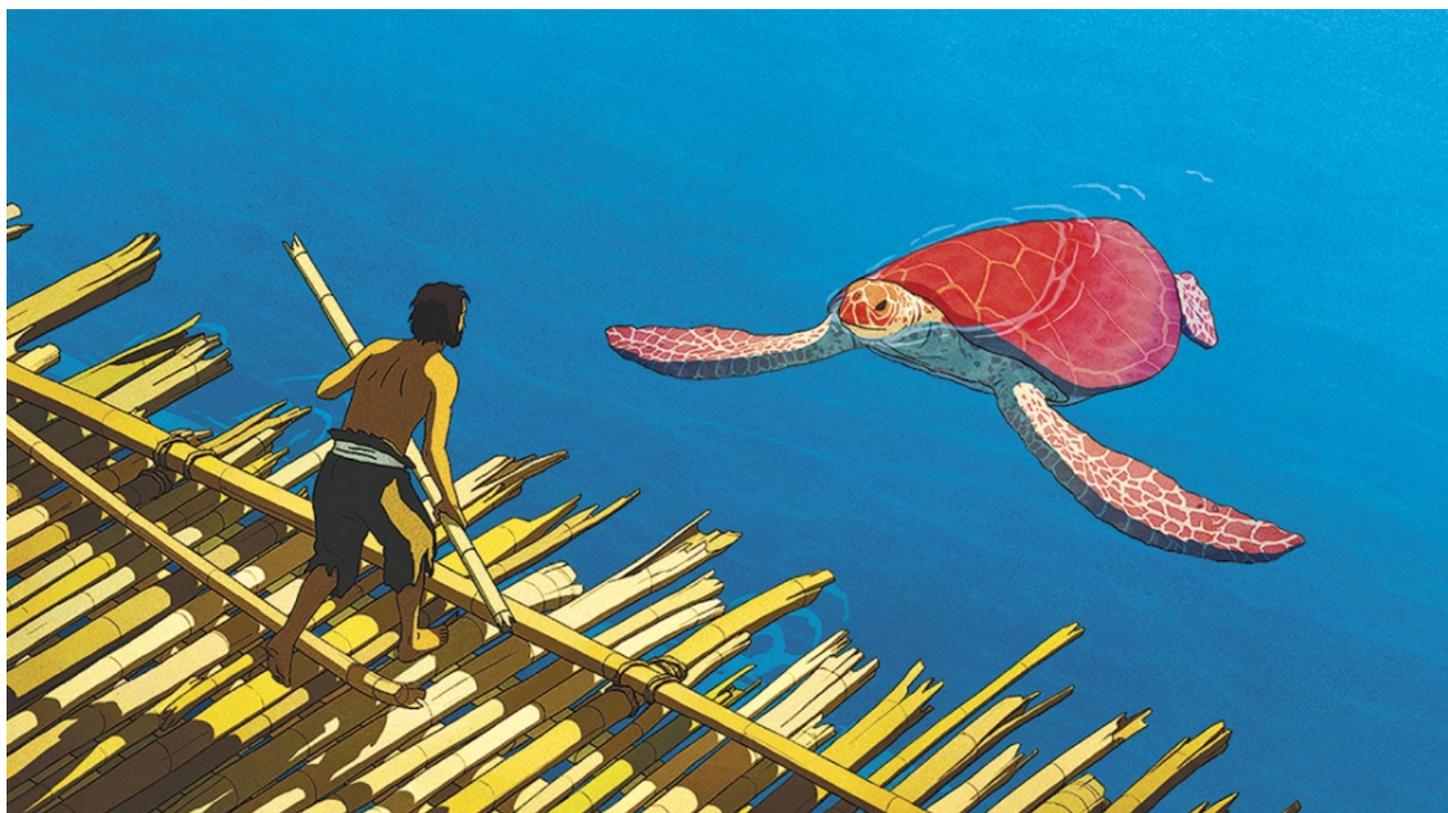


European Animation Awards: 12 Points on the Inaugural Edition

Also called the Emile Awards, the first edition is celebrated Dec. 8 in Lille, northern France

By [John Hopewell](#)



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LILLE, France — The brainchild of European [animation](#) luminaries, the Emiles or, more formally, the [European Animation Awards](#), take place for the first time tonight in Lille, in the northernmost-part of France. 12 points about a event which bids fair to become a significant addition to an already-demanding film-TV big event calendar.

1.A CELEBRATION OF BELOW-THE-LINE CRAFT

“The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales,” “The Red Turtle” and “My Life as a Zucchini” compete for best feature [animation](#) production. Three U.K. shows – “Revolting Rhymes,” “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt,” “The Amazing World of Gumball” – vie for best European TV/broadcast production. But that’s not really the Emiles’ point. Inspired by the Annie Awards, 10 of the EAA’s 16 categories highlight below-the-line craft contributions, such as background and character design, storyboard and soundtrack. The Emiles “are more to promote the excellence of European animation and give confidence and pride to all members of its industry – from producers to animators to story-boarders – about being members of the big European family,” said Emile Awards founder, producer Didier Brunner, (“Ernest and Celestine”). “The opportunity to really celebrate craftspeople and



2. THE SINGULARITY OF ANIMATION

The Emile Awards also recognize the particular nature and demands of animation in general. Visuals, for example, involve double labor, argued Maïlys Valatte, in consideration at the Emiles for her storyboarding on "Long Way North." An artistic director, for instance, "must not only know and juggle a film's moods" as in live-action pictures, but also "have the ability to reproduce them pictorially and synthetically, often like great painters," she remarked.

3. CELEBRATING A GROWTH INDUSTRY

The Awards target a Euro growth industry. Of the eight animated movies nominated in any category, six are first features. Just 20 years ago, Europe's feature film production hardly existed. "Beyond famous titles such as Raymond Briggs adaptations like 'When the Wind Blows,' it's hard to think of that many titles made in Europe over 20 years ago," said Peter Dodd, nominated for best character animation in a feature film for his work as animation director on "Ethel & Ernest." Bearing him out, 76 animated features were produced in Europe over 1984-1998, 361 over 1999-2013, according to a European Audiovisual Observatory study which suggested that, over 2010-14, non-European territories on animated features were responsible for 34.8% of admissions, vs. 26.3% of those for European films in general.

4. THE EMILES COME AT A PROPITIOUS TIME

Hitting \$36 million after 24 days in the U.K., "Paddington 2," produced by London-based David Hayman and financed by Studiocanal, topped new box office entries in France on Wednesday, selling a first-day 131,004 admissions, about \$1 million. A movie animated in France, "Despicable Me 3," made out of Paris-based Illumination Mac Guff, is the third-biggest movie in the world this year, grossing \$1.032 billion. The Commission, the executive arm of the E.U., announced in December 2015 that it would explore alternative models of financing, production and distribution for Europe's animation sector. At this September's Cartoon Forum, Europe's industry presented an E.U. Preferential Animation Support Plan that identified promotion precisely (as well as financing and retaining talent in Europe) as a priority for E.U. action. The Emile Awards are inspired by the Annies. Europe's animation industry has to learn from the U.S. industry's "professionalism at profiting to the maximum from all its talents," said Brunner. The Emiles at least look like one step forward. This is no time for Europe to hide its talents under a bushel.

5. THE SINGULARITY OF EUROPEAN ANIMATION

Much talk at the Emiles, as Europe's animation clans gather, is likely to focus on the state of Europe's industry and its singularity, especially in comparison to the U.S. This may cut several ways. "European animation feels less trapped in childhood than that Stateside. There is more variety in terms of culture, audience demographics and in terms of the pace of storytelling and the subject matter compared to [Hollywood's] more popular traditional sort of fantasy films aimed at children," said Dodd, citing "The Red Turtle" and "The Breadwinner." In industry terms, Europe's industry is essentially an independent one, said Brunner. Style varies from country to country and studio to studio: "There is an Aardman style, a Xilam style, the same for Magic Light." Also, big American studios control animation movies from the beginning to end. In Europe, producers have to "balance the creativity and the freedom of directors and how animation films get made." That requires negotiation, Brunner added.

6. IN EUROPE, EVERY ANIMATED FILM IS ITS OWN WORLD

In consequence, every European animated feature seems in part to be its own world, with its own singular challenges. Dodd remembers being brought in for character design on "Ethel & Ernest." "There was a sort of a house-style already, which was Raymond Briggs' style." So the challenge when adapting Raymond Briggs book was to bring a consistency throughout the film to Briggs' drawings which described a huge gamut from "caricature to sometimes very anatomical, or realistic, or expressionistic" as well as to "keep character animation graphically looking like an illustration but realistic enough so that you could identify with the characters," Dodd said. How that was achieved lies at the heart of the movie's art, worthy of celebration at the Emile Awards.



but characters noses are just a line. Animated with a painterly realism, “Long Way North” involved “a borderless, rather refined rendering and a simplicity in its curves that might seem easy but is a big challenge to get to draw and keep the volume of such characters,” said Valatte. As a result, “landscapes seem to have leapt off 1920s railway posters, while character scenes look quite unlike any other animated film in recent memory — and for a film made under such modest circumstances, that’s a feat unto itself,” said Peter Debruge, reviewing “Long Way North” for *Variety*.

8.CHILDREN OF THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

But, yes, Hollywood’s big toon pics are often burdened by the weight of their budgets, Europe’s by their lack. So in European animation, necessity frequently becomes the mother of invention. That can be seen perhaps most in the student and animated shorts categories at this year’s [European Animation Awards](#). Three are made in black and white, their virtuosity in part stemming from the inventiveness brought to limited resources. One case to point: “Oh Mother,” a B & W, hand-drawn piece from Poland’s Panstwowa Wyzsza School, where the characters’ expanding or contracting sizes emphasize the fluctuating relationship between a happily protective mother and her fast-grown son.

9.SO ARE THE EMILES AN OSCARS BELLWETHER?

It’s hard to say. Two of the three best picture nominations – “My Life as a Zucchini” and “The Red Turtle” – were already nominated for this year’s Academy Awards. “Revolt Rhymes,” nominated in three Emile TV categories, is shortlisted for best animated short this time round. At least four titles up for contention at the Emiles have made the 26-title best animated feature film longlist: “The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales,” “Birdboy: The Forgotten Children,” “Ethel & Ernest,” and “The Girl without Hands.” The Emiles gala movie, “The Breadwinner,” is even being talked up as one of the category’s frontrunners for nomination. For Jesteadt at distributor GKids, whose U.S. acquisitions have scored a remarkable eight Oscar nominations, “of the ‘surprise’ animated titles that have gone on to receive Academy Award nominations outside the Hollywood studio system, a large number have been European works. So I think the Emilies could be meaningful in determining which European animated feature is deemed superior by the artists themselves.”



10. EUROPE'S ANIMATION'S CHALLENGE

"Hollywood's brilliant, blockbuster productions have had enormous success all over Europe, coming to represent what fir audiences make for excellent animation: CGI films with lots of VFX, dynamic, fast-paced rhythms," said Brunner. One result: "The public now wants more and more CGI films." Yet much of Europe's best animation – "The Breadwinner," "Big Bad Fox" could never have been made in CGI, Dodd argued. Brunner agreed: "Despite this audience tendency, we must defend the diversity of techniques in the art of animation (2D, stop-motion, animated paintings, and so on) and resist this domination of CGI." How to square this circle is one of the largest conundrums facing Europe's animation industry.

11. THE E.U.'S MEDIA PROGRAM TO THE RESCUE?

Maybe, however, the E.U.'s Media Program will come to the rescue. It will certainly channel at least some initial E.U. aid to the sector and is reacting positively to the sector's suggestions for support. "We recognize that the animation industry has growth potential and the Animation Plan looks into what makes animation successful and what is required to take it to the next level," Lucia Recalde, Media Unit head, told *Variety* just before the Emile Awards. The Plan also comes "at the right moment," she added. "In the shorter term, we are currently looking into ways to better support the animation sector through the Media Programme in 2019," she said. "In addition, we will be involving the animation sector in debates with members of the European Parliament and the European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya Gabriel. This will bring the great potential of European animation to the attention of decision-makers."

12. BUT HOW ARE THE EMILE AWARDS SHAPING UP?

"For such a project, the most difficult challenge is the first edition, said Commin. That said, "The response and input from European professionals is more than encouraging," he added on the near eve of the awards ceremony. The European Animation Awards received a large number of applications, close to 500 for the 16 categories. Natural and necessary allies such as Cartoon and the Annecy Festival, already honorary members of



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