

Review 'Print the Legend' gives form to 3-D printer makers' history



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A scene from "Print the Legend." (Netflix)

The 3-D printer has been generating headlines steadily but only based on the latest thing the technology can build. How it actually works remains a mystery to most people.

Although the technology is the subject of "Print the Legend," the documentary focuses almost exclusively on behind the scenes at the start-ups that mass-market it as a consumer product.

Since 1986, 3-D printers have built engine parts, braces for teeth, prosthetics, car bodies, skull implants and even human organs using one of two methods: by extruding plastic, drop by drop; or by fusing resin and metals with a laser.

Two leaders of the technology, 3D Systems and Stratasys, have been pricing printers at \$80,000 to \$500,000. "Print the Legend" primarily follows two start-ups — MakerBot, founded in 2009, and Formlabs, founded in 2011 — as they develop more affordable desktop options.

Filmmakers Luis Lopez and J. Clay Tweel achieve the fairness and balance so rarely seen in documentaries nowadays by also featuring four competitors prominently. Lopez and Tweel also include disgruntled former employees at MakerBot and Formlabs, as well as Cody Wilson, the anarchist who courted controversy in 2012 with 3-D printed handguns.

What transpires at the start-ups almost mirrors Facebook's trajectory as seen in "The Social Network," with youthful idealism and a can-do attitude crushed under the growing pains of infighting and lawsuits.

"Print the Legend"

MPAA rating: None

Running time: 1 hour, 38 minutes.

Playing: At Laemmle's Music Hall 3, Beverly Hills. Also on VOD.

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