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25.03.07-31.03.07

Cover portrait by André Carrilho

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# TALK OF THE TOWN

Openings, closings, people and places



### WALT DISNEY RETURNS

## Back from the dead

What do you get if you cross the most famous animator of all time with two of his best-loved creations? A sinister animatronic man-rabbit-deer chimera called Hexer, it seems. I have the pleasure of meeting him in the upstairs space of Beaconsfield Gallery in Vauxhall, south London, which has been transformed into a green-screen studio by London Fieldworks artists Bruce Gilchrist and Jo Joelson. As I chat to Bruce and Jo about their latest project, *Hibernator*, something moves in the corner of my eye. Walt Disney is fluttering his eyelids at me. His Bambi-esque front legs are still, as are his Thumperish hind legs. But his face has come to life; a brow comically raised, eyes googling for attention. "Ah, he's woken up," Bruce murmurs fondly, as if speaking about his newborn child.

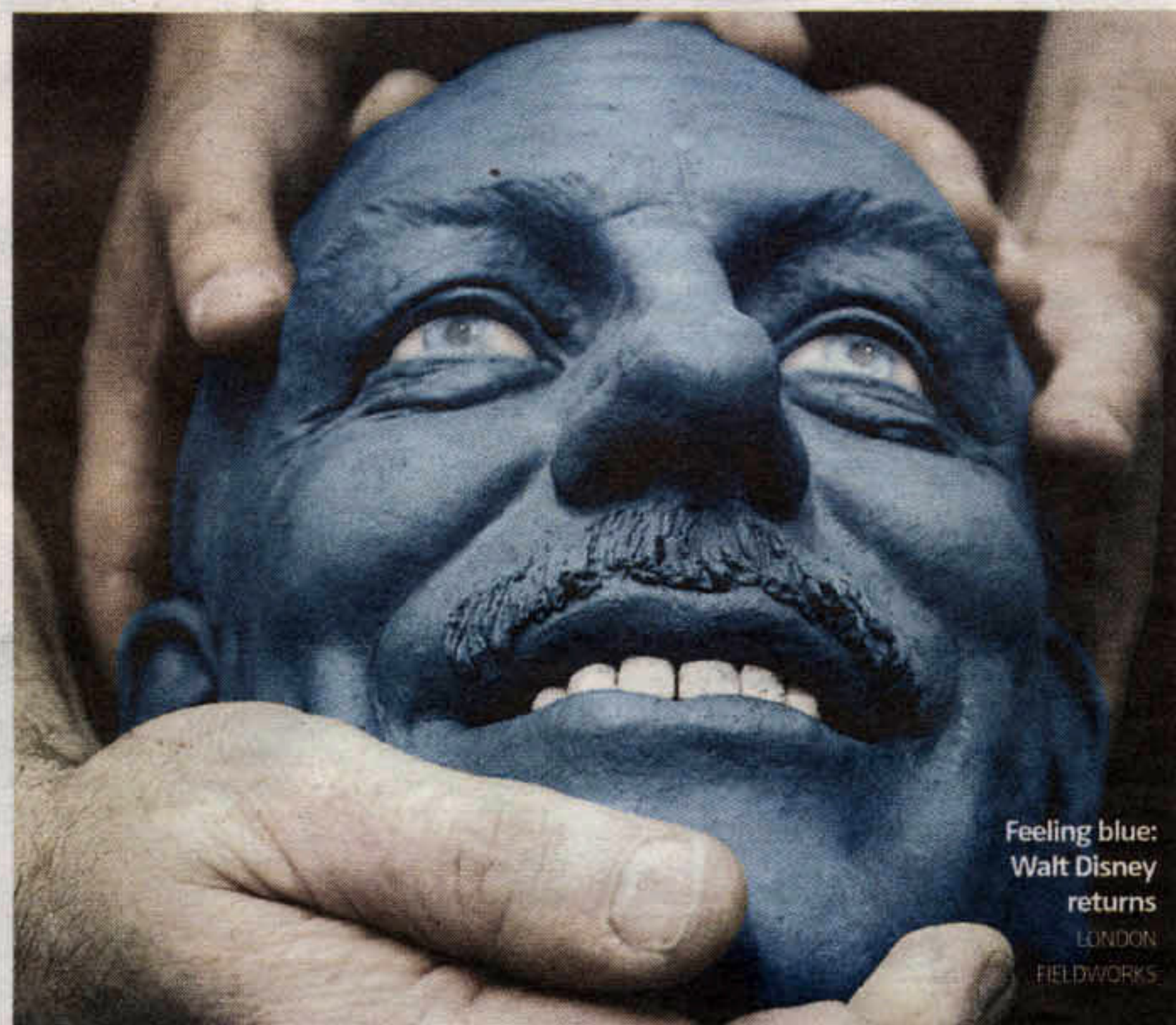
"Hexer" is derived from the Hopi name for the ever-lasting soul. If the soul of Walt Disney were to take any form, Hexer would be it. *Hibernator* is an ongoing project at Beaconsfield, whereby Bruce and Jo create eight films (or "visions") in as many weeks, each one starring Hexer. The tables are turned, as the dead animator becomes the animation.

Upstairs, they work on their visions, downstairs, you can watch the fruit of their labours.

When I visit Beaconsfield in the first week of the project, only the first vision is completed. Walking into the gallery, I am immediately ushered, by myself, into the dark, labyrinthine screening room - which is so black that I can barely see my own hands. What I'm faced with on the screen matches the lonely strangeness of the setting. Apocalyptic scenes, so dark I can hardly register what they are: wastelands, old Bambi dolls, a Native American Kachina doll.

The voiceover holds me in a trance: "It's over," says a weary American voice. "No more fairy tales. This is not a dream. Something out there is giving up the ghost. Something out there is over." (Later on, I learn that it's the voice of cartoonist and musician Peter Blegvad.) "Did you really think you could live forever? Did you think you could fake your own death?" It's a voice that speaks directly to the dead cartoon legend, and his mythology. Who hasn't heard the one about Walt Disney being cryogenically frozen after a premature death from lung cancer?

The cryogenics myth was the starting point for Bruce and Jo. Inspired by Timothy Leary's *The Psychedelic Experience* (his reading of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*), *Hibernator*, in Jo's words, is all about "reanimating the great animator - not in a Utopian Disney landscape, but in a landscape of visions". But what is it about Walt



Feeling blue: Walt Disney returns LONDON FIELDWORKS

Disney? "Disney is a brand," says Bruce. "It makes \$30bn a year; it's culturally embedded, in the public domain. But Walt Disney was not as squeaky clean as his films suggest." All manner of prancing deer and singing dwarves hide the rotten core of the Disney legend: the Nazi connections, the greed, the megalomania. *Hibernator* inverts the idealised American landscape of his cartoons, turning it into something - as Jo puts it - "much more fucked up".

The script (already written) is by Steve Beard, Hexer is created by Paul and Laura Carey and Mathew Walker, the claustrophobic score - which draws on the music

from the original *Bambi* - by Dugal McKinnon, working remotely over the weeks from New Zealand. This is true 21st-century art: technologically advanced, temporal, international, collaborative and, most importantly, breaking down the icons of the century just past. I only have a glimpse of what *Hibernator* will become but, over the weeks, London Fieldworks will create a fictitious, surreal, "shamanic" biography of Walt Disney. How apt it seems for America's greatest dream-weaver to become the subject of his own nightmare.

Luiza Sauma

### WATCH THIS FACE

#### Robyn



Think she looks familiar? The more discerning pop pickers among you will recognise Robyn from back in the Nineties, when she had a fair stab at

international pop stardom. Ten years ago, the Stockholm-born singer had a record deal with RCA and a couple of singles in the Billboard Hot 100, thanks in part to a partnership with Britney Spears/Backstreet Boys hitmaker (and fellow Swede) Max Martin.

What a difference a decade makes. Still just 27 years old, Robyn has broken away from her major label, become the CEO of her own Konichiwa Records, gone straight to

No 1 in her homeland with her album 'Robyn', and is finally making waves in the UK. Phew. So how does it feel? "Things couldn't be better really," she says. "I feel really lucky. I'm having a lot of fun, you know? I get to do what I want." Robyn was brought up by avant-garde theatre enthusiasts, but her heart still belongs to planet pop: "It's kind of become this ugly word, 'pop'... I love pop music. I think a good song is the best thing in the world."

The album hits the UK on 2 April, and it's everything you'd expect from a former pop princess who cites both The Knife and Biggie Smalls as her influences: a wondrous, winking slice of bubblegum R&B. Who said there's no such thing as a second chance? LS