

# Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

Welcome and thank you for making the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum part of your classroom! This packet is designed to provide a brief introduction to the life and art of Georgia O'Keeffe and to help teachers prepare their students for a visit to our Museum.

## Table of Contents:

- I. Who was Georgia O'Keeffe?
- II. The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
- III. What to Expect: Visiting the Museum
- IV. Don't Wait- Get Started!

## I. Who was Georgia O'Keeffe?

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*Georgia O'Keeffe—After Return from New Mexico, 1929*  
Alfred Stieglitz

### A Brief Bio

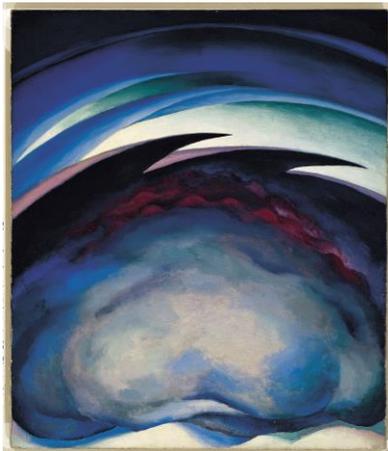
Georgia O'Keeffe was born on a farm near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin in 1887. As a child she received art lessons at home, and by the time she graduated from high school in 1905, she knew she wanted to be an artist. O'Keeffe studied art in many different places including Chicago, Virginia and New York City. Her artwork was first exhibited in 1916 by Alfred Stieglitz, a highly influential gallerist and advocate for modernism. By the mid-1920's O'Keeffe was recognized as one of America's most important and successful artists, known for her paintings of New York skyscrapers as well as flowers. In the summer of 1929, O'Keeffe made the first of many trips to northern New Mexico. For the next two decades she spent part of most years living and working in New Mexico, a pattern she rarely altered until she made it her permanent home in 1949. At the end of her career she began to lose her eyesight and painted her last unassisted oil painting, *The Beyond*, in 1972. However O'Keeffe's desire to create did not diminish with her eyesight. She continued to create paintings with the help of her studio assistants, returning to her favorite visual motifs from her memory and vivid imagination. She worked in watercolor and pencil until 1982 and produced objects in clay from the mid-1970s until two years before her death at the age of 98.



Georgia O'Keeffe artist materials, 2001

## Materials and Technique

Georgia O'Keeffe is one of America's most influential artists, known for her groundbreaking use of abstraction, dramatically modern compositions and exquisite sense for the beauty of the natural world. Her mediums of choice included: charcoal, pastel, watercolor, and oil paint, however she never settled easily into a set convention or habit, determining the size and medium anew with each painting. O'Keeffe also left very little to chance in her creative process. She was almost never impulsive, meticulously planning her composition and applying paint to the canvas with careful precision. This exacting control can be seen in the way she carefully shaped and shaved the tips of many of her paint brushes found in her studio.



Series I - From the Plains, 1919  
Georgia O'Keeffe

## Abstraction

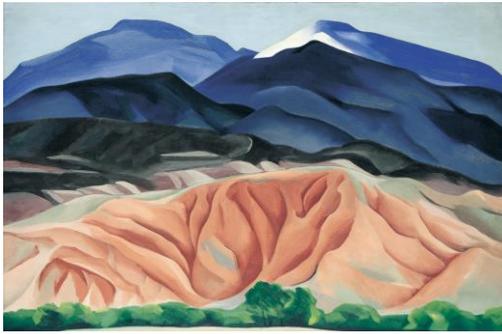
What is abstraction? Abstraction is a word used to describe an image that is no longer recognizable as a person, place or thing, but instead might express an emotion or sensation through the use of color and form. Abstract artists simplify, generalize, distort and rearrange what they see or perceive in the real world. Objects and places are distilled to their most basic elements. O'Keeffe was one of the first American artists to make abstract art. She sought to communicate the essence of an experience so that the viewer would feel as she felt and see as she saw.



Untitled (City Night), 1970s  
Georgia O'Keeffe

## American Modernism

Modernism, as an art movement, emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a rejection of past traditions and conventions in favor of a more direct and unmediated aesthetic experience using experimental techniques and new materials. For O'Keeffe, this meant dispensing with received wisdom about how to represent the world, in favor of a direct distillation of her visual experience into forms and colors that conveyed much more than a visual likeness. O'Keeffe shared with other artists a commitment to an idea she called "the Great American Thing" – creating an identifiably American strain of modern art distinct from European examples. Her abstract compositional skills of reducing the natural world to identifiable shapes and colors evoke a sense of feeling and place that has made her landscapes and large-scale flower paintings enduring icons.



*Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico / Out Back of Marie's II, 1930*  
Georgia O'Keeffe

## O'Keeffe in New Mexico

Georgia O'Keeffe visited northern New Mexico in 1929, and gradually it became the center of her life. Enamored with the richness of the dramatic landscape and turquoise-blue sky, O'Keeffe continued to visit the state over the next several years, finding solitude in the open spaces, and the camaraderie of artists in Taos and Santa Fe. This lovely isolation captivated O'Keeffe and in 1949 she became a permanent resident with homes in both Abiquiu and Ghost Ranch. The New Mexico landscape inspired O'Keeffe for the rest of her life. The cottonwood and pinon, yellow-and-red mesas, and glittering Chama River became her easy companions. In the distance, the flat-topped Pedernal attracted her like nothing else she saw, and she painted it frequently. Over time, her New Mexico paintings became as well known as the work she had completed earlier in New York.



*Untitled (Purple Petunia), 1925*  
Georgia O'Keeffe

## Floral motifs

In the words of Georgia O'Keeffe, "Everyone has many associations with a flower- the idea of flowers. You put out your hand to touch the flower- lean forward to smell it- maybe touch it with your lips almost without thinking- or give it to someone to please them. But one rarely takes the time to really see a flower. I have painted what each flower is to me and I have painted it big enough so that others would see what I see." O'Keeffe painted over two hundred paintings of flowers, yet her flower paintings only account for a small percentage of her total body of work. Many of these flower paintings are close up abstractions of the floral form and indicate an awareness and interest in visually cropping her subject matter- in a manner similar to photography. Though there is no evidence that O'Keeffe was actively photographing during this period, she was heavily influenced by the work of photographers Paul Strand and Alfred Stieglitz.



*Georgia O'Keeffe's Abiquiu House, Living Room, 2007*  
Herbert Lotz

## Living an artistic life

Georgia O'Keeffe lived her life as she painted her paintings: deliberately. Visitors to her 5,000 sq. ft. Spanish colonial-era compound in Abiquiu experience firsthand the carefully considered life O'Keeffe cherished and the views she made known to the world through her paintings. Her garden offers a glimpse of her modern approach to sustainable living. During the spring and summer months, the garden is planted, in partnership with the Santa Fe Botanical Garden, according to the plans O'Keeffe developed while living in the house.



Letter from Georgia O'Keeffe to Alfred Stieglitz, with enclosed photographs, July 6, 1944

## Letters

Though Georgia O'Keeffe was a successful professional artist, the public perception of O'Keeffe, first as an intuitive, perhaps naïve woman artist and later as an eccentric recluse, is significantly different from the person who emerges through her abundant correspondence. From the early 1910's through the late 1950's, O'Keeffe regularly exchanged letters with numerous friends and colleagues. These often witty and spontaneous words now offer a more complex and nuance perspective of the famous artist.

"Color is one of the great things in the world that makes life worth living to me and as I have come to think of painting it is my effort to create an equivalent with paint color for the world- life as I see it."

-Letter to William M. Milliken, 1930

"If you can believe in what you are and keep to your line- that is the most one can do with life."

-Letter to Maria Chabot, 1944

"... I like the artist standing up for himself- believing in his own word no matter what anyone may say about it."

-Letter to Cody Wells, 1938

## II. The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum



Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Exterior

The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum opened in 1997, eleven years after the death of our namesake artist. The Museum's collections of over 3,000 works comprises 140 O'Keeffe oil paintings, nearly 700 drawings, and hundreds of additional works dating from 1901 to 1984, the year failing eyesight forced O'Keeffe into retirement. Throughout the year, visitors can see a changing selection of these works. In addition, the Museum presents exhibitions that are either devoted entirely to O'Keeffe's work or combine examples of her art with works by her American modernist contemporaries.

In 2006, the Museum took responsibility for the care and preservation of O'Keeffe's home and studio along the Chama River in Abiquiu, New Mexico, about an hour north of Santa Fe. A national historic landmark and one of the most important artistic sites in the United States, the home where the artist lived and worked is open for tours by appointment. O'Keeffe's first home in New Mexico, about 30 minutes northwest of Abiquiu at the Ghost Ranch is also cared for by the Museum though it is not currently open to the public.

The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center opened in July 2001 and is dedicated to the study of American Modernism (late nineteenth century – present). The Center sponsors research in the fields of art history, architectural history and design, literature, music, photography, and other fields. The library collections and unique archives are accessible to researchers, in-house scholars, and the public by appointment.

### III. What to Expect: Visiting the Museum

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#### Before your visit:

Please take the time to review these gallery guidelines with your students and chaperones before visiting the Museum.

#### For students:

- Remember to stand at least 2 feet from the artwork at all times and please do not touch or lean on the artwork, walls, exhibit cases, or television/video equipment.
- Only pencils (no pens, markers or paints) are allowed in the galleries for sketching or notetaking.
- Prior to entering the galleries, leave all food, drinks, chewing gum, candy and anything that may be messy outside of the galleries. There is a trash can in the lobby.
- Please make sure to use your inside voices and do not run in the Museum.
- Only non-flash photography is allowed in the Museum, however some artworks may not be photographed at all. **Do not photograph anything with this icon next to it.** 
- Please silence your cell phones in the gallery. If you must take a phone call, please step outside of the galleries.
- Listen carefully to what your guide is telling you – Ask questions! Have fun!

#### For chaperones:

- For grades K-8: please have one chaperone per five students in your group.
- For grades 9-12: please have one chaperone per ten students in your group.
- Museum admission is free for teachers and chaperones accompanying their school groups.
- Chaperones must stay with their student group throughout the entire visit. Teachers and chaperones play an important role in keeping both students and the artwork safe!

#### Buses and Parking:

- Buses may drop students off in front of the main Museum entrance on Johnson Street.
- There is no parking for buses at the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum. If you have concerns please contact Sarah Zurick at (505) 946-1007 or [szurick@okeeffemuseum.org](mailto:szurick@okeeffemuseum.org).
- The Museum provides transportation funding for qualifying schools. Please indicate your interest in receiving transportation funding when submitting your visit request (additional forms are required).

#### Arrival at the Museum:

- Please arrive promptly at your scheduled time. If you are delayed more than 30 minutes, your guide may no longer be available. If you are running late **OR** arriving early, please call the Front Desk of the Museum at (505) 946-1017.
- Your museum guide will greet you at the main entrance and direct your group to the Museum’s lockers where you may store your bags and backpacks securely.
- If you have questions or are unclear about anything related to the Museum, the security and front desk staff are always happy to help.

### Facilities:

- The Museum does not have lunch facilities on-site, however, if your group needs an area to eat lunch or picnic, special accommodations can be made.
- The Museum is wheelchair accessible.

### Leaving the Museum:

- Remember to collect your belongings from the Museum's lockers.
- Restrooms are around the corner from the lockers if you need to stop on your way out.
- Encourage your students to bring their families to the Museum. We hope to see you again soon!

### Tell us what you think:

- We want to hear about your museum experience and we welcome any questions or comments! Please contact Sarah Zurick at (505) 946-1007 or [szurick@okeeffemuseum.org](mailto:szurick@okeeffemuseum.org) and let us know what you enjoyed about your visit, what information was useful and any suggestions you have for your next visit. Keep in touch!

## IV. Don't Wait- Get Started!

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Make sure your students get the most out of their visit to the Museum by introducing them to Georgia O'Keeffe and her artwork in your classroom before they visit. Here are some questions and images to get you started!

*Who was Georgia O'Keeffe? Why is she famous?*

*Take a moment to look at one of her paintings on the following pages. What's going on in this piece of art? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?*

*What is abstraction? Are these works abstract? Why?*



Pelvis Series, Red with Yellow, 1945  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas



*Bella Donna*, 1939  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas



*Pond in the Woods, 1922*  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Pastel on paper



*Tan, Orange, Yellow, Lavender*, 1959/1960  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on Canvas

## Image Credits

*Georgia O'Keeffe—After Return from New Mexico, 1929*  
Alfred Stieglitz  
Gelatin silver print  
3 1/16 x 4 5/8 in.  
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum  
Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation (2003.01.015)  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

Georgia O'Keeffe artist materials, 2001  
Photography by Matthew Marston  
Gift of Juan and Anna Marie Hamilton  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

*Series I - From the Plains, 1919*  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas  
27 x 23 (68.6 x 58.4)  
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum  
Gift of The Burnett Foundation (2007.01.013)  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

*Untitled (City Night), 1970s*  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas  
84 1/16 x 48 1/16 in (213.5 x 122.1 cm)  
Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation (2006.05.542)  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

*Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico / Out Back of Marie's II, 1930*  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas mounted to board  
24 1/4 x 36 1/4 (61.6 x 92.1)  
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum  
Gift of The Burnett Foundation (1997.06.015)  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

*Untitled (Purple Petunia), 1925*  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas  
7 1/4 x 7 1/4 (18.4 x 18.4)  
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum  
Gift of The Burnett Foundation (2007.06.021)  
© The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

*Georgia O'Keeffe's Abiquiu House, Living Room, 2007*  
Herbert Lotz  
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RC-2009-002-003

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Exterior  
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Letter from Georgia O'Keeffe to Alfred Stieglitz,  
with enclosed photographs, July 6, 1944  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

Pelvis Series, Red with Yellow, 1945  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas  
36 1/8 x 48 1/8 (91.8 x 122.2)  
Extended loan, private collection (1997.03.04L)  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

Bella Donna, 1939  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on canvas  
36 1/4 x 30 1/8 (92.1 x 76.5)  
Extended loan, private collection (1997.03.03L)  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

*Pond in the Woods*, 1922  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Pastel on paper  
24 x 18 (61 x 45.7)  
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum  
Gift of The Burnett Foundation (2007.01.017)  
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

*Tan, Orange, Yellow, Lavender*, 1959/1960  
Georgia O'Keeffe  
Oil on Canvas  
36 x 30 (91.4 x 76.2)  
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum  
Gift of The Burnett Foundation and The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation (1997.05.017)  
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