



GEORGIA
O'KEEFFE
(1887-1986)

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Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) in 1918, aged 31, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz.

- Welcome. This is Georgia O'Keeffe sometimes described as the Mother of American Modernism, a title she would have hated. She regarded herself as an artist not a woman artist.
- We associate her with New Mexico and its open skies and harsh landscape but although she lived there later she was born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin about 120 miles north-west of Chicago.

NOTES

- She lived in Abiquiú (pronounced 'abbey-queue'), New Mexico. She loved to drive her Ford Model A and used it to explore the deserts in New Mexico. She would paint from inside her car to avoid the burning desert sun and the insects. She would also paint under tarpaulins in the rain and wear gloves to paint when it got cold. She went camping well into her 70s.
- In 1946, she was one of the first women to be given a solo exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art.
- She gave up painting three times, the first time was to get a full-time job to help her family through financial difficulties, the second was a

nervous breakdown in the 1930s and finally her eyesight failed but she continued by using assistants and finally by taking up sculpture which she could create by touch.

- In the 1970s Georgia began a scandalous relationship with a man 58 years her junior. While she was 85 years old, she began an intimate relationship with Juan Hamilton, a 27-year-old, broke artist who was looking for a job when they met. This relationship received a large amount of negative attention, with frequent complaints from friends and business colleagues.
- She died on March 6, 1986, at Santa Fe, New Mexico at the age of 98, two years short of her goal to reach 100.
- The Georgia O'Keefe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico has 981 of her works including paintings, drawings, sculptures, sketches, and photographs.
- In 2014, her painting *Jimson Weed* sold for a record breaking \$44.4 million, more than three times the record for any female artist. However, she disliked the phrase 'woman artist' simply wishing to be known as an artist.
- She was an original artist and has been described as the Mother of American Modernism. She said, "*I have but one desire as a painter – that is to paint what I see, as I see it, in my own way, without regard for the desires or taste of the professional dealer or the professional collector.*"
- If you are worried about taking on a new project or making a major change remember she said, "*I've been absolutely terrified every moment of my life — and I've never let it keep me from doing a thing I wanted to do*".

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Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Dead Rabbit and Copper Pot*, 1908, Art Students League of New York collection



Georgia O'Keeffe as a teaching assistant at the University of Virginia, 1915

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Dead Rabbit and Copper Pot*, 1908, Art Students League of New York collection

Georgia O'Keeffe as a teaching assistant at the University of Virginia, 1915

- She grew up there on a dairy farm with six brothers and sisters and she wanted to be an artist from an early age. When she was 18 she studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and then the Art Students League in New York (from 1907 to 1908) and was taught there by the famous artist, William Merritt Chase. He was the most important teacher of American artists around at that time and taught a host of artists.
- O'Keefe learnt the techniques of traditional painting from him and in 1908 she won first prize for this painting *Dead Rabbit with Copper Pot*. In fact, capturing the effect of light on metallic surfaces such as copper bowls was a speciality of her teacher William Merritt Chase.
- While she was in New York she had explored its galleries including the avant-garde gallery, 291, owned by her future husband, Alfred Stieglitz and she saw the work of Picasso and Braque and other leading European artists.

- Despite winning the prize she was discouraged by traditional art and abandoned the idea of becoming an artist when she was 21.
- The same year, 1908, her father went bankrupt and her mother became seriously ill with tuberculosis. This meant her family couldn't afford to keep her in college so she took a job in Chicago as a commercial artist. She did not enjoy the work but then illness intervened. She caught measles and convalesced at home with her mother.
- (CLICK) She decided to become an art teacher and the financial security between 1911 and 1918 (aged 24 to 31) helped her. She took a number of jobs including the University of Virginia and Amarillo, Texas. She loved the harsh landscape around Amarillo, the hot summers, the strong winds, and the cold winters, she said, "**I was just crazy about all of it ... The beauty of that wild world**".

BIO:O'KEEFE

- Georgia Totto O'Keeffe (November 15, 1887 – March 6, 1986) is one of the most significant artists of the 20th century, renowned for her contribution to modern art. Born on November 15, 1887, the second of seven children, She grew up on a farm near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. Her father Francis Calyxtus O'Keeffe was Irish and her mother Ida (Totto) O'Keeffe was Hungarian. By the time she graduated from high school in 1905, O'Keeffe had determined to make her way as an artist. She studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York, where she learned the techniques of traditional painting. The direction of her artistic practice shifted dramatically four years later when she studied the revolutionary ideas of Arthur Wesley Dow. Dow offered O'Keeffe an alternative to established ways of thinking about art. She experimented with abstraction for two years while she taught art in West Texas. Through a series of

abstract charcoal drawings, she developed a personal language to better express her feelings and ideas." [1]

REFERENCES

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Tate Kids

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Wesley_Dow



Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), *The Long Road—Argilla Road, Ipswich*, c. 1898, colour woodcut on cream, moderately thick, slightly textured laid paper, 13.7 × 21.6 cm, Brooklyn Museum

Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), *The Long Road—Argilla Road, Ipswich*, c. 1898, colour woodcut on cream, moderately thick, slightly textured laid paper, 13.7 × 21.6 cm, Brooklyn Museum

- This is a work by Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922) who was a major influence on O'Keefe.
- She had given up her own painting for four years when she worked as a commercial artist. She decided to attend a Summer School at the University of Virginia. At the time she was working as an art supervisor in a public school in Amarillo, Texas (from 1912 to 1914) and at the Summer School she was introduced to the art and philosophy of Dow and in 1914 took a class with him.

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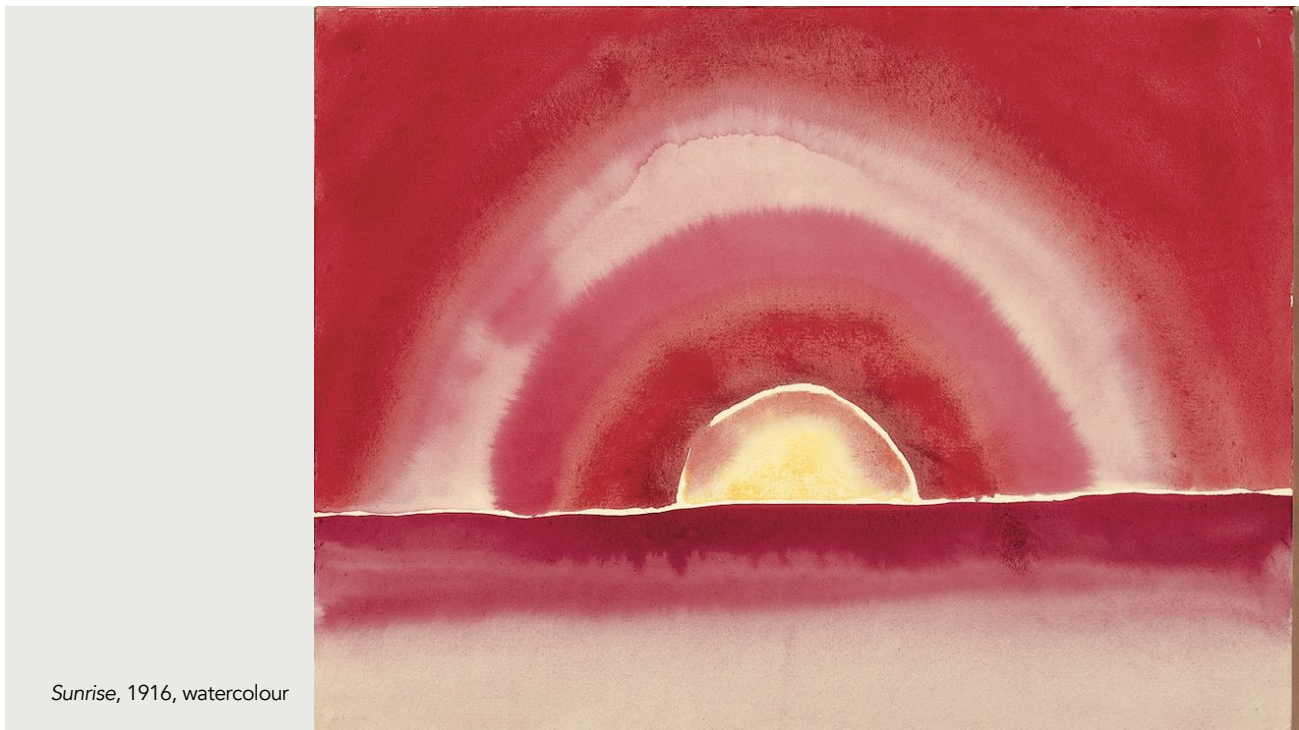
<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/2532>



Second, Out of My Head, 1915, charcoal on Fabriano laid paper, 61 x 47 cm, National Gallery of Art

- It was pivotal to her thinking and she started to draw charcoal abstractions. Dow offered her an alternative to established ways of thinking about art, she did not have to copy or imitate nature. She experimented with abstraction for two years while she taught art in Amarillo. She banned herself from using colour and worked solely in charcoal. These drawings are her first exploration of abstract art and they enabled her to overcome the stifling repression she felt with traditional art.
- Through these abstract charcoal drawings she developed a personal language to better express her feelings and ideas. She called them The Specials and they were her first authentic, truly original work.
- She sent some to a friend and unknown to O'Keeffe her friend took them to the 291 gallery in New York that I mentioned just now. It was run by the famous photographer Alfred Stieglitz and he described them as "**purest, finest, sincerest things that had entered 291 in a long while**". He exhibited ten in his gallery without her permission. When she saw them and was furious as he

had exhibited them without her permission. She ordered him to take them down but they quickly made up and he continued to exhibit her work.



Sunrise, 1916, watercolour

Sunrise, 1916, watercolour

- In 1916 she became the chair of the art department at West Texas State Normal College, in Canyon, Texas. She would walk in the desert and was inspired by the sunrises, sunsets and intense colours.
- She taught during the day and painted at night. She painted the plains and endless skies, colourful sunrises and sunsets. You can see she has reintroduced colour and retained a level of abstraction [1]

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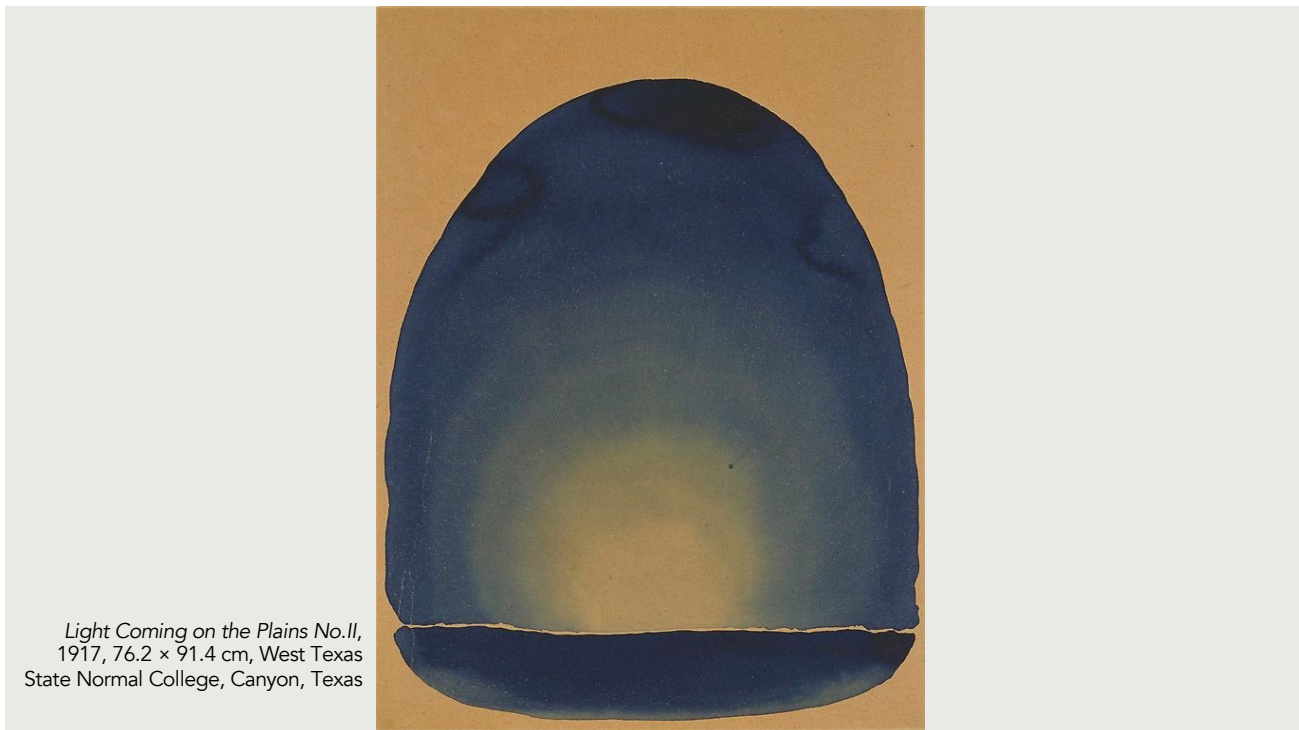
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_Coming_on_the_Plains includes *Sunrise*



Pink and Blue Mountain,
1916, watercolour on paper,
22.4 × 30.3 cm, Georgia
O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of
The Burnett Foundation and
The Georgia O'Keeffe
Foundation , 1997

Pink and Blue Mountain, 1916, watercolour on paper, 22.4 × 30.3 cm, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Burnett Foundation and The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation , 1997

- Another example based on the the scenery and expansive views during her walks. It is called *Pink and Blue Mountain* but is almost completely abstract. The horizontal deep blue watercolours and the pink above echo a rounded hill shape. The blue covers most of the paper, bleeding down to lighter hues towards the bottom. It could be a receding range of mountain tops or a purely abstract work.
- This was very early, artist in Europe such as Hilma af Klint, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky were experimenting with abstract art around the same time.



Light Coming on the Plains No.II,
1917, 76.2 × 91.4 cm, West Texas
State Normal College, Canyon, Texas

Light Coming on the Plains No.II, 1917, 76.2 × 91.4 cm, West Texas State Normal College in Canyon, Texas

- The following year she painted a series called *Light Coming on the Plains*. She has taken another step towards pure abstraction. This is one of a series of three paintings that were included in a list of the top 10 paintings of the sky ever painted and has been described as "one of the purest and most radical images O'Keefe ever made" (Laura Cummings, *The Guardian*).

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The Flag, 1918, 30 × 22 cm,
watercolour and graphite on paper,
Milwaukee Art Museum

The Flag, 1918, 30 × 22 cm, watercolour and graphite on paper,
Milwaukee Art Museum

- This was during the First World War and her brother, Alexis, was stationed near her college and she went to see him in the autumn of 1917 as he prepared to ship out to join the fighting in Europe. *The Flag* was painted in the early part of 1918 when she was recovering from Spanish Flu, the influenza pandemic that killed 20 million people worldwide. Her brother died fighting in France and this work reflects her feelings at the time. It was not displayed publicly until 1968. (<https://www.artistsnetwork.com/art-history/georgia-okeeffe-life-in-paintings/>)
- We see a wretched and withered flag, lacking all the stars and stripes, fluttering aimlessly, smeared in blood. Keeffe expresses her trauma and discontent against the brutality of the First World War. (<https://artisticjunkie.com/georgia-o-keeffe-paintings/>)

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Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), Georgia O'Keeffe, 1920, platinum print, 24.5 × 19.5 cm, George Eastman Museum




Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), Georgia O'Keeffe, 1920, platinum print, 24.5 × 19.5 cm, George Eastman Museum

- When she caught Spanish flu in 1919 Stieglitz suggesting caring for her in Manhattan, though he was married and more than two decades her senior.
- He had fallen in love with her work before he met her. Later, when they were apart, they wrote love letters to each other sometimes two or three times a day and up to 40 pages long. In total there are 25,000 pages of love letters.
- When she moved to New York their professional relationship quickly led to a personal and his divorce and their marriage in 1924. However, they were very different personalities and their relationship made enormous demands on her time. He had a frenetic social life and she needed peace and calm to work. He put her on a pedestal but that gave her little room to move.
- He made her one of the most photographed women of the twentieth century. He took some 350 portraits and over 200 nude studies of her.
- He encouraged her to stop painting in watercolour and switch to oils

as watercolour was associated with amateur women artists.

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The painting 'Blue and Green Music' by Wassily Kandinsky is an abstract oil on canvas. It features a central, upward-pointing, flame-like or musical form composed of layered, wavy bands of light blue and pale green. This central form is set against a dark, deep blue background. To the left and bottom, there are more organic, wavy shapes in shades of green and yellow-green, suggesting a landscape or a musical composition. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and emotional intensity, characteristic of Kandinsky's early abstract work.

Blue and Green Music, c.
1919-1921, oil on canvas,
58.4 × 48.3 cm, Alfred
Stieglitz Collection, The Art
Institute of Chicago

Blue and Green Music, c. 1919-1921, oil on canvas, 58.4 × 48.3 cm, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago

- This is an early oil painting, *Blue and Green Music*. She later said, "**the idea that music could be translated into something for the eye.**" Is what inspired her. In this work colours and forms suggest the natural world and evoke the experience of sound. The forms seem to flow upwards like flames from a cold fire or sounds from an orchestra.
- She was influenced by the theories of the Russian Expressionist painter **Vasily Kandinsky**, who, in his 1912 text **Concerning the Spiritual in Art**, argued that visual artists should emulate music in order to achieve pure expression free of literary references. [1]

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[1] <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/24306/blue-and-green-music>



Series I, White and Blue Flower Shapes, 1919, oil on board, 50.5 × 40 cm, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

Series I, White and Blue Flower Shapes, 1919, oil on board, 50.5 × 40 cm, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

- We now come to her famous flower paintings. This is an early example, *Series I, White and Blue Flower Shapes*, 1919. This is when she started to create her large-scale flower paintings that she would become famous for although they account for only about 200 of the over 2,000 paintings she created.
- Which leads me into an area that I will mention just once. Many writers and critics have interpreted her flowers as a coded reference to female genitalia. However, she denies all sexual associations and wrote, "**Nobody sees a flower – really – it is so small – we haven't time – and to see takes time... So I said to myself – I'll paint what I see – what the flower is to me, but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it – I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers... Well – I made you take time to look ... and when you took time ... you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower – and I don't.**"

- Personally, I respect her opinion. I can see the connection some critics have made but I feel it is too narrow and particular an interpretation and reflects their personal history. Great works like this throw up a multitude of associations all of which ricochet around our heads when we see the works. I will leave it like that and as she said, you can all hang your own associations on her work but remember they are yours not hers.

NOTES

- "A floral form occupies much of this painting. It is situated in front of a reddish background. The lower portion of the flower is rounded and largely white in colour. It has a small spot of pink in the center. The upper portion of the flower is made up of curving layers in shades of blue and green. It has a tear-shaped spot of black in its center." [1]

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- [1] <https://www.okeeffemuseum.org/>



Red Canna, 1924, 73.7 × 45.7 cm,
private collection

Red Canna, 1924, 73.7 × 45.7 cm, private collection

- Cannas (pronounced 'can-er') are vibrant tender perennials that produce bold leaves and showy flowers in shades of red, orange, yellows and pinks. This is one of eight paintings of the red canna that she painted between 1919 and 1927. They all pulse with life and their intense colour gives an energy to the swelling and tapering forms.
- By this time she was becoming well known in the New York art world as Stieglitz introduced her to the most well-known artists of the American early modern art movement.

NOTES

- "By 1918, Stieglitz had taken O'Keeffe securely under his wing, bringing her to New York and introducing her to the heavy hitters of early modernism including Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, and Charles Demuth among others. O'Keeffe's work had fully evolved into intersections between abstraction, personal sensation and vision, and the natural world. She and Stieglitz would marry after his divorce is finalised in 1924. In the early 1920s O'Keeffe created many of the magnified large-scale floral paintings she would

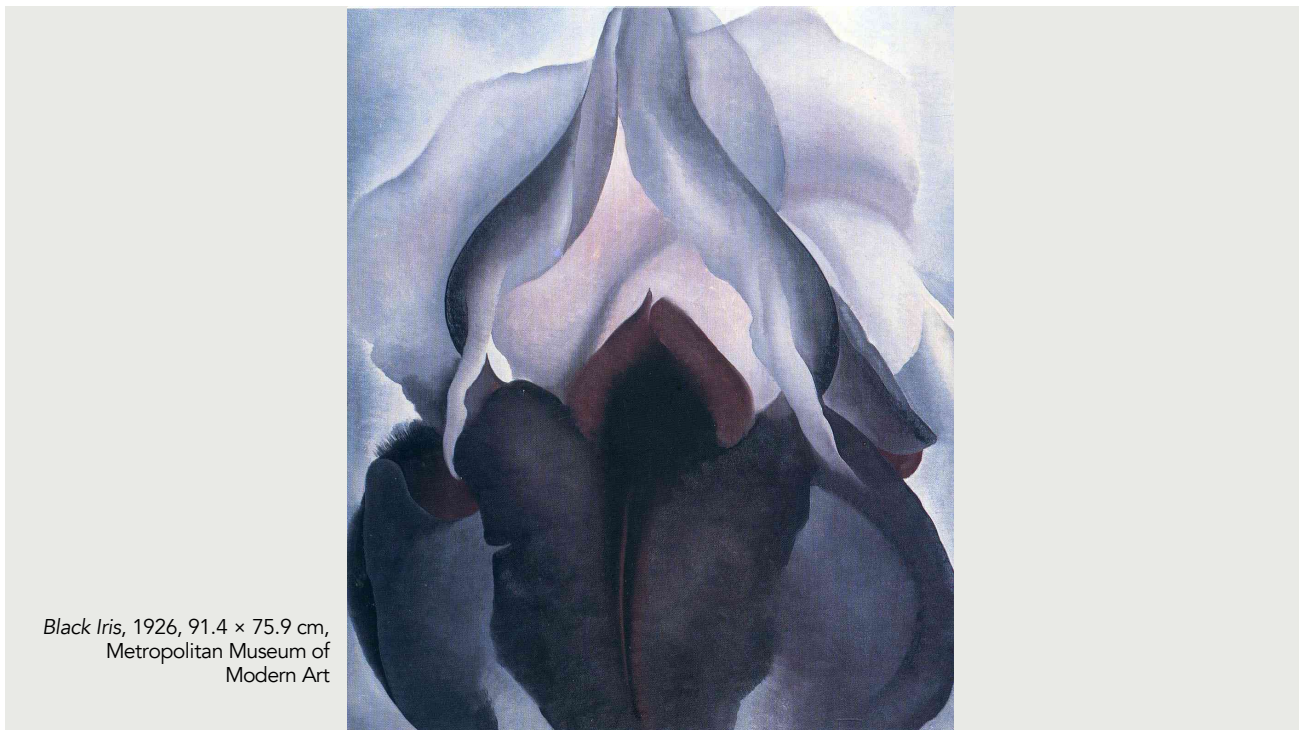
become famous for, including her *Red Canna* paintings. Florals number around 200 of the artist's 2,000 or so total works"[1]

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<https://www.georgiaokeeffe.net/red-canna.jsp>



Black Iris, 1926, 91.4 × 75.9 cm,
Metropolitan Museum of
Modern Art

Black Iris, 1926, 91.4 × 75.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art

- This is another of her early flower paintings. She has enlarged the flower way beyond its actual size so we can see the smallest detail. When these paintings were first exhibited even Stieglitz, by then her husband, was shocked by their audacity, he said, "***I don't know how you're going to get away with anything like that. You aren't planning to show them are you?***" She did exhibit them and they received rave reviews from the critics and they are now among her most celebrated paintings.

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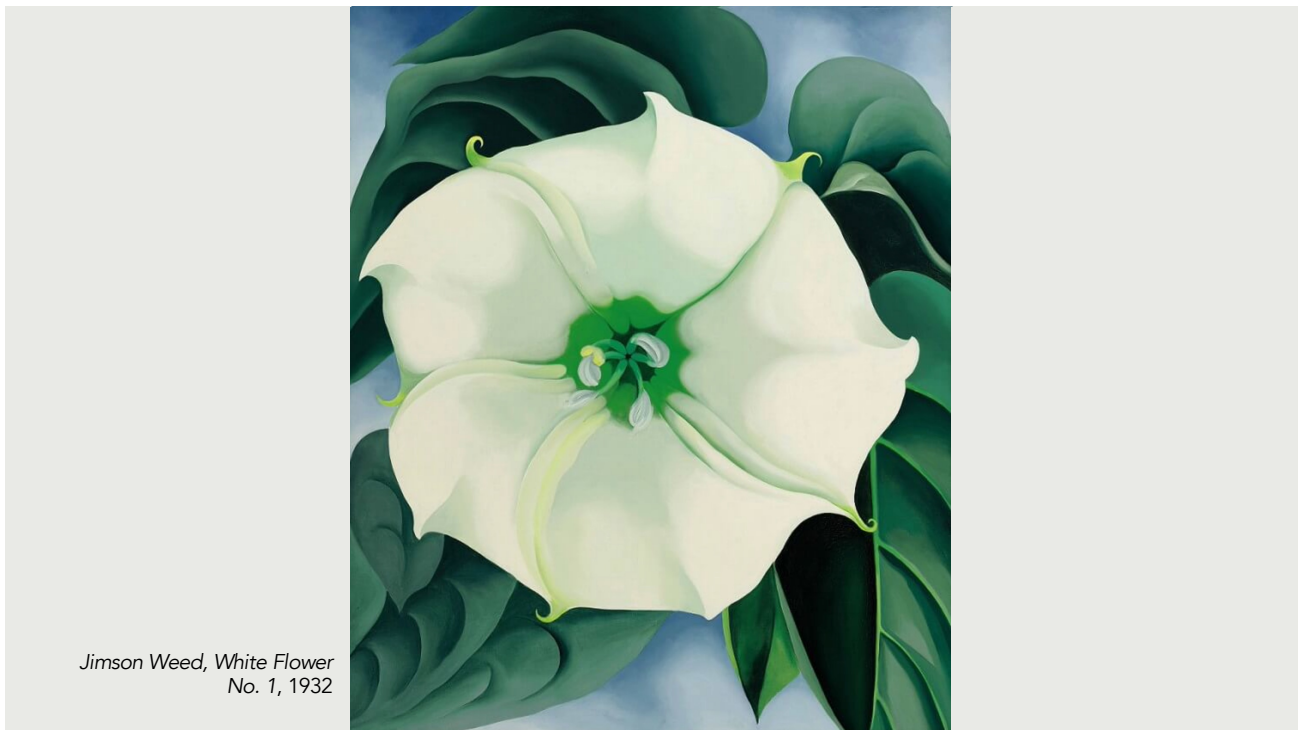
Oriental Poppies, 1928,
76.2 × 101.6 cm,
University of Minnesota
Art Museum, Minneapolis

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Oriental Poppies*, 1928, 76.2 × 101.6 cm, University of Minnesota Art Museum, Minneapolis

- Flowers fascinated Georgia and they were her favourite subject on canvas. She seems to have liked particular flowers - the calla lily, poppy, canna, iris, petunia, and jimson weed. She painted this work, *Oriental Poppies*, in 1928. This stunning work was declared groundbreaking an art masterpiece.
- (CLICK) I could not resist showing you this photograph I took in my garden yesterday of two giant red poppies about 20 cms or 8 inches across.(CLICK)

REFERENCES

<https://www.georgiaokeeffe.net/oriental-poppies.jsp#prettyPhoto>



*Jimson Weed, White Flower
No. 1, 1932*

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Jimson Weed, White Flower No. 1*, 1932

- She was still painting flowers and this iconic close-up floral painting made first-page headlines worldwide in 2014. It is called *Jimson Weed, White Flower* and sold for \$44,405,000 at Sotheby's that year. It is the most expensive artwork by a female ever sold at auction." (<https://www.artistsnetwork.com/art-history/georgia-okeeffe-life-in-paintings/>)
- I should add that during O'Keeffe's marriage to Stieglitz, both had several affairs, O'Keeffe's with women and men and there is some evidence that about this time, 1932, she had an affair with the famous painter Frida Kahlo who was married to Diego Rivera. The two met in December 1931 in New York City at the opening of Rivera's solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

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Radiator Building—Night, New York, 1927, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas



Radiator Building—Night, New York, 1927, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas

- For a while the city skyline became her muse. This is *Radiator Building—Night, New York*, 1927.
 - She painted them from her apartment on the 30th floor starting in 1925. Over the years, the views go from glitz and city lights, like this one, to smog-filled pieces with little glamour.
 - In 1927, she had surgery for a benign lump in her breast and that year a woman began to visit Stieglitz's new gallery, the Room. He was always drawn to pretty girls and began an ill-concealed affair with the married woman, Dorothy Norman. This heightened O'Keeffe's feelings of the restrictions of their relationship.
 - She began to take increasingly long trips to New Mexico. The separation helped her work and the late 1920s and 30s are filled with masterpieces. By then her work commanded extremely high prices and was on view in major exhibitions and solo retrospectives.
- [1]

REFERENCE

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_skyscraper_paintings_of_Georgia_O%27Keeffe

[1] <https://www.artistsnetwork.com/art-history/georgia-okeeffe-life-in-paintings/>



The Lawrence Tree, 1929, 78.7 × 101.6 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut

The Lawrence Tree, 1929, 78.7 × 101.6 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut

- In 1929 that she travelled to New Mexico with a woman friend (Rebecca Strand). She went on many hiking trips in the mountains and deserts. She visited the D.H. Lawrence Ranch where she painted this now famous work *The Lawrence Tree*. D.H. Lawrence and Frieda Lawrence lived in a cabin near this large ponderosa pine.
- As an aside, the Lawrences arrived in the US in 1922 in order to set up a utopian community. He wrote,
 - ***"I want to gather together about twenty souls and sail away from this world of war and squalor and found a little colony where there shall be no money but a sort of communism as far as necessities of life go, and some real decency ... a place where one can live simply, apart from this civilisation ... [with] a few other people who are also at peace and happy and live, and understand and be free...."*** (Letter to Willie Hopkin, January 18th 1915)
- An attack of malaria and tuberculosis meant he had to return to Europe and he lived in Northern Italy where he wrote his last major

novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. He briefly returned to New Mexico in 1929 which is when he met O'Keeffe.

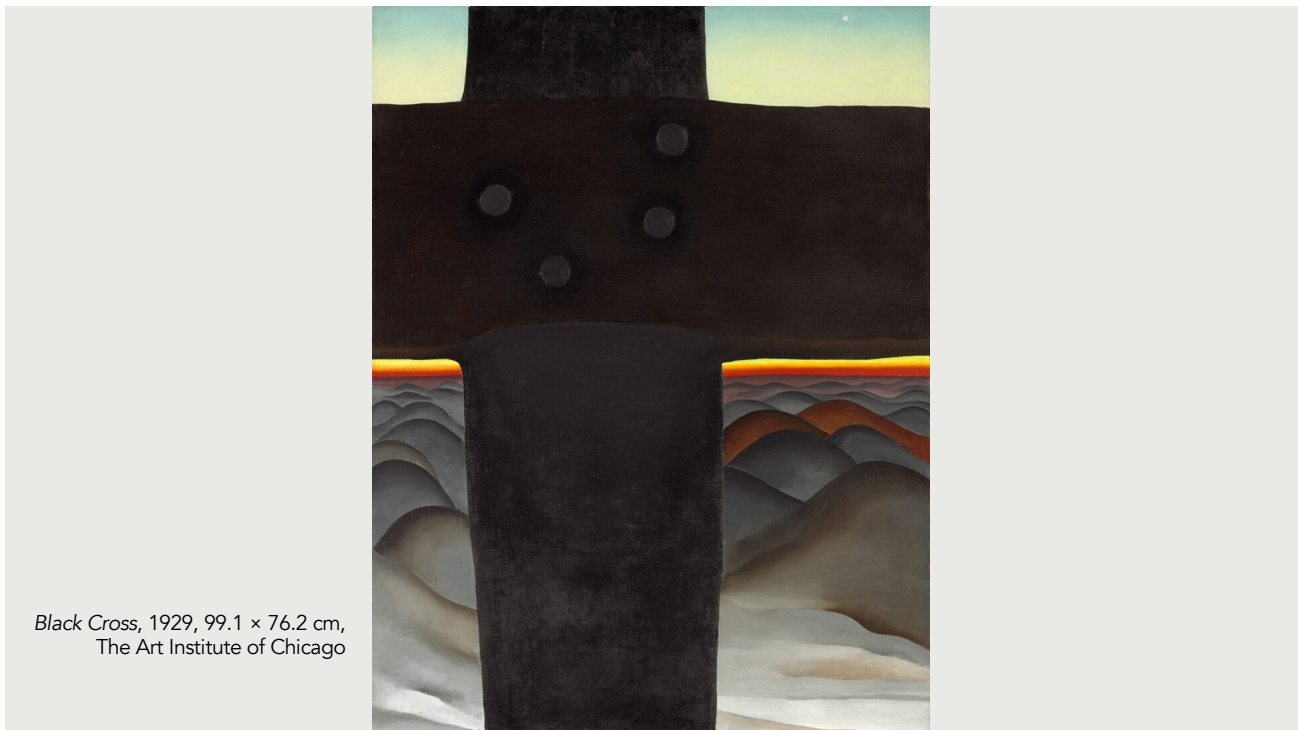
- She painted the tree by lying down on a bench and looking up through the branches to the night sky. The orientation is therefore ambiguous. The Wadsworth were told by O'Keeffe that it should be hung with the tree top at the bottom edge. You will sometimes see it shown this way (CLICK), a more conventional view.

NOTES

- According to the web search results, D.H. Lawrence was in Italy in 1928, where he published his novel ****Lady Chatterley's Lover**** privately¹⁴. He then moved to France in 1929, where he also published the novel¹. **He visited New Mexico in the summer of 1929, where he met Georgia O'Keeffe** and stayed at his ****Kiowa Ranch****²³. He returned to Italy in late 1929 and stayed there until 1930².
- Source: Conversation with Bing, 17/05/2023
- (1) Lady Chatterley's Lover - Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady_Chatterley%27s_Lover.
- (2) LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER by D.H. Lawrence | Goodreads.
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- (4) In Search of D. H. Lawrence's Sicilian House - Interesting Literature. <https://interestingliterature.com/2020/05/dh-lawrence-house-sicily-directions/>.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lawrence_Tree



Black Cross, 1929, 99.1 × 76.2 cm,
The Art Institute of Chicago

Black Cross, 1929, 99.1 × 76.2 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago

- After 1929 she spent part of every year in New Mexico, driving solo in her Ford Model A across the bad lands, painting from the seat of her car and collecting specimen from the desert floor to bring back to her studio. She would paint from inside her car to avoid the burning desert sun and the insects. She would also paint under tarpaulins in the rain and wear gloves to paint when it got cold. She went camping well into her 70s.
- She painted a series of crosses which she said for her "**was a way of painting the country**". Her she contrasts the black cross with the brilliant sunset beyond the rolling hills.
- O'Keeffe was fascinated with the crosses that dot the Southwest landscape. She said, "**Anyone who doesn't feel the crosses ... simply doesn't get that country.**"

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<https://www.georgiaokeeffe.net/black-cross.jsp>



Black, White and Blue, 1929, 121.9 × 76.2 cm, National Gallery of Art

Black, White and Blue, 1929, 121.9 × 76.2 cm, National Gallery of Art

- Over the years, O'Keeffe said little about her paintings, but in 1976 she wrote that *Black and White* (1930, Whitney Museum of American Art), an earlier version of *Black, White and Blue*, "**was a message to a friend—if he saw it he didn't know it was to him and wouldn't have known what it said. And neither do I.**"
- The friend was most likely a Tony Luhan, a native American she knew in New Mexico who did not often, if ever, see her paintings.
- She expressed herself in colour and form and the act of painting was a way of clarifying an experience for her. So when she said she did not know what the message was she was not being coy or clever, she was being accurate. Her painting was her way of coming to terms with, of knowing and understanding, an experience. As she repeatedly insisted, her paintings embodied the "**things that I had no words for . . . the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint.**"

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<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.105589.html>



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*, 1931

- Another motive often used by O'Keeffe. A single skull with its jagged edges, worn surfaces, and sun bleached colour.
- To her, such bones represented the desert's enduring beauty and the strength of the American spirit. The bones represented the hard, tough land she loved, stripped away to its bare essentials.
- Meanwhile, the love triangle—her, her husband and Dorothy Norman, who was married, reached a crisis in 1932.
- She won a commission to paint a public mural in New York but Stieglitz hated public works and tried to stop her and persuade her to be more friendly to his mistress. She fought against him but then discovered she could not paint the mural as the plaster was not dry. She broke down, could not eat, cried for days and was hospitalised for psychoneurosis

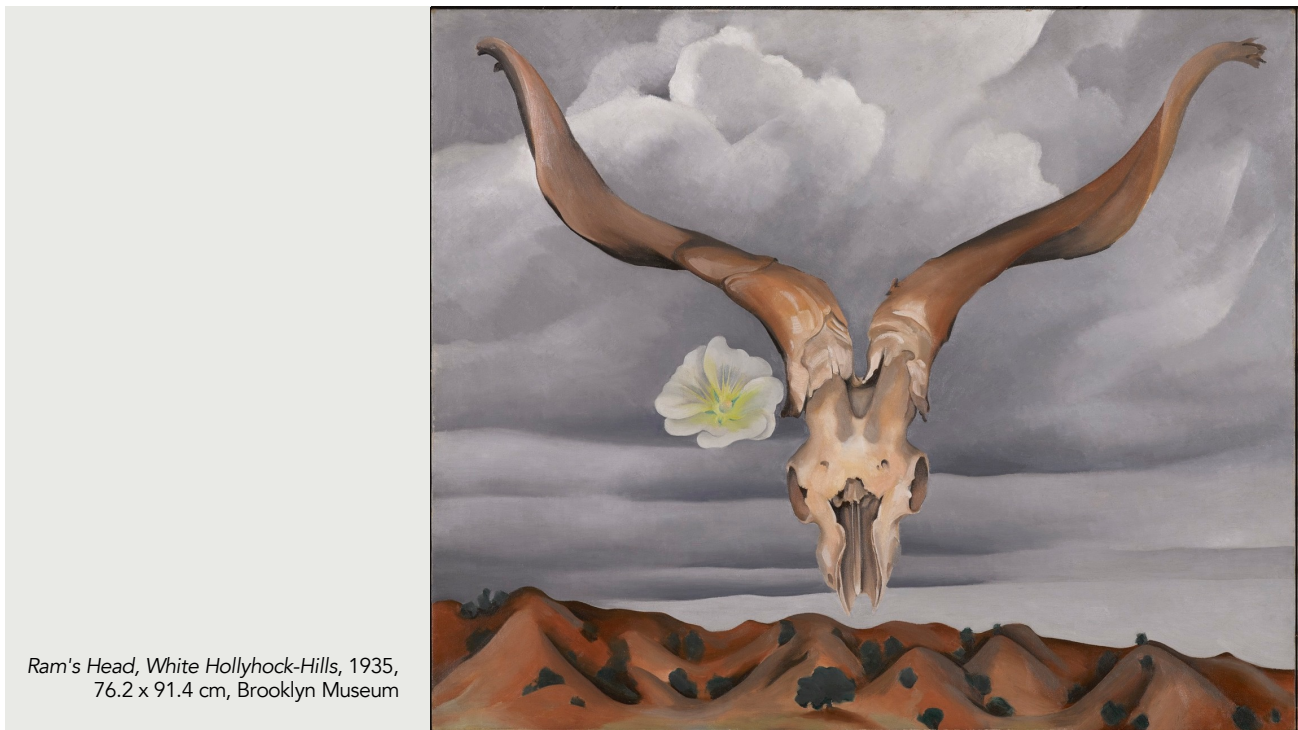
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<GB&ms=%7B%22x%22%3A0.5%2C%22y%22%3A0.5%2C%22z%22%3A9.593626806188668%2C%22size%22%3A%7B%22width%22%3A1.3235877636308835%2C%22height%22%3A1.2375015440105992%7D%7D>



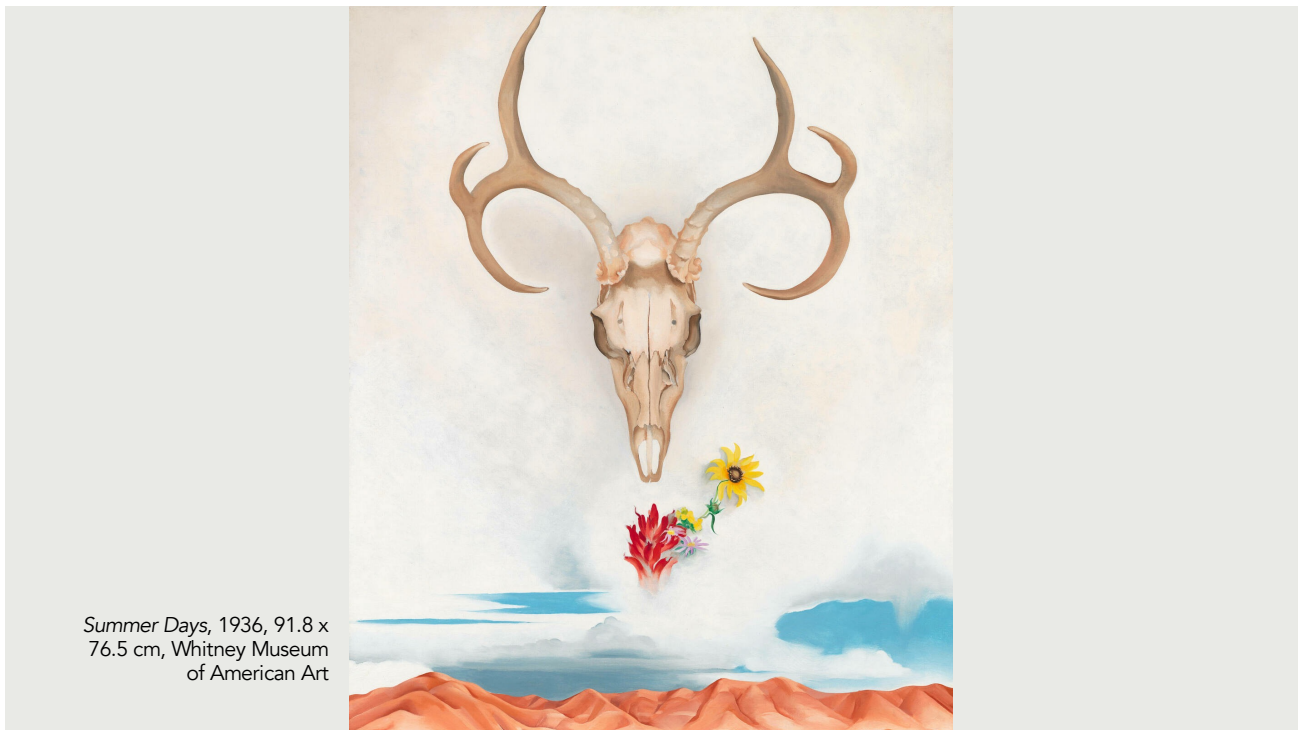
Ram's Head, White Hollyhock-Hills, 1935,
76.2 x 91.4 cm, Brooklyn Museum

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Ram's Head, White Hollyhock-Hills*, 1935, 76.2 x 91.4 cm, Brooklyn Museum

- She did not work from 1932-1935 but after the breakdown she realised it was the compromise that had almost destroyed her and she now focused entirely on her work. She spent every summer in New Mexico and avoided socialising during the winter in New York.
- She returned to her work reinvigorated after her first visit to Ghost Ranch, north of Abiquiu (pronounced 'abbey-queue') in New Mexico, in 1934. It would be a place she would visit on and off until Stieglitz's death in 1946. She was increasingly happy and the relationship with Stieglitz improved although he missed her and wrote long tormented letters.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.artistsnetwork.com/art-history/georgia-okeeffe-life-in-paintings/>



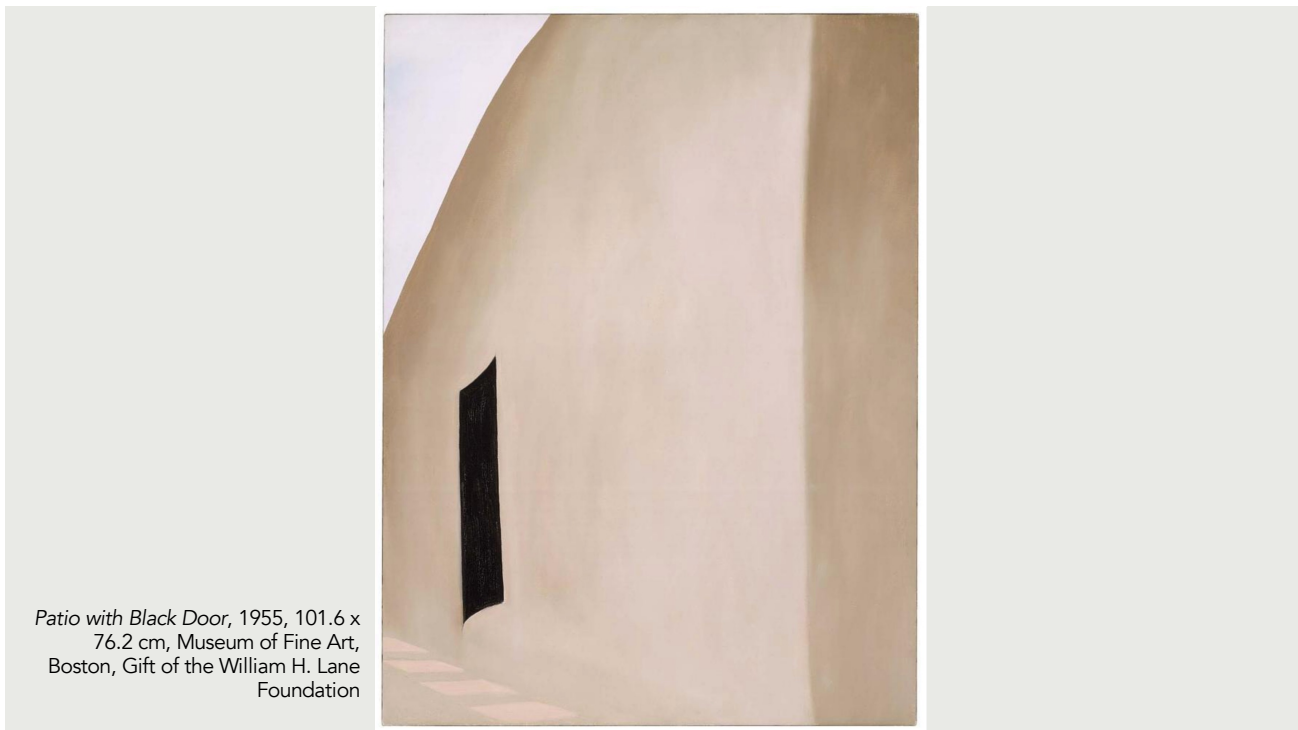
Summer Days, 1936, 91.8 x 76.5 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Summer Days*, 1936, 91.8 x 76.5 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art

- In this work, *Summer Days*, she shows a skull and several Southwestern flowers above a barren desert landscape. She includes the symbols of the cycles of life and death that shape the natural world giving the work a surreal quality.
- She collected deer, horse, mule, and steer skulls as one would gather wildflowers and they were potent souvenirs of the landscape that had deeply inspired her. As she explained, "**The bones cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive in the desert.**" (Whitney Museum)
- In 1946 she had a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, **the first for a woman artist**. That year Stieglitz had a seizure, she remained in Ghost Ranch, New Mexico and he seemed to recover but then had a massive stroke. She flew back and had to take it in turns at his bedside with his lover Dorothy Norman. He died shortly after. He had asked to be buried with her watercolour *Blue Lines* which she refused to do and she banished Norman from the gallery for good.

REFERENCES

<https://whitney.org/collection/works/7539>



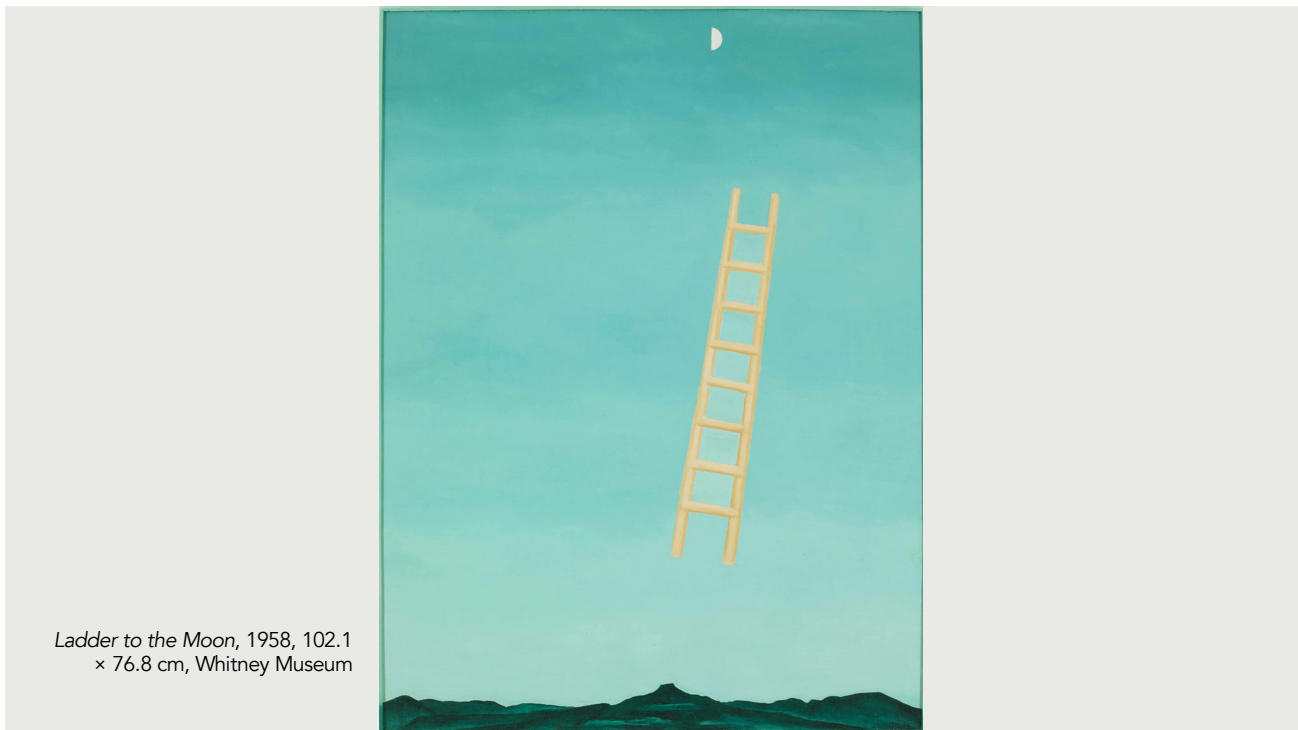
Patio with Black Door, 1955, 101.6 x 76.2 cm, Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Gift of the William H. Lane Foundation

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), *Patio with Black Door*, 1955, 101.6 x 76.2 cm, Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Gift of the William H. Lane Foundation

- It was during her visits to New Mexico in the 1930s that she began to obsess over a wall with a door in it, in a courtyard of a farm in Abiquiú. She bought the house for \$10 and spent ten years rebuilding it and she created almost twenty works recording the door. She said, **"I'm always trying to paint that door – I never quite get it ... It's a curse the way I feel – I must continually go on with that door."** This is the version in the Museum of Fine Art in Boston.
- She was then in her late 60s and as she became older she became increasingly cantankerous and argued with friends and staff.

REFERENCES

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/35103>



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Ladder to the Moon*, 1958, 102.1 × 76.8 cm, Whitney Museum

- She would alternate between spending days in the landscape making sketches from the back of her Ford and then retreat to her studio to work. In the winter in Manhattan, she painted from the sketches and from memory, in order to capture the heart of the landscape. Here, at dusk, the ladder seems to take us away to a distant magical land. [1]

REFERENCES

<https://whitney.org/collection/works/37900>

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jul/01/georgia-okeeffe-tate-modern-exhibition-wild-beauty> (Olivia Laing, *The Guardian*, 1 July, 2016)



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), *Sky above the Clouds IV*, 1965

- Her last great series was painted in the mid-1960s of the sky above the clouds.
- By the 1970s she was a wealthy and famous artist. In 1972 on her way home she noticed the world looked grey even though the sun was shining. She was suffering from macular degeneration and eventually lost most of her eyesight.
- She spent the years traveling the globe for months at a time followed by bouts of working and painting in New Mexico. She made these large-scale cloud works in her garage in Abiquiu (pronounced 'abbey-queue') in 1965. These were inspired by the view of clouds from an airplane window.
- She made her last unassisted oil painting in 1972. One day, at this time, a beautiful young man, John Hamilton, called on her and despite the fact that he was 27 and she was in her eighties she doted on him. He took control of her finances and in 1978 she gave him power of attorney and he bought a mansion and three Mercedes.
- By 1984 she had to give up drawing as well because of her lack of

eyesight. She moved to Santa Fe in 1984 and died on March 6, 1986, aged 98. When she died a codicil to her will left most of her \$65 million estate to Hamilton. It emerged from her staff that she had signed the codicil believing they were getting married. Her family went to court and eventually he agreed to hand over part of the estate to create a non-profit Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. A sad note note on which to end.

REFERENCES

<https://blog.singularart.com/en/2019/08/02/18973/>

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Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) in 1918, aged 31, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz.

- Let us remember her as one of the key founders of American Modernism. She said, "***I have but one desire as a painter – that is to paint what I see, as I see it, in my own way, without regard for the desires or taste of the professional dealer or the professional collector.***"
- Let me end with a piece of advice from her aimed at everyone. If you are worried about taking on a new project or making a major change remember she said, "***I've been absolutely terrified every moment of my life — and I've never let it keep me from doing a thing I wanted to do***".
- Thank you.