

01

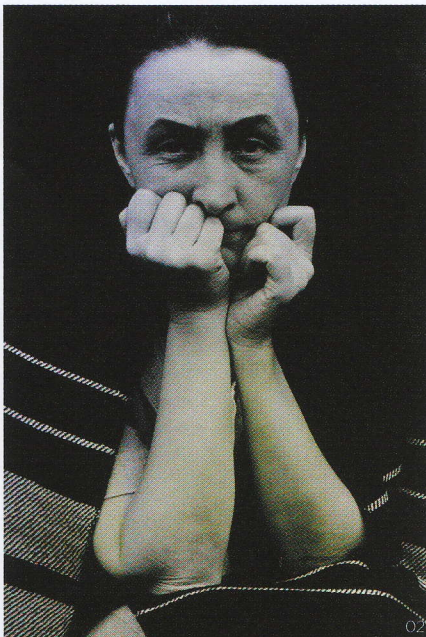
20th-century pioneer

A retrospective on Georgia O'Keeffe is set to give the famous American artist some long-overdue exposure in Europe, writes *Jo Caird*

Georgia O'Keeffe has been an icon of American art for at least the last 50 years, since well before her death in 1986. Yet in Europe the master modernist is barely known. Long overdue, an important travelling retrospective, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Life and Work*, is set to change all that.

The show sets out to provide an introduction to O'Keeffe, says Barbara Buhler Lynes, the exhibition's curator and director of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in New Mexico, USA. Anyone already familiar with O'Keeffe most likely knows the very large-scale flower paintings that she began producing in the 1920s while living in New York with her lover, artistic champion, and eventual husband, the famous photographer Alfred Stieglitz. There are examples of these works in the show – notably *Purple Petunia* (1925) and *Two Jimson Weeds with Green Leaves and Blue Sky* (1938) – but Lynes was very keen that this style of O'Keeffe's painting should not dominate.

“What I felt was that the exhibition should



02

be representative of all of her work... I wanted people to see the varied ambition in her subject matter; that she does flowers, fruits, New York buildings, various components of the natural world.”

Born in 1887 in the rural Mid-West, O'Keeffe was taught art as a child, before pursuing more rigorous training at various institutions in Chicago and New York. It wasn't until after 1918, however, when she moved to New York at Alfred Stieglitz's invitation, that her career really began.

Stieglitz was a major player in the city's avant-garde art scene and exhibited both O'Keeffe's work and his own photographs of her right up until his death in 1946. There are a number of works by Stieglitz in *Georgia O'Keeffe: Life and Work*, included not only to bring the artist to life alongside her paintings, drawings and rare sculptures, but also to underline how “absolutely critical” was Stieglitz's impact on O'Keeffe's career. “He was »



Purple Petunia, 1925 Collection of the Newark Museum, Estate of Miss Cora Louise Hartshorn, 1958 © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011

a key figure in making her well known and without Stieglitz I often wonder if we would even know O'Keeffe", explains Lynes.

Art of the sexes

Stieglitz's support was invaluable, but his critical approach – which still feeds critical thinking about O'Keeffe's work to this day – was in direct opposition to how the artist herself regarded her work. "On the one hand", says Lynes, "he believed that a woman could be a great artist, which was a new idea in the twenties ... a very positive and revolutionary idea. At the same time, he was also an essentialist – he believed that men and women created through their sexuality – and so he was not only gender-biased, but he was using Freudian ideas to explain O'Keeffe's imagery".

It was O'Keeffe's resistance to this idea that led her to move away from abstraction towards representational form in the 1920s in

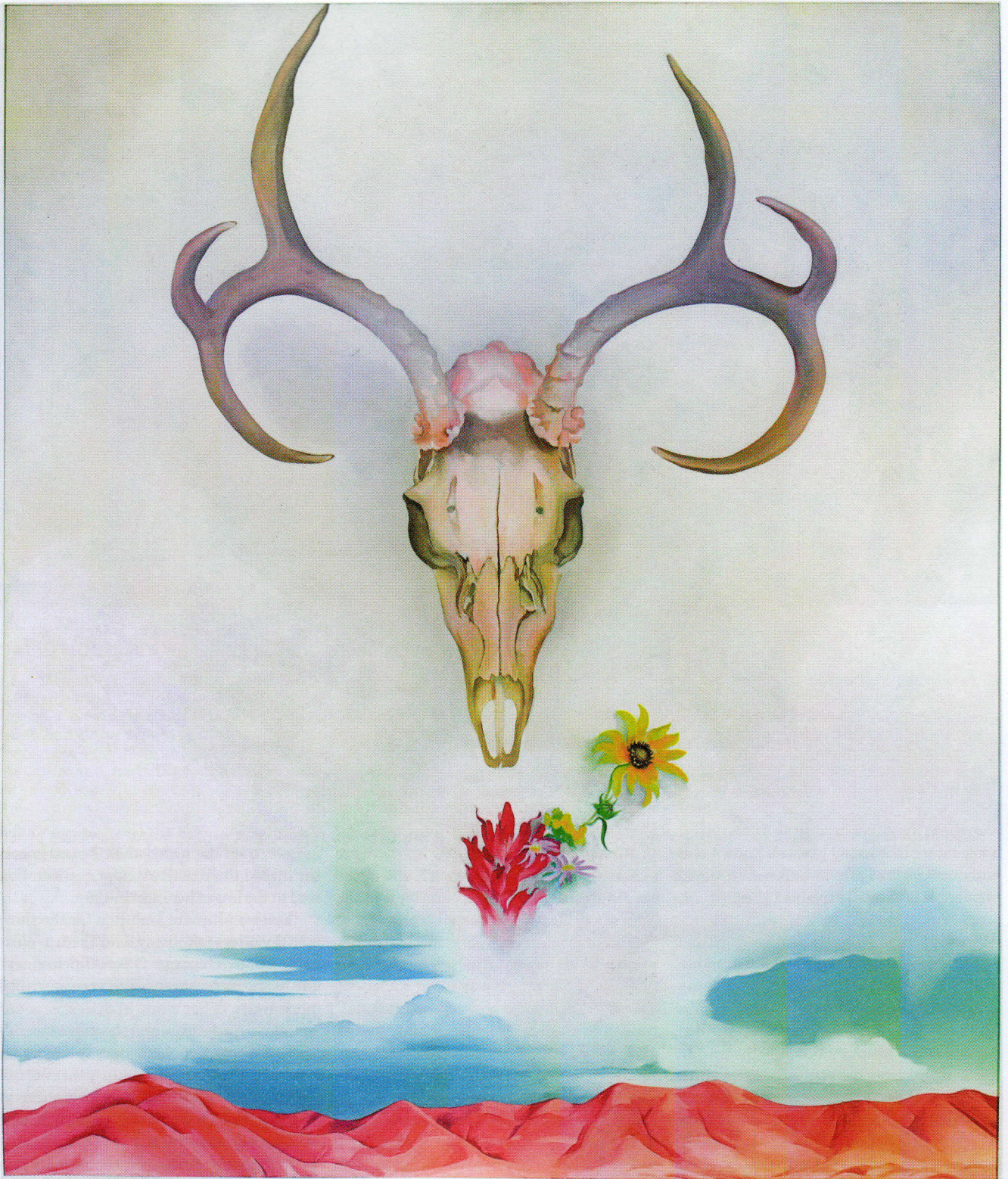
an attempt to have people view her work for what it was rather than for what it said about her. As well as the flower paintings, other types of still life and landscape became highly significant in her oeuvre, particularly after she began working on and off in New Mexico from 1929. But abstraction was never excluded. "Her work, no matter how representational, always has an abstract underpinning. And at the very end of her career, which the exhibition makes very clear, she returns to abstraction entirely", says Lynes.

O'Keeffe was inspired by the harsh, wide-open panoramas of the desert with its palette of bright, earthy colours. She was prolific in her creation of landscapes that exactly summon the atmosphere of her surroundings, *Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico / Out Back of Marie's II* (1930) a striking example of this style of work. After Stieglitz's death, O'Keeffe moved to New Mexico permanently

in 1949, continuing to work at the two homes she owned there until macular degeneration led to the loss of her sight in 1984.

Lynes's ultimate ambition for the show is that visitors take away with them a "curiosity about Georgia O'Keeffe" and are left "wanting to know more, wanting to be more aware of her work, of Stieglitz, of the American modernists and the importance of her contribution to the history of American art. And I want them to be aware that women can do anything when they set their minds to it". Aims of which the great American painter would surely approve. ■

***Georgia O'Keeffe: Life and Work* is running at the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich, Germany, from 3 February to 13 May 2012. www.hypo-kunsthalle.de**



03

01 *Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico / Out Back of Marie's II*, 1930. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Burnett Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011

02 Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe, 1928 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011

03 *Summer Days*, 1936. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Gift of Calvin Klein 94 171 © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011

Further exhibitions:

There are plenty more worthwhile exhibitions taking place across the European art scene, including David Hockney at the Royal Academy and Marc Chagall in Madrid



Woldgate Woods, 21, 23 & 29, 2006 © David Hockney Photo: Richard Schmidt

DAVID HOCKNEY RA: A BIGGER PICTURE

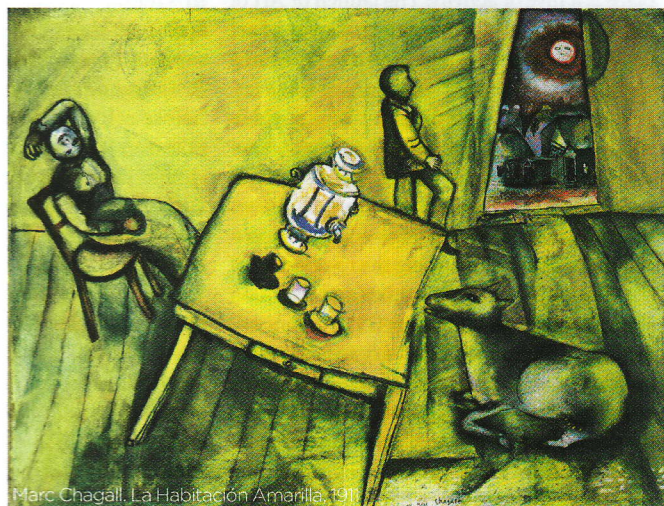
One of the UK's most influential living artists, David Hockney has found acclaim through painting, photomontage, printmaking and set design. An important player in the pop art movement of the 1950s and '60s, Hockney went on to spend time in Los Angeles, where he produced a series of paintings of swimming pools that are now among his most recognised pieces. This exhibition is the first major show of the artist's new landscape works: as well as presenting recent paintings created specifically for the RA's galleries, the exhibition will include works produced over the last 50 years. Exploring Hockney's ongoing passion for landscape, particularly that of his native Yorkshire, the show reveals the artist's interest in working with new technologies, including the Polaroid camera, the colour photocopier, and in recent years his iPhone and iPad. Following London, this show will travel to the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain and the Museum Ludvig, Cologne, Germany.

David Hockney RA: A Bigger Picture is running at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK from 21 January to 9 April 2012. www.royalacademy.org.uk

MARC CHAGALL

The first major Spanish retrospective of the Russian painter, this exhibition aims to highlight Chagall's role in 20th century art history. Such is the scale of the show, it is taking place across two venues in the Spanish capital. The Thyssen hang focuses on the artist's early life, his time in Paris before the First World War, and the years spent in France and Russia before his exile to the United States in 1941. The Fundación then picks up where the Thyssen leaves off, exploring Chagall's American career, as well as showcasing some of his non-painting works, including sculptures, ceramics and stained-glass windows. Chagall, who was born Moïse Shagal in what is now Belarus, is regarded as the preeminent Jewish 20th century artist, as well as a pioneer of modernism.

Chagall is running at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and the Fundación Caja Madrid, Madrid, Spain, from 14 February to 20 May 2012. www.museothyssen.org



Marc Chagall, La Habitación Amarilla, 1911