

SHOWCASE

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O'Keeffe's view opens

By KARLA TIPTON
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Georgia O'Keeffe's artistic vision of the desert has become a part of the 20th century collective consciousness.

Although her oil paintings differ dramatically from the commercial images of the Old West's cowboys and cattle, O'Keeffe's bleached skulls crowned with flowers and the majestic landscapes seem to burn themselves onto the mind after just a glimpse.

Like the desert itself, her distilled images — whether in the abstract or representational forms — are large, sparse, hard, unpopulated.

"She avoided tourist areas. She was more concerned with isolated areas, the rugged quality, the timeless quality of the



desert," said Ilene Fort, curator for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's presentation of "Georgia O'Keeffe: 1887-1986," a centennial exhibition of the late artist's paintings and watercolors. A traveling exhibit put together by the National Gallery of Art, the show opened Thursday and runs through June 18.

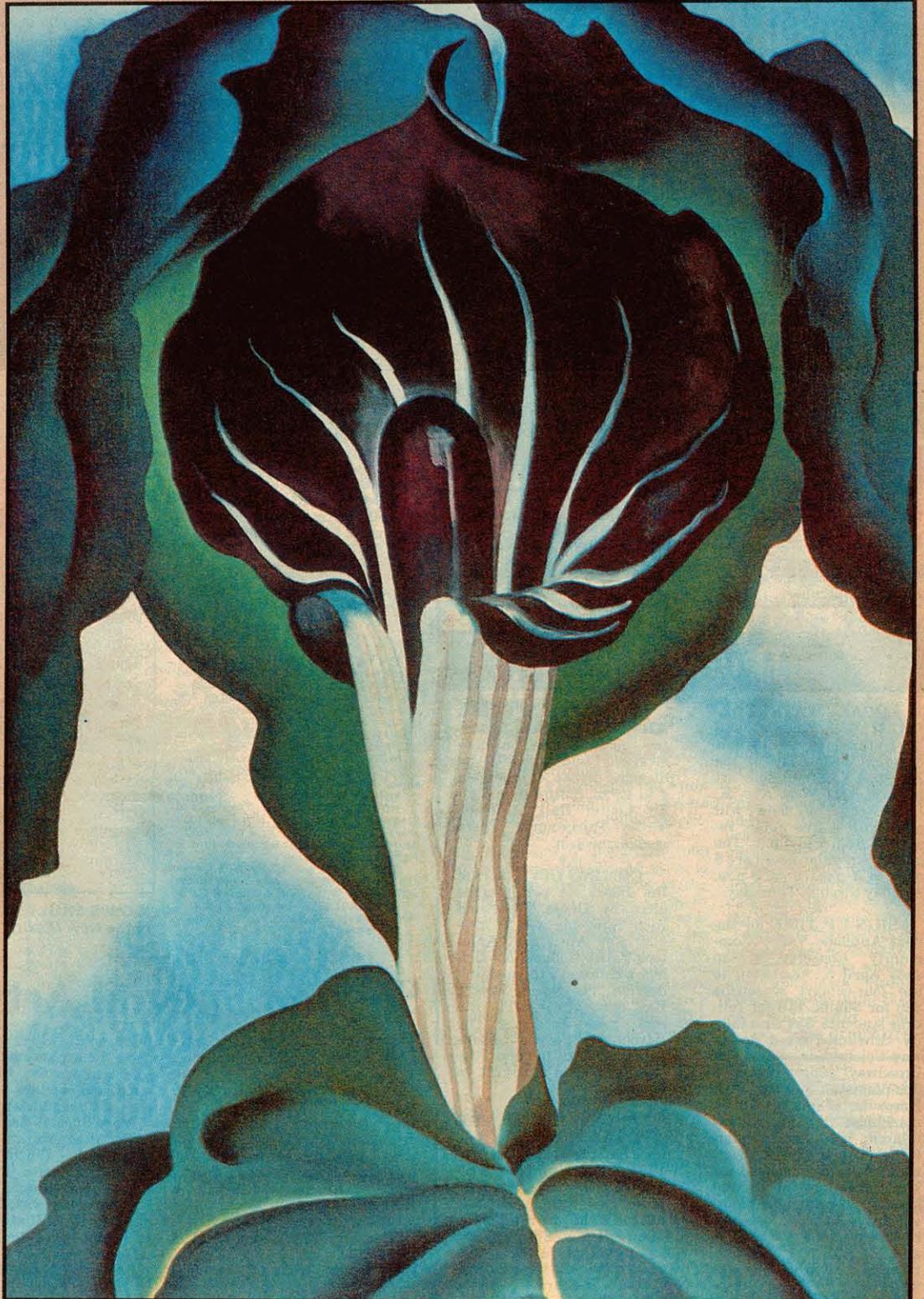
"Her images contributed to people understanding the beauty of the Southwest," said Fort. "I think she captured better than any other artist the mystique of the desert."

It was to the desert O'Keeffe permanently moved in 1949 after the death of photographer and art gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz, her husband and most avid supporter. She already had 33 years of New York exhibitions behind her. But after dividing her time between both places for several years, she left New York for the isolation of Abiquiu, N.M. Nearly 40 years later at age 98 she died there.

In going to the desert, she not only exerted individualism in her artwork but also in her life. She tested her physical and psychological independence by living beyond the fringes of civilization, following a rugged road of artistic revelation.

Her art and her actions generated criticism.

See O'KEEFFE on H2



O'Keeffe

From H1

"Because she was such a strong painter to begin with and quite an independent person - I think 'discussion' follows people like that all the time," said Fort.

O'Keeffe didn't want to be known as strictly a woman artist.

"She was very adamant about her art not being considered a woman's art. She was an artist, not a woman artist - way before most female artists even thought about that," said Fort. "She fared equally in a man's world."

While the National Gallery of Art exhibit encompasses all six decades of her artwork - featuring more than 100 abstracts, flower paintings, cityscapes, still lifes and landscapes - it focuses on those pieces created from 1910 to the 1970s when she did her finest work.

It's in this period we find in her work those icons that have become so memorable: the abstractly fascinating sea shells, the landscapes and the stark bones. Her austere style made her a pioneer of the American modernist movement, yet O'Keeffe wasn't overwhelmingly influenced by her European contemporaries.

"She didn't go to Europe until she was quite old, and so her abstractions are very much her own inspiration," said Fort. "She's less derivative (of European modernist art) than some of the other American modernists because of her independence."

Georgia O'Keeffe:

1887-1986

This traveling exhibition put together by the National Gallery of Art and funded by the Southwestern Bell Foundation is the first major exhibit of O'Keeffe's artwork since her death in 1986 at age 98. It includes more than 100 of the modernist artist's oil and watercolor paintings from 1910 through the 1970s.

WHERE: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.

WHEN: Through June 18.

HOURS: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday; 9:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday and Friday; and 9:30 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. (Last admission time is 1½ hours before closing.)

TICKETS: \$5 for adults; \$3.75 for senior citizens (62 and over) and students with ID; and \$2 for children (ages 6-12).

AVAILABLE: At the museum box office or through Ticketron.

INFORMATION: (213) 857-6110.

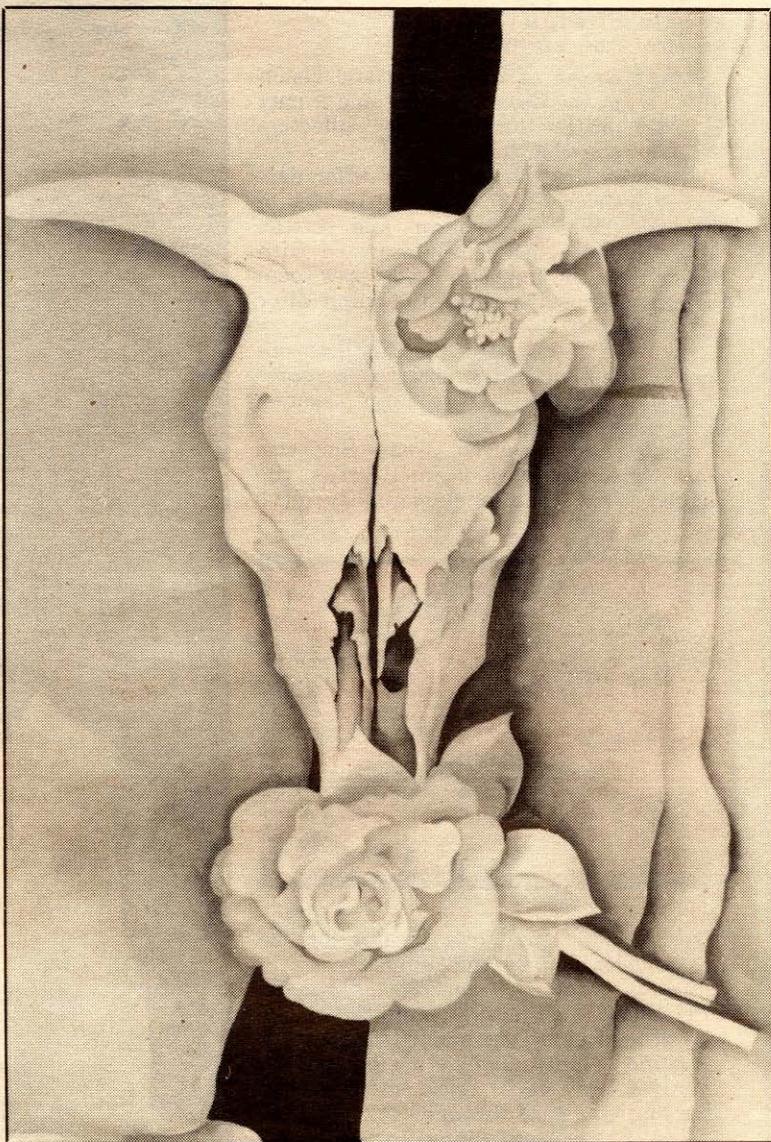
O'Keeffe was fond of repeating one idea in a series of pictures dealing with the same subject until she had exhausted her interest in the imagery. Many series are represented in the county museum's exhibit, including the "Special," "Evening Star," "Black Place," "Patio" and "Cloud" series.

Since the West Coast showing wasn't on the original schedule, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's version of the exhibit is slightly different from those presented at the other four sites (Washington, New York, Chicago and Dallas). While Los An-

geles lost the opportunity to see the controversial "Lawrence Tree" (which had art connoisseurs arguing over which direction the painting should be hung), it will be showing "Cow's Skull: Red, White and Blue," one of O'Keeffe's most famous paintings, unavailable to the earlier sites because of previous commitments.

On the cover . . .

Shown on the cover of Showcase are Georgia O'Keeffe's "Red Hills and Bones" and "Jack-in-the-Pulpit."



'COW'S SKULL WITH Calico Roses,' 1931, shows the influence of the New Mexico desert on Georgia O'Keeffe.