

LES BONS CLIENTS

and ARTE France

present



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2024
Official Selection



a film by LÉO FAVIER

Un film réalisé par LÉO FAVIER, coécrit avec LÉO BRACHET, produit par LOÏC BOUCHET et THIBAUT CAMURAT - LES BONS CLIENTS en coproduction avec CHRISTIAN POPP - TAG FILM, productrice exécutive EMI GUEYDAN-HIRAOKA, musique originale CAMILLE DELAFON, montage MATHILDE MORIÈRES, image ROBIN GOBERT, avec la voix de MALIK ZIDI, conseiller scientifique ILAN NGUYEN, directeur de production RENAUD PERONNE, équipe de production VIOLAINE JOURDAN POULENARD, HÉIDI VALLET, LIONEL ARNOULD, MOH. FACI, post-production THOMAS LAVERGNE, CAROLINE DEBIA, documentaliste MÉLISSA DUBOIS, graphisme et étalonnage ARNAUD VIÉMONT, montage son ÉRIC REY, mixage AMÉLIE CANINI. Une production déléguée LES BONS CLIENTS / ARTE FRANCE, en coproduction avec TAG FILM, avec le soutien du CNC, de la RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE et de la PROCIREP-ANGOA Avec la participation de RTS. Ventres Internationales BALANGA. Calligraphie © Toshio Suzuki. Illustration © Hayao Miyazaki / Toshio Suzuki

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宮崎駿
MIYAZAKI
Spirit of nature

a film by LÉO FAVIER

84 minutes - France 2024 - Color/B&W - 2K - 5.1

#MiyazakiSpiritOfNature

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SYNOPSIS



"Miyazaki, Spirit of Nature" is the first documentary to focus on Academy Award® winner Hayao Miyazaki's deep connection to nature and the environmental themes expressed through his films. Through iconic characters such as Totoro and Princess Mononoke, Miyazaki's films reflect his deep concerns about the world, often autobiographical and echoing the upheavals of the 20th century.

"Miyazaki, Spirit of Nature", enriched with exceptional film excerpts and insights from voices like his son and director Goro Miyazaki, his producer Toshio Suzuki or the philosopher Timothy Morton, reveals Miyazaki's profound ecological work that questions our relationship with the natural world and living creatures.

INTERVIEW

with director LÉO FAVIER

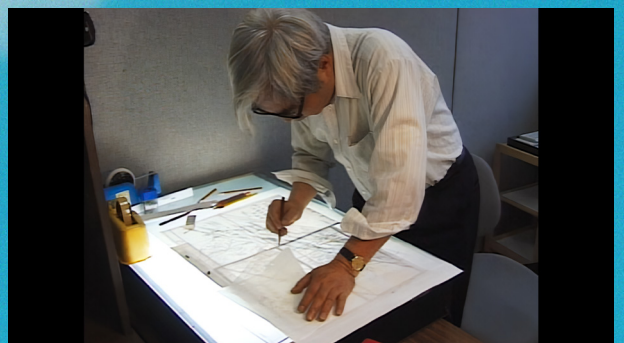
Hayao Miyazaki is an icon of world animation. What made you want to make a film about him and how did you go about it?

I still remember very precisely the emotion I felt the first time I saw a Miyazaki film, *Princess Mononoke*. It was the year 2000, I was 15 years old, and I was completely fascinated by this vision of nature as something sublime, furious, and at the same time so fragile. It was really this film that made me want — myself — to make films.

Today, I am a father and I am showing Miyazaki's films to my children, such as *My Neighbor Totoro*, and I am rediscovering this work that seems so fascinating to me and at the same time completely resonates with the world as it is today, with the climate crisis and the collapse of biodiversity. Here in the West, I speak from my perspective living in France and Germany, we are forced to question our relationship with the living world.

Very early on, I had this conviction — it's the starting point of the project — that Miyazaki's 11 feature-length films were not just movies, but that they all encapsulate a very coherent vision of the world. They truly resonate with Miyazaki's life and with what is happening in the world. My documentary has three narrative lines: the state of the world, Miyazaki's biography, and his films. And the challenge of this documentary for me was really to see how these three things intertwine intimately.

The documents that were crucial for understanding Miyazaki's thinking are his own writings. They are compiled in two books: "Starting Point (1979-1996)" and "Turning Point (1997-2008)." These books really guided the writing of the documentary from beginning to end and are even featured in the film in the form of quotes. This was done to stay as close as possible to Miyazaki's own thoughts.



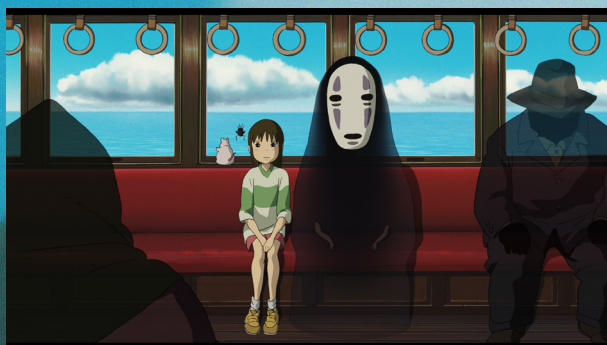
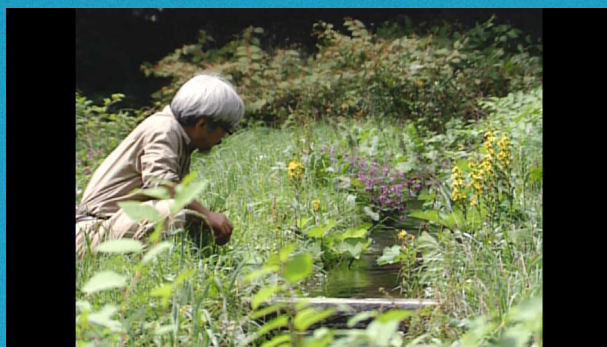
You had access and permission to use many extracts from all films by Hayao Miyazaki. How did you obtain this exceptional agreement from Studio Ghibli to use them? And what guided your choice?

From the outset, my intention was to involve prominent thinkers (like the anthropologist and former student of Lévi-Strauss Philippe Descola) and to ask them what is at play in Miyazaki's films. We really wanted to start with the films and their ideas. This is what interested Miyazaki's producer Toshio Suzuki and Studio Ghibli.

Afterward, we needed a significant number of excerpts to explain the major ideas in the film. For example, human's relationship with nature—the fact that in Miyazaki's films, nature is not something external to us. We touch on this with *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984). There is also the relationship with animist thought in Japan, which we address with the character of Totoro. Additionally, there are “great” values, like the notion of responsibility, which we discuss with the philosopher Timothy Morton and the character of Chihiro in *Spirited Away*. That's why we needed a certain number of excerpts to accompany the conversations with these thinkers.

Of course, there were also individuals we met, such as the great writer and poet Natsuki Ikezawa, who spoke to us about something he considers really important. We then asked Studio Ghibli for permission to use that particular excerpt of the encounter between Mei and Totoro because Mei's character, with her naivety and innocence, is a very important point. This way, we made a series of requests for excerpts after conducting the interviews.

I really like this idea of focusing on big, complex, intellectual, demanding, and difficult notions, but using children's animated films as the medium.



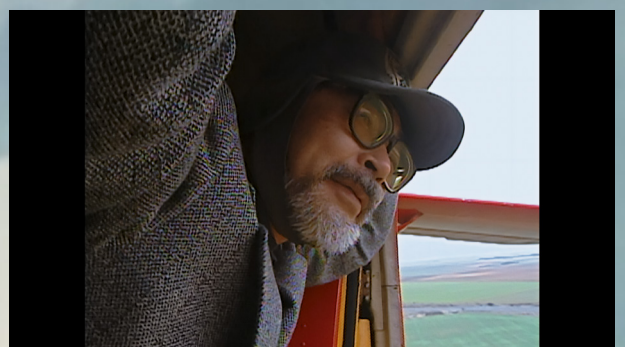
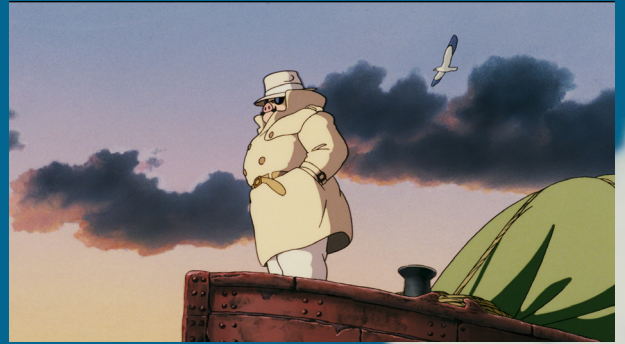
I believe this is exactly what Miyazaki's cinema does: it poses great philosophical questions in a way that is not theoretical at all. And with this documentary, we provide a sort of intellectual substance to the sensations and feelings we already experience when watching the films.

If you had to choose one character from Miyazaki's universe who most resembles him, who would it be?

The character of Porco Rosso is a sort of alter ego for Miyazaki. For a long time, he has been drawing as a pig. What is beautiful in the film *Porco Rosso* is that we see a character who is, on one hand, flamboyant, jovial, and amused, and on the other, deeply disillusioned with the state of the world. He prefers to be a pig rather than a fascist. It's funny because this message has recently been prevalent in memes on Facebook and Instagram. In the face of far-right ideologies across Europe, many people identify with the character of Marco. Here, we see something that interests me a lot: when something intimate (Miyazaki's despair at that time) becomes something universal.

Another character that I find remarkable and completely relevant today is Ashitaka in *Princess Mononoke*. I am still surprised because we don't know which side he is on. Is he with the forest gods? Is he with the workers at the forge? It seems like he is with everyone, and that is fascinating and very instructive in a way.

Today, we are always asked to choose our side and take a stand, and often it is heartbreaking and impossible. Often, like Ashitaka, we want to stand up for humanity and for the living. This is a resolute form of pacifism that is surely deeply rooted in Miyazaki. But it is a pacifism that does not ignore the violence



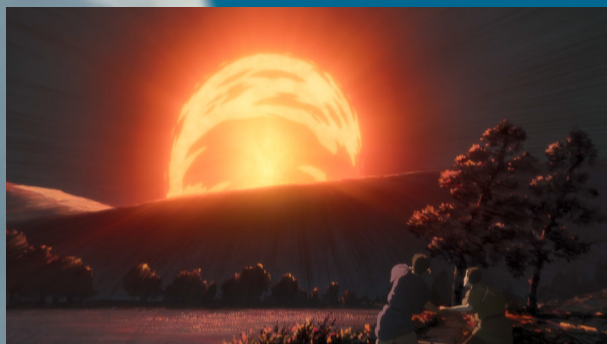
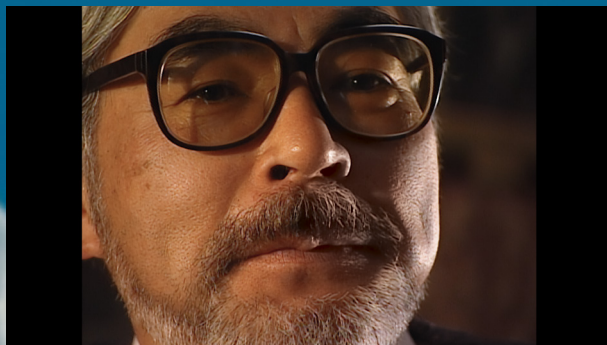
of the world. Ashitaka also acts with violence and is overcome by fury, so it is a pacifism full of contradictions, and I find that it speaks to us a lot today. It speaks to how we make decisions today, and this brings me back to the intuition we had at the beginning. The idea is that Miyazaki's films are a kind of toolbox that accompanies us. Miyazaki's characters are with us in the world today, and perhaps they help us make decisions with dignity, respect, and humanity.

Looking at his films, you get the impression that Hayao Miyazaki is a paradoxical creator: terribly pessimistic on the one hand, and at the same time a beacon of hope. How did you balance these two aspects of his films?

When we started this project, we started from the works' vision of the world. The starting point was the desire to analyse the works. But gradually we realised that to really understand why works emerge at a particular point in a career, you have to look at Miyazaki's life, his biography. And also a whole psychological side.

That's when I realised that there really is something profoundly dark about him, and at the same time there's a quest for light. I wasn't aware of this at all, and now it's obvious. It's really present in Miyazaki's writings, this happiness, this joy, of animation as something magical that allows him to conjure up all the darkness he has within himself. This duality also explains his insane demands on animation, this art form where you can control everything through the power of drawing.

Darkness and light. It's an obviously dynamic balance, which can be understood through biography. There are moments in life that are terrible and moments when there is light. Like in the 1990s, when there was an Asian



economic crisis, an earthquake in Kobe and a sarin gas attack in Tokyo. These are terrible times and it's something that nourishes a work, in this case, *Princess Mononoke*. A film born out of this period of despair.

Here we see that works of art are deeply connected to the life of an artist. They don't just appear out of nowhere. But it's a precise moment in an artist's life. As an artist, I find it really touching when a work comes across as deeply personal, and the more personal it is, the more it speaks to us all. How there's this bridge between the intimate and the universal. It's something I find fascinating.

An anecdote from the filming?

When we did the (remote) filming in Houston with the philosopher Timothy Morton, he talked to us about a scene in *Ponyo* where the children are at home and outside there is a storm. Timothy explained that in the film, it seems like the entire biosphere is under attack. And he said, "It's like today in Houston." Outside, there was a heat dome with temperatures over 50°C, and the meteorological services were unable to predict what would happen next. Every day, they said, "It will stop," but in reality, it continued.

At that moment, I realized that the climate catastrophe is truly here, it was even the backdrop of our filming. A scene that mirrors one described by Timothy Morton from a Miyazaki film.

This collision between Miyazaki's work and reality happened constantly throughout the production of the film. We constantly encountered Miyazaki's motifs that were reflected in current events...with the climate crisis, of course, but also with the bombings in Gaza. The motif of bombing, of houses in flames, is something that repeatedly appears in Miyazaki's films because it's what he experienced. And that's why making this film today feels so vivid. So necessary. It's a great responsibility for us as well.

Miyazaki's cinema challenges us as humanity to recognize both the most beautiful and the most terrible aspects of our existence, while continually encouraging us, despite adversity and despair, to remain curious, to move forward, and to view the world and humanity without hatred. This is what Ashitaka says: "See with eyes unclouded by hate." It's more complicated than it seems, but it is an essential message that remains deeply relevant.



FILMOGRAPHY

HAYAO MIYAZAKI

The Castle of Cagliostro

1979

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind

1984

Castle in the Sky

1986

My Neighbor Totoro

1988

Kiki's Delivery Service

1989

Porco Rosso

1992

Princess Mononoke

1997

Spirited Away

2001

Howl's Moving Castle

2004

Ponyo

2008

The Wind Rises

2013

The Boy and the Heron

2023



Director

Léo Favier (born 1985) studied visual art in Berlin and screenwriting in Paris. His work spans fiction and non-fiction, including experimental short films, books, an autofiction podcast, and documentary features.

Filmography

Kinoki, 2012

Qui n'a pas sa part d'ombre, 2015

Après le volcan, 2016

Apollo ou la vie sauvage, 2018

#Propaganda, 2017

Culbute, nos sexualités sous influence, 2022

Dopamine, 2022

Dopamine, how apps hack our brains, 2023

Producer

The production company Les Bons Clients has been founded in 2005 by Loïc Bouchet and Thibaut Camurat and has produced ever since more than 150 documentaries, that have been highly acclaimed by audiences and won numerous awards at film festivals. The company has produced several documentaries about the art of cinema and its artists, notably *Belmondo*, *l'incorrigible* by François Lévy-Kuentz, *Conversations with Romy Schneider* by Patrick Jeudy or *John Wayne, America At All Costs* by Jean-Baptiste Péretié.

Reflecting on the future of our planet, Les Bons Clients is currently developing and producing several inspiring documentaries on this theme: the 100-minute documentary for France 2, *A journey through our future*, which projects France in 2100 into a desirable future based on rigorous scientific studies and *If Schools Were Outdoors*, on the rise of classes in nature for the France Télévisions Group. *Miyazaki, Spirit of Nature* unites both worlds. www.lesbonsclients.fr

CREDITS

A **LES BONS CLIENTS** production, in coproduction with **ARTE France**, in coproduction with **TAG FILM**, with the participation of **RTS**, with the support of **CNC, Région Île-de-France & Procirep-Angoa**

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Edited by **MATHILDE MORIÈRES**

Line producer **EMI GUEYDAN-HIRAOKA**

Producers **LOÏC BOUCHET & THIBAUT CAMURAT**

Coproducer **CHRISTIAN POPP**

International Distribution **BALANGA**