

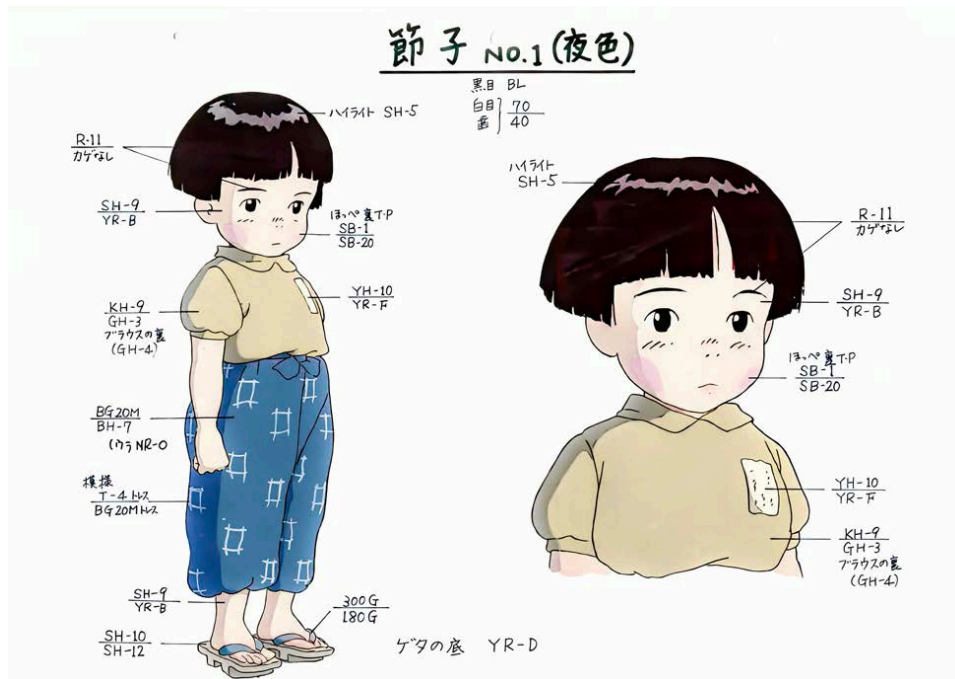


Isao Takahata

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

24.04 – 27.09.2026

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Grave of the Fireflies © Akiyuki Nosaka/Shinchosha, 1988

Isao Takahata
A Pioneer of Contemporary Animation,
from the Post-war Era to Studio Ghibli
24.04 – 27.09.2026

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	Ishizu Naoto
Graphic design - exhibition	& d'eau fraîche - Mathilde Damour
Graphic design - communication	Office for Typography

The exhibition

1. General presentation

A Passion for Animated Film

In 1959, Isao Takahata joined Tōei Animation with the ambition of becoming an animation director. He worked as assistant director on the feature films *Anju and Zushiō-maru* (1961) and *The Little Norse Prince Valiant* (1963). He made his directorial debut on episodes of the television series *Ken the Wolf Boy* (1963–1965). His skills and artistic sensibility—remarkable for a beginner—were recognized, and he was chosen to direct his first theatrical feature: *The Great Adventure of Horus, Prince of the Sun* (1968). This first section highlights the collective production methods he developed with his colleagues, the process of constructing a complex narrative world, and the reasons why this film represents a major milestone in the history of Japanese animation.

The Joys of Everyday Life

After leaving Tōei Animation, Takahata broke new ground with several television series that became classics: first *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974), then *From The Apennines to The Andes* (1976) and *Anne of Green Gables* (1979). Despite the demanding schedule of completing one episode per week, the team demonstrated remarkable formal ingenuity in meticulously depicting every aspect of daily life—clothing, food, housing, as well as relationships with nature—thus creating a deeply human and emotionally resonant drama across more than 50 episodes per series during a year of broadcast. The collaborative work with Hayao Miyazaki, Yōichi Kotabe, Yoshifumi Kondō, Masahiro Ioka, and Mukuo Takamura is explored in this second section through storyboards, layouts, background art, and other materials, shedding light on the secrets of Takahata's approach to directing.



Pom Poko © 1994 Isao Takahata/Studio Ghibli, NH



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

Perspectives on Japanese Culture

Beginning with the films *Jarinko Chie* (1981) and *Gauche the Cellist* (1982), Takahata turned his focus to stories set in Japan, seeking to capture with authenticity the natural environment and the everyday lives of ordinary people. Within Studio Ghibli, which he helped found in 1985, this approach led to a series of films offering a perspective on contemporary Japanese history: *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), *Only Yesterday* (1991), and *Pom Poko* (1994). These works notably feature a narrative style that reinterprets the experiences of the Japanese people during and after the war in continuity with the present day, as well as a thematic exploration of *sato-yama*—the transitional zones between wild nature and human habitation, a rural landscape shaped by human intervention.

Sketches Full of Life

Takahata was a tireless explorer of animated forms. In the 1990s, he immersed himself in the study of ancient painted scrolls (*emakimono*), bringing renewed attention to an entire tradition of Japanese visual culture, and continually sought a new animation style in which characters and backgrounds would merge into a single entity. *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (1999) and *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* (2013) represent the culmination of this research. Embracing the challenge of a drawn style reminiscent of watercolor, and making full use of digital technologies to breathe life back into the brushstroke, he achieved the feat of establishing a visual language radically different from the classic look of cel animation. The final stage of the exhibition invites viewers to discover the alchemy of Takahata's images, rooted in his profound knowledge of the art world.

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



Heidi, Girl of the Alps © 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

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

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 Wolf Boy</i> .
1968	He directed his first feature film, <i>The Great Adventure of Horus, Prince of the Sun</i> .
1974	He directed all 52 episodes of the animated series <i>Heidi, Girl of the Alps</i> .



Portrait of Isao Takahata

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.



© Locarno Film Festival

Locarno Film Festival

For eight decades, the Locarno Film Festival has positioned itself at the forefront of the international film festival circuit, championing both the works of established filmmakers and the creations of emerging talents. Nestled in the heart of the Swiss Alps with a breathtaking view of majestic Lake Maggiore, the city of Locarno transforms each August, for eleven days, into the world capital of auteur cinema. Film lovers can enjoy the program in the calm and focus of a movie theater or under the starry sky of the Piazza Grande - an impressive open-air cinema that can host that can host thousands of spectators per evening and is considered one of the largest open-air cinemas in the world.

Over the decades, the Festival has paid tribute to many figures from the world of cinema, including Isao Takahata, animator and director, who was honored in 2009. The Locarno Film Festival is pleased to celebrate him once again on the occasion of the retrospective dedicated to him by Plateforme 10 and mudac.



© Nicolas Prahin

La Cinémathèque suisse

Founded in 1948, the Swiss Film Archive is recognized as one of the most important film archives in the world due to the scope, diversity, and quality of its collections. In order to highlight this exceptional cultural heritage, the institution offers monthly retrospectives, tributes, and thematic series in Lausanne, and organizes numerous events featuring personalities from the world of cinema.

In collaboration with mudac, the Swiss Film Archive presents the retrospective Isao Takahata: *The Spirit of Ghibli* on the occasion of the exhibition that the Lausanne museum is dedicating to the Japanese filmmaker. His greatest works will be screened at the Capitole, from *Pom Poko* to *Grave of the Fireflies*, as well as episodes from the series *Heidi*, *Girl of the Alps* and *Panda! Go, Panda!*. A program designed for both children and adults.

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
Film	Tapio Snellman



Barovier & Toso, *Fox terrier*, 1947

Courtesy LE STANZE DEL VETRO © Enrico Fiorese

Find all the events and conferences related to the exhibition, as well as practical information, prices and registration details at mudac.ch.

Opening night of the film cycle *The Spirit of Ghibli* at the Cinémathèque suisse
Saturday, May 2 at 8:30 pm

To open the cycle dedicated to Isao Takahata, the Swiss Cinematheque is collaborating with mudac to present a special evening at the Capitole, featuring a screening of *Pom Poko* (1994), introduced by Marco Costantini, director of mudac.

- Registration required

Illustrated concert – Night Train in the Milky Way
Sunday, May 3, 4–5 pm

Plateforme 10 and BDFIL present an illustrated concert inspired by *Night Train in the Milky Way*, the cult work by Kenji Miyazawa (1927). Travel through live illustrations by Adrien Demont, accompanied by ambient/post-rock soundscapes by Takuma Shindo.

- Free, no registration required

Discovery afternoon: animals and glass
Saturday, May 30, 2–5:30 pm

Sonja Bischofberger will introduce you to torch-based glass sculpture, and you will also have the opportunity to try balloon sculpting to create small creatures. Micro-tours of the exhibition *What about us?* are also part of the program.

- No registration required

Introductory manga workshop
Saturday, June 13, 2–4 pm

Learn how to draw manga characters. Artists and professionals from the Cordeb'Art school will guide you through this visual style and its techniques.

- Registration required

Fête de la Musique “spécial Japon”
Sunday, June 21, 12–6 pm

As part of its exhibition dedicated to Isao Takahata, co-founder of Studio Ghibli, mudac invites you to celebrate music at Plateforme 10 and discover local artists inspired by Japan.

- Free, no registration required

Open-air Locarno Film Festival
Sunday, July 12 to Saturday, July 18

For its fifth edition, the open-air event organized by the Locarno Film Festival and Plateforme 10 celebrates the legacy of this genius of Japanese animation with an exceptional program.

- Free, no registration required

Origami workshop
Saturday, August 29, 2–4 pm

Inspired by the world of the great master of Japanese animation, learn the art of origami. You will create traditional paper foldings with the guidance of artist Akiko Kikutani Amiguet.

- Registration required

Lecture by Claude Hauser: “Heidi between Alpine Switzerland and Japan: what story lies behind the icon?”
Thursday, September 10, 6–7 pm

Throughout the 20th century, Heidi appears as a central figure in the circulation of images of Alpine Switzerland in Japan. Claude Hauser, professor of contemporary history at the University of Fribourg, explores this influence on tourism and Swiss-Japanese exchanges.

- Free, registration required

Partners of the exhibition

With special support from:
Studio Ghibli

Produced in collaboration with:
NHK Promotions Inc.

With the participation of:
The Tokuma Memorial Cultural Foundation for Animation, SHINCHOSHA Publishing Co., Ltd.



Cultural partners

**Locarno
Film Festival**

 **cinémathèque suisse**

Main partners for the construction



Press visit

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

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Press

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

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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
