



Georgia O'Keeffe

Cross with a Red Heart, 1932 in G301

O'Keeffe saw photographs by Paul Strand (of Steiglitz circle) from a trip along the St. Lawrence River to the Gaspé Peninsula in Canada. Map: part of Québec directly north of Maine. Gave her the impetus for a detour in her work.

Nature Forms, Gaspé, 1932

In June 1932, O'Keeffe took her first excursion outside of the U.S., travelling to Gaspé, Quebec on a three-day car trip with Alfred Steiglitz's niece. Later that summer, they returned on a three-week trip. She was instantly enchanted by the turbulence of the water around Cap-des-Rosiers (Rosebush Point). She incorporated the mossy greens and aquas of the region into coiling, circling ornamental abstractions. Painted after she returned from her trip.

White Barn, Red Doors, 1932

Mesmerized by the long white barns in the peninsula. On the second trip, she painted seven canvases of the tidy buildings with rows of dark doors and tarpaper roofs. Here, 4 red rectangles against the white walls resting on just a sliver of green. Cropped tightly, feels compressed. Emphasis on geometry. (We know her Lake George barns from WAC).

Cross by the Sea, Canada, 1932

Cross made from narrow pieces of wood, with small picket fence around its base, posted against the watery horizon as protection for fisherman.

"In New Mexico, the crosses interest me because they represent what the Spanish felt about Catholicism—dark, somber—and I painted them that way. On the Gaspé, the cross was Catholicism as the French saw it—gay, witty."

Cross with a Red Heart, 1932

First trip: "We went into the Laurentian Hills—northwest of Montreal—as perfect a kind of landscape as I ever saw . . . I got drawings of barns I had in mind—two rather grand crosses—so different from the New Mexico crosses—Sharp and white with obvious hearts on them—We drove six hundred and ten miles—I am a bit weary—but I am glad I went."

On the drive they passed by several crosses that line the St. Lawrence to commemorate men lost on the water. Later she painted two pictures of crosses. On view at Mia: narrow, gray crucifix decorated with a sacred heart of Jesus and a crown of thorns and topped with a rooster weathervane.

Bleeding heart/sacred heart of Jesus: a widely practiced devotion in the Catholic church, taking Jesus' physical heart as the representation of his divine love for humanity. Often depicted as a flaming heart shining with divine light, pierced by the lance-wound, encircled by the crown of thorns, surmounted by a cross, and bleeding. Notice how O'Keeffe has stylized these elements.

Clouds are breaking up and sun falls on the hills. She loved the “very beautiful colors from grey to gold—no red.”

Sources

Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O’Keeffe, p. 343

By Hunter Drohojowska-Philip

<https://canadianart.ca/features/georgia-okeeffe/>

Black Cross with Stars and Blue, 1929

In New Mexico, O’Keeffe was intrigued by the different cultural influences. . . . In *Black Cross with Stars and Blue* (1929), the Penitente cross was, in reality, not set exactly against the mountain, but O’Keeffe painted it thus, composing the two images into one in her mind’s eye, creating a portrait – or experience – of a place. She reduced the world around her to essential lines, citing a calligraphic influence, having studied Japanese printmaking, and acknowledging an interest in Chinese paintings, which would manipulate scale and perspective according to decorative demands.

<https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/georgia-o-keeffe-tate-modern-london-review>

Black Cross, New Mexico, 1929

“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,” said Georgia O’Keeffe about her first visit to Taos, New Mexico, in the summer of 1929. . . . What she encountered during late-night walks in the desert and then transformed into *Black Cross, New Mexico* were probably crosses erected near remote *moradas*, or chapels, by the secret Roman Catholic lay brotherhoods the Penitentes. As this pioneer of American modernism approached all of her subjects, here O’Keeffe magnified shapes and simplified details to underscore their essential beauty. She painted the cross just as she saw it: “big and strong, put together with wooden pegs,” and behind it, “those hills . . . [that] go on and on—it was like looking at two miles of gray elephants.” For O’Keeffe, “painting the crosses was a way of painting the country,” a beloved region where, in 1949, she settled permanently and worked almost until her death at the age of ninety-eight.

<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/46327/black-cross-new-mexico?q=Black+Cross>

Show AIC *Black Cross* (on iPad) with *Canada cross* and ask people to compare and contrast them.

Black Place I, 1945

Among her favorite places to paint was a site she called “the Black Place,” in the Bisti Badlands in Navajo country, a barren stretch of weathered hills that O’Keeffe said looked like “a mile of elephants” from a distance.

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/119128/black-place-i-georgia-okeeffe>

Her progressively abstracted series focusing on the *The Black Place* (soft mounds of deep-grey gypsum around 150 miles from Ghost Ranch) and the *White Place* (a 60m-year-old formation of white volcanic ash, eroded by wind and water) are two of her most expressive, composed from memory, but highly

evocative of an emotional response to the New Mexico landscape she had fallen in love with. “Such a beautiful, untouched lonely-feeling place – part of what I call the Far Away,”⁸ she wrote. This loneliness, and the central fissure, appearing like a lightning bolt and ricocheting down the centre of the compositions, echoing the central cleft in her skull paintings as well as in her early pink and blue music and leaf paintings, speaks loud about the dichotomies with which O’Keeffe had to live: loving Stieglitz, but needing to be away from him; feeling lonely, but shunning company and seeking self-imposed solitude; splitting her time and location for much of her life; and, despite being such a strong character, struggling to live fully as her whole self. When she is still being described as “perhaps the most inspiring woman artist ever”⁹ and is being shown as dependent on and part of a larger, male-dominated artistic group, this is no wonder. O’Keeffe ought more properly to be described as “perhaps the most inspiring artist ever”.

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