



PREVIEW

Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman

+ intro with director Pierre Földes

Based on a collection of short stories by Haruki Murakami, this animated feature film follows the lives of multiple characters as they navigate post-tsunami existence and the existential repercussions of urban life, including an unambitious bank employee, his frustrated wife, a delusional accountant, a lost cat and a giant talkative frog. It's an ambitious treat that flirts with the surreal and delivers on all fronts.

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Tokyo, a few days after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Kyoko suddenly leaves her husband after spending five days in a row glued to unfolding earthquake footage on TV. Her helpless husband Komura takes a week's leave from work and heads north to deliver a box and its unknown content to two young women. His colleague Katagiri, a simple debt collector by profession and an awkward loner in life, returns home one evening to find a two-meter-tall frog asking for his help to save Tokyo from an imminent earthquake. Through memories, dreams and fantasies, Kyoko, Komura and Katagiri, influenced by their visions of earthquakes – which are manifested as evil willow trees, giant earthworms, secret vows, mysterious boxes and a dark, endless corridor – attempt to rediscover their true selves.

Production notes

The work of novelist Haruki Murakami seems to be finding new life on screen with increasing frequency. Lee Changdong's *Burning* (2018) revelled in the ambiguity of its source text through the alluring but intentionally opaque performances of its actors, while Ryūsuke Hamaguchi expanded one Murakami short story (and drew from several others) for his three-hour film *Drive My Car* (2021). Despite operating in a different medium with different narrative priorities, director Pierre Földes takes a not dissimilar approach to Hamaguchi, interlinking separate short stories from Murakami's collection *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* and folding them into loosely connected vignettes.

Set in Tokyo in 2011, in the wake of the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami but before the aftershocks, the film follows its group of characters as a 'very big earthquake, even worse than the one that struck last week' threatens the city – at least, according to a giant anthropomorphic frog. The stories begin together before diverging into separate chapters, their characters connected by nightmare. Two businessmen are haunted by disturbing dreams – of being trapped in stark, collapsing corridors, of being eaten whole by giant worms disguising themselves as commuter trains. These sequences immediately present an interesting visual tension which runs throughout the film, as Földes contrasts the surrealism of these nightmares with the naturalism of its quasi-rotoscoped acting. The existential crisis of each character leads to conversations with others that bring up long anecdotes, references to films,

books and more, each tale containing stories within stories. The Russian doll approach to narrative suits *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*: it visually leans into the surreality often found in Murakami's stories, visualising his idiosyncrasies by exploring different variations on its art style.

Földes flirts with psychological horror as he conjures different textures, flashbacks bringing with them changes in the style of lines and colouring. The film feels malleable and unbound from reality – we see one man drawn through swirling scribbles, the lines then detaching themselves from him and turning into the crest of a wave. But the distinctive animation lends realism to the volume and movement of the characters' bodies.

Though some of the animation can seem a little rough, for the most part it's gorgeous, the beautiful layouts and compositions filled with fascinating detail. Translucent lines and rough crosshatched textures throughout the background art give the film both tactility and a touch of ephemerality. It's a perfect embodiment of its combination of realist elements and strange visions, historical concerns and waking dreams. The film's directness and its dry sense of humour – brought out most of all through the editing and tongue-in-cheek superimpositions – make *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* an invigorating translation of writing to the animated form.

Kambole Campbell, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound, 19 September 2022

Pierre Földes

A consummate artist, Pierre Földes is a director, composer and painter. Born in the United States to a Hungarian father and British mother, Pierre Földes, nominated for an Oscar and a César winner, grew up in Paris where he studied piano and composition. He began his career in New York composing music for film and advertising before moving to Europe. Fascinated by drawing and animation, he has written and directed several short films by adapting a production pipeline to his idea of film. He has thus developed his own unique and personal style and technique.

BLIND WILLOW, SLEEPING WOMAN

Directed by: Pierre Földes

Production Companies: Miyu Productions, Cinéma Defacto, Doghouse Films, micro_scope, Productions L'Unité Centrale, Studio MA

Produced by: Pierre Baussaron, Tom Dercourt, Emmanuel-Alain Raynal, Pierre Urbain, David Mouraire, Luc Déry, Kim McCraw, Gailllé Marion-Gauvin, Antoine Coutant, Pierre Földes, Josst de Vries

Line Producer: Tanguy Olivier

Written by: Pierre Földes

Based on short stories of: Haruki Murakami

Production Designer: Pierre Földes

Cinematography: Etienne Bollard

Edited by: Kara Blake

Artistic Direction: Julien De Man

Animation Supervisor: Julien Maret

Composition Supervisor: Mathieu Tremblay

Original Music: Pierre Földes

Sound Design: Matthew Földes

Mixing: Michel Schillings

Voice cast

Ryan Bommarito (*Komura*)

Shoshana Wilder (*Kyoko*)

Marcello Arroyo (*Katagiri*)

Scott Humphrey (*Sasaki*)

Arthur Holden (*Mr Suzuki*)

Pierre Földes (*Frog*)

France/Luxembourg/Canada/Netherlands 2022

108 mins

Courtesy of Modern Films

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

UK Premiere: Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman + intro with director

Pierre Földes

Mon 6 Feb 20:45

Preview: Joyland + Q&A

Wed 8 Feb 18:00

Spike Lee in Conversation

Mon 13 Feb 18:15

Summer of Sam + Introduction by Spike Lee

Mon 13 Feb 20:35

BFI Future Film Festival

16-19 Feb

Preview: Subject + Q&A with director Camilla Hall and contributor

Margaret Ratliff

Fri 17 Feb 18:10

Preview: The Strays + Q&A

Mon 20 Feb 18:15

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Shadow + intro and discussion

Wed 8 Feb 18:20

Art in the Making: Edward Hopper + intro by Steven Foxon, Curator

BFI National Archive + Night Work

Thu 9 Feb 18:30

African Odysseys: Free Renty: Lanier v. Harvard + intro and Q&A

Sat 11 Feb 14:00

Silent Cinema: Neil Brand Presents Laurel and Hardy

Sun 12 Feb 16:00

Woman with a Movie Camera: Galentine's Day: The Parent Trap 25th

Anniversary

Mon 13 Feb 20:15

Projecting the Archive: I'll Get You for This (aka Lucky Nick Cain) +

intro by Rosie Taylor, Curatorial Archivist, BFI National Archive

Tue 21 Feb 18:20

Experimenta: Right of Way + Q&A with artists Dan Guthrie, Ufuoma

Essi and Arjuna Neuman, hosted by Jonathan Ali

Thu 23 Feb 18:10

Film Wallahs: Kekee Manzil: House of Art

Fri 24 Feb 20:40

Course: Filmmaking for Artists: Beginners Filmmaking Workshop

Sun 26 Feb 10:30-16:30

Relaxed Screening: Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-jō) + intro and

discussion

Mon 27 Feb 18:15

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