

“Flow”: A Win for Inspired Storytelling

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The winner of a Golden Globe and now an Academy Award, the Latvian indie film “Flow” (2024) illustrates that evocative storytelling trumps expensive film production.

In animation, expensive movies take the crown. Just look at the Academy Awards of past years—up until recently, Disney has dominated the field of animation. Two of the critically acclaimed Studio Ghibli’s works have charmed voting members enough to earn the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in their respective years, compared to 15 of Disney’s. Most studios can’t afford to mass produce films the way that Disney can (and certainly not to the same visual caliber).

While wealthy corporations deplete their creative stores and fall back on tired tropes, sequels, and formulaic plots catered to the lowest common denominator, artists and writers can celebrate a victory for original work, now threatened by the advancement of artificial intelligence, through Blender-produced “Flow.”

“Flow” is set in a world being submerged in water, a concept reminiscent of the threat posed by rising sea levels. A cat serves as the film’s protagonist. It’s not a talking cat, and it’s not surrounded by talking humans; the film runs entirely without spoken dialogue. The lack of speech erases shoe-horned quips and phony lines, exemplifying the merits of action over spoken word. This adds authenticity to the film, especially when so many films rely on insincere or perfunctory dialogue to advance the plot.

The animals’ non-anthropomorphic behavior contributes to “Flow”’s authenticity. The characters are depicted as animals rather than humans in animal bodies, demonstrating a value for non-human lives as they are. The film awakens viewers’ empathy for earth’s other creatures by following animals who behave unlike humans, but still possess concerns and emotions people can relate to. This is a rare approach for a film. In most movies, the animal-bodied characters are practically human with some quirky characteristics, or they are nature documentaries.

The main animals—a cat, capybara, lemur, secretary bird, and dog—are all different species from one another, but aboard the same boat. They each embody their own species, which brings about tension at points in the film, but they adapt to one another’s needs and behaviors regardless.

Humans, too, hail from a variety of backgrounds, and they express an array of personalities that contrast those of others. They can relate to being forced on a boat on which they have to coexist with beings different from themselves and find common ground—that’s just the reality of life.

It’s notable that “Flow” is an independent production and not another invention from a multi-billion dollar company. In addition to this, it was created with Blender, a free and open-source software for 3D graphics. This might be the gateway for more works of art from inspired creatives to make it big. In an ideal future, indie creators can successfully present stories motivated by dreams and big ideas without being limited by the constraints imposed on them by companies trying to make another buck.

Aside from being a success for indie creatives, “Flow” is a success for Latvia and other foreign filmmakers. While two animated productions, “Spirited Away” and “The Boy and the Heron,” have slipped through the cracks to gain recognition at the Oscars (the creations of the aforementioned Studio Ghibli), Best Animated Feature has been awarded almost entirely to U.S.-based films. “Flow” is only the third foreign film to have won this award, and it sets the precedent that future animated films don’t need to be produced by big American studios to interest global audiences—so long as the story is inspired and not another thinly veiled clone of past hits.

Photo: Gints Zilbalodis –

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/6zl3krb1vz16ubxu5nhmm/AF8ghXBey3zK5-Hvg03Y5AA?dl=0&e=1&preview=Flow_35.png&rlkey=w3monya3nyxnni0q5r8tn0q61