

Georgia O'Keeffe *and* Ansel Adams

Natural Affinities

This is the first major exhibition to compare the work of Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) and Ansel Adams (1902-1984), two towering figures of twentieth-century American art. From the time the two artists met in 1929, their careers intertwined. Yet these two artists carved out very different paths as they sought to capture the essence of the American landscape. In doing so, each claimed a particular place as their own: Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada wilderness for Ansel Adams, and Northern New Mexico for Georgia O'Keeffe. Forty-two of O'Keeffe's paintings and fifty-four photographs by Adams reveal telling parallels and differences between the artists' unique visions of the natural world.

Georgia O'Keeffe and Ansel Adams: Natural Affinities was organized by the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico. The exhibition was made possible in part by **MetLife Foundation**, the exhibition's Lead National Sponsor, The Burnett Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, The Kerr Foundation, The Annenberg Foundation, and the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum's National Council.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum wishes to thank The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, The Robert S. & Grayce B. Kerr Foundation, The Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation, and the Smithsonian Council for American Art for their generous support of the exhibition's presentation in Washington, D.C.

"Nothing is less real than realism . . . Details are confusing. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things."

--Georgia O'Keeffe, 1922

"A great photograph is one that fully expresses what one feels, in the deepest sense, about what is being photographed, and is, thereby, a true manifestation of what one feels about life in its entirety . . . My approach to photography is based on my belief in the vigor and values of the world of nature, in aspects of grandeur and minutiae all about us."

--Ansel Adams, 1982

Ghost Ranch Hills, Chama Valley

1937, printed 1972

Ansel Adams

gelatin silver print

The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive

"I am deeply attached to the high desert regions of the American southwest. Despite its seeming intrinsic ruggedness, the land is unusually fragile."

--Ansel Adams, 1980s

Winter Sunrise, the Sierra Nevada from Lone Pine, California

1944, printed 1978

Ansel Adams

gelatin silver print

The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive

"The West is, in many ways, the center of modern creative work in photography. Some would dispute this, claiming that New York and Boston should be considered first. In the east there is emphasis on the social aspects of the medium; out here there is a fine balance between the social emphasis on the natural scene and on the abstract and experimental."

--Ansel Adams, 1972

Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico / Out Back of Marie's II

1930

Georgia O'Keeffe

oil on canvas

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Burnett Foundation

"It was the shapes of the hills there that fascinated me. The reddish sand hills with the dark mesas behind them. It seemed as though no matter how far you walked you could never get into those dark hills, although I walked great distances."

--Georgia O'Keeffe, 1935

The Black Iris

1926

Georgia O'Keeffe

oil on canvas

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Burnett Foundation

"I often painted fragments of things because it seemed to make my statement as well as or better than the whole could."

--Georgia O'Keeffe, 1976

Leaves, Frost, Stump, October Morning, Yosemite National Park
about 1931, printed about 1963-71
Ansel Adams
gelatin silver print
The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive

"What I call the Natural Scene—just nature—is a symbol of many things to me, a never-ending potential."

—Ansel Adams, 1980s

Red and Pink Rocks
1938
Georgia O'Keeffe
oil on canvas
Private collection, Pennsylvania

"Wherever I go, I have an eye out for rocks. Outside my hotel in Phon Pnem, I picked up a stone and carried it back around the world in my purse . . . Stones, bones, clouds—experience gives me shapes—but sometimes the shapes I paint end up having no resemblance to the actual experience."

—Georgia O'Keeffe, 1968

Pelvis with the Moon—New Mexico
1943
Georgia O'Keeffe
oil on canvas
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida, Purchase, the R. H. Norton Trust

"The pelvis bone is most beautiful against the blue, that blue that will always be there as it is now, after all man's destruction is finished."

—Georgia O'Keeffe, 1935

Lake near Muir Pass, Kings Canyon National Park
about 1934, printed 1978
Ansel Adams
gelatin silver print
Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of the photographer

"The Sierra built and modulated my environmental concepts. It joined the wondrous visions of astronomical reality with the dynamics of nature all about me. And I did meet with people in the mountains who matched their power and dignity, not because they could conquer peaks, but because they seemed to understand and become part of the mystery."

—Ansel Adams, 1980s

Refugio Beach, California
1938, printed 1972-74
Ansel Adams
gelatin silver print
The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive

"I believe that the artist and his art are only a part of the total human experience; the viewer in the world at large is the essential other part."

—Ansel Adams, 1980s

Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico
1941, printed about 1972
Ansel Adams
gelatin silver print
The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive

"Driving south along the highway, I observed a fantastic scene as we approached the village of Hernandez. In the east, the moon was rising over distant clouds and snow peaks, and in the west, the later afternoon sun glanced over a south flowing cloud bank and blazed a brilliant white upon the crosses in the church cemetery. I steered the station wagon into the deep shoulder along the road and jumped out, scrambling to get my equipment together . . . I knew it was special when I released the shutter, but I never anticipated what its reception would be over the decades."

—Ansel Adams, 1980s

Thunderstorm, Española Valley, New Mexico
1961
Ansel Adams
gelatin silver print
The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive

"The world of stone and space and sky reveals to all people the patterns of eternity. He who has known the jubilation of mornings and the endurance of arid lands attends the rituals of spring and becomes one with the world."

—Ansel Adams, 1945

Gate of an Adobe Church, New Mexico
1929
Georgia O'Keeffe
oil on canvas
The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Gift in memory of Elisabeth Mellon Sellers from her friends

"Everybody paints the Taos Church. If you're in Taos two days you had to paint the Taos church. I'd asked myself do I have to paint all that church? I'll just paint a little piece of it. That'll do just as well, and I did."

—Georgia O'Keeffe, 1976

Grey Cross with Blue
1929
Georgia O'Keeffe
oil on canvas
The Albuquerque Museum, Museum Purchase, 1983 and 1985 General Obligation Bonds; Albuquerque Museum Foundation; Ovenwest Corporation; Frederick R. Weisman Foundation

"I saw the crosses so often—and often in unexpected places—like a thin dark veil of the Catholic Church spread over the New Mexico landscape."

—Georgia O'Keeffe, 1983

Flower Abstraction
1924
Georgia O'Keeffe
oil on canvas
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 50th Anniversary Gift of Sandra Payson

"I know I can not paint a flower. I can not paint the sun on the desert on a bright summer morning but maybe in terms of paint color I can convey to you my experience of the flower or the experience that makes the flower of significance to me at that particular time."

—Georgia O'Keeffe, 1931

Gerald's Tree I
1937
Georgia O'Keeffe
oil on canvas
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Burnett Foundation

"I wish people were all trees and I think I could enjoy them then."

—Georgia O'Keeffe, 1921

Early Morning, Merced River Canyon, Yosemite National Park, California
about 1950, printed 1978
Ansel Adams
gelatin silver print
The Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona: Ansel Adams Archive

"To see O'Keeffe in Yosemite is a revelation; for a while I was in a daze. Her mood and the mood of the place, not a conflict, but a strange, new mixture for me. She actually stirred me up to photograph Yosemite all over again, to cut all the advertising rot and see things for myself once more."

—Ansel Adams, 1938