

Georgia O'Keefe biography

"When I was still a little girl, I used to think that since I couldn't do what I wanted to... at least I could paint as I wanted to, and say what I wanted to when I painted." Georgia O'Keefe.

Georgia O'Keefe is known for her brilliantly collared paintings with confident shapes and simple patterns. She painted a great many floral paintings, which were large pieces with the flower, exaggerated and enlarged to completely fill the canvas, then stylised to their most essential forms. She is also known for her Southwest paintings, which include adobe buildings, desert mountain panoramas or floating cow skulls against rich blue skies. The emphasis on the simplest aspects of the shapes created a surrealistic dynamic that is captivating.

O'Keefe was born on November 15, 1887 in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. She knew from a young age that she would be an artist when she grew up. She studied first at the Art Institute of Chicago. After stopping her education due to a bout of typhoid, she resumed study in 1907 at the Art Student League in New York. She was following a family tradition of educated women - an idea not prevalent at that time. Even as she excelled in her studies it was believed that she would end up teaching art rather than making it.



Georgia moved for a time with her family to Virginia, but in 1914, when a teaching job opened in Amarillo, Texas, she took it. After two years she went to New York's Columbia Teacher's College, and took a job at Columbia College in South Carolina.



Georgia O'Keefe's friend Anita Pulitzer was taken by O'Keefe's works and took some samples to show Alfred Steiglitz at the 291 Gallery in New York. Some sources say that she did so without O'Keefe's permission. Steiglitz was a respected Gallery curator and artist himself, and O'Keefe respected his opinion, but even though he loved them it took some negotiations with O'Keefe to convince her to let him exhibit her work.

O'Keefe returned to Texas and worked at the West Texas Normal College while painting the scenes she loved, and hiking the Palo Doro Canyon. An illness caused her to quit her job- or perhaps it was her radical political views clashing with her colleagues. In any case, she returned to New York at Alfred Steiglitz's urging. After several years of cohabitation, Steiglitz divorced his wife and they married when she was 23 and he was 54. O'Keefe was not enthusiastic, however.

Their many trips to the Steiglitz family home in the Adirondacks were the inspiration for many paintings. They spent several years living in a New York City hotel, and her view there also served as inspiration. It was in New York that she painted her first large flower paintings.

Beck Strand was a friend who invited O'Keefe on a trip to Taos New Mexico at a time when the artist was craving new scenery to paint. Steiglitz didn't like travel and firmly stayed in New York except for occasional uncomfortable forays elsewhere with O'Keefe. She spent all her summers in Taos from then on, and when Steiglitz died in 1946, she moved there permanently.

She purchased a hacienda at Ghost Ranch, New Mexico and it became her lair for much of the remainder of her life. Her eyesight began to fail in the early seventies and by 1972 she could no longer see well enough to paint. A young man named Juan Hamilton, a potter, came to do odd jobs for O'Keefe and ultimately became her closest companion in her later years. Many felt he was using her for his own ends, but O'Keefe liked him and he stayed. She even did a bit of pottery herself while knowing him.

At the very end of her life she moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was there that she died in 1986 at the age of 98. She was cremated the next day and Juan Hamilton scattered her ashes from Paternal Mountain as she had requested.

