Jonathon Rogers

DGM – 312G

Principles of Animation II

Ub Iwerks

The man that would bring Micky Mouse to life and would be known as Walt Disney’s right-hand man was Ub Iwerks. He was born an only child in March of 1901 to a poor Dutch and German family in Kansas City, Missouri. Ub’s father was an inventor who would introduce him to the world of film. But at the age of 14, Ub’s father left their family and would become the only provider for his family. This resulted in Ub leaving school and working odd jobs. This did not stop him from engaging in his hobby, which was art.

Ub Iwerks’ first job after enrolling in the Institute of Fine Arts school in Kansas City was at a commercial art studio. The owner of the studio praised Ub for his draftsmanship and was considered the best. His job at the commercial art studio is where his path crossed with Walt Disney, whom also worked for the same commercial art studio. Walt and Ub came from similar backgrounds of struggle which made it easy for them to relate to each other and became good friends. This friendship led to a partnership and starting their own business called Laugh – O – Grams. They were both intrigues by art in motion, also known as animation.

Their first clever idea was a film where a 4-year-old girl was introduced to an animated world, combining live action and animation. At this time, Laugh – O – Grams was being kept alive using their private funds. Those funds would soon run our and would cause Walt Disney to go bankrupt. Walt decided to follow his brother Roy and move to California to start fresh and would enlist his brother to start a new business with him, which he questioned. The project they worked on did not meet the standards of the investors which would lead Walt to send an invitation to Ub Iwerks to join their company once again. During this time, Ub had become the head of the art department at the studio which he worked at trying to make up for the financial loss he took at Laugh – O – Grams. He had started to find he own style design and was learning principles of animation while he was the head of the art department. Because of the spirit of animation that Ub possessed, he left his job as the art department head and he and his mother drove west to join Walt and Roy in California. This would change the world of animation forever.

After several years of producing animated films for Margaret Winkler, who invested in Walt’s business, Margaret handed over the rights to her production studio to her husband. Her husband hired Walt and his crew to work on a new animated cartoon for Universal Pictures called “Oswald The Lucky Rabbit”. Once again, Ub was the lead animator and would use Oswald The Lucky Rabbit to experiment with animation and would find new ideas. The new cartoon became a hit and after several years, Ub finally started to focus on a social life outside of work which allowed him to meet his wife through a blind date and whom he married in 1927. After years of success with Oswald, the distributor became greedy and paid walt and his animator less. Behind Walt’s back, the distributor convinced many of Walt’s animators to join his own studio he would soon start, but Ub Iwerks knew it would be a betrayal and decided to leave the distributor and stay with Walt. This proved the loyalty and friendship they had with each other. Sadly, they didn’t have the rights to Oswald The Lucky Rabbit, and they would have to leave it with their distributor and start from scratch with a new idea.

Walt turned to Ub to design a new character that he would own. Ub worked day and night to come up with a new animated cartoon character that would surpass Oswald. “Plane Crazy” was a Micky Mouse Sound Cartoon that was created by Ub Iwerks alone. What would normally take months, Ub did in weeks. This is how Micky Mouse first came to be. Iwerks was responsible for the style and design of Micky Mouse.