

ANIMAL is a film about life told through animals. Not metaphorically — literally. Through their presence, Józef Wilkoń, one of Poland's most distinguished illustrators and sculptors, reveals the world that shaped his sensitivity and his way of seeing.

The first image is a forest. A young boy carries wild strawberries for his mother and almost touches a hare. This fleeting moment — fragile and impossible to repeat — becomes the beginning of a story about a world that “is changing beyond recognition.” Then comes a meadow and Pyzia, a beloved cow with extraordinary horns, escaping the pasture like a free spirit. Her sudden disappearance leaves an invisible mark that will never fade. Just as powerful are the encounters with Baśka the horse, unpredictable dogs, wild boars, badgers, and birds.

The film unfolds in chapters of memory. One teacher says:

“A crooked line is beautiful. Throw away the eraser, or you will never see progress.”

These words become Wilkoń’s artistic manifesto. He learns to work with accident — with paint that “travels on its own,” with a stain that becomes a co-author of the image.

In parallel runs the history of books: from early illustrations drawn on sugar sacks, through children’s magazines, to original stories about cats, birds, and tigers. Wilkoń’s animals are always different — a red cat in a black family, a white cat searching for black milk — creatures that do not fit, like people. In their stories, the artist recognizes our own fears: of rejection, exclusion, and loneliness.

Over time, the brush becomes an axe. Sculptures grow from a single trunk, from pieces of wood that “already speak.” From logs emerge bison, bears, birds, and fish — monumental and fragile at once. Wilkoń modestly calls them “spatial illustrations” — books one can walk into.

The film reaches Japan, exhibitions, and international editions. But success never sets the tone. At its center remains the relationship between a human being and nature — and between two people.

Its most intimate chapter is the story of Małgorzata, his wife of more than forty years. During her illness, every day he brought her a small wooden duck and placed it on the hospital windowsill. When she died, the artist’s world fell silent. What remained were the night, the moon, and conversations with it, as with a close friend.

The final scenes lead to a garden in Zalesie — a place of silence and sculpture. It is here that Wilkoń says he has “not yet spoken the last word” and that “a human being is always arriving somewhere.”

ANIMAL is not a biography. It is a film about life written in wood, ink, paint, stains, and memory. About how no one defends themselves with beauty — but when beauty settles in the heart, it no longer allows harm.