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Mickey Mouse debuted 90 years ago and went from being a sketch on a piece of paper to becoming an icon of animation, as well as a global figure of popular culture, with Walt Disney receiving a special Academy Award for his creation. The movies and shorts he starred in featured trailblazers in animation techniques and technology. Walt considered Mickey “a little fellow trying to do the best he could”.

At the time of Mickey’s creation, Walt had just walked out of a bad deal with a production company (run by Charles Mintz) that took ownership of his previous cartoon star, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, while also luring away most of his artists to produce the Oswald series without him. Walt’s small, LA-based cartoon studio (set up in 1923 with his brother Roy) was still fledgling, yet he traded financial security for self-respect and decided to go it alone. The young director needed a new character and fast, one that represented his own self-determination and pluck, and perhaps also encapsulated irreverence for the commodity “factory” that the cartoon business was becoming.

Thus, Mickey was the happy result of trying times. Legend has it that, while Walt originally wanted to name his new creation Mortimer, his wife, Lillian, who he had met when she came to interview at the studio for a secretarial role, suggested the name was too pompous and pushed Walt to find a friendlier one. The essence of Mickey was a well-intentioned, adventurous, trustworthy, keen-to-learn character who believed the world was friendly to everyone and could be a better place. Those values made Mickey a mascot in post-First World War America, where education and entrepreneurship were seen as the bedrocks of a great nation.

In the nascent animation business that had started taking shape about a decade before, with hits such as Felix the Cat and Koko the Clown, Mickey was modern and equipped with chipper, “give it a go” self-belief. In *Plane Crazy* he constructs a homemade plane using a turkey’s feathers as a tailfin. When the plane starts spiralling, Minnie Mouse jumps out and parachutes down using her bloomers. Mickey crashes the plane and

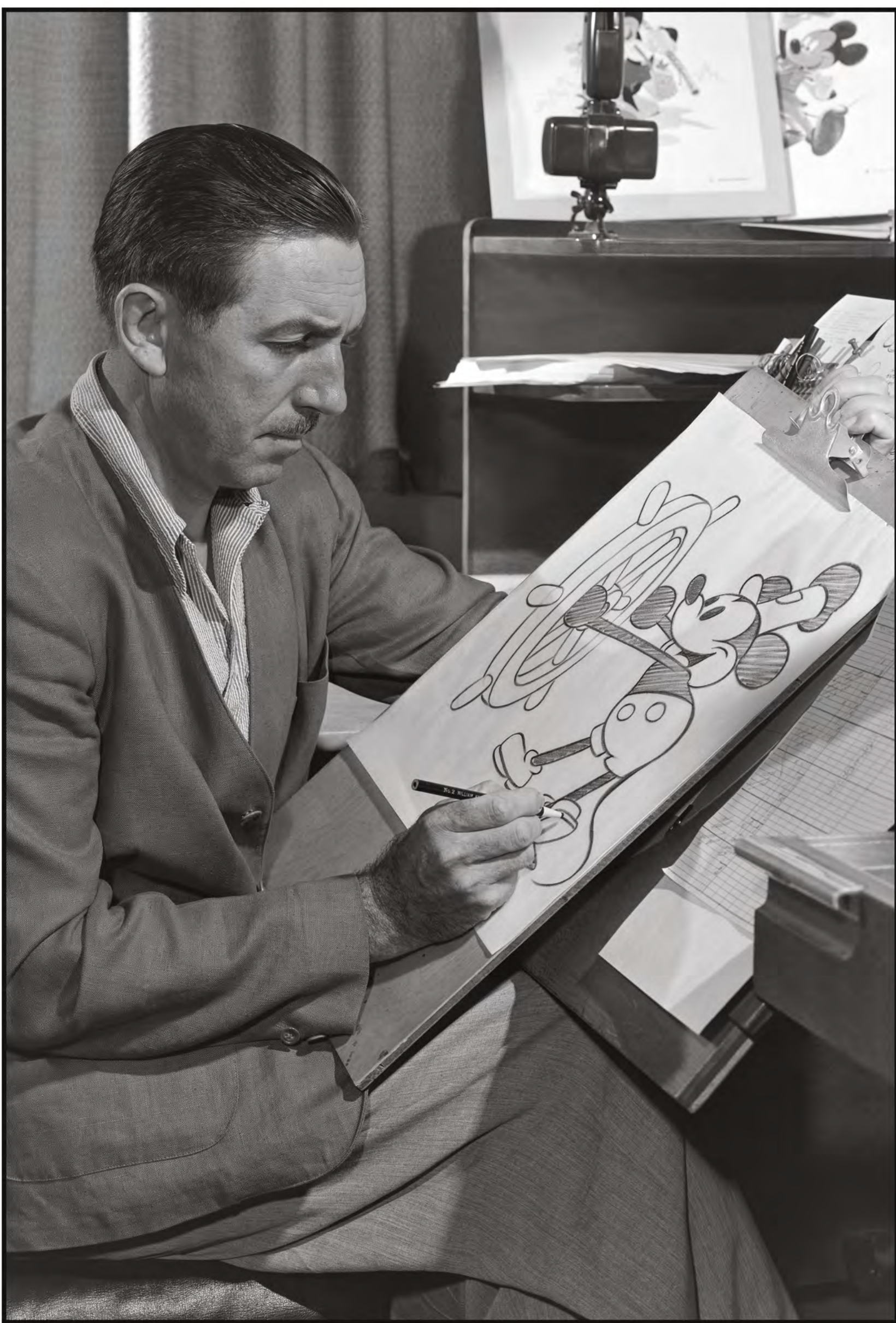
ends up with a “lucky” horseshoe wrapped round his neck. He is constantly averting calamity and getting by on a wing and a prayer to be reunited with Minnie. The comic spirit relies on watching others problem-solving, and Mickey did it adorably.

Disney’s previous creations, namely the Alice Comedies (mixed live action and animation based on Walt’s pilot film, *Alice’s Wonderland*) and Oswald the Lucky Rabbit (distributed by Winkler Pictures for Universal), were acclaimed for their eye-popping graphics and mischievous satirical humour, but – to some – they were not in the Felix league. Mickey was the game-changer. He went on to star in more than 120 animated short films, several feature films and numerous TV series.

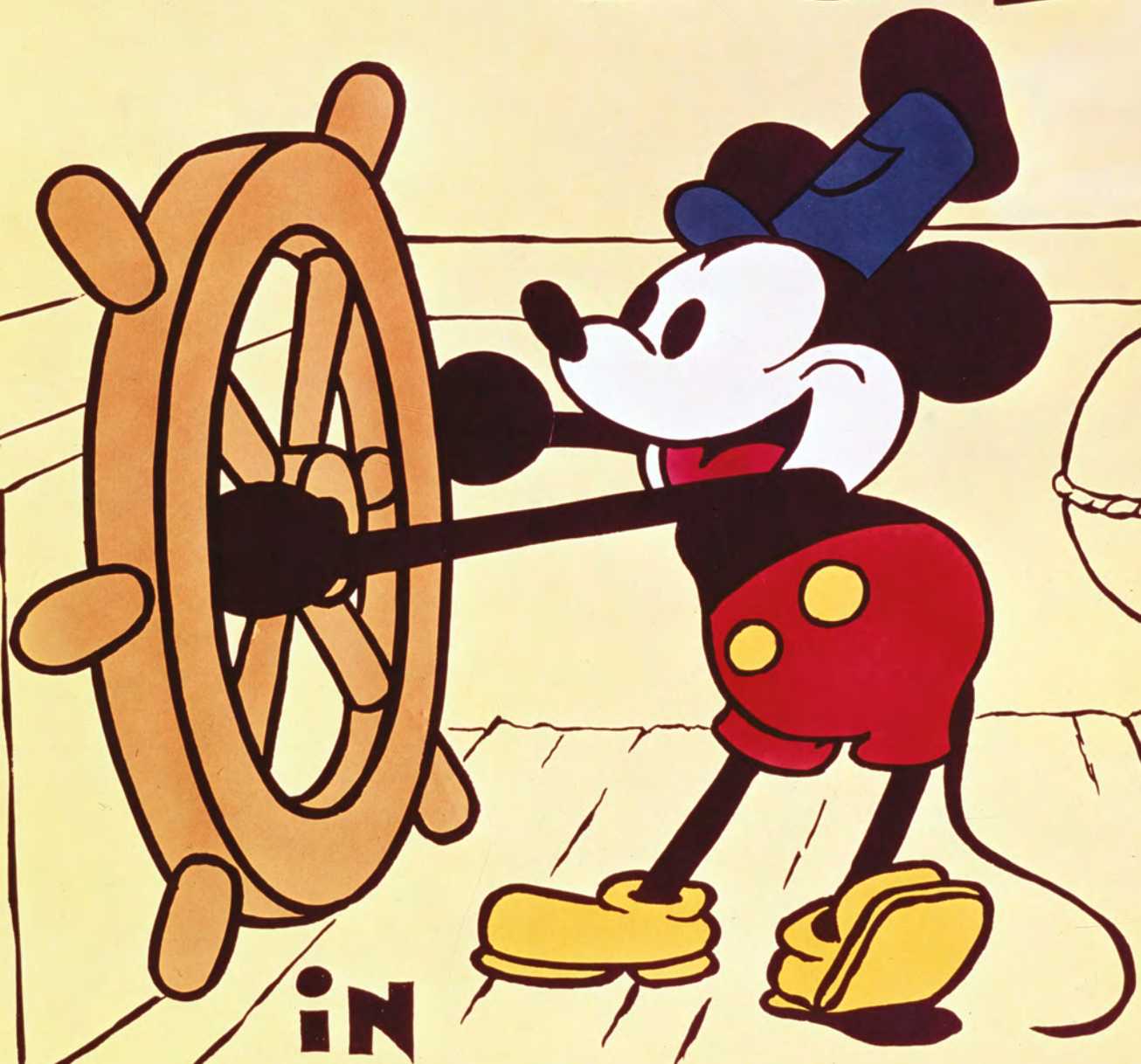
While *Plane Crazy* was his first short to be produced, *Steamboat Willie* (1928) was the first short to be publicly released. Also being the first cartoon to feature synchronised sound, *Steamboat Willie* used Powers Cinephone technology to help bring images of Mickey jamming with a host of farmyard animals to audible life. He was redesigned in the 1930s, gradually taking on more of a round shape. His original form, drawn up and animated by Ub Iwerks, was based on a silhouette made up of a collection of circles and hoses that, at that time, were simpler to animate. Voice (the first thing Mickey said was, “Hot dogs!”) and, later, Technicolor transformed the fortunes of Mickey Mouse as “make-believe” became ever more fantastical. Mickey’s attributes – those big, round ears, red shorts, yellow shoes – popped in graphic, primary-coloured brilliance. His mission, against all the odds, was to remain happy and optimistic.

The character publicly premiered in colour in *The Band Concert* (1935), and was followed by *Fantasia* (1940), Mickey’s first feature-length film, in which the live-action scenes were filmed using the three-strip Technicolor process. It was an immersive experience, featuring a score by Leopold Stokowski, performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra and played back via Fantasound, an early stereophonic sound system developed by engineers at The Walt Disney Studios.

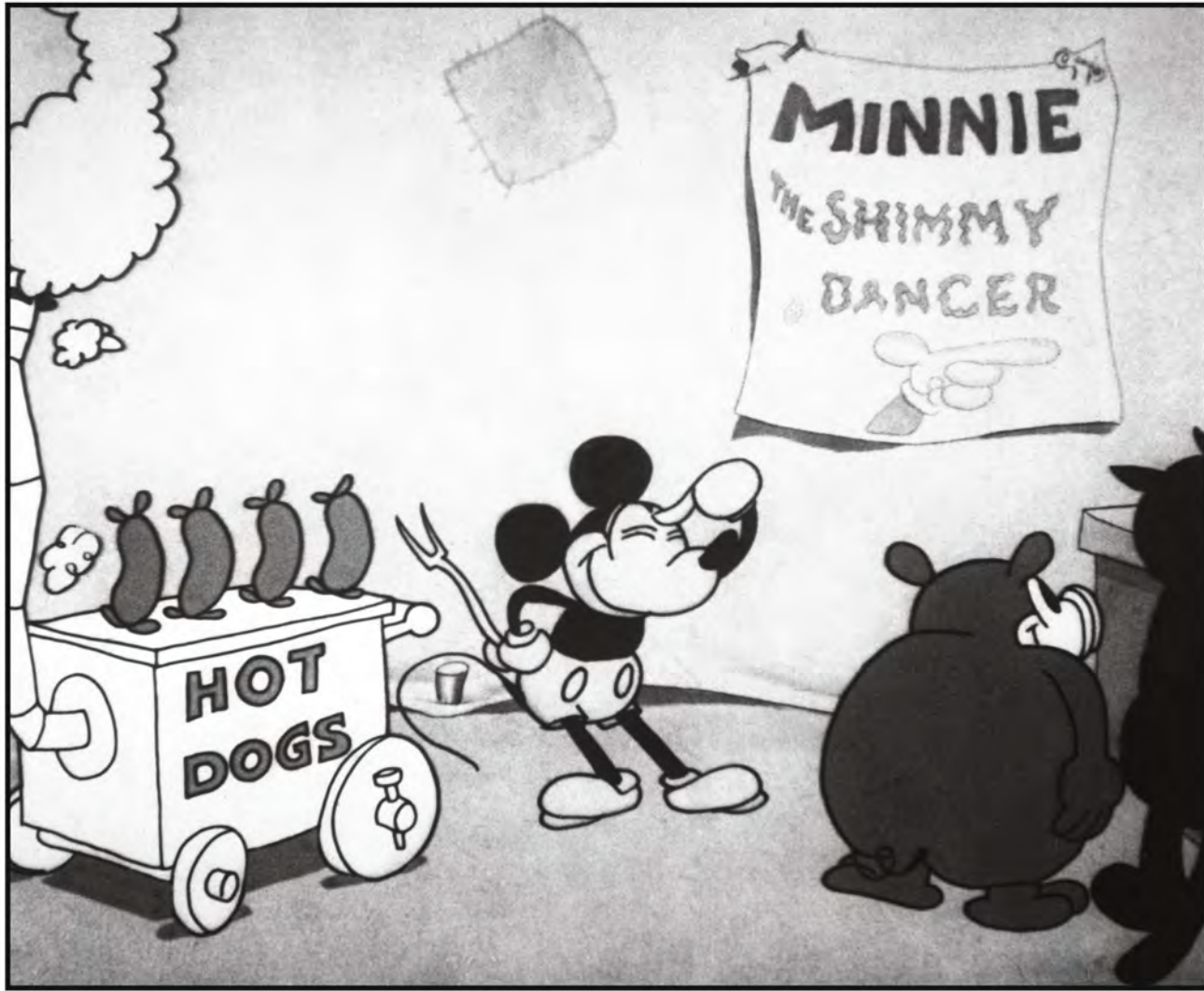
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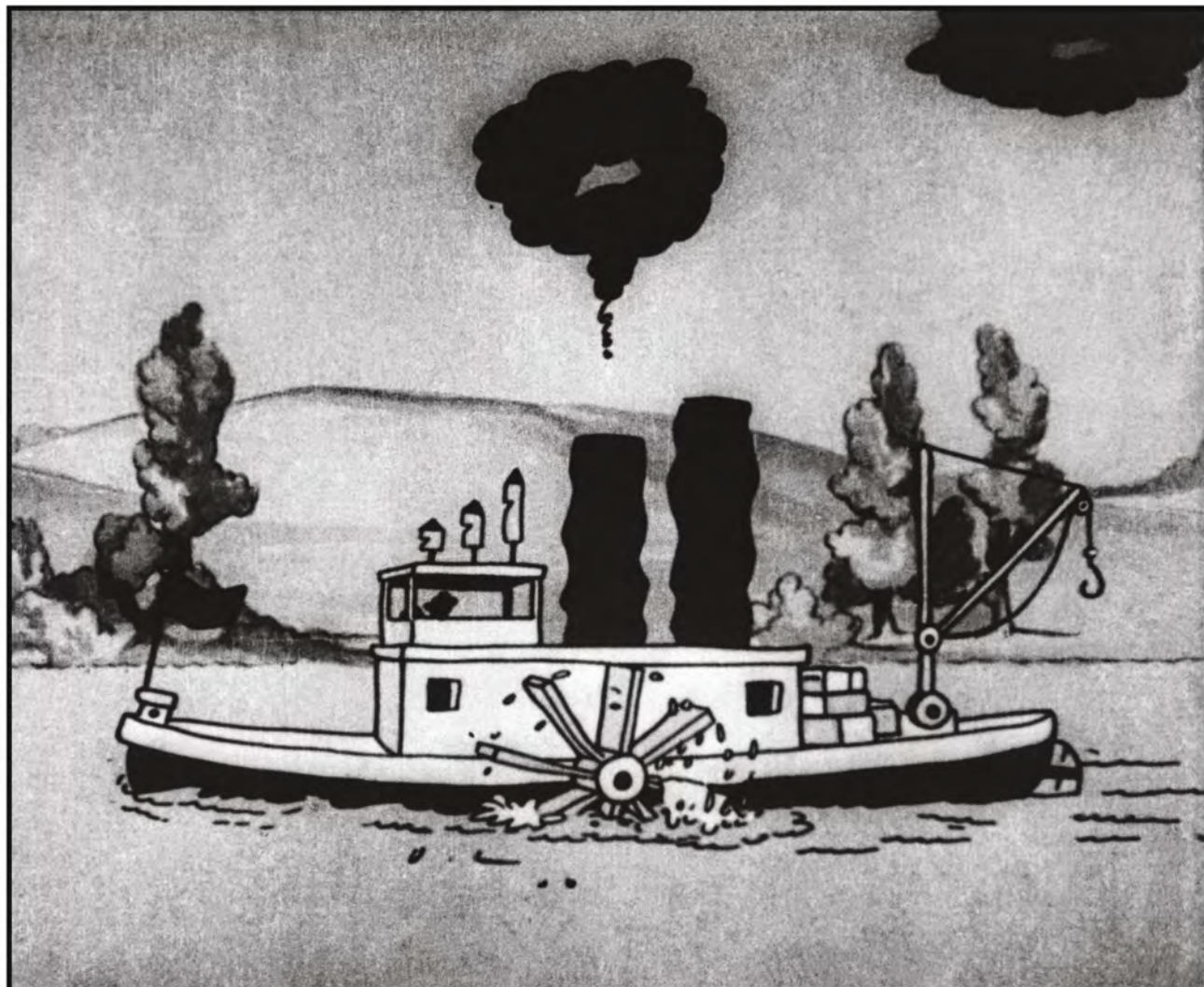
WALT DISNEY'S
**MICKEY
MOUSE**



in
STEAMBOAT WILLIE



THE KARNIVAL KID, 1929



STEAMBOAT WILLIE, 1928

Walt was born in 1901 in Chicago and later moved to Missouri. While his father initially disapproved of his interest in art, he did instil in him the virtue of, "If anything is worth doing, it's worth doing well." Walt earned pocket money sketching animal portraits, became the cartoonist for his student newspaper and even took classes at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. His first professional job was at a commercial art studio in Kansas City, which is where he met Iwerks. He saw the potential in theatrical cartoons and started his own rudimentary studio, calling it Laugh-O-grams Films, Inc. Iwerks, Walt's chief animator, who drew up Oswald the Lucky Rabbit and Mickey Mouse, was his right-hand artist. It was a labour-intensive business.

The business went through highs and a big low in the early 1940s, as revenues from war-torn Europe dropped. Theme parks, a recording division, television production and merchandise sales helped to reboot the business in the postwar 1950s and attracted America's emergent leisure class. Towards the end of his life, Walt was planning and raising interest for EPCOT – the centre of a proposed urban development project and "magic kingdom" in central Florida. "An experimental prototype community of tomorrow that will take its cue from the new ideas and new technologies that are now emerging from the creative centres of American industry," is how he described it. Even now, with Walt gone, Mickey remains beloved worldwide. We will always have Mickey as a hero of ingenuity.



*Greetings
from*
Disneyland





Disneyland Paris, France, 2009

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Mickey Mouse is a natural master of reinvention, a true maverick. He starred in the first fully synchronised sound cartoon, has inspired “hidden Mickeys” saluting his famed silhouette, and acts as an official greeter at all six Disney resorts, in Orlando, Florida, Anaheim, California, Paris, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo. Mickey has welcomed kings, presidents, prime ministers and rock stars into the theme parks, places that Walt Disney conceived as “a source of joy and inspiration to all the world”.

Now, to be that cheerful and welcoming all year round takes some doing. Expectations are high, the volume of visitors goes through swells and peaks (more than 100m guests visit Disney parks around the world each year), not everyone will want to do the same thing and, naturally, the weather can be inclement. So, as a host, you have to keep your ears and social cool on.

Over the decades, Mickey has also greeted legions of photographers, including Magnum lensmen Martin Parr, René Burri, Bruno Barbey and Alex Majoli, always curious about what they might be framing. Perceptions and impressions can switch and re-colour on entering Walt’s make-believe world and encountering real-time fantasy characters in 3D reality.

Parr cast his incisive eye over Disneyland Paris, capturing images of Mickey on popcorn containers, balloons and candies. Burri went backstage with a mysterious Mickey as he prepared for a date with Minnie, while Barbey captured that remarkable jump for joy of sweethearts Minnie and Mickey. It symbolises the leap of faith everyone is best advised to take on entering the Disney kingdoms. There are parades, entertainment, attractions and games devoted to a myriad of Disney movies, with Mickey and friends Pluto, Goofy and Donald Duck to keep you in a good mood.

Back in 1955, when Disneyland first opened in Anaheim, the park was designed as a collection of themed lands linked by a central hub at the end of Main Street, USA – partially inspired by the main streets of Walt’s childhood. A piece in The New York Times at the time said that he had “tastefully combined some of the pleasant things of yesterday with fantasy and dreams of tomorrow”.

His vision of bringing animation to life and crafting an entertaining experience for the whole family was audacious and revolutionary. The parks are still brimming with super-duper wow.

Words by Harriet Quick



Andy Warhol took the Campbell's Soup can, the Coca-Cola bottle and the Brillo pad box, and turned the commercial household packaging into a radical new everyday study for art. He created portraits of a pantheon of American entertainment greats, including Liza Minnelli, Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. Warhol's embrace of Mickey Mouse in 1981 could be argued as a fait accompli.

By then a world-famous artist, filmmaker, music producer, society portrait painter and founder of Interview magazine, Warhol re-envisioned Mickey Mouse as part of his Myths series, which also featured Dracula, Uncle Sam and Superman, among others. Almost all of these screen-printed "portrait" works were inlaid with diamond dust, an industrial material comprising mostly crushed glass that created a tantalising shimmer.

The Mickey he imagined had a potent edge. He appears in a stained-glass quad of hues, and in white out of a black silhouette that references Disney's first renditions of his superstar-to-be. As a young boy, Warhol devoured Hollywood fanzines and, in the summer of 1949, after graduating in pictorial design from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, moved to New York, where he soon found work as a highly successful commercial artist, developing his signature fluid black line. Like Disney, he was fascinated by the latest technology in filming and recording. His screen prints mirror the visual effects of photographic magic, including superimposition and stop frame as he blurred the boundaries of image making and explored the myth-making of superstar fame. In turn, he became an idol himself, with a legacy that still has an impact on and foresaw the symbiosis of media, film, fashion, art and design today.

Warhol's fascination with Mickey Mouse and Disney is a meeting of two graphic artists simultaneously in an "impossible" conversation between two American icons – one with big ears, one with a platinum wig.

DISNEY & WARHOL