

ARTISTS & ILLUSTRATORS (2016)
(To coincide with the Georgia O' Keeffe exhibition at the Tate London)

Expressive Flowers

London artist Andrea Byrne's flower portraits explore the unpredictability of nature. Here she demonstrates how to capture that rebellious nature on canvas.

Flowers make excellent models. Generously they're always available in whatever form or season willing to sit anytime of the day or night (all without prior notice) and yet never succumbing to either pettiness nor complaining. Their conversation is always profound obviously speaking of life, love and death but always redundant of cliché. Flowers never outstay their welcome. In the open field engaged in a rendezvous with a breeze they shudder flirtatiously, so easily swayed by the chatter of the wind. Then gone.

The challenge of their capture is what interests me along with the questions they always leave behind. A woman painting flowers has a long tradition but it is a complicated and sometimes subversive one. I decisively wanted to paint large-scale flowers that had a watercolour quality but most of all I wanted them to be strong in every sense through scale, application and impact but most of all I wanted to hear them bellow their questions. Georgia O'Keeffe was one of the most significant and intriguing artists of the twentieth century. An independent woman forging her way artistically and personally in a male world. A founding figure of American modernism and embraced as an important pioneer by feminist artists of the 1970s. For myself the work of Georgia O Keeffe - especially her flowers - are influential and so important purely because her paintings are abundant and replete with spirituality, integrity, mystery and power. In 1925 *Petunia* her first large-scale flower painting was exhibited in New York City and marked the beginning of a close-up examination of the flower as model. The ruffles and crevices of the petals and stamen portraying reproduction, sex and beauty beckon a viewer to stop and listen intently to the question.

"You hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think of the flower – and I don't". (About Myself Georgia O'Keeffe New York 1939)

Andrea Byrne

