



## hayao miyazaki and the golden lion

commentary by kym cooper-rodgers

published 14 march 2005

cambridge letters | volume 1 • number 2

Born January 5, 1941, in Tokyo, producer/director/screenwriter/manga<sup>1</sup> cartoon designer Hayao Miyazaki is an undisputed master of anime (pronounced AN-EE-MAY; the name for animated films in Japan) and considered one of Japanese cinema's finest directors. He is responsible for manifold, critically-acclaimed and financially successful feature-length works venerated not only by those in his native country but throughout the world.

It was as a teenager that Miyazaki discovered his fascination with animation. Although he later graduated with a degree in Economics, the children's literature of Europeans such as Rosemary Sutcliff, Eleanor Farjeon, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and Philippa Pearce more than held his interest, as well. Anime seemed the most intuitive way to combine his two passions; so, in 1963, after training as a draftsman, he joined the staff of Toei Animation, Asia's largest company of its type. His natural talent immediately singularized him. He left Toei for A-Pro, in 1971—joining forces with Isao Takahata (his former boss at Toei) on a number of animated television series, including the extremely popular "Heidi"—then headed, in 1973, to Nippon Animation. There, he was heavily involved in the World Masterpiece Theater TV animation series until 1978, when he directed his first TV series, "Future Boy Conan". Tokyo Movie Shinsha was next, in 1979; and, in that environment, the prolific artist directed his first feature: the much-beloved *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*. By the early 1980s, Miyazaki and Takahata had founded Studio Ghibli<sup>2</sup>, where—to this day—brilliant art for the big and small screens is produced.

Miyazaki's international success story began with the charming *Tonari no Totoro* (*My Neighbor Totoro*, 1988). *Mononoke-hime* (*Princess Mononoke*, 1997) followed, then *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*), recipient of the 2002 Berlin Festival Golden Bear and the 2003 Academy Award for Best Animated Film<sup>3</sup>, and now widely considered a fantasy genre classic. In September 2004, the 61st Venice Film Festival world-premiered *Hauru no ugoku shiro* (*Howl's Moving Castle*), Miyazaki's exquisite and very personal statement about the repugnance of war—a theme often repeated in his work [i.e., *Tenkû no shiro Rapyuta* (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, 1986)].

Given his honeyed standing, it certainly seems appropriate that, on February 9th, the Davide Croff-chaired board of directors of La Biennale di Venezia approved Marco Müller's proposal to honor Hayao Miyazaki with the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement—the first ever bestowed upon an animation director—at the 62nd Venice International Film Festival (August 31st-September 10th, 2005). (The actual presentation is slated for Friday, September 9th, during the course of what is being referred to as "Miyazaki Day", in which several of his films—yet unknown in Europe—will, finally, be screened.)

In Müller's words: "...Hayao Miyazaki is the giant who pulled down the walls which had been erected to contain Japanese animated films and reduce them to Western categories. Too hastily,

he was dubbed a 'Japanese Disney', reducing a creative energy and a vision that is completely out of the ordinary to parameters we are more accustomed to. Miyazaki's energy combines romanticism and humanism with an epic take on storytelling, a touch of visionary fantasy that leaves one open-mouthed. The sense of wonder his films convey awakens the child who sleeps within each of us. We should not, however, forget the industrial surprises of Miyazaki: with the right 'accomplices', he has succeeded in exploding the conventional categories of animation, thanks to the systematic work of a factory which has also trained a considerable deal of fresh talent. In Hayao Miyazaki is embodied the filmic pop art of the new millennium, one of the components that are increasingly present in the research work of the Venice Film Festival."

Miyazaki is currently planning three new films, and a major exhibition entitled "Miyazaki & Moebius" (the Musée de la Monnaie, Paris, France) pays additional tribute to his impressive contribution to world art.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes confused with anime, 'manga' is the Japanese word for comic book (or graphic novel, if you prefer) and is used in English to mean Japanese comic books. Manga and anime are very closely related, as artists frequently crossover, as do the characters they create. (*from A Dictionary of Anime*)

<sup>2</sup> More than a production house, the Studio Ghibli factory also serves as a museum which opened at the end of 2001 in the park of Mitaka (Tokyo). Here, Miyazaki-created characters may be found—part of the director's master plan to encourage children in unique voyages of individual discovery and fantasy exploration, all the while learning the ins and outs of animation filmmaking.

<sup>3</sup> This was the first Oscar ever awarded to an anime production.

---

- Miyazaki's IMDB page: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0594503/>

- official site of the Miyazaki film collection: <http://disney.go.com/disneyvideos/animatedfilms/studioghibli/flash.html>

---

## **ABOUT LA BIENNALE DE VENEZIA**

The Venice Biennale has, for over a century, been one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the world. Ever since its foundation in 1895, it has been in the avant-garde, promoting new artistic trends and organizing international events in the contemporary arts in accordance with a multi-disciplinary model which characterizes its unique nature. It is world-beating for the International Film Festival (61 editions), for the International Art Exhibition (50 editions), and for the International Architecture Exhibition (9 editions), and continues the great tradition of the Festival of Contemporary Music (48 editions) and Theatre (36 editions), now flanked by the Festival of Contemporary Dance (2 editions). The Biennale promotes numerous publishing initiatives in the same sectors. Its visibility is high in all the media. Through the ASAC (Historic Archives of Contemporary Arts), the Biennale conserves the documentation of its history.

The Foundation's venues, which receive an increasingly vast international public (320,000 visitors per annum), are not owned by it but are made available by law by the Venice City Council—the Giardini di Castello (visual arts and architecture), the Palazzo del Cinema and the Palazzo del Casinò on the Lido (cinema)—or are obtained through pluriennial agreements with the

Italian Navy and the Inland Revenue—the Arsenale (visual arts and architecture), the Teatro alle Tese, and the Teatro Piccolo Arsenale (dance, music, theatre).

The legislative reform decree of January 2004 has transformed the Biennale into a Foundation, with a new board of directors chaired by Davide Croff. The challenge of the new Foundation lies in reviving the potential of the Biennale and its unique nature as a center of attraction of outstanding excellence—not only during the major exhibitions, but also for artistic production in every sector, throughout the year. For this, prestigious private partners are being sought to set up a permanent 'home', its own venue which reinforces and establishes the identity of the Biennale and which can, at the same time, become a permanent exhibition center, a laboratory of culture, the arts, and ideas which reach the whole world from Venice. - Copyright © 2003 La Biennale di Venezia

Copyright © 2005 The Bohemian Aesthetic/Kym Cooper-Rodgers. All rights reserved.