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Seven Minutes: The Life And Death Of The American Animated Cartoon



Synopsis

Seven Minutes is a social and aesthetic history of the "controlled anarchy" of the cartoon, from the first talking Mickeys to the demise of Warners and MGM theatrical productions in 1960. Norman M. Klein follows the scrambling graphics and upside-down ballet of Fleischer's Betty Boop, Popeye, Superman of the Wolfie cartoons by Tex Avery, of the Bugs and Daffy, Tweetie and Roadrunner cartoons from Warners, of full animation at Disney, of the "whiteness of Snow White", and of how Mickey Mouse became a logo. Reviewing the graphics, scripts and marketing of each era, he discovers the links between cartoons and live action movies, newspapers, popular illustration, and the entertainment architecture coming out of Disneyland. Klein shows that the cartoon was a perverse juggling act, invaded constantly by economic and political pressures, by marketing for sound, by licensing characters to stave off bankruptcies, by Prohibition, the Great Depression, World War II and the first wave of television.

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Customer Reviews

An aggressively didactic history of the animated cartoon from the days before Mickey Mouse to the rise (or fall, depending on your feelings about the Flintstones) of Hanna-Barbera's 137 TV programs. Unlike Eric Smoodin's *Animating Culture* (p. 516), Klein's history insists on maintaining a sharp focus: It's interested almost exclusively in how and why the shape of the seven-minute cartoon short changed from Felix the Cat to Disney and Warners to the UPA cartoons (Gerald McBoing-Boing, Mr. Magoo) of the 50's. What modes of space and entertainment have different

cartoons drawn their inspiration from? The earliest cartoons, argues Klein (California Institute of the Arts), were staged in the depthless space of vaudeville gags, their jokes typically depending on spatial transformations between foreground characters and background objects (Felix using his tail as a crank to start a prop car). What Disney brought to the cartoon short was a fascination with the same deep space that marked live-action movies, with a corresponding emphasis on realistic melodrama, full animation, and the artful illusions of the multiplane camera. Even as Disney was turning increasingly to features and merchandising tie-ins (which alone kept the studio solvent in the 30's and 40's), Tex Avery and Chuck Jones at Warners were leading a more formulaic return to the anarchic chases of the earliest animation. Meanwhile, UPA pioneered the stripped-down style of "consumer cubism," inspired not by painting but by advertisements, architecture, and consumer spaces like shopping malls and amusement parks. Klein's often schoolmarmish tone gets in the way of his ambitious secondary goal--to provide a history of the American audience's perception. As a brief history of the evolution of Hollywood cartoons, though, this could hardly be improved. (B&w illustrations) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

"Norman Klein in his remarkable *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon* has accomplished what is by no means a minor miracle ... the work is erudite, witty, comprehensive and just plain fun." — Chuck Jones, Animation Director
"A volume which should be on every toon fan's bookshelf ... genuine food for thought with a mass of fascinating detail." — Sight and Sound
"This book is an important contribution to the history of American popular culture and a gold mine of suggestive insights into the inner workings of the cartoon business." — American Historical Review

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