

# Free essay on black cross new mexico

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In the realm of abstract modernist painters, Georgia O'Keeffe is not often thought of as being among this specific group of artists. However, many of her works do fit into the realm of abstract modernism, with their strange obsession with objects and their vague connection to the landscape. For me, her painting *Black Cross, New Mexico* is a defining piece of what makes abstract modernism art, due to its ability to create general feelings of oppression and isolation through its too-close rendering of a black cross in the desert.

In this oil on canvas painting, 39x30" in size, O'Keeffe paints a large black cross in the foreground - we are so close to it that it takes up the whole painting and it is implied there is much more to the cross outside its borders. Above the horizontal plank of the cross, which lays on the horizon, a clear blue sky with white highlights is seen. Below the horizontal plank, a sharp red and yellow line borders the plank, under which is a rolling sea of dunes, with large, acute humps rising up from the sand. This painting has a large sense of depth, with the dunes seemingly stretching back all the way to the horizon. With the cross in the foreground, it looms over the sand and almost completely obscures the background from the viewer's eye.

O'Keeffe's work places a strange emphasis on beauty and death in the American Southwest, imbuing it with purpose and theme that is often ignored in abstract modernist paintings. In *Black Cross*, the crucifix (a crucifix in the sand conjuring up images of the Crucifixion) is colored black, a color commonly associated with death. At the same time, the rolling dunes of the sand in the background provide an elegance and a beauty to the starkness of the rest of the painting.

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The painting itself was inspired by O'Keeffe seeing the sacred monuments of the moradas, remote chapels set up by Catholic brotherhoods known as Penitentes, strewn throughout the New Mexican landscape. This was a way to show the domineering influence of Hispanic religion in New Mexico, by having the black cross dominate the view of the audience, almost to the exclusion of all else. With this clear artistic intent behind the creation of the painting, a message is formed, which is the hallmark of an artistic work.

With the black cross, almost oppressive in the foreground, O'Keeffe seeks to both protect and warn us about the dangers of the desert. The black cross is pushing us back, pushing us away from the rolling hills and unbearable heat, while at the same time telling us of the death that occurs there (through the blackness and unforgiving size of the cross). These things offer the viewer a feeling of both uncertainty and sheer beauty, as the American Southwest is presented as a romantic minefield of danger.

O'Keeffe's Black Cross, New Mexico presents the perfect definition of how abstract modernist paintings absolutely qualify as art. In this simple painting, the religious and Catholic presence in the American Southwest is made surprisingly clear. It also showed the inexorable influence of man on the natural desert landscape, showing O'Keeffe's anxiety at the increasing industrialization of America, and the cost it would have on the serenity of New Mexico. With the cross' flat plane, staring straight out at the audience, the stretching perspective of the desert is also starkly contrasted. Due to the imbuing of such meaning on the landscape, it is easy to derive purpose and emotion from it. This fills it with artistic purpose and makes it art.