

The Crossing

The Story

A pillaged village, a family on the run and two children lost on the roads of exile. . . Kyona and Adriel try to escape those who track them to reach a more welcoming country. During an initiatory journey that will take them from childhood to adolescence, they will go through multiple trials, both fantastic and real, to reach their destination.



The Undefined Time of the Legend

The subject of *The Crossing* was born from the meeting of two emotions: the memories of my family - my great-grandparents fleeing Odessa at the beginning of the 20th century, my mother and her young brother on the roads of France to the liberated zone in 1940 - and the remarkable increase in human displacement over the last few decades. I have seen the journey of Kurdish, Syrian, Sudanese, Afghan families reflect that of my own Jewish family. People who are pushed by war, hunger, persecution, looking for a better land where they may rebuild their lives and are willing to face all perils to do so.

While the film is rooted in contemporary migration realities, the subject is treated in a timeless way - to illustrate the permanence of migration history - drawing inspiration from the narration of myths and tales.



The decision to follow two heroes as they leave childhood was made with my co-screenwriter the novelist Marie Desplechin, whose books are primarily aimed at young people. We approached the story from this perspective: our two heroes, sister and brother, Kyona and Adriel, bear the resemblance to Hansel and Gretel as well as that of young "unaccompanied minors".

It is in this dual approach, whose relevance has been confirmed over the course of the writing, that we have constructed the narration. The film is divided into "chapters" which each correspond to an area of the tale and simultaneously to a current situation of the paths of exile.

Thus, street children are evoked as "raven brothers" or little Hop-O'-My-Thumbs abandoned by their parents, the old woman who takes Kyona in the forest is like a Baba Yaga, the couple of child buyers are like ogres . . .

Relying on the power of fiction to capture reality, we use its codes. The story is located on an imaginary map, more or less reminiscent of the contours of Europe. The people who inhabit it are strangely familiar to us. There is no way of assigning the story to a particular time, which could be last century, today or tomorrow. We are in the indefinite time of the legend.

This approach has meant that we address a common audience of children and adults, as do the myths, which offer at each age the images necessary to represent and apprehend the experience of the world.

Animated Painting

The action, from start to finish, takes place over four seasons, distinguished by atmospheres and colors. This cycle contains a double crossing, the two heroes leaving both their country and childhood. Along the way, the heroes learn to resist, to fight, to lose and to love. They gradually become themselves. Their character evolves, like their body and their face. Their epic takes on an initiatory character and their journey is offered as a metaphor for the passage to adulthood.

The story is carried by the voice of an elderly Kyona, who recounts the memory of her "crossing", from a sketchbook that she draws throughout her journey. This restored memory thus presents itself as an act of transmission.

The notebook was reconstituted from drawings by my mother, Mireille Glodek Miaillhe. Between 15 and 18 years old around the Second World War, she represented her family, her brother, scenes of her daily life. It is from her drawings that we defined the film's characters and certain sets.

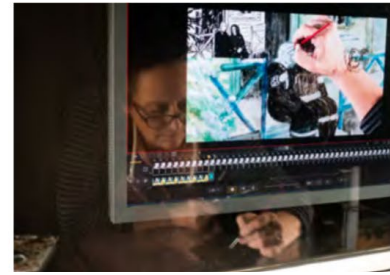
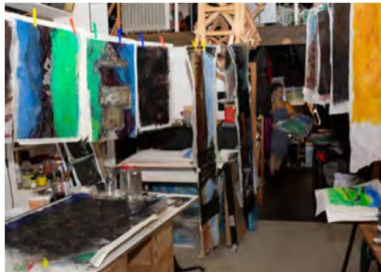
Conversely, my mother's drawings were modified to match the characters. Thus, a disturbing reality was created made of round trips between the sketches of the time and the universe of the film.

The work on the settings and the situations was preceded by extensive documentation on the journeys of the refugees, the dangers and detention camps. Photos, reports, stories form the basis of the contemporary reality of the film. This is particularly noticeable in the sequences devoted to the shelter for street children, the nomadic circus and prostitutes and in those dealing with the Shalangar detention camp.

The film thus constantly plays between the imaginary and the documentary, the everyday and the dreamlike.

Animation in painting, with what it offers in terms of aesthetic emotion and distancing, contributes to this.

My animated painting technique is a bit like a balancing act without a net. I paint directly under the camera, which involves risks, intuitions, chances and requirements.



The process is seemingly simple. A camera above a table, a first drawing is photographed then slightly modified on the same surface and as the changes are made, images are taken. There are few possibilities of turning back. I draw the movement by successive transformations, touch after touch, creating a material which acts, vibrates, produces its own intensities, its own colors. I take advantage of the accidents it offers me, I let myself be guided by it. The detail of the movements is improvised according to my intuitions, the ideas that arise. . . I have always given myself the freedom to hesitate, to drag, and sometimes to spoil. . .

There is nothing less industrial than this animation technique. It is almost impossible to rationalize the work, to hope that we can do so many seconds a day, so many sets, so many covers in compositing.

In cinema, it takes 24 frames per second to give the illusion of movement, or to save a little work, 12 drawing that you take twice. You can calculate the number of images needed for 1 hour 20 minutes of film.

Until now, I have worked alone or almost. But for a feature film, we needed a team. But how to pass on to decorators, animators, men and women, this technique which is the translation of a personal work?

We started by creating more than 500 decorations with ten decorators.

A team of fourteen men animators and one woman animator worked under my direction. We had to keep the coherence of the whole, while giving everyone the opportunity to express their own talent. This was one of the main issues of the film.

The construction took three years. Fourteen title banks were built in three studios and three countries: France, the Czech Republic, Germany. And little by little, second by second, shot by shot, I saw the film come to life.

The Voices and the Music

I spent a lot of time choosing the voices, in particular those of the children. I wanted actors who were the age of the roles. The voices were recorded well in advance so that the presenters could follow the rhythm and phrasing of the actors.

I worked very closely with the composer of the music, Philippe Kumpel. During the three years of production time, he proposed musics from which, with editor Nassim Gordji Terhani, we chose the ones that would accompany the story from start to finish, maintaining a subtle balance between their narrative role and the color that they bring to the story. From beginning to end, the magpie that runs through the film – the heroine's "magical" companion – is accompanied by its own theme, with childish and comforting accents.

Florence Miailhe

Born in 1956, Florence graduated from the École Nationale des Arts with a specialization in printmaking. She began her professional career as a print designer for the press, and showed her drawings and prints in expositions. In 1991, she directed her first short film *Hammam*.

Since then, she has established a very personal style of animation in cinema. She makes her films based on paintings, pastels or sand, directly under the camera, using an overlapping process. Her work has been praised in various festivals in France and abroad.

In particular, she received the César for the best short film in 2002 for *Au premier dimanche d'août*, a special mention at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006 for *Conte de Quartier* and in 2011, she received a Cristal d'Honneur, at the 39th Annecy International Animation Film Festival for her body of work.

She has worked as a teacher in various animation schools: the Gobelins, the ENSAD, the Poudrière. . . and continues in conjunction with directing her work as a visual artist. Most of her films were written in collaboration with the writer Marie Desplechin. Their feature film *The Crossing* received the best screenplay award at the *Premiers Plans Festival* in Angers in 2010 and was the subject of an exhibit at the Abbaye de Fontevraud. In 2017 the film was awarded the Gan Foundation for Cinema prize. In 2022, the film was nominated for the César of Best Animated Feature.



FILMOGRAPHY

2020 *The Crossing (La Traversée)*

Audience Award for Screenplay at the 2010 Angers Festival

2012-2015 Four short films of 4' for the ARTE programme Karambolage

2010-2012 *Méandres* 20' and a series of 6 episodes of 5' based on the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid

2008-2009 *Matières à rêver* 6' (*Dream Materials*)

2003-2006 *Tale of the Neighborhood*, 15' Special mention from the Official Selection Jury at Cannes 2006

2000 *Les Oiseaux noirs et les oiseaux blancs* 4'

1998-2000 *Au premier dimanche d'août* 11'20

César for Best Short Film 2002

César du meilleur court-métrage 2002

1996 *Histoire d'un Prince devenu borgne et mendiant* 16'

1995 *Schéhérazade* 16' Special Mention by the Jury of the Clermont Ferrand Short Film Festival, 1996

1991 *Hammam* 9' Emile Reynaud Prize 1992

Marie Desplechin

Marie Desplechin, 61, has been writing books for young people for almost thirty years. They have been published mainly by *L'école des loisirs*. Some of them have been widely praised by young readers, such as *Verte*, published in 1996 (2018 for the comic book adaptation, currently being adapted for the screen), or *Le Journal d'Aurore* (2006, adapted for cinema by Emillie Deleuze under the title *Jamais contente*). Her latest book, published in autumn 2019, is a manual of environmental activism for children entitled *Ne change jamais*. Several of her books have been translated around the world. Trained as a journalist, she has written a number of books for adult audiences, including novels, short stories and narratives, and has been involved in screenwriting. She was Florence Mialhe's co-writer on three of her short films, *Schéhérazade*, *Histoire du Prince borgne* and *Conte de quartier*. She has participated in the story of *La Traversée*, since its inception,

THE CHARACTERS



KYONA, aged thirteen, lives in a poor village in the Eastern part of the continent with her family. Voluntary, reckless, combative, she found her refuge and her way of expressing herself in her drawings. She never separates from the sketchbook that accompanies her throughout her journey and visually represents her memory. It is through her voice-over narration that the story is told to us. As the eldest, she takes on the responsibility of leading her brother to the end of their voyage.

ADRIEL, aged twelve, is Kyona's brother. Sensitive, easily startled, he is also unpredictable and susceptible to rash acts of bravery. Adriel is at the heart of the story without being the main actor. Alternatively driving force and brake, he is the incessant preoccupation of Kyona whose mission is to lead him beyond the border. Affected by the vagaries of the voyage and the terrors of separation from his family, the young boy will grow up painfully.

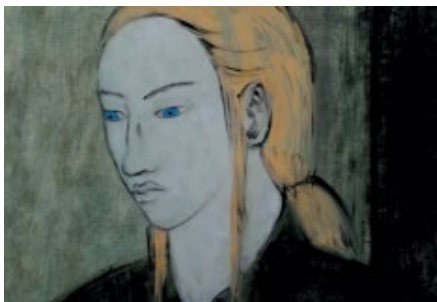


ISKENDER, leader of a gang of street children, is the first stranger the two heroes encounter on their journey. Both dictator and protector of his band, this teenager belongs to a people chased out of their mountains by conflicts. He has Skanderbergs tattoos on his face. Carried away in the turmoil of migrations, he learned to fend for himself and to get how from trouble by himself. Iskender is a figure of seduction and ambiguity.



JON is a representation of ordinary evil, trafficker of the worse kind, receiver of stolen goods, seller of all that can be sold, scrap metal, children, information... A character without principle or faith, Jon is everywhere, more and more dangerous, more and more threatening.

THE DELLA CHIUSA are a bourgeois couple who live in an opulent residence in the middle of a park. They have everything, except children. Jon sells them Kyona and Adriel. Strange market that requires for the children to forget everything about their past and bend to the whims of their new "parents". In exchange, they are given accommodation, food, luxury and an appearance of love that borders on madness. Florabelle, acute, gussied up, childish, and Maxime, disturbing and adipose.



ERDEWAN is a sunny and endearing character, immediately likeable. He belongs to the peoples of the North, and has their tallness, long blond hair and very pale skin. Rival of Iskender, he will fall under the charm of Kyona.

BABAYAGA could be a witch, but she is just an old lady, wounded by life and who has taken refuge in silence. She too wears the Skanderberg tattoos. She does not speak much. She will open her door, then her heart to Kyona





ISSAWA, a little boy of seven or eight, appears in the latest part of the film, in the internment camp of which he is one of the prisoners. An orphan, he has the disarming cheekiness of a seasoned Gavroche.

Translation by Annie Waters and Andrew Jackson