

Georgia O'Keeffe handles some jade

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A nice reminder that one of the 20th Century's most celebrated modernists anchored her approach to abstraction in a deep engagement with the material world:

I handled pieces of Jade—They told me it was Jade—I would not have thought what it might be—I only knew that the surfaces were fine and smooth and cold...the pleasure in the thing its self is some what dulled when you begin to wonder how that particular shape can symbolize the earth and that idea seems to take away from the pleasure one feels—just in the thing its self—So—looking up—a row of round shapes catches ones eye—round—flat—and a round hole in the center—the circle serves to fascinate—you take it in your hand...you are told that these symbolize heaven—that idea does not disturb—for the sun seems round—if you have ever stood on the prairie at night—alone and put your head way back till you look straight up so that you half way see all the horizon at once—a circle unbroken by trees or hills or houses—the heavens seem a marvelously round trembling living thing—you would like to go deep into the colors of these round shapes and be lost....

-- From a letter by Georgia O'Keeffe describing her 1922 visit to the Asian collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

[Quoted in [this recent article](#) in the New York Review of Books.]