**Hedgehog in the Fog (1975)**

*by* Yuri Norstein

_Hedgehog in the Fog_ is a landmark moment in animation. It is as loved in Russia, as it is adored by animation fans around the world. The film is one of animation studio Soyuzmultfilm's most successful titles, and a quintessential example of the art form's capacity to communicate wonder, awe, fear and humour. Hayao Miyazaki, the great Japanese animator, has described it as his favourite work. Some critics have even pointed to Norstein's imprint on Miyazaki's naturalistic aesthetic and suggested the woods in _Princess Mononoke_ (1997) owe something to _Hedgehog in the Fog._

As aforementioned, there was an ambitious distinctness to the Soviet animation tradition that often exhibits a depth in its rendering of human nature. Whilst the Western, or more specifically, American tradition of animation has a brightly coloured and childlike quality, there is a delicate whimsy in Soviet animation, a whimsy that is often layered, capable of carrying multiple meanings and associations. _Hedgehog in the Fog_ must be one of the tradition's greatest examples.

Interestingly, like this week's other film, _The Cameraman's Revenge,_ _Hedgehog_ is made using stop motion animation. In a stop motion film, an animator arranges an object, takes a picture, slightly adjusts positioning, and then does it all over again. When the pictures are played in succession, it looks like motion. Yuri Norstein favours a painstaking process of painting on glass. The glass is used to produce a depth of field that is otherwise not possible in the stop motion method. Norstein and his team move the panes of glass forwards and backwards to create this effect. It is a technical feat that requires patience, fortitude and artistic vision.

Whilst Norstein's genius is not in dispute, his life and pursuits as an artist have exposed some dark ironies. Whilst Soyuzmultfilm, under the Soviet Union, had a studio culture that commended artistry it was also problematic, anti-semitic and rife with censorship. Norstein, during these years, spent his career battling these challenges. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union he was finally freed from censorship but ran directly into another brick wall: studio focus on profit. Famously, he has been making an adaptation of Gogol's **Overcoat** since 1981. Due to his perfectionism and devotion to his technique, he has been struggling with funding issues through this process. He famously stated, in a 2005 interview with The Washington Post, that "There is no artistic freedom because artistry has been replaced by ignorance."

But _Hedgehog in the Fog_ was made at a time that valued Norstein's style and efforts. It is a visceral and beautiful journey. We travel through the fog with the little hedgehog in a unified experience. The beautiful, the terrible, the awe inspiring and the unknown occur in the unfamiliar landscape. The aesthetic of the film is deceptively sweet. When the hedgehog leaves his beaten track behind and sets off into the fog in pursuit of the ephemeral white horse, we might expect a short and heartwarming tale. Instead, what occurs is an unsettling foray into the subconscious. The hedgehog's journey, whilst told visually and with whimsy, is evidently a parallel to the deep workings of the mind. As things shift, move and appear through the fog, the little hedgehog is helped, taunted and awed. There is a moment of total darkness, in which the hedgehog resigns himself to drowning. And then he is saved by 'someone'. Who or what that 'someone' is, rising mysteriously from the depths and then disappearing again, is one of the film's unanswered questions.

This consideration of death is an example of an aesthetic unbridled by notions of commercial concern that exist in other animation traditions, and indeed the post Soviet animation world. Aysegal Savas commented on this specificity of Soviet animation for the Paris Review: "Their lack of commercial concern is apparent in their unresolved narratives and wide spectrum of subtle emotions. In their innocence, wonder, and muted colors, these cartoons are at once a nostalgia for childhood and an expression of childhood itself.”

As the film culminates with the little hedgehog's mind being drawn inexorably back to the white horse, we are reminded of the bittersweet notion of longing and the untouchable, ephemeral quality of our obsessions. Simply put, _Hedgehog in the Fog_ captures the essence of melancholy. Perhaps, it is a testament to Norstein's own philosophy, that the purpose of art should be to allow people to 'experience life yet un-lived.'
Yuri Norstein
Yuri Norstein is a Russian animation director. He was born in 1941 in the Penza Oblast and raised in a Moscow suburb. He is best known for his animation shorts. The most loved and famous of these is Hedgehog in the Fog, which is considered a classic in Russia and a favourite of adults and children alike around the world. Critics have lauded Tale of Tales (1978) as one of the greatest animations ever made. Tale of Tales is a half hour long, non-linear work which mimics the workings of memory. Known to be a perfectionist, who is entirely uncompromising on quality, he has earned the title, 'The Golden Snail'. Norstein has been working on an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's Overcoat since 1981. With a distinctive style which departs from the typical lines and colours of animation, his films are masterful and full of depth. Norstein uses imagery and the unique power of animation to delve into the subconscious and cultural memory.

About Klassiki
Klassiki is an opportunity to experience online a weekly curated selection of the best of Soviet, Russian, Caucasian and East European cinema. Championing director led work, each week's offering chooses a relevant film of a great director to introduce audiences to the director's work and give biographical, social and political context to each film with specially commissioned and downloadable program notes.

This is the birth of Klassiki, our planned free streaming platform, which will allow you to stream great cinema from the region, literally on the hop.

Last week's Klassiki screening showcased the films of 'King of Soviet Comedy', Leonid Gaidai with a screening of his comedy caper Diamond Arm. This week's films: Starevich's Cameramans's Revenge and Norstein's Hedgehog in the Fog showcase the work of two of the region's greatest ever animators.

About Kino Klassika Foundation
Kino Klassika creates programmes of film restorations, publications, art commissions and events to educate audiences about classic Russian language and Eastern cinema. This includes a 2-year programme to spotlight the pioneering work of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, our first restoration projects including Hakob Havutyanian, Arabesques on the Pliosmani Theme and Jirtdan (1969). We have recently completed Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus, a screening season in partnership with the British Film Institute, Institut Francais, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham. The program celebrated the diversity and complexity of Soviet, Russian and Caucasian musicals. It gave UK audiences a unique opportunity to explore an undiscovered musical tradition.

Kino Klassika's trustees are Professor Ian Christie, Daniel Jowell QC, Roger Munnings CBE and Justine Waddell. The patron of Kino Klassika is Ralph Fiennes.

The Kino Klassika Team
This screening could not happen without the unstinting support of the Kino Klassika team: Joseph Andreyev, Nathan Dampier, Tatiana Isaeva, Zoryana Mischiy, Olja Miljevic, Seraphina Paisey and Talitha Piggott.

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