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\$2.95 SEPTEMBER 1994

A MAGAZINE FOR ALL FILIPINOS

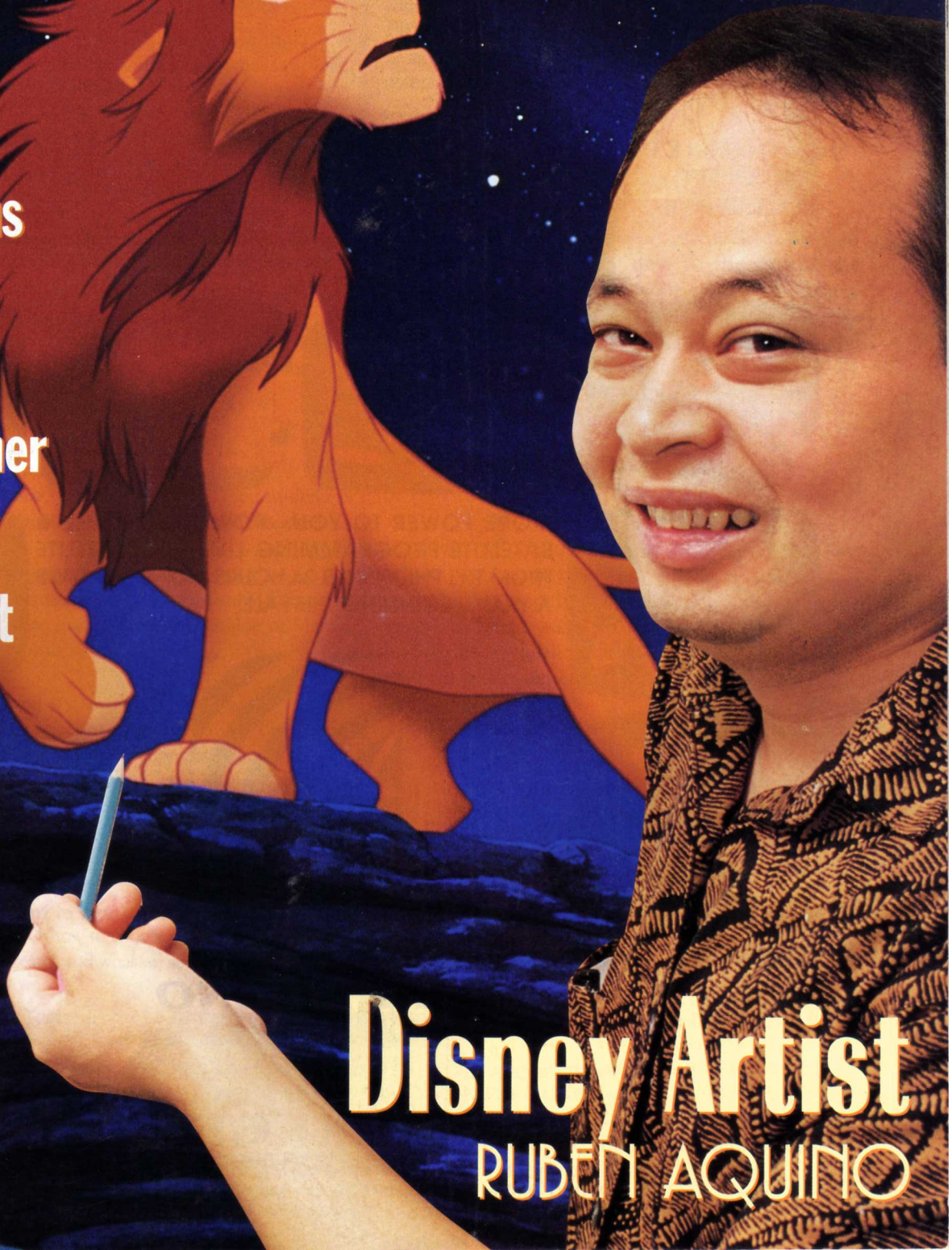
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Disney Artist
RUBEN AQUINO



cover story

PHOTOS: THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

“*he Lion King*”

mauled the box office this summer, and a lion's share of the credit goes to Ruben Aquino, the supervising animator of the troubled heir to the African savannah, Simba.

The 12-year veteran of Disney's feature animation division in Florida was recently joined by another Filipino American, 24-year-old Cynthia Ignacio, who is hard at work in the layout department.

Film Art Artists at Walt Disney Studios

A Great Lion of Work

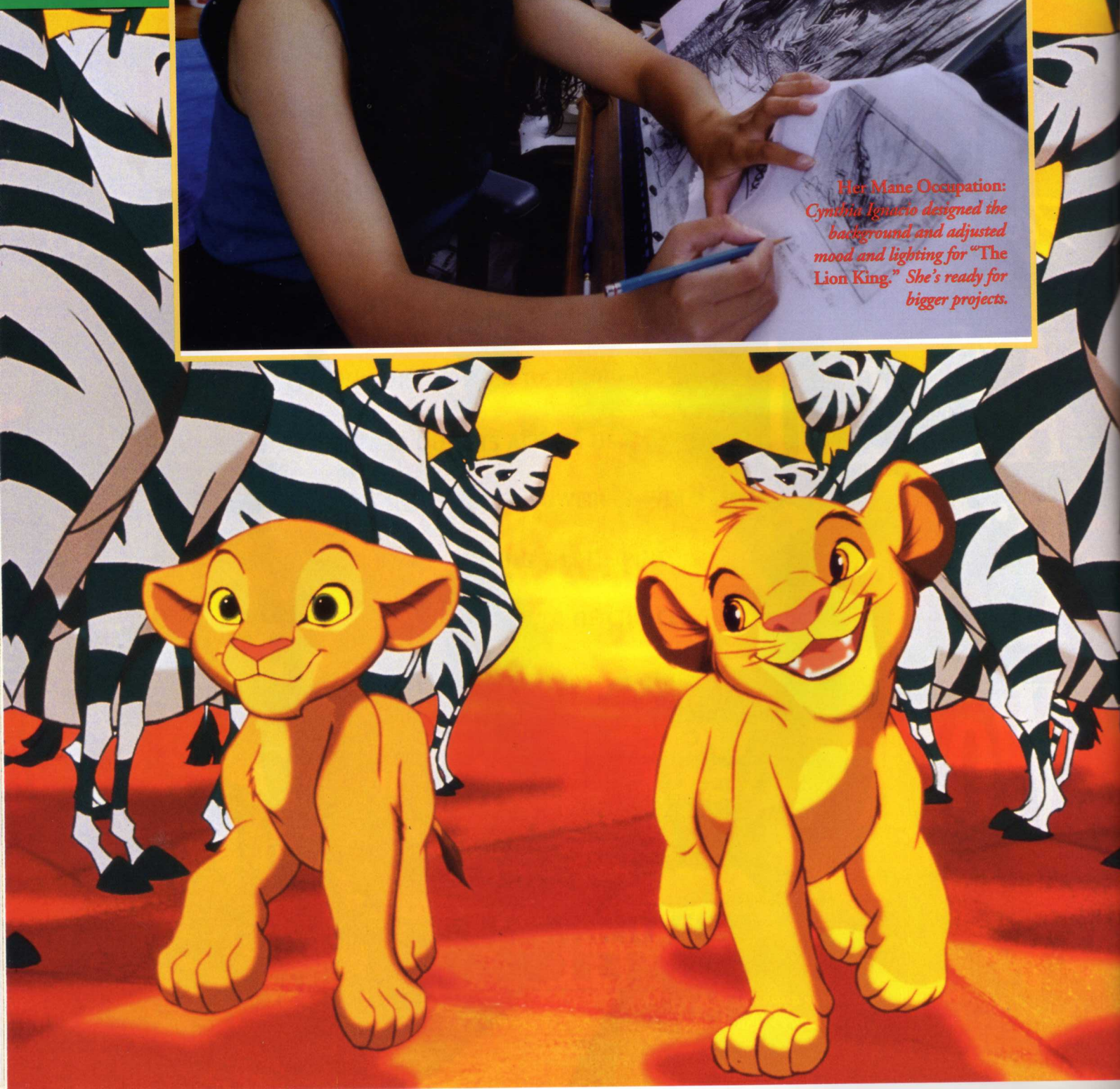
BY RACHELLE AYUYANG

On a Roll: Supervising animator Ruben Aquino's next job is Disney's "Pocahontas."





Her Mane Occupation:
Cynthia Ignacio designed the background and adjusted mood and lighting for "The Lion King." She's ready for bigger projects.



There are only three other Filipino animators in Disney's Los Angeles studio, in addition to Aquino and Ignacio in the smaller Florida offices.

As the first artist named to work on *"The Lion King,"* Aquino prepared for production by studying animal movements. To achieve the trademark realism of Disney characters, he watched almost every wildlife documentary available. He also dug into Disney's archives and studied features like *"The Lady and the Tramp,"* *"Bambi"* and *"The Jungle Book."*

"Animating movements from certain angles can be very difficult and transitioning between a run and walk cycle is particularly hard," Aquino intimates.

"It was important for the audience to believe these characters were real. The more we understood their anatomy, the easier it was to animate."

Aquino and other artists collaborated closely to achieve the likeness of an animal; so that when the drawings were shot, there was a sense of continuity from one frame to the next.

Animation had been more of a childhood fancy for Aquino, never a career. When in the 1975, he couldn't find work with his degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania, he went to Hawaii, creating paste-ups and logo designs for restaurants.

When he grew tired of commercial work, Aquino applied to a small Los Angeles animation studio and stayed there for a year. Without any prior experience in animation, he was hired at Hanna-Barbera, producers of Saturday cartoon fare, and worked there for a year. In 1982, with a portfolio consisting mostly of figure drawings, Aquino was recruited by Walt Disney Animations in Florida.

Ignacio took a less circuitous route to Disney. Born and raised in a cozy suburb of Baltimore, Maryland, she ventured to New York and graduated with a degree in illustration from the prominent Pratt Institute of Art. While in Manhattan, Ignacio free-lanced for such

record companies as EMI and Polygram and did album sketches for rock bands Bon Jovi and Kiss. For a summer, she assisted in the animated segments of Bill Cosby's comedy game show *"You Bet Your Life."*

In 1991, Disney recruited Ignacio, first as an intern and eventually as a full-time artist. She received training in the company's Florida and California studios. She advises aspiring animators to "draw as much as possible because the level of draftsmanship is high." Enrolling in an art school and having supportive parents also

help. Ignacio's parents, who are from Zambales province in the Philippines, have encouraged her every step of the way, accepting the limited financial rewards in her field.

As the assistant layout artist on her first feature animated film, Ignacio "set the stage" for *"The Lion King,"* designing the background, adjusting the mood and lighting and indicating to animators where characters are to be drawn.

Both Aquino and Ignacio will be working on Disney's upcoming productions, *"Pocahontas"* and *"The Legend of Mulan."*

In *"Pocahontas"* Aquino has the big job of creating Pocahontas' father, Chief Powhatan. The Chief will be his "second dad," so to speak. Maurice, Belle's inventor-father in *"Beauty and the Beast"* was his first. Aquino's own father, who hails from Mandaluyong in Rizal province, is proud of his son's artistic endeavors, with minor regrets that Aquino didn't stick to an architectural career.

The next logical step for Aquino is the director's chair. He fears, however, that his lack of patience would be his downfall. For now, he likes the "point of view" of his drafting board where he's constantly honing his craft.

Aquino says other studios are cashing in on the popularity of animated movies, but they have yet to catch up with the prestige of Disney's most popular movie titles.

Ignacio calls Disney "the most creative place to work," and she hopes to be based in the Los Angeles studio by the end of this year or perhaps work in the new Paris studios.

She wants to leave the technical department and get involved in production design, which allows room for more creativity. Ignacio just might get there soon, as she is already pitching storyboard ideas to Jeffrey Katzenberg, the chairman of Walt Disney Studios. ■

*To achieve the
trademark realism
of Disney charac-
ters, the artists*



*watched almost
every wildlife
documentary
available.*