

## Glen Keane interview at the *Arludik* gallery in Paris

[translation by Christiaan Moleman... with corrections by Marc Loos]

Original interview here: <http://vimeo.com/16688743>

**CloneWeb:** You are before all else an animator. This is how you began your career. You've done some art direction, and for a time you were the director of *Tangled*, but had to stop because of health problems... So two others took the job.

**[Glen Keane nods]**

Would you consider going back to directing?

**GK:** Possibly... but I developed this idea mostly to create a character.

For me, I really think of the heart of the character... Ariel or Beast... and afterwards I start to develop a story. So I'm a different kind of director perhaps.

I started developing Rapunzel so I could animate her.

If there's another character that interests me, maybe - and no one else is going to direct the film - I might pick it back up... And if it's necessary to ask someone else to take over so I can focus on the animation, I would do that again.

It's worked really well with Byron and Nathan who found their own inspiration for the film without completely forgetting what I had established, the general architecture of the film.

**CW:** So if you were to become a director ... Many directors used to be animators. They had to stop animating when they took the role of director. John Lasseter, for example.

**GK:** That's not me.

**CW:** That's not you?

**GK:** No, that's not me.

**CW:** Never stop animating?

**GK:** No. Actually, when you started by saying I'm an animator...

I actually don't see myself as an animator, more as an artist who every time having finished a film... I look around for my next project, be it an animated film, or sculpture, or a children's book - maybe even doing paintings, but at Disney there's always another film that tempts me into animating the next character.

Though initially when I gave my portfolio to Calarts, when I was eighteen, I was accepted by chance into the school of animation. I wanted to be a sculptor or painter at the time, but I was

accepted into animation. I followed that career more through fate than choice... but I'm always looking for a better way to express myself.

For example doing drawing for Disney my drawings are not really on the screen. There's always someone who has cleaned up on top of it. So there's something missing for me. Because of this I really like having my drawings on the wall like this because it's the first time people can see what I've drawn.

**CW:** See you as an artist.

**GK:** Yes, more as an artist.

**CW:** Because an animated film is a very collaborative effort. Several people are involved. And here you are the artist, you're Glen Keane, standing out from the crowd...

**GK:** Yes.

**CW:** You're enjoying showing some of what you can do on your own?

**GK:** Yes, there's something I do that is... really \*me\*.

I think about drawing as sculpture. I like the idea of sculpting a shape and when I draw the characters I put in the shadows, on a drawing of Beast or whoever... Ariel... and the other Disney animators ask me: Why do you do the shadows? That's crazy... No one's going to see it! We're going to paint it, clean it and it'll be lost.

But for me, the best moment of the creative process is the moment where I draw at my table, with the light... my desk is very dark, except for one light. I really immerse myself in the drawing.

That is the magic moment for me. Not necessarily the moment the film is projected on the big screen.

**CW:** The moment you create a form on the paper?

**GK:** Yes.

I feel like a line is like a kind of seismograph... of emotions.

Imagine if you took a drawing by Degas and cleaned the pencil line. You'd lose the energy and the emotion of the moment.

**CW:** Actually I have a question about that. Recently *Beauty & The Beast* came out on Blu-ray and DVD, so we've all been able to see it again. I was surprised by how the animation, especially on certain characters like Gaston, was not always consistent. Sometimes it was really good and sometimes less so... and I think that's part of both the charm and the limitation of traditional animation. Which is to say, at times you can see the hand of the man, or woman, that drew it... You can feel the artist behind it.

In 3D animation, you no longer have the problem of consistency because once the model has been created on the computer it's not going to change. You animate it with 'avatars' and all that, but you won't have problems of anatomy, like next drawing I have to do it exactly like that... So it's more precise.

I would like to know how you see that difference between traditional animation where you have to recreate the same thing at every frame, and 3D animation where you have to compensate in other ways. You no longer have that problem of reproduction, but you still have to animate. It's much more precise, but it's perhaps also more demanding...

**GK:** First thing: I've thought the same thing... but it's not true.

It was clear [?] to me, seeing *Tangled* on the screen. Maybe in other films, yes. Maybe you're right - I'm not sure - but I think you're right that the problem of differences-- there's a variation between each animator that's much clearer in 2D animation. But we've really tried to take what we like in 2D and adapt those principles while making *Tangled*. I was surprised watching the finished film that \*every\* time a character was on the screen it was clear exactly who animated that character. Their fingerprint was there and the style of acting, also the face, their expressions... I saw their faces! Even if it was a man animating Rapunzel... I could see him through this girl.

It was a surprise for me... that 2D and 3D animation have the same potential to use the individuality of the artist who animates.

**CW:** So *Tangled* actually reproduces the spontaneity of traditional animation, with new 3D tools.

**GK:** Yes. It's incredible. And there's something that's fascinating to me: when you animate with the computer it's always trying to seduce the animator into accepting something other than what they envisioned, to accept something less - what is the expression? - [in English] "*It tempts you to accept less than...*"

**CW:** The computer forces you to lower your expectations?

**GK:** Yes, to lower the bar, but also to suggest... like a 'used car salesman': "You want a car? WELL, I have this very nice model..." "Uhm, I was thinking more a Mustang." "No, but LOOK! The PRICE, the COLOR! You like it?"

The computer is \*exactly\* like that. A used car salesman...

**CW:** It tries to sell you something.

**GK:** Always.

**CW:** And it's not necessarily what you want.

**GK:** It tries every possible way - "*Look at those reflections!*" - but it's not what you had in mind. So I encouraged the animators on *Tangled* to have something really personal to say. This is important. If we don't have something that comes from inside the soul, we'll be tempted to accept something much easier.

**CW:** More standard?

**GK:** Standard, formulaic.

... but watching *Tangled*, I was surprised by the fact that the performances came from deep within the animators, especially the girls. We have an extraordinary team of women animators on this film that always asked the directors for the most traumatic and emotional moments like when [APPARENT SPOILERS] the hero, Flynn, is dying in the arms of Rapunzel [END SPOILERS]. It's the girls that animated those moments. It's the first time in the history of Disney that the girls have really exerted their power, like a force of animation.

**CW:** Speaking of girls, you're mostly known for your heroines, Ariel etc. I would like to know: Do you prefer to animate male or female characters? You're also the animator of the Beast in *Beauty & The Beast*, whose animation is extraordinary ... So do you prefer animating girls or guys?

**GK:** I like anatomy. I love the human form, so for me Tarzan was a joy to animate. Also, I was just as happy animating Tarzan as I was animating Rapunzel, or doing the drawings of Rapunzel, or Ariel, for example. I try to animate a character that has a desire, that believes the impossible is possible. That's what interests me. It's in the heart, the motivation of a character.

**CW:** That which *animates* the character?

**GK:** In fact, yes... yes, it's exactly that.

**CW:** A small question. Pixar when they started *Toy Story* broke with the Disney tradition where there was one animator in charge of a character for the entire film. At Pixar an animator would have a scene with multiple characters. How did this go on *Tangled*? Did one animator have a character for the whole film or did they focus on a particular scene?

**GK:** That's an interesting question. At the start, I figured you have to have a character directed by a supervisor.

**CW:** That is the Disney-school.

**GK:** Yes. It's a pyramid of supervision, and also the personal investment of an artist in the being of a character that will guide all the others.

But... John Kars, he came from Pixar. He was a fan of the idea of giving everyone the chance to animate a character, not necessarily one select artist, or number of artists... and Clay Kaytis, who was the third supervisor - Clay, John and me - Clay was between the two and he went for John's idea, so I accepted: OK, let's try this.

And... the idea was to let the leads emerge naturally, the animators that 'got' a certain character, that could imagine the movement of Flynn or Rapunzel... Right away, after perhaps two months, it was very clear who would be the leads. But instead of having one or two, we had three or four for each character.

And there was a competition, good competition, between the artists. Nobody was 'the boss' but everyone had a sense of responsibility. It put much more on my shoulders during dailies, where I had a tablet and drew on top of the work of all the animators. I drew on top of Rapunzel, Flynn and Maximus... It permitted me to be more involved with all the artists, instead of-- otherwise I would have been tempted to stay back a bit instead of jumping into the drawing... Instead of redoing somebody else's work, a supervisors work, I would have let it go... because when I was a supervisor I wouldn't have liked someone else telling me "oh yeah, it should be like that".

**CW:** This is because you worked at Disney for a long time and that was how it was before. You knew Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas. You're of the old school... and you discovered the Pixar-method...

**GK:** Yes.

**CW:** The chemistry of seeing how - taking a less rigid structure - letting people work on their own a little, they manage to get involved.

**GK:** But... for *Tangled* we had perhaps only three main characters and it was necessary with a large team to share the burden with everyone. But I'm still interested in organizing a film differently, with supervisors that create their characters. If I were a 3D animator I think I would have to do the drawing, the modeling, and then the rigging... everything.

**CW:** It's because you're a complete artist. You like creating everything character-based, but now the work is separated more and more. Have you used 3D animation software at all?

**GK:** Yes. One day, I used it. It was SUPER hard. I gained a lot of respect for 3D animators. And, it was funny, but afterwards I realized they had to put A LOT of energy into creating something average and they put a quote on the wall saying that [laughs]. It's hard.

But something that was important to me, the fact that I'm not a 3D animator... I was not very empathetic.

**CW:** You were not at ease animating 3D, or you were not very interested in 3D animation?

**GK:** No, I was not... I was not sympathetic to their struggle. The fact that--

**CW:** You didn't understand their daily problems.

**GK:** Yes. And right away I would say: We have to go much further than that. And they would say: "No, but if you'd seen what we had before you'd be really happy with this." And I said: "No, I don't see since I'm not a [3D] animator, but we have to go all the way."

**CW:** You didn't realize the work they had to do. OK.

Just one small question - last question - about John Lasseter, who is now the creative director at Pixar and Disney... who is now you could say the most important person in American animation.

What would you say of John Lasseter at the position he occupies now. Is he the new Walt Disney?

**GK:** He's really John Lasseter. He is not Walt Disney and it's good that way, because there's only one Walt Disney, and one John Lasseter... but I've known John Lasseter since he was eighteen. A long time. John has created a studio that represents his spirit. And Walt Disney has created-- There are differences between Pixar and Disney. If you reduced Pixar to a phrase it would be: *"Wouldn't it be cool if?"*

Like if a kid was looking at their toy: What if the toy could talk? All their films are like this.

If you reduced the Disney films it would be: *"Once upon a time..."*

There is big difference. *"Once upon a time"*, it's make believe. It's the atmosphere we breathe in the two studios and John is president of both but for the first couple of years it was a constant fight for him to accept that Disney is not Pixar. They're completely different. Now he's started to respect the differences between the two. It's important to realize Disney is Disney, Pixar is Pixar. And John is John and Walt is Walt.

**CW:** That will be the last word. Thank you.

(also: [pictures](#) of the gallery)