Fleischer Brothers

Max Fleischer (July 17, 1883–September 11, 1972) and his brother Dave (July 14, 1894–June 25, 1979) were innovators in the world of animated film. Before World War II, they were Disney’s main competitors in the cartoon business. In 1915, Max patented the rotoscope, a process that enabled the animator to trace the filmed movements of live-action actors to create greater realism, one that animators from Walt Disney (1901–1966) to Ralph Bakshi would later use. At John Randolph Bray’s studio, the brothers first developed the “Out of the Inkwell” series, eventually featuring a rotoscoped KoKo the Clown battling with a live-action Max in an anarchic, frequently self-referential world. Starting their own studio, with Max running the business and Dave managing the animation, they developed such iconic characters as Betty Boop and Popeye the Sailor. The characters’ plasmatic bodies were often in productive tension with the realism of rotoscoping or of the brothers’ Stereoptical process (an early version of the multi-planar camera), especially since these images were created in a production context that enabled free expression, and were coupled with a use of post-production sound that could seem like ad-libbing,

The Fleischers’ poor business practices, however, as well as a loose production line that lagged behind the industrial division of labor developed at other studios, forced them to sell the studio to Paramount after their own efforts at feature-length animation failed, and despite their well-animated beginning of the *Superman* series in 1941.

List of works:

The Tantilizing Fly (1919)

Modeling (1921)

*Invisible Ink* (1921)

KoKo’s Earth Control (1928)

Bimbo's Initiation (1931)

Minnie the Moocher (1932)

Somewhere in Dreamland (1936)

Popeye the Sailor Meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves (1937)

Goonland (1938)

Gulliver's Travels (1939)

Mr. Bug Goes to Town (1941)

Superman (1941)

Paratextual materials:

It seems much of the Fleischer catalog is now public domain, with some examples available on Archive.org:

**Popeye The Sailor Meets Ali Baba's Forty Thieves (1937)** [**https://archive.org/details/PopeyeTheSailorMeetsAliBabasFortyThieves**](https://archive.org/details/PopeyeTheSailorMeetsAliBabasFortyThieves)**1937**

**Superman (1941)**

[**https://archive.org/details/superman\_1941**](https://archive.org/details/superman_1941)

# Popeye In Goonland (October 14th. 1938)

[**https://archive.org/details/PopeyeInGoonlandoctober14th.1938**](https://archive.org/details/PopeyeInGoonlandoctober14th.1938)

# Betty Boop: Minnie The Moocher (1932)

# <https://archive.org/details/bb_minnie_the_moocher>

Somewhere in Dreamland

<https://archive.org/details/SomewhereInDreamland_24>

The Tantalizing Fly (1919)

<https://archive.org/details/Fleischer_The_Tantalizing_Fly_1919>

Further reading:

Fleischer, R. (2005) *Out of the Inkwell: Max Fleischer and the Animation Revolution*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Telotte, J.P. (2010) *Animating space: from Mickey to Wall-E*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

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