotic arm reproduces the movements of the drone that filmed the natural backgrounds in Iceland. The two layers of filming will later be assembled during compositing.





# Momoko Seto

*setomoko.org*

Tokyo-born Momoko Seto studied at the French national contemporary art school in Le Fresnoy before working as a filmmaker at the CNRS. In 2021, she won the CNRS Crystal award, the highest distinction for a scientific movie director. In parallel, she directed the series PLANET, comprised of four short films, of which PLANET  $\Sigma$  earned accolades at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2015. She was the winner of the Fondation Gan pour le Cinéma prize for her first feature film, Dandelion's Odyssey, a poetic, ecological odyssey combining 3D animation, macro live action footage, and time-lapse photography.

2025 – Dandelion's Odyssey, 75', Cannes Critics' Week – Closing Film  
2021 - Ojichan, 35'  
2019 - Edgar Morin, un penseur à Paris, 40'  
2017 - Planet  $\infty$ , 7'  
2016 - I don't want to sleep with you I just want to make you hard, 30'  
2015 - Planet  $\Sigma$ , 12', Audi Short film Award Berlinale  
2014 - Arekara – la vie après, 17'  
2011 - Planet Z, 9'  
2011 - Il Bacio delle vacche marziane, 10'  
2008 - Planet A, 7'  
2005 - Le Bilan, 16'









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By Momoko Seto

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