

**Mary Blair** (1911-1978) was one of Walt Disney's favorite artists, and was one of the few women to break the glass ceiling at Disney Studios in the mid-20th century. Her colorful, stylish concept art set the tone for such major 1950s animated features as "Peter Pan," "Alice in Wonderland" and "Cinderella."



Blair traveled with Disney and a group of his artists on a three-month tour of South America in 1941 as U.S.

cultural ambassadors – and to draw and paint all along the way. Out of this grew her mature painting and design style – bright colors against neutral backgrounds and flat, stylized forms. And her style caught the eye of Disney himself, who promoted her to lead concept artist – basically the all-important visual lead – on his most important movies of the early 1950s.

After completing work on the last of them, "Peter Pan," she amicably left Disney and moved with her husband Lee to the East Coast, where she became a highly successful illustrator for Little Golden Books (all her books are still in print) and for notable magazine advertising campaigns, as well as designing fabrics, murals and other projects.

Mary Blair then returned to Disney in the early 1960s to design a ride for the 1964 New York World's Fair that became "It's a Small World." More than 10 million people rode the popular ride during the run of the Fair, and it was reconstructed at Disneyland in Anaheim in 1966. Its popularity continued so strongly that "It's a Small World" has now been replicated at almost every Disney park in the world.

In the mid 1960s Blair was asked to design tile murals for the new Disney World Resort in Florida. The murals are approximately 15' high and 55' long. They are located around Tomorrowland. Today, some of the murals are no longer visible, due to changes at the park, but still exist behind new walls. In the hotel, the Grand Canyon concourse mural is 9 stories tall.