



A painter working on the celluloid sheet for Disney's "Pinocchio"

Walt Disney Archives



Brenda Chapman, first woman to direct an animated film, working as a storyboard artist for Disney's "Beauty and the Beast"

Walt Disney Archives

Breaking the glass ceiling

Women in animation — then and now The challenges and advancements – past and present – in artistic equality

The art of animation has grown since its early beginnings in the 20th century. Noted for being the first fully drawn, feature-length, animated film, Walt Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" revolutionized the artform.ⁱ

Recently celebrating its 60th movie, "Encanto," Disney has produced numerous classic animated films since 1937.ⁱⁱ The art of animation has inspired artists throughout the century, but the industry is no stranger to gender inequalities.

NO GIRLS ALLOWED

Walt Disney's animation studio brought in many talented artists to create classics, but there was a caveat: women could not be animators.

That did not stop women from trying, however. Women did apply to join Walt Disney's animation team but were quickly rejected and told they could instead apply to be an "Inker" or "Painter."ⁱⁱⁱ

“Women do not do any of the creative work^{iv}”

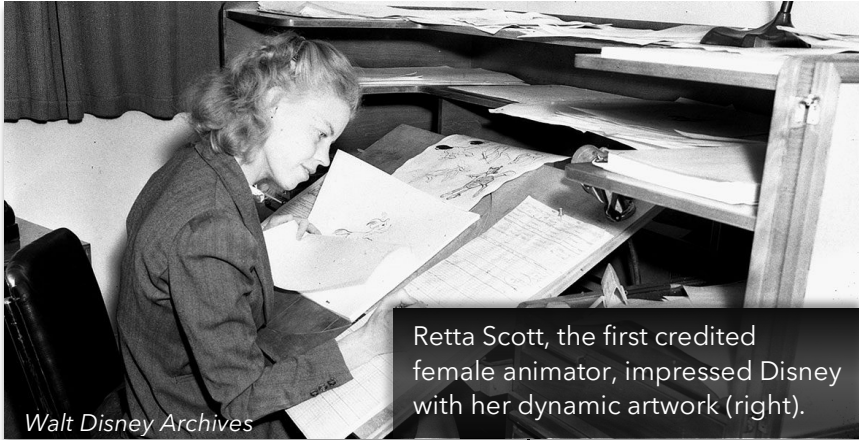
Women in the Inking and Painting Department -

often referred to by Disney as "the girls" – put in an exhaustive effort painting backgrounds and inking celluloid sheets. During the production of "Snow White," the artists would often put in 85-hour work weeks and were reported to sleep under their desks and forget to eat.^v

FIRST CREDITED

Among the team of Walt's "girls," was artist Retta Scott. At the age of 22, Scott began working for Disney in 1938 on the production of "Bambi." She was given the job of visiting the zoo to provide concept drawings of animals for the other





Retta Scott, the first credited female animator, impressed Disney with her dynamic artwork (right).



Walt Disney Archives

artists to use for reference purposes.

Armed with a pad of paper and charcoal, Scott sketched poses of deer that were not just “conceptual,” but cinematic. Her ability to capture lighting, shadows, and emotion “wowed” Disney, and she was welcomed to be trained and credited as the first female animator in 1942’s “Bambi.”^{vi}

WOMEN IN ANIMATION TODAY

Today, many female artists pursue the field of animation and are not banned for simply being women. However, there is still a notable gender imbalance.

The California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), co-founded by Walt Disney in 1961, trains many future animators. Currently, CalArts boasts that 70 percent of animation students are women.^{vii} Nevertheless, as of 2017, women in the animation

industry hold fewer than a quarter of animation jobs in California-based studios.^{viii}

“Women have been trained to be artists in animation schools but not to be leaders”^{ix}

Female directors in the animation industry are an even rarer sight – in some studios more than others. In 1998, Brenda Chapman, a former storyboard artist for Disney, made history as the first female director of an animated movie by directing the DreamWorks Animation film, “The Prince of Egypt.”^x

In fact, since its founding in 1994, DreamWorks has produced a handful of feature-length animated films directed by women. “Shrek,” “Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron” and “Kung fu Panda 2” all

had women at the helm. In contrast, Disney celebrated its first female director in 2013 with its blockbuster film, “Frozen.”^{xi}

LOOKING AHEAD

The non-profit organization, Women in Animation, strives to close the massive gender gap in the animation industry. The organization leads the “50/50 by 2025” pledge – encouraging animation studios to hire on more female, transgender and nonbinary creatives within the field, setting a goal for the workforce to reach equality and balance by 2025.^{xii} The industry has come a long way since its total ban on women in animation, but approaching nearly a century later, it still has quite a way before the glass ceiling is completely shattered.

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i "A Quick History of Animation"

ii Whitten, Sarah

iii Holt, Nathalia

iv Acuna, Kirsten

v Zohn, Patricia

vi Seastrom, Lucas O.

vii Ito, Robert

viii Mayorga, Emilio

ix Mayorga, Emilio

x Wolfe, Jennifer

xi Dowd, Maureen

xii "50/50 By 2025"

