

READY FOR ACTION



Among this year's crop of Academy Award nominees for Best Animated Short was a 3D heart-warming animated tale of a withdrawn "Mr Hublot", an OCD character made of mechanical parts scared of the outside world but who soon sees his world turned upside down when a very invasive robot pet moves in with him. Snatching it from the favourite, Disney's "Get a Horse!", this joint Franco-Luxembourg production written by Laurent Witz and co-directed by Alexandre Espigares marked Luxembourg's first Oscar® win ever, showing that Luxembourg has more to offer than an international financial centre.

"Thank you Mr Hublot for making this dream become a reality!" said Laurent Witz while holding the coveted golden statuette on the stage of the Dolby Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard, in front of a full crowd of the finest professionals of the film industry worldwide. The incredible success story of "Mr Hublot" is the culmination of more than 3 years of intense work by producer and director Laurent Witz, co-director Alexandre Espigares and ZEILT productions, a production company founded by Witz in Luxembourg in 2007 to develop his vision of animation and

audiovisual productions. *"It had been a while since I worked in Luxembourg and on audiovisual production projects. The idea of setting up my own production company in Luxembourg came up as I wanted to boost the animation sector"*, explains French native Laurent Witz. Specialising in the production of innovative 3D animation programmes for various media such as the cinema, television, the Internet or video games, the company illustrates the result of the active public policy led by the Luxembourg government and that has led to the creation and development of the

Luxembourg film industry since the 1980s. *"I found the Luxembourg government very supportive; they put a lot of efforts in the development of the industry and creation of audiovisual productions. There is a real desire to boost the creation of new projects",* points out Witz.

DIVERSIFICATION TOOL FOR THE LUXEMBOURG ECONOMY

Recognised as a true diversification tool for the Luxembourg economy, a lot of efforts have been put to create a competitive industry on the international scale. *"Twenty years ago the film industry was at a stage of amateurism because we didn't have public support available nor professional infrastructures. Now we have accomplished the government's plans to develop a local industry which is competitive on the international market",* says Guy Daleiden, Managing Director of Film Fund Luxembourg. With a yearly public financial support averaging 30 million euros, the Fund supports audiovisual creation and the industry's development by awarding funds for the writing, development, production, and distribution of feature films, shorts, animation, and documentaries. *"Co-productions remain the core business of the Luxembourg film industry. We also developed international co-production agreements with neighboring countries such as France, Germany, Belgium but also with Ireland, Canada and Switzerland",* says Daleiden. Each year, the fund allocates Audiovisual Production Support (AFS) to up to 20 audiovisual projects, while a dozen are feature films. Currently more than 750 professionals earn their living in the industry as set technicians, film directors, producers, actors or in service provider companies.



As a French-Luxembourg co-production, "Mr Hublot" has been supported by the Film Fund Luxembourg from its development phase right through to promotion. Financed up to 73% by ZEILT productions through the financial support of the Fund, the 27% left were financed by French production company WATT frame, in which Witz also has a stake. *"The challenges were first to convince and get the necessary funding to get started. The fund financed the project for an amount of approximately 113,000 euros, which already represented almost half of the financing. It was decisive as it was the first funding accepted and it brought more credibility to the project to receive more financial support from additional partners",* commented Witz, who produced "Mr Hublot" as first time Director and Producer.

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INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Above all, the votes of the Academy Awards constituted of more than 6,000 worldwide prestigious artists and industry's finest filmmakers have brought international recognition to the deep pool of expertise and highly talented technicians who are working in the Luxembourg film industry. "There is a very wide pool of expertise in Luxembourg going through design, production, storyboard, 3D creation and more. Luxembourg is ripe and mature enough to go further," says Witz. With the opening of Filmland S.A in 2013, Luxembourg has finally got its very own film studios where all its experienced technical teams can work in 3,000 square meters of studio space, production offices and as post-production services. "This Oscar® has a great impact over the entire Luxembourg economic sector. It shows the innovative spirit of our economy and the quality and creativity of our skills but also how companies can grow from scratch to the big award," points out Daleiden enthusiastically.

While more than two thirds of the production of "Mr Hublot" was made in Luxembourg, over 30 technicians in total took turns at modeling 3D sets, characters and animating the shots. Since the beginning of the project in 2010, Witz had one primary goal in mind: "To create emotion and poetry, and to make a movie on a little budget while being highly technically sophisticated and pretend it's a big budget". All these efforts paid off. Branded by many in the US as the "Pixar-esque" movie, the success of "Mr Hublot" puts ZEILT productions in the limelight on an international scale. More than a key professional achievement,

an Oscar® is a precious tool for the future. "It definitely brought us an international credibility and aroused a keen interest especially in the United States and China. I now collaborate with the United States, something that would have been almost impossible for me before. People want to know more about us and what is the key to our success", says Witz.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

Currently working on several other projects, among which a long animated movie, Witz explains that this recognition gave him the means to work on even more ambitious projects. "My goal is to keep this momentum going and continue to develop innovative co-productions that are exported internationally while boosting the interest of the Luxembourg film industry. All of this can be achieved through international co-productions with European countries but also with the United States".

Daleiden adds that in addition to the now famous "Mr Hublot", the whole industry is doing quite well on the international level. "Films are selected at international awards. It is a good year for us but we have to keep going". In addition to "Mr Hublot", "Ernest & Célestine" co-produced by Mélusine Productions in Luxembourg was nominated in the best-animated feature category at this year's Academy Awards but lost it against Disney's Frozen. The Academy Award is only the latest in a series of awards and nominations, which "Mr Hublot" has garnered over the past months. The film has been showered with over 30 prizes at festivals in Europe and the US, and has been shown at over 80 different festivals with the latest being Les Nuits en Or hosted by UNESCO, a unique

program that brings together all the short films awarded in 2014 by the most prestigious film Academies.

With a deep pool of highly talented local talents, brand-new facilities and an effective financial support system in place, the Luxembourg film industry is set for a bright future. And action! **OB**



"Mr Hublot has more than 13,000 fans, which is totally new for a short animated film. I want and will continue to surprise with this project."