

**MARY
ROBINSON
BLAIR**
1911-1978



**ARTIST,
ANIMATOR,
AND
DESIGNER**

If you have been to a Disney park or seen a Disney animated film, you know Mary Blair's work. Her bright designs reigned supreme at Walt Disney Studios for nearly thirty years. Blair created character designs for Disneyland's "It's a Small World", the fiesta scene in "El Rio del Tiempo" in the Mexico pavilion in Epcot's World Showcase, and an enormous mosaic inside Disney's Contemporary Resort.

Mary Browne Robinson was born in October 1911 in McAlester, Oklahoma. In the early 1920s, her family settled in Morgan Hill, California, south of San Jose. After graduating from San Jose State University, Mary studied at Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, where she graduated in 1933. In March 1934, she married fellow art student Lee Everett Blair.

In 1938, Lee was hired at Disney Studios for "Pinocchio" and Mary became an animator with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. In 1940, she joined Lee at Disney Studios. She worked briefly on "Dumbo", an early version of "Lady and the Tramp", and "Baby Ballet", a segment for a proposed "Fantasia" follow-up. In 1941, Walt Disney asked several Disney artists to go with him to South America to for an extended research journey in South America to provide the basis for future projects steeped in South American culture. The stunning, colorful artwork that Mary produced on the trip impressed Disney, who appointed her artistic director of "Saludos Amigos" (1943) and "The Three Caballeros" (1945).

Mary Blair became one of the masterminds behind "Cinderella" (1950), "Alice in Wonderland" (1951), and the unforgettable "Peter Pan" (1953). After completing "Peter Pan", Blair resigned from Disney to work as a freelance graphic designer and illustrator, creating advertising campaigns for Nabisco, Pepsodent, Maxwell House, and Beatrice Foods. She also illustrated several Little Golden Books for Simon & Schuster.

In 1963, Walt Disney again turned to Mary to create a pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair in New York that centered around children. Her graphic style was perfect for the complex, colorful scenes for the attraction "It's a Small World". The attraction moved to Disneyland after the World's Fair closed in 1966.

In her last Disney mural, Mary Blair designed a ninety-foot centerpiece for Walt Disney World's Contemporary Resort. The mural is a tribute to the Grand Canyon, featuring stylized birds, flowers, animals, and plant life. Mary Blair died at age 67 in July 1978 in Soquel, California. In 1991 she was honored as a Disney Legend. In October 2011, she was the subject of a Google Doodle, that featured an image of how Mary might have drawn herself, surrounded by the simple patterns and shapes that made up her familiar cartoon world.

During her career as an illustrator, designer, and animator for Walt Disney Studios, Mary wouldn't play by the rules. At a time when studios wanted to hire men and think in black and white, Mary painted twinkling emerald skies, peach giraffes with tangerine spots, and magenta horses that could fly. She painted her world.