

Shadow THEATRE – Puppet and Object Theater – from 6 years old onwards – length : 45 min

# THE HOUSE OF SMALL CUBES

After Kunio Katô's and Ken'ya Hirata's work  
2009 Animated short film Oscar  
and *La Maison en Petits Cubes*' children's book

Directed by Odele Bouvais

Non verbal performance accessible to hard of hearing people and non-French speakers

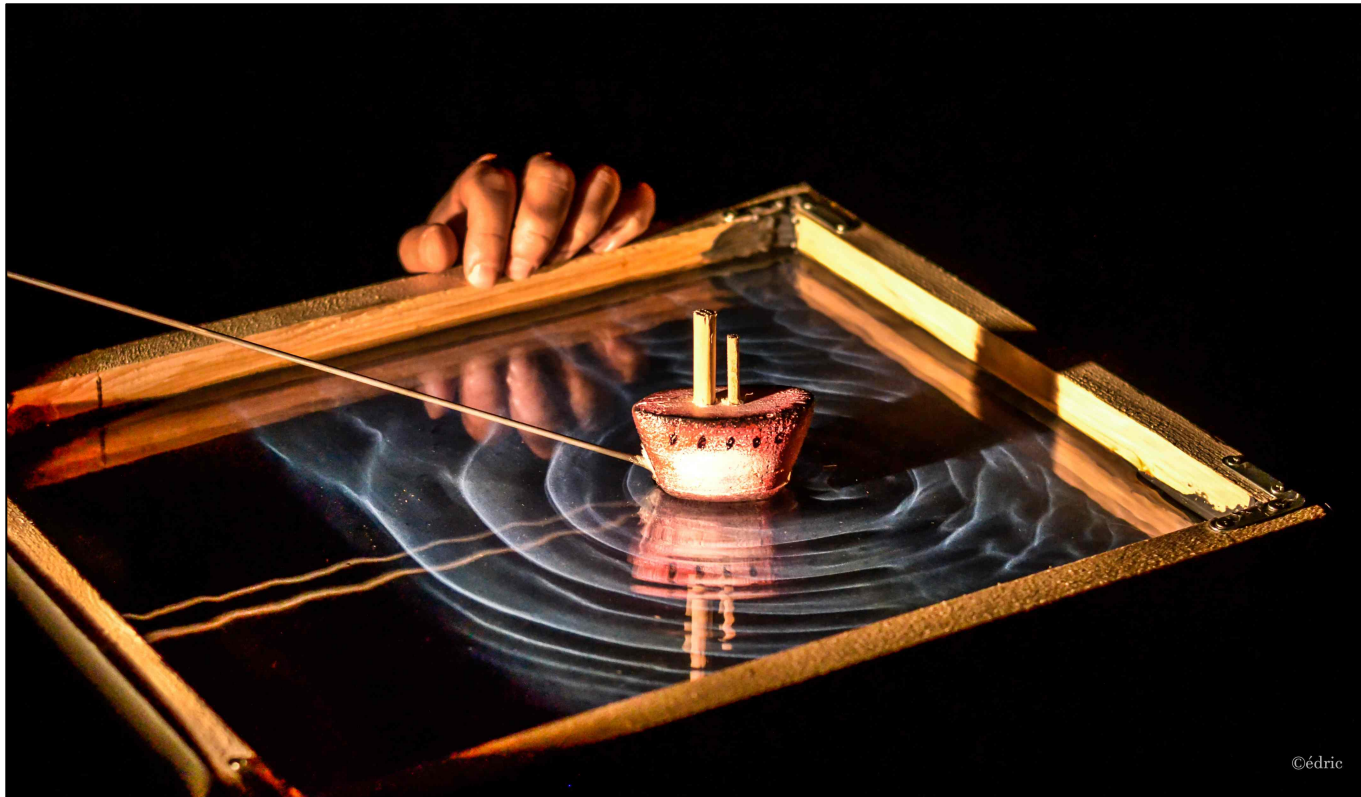
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## CAST AND SYNOPSIS

In a town where water keeps rising, peculiar houses are built: each time a house is flooded; its inhabitant builds a new floor on top of it. There are thus, underwater, houses built on top of each other, looking like small piled up cubes. Over time, inhabitants have left the town, and today only an old man continues to resist the sea level rise. One day his tools sink into deep water so he puts his diving suit on and dives into the water to the lower floors in order to get them back. Every room sings him a song reminding him of the past, bringing back shifting memories from the depths. Therefore an immersion into the past begins for the old man, a delicate flashback, as if the film of an entire life unfolded before our eyes... a film going backwards.

After Kunio Kato / Nobi Nobi Editions



**Director**  
Odile Bouvais

**Set designer**  
Bruno Cury

**Comedians**  
Cécile Schletzer  
Régis Huet  
Olivier Algourdin

**Lighting director**  
Patrick Touzard

**Costume designer**  
Michelle Amet

**Animated film director**  
Simon Astié

**Music composer**  
Olivier Algourdin

**Graphic designer**  
Marc Barotte

**Production manager**  
Samuel dAboville

## DIRECTOR'S INTENTION

Showing an old man's solitary and peaceful life,  
Showing the time passing by and the choices that make each life singular,  
Showing the evolution of the world.  
Speaking of this water which makes some populated areas disappear,  
Speaking indirectly of global warming.

That's what Kenia HIRATA achieves in his tale 'The House of Small Cubes'.

Nothing in it is moralizing; this tale is entirely joy and delicacy.

Three comedians tell this story handling puppets, using objects and manipulated figures. I give priority to the visual aspect. I want this performance not very talkative, but, on the contrary, led by a musical and sound universe, cellos' and pianos' pianissimos and fortissimos, lapping, running and overflowing water noises.

Water distorts pictures, time changes memories. Here, the sea binds all the elements of the story. Water invades and worries, but also calms down. Time passing by, everything floats, everything moves away and takes some distance. The natural fluid element is essential in the scenic representation of this tale: it is brought up by a pictural watercoloured universe.

**Odile Bouvais**





## THE AUTHOR / FIRST ADAPTATION FOR THE THEATRE (1/2)



**KUNIO KATO**

**Kunio Katô** is a Japanese illustrator and film director born in 1977 in Kagoshima, Japan. Specialized in short films, he is mostly known for his work *The House of Small Cubes*, released in 2012, for which he's won the Best Animated Short Film Oscar. He has also illustrated its picture book adaptation, edited in French by Nobi Nobi Editions(!).

### **2012 Interview on the occasion of the release of the children's book in Paris Book Fair**

**What's been the process to adapt your Oscar-winning short film *The House of Small Cubes* into an illustrated children's book? Was it intended at the beginning of the project?**

It's usually the other way around: a book is adapted into an animated film. In fact, I had no project of adaptation at all. A producer had watched the short film and suggested to make a children's book of it. At first, I was rather reluctant to get back into the story with the same setting and the same character... It was rather difficult, after having already worked on the short film for a year. Then I was finally attracted by the idea of conveying the same message but with a different mode of expression.

**How was the collaboration with screenwriter Kenya Hirata in terms of changing mode of expression?**

We had already animated the film, so we were used to work as a team. Actually, the text has been written real quick: Kenya Hirata is a very good father, he reads to his child every night. He absolutely wanted to tell a tale he had written himself, so it all happened very fast.

**As an author, did your situation change with winning the Best Animated Short Film Oscar for *The House of Small Cubes*?**

Getting the Oscar made me travel to the States and enabled me to discover a very different way of life; it's been a very good experience. Apart from that, the Oscar didn't make a big difference for me, but it has been a very good way to bring my audience to discover my other activities.

***The House of Small Cubes* describes in a touching way an old man's outlook on the important steps of his life. We discover in it a deep nostalgia, even some kind of melancholia. What are your thoughts about this man?**

Although we may feel a certain nostalgia in these reminiscences, I've always wanted to underline the positive aspects of things. This man, despite his stubbornness, looks out wisely on the main axes of his life. I can't say if my character is happy or not, it's up to everyone to judge. What I can tell is that a fierce strength of temper and motivation is needed to keep on living in such conditions. I admire his courage and, on the other hand, I don't think it would be pleasant to live with him!



### **Why did you choose nostalgia and memories as a topic? What does this feeling mean to you?**

Actually, the topic has imposed upon me by itself. After drawing sketches and pictures, we have thought about the theme, and memories seemed obvious to us. When I watched the illustrations I really saw them as the symbol of life. Behind this vast topic, many feelings are hidden which make this wise man the person he is in the twilight of his life.

### **In the illustrated book, you've chosen a watercoloured effect to match the contents. How did this choice impose upon you?**

I don't really know! What is certain is that I like very much Nicolas de Crécy's work and that he had a major influence on my way of considering The House of Small Cubes. His unconventional and surprising style has seduced me and, in some ways, I was willing to recreate this surprise effect.

### **Yesterday at the Books Fair Kenzaburo Oe and Satoshi Kamata spoke of the fact of writing after the tsunami disaster. Do you classify The House of Small Cubes in this category?**

The story of The house of Small Cubes has been created long before the tsunami. Finally, fiction reaches out reality, and there are some common themes. I did not intentionally draw an old man who keeps on living in a house getting smaller and smaller, and where the natural element play an important part. This kind of event happens, it's not destiny, it just happens. This fiction fits reality, which shouldn't be so. It questions me about creating from reality and it has upseted me very much with The House of Small Cubes. I have been asked many times and, as a creator, I feel responsible for taking part in the 'disaster literature'.

### **How do you perceive this natural element?**

There are many ways to stop water from rising every year, by building a dyke for instance. We can see in the book how lively the place was once, then the people left one by one and the old man chose to stay there, alone. That's his choice as a hero, his response to this catastrophe against which he remains powerless. Above all, I wanted to show acceptance, but also resignation to the situation. You can live this way, that's what I wanted to express. For Japan it's a bit the same.

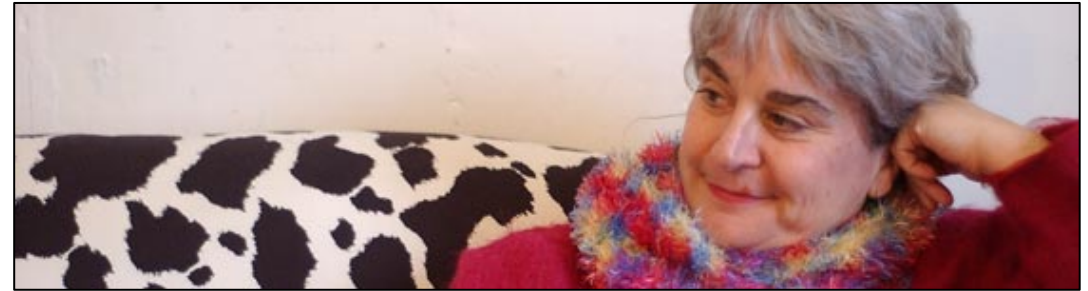
### **Did you appreciate the constraints specific to hand-draw pictures? Would you be interested in a new adaptation into a digital book?**

I'd never thought about it when the film was adapted into a book. Last year, I was asked to adapt the book into an electronic format. We have directly replicated the work illustrations and the result was not satisfying, simply because the pictures were not drawn for this purpose. If I work again on an electronic format, I'll have to work on it beforehand. I'm not against the idea with The House of Small Cubes, but not for the moment.

## DIRECTOR ODILE BOUVAIS

### **My artistic career may – or may not be – atypical...**

Throughout my artistic life I've experienced different kinds of live performing arts: author's theatre and poetry as a comedian, which I coupled with clown and puppet art from time to time. What do they have in common? Poetry... Yes, Poetry. Like poetry, Clown art is fragile and does not stick to reality, and Puppet art leads to a poetical and sublimated universe.



My desire to play outdoors and meet ordinary spectators has led me to discover different audiences in many various places such as: streets, hospitals, high and secondary schools, colleges, parks and gardens, and, since last year, prisons.

I am the result of so many stories, pathways and companionship that I couldn't say which experiences have been the most important to me. Over the past years I have been a clown in hospitals with "Rire Médecin", a puppeteer comedian in Garin Trousseboeuf Cie, a comedian reader for the House of Poetry in Nantes, a director in partnership with Théâtre Pom', Spectabilis Cie, and this year, with Niouton Theatre.

Every new proposal is an openness and is fruitful for me as a comedian and a director.



## ARTISTIC AND TECHNICAL CAREERS (1/2)

### Set designer, **Bruno Cury**

Puppet master, stage and set designer, he's played his part in Théâtre Pom' s performances since 2004: in Mike Kenny's "Electric Night", Geert de Kockere's children's book "Pense-Bêtes" ("Animal Reminders"), Marie Nimier's "Un Enfant disparaît" ("A child disappears"), "bb babils" ("Babies' Babbles") after Valérie Rouzeau's poems. He's also worked for Athénor ("78 Tours"), Théâtre de Cuisine ("Duo Dodu" - "Plumpy Duo"), Les Quatre Marionnettistes (Four Puppet Handlers) ("Quai des Antilles" - "West Indies Dock", "La partie commencera à l'heure" - "Game will start on time"), and works with the Nantes Puppet Cie. He makes puppets for Atelier 44, Théâtre Messidor, Dominique Houdard Cie, Démons et Merveilles (Demons enWonders) and Théâtre de l'Entracte (Intermission Theater).



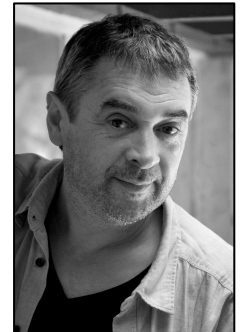
### Comedian, **Cécile Schletzer**

Co-founder of Spectabilis Cie, she acts under the direction of J.Percher, M.Gaultier, P.Piau, H.Uzureau, E.Sorba, T.Charrier, J-P.Dubois, J.L.Beaujault, P.Sarzacq, O.Bouvais and D.Royan. In parallel she keeps working on acting and voice with J.Templeraud ("Manarf"), M.Liard ("Au Fol Ordinaire" - "At Crazy Ordinary"), J-P.Rossfelder (Théâtre de la Fontanelle - Fontanel Theater), E.Sorba and O.Messenger, N.Kossenkova (Théâtre Temb Moscow). She also runs workshops in schools.



### Comedian, **Régis Huet**

Co-founder of Spectabilis Cie, he performs Christine Blondel (directed by J.Percher), T.Charrier (directed by P.Piau, E.Zorba), M-J. Brighel (directed by Y.Pallard, P.Sarzacq), Courteline, N.Renaude (directed by H.Uzureau), M.Karge (directed by H.Vaulerin), G.Bourdet (directed by J-P.Dubois), C.Bobin (directed by J-L.Beaujault), L.Miloudi (directed by O.Bouvais), Balzac (directed by D.Royan)... He's in charge of teenagers and adult workshops in which he performs staging.



### Comedian, **Olivier Algourdin,**

Co-founder of Artbigüe Cie, he's been trained at the "Conservatoire d' Angers" ( Conservatory theatre). Now he acts, plays music and performs magic tricks under the direction of B.Poitevin, E.Goupil, G.Pichereau, V.Brochard and O.Bouvais.





## ARTISTIC AND TECHNICAL CAREERS (2/2)

### Lighting director, **Patrick Touzard**

After a musical training at CIM in Paris , he's become a lighting director and works on several projects for different companies such as Loba Cie for the creation of "Vagabonde, Bottes de prince et Bigoudis" ("Female Tramp, Prince Boots and Curlers"), "PP les p'tits cailloux" ("PP Little Stones"); Compagnie La Parenthèse (Parenthesis Cie) for "Un paso svp", "Cyrano", "Lettre pour Eléna ("A letter for Elena"), "Hermia"; Compagnie Plumes (Feather Cie) for "Pas un mot en Poche" ("Not a word in the pocket"); Thomas Drelon for "Bashir Lazar"; Rosilux Cie for "Noce" ("Wedding"); Compagnie Les Eléments DISPONibles (AVAILable Elements Cie) for "Merci facteur" ("Thank you Mr Postman"); FénémONE Cie for "Une femme à la mer" ("Woman overboard"); Compagnie ceci ET cela (This AND That Cie) for "Que la Joie Demeure" ("May Joy remain") and Spectabilis Cie for "Les yeux plus grands que le monde" ("Eyes bigger than the world"). He finds with them more freedom to create light universes and settings, seeking to simplicity and to the heart of the matter.



### Production manager, **Samuel d'Aboville**

After getting a Degree in Public Administration and Cultural Management, he's worked in Paris for CEMAFORRE, a national center for "Culture and Disability", and carried out a project: CASCAD 12<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> Paris, with the City of Paris. Afterwards, he's become head of mission for sponsorship for the "Collectif Gradisca", and then started working with Spectabilis Cie in 2009.



# ACCESSIBILITY FOR DISABLED PERSONS

**The field of disability, as a sustainable development component, is a main reflection concern for the Company**

- Our last two plays, “Perce-Neige” (“Snowdrop”) (young audience-2014) and “Les yeux plus grands que le monde” (“Eyes bigger than the world”) (2016- all audiences), have been created in audio description (intended to blind and visually-impaired audiences).
- Among other things, Spectabilis has been working since 2006 with the Mental Health Center CESAME in Angers (Ste Gemmes-sur-Loire) with mentally handicapped people through an artistic practice workshop.
- Regular tours are organized in nursing homes” EHPAD” or other health and medical and social institutions.

**This new creation will be accessible to hearing-impaired (hard of hearing) audiences and non-French speakers.**

**Why?** It's a long-term wish and a continuity of our last two creations, strengthened by Samuel D'Aboville's experience as a former accessibility manager who worked in particular on the Disability and Live Performing Arts Guide with the Ministry of Culture.

**How?** The performance, by essence, uses none or only a few words. It is then accessible to hard-of-hearing audiences. It is also accessible to people who do not speak French. We are presently thinking about a way of making its musical universe accessible to deaf persons.



## PLANNED CULTURAL ACTIONS (1/2)

### Classes mentoring (Twinning and associating school classes)

The idea is to encourage meetings with school children all along the creation of the play. A class will attend the creative process for 3 or 4 meetings. They will first listen to a reading, watch a scene, then several, and at last they will attend the whole performance. All along the process, the pupils will share their reactions, suggest ideas and explain what they did or did not understand. These discussions will enable us to test new ideas, to point out potential black spots and to deepen our creative approach.

### Music

Music will have an important part in the performance. What does music convey on stage? What does it tell us? How do we compose music for theatre?

### Inter-generational projects

In conjunction with one of the play's themes, the idea is to allow old people and children to communicate, in order to question memories, time (long and short, past and present...) and transmit.





## PLANNED CULTURAL ACTIONS (2/2)

### PROJECT FORM

#### For whom?

Voluntary old dependent people hosted in a health or medical and social institution and children from a primary school.

#### What? How?

Collecting memories from old people about one or several of the events evoked in the play:

their wedding

their children's wedding

the day their children left home

Also collecting pictures of these events

Asking a cartoonist to draw one of these events

Attending a performance with the pupils of a class, displaying these pictures in a hall and having the whole audience share opinions and feelings.

#### When?

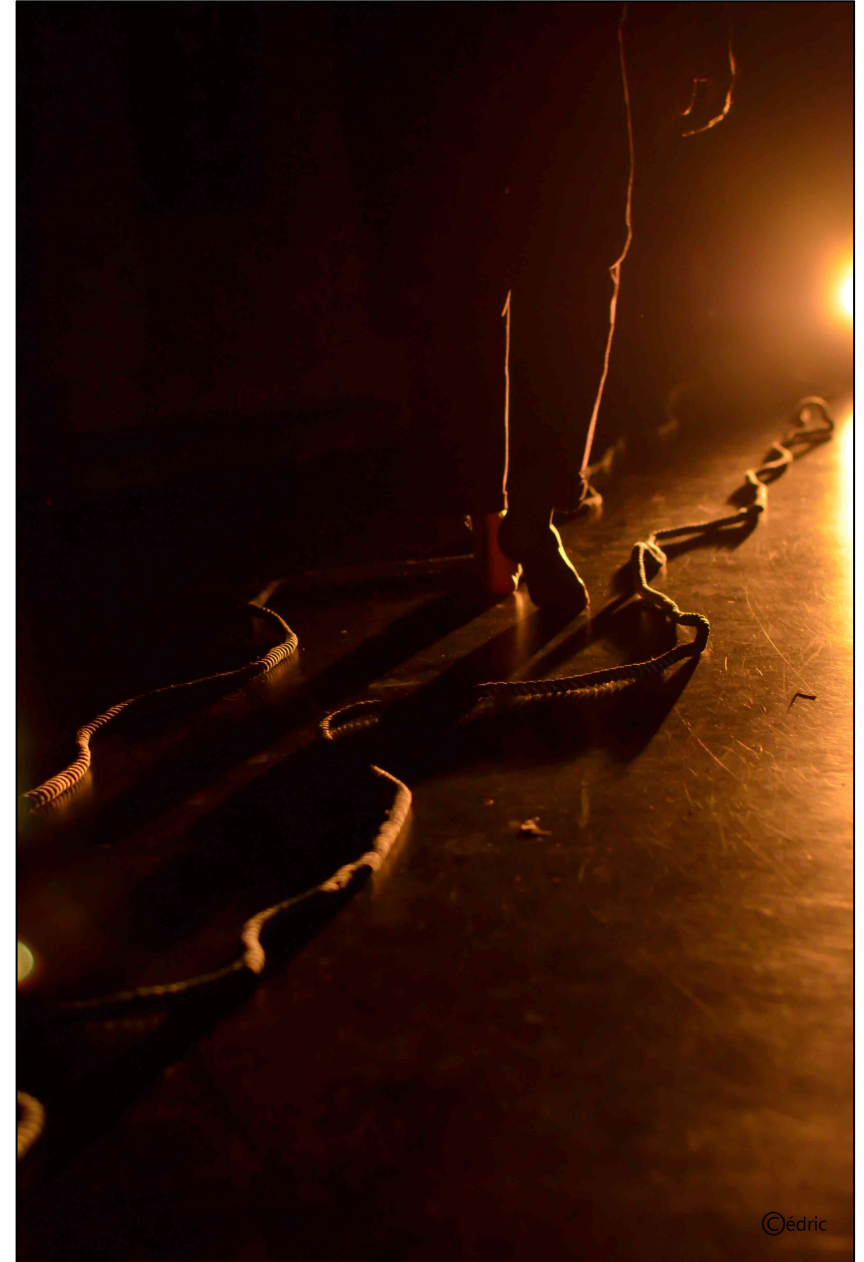
Collecting can be done in advance, before the performance and the drawing.

#### By whom?

One of the artists of Spectabilis Cie will collect the memories (it's been made before by PREAC-DRAC Pays des Vallées d'Anjou ("Anjou Valley Land") in 2016-2017).

The pictures will be drawn by a cartoonist.

A good relationship will have to be established between the health institution staff, its residents, the school teachers and Spectabilis members.



## PRESS REVIEW AND AWARDS

### About the children's book and the short film

*“Alternately dashing and full of tears, Kunio Katô's watercolour soaks memories and emotions, in order to slow them down until they freeze into an amniotic wellness.”*

**Telerama**

*“Watercolour, ideal for the purpose, saturates with emotions the pictures of the past. In a puzzling poetry.”*

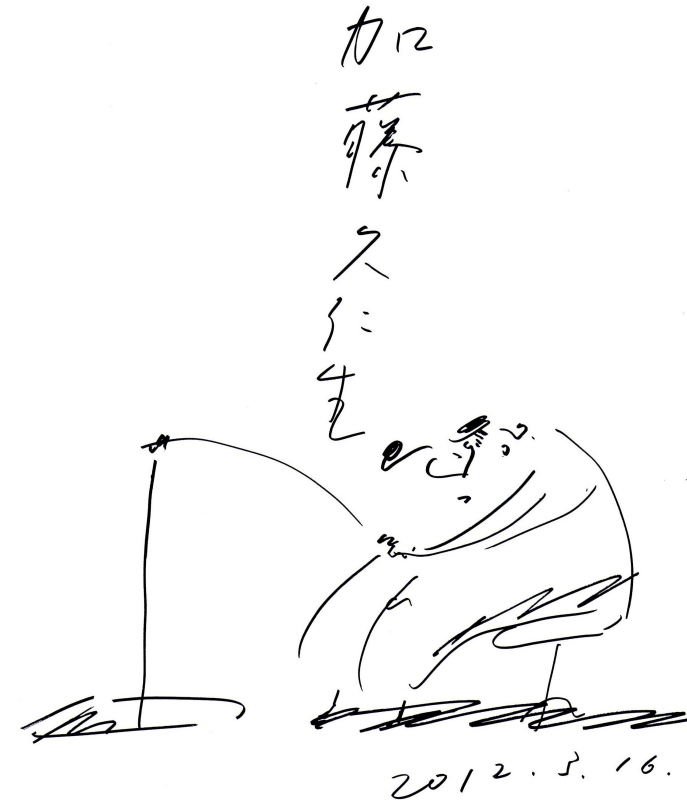
**Le Monde**

*“This book opens widely the door to imagination with its mood and the care conveyed in all details.”*

**Le Figaro**

*“A beautiful allegory about old age and the wholeness of a life delicately illustrated by Kunio Katô.”*

**L'Express**



### Awards

Best Animated Short Film Oscar (2009)

Best Animated Short Film – Annecy International Film Festival  
(2008)

Best Animated Short Film – Hiroshima International Film Festival  
(2008)

French Academy Grand Prix (2013) – Children's Book

Witches Price (2013) – Children's Book

# PRODUCTION – ON TOUR

## Technical conditions

Performance length: 45 min

Time for the stage arranging: 2 shifts of 4 hours / Time for clearing: 1 shift of 4 hours

Needed area: 8 m large, 8 m deep

Black floor, Italian legs

Setting elements to be suspended and laid on the floor

Puppet and object handling

150 people maximum seating according to configuration

5 people tour (3 comedians, 1 technician, 1 production manager)

Technical form and lighting plan in the Annex

## Financial conditions

1600€ for one performance

1400€ for the next ones

Not included: travel expenses, meals, lodging, copyright...

**No SACD fee for this assignment of copyright for the company**

