

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

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CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION OF GEORGIA O'KEEFFE TO OPEN IN NOVEMBER 1987 AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Washington - The centennial exhibition of works by Georgia O'Keeffe will open at the National Gallery of Art in Washington on Nov. 1, 1987 to celebrate the artistic achievement of this major American artist. This exhibition, made possible by a grant from the Southwestern Bell Foundation, will later travel to The Art Institute of Chicago, the Dallas Museum of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The selection of more than 100 works, made by co-curators Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, will focus on the most influential aspects of O'Keeffe's career and present the best of her abstractions, flower paintings, figure studies, cityscapes, still lifes and landscapes. Rarely seen oil paintings, watercolors, pastels and drawings from the artist's estate provide the core of the exhibition. Also included will be major works from public and private collections in the U.S. and abroad.

J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery, said: "We are attempting to illuminate Miss O'Keeffe's innovative vision as an artist in the development of this exhibition. By presenting some highlights of her career, which spanned nearly 70 years, we can demonstrate the tremendous influence she has had on 20th-century American art. We were extremely grateful for the support of Miss O'Keeffe before her death and now for the assistance of her estate in bringing together these pictures."

Born Nov. 15, 1887, Georgia O'Keeffe attracted the attention of Alfred Stieglitz in 1916 when her abstract drawings were presented to him without her

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knowledge by a mutual friend. Stieglitz's initial support and her participation in his renowned Gallery 291 and its circle of artists encouraged O'Keeffe to devote her life to art.

After a long history of visits to New Mexico and the Southwest, O'Keeffe moved permanently in 1949 to Abiquiu, New Mexico, where she continued experimenting with both abstraction and realism, as well as a combination of both, perfecting her unique style. Paintings completed during her earlier years in New York and her later years in New Mexico show maturity, confidence and a visionary quality.

A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition with an essay by Jack Cowart, the National Gallery's curator of 20th-century art. A selection of previously unpublished letters by the artist to her many artist-friends, edited and annotated by Sarah Greenough, research curator at the National Gallery of Art, will establish the core text. The catalogue is being co-published by the National Gallery of Art and New York Graphic Society Books/Little, Brown and Company.

After its Washington showing (Nov. 1, 1987-Feb. 21, 1988), the exhibition will travel to The Art Institute of Chicago (March 5-June 19, 1988), the Dallas Museum of Art (July 31-Oct. 16, 1988) and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Nov. 19, 1988-Feb. 5, 1989).

Gerald D. Blatherwick, president of the Southwestern Bell Foundation and vice chairman of Southwestern Bell Corporation, said the exhibition "would introduce Miss O'Keeffe's works to a new generation of Americans.

Almost two decades have passed since there was a major O'Keeffe exhibition. This is an exciting opportunity for people to experience the highest quality work of a remarkably gifted artist," he said.

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GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

[11-87]

Background Information

Born in 1887 on a farm in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, Georgia O'Keeffe began a direct, observant relationship with her immediate environment during her childhood. Perhaps as a result of spending her early years on a farm, she gained insight into the cycles of nature which would have an impact upon her life and would serve as one source for her work as an artist.

O'Keeffe was sent to boarding school in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains when her family moved to Virginia in 1903. She spent long hours walking in the mountains, observing the landscape and communicating her observations through her work.

After spending a year at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, O'Keeffe went to New York City for the first time in the fall of 1907 as a student at the Art Students' League. The tone of the art world, set by such champions of the American school as William Merritt Chase, was conservative. Before the revolutionary Armory Show in 1913, when European avant garde artists such as Henri Matisse, Paul Cézanne, and Pablo Picasso were introduced to the American public, Alfred Stieglitz's "291" Gallery was the only outlet where work by such innovative artists could be seen. O'Keeffe visited "291" and was initially put off by Stieglitz's abrasive, argumentative personal style. But she was, at the same time, fascinated by his enthusiasm for the role of new arts for the new century.

After another year in Chicago, working as a commercial artist, O'Keeffe returned to her family's home in Virginia. In the summer of 1912 at her sister's urging she visited a drawing class at the University of Virginia taught by Alon Bement. His instruction, based on theories of design inspired by Columbia Teachers' College professor Arthur Dow, greatly influenced O'Keeffe's thinking. Thus Dow's notions of filling a space in a beautiful way would become an element in her work. The following four summers O'Keeffe worked with Bement as a teaching assistant at the University.

From the fall of 1912 through the spring of 1914 O'Keeffe supported herself teaching art in Amarillo, Texas. She immediately felt at home in the prairie, despite the difference between the great empty spaces of Texas and the familiar green rolling hills of Virginia where she continued to spend her summers. She identified with the flat, barren landscape that became a frequent inspiration for drawings and paintings.

O'Keeffe returned to New York from the fall of 1914 through the spring of 1915 and again in the spring of 1916 for a few months of study at Columbia Teachers' College. A more serious student than on previous visits, O'Keeffe began making critical decisions about her future as an artist. The art world, affected by the Armory Show, was more sophisticated in 1915 than in 1907, the year of her first visit. New European and American artists, as well as collectors and critics, continued to meet in Stieglitz's "291" Gallery. O'Keeffe made giant steps toward becoming an artist by developing a more original approach to art.

While in South Carolina teaching at a small college in 1915 and 1916, O'Keeffe decided to reject the influence of other artists and to paint and draw to please only herself. This resulted in a series of highly original black and white charcoal drawings. She sent the drawings

to Anita Pollitzer (a friend and fellow student from New York) who showed them to Alfred Stieglitz. Organic, natural forms define these abstract drawings which visually incorporate O'Keeffe's impressions of the only instruction which she didn't totally reject-- an idea of drawing based on the elements of design.

Her returning in the fall of 1916 to the landscape where she felt most at home - Texas - provided inspiration for highly expressive images. She re-introduced brilliant color into her work, using it freely as a tool of expression, just as she had before used only line, form and composition. She began to utilize a technique which she would follow throughout her life: the repetition of one idea in a series of pictures dealing with the same subject until she had exhausted her interest in the image.

Stieglitz and O'Keeffe corresponded regularly from 1916 to 1918. The drawings that the artist sent to Stieglitz from Canyon, Texas, formed the nucleus of her first one-woman show held at "291" during the spring of 1917. She traveled to New York to see the exhibition, which had been taken down and had to be re-hung. When the paintings and drawings were re-installed Stieglitz took his first photographs of O'Keeffe, beginning a study that would last until 1937. At Stieglitz's urging O'Keeffe returned to New York in 1918. She and Stieglitz were married in 1924.

During her career, which spanned nearly 70 years, O'Keeffe's art continually fluctuated between the real and abstract. She presented identifiable subjects, whether a flower, a bone or a rock, and explored the idea of that object to its end.

Stieglitz supported her work with yearly solo exhibitions, first the Intimate Gallery, and subsequently at An American Place after "291" closed. In 1929, tiring of annual sojourns at Lake George with the large

Stieglitz family and of the routine of her life, O'Keeffe began spending summers in New Mexico. There she continued to use her surroundings as her most frequent subject, creating innovative renderings of the magnificent beauty and mystery of the desert landscape. She continued with some of the same treatments she had used when painting the landscape of Lake George, New York, and Texas: isolation and magnification. O'Keeffe painted her impressions of and the feeling for the desert Southwest. By picking up pieces of the desert, bones and rocks, she painted the essence of the land she considered most well-suited to her in works.

After Stieglitz's death in 1946, O'Keeffe returned to New Mexico to live permanently. She traveled frequently and gained inspiration from new sites and experiences. To communicate the sensation of the tremendous height she experienced when flying, she created by far her largest canvas, Sky Above Clouds VI (1965).

Throughout her life Georgia O'Keeffe maintained an unusually close visual relationship to the world around her and to her direct experiences. By realistic rendering or by capturing the essence of the land by removing one element which becomes a symbol of the subject, O'Keeffe remains today, as we celebrate the centennial of her birth, one of America's most independent and innovative artists.

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GEORGIA O'KEEFFE CHRONOLOGY

- 1887 Born Nov. 15, near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.
- 1905-16 Attends the School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Art Students League of New York, University of Virginia and Teachers' College, Columbia University.
- 1908 Sees exhibitions of Auguste Rodin and Henri Matisse at Alfred Stieglitz' Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession ("291") in New York City.
- 1911-18 Teaches art at high school in Chatham, Virginia, public schools in Amarillo, Texas, University of Virginia, Columbia College, South Carolina, and West Texas State Normal College.
- 1916 A friend of O'Keeffe's, Anita Pollitzer, shows the artist's drawings to Stieglitz.
- 1917 Stieglitz organizes O'Keeffe's first solo exhibition at "291," while she is in Texas. O'Keeffe arrives to see the exhibition, which is rehung for her visit. Stieglitz begins to photograph her.
- 1918 Stops teaching at West Texas State Normal College, and with Stieglitz' prompting, returns to live in New York in May. Spends the first of many summers in Lake George, New York, with Stieglitz and his family.
- 1923 First solo exhibition in six years, organized by Stieglitz, at The Anderson Galleries. Exhibits yearly thereafter at The Anderson Galleries (1924-1925), The Intimate Gallery (1926-1929), and An American Place (1930-1946).
- 1924 O'Keeffe and Stieglitz marry.
- 1929 First of many visits to New Mexico, this time as guest of Mabel Dodge Luhan in Taos.
- 1930-46 Usually spends winter in New York and summer in New Mexico during this period.
- 1943 First large retrospective exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1946 Exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art. Stieglitz dies.
- 1949 O'Keeffe moves permanently to New Mexico.

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- 1950-67 Makes several trips abroad, visiting Mexico, Europe, South American, Far East, Southeast Asia, India and Middle East.
- 1960 Retrospective exhibition at the Worcester Art Museum.
- 1966 Retrospective exhibition at the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, which travels to The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.
- 1970 Retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, which travels to The Art Institute of Chicago and the San Francisco Museum of Art.
- 1976 Georgia O'Keeffe, with texts by the artist, is published by Viking Press.
- 1986 Dies in New Mexico, on March 6.

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