

Biography of Mark Rothko (September 25, 1903 to February 25, 1970) by Kurt Gravenhorst

Mark Rothko, born Markus Yakovlevich Rothkowitz, was only ten when his family, fleeing Russia and Jewish persecution, arrived on Ellis Island in 1913. Speaking only Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew, Rothko quickly learned English and accelerated through the school system, graduating with honors and receiving a scholarship to Yale.

Finding the atmosphere at Yale stultifying and elitist, he dropped out and went to New York City where he encountered the fertile, vibrant avant-garde art scene. Although later linked to the school of Abstract Expressionism, Rothko eschewed artistic labels and sought to create a new artistic that gradually evolved to the creation of large-scale paintings with shimmering rectangles of color designed to completely encompass the viewer and evoke a sense of the spiritual awe and magnificence. "I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on . . . The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. "

Although achieving commercial success and fame, Rothko felt a growing personal seclusion and a sense of being misunderstood as an artist. He feared that people purchased his paintings simply out of fashion. In 2012, just 42 years after his death, Mark Rothko's painting, "Orange, Red, Yellow," sold at Christie's for \$86.8 million, establishing a new record for post-war art sold at a public auction—a remarkable, but sadly ironic, achievement for an artist who committed suicide at the age of 66 feeling that his work never fully received the appreciation or understanding it deserved.

Biography of Georgia O'Keeffe (November 15, 1887 to March 6, 1986) by Marki Shalloe

Sun Prairie, Wisconsin-born Georgia O'Keeffe grew up on a prairie farm, where she demanded -- and got-- art lessons. She attended the Art Institute of Chicago in 1904 and Columbia University in 1907, where exposure to Japanese art honed her eye for color and line. In 1912, Arthur Dow introduced her to abstraction vs. realism. She was ready to be an artist.

But this was early 1900's America. While there was an open door for modern art, the door did not swing wide for women. O'Keeffe settled in as a teacher in West Texas and would have remained there, happy in her prairie vistas, if a friend had not sent her drawings to photographer/gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz. Stieglitz displayed the drawings as 'A Woman on Paper!' As he'd neglected to ask Georgia's permission, they were off to a rocky start.

Stieglitz persisted and moved Georgia to New York, first as a gallery artist, then as a wife. He displayed her art next to his nude photographs of her, forever linking Georgia's paintings to voluptuousness and sensuality. She responded by painting flowers larger-than-life "as if we humans were butterflies."

She saw New York as 'looking down steel canyons' and moved solo to New Mexico in 1929, at the age of 32. There, her riotous flowers changed into bits of blue sky as seen through sun-bleached bones. In 1960, she was the first female artist to have a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. In 2014, her 48"x40" 'Jimson Weed' sold for \$44,405,000.

When Stieglitz died, O'Keeffe spent all night replacing his casket's pink silk lining with white muslin. She buried his ashes under a tree in New York so only she'd know where he was. Her ashes are scattered near Abiquiu, where everyone - even the desert - knows exactly where she is.