

# Georgia O'Keeffe

American, 1887-1986



*Black Cross, New Mexico, 1929*  
Oil on canvas

99.2 x 76.3 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago  
Purchase Fund, 1943.95

"I saw the crosses so often — and often in unexpected places — like a thin dark veil of the Catholic church spread over the New Mexico landscape," said Georgia O'Keeffe of the Southwestern territory near [Taos](#), where she would eventually settle. A member of the circle of [avant-garde](#) artists who exhibited at Alfred Stieglitz's [New York](#) gallery, 291, O'Keeffe married Stieglitz in 1924. She made her first visit to New Mexico in 1929. During late-night walks in the desert, she encountered mysterious crosses, one of which she transformed in *Black Cross, New Mexico*. These sacred monuments were probably erected near remote chapels (*moradas*) by secret Catholic lay brotherhoods called *Penitentes*.

O'Keeffe, a pioneer of American [Modernism](#), emphasized the essential beauty of all of her subjects by magnifying shapes and simplifying details. She painted the cross just as she saw it: "big and strong, put together with wooden pegs," and behind it, "those hills . . . [that] go on and on — it was like looking at two miles of gray elephants." For O'Keeffe, "painting the crosses was a way of painting the country," a beloved region where she settled in 1949 and lived until her death at age 98.