

NATHALIE
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ANIME THROUGH THE
LOOKING
GLASS

TREASURES OF
JAPANESE ANIMATION

PRESTEL

MUNICH · LONDON · NEW YORK

鏡の國のアニメ

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INTRODUCTION

Dragon Ball, Naruto, One Piece, etc. Readers and spectators from all over the world are fascinated by anime. Despite globalization and the cultural domination of the United States and Coca-Cola, Japanese anime has made its way into our homes, as we move away from animated cartoons on the long-established television channels toward Netflix, which drastically increased its catalog of *japanimation* at the height of the pandemic. The influence of manga, which offers a reservoir of stories for animated movies, is dizzying. English-based and even Franco-Belgian comic strips, such as *Tintin* and *Asterix*, have been successful for decades, but the new generation has adopted the rites of the original geeks: reading from right to left and a taste for typically Japanese storylines. Initially a subculture reserved for just a few aficionados, the imaginary world of the Land of the Rising Sun has since earned its privileged status and has spread to all media: paper, video games, television series, cinema, and merchandise.

Beyond these fashion trends, the world of anime is much more prolific, colorful, and tormented than the caricature of the 1980s, when Japanese animators

produced *UFO Robo Grendizer*, *Candy*, and *Knights of the Zodiac* for children to watch after school. More so than *Fist of the North Star*, portrayed by French politician Ségolène Royal as a form of pornography of violence. Supposedly mindless products, capable of corrupting young souls raised on watching talking animals, pastel colors and Walt Disney's happily-ever-after fictions. Its detractors had not perceived the inventiveness of this art form that eagerly devoured all subjects. Far from appealing to only children, Japan has forged extremely high-quality animation for adults through its rich, unapologetically experimental, and sometimes offensive aesthetics. One after another, original creations followed, from *Akira* (1988) by Katsuhiro Ôtomo to *Your Name* (2016) by Makoto Shinkai, passing through the masterpieces of Studio Ghibli. These works are both pivotal and instrumental in the recognition of this film style in the West.

Free from the physical constraints of live-action movies, anime interweaves narrative layers while playing with the imaginary. A true visual feast, it is a laboratory of human experience and a kaleidoscope of the soul,

multiplying the levels of reality. Its graphic debauchery, as well as its poetic purity, acutely seize the failings of society and materialize intangible emotions. Its creativity is boundless, from the apocalyptic tone that runs through its futuristic dystopias, such as in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) by Mamoru Oshii, to the fantastic universes immortalized by Hayao Miyazaki, not to mention the elegiac realism of Isao Takahata and the spiritual threads that run through his work. These are registers that interweave to capture the metamorphoses of reality and the endless nuances of feelings. Rich in initiatory tales, Japanese animation is a wonderland, sometimes nightmarish, that takes the viewer to the other side of the mirror in order to better examine social, political, and environmental issues. A mirror that distorts—whether futuristic, poetic, or hyperrealistic—and never fails to sanctify the spirituality of nature through the grace of a traced line or a particular movement. A journey to the land of Japanese animation is, therefore, necessary to unfold its thematic wealth, its forceful narratives, and its aesthetic crossroads, where it displays its full emotional and reflective range.

鏡の国のリリス

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