





Georgia O'Keeffe and the Southwestern Still Life

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Founders Day Dinner & Exhibition Preview

October 30

Member Preview Days

October 31 & November 1

Exhibition Opening Party

November 1

The ancient land and rich cultural traditions of the Southwest region of the United States fueled the imaginations of many early 20th-century artists, including Georgia O'Keeffe. The evocative still-life paintings produced by these artists provide a fascinating example of art's capacity to document the essence of a place and time. *Georgia O'Keeffe and the Southwestern Still Life* will feature works by O'Keeffe and her contemporaries that help tell the story of the American Southwest as seen through the eyes of the artists that lived there. It is the first major exhibition to focus on the role of the still life as a means of exploring the culture and diversity of the region.

Home of arresting desert vistas, rugged terrain, and distinctive plant and animal life, the Southwest is one of the most awe-inspiring regions of America. Numerous 20th-century artists were drawn to its beauty. Some artists stayed for long periods of time, while others passed through only for short visits, but a great many were moved to capture the land in their art. One might imagine, naturally enough, that the typical vehicle for doing so would be the landscape. However, many of the most striking images of the Southwest that these artists produced were still-life paintings that depicted objects that defined and symbolized the region. The breadth of these artists' subjects and styles resulted in an array of compelling

images that reflect the unique character of the American Southwest. Approximately 60 such works will be on view in the IMA exhibition, which will be primarily organized around groups of still-life subjects such as flowers and edibles, cultural artifacts, and bones. Throughout, the exhibition will prompt visitors to expand their understanding of what a still life is and what it can convey.

Georgia O'Keeffe's still lifes are instrumental to how we envision the Southwest. O'Keeffe first traveled to the Southwest in 1917, when she spent a few days in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and was immediately captivated by the region. However, her next opportunity to return wasn't until 1929, when she was invited as a guest of Mabel Dodge Luhan, a wealthy American art patron who had established an art and literary colony in Taos. The following year O'Keeffe began her regular summer sojourns to New Mexico. Searching for a quieter place to stay than the bustling Luhan compound, she discovered the more secluded Ghost Ranch and spent every summer there from 1934 until 1940. O'Keeffe later purchased and renovated a ruined hacienda in the village of Abiquiu, and in 1949 she moved permanently to New Mexico, spending part of each year at either Ghost Ranch or Abiquiu.

During O'Keeffe's exploration of the surrounding landscape, she discovered the animal bones that littered the desert floor. These



Opposite: John Loengard (American, b. 1934), Profile view of American artist Georgia O'Keeffe leaning against a wall amidst the shadows of a fence in a courtyard, Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1966. The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images. © John Loengard.
Above: Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986). *Deer Horns*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 36 x 16 in. Collection of Louis Bacon. (O'Keeffe 941) Photography by Christie's Images. © Copyright 2014 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Image courtesy International Arts®



Above: Victor Higgins (1884–1949). *Petunias*, ca. 1928–1930. Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in. Private collection, Courtesy Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico. © Copyright 2014. Image courtesy International Arts®

unusual objects inspired O’Keeffe from the first time she saw them, bleached white from lying in the sun. She called the remains “as beautiful as anything I know” and considered them symbols of the place she had come to love and call home: “To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around—hair, eyes and all, with their tails switching, the bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho’ it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty.”

The paintings by O’Keeffe in the exhibition illustrate the variety of still-life subjects that will be on display. Several feature the skeletal remains she described so eloquently; she also painted works that reflect an awareness of Pueblo culture and artifacts. Among her favorite subjects during her time at Abiquiu was the patio of her newly renovated adobe home, and the shadowed passageway leading to the sunlit patio became a promi-

nent focus of these still lifes. However, when thinking of O’Keeffe’s still-life paintings, flowers are probably the subjects that first come to mind to many viewers. The exhibition includes a number of such works concentrating on floral subjects, all depicted in the close-up, vibrantly colored style for which O’Keeffe is best known.

Georgia O’Keeffe’s iconic still lifes were influential in the development of an energetic Southwestern art scene that flourishes yet today. A key component of the exhibition is its inclusion of works by other artists who similarly drew on the expressive potential of the still life to capture the spirit of the Southwest region. Some of their names will likely be familiar to IMA audiences. The American Modernist Marsden Hartley, for example, found inspiration during a yearlong stay in New Mexico and created still-life paintings in which he depicted New Mexican subjects such as Hispanic santos, or saints. The Indiana-born Victor Higgins relocated permanently to Taos and became an important figure in the Southwest art scene. Many of his Southwestern still lifes contain brightly colored flowers set in Native American pottery; local textiles also feature prominently in these works. Other artists, though, may prove to be discoveries for many viewers. The range of approaches they engage in addressing their Southwestern subjects allows for a notably multifaceted investigation of the exhibition theme.

A broad variety of additional interpretive experiences will be available in the exhibition. Audio guides and rich in-gallery video content will provide expanded information on key works, artists, and themes. The Inspired by O’Keeffe school competition and exhibition will offer schools a meaningful opportunity to integrate and respond to the featured exhibition in the classroom, and selected student

works will be displayed in the gallery. Visitors can even create their own still lifes in a dedicated drawing studio space within the exhibition gallery. All these activities will contribute to a deeper understanding of how a still life can resonate with intensely personal meaning—knowledge shared by O’Keeffe and the many artists she influenced.

Organized by Joseph S. Czestochowski,
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