

Georgia O'Keeffe



Yellow Cactus, 1940
oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in
The Maier Museum of Art, Lynchburg

The Artist

Georgia O'Keeffe

Born Sun Prairie, Wisconsin 1887; died Santa Fe, New Mexico 1986
Georgia O'Keeffe was the second of seven children, and grew up on a farm in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. She grew up receiving art lessons at home and her abilities were quickly recognized and encouraged by teachers throughout her school. Georgia moved her family with Williamsburg, VA to attend the Chatham Protestant Episcopal Institute, which she graduated from in 1904. She also studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Arts Students League in New York. Her oil painting, *Dead Rabbit with Copper Pot* won her a

scholarship. In 1912, she became an art teacher and moved to Amarillo, Texas. Six years later, she became the head of the art department at West State Normal College in Canyon, Texas. During this time, Georgia resumed painting free of artistic conventions and all their influence after studying art theories with Arthur Wesley Dow. O'Keeffe's friend showed her charcoal drawings to Alfred Stieglitz, the owner of the prominent gallery "291" in NYC. Her work became an instant success. She eventually married Alfred Stieglitz. In 1929, Georgia moved to New Mexico and was mesmerized by the dry magical landscape and broad desert skies. Throughout her prestigious and successful career as an artist, Georgia was also the recipient of many awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the National Medal of Arts.



Alfred Stieglitz
Georgia O'Keeffe, 1919
palladium print
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Art Movement

American Modernism

Georgia O'Keeffe is referred to as the Mother of American Modernism. American modernism, like modernism in general, is a trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve, and reshape their environment, with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology and practical experimentation, and is thus in its essence both progressive and optimistic. Her work is described as naturalistic, romantic, and as having magical realism quality.

The Artwork

Yellow Cactus

Her artwork is characterized for her immense and singular abstract natural forms. *Yellow Cactus*, instead was painted with small and bright multiple blooms, and is a symbol of her transition to desert imagery after many visits to New Mexico. She eventually settled there and spent the rest of her life at Ghost Ranch near Santa Fe.

Discussion Suggestions

Discuss the Painting:

- *What is this a painting of? How can you tell?*
- *Are flowers usually painted like this? Why do you think she painted them this way?*
- *What colors do you see? If you saw the real flower, what color would it be?*
- *How does she use the color green?*
- *Does this painting remind you of anything else?*

Activity Idea

Creating an O’Keeffe Painting:

Pre-Activity:

- Talk about warm, cool, and neutral colors. Review blending of colors.
- Introduce O’Keeffe and talk about how she used very little background space in her artwork.

Activity:

- Have each student choose an object (flower)
- Tell the students the object has to touch, or extend over the 4 sides of the paper, make it look as if the object is falling off the page!
- Review the work overlapping and talk about how petals overlap
- Have students draw the object on the paper and outline the pencil with sharpie markers
- Have them define some parts with watercolor. If students chose a cool color for the flower ask them to do a warm colored background. And vice versa, warm object/flower with a cool background.
- Allow students to paint independently with watercolors.

Materials Needed:

- White construction paper 12 x 12 inches
- Pencils and Sharpie Markers
- Watercolor Paints