



# The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms

*Christopher Finch*

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**The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms** Christopher Finch

Based on hundreds of interviews with Disney staff members past and present, this story of Walt Disney and his company's vast artistic achievements through the decades contains more than 800 illustrations ranging from concept art to film stills to views of the theme park attractions. 0-8109-4964-4\$60.00 / Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

## The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms Details

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Author : Christopher Finch

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## From Reader Review The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdoms for online ebook

### Luke White says

I read the version which has been updated to include Tangled and Disney's California Adventure park expansion. I found the book as a whole to be a fascinating dive into animation history offering complex critical analyses of the Disney canon. These are given alongside stories, anecdotes, and historical context surrounding their development, release, and eventual reception. Finch also pays close attention to weigh each development on its own terms as well as judging it against the greater Disney canon as a whole. This is done with some success, except where he fails to acknowledge shifting audience expectations that make judging the success of "Snow White" versus something like "Mulan" a case of apples and oranges. I appreciated the comprehensiveness of the work, especially its attempt to place the Pixar story within the Disney narrative while still acknowledging Pixar's independent successes. Where the book fails to unpack the true significance of "art" within the company is in its analysis of the parks. Much of those chapters merely offer a cursory history of their development and listing of their unique offerings without much analysis of their artistic or cultural success like Finch offers for the films. Of course, that effort could double the size of the book and other books have done this well enough already ("Designing Disney's Theme Parks"). However, more effort could have been given to showing how the developments in the parks were extensions of knowledge gained from animation and film.

Overall, I really enjoyed the book. It renewed my appreciation and increased my knowledge of animation and the Walt Disney Company as a whole. A must read for any fan of Disney or animation!

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### Sesana says

This, apparently the most recent edition of The Art of Walt Disney, dates from 2004. For context, that was the year Home on the Range and Incredibles was released. California Adventure and DisneySea were still new, and Hong Kong Disneyland was on the verge of opening.

This book tries to cover a lot. Way too much, probably. Why bother covering The Disney Afternoon if you can only give it a few paragraphs, and most of the shows only get one sentence? The individual parks get more, better, and more detailed coverage in other books.

But we're all really here to read about Disney shorts and animated features. And the older the work, the more information given about it. As time goes by, the sections about each work gets shorter and shorter. So if you're interested in Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, you're in luck. Sleeping Beauty? Not so much.

Any book with "art" in the title needs to have great illustrations, and there's some really good stuff in here. Backgrounds, model sheets, concept art, storyboards... It's all very cool. And this is, of course, the real attraction of the book, and why I enjoyed it.

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### Luly says

**The Art of Walt Disney** has been, for decades, the quintessential Disney book, because it's set in the intersection of a lot of sub-genres of the subject. I consider that Disney books can be roughly grouped in

different categories, according to what they focus on: history, animation, art, business, keepsakes & collectibles, imagineering & parks, live-action movies, to name some of them. Normally, they focus on one or two of those things, but this book offers a wider view, which goes through history, animation, live-action, business and theme parks through the years of the company.

Disney seems to agree about the importance of this book, since it has had, at least, 6 editions through the years: 1973, 1975, 1995, 1999, 2004 and 2011. It is uncertain if, with the introduction of apps like Disney Animated, the book will continue to be expanded, but it would be greatly appreciated if the tradition carried on.

I longed for the 2011 edition for a long time, but I came across the rare **1999 concise edition** and decided to give it a go, since adding at least one The Art of Walt Disney book to my Disney collection was greatly needed. This edition starts with Walt's beginnings, even before Laugh-O-Gram, and ends with the Eisner era (after Katzenberg left and Wells passed away), years before Iger, as you can guess. This means it spans the entirety of the Renaissance era in animation (the last movies included are Tarzan, Fantasia 2000 and Toy Story 2); whereas, parks-wise, it ends with Animal Kingdom's introduction and Celebration, and the international parks included are Tokyo and Paris. It also includes live actions such as the Miramax and Touchstone movies, as well as the Disney ones.

I find that this edition is missing from most places when you look up the book, maybe it was short lived, since a next edition came less than 5 years after it, but it's a good stepping stone to have the entire Renaissance movies included in one place.

I think this is a starter book for any Disney shelf, but it may be somewhat repetitive in instances if you have information from various historical moments in Disney elsewhere. If you're more interested on going in-depth on a specific subject (like a certain business deal or a specific movie), it may be not thorough enough, but if you're looking for a lot of information in one place, a source to have a bit of everything Disney, it's a great 101 book to own (it even mentions some of the Disney Theatrical releases!). It does hold some subjective values and opinions here and there, when it comes to movies, but it isn't enough to make it bothersome.

The bad side of this book is that things change so fast and so dramatically in Disney, that all editions end up being late by the time they come out, so depending on which edition you grab, you will find some information that isn't up to date anymore. Still, it's a great way to keep records and have a wide diachronic view of Disney as a whole: as a company, an artistic beacon and the dream of a man that outlives him.

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## Josh says

Regardless of whether you believe that Walt Disney bastardized numerous fairy tales or made them saccharine-sweet to make them palatable for families, there is no denying the influence he has had on the world of animation and movie making. His movies showed the world what could be done with animation and his constant drive to push technology and creativity forward paved the way for the Disneyland resorts and entire areas of entertainment that were unheard of when he first began his company in the 1930s.

This massive tome goes into great detail about the creation of his animated shorts which in turn led to the first animated movie 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.' The author discusses how Disney surrounded himself with incredibly talented men and women who were interested in crafting imaginative and thoroughly engrossing films that would be embraced by all. The book doesn't shy away from Disney's personality which at times alienated people and it goes into great detail the times the company was nearly shut down due to

money woes as well as periods of disharmony in the company which caused inferior films to be released. But through each incident that would have driven many to abandon the movie business, Disney persevered and pushed on, creating a place for himself and his creations in pop culture forever.

This book touches on every one of the Disney animated films with some getting more pages than others. Some times it feels like the writer is rushing through some films just to get to ones he enjoys more. I do understand if he had written pages and pages on each movie, the entire book would be more than a 1,000 pages, but some movies only get a brief one or two paragraphs when they deserved more. The book also discusses the live action films Disney produced. Again, sadly some movies only get a brief mention and others like 'Pete's Dragon' don't merit any attention. The book also delves into the creation of the Disneyland resorts around the world and how Pixar pushed Disney honchos further and pushed the world of animation into new territories of imagination and creativity.

This is a very informative book with great accompanying pictures of both the artists and the movies. There is a lot of interesting information and lots of details for Disneyphiles. It's definitely worth reading and owning. I do hope someday that a truly definitive edition is written that does come close to a 1,000 pages.

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### **Vimacone says**

There have been several updated versions over the years. The one that I have is the original 1973 version, which is what I'll be describing. There are several production sketches and drawings which I haven't seen published in any other book. In the section on the features, more attention is given to Snow White, Pinocchio, and Fantasia than any other feature which shouldn't be too surprising since those were the first 3 films which were made when the quality of Disney animation was at its pinnacle. The other films only get a couple of screen grabs or are not mentioned at all. The 1973 edition has a section on the making of the then new release Robin Hood, which has had little coverage in any Disney book. I highly recommend getting the 1973 or 1995 edition.

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### **Tracey says**

[NOTE: I am reading the 1973 version, so the last movie referenced is *The Aristocats*

A massive coffee-table format book that delves into history of the Walt Disney Studios through the artwork of its cartoon shorts, movies, live-action films and the theme parks. While the author is a bit of a Disney apologist, I found the text fairly engaging, and the artwork astounding - I especially enjoyed the two-page foldouts.

The final chapters dealing with the theme parks - Disneyland and the newly-opened Walt Disney World (with only the Magic Kingdom, and 2 hotels - the Contemporary & the Polynesian in operation) were quite interesting; as was the article from an architectural magazine - the author's name escapes me at the moment.

Definitely worth our purchase price (a steal at \$7 used) - recommended to anyone interested in the design and art behind the Walt Disney Productions empire.

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## **H.G. Howell says**

More or less the same as From Mickey Mouse to Beauty and the Beast. Not as much info on the parks as I would have liked and really just a retread of what I have already read.

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## **Alenka says**

Having read the biography of Disney this was a nice follow-up. It deals mainly (as the title implies) with the artistic side of the business: how Disney started as a company, what innovations they brought to movie making, especially animated movies, the artistic process of the early movies and some of the later movies, the big breakthroughs, and finally the conception of the idea of Walt Disney world and how it was realized. Very interesting read, nicely complemented with pictures from Disney's life, early sketches, movies, etc.

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## **Sarah says**

A fascinating look into the processes of Walt Disney's many creative projects -- from his early animated cartoons and feature films, to the planning and beginnings of Disneyland and Walt Disney World -- which, although written in almost a dry, textbook style, nevertheless is chock-full of interesting behind-the-scenes information as well as critiques of the actual artistic factors of each.

Sprinkled with samples, sketches, and photographs, the book merely scratches the surface of what could have been explored in its pages; but what is there seemed a good snack, and a concise overview.

I love how the "nerdy" side of things is not much overlooked in this book, but is included in the treatment of each project. Not only the artwork itself and its subjects are touched upon, but also the difficulties and triumphs met by Walt and his team in technical areas regarding camera work, evolving developments in animation, audio-animatronic figures, transit systems, and more.

In short, this book could have been five times as large and it would still have kept my interest.

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## **Stephanie says**

[The version I read was the 2011 edition, where the most recent film releases were Tangled for Disney and Toy Story 3 for Pixar (just before the release of Cars 2)]

The Art of Walt Disney is a part-art-book part-biography of Walt Disney himself and the growth of his eponymous company. It's a huge volume, a coffee table style book, with full pages of lavish artwork and concept designs, brought into a framework with a narrative about Disney's beginnings and the creation of each of their works.

It runs mostly chronologically, about how Disney got into animation originally, through the creation of Mickey Mouse, production of shorts, and eventual move to feature length films. The stories are told in great detail, with nods to significant personnel and explanations of work and technology. The narrative up through the first five feature films (Snow White, Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo and Bambi) is excellent, and you get a

real sense of the development of the studio and the productions.

Aaaaaand then it went from a five-star review to a three-star review from there. It continues with a sense of "well, we've explained the basics, now lets rattle on through the rest". The other films are all talked about individually, in order, but in nowhere near as much detail. The death of Walt Disney, and the Dark Period and the Renaissance are all explained but it always felt like it kept coming up short and moving on to the next topic too quickly. A lot of the time for films, descriptions were kept to a handful of short paragraphs, the majority of which were just synopses of the film plot. In places these descriptions border on film reviews, with the author stating whether the result was good or bad as if it was fact. I took the short and blunt mediocre review of 'The Emperor's New Groove' quite personally (it's my favourite).

After the run through the film progression, up to Tangled, the book goes into the development of the Pixar studios, how they became successful and were eventually brought into the Disney fold. After this is a short piece on live-action productions, and the book ends with chapters on the Disney theme parks.

It's a good, broad overview of the history of Disney. It's difficult to review because the first third/half is SO fantastic, I wish it had continued like that for the whole volume. The first half is a definite must-read for Disney fans, but the rest doesn't go into enough detail to be satisfying.

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## **Roy Gloeckl says**

This was an absolutely fascinating read. The background information on the films, animated and live-action, as well as the parks all around the world, are exactly what any Disney fan would want to read.

There were a few moments when I thought there could have been less synopsis of a movie and more background information. In fact, some movies seemed to get \*just\* a synopsis and the author's opinion, no background information at all. That brings me to the other thing that kind of grated on my nerves in this book: the author. I suppose I should understand his critical way of looking at the animated films. He analyzes the technical aspects, the character design, story, artistic vision, overall product, musical score, etc. I totally appreciate that. What bothered me was when he would not hesitate to call movies I found very enjoyable to be "utter failures" and therefore, not bother to offer much more information beyond why he thought they were bad. Dinosaur, Treasure Planet, Tarzan, Hercules and worst of all, Alice in Wonderland, were all some of the animated films he labeled as failures. Disney itself has a way of doing this same thing, ignoring the movies that didn't bring in the money and pushing the ones that did. Sure, that makes sound business sense but giving a bit of attention to them won't kill you. There are people out there that \*loved\* Hercules. Alice is a cult phenomenon. While I love The Lion King, Aladdin, B&B and the Little Mermaid, there is only so many park rides/attractions and merchandise one can stand from those films before they become old news. Just like Disney, he decided that these "lesser movies" didn't deserve anything but his derision and he quickly moved on. No concept art, no background, nothing. For a book as big as this one, you could have included \*one\* piece of concept art from \*any\* of these...jerk.

All in all, lots of great information. Heavy book though. I think I hurt my wrist holding it up to read in bed. Can you get carpal tunnel from holding up a book?

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## **Jelena Nemet says**

All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.

## **Ella Catherall says**

What this book did it did very well. However, it was not what I was looking for. Much of the descriptions of TV shows and movie bits just seemed to be lists of reviews of movies. There's nothing wrong with this and the artwork included is marvellous. The issue is that I was hoping this would go into the ways that the movies were made more than it did. A further issue that I had with this was that it made it seem, in most cases, like there were no slip-ups in the path of the company, other than 'The Black Cauldron'. There were plenty of financial issues and issues with unions and stuff which would have been interesting to delve into - it makes it seem like Walt Disney was some kind of genius who was never wrong which is simply false as no one is like that. Regardless, it's a very pretty book and I would recommend it if you like anything Disney, no matter how dedicated you are.

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## **Sydney Smith says**

Do you ever wonder what made Walt Disney want to make his company? Then you should read the nonfiction book *The Art of Walt Disney- From Mickey Mouse to The Magic Kingdoms* by Christopher Finch. In the book Finch explains Walt Disney's childhood and what made him want to make something out of his drawings that he always loved to do as a child. Then it goes on to tell about his first jobs and things he created including short films and his most popular characters Oswald the Rabbit and Mickey The Mouse. After Finch showed how Disney's mind worked to create his short films and movies. He wrote history on the Disney Parks. Overall, I think this book gave me a good understanding of Walt Disney and made me want to know more about him.

I really enjoyed reading this book because it had a good deal of information about Walt Disney and his thought process and got me thinking my MGRP topic. The book was interesting and fun to read because it was interesting to be able to learn about the man who created the movies and characters that we learned to love. Some interesting things that I learned from reading this book are the first animated film that he created was stories on Alice in Wonderland. Also, I learned that Song of The South was the first live action film created by Disney. Finally, the one thing that I learned was that "Walt Disney World opened by Roy Disney (Walt Disney's Brother) in October 1871." (p. 152) and that Disney was a collector of mechanical toys and wanted to make an art of screen animation and "the first audio-animatronic models made were some exotic birds which eventually formed the basis of Disneyland's Tiki Room." (p. 152)

*The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to The Magic Kingdoms* influenced me to do my MGRP on Walt Disney because the book showed me how interesting Walt Disney is and what made him want to make his company the way that he did. Finch showed that Walt Disney started off with short films and went to make larger movies and soon the Disney Parks. I want to learn more in my research about his movies and what made him create them, his childhood/ family life, and the Walt Disney Parks and what he did to make the Disney company so successful.

Finally, I really liked this book so much because gave me a good understanding of Walt Disney made me want to learn more about him and his company. I definitely would recommend this book to people that enjoy Walt Disney/ his company and would like to learn more about him. However, I think that the author could organize the book a little better so it's easier to find certain information throughout the book.

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## **Koen Kop says**

One of the most beautiful and educative books I ever read. Shows you how f.i. "Snow White" came to be not simply an astounding movie, but one of the 20th century's major works of art. (I lent this wonderful (and very expensive) book, a birthday gift from a cherished ex-loved one, to my then girlfriend's brother more than twenty years ago, under the explicit condition that I wanted it back within three months ... I'm still waiting ... the bastard!)

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