



# Georgia O'Keefe

Georgia Totto O'Keefe is a famous artist who focused on nature. She has many paintings of flowers, desert skulls, and illustrations of her inner-self. For example, the drawing below is a recreation of her greatest painting of her inner-self. Georgia liked to draw this type of thing because the farm she lived on had lots of desert and flowers.

One of Georgia O'Keefe's most famous paintings is called *Oriental Poppies*. That painting is of two giant red poppies. The poppies cover the whole canvas, which is 30 inches tall and over 40 inches wide. This is about the size of a kitchen table that can seat four to five people. She painted it in 1928 and the painting is part of a collection at the University of Minnesota.

Over the years, Georgia's paintings included images of skyscrapers and city images, but she always returned to paint nature. Throughout her life she painted hundreds of flower images of many different colors, shapes, and sizes. She began to paint flowers so large that a single flower would fill an entire canvas. Her flower paintings expressed what Georgia saw in her mind and felt in her heart. The New York art world loved her paintings.

In 1929, Georgia wanted to paint new things. She moved to New Mexico where she began to paint the desert things and old buildings. Later, animal skulls and desert bones fascinated her. Many people also loved these paintings.

Another one of Georgia O'Keefe's famous paintings is owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The painting is of a skull and is called *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*. She painted it in 1931 with oil paints. This painting is a celebration of our country and of the western part of the United States. The painting is over 39 inches tall and over 35 inches wide.

## Child Life

Georgia was born on November 15, 1887. Her parents were Ida and Francis O'Keefe. Georgia grew up in a big farmhouse on the border of Texas and New Mexico. She was the second child born out of seven children. She knew that she wanted to be an artist from the time she was three. Georgia loved the colors of the sunset and used them in a great many of her paintings. She was able to take the simplest items in life and turn them into masterpieces.

It is said that Georgia got her painting skills from her grandmother, her love for land from her father, and her love for books from her mother. Georgia did not start school until she was nearly 15 years old. Because she was so talented, her mother insisted that Georgia have more training in art than was offered at the one room school that she was attending.

Shortly after Georgia began school, her family moved from Wisconsin to Williamsburg, Virginia. Her parents enrolled her in a boarding school for girls in the nearby town of Chatham, Virginia. Georgia was at first quiet in her new school. Soon she was very popular with her classmates because she made them laugh. While at the boarding school, Georgia painted for hours not hearing what the other students were doing or saying around her. Her art teacher was very encouraging to her and praised her work.

## **Becoming An Artist**

In 1905, after graduating from Chatham, Georgia went to Chicago to study at the Art Institute. At the Art Institute, Georgia was embarrassed because she had to draw pictures of male models who only wore loincloths, pieces of cloth that are worn around the waist and cover the person's front and back. Even though she got better and was no longer embarrassed of drawing nudes, she was not very good at drawing people.

In 1907, Georgia moved to New York City where she became a member of the Art Students' League, a popular art school of that time period. While there, she studied with William Martin Chase who taught her how to make her paintings more bright by using white paint and how to paint still lifes of objects. Georgia won first prize at the Art Student League for one of her paintings after studying with William Martin Chase.

She stopped painting in her early twenties to take a job as a commercial illustrator, a person who draws pictures for books and advertisements, in Chicago. She could not afford school any longer and women at that time were discouraged from becoming serious artists. Georgia decided to give up her dream of becoming an artist. With her family suffering from illnesses and Georgia suffering from a terrible case of measles, she moved back to Virginia.

After Georgia recovered, her sisters convinced her to go back to art school in Virginia. She attended the University of Virginia and studied with Alon Bement who once again excited her about art. He taught her a new style of painting that he learned from Arthur Wesley Dow, a New York art teacher. Dow's style was an abstract method that used geometric shapes and filled these spaces in a beautiful way. This would become the style of painting that would make Georgia famous.

## **A Long Life Filled With Beautiful Paintings**

Georgia's life as an artist took her to many places. She moved back to New York in 1914 to study with Arthur Wesley Dow. In 1915, she became a teacher at a women's college in South Carolina. In 1916, Georgia took a job as a teacher at West Texas State Normal College. While in the west, she began to paint the nature of the canyons and landscapes of the area. In 1918, she moved back to New York and married Alfred Stieglitz, the owner of an art gallery.

Although she would travel around the world, Georgia always returned to the privacy of her New Mexico home. In 1986, at the age of 98, Georgia O'Keeffe died in Santa Fe, New Mexico. During her life as an artist, she had more than nine hundred works of art exhibited at art museums. Her painting made her very wealthy. She received many awards, including the United States Medal of Freedom – the highest honor for a person not serving in the military.

## **Bibliography**

Gherman, Beverly. Georgia O'Keeffe the "Wideness and Wonder" of Her World. Atheneum, New York: Collier Macmillan Canada, Inc., 1978.

Turner, Robyn. Georgia O'Keeffe. Canada: Little, Brown and Company, 1987.

Many of the works produced by Georgia O'Keeffe during the 1920s and 1930s hover enticingly on the margins between figuration and abstraction. The notion that art could be entirely non-representational, or abstract, was widely explored in the decade from 1910, particularly in the works of the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky and the Dutchman Piet Mondrian. O'Keeffe's works shifted towards oil paintings which appeared to be magnified natural forms. In 1925, her first large-scale flower painting was exhibited in New York City. Georgia O'Keeffe is a 20th century American painter and pioneer of American Modernism best known for her canvases depicting flowers, skyscrapers, animal skulls and southeastern landscapes. Learn more at [Biography.com](https://www.biography.com). "When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment. I want to give that world to someone else. I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way - things I had no words for." Georgia O'Keeffe. Georgia O'Keeffe Biography.