

Georgia O'Keeffe

Looking Deeper



Georgia O'Keeffe was born in 1887 and died in 1985, almost 100 years old and painting up till the end of her life. Even when she was a baby, Georgia O'Keeffe saw the world around her a little differently than most people do. Can you describe anything that you saw before you were a year old? Georgia could describe the shapes and patterns on a quilt she played on before she could even stand up.

When Georgia was growing up most girls learned embroidery and other ways of artwork that help decorate the house. Some girls became Art teachers. Few were encouraged to try to make their living as artists! O'Keeffe didn't see things that way at all. She started taking art lessons, and when she was twelve years old she decided to become an artist.

One day in her high school art class, she experimented with a new way of looking at the world. Holding up a wildflower, her teacher showed how important it was for her to examine it carefully before drawing it. She did look closely at it, but she did a lot more than that. She turned it in different directions, drawing it over and over again. Then she tried drawing just parts of it, to see what that would look like. Every time she drew it, she made the shape of the flower look more simple. Someone looking at her drawing might not have recognized the flower at all. That didn't matter at all to her. Just to copy the flower was dull. In her drawings, a flower became a world to be explored.

After painting for a few years as an adult O'Keeffe realized that she'd begun to copy other artists, but she still felt that she was doing differently than the other artists. She remembered her high school experience and began a series of paintings that explored the world of flowers up close and personal the way she liked to see them. Her compositions used the outside forms to frame the edges and to look inside the flowers. Her use of colors and simplified shapes created an abstraction of the flowers. She was just looking for the design and beauty that some people miss altogether. She said she wanted people to be "surprised into taking time to look...to see what I see of flowers."

