

Georgia O'Keeffe

Georgia O'Keeffe was a famous and influential American artist, best known for her paintings of flowers, skyscrapers and the landscape of New Mexico.

Early Life

For an artist whose style would go on to be recognised around the world, Georgia came from humble beginnings. She was born on 15th November 1887 on a wheat farm in Wisconsin, USA. The second of seven children, she was rarely lonely growing up. Although there were many chores to do on the farm, she was never without a sketchbook in her hand.



The natural world of the farm interested her and by the age of ten, she had decided that she wanted to be an artist. She was deeply influenced by the landscape of Wisconsin, which became evident in her later work. Her mother, Ida, encouraged Georgia's love of art and arranged for her to have art lessons.

Georgia left her modest home to go to art school in Chicago and then to New York to study painting. After this, she moved to Texas to teach art but she kept drawing. It wasn't easy being a woman artist at this time; most famous artists were men and some people didn't think women could be serious artists. Georgia sent some of her charcoal line drawings to a friend, who showed them to a famous photographer, Alfred Stieglitz; he **exhibited** Georgia's work in his gallery in 1916. Alfred and Georgia later married.

A Brand-New Style

Georgia was disappointed that people in big cities like New York were too busy to pay attention to small beautiful things like flowers. She decided to make them pay attention. She said, "I'll paint what I see – what the flower is to me but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it." This was just what she did. She put her face close to a flower and painted what she saw. Suddenly, the smallest flower became an enormous painting! She used oil paints in vivid, bold colours and she painted on huge canvases. This new and unusual style made even busy New Yorkers stop and take notice.



Georgia was also **inspired** by the busy city of New York, where she lived. She painted the towering skyscrapers from below as if she was a tiny child looking up at them. These paintings also made people look at the modern city in a new way.

In 1929, Georgia visited New Mexico and was amazed at the landscape; the incredible rock formations, the unusual light, the bones of animals dried out by the sun and the **Navajo** culture. She began painting landscapes and natural objects in New Mexico and these paintings added to her success.



Artistic Legacy

In her astonishing lifetime, Georgia painted thousands of paintings that have now been exhibited in galleries all over the world. Her **legacy** is that she is one of the greatest American artists of the twentieth century and has been called the 'Mother of American **Modernism**'.

In 2014, one of Georgia's artworks set a new auction record for a painting by a female artist. The painting sold for 44.4 million dollars (28.8 million pounds)! The painting can now be seen, alongside many of her others, at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe. The museum was opened in 1997 so that her genius would never be forgotten.

Glossary

abstract: A style of art that uses shape, lines and colour in a way that does not show things as they are.

exhibited: To show something publicly, such as paintings in a gallery.

legacy: How someone is remembered.

magnified: To make something appear larger than it is.

Modernism: Art that moves away from the ideas and methods of traditional styles.

Navajo culture: The art, music and clothing of the Native American people of the Southwestern United States.



Questions

1. Where was Georgia born? Tick **one**.

- New York
- Wisconsin
- New Mexico
- Texas

2. Number the events below to show the order that they happened to Georgia.

- Her charcoal drawings were exhibited in a gallery.
- She painted things looking up.
- Her mother encouraged her love of art.
- She painted things up close.
- She was disappointed in the people of New York.

3. Find and copy one word that describes Georgia's background.

4. Fill in the missing words.

Georgia was inspired by the places _____ and _____.

5. Who did Georgia marry?

6. What was Georgia's main goal in painting her flower paintings? How did she achieve it?

7. ***She was deeply influenced by the landscape of Wisconsin, which became evident in her later work.***

How do you think Georgia's love of the landscape as a child can be seen in her later work?

8. What are the main similarities between Georgia's flower paintings and her paintings of skyscrapers?

9. ***It wasn't easy being a woman artist at this time; most famous artists were men and some people didn't think women could be serious artists.***

Give evidence from the text that proves these people were wrong not to take Georgia seriously.
