



Marc Chagall; Georgia O'Keeffe

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This new series looks at the lives and works of sixteen 20th-century artists, 'exploring', the blurb tells us 'their work in relation to their life and what was happening in the world around them'. This is an ambitious project which introduces young readers to some of the most influential artists to emerge from Europe and America over the last 100 years. Each book follows the life and loves of the artist in the context of the changing contemporary social and political climate.

Marc Chagall's intensely personal paintings and prints are analysed alongside the changing face of Europe, the Russian Revolution, the Holocaust and life on the Lower East Side of New York. The American painter Georgia O'Keeffe's voluptuous and sensual portrayals of natural forms come with an informative description of her journey from childhood in Wisconsin to advanced age among the Indians of New Mexico, via romance in New York.

The series is a welcome addition to the non-fiction shelves, but I do wish the design of the books could be a little more sympathetic to the subject-matter. The paintings themselves are lost amongst the bombardment of photographs, tables, coloured panels and borders, and the cover designs are particularly jarring. There is much talk of visual literacy these days, but it is not something which is acquired only by reading about pictures. We need the space and time to look, and better still, to draw.

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