

# AMERICAN MUSEUM OF WESTERN ART

THE ANSCHUTZ COLLECTION

## American Modernism in the West



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Hills, Grey Sky*, 1935.

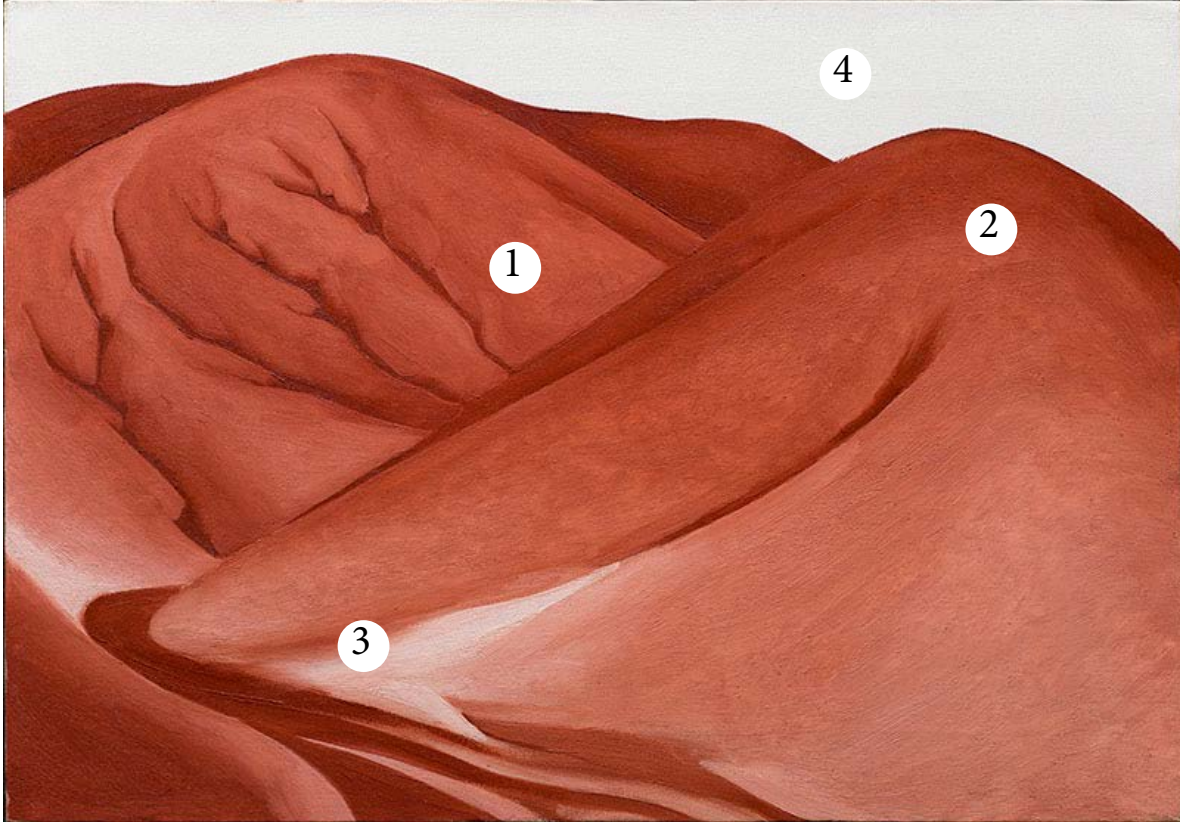
## Background Information

At the turn of the 20th Century, the United States was undergoing major changes in industry, technology, and urbanization. These changes affected the American West, but to a different degree and in different ways. Artists in urban centers began to respond to these changes by shifting to new, modern, styles of painting, and many of them came from, or travelled to the American West. Some settled permanently there. During this period, the West played a major role in the development of American Modernist art. Stark landscapes and bright sunlight in the area led artists like Georgia O'Keeffe to create ever more abstracted paintings. Different artists responded with different styles that were influenced by, or influenced, Modernist movements across the United States.

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## Look Closer



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Hills, Grey Sky*, 1935.

Georgia O'Keeffe, like other modern artists, was known for her use of abstraction in her landscapes. That is, she simplified the lines, colors, and shapes of the landscapes which she painted. Look carefully at her painting, *Red Hills, Grey Sky*. Look at how O'Keeffe painted the shapes and lines of the hills(1). Consider her use of color in this painting, and how she uses it to form the landscape(2). Notice the stark contrast between lights and darks in her composition(3), and the monochrome background(4).

## Discussion Questions

- How does the artist use color in this work? How does this help her create the landscape?
- What adjectives would you use to describe this landscape? Do those words evoke a sense of realism in what you are viewing? Why or why not?
- What makes this piece “modern”?
- Compare this painting to Albert Bierstadt’s *Wind River, Wyoming*. What makes it seem like it could be a departure from previous styles of landscape?

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## Activity

Modern artists in the West admired their surroundings and noticed that the landscapes were often extreme, made even more stark and vivid by the bright sunlight. O’Keeffe was particularly known for her use of crisp lines, simplified shapes, and a reduced color palette. She would often begin her work by sketching the contour lines she viewed in the landscape. In a separate sketch, she would ignore lines, and create a drawing focusing only on shading. First, find a landscape you would like to recreate. You may consider going outdoors to sketch, or you may work from a photo. Take your sketching worksheet, and create your contour line sketch on the left. On the right, create your sketch only focusing on shading. Look at these sketches to visualize the most simple shapes and lines. Now notice the colors you see in the landscape, and feel free to make notes of these colors. Take your project further by combining these two sketches and your notes to create a new landscape. Try using only cut, colored paper to emulate O’Keeffe’s technique.

Materials:

Side-by-side sketch worksheet

Pencils

Photo or 360 view of a landscape

Colored paper in various colors

Scissors

Glue/glue stick

## Resources

<https://www.okeeffemuseum.org/about-georgia-okeeffe/>

<https://www.okeeffemuseum.org/installation/georgia-okeeffe-line-color-composition/>

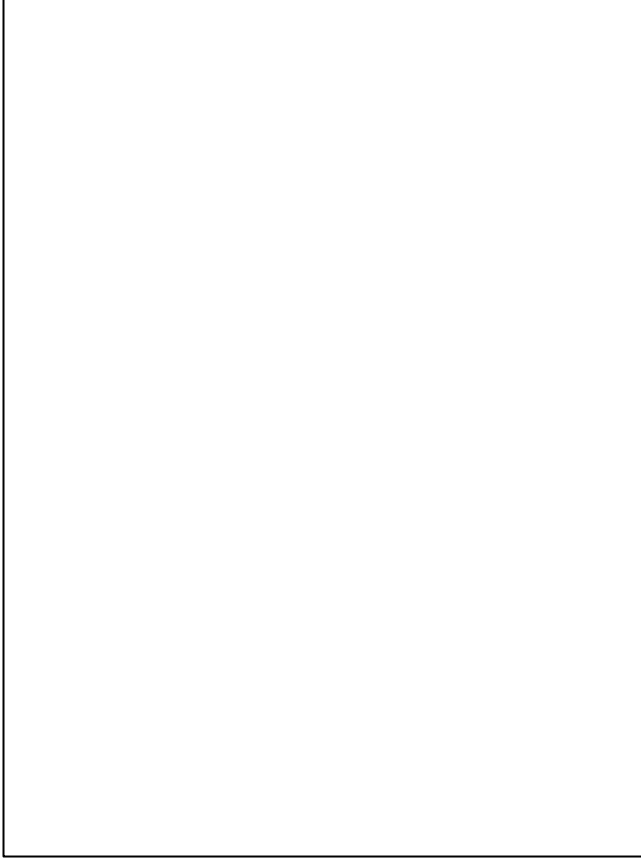
<https://www.ghostranch.org/live-stream/>

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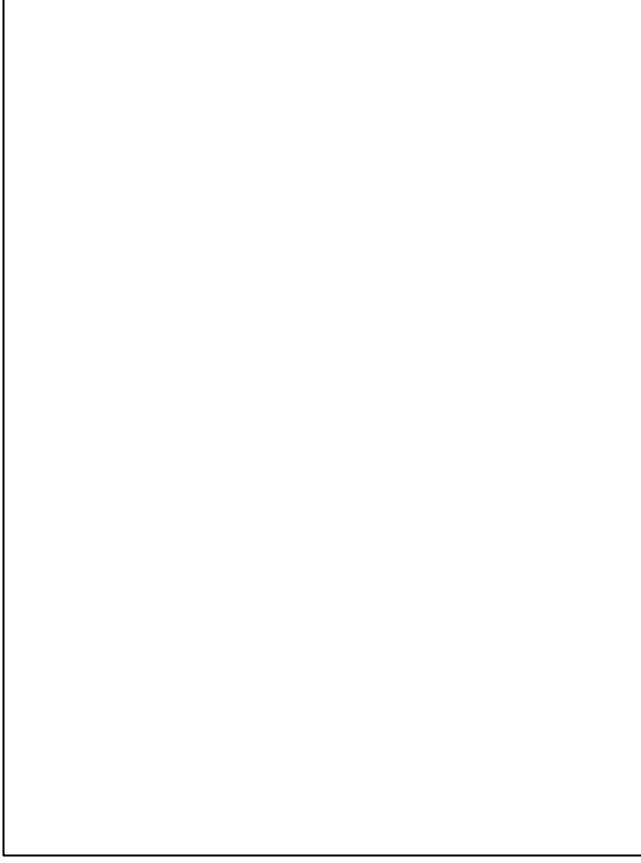


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Box 1: Draw the landscape you are viewing using only contour lines.



Box 2: Draw the landscape you are viewing using only shading.



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## Grade levels: P-12 CO Standards

### **Visual Arts (2009)**

P 1.1; P 2.1; P 3.1; P 4.1

K 1.1-2; K 2.1-2; K 3.1; K 4.1

1 1.1-2; 1 2.1; 1 3.1; 1 4.1

2 1.1-2; 2 2.1; 2 3.1; 2 4.1

3 1.1-2; 3 2.1-2; 3 3.1-2; 3 4.1-2

4 1.1-3; 4 2.1-2; 4 3.1-2; 4 4.1-2

5 1.1-3; 5 2.1-2; 5 3.1,3; 5 4.1-2

6 1.1-3; 6 2.1-2; 6 3.1-2; 6 4.1-2

7 1.1-3; 7 2.1-2; 7 3.1-3; 7 4.1-2

8 1.1-3; 8 2.1-2; 8 3.1-2; 8 4.1-2

HS 1.1-3; HS 2.1-3; HS 3.1-3; HS 4.1-3