

# O'Keeffe and the Masculine Gaze

*Treated, the author argues, as intuitive or wanton—as anything but a thinking artist—Georgia O'Keeffe has never received her critical due for the achievement of a popular and feminist art.*

BY ANNA C. CHAVE

Interest in Georgia O'Keeffe has always been keen in this country—keen enough to rival even the extreme fervor felt for Impressionism. When the Metropolitan Museum presented major retrospectives of the work of O'Keeffe and the work of Edgar Degas simultaneously last winter, the O'Keeffe exhibition—though a smaller show and mounted with less fanfare—drew almost as many visitors per day on average as the Degas show.<sup>1</sup> Despite her long-standing popularity, however, O'Keeffe's work is rarely afforded serious critical treatment. Critical reaction has not been consistent; in the 70 years since her first New York exhibition, the critical estimation of O'Keeffe's art has actually declined. If we are ever to be able to see O'Keeffe's art anew—as a worthwhile, complex and even daring project—we must examine the prevailing biases and themes that have dominated the O'Keeffe criticism from the outset.

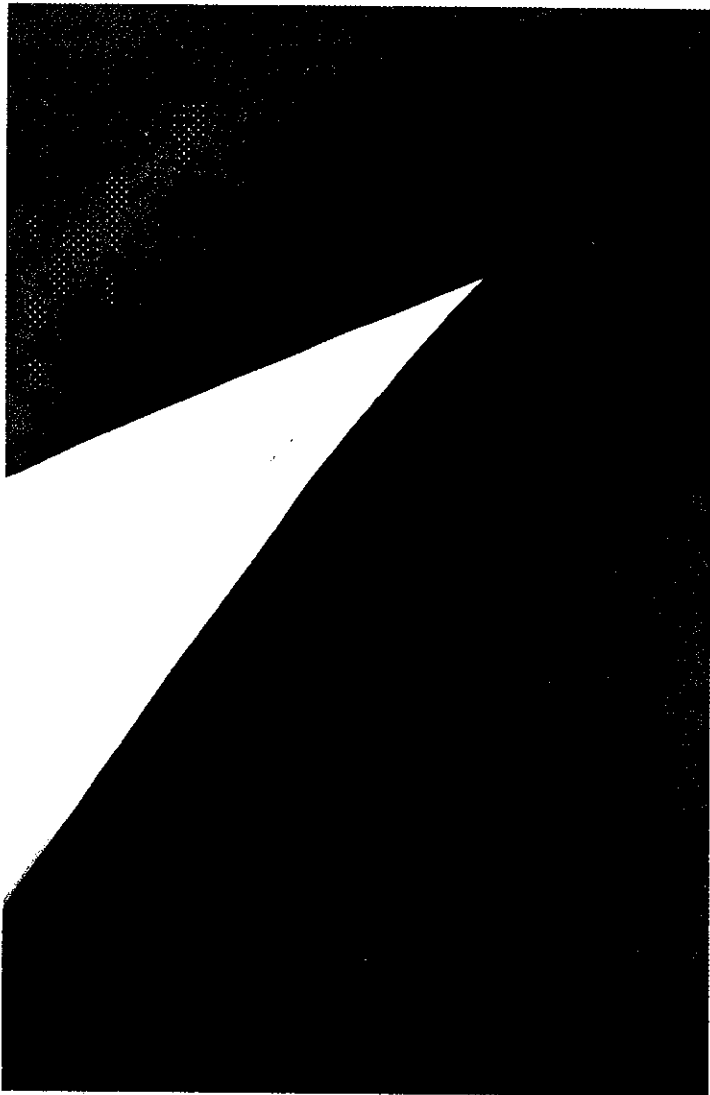
A negative review in the *New York Times* of the Met's O'Keeffe exhibition reveals the uncertain critical position her art occupies today. Michael Brenson found her “dependent upon inspiration . . . immediacy and touch” in her efforts to convey her “almost mystical feeling for the union of the human body with the body of the natural world.” He described how O'Keeffe filled her pictures “with organic shapes and swells” which “reflected the changing colors and shapes inside her,” and he inferred that because the paintings “have a sameness to them” that they revealed an artist “only capable of limited artistic growth.” Brenson concluded that O'Keeffe's paintings were, at most, “skillfully designed and sometimes dramatic decor.”<sup>2</sup>

Whereas O'Keeffe's obsession with the female body emerged as a limitation in Brenson's account, a similar preoccupation emerged as a magnificent obsession in a review of the Degas exhibition by Jack Flam in the *Wall Street Journal*. Flam marveled at how, “in picture after picture Degas seems to be probing the female body for its secrets, to be reaching out toward a mystery that he sensed, longed for, and was haunted by, but that he was unable fully to grasp. The efforts to do so, however, created some of the greatest art of a century remarkable for the greatness of its art.” Degas's perspective on the mesmerizing female body was necessarily a more removed one than O'Keeffe's, but that distance was deemed an advantage, as the critic described Degas's late bathers as “awesomely impersonal.”<sup>3</sup> Flam also reassured his readers of Degas's considerable stature (as if they had any cause to doubt it) by alluding obliquely to the artist's virility—picturing him relentlessly “probing” the female body until it expelled those “secrets” which supposedly inform great art. It matters not that we have no proof that the lifelong bachelor was ever sexually active, for Degas's actual sexuality is not at issue here. A great artist is by definition a potent artist.



*Georgia O'Keeffe: Blue and Green Music, 1919, oil on canvas, 23 by 19 inches. Art Institute of Chicago.*

**What the recent O'Keeffe retrospective offered the public was something rather exceptional: a woman's often vivid, poetic and evocative report on her own experience of her body and her desires.**



*Black and White, 1930, oil on canvas, 36 by 24 inches.*  
Whitney Museum, © Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe.

Women remain, according to Teresa de Lauretis, "the very ground of representation, both object and support of a desire which, intimately bound up with power and creativity, is the moving force of culture and history."<sup>4</sup> Although "the naked woman has always been in our society the allegorical representation of truth,"<sup>5</sup> this is a truth that could be articulated only by the knowing probing of the phallic pen or brush—a truth that O'Keeffe could only hope to embody, but never to enunciate. In such a context, there exists little room for examining an endeavor such as O'Keeffe's.

Accustomed to a narrative of art history centered on male artists who commonly created, implicitly for male viewers, images of female bodies, the public's reflexive way of consuming the famously female

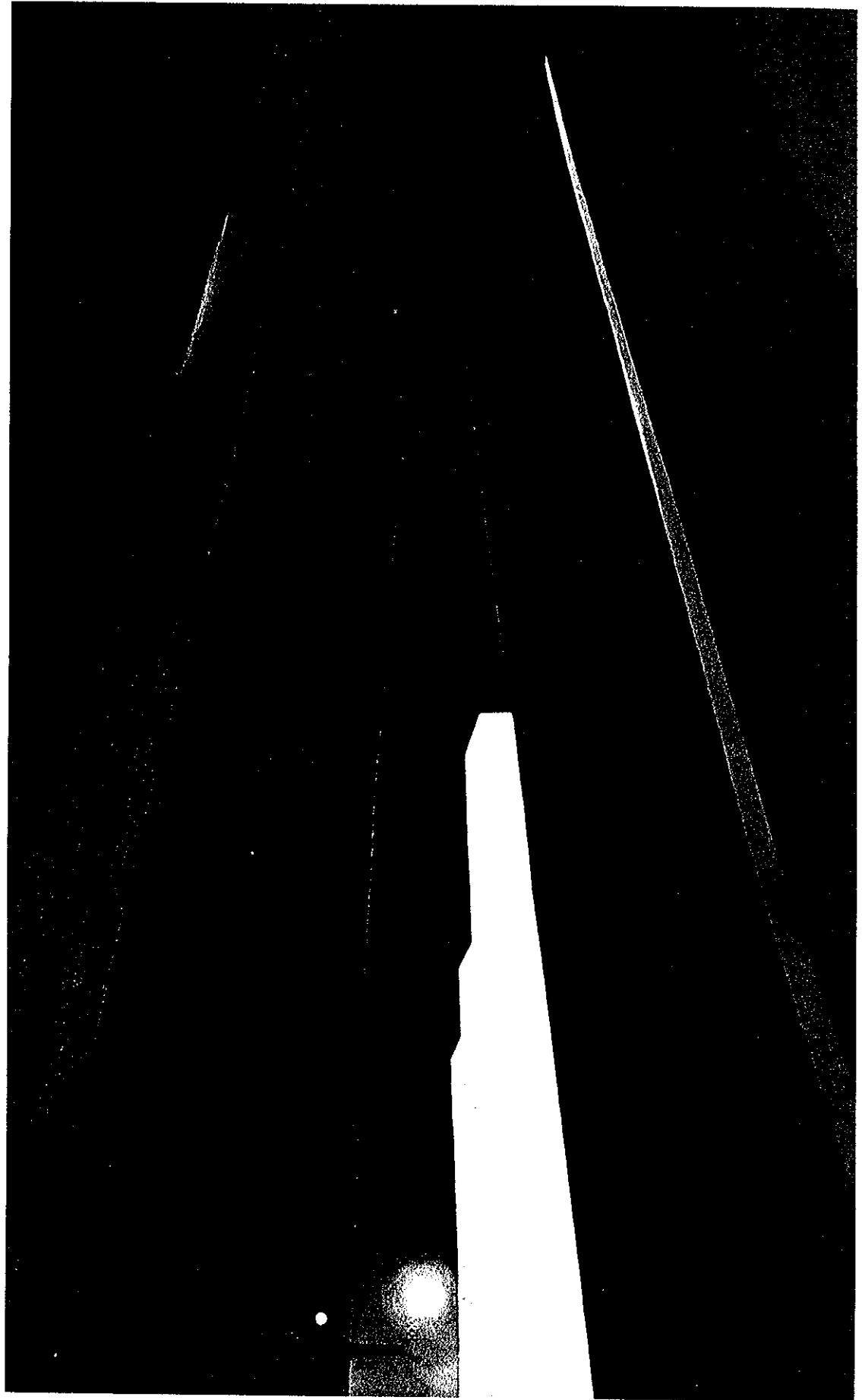
O'Keeffe has been as the object of *its* desire rather than as the agent of her own. Her own body has been subjected to intense public scrutiny from the first through the long series of highly eroticized nude photographs taken of her by her husband, Alfred Stieglitz.<sup>6</sup> That the literature on O'Keeffe is almost universally biographical is just another sign of how the fascination has been more with the woman than with the art. It is symptomatic that the catalogue for the recent O'Keeffe exhibition consisted mainly of her letters and of a personal memoir by her last assistant.<sup>7</sup> But we might draw other conclusions from the O'Keeffe retrospective, conclusions that diverge from both the recent critical reception of O'Keeffe's works and from earlier, more positive responses. Each of these earlier approaches has, in its way, bound O'Keeffe and her work to the masculine gaze—her body and her art have been eroticized from an exclusively male perspective. But I would suggest that what the recent O'Keeffe exhibition offered the public was something even more exceptional: a woman's often vivid, poetic and evocative visual report on her own experience of her body and her desires.

**E**ven when O'Keeffe's work was most warmly received by critics, in the 1920s—as when Lewis Mumford wrote in the *New Republic* in 1927 that she was "perhaps the most original painter in America"<sup>8</sup>—they did not generally regard her as entirely responsible for her own achievement. When a critic for the *New York Sun* compared an O'Keeffe show favorably to an Impressionist exhibition in 1923, for instance, he said of the latter pictures: "Here are masculine qualities in great variety and reserve. But as in this unfair world, though the man spends a lifetime in careful consideration of a question his answer may seem no more sure than the one the woman [O'Keeffe] gets by guesswork."<sup>9</sup>

To critics then as now, O'Keeffe was an intuitive creature who groped her way along. For that matter, a review of her first solo show, in 1917 at "291," Alfred Stieglitz's gallery, sounds similar to (if somewhat more positive than) Brenson's: "Here are emotional forms quite beyond the reach of conscious design, beyond the grasp of reason—yet strongly appealing to that apparently unanalyzable sensitivity in us through which we feel the grandeur and sublimity of life."<sup>10</sup> This image of O'Keeffe as a purely instinctual creature persisted throughout the 1920s. Waldo Frank portrayed her as "a glorified American peasant . . . full of loamy hungers of the flesh" and given to "monosyllabic speech."<sup>11</sup> And Lewis Mumford conjured an image of the artist as plant, saying that "all these paintings come from a central stem . . . well grounded in the earth."<sup>12</sup> By extension, O'Keeffe's art was often seen as picturing some unevolved creature's native habitat: "There are canvases of O'Keeffe's that make one to feel life in the dim regions where human, animal and plant are one, undistinguishable, and where the state of existence is blind pressure and dumb unfolding," wrote Paul Rosenfeld.<sup>13</sup>

But O'Keeffe was no plant, no amoeba and no dimwit: she was a self-possessed, literate person<sup>14</sup> who formulated with great deliberateness often eloquent visual descriptions of her ideas, perceptions and feelings. O'Keeffe saw art precisely as a means of saying what she wanted to say in a way that suited her. As she said in a public statement for her first major exhibition, in 1923 at the Anderson Galleries, she knew that as a woman her social freedom was strictly limited: "I can't live where I want to—I can't go where I want to—I can't even say what I want to." Her art was prompted, then, by the realization that "I was a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted . . . I found that I could say things with colors and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way—things that I had no words for."<sup>15</sup> O'Keeffe further explained her motivations when she wrote the same year to her friend Sherwood Anderson of her deep "desire to make the

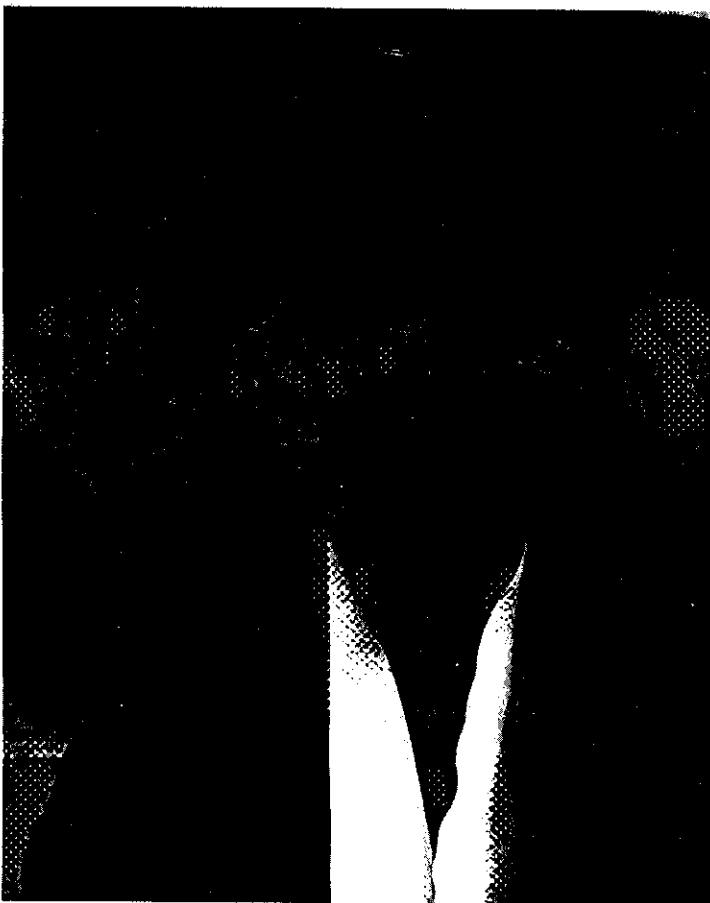
*City Night, 1926, oil on canvas,  
48 by 30 inches.  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts.*



unknown—known." Using the then-standard male pronoun, she explained, "By unknown—I mean the thing that means so much to the person that he wants to put it down—clarify something he feels but does not clearly understand. . . . Sometimes it is all working in the dark—but a working that must be done."<sup>16</sup>

For a woman to find a way of picturing her desires was (and remains) an extraordinary feat. That O'Keeffe accomplished that feat effectively was appreciated initially by her closest friends,<sup>17</sup> and slightly later by Stieglitz who, legend has it, sensed in the first work he saw by her (late in 1915) that he had encountered "at last, a woman on paper." The critics and the public—especially, it is said, the female public<sup>18</sup>—marveled in their turn at this phenomenon. Henry Tyrell, critic for the *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote of her first solo show, in 1917, "Artists especially wonder at [her art's] technical resourcefulness for dealing with what hitherto has been deemed the inexpressible—in visual form, at least. . . . Now, perhaps for the first time in art's history, the style is the woman." Rosenfeld exclaimed in 1921, "It is a sort of new language her paint speaks. We do not know precisely what it is we are experiencing. . . . Here speaks what women have dimly felt and uncertainly expressed." And Mumford declared in 1927, "What distinguishes Miss O'Keeffe is the fact that she has discovered a beautiful language, . . . and has created in this language a new set of symbols; by these means she has opened up a whole area of human consciousness which has never, so far as I am aware, been so completely revealed in either literature or in graphic art."<sup>19</sup>

For some critics, certainly, this novel "woman on paper" (or canvas) was merely a kind of freak occurrence. To others, however,



Alfred Stieglitz: Georgia O'Keeffe, 1918, palladium print, 9¼ by 7½ inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

O'Keeffe's distinctive art opened vital new territories in the visual realm, and brought credit and honor to a nascent American modernist culture. To Edmund Wilson, writing in 1925, O'Keeffe "outblazed" the work of the men around her, while Henry McBride exulted that, "In definitely unbosoming her soul she not only finds her own release but advances the cause of art in her country."<sup>20</sup> As events transpired, O'Keeffe would be ushered briskly out of the limelight once the victory of that "cause" was in sight, however. To Clement Greenberg, mouthpiece of the New York School during its rise to international prominence after World War II, O'Keeffe was merely a "pseudo-modern" whose work "adds up to little more than tinted photography . . . [or] bits of opaque cellophane."<sup>21</sup> By (what became) the normative, modernist standards, the art of O'Keeffe no doubt fell short. Her abortive relation to abstraction and her manifest indifference to Cubism have long since rendered her *persona non grata* among critics prone to certain modernist orthodoxies.

O'Keeffe was neither ignorant nor contemptuous of European abstraction, however. She had studied Braque and Picasso drawings at 291 as early as 1914, and she had pored over too many issues of *Camera Work*, and read Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art* too carefully at the start of her career, to totally dismiss what they offered. The "errors" her art was prone to—not only her literalism, but her flat-footed way with oil paint, her sometimes cloying palette and her shallowness of surface—were less a sign of provincialism than of her search for a voice distinct from the European masters'. This difference emerges, for instance, in O'Keeffe's confession that she longed to be "magnificently vulgar . . . if I could do that I would be a great success to myself."<sup>22</sup>

In O'Keeffe's day, painting as an American, like painting as a woman, meant working from a shallow cultural and historical background. Her pictures accordingly tend to express their values on the surface, collapsing depth and focusing on the surfaces of objects. Avoiding telltale references to Cézanne or Picasso, O'Keeffe attempted to develop a voice that would speak, comprehensibly and vividly, of her own experience: a Midwesterner's, an American's, a woman's experience. To realize her ambition, O'Keeffe knew she had to paint the "wrong" way, as the approved visual languages were developed in other contexts to serve other ends. It seems that this is what she meant when she wrote: "I just feel I'm bound to seem all wrong most of the time—so there is nothing to do but walk ahead and make the best of it."<sup>23</sup> In the process, she admitted that she felt at times "not steady"<sup>24</sup> or "rather inadequate," and would "wish that I were better," but she knew all along she was a pioneer. And in 1945 she proudly claimed, "I think that what I have done is something rather unique in my time and that I am one of the few who gives our country any voice of its own."<sup>25</sup>

While Stieglitz and his followers proselytized for the development of a native American vision, O'Keeffe noted wryly that, among them, she "seemed to be the only one I knew who didn't want to go to Paris. They would all sit around and talk about the great American novel and the great American poetry, but they all would have stepped right across the ocean and stayed in Paris if they could have. Not me. I had things to do in my own country."<sup>26</sup> In attempting to devise an American idiom, however, she learned from other artists in Stieglitz's sphere, especially Arthur Dove and Paul Strand. But O'Keeffe managed to formulate a language that, even in its most abstract moments, had a more vernacular tone, and proved more popularly accessible and commercially successful than theirs did.<sup>27</sup>

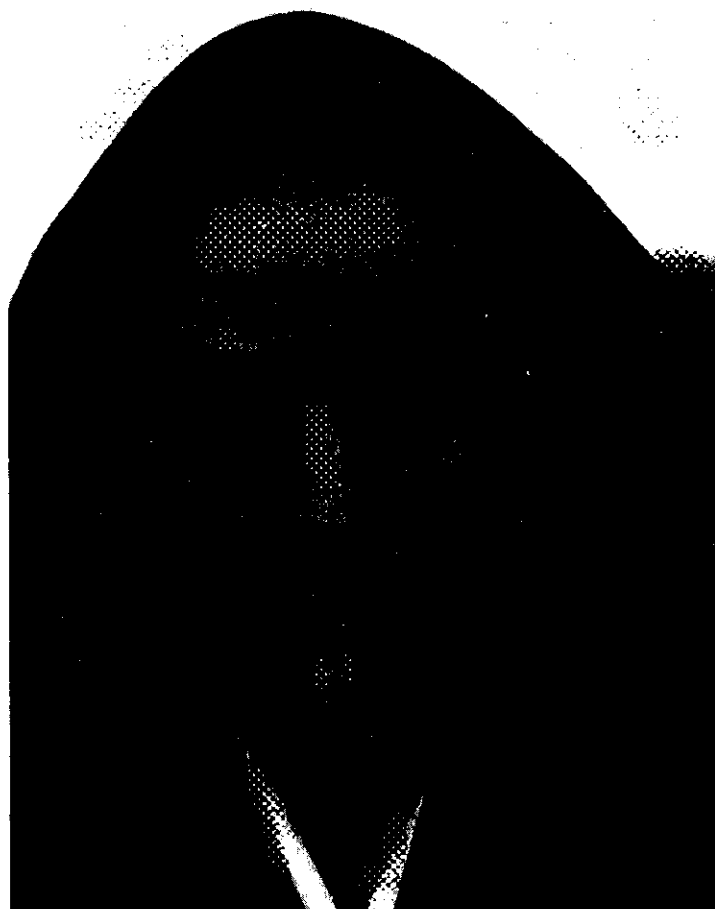
In trying to develop a (woman's) visual language of desire, however, O'Keeffe was on her own. Her solutions to that problem were, admittedly, uneven: now crude and obvious, now elegant and ingenious. She rejected from the first the dominant modes of picturing

desire: she did not depict in a literal way the site of desire itself, the human body.<sup>28</sup> Not only did she deny the (male) viewer the opportunity to look in a sexually predatory way at actual female anatomy (though critics proved remarkably inventive even so in their voyeuristic readings of her art's metaphorical content), but she also eschewed the easy but self-defeating tack of inviting (female) viewers to gaze at the male body. Instead, O'Keeffe portrayed abstractly, but unmistakably, her experience of her own body, not what it looked like to others. The parts of the body she engaged were mainly invisible (and unrepresented) due to their interiority, but she offered viewers an ever-expanding catalogue of visual metaphors for those areas, and for the experience of space and penetrability generally.

A model of sexuality and of sexual development centered around voids (vaginas, wombs) and penetrability, rather than around the probing penis, has recently been posited by Luce Irigaray in her critique of Freud and Lacan.<sup>29</sup> O'Keeffe's imagery—with its myriad canyons, crevices, slits, holes and voids, its effluvia, as well as its soft swelling forms—in a sense prefigures Irigaray's vision, as it describes abstractly what differentiates female bodies: the roundness, the flows and, above all, the spaces. In certain paintings O'Keeffe depicted spaces penetrated by long, rigid forms, and these works were often read, and continue to be read, as images of the experience of coition (their abstractness notwithstanding). Wrote Lewis Mumford: "She has revealed the intimacies of love's juncture with the purity and the absence of shame that lovers feel in their meeting; . . . she has, in sum, found a language for experiences that are otherwise too intimate to be shared."<sup>30</sup> Said McBride, "It was one of the first great triumphs for abstract art, since everybody got it."<sup>31</sup>

Significantly, O'Keeffe first developed such an imagery when the campaign for the sexual self-determination of women through access to contraception was at a peak—a campaign that reflected a growing acceptance of women's sexual expression by unfastening the instrumental link between sexual activity and procreation. Historians have noted that "by the 1920s Americans were clearly entering a new sexual era [distinguished by] . . . the new positive value attributed to the erotic, the growing autonomy of youth, the association of sex with commercialized leisure and self-expression, the pursuit of love, the visibility of the erotic in popular culture, the social interaction of men and women in public, [and] the legitimization of female interest in the sexual."<sup>32</sup>

O'Keeffe's abstract and highly sensual images of often labiallike folds, sometimes rendered in pastel shades, invoked associations not only with the body, but with skies and cloud formations, as well as with canyons and the anatomy of flowers. O'Keeffe had intense feelings about certain elements of nature, especially the open skies and spaces of the plains, and she found in natural configurations, large and small, homologies for the felt experience of the body. Her distinctive visual language first took shape when she was living in Canyon, Texas, and struggling to paint the Palo Duro Canyon nearby. The invisibility of the beautiful canyon fascinated her; she said, "It was a place where few people went. . . . We saw the wind and snow blow across the slit in the plains as if the slit didn't exist."<sup>33</sup> Later, even in painting the built environment of New York City, she often focused on architectural canyons or on the spaces between and over buildings as much as on the buildings themselves. Further, once they became available, and once she could afford it, O'Keeffe lived at the tops of skyscrapers in New York, nearest to the sky. As a native of the rolling Wisconsin landscape who later chose to move to the open plains of Texas and New Mexico, she sometimes wrote to friends out West (when personal circumstances kept her in the city) asking them to "kiss the sky" for her.



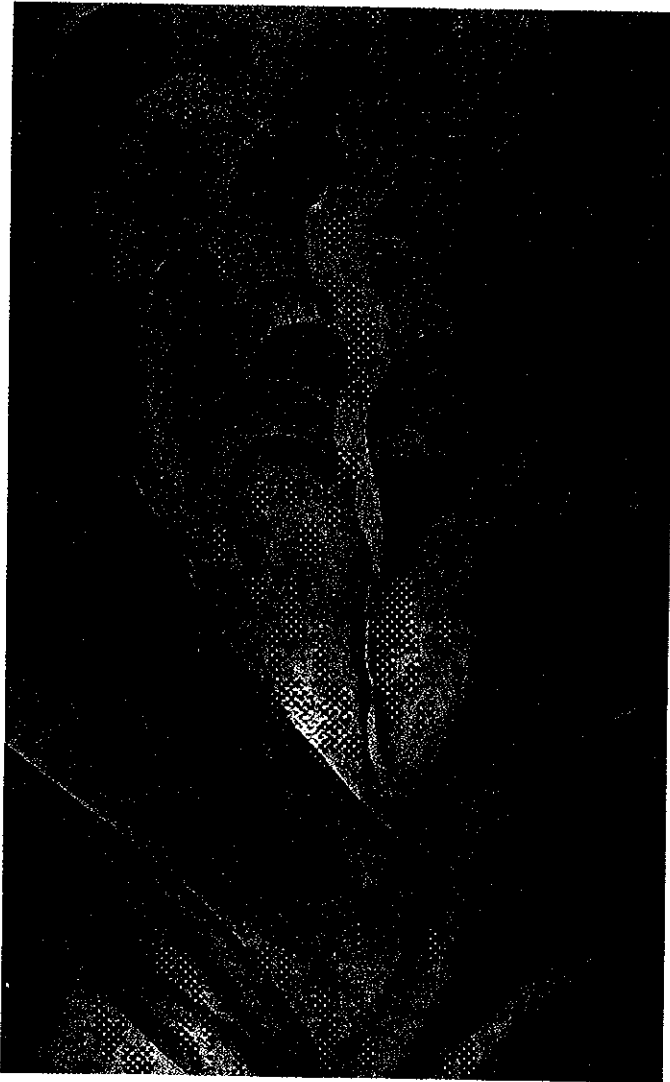
Photograph of Georgia O'Keeffe taken by Stieglitz in 1924. Museum of Modern Art.

O'Keeffe once described herself as "the sort of child that . . . ate around the hole in the doughnut saving . . . the hole for the last and best so probably—not having changed much—when I started painting the pelvis bones I was most interested in the holes in the bones—what I saw through them—particularly the blue from holding them up in the sun against the sky."<sup>34</sup> O'Keeffe's renderings of the empty space framed by pelvic bones made literal what some critics had seen as an oblique reference in many of her earlier pictures: the relation of their voids to the space of the uterus. Critics rhapsodized that "the world [O'Keeffe] paints is maternal," that her pictures' "profound abysses" evinced "mysterious cycles of birth and reproduction" (to take some representative phrases).<sup>35</sup> O'Keeffe's art was not the exalted vision of maternal plenitude that many of these critics liked to imagine, however, but was instead, if anything, a report on the experience of childlessness; of the vacant—not the occupied womb.

Her earliest exhibited work supposedly prompted Willard Huntington Wright to complain to Stieglitz, "All these pictures say is 'I want to have a baby.'" To this Stieglitz reportedly replied, "That's fine."<sup>36</sup> Stieglitz considered it "fine" because he had a theory that a woman experiences the world through the womb, which he called "the seat of her deepest feeling," and he wanted to see that feeling visualized.<sup>37</sup> However, he refused to father a child by her, insisting that his decision was in the best interests of her work and of refuting the prejudice that women are capable of creating only babies, not art (he preferred not to contemplate their ability to do both).<sup>38</sup>

Stieglitz's denial of his wife's wish to have a child was only one of

**Stieglitz discouraged O'Keeffe's innovations throughout her career, including her decision to render that priapic icon, the skyscraper, and to magnify the scale of her flowers.**



Flower Abstraction, 1924, oil on canvas, 48 by 30 inches. Whitney Museum, © Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe.

the many ways he thwarted her in life as in her art. Though he is widely regarded as responsible for her success, the record now shows that Stieglitz's effect on O'Keeffe was more destructive than not, and that the efforts he made, supposedly on her behalf, were often self-serving.<sup>39</sup> The prerogative of giving birth, which he refused his wife, Stieglitz in effect arrogated to himself, saying that he had given birth to her, and that together they had given birth to her art—those much admired pictures being his progeny.<sup>40</sup> To hear O'Keeffe tell it, her dealer and husband discouraged her innovative moves throughout her career, including the decision to render that

priapic urban icon, the skyscraper, as well as the important decision to magnify the scale of her flowers.<sup>41</sup>

**T**he subject O'Keeffe has been mostly identified with is, of course, flowers—historically a relatively minor subject, and one often relegated to women and amateur painters. Eschewing the artist's customary, innocuous bouquets, however, O'Keeffe chose one or two blooms with particularly suggestive forms and inflated their proportions until they pressed against the pictures' edges. The effect could be intensely, even disquietingly sexual. But O'Keeffe took offense at the sexual readings of her flower paintings, as well as of her abstractions. Stieglitz represented O'Keeffe and her art in sexual terms from the first, however—introducing her to a wider viewing public (in 1921) not directly through her own work but through his many sensual photographs of her, where her pictures sometimes served as hazy backdrops to her voluptuous, nude or lightly clothed body. As far as we know, she made no effort to stop him.

O'Keeffe's objection to the sexual readings of her art probably had more to do with the degrading forms those readings took than with any naivete about her works' sexual overtones. Her own and others' recollections (of her painting in the nude, for instance) suggest that she had an acute awareness of her sexuality, and that she wanted to express that sense in her art. In a letter to her closest friend in 1916 she said, however tentatively, that her work "seems to express in a way what I want it to . . . it is essentially a woman's feeling—satisfies me in a way— . . . There are things we want to say—but saying them is pretty nervy. . . ."<sup>42</sup> Some years later, hoping to find a woman who might write about her art more perceptively than the male critics, O'Keeffe wrote to Mabel Dodge Luhan: "I have never felt a more feminine person—and what that is I do not know—so I let it go at that till something else crystalizes. . . . What I want written . . . I have no definite idea of what it should be—but a woman who has lived many things and who sees lines and colors as an expression of living—might say something that a man cant—I feel there is something unexplored about women that only a woman can explore—Men have done all they can do about it."<sup>43</sup>

Year after year, Stieglitz issued pamphlets for O'Keeffe's shows with excerpts from reviews and essays by Hartley, Rosenfeld, McBride and others—critics who, as the dealer's friends and supporters, were all influenced by his vision of her art. These accounts that Stieglitz elicited, and that he used to promote O'Keeffe, generally left her "full of furies." She wrote to Sherwood Anderson, "I wonder if man has ever been written down the way he has written woman down—I rather feel that he hasn't been—that some woman still has the job to perform—and I wonder if she will ever get at it—I hope so."<sup>44</sup>

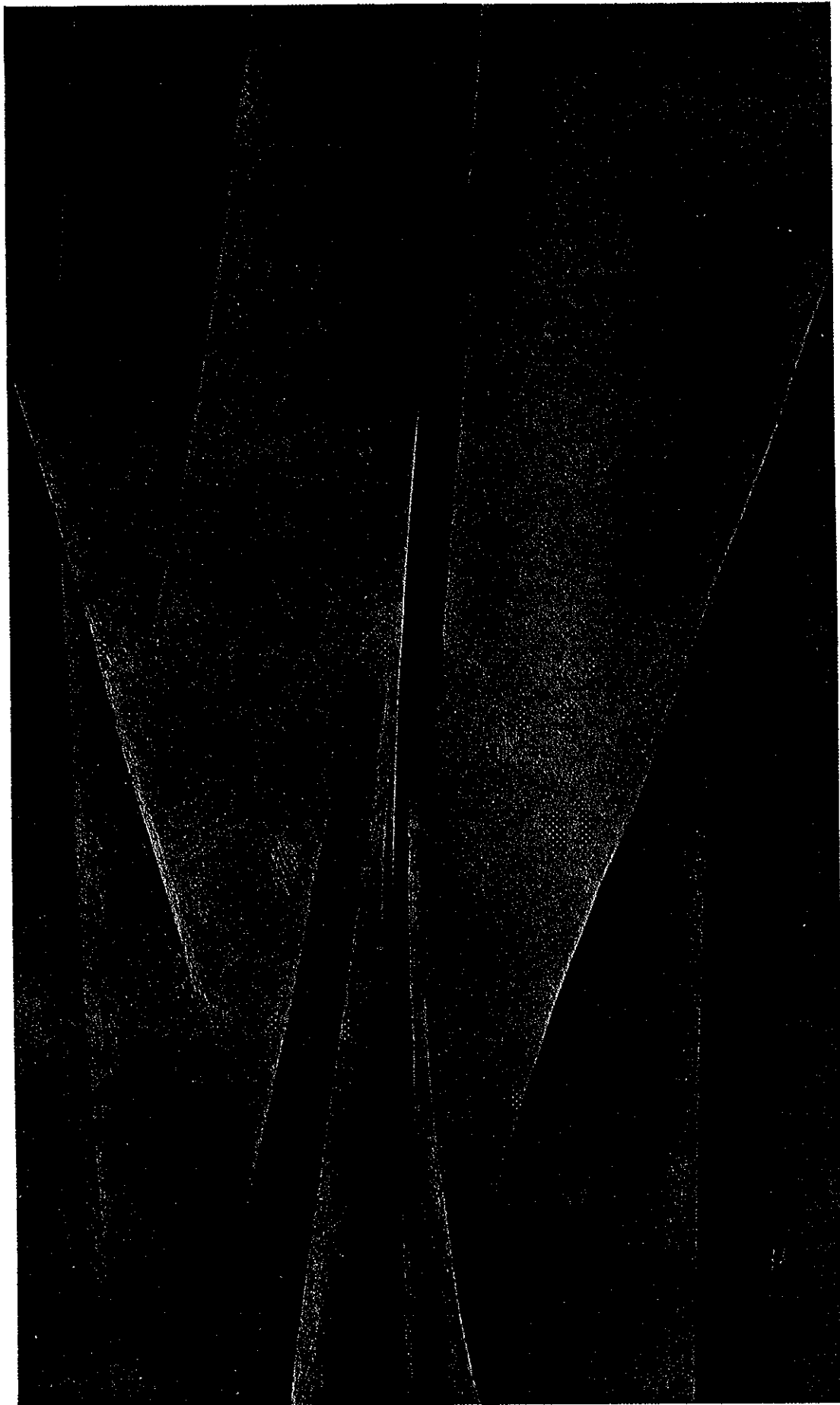
The moral of the story of the reception of O'Keeffe's art could be encapsulated by the axiom that "'sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away,' . . . most personal, and at the same time most socially determined, most defining of the self and most exploited or controlled."<sup>45</sup> O'Keeffe's expressions of her sexuality were appropriated and exploited by critics for their own ends, made over into mirrors of their own desires. They habitually homogenized or reduced the sensuality of the artist's work—which varied widely, from the subdued or controlled to the lavish or vulgar, depending in part on the motif she employed: flowers, leaves, shells and bones, canyons and mesas, skyscrapers and barns (as well as abstraction)—into something lurid and literal. In the 1920s, Hartley proclaimed that her images "are probably as living and shameless private documents as exist, in painting certainly, and probably in any other art. By shamelessness I mean unqualified nakedness of statement. . . . Georgia O'Keeffe pictures are essays in experience that neither Rops nor



*Black Iris III, 1926, oil on canvas, 36 by 29 7/8 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art.*



*Abstraction, 1926, oil on canvas,  
30 by 18 inches.  
Whitney Museum.*



Moreau nor Baudelaire could have smiled away." Rosenfeld wrote, "All is ecstasy here, ecstasy of pain as well as ecstasy of fulfillment." And Kalonyme declared that, in a "sensationally straightforward, clear and intimate" way, O'Keeffe "reveals woman as an elementary being, closer to the earth than man, suffering pain with passionate ecstasy and enjoying love with beyond good and evil delight."<sup>46</sup>

The problem with all these accounts of O'Keeffe's art is not that her pictures are not sexual, but that the difficult exercise she set herself, and the now-muted, now-declamatory visual poetry it yielded, was crudely translated by critics into a fulsome, clichéd prose. Her art was not described as the vision of someone with real, deeply felt desires, but as the vision of womanhood *tout court* or that depersonalized Woman who obligingly stands for Nature and Truth. To the painter Oscar Bluemner (as to many others), O'Keeffe was the "priestess of Eternal Woman," her art "flowering forth like a manifestation of that feminine causative principle."<sup>47</sup> What we find here, in other words, is what Klaus Theweleit has aptly described in another context as "a specific (and historically recent) form of the oppression of women—one that has been notably underrated. It is oppression through exaltation, through a lifting of boundaries, an 'irrealization' and reduction to principle—the principle of flowing, of distance, of vague, endless enticement. Here again, women have *no names* . . . [and] Exaltation is coupled with a negation of women's carnal reality."<sup>48</sup>

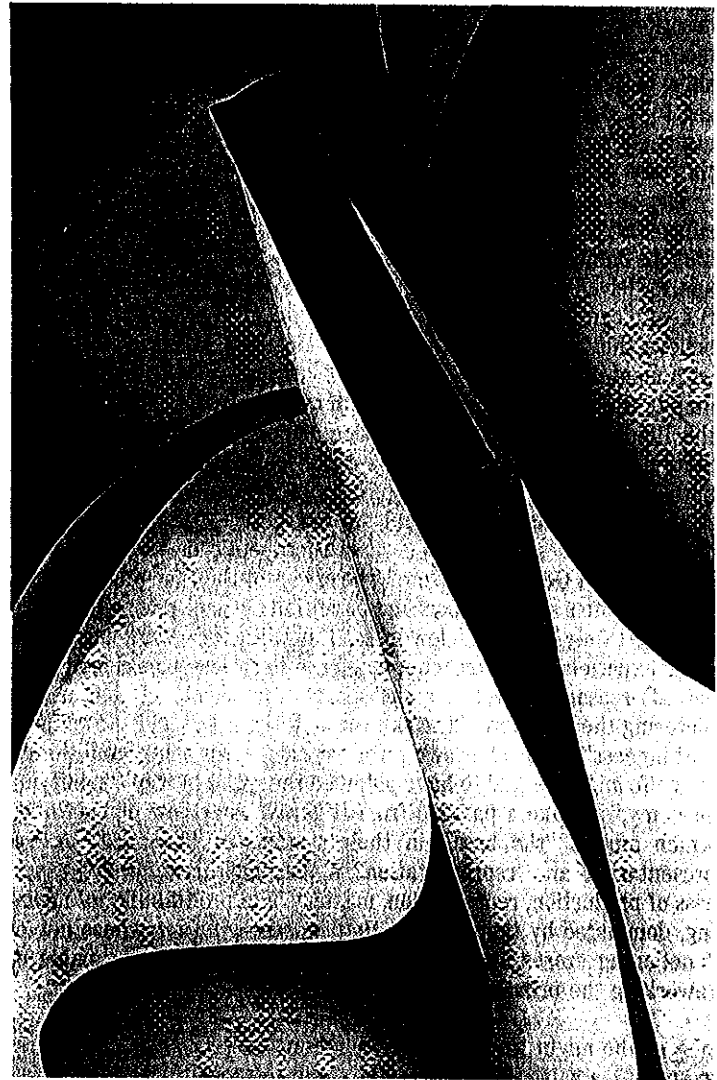
In most critics' eyes, O'Keeffe's art conveyed principles of maternity, purity and (paradoxically) enticement. This contradictory image of the artist as chaste and lustful, as child, seductress and mother, permeated and permeates the writing on her work. An article on O'Keeffe in *Time* in 1946 was headlined "Austere Stripper," while just two years ago *Vanity Fair* gushed: "Vast and virginal, O'Keeffe's space is one of ecstatic possibility. . . . O'Keeffe is sexy, heartless, canny, wise, stylish, resigned, slatternly, intelligent, pixieish . . . [and] Pretty cocky [sic]."<sup>49</sup> As early as 1918, for that matter, Stieglitz described the artist to herself as "The Great Child pouring out some more of her Woman self on paper—purely—truly—unspoiled."<sup>50</sup> In the 1920s, Hartley found O'Keeffe at once "shameless" and near to "St. Theresa's version of life" in its ecstatic mysticism.<sup>51</sup>

Rosenfeld wrote provocatively that in O'Keeffe's pictures, "Shapes as tender and sensitive as trembling lips make slowly, ecstatically to unfold before the eye. . . . It is as though one had been given to see the mysterious parting movement of petals under the rays of sudden fierce heat. . . . She gives the world as it is known to woman . . . rendering in her picture of things her body's subconscious knowledge of itself. . . . What men have always wanted to know, and women to hide, this girl sets forth."<sup>52</sup> But what was this tantalizing knowledge that women presumably concealed? Rosenfeld was more explicit on another occasion: "Her art is gloriously female. Her great painful and ecstatic climaxes make us at last to know something the man has always wanted to know."<sup>53</sup>

Why would Stieglitz so relish seeing O'Keeffe's art described in these terms—as reports on her wondrous climaxes—that he invariably used just such phrases to promote her work, despite the intense dismay it caused her?<sup>54</sup> Because those "great painful and ecstatic climaxes" (as the public well knew) were given to O'Keeffe by none other than Alfred Stieglitz; her art itself, he liked to intimate, issued out of those experiences. In a review of her first major show, McBride said flatly that O'Keeffe and her art were Stieglitz's creations; that he had fomented the sexual liberation that enabled her (however "subconsciously") to paint:

Georgia O'Keeffe is what they probably will be calling in a few years a B.F.,

**Her art was not seen as the vision of someone with real, deeply felt desires, but as the vision of all womanhood, or that depersonalized Woman who stands for Nature.**



**Black Spot No. 3, 1919, oil on canvas, 24 by 16 inches. Albright-Knox Gallery, © Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe.**

since all of her inhibitions seem to have been removed before the Freudian recommendations were preached upon this side of the Atlantic. She became free without the aid of Freud. But she had aid. There was another who took the place of Freud. . . . It is of course Alfred Stieglitz that is referred to. He is responsible for the O'Keeffe exhibition in the Anderson Galleries . . . and it is reasonably sure that he is responsible for Miss O'Keeffe, the artist.<sup>55</sup>

On one level, no doubt, this relentless stress on Stieglitz's Svengali role, on O'Keeffe's sexuality and on her art's sexual content is or ought to be puzzling. Much art that is far more explicitly erotic (Matisse's famous odalisques, for instance) is rarely described in such a sexualized way. Whereas art (by a man) that is literally sexual tends to be discussed in terms of beauty, purity, the sacred, line-color-and-form or in relation to the transgressions of the avant-garde, art by O'Keeffe that is only metaphorically sexual gets

**In opening up the possibility for the representation of women as agents of their own desire, she opened up new possibilities as well for male sexuality.**

described in the most lurid terms imaginable: where the literal gets metaphorized, the metaphorical gets literalized. In a review of a show featuring the flower paintings (in which he advised O'Keeffe to get to a nunnery), McBride said of her earlier, supposedly lewd abstractions: "To this day those paintings are whispered about when they are referred to at all."<sup>66</sup>

The woman strange and brazen enough to make public such supposedly explicit reports on her sexual satisfactions would inevitably be viewed, whether mockingly or admiringly, as a creature apart. "Psychiatrists have been sending their patients up to see the O'Keeffe canvases," gossiped the *New Yorker* in 1926. "If we are to believe the evidence, the hall of the Anderson Galleries is littered with mental crutches, eye bandages, and slings for the soul. [People] limp to the shrine of Saint Georgia and they fly away on the wings of the libido." Moreover, "One O'Keeffe hung in the Grand Central Station would even halt the home-going commuters. . . . Surely if the authorities knew they would pass laws against Georgia O'Keeffe, take away her magic tubes and her brushes."<sup>67</sup>

Just what is so subversive or so therapeutic or both about the sensual art of Georgia O'Keeffe? The critics of the time might have it that O'Keeffe's art was illicit and potentially censurable owing to its, at best, thinly disguised lewdness. But O'Keeffe's work may have been experienced as treacherous for other (less consciously perceived) reasons as well. As she spent so much of her long career picturing the not-there, "the sky through the hole" and the "slits in nothingness" (to use her own phrases) more than beings and things, O'Keeffe might be said to have plumbed the "hole in men's signifying economy," to take a passage from Irigaray. That hole or "nothing" which augurs "the break in their systems of 'presence', or 'representation' and 'representation'." A nothing threatening the process of production, reproduction, mastery, and profitability, of meaning, dominated by the phallus—that *master signifier* whose law of functioning erases, rejects, denies . . . a *heterogeneity* capable of reworking the principle of its authority."<sup>68</sup>

So who might find such a treacherous exercise, or such contraband, a salve; and who might stand to profit by it? In the first instance, no doubt, it was Stieglitz who profited: he successfully marketed O'Keeffe's art as a kind of soft-core pornography or as a sop to male fantasies by perverting her images of her experience of her body and her desire into reifications of male desire, of the pleasure men imagine themselves giving women. There are more significant and more salutary benefits to be had from O'Keeffe's improper pictures, however. "[S]ince women has [sic] had a valid representation of her sex/organ(s) amputated," as Irigaray put it,<sup>69</sup> O'Keeffe's pictures may appeal to women by articulating the sensation of crevices and spaces not as an experience of lack and absence, but as one of plenitude and gratification. O'Keeffe pictured her sexuality in a personal, but resonant way, and—without making any reductive equations of Woman to Nature to Truth—she created in the same stroke a vivid record of her consoling sense of her relation to nature.

For male viewers, too, O'Keeffe's art may be potentially liberating. There is, after all, that lingering question about the pleasure men give women. Lacan suggested that this question lingers because men

yearn for that privilege, conventionally reserved for women, of being the cause and the object of desire: "For each partner in the relation, the subject and the Other, it is not enough to be the subjects of need, nor objects of love, but they must stand [also] as the cause of desire. This truth is at the heart of all the mishaps of sexual life which belong in the field of psychoanalysis."<sup>60</sup> In opening up the possibility for the representation of women as agents of their own desire, O'Keeffe opened up new possibilities as well for the sexual positioning of men; and the commotion raised by male critics over her "shameless" imagery might be explained, in part, by their glimpsing of those possibilities. Since women have not been constituted as subjects under patriarchy, they have had no legitimate basis for experiencing, let alone describing, their own desire; and it follows that men have had little basis for experiencing themselves as the cause or objects of desire. Insofar as she presumed to describe her desire, articulating a female erotics and claiming a full sexual citizenship, O'Keeffe was in a real sense an "outlaw." And insofar as her art endeavored to position itself outside the existing visual practice in which "woman is constituted as the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to man,"<sup>61</sup> it was, in a sense, both subversive and hygienic.

If O'Keeffe is seen as a shamanistic figure (like many important modern artists) and if her art is construed as a transgressive exercise (such as avant-garde artists are supposed to perform), then what can explain the shabby treatment she receives at the hands of critics and art historians? O'Keeffe was an inconstant modernist, disinclined to use hermetic languages—however well she understood them—and so bound to remain a comparatively parochial or marginal figure. Just as importantly, however, the nature of the project that O'Keeffe pursued, and the way it has been used, prevent her from attaining a major historical position, as art history is not built around women's desire but around men's, not around a model of permeability or mutuality but around one of closure and domination. O'Keeffe, the female body, has thus inevitably been more the object of interest and exchange than O'Keeffe, the art. Janet Hobhouse has suggested that O'Keeffe "serves too usefully as an icon for the pictures to be seen as anything other than a gloss on the life."<sup>62</sup>

But even if the art's attractions cannot be separated from the artist's, that poor oxymoronic figure—the *femme-enfant* and "austere stripper," not to mention the *Woman Artist*—might yet be hounded into retirement. O'Keeffe should be allowed to become another kind of icon. She pursued and achieved an elusive goal, a popular art that is also a feminist art,<sup>63</sup> enjoyed not exclusively by women. In this country if not internationally, she excites an interest exceeding that of any other pre-World-War-II American artist, and rivaling that of most postwar artists as well. It is time the enduring appeal of O'Keeffe's work be taken seriously, and the political content of her art be recovered—in all its specificity, its ingenuousness and its ingenuity—in a different art history. □

1. At the Metropolitan, the O'Keeffe show was open to the public for 68 days (Nov. 19, 1988–Feb. 5, 1989), drawing an average of 5,411 visitors a day; the Degas show was open for 97 days (Sept. 27, 1988–Jan. 8, 1989), drawing around 5,561 visitors a day—that is, about 160 more per day than the O'Keeffe show.

2. Michael Brenson, "How O'Keeffe Painted Hymns to Body and Spirit," *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1988.

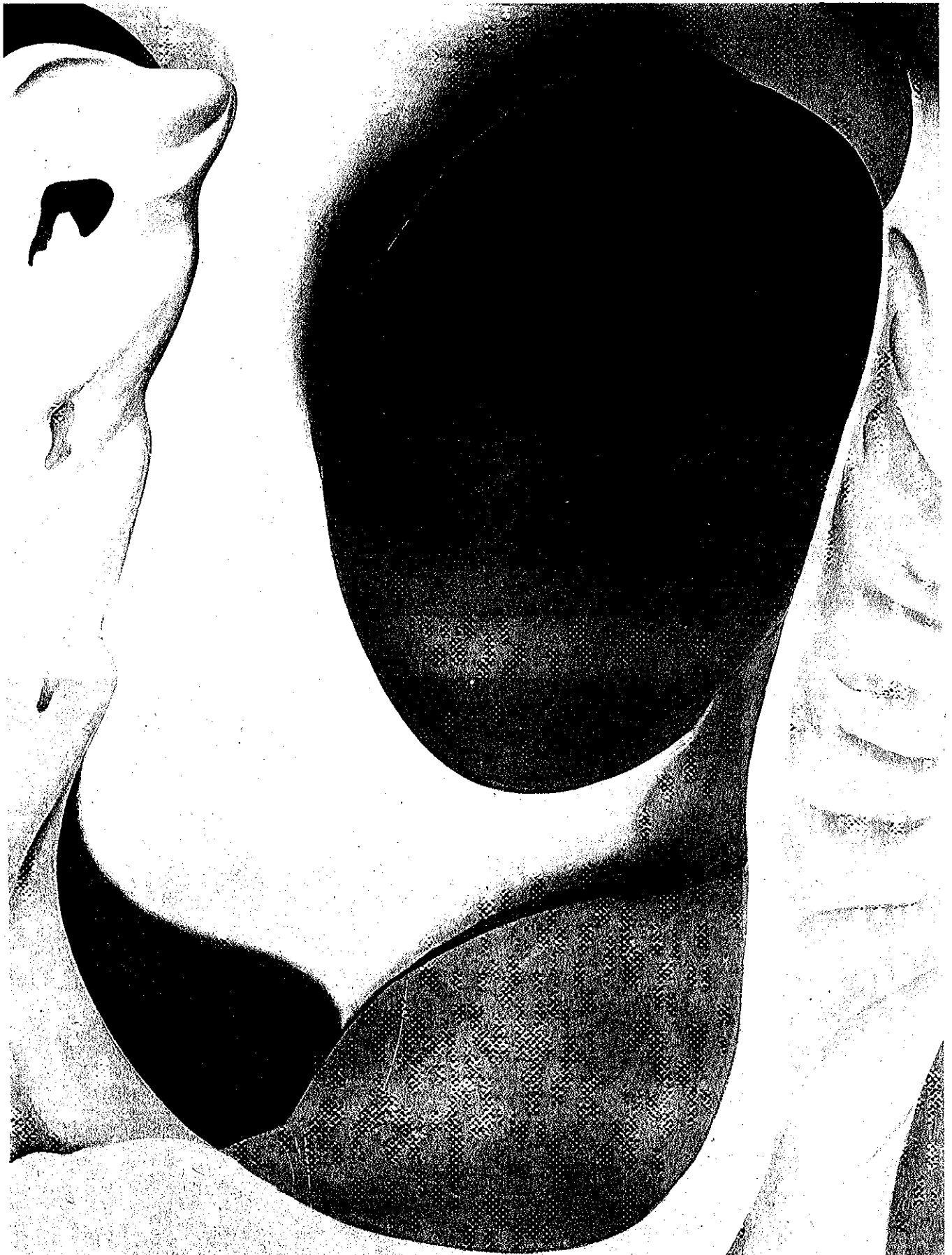
3. Jack Flam, "The Master on View at New Met Galleries," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 27, 1988.

4. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana Univ. Press, 1984.

5. Yann Lardeau, as quoted and translated by de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, p. 26.

6. Alfred Stieglitz staged his own comeback as a photographer in 1921, with an exhibition featuring the ongoing study of O'Keeffe that he began in 1917. Those intimate photographs, in which she was often posed nude or lightly clad, fueled the

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*Pelvis II, 1944, oil on canvas, 40 by 30 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

# O'Keeffe

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public perception that O'Keeffe was "oversexed," and the gossip about the artists' liaison. (Stieglitz, who enjoyed a reputation as something of a libertine, was not only much older than O'Keeffe but was at this time still married to his first wife.) What is now publicly available of O'Keeffe's private correspondence, including accounts of relationships with some men other than Stieglitz (the letters to him remain sealed), reveal a sensual and passionate woman, but not (by present standards) an abnormally or pathologically sexual one. Sensationalized attention to O'Keeffe's sexuality persists, however; see Benita Eisler, "Scenes From a Marriage," *Mirabella*, July 1989, pp. 178-87 (part of a forthcoming biography) which makes numerous undocumented claims.

7. See Jack Cowart, Juan Hamilton and Sarah Greenough, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters*, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, 1987. Further (though a more minor point), the banner for the show on the Metropolitan's main facade spelled out "Georgia O'Keeffe 1887-1986," by contrast with the banner which said simply, boldly, "DEGAS."

8. Lewis Mumford, "O'Keefe [sic] and Matisse," *New Republic*, Mar. 2, 1927, p. 41.

9. Allan Burroughs, *New York Sun*, Feb. 3, 1923; reprinted in "Alfred Stieglitz Presents Fifty-One Recent Pictures: Oils, Water-colors, Pastels, Drawings, by Georgia O'Keeffe, American," brochure, New York, Anderson Galleries, 1924, n.p.

10. Wm. Murrell Fisher, "Georgia O'Keeffe Drawings and Paintings at '291,'" *Camera Work* (1917), reprinted in *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology*, Jonathan Green, ed., Millerton, N.Y., Aperture, 1973, p. 328.

11. Search-Light [Waldo Frank's pseudonym], *Time Exposures*, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1926, p. 32 (Frank also described O'Keeffe as a tree: "If a tree thinks, it thinks not with a brain but with every part of it. So O'Keeffe," pp. 34-5).

12. Mumford, "O'Keefe [sic] and Matisse," p. 41.

13. Paul Rosenfeld, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Port of New York* (1924), reprint: Urbana, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1961, p. 204.

14. As it conflicts with her image as an intuitive, O'Keeffe's appetite for books tends to get suppressed in the literature. In a recent volume of early correspondence, most of her many references to what she was reading (in 1915-17) were excised from the published versions of her letters. Her reading at the time included *The Masses*, Aldous Huxley, Kandinsky, H.G. Wells, Willard Huntington Wright, Clive Bell, Sygne, *The Trojan Women*, Chekhov, Shelley, *The Divine Comedy*, *Faust*, *The Seven Arts*, the *Forerunner*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ibsen and Nietzsche, among other things. See Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O'Keeffe: The Letters and Memoir of a Legendary Friendship*, New York, Simon and Schuster-Touchstone, 1988.

15. Statement by O'Keeffe in "Alfred Stieglitz Presents One Hundred Pictures: Oils, Water-colors, Pastels, Drawings, by Georgia O'Keeffe, American," New York, Anderson Galleries, 1923.

16. O'Keeffe, letter to Sherwood Anderson, Sept. 1923 [?], in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 174. (The artist's imperfect punctuation has been left intact throughout.)

17. Anita Pollitzer wrote excitedly to O'Keeffe (then nicknamed Patsy, Pat or occasionally Patrick) about her most experimental works to date: "They made me feel—I swear they did—they have emotions that sing out or holler as the case may be . . . They've all got feeling Pat—written in red right over them—no one could possibly get your meanings . . . but the Mood is there everytime . . . The crazy one—all lines & colors & angles— . . . it pleases me tremendously . . . It screams like a maniac & runs around like a dog chasing his tail," Oct. 14, 1915, Pollitzer, *A Woman*, p. 27.

18. Henry McBride wrote, "There were more feminine shrieks and screams in the vicinity of O'Keeffe's work this year than ever before. I begin to think that in order to be quite fair to Miss O'Keeffe I must listen to what women say of her—and take notes," "Modern Art," *Dial*, May 1926, p. 437.

19. Henry Tyrell, "Esoteric Art at '291,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, May 4, 1917, quoted in Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist*, p. 106; Rosenfeld, "American Painting," *Dial*, Dec. 1921, pp. 666-67; and Mumford, "O'Keefe [sic] and Matisse," pp. 41-2.

20. Wilson was comparing O'Keeffe favorably to Marin, Hartley, Dove and Demuth in a review of a group show called "Seven Americans," "The Stieglitz Exhibition," *New Republic*, Mar. 18, 1925, p. 97; Henry McBride, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *New York Herald*, Feb. 4, 1923, reprinted in *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride*, Daniel Catton Rich, ed., New York, Atheneum, 1975, p. 168.

21. Clement Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Georgia O'Keeffe," *Nation*, June 15, 1946, rpt. in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, v. 2, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 87.

22. O'Keeffe, Jan. 10, 1927, letter to Waldo Frank, in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 185.

23. O'Keeffe, Sept. 1929 letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 199.

24. O'Keeffe, Jan. 10, 1927, letter to Waldo Frank, in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 185.

25. O'Keeffe, June 11, 1946, letter to James Johnson Sweeney, in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 241.

26. Quoted in Blanche Matthias, "Stieglitz Showing Seven Americans," *Chicago Evening Post, Magazine of the Art World*, Mar. 2, 1926, cited in Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 162.

27. An unnamed *Camera Work* reviewer wrote of the first showing of O'Keeffe's work in 1916 (an exhibition with two other artists at 291, arranged by Stieglitz without her knowledge), "In spite of the lateness of the season . . . this exhibition, mainly owing to Miss O'Keeffe's drawings, attracted many visitors and aroused unusual interest and discussions," quoted in Pollitzer, *A Woman*, p. 138. The *New York Sun* reported that her first major solo show, in 1923, drew 600 people daily, Pollitzer, *A Woman*, p. 183. When Steiglitz mounted a gallery retrospective of her work in Jan. 1934, 7,000 people attended, Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 269. In her lifetime, O'Keeffe had major museum retrospectives in Chicago in 1943, at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946, at the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art in Fort Worth in 1966 and at the Whitney Museum in 1970.

With his exclusionary or antipopulist bent, Stieglitz's difficulty with his other artists was building a sufficient public to assure them of a living, but with O'Keeffe he had the opposite problem—keeping the public at bay. From 1927 on, O'Keeffe supported herself entirely on the sales of her work (Mary Lynn Kotz, "Georgia O'Keeffe at Ninety," *Art News*, Dec. 1977, p. 44); and by 1935 or '36 she was fully supporting Stieglitz as well (just as his first wife had—though on an inherited income—see Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir-Biography*, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983, pp. 62-3).

O'Keeffe's paintings have always brought high prices. Because she and Stieglitz both disliked parting with her work, he preferred to sell fewer paintings at higher prices rather than the other way around. "[T]hree thousand dollars' worth [of pictures] were sold" from her 1923 show "perhaps adding up to half a dozen pictures," Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 142. In 1927 she exhibited 36 paintings, and in the first few days six were sold for prices up to \$6,000 each. In 1928, a French collector bought six small calla lily paintings (of 1923) for \$25,000 and the tabloids picked up the story. In more recent history, a painting of poppies brought \$120,000 in 1973, and at auction in 1987 two O'Keeffes went for \$1.9 million and \$1.4 million, Rita Reif, "Record Price for a Work by O'Keeffe," *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1987.

28. The exception is a series of watercolors of her own body done in 1917 and sent to Stieglitz. O'Keeffe despised life drawing, finding the customary use of the model by artists mortifying and degrading. See O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, n.p.

29. Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1985, pp. 22-23, 29 and passim. Significantly, around the time O'Keeffe began painting, Karen Horney was already challenging Freud's phallogocentric view of women's sexuality in favor of a specifically feminine, vaginal sexuality.

30. Mumford, "O'Keefe [sic] and Matisse," p. 42 (Stieglitz reprinted this passage in the brochure for an O'Keeffe exhibition at the Intimate Gallery in 1928). Not everyone was so direct, however. The effusive Rosenfeld described how "Rigid, hard-edged forms traverse her canvases like swords through cringing flesh. Great rectangular menhirs plow through veil-like textures; lie in the midst of diaphanous color like stones in quivering membranes," "The Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe," *Vanity Fair*, Oct. 1922, p. 112.

31. McBride, "O'Keeffe," p. 167.

32. John d'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, New York, Harper and Row, 1988, p. 293. The battle for the political self-determination of women through suffrage is of course no less a factor in the 1910s. As for O'Keeffe's role in the women's movement, although some feminists complained in the 1970s of her poor feminist consciousness, she was for many decades (when there was far less support for such a stance) a vociferous feminist. She read feminist literature, belonged to the National Woman's Party from 1913 through World War II (and was a featured speaker at their convention in 1926) and lobbied for the Equal Rights Amendment. See Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 73, and O'Keeffe, Feb. 10, 1944, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 235.

33. O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, n.p.

34. O'Keeffe, "About Painting Desert Bones," in "Georgia O'Keeffe: Paintings, 1943," brochure, New York, An American Place, 1944, n.p.

35. Kalonyme, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Creative Art*, Jan. 1928, p. xl, and Rosenfeld, "O'Keeffe," pp. 203-4.

36. Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 93.

37. See Stieglitz, Notes on "Woman in Art," 1919, quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, Millerton, N.Y., Aperture, c. 1973, p. 137. Rosenfeld, who shared Stieglitz's view, resumed this theme in his writings on O'Keeffe: "Women . . . always feel, when they feel strongly, through the womb . . . In the womb lies the race," "American Painting," *Dial*, Dec. 1921, p. 666.

38. Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 160. Stieglitz's grandniece, Sue Davidson Lowe, observed, "Pessimism over money contributed heavily, no doubt, to the firmness with which Alfred turned down repeated importunings [from others in the family as well as O'Keeffe herself] to grant Georgia's wish to have a child," Lowe, *Stieglitz*, p. 247. His rationalizations also included "his proven failure as a father," p. 248. What finally closed discussion of the matter, by this account, was the institutionalization in 1923 of Stieglitz's daughter (by his first wife) for postpartum dementia praecox, from which she never recovered, p. 248.

39. O'Keeffe complained, "I think I would never have minded Stieglitz being anything

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# O'Keeffe

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he happened to be if he hadn't kept me so persistently off my track," in a letter to Dodge Luhan, July 1929 (Yale University, Beinecke Library). After Stieglitz died she disclosed, "Alfred once admitted that he was happiest when I was ill in bed because he knew where I was and what I was doing," Lowe, *Stieglitz*, p. 323, and she became ill rather regularly on the occasion of her annual shows. In 1932, O'Keeffe suffered a severe breakdown after Stieglitz interfered with her executing a commission she had eagerly accepted to paint murals in the women's powder room at Radio City Music Hall (he reportedly told the designer in charge of the decoration for the project that O'Keeffe was "a child and not responsible for her actions" in agreeing to the commission, Lisle, *Portrait*, pp. 258-61).

40. Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 189. When Stieglitz closed 201 in 1917, giving O'Keeffe the final show there, he declared, "Well I'm through, but I've given the world a woman," Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 107. O'Keeffe once suggested a curator working on a catalogue essay "put in a sentence to the effect that he [Stieglitz] did not know me personally when he gave me the 2 shows at 201—it often sounds as if I was born and taught to walk by him—and never thought of painting till he worked on me," Apr. 1944 letter to Carl Ziggrosser, Cowart et al., *Georgia O'Keeffe*, p. 236. What galled her most, as Lowe describes it, was "the continuing suggestion that she was a Galatea brought to life by Alfred's Pygmalion, a suggestion to which . . . Alfred himself seemed secretly to subscribe," p. 258. Or not so secretly: when he organized major shows of O'Keeffe's work at the Anderson Galleries in 1923 and '24, the brochures were headlined *Alfred Stieglitz Presents . . . Pictures . . . By Georgia O'Keeffe . . .*, with his name in letters the same size as hers.

41. By O'Keeffe's account, Stieglitz initially refused to show the skyscraper paintings—surely among the most compelling images ever painted of New York City—on the grounds that she should keep to subjects more befitting her gender (see O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, n.p.). The first enlarged flower was done in 1924, shown in 1925. Stieglitz reportedly said of it: "I don't know how you're going to get away with anything like that—you aren't planning to show it, are you?" (See Lisle, *Portrait*, p. 171).

42. O'Keeffe, letter to Pollitzer, Jan. 4, 1916, in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 147. A subsequent letter closed with the confession: I want real things—live people to take hold of . . . Music that makes holes in the sky—and Anita—I want to love as hard as I can and I can't let myself—When he is far away I can't feel sure that he wants me to—even though I know it—so I'm only feeling lukewarm when I want to be hot and can't let myself," O'Keeffe, letter to Pollitzer, Jan. 4, 1916, Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 149 ("sure" underlined three times in the original).

43. O'Keeffe, 1925? letter in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 180. The essay Dodge Luhan wrote was never published; it represented O'Keeffe's art as the unknowing excesses of a repressed woman in thrall to Stieglitz. The four-page manuscript (Beinecke Library, Yale University) suggested that O'Keeffe "externalises the frustration of her true being out on to canvases which, receiving her out-pouring sexual juices, lost while in the sleep of Unconscious Art, permit her to walk this earth with the cleansed, purgated look of fulfilled life! . . . The deposits of art, then, lie all about us, no more significant than the other deposited accretions and excrements of our organisms . . . The art of today . . . the art in these 'Intimate' galleries . . . [is] among the other 'comfort stations' of our civilized communities . . . This woman's sex, Stieglitz, it becomes yours upon these canvases. Sleeping, then, this woman is your thing . . . [W]e others, we go to look on this filthy spectacle of frustration that you exalt and call by the name of Art . . . Let live this somnolent woman by your side."

44. O'Keeffe, Sept. 1923? letter to Anderson, in Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 174.

45. de Lauretis, quoting and amplifying a phrase of Catherine MacKinnon's, *Alice Doesn't*, p. 184.

46. Hartley, "Some Women Artists," *Adventures in the Arts*, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1921, pp. 116-117; Rosenfeld, "American Painting," p. 666; and Kalonyme, "O'Keeffe," p. xi. The notion, suggested by Kalonyme, that in representing women's sexuality, she was also imaging their masochistic nature—the idea that women characteristically take pleasure from pain—is another topos of the O'Keeffe literature. Wrote Rosenfeld (to take another example), "Darkly, purely painted flower and fruit pieces have not a little sorrow. Pain treads upon the recumbent figure. Pain rends the womb to shreds with knives. Pain studs the universe with shark's teeth," Rosenfeld, "O'Keeffe," p. 207.

47. Oscar Bluemner, "A Painter's Comment," *Georgia O'Keeffe Paintings, 1926*, New York, Intimate Gallery, 1927; rpt. in *Georgia O'Keeffe: Exhibition of Paintings (1919-1934)*, New York, An American Place, 1935, n.p.

48. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, v. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway, Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 284.

49. Anonymous, "Art: Austere Stripper," *Time*, May 27, 1946, p. 74; and Mark Stevens, "Georgia on my Mind," *Vanity Fair*, Nov. 1987, pp. 72, 76.

50. Stieglitz, Mar. 31, 1918 letter to O'Keeffe, quoted in Pollitzer, *A Woman*, p. 159.

51. Hartley, "Some Women Artists," pp. 116-17.

52. Rosenfeld, "O'Keeffe," pp. 202, 205.

53. Rosenfeld, "American Painting," p. 666. This notion that women do not, will not,



Georgia O'Keeffe photographed by Juan Hamilton in New Mexico, July 1976.

and so, perhaps, cannot describe their orgasms became an *idée fixe* also of Jacques Lacan who told how he had begged women analysts on his knees "to try to tell us about it, well, not a word! We have never managed to get anything out of them," "God and the Jouissance of The Woman," in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, trans. Rose, New York, Pantheon, 1985, p. 146. For Lacan as for Stieglitz, women's "jouissance," represented a moment of experience potentially "over and above the phallic term"; Woman served in a mystical way as an epigone of nature and so as a site of truth. 54. When O'Keeffe first saw Hartley's article about her, she recalled, "I almost wept. I thought I could never face the world again," Grace Glueck, "It's Just What's In My Head," *New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1970. In a Fall 1922 letter to Mitchell Kennerley, she said she felt embarrassed by Hartley's and Rosenfeld's articles, that she did not recognize herself in them and, significantly, that they gave her "a queer feeling of being invaded," Cowart et al., *O'Keeffe*, p. 171.

55. McBride, "O'Keeffe," p. 166.

56. McBride, "O'Keeffe," p. 167.

57. Pemberton, "The Art Galleries," *New Yorker*, Mar. 13, 1926, pp. 36-7; and Pemberton, "The Art Galleries," *New Yorker*, Feb. 20, 1926, p. 40.

58. Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 50.

59. Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 105.

60. Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," in Mitchell and Rose, eds. *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 81. As Irigaray describes it "woman does not so much choose an object of desire for herself as she lets herself be chosen as an 'object,'" *Speculum*, p. 104.

61. de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, p. 15.

62. Hobhouse, "A Peculiar Road to Sainthood," *Newsweek*, Nov. 9, 1987, p. 74.

63. O'Keeffe was both self-identified and identified as a feminist from the outset. The *Nation* reported in 1927, "If Georgia O'Keeffe has any passion other than her work, it is her interest and faith in her own sex . . . She believes ardently in woman as an individual—an individual not merely with the same rights and privileges of man but . . . with the same responsibilities. And chief among these is the responsibility of self-realization," Frances O'Brien, "Americans We Like: Georgia O'Keeffe," *Nation*, Oct. 12, 1927, p. 362. Paul Strand wrote a few years earlier of "that kind of intensely which burns women [sic] like Carrie Nation, Pankhurst, and Emma Goldman, which has become organized and philosophic in the paintings of O'Keeffe . . . [H]er work stands as the first veritably individualized expression by a woman, in plastic terms, which is differentiated from, yet meets comparison with the best work of men . . . [W]omen have indeed set out upon a search for their own particular Grail. Georgia O'Keeffe is . . . releasing in her work, the deepest experiences of her search," "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Playboy*, 9 (July 1924), pp. 19-20.

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