



Presents

IRON BOY

A film by Louis Clichy

90 mins, France, Belgium, 2026

Language: French with English Subtitles

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Synopsis

In rural France, Christophe (11) tries to live up to his rigid, distant father on the family farm. But the young boy starts to lean over and collapse without warning, on the tractor, at school, at dinner.

A doctor finds the solution: Christophe must wear an iron corset to keep himself upright. Forced to reinvent his life away from the farm, he discovers a new passion for music, meets a new friend, and follows her into his first mischief. But will any of this really fix what is out of balance?





Louis Clichy

Born in 1979 and originally from the Beauce region, Louis Clichy trained in animation at the École des Gobelins in Paris. He began his career as an animator at Pixar, working on Wall-E (2008) and Up (2009). He then co-directed with Alexandre Astier Asterix: The Land of the Gods (2014), followed by Asterix: The Secret of the Magic Potion (2018), which was nominated for the César Award for Best Animated Film.

Iron Boy is his first feature film as a solo director. After many years devoted to 3D animation, the film presents a highly personal style, characterised by ink line drawing that returns to the spirit of Mange and À QUOI ÇA SERT L'AMOUR ?, his early short films.

Interview

with Louis Clichy

How did you come to animation?

As a child, I fell in love with animation, and that love never left me, not in my teenage years, not as an adult. I eventually had to accept making it my career.

What appeals to me first in animation is the approach to sound and music; I work on these very early in the process. That actually brings me much closer to live-action filmmaking than to comics.

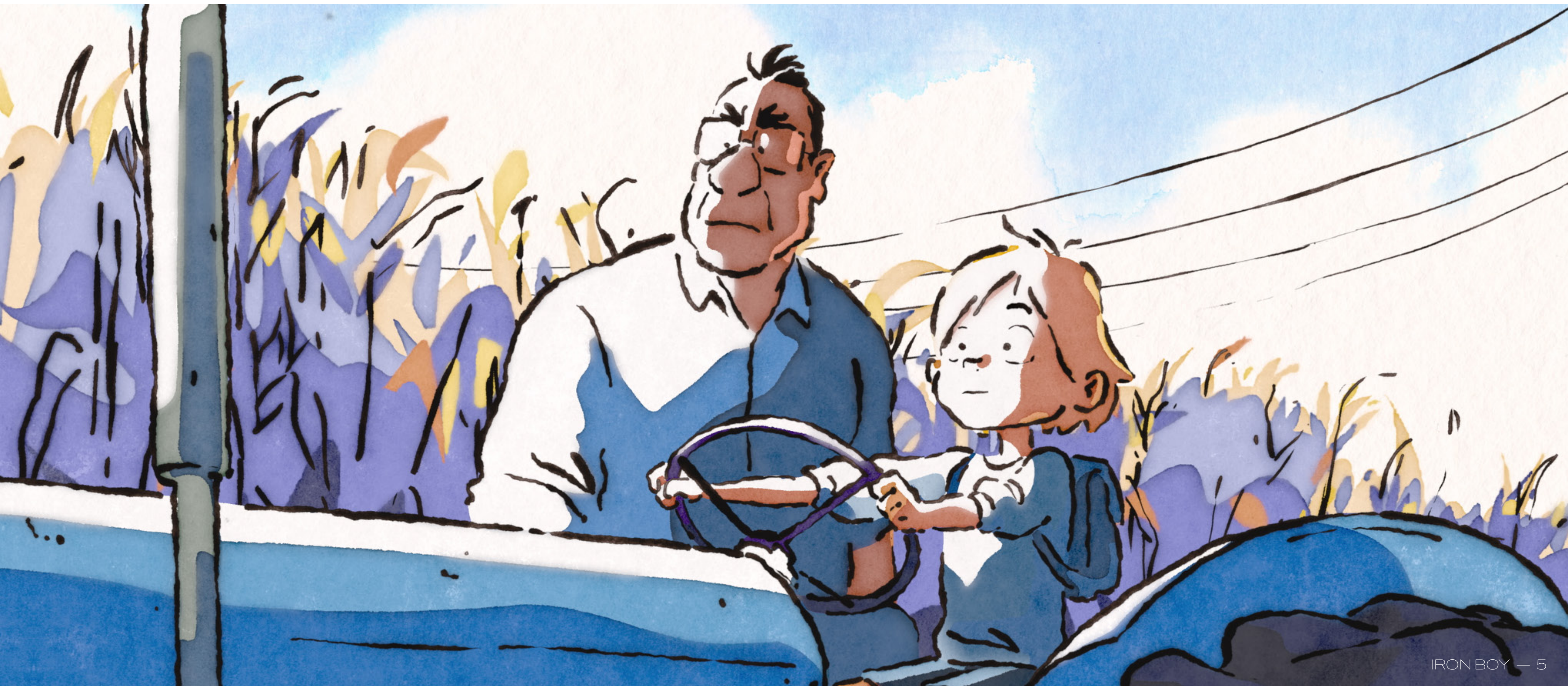
After your collaboration with Pixar and several co-directing credits, *IRON BOY* is your first solo feature. How did the character of Christophe come to life?

To write Christophe, I drew on my own childhood, but also on the childhoods of people I knew at the time.

So while there is certainly something of me in him, he is above all a blend of people I have known, family members, and, without fully realising it, many films.

He is a character I wanted to keep mysterious. You don't understand everything that happens to him right away, but piece by piece, as the film unfolds.

The family reticence he has inherited slowly loosens, and he begins to find his voice. I also wanted him to be slight and unremarkable, not the stereotypical farm boy, but not a completely withdrawn kid either.



You wrote the screenplay in collaboration with Franck Salomé. How did the writing process unfold?

Working with Franck was very interesting. I had the foundations of the story, which remained those of the finished film, but he brought important structural improvements. He also injected more life into the characters and deepened them, particularly Clara. Under his influence she became this alter ego, alongside the organist character.

In what way is this story personal?

I am from the Beauce region in France, and I wanted to talk about it. I lived there until I was ten, my father was a farmer. I can't say I had a very happy childhood there, and after my parents' divorce I became a city-dweller. But I keep a very particular affection for that region.

It is also a territory rarely represented in cinema or literature, probably because it doesn't match the image of an ideal countryside. It is a highly productive region, with a flat landscape, heavily exploited. Those constraints were precisely what interested me.

The story is also personal because I wore a corset, and still wear one today. I wanted to bear witness to that experience, but also to have some fun with it, to make it something almost fantastical, as if the corseted body became a doorway into the imagination.



You treat the characters with tenderness while also showing the underlying family unease. How did you approach that?

It is hard to be fully conscious of everything. I feel some things without being able to put into words, they come from the instinct of drawing. Others are very deliberately crafted. I particularly enjoyed developing certain sequences, especially the argument scenes.

In this still-traditional rural world, speaking openly is not easy, introspection is impossible, feelings are taboo. It is fertile ground for the unspoken and for frustration.

Phrases like 'I'm angry' or 'I have feelings for you' are never uttered. Everything passes through silences, through apparently trivial gestures that ultimately reveal buried emotions, like giving your son an overly extravagant present because you don't know how to talk to him.

Christophe is in Year 5 when the film opens. How old is he by the end? And in that span of time, what did you want to capture about adolescence?

Christophe is eleven when the film opens, and in his second year of middle school by the end I'm fairly flexible about how old he appears, whether because a scene calls for him to seem younger or older, or simply because of the way he is drawn. I liked leaving that freedom to the animators. By the end he looks older still, but that's fine, it feels like an opening onto his adult life.

What interested me above all was that transition, which I find deeply mysterious, from childhood to adolescence. You feel a desire for elsewhere, a longing for something

other, new impulses, while still clinging to the things of childhood. A kind of innocence survives, but it is destined to fade.

The corset then becomes the expression of a body in transformation, one we are not yet comfortable with. I found it interesting to explore that metamorphosis, intensified by this physical constraint. By definition, entering adolescence is already a physiological constraint.

Alongside Christophe's experiences, we also follow Clara. Who is she and what role does she play beside him?

This encounter with Clara is a little like a stroke of fate. She is older, more streetwise, more independent. Her family world is never shown, and nothing would suggest she could be interested in a kid like Christophe.

But she defies appearances and becomes a kind of initiator for him, opening his eyes to the world. Their meeting gives rise to a very strong bond, a romantic one, and then she leaves his life just as she arrived, like a fatality.

The film looks at the farming world. Do you have a particular point of view on agriculture?

It's complicated, but yes, the film does start from a desire to tell the story of the agricultural world and the upheavals it went through from the post-war years to the 1980s. During the writing, however, that story was taking up too much space. I realised I was losing Christophe's point of view and drifting away from the family's more intimate stakes by lingering on technical details. I also felt I was pushing at an open door, I wasn't adding much that hadn't

already been said about the excesses of productivist agriculture. So I tried to convey the changes through indirect means, through set details, through ellipses: the farmhouse gets a picture window, a century-old tree is cut down because it gets in the way of farm machinery...

In the film, we understand that this small farm is going to disappear, probably bought out by a larger operation that will exploit the land and leave the buildings to decay. That observation was what I wanted to capture and tell. At the start of the film this family lives off its animals and its compost, operating in a closed circuit where nothing is wasted and everything is transformed.

Then, through the cooperative, they discover heavy machinery and massive investment.

What I try to show is that nothing had prepared them for any of this.

But in both cases, I am telling the story of a family that is not entirely at ease in its environment.

So I am not really passing judgement. It is above all an observation of a deep-seated evolution that also transforms social customs.



When were the final voices recorded? How did directing the actors work?

The voices carry enormous importance for me, particularly on this film. In animation there is a culture of dubbing, with an expected kind of performance that locks the animation into a genre. Since the animator will base the characters' gestures on the dialogue, casting predictable voices only reinforces the sense of stereotype.

So we did a real shoot on a farm in the Beauce, with many non-professional actors from the region, with freedom in the dialogue and in the performances, sometimes rough-edged, not always perfect, but I liked that.

The idea was to make the whole thing fairly naturalistic, close to documentary. It was also, I think, the only way to avoid a heavy peasant twang that was almost a caricature, which would, once again, have pushed the animators to exaggerate the gestures. The idea was not to make a cartoon version of a French rural comedy.

Without idealising the rural landscape of the Beauce, the agricultural scenery is magnificent. How did you design the film's settings?

To design the settings, I went back to the Beauce for location scouting with Cécile Guillard, the film's art director. A good part of my family works in agriculture, so I had ways into farms and cooperatives, which allowed me to observe it all up close.

Finding the film's visual signature was not easy, because I didn't want to soften what the region actually is: a flat land with enormous power lines, rare patches of woodland, square enclosed farmsteads built to shelter from the wind. That aspect is revealing: it mirrors a kind of social withdrawal too.

I quickly realised that even though I was more comfortable in black and white, I would have to introduce colour, something vivid and fairly vibrant, because there were seasons to tell. Watercolour then seemed interesting to me: large white reserves, vast skies, a clean horizon line. The skies are what bring enormous richness to the image.



More broadly, how did you approach the film's colour palette and visual style?

The line, drawn with a Chinese ink brush, allows you to get to the essence of things and not lose yourself in a swarm of unnecessary details. It leaves room for authenticity, a certain truth of feeling. By its nature it is artisanal and perfectly suited to my subject matter, which is so rooted in gesture and in ancestral tradition. The choice of traditional animation makes it possible to exaggerate expressions when leaning toward cartoon, to make the unreal feel tangible when Christophe distorts reality, and at the same time to be delicate, using just a few lines to convey subtle emotions. Watercolour emphasises light in the image and, above all, it preserves the spontaneity of the gesture, to avoid at all costs the 'colouring-in' effect.

How has your work at Pixar (Wall-E, Up) and with Alexandre Astier on Asterix influenced the way you make animated films?

At Pixar, as with Alexandre Astier, story comes before everything else. It can be a trap to fall in love with a sequence or a character's design and want to keep it for the wrong reasons. I have tried to stay true to that lesson: it is the story that must drive every choice, including visual ones.

Alexandre Astier taught me a great deal about managing voices and working with actors. He also made me aware of the habitual reflexes animators can fall into, for example the compulsion to add smiles constantly, almost automatically. If you are also dealing with childhood and joyful things, the grin becomes obligatory. It can quickly turn saccharine. In Iron Boy I tried to avoid that.



We lean more towards observation and less towards projection, so that when a smile does arrive, it actually means something.

Two pieces of music are very important in the film: *Comme un ouragan* by Stéphanie de Monaco and the *Requiem in D minor* by Gabriel Fauré. How did you think about the place of music in the film?

Film music, when it is used to validate or reinforce an emotion, tends to irritate me. I am increasingly wary of it. I wanted to do without a score. That is not a choice I will always keep, but I wanted to try making this film almost exclusively with diegetic music. It is a staging challenge because there can be moments of silence, a risk of losing the audience, who are increasingly used to being led by the hand with a wall of strings. But it allows you to stay very close to the characters, since the audience ultimately hears only the music the characters themselves are hearing. It also gives full value to sound: sound effects, wind, engine noise, all of it was recorded and worked on to give the film physical presence.

Comme un ouragan by Stéphanie de Monaco is a kind of tribute to my three sisters, with whom I listened to it a great deal. I also find the song very well produced, it was a pleasure to use. The song is about a love story but its lyrics also carry a sense of fatalism, the hurricane, the force that sweeps you away, and that reflected something of what Christophe was going through.

The organ plays a predominant role in the film. It is an instrument chosen first for narrative reasons: with its pipes, pistons and pedals, it is something

of a counterpart to the tractor, which has become off-limits.

The organ is also an instrument available in every village, waiting desperately for someone to play it. In some ways it strikes me as more accessible than certain instruments, such as the piano, which carries a more bourgeois and urban connotation.

In terms of sound, the organ is very particular, without the nuances the piano offers. It was therefore necessary to find pieces that could be vehicles of narrative and emotion. By adding choral voices, as in Fauré's *Requiem*, I bring back sensitivity and align the music more closely with the mood of a scene or a character's state of mind. Fauré's music is heard at a concert and then 'slides' over the harvest sequence, functioning as a score, a departure from my own rule.

Louis Clichy



FOUR QUESTIONS

to Cécile Guillard,
Art Director

What was your role as art director on the film?

My role was to define the film's colour world in dialogue with Louis's pre-existing black line work. The designs (characters, environments) already existed, but colour gives us the possibility of amplifying certain emotions through more expressive lighting and colour choices.

For the backgrounds team, I worked with watercolour and coloured inks. We painted on paper, a fairly rare practice in animation today. For the characters, we sought to adopt a similar colouring logic so they would integrate as seamlessly as possible, even though they were drawn digitally.

After establishing the visual foundations with Louis, I also supervised the production of shots so that the aesthetic was respected and truly embraced by the artists at every stage of the pipeline.

How did your visual world connect with Louis Clichy's?

We both draw regularly, if not daily, in sketchbooks. Our drawings are spontaneous and intuitive. We were artistically on the same wavelength, both drawn to the vitality that watercolour brings.

The 'accidents' contributed to the style and led to unexpected colour compositions. We preferred the freedom and

expressiveness of an image over its technical precision. Line and colour therefore 'married' naturally.

What differences do you perceive between working in still images and working in animation?

I think the main difference lies in the fact that in animation we work as a team. Each person inherits the work done before them and will hand their section on to whoever comes next. You therefore have to be attentive to the clarity of your artistic intentions so that they are understood right through to the end of production.

My work in publishing is much more solitary, a 'short circuit': I don't need to explain what I want to do, everything stays in my head.

How do you achieve a coherent and singular visual identity when so many people are involved in a film?

You have to try to be as expressive and explicit as possible in your work, but above all, produce a great deal in advance.

Before the teams arrive, months of work are compiled to create a reference document, a kind of visual bible to guide the heads of department and the artists throughout production.

You therefore have to succeed in transmitting to dozens of people what you imagined alone, sometimes one or two years earlier, in an entirely empirical way. And then it is the follow-up work that must be assiduous: many meetings, video calls, emails, so that everyone moves in the same direction.

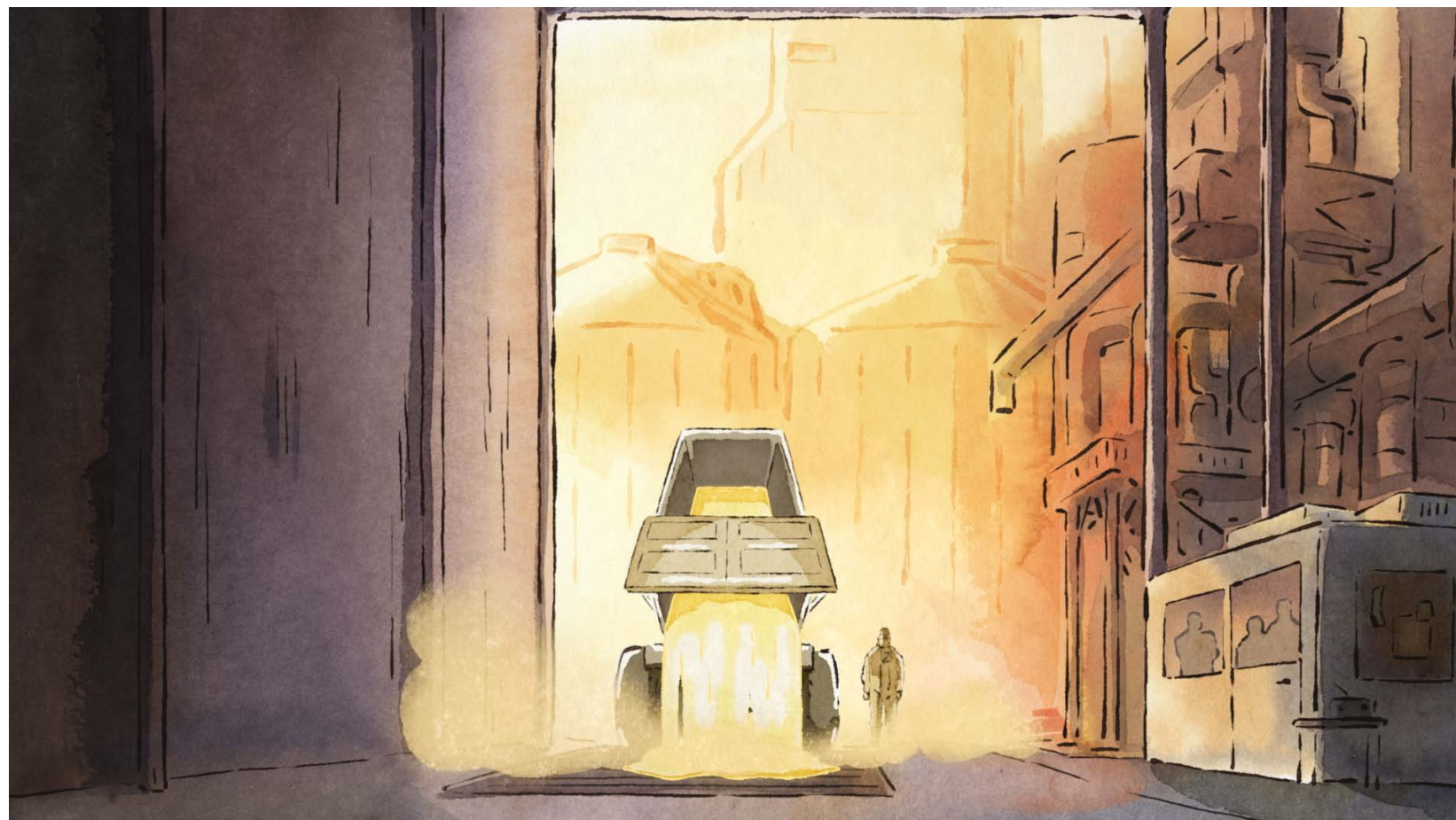


Chloë Aubert

Animation Director

Chloë Aubert began her career at 21 after studying at LTAM in Luxembourg and EMCA in Angoulême, where she directed two short films made entirely on paper, using watercolor, ink, and charcoal. Her passion for drawing has always been at the heart of her approach to animation. What draws her most to animation is the pursuit of truthful character acting: using the unique magic of animation to make a drawing feel alive and human. She is particularly interested in the relationships between characters, and in how drawing and graphic choices can express emotions, connections, and moments of intimacy in ways that live-action cannot.

Specializing in traditional 2D animation, she has worked across a wide range of projects, including six feature films such as *Long Way North*, *The Breadwinner*, and *Wolfwalkers*, as well as series such as *Splinter Cell* and Genndy Tartakovsky's *Unicorn Warriors Eternal*. Her experience across very different worlds has allowed her to explore the many possibilities of character acting and visual storytelling. As animation director on *Iron Boy*, she brings these experiences together, with drawing, character relationships, and the love of bringing movement to life at the center of her work.





CAST & CREW

With the voices of

Christophe Gary Clichy
JB Rod Paradot
Jean Dimitri Colas
Catherine Aurélie Vassort
Clara Brune Moulin
Michel Alexandre Astier
The Priest Jean-Pascal Zadi

Producers EDDY CINÉMA (France)
Céline Vanlint
Nicolas de Rosanbo

Co-producers BESIDE PRODUCTION (Belgium)
Fabrice Delville
Christophe Toulemonde

REGULAR PRODUCTION (France)
Agathe Sofer
Alexandre Astier

France 3 Cinéma
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
RTBF

Production manager Amaury Willemez

Screenplay Louis Clichy, Franck Salomé

Directed by Louis Clichy

First assistant director Louise Cailliez

Art direction & colorboard Cécile Guillard

Storyboard supervision Louis Clichy

Storyboard Cédric Guarneri, Nils Balleydier

Editor Vincent Tricon

Character & background design Louis Clichy

Artistic supervision Rémi Lelièvre

Background direction Nicolas Hu

Animation direction Chloë Aubert

Head of posing Philippe Rolland

Compositing direction Paul Jadoul

Colour grading David Chantoiseau

Sound mixer Olivier Guillaume

Sound editor Selim Azazi

Dialogue editing Quentin Romanet

Technical director Bruno Lelevier

Post-production director Rodolphe Ploquin

Animation studios Eddy Studio, Caribara,
Les Astronautes, Amopix,
L'enclume