

Spotlight on Georgia O'Keefe's "Summer Days"

"Summer Days" is O'Keefe's tribute to her adopted state of New Mexico. Using her favorite props, a skull, flowers and the land, O'Keefe created the abstract landscape in oils in 1936. The focal point is a large elk skull floating in a white sky. Beneath the skull is a bouquet of flowers, red, pink, and yellow. In the lower half of the painting, rugged reddish-brown mountains appear in the distance across the entire horizon. Patches of clear sky are breaking through the clouds above the mountains. The painting seems sparse in its composition but creates a powerful statement on the inevitability of the life cycle, death and renewal.

The focal point or dominant image of "Summer Days" is the large elk skull and bouquet of flowers beneath it. By making them the larg-

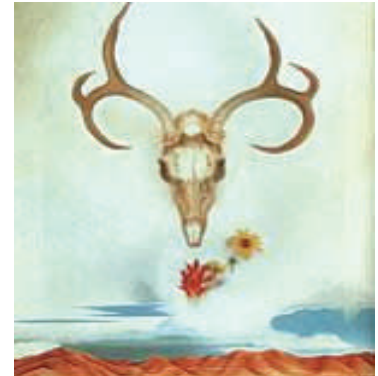
est images and placing them at the top of the painting, O'Keefe draws the viewer's eye to them first. She also creates a feeling of three-dimensional space with this placement. The illusion is complemented with a small band of mountains in the background with runs across the bottom of the composition.

O'Keefe uses some of her favorite organic shapes in "Summer Days". The antlers and skull represent the passing of the flesh. The skull is anonymous, stripped of all of its identity. The flowers symbolize the renewal of life. The delicate forms, fresh with life contrast with the bare, dry skull. The mountains are treated in a hard edged manner to make them stand out against the background and seem even more rigid and hard.

Patches of soft, blue sky are more softly blended and act as a buffer between the lower and upper areas of the composition.

O'Keefe uses realistic colors in the painting. Dark tans and reddish-browns are the colors of the desert, and are used on the skull and mountains. These contrast with the bright red, pink, and yellow of the flowers beneath the skull. Small patches of blue slashes across the stark sky give the painting a dusty yet cool feeling.

There are a few areas with value changes in the painting. The skull is modeled helping to give it a three dimensional quality. The mountains also have some shading to create the ridges and valleys. These areas are in contrast against the flat white background



Summer Days, 1936
***"I have used
these things to
say what is to
me the wideness
and wonder of
the world as I
live in it."***
- Georgia O'Keefe

About the Artist

- 1887—Born on a farm in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin
- 1904—Studies at The Art Institute of Chicago
- 1912—Teaches art in Texas
- 1919—Meets Alfred Stieglitz who shows her work in his art gallery.
- 1923—Georgia moves to New York to paint full time.
- 1924—Marries Stieglitz
- 1929—Visits New Mexico for the first time
- 1946—Stieglitz dies, moves to New Mexico
- 1970's—Reaches peak of popularity
- 1986—Dies at her home in Santa Fe, New Mexico



Georgia O'Keefe outside her studio

Which gives the upper section of the painting a flat appearance.

Line is used to create movement in the painting. The motion begins with the curving, flowing contours of the antlers. The motion gathers together as the skull and leads downward to the jagged edges of the mountain where it leads the viewer's eye out of the painting along the horizon. The effect is similar to a swirling wind which suddenly dies. The painting's symmetry is created by placing the focal point in the center of the composition. The skull and flowers dominate the upper half of the painting but are balanced against the darker mountains with balance the painting horizontally. This along with the visual flow, big to small to smaller, give the painting a quiet, restful mood.

"Summer Days" is a skillfully executed painting which succeeds in creating a quiet, reflective mood. Using a sparse composition, O'Keefe makes a powerful impression on the viewer which forces one to contemplate the never ending cycle of life and our own place in the cosmos.