



Every Hero Has A Story: Rose O’Neill

For children, play time is ripe for expression and imagination. For artist Rose O’Neill, play time helped spur a national sensation.

Although she lived many places during her life, it was at her family home in Walnut Shade, Mo., that Rose created her most-famous work: Kewpies.

Rose was in her 30s when Kewpies first garnered national attention. But the idea for the character had been with her for some time. She once told an interviewer the Kewpie grew from playing with her baby brother when she was a little girl. “I made drawings of him while I played with him. All his little looks and gestures came out later in the Kewpie,” she told Hobbies Magazine.

Born in 1874, Rose first traveled to Missouri as a young woman. She had lived the previous year in New York, working as an artist, selling her

illustrations to magazines such as Life and Harper’s.

Her family home was in a remote area of the Missouri Ozarks, south of Springfield. She named the O’Neill homestead “Bonniebrook,” a nod to the small stream that ran alongside the home.

After years of travel and work, Rose returned to Bonniebrook in 1909 and entered a new and prosperous phase of her career. She created Kewpies that year and they appeared in a Christmastime edition of the magazine Ladies Home Journal. They appeared regularly in publications for the next 25 years and became



a national phenomenon, appearing on everything from paper dolls (called Kewpie Kutouts) to real dolls to doorknockers.

By 1912, a company in Germany was making Kewpies out of porcelain – the demand was so great, 21 factories were producing the dolls. In the late 1920s, the Kewpie craze quieted and magazines began using photos instead of illustrations.

Rose moved back to Bonniebrook permanently in 1936 and spent her remaining years writing her memoirs and accepting invitations for a variety of speaking engagements. In her career she had

Points of Interest

- ★ Rose practiced her art by copying pictures from books in her father’s library. At 14, she won a drawing contest sponsored by the Omaha World Herald.
- ★ Today, there are Rose O’Neill fan clubs around the world and the International Rose O’Neill Club Foundation hosts the Kewpiesta festival each April in the Branson area. This year’s Kewpiesta theme was “Kewpies on Vacation.”
- ★ Early in her career, Rose signed her illustrations as C.R.O. to conceal her gender – to be a female illustrator was somewhat unheard of at that time.
- ★ Walnut Shade is not far from Branson, a mecca for Ozarks entertainment. Learn about all there is to do and see in the area at ExploreBranson.com.
- ★ Read more about Rose O’Neill on The State Historical Society of Missouri’s Historic Missourians site, shs.umsystem.edu.

Source: Hall of Famous Missourians



created nearly 5,500 drawings, countless paintings and considered herself a sculptor, suffragist, inventor, businesswoman, philosopher, poet, novelist, children’s book author, and musician. She died at Bonniebrook in April of 1944 at the age of 69.



Bonniebrook Gallery, Museum and Homestead
485 Rose O’Neill Road
Walnut Shade
(417) 561-1509
Bonniebrook has limited months of operation, so check before you go.

Take A Road Trip to Walnut Shade!

You can visit the Bonniebrook Gallery, Museum and Homestead in Walnut Grove, about 10 miles northwest of Branson. The Rose O’Neill Art Collection is housed in a newly renovated gallery at Bonniebrook. The collection features nearly 60 original works of art from Rose’s career as an illustrator and sculptor. The Kewpie Museum features antique Kewpie memorabilia, including hundreds of items sold during the Kewpie’s 20th century heyday. Bonniebrook House is a recreation of Rose’s 14-room Ozarks mansion. According to the Bonniebrook Historical



Society, the original house was the first home in Taney County to have electricity, a telephone and an indoor bathroom. The home burned in January 1947 and sat in ruins for 30 years before the society began rebuilding. The new house was finished in 1993. Bonniebrook also houses a research library with more than 20,000 pages of historical records related to Rose O’Neill’s life and career.



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