

La Maison en Petits Cubes

(22101089)

“La Maison en Petits” or “The House of Small Cubes” is a 2008 Japanese animated short film created by Kunio Katō, with music by Kenji Kondo and animated by Oh! Production. If you enjoy art films and have 12 minutes to spare in your hectic schedule, you must treat yourself with this one after reading the review. It is a figurative and emotional investigation into everything that goes behind an apparently pointless old man's existence. This was one of only two animes to ever win an Oscar, along with the 2008 Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film among numerous other awards.

In what seems like a town where continuous flooding causes water levels to rise on a regular basis, an elderly widowed man must frequently construct additional levels to his house to stay above water. The only connection between the new and old levels is a small square shaped hatch. One day, when he mistakenly drops his favorite smoking pipe into the lower underwater levels of his house, his search for the pipe leads him to relive scenes from his eventful life, including the time before the flooding began. The old man descends further and further into his past as he explores each level of his home. He initially experiences some heartwarming memories of his late wife. The framed photos on his walls reveal how much he treasures her memory; these flashbacks can simply be written off as typical reminiscences for a guy of his age. As he investigates the lower levels and moves further back in time, he comes across how he raised his daughter and how she eventually grew up starting her own family, all the way down to the point where he first met the love of his life and the foundation was laid. It's a pyramidal structure overall that represents the decline of the old man's life. The remaining little chunk sticking above the water makes the old man's existence look insignificant to the outside world right now.

What I liked most about this film is that it despite having no dialogues at all, it explores how time has an enduring impact on people's lives. Along with the gloomy art style and music that just fits right in, this short film delivers bold and clear message to its audiences. As you proceed through the film, the atmosphere keeps getting more effective.

Even though this short film was made solely in Japan, it looks nothing like the mainstream anime we know. It seems to be heavily influenced by French art style. Instead of flashy and attractive colors, the crayon-like drawing and choppy animation fulfills the imprint the director had intended to leave on our minds. To some viewers, it may appear as a sketchbook. Then again, this style not fully uncommon but may appear boring to some. Just through the dull colors shifting, we get a strong sense of the moving timeline of the past in this film. And then it's backed up by purposefully crafted piano, violin and guitar strings which is just cherry on the top, further aiding the visuals to be more impactful. The social messages this short film might create in someone's head can be – Global warming, how the rising sea level might one day take everything from us. But at the same time, the flood can appear purely metaphorical, to reassemble the buried memories of an old man. How people at their last stage of life deals with a topic that we all must eventually face unless we die young. What only remains is a good memory as the curtains close.

In conclusion, this is a brilliant short film that everyone should experience at least once in life. It might take you through a nostalgia tour, sad or bitter memories probably you never even had, it's that powerful. It conveys in either way that the rule of nature is different to none, and eventually we all have to accept it.