Spring 5-11-2018

Hidden Mickey: Animation's Exclusion from Art History

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Hidden Mickey:
Animation's Exclusion from Art History

by

Molly McGill

B.A., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Art & Art History
2018
This thesis entitled:
Hidden Mickey: Animation's Exclusion from Art History
written by Molly McGill
has been approved for the Department of Art and Art History

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Department of Art History at the University of Colorado at Boulder for their continued support during the production of this master's thesis. I am truly grateful to be a part of a department that is open to non-traditional art historical exploration and appreciate everyone who offered up their support. A special thank you to my advisor Dr. Brianne Cohen for all her guidance and assistance with the production of this thesis. Your supervision has been indispensable, and I will be forever grateful for the way you jumped onto this project and showed your support. Further, I would like to thank Dr. Kirk Ambrose and Dr. Denice Walker for their presence on my committee and their valuable input. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Catherine Cartwright and Jean Goldstein for listening to all my stress and acting as my second moms while I am so far away from my own family. Finally, thank you to Dr. Claire Farago, without whom this project would have never been started. Thank you for your support and all the guidance you provided me in the early stages of this thesis.

Thank you to my family for all their love. I would not be here without all of you. Thank you for supporting me and always being available to listen to my stress-rants. I love you Mom, Dad, Ben, Megan, and Grandma. Thank you for always reminding me that I can do anything I put my mind to. Also, a special thank you to my babies, Bruce and Lucy, for being my rocks during the last two years. Mom loves you to the moon and back (even though you can't even read this).

Shout out to my #gradgirls for making this whole process as fun and stress-free as is humanly possible. To Emily Mullen, Gladys Preciado, and Laura Thompson, thank you for your constant love and support over the last few years. I appreciate each and every one of you fabulous ladies! To Ailie Pankonien, thank you for being the best friend I truly needed during this period. I will forever be grateful for the weekend mountain excursions, brunches, and impulse shopping trips that made writing this thesis seem not-impossible. You are flawless and I love you more than you know! #gradgirlsforever honestly.

To the miscellaneous people who made this possible: Thank you to John Vojel at the Pearl Street Pub and Cellar for keeping us sane during the last year. Mondays were made easier by your presence and for that I will be forever grateful! Thank you to Taylor Swift, who released her newest album just in time to give me life as I was writing this thesis. It has been on repeat for the duration of my writing process. No shame. Thank you, Michael Bill, without whom I would not be here, living my best life. Thank you to the developers of Zotero for creating a program that saved me countless hours of handwriting citations. In the name of Lord Zotero, I give many thanks.

And, finally, thank you to the man himself—Walt Disney. I truly have no words to describe the way you have shaped my entire life. Your work provided me with the best childhood I could have ever imagined and I can think of no better way to honor that than to make dedicate my adult life to preserving it. Thank you, Walt, for creating these rich worlds and characters that have inspired so many of us. Thank you for being the dreamer we all hope to be. And thank you for demonstrating that nothing is truly impossible.

"All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them"—Walt Disney
ABSTRACT

McGill, Molly (M.A. Department of Art and Art History)

Hidden Mickey: Animation’s Exclusion from Art History,

Thesis directed by Dr. Brianne Cohen

Despite being one of the most prevalent forms of entertainment in the twentieth century, commercial animation has long been excluded from serious art historical discourse, only considered within the disciplines of film studies or visual studies. As a drawn-medium, reliant on a team of artists for completion, I argue animation warrants discussion within the discipline of art history, particularly to address modernism within the vernacular consumer in the early twentieth century. This thesis operates as a proponent for animation's inclusion in art history, as well as a historiography of the fraught relationship between animation and the art world. Animation's origins in lowbrow, vaudeville theaters and its early relationship to "craft" initially disadvantaged serious discussions on its artistic merit, regardless of the parallels between traditionally accepted art historical areas of study, which are outlined in this thesis. Because of its commercial success in the first decades of the twentieth century, art historians and museums alike were drawn to the medium of animation. However, despite a number of art historical writings and museum exhibitions featuring animation in the 1930s and 1940s, this remained a superficial relationship that did not truly advocate for inclusion within the canon. Cultural shifts within and outside of the discipline in the post-World War II period further marginalized animation as a worthy artistic medium, and the relationship that started in the 1930s and 40s crumbled by the 1970s. With the resurgence of animation in the 1990s, animation's inclusion into the art historical canon needs to be renegotiated, as it offers insight into the vernacular reception of art in the contemporary period.
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**Introduction**

On December 21, 1937, over 1,100 audience members arrived in Los Angeles to experience the opening of a visionary artwork unlike any the United States had seen before.\(^1\) The work was born of two million pre-production concept pieces, required 1,500 custom mixed shades of paint, and employed upwards of 700 artists over the course of four years, from inception to conclusion.\(^2\) Reviews lauded the work as a technical masterpiece, noting "daylight finds broad rays of sun slanting through the trees, the effect so expertly done that it is almost impossible to think paint had a hand in it," and "the dank, dark shadows of the forest are among the atmospheric miracles achieved in this medium."\(^3\) By the end of 1938, the work sold $6.5 million in tickets, an astounding number for the Depression era, and quadruple the final production cost.\(^4\) That work was Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, one of the world's first commercial animated feature-length films.

Prevalent since the turn-of-the-twentieth century, mainstream, commercial animation has been excluded from the art historical canon on the basis that this type of animation is intended for children, not serious, adult audiences, and that it is moving-image, best evaluated in film studies or visual studies. Additionally, animation is often only discussed in terms of its narrative elements, particularly in film studies, with the visual disregarded as unimportant in relation to the

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2 The final numbers are disputed among source materials and varies anywhere between 450 and 700 artists included in the final production.


narrative. This view of animation, however, ignores animation's presence in a liminal space between art and film—characterized by both artistic processes of development and its final form as moving image.

In this thesis, I argue that commercial animation deserves to be recognized in art historical study, no longer confined to film studies or visual studies on the basis of its medium or audience. Furthermore, I argue that studies of animation have the potential to provide new insight into the vernacular reception of fine art practices, particularly Modernist practices in the turn-of-the-twentieth century. For the purposes of this thesis, I limit my study to American mainstream, commercial animated shorts and feature-length films, which are often overlooked in favor of avant-garde, experimental animation, even in the aforementioned disciplines. Commercial animation is often overlooked based on its contemporary status as "children's entertainment," an issue that will be addressed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, because of the wealth of sources available and longevity of its production, this thesis will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on the production of the Walt Disney Animation Studios, from 1928 until the late 1990s. This focus will provide an evaluative case study in order to analyze how art historical discourse has marginalized animation, as well as how the discipline could approach animation.

Narrative and narrative structure will be of little importance to this study. Rather, I will emphasize the visual itself, as well as the methods of producing animation. The majority of current scholarship on animation arises from the humanities, in disciplines such as film studies, communications, women and gender studies, and ethnic studies, which highlight the questions of narrative to address how messages are being conveyed and emphasized through animation. I have found that, outside discussions of race or stereotyping, little to no analysis of the visual in
and of itself is present in this scholarship. Considering the age group these films and shorts are intended for, this is problematic. Children who are not old enough to discern the narrative as a whole often turn to the visuals in order to make sense of the story’s narrative. Scholars such as Dorothy L. Hurley, a specialist in urban education and educational leadership, have unveiled how children pick up on the coding present inside the visual. Light colors, for instance, generally indicate who is "good" while darker colors represent those who are "evil." The visual is the most important aspect of this medium, as it is what is anticipated to capture the intended audience from the start, but it is overlooked almost entirely by contemporary scholarship, which emphasizes narrative and animation technique. This disregard for the visual directs contemporary analyses of animation to miss important messages embedded within the visual itself.

**Chapter Outline**

Ultimately, the overarching aim of this thesis is to demonstrate why forms of visual culture that are considered "vernacular" are relegated to other disciplines on the basis of their production methods and their intended audiences. Despite the parallels between animation and traditional areas of art historical study, animation is not considered a worthy addition to the art historical canon—a demonstration of the processes of exclusion that structures the canon itself. This thesis operates as a historiography, in which I outline the connections between animation and art history, a relationship fraught with clashing ideologies from animation's birth through the

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present day. While other scholars have dabbled in telling bits and pieces of this story, I aim to compile the history of this relationship into one chronology, demonstrating how art historical discourse has only ever considered animation on a superficial level. Further, this discourse acts as a proponent for animation's inclusion into art historical study, highlighting how animation can be used to gather new insights into vernacular visual culture.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I discuss how animation came to be overlooked by mainstream art historical studies, emphasizing the historical development of the boundaries between "fine" art and vernacular culture and how these boundaries have been reinforced by traditional art historical hierarchies throughout the twentieth century. This chapter suggests that animation's birthplace in vaudeville, during a period of social stratification that stressed modes of entertainment as class-based, inherently placed animation on a trajectory to be ignored by art historical discourse. Additionally, I outline how animation's productions methods relegate it to the realm of "kitsch" or "craft," which is a category traditionally marginalized by art historical study. The historiographic element of this thesis begins in this chapter, discussing the origins of animation's eventual exclusion from art history.

The production methods of animation and their parallels to already defined areas of art historical study are outlined in Chapter 2, demonstrating the direct connections between art historical discourse and animation. This chapter primarily analyzes the works and techniques of the Walt Disney Studios, as Disney production methods are, generally, adopted by other commercial animation studios in the 1930s, due to their efficiency and artistic merit. Furthermore, the Disney Studios did not face any true competition in the commercial animation market, particularly in the production of full-length feature films, until the early 1990s, denoting
their importance in this study. In this chapter, I continue my historiographic analysis by addressing animation's filmic origins and early chronology.

The third chapter will discuss early art historical interests in animation. This includes writings on animation as well as the first museum exhibitions to feature animation, primarily in the 1930s and 40s, which I will examine in order to discuss how art historians were negotiating animation's place in art historical discourse and the canon itself. Utilizing my own findings during research at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, I contend that, despite clear early interest in animation, this relationship between art history, museums, and animation was a superficial one that did not truly aim to canonize animation in art historical study.

My final chapter will discuss how this early exploration of animation in art historical studies was derailed by a number of factors within the discipline itself, and historical events affecting the production of animation and, more broadly, American culture in the period after World War II. In this section, I will evaluate how elements within the field of art history, like the shift away from formalist evaluation and the movement towards abstraction, further removed commercial animation from art historical relevance. Additionally, post-World War II budget crises and the onset of television impacted animation's potential to be seriously considered by art historians, as it led to a far different type of animation being produced in the post-war period than was being produced prior to World War II. Animation in this period, particularly with the establishment of Disneyland, was returned to the status of childish amusement, tumbling from its pre-war status as a potential artform within modernism.

To conclude, I will discuss how the evaluation of animation would prove beneficial for the discipline of art history as opposed to other disciplines, like visual studies or film studies. Additionally, I will demonstrate how a resurgence of interest in animation beginning in the
1990s in conjunction with the current disciplinary crisis could allow for animation to be easily included in art history in the present moment. However, I also aim to complicate the canon and its exclusionary structure, highlighting how contemporary discussions emphasize *who* is ignored rather than *what* is ignored, limiting the scope of inclusion in art historical study. Current disciplinary debates on the canon emphasize marginalized groups that are regularly excluded from serious discourse. However, these discussions do not take into account entire media forms that have been historically disregarded, animation included, and the implications these media formats may have on art historical discussions.
Chapter 1: The Origins of Animation's Exclusion

Since its inception as a formal discipline in the nineteenth century, art historical study has been concerned primarily with two things: identifying broad historical trends in art production and traditions, and the analysis of specific works of art to determine their maker, meaning, and how they fit into these broad traditions. However, the objects and artists studied fall into very specific categories that allow for their inclusion—particularly categories of fine, highbrow artistic production. Through an exploration of the development of the concepts of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" culture and how art history has operated within these categories, I seek to evaluate how animation was set up to be excluded from art historical study at the time of its foundation. Here, I evaluate this dichotomy and its relationship to class boundaries in the United States starting in the mid-nineteenth century, moving into the twentieth century. Sociologist Tak Wing Chan has demonstrated that social stratification varies from nation to nation, with certain occupations and positions in a society considered higher in a social hierarchy than others. By emphasizing how the boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow developed in the United States, I aim to demonstrate how art historical study was on track to dismiss this American art form from its inception.

Origins of the High/Low Dichotomy

The concepts of "high" and "low" culture permeate society today, defining who belongs to certain status groups, particularly based on wealth, intellectual interests, or lack thereof. These terms were developed during the second Industrial Revolution, which began in the 1820s. They developed in tandem with the onset of expanded leisure time and a further societal stratification...
with the expansion of the middle class during this period. Highbrow generally refers to forms of culture considered appropriate and worthwhile by the social elites, such as fine art, literature, and music, like opera. Lowbrow generally refers to forms of popular culture consumed by the masses, like pulp novels, cinema, and arts that are frequently considered "craft" or "decorative."

The term "highbrow" and its partner term "lowbrow" first appeared in print as a reference to culture in the American journal *The National* in 1912, with an unnamed author discussing the disparities of reading skills between social classes:

> There is an alarmingly wide chasm, I might almost say a vacuum, between the high-brow, who considers reading either as a trade or as a form of intellectual wrestling, and the low-brow, who is merely seeking for gross thrills. It is to be hoped that culture will soon be democratized through some less conventional system of education, giving rise to a new type that might be called the middle-brow, who will consider books as a source of intellectual enjoyment. 

For this author, the terms were employed as a method of discussing social classes and their respective tastes, as the terms are utilized today.

However employed today, these concepts have racial underpinnings behind their development. Phrenology, or the study of the correlation between the shape of the skull and intelligence level, was popularized in the nineteenth century and was used as a form of racial science, often determining that non-white populations were less intelligent than their white

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9 *The Nation*, January 15, 1912, 75.

10 Each of these terms did debut earlier than this, with "highbrow" first being used in print in 1898 and "lowbrow" in 1907, according to Merriam-Webster. However, this 1912 date represents the first time they were utilized in relationship with defining social classes and their taste.
counterparts, based solely on physical features.\textsuperscript{11} English professor Perry Meisel notes that the terms were directly related to the physiognomic features of these marginalized communities, stating, "a 'high' forehead meant intelligence; a 'low' one meant stupidity. Phrenology thrived as a popular science in the late nineteenth century and contributed to the racial theories of the Nazis, for whom the Jewish cranium and pale, sunken face were clear indications of Jewish racial inferiority."\textsuperscript{12} This connection to nineteenth-century racial theory is important, as many of the populations that are deemed "lesser than" during this period were the same populations consuming early animation, as I will evaluate later in this chapter.

The types of media that were considered under the umbrellas of high and low at the turn of the twentieth century, and the venues that were associated with them, frequently have class correlations as well. The theater and the museum space, filled with the exemplars of high society, were cornerstones of highbrow culture, while the cinema, vaudeville, and the amusement park connoted lowbrow culture because of the crass sensibilities that the venues and their respective media represented. Historically, while areas like the vaudeville theater and amusement park were visited by middle and working-class patrons, the theater was open to those of high societal status, with performers enacting works, such as Shakespearean classics, which were elevated by their elite patrons.

In his book \textit{Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America}, American historian Lawrence Levine discusses the dissemination of Shakespeare across the United States in the nineteenth-century as the event that launched the associations of certain

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Perry Meisel, \textit{The Myth of Popular Culture from Dante to Dylan}, Blackwell Manifestos (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.}
types of media with different social classes.\textsuperscript{13} Noting that at this time theaters generally had three levels of seating available for all rungs of society, Levine suggests that theaters worked diligently to make sure the differing classes never had to interact with each other, with theater boxes designated for the well-to-do, high-class populations; the pit selected for the "middling classes;" and the galleries relegated to the working classes, who could not afford better seats, and the undesirables, like prostitutes and African-American spectators.\textsuperscript{14} Regardless of class, Shakespeare was popular across the United States and performed in non-traditional spaces like mining camps and saloons during westward expansion. It was also altered to fit vernacular language and customs, with tragedies being shown as satiric comedies in some areas, and language being altered to make the content approachable to all audience members. However, feeling unwelcome in traditional theater spaces, many middle and working-class individuals looked for their own spaces for entertainment.

By the nineteenth century, the theater had split off into two branches, the elitist, highbrow theater in which classics, like those of Shakespeare, were performed in their entirety, and vaudeville theaters, which spoke more to the working classes who primarily attended Shakespeare performances for the humorous acts that preceded or followed the original productions.\textsuperscript{15} While the upper-class, urban elites remained with tradition, the working classes and marginalized populations across the country turned to forms of performance and media that


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 20-45.
were more open to them and their tastes—such as vaudeville, the cinema, comic strips, and other forms of vernacular culture.

**Vaudeville, Animation, and Separation from Art**

As a result of the popularity of short one-acts or variety acts that played before or after a performance at the theater, vaudeville became a prevalent form of entertainment among the working classes across the United States. Vaudeville shows contained a number of musical and theatrical acts that catered to a working-middle-class audience, often featuring unsavory elements, like nudity, crass humor, and questionable language. Furthermore, vaudeville was open to spectators of all ages and backgrounds, allowing for immigrant audiences and audiences of color—shunned by the audiences of higher forms of culture—a safe space for interacting with the modern world. American historian Patricia Bradley identifies vaudeville as a space free from the traditional restraints of society, arguing that vaudeville was a space of subversion, full of "too much flesh, too many immigrants, and a bit too much freedom."\(^{16}\) Born out of saloon one-acts, theater end-cap acts, and burlesque houses, variety theaters began springing up, particularly in urban centers, by the end of the 1800s and were popular with both working class communities and immigrant populations. Further, these theaters were frequented by middle-class women, who often partook in vaudeville shows while out on the town running errands, both with or without their children.\(^{17}\)

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As a venue, vaudeville theaters were far more open to women as audience members enjoying a show on their own than traditional theaters, which employed a restrictive, traditional, Victorian value system. However, noticing the attraction to middle-class women and families, vaudeville houses began advertising "clean" or "polite" vaudeville shows, which eradicated the unsavory elements of traditional performances, like burlesque performances and the crassest humor. Vaudeville became a venue for middle- and working-class America at the turn of the century, as it created a safe space for marginalized populations and provided entertainment that catered to these populations, as opposed to traditional forms of entertainment. Further, it provided an outlet for audiences to interact with these populations in a positive way—through humor and performance that was generally free of bigotry. Many immigrants tried their hand at vaudeville performance, bringing their traditional acts from home to the American stage, which allowed for audiences to interact with these "outsider" traditions in a positive manner that encouraged interaction with other cultures through their own vernacular lens.

As a space free from constraints of highbrow traditions, vaudeville allowed for the experimentation with modernist language and art forms, such as animation, alongside old forms of entertainment. Animation itself has its origins in optical illusions and toys that were popular with working classes. Parlor toys, like the phenakistoscope or the zoetrope, were fashionable because they demonstrated the newly discovered optical illusion known as the persistence of vision, or the blending of multiple images into a single image in the human mind when moved at

18 Ibid.

a particular speed. Foundational to animation, and cinema more broadly, these simple toys demonstrated that images, moving at a particular speed, could be fused into a moving image. This would be further demonstrated with Eadweard Muybridge's photographic experiments regarding animal motion. However, as film historian Don Crafton discusses in Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928, most early animators were also influenced by flipbooks, which consisted of sequential drawings that produced an illusion of movement when thumbed through.

On the vaudeville stage, early experimentations with these old technologies in combination with newer ones led to the development of animation within this venue. Film historian Nicholas Sammond notes that lightning sketches were an important antecedent to the animated short film: "The lightning-sketch artist performed a narrative monologue while drawing on a large easel, creating images that rapidly transformed. Some of the earliest animated films captured these performances, adding film tricks such as double-exposure and stop motion, to create imagery that seemed to come to life and interact with the real world." These built on old performances and flipbooks, combining them with cinematic technologies to create a spectacle of moving images. Don Crafton notes that it is highly likely that early animator J. Stuart Blackton saw one of these sketches and adapted it for his experiments with animation. Often identified as the first person to utilize true, hand-drawn animation, Blackton created a hand-drawn face in The Enchanted Drawing (1899) that interacts with various other objects, including

22 Sammond, “Birth of An Industry.”
cigars and wine, that appear on the screen (Figure 1). This short replicates lightning sketch performances, with the chalkboard aesthetic and the utilization of hand-drawn caricatures.\footnote{Donald Crafton, \textit{Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898-1928} (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982).} Blackton's \textit{The Enchanted Drawing} is an excellent example of the connections between vaudeville and animation technologies, demonstrating how old forms of entertainment like flip books, comics, and lightning sketches were hybridized with new cinematic technologies on the vaudeville stage.

Beyond lighting sketches, early experimentation with animation was part of vaudeville acts more broadly, used as a spectacle for the audience's amusement, similar to Tom Gunning's concept of the "Cinema of Attractions." A notable example of this arises in the early work of animation pioneer Windsor McCay, whose short \textit{Gertie the Dinosaur} (1914) was originally shown as part of McCay's own vaudeville act. In \textit{Gertie the Dinosaur}, McCay would interact with Apatosaurus Gertie through the screen on which she was projected. As McCay gave her directions from the stage, Gertie appeared to respond to his commands, with the hand-drawn dinosaur moving at his urging. The figure of Gertie introduced a new concept to animation, which previously had been used in the manner of trick-film, in which objects appeared to spring to life on their own, independently of the artist's hand. Furthermore, \textit{Gertie the Dinosaur} employed character animation, a staple of animation that the Disney Studios would later employ to give their animated creations distinctive personalities. Gertie not only followed commands from McCay, but also had her own temperament: crying when scolded, nonchalantly eating everything in sight, and sassing McCay himself, requiring that he talk to her in a different manner for her to respond to his commands (Figure 2). Towards the end of the act, McCay disappeared behind the screen and became a part of the moving image himself, with a basic
outline of McCay joining Gertie on screen, climbing on her back, and riding off into the distance with the dinosaur (Figure 3). McCay's fusion of stage and screen content demonstrates that vaudeville was a venue open to the exploration and development of animation technologies.

Considering these performances' audiences, it is no wonder animation was considered a lowbrow form of entertainment to the upper-classes, who saw the venues as dens of sin. However, even as vaudeville theaters shuttered their doors with the onset of cinema, many cartoons carried on the traditions of the vaudeville stage through their narratives and imagery. Some of the earliest commercial animated shorts often featured the same crass humor and questionable content for which early vaudeville was known, and embraced their origins on the vaudeville stage. A cartoon from 1928, titled *Woos Whoopee* features Felix the Cat enjoying the sinful activities the vaudeville theater was known for. Felix spends the evening drinking heavily at the "Whoopee Club" and ends up hallucinating several grotesque images as he tries to get home. The short ends with Felix drunkenly driving a stolen car to his home, where he is berated by his wife for being out too late. This replicates the behaviors practiced in vaudeville venues that caused women to rally and push for the prohibition of alcohol eight years prior. Betty Boop's first appearance in Max Fleischer's *Talkartoon* series in 1930 also demonstrates the crass nature of these clubs and theaters. The short is set in a vaudeville performance, with Boop performing


25 For distribution purposes, McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* was spliced with live-action sequences in which McCay makes a bet with a handful of companions that he can make a drawing come to life, like his earlier *Little Nemo* shorts. While there is no recording of McCay's live performances of the act, Walt Disney created a reenactment for an exploration of the history of animation for his *Disneyland* television series in the 1950s, which can be found on YouTube.

26 Nicholas Sammond, “Birth of An Industry.”

the role of a risqué burlesque dancer. Additionally, many of the earliest Mickey Mouse shorts have been deemed questionable, even by today's standards, because of the amount of violence and sexual humor present in them. In their short format, cartoons are the equivalent of the vaudeville segmented performance—a quick story told in a matter of minutes featuring gag humor to keep the audience's attention. Early cartoons took this connection a step further by replicating the behaviors found in the vaudeville theater within their narratives.

One of the most important features that animation adopted from vaudeville was the character of the minstrel. Performed by African-American men, or white men in blackface and costume, minstrelsy is a primarily American performance tradition, in which the actors dance, sing, and perform acrobatic tricks under the guise of a "happy slave." Minstrelsy enacted a stereotypical, often fantastical, "blackness" as the main element of the character. White performers would demonstrate "blackface," with grease paint or cork, wear gaudy costumes that reassured their "blackness," including crude wigs, and vocalize a performance that replicated the sound of the "happy slave." Film historian Nicholas Sammond has analyzed the transformation of the role of the minstrel from stage to screen in early animated characters, particularly Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse, whose all-black bodies, with white outlines around their mouths and eyes, respectively, align them with stereotypes of the minstrel performer (Figure 4). Additionally, Mickey's ever-present white gloves implicate him further in this regard. Each character acts as the everyman, often getting into trouble and acting in a facetious manner, similar to how minstrel performances were enacted.

28 Dave Fleischer, Talkartoon: Dizzy Dishes (Paramount Publix Corporation, 1930).

With the onset of sound cartoons, the association of jazz music with cartoons further implicated the racial undertones of these cartoons and their associations with minstrelsy.\textsuperscript{30} It should be of no surprise that, often, cartoons employed the minstrel show as their narrative. A notable example includes Disney's \textit{Mickey's Mellerdramer} (1933), which exhibits Mickey Mouse and friends performing their own stage version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin}, complete with Mickey Mouse and his fellow performers putting on blackface and traditional minstrel costumes (Figure 5).\textsuperscript{31} Moreover, a handful of the original \textit{Looney Toons} and their \textit{Merrie Melodies} counterparts, produced by Warner Brothers, were held from syndication because of their problematic employment of blackface and racial stereotyping. Known as the "Censored Eleven," the shorts feature several instances in which multiple characters perform in blackface, particularly in a satire of \textit{Gone with the Wind} (1939) called "Confederate Honey."\textsuperscript{32} The widespread utilization of blackface in animated shorts harkens back to the vaudeville character of the minstrel, demonstrating further connections between this popular theater format and animation.\textsuperscript{33}

As vaudeville lost popularity moving into the 1920s and 30s, the marginalized populations that attended vaudeville previously now flocked to the cinema—the newest form of spectacle for mainstream audiences. Films were originally shown as end caps to vaudeville

\textsuperscript{30} Sammond, "Birth of an Industry."

\textsuperscript{31} Wilfred Jackson, \textit{Mickey’s Mellerdramer} (United Artists, 1933).


\textsuperscript{33} I have discussed minstrelsy here at a basic level to demonstrate connections between animation and the vaudeville stage. As a problematic performance style, however, I have barely skinned the surface on minstrelsy here and its implications. I recommend Nicholas Sammond's \textit{Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation} for a further, in-depth discussion of the implications of minstrelsy and the use of blackface in turn-of-the-century American animation.
performances, furthering connections between the cinema and vaudeville. As film garnered widespread attention, nickelodeons began popping up en masse, offering crowds the chance to see a continuous feed of films, with live performances interspersed.³⁴ Film historians Stephen Mintz and Sara McNeil note of early film attendance:

During the twentieth century's first two decades, movie-going tended to conform to class and ethnic divisions. Urban workers attended movie houses located in their own working-class and ethnic neighborhoods, where admission was extremely inexpensive (averaging just 7 cents during the teens), and a movie was often accompanied by an amateur talent show or a performance by a local ethnic troupe. These working-class theaters were rowdy, high-spirited centers of neighborhood sociability, where mothers brought their babies and audiences cheered, jeered, shouted, whistled, and stamped their feet.³⁵

This rowdy behavior discussed by Mintz and McNeil was popular in the working-class sections of traditional theaters. However, the behavior was scathed at by elite members of the audiences, who despaired that this behavior was ruining their nights out at the theater.³⁶ These attitudes echo the concerns of the societal elites at the time of vaudeville's inception, when high-class audience members were appalled by the loud

Furthermore, women and children were crucial in the earliest days of cinema, with these groups establishing themselves as the primary cinema attendees in suburban theaters. Women often saw their own middle-class values echoed on screen, and working-class women attended urban theaters en masse, often dressing up and hoping to be seen. Working class women utilized the cinema as a space for judging their own fashion and a space for a new form of female


³⁶ Levine, Highbrow/lowbrow, 20-87.
bonding. Similar to vaudeville, nickelodeons catered to immigrant populations, women, and those of working-classes, providing these communities with a venue for coming to terms with the rapidly changing modern world. The tradition of animation continued in the cinema, catering to the same audiences as vaudeville and continuing the same innovations that were founded on the vaudeville stage.

Hierarchies in the Arts

Whereas working-class populations flocked to vaudeville performances and, later, cinema, upper-classes refused to betray tradition. The concepts of highbrow and lowbrow are easily applied to attitudes in the art world in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. The evolution of museums in the early twentieth century denotes a shift of values in the American mindset. Upper-class elites stuck with tradition, in which the traditional performance and visual formats are highly lauded. This is indicated by their refusal to abandon conventional forms of theater and continued patronage of traditional art institutions, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, which opened in 1870 with a robust collection of Italian and French traditional paintings and Classical antiquities for museumgoers to view and learn from. The Met emphasized traditional forms of artistic production that were valued by established art institutions, like the Salon of Paris. In contrast to the vulgar spaces of


40 The Salon system notably established a hierarchy of genre that denoted what was acceptable to be shown. The hierarchy was established in 1669 by art-theoretician Andre Felibien and consisted of history painting, megalography and mythology, religious subjects, portraiture, genre painting, landscape, and still life. Anything falling outside of these categories was considered uncouth. Often, paintings falling outside of this traditional
the vaudeville theater or the carnival, "the museum comprised a pure space, symbolically opposed to the vulgarities [of other public arenas], where the values of civilized bourgeois culture were coded and decoded by this class itself." 41

The museum acted, in theory, as a public space, open to all for the education of the masses through proper, high culture. However, rules imposed by the museums themselves removed any inclusionary modes of behavior, and, rather, acted as a proponent of the higher classes, distancing the institutions from the crass behaviors of the working classes. Museums often imposed regulations that disadvantaged working-class audiences from visiting and determined what groups belonged to the museum-going sphere and who were "alien" populations. Regulations on "the prevention of vandalism, the touching of pictures…the carrying of babies…[and] proscriptions against spitting, drinking, and dirty footwear" were established as a method of weeding out those groups that were viewed as improper consumers of this fine culture. Furthermore, many museums opened their doors to all classes on certain days only, regulating their visits in a scrutinious manner. For example, the Royal Museum of Scotland welcomed the working classes as an experiment on New Year's Day in 1852, but only gave working-class visitors a total of twenty-five minutes in the institution before they were ushered out to make way for the next group of working-class cultural tourists. 42 Despite being theoretically open to patrons of all classes, rules and regulations established by museums in the hierarchy or traditional style were shown and ridiculed. Notably, Manet's *Olympia* was exhibited in 1865 and was scrutinized heavily by the public and the Salon itself. The Met opened a mere five years after this incident, and likely promoted salon-approved aesthetics in its first decades of operation.


nineteenth and early twentieth-century disadvantaged working-class patrons and directed their attention to other, "more appropriate" forms of leisure activities.

This retained lauding of fine, particularly Classical, art forms likely comes from a desire for the elites of American society to negotiate their own anxieties about the chaotic modern world. Published in 1869, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* satirizes these concerns, identifying culture as the study of perfection and anarchy as the distinguishing factor of Britain's newfound "democracy," which lacked direction and authority. In his satire, Arnold highlights the deleterious nature of popular forms of culture and insists that disseminating the purest forms of art, literature, music, and drama, among others, would be the best way to enforce the natural moral order and cease the anarchical society that had developed in the onset of industrialization.

Arnold's text demonstrates upper-class worries about the loss of authority. He points to their fear that these false forms of culture have created a working-class that has no idea where to turn for authority. However, with exposure to the appropriate forms of culture, this working class will become conformant again, through the discovery of their "best" self:

People of the aristocratic class want to affirm their ordinary selves, their likings and dislikings; people of the middle-class the same, people of the working-class the same. By our everyday selves, however, we are separate, personal, at war; we are only safe from one another’s tyranny when no one has any power; and this safety, in its turn, cannot save us from anarchy. And when, therefore, anarchy presents itself as a danger to us, we know not where to turn… We want an authority, and we find nothing but jealous classes, checks, and a dead-lock; culture suggests the idea of the State. We find no basis for a firm State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our best self.43

Arnold's text indicates that culture has the power to liberate society from this anarchical position and to reaffirm the traditional status quo, or traditional class structure, insisting that the correct forms of culture will lead to people to discover their best selves and their place in society. As a

satire, Arnold points to the irrational fears of the upper-classes and indicates that the culture they so fear could actually benefit society.

Writing before the inundation of photography and cinema, Arnold's satire points to burlesque, popular music, cheap pulp novels, and vaudeville as the main forms of culture that are deemed questionable. At the inception of cinema, the movies and jazz music were attacked frequently as being the corrupting force of society—two media forms that were enjoyed not only by the working-classes of society, but by non-white communities in particular. Unlike Arnold, writers of the twentieth-century found these media forms to be deleterious to society. This attack on popular culture is highlighted in the writings of later twentieth-century cultural critics who are concerned that these popular forms of culture were destructive to society.

Notably, Walter Benjamin bemoaned the reproducibility of art that destroyed the sacred aura of an original artwork, reducing each masterpiece to a cheap reproduction. For Benjamin, photography and film were to blame and "the film is….the artwork most capable of improvement. And this capability is linked to its radical renunciation of eternal value." Film, by its nature, is the first art form that depends entirely on being reproducible—a flaw that Benjamin saw as detrimental to society and the arts as a whole. This is primarily because the reproducibility of an object removed it from its original sacred, ritualistic context, and, instead, politicized it. However, Benjamin implies that, if film were removed from its "capitalist exploitation," it is possible that it could be a positive form of media. Film can be used to take


certain ideas and promote them to the masses, such as fascist ideologies, which were a concern during the period of Benjamin's writing in 1935. Benjamin lauds "American slapstick comedies and Disney films [which] trigger a therapeutic response of unconscious energies," allowing a release of built-up emotional conflict and catalyzing inward reflection on part of the viewer.46 For Benjamin, the detrimental aspect of film is that it has turned the masses into those seeking distraction over those seeking devotion, which is problematic when film is heavily politicized and pushing agendas. Because of their comedic nature, Disney animation and slapstick films have a harder time pushing problematic agendas, like those of fascism. Instead, they allow for the release of unconscious threatening energies embedded in other types of grotesque film that do urge viewers to reevaluate their own causes and ideologies.

Cultural critics Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer also criticized mass culture and the power that technology held over society in their 1944 essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." According to Horkheimer and Adorno "films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce."47 Films, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, were simple reiterations of the same plots repeatedly, formulaic to the degree that audiences became borderline brainwashed. Horkheimer and Adorno also despaired the evolution of the cartoon from a surrealist slapstick endeavor into yet another formulaic, artificial method of storytelling that depended too much on rationality and violence for the sake of violence.48 Once a

46 Ibid, 244-245.


48 Ibid.
spectacle of technological innovation, for these authors, the movies came to be seen as a method of turning the masses into conformist consumers with no minds of their own. Horkheimer and Adorno believed the film industry's evolution into just that—an industry—removed the artistic intentions of film and instead transformed it into a media form that pushed political and business interests. However, for both Benjamin and Horkheimer and Adorno, animation previously stood outside of these corporate limitations, implying that they were considered to have artistic merit before their adoption into mainstream cinematic practices.

**Art Versus Craft**

Similar attitudes towards mass culture can be found in writings of art historians from the same period. Clement Greenberg's 1939 article "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" identifies the avant-garde art circles as those with a superior consciousness of history, or those wishing to keep culture moving forward despite the chaos and violence of the modern world. Kitsch, on the other hand, is "a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy." In other words, Greenberg identifies kitsch as that which is mechanical, operates under a formulaic structure, and imitates the avant-garde. It is a spectacle, and a false, superficial one—indicating that the cinema and, therefore, animation are simply kitsch. Further, like Benjamin's attitudes on film, Greenberg connects kitsch to authoritarian political regimes because this type of media is easily augmented to control the masses. Art historian Elissa Auther highlights Greenberg’s association between

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50 Ibid, 38.

51 Interestingly, animation will be utilized across the world during World War II to push the masses to aid in the war effort in a variety of ways. Shorts by the Walt Disney Studios demonstrated both the harsh realities of
mass culture and the feminine across his life’s writings, noting that his linking of the masculine with fine art further divided art from craft in this historical period.\textsuperscript{52}

The boundaries between what is considered art and craft stem from a shift during the Renaissance from guild production of goods to individual artistic creation, elevating the status of certain individuals and media, like painting and sculpture, over those that were created by guilds and artisans, such as woodworking and metallurgy. Art historian Laura Morelli notes that most cultures do not have a notion of art versus craft, arguing that these boundaries come out of primitivist, colonialist practices of the nineteenth century in which certain media and cultures were relegated to the status of "craft" and ignored by art historical study and textbooks based on their hypothetical unimportance.\textsuperscript{53}

The development of this dichotomy in the nineteenth century, as this classist stratification was unfolding, is striking. Craft, traditionally seen as a feminine undertaking, was not considered under the umbrella of fine art because it is often viewed as decorative, lacking serious artistic merit or depth. Developing out of the Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth century, craft lost its position of importance with mass mechanization and industrialization, as machines could produce similar works much more quickly and cheaply. The arts of embroidery, jewelry making, and interior décor were now relegated to machine production, which was more efficient. Further, World’s Fairs exhibitions highlighted the future, frequently displaying machinery and

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technological innovation in the "Western" pavilions, while Euroamerican countries displayed items that were viewed as craft, often intended to demonstrate their lack of advancement. Additionally, craft was often associated with immigrant populations, African-American populations, and the working class—all populations that were linked to mass culture, as I have discussed previously.  

This connection to working-class and marginalized populations helped to diminish the importance of craft, similarly to how vaudeville and, later, cinema and animation were not taken seriously by cultural elites.

Craft went relatively unrecognized in the discipline of art history in the twentieth century. Museums often either rejected craft objects or embraced them wholly, as Alfred J. Barr of New York’s Museum of Modern Art did during his tenure as director of the museum. Exhibitions on architecture, interior design, posters, and machine art occurred frequently during his time at the MoMA.  

Similarly to animation, as will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, craft appeared to be on track to for more explanation and analysis in art historical study. However, this attitude shifted in the period after World War II, with expanding art departments across the United States. Curator Nicholas R. Bell discusses attitudes towards craft in the post-war period as fundamentally concerned with the specific materials used. As many art departments flourished and expanded because of the GI Bill, they began to introduce departments based around different materials—clay, fiber, wood, metals, and glass, specifically. However, critical evaluation and


review of these works was never truly taken seriously and the emphasis on single materials limited the scope of practice that was analyzed.56

The divisions between art and craft are still prevalent to this day. In a 2011 blog post for the Tate Modern, arts and culture columnist Kirstie Beaven documents her discussion with contemporary artists about what the boundaries between art and craft truly are: "I asked a few makers at a contemporary craft fair last week, and they often felt that it was the material they worked with that made it craft - textiles, ceramics, glass seem to fall into the craft category, never mind if their intention as maker might be an artistic one."57 If we consider medium as the defining boundary of what constitutes art over craft, it is important to note the connection between these media and "female" modes of production. Particularly media like textiles and ceramics have historically been considered "feminine" arts, as it has been primarily women who have worked with them. Earlier, I discussed the connection between film and female audiences, pointing to the link between early cinema and female attendance. Considering the discussion surrounding women's' historical exclusion from art history, it is no wonder these media have been historically connected to craft, as opposed to art.

Another reason objects are defined as "craft," according to the Tate Modern survey, is the way their makers learned their skills. Many artists feel that learning through a trade system, as many textile workers and ceramicists do, classifies their works as craft, while art relies on an individual "genius" that needs no formal training to generate his or her expressive talent.58 It is


58 Ibid.
important to note that animation comes out of the tradition of cartooning, which, unlike naturalistic drawing, has historically been considered vernacular, and cartoon artists were primarily taught through instructive courses or apprenticeships. Otto Messmer, creator of Felix the Cat, Max Fleischer, creator of Betty Boop, and Walt Disney all attended local art courses and participated in correspondence courses as a way of fine-tuning their cartooning skills in their early years, with each shifting to animation as an experiment or when jobs in cartooning were scarce. This type of training would have indicated that they are not the artistic "genius" in the Vasarian tradition, which has been seminal for art historical recognition. Furthermore, the workshop model that animation studios followed historically has been seen as connected to artisan trade. Art historian Louis Waldman observes that there was a stigma attached to workshops and collaborative production, even in the Renaissance, noting that "though art-making with the collaboration of assistants remained the norm, among elite artists the concept of the workshop became problematic, so much that Vasari in his Lives of the Artists uses the term 'ordinary painters' to refer to 'painters who keep a workshop.'…Part of the stigma of the workshop was tied to its associations with artisan trades." 

While this workshop format does allow for a connection to art historical studies, it also further perpetuates the image of animation as craft because of this model. As demonstrated, these


60 Catherine M. Soussloff, The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

attitudes on art versus craft are easily applied to film, and animation, and hinder its consideration as a worthy art form, instead deeming both inferior modes of craft. Because of animation's continued connections to the vivacious forms of vernacular "lowbrow" culture, from the vaudeville stage to the cinema screen, and to craft as opposed to fine art, animation was always on track to fail in the eyes of art history and be excluded on these criteria alone. However, with the onset of animated feature films under the guidance of Walt Disney, art historians and critics began to take notice of the potential of the medium and began to question its status as a potential "fine" art.
Chapter 2: Where Art and Animation Overlap

Commercial animation is regularly discounted as a worthy artistic medium for evaluation based on its association with children's entertainment and cartoons or comic strips, which are considered lowbrow, popular culture. Often, in conversations about animation's artistic merit, many will point to experimental, avant-garde animation, which often plays with non-figural representation and non-linear storytelling, if a story is told at all. In her popular textbook *A New History of Animation*, Maureen Furniss, one of the leading experts in animation history, has an entire chapter dedicated to animation as art, titled "Animation as Modern Art," in which only abstract or avant-garde animation is discussed, not commercial animation. Stan Brakhage's *Water for Maya* (2000) is an excellent example of the type of animation with which art historians and film historians have been concerned: the film, an homage to avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren, is a short, abstract animation. To create it, Brakhage painted directly onto film strips with watercolors, giving the viewer the feeling of traveling through a Pollock or Kandinsky painting (Figure 6). However, with this continued academic emphasis on only avant-garde and experimental production, commercial animation is diminished in art history and film studies, which focus reductively on its cartoon-based characters, seemingly simplistic narratives, and child audiences. With this marginalization of commercial animation, art historians ignore the artistic processes embedded within commercial animation production that, at different historical points, have already been studied seriously within art history.

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In this chapter, I outline the artistic processes behind animation, as they originated and have developed to the present day, and how such methods of creation overlap with already recognized practices within art historical study. I contend that animation would be easily enveloped within art historical study because of the numerous parallels. Animation utilizes various artistic techniques already studied in art history, emphasizes tropes familiar within art history, and frequently references specific art pieces and movements. For the purposes of this chapter, a strong emphasis will be placed on the Walt Disney Animation Studios for two reasons. First, there is a wealth of scholarship on this studio because of its longevity, now in its ninetieth year of production, and second, many of the artistic and technological innovations created at the Walt Disney Studios have historically been adopted by other studios, particularly after the 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. I will discuss other studios and filmmakers, as scholarship allows and as relevance dictates. Unlike typical analyses in film studies, I will not focus on the narrative structure of the shorts and films themselves. Rather, I emphasize the visual and address narrative only where it is imperative to the discussion at hand.

**Early Animation Processes and Origins**

The development of animation as a method of filmic creation lacks a strict chronological accounting, as many of the early endeavors in animation have gone undocumented. This lack of a concrete origin story has given animation the reputation of a medium that is not easily approachable with an observable, technological or artistic trajectory.\(^{64}\) Prior to the inception of sound cartoons, as introduced to mainstream commercial audiences by Walt Disney's *Steamboat Willie* (1928), the silent era of cartoons consisted of major technological developments that were

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\(^{64}\) This in and of itself disadvantages animation from serious consideration within art history, which relies heavily on chronological narratives.
discovered independently of each other. Don Crafton acknowledges this and explains the issue in his book *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, stating "*Steamboat Willie* provides a convenient end bracket, capping the silent period and heralding the glorious 1930s and 1940s, but no similar arbitrary event signaled the beginnings of animation history. No one knows who first discovered that screen motion could be deliberately synthesized by making single-frame exposures." The origins and referents of animation are debated in film studies, with some pointing to technological predecessors and others pointing to artistic predecessors. For animation historians like Don Crafton, technological innovation was foundational in the development of animation. Stemming from inventions like the camera obscura and the praxinoscope, animation was born out of technologies that sought to "trick" the viewer through optical illusions. Furthermore, many early animators, including Walt Disney, originally endeavored to create comic strips for local newspapers but were unable to find work in commercial comic publishing. Many were forced to join the animation industry as a last resort. For early animators, drawn flipbooks and the motion-study photographs of Eadweard Muybridge provided a spark for their own curiosities in creating moving image.

In 1907, Vitagraph Productions would create what is considered to be the first true instance of animation for mass, commercial audiences with their short *The Haunted Hotel*. In

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65 *Steamboat Willie* is falsely canonized as the first sound cartoon, likely at the hands of the Museum of Modern Art, who included the short in their film library in the early 1930s on this basis. There are sound cartoons that predate *Steamboat Willie*, including an entire series produced by the Fleischer brothers in 1925-26.


67 In a special on the history of animation for his *Disneyland* television show in the 1950's, Walt Disney himself points to the origins of animation within paleolithic cave art, hieroglyphic friezes, and the Bayeux Tapestry, all of which invoke motion within a static image

68 Crafton, *Before Mickey*, 13-34.
his 1989 essay "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," Tom Gunning argues that the "cinema of attractions" developed during the early years of film when the technologies in and of themselves were fascinating enough to secure an audience. Drawing from the writings of early modernists on cinema, most notably Fernand Léger, Gunning defines the cinema of attractions as "an exhibitionist cinema…. [which is] emblematic of this different relationship the cinema of attractions constructs with its spectator."69 While Gunning portrays this demonstration of technology as an attraction that ended with the introduction of narrative cinema in the period between 1907 and 1913, animation, in fact, provided an outlet for this format of cinema to continue. Gunning acknowledges that certain forms of filmic expression, like animation, continued this tradition.70 However, aside from this brief acknowledgment, he does not elaborate on this idea. Here, I aim to expand on Gunning's assertion that animation continued this tradition after the period of narrativization, which ostensibly reduced the number of features operating within the guise of the "cinema of attractions."

Animation as a cinematic technology began not as drawing, but rather as a series of visual effects that came to the attention of audiences in March 1907, the beginning of the period of narrativization as described by Gunning. This included Vitagraph's *The Haunted Hotel*, which was a standard haunted house narrative, popularized on stage and moved to screen in the early twentieth century in a multitude of versions both in the U.S. and abroad. Vitagraph's iteration, however, stunned audiences because of its trick film techniques: "One scene in particular


70 Ibid, 71-75
astonished viewers. It showed a table being set, a wine bottle pouring its contents into a glass, and a knife slicing bread, all in large closeup and without any apparent wires. The scene's peculiar flickery, jerky quality enhanced its strangeness.”71 Audiences were astounded, as there were no wires or hints of trickery exposed for their viewing. They lined up outside of cinemas across the world in order to try and guess at how the visuals occurred, in true cinema-of-attractions fashion (Figure 7). What Vitagraph accomplished was the first stop-motion animation, utilizing single frame photography to deceive audiences and make them believe that the objects moved independently.72

It was not until a year later that the first commercial hand-drawn animated short film entered cinemas, with Emile Cohl's Fantasmagorie (1908). Cohl opens the film with the artist's hand, which creates a stick figure that evolves to be the main character (Figure 8).73 The style of Fantasmagorie harkens back to vaudeville attractions with chalk caricaturists. Creating over 700 images for this one minute and twenty-second clip, Cohl printed the film in negative in order to make his black lines on white paper appear as white lines on a black background, akin to chalk drawings. As the hand moves out of frame, the artist disappears and the chalk figure is left to his own devices, navigating the screen for a minute on his own and interacting with objects that morph in and out of the setting. This artwork thus becomes an attraction to inspire awe in the viewer, one similar to lightning sketches of the vaudeville stage.

Likewise, Windsor McCay's Gertie the Dinosaur (1914) is a narrative based on the idea of an attraction in and of itself. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gertie becomes the main

71 Crafton, Before Mickey, 25.
72 Ibid, 13-34.
73 Emile Cohl, Fantasmagorie (Société des Etablissements L. Gaumont, 1908).
spectacle as she interacts with McCay between shots. He asks her to come out of her cave and meet his friends, bow to the audience, and even dance for them, in a new hybridization of cinematic and vaudevillian performance. Additionally, McCay further turns this magical dinosaur into a spectacle by incorporating himself into her narrative. McCay animates himself into Gertie's world in the last few seconds of the film and takes her for a ride, grabbing the attention of audiences by incorporating a live man into this prehistoric fantasy (Figure 3). Thus, McCay establishes his film within the narrative of the cinema of attractions in multiple ways, even exhibiting to spectators how they should be awed by this dinosaur, as demonstrated by the amazed reactions of the spectators on the screen.74 Despite the unclear origins of animation, the cinema of attractions allows for chronology to be developed, highlighting individual milestones in the history of animation. Further, the cinema of attractions is foundational to animation as it demonstrates early animators' desires to appeal to audiences through a spectacle, and how the process of animation itself was developed into the animation format we know in the present day through the evolution of this desire.

**Artistic Methods of Creation**

The artistic production and processes behind animation directly parallel art historical processes that make its inclusion into the discipline of art history practical. An analysis of these production practices demonstrates the similarities between animation production and already recognized artistic practices within the discipline of art history. At its most basic level, animation is a series of drawings displayed in rapid succession in order to give the illusion of movement.

74 Further, the myth surrounding the creation of *Gertie the Dinosaur* hints that McCay chose to make Gertie a dinosaur after earlier animations featuring animals like lions or tigers failed to impress spectators who believed that there was simply an animal behind the screen. Dinosaurs, having been extinct for millennia, would have been impossible to replicate with a live animal. Dinosaurs, having been discovered in the late 19th century, were popular with contemporary spectators.
Stemming from the tradition of satirical cartoons that were popularized in the nineteenth century, as well as the comic strip, which first appeared in the United States in 1898 with Richard Felton Outcault's "The Yellow Kid," animation soon provided a narrative art form unlike any other. As outlined in the first section of this chapter, animation built on early forms of comic strips, providing them novelty through actual motion.

It is in the early 1920s that the process of traditional celluloid, or cel, animation was established. This process utilized a number of methods that are traditionally studied within a Euroamerican art historical canon. Unlike cut-out animation, which involves the simple movement of cut-out shapes across a static background, cel animation allowed for a more naturalistic depiction of space and depth within an animated short. Cut-out animation is used primarily in television today, such as in the Nickelodeon show *Blue's Clues* (Figure 9). Cel animation, while now used infrequently due to the onset of digital technologies, is still employed for television and particular sequences in animated film.

With the rising popularity of cel animation, a basic eight-step process was outlined to produce an animated short or film with this style of animation. Storyboarding, or the initial outlining of the narrative for the intended story, involves quick sketching of characters, settings, and narrative sequences, not unlike concept drawings and studies utilized by artists before they create the main product. As the first step of animation, storyboarding was developed in the Disney Studios from a few basic notecards—discussing the major plot points and gags, as seen in

75 Cel animation was practiced primarily through 1989, when computer graphics began to be popularized and the ink and paint process was fully digitized. *The Little Mermaid* (1989) was the last Disney film to utilize traditional cel animation, and it is still practiced minorly in feature films and heavily in television animation (Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 286-296).

early shorts (Figure 10) --to a full conceptual process involving months, if not years, of production and a number of large-scale development boards (Figure 11). Artists from Dürer to Manet have practiced early sketching for major pieces, and it remains a common practice. Like artists preceding them, these initial sketches are never truly intended to be seen by the public, but, rather, are intended to be a study in preparation for the final work.

Furthermore, following the approval of the storyboards, animators use basic pencil and paper to render the characters' main poses. Despite being considered inferior to painting or sculpture in the art historical hierarchy, drawings have been crucial for art historical study. Often, drawings and concept sketches can be used to determine the maker of particular works and to assist with identifying any changes that the artists made to their images over time. Further, drawing copies of already created works, as a form of practice, is popular with artists and art academies throughout history and into the present day.

Following the main poses, "inbetweeners" are responsible for drawing all the minor actions between the major poses created by the major animators. Similar to artist workshops, which have been in operation for millennia, from ancient Greece with Praxiteles to Michelangelo, the inbetweeners are responsible for the detail-oriented, labor-intensive work that the main animators do not wish to handle themselves. Of this process in the Walt Disney Studios, specifically, art historian Robert Feild notes the following:

The medium [Walt Disney] employs consists of about a thousand workers—workers with no higher ideals than those employed, shall we say, in Raphael's workshops or in any of the other great institutions whose output has reflected the highest culture of their age. They are a surprising cross-section of humanity; artists (we have no other word to

77 The Disney Studios revolutionized the storyboarding process, and it was picked up as a practice for live-action feature films shortly after the 1937 release of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, with Gone with the Wind (1939) being the first live-action film to be fully storyboarded (See Krause, Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: An Art in Its Making).
describe people who draw and paint well), musicians, scientists, electrical engineers, literary storytellers, dramatists, actors, etc.… 78

The connections Feild makes between animation and traditional workshops are key to our understanding of how corporate art operates within the contemporary world. Despite being considered an endeavor outside of serious art production, corporate art is not unlike the major workshops traditionally seen in art history. Prints, originating in the Renaissance, are considered worthy of study, while they were traditionally commercial endeavors. Additionally, the canon of art history has embraced objects that arose out of advertising, poster art, and household objects such as furniture, indicating that art historians have not been historically opposed to works produced for commercial consumption.

After animators and their inbetweeners create characters, artists create their backgrounds, conventionally as oil paintings, another acknowledged art form within the field of art history. Alongside background development, Inkers trace outlines of the drawings provided by animators and inbetweeners onto the celluloid film, and painters fill in the traced images with color. The ink-and-paint process was rendered extinct by the late 1980s with the onset of digital ink and paint programs, but it was a crucial element in the process until that point. Finally, photographs are taken of the celluloid sheets in order to provide the final moving image. The photography process allows for these drawings to come to life on screen, as they are played in rapid succession of eight to twenty-four frames per second. 79


Robert Feild points to this systemic production process of animated film as closely related to the tradition of the artistic workshop in one further way: the Artist-as-Genius always has final say.80 Just as Michelangelo or Raphael determined what works were finally produced in their workshops, so, too, did Walt Disney, the Fleischer brothers, or Otto Messmer.81 This is exemplified in one of Feild's charts, in which he diagrams the production channels within Disney's studio. Naturally, Disney's name is centered, in bold letters, at the top of the chain (Figure 12). No matter what happens in the stages beneath him, he is the one in charge and all decisions are finalized by him.

At the turn of the twentieth century, mainstream artistic production shifted away from the demands of realism, lauded by traditional art academies and institutions, and towards abstraction, as popularized by avant-garde artistic movements. As art turned away from realism, animation began to push for heightened realism—another factor that allowed it to be ignored in the art world at this time. Beginning with the production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, animators realized that to tell a full-length story, it would be necessary to produce realistic human characters and spaces. In early animation, human and animal characters alike were produced in the style of "rubber hose" animation. Rubber hose animation describes the free-flowing joints of characters. These joints resembled firehoses for the purposes of gags and humor. Characters stylized in this manner can move and bend in ways that are completely unrealistic and unnatural, but befitting for the physical humor that often drove the plot in early

80 I use the term "Artist-as-Genius" following the scholarship of Catherine Soussloff, who analyzes the presence of the white male artist as genius in the Vasarian tradition in her book *The Abolute Artist: the Historiography of a Concept*.

81 Feild, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 76.
animated shorts. Early attempts to render humans naturalistically echoed this rubber hose style; Disney's *The Goddess of Spring* (1934) was the studio's first attempt at replicating naturalistic humans with the character of the goddess Persephone. However, animators found the task challenging—with the goddess's free-flowing, disjointed arms and exaggerated movements revealing her disconnect from the natural world (Figure 13). To perfect a sense of naturalism, Disney's team began attending life-drawing classes at the home of fellow animator Art Babbitt. These classes emphasized traditional drawing techniques in the same vein of those at conventional art academies. When Disney heard about these classes, he arranged for the courses to take place in the auditorium at the studio, and subsequently in local universities, for more artists to participate. Furthermore, this dedication to art education continued in the establishment of the California Institute of the Arts by Walt Disney and his brother Roy Disney. The CalArts website touts its history as follows:

Deep into his fabled career, Walt Disney conceived of a new school for nurturing future generations of creative talent: a multidisciplinary 'community of the arts' built around the real-life experience of working artists instead of the conventions of the academy. Moreover, the school would remove the walls separating the creative disciplines and encourage artists from different branches to mix and collaborate as a way of sparking new ideas and methods. Walt and his brother Roy started making this vision a reality in 1961 when they formed California Institute of the Arts through the merger of two existing L.A. schools for art and music.

CalArts, to this day, is a primary establishment for those wishing to work in animation and demonstrates the institutionalization of the process of animation. Even with the onset of

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82 Thomas and Johnston, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*, 47-70.


84 Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 121-152

computer animation and CGI, traditional art classes, like life-drawing, painting, and color theory, are still key to the development of an animator at CalArts, further promoting the connection to art history in an unrecognized art form.

**Art Historical Referents and the Story of Modern Art**

Despite its consideration as a non-serious artistic tradition, examples of commercial animation frequently refer to objects and styles that have been evaluated and canonized in art history. Animation, to the present day, is often full of direct and indirect art historical referents, in terms of both specific imagery and broad artistic styles. For example, one can identify Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Swing* (1767) in an opening musical number in *Frozen* (2013) (Figure 14), Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930) in *Mulan* (1998) (Figure 15), and countless representations of Classical Greek art styles in *Hercules* (1997). Furthermore, indirect art historical references are explored through the art styles of various films. An example of this is found in the bold appearance of *101 Dalmatians* (1960), which utilized a Xeroxing process to eliminate the need for inking. With this technique, it explored issues of reproduction that were also paramount during this time to Pop Art. Other features deploy art historical references more overtly, as demonstrated in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), with the use of Renaissance single-point perspective and style replicating medieval tapestries by artist Eyvind Earle. Examples of animation have frequently included a number of historical styles analyzed within art historical discourse already, particularly within modernism.

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86 Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 246-247

In her essay "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," Miriam Hansen argues that the social and sensorial changes brought about by modernity were navigated not only through modern art movements of the turn at the twentieth century, but also by cinema, which she calls "vernacular" modernism, as it evolved into a language that could be understood by masses of audiences. She observes that "just as modernist aesthetics are not reducible to the category of style, they tend to blur the boundaries of the institution of art in its traditional eighteenth century and nineteenth century incarnation that turn on the ideal of aesthetic autonomy and the distinction of 'high' versus 'low,' of autonomous art versus popular and mass culture." While Hansen speaks primarily of film's adoption of avant-garde, modernist film techniques in the twentieth century for vernacular audiences, animation adapting characteristics of modern art speaks further to Hansen's point. In a period when Impressionists, Expressionists, and the varied other groups of "—ists" seek to adapt to the demands of modernity and negotiate their place within this new, fast-paced world through their art, animation allows for those in the vernacular realm to encounter these artistic styles and characteristics in the safe venue of the cinema, which catered to the working classes of society. However, by relegating animation to film studies, and ignoring it in art history, we ignore how these modern art movements, and all artistic styles, were utilized in this vernacular modernism and how the visual itself eased anxieties over the modern world.

The employment of different modern art styles in animation began with some of the earliest commercially animated shorts. Early Betty Boop cartoons developed by the Fleisher Brothers embodied the style of German Expressionism, with dark lighting, long curvilinear

shapes, and morbid subject matter. First introduced in the 1930s, Betty embodied the Expressionist movement, which was considered flawed by art institutions until its canonization in the late 1930s at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.\textsuperscript{89} In a short entitled \textit{Mysterious Mose} (1930), Betty, then still known as Bimbo, finds herself home alone, frightened by mysterious noises that she hears in her home. The short opens with Betty's eyes wide open on a dark screen in an ominous manner (Figure 16). As she clicks on her lamp, her room is revealed with a shadowy interior, reminiscent of German Expressionist works (Figure 17). Further, as she gets out of bed to investigate, Betty dances and walks in a dramatically unnatural manner, her body taking on contorted, curved shapes and pushing towards the picture plane in a similar German Expressionist style.\textsuperscript{90} However, Fleischer was not the only commercial animator toying with modernist art movements.

In the Walt Disney Studios, animators foregrounded the inherent Surrealism observed within cartoons and pushed the boundaries of Surrealist experimentation within animation. Realizing how much of an impact sound made on his creations after the release of \textit{Steamboat Willie} in 1928, Walt Disney developed the \textit{Silly Symphonies} series to further experiment with the combination of sound and animation without being fully constrained by a particular character. Within the \textit{Symphonies} series, Disney was also able to experiment with modern art movements that were occurring at the time, taking them out of museums and galleries and making them approachable for the everyday consumer. For example, in the first and one of the most successful \textit{Symphonies} shorts, \textit{The Skeleton Dance} (1929), the surrealist tendencies of animation become


\textsuperscript{90} Dave Fleischer, \textit{Mysterious Mose} (Paramount Pictures, 1930).
fully exposed for the spectator. Surrealism seeks the unification of the banal world of reality with the fantastical realm of dreams, according to Andre Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924). It can be argued that animation has its foundations in surrealism, which emphasizes liberation of the unconscious without restraint from the physical world or rational confinement. Animation requires the viewer to suspend reality in favor of a world where the scientifically impossible, like walking trees and dancing skeletons, is possible. *The Skeleton Dance*, for example, features a group of skeletons dancing in time to a variety of songs, at times using their own bony bodies as instruments (Figure 18).

According to Breton, the ultimate aim of Surrealism is the complete unification of both the conscious and the unconscious, which, is arguably present in all of Disney's feature-length animated films. For example, *Sleeping Beauty* (1956) exhibits a realistic European setting with everyday human characters, but also fantastical elements of magic, dragons, sorcerers, and other dream-like elements. Sergei Eisenstein, who wrote extensively on his love of Disney animated film, saw animation itself as inherently surrealist, noting on Disney's creations:

> We know that they are drawings, and not living beings. We know that they are projections of drawings on a screen. We know that they are miracles and tricks of technology, that such beings do not really exist. But at the same time: We sense them as alive. We sense them as moving, active. We sense them as existing and even thinking.

Beyond this acknowledgement of the absurdity of the process of animation, Eisenstein comments frequently on how Disney is able to manipulate the natural word in a nonsensical fashion. He

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91 Andre Breton, *Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924.

92 Walt Disney, *The Skeleton Dance* (Columbia Pictures Cinephone, 1929).

93 Breton, *Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924.

repeatedly notes his fascination with the anthropomorphism of natural elements like fire and water and how Disney's characters do not follow the laws of physics, particularly with their long necks that can stretch and bend at will in the most unnatural manner.\textsuperscript{95} The elements lauded by Eisenstein directly correlate with the desires of the Surrealists to hybridize the conscious natural world with the unconscious.

Additionally, Surrealists embraced animation as a medium for projecting their aims. Salvador Dalí is a notable Surrealist who sought to utilize animation after developing a friendship with Walt Disney in the early 1940's. Dalí and Disney embarked on a collaborative project in 1940, which was never finished in either man's lifetime because of the restrictions placed upon the studio during World War II.\textsuperscript{96} However, Dalí 's dedication to the animated medium is demonstrated by his presence as a staff member at the Disney Studios. In late 1946, Dalí began arriving at the Disney Studio every morning at 8:30 and working until 5:00 at night. Twenty seconds of film, several paintings, various pen-and-ink drawings and many storyboards came out of this eight-month period during which Dalí was an employee of Walt Disney Studios (Figure 19). He hinted in his own newsletter, \textit{Dalí News}, that the collaborative film effort would “offer to the world the first vision of ‘psychological relief." \textsuperscript{97}

The macabre display of \textit{The Skeleton Dance} is one of Disney's earliest overt recognitions of modern art movements of the time, demonstrating his unique capability to bring these artistic

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{96} The short, \textit{Destino}, would be finished by the Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2000, and included in \textit{Fantasia 2000} that same year.

\textsuperscript{97} David Bossert, \textit{Dali and Disney: Destino: The Story, Artwork, and Friendship behind the Legendary Film}, First hardcover edition (Los Angeles: Disney Editions, 2015), 40-42.
movements from the upper echelons of society into the lives of thousands of cinema-goers, who may otherwise have not been exposed to these artistic creations. Arguably, the piece of animation most connected to modern art movements is Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940).

Stemming from an idea for a new Mickey Mouse cartoon to revitalize interest in the character, *Fantasia* evolved into a full-length feature film that replicated a concert of orchestral pieces conducted by Leopold Stokowski, the maestro of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and that was illustrated by Disney animators. Playing with technology, music, color, and highbrow culture, Disney wanted this film to be an experience, more than just sitting in a theater and passively watching a film. Early plans for a specially developed wide screen ended up being scrapped because of budget restraints, but Disney developed a sound system, similar to contemporary surround sound, that used seven tracks and over thirty speakers, making the viewers feel like they were surrounded by the symphony.

*Fantasia* evokes several modern art movements within the span of the two-hour film. The film opens with Bach's "Toccata and Fugue" played by a live orchestra. The lighting effects are manipulated in a Fauvist manner, emphasizing the silhouettes of the orchestra and conductor on colored backgrounds and utilizing an abstraction or erasure of details in favor of color (Figure 20). Rather than showing the orchestra in concert, Disney attempted to convey the emotions that one should feel through the use of heavy, bold colors that danced in synch with the tempo of the music itself. After a few minutes of these light experiments, the segment fades into a collection of abstracted animation, with the instruments mimicked in the forms that dance along the screen.

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98 Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 179. The idea for *Fantasia* developed into a full-length feature after Stokowski agreed to conduct the music for the film for free.

in time with the music (Figure 21). This was a first for the Walt Disney Animation Studios, which had never truly dabbled in abstract animation. However, Disney also determined—along with the experimental structure of the film—that the narrator would be a key player in the film, introducing each segment and making the transition between pieces and styles easier for the vernacular viewer.

Further examples of the adoption of modern art styles can be found in later segments of the film. Once again German Expressionism is explored in the *Night on Bald Mountain* sequence. The characteristic swirling, exaggerated brushstrokes and garish color palettes of German Expressionistic art are visible in the sequence (Figure 22) -- as well as blatant nods to anxieties of death in the narrative, which focuses on the rise of dead spirits at the hands of the devil Chernabog, until they are forced back into their graves with the ringing of a church bell. General abstraction is evident yet again in the *Nutcracker Suite* with the swirling airbrushing that artists used to indicate movement (Figure 23), and Surrealism finds its place in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* in the figures of the anthropomorphic brooms brought to life by Mickey Mouse (Figure 24). Disney managed to utilize a number of modern art styles within *Fantasia* alongside classical music in a way that brought high culture to the masses, in an approachable "Disney-fied" way. A review by John C. Flinn Sr. for *Variety* lauded the film for bridging Modernist art, classical music, and popular culture: “*Fantasia* best can be described as a successful experiment to life the relationship from the plane of popular, mass entertainment to the higher strata of appeal to lovers of classical music. The boost isn’t so far from general taste as might be imagined, in the light of the proselytising which radio, with the help of Toscanini, Damrosch and

100 Ibid, 182.

101 Ibid.
others, has been carrying on in millions of American homes for some years."\textsuperscript{102} Despite minimal commercial success because of the expense of the newly developed technology and the closure of European markets with the onset of World War II, \textit{Fantasia} was one of Disney's biggest critical hits for its blending of unique elements in a new way. It was for this film that many praised Disney and his work as the pinnacle of modern art. The entire composition of \textit{Fantasia} harkens back to Gunning's description of the cinema of attractions, as episodic and in direct communication with the spectators. Here, in its direct discussion with the audience at the hands of the conductor, package film nature of the production, and integration of new technologies and ideas to spur interest, \textit{Fantasia} meets the criteria for the cinema of attractions.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Through this evaluation of early animation, I have provided a rough chronology for the inception of animation as a technology and art form, demonstrating that animation continues the tradition of the "cinema of attractions" as outlined by Tom Gunning. I suggest, however, that the cinema of attractions is not unique to film history and is also easily applied to the development and aims of modern art and animation. Animation as spectacle in the early twentieth century is not unlike the spectacle that drives Modernist art movements. Some of the earliest Impressionist works operated as a spectacle in that their subject matter was considered offensive, like Manet's \textit{Olympia} (1863) which was regarded as a vile iteration of Titian's \textit{Venus of Urbino} (1508). In the 1918 Dada manifesto, Dadaist Tristan Tzara emphasizes Dada as a spectacle of destruction, while the Futurists lauded the spectacle of war and machinery through their own works and

manifesto.\textsuperscript{103} The First International Dada Fair in 1920 pushed the notion of spectacle even further, with the Dadaists covering the walls from floor to ceiling in political propaganda and offering audiences an array of pieces for viewing that were considered crass or vulgar, including a pig's severed head hanging from the ceiling, titled "Hanged by the Revolution." Much like its 1919 predecessor that was shut down for vulgarity, the 1920 Dada exhibition was shut down by the armed forces for the hostile treatment of the German army in its works. Five Dadaists were taken to trial in April 1921 under charges of insulting the German army as a result of this show. Despite being shut down prematurely and being wildly commercially unsuccessful, with only a single piece being sold, the First International Dada Fair and the spectacle surrounding the event is seen as the pinnacle of Dadaist practice. \textsuperscript{104}

Modern art movements embraced spectacle as a way of garnering attention, which is not unlike animation's own origins. Further, animation provided an outlet for modern art movements to be dispersed to the vernacular realm, as demonstrated through my discussions of early Disney shorts and the utilization of modern art movements, specifically in Fantasia. The inclusion of these modern art styles in animation allowed the masses to negotiate their own disjointed feelings of modernity in the comfort of the cinema, without venturing into the museum, which, in the decades prior, had alienated these marginalized populations. By insisting that animation has no place in art history, the implications of these vernacular interactions with Modernist spectacle are lost.

\textsuperscript{103} Tristan Tzara, \textit{Dada Manifesto}, 1918.
\textsuperscript{104} FT Marinetti, \textit{The Futurist Manifesto}, 1909.


Chapter 3: Early Art Historical Discussions on Animation

Despite its inception in the crass worlds of vaudeville performance and lowbrow cinemas, and connections to the ever-ignored category of "craft", the discipline of art history began to take notice of the animated medium around 1940, just after the widely celebrated release of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). This feature film, along with the two that followed it, *Pinocchio* (1940) and *Fantasia* (1940), pushed the medium to the forefront of art historical discourse because of their respective technical achievements. *Pinocchio*, still widely considered to be one of the most technologically advanced animated films of all time, demonstrated a further evolution of realism in the animated medium through its lifelike human characters, naturalistic representation of worldly elements, specifically water, and blending of dark elements with the childish fun that the Disney name had come to embrace (Figure 25).  

*Fantasia* was a sweeping spectacle that appropriated many modern art movements that were lauded in the art world at the time, from Fauvism to German Expressionism, and it also dabbled in abstraction for vernacular audiences. It is just before 1940 that art historians noticed the artistic development within animation circles, with various writings and exhibitions on animation coming out of the discipline.

In this chapter, I seek to evaluate how art historians interpreted animation beginning in the 1940s, before the developing relationship between art history and film came to an abrupt halt after the devastation of World War II, which will be addressed in the following chapter. Furthermore, I argue that the early connections between the art world and animation often reflected a superficial relationship, whereby the art world utilized animation and its material products for public interest reasons, not considering animation a serious art form. Analyzing

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early art historical publications on animation, as well as museum exhibitions in which animation was displayed alongside modernist art movements or featured in its own right, I emphasize early established connections to conventionally accepted art historical areas of study in this period and how art history reconciled this modern technological achievement in relation to established disciplinary norms.

**Early Art Historical Interest in Animation**

With the rise of cinema and its expanding popularity in the early twentieth century, art historians were not blind to the influence this medium had on society. A handful of art historians attempted to grapple with film as a medium in and of itself and its implications for the artistic sphere. Notably, art historian Erwin Panofsky attempted to outline the "visual symptoms endemic" to the medium of film in his 1936 essay "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," originally given as an informal lecture at Princeton University, a talk he wrote in the process of founding the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library. Panofsky was particularly concerned with this medium for two reasons. For one, it was the only medium that contemporary audiences had experienced from its inception and, for another, because the movies had reestablished the dynamic between artistic production and consumption, as films were able to be viewed by a much larger percentage of the population than, for instance, a painting would be.

Panofsky asserts that the earliest attempts at cinema can be relegated to the status of folk art, as they are less concerned with aesthetic beauty and narrative, with much of their source material coming from the vernacular realm—comic strips, dime novels, pornography, popular

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107 Ibid.
music, and the like. It is with the shift to narrative cinema, and a rejection of simply replicating theater performances, that films are elevated to the status of art. This idea can be juxtaposed with Tom Gunning’s concept of the "cinema of attractions," in which Gunning asserts that early film operated as a spectacle of technology, through which audiences were to marvel at the mere technological innovations of cinema. This advancement was often signaled within the films themselves, with optical illusions and the "breaking" of the fourth wall to point to these technological delights.

Panofsky’s ideas indicate that, in this narrativization period, cinema was no longer a dime-store or amusement park attraction, but rather elevated film to the status of art, whereas Gunning laments how this period altered how audiences were expected to interact with film as passive spectators. It is interesting to note that, during the period of narrativization, particularly with the onset of sound, the way audiences themselves were constructed shifted. Audiences during the early period of cinema were often vocal during the show, interacting with what was happening on the screen in a way that replicated the jeering low-class crowds at traditional theater performances or vaudeville performances, as discussed in Chapter 2. In the period of narrativization and sound film, spectators transformed into a silent, passive crowd, which is how audiences experience traditional films today. This is also how one is expected to interact with an art piece in a museum—with silent contemplation as opposed to vocalized communication. This newfound silence validated these vernacular audiences in the eyes of the museum community, allowing for their inclusion in the high-class museum realm.108

According to Panofsky, the cinema has a unique problem in which one has to "manipulate and shoot unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style."\(^{109}\) Comparing the development of the cinema to that of line engraving—which "started out as a cheap and handy substitute for book illumination and culminated in the purely 'graphic' style of Dürer"--Panofsky asserts that the development of film, from its nascent, rudimentary experiments with plot construction and symbolism, becomes elevated by more established narrativization and the utilization of sound. The development of acting is particularly important to Panofsky, who compares the trajectory of the art of acting to that of the engraving, highlighting the relationship between formal qualities and technical process. For Panofsky, there are certain stylistic procedures that make a film good or bad, but, regardless of its artistic merit, films are important because commercial art is more viable in the industrialized world than traditional, non-commercial art.\(^{110}\)

Panofsky does discuss animated film in two brief, separate instances. First, Panofsky discusses Disney specifically, saying that the early Disney shorts and films are "a chemically pure distillation of cinematic possibilities" with their seamless combination of folkloric narratives in the fantastical realm of the animated world in which natural laws do not exist. This, therefore, gives animators an edge on creating integrated spatial and temporal environments that are harder to achieve in a live action film.\(^{111}\) In the conclusion of his essay, Panofsky also explicitly states that the animated cartoon can be excluded from his final thesis that the film


\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Ibid, 104.
organizes people and things into its own form of composition, paralleling the way composition is discussed in art history. While Panofsky gives no further explanation, his exclusion is likely because the animated film does not require an assemblage of real objects or persons, as a drawn medium. Further, as identified in a footnote, Panofsky feels the animated cartoon fell from its status as art the moment it attempted to replicate the natural world. He asserts that early cartoons that imbue anthropomorphized life into animals, trains, and weather, among others, transform the world into an artistic playground, while those films that simply replicate the natural world are caricatures at best. Because of this "fall from grace," Panofsky did not elaborate further on his attitudes towards animation.

While Panofsky may not have felt an elaborate discussion on animation's artistic merit was necessary, others believed it was not as clear and attempted to initiate the conversation within the art historical sphere. In 1942, the first art historical overview of animation was published by art historian Robert D. Feild, who was fired from a teaching post at Harvard University, along with notable art historian Meyer Schapiro, for attempting to unionize two years prior. Now operating as the Dean of the Art department at Tulane University, Feild published *The Art of Walt Disney* (1942), which is both the first art historical analysis of animation and of the work of the Disney Studios. Feild worked closely with Disney himself and within the studio archives for his survey of Disney artistic production, providing readers with a detailed trajectory

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112 Ibid, 118.


of the progression of the animated form under Disney's leadership. However, despite being an established art historian, Feild was quick to acknowledge his peers' oversight when it came to animation in the opening of his book, stating:

Many of us have failed to recognize those trends which have been breaking down barriers between art and science but also have continued to resist anything that may disturb our equanimity regarding art. Many have, for example, continued to hold on to the belief that the machine is the enemy of art, and that a picture not all done by hand is beyond the pale of artistic judgement…. There is an element here that we can no longer afford to overlook. Not only is it short-sighted to fail to keep informed of what is going on in our midst, but we are losing the pleasure that might be ours if only we met the artist halfway…we must rediscover the great tradition of which we are all a living part and out of which [Walt Disney] grew, an unbroken continuity from those prehistoric days when man first learned to express himself with lines and smudges regardless of whether or not future generations would consider his stories 'Art.'

In this introductory text, Feild acknowledges that he is challenging the view of his contemporaries in asserting that animation is, in fact, art, and he further elaborates on this by demonstrating a linear trajectory of the narrative forms of art through to Disney, tying it to Paleolithic cave art, pictographs and Egyptian hieroglyphics, Japanese scroll painting, and German Renaissance woodcuts, among others. This emphasis on the chronological development of art that leads us to animation cements animation within a methodological framework used consistently within art history. By placing animation within this teleological timeline of development, as many later animation historians would, Feild asserts that it was only a matter of

115 Currently, the Disney Studio archives are notoriously hard to access by scholars and visitors alike. After Richard Schickel's The Disney Version was published in 1968, they have been kept under lock and key and accessible only for internal company. Schickel was allowed access to the archives by Walt himself, but his book, which was published two years after Walt Disney died, was considered a salacious, tabloid-esque exposé of the company. The publication of Schickel's book led the company to close the archives to those who were not involved with the company, and they have been inaccessible to scholars since then.

116 Field, The Art of Walt Disney, 2-5.

117 Ibid, 5-22.
time before animation and the moving image would be developed as the next phase in this
millennia-long evolution.

Feild's subsequent examinations highlight animation's connections to traditional artistic
workshop production (as discussed in Chapter 2), the physical layout of the studio, and with
tremendous detail, each stage of its development. The latter analysis touches on storyboarding as
a process of conceptualizing the feature itself, character animation as a process that brings the
characters to life on the screen, the use of modeling and sculpture to render characters, and the
potential issues uncovered in the final synchronizations of music, art, and dialogue. Feild's
analysis emphasizes the connections between the process of animation and traditional art
historical evaluation while also acknowledging the unique, factory operation that Disney
established at his studio that commercialized the art form. In his conclusion, Feild leaves his
reader with a final push for the breaking of artistic barriers, stating:

"We had been so convinces that the Fine Arts were certain permanent types of
expression, inviolable and self-sufficient, that anything that did not fall within the
accepted categories must affront the Muses. Presumably, there was no machinery on
Olympus. The coming of the Industrial Revolution took the Muses by surprise. They
were thrown into a panic. Not only did they lack all scientific training, but they realized
with horror that if machinery was allowed to become fashionable they would lose their
sentimental influence over mankind. Unfortunately, owing to our lack of imagination,
they were able to infect us with their hysteria, and the new God-given source of energy
came to be considered the enemy of Art…Despite the old insistence that the machine is
the enemy of art and that the Arts and Sciences are separate fields of endeavor, all such
barriers are gradually being broken down….At last the artificial categories, those
subdivisions of the Arts with all their caste distinctions and absurd connotations are
recognized for what they are worth. In the light of such new types of expression as the
animated sound picture, the imaginary distinctions between them disappear and the word
Art begins to recover its real meaning—work well done."118

In 1942, Feild truly believed that the animated medium had the power to break down the false barriers and hierarchies within art historical discourse. Feild advocates for the abandonment of antiquated methods of art historical discourse—with their "absurd" connotations and class distinctions—which are established methodically in order to exclude items considered irrelevant. Rather, he wishes to dismantle barriers and dissolve snobbish attitudes towards technology and commercial art forms.

After Feild, however, no other art historians would evaluate commercial animation until the 1970s, when artist and art historian Christopher Finch's book *The Art of Walt Disney* was published. Like Feild's work, Finch's book dissects the inner workings of the Walt Disney Animation Studios and unpacks how technology and art are entangled in animation—emphasizing both the role of technological development and artistic exploration in the works of the Disney Studios. Following this, the issue of the artistic merit of animation would not be explored again until the 1990s, due to the start of the Disney Renaissance, a moment that will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis. However, despite the attempt by a handful of art historians in the 1940s to reconcile animation, and, more broadly, film, with traditional art historical standards, these questions are never truly debated again within the field of art history or debated within the discipline in a serious manner.

119 Ibid, 284.

Displaying Disney: Animation in the Museum

With an increased production of animation spurred on by Disney's successful 1928 release of *Steamboat Willie* and the 1929 launch of the *Silly Symphonies* series, art critics and museums—similar to art historians--began to take notice of the commercial success of animation.¹²¹ In turn, the artistic merit of, specifically, Disney animation, was debated frequently among art critics in the early 1930s. The writers of *Art Digest* asserted that "Walt Disney has invented a new art and a very profound one….the sensitive imagination of a great artist has created something very close to the work of a real genius," and others claimed that Disney was the Michelangelo of the twentieth century, or "Leonardo da Disney."¹²² Additionally, Diego Rivera, as he readied for his own solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, wrote a brief essay on the artistic merits of Mickey Mouse in 1933, calling him the true hero of American art and bemoaning the art world's inability to accept vernacular objects into their fold.¹²³

However, not everyone was convinced to consider this vernacular art form as "fine" art. Some critics were appalled that such a "folk art" could ever be considered art. Folk art, traditionally, is a vernacular mode of craft and, therefore, largely considered irrelevant to art history. Notably, caricaturist Al Hirschfield, whose own work would serve as inspiration for later Disney films, felt that Disney's works were no different than the doodling of school children.¹²⁴

¹²¹ The early success of the *Silly Symphonies* led competing animation companies to adapt this format in their own series. Warner Brothers began distributing *Merrie Melodies* in 1931 and Metro Goldwyn Mayer distributed their own version, *Happy Harmonies*, starting in 1934.


Others feared that, if animation were truly to be embraced in the world of fine art and high society, that its humble stories and characters would lose their charm and that their popularity would fizzle. Regardless of the opinion, however, the art world was clearly talking about animation and there were many figures beyond Feild who were dedicated to finding a place for animation in the art historical narrative.

Beginning in the 1930s, many forged the way for animation to be included in museum exhibitions. Disney historian Steven Watts notes that these exhibitions were likely a way for those concerned with how these vernacular forms of culture could possibly fit into the established standards for "Fine" art to reconcile these attitudes. The earliest of these experimental exhibitions was in 1932 at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, which had opened its doors a mere seventeen years earlier. Curated by Dorothy Grafly, the small exhibition featured several drawings from the Disney Studios and emphasized the studio's connection to modernism. In her article "America's Youngest Art" (1933), Grafly contrasts animation with Impressionism, specifically citing Cezanne and his followers. According to her, animation actually creates motion, whereas the Impressionists were unable to achieve this despite their aims. She also links animation to primitivism, which was en vogue in art at the time of her writing, and indicates that animation is experimental in the same way that Courbet or Picasso were. Grafly states "quite as much as Picasso, [Disney] distorts and renders the unreal, but from this unreality,

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid, 123-126.


128 Ibid.
one derives a fine emotional participation that brings conviction… [Disney's work] repudiates
representation, but aims to provoke the reality of the unreal. It, too, goes back to the study of the
primitive and of the child…” Historian Bill Muklak notes that Grafly's comparison with the
Impressionists, as opposed to caricaturists like Daumier, is important because "she links Disney
to prestigious fine artists whose experimentation ceased to shock all but the most old-fashioned.
The elite art world still has value to her, if only it would open its gates to Disney and those who
still create communicative art.” The comparison emphasized animation's connection to
accepted high art forms, implying that here one could break down traditional barriers between
"high" and "low."

By the mid-1930s, cels from Disney films and shorts were being exhibited alongside
popular modernist names like Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, and Joan Miró. The exhibition
"Fantastic Art: Dada, Surrealism" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City featured four
cels from the sequel to The Three Little Pigs, under the category "Artists Independent of the
Dada-Surrealist Movements." Later exhibitions, including "Three Centuries of American Art"
(1940) and "We Like Modern Art" (1940-441), more prominently displayed the shorts and films
of Walt Disney, including Bambi, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and a number of Silly
Symphonies in relation to American art development. Disney's artistic achievements appeared
to be on track to be accepted by the art world, with minor exhibitions of Disney drawings and
concepts popping up at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1933, and soon thereafter, the Los Angeles

129 Ibid, 342.

130 Bill Muklak, "Disney and the Art World: The Early Years" in Maureen Furniss, ed., Animation: Art and

County Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. Further, the Metropolitan Museum of Art indicated its own interest with their own display of a single watercolor from the development of *Snow White* in 1939.132 Academia also advocated for animation's inclusion, with the College Art Association developing *The Art of Walt Disney* exhibition in 1933 and several universities granting honorary doctorates to Walt Disney for his artistic achievements, including Yale, Harvard, and the University of Southern California.133

Despite the apparent enthusiasm of the art world and museums to adopt animation into their sphere, the realities of these exhibitions reveal otherwise. While Grafly's exhibition and accompanying article truly lauded animation and its artistic achievements, other exhibitions at more established institutions actually displayed a more superficial interest, evidenced by the lack of documentation in relation to these exhibitions. The entire catalogue for the 1940 *Art of Walt Disney* exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art consists of six pages of text followed by four times as many pages of images. The opening remarks note that Disney emancipated animation from its origins as a crude artform and elevated animation to the status of true art. It emphasized Disney's personal artistic trajectory alongside the process of creating an animated film, and importantly, the museum's physical exhibition suggested that Disney cels functioned as autonomous pieces that could be displayed independently of each other.134 However, the catalogue's six pages of information provide a tremendously superficial history of


134 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *The Los Angeles County Museum Presents a Retrospective Exhibition of the Walt Disney Medium* (USA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1940).
the medium and no true connection between animation and "art." Furthermore, the petite exhibition traveled to seven other museums, but beyond this simple catalogue, little other information is available on this exhibition. Similarly, aside from Dorothy Grafly's eight-page article, little is available for the public in regard to the Philadelphia Art Alliance's *Art of Walt Disney* exhibition.

In my own research at the Museum of Modern Art, concerning early exhibitions and their methods of display, I discovered very little in archival files relating to animation, despite it being presented numerous times at the Museum in the period spanning 1935-1945. The records for the *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition, in which four cels from a *Three Little Pigs* sequel were displayed, carries no accounting of these objects. The archival file only includes a brief, four-line history of Walt Disney, which, as mentioned previously, describes Disney as an artist operating outside the Surrealist or Dada group.135 Despite there being over fifteen files full of hundreds of pieces of paperwork and correspondence in relation to the exhibition, Disney's involvement appears to be non-existent. This is interesting considering Disney was on the board of the MoMA and had a close relationship with curator Alfred Barr at this time, suggesting that there should be more correspondence between the two available, particularly in relationship to cels loaned directly to the museum. Most archival documents for the exhibition are banal exchanges between the curatorial staff and those loaning objects for the exhibition, memos regarding pick up, drop off, and display procedures for the pieces featured. There is no documentation of the animation cels. Moreover, in the *Three Centuries of American Art* exhibition files, which ran for six weeks in 1938, there is no record of Disney's inclusion aside

135 Alfred J. Barr, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.*
from his presence on the schedule of film screenings, and in the *We Love Modern Art* exhibition from 1940-41, which was curated by local high school students, the exhibition files feature a similar absence of any record of inclusion of Disney-related objects.

This lack of documentation not only pertains to exhibitions in which animation played a minor part, but also those that featured Disney's work more prominently. In 1942, the Museum of Modern Art presented *Bambi: The Making of an Animated Sound Picture* to coincide with the film's theatrical release. The MoMA's website touts the exhibition as one which "explored the technical process of making feature-length animation; it featured the building blocks of the craft—animation cels, drawings, and background paintings—along with documentary photographs of the cast and crew at work on the film." However, I cite the website here simply because no exhibition catalogue exists, and aside from two press releases and a handful of exhibition photographs, no documentation exists for this exhibition. In MoMA archival files for this exhibition, a single press release is present and nothing else. Furthermore, the MoMA website states that, following the *Bambi* exhibition, "MoMA would follow this effort [to display animation] with numerous exhibitions on the art of animation over the years, including *United Productions of America: Form in the Animated Cartoon* (1955)."

Upon inspection of the archival files for this exhibition, a similar issue occurred, where there was no documentation for it, aside from a handful of press releases and exhibition photographs. Even the master checklist for this exhibition simply discusses show times for the shorts featured, with no indication of what


137 Ibid.
art objects were exhibited. Additionally, critical reception of the Bambi exhibition was far from positive, with critic Emily Genauer saying, “I don’t think the exhibition ... can properly be considered an art event... It has no more significance as art than would an exhibition which showed you how the canvas is woven, pigments are ground and camels hunted for the hair which makes an artist’s brush.” Reviews of the film itself echoed these sentiments, degrading the art style of the film. Reviewer Manny Farber lamented:

[Disney] films are now doused in sweet sugary tints, flowery violets, fancy-pants pinks, and he’ll waste ten minutes if he can end up with a gold-splashed sunset. Whereas the early color was fresh, simple and in the comedy spirit, this new development is a synthetic reveling in vulgarity. The worst effect of all this artiness is the preference now for cheap painting, the Vanishing American kind you buy in Kress’s, in place of the movement which was the main thing before.

It is possible that, considering the critical reception of the show and the film itself, the museum had no desire to document the exhibition to the degree that they had documented other exhibitions. Regardless of the reason, this lack of documentation in relation to the animation historically exhibited at the MoMA is telling. Whereas other exhibitions feature file after file of simple correspondence discussing the logistics of object borrowing and transfer, this simply does not exist for objects related to animation. Additionally, few catalogues are created for major animation exhibitions and those that do exist are brief in their discussions of animation's artistic merit, frequently featuring more images than text. I argue that this is because animation is simply


not taken seriously as an artform in the museum world. Further, many scholars have argued that Walt Disney's relationship with the MoMA was a marketing move, with animation historian Maureen Furniss calling his relationship with MoMA film librarian Iris Barry one of his "most savvy alliances."¹⁴¹ No stranger to marketing his product, it is possible that Disney believed that the inclusion of his shorts and these objects in a museum setting would expand his audience base. Bill Muklak, in turn, argues that Disney's relationship with the MoMA was a reciprocally advantageous one which also furthered the museum's reputation. Muklak contends:

In the early 1940s, MoMA was in the midst of aesthetic and political crosspressures that pitted elite tastes in European Modernist painting styles against nativist American populism. While the museum had a longstanding interest in Disney, in the midst of World War II, the studio provided MoMA with an art that helped counter accusations that its Eurocentrism was un-American. ¹⁴²

With this insight from Muklak, it is easy to conclude that Disney and MoMA used each other for promotional purposes. As the MoMA was bombarded with accusations of Eurocentrism and Disney looked for further ways to promote his product, the inclusion of this "All-American" artform within the museum space would have been mutually beneficial. Moreover, Disney, particularly during the financial troubles of World War II, was not opposed to the sale of art objects related to his animated features. It is also during this period that Disney began a partnership with Corbusier Galleries to keep his staff levels afloat during the war, with Fred Nugent of the New York Times writing: “[Disney] began making his composite drawings for the galleries so he wouldn’t have to lay off any of his employees during the slack season. Instead of cutting his staff, he made work – assigned people to cut up the celluloid drawings, mount them

¹⁴¹ Maureen Furniss, Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics, Rev. ed (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 123.

¹⁴² Bill Muklak cited in Maureen Furniss, Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics, 123.
on backgrounds and wrap them with cellophane.” Many museums responded to the sale of these cels with their own purchases of the cels. Disney, in doing this, created a cult collectible out of cellophane sheets that were traditionally thrown away or washed and reused. When sales of these cellophane images succeeded, Disney repeated the process of the sale of these images in his own art gallery at Disneyland upon its opening in July 1955, turning this piece of collectible art into a souvenir, an issue that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the end, regardless of the appreciation of the animated medium by a handful of art historians and curators, the relationship between Disney and the art world appears to have been a superficial one when one digs into the depths of these connections. This is evidenced by critical reviews of these exhibitions, the lack of official documentation of these exhibitions, and the symbiotic relationships that appear to be at play. These artificial connections allow art historical discourse to seem more democratic and inclusionary than it actually was at the time, implying that animation was art because of its inclusion in the museum space. However, lack of internal documentation reveals the medium was relegated as a peripheral concern. Instead, animation was utilized as a crutch for museums in the pre-World War II period, used as a tool to assert their own patriotic stance and to attract more audiences. Animation also benefitted from the marketing that museum exhibitions provided, allowing studios to reach new audiences with these high art exhibitions. Unfortunately, the fragile relationship between animation and art history completely collapsed in the post-war period for many reasons to be outlined in Chapter 4, and it never truly recovered, despite early interest in the art form itself.

Chapter 4: Derailing Animation's Art Historical Relevance

On July 17, 1955, Disneyland opened to the public for the first time, with thousands of guests and media personalities descending upon the small theme park in Anaheim, California. Despite a bumpy opening day fraught with major challenges, Walt Disney considered this one of his crowning personal achievements. In his dedication speech, Disney declared:

To all who come to this happy place; welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past…and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams and the hard facts that have created America…with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world.  

Disneyland was a wild success upon its opening, attracting its one-millionth visitor within the first year of operation. Its intricate theming, family-friendly atmosphere, and the inclusion of Disney's most popular characters and concepts provided post-war America a safe playground for families to interact with each other without the anxieties of the outside world clouding their experiences. Today considered an icon of American culture, Disneyland also signifies the shift of Disney, animation, and these worlds of fantasy from an artistic endeavor worthy of serious discussion to a commercialized product for children that is undeserving of even the slightest critical attention.

In the period after World War II, the animation industry, which had appeared to be on a trajectory towards artistic recognition, experienced several setbacks that altered how animation was produced and received. Many animation studios went bankrupt or experienced significant budget and staff shortages after the war, which altered the final products that emerged from


surviving studios and differentiated them quality-wise from their pre-war successors. Television also emerged as a new popular form of media in the post-World War II period, challenging the longevity of those studios that remained and the viability of the animated medium. Further, shifts in art historical developments in the post-war period altered how animation might be viewed within the discipline. A transition away from formalist evaluation, as well as the emergence of an avant-garde art scene in New York City, turned art historical discourse away from animation, which by the 1950's was a staple of cinematic culture and no longer a mere "cinema of attraction."

In this chapter, I discuss how animation became further removed from art historical significance in the post-war period, effectively ending any discussion of animation's artistic merit as outlined in the previous chapter. First, I outline the issues faced by the animation industry at the end of World War II and how these issues affected artistic production and the attitudes of the art world towards animation. Next, I evaluate how television and Cold War-era nostalgia altered how consumers interacted with animated media, transforming animation from a photofilmic technological marvel to primarily a medium associated with children. Despite animation's rise to an artistic medium worthy of serious art historical discussion before World War II, the Cold War period saw the return of animation to the status of lowbrow amusement from which it was born. These historical factors, combined with a post-World War II attitude shift in art history away from a Eurocentric mindset and from a formalist methodology, returned animation to the periphery of art history from whence it came.

**Post-war Struggles in the Animation Industry**

Despite being one of the key producers of wartime propaganda and training videos, the animation industry as a whole suffered after the war. Many of the big names in early animation
had passed away just before or during the war, figures like Windsor McCay and Emile Cohl who both passed away in 1938 and J. Stuart Blackton who passed in 1941. Many studios and animators were also no longer in production, with Otto Messmer retiring from film in 1931 after his distributor Pat Sullivan passed away and the Fleisher Brothers essentially going bankrupt and losing their studio to Paramount Pictures by 1941.\textsuperscript{146} Established studios struggled to find their footing in the post-war period, with many eventually selling to television distributors in the mid-1950's. Warner Brothers struggled after a Supreme Court ruling that they could not force theaters to buy their animated shorts along with feature films and must sell them independently.

Additionally, the UPA Studios--which found popularity with former Disney animators after the 1941 strike at the Disney Studios but struggled to hold distributors after the House Un-American Activities Committee found many of its members involved with communism--sold to television distributors after they failed to secure a theatrical market.\textsuperscript{147} The only studio that truly carried on in feature films after the war was the Disney Studios, but not without their own compromises.

After gaining notoriety for their incredible artistic achievements before World War II, particularly with \textit{Pinocchio} and \textit{Fantasia}, the Disney Studios no longer had the funding necessary for creating elaborate backgrounds and special effects within their films. In fact, the Disney Studio, after four years of producing wartime propaganda and training films with no income had survived the war primarily through merchandise sales and rereleases of their earlier


\textsuperscript{147} Maureen Furniss, \textit{A New History of Animation} (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 201-219.
films. After the war, the studio shifted gears, producing primarily package films, which consisted of several shorts shown back-to-back. They also ventured into live-action films, as they took far less time and money to produce than animated films. By the time the studio was finally able to release a full-length feature film again, Cinderella (1950), it had a very different aesthetic than previous films simply because of budget restraints.

Cinderella was carefully crafted to appeal to audiences after the lackluster successes of Fantasia, Pinocchio, and Bambi before the war. Audiences felt that these films were too dark and experimental, despite critical acclaim, and Disney needed a success to produce further films and the theme park that he wished to create in the coming years. Cinderella was a return to the fairy tale format that audiences fell in love with during the release of Snow White, but it was more subdued because of budget restraints. Animation and artistic control was left to a handful of animators known as the "Nine Old Men" as opposed to droves of workers, and the film carried a more muted ambiance, with the backgrounds needing to provide much of the "magic" due to the lack of special effects. Many of the backgrounds for Cinderella (Figures 26 and 27) carry an ethereal quality to them and provide a fairytale quality to the narrative. Critics adored the film, with a New York Times critic stating the following on the film's artistic merit:

Considering the army of craftsmen who work on a Disney cartoon film, it is hard to give individual credits, for the memorable qualities. But whoever engineered the sequence of the pumpkin transformation in this film—the magical change to coach and horses—deserves an approving hand. And the scene in which Cinderella blows soap bubbles—

148 Whereas an animated film takes upwards of five years to produce, a live-action film can be completed in just a year or two.

149 Finch, The Art of Walt Disney, 223-243.


151 Finch, The Art of Walt Disney, 223-252.
opalescent globes full of fragile reflections and rainbow colors—is one of the cleverest animations yet seen. To the fellows who dreamed up these fancies we are heartily grateful, indeed. They have sprinkled into "Cinderella”—along with sugar and wit—some vagrant art.\textsuperscript{152}

Despite the success of \textit{Cinderella}, however, the Disney Studio struggled to find another hit through the 1950s, with \textit{Alice in Wonderland} (1951), \textit{Peter Pan} (1953), \textit{Lady and the Tramp} (1955), and \textit{Sleeping Beauty} (1959) struggling commercially, despite being Disney classics today.

Disney scholars generally attribute this lack of success to two historical factors: Disney's diminished disinterest in participating in the production of animated films and the rise of television animation. Disney became disenchanted with his own studio after a strike broke out in 1941, with many of his major animators walking out when he refused to allow a union to form. Because of this, Disney turned his attention to other projects after the war, primarily live-action features and the development of Disneyland, which relegated animation to the sidelines and placed others in charge of major details.\textsuperscript{153} Further, animated television took over in the home, providing a new outlet for this medium. The number of animated television shows increased in the mid-1950's, and these, unlike animated film of the time, were specifically designated for children. However, the types of programming provided for children, combined with the construction of Disneyland, which turned these animated worlds into literal attractions, returned animation to the status of lowbrow amusement.


\textsuperscript{153} Finch, \textit{The Art of Walt Disney}, 230-243.
The Cold War, Television, and the Return of Animation to Amusement

With the onset of the Cold War, American anxieties were at a high. Urban metropolises of the pre-war period were considered "unsafe," leading to the mass "white flight" to the safety of suburbia. The importance of the family and familial relationships became prominent; foreign products and media were abandoned as domestic pride soared; and technology and commercialism began to boom—the apparent ideal conditions for animation to flourish.\textsuperscript{154} However, it was quite the opposite. The Cold War period saw animation return to the status of lowbrow, children's entertainment, demoted from the pedestal where it had found itself temporarily placed before the war. As stated before, the two primary reasons for this were the onset of animated television directed towards children and the creation of Disneyland, which effectively turned Disney's creations into literal attractions for entertainment purposes.

Using animation to market to children was not a new form of commercialism, with Felix the Cat licensed merchandise already available in the 1920s and Disney having products available for his feature films at their time of release since Snow White, but television provided a new outlet for reaching out to children. The graphic nature of animation, with its bright colors and emphasis on gag humor, was considered one of the best ways to attract children, and early television shows were not afraid to use animation to their advantage. For example, a live-action program from the mid-1950s called Winky Dink and You marketed a "magic screen" to children, a screen that adhered to the television itself and allowed children to draw on it in order to

complete games that were part of the program. Frequently, this included drawing the missing parts of an animated figure or a missing action in an animated sequence.\textsuperscript{155}

Television provided a new outlet for distributors to market to children, just as the rise of comic books had before and during the war period. Animators that had lost their jobs in the post-war turmoil made the move to television, notable examples being William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, who created the Hanna-Barbera Studios which developed popular shows like \textit{The Jetsons} and \textit{The Flinstones}.\textsuperscript{156} Others made the jump to advertising, where animation flourished. Television animation, in its short format, offered new opportunities for experimentation, with many animated television shows adopting a modernist style, which, in the end, Disney was afraid to fully embrace.\textsuperscript{157} Programs like \textit{The Jetsons} epitomized this new style, allowing for experimentation with animation outside of the hyper-realisim for which Disney was known. The show exhibited a pseudo-futuristic modernist art style. However, with the rise in full-time programming dedicated to children, parents became much more concerned with what was being shown to their children.\textsuperscript{158}

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\textbf{155} & Maureen Furniss, \textit{A New History of Animation}, 224. \\
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\textbf{156} & Furniss, \textit{A New History of Animation}, 225-226. \\
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\textbf{157} & Despite Disney’s hesitation to create entirely new material for television, the Disney Studios were one of the first to make the jump to television with the \textit{Disneyland} television series in 1950, which showed old shorts or films, while promoting upcoming works. Notably, Disney used this show to promote Disneyland, which had its opening day broadcast live on ABC. \\
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\textbf{158} & This is also the case with comic books, which were popularized particularly during World War II among child audiences. In 1954, the Comics Code Authority was formed to set standards for content in comic books for children, after Dr. Frederic Wertham's book Seduction of the Innocent was published in the same year. Wertham's book insisted that the violent and sexual themes present in popular crime comic books were a leading cause of juvenile delinquency, with Wertham arguing that comic books were anti-educational, provide an outlet for moral disarmament and questionable ethical conditioning, and plant the seeds of discriminatory ideals. Wertham also asserted that these effects were far more detrimental for girls than boys, who were more susceptible to the seductive qualities of comics. Fredric Wertham M. D, \textit{Seduction of the Innocent}. (Amereon Ltd, 1999), 84-118.
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As animated television became increasingly criticized for questionable themes and content, Walt Disney moved his company in the opposite direction, providing a vision for a safe space for wholesome family entertainment. Particularly after the Studio Strike of 1941 and his involvement working against communism with the House Un-American Activities Committee, Disney became disenchanted with his team of animators and distanced himself from the production of animation. In this period, his mind moved to the creation of Disneyland, arguably the physical incarnation of his highly regarded animated features for mass entertainment. As the myth goes, Walt Disney conceived of Disneyland after a visit to the Griffith Park carousel with his own young daughters in the late 1940s. After witnessing how dirty and rundown the local operation was, and sitting on the sidelines of the carousel as his daughters rode, Disney decided to create a space for families to enjoy their time together in a safe, controlled environment. Further visits to deteriorating Coney Island, Santa Monica Pier, and other roadside attractions cemented Disney's idyllic vision and the utopian experience that he desired to implement in his own park.

Imagined as a countercultural operation to the dominant system of public amusement parks, Disneyland's artifice was of no concern to visitors, as the park topped five million visitors a year only a decade after opening. For families, Disneyland was a place of magic and nostalgia that allowed adults and children alike to interact with their childhood memories in a controlled space separate from the Cold War anxieties present outside the gates. In the space of Disneyland, visitors could literally walk and ride through Disney's animated features, taking


160 Finch, The Art of Walt Disney, 391.

them out of the cinema and into the everyday world. Cultural historians Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton indicate this was a welcome change for suburban America: "Disney's transformation was a blessing, substituting clean, orderly, and family-oriented fun for the grimy disorder and working-class and minority crowds of America's declining urban amusement parks and seaside resorts." With the post-WWII "white flight" shift away from urban city centers towards the safety of suburbia, middle-class, predominately white, families sought refuge in such controlled environments, away from racial tensions that were developing in urban areas and the deviance that was advertised as belonging to those tensions directly. In other words, Disneyland was intended as a middle-class safe haven for familial exploration and entertainment within a controlled environment, and, as scholar Eric Avila observes, "in its proximity to freeways, its highly disciplined ordering of space, its validation of the patriarchy and nuclear family, and its thematic emphasis on racial distinction, Disneyland provided a spatial articulation of a new suburban ethos that millions of Americans adopted…after World War II." Disneyland provided a commercialized playground for middle-class white families in the post-World War II period, transforming Disney's artistic endeavors into a vernacular amusement for the masses.

As art historian Karal Ann Marling points out, control was the ultimate goal of the operation. After Disney's harsh experiences with his own animation team, he wanted to take

164 Ibid, 225.
matters into his own hands and have power over the entire consumer experience. Marling explains, "Disneyland is about mild contentment and the overarching reassurance that there is an order governing the disposition of things. A detectable order that will take the visitor by the hand and lead him through an astonishingly varied array of ersatz places…the feelings are domestic in scale, of an order of magnitude exactly commensurate with 5/8-, or ¾- or 7/8 scale show in a window in a toy store."166 With forced perspective, scale models, and bright welcoming colors, Disneyland provided a playground of imagination that replicated model toy sets. Unlike the real streets of America, visitors can wander the avenues of Disneyland without concern for real-life worries and restrictions. Stemming from Disney's own fascination with miniatures, Disneyland was constructed as a microcosmic city, fully operational on its own, providing safety and security away from the dangers of nearby urban centers (with Los Angeles a safe forty-minute distance north) and the demands of the outside world. From the scents in the streets, the sounds heard in each land, and the costumes worn by the cast members who are employed to work in Disney's idyllic vision, each and every piece of the park is a piece of a puzzle that is carefully crafted to provide a fully themed entertainment experience.

What began as a countercultural turn away from the destitute theme parks of the turn-of-the-century has evolved into the ultimate retreat for upper-middle-class white families in the period of "white flight" through to the present day. In her book Understanding Disney, Janet Wasko notes the following about visitor demographics in Disney theme parks:

By 1989, it was claimed that 70 percent of all Americans had visited either Walt Disney World or Disneyland. Even when the number of children decreased [after the post-WWII baby boom], adults became more prevalent than children in the parks by a ratio of four to one…with entrance fees and transportation expenses as barriers for some families, it has been reported that three-quarters of [Disney visitors] are professionals, technical

166 Karal Ann Marling, Designing Disney’s Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance.
personnel, or managers, with only 2 percent representing laborers. And despite their frequent representation in Disney's advertising campaigns, only 3 percent of [visitors] are black and only 2 percent are Hispanic.\(^\text{167}\)

For many middle-class families even today, a trip to a Disney theme park has become a pilgrimage of sorts, with visits to the parks related to religious ritual in a majority of scholarship about the parks themselves.\(^\text{168}\) Disneyland's cultural prevalence is not to be ignored. Walt Disney, in his creation of Disneyland, provided a space for visitors to physically interact with his animated creations, with attractions themed to *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Peter Pan*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* operational on opening day, and two *Dumbo* attractions opening within the year afterwards.\(^\text{169}\) Disneyland effectively took Disney's animated creations and turned them into a three-dimensional playground, further connecting animation to the realm of vernacular amusement. With Disneyland, animation was once again returned to the lowbrow origins from which it came, as it "enacted" animation as entertainment, instead of serious art.

Critically, this moment occurred just as the art world was beginning to focus on the United States. Disneyland also sold animation cels in the art shop on Main Street, further removing the artistic endeavors of the studios from noted art venues, like Sotheby's auction houses, instead transforming these art objects into lucrative tourist souvenirs. Much like vaudeville that preceded it, this new theme park transformed these modernist artforms into a


\(^\text{168}\) Dori Koehler, *The Mouse and the Myth Sacred Art and Secular Ritual at Disneyland* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 2017

middle-class entertainment paradise focused on control and profit. Despite Disneyland being an innovative theme park experience, it still emphasized the commercial aspect of animation, which did not fare well in the eyes of art historical discourse.

**A Shift in the Art Scene**

As animation became further and further commercialized in the 1950s and 60s, a shift occurred in the art world that brought the United States to prominence. With the eruption of Abstract Expressionism--largely through the works of Jackson Pollock--the United States, specifically New York City, found itself to be the center of the post-war art scene. As explained by the NYU Grey Art Gallery:

> Before World War II, American art was generally considered provincial and unsophisticated. Artists in New York worked in isolation, in spartan conditions, without public recognition. Paris, which had been the center of the art world since the nineteenth century, still reigned. Only after World War II did New York come to dominate the international art scene. When Jackson Pollock appeared in Life magazine in August 1949, it signaled a shift whereby New York art became the standard against which all other art would be measured.  

With this shift to New York City, the art world found itself centered in the United States, but animation was at a disadvantage yet again. The first issue was animation's locale. Despite the origins of animation in New York City, with many of the prominent distributors and animators operating out of New York through the early 1930s, animation production shifted to California, particularly after the success of Walt Disney and the Mickey Mouse shorts. By the mid-1930s, the animation industry had shifted to Los Angeles, with many of those prominent New York

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171 As the legend goes, Mickey Mouse was born on a train ride from New York City to Los Angeles after Walt had an ill-fated meeting with his distributor for the Oswald shorts in which he lost the rights to the character. (See Finch, *Art of Walt Disney*, 37).
animators either leaving for Los Angeles, like the Fleisher Brothers, or retiring because they were too old to produce animation any longer, as discussed earlier. Despite the popularity of American art in the post-war period, animation was easily marginalized based on location alone.

Additionally, interest shifted in the art world towards abstraction. Commercial animation, particularly *Fantasia*, dabbled with abstraction before the war. However, after the war, animation studios did not have the budget to continue with experimentation and settled for scaled back productions that emphasized naturalistic, primarily human, characters and straightforward narratives. As art was pushing for further abstraction, leading up to the Abstract Expressionists, animation—ever since the release of *Snow White*—had been on a trajectory aimed at more realism, which placed animation at odds with trends in fine art.

The final factor that further separated animation from the art world during this time was the shift away from a formalist approach in art criticism to a postmodern, analytical model, which no longer aligned animation with anything avant-garde in the art world. A formalist approach emphasizes the formal qualities of a work, over the content, and allows the critic to judge a work based on the cohesiveness of the composition, whereas postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches reject a singular idea of modernism or criticism and place more emphasis on the context of the piece or its artist than its formal qualities. Early museum exhibitions, as discussed in the previous chapter, often exhibited animation cels in relationship to modern art movements based on their formal qualities. For example, the cels that were exhibited in the *Fantastic Art, Surrealism, Dada* exhibition in 1936, which featured cels from the Disney short *Three Little Wolves* (1936), were featured alongside Surrealist works that had similar compositions and formal qualities. The cels are easily comparable to the busy, dreamlike, Surrealist and Dadaist works that were featured in the exhibition. This shift away from formalist
evaluation led art critics to reconcile the medium of animation with its newfound return to its vernacular origins as entertainment—and children's entertainment more specifically.

**The End of an Era**

On December 16, 1966, Walt Disney passed away, succumbing to a bout of lung cancer due to his many years as a heavy smoker. The world lamented this loss, with articles from Los Angeles to Paris lauding the imaginative worlds created by the entertainer and his contributions to American culture. The obituaries did not shy away from Disney's status as artist, with many discussing his artistic achievements in depth, and the *New York Times* emphasizing Disney's own modesty when it came to his role as an artist: "Mr. Disney seemed to have had an almost superstitious fear of considering his movies as art, though an exhibition of some of his leading cartoon characters was once held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. 'I've never called this art," he said. 'It's show business.'"\(^{172}\) Regardless of Disney's own opinions on his artistic achievements, the animation industry would suffer greatly with his death.

After Disney's passing, the Disney Studios, the only major studio making full-length feature animation at the time, would go through a period of managerial turmoil that affected production. Between 1966 and 1989, the company would change hands four times, falling out of control of the Disney family, and it was nearly bought out and disassembled twice.\(^{173}\) During this period, animators left the company in droves, limiting the scope of animation production at the company to the point that animators could not render realistic human characters by 1980, barely

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\(^{173}\) Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 446.
fifty years after Disney instated courses to perfect this skill. By 1989, which signifies the beginning of the Disney Renaissance, to be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis, the majority of prominent animators had left the company, with the older animators retiring and the younger animators leaving to form their own studios. Notably, Don Bluth left the company on his fortieth birthday with several other animators to form his own competing studio. Bluth is known primarily for his work on early 1990s animated films like *An American Tail* (1986) and *The Land Before Time* (1988), and his later endeavor with Twentieth Century Fox, *Anastasia* (1997).

With the Disney Studio in crisis, animation was no longer able to achieve the status it had once held before World War II. Most studios disappeared or were bought out in the post-war period, and they produced content that looked cheap and basic in comparison to their pre-war predecessors. Animation cemented its own status as childish entertainment in this period, as studios focused on creating television animation and a handful of films that recycled old animation and stories. The innovative quality of animation appeared to come to a halt, leaving animation behind in the eyes of the art world, which emphasized avant-garde production. By the end of the 1980s, animation seemed on track to be forgotten as a serious art form, and it was certainly not considered within art historical discourse. However, the resurgence of animation in the late 1980s and early 1990s provides the field with a new opportunity to reconsider animation within its canon.

174 Finch, *The Art of Walt Disney*, 253-298. The company had such a hard time rendering realistic human characters that animator Milt Kahl was brought out of retirement to create the characters for *The Black Cauldron* (1985), after animators within the company demonstrated they could not do so themselves.

175 Ibid.
Conclusion

Early animation often utilized a narrative device that was familiar to art circles—that of the artist in his studio. Traditionally, images of the artist in the studio or workspace speak to how the artists wish for themselves or their work to be viewed: Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) situates the artist as equally important to the royal family depicted in the same space with him, placing the images of the king and queen in the mirror in the back of the room and his own portrait in the foreground (Figure 28); Bazille's *The Studio* (1870) puts Impressionist masterpieces on display with their creators at a time when Impressionism was still mocked by the general public (Figure 29); and Courbet's infamous *The Studio (A Real Allegory)* (1854-55) literally situates Courbet between the working-class people and the bourgeois intellectuals that with whom he wishes to associate himself (Figure 30). Likewise, animators also used this trope to situate themselves and their works into a position of importance. Demonstrating the "attraction" that was animation, animators frequently opened their shorts by showing themselves at the drawing board in their own offices. Art historian Lynda Nead discusses the phenomenon as a way for animators to both demonstrate their craft and establish their superiority, beyond the limitations of the traditional art world:

Makers of trick or transformation films used all the available techniques of filmed illusion, such as stop-motion effects, multiple exposure, and dissolves, to create spectacular visions of the artist’s studio in which paintings are made in the blink of an eye, pictures come to life and taunt the bemused artist, and devils appear from thin air and wreak artistic havoc. Artists are invariably made to look like fools and their attempts at artistic creativity are ridiculed, in the end typically the artist is abandoned to his unrequited desire and inadequate creative powers. Although fine art had much greater cultural value and status in the 1890s than the emergent, popular medium of cinema, these films can be seen as the way in which the first filmmakers asserted their technological superiority and illusionistic skills. If a painting could imitate reality, film could go one better and actually animate the picture and transform it into a living form.
The artist’s studio became a battleground for a fascinating and frequently comic cultural struggle between the creative powers of art and film.\textsuperscript{176}

This conceit of the artist-in-the-studio imagines the animator as the giver of life, providing him an ability of which the artist can only dream.

To be sure, beginning with Émile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908), in which one views a moment of the artist's hand rendering the first image on the screen (Figure 8), animators position themselves in the tradition of the artist-in-the-studio, demonstrating their advances artistic skills and their ability to create life. This is the concept surrounding McCay's animation of *Gertie*, a creature that has not lived for millennia, and it is used frequently by the Fleischer Brothers in their *Out of the Inkwell* series. In the first short of the series, *The Clown’s Pup* (1919), Max Fleischer is depicted drawing a clown into life at his desk (Figure 31). The clown, once fully formed, mocks Fleischer, looking down at his own outfit, and asks "You don't mean to say that this is high art?" (Figure 32). Fleischer's irritation is clear as he pokes back at the clown, pulling his pants down to reveal his bloomer-style undergarments. The clown then insists that he can also draw and, once Fleisher provides him with a drawn pencil, the clown himself sketches a dog that comes to life. The pair continues to trade insults about each other's art, reaffirming that Fleischer himself saw his work as an artistic endeavor worthy of high consideration, but also recognized that it was not taken seriously by critics.\textsuperscript{177}

The trope of the artist creating a character that then proceeds to wreak havoc on the staff and studio remains highly popular until the late 1920s and into the 1930s, when the growing


desire for realism and shift towards full-length feature animation eradicated the need for
demonstrations of the technology. The trope of the artist in his studio offers a rich parallel,
however, between animation and art history. In both animation and art history, the artist displays
himself in his studio as a way of demonstrating his own power over his medium and within the
context of production at the time. This allows for a self-reflexive moment for both the artists and
audiences, questioning what is truly important in and for the creation of "art." However, unlike
artists working in traditional media like painting, the animator still struggles to be recognized by
art history in the contemporary period.

Beginning with the 1989 release of Walt Disney Studios' The Little Mermaid, the
animation industry saw a resurgence of creative innovation; the Walt Disney Studios recovered
from two decades of managerial strife in the years following Walt Disney's death; a number of
competing studios emerged to provide direct competition to Disney; and the development of
computer animation provided a new outlet for experimentation in animation. This has not gone
wholly unnoticed by the art world, with many museums reflecting this resurgence with
exhibitions on animation. Notably, the Museum of Modern Art opened Designing Magic: Disney
Animation Art in 1995, with the press release acknowledging of the art form, "In the past decade,
a new team of artists and supervisors has reinvented the format, creating the next generation of
Disney classics: The Little Mermaid (1989), Beauty and the Beast (1991), Aladdin (1992), and
The Lion King (1994)." 178 This exhibition focused on the artistic production behind animated
films of the Disney Studios. Later exhibitions, like Watch Me Move (2006), emphasized the
contentious relationship between art and technology, with the exhibition catalogue noting "this

exhibition…explores the contentious hierarchy between animation and film, and offers a timely insight into animation as an all-important and all-pervasive cultural and socio-political phenomenon.”  

179 Watch Me Move exhibited technology and machinery used to create animation, backgrounds, cels, and concept pieces from both avant-garde and commercial animation, and it paralleled the artistic trajectory of animation with that of art historical narratives, particularly that of modernism. If exhibitions enfold animation into art-world discussions, why has art history not elaborated on this vernacular art form?

The answer lies in the art historical canon and its methods of exclusion. In the Introduction to her book Partisan Canons, art historian Anna Brzyski identifies the canon as the product of the dynamics of privilege, which function as a “mechanism of oppression, a guardian of privilege, a vehicle of exclusion, and a structure for class, gender, and racial interests.” 180 The canon itself is extremely limited in scope. What is considered canonical is what is studied and what is studied determines what is important. This is the circle of art historical discourse, leaving little room for new insertions into the art historical narrative. As an art form that has existed for one hundred years, animation has never been seriously considered as art, as this thesis has demonstrated, and it will not be unless a structural change occurs within the discipline and the canon itself.

In addition to the overlap in artistic production methods and styles recognized by mainstream art historical studies, animation appears to also experience the same crises that are debated in art historical discourse. As a discipline written by nineteenth and twentieth-century men, female artists have historically been marginalized within art history, despite their proven


numbers within art institutions and participation within the art world. Art historian Linda Nochlin questions why there are no "great" canonized women artists in her 1971 article of the same name. In her discussion, Nochlin points to institutional bias as the reason for the exclusion of women—noting the traditional prevalence of the male voice and gaze in art historical study; the notion of the "Great Artist" as markedly male, similar to Catherine Soussloff's discussion of the subject in *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept*; and the historical exclusion of women from art institutions that significantly impacted the visibility of female artists.¹⁸¹

At the beginning of the animation studio system, women were utilized only in Ink and Paint departments, as it was believed that they had a capacity for delicate and detailed work that the men controlling the production simply did not have. According to the Disney Studios, “It was a forbidden realm set behind closed doors. Studio write-ups noted that the ‘tedious and detailed work’ completed in this department was deemed ‘best suited for women’ as they were ‘considered more sensitive to detail than men, having demonstrated the ability to do more finished types of work.’”¹⁸² This consignment of women to simple Ink-and-Paint procedures and their "incapacity" for further creative work is echoed in a letter from the Walt Disney Studios to a woman named Mary Ford, dated 1938 (Figure 33). The letter, rejecting Miss Ford from the Disney animation training program, states the following:

> Women do not do any of the creative work in connection with preparing the cartoons for the screen, as that work is performed entirely by young men. The only work open to women consists of tracing the characters on clear celluloid sheets with India ink and filling in the tracings on the reverse side with paint according to directions. ¹⁸³


¹⁸³ Walt Disney Productions LTD. to Miss Mary V. Ford, June 7, 1938.
This letter demonstrates the institutional bias against female creative work historically ubiquitous within the animation studio system, and it is comparable to Nochlin's identification of institutions as the biggest reason for the exclusion of women within the animation network.

As the question of representation still plagues art history, it too plagues animation, as many studios are pushing for more diverse stories and creative teams to more accurately represent a changing United States. This is clearly evident seen in the most recent Pixar film *Coco* (2017), which focuses on a Mexican family during the celebration of Día de Los Muertos, emphasizing Mexican traditions and folklore. This is the first time Pixar has put a non-white character at the helm of one of their films, typically favoring white humans or anthropomorphized animals and objects. It is also notable that Disney did not introduce their first non-white princess until *Aladdin* in 1992, and their first African-American princess until 2009 with *The Princess and the Frog*. Further, details on representation behind the scenes are fuzzy. In a recent lecture by Pixar lighting director Danielle Feinberg, she touted Pixar as being quite diverse, with the staff almost fifty-fifty men and women across the company.¹⁸⁴ The Disney Company’s website also claims that the company is "completely and complexly diverse," noting its commitment to LGBTQ employees and that its global workforce is over fifty percent female driven.¹⁸⁵ However, these claims have been called into question after recent comments by writer Rashida Jones, who was writing for the upcoming *Toy Story* sequel. She noted that she left her

¹⁸⁴ Danielle Feinberg, “Coco and the Future of Animation” (University of Colorado at Boulder, November 1, 2017).

position as a writer for the film because Pixar was not nearly diverse enough. On their exit, Jones and her writing partner Will McCormack wrote a public statement declaring, "There is so much talent at Pixar and we remain enormous fans of their films. However, it is also a culture where women and people of color do not have an equal creative voice."186

This concern for equitable and accurate representation is echoed in concerns by art historians moving forward in the Biennale and international exhibition era. Whereas, in theory, everyone can participate and have a say, institutional foundations and biases undermine the establishment of a truly diverse platform for creation and discourse. Art history has always been a white male's game, as has animation, and each finds itself undergoing the same critiques and demands for self-reflection. Animation studio's focus on white characters, stories, and audiences is particularly interesting because of its historical development in venues that catered to non-white, immigrant audiences and female audiences. Today, those audiences exposed to animated media are very similar. In a study that evaluated how Disney films affected self-esteem in children, researchers found that 50% of female children watch Disney media at least once a week, compared to 29% of male children. Further, non-white children were far more likely to view Disney media more than once a week than their white counterparts.187 With these sorts of statistics, diversity on screen and behind the scenes should be a concern to animation studios and how race and gender have been dealt with in animated film needs to be critically evaluated, particularly visual cues that children are more likely to pick up on. That is not to say, however,


these questions of diversity and representation are the only connections within ongoing discussions between animation and art history.

When it comes to matters of the canon, it is often a debate regarding who is excluded, not what is excluded, indicating that the discipline is more focused on the exclusion of specific groups or individuals, as opposed to entire media formats. In her article, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Art History,'" art historian Monica Juneja observes that artists from "non-Western" countries often must undergo a process of "self-orientalization" in order to differentiate themselves from their Western counterparts and be included in the biennial scene.188 While conversations like this are extremely important for deconstructing the canon, they often occur on the level of individuals or groups who have been marginalized. However, the possibility of including animation within the canon has not even been broached, as art historians are focused on those who are excluded rather than what has been excluded, for instance, ignoring vernacular, often "craft", artforms. Excluding entire media formats can problematize who is included in art historical discussions. For example, while female painters have been included in the canon, such as Artemisia Gentileschi or Georgia O'Keefe, female ceramicists or fiber artists are seldom discussed in art history courses, particularly survey courses which frequently perpetuate the canon.189

188 Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation."

189 I also point here to artist Thomas Kinkaid, who practices oil painting of landscape scenes, but has historically been left out of the canon for two reasons. First, his subject matter at times is read as juvenile, as he works closely with the Disney Studios, creating fanciful landscape paintings of familiar Disney scenes and characters. Second, his exclusion stems from his openness to the commercialization of his images, through calendars, coffee mugs, and other consumerist products created for mass consumption of his images. In her article "Kinkaid and the Canon: Art History's (Ir)Relevance," art historian Monica Kjellman-Chapman notes his marketing tactics and workshop style production method keep him out of art historical relevance, despite other canonical artists engaging in the same practices. Mass consumption of the works of Van Gogh and Monet are made possible through lunchboxes and tapestries and Barbies, among other consumer products that feature their work. The difference is that these great artists were canonized before their images were used for commercial purposes, whereas Kinkaid embraced it from
Frequently, scholars point to visual studies as a discipline for studying items outside of the canon, with art historian Keith Moxey stating on the relationship between art history and visual studies:

Visual studies allows art historians to look beyond the parameters of the canon, at objects that have not traditionally been the focus of their interest... I think that the notion of art has a historiography on its own - namely, the historiography that grew in the late 18th century with the development of aesthetics. This is a special discourse about cultural artifacts that are privileged by means of the concept of art. This has become a part of the culture to which we belong. It is a way of speaking a language, and it is not something that visual studies would seek to contest. I think the point of putting the study of "art with a capital A" alongside, say, the study of television or film or advertising would not be to suggest that everything is the same.190

Moxey demonstrates that visual studies is a realm for interdisciplinary discourse relating to visual media, distinctly different from conversations over aesthetics that take place within the realm of art history. I argue, however, that the inclusion of animation within art history would give rise to a number of research opportunities into the vernacular reception of twentieth-century art forms and that the medium of animation itself warrants an analysis of its aesthetic parallels with artforms already considered within art history. Simply because animation falls into the realm of moving-image or "children's entertainment" does not mean it is not aesthetically meaningful or that it offers no insight into artistic practices of the twentieth century. This thesis has demonstrated exactly the opposite.

Returning to Anna Brzyski's examination of the art historical canon, she observes "art history does not deal with the entire spectrum of art practice but only with its historically

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate precisely this: the historical importance of animation as an artform. On the one hand, it combines a unique number of artistic processes and puts them into literal motion. On the other hand, it both hybridizes the vernacular and avant-garde art forms of the twentieth century, and employs photographic technologies in a way that warrants an analysis of it as one of the most important art forms of the twentieth century. Animation envelops traditional forms of artistic practice within the mechanized processes of film, accomplishing the motion of drawn figures, which is a feat that artists have aspired to engineer in their own artworks since the Paleolithic period. Simply disregarding this medium because of its vernacular audiences undermines the artistic and historical importance of this medium. In a period, for instance, where children aged two to eleven view, on average, twenty-four hours of television or film per week, the visuality of animation should be dissected by art historians, who can interpret the ramifications of this in a contemporary moment. Furthermore, the implications of modern art styles in the early years of animation could be revealing as to how vernacular audiences were interpreting these materials. During this historical period, when working-class spectators were effectively barred from entering museum spaces, this adoption of modern art movements within animation provided a media format through which audiences could negotiate their own anxieties about the ever-changing world, as upper-class patrons did the same in gallery settings.

It will take a reevaluated canon to propel animation's inclusion into mainstream art historical studies. Without a reassessment of the scope of the canon, it is highly unlikely that

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animation will be included in the discipline of art history, for the reasons outlined in this thesis. Stemming from the late nineteenth and twentieth-century attitudes of "high" and "low," animation has always been on track to be disregarded as a worthy artistic medium by art historians and, even when it is included, it is at a superficial level. Animation is generally only considered when it directly replicates high forms of art, as seen in the lengthy discussion of Fantasia and the early exhibitions of animation. When animation does not replicate avant-garde artistic practices, it is left out of the discussion completely. Like early discussions on the merits of modern art movements like Impressionism or German Expressionism, however, animation's initial marginalization has the potential to be eradicated through serious museum or art historical interactions with the artform. It is not uncommon for a once-marginalized form of artistic expression to achieve canonical status within the discipline. Further, contemporary artists frequently utilize filmic modes of expression in their own works, so it is not unlikely that moving-image will soon be welcomed into mainstream art historical discourse. However, because animation is directly tied to lowbrow, commercial, children's entertainment, it is unlikely that these initial pushes will welcome animation into the discipline. Without a re-evaluation of the artistic merit of animation, and commercial art more broadly, this innovative medium will likely still not be addressed, despite all the opportunities for study and evaluation present in the relatively unstudied media form of animation.
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Miss Mary V. Ford
Searcy,
Arkansas

June 7, 1938

Dear Miss Ford:

Your letter of recent date has been received in the Inking and Painting Department for reply.

Women do not do any of the creative work in connection with preparing the cartoons for the screen, as that work is performed entirely by young men. For this reason girls are not considered for the training school.

The only work open to women consists of tracing the characters on clear celluloid sheets with India ink and filling in the tracings on the reverse side with paint according to directions.

In order to apply for a position as "Inker" or "Painter" it is necessary that one appear at the Studio, bringing samples of pen and ink and water color work. It would not be advisable to come to Hollywood with the above specifically in view, as there are really very few openings in comparison with the number of girls who apply.

Yours very truly,

WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, LTD.

By:

Mary Grant

WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, Ltd.
2719 Hyperion - Hollywood, Cal.
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