

Panel I1

Auditorium

Cartoons and Beyond

Maureen Furniss

GKIDS and the Diversification of Animated Features in the US



GKIDS was founded in 2008 by the directors of the New York International Children's Film Festival, Eric Beckman and Emily Shapiro. Within the context of the festival, the directors witnessed impressive animated features made worldwide that lacked adequate distribution, allowing the dominance of American-made features to remain virtually uncontested within the US. The first property it distributed was Michel Ocelot's *Azur & Asmir*, but the company's next acquisition, Tomm Moore's debut film *The Secret of Kells*, brought it into the spotlight, after the film was nominated for Best Animated Feature by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In subsequent years, other GKIDS properties have been nominated as well, sometimes beating out well-ranked American features. Stylistically, the films distributed by GKIDS have tended to be a challenge to American work, since the company has focused on 2D animated features that are not in the franchising model of US productions. In 2011, the film acquired theatrical distribution rights for some of the most popular animated features in history, Studio Ghibli features, marking another step in GKIDS's development; previously, the films had been distributed theatrically by Disney.

This paper will summarize GKIDS's accomplishments and determine how its injection of distinctive work into the American system has impacted US production. My findings will be based on interviews with individuals from GKIDS, as well as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, CARTOON, and other organizations. I will also plan to talk with feature film directors TBA.

My presentation will very briefly describe the founding of G-KIDS, and then will focus on its strategies to promote international features, the effect that the company has made by bringing these works into American distribution, the role of the Oscars in promoting its efforts, and how the directors of the works they have distributed have been impacted. Some attention will be given to the specific case of the Ghibli films, which represent a distinct group of works, already so well known worldwide. The presentation will end with discussion of future directions for GKIDS as a distributor.

Biography

Maureen Furniss is founding editor of *Animation Journal* and the author of three books on animation history and aesthetics, and she is the program director of Experimental Animation at California Institute of the Arts. She is past treasurer, president, and chairman of the board of the Society for Animation Studies. She has been honored with the "Award for Outstanding Contribution to Animation Studies" (2017) from the World Festival of Animated Film Zagreb (Animafest) and for "Creative Impact In Animation Education" (2016) by *Variety* magazine and Nickelodeon. In 2009, her book *The Animation Bible* won the "McLaren-Lambart Award" (2009) for best animation scholarship from the SAS, which also has honored her with the use of her name for "The Maureen Furniss Student Writing Award" (beginning 2016).

