





13 Women Artists

Children Should Know

Bettina Schumann

PRESTEL 

Munich • Berlin • London • New York

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This

book introduces you to thirteen great women artists. You will learn about the dreams that the thirteen artists followed throughout their lives and discover how these women were able to fulfill them. This book tells you where and when they lived and what they managed to achieve with their art. Almost all of them were successful during their own lifetime, which is not something every artist manages by any means—and for women artists it has always been twice as difficult.

Of course you will also get to know some of their most important works of art. You can answer the quiz questions and find lots of ideas for your own pictures.

The timeline gives you an idea of important events which happened during the lifetime of each artist in this book. And right at the back you will find explanations of terms and names which are marked with an asterisk* in the text. Have fun reading and experimenting!

And just one more thing:
Be careful—
art is infectious!

Explanation
of terms and
names*

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Sofonisba Anguissola— The painter of wonderful portraits

Sofonisba Anguissola created magically lively portraits which captured the true character of her subjects. In those days that was something completely new.

Her early works were mostly self-portraits that show her remarkable talent and her great beauty. In order to make Sofonisba famous, her father sent the pictures to the most important royal courts of the time. And so it came about that this young girl from a minor aristocratic family was summoned to the court of King Philip II of Spain who, in those days, ruled over her native Cremona. She was to give fourteen-year-old Queen Isabella painting lessons. She became Isabella's favorite lady-in-waiting.

Sofonisba produced a number of portraits of the Spanish royal family. There were a lot of rules in those days about portrait painting and artists who painted the Queen, for example, had to make sure that she look as dignified as possible. But all the same, Sofonisba always managed to give her pictures a personal touch.

She observed her fellow humans with humor and affection, and chose her subjects to match. One of her pictures shows a little boy crying because he has just been pinched by a crab. His big sister smiles kindly as she comforts him. Portraying scenes like this from everyday life was also something new at that time.

Sofonisba lived during the Renaissance*. It was then that people started to try to paint things according to nature for the first time. And they also began to see how each individual person was unique and important. Girls were allowed to enjoy a proper education—and that was new as well! Sofonisba was lucky to be born at that time.

Born:
1532 in Cremona

Died:
1625 in Palermo

Lived in:
Cremona, Madrid,
Genoa, and Palermo

Children:
None of her own, but
her second husband
had a son by a previ-
ous marriage

Era:
Renaissance*

Good to know

A man called Giorgio Vasari wrote a famous book about the most important artists of his time and it was a great honor to be included. He reported enthusiastically about Sofonisba: "... indeed, the people she paints seem to be alive and the only thing they cannot do is speak..."



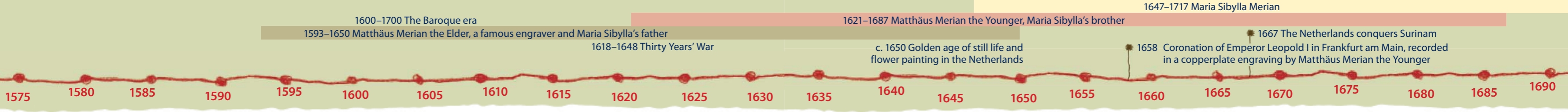
Lucia, Minerva, and
Europa Anguissola
Playing Chess, 1555
National Museum, Poznań

Here Sofonisba has painted three of her five sisters playing chess—Lucia is on the left, Minerva on the right, and Europa in the middle. A maid is watching them. Look at their faces: can you guess what they are laughing about?

Quiz

Do you agree with Giorgio Vasari? What do you think they might be saying! You can find some suggestions on page 46.

Would you also like to draw a portrait? Why not have a go! The easiest way to start is to copy a photograph in black and white using a pencil.



Born:
April 2, 1647 in Frankfurt am Main

Died:
January 13, 1717 in Amsterdam

Lived in:
Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Castle Waltha (Frisia), Surinam, and Amsterdam

Children:
Two daughters

Era:
Baroque*

Maria Sibylla Merian-Butterflies, bugs, and other creepy-crawlies

Maria Sibylla Merian was fascinated by the metamorphosis of a chrysalis into a beautiful butterfly. That even inspired her to travel to tropical Surinam in South America.



What an amazing woman! She had the courage—400 years ago—to do things which would be pretty daring even today. Or would you—assuming you were already grown up—just set sail across the Atlantic to visit the unknown country of Surinam, in order to catch butterflies in the jungle and then preserve and draw them? Maria Sibylla Merian did just that!

At the age of eleven she was already a highly skilled copperplate engraver*. When she was thirteen she first observed the metamorphosis of butterflies at a silk farm. For her it was a “divine miracle!”

Maria Sibylla could not forget about the miracle she had seen. She roamed through the meadows near where she lived in Frankfurt, Germany, and collected caterpillars. At home she put them in jars and boxes—but what do caterpillars eat? Imagine her joy when another butterfly emerged! The Church regarded insects as “the Devil’s creatures” and the neighbors started to gossip: “She’s a witch!” they said—which was dangerous as there were still witch hunts* at that time. But Maria Sibylla refused to be put off. She observed and drew one “divine miracle” after the other.



Attacus Atlas (Moth and Pupa), Wild Wasp, Caterpillar of a Saturniid Moth, 1700–02
St. Petersburg Watercolors, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg

Maria Sibylla discovered that each butterfly concentrates on one particular type of plant for its food. It lays its eggs on that plant and the caterpillars eat the leaves and grow big and fat before developing into a chrysalis and finally emerging as a butterfly. That is why Maria Sibylla always painted the plant which was the source of food together with the creature in all its stages of development.

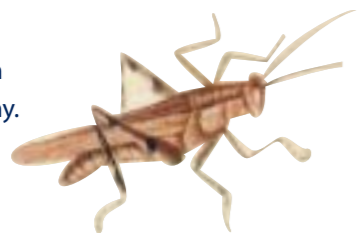
Darevskia Lizard, Great Earless Lizard, Surinam Ameiva, Gecko, 1699–1701
St. Petersburg Watercolors, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg

During her trip to Surinam, Maria Sibylla was not only interested in butterflies. Look how carefully she made these drawings and then colored them using watercolors. Her drawings served as templates for copperplate engravings* which could then be printed.



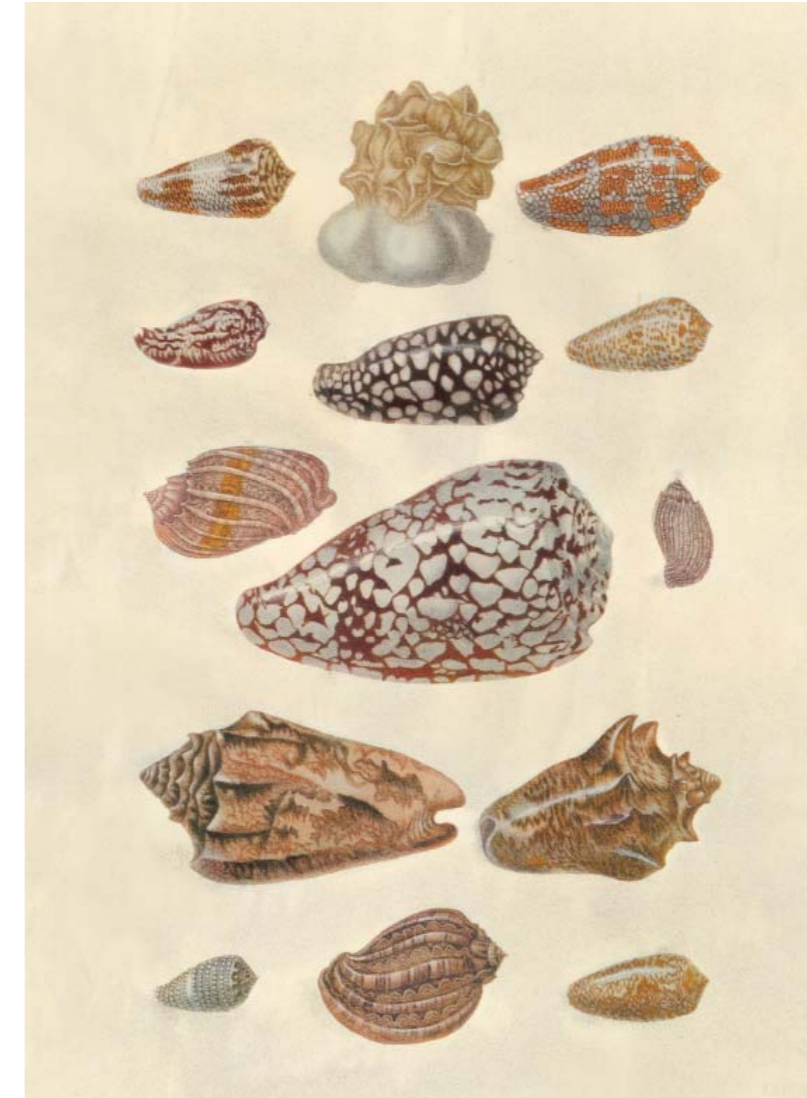
Tips
You can find out all about butterflies and where and when you can see tropical butterflies near your home from this UK website: www.ukbutterflies.co.uk or in the USA: www.butterfliesandmoths.org

Some of the butterflies prepared by Maria Sibylla in Surinam have survived for 400 years and can still be seen today. They form part of the “Gerning Collection” in the Landesmuseum Wiesbaden in Germany.



Frog and Various Insects, before 1699 or after 1702
St. Petersburg Watercolors, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg

Maria Sibylla’s curiosity was aroused by everything which buzzed, crawled, or hummed.



Prosobranchiae: Cone Snail, Limpet, and Volute, 1704/05
St. Petersburg Watercolors, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg

Strange creatures like these snails were brought back to Europe from far-away colonies*. The artists of the time were inspired by them to paint still lifes*.

One day Maria Sibylla had the chance to see examples of the most beautiful tropical butterflies from Surinam. It was a sight which filled her with a longing to go on a voyage of exploration to that very place! She was the very first person to carry out such a plan.

She set sail for South America with her younger daughter. The two women spent two years in Surinam. Indians helped them to clear paths through the jungle so that they could watch and draw the animals and plants. Then Maria Sibylla became seriously ill with malaria and she and her daughter had to return to Amsterdam.

But in their luggage they had a real hoard of preserved animals and insects as well as lots of drawings which they displayed in their house in Amsterdam. Many visitors came to marvel at the exhibition. Then Maria Sibylla produced her most magnificent work: *Metamorphosis Insectorium Surinamensium*, illustrated with lots of engravings, detailed descriptions, and scientific observations.

What would your most beautiful butterfly look like?

Good to know
There is a “Maria Sibylla Merian Prize”, which is awarded every year to two young women artists with the aim of supporting talented young women artists.

1826 The first photograph is taken

1860–1910 Impressionism

1870/71 Franco-Prussian War

1914–1918 World War I

1810 1815 1820 1825 1830 1835 1840 1845 1850 1855 1860 1865 1870 1875 1880 1885 1890 1895 1900 1905 1910 1915 1920 1925



The Child's Bath
(*La Toilette*), 1893
The Art Institute of
Chicago

A mother is tenderly washing her daughter's feet. Both of them are totally concentrating on each other and aren't taking any notice of what is going on around them. It really makes you feel as if you are secretly watching them without their knowledge, doesn't it? That is because of the unusual angle from diagonally above them which Mary chose.

Mary Cassatt— The Impressionists' friend

She was gifted, famous, and wealthy. Mary Cassatt was an American artist who chose mostly to paint women—especially mothers with their children.



Once she had put her mind to something, Mary could be quite stubborn. Her father felt the full force of it; he was not at all pleased that his daughter had decided to become an artist. But she insisted on having her own way and that was a good thing as her work would be compared with that of the best artists of her time.

Mary spent most of her life in Europe. At that time, Impressionism* was just coming into fashion in Paris, which was the art capital in those days. Arriving from America, Mary was full of enthusiasm for this style of painting. She became friendly with some of the Impressionist painters and exhibited her work alongside theirs. Her bright pictures, full of shimmering colors, delighted the public too. She soon became famous—despite being not only a foreigner, but a woman too. It was a really unusual career at that time!

As she grew older, Mary's eyesight failed and she had to stop painting. Nonetheless, she continued to support Impressionist art actively. It was thanks to her that some of her fellow artists also became famous in America.

Another new thing was that the Impressionists went outside to paint. Where would you choose to go to paint nature? Which tree, stream, or park is your favorite?

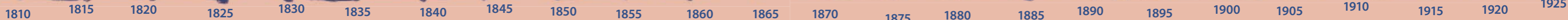


Born:
May 22, 1845 in
Allegheny near
Pittsburgh, USA
Died:
June 14, 1926 in
Mesnil-Théribus,
France
Children:
None
Style:
Impressionism*

**A Woman and a Girl
Driving, 1881**
Philadelphia Museum of
Art

Wild horses couldn't stop these two as they drive along together. The man in the background hardly seems to be of any importance at all. Mary often showed women as active and determined—not just young and pretty. That was something new at the time.





The Minuet, 1892
Penlee House, Penzance,
Cornwall

The minuet is an old French folk dance which was popular until well into the nineteenth century. Here, the people are dancing at home. Look carefully to see how many reflections and sources of light you can see in this picture.



Elizabeth Armstrong Forbes— Children were her favorite subject

Elizabeth Armstrong Forbes went traveling in order to learn how to paint. In the end she found the place where she really belonged.



What could be nicer than to live with friends in a pretty village by the sea and to spend your time with them doing what you like best in the whole world: painting? Elizabeth was lucky enough to do just that. She settled in the artists' colony* in Newlyn, Cornwall, in the southwest of England. She became successful and was a recognized artist. She even founded a painting school of her own in Newlyn. However, before she settled down she traveled a great deal between Canada, England, the United States, Germany, France, and the Netherlands.

Elizabeth was born in Canada. When she was eighteen she left for London and attended Kensington Arts School before going to the Arts Students League in New York, where she positively soaked up new ideas. They painted outdoors in the open air where they could see the light changing at different times of day and look at the colors of the landscape at different seasons of the year.

For one year Elizabeth lived in the artists' colony of Pont-Aven in France. Although her future husband, Stanhope Forbes, was there at the same time, they didn't actually meet there, but four years later in England at the artists' colony in Newlyn. They were married in 1889—in the year in which Elizabeth painted her most famous picture *School is Out*. It was in this picture that she discovered her favorite subject: children.



Born:
December 29, 1859
in Kingston, Canada
Died:
March 16, 1912 in
Newlyn, Cornwall,
England
Lived in:
Canada, London, New
York, Munich, Pont-
Aven (Brittany, France),
Zandvoort (Holland),
Newlyn
Children:
One son
Painting style:
Impressionism*

Tip
You can see pictures by
the Newlyn artists in
Penlee House Gallery and
Museum, Morrab Road,
Penzance, Cornwall,
England.

Quiz
Which new industrial product enabled artists to paint their pictures outdoors?
(Answer on page 46)



School is Out, 1889
Penlee House, Penzance,
Cornwall

How lovely the sunshine looks outside! Its rays are filtering into the classroom and the play of light and shade has been carefully worked out. In Impressionism*—which is the painting style to which this picture belongs—the artists often tried to capture the various moods of light.





Georgia O'Keeffe— The artist in the desert

With her mysterious pictures Georgia O'Keeffe wanted to make people more aware of the “wonders of our world.”

Whenever possible Georgia left home and roamed the countryside. She only had to open the door and she was surrounded by nature—the forests, the meadows and fields, or the shores of one of the numerous lakes. She found incredible treasures everywhere: stones, grasses, blossoms, shells, pieces of wood . . .

At the age of twelve she realized that she wanted to become an artist and went on to study at the best art schools in Chicago and New York. But at the same time she had a sort of empty feeling inside. Technically her work was perfect. But who could provide her with an answer to the question as to how she could paint what she actually felt?

She found the answer when she met the artist Arthur Wesley Dow. For him it was perfectly clear: Pictures should be “composed” like a piece of music—but with colors and lines instead of sounds and melodies. A picture contains rhythms just like music. And the shapes should be clear and simple, so that the “essence” of an object could be clearly seen.

And so it was that Georgia found her own unique form of expression: she “painted music” in colors and shapes. And she also painted luminous landscapes and ripe fruits. She sometimes painted tiny things very large—so big that they were hardly recognizable. She wanted to persuade people to look more carefully! Her enormous flower pictures, in particular, became famous. We find ourselves looking into the inside of a humongous open flower as if through a zoom.

Born:

November 15, 1887 on her parents' farm near the little town of Sun Prairie in Wisconsin

Died:

March 6, 1986 in Santa Fe, New Mexico

Lived in:

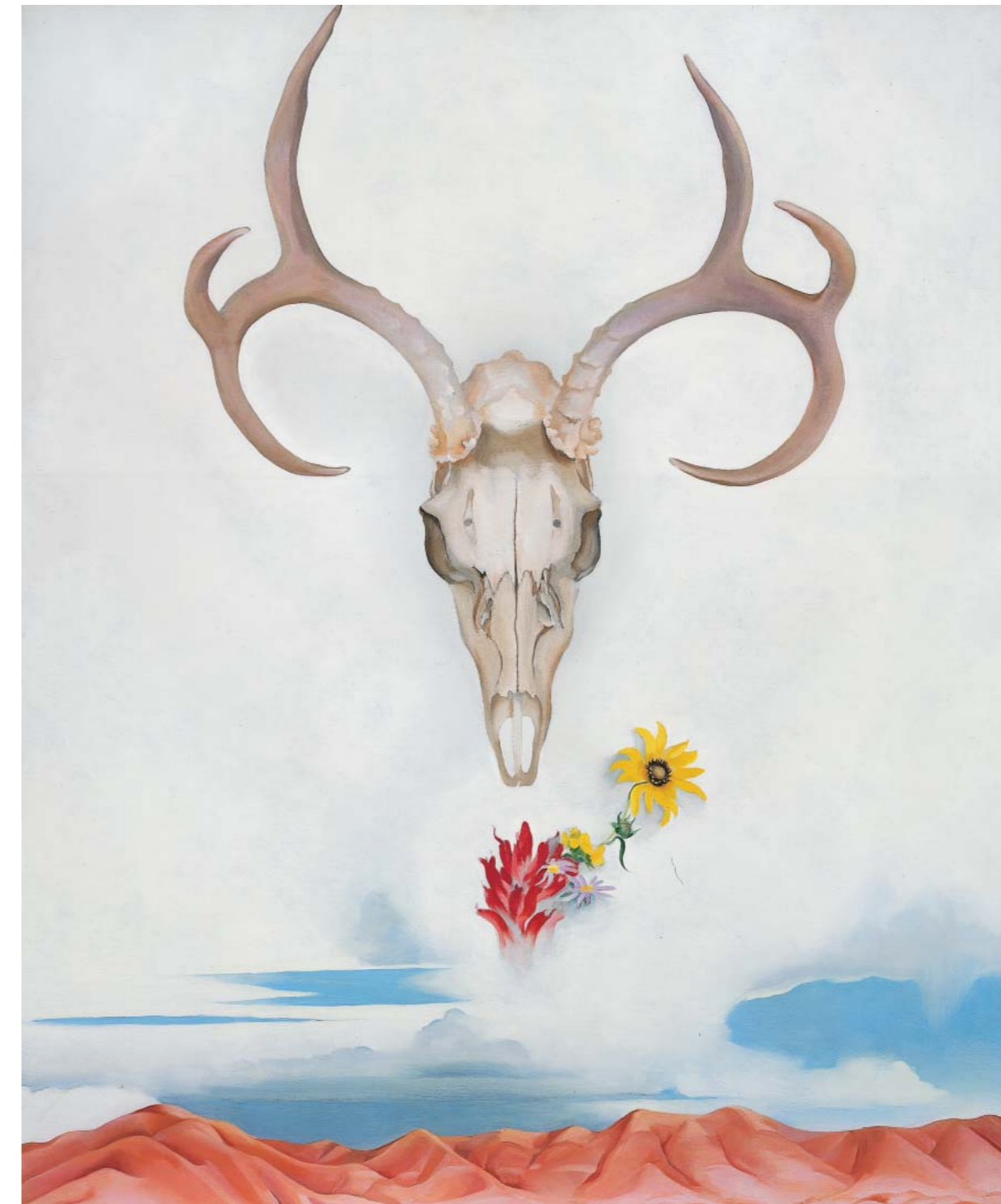
Sun Prairie, Williamsburg (Virginia), Chicago, New York City, Texas, South Carolina, New York State, New Mexico

Children:

None

Style:

Abstract* or representational in abstract, compositional style



Summer Days, 1936

Whitney Museum of American Art, Gift of Calvin Klein, New York

How do the things in this picture fit together? A deer skull hovers in the sky and luminous flowers are growing in a red desert. How strange!

Georgia often found skulls like this one in the desert. Although they remind us that death is ever-present in this merciless landscape, for Georgia the bones stood for vitality. And with it she painted these brilliantly-colored flowers—are they made of fabric, perhaps? The Spanish inhabitants of New Mexico use flowers like these ones, made of fabric, to decorate graves. The rules of “above, below, near, and far” seem to have been cancelled out in the shimmering desert light.



Oriental Poppies, 1927
The Frederick R. Weisman
Art Museum, University
of Minnesota, Minnesota

What a brilliant shining red! For Georgia, colors were one of the things which made life worth living. Do you think she was trying to pass on this feeling to us too?

Georgia was fascinated by Arthur Wesley Dow's idea of painting to music. Why don't you try it too? First choose a suitable CD—classical music is best. Then take a sheet of paper and some crayons. Make sure you have plenty of space—and begin. You can draw soft lines, zigzags, dots, circles, spirals—whatever goes best with the music. You can draw in color or just in pencil and then color in your picture later on if you like!

On one trip she discovered the magnificent landscape of New Mexico and realized she was happiest surrounded by its endless expanse. Even when she was still living in New York with her husband, the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, she kept going back there. Later on she fulfilled her dream of living in the desert and renovated two houses where she could live near Ghost Ranch. There she never tired of painting her feelings in the face of this unique natural setting.



Two Callas on Pink, 1928
Philadelphia Museum of
Art, Bequest of Georgia
O'Keeffe for the Alfred
Stieglitz Collection, 1987,
Philadelphia

Georgia said of her flower pictures: "Nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small it takes time—we haven't time—and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time. So I said to myself, I'll paint what I see, what the flower means to me. I'll paint it big and ... I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see in flowers."

Tip

Georgia painted the landscape of New Mexico so often that the region where she lived is now known as "O'Keeffe Country" to this day. In her house you can see a collection of her paintings. But since for most of us it's a bit far to go to just "drop by" you can also see them on the internet at www.okeeffemuseum.org!