



THE UNKNOWN O'KEEFFE

A portfolio of little-known paintings offers a new look at an American legend.

*I*n every mall in America there is a poster shop where the voluptuous flowers of Georgia O'Keeffe are in full bloom. For more than sixty of her ninety-eight years O'Keeffe was a star, as close to a household name as a modern artist can be in this country. She was the subject of five

museum retrospectives during her lifetime; a sixth, organized in 1987 by the National Gallery, drew record crowds to museums around the United States. She became equally famous for her forthright, individual style and personality. O'Keeffe was one of the most photographed women of all time, her face alone becoming an icon through the pages of women's magazines like *Vogue*. Two films and five biographies are in production. And still, there is an unknown Georgia O'Keeffe.

For all her celebrity, for all the massive attention her work and life have received from the media, much about O'Keeffe remains a mystery, obscured by the myths she was herself partly responsible for. During the 1920s and early 1930s, when she first came to prominence, she was heralded and perceived as an artistic embodiment of the "Feminine Principle," "the poet of womanhood in all its

By Hunter Drohojowska

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phases," in Lewis Mumford's words; later she became America's desert recluse, a black-cloaked oracle picking her way across the mesas, palette in hand. Many of her paintings are accepted as classics—the velvety, erotic folds of black irises, the shadowy art-deco nuances of New York skyscrapers, and the tough-minded abstractions of perverse, confounding color. Her paintings of the New Mexico landscape—swollen red and black hills, bleached animal skulls and bones, adobe churches—all became source material for the now-popular Santa Fe style.

However, the very familiarity of these images has disguised the true breadth of her accomplishment. O'Keeffe is said to have painted some 900 canvases in her long career, and her celebrated pictures, exhibited again and again, comprise only a small fraction of that number. Most of her works were widely dispersed—her annual shows frequently sold out—and many of these "lost" paintings, difficult to locate today, are as distinctive in their own way as the images that have become well known.

But with the publication of *Georgia O'Keeffe: In the West* next month, the logical successor to the 1987 *Georgia O'Keeffe: 100 Flowers*, even ardent O'Keeffe admirers will see many paintings for the first time. Some of the paintings are previewed on these pages—most have not been reproduced or exhibited for decades; others have never been published before. Many are from O'Keeffe's private collection and have rarely, if ever, been publicly shown. Both volumes were assembled by publisher Nicholas Callaway with the help of Doris Bry, O'Keeffe's assistant for more than thirty years. More than two thirds of *100 Flowers* were little-known paintings, most never seen by the public after Alfred Stieglitz exhibited them in the 1920s. That fraction is smaller in *In the West*, but the period of O'Keeffe's life

Hunter Drohojowska is currently writing a biography of Georgia O'Keeffe to be published by Alfred A. Knopf.

From O'Keeffe's first trip to New Mexico in 1930 came *Rust Red Hills* (above), 16 by 30 inches. A painting that "goes beyond simple correspondences": *Pelvis with Distance from 1943* (right), 23 $\frac{7}{8}$ by 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.



covered is longer, and the selections were made in keeping with the major themes that recur throughout her career. In the absence of a catalogue raisonné, this publication fills a number of gaps in what we know about O'Keeffe's work.

In the West begins where *100 Flowers* tapered off—1929. This was a pivotal year for O'Keeffe. She had received only lukewarm response to her annual show at the Intimate Gallery, run by her husband of five years, Alfred Stieglitz. O'Keeffe's romance with Stieglitz was integral to her success as an artist. A pioneer of modern photography as well as an impresario of the avant-garde, Stieglitz was the first in this country to show Rodin, Picasso, and Matisse, as well as such American modernists as Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, John Marin, and Marsden Hartley.

On New Year's Day 1916 (Stieglitz's fifty-second birthday) Anita Pollitzer, a mutual friend, brought him a sheaf of charcoal drawings by the talented young woman from Sun Prairie,

Wisconsin. The encounter has since become legend: "At last, a woman on paper!" Stieglitz has been said to respond. "Why they're genuinely fine things," he said, according to Pollitzer's report. "You say a woman did these—She's an unusual woman—She's broad minded, she's bigger than most women, but she's got the sensitive emotion—I'd know she was a woman O look at that line." Five months later, he exhibited the drawings, albeit without obtaining O'Keeffe's permission first. O'Keeffe happened to be in New York at the time and came to Stieglitz's gallery, known by its Fifth Avenue address, "291," to protest his thoughtlessness and demand the show be taken down. Stieglitz argued, insisting that her drawings were too wonderful not to show, and that she had no right to withhold her work from the public. When she left, her drawings were still on the walls, and Stieglitz's admiration for her art had been bolstered by his attraction to her simple charm and physical grace.

Spurred by Tony Luhan, O'Keeffe developed a fascination with the simple, eloquent relics of Indian culture, like the burial in It Was a Man and a Pot of 1942 (below), 16 by 20 inches, and the tiny Kachina of 1935, 5 by 3 inches.



O'Keeffe, who had been teaching art for a living, spent that summer at the University of Virginia and then sped on to Canyon, Texas, where she was head of the art department at West Texas State Normal College. Stieglitz sent her copies of his magazine, *Camera Work*. O'Keeffe wrote back, sending Stieglitz her drawings of the Texas landscape. He was now free to do as he chose with them: "They are as much yours as mine," she wrote. Their correspondence had become a courtship.

In 1918, the fifty-four-year-old Stieglitz invited the thirty-year-old O'Keeffe to New York to live and work. She agreed. A few weeks after her arrival, Stieglitz left his wife to move in with his protégée.

Accustomed to the role of mentor, Stieglitz promoted and photographed O'Keeffe tirelessly. (Stieglitz was eventually to take more than 500 pictures of her, making her, in critic Sanford Schwartz's words, "the one great actress of still photography," and, according to O'Keeffe, helping her "to say what I want to say—in paint.") Regardless of her talent, it seems doubtful O'Keeffe would have had such an extraordinary career without Stieglitz as publicist and manager. So far as he was concerned, her painting was "the beginning of a new religion."

Stieglitz first aroused the public's curiosity about O'Keeffe in 1921, when he exhibited a series of nude photographs of her. For the first time, she found herself at the center of a storm of publicity—the model of a photographer to whom she was not married but who publicly proclaimed his passion for her in his work. "It created a stir," wrote critic Henry McBride. "Mona Lisa got but one portrait of herself worth talking about. O'Keeffe got a hundred." When her own paintings were shown two years later, including some of her early, smaller flower canvases, they stimulated plenty of attention. According to McBride, O'Keeffe was "B.F." (Before Freud): "She became free without the aid of Freud. But she had aid. There was another who took the place of Freud. It is of course Alfred Stieglitz. . . . She will be besieged by all her sisters for advice—which will be a supreme danger for her. She is, after all, an artist, and owes more to art than reality. My own advice to her. . . is, immediately after the show to get herself to a nunnery."

In 1924 Stieglitz's divorce became final and the now legendary romance was legitimized by marriage. The same year, O'Keeffe began to paint her enormous flower canvases and controversy surged over their erotic implications. "She reveals woman as an elementary being, closer to the earth than men, suffering pain with passionate ecstasy and enjoying love with beyond-good-and-evil delight," said *The New York Times*. "If we are to believe the evidence," *The New Yorker's* critic wrote, "the hall of the Anderson Gallery is littered with mental crutches, eye bandages, and slings for the soul. . . . People limp to the shrine of St. Georgia and they fly away on the wings of the libido." But O'Keeffe was increasingly incensed with the interpretations read into her work. "You hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower," she answered the critics, "and you write about my flower as if I think and



O'Keeffe's return to the Southwest turned out to be more of a pilgrimage than a vacation.

see what you think and see of the flower—and I don't."

Despite these qualms about the way her work was received, this was an extraordinarily fertile period for O'Keeffe. Over the next five years, she completed more than 200 paintings, sometimes averaging two a week. It is little wonder that by 1927 she would write to a friend: "It is much more difficult to go on now than it was before. Every year I have to carry the thing I do further so that people are surprised again."

After years of being the eye of the hurricane of press whipped up by Stieglitz, O'Keeffe found her name in headlines yet again in 1928. It seems Stieglitz leaked *continued on page 84*

continued from page 81 the news that he had sold six paintings of calla lilies to an anonymous American living in France for the outlandish sum of \$25,000. The item appeared in the *Times* and then the tabloids picked it up. SHE PAINTED THE LILY AND GOT \$25,000 AND FAME FOR DOING IT! shouted the headline over O'Keeffe's photograph in *The New York Evening Graphic*. "Not a rouged, cigarette-smoking, bob-haired, orange-smocked Bohemian," the caption read, "but a prim ex-country schoolmistress who actually does her hair up in a knot is the art sensation of 1928!" (Some of these paintings later turned up in New York, in the collection of art dealer Mitchell Kernerly, so the event, at least in part, appears to have been staged by Stieglitz.)

This ceaseless media attention was rapidly overwhelming O'Keeffe and stretching her patience beyond its limits. In September, Stieglitz suffered a severe angina attack. O'Keeffe helped nurse him back to health, yet noted that there never seemed to be time for herself or her art. Six months later, when the eccentric art patron Mabel Dodge Luhan visited New York and invited O'Keeffe to her ranch in Taos, New Mexico, O'Keeffe was more than ready to go.

Now forty-two, she felt constrained by Stieglitz's forceful personality—his gregarious involvement with the avant-garde and with the press, his public rather than private ways, and, since the angina attack, his physical complaints. Doubtless, O'Keeffe also recalled the less encumbered years she spent teaching school in the Texas panhandle.

In late April 1929, departing from her decade-long custom of going north to the Stieglitz family's summer home in Lake George, O'Keeffe left for Taos with her friend Rebecca Strand, a fellow artist and the wife of photographer Paul Strand. Stieglitz, who was given to such statements as "freedom is necessary to sincerity," was left to live up to his philosophy. Of the "Farm and the Hill," the Adirondack resort so near to his heart, he wrote to a friend: "All this was much too tame (in summer) for O'Keeffe."

O'Keeffe's return to the Southwest turned out to be more of a pilgrimage than a vacation. She was as wealthy and renowned as a modern American artist could possibly be, especially compared with her peers. (Her friend Arthur Dove, for example, rarely sold a painting and did not have a major museum show in his lifetime.) Despite her success, O'Keeffe felt she was at a turning point. She later wrote, "It often

sounds as if I was born and taught to walk by [Stieglitz]—and never thought of painting till he worked on me—I don't really care but I know I've had to be both strong and tough to survive."

Survival came in part through the months spent in the vast, austere, healing expanse of New Mexico. Doing without electricity in a desert where few roads had been paved, O'Keeffe reveled in the sort of privacy that ultimately became a quest.

She was literally and figuratively rejuvenated. Her hostess, Mabel Dodge Luhan, had to return east suddenly for a hysterectomy, leaving her Pueblo Indian husband Tony Luhan in charge of the guests. O'Keeffe and Strand were taken horseback riding and camping, to rodeos and to the pueblos to see Indian ceremonies and dances. Luhan taught O'Keeffe to drink, something Stieglitz had never permitted.

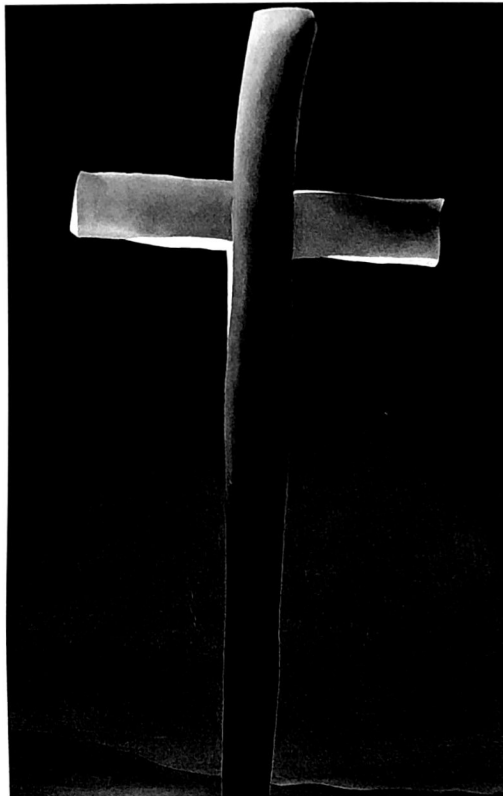
In August, O'Keeffe went with a group of friends on an eight-day trip into Navajo country. A despondent Stieglitz wrote to a friend: "Wonder whether any painting can come out of so much intense experience covering so much ground in so short a time."

Memories of the wild summer adventures are obvious in the paintings O'Keeffe produced on her return to Lake George that fall. Each is charged with a mystical undercurrent awkwardly rendered, from the soft adobe curves of Ranchos de Taos church to the Penitente crosses that are placed so incongruously around the rocky landscape. *Gray Cross with Blue*, for instance, lets the dawn's light illuminate a rough-hewn crucifix surrounded by empty plains.

On her return, O'Keeffe also found herself reconciled to Stieglitz. "[He]

is quite as perfect as the summer—Many things to talk about and we seem to be getting acquainted all over again—He is a never ending surprise to me." Then she added, "I feel like water that has been much tossed about and is quietly—quietly settling—and I like it."

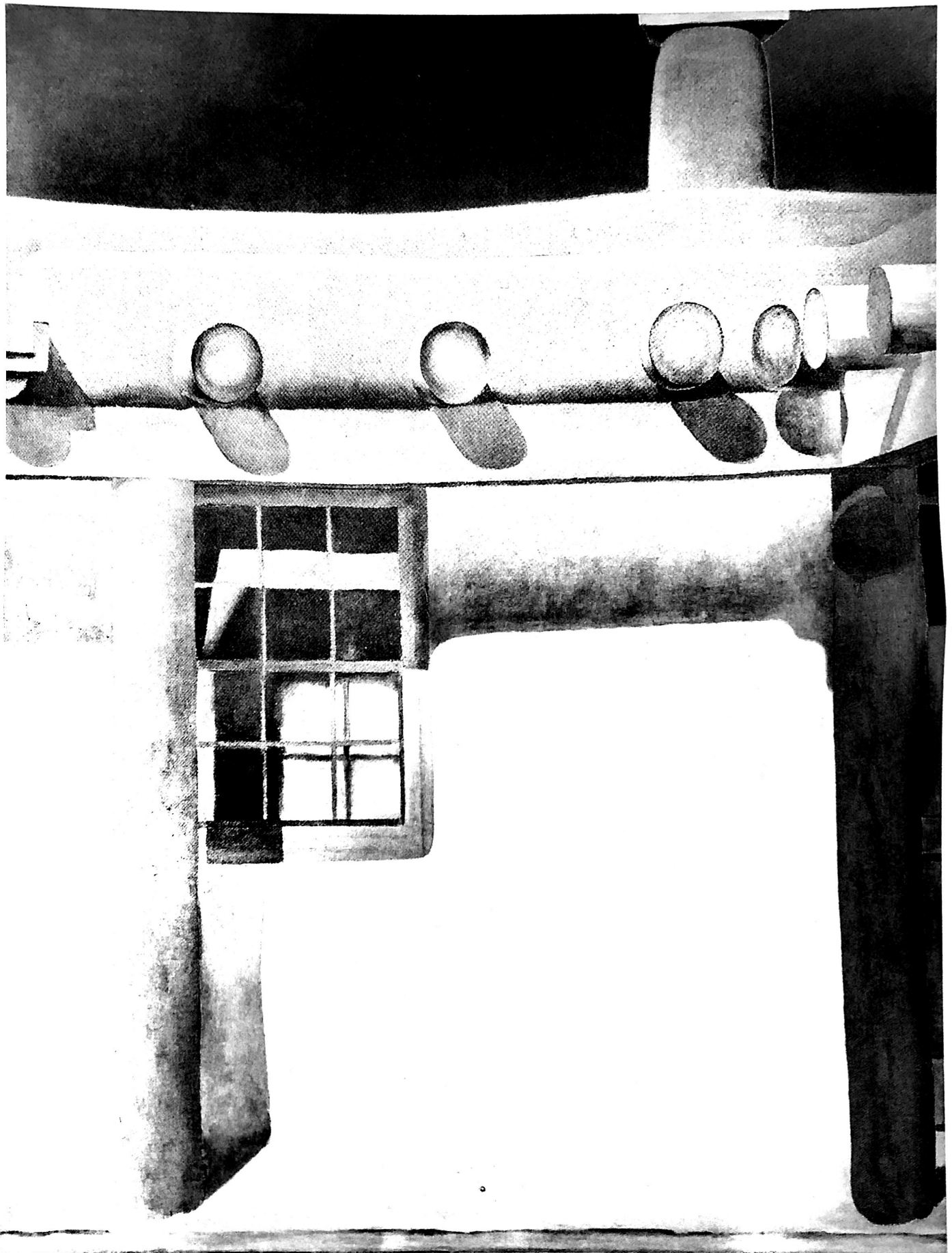
But this was the proverbial calm before the storm. Stieglitz had closed the Intimate Gallery in May and opened what was to be his last gallery, An American Place, in December 1929. In February and March 1930, O'Keeffe exhibited twenty-seven paintings, at least nineteen of which were inspired by her summer sojourn. *New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell wrote: "A sharp monumental vigor has come into the work, revealing itself especially in the things done in New Mexico." Her creative momentum continued into the spring,



"I feel like water that has been much tossed about and is quietly settling—and I like it."

Gray Cross with Blue of 1929 (above), 36 by 24 inches; From the Patio No. II of 1940 (facing), 24 by 19 inches.







when O'Keeffe painted a series of six unapologetically erotic jack-in-the-pulpits in just one week. They were exhibited with the equally sexual paintings of giant clamshells. "Perhaps mundane and cosmic, rather than profane and sacred love, would be the way to characterize the difference between Matisse and O'Keeffe," wrote Lewis Mumford in *The New Yorker*. "These pictures are not derivations; they are sources. Some of them are like words achieved for the first time by a dumb or tongue-tied race."

In the flush of inspiration, O'Keeffe bucked Stieglitz's will again and returned to Taos for the summer of 1930, a trip that catalyzed some of her most brilliant landscapes.

Several of these pictures have rarely been reproduced, yet

they are ripe with a passion that many of O'Keeffe's later landscapes do not possess. *Rust Red Hills*, for example, is a delicious painting—wrinkles of geology in salmon and ocher with an unexpected accent of peacock blue and two tiny clouds hanging in the peach sky. It is vibrant and vital with the feeling of release. "A red hill doesn't touch everyone's heart as it touches mine," O'Keeffe said later on. "You have no association with those hills—our waste land—I think our most beautiful country. . . so you want me always to paint flowers."

As Doris Bry notes in her afterword to *In the West*, it probably took a year of gestation before O'Keeffe wanted to tackle the overwhelming beauty of the New Mexico landscape and find ways to make it her own, to imbue it with her singular

Two rarely seen masterpieces: Pelvis IV (Oval with Moon) of 1944 (above), 36 by 40 inches; and the immense "everything" painting, Spring, of 1948, 4 by 7 feet.

vision. O'Keeffe later described it as "that memory or dream thing I do that for me comes nearer reality than my objective kind of working. . . ." As she told one interviewer, "I rarely paint anything I don't know very well."

At the end of the summer of 1930 O'Keeffe shipped a barrel of bones and artificial flowers back east, where they became the subject of her most startling paintings. It is likely the series began with *Thigh Bone with Black Stripe*, a strange demonstration of weightlessness in which the bone appears to float above the black-and-white striped background of a Navajo blanket. *Horse's Skull with Rose* of 1931 also seems to hover against a field of black, possibly part of the same blanket. In *Cow's Skull on Red* of 1931-36, a painting that has not been exhibited since O'Keeffe's MOMA retrospective in 1946, she mounts the skull on a black post against a pink horizon line, making a cruciform background. Despite the dark post supporting this skull, it appears suspended in space, as do the skulls in more familiar works like *Cow's Skull—Red, White, and Blue* and *Cow's Skull with Calico Rose*, both painted in 1931. This "floating skull" theme returns more emphatically in the mid-1930s, but it must derive from the illusion of suspension in these first attempts.

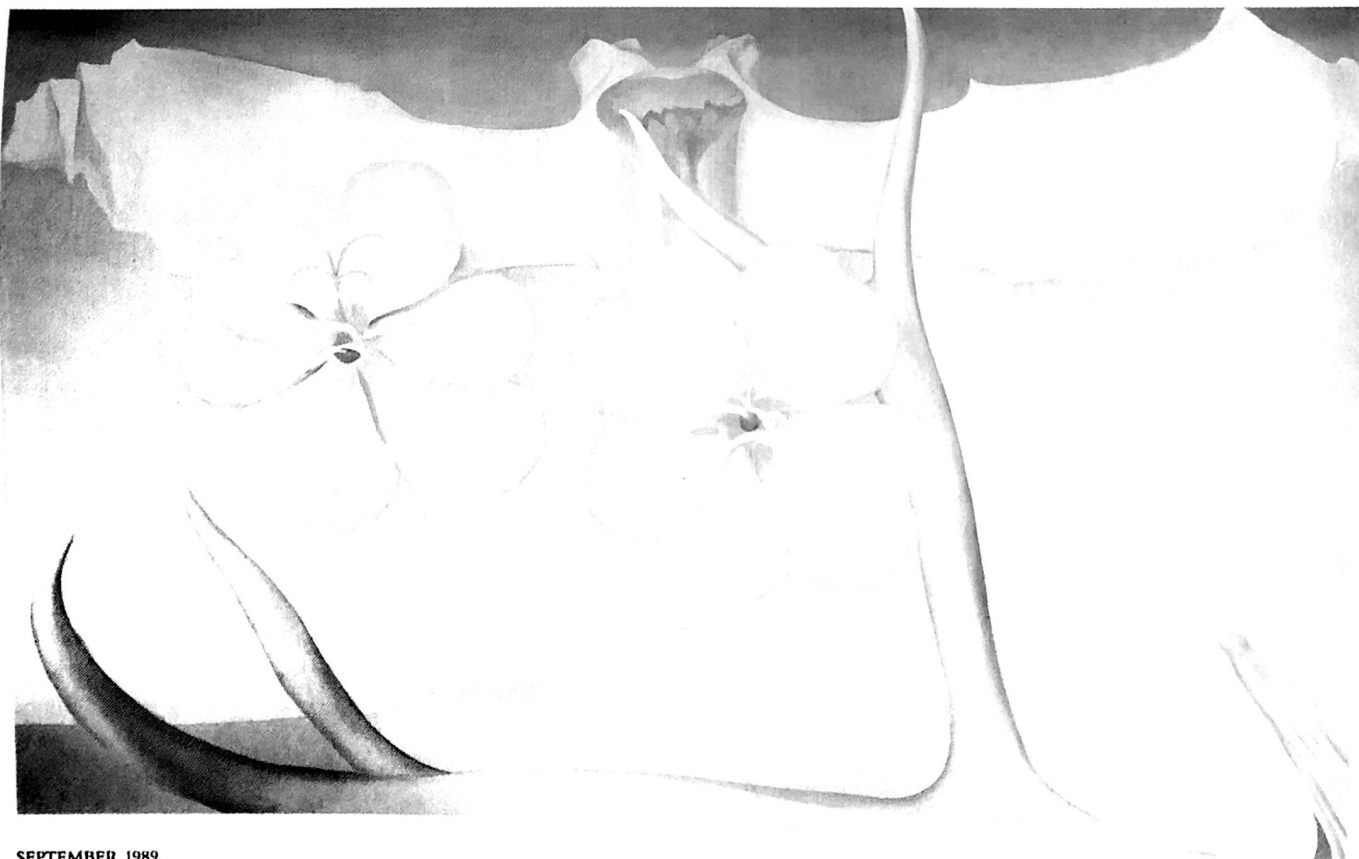
The summer of 1931, O'Keeffe stayed at the H&M Ranch

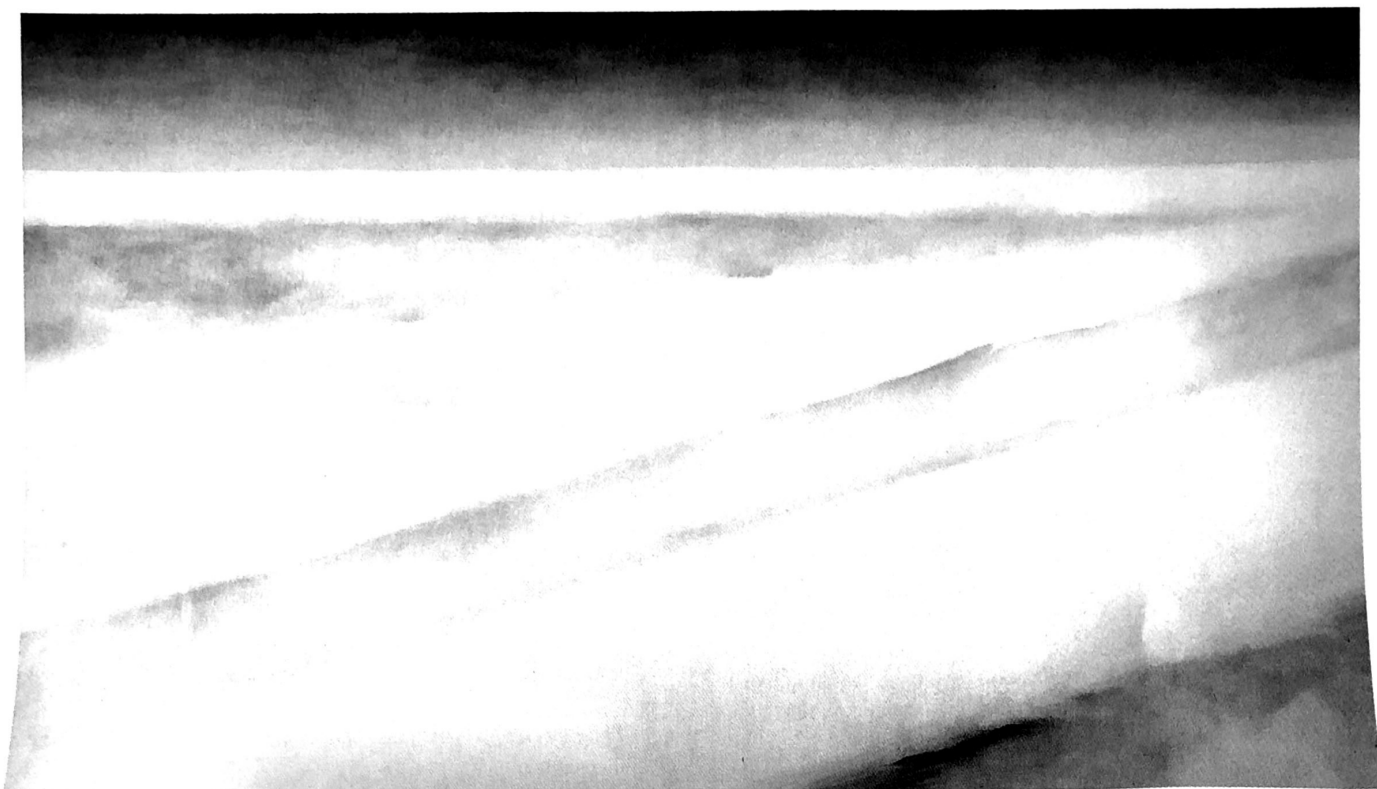
in Alcalde, driving around the hills and arroyos each day to paint. She wrote to Henry McBride about the curious pile of bones she had collected in her studio: "When I leave the landscape it seems I am going to work with these funny things that I now think feel so much like it. . . ."

These souvenirs must have acquired even greater symbolic importance to O'Keeffe when she was unable to return to her beloved New Mexico for three years. The response to her show at *An American Place* in December 1931 was decisive: "Miss O'Keeffe has never done better paintings in her life," wrote one reviewer. But tensions between her and Stieglitz were escalating over the issue of a mural commission for the ladies' room of the new Radio City Music Hall. O'Keeffe worked on the project for a year over Stieglitz's protests; in the fall of 1932, slow-drying plaster sabotaged her efforts to complete the project on time. Adding to the already existing stress over Stieglitz's affair with a younger woman, Dorothy Norman, and O'Keeffe's repeated exiles in the Southwest, the commission failure triggered an emotional and physical breakdown.

O'Keeffe was hospitalized in November 1932 for several months. Rest, a leisurely vacation in Bermuda, a love affair of her own with novelist Jean Toomer, and yet more rest

Spring might be called the "everything" O'Keeffe painting—it summarizes her concern with bones, flowers, the Pedernal, and the landscape, all painted in celestial whites and silvered blues.





“What one sees from the air is so simple and so beautiful I cannot help feeling that it would do something wonderful for the human race—rid it of so much smallness and pettiness if more people flew.”

gradually helped heal the wounds. When some of her older work was exhibited in 1933, a writer mentioned O’Keeffe’s illness and perceptively added, “Miss O’Keeffe’s art is a soul reflection. It seems not to have much to do with painting as such. It seems to be wished upon the canvas.”

In 1934, she returned to New Mexico, first to Alcalde, then, serendipitously, to Abiquiu, to a small adobe at Ghost Ranch which she would call home for the rest of her life. Although she spent winters in New York with Stieglitz, she returned west every summer, often staying late into the fall. After Stieglitz died in 1946, at eighty-two, she began to live in Abiquiu all year.

The view from Ghost Ranch of the giant smoky blue mesa called Pedernal became a favorite subject, along with a return to the animal skulls seen floating above the desert floor, with airborne flowers often added to the composition. These pictures of 1935 and 1936 demonstrate new levels of compositional complexity. The surrealism of such paintings—with their ongoing theme of floating bones combined with landscape or flowers—is undeniable. O’Keeffe protested, “I was

in the surrealist show when I’d never heard of surrealism. I don’t think it matters what something comes from; it’s what you do with it that counts. That’s when it becomes yours.” Of course, O’Keeffe also claimed that her work had no sexual references, that it was all something made up by Stieglitz.

Art historians generally accept that an artist’s own account of the genesis of his work must always be taken with a grain of salt. Witness Picasso’s well-known claim that he had never seen an African mask when he painted the *Demoiselles d’Avignon*, contradicted by a photograph of the artist in his studio with just such a mask hanging on the wall.

O’Keeffe claimed she only painted what she saw; but skulls and flowers hanging in the sky like celestial messengers are hallucinatory; they speak of an inner vision. O’Keeffe continued to paint the bones into the 1940s, when she wrote: “It is a kind of thing that I do that makes me feel I am going off into space—in a way that I like—and that frightens me a little because it is so unlike what anyone else is doing.”

It often seems that in the revisionist battle to maintain Georgia O’Keeffe’s reputation as the “doyenne of modern

*Painting what she saw: Above the Clouds, Again (Yellow Horizon) of 1964 (above), 4 by 7 feet.
Spring Tree No. II of 1945 (facing), 30 by 36 inches: “that memory or dream thing I do.”*

American art," she is presented as a progenitor of formalist abstract painting. Indeed, her abstractions are among her strongest contributions, but her ongoing series of skeletal still lifes is unparalleled elsewhere in modern American art.

Remembering her own earliest attempts to go beyond what she had been taught at the Art Institute of Chicago or the Art Students League in New York, she said, "I wondered why I hadn't put down things of my own from my own head. And then I realized that I hadn't done this because I'd never seen anything like the things in my own head." Paintings like *Pelvis with Distance* (1943), *Pelvis IV* (1944), *Flying Backbone* (1944)—all relatively unknown compared with more popular O'Keeffe images—clearly come from her own head. One can speculate about their various symbolic references: the impending death of Stieglitz; the pelvis as a preoccupation with birth, loss, and the change of life; resurrection or rebirth; even the death toll of the wars. But the paintings themselves go beyond such simple correspondences. It is possible she brought to these works some of the feelings she recorded

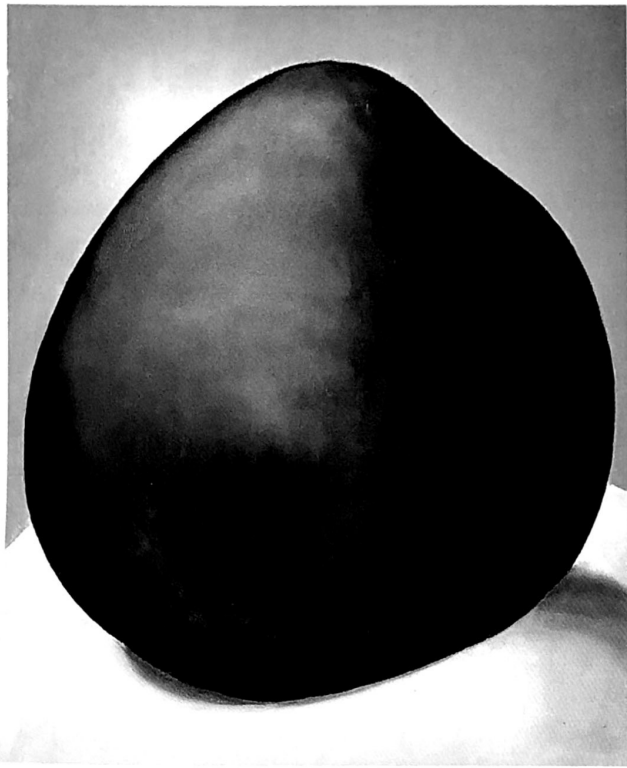
about *Deer's Horns* of 1938: "It is of our country there without any of the feeling imposed by peoples who have lived there."

Stieglitz photographed clouds and called them "equivalents," meaning that they stood for experiences and emotions that, for him, were otherwise inexpressible. The bones seem to be "equivalents" for O'Keeffe. She understood their uniqueness when she wrote, "I am one of the few who gives this country any voice of its own. . . . It may not be painting but it is something."

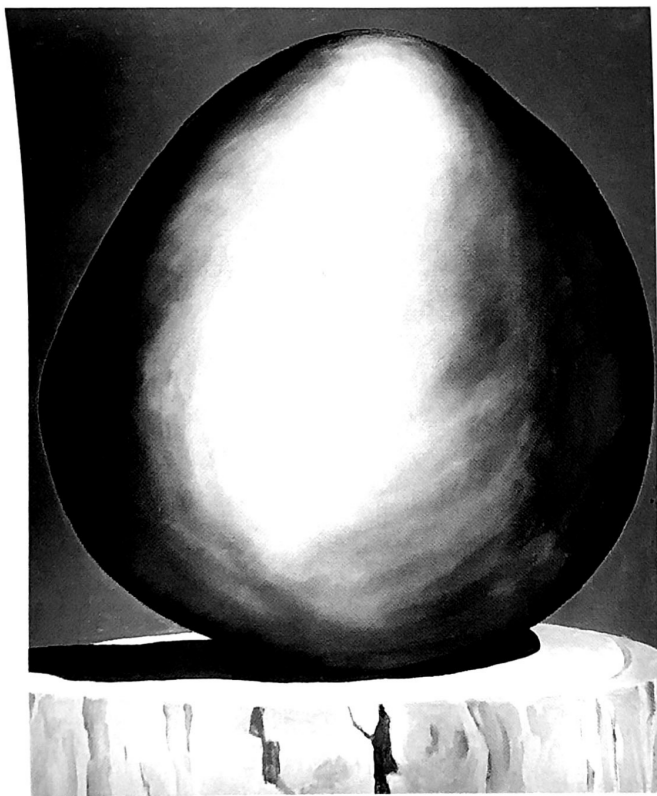
O'Keeffe did not often have the opportunity to paint during the late 1940s, while she was settling Stieglitz's estate. She lived at Ghost Ranch and was in the process of remodeling a walled adobe house on a hill in the town of Abiquiu with her friend Maria Chabot. But in 1948 she nonetheless completed a masterwork of four by seven feet: *Spring*.

Spring might be called the "everything" O'Keeffe painting—it summarizes her concerns with bones, flowers, the Pederal, and the landscape, all painted in celestial whites and silvered blues. Her restrained enthusiasm for the picture is evident





In her final picture the planet below is left in darkness, but a crepuscular light rises into a twilight blue sky.



in a letter she wrote to Henry McBride: "It looks very well to me where it is so I think it will stay there. It is too large to take to [New York]—No one would buy it. . . . If Alfred were here I would take it for him. He would enjoy it—for the others I don't seem to care—it can stay here."

Spring eventually did go to New York, in 1950, for O'Keeffe's last show at An American Place, which she had helped support, along with John Marin, after Stieglitz's death. But her life in New York was about to fade into memory. She was ensconced in Abiquiu and after the fight to get there, found herself bragging about her isolation: "Colored earth—rattlesnakes and a Siamese kitten for news is all I have. . . . Too bad you don't like nothing the way I do," she wrote to a friend.

Yet she longed for Stieglitz. "I often wish Alfred could be here and walk around in my world here. He would like it I think—but I can hear him say 'Of course, I couldn't do anything like you have done here but it is you.'"

The paintings of the next two decades are drawn from

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE: IN THE WEST

In a career of more than six decades, Georgia O'Keeffe maintained an amazingly consistent vision. From the autumn of 1915 she decided to follow her own heart and please no one but herself with her art. "I said to myself, 'I have things in my head that are not like what anyone else has taught me—shapes and ideas so near to me—so natural to my way of being and thinking that it hasn't occurred to me to put them down.'" Putting them down became an exhilarating adventure: "I was alone and singularly free, working into my own, unknown—no one to satisfy but myself."

But it was during her 1929 trip to northern New Mexico that she found the landscape she was truly to make her own. It was an experience that was to transform her life and her art. The hundreds of paintings and watercolors O'Keeffe did of the mountains, mesas, skulls, bones, adobes, and crystalline vistas of New Mexico have become an indelible aspect of twentieth-century American art. They are paintings that (as O'Keeffe said of her fascination with 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."

With ninety-four color plates—including many previously unpublished paintings from O'Keeffe's private collection—*Georgia O'Keeffe: In the West* provides the first comprehensive look into this culminating period of her life and art. Like its predecessor, *100 Flowers*, it is a remarkable tribute to a great American artist—exquisitely produced and stunningly printed. Because we feel that copies of its first printing are destined to become one of the classic volumes of O'Keeffe's work, *Art & Antiques* has reserved a limited number of copies for our readers. We are also pleased to be able to offer *Georgia O'Keeffe: In the West* at a 20 percent discount from the publisher's price of \$100. To reserve a copy, call 1-800-237-1100 or send a check or money order for \$79.95 plus \$12.95 for postage and handling (the total shipping weight of *Georgia O'Keeffe: In the West* is six pounds, twelve ounces) to *Art & Antiques* Books, 89 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10003. New York State residents must add 8¼ percent sales tax.



either extreme domesticity or high adventure. From the Abiquiu studio window, she painted the cottonwood trees in the valley below and the road that runs around the bend. Yet she also traveled around the world—to Europe, the Far East, and South America. Significantly, she chose to represent the process rather than the destination or culture of her travels. Paintings like *Above the Clouds, Again* (1964) might be confused with Mark Rothko's ethereal planes of color. But O'Keeffe was painting what she saw: this is the view from the airplane window when it is "above the clouds." These powerful paintings predate the better-known pictures of the sky with the cotton-puff clouds.

According to Nicholas Callaway and Doris Bry, *The Beyond*, reproduced here for the first time, is the last canvas O'Keeffe worked on. It is an unfinished painting, so one hesitates to read too much into it. Nonetheless her final picture is gripping and uncanny, a haunting vision of the horizon as seen from 40,000 feet; the planet below is left in darkness, but a crepuscular light rises into a twilight blue sky. Like all

of O'Keeffe's paintings, *The Beyond* is grounded in reality. At the same time, it captures a private, inward sensibility that paradoxically translates as the universal.

O'Keeffe and Stieglitz shared many passions, both profound and simple. Both loved the experience of flying. Like many artists, they loved it metaphorically, physically, and aesthetically. O'Keeffe described those feelings—and so much more—in a 1941 letter to Maria Chabot: "It is breathtaking as one rises up over the world one has been living in. . . it is fantastically handsome—like marvelous rug patterns or 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—What one sees from the air is so simple and so beautiful I cannot help feeling that it would do something wonderful for the human race—rid it of so much smallness and pettiness if more people flew—However, I am probably wrong because I will probably not really be very different when I get my feet on the earth than I was when they left it." □

Late masterpieces: Black Rock with Blue III of 1970 (facing, top), 20 by 17 inches; and Black Rock with Red of 1971, 30 by 26 inches. O'Keeffe's last, unfinished painting, published here for the first time, The Beyond (above), 1972, 30 by 40 inches.