

This Day in History... November 15, 1887

Birth of Georgia O'Keeffe

Artist Georgia Totto O'Keeffe was born on November 15, 1887, in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. Most well-known today for her close-up paintings of flowers, Georgia O'Keeffe found her greatest inspiration in the rugged deserts of New Mexico.

O'Keeffe decided to be an artist at the age of 10. She went on to study at several schools, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Virginia University, Columbia University, and the Students League of New York. O'Keeffe won several honors before temporarily giving up her art career in 1908. She believed she would never distinguish herself from other artists in the then common Realist style. However, in an art class four years later, she discovered Arthur Wesley Dow, who encouraged artists to express themselves with line, color, and shading.



Stamp pictures O'Keeffe's painting Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico/ Out Back of Marie's II.

Experimenting with these ideas, O'Keeffe began creating her signature paintings of large-scale flowers at close range in the mid-1920s. Much of her work was influenced by American photographer Alfred Stieglitz, whose works included closely cropped images. As popular as these paintings were, some people suggested they were representations of female anatomy, which O'Keeffe denied.

In 1924 O'Keeffe married Stieglitz, who had been exhibiting her works in his avant-garde gallery since 1916. Five years later, O'Keeffe set out for a change of scenery. She traveled to New Mexico and camped in the rugged deserts and mountains of the region. She was amazed at the beauty of the desert and eventually moved to the area and painted the landscapes that surrounded her. Greatly influencing her work, the Southwest landscape became one of her favorite subjects. She was immediately inspired and would spend most of the rest of her life there. She was so moved by the landscape, O'Keeffe is quoted as saying, "God told me if I painted that mountain enough, I could have it."



O'Keeffe spent summers in New Mexico for 20 years before moving there permanently in 1949.

During the 1950s O'Keeffe began to travel more, and in 1959 made a trip around the world. From that journey and subsequent airplane flights came her series on the sky and clouds.

O'Keeffe became one of America's leading artists, known for her sensitive, semi-abstract paintings derived from nature. Linked with the first generation of American modernists, her impressive career spanned the entire history of modern art. While much of the modernist work showed a strong European influence, O'Keeffe developed her own unique style, reducing and simplifying forms to an abstract study of color and light. Her best-known subjects included flowers, animal bones, and rocks.

O'Keeffe died on March 6, 1986, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. After her death, O'Keeffe received the distinct honor of having a fossilized species of archosaur named after her – *Effigia okeeffeae* (O'Keeffe's Ghost) – for her numerous paintings of, and longtime interest in, the American Southwest.



Stamp picturing O'Keeffe's Red Poppy, was issued in Santa Fe, where she spent her final years.



Many of O'Keeffe's early paintings were inspired by the photography of Alfred Stieglitz, who she married in 1924.

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