

**BORDER BUSTERS**

# OUTSIDE THE LINES

*Academy celebrates overseas animation in feature and shorts categories*

By JERRY BECK

It's been said that animation has no boundaries.

In recognizing achievement in the animated cartoon world, Academy voters have often looked beyond U.S. borders to acknowledge superior work.

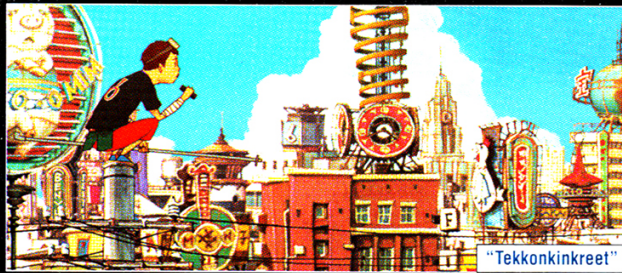
Since 1961, Academy voters have liberally handed the gold statuette to animated shorts created in foreign studios. Most notable among the winners is the National Film Board of Canada (six wins), but the Academy has also recognized distinguished work from countries including Germany, Australia and Croatia.

Films of international origin also appear to have an equal footing in Oscar's feature animation contest. In the category's first six years, three foreign toons were nominated, and one ("Spirited Away") even won.

Among this year's qualified entries, France's "Persepolis" and Japan's "Tekkonkinkreet," while lower-profile than their U.S. studio competition, each tell a powerful story with innovative visuals and their own unique points of view, touching on adult perspectives that U.S. studio product traditionally avoids.

"To most people, drawing is the way children express themselves," says Marjane Satrapi, co-writer/co-director of "Persepolis," based on her graphic novel. "We know how to talk about a text: 'The author wanted to say that; the poet wanted to express this,' but we don't know how to talk about drawing. I'm so happy that Hollywood can see beyond this."

"It's probably just a generalization to say that Hollywood is coming around," adds "Tekkonkin-



kreet" writer Anthony Weintraub. "I certainly think the world is looking at the high artistry of what's coming out from all of these places, and the Academy is recognizing it."

**Anime nation**

Anime not only has a strong fan base, but top Hollywood creatives, from John Lasseter to the Wachowskis, openly celebrate the toons. "There are a whole host of artists who were influenced by anime in a great way, going way back over the years to 'Speed Racer,'" Weintraub recalls. "It's a different kind of animation. It's exciting, it's graphic, and the interplay between it and the whole of cinema is unique and vital."

Though previous Oscar-qualified anime features — such as "Paprika," "Three Godfathers" and "Metropolis" — have been passed over, "Tekkonkinkreet" tells a more realistic, personal story. Using cutting-edge graphics, violent imagery and bold colors, it's a tale of two young orphans who risk their lives opposing an authoritarian society of the near future. And though it was entirely produced in Japan, it was written and directed by a pair of American filmmakers.

"It's exciting to have a film like this, which basically came out of a small studio, inspired by manga

that had a cult following, nurtured by a director and the filmmakers over a long period of time," Weintraub says. "It's amazing that our little film has gotten this far. It's just eligibility at this point, but I'm really excited, and I hope people get a chance to see it."

**Color blind**

"Persepolis" also tackles grown-up subject matter, but in a completely different way. Animated with deceptively primitive-looking (though technically quite sophisticated) B&W hand-drawn imagery, "Persepolis" tells the story of a young Persian girl forced to leave Iran during the revolution.

"That animation people like it, for me, is like a great present," Satrapi says. "I wrote a book, and it happened that my book was a comicbook. I made a film, and it happened that my film is animation. Animation is just a technique, and I'm flattered we are not just talking about technique, but the movie itself."

In the animation categories, Oscar has traditionally recognized the art form over box office popularity. So don't be too surprised if the French-language toon appears alongside its polished, French-themed Pixar cousin "Ratatouille" on the ballot.

