

Media release

Georgia O'Keeffe

23 January – 22 May 2022

The Fondation Beyeler will devote the first exhibition of its anniversary year to Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), one of the most significant painters and an icon of modern American art. With 85 works from mainly American public and private collections, «Georgia O'Keeffe» offers a representative overview of this exceptional artist's many-faceted and endlessly surprising work. The retrospective provides European viewers with a rare opportunity for such in-depth exploration of Georgia O'Keeffe's work, which is hardly represented in collections outside the United States.

The exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler highlights O'Keeffe's distinctive way of contemplating her environment and translating her perceptions into wholly unprecedented images of reality – at times almost abstract, at times close to their model in nature. «One rarely takes the time to really see a flower. I have painted it big enough so that others would see what I see.» This quote from 1926 can be viewed as a guiding thread when considering O'Keeffe's art and life. O'Keeffe developed a highly distinctive visual language, shifting between abstraction and figuration, which to this day has lost none of its topicality. Her singular gaze, combined with her delicate and respectful approach to nature, make Georgia O'Keeffe the most significant and interesting landscape and nature painter of the 20th century.

From 1918, Georgia O'Keeffe spent decisive years of her artistic development in New York City, at the heart of the then fashionable and highly influential small circle around Alfred Stieglitz, photographer, gallery owner and advocate of modern art. Next to providing an early venue for the display and discussion of the European avant-garde, his gallery also fostered new American art and photography. O'Keeffe owed her early recognition and subsequent career to the support provided by Stieglitz, who later became her husband, and to her connection over many decades to the New York art scene. Yet in terms of her artistic output, urban life left only very few discernible traces.

O'Keeffe grew up on her parents' dairy farm in Wisconsin, in the American Midwest. The decisive steps in her artistic development took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, and later in Canyon, Texas, where she taught art from 1916 to 1918. Even after moving to New York, her life as an artist remained punctuated by regular stays in different places. During many years, she thus spent summers at the Stieglitz family's holiday home on Lake George in the State of New York, which provided the inspiration for much of the work she produced during this time. In 1929, O'Keeffe for the first time spent several weeks in New Mexico in the American Southwest, where she would henceforth return every year, always alone, and where she would settle for good following Stieglitz' death.

The exhibition starts with a look at O'Keeffe's early works, produced during her time as an art teacher in Virginia and in Texas. Charcoal drawings such as *Early Abstraction*, 1915, and *No. 14 Special*, 1916, are shown alongside a selection of small-format, saturated and vibrant watercolours. *Red Landscape*, 1916/17, with its night sky lit up by a spectacular explosion that turns the barren hillscape crimson red, is one of the rare oil paintings produced during these years.

Subsequent works such as *Blue and Green Music*, 1919/1921, and *Series I – From the Plains*, 1919, manifest the artist's path toward abstraction. Fundamentally, however, O'Keeffe's work is defined by the coexistence of figurative and abstract painting. Plants, especially flowers, provided key motifs in O'Keeffe's work. In her large-scale flower paintings, such as *Jimson Weed / White Flower No. 1*, 1932, one of the most famous in this group, or *Oriental Poppies*, 1927, O'Keeffe's interest in the movement of «straight photography» becomes apparent.

O'Keeffe found her most important sources of inspiration in landscapes and in the natural world; she painted both figurative and abstract works based on landscape motifs, first on Lake George and later in New Mexico. The works from her first stay in New Mexico, among them *Ranchos Church No. 1*, 1929, and *Gray Cross with Blue*, 1929, were inspired by typical elements of the region such as its adobe architecture or the penitents' crosses erected by a religious lay brotherhood. This is also the period in which she painted *Mule's Skull with Pink Poinsettias*, 1936, one of her famous paintings featuring the animal skulls she found in the desert. During the years of the war, in which O'Keeffe lived permanently in New Mexico, her view of the landscape shifted. In her two series *Black Place I–IV*, 1944, and *Black Place I–III*, 1945, she represented the greyish black landscape in an unusually dark palette, from a bird's-eye view and in ever more abstracted form. The still life *It Was a Man and a Pot*, 1942, featuring a human skull, suggests that O'Keeffe's perception of her surroundings changed in the 1940s as the war raged on.

In the last room of the exhibition, O'Keeffe's late work comes face to face with *Black Mobile with Hole*, 1954, by Alexander Calder (1898–1976), whose work has long been closely associated with the Fondation Beyeler – by way of both the museum's collection and several exhibitions. While Calder, unlike O'Keeffe, maintained an ongoing relationship with Europe, both artists shared a deep attachment to the wide expanses and endless horizons of rural America, which permeate their work.

During her own lifetime, Georgia O'Keeffe was considered a major exponent and co-initiator of new American art as propagated since the late 1910s next to and distinct from the European avant-garde. In 1943, her first museum retrospective took place at the Art Institute of Chicago and in 1946, the Museum of Modern Art in New York organised a large exhibition of her work, the first such display the institution had ever devoted to a female artist. Most of O'Keeffe's works are to be found in the United States, both in more than 100 public collections and in private hands. In Europe, to which O'Keeffe herself travelled for the first time in 1953 aged 65, only around a dozen works are held in private and public collections. Her first major exhibition on the Old Continent took place in 1993 at the Hayward Gallery in London. One of the rare exhibitions in the years that followed, and the very first to be held in Switzerland, was the retrospective curated by Bice Curiger at the Kunsthaus Zürich in 2003. Today, Georgia O'Keeffe is also among the highly recognised artists in Europe, even though the originals of her works are rarely to be seen here.

«Georgia O'Keeffe» is curated by Theodora Vischer, Chief Curator, and is on view at the Fondation Beyeler from 23 January to 22 May 2022. The exhibition has been organised by the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, and the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in partnership with the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe.

The exhibition catalogue is published in German by Hatje Cantz Verlag, Berlin. Numbering 208 pages, it brings together articles by Cody Hartley, Anna Hiddleston-Galloni, Didier Ottinger, Marta Ruiz del Árbol, Ariel Plotek and Julia Keller. With a foreword by Sam Keller and Theodora Vischer.

The exhibition is generously supported by:

Beyeler-Stiftung
Hansjörg Wyss, Wyss Foundation

Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne
FX & Natasha de Mallmann
Erica Stiftung
Patronesses of the Fondation Beyeler
Terra Foundation for American Art
Wyeth Foundation for American Art

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25 Years Fondation Beyeler

In 2022 the Fondation Beyeler celebrates its 25th anniversary. Switzerland's most visited art museum is internationally renowned for its high-calibre exhibitions, its important collection of modern and contemporary art, as well as its ambitious programme of events. The museum, designed by Renzo Piano, is idyllically situated in the park with its old trees and lily ponds. The location in the middle of a nature reserve with a view across cornfields, grazing cows and vineyards at the foothills of the Black Forest is unique. For the future, the Beyeler-Stiftung is planning an extension in the adjacent park with the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, thus strengthening the harmonious combination of art, architecture and nature.

In 2022, the Fondation Beyeler's exhibition programme will be guided by its 25th anniversary celebrations. It will launch with a major retrospective on Georgia O'Keeffe, followed by the summer exhibition «Mondrian». In autumn, the Fondation Beyeler will present its most comprehensive exhibition to date of works from the collection, along with a richly varied events schedule. Further information: www.fondationbeyeler.ch/en/25years

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Fondation Beyeler opening hours: 10am to 6pm daily, Wednesday 10am to 8pm



Georgia O'Keeffe
Oriental Poppies, 1927
Oil on canvas, 76.7 x 102.1 cm
Collection of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Museum purchase.
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



Georgia O'Keeffe
Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1, 1932
Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 101.6 cm
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Edward C. Robison III.



Georgia O'Keeffe
Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV, 1930
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe, 1987
© Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Georgia O'Keeffe
Series I, No. 8, 1919
Oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munich, Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation
© Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau Munich



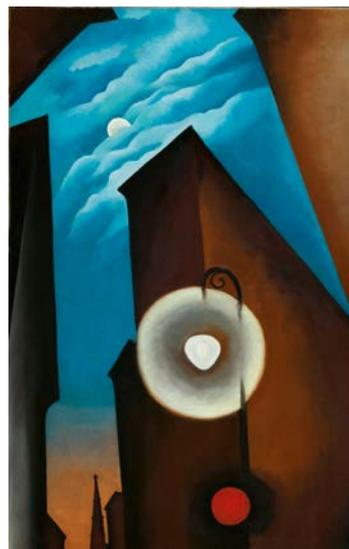
Georgia O'Keeffe
Grey Blue & Black—Pink Circle, 1929
Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 121.9 cm
Dallas Museum of Art, Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation
© Dallas Museum of Art
Photo: Courtesy Dallas Museum of Art



Georgia O'Keeffe
From the Lake No. 1, 1924
Oil on canvas, 91.4 cm x 76.2 cm
Des Moines Art Center, Nathan Emory Coffin Collection, purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust, 1984
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Rich Sanders, Des Moines



Georgia O'Keeffe
The Shelton with Sunspots, N.Y., 1926
Oil on canvas, 123.2 x 76.8 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Leigh B. Block, 1985
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY



Georgia O'Keeffe
New York Street with Moon, 1925
Oil on canvas, 122 x 77 cm
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection on loan to the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Provenance: Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection on loan at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid



Georgia O'Keeffe
***Pelvis with the Distance*, 1943**
Oil on canvas, 60.6 x 75.6 cm
Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields,
Gift of Anne Marmon Greenleaf
in memory of Caroline Marmon Fesler,
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



Georgia O'Keeffe
***The Chestnut Tree - Grey*, 1924**
Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm
Myron Kunin Collection of
American Art, Minneapolis, MN
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum /
2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art



Georgia O'Keeffe
***Train at Night in the Desert*, 1916**
Watercolor and pencil on paper, 30.3 x 22.5 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired with
matching funds from the Committee on Drawings and the
National Endowment for the Arts, 1979.
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, Pro Litteris, Zurich
Photo: © 2021. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art,
New York/Scala, Florence



Georgia O'Keeffe
***Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico / Out Back of Marie's II*, 1930**
Oil on canvas, 61.6 x 92.1 cm
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, NM.
Gift of The Burnett Foundation, 1997
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe / Art Resource, NY



Georgia O'Keeffe
***Lake George with Crows*, 1921**
Oil on canvas, 72 x 63.2 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation,
Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1995
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum /
2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: NGC



Georgia O'Keeffe
***Patio with Cloud*, 1956**
Oil on canvas, 91.44 x 76.2 cm
Milwaukee Art Museum,
Gift of Mrs. Edward R. Wehr
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum /
2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: John R. Glembin



Georgia O'Keeffe
***Abstraction - Alexis*, 1928**
Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm
Regula and Beat Curti
© Georgia O'Keeffe Museum /
2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo: Courtesy of the Georgia
O'Keeffe Museum



Georgia O'Keeffe
***Gray Cross with Blue*, 1929**
Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 61 cm
Albuquerque Museum, museum purchase, 1983 & 1985
General Obligation Bonds, Frederick R. Weisman Foundation,
Overwest Corporation, and The Albuquerque Museum Foundation
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Photo: David Nufer

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