

Studio Saturdays: Pull String Flowers



Drawing Number 12 (1917)

Georgia O'Keeffe

1968

Offset lithograph on Rives BFK paper
on Rives BFK paper

24 in. x 19 in. print

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MATERIALS

- 2 Sheets of White Paper
- String
- Paint
- Paintbrush

Georgia O’Keeffe was an American artist who was born in Wisconsin in 1887. She is considered one of the most important artists of the 20th century. Georgia O’Keeffe went to two art colleges as a young adult and was taught to paint in the style of realism. This means trying to make your drawings or paintings appear real, like a photograph, by recreating exactly what you see in front of you. Because O’Keeffe thought she wasn’t good enough at realism to be a professional artist, she decided to become an art teacher instead. In 1912, O’Keeffe attended a summer class for art teachers at a university in Virginia. In this class, she was introduced to the ideas of Arthur Wesley Dow, an American painter. He believed in creating artworks focused on shape, color, and line, rather than artworks focused on making exact realistic images. Through learning these ideas, O’Keeffe began making more abstract drawings, paintings, and prints. Abstract artworks use shapes, color, and line to make images that often do not represent a real object.

As her career went on, Georgia O’Keeffe didn’t stick only to creating abstract images, but also included some realism in her artworks. She would often paint cow skulls, and, most famously, would create many large and detailed paintings of flowers. One thing that set Georgia O’Keeffe apart from other abstract artists was that she used soft and natural shapes in her abstractions, rather than sharp geometric ones. Her nature-based imagery was inspired by her surroundings of New Mexico, where she lived in an old house out in the desert. This print, *Drawing Number 12* (1917), is a 1968 recreation of a drawing she made in 1917, when she was still beginning her interest in abstraction. The shape doesn’t look like exactly like anything that exists in real life, but it could represent a flower, tree, wind, or something else from nature. What does it look like to you?

For today’s craft, we will be creating our own abstract pulled-string flowers inspired by Georgia O’Keeffe. Although I’ll just be showing you how to create flowers today, remember how Georgia O’Keeffe thought outside of the box for her nature-inspired abstraction, and feel free to use this pulled-string method to make more abstract art with different subjects. It doesn’t have to look exactly like what you’re representing—get creative and don’t be afraid to experiment!

THINK LIKE AN ARTIST

- 1) Do you like geometric abstraction (abstract art with hard lines and geometric shapes) or organic abstraction (abstract art with soft lines and nature-inspired shapes) more? Why?
- 2) What does “*Drawing Number 12*” look like to you? What other things can you see in it?

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Lay out a piece of paper and put some paint on a surface like a paper plate
2. Cover two thirds of the string with paint using a paint brush.
3. Next, lay out the string in a wobble shape on your sheet of paper. You can do straight up and down, or have it leaning to one side. Make it as big or small as you'd like. Make sure you leave the section of clean string hanging off the bottom of the paper.
4. Place your second sheet of paper over the string and bottom paper. Then, pressing your hand over both pieces of paper, with the string sandwiched between, pull on the clean section of string.
5. When you remove your top paper, you should have an abstract flower shape!
6. Now you can paint the string again and add as many flowers as you want. You can experiment with laying the string in different shapes, and make simple leaves using an upside-down U shape. Get creative; see if you can make things other than flowers using this technique!
7. Use colored pencils to decorate. You can add on details like leaves, stigma, other flowers, or color in sections. Let your imagination take over!