Rose O’Neill (1874-1944) was an illustrator, author, artist, poet, sculptor, inventor, suffragette, and creator of the world famous Kewpies.

In 1893 Rose moved to New York and her work began appearing in Harper’s Monthly, Harper’s Weekly, Harper’s Bazar, Life, Broadway Life, and Collier’s. She was hired on to the staff of Puck in 1896. Over the next five years she produced over 700 illustrations and cartoons for Puck. She became one of the most sought after magazine illustrators in the country. Rose did not follow the typical magazine humor of the time, which perpetuated stereotypes of the urban immigrant, the black, and the child. Her illustrations centered on the shifting roles of women, ethnic groups, and children. Rose supported the suffragette movement by attending rallies and creating illustrations.

During the years of 1909 and 1922 Rose produced about 100 illustrations for a wide variety of advertisements for such products as Kellogg’s Corn Flakes, Pratt and Lambert Varnishes, Oxydol, Edison Victrolas, Rock Island Railroad, and Jell-O. Besides her illustrations for advertisements, she was sought after as an illustrator for novels, poetry, short stories, magazine stories, and children’s books. The same magazines that carried her advertising illustrations carried a number of her own illustrated short stories. She also had four novels and one poetry collection published, all of which she illustrated.

In December of 1909, Kewpies made their debut in Ladies’ Home Journal, along with a playful verse by Rose. The patent for Kewpie dolls was registered on March 4, 1913 and figures began being produced in nine different sizes. It is estimated that Rose earned $1.4 million from the Kewpies. Kewpies, in addition to the dolls and magazine appearances, quickly spread to four books, a syndicated comic strip, and just about every form possible: nursery china, tableware, glassware, clocks, inkwells, vases, ice cream molds, picture frames, napkin rings, fabrics, wallpaper and eight Kewpie books.

Bio edited from the International Rose O’Neill Club Foundation http://www.irocf.org/history

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Kewpie images from the Hendler Creamery Corporation Collection.
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