



EDITED BY
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THE WALT DISNEY FILM ARCHIVES



THE ANIMATED MOVIES 1921-1968

TASCHEN

Walt's Arcadia: The Silly Symphonies

By Daniel Kotheneschulte

In the history of cinema, it took 15 years from the short moving pictures of the Lumière brothers in 1895 for the feature film to establish itself. This progression was repeated in Walt Disney's early career in animation. Sixteen years lie between his first short, the still sparsely animated Laugh-O-grams, and the premiere of *Snow White and the Seven*

Dwarfs, the feature-length landmark. The time between is considered the coming-of-age of an art form. More than the Mickey Mouse series, which was the cornerstone of Disney's worldwide success, the 75 short cartoons in the Silly Symphonies series are the benchmark of his process of artistic and technical perfection. And yet it would be

an understatement to merely admire them as milestones along the way to later masterpieces.

Just as we see early silent film history today as far more than just the infancy of cinema, but rather as a time of inexhaustible fantasy and variety, never to be repeated again, the Silly Symphonies were Walt Disney's arcadia.

Disney selected Wilfred Jackson, Burt Gillett, Dave Hand, and Ben Sharpsteen to direct them and enlisted some of America's best animators—Norman Ferguson, Fred Moore, Dick Lundy, and Albert Hurter, whom he eventually appointed as the first inspirational artist.



4.02

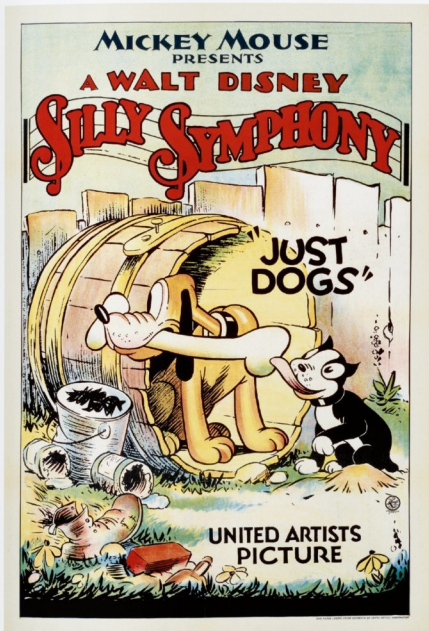


4.03

4.01 An all-purpose Silly Symphony poster from 1931, highlighting characters from some of the most popular releases.

4.02-03 In these story sketches for *Ferdinand the Bull* (1938), the matador, a caricature of Walt Disney, tries—without success—to rouse Ferdinand's fighting spirit.

4.04 Plato, a regular cast member in the Mickey Mouse series, was also featured in two Silly Symphonies. *Just Dogs* (1932) was the first.



4.04



6.12 *The Blue Fairy works her magic on Pinocchio in this watercolor by Gustaf Tenggren.*



9.11

9.11 Third row: Larry Clemmons, Ted Sears, unknown, Bill Cottrell; middle row: Hamilton Luske, Walt, Robert Benchley, Buddy Pepper; front row: Erdman Penner, Lance Nolley.

9.12 Animation drawing of the Dragon, who, said Robin Alan, "resembles Oscar Wilde in shape if not in wit."
9.13-14 Two story sketches by T. Hee.
9.15 Reluctant Dragon model sheet by Disney's first "concept artist," Albert Hurter.



9.12

"That's my man. Any man who could slide from Rothschild to Rax is the man for me."

Walt Disney about director Alfred Werker



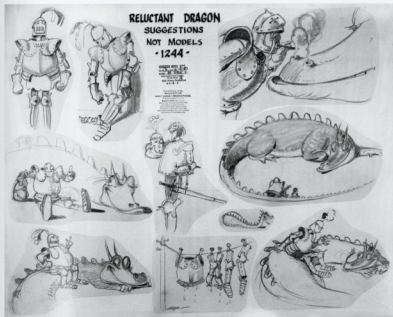
9.13



9.14

"It wasn't until we'd done about three or four of these [Goofy shorts] that [John McLeish] knew I was pulling his leg. By that time, he didn't mind. He was a star in his own right."

Jack Kinney



9.15



11.13

Fantasia, with its separate sections, could boast multiple styles of its own. Now, with the advent of Wong's sophisticated simplicity, *Bambi* found its unique "look." Layout and background artists followed Wong's lead, crafting refined settings that evoked the atmosphere of Bambi's world: the breathless hush before a rain shower, the lush greens of summer, the bittersweet melancholy of autumn.

"You have hit the spirit of the story with this. This is Bambi. There is no gag that stands out above Bambi himself."

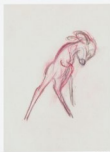
Sidney Franklin

What made this development doubly brilliant was that it also worked on a practical level. Veteran artists later pointed out that painting all the film's backgrounds in an elaborate style, each leaf and twig rendered in painstaking detail, would have taken so long that the entire production would be delayed. Too, such ornate backgrounds would invite technical problems; the animated characters, intended as the focal point of a scene, would be less effective when placed against cluttered, "busy" backgrounds. Now, with simplified, understated settings, both those problems were eliminated. From both an aesthetic and a practical standpoint, Tyrus Wong's

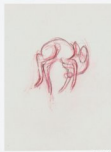
distinctive pictorial approach was a key factor that transformed Bambi.

Character Design and Animation

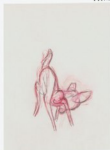
Of all aspects of production, by far the most technically difficult was the animation of the leading characters. Disney artists had animated deer and other hooved creatures in *Snow White* and other films, but with perfectly acceptable results. Those deer had generally appeared in supporting roles, and their toylike appearance was appropriate to the storybook world of a film like *Snow White*. As we have seen, however, *Bambi* was set in an entirely different animated universe, one based on the authentic world of nature. Moreover, these deer would not simply be glimpsed in passing but would be featured at the fore-



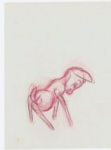
11.14



11.15



11.16



11.17

11.13 Art Elliott consults a model sheet as he animates the young Bambi.

11.14-17 These animation roughs by Milt Kahl, for a scene later cut from the film, show how the principles of animal anatomy were adapted to animation.