

EXHIBIT DOCUMENTS ARTISTS' INFLUENCE ON EACH OTHER

Stieglitz' and O'Keeffe's Mirrored Images

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'FOUNDING COUPLE of the modern" is how art historian Roger Shattuck refers to Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz. But for all their individual fame as artists and personalities, there has not been an exhibition since 1924 to examine their influence on one another. That oversight is remedied this month with a fine exhibition at the Phillips Collection, "Two Lives: Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz — A Conversation in Paintings and Photographs."

Stieglitz, the pioneer photographer, publisher and gallery owner, was among the first to promote modern art in America. He was already a legendary figure in 1917 when he decided to exhibit the drawings of an unknown schoolteacher from Wisconsin at his gallery, which was known by its Fifth Avenue address as 291. The ensuing love affair with O'Keeffe, who was 22 years his junior, is considered one of the most dramatic and creative of this century.

It was a largely beneficial union for O'Keeffe, though complicated by the fact that Stieglitz was also her dealer. He carefully controlled the presentation and interpretation of her art. After his death in 1946, O'Keeffe made sure that she had other equally protective caretakers until her own death in 1986. As a result, there have been few exhibitions to examine her art from a fresh or critical perspective. This exhibition, which could not have been mounted without the cooperation of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, is welcome material for scholars as well as the sizable O'Keeffe fan club. The catalogue published by Harper Collins/Callaway Editions includes thought-provoking essays by Shattuck, Belinda Rathbone and Phillips curator Elizabeth Hutton Turner.

Turner points out that the general audience knows many of the facts of the two artists' lives. They are less familiar with the legacy of paintings and photographs.

She says: "In 1918, thanks to Stieglitz's support, O'Keeffe was able to move to New York and paint full time." In addition, Stieglitz had virtually given up his gallery and photography when he met O'Keeffe. She inspired him to begin a serial portrait, hundreds of pictures of what he called a woman "in the flux of life," both clothed and not, taken during the first decade of their relationship. "He saw something uninhibited, forthright and true," explains Turner, "something that he wanted."

There is abundant writing about Stieglitz' influence on O'Keeffe's painting and career, but recently art historians have begun to examine the painter's role in the photographer's evolution. In an excellent essay, Rathbone contends that Stieglitz, though the first to show such abstract artists as Picasso and Matisse, was unable to make the leap to abstraction in his own photography until he documented the abstract paintings of O'Keeffe. First he photographed them as installation records. Then he photographed the artist posed before one abstraction after another. By 1922, Stieglitz was photographing the clouds in the sky with no orientation to the Earth. These pictures are meant to represent feelings and sensations while remaining abstract.

In the exhibition, there are some examples of mutual influence that are especially striking. O'Keeffe's "Dark Iris No. 2" of 1927, with petals like so many gray, mauve and burgundy ruffles, is echoed in Stieglitz' photograph of 1929 with a pattern of rippling, dark, vertically oriented clouds obliterating the sun. These close parallels in abstraction underscore the central point of the exhibition — that between 1918, when O'Keeffe came to New York and began living with Stieglitz, to 1929, when she began annual pilgrimages to her future home in New Mexico, the two artists lived in a virtual laboratory of new ideas and innovative exchange.

The exhibition also examines the ways in which photography by Stieglitz influenced O'Keeffe. In the first gallery, there is a photogravure of Stieglitz' 1902

"The Hand of Man," a well-known depiction of a train puffing its way into the city. The composition is nearly identical to a 1916 watercolor by O'Keeffe, "Train at Night in the Desert." Stieglitz had sent copies of his magazine *Camera Work* to O'Keeffe and she surely would have known his image. She revered his work. She was quoted later as saying, "For me he was much more wonderful in his work than as a human being. I believe it was the work that kept me with him."

Turner points out that O'Keeffe and Stieglitz shared many subjects, themes and compositions, learning from one another freely. The exhibition includes many of O'Keeffe's still lifes of apples juxtaposed with Stieglitz' photographs of the fruit, which he considered to be the symbol of America at its most pure.

In 1923, the work was exhibited individually for the first time at the Anderson Galleries. The following year, the artists were married. Stieglitz decided to add 61 of his photographs to O'Keeffe's 1924 exhibition of 51 paintings. These two exhibitions of O'Keeffe's paintings elicited sexual, mystical and biographical interpretations from critics, often encouraged by Stieglitz. O'Keeffe felt violated, and soon after the spirit of collaboration diminished. According to Turner, "From this time onward, the need to assert what was hers, and his, began to undermine their sense of artistic collaboration."

There is an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington that serves as an extraordinary complement to the show at the Phillips. "Stieglitz in the Darkroom," organized by the museum's curator of photographs Sarah Greenough, documents the ways in which Stieglitz — often perceived as the exemplar of modernist discipline — cropped, spotted, retouched, solarized and otherwise altered photographs and negatives. Greenough has drawn from the key set of approximately 1,600 Stieglitz photographs given to the National Gallery by O'Keeffe, and has presented well-known images in a new context, as well as images not seen since the '20s. / ■