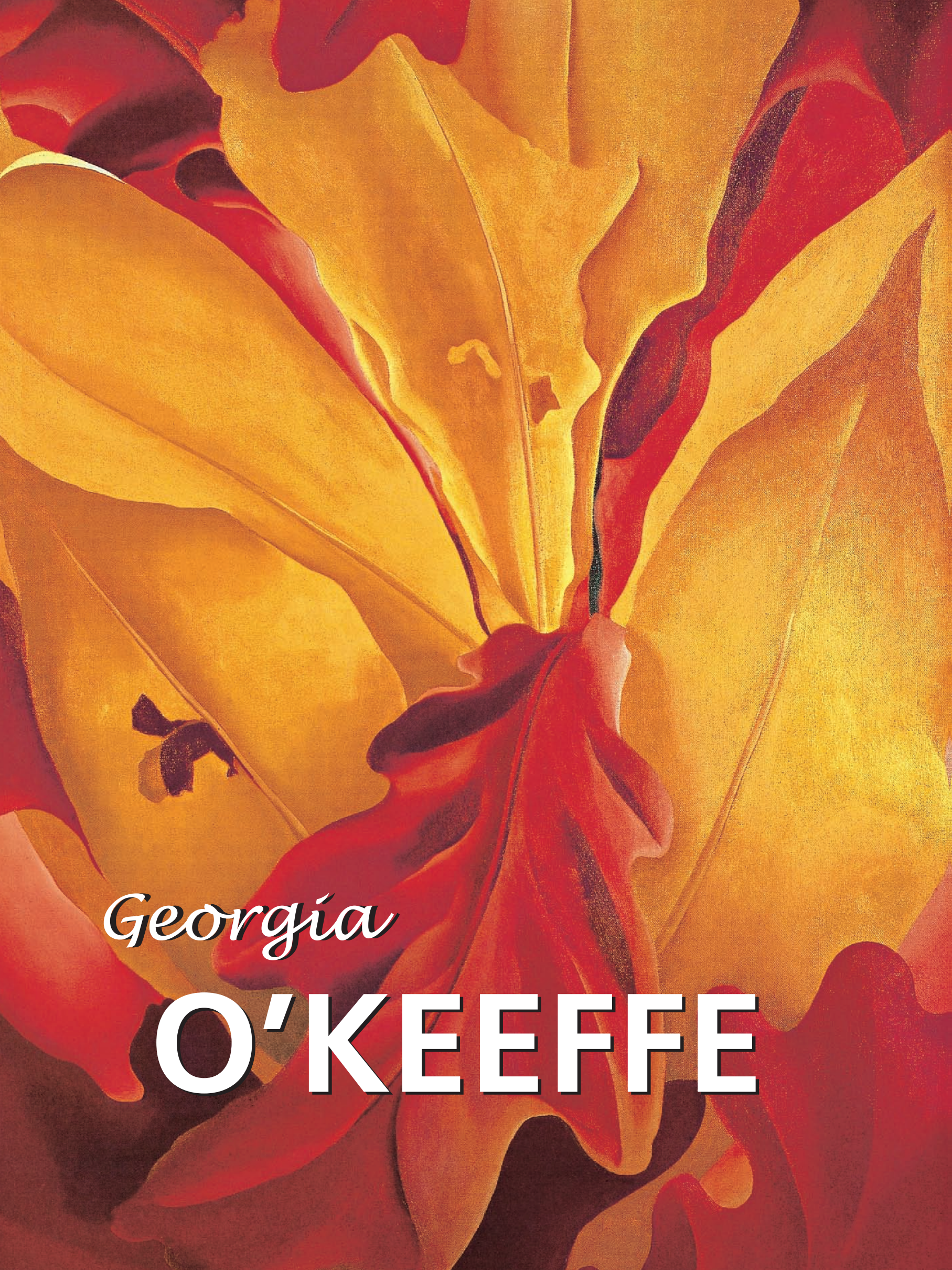


An abstract painting featuring large, overlapping leaves in vibrant autumnal colors. The palette is dominated by deep reds, bright yellows, and oranges, with some darker, almost black, areas that provide contrast. The brushstrokes are visible, giving the work a textured, expressive quality. The leaves are arranged in a way that suggests a dense cluster, with some leaves appearing to be in the foreground and others receding into the background.

Georgia

O'KEEFE

Front cover illustration

My Autumn, 1929.

Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.

Private Collection, Photo courtesy

Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe,

New Mexico.

Back cover illustration

It was Blue and Green, 1960.

Oil on canvas, mounted on

cardboard, 76.4 x 101.9 cm.

Whitney Museum of American Art,

New York.

Leaves of a Plant, 1942.

Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.

Gerald and Kathleen Peters

Collection, Santa Fe.

Jimson Weed, 1932.

Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 101.6 cm.

The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation,

Gift of the Burnett Foundation.

Author: Janet Souter

Design: Baseline Co Ltd

61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street

District 3, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

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Georgia O'Keeffe

Janet Souter

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
1887-1907	
Early Years: The Shaping of Georgia O’Keeffe	9
1907-1916	
Finding Her Vision in the Emerging World of Modern Art	17
1916-1924	
“I’ve Given the World a Woman”	33
1925-1937	
The Stieglitz Years — Galleries, Exhibitions, Commissions	59
1938-1949	
An Artist in her Own Right	103
1949-1973	
The New Mexico Years	125
1973-1986	
Artist Emeritus	145
Notes	155
Biography	156
Index	158



INTRODUCTION

Georgia O’Keeffe, in her ability to see and marvel at the tiniest detail of a flower or the vastness of the southwestern landscape, drew us in as well. The more she cultivated her isolation, the more she attracted the rest of the world. What is it that makes her legacy so powerful, even today? People recognize flowers, bones, buildings. But something in her paintings also shows us how to see. We stroll on the beach or hike a footpath and barely notice a delicate seashell or the subtle shades of a pebble; we kick aside a worn shingle. Driving through the desert we shade our eyes from the sun, blink, and miss the lone skull, signifying a life long since gone. Georgia embraced all these things and more, brought them into focus and forced us to make their acquaintance. Then, she placed them in a context that stimulated our imagination. The remains of an elk’s skull hovering over the desert’s horizon, or the moon looking down on the hard line of a New York skyscraper briefly guide us into another world.

Her abstractions tell us that the play of horizontal and vertical shapes, concentric circles, curved and diagonal lines, images that exist in the mind, are alive as well and deserve to be shared. Georgia sensed this even as an art student in the early part of this century as she sat copying other people’s pictures or plaster torsos.

In her own life, she showed women that it was possible to search out and find the best in themselves; easier today, not so easy when Georgia was young. Her later years serve as a role model for those of us who feel life is a downhill slide after the age of sixty. Well into her nineties, her eyesight failing, she still found ways to express what she saw and how it excited her.

We look at her work and talk about it, but even Georgia had difficulty putting her thoughts into words. Her thoughts were on the canvas. What we can do in this book is see her evolution, who influenced her and how she forever sought out new experiences.

We cannot discuss these discoveries with Georgia O’Keeffe. Those days are gone. But if we look around, we can see that she still talks to us.

To this day, her work is as bright, fresh and moving as it was nearly 100 years ago. Why? Because, although the paintings, simple in their execution, hold a feeling of order, of being well thought out, a steadiness, yet a vehicle to help all of us see and examine the sensual delicacy of a flower, the starkness of a bleached skull and the electricity of a Western sunset.



1887-1907

EARLY YEARS: THE SHAPING OF GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

Georgia Totto O'Keeffe was born on 15 November, 1887, on a farm near the village of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, the first daughter and second child of Francis and Ida Totto O'Keeffe. Her older brother, Francis Jr., had been born about a year and a half earlier. As an infant, Georgia already had a perception of lightness, darkness, brightness and had an artist's eye for detail. Her first memory is from her infancy. She recalls being seated on a quilt on the lawn in front of the family farmhouse. Her mother sat at a table on a long bench. A friend of the family, known as Aunt Winnie, stood at the end of the table. Georgia recalls Winnie's golden hair and her dress made of a thin white material. Years later, when she related the memory to her mother, Ida remembered that Georgia had been about nine months old at the time.

Georgia's childhood was singularly uneventful. She spent her early and middle years on the large family home near Sun Prairie, an area of rolling hills and farmland. Wild flowers grew on either side of the dusty roads in the spring; the heavy sawing of cicadas could be heard on warm summer evenings; women gathered vegetables from the garden beneath a canopy of leaves in the fall and children delighted in sleigh rides over snow-covered fields in the winter.

Following Georgia's birth, five other children appeared in rapid succession: Ida, Anita, Alexius, Catherine and Claudia. In the evenings and on rainy days, Ida O'Keeffe, believing in the importance of education, read to her children books such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* or stories of the West. Ida had spent much of her childhood on a farm next to the O'Keeffe's property. When her father, George, left the family to return to his native Hungary, Ida's mother, Isabel, moved the children to Madison, Wisconsin, where her children might have the opportunity for a formal education. Ida enjoyed pursuing her intellectual interests and as a young girl, thought of becoming a doctor. But when she reached her late teens, Francis O'Keeffe, who remembered her as the attractive girl from the nearby farm, visited her regularly in Madison and eventually proposed marriage. Isabel convinced Ida that Francis O'Keeffe possessed ambition and dependability, two excellent qualities in a husband. Ida liked Francis, although there was a history of tuberculosis in his family and people at that time avoided anyone whose relatives had died from the disease. Also, Ida was not enthusiastic about returning to Sun Prairie and its lack of cultural opportunities. Nevertheless, she listened to her mother, buried her ambitions, and on 19 February, 1884,

Page 8
Grapes on White Dish – Dark Rim,
1920.
Oil on canvas, 22.9 x 25.4 cm.
Collection Mr. and Mrs.
J. Carrington Woolley, Santa Fe.

became Mrs. Francis O’Keeffe. For the next several years, there was hardly a time when Ida was not pregnant or nursing. True, her husband worked tirelessly and they had a large home, but she was still a farmer’s wife whose education had been cut short.

She wanted more for her offspring and over the next several years, clung to the belief that if her children had the advantage of an exposure to culture, and a well-rounded education, it might keep them from falling further down the social ladder. She also felt it was important for her daughters to have the skills needed to earn their own living, should the need arise.

Ida had had some relief in the care of her children. Her widowed aunt Jennie lived with the family from the birth of the first baby. This left her time to pursue her own education, visit family in Madison, and occasionally enjoy the opera in Milwaukee.

From the time she was a tiny child, Georgia sensed that her mother favoured Francis Jr. and her more demonstrative sister Ida. This may have been why Georgia felt closer to her father, who she thought of as quite handsome. He always carried a little bag of sweets for his children and enjoyed playing Irish tunes on the fiddle. When a problem arose, he took it in his stride, and like most children, Georgia was drawn to the parent who made light of little mishaps. Ida, concerned with propriety and status, carefully monitored her children’s social life, seldom allowing them to play at their friends’ homes for fear they would acquire unacceptable social behaviour, or become sickly if they contracted the illnesses that spread around the area.

For nine years, Georgia walked to the one-room schoolhouse, a short distance from her home. Perhaps because of the importance her mother had placed on learning, the thin, dark-haired Georgia with alert brown eyes was known to her neighbours and teachers as a bright, inquisitive little girl. Endowed with a typical child’s fascination with disaster, she once asked a teacher, “If Lake Monana rose up, way up and spilled over, how many people would drown?”

The oldest daughter in a family of seven children, Georgia became lost in the hustle and bustle of activity common in a large household. For Georgia, this meant she could enjoy unsupervised solitary play, creating “families” with her dolls. She once created a “father” by taking one of her “girl” dolls and sewing a pair of pants for him but was thoroughly dissatisfied with the result. She could not cut the long blond curls, because the stitching would show. In addition, the male doll was still fat, not the ideal image of an attractive, tall, lean man as head of a household.

The first picture Georgia remembers drawing was a man lying with his feet up in the air. “He was about two inches long,” she indicates in her autobiography, “carefully outlined with black lead pencil — a line made very dark by wetting the pencil in my mouth and pressing very hard on a tan paper bag.”

One can imagine a little girl hunched over her work, struggling with head and body parts, trying to show the man leaning over and wondering why the knees and hips did not seem to

bend right. She wrote that after she had drawn the man bending at the hip, she turned the picture sideways and was delighted to see it worked when he was shown lying on his back his feet above his head. She always felt that she had never worked so hard before or since. Consistent with her desire for her children to have as many educational advantages as possible, Ida enrolled her daughters in drawing and painting classes in Sun Prairie during their elementary school years.

At first, they drew cubes and spheres to get the basics of perspective drawing. The following year, they took painting classes on Saturdays and were allowed to choose a picture to copy. Georgia remembers just two — one of Pharoah's horses and another of large red roses. "It was the beginning with watercolor," she later wrote.

Georgia attended the one-room school up until eighth grade. At the age of 13, she was talking with a washerwoman's daughter about what they would be when they grew up. Georgia remembers saying, almost without thinking, "I'm going to be an artist." To Georgia at the time it meant simply a portrait painter, having had little exposure to other art forms. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, few options were open to the woman seeking a career. She knew she could find work as a teacher, nurse, seamstress, governess, cook or housemaid.

If she were ambitious or from an upper class family and could afford the education, the law and medicine professions might let her in. As technology gained a foothold, she could be trained as a typist or telephone operator. In the world of art, a woman who attended a public art school went on to designing wallpaper, teaching, or commercial illustration. For most women, studying art was a stopgap pursuit to the ultimate goal — marriage.

Georgia began her high school years at Sacred Heart Academy, a Dominican convent near Madison. For her second year, she and Francis Jr., were sent to Madison High School and lived with their aunt in town. The school's art teacher, a slight woman who wore a bonnet with artificial violets, gave Georgia her first insight into the mysteries and detail of the Jack-In-The-Pulpit flower. In her autobiography, O'Keeffe says:

*"I had seen many Jacks before, but this was the first time I remember examining a flower...I was a little annoyed at being interested because I did not like the teacher...But maybe she started me looking at things — looking very carefully at details."*¹

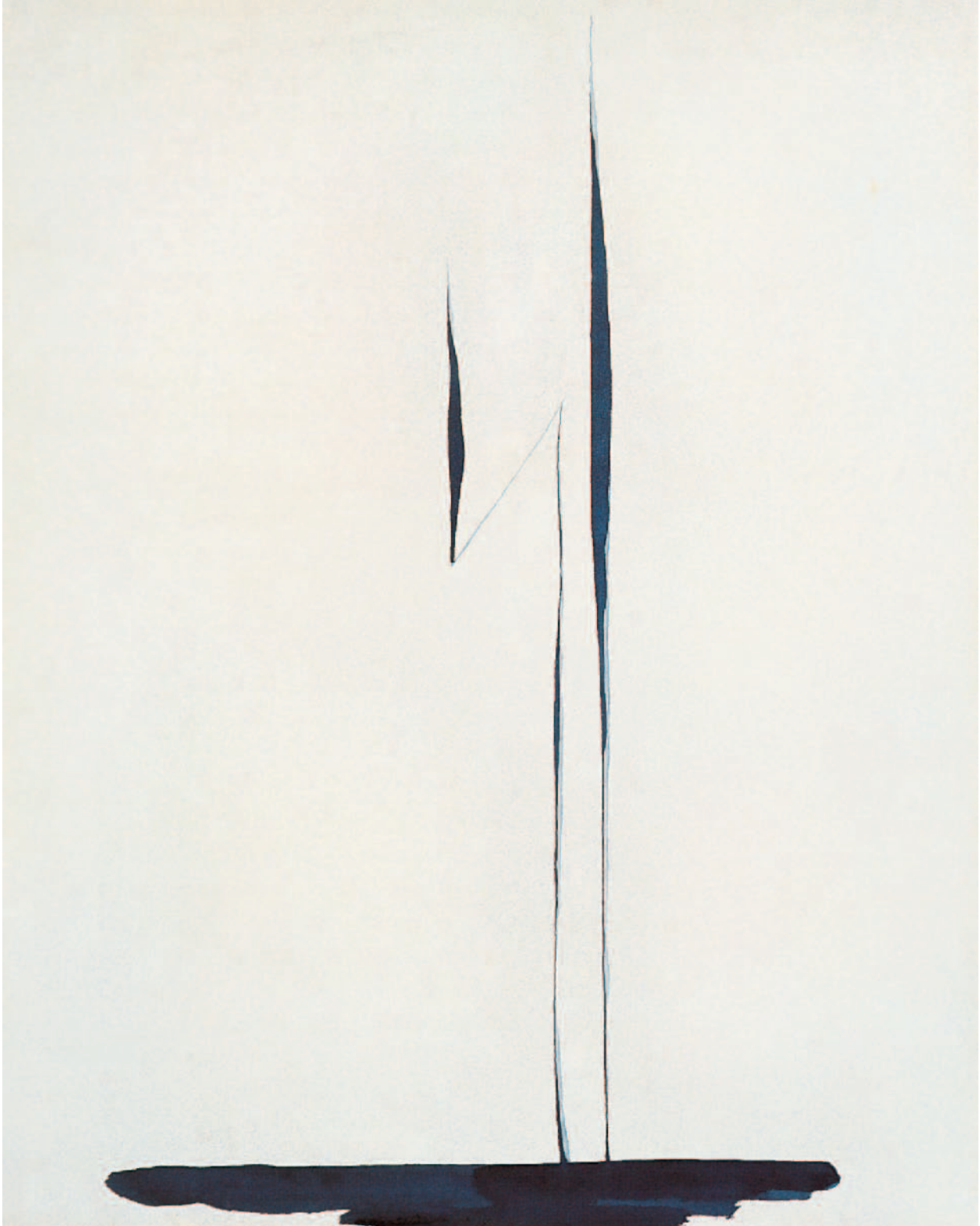
In 1902, suffering from ill health, Francis O'Keeffe moved his family to Williamsburg, Virginia, hoping the warmer climate would help him recover. His brothers and father had all succumbed to tuberculosis over the years, and Francis felt he could avoid the same fate in an area where the winters were not quite so harsh. Lured by brochures promising mild weather and reasonable land values, he moved his family east. For Georgia, this meant changing schools once again and for the next two years, she attended Chatham Episcopal Institute, a boarding school two hundred miles away. Unlike most children who might find this upheaval traumatic, Georgia did not seem to mind the school's rules and rigid schedule imposed on her.

Within her large family, she was the quiet child people tended to ignore, and relied on her own resources for amusement. At Chatham, she enjoyed long walks in the woods, nurturing her love of nature, training her eye on a flower's intricate details, and letting her gaze wander to the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance.

If there was one teacher in her adolescent years who had a profound influence on Georgia's life, it might have been Elizabeth May Willis, Chatham's principal and art instructor. Tuned into Georgia's inconsistent work habits, Willis let her student work at her own pace. And Georgia admitted years later, that Willis must have been frustrated with her at times, for the teenager sometimes refused to work and was often a disruption during class. Yet, when ready to create, she would stand by her easel for hours to perfect a painting, creating purples, reds, greens that amazed and impressed the other students. When the other girls complained that Georgia was never singled out for punishment because of her erratic behavior, Willis responded by saying that when she did work, she accomplished more in one day than the others did in a week.² One of the paintings that still exists is a still life called simply *Untitled (Grapes and Oranges)*, a watercolor in earth tones of rather dark green and ochre. The style is somewhat similar to the Impressionists, and shows her ability to work with color, light and shadow as well as displaying a mature drawing skill.

As for her relationships with the students in general, Georgia knew she looked somewhat odd to the others, whose frilly clothes and flirtations she ignored and never tried to imitate. Perhaps she chose black to rebel against her mother, who tried to remake her daughter into the image of a genteel young lady. Also, the family's finances had dwindled and it is possible Ida could not afford to clothe her daughter in the same frilly dresses as the other girls wore. Nevertheless, Georgia's schoolmates liked her and were impressed with her artistic talents. Although quiet and reserved, she joined in several school activities, including the basketball and tennis teams, the German Club and Kappa Delta, the social sorority. On the occasions when she did open up, she loved playing pranks. Once she pinned a bow to the back of a teacher's dress, and for the school yearbook, drew extremely unflattering caricatures of the instructors. After teaching some of the girls how to play poker, she kept a game going for several weeks. Her schoolwork suffered because of her indifference to studying and she barely graduated in June, 1905.

The South at that time still held vestiges of pre-Civil War social order. The O'Keeffes were thought of as somewhat odd because they had no Negro servants, even though the family lived in a large home that Francis had optimistically purchased after selling the Sun Prairie farm. His grocery store did not produce much of a profit over the years, yet Ida struggled to keep up appearances and with her refined mannerisms desperately worked to fit into the women's community, and to some extent, she did. She tried without success to have Georgia behave more like a southern lady. Her daughter's plain way of dressing and her long solitary walks at dawn along the countryside paths, were hardly the lifestyle of a blossoming southern belle. To Georgia, what other people thought was unimportant; to keep peace, she obeyed her mother whenever possible and the rest of the time, kept to herself.



Following her graduation from Chatham, and encouraged by her mother and Elizabeth Willis, Georgia began to pursue her art career in earnest and in 1905 returned to the Midwest to study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. At that time, it was unusual for girls to attend art school. Most Americans held fast to the Puritan ethic and the idea of sending a daughter to an institution that employed nude models was considered a threat to her moral upbringing. But Georgia had family living in Chicago, so in a sense she was not unsupervised. Two of her aunts and an uncle had a place not far from the school so she could walk to classes. One of the few remaining drawings she created at the time, titled *My Auntie*, is of another aunt, Jennie Varnie, the relative who lived with the O'Keeffes and helped care for the children. Even then one can see that she had confidence in her ability to capture the essence of a person. Shading and texture form the tired eyes, firm mouth and tilt of the head. There are no inhibitions, no struggle with drawing the perfect line, common to young serious art students.

The Art Institute and its environment were a marked change from the rolling green hills and heady fresh air of the country. Now she strolled along crowded streets and breathed air full of soot and smoke as she made her way from her relatives' apartment to the imposing Art Institute entrance, flanked by the famous bronze lions. During the first few months, her classes were held in the large galleries where she drew casts of hands and torsos. Later, in her anatomy class, she sketched in drab olive green rooms housed in the building's basement. She was now exposed, so to speak, to the human figure. The story has been told several times of her embarrassment at the sight of a male model appearing from behind the dressing room curtain wearing nothing more than a small loin cloth.

Although Georgia never had an interest in drawing or painting the human figure, she did hold in high regard her anatomy instructor John Vanderpoel, a diminutive hunchback, yet one of the few teachers whose skill in drawing had a profound influence on her for years to come. In the auditorium where he lectured, she watched fascinated as his hand moved deftly over large sheets of tan paper, extending his reach as high as he could. His book, *The Human Figure*, was one she treasured throughout her career. At the end of the year, he gave Georgia's drawings the first place award, and her overall record was stated as "exceptionally high."

During the summer of 1906 she returned to Virginia and the rural countryside where she felt so at home. But, to her father's disappointment, the South's humid, stifling summer climate created more health problems than the Midwest's cruel winters. Georgia contracted typhoid fever which lasted through most of that year and part of the next, leaving her pale, weak and suffering from hair loss.

The children in her family and the neighborhood provided company during her recovery and she in turn enjoyed hosting afternoon walks, a parade of young people skipping behind her down the street. After spending a year in the city and experiencing a cosmopolitan life style, she related even less to the other young women in town.

Meanwhile, Francis O’Keeffe’s grocery and feed store business failed and he was forced to close up shop. Ida had no choice but to take in boarders. Assisted by Georgia’s younger sisters and Aunt Jennie, she cooked simple, but ample meals for the young college men, once friends of Georgia’s brother Francis Jr., and now paying guests. One can guess how difficult this must have been for Georgia’s mother, who still desperately wanted to keep up appearances.

After her lengthy illness, Georgia made plans to live in New York and attend the Art Students League School. The city’s atmosphere was in marked contrast to the country she loved so well, yet its vibrancy sparked her creativity and she found herself among people with whom she could form lasting friendships. For a young woman like Georgia, who had not quite related to her surroundings anywhere else, it was like Dorothy opening the door to Oz. People gravitated to her and for the first time, men began to notice her, with her bright, dark eyes and dimpled cheeks. The students nicknamed her “Pat” or “Patsy,” in tribute to the humor and jollity associated with any Irish surname. She warmed to the pranks, parties, the New York scene with its bustling streets, fashions for women aggressively changing (skirts now six inches above the ground, revealing a gently curved ankle) and electric trolleys replacing horse-drawn omnibuses.

Georgia delighted in her still life classes with the dapper William Merritt Chase, one of many teachers that influenced her during that period. Each day the students were required to paint a still life and once a week Chase arrived at his office where students gathered to have their work critiqued. Although he dressed in a high silk hat, suit, gloves and spats and sported spectacles on a cord, she found him fun and full of energy. He imparted that same excitement to his students and Georgia loved painting the gleaming brass and copper pots, shiny peppers, and textured onions that served as subject matter.

Just like her anatomy class at the School of the Art Institute, Georgia found the anatomy sessions conducted by Kenyon Cox singularly forgettable and his criticisms frightening. She remembers, however, fellow student Eugene Speicher who begged her to pose for him and once stopped her on the stairs, preventing her from passing until she agreed. When she replied that she only wanted to get to class, he made a prediction that he must have regretted often in the years to come. According to Georgia, he said, “it does not matter what you do... I’m going to be a great painter and you will probably end up teaching painting in some girls’ school.”

Although he let her go, she did finally let him paint her portrait, after, as she put it: “I went down the dark hall to the Life Class. The model happened to be a very repulsive man who gave me the creeps, so I gave up and went back to Speicher.”³ The following day she again posed for him and they were soon joined by others. After a short time, a student walked in and suggested they all go over to see the Rodin drawings at the 291 Gallery. The gallery was owned by the well-known photographer and gallery-owner, supporter of avant-garde artists, Alfred Stieglitz.



1907-1916

FINDING HER VISION IN THE EMERGING WORLD OF MODERN ART

Everyone called the gallery 291, referring to its Fifth Avenue address, but in reality its full name was Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. Stieglitz, a pioneer in the art of photography, had been the first to experiment and successfully produce photographs taken in inclement weather conditions — rain, snow and the dark of night. He had been a photographic chemistry student in Berlin in the 1880s, then after a short detour through the photoengraving business in the United States, he struck out in another direction — establishing photography as art. The Camera Club of New York had expelled him from their desultory group of tradition-bound pictorialists (although he had been its founder) and shortly thereafter he opened the 291. His exhibition of Rodin drawings marked a new path he had decided to take in giving exposure to avant-garde drawings and paintings.

The gaggle of students that descended on the 291 that snowy afternoon were not unlike most college undergraduates who delight in baiting someone passionate about his convictions. They had come to challenge Stieglitz about the Europeans who were toppling the conventions in art: Picasso, Rodin, Matisse, Cézanne, and others. But they also found it amusing to get the gallery owner riled up and they succeeded. While the exchanges between Stieglitz and the students became fierce and bordered on violence, Georgia stood in a corner to wait out the storm. At the time, she was not impressed with Rodin's watercolor washes supported by, as she described, "curved lines and scratches." Years later, as she went through Stieglitz's estate, those were the drawings she treasured the most.

Georgia finished her first year at the League with the \$100 prize awarded to the top still-life artist, for her oil painting *Dead Rabbit with Copper Pot* (p. 16). This resulted in an invitation to the League's summer school at Lake George, in upper New York State. That summer Georgia painted, attended dances, partied, and caught the attention of two of the young men in the class. It was the sort of summer that people remember well into old age. Two young men vied for her attention, but she spent her days with the one who shared her love of painting and the outdoors. The two maintained a long-distance relationship for the next few years, his letters bearing postmarks from the far West and Europe, but she never saw him again. When Georgia returned to Williamsburg at the end of the summer, it was obvious to her that Francis O'Keeffe was in trouble.

Bad investments in building materials, coupled with real estate speculation and a creamery manufacturing business that never got off the ground, ate into the family's finances. She could see that there was no money for her to return to school at the League. Her sisters

Page 16

Dead Rabbit with Copper Pot, 1908.
Oil on canvas, 48.2 x 56.7 cm.

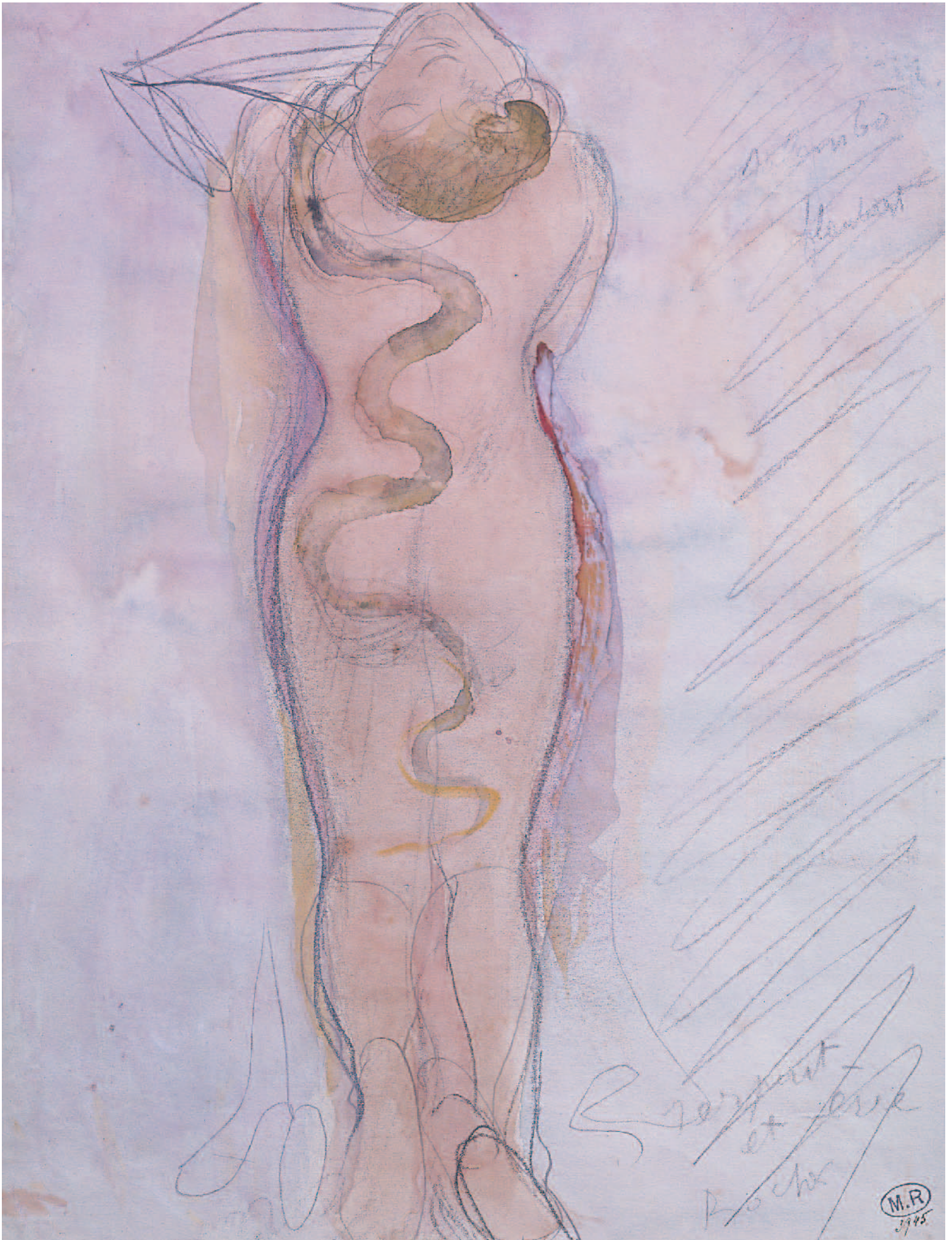
The Art Students League, New York.



Paul Cézanne, *Apples and Oranges*,
1898-1899.
Oil on canvas, 74 x 93 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Plums, 1920.
Oil on canvas, 22.9 x 30.5 cm.
Collection of Paul and Tina
Schmind, Boston.





were forced to drop out of boarding school, freeing up the family's funds so that her brother Alexius could continue his studies at William and Mary College.

Now Georgia was forced to make a decision. She could not go back to school, and marriage — which ordinarily might have been an option for a woman in her early twenties — was out of the question for someone with Georgia's spirit and love of independence. The boy she'd grown fond of over the summer hinted that he might come to Virginia for a visit. Years later, she reflected that if he had come to Williamsburg during such a low point in her life, she might have considered marriage. The art fields open to a woman were fairly limited — she could work as an illustrator for newspaper and catalog advertisements, teach, or attempt to build up a following with portraiture. In November of 1908, she left for Chicago to live once again with her mother's relatives. The advertising industry was growing and she found freelance work illustrating lace and embroidery for dress advertisements. The meaningless repetitive work left her exhausted, bored and unhappy. She endured this life for two years, until she contracted measles. Her eyes weakened and, now unable to work, she returned to Williamsburg.

The situation at home was worse than the day she left. Her father had moved the family into a cinder block house he had constructed using leftover materials from his failed building supply company. Her mother, suffering from tuberculosis, spent her days in the porch outside her upstairs bedroom. Eventually Ida recovered enough to move to Charlottesville, Virginia, which she felt offered a warmer, drier atmosphere. To bring in money, she and the other daughters rented a house and took in student boarders from the University of Virginia. Georgia and Francis stayed behind to help with the final moving arrangements.

In 1911, Elizabeth Willis, her former art instructor at Chatham, heard about Georgia's situation and asked her to fill in at Chatham while Willis took a leave of absence. Georgia readily agreed. The following summer in 1912, she and her sisters, Anita and Ida, studied at the University with Alon Bement who employed a somewhat revolutionary method in art instruction, originally conceived by Arthur Wesley Dow. In Bement's class, the students did not mechanically copy nature, but instead were taught the principles of design using geometric shapes. They worked at exercises that included dividing a square, working within a circle and placing a rectangle around a drawing, then organizing the composition by rearranging, adding or eliminating elements.

It sounded dull and to most students it was, although Bement encouraged the class to take the lessons a step further and create their own patterns. But Georgia found that these studies gave art its structure and helped her understand the basics of abstraction. Dow's book, *Composition*, states that painting is essentially a two-dimensional medium, a radical departure from the three-dimensional modeling that had dominated the European art world for centuries. In Dow's teaching, the concept of line was stressed most often. The filling of space consisted of the elements of line ("the synthetic related masses of dark and light convey an impression of beauty... independent of meaning"⁴) and color. Color, he believed, was determined by sense, rather than hard-and-fast rules.

Although her sisters and others made fun of Bement's exaggerated gestures as he arranged drapery, waving his arms and swirling, turning in the manner of a dancer or toreador, Georgia felt she had finally found someone to guide her and take her art to another level. She felt the Dow method actually served as a tool to work with, yet help her maintain

Page 20
Rodin, *Serpent and Eve*.
Lead, watercolor and gouache
on paper, 40 x 50 cm.
Musée Rodin, Paris.

Page 21
Nude Series VIII, 1917.
Watercolor, 45.7 x 34.3 cm.
The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe.

Page 23
Abstraction IX, 1916.
Charcoal on paper, 61.5 x 47.5 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.





her individualism. Georgia enrolled in Bement's advanced class, Drawing IV, and quickly became one of his favorite students, impressing him with her skill and imagination. At the end of six weeks, she finished with a grade of 95.

Bement also offered to help her find a teaching position, despite the fact that she did not have a degree. Meanwhile Georgia contacted several friends from school, telling them she was looking for a teaching job. Eventually a boarding school friend now living in Texas told her of a position in Amarillo as a drawing supervisor. Georgia jumped at the chance to live in the west. As a child, listening to her mother read from stories of the wild west, of Texas and Kit Carson and Billy the Kid, she became fascinated, her imagination fired with thoughts of cowboys, brilliant sunsets and distant mountains.

When she stepped off the train in Amarillo in 1912, she found it situated at the crossroads of two railroad lines and populated by merchants, saloon-keepers, lawyers and whores. Other teachers resided in boardinghouses, but Georgia preferred the local hotel, possibly because she felt out-of-place, since she did not officially possess a teaching degree. Nevertheless, Georgia seemed to enjoy living in the center of town where on several occasions she witnessed fights and shootouts. While other residents may have cursed at twisters, dust storms and spring flooding, she enjoyed the sudden changes in weather, and seeing cattle herds driven across the plains and into pens near the railroad station. As she lay in bed, the loud rhythmic lowing of the cattle in the night was a sound that forever haunted her. When she returned to New York in 1914, the memory of the vast Texas prairie inspired the paintings *Orange and Red Streak* (p. 38), a fiery yellow lightning-like curved shape cutting across a red-orange landscape, and *From the Plain I* (p. 40), a vibrant, swirling mixture of reds and yellows and muted greens against the dark, tranquil horizon.

Georgia's official duty was supervisor of drawing and penmanship for the several hundred students in Amarillo's six schools. Because of the lack of flora to use as subject matter for the children to draw, and having no money to buy items like fresh fruit or flowers, she employed Dow's philosophy that children should be encouraged to draw pictures from their everyday life, rather than force them to copy from art books. However, the following year the Texas legislature passed a law requiring textbooks for its art classes, a move which Georgia fought for several months. It was not only her philosophy that prompted her to speak up. Georgia's heart went out to the children who came to school wearing shoes with holes in them, or no shoes at all. If they could not afford shoes, she felt, why should they be forced to pay 75 cents for a book? At the end of the school year, there were still no books in the classrooms.

In 1913, she returned to Charlottesville for the summer and taught in the art department at the University of Virginia. As autumn approached, she received an offer to teach at another school for more money, but she preferred the raw, flat, unspoiled Texan plains and so returned to Amarillo in the fall for another year of teaching. It was the children, too, that made her want to return. Perhaps understanding the poverty and hardships their families endured, she had formed friendships with many of them, even the difficult ones.

By the spring of 1914, Georgia wearied of the ongoing textbook battle with the state legislature and after teaching again at the University of Virginia that summer, she heeded Bement's advice to return to New York and study with Arthur Dow at Teachers College of Columbia University.

Page 24
Special No. 32, 1914.
Pastel on paper, 35.5 x 49.5 cm.
Private collection.

The New York art world she left in 1908 had now, in 1914, opened its doors and thoughts to the avant-garde art of the European painters and sculptors. The previous year, at the Armory show, Marcel Duchamp's cubist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* had shaken up the public as well as the art world. In the social and political arena, a bohemian community sprang up in Greenwich Village where Freud, free love and socialism dominated conversations. Eugene O'Neill wrote daring new plays and Max Eastman produced outlandish political magazines. For women, issues such as birth control and women's voting rights had gained a foothold in American politics. The previous year a parade of Suffragettes had disrupted the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson. In 1915 Margaret Sanger published the first issue of *The Woman Rebel*, a magazine designed to offer women information on contraceptive devices and thus allow them to help control their reproductive cycle.

At Teachers College, Georgia flourished under Dow's influence. He had studied with Gauguin and other Post-Impressionists and believed that decadence in art lay not with the experimenters and those who sought to express themselves in other directions, but with those who insisted on imitation and lacked imagination. It was Dow's admiration for the Oriental use of organic forms and their sense of order that Georgia was drawn to as well.

During her year at Teachers College, Georgia did excellent work in the creative classes but her teacher-education courses suffered. In 1915, Professor Dow extolled her abilities as an artist when he recommended Georgia for a teaching position. After claiming he had "heard" she did well as a teacher, he continued with complimentary remarks, including "Miss O'Keeffe is ... one of the most talented people in art that we have ever had."⁵

While at Teachers College, Georgia formed a lifelong friendship with a young woman student, Anita Pollitzer, whose father was a cotton broker in Charleston, South Carolina. Her spirited, energetic personality was in marked contrast to Georgia's quiet, more conservative ways, yet they complemented each other so well and were alike in their love of new experiments in art, music, and excitement over the emerging role of women in the artistic, social and political arenas. For several decades, they exchanged letters frequently and books have been written about their friendship and prolific correspondence.

Georgia and Anita often visited Stieglitz's gallery on Fifth Avenue during that time. Thousands of people visited the gallery each year, primarily to hear him speak in his resounding voice on the American aesthetic in art and culture and how he desperately wished for America to support its own artists. During the winter, Georgia attended an exhibition of Braque and Picasso drawings and was struck by Stieglitz's dark deep-set intense eyes, at the same time felt somewhat intimidated. Later, as the school year wound down, she had the chance to visit Stieglitz during the show of watercolors by John Marin. Georgia felt inspired by Marin's bold use of splattered color, but her practical side surfaced as well when she asked Stieglitz if the artist was actually able to make a living selling paintings such as these. She pointed out an abstract executed in blue crayon.

When she was told that the painting had sold, she realized that she could have the best of both worlds — paint as she wished and earn money doing it. In June 1915, Georgia returned to the University of Virginia to teach summer art classes. The university still clung to the belief that women should not be afforded the same educational privileges as their





male counterparts. They were allowed to participate in or serve as faculty members for the summer classes, but did not receive class credit for the summer courses. Nevertheless, Georgia shared her enthusiasm about the emerging modern artists with her students and how this next generation must embrace the exciting new ways of self expression. Apparently it was infectious, because, as one student said years later, “Even my very short exposure to her teaching has afforded me great freedom emotionally ... in my response to art.”⁶ She also took long walks with a young professor, Arthur MacMahon, who was teaching government at the school. A liberal, he believed that women should be encouraged to use their talents to create a better world and not be forced into serving as wives and child-bearers.

When school ended, the approaching fall and winter forced Georgia to make some more decisions. The realities of earning a living wage, coupled with the desire to pursue her craft finally led to the decision to accept a teaching position at Columbia College in Columbia, South Carolina, a women’s institution. The job allowed her time to paint as well as support herself. Although the salary was meager (partly due to her lack of a teaching degree and also the fact that the school had fallen on hard times), she enjoyed the solitude that gave her time to paint, draw, and take her customary long walks in the woods and flower-rich countryside.

This also allowed her time to assess her work over the past few months and consider whether the work was really hers, or the vision of other artists who had served as instructors. She realized, as she stared at the group of paintings and drawings on the wall, that she had not given reign to her own way of seeing, that there were images inside her that were hers alone, yet she had not expressed them in her art. So, in a sense she began with the basics and worked only in black-and-white charcoal: as she stated in her autobiography, she “decided not to use any color until it was impossible to do what I wanted to do in black and white.”⁷ The preliminary sketches for her painting *Blue Lines* (p. 13) were first done in charcoal, then several times in black watercolor before she produced the final painting in 1916. Here we see a delicate blue line rising from a single blue brushstroke at the bottom of the picture; to the line’s right is another that dips and rises again. The picture is complete; our eyes fill in the negative space. One can almost see the brush as it must have moved swiftly, yet carefully over the page.

Letters from Georgia’s friends in New York kept her spirits high as she dealt once again with the southern-belle mentality of her fellow teachers and students. Arthur MacMahon and Anita Pollitzer both wrote frequently. Georgia’s thoughts, as she struggled with the philosophical aspects of her art and whom to paint for, always went back to what she’d heard from Stieglitz, his ideas and belief in the freedom of artistic expression. At one point, that fall, Anita wrote that she had visited Stieglitz’s gallery and spoken to him about O’Keeffe and her lonely existence in South Carolina. According to the letter, Stieglitz had responded: “When she gets her money — she’ll do Art with it — and if she’ll get anywhere — it’s worth going to Hell to get there.”⁸

This was enough to shake Georgia out of her despondency. Outside of taking a moment to laugh, as she read the letter on the way back from the post office, she expressed her joy in quieter ways by filling her room with the flowers she loved and throwing herself into her art.

Page 28
Special No. 22, 1916.
Oil on board, 33 x 43.8 cm.
Georgia O’Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe.

Sometime during that period, she wrote to Anita:

*"I believe I would rather have Stieglitz like something — anything I had done — than anyone else I know of — I have always thought that — if I ever make anything that satisfies me even ever so little — I am going to show it to him to find out if it's any good..."*⁹

Anita did more for her friend than write encouraging, uplifting letters. On 1 January, 1916, Anita took some of her friend's drawings to Stieglitz at the 291 gallery. Georgia had asked that Anita not show them to anyone, but once O'Keeffe heard of Stieglitz's exuberant reaction to them ("...these are the purest, fairest, sincerest things that have entered 291 in a long while,"¹⁰ Anita reported him to have said) she wrote to thank Anita, saying she was now inspired to keep on going.

In March of that year, Georgia returned to New York to once again study with Arthur Dow. She had been offered a teaching position at West Texas State Normal College in Canyon, Texas, but one of the requirements was completing a course with Dow on teaching methods. She resigned from Columbia College immediately and set out for New York, and Dow's classes, glad for the excuse to get back to the vibrant art world she loved. At some point that year, Stieglitz came into possession of several O'Keeffe drawings, but no one mentions how he got them. This led to a heated confrontation that showed Stieglitz he was dealing with a fiercely independent and determined woman, not easily swayed by flattery. The incident began one afternoon in early summer, when a girl came up to Georgia as she was eating in the college cafeteria and asked, "Are you Virginia O'Keeffe?" "No, I am Georgia O'Keeffe," she replied. The girl said she thought she was Virginia because someone named Virginia O'Keeffe had an exhibition of drawings at the 291 gallery. This upset Georgia, not only because she realized that her first name was incorrect, but that Stieglitz had exhibited her drawings without her knowledge. Although she had heard that he had them and intended to show them she was still shocked when given the news. Georgia immediately headed over to 291, but found that Stieglitz was away on jury duty. A few days later, she went back. Stieglitz was alone in the gallery. In a quiet, but dignified voice, she asked him to remove her work from his walls.

"You do not know what you have done in those pictures?" he asked.

"Certainly I know what I've done," she replied. "Do you think I'm an idiot?"

"Intellectually, you do not know what you've done," he answered. "In reality you do."

Stieglitz, never at a loss for words, talked on about the drawings and their worth and in the end Georgia left. The drawings remained on the wall. Georgia taught for another summer at the University of Virginia. Although she may have sensed that she was finally emerging as an artist in her own right, it was a difficult summer emotionally; her mother had passed away the previous May, dying in virtual poverty. In September, she boarded the train for Canyon, Texas and the West Texas State Normal College, excited to be back in the expanse of prairie and unbroken sky of the state's panhandle. She had a feeling of optimism now and had been corresponding with Stieglitz since the previous summer. In an apparent change of heart, she informed him in July that her drawings belonged to him as much as they did to her.





1916-1924

“I’VE GIVEN THE WORLD A WOMAN”

In September, 1916, as hot winds blew across the Texas prairie, Georgia arrived in Canyon, Texas to take up her duties as head of the art department at West Texas State Normal College. Once again, she felt a connection with the vastness of the blue-gray sky, and the shows it performed for her day and night. Roiling clouds advancing, the intense red backdrop of the sun, the dialogue of the sheet lightning bursts, punctuated by forked lightning attacking the horizon. The town was named for the nearby Palo Duro Canyon, whose name means “hard wood” referring to the mesquite and juniper trees that grow there. Contrasted with the deep green foliage are layers of deep red sandstone, claystone, and gray gypsum, and lavender mudstone. Georgia spent many Saturdays flirting with danger as she hiked down the canyon’s steep narrow paths.

Unlike the canyon, the buildings and streets of the tiny nearby town hardly reflected or gave life to her imagination. Structures were so similar and the streets criss-crossed at such capricious angles, that she became lost one night after going out to mail a letter. The townspeople subscribed to conservative propriety, yet seemed to look the other way when it came to such activities as weekend wild-rabbit clubbing or buffalo-kill parties, with hired Indians demonstrating their hunting prowess using bow and arrows.

Georgia’s official title was head of the art department; her teaching duties consisted of design (taught to the younger students), and interior decoration for the home economics majors. As she had in her previous teaching positions, she tried to inspire them to see the beauty in the surrounding harsh, sometimes forbidding landscape they called home. Everything, she told her pupils, had an aesthetic quality, whether it be the shapes within a dress pattern, the placement of windows in a home or even addressing a letter. The students warmed to this new insight into seeing and imagination and the way she opened their minds to ideas. One teenager eventually went on to become an English teacher and credited Georgia with first introducing her to Russian literature. The townspeople were not so sure. Again, Georgia’s severe manner of dress — black and white straight-lined clothing almost studiously avoiding bodily curves — prompted many to think of her as somewhat odd. She even moved out of a boarding house because her room, with its rosy pink wallpaper pattern was so repugnant to her.

She eventually settled in a third-floor bedroom in a home owned by a physics professor, Douglas Shirley, and his wife. They had not planned on renting the room, but Georgia, seeing that it faced east giving an unobstructed view of the sunrise, begged them to let her have it and eventually they relented. Since Georgia had promised their mother that she would watch over Claudia, the baby of the family, she brought her younger sister to Canyon and the two

Page 32

Light Coming on the Plains II, 1917.

Watercolor, 30.5 x 20.3 cm.

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth.

shared a room at the Shirleys. Claudia, now close to 18 years of age, was enrolled in West Texas State.

Although her days were filled with teaching duties, and occasional socializing (she avoided events such as dull faculty teas, but went on drives with a local attorney and became friends with the president of the school's drama club) Georgia's creativity and inspiration seemed to be boundless, possibly because of her deep feeling for the land. In a letter to Anita Pollitzer, she mentioned how she had gone out to the canyon till late at night, and unable to sleep after returning home, she made a pattern of flowers she had picked that day. Her frequent trips to Palo Duro and the surrounding countryside resulted in paintings such as *Canyon with Crows* (p. 37), two dark shapes soaring over dark green splashes forming the craggy hills that rise from the deep reddish pink canyon below. In *Painting No. 21 (Palo Duro Canyon)*, we look into an almost Dante-like swirling abyss of reds and oranges surrounded by black. A yellow inferno dominates the center.

Even Georgia's written description of the land seemed to give her writing a quality of imagination that other writers might envy. In describing the cattle that often wandered into the canyon to escape the wind, she wrote in her notebook that she saw "a long line of cattle like black lace against the sunset sky."¹¹ In a letter to Pollitzer, she described the sky "— and there is so much of it out here — was just blazing — and grey-blue clouds were rioting all through the hotness of it —"¹²

"I'm not even having the smallest wish for New York," she said in another letter to Pollitzer. Georgia's own vision began to emerge at this time as well. She may have kept Stieglitz's advice to work only in black-and-white, but as her enthusiasm for the surrounding land became uncontrollable, she started working in watercolors, a perfect medium for subject matter such as the tonal quality of a setting sun, its oranges, pinks and blues drifting over each other. But there was nothing sentimental in the work she produced at that time. The boldness of her brushstrokes, the purity of shape and the wide, curved lines present in these paintings, showed the way the subjects excited her.

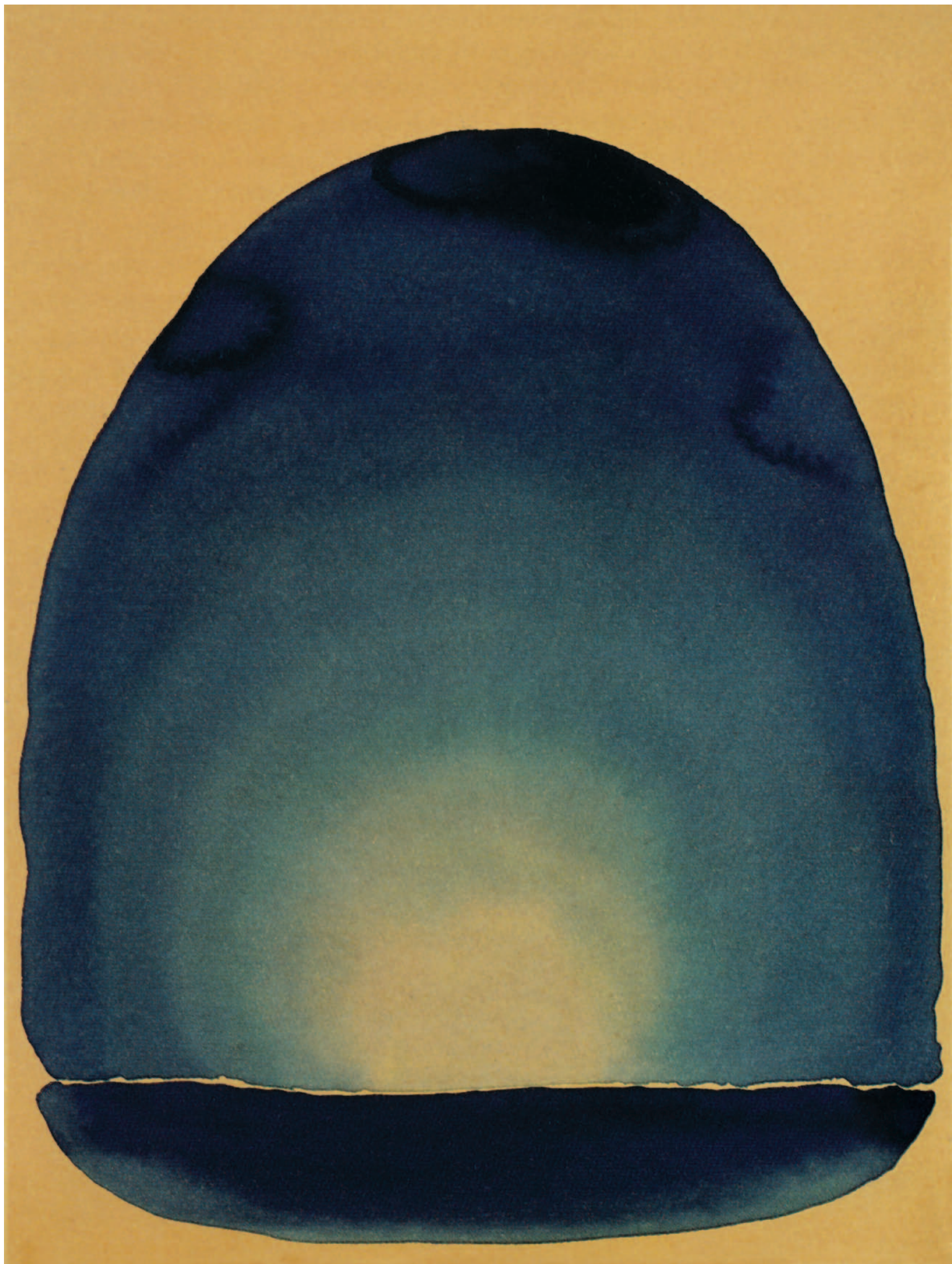
Georgia and Claudia took walks in the early twilight, and while Claudia took a gun and shot bottles tossed in the air, Georgia stood and marveled at the intensity of the evening star. From this experience, she produced ten *Evening Star* watercolors, showing a white and yellow circle surrounded by an intense orange crescent rising out of the blue-black earth to hold it.

When she showed some of her paintings to fellow teachers and friends, however, they were mystified by her work, feeling that art consisted of pictures hung on the wall. One painting showed an oval of light, which the mathematics instructor thought was a watermelon. The woman laughed when Georgia told her it was the town's light against a black sky. It may have been something similar to her watercolor *Light Coming on the Plains II* (p. 35). Here a white light gradually moving toward a black oval sky rises above the almost imperceptible white line of a town sitting on the darkened plane. The half oval shape against an unassuming gray background appears to be a landscape all its own, enveloped in its sky and earth. But Georgia, however much she loved the land, also felt the pull of Stieglitz's influence and it was his approval she sought and anticipated for future 291 showings.

Page 35
Light Coming on the Plains III,
1917.
Watercolor, 30.2 x 22.5 cm.
Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth.

Page 36
Nude No. IV, 1917.
Watercolor on paper,
30.5 x 22.9 cm.
Private collection.

Page 37
Canyon with Crows, 1917.
Watercolor, 22.9 x 30.5 cm.
Private collection.













In December, 1916, Anita Pollitzer wrote to Georgia and told of visiting Stieglitz at 291, bringing three of O’Keeffe’s works, yet startled at seeing the painting *Blue Lines* on the gallery wall. Referring to the painting, she said “— your two dependent on each other yet perfectly separate individual lines on fine dark blue — are on the wall — nearest to his back room. I was thunderstruck! What are you putting on paper now...”

In April, 1917, Stieglitz entered two of Georgia’s works in the Society of Independent Artists exhibition. That same month, he gave O’Keeffe her first one-person show at 291. For both Stieglitz and Georgia, this was a bittersweet period in their lives. While Georgia reveled in the freedom and her love of the Texas countryside, the United States was becoming a force within the rest of the world, as it could no longer avoid being pulled into World War I. Boys in Canyon were being drafted and going off to places with such unfamiliar names as Cantigny and Belleau Wood.

Meanwhile, Stieglitz’s spirit seemed to go out of him as he struggled with seeing the hostilities between America and Germany, the country of his youth. He had spent the last ten years publishing his magazine *Camera Work*, creating his own photographic images, giving his voice to the emerging world of modern art and operating 291. Now, apparently exhaustion had set in. The O’Keeffe exhibition was the last for the gallery. As he prepared to close it following the conclusion of O’Keeffe’s exhibit, he is reported to have said, “Well, I’m through, but I’ve given the world a woman.”

Georgia’s classes ended in mid-May, the same day her show closed at 291, and there was a three-week hiatus between the winter term and summer school at WTSNC. From Stieglitz’s letters the past few months, she sensed his depression and it is possible that prompted her to take the train to New York. Or it may have been just the urge to connect with her mentor. Also thanks to her one-woman show she had sold her first painting — *Train in the Desert*, a gray, distant steam engine almost enveloped in its own billows of smoke as it floats ghostlike toward the viewer. On a Sunday morning around the end of May, she ran to the home of the president of the local bank in Canyon and convinced him to open the bank so she could withdraw funds for a train ticket.

Once she arrived in New York, Georgia lost little time in heading toward 291. When she arrived, Stieglitz was speaking to several guests at the gallery, now bare except for paintings lined up on the floor leaning against the walls. As he spoke he sensed someone standing behind him, and turned, delighted to see his favored artist. During the next few days, Stieglitz re-hung the show for Georgia to see, even though he had photographed it before taking it down. She spent several days in New York with Stieglitz. At some time during that stay, Alfred photographed the first of many images of Georgia O’Keeffe. In *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait — Hands and Watercolor*, we see her fingers almost caressing her painting of a shape reminiscent of a child, or fetus. In *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait — Hands*, her left-hand fingers form a pattern of delicately curving lines against her black dress, while the other hand almost reaches out to the viewer.

Georgia O’Keeffe at 291 shows a Georgia leaning against her watercolor, her dark eyes staring toward the middle distance, her firm mouth perfectly shaped, the hint of a dimple or start of a smile on one cheek. Alfred and Georgia also spent a pleasant holiday at Coney Island with other artists and photographers. The first inkling of Stieglitz’s feelings

Page 38
Orange and Red Streak, 1919.
Oil on canvas, 68.6 x 58.4 cm.
Philadelphia Museum of Art,
Philadelphia.

Page 39
Abstraction, 1921.
71.1 x 61 cm.
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza,
Madrid.

Page 40
From the Plains, 1919.
Oil on canvas, 70.1 x 65 cm.
Private collection.

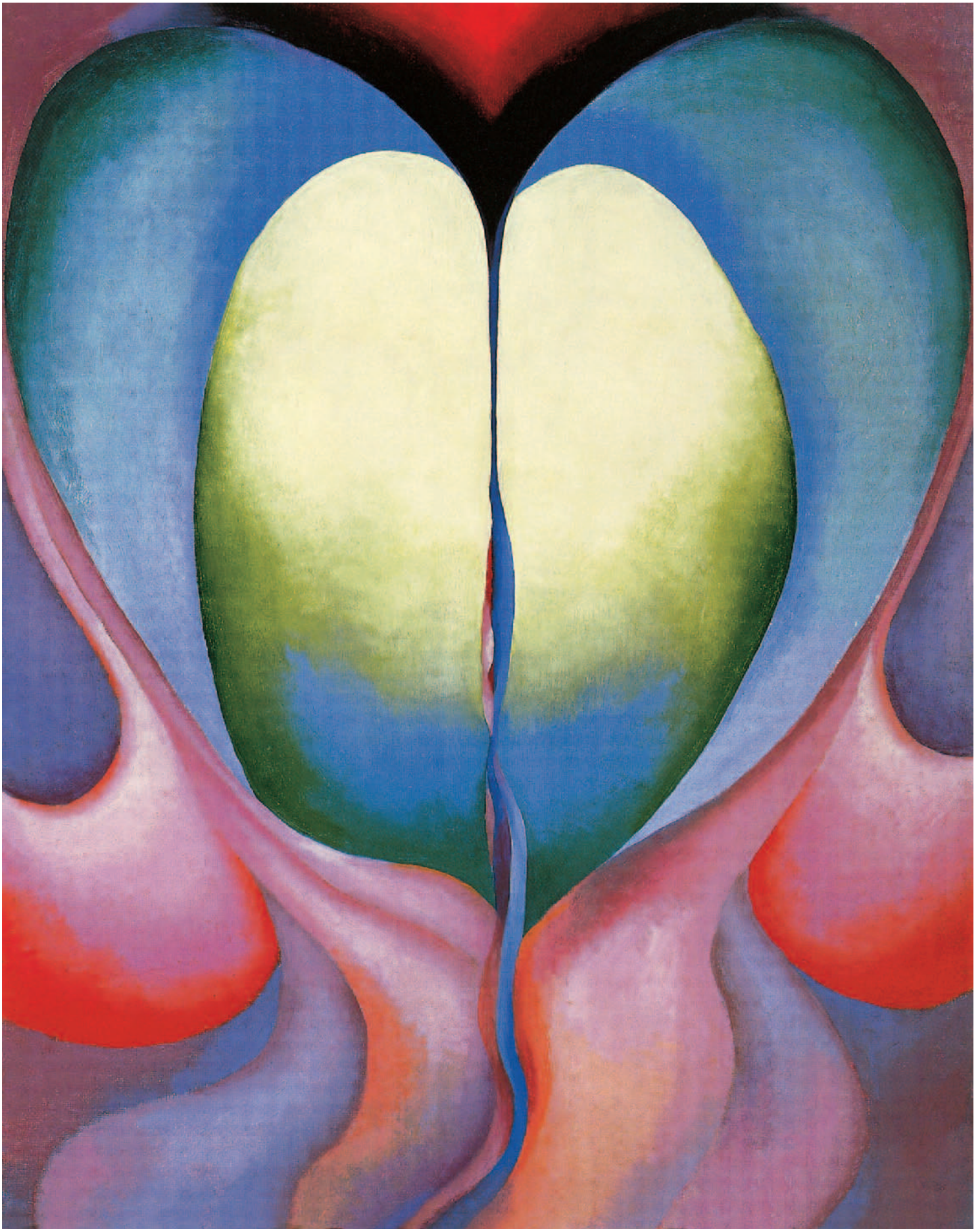
for her were shown on the trolley ride back to the city when he wrapped his large cape around her shoulders.

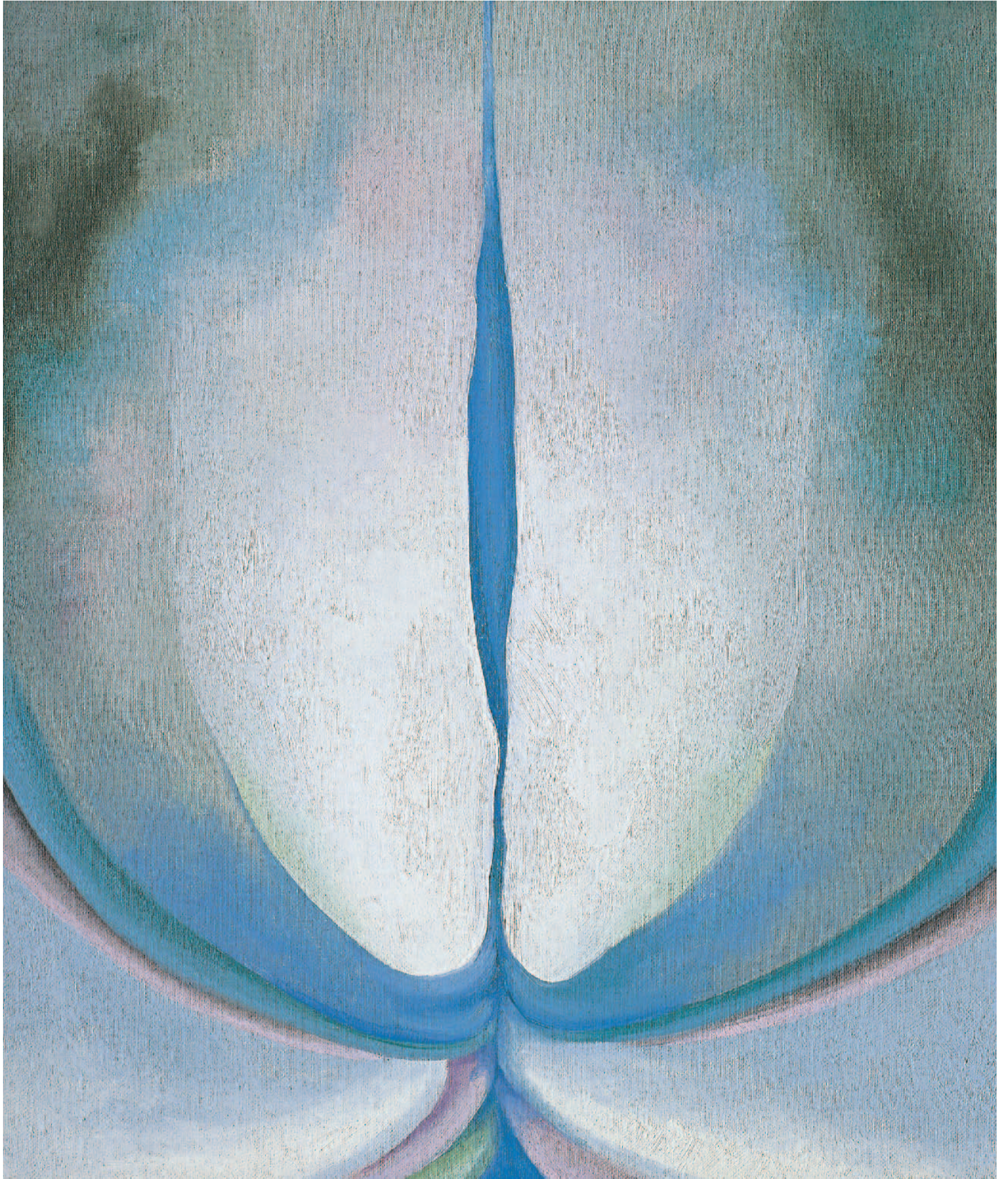
Georgia returned to teach summer school in Canyon, and passed the nights getting caught up in the dance of heat lightning, the headlights of cars as they dipped down a hill and reappeared on the horizon and the intensity of the first evening stars. At the end of summer school, she and Claudia decided to take a trip to Colorado. Because the area around Denver was flooded, the train was forced to take a less direct route through northern New Mexico, giving Georgia her first glimpse of the state whose name is so often intertwined with hers. They stayed a few days in Santa Fe, wandering among the earth-colored adobe buildings, the intense reds and yellows of the Mexican and Indian dresses, the turquoise sky giving way to incredible flamingo-colored sunsets. Even then, Georgia said she knew she'd be back.

Georgia began her fall teaching session at WTSNC but her spirit began to lag. Canyon citizens had thrown themselves into the war effort but she felt intensely neutral and leaned toward pacifism. The patriotic frenzy rampant throughout the town left her indifferent. Although most young men at WTSNC had dropped out of school to fight for their country, she managed to talk Ted Reid, a drama student who had become a close friend, into deferring his enlistment until after his graduation the following spring. Her dissension may have been fueled by the realization that she had reached her thirtieth birthday and was alone once again. Her sister Claudia had taken a student-teaching position in another small Texas town. By January, 1918, the bitter cold weather coupled with scarcity of fuel caused her to contract influenza, which had reached epidemic proportions. There were conflicting reports regarding her illness; one newspaper article stated she had taken a leave of absence due to sickness; another mentioned that she had spent some time in Amarillo. Nevertheless, through what is believed was a mutual agreement between Georgia and the school's administration, she left WTSNC in February. For the next several months, she stayed with a friend in south Texas where she had a chance to regain her strength.

Stieglitz, meanwhile, had grown more depressed. He missed Georgia and felt that it was she who embodied the spirit of the now defunct 291, and became obsessed with bringing her back to New York. His niece Elizabeth wrote to Georgia offering the use of her New York studio if only she would return but Georgia continually wavered. Finally Stieglitz hit on the idea of sending photographer Paul Strand out west to convince her to come back to New York. Strand took the train to Texas and stayed near Georgia while she grappled with the New York vs. Canyon conflict. Paul, who now had developed a crush on her, waited patiently. Finally in early June, she decided — New York it was. So Georgia and Paul boarded the train that would take her back to her mentor. When the two arrived, she greeted Stieglitz warmly, leaving Paul alone on the platform.

Stieglitz's marriage had been foundering for some time. His wife, Emmy, had little interest in her husband's projects and lacked the spirit and zest for life that Alfred found so appealing in Georgia. Ironically, while Emmy tried to keep up with the latest fashions, wearing designer gowns and carrying ruffled parasols, she possessed a dull, mediocre personality. Georgia dressed in black with a touch of white, and although to many she appeared shy or standoffish, Alfred saw a creative spark in her and someone closer to his world.





So it was no surprise to Stieglitz's artist and photographer colleagues when Georgia took up residence in his niece's small studio apartment on East 55th Street. The O'Keeffe-Stieglitz relationship flowered, thanks in part to Georgia's lack of concern for conventions or the opinions of others. And Alfred needed little encouragement to slowly free himself of his relationship to Emmy. It is very possible that they became lovers not long after Georgia arrived in New York.

Alfred's creativity began to revive, and he photographed Georgia often during those first few years. He had always been fascinated by women in black and with Georgia's manner of dress — a plain black outfit with a little white at the throat — it seemed as though it was pre-ordained that they should be together.

The Stieglitz family — Alfred's mother, Hedwig, and his siblings, their children and grandchildren — had no problem accepting Georgia into the clan. Georgia and Alfred spent a delightful few weeks at the Stieglitz summer home at Lake George in the Adirondacks, and the rest of the family, who never cared much for Emmy (many felt she was cold and mean-spirited), were delighted with Alfred's new love. Some guests, when they found that a pair of illicit lovers were staying under the same roof, left immediately, but Hedwig's loyalty to her son's lover never wavered. It took some time for Georgia to let down her guard as well, since the high-spirited Stieglitzes, in marked contrast to the Midwestern restraint of the O'Keeffes, had made her uncomfortable at first.

The vacation also gave Georgia time to paint in oils and Alfred a renewed enthusiasm for his craft. He often took joy in photographing the woman he loved. In one of his best known photographs, Georgia, looking younger than her nearly thirty-one years, looks up from a watercolor she is painting, her lips pressed tightly, her eyes bright with concentration, but looking mildly annoyed at the interruption, and wisps of hair falling across her forehead.

As the summer waned, it was time for Georgia to decide whether or not to return to Canyon. The town's conservative atmosphere now held little attraction for her, whereas Stieglitz and his love, encouragement and the excitement of New York drew her in. She also had a taste of freedom — the freedom to paint without the demands of work-related duties. Stieglitz promised that somehow he had to find a way to support her so she could pursue her craft. The decision was easy, and in the fall, Stieglitz moved into the little studio apartment on 55th Street.

Alfred and Georgia shared many similarities. He disliked deceit and so her honesty pleased him. Both insisted on working with only the best materials — Alfred used the finest photographic paper and Georgia the highest quality paints. It is believed that this is the reason her paintings have retained their brilliance over the years. "...We found we were co-workers," Stieglitz said years later. "We believed in the same things."

Life with Alfred heightened Georgia's pleasure in her sexuality as well as her ability to create. During those first few months together, she found herself using bright pastel tones and vertical shapes contrasted with supple, curved, pulsating lines. A number of writers commented on the sexual overtones in several of her works.

In *Music — Pink and Blue I*, done in 1919, a large blue void is surrounded on three sides by throbbing pink and blue streaks. *Gray Line with Lavender and Yellow*, painted in 1923, shows a strong phallic shape softened by the feminine lavenders, yellows and blues with a long narrow oval of gray running vertically up the center.

Page 44
Blue Line, c. 1919.
 Oil on canvas, 51 x 43.4 cm.
 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
 Santa Fe.

Page 46
Series I, No. 4, 1918.
 50.8 x 40.6 cm.
 Städtische Galerie im
 Lenbachhaus, Munich.

Page 47
Music, Pink and Blue II, 1919.
 Oil on canvas, 88.9 x 74 cm.
 Whitney Museum of American Art,
 New York.





The next few years were rewarding for Georgia and she most likely never regretted her decision to give up her teaching career. Yet there were times when conflicts arose, not surprising for two intensely creative types. Although Georgia believed in using the best paints she felt uncomfortable working on the expensive paper Alfred provided for her, and was less likely to experiment as she had in Texas where thin paper used for kindling in her potbellied stove was so plentiful. They often found themselves using the same subjects to photograph or paint. For example, Georgia's paintings of clouds on Lake George one summer were also seen in a series of Alfred's photographs he titled *Equivalents*. Nevertheless, their respect for and interest in each other's work never faltered.

Stieglitz found great joy in photographing his beloved Georgia in every conceivable mood, dress or pose. Whether it was Georgia waking from sleep or standing in front of her paintings, he found something new in her every time he looked into the lens. Often she posed naked. The photos showed a striking woman, her finely sculptured face, with its arched eyebrows, clearly defined mouth over a firm chin, her dark eyes staring off into space: one can understand how Alfred could so easily fall in love with her. During these sessions, the proud and stubborn Georgia could be extremely patient during the three - and four-minute long exposures.

Georgia now saw herself through another's eyes and actually became aware of the shape of her face, realizing now that it was not, as she had previously thought, round, but actually thin. She also felt that seeing her image helped her to see her individuality and to more easily express herself in painting.

In the spring of 1920, Georgia really came to know the sea for the first time when she visited friends of the Stieglitz family who had a home on the coast of Maine. Here was another fierceness borne of the wind, not unlike the winds that attacked the Texas plains and she immediately developed a love of the ever-changing surf and became fascinated by the tiniest seashell. She came to the sea several times during the following decade.

When word got out that Stieglitz had produced a new series of photographs, his friend Mitchell Kennerly, of New York's Anderson Galleries, offered two rooms for an exhibition of his work. A 145-piece retrospective of Stieglitz's work opened in February, 1921, and those that attended found Stieglitz as animated and full of new ideas as ever. About one third of the photos were of Georgia. The show held another meaning as well, since it also provided the showcase of Alfred's love for his artist and an intimate portrait of their relationship.

Although many of the photographs of Georgia were semi-nudes, the collection was enough to attract several thousand visitors to the exhibition. But for Stieglitz, the show also proved that his creativity and vision had taken on a new life, and in fact, had reached a new peak, thanks to his beloved Georgia. And the show brought a new awareness of Georgia's work to critics and the public, since many of the photos showed her paintings in the background. She became, as one critic noted, "a newspaper personality."¹³

Years later in *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (1924), critic Paul Rosenfeld wrote of the O'Keeffe images in Stieglitz's photographs: The series of pictures, filled with high cathedral air and religious elevation, constitutes one of the profoundest records of woman's being which we possess. The many scores of infinitely poignant,

Page 49

Blue and Green Music, 1919.
Oil on canvas, 58.4 x 48.3 cm.
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

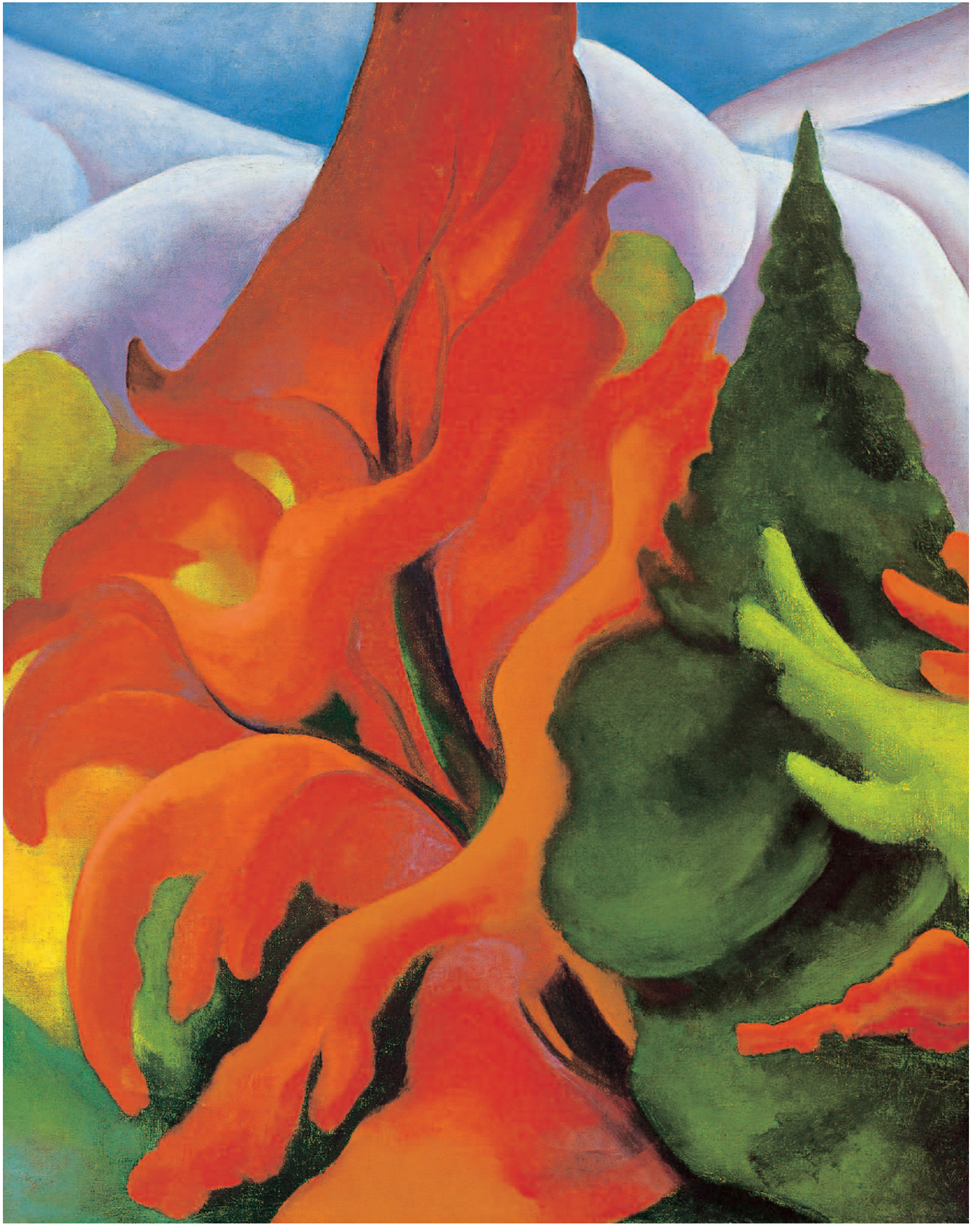
Page 50

Maple and Cedar (Red), 1923.
Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 50.8 cm.
Mr. and Mrs. Gerald P. Peters,
Santa Fe.

Page 51

Canna – Red and Orange, c. 1922.
Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm.
Private collection.









infinitely tragic, infinitely rapturous moments are from the deeps of the psyche.¹⁴ So, it is not surprising that in April of that year, Georgia's work appeared in an exhibition of modern art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. But getting Georgia's work included was not easy. Arthur Carles, an instructor at the academy, who had asked Stieglitz to help him with the exhibit, emphatically insisted that he did not want any "goddamn women in the show." The equally stubborn Stieglitz said that if he was involved with the show, Georgia's work must be included as well, or he'd bow out. Carles had no choice, and not only were three of Georgia's paintings shown — *Red*, *Pink* and *The Black Spot* — but two other women's works were hung as well. While little is known of the paintings *Red* and *Pink*, there are three versions of *The Black Spot*. The third version, *Black Spot III*, Georgia admitted were just shapes that came to mind. A long black rectangle at the top of a white and gray v-shaped shaft rises diagonally amidst blue, yellow and green softer curvilinear tonal shapes. There's a power in the way the vertical shape cuts across the canvas, one can see a resemblance between this painting and the calla lily series or even the New York skyscraper images she produced during the following decade. By summer of 1922, Georgia was in the midst of framing some of her paintings, when Alfred decided it was time once again to have a one-woman show and persuaded Mitchell Kennerly to arrange for an exhibition at the Anderson Galleries.

In getting the word out about the show, Stieglitz made sure that the critics were aware they would see something "different." A form of advance publicity helped as well when articles about Georgia appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *The Arts*, and the *New York Sun*. Paul Rosenfeld, in *Vanity Fair*, compared her work to music as though she were creating "intricate chords." The show opened in January, 1923. In a photograph of the exhibition we see paintings included *Zinnias*, subtle pink flowers cheerily rising like puppets out of the vase; abstractions similar to her *Series I* paintings in which a round, soft flesh-like shape is nearly bisected by a slim line running through the center; and another resembling one of her *Lake George* landscapes.

Most pictures exhibited were untitled, but dated and numbered and most had a softer, and gentler atmosphere than the bolder primary colored ones inspired by the Texas landscape. Unlike most artists, Georgia felt somewhat shy about having her work set out for the public to see. In her mind, her paintings were her own private expressions, her children, so to speak. Throughout her life, she saw shows as a "necessary evil."

Henry McBride, a supporter of the modern art movement, indicated in a review of the show, that Georgia now "...says anything without fear... The outstanding fact is that she is unafraid ... the result is calmness."¹⁵ In addition to garnering a large audience during its relatively short run (over 500 people a day wandered through the gallery and after deducting expenses, she cleared about \$3,500), the show helped establish Georgia O'Keeffe as an artist to be taken seriously. Now with the money she had earned she felt a renewed confidence and was eager to show her work again the following year. This time she and Stieglitz had their work exhibited simultaneously at the Anderson Galleries.

Her exhibition focused on the simpler natural forms — alligator pears, calla lilies and other flowers, Lake George and Maine landscapes and only three abstracts. It is believed that her first foray into examining, then painting large plants began with her leaf paintings sometime between 1920 and 1923. *Pattern of Leaves* (56.2 x 46 cm) is the largest and here she

Page 52
Light Iris, 1924.
 Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,
 Richmond.

Page 54
From the Lake No. 1, 1924.
 Oil on canvas, 94.3 x 78.7 cm.
 Des Moines Art Center, Iowa.

Page 55
Red, Yellow and Black Streak, 1924.
 100 x 80.6 cm.
 Musée national d'art moderne,
 Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.





depicts, not the perfect autumn leaf, brilliant orange or green, newly fallen from the tree, but a deep, red-brown one, torn through the center, and its edges ragged. Behind it are light green and whitish, less defined leaves providing a backdrop. The *Calla* series (*Calla*, and *Calla Lily in Tall Glass*), painted on board, show several versions of the lily, all with a similar style, harkening back to the lessons she learned from Dow.

Georgia takes the droplet female shape of the flower rising out of a slender vase and encloses it in a series of almost protective vertical lines and shapes. *Pink Moon and Blue Lines*, painted in 1923, in a sense, defies the laws of design, by the heavy blue vertical line with yellow thread bisecting the center, but one sees only the pink circle surrounded by a white aureole breaking through it near the top. On either side waves of pink, blending into yellow, yellow blending into blues, blues bow toward the center as if guided by an unseen breeze.

Throughout this period from the time Georgia and Alfred began their relationship in 1918, and probably earlier, she had talked of wanting children and felt her life would be incomplete without the joys of motherhood. Children had always delighted her and they seemed to be drawn to her as well, when she was a teacher, or the “neighbor lady” in Virginia when a group of youngsters accompanied her on her afternoon walks. Stieglitz had other ideas. His relationship with his own daughter, in college by that time, was at best, strained.

Not only that, but he was now 60 years old, a time when a baby in the house may have tested his patience. Moreover, he feared that the responsibilities of motherhood would drain Georgia’s energies and keep her from doing what she was meant to do — create. Apparently, Georgia, after seeing the public’s reaction to her 100-painting exhibit, realized that she could indeed be successful as an artist and devoted herself to her work, abandoning all thoughts of motherhood.

By 1922, Stieglitz’s wife, Emmy, realized that the chances of her husband returning to her were nonexistent and filed for divorce. This left Georgia free to marry her lover, yet she resisted Stieglitz’s arguments that they should now live as man and wife.

She felt they had weathered all the gossip surrounding their living arrangements, so there seemed to be no reason to go through the motions of a ceremony now. Eventually she gave in and on 11 December, 1924, the couple took the ferry to New Jersey, where the laws governing divorce and remarriage were more lenient. George Engelhard, Stieglitz’s brother-in-law came along to act as witness. The watercolorist, John Marin, met the group at the Weehawken ferry slip, drove them to the Justice of the Peace and acted as the second witness. The ceremony itself — without an exchange of rings — included only the simplest of vows. The bride, once again fiercely independent, did not utter the words “love, honor and obey.”





1925-1937

THE STIEGLITZ YEARS: GALLERIES, EXHIBITIONS, COMMISSIONS

Following the Armistice of 1918 and the onset of Prohibition, speakeasies, jazz, writers and artists sought the romantic and artistic freedom that Europe seemed to offer. The gritty, cobblestone streets of Paris seemed to offer a fertile ground where creative people could sit in outdoor cafés, discussing Freud and Cubism. Not so Georgia and Alfred, who created an American colony of their own.

Stieglitz still held court over gatherings on the fourth floor quarters of Alfred's brother's brownstone on 65th Street, where intellectuals and students talked of literature, music, the future of modern art ad infinitum. Crowds at the Stieglitz-O'Keeffe home stayed far into the early morning hours at the feet, so to speak, of the master. Alfred seemed to feed on the support of his audience, his opinions and expertise a constant banquet of ideas. Those who lounged around on the couches and floor included poet William Carlos Williams, sculptor Gaston Lachaise, writer Herbert Seligman and critic Paul Rosenfeld. Stieglitz's constant flow of rhetoric, his intense eyes, his bravado prompted one friend to describe him as a "smoldering volcano in whom fire never died out and seldom subsided."¹⁶

Georgia, reticent, shy, and given to introspection, was not always happy with this arrangement. She cultivated relationships with those who interested her and ignored the ones who she felt were pompous or shallow. Throughout her life she refused to suffer fools. Often people had the impression that she was standoffish. One winter day, a wealthy art critic from Chicago, Blanche Matthias, appeared at the apartment as a guest of Stieglitz. At first Georgia was wary of her and barely spoke during the visit. Blanche persisted and eventually Georgia accepted an invitation to lunch. The luncheon conversation was strained until Georgia noticed a snowstorm outside and suddenly became excited about the intensity of the wind and swirling flakes, threw down the barriers and from then on the two became lifelong friends.

Early in 1925, Stieglitz was ready now to showcase the artists whose work he had supported since the 291 days. Again, Mitchell Kennerly loaned space on the Anderson Galleries' top floor for the Stieglitz-engineered *Seven Americans* exhibition. A total of 159 works by Stieglitz, photographer Paul Strand, watercolorist John Marin, and painters Arthur Dove, Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and of course, Georgia.

It was at this show that the first of her giant flower paintings were exhibited. Georgia's love of nature and her excitement in the unfurling of a flower bud, delighting in the subtlety of its color, and changing shape, inspired her to paint flowers so large they dominated the wall. Works such as *Petunia and Coleus*, *Petunia No. 2* and the *Calla* series were created, Georgia said, to force people to sit up and take notice of nature.

Page 58
New York Street with Moon, 1925.
121.9 x 76.2 cm.
Colección Carmen
Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

Page 60

New York, Night, 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 48.3 cm.
Nebraska Art Association.

Page 61

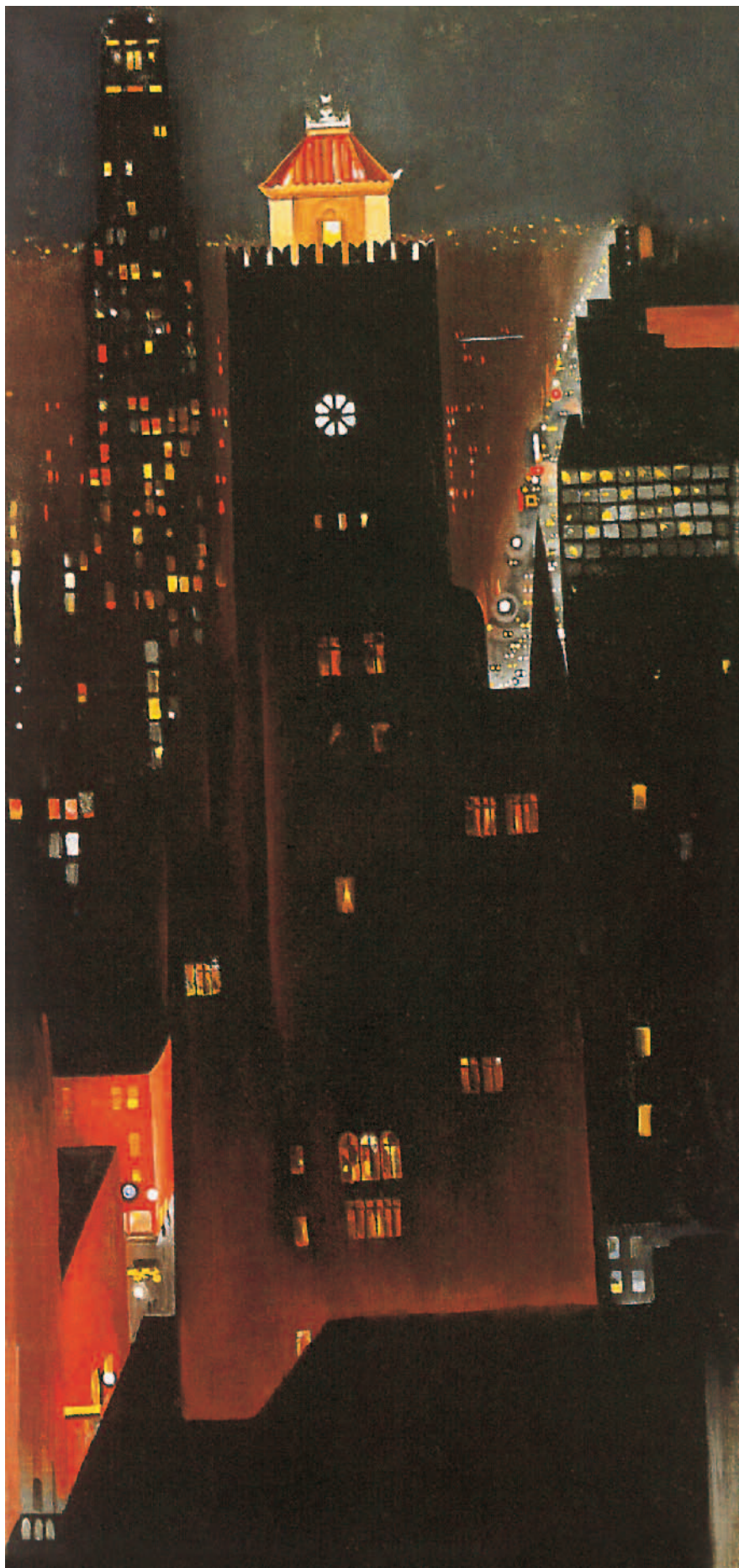
Radiator Building, Night, New York,
1927.
Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 76.2 cm.
Fisk University, Nashville.

Page 62

The Shelton with Sunspots, 1926.
Oil on canvas, 123.2 x 76.8 cm.
The Art Institute of Chicago,
Chicago.

Page 63

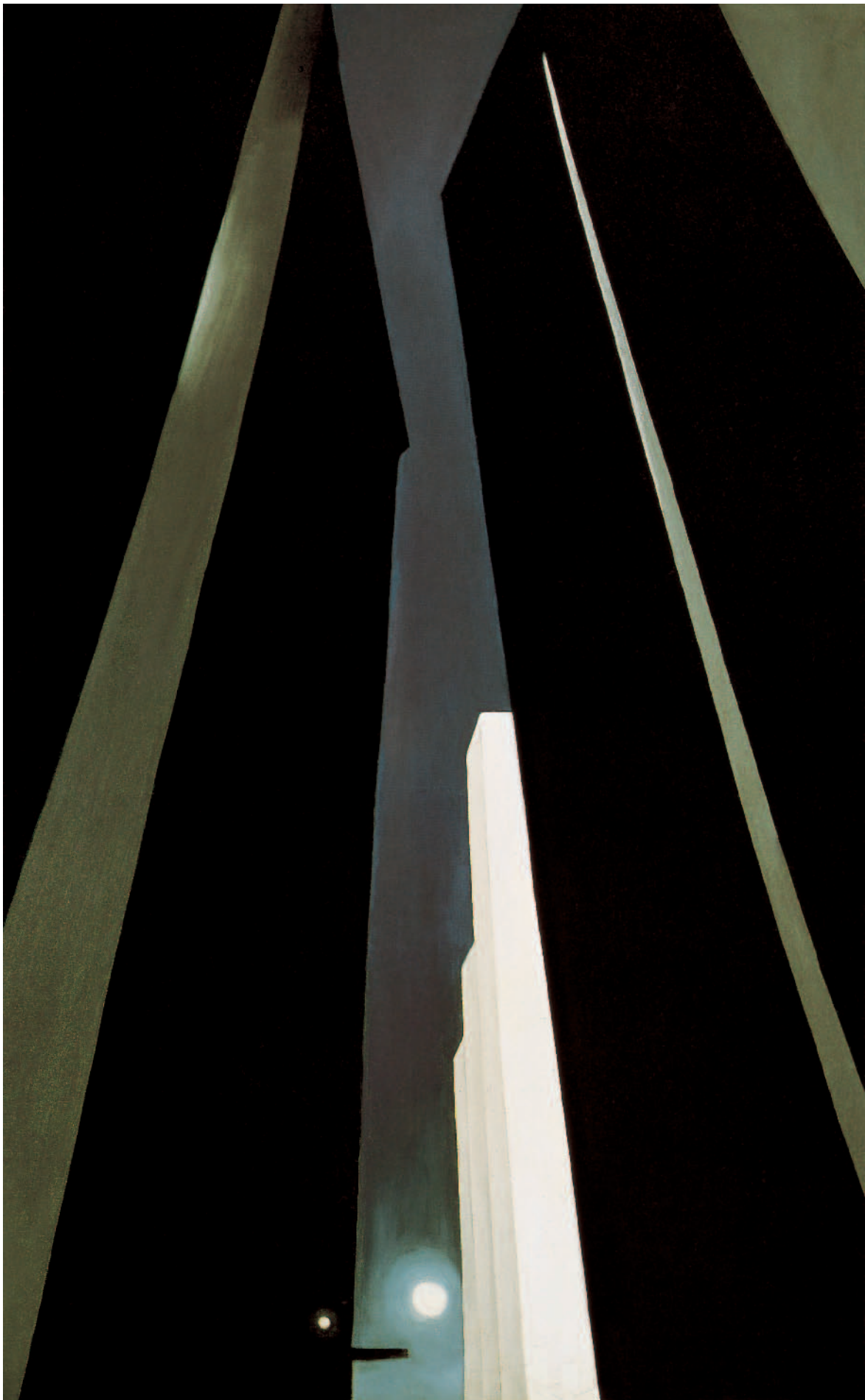
Street, New York I, 1926.
Oil on canvas, 122.2 x 75.9 cm.
The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation,
Gift of the Burnett Foundation.

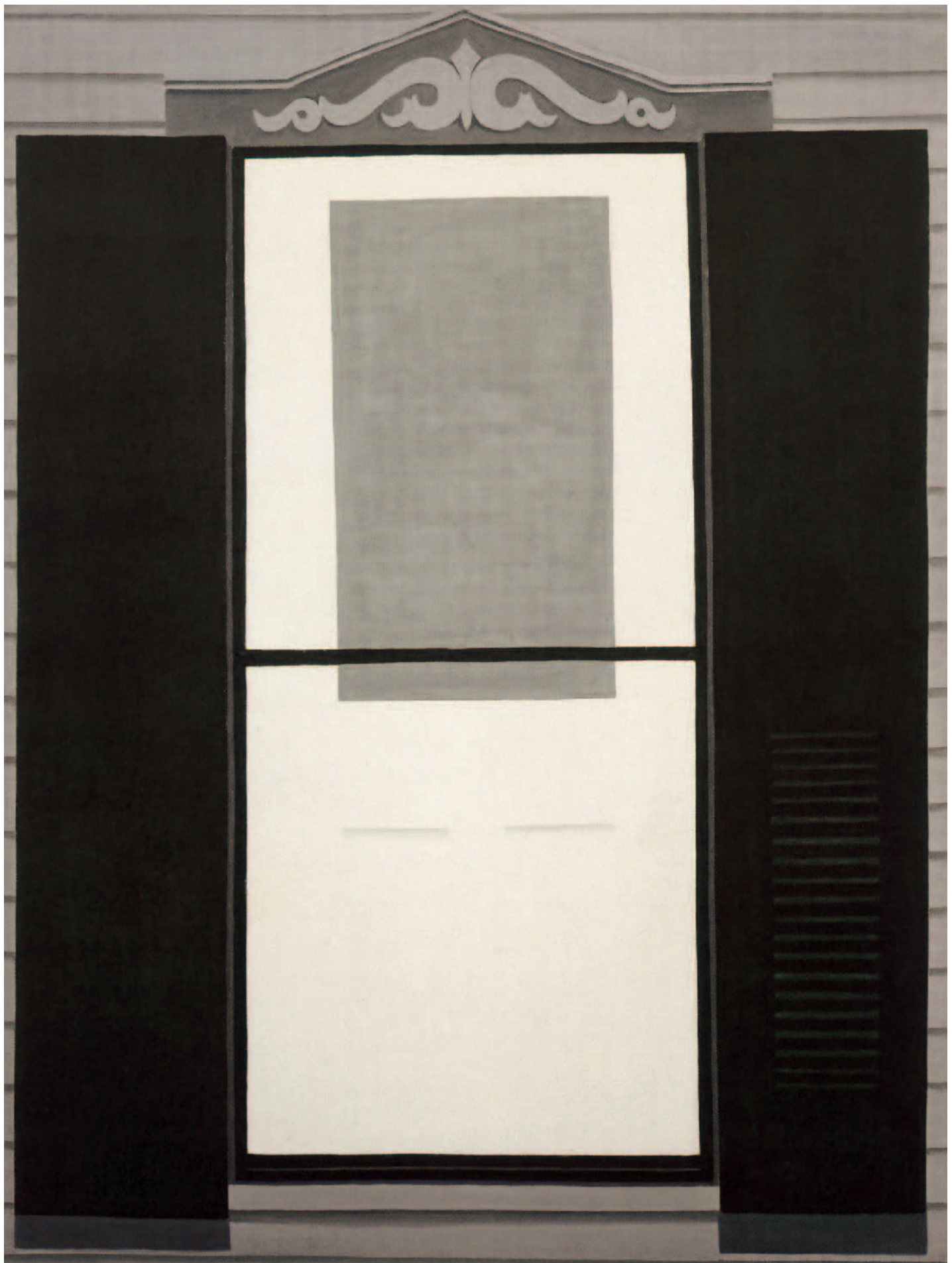












They could not ignore the huge buildings forcing themselves into the city skyline; nor, she felt, should they be unaware of the delicacy of a flower. In *Petunia and Coleus*, no petal scallop is missed, the green veins emanating from the center run the spectrum of pure green to a delicate yellow, through the pink petal, which is not just pink, but also varying degrees of white. Alfred had reservations about this new direction, even to the point of asking her point blank if she was really serious about showing them.

Once the show opened, the critics lauded this new way of seeing. One reviewer said that she had “outblazed the work of the men around her.”¹⁷ Critic Royal Cortissoz, who had criticized her 1923 exhibition for its lack of “intelligible elements of design,” now had to admit “she shows more [craftsmanship] than she has ever shown before... The technical quality that commands respect.”¹⁸

Male critics described her work in glowing, esoteric verbiage, as though they were as in love with the phrases they created as the paintings they described. Descriptions such as the one written by music critic Paul Rosenfeld in an article in *Dial* in 1921: “...In her, the ice of Polar Regions and the heat of tropical spring tides meet and mingle. Greenland’s icy mountain abuts in India’s coral strand...”¹⁹ did more than embarrass her. But she couldn’t deny that all this exposure helped — her painting *The Black Spot* had accompanied the article and *The Dial*, after showcasing male artists month after month, had finally seen fit to feature a woman. They made her feel as though she was being “invaded.”

She also resented the sexual connotations people attached to her paintings, especially during the 1920’s when Freudian theories became a form of what today might be termed “pop psychology.” In *Calla Lily with Roses*, it has been observed that the lily with its stamen reflects Georgia’s uninhibited pre-occupation with sex, especially since the lily dominates the painting while the feminine rose hovers in the background. Eventually, on the advice of journalist Hutchins Hapgood, she adopted the philosophy that the reviews said more about the reviewer’s sexual proclivities than they did about her, but even years later, she threatened to stop painting if people continued their obsession with connecting Freudian premises to her work.

She also took issue with the “woman artist” label attached to her work. To be sure, there were other female painters at the time, but none of Georgia’s stature. Pre-twentieth century convictions prevailed: that a woman’s place was in the home, that motherhood took too much time away from pursuing the arts and a childless woman could not possibly possess the same deep-seated feelings as one who had experienced the miracle of birth. Stieglitz was there to dispute this and insisted there was no difference between the male or female creative process.

Stieglitz longed for the 291 era where he could display and publicize artists he felt deserving of recognition. Following the *Seven Americans* exhibit, he asked Kennerly if there were space he could rent where works could be seen on a regular basis. Kennerly agreed, and a small room on the third floor, surrounded by expensive shops was given over to Stieglitz’s select group in December, 1925.

It was officially known as the Intimate Gallery, but the regulars who gathered there called it simply “the room.” The gallery’s décor was devoid of all but the bare essentials: a small crystal ball sat on a table, and a few pieces of utilitarian furniture were scattered about the room.

Page 64
City Night, 1926.
Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 76.2 cm.
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,
Minneapolis.

Page 65
Lake George Window, 1929.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 72.2 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Page 67
Ranchos Church, 1929.
Oil on canvas, 61.3 x 91.8 cm.
Phillips collection, Washington, D.C.

Page 68
Black Hollyhock and Blue Larkspur,
1929.
Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 101.5 cm.
Private collection.

Page 69
My Autumn, 1929.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
Private Collection, Photo courtesy
Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe,
New Mexico.













Black carpet covered the floor, dark oak woodwork surrounded the walls, which Georgia, the decorator, covered with white cheesecloth. In March of 1925, Stieglitz's brother sold his brownstone, and Georgia and Alfred were forced to move. Eventually, they found a small apartment on East 58th Street, but a skyscraper known as the Shelton Hotel was being erected a few blocks away, and as Georgia watched the work progress, even riding the elevators to the observation deck on top, she thought the quiet away from the city's noise might be a perfect place to live. The idea of looking out the window at the vast landscape of spires and clouds appealed to both her and Alfred. So, in 1925, they took an apartment on the top floor and lived there for the next ten years.

This venue, such a departure from the microcosm of a flower or the dramatic flatness of the Texas prairie, sent her in another direction, one where she caught the geometric romance of buildings reaching toward a sun journeying toward the horizon, as in *Shelton With Sunspots*, or *East River from the Thirtieth Story of the Shelton Hotel, New York*, in which the New York urban landscape with its precise arrangements of buildings edges toward the river and fades into the horizon. The first painting she did after moving to the Shelton was *New York Street with Moon* (p. 58), a deep red block rising behind a glowing street lamp, the distant moon riding on clouds.

In February 1926, Georgia was asked to address the National Women's Party Convention in Washington, D.C. The party provided a means by which women sought to achieve equality and recognition and was instrumental in securing the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granting voting rights for women. Alice Paul, one of the party's leaders, drafted the first version of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. Speaking at the convention, Georgia gave the women a practical approach to finding their independence. She advised them to break away from the centuries-old custom of dependence on men for financial support and concentrate on their abilities to make a living on their own.

Her inspiration obviously came from her own life, and while most women were not blessed with her talent and the influence and support of an Alfred Stieglitz, it was her work and efforts to forge a new way of seeing that had caught her mentor's attention in the first place. But her feminist views also most likely sprang from discussions with Arthur MacMahon, her close friend during the University of Virginia days. He had introduced her to ideas of men such as Floyd Dell whose book *Women As World Builders* also urged women to strike out on their own and concentrate on using their talents in order to partner with men.

Another visible aspect of Georgia's feminism and breaking with convention was her choice of clothing. She continued to wear black with touches of white, even when she could easily afford to shop for the latest style outfits in color. She sewed most of her simpler white garments, as a form of relaxation and to clear her mind so she could think. Yet the material she used was the finest: blouses were made of silk; her black coats and gloves were fashioned out of the best wool and leather. Over the years, when questioned on her choice of clothing, she gave several different answers. If she wore a color such as red, she'd have to live up to it, act with abandon; or she did not have time to shop and labor over decisions about what to purchase; or, quite simply, black drew attention away from her.

Page 70
White Iris, c. 1926.
 Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.8 cm.
 Private collection, New York.

Page 71
Two Calla Lilies on Pink, 1928.
 Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
 Philadelphia Museum of Art,
 Philadelphia.

Page 72
Abstraction White Rose II, 1927.
 Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm.
 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
 Santa Fe.

Page 74
Black Petunias and White Morning Glory, 1926.
 Oil on canvas, 91 x 75.5 cm.
 Cleveland Museum of Art,
 Cleveland.

Page 75
Black Iris III, 1926.
 Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 75.9 cm.
 Metropolitan Museum of Art,
 New York.









The summer of 1926 was again spent at the Stieglitz home at Lake George. Alfred's mother had passed away a few years earlier and the large house that had welcomed so many family members and friends, was sold, but Stieglitz family members joined forces to fix up a rundown farmhouse on the property that had been used for overflow guests. Georgia and Alfred spent half the year there from early spring until the chilly fall winds told them it was time to return to the relative warmth of their city apartment.

Though Georgia was often distracted and often felt annoyed as guests dropped in during the warm summer months, she found privacy in a small shanty up the hill from the farmhouse. The structure also had a platform facing north giving her the "studio" and solitude she needed to work. That year, she created the *Shell and Old Shingle* series, oil painted mostly on canvas, but at least one on a board. The clam shell in the paintings was one she had picked up years ago on one of her many visits to York Beach in Maine. The shingle was a piece of discarded roofing left after the barn had been repaired. Georgia found the contrasting shape of the weather-beaten shingle provided the right contrast to the delicacy of the shell. The green leaf gave her the brilliant color she needed.

The first few in the series began as realistic images, the rough-hewn almost geometric edges of the shingle rising behind the organic, lacy shape of the shell and the soft lines of the leaf. With *Shell and Old Shingle VI* she had reduced the composition to its basic lines, resulting in a more graceful shell, resembling a Brancusi sculpture. *Shell and Old Shingle VII* became a landscape, the shingle on its side, resembling more a misty mountain than a piece of building material. Georgia's creative output while at Lake George was prolific, sometimes finishing a painting in less than a day, but the fall months provided her with the time (summer visitors had long since left) and color to give her inspiration she needed. Among the paintings she produced in the 1920s were *Lake George With Crows* (not unlike her Texas-era *Canyon With Crows* (p. 37), and several *Lake George Barn* oils). One of her first Lake George buildings, *The Shanty*, painted in 1922, shows a deep red weathered building set against the green rolling hills.

The building's one window, intense black surrounded by a stark white frame, seems to float away from the rest of the structure. There was a spirit of competitiveness in this work as well. In her autobiography, Georgia says she viewed the shanty and realized, "I can paint one of those dismal-colored paintings like the men. I think just for fun I will try — all low-toned and dreary with the tree beside the door."²⁰ *Red Barn, Lake George*, done in 1921, possesses a charming simplicity, as its shapes and textures are reduced to the minimum, capturing the spirit of early American art; at the same time she calls attention to the sky, the brilliant hovering clouds overhead.

By the late 1920s, there were few times when an O'Keeffe painting was not being shown somewhere in New York. In January and February, 1927 she exhibited at the Intimate Gallery. During the summer of that year, the Brooklyn Museum had a small retrospective of her work. And from December through January, she was part of a group exhibition at the Opportunity Gallery. Georgia was now earning a very comfortable living as an artist, painting to please herself and gaining public approval as well. She again exhibited at the Intimate Gallery in the winter of 1928. Time magazine featured a story on it, but one sale from the exhibition stunned her, earning far more than she had altogether the previous year.

Page 76
Black and Purple Petunias, 1925.
Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 63.5 cm.
Private collection.

Page 77
Oriental Poppies, 1928.
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 101.9 cm.
Weisman Art Museum,
Minneapolis.

Page 79
Single Lily with Red, 1928.
Oil on wood, 30.5 x 15.9 cm.
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York.









A Frenchman offered to buy six of her small *Calla Lily* paintings done in 1923. Stieglitz possessed a certain snobbishness when it came to selling an O’Keeffe painting; the buyer had to be “worthy” of the work, and perhaps he felt that the gentleman had no appreciation for the paintings’ intrinsic value. Stieglitz picked a price of \$25,000.

The client agreed. Stieglitz was as much overjoyed by the fact that a European had purchased an American work of art as the money Georgia received for it. Not only that, but unlike many Americans Georgia’s art education took place in the United States; this should make Americans aware, Stieglitz claimed, that there were artists outside of France. While the newspapers proclaimed her an overnight success, in the interviews that followed, Georgia emphasized that it took years of study, soul-searching and working to earn a livable wage to get where she was.

Georgia stayed only a short time at Lake George the summer of 1928. She was uncomfortable with the publicity surrounding the sale of the calla lily paintings. She also felt that in a sense, she had exhausted all that Lake George had to offer. In July, she returned to her Wisconsin roots to visit aunts and other family members. It is known that she found inspiration in the Midwestern prairie and produced paintings of barns and silos in central Wisconsin, although the paintings themselves have not been found.

Longing for the freedom and mood swings of the sea, Georgia also traveled to Maine sometime during that year and painted *Wave, Night*, a gentle line of foam against the intense blackness of the ocean, the sky broken by the tiniest beacon of a lighthouse on the shore. Alfred had no desire to give up his New York-Lake George cycle, and stayed behind at the Stieglitz family home.

In September, however, Alfred’s health problems, consisting of varying aches and pains over the years had grown steadily worse, and he suffered an attack of angina. Although caring for him left Georgia little time to paint, she managed to put together a show for the Intimate Gallery in February 1929. Most of the paintings were not created the year before, as in other exhibits but ones done years earlier. Critics were less ecstatic than they had been for her previous showings, and some kindly stated that perhaps she was going through a period of transition.

The winter of 1928-29 Georgia began to feel the stirrings of a need to reconnect with the West she loved, thanks to a visit from her friend Dorothy Brett who had brought along a couple from Taos, New Mexico — Tony Luhan, a Pueblo Indian and his wife, Mabel Dodge Luhan. At Dorothy’s repeated urgings, and with Stieglitz’s reluctant blessing, Georgia finally decided to spend a summer in the west accompanied by Paul Strand’s wife, Rebecca. On 1 May, the women boarded the train for New Mexico.

After a stop in Chicago to visit Georgia’s brother Alexius, they continued on. Georgia found the country even more exciting than she remembered from her first visit out west, and, enthralled with the landscape, she sat on a suitcase in the center of the observation car so she could see out of both sides of the train. Mabel Luhan and Dorothy Brett were in town at the same time and after a visit to the corn dance at nearby San Felipe Pueblo, they accepted Luhan’s invitation to stay at her home near Taos.

The gatherings at the Luhan home were far more lively in than those at which Stieglitz presided over in New York. Taos had already attained the image of an artists’ colony,

Page 80

Jack-in-the-Pulpit III, 1930.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.

Page 81

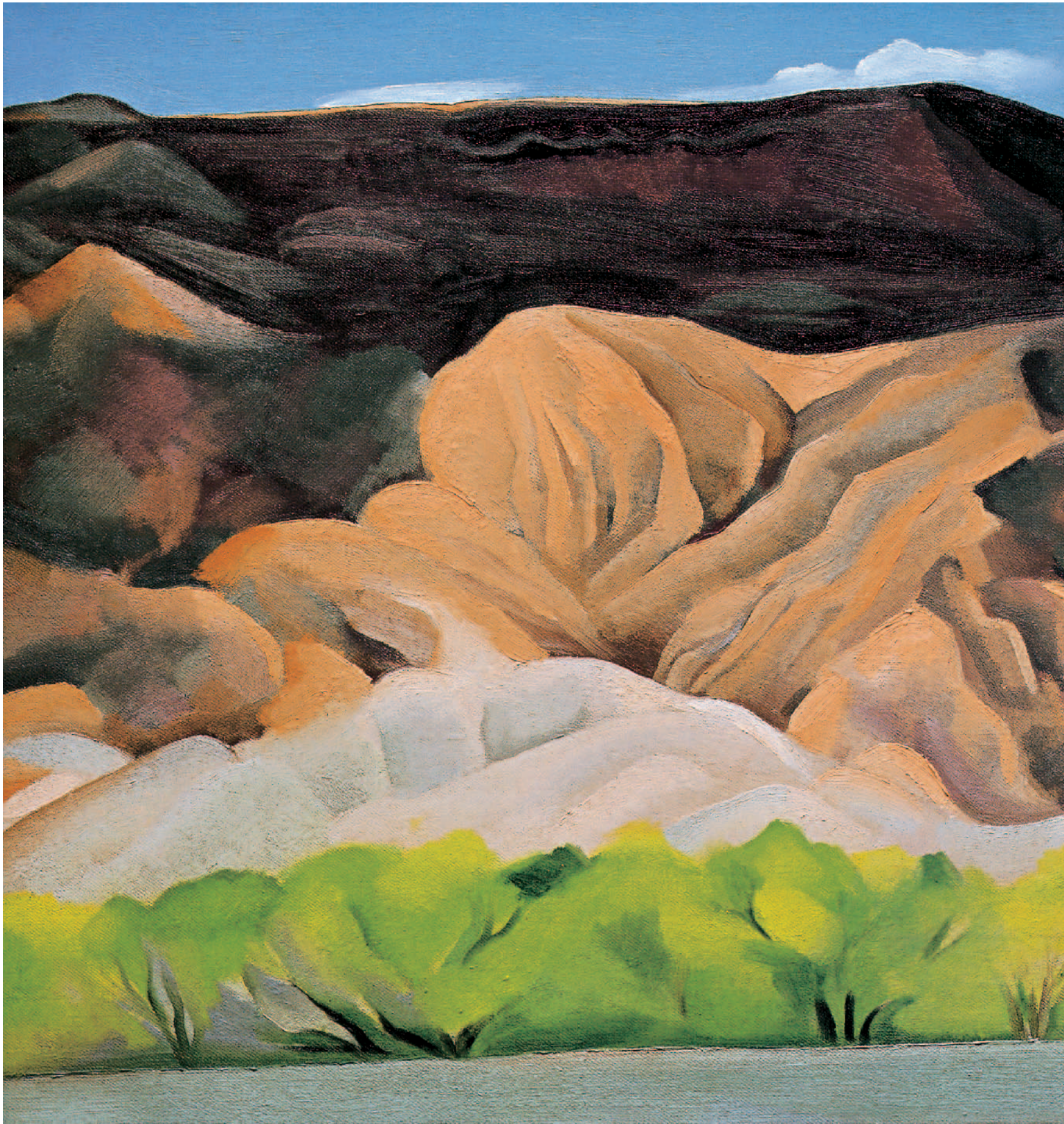
Jack-in-the-Pulpit IV, 1930.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.

Page 82

*Jack-in-the-Pulpit Abstraction —
No. 5*, 1930.
121.9 x 76.2 cm.
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.









most of whom were transplants from the East. Brightly colored Indian blankets, a blazing fire and several bottles of wine added to the festivities. Georgia enjoyed evenings with Spud Johnson, publisher of the local magazine, *Laughing Horse*. Photographer Ansel Adams, working on a project for the Sierra Club, was a frequent guest. She met Daniel Catton Rich, who worked at the Art Institute of Chicago. Years later, he invited her to exhibition in a retrospective at the museum. Often Tony Luhan arranged to have his fellow Pueblo tribesmen perform dancing exhibitions.

Other evenings Georgia rode horseback to the edge of the mountains, feeling not tiny but in synchronization with the wideness, the almost endless horizon. Eventually she felt the need for more freedom and time to get in touch with the land on her own. She purchased a black Model A Ford in Taos and several people, including Dorothy Brett and Tony Luhan, took turns teaching her to drive. Most of her instructors came back from the lessons in a state of nervous agitation, for Georgia was, as Mabel Luhan described, “a demon driver.”

But more significant was the fact that she found new subject matter, a new vision, and a wealth of new paintings. Her first *Black Crosses* were painted during that summer. The crosses that appeared across the landscape were planted by the devout Spanish Catholics (*penitentes*) as they systematically occupied the Indian territory in the nineteenth century. In *Black Cross, New Mexico*, the black shape so completely dominates the picture that the viewer may feel he is standing just behind it gazing at the last vestiges of the retreating sunset beyond the rolling, smoke-like hills. *Ranchos Church* (p. 67), also painted that year, emphasizes the sparse adobe architecture that seems to rise out of the New Mexico desert.

When Georgia returned to Lake George in September, she was delighted to find that Alfred was stronger and in much better health. They spent a few days in Maine, before returning to the lake, and finally in November, they closed up the cottage and made the trip back to their New York apartment. Stieglitz was so impressed with her New Mexico paintings, that he insisted she exhibit them in a group show, *Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans* at the newly opened Museum of Modern Art. Although the show provided a fair amount of publicity for O’Keeffe and Stieglitz’s other artists, critical reaction was generally lukewarm.

Earlier that year, the Intimate Gallery had closed when the building that housed the Anderson Gallery was sold. Stieglitz put the paintings into storage, but his friends and colleagues knew that as long as Stieglitz lived, he needed to have a home to showcase the work of his artists, as well as a sanctuary where ideas could be freely exchanged.

Shortly after the *Nineteen Americans* exhibition, in December, 1929, space for his new gallery was secured in a modern building on Madison Avenue and 53rd Street and named An American Place. Stieglitz, determined to see that the gallery had its own image, and to keep it from resembling commercial enterprises, printed a card indicating what the space would not offer. Items on the list included: no formal press views, cocktail parties, advertising, “isms,” theories, games. The message at the bottom nevertheless stated that “The doors of An American Place are ever open to all.”

As with the Intimate Gallery, An American Place’s décor was minimal. Window shades were raised to let in as much light as possible onto the stark white walls. Eventually some walls along with the floors, pipes and radiators were painted a light gray allowing the

Page 84

Jimson Weed, 1932.

Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 101.6 cm.

The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation,
Gift of the Burnett Foundation.

Page 85

Abstraction — Alexius, 1928.

Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm.

Private collection, Switzerland.

Page 86-87

Out Back of Marie’s IV, 1931.

Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 76.2 cm.

The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation,
Gift of the Burnett Foundation.

Page 89

From the Faraway Nearby, 1937.

Oil on canvas, 91.2 x 102 cm.

Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.





photos and paintings to look as though there they weren't hanging on the walls, but suspended in space.

Most of the paintings Georgia exhibited at the gallery in February, 1930 were those she had created in New Mexico. The show, which included such subjects as a Taos pueblo, the black crosses, and a carving of the Virgin, created quite a stir among the critics who a few years earlier thought her work had grown stale.

During the years 1930 through 1932, Georgia exhibited in the winter, spent the spring in Lake George readying the house for Alfred, and painted in New Mexico in the summer. The Jack-in-the-Pulpit series was painted while at Lake George, but all the while she felt the stirrings of a need to return to the west. Upper New York State and New England were lovely, but New Mexico was where she felt she truly belonged. Alfred wasn't pleased with her decision to forgo the lengthy stay at Lake George, but knew that the Taos area was so vital to her art and seemed to accept this new life cycle with a little more equanimity.

Georgia created her first skull paintings in the summer of 1930. The bleached animal remains caught her eye as she drove over the desert and she found them as delicate and complex as any of the seashells she had found on the New England shore. Moreover, they epitomized the desert, far more than any massive painting attempting to give the feeling of the vastness of space ever could. Most of all, she wanted to bring back to the east parts of the land that had also become part of her, so she could continue to keep it with her during the rest of the year. Throughout that summer she gathered the sections of carcasses, skulls, limbs, etc. until she amassed enough to send back to Lake George. Stieglitz must have thought her quite mad when the package arrived and he opened it to discover these skeletal objects, surrounded by cloth flowers to keep the bones from breaking.

Georgia returned to Lake George in September 1930 and found Stieglitz despondent and complaining. The country was moving toward the worst years of the Depression, making it virtually impossible for artists to find patrons; the government was working on ways to subsidize the Arts through the Works Progress Administration, still in its planning stages. But Alfred only saw this as an indication that only those with mediocre talents would be funded. He had no desire to travel, and his circle of friends seemed to be diminishing, while Georgia's was increasing.

Although she may have felt impatient at times with Alfred's moods, this did not prevent her from taking up the paintbrush. She painted horse and cow skulls, the thought running through her mind was, as she put it, "The Great American Thing." Georgia noticed that in cultural circles, people talked of Great American novels, poetry, plays, but never the Great American painting.

Her *Cow's Skull — Red, White and Blue* (p. 92) was not, she knew, her best, but she wanted to call people's attention to the country she loved by adding the red stripes on either side. But while the brilliant red, white and blue background is distracting, the eye is still drawn to the lace-like edges of the fragments where the bone has worn away. There is a lifelike facet to the tiny staring "eye holes" giving the skull a macabre quality.

In 1932, to the anger and disappointment of many American artists Mexican Diego Rivera and other foreigners were commissioned to produce the mural for the Radio City Music Hall. For the past few years, Georgia herself had sought to create murals in public buildings.

Page 90
Summer Days, 1936.
Oil on canvas, 92 x 76.6 cm.
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York.

Page 92
Cow's Skull: Red, White and Blue,
1931.
Oil on canvas, 101.3 x 91.1 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.

Page 93
Mule's Skull with Pink Poinsettias,
1936.
Oil on canvas, 101.9 x 72.2 cm.
Private collection.





Then the Museum of Modern Art invited over 60 artists and photographers — Georgia among them — to enter their works in a competition for the massive walls of the museum's new headquarters. Artists were required to submit a drawing for a three-part mural and complete one panel in a nearly impossible six week time frame. After the entries were completed and submitted, most were criticized by reviewers — some because of the artists' inexperience, others because of their political overtones. O'Keeffe's entry of "Manhattan" resembled some of her New York paintings (skyscrapers tilted, a moon hanging over a building, dancing roses). Her submission resulted in a request to do a mural surrounding the hall's nine round mirrors as well as the second mezzanine powder room. Georgia was thrilled, and signed a contract to produce the work for the incredibly low rate of \$15,000 — but this was the Depression. Stieglitz, angered, did not see it that way. He felt she had sold out to democratic interests, and moaned about the money spent on Rockefeller Center, while funding-poor art museums were left to shift for themselves. He disputed the contract, even appearing at the office of the designer in charge to state that Georgia was "a child and not responsible for her actions."²¹

In the early summer, 1932, Georgia decided to visit the Gaspé Peninsula in Canada accompanied by her niece Georgia Engelhard. For nearly three weeks, the two drove through the lush green countryside, dotted with whitewashed farmhouses and barns, and slept in barren little guesthouses at night. Georgia's niece took pleasure in finding subject matter for her aunt to paint, and when they reached the rocky windswept coast with the swirling tides, Georgia was so taken with the wonder of it all, she said she felt as inspired as she had in New Mexico.

Nature Forms, Gaspé evokes the violent pounding surf, the swirling tides in the eddies whirling among rocks and the gray-green churning of the water. Yet there's a gentleness in the curved lines that soften its strong diagonals. She was also fascinated by the mariners' crosses, memorials to sailors lost at sea. Unlike the massive black *penitente* crosses she painted in New Mexico, these were gentler ones, some with hearts and star-shaped centers as in *Cross with Red Heart* (p. 101). The chilly weather finally got the better of her and Georgia returned to Lake George in September. For the next several weeks, she traveled to New York to check the progress on the mural site. In November as she and Donald Deskey, the project's head designer, were inspecting the walls, a portion of the canvas began to peel away, indicating shoddy craftsmanship. Georgia became so upset; she stormed out, crying hysterically.

The incident triggered a lengthy illness caused by more than a mere problem with the canvas. Stieglitz had over the past few years formed a deep friendship with Dorothy Norman, the wife of an heir to the Sears Roebuck fortune. Like Georgia years earlier Dorothy posed for Stieglitz at varying times in the nude. She was also instrumental in saving An American Place from closing when the three year lease expired in 1932. Thanks to her fund-raising efforts, the lease was extended for another three years and Dorothy officially became its business manager, adding to the secretarial and bookkeeping duties she'd taken on the previous year. After Stieglitz showed Dorothy how to take pictures, she photographed him and the American Place. Later, he helped publish her poetry on love and religion.

Possibly because of the tension between her and Alfred the previous months, and their disagreements over the mural negotiations, coupled with Stieglitz's relationship with





Dorothy Norman, in December 1932 Georgia began to suffer headaches, a severe sensitivity to noise and fear of crowds. This eventually led to appetite loss and shortness of breath and even an inability to walk. By February 1933 she entered the hospital to be treated for psychoneurosis.

Nevertheless, she had produced a small number of paintings to exhibit in the American Place show for the winter of 1933: the white flowers created for the Music Hall powder room, and the crosses painted in Canada. The critics hailed the show as an indication of O'Keeffe's enthusiastic vision, sense of beauty, and an artist that possessed a seemingly effortless technique.

Following her release from the hospital, Georgia immediately departed for Bermuda at the invitation of Marjorie Content and her daughter, friends of the Stieglitz family. The warm pinks of the buildings, white sand and clear blue waters of the small island just off the coast of the Carolinas cheered Georgia, helped her gain weight and put color in her face. She stayed until May, at which time she returned to New York and from there to Lake George with Alfred. Following her doctor's orders, she spent the summer resting, occasionally riding along the countryside, but painted little. In the fall, she returned to New York and stayed long enough to renew an acquaintance with writer Jean Toomer, a man she'd known for several years. But she still found the noise and bustle of the city disturbing and went back to Lake George. Toomer visited her there, and they spent their days driving over the ice-covered lake and in the evenings he read her excerpts from his manuscripts. Although the two shared a comfortable and perhaps intimate friendship, Georgia took time after Christmas to return to the Midwest for a brief period, then to New York to get ready for her 1934 exhibit, a retrospective of her work done between 1915 and 1927. She had produced very little work the previous year, but the show itself attracted the attention of another woman whose name is synonymous with the flash and rowdiness of the 1920s — Zelda Fitzgerald. The wife of one of the greatest novelists of the time had defied her doctor, and traveled from the mental institution to New York to see a show of her own drawings (which clearly resembled some of Georgia's work) and also visited O'Keeffe's exhibition.

Sales from Georgia's show were far more successful than the previous year. The Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased a painting created in Taos, *Black Hollyhock*, *Blue Larkspur* (p. 68) - a massive velvety black image of petals nests on top of a violet flower. A bright yellow star shape stares out of the darkness.

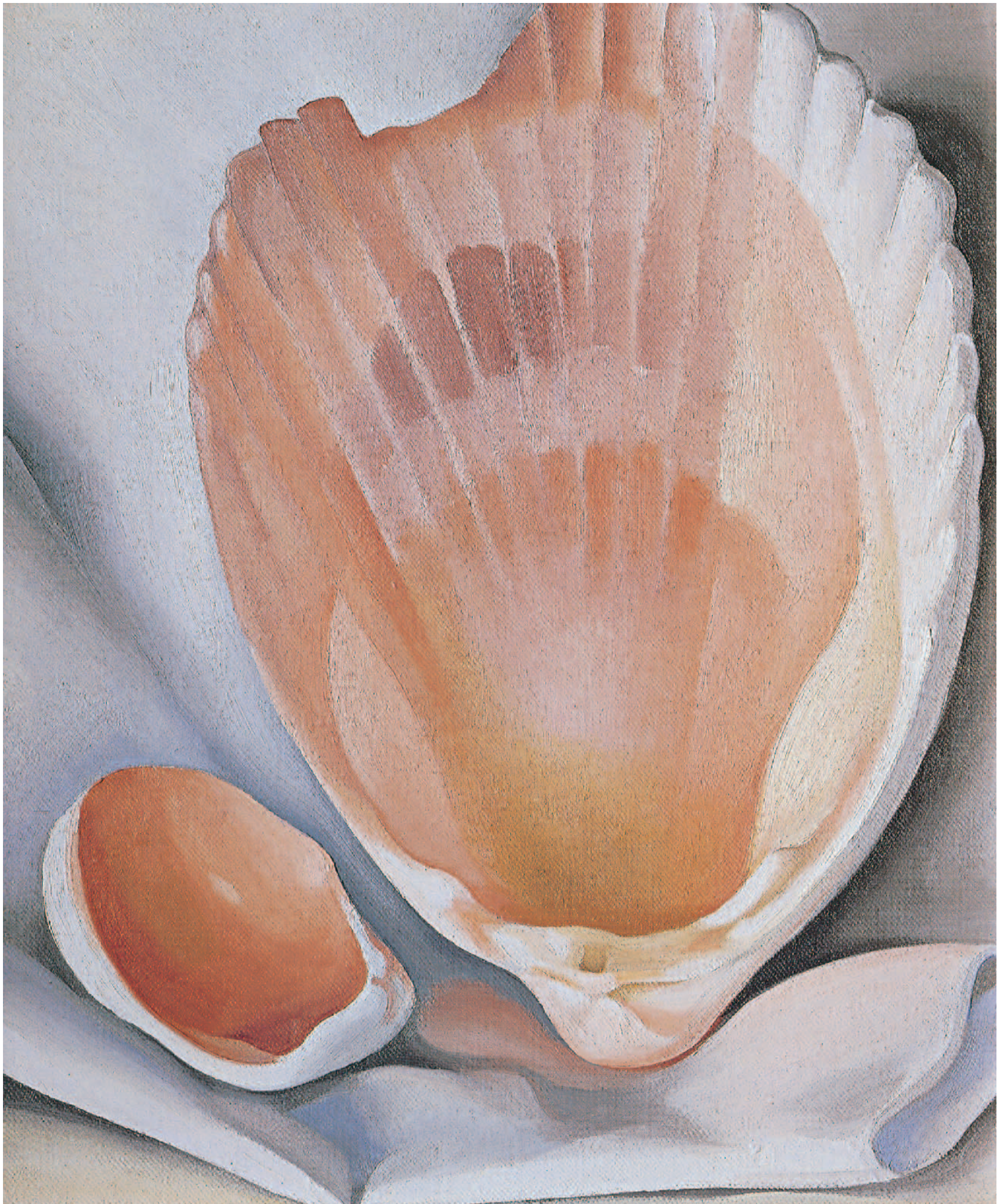
Still unable to return to painting, Georgia decided to travel to Bermuda where she stayed until early spring and then headed for Lake George. But the southwest was where she felt she should be and in June of 1934, with her friend Marjorie Content, she drove out to the H and M Ranch in Alcalde, New Mexico, where she had stayed three years earlier. Georgia spent her days drawing, and Marjorie made preparations for a visit from Jean Toomer, who had now become her lover. The eminent arrival of a third party, especially one romantically involved with her travel companion prompted Georgia to move on. She became intrigued with exploring a place she'd heard of called Ghost Ranch. Rumor had it that the ranch was haunted, or at least out of the way, hence the name. As fate would have it, while shopping in a little store, she met a cowboy from Ghost Ranch who gave her directions. The following day, she headed out and found the ranch indeed had lived up to its name.

Page 96
Church Steeple, 1930.
Oil on canvas, 72.2 x 40.6 cm.
Private collection.

Page 98
Shell II, 1928.
Oil on board, 23.5 x 18.4 cm.
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe.

Page 99
Two Pink Shells (Pink Shell), 1937.
Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.4 cm,
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe.





After driving over a long wooden bridge, bouncing along a dirt road, which eventually turned into a rutted dirt track, she arrived. The ranch, owned by Arthur Pack, a wealthy man from the east, catered to upscale clients, despite its out-of-the way location. Georgia was a little put off with the idea of staying with “dudes”, but found its location and the surrounding desert countryside that yielded bones, rocks, twisted branches, and brilliant pinkish yellow buttes, irresistible. To anyone with a creative bent, life at Ghost Ranch provided an idyllic way of life. Georgia left early in the morning, drove into obscure back canyons, gathering rocks and bones and painting and would return in the evening in time to marvel at the sunset. At dinnertime, she seldom ate with the guests, preferring the company of the ranch help who spent their meals in relative silence. But she did make the acquaintance of several of the more celebrated guests. Conductor Leopold Stokowski, Charles and Anne Lindbergh, Robert Wood Johnson (president of Johnson & Johnson and Co.) and Ansel Adams, who became one of Georgia’s lifelong friends.

For the next few years she established the pattern of heading to Ghost Ranch in the spring, returning in the fall, a wealth of paintings in the back of her car to be exhibited the following winter at the American Place. Her 1935 show at the American Place displayed only nine new drawings and paintings, but by 1936 she was back “in shape”, so to speak, and proudly exhibited among others, *Ram’s Head*, *White Hollyhocks*, *Hills*, *Sunflower* and *Kachina*.

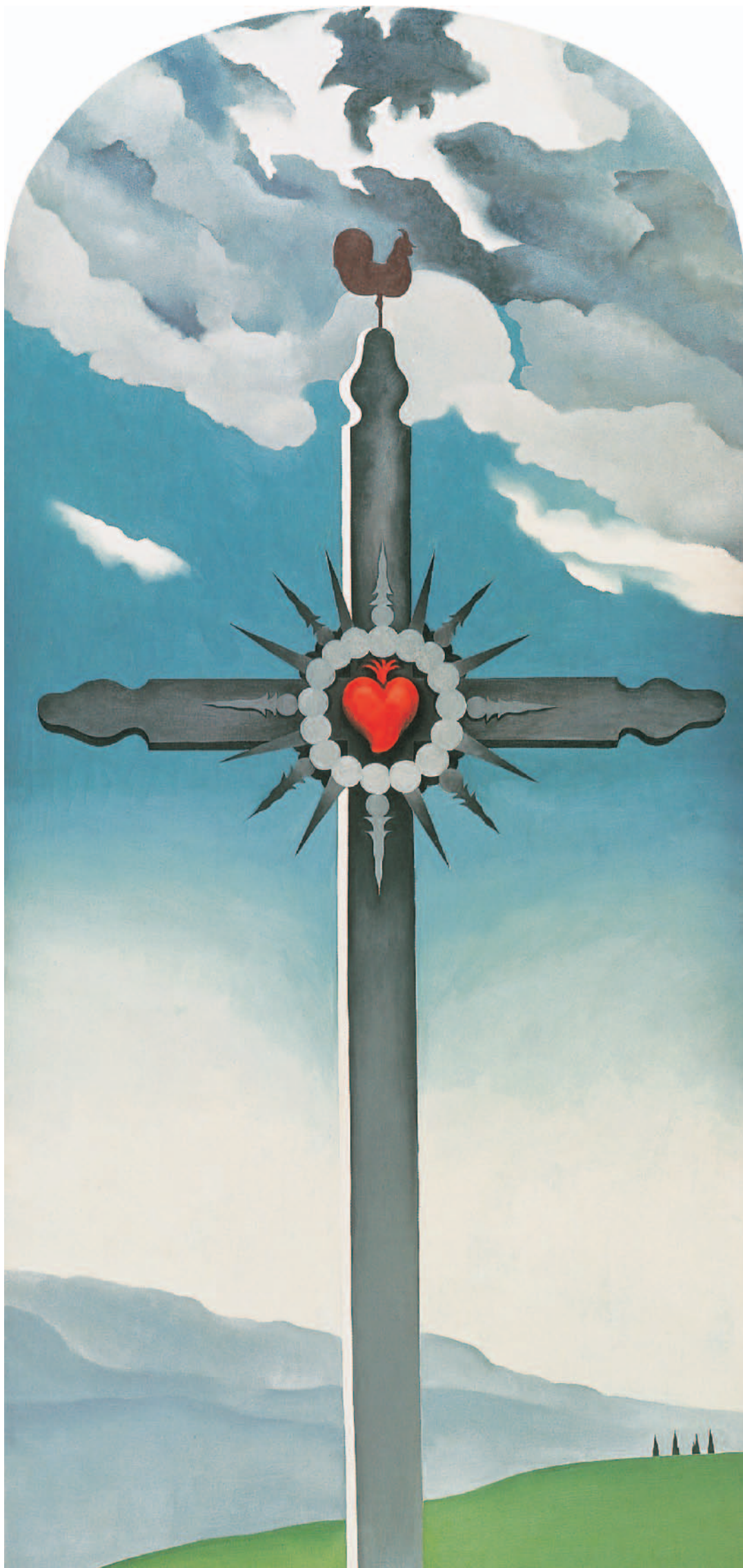
Also in 1936, Georgia was commissioned by Elizabeth Arden to create a painting for her exercise salon in New York. Arden already had a large O’Keeffe petunia hanging in her elegant Fifth Avenue apartment. Ironical since Georgia, with her severe clothes and lack of makeup, did not fit the image of an Elizabeth Arden client. A photo in Life magazine for a feature on her in 1938, shows Georgia in front of the painting, one of her large images of lilies, their curved edges and soft colors swirling behind her as she stands with her arms folded across her waist, her high cheekbones and hair drawn away from her face.

In October, 1936, Georgia and Alfred moved from the Shelton Hotel to a penthouse on 54th Street. Although Alfred resisted any kind of change, his health was failing, and Georgia knew they would need room for a housekeeper since she was away for a good part of the year. Georgia’s fame as an artist was also firmly established; the time had come, she knew, to allow herself more room to create when she was in New York.

In 1936 and 1937 Georgia created paintings that had the eerie, almost dreamlike quality of objects suspended in air. *From the Faraway Nearby* (p. 89) showed an elk’s skull, hovering over a pink mountain. Its eye cavity looks at first menacing then almost languid, the complex arrangement of horns reaching for the sky.

In spite of his poor health and need for greater care, Stieglitz came to accept Georgia’s long stays in the west. Their marriage became one of tender understanding in its later years. In addition to implying that he was sacrificing his company with her for the sake of art, he said he would rather have six months with her than a year with anyone else. She, in turn wrote to him daily when she was away.

Page 101
Cross with Red Heart, 1932.
 Oil on canvas, 211.5 x 101.6 cm.
 Sacred Heart Church, Margaretville.





1938-1949

AN ARTIST IN HER OWN RIGHT

In the late 1930s, as Stieglitz's health declined, Georgia's fame increased. She returned to Ghost Ranch in July, 1937, but with all the ranch cottages occupied, Arthur Pack could only give her a small adobe house a few miles away. The home faced a mesa called the Pedernal, about 10 miles to the southeast, situated beyond some brush, grass and small trees. She set about to do a series of paintings of the view and titled them *My Front Yard*. Another view to the north gave her giant, multicolored cliffs, reddish on the bottom, then a layer of gold and finished off with a grayish white at the top, resembling pieces of a huge sand painting. As if a giant god were working a series of light cues, the colors changed throughout the day when the sun occasionally hid, then moved out from behind a cloud.

That summer she struggled with a painting she eventually titled *Gerald's Tree*, named after a friend who had visited her that summer and whose footprints she found "dancing around it."²² In the foreground is a red-brown bushlike plant with three limbs, one of which is a bleached gray, devoid of leaves, the smaller branches reach out to as if to signal a passerby, or up as if to speak to the gods. The pinkish clay of the New Mexico hills provides the backdrop.

In spring, 1938, Alfred suffered the first of several heart attacks. This coupled with a bout of pneumonia which nearly killed him. A live-in nurse cared for him during the five-week recovery period. Even then, the sickness lingered for six months; the medical miracle of antibiotics was decades away.

Meanwhile, the first of many honorary degrees was presented to Georgia by the president of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, where she had spent much of her adolescence. She felt quite flattered, since the only diploma she'd received was from her high school. Two commissions came her way in the late 1930s. One was from Steuben Glass for which she created a lily engraved on the bottom of six crystal bowls. Then in 1939, Georgia accepted an invitation from the N.W. Ayer advertising agency to visit Hawaii as the guest of Dole Pineapple Company, but also on the condition that O'Keeffe would create two paintings depicting an aspect of Hawaii that the company could use in their advertising.

Page 102

Leaves of a Plant, 1942.

Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.

Gerald and Kathleen Peters

Collection, Santa Fe.

Page 104

Two Jimson Weeds with Green

Leaves and Blue Sky, 1938.

Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 101.6 cm.

Private collection, Switzerland.

Page 105

Two Jimson Weeds, 1938.

Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm.

Private collection, Santa Fe.









Georgia accepted almost immediately, probably intrigued by the opportunity to study tropical flora, and in February 1939 she traveled to the West Coast and boarded a ship for Honolulu. Delighted by the lush tropical foliage and surrounded by rare plants, she at once set out to paint hibiscus, white lotus, red heliconia, but not pineapples as Dole had expected.

A contretemps developed when, after seeing the pineapple fields and marveling at their beauty, asked if she could live in the workers' village, so she'd be closer to the fields. The Dole representative told her it was against company policy to let a guest live near the workers; a strict class system still existed on the islands. After a heated exchange and receiving the gift of a pineapple (which she rejected), Georgia traveled to the island of Maui where she painted waterfalls, rock formations and green valleys. When she returned to New York she sent two paintings to Dole — one a small painting of a ginger flower, the other depicted a papaya tree.

Dole found the second painting unacceptable — the papaya represented a rival company's product. The art director for N. W. Ayer had a pineapple shipped to her, and she created a painting of a pineapple bud for Dole, which was used in its advertising and annual report.

By the time she returned after two months in Hawaii, Georgia was exhausted, and suffered from headaches and loss of appetite. On the advice of her doctor, she stayed in New York, rested and did not travel again until August when she and Alfred made their way up to Lake George. By October, she had returned to painting.

Georgia received another honor during this period, that put her in the company of such esteemed women as Eleanor Roosevelt and Helen Keller. A committee of the New York World's Fair included her in its list of the twelve most outstanding women in the past 50 years. Not only that, but her painting *Sunset, Long Island*, a bright sun suspended over dunes, was chosen to represent New York State at the fair.

Following the opening of her next show at An American Place in February 1940 (in which she exhibited many of her paintings of Hawaiian flora), Georgia took off for Nassau for a month. With the coming of spring in New York she again felt a longing for the solitude of Ghost Ranch and returned there in June. The house that she had fallen in love with two years earlier was rented out, so she offered to buy it and in October, 1940, signed the deed to her first home.

During the summer of 1940, she began to make arrangements for a more independent lifestyle. When she had previously rented the home she had eaten with the help at the main ranch house. Now a process as simple as eating at home required an eighty mile trip to the nearest town of Espanola for canned goods or 140 miles to Santa Fe for fresh produce. This could be dangerous during periods of flash flooding; she had to pump her own water and was without electricity.

The U-shaped home itself was sparsely furnished, with her precious bones and piles of stones scattered around the walls. Any desert plants, such as sage or grama grass that grew in the center of the U or surrounding the house was allowed to grow freely. Although Georgia took on some bread baking and scrubbing chores, this cut into her painting time,

Page 106-107
Spring, 1948.
Oil on canvas, 122.5 x 214 cm.
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe.

Page 109
Pedernal, Blue and Yellow, 1941.
Oil on canvas, 51.1 x 76.8 cm.
Private collection.





so eventually she hired Maria Chabot, a capable, strong woman in her twenties who had worked for a friend of Georgia's. The women formed a strong friendship; Maria admired Georgia's work and took on the household chores as well as more "manly" duties like starting the generator in the evening or accompanying Georgia on camping excursions into the desert.

With more time to paint, Georgia's output was again quite prolific. While she still loved the shapes of the isolated lifeless trees that stretched out against the deep red of the hills (as in her painting *Stump in Red Hills*, 1940 (p. 115), she was also taken by the grayish-white formations around Abiquiú, and spent the next few summers painting works such as *Cliffs Beyond Abiquiú — Dry Waterfall*. Another area she fell in love with she dubbed "the Black Place," a gathering of dark and grayish hills patterned with white, pink and gold lines, which she described as "two miles of gray elephants."²³

Getting to these "gray elephants" was no easy task. Georgia and Maria set out in the station wagon, which groaned under the weight of canvases, logs, water cans, food, cots, paint and an easel (sometimes even the pet cat), and made their way over muddy roads and dried river beds to the "Black Place," northwest of Ghost Ranch in Navajo country. Occasionally, Georgia walked ahead, clearing the way for Maria to drive. When they'd arrive at their destination, Georgia hiked around the area, then set out to paint. After spending the day battling the elements of heat, cold and wind, the two cooked dinner over an open fire.

The pattern of working in New Mexico in the summer and exhibiting at An American Place in the winter continued for the next few years, punctuated by the onset of World War II in December, 1941. Georgia had felt distanced from the war except for the inconvenience of food and gas rationing, and the shortage of strong men to handle heavier jobs. But she also felt the war's impact when Ghost Ranch itself became the weekend retreat for some secretive men who worked at a research laboratory in nearby Los Alamos.

In 1942 Georgia and General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the Pacific forces, received honorary Doctor of Letters degrees from the University of Wisconsin. Although she had been criticized for her apathy toward the war in 1917 while living in Texas, she felt encouraged this time that the university was recognizing an artist along with a high profile military officer. The visit to the country that had first shaped her was a sentimental and nostalgic one, as Georgia, accompanied by her aging aunt Ollie, stood to receive her degree, and later visited with friends, relatives and Mrs. Edison, school teacher at Sun Prairie.

As the war escalated and rationing peaked, Alfred became more frail and Georgia saw the need for a smaller apartment, one that could be heated relatively cheaply should fuel become scarce. In addition, it had to be located within walking distance of An American Place, where he went each day, a practice he refused to give up. In the fall of 1942 they left the penthouse and moved to a small apartment on East 54th Street, close to the gallery.

Page 110
Red and Yellow Cliffs, 1940.
 Oil on canvas, 61 x 91.5 cm.
 Gift of The Burnett Foundation.

Page 112
Black Place Green, 1949.
 Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 121.9 cm.
 Whitney Museum of American Art,
 New York.

Page 113
Dark Tree Trunks, 1946.
 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
 Brooklyn Museum of Art,
 New York.









Another connection with her past surfaced in 1943. Daniel Catton Rich, curator of the Art Institute of Chicago, had met Georgia in 1929 in Taos, and again in New York in 1942. In the course of reminiscing about the stark beauty of New Mexico, Rich mentioned that he was interested in having a retrospective of Georgia's work at his museum.

She readily agreed. This would be Georgia's first big retrospective, and ironically, featured in the Midwest's largest museum and at the school where she had been a student nearly forty years earlier. Alfred, now 79 years old, may have objected, since he was unable to make the trip to see it and felt strongly about her work being shown outside of An American Place. In any case, the decision was made that following the show at the Art Institute the newest paintings would be exhibited in New York.

Georgia handled the exhibition herself, much as she had done for shows at An American Place and the Intimate Gallery. As usual, she was unwavering in her demand for her version of perfection in an exhibition venue. The walls, she insisted, must be repainted white to cover the pale violet in the East Gallery rooms where the paintings would be hung, and she was unhappy with the lighting arrangement. Assembling the exhibition took nearly a week, both Georgia and Rich working tirelessly, carrying heavy paintings back and forth through the rooms. Eventually, Georgia became ill and spent several days bedded down in her hotel room, unable to attend the preview dinner in her honor.

The show opened on 31 January, 1943, a total of 61 works altogether, created between 1915 and 1941. Reviews were mixed but generally the show was well-received by the public; most viewers found the brilliance of her colors and the clarity of her vision and her love of nature cheering in the middle of a gray winter in wartime.

During the New Mexico years, Georgia's intense craving for privacy increased to the point of obsession. She maintained a strict work schedule, avoided the artists colony in Taos and thought little of the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, which showed works by virtually any artist who happened to reside in the state. In fact, Georgia felt that only she and two other artists — Andrew Dasburg and Cady Wells — merited recognition.

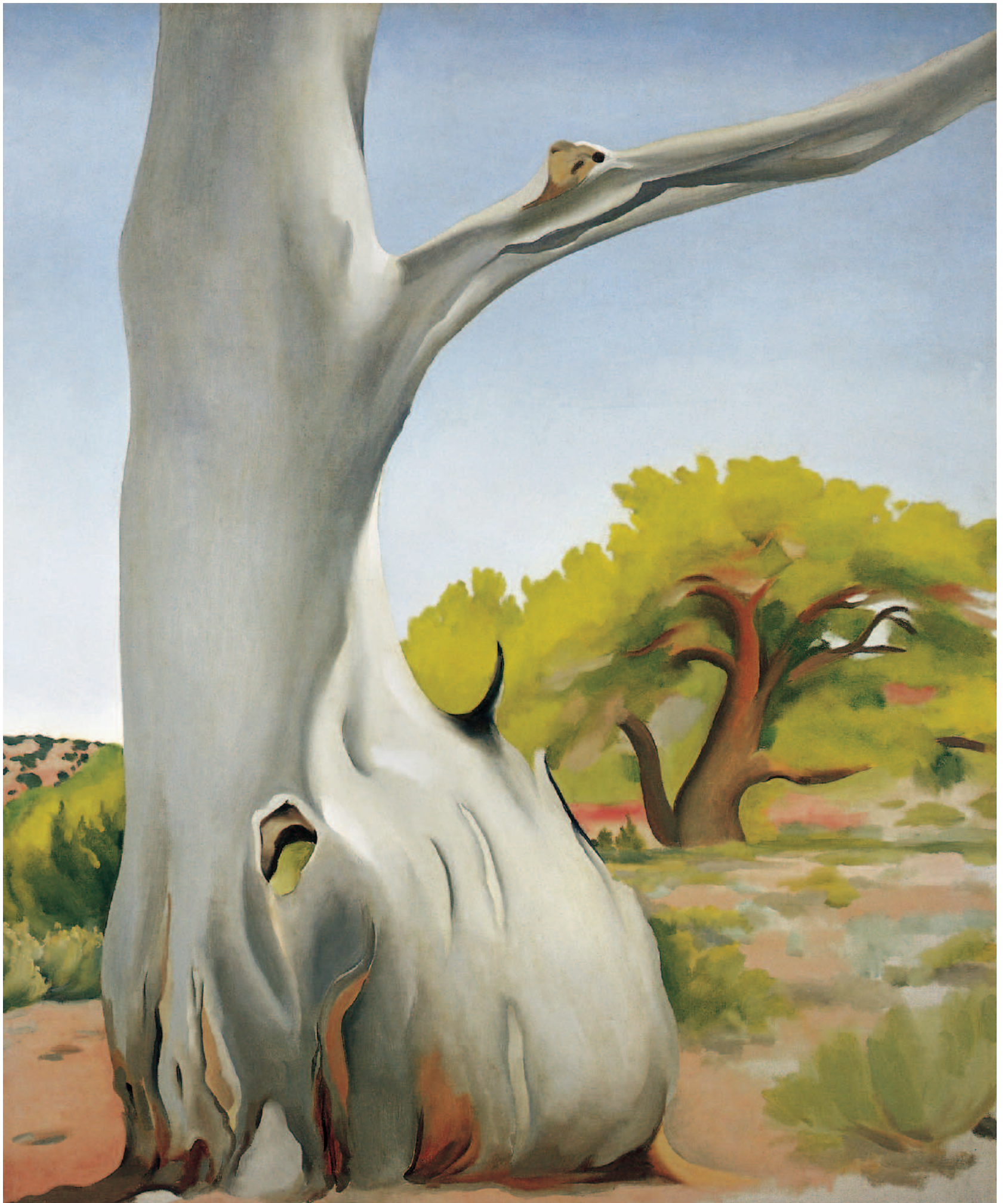
Of the people she did socialize with, many were high profile names in the art and literary world, or simply lifelong friends, such as writer Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, Irish intellectual Gerald Heard (after whom the painting *Gerald's Tree* was titled), Frieda Lawrence (D.H. Lawrence's widow), Dorothy Brett and Beck Strand (who had been her traveling companion on her first visit to New Mexico). Georgia fired Maria Chabot after Maria became somewhat possessive and demanding; then hired a more agreeable Spanish girl.

The year 1943 might be called the "Year of the Pelvis". The first one she found she hung in her home as a mobile. But it was the perfect oval that formed its negative space and its complex shape that first intrigued her. One day she held it against the intense blue of the New Mexico sky and not surprisingly, was struck by the idea for another painting. In *Pelvis III* (p. 158), the intimate view of the pelvis contrasting with the macrocosm of the universe in the blue sky.

Page 114
Black Place IV, 1944.
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 91.4 cm.
Private collection.

Page 115
Stump in Red Hills, 1940.
Oil on canvas, 72.2 x 60.9 cm.
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe.

Page 117
Dead Cottonwood Tree, 1943.
91.4 x 76.2 cm.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art,
Santa Barbara.









In other pelvis paintings she incorporated images used in previous paintings: flowers, the Pedernal, the moon.

Colors became more intense as well and departing from the pelvis' natural color, she gave it new life by depicting it in a brilliant shade of red against a burning yellow sky. The Pelvis series, first exhibited in 1944 delighted her followers, many of whom saw the paintings almost as a celebration of death. Some also saw them as a comment on war's destruction and brutality, which in a sense she agreed with when she wrote in her autobiography, "...that Blue that will always be there as it is now after all man's destruction is finished."²⁴

By 1944, Stieglitz, now 80, could only walk short distances. With his black cape draped shroud-like around his shoulders he shuffled slowly and deliberately to An American Place on the days he was strong enough to get out of bed. The gallery continued to exhibit works by John Marin, Arthur Dove and, of course, Georgia. Like many old people he was subject to moodiness, depressed and bitter one minute, elated and optimistic the next. The war with Germany where he'd spent his youth did not help.

The gallery itself reflected his feelings; it had become a much lonelier place over the years. A cot had been placed in a small room off to one side and there he dozed, his cape draped over him, the electric heater humming. Another New Mexico property caught Georgia's interest in the mid-1940s. She had spotted a small deserted home situated in the tiny village of Abiquiú, sixteen miles from Ghost Ranch, and boldly climbed through a hole to the inside of the complex which contained a garden, a well and the house whose doors hung loosely against the walls.

There followed some negotiating back and forth but nothing came of it and eventually she purchased the Ghost Ranch home. Eventually the Catholic Church inherited the villa from the original owner and in turn let the Abiquiú Livestock Association use it for village livestock. Georgia had grown weary of the lack of really tasty fresh produce and wanted the place for its water rights so she could finally have her own garden. After purchasing the place in 1945, she patched up her differences with Maria Chabot and rehired her to oversee the tremendous rebuilding needed to make it livable.

The final result was a compound which included an eight-room home with several fireplaces, patios and passageways, as well as a garage. In May, 1946, Georgia had another major exhibition, this time at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Fourteen of the works exhibited had been shown at An American Place the previous winter, yet Stieglitz, realizing the woman whose artistic career he had so lovingly nurtured, was now functioning on her own, felt somewhat left out, a feeling exacerbated by his weakened condition.

He stayed alone in the tiny apartment while Georgia attended the dinner and reception for the show's opening. Fifty-seven paintings in all, done between 1915 and 1945 and hung in chronological order were showcased. As with other exhibits this one also was well-received. A month later, Georgia departed once again for Abiquiú.

Page 118

Pelvis with Pedernal, 1943.

Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 55.9 cm.

Munson-Williams-Proctor Art
Institute, Museum of Art, Utica.

Page 119

Pelvis with Moon, 1943.

Oil on canvas, 72.2 x 60.9 cm.

Norton Gallery of Art,
West Palm Beach.

Page 120

Pelvis III, 1944.

Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 101.6 cm.

Private collection.

On 6 July, 1946, Stieglitz suffered a heart spasm, followed by a stroke a few days later, which rendered him unconscious. He was found on the floor of the apartment by a handyman and taken to the hospital. Georgia received a telegram advising her that Alfred had suffered cerebral thrombosis and his condition was critical. She left immediately for New York, but by the time she arrived he was already in a deep coma.

Stieglitz passed away in the early hours of 13 July, 1946. The funeral arrangements were simple, but Georgia, still independent and intent on perfection, found the pink lining in the casket offensive and spent most of the night ripping it out and inserting a white linen lining in time for the memorial service on Sunday. In accordance with his wishes, no music was played nor eulogies read. Photographer Edward Steichen placed a pine bough on the casket; Stieglitz's body was cremated and his ashes buried at the foot of a pine tree on the shore of Lake George. Georgia, as usual, was not given to obvious displays of emotion, but those who knew her best were aware that, although prepared, she deeply felt the loss of her lover and mentor and wished she could share her world with him.

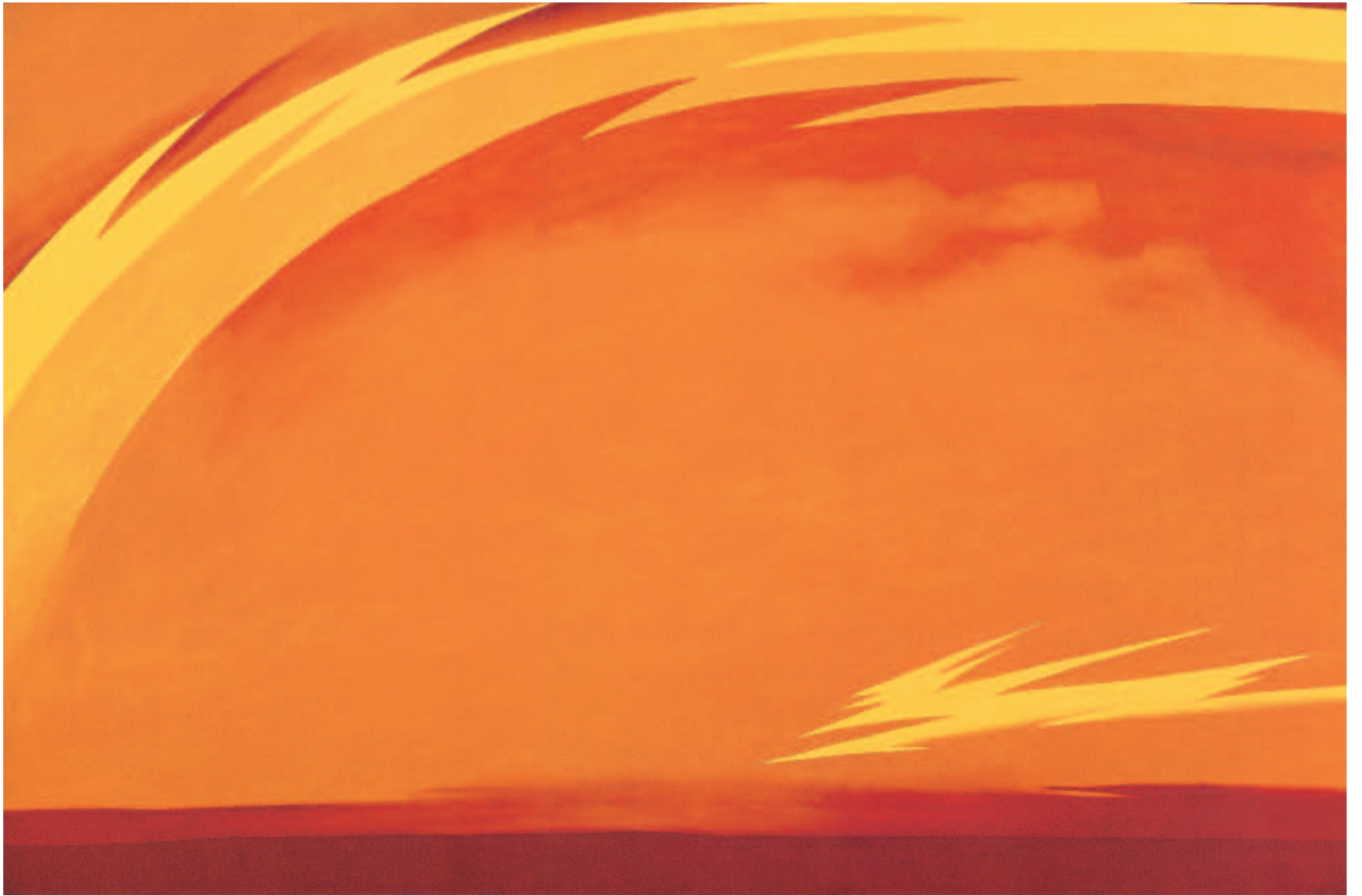
Following Alfred's death, Georgia was suddenly thrust into the role of curator of his collection, which numbered 850 works of art, hundreds of photographs and tens of thousands of letters. She knew there wasn't a museum anywhere that would take the entire collection, or if it did, the works would most likely be stored away and rarely seen by the public, not an acceptable solution.

In the end, she decided to distribute the works to several different museums and libraries. Most of the paintings were sent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, others to the Art Institute of Chicago, and the rest were scattered among smaller institutions. Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library became the recipient of Stieglitz's letters and papers. The distribution task took three winters to complete, but with the help of her friend Doris Bry, Georgia made sure every item was photographed, then deleted those with little value, and made lists of who would get which items.

Between the time of Alfred's death and 1948, Georgia painted little, although she did spend her usual summers in Abiquiú where the demands on her time revolved around remodeling her house. In 1947, the Museum of Modern Art held a Stieglitz retrospective. Later that year, in one of life's ironies, dinosaur bones were discovered at Ghost Ranch, resulting in an influx of paleontologists, tourists and the press. The objects which most people thought little of but had so fascinated O'Keeffe, now became subjects of great public interest. The year 1948 saw her nearly total return to her work pattern, as the rains that spring yielded an abundance of flora. She delighted in the tall yucca plants and created one of her first large canvasses, a four foot by seven foot painting of white flowers and bones with the Pedernal in the background, titled *Spring* (p. 106-107). As if once and for all to sever her ties to the east, she did not send the painting to New York as she had done with so many others when Alfred was alive.

Page 123
Blue-Headed Indian Doll, 1935.
Watercolor on paper,
53.3 x 30.7 cm.
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe.





1949-1973

THE NEW MEXICO YEARS

In 1949, Georgia bid goodbye to the city that launched her career and settled permanently in New Mexico, dividing her time between Abiquiú in the winter and Ghost Ranch in the summer. That same year she directed the establishment of the art gallery of Fisk University, an institution founded for black students. The university was the recipient of some African carvings as well as about 100 paintings from Stieglitz's collection. It is believed Georgia had a number of reasons for choosing Fisk. There was the close relationship she had with black writer Jean Toomer; the black Tennessee artist Beauford Delaney was the subject of several charcoal drawings, and one of the few people whose images she portrayed. In addition, a friend of hers was acquainted with another black artist, Aaron Douglas, founder of the university's art department. Shortly before the gallery officially opened, she and Doris Bry drove to Nashville to check on the gallery's lighting, colors and art placement. The gallery had originally been an old gymnasium, which Georgia felt was perfect for exhibiting paintings — except that the walls had to be painted white, lights needed to be changed, unnecessary molding removed, cabinets in the gallery library repainted. She developed a solid working relationship with a lame black man who was in charge of the other building workers as well as the head of their local union. At one point he asked Georgia to speak at a union meeting. She found the experience exhausting, but in a letter to Daniel Catton Rich, she told of a conversation with a young black girl who impressed her when she asked why the idea of purity is associated with white rather than black. "She wanted only to be a person," Georgia wrote, "That black girl had something that made me discount the color of her skin as I never have with any other colored person."²⁵

Georgia's ties to New York were not quite cut even after she disposed of Stieglitz's collection in 1949. Along with John Marin, she attempted to keep An American Place going, but without Alfred at the helm, the spirit did not seem to be there. Hers was the last show at the gallery in the fall of 1950, but the amount of paintings was minimal due to the tremendous amount of time spent organizing and distributing his estate.

In 1949, Georgia was honored to be elected to the blue-ribbon National Society of Arts and Letters. Her selection carried other distinctions as well — she was in the company of such talented people as artist Gertrude Lathrop, E.E. Cummings and Christopher Isherwood and only 10 percent of the institute's members were women.

Page 124

From the Plains II, 1954.

Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 182.9 cm.

Private collection.

Page 126-127

Lavender Hill with Green, 1952.

Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 68.9 cm.

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,

Santa Fe.





In spite of the fact that she had spent the better part of the previous decade away from Stieglitz, Georgia had been dependent on him as a negotiator and liaison between her and the New York galleries; he had, in effect, served as her agent. But over the years he had dealt with art dealer Edith Gregor Halpert, of the Downtown Gallery, which showcased American art and artisans and it was Edith to whom he lent work done by artists in his coterie. It made sense, then, for Georgia to continue the relationship and so Halpert now acted as her dealer.

Georgia also had reached a point in her career where it was no longer necessary to maintain a schedule of high-profile shows in order to sell her work. She produced fewer paintings during the 1950s and during that decade had only three one-woman shows. Between 1950 and 1973, she spent more time traveling, accepting honorary degrees and exhibiting the work that she did create. Reviews of her work, laudatory or apathetic, no longer interested her, as she spent her days in the quiet beauty of her adopted state, dividing her stays between Abiquiú and Ghost Ranch. The first winters in New Mexico assaulted her senses in a way the dreary winters of the big city never had. The white snow capping the straw-colored mesas provided another stratum of color to gaze at, the fireplace at night provided a more sensual warmth during the cold winter nights. And the winters themselves were relatively short, not dragging into the late weeks of April as some Midwestern and New York seasons did.

For O’Keeffe the process of painting, or creating, sounds typical of the structured mind rather than the free-wheeling spirit of the 20th century artist who lived for the moment. She sometimes saw shapes in her mind, but obviously the natural world served as a cornucopia of inspiration as well. Even then she took her time executing preliminary sketches, like the old masters, and then consulted her color charts for the mixing formula for each color. She had a different brush for each color, which contributed to and preserved the intensity of the hues in her paintings. She was seldom satisfied with the first version of an image and often painted several as she explored new ways of seeing, as in the Shell and Old Shingle series done in the 1920s, which began as realistic images and were finally brought down to the essence of the assembled shapes. In a way, Georgia seemed to have her feet in two worlds, straddling between abstraction and stark realism, while steadying herself with surrealism, as in the Pelvic paintings. She once said, in the early 1920s, “Nothing is less real than realism; details are confusing.” Often in a series she would struggle for perfection as she sought new ways to express what she saw, but even she grew weary of the battle and eventually seeing she’d exhausted a subject, moved on. She detested describing her feelings in words, preferring to let the paintings speak for themselves. To explain why she painted skulls and what it was about them that excited her, she replied that she’d most likely have to answer by painting another skull.

Although Georgia treasured her solitude, she was not above entertaining friends on holidays, as well as visitors who occasionally dropped in — although she often gave them a guesthouse in the complex for her convenience, not necessarily their privacy. Once they were

Page 129

Ladder to the Moon, 1958.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
Private collection, New York.

Page 130

Patio with Black Door, 1955.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

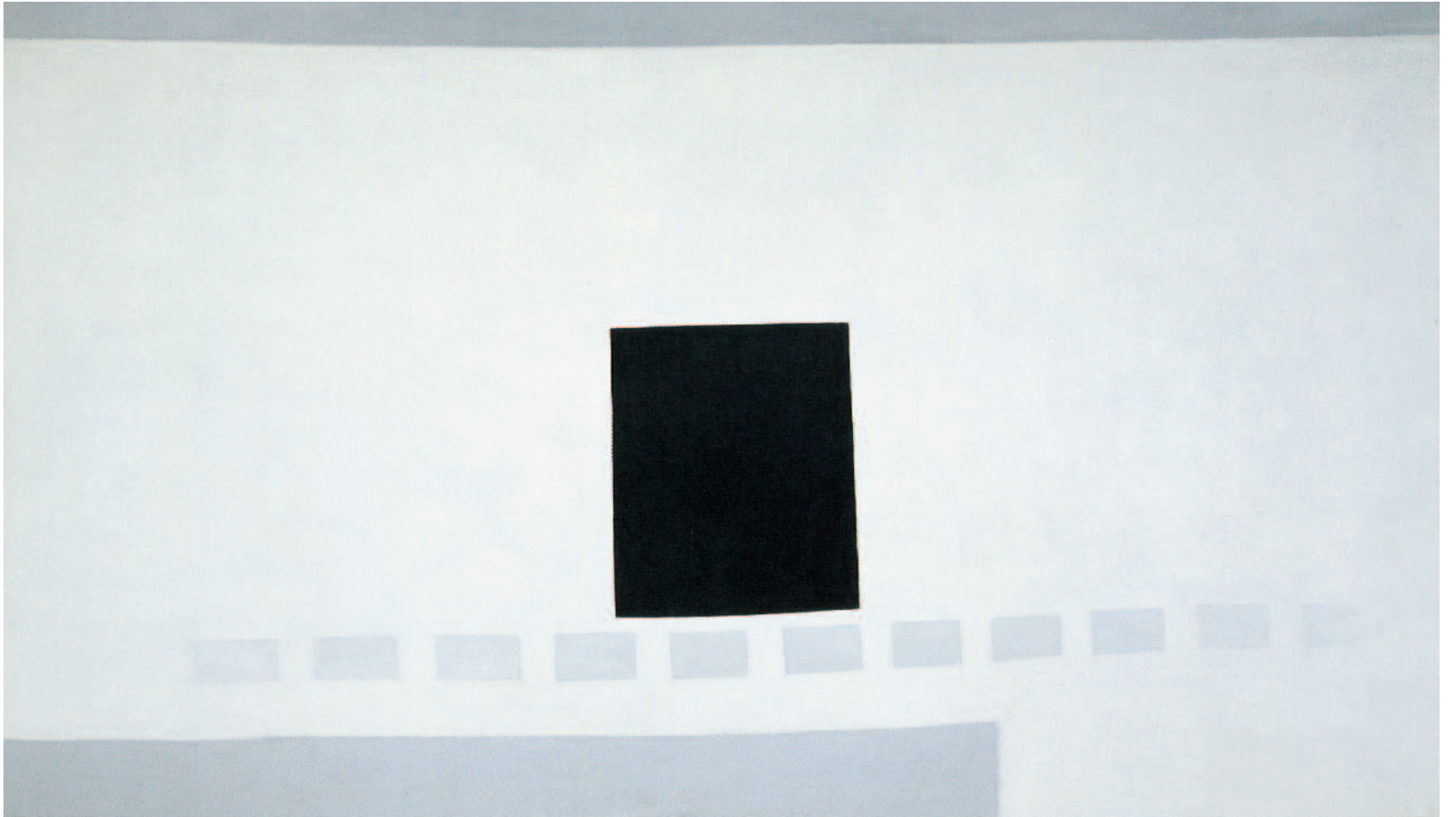
Page 131

Patio with Cloud, 1956.
Oil on canvas, 91 x 76 cm.
Milwaukee Art Museum,
Milwaukee.









gone, and she worked through a brief period of loneliness, she was once again happy to be by herself, often lying outside at night in the courtyard, surrounded by walls, and the nighttime sky for a roof.

In 1952, a friend from the nearby Indian pueblo brought her two Chinese chow puppies, which, totally out of character, she came to love. The dogs may have been protection for her, but others found them dangerous, and a number of stories circulated through the area about people whose shoes, feet and arms had fallen victim to the animals' fangs.

In 1951, Georgia and Spud Johnson, a poet from Taos, decided to visit Mexico with photographer Eliot Porter and his wife Aline. They traveled in the same car, but it was not long before the couples separated for the remainder of the trip. Georgia, as she grew older, became more and more opinionated, and demanding. And sometimes the chemistry did not work between her and other women especially. During this trip, she insisted that everyone eat with her at five o'clock, although the Porters preferred the more civilized custom of freshening up and relaxing with a drink.

In her jeep station wagon loaded down with suitcases, painting supplies, an icebox of food and small stove, Georgia and Spud traveled first to Mexico City, then Cuernavaca and south to the valley of Oaxaca. Georgia became enchanted with the brilliant colors, the noisy marketplaces, and even the dusty Indian villages. They made their way back to Mexico City where she renewed her friendship with illustrator Miguel Covarrubias and his wife Rose. Formerly an illustrator for several New York magazines, Covarrubias now was the dance director for the Mexican National Institute of Fine Arts. He introduced Georgia to Diego Rivera (who years ago had garnered the commission to paint the mural for the Radio City Music Hall) and his wife, the fiery, bizarre Frida Kahlo, who fascinated Georgia. Although nearly poles apart personality-wise, the two shared one thing in common: both had lived with their lovers before they married, and the principal men in their lives fostered and furthered their art careers.

One day, Georgia and Rose impulsively decided to fly to the Yucatan peninsula to see the Mayan ruins. Spud stayed behind until Georgia telegraphed him to meet her back in Mexico City. They left for New Mexico, traveling through Texas, stopping at Big Bend National Park and Carlsbad Caverns in southern New Mexico.

This trip was just the beginning. Two years later, she took her first trip to Europe and traveled for the next two months to France and Spain. While France had been the center of the art world for so many decades and the birthplace of Impressionism, in many ways, it left Georgia cold. She even passed up the opportunity to visit with Pablo Picasso, stating that since she did not speak French and he did not speak English, there seemed little point in the two talking through a translator. In Spain, she felt a connection with the works of Goya, his use of light and shadow in his works depicting cruelty and unrest. Perhaps she saw a relationship between the Spanish temper and the intensity of color in her beloved Southwest.

In spring, 1956, she spent two months in Peru, intrigued, yet frightened of the mountains stretching into the mist; the indigenous people, mysterious as if they were privy

Page 132

My Last Door, 1954.

Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 213.4 cm.

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,

Santa Fe.

to some terrible secrets. Yet, as with two other Spanish speaking countries — Mexico and Spain — she called Peru one of the best places in the world to visit. Only four watercolors embody her visit to Peru, one of which is *Machu Picchu (Peruvian Landscape)*, showing bold intense blue peaks advancing toward more brilliant peaks, all fighting for space with the sky.

In 1959 Georgia decided it was time to take a trip around the world. She started in San Francisco, crossed the Pacific to Tokyo, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, the Middle East, Italy and ended in New York. She spent several weeks in India, and only a short time in Italy — the Renaissance masters she found “vulgar.” Feeling a strong connection with Asia, having gravitated toward its simplicity of form when other artists launched into Cubism in the early part of the twentieth century or Abstract Expressionism decades later, Georgia traveled again to Asia in 1960.

Travel had become an elixir for her during the fifties and sixties, yet Georgia still loved her New Mexico places best, and she always felt a rush of warmth whenever she arrived home. Somewhere in between these trips, she created, but exhibited little. Between 1952 and 1958 she exhibited at the Downtown Gallery, received a Doctor of Letters from Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, and Mills College in Oakland, California, exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art and Mayo Hill Galleries in Delray Beach, Florida. Still, people had lost touch with her. An article in the December, 1958 issue of *Saturday Review* claimed that many O’Keeffe paintings had decreased in value. Daniel Catton Rich, who had engineered and supervised her exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1943, vehemently disagreed in a letter to the magazine’s editor. Now director of the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, he approached Georgia asking her to exhibit there. She agreed, then took off for a round-the-world trip.

It is interesting to note, that very few of the works created during this period of frenetic travel depicted any exotic landscapes, or natural wonders and sights that entranced her. It was the views from the plane, the curve of a river bed or the floating clouds that often became subjects in those years. *Yellow and Pink* and *It Was Red and Pink* were inspired by rivers viewed from the sky, as though she were a goddess looking down on the land she had created. The first shows two ochre S-like shapes snaking up and around, almost dancing against a pink backdrop. The second, a bolder, broad red line cuts through a mixture of earth tones. When Edith Halpert saw the paintings, she thought they were trees, but the remark did not bother Georgia. But during one of her exhibits at Halpert’s gallery, she overheard a man remark that the paintings must be rivers seen from the air and was pleased that someone had seen things the way she saw them.

After she agreed to the Worcester exhibit, Georgia worked tirelessly to have new pieces to show, but found the preparation work — stretching paintings, framing, packing and shipping — even more exhausting than she had fourteen years earlier when she had assembled the Museum of Modern Art exhibit. She was not above making a couple of demands, however. At one point, she asked Rich to change the dates of the show thereby allowing her to oversee the hanging before leaving on a trip to the Far East. He agreed to

Page 135
Green Patio Door, 1955.
 76.2 x 50.8 cm,
 Albright-Knox Art Gallery,
 Buffalo, New York.

Page 136
Tan, Orange, Yellow, Lavender,
 c. 1959.
 Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm,
 Georgia O’Keeffe Museum,
 Santa Fe.

Page 137
Only One, 1959.
 Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 72.2 cm.
 Museum of American Art,
 Smithsonian Institute,
 Washington, D.C.









that but was not able to comply with her second request — that the museum add one of her paintings to its collection.

Included in the exhibition was *White Patio with Red Door* done in 1960, a geometric abstraction and a counterpart to her *Black Door with Red*, painted in 1955. The former is an almost ethereal rectangle floating above a line of horizontal rectangles resembling giant stitches across the bottom. The latter is a solid wall-like painting (122 cm high by 213 cm wide), red-brown background supporting a black rectangle in the center that from a distance must have resembled the section of a southwestern pueblo. Georgia created several *Patio with Door* paintings during the mid to late fifties, another example of her struggle to achieve perfection as she tried to express her feelings about how a shape and color struck her. While most of the “Patio/Door” paintings showed how she viewed the endless possibilities that a solid and simple shape could inspire, she also saw the way a slightly curved line gave the painting a gentleness, as in *Black Door with Snow II*, done in 1955.

Georgia went against her nature and graciously consented to interviews during the show’s opening. The following day she left for Japan and on her return, was pleased to see that the show had been well received. One article described her as the “grand old lady of painting.” More honors came her way during this period — a medal for the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Creative Arts Award from Brandeis University.

In spring, 1961, Georgia had her last exhibition at the Downtown Gallery in New York. A clash of temperaments caused O’Keeffe and Edith Halpert to agree to sever relations. Georgia took issue with the way her show was hung, Halpert felt, as others had, that her client was too difficult to work with. Both women were strong-willed so it was no surprise to anyone, when in 1963, Doris Bry became Georgia’s new agent.

Still agile and ready for whatever life had to offer, Georgia, now nearly 74, decided to get a personal feel for the rivers she had been painting. In August 1961, accompanied by Eliot Porter, Doris Bry and others, she took the first of several river rafting trips through the upper Colorado River in Southern Utah. For 10 days she dealt with the hot sun, cold, rain and handled her own equipment as well as handling, with the rest of the group, the maneuvering of the raft. Needless to say, there was no time to sketch, much less paint, but she and Porter took another trip through the slowly rising river as the Glen Canyon dam forced it higher, covering the wonders of Glen Canyon. She created a group of paintings, among them *On The River* and *Canyon*, but never exhibited them; she may have been uncertain that they would be successful.

Georgia’s next fascination was again sky oriented, this time images took the viewer into the sky, in somewhat the same way the viewer was drawn into the flowers. In 1965, she began her *Sky Above Clouds* series, the largest *Sky Above Clouds IV* (p. 140-141), an expanse of canvas 243 cm x 731 cm inspired by hundreds of little white clouds she had seen out the plane window on one of her return trips to New Mexico. Here she has created a ghostly landscape; one feels as though he could easily step across the ovals created by a giant landscape artist into the faint pink sunset on the horizon.

Page 138

It was Blue and Green, 1960.

Oil on canvas, mounted on cardboard, 76.4 x 101.9 cm.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Page 140-141

Sky Above Clouds IV, 1965.

Oil on canvas, 243.8 x 731.5 cm.

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.





For this painting, she had a friend in New Mexico build the stretcher pieces while she was in New York ordering the canvas. When she returned home and opened the canvas, she discovered it was much coarser than the one she ordered, but not wanting to wait for a replacement, she and the handyman began to assemble the stretchers, applied grommets, laced the canvas with nylon string, drawing it tightly over the stretcher frame and finally tacking it in place. Other battles between Georgia and her canvas ensued before she was finally ready to paint. She hung the canvas on the wall, and then had to dampen the canvas to rid it of wrinkles. To reach the highest part of the canvas, she placed tables in front of it, then chairs on the tables; working her way across the canvas, she stood on the tables, sat on the chair then sat on the tables. But wetting the canvas caused it to shrink, which caused parts of the stretchers to break. To hold the stretchers together, the canvas was taken off the wall and steel strips were screwed onto it, and placed back on the wall with the same table-chair arrangement so she could begin the tedious job of sizing and priming.

Georgia worked on the painting for weeks, rising at six in the morning and cleaning her brushes at nine in the evening, in a race to stay ahead of the cold weather and to be ready to exhibit it at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. Snow had started to fall as the museum truck pulled up with a large drum for the painting to be wrapped around. The painting was disassembled, placed on plastic, and rolled onto the drum, Georgia running around in stocking feet with several workmen helping. The job still took most of the day. The painting was shown as part of a retrospective in Texas and in 1970, included in a show at the Whitney Museum, then the Art Institute of Chicago. According to O’Keeffe’s autobiography, it was scheduled to go on to San Francisco, but discovered that there was no door wide enough for it to get through. Today it still hangs in Chicago.²⁶

Between 1966 and 1971, Georgia received several honors; many from areas which helped shape her life as an artist. These included: the Wisconsin Governor’s Award for Creativity in the Arts, an Honorary Fine Arts degree from the Art Institute of Chicago, a Distinguished Service Citation in the Arts from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters; Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree, Columbia University, New York; Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree, Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island and the M. Carey Thomas Award from Bryn Mawr College — citation for distinguished contributions to the visual arts from the National Association of Schools of Art.

Then in 1971, she became afflicted with the loss of her central vision, not unusual for a woman nearly 84 years old. In the late 1930s, when she was entering her 50s and fearful of needing glasses, she had begun practicing eye exercises designed by Dr. W. H. Bates, who theorized that poor eyesight was stress related. Concentration was the key ingredient in his training procedure and Georgia had followed the instructions diligently. One of his more controversial methods involved flickering one’s eyes directly at the sun. While Georgia never had to wear glasses, it is uncertain whether the Bates method deserved any credit. Now, for Georgia, everything she viewed was blurred. She visited several specialists but they all told her the same thing: the degenerative condition of her eyes was irreversible. Her inability to see objects clearly proved so frustrating, that she stopped painting altogether for the next several years.





1973-1986

ARTIST EMERITUS

It was the classic “one door closes, another opens” scenario. A young man knocked on Georgia’s kitchen door one day, looking for work. At first Georgia said no, as she had said to so many young people who came to her door. Then she remembered she needed some paintings wrapped and called him back. The man’s name was Juan Hamilton, a missionary’s son who had grown up in South America. Something about him interested Georgia; he seemed to be more educated and she found he could type. Later she learned from Jim Hall that Hamilton had attended college in Nebraska, was married and later divorced, had little money, and had come to New Mexico to work at Ghost Ranch. (Hamilton had, in fact, been to Georgia’s home twice before; once with the head of maintenance at Ghost Ranch; another time with Jim Hall. Both times, as Hamilton recalled, she ignored him.)

Georgia hired Hamilton to work part time doing odd jobs, but after she found out that he was also a potter, she insisted that he must pursue his own art as well. She let him work at the kitchen table, creating asymmetrical-shaped dark brown and black pots that soon adorned her cabinets, fitting companions to her shells and stones. Eventually Juan worked for her full time, purchased a small house near Abiquiú and he and Georgia took on the roles of protégé and mentor, as she encouraged him to work at his pottery. At times they were teacher and student as he, in turn, showed her the art of ceramics. Georgia apparently had never taken a real interest in ceramics; she received only passing grades in her ceramics classes at school, possibly because she never cared for the messiness of the medium.

Now the experience with ceramics excited her and allowed her to “feel” the medium as well as see it. Working in three dimensions, she had a new outlet for her creativity, and even considered making a ten-foot white piece at Ghost Ranch. But ceramics eventually proved to be more than she cared to handle, painting was a medium she could control; she felt the wet clay controlled her. Eventually she gave up. Longing once again for the feeling of a brush in her hand, she returned to painting.

Although she was now well into her eighties, Georgia’s energy did not seem to dissipate. Hamilton gradually became her constant companion and advisor. They traveled to the island of Antigua in 1975, where she sketched palm trees using her felt tip pen, and made a few charcoal drawings after returning home. The previous year with the assistance of Doris Bry she published *Some Memories of Drawings*, a collection of her charcoal drawings done between 1915 and 1963, with comments by O’Keeffe.

Page 144
Black Rock with Blue III, 1970.
Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 43.2 cm.

In 1976, she and Juan traveled to Washington, D.C. to handle some unfinished business relating to the Stieglitz photographs at the National Gallery of Art. It was a sharp, clear, sunny Fall day, an unbroken blue sky accentuating the intense yellow of the changing trees. Georgia marveled at the hugeness of the Abraham Lincoln sculpture in the Lincoln Memorial and considered what he might think of such an immense image of himself. She delighted in the vastness of the Mall, but it was the straightforward shape of the Washington Monument touching the sky that brought out the Georgia of the past. On her return to New Mexico, she began making line drawings, then pastel, and finally, ordered canvas and paint from her shipper in New York. The series of images showed not the full obelisk but a section of it, the starkness of the shape brilliant against a deep blue sky. She created a series of oils, titled *A Day with Juan*.

Or rather, she conceived of the paintings. John Poling, a painting and maintenance man who worked at Ghost Ranch, was helping Georgia with some correspondence during a period when Hamilton was out of town. Georgia asked him to help her with a painting she had in mind. Poling agreed and set to work stretching, sizing and painting the canvasses while Georgia sat nearby using binoculars so she could see to direct him. Over the years several people had asked Georgia to write about her works and history as an artist. But she had always felt that the written word had no place when it came to art and she never liked writing about herself. Yet she made some notes occasionally over the years and in the mid-1970s, Hamilton encouraged her to begin writing her autobiography. She relented, and entered into a contract with Studio Books, a division of Viking Press in New York. Hamilton oversaw the project, serving as the pair of eyes she needed to help choose transparencies, layouts and proofs. The book came out in the Fall of 1976, and received high praise for its faithfulness to her way of speaking and her struggle to create her own vision. By this time, Georgia had apparently mellowed to the idea of being a public figure and permitted a television crew to spend five days documenting her world in the fall of 1975. This was not the first time she was approached by film makers, but when Perry Miller Adato of National Educational Television in New York told her she could speak in her own words, Georgia accepted. The award-winning film was shown in November, 1977 in Washington, D.C. A reception followed at the National Gallery of Art, currently exhibiting a joint showing of her paintings and Stieglitz's photographs. In autumn of the following year, the Metropolitan Museum in New York featured "Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz," an exhibition of fifty-one photographs. Georgia and Juan worked together to assemble the showing, which included some nudes seen for the first time. They pored over stacks of prints — five hundred in all — to come up with their selection. Memories continued to surface as Georgia gazed at the works made by the man who had the most profound influence on her life. In those early years, she had felt annoyed during long periods when she was forced to stay in one position as he struggled with lighting and camera placement. Now, Georgia had apparently mellowed, and spoke affectionately of the man who had helped make her an icon in the art world.

By now, Hamilton had become the liaison between Georgia and the rest of the world, as well as her agent. The relationship nearly resembled the one between her and Stieglitz, as he gradually began to take over the handling of sales of her paintings. Doris Bry still served





as negotiator, cautiously marketing O’Keeffe’s works to ensure that they retained their value. Only one or two works were offered for sale each year.

Rarely selling to art dealers, Bry told purchasers that Georgia must have the right of first refusal, should they decide to sell. But as time went on, Bry (who had helped with the donations to the Fisk Gallery in the late 1940s, served as the guest curator during the Whitney Museum retrospective and even assembled the *Memories of Drawings* book), now found herself pushed into the background. She did not agree with the way in which Hamilton dealt with art dealers, in her estimation, selling unconditionally at prices either too low or too high.

A complicated web of suits and countersuits developed over the next several years: Georgia fired Bry and sued for the return of her paintings Bry had kept in New York. Bry countersued, saying O’Keeffe had no right to fire her and her services were worth more than the standard 25 percent agent’s commission. Hamilton also felt Bry’s wrath, when he was served with a lawsuit stating that he had unduly pressured O’Keeffe to sever the relationship with her. Hamilton in turn, filed a defamation of character lawsuit.

Gossip flourished regarding the O’Keeffe-Hamilton relationship, and there was some speculation that the two would marry, since they took several trips together. Now well into her nineties, she traveled to Costa Rica and Guatemala in 1979, to Hawaii in 1982 and back to Hawaii the following year. Several magazine articles with pictures of Georgia and Juan in their studio, or posing casually against the backdrop of the house only helped to fuel the talk that persisted.

Most articles, however, focused on her art; it was as though she had been rediscovered, and although she wore the cloak of artist emeritus a little more comfortably, she still blushed at being referred to as “great.” But neither was Georgia exactly shy, nor without strong opinions and a sharp tongue. One of her favorite stories told of the time a stranger came to the gate asking to see Georgia O’Keeffe. She stood for a moment, and then said, “Front side”, turned around, saying “Back side”, and bid the visitor goodbye. Other times, she’d open the door to unannounced visitors and, to their surprise, invite them in.

The mail mounted up as well. Part-time secretaries handled the letters from “fans”, museums, art dealers and historians. She tried to answer as many as possible, but some were simply discarded. Her paintings continued to increase in value as well, gradually rising toward the six-figure bracket. Then in 1972 she briefly found herself in the political arena, when she donated a small painting to a fund-raising auction benefiting George McGovern’s presidential campaign. The \$40,000 price it generated was reported in the press. Now that her name was connected to President Nixon’s opponent, it wasn’t long before she held the dubious honor of making the White House enemies list. An amused Georgia claimed to be delighted to be in the same place as so many other Americans. The “enemy” label was short lived. In January, 1977, she received the Medal of Freedom Award from President Gerald Ford.

While Georgia’s experimentation with sculpture was fairly sparse, she did exhibit one large piece at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1983. Originally created in plaster in 1945, the piece resembles the *Goat’s Horn with Red* pastel, also drawn in 1945. The pastel shows a section of a goat’s skull as viewed from the side. A giant, curved, brilliant red circular shape

Page 148
Abstraction, 1946.
88.9 x 43.2 cm.
Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe.

dominates the center and off to the left, the hollow of the eye. A blue circle in the very center calls our attention to the negative formed by the red “horn”.

The plaster creation was cast at a New Jersey foundry in 1980. A photo taken during the 1983 exhibition shows a diminutive but distinguished Georgia standing in front of a large structure of three somewhat concentric circles, the largest ending almost whimsically in a line floating up and back into itself. Another piece, created in 1917, was sent to the foundry for casting in 1980. This one was only a little over 10 inches high, and although cast, it was never approved, and most likely remained at the foundry. Georgia had spent the better part of a night working on the curved, upright piece during the summer of 1917 while teaching art at the University of Virginia. She had refused to title or explain it, but even those who knew little of Freud couldn't miss the phallic resemblance. San Francisco Museum of Art director George Neubert visited O'Keeffe in 1983 and in a later interview noted that he'd seen three new cone-like pieces cast in bronze, resembling, he felt, the “angled forms from the outside edges of the cityscape paintings of the twenties.”²⁷

All the way through to her late nineties, Georgia maintained a steady but diminishing pace in her daily schedule, yet an enviable one. She rose early, worked with clay, walked with her dogs, enjoyed a glass or two of wine, wrote, and listened to music. She retired early shortly after sunset, and had a housekeeper read to her from a book or magazines such as *Smithsonian*, *New West* or *Prevention*. She connected with old friends occasionally, visiting with Ansel Adams during his exhibition in Tucson and went to New York to view Alexander Calder's show at the Whitney in 1976. Georgia was relieved that she had made the trip, because Calder died not long after. In 1978, Georgia and the three remaining siblings of the O'Keeffe family — Anita, Catherine and Claudia — gathered for the last time in Abiquiú. The family had never been close; in fact, a feeling of rivalry seemed to dominate the relationship between Georgia and her sisters. They may have been jealous of her success; yet Georgia felt as though Ida, also talented, was trying to move into her “territory.” Georgia was closest to Claudia, the youngest, perhaps because she had been Claudia's caretaker in her teaching days in Texas. In the later years of her life, Georgia was approached by the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe asking for her approval of the building of a wing for the purpose of exhibiting her work.

But it was Georgia's wish that a separate building be erected to house her legacy. With that in mind, she considered buying back some of her best paintings she had produced during her lifetime. In 1984, at Hamilton's urging, Georgia reluctantly left her hacienda in the mountains and moved to Santa Fe, where medical help was close by should she need it. Yet she was unwavering in her determination to reach the century mark, and later changed her goal of longevity to an ambitious 125 years. She came close. On 6 March, 1986 at the age of 98, she became ill and was admitted to St. Vincent's Hospital in Santa Fe. She died a few hours later. When word reached Abiquiú, a resident ran to St. Thomas the Apostle church and began to ring the bells. The following day, Georgia Totto O'Keeffe was cremated, and as she wished, no funeral or memorial services were held. Juan Hamilton cast her ashes over the New Mexico landscape where she became a part forever of the land she loved.

Following her death, a squabble ensued between Juan Hamilton and the rest of the family. Juan was the only beneficiary mentioned in her will and stood to inherit tens of





millions of dollars. O’Keeffe’s sister Catherine was the only surviving sister and it was Catherine’s children who brought suit against Hamilton. The claimants reached an out-of-court settlement, the details of which are sealed, but the estate was divided, with Juan the primary heir. In July, 1997, the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum opened in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the first art museum dedicated to an internationally renowned woman artist and home of the largest collection of O’Keeffe works in the world. Its mission carries on the basic tenets that Georgia held onto throughout her life. The museum’s research center sponsors research in art and architectural history, architectural design, literature, music and photography. In addition to its exhibitions, it continually offers education programs at all levels throughout the year.

Today, when one mentions Georgia O’Keeffe, the reaction is usually, “Oh, I love her work.” What comes to mind are the delicacy of a lily or the smoothness and simplicity of an animal skull. She had a way of seeing the beauty in a simple line; in her early days she struggled with the battle between what she wanted to paint, and what she was expected to paint. She never signed her paintings. She did not have to. When we see an O’Keeffe, we know it’s an O’Keeffe. It is interesting that many of the men in her life supported and even encouraged her to pursue art rather than try to persuade her to follow the conventional role of wife and mother. Her relationship with photographer, gallery owner, art connoisseur and visionary Alfred Stieglitz, was undoubtedly her greatest blessing. Georgia already had the underpinnings of talent, creativity and the willingness to pursue her craft to the exclusion of other conventions and dictated lifestyles. She knew that the only way to express her excitement and wonder was through the charcoal stick and the paint brush. One cannot reproduce the oranges of a sunset, the glow of a western village at night; but the burst of feeling created with the bold stroke of the brush conveys the mood. Her creative spark and energy barely diminished in her later years. She traveled extensively, exhibited her work several times a year and was the recipient of numerous honorary degrees. Her paintings commanded prices in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. She counted among her friends and acquaintances distinguished creators in the world of arts and letters, including: Edward Steichen, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, D.H. Lawrence, Christopher Isherwood, Sherwood Anderson, Aaron Copland, Leopold Stokowski, and Aldous Huxley. In her entire career, she never walked away from the creative process. Struggled, yes. Felt self-doubt, occasionally. She expected no less of others in her field. “Just work,” she’d snap at an artist frustrated with his lack of success and recognition. Sound advice for all of us. The legacy she left behind is a unique vision that translates the complexity of nature into simple shapes for us to explore and make our own discoveries. She taught us there is poetry in nature and beauty in geometry. Georgia O’Keeffe’s long lifetime of work shows us new ways to see the world, from her eyes to ours.

— Janet Souter

Page 152

From a Day with Juan IV,

c. 1976-1977.

Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm.

The Art Institute of Chicago,
Chicago.

Page 154

Cup of Silver Ginger, 1939.

48.7 x 41 cm.

The Baltimore Museum of Art,
Baltimore.



NOTES

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- ³ O'KEEFFE, p. 11.
- ⁴ DOW, Arthur Wesley, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for Use of Students and Teachers New York*, Doubleday, p. 53.
- ⁵ LISLE, p. 58.
- ⁶ LISLE, p. 62.
- ⁷ O'KEEFFE, p. 14.
- ⁸ CASTRO, Jan Garden, *The Art & Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*, New York, Crown Publishers, p. 22.
- ⁹ Georgia O'Keeffe to Anita Pollitzer, undated. Quoted in Georgia O'Keeffe film by Perry Miller Adato, 1976, WNET; also mentioned in Museum of Modern Art press release.
- ¹⁰ POLLITZER, Anita, *A Woman on Paper*, New York, Simon & Schuster, p. 120.
- ¹¹ O'KEEFFE, p. 24.
- ¹² POLLITZER, p. 145.
- ¹³ LISLE, p. 109-110.
- ¹⁴ POLLITZER, p. 180.
- ¹⁵ MCBRIDE Henry, "Curious Responses to Work of Miss Georgia O'Keeffe on Others", *New York Herald*, February 4, 1923.
- ¹⁶ LISLE, p. 121.
- ¹⁷ LISLE, p. 137 "outblazed".
- ¹⁸ PETERS, Sarah Whitaker, *Becoming O'Keeffe*, New York Abbeville Press, 1991, p. 173, 177.
- ¹⁹ LISLE, p. 134.
- ²⁰ O'KEEFFE, p. 33.
- ²¹ LISLE, p. 205.
- ²² O'KEEFFE, p. 90.
- ²³ LISLE, p. 248.
- ²⁴ O'KEEFFE, painting 74.
- ²⁵ COWART, Jack, HAMILTON, Juan and GREENOUGH, Sarah, *Georgia O'Keeffe, Art and Letters*, Boston. Little, Brown and Company, 1987, p. 250-251.
- ²⁶ O'KEEFFE, Georgia, p. 106.
- ²⁷ CASTRO, Juan Garden, *The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*, Crown Publishers, New York, 1985, p. 177.

BIOGRAPHY

- 1887 Georgia O’Keeffe is born on 15 November in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, USA, the second of seven children born to Francis Calyxtus O’Keeffe and Ida Totto O’Keeffe.
- 1902 The family moves to Virginia. Georgia takes private art lessons for the next five years.
- 1905-06 Georgia studies at the Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1907-08 She studies at the Art Students League School in New York.
- 1908 She wins the League’s William Merritt Chase still-life prize for her painting *Untitled (Dead Rabbit with Copper Pot)*
- 1908-10 She temporarily abandons painting to devote herself to a career as a commercial artist, painting mainly for advertisements.
- 1912 She teaches art at Amarillo (in Texas) and at the University of Virginia.
- 1915 She teaches art at Columbia College in South Carolina. At the same time, whilst waiting to discover her own personal style, she begins painting abstracts in charcoal.
- 1916 She sends these paintings to a friend, Anita Pollitzer who shows them to the renowned Alfred Stieglitz. Georgia returns to New York to teach at Teachers College.
- 1917 Her first exhibition opens in April at 291, the Alfred Stieglitz Gallery in Chicago.
- 1918 Alfred Stieglitz offers her financial help, allowing her to paint for a year in New York. She begins to paint her flowers, still the most famous of her works today.
- 1918-29 Her interest in oil-painting grows; she creates abstract works, especially landscapes and still-lives.
- 1923 From 1923, and up to his death, Alfred Stieglitz works assiduously to promote O’Keeffe and her work, organizing annual exhibitions at the Anderson Gallery (from 1923 to 1925), at the Intimate Gallery (from 1925 to 1929) and at the American Place (from 1929 to 1946).
- 1924 Marriage of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz.
- 1925 They move into the Shelton Hotel in New York where they will live for twelve years. The apartment, situated on the thirtieth floor of the building, offers an unrestricted view of New York which Georgia paints numerous times.
- 1927 An exposition is dedicated to her at the Brooklyn Museum

- 1928 She sells six paintings representing lilies for a record price of \$25,000 which brings her to the foreground of public attention. However, Georgia O’Keeffe feels the need again to travel to find new sources of inspiration for her painting.
- 1929 She leaves to go East, to Taos in New Mexico. This journey will change her life; she discovers a landscape of austere beauty and infinite space. She visits and paints the mountains and the deserts of the region as well as the historical Ranchos mission church in Taos. She returns every summer to “her country” up until the death of Stieglitz.
- 1930-31 She creates her first works representing skeletons.
- 1933 She is hospitalized in New York for nervous exhaustion.
- 1934 Georgia visits the Ghost Ranch for the first time and knows immediately that it is there that she wants to live.
- 1943 Big exhibition of her works at the Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1945 She buys an abandoned farm property in Abiquiú village, near Ghost Ranch.
- 1946 An exhibition is dedicated to her at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; she is the first female artist to have the honor of an exhibition in this museum. Alfred Stieglitz dies July 13.
- 1949 She settles in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she stays until her death.
- 1962 Georgia is elected amongst the 50 members of the American Academy of Arts and Letters – the highest national arts honor.
- 1951-63 She travels a lot, first in Mexico, then in Peru, India, Greece and Egypt, which will greatly influence her painting.
- 1971 At the age of 84 her eyesight deteriorates, and she is forced to stop painting in 1972.
- 1976 She writes a book about her art with the help of her friend Juan and allows the filming of a documentary at Ghost Ranch.
- 1986 Georgia O’Keeffe dies March 6, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the age of 98.
- 1987 A very important exhibition is dedicated to her for the centenary of her birth; it takes place first in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., then at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
- 1989 Creation of the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation in order to continue her memory and celebrate her work.

INDEX

A		
Abstraction — Alexius, 1928.	85	From the Lake No. 1, 1924. 54
Abstraction IX, 1916.	23	From the Plains II, 1954. 124
Abstraction White Rose II, 1927.	72	From the Plains, 1919. 40
Abstraction, 1916, 1979-1980.	151	
Abstraction, 1921.	39	G
Abstraction, 1945, 1979-1980.	147	Grapes on White Dish – Dark Rim, 1920. 8
Abstraction, 1946.	148	Green Patio Door, 1955. 135
B		
Black and Purple Petunias, 1925.	76	I
Black Hollyhock and Blue Larkspur, 1929.	68	In the Patio VIII, 1950. 143
Black Iris III, 1926.	75	It was Blue and Green, 1960. 138
Black Petunias and White Morning Glory, 1926.	74	J
Black Place Green, 1949.	112	Jack-in-the-Pulpit Abstraction — No. 5, 1930. 82
Black Place IV, 1944.	114	Jack-in-the-Pulpit III, 1930. 80
Black Rock with Blue III, 1970.	144	Jack-in-the-Pulpit IV, 1930. 81
Blue and Green Music, 1919.	49	Jimson Weed, 1932. 84
Blue-Headed Indian Doll, 1935.	123	
Blue Line, c. 1919.	44	L
Blue Lines, No. 10, 1916.	13	Ladder to the Moon, 1958. 129
C		
Canna – Red and Orange, c. 1922.	51	Lake George Window, 1929. 65
Canyon with Crows, 1917.	37	Lavender Hill with Green, 1952. 126-127
Church Steeple, 1930.	96	Leaf Motif, No. 1, 1924. 57
City Night, 1926.	64	Leaves of a Plant, 1942. 102
Cow's Skull: Red, White and Blue, 1931.	92	Light Coming on the Plains II, 1917. 32
Cross with Red Heart, 1932.	101	Light Coming on the Plains III, 1917. 35
Cup of Silver Ginger, 1939.	154	Light Iris, 1924. 52
D		
Dark Tree Trunks, 1946.	113	M
Dead Cottonwood Tree, 1943.	117	Maple and Cedar (Red), 1923. 50
Dead Rabbit with Copper Pot, 1908.	16	Mule's Skull with Pink Poinsettias, 1936. 93
F		
From a Day with Juan IV, c. 1976-1977.	152	Music, Pink and Blue II, 1919. 47
From the Faraway Nearby, 1937.	89	My Autumn, 1929. 69
		My Last Door, 1954. 132
		N
		New York Street with Moon, 1925. 58
		New York, Night, 1928-1929. 60

Nude No. IV, 1917.	36	Special No. 32, 1914.	24
Nude Series VIII, 1917.	21	Spring, 1948.	106-107
		Street, New York I, 1926.	63
O		Stump in Red Hills, 1940.	115
Only One, 1959.	137	Summer Days, 1936.	90
Orange and Red Streak, 1919.	38		
Oriental Poppies, 1928.	77	T/W	
Out Back of Marie's IV, 1931.	86-87	Tan, Orange, Yellow, Lavender, c. 1959.	136
		Two Calla Lilies on Pink, 1928.	71
P		Two Jimson Weeds with	
Patio with Black Door, 1955.	130	Green Leaves and Blue Sky, 1938.	104
Patio with Cloud, 1956.	131	Two Jimson Weeds, 1938.	105
Paul Cézanne, Apples and Oranges, 1898-1899.	18	Two Pink Shells (Pink Shell), 1937.	99
Pedernal, Blue and Yellow, 1941.	109	White Iris, c. 1926.	70
Pelvis III, 1944.	120		
Pelvis with Moon, 1943.	119		
Pelvis with Pedernal, 1943.	118		
Pelvis with Shadows and the Moon, 1934.	95		
Plums, 1920.	19		
Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe.	6		
R			
Radiator Building, Night, New York, 1927.	61		
Ranchos Church, 1929.	67		
Red and Yellow Cliffs, 1940.	110		
Red Mesa, 1917.	31		
Red, Yellow and Black Streak, 1924.	55		
Rodin, Serpent and Eve.	20		
S			
Series I, No. 4, 1918.	46		
Series I, No. 8, 1919.	43		
Shell II, 1928.	98		
The Shelton with Sunspots, 1926.	62		
Single Lily with Red, 1928.	79		
Sky Above Clouds IV, 1965.	140-141		
Special No. 21, 1916.	27		
Special No. 22, 1916.	28		



Born in 1887, Georgia O'Keeffe was one of the key figures who participated in the emancipation of modern art from its conventional forms and subjects. At a time when women were above all wives and mothers, Georgia O'Keeffe defied tradition when she became first the companion and finally the wife of the famous photographer and father of American modern art: Alfred Stieglitz. Georgia O'Keeffe is known above all for her complex descriptions of nature: the delicacy of an autumn leaf, the subtle nuances of a flower petal, or the symmetry of an animal's head. Today we associate Georgia O'Keeffe with bright colours and the austere beauty of the New Mexican desert, where she lived right up to her death at the age of 98.

This work explores the personal journey of Georgia O'Keeffe, her process of creation and the legacy that she has left the art world. It not only explores the experiences that shaped Georgia O'Keeffe at the beginning of her life, but it also invites the reader to look at her later years, when she was just as vibrant and prolific an artist as in her youth.