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| Disney, Walter Elias |
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| Walt Disney, (b. 5 December 1901, d. 15 December 1966) in Chicago and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, was a film producer and entrepreneur who built an entertainment empire on the foundation of his animated cartoons. As a result of Disney’s resounding success and influence, the vast majority of animation studios across the world, at different times, either emulated or reacted against his style and production model.  After early business failures, Disney gained worldwide success with the release of the world’s first synchronized sound cartoon and the debut of Mickey Mouse, *Steamboat Willie* (1928). The cartoons’ huge popularity permitted Disney to launch the Silly Symphonies series — where he experimented with new animations techniques — leading directly to his first cartoon feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).  Disney films are known for their Midwestern sensibilities, sentimentality, and a realistic style that aspired to create the ‘illusion of life.’ Disney drew upon works by European artists and illustrators including Honoré Daumier, Gustave Doré, Heinrich Kley, Arthur Rackham, and John Tenniel to inspire his staff. Disney provided training for his animators, enrolling them in drawing classes at the Chouinard Art Institute. |
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Special roadshow screenings of *Fantasia* (1940) featured the multiple (sixty-eight) speaker audio system Fantasound. *A Hundred and* *One Dalmatians* (1961) established the practice of photocopying animators’ pencil drawings directly onto cels rather than having inkers trace them, thereby preserving the quality of the drawings’ original lines.  Disney productions anticipated many of the critically praised modernistic elements of UPA (United Productions of America) cartoons. *Fantasia* presented visual accompaniment for classical music, while *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941) not only gave audiences a detailed and demystifying explanation of animated cartoon production, but also provided an early example of limited animation in its ‘Baby Weems’ section. The Disney studio later adopted UPA’s flat figure design and minimal backgrounds for certain special informative releases such as *Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom* (1953).  Disney often employed artists whose styles differed from the Disney norm to design his films. Their work, however, seldom reached the screen in its original form. Visual music pioneer Oskar Fischinger worked on the ‘Toccata and Fugue' segment of *Fantasia*, and Salvador Dali created images for a planned *Fantasia* re-release. During the 1940s and early 1950s, Mary Blair, a California School water colourist, painted vibrant, flat, abstract pictures for the colour and styling of many Disney films. But it was only when Disney, wanting to prove animation could be high art, insisted that *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) retain art director Eyvind Earle’s angular, stylized designs that a Disney feature included modern looking characters.  During World War II, the Disney studio produced many war-related cartoons from military training films to films encouraging viewers to buy bonds and pay their taxes on time. Theatrical propaganda releases *Der Fuehrer’s Face, Education for Death,* and *Reason and Emotion* (all 1943) attempted to explain the psychology of Nazi Germany.  In 1949, Disney began releasing nature documentaries, and in 1950 *Treasure Island* became his first completely live-action feature drama. In 1954 the *Disneyland* television series premiered, with Disney himself hosting, while in 1955 the Disneyland theme park opened, surrounding visitors with a completely engineered environment based on Disney film productions. In 1961, Walt Disney founded the California Institute of the Arts. He died of lung cancer in 1966. Selected Filmography: *Alice’s Wonderland* (1923)  *Steamboat Willie* (Dir. Walt Disney, 1928)  *The Skeleton Dance* (Dir. Walt Disney, 1929)  *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)  *Fantasia* (Dir. Samuel Armstrong, James Algar, and eight others, 1940)  *The Reluctant Dragon* (Dir. Alfred Werker, 1941)  *Der Fuehrer’s Face* (Dir. Jack Kinney, 1943)  *Education for Death* (Dir. Clyde Geronimi, 1943)  *Victory Through Air Power* (Animation Supervisor, David Hand, 1943)  *Reason and Emotion* (Dir. Bill Roberts, 1943)  *Seal Island* (Dir. James Algar, 1949)  *Treasure Island* (Dir. Byron Haskin, 1950) (Based on the Robert Louis Stevenson novel)  *Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom* (Dir. Charles Nichols and Ward Kimball, 1953)  *Man in Space* (Dir. Ward Kimball, 1956)  *Mars and Beyond* (Dir. Ward Kimball, 1957)  *Our Friend the Atom* (Dir. Hamilton Luske, 1958)  *Eyes in OuterSpace* (Dir. Ward Kimball, 1959) |
| Further reading:  (Amidi)  (Barrier)  (Barrier, The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney )  (Gabler)  (Holliss and Sibley)  (Eisenstein)  (Maltin)  (Thomas and Johnston)  (Riper) |