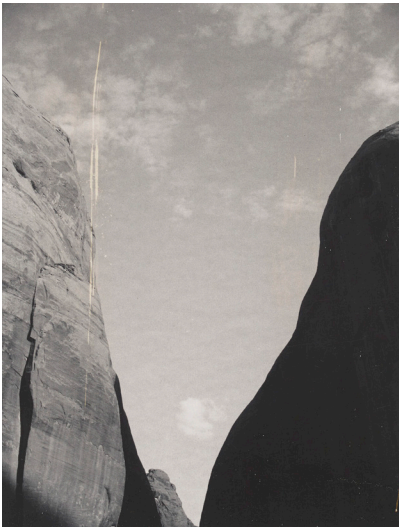


Exploring Composition and Drawing a Reduced Landscape

Time: 1 hour

Difficulty level: Medium

Messy level: Low



Top and bottom: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Glen Canyon*, 1964, black-and-white Polaroid, gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

To view more images from *Georgia O'Keeffe, Photographer*, visit the [MFAH website](#).

This is a great activity for people looking to strengthen their drawing and composition skills. Professional artists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe, spend countless hours honing their skills and planning compositions before creating a final work of art. Step into the shoes of O'Keeffe by looking at the canyons she frequented to find the perfect composition of lines, shape, and form. Then, create a series of drawing studies.

Investigate the Work of Art!

1. While Georgia O'Keeffe is well known for painting, she also took photographs and made drawings. She approached every art form in the same way. She would look at a landscape and find the best combination of shapes and space. This led her to create countless studies of the same landscapes. Look at the two images on the left—what differences do you see between the two?
2. Glen Canyon is a massive ravine spanning Utah and Arizona. You can see in the test prints that O'Keeffe took images capturing the vastness of the canyon. In the bottom two photographs, she has zoomed in on the V shape where two canyons meet. Does this approach make the canyon feel more intimate?
3. O'Keeffe cared more about how she was constructing the composition when taking a photo than producing a final print. Many times, she would only have test sheets made, or simply get images printed at a drugstore. Thinking about phones and digital cameras used today, do people typically get prints made? What motivates people to take photos daily?

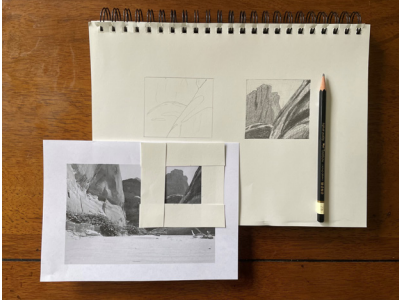
Let's Make Some Art!

Arthur Wesley Dow, O'Keeffe's most influential teacher, suggested, "Try only to cut a space finely by landscape shapes. . . . [T]he art in your composition will lie in placing these in good relations to each other." O'Keeffe applied these lessons to her drawings of Palo Duro Canyon. She drew the arresting landforms of the Texas Panhandle in "landscape shapes"—in both vertical and horizontal formats—each time filling her small sheet of paper with a harmonious balance of forms. While she did not learn to photograph from Dow, his instruction seeded an understanding of photography's capacity for reframing.

Gather These Materials

- Sketchbook
- Drawing pencil set or 2B, B, H
- Regular eraser
- Kneaded eraser
- Artist tape

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Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

1. Through photo documentation, we can view images of the landscapes from which Georgia O'Keeffe drew inspiration. Use the Internet to find landscape images of Palo Duro Canyon, Canyon De Chelly, or Glen Canyon.
2. Print the image in black and white (O'Keeffe chose to use black-and-white photography even though color film was available).
3. Tear out a sheet of paper from your sketchbook. This will be used for creating your viewfinder.
4. Cut four strips of paper between 3–4 inches long and 1-inch wide.

Tape these together at the corners to become a viewfinder, or frame.

5. Slide the viewfinder over the printed image, paying close attention to the different shapes and values you are capturing.
6. When you find a composition that you like, leave the viewfinder in that spot—this will be the view for your drawing.
7. On the next sheet in your sketchbook, use artist's tape to create squares that are similar in size to your viewfinder. You will be drawing within these squares and the tape will keep your edges clean.
8. Squint your eyes and look at the area in the viewfinder. Mentally pick out the large shapes.
9. Using a pencil, lightly begin drawing these large shapes into your sketchbook. The important and difficult part is to make sure the shapes are in the right area within the square.
10. Move the viewfinder to a different spot within the printed image to find your next desired composition.
11. On your next sketchbook square, repeat steps 9 and 10.
12. Create as many compositions as possible, and then shade in your favorite one.
13. Remove artist tape.

Take it a step further:

Once you have picked a favorite composition, try making it larger and using materials like paint or charcoal to create a full rendering with shading.

This exhibition is organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, with the collaboration of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe.

Generous support provided by:
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Family Programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive generous support from the Junior League of Houston, Inc.

Learning and Interpretation programs receive generous funding from the Jerold B. Katz Foundation; Institute of Museum and Library Services; H-E-B; MD Anderson Cancer Center; The Brown Foundation, Inc.; Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo; Sharon G. Dies; Susan Vaughan Foundation; and additional generous donors.

All Learning and Interpretation programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive endowment funds provided by Louise Jarrett Moran Bequest; Caroline Wiess Law; Windgate Foundation; the William Randolph Hearst Foundation; Cyvia and Melvyn Wolff; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Fondren Foundation; BMC Software, Inc.; the Wallace Foundation; the Neal Myers and Ken Black Children's Art Fund; Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Ballard; Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Tate; the Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation; Virginia and Ira Jackson; the Favrot Fund; CFP Foundation; Neiman Marcus Youth Arts Education; gifts in memory of John Wynne; and gifts in honor of Beth Schneider.