

THE  
METROPOLITAN  
MUSEUM  
OF  
ART

BULLETIN  
FALL 1984





# GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

LISA MINTZ MESSINGER  
Curatorial Assistant, Department of Twentieth Century Art

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



Many *Bulletin* readers, viewing the cover of this issue, will immediately recognize the very individualistic art of Georgia O'Keeffe. Her memorable images of the landscape of the American West, flowers, and bones possess a distinctive strength of character and adventurous spirit.

O'Keeffe's stature as an artist has endured throughout the changing currents of modern art. In the mid-1910s, as a member of the avant-garde circle surrounding the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, she applied the European modernists' abstract vocabulary of forms to a traditionally American subject—landscape. For much of O'Keeffe's career, however, she has not been associated with any artistic movement, pursuing her own course in the isolation of the New Mexico desert. Today, looking back over a long span of time, one can find correspondences between her work and recent trends in painting toward both representational imagery and landscape motifs.

A prolific artist, O'Keeffe has produced a total of more than nine hundred works of art, only a few of which are in public collections. A large number have been retained by the artist and they have not been widely exhibited or published. In view of the scarcity of O'Keeffe's work in museums, the Metropolitan is especially fortunate in possessing the largest such collection. Our holdings, spanning the years from 1915 to the 1950s, are comprised of twenty-five works in a variety of media—twelve oil paintings, three watercolors, two charcoal drawings, one pastel, and seven photographs.

The Metropolitan's collection is strongest in O'Keeffe's early works, drawings of the 1910s and paintings of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. This is largely the result of the singular history of the collection. Most of our works were part of the magnificent bequest of O'Keeffe's husband, Alfred Stieglitz, who died on July 13, 1946. Stieglitz, a pioneer of photography and modern art in America, introduced and sponsored O'Keeffe's work for thirty years, exhibiting it at his well-known New York galleries. In his will, Stieglitz empowered Georgia O'Keeffe to transfer his collection of paintings and photographs to the institutions of her choice. In 1949 she divided the collection among six institutions, giving the bulk—more than five hundred works—to the Metropolitan. The rest were distributed among the Art Institute of Chicago, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, Fisk University, and Yale University. At the same time she presented the Museum with a permanent loan

of eleven of her oils, two charcoal drawings, and a watercolor—all given with the stipulation that they be made part of the Alfred Stieglitz Collection. Already in the Metropolitan were *Black Hollyhock*, *Blue Larkspur*—the first painting by O'Keeffe the Museum had purchased, in 1934—and *Pelvis II*, acquired in 1947. In recent years the Museum's collection was further expanded by the acquisition of three early works on paper—the two watercolors of female nudes and the pastel *A Storm*—and the seven photographs taken by the artist in the mid-1950s, four of which are published here for the first time.

Although the Metropolitan's paintings all predate 1945, the collection is representative of most of O'Keeffe's major themes, which had been introduced in her repertory before the mid-1940s. Unfortunately, there are gaps in the collection in several important areas: the New York City architectural scenes of the 1920s, the patios and the rivers of the 1950s, and the enormous clouds of the 1960s. We fervently hope that this publication will draw attention to these omissions, so that one day the Metropolitan's collection will represent fully the entire career of one of America's foremost artists.

Philippe de Montebello  
Director

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# GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE has remained for almost seven decades a major but separate figure among the American modernists. Remarkably unaffected by the fluctuations of artistic trends, O'Keeffe has created her own highly individual style of painting, which synthesizes the formal language of modern European abstraction and the subjects of traditional American pictorialism. She has produced an unusually cohesive body of work, whose imagery, based on a select number of themes, has evolved continually through her working process of artistic self-evaluation and reinterpretation. Her fertile imagination and masterly technique have produced an oeuvre that includes some of the most original paintings done in the United States.

Georgia Totto O'Keeffe was born near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, on November 15, 1887, to Ida and Francis O'Keeffe. When she was young her artistic talent was recognized and she received private instruction. At eighteen O'Keeffe began formal studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1905–6), and a year later she attended the Art Students League of New York, where she studied under William Merritt Chase. Both schools followed the conventional European curriculum that emphasized drawing from casts, life drawing, and still-life painting. Unlike most of her American contemporaries, who attended French and German academies, O'Keeffe did not go abroad until she was sixty-six years old. Her work developed wholly on American soil, although the influences of European modernism, as imparted by current exhibitions and publications, did not escape her.

While she was living in New York in 1908, O'Keeffe first saw the work of Auguste Rodin and Henri Matisse, at two of the earliest exhibitions of European modernists to be held in the United States. The impact of their work was not evident in her art until the mid-1910s, but these exhibitions exposed her to an artistic approach radically different from the one she was being taught in school.

Between 1911 and 1918 O'Keeffe taught art at various schools in Virginia, Texas, and South Carolina, taking time off only intermittently to resume her own art training. In 1912 she attended the summer session of the University of Virginia, where, through her teacher Alon Bement (1876–1954), she encountered the design theories of Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922). Later, during parts of 1914–15 and 1916, O'Keeffe studied with

Dow himself at Columbia University's Teachers College in New York, and his ideas strongly influenced her work of this period.

In 1915, while teaching in South Carolina, O'Keeffe suddenly shifted course and began to follow her own artistic instincts, experimenting in an original style and seriously considering pursuing a career as an artist. This dream became reality with the enthusiastic support and assistance of Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), the prominent photographer and one of the foremost champions of modern art in America.

It was Stieglitz who exhibited O'Keeffe's work for the first time—in May 1916 at his New York gallery, the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, known as 291—and who presented her first one-woman show there the following year. He was also the motivating force behind her momentous decision to move to New York in June 1918 at the age of thirty-one, give up teaching, and devote her life to her own art. O'Keeffe's personal and professional relationship with Stieglitz, then fifty-four years old, deepened upon her arrival. They began living together almost immediately and six years later, in 1924, they were married.

Stieglitz was unquestionably the single most important figure in O'Keeffe's life for thirty years, despite their intermittent periods of estrangement. As her mentor, he gave O'Keeffe the confidence to pursue her early artistic ideas in the 1910s, and he provided her with almost annual exhibitions at his galleries: 291, The Intimate Gallery, and An American Place (see list of solo exhibitions, p. 63). He was a promoter, not only of her work, which he guided like a protective father, but also of her public image as an artist who was an independent spirit, mysterious, strong, and somehow unapproachable—an image that has continued through today. His photographs of her from the 1910s and 1920s, however, reveal a different, more human, portrait—that of a young woman who was warm, humorous, and vulnerable. The strains of exhibiting annually and the accompanying publicity took their toll on her health each year, and she may have developed the forbidding public façade to discourage any further intrusions into her private life.

New York City remained O'Keeffe's official residence for all or part of each year until 1949, when she moved permanently to New Mexico. Although the city architecture inspired some of her strongest and most

geometric compositions, O'Keeffe was most profoundly influenced by landscape, and every year she found time to retreat to nature. During the 1920s she spent long summer vacations at Oaklawn, the Stieglitz family's country estate in Lake George, New York. Surrounded there by a lush rural setting of rolling green hills, densely foliated woods, and crystalline lakes, O'Keeffe created a large number of quiet, soft-focus paintings.

In 1929, O'Keeffe made her first trip to New Mexico, where she stayed at Mabel Dodge Luhan's home in Taos. By this time she had grown weary of the monotonously green Lake George setting and felt equally oppressed by the man-made cityscape. New Mexico, a vastly different terrain with a seemingly endless number of natural wonders from which to work, provided the invigorating inspiration she needed. Over the next twenty years O'Keeffe traveled west almost every year, spending up to six months painting in relative solitude. She returned to New York each winter with the fruits of her labor ready for exhibition at Stieglitz's gallery. This division of her time continued until O'Keeffe took up full-time residence in Abiquiú, New Mexico, in 1949, three years after Stieglitz's death. Today, New Mexico remains her home and the subject of her work.

Essential to O'Keeffe's artistic process is her exploration of the myriad nuances found in a relatively limited number of subjects, predominantly landscapes, flowers, and bones. As she has explained, "I work on an idea for a long time. It's like getting acquainted with a person, and I don't get acquainted easily." The pictorial potential of a subject is examined in a series of canvases—generally three or four, but sometimes as many as a dozen—that are painted over the course of months or even years. During this time O'Keeffe reworks many different elements of the picture—an image, a color scheme, or an entire compositional arrangement—to raise new problems or suggest alternate solutions to ones already studied. Throughout her extraordinary career, there has always been this ebb and flow of imagery, a cyclical working and reworking of ideas.

In pursuing a subject intensively and repeatedly, O'Keeffe has tried to capture its essence—both its spirit and its form. The spirit is expressed through color and line, an idea she first encountered in Wassily Kandinsky's book *On the Spiritual in Art*. O'Keeffe is a brilliant colorist whose palette

ranges from subtle modulations in tone to raucous, unusual contrasts. Often her color is affected by her immediate surroundings. Her early Lake George paintings frequently display the dark green tones associated with summer foliage. When her later work shifted focus to the landscape of New Mexico, its colors naturally changed to reflect the rusts, browns, and ochers found in the earth.

For O'Keeffe, the subject's essential form is derived from her radical simplification of shape and detail. Although her paintings of landscapes, flowers, and bones are the result of intense direct observation and familiarity with a particular locale or subject, they do not produce a sense of specificity. Rather, these images seem to be abstract symbols for nature—generalized representations—despite their frequent anatomical and geological accuracy. In their reductive state they transcend particular categories and become universal motifs that can be used in other contexts. Thus, motifs and imagery first generated in O'Keeffe's earliest paintings and drawings reappear decades later in paintings of completely different subject matter.

By the mid-1920s, after an initial period of experimentation with various media, techniques, and imagery, O'Keeffe had already developed the personal style of painting that would characterize her mature work. During the 1930s she added an established repertory of color, forms, and themes that reflected the influence of her visits to New Mexico. For the most part, her oeuvre has relied on those images already present in her art by the mid-1940s.

The Metropolitan Museum's collection surveys the full range of O'Keeffe's expression during the first forty years of her career. We are fortunate to have the largest collection of O'Keeffe's work in the public domain: twelve oil paintings, three watercolors, two charcoal drawings, one pastel, and seven photographs. The Museum's paintings and drawings were all done between 1915 and 1944, a crucial period for the gestation and development of O'Keeffe's rich visual vocabulary. Two important subjects that characterized her paintings from the early 1950s and 1960s—patios and winding roads—are suggested in our rare group of photographs taken by the artist of her home and surrounds in New Mexico. The clouds that O'Keeffe painted in the 1960s (on enormous canvases up to twenty-four feet long) are the only major subject of her later years not represented in the Museum's holdings.

THE METROPOLITAN owns three superb examples of O’Keeffe’s earliest experiments on paper done in 1915–16, at the very beginning of her artistic maturation. In these early charcoal drawings and watercolors we witness O’Keeffe’s breakthrough from her academic training toward modern abstraction. In South Carolina during the fall of 1915 she first began to draw simple, abstract forms from her imagination that expressed her feelings and experiences. To permit the full exploration of these forms O’Keeffe eliminated the distraction of color, working exclusively with black charcoal applied to large white sheets of paper.

O’Keeffe began these charcoal drawings only a few months after studying with Dow at Teachers College, and his influence is strongly felt in her first independent work. Dow’s design formulas were in large part developed from his knowledge of oriental art, particularly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japanese woodcuts, and from his experience in France painting with Paul Gauguin and the Nabis, whose compositions were also influenced by Japanese prints. Dow taught that through the artist’s selective orchestration of format and compositional elements (line, shape, color, value) each subject’s true identity could be revealed. Harmony and balance were the key words in his theories. O’Keeffe absorbed Dow’s lessons well, and throughout her career she produced primarily serene images of nature that relied on her sensitive arrangement of elements for their emotive power. In the 1915–16 drawings she seems to have adopted many of the vegetal shapes and graphic patterns found in Dow’s own representational work and in the illustrations to his book *Composition* (1914). Where O’Keeffe asserted her personal vision was in her application of these design concepts and visual motifs to an abstract idiom. (Dow had been shocked by the extreme abstraction displayed in the work of the artists who had exhibited at the 1913 Armory Show in New York, although he had nevertheless encouraged O’Keeffe to continue her own experiments in this direction while she was under his tutelage.) Moreover, the 1915–16 drawings exude a sense of vital energy and movement that was never an issue in Dow’s theories.

*Drawing XIII*, 1915 (fig. 1), is similar to other drawings of this period by American modernists—such as *Sentimental Music* (fig. 2) by Arthur Dove (1880–1946)—in its evocation of nature through purely abstract forms and its subjective interpretation of personal experiences. Although O’Keeffe has said that these images were derived solely from her imagination, they reproduce basic forms found in nature that were familiar to the artist from her keen observations of the landscape. What is so unexpected in this drawing of such early date is the strength of its compositional structure and its assured draftsmanship. The image consists of three distinctly different parallel sections, united in their thrust upward. Each evokes a different aspect of nature. On the right, meandering lines suggest the flow of a river or the rise of a flame. In the center, four elliptical bulbs suggest a rolling hillside or densely foliated trees. To the left, a severely jagged black line, accentuated by erasure, alludes to a rocky mountain range or a bolt of lightning. The contour of the total shape as formed by these three elements is very close to that of the tree in Vincent van Gogh’s (1853–1890) painting *Cypresses* (fig. 3). This connection is not as improbable as it might seem: as an avid reader of Stieglitz’s periodical *Camera Work*, O’Keeffe most likely saw this painting reproduced there in black and white, in the June 1913 issue. Both works convey a sense of movement and growth, but while van Gogh’s image is agitated and chaotic, O’Keeffe’s is ordered and controlled. The comparison illustrates O’Keeffe’s ability to absorb the examples of other artists and transform them into original expressions.







LEFT

1 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Drawing XIII*, 1915. Charcoal on paper, 24½ × 19 inches (62.2 × 48.3 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1950 (50.236.2)

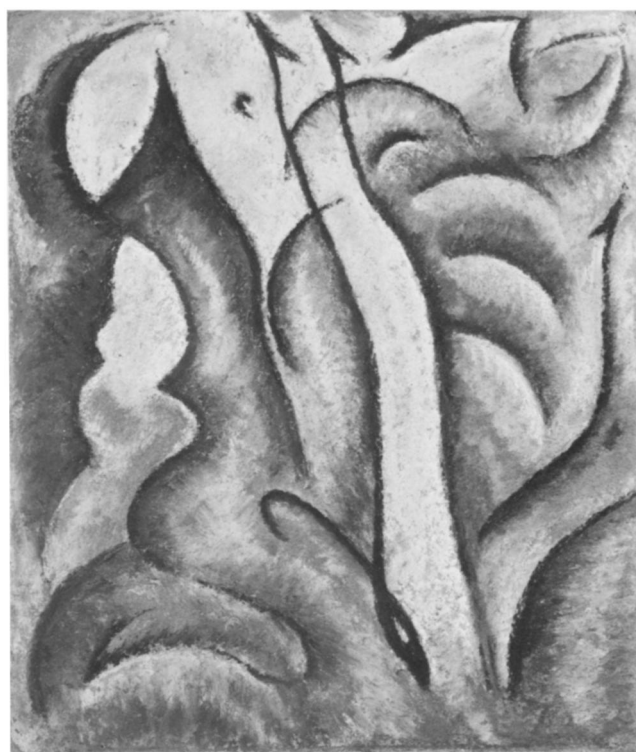
Since the summer of 1915 O'Keeffe had been sending samples of her work to her friend Anita Pollitzer, a classmate from Teachers College. In late December of that year O'Keeffe once again sent Pollitzer her most recent charcoal drawings to critique, including *Drawing XIII*. Disregarding O'Keeffe's instructions not to show them to anyone, Pollitzer took them directly to Stieglitz at 291 on January 1, 1916. He reacted immediately and positively, reportedly calling them the "purest, finest, sincerest things that have entered 291 in a long while," and he suggested that they might be shown in the gallery at some later, unspecified time.

Encouraged by Stieglitz's appreciation of her art, O'Keeffe worked prolifically in charcoal during the first six months of 1916. Among the drawings she produced is the Museum's beautiful *Abstraction IX* (fig. 4). Although the drawing's source is clearly the head and shoulders of a young woman, the nondescriptive title indicates the artist's true interests, which lay not with the figure per se, but with its formal elements of line and shape. O'Keeffe may have been inspired to experiment in this direction after seeing Abraham Walkowitz's (1878–1965) drawing *From Life to Life I*, 1912 (fig. 5), which was reproduced in the March 1914 issue of *Camera Work*. Although the figurative source of Walkowitz's drawing is evident, his work is far more drastically abstracted than any of O'Keeffe's studies.

With the limited tools of charcoal and paper O'Keeffe produced a composition that is both tonally and graphically complex. The subtle gradations of gray, black, and white are as rich in nuance as any that could be achieved with color. Equally varied is the modulation of line, which ranges from harsh, broad, dark strokes to ethereal veils of shading and pencil-thin notations. The diagonal meanderings of line make the image appear to float within the pictorial space, and the woman's sensuality is translated into graphic calligraphy. A simple sweep of charcoal denotes the roundness of her shoulders and the outline of her neck. The shaded areas above and below the uplifted head suggest flowing hair and clothing. It is the mouth, full and sensuous, that unequivocally indicates this drawing's figurative origins.

Years later O'Keeffe used an almost identical curvilinear pattern to depict landscape subjects. In such paintings of the 1960s as *It Was Blue and Green* (fig. 6) and *The Winter Road* (fig. 7), the scenes have been so severely stripped of all naturalistic detail that the resulting images are completely nonobjective.

In May 1916 Stieglitz fulfilled his promise to exhibit O'Keeffe's drawings by mounting a group show at 291 featuring her work and that of two other new artists, Charles Duncan and René Lafferty. O'Keeffe had the largest representation with ten drawings, those that Pollitzer had brought to Stieglitz in January. Although she was initially upset to find her work on public display without her permission, the drawings



2 Arthur Dove. *Sentimental Music*, 1917. Pastel on paper, 21⅝ × 18 inches (54.9 × 45.7 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.70.77)



3 Vincent van Gogh. *Cypresses*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 36¾ × 29⅞ inches (93.3 × 74 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1949 (49.30)



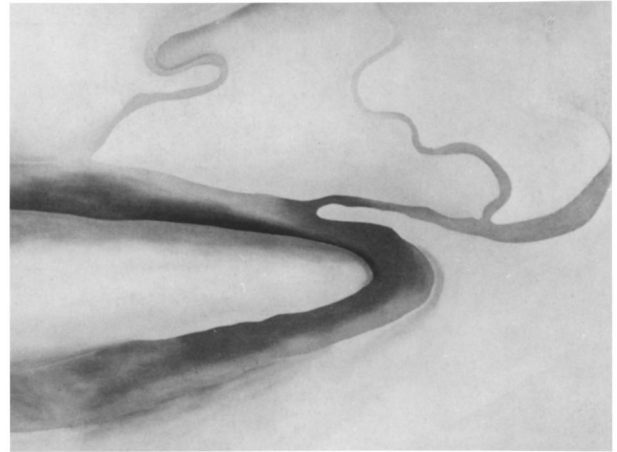


OPPOSITE PAGE

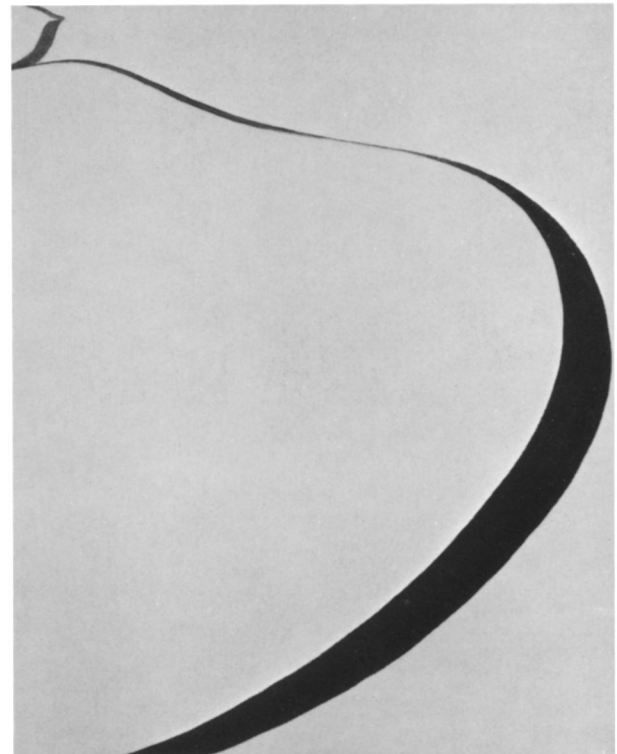
4 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Abstraction IX*, 1916. Charcoal on paper, 24¼ × 18¾ inches (61.5 × 47.5 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969 (69.278.4)

LEFT

5 Abraham Walkowitz. *From Life to Life I*, 1912. Pencil on paper, 12⅝ × 8½ inches (31.7 × 21.5 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.70.159)



6 Georgia O'Keeffe. *It Was Blue and Green*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 30 × 40 inches (76.2 × 101.6 cm.). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Lawrence H. Bloedel Bequest (77.1.37)



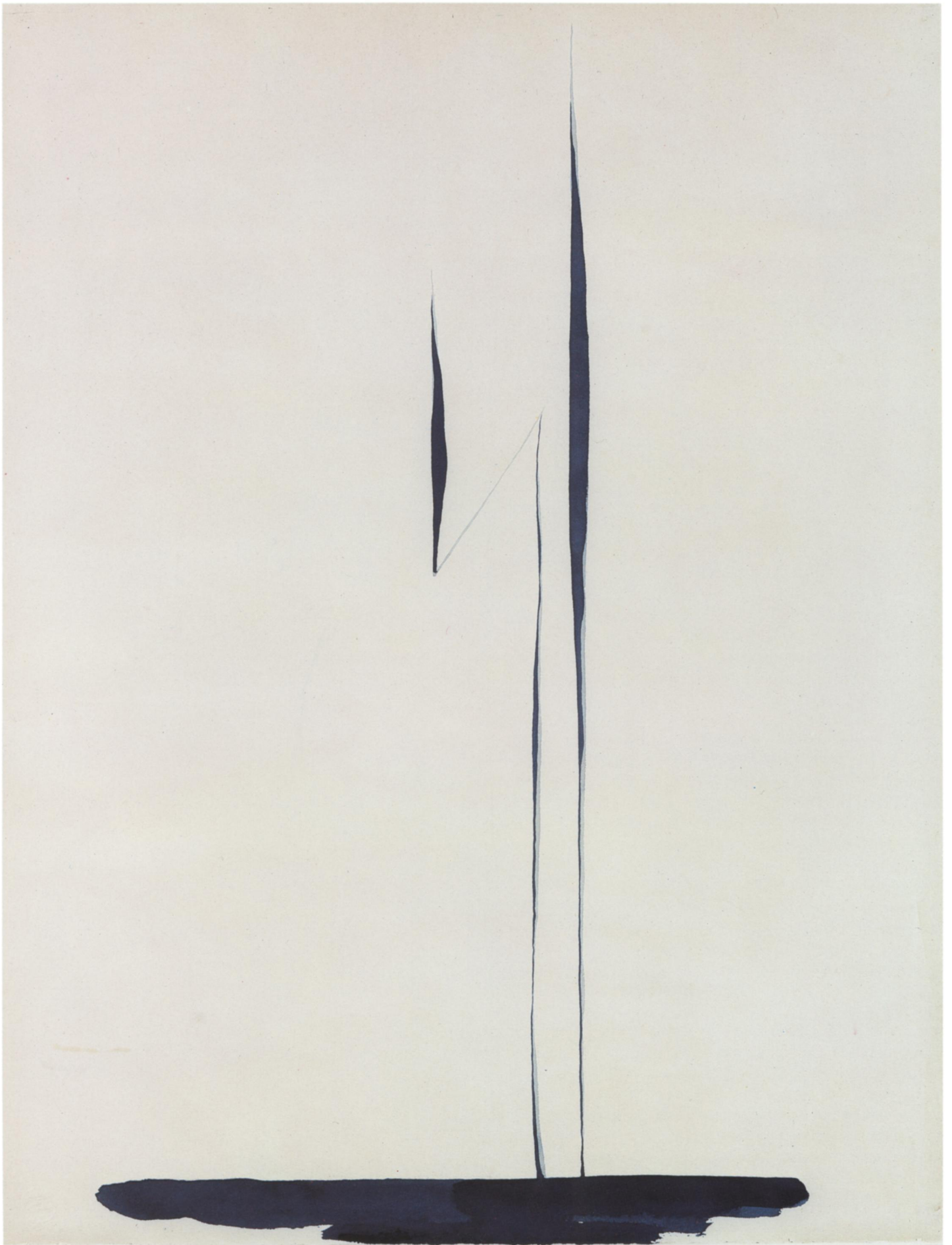
7 Georgia O'Keeffe. *The Winter Road*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 22 × 18 inches (55.9 × 45.7 cm.). Collection of the artist

remained on view until July. They elicited attention from the art critics, who saw in them explicit sexual imagery, an interpretation that was also fostered by Stieglitz.

O'Keeffe's 1916 exhibition was the first of numerous group and solo shows of her work organized by Stieglitz over a thirty-year period. Later that year O'Keeffe was included in another group show at 291 with the gallery's more established regulars—Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Abraham Walkowitz, and Stanton MacDonald Wright. Eventually Stieglitz devoted all of his energies to promoting the work of just three artists: Marin, Dove, and O'Keeffe, the only woman accepted into his inner circle.

Having mastered the concepts of abstraction in works like *Drawing XIII* and *Abstraction IX*, O'Keeffe gradually reintroduced color into her compositions, starting in June 1916, when she was again studying at Teachers College. She worked almost exclusively in watercolor for the next three years and then moved on to oil paint, which remained her primary medium thereafter. The Metropolitan's *Blue Lines X* (fig. 8) was among her first attempts in watercolor. Its elegantly simple arrangement of two parallel, vertical lines (one angled at the top) anchored on a broad horizontal base was initially drawn in charcoal. Indeed, the configuration of the jagged line and the sense of upward movement is reminiscent of *Drawing XIII*. The composition was further refined in a series of five or six paintings done in black watercolor with a delicate Japanese brush. When the proportions of the linear elements and the







LEFT

8 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Blue Lines X*, 1916. Watercolor on paper, 25 × 19 inches (63.5 × 48.3 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969 (69.278.3)

spatial relationships between them were adjusted to her satisfaction, O'Keeffe produced the final statement in blue watercolor.

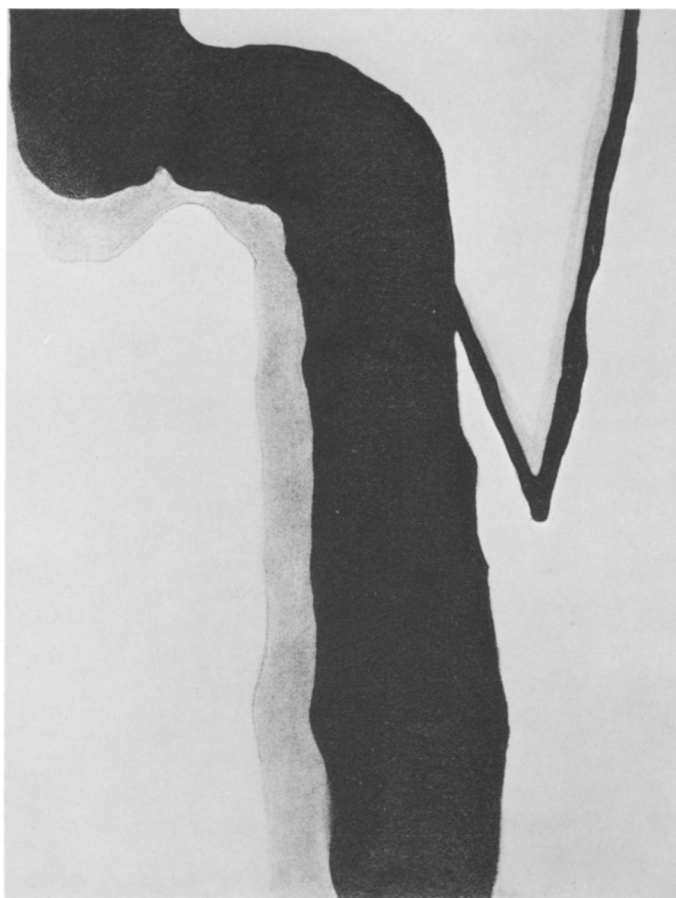
The resulting composition presents a lyrical motif, stripped bare of all extraneous detail. Stieglitz interpreted this piece as a symbol for the potential relationship between man and woman, and during O'Keeffe's absence from New York (June 1917 to June 1918) the watercolor hung in his gallery office. The flat, linear configuration of *Blue Lines X* became a basic motif in her oeuvre. It assumed a third dimension in her 1920s paintings of naturalistic trees; decades later the motif reappeared as a simplified, flat shape that described the meanderings of rivers seen from aerial perspective, as in *Drawing X*, 1959 (fig. 9). This sequence of transformations, which changed the motif from line to three-dimensional form to shape, is typical of the visual metamorphoses that take place in her work.

O'Keeffe's first solo show opened at 291 in April 1917, while the artist was living in Texas, and included both *Abstraction IX* and *Blue Lines X*. With this show Stieglitz in effect gave O'Keeffe his full support, which continued even after 291 closed a few months later. Thereafter she was considered part of his inner circle of artists. Although the country was preoccupied with war, O'Keeffe's show (which lasted until mid-May) received considerable attention from the art critics, who still remembered the stir provoked by her debut the previous year.

In late 1917, O'Keeffe resumed the figurative subject matter that had occupied her in *Abstraction IX*. The resulting group of sixteen watercolors was the artist's second and final exploration into this subject. These compositions form two distinct series: four paintings of female figures in profile and twelve of seated female nudes. The Museum owns two examples of the seated figures. In this series, probably the later of the two, O'Keeffe modifies the severely reductive abstraction of her previous drawings. Compared to the other group, of amorphous figures in profile, these works reflect a careful study of pose and anatomical structure.

*Seated Nude X* (fig. 10) and *Seated Nude XI* (fig. 11) illustrate the two variations in pose that occur within the group: a three-quarter view with arms at the side and a frontal pose with one arm extended. In each, O'Keeffe freely exploits the watercolor medium's potential for fluidity and transparency. She has controlled the amounts of water added so that the colors bleed into one another, creating linear patterns and producing subtle variations in tone from only two colors. The colors are different in each work, as is the effect they produce.

*Seated Nude X*, painted in tones of red and brown, is the more naturalistic representation of the two. The artist has suggested the three-dimensionality of the figure by broad modeling. The work's sequential partner, *Seated Nude XI*, is a freer, more experimental translation of the figure, painted in red and blue. The artist has isolated areas of color as independent shapes within the composition by leaving thin margins of unpainted paper around them. These unpainted areas produce linear patterns of their own. The overall effect is the further abstraction of the image. A similar watercolor technique is evident in



9 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Drawing X*, 1959. Charcoal on paper, 24¾ × 18⅝ inches (62.9 × 47.3 cm.). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller

OVERLEAF, LEFT

10 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Seated Nude X*, 1917. Watercolor on paper, 11⅞ × 8⅞ inches (30.2 × 22.5 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Van Day Truex Fund, 1981 (1981.324)

OVERLEAF, RIGHT

11 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Seated Nude XI*, 1917. Watercolor on paper, 11⅞ × 8⅞ inches (30.2 × 22.5 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Petrie Gift, 1981 (1981.194)







the landscapes O'Keeffe also painted in 1917, most notably the Evening Star series.

The nudes invite comparison with the watercolor figures done a decade earlier by Auguste Rodin and those of O'Keeffe's contemporary Charles Demuth. However, unlike O'Keeffe, both Rodin and Demuth made preliminary underdrawings to define the structure and composition and then added watercolor. O'Keeffe's direct application of watercolor to paper produced far more abstracted compositions.

O'Keeffe's early years in New York (from 1918 through the 1920s) were crucial to her final maturation as an artist. During this period she worked prolifically, almost exclusively in oil, and associated closely with the artists and photographers around Stieglitz. O'Keeffe's early commitment to abstraction based on nature was shared by other avant-garde American artists with whom she exhibited, such as Dove, Marin, Hartley, Demuth, and photographer Paul Strand. An inevitable exchange of ideas took place between these artists and O'Keeffe, who was fully aware of developments in contemporary art and photography. It was not uncommon for her to adapt to her own artistic purposes specific images, themes, or compositions from other people's work, although her ideas more often paralleled, and sometimes even preceded, those of other artists.

O'Keeffe's artistic and spiritual kinship with Arthur Dove, one of America's earliest abstractionists, particularly illustrates this exchange of influences. She felt an affinity with Dove even before she made his acquaintance through Stieglitz. As a young art student she was very impressed by one of his paintings reproduced in Arthur Jerome Eddy's book *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (1914), and subsequently she actively sought out his work in exhibitions. What O'Keeffe most admired in Dove was his ability to create seemingly abstract compositions that were actually based on an observation of nature. In his work line, color, and shape were visual interests in their own right, exclusive of subject. His example provided an important model for O'Keeffe's early work. Many motifs found in Dove's early abstractions find remarkably close counterparts in her work of slightly later date. The direction of influence seems to have occasionally reversed itself, with O'Keeffe's paintings providing the inspiration for Dove's work (see fig. 2), especially in later years.

O'Keeffe may have been aware of Dove's charcoal drawing *Thunderstorm*, 1917–20 (fig. 12), a preliminary study for a 1921 painting, when she herself recorded a similar theme in 1922. *A Storm* (fig. 15), one of two pastels drawn at Lake George that capture the awesome sight of a raging electrical storm over water, seems to be O'Keeffe's initial artistic response upon viewing the scene. The other, probably later, work, erroneously titled *Lightning at Sea* (fig. 14), is a more stylized and consciously composed interpretation. This sequence is indicated by the artist's usual process of reworking compositions from a naturalistic treatment to an abstract one. In this instance, *A Storm* is the more faithful rendering of the incident, even to the inclusion of the full moon reflected in the dark water. It achieves a sense of the particular moment and reproduces the dramatic display of sudden light in an otherwise blue-black sky.



12 Arthur Dove. *Thunderstorm*, 1917–20. Charcoal on paper, 21 × 17¾ inches (53.3 × 45.1 cm.). The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Mark Ranney Memorial Fund (1976.15)



13 John Marin. *Storm, Taos Mountain, New Mexico*, 1930. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 16⅞ × 21¾ inches (42.9 × 55.2 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.70.144)



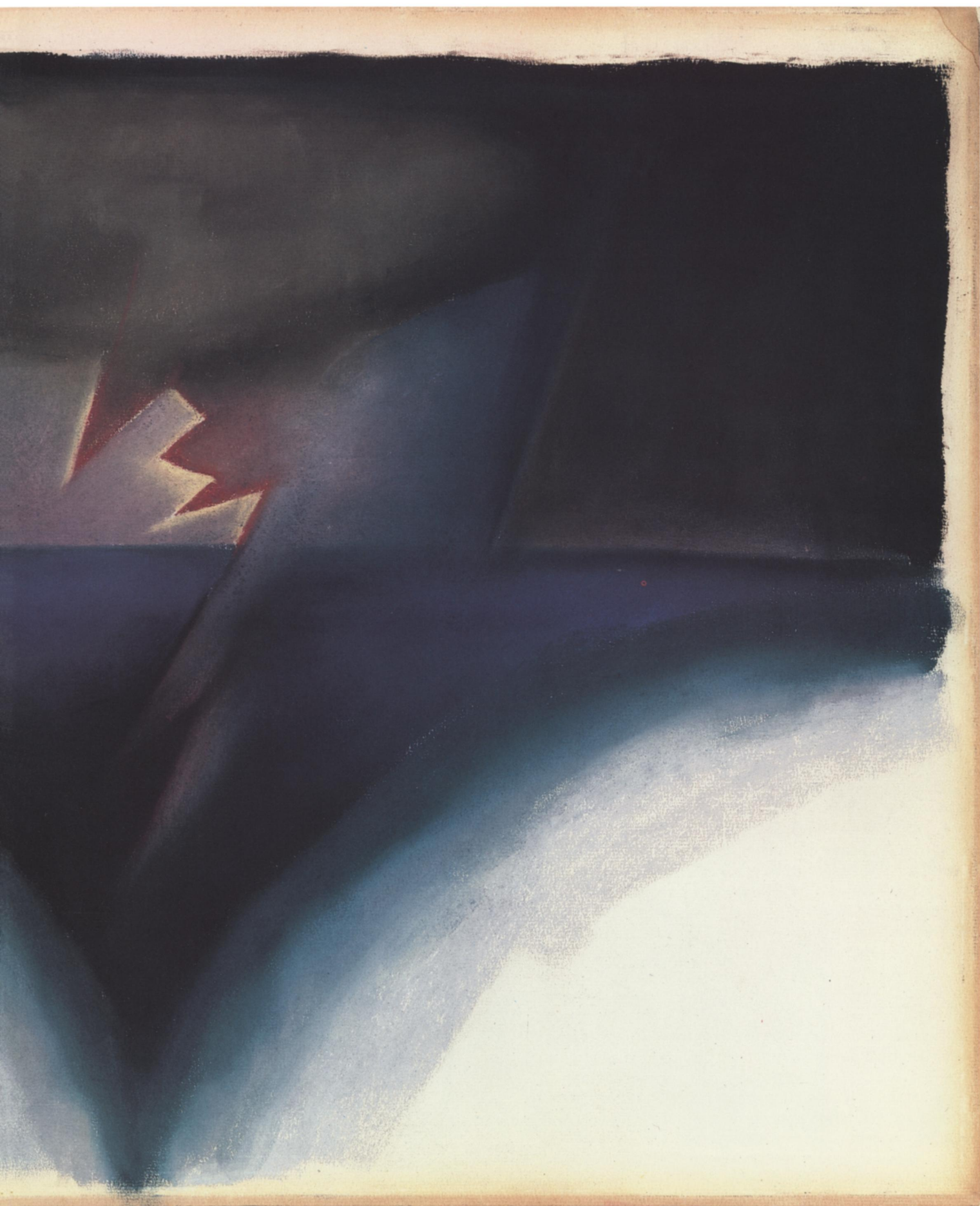


14 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Lightning at Sea*, 1922. Pastel on paper, 19 × 25½ inches (48.3 × 64.8 cm.). The Lane Collection

15 Georgia O'Keeffe. *A Storm*, 1922. Pastel on paper, 18¼ × 24⅜ inches (46.4 × 61.9 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1981 (1981.35)







This piece exemplifies O'Keeffe's mastery of the expressive use of color and her expert handling of pastel, a medium she favored in the 1920s and to which she returned for brief interludes over the next sixty years. In *A Storm* O'Keeffe contrasts the smudged, velvety quality of the deep blue sky and water with the sharp angularity of the red lightning bolt, accented by a pale line of yellow. After seeing the two storm pastels in her 1934 exhibition at An American Place, a critic was moved to write about O'Keeffe's "thrilling imprisonment of the sky's wild splendor."

There is a striking correspondence between O'Keeffe's storm pictures and a later watercolor painting (fig. 13) by John Marin (1870–1953) of a similar scene in New Mexico. Marin had been invited to Taos in 1929 and 1930 by Mabel Dodge Luhan on O'Keeffe's recommendation. Marin, confronted by a storm in O'Keeffe's adopted locale of New Mexico, might well have recalled her earlier interpretations of the subject. Specific elements from O'Keeffe's compositions seem to be quoted by Marin: the trapezoidal shape in *Lightning at Sea* and the jagged line of lightning from *A Storm*. These particular motifs readily adapted themselves to Marin's already developed use of cryptographic symbols in his pictures.

Although O'Keeffe's affinity with the painters of the Stieglitz circle must be recognized, her work seems most related to that of photographers of the period such as Paul Strand, Imogen Cunningham, Johan Hagemeyer, Paul Haviland, and Edward Weston. All of the painters around Stieglitz shared his appreciation of photography as an art form. O'Keeffe in particular, as intimate and protégé of Stieglitz, was naturally quite familiar with the current ideas in this field and often adapted them to her own work.

Of particular influence was Paul Strand (1890–1976), a young, innovative photographer who worked closely with Stieglitz. O'Keeffe saw Strand's photographs in *Camera Work* in October 1916, seven months before she actually met him. In his photographic vision and choice of locales he seems to have often set precedents that O'Keeffe followed. In 1915 he photographed details of objects in such extreme magnification that they lost all pictorial reference, becoming pure abstractions of pattern, shape, and line. These photographs predate O'Keeffe's similarly geometric abstractions, painted four years later. O'Keeffe's greatly enlarged flowers and plants of the mid-1920s also followed in date similar photographic studies by Strand, as well as some by Stieglitz's former associate, Edward Steichen. Strand's travels to the Gaspé Peninsula in Canada, where he photographed weathered barns and houses, and his sojourns in New Mexico in the late 1920s also prompted O'Keeffe to visit these places.

The connection between O'Keeffe and Strand is easily found in their work. More difficult to assess is the extent to which O'Keeffe and Stieglitz influenced each other's work. Their subjects are often similar, but their approaches seem vastly different. The intense emotional fervor expressed in some of Stieglitz's photographs, such as the *Equiv- alents*, a cloud series, is rarely evident in O'Keeffe's more coolly rendered, though no less personal, images. His essentially romantic viewpoint is also at odds with O'Keeffe's emphasis on analytic observation and calculated permutations. Where they coincide, to a certain degree, is in their use of abstraction, which occurred initially in O'Keeffe's work, in her nonobjective images of 1915–16. Stieglitz was the first of the two, however, to create abstract compositions with recognizable images by focusing on one section, thereby negating a subject's natural context. His 1918 photograph of O'Keeffe showing just her hand and coat (fig. 16) is an example. In a general sense their



16 Alfred Stieglitz. *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1918. Photograph,  
3 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 4 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches (9.1 × 11.7 cm.). The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection  
(L.49.56.3)

creative processes were also similar. Both explored the multiple possibilities of a subject in thematic series, reworking compositions in order to discover the ultimate solution. More than any specific aspect of their technique, however, it was their equal dedication to perfection that made them compatible as partners and receptive to each other's influence.

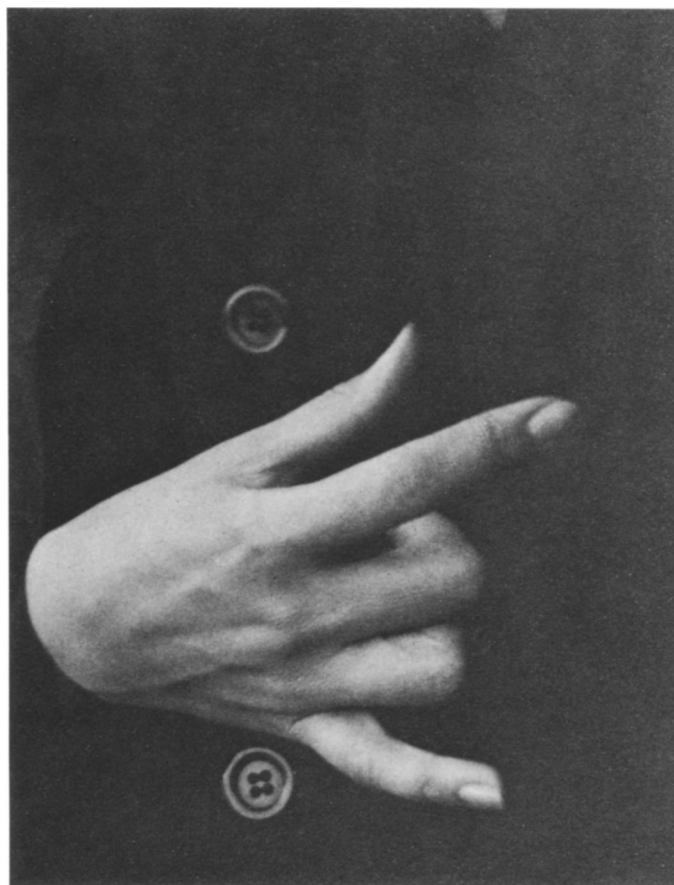
Although informed by contemporary photography, O'Keeffe's paintings were never merely painted photographs. What distinguished her work from photography was her utilization of options afforded by the painting medium and process. Photographers like Strand and Stieglitz could not completely escape the documentary nature of the camera in recording the texture and detail of a subject. O'Keeffe could be, and was, selective in the amount of detail included in her paintings. As a painter she was able to adjust the subject to fit her artistic concept by eliminating, reworking, or adding any element deemed necessary. Even when her paintings were so accurately representational and sharply focused that some associated them with the Precisionist movement of the 1920s, they were nevertheless abstractions. These differences often make O'Keeffe's paintings of the 1920s and 1930s seem more abstract and modern than the work of even her most avant-garde contemporaries in photography.

O'Keeffe's modern sensibility is exemplified by *Corn, Dark I*, 1924 (fig. 17), in the Metropolitan's collection. Painted during her summer months at Lake George, it is the first of three variations. The artist has explained that this seemingly abstract picture is in fact a rendering of the leaves of the corn plant, observed in O'Keeffe's garden: "The growing corn was one of my special interests—the light-colored veins of the dark green leaves reaching out in opposite directions. And every morning a little drop of dew would have run down the veins into the center of this plant like a little lake—all fine and fresh."

In this painting the image is greatly enlarged and brought to the front of the picture plane. Although the plant seems to be depicted in a strictly frontal view, it is actually painted as if seen from a high vantage point, an unusual perspective that reveals the decorative, linear patterning O'Keeffe described above. In *Corn, Dark I* she explored the ambiguities of positive-negative space, the challenge of creating a composition whose focus is below center, and the emotive power of color. As in most of her Lake George pictures, her palette here is rich and subdued, playing on an unusual combination of green and magenta. There is no sense of movement in this painting beyond the pale white vein's piercing verticality, which is echoed in the elongated shape of the canvas.

By comparison, O'Keeffe's second version of this subject (fig. 18) writhes with movement. This effect was achieved by placing the image along a diagonal axis and by emphasizing the curvilinear forms of the plant. These two paintings are illustrative of O'Keeffe's process of selectively reworking a theme to achieve completely different results.

During the same summer that she painted the corn series (1924) O'Keeffe did her first magnified flowers on large canvases (about 36 × 30 inches). Prior to this time, and as early as 1919, her floral images were depicted in close-up but were executed on small can-





17 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Corn, Dark I*, 1924.  
Oil on composition board, 31 $\frac{3}{4}$   $\times$  11 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches  
(80.5  $\times$  30.4 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1950  
(50.236.1)



18 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Corn, Dark II*, 1924. Oil on canvas,  
27  $\times$  10 inches (68.6  $\times$  25.4 cm.). Collection of the artist

RIGHT

19 Imogen Cunningham. *Leaf Pattern*, 1920s. Photograph, 14 × 11 inches (35.6 × 27.9 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Dorothy Levit Beskind Gift, 1973 (1973.540.2)



20 Imogen Cunningham. *False Hellebore*, 1926. Photograph. The Imogen Cunningham Trust

vases. When Stieglitz first saw these adventurously large flowers, he is reported to have said, "Well Georgia, I don't know how you're going to get away with anything like that—you aren't planning to show it, are you?" He did, however, include them in the 1925 *Seven Americans* exhibition at The Anderson Galleries, where they received rave reviews from the critics.

While precedents for O'Keeffe's magnified botanical subjects can be found in the photographic work of Strand and Steichen, other photographers such as Edward Weston (1886–1958) and Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976) seem to have adopted this style only after O'Keeffe's painted interpretations were done (figs. 19, 20). Not surprisingly, their greatly magnified, cut-off images are very similar to those of O'Keeffe's artistic vision.

The Museum's *Black Iris III*, 1926 (fig. 21), one of O'Keeffe's floral masterpieces, is representative of her large, early compositions that depict a single flower. The final, and largest, variation on the subject, *Black Iris III* is also the most detailed and frontal of the three compositions. O'Keeffe has translated the delicate ephemerality of this exotic flower, which blooms for only a few weeks each spring, into the artist's language of color, form, and brushwork. The colors of the painting are subtle and dense, ranging from the deep impenetrable black at the iris's center to the soft veils of pinks, grays, and whites in the upper petals. In certain areas, O'Keeffe's feathery brushstrokes capture the velvety quality of the iris's center. This exquisite sensitivity to color and texture led some reviewers to see sexual implications in this and other flower paintings by O'Keeffe. It is, however, sensuality more than sexuality that is the main quality of these works. Throughout O'Keeffe's career critics and public alike have often narrowly focused on the sexual imagery they perceive in her shapes and compositions. Such interpretations are flatly dismissed by the artist.

The composition of *Black Iris III* is an interesting modification of the artist's first large-scale flower paintings of 1924, such as *Red Canna* (University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson) and *Flower Abstraction* (fig. 22). These early works utilize the V-shaped arrangement that first appeared in her works of 1919 and later reemerged in such paintings as *Black Place II* (see fig. 56). The floral subjects of 1924 suggest growth in nature by emphasizing the space between the diagonal lines that fans up and out into a conical shape. Within this area O'Keeffe has painted the delicate petals of the flower unfurling upward from the stem.

Two years later, in *Black Iris III*, O'Keeffe inverted the V, thereby producing a triangular arrangement of the floral elements. The resulting composition is weighted at the bottom by the dark coloration of the lower petals and by the strong horizontal line of the canvas edge. *Black Iris III* is vastly different from the earlier paintings in emotional tenor. No longer an image of spontaneous growth and uplifting movement, the flower here has assumed a monumentality, a sense of being frozen in time, and a somber dignity. It is perhaps not surprising, given the autobiographical nature of O'Keeffe's work, that this solemn pictorial mood paralleled changes that were occurring in her relationship with Stieglitz at this time.





LEFT

21 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Iris III*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 36 × 29 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches (91.4 × 75.9 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969 (69.278.1)

Between 1926 and 1930 O'Keeffe returned to the abstract idiom that had characterized her very first oil paintings of 1919. In the works of both periods, the forms created seem to be nonobjective but are in fact based on physical reality or on the artist's recollections of an actual experience. Beyond this general accordance, however, there are few similarities between the two groups of work. In 1919 the artist created from her imagination three-dimensional, often geometric, forms to express her experiences and feelings. The titles of these paintings made little or no reference to specific subjects, forcing the viewer to see the works simply as arrangements of line, color, and form.

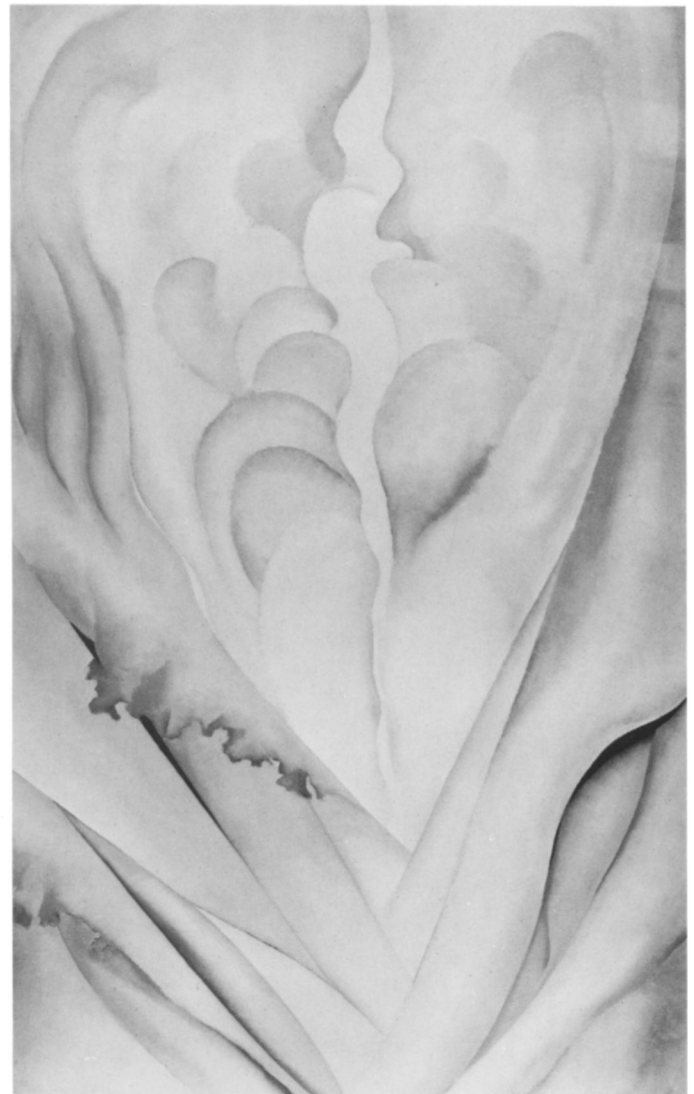
O'Keeffe's approach is completely different in the later works, where she has abstracted simplified, nonspecific forms from physical reality. She employed the same reductive process, to a lesser degree, in her representational work of the period, where flowers and shells are distilled to their essential shapes. O'Keeffe has written about the strong connection between her abstract and her representational work:

It is surprising to me to see how many people separate the objective from the abstract. Objective painting is not good painting unless it is good in the abstract sense. A hill or tree cannot make a good painting just because it is a hill or a tree. It is lines and colors put together so that they say something. For me that is the very basis of painting. The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint.

In contrast to the 1919 paintings, with their sculpturally modeled forms, O'Keeffe's abstractions of 1926–30 emphasize line and two-dimensional space. In the later works, the prominent motif of point and line is used to represent different subjects, elucidated by the descriptive titles of the paintings. In O'Keeffe's severely reductive composition *White Abstraction (Madison Avenue)*, 1926 (Museum of Fine Arts of Saint Petersburg, Florida, Inc.), the motif represents converging city streets, while in her seascape *Wave, Night*, 1928 (fig. 23), the two elements describe a distant lighthouse beacon and the shoreline.

In the Museum's painting *Black Abstraction*, 1927 (fig. 24), one of O'Keeffe's most abstract statements, point and line are almost the only compositional elements. The picture's imagery was inspired by an operation the artist underwent during the summer of 1927. She has recalled that while trying to forestall the inevitable effects of the anesthesia, she reached up to a bright overhead light that seemed to whirl and grow increasingly smaller. The canvas is filled with three dark, concentric rings, in front of which is a graceful white V, representing her extended arms. At the vertex of the V is a small white spot, the disappearing light. With its palette austere, limited to black, white, and gray, the picture creates a tense and ominous mood and a sense of being lost in space.

Since 1920 O'Keeffe had retreated for a few days or weeks of every summer to the solitude of York Beach, Maine, and the shells she collected on the beach there became the subject of a number of paintings and drawings. A large series of Shell and Old Shingle paintings done in 1926 preceded our precise, close-up study of a single clam shell of 1930 (fig. 25), one of two very similar compositions. In this work

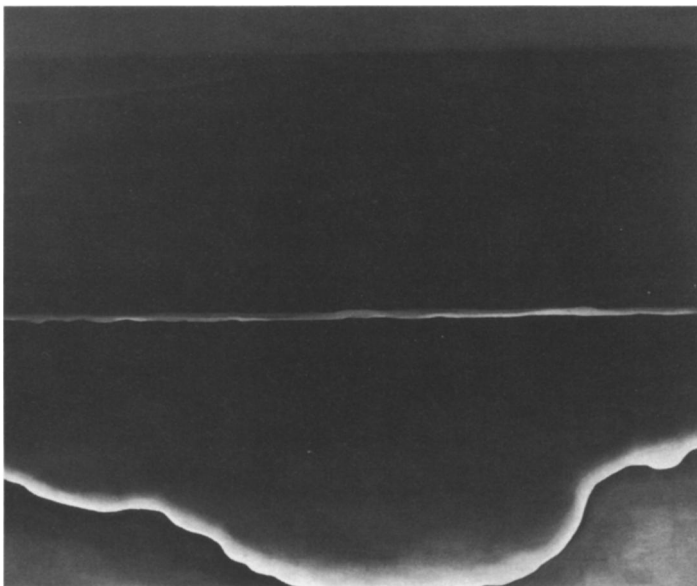


22 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Flower Abstraction*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 48 × 30 inches (121.9 × 76.2 cm.). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Promised and Partial 50th Anniversary Gift of Sandra Payson (P.71.80)

24 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Abstraction*, 1927. Oil on canvas,  $30 \times 40\frac{1}{4}$  inches ( $76.2 \times 102.2$  cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969 (69.278.2)



23 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Wave, Night*, 1928. Oil on canvas,  $30 \times 36$  inches ( $76.2 \times 91.4$  cm.). Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., Gift of Mr. Charles L. Stillman







25 Georgia O'Keeffe.  
*Clam Shell*, 1930. Oil  
on canvas, 24 × 36  
inches (60.8 × 91.2 cm.).  
The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, Alfred Stieglitz  
Collection, 1962 (62.258)











26 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Road Past the View I*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 24 × 30 inches (61 × 76.2 cm.). Collection of the artist



27 Edward Weston. *Eroded Rock, Point Lobos*, 1930. Photograph, 7½ × 9¾ inches (19.1 × 23.8 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1957 (57.519.10)

the artist has sensitively depicted the undulating edges of the shell, the shallow, teardrop-shaped hollows, and the subtle shadings of the interior surface. Although the actual subject of this painting is in no way obscured, O'Keeffe suggests an alternate reading of the lines and shapes as landscape imagery in her detailed recording of the shell surface. A similar double interpretation can be read in *Abstraction IX* (see fig. 4), and both works relate to a later group of landscape paintings that utilize a meandering-line motif (see figs. 6, 7, and 26). Dual imagery was also explored by Edward Weston in his series of close-up photographs of stones (fig. 27), done the same year as O'Keeffe's painting *Clam Shell* (fig. 25).

In O'Keeffe's predominantly nature-oriented work, architectural structures are relatively infrequent subjects. They appear sporadically as her first artistic responses to travel or change of residence. A large series of New York City skyscrapers marked her taking up residence at the Shelton Hotel in the mid-1920s; a variety of barns charted her visits to Lake George, Wisconsin, and Canada; and a large group of churches recorded O'Keeffe's first extended trips to New Mexico in 1929 and 1930. Her adobe house in Abiquiu, New Mexico, in which the artist lived after 1948, inspired one of her largest and most interpretive series of architectural paintings, the patio pictures of the 1950s, which were also some of her most abstract, minimalist works.

Observing the physical details of her immediate environment and then committing them to paint seems to be the process through which the artist has assimilated new surroundings. As her familiarity with a particular place increased, O'Keeffe produced less representational and more interpretive works, exploring various aspects of the environment and her emotional reaction to them. As the artist has explained, "You paint *from* your subject, not what you see. . . . I rarely paint anything I don't know very well."

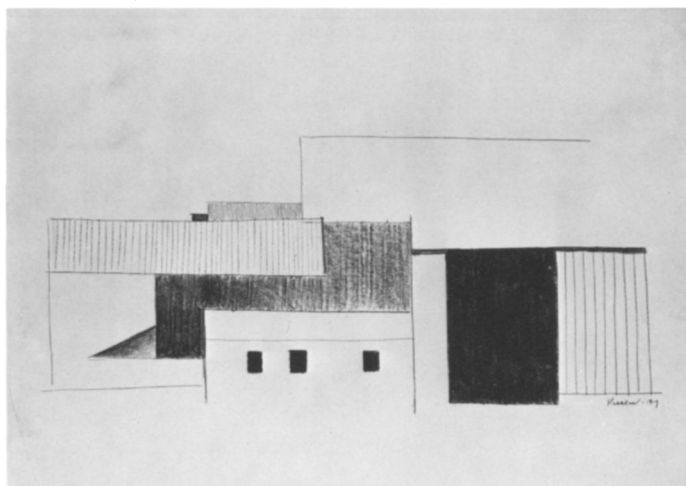
Among the architectural sights that O'Keeffe knew intimately were the old, weathered barns that dotted the Wisconsin landscape of her childhood. In the early 1920s she painted the barns and shacks on the Stieglitz property at Lake George. Ten years later, in August 1932, during a trip to the Gaspé Peninsula, she again produced a large series of barns (and also crosses) that suggested the hard life of the farmers. Unlike her Lake George barns, these Canadian structures were stark in color and design, and precisely delineated. Their austerity and commanding presence create an iconic quality.

In their precisionist clarity and abstract reduction of structure, shape, and line, these paintings most closely resemble the Bucks County barns (fig. 28) drawn and photographed fifteen years earlier by Charles Sheeler (1883–1965), an acquaintance of Stieglitz and Strand. Sheeler distilled the essential geometric shape from each architectural element in much the same way as O'Keeffe did in *White Canadian Barn II* (fig. 29). However, unlike Sheeler, O'Keeffe never focused on the textural patterns of the barns' surfaces.

The narrow, horizontal format of *White Canadian Barn II* typifies O'Keeffe's Canadian pictures. This elongation is echoed in the rectangular forms of the barn, which are painted as flat bands of color. The picture space is divided into three distinct areas of uneven proportion designating sky, building, and ground. Interestingly, in one of Stieglitz's Lake George barn photographs of 1923 he had similarly simplified and flattened the roof, wall, and foundation of the barn into three horizontal strips of unequal width (fig. 30).

In O'Keeffe's painting three-dimensional form and depth are almost completely negated by the strictly frontal presentation of the barn. The somber tone and massive size of the barn, however, indicate a tangible

28 Charles Sheeler. *Barn Abstraction*, 1917. Black conté crayon on paper, 14½ × 19½ inches (35.9 × 49.5 cm.) Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection









29 Georgia O'Keeffe. *White Canadian Barn II*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 12 × 30 inches (30.5 × 76.2 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1964 (64.310)

and weighty presence. Dark, impenetrable vertical doorways anchor the horizontal movement of the composition. This doorway motif became the essential element in the severely abstracted patio paintings of the 1950s, where it is taken out of architectural context, as a flat shape isolated against a blank rectangle (fig. 31).

A similar view of the patio was captured by O'Keeffe in two beautifully composed photographs in the Museum's collection of the walls and doors of her Abiquiu home (figs. 32, 33). Unlike the paintings, which are selectively simplified to two or three essential elements, the photographs record all of the extraneous details of the setting—the bushes, the architectural beams, and the cracks in the adobe walls. Despite these intrusions, our attention is focused on the element of O'Keeffe's greatest interest, the striking composition of the dark square door set in a long, horizontal band. She achieves this by emphasizing the strong light-and-dark contrasts and by confronting her subject head-on. Not only are the photographs of documentary interest, but they are also eloquent artistic statements by O'Keeffe in another medium.

The late 1920s to early 1930s, a period of emotional turmoil for O'Keeffe, was also a time of artistic experimentation. The precisionism of her Canadian barns represented one of her brief experimental interludes. During these years she began to extricate herself from Stieglitz's daily schedule and to travel on her own in search of new visual stimulation. Her trips to Maine and Canada, however, proved to be of limited consequence for the general course of her art.

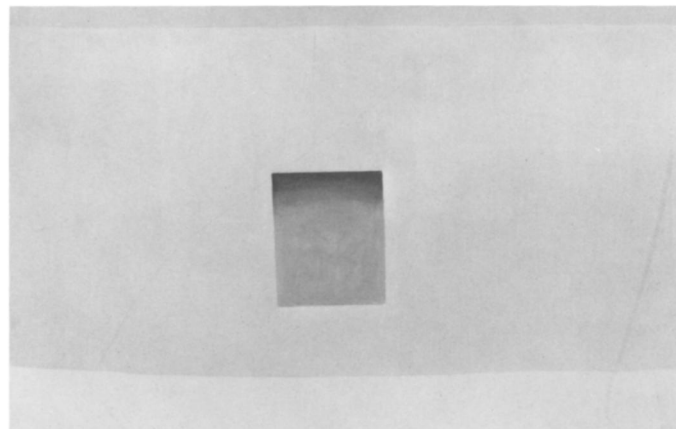
Of more profound and lasting effect was her visit to New Mexico in April 1929. When O'Keeffe came to New Mexico for her first extended stay, she was forty-one years old and a mature artist. Her decision to make the trip at this time was probably prompted by Strand's enthusiasm for the region and by the growing confinement she was feeling in New York and Lake George: After her annual exhibition at The Intimate Gallery (February–March) received cool reviews and generated few sales, O'Keeffe resolved to visit Mabel Dodge Luhan in Taos, despite Stieglitz's objections.

During the early 1910s Mabel Dodge was hostess to a wide circle of modern artists and writers in her New York home. In 1917 she moved to New Mexico, creating a salon where visiting American and European modernists mixed with local artists and artisans. As one might suspect, the constant socializing at the Luhans' did not afford O'Keeffe the solitude and privacy she needed in order to paint. Consequently, she spent only two seasons there before venturing away from Taos to more remote parts of the state.

The majestic terrain of New Mexico, with its varied geological formations, wide range of exotic colors, intense clarity of light, and unusual vegetation, provided O'Keeffe with a rich source from which she expanded her already extensive visual vocabulary. Mountains and bones—new and powerful themes that were readily adapted to her style of combined representation and abstraction—were added to her repertory. The sculptural qualities inherent in these subjects led her in a new direction, toward more three-dimensional space and form, which she had begun to explore in some of her earliest abstractions (see fig. 1). The breathtaking simplicity of enormous mountain ranges silhouetted against an expansive sky and the sculpted quality of rolling hills creased and furrowed by centuries of erosion inspired O'Keeffe to record their forms again and again in paint. Their contours were a realization in nature of the purely abstract forms that O'Keeffe had previously only imagined. The new surroundings also generated new interpretations for her tree and flower imagery.



30 Alfred Stieglitz. *Side of Barn, Lake George*, 1923. Chloride photograph, 4 × 5 inches (10.2 × 12.7 cm.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Miss Georgia O'Keeffe



31 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Wall with Green Door*, 1952. Oil on canvas, 30 × 47½ inches (76.2 × 121.6 cm.). The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gift of The Woodward Foundation



32 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Looking from Garage to Bedroom, Abiquiu, New Mexico*, c. 1955. Gelatin silver photograph,  $4\frac{7}{16} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$  inches (11.6  $\times$  15.9 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1977 (1977.657.1)



33 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Looking from Garage to Bedroom, Abiquiu, New Mexico*, c. 1955. Gelatin silver photograph,  $4\frac{7}{16} \times 6\frac{3}{16}$  inches (11.6  $\times$  15.7 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1977 (1977.657.2)



The time she spent painting in the relative solitude of the unspoiled New Mexico wilderness during the 1930s and 1940s proved to be O'Keeffe's most fertile period. Other artists from the Stieglitz group were also attracted to New Mexico: Marsden Hartley, in 1918 and 1919; John Marin, in 1929 and 1930; and Paul Strand, in 1926 and 1930–32. None stayed as long as O'Keeffe, however, nor did any of them capture the understated magnificence of the area as she did. While the abundance of visual stimuli prompted O'Keeffe to focus selectively on a particular aspect of the scenery, it seemed to overwhelm the other artists, who tried, unsuccessfully, to incorporate too much in each picture. Their paintings were unfocused, at once panoramic and overly detailed, and aloof. Hartley (1877–1943), in particular, could only approach O'Keeffe's clarity of vision and sense of immediacy in the paintings he did from memory five years after his New Mexico trip (fig. 34).

One of the canvases that O'Keeffe produced during her first trip to New Mexico in 1929 was *Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur* (fig. 35). The painting records the beauty of the flowers that grew along the garden path outside the Luhan guest house. Although the work was painted in Taos, its subject and interpretation are typical of the flower paintings that O'Keeffe did in New York. Its composition is in fact based on a painting of two years earlier, *White Rose with Larkspur II* (fig. 37).

What sets the vertical *Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur* apart from the preceding floral studies is its relationship to a horizontal version of the same title (fig. 36). As a pair they reflect O'Keeffe's study of composition as it is affected by the orientation of the rectangular canvas. The relationship between the floral elements in each painting is identical: a large red-black hollyhock dominates a group of smaller-petaled blue larkspur. Different compositional arrangements, however, are used to achieve the same effect. In the Museum's vertical composition, the hollyhock swells into the upper two-thirds of the canvas, pushing out to the edges of the frame and encroaching on the delicate blue larkspur below. In the horizontal version the space is almost evenly divided between the two flowers, with the hollyhock remaining dominant by virtue of its massive form and dark coloring.

These paintings are masterful experiments in balancing contrasts—

35 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 36 × 30 inches (91.4 × 76.2 cm.).  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund, 1934 (34.51)



34 Marsden Hartley. *Cemetery, New Mexico*, 1924.  
Oil on canvas, 31½ × 39¼ inches (80.3 × 99.7 cm.).  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.70.49)



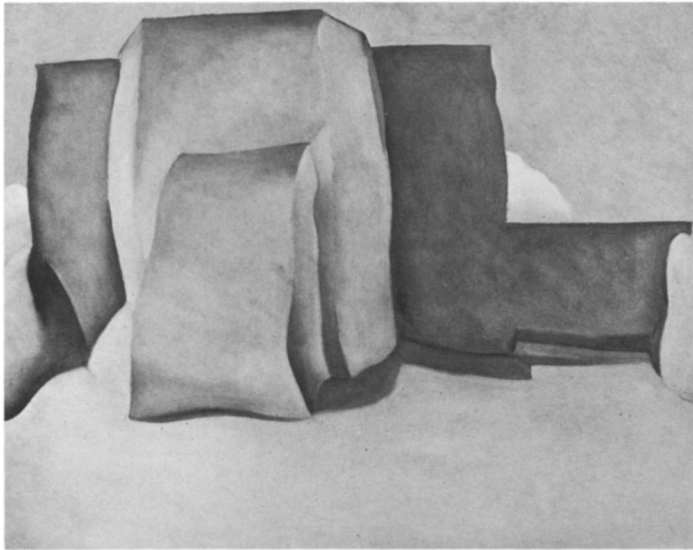
37 Georgia O'Keeffe. *White Rose with Larkspur II*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 40 × 30 inches (101.6 × 76.2 cm.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Henry H. and Zoë Oliver Sherman Fund

36 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 30 × 40 inches (76.2 × 101.6 cm.). Collection of Anita O'K. Young









38 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Ranchos Church I*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 18½ × 24 inches (47 × 61 cm.). Norton Gallery and School of Art, West Palm Beach, Fla.

of light and dark, small and large, delicate and dense, and, as a pair, of vertical and horizontal. O'Keeffe further studied the problem of composition and format in a work of the same year, *The Lawrence Tree* (Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.), which was painted so that it could be turned on any of its sides.

Two groups of paintings, done in 1929 and 1930, document the transition that O'Keeffe's work underwent during her early years in New Mexico. Both series depict Saint Francis of Assisi Mission, the eighteenth-century adobe church located in Ranchos de Taos. O'Keeffe painted about eight pictures of this large structure, often called Ranchos Church. With the exception of one canvas that depicts the front façade with bell towers and crosses, all show the imposing rear view, where the massive form of the church is sculpted by unusual buttresses.

The first paintings, done in 1929, emphasize the church's bulging, sculptural masses. Deep shadowing and the use of perspective enhance the three-dimensional quality of the image. In these compositions, of which *Ranchos Church I* (fig. 38) is an example, O'Keeffe has also emphasized the intrusion of the man-made building in the natural landscape by clearly separating the areas of the building, sky, and ground. The distinction between church and sky is specifically addressed in a painting of the top-right portion of the roof (fig. 39) that isolates these two elements for comparison. The sharp edge of the roof line cuts incisively into the billowy clouds, while the solid adobe wall obstructs our view of the bright blue sky.

The paintings of Ranchos Church that O'Keeffe produced the following year (1930) reflect an altered perception of the relationship between building and environment. No longer does the building intrude into the setting as a separate and alien entity; rather, it is united with the surroundings by closeness of color and tone, and the elimination of dark outlines. In the Museum's composition from this group (fig. 40), church and ground meld into one form that seems more geological than architectural. This undulate mass is set against the sky, inviting a comparison of the two areas. Rather than underscoring the differences between the elements, as she did in the 1929 fragment (see fig. 39), O'Keeffe emphasizes their similarities. Correspondences, enhanced by the uniformly subdued tonalities, are drawn between the irregular shapes of the architecture and the radiating cloud formations. The discordant mood of the 1929 fragment is here replaced by a sense of





39 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Fragment of Ranchos Church*, 1929. Oil on canvas mounted on board, 15 × 11 inches (38.1 × 27.9 cm.). Collection of Arline Snyder



40 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Ranchos  
Church*, 1930. Oil on canvas,  
24 × 36 inches (60.8 × 91 cm.).  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Alfred Stieglitz Collection,  
1961 (61.258)











41 Paul Strand. *Saint Francis Church, Rancho de Taos, New Mexico*, 1931. Platinum print. © 1971, 1976, 1983 The Paul Strand Foundation, as published in *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photographs*, Aperture, Millerton, N.Y., 1976

harmony. One might suggest that these changes in artistic vision parallel the growth of O'Keeffe's own sense of belonging to her new environment during the second trip to New Mexico.

In 1931, two years after O'Keeffe initiated her series, Paul Strand photographed Ranchos Church from an almost identical perspective (fig. 41). His image reveals the accuracy of O'Keeffe's representation of the architectural structure, as well as some instances of her selective vision. In O'Keeffe's paintings the actual vertical-horizontal proportions of the building have been altered slightly to emphasize the horizontal. Small architectural details and textural elements (cracks and irregularities in the surface) have been completely deleted in the paintings, save for the suggestion of the adobe surface in the rough, grainy texture of the paint.

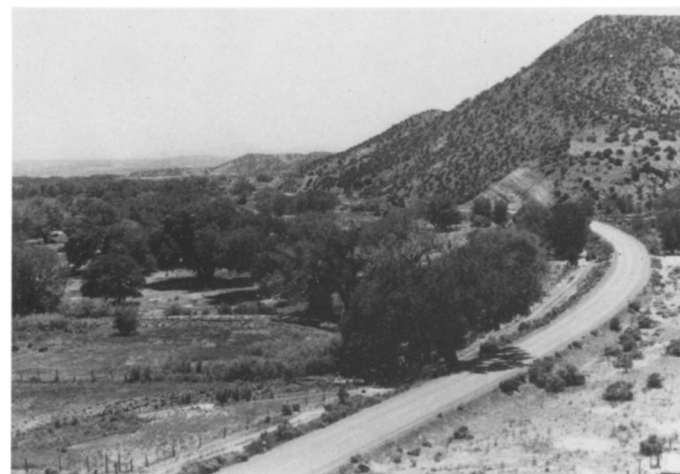
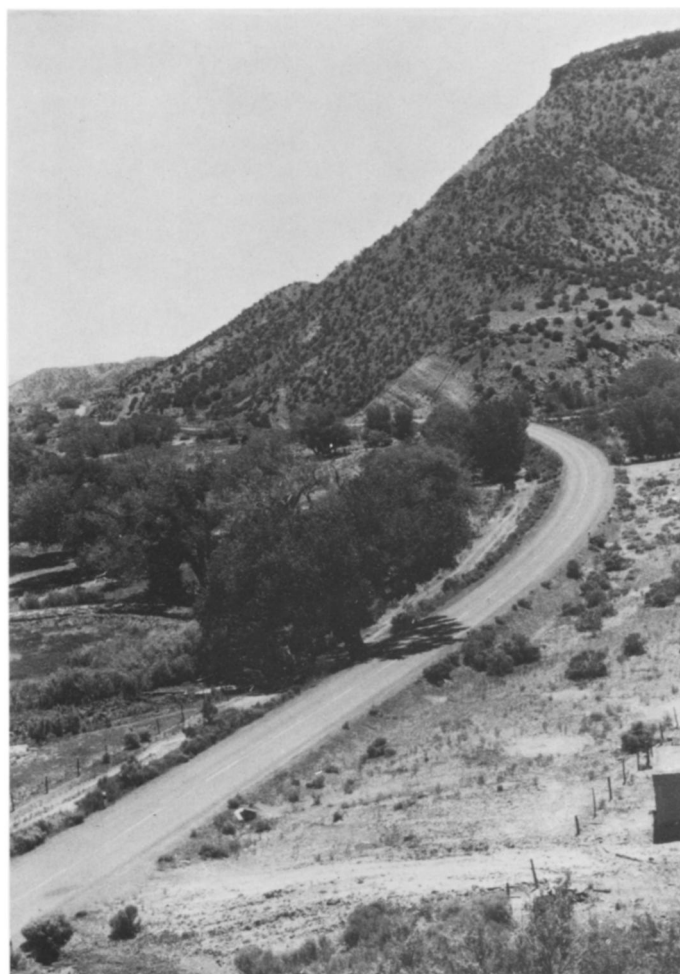
In addition to architectural studies and floral compositions, O'Keeffe painted some pure landscape subjects during her first trip to New Mexico in 1929. These were treated in a manner similar to her botanical motifs of the late 1920s, where a single form is enlarged to encompass the entire picture space, without reference to the surrounding environment. Although the 1929 landscapes incorporated new western imagery, they did not reflect any new approaches. It was not until after her second visit in 1930 that O'Keeffe's landscape subjects fully revealed the influences of the new setting, as had been the case with the Ranchos Church series.

*Near Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1930* (fig. 44), demonstrates one important influence of the New Mexico locale on O'Keeffe's art: the panoramic scene became the subject of paintings that emphasized sculptural form and linear contours. As others have noted, the quality of light in New Mexico enabled O'Keeffe to see clearly over great distances as if endowed with telescopic vision. Thus, paintings such as *Near Abiquiu, New Mexico* show the landscape as a succession of receding layers.

The subject of our painting and of at least two other very similar compositions is the sand hills of the Rio Grande valley, west of Taos, viewed from an elevated vantage point. O'Keeffe draws our attention to the tranquillity of the evenly curved hills, which are accented by the occasional rise of a sharper peak.

"It was the shapes of the hills there that fascinated me," O'Keeffe has said. "The reddish sand hills with the dark mesas behind them. It seemed as though no matter how far you walked you could never get into those dark hills, although I walked great distances." The artist re-creates her experience of trying to traverse this terrain by forcing us to make our way visually through the successive rows of mountains that are painted as alternating bands of light and dark. As in other paintings of the period, O'Keeffe allowed the subject of *Near Abiquiu, New Mexico* to determine the proportions of the composition. The extended vista suggested the use of a narrow, horizontal canvas. O'Keeffe exaggerated this shape to describe more fully the subject's expansive form and to enhance the painting's visual impact. A similar technique was employed in her earlier Corn, Dark series (see figs. 17, 18), where an extremely narrow, vertical canvas was utilized.

Our vivid sense of the width and depth of this panorama is surprising, in light of the rather small size of the painting (about 10 × 24 inches). O'Keeffe's treatment of scale in *Near Abiquiu, New Mexico* is a reversal of the interpretation in her floral subjects, which, although small in actual size, are painted on a scale and canvas that are both enormous. Both instances illustrate the challenge O'Keeffe's work often poses to artistic conventions and to the viewer's own perception of reality.



ABOVE

42 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Looking from Bedroom Toward Espanola, New Mexico*, c. 1955. Gelatin silver photograph, 4 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 6 $\frac{3}{16}$  inches (10.9 × 15.7 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1977 (1977.657.5)

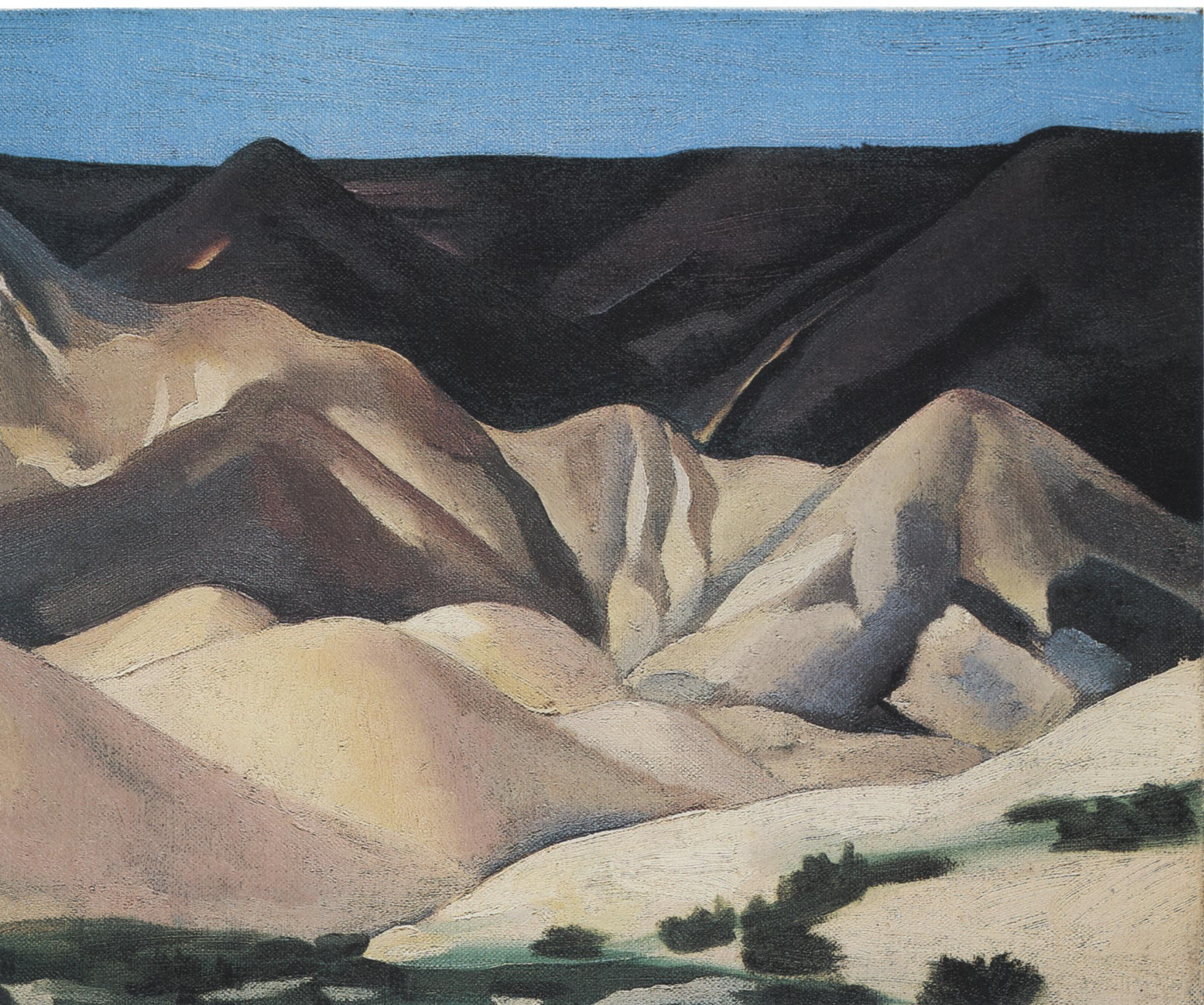
43 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Looking from Bedroom Toward Espanola, New Mexico*, c. 1955. Gelatin silver photograph, 6 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 4 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches (15.6 × 11.1 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1977 (1977.657.3)





44 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Near Abiquiu, New Mexico*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 10 × 24½ inches (25.4 × 61.3 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1963 (63.204)







The artist's experimentation with vertical and horizontal formats was not limited to her paintings. In two photographs of the flat-topped mesa (called the Pedernal) in the Jemez Mountains and of the winding road below it, O'Keeffe shows the same scene as a vertical and as a horizontal composition (figs. 42, 43). As she has explained, the unintentional spatial effect of the photographic print inspired her to do a series of paintings based on the road image (figs. 7, 26):

Two walls of my room in the Abiquiu house are glass and from one window I see the road toward Espanola, Santa Fe and the world. The road fascinates me with its ups and downs and finally its wide sweep as it speeds toward the wall of my hilltop to go past me. I had made two or three snaps of it with a camera. For one of them I turned the camera at a sharp angle to get all the road. It was accidental that I made the road seem to stand up in the air, but it amused me and I began drawing and painting it as a new shape. The trees and mesa beside it were unimportant for that painting—it was just the road.

The mountains of New Mexico, viewed both intimately and in full breadth, remained the inspiration for much of O'Keeffe's subsequent work. Of equal importance has been the recurring subject of bones, which she has depicted since 1930, either alone or within a landscape setting. Both variations on this theme are represented in the Museum's collection.

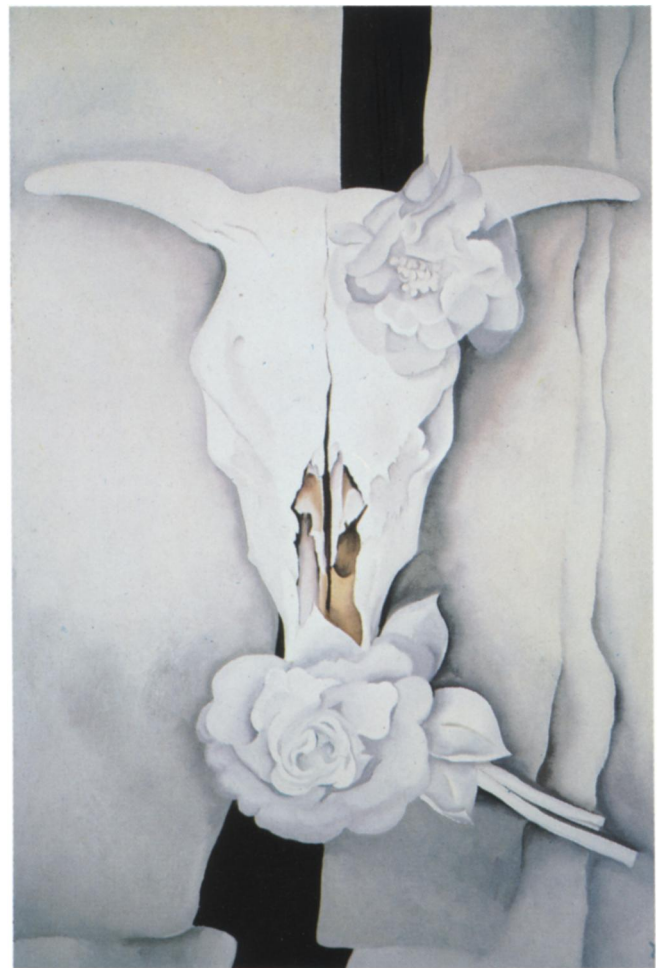
*Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue* (fig. 46), one of O'Keeffe's most famous works, numbers among her earliest studies of a single bone isolated from its natural environment. Despite its subject of a bleached animal's skull, this particular painting was most likely done not in New Mexico, but at Lake George during the fall of 1931. The cow's skull was one of several bones O'Keeffe had shipped back east the year before, with the intention of painting them. She saw in their jagged edges, worn surfaces, and pale color the essence of the desert.

Several years after she painted *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*, O'Keeffe wrote about what these bones represented to her: "To me they are as beautiful as anything I know. To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around. . . . The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho' it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty." The interesting shapes and textures of the bones and their natural play of positive form and negative space inspired her to paint their images many times.

During the 1930s, when O'Keeffe painted *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*, an animal's skull also became a subject for Stieglitz, who incorporated it into his photographic portraits of O'Keeffe. His exquisite photograph of her hands probing the cavities of a horse's skull (fig. 48) makes such a strong visual connection between the artist and the bone that it suggests a reading of the picture more symbolic than simply that of a study of an artist and her subject matter. In general, Stieglitz's portraits of O'Keeffe, taken over the course of twenty years, record not only the physical and emotional changes in his model, but also his own altering perception of her and their relationship. This particular photograph seems to echo O'Keeffe's interpretation of the bones as symbols for the dual nature of the desert, at once magnificent and harsh. Stieglitz, producing this photograph during a year of marital discord, may also have been drawing an analogy between O'Keeffe and the bone she touches—both beautiful but unapproachable.

Like Stieglitz, O'Keeffe was able to create compositions of extraordinary simplicity that could be appreciated on many different levels. *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue* is masterful both as an eloquent

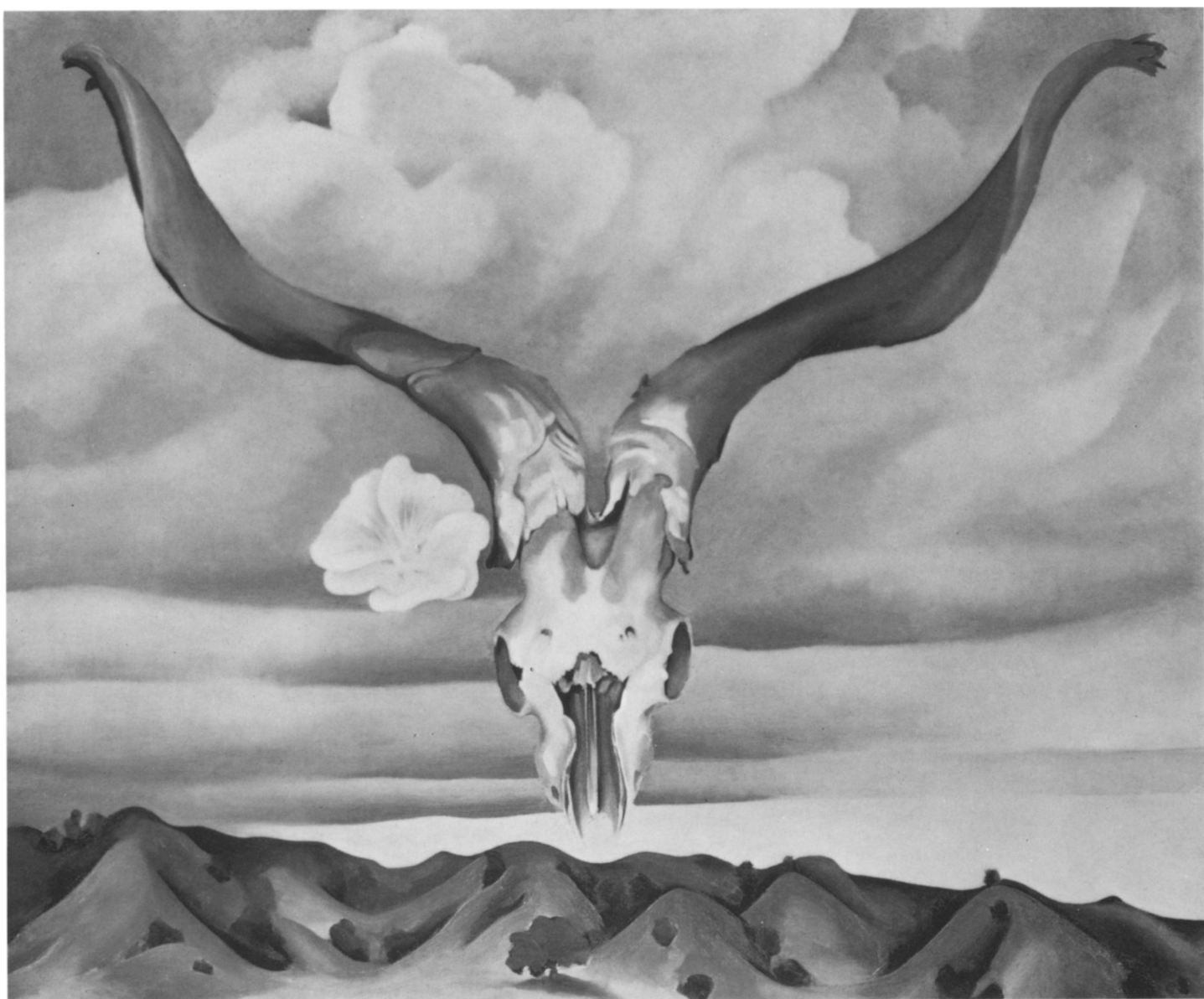
45 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Cow's Skull with Calico Roses*, 1931.  
Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 24 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (92.2 × 61.3 cm.).  
The Art Institute of Chicago





46 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  35 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches (101.3  $\times$  91.1 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1952 (52.203)





47 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Ram's Head with Hollyhock*, 1935. Oil on canvas, 30 × 36 inches (76.2 × 91.4 cm.). Collection of Edith and Milton Lowenthal

48 Alfred Stieglitz. *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1930. Photograph, 7 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 9 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (18 × 24.1 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection (L.49.56.46)

abstraction of form and line, and as a richly symbolic image that raises issues of nationalism and religion. The compositional arrangement is starkly simple. The skull, strictly frontal in its placement and precisely modeled, becomes an image of great mystical power, almost a sacred relic. The religious connotation is reinforced by the cross configuration of the extended horns and vertical support (probably the tree or easel upon which the skull was hung). Only a few years before, O'Keeffe had produced a number of paintings that dramatically depicted the actual wooden crosses found in the New Mexico landscape.

The painting prominently displays the three colors of the American flag, and its title, "*Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*," reiterates the point. In the 1930s, when this painting was executed, artists, musicians, and writers were all interested in developing an indigenous American art form. It was an idea strongly supported by Stieglitz in his galleries and by the artists around him, who sought to create an American style rather than an American subject. Other artists, particularly the Regionalists and Social Realists, pursued the American spirit through more tangible representations of the American scene that often bordered on illustration. Their subjects were the American agricultural landscape and the urban narrative, respectively. To O'Keeffe these artists portrayed an inaccurate view of America:

There was a lot of talk in New York then—during the late twenties and early thirties—about the Great American Painting. It was like the Great American Novel. People wanted to "do" the American scene. I had gone back and forth across the country several times by then, and some of the current ideas about the American scene struck me as pretty ridiculous. To them, the American scene was a dilapidated house with a broken-down buckboard out front and a horse that looked like a skeleton. I knew America was very rich, very lush. . . . For goodness' sake, I thought, the people who talk about the American scene don't know anything about it. So, in a way, that cow's skull was my joke on the American scene, and it gave me pleasure to make it in red, white and blue.

Despite her satirical intentions, *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue* is symbolic of America as O'Keeffe saw it represented by the New Mexico desert and its relics, and her attitude is not very far from that of the Regionalists whom she chastised. For all of them, the American landscape was a subject to be revered, as it had been for an earlier generation of American artists in the nineteenth century. O'Keeffe reinforces the sacredness of the landscape by infusing her painting with subliminal religious undertones.

None of the other numerous works in the skull series attain quite the same degree of starkness or monumentality as *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*. In fact, *Cow's Skull with Calico Roses* (fig. 45), painted the same year and with an almost identical composition, achieves an opposite, and somewhat bizarre, effect of jaunty lightheartedness. O'Keeffe's intensive two-year examination of the isolated skull form seems to culminate with these exquisitely executed paintings.

In O'Keeffe's work, the fruition of one theme often contains the seeds of another. Four years after she introduced floral elements almost offhandedly in *Cow's Skull with Calico Roses* in 1931, she developed



49 Georgia O'Keeffe. *From the Faraway Nearby*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 36 × 40⅞ inches (91.2 × 102 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1959 (59.204.2)

the skull-and-flower theme in *Ram's Head with Hollyhock* (fig. 47). The gap in time between these works was caused by a series of professional and personal difficulties that included a three-year separation from New Mexico and an eighteen-month illness during which the artist did little or no painting. That she sustained this idea for four years indicates its strong hold on her imagination.

*Ram's Head with Hollyhock* and the related series done the following year are the first works in O'Keeffe's oeuvre to combine skeletal and landscape imagery in the same composition; several add a third, floral, element. In previous works she had intensely examined these subjects as separate entities. When she combined them in a single work, she incorporated the final interpretations she had developed for each, so that the skulls are depicted with scrupulous detail in a head-on view, while the landscapes are seen from distant, aerial perspective. The visual effect is at once startling and exhilarating. One change in the depiction of the skulls is that they now mysteriously float free of any visible support. The discrepancies in spatial orientation and the unusual and seemingly symbolic juxtaposition of unrelated imagery have sometimes led critics to call O'Keeffe's work surrealistic.

The Museum's painting *From the Faraway Nearby* (fig. 49) demonstrates a later development in the landscape-skull theme. It was done in the summer of 1937, when O'Keeffe was living for the first time at Rancho de los Burros on the property of Ghost Ranch, near Abiquiú. Three years later the artist bought this house with eight acres of surrounding land. It remained her summer residence after she purchased a hacienda in Abiquiú in 1945.

The composition of *From the Faraway Nearby* departs somewhat from the standard format outlined above, although it maintains the overall effect of the related works. Here the elk's skull is not suspended mid-air, but rather rests tentatively on the narrow strip of landscape at the bottom, emphasizing the strong similarities between the color and shape of the enormous antlers and the hilltop peaks. The skull has become an extension of the landscape forms in much the same way as the building of Ranchos Church united with the ground in one continuous form. The painting's muted tones of rose, gray, blue, and brown help to unify the diverse elements and also produce an unusual serenity of mood. While the other skull-in-landscape paintings of this period show the animals' heads in flattened frontality, here the elk's head is painted in three-quarter view. This perspective emphasizes its three-dimensional form, whose hollowed cavities and irregular surfaces are echoed in the forms of the crevassed hills.

Although the individual images are painted with meticulous modeling, there is no verisimilitude to the scene. This is because of the oddly juxtaposed imagery and the absence of a discernible middle ground, a device also used in mid-nineteenth-century Japanese prints. Most of O'Keeffe's skull-in-landscape paintings have an ambiguous sense of spatial depth. The large skulls loom toward the front of the picture plane; the small strips of landscape, painted as if at a far distance, recede quickly. The great variance in depth tends to abstract and flatten the composition. In *From the Faraway Nearby* the elk's skull is situated







beyond the farthest hill, but it advances visually, by virtue of its prominent size and color.

The natural connection between the animal bones and the desert landscape in which they are preserved is developed further in O'Keeffe's Pelvis series, painted between 1943 and 1945. The cycle, consisting of about a dozen canvases, presents the bone both as a whole shape and as a fragment in close-up. The earliest compositions of 1943, such as *Pelvis with Moon* (fig. 50), describe the elegantly convoluted form in its entirety. The pelvis bone is placed in the forefront of the picture plane and occupies the space of the canvas from edge to edge. Although in different pictures the bone is explored from various angles—front, back, or side—its placement on the canvas is always centered and the painter's perspective always head-on. Attention is drawn first to the bone, which looms in our sight, and then, almost incidentally, to the landscape elements that appear behind it like a theatrical backdrop.

While painting the initial pelvis pictures of 1944, O'Keeffe became aware of the extraordinary compositional potential offered by the openings of the bone. In a subsequent group, made up of four paintings done later that year and two paintings from 1945, she focused exclusively on the openings, excluding all extraneous landscape details so that the viewer's attention rests wholly upon the essential elements of bone, opening, and sky.

The Museum's canvas *Pelvis II* (fig. 51) belongs to this group by date but is actually a transitional piece between the representational paintings of 1943 and the severely abstracted pictures of 1944–45. It incorporates many of the most salient aspects of the 1944 works, in particular the magnification of an isolated section of the whole pelvis and the framing of the sky, rather than the land, within the ovoid openings. However, in its profusion of physical details and its representational modeling of form, it most closely relates to the pelvis paintings of the previous year. In fact, the section of the bone that has been isolated in *Pelvis II* seems to be a magnification of the central portion of *Pelvis with Moon*. This procedure of blowing up a small section of a larger image for closer inspection of detail was adapted from photography.

During the next thirteen years O'Keeffe sporadically returned to the theme of pelvis and opening. These later works adapted the compositions of the 1944 pictures but deviated from them in terms of color. Instead of following the naturalistic coloring of the earlier works with their bleached gray bones and blue skies, these pieces are expressive statements in bright, unnatural color.

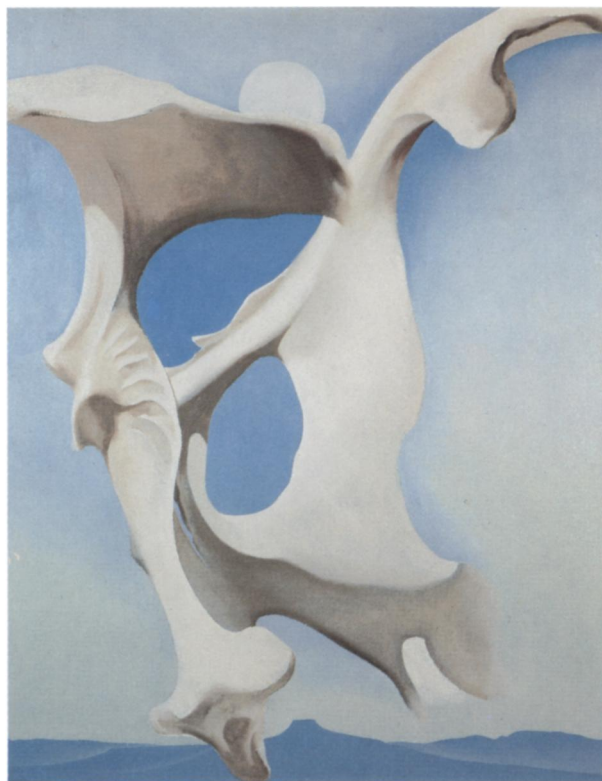
The formal concerns of the pelvis paintings—the contrasts between convex-concave surfaces and positive-negative spaces—were explored by O'Keeffe within various contexts throughout her oeuvre. In the mid-1920s, at the beginning of her career, she painted leaf and flower subjects that similarly emphasized elliptical openings and curvilinear forms. Recently, in the 1970s, her series of rock paintings offered a radically altered perception of the ovoid motif. In these works a single black rock is silhouetted against the sky, dominating the composition. Its shape is comparable to that of the pelvis openings, but O'Keeffe has reversed the positive and negative assignments: the ovoid shape no longer denotes a hole, but rather represents a solid, three-dimensional form.

O'Keeffe's bone subjects were probably the most startlingly original images she produced during the 1930s and early 1940s, her period of greatest mature creativity. It was, however, the magnificent New Mexico landscape that endured in her art long after her experiments with

RIGHT

51 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Pelvis II*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 40 × 30 inches (101.6 × 76.2 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund, 1947 (47.19)

50 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Pelvis with Moon*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 30 × 24 inches (76.2 × 61 cm.). Norton Gallery and School of Art, West Palm Beach, Fla.









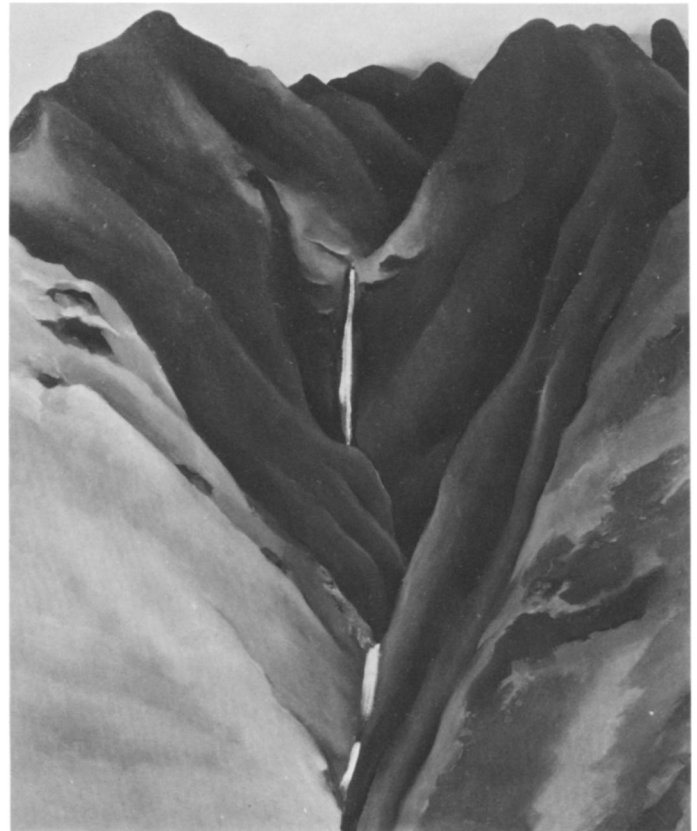
52 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Place I*, 1945. Oil on canvas, 29½ × 35⅜ inches (74.9 × 89.9 cm.). Property of Mrs. Jackson Burke

the skeleton theme had passed. The monumental images of enormous mountain ranges and expansive space were deeply impressed in her mind. Many of her later paintings were done from memory, attesting to her keen powers of observation and her intimate knowledge of the region.

Some of her most dramatic paintings were free interpretations of a setting that she nicknamed the "Black Place," a stretch of gray hills located about one hundred fifty miles northwest of Ghost Ranch. She had first seen it in 1937 while motoring through Navajo country. Between 1940 and 1943 O'Keeffe painted the Black Place several times, in different compositions, and always in distant perspective. Some of the paintings captured the hulking gray shape of the hills, which she said looked like "a mile of elephants." In other paintings she focused on the textural quality of the "evenly crackled" surface.

In 1944 O'Keeffe found the one compositional format that expressed her sense of both the Black Place's vastness and its rhythmic drama. Over the next two years she painted two Black Place series—together comprising about seven canvases, including *Black Place I*, 1945 (fig. 52)—that repeated the same section of hills, seen as though the artist was in their midst. In all of the works, our attention is focused on the undulating land, on the dramatic variances in light and dark, and, particularly, on the juncture of the two hills. There is a sense of great immediacy about these pictures: the mountain forms fill every available inch of canvas, eliminating all reference to sky.

*Black Place II*, 1944 (fig. 56) and its sequential partner, *Black Place III*, 1944 (coll. the artist), are the most theatrical statements of the theme. Unlike the other works, they accentuate the jagged, dark cleft that divides the hills. All of the landscape forms are so abstracted and flattened that the recess becomes an independent shape in the composition—a zigzagging spearhead plunging into the earth with dy-



53 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Waterfall II—Iao Valley*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 inches (61 × 50.8 cm.). Private collection





54 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Place Green*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 38 × 48 inches (96.5 × 121.9 cm.). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Promised 50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Lombard (P.19.79)



55 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Blue and Green Music*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 23 × 19 inches (58.4 × 48.3 cm.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Stieglitz Collection

56 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Place II*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 23 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 30 inches (60.8 × 76.1 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1959 (59.204.1)

namic force. In *Black Place II* we feel the artist's great sense of awe in the presence of such natural beauty and raw power. A few years later, in *Black Place Green*, 1949 (fig. 54), O'Keeffe extracted the essential form of the *Black Place II* composition and painted only the plummeting arrow, without the surrounding hills.

In all of the 1944–45 *Black Place* paintings, O'Keeffe purposely worked with a restricted vocabulary of colors (greens and blacks), shapes (rectangles), and lines (diagonal), thereby eliminating extraneous and distracting details of the landscape. Equally calculated for expressive effect is her choice of the V-shaped composition. The artist has repeatedly used this format to suggest dynamic movement as well as symmetry and balance, and to signify a positive, metaphysical force. In the same way that O'Keeffe has reworked a number of subjects and forms, she has developed her own repertory of compositional formats. The reappearance of the V shape in several paintings done at various points in her career bears witness to the extraordinary cohesiveness of her work.

The arrangement first emerged in a series of music-inspired abstractions from 1919, which have remained perhaps her most esoteric works (fig. 55). The imagery of these early paintings relates closely to that of *Black Place II*, but it is expressed with an unrestrained passion that is controlled in the later work. Her paintings from the 1920s variously utilize this V shape to achieve both dramatic and contemplative moods.

On a visit to Hawaii in 1939, O'Keeffe did a number of waterfall pictures (fig. 53) that display the V configuration and are direct prototypes for the *Black Place* paintings. Although the Hawaiian works are vertical and the *Black Place* pictures are horizontal, their compositions are nearly identical.

In the works following the *Black Place* series, the V understructure is often more readily apparent, as the number of forms in the composition has been greatly reduced. These later works fall into two categories: first, abstracted representations of nature, where the original subject is recognizable (the *Black Bird* and *Waterfall* series, both done in the 1950s, and the *Grand Canyon* paintings, done in the mid-late 1960s); and second, severely reductive abstractions, where the imagery is presumably derived from nature but is not specifically identifiable (the series of geometric color abstractions and the aerial paintings, both of the late 1950s).

With few exceptions, the work that O'Keeffe has done since Stieglitz's death in 1946 does not display the same emotional intensity that charged her earlier paintings. The few new subjects that have been generated during recent decades—patios, rivers, and clouds—have been contemplative studies of her environment, quiet appreciations of nature's splendor. One feels in these works the artist's sense of peace, both with herself and with her life in New Mexico—a life that has been almost completely unencumbered with the distractions of exhibitions and social obligations that characterized her years with Stieglitz.

Her almost complete loss of eyesight in recent years has unfortunately curtailed her artistic productivity. Cut off from her main source of inspiration, the landscape around her, she has produced few works







in the past decade. They have been direct quotations from paintings of earlier years—images that have remained in her mind's eye.

On the whole, her life has been devoted to her art. One feels that it is through painting that O'Keeffe has filtered all experience:

One works because I suppose it is the most interesting thing one knows to do. The days one works are the best days. On the other days one is hurrying through the other things one imagines one has to do to keep one's life going. You get the garden planted. You get the roof fixed. You take the dog to the vet. You spend a day with a friend. . . . You may even enjoy doing such things. . . . But always you are hurrying through these things with a certain amount of aggravation so that you can get at the paintings again because that is the high spot—in a way it is what you do all the other things for. . . . The painting is like a thread that runs through all the reasons for all the other things that make one's life.

## NOTES

Shortened references are given for works included in the Selected Bibliography.

Page 4 O'Keeffe, quoted in Goodrich and Bry, p. 19.

Page 7 Stieglitz, quoted in Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir* (New York, 1983), p. 201.

Page 18 Edward Alden Jewell, "Georgia O'Keeffe in an Art Review," *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1934, p. 15.

Page 19 O'Keeffe, p. opp. pl. 34.

Page 21 Stieglitz, quoted in Lisle, p. 171.

Page 23 O'Keeffe, p. opp. pl. 88.

Page 29 O'Keeffe, interviewed in Kuh, p. 200.

Page 43 O'Keeffe, quoted in Tomkins, p. 54.

Page 46 O'Keeffe, p. opp. pl. 104.

Page 46 Georgia O'Keeffe, "About Myself," in *Georgia O'Keeffe: Exhibition of Oils and Pastels*, exh. brochure, An American Place (New York, 1939), n.p.

Page 49 O'Keeffe, quoted in Tomkins, pp. 48, 50.

Page 58 O'Keeffe, quoted in Lee Nordness, *Art USA Now* (Lucerne, 1962), reprinted in Lisle, pp. 403–4.



**1887**

November 15: Born near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, to Ida (Totto) and Francis O'Keeffe; the second of seven children.

**1887–1905**

Raised on family's 600-acre farm near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. Attends local elementary schools in Sun Prairie and high schools in Madison, Wisconsin, and Chatham, Virginia.

**1905–6**

Attends the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**1907–8**

Attends Art Students League of New York.

Sees Auguste Rodin's first U.S. exhibition (January 1908), and an Henri Matisse exhibition (April 1908), both at Alfred Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (291) in New York.

**1908–10**

Temporarily abandons art studies. Works as freelance commercial artist in Chicago.

**1911**

Teaches art at high school in Chatham, Virginia.

**1912**

Summer: Attends drawing class at University of Virginia, Charlottesville, taught by Alon Bement, a student of Arthur Wesley Dow.

**1912–14**

August 1912–spring 1914: Is art supervisor in Amarillo, Texas, public schools.

**1913–16**

Summers: Teaches art at University of Virginia.

**1914–15**

Fall 1914–spring 1915: Attends Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, studying with Dow. Becomes a friend of Anita Pollitzer. Winter: Sees exhibitions of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso at 291.

**1915**

Summer: Begins to send Pollitzer her drawings to critique. Subscribes to the magazines *Camera Work* (and sends for past issues) and *291*.

**1915–16**

Fall 1915–March 1916: Teaches art at Columbia College in Columbia, South Carolina. Does series of charcoal abstractions, including *Drawing XIII* (50.236.2). December 1915: Sends some of these new drawings to Pollitzer.

**1916**

January: Pollitzer shows O'Keeffe's drawings to Stieglitz.

February: O'Keeffe begins correspondence with Stieglitz.

March–June: Resumes studies at Teachers College. April: Sees Marsden Hartley exhibition at 291. At the end of her stay in New York, O'Keeffe reintroduces color in her work; paints *Blue Lines X* (69.278.3).

May 23–July 5: First public exhibition of her work, at 291, in group show with Charles Duncan and René Lafferty.

November–December: Stieglitz includes her work in a group show at 291 with gallery regulars Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Stanton MacDonald Wright, and Abraham Walkowitz.

**1916–18**

September 1916–February 1918: Teaches art at West Texas State Normal College, Canyon, Texas.

**1917**

April 3–May 14: First solo exhibition opens at 291 while O'Keeffe is in Texas. This is the last exhibition Stieglitz mounts at 291 before permanently closing gallery in July.

May 25–late June: Arrives in New York after show is dismantled; Stieglitz rehangs exhibition for her to see. For the first time O'Keeffe models for Stieglitz.

**1918**

February–May: Lives in Waring and San Antonio, Texas.

June: Returns to New York at Stieglitz's prompting. Resides at 59th St. studio.

July: Stieglitz also moves into the studio; takes some of his most erotic photographs of O'Keeffe during this period.

August–October: Stays at Lake George, New York, with Stieglitz and his family for the first of many annual vacations there, which continue through the 1930s.

**1919**

Paints a series of music-inspired pictures. O'Keeffe and Stieglitz work prolifically and show their work informally to artists and patrons.

**1920**

Spring: Makes the first of many annual trips alone to York Beach, Maine.

December: O'Keeffe and Stieglitz move to Stieglitz's brother's house on East 65th St., where they live until 1924.

**1921**

February: Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe are shown for the first time in an exhibition of his work at The Anderson Galleries, New York.

**1922**

June–October: Draws *A Storm* (1981.35) while at Lake George.

**1923**

January–February: First solo exhibition in six years, organized by Stieglitz, at The Anderson Galleries,

includes *Blue Lines X* (69.278.3) (see list of solo exhibitions for other dates).

## 1924

February–March: Has joint exhibition with Stieglitz at The Anderson Galleries; O’Keeffe shows 51 pictures.

June–November: Paints *Corn, Dark I* (50.236.1) and first close-up flowers on large canvases while at Lake George. September: Stieglitz is divorced from his wife.

December: O’Keeffe and Stieglitz are married; they move to apartment on East 58th St.

## 1925

March: Included in the exhibition *Seven Americans* at The Anderson Galleries, along with John Marin, Arthur Dove, Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, Alfred Stieglitz, and Paul Strand; among O’Keeffe’s entries is *Corn, Dark I*.

November: O’Keeffe and Stieglitz move to Shelton Hotel (Lexington Ave. between 48th and 49th Sts.). O’Keeffe makes first paintings of New York City buildings.

December: Stieglitz opens The Intimate Gallery; O’Keeffe supervises almost all installations.

## 1926

Dorothy Norman begins to visit Stieglitz at The Intimate Gallery.

February: O’Keeffe addresses the National Woman’s Party Convention, Washington, D.C.

Spring: Paints *Black Iris III* (69.278.1).

## 1927

Early August: Has operation at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York and later that year paints *Black Abstraction* (69.278.2).

## 1928

During first half of the year travels to Bermuda, Maine, Lake George, and Wisconsin.

August–November: While O’Keeffe and Stieglitz are at Lake George, Stieglitz has first serious heart attack.

## 1929

Dorothy Norman a daily visitor at The Intimate Gallery.

April–August: First visit to New Mexico, with Rebecca Strand, as guest of Mabel Dodge Luhan in Taos, where she paints *Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur* (34.51). June: Stieglitz closes The Intimate Gallery.

December: Stieglitz opens An American Place, with funds raised by Paul Strand and Dorothy Norman.

## 1929–30

December 1929–January 1930: Five paintings by O’Keeffe included in *Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans*, the second exhibition at the newly opened Museum of Modern Art, New York.

## 1930

Stieglitz begins to photograph Dorothy Norman, who becomes his assistant at An American Place. O’Keeffe visits the gallery only to install exhibitions.

April: During week alone in Maine paints *Clam Shell* (62.258).

June–September: Second trip to New Mexico; stays again with the Luhans in Taos. Paints *Ranchos Church* (61.258) and *Near Abiquiu, New Mexico* (63.204). Before leaving in September, sends a barrel of bones and fabric flowers east, so that she can continue painting New Mexico themes.

## 1931

April–July: In New Mexico, rents a cottage on the H&M Ranch in Alcalde.

October–November: Paints *Cow’s Skull: Red, White, and Blue* (52.203) at Lake George.

## 1932

April: Despite Stieglitz’s strong objections, O’Keeffe accepts commission to paint mural for Radio City Music Hall in New York.

May–September: Goes to Lake George instead of making annual trip to New Mexico. Early August: With Stieglitz’s niece, motors through the Gaspé Peninsula, Canada, where she paints *White Canadian Barn II* (64.310).

Winter: Backs out of the Radio City Music Hall mural project after difficulties arise. Suffers a nervous breakdown, and stops painting for a year.

## 1933

February–March: Hospitalized in New York for nervous breakdown.

March–December: Recuperates in New York, Bermuda, and Lake George.

## 1934

February–March: The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquires its first painting by O’Keeffe, *Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur* (34.51), from her eleventh annual exhibition, at An American Place.

June–September: Goes to New Mexico for the first time in three years. First stays at H&M Ranch, then at Ghost Ranch, located 70 miles from Taos.

## 1935

June–November: Stays at Ghost Ranch.

## 1936

Accepts commission to do large flower painting for Elizabeth Arden’s New York exercise salon.

June–September: Stays at Ghost Ranch.

October: O’Keeffe and Stieglitz move to penthouse apartment on East 54th St.

## 1937

Stieglitz, unable to handle a heavy camera, takes his last photographs.

July–December: O’Keeffe stays at Rancho de los Burros, located about three miles from Ghost Ranch headquarters. Paints *From the Faraway*



*Nearby* (59.204.2). Summer: Tours Indian country in western New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. October–December: Included in large group show *Beginnings & Landmarks—291—1905–1917* at An American Place.

#### 1938

May: Receives honorary doctor of fine arts from College of William and Mary in Virginia, Williamsburg.

July–August: Stays at Lake George with Stieglitz. O’Keeffe has bursitis; Stieglitz recovering from second, near-fatal, heart attack and pneumonia.

August–November: Stays at Ghost Ranch. October: Travels to Carmel, California.

#### 1939

February–April: Paints in Hawaii, as guest of Dole Pineapple Company; her paintings will be used in company’s advertisements. April: Chosen one of 12 most outstanding women of the past 50 years by the New York World’s Fair Tomorrow Committee. Her painting *Sunset, Long Island* is chosen to represent New York State at New York World’s Fair.

May–July: Returns to New York and becomes ill; stops painting until October.

August–September: Stays at Lake George with Stieglitz; does not go to New Mexico this year.

#### 1940

Stieglitz confined to bed because of ill health.

February–March: Vacations in Nassau, Bahama Islands.

June–December: Stays at Ghost Ranch. October: Buys Rancho de los Burros and almost eight acres of land.

#### 1941

May–November: Stays at Rancho de los Burros.

#### 1942

May: Receives honorary doctor of letters from University of Wisconsin.

October: Because of Stieglitz’s ill health and in anticipation of wartime difficulties, O’Keeffe and Stieglitz move to smaller, cheaper apartment on East 54th St., one block from An American Place.

#### 1943

January–February: First large retrospective exhibition of her work held at the Art Institute of Chicago.

April–October: Stays at Rancho de los Burros.

#### 1944

April–October: Stays at Rancho de los Burros. Paints *Pelvis II* (47.19) and *Black Place II* (59.204.1).

#### 1945

May–October: Stays at Rancho de los Burros. Buys second home on three acres of land in Abiquiu, New Mexico, about sixteen miles from Ghost Ranch. Begins renovations on the house that continue until 1948.

#### 1946

May–August: Retrospective exhibition of her work held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. June–July: Stays in Abiquiu.

July 10: Flies back to New York when Stieglitz has massive stroke and is taken to hospital in a coma.

July 13: Stieglitz dies in hospital.

Autumn: Stays in Abiquiu.

#### 1946–48

Winter 1946: Begins to disseminate Stieglitz’s large art collection, a project that takes three years to complete. Helps organize two exhibitions of Stieglitz’s collection at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1947), and at the Art Institute of Chicago (1948). Paints very little during these years.

#### 1948

Summer: After renovations on Abiquiu house are completed it becomes her primary residence. Resumes painting.

#### 1949

Moves permanently to New Mexico and begins pattern of living in Abiquiu house during winter and spring and at Rancho de los Burros during summer and autumn.

Spring: Elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

#### 1950–60

A slow period in O’Keeffe’s artistic output. Begins to travel around the world.

#### 1950

October–November: Solo show at An American Place, the first exhibition of her work since Stieglitz’s death. It is the last show held at An American Place before the gallery closes. Edith Gregor Halpert of The Downtown Gallery, New York, becomes her dealer.

#### 1951

February: First trip to Mexico, where she meets artists Miguel Covarrubias and Diego Rivera.

#### 1952

February–March: Exhibits pastels from 1914–45 in her first solo show at The Downtown Gallery.

#### 1953

Spring: First trip to Europe (France and Spain).

#### 1954

Returns to Spain for three months.

#### 1956

Spring: Spends three months in Peru.

#### 1959

A three-and-a-half-month trip around the world (Far East, Southeast Asia, India, Middle East, and Italy). Upon return, paints first cloud pictures.

## 1960

October–December: First large retrospective exhibition since 1946, at the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts. Autumn: Six-week trip to Japan, Formosa, Philippines, Hong Kong, South-east Asia, and Pacific Islands.

## 1961

April–May: Last exhibition of her work at The Downtown Gallery.

August: First of several rafting trips down the Colorado River. She will return to Colorado to paint at least six times.

## 1963

Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Receives the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award. After 13 years, O'Keeffe ends her association with The Downtown Gallery. Doris Bry becomes her agent (she will represent O'Keeffe until 1977). O'Keeffe travels to Greece, Egypt, and Near East.

## 1965

Paints her largest canvas, *Sky Above Clouds IV* (8 × 24 ft.).

## 1966

Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Retrospective exhibition at the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas, which travels to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, and Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

## 1967

Travels to England and Austria.

## 1969

Second rafting trip down the Colorado River.

## 1970

Third rafting trip down the Colorado River. Large retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, which travels to the Art Institute of Chicago and San Francisco Museum of Art. Awarded the National Institute of Arts and Letters gold medal for painting.

## 1971

Receives the M. Carey Thomas Award from Bryn Mawr College. Late in the year O'Keeffe permanently loses central vision, retaining only peripheral sight. Stops painting.

## 1972

Juan Hamilton, a potter, becomes her assistant and teaches her to make hand-rolled pots. With his encouragement O'Keeffe begins to paint again, first in watercolor, then in oil. Hires studio assistants to help execute her paintings. Receives the Edward MacDowell Medal from the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire.

## 1973

Receives honorary doctor of arts from Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## 1974

*Some Memories of Drawings*, a portfolio of drawings with short texts written by the artist, is published by Atlantis Editions.

## 1975

Perry Miller Adato produces film about O'Keeffe and her work.

## 1976

*Georgia O'Keeffe*, a large, full-color book, with texts written by the artist, is published by The Viking Press.

## 1977

Visits the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., to see exhibition that includes Stieglitz's photographs. Also visits the Freer Gallery of Art. The Perry Miller Adato film about O'Keeffe is shown for the first time on television. O'Keeffe working in watercolor.

## 1978

Exhibition of photographs *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* shown at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

## 1979

Awarded the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, by President Gerald Ford.

## 1980–84

Continues to live in New Mexico; makes occasional trips.



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## SOLO EXHIBITIONS AT GALLERIES

**1917**

Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (291), New York

**1923**

The Anderson Galleries, New York

**Yearly, 1926–29**

The Intimate Gallery, New York

**Yearly, 1930–46; 1950**

An American Place, New York

**1952; 1955; 1958; 1961**

The Downtown Gallery, New York

## RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITIONS AT MUSEUMS

**1943**

The Art Institute of Chicago

**1946**

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

**1960**

Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Mass.

**1966**

Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Tex. Traveled to The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Tex., and Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

**1970**

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Traveled to The Art Institute of Chicago and San Francisco Museum of Art.

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## PHOTO CREDITS

Color photography of works in The Metropolitan Museum of Art and figs. 7, 26, 36, and 47 by Malcolm Varon. Black-and-white photography of works in the Metropolitan Museum by the Metropolitan Museum Photograph Studio. Fig. 18 courtesy of Washburn Gallery, New York. Fig. 52 by Otto E. Nelson. Fig. 53 courtesy of Sotheby Parke-Bernet, Inc., New York. Other photographs courtesy of the museums and collections indicated in captions.

### INSIDE FRONT COVER

Alfred Stieglitz. *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1932. Photograph. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection (L.49.56.19)

### INSIDE BACK COVER

Yousuf Karsh. *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1956. Photograph. © 1956 Karsh, Ottawa

### COVER

Georgia O'Keeffe. *Corn, Dark I* (fig. 17)



