

Title: Georgia O'Keeffe, The Woman Behind the Myth:
Assumptions and Associations Projected by Alfred Stieglitz throughout the 1920's

By Alexandra Queener

Georgia O'Keeffe's *Pink Tulip* (Fig 1.), an oil on canvas painting completed in 1926, serves as an example of the quintessential O'Keeffe painting. When one mentions the name "Georgia O'Keeffe" they are apt to think of her floral paintings in which the most striking aspect is its shockingly close perspective and detailed depiction of its anatomy. O'Keeffe revolutionized the ways in which American modernism evolved. Her unexpected, microscopic examination of the tulip lends itself to a powerful image. The canvas is brilliantly painted in vibrant colors, which comprise the form of a pink tulip. The minute perspective with which the flower is painted allows the viewer to catch a glimpse of a tulip in bloom. A leaf frames the left side of the painting, its sinuous edge creating a sharp dividing diagonal line, while the petals are veritable arabesques of pinks and white, cupping the seeds in a sheltering motion.

While there are certainly many interpretations of O'Keeffe's minute floral paintings, the most widely accepted ones are those relating to female imagery and sexual desire. Though there are aspects of the painting that serve to reinforce that belief such as: the gentle, but awkward way in which the petals of the flower cup its reproductive organs—there is also much about the painting that lends itself to a different interpretation. The fact that the flower is in bloom is quite important because traditionally speaking, that would serve to represent a person at their most mature, most self-confident, and most beautiful. O'Keeffe may be making a broader statement than that about a person's inner beauty as the flower in bloom could also refer to the cyclical aspect of nature and how beauty evolves over time. Regardless of the potential readings of this image, critics of the day were content to accept the image projected by O'Keeffe's husband, Alfred Stieglitz, and his band of followers. For, when looking at O'Keeffe's

personal writings on her influences and works, she mentions little in the realm of sexuality. In fact, when discussing her opinion of the “artist’s observation,” O’Keeffe states that “this unexplainable thing in nature makes me feel the world is big far beyond my understanding—to understand maybe by trying to put it into form.”¹

Her attempt to make transcendental an image so accessible as nature, as displayed in *Pink Tulip*, can account for why O’Keeffe earned much of her widespread fame. The speculation surrounding these kinds of images has defined O’Keeffe’s career in the eyes of the American and the international public. O’Keeffe’s images have been reviewed, interpreted, and manipulated in a variety of manners. However, no interpretations have been as pervasive and influential as those of the people closest to her. Throughout the nineteen twenties when O’Keeffe was an emerging artist, the people surrounding her were the first to review and critique her works. The most prominent example of this was with O’Keeffe’s husband, Alfred Stieglitz.

While Stieglitz can be credited for introducing Georgia O’Keeffe to the art world, he can also be criticized for the image he projected of her. The pair initially formed a relationship through O’Keeffe’s good friend, Anita Pollitzer, who showed Stieglitz several of O’Keeffe’s charcoal works in 1916. Upon seeing the works Stieglitz stated, “Tell her...they’re the purest, finest, sincerest things that have entered 291[Stieglitz’s gallery] in a long while.”² While O’Keeffe was pleased at Stieglitz’s reception of her work, she was also perplexed and wanted to know why he liked her work so much. Upon writing him about the matter he replied, “They were a real surprise and above all I felt

¹ Celia Weisman, “O’Keeffe’s Art: Sacred Symbols and Spiritual Quest.” *Women’s Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (1982): 10, <http://jstor.org>.

² Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, *Full Bloom: The Art an Life of Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004) 106.

that they were a genuine expression of yourself. I do not know what you had in mind while doing them.”³ Ecstatic at this response and in between jobs herself, O’Keeffe decided to move to New York City to pursue her degree from Columbia University’s Teachers College. Prior to this, though O’Keeffe and Stieglitz had had several correspondences, they had never been introduced.

The move to New York City reinvigorated O’Keeffe—being around new artists and living in a new city was inspiring and she found herself in awe of many of the artists whose work was displayed at 291, including that by Stieglitz. It is important to recognize the multiple factors which account for the shift in O’Keeffe’s expression upon her 1917 move to New York. In addition to being exposed to a multitude of different artists, O’Keeffe also began attending classes taught by Arthur Wesley Dow at Columbia’s Teachers College. Dow “proposed an art which spoke directly to the senses. His main artistic goals were to “express the ‘poetry and mystery of nature,’ and to reveal creative power ‘as a divine gift, the natural endowment of every human soul.’”⁴ Instead of teaching in a classicizing, traditional manner, Dow preferred a new kind of beauty, one that was not based on the exact portrayal of an object, but rather an “ideal synthesis.” This ‘synthesis’ was vastly influential in O’Keeffe’s approach, inspiring her to look at images as a whole. The whole had the potential to evoke a harmonious feeling, compared to fragmented pieces, which were presented as disconnected and in conflict.

While O’Keeffe began to experiment with new forms of expression inspired by the teachings of Dow, she concurrently developed a closer relationship with Stieglitz. The photographer turned gallery owner certainly had the greatest impact on O’Keeffe’s early

³ Drohojowska-Philp, 107.

⁴ Weisman, 10.

years in New York. The two formed a close friendship that eventually led to their marriage in 1924. By this time O’Keeffe was a regular in Stieglitz’s 291’s annual exhibitions, having achieved her first solo exhibition in 1917, just one year after arriving in New York. The pair became veritable catalysts for the other, inspiring and challenging their creations. For Stieglitz’s photography, O’Keeffe served as a model for many of his most renowned works, which documented the “ups and downs of their personal and professional relationship.”⁵ It is in fact because of many of Stieglitz’s photographs that O’Keeffe’s works have been interpreted as so distinctly feminine, a classification that O’Keeffe herself never endorsed. In reference to Stieglitz’s images of O’Keeffe, Anna Chave states, “it was subject to intense public interest from the first, owing in part to the erotic photographs taken of her by her lover...the public fascination has been more with the woman than with the art.”⁶ In a biography on O’Keeffe by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, she comments on the nature of the pair’s relationship. She states, “Stieglitz’s passion for O’Keeffe also led him to compose a portrait in photographs...although O’Keeffe had been photographed before, she had not been envisioned by an artist.”⁷ Drohojowska-Philp compares this relationship to that of one between Pygmalion and Galatea with O’Keeffe transforming into the object of his gaze, a woman concocted to align with Stieglitz’s own ideal of femininity.

The allusion to Pygmalion and Galatea is quite apropos to come to term with the relationship between Stieglitz and O’Keeffe. While it was one of a probiotic nature, with

⁵ Lisa Messinger, “Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986); Thematic Essay: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Metmuseum.org.

⁶ Anna Chave, “O’Keeffe and the Masculine Gaze,” *Reading American Art* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998): 351.

⁷ Drohojowska-Philp, 161.

both benefitting and relying upon the other, Stieglitz maintained the upper hand throughout much of O’Keeffe’s career. O’Keeffe has written of Stieglitz’s relationships and interactions with the artists exhibited at his gallery. When asked about the nature of Stieglitz, O’Keeffe stated in an interview that he has “a special interesting personality...he thought out loud—this was one of the secrets to his character...yet he couldn’t be talked into anything, and his favorite word was ‘no.’”⁸ In the same interview O’Keeffe speaks about Stieglitz’s circle of men: a group of innovative modern artists, who, similarly to O’Keeffe revered him as their leader. Homer states, “She recalled that the men in the group stuck together and talked a lot while she ‘did the work,’ that is, hanging shows.”⁹ It is also mentioned in many of O’Keeffe’s writings that Stieglitz was considered the father figure of the group. Shortly after his death O’Keeffe has been quoted as saying, “he was the leader or he didn’t play...it was his game and we all played along or left the game.”¹⁰ Stieglitz appeared to have a sort of monopoly control on the artists in his circle; he was responsible for promoting them and displaying their work. His approach to promoting his artists has been described by critics as “idiosyncratic.”¹¹ No promotion was as idiosyncratic or unique as with O’Keeffe. This unique approach is documented within Chave’s essay; she writes, “Year after year, Stieglitz issues pamphlets for O’Keeffe’s shows with excerpts from reviews and essays by Hartley, Rosenfeld, McBride and others—critics who, as the dealer’s friends and supporters, were all

⁸ William Innes Homer, “Abiquiu Is a Long Way for you to Come,” *American Art* 20, no. 3 (2006): 10, <http://www.jstor.org>.

⁹ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰ Vivien Green Fryd, “Georgia O’Keeffe’s “Radiator Building:” Gender, Sexuality, Modernism, and Urban Imagery,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 35, no. 4 (2000): 287, <http://www.jstor.org>.

¹¹ Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research, 1989) 155.

influenced by his vision of her art.”¹² Simply through interviews with O’Keeffe, it is evident that Stieglitz was an adamant individual, determined to be the one to define his artists to the greater artistic community. He felt the artists exhibited in his gallery, 291, were considered to be innovators of a specifically American modernism.

However, while Stieglitz and crew projected the importance of developing a new American modernism, O’Keeffe has written on how Stieglitz and the other men in his circle were far more concerned with the happenings of artists in Europe than in the United States. This inconsistency is most obvious within O’Keeffe’s comments on her painting, *Cow’s Skull—Red, White and Blue* [fig. 2] from 1931. She writes—

As I was working I thought of the city men I had been seeing in the East. They talked so often of writing the Great American Novel—the Great American Play—the Great American Painting...I was excited over our country and I knew that at the time almost any one of those great minds would have been living in Europe if it had been possible for them.¹³

While the men in Stieglitz’s circle were concerned with the art movements occurring in Europe, O’Keeffe felt incredibly connected with America, and had no desire to travel to Europe. The frontier of America had in fact become a state of mind for O’Keeffe that inspired her more than the European image. As Weisman points out, “To O’Keeffe the New Mexican desert is a symbol of the American vision.”¹⁴ Also, unlike the men in Stieglitz’s circle, O’Keeffe never received European training; solely educated in the United States, O’Keeffe felt a strict preference for “her” America. Though other artists were attempting to create their own American imagery, O’Keeffe proved most

¹² Chave, 360.

¹³ Weisman, 14.

¹⁴ Ibid, 14.

successful, managing to make her works more accessible and commercially viable than others.

By refusing to turn to Europe for an inspiration she felt she could achieve at home, O’Keeffe remained true to the projected ideals of Stieglitz. However, the other artists in Stieglitz’s circle, as well as Stieglitz himself spoke of a different ideal than that which was projected. This contradictory behavior does not exist solely within Stieglitz’s vision for a new American art, but also in his opinions regarding the art market in general. Quoted comparing the business of art to that of prostitution, Stieglitz condemned both businesses for “creating situations in which ‘money ruled.’”¹⁵ However, as Fryd points out, Stieglitz had no problem selling works displayed in his own gallery for significant financial gain, asking high prices for all art claiming its value to be due to its branding as “highbrow modern art.”¹⁶ O’Keeffe’s works were not free from this subjection, and it is partially because of Stieglitz’s value placement on O’Keeffe’s works that they received as much attention as they did.

Since the public had seen few works similar in style to those by O’Keeffe, and certainly none as comparable by a female artist, critics were quick to be influenced by Stieglitz’s interpretations. However, when taking a critical look at Stieglitz’s projected ideals and actual intentions, the disparities between the two should speak for themselves. Nevertheless, Stieglitz was an influential character in O’Keeffe’s career; as Lynes states, “He was a persuasive, informed advocate of modernism, and furthermore, his ideas about O’Keeffe and her work were extraordinarily appealing.”¹⁷ Claiming O’Keeffe to be the

¹⁵ Fryd, 277.

¹⁶ Ibid, 277.

¹⁷ Lynes, 157.

first woman artist to realize her full potential as a woman, he promoted her work as exclusively female. This served as a double-edged sword throughout O’Keeffe’s career; for, while she gained her fame as a result of Stieglitz’s work, she was also subject to interpretations based on little more than his projection of her. Even throughout the years when O’Keeffe experimented with several varying styles of expression, Stieglitz maintained the view that her work was “dominantly emotional in basis and expressively bound to her sexuality.”¹⁸

It is this view of O’Keeffe that is most prominently enforced through Stieglitz’s multiple portraits of his wife—his muse. In his personal images of O’Keeffe, Stieglitz has been criticized for creating “sharp-focus, objectified, and erotic images of woman as spectacle.”¹⁹ Furthermore, instead of Georgia O’Keeffe presented as Georgia O’Keeffe in Stieglitz’s portraits, she has been reduced to the global conception of a ‘woman.’ She is void of personality, displayed in fragmented images of her breasts, pelvic area, and buttocks. Fryd states on these images: “These photographs objectify, frame, and control the image of the woman, in a sharp focus manner.”²⁰ In fact, prior to O’Keeffe’s works being presented to a wide range of the public, O’Keeffe was introduced only through Stieglitz’s own “sensual photographs of her, where her paintings sometimes served as hazy backdrops to her voluptuous, nude or lightly clothed body.”²¹ While O’Keeffe agreed to participate in these portraits, it is unclear whether or not she realized the implications these had in contributing to interpretations of her work. There is some glimpse of O’Keeffe’s realization in a 1917 letter to Paul Strand in which she writes,

¹⁸ Lynes, 157.

¹⁹ Fryd, 283.

²⁰ Ibid, 283.

²¹ Chave, 359.

“Men never understand me—unless maybe Stieglitz does—don’t know that I understand myself.”²²

O’Keeffe’s personal search for identity was thwarted due to the control exercised by Stieglitz over O’Keeffe throughout their professional and personal lives. To the public Stieglitz was content to project an image of O’Keeffe as strictly female, characterized as having a frail and emotional character. He wrote to a friend in 1926: “Georgia worries me much...psychic conditions...she has lost 15 pounds and was terribly nervous.”²³ Several years later in 1929, O’Keeffe’s friend and confidant, Rebecca Strand writes to Stieglitz: “I hear you say she is frail—here she seems as tough as a hickory root, and it’s not the false toughness of excitement and newness, but a strength that has come from finding what she knew she needed.”²⁴

Though O’Keeffe gained strength with distance from Stieglitz, he felt uneasiness in her departure. As suggested in Sharyn Udall’s essay “Georgia O’Keeffe and Emily Carr: Health, Nature and the Creative Process,” Stieglitz wanted that professional control over O’Keeffe’s career, so much so, that she has been quoted as saying, “Alfred once admitted that he was happiest when I was ill and in bed because then he know where I was and what I was doing.”²⁵ Stieglitz’s complete control over O’Keeffe’s early career severely limited her interaction with the public, which in turn did not allow for O’Keeffe to explain the intentions of her paintings. This lack of communication with the general public did little to change the reputation presented of her. In one essay by Udall entitled

²² Fryd, 287.

²³ Sharyn R. Udall, “Georgia O’Keeffe and Emily Carr: Health, Nature, and the Creative Process,” *Women’s Art Journal* 27, no. 1 (2006): 18, <http://www.jstor.org>.

²⁴ Ibid, 20.

²⁵ Ibid, 21.

“Beholding the Epiphanies,” she notes that O’Keeffe’s male contemporary, Arthur Dove, “told Stieglitz that he ‘hardly knew that she [O’Keeffe] could read and write.’”²⁶ Though this distance from the public was in part encouraged by Stieglitz, it was also self-inflicted by O’Keeffe, who was upset at the judgments by her critics. This continued to affect O’Keeffe throughout her lifetime, even at age eighty when “asked to discuss the meaning of her art, she snapped, ‘the meaning is there on the canvas. If you don’t get it, that’s too bad. I have nothing more to say than what I painted.’”²⁷

Despite O’Keeffe’s rejection of the classification as an artist who embodied a sense of female eroticism, the critics and Stieglitz maintained that limited view. Stieglitz supported his views of O’Keeffe as some mythic artist who embodied purely female attributions by utilizing a Freudian vocabulary. With the rise of Freud’s theories occurring simultaneously with O’Keeffe’s ventures into abstraction, it was difficult for O’Keeffe to distance herself from these perceptions. As Fryd writes, “O’Keeffe never claimed to represent the female body or female sexuality, simply something ‘only a woman can explore,’ which may include female experiences, feelings, relationships, attitudes, and perceptions.”²⁸ Had O’Keeffe been discovered outside the realm of her time and outside of the Stieglitz circle, it is doubtful that her works would’ve been criticized in the manner they were. For, what O’Keeffe was attempting to communicate through her art was no different than many other artists of her day. She was exploring the realm of abstraction in a way similar to many male artists; however, her enlarged flowers were read in a sexual light instead of as the exploration of a form.

²⁶ Sharyn R. Udall. *Contested Terrain: Myth and Meanings in Southwest Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996), 91.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 91.

²⁸ Fryd, 282.

It is because of this that O’Keeffe felt her art should stand alone, a visual representation of her voice. While her enlarged flowers, which she began painting in 1924, are quick to be interpreted as some inner, repressed sexual desire, Weisman maintains that perhaps that judgment shouldn’t be made so preemptively. She states—

One is struck by the beauty and sensuality of the flowers, as well as by the sense of penetration to that which is at the heart of both these particular flowers and all creation. Since they appear as enclosing, soft, protective spaces, the flower images also bring to mind vaginas and wombs. Yet to limit their significance to representations of female anatomy would be to reduce their power as symbols.²⁹

Weisman makes a distinct observation that is quite important in understanding the works of O’Keeffe. She acknowledges that yes, there is imagery within O’Keeffe’s flowers that has the potential to be interpreted as a representation of female anatomy, but to reduce her work, and O’Keeffe, to female anatomy is no worse than what Stieglitz’s photographs accomplished.

O’Keeffe has acknowledged the influence behind her flowers, and it has never been about expressing un-fulfilled sexual desire; rather it began as earlier described with the teachings of Dow. O’Keeffe elaborates on Dow’s influential ideas stating, “He had an idea that interested me...the idea of filling space in a beautiful way.”³⁰ Art critic Barbara Rose comments that O’Keeffe “consciously opposed any idea of fragmentation” which supports the nature of O’Keeffe’s earliest works completed before her move to New York; these works have been described by Rose as “imbued with a pantheistic, transcendental life of its own.”³¹ The enlarging of flowers served as a continuation of this

²⁹ Weisman, 11.

³⁰ Ibid, 10.

³¹ Weisman, 10.

motif, which was first examined during her time in Texas between 1912 and 1914.

O’Keeffe sought to present images that had the potential to transcend, allowing viewers to examine a common object from different perspectives. Her abstractions were a conscious decision that flattened and exposed objects in a way unprecedented.

Though O’Keeffe initially looked up to Stieglitz, viewing him as a mentor of sorts, the pair gradually lost the romantic spark in their relationship, eventually only maintaining a professional, respectful bond. With this loss of spark came a distance between the two that manifested itself on both a physical and emotional level. Though the pair was never officially separated, they made moves towards the end of the nineteen twenties to develop separate lives. Living in New York had become a burden for O’Keeffe; she was tired of the constant scrutiny of her work, not to mention Stieglitz’s budding relationship with another young woman. O’Keeffe’s only reprieve during her years spent in New York were her and Stieglitz’s annual summer trips to Lake George. However, even these retreats proved futile in reinvigorating O’Keeffe’s spirit; she felt too contained, still sheltered under Stieglitz’s sphere of influence.

The desire for freedom only found in an unrestricted, expansive environment stems from the independence O’Keeffe experienced as a young artist. Prior to moving to New York, O’Keeffe was used to being on her own, doing what she wanted to do. Before being discovered she was “alone and singularly free, working into my own, unknown—no one to satisfy but myself.”³² Upon her move to New York, O’Keeffe was both fascinated and overwhelmed with the new setting, but over time she grew weary of dealing with the city. She writes of the city to her friend, Sherwood Anderson, “I wanted

³² Udall, 18.

to write you in the city often but couldn't—it wasn't nice—it was cracked and torn and bent and a little moldy.”³³

Throughout the nineteen twenties New York City took its toll on O’Keeffe, and she gradually became disillusioned with its initial excitement. As a resident of the city, and a member of the Stieglitz circle, O’Keeffe had become accustomed to being a bystander to interpretations of herself rather than projecting her own. The very nature of this contradicts O’Keeffe’s independent spirit. Fed up, O’Keeffe began to speak out, asserting her own opinions about what was said of her. A prominent example of this was in 1927 when she thanked Henry McBride for his review of her work. She stated, “I am particularly amused and pleased to have the emotional faucet turned off—no matter what other ones you turn on.”³⁴ It should also be noted that the same year she remarked that, “she had come to the end of something, an end that she was still trying to clarify for herself.”³⁵ Perhaps this symbolized the end of O’Keeffe’s reliance on Stieglitz for both financial and emotional confirmation. For, in 1929, O’Keeffe moved to New Mexico, where she was free to paint what she wanted, unrestricted by the domineering Stieglitz circle. Instead of the skyscrapers of New York City, O’Keeffe was surrounded by infinite skies, and outreaching grounds at her disposal. This physical distance in combination with her increasing financial independence, allowed for O’Keeffe to remove herself even farther from Steiglitz.

As previously discussed, O’Keeffe’s private nature has had both a positive and negative impact on her career. However, with distance and time from New York City and

³³ Udall, 19.

³⁴ Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001), 135.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 135.

Steiglitz, O’Keeffe eventually spoke out about her work, publishing her own book that describes memories which influenced the process behind her paintings. The book opens with this illuminating passage—

The meaning of a word—to me—is not as exact as the meaning of a color. Colors and shapes make a more definite statement than words. I write this because such odd things have been done about me with words. I have often been told what to paint. I am often amazed at the spoken and written word telling me what I have painted. I make this effort because no one else can know how my paintings happen. Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.³⁶

Clearly O’Keeffe is addressing those who were quick to place an all-encompassing label on her works. As this is the preface to her book, O’Keeffe is regaining her voice and seeking to change the perceptions of herself as communicated through her art. The works most often considered to be stereotypical of O’Keeffe are of course her flowers. On these she writes—

A flower is relatively small. Everyone has many associations with a flower—the idea of flowers...Still—in a way—nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small—we haven’t time—and to see takes time...so I said to myself—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—I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers.³⁷

This explanation of her floral images sheds a new light on prior interpretations. While O’Keeffe’s flowers certainly made ‘busy New Yorkers take time’ to notice her works, the attention given to her flowers was dominated by Stieglitz’s school of thought. Despite

³⁶ Georgia O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York: Penguin, 1976), i.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 54.

misinterpretations, O’Keeffe’s work has withstood the test of time, truly revolutionizing the modern art scene of America in the early 20th century.

While others were looking to Europe for influence, O’Keeffe maintained focus on “her” America, completing images that have become synonymous with the great American frontier. Thanks to the projections of Stieglitz, O’Keeffe’s flowers have made her both an iconic symbol of American art, as well the most controversial female artist of the early 20th century. Without Stieglitz’s sphere of influence O’Keeffe would likely not have garnered the same celebrity status, but with his influence her intentions were altered to accommodate his own opinions and ideals.

Despite Stieglitz’s attempts to monopolize thought on her images, O’Keeffe’s flowers are now being re-interpreted by critics in a manner that judges O’Keeffe as she wished to be judged. This judgment, O’Keeffe felt, should be on the basis of her work rather than solely for her sex. We see these ideas synthesized in her statement, “When you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower—and I don’t.”³⁸ With these words O’Keeffe is challenging modern day art historians to think of her in terms beyond the words of Alfred Stieglitz.

³⁸ O’Keeffe, 56.

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Figures

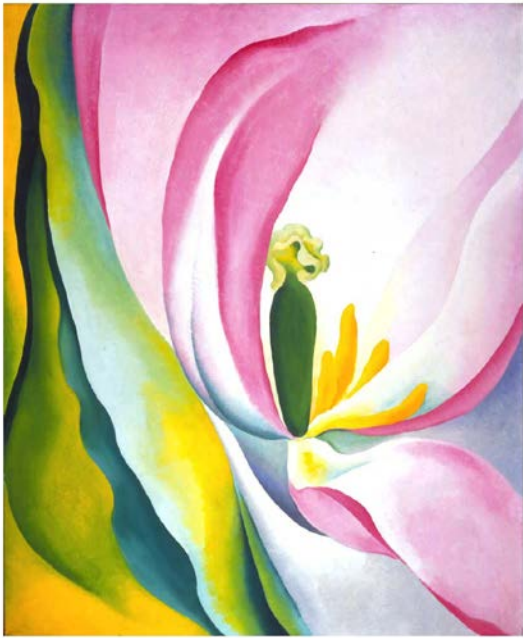


Figure 1. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Pink Tulip*, 1926.



Figure 2. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Cow Skull—Red, White and Blue*, 1931.

Research Method:

After visiting the Baltimore Museum of Art and selected which painting I would focus on for this paper, I was able to employ many of the library's resources. Our class was structured in a manner that enabled research to be done methodically. After selecting what object we'd like to write on, we were instructed to compose a visual analysis; this proved to be a great way to get our intellectual juices flowing. With the aid of the visual analysis, I was able to come up with a topic that interested me, and would be researchable.

The next stage was compiling an annotated bibliography. In order to do this I did a keyword search of the library catalog. This supplied a plethora of print resources that I was able to track down and sift through. In addition to the library catalog search, I also used the online journal search, on JSTOR and other Academic Journal catalogs.

After selecting numerous sources—there was a requirement of ten—I spent time reading through each book and article in order to get a general sense of the main themes of each piece. Once I had decided which sources were necessary for my paper I read them more thoroughly: highlighting and underlining pertinent passages. I kept each article in a giant envelope and marked what days I had read what article to keep track of all sources.

This methodical and organized structure of researching was the most important thing I learned about the research process. By taking the researching process one step at a time, I was able to fully absorb the points of view of each of my sources and then decide where these viewpoints merged with my own, and where they didn't. As such, I was able to formulate a developed argument and support that with the research I'd accumulated.