
This slim biography of the little known creator of the Kewpie doll provides the reader with a fanciful narrative of Rose O'Neill’s (1874-1944) early life. The various episodes of her nomadic youth are presented as short, easy-to-read chapters that are juxtaposed with examples of O'Neill’s illustrations published in books and magazines, such as Good Housekeeping and Puck, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Told through the words of Linda Brewster, an artist who felt a special kinship to Ms. O'Neill from an early age, this book is appropriate for all age groups, and recommended for museum libraries and educational programs that cater to children and adolescent audiences.

Rose O'Neill was born in Pennsylvania into a life of comfort in 1874. Four years later, her father’s financial problems begat a succession of moves that started with a three month trek in a Conestoga wagon across the country to Nebraska. O'Neill’s birth was followed by five more additions to the family, and she played an important role in her younger siblings’ rearing. The layout of text and imagery easily connects the influences of adventure and family life that became the foundation of O'Neill’s work to the imaginative illustrations produced in her lengthy career. O'Neill had little in the way of formal schooling, but her father’s large book collection provided the curious child with enough fodder to arouse a creative talent that eventually led her to New York City. Her resulting career is evidenced by her title as the first woman comic artist and the permanence of the Kewpie as a cultural icon.

This book focuses on O'Neill’s illustrations and early life, and therefore leaves the reader with a lopsided perception of the artist’s dynamic life and full oeuvre. However, the color reproductions of the artist’s work would compliment some of the more scholarly books on the subject in library collections. The book is oversized and soft covered, and a visual pleasure to flip through. It concludes with a thorough listing of resources and an index. Finally, the fondness of the author for the artist, coupled with the sentimental nature of O'Neill’s illustrations, will leave the reader with an appreciation for this self-taught, trailblazing woman.

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