

“Ice Merchants”, An Animation with Stunning Visualization and Unique Perspective

The First Portuguese Animation to Reach the Oscars Tells a Family Drama and the Grief of Loss

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“Ice Merchants”, directed by João Gonzalez, has won numerous awards, including the Golden Hugo for Best Short Animation at the Chicago International Film Festival and a nomination for Best Short Animation at the Oscars.

The most striking aspect of this work is its unique and captivating visual style. The unusually long legs of the father, which we will see later, and the use of geometric forms in the design are part of this distinctive visual representation. The use of warm and cold colors together is another strong feature of the film.

Sound Design

The strong sound design is evident from the beginning, with the squeaking sound of the character swinging on the swing, along with the sound of the gentle wind, which enhances the sense of the cold environment.

Cinematography and Perspective

The director uses various shots to depict the specific situation of the boy on the swing. Indeed, the child is playing on a swing in a very precarious location.

The swing's movement toward the camera creates an attractive and unique perspective, adding depth to the visual.

The Emotional Pull of the Story

As the audience becomes engrossed in the stunning and somewhat mysterious visuals, the sound of the bell pulls them out of the space and propels them toward following the narrative.

An overhead shot from a slightly tilted angle shows the position of the house where the boy and his father live, a house nestled against the cliffs in the mountains.

Symbolism and Repetition

The portrayal of the father frozen in ice slowly reveals the reasons for their presence in the mountains. In this moment, we are once again presented with an astonishing shot: the boy climbing up the ladder, embodying all the principles needed for an animation to bring the character closer to the camera.

The father and son jump from their cliffside house using a parachute to reach the village at the foot of the mountain, with the title of the film revealed at this moment.

They perform this jump every day to sell their daily ice at the village.

As they approach the village, the green color representing its lushness appears, and from above, the village is depicted in the shape of a heart. The orange tones during the jump towards the village signify warmth and the presence of life there.

Themes of Love, Family, and Loss

During the freefall of the father and son, we witness their hats separating from their heads, floating through the air. The presence of these two hats together symbolizes the companionship and intimacy between them.

After selling their ice, the father buys a new hat for himself and his son. They then use a pulley to return to their home. A thermometer shown warns us that there is something related to temperature in the story, and we see the thermometer again as the story progresses. The third cup, representing the absence of the mother, is also shown. Even the space on the bed where she should be is felt.

The repetitive cycle of the boy swinging above the village, carrying the ice in freefall, the floating hats, and the purchase of new hats showcases their daily routine.

Finally, the thermometer indicates what must happen: the temperature has risen, and no new ice has formed. As the temperature rises, the snow on the mountain begins to melt, and the house is in danger. The house detaches from the cliff, and the parachute backpack falls to the bottom. Ultimately, the father has no choice but to take his son in his arms and jump downward. Here, the spirit of the mother, represented by the third cup, comes to their aid, hugging them and opening an angelic parachute. Father and son land safely atop a mound of their lost hats, having been saved. The shot makes it appear as though they are resting on a bed of flowers. As father and son exit the frame, two hats resulting from this jump fall on the

remaining hats. Will these two hats be the last ones to fall, or is another jump yet to come?