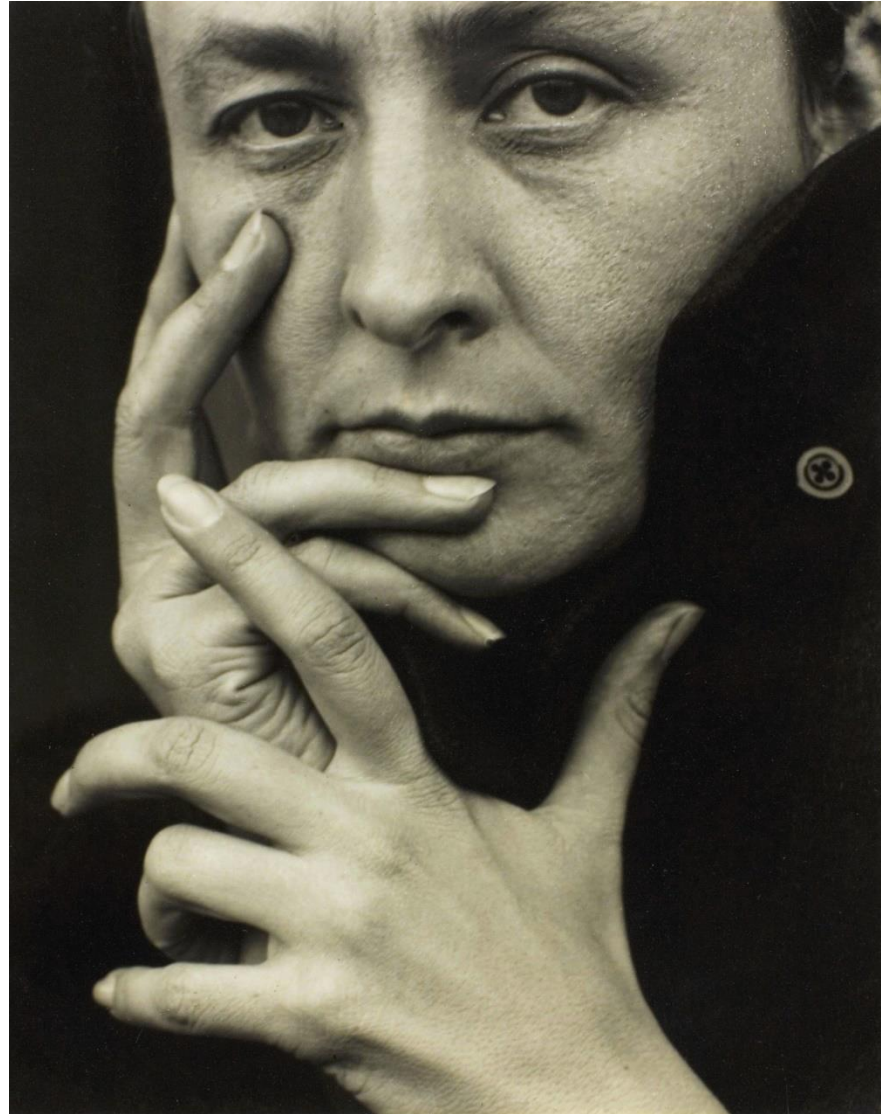


# Georgia O Keeffe



# WHO IS SHE AND WHAT IS SHE FAMOUS FOR?

Born in 1887, Georgia O'Keeffe was an American artist who painted nature in a way that showed how it made her feel. She is best known for her paintings of flowers and desert landscapes.

She played an important part in the development of modern art in America, becoming the first female painter to gain respect in New York's art world in the 1920s. Her unique and new way of painting nature, simplifying its shapes and forms meant that she was called a pioneer.

# WHAT INSPIRED HER?

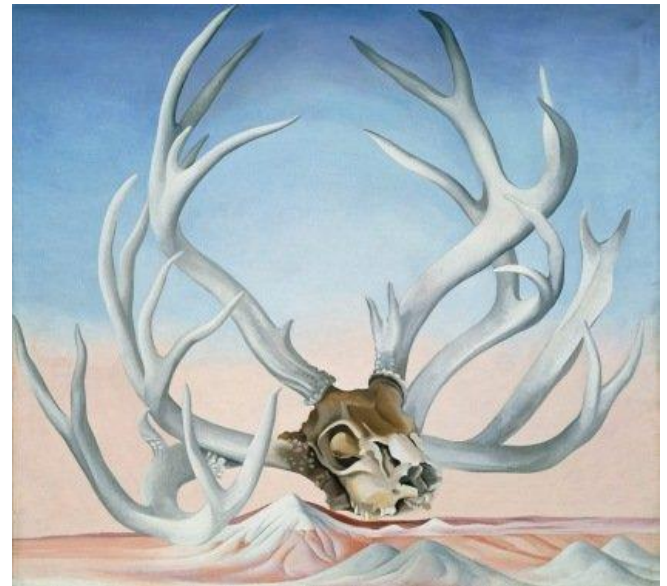
The artwork below is a landscape. Can you see how she has simplified the shapes of the hills in the painting?



As well as the shapes of the landscape itself, O'Keeffe was fascinated by the bones and skulls she found in the desert landscapes near where she lived. She said:

'To me they are as beautiful as anything I know...The bones seem to cut sharply to the centre of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho' it is vast and empty and untouchable.'

Do you agree? Why do you think she painted the bones so large in front of the landscape?

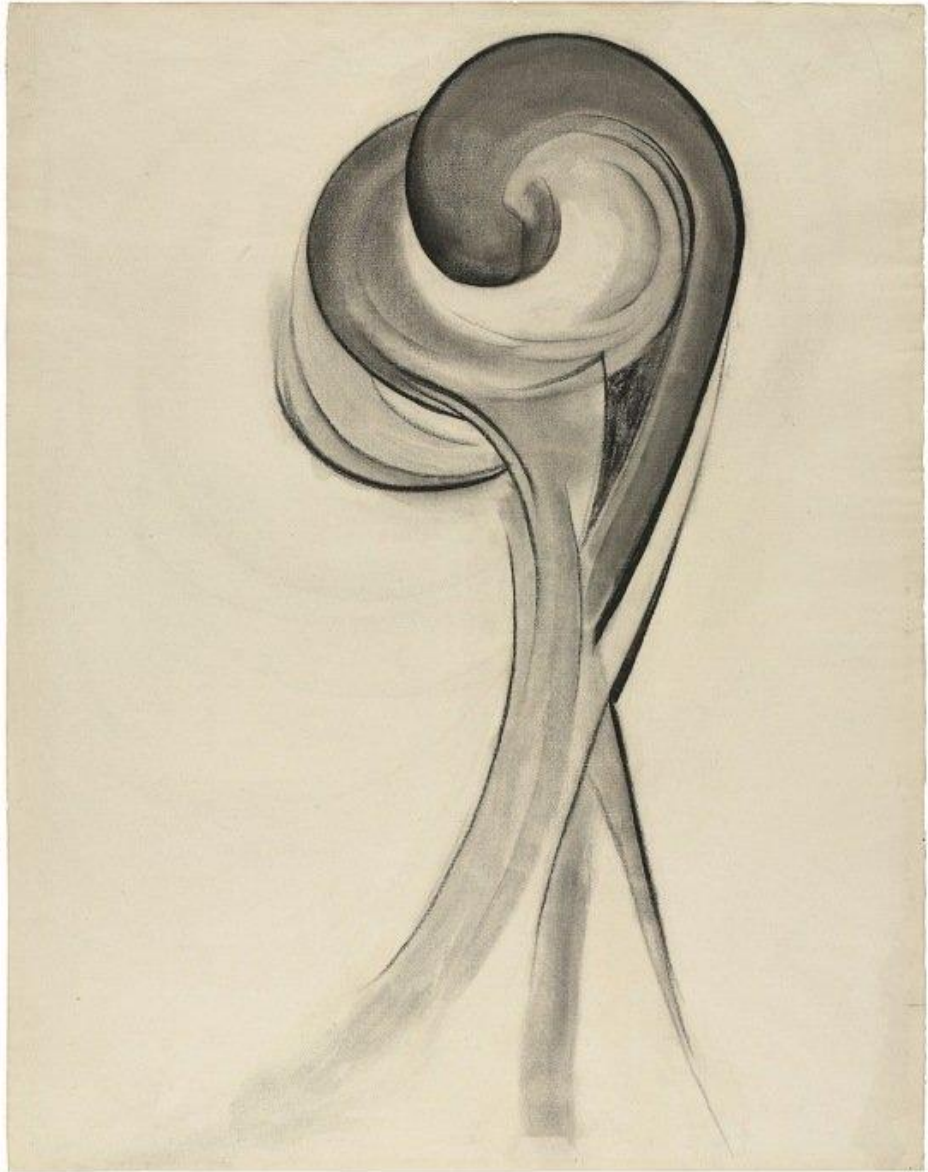




# HOW DID SHE DEVELOP HER STYLE?

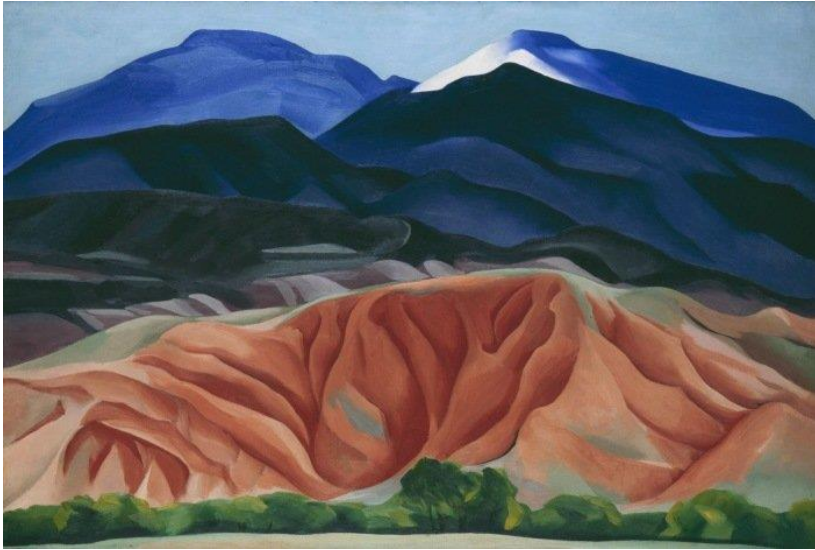
Georgia knew from the age of 12 that she wanted to be an artist. She went to art school but what she was taught there didn't seem relevant to the way she wanted to paint. Then in 1912 she discovered the revolutionary ideas of an artist and designer called Arthur Wesley Dow. He emphasised the importance of composition – which means how you arrange shapes and colours.

As O'Keeffe explained:  
'His idea was, to put it  
simply, fill a space in a  
beautiful way'. This  
was a light-bulb  
moment for her and  
from then on she  
began to experiment  
with shapes, colours  
and marks.



Georgia met other artists who, like her, were experimenting with abstract art. Art in the 1920s was exciting. Artists didn't just want to show how something looked but were using colours, shapes and brush-marks in unexpected ways to express meanings, ideas and feelings. This encouraged Georgia to develop her own unique style – a combination of abstract and realistic.





What words would you use to describe this landscape?

Look at this painting of hills, above. Although you can recognise what it is, it also has a strange and powerful atmosphere that a photograph of the landscape, or a more traditional, straightforward realistic painting, wouldn't have.

It was painted in New Mexico, USA. Georgia first visited New Mexico in 1916 and fell in love with the dramatic desert landscape with its rugged mountains. This is what she said about the landscape:

‘As soon as I saw it, that was my country. I’d never seen anything like it before but it fitted to me exactly. There’s something that’s in the air, its just different. The sky is different the stars are different, the wind is different’.

# ON THE ROAD

Georgia wanted to stay as close as possible to the remote landscape places she loved, she travelled around the desert drawing and painting. She battled the heat and heavy wind and camped out under the stars. Luckily she had favourite mobile studio with her – her car – which she'd specially adapted as a place to work!

Have you ever visited a landscape that has taken your breath away? Next time try putting those feelings across using shapes and colours and try, (as Georgia says) to 'fill the space in a beautiful way'.

[Tate Museum](#)