

O'Keeffe's Century

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Fig.1
Series I - From the Plains 1919
Oil paint on canvas
68.6 x 58.4
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

*I don't know what Art is. No one has ever been able to give me a satisfactory definition.
I have not been in Europe.
I prefer to live in a room as bare as possible.
I have been much photographed.
I paint because color is a significant language to me but I do not like pictures and I do not like exhibitions of pictures. However I am very much interested in them.*
Georgia O'Keeffe, 1922¹

It is quite easy to show that abstract art like every other cultural phenomenon reflects the social and other circumstances of the age in which its creators live, and that there is nothing inside art itself disconnected from history, which compels it to go in one direction or another.
Clement Greenberg, 1940²

A century after her debut in New York at '291', the renowned gallery of the photographer Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), this exhibition revisits six decades of the work of Georgia O'Keeffe. There are few artists more clearly and resolutely associated with the United States, and with identifying and embodying what it means to be both 'American' and 'Modern', than O'Keeffe.³ Born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, in 1887, under the first presidential

administration of Grover Cleveland, she died, having lived for the best part of a century, in 1986, during that of Ronald Reagan.⁴ In-between, the U.S. endured the Great Depression, two World Wars, one Cold one, and had no fewer than seventeen Presidents. O'Keeffe's career was formed before the U.S. became a modern superpower and New York the centre of the art world, but it traversed this complex and transformational era of national history and thus her work must be considered in the context of the various times in which she lived and worked; the shifts in aesthetics that occurred, bound up in the project to create a national art; and the subsequent years of her ongoing influence.

Like her contemporaries - a group of brilliant young men who were set on placing 'American' culture firmly within modernism and on a different cultural plane than, as they perceived it, it had occupied previously - O'Keeffe came to maturity during the 'Progressive Era', lasting from the 1890s to the 1920s. One of their number, the writer Paul Rosenfeld (1890-1946), commented: 'For the first time, among these modern men and women, I found myself in an America where it was good to be ... [Their works] gave me the happy sense of a new spirit dawning in American life, and awakened a sense of wealth, of confidence, and of power which was not there before.'⁵ In the arts, this generation looked towards one figure in particular as their leader: the photographer, editor and



Fig. 2
Red and Orange Streak 1919
 Oil paint on canvas
 68.6 x 58.4
 Philadelphia Museum of Art

gallerist Alfred Stieglitz.⁶ As art historian Wanda Corn has noted, this was an era in which the new urban elites became advocates of a kind of cultural nationalism; these elites included Stieglitz, and others from his circle who frequented both 291 and the Stieglitz family summer residence at Lake George, in upstate New York: 'White, well-educated, and contentious, these men grew up during the Progressive Era and by the time they were young adults had ideologically committed themselves to the politics of modernism and to a renaissance in the nation's arts and letters.'⁷ O'Keeffe was to become part of this circle – a generation with their roots in late-nineteenth-century romantic, symbolist and transcendental aesthetics, they nevertheless embraced modernism. O'Keeffe later expressed how she had shared the excitement at the potential for a new national culture, but also her distance and otherness from this group (she called them 'city men' – gendering the urban context in a telling way) and her doubtfulness as regards their dedication to an America in competition with Europe. She highlighted the gap between their rhetoric and their actual commitment:

As I was working I thought of the city men I had been seeing in the East. They talked so often of writing the Great American Novel - the Great American Play - the Great American Poetry ... I was excited over our country and I knew that at that time almost any of those great minds would have been in Europe if it had been possible for them. They didn't even want to live in New York - how was the Great American Thing going to happen?⁸

O'Keeffe's debut in 1916 consisted of the display of a small number of abstract drawings in charcoal, which she had sent to her friend Anita Pollitzer in New York City (O'Keeffe and Pollitzer studied together at Teachers College, Columbia University, two years previously). Pollitzer had shown them to Stieglitz, who promptly put them on display.⁹ The following year, Stieglitz gave O'Keeffe a solo exhibition at the gallery, including both charcoals and watercolours made in Texas – it was the last show to be held at 291 before its closure due to financial difficulties caused by the First World War. O'Keeffe's charcoals are her earliest mature expressions and the basis of her lifelong commitment to abstraction.¹⁰ Drawn largely from emotional experience inspired by music or landscape, they explored the Theosophical concept of the thought-form, ideas drawn from Wassily Kandinsky's (1866–1944) *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911, translated into English in 1914), and the compositional principals of O'Keeffe's teacher at Columbia, Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922).¹¹ Their interpretation first by Stieglitz and then O'Keeffe's peers in his circle largely set the tone for critical responses to her work. Stieglitz wrote that 'Miss O'Keeffe's drawings besides their other values were of intense interest from a psycho-analytical [sic] point of view. "291" had never before seen woman express herself so frankly on paper.'¹² Henry Tyrrell, who reviewed her first solo show in 1917, wrote 'there can be no mistaking the essential fact that Miss O'Keeffe, independent of technical abilities quite out of the common, has found expression in delicately veiled symbolism for "what every woman knows," but what women heretofore have

kept to themselves.'¹³ Slightly later, the painter Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) would comment that 'the pictures of O'Keeffe ... are probably as living and shameless private documents as exist, in painting certainly, and probably in any other art.'¹⁴ Interpretations of O'Keeffe's work however, have been largely defined by three 'moments': the formative years of American modernism among her generation, as outlined above, influenced by Stieglitz; the high modernist reassessment, and dismissal, of her work led by critic

feeling of dangling her feet in a river,¹⁷ or the watercolours of the endless sky, lit up in a variety of colours – as in *Sunrise* 1916 (fig. 23), *Sunrise and Little Clouds No. II* 1916 and the two series *Light Coming on the Plains I–III* 1917 and *Evening Star I–VII* 1917. It was this rootedness in her environment that she took to New York, where the memory of landscape impressions, light effects and sounds inspired her to paint works such as *Series I – From the Plains* 1919 and *Red and Orange Streak* 1919 (figs 1 and 2).¹⁸



Fig. 3
 Frederic Church
Twilight in the Wilderness 1860
 Oil paint on canvas
 101.6 x 162.6
 The Cleveland Museum of Art

Clement Greenberg (which conceals both more positive instances of reception and her influence, particularly from the 1940s to the 1960s); and, thirdly, her apparent 'rediscovery' by feminist artists of the 1970s.¹⁵

Synaesthesia: abstraction and the senses

In the 1910s, O'Keeffe was based in west Texas, teaching first in Amarillo and then in Canyon. She was deeply impressed by the landscape, which was much closer to that of her early youth on the farm where she was born than anywhere she had since resided. She took to the wide-open spaces and massive presence of the sky, to the immersive experience of walking and the changes in weather. O'Keeffe was a lifelong hiker, in her element in the landscape; her early letters to Stieglitz, Pollitzer and others reveal how she would often go 'tramping' at any time of day, or night, and in all conditions, and are full of impressions of the landscape, its colours and weather.¹⁶

The notion of synaesthesia, the stimulation of one sense by an experience in another, and its use as a way to create images, underpins much of O'Keeffe's early work. She employed the concept to respond to her surroundings, whether in the swirling movement of the pastel *Special No. 32* 1915, inspired by the

Abstraction and immersion in landscape go hand in hand in these works and establish a guiding theme that runs throughout O'Keeffe's work. These works might be seen as indebted to both Kandinsky's radical fusion of landscape and abstraction (see, for instance, *Cossacks* 1910–11), as well as to nineteenth-century American luminism, as exemplified by Frederic Church (1826–1900) and his focus on light effects in the expansive American landscape.¹⁹ Church employed these effects as a means to convey emotional weight, as in his masterpiece *Twilight in the Wilderness* 1860 (fig. 3), painted as a spiritual meditation on the eve of the Civil War. O'Keeffe's watercolours equally find a resonance in the context of the First World War; despite her remoteness, both from the East Coast and Europe, she was nevertheless deeply concerned by events.²⁰ However, when her watercolours were shown again during the late 1950s, they also struck a chord with the context of abstraction then dominating American art.²¹ These works are the beginning, then, of O'Keeffe's art: they lay out a foundational interest in abstraction; they introduce the rural and expansive western American landscape – a landscape that would become so crucial within her life and art – as a source of inspiration for modernism; and they reveal the ways in which her work might be presented as an antecedent to later manifestations of American abstraction.

'Woman as Exponent of the Abstract ... Free without Aid of Freud'²²

Once based in New York, O'Keeffe turned with greater assurance towards abstraction, shifting more definitively to oil paint as a medium; though she used pastel, she would rarely again employ either charcoal or watercolour to the same extent as she had done in Virginia and Texas. Her abstract compositions continued to be rooted in the landscape, exploring memories of the Texas plains, but she also found sources of inspiration in music – an art form that held almost as much interest for O'Keeffe as the visual arts – and, famously, flowers. Following the closure of 291, Stieglitz staged exhibitions at the Anderson Galleries, including solo shows of O'Keeffe's new work in 1923 and 1924, thus giving her far more prominence than other female artists enjoyed at this time. O'Keeffe's explanations of her work emphasised their abstract formal qualities: 'I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way – things I had no words for.'²³ However, the critical reaction to these exhibitions continued to be authored largely by Stieglitz and his associates. They saw in O'Keeffe's work the essence of womanhood expressed through a modernist abstraction that was also, importantly, American. Following Stieglitz, critics advanced Freudian interpretations of her abstract and flower imagery, connecting these explicitly with her body and gendering her art in ways she found increasingly frustrating. As early as 1922, she commented, 'They make me seem like some strange unearthly sort of creature floating in the air – breathing in clouds for nourishment – when the truth is that I like beef steak – and like it rare at that.'²⁴ The text that most revealingly elucidates Stieglitz's position are his remarks on 'Woman in Art'; first published in 1960, the piece was, however, written in 1919 and was echoed in contemporary reviews. Stieglitz wrote, 'Woman feels the World differently than Man feels it. And one of the chief generating forces crystallizing into art is undoubtedly elemental feeling – Woman's & Man's are differentiated through the difference in their sex make-up ... The Woman receives the World through her Womb. That is her deepest feeling. Mind comes second.'²⁵

O'Keeffe's professional introduction therefore largely came about through the mediation of Stieglitz. The art historian Barbara Buhler Lynes identifies the double-edged nature of that introduction, given Stieglitz's contradictory position: 'by suggesting that there might be equality between the sexes in art, Stieglitz adopted a revolutionary position; but by simultaneously calling attention to biological differences between men and women, he implicitly categorised them as separate and unequal and, thus, neutralised the strength of that position.'²⁶ Stieglitz's influence is clear in much of the early writing on O'Keeffe's art – as in Hartley's or Rosenfeld's early texts, published between 1921 and 1924, which stressed Stieglitz's decisive role in forging her career. When the critic Henry McBride wrote in 1923, reviewing the second solo exhibition of O'Keeffe's work organised by Stieglitz, that '[Alfred Stieglitz] is responsible for the O'Keeffe exhibition in the Anderson Galleries. Miss O'Keeffe says so herself, and it is reasonably sure that he is responsible for Miss O'Keeffe, the artist', he emphasised how Stieglitz as impresario, agent, critic and advocate-in-chief of modernism facilitated the careers of the artists he supported to such an extent that they were considered, in large part, his creations.²⁷

McBride was himself a close ally of Stieglitz's circle, though not always uncritical. Rosenfeld, much more the disciple of Stieglitz than McBride was, meanwhile, reflected on the legacy of 291 (meaning Stieglitz) in modernist magazine *Dial* in 1921, in a way that appears to refute this tendency:

*Here are [Arthur] Dove and [John] Marin and O'Keeffe, moved by something of the same impulse that moved 291; reflecting something of the same human maturity. All these people, no doubt, were affected by what was going on in the gallery. But none of them was actually created by the place. There must have been in them something of 291 before ever they heard of it. Otherwise how could they have come into touch with it?*²⁸

Nevertheless, as Lynes indicates, Stieglitz had also created O'Keeffe in another way; he had produced such an effective interpretation of O'Keeffe's work that it was to obscure her art for years to come: 'the O'Keeffe perceived by most critics in the early years of her career was essentially the invention of Alfred Stieglitz, and his ideas about creativity in general and O'Keeffe's creative drive in particular are a key to understanding why she chose to define herself as an artist as she did.'²⁹ The way she chose to define herself was in opposition to being categorised as a woman artist (and later, to being claimed by feminist artists); instead, she fiercely asserted her independence and refuted the idea that her art was essentially feminine, while nevertheless being committed to female equality – she was a lifelong member of the National Woman's Party (NWP).³⁰ By the early 1920s, as Lynes has argued,³¹ O'Keeffe had become frustrated by readings of her work and began to change her approach, turning away from abstraction towards a style closer to precisionism and, perhaps ironically, more clearly towards photography and specifically its opticality – clarity, close-ups, cropping, magnification and distortion – with a range of subjects that included flowers and still lifes, as well as subjects not traditionally associated with women – urban views of New York City, for example – in an effort to shake off the constrictions of being labelled a 'woman artist'.³² In 1922, O'Keeffe wrote that '[Photography] has been part of my searching and through the searching maybe I am at present prejudiced in favour of photography.'³³ Indeed, photography would remain an important reference point for O'Keeffe's work, and her close friendships with photographers are well known, from Stieglitz and Paul Strand (1890–1976), to Ansel Adams (1902–84) and Eliot Porter (1901–90), among others.

From New York to New Mexico

O'Keeffe's early reception led her, then, to make several further shifts in her work; in 1925 towards the motifs of urban life, principally skyscrapers, and, after 1929, towards the Southwest.³⁴ In 1915, New York City was already being hailed as a social and cultural centre, both as an effect of the war, but also because of its modernity and scale.³⁵ O'Keeffe's arrival in the city in 1918 coincided with a building boom that would see the city, and the modes of living within it, transformed.³⁶ In 1925, O'Keeffe and Stieglitz, recently married, moved to the newly completed and ultra-modern Shelton Hotel. It was also the year of her first painting of the city, *New York Street with Moon* (fig.71). Stieglitz had been



Fig.4
The Shelton with Sunspots, N.Y. 1926
Oil paint on canvas
123.2 x 76.8
The Art Institute of Chicago

photographing New York City since the 1890s, and, as is the case for several of O'Keeffe's New York scenes, *New York Street with Moon* acknowledges Stieglitz in its inclusion of a sky dominated by rippling cloud formations, which evoke those in his sky series *Equivalents* c.1922–35. Through these skies, full of incident, the natural world and a sense of space enter the New York paintings in a way that contrasts with the solidity and mass of the buildings. Likewise, *The Shelton with Sunspots, N.Y. 1926* (fig.4) includes photographic lens flare and a series of sunspots – caused when, facing into the sun, the diffuse glare disrupts the geometry of the building – within its composition. In some works, they shared subjects; *New York, Night 1928–9* (fig.73) revisits a view Stieglitz had photographed the year before, but at night time, while O'Keeffe painted the East River panorama several times before Stieglitz addressed the same subject. In *Radiator Building – Night, New York 1927* (fig.134), a neon sign even spells out Stieglitz's name.

Although O'Keeffe had admired the images of New York by John Marin (1870–1953), particularly his watercolours of the Woolworth building, she declared, '[when] I began talking about trying to paint New York ... I was told that it was an impossible idea – even the men hadn't done too well with it.'³⁷ Elsewhere,

she said of their reaction: 'when I wanted to paint New York, the men thought I'd lost my mind. But I did it anyway.'³⁸ Stieglitz was among the doubtful and rejected *New York Street with Moon* from the exhibition *Seven Americans* at the Anderson Galleries in 1925. Having praised O'Keeffe's work largely for its organic qualities and femininity, he may have found the New York paintings too much at odds with his conception of what a female artist ought to be. It was a reaction O'Keeffe embraced, stating her intention, in 1927, that her next exhibition be 'so magnificently vulgar that all the people who have liked what I have been doing would stop speaking to me.'³⁹ Nevertheless, when *New York Street with Moon* was shown, in 1926, it sold immediately.

O'Keeffe painted New York from 1925 to 1929/30, her enthusiasm for the subject ending, as Anna C. Chave points out, with the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, which ended the inter-war period of affluence, utopianism and modernity that was encapsulated by the burgeoning skylines of American cities such as New York and Chicago.⁴⁰ The financial crash called a halt to the optimism of the Progressive-era metropolitans and O'Keeffe turned towards the Southwest. Her relocation enabled her to develop more fully her personal project to produce the 'great American thing', to find a



Fig.5
John Gast
American Progress 1872
Oil paint on canvas
29.2 x 40
Autry National Center, Los Angeles

unique way to embody the nation culturally and artistically. The focus of O'Keeffe's incorporation of European-inflected modernist abstraction into a new and American mode of modernism became the landscape – as Wanda Corn has observed, 'the circle around Stieglitz utilised the term American more than any other to describe their work and "American" in their lexicon meant, among other things, a sense of place.'⁴¹ Uniting abstraction with the American landscape, be it urban or rural, provided a way for Americans to contribute in a unique way to modernism and to make modernism relevant to Americans, for whom the landscape had always been a principal touchstone of identity. In the history of the nation-formation of the U.S., from 'Manifest Destiny' onwards, but particularly in the wake of the Civil War, the landscape played a key role in the construction of an American sense of nationhood.⁴² Corn has remarked that, 'when O'Keeffe left the architectural canyons of Manhattan for the God-given deserts of New Mexico and put aside paintings of skyscrapers for those of bones, it was both a private affair and a public announcement that modern America could be found far west of the Hudson, not just on Wall Street, at Lake George, or on the New England Coast.'⁴³

The paintings of bleached animal skulls that O'Keeffe made during the 1930s offer a motif that synthesises various meanings and shows how O'Keeffe constructed complex, layered allegories of nationhood and identity, simultaneously reflecting both her personal aims as an artist and the predicament of the times. The skulls that she gathered following an exceptional drought in 1930 were a way to address the Great Depression and Dust Bowl (a period of drought and severe dust storms in the 1930s) without illustrating them directly (as they would be in John Steinbeck's 1939 realist novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and John Ford's 1940 film adaptation, for example). The resulting works call on a motif used to signify the West and the effects of the westward

enlargement of the U.S. and which featured in both paintings and collections of memorabilia that were themselves a way to construct an image of American identity, a mythic image of the once 'Wild West'.⁴⁴ Even in John Gast's well-known and widely reproduced image *American Progress* 1872 (fig.5), depicting the westward expansion, a pile of bones appears in the middle of the painting suggesting an indigenous loss. Unlike Gast's allegory of Manifest Destiny, however, in which progress personified floats above a Midwestern scene, in O'Keeffe canvases such as *From the Faraway, Nearby* 1937 (fig.126), the bleached skulls float above Southwestern desert in a way that in aesthetic terms evokes surrealism, without O'Keeffe's actually adhering to the principles of that movement, to describe the Dust Bowl, which itself caused another westward migration. Bones summarise succinctly the resilience and individualism of the pioneer, and simultaneously signal the presence (and disappearance) of native inhabitants.

A lesser-known body of work indicates O'Keeffe's deeper interest in the cultural complexity of the American Southwest. From the moment she arrived in New Mexico in 1929, she became aware of and interested in its layered native cultures. While the crosses, adobe churches and *moradas* (chapels) of the *Penitentes* sect, a community dating from the Spanish colonial era, could be worked into her landscape representations, the Native American adobe structure became the focus of her architectural rendition of *Taos Pueblo* 1929/34 (fig.141) – although this early work has a touch of the touristic vista, more typical of her initial approaches to the region. Alongside these subjects, she painted a number of images of Kachina dolls, representations of spirit beings that are sacred objects for the Native American populations of the area. These figurines clearly held a fascination for O'Keeffe, since she made paintings of them repeatedly over a period of ten years.⁴⁵ As Corn remarks, 'in New Mexico ... O'Keeffe consciously worked



Fig.6
Grey Hill Forms 1936
Oil paint on canvas
54.3 x 79.7
University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque

to change the paradigm [used to describe her] from woman painter to regional painter ... the objects that inspired her to paint – animal bones, crosses, masks, Indian blankets – and the way she configured them were deeply tied to a rich regional culture or, to be more accurate, to the multiple cultures of the Southwest.⁴⁶ Through her work, O'Keeffe negotiated and eschewed the substantial and successive artistic traditions of American landscape painting and their concomitant construction of the West; she rejected the urban as a focus of modernism and responded instead to a broader contemporary need to root identity in landscape and place. As Corn has stressed: 'In taking herself and her art to New Mexico, O'Keeffe shared in the Regionalist's revolt against Manhattan ... she responded most decisively to the depression era's intensified rhetoric of "place" and "America." She took modernism further from Manhattan than any other member of the second [Stieglitz] circle and artistically engaged a region where the past was stronger than the present.'⁴⁷

O'Keeffe's work in the Southwest falls into different stages: first, her initial contact in 1929–31, during which time she focused on learning about the new locale, its layered cultural references and unfamiliar landscape forms; then, after a period of ill-health, and a hiatus in her visits between 1932 and 1933, she returned and re-engaged with the area, this time with a clearer sense of those aspects that interested her. She began to truly develop her language following the discovery of Ghost Ranch in 1934 and her acquisition of a house there in 1940. Then, in a later stage, from the early 1940s to her final representations of the New Mexico landscape in 1953,⁴⁸ she concentrated for the most part on serial representations of specific motifs – cottonwood trees, pelvis bones against the landscape or sky and, of course, her patio door.⁴⁹ From the outset, however, one aspect seems consistent, and that is her eye for eccentric or unusual landscape configurations

– aspects of the locale that she could turn more easily towards abstraction, and nowhere in her work is this clearer than in her repeated and evolving representations of the area she called the 'Black Place'.

The 'Black Place' paintings

O'Keeffe first visited the area of Bisti Badlands, 240 kilometres west of Ghost Ranch, in 1935; returning to paint it the following year, she was preoccupied with it until 1949 and made, in total, fourteen paintings, along with one large pastel drawing.⁵⁰ Its relative remoteness meant that she needed to camp on site and did so in different seasons, in often difficult weather conditions.⁵¹ O'Keeffe called this area of dark grey hills the 'Black Place' and described it as looking 'like a mile of elephants'.⁵² In this place, she found an area that was marked by its exceptional characteristics, not typical even in the context of the extraordinary geological formations of the Southwestern states. By focusing on this exception, it is clear she was interested in something other than representing the essence of a region in a straightforward manner, as perhaps many other Southwestern or Western artists had done, and as she had come closer to during her own early forays into depicting New Mexico. Instead, she found an area that interested her aesthetically and that allowed her to push her work further towards abstraction by virtue of its already seeming a natural abstraction. O'Keeffe's 'Black Place' paintings reveal the nature of this negotiation of landscape and abstraction, indicating her concern with aspects of aesthetics that were also of interest to a new generation of artists working in New York, and point towards wider concerns that are not often discussed in relation to O'Keeffe's work.

In the years preceding and overlapping with the beginnings of the 'Black Place' series, O'Keeffe, as we have seen, had been



Fig.7
The Black Place III 1945
 Pastel on paper
 70.5 x 111.1
 Private collection, courtesy
 The Owings Gallery, Santa Fe

preoccupied with depictions of animal skulls against distant landscapes, culminating with the emblematic *From the Faraway, Nearby*, in which she explored her concept of the 'faraway' and the nature of space in the Southwestern landscape. The series of skull paintings had begun with an allegory of the U.S. - *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue* 1931 (fig.135) - and ended with this icon of the vast and harsh territory, an image of the context for the formation of American identity.⁵³ In contrast, her paintings of the 'Black Place' begin with relative naturalism. Although O'Keeffe was always editing, simplifying, accentuating and transforming the landscapes she painted,⁵⁴ it is possible to identify the particular locations she depicted within the actual landscape. One of her first paintings of the area was *Grey Hill Forms* 1936 (fig.6), which concentrates on the strange softness and distinctive morphology of the landscape, bounded below by a sandy arroyo (dry creek) and sage bushes, and above by the high horizon, leaving room for a narrow passage of blue sky. These naturalistic features also characterise a painting titled *Black Hills with Cedar* 1941-2 (fig.159), which features a cedar bush within the central gully, and an accentuated pink in the flanking hill forms. O'Keeffe often proceeded by learning the landscape, becoming intimate with its minute features, only later to decide what to use and what was superfluous in the image. These early representations are marked by a faithful naturalism that is nevertheless guided by a concern with form, which itself evokes the way in which modernist photographers were intent on looking and abstracting by identifying strangeness within the observed world. Later, in 1943, she wrote to Stieglitz, describing:

*the long formations of black hills - sometimes long lines of very dark purple in them - it is so unbelievable the color ... the heat of the sun on it - the rain and the moonlight ... oddly - When I see the country in its silvery beauty and forbidding blackness in my memory ... Those black hills ... have something of a photograph about them.*⁵⁵

As O'Keeffe continued the 'Black Place' landscapes, she made them progressively more abstract. Between the late 1930s and 1940, O'Keeffe was not able to return to the 'Black Place', but resumed her series again from 1941. In the early 1940s, she was also preoccupied by the Plaza Blanca, or 'White Place', a site in the Chama River Valley composed of vertical white cliffs that are partially visible in the distance from her house at Abiquiú. She had known of it since 1931, but it was not until the 1940s that she began to paint it repeatedly, and these paintings compliment and contrast with those of the 'Black Place'.⁵⁶

A series of four works painted in 1944 shows how O'Keeffe transformed her apprehension of the 'Black Place'. They take as their subject a ravine, situated centrally on the canvas, either side of which are the convex, rounded hill forms that recede into the near distance but do not resolve into a horizon and sky. These were features usually required for pictorial illusion but were eschewed by artists beginning with Claude Monet (1840-1926) whose late paintings would influence American abstract painters when they were exhibited in post-war New York and acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 1955.⁵⁷ The first in the series, *Black Place I* (fig.160), is naturalistic in the way that her earliest works of the area had been, concentrating on the soft undulations of the hills. In the second canvas, a slightly smaller work, *Black Place II* (fig.161), she radically reimagines the configuration of the location and the coloration becomes stronger, more assertive. The softly rolling forms and tonalities of grey are replaced by starkly simplified shapes in more abrupt areas of black, grey and white, the suggestion of pink proceeding horizontally across the middle of the rock formation has become a lower border of burgundy. The pale base of the ravine has been transformed into a lightning bolt that forms a roughly serrated vertical 'zip' running through the centre of the composition. Scaled-up for her next painting, *Black Place III* (fig.162), these changes become more determined.

The oscillation between the flatness of the canvas and the sense of recession, between all-over abstract design and its rootedness in landscape, is held in balance, with the work poised between abstraction and figuration. In the last of the series, *Black Place No. IV* (fig.163), the landscape is largely divested of naturalistic tones and is rendered in a fiery palette of red, orange and yellow - non-naturalistic colours that O'Keeffe would later employ in other paintings.⁵⁸ The slightest suggestion of sky and cloud, thus horizon, however returns here and provides a reference to the observed landscape. Nevertheless, this painting was done from memory on O'Keeffe's return to Ghost Ranch. In it, the ravine becomes a jagged zig-zag, bolting through the centre of the canvas. It is shocking in its drama and violent transformation of the gentle landscape. In subsequent paintings and a large-scale drawing in pastel made in 1945 (fig.7), again from memory, O'Keeffe returned to a concern with the location's soft morphology and grey tones. The year 1944 thus represents a rupture in her rendition of this landscape region. The changing treatment seems to have been primarily an interpretation of the violent weather conditions she experienced on a number of camping trips made to the 'Black Place' with companion and aspiring writer Maria Chabot;⁵⁹ in 1945 she went with a different companion and described the experience as smooth and pleasant.⁶⁰

One of O'Keeffe's final paintings of the 'Black Place', and the most abstract - *Black Place Green* - was made in 1949 (fig.165); the composition is at its flattest; the undulating hills are now areas of grey punctuated by diffuse stripes of pink and white representing the geological strata, and dominated by a central

black area, a chromatic fissure. The composition is only legible as landscape to those who understand its origins, and not easily understood as such by those unfamiliar with this singular location; it is an imaginative, emotive response to landscape. Such works encapsulate and summarise all that O'Keeffe had previously explored in relation to synaesthesia in her early works, foregrounding an immersive experience of landscape and the sensations it inspired - connecting emotion, abstraction and environment - and touch on the reflections on nationhood, national spirit and identity familiar from the skull paintings, as well as her connection to particular, specially-chosen locations. Moreover, these 'Black Place' paintings perform a level of formal, painterly abstraction that O'Keeffe had practiced only occasionally in her work in the decades since the late 1910s and 1920s.

O'Keeffe's skull paintings reveal her concern with issues of national and cultural identity in relation to the practice of modernism. They show how she related her work to a contemporary social and historical context in sometimes subtle and oblique but unmistakable ways. Her 'Black Place' paintings, similarly, address a wider context. The transformation of her visual language in relation to the 'Black Place' came following the publication of Clement Greenberg's essay advocating abstract art as the realisation of an unavoidable historical trajectory and arguing for the purity of specific art forms 'Towards a Newer Laocöon' in 1940, and the United States' entry into the Second World War in 1941.⁶¹ It occurred in the context of debates concerning art as a form of escapism from, or reflection on, the war, and amid a further



Fig.8
The Lawrence Tree 1929
 Oil paint on canvas
 78.8 x 101.6
 Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford



Fig. 9
Emily Carr
Untitled 1929-31
Charcoal on paper
91.8 x 47.7
Vancouver Art Gallery



Fig. 10
Dead Tree, Bear Lake, Taos 1929
Oil paint on canvas
81.3 x 43.1
Private collection



Fig. 11
Mary Beth Edelson
O'Keelson 1973
Photograph, gelatin silver print with china
marker
76.2 x 40.6
Courtesy of the artist

impetus to reflect on American culture as distinct from that of the war-torn Old World. O'Keeffe found solace in the land. In 1941, she wrote about her early, transformational experience of flying – how it impacted on her view of the landscape, seen as abstraction – and related this to the troubling times: 'It is breathtaking as one rises up over the world ... It is very handsome way off into the level distance, fantastically handsome – like some marvellous rug patterns of maybe "Abstract Paintings" ... the world all simplified and beautiful and clear-cut in patterns like time and history will simplify and straighten out these times of ours.'⁶² Even though O'Keeffe frequently articulated a sense of distance and detachment from her friends and associates in metropolitan centres on the East Coast during the 1940s, evidently she was not unconcerned about the times, and, when the war was at its height, painted her darkest, desolate and arguably most violent images of the landscape.⁶³ O'Keeffe repeatedly employed landscape as a measure of her state of mind and her paintings from the war years are no different.⁶⁴

O'Keeffe first exhibited two of her 1944 'Black Place' paintings at her retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1946; the works included were *Black Place I* and *Black Place III*. Greenberg published a review of this show in *The Nation*,⁶⁵ in which he attacked the 'Germanising' leanings of the

early modernists through O'Keeffe's work (naming also Stieglitz – attacked for his 'messianism' – Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove (1880–1946)) less than a year after the end of the war and a little less than a month before Stieglitz's death. He criticised the preceding generation of modernists' tendency towards the esoteric and mystical and, through O'Keeffe, the prematurity of their engagement with abstraction, seemingly rejecting her work for being rooted in a time before American painters could properly be expected to cope with abstract art, and for its subsequent return to realism. Greenberg's conclusion that O'Keeffe's work amounted to 'little more than tinted photography'⁶⁶ likewise recalls his argument in 'Towards a Newer Laocoön' that art forms should remain distinct, but also implies a further critique of Stieglitz himself. In order to assert his own primacy, and that of the artists he championed, as the first true and timely group of 'American' artists, Greenberg first had to discredit the preceding, and previously dominant, claimants to that position, an Oedipal act of erasure that also impacted on O'Keeffe. Thus, the review can be seen to be less a comment on O'Keeffe than a not-so-thinly-veiled attack on Stieglitz through his most prominent and successful protégé, his wife. Nevertheless, Greenberg adopted the same project as Stieglitz – a quest to define and promote a generation of uniquely American artists, though one that excluded O'Keeffe and her colleagues; he did so both for the audience at home but also for

that abroad and succeeded in superseding Stieglitz by becoming internationally recognised as embodying the foremost American art, in the new pre-eminent art centre, New York City. Mid-century, then, O'Keeffe became a target not merely for what her own work aimed towards, but because it had been too closely associated with Stieglitz. In 1949, O'Keeffe relocated to New Mexico permanently, maintaining her distance from the centres of the art world, including New York, and it was not until her exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970, and her rediscovery by the feminist artists of that decade, that her work would gain the same sense of widely acknowledged currency as it had in the 1920s and 1930s.

O'Keeffe's influence

O'Keeffe began influencing her contemporaries early on, both within the Stieglitz circle and beyond its narrow confines. In 1930, the Canadian painter Emily Carr (1871–1945) visited New York, meeting O'Keeffe at Stieglitz's final gallery, An American Place, and viewing an exhibition of her works, completed during O'Keeffe's first prolonged visit to New Mexico. They discussed O'Keeffe's work, in particular her painting *The Lawrence Tree 1929* (fig. 8) and its relation to D.H. Lawrence's poetry and the importance of tree-motifs for them; O'Keeffe preferred Waldo Frank's portrayal of her as a tree to other early writings about her.

Following her encounter with O'Keeffe, Carr's work took on a new expressive freedom; she began using charcoal to make drawings in a manner similar to the American artist, and likewise aimed to find formal equivalents for the natural world.⁶⁷ Thus the drawing *Untitled 1929-31* (fig. 9) echoes both O'Keeffe's early charcoals as well as her darkly hieratic painting *Dead Tree, Bear Lake, Taos 1929* (fig. 10). While Carr became more deeply involved in the representation of indigenous cultures during the 1930s, she did not go as far towards abstracting from them as O'Keeffe did, in paintings like *Grey Blue & Black – Pink Circle 1929* (fig. 33), inspired by Hopi dances, and *At the Rodeo, New Mexico 1929*, drawn from a headdress. Like Carr, O'Keeffe's employment of indigenous cultural subjects was motivated in part by a search for symbols of an authentic cultural nationality, divorced from European models. The demand to find a uniquely American brand of painting, in which abstraction played a central role, however, was never far from O'Keeffe's consciousness.

While O'Keeffe was excluded from the Greenbergian narrative of American abstraction as 'pseudo-modern', it was recognised by critics such as Barbara Rose and John Canaday, if sometimes belatedly, that within the context of 1940s to 1960s New York, art-historical narratives addressing the era should take account of those artists who were influenced by her. In the *New York Times*



Fig.12
Elizabeth Peyton
Georgia O'Keeffe after Stieglitz 1918 2006
Oil paint on canvas
76.5 x 58.7
Private collection/courtesy the artist and
Sadie Coles HQ, London

obituary for O'Keeffe, Edith Evans Asbury wrote of Canada's late recognition of O'Keeffe as an antecedent of post-war American art, particularly abstraction: 'Strolling through the Whitney show, one could think Miss O'Keeffe had made some "very neat adaptations of various successful styles of the 1950s and 1960s in her own highly refined and slightly removed manner," wrote John Canaday, art critic of *The New York Times*. He described apparent similarities to Clyfford Still, Helen Frankenthaler, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt and Andrew Wyeth. But the paintings that seemed to reflect those styles were done by Miss O'Keeffe in 1920 or earlier, Mr. Canaday pointed out.'⁶⁸ If O'Keeffe's 1946 retrospective caused Greenberg indignation, this in-depth institutional show may nevertheless have provided an opportunity for artists in the newly-ascendant centre of the art world to encounter O'Keeffe's work. Barnett Newman (1905-70), born and raised in New York, had ample opportunity from his days as a student in the 1920s to see O'Keeffe's many solo shows - they were staged almost annually through the 1920s and 1930s, and his work of the mid-1940s, specifically the development of his trademark 'zip' motifs, could have a possible genesis within O'Keeffe's symmetrically arranged canvases, including her 'Black Place' paintings. Earlier exhibitions had included paintings such as *Pink Moon and Blue Lines* 1923,

Red Lines 1923, *Grey Line with Lavender and Yellow* c.1923, *Line and Curve* 1927 (fig.37) and *Abstraction Blue* 1927 (fig.30), that could also be identified as sources. Each of these paintings, but particularly the latter, disclose a close formal proximity to the work Newman made in the mid-1940s. The central angular divide in *Abstraction Blue*, narrowing as it reaches the bottom of the canvas, is mirrored both in Newman's *Untitled (The Break)* 1946 and *The Word I* 1946, while his *Moment* 1946, *The Name I* 1949, *Eve* 1950 and *Adam* 1951/52 could be compared with *Pink Moon and Blue Lines* and *Red Lines*, and the later *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*, the flag-like vertical lines in which were inspired by the bands on Navajo blankets. Newman became close friends with the Cuban-American abstractionist Carmen Herrera (b.1915), who was herself in New York in the 1940s, studying from 1943 to 1947 at the Art Students League, where Newman had studied intermittently from 1922, along with many of the abstract expressionists, and where O'Keeffe had been a student in 1907-8. Permanently relocating to New York from 1954, Herrera would later comment on the importance O'Keeffe had for her, in contrast to another Greenbergian abstractionist, Ad Reinhardt (1913-67), thereby illustrating the sharp division of opinion O'Keeffe inspired: 'Like a lot of artists at that time, [Reinhardt] had a thing against

Georgia O'Keeffe. But I admired her no end when I first came to America. She was one of my gods. But Reinhardt, he hated her.'⁶⁹ Herrera's work was transformed in the 1950s from her earlier, more organic, European-derived abstraction to a harder-edged, colour field painting. It is conceivable that looking at O'Keeffe's later work, especially her 'Patio' series, may have played a role in that development. Moreover, Herrera's paintings of the 1950s and 1960s, such as *Red with White Triangle* 1961 and *Blanco y Verde* 1966-7, explore pared-down compositions with sharp, triangle forms, which evoke O'Keeffe's centralised angular divisions.⁷⁰

In dealing with the delayed influence of O'Keeffe's work on post-war American abstraction, we might also note the influence of her early watercolours, as shown by Edith Halpert at The Downtown Gallery in New York in 1958 - juxtaposing, in particular, *Evening Star III* 1917, as well as works on canvas including *Grey Line with Lavender and Yellow* and *Grey Lines with Black, Blue and Yellow* (both c.1923) with Morris Louis's (1912-62) poured 'Veil' paintings of 1958-9, or his *While and Where* (both 1960), and later 'Unfurled' and 'Stripe' paintings of 1960-2.⁷¹ Still later, artists such as Lynda Benglis (b.1941) have acknowledged O'Keeffe's importance as both a source of inspiration and as a precursor. Benglis's floor painting *Fling, Dribble, and Drip* 1970, executed at Rhode Island School of Art, Providence and featured in *Life* magazine in the year of O'Keeffe's Whitney retrospective, may also look to O'Keeffe's use of colour and pigment. Benglis is as interested as O'Keeffe was in the ways that form might portray emotion, but more readily embraced the psychological implications of this as a means of regression to the womb than did O'Keeffe, who rejected the libidinal and bodily, though the attribution of these aspects to her work may also be seen as a source of her influence on feminist artists such as Benglis. Benglis, along with Judy Chicago (b.1939), forms the nexus of O'Keeffe's influence on work that spans abstraction and feminist art.

In Mary Beth Edelson's (b.1933) controversial re-envisioning of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* 1494-7, *Some Living American Women Artists* 1972, made as part of her poster series to highlight the relative invisibility of women in the arts, O'Keeffe is given priority within the female artistic pantheon - her face superimposed over Christ's at the centre of the table. In 1970, Edelson transformed herself into O'Keeffe and American sculptor Louise Nevelson (1899-1988) in *O'Keelson* 1973 (fig.11), paying homage to the two senior artists and revealing her understanding of O'Keeffe's complex image-construction (as well as her complicity in its presentation in photography from Stieglitz's extended photographic portrait onwards). Chicago would echo Edelson's placement of O'Keeffe in a position of prominence in her *The Dinner Party* 1974-9, in which O'Keeffe is given the last place-setting at the greatest height, representing her measure of liberation and success - reinforcing her primacy in the feminist genealogy. For Chicago, O'Keeffe was 'pivotal in the development of an authentically female iconography'.⁷² By representing O'Keeffe as a not-so-abstract arrangement of labia, evoking the reading Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (1923-2015) had given O'Keeffe's *Grey Lines with Black, Blue and Yellow* c.1923 (fig.34) in an essay of 1973, however, Chicago's work

reinstated the Freudian and bodily interpretations imposed on O'Keeffe's work as an essence of the feminine and the association of her works with representations of wombs.⁷³ It was for this reason, as well as for the inequality implied by being labelled a 'woman artist', that O'Keeffe repudiated the claim of feminist artists on her work.

O'Keeffe, as role model and pioneer - an exemplar of the contradictions of being a woman in modernism, and of uncompromising commitment to her work - has an ongoing relevance to artists. Early in his career, land artist James Turrell (b.1943) had a fascination with O'Keeffe and travelled to visit her in New Mexico.⁷⁴ Though the encounter was only brief, it left a powerful impression and we might discern the influence of O'Keeffe's 'Pelvis' series, in which bones become apertures framing blue sky, in Turrell's installations such as the *Roden Crater*, begun in 1979, in Arizona, that likewise frames the Southwestern sky - as well as a similar obsession with, on the one hand, the Cerro Pedernal mountain and, on the other, the extinct volcano. Agnes Martin (1912-2004), O'Keeffe's neighbour in New Mexico, kept a poster of her work prominently displayed, and comparisons have been drawn between her restrained minimalist bands and the pale tones and horizontal formats of O'Keeffe's skull paintings, as well as her later works such as *Sky Above the Clouds III/Above the Clouds III* 1963 (fig.204). In 1993, at the time of the last O'Keeffe retrospective exhibition in London, Susan Hiller (b.1940) wrote of her personal relationship to O'Keeffe (reproduced in this publication). Latterly, O'Keeffe's influence has hardly diminished. New generations of artists continue to cite her as an influence on and within their work. Elizabeth Peyton's (b.1965) portrait *Georgia O'Keeffe after Stieglitz 1918 2006* (fig.12), based on one of the early portraits by Stieglitz, acknowledges her status as a popular, feminist and aesthetic icon and also the role that photography played in her painting - emulating the interrelation of these media in O'Keeffe's own work.

O'Keeffe's influence traverses both hard-edged and post-painterly abstraction, as well as feminist art and diverse forms of figuration. If her influence has most consistently been on artists from North America it seems that this might stem from her own concern with forging an imagery appropriate to expressing what it meant to be American and Modern - with manifesting the 'Great American Thing' and expressing her sense of rootedness and her connection to the national history through a turbulent era. O'Keeffe was born of Irish and Dutch-Hungarian immigrant stock into a farming community in the Midwest; how she became an artist of global fame is a story of acute intelligence and artistic talent combined with determination. When Henry Tyrrell wrote a review of O'Keeffe's first solo exhibition at 291 in 1917, he referred to the 'interesting but little-known personality of the artist'.⁷⁵ By the later decades of her career, O'Keeffe had become an icon of American modernity and individualism and is now recognised as having made a crucially important aesthetic contribution influencing successive generations of artists.



Fig.13
Early Abstraction 1915
Charcoal on paper
61 x 47.3
Milwaukee Art Museum



Fig.14
Early No. 2 1915
Charcoal on paper
61 x 47
The Menil Collection, Houston



Fig.15
Abstraction 1916
Charcoal and wash on paper
63.2 x 48.3
Greenville County Museum of Art



Fig.16
Special No. 9 1915
Charcoal on paper
63.5 x 48.6
The Menil Collection, Houston



Fig.17
No. 12 Special 1916
Charcoal on paper
61 x 48.3
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

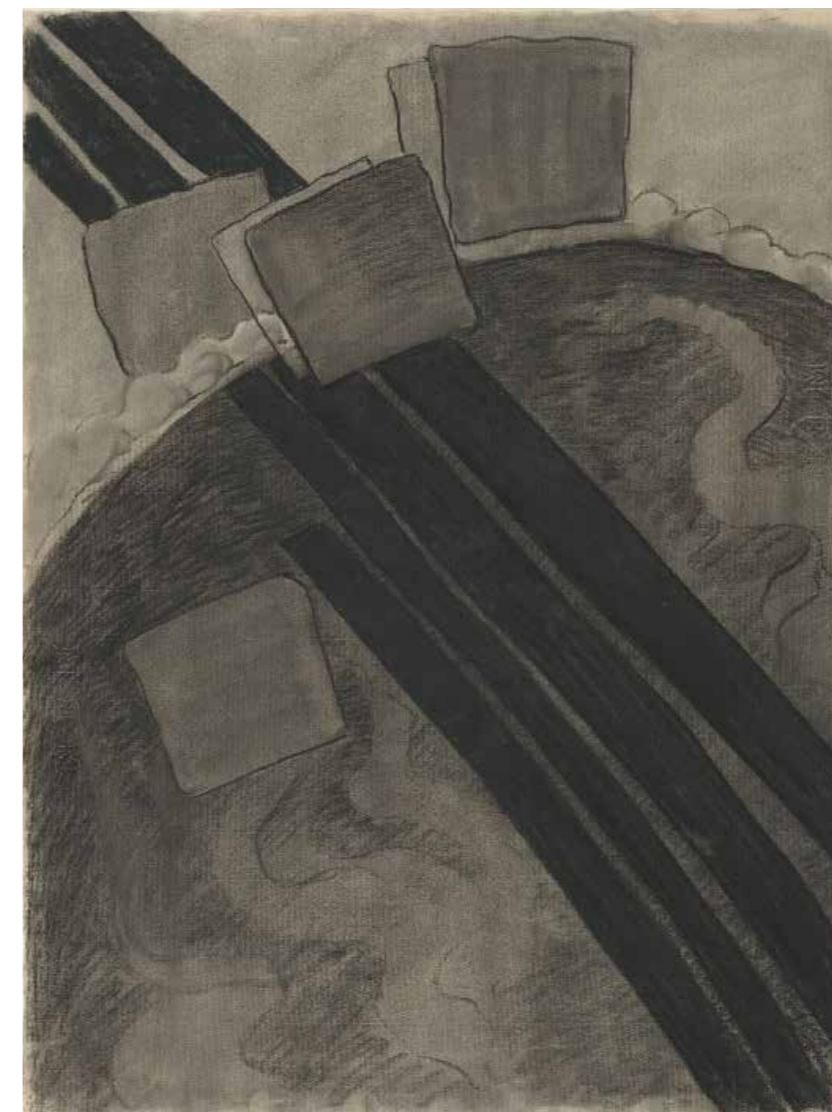


Fig.18
No. 14 Special 1916
Charcoal on paper
62.9 x 47.6
National Gallery of Art, Washington

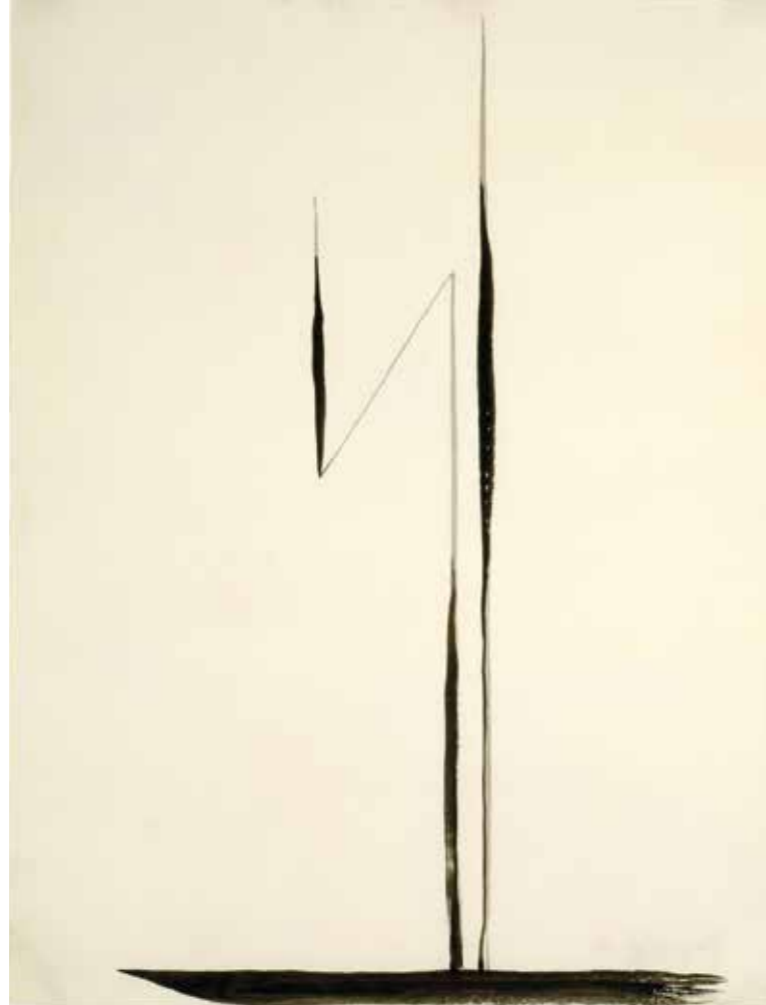


Fig.19
Black Lines 1916
Watercolour on paper
62.2 x 47
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe



Fig.20
No. 15 Special 1916-17
Charcoal on paper
47.9 x 61.9
Philadelphia Museum of Art



Fig.21
Pink and Blue Mountain 1916
Watercolour on paper
22.3 x 30.3
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe



Fig.22
Blue Hill No. II 1916
Watercolour on paper
22.5 x 30.3
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

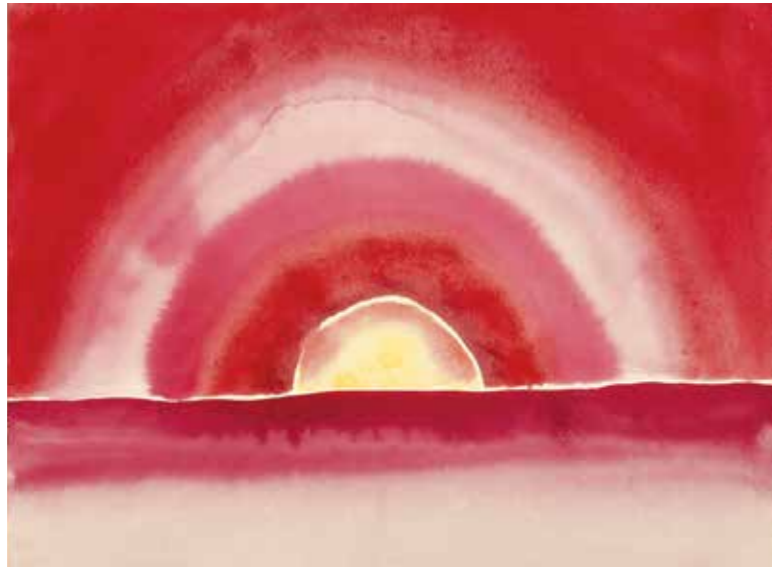


Fig.23
Sunrise 1916
Watercolour on paper
22.5 x 30.5
Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth



Fig.24
Abstraction 1916, cast 1979-80
Lacquered bronze
25.4 x 12.7 x 12.7
Number 6 in of an edition of 10
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

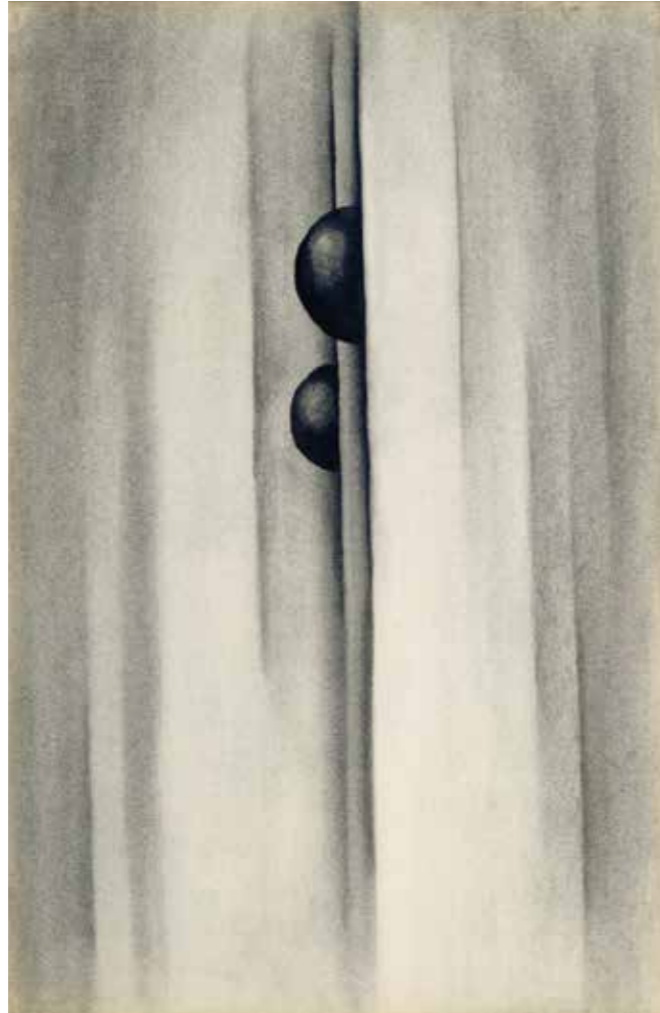


Fig.25
No. 17 - Special 1919
Charcoal on paper
50.2 x 32.4
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe



Fig.26
Black Lines 1919
Charcoal on paper
62.6 x 47.6
Addison Gallery of American Art,
Phillips Academy, Andover



Fig.27
Music - Pink and Blue No. 1 1918
Oil paint on canvas
88.9 x 73.7
Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth.
Partial and promised gift to Seattle Art Museum

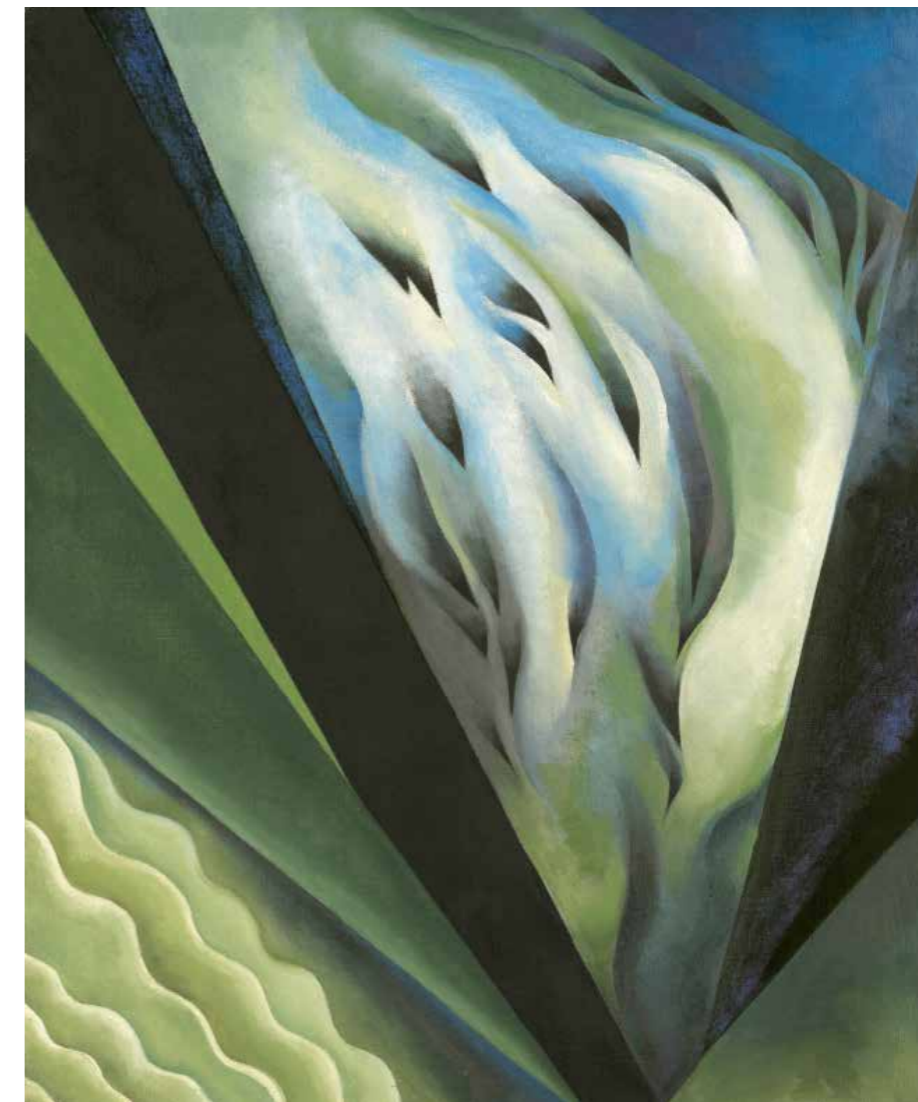


Fig.28
Blue and Green Music 1919/21
Oil paint on canvas
58.4 x 48.3
The Art Institute of Chicago



Fig.29
Flower Abstraction 1924
Oil paint on canvas
122.2 x 76.2
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



Fig.30
Abstraction Blue 1927
Oil paint on canvas
102.1 x 76
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Fig.31
Abstraction White Rose 1927
Oil paint on canvas
91.4 x 76.2
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe



Fig.32
Abstraction - Alexius 1928
Oil paint on canvas
92.1 x 76.5
Private collection, Switzerland



Fig.33
Grey Blue & Black - Pink Circle 1929
Oil paint on canvas
91.4 x 121.9
Dallas Museum of Art



Fig.34
Grey Lines with Black, Blue and Yellow c.1923
Oil paint on canvas
121.9 x 76.2
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



Fig.35
New York - Night (Madison Avenue) 1926
Oil paint on canvas
81.3 x 30.5
Museum of Fine Arts, St Petersburg, Florida



Fig.36
Abstraction 1926
Oil paint on canvas
76.7 x 46.4
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



Fig.37
Line and Curve 1927
Oil paint on canvas
81.2 x 41.2
National Gallery of Art, Washington



Fig.38
Black, White and Blue 1930
Oil paint on canvas
121.9 x 76.2
Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth.
Partial and promised gift to National Gallery of Art, Washington

Esoteric Art at '291'

—
Henry Tyrrell
The Christian Science Monitor
4 May 1917

The recent work, in oil, water color and charcoal of Miss Georgia O'Keeffe of Canyon, Tex., speaks for itself at that jumping-off place of modern art, the little gallery of the Photo-Secession, 291 Fifth Avenue.[†] The work has to speak for itself, as it is not numbered, catalogued, labeled, lettered or identified in any way—in fact, it is not even signed. The interesting but little-known personality of the artist, who has exhibited here once before, is perhaps the only real key, and even that would not open all the chambers of the haunted palace which is a gifted woman's heart. There is an appeal to sympathy, intuition, sensibility and faith in certain new ideals to which her sex aspires. For there can be no mistaking the essential fact that Miss O'Keeffe, independently of technical abilities quite out of the common, has found expression in delicately veiled symbolism for "what every woman knows," but what women heretofore have kept to themselves, either instinctively or through a universal conspiracy of silence. Marie Bashkirtseff, the little Tartar of a Russian, who was a fellow art-student in Paris with Bastien-Lepage, wrote many audacious hints and intimate self-revelations in her famous diary; but she did it more or less unconsciously, and in any case she was a temperamental variant from the average femininity. Georgia O'Keeffe, offspring of an Irish father and a Levantine mother, was born in Virginia, and has grown up in the vast provincial solitudes of Texas.^{††} Whatever her natural temperament may be, the loneliness and privation which her emotional nature must have suffered put their impress on everything she does. Her strange art affects people variously, and some not at all; but many feel its pathos, some its poignancy, and artists especially wonder at its technical resourcefulness for dealing with what hitherto has been deemed the inexpressible—in visual form, at least.

But new aspirations, and yearnings until now suppressed or concealed, find their medium in the new manifestation which is one with the impulse of an age occupied with eager inquiry and unrest. "Style is the man," declared Buffon the biologist, with fine truth in his time.^{†††} Now, perhaps for the first time in art's history, the style is the woman.

"Two Lives," a man's and a woman's, distinct yet invisibly joined together by mutual attraction, grow out of the earth like two graceful saplings, side by

[†] No editorial interventions have been made in original, historical texts, with the exception of correcting artist names, where they appear, for reasons of consistency and ease of use.

^{††} O'Keeffe was actually born near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.

^{†††} Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, an eighteenth-century naturalist.

side, straight and slender, though their fluid lines undulate in unconscious rhythmic sympathy, as they act and react upon one another: "There is a another self I long to meet, / Without which life, my life is incomplete." But as the man's line broadens or thickens, with worldly growth, the woman's becomes finer as it aspires spiritually upward, until it faints and falls off sharply—not to break, however, but to recover firmness and resume its growth, straight heavenward as before, farther apart from the "other self," and though never wholly sundered, yet never actually joined.

This is one of the "drawings," purely symbolistic, a sort of allegory in sensitized line. More directly appealing to the material beauty-sense are two oil paintings of lovely but singularly disquieting color tonality, which may be interpretively called "The Embrace," and "Loneliness"; also a water-color impression of an approaching railway train rushing steaming out of space across the limitless prairie, like a vision-bearing cloud in the skies of heaven.

Henry Tyrrell, "New York Art Exhibition and Gallery Notes: Esoteric Art at '291'" [review of the exhibition Georgia O'Keeffe, 291, New York, 3 April - 14 May 1917], *The Christian Science Monitor*, 4 May 1917, p.10. Reprinted in Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916-1929*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1989, pp.167-8.