

Georgia O'Keeffe: A Closer Look

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Explore *The Shelton with Sunspots, N.Y.* by artist Georgia O'Keeffe. Using the questions and activities below, we encourage you to engage in slow looking, learn about O'Keeffe and her work, and get new ideas for your own art making. Students can view the work in the museum, online, or on a classroom poster.

This resource is made possible through the generous support of the Terra Foundation for American Art.



Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)
The Shelton with Sunspots, N.Y., 1926
Oil on canvas
Gift of Leigh B. Block

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- Look carefully at the work. What do you see or notice?
 - Make a list of 10 descriptive words
 - If you were to describe this painting to a friend using only four words, what words would you choose?
- What angles do you see? Use your finger to trace those lines. Where do they start? Where do they end?
- What moods or feelings do you get from this work? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What do you think the artist wished to show or communicate through this painting?
 - If you could ask her a question, what would you like to know?

CREATIVE RESPONSE: WALK AND EXPLORE YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Georgia O'Keeffe gained inspiration for her work by walking and observing her surroundings. Go on a walk and use all of your senses to observe an area within your community. Put away distractions like your phone and headphones. What shapes and forms do you notice? How do you feel in this place? Sketch or write about your impressions.

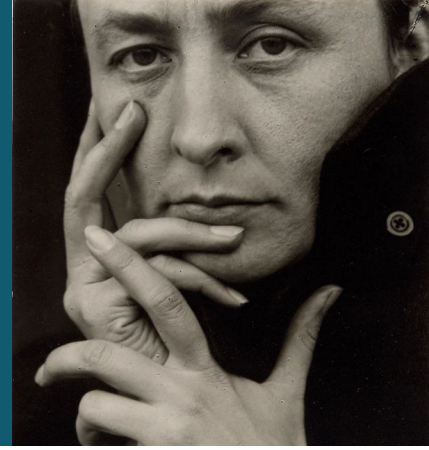
Variation: Select a building in your community that appeals to you. Study and photograph that structure from different vantage points—from up close, further away, above, below, or through objects or barriers. How does its appearance change as your vantage point changes? Which photograph do you like best? Describe and share.

CREATIVE RESPONSE: EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTIVITY

Ask students to point to where they see geometric shapes—circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles—in *Shelton with Sunspots*. Beyond these shapes, what else do they see? Ask students to look at or imagine a favorite building in their community. Direct them to glue shapes cut from colored paper to a piece of paper to recreate that place. Provide crayons, colored pencils, or markers for them to draw in other elements they think are important.

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Alfred Stieglitz
Georgia O'Keeffe, 1918
Gelatin silver print
The Art Institute of Chicago
Alfred Stieglitz Collection



ABOUT THE ARTIST

"I went out one morning to look at [the Shelton Hotel]," said Georgia O'Keeffe, recalling the moment that inspired her to paint *The Shelton with Sunspots*, "and there was the optical illusion of a bite out of one side of the tower made by the sun, with sunspots against the building and against the sky."

Best known for her paintings of flowers, plants, and the American Southwest, this work is part of a group of paintings O'Keeffe made of New York City between 1925–1930 that she called "My New Yorks." In 1924, O'Keeffe and her husband, the photographer and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz, moved temporarily into the Shelton Hotel, a recently built skyscraper in New York's growing skyline. At 31 stories, the Shelton was one of the tallest buildings in New York at that time. Few people had experienced the view of a city from that height. O'Keeffe loved to walk around Manhattan and study the views of the Shelton and other nearby buildings from the street. She noticed how the height differences and gaps between buildings seemed to give shape to the sky.

O'Keeffe, who is known for her groundbreaking approach to abstraction, believed that rather than show reality, her paintings should reflect her observations, thoughts, and feelings. She said, "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." Here O'Keeffe emphasized the Shelton's great height through her use of perspective, as if we are looking up at the soaring building from down below. Organic forms, patches of sky between the buildings, round sunspots, and wavy lines of smoke and steam, soften the hard lines of the built environment. Through this work and others, we see O'Keeffe experimenting with colors, shapes, and forms to describe her experience of the city through different times of day, weather conditions, and perspectives.

O'Keeffe had a special relationship with the Art Institute of Chicago. She spent one year studying at the School of the Art Institute but had to withdraw to recover from typhoid. Her first major museum exhibition was held at the Art Institute in 1943, and when her husband died in 1946, she donated a significant portion of his art collection to the museum, including a large group of photographs, works by American and European modernists, and a number of her own paintings now on view in the museum's galleries.

EXPLORE MORE ARTWORKS

Learn more about the many works by Georgia O'Keeffe and thousands of other artists whose work is held by the museum by searching the [collection](#) by name, title, or keyword. Below are suggestions of select modern artists who share connections with O'Keeffe's "New Yorks." What connections and differences do you find?

Alfred Stieglitz took photographs of the Shelton too, like [From My Window at the Shelton, West](#), 1931 and [New York from the Shelton](#), 1935. [Charles Sheeler](#) painted cities. [Marsden Hartley](#) painted the Southwestern landscape. [Arthur Dove](#) explored abstraction.