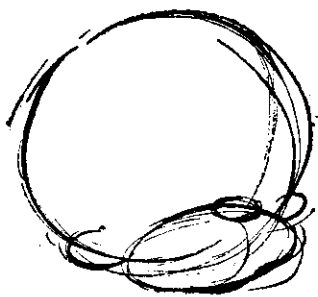


HOW A CARTOON FILM IS MADE

Screen Animator Discusses His Craft



"WHEREFORE can it be said, See, this is new? It was already old of time that was before us"—so ran an ancient Egyptian maxim. To most people the art of the animated sound picture is still one shrouded in mystery. The medium, all too often associated with pigs and bunnies, when mentioned in the same breath with art provokes those people whose aesthetic sensibilities are lacerated by anything short of an old master's drawing or painting. Yet the origin of the sequence type of drawing can be traced back through the ages—past the Japanese Kamakura scroll painters, Grecian vase painters, the Egyptian mural painters, to the early efforts of the caveman on the wall of his cave. There is one difference, however, and that is the method of the story-telling.

On its first appearance on the screen, the cartoon film was accepted with a good-humoured tolerance. The public marvelled at Mickey's antics and the ingenuity of his paces. The public accepted the medium as one of hilarious entertainment not requiring understanding. They failed to realise, however, that now it was possible for the camel to pass through the eye of the needle, with yards of room to spare. Under the influence of Walt Disney, the art of the animated sound picture developed by leaps and bounds. Within two years Disney was using sound. One year later he used colour. As a measure of this development, it is interesting to consider the music employed in *Plane Crazy* (1923) with the first Silly Symphony, *Flowers and Trees* (1931). Among 14 popular tunes *Plane Crazy* used "Yankee Doodle," "Dixie," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "Annie Laurie," "Old Lang Syne," and "Rock-a-bye Baby." In *Flowers and Trees* the music was by Rubinstein, Mendelssohn, Rossini, Schubert and Chopin.

Another Field Exploited

The public was startled by *Snow-White*—it could no longer sit back and accept. *Fantasia* provided a new sensation. Deems Taylor said of the latter film that it was the impressions of a group of artists rather than the mental picture painted by the composer. It might not have been everybody's pigeon but another field of the animated sound picture had been explored.

I am of the opinion that if we are to enjoy this art, not only must we have an insight into the problems it has to face, but also we must have a knowledge of the medium employed to express the idea. Moreover, it is only with this knowledge that we can feel ourselves in a position to assume responsibility as intelligent filmgoers and patrons and as such inspire the artists to higher standards of production.

The late Robert Benchley has already testified, in *The Reluctant Dragon*, that the technical procedure involved in the making of a cartoon film ranks as one of the most complicated in the modern world. In most cartoon studios there

are seven major departments. In order of production they would appear thus: Story, Layout, Animation, Backgrounds, Tracing and Opaquing, Camera, and finally Sound. Each department in turn embraces other branches specialising in refinements. The Story department includes character design, story research and atmosphere—the latter both visual and sound. Layout works closely with Camera—complicated camera moves are calculated. The lengths of the various scenes are decided on, the tempo of the film is set. Backgrounds, the scenery for the picture, are designed with an eye to the proportions of the various characters who will act in each particular scene.

The Animation department is again divided into specialist groups. The animator, the key artist, works very roughly and is interested only in movement. (The sketches on this page are examples of early stages in his work.) Assistants are provided for "clean-up" work. Where the movement is comparatively simple assistance is given by the "in-betweeners." Their task is to draw the necessary number of drawings required between one key position and another. Animation is still further broken up into specialist groups. One animator may specialise in character while another may prefer to work with fire, water or any other special effect. The same goes for the background painters. Some may prefer spring woodland scenes, others the musty interior of a hollow log.

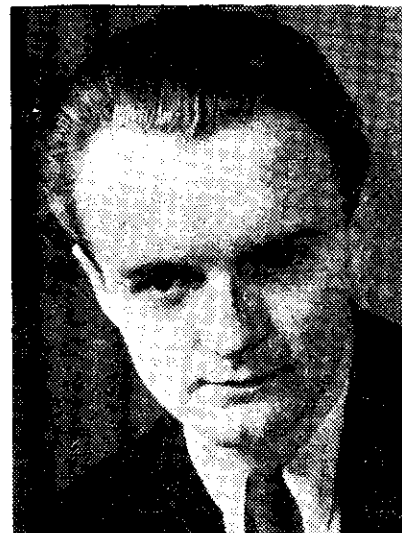
"Tracing and opaquing" artists are specialists in themselves. Their task is to transfer by hand on to celluloid sheets each drawing of movement completed by the Animation department. The outline, first traced by ink, is filled in with colour by the opaquers. Camera and Sound although mentioned last have been busy all through the various stages of production, Camera making tests for Animation and colour, Sound making preliminary recordings and synchronising effects.

Making a 10-Minute Picture

Let us briefly follow a picture through these various stages of production. The Story department has an idea. It doesn't really matter what the subject is to be but the important thing is it will run for 10 minutes on the cinema screen.

The Story department is enthusiastic. Sketch after sketch fall from their drawing board—they are extremely difficult to satisfy. A split-second situation has to be recorded; it must be correct. Gradually the wall becomes covered with these pinned-up drawings, and gradually the story takes shape. Drawings are taken down and improvements on these take their place.

A memo is sent to all key men on the production staff inviting them to attend a meeting and discuss the proposed story. The cameraman offers his criticism, suggesting alterations here and there—in fact, modifying the story to the technical skill and equipment available. Sound technicians are present. Similar recommendations are made by



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them and by all the others. By the end of the meeting the proposed story is an established fact.

The story board at this moment is a collection of strange scribbles, often unintelligible to anyone else but those who have recently worked on it. Immediately after the meeting the Story department elaborates on these drawings, taking care to add to, if possible, the subtlety of each. Photostat copies of the entire collection are made and distributed to all departments.

Layout receive their copy and prepare the story for the screen—I have already mentioned their duties. It is unfortunate that in simplifying the story to accommodate it to the limitations of the medium a lot of the original crispness is lost. Most critics of cartoon pin their words on the crudity of the presentation of an idea. Aware of this failing I am, however, inclined to exercise reservation in such criticism and would rather bestow a laurel on the head that sorted out the complexity. In defence I can only add that if there was another method or technique by which this unfortunate step could be avoided it would be used. There is no one more aware of this limitation than the artist himself who after dreaming up an idea is mortified to find it naked and ashamed in its production state.

Each scene, and in a ten-minute picture there may be 180 scenes, leaves the Layout department enclosed in separate files. Rough pencil outline drawings of the background details are enclosed along with a copy of the "registration lines" required. When a