

One of the trademarks of a successful artist is their ability to have their work flow with time. That doesn't mean just in subject matter either. The biggest shift in the artistic world is the incorporation of technology. Just think, you go from paint and ink being the main medium and the client completely understood that the process can take a while, to clients looking for the speed and the skill of the artist's hand through software like Adobe. If you can't just bend and twist with the trends of the current time, then you are left behind. No one can be a better example of an illustrator that flowed through the world as Sheilah Beckett. This woman was a power house of versatility. She went from self-taught artist to working in Cooper's Studio to freelance and blew the world away. Beckett was one that could dance to any beat of the drum.

Born in Vancouver, Canada in 1913 Sheilah Beckett had an obsession with children's book illustrations. Beckett never had a formal art education. She was entirely self-taught. After leaving high school she got a few assignments for advertising work here and there, but once she moved to LA, she landed a contract for a series of illustrations for *Gilbert & Sullivan* books. Before WW2 happened, Beckett took a chance to head over to England, "'I went to England,' Sheilah tells me, 'to catch up with the Gilbert & Sullivan Players - the real ones - and followed them around during their summer season. I did three books... and then the war came.'" (Leifpeng) When Beckett got back to the States, she ended up in New York City. In 1942 she became the first female artist to work at Charles E. Cooper Studio. This was a big accomplishment because Cooper Studio was known for being a "man's studio". It is also noted that Beckett met her future husband, J. Frederick Smith while they both worked at Cooper's. "Beckett was hired to illustrate ads for companies like Necco Wafers, Whitman's Chocolates, and General Electric." (Unknown) She also loved to illustrate greeting cards for American Artist Group. After Cooper's Studio dissolved, Beckett started her freelance career. She was hired to do cover art for magazines like *Esquire* and *Coronet*. Beckett still got some advertisement work from *The Saturday Evening Post* and others. She started to do soft book covers in the 50s. And she was receiving contracts with publishers like Golden Books to live out her dream of being a children's book illustrator. She always wrote and illustrated several of her own books as well. In the early 2000s Beckett taught herself how to create beautiful works of art on the computer. "According to her son Sean Smith, 'She continued to work right up to the day she died at 100. She did her final book for Golden Books at 99 on the computer.'" (Unknown) Beckett was a true artist that never gave up and could adapt her work to the given time.

Beckett was a brilliant woman with amazing talent. Her style was very playful. You can tell even in her advertisements that her style was geared more towards children's book illustrations. She also had a very graphic and flat look to her work. You can see her line work is very bold and crisp. Her work kind of reminds me of early Disney and also early Loony Toons. You can tell her style also translated perfectly with the graphic design software that she used. You can see all the love and passion in each one of her illustrations. The way that she flowed and glided through the changing decades is a true testament to her skills and love for her work.

In the end I think we all could learn a thing or two about how to be successful in our careers. You don't have to be a degree holder to become an artist. You don't have to bind yourself to one classification of work to do. Wear as many hats as you want, but make sure that you love each one of those hats. Don't settle and don't give up. Sheilah Beckett didn't stop creating and living her dreams. We are not allowed to stop either.

Author's Note: Sean Smith, Shielah's son, is still running his mother's Facebook Artist page. There are a ton more examples of her work, both public work and private, unpublished/unfinished work to see.

<https://www.facebook.com/The-Art-of-Sheilah-Beckett-112433015441913/>

Work Cited

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