

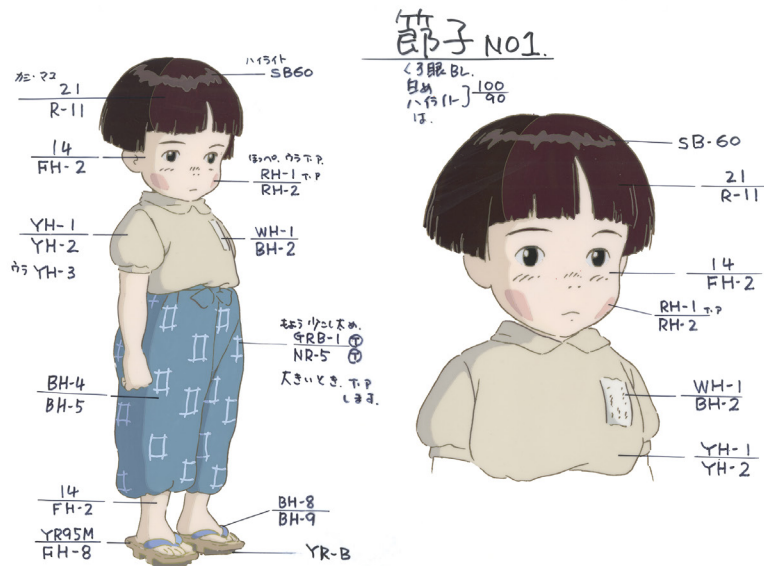


Isao Takahata

**A Pioneer of Contemporary Animation,
from the Post-war Era to Studio Ghibli**

24.04 – 27.09.2026

Page 3	Press release
Page 4-5	The exhibition 1. General presentation
Page 6	The exhibition 2. Isao Takahata, A Life and a Body of Work in Dialogue with the West
Page 7-8	The exhibition 3. Isao Takahata, biographical highlights
Page 9	At the same time at mudac
Page 10	Partners
Page 11	Practical information



Grave of the Fireflies © Akiyuki Nosaka / shinchosha, 1988

Isao Takahata
A Pioneer of Contemporary Animation,
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The exhibition dedicated to Isao Takahata celebrates one of the great masters of Studio Ghibli, whose work revolutionized animated cinema. The exhibition not only retraces the career of this remarkable director, but also presents a new section highlighting the special connections Isao Takahata maintained with Switzerland and the West, with particular emphasis on the series *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974).

Isao Takahata (1935–2018) is considered one of the great masters of world animation. A co-founder of Studio Ghibli alongside Hayao Miyazaki in 1985, he had, from the 1960s onward, built a body of work that was both demanding, poetic, and innovative. Through his deeply humanistic perspective, his sense of storytelling, and his formal boldness, Takahata renewed the language of animation, freeing it from its traditional conventions and elevating it into an art form in its own right—recognized for what he himself called “the invention of animated reality.”

At mudac, the exhibition traces the filmmaker's journey - from *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974) to *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* (2013) - through his notebooks and storyboards, original drawings, cels, film and video excerpts and audiovisual documents. It also highlights a lesser-known aspect: the privileged ties Takahata cultivated with the West throughout his life. From his intellectual formation to his role as a cultural mediator between East and West, and the remarkable accuracy with which he portrayed the European world in emblematic works such as *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974).

Curation	Kazuyoshi Tanaka (Studio Ghibli)
Scientific Advisory Team	Ilan Nguyễn (MEMA)
Exhibition design	Naoto Ishizu
Graphic design - exhibition	& d'eau fraîche - Mathilde Damour
Graphic design - communication	Office for Typography

1. General presentation

Starting Out

Isao Takahata joined Toei Animation in 1959 with the aim of becoming an animation director. As assistant director, he participated in such works as *The Orphan Brother* (1961) and *Little Prince And Eight Headed Dragon* (1963). His first project as a full director was the TV series, *Ken, The Wild Boy* (1963-1965). Takahata's outstanding skill and judgment in a newcomer were quickly recognized and Toei chose him to direct the studio's first full length animation film, *Little Norse Prince Valiant* (1968). This section focuses especially on the team production methods he tried out together with his colleagues and the process by which the story's complex world was constructed to understand why this film became so important in the history of Japanese animation.

Everyday Pleasures

Following his work with Toei Animation, Takahata explored new frontiers in a number of TV series including *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974), *From The Apennines to The Andes (Marco)* (1976), and *Anne of Green Gables* (1979). Despite the time constraints involved in having to complete an episode every week, Takahata created lively human dramas, which unfolded in a total of 52 stories per year, by devising ingenious artistic expressions and carefully depicting aspects of everyday life such as food, clothing, shelter, and nature. The storyboards, layouts, and backgrounds, made with a team that consisted of Hayao Miyazaki, Yoichi Kotabe, Yoshifumi Kondo, Masahiro Ioka, and Takamura Mukuo, provide us with important insights into Takahata's directorial approach.



Pom Poko ©1994 Isao Takahata/Studio Ghibli, NH

1. General presentation



The Tale of The Princess Kaguya © 2013 Isao Takahata, Riko Sakaguchi / Studio Ghibli, NDHDMT

Looking at Japanese Culture

Beginning with films such as *Downtown Story* (1981) and *Gauche the Cellist* (1982), Takahata came to specialize in works set in Japan, vividly depicting the country's regional climate and culture, and the reality of ordinary people's lives. This approach came to fruition in works that focused on contemporary Japanese history such as *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), *Only Yesterday* (1991), and *Pom Poko* (1994), produced by Studio Ghibli, the company that Takahata helped form in 1985. Here, we focus on the use of narratives that recount Japanese people's experiences during and after World War II within the context of the contemporary era, and the development of the theme of the satoyama (semi-natural rural areas where people and nature form interdependent relationships).

Lively Sketches

Takahata was an insatiable explorer of animation as a form of expression. Immersing himself in researching picture scrolls and uncovering the Japanese tradition of visual culture in the 1990s, Takahata continued to investigate new styles of animated expression, marked by a unification of human figures and backgrounds. This resulted in works such as *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (1999) and *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* (2013). Setting himself new challenges by adopting a watercolor style of depiction, which was realized through the use of digital technology to accentuate hand-drawn lines, Takahata developed an approach that was distinctly different from traditional cel-based animation. These efforts provide insight into the alchemy of Takahata's imagery, bolstered by his extensive knowledge of art.

2. Isao Takahata, A Life and a Body of Work in Dialogue with the West



Heidi, Girl of the Alps, 1974 © Studio 100 International

This part of the exhibition explores Isao Takahata's decisive relationship with the West, particularly the French-speaking world. It retraces his discovery of Prévert's poetic realism – a foundation of both his aesthetic and political engagement – and presents his in-depth research into *The Shepherdess and The Chimney-Sweep* (1953), through original documents that shed light on the origins of his vocation. It then examines the unprecedented challenge of adapting classic Western stories into animation (Heidi, Marco, Anne), combining ethnographic rigour with documentary ambition. Finally, it highlights Takahata's exchanges with Western artists (Grimault, Ocelot, Back, Norstein and many others), his influence on world animation and his major role in establishing animated film as a recognised art form. This journey illustrates the importance of sustained cultural exchange, portraying Takahata as a key figure in intercultural dialogue and a source of inspiration across borders.

Curators for the new section at mudac

Xavier Kawa-Topor (NEF-Animation)
Ilan Nguyễn (MEMA)

3. Isao Takahata, biographical highlights

29 October 1935	He was born in Ujyamada (now Ise), Mie Prefecture, Japan.
1943-1945	Isao Takahata spent part of his childhood in Okayama and survived the bombing of the city in June 1945.
1954	He entered the University of Tōkyō, majoring in French literature.
1955	The Japanese release of <i>The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep</i> by Paul Grimault left a deep impression on him; he saw the film several times in theaters.
1959	He joined Tōei Animation.
1964-1965	He directed twelve episodes of the animated series <i>Ken, The Wild Boy</i> .
1968	He directed his first feature film, <i>Little Norse Prince Valiant</i> .
1974	He directed all 52 episodes of the animated series <i>Heidi, Girl of the Alps</i> .



Portrait of Isao Takahata © Yasuo Otsuka

3. Isao Takahata, biographical highlights

1985	He co-founded Studio Ghibli with Hayao Miyazaki and Toshio Suzuki.
1988	He directed <i>Grave of the Fireflies</i> .
1991	He directed <i>Only Yesterday</i> .
1994	He directed <i>Pom Poko</i> (which won the Grand Prize for Feature Film at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival the following year).
1999	He directed <i>My Neighbors the Yamadas</i> .
2009	Honorary Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival.
2013	He directed <i>The Tale of The Princess Kaguya</i> , which received international critical acclaim and an Academy Award nomination.
2014	Honorary Cristal at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival.
5 April 2018	He passed away in Tōkyō at the age of 82.

What about us? 24.04 – 27.09.2026

mudac hosts a vibrant menagerie, showcasing more than 300 glass animals from the Pierre Rosenberg Collection. Beyond the technical skill of the glass artists, the exhibition explores our ambivalent relationship with the living world. The diversity of forms and expressions attributed to these animals reveals not only our curiosity and desire to understand wildlife, but also our impulse to control its image and domestication.

Collected by Pierre Rosenberg - renowned art historian and honorary director of the Louvre Museum - since the 1960s, through an intuitive and subjective approach, these pieces testify to a fascination with glass animals and to the legacy of three generations of Venetian artists. This bestiary appears stylised, frozen in glass, yet always imbued with a strong and distinctive personality.

Press kit and HD visuals available for download on mudac.ch/presse

Curation	Amélie Bannwart
Scientific collaboration	Diane Maechler
Exhibition design	Nathalie Opris
Graphic design - communication	Enen Studio



Fox terrier, Barovier & Toso, 1947

Courtesy LE STANZE DEL VETRO © Enrico Fiorese

Partners of the exhibition

With special support by Studio Ghibli

Produced in collaboration with NHK Promotions Inc.

With cooperation of The Tokuma Memorial Cultural Foundation for Animation,
SHINCHOSHA Publishing Co., Ltd.



Cultural partner

 **cinémathèque suisse**

Main partners for the construction



Press visit of the two exhibitions

Wednesday 22 April 2026, from 2 pm

Exhibition opening

Thursday 23 April 2026

Tickets options

Visitors are invited to take advantage of the "1 ticket-3 museums" offer to visit all the exhibitions at Plateforme 10. Valid for 3 months.

- Full price: CHF 25
- Reduced price: CHF 19
- Duo (visit for two): CHF 38
- Free for under-26s

Free admission on the first Saturday of the month

Media contact

Sylvie Rottmeier

Head of Marketing - Communication

T +41 21 318 43 59

E presse.mudac@plateforme10.ch

Press

Press kit and HD images available for download at the address:
mudac.ch/presse

mudac

museum of Contemporary Design and Applied Arts
Plateforme 10, Quartier des arts
Place de la Gare 17, CH - 1003 Lausanne

+ 41 21 318 44 00
mudac.ch
mudac@plateforme10.ch

@mudaclausanne
#mudaclausanne

Opening hours

Monday	10 am – 6 pm
Tuesday	Closed
Wednesday	10 am – 6 pm
Thursday	10 am – 8 pm
Friday	10 am – 6 pm
Saturday	10 am – 6 pm
Sunday	10 am – 6 pm

Cover visual:
Heidi © Studio 100 International
