

Nose Art Designs As War Symbols During The World War II

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ABSTRACT: Walt Disney movies and the industrial culture products created by these films mean the world of images that are consumed all over the world. Even today Walt Disney studio continues to be an important propaganda tool both at home and abroad. It is observed that the studio assumed a great mission for this purpose, especially during the Second World War. The most notably of these propagandist exertions was that the heroes in the Walt Disney films were engraved on the nose and fuselage of American warplanes. Thus, the artists of the Walt Disney studio tried to give these planes a vivid image other than being a warplane. It is well known that, in a destructive and traumatic warfare, the positive state of the mood is very important. American soldiers tried to overcome the negative emotions created by the warfare with the help of Walt Disney heroes, who were very popular culture subjects during the warfare. In this study, it is aimed to reveal a critical interpretation by discussing the ideological and artistic functions of the images on warplanes, which were called Nose Art during the World War II.

Keywords: - animated film, warplane, design, image, cartoon, military film

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1941, there was a rapid increase in the animation film production of the Walt Disney studio. As the United States entered the war, a number of important changes took place in this studio, as in the industrial field. Seven hundred American soldiers took over the studio and began using it to protect a nearby air base. With this symbolic act, the studio ceased production of films within its own line and began to make cartoons and educational films about the war for the army.¹ During the Second World War, Walt Disney continued to have a long-term relationship with the American government and supported it for educational projects, military training films and propaganda films. Based on all these, animated films were accepted as a suitable medium for propaganda process in America. The most important reason for this is that they have simple narrative templates. Walt Disney studio has become one of the ideological apparatus that contributed to the creation of civilian propaganda and military training films in America's war process. The studio served the FBI as a special agent and became a center for the production of anti-communist propaganda films. Wartime was such a time that even mentioning the name of communism could turn a person's life into anguish. Hollywood's propagandists were in excellent collaboration with *Werner Von Braun** known for his authoritarian and reactionary personality. In pre-war times, Walt Disney was among those loyal to the American Nazi party and occasionally attended secret meetings.

Although this attitude of Walt Disney seems inconsistent with his propaganda efforts against the Nazis, the Nazi movement in America affected many people secretly.² Nazism and Communism were the two enemy concepts that the studio would engage in the propaganda movement during this period. Anti-Nazi animated propaganda films were shot with high threat anticipation and are quite numerous in number. Animation films with an anti-communist message have increased, especially during the cold war period.

¹J. Preszler, (2004). *Walt Disney: A Photo-Illustrated Biography*, Minnesota: Capstone Press. p.17

*Werner Von Braun: The scientist who led the development of rocket technology in Germany and the USA.

²G. Wisniewski, (2007). *One Small Step?: The Great Moon Hoax and The Race To Dominate Earth From Space*, East Sussex: Clairview Books. p.66

The book of *Boneyard Nose Art: U.S. Military Aircraft Markings and Artwork*³ by Jim Dunn, Ron Strong and Nicholas A. Veronico gives an introduction to the subject with the origins and evolution of nose art. The other chapters of the book are in the titles of fighter nose art and markings, bomber and patrol paint, tanker and transport art, helicopters and special-use aircraft. According to the writers “prior to the emergence of the aircraft and its introduction into a combat role in the early part of the twentieth century, the personalisation of weapons was confined mostly to an elite class of warriors: the proven combatants who had earned the right to distinguish themselves from others on the battlefield. Standing out field of battle was meant to inspire pride and confidence among those who fought alongside those distinguished few and, at the same time, to instill fear and disorder in the enemy...”⁴ Gary Valant’s *Vintage Aircraft Nose Art*⁵ is a detailed study of nose art produced by different artists. The book written by Andretta Schellinger *Aircraft Nose Art American, French and British Imagery and Its Influences from World War I Through the Vietnam War*⁶ gives information about bombers using nose art designs. The book deals with the historical process of nose art concept. between 1900 and 1913, the beginning 1914-1919, the great war 1919-1939, lull in fighting or a continuation 1940-45, 1945-53 the starting of the cold war, 1965-1973 political war, The future of Nose art. The book named *Fighting Colors: The Creation of Military Aircraft Nose Art*⁷ by Gary Velasco, The origin of nose art The art of war In the title of Hollywood goes to war. Jeffrey L. Ethell, Clarence Simonsen’s book *Aircraft Nose Art: From World War I to Today*⁸ discusses about that; collection takes readers on an extraordinary journey through the hearts and minds of the pilots, crews and artists who used cowling for canvas and left this colorful legacy. Ethell and Simonsen combine their knowledge to reveal stories behind the greatest nose art of all time. Packed with over 400 photographs of the best nose art from WWI, the Spanish Civil War and WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam and today. Other detailed sources on the subject are *Aircraft Nose Art: 80 Years of Aviation Artwork*⁹ by J.P. Wood and *Metal Canvas: Canadians and World War II Aircraft Nose Art*¹⁰ by Stephen M. Fochuk.

II. WALT DISNEY’S MILITER AND EDUCATIONAL FILM PRODUCTION AS A SOURCE OF NOSE ART DESIGNS

Themes of Walt Disney's military and educational films are generally; how taxes will be paid, how anti-tank guns will fire, how enemy aircraft will be made inactive, and how the public will think about the Germans. In animated films, the demonism of mass hysteria was emphasized, brainwashing techniques used by Germans to turn young people into Nazis were mentioned and how to make fun of the Fuhrer were showed. Disney studio fulfilled all wishes as a wartime propagandist in the name of patriotism. In 1943, Disney became a true wartime patriot in the eyes of the public when the film *Führer’s Face* won the Academy Award. The animated movie *Hitler’s Education For Death* humorously describes how a German child was turned into a Nazi. In the animated movie *Führer’s Face*, we watch Donald Duck, who finds himself as a Nazi, losing his mind because of being forced to work in an armoury. During this period, both films aroused great interest as films with strong anti-Nazi propaganda message and especially the *Führer's Face's* music has been remembered for a long time.

During the war, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck went to war arm in arm with Walt Disney studio and studio’s animation artists. The studio has produced educational films that give soldiers the correct information on how to use war weapons, teach civilians how to fight infectious diseases, and summarize what needs to be done to improve health protection and other processes related to the war situation in a systematic manner. Media were used to deliver these educational films to the public in the fastest and most widespread manner. Propagandist animated films were simple but dramatic. Even though military and navy films are outnumbered, Disney productions have mainly focused on Latin American sales. It aimed to raise living and health standards in this region and to educate Pan Americans on how to develop their natural resources...¹¹ American propagandist animation did not create a new and unknown hero in this period. The Disney heroes' sympathy and influence over the target audience was found sufficient. The purpose of educational and military-themed

³ also look. J. Dunn, R. Strong, N.A. Veronico (2013). *Boneyard Nose Art: U.S. Military Aircraft Markings and Artwork* Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books

⁴ J. Dunn, R. Strong, N.A. Veronico (2013). *Boneyard Nose Art: U.S. Military Aircraft Markings and Artwork*, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books p. vii

⁵ also look. G. Valant, (2001). *Vintage Aircraft Nose Art*. MBI Publishing Company. USA

⁶ also look. A. Schellinger (2016). *Aircraft Nose Art: American, French and British Imagery and Its Influences from World War I Through The Vietnam War* McFarland&Company Inc. North Carolina

⁷ also look. G. Velasco, (2004). *Fighting Colors: The Creation of Military Aircraft Nose Art*. Turner Publishing Company

⁸ also look. J.L. Ethell, C. Simonsen (2003). *Aircraft Nose Art: From World War I to Today*. MBI Publishing Company LLC,

⁹ also look. J.P. Wood. (1996). *Aircraft Nose Art: 80 Years of Aviation Artwork* Nose Art, Smithmark Publishers

¹⁰ also look. S. M. Fochuk. (1999). *Metal Canvas: Canadians and World War II Aircraft Nose Art*. Vanwell

¹¹ also look, Science. (1942). September,. Vol. 141, No. 3 ISSN 0161-7370, Published by Bonnier Corporation. pp. 98-99.

propagandist films is to fulfill civic duties. There is no implicit fiction about the current system or ideology in animated movies. They are understandable and simple. The reason for this situation is the expression of the plain daily lives of Walt Disney heroes.

The deterioration of the economic situation in the 1940's also affected the studio system, which was reflected in the animation style, namely aesthetics and technique. Many animators lost their jobs due to budget constraints. Therefore, the animators were faced with the need to draw less images and started producing of educational and informational films on behalf of the government with the available resources. Walt Disney fell into a kind of artlessness policy at this time. The boundaries of the culture created by the studio have faded, and the essence of the messages has begun to disappear. America of World War II is full of values, conflict and question marks. Both stylistic and thematic inconsistency reflect the zeitgeist of his period. In this process, a new culture created by war has emerged. In some educational films of the period, an analogue was established between the human body and the city. For example, the subject of an educational film explaining the necessity of vaccination is as follows; red soldiers defending a body full of viruses represented by insects are weakened by insect-virus attack, doctors vaccinate the body to strengthen the soldiers, and the city-body gets rid of enemies-viruses. In this educational film, metaphorical interpretations with propagandist features were created.

Disney's military films often used the label "scientific" to mask wartime propaganda. This situation has determined what kind of production the American government orders from the studio. In the film *Victory Through Air Power* (1942), the importance of the air force during the war is explained with maps, scientific theories and graphics. In a meeting held in 1941 with the participation of the governments of the United States and Canada, representatives of different industries discussed how animation could be used in education and propaganda. An informative film about the training of engineers and military personnel, called *Four Methods of Flush Riveting* (1940), was produced. During this period, the government support for Disney was so great that over the course of the strike period, it financially supported Disney's Latin America trip to save the studio from unnecessary media discussions. Disney has contributed to the promotion of a combat aircrafts through military and educational animated films, and has become a visual guide to technical information about how war weapons and engines work.¹² At this point, animation cinema, which has become an ideological device by using visual representations, makes a military propaganda through visualizing technical tools. Disney has created techno-visual language that has become a instruction book for the war industry. But this kind of language, which was considered futuristic at that time, resembled and transformed into visual expressions of enemy Nazi militarism over time. That was inevitable because if a concept develops defensive tactics against opposing concepts, it will gradually develop towards it. The situation of the Disney studio also accords with the assessment in this determination.

It is an unquestionable fact that Walt Disney served as a significant propagandist during the Second World War. With the contributions of the studio, animated characters who represent the image of the perfect American citizen, gave the public morale support. The best known film of this period is *Führer's Face*, which won an Oscar in 1943. The film tells Donald Duck's terrible life in Nazi Germany, accompanied by an easily remindful song. The stereotype of the Donald Duck character is that he is often grumpy, angry and snappish. In the morning, Donald Duck realizes that everything is a nightmare, kisses the statue of freedom with happiness and he glances around in his American flag figured pyjamas. In anti-Nazi propaganda, the sign of the other is the Nazi swastika, while the opposite sign is the American flag. The flag has virtually replaced the frame background in most Walt Disney movies and has become dominant and aggressive expression tool. Thus, the values claimed to be defended were visually fetishized, meanings were simplified and turned into criticized concepts.

III. AMERICAN COMBAT AIRCRAFT DESIGNS: "NOSE ART"

Nose Art has become an icon of American patriotism as the figures transferred on the bombers of the American air force during the Second World War. The term Nose Art is because the figures are drawn on the nose of the aircrafts. The name "Nose" also refers to the sense of smell. In other words, this name represents the bomber planes that smell and track the enemies during the airborne combat. Artists have faced too much demand for Nose Art designs to be drawn on airplanes, so they found a source of income in the deep economic crisis of the period. Thus, Nose Art designs became a kind of industry during the war period. In this way, the bombers were tried to be removed from being an object of war, they were personalized and became the war toy of air pilots rather than the property of the army. Images found in the Texas Harlingen United Air Force are the largest collection of WWII Nose Art designs. Brinkman, a former advertiser, was one of the first Nose Art designers and after joining the air force, he started painting the walls of the base. Meanwhile, the symbols of

¹² S. Griffin, (2000). *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company From Inside Out*, New York: New York University Press. pp. 31-33

astrological signs began to be picturized on the B-24 bombers¹³ Thus, each pilot began to paint his own sign of the zodiac on the plane he used. Old model combat aircraft were generally preferred for Nose Art designs. This artistic trend towards nose art designs in the aviation industry was extremely important for Disney artists, who found a different line of business for themselves. For that purpose, the studio decided to shoot the movie *Victory Through Air Power* to educate the public, despite the risk of losing a lot of money. The movie begins with the episode about the country's going into World War II in 1943. *Victory Through Air Power* is one of the most important propaganda films in aviation history. Although the film did not achieve great commercial success, it was extremely effective in terms of propaganda. In 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt watched the film together in Quebec.¹⁴ In this movie, which is proposed by Walt Disney and has a war project attribute; there are messages that the war of the future is in the air, planes can sink submarines, Japanese plans to conquer the Pacific and air defense is very important for war. The film clearly conveys the idea that there is an extremely strong link between the phenomenon of victory and the air force. It has too many scenes and shots, camera angles and camera movements are very competent and it is planned to be highly impressive. Technically and aesthetically, this film constitutes an ideal example for later propagandist animation films.

When the Second World War broke out, American people were calling the warplanes as Mary Ann, Ruptured Duck etc. Since then, Nose Art forms continue to be used in every military aviation film. These forms are seen as icons symbolizing national consciousness. Walt Disney was aware of the moral value of this personalized art that ranges from jackets to combat aircrafts. For this reason, characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donal Duck, Popeye are often seen on warplanes. With a special team created for this purpose, Disney has completed the visuals with short slogans, expanding their use areas and increasing their morale value.¹⁵ Nose Art was not officially accepted like socialist realist art, but it gave morale support to pilots in the war atmosphere and they had the opportunity to express themselves through these images. Heroes depicting the longing for women, mother and country are usually drawn on the airplanes. These heroes were believed to bring good luck and help the pilots return home safely.

IV. CONCLUSION

These images, which are propagandist and patriotic, are important in terms of reflecting the spirit of the time. One of the most important sources of inspiration for Nose Art, which is fed by different visual sources, is Hollywood cinema. The participation of Disney artists in the army has also been effective for using the Nose art applications. Disney had already been working with the American military from the beginning of the war. The studio had become a sort of war propagandist. In this manner, patriotic comic heroes of Hollywood were used as war mascots.

During the Second World War, American soldiers in uniforms became representatives of the iconography culture through Nose Art designs. Popular signs and symbols were embroidered on military uniforms and leather flight jackets. Many of these were designed by the artists of Walt Disney Studio. Moreover, there were images of Mickey Mouse, Goffy and other heroes on the warplanes, and the pilots went to war with these planes. Technical team working in the air force themselves have been the creators and practitioners of Nose Art. Nose Art applications had designs with high energy, although they were not technically proficient. The representation of these designs on air combats was stress-relieving for military-citizens who were at war with Germany and Japan and who were experiencing a military madness.¹⁶ Thus, attitudes and emotions regarding war had turned the phenomenon of war into a playground by preventing the possible tragic end or dramatic existence. In this playground, the soldiers backed up their personalities through funny heroes, the war culture and war aesthetics created a unique war attitude and feeling. Identification with Walt Disney heroes has abstracted American soldiers from the chaotic environment in which they lived, so they gave up taking the concept of war, enemy or the otherness seriously. The American air force has become one of Walt Disney's amusement parks through the nose art designs, and the soldier- children in the army had played a kind of war game in the war process.

¹³ G.M. Valant, (2001). *Vintage Aircraft Nose Art*, USA: MBI Publishing Company. pp.11-13

¹⁴ J. Gooch, (1995). *Airpower: Theory and Practice*, Oregon: F. Cass. Co.Ltd. pp.20-21

¹⁵ J. Ethel, C. Simonsen, (2003). *Vintage Aircraft Nose Art: From World War I To Today*, USA: MBI Publishing Company, pp.139-

¹⁶ D.H. Fischer, (2005). *Liberty and Freedom, A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, New York: Oxford University Press. pp.545-546

IMAGES



Figure 1. Führer's Face source¹⁷



Figure 2. Education For Death¹⁸



Figure 3. Victory through Air Power¹⁹



Figure 4. Thumper was painted on this B29 Assigned to the 73. rd Bombardment Wing 497th Bomb Group²⁰



Figure 5. Two Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) Air Training Corps (ATC) cadets viewing the artwork on a Lockheed Ventura fuselage, 1943 (aircraft type and serial is unknown). Mickey Mouse, proprietor of "M. Mouse Loans" says: "The Axis is Living on Borrowed Time, An' We're Gonna Foreclose."²¹

¹⁷ <http://www.disneyfilmproject.com/2010/10/der-fuehrers-face.html> Disney Film Project, date accessed: 25-12-2019

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_for_Death Education for Death: The Making of The Nazi, date accessed: 25-12-2019

¹⁹ <https://www.tor.com/2016/07/28/animation-as-war-propaganda-disneys-victory-through-air-power/> Animation as War Propaganda: Disney's Victory Through Air Power, Mari Ness, Thu Jul 28, 2016, date accessed: 25-12-2019

²⁰ <http://www.nww2m.com/2012/08/bambi-opens/> The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, Bambi Opens in the US, date accessed: 25-11-2020

²¹ http://www.skylighters.org/disney/Disney_Goes_To_War, date accessed: 25-11-2020



Figure 6. Grumpy, one of the Seven Dwarfs, totes a 250-lb. bomb on the fuselage of an RNZAF Avenger of 30 Squadron.²²

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²² <http://www.skylighters.org/disney/> *Disney Goes To War*, date accessed: 25-11-2020