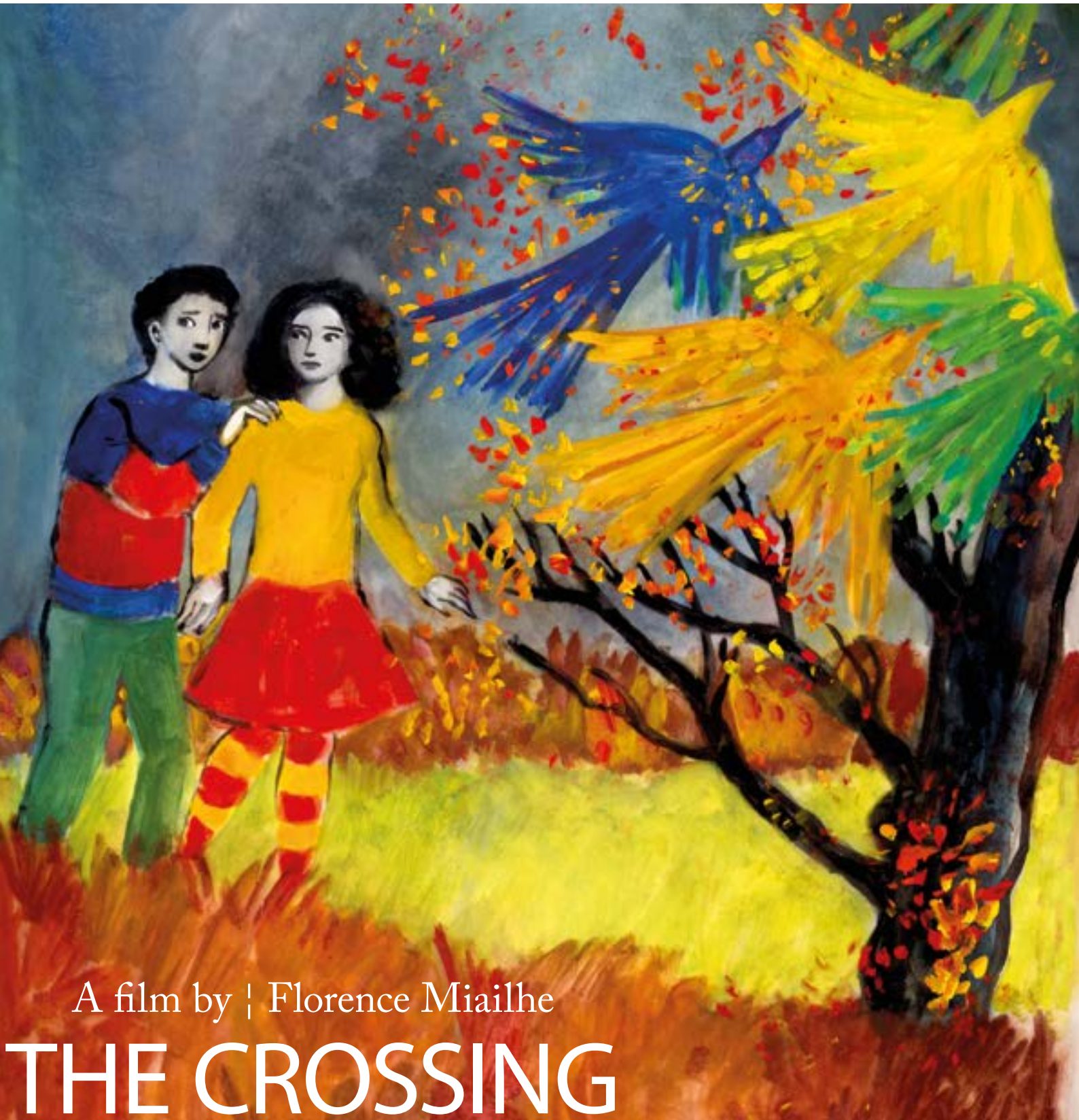




INDIE | SALES



A film by | Florence Mialhe

THE CROSSING





A film by | Florence Miailhe

THE CROSSING 'LA TRAVERSÉE'

● **International sales**

Indie Sales

Sales: sales@indiesales.eu

Festivals & press: festivals@indiesales.eu

● **Countries** France, Germany, Czech Republic

● **Duration** 84'

● **Language** French

● **Screen** 1:85

● **Sound** 5.1

● **Premiere** Annecy Animation Film Festival 2021

**● Annecy Animation Film Festival**

16.06.21	2:00 p.m.	La Turbine
17.06.21	5:30 p.m.	Grande Salle Bonlieu
19.06.21	9:30 a.m.	Pathé 1





A small village looted in darkness, a family forced to flee. The two oldest children, Kyona and Adriel are quickly separated from their parents facing the road of exile alone. They embark on a heroic journey which takes them from childhood to adolescence in search of shelter, peace and the hope of finding refuge and their family. Crossing a continent torn apart by war and migrant persecution, these courageous siblings survive incredible challenges, before reaching a new world, free at last.



● **Director**

Florence Miailhe

● **Screenwriters**

Marie Desplechin, Florence Miailhe

● **Producers**

Dora Benousilio (Les Films de l'Arlequin), Luc Camilli (XBO Films)

● **Co-producers**

Ralf Kukula (Balance Film), Martin Vandas & Alena Vandasová (Maur Film), ARTE France Cinema, MDR/ ARTE Germany, Česká Televize

Florence Miailhe

Director and screenwriter

Born in 1956, Florence graduated from the Ecole Nationale des Arts Décoratifs with a specialization in engraving. She began her professional career as a layout artist for the press and exhibited drawings and engravings.

In 1991, she directed her first short film *Hamam*. Since then, she has imposed a very personal style on animated films. She makes her films with paint, pastel or sand, directly under the camera, using a covering process.

Her work has been noticed 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 Festival in 2006 for *Conte de Quartier* and in 2015 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: Les Gobelins, ENSAD, La Poudrière, etc. and continues to work as a visual artist in parallel with her directing.

Most of her films were written in collaboration with the writer Marie Desplechin. Their feature film *The Crossing* won the best screenplay award at the Festival Premiers Plans in Angers in 2010 and was the subject of an exhibition at Fontevraud Abbey. In 2017 the film received the Gan Foundation for Cinema Special Award.



Marie Desplechin

Screenwriter

Marie Desplechin, 61, has been writing children's literature for almost thirty years. They have been published mainly by L'École des Loisirs.

Some of them have been very popular with young readers, such as *Verte*, published in 1996 (2018 for the comic book adaptation, currently being adapted for the screen), or *Journal d'Aurore* (2006, adapted for the screen by Emillie Deleuze under the title *Jamais contente*).

Her latest book, published in autumn 2019, is a children's environmental activism manual 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 Miailhe's co-writer on three of her short films, *Schéhérazade*, *Histoire du Prince borgne* and *Conte de quartier*. She has participated in the adventure of *The Crossing* since its inception.



Notes on writing

As I primarily write books for children, I felt comfortable creating a story for all audiences with two teenage heroes as its main characters. As a writer I always keep in mind that all readers, adults and children alike, should find interest, pleasure, and something of themselves too in my writings – though sometimes at different levels. To me, all readers deserve the same commitment.

In the same way, I embrace Florence Miailhe's view that tales and myths allow us to shed light on, and see poetry in, our experience of today's world. Like her, I believe greater awareness of events can be achieved in moving away from the dazzling immediacy of contemporaneous representations.

This creative approach was perfect to tell the story of such immemorial figures of the human condition as 'refugees' or 'migrants'. Creating an epic coming-of-age story – based on the unique experience of Florence's great-grandparents – which echoes the stories of millions of displaced people in today's world and resonates with chosen tales: this is what convinced me to get involved in the project. Even if my work is not dedicated to the fate of displaced people in particular, I have long taken a political and civic interest in this issue. Writing the film gave me the opportunity to express and share my interest.



Florence Miailhe

Director & screenwriter

***The Crossing* is very contemporary, yet you began working on this film a decade ago, what inspired you to embark on this journey?**

Yes, it's been more than ten years... I started to lay the foundations of the story during a residency at Fontevraud Abbey in 2006. Four years later, with Marie Desplechin (the screenwriter), we received the screenplay prize at the Premier Plans festival in Angers. It then took more than ten years for Dora Benousilio, the producer, to find funds for the film.

In the early 2000s, Europe experienced an unprecedented wave of «illegal» migrants, most of whom came from Africa and the Middle East to land on the beaches of Malta or Lampedusa. Because of their scale, these migrations have become one of the most serious human, economic and political issues of the early twenty-first century. Considered by many as an entirely new phenomenon, they nevertheless echo the great migrations of the beginning of the twentieth century... and those of all the centuries that preceded it.

Fleeing persecution, seeking elsewhere a less hostile land, a less precarious situation, a more lenient regime – being led to cross seas and continents is a story as old as humanity. This is what literature accounts for and, more recently, what cinema tells us. We think of Chaplin's *The Immigrant* in 1917, Aki Kaurismäki's *The Other Side of Hope* a hundred years later, and Elia Kazan's *America America...*

I myself come from a history of migration.

Like thousands of others, my great-grandparents left Odessa at the beginning of the twentieth century, fleeing the pogroms organised against the Jews. This is one reason why the contemporary migration 'crisis' immediately resonated within me. I felt it was an obvious reminder of how many of us have come from elsewhere, and how much courage, ingenuity and hope are required for these immense and perilous journeys. I also knew that these individual adventures are extraordinary, often tragic, and certainly worth telling.

The death of little Aylan Kurdi, found drowned on a Turkish beach in 2015, only revealed to the world the heartbreaking human dimension behind the abstract word 'migration'. Since I started working on this film, the facts have constantly confirmed my intuition that art should represent this reality.

What sort of research did you do for the film?

I was very much inspired by photographers' images. I searched in the archives, over a long historical period, for photos of migrants, camps, ransacking. In particular, I used the archives of the Magnum agency, where my husband Patrick Zachmann is a photographer. He went to Malta and Lampedusa in 2011 to report on the Mediterranean, the place of departure and crossing. He brought back photos of boat graveyards, boats loaded with men and women lost at sea, young people trying to leave...

There were already many deaths at sea. The disaster is still ongoing and the



Mediterranean has become one of the biggest migrant graveyards in the world.

I found another source of inspiration in the sketchbooks of my mother, Mireille Mialhe, which date from the Second World War. She was then barely out of her teens. As Kyona (the heroine of the film) does, she was constantly drawing her family, her friends, scenes from the everyday life... I was inspired by her drawings to create some of the characters and certain situations in the film. Made during a period of war, these sketches take on an almost documentary value in the film.

Marie and I enriched our story with bits of personal stories, my grandparents hiding their children in the luggage because they were not rich enough to pay for the train for the whole family, my mother and her brother

going alone to the French unoccupied zone in 1939-40... We wove together mythical stories, stories from the last century, and contemporary testimonies. We drew out the common lines of all these epics to build a universal and timeless story.

The film is organized as a tale, why this genre?

Many of my previous short films were adapted or inspired by tales. It is a universe that we have in common with Marie Desplechin. While being nourished by history and current events, the tale allows us to escape from it, to absorb it, to keep only the broad outlines and to have access to a destiny and a human truth, valid at all times and in all places.

We were inspired by the characters and



archetypal motifs of the tales to relate them to the most current situations: the children are all Hop-o'-My-Thumb separated from their parents on the roads to exile, ogres are smuggling children, the witch Babayaga hides a young migrant lost in the forest... Evil or beneficial characters, they all have equivalents in the treasure trove of the tales. As for Adriel and Kyona, they are Hansel and Gretel, Gerda and Kay, or little Rémi from Sans Famille.

The intimate combination of history and the contemporary allows us to address all audiences, each one perceiving at its own level the stakes of the narrative.

Tell us about your collaboration with Marie Desplechin, why did you tell the story in chapters?

We've been working together for a very long time, and we're used to each other. Perhaps because I'm used to short films and Marie to novels, the story came to us in chapters. We enjoyed moving from story to story. Technically, this structure also allowed for a division of labour that was easier to set up in an international co-production. Each chapter takes us to a different place, with its characters, its colours, its season.

Painted animation on glass is so impressive and time consuming, could you explain why you work in this technique and how you adapted it for a feature film?

I have always worked in animated painting directly under the camera. It's a technique I particularly like. For me, it was obvious that this film had to be told this way. It evokes memories, it is detached from reality. If I imagine the landscape of my childhood, I remember a very blue sky, a very black mountain. The real is sublimated. This is how we imagined and produced the sets

and the animation, taking into account the fragility of the material and its transience.

This practice requires rigour and intuition. I have refined it as my films have progressed. The animation is done frame by frame, on several levels of glass, directly under the camera. This system is set up so that, as far as possible, everything is done at the same time and by the same person: the characters, the set, the effects, the colour... This allows the image to be conceived in its entirety at all times. In this way, the animator has the feeling of bringing a painting to life. It is true that animated painting may take a little longer than other animation techniques, but above all, as the work is more difficult to share, we are obliged to work in a small team and production takes much longer.

For the producers as well as for me, it was very difficult to plan with certainty the animation schedule. Depending on the shots and the animators, the work could vary from 1 to 6 seconds of film per day.

Tell us about your team and how you worked across three countries?

To constitute the «artistic» team of the film (sets, animation and graphic bible) we proceeded to a casting. We chose designers, animators and graphic artists whose drawing style and way of animating were already close to my universe. Strangely enough, most of the people who showed up for the casting were women. So I broke the gender quota and worked with an almost exclusively female team.

Partly for production reasons we had to share the work with other European countries. Dora found producers in Czech Republic and Germany who were enthusiastic about the project. I shot between Toulouse (where Luc Camilli – co-producer in the Occitanie



region – was based), Prague, Leipzig and Halle.

In Toulouse, with about fifteen female artists and a draughtsman, we made 600 painted sets on silk paper and celluloid; the animation was divided between Prague, Leipzig and Toulouse, by about fifteen female artists and an animator, and finally the sound design took place in Halle, Germany. The assistant directors organised the work and we took on two head animators for the times when I was not on location with the team.

And finally, I am grateful to the interpreters who tried to make sure that everyone communicated as well as possible, which was not always easy! The film took three years to make.

What were your biggest challenges in making your first feature after so many successful short films?

Until then I had always worked alone, or with two or three people at most. This was the first time that I was directing such a large team, and that I was giving the direction of the sets and the animation to others. I tried not to impose any rigidity in the production, I had to feel the lightness of the paint, the hazards of the brushstrokes while preserving the unity of the whole. We had to appropriate the characters without copying them but without distancing ourselves from them. The animators, the decorators, had the choice of gesture, of line. Jokingly, I used to say that my team was on probation.

We made a lot of sketches for the characters, the drawings, the animation. We tried to make the first image of each shot so that the animators could start on a coherent basis. The experience was extraordinarily enriching. It was great to see, little by little, each shot take its place in the whole.

You have created some very unique (and sometimes scary) characters: Iskander & Jon, the childless bourgeois couple, the circus owner or the Babayaga, to name just a few. Where do they come from?

The characters were inspired both by fairy tales and by situations encountered in contemporary reality. Jon represents both a universal figure of evil and is inspired by the traffickers who have always taken advantage of human misery. The babayaga was inspired both by the many traditional tales in which a young girl spends a year in the company of an old woman in a lost forest and by a novel by Aharon Appenfeld, *The Story of a Life*. The middle-class couple represents the figure of the ogres or the Snow Queen, and recalls situations of children being kidnapped and placed in rich families. Street children who, like crows, scavenge from the rubbish heaps are still present in many countries... It was Marie's art to make them credible, to embody them.

The Crossing is the story of two children separated from their parents who grow up on the move tell us more about their journey.

The title «The Crossing» is obviously to be understood in a double sense. It is both about crossing a continent, with all the adventures and dangers that will arise during the journey. It is also about making the crossing that leads from childhood to adulthood, facing the discoveries and pains that make up life: the distance from family, the loss of friends, the discovery of love, the building

of fraternal bonds, and finally the learning of autonomy. In this sense, «The Crossing» is a classic coming-of-age film.

The musical score is very important in animated films and yours is quite beautiful how did you work with the composer?

We worked very early on with the composer Philippe Kumpel. As soon as the animation was finished, he started to lay down the music and prepare a model. I wanted the music to be the kind you take with you, in your luggage when you leave. It should be inscribed in the memory like a nursery rhyme. This is the theme that was composed to accompany the appearances of the magpie. Based on this desire, Philippe then proposed numerous pieces intended to evoke friendship, escape, danger, travel...

The challenge was to accompany the emotion without overemphasising the dramatic significance of the scenes. Since Philippe Kumpel was not as comfortable composing accordion tunes «à la française», Marc Perrone was kind enough to let me draw on his repertoire. Manu Merlot and Lucien Larquère composed the original music to accompany the circus act.

With Nassim, the editor, we placed the different themes on the images without necessarily taking into account the sequences for which Philippe Kumpel had imagined them. After a lot of back and forth, he reworked and arranged the pieces so that they would take their exact place in the film. The music was performed by the Filmorchester in the Babelsberg studios. It was magical!





● **The Crossing, 2021**

Animated Feature

● **Manderss & Metamorphoses, 2014**

Animated Short Series

● **Matières à Rêver, 2009**

Animated Short

● **Urban Tale, 2006**

Animated Short - Special Mention Cannes Film Festival

● **White Birds and Black Birds, 2001**

Animated Short

● **A Summer Night Rendez-Vous, 2001**

Animated Short - César for Best Short Film

● **The story of the prince who became a one-eyed beggar, 1996**

Animated Short

● **Scheherazade, 1995**

Animated Short

● **Hammam, 1991**

Animated Short



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