



Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts

6 April – 16 October 2022

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Next spring, The Wallace Collection – in collaboration with New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art – will present the magic of Disney, as you have *never* seen it before.

Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts will display American twentieth-century hand-drawn animation alongside French 18th-century art to reveal the surprising and enchanting connections between these two artistic movements.

Drawing on the outstanding artworks of the Wallace Collection and spectacular international loans, the exhibition will highlight the exceptional talent and innovation of both Walt Disney Animation Studios artists and the creative pioneers of the French 18th century. Although separated by two centuries, the artists, craftspeople and animators all had the same ambition – to breathe life, character, and charm into the inanimate.

In an entirely new approach to this material, the exhibition will focus on Walt Disney’s personal fascination with France and French culture, and the way in which artists behind the most iconic Walt Disney Animation Studios films looked to French 18th-century artworks for their source material. These connections will be explored through the juxtaposition of illustrations by artists at Walt Disney Animation Studios and a selection of the finest 18th-century furniture and porcelain, highlighting the humour, wit, and ingenuity of French Rococo decorative arts.

Seeing the art in this unique context will appeal to visitors of all ages and will encourage new ways of looking at these masterpieces. Over 120 examples of production artwork and works on paper from the Walt Disney Animation Research Library and the Walt Disney Archives will be on display, alongside approximately 30 great 18th-century artworks. These include Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s much-loved painting, *The Swing* (c.1767), which provided inspiration for several Disney films [*Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Tangled* (2010) and *Frozen* (2013)], and which will be showcased for the first time after its recent conservation.

In addition to material from some of the studio's early animated films, the exhibition will draw on two of the most popular Disney movies, *Cinderella* (1950) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), a film in which the decorative art comes to life. Pairing the preparatory material from these films with masterpieces from the 18th century, *Inspiring Walt Disney* will reveal the connections and highlight the supreme craftsmanship, cutting-edge technology and creative genius that was the foundation of both 18th-century French decorative art and the hand-drawn animation of the Walt Disney Animation Studios. Just as the dynamic, twisting movements of the Rococo sought to breathe life into what was essentially inanimate – silver, porcelain, furniture – so, too, did Disney animators seek to create the illusion of movement, action and emotion.

Inspiring Walt Disney is organised in collaboration with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it will be on display from 10 December 2021 to 6 March 2022, before travelling to London. The Wallace Collection is the only European venue for this exhibition.

Director of the Wallace Collection, Dr Xavier Bray, says: 'As well as providing a chance to examine Walt Disney Animation Studios artworks close up and to admire the complexities of hand-drawn animation, the exhibition also draws attention to the Wallace's unrivalled collection of French decorative art. We are fortunate to have one of the finest collections of 18th-century artworks in the world and we are thrilled to be bringing it to life for new audiences, in a manner that the original geniuses of the French 18th century, Boulle, Meissonnier, Duplessis and Caffieri, envisaged three hundred years ago.'

The exhibition's Co-Curator, Dr Helen Jacobsen, says: 'This exhibition presents us with a remarkable opportunity both to appreciate the extraordinary talents behind Disney animated films and to understand the continuing relevance of French 18th-century artworks. Juxtaposing one of the twentieth-century's most iconic art forms with these exquisite objects not only provides an unprecedented look at the impact of French artworks on Disney Studios' productions from the 1930s until the present, it also allows us to understand something of the wit and humour of the innovators of the Rococo, who turned everyday objects into works of genius.'

Exhibition Overview

The exhibition begins by demonstrating Walt Disney's fascination with story-telling. It chronicles his visits to France and his personal discovery of French fairy tales, as well as his early attempts to bring inanimate objects to life in film. Early films from the *Silly Symphony* series (1929-1939) demonstrate his fascination with anthropomorphic objects such as porcelain vases and clocks. Preparatory works from *Cinderella* (1950) showcase the work of barrier-breaking female artists at Disney such as Bianca Majolie and Mary Blair, whose works brought so much character and vibrancy to the films of the 1940s and 1950s, and further illustrate the complex process of hand-drawn animation, a team effort which has parallels to the decorative art studios of the 18th century. A subsequent section is devoted to the imaginative architecture of fairy tales, and the development of the castles in *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), which took inspiration from Versailles and the Loire Valley in early development. Highly evocative works by Hans Bacher explore the atmospheric opportunities of their interiors. In this section, highlights of the exhibition include two pairs of spectacular Sèvres turret vases – the only two in the world – on loan from The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Huntington Library in California, brought together for the exhibition.

Animating the inanimate is the key theme of the exhibition and central to this concept is *Beauty and the Beast*, an animated feature in which decorative art comes to life. Disney's early inspiration for both the story and animation can be directly traced to 18th-century France: the source of the original story was a French publication of 1740 by Suzanne Gabrielle Barbot de Villeneuve, and Fragonard's *The Swing* was one of the visual motifs around which the film's early development was conceptualised. Some of the artists working on the film in the late 1980s used a studio in Goodge Street, just fifteen minutes' walk from the Wallace Collection, and the reference to 18th-century decorative art, for which

the Wallace Collection is globally recognized, is explored closely in this section of the exhibition, where visitors will be able to see the outstanding clocks, furniture and porcelain juxtaposed with the working drawings by the Disney artists.

Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts is generously supported by:

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

The exhibition at the Wallace Collection is curated by Helen Jacobsen (Executive Director of the Attingham Trust and former Senior Curator at the Wallace Collection) with Wolf Burchard (Associate Curator in the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Tickets now on sale. Exhibition tickets include free adult and family audio guide tours, which will enable visitors of all ages to discover more about the exhibition.

Publications

A fully-illustrated monograph, *Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts*, by Wolf Burchard is now available. Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Distributed by Yale University Press. The Wallace Collection will also produce a beautifully-illustrated catalogue to accompany the exhibition. Available from 24th March 2022 in collaboration with Bloomsbury Publishing.

About the Wallace Collection

As one of Britain's preeminent cultural institutions, the Wallace Collection is home to one of the most significant ensembles of fine and decorative arts in the world. Highlights include oil paintings from the fourteenth to the late nineteenth centuries by artists such as Titian, Velazquez, Rubens and Van Dyck; princely arms and armour; and one of the finest collections of eighteenth-century French paintings and decorative arts. Visitors can also enjoy superb medieval and Renaissance objects, including Limoges enamel, maiolica, glass and bronzes. Displayed at Hertford House, former home to Sir Richard and Lady Wallace, this outstanding collection is displayed in a manner designed to evoke the lives and tastes of its founders, creating a special ambiance that remains an essential part of its charm.

www.wallacecollection.org. The Wallace Collection is open daily, 10.00-17.00.

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