

Example of essay on georgia o?

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



Critical analysis of Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pattern of Leaves* (1923) and comparison of the work to Gainsborough's *Portrait of a Woman* (1750).

Among the most celebrated American artists of the 20th century, Georgia O’Keeffe created some of the most iconic works of art in the continent (Arnason and Prather 408). *Pattern of Leaves* was created in 1923 and is a great example of her work although it belongs to her early period (The Phillips Collection).

The painting depicts three magnified leaves placed one upon another as if in layers against a neutral background. The form is simple, the lines clear and what is represented seems evident, but there is more to the painting that is at first visible. The leaf placed diagonally on top is clearly a maple leaf in a dark red color which immediately catches the eye from the white and green colored leaves placed vertically below seemingly serving as a background. A rip on the red maple leaf reveals a yellow line that the viewer cannot really understand where it comes from. The painting is a unique combination of the representation of an object (or objects) in a form that approaches abstraction (The Phillips Collection). The leaves are still recognizable as objects but at the same time are magnified and fragmented to the point of distortion. In the end, they are even used as a way to convey emotion. As O’Keeffe often used devices like tears and rifts in order to convey personal feelings and states of mind, the tear on the maple leaf and the yellow line that emerges from that opening is meant to be a dramatic and emotional addition to the painting (The Phillips Collection).

O’Keeffe painted during a period when more and more artists turned to complete abstraction. In this respect, her work in general and this painting in

particular could be seen as a bridge between the past and her time, a bridge between two traditions, one that had started during the Renaissance (or even before) and another that was just emerging but which would prevail in the long 20th century. At the same time, O’Keeffe seems to have been influenced by a relatively new –at the time- form of art: photography. Photographs by Paul Strand and her husband, Alfred Stieglitz which focused on objects or part of objects that were isolated from everything else that might surround them inspired O’Keeffe who used this isolation in her paintings (The Phillips Collection). Through this and with the simplicity of the forms she chose O’Keeffe tried to reach the “ essence” of the objects in accordance with the theories of the art theoretician and her teacher, Arthur Wesley Dow.

It is interesting to compare Patterns of Leaves with a work of art created almost two centuries earlier. Gainsborough’s Portrait of a Woman was created in 1750, belongs to the Rococo style and depicts a young, richly dressed woman in front of a landscape. In sharp contrast to O’Keeffe’s work a human is the protagonist of the painting. Gainsborough also scaled the picture in a realistic way unlike O’Keeffe who magnified and almost distorted the leaves. He used colors to clearly define lines and spaces, to depict the figure and its surroundings. In a world where photography was not yet invented, portraiture played the role of photographs and thus a realistic representation was necessary. Gainsborough was therefore painting –at least in this particular instance- for a very different reason than O’Keeffe. He worked in the Renaissance tradition at a time when deviation from realistic representation could not even be thought of. O’Keeffe, on the other hand

worked in a completely different world. Film and photography have been invented already from the mid 19th century, inventions that made life easier than ever before, like electricity, were a reality by 1923 and the world was radically different. In this environment artists were moving rapidly away from earlier traditions in art trying to establish a modern way of painting along with modern ways of seeing and experiencing art. The world had changed and art had changed with it.

WORKS CITED

Arnason, H. H. and Maria Prather. History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and Photography. London: Thames and Hudson. 1998.

The Phillips Collection. " Pattern of Leaves, 1923" Georgia O'Keeffe 1887-1986. Web. 14 Oct. 2012 http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/OKeeffe-Pattern_of_Leaves.htm.