



Today's Masterpiece: Georgia O'Keeffe, [*The White Flower \(White Trumpet Flower\)*](#), 1932. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. Inez Grant Parker in memory of Earle W. Grant, 1971.12.



Welcome to Masterpiece Minute. This is Anita Feldman, Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs for The San Diego Museum of Art. Today I will be discussing a visitor favorite: Georgia O’Keeffe’s *White Trumpet Flower* of 1932.

O’Keeffe, born in 1887 of seven children on a Wisconsin dairy farm, had been tutored in art from an early age. By 1905 she attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and two years later arrived at the Art Students League in New York. She recalled that the first time she closely examined a flower was when a high school art teacher held up a jack-in-the-pulpit.

When O’Keeffe first began painting large flowers, her husband, the leading gallerist and photographer Alfred Stieglitz, exclaimed ‘Well what are you going to do with that?’ They were immediately interpreted as expressions of female sexuality, despite her repeated protests over four decades. She declared . . . “you hung all your associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flowers as if I think and see what you think and see—and I don’t.”

O’Keeffe was familiar with photographic compositional devices such as cropping and enlarging, to draw attention to natural forms. In addition to her relationship with Stieglitz, she was close friends with many photographers including Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, Paul Strand, and Todd Webb. Here the flower fills the canvas, with lines emanating from a hidden interior, and dark leaves enhancing contrast. Subtle nuances of color and tone within the white forms can be appreciated the longer one looks at the painting.

In fact, O’Keeffe’s painting technique is extraordinary; ultraviolet light reveals many layers and that incredibly she almost never blended paint on the canvas. Painting wet on dry, often using brushes that she trimmed herself, she ensured each color remained clean – never muddied. The colors were instead mixed on glass palettes according to her handmade color cards. She sometimes added dry pigments to the paint and mixed in mastic varnish to create a matt finish, or diluted with turpentine. She used linseed oil as a levelling media, to smooth out the forms, and zinc white to increase translucency. The effect of blended colors was thus achieved without mixing paint on the canvas.



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