

# Vladimir William Tytla (1904-1968) Animation's Michelangelo

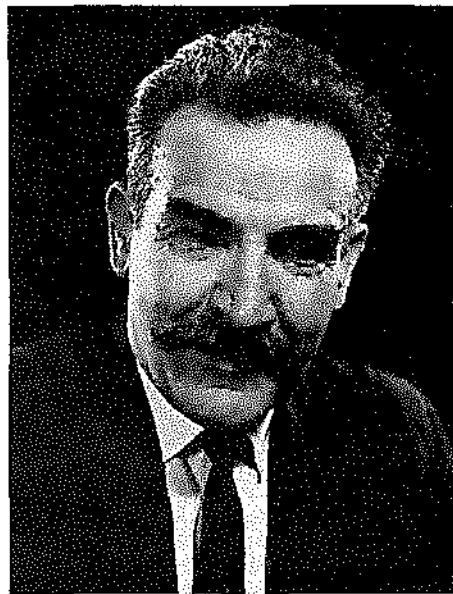
There is a scene in Walt Disney's *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS* (1937), masterfully animated by Bill Tytla, that remains a tour de force of animation technique in exploring cartoon personalities: Snow White informs the dwarfs that they must wash before supper or they'll "not get a bite to eat." Reluctantly they make their way to an outdoor water pump and tub—all except the recalcitrant Grumpy, who jeers at their attempts at cleanliness from the sidelines. After singing a courageous washing song ("Bluddle-Uddle-Um-Dum"), the six dwarfs attack Grumpy and throw him into the tub for a rousing reprise.

In "full animation" technique, as opposed to "limited," Saturday morning-type animation, it is quite a feat to not only move a cartoon "actor" convincingly through his paces, but to make him move and react according to the dictates of his unique cartoon personality. In Tytla's sequence, we have a veritable mob scene with seven characters, who are of a similar shape but have seven completely different personalities, and thus seven different motivations and reactions. Tytla's successful solution of this problem of cartoon identity can be regarded as a small miracle and is a tribute to his powerful gifts of concentration and his ability to "become" the characters he drew.

Animator George Bakes, Tytla's friend and assistant in New York from the late 1950s until Tytla's death in 1968, commented recently on "Bill's connection with the thing he was able to do, that it wasn't really a drawing—it was Bill that was coming out! He was such an intense and sensitive soul that once he had that connection with paper, with a little perspiration he was home free.

John Canemaker is a leading authority on the field of cartoon animation. He lives in New York and is currently preparing a book on the production of the feature-length cartoon *RAGGEDY ANN AND ANDY* to be published by Bobbs-Merrill.

"...at times you will want to animate stuff where you just can't be cute and coy. Those are the times when you will have to know something about drawing. Whether it is called form or force or vitality, you must get it into your work, for that will be what you feel, and drawing is your means of expressing it."



Vladimir William Tytla, circa 1963.  
(Photo by G. Komar)

Plus he was very bright, could analyze and think, which you have to be able to do to animate, at least the way he did to coordinate all these things.

Donald Graham, the gifted instructor in charge of the Disney Studio art classes that began in 1932, frequently used film examples of Tytla's animation in his action-analysis classes. "[Tytla] does not animate forms, Graham observed in 1937 to a group of novice animators, 'but symbols of forces...this is a revolutionary conception...instead of seeing a character as a round body, beautifully modelled in drawing, he sees the animating forces inherent in it. It is a confirmation of all the instructors have been trying to do here in the drawing classes. Tytla's work has been a revelation!'"

Vladimir William Tytla is almost totally unknown outside of the animation industry, but audiences all over the world have experienced his artistry through unforgettable cartoon performances in thousands of animated films, most notably in scenes from the Disney features. *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS* (1937), *PINOCCHIO* (1940), *FANTASIA* (1940), *DUMBO* (1941), and *SALUDOS AMIGOS* (1943). In the profession, he is a legend, "the Michelangelo of animators," claims Chuck Jones.

In many ways, Tytla's career parallels the brief history of film animation itself: he began when both he and the art were in their teens in New York, and went on to flourish during animation's "Golden Era" at Disney's; there the vital Tytla was at the height of his creativity and in total command of his dynamic powers, which were challenged by each new assignment at that studio. The dark side of the Tytla legend concerns his slow, tragic decline as an artist after leaving Disney's; changes in economics and public tastes in the late 1940s and '50s were reflected in animated productions and Tytla's frustration with television animation that never challenged his magnificent talent, plus his depression over the realization that he would never again attain the peaks he

## by John Canemaker



reached at Disney, eventually took their toll. Tytla did not live to participate in the current resurgence of animation as an industry and as an art form.

William Tytla, christened Vladimir, was born in Yonkers, New York, on October 25, 1904, the eldest of four children. His father, Peter, was a Greek Untate Catholic and an Uhlan in Emperor Franz Josef's Austrian Army who emigrated from the Ukraine to America in 1890, and established himself as a cooper in Yonkers and Jersey City, making barrels and crates. His success in a new land opened the way for marriage to his intended, a Roman Catholic woman from his homeland whose father, a well-established architect of the lower Polish nobility, had earlier disapproved her marriage to this man of the Cossacks.

Anne Tytla Gibb recently described her brother William's earliest years: "As a child," writes Mrs. Gibb, "Bill loved to draw, copying pictures in magazines, especially the comic strips, such as Buster Brown, Katzenjammer Kids, and the like. Any loose paper around the house was seized for his drawings. Occasionally my father brought home drawing paper and other supplies."

"Bill was the only one of us who showed any talent for art...he attended Catholic parochial schools in Yonkers and public schools in Jersey City. His teachers recognized his drawing talent and encouraged him to develop it."

"He did not complete high school but went to art school in New York City [at the New York Evening School of Industrial Art and the Art Student's League]. My father was summoned to court because of Bill's absence from school. He explained to the judge that Bill was attending art school and showed samples of Bill's work. The judge was especially impressed by a sketch of Admiral Sims which Bill autographed and presented to the judge. The charges were dismissed."

The teenaged Tytla was greatly influenced by Boardman Robinson, one of his instructors at the Art Student's League. "I

wanted to work with him," Tytla recalled years later. "I heard he was a really tough guy, he never treated anyone with kid gloves...I had the reputation of being very slick with a crayon and pencil...I took a great liking to him as a man because he looked like a man and talked like one and he had a very fine subtle sense of humor. Finally he came over to my easel and he got a whole stack of drawings I had done for a week. He glanced through them and said, 'They're kinda clever, aren't they?' Then he got to work on me. He told me to get a brand new pencil with a new slick point on it, so I would have to draw—and no technique! Then he criticized the drawing. He asked where the neck line was (I just had a couple of lines and a smudge). I had no leg to stand on...I picked up a lot from Boardman Robinson."

By age 17, Tytla was working at Paramount Pictures in New York lettering main titles and balloon captions for that studio's films, which earned him the nickname "Tyt-



This Page: Bashful plays the concertina, 3 of Tytla's original animation drawings for SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (1937). Right: Tytla animating Stromboli for Walt Disney's PINOCCHIO (1940).



much later. The fact of this moustache nonsense was that at 22, Bill was a top animator receiving a top salary as proof of his animation capability."

Tytla roomed with two commercial artists, Maurice Rawson and Henry Berger, at the Kit Kat Club at 7th Avenue and 14th Street, an association that rented studios to artists. Klein lived in a studio below Tytla's and notes that Tytla and his friends "attended some evening life-sketch classes, did some painting, and lead a lively after-work young artists' life."

In 1929, Tytla, Rawson and Berger took their savings and sailed for Europe to travel and study painting. In Paris, Tytla studied sculpture briefly with Charles Despiau and it has often been noted that Tytla's animation has the solidity, weight and dynamism of sculpture.

It was in Paris that Tytla first heard of Walt Disney. "I went to a movie there," he remembered, "and saw one of his shorts. I wondered who he was... Later I had the opportunity to watch some stolid Germans as they sat through a Disney short. They didn't laugh at all. Throughout the film they turned to each other and made a motion of a wheel turning by their ear. They thought he was screwy...they didn't understand him at all."

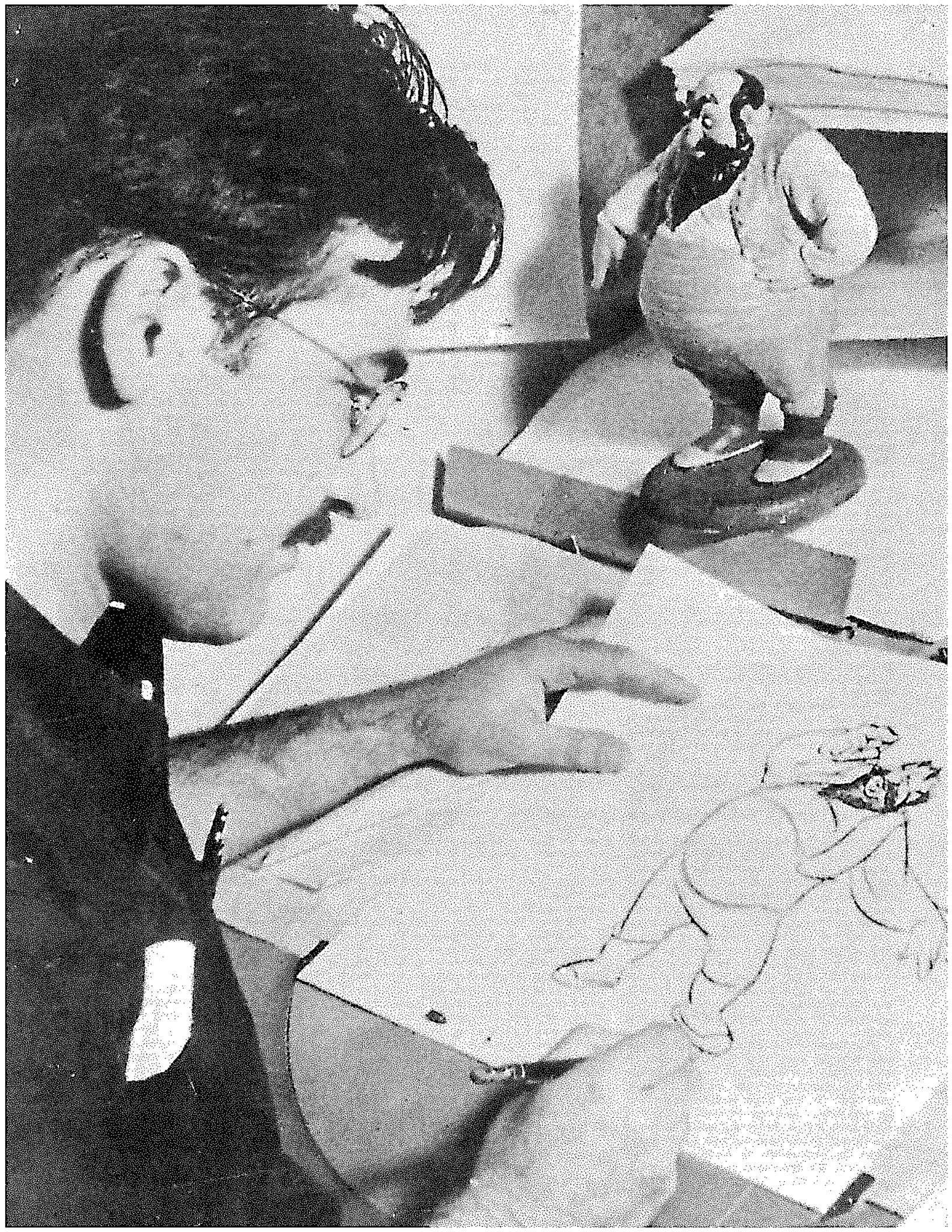
Henry Berger recently recalled their visit to London: "The usual sight-seeing; museums, cathedrals, historical sites, etc. While there Bill tried to interest the Russian Embassy in his animation abilities. Bill had thoughts of heading a Disney-like studio in Moscow. They didn't go for it."

"We headed [back] for Paris by plane, stuffing our ears with cotton to cut out the noise. A rough-go over the Channel. It was a first for both of us. All this before the trip down to Nice. Down there Rawson and



la the Titler." Soon he was animating "Judge Rummy" and "Happy Hooligan" at John Terry's Greenwich Village studio; according to I. Klein, veteran Disney animator and a contemporary of Tytla's in those early animation days in New York, "Bill Tytla regarded John Terry as a worldly and wise man to whom he could always turn to for advice. Long after Bill went to work for other studios, he always went to John for his opinion before coming to a decision."

By 1923, Tytla was animating AEsop's FABLES for John Terry's brother, Paul. I. Klein met Tytla on the street a few years later and noticed that he was now a "dapper dude" and was "sporting a fancy hirsute adornment above his upper lip. He seemed to think an explanation was in order. To wit: he was now earning a very fine salary as an animator and wanted to look mature, to match his salary-earning capacity. It was a suave type of moustache, sort of a Dalí thing in its early stages—the change for the Stalin-type of heavy moustache developed





Bill met up with a couple of dames and left me behind for a tour of Italy."

During his 18 months in Europe, Tytla painted some Cezanne-ish landscapes and still lifes, and went to Vienna specifically to gaze upon the work of his idol, Bruegel. There Tytla assessed his own artistic potential and decided to concentrate on the commercial, rather than the fine, arts. When Paul Terry contacted him in Paris asking him to work on the new Terrytoon sound cartoons, Tytla accepted immediately and returned to New York.

The New York animation industry in 1930 was made up of a majority of men who were mainly cartoonists with no background or training as fine arts draftsmen. Tytla once spoke to a Disney animation class about his problems returning to this rather rough and tumble atmosphere: "I worked for a company that was considered tops and aces in the east and they were making a tremendous amount of money. When I suggested a model, we had to hire him ourselves and of course they wouldn't consider engaging an instructor for us. We thought the lead animators could help us, but they couldn't do much if you took them off cats and mice. If there was a scene of an old man hit by a club and beautiful girls floated around him in his daze, the lead animators couldn't animate the girls—we would have to... It was just purely accidental that one or two of us liked drawing and went to art school because it was a lot of fun besides."

"Finally, we had to give it up—the fellows would make wisecracks about the girls who posed for us. So after two or three sessions even these classes stopped... the time I speak of, they said anyone who goes to art school is a 'homo Bolshevik.' They'd say, 'What the hell do you want to go to art school for—you're animating, aren't you?' Then when you countered with, 'Why do you give me this stuff [dancing girls, etc.] to do—why don't you do it yourself?'—That was different."

Then there was the matter of salary. Tytla found out that some older Terrytoon animators, turning out as much footage as he and of a lesser quality, were being paid considerably more per week. He went to John Terry who advised him to go to his brother, Paul Terry, and threaten to quit if he were not given an immediate 100% increase in salary. It worked and Tytla got the raise.

It was at Terrytoons that Tytla first met Art Babbitt, who today is recognized by his peers as one of the world's finest animators. He and Tytla were to become life-long friends, and Babbitt recalls, "Bill taught me a great deal [about animation]. Bill taught me to have the courage to invent. He was sort of a reticent personality, he was shy, and yet there was an exuberance about him. You felt little sparks of electricity coming off of him all the time. We seemed to hit it off right from the start and within a week after we met, we were sharing an apartment up in the Bronx not far from the studio."

"He burned many of the paintings that he had brought back from Paris. Bill just didn't think they were good enough and that was his attitude towards all the work he ever did. He was never satisfied with what he had done. Although he sat across the aisle from me [at Terry's] I never observed too closely at the time just how he did work. I had the impression he wasn't struggling too hard. He seemed to have confidence in what he was doing, as opposed to his inse-

curity at Disney's later on. Bill was very highly regarded in the animation industry even at that time.

"When I first came out to California [in 1932]," continues Babbitt, "and had my first interview with Walt Disney, I immediately started talking about the marvelous talents of Bill Tytla. He had heard about Bill from other guys like Ted Sears and Norm Ferguson [New York animators who joined Disney's], and Disney asked me, 'Now how soon can we get this guy Tytla out here?' So I wrote to Bill and when Terry heard of it, Terry gave him a \$25 raise. A month or two later, Disney asked me again, 'Let's get this guy Tytla out here!' So again I wrote to Bill and again Terry gave him a \$25 raise. Now this happened about three times, so I finally gave up trying to get Bill out here. So I figured, just for the hell of it, I'll send him a telegram which said nothing specific. It was stated something like this: 'There are many opportunities in the west'—and Bill got another \$25 raise!"

"In 1934," Tytla recalled in 1968, "I flew from New York to the Disney studio. The flight took 18 hours. Jesus, but I was impressed at the Disney studio. It was such



a beautiful plant... Walt and Roy knew of me because of what I did for Terry. They would look at Terry's productions and could recognize my animation. Roy would call me up whenever he was in New York... I returned to New York to tie up my affairs and in November of 1934 started to work full-time at the [Disney] studio."

The High Renaissance of animation was in full flower at the Disney studio; during the period between 1928 to about 1938, Walt Disney developed his cartoon factory into a 20th century version of a Middle Ages Florentine workshop. Sound and Technicolor added tremendous emotional impact to the Disney cartoons and advanced animation's potential as a storytelling medium, but Disney's greatest triumph was in creating a new look for animation, a look unique in the history of art containing a new flexibility and life quality based on caricatured reality and fine draftsmanship.

Leonardo da Vinci would have felt quite at home at Disney's, for as in any proper "workshop" all the master artists had assistants and apprentices learning their individual crafts on-the-job. In addition, Disney maintained a formal art school on the

Left: Dopey washing up, blowing water out of both ears, one of Tytla's original animation drawings for Walt Disney's SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS. Right: Tytla's model sheets for DUMBO (1941) and an early version of Stromboli for PINOCCHIO.

studio grounds where all his artists could sharpen their drawing skills by sketching live models, animals and nude and draped humans. The Disney artists could extend their knowledge of the world of art by attending lectures featuring guests, such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Rico LeBrun, and Alexander Woolcott, and they could participate in seminars on perspective, color, music, and action-analysis of live-action films from Chaplin comedies to NOSFERATU and SAN FRANCISCO.

Discoveries improving the quality of the films were made almost daily in every department and the knowledge was shared by every artist in the studio. This grounding in the disciplines of graphic art and unceasing explorations of the possibilities in the new art of film, plus the sharing of all information, is what enabled the Disney animated films to advance their quality to such a high degree in an extraordinarily short time and subsequently to profoundly influence the entire animation industry.

In the fall of 1934, Walt Disney was already deeply involved in the basic structures of the greatest challenge of his career, the feature-length cartoon, SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS, which would be completed three years later. Into this highly-charged creative atmosphere, after two years of coaxing, stepped Bill Tytla, one of the best paid and most highly respected young animators in New York. The brilliance with which he would handle all his assignments during his brief nine year tenure at the studio would provide Walt Disney with some of his finest cinematic moments and would build Tytla's reputation to legendary status.

David R. Smith of the Walt Disney Archives provided a summary of Tytla's contributions to the Disney shorts: 1935: COCK OF THE WALK (most of rooster and girl); COOKIE CARNIVAL (boy cookie sings to girl and leads her away; Angel Food; Devil's Food); MICKEY'S FIRE BRIGADE (Clarabelle); BROKEN TOYS (Step'n Fetchit; Jemima); 1938: BRAVE LITTLE TAILOR (Giant); 1941: GOLDEN EGGS (rooster); 1943: THE GRAIN THAT BUILT A HEMISPHERE (Indians); EDUCATION FOR DEATH (Sleeping Beauty sequence; teacher); REASON AND EMOTION (Hitler). Tytla also worked on the feature VICTORY THROUGH AIR POWER.

After beginning on the Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphony shorts, Tytla was soon assigned as Supervising Animator, with the late Fred Moore, on SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS, and it was these two who were responsible for defining the distinctive personalities of the Seven Dwarfs.

Concerning Tytla's work on the Dwarfs, Don Graham noted that, "Individually [the drawings] are full of movement which results in a feeling of real vitality and personality in the character. There is a feeling of movement of line developed through necessity... This stuff has vitality," repeated Graham, and concluded that "any animator could profit a lot by studying these as drawings... there is a strong feeling of linear design throughout, but always in three dimensions."

Bill Shull, Tytla's assistant on SNOW



Notes on  
**THE FIRE EATER.**  
The head is a modified  
pear shape.  
Keep beard full.  
Jowls are heavy.  
Body powerful and  
solid - not fat.

© Walt Disney Prod.

# PINOCCHIO

TEMPORARY MODEL SHEET  
FOR STORY DEPT. USE

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754-522 No-ME  
98



COMPARATIVE  
SIZES.



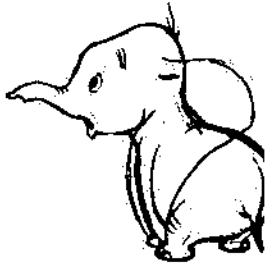
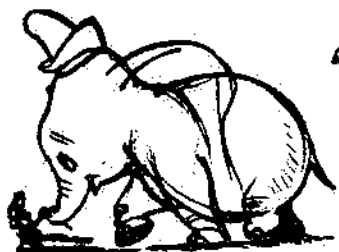
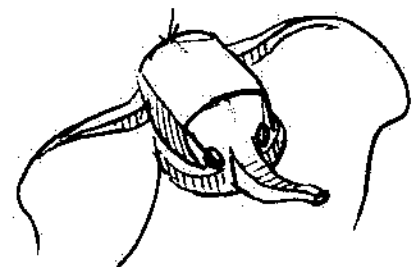
Shoes are  
made of canvas



## DUMBO MODEL

- 2006 -

CHARACTER MODEL DEPT.  
O.K. BY DATE 1-28-41  
NUMBER M 455 A  
MOOD SHEETS SUBJECT TO RECALL  
WITHOUT NOTICE  
©Walt Disney Productions  
11-389



Right: Tytla animating the devil from "The Night On Bald Mountain" sequence of *FANTASIA* (1940). Fellow Disney animator Art Babbitt, commenting on this breathtaking Tytla animation of the gigantic devil noted "...the power of the devil, the drawing where he turns his hands around—this is something that has been forgotten. The so-called animators of today couldn't come anywhere near the craftsmanship that Bill was capable of in those years. Inset: Tytla's "method acting" approach to animation via which he sought to become the characters he drew.

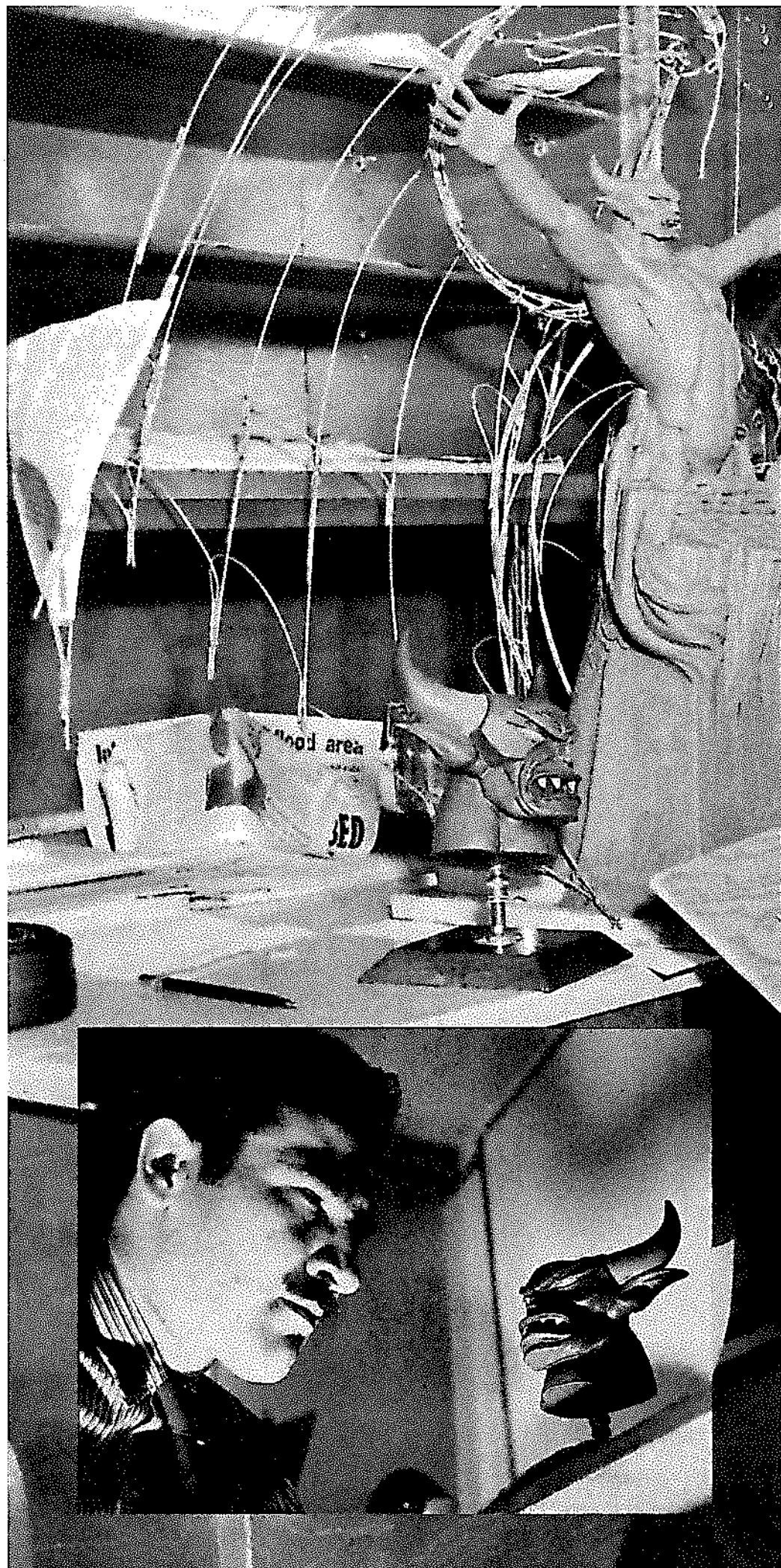
**WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS**, once remarked on Tytla's instinctive use of distortion and exaggeration, the keys to dynamic animation: "I get a kick out of the way Tytla will distort something," said Shull, "the forefinger of a hand perhaps—stretch it out so that it looks almost silly. When you see it on the drawing you would swear it meant nothing, but on the screen these things seem to hold the scene together."

A prime example of this magical distortion can be observed in Tytla's superb realization of the character, Stromboli, the evil puppeteer in *PINOCCHIO*. An overweight monster of mercurial moods, capable of wine-soaked, garlic-breathed Old World charm one second and knife-wielding, chop-you-up-for-firewood threats the next, the Stromboli character is larger than life, and this is how Tytla animated him. Frightening and comic by turns, Stromboli as Tytla captured him, is one of the most three-dimensional of all the Walt Disney cartoon villains.

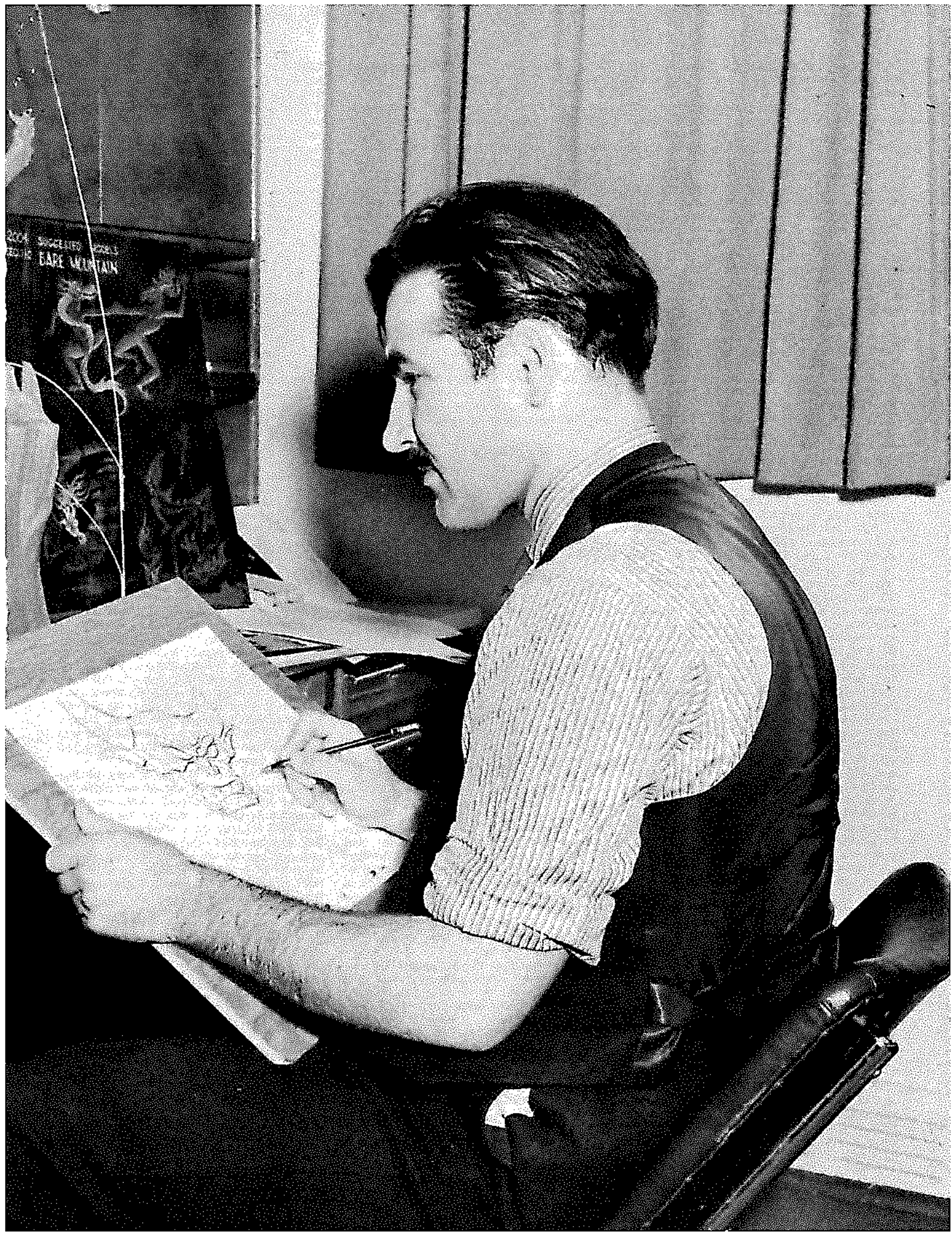
"In my estimation," states Art Babbitt, "the greatest animator of all time was Bill Tytla." Commenting on the breathtaking Tytla animation of the gigantic devil in "The Night On Bald Mountain" sequence of *FANTASIA*, Babbitt notes, "...the power of the devil, the drawing where he turns his hands around—this is something that has been forgotten. The so-called animators of today couldn't come anywhere near the craftsmanship that Bill was capable of in those years."

Versatility, the rare ability of an animator to assume completely different roles, was yet another natural attribute of Tytla. "Bill was a very sensitive and sentimental man," explains Babbitt, "and he was perfectly capable of being tender as he was with the little character Dumbo [the elephant with the long ears who learned to fly]. In fact, there's one memorable scene in *DUMBO* where he comes to visit his mother who is locked up in a cage, and I have seen this picture in several places around the world and each time a number of people in the audience weep. It could have been so crude and maudlin but instead it was done with great sensitivity and taste. It's assumed you can make somebody laugh with funny little drawings," concludes the veteran animator, "but to be able to use these funny little drawings and to make a person feel so deeply that he weeps—in my estimation, that is true artistry."

When he first arrived in Hollywood, Tytla moved in with old pal Babbitt in his beautiful home on Tuxedo Terrace. The two well-paid bachelors led busy "playboy" existences after work and Tytla, who loved horses, took up polo, only to temporarily give that sport up when a horse fell on him and cracked his pelvis. He was in the hos-









pital on the critical list for months, then on crutches, and finally he recovered without a limp.

It was at a Disney drawing class one evening in 1936 that Tytla met his future wife, Adrienne le Clerc, an actress from Seattle who worked at the Hollywood Playhouse and other Little Theatres. In addition, Miss le Clerc was a fashion model and worked for artists and illustrators including, on this fateful occasion, the Walt Disney studio.

Today, Tytla's vibrant and elegant widow maintains the acres of property Tytla purchased in East Lyme, Connecticut in the 1930s on advice from his father. Mrs. Tytla owns and operates, out of her barn, an Antiques and Garden Ornaments Shop, writes a spirited weekly local newspaper column called "The Joy of Eating" and is writing a cookbook called *The Mousse That Roared*. A witty and candid woman, Mrs. Tytla is still easily moved to tears when discussing her late husband.

"I had a friend who was a model," she recalled recently, "and she had been dating Art Babbitt and I heard all about this character, Bill Tytla. She called him a mad Russian. Well, he wasn't Russian and he wasn't mad—he was just brooding and intense. I was manic and he was depressive. But dynamite with that great leonine head! He was so broadshouldered he looked as though he should come through a door sideways. God, he was a hunk!"

"Our son Peter is now 37 and is a gifted and successful director of TV commercials in Mexico City. Tamara, our 27 year-old daughter is married to a superb chef and lives in Ossining. She has just started in the business and commutes to New York City where she free-lances for George Bakes... learning to be a camera assistant and loves it. When people in the business find out she is Bill Tytla's daughter they invariably speak of his genius with great reverence. It completely blew her mind the first few times because after all, he was just 'Daddy' to her for so long.

"Anyway, we were together for three years and when we finally got married on April 21, 1938 we had dinner at Victor Hugo. That was it—we never went on a honeymoon. The next day he had to get right back to work. He loved to hunt, he loved horses, he loved the out-of-doors, but most of all he loved his work. He was always under a lot of pressure. He was like Vesuvius but he worked best under pressure. I think he needed it, it was always a challenge to him. No matter what he worked on, everytime he would come home with a different assignment, he would say, 'Oh God! I don't know. I've never done an elephant before, I've never done a whale before. Jesus! How am I going to do a giant? And dwarfs? And seven of them at the same time and all of 'em different.'"

Babbitt concurs with this picture of the insecure Tytla: "Everytime he was handed an assignment he would come to me and say, 'Art, I can't do it. I'm gonna quit. I'm gonna go back to New York.' And of course, whatever he tackled just turned out beautifully. And he was very highly regarded at Disney's."

Tytla once spoke about his problems in dealing with Walt Disney's cryptic way of demanding the best from his men: "I had to animate one sequence in PINOCCHIO and I gave it everything I had. There were several scenes in the sequence and I showed my animation to the other animators. They all said 'great' or 'nothing else needed' or

'don't change a thing.' I felt pretty good about it.

"Finally the time came for Walt to see it. He was subdued and even jolly in the 'sweatbox' [projection room]. He said 'That was a helluva scene, but'—there's always that cruel 'but' in there—if anybody else had animated it I would have passed it. But I expected something different from Bill!"

"Well, he sunk a ship with that remark... it took a couple of weeks before I could work again. I was crushed. But one day I took up my pencil and started to draw again, differently. It was as if something hit me and I started all over. This time I showed it to Walt, he said, 'Great! Just what I was expecting!' He never did explain what was wrong. It was as if by some magical way you would know."

At some point, Tytla read Boleslavsky's *Acting: The First Six Lessons* and used the book's six premises of concentration, memory of emotion, dramatic action, characterization, observation, and rhythm in his animation. "On all my animation," he once said, "I tried to do some research and look into the background of each character. So



for the devil on Bald Mountain in FANTASIA I did some reading about Moussorgsky. Now I'm Ukrainian and Moussorgsky used terms I could understand. He talked about 'Chornibok,' the Black Art. Ukrainian folklore is based on 'Chornibok'—I related to this and studied up."

Tytla's baby son, Peter, provided the characterization for the star of DUMBO. Time magazine of December 20, 1941 glowingly reviewed the film and quoted Tytla as saying, "I saw a chance to do a character without using any cheap theatrics. Most of the expressions and mannerisms I got from my own kid. There's nothing theatrical about a two-year old kid. They're real and sincere... I tried to put all those things in Dumbo."

Art Babbitt was a leader in the company union and he had a serious personal confrontation with Disney over a wage differential between himself and his assistant. Finally, Babbitt switched his allegiance to the new Screen Cartoonists Guild, which was affiliated with the AFL. Disney fired Babbitt which was in direct violation of the Wagner Labor Relations Act and the union

agreed unanimously to go out on strike on May 29, 1941. To Walt Disney's amazement, Bill Tytla joined the strikers.

"I was for the company union," Tytla explained later, "and I went on strike because my friends were on strike. I was sympathetic with their views, but I never wanted to do anything against Walt."

"The food supplied by the union wasn't for me, so one lunch hour I went to a nearby greasy spoon for lunch. There was Walt in a booth. I went up to him and we shook hands. I told him the strike was foolish and unnecessary. He asked me to return to his office with him to work out a solution. I was dressed in old clothes, so I asked to go home, shower and change. We made an appointment for later that afternoon."

"I drove to my home in La Canada and my wife said that Walt had just called to cancel our meeting. Somebody had gotten to him and told him not to work with me. I wasn't an officer of the union and I really couldn't speak for anybody really."

Babbitt states, "I know that Disney respected Bill's integrity and craftsmanship to the highest degree. Although they never socialized very much, if at all, I could feel that Bill was one of the few people that Walt permitted himself to be fond of. Even after the strike Walt couldn't quite bring himself to completely write off Bill Tytla. I know one of Bill's most prized possessions was an autographed picture of Walt Disney and Bill posed together [in 1959]."

Tytla resigned from the Disney studios on February 25, 1943 almost two years after the strike was settled. Adrienne Tytla suggests several reasons for his decision: "Will felt unhappy there after the strike. He felt discriminated against for his 'disloyal opinions' against the studio. Will had created a lot of heavies for Walt. Now he had been cast as one, by him. And there was too much tension and electricity in the air. With Will everything was instinctive and intuitive, and now the vibes were all wrong. Also the war was on. We were actually shelled by the Japanese in Santa Barbara (sic). And Will felt Peter and I would be safer in Connecticut on the farm—especially if he had to go off to the service."

"Paul Terry made a special trip out to California to try to get Will back. He wine and dined us at posh restaurants with his wife, Irma, and old friend Claire Trevor. And he offered Will a job back at Terrytoons."

Whatever the reasons for Tytla leaving the Disney studio, Mrs. Tytla is sure "Will regretted it to the end of his life, because he realized he would never have the opportunity to work anywhere the way he did there."

The Tytla's moved to their 160 acre farm in Connecticut on March 1, 1943.



©WDP



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Bill's father and one of his brothers were living on the property at the time. They left after a couple of years and Will, who loved cattle and farming tried his hand at being an absentee dairy farmer for seven years. "We had Displaced Persons living here helping," Mrs. Tytla says. "But Will worked in New York City all week and I managed the running of the farm... he was no farmer and he poured money into this place like water in 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice.'"

Tytla returned to Terrytoons as a director of animation; I. Klein was working there at the time and observed that "Bill was in a new atmosphere where the Disney-type of perfection at any cost did not exist. Animation was just a commercial commodity to be produced in the most economical way... Terrytoons work schedule was tight, efficient and fast. Bill adjusted grudgingly. After several years he moved on to Paramount Cartoon Studios where he directed Popeye... here too the schedule was tight and efficient."

George Bakes recalls that Tytla "was very depressed, got discouraged from the work and the lack of work and the lack of something meaningful to do... He was offered a whole bunch of Popeyes [to produce] at one point. They were going to do a limited-animation version of it. He didn't do one of them. He didn't like the budget."

Tytla turned to directing commercials for television and worked on close to 2000 cartoons for Tempo Studio, Academy Pictures, and finally, his own William Tytla Productions, Inc. He maintained an apartment/office in Manhattan and went home to Connecticut on weekends.

"Bill was not a businessman, he was an artist," says George Bakes. "His business got pretty bad because he was a bad businessman. Eventually it died and he went looking for work." Adrienne Tytla recalls, "He would go out to the coast and everybody knew how great he'd been and they were sorry for him and they gave him stuff to do, but he couldn't keep up with the amount of footage that was required. Within a five year period he had three strokes, [and] he'd periodically get a hemorrhage in the left eye. He was blind in that eye for three years and he never let anyone know that."

Tytla's work for other studios always brought him a handsome salary. He created the three Post Sugar Crisp Bears and did many lucrative ads with them on TV and in *Life* and *Look* magazines. He directed odds and ends for Hanna-Barbera and in 1962 was in charge of the animation sequences in *THE INCREDIBLE MISTER LIMPET* which combined live-action with animation and starred Don Knotts. He worked nine months on that film in Hollywood and Art Babbitt saw him during this period: "It was a tragedy to see this man disintegrate. His mind just gradually dissipated. He still made sense but he was not the strong, vibrant person I had known when he was young."

While in California, Tytla tried to sell a cartoon film idea he had been planning for five years, "Mousthusula, the 2000 Year Old Mouse," and for which he had made many charming and vigorous sketches; but there were no takers. "He got sick out there with pneumonia," Bakes recalls. "He came back in terrible shape, a beaten man. I saw him in the street one day trying to go around, like he was staring in the air. I saw this thing [drawings of Mousthusula] under his arm. I said, 'Bill, I don't want you to go nowhere (sic). You stay home. I'll go get some work.' He had moved out of New

York after his studio folded and went to live in Connecticut on the farm. I started to get some free-lance work and I gave Bill some footage to do. Whenever the date for it came due, he'd have half of it done. If I gave him five feet, two and a half was done. If I gave him 25 feet, 12 and a half was done. And his animation was rough when he started to do it again after the sickness, but it was getting better and better. You just knew that this guy had such a strong hold on this thing that if he was just sittin' on the board that he would be doing it. No doubt in my mind."

While in the hospital for a "routine prostate operation," Tytla had another stroke and was unable to speak or write for weeks after. He tried to print words during this period and managed to even draw some additional Mousthusula sketches; but these drawings are very sad to see—pathetic scribbblings of a giant who had lost the power.

On December 29, 1968, William Tytla died on his farm. George Bakes had just negotiated to produce a series of TV commercials and was going to share his luck with Tytla. "That was a big change from just free-lancing for producers," Bakes said. "I was waiting to tell Bill about this thing because this is a character [the Trix rabbit] that goes on and on. If he got used to the character and got to know him, he could really get back into animation."

"But he died before I could tell him that. Saddest thing I ever heard of. That the guy was emotionally taking a pounding because of his great love for animation that turned into a great frustration. That's what killed him. 'Cause of this tremendous pride—he started out so young and was on top and then to have this kind of animation that came around that didn't have any craft in it. It was discouraging that he had to compete with that with what he could do. There was no place he could do what he could do outside of Disney's."

It seems unlikely that the Trix rabbit, or even the more recent characters and films from the Disney studio, would have satisfied Tytla's demon talent and his aching de-

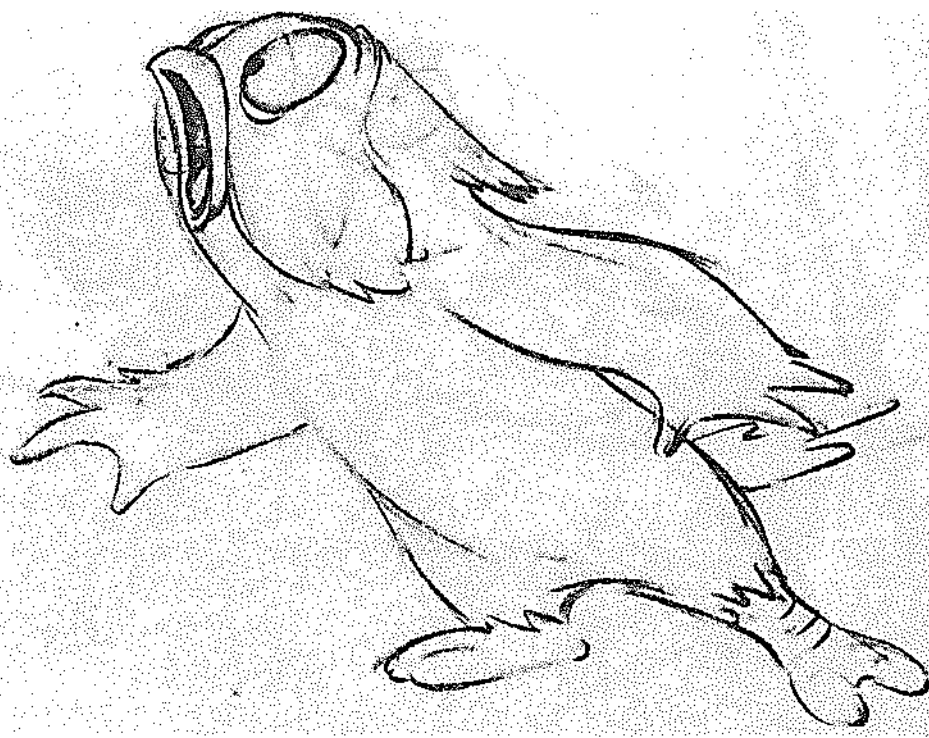
Below: An owl does a double-take, an original Tytla animation drawing from his post-Disney period at Terrytoons. Right: The young "Bill" Tytla, circa 1930. (Photo courtesy of Henry Berger). Inset: Walt Disney poses with Tytla during a meeting in 1959, holding the model of the Devil Tytla animated in *FANTASIA*. Disney inscribed the photo "To Bill, with all best wishes."

sire to express the knowledge of craft and the "Vesuvius" of emotions inside of him. Once, he was fortunate enough to find the perfect outlet for his gifts—at Disney's, as a top cog in the best, most lavish and expensive of the cartoon factories, where even a nine minute short went through over 24 different specialized departments, where there was time and money for careful experimentation and, luxury of luxuries, perfection.

Tytla was an animation elitist who would not, and in many ways could not, adapt himself to an evolving film world. To his mind there was only one way of animating and producing a film—the way it was done at Disney's during the "Golden Era." This intractable attitude finally destroyed him, and the young art of animation lost an authentic genius.

During the current explosion of interest in animation, with not less than six feature films in production in this country alone and a constant flood of personal animated shorts from individual artists, designers, and students finding international outlets and showcases, it would be wise to review and study the legacy of magnificent cartoon performances animated by Vladimir William Tytla. For he was the greatest sorcerer of them all, and knew the spells for infusing life and personality into anything he drew; by combining Tytla's pioneering contributions to the vocabulary of the craft, with today's freedom of expression and choices of techniques, perhaps only then will animation realize its fabulous potential.

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# Vladimir William Tytla (1904-1968) Animation's Michelangelo see page 8

"Vladimir William Tytla is almost totally unknown outside of the animation industry, but audiences all over the world have experienced his artistry through unforgettable cartoon performances in thousands of animated films, most notably in scenes from the Disney features, SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (1937), PINOCCHIO (1940), FANTASIA (1940), DUMBO (1941), and SALUDOS AMIGOS (1943). In the profession, he is a legend, 'the Michelangelo of animators,' claims Chuck Jones."



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