

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation / Thesis: "LIVING ON PAPER:" GEORGIA O'KEEFFE
AND THE CULTURE OF DRAWING AND
WATERCOLOR IN THE STIEGLITZ CIRCLE

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Drawing and watercolor were important in shaping the modernism of artist Georgia O'Keeffe and photographer Alfred Stieglitz. In his gallery 291 and journal *Camera Work*, Stieglitz introduced European avant-garde art to early twentieth-century America and promoted American modernists including O'Keeffe.

Stieglitz as a child collected drawings and watercolors and learned traditional drawing connoisseurship that valued revelation of the artist's character through the marks he made on paper. Stieglitz's journals *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work* asserted connections between photography and other graphic media. Stieglitz and Edward Steichen founded 291 as a pictorial photography gallery but later exhibited modern paintings and many drawings and watercolors.

O'Keeffe studied academic art at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York, but she wanted more creative freedom. Art educator Arthur Wesley Dow introduced O'Keeffe to abstract design principles and prepared her to appreciate modern art. While O'Keeffe was training as an art teacher at

Columbia University Teachers College in New York in 1914 and 1915, she visited 291 and became interested in modern art.

O'Keeffe's original conception of modernism was graphic because the modern arts she had seen was mainly in the form of drawings and watercolor and printed reproductions of paintings. Her first modern art works, made in South Carolina in 1915, were abstract charcoal drawings that combined academic drawing techniques with modernist approaches from charcoal drawings by Pablo Picasso and Marius de Zayas. Stieglitz interpreted O'Keeffe's drawings as naïve expressions of female sexuality and showed them at 291 in 1916.

O'Keeffe taught art in Texas and made modernist watercolors of the Texas sky and landscape. Stieglitz showed her new works at 291 in 1917. In 1918 O'Keeffe returned to New York and moved in with Stieglitz. She concentrated on painting in oils for the rest of her career. Stieglitz photographed O'Keeffe with her drawings and watercolors, connecting the marks on paper with the artist's body, hands, and sexuality. While exhibiting O'Keeffe's oil paintings, Stieglitz continued for decades to show O'Keeffe's early drawings to critics and to stress her origins as a simple graphic artist.

“LIVING ON PAPER:” GEORGIA O’KEEFFE AND THE CULTURE OF
DRAWING AND WATERCOLOR IN THE STIEGLITZ CIRCLE

By

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated with love to my parents, John Prentice Wagner and Polly Sweet Wagner, who encourage me to follow my heart.

Acknowledgements

In the last four years I have traveled thousands of miles, seen at least one thousand works of art, and learned far more than I ever anticipated. It has been a great pleasure to meet and work with the many people listed below, without whom I could not have completed this dissertation.

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I thank the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation for kindly giving me permission to quote from letters written by Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz. I appreciate the guidance and responsiveness of the Foundation's Judy Lopez.

My advisor at the University of Maryland, Professor Sally M. Promey, helped me to find funding and has been a thoughtful and responsive guide and friend throughout my study, research, and writing. I have benefited greatly from the insightful comments of

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Dr. Mecklenburg was also one of the advisors and consultants who provided valuable guidance during my time as a Smithsonian Pre-Doctoral Fellow, the others being Joann Moser of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Wendy Wick Reaves of the National Portrait Gallery, and Judith Zilczer, now Curator Emerita of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. The friends who made my two years at the Smithsonian American Art Museum such a productive and delightful experience include Fellows Program Administrator Gwen Allday and her successor Amelia Goerlitz; *American Art* journal Executive Editor Cynthia Mills; and the Smithsonian Fellowship Program Manager, Bruce “Will” Morrison. The unfailingly friendly and supportive Smithsonian Fellows with whom I was in residence include: Alison Bechtel, Martin Berger, Zeinat Bitar, Jody Blake, Kim Curtiss, Michael C. Dooley, Shannon Egan, Sarah Evans, Susan Fillin-Yeh, Oscar Fitzgerald, Mette Gieskes, Ken Gonzales-Day, Anne Harrell, Janet Headley, Carmenita Higginbotham, Hiroko Ikegami, Guy Jordan, James Lawrence, Michael Lobel, David McCarthy, Deirdre J. Murphy, Sarah Newman, R. Sarah Richardson, Ellen Roberts, Tacey Rosolowski, Anne Samuel, Michael Shreyach, Donald Sloan, Katherine Smith, Kirsten Swenson, Isabel Taube, Flora Vilches, Judith Walsh, Terri Weissman, Elizabeth Wiley, Michelle Wilkinson, Catherine Whalen, Jennifer Wingate, and Barbara Zabel.

My time at the Smithsonian Institution began when I worked for 12 years at the National Portrait Gallery starting in 1989, and the relationships forged during those years have continued to benefit me during my graduate work. My fellow members of the Departments of Prints and Drawings and of Photographs encouraged my studies in every way both before and after I left the Department. Wendy Wick Reaves, Curator of Prints and Drawings, urged me to return to graduate school and stood behind me while I took classes. Others who have always been in my corner are Ann Shumard, LuLen Walker, Marie Louise “Pie” Friendly, Mary Panzer, my fellow University of Maryland graduate student Kimberlee Staking, Jennifer O’Keefe, Amy Baskette, Eowyn McHenry, Frank Goodyear, and my successor as Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings, Anne Collins Goodyear. I have benefited from the friendship and graphic art wisdom of Conservation department members Rosemary Fallon, Emily Jacobson, and Ed Myers. My mentors in other departments have included Ellen Miles, Brandon Brame Fortune, Fred Voss, Amy Henderson, Linda Thrift, and Patricia Svoboda. There is not space to properly thank all of my other Portrait Gallery colleagues, but I owe a great deal to all of them.

Other Smithsonian museums and agencies have also contributed much to my work on my dissertation. At the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Denise Wamaling and Lynn Putney have helpfully pulled art for me. Conservators Fern Bleckner and Catherine Maynor helped me with their museum’s Georgia O’Keeffe pastel and other graphic art technical questions. In the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery Library, I depended upon Cecilia Chin, Patricia Lynagh, Stephanie Moye, Barbara Insidioso, Jesse Foley, Alice Clarke, and Glenn Juchno. At the Archives

of American Art, Judith E. Throm, Wendy Hurlock, Elizabeth Botten, and Tessa Veazey made collections available to me.

I spent three enjoyable and productive months at the beginning of 2003 at the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center in Santa Fe. The warm welcome of Museum Director George King and his staff made me wish I could stay longer. Barbara Buhler Lynes, the Emily Fisher Landau Director of the Research Center and Curator of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, helped me to craft the presentation that turned out to form the center of my dissertation. Dr. Lynes also generously allowed me access to her files on Georgia O’Keeffe, saving me countless hours of research. Librarian Eumie Imm-Stroukoff cheerfully answered my many requests to see art works, books, and files. I spent joyful hours pouring over art by Georgia O’Keeffe at the Research Center and at the Museum, thanks to the help of Judy Smith, Ted Stearns, and Michael Shiller. Conservator Dale Kronkright answered my many questions insightfully. I was inspired by the outstanding work done by my fellow visiting scholars, Christina Cogdell, Audrey Goodman, Carolyn Butler Palmer, and Bette Schumacher.

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My dissertation came from my long interest in drawing and watercolor that began when I was a fine art student. I would never have found this rewarding area of art history without John Bledsoe, III, my art teacher at Walter Johnson High School, who made sure

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Introduction

The Drawings and Watercolors of Georgia O’Keeffe

On January 1, 1916, a group of charcoal drawings (Figs. 3.1 – 3.11) initiated a lasting dialogue between an artist and the man who would present her art to the public.¹ The artist was Georgia O’Keeffe and the man who introduced her art was the photographer and modern art impresario Alfred Stieglitz. Stieglitz had met the quiet young art student and artist O’Keeffe previously at his Manhattan gallery known as 291, though she had failed to make a serious impression on him.² When her friend Anita Pollitzer first showed O’Keeffe’s drawings to Stieglitz in 1916, he felt connected to the absent artist. As he wrote to a friend, “When I looked at the drawings they staggered me I decided then and there that at some time I would like to show these things.”³ In the spring of 1916, Stieglitz exhibited these first modern works by O’Keeffe at 291; this show began the modernist career of the woman who would become one of the most recognized modern artists in the United States.⁴ I assert that Stieglitz’s response to O’Keeffe’s drawings arose not only from the abstraction of the art but from the graphic medium the artist had used and the manner in which she had applied it. In this dissertation I examine the cultural impact of medium in the drawings and watercolors that, between 1915 and 1918, established Georgia O’Keeffe as an American modern artist. As I will discuss in the last chapter, graphic media continued to appear in O’Keeffe’s oeuvre. However, I see her drawings and watercolors of the mid-teens as the most important of her graphic productions for both the artist herself and for Stieglitz and other members of his circle; therefore my work focuses on these formative works.

O’Keeffe began her long and distinguished modernist career with these works on paper before she turned to the oil paintings for which she is best known. As Judith C. Walsh has demonstrated, O’Keeffe’s choice in the mid nineteen-teens to make her first modern works in charcoal reflected a comfortable reliance on a medium she had mastered during her academic art training.⁵ I will also argue in this dissertation that many additional factors were at work in the artist’s decision to use graphic media in her early modern works. O’Keeffe’s visits to 291 and her reading of avant-garde books and journals had exposed her to modern drawings and watercolors. The few oil paintings to which she had access at this point were in the form of photographic reproductions. Others have noted O’Keeffe’s early formal graphic inventions and their place at the core of her life-long modernist enterprise.⁶ This dissertation establishes, however, that O’Keeffe’s grasp of the very notion of modernism came to her through graphic media. Drawing and watercolor, as I aim to show, significantly conditioned and shaped O’Keeffe’s initial modernist creations.

Near the end of her career, O’Keeffe affirmed her enduring regard for her early works on paper. Doris Bry recalled, “When as guest curator of the Whitney retrospective I reviewed the early drawings and watercolors with O’Keeffe in Abiquiu in 1969, she turned to me at the end and remarked: ‘We don’t really need to have the show, I never did any better.’”⁷ For Stieglitz, too, O’Keeffe’s early graphic works held lasting appeal on many levels. He approached these drawings and watercolors from his own viewpoints as a promoter of modern art, a photographer, and a man who became the artist’s husband. Stieglitz assembled a rich composite portrait of the artist as avant-garde draftsman in his letters, discussions with gallery visitors, and his photographs of O’Keeffe posed with

her drawings and watercolors. I observe in these words and images Stieglitz's excitement, both aesthetic and sexual, over the tactile communication he experienced in O'Keeffe's drawings and watercolors.

During 1918, after she began living with Stieglitz in New York, O'Keeffe shifted her focus to painting in oils. Perhaps she made this change for creative or practical reasons; perhaps it was at least partially in response to Stieglitz's urging her to take up the more established and respected medium.⁸ Yet even as Stieglitz, after the 1917 closing of 291, showed O'Keeffe's oil paintings on the walls of Anderson Galleries and his own later galleries, The Intimate Gallery (1925-1929) and An American Place (1929-1946), he continued to share her early drawings with visitors. As he and his visitors studied the charcoals and watercolors, Stieglitz repeated and expanded upon stories that became myths of origin for O'Keeffe the modernist and of vindication for Stieglitz the prescient connoisseur who had recognized the promise in her graphic works.

During the autumn of 1915 O'Keeffe, while teaching art at Columbia College in South Carolina, was engaged in a struggle to remake herself from an academic artist and art teacher into a modern artist in the mold of the artists who exhibited at 291. It was during this crucial season of transformation that O'Keeffe made the charcoal drawings Stieglitz saw the following January. O'Keeffe wrote to her friend Anita Pollitzer, an art and art education student in New York, about how she desired to express her life in her art. It was not easy, however, for O'Keeffe either to feel her life was worthy of such expression or to get her feelings onto paper. She wrote to Pollitzer, "I don't know that my heart or head or anything in me is worth living on paper."⁹ Why did she choose to communicate this feeling of life on paper rather than on canvas? Why did Stieglitz find

such resonance in the graphic qualities of O’Keeffe’s first modern works? The answers, I believe, lie in the cultures of drawing and watercolor specific to Stieglitz and O’Keeffe in the nineteen teens.

The Culture of Drawing and Watercolor

What I am terming the culture of a medium is the impact of that medium on the creation, exhibition, promotion, and reception of works of art; this impact of medium also extends to the lives of artists and others concerned with art. There is much more at work here than the simple physical characteristics of dusty silver-black charcoal stroked onto textured paper. The words “drawing” and “watercolor” summon up hosts of personal and historical associations. Meaning adheres to medium on levels ranging from the physical sensations of creation to awareness of the sweeping history of art in the Western world.

As Stieglitz the photographer and champion of photography as art knew all too well, a painter of his day functioned in quite a different cultural zone than did a photographer. Many in the art world took decades to admit that photography might be a form of art. In 1898 photographer F. Holland Day complained, “they who have ‘studied’ art in some local academy declare the camera is not worthy of serious consideration.”¹⁰ For O’Keeffe, as well, media had divided artists into different groups. Lila Howard, who studied at the Art Students League when O’Keeffe was there, recalled, “I was in the sculpture class and she [O’Keeffe] was in the painting class We had very separate goings on, we had separate parties and separate all kinds of things.”¹¹

Different art media carry contrasting cultural charges. How do these cultures of media function? That is the central question I explore in this dissertation. I can begin by observing that medium works as both a physical tool and an implement of meaning.

Each medium gives artists who employ it a different kind of cultural power. When an artist picks up a stick of charcoal or a brush laden with oil paint, he or she calls upon both a personal history of training and experience and the overarching history of artists who have employed that same medium. Each medium offers its own combination of formal and expressive possibilities and imposes its own limits. In a work of art, physical medium is but one factor operating in conjunction with other considerations including style, composition, and content. In a parallel way, the culture of medium is but one element in an artist's life. For both Stieglitz and O'Keeffe, choice of medium was only one factor in determining the course of the artist's career – medium always interacted with gender, class, family background, art training, historical period, and countless other factors. In my first chapter I will explore how Stieglitz chose and utilized his medium of photography, even while establishing his relationship to the media he chose not to use. In my second chapter I will investigate how O'Keeffe's background shaped her use and conceptions of drawing and watercolor.

The media of drawing and watercolor pose special problems in a cultural study even as they add special rewards. The practice of drawing constantly intertwines with those of other media. Drawing has long been used to train painters, sculptors, and architects. Artists use drawings to gather material, to formulate visual ideas, and to plan art works in nearly every visual art medium, from painting to conceptual art. Watercolor adds another strand to the cultural web, as it operates between drawing, from which it arose, and oil painting, to whose exalted state in the cultural hierarchy its practitioners often aspire. Watercolors, like drawings, can be either private sketches or public works that may compete in the same arenas with works in other media. In this dissertation, I

trace the cultural threads of drawing and watercolor in O’Keeffe’s career from the beginning of her graphic experiences until the commencement of her commitment to oil painting in 1918. I consider the beginnings of her understanding and mastery of graphic media in my second chapter. Then in my third chapter I look at the motivations for her utilization of charcoal in her first modern works in 1915. In my fourth chapter, I examine the role of graphic media in Stieglitz’s exhibitions that presented O’Keeffe’s first modern works to the public in 1916 and 1917; in this chapter I also discuss the artists’s contemporaneous use of watercolor to create her first modern works in color. In my fifth chapter I analyze Alfred Stieglitz’s modes of photographing and discuss O’Keeffe’s drawings and watercolors during the same period when she was moving into painting in oils. In this last chapter, I also address how O’Keeffe made her transition into using graphic media less often and less importantly in finished works after 1918 than she had during the previous four years. It was between 1915 and 1918, the years on which this dissertation centers, that O’Keeffe used drawings and watercolors to form the modernist mode that established her as a major modernist in the eyes of Stieglitz and his audience. Thus, by studying the problem from the contrasting view points of creation and reception, I aim for a rounded understanding of the cultural functioning of medium.

Drawing and Watercolor and the History of the Stieglitz Circle

I have chosen to study O’Keeffe’s early graphic modern works in the context of Alfred Stieglitz and his circle for a number of reasons. First, I am captivated by the freshness and beauty of the works themselves. Second, the importance of Stieglitz and the artists around him in the formation of modern art in America gives the art in question lasting cultural impact. In addition, I find that Stieglitz’s devotion to establishing the

viability of photography as fine art assured that, long after he and those around him included non-photographic media in their activities, they would continue to give special attention to questions of medium. Finally, Stieglitz and O’Keeffe, among others, created a powerful and revealing body of written and visual cultural material related to O’Keeffe’s early graphic works.

Art historians who have studied Stieglitz and 291 have consistently divided the enterprises of the man and his galleries into the two categories of photography and modern painting. This natural chronological division of media is, for instance, what determines the separation of William Innes Homer’s two pioneering surveys, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession* and *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde*.¹² What is now often called “the Stieglitz circle” began as the group of pictorialist photographers, the Photo-Secession, founded in 1902 by Stieglitz. In that same year, he began publishing the quarterly *Camera Work* to articulate the views of the Photo-Secession. In 1905, at the suggestion of his fellow Photo-Secessionist, the photographer and painter Edward Steichen,¹³ Stieglitz opened the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.¹⁴ Beginning in 1907 Stieglitz widened his focus to include modern art in all media, both photographic and non-photographic. *Camera Work* and the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, which became familiarly known as 291, were more and more co-opted for the needs of establishing modern art in America. 291 began its modernist activities with exhibitions of works by European modern artists. Soon Stieglitz devoted increasing effort to promoting American modernism.¹⁵

The focus of Stieglitz's later activities has often been inaccurately described as modernist painting. In fact, a high percentage of the exhibitions held at 291 between 1907 and its closing in 1917 were made up of non-photographic works on paper. Of the 58 exhibitions of non-photographic works held at 291, 48 included drawings and watercolors, and many of these shows featured only graphic works.¹⁶ As Ruth E. Fine and Elizabeth Glassman stress, of the more than 600 art works other than photographs that Stieglitz's estate gave to American museums, about 470 were drawings, watercolors, or prints.¹⁷ While the intimate scale and limited financial resources of 291 were practical barriers to the exhibition of large paintings, it is undeniable that the gallery developed a significant tradition of exhibiting graphic works. Drawings and watercolors at 291 both functioned as "other" arts caught between Stieglitz's own medium of photography and the economically dominant artistic medium of oil painting. O'Keeffe's first modern works therefore were part of an established history, yet one subject to peculiar cultural and economic pressures that probably contributed to her decision to devote most of her career to painting in oils after she moved to New York.

The Cultural Context of O'Keeffe's Drawings and Watercolors

The subject of my study is not simply the drawings and watercolors that O'Keeffe made, but the wealth of verbal and visual culture that they inspired. O'Keeffe began writing about her own art works even as she was making them. She elucidated her creative experiences in an extraordinary correspondence with her friend Anita Pollitzer. O'Keeffe met Pollitzer and their fellow student and modern art enthusiast Dorothy True while the three of them were studying at Columbia University Teachers College in New York in 1914 and 1915. During the summer of 1915 O'Keeffe made some of her first

modernist experiments while she teaching at the University of Virginia. That autumn she was teaching at Columbia College in South Carolina when she turned to making modernist charcoals. During these seasons when she was away from New York, O’Keeffe corresponded intensely with both Pollitzer and True. Unfortunately, the letters between O’Keeffe and True have vanished. The lively and informative correspondence between O’Keeffe and Pollitzer, however, is extant and has been published.¹⁸

O’Keeffe’s letters to Pollitzer provide an invaluable source of insight into the artist’s ambitions, insecurities, problems, and triumphs while she was making her first modernist drawings and watercolors. Divided by many miles, the two friends found an emotional lifeline in their letters. O’Keeffe wrote, “Anita – I just want to tell you lots of things.”¹⁹ Although the talkative Pollitzer was the younger of the pair by seven years, she became a kind of mentor to her quiet friend. Pollitzer’s stream of letters gave O’Keeffe informed feedback, advice, and moral support. O’Keeffe assured Pollitzer, “Your letters are certainly great. I can’t imagine what living would be like without them.”²⁰

While I value the immediacy and relative straight-forwardness of O’Keeffe’s private commentary, I do not neglect the public statements through which she attempted to shape the world’s understanding of her art. O’Keeffe’s first published statements appeared in exhibition checklists and catalogues.²¹ Journalists throughout her long career also solicited comments for their articles. Although these pieces were all written later than the period I am studying, in them the artist often recounted memories of her early drawings and watercolors.²² Of course, one must be very careful when interpreting an artist’s statements made for either private or public consumption. It is necessary not only

to check for factual errors in later interpretation of events, but also to be cognizant of the artist's reasons for possibly recasting her own acts and thoughts.²³ With these considerations in mind, I have found very useful materials in later interviews of O'Keeffe, her autobiographic book, and a film about the artist.²⁴ In addition, O'Keeffe's long-time assistant Doris Bry compiled a book of O'Keeffe's comments on her art called *Some Memories of Drawings*.²⁵

Stieglitz also left extensive records of his point of view as exhibitor and interpreter of O'Keeffe's graphic works. Stieglitz and O'Keeffe shared an intense correspondence beginning in 1916. The reams of letters between the two will not be opened to public access until March 6, 2006.²⁶ However, selections from a few of the early letters between O'Keeffe and Stieglitz have been published.²⁷ Stieglitz also wrote to other friends and colleagues about O'Keeffe's works.²⁸

Stieglitz's most dynamic form of communication about art was in the constant, passionate conversations he and his cohorts and visitors held at 291 and at nearby restaurants. Unfortunately, it was not until after the close of 291 that discussions in Stieglitz's galleries were recorded. Dorothy Norman and Herbert Seligmann, both of whom worked closely with Stieglitz after the close of 291, published their notes about events at The Intimate Gallery and An American Place,²⁹ and Norman's periodical *Twice a Year* included Stieglitz's stories and recollections.³⁰

Events at 291 and other galleries are also reflected in published reviews of exhibitions and statements by Stieglitz. For instance, he described for *Camera Work* the debut of O'Keeffe's art at 291, "This exhibition [a small group show], mainly owing to Miss O'Keeffe's drawings, attracted many visitors and aroused unusual interest and

discussion. It was different from anything that had been shown at '291.'"³¹ Barbara Buhler Lynes in her authoritative book *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics, 1916-1929*, has collected and analyzed Stieglitz's words and other critical publications about O'Keeffe's art. As Lynes asserts, Stieglitz had a profound influence on the critics who frequented his galleries.³² I have found in these critical articles, and many from later years, abundant evidence of how Stieglitz continued for decades to show visitors O'Keeffe's early graphic works and to tell stories of how he first saw the artist's drawings and met their creator.

Stieglitz funneled his electric reaction to O'Keeffe's early drawings and watercolors, and to the artist herself, into a series of photographs he made of the artist beginning in 1917. Over many years Stieglitz created a vast composite portrait of the woman who became his wife. Many of the first images Stieglitz made of O'Keeffe picture the artist tellingly posed with her own drawings and watercolors. I see in these images the photographer's erotically-charged visual commentary on the graphic works and their creator.³³ It is not accidental, I think, that Stieglitz rarely photographed O'Keeffe with her paintings, but preferred to show her with works in the media of charcoal and watercolor that he evidently found more directly connected to the body of the artist.

Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe have prompted much art historical analysis. O'Keeffe's own remarks about the works published as the introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* have become a frequently-cited source of information on how these works were made and what they meant to the photographer and his subject.³⁴ Many authors have looked at Stieglitz's powerful body

of photographs of O’Keeffe in conjunction with O’Keeffe’s words in search of revelations about the artistic, professional, and personal relationship between these two great creative personalities.³⁵ In my fifth chapter I review the continuing debate over whether these photographs represent statements by Stieglitz only or were a cooperative venture between photographer and model. My chief aim in analyzing these photographs, however, is to interpret how they display Stieglitz’s attitudes toward graphic media in O’Keeffe’s works.

The Modernism of the Stieglitz Circle

While O’Keeffe was making her first modernist drawings, she wrote to Pollitzer, “I believe I would rather have Stieglitz like some thing – anything I had done – than anyone else I know of.”³⁶ It is clear from O’Keeffe’s letters that she wanted to make the kind of art that Stieglitz showed; she wanted to be a part of the modernist sphere of 291. Stieglitz’s modernism was a major force in the transformation of O’Keeffe’s art and life during the period I am studying. When I speak of modern or avant-garde art in this dissertation, I use these words in relation to the beliefs and practices of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz in the nineteen teens. But what did modernism mean to Stieglitz and the artists around him?

To understand Stieglitz’s and O’Keeffe’s conceptions of modernism, it is necessary first to examine the word modernism as it functions in the wider cultural discourse. There is no universally accepted definition for this powerful and capacious concept. As Charles Harrison states in his essay on the term modernism in *Critical Terms for Art History*, “there are few terms upon which the weight of implication, of innuendo, and of aspiration bears down so heavily as it now does upon modernism.”³⁷

I find Harrison's essay on modernism helpful in coping with the massive and varied literature of modernism in the art historical discourse. He sets out three different definitions of this term, all of which bear upon the modernist practices of O'Keeffe and Stieglitz. First, Harrison speaks about the social and historical situation of modernism. He states, "modernism is used to refer to the distinguishing characteristics of Western culture from the mid-nineteenth century until at least the mid-twentieth: a culture in which the processes of industrialization and urbanization are conceived of as the principal mechanisms of transformation in human experience."³⁸ That is, modernity was the force that shaped this age and modernism was the cultural expression of the age. Or, one might say, modernism is a compendium of the ways people have found to cope with the pressures exerted by modernity.

Harrison's second definition of modernism addresses the formal characteristics of modernist objects, largely as conceived in a series of influential essays written by the formalist American art critic Clement Greenberg between 1939 and 1960.³⁹ To Greenberg, "The essence of Modernism lies . . . in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." The discipline in question for Greenberg was visual art. He found that,

Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure.

It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium.⁴⁰

The media Greenberg explored most in his famous essays "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," and "Modernist Painting," were painting and sculpture. He set painting, defined

by its two dimensional nature, in opposition to the three dimensions of sculpture.

Greenberg found the flatness of paint on a rectangular canvas the principal characteristic of painting, and thus the area of competence of that art.

Harrison's third definition of modernism looks at the social functioning of modernism within the art world. "A modernist . . ." in these terms, says Harrison, "is seen not primarily as a kind of artist, but rather as a critic whose judgments reflect a specific set of ideas and beliefs about art and its development." Greenberg was this kind of modernist. Among the other critics Harrison lists as practicing modernist criticism are Stieglitz's British contemporaries Clive Bell and Roger Fry.⁴¹

At the time O'Keeffe first began working in a modernist mode, before she formed more independent ideas, she found much of her inspiration and guidance in exhibitions held at 291 and articles in *Camera Work* and *291*. Stieglitz and his cohorts at 291 were, therefore, her ideal modernists when she began making modernist works on paper. What kind of modernist was Stieglitz and what kind of modernist models did he and those in his circle offer to O'Keeffe? Certainly, he can easily be seen as the kind of modernist practitioner who fits into Harrison's third definition of modernism. Stieglitz was, in the New York of the teens, the eminent authority who decided which art and artists would be seen as modernist. In 1916 the witty critic Henry McBride wrote, for example, of paintings by Marsden Hartley shown by Stieglitz, "These works are all terrifically modern, of course, else they would not be shown at the Photo-Secession."⁴² A critic writing for the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1917 defined "modern art" as "the most recent expressions of painting, such as impressionism, cubism and futurism." He asserted that in New York "the true protagonist and by far the most influential ex-officio

impresario of the modern movement in general is Alfred Stieglitz.”⁴³ As Sarah Greenough notes, “by 1912 Stieglitz was as knowledgeable as any ‘291’ artist or critic about recent developments in European or American art. So much so, in fact, that in 1913 [the avant-garde French artist Francis] Picabia hailed him as ‘the man best informed in this whole revolution in the arts.’”⁴⁴ Stieglitz’s modernism, however, changed rapidly during the years when he ran 291.

T. J. Clark chillingly states, “It is the blindness of modernity that seems . . . fundamental, and to which modernism is a response.”⁴⁵ Even before he opened 291, Stieglitz had been, through his own photographs, fighting to open up society’s understanding of what art was. As early as 1903 he wrote, “In phases of human activity the tendency of the masses has been invariably toward ultra conservatism. Progress has been accomplished only by reason of the fanatical enthusiasm of the revolutionist, whose extreme teaching has saved the mass from utter inertia.”⁴⁶ Through all of his activities undertaken to promote modernism in America, Stieglitz acted as such a revolutionist.

Once he opened 291, Stieglitz was able to break up the mass of humanity into individuals who walked in the door of the gallery. He used 291 for “experimenting” and his visitors were the subjects of the experiments.⁴⁷ Stieglitz stimulated reactions by bringing people into contact with the active ingredients of the new art on the walls and the new ideas that thrived in conversation at 291. He would not stand for inertia. Greenberg said of avant-garde artists that their function was “to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving*.”⁴⁸ Stieglitz was a gad-fly who used art and words to goad people’s minds and feelings into motion. When Stieglitz’s lieutenant and European talent scout Edward Steichen saw Picasso’s shocking new art in France, it

seemed an appropriate “red rag” to wave at visitors to 291 to keep them moving; Stieglitz gladly accepted such works for exhibition.⁴⁹ He delightedly recounted how his exhibitions of radical European modernist works by artists like Picasso and Matisse had caused “pandemonium”⁵⁰ and led to “many heated controversies.”⁵¹

Part of Stieglitz’s opposition to the status quo of modernity was his resistance to the stress on money and materialism that he saw around him. He refused to look upon his galleries as businesses. He told a visitor that “the art business reminded him . . . of a house of prostitution.”⁵² Stieglitz ran his galleries as informal cooperatives, taking what was needed from sales to keep the institution running and sharing the rest with the artists according to how he understood their needs. He sought appropriate homes for art works rather than selling to those who offered the most money. This resulted in utterly inconsistent pricing of works.⁵³

Stieglitz’s understanding of modern art was as unsystematic and unorthodox as his financial practices. Whatever could express the individual could constitute modern art. He stated in a 1908 interview, “We have no formulated theories . . . because we believe that a formulated theory is a narrowing thing, lacking in that perfect freedom which we are looking for.”⁵⁴ His ideas shifted to keep up with the rapid pace of his learning from those whom he acknowledged knew far more than he did about the latest trends in European modernism. He read and traveled widely, always looking at phenomena around him and considering what he saw. Mentors who guided the formation of Stieglitz’s concept of modernism included Edward Steichen, the Mexican-born caricaturist and theorist Marius de Zayas, the American painter Max Weber, and the American art collector Leo Stein.⁵⁵

Stieglitz's appreciation for new art advanced by leaps and bounds. In 1907 he laughed at Paul Cézanne's watercolors, saying "there's nothing there but empty paper with a few splashes of color here and there;" by 1911 Stieglitz not only appreciated Cézanne's watercolors but showed them at 291.⁵⁶ As he admitted new art and ideas to his modernist canon, he shared his evolving thoughts with gallery visitors in a constant stream of often heated conversation. The talk frequently took the form of a monologue by the proprietor, yet Stieglitz also managed to listen to and learn from his fellow artists, writers, and other visitors.⁵⁷ As O'Keeffe stated it, "Stieglitz was a very contradictory person . . . he would start out in the morning saying one thing, and by noon he would be saying the exact opposite, and then in the evening he would have changed his mind again. He thought aloud, you see."⁵⁸ When O'Keeffe strove to become a modernist of the kind whose work Stieglitz exhibited, she was aiming at a large but rapidly moving target. The constant changes in Stieglitz's interpretation of modernism must have made it very difficult for O'Keeffe to know how to fulfill his ideals until she gained the confidence to define her own goals more independently.

The young O'Keeffe debated what medium she should use in her first modernist ventures, considering oil painting, then trying watercolor, and finally settling on charcoal. Ironically, O'Keeffe's later art journeyed back through this sequence of materials in reverse, so that she first experimented with color through watercolor and then wound up as a mature modernist oil painter.⁶⁰ O'Keeffe's technical considerations brought her into an area of particular interest to Stieglitz. Much as Greenberg would later define the task of modernism, Stieglitz and critics associated with him questioned which territory was appropriate to various art media. Stieglitz began with photography, working to open up

the category of fine art to include this new medium. Through his examinations of other media to determine their properties in contrast to those of photography he originally became interested in exhibiting non-photographic art.⁶¹ Later, as Stieglitz learned more about modernism, he came to characterize art as photographic or anti-photographic. According to this formulation, anyone who attempted to paint or draw precise representations of the physical world was making a hopeless attempt to do what photography could do much better, and neglecting the wider communicative possibilities of his or her own medium. Self-expression rather than mimesis was the proper realm of modern art in non-photographic media.⁶² Stieglitz, however, evidently valued and appreciated both photographic and anti-photographic art in their own proper areas, and found both suited for the free expression of the individual.

Methodology

In formulating the questions about the culture of medium that I am investigating in my dissertation, I find inspiration in T. J. Clark's previously mentioned book, *Farewell to an Idea*. In this book, Clark seeks to understand the mechanisms through which modern life and thought were communicated by way of material objects - art works. In his chapter on Camille Pissarro, for instance, Clark attempts to divine how the artist's beliefs shaped his art. Clark states, "It was only by utter immersion in painting, or in some comparable mere material practice, that the true structure of one's 'sensation [perception of life]' – its uniqueness and immediacy, its folding of parts into wholes – would be made available to all."⁶³ I explore the "mere material practice[s]" of drawing and watercolor. I want to understand how the historical, social, and aesthetic forces of O'Keeffe's life found expression in her modern graphic works made between 1915 and

1918. And, on the other side of the question, I want to uncover what shaped Stieglitz's understanding of these same graphic works.

My basic method of working consists of examining physical works of art in conjunction with a study of characters, events, ideas, and cultural material that shaped and surrounded them during the period when they were created and first exhibited. From this combination of visual and written materials, I am able to form conclusions about the meaning of drawing and watercolor for O'Keeffe, in making her works, and for Stieglitz, in viewing and presenting them. The central materials I am investigating are drawings and watercolors, but to understand them I also turn to other visual works and writings. To comprehend the distinctive cultural languages of these images and writings, I must be familiar with the lives, times, and oeuvres of my two protagonists, O'Keeffe and Stieglitz. I must know as much as I can about how they were trained, how they practiced their arts, with whom they spent their lives, what they read, and what they saw.

It is impossible, of course, to truly reassemble the cultural contexts of dead people and past times. Yet it is worth while to bring together some of the elements that can still be recovered in order to reinvest their creations with some of their original life. In my project to reassemble the early modernist history of drawing and watercolor in O'Keeffe's works, I look to the examples of important cultural historians who have taken on parallel kinds of projects. T. J. Clark in each of the chapters in his book *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* approaches a more or less well-known modern work or works. His subjects include Jacques-Louis David's painting *Death of Marat* and Pablo Picasso's cubist paintings of 1911 and 1912. Clark searches for fresh insights into the nature of modernism by examining art works that he feels to be

characteristically modern in the context of each artist's life and career. In *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*, Wanda Corn analyzes the cultural production of various American and European artists in light of the artistic dialogue of the period. Her investigation focuses on what a variety of people felt was, or should be, American about American art.⁶⁴ Like Clark, she examines selected works of art, in her case in search of cultural constructions of the "American" in art.

Both *Farewell to an Idea* and *The Great American Thing* cover familiar territory in their choices of artists and works of art. These projects are well worth while because each author takes a new point of view that enables him or her to isolate previously neglected patterns of meaning. Through the vast array of visual, biographical, and historical specifics that Clark and Corn study, they trace how abstract ideas assumed reality in the works and lives of their chosen artists. I take a similar approach.

O'Keeffe's drawings and watercolors are well-known works that have been explored in multiple exhibitions and catalogues.⁶⁵ I re-approach them in order to discover how they realized abstract ideas that might be called drawingness and watercoloriness. That is, I look for what, in the eyes of my protagonists, O'Keeffe and Stieglitz, gave these graphic media their own ways of carrying meaning. Thus, at a higher level, I am in search of the cultural nature of medium itself.

I seek to catch the elusive flavor of each medium as O'Keeffe and Stieglitz tasted it in their native times and places. This is not at all the same as simply observing what makes O'Keeffe's drawings and watercolors graphic to me or to others in my own time. Clark observes that he and his contemporaries live in a different age than did the artists of whom he writes. "Modernism," he states, "is unintelligible now because it had truck with

a modernity not yet fully in place,” while in his own era modernization is completely accomplished.⁶⁶ Between the nineteenth teens and my own time, graphic media have assumed a rapidly shifting succession of cultural essences. The points of view of O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and those around them have, however, left visual and written traces. With sufficient labor and a sharp eye, I can follow the trail. As Corn realizes, “You have to work long and hard to extract the historical stories embedded within a visual text.”⁶⁷

At the center of my study lie my own visual texts: O’Keeffe’s drawings and watercolors. As a graphic artist, as well as an art historian, I call upon my background to help me study the physical evidence of these art works. I have been fortunate to be able to visit a number of museums, galleries, and other institutions where I have spent many hours gazing at hundreds of works of art made by O’Keeffe and other artists whose works Stieglitz exhibited. It is important that I make accurate determinations of what media the artists used in making these works and how they employed these media. I consult the files and published catalogues of the works in question. To correct and expand my technical understanding of these works, I utilize writings by and conversations with conservators. Judith Walsh of the National Gallery of Art and Dale Kronkright of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum have been particularly important to my work in this regard.⁶⁸ In addition to reading about O’Keeffe’s works on paper, I have also discussed the works with curators and other art historians who know them well. Authorities whose mentorship helps me to formulate my ideas about Georgia O’Keeffe and her work include Barbara Buhler Lynes, Emily Fisher Landau Director of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center and Curator of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum; Ruth Fine, Curator of Special Projects in Modern Art and previously Curator of

Modern Prints and Drawings of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; and Wendy Wick Reaves, Curator of Prints and Drawings of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

I also consider O’Keeffe’s graphic works in the context of her oeuvre in other media. My work would be all but impossible without the exemplary catalogue raisonné of Georgia O’Keeffe’s art written by Barbara Buhler Lynes.⁶⁹ This valuable resource allows me to see all of the artist’s known works in the approximate order in which they were made. This book provides these works with their provenance and exhibition histories. An equivalent resource, Sarah Greenough’s *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set: the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs*, lays out and documents the complete “key set” of photographs by Alfred Stieglitz that O’Keeffe gave to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., after the photographer’s death. This set of “at least one print of every mounted photograph in his possession at the time of his death,”⁷⁰ includes the vast majority of the photographs Stieglitz made of O’Keeffe with her art that are so important to my project.

Key monographs on O’Keeffe that help me to build my approach to the artist include Charles C. Eldredge’s *Georgia O’Keeffe: American and Modern*,⁷¹ Elizabeth Hutton Turner’s *Georgia O’Keeffe: the Poetry of Things*,⁷² and especially for the early period on which I am working, Sarah Whitaker Peters’ *Becoming O’Keeffe: the Early Years*.⁷³ The artist’s attitude toward her own works, including the place of the graphic works in the conscious shaping of her own oeuvre, emerges in Barbara Buhler Lynes’s *O’Keeffe’s O’Keeffes: the Artist’s Collection*.⁷⁴

For my own work, perhaps the most engaging interpretations of O’Keeffe’s art are those that concentrate on the context of the artist’s identity as a woman. The pervasive and complex cultural forces of gender and medium often interacted in their effects on her artistic career. Stieglitz found gender the central aspect of O’Keeffe and her art, as Lynes brings out in her influential book *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916-1929*.⁷⁵ In her article “Georgia O’Keeffe and Feminism: a Problem of Position,” Lynes continues her discussion of how O’Keeffe was embarrassed by blatantly sexual interpretations of her work and violently objected to those who saw nothing but her female sex in her art. Yet Lynes demonstrates that the artist was a feminist who championed voting rights for women. As Lynes stresses, O’Keeffe did not deny the importance of her womanhood, she simply objected to the isolation and limitation of women’s art on the basis on gender.⁷⁶ Anne Middleton Wagner wrestles substantively with the problem of gender in the creation, presentation, and interpretation of O’Keeffe’s art in *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe*.⁷⁷ My fellow Wagner’s approach to O’Keeffe’s art is stimulating and challenging to my own thought, particularly in her discussions of O’Keeffe’s charcoal drawings, her watercolor nudes, and Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe with her art. To the assertions of these feminist scholars, I add the complicating factor of medium that I see shaping Stieglitz’s response to O’Keeffe’s gender in his interpretations of her graphic art.

Alongside the works of art O’Keeffe made, I place the artist’s writings which I have already discussed as a major focus of my work. I also consider Stieglitz’s writings and images in reference to O’Keeffe’s works. A vast array of original documents by both

Stieglitz and O’Keeffe and their many correspondents is preserved in the Stieglitz/O’Keeffe Archive in the Yale Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Stieglitz and O’Keeffe both had wide interests that are reflected in the great array of material they read. Many of the actual books and journals owned by the photographer and the artist, often with revealing inscriptions or marks of wear, are still gathered in O’Keeffe’s library at her house in Abiquiu, New Mexico.⁷⁸

The members of the Stieglitz circle were indefatigable creators who left behind a vast body of art and writings. Many of these writings are in the journal Stieglitz edited for the Camera Club of New York beginning in 1897 and ending in 1902, *Camera Notes*, and the voice of 291, *Camera Work*, published between 1902 and 1917. O’Keeffe avidly read *Camera Work* as well as the alternate Stieglitz circle periodical *291*, edited by Marius de Zayas, Paul Haviland, and Agnes Ernst Meyer between March 1915 and February 1916. These publications contain only a fraction of the writings on art and modernist culture in articles and books produced by authors connected to or commenting on the Stieglitz circle.

To effectively discover and analyze these texts, I make use of the existing art historical surveys of modernist activity in the Stieglitz circle. The first of these are William Innes Homer’s previously mentioned *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* and *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*. More recently, Sarah Greenough curated an important exhibition and edited an encyclopedic catalogue on the modern art movement group around Stieglitz, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*.⁷⁹ I am also fortunate to be able to consult the voluminous research

materials Greenough's team at the National Gallery of Art assembled for this major project.

As Charles Brock discussed in his presentation "Squaring the Circle: The Role of the Stieglitz Circle in Histories of American Art," the standard term "Stieglitz circle" is in certain ways perhaps not the most appropriate way of referring to this loose community of people. These varied characters – artists, authors, cultural critics, collectors, and assorted appreciators of art - moved in a much more fluid cultural milieu than is suggested by the precisely-bounded form of a circle. Stieglitz was not even always the clear leader of the group.⁸⁰ For instance, it was the younger Steichen who took the initiative when he chose the location for 291, decorated the space, and designed the cover of *Camera Work*.⁸¹ Steichen also first suggested showing art other than photography in the Little Galleries, went on to rouse Stieglitz's interest in modern art, and then selected works by European and American artists for some of the gallery's most important exhibitions.⁸² During later periods Marius de Zayas, among others, assumed varying degrees of leadership in New York's modernist circles. The members of the amorphous group around Stieglitz came and went unpredictably, being attracted or repelled according to shifting events and relationships. Circle does, indeed, seem to be too neat a shape to confine such a protean cultural population. For my own project however, Stieglitz and those closest to him are of the greatest importance. Therefore, while acknowledging its limitations, I continue to use the established term Stieglitz circle simply because the phrase is the most convenient and widely understood way of making reference to those who were more or less closely associated with Stieglitz and his galleries and publications.

My investigations of art and readings in the history of the Stieglitz circle take on specific context with relation to O’Keeffe and Stieglitz through investigations of the biographies of my two principles characters.⁸³ I view O’Keeffe’s life as a woman artist in the context of her fellow women in the field. To learn what such a woman faced as she strove to gain training and to work as an artist, I consult writings by such feminist art historians as Kirsten Swinth, Helena Wright, Ann Sutherland Harris, Linda Nochlin, and Josephine Withers.⁸⁴

My analysis of graphic media in the Stieglitz circle involves my bringing the history of those artists into juxtaposition with the overall history of graphic media in the Western art tradition. Technical investigations like James Watrous’s *The Craft of Old Master Drawing*⁸⁵ or Marjorie B. Cohn’s *Wash and Gouache* are basic tools for anyone seeking to understand the history and physical operations of graphic media.⁸⁶ Large historical surveys like *Drawing: History of an Art*⁸⁷ and meditations on medium like Philips Rawson’s *Drawing*⁸⁸ afford a broad overview of practices and ideas about graphic media through history. On the specific topic of charcoal drawings, Vojtech and Thea Jirat-Wasiutynski have written a pair of useful articles.⁸⁹

The rise of modernism caused graphic media to shift their meanings. One of the most important treatments of the new questions raised by graphic media in the modernist milieu is Jack Flam’s essay “The Modern Drawing.” Flam discusses the increasing stress on plainly stated facture in modern drawings and watercolors, particularly those by Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse. As Flam notes, in modern art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries facture overtook mimesis as the priority in drawing.⁹⁰

The roots of the perceived division in the reception of drawing between mimesis and facture existed long before the advent of modernism, however. While any work of art can reveal both what is represented and who represented it, in *Drawing Acts* David Rosand considers the special character of drawing that gives enhanced importance to the viewer's perception of the artist,

By drawing we generally understand a pictorial structure more open than that of painting. Drawing tends to cover its supporting surface only incompletely; the ground retains its own participating presence in the image, just as the marks it hosts, and which so transform it, retain their autonomy. Ambivalence is an essential and functioning aspect of drawing. More insistently than the brush stroke in painting, the drawn mark resists surrender to the mimetic imperative, to pictorial illustration.⁹¹

It was through the tradition of connoisseurship that viewers came to study drawings in hopes of finding revelations about the artists who had made the works. The Grove Dictionary of Art defines connoisseurship as the "Term given to the technique or art of recognizing works of art. In the Western world this particularly involves the evaluation, distinction and appreciation of the work's quality and, above all, the ability to determine the time and place of its execution, and as far as possible, the identity of the artist."⁹² But connoisseurship, particularly the connoisseurship of drawings, continues beyond this mere technical understanding. The artist's hand is guided by his or her character, and mind. Thus, to be able to recognize the characteristic lines made by a particular artist is to form some idea of that artist's distinctive ways of thinking and feeling. As Rosand realizes,

Connoisseurship has always recognized the fundamental subjectivity of its operations, respecting intuition and celebrating the 'good eye.' In acknowledging drawing as a most personal statement, a direct expression of the character of the artist, it has, in effect, insisted on such critical subjectivity. Through a drawing, the connoisseur feels himself in privileged rapport with the artist, a meeting of two correspondingly fine and mutually confirming sensibilities.⁹³

In his discussion of the viewer's perception of the artist in his or her drawings, Rosand makes effective use of the semiotic concept of the index, originated by Charles Sanders Peirce.⁹⁴ A drawing, whether representational or abstract, is far from a pure index; it is not a mere hand mark on a page functioning as the signature of its creator. Rosand finds the concept of the index an apt way of referring to that cultural aspect of the interpretation of drawings in which viewers think about the creator of the marks before them. I use the term index in a similar way in this dissertation, particularly in reference to Stieglitz's strikingly indexical approach to O'Keeffe's graphic works. As Stieglitz wrote to O'Keeffe, "Your drawings on the walls of 291 would not be so living for me did I not see you in them. Really see."⁹⁵

As I will discuss in my first chapter, I see this intimate, indexical, connection between artist and viewer through a work of art as moving from the traditional connoisseurship of drawings into the culture of modernism in the Stieglitz circle. O'Keeffe's drawings and watercolors played a major role in this transference of culture, as Stieglitz revealed in his photographs of the artist with her drawings and watercolors. Stieglitz, as I will discuss in my first and fifth chapters, valued artistic touch as the point where artist and viewer met emotionally. But artistic touch is a more complex concept than is normally understood. Richard Shiff in his article "Constructing Physicality" analyzes the aspects of this term that I use so often in my work. Shiff refers to painting, but his ideas are just as useful for drawing,

"Touch," as the term is commonly used, refers to at least three aspects of a painting and its process. First, touch is the gesture that deposits the painter's mark as an imprint or impression. We regard the mark as an indexical sign of the gesture. Second, touch is the applied paint mark itself, in its capacity as a visible

form. . . . Third, touch is the tactile sensation the painter actually experiences or the viewer imagines to be associated with making such a mark.⁹⁶

Touch in all three of these aspects was crucial to the functioning of drawing and watercolor in the Stieglitz circle.

For my work the most important and specifically relevant discussion of the history of graphic media in the Stieglitz circle is the essay by Ruth E. Fine and Elizabeth Glassman, “Thoughts Without Words: O’Keeffe in Context,” included in the National Gallery of Art and Georgia O’Keeffe Museum’s exhibition catalogue *O’Keeffe on Paper*.⁹⁷ This essay establishes important concepts about the place of graphic media in the Stieglitz circle, including the many works on paper in Stieglitz’s own collections and Stieglitz’s stand that in his gallery there would be no differentiation between so-called “major” and “minor” media.⁹⁸ The exhibition *O’Keeffe on Paper* was an important inspiration for my dissertation and, in many ways, the catalogue must be seen as the beginning of my own project.

As I discuss in detail in my first chapter, all art media originally entered the Stieglitz circle through their relationships with photography. In the articles Stieglitz chose to publish in *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, painting, drawing, and watercolor had an important place from the first as exemplars of fine art to be studied and imitated by photographers.⁹⁹ Then, when Stieglitz and Steichen first decided to exhibit works other than photography in the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, it was because, as Sarah Greenough states, “They hoped that by exhibiting paintings, drawings, or sculpture they would draw artists and critics into their space and thus initiate a dialog about the relationship between painting and photography.”¹⁰⁰ It was from this dialogue that Stieglitz developed his ideas of photographic art as the correct way of using his own

medium and anti-photographic art as the proper direction for expression in other media. The authority who has most thoroughly and thoughtfully articulated this dynamic relationship between photography and other media, including graphic media, in the Stieglitz circle is Sarah Greenough. She discusses how photography and modern art shaped each other in the Stieglitz circle in her dissertation, refining those ideas in later publications.¹⁰¹

Greenough took the title of her essay “Alfred Stieglitz and ‘The Idea Photography,’” from a quotation by Stieglitz that I find particularly apt for my own work. Greenough relates, “When Stieglitz’s photographs are considered it is usually for their innovations in style, subject matter, and technique. But these are the manifestations, the visible results, of something larger and more profound, something that permeated and propelled Stieglitz’s entire undertaking as a photographer: a search for what he termed ‘the *meaning* of the *idea* photography.’ For Stieglitz saw that photography was ‘a distinct medium’; that it had, or should have, its own set of standards; that it should not blindly emulate the style, the subject matter, or even the function of the other arts.”¹⁰² As Stieglitz pursued the *idea* photography, I am attempting to pursue the *ideas* of drawing and watercolor, in the forms they took in a specific context.

The media of drawing and watercolor have their own distinct personalities and sets of meanings. These meanings are constantly shifting with the passage of time, the creation of art, and changes in the world around the artworks and artists. But I hope to pin down the ideas of these graphic media in a specific moment in the early twentieth century as used by a specific artist. Through this case study, I will establish ideas and methods that can be used to divine the roles of drawing, watercolor, and other media in

other contexts of time and place. I strive to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the physical realities of art media become enmeshed in our thought about works of art and artists. Through such investigations art historians may become more sensitive to how traditional physical categories distort or enrich our understanding of any kind of artistic production. In art history we often attempt to understand sophisticated and transcendent concepts. We may even come to the point of acting as if the physical form of an art work is only incidental to the expression of ideas. Yet the physical properties of works of art are, I think, vital to creating understanding between human beings who inhabit physical bodies in a physical world.

Organization of the Dissertation

I have arranged my dissertation as a dialogue between Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O’Keeffe. Stieglitz enters first as I establish his background in graphic media and the role of these media in his gallery. I then turn to the story of O’Keeffe’s life and career. I follow the tale as O’Keeffe encounters Stieglitz, the photographer both shaping and reacting to the artist’s inventions on paper.

Chapter One: Alfred Stieglitz, the Photo-Secession, and the Graphic Arts

In the first chapter I look at encounters between Stieglitz and the media of drawing and watercolor. These media initially entered his world through his father’s interest in art and his artist friends. As the younger Stieglitz shaped his conception of how photography could function as a fine art, he looked to older graphic media as examples. When Stieglitz began to exhibit modern art, Edward Steichen, a painter and photographer trained in commercial graphic art, helped to establish drawings and watercolors as important modernist objects suited for the confined spaces of 291.

Chapter Two: The Formation of Georgia O'Keeffe's Graphic Art

In this chapter I investigate the role of drawing and watercolor in O'Keeffe's background and training as an artist. These graphic media were the ones used most to train young artists before they were considered ready for the challenges of oil painting. O'Keeffe also supported herself through graphic art, both making commercial art drawings and teaching drawing. When O'Keeffe first entered 291 and stumbled upon the modernism that would change her life, what she saw first was an exhibition of drawings by Auguste Rodin. O'Keeffe's training with Arthur Wesley Dow turned her understanding of drawing upside down and prepared her to accept the modern art she would see when she again entered 291.

Chapter Three: Georgia O'Keeffe Enters the Stieglitz Circle through Drawings

In my third chapter I look at the many cultural forces that came together to shape O'Keeffe's first attempts at modern art in the form of drawings made in the autumn of 1915. I examine the blending in her 1915 charcoals of ideas from both academic art, Dow's books and classes, and modern art. O'Keeffe's encounters with modern art had come through seeing exhibitions of mostly graphic works at 291, and through reading modern publications which included graphic reproductions of art. She had, to this point, seen almost no modern art in color. It therefore makes perfect sense that she felt most confident working in a very familiar black and white graphic medium. And it is also natural that some of the content of academic charcoal drawings bled into O'Keeffe's first abstract drawings.

Chapter Four: O’Keeffe’s Debut at 291 and Her Watercolors

In this chapter, I continue following O’Keeffe’s career as a modernist through the years 1916, 1917, and 1918. During these years, O’Keeffe saw a much greater variety of modern art works than she had seen previously, being at last exposed to paintings in full color. Color entered her own works in the medium of watercolor, particularly as she traveled and taught in Virginia, North Carolina, and Texas. At the same time that O’Keeffe was expanding her artistic resources, Stieglitz was holding the first exhibitions of her modern works, first the charcoals of 1915, and then the watercolors and first oils of 1916 and 1917. Thus, O’Keeffe had to cope with the beginnings of the reception of her art even as she moved beyond the works to which Stieglitz was reacting.

Chapter Five: O’Keeffe’s Drawings and Watercolors in Photographs and Words

The final chapter begins with O’Keeffe’s move from Texas to New York, where she lived with Stieglitz. Here I query O’Keeffe’s change from graphic media to paint in oils at this time. Again, as O’Keeffe was moving into new artistic territory, Stieglitz was reacting to her existing works. In this chapter I explore how, through his photographs of the artist, Stieglitz expressed his excitement over the immediacy of artistic touch in O’Keeffe’s drawings and watercolors. Further, I examine the myths of origin that Stieglitz established by continuing through the decades to share O’Keeffe’s drawings with visitors to his later galleries while telling stories about how he discovered the artist through these works. I see Stieglitz adopting the approach of the traditional connoisseur to drawings, looking for deep revelations about the artist’s character and emotions, to his approach to modern art in all media.

Notes

¹ Anita Pollitzer described showing her friend Georgia O’Keeffe’s drawings to Alfred Stieglitz in a letter to O’Keeffe, January 1, 1916, in *Lovingly, Georgia: the Complete Correspondence of Georgia O’Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer*, ed. Clive Giboire, (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990), 115-116.

It is now impossible to know precisely which drawings Stieglitz saw on January 1, 1916. O’Keeffe had sent some of the works to Pollitzer in November 1915, more in December 1915, and a final shipment in February 1916. It was the December shipment that Pollitzer said she showed to Stieglitz. All three sets of works were available to Stieglitz when he hung the May 1916 exhibition of O’Keeffe’s works. See Anita Pollitzer to Georgia O’Keeffe, November 1915; Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, January 1, 1916; O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916; O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916; O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February, 1916, in *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 84-86, 115-116, 137, 143-144, 146. That exhibition of ten drawings included, according to the *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, the works I reproduce as figures 3.1-3.8, along with two less certainly identified drawings from among the three that are my figures 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11. What Stieglitz saw on January 1, 1916, was some portion of these eleven works. Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1:51-56, 58.

² See Benita Eisler, “Introduction: Letters Exactly Like Themselves,” in *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, xx-xxi.

³ Stieglitz letter to his friend the artist Katharine Rhoades, May 31, 1916, Alfred Stieglitz/ Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, hereafter cited as YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. I would like to thank Lisa Mintz Messinger, Associate Curator of Modern Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for bringing this letter to my attention.

⁴ “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz, 1905-1946,” in Sarah E. Greenough, ed., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 546.

⁵ As Walsh says, “Charcoal may have seemed in 1915, as at those other times [when O’Keeffe began new phases of her art], as an old friend. She had first used it in drawing lessons as a school girl, and later, as an art student.” Judith C. Walsh, “The Language of O’Keeffe’s Materials: Charcoal, Watercolor, Pastel,” in Ruth E. Fine and Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O’Keeffe on Paper* (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, 2000), 58.

⁶ “Her experiments of the mid-1910s provided a formal vocabulary, the basis for later compositional experiments. . . . The early works continued for decades to provide her with inspiration.” Charles Eldredge, *Georgia O’Keeffe: American and Modern* (New Haven, CN and London: Yale University Press in association with InterCultura Fort Worth and the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, 1993), 163.

⁷ Doris Bry, “About Georgia O’Keeffe,” in Georgia O’Keeffe, *Some Memories of Drawings*, ed. Doris Bry (Albuquerque: The University Press of New Mexico, 1988), 102.

⁸ Barbara Buhler Lynes notes this change in O’Keeffe’s art and speculates about the influence of artistic considerations or pressures from Stieglitz on the artist’s change of media. “Inventions of Different Orders,” in Fine and Lynes, *O’Keeffe on Paper*, 52-53.

⁹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, in *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 68. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁰ F. Holland Day, “Art and the Camera,” *Camera Notes* 2, no. 1 (July 1898): 4.

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- ¹¹ Lila Wheelock Howard, interview by Laurie Lisle, tape recording, September 28, 1977, Laurie Lisle material on Georgia O’Keeffe, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., hereafter referred to as AAA.
- ¹² William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession* (A New York Graphic Society Book. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983) and William Innes Homer *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977).
- ¹³ Steichen was baptized Eduard Jean Steichen but after World War I changed the spelling of his first name to Edward. Penelope Niven, *Steichen: a Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1997), 4, 66.
- ¹⁴ Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 49-55, 111-112, 118-119.
- ¹⁵ Sarah E. Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz: Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” Greenough ed., *Modern Art and America*, 27-29.
- ¹⁶ My count is based upon “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz,” Greenough, *Modern Art and America*, 543-547.
- ¹⁷ Ruth E. Fine and Elizabeth Glassman, “Thoughts without Words: O’Keeffe in Context,” in Fine and Lynes, *O’Keeffe on Paper*, 14.
- ¹⁸ Pollitzer published selections from the letters in her biography of O’Keeffe, Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O’Keeffe*. (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988). The complete surviving correspondence between O’Keeffe and Pollitzer is published in Clive Giboire, Editor, *Lovingly, Georgia: the Complete Correspondence of Georgia O’Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990). The original letters are preserved in the Alfred Stieglitz/ Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.
- ¹⁹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, Saturday night, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 42. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ²⁰ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 28, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 127. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ²¹ O’Keeffe’s statements for her exhibitions organized by Alfred Stieglitz between 1923 and 1943 are gathered in “Appendix A,” Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1:1098-1099.
- ²² The most useful articles for my work include “‘I Can’t Sing So I Paint’.” *New York Sun*, December 5, 1922; Helen Appleton Read, “Georgia O’Keeffe - Woman Artist Whose Art Is Sincerely Feminine,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 6, 1924, reprinted in Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916-1929* (Ann Arbor, London: UMI Research Press, 1989), as Appendix A, #9, p. 180-182; Carol Taylor, “Lady Dynamo: Miss O’Keeffe, Noted Artist, Is a Feminist,” *New York World-Tribune*, March 31, 1945; Charlotte Willard, “Georgia O’Keeffe,” *Art in America*, no. 5 (1963): 92-96; Ralph Looney, “Georgia O’Keeffe,” *Atlantic Monthly* 215 (1965): 106-10; and Calvin Tomkins, “Profiles: the Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine,” *The New Yorker* 50 (1974): 40-44, 47-48, 50, 53-54, 56, 60-62, 64, 66.
- ²³ See, for instance, the way Stieglitz and John Marin carefully constructed the public image of Marin and his art. This is analyzed in Timothy Robert Rodgers, “Making the American Artist: John Marin, Alfred Stieglitz and Their Critics, 1909-1936.” PhD diss., Brown University, 1995.

²⁴ Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks With Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976); and *Georgia O'Keeffe*, VHS, directed by Perry Miller Adato (New York: WNET, 1977).

²⁵ Georgia O'Keeffe, *Some Memories of Drawings*, ed. Doris Bry (Albuquerque: The University Press of New Mexico, 1988).

²⁶ See the Finding Aide for the Alfred Stieglitz/ Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, available at the Beinecke Library web page at <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke.sok1.con.html#a2>.

²⁷ Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*; Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters*, letters selected and annotated by Sarah Greenough (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987); Sarah E. Greenough and Juan Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs & Writings*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, Bulfinch Press, Little, Brown and Company, 1999).

²⁸ These letters are in the Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL.

²⁹ Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer* (An Aperture Book. New York: Random House, 1973) and Herbert J. Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of His Conversations, 1925-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

³⁰ See, for example, Dorothy Norman quotations from Alfred Stieglitz, "From the Writings and Conversation of Alfred Stieglitz," *Twice a Year* 1 (1938): 77-110.

³¹ Alfred Stieglitz, "Georgia O'Keeffe - C. Duncan - René [sic] Lafferty," *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166.

³² Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 21-22.

³³ For these photographs, see Sarah Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set: the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Gallery of Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2002) and Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.)

³⁴ Georgia O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978).

³⁵ Among the most important treatments of Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe are the following: Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 78-96; Jonathan Weinberg, "The Hands of the Artist: Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Georgia O'Keeffe," in *Ambition & Love in American Modern Art*, Yale Publications in the History of Art, Editor, Walter Cahn (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 73-103; Sarah Greenough, "The Key Set," in *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set*, xxxiv – xl.

³⁶ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 40. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

³⁷ Charles Harrison, "Modernism," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 188.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 188-189.

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- ³⁹ Ibid, 191-192. The essays by Clement Greenberg include “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” and “Modernist Painting,” in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (first published in 1939, 1940, and 1960, and respectively; reprinted Oxford, United Kingdom, and Cambridge, United States of America: Blackwell, 1995), 529-54, 554-560, 754-760.
- ⁴⁰ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 755.
- ⁴¹ Harrison, “Modernism,” 193.
- ⁴² Henry J. McBride, article originally in *The New York Sun*, republished without title in *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 58.
- ⁴³ “The Wherefores of Modern Art,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 28, 1917, 8.
- ⁴⁴ Sarah E. Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz’s Photographs of Clouds,” PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 1984, 64. Greenough quotes Picabia from “A Post-Cubist’s Impressions of New York,” *New York Tribune*, March 9, 1913.
- ⁴⁵ T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 8.
- ⁴⁶ Alfred Stieglitz, “The Photo-Secession,” *Bausch and Lomb Lens Souvenir* (1903): 3.
- ⁴⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, “What is 291?,” *Camera Work* 47 (July 1914): 3.
- ⁴⁸ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 531.
- ⁴⁹ For instance “As for the red rag I am sure Picasso would fill the bill.” Edward Steichen to Alfred Stieglitz, June 1908, YCAL.
- ⁵⁰ Seligmann paraphrasing Stieglitz, *Stieglitz Talking*, 111-112.
- ⁵¹ Alfred Stieglitz, “Henri Matisse at the Little Galleries,” *Camera Work* 23 (July 1908): 10.
- ⁵² Seligmann paraphrasing Stieglitz, *Stieglitz Talking*, 40.
- ⁵³ Greenough, “Stieglitz: Rebellious Midwife,” 27.
- ⁵⁴ Stieglitz quoted in Agnes Ernst, “New School of the Camera,” *New York Morning Sun*, April 26, 1908.
- ⁵⁵ Greenough, “Stieglitz: Rebellious Midwife,” 32.
- ⁵⁶ Stieglitz quoted in Dorothy Norman, “From the Writings and Conversations of Alfred Stieglitz,” *Twice a Year* 1 (Fall-Winter 1938): 81, 83-85.
- ⁵⁷ Greenough, “Stieglitz: Rebellious Midwife,” 28.
- ⁵⁸ Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, “Profiles: the Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine,” 47.
- ⁶⁰ See this story throughout my chapters 3, 4, and 5.
- ⁶¹ Greenough, “Stieglitz: Rebellious Midwife,” 29.
- ⁶² Ibid, 38.

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- ⁶³ Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 80.
- ⁶⁴ Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- ⁶⁵ The most important previous investigations of this topic include: Barbara Haskell, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Works on Paper* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1985) and Ruth E. Fine and Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O'Keeffe on Paper* (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, 2000).
- ⁶⁶ Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 3.
- ⁶⁷ Corn, *Great American Thing*, xxiii.
- ⁶⁸ One of my most important sources for understanding O'Keeffe's techniques is Judith C. Walsh, "The Language of O'Keeffe's Materials: Charcoal, Watercolor, Pastel," in *O'Keeffe on Paper* (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, 2000), 57-79.
- ⁶⁹ Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2 vols.
- ⁷⁰ Sarah Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set: the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Gallery of Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2002), 2 vols. The description of the key set is from vol. 1:xi.
- ⁷¹ Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe: American and Modern* (New Haven, CN and London: Yale University Press in association with InterCultura Fort Worth and the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, 1993).
- ⁷² Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *Georgia O'Keeffe: the Poetry of Things* (Washington, D.C., New Haven, London and Dallas: The Phillips Collection and Yale University Press in association with the Dallas Museum of Art, 1999).
- ⁷³ Sarah Whitaker Peters, *Becoming O'Keeffe: the Early Years*, updated and expanded ed. (New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press, Publishers, 2001).
- ⁷⁴ Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O'Keeffe's O'Keeffes: the Artist's Collection* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001).
- ⁷⁵ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*.
- ⁷⁶ Barbara Buhler Lynes, "Georgia O'Keeffe and Feminism: a Problem of Position," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed.s Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 436-439.
- ⁷⁷ Anne Middleton Wagner, "O'Keeffe's Femininity," in *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 29-103.
- ⁷⁸ See Ruth E. Fine, Elizabeth Glassman, and Juan Hamilton, *The Book Room: Georgia O'Keeffe's Library in Abiquiu* (Santa Fe and New York: Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation and the Grolier Club, 1997). A complete catalogue of the library is available in the Library of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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- ⁷⁹ Sarah E. Greenough ed., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* with essays by William C. Agee, Charles Brock, John Cauman, Ruth E. Fine, Pepe Karmel, Jill Anderson Kyle, Barbara Buhler Lynes, Townsend Ludington, Anne McCauley, Bruce Robertson, Helen M. Shannon, and Ann Temkin (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001).
- ⁸⁰ Charles Brock, "Squaring the Circle: The Role of the Stieglitz Circle in Histories of American Art" presentation at *Colloque Alfred Stieglitz: De l'Avant-garde Européenne à l'Art Américain*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France, December 3, 2004. I did not attend this colloquium, but I discussed its contents with Mr. Brock.
- ⁸¹ Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 111, 118-119.
- ⁸² Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1963), unpaginated.
- ⁸³ Important biographies of George O'Keeffe include the following: Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: a Biography of Georgia O'Keeffe*, revised ed. (New York: Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, 1986); Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Life* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989); and Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, *Full Bloom: the Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004). Lisle's research materials on Georgia O'Keeffe given to the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., provided invaluable documentary information.
- The important biographies of Stieglitz are: Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995) and Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: a Memoir/ Biography* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983). A study of Stieglitz's early years is: Katharine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: a Beginning Light* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).
- ⁸⁴ Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists & the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Helena E. Wright, *With Pen & Graver: Women Graphic Artists Before 1900* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1995); Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (Los Angeles and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Nochlin, Linda. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News* 69, no. 9 (1971): 22-39, 67-71; and Josephine Withers, "Artistic Women and Women Artists," *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (1976): 330-336.
- ⁸⁵ James Watrous, *The Craft of Old-Master Drawings* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1957).
- ⁸⁶ Marjorie B. Cohn, *Wash and Gouache: a Study of the Development of the Materials of Watercolor* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Published by The Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Fogg Art Museum and The Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation, 1977).
- ⁸⁷ Jean Leymarie, Genevieve Monnier, and Bernice Rose, *Drawing: History of an Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979).
- ⁸⁸ Philip Rawson, *Drawing*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1969).
- ⁸⁹ Vojtech and Thea Jirat-Wasiutynski, "The Uses of Charcoal in Drawing," *Arts Magazine* 55, no. 2 (1980): 128-35 and Thea Jirat-Wasiutynski, "Tonal Drawing and the Use of Charcoal in Nineteenth Century France," *Drawing XI*, no. 6 (1990): 121-24.
- ⁹⁰ Jack Flam, "The Modern Drawing," in *New York Collects: Drawings and Watercolors, 1900-1950* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1999).
- ⁹¹ David Rosand, *Drawings Acts: Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

⁹² “Connoisseurship,” *Grove Art Online*, (Oxford University Press, Accessed January 24, 2005), <http://www.groveart.com>.

⁹³ Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 18-19.

⁹⁴ Peirce was a nineteenth-century American philosopher who was one of the major figures in the development of semiotics. He classified signs as icons, indexes, or symbols. See Winfried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics*, Advances in Semiotics, General ed., Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 39, 44-45. “The index . . .,” as defined by Peirce, “like a pronoun . . . forces the attention to the particular object without describing it.” An index has a direct physical connection with the thing signified. Charles Sanders Peirce, “One, Two, Three: Fundamental Categories of Thought and of Nature,” reprinted in *Peirce on Signs*, editor James Hoopes (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 181, 183. James Hoopes notes that “one of his [Peirce’s] favorite examples [of an index] was the interpretation of a weathercock as accurately signifying the direction of the wind because of its having a real relation with the wind.” James Hoopes, “Introduction,” in *Peirce on Signs*, editor James Hoopes (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 12.

⁹⁵ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 139. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁹⁶ Richard Shiff, “Constructing Physicality,” *Art Journal* 50, no. 1 (1991): 43.

⁹⁷ Fine and Glassman, “Thoughts without Words,” 13-36.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 14, 18.

⁹⁹ For instance, F. Holland Day said to aspiring photographers, “Become a student and lover of art if you would produce it. To suppose it possible with the aid of a camera to concoct a landscape without previous knowledge of method and effects of Durer, Leonardo, Troyon, Corot and Constable, were on the face of it hopeless; and on the more difficult and less successful side of figure work an intimate knowledge of line and composition is even more necessary to the man behind the camera. And this knowledge cannot be obtained through attention devoted to the photographic representations so generally circulated, but must be obtained directly from past masters of their craft – Memling, Rembrandt, del Sarto, Velasquez, Titian, Rossetti. The list cannot be too large or the knowledge too intimate.” F. Holland Day, “Art and the Camera,” *Camera Notes* 2, no. 1 (July 1898): 5.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Widwife,” 27.

¹⁰¹ See Sarah E. Greenough, “Chapter 2 – Stieglitz, ‘291,’ Modern Art, and Photography,” in “Alfred Stieglitz’s Photographs of Clouds,” 44-104; “Alfred Stieglitz and ‘The Idea Photography,’” in Greenough and Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs & Writings*, 12-32; Sarah Greenough, “The Key Set,” 1:xi-lviii; and Sarah Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Widwife,” 23-53.

¹⁰² Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz and ‘The Idea Photography,’” 13. The quote from Stieglitz is from his letter to W. Orison Underwood, April 30, 1914, in *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs & Writings*, no. 15, p. 197.

Chapter One: Alfred Stieglitz, the Photo-Secession, and the Graphic Arts

Stieglitz and Graphic art

Photographer Alfred Stieglitz proudly stood up for his own medium as opposed to the traditional artistic media of drawing and painting; he proclaimed, “I feel that one of the chief advantages I’ve had over virtually all other ‘distinguished’ photographers is the fact that I never drew – painted – had any art lessons – never desired to draw – never tried to.”¹ He and other writers in his circle created a division of artistic media into those that were photographic, and thus should be used to create mimetic work, as opposed to those that were anti-photographic and thus should be used to create expressively abstracted works.² While photography stood alone as the rightful occupant of the photographic side, the anti-photographic side included painting, sculpture, drawing, watercolor, and printmaking. Yet, while Stieglitz had originally fought to establish photography in a painting-dominated world of art, to him the separation into photographic and anti-photographic did not mean that the two sides had to fight one another. Stieglitz, the consummate photographer, became just as passionate an advocate of anti-photographic art.

Stieglitz, as a practitioner of an art that was attacked as uncreative, came to identify with anti-photographic graphic media that were stigmatized as “minor” arts. Near the end of his career, he said, “I do not see why photography, water colors, oils, sculptures, drawings, prints . . . are not of equal potential value. I cannot see why one should differentiate between so-called ‘major’ and ‘minor’ media. I have refused so to

differentiate in all the exhibitions I have ever held.”³ Stieglitz defended the dignity of drawings and watercolors and gave them important places in his publications and the exhibitions at 291. I assert that his exhibitions and publications of modernist drawings and watercolors were important in inspiring Georgia O’Keeffe to make her first modern art works in these media. I also believe that the graphic nature of O’Keeffe’s modernist works helped to motivate Stieglitz’s enthusiasm for them.

Although there were times when his personal artistic agenda motivated him to deny any background in arts other than photography, Stieglitz actually came from an artistically rich personal background that laid the groundwork for his understanding and appreciation of graphic media.⁴ As the son of an amateur painter and art collector, during his childhood Stieglitz moved in fine art social circles and became a precocious art patron.

When he came to adulthood, Stieglitz worked in a varied aesthetic sphere that encompassed the cultures of traditional fine art media, painting and graphic art alike, and combined them with the culture of photography. Pictorialist photographers like the young Stieglitz imitated aspects of graphic fine art media as part of their fight to establish their own work as fine art. Stieglitz’s work as a professional in the field of photographic reproduction drew him into the thriving turn-of-the-century graphic culture comprising a complex blend of photography, reproductive printmaking, illustration, fine art printmaking, and drawing. Stieglitz continued to work in a graphic milieu through his editorship of photographic publications that discussed and reproduced both photographs and works in other media. His modern art activities at 291 brought the photographer into

creative exchanges with draughtsmen, caricaturists, watercolorists, and printmakers, in addition to painters and photographers.

While Stieglitz's own personal art production never moved beyond the realm of photography, he always interacted with works and artists in other media. Constant references to other modes of art making shaped his conceptions and practices of photography. As a photographer, and thus a graphic artist, he found, I observe, special resonance in the graphic media of drawing and watercolor.

Graphic Art and the Stieglitz Family

Art was a strong presence in Stieglitz's life from an early age. Alfred Stieglitz was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, on January 1, 1864, fifty-two years to the day before he would first see Georgia O'Keeffe's abstract charcoals.⁵ He was the first child of German immigrants Edward Stieglitz, a prosperous businessman, and his wife Hedwig Werner Stieglitz. Edward Stieglitz was an elegant, imperious figure with passions for fast horses and fine art. In 1871 the family moved to Manhattan where Edward Stieglitz filled his Sixtieth Street house with art.⁶

His father's activities as an amateur painter, and a patron and collector of art assured that Alfred Stieglitz would see art and know artists from his earliest years. He recalled, "Our house was filled with guests, forever guests, expected and unexpected, from all classes of society, but mainly musicians, artists and literary folk, rather than business people. We had many books and pictures."⁷ Academically-trained German-born artists were practically part of the family. Painter Feodor Encke, for instance, lived in the Stieglitz home for nearly a year.⁸

While Stieglitz did not follow his father into actually making drawings and paintings, the boy did take up his father's habit of patronage. With a child's limited financial resources and patience, young Alfred concentrated on collecting works in the relatively inexpensive and quickly executed media of drawing and watercolor. These same media would figure prominently in the collection of modern art he assembled as an adult. Stieglitz's biographer Dorothy Norman notes that the child "asked virtually every painter who visited his parents to draw for him and spent a great part of his allowance on pictures."⁹ Stieglitz told Norman that in his youth, "Among the pictures I loved best . . . was a realistic and, to me, miraculous watercolor of stamped postcards, made for my thirteenth birthday by a friend of the family, Julius Gerson. I was told it was a portrait of me."¹⁰ That such a work, a graphic depiction of graphic objects, would be a symbolic representation of young Stieglitz underlines the importance of works on paper in his early patterns of taste and collecting.

In 1881 Edward Stieglitz retired from his wool business. He took his family to Germany where he planned to travel and paint for five years while Alfred and his younger brothers Julius and Leopold attended German schools to train for their careers.¹¹ During this period the Stieglitz family friend Wilhelm Gustav Friedrich Hasemann, an accomplished German painter and draftsman, made a handsome watercolor portrait of Alfred (Fig. 1.1).¹² For the Stieglitz family Hasemann's draftsmanship took on a very personal meaning in such works. He made many hand-drawn postcards of landscapes for the family to send to one another (Fig. 1.2). Edward Stieglitz so admired these little graphic works that he had Hasemann help him try to produce similar drawings.¹³ For

young Alfred, graphic art was a familiar means of communication between family and friends.

Stieglitz's father decided that his son Alfred's gift for mathematics suited him to become an engineer, although the boy had no background in the subject.¹⁴ To remedy his lack of scientific education and improve his German, young Stieglitz spent his first year in Germany attending the Realgymnasium in Karlsruhe.¹⁵ This was in preparation for Stieglitz's entering the Königlische Technische Hochschule in Berlin in the autumn of 1882 to study engineering.

During September before his classes began in October, Stieglitz stayed in Berlin with Feodor Encke's brother Erdmann Encke, who worked as both an academic sculptor and a portrait photographer. Erdmann Encke suggested that his guest visit the impressive art collections in Berlin's museums, such as the Altes Museum, the Schlossbrücke, and the Alte Nationalgalerie. Perhaps it is surprising that young Stieglitz, who had grown up in a house filled with academic paintings and who enjoyed art enough to commission drawings and watercolors, at first had no interest in visiting the artistic heritage on display in the proud halls of Berlin.¹⁶ The boy termed the classical art of Berlin "dead."¹⁷ He said that on these first visits to museums, they struck him as smelling "like old leather" and he much preferred to be outside.¹⁸ He seems to have taken more naturally to intimate works of graphic art than to large paintings in formal settings. The drawing postcards his family sent back and forth and the drawings and watercolors artists made for him appear to have meant far more to him than did large formal paintings, whether on the walls of his own family home or in Berlin museums. The paintings he did

come to admire were often warm, voluptuous portrayals of women like Peter Paul Rubens's *Hélène Fourment*.¹⁹

At all stages of his life, it seems to me that the immediate relationship between art and viewer was the quality that mattered most to Stieglitz as an artist and viewer. Judging from the works that Stieglitz made, exhibited, and collected throughout his life, he found profound connections to art in small, graphic works: photographs, drawings, watercolors, and prints. In his attempts to achieve an understanding of artists through the study of graphic works, especially drawings, Stieglitz continued a long tradition of European drawings connoisseurship. He must have imbibed this tradition through his father and his artistically cultivated German friends.

Drawings as discernable individual marks on an exposed support had particular appeal to connoisseurs who studied art works to identify their makers. Through the centuries, European connoisseurs granted drawings a special status as the art works that brought the viewer closest to the artist, in contrast to the more public statements of finished oil paintings. The early eighteenth-century British art theorist Jonathan Richardson typified this attitude, observing how the layers of color in a painting might obscure the "spirit, freedom, or delicacy" of an artist's style, while this style was clearly displayed in original drawings.²⁰ In studying drawings, many connoisseurs felt that they could discern not only the identity of the artist but also something about the character of that artist. The late seventeenth-century Italian collector and connoisseur of drawings Padre Sebastiano Resta believed that the artist's intentions, indeed his very thoughts, could be discovered in marks on paper. He stated that Raphael's drawings provided him with a view of "the mind from which such brilliant offspring (*parti*) issued forth."²¹

Goethe, the author who was Stieglitz's favorite from an early age, continued this same theme in an 1827 letter to a friend in which he wrote that he had "recently been fortunate . . . in buying many excellent drawings by famous masters very cheaply. Such drawings are invaluable, not only because they give the artist's mental idea in all its purity, but also because they put us into his mood at the moment of creation."²² Perhaps the most apt author to sum up the attitude toward drawings connoisseurship that Stieglitz encountered in Europe is Joseph Meder, who was curator of the famous collection of drawings at the Albertina in Vienna in the early twentieth century. Meder said in the introduction to his book *The Mastery of Drawing*, "What notes, letters, journals, and first drafts are to the poet, drawings are to the artist. Born in the moment of the wish to create, intimate, personal as handwriting though intended for the artist's own use rather than for communication, drawings disclose the artist's soul."²³

I see many of Stieglitz's life-long habits as a creator, exhibitor, admirer, and collector of art as arising from this tradition of drawing connoisseurship. As a child, he loved to own works made by artists he knew. As a promoter of modern art, he sought to bring himself and other viewers close to artworks. He often favored graphic works, including photographs, in his small gallery spaces and lushly illustrated periodicals. Graphic works also appeared in the background of photographic portraits Stieglitz made of artists and others in his circle, forging another layer of connection between art and viewer.

The young Stieglitz's budding interest in intimate graphic evidence of human character also emerged in the collection of autographs he assembled in the late 1870s and early 1880s. He collected the signatures of friends and family members, in addition to

those of famous people he admired. He had autographs, for instance, of Goethe's patron Duke Karl August, and the German sculptor Johann Schadow.²⁴ As biographer Katherine Hoffman notes, "From a very early age Stieglitz seemed to have a need to be connected to others – those close to him and those to whom he wished to be culturally or psychologically connected."²⁵ Drawings and other intimately scaled graphic objects seemed to appeal to Stieglitz, as to many connoisseurs, through their evocation of emotional closeness.

Stieglitz Becomes a Photographer

Another desire that extended throughout Stieglitz's life was to find his own areas of interest and to exert control over them. The boy, for instance, rigorously trained himself to master such skills as playing billiards and long distance running.²⁶ Engineering did not prove to be a field that Stieglitz could master. While the young man enjoyed his student pastimes of reading fiction, attending operas, and playing billiards, he found no delight in attending lectures on science.²⁷ Stieglitz recalled his bafflement in classes taught by the famous German physicist and physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz. When the student approached the professor and expressed his difficulty in grasping the material, he was dismayed to hear the master respond, "I am making this course as simple as I can. I am discussing the ABC of physics."²⁸

Feeling at sea in the subject his father had set him to study, young Stieglitz found his own interest outside of the classroom in the form of a basic camera and darkroom equipment he had chanced to see in a shop window. After buying the equipment and a booklet on how to use it, Stieglitz excitedly took to photography and dark room work. He soon enrolled in a class with the professor of photochemistry Dr. Hermann Wilhelm

Vogel. While Stieglitz at first found Vogel's lectures on photochemistry hard to understand, in lab sessions the new student's practical talents bloomed.²⁹ Stieglitz had found his calling.

In defiance of his father's wishes, Stieglitz said he "gave up mechanical engineering to devote myself entirely to photography." Indeed, he abandoned any pretense of working toward a degree.³⁰ Stieglitz later recalled that he had a difficult, contentious relationship with his father, "even while rebelling against my father and finding him vain, impatient and impossible to speak to, I admired him."³¹ It seems evident that Stieglitz aspired to a fulfilling existence in the art world similar to that which his father enjoyed. Yet, as the quote that begins this chapter indicates, he was not comfortable with following his father into the media of painting and drawing. Had he tried to take up drawing, no doubt his father and his artist friends would have instructed the boy rather than allowing him to find his own way.

Before his family's move to Germany, young Stieglitz had visited a commercial photography studio in Lake George. He became interested in this alternative visual medium, but the elder Stieglitz would not hear of his son's making photographs at home. The wet plate technology of the day would have brought too much smell and mess into the Stieglitz home.³² In Berlin, however, Alfred Stieglitz was outside of his father's home and therefore free to take up the medium that he would make his own. Photography seems to have been a medium that Stieglitz adopted in rivalry with his father's medium of painting. Certainly, painting was the "father" medium in the fine art world of Europe and America, dominating in museums, salons, commercial galleries, major exhibitions, and critical literature. When the discovery of two modes of

photography was announced to the public in 1839, it appeared as a strange visual offspring that would long be rejected from the family of fine art media.

Stieglitz obsessively threw himself into photography, attempting to surpass all others in the technical excellence of his results. Professor Vogel assigned his students such exercises as photographing a white plaster cast of a classical bust draped in black velvet. Stieglitz recalled that he spent weeks trying to make a print showing correct relative values and full detail in both light and dark areas. Vogel had actually made the assignment to teach his students how they must make compromises, deciding whether to concentrate on detail in the light tones or the dark tones. Stieglitz, however, refused to make such a compromise and took the assignment as an opportunity to achieve what his professor saw as an impossible level of detail on both ends of the spectrum. The student Stieglitz set himself further technical challenges, such as photographing in extremely low light conditions. He made, studied, and compared piles of prints to discover how he could improve his results.³³ Through such work, he perfected not only his technical skills but his eye for judging details and values in graphic works. Thus he developed his expertise as both a photographer and a connoisseur of works on paper.

At first, as Stieglitz biographer Richard Whelan observes, Stieglitz “favored the technical and the scientific over the artistic.”³⁴ The student was responding to Professor Vogel’s emphasis on questions of precise reproduction through photography.³⁵ Stieglitz thus initially treated photography as merely a document, although one whose production required exacting efforts. The fledgling technology fascinated him and he devoted much of his time to solving its complex chemical problems. Stieglitz’s advanced understanding

of photochemistry and his efforts to advance photographic technology resulted in his publication of many articles in technical journals.³⁶

But photography could also be approached as art, setting up what Greenough terms “a fundamental dichotomy within the medium.”³⁷ Stieglitz would explore the implications of this dichotomy for decades to come. Professor Vogel, Stieglitz recalled, was so impressed by his student’s photographs that he asked permission to show them to painter friends. Stieglitz related,

One of the artists remarked, “Isn’t it too bad your photographs are not paintings. If they had been made by hand, they would be art.” The same artist said he wished he could paint the way I photographed.

I looked at him in surprise: “I never had any desire to make a photograph look like anything I have seen painted.”

Stieglitz spoke to the artists metaphorically, likening his photographs to machine-made shoes. The artists felt that no one would ever want machine-made shoes - hand-made ones would always be superior and in demand. Stieglitz, however, saw that the day of cheaper machine-made shoes would come someday and that hand-made shoes would be left in the dust. He saw also that the day of art made by the camera, a machine, was at hand.³⁸

Stieglitz and Pictorial Photography

From his very early experiences with photography, Stieglitz found the new medium intertwined with more established, hand-wrought, artistic media. Professor Vogel’s class “emphasized the photographic reproduction of charts, drawings, paintings, and sculptures.”³⁹ Thus, his students studied and reproduced art, but were not expected in such exercises to make original, independent works. Stieglitz was not satisfied with such merely technical productions.

The student Stieglitz soon began making photographs that directly paralleled paintings and other traditional fine art works. For instance, in 1886 he set up a tableau of card players in historical costume so that he could make a photographic equivalent of the genre scenes he saw painted by German academic artists.⁴⁰ Stieglitz also traveled around Europe with friends, looking for attractive scenes to photograph. His traveling companions included painter Frank Simon Hermann and sculptor Wilhelm Hasemann.⁴¹ Stieglitz's photographic subjects included picturesque landscapes, architectural views, and genre scenes he found in Germany and Italy and that apparently caught his eye because of their resemblance to subjects painted by popular academic German artists (Fig. 1.3).⁴² His friends drew or made oil sketches to capture quick notations of what they saw so that they could later use these as the basis for finished paintings made in their studios.⁴³ Stieglitz, as a photographer, shot negatives from nature that he could later craft carefully as he printed them in his darkroom. As Greenough observes, Stieglitz's photographs of this kind responded to their subject matter in a fresh, immediate way that painters could not achieve in paintings elaborately contrived in their studios.⁴⁴ In this way Stieglitz's experience of shooting photographs was more like sketching, although his darkroom work enabled him to produce final works that were more like small monochrome paintings.

Photography had a natural connection to drawing because it was originally invented, described, and used as a new kind of drawing. William Henry Fox Talbot invented his version of the photographic process because he was frustrated with his own inability to make graceful drawings of landscapes from nature. Talbot originally named his invention "photogenic drawing." When the scientist François Arago and the painter

Paul Delaroche described Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's "Daguerreotypes," both men called the pictures "Mr. Daguerre's drawings."⁴⁵ This understanding of photography as a new kind of drawing was perfectly natural, since both Talbot's and Daguerre's original processes produced small, monochrome works, that were unique and thus more like drawings than like any other previously known medium.⁴⁶

Stieglitz made plenty of casual images of his friends, but it was through his early photographs that more consciously captured his own reactions to the world around him that Stieglitz entered the realm of pictorial photography. That is, he did not merely make documents of visual facts; he consciously created original pictures that he composed and crafted as deliberately as other artists created their paintings or drawings. "Picture" was a word the pictorialists felt could be applied equally to a painting or to an artistic, rather than merely technical, photograph. Professor Vogel was among those who in the late nineteenth century urged photographers like Stieglitz to treat photography as an art in its own right and to study art in other media to educate their eyes. Stieglitz felt that he learned the most, however, from the English pictorial photographers whose work he saw and articles he read in photographic journals.⁴⁷

The photographer who was the most important in shaping the young Stieglitz was the British pictorial photographer Peter Henry Emerson, with whom Stieglitz had an early and meaningful encounter. In 1887 the British publication *The Amateur Photographer* held a contest for amateur photographers and Stieglitz entered twelve photographs he had made in Italy. His *The Last Joke* (Fig. 1.3) won first prize. Emerson, who had been the judge, wrote to Stieglitz that his photograph had been "the only *spontaneous* work in the whole collection." Thus the sketch-like spontaneity of Stieglitz's work was the first

property that gained recognition beyond his own circle of teachers and friends. Stieglitz was no doubt excited by this notice from the British pictorialist, although he later said of the award only, “I’m very glad for my father; it’s a tangible proof for him that I am not wasting my time.”⁴⁸ Stieglitz went on to enter and win numerous photographic contests, continuing to prove to his father, and to himself, the legitimacy of his work in photography.⁴⁹

A rival to Emerson on the British photographic scene was Henry Peach Robinson.⁵⁰ Robinson, having begun his career as a painter, was one of the school of photographers who imitated history painters by making photographs of elaborative fictive figurative scenes. Like an academic painter, Robinson began by creating a drawing of the dramatic figural composition he envisioned. Then he separately photographed each figure or element of the setting needed and assembled the individual photographs into a single work (Fig. 1.4).⁵¹ Thus, Robinson used drawing much as painters had traditionally used it for planning a work and applied photography over drawn lines like a new mode of painting to realize the finished composition.

Emerson, by contrast, was more influenced by Barbizon School painters (and graphic artists) with their interest in the actual scenes they saw around them. Emerson thus supported what he called naturalism in photography (Fig. 1.5).⁵² He said “*Naturalism* is an *impersonal* method of expression, a more or less correct *reflection* of nature wherein (1) truth of sentiment, (2) illusion of truth of appearance (so far as is possible) and (3) decoration are of first and supreme importance.”⁵³ Thus, for Emerson, as for Stieglitz, photography functioned more like drawing, as a mode by which the artist could see the world honestly and record what he saw, while interpreting his subject to

bring out expression and beauty. This basic approach to nature would be crucial for Stieglitz's photography throughout his career. Stieglitz would later write that pictorial photography owed more to Emerson than to any other man.⁵⁴

Stieglitz Returns to America

In 1890, after his sister Flora died in childbirth, Stieglitz's grieving parents summoned him home.⁵⁵ Stieglitz felt miserable and isolated in the United States, away from the friends and activities he had grown to love in Germany, but it was time for him to decide what to do with his life. His father urged Stieglitz to find a job. The young man was repulsed by suggestions that he sell his own photographs or that he open a commercial photographic gallery. The only suggestion of his father's that he would even consider was that he enter the business of photoengraving.⁵⁶ Stieglitz and his Berlin roommates Louis Schubart and Joseph Obermeyer began work for the Heliochrome Engraving Company. Stieglitz, the director of the company, devoted his efforts to technical experiments in black and white and color photographic reproduction processes. The business aspect of the operation bored him utterly. He wanted his workmen to do the highest possible quality of work and he respected them; yet Stieglitz seemed to care nothing for finding paying orders, preferring to allow the business to fail in 1891.⁵⁷

Stieglitz, Schubart, and Obermeyer bought their old firm's equipment with money given by Stieglitz's father so that they could found their own new company named the Photochrome Engraving Company. They hired the employees from the old Heliochrome Company and some additional men, hoping to make a better go of the new business. Stieglitz and his partners strove to climb higher in the rapidly developing photographic reproduction business by originating a process for making full color photographic

reproductions. A rival company, however, was the first to invent and patent such a process, and Photochrome could only devise an inferior color process of their own. Stieglitz's company was able to garner a few clients, but had difficulty in getting them to pay their bills.⁵⁸ Stieglitz's perfectionism was a liability as he demanded the highest quality work whether it made profits or not. He left his partnership at the company in 1895, although he remained associated with them informally.⁵⁹ Stieglitz, who had long lived on a stipend from his father, would continue to do so rather than seeking another "job." His father had always had to prop up his son's businesses, which only lost money, so the new situation would actually save Edward Stieglitz money.⁶⁰

Stieglitz's experiences in the photographic reproduction business would seem to have been of no value to his artistic enterprise, yet I see his time at Photochrome as important in bringing him into contact with graphic art technology and culture. The late nineteenth century was a time of keen competition and swift changes in the reproduction of images. The publication of illustrated books and periodicals boomed, promising profits to whoever could reproduce illustrations the most efficiently. Wood engraving, lithography, and steel engraving had dominated the printing of illustrations and other reproductions of art for most of the nineteenth century. Decades passed after the invention of photography before accurate and efficient processes of photographic reproduction were invented. This resulted in the irony that in the eighteen-sixties and eighteen-seventies photographs were still reproduced in magazines by means of handmade wood engravings whose relief blocks could be printed along with relief metal type. Financial considerations, including a price war among illustrated magazines in the

1880s, drove the race to invent and refine photographic reproduction processes. Line block and halftone replaced the slower and more expensive wood engravings.⁶¹

But the relief processes of halftone and line block were far from the only methods of photographic reproduction available at this time. Articles detailing the invention and refinement of dozens of photographic reproduction processes filled the pages of such trade journals as *Penrose's Pictorial Annual*. The plethora of competing photo-reproductive processes included the intaglio processes of photogravure and Woodburytype, and the planographic process of photolithography.⁶² Stieglitz's activities with the Photochrome Company had brought him into a lively field that he could have found lucrative had he been more interested in making money.

Technical innovations and their economic consequences resulted in shifting cultural attitudes toward various graphic media. Photography was not the only process whose practitioners in the late nineteenth century now asked viewers to accept as fine art works produced in media previously classed as merely technical or commercial. Wood engravers forced out of the commercial illustration industry by halftone claimed that their crisp black and white productions were artistically superior to the dull gray tones of photographic process work. They attempted to gain fine art recognition for their craft by using their burins to make original works from nature.⁶³ While lithography had long been despised because of its association with cheap commercial reproductions, in the late nineteenth century such avant-garde artists as Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Odilon Redon, and James McNeill Whistler transformed the image of this technology by using it to make important new works of fine art.⁶⁴ As the nineteenth century drew to a close, lines between commercial art and fine art, as well as between printmaking and

photography, shifted and blurred. Stieglitz's activities and interests moved restlessly back and forth across these divides in graphic production.

While Stieglitz was supposed to be spending his time at the Photochrome Company, he was often so bored that he simply walked out of the office to explore the nearby streets. Soon he began making these urban rambles with a camera.⁶⁵ The heavy cameras Stieglitz had used previously were unsuited to such documentary work, but he had joined the Society of Amateur Photographers of New York, and his fellow club member William B. Post urged him to try one of the new small hand-held cameras then being produced by Kodak.⁶⁶ Stieglitz remembered,

From 1893 to 1895 I often walked the streets of New York downtown, near the East River, taking my hand camera with me. I wandered around the Tombs, the old Post Office, Five Points. I loathed the dirty streets, yet I was fascinated. I wanted to photograph everything I saw. Wherever I looked there was a picture that moved me – the derelicts, the secondhand clothing shops, the rag pickers (Fig. 1.6), the tattered and the torn.⁶⁷

On these ventures through the Manhattan streets Stieglitz tried innovative informal modes of composition that captured the dynamic qualities of modern urban life and his excitement in witnessing them.

Stieglitz also became interested in photographing the city in extreme conditions of light and weather. He dramatically recounted years later how he made one of these photographs (Fig. 1.7),

On Washington's birthday in 1893, a great blizzard raged in New York. I stood at the corner of 35th Street and Fifth Avenue, watching the lumbering stagecoaches appear through the blinding snow and move northward on the Avenue. The question formed itself: Could what I was experiencing, seeing, be put down with the slow plates and lenses available? The light was dim. Knowing that where there is light one can photograph, I decided to make an exposure.

Later, at the New York Society of Amateur Photographers, before my negative was dry, I showed it with great excitement. Everyone laughed. "For

God's sake, Stieglitz," someone said, "throw that damned thing away. It is all blurred and not sharp."

"This is the beginning of a new era," I replied. "Call it a new vision if you wish. The negative is exactly as I want it to be." What I was driving at had nothing to do with blurred or sharp. And when, twenty-four hours later, the men saw my lantern slide, they applauded. No one would believe it had been made from the negative considered worthless. I called my picture *Winter-Fifth Avenue*.⁶⁸

With such images Stieglitz shifted his aesthetic from the more painting-like formality of his European photographs to something more like a watercolor. In watercolors like the acclaimed works in that medium Winslow Homer was making in the 1880s and 1890s, it was more important to capture spontaneous visions of light and atmosphere than to achieve precise detail or formal compositions.⁶⁹ In the shifting aesthetic world of the 1890s Stieglitz, both in his own photographs and in the ideas he communicated to the public through his writing and editing, began to wrestle with such new aesthetic questions that arose as photography matured as a medium.

Graphic Art in Stieglitz's Journals

As Whelan states, Stieglitz "was writing fairly regularly for *The Amateur American Photographer*, but he longed to have editorial control so that he could publish images by the most progressive photographers and enlist them to write articles. When circumstances led to his being offered a position as editor of the magazine in the spring of 1893, he accepted with alacrity." Stieglitz worked as editor without a salary. At this time he was still working for the Photochrome Company, which was already producing photogravures for the magazine.⁷⁰ Stieglitz was thus able to combine his interest in photography as fine art with his technical interest in photographic reproduction. As both a professional in photographic reproduction and a journal editor, Stieglitz exercised his perfectionism by demanding only the finest reproductions of the excellent works he chose

to reproduce. *The Amateur American Photographer* concentrated largely on photographic technical processes, photographic club activities around the country and the world, and photographic exhibitions, with a small but steady stream of articles taking on theoretical questions about the potential fine art nature of photography.

In 1896 Stieglitz resigned as editor of *The Amateur American Photographer* because his unflinching criticisms of photographs aroused acrimony. The following year Stieglitz became editor of the new journal of the Camera Club of New York, *Camera Notes*. In this position, he continued to believe in the importance of including only the very highest quality of illustrations, and again Photochrome provided the reproductions. As Whelan notes, the illustrations “were to constitute, in effect, a monthly exhibition that would reach more than a thousand photographers throughout the world.”⁷¹ In 1902 Stieglitz left *Camera Notes* and began his own photographic magazine, *Camera Work*, which would be the voice of his new organization of American pictorial photographers, the Photo-Secession. Whelan describes the exquisite illustrations for this most elegant of magazines,

Stieglitz did everything to ensure that the photogravures in *Camera Work* would be nearly like prints. Indeed, in 1904, when a Photo-Secession exhibition failed to arrive in Brussels on time, a selection of gravures from the magazine was hung instead. Most viewers of the exhibition assumed they were looking at original photographs. The gravures were printed on very fine, thin Japan tissue paper, which was nearly grainless and which had only recently become available. They had to be hand mounted – by Stieglitz and his associates – either directly onto the pages of the magazine or onto brown or gray mats that were then pasted on the rich cream-colored pages. Stieglitz himself would check each example of every gravure and carefully ink out any light spots caused by dust.⁷²

In the first issue of *Camera Work*, Stieglitz asserted his feelings about the importance of reproductions in his enterprise, “Photography being in the main a process in monochrome, it is on subtle gradations in tone and value that its artistic beauty so

frequently depends. It is, therefore, highly necessary that reproductions of photographic work must be made with exceptional care and discretion if the spirit of the originals is to be retained, though no reproduction can do full justice to the subtleties of some photographs.”⁷³ In the photographs reproduced in *The Amateur American Photographer*, *Camera Notes*, and *Camera Work*, Stieglitz expressed a demanding, fine-art-rooted aesthetic sense that combined his technical experience of making photographs with his heritage as a connoisseur of graphic fine art. He developed a very sophisticated eye for quality and detail. Small monochrome works, both the originals he reproduced and the reproductions themselves, were the art he knew best and valued most highly. I believe this graphic aesthetic would be of the greatest importance in his accepting and even embracing the necessity of showing so many small graphic works rather than larger paintings on the limited wall spaces at 291.

In the pages of *The Amateur American Photographer*, *Camera Notes*, and the early issues of *Camera Work*, Stieglitz participated in an intense debate about the nature of photography that extended into many other photographic journals, books and other forums. The most basic question was whether photography was capable of being fine art. Even among photographers the art status of photography was not always taken for granted. In 1891, Peter Henry Emerson, the photographer Stieglitz so admired who had written *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, published *The Death of Naturalistic Photography* in which he renounced his former views about photography. Emerson now said, “The limitations of photography are so great that, though the results may and sometimes do give a certain aesthetic pleasure, the medium must always rank the lowest of all arts, *lower than* any graphic art, for the individuality of the artist is

cramped, in short, it can scarcely show itself.”⁷⁴ Stieglitz, for whom *Naturalistic Photography* had been and remained a crucial source of ideas, was furious at Emerson’s betrayal.⁷⁵

In *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, under Stieglitz’s editorship, authors generally worked on the assumption, or at least the hope, that photography could be fine art. They carefully differentiated artistic photography from the work of mere hack commercial photographers and amateur makers of casual snapshots. In his 1898 article “Relation of Photography to Art,” photographer J. Wells Champney staunchly stated, “In the first place, I wish to defend the use of the word ‘artistic’ in connection with photography. What else than artistic shall we call that very welcome *something* which differentiates our pictures [from photography that is not art such as scientific work]?”⁷⁶ One of the most effective ways to prove the artistic nature of photography was to relate it to existing modes of art. As Stieglitz wrote in 1910, “Photography, claiming to be a legitimate medium of personal pictorial expression, should take its place in open review with other mediums in order that its possibilities and limitations might be more fairly judged.”⁷⁷

The attitude of pictorial photographers toward more established art media was often a bitter mix of jealousy and pride. They knew that the culturally dominant medium of painting had a long, highly respected tradition that photography could not hope to match; yet they denigrated inept painters and boasted of what strong work the best photographers had already accomplished in their young medium. They wanted to keep the special identity and community of their own medium, even while achieving

membership in the established world of fine art. The distinguished photographer F. Holland Day began his article “Art and the Camera” with the statement,

It is not strange that the relation between art and the camera is to-day not quite understood, or perhaps I would better have said, only beginning to be understood. Art is old and the camera is new. Art was not built in a day any more than Rome was, and to comprehend that an entirely new medium may be brought to uphold or defend the old theory is a difficult matter for the observer in general and the painter in particular. The painter, I believe, in some instances realizes only too keenly that a new competitor has entered the field, and that his pencil [that is, brush] may not always possess the prestige which he cherishes for it to-day.⁷⁸

Day defied the disdain of painters for photography, yet he emphasized to photographers that they must study paintings and other art in established media in order to enter the realm of art themselves. Authors recommending art for photographers to study frequently cited Rembrandt as a great historical painter whose works any aspiring photographer should know.⁷⁹ They also cited contemporary artists as examples for photographers, with James McNeill Whistler being mentioned most often. By studying painting and other fine art, both from past centuries and from their own day, photographers could graft their own contributions onto the existing history and culture of art.

Of all recognized art media, pictorial photographers envied most the privileged standing and established institutions of painting. Photographers realized, however, that their medium was not the only rival to painting. They were inspired by fine artists in the traditionally “minor” graphic media of drawing, watercolor, pastel, and printmaking. For instance, in defending photography from the charge of being limited by the properties of certain lenses, photographer Frederick H. Evans called upon drawing, “Surely it is absurd to condemn Photography because it can not do everything; it should be sufficient to

condemn it when it does not do well what it sets out to do. What folly, for instance, it would be for us to condemn an otherwise delightful pencil-drawing of a cathedral interior by this artist-critic because he does not give in it a knowledge of the color-effect of the glorious stained-glass windows he includes in his picture!”⁸⁰ Photographer Eva Watson-Schütze, arguing for the importance of having photographers rather than painters judge exhibitions of photography, paralleled the situation of photography with that of etching, “Were an etching to look like a painting, of what avail would be the choice of the medium? In all of Rembrandt’s work there are common characteristics which distinguish his work from that of any other master, but his etchings have certain qualities peculiar to the medium and not to be found in his painting. Doubtless an etcher is the best judge of those qualities which give character and value to an etching.”⁸¹

One of the criticisms most often faced by photography was that it was a mechanical process. Joseph Pennell, the famous illustrator and biographer of Whistler, used the established academic discipline of drawing to attack photography, “Frankly, unless a man can draw with his own unaided hand he is not an artist; he never has been considered one and he never will be.”⁸² Frederick H. Evans hotly responded, “If this . . . were true . . . it would follow that, however badly equipped, however badly trained, however unseeing, lacking in vision, however deficient in taste or crude in judgment a man may be, if only he produce his work by his ‘own unaided hand,’ he is and must be an artist.” For Evans, the eye and mind were far more important than the hand.⁸³ The photographer and art critic J. Nilsen Laurvik, writing in the prominent journal *The International Studio*, enlisted the graphic practice of etching to defend Stieglitz’s photographic prints. Laurvik asserted that while machines were involved in creating both

kinds of artistic multiples, each print was an individually crafted work made by the complex methods of a master artist. “For this reason,” said Laurvik,

two prints by Stieglitz are seldom alike. Just as Whistler remarked to [Mortimer] Mompes [Whistler’s devoted follower] that he had his good days for printing etchings, when every manipulation of the plate was accomplished with consummate ease, so the photographic prints of Stieglitz reflect the fluctuations of his temperament and reveal to an astonishing degree the flexibility of this so-called ‘mechanical’ medium of personal expression.⁸⁴

As workers in a technology with but a short history, to establish their medium as part of the fine arts, photographers turned to existing media for guidance in myriad areas. In addition to studying paintings and graphic arts to learn about the use of such formal pictorial elements as composition, lighting, and use of tones, photographers looked to existing traditions to formulate a range of cultural practices concerned with their art. For example, Eva Watson-Schütze suggested that photographers should not simply sign their names on their works, but should rather look to the example of Chinese and Japanese printmakers who signed their prints with Oriental characters, as well as James McNeill Whistler, who signed his works with symbols.⁸⁵

For photographers seeking to align their own medium with fine art, perhaps the most obvious course was to imitate the appearance of established fine art media. The small size and monochrome nature of photographs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries precluded close imitation of oil paintings, but photographers had effective means of emulating drawings and prints. The process of gum bichromate printing, in which the photographer used hand work to manipulate the color and density of the photographic print, could mimic a range of graphic media (Fig. 1.8). It was controversial whether such blurring between media was good for photography.

Prominent French photographer Robert Demachy defended his own practices, saying,

Though it is a common adage throughout photographic literature that photography must resemble no other graphic art, I must say that the best results I have ever seen in gum, in [Edward] Steichen's, [E. J. Constant] Puyo's, [Hans] Watzek's, [Heinrich] Kühn's, etc., have always reminded me forcibly of fine engravings, fine etchings, fine lithographs or fine wash-drawings. The repetition of the adjective is intentional, for, notwithstanding that this fact is never considered in the eternal comparisons between recognized art-processes and photography, there are thousands of engravings, etchings, lithographs and wash-drawings that are quite as bad as any very bad gum-print. . . . Now, what is important in a wash-drawing is just as important in a gum-print. Fine tones, true rendering of values, etc., are no more the property of one process than of another; they are evolved from the brain and hand of the artist who is using it.⁸⁶

Stieglitz, keen in his early years to open possibilities for photographers but already seeming uneasy about anything that took away from the singularity of photography, commented, "Gum printing undoubtedly opens a new field of possibilities, impossible to be attained by any other known printing process; still, it by no means kills the existing ones."⁸⁷

It was also possible for photographers to imitate other media through the use of fine art papers and the retouching of negatives and prints in various ways. In his early years Stieglitz himself, Greenough notes,

made carbon, gum bichromate, and photogravure prints, processes that allowed him to use the materials and palettes of a painter; he frequently printed these photographs on *chine collé* or thick, textured watercolor sheets in charcoal gray and brown, and even red, green, blue, and yellow on occasion. . . . Many of the [Stieglitz's] works exhibited in 1899 were highly painterly and manipulated: carbon prints on 'etching papers,' red and black gum bichromate prints on 'toned' and 'rough Whatman' papers [usually used for watercolor], and two-toned, glycerine developed platinum prints.⁸⁸

By 1900, Stieglitz was working in the mode of "straight" photography although often with the soft and selective "naturalistic" focus advocated by Emerson.⁸⁹ Stieglitz still allowed both side of the debates over gum printing and retouching to speak in his

publications, however, and he reproduced both straight photographs and retouched ones.

As Whelan comments,

Gum printing was not in accord with Stieglitz's personal aesthetic of 'straight' photography, but he hoped that gum prints resembling drawings or watercolors could perhaps finally induce the philistine public to recognize photography as a fine art. Once photography had a foot in the door of the sacred precincts, and as the public was led to understand that the manipulations in gum printing were only exaggerations of what purists did in the darkroom, then 'straight' photography should finally also be accepted as art.⁹⁰

Otto Walter Beck asserted that "For a long time 'straight [unmanipulated] photography' has reigned supreme." Yet, he stated, "In time, 'good straight photography' will be but the preliminary step to be followed up by 'treatment,' possible only by the hand of the art-trained man."⁹¹ Stieglitz reproduced photographs by Frank Eugene, who broke from straight photography in such works as *Horse* (Fig. 1.9). Charles H. Caffin, an art critic who often published in Stieglitz's journals, observed that in this photograph, "the background has been fearlessly etched upon the negative, and brush and point as well would appear to have been used on the horse. The print, in fact, has the quality of texture and spontaneousness of a fine etching."⁹²

Sadakichi Hartmann, who was perhaps the chief photographic critic in Stieglitz's publications, voiced Stieglitz's mature point of view when he said that some of the photographers he most admired, disdained "the assistance of retouching." They realized "that [for] artistic photography to become powerful and self-subsistent it must rely upon its own resources, and not ornament itself with foreign plumes, in order to resemble an etching, a poster, a charcoal or a wash drawing, or a [Gertrude] Käsebier [photographic] reproduction of an old master."⁹³ Hartmann said of a work in a photographic exhibition, "L. M. McCormick's "Sand Dunes" would please the artists. It almost looks like an

etching. But I prefer a real etching to a photograph. A photograph should look like a photograph. It is not well when an art oversteps its natural line of limitation.”⁹⁴

Hartmann concluded,

Retouching, in my opinion, should be entirely abolished. To retouch successfully the photographer must be a draughtsman, and that can hardly be expected from him. Besides, very little is gained by making a photograph look as if it were done in some monochrome art process. As soon as it resembles an etching or a wash drawing it outsteps its true vocation and challenges comparisons, which will hardly be to its advantage. The scope of photographic reproduction is large enough without using other mediums of expression as helpmates.⁹⁵

In the early years of the twentieth century, most photographers in the Photo-Secession, Stieglitz’s organization of pictorial photographers, worked in a shadowy, suggestive soft-focus style related to Tonalist American painting and symbolism (Fig. 1.10). Stieglitz, by contrast, in the early twentieth century began photographing clearer views of New York’s architecture and technology that led directly into the modernism of the new century (Fig. 1.11).⁹⁶ As Hartmann had stated, it was becoming increasingly evident that photography could and should stand on its own as a medium with its own aesthetic values.

In Stieglitz’s journals, as in other venues, photography had explored its identity as a medium in part by comparison and contrast with the traditional graphic arts. Drawings, watercolors, and prints, familiar to Stieglitz since his childhood, had assumed new roles as teachers, parallels, and friends of photography. In the early years of the new century photography began pulling away from such props to find its own technical and cultural balance. In his publications Stieglitz and others engaged in a protracted and enlightening discussion that brought about an enhanced understanding of the cultural nature of not only the photographic medium but medium itself.

Edward Steichen Joins the Stieglitz Circle

For years drawings, watercolors, and prints had played an important but passive role in Stieglitz's journals as familiar exemplars to be cited and studied. In 1900 Stieglitz first met the man who would bring the traditional graphic arts into active play in his artistic enterprise. On his way to study art in Paris, the brash young Milwaukee photographer, graphic artist, and painter Edward Steichen stopped by the New York Camera Club, where Stieglitz was hanging an exhibition. Stieglitz took time from his work to meet Steichen and see his portfolio full of paintings, lithographs, drawings, and photographs.⁹⁷

Although Steichen's background was very different from Stieglitz's, the younger man had also been exposed to a variety of media, including graphic art ranging from commercial design to fine art drawing. Steichen, the son of immigrants from Luxembourg who worked their way up from poverty to prosperity, was apprenticed to a lithographic firm where he learned to draw commercial designs. On his own he learned photography, at which he soon proved so enthusiastic and skillful that he was able to convince his boss to pay him to photograph subjects needed for lithographed advertisements. This level of artistic success was not sufficient for the ambitious Steichen. He and some friends set up their own life drawing sessions and convinced a couple of local academically trained artists to give them lessons. Steichen, inspired by tonal landscape paintings by contemporary American artists, made softly focused, suggestive landscape images in both painting and photography (Fig. 1.12).⁹⁸

Like Stieglitz in his early years, the youthful Steichen was interested in trying to imitate other media in his photographs. Steichen recalled,

I was always intrigued with the possibility of producing by photography a picture as good as one that could be done in any other way, and the gum process gave me a chance to develop this idea along extreme lines. The picture 'Polly Horter' was printed on charcoal paper in two printings and deliberately made to produce an effect similar to that of a charcoal drawing. I also made prints at that time in two different tints.⁹⁹

Steichen and Stieglitz thus were both fascinated by a wide array of artistic modes and media, and the continuities and discontinuities between them. But photography had a special standing for both men.

Steichen said of his first meeting with Stieglitz,

although he was busy, Stieglitz gave me over an hour and expressed warm interest in my plans. He seemed particularly interested in the fact that I was both a painter and a photographer. He bought three of my prints for five dollars apiece, saying, 'I am robbing you, at that.' But, to me, this was a princely price.

As I left, he went with me to the elevator, and as the door closed, he said, 'Well, I suppose now that you're going to Paris, you'll forget about photography and devote yourself entirely to painting.'

As the elevator went down, I shouted up to him, "I will always stick to photography!"¹⁰⁰

Steichen, like Stieglitz and other photographers in his circle, was strongly influenced by Whistler's paintings and etchings.¹⁰¹ From France, where he briefly studied academic art, Steichen wrote to Stieglitz that he aspired to continue working in both painting and photography. Steichen became close friends with Auguste Rodin and his common-law life Rose Beuret, but the young American took issue with Beuret when she told him that she thought he should devote himself exclusively to either painting or photography rather than dividing his time between both. Steichen wrote to Stieglitz, "I disagree – Whistler has painted and how many charming etchings has he not given us – as well – To me the Camera shall be as the etching – really it has greater possibilities – possibilities in fact of a nature foreign to any other medium."¹⁰²

Stieglitz, with his keen desire to prove that photography was a fine art capable of standing up to painting, was delighted by this artist who saw the two media as complementary equals in his artistic practice. For photography to take on a cultural and, he no doubt hoped, a monetary, status equivalent to that of Whistler's or Rembrandt's highly respected etchings was a notable achievement. Stieglitz wrote to his wife Emmeline about Steichen, "I think I've found my man."¹⁰³

Steichen, well trained as a draftsman and printmaker as well as a painter and photographer, continued Stieglitz's efforts to enlist traditional graphic art to help establish photography in the world of fine art. Steichen was keen to have photographs accepted into major exhibitions alongside paintings, sculpture, and graphic arts. He wrote,

Photography and photographers have ever held a unique position amongst the arts and crafts. . . . Results alone are arguments, and it might be that the admission of photograms [photographs] into the forthcoming Glasgow Exposition, the photographic exhibitions held by the secession of Munich and like exhibitions in America, ought to be considered as one type of result. Let it be not the medium we question but the man. Our consideration of lithography was a lowly¹⁰⁴ one until Whistler made it an art. Let photographers concern themselves more with art and less with photography and we will have better photograms.¹⁰⁵

Steichen carried through his plans in March 1901 when he entered several photographs – gum prints and ozotypes – along with a few drawings and one painting in the Paris Salon de la Nationale, better known as the Salon du Champs de Mars. Steichen submitted his photographs as "prints." Of course they *were* prints – photographic prints. But because the jury originally assumed that the works were etchings or lithographs, the photographs were accepted for exhibition. This was a resounding victory for the photographic cause. As Whelan relates, "There was tremendous excitement in New York

when the news arrived that for the first time ever a French fine-arts salon jury had admitted photographs.”¹⁰⁶ Stieglitz exclaimed,

a cable to the *New York Herald* announced to the public that in spite of a stormy opposition in the ranks of the jury, Mr. Steichen broke down the immemorial barriers of the recognized Salon of the world, the Champs de Mars in Paris, and had been the first photographer whose prints were admitted to an art exhibition of any importance.¹⁰⁷

However, once the salon jury penetrated Steichen’s minor subterfuge, they withdrew their acceptance. Stieglitz wrote a postscript in *Camera Notes* updating his information and sneering, “notwithstanding acceptance by the Jury, jealousies and political intrigue within the Salon itself, proved powerful enough to prevent the hanging of *photographs*.”¹⁰⁸ Even though the move had ultimately been blocked by the forces of dominant art media, photography, moving under cover of more traditional graphic art media, had been able to make advances toward the position in the arts that photographers coveted. Once again, established graphic media had proven valuable allies for photography. Stieglitz and Steichen would not forget their fellow graphic media as they moved forward in their art enterprises.

Steichen returned to the United States in August 1902, just after conflicts within the Camera Club of New York had forced Stieglitz to resign as editor of *Camera Notes*.¹⁰⁹ Stieglitz now needed his own organization to advance his agenda. For models, he looked to European secessionist salons and to the British pictorial photography organization, the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring.¹¹⁰ The Linked Ring was an exclusive organization that selected its members from the finest photographers around the world. In 1894 Stieglitz became one of the first two American “Links.”¹¹¹

The annual Philadelphia photographic salon run by the Philadelphia Photographic Society had been a vital part of the advancement of pictorial photography in the United States, but more conservative factions came into control of the organization and blocked progress. Stieglitz and his followers needed a new exhibition venue. The National Arts Club in New York offered Stieglitz a place to show his photographs in 1902. Stieglitz, however, wanted to hold not a solo show of his own work but a group exhibition. He did not want to put his own name on the exhibition, so he decided to call it “An Exhibition of American Photography arranged by the Photo-Secession.” There was not yet, in fact, any such organization as the Photo-Secession in existence outside of Stieglitz’s mind. Stieglitz and a few associates selected the photographs to be shown at the March 1902 exhibition. The works were outstanding and reviews were positive but the organization supposedly behind the exhibition remained shadowy.¹¹²

At Steichen’s urging, Photo-Secession meetings were held and officers were selected, with Stieglitz serving as director. The elective organization stated that its aims were “to advance photography as applied to pictorial expression,” to draw together those practicing or interested in the art, and to hold exhibitions of Photo-Secession or American photography.¹¹³ The quarterly journal *Camera Work*, edited by Stieglitz, would be the mouthpiece of the new organization.

Steichen’s impact on the Photo-Secession was enormous from the beginning. The young artist assured that the beautifully reproduced photographic illustrations and the articles in *Camera Work* would have an appropriately elegant and sophisticated graphic setting. He designed the cover and typography of the journal in what Jonathan Green terms “a refined, rectilinear version of the Art Nouveau style.”¹¹⁴ Steichen worked with

Stieglitz on a series of touring exhibitions held by the Photo-Secession in Washington, D.C., and Pittsburgh, designing the catalogue cover and helping to hang the exhibitions.¹¹⁵ Stieglitz, in turn, published two articles lauding Steichen's art work in the second issue of *Camera Work*.¹¹⁶ The work and lives of the two men were closely intertwined, with Steichen's graphic design and fine art background having an increasing influence on the projects of Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession.

Steichen worked hard in New York, where he established himself as a fashionable studio portrait photographer catering to the wealthy and influential.¹¹⁷ In 1905 he realized that it was vital for the Photo-Secession to have its own exhibition space. He suggested using the two empty rooms at 291 Fifth Avenue he had vacated when he moved his photographic studio.¹¹⁸ In these modest rooms modern drawings and watercolors would come to the fore in a new artistic enterprise under the aegis of Stieglitz and Steichen.

The Foundation of 291

When Steichen suggested that the Photo-Secession should have its own permanent exhibition space, Stieglitz was doubtful that there was enough good American photographic work to keep the walls filled. Steichen told him, "That's not my idea. . . . We'll bring the enemy into our camp."¹¹⁹ He suggested bringing in works by artists from other countries and in other media who shared the expressive aims of the Photo-Secession photographers. Stieglitz agreed and thus the institution of the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession was born.¹²⁰ It is interesting to observe Steichen's terming other media than photography the "enemy." Clearly photographers like Steichen felt that their enterprise was still under threat from those outside their own medium. In practitioners of

graphic art, however, they had long found allies in the fight against the hegemony of painting. Steichen's reference to "the enemy" at this early stage was probably because he envisioned hanging paintings to complement the photographs in the galleries.¹²¹ Perhaps he had not yet realized that the small space and limited financial resources of the Little Galleries would result in the confining of a large percentage of their non-photographic exhibitions to graphic works and a few small paintings.

Steichen designed the new galleries (Fig. 1.13), creating a space reminiscent of exhibitions designed for the Vienna Secession by Josef Hoffmann¹²² and by Whistler for his own works. Both of these designers had created galleries appropriate for graphic works as well as paintings. Stieglitz described the galleries in *Camera Work*,

One of the larger rooms is kept in dull olive tones, the burlap wall-covering being a warm olive gray; the woodwork and moldings similar in general color, but considerably darker. The hangings are of an olive-sepia sateen, and the ceiling and canopy are of a very deep creamy gray. The small room is designed especially to show prints on very light mounts or in white frames. The walls of this room are covered with a bleached natural burlap; the woodwork and molding are pure white; the hangings, a dull ecru. The third room is decorated in gray-blue, dull salmon, and olive-gray.¹²³

Many years after the opening of the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, Stieglitz circle artist Marsden Hartley recalled one of the galleries,

In the center of this small room was a square platform . . . and in the center of this was a huge brass bowl (Fig. 1.13).

I didn't know the meaning of brass bowls any more than I do now, but I suspect it was a late reflex from the recently departed eighteen-nineties, and the spirit of James McNeill Whistler seemed to come up out of this bowl like a singular wraith.¹²⁴

Hartley was quite correct in linking 291's early aesthetic sense to that of Whistler and his era. Whistler, indeed, was a formative influence on both Stieglitz and Steichen and other Photo-Secessionists.¹²⁵ In the 1880s and 1890s, the controversial and theatrical

ex-patriot was a major art celebrity in the United States and his influence was pervasive in both painting and the graphic arts.¹²⁶ Whistler's name was mentioned more often in *Camera Work* than that of any other artist.¹²⁷ Whistler's influence on Stieglitz's early photographs is often marked. For instance, the photographs that Stieglitz made of canal scenes when he visited Venice in 1894 strongly recall Whistler's famous etchings made about 15 years earlier (Figs. 1.14, 1.15). While still a boy, Steichen had discovered Whistler through reproductions in library books and articles and he may have seen Whistler's paintings at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. The impact of the great ex-patriot on the young Steichen's subtle tonal landscape and portrait paintings and photographs is undeniable (Fig. 1.16).¹²⁸ When Steichen was in Europe between 1900 and 1902 he worked on photographic exhibitions with F. Holland Day, the photographer and art book publisher whose refined aestheticism and love of Whistler's work can only have reaffirmed Steichen's existing interest.¹²⁹

Both Stieglitz and Steichen thus naturally found inspiration for the Photo-Secession's presentation of photography in Whistler's presentation of his drawings, pastels, watercolors, etchings, and lithographs.¹³⁰ Whistler's exhibition designs were famous in the United States as well as in Europe (Figs. 1.13, 1.17). The "canopy" Stieglitz described in the Little Galleries seems to have been based upon the "valerium" Whistler had invented. This was a loose fabric drapery used to filter and color the light from the skylights in galleries where his art was exhibited.¹³¹ The horizontal division of the gallery walls at 291 by a dado (in Steichen's case a small shelf with drapery below to hide a storage space for art not on view) also equates to the way Whistler divided walls to show small works to best advantage. The colors of Steichen's gallery design, stressing

grayish tones and white, also reflect Whistler's color choices in his famously theatrical exhibitions of the 1880s.¹³² In the third gallery of the Photo-Secession the combination of gray tones and salmon could have been specifically based upon the "Arrangement in Flesh Color and Gray" that Whistler used in 1884 to introduce his first exhibited watercolors and a group of small oil paintings.¹³³

Steichen remained a crucial part of the Photo-Secession in its first exhibition season, meticulously hanging the 100 photographs in the first show. Steichen's own photographs sold briskly during his one-man show at the Little Galleries in March 1906.¹³⁴ The Photo-Secession was launched with a strong first season of photographic shows in its own galleries, and it continued to mount traveling exhibitions as well.¹³⁵

Steichen's commercial studio, too, was thriving. His very success and financial stability seemed to make him nervous. As his biographer Penelope Niven observes, "All his life he would migrate from medium to medium, risk to risk, never settling permanently into one regimen or enterprise."¹³⁶ Therefore, at this moment of triumph, Steichen, now married and with a young daughter, decided to return to France. In 1906 he closed up his New York studio and sailed to Europe in a move that would result in the transformation of Stieglitz's enterprise from strictly photographic to encompassing the breadth of modern art.

Anti-Photographic Art Enters 291

On Steichen's first sojourn in France one of his goals had been to make photographic portraits of important cultural figures. One of these was the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin. While Rodin was best known for his ground-breaking sculpture, by the early twentieth-century he had come to also see his swiftly-drawn contour

drawings of nudes as important works of art (Figs. 2.38-39).¹³⁷ Rodin's drawings had been shown in Europe, but they had not yet been seen in America except by a few collectors, although his sculpture was well known and respected.¹³⁸ Steichen recalled that he had suggested to Stieglitz his idea of showing Rodin's drawings at 291 when they were first discussing the idea of founding a gallery for the Photo-Secession. Steichen said he told Stieglitz,

As we had not succeeded in getting photographs hung with paintings in any art gallery, we should try the opposite tack and bring artists into our space. I told him I was sure I could get an exhibition of Rodin drawings and that we might find material for a Salon des Refusés, such as the one held in Paris. This idea intrigued him, and he decided to risk the expense of such an operation.¹³⁹

Steichen later recalled that when he returned to Europe in 1906,

One of the first things I did was to visit Rodin and tell him about the new gallery we had in New York. I told him that we hoped to open our new program with an exhibition of his drawings. He was immensely pleased and promised to let me select whatever I wanted.

Since my promise of a Rodin exhibition had been one of the chief inducements in persuading Stieglitz to open the Photo-Secession Galleries, Stieglitz and I had agreed that the showing of works of art at the Photo-Secession should certainly be inaugurated with this Rodin exhibition. So I was shocked when, in January 1907, I received a formal notice announcing a show of water-color drawings by Pamela Coleman [sic] Smith at the Photo-Secession Galleries.¹⁴⁰

Pamela Colman Smith was a young illustrator “of mixed Anglo-American and Afro-Caribbean descent” who had “appeared at 291 with portfolio in hand in late 1906.”¹⁴¹ Smith had made a series of watercolors “that Smith told him [Stieglitz] she painted ‘automatically’ – that is, without conscious control – claiming simply to record passively the hermetic visions that came to her unbidden when she listened to music.”¹⁴² She made stylized illustration-like figurative watercolor drawings in a Symbolist mode (Fig. 1.18). The exotic young artist so far outside of the norms of accepted art fascinated

Stieglitz, who later gave her two more exhibitions at 291. Stieglitz told the readers of *Camera Work*, photographers whom he knew would be baffled by the sudden appearance of another medium in “their” gallery,

The exhibition of drawings in black and white and color by Miss Pamela Colman Smith, held at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession in January, marked, not a departure from the intentions of the Photo-Secession, but a welcome opportunity of their manifesting. The Secession Idea is neither the servant nor the product of a medium. It is a spirit.¹⁴³

With this exhibition, and many more to come, Stieglitz continued the close relationship in his artistic enterprise between photography and the other graphic arts. Smith’s identity as a woman, however, was probably as important a consideration for Stieglitz as her medium. He found her “a young woman with that quality rare in either sex – imagination.”¹⁴⁴ Stieglitz had welcomed many excellent women photographers into the Photo-Secession, including Gertrude Käsebier, Eva Watson-Schütze, and Annie W. Brigman.¹⁴⁵ As a practitioner of a medium often seen as inferior to painting, he seems to have identified with women artists who were seen as inferior to male artists, much as he identified with artists who worked in graphic media seen as “minor.” In 1919, Stieglitz queried photography, “Has it ever produced any art? It is like the ‘Woman [artist]’ question. - I claim ‘yes’ for both instances.”¹⁴⁶

After Stieglitz’s first season at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, and after the many successful exhibitions of pictorial photography he had mounted elsewhere, he seemed to feel that pictorial photographers were becoming too well established and their work was getting stale. He wanted, as Greenough phrases it, “To rattle this growing complacency,” with exhibitions of works in other media like the show of drawings by Pamela Colman Smith.¹⁴⁷ The same comparisons between photography and painting and

graphic media that had long appeared in written form in Stieglitz's journals now appeared in physical form on the walls of 291.

In January 1908, the exhibition of Rodin drawings at last went forward. Rodin's abstracted pencil drawings of nude women in motion, many tinted in watercolor, were like nothing ever previously seen in New York, and certainly nothing like photographs (Figs. 2.38-39). They attracted a welcome new audience to the Little Galleries to mix with, and presumably influence, the photographers. Stieglitz proudly told *Camera Work* readers, "During the three weeks they were shown, connoisseurs, art-lovers of every type, and students from far and near flocked to the garret of 291."¹⁴⁸ Stieglitz took little note, at the time, of a shy young woman student from the Art Students League who waited quietly while her male colleagues argued about the merit of the Rodin drawings. The woman was Georgia O'Keeffe; she would never forget her first experience of modern art. As I will discuss in later chapters, these drawings were vital in molding her initial graphic conception of modernism.¹⁴⁹

Stieglitz reprinted in *Camera Work* several pages of critical responses, including that of J. N. Laurvik, who said the exhibition was "of unusual artistic and human interest. It is also a challenge to the prurient prudery of our Puritanism. . . . In these swift, sure, stenographic notes a mastery of expressive drawing is revealed – a sculptor's mastery – which is seldom beautiful, according to accepted standards of beauty, but that never fails to be interesting and imbued with vital meaning."¹⁵⁰ The ultra-conservative critic Royal Cortissoz appreciated the subtle and effortless skill of the drawings, yet was frustrated that "This skill, however, is discounted for the connoisseur of draftsmanship by the scrawling and sometimes meaningless touch of the artist. . . . It is easy to believe that

such memoranda as these might be valuable to the sculptor himself.”¹⁵¹ The public excitement and outpouring of critical response, plus the sales of drawings, must have delighted Stieglitz no end.¹⁵² Photographic complacency was as shaken as he could have hoped. Steichen’s experiment in showing works other than photography had been an unqualified success. Stieglitz was hooked on the idea and would continue it with ever greater frequency over the following seasons.

Steichen, meanwhile, was experiencing a whole new world of art in Paris. There, as he recalled, “Like most young Americans in Paris, I had made the acquaintance of the Steins, Gertrude and Leo, as well as the Michael Stein family. At Leo and Gertrude Stein’s we could see all types of modern paintings, from Cézanne and Renoir to Matisse and Picasso. Mrs. Michael [Sarah] Stein, a painter herself, bought nothing but Matisses, and her whole apartment was filled with them.”¹⁵³ These abstracted Post-Impressionist, Fauve, and Cubist works thrilled Steichen and redirected his visual ideas. Through the Steins, Steichen met many of the contemporary European modern artists, including Matisse and Picasso, and the young American began to take up their ideas. As Gertrude later phrased it, Steichen

had been one of Stieglitz’ [sic] men and came over very excited about photography. Pretty soon he decided that ordinary painting did not interest him, one could do all that with photography, that is to say that the photographs of pictures looked just like the photographs of real landscapes or of still lives if they were good pictures, and so there must be something else and so he became very interested in modern painting and was one of those who told Stieglitz and the rest of them all about it.¹⁵⁴

Steichen did not grasp Picasso’s radical work at first, but he was impressed by Matisse from the first and wanted to show his work at 291. Steichen remembered, “It was to her [Sarah Stein] that I first broached the possibility of getting an exhibition of

watercolor paintings by Matisse for the Photo-Secession Galleries. She began working on Matisse, and after I met him he promised full cooperation.” Steichen wrote excitedly to Stieglitz in January 1908,

I have another cracker jack exhibition for you that is going to be as fine in its way as the Rodin show.

Drawings by Henri Matisse the most modern of the moderns – his drawings are the same to him & his paintings as Rodin’s are to his sculpture. Ask young [George] Off [Sic – Of] about him. I don’t know if you will remember any of his paintings at Berneheim’s. Well they are to the figure what the Cézannes are to the landscape – simply great. Some are more finished than Rodins more of a study of form than movement – abstract to the limit. I’ll bring them with me and we can show them right after mine if you can so arrange it.¹⁵⁵

As Steichen had realized, Stieglitz had seen a few of Matisse’s works previously in New York but, in his ignorance of avant-garde visual language, had taken little notice. Stieglitz now accepted the idea of a Matisse exhibition on the strength of his trust in Steichen’s superior knowledge and understanding of European modernism.¹⁵⁶ The exhibition of Matisse drawings, lithographs, watercolors, etchings, and a single oil painting opened at 291 on April 6, 1908. Stieglitz sent out an invitation informing his readers, “Matisse is the leading spirit of a modern group of French artists dubbed ‘Les Fauves.’ The work of this group has been the center of discussion in the art-world of Paris during the past two to three years. It is the good fortune of the Photo-Secession to have the honor of thus introducing Matisse to the American public and to the American art-critics.” As he had done for the Rodin show, Stieglitz again printed in *Camera Work* a variety of reviews of the exhibition. This time, however, the majority of the reviewers seemed shocked and even repulsed by what they saw.¹⁵⁷

Stieglitz appears to have taken delight in the controversy this new kind of exhibition could provoke, and he certainly took pride in moving his gallery to the

forefront of modernism in America. He brought in more and more exhibitions of works, more modern or less so, in media other than photography. As Homer comments, “Suddenly Stieglitz found himself in the limelight, enjoying a level of patronage and attention that his exhibitions of pictorial photography had never engendered.”¹⁵⁸

As Steichen scouted for the latest modern art in Europe and kept Stieglitz apprised of the latest artists and events, the older man rapidly progressed in his understanding of this new art. In 1909 and 1910 Stieglitz traveled to Europe, where he met the Steins and many artists, both European and American, who would be important exhibitors at 291. Stieglitz’s experience of European modernist culture in person made him a firm convert to the new visual ideas. He was particularly impressed by what he heard from Leo Stein, who had the temerity to dismiss Whistler and Rodin as second and third rate artists. Stieglitz, rather than rising to the defense of his former favorites, eagerly followed Steichen and the Steins into a new realm where he felt more exciting things were happening.¹⁵⁹ Stieglitz still considered photography to be his central concern, stating defensively in 1911, “Although the Photo-Secession has had little to say about Photography in the recent issues of its organ, *Camera Work*, its interest in the medium has not waned.”¹⁶⁰ But photography was less and less in evidence on the walls of 291. Modern art by Europeans and some young Americans came to dominate 291, while exhibitions of photography were rare. During the 1909 to 1910 exhibition season, 291 showed lithographs by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and new selections of drawings by Rodin and photographs of paintings by Matisse, in addition to several exhibitions of work by young American modernists. The only photography shown was by Steichen.

When Stieglitz and Steichen first began exhibiting works in media other than photography, they had hoped that photographers would learn more about the larger nature of art and thus improve their work, just as any number of articles in *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work* had advised them to do. But the photographers who had been the heart of the Photo-Secession felt crowded out of Stieglitz's concerns. Rather than remaining to learn about questions larger than medium, more and more of them cancelled their subscriptions to *Camera Work* and moved away from Stieglitz.¹⁶¹ As Stieglitz and Steichen observed this desertion of photographers, and as they themselves learned more about modern art, their aims gradually changed. In 1910 Stieglitz explained,

The exhibitions which have been held during the past two years and those which are announced for the season of 1910-1911 show the logical evolution of the work of the Association. Its name, while still explanatory of its purpose, has taken a somewhat different meaning. The Photo-Secession stood first for a secession from the then accepted standards of photography and started out to prove that photography was entitled to an equal footing among the arts with the productions of painters whose attitude was photographic. Having proved conclusively that along certain lines, pre-eminently in portraiture, the camera had the advantage over the best trained eye and hand, the logical deduction was that the other arts could only prove themselves superior to photography by making their aim dependent on other qualities than accurate reproduction. The works shown at the Little Galleries in painting, drawing and other graphic arts have all been non-photographic in their attitude, and the Photo-Secession can be said now to stand for those artists who secede from the photographic attitude toward representation of form.¹⁶²

The basis for Stieglitz's idea that he would later term photographic versus anti-photographic art was in place. 291 now attracted people more concerned with modern art than with photography, and these moved into Stieglitz's circle to take the place of those who left. For instance, the photographer and art critic Paul Haviland first came to the gallery to see the 1908 Rodin drawings show. Both he and his brother Frank Burty Haviland bought drawings and became regulars at 291. In 1908, when a rent hike

threatened to close the gallery, Paul Haviland quietly stepped in and provided the money necessary for the gallery to continue to operate in the space next door in the same building.¹⁶³

While photography was disappearing from 291, it was replaced less by paintings and sculpture than by works on paper. The Little Galleries showed a small group of oil sketches by the young Paris-based American Alfred Maurer and oil paintings by the young native of Maine, Marsden Hartley, but these were far outnumbered by drawings, etchings, watercolors, lithographs, and pastels during the early seasons at 291. When radical works by European modernists appeared, they were usually on paper. Between 1908 and 1912, Rodin appeared via drawings (Figs. 2.38-39), Matisse via drawings (Figs. 1.19-20, 2.44), watercolors (Fig. 4.11), and photographs of his paintings, Cézanne via watercolors (Fig. 1.21), and Picasso via drawings, watercolors, prints and a few oils (Figs. 3.18-20, 4.17). In November 1910 Stieglitz showed a selection of lithographs by Manet, Cézanne, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec.¹⁶⁴ While a few more paintings and sculptures appeared in the following years, still 291 was dominated by works on paper. The proliferation of such graphic exhibitions at 291 may have created in the minds of American artists an association between modernism and graphic art. As Ruth E. Fine and Elizabeth Glassman observe, “A logical outgrowth for artists who viewed the wealth of works on paper that Stieglitz brought to them was an excitement to try such techniques themselves. Indeed, [Charles] Demuth (Fig. 1.22), [Marius] De Zayas (Figs. 3.33, 3.38-42, 5.12-13), [Arthur] Dove, Hartley, [John] Marin, O’Keeffe, and [Abraham] Walkowitz all turned to paper to explore some of their most central concepts.”¹⁶⁵

The predominance of drawings, watercolor, and prints in the Little Galleries was not entirely intentional. Although Steichen and Stieglitz had, as we have seen, every reason to value graphic works, they knew that the central impact of modern art was in painting. They were simply unable to show much modern painting for practical reasons. Steichen complained, “There was no difficulty in securing the cooperation of most of the painters, because everybody wanted to exhibit in America. The only real problem was that of space in our galleries. We could handle only small things, drawings and watercolors. Large paintings were out of the question.”¹⁶⁶ In the autumn of 1909, when he had just attended the Salon d’Automne, Steichen wrote to Stieglitz in frustration, “I wish we could show paintings,” and hopefully added, “I may get some small things.”¹⁶⁷ The expensive duty on art exported from France to the United States added to the difficulty 291 had in obtaining art works in the expensive medium of oil painting. As Steichen explained in a May 1908 letter to Stieglitz, “You speak of having something from over here and of course here we are again up against the old customs difficulty. We can only bring in things that have practically no commercial value so that the duty can be paid on them.”¹⁶⁸

Graphic art did, of course, offer its own inherent attractions beyond its being cheap and small. Stieglitz, a devotee of the theater, enjoyed showing works in the peculiarly graphic mode of caricature. Actors and other assorted New York celebrities, like Stieglitz himself, afforded prime subjects to caricaturists. Stieglitz showed caricatures by popular American theatrical caricaturist Al Frueh (Fig. 1.23)¹⁶⁹ and the Mexican Marius de Zayas (Figs. 3.38-42, 5.12-13), bringing a delightful lightness and humor into 291. Stieglitz observed to the readers of *Camera Work*, “while Frueh’s work

is not to be considered as a contribution to the advancement of modern art; it reveals a fresh and independent point of view.”¹⁷⁰ Stieglitz certainly had a fine, often self-deprecating sense of humor. For instance, he was not above showing watercolors made in mockery of cubist art by humor author and illustrator Gelett Burgess.¹⁷¹ Caricature could also offer more intellectual values. De Zayas poked an elegant sort of fun at celebrities. But he also, in his charcoal caricatures, to attempt to capture the characters, even the very souls, of his subjects. To this end he used rich black shadows and spot-lit faces and hands to create effects strikingly like those pictorial photography (Fig. 3.39-41).¹⁷² De Zayas, who was a serious (if unreadable) modern art theorist, also attempted a new type of caricature in which he combined abstracted forms with mathematical equations in an attempt to capture more than mere visual properties of those he depicted (Fig. 3.38, 3.42).¹⁷³ Thus De Zayas’s graphic works built a kind of bridge between pictorial photography and the most advanced abstract works.

Most of the graphic art that 291 showed, however, was not caricature. Some were more or less finished graphic works made for exhibition that represented the closest approximation of the artists’ paintings the gallery could manage to obtain. For instance, many of Rodin’s drawings that Stieglitz showed in 1908 and 1910 were based upon very rapidly made contour drawings but the works exhibited were more finished and included the addition of watercolor washes (Figs. 2.38-39).¹⁷⁴ Picasso’s cubist charcoal drawing *Standing Female Nude* that Stieglitz exhibited in 1911 and purchased for his own collection, while strong abstracted, seems confidently finished for public viewing (Fig. 4.17). Matisse’s elegantly drawn pen and ink drawings like *Female Nude Lying Face*

Down on a Table (Fig. 1.19), and watercolors (Fig. 4.11) neatly executed and signed by the artist, also give every evidence of being considered finished works.

Stieglitz also included in his exhibitions what appear to be sketches made primarily for the private use of the artist and only later chosen for exhibition and signed. Henri Matisse's *Nude Study* (Fig. 1.20), for instance, is one of several drawings in the 1910 Matisse exhibition that includes such strong evidence of changes in proportion, pose, and detail that they appear to be life studies made for the artist's information rather than for exhibition. These works must have appealed to Stieglitz's background as a connoisseur of drawings, studying works to learn about the artist's methods of working and even to catch a glimpse of his thoughts. Many critics seemed to understand these studies for what they were; asking no more finish than Matisse gave. An educated viewer like critic Frank Jewett Mather felt that he could look at Matisse's sketches and understand how the artist felt about the human form, "Matisse conceives the body as a powerful machine working within certain limits of balance. The minute form of the tackles and levers does not signify for him, what counts is the energy expended and the eloquent pauses which reveal the throb of the mechanism."¹⁷⁵

Paul Cézanne inspired many followers in France and America among modernists early in the twentieth century. Critics had high expectations when 291 hosted Cézanne's public debut in America in the form of three lithographs shown in 1910 and a group of watercolors in 1911 (Fig. 1.21). The spare watercolors baffled many. Critic Henry Tyrrell, often sympathetic to modern art, was disappointed by the watercolors he saw as only "fragmentary drawings washed in here and there with spots and patches of flat tint."¹⁷⁶ Stieglitz, however, his eyes opened to Cézanne by Leo Stein, found that the

simple, open forms of Cézanne's watercolor brush strokes against white paper displayed the artist's physical and psychological process of creation.¹⁷⁷ In a new modernist form of traditional drawings connoisseurship, Stieglitz wrote that while,

On first glancing at the few touches of color which made up the watercolors by Cézanne, the fount of inspiration of the younger school of painting, the beholder was tempted to exclaim, 'Is that all?' Yet if one gave oneself a chance, one succumbed to the fascination of his art. The white paper no longer seemed empty space, but became vibrant with sunlight. The artist's touch was so sure, each stroke was so willed, each value so true, that one had no [sic] surrender to the absolute honesty, sincerity of purpose and great mentality of him whom posterity may rank as the greatest artist of the last hundred years.¹⁷⁸

Many young American artists, including John Marin and Charles Demuth, were electrified by the radical approach not only to form but to medium in Cézanne watercolors. Such images encouraged Americans to boldly invent their own modernist applications of this formerly genteel medium (Fig. 1.22).¹⁷⁹

291 became a magnet for such rising American modern artists, where they could see the latest trends in European modernism. The Little Galleries also offered exhibition opportunities to young Americans. The Photo-Secession had moved from the promotion of photography to the introduction of European modern art in America; now it began to favor American avant-garde artists. In Paris Steichen found himself working among many promising young Americans. He gathered a group of them into an organization called the "New Society of American Artists in Paris." The group included Arthur B. Carles, John Marin, Max Weber, Alfred Maurer, and Donald Shaw MacLaughlan. Steichen brought all of these artists to the attention of Stieglitz, who showed at least a few works by each of them. Stieglitz included a number of the young men in a 1910 group exhibition of "Younger American Painters."¹⁸⁰

Of this group, the most important for the history of graphic media at 291 was John Marin, who would be one of major artists in Stieglitz's stable until his death. Marin had been working in Europe, based in Paris, since 1905, earning his living by making etchings of European tourist attractions and picturesque architectural views.¹⁸¹ But Steichen recalled that when he visited the 1908 Salon d'Automne with Arthur Carles "in wandering through the section of watercolors, drawings, and pastels, we came upon a large group of Marin watercolors, which excited me very much. Carles knew Marin well, and from the Salon we went directly to Marin's studio."¹⁸² Marin had for some time been making soft gray-toned watercolors and delicate pastels in a Whistlerian mode, but recently he had started making new watercolors that were more vigorous and brightly colored. Steichen sent some of Marin's new watercolors to Stieglitz. Stieglitz was interested in the works; he showed them in March and April 1909 alongside oil sketches by Maurer. Marin continued to make etchings for many years, but he established his standing as an American modernist through his works in watercolor depicting both New York City (Fig. 1.24) and rural views of American landscapes and seascapes. Marin's watercolors helped to establish this medium as a major element in the Stieglitz circle. He was a powerful encouragement for younger artists like Abraham Walkowitz and Georgia O'Keeffe to take watercolor seriously as a medium for American modern art.

Exhibitions at 291 were increasingly varied. They included photographs, paintings, sculptures both European and African, drawings, watercolors, and prints; works by European modernists and young Americans. Exhibitions in the Little Galleries also included some curiously conservative exhibitions of architectural etchings by Canadian Donald Shaw MacLaughlan, book plates etched by Martin Lewis, Japanese

woodblock prints from a private collection, and similarly tame graphic art. Sarah Greenough asserts that Stieglitz and Steichen purposefully created a progression of exhibitions designed to play off of one another. They wanted visitors to be able to see and compare works in different styles, by Americans and Europeans, and in different media. This comparison also included playing modernism against more traditional art.¹⁸³

As she states,

This odd mixture of exhibitions . . . was largely the result of Stieglitz's and Steichen's belief that they needed to rotate advanced work with what Steichen referred to as "understandable" or more conventional art, and photography. As he explained in a letter to Stieglitz in June 1908, "I think we should [,] if we have two shows [,] have one !!! and the other an 'understandable' one. I had thought some of Charles Shannon's lithographs or drawings by [theatrical designer] Gordon Craig As for the red rag I am sure Picasso would fill the bill if I can get them but he is a crazy galloot[,] hates exhibiting etc. however we will try him."¹⁸⁴

I believe that Stieglitz and Steichen may have had an additional reason for choosing to show etchings and Japanese prints in between the more radical works. The influence of Whistler on the two men would have naturally inclined them to value works in the tradition of Whistler's etchings, as well as the Japanese art he had admired. But it also seems likely to me that Stieglitz and Steichen, for whom Whistler had been so important in their early progress toward modernism, may have hoped that others could travel a similar route. And, in fact, there were a number of collectors of modern art who did exactly that. Paul Burty Haviland, who was a major enthusiast and financial supporter of 291, was the grandson of the great etching collector Philippe Burty. The Haviland family members were also collectors and dealers of Japanese objects, including prints. Hamilton Easter Field, a cousin of the Havilands', joined the family enthusiasm by collecting etchings and Japanese prints. He went on to be a painter and collector of

modern art whose collection included works by such Stieglitz circle artists as Marsden Hartley.¹⁸⁵ Duncan Phillips, founder of the Phillips Collection, also eagerly collected Japanese art in his youth before he began his excellent collection of modern art that included many works by Stieglitz circle artists such as Arthur Dove, Georgia O’Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, and John Marin.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps because of the affordability of prints, they seem often to have been a way that collectors began before branching out into more daring or expensive areas of art. It would not be at all unreasonable for the proprietors of 291 to realize that by showing interesting exhibitions of prints in between more modern fare they had a good chance of redirecting the interests of print collectors into the realm of modern art.

It was through seeing the contrasts between modern art and mimetic art that Stieglitz, Steichen, and their cohorts originated the concept of photographic and anti-photographic art. The roots of the idea lay in the tension that Stieglitz and Steichen felt between the gift of their medium of photography for the exact recording of visual facts and the continuing tradition of mimesis in painting. When Steichen and then Stieglitz discovered the free distortions of abstract modern painting, they realized that if painting could be freed (perhaps by photography itself) from the need to imitate nature photographically, then it was ridiculous for photography to continue imitating painting or other traditional media.¹⁸⁷ Steichen broached the idea in his essay “Painting and Photography,” written just as he was discovering modern art,

The great painter would find in this [an ugly] motif that which would inspire him to paint a picture that must first and foremost be beautiful in form and in color regardless of its physical representation of nature, otherwise it is only a photograph, and photography can never be a great work of art in the same sense that painting can; it can never create anything, nor design. It is basically

dependent on beauty as it exists in nature, and not as the genius of the artist creates it. It is an art entirely apart and for itself.¹⁸⁸

Two years later Stieglitz declared that the works he showed were validating this division, “The works shown at the Little Galleries in painting, drawing and other graphic arts have all been non-photographic in their attitude.”¹⁸⁹ As Greenough observes, “By 1912, the idea of ‘anti-photographic’ art was widely held among members of ‘291.’”¹⁹⁰ Stieglitz explained the new terminology and its place in the Photo-Secession in a letter to photographer Heinrich Kühn,

You don’t understand what Picasso & Co. have to do with photography! Too bad that you can’t read the text in *Camera Work*, perhaps it would help you to understand. With *Camera Work* I strive that once and for all one may get some idea of what has been accomplished artistically in photography; secondly, whatever struggle it costs, to compel the world to respect art-photography (how I hate that word!); and thirdly, what *photography* essentially means [aesthetically] – whether employed through the camera (photography in the purest sense) or through a painter with his brush (photography in an intellectual sense just as much as though a camera were used). Now I find that contemporary art consists of the abstract (without subject) like Picasso etc., and the photographic. The so-called photographic art whether attempted with camera or with brush is not the highest art. Just as we stand before the door of a new social era, so we stand in art too before a new medium of expression – the true medium (abstraction).¹⁹¹

In this way Stieglitz created a pair of meta-media classified according the intention of the artist rather than the physical means employed. Drawings, watercolors, and prints functioned equally alongside painting in the work of abstraction, with no division between “major” or “minor” media. Stieglitz appears to have realized that, while the physical properties of medium appeared before the viewer in works of art, the cultural reality of medium was in many ways its most influential aspect. A viewer’s or artist’s expectations could be far more limiting to art in a given medium than were the physical substances and processes involved. Stieglitz, I believe, came to want any kind of art to take strength, not limitation, from its medium.

When in 1914 Georgia O'Keeffe returned to 291 for the first time since 1908, she entered the aesthetic world that Stieglitz and his cohorts had created. O'Keeffe found there an exciting, inclusive atmosphere that gave great opportunities to those who wanted, as she did, to make modern art in graphic media. To understand how she came to want to be a graphic modern artist it is necessary to examine her own graphic background.

Notes

¹ Stieglitz to Stanton Macdonald Wright, October 11, 1919, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. Stieglitz wrote these words to the artist Stanton Macdonald Wright who was writing a book about art and had written to Stieglitz asking him to comment for the book about photography. Stieglitz made his first comments in a letter written on October 9, 1919. Two days later he thought more about the subject and wrote back to Wright. Dorothy Norman published the essay "Woman in Art." Originally part of Stieglitz's first letter to Wright, in her book *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, An Aperture Book (New York: Random House, 1973), 136-138.

² I will discuss these ideas in more detail near the end of this chapter. For the development of the photographic/ anti-photographic idea in writings by Stieglitz and others in his circle, see Sarah E. Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Clouds." PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 1984, 50-86.

³ Dorothy Norman, ed., "From the Writings and Conversations of Alfred Stieglitz," *Twice a Year*, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 1938): 79.

⁴ On Stieglitz's denial of previous knowledge of art, see Sarah Greenough, "The Key Set," in *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set: the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Gallery of Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2002), xiv.

⁵ Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 13.

⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

⁷ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 15.

⁸ Katherine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: a Beginning Light* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 23.

⁹ Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 19.

¹⁰ Stieglitz quoted in *ibid*.

¹¹ Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: a Memoir/ Biography* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), 59-60; Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 61.

¹² Hoffman, *Stieglitz: a Beginning Light*, 27-28.

¹³ *Ibid*, 29-32.

¹⁴ Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 24; and Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 55.

¹⁵ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 63.

¹⁶ Lowe, 72; and Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*, 35-36.

¹⁷ Quoted in Lowe, 72.

¹⁸ Stieglitz quoted by E. M. Benson, "Alfred Stieglitz: The Man and the Book," *The American Magazine of Art* 28, no. 1 (January 1925): 36-42; cited in Sarah Greenough, "The Key Set," in *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set: the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Gallery of Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2002), xiv, n. 28.

¹⁹ Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 32.

²⁰ Richardson's words are paraphrased in Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: An Art Theorist of the Enlightenment* (New Haven & London: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2000), 166.

²¹ Lansdowne ms 802 British Library, London, j Urania, "Mira . . . suoi disegni . . . e vedrai da qual mente uscirono parti così luminosi." Resta's album at the British Museum is quoted in Genevieve Warwick, *The Arts of Collecting: Padre Sebastiano Resta and the Market for Drawings in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 172-173.

²² Goethe to Eckermann, July 5, 1827, in Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethe on Art*, ed. and trans. John Gage (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 74. The work of Goethe's that Stieglitz admired the most was *Faust*. In 1916 Stieglitz sent a copy to Georgia O'Keeffe as a present, inscribing the book, "When I/ was NINE I discovered Faust./ - It gave me quiet then./ I knew not why. - But it/ gave me quiet. - And I/ have lived since then - much/ & hard - & in consequence/ suffered so that I could not/ suffer anymore. - Faust/ quieted me in such despairing/ moments - always - /And as I grew it seemed to/ also grow. - It is a Friend./ - Like the Lake. - / - To one who, without/ knowing, has given me much at/ a time when I needed Faust +/ Lake. - 1916." Ruth E. Fine, "Georgia O'Keeffe's Library," in Ruth E. Fine, Elizabeth Glassman, and Juan Hamilton, *The Book Room: Georgia O'Keeffe's Library in Abiquiu* (Santa Fe and New York: Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation and the Grolier Club, 1997), 34. I have no proof that Stieglitz read Goethe's letters to Eckermann, but there were several published versions in German available in the late nineteenth century, so he could easily have done so.

²³ Joseph Meder, *The Mastery of Drawing*, trans. and revised Winslow Ames, revised ed. (New York: Abaris Books, Inc., 1978), 16.

²⁴ Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*, 16-17.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

²⁶ Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 17.

²⁷ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 65-67.

²⁸ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 24-25.

²⁹ Stieglitz quoted in *ibid*, 26.

³⁰ Stieglitz quoted in *ibid*.

³¹ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 16.

³² Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 21

³³ Stieglitz's account quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 27-29; and Stieglitz's account quoted in Dorothy Norman, "Writings and Conversation of Alfred Stieglitz," *Twice a Year* 1 (Fall-Winter 1938), 93-94.

³⁴ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 76.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 74.

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- ³⁶ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 94-95. For a bibliography of Alfred Stieglitz's published writings, see Sarah Greenough's compilation "Chronological Bibliography of the Published Writings of Alfred Stieglitz," *Stieglitz on Photography*, 257-274.
- ³⁷ Greenough, "The Key Set," xiv.
- ³⁸ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 30.
- ³⁹ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 74.
- ⁴⁰ Greenough, "The Key Set," xv.
- ⁴¹ Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*, 66; and Lowe, 75.
- ⁴² For Stieglitz's youthful European travels and the photographs he produced during them, see William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, A New York Graphic Society Book (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983), 11-13; and Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*, 64-86. For the resemblance of Stieglitz's early travel photographs to contemporary German academic painting, see Greenough, "The Key Set," xv-xvi.
- ⁴³ Lowe, 75.
- ⁴⁴ Greenough, "Key Set," xvi.
- ⁴⁵ Weston Naef, "Daguerre, Talbot, and the Crucible of Drawing," *Aperture* 125 (Fall 1992), 10-15.
- ⁴⁶ Daguerreotypes were inherently unique originals that could be photographically copied only by making photographs of them, which reversed and degraded the duplicate image. Talbot, however, soon devised means for printing multiples of his photographs from negatives, thus making his process more akin to printmaking from matrices. See Lois Olcott Price, "The Development of Photomechanical Book Illustration," in *The American Illustrated Book in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Gerald W. R. Ward (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1987), 237-238.
- ⁴⁷ Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 9,11.
- ⁴⁸ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 84-85.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 95, 97, 99.
- ⁵⁰ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 86.
- ⁵¹ Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, Publishers, 1997), 228-229.
- ⁵² Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 87; and Rosenblum, *World History of Photography*, 236-239.
- ⁵³ Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art and The Death of Naturalistic Photography*, reprint of 3d ed., *The Literature of Photography*, (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 30.
- ⁵⁴ Alfred Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography," *Scribners* 26 (1899), reprinted in Alfred Stieglitz, *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, comp. and annotated Richard Whelan (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 2000), 103.
- ⁵⁵ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 99-100.

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- ⁵⁶ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 35; and Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 95-97.
- ⁵⁷ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 103-104.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 104-106.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 138-139.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 125-126.
- ⁶¹ Ann Prentice Wagner, "The Graver, the Brush, and the Ruling Machine: The Training of Late-Nineteenth-Century Wood Engravers," *The Cultivation of Artists in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Georgia Brady Barnhill, Diana Korzenik, and Caroline F. Sloat (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1997), 165. Also see Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1885-1905* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 4:4-5; and David Woodward, "The Decline of Commercial Wood-Engraving in Nineteenth-century America," *Journal of the Printing Historical Society* 10 (1974-75): 77.
- ⁶² Price, "The Development of Photomechanical Book Illustration," 233-255.
- ⁶³ See Frank French, "Wood-Engravers in Camp," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 16 (1889): 569-575.
- ⁶⁴ Clinton Adams, *American Lithographers, 1900-1960: The Artists and Their Printers* (Albuquerque, NM: The University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 5-13.
- ⁶⁵ Lowe, 98.
- ⁶⁶ Greenough, "The Key Set," xvii; and Lowe, 99; and Richard Whelan, *Stieglitz on Photography*, 25.
- ⁶⁷ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, 39.
- ⁶⁸ Stieglitz quoted in *ibid*, 36.
- ⁶⁹ Judith Walsh, "Innovation in Homer's Late Watercolors," in *Winslow Homer*, Nicolai Jr. Cikovsky, and Franklin Kelly (Washington, D.C., New Haven, CT and London: National Gallery of Art and Yale University Press, 1995), 283-299.
- ⁷⁰ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 111.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid*, 139, 145.
- ⁷² *Ibid*, 192-193.
- ⁷³ Alfred Stieglitz, "An Apology," *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903):15-16.
- ⁷⁴ Emerson, *The Death of Naturalistic Photography*, not paginated.
- ⁷⁵ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography*, 92.
- ⁷⁶ J. Wells Champney, "Relation of Photography to Art," *Camera Notes* 1, no. 4 (April 1898): 93.
- ⁷⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, "Our Illustrations," *Camera Work* 32 (October 1910): 47.

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- ⁷⁸ F. Holland Day, "Art and the Camera," *Camera Notes* 2, no. 1 (July 1898): 3.
- ⁷⁹ For example, Otto Walter Beck, "Some Lessons from the Old Masters," *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903): 49-52; and Otto Walter Beck, "Lessons from the Old Masters II," *Camera Work* 3 (July 1903): 27-31. Rembrandt occurs as an example in many other articles in *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*.
- ⁸⁰ Frederick H. Evans, "Pros and Cons," *Camera Work* 8 (October 1904): 25.
- ⁸¹ Eva Watson-Schütze, "Salon Juries," *Camera Work* 2 (April 1903): 47.
- ⁸² Joseph Pennell, "Is Photography Among the Fine Arts?," *Contemporary Review* (1897): 824-836.
- ⁸³ Frederick H. Evans, "Pros and Cons," *Camera Work* 7 (July 1904): 21.
- ⁸⁴ J. Nilsen Laurvik, "Alfred Stieglitz, Pictorial Photographer," *The International Studio* XLIV, no. 174 (1911): xxvii.
- ⁸⁵ Eva Watson-Schütze, "Signature," *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903): 35-36.
- ⁸⁶ Robert Demachy, "The Gum-Print," *Camera Work* 7 (July 1904): 34-35.
- ⁸⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, "Notes," *Camera Notes* 2, no. 2 (October 1898): 54.
- ⁸⁸ Greenough, "Key Set," xx.
- ⁸⁹ "After many practical experiments I found the closest truth to nature in PHOTOGRAPHY (*from the psychological point of view*) was to be obtained by throwing the background of the picture out of focus to an extent which did not produce *destruction* of structure – that was my limit; the principal object of the picture being either sharp or just out of the 'sharp.' This convention I termed the naturalistic method of focusing." Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography*, 171.
- ⁹⁰ Richard Whelan, notes on "From *American Annual of Photography and Photographic Times Almanac for 1899*," in *Stieglitz on Photography*, 100.
- ⁹¹ Otto Walter Beck, "Some Lessons from the Old Masters," *Camera Work* 1 (January 1903): 49-50.
- ⁹² Charles H. Caffin, *Photography as a Fine Art*, reprint ed. (New York: American Photographic Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), 106.
- ⁹³ Sadakichi Hartmann, "Portrait Painting and Portrait Photography," *Camera Notes* 3, no. 1 (July 1899): 18.
- ⁹⁴ Sadakichi Hartmann, "A Walk Through the Exhibition of the Photographic Section of the American Institute," *Camera Notes* 2, no. 3 (January 1899): 86-89.
- ⁹⁵ Sadakichi Hartmann, "A Few Reflections on Amateur and Artistic Photography," *Camera Notes* 2, no. 2 (October 1898): 44.
- ⁹⁶ See Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Clouds," 31-32.
- ⁹⁷ Penelope Niven, *Steichen: a Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1997), 74-75.
- ⁹⁸ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 1-74; and Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1963), not paginated.

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- ⁹⁹ Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, not paginated.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ See Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Clouds," 30.
- ¹⁰² Steichen to Stieglitz, c. 1901, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁰³ Stieglitz to Emmeline Stieglitz, May 1900, quoted in Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 167; citing Nancy Newhall, *From Adams to Stieglitz: Pioneers of Modern Photography* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1989), 118-119. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁰⁴ Penelope Niven notes that "In the *Photogram Essay*, the word *lowly* was used; in *Camera Notes*, it became *hourly*. Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 141.
- ¹⁰⁵ Eduard J. Steichen, "The American School," *Camera Notes* 6, no. 1 (July 1902), 22, reprinting an article from the British photographic journal *Photogram* (January 1901).
- ¹⁰⁶ Whelan, notes on "From *Century Magazine* 44 (1902)," *Stieglitz on Photography*, 148.
- ¹⁰⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, "The 'Champs de Mars' Salon and Photography," *Camera Notes* 6, no. 1 (July 1902): 50.
- ¹⁰⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, "Postscript. – May 10th," *Camera Notes* 6, no. 1 (July 1902): 51.
- ¹⁰⁹ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 139.
- ¹¹⁰ Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 32-33.
- ¹¹¹ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 134.
- ¹¹² Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*, 49-55.
- ¹¹³ Ibid, 55-56.
- ¹¹⁴ Jonathan Green, "Introduction," *Camera Work, a Critical Anthology* (New York: Aperture, 1973), 11-13.
- ¹¹⁵ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 179-180.
- ¹¹⁶ Charles H. Caffin, "Eduard J. Steichen's Work. – An Appreciation," and Sadakichi Hartmann, under the pseudonym of Sidney Allan, "A Visit to Steichen's Studio," *Camera Work* 2 (April 1903), 21-24, and 25-28.
- ¹¹⁷ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 195-203.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid, 204-205.
- ¹¹⁹ Edward Steichen to René d'Harnoncourt, interview transcript 8, Edward Steichen Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York, quoted in Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 205.
- ¹²⁰ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 205-206.
- ¹²¹ Ibid, 205.

¹²² Ibid, 206-207.

¹²³ Alfred Stieglitz, "Photo-Seession Notes: The Photo-Seession Galleries," *Camera Work* 14 (April 1906), 48.

¹²⁴ Marsden Hartley, "291 – And the Brass Bowl," *America and Alfred Stieglitz: a Collective Portrait*, ed. Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld, and Harold Rugg (New York: Doubleday, 1934), 236-237.

¹²⁵ For the influence of Whistler on Stieglitz and the Photo-Seession, see Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Clouds," 30; and Greenough, "Key Set," xxi.

¹²⁶ See Robert H. Getscher, *The Stamp of Whistler* (Oberlin, OH: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, 1977); and Linda Merrill, Robyn Asleson, Lee Glazer, Lacey Taylor Jordon, John Siewert, Marc Simpson, and Sylvia Yount, *After Whistler: the Artist and His Influence on American Painting* (Atlanta, GA, and New Haven, CT and London: High Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2003).

¹²⁷ This is clear to anyone who has read through *Camera Work*, but Charles Brock of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., has verified the fact and made a listing of all of the many mentions of Whistler in the journal.

¹²⁸ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 47, 92; Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Seession*, 86; and Lacey Taylor Jordan, "Eduard J. Steichen," in *After Whistler*, 224.

¹²⁹ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 84-86; and Estelle Jussim, *Slave to Beauty: the Eccentric Life and Controversial Career of F. Holland Day: Photographer, Publisher, Aesthete* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1981), 6, 97-98.

¹³⁰ Deanna Marohn Bendix, *Diabolical Designs: Paintings, Interiors, and Exhibitions of James McNeill Whistler* (Washington, D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 233.

¹³¹ Ibid, 208, 227, 234, 237- 239, 242-243, 245-246, 263.

¹³² Ibid, 219-249.

¹³³ Ibid, 232-236.

¹³⁴ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 207-208.

¹³⁵ Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Seession*, 118-122.

¹³⁶ Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 208-209.

¹³⁷ Patricia G. Berman, *Modern Hieroglyphs: Gestural Drawings and the European Vanguard 1900-1918* (Wellesley, MA: Davis Museum and Cultural Center Wellesley College, 1995), 14.

¹³⁸ Anne McCauley, "Auguste Rodin, 1908-1910: The Eternal Feminine," in Sarah E. Greenough, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 71-74.

¹³⁹ Steichen, *A Life in Photography*.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

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- ¹⁴¹ Melinda Boyd Parsons, "Pamela Colman Smith and Alfred Stieglitz: Modernism at 291," *History of Photography* 20, no. 4 (1996): 285, 287.
- ¹⁴² Parsons, "Pamela Colman Smith and Alfred Stieglitz," 285.
- ¹⁴³ Alfred Stieglitz, "The Editors' Page," *Camera Work* 18 (April 1907): 37.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁵ See "The Photo-Seession: List of Members," *Camera Work* 3 (July 1903): 13-14.
- ¹⁴⁶ Alfred Stieglitz to Stanton MacDonald Wright, October 9, 1919, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁴⁷ Sarah Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas," in *Modern Art and America*, 28-29.
- ¹⁴⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, "The Rodin Drawings at the Photo-Seession Galleries," *Camera Work* 22 (April 1908): 35.
- ¹⁴⁹ Georgia O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), not paginated.
- ¹⁵⁰ J. N. Laurvik, *New York Times*, reprinted in *Camera Work* 22 (April 1908): 36.
- ¹⁵¹ Royal Cortissoz, *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Camera Work* 22 (April 1908): 40.
- ¹⁵² McCauley, "Auguste Rodin, 1908-1910," 75-76.
- ¹⁵³ Steichen, *A Life in Photography*.
- ¹⁵⁴ Gertrude Stein, "And now – and so the time comes when I can tell the story of my life," *Vanity Fair* (September 1934): 35, 65.
- ¹⁵⁵ Steichen to Stieglitz, January 1908, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. George Of was a New York artist and framer who became associated with the Stieglitz circle. He lent his small oil painting *Nude in the Forest* by Matisse to the exhibition. See John Caumann, "Henri Matisse, 1908, 1910, and 1912: New Evidence of Life," in *Modern Art and America*, 84.
- ¹⁵⁶ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 238-239.
- ¹⁵⁷ Alfred Stieglitz, "Henri Matisse at the Little Galleries," *Camera Work* 23 (July 1908): 10-12.
- ¹⁵⁸ Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Seession*, 126.
- ¹⁵⁹ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 255-256.
- ¹⁶⁰ Stieglitz, "Photo-Seession Notes," *Camera Work* 33 (January 1911): 46.
- ¹⁶¹ Homer, *Stieglitz and the Photo-Seession*, 140-141.
- ¹⁶² Alfred Stieglitz, "Photo-Seession Notes," *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 54.
- ¹⁶³ The new location of the Little Galleries of the Photo-Seession was at 293 Fifth Avenue, although the gallery continued to be called 291. Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 241-244.

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- ¹⁶⁴ “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz, 1905-1946,” in Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL., 543-545.
- ¹⁶⁵ Ruth E. Fine and Elizabeth Glassman, “Thoughts Without Words: O’Keeffe in Context,” in *O’Keeffe on Paper* (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, 2000), 19.
- ¹⁶⁶ Steichen, *A Life in Photography*.
- ¹⁶⁷ Steichen to Stieglitz, autumn 1909, Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.
- ¹⁶⁸ Steichen to Stieglitz, May 1908, Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.
- ¹⁶⁹ On Frueh and Stieglitz’s interest in his work, see Wendy Wick Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America* (Washington, D.C., New Haven, CT and London: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in association with Yale University Press, 1998), 103-127.
- ¹⁷⁰ Alfred Stieglitz, “Photo-Secession Notes,” *Camera Work* 41 (January 1913): 24.
- ¹⁷¹ Charles Brock, “Pablo Picasso, 1911: An Intellectual Cocktail,” in *Modern Art and America*, 118. Burgess is perhaps best remembered as the author of the nonsense poem “The Purple Cow,” “the most widely quoted poem of the 1890s.” Stieglitz must have taken keen delight in poking fun at his own pretensions by showing the art of the “Purple Cow Man.” On Burgess and his comic poetry see John Wenke, “Gelett Burgess,” *American Humorists, 1800-1950, Part 1: A-L* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1982), 11: 68-76.
- ¹⁷² Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America*, 78, 85.
- ¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 95-99.
- ¹⁷⁴ Kirk Varnedoe, “Rodin’s Drawings: Life Drawings and Watercolors,” in *Rodin Rediscovered*, Albert Elsen ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 179.
- ¹⁷⁵ Frank Jewett Mather, from the *Evening Post* reprinted in *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 50.
- ¹⁷⁶ Henry Tyrrell, in the *New York Evening World*, reprinted in *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911): 47.
- ¹⁷⁷ Jill Kyle, “Paul Cézanne, 1911: Nature Reconstructed,” in *Modern Art and America*, 101-111.
- ¹⁷⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, “The Exhibitions at ‘291:’ Cézanne Exhibition,” *Camera Work* 36 (October 1911): 30.
- ¹⁷⁹ Kyle, “Paul Cézanne,” 111-113.
- ¹⁸⁰ McCauley, “Edward Steichen,” 62-64.
- ¹⁸¹ Ruth E. Fine, *John Marin* (Washington and New York: National Gallery of Art and Abbeville Press, 1990), 31-45.
- ¹⁸² Steichen, *A Life in Photography*.
- ¹⁸³ Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife,” 30-31.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 30.
- ¹⁸⁵ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 241-242; and Doreen Bolger, “Hamilton Easter Field and His Contribution to American Modernism,” *The American Art Journal* XX, no. 2 (1988): 79-107.

¹⁸⁶ Marjorie Phillips, *Duncan Phillips and His Collection*, revised ed., (New York, London, and Washington, D.C.: W. W. Norton & Company in association with The Phillips Collection, 1982), 47.

¹⁸⁷ Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Clouds," 30.

¹⁸⁸ Edward Steichen, "Painting and Photography," *Camera Work* 23 (July 1908): 5.

¹⁸⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, "Photo-Secession Notes," *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910): 54.

¹⁹⁰ Greenough, , "Alfred Stieglitz's Photographs of Clouds," 71.

¹⁹¹ Stieglitz to Heinrich Kühn, October 14, 1912, in Sarah E. Greenough and Juan Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs & Writings*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, Bulfinch Press, Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 194. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

Chapter Two: The Formation of Georgia O’Keeffe’s Graphic Art

O’Keeffe’s Early Childhood Drawings and Watercolors

Having explored in my first chapter the cultures of drawing and watercolor as they evolved in Stieglitz’s life and in the Stieglitz circle prior to O’Keeffe’s arrival, I will now turn to the formation of O’Keeffe’s own cultures of drawings and watercolor before she joined the Stieglitz circle. In striving to understand the content and workings of O’Keeffe’s particular brand of modernist graphic culture, I will consider how she encountered and accepted or resisted various aspects of graphic art, both technical and theoretical.

O’Keeffe’s physical skills and attendant ideas about art media developed over the years as she learned to draw and to make watercolors. She began making art as a child in the context of her family. Therefore, her first exposure to art was shaped by the social forces at work within her family and the society in which they moved. Her mother Ida, the daughter of an aristocratic Hungarian immigrant, had high aspirations for her family. Despite living on a remote farm outside of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, the O’Keeffes arranged for Georgia and their other daughters to learn art and music. Ida O’Keeffe did not allow a marriage to a land-rich but poorly educated Irish-American farmer, Francis Calixtus O’Keeffe, to stand in the way of her children’s gentility.¹ According to O’Keeffe’s younger sister Catherine, “Georgia always said ‘Our mother had an awfully good opinion of herself and she wanted all the rest of us to be the same way.’”² Art and music were both weapons Ida O’Keeffe deployed against class anxiety. Surely, she must

have hoped, artistic sensitivity would help the O’Keeffe children to gravitate toward the higher end of the family scale of class.³ As Benita Eisler states, “In such a family, music, art, and books became a fortress . . . against the cultural poverty of the father and the barbarians at the door.”⁴

O’Keeffe’s gender, a factor that would strongly shape the reception of her modern art in the Stieglitz circle, also dictated much about the meaning of her art when she was a child. Helena E. Wright observes that in nineteenth-century America, “Women were thought to have a natural aptitude for sketching and decoration, and drawing was a regular component of upper- and middle-class women’s education.”⁵ Traditionally, such training in the arts was designed not to prepare young ladies for professions but to give them cultural accomplishments suitable to the proper home life of their class.⁶ As Wright notes, “there was a general belief in art as an agent of cultural improvement, made even more compelling if it came from the hands of the gentler sex.”⁷ O’Keeffe’s maternal and paternal grandmothers both set a proper example by engaging in the polite art of flower painting.⁸ For young Georgia O’Keeffe, however, art would take on promise beyond this tradition.

When O’Keeffe was eleven years old she and her younger sisters began taking drawing lessons from the teacher who also taught their regular academic classes at the little Town Hall School in Sun Prairie.⁹ O’Keeffe said that the teacher “had us each get a Prang Drawing Book. There was something about the perspective of a cube, and I remember once shading a sphere – copying it from the book. I did a drawing of a spray of oats that I thought was pretty good, compared with the drawing in the book.”¹⁰ Already, the young O’Keeffe was developing great pride in her skill as a draftsman;

here was a field that she could make her own. Her joy and confidence in these skills, as she polished and elaborated on them through the years, would be at the core of her art for her entire long career. Drawing was her central artistic technique long before she had any opportunity to paint in oils.

At this first stage of her training O’Keeffe learned from one of a series of drawing instruction books published by the Prang Educational Company, formed by chromolithographer Louis Prang in 1882.¹¹ Many school systems used the Prang books or other similar texts to add art to their regular curricula. These schools justified the study of art not only as cultivating an appreciation for beauty but also as introductory study for potential industrial designers and other art workers.¹² Therefore, O’Keeffe’s initial training in drawing positioned her either to follow in the footsteps of her flower-painting grandmothers or to start on the path, newly opened to women, of the professional worker in the applied arts. It was far more difficult and rarer for women to become professionals in art fields than it was for men, yet many women managed to do so. Training by family members and in design schools helped women to find careers in lithography, metal engraving, wood engraving, etching, illustration, poster design, and the design of such decorative items as fabrics, wallpaper, carpets, and furniture.¹³

As O’Keeffe trained in art and then emerged as a professional early in the twentieth century, she reaped the benefits of the generation of ambitious women art students and professional artists who had preceded her, establishing the propriety of art as a career for middle-class women. As Kirsten Swinth notes, “A modern, twentieth-century and avant-garde art world would be profoundly shaped by late-nineteenth-century women’s urgent desire to become artists.”¹⁴ Mrs. O’Keeffe’s propriety and desire for her

family's gentility did not prevent her from taking an interest in potential economic independence for her daughters. Before she married she had aspired to become a doctor. She presumably supported the decisions of her daughters to seek professional training in fields including art, teaching, and nursing. She cherished hopes that all of her children would attend college.¹⁵ O'Keeffe's sister Catherine observed that their mother "wanted us all to be educated so we could take care of ourselves."¹⁶ The idea that one or more of the O'Keeffe daughters might one day look to art as a means of support may have occurred to the O'Keeffes even at this early stage of their daughters' training.

The Prang drawing books started numerous young men and women of O'Keeffe's generation toward art careers. The books comprised a series of lessons, most including a printed picture, instructions for the student on how to copy the picture, and a blank area for the student's drawing. In addition there were spaces for exercises labeled "dictation," for drawing from spoken instruction, and "black board," for drawing from examples drawn by the teacher (Fig. 2.1). Students began with straight lines, and then progressed to angles, curves, and the assembly of these elements into increasingly complex figures. From plane geometry they advanced to rendering three-dimensional shapes in perspective, using these skills to depict such common objects as doors, pitchers, and flowers. Occasionally the more advanced texts directed students to create decorative designs analogous to the models they had copied.¹⁷ The O'Keeffe girls would not have gotten so far as the creation of original designs, however, in the few months that they studied from the Prang books.

Prang drawing books advised teachers to provide three-dimensional objects so that rather than only copying from the printed two-dimensional models students would

learn to draw from life.¹⁸ The company sold wooden geometric solids and suggested the use of real objects such as plants for models. O’Keeffe’s first teacher, Mrs. Zed Edson, remembered that her sister Belle, O’Keeffe’s second teacher, was “a natural artist” who at times “would take a sprig from a tree, a leaf, or if fortunate, a blossom, and arrange it for the pupils to draw and enlarge.”¹⁹ There is no evidence that the teacher had geometric solids at hand, however, and most of the time the young O’Keeffes probably simply copied the illustrations from their Prang books as they worked at the dinner table on winter nights.²⁰

Drawing as O’Keeffe first learned it apparently required mainly concentration and physical facility. The exercises in the books cultivated hand-eye coordination applied to the task of making properly proportioned and shaped two-dimensional copies of two- and three-dimensional models. Copying and occasional drawing of objects from life was O’Keeffe’s first exposure to the academic tradition of drawing which would shape her training and her art for many years. Such training was widespread in America and in Europe, following the traditional academic regimen that established students’ skills first in two-dimensional copying and then in the interpretation of three-dimensional models into two dimensions. This hand-eye coordination began O’Keeffe’s development of the technical skills and discipline that would eventually allow her to create a style of modernism dependent on strong physical crafting.

Judging from the student drawings in surviving Prang drawing books in the Mary Margaret Sittig Collection in the Archives of American Art, whose examples come from a variety of schools²¹ not including O’Keeffe’s, many students working in Prang books drew in hard, light pencil. These students gave most attention to faithfulness of shape

rather than expression or grace. They erased and redrew portions of the exercises until the shapes were approximately correct without regard for whether the outlines had any flow or conviction. Since O’Keeffe’s Prang book does not survive, it is impossible to know how her own exercise drawings differed from these examples.

The plan of instruction in the Prang books gave students years of physical practice to gain technical facility before they were considered ready to create original designs. This model of training the hand before the mind, building up facility in copying before practicing creativity, dominated traditional art instruction from grade school up through the level of such formal art academies as the National Academy of Design. This was the kind of training that would rule during O’Keeffe’s long apprenticeship in drawing and watercolor until she encountered a contrasting approach to art education at the University of Virginia in 1912. In the meantime, the young girl who labored, pencil in hand, may have had no clear idea of when or if she would emerge from her training qualified to make her own original designs.

Outside of classes, O’Keeffe exercised her ideas that she could not wait to try out until her teachers judged her ready. Drawing served not only her teachers but the girl herself. Being the most direct, simple, and accessible of media, it was her natural outlet outside of school. These same factors would help to lead O’Keeffe back to drawing when she began moving toward modernism many years later. As a young girl, perhaps before she started taking drawing lessons, O’Keeffe recalled making a drawing on a brown paper bag rather than on the clean white paper a teacher would have provided. The artist said,

The first thing I can remember drawing was a picture of a man lying on his back with his feet up in the air. He was about two inches long, 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. His nose and eyes were worked out in profile – a bit too big for the rest of him. I tried to draw him standing and bending over. The fact that I tried to draw him bending over makes me think that that I must have drawn many figures standing straight before my effort to make this one bend. I worked at it intensely – probably as hard as I ever worked at anything in my life. There was something wrong about his knees. I couldn't make the legs bend right at both hips and knees. When I had the man with his legs only bent at the hips, he just wasn't balanced right. I turned the paper bag around and saw that he did look right as a man lying on his back with his feet straight up in the air. That was a surprise! I thought it a very funny position for a man, but after all my effort it gave me a feeling of real achievement to have made something – even if it wasn't what I had intended.²²

This story typifies the emotionally-charged memories the mature O'Keeffe retained of drawing when she was a child. Long after she had forgotten many particulars, such as the details of other drawings of figures she had made before this one, O'Keeffe recalled her emotions of frustration, surprise, and triumph experienced while making this drawing. Her investment of ambition and labor in such works, too, remained with her. O'Keeffe recalled how hard she worked for her own satisfaction, with no need for a teacher to direct her efforts. In the 1910s, she would find new ways to use this independent mode of graphic exploration outside the classroom.

For Perry Miller Adato's documentary film, the elderly O'Keeffe described the process through which she conceived her images, whether abstract or representational, throughout her artistic career, "I can see shapes. It's as if my mind creates shapes that I don't know about. I can't say it any other way; that I get this shape in my head. And sometimes I know where it comes from and sometimes I don't."²³ From her childhood throughout her career until her old age, O'Keeffe drew to capture and begin working with these mental shapes. At all stages of her career drawing helped O'Keeffe to communicate with herself before she tried to communicate with other viewers.

Whether she was a child or an adult, making drawings was clearly of great importance to her. From the first, O’Keeffe used drawing to solve the visual problems that stimulated or perplexed her. In her mind she created an image and then with her pencil transferred the conception into the physical world where it had to become specific and concrete in her drawing. Once she had put her vision on paper any weaknesses emerged. In this case of drawing a bending man, the deficiencies in a small child’s knowledge of human anatomy were obvious even to her. One can only wonder whether she showed this early effort to her parents and perhaps won the recognition that led the artist to save the scrap of paper bag, or whether her own investment of time and effort was sufficient to make the work precious to her.

The adult O’Keeffe, like the child, drew to examine and perfect the mental images that were the templates for her art. The mature O’Keeffe told an interviewer, “I make little drawings that have no meaning for anyone but me. They usually get lost when I don’t need them anymore. If you saw them, you’d wonder what those few little marks meant, but they do mean something to me.”²⁴ As an adult, some of her initial sketches were as simple and crude as childish scribbles, seemingly made in a rush to catch a fleeting phenomenon she saw before her or inside her own mind. A rough 1916 pencil drawing, the basis for a series of watercolors and oils, is an excellent example (Fig. 2.2). While on a camping trip, O’Keeffe may have sketched the opening of a tent to fix her memory of this simple triangular shape that caught her eye as an abstract shape transcending its specific physical origin. The awkward lines of the drawing, with the artist obviously struggling to get the shapes even approximately correct and not bothering with any degree of grace or finish, makes me envision a disheveled O’Keeffe drawing on

a scrap of paper supported on her knee or whatever irregular surface was available in the dim tent.

Much as the adult O’Keeffe strove to get her mental images onto paper so she could mould them into a modernist mode, the child O’Keeffe labored to bring her mental shapes into line with the traditional modes of art she knew at that early age. The scope of art the girl knew was discouragingly narrow. She saw little visual art beyond the few paintings on the walls of family homes and the illustrations in her family’s books and magazines. She recalled, “The portraits in the house didn’t interest me enough to have made me think I would enjoy making them.” The graphic media of illustration interested her more. As a small child she enjoyed the pictures in a Mother Goose book.²⁵ She saw more illustrations in the evenings when Mrs. O’Keeffe read to Georgia and her siblings “travel stories and history – *The Life of Hannibal*, *Stanley’s Adventures in Africa*, all *The Leatherstocking Tales*, *The Bible*, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Arabian Nights*, and *The Life of Kit Carson*.”²⁶ I do not know which editions of these popular books the O’Keeffe family owned, but at least some of them would have been illustrated with steel engravings or wood engravings that reproduced linear drawings. One can imagine the illustrations catching the child O’Keeffe’s eye as visualizations of the exciting tales she enjoyed.

When she was in the eighth grade, O’Keeffe told another child of her aspirations for when she grew up, “I am going to be an artist.” It was a strange decision, since she knew so little about what artists did. O’Keeffe continued,

I don’t really know where I got my artist idea. The scraps of what I remember do not explain to me where it came from. I only know that by that time it was definitely settled in my mind. I hadn’t seen many pictures and I hadn’t a desire to make anything like the pictures I had seen. But in one of my mother’s books I had found a drawing of a girl that I thought very beautiful. The title under it was “Maid of Athens.” It was a very ordinary pen-and-ink drawing about two

inches high. For me, it just happened to be something special – so beautiful. Maybe I could make something beautiful . . . I think my feeling wasn't as articulate as that, but I believe that picture started something moving in me that kept going and has had to do with the everlasting urge that makes me keep on painting.²⁷

The illustration the child saw, of course, was not actually a drawing; it was a printed reproduction of one. Engravings and other prints were the professional graphic art works that O'Keeffe could see, while pencil, ink, and watercolors were the graphic media that she could use herself. She did not yet understand the connection between her own drawings and the printed illustrations that reproduced original drawings made by professional illustrators. She later recalled that as a child, "The idea of being an illustrator didn't mean much to me. I never associated my idea of being an artist with illustrations in books that we had." When practical-minded adults pressed her to specify what kind of artist she wanted to be, she guessed at the profession of portrait painter.²⁸ While her skills were helping O'Keeffe to prepare for a day when she might support herself, she was as yet far from facing the choice of how she would make her living. Perhaps having heard from some adult that important art was in the form of paintings, she wanted to paint even while the only art she had ever actually made was graphic. The prestige of painting was already established in her mind.

The year after O'Keeffe and her sister took their first drawing lessons they advanced to being driven into town once each week to take art lessons from a local watercolorist named Sarah Mann. Mrs. Mann kept a pile of prints, probably the engravings, lithographs, and chromolithographs most common at the time, for the children to copy in watercolor. O'Keeffe remembered copying a print of Pharaoh's horses and another of large red roses.²⁹ Mrs. Mann's lessons continued the familiar

copying of two-dimensional models, made less arid by the addition of color and the use of a new medium that would be important for the mature O’Keeffe. She recalled these sessions as “the beginning with watercolor.”³⁰ Color opened up myriad new possibilities for the young artist that she would be exploring for the rest of her career. Color also made the girl’s works attractive and important to her family. Her mother framed some of these early watercolors and hung them on the walls of the O’Keeffe home.³¹

O’Keeffe’s Studies at the Sacred Heart Academy

In the autumn of 1901, the thirteen-year-old O’Keeffe began attending a boarding convent school, the Sacred Heart Academy, outside Madison, Wisconsin. With this move outside the family circle, O’Keeffe took her drawing skills to a more demanding and public level. Her parents paid an extra twenty dollars for her studies there to include art. They must have understood that their daughter enjoyed art and presumably they wanted to encourage her in this appropriate feminine pastime. The O’Keeffes may also have begun to realize that their oldest daughter might one day make her living with her art.³² While it seems doubtful that O’Keeffe’s parents were so ambitious as to envision their daughter’s becoming a professional painter, they might have anticipated her becoming an art teacher or a commercial artist or illustrator, at least until she married. At the turn of the century, these were realistic career aspirations for an American woman. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, more and more women became professionals in a variety of fine and commercial art fields, ranging from free-lance reproductive wood engraving to portraiture in oils.³³ Anita Pollitzer said that, “In her youth . . . marriage never seems to have been discussed by her parents as the goal for Georgia. Mrs.

O’Keeffe and Georgia greatly admired those who succeeded in their chosen fields and in the early 1900s, to combine a career and marriage was unusual.”³⁴

By this time, O’Keeffe herself could have had a voice in deciding her own fate. O’Keeffe’s younger sister Catherine remembered Georgia as a forceful child whose desires had an impact in the household, “She was It. She had everything about her way, and if she didn’t she’d raise the devil.”³⁵ This may be the exaggerated memory of a jealous younger sibling, but in this case it seems that O’Keeffe’s desire for art training held sway despite the expense. O’Keeffe later dated her ambition to become an artist to about the eighth grade, while she was attending Sacred Heart Academy.³⁶ Perhaps the prominence of art depicting both sacred and secular subjects at the Academy impressed O’Keeffe, who would never have seen so much art before (Fig. 2.8). She may even have asked the nuns about what artists did. The nuns could have assured the child that there was nothing outrageous either socially or practically in her dreams of being an artist, although she would require much additional training.

At the Sacred Heart Academy, O’Keeffe took her drawing from three-dimensional objects to a higher level. It was also there that the teenaged O’Keeffe had her first chance to draw in charcoal. She said that she remembered wanting to take advantage of this new medium to make bolder, darker lines than she could with a pencil. However, the nun who instructed the child gave her a white plaster cast of a baby’s hand to draw and found O’Keeffe’s charcoal drawing of it much too black and small. The incident seemed to smart still when the artist recalled it decades later,

She particularly emphasized the fact that it was too small. At the time I thought she scolded me terribly. I was so embarrassed that it was difficult not to cry. The Sister sat down and drew a few light lines blocking in the way she thought the drawing should be started. It looked very strange to me – not at all beautiful like

my own drawing. I wasn't convinced that she was right, but I said to myself that I would never have that happen again. I would never, never draw anything too small. So I drew the hand a little bit larger than she suggested and that whole year never made a heavy black line again. I worked mostly with a fairly hard lead pencil and always drew everything a little larger and lighter than I really thought it should be.

When my drawings were put up on the wall for exhibition in June, there was a whole wall of the pale drawings of casts. The Sister wrote G. O'Keeffe on each of them in her big free hand – writing with a lead pencil so big and black on my pale drawings.³⁷

In O'Keeffe's autobiography, her emphasis on how she began to draw things large was connected, both here by the artist herself and elsewhere by authors like Daniel Catton Rich, to the well-known large paintings of flowers she made as a mature artist.³⁸ In this account, the artist emphasized her own rebellion against artistic restraints even as a child, to set up her later emergence as a modernist. This habit of tracing characteristics of O'Keeffe's mature art to earlier art is but a slight variation on Stieglitz's tendency I will discuss in the fifth chapter, to look back and find aspects of O'Keeffe's mature modernist paintings already appearing in her early modernist drawings.

The surviving drawings from 1901-1902 bear out O'Keeffe's recollections except that the only two surviving drawings of casts of hands are drawn in pencil rather than charcoal (Figs. 2.3-4).³⁹ Many of the surviving drawings from O'Keeffe's year at Sacred Heart are still bound into a sketchbook. Two drawings have been taken out of the sketchbook (Figs. 2.3, 2.5), presumably to allow them to be exhibited, marking the public debut of O'Keeffe's graphic art. The drawing of a basket has pin holes at the corners, perhaps from its being pinned up for public viewing. Both of these loose drawings bear the name "G. O'Keeffe" boldly added over erased lighter signatures, as do larger drawings of plaster casts that O'Keeffe probably also made at Sacred Heart (Figs. 2.6-7). The catalogue raisonné dates these large drawings of casts to 1905-1906, when O'Keeffe

was at the Chatham Episcopal Institute and the Art Institute of Chicago. The bust of Jesus in O’Keeffe’s drawing (Fig. 2.6) appears to be the same one that appears at the far right of a photograph of the art room at Sacred Heart Academy at about the time O’Keeffe was there, however, so it is possible that some or all of O’Keeffe’s surviving drawings of plaster casts may have been made during her years at Sacred Heart (Fig. 2.8).

While art instruction at the Sacred Heart Academy was far from the level of teaching at the National Academy of Design, the story of her embarrassment by the nun shows O’Keeffe’s drawing instruction beginning to advance into the more formal academic mode against which she would rebel in the 1910s when she became a modernist. Yet her modernist works, particularly her abstract charcoal drawings, utilized the same technical mastery of drawing media and representational approaches the artist had learned in academic studios. At Sacred Heart, in accordance with standard procedures in traditional art academies, O’Keeffe learned to use charcoal. She worked from sculptural casts and then her drawings and were critiqued in front of the class. Her works might have later been displayed to students, teachers, and possibly even to visitors to the school. Through such experiences O’Keeffe began to understand drawing as a public performance that could bring her either humiliation or triumph. What determined her success, such experiences told her, was how well she conformed to the demands of her teachers. Internally, she might disagree with the nun’s directions, but the young artist enjoyed the success and respect she gained from obedience. This conformity with the expectations of others became a deeply engrained part of O’Keeffe’s understanding of art making (though not, perhaps, how she *wanted* to make art). When, years later, she decided to become a modernist, this obedience to the wishes of authority figures was

something she was determined to root out of her art. As a mature artist, she would face emotional stresses because of the contradiction between the private experiences of personal expression in drawing and the public exhibition and criticism of the works she had created.

The child O’Keeffe, however, must have been proud when her drawing of a duck hunter was chosen for publication in the school catalogue at the end of the year. Her increasing excellence, and compliance, in drawing earned O’Keeffe a gold pin “for improvement in illustration and drawing.”⁴⁰ This striving for prizes and other forms of recognition further prepared O’Keeffe for the competitive practices of art academies, and, indeed, of commercial art galleries. Each drawing she made functioned in a particular context, be it to train the hand and eye, or to demonstrate her skills to the wider world.

Most of a student’s drawings fell into the context of training. Each introduced or practiced one or more visual principles. At Sacred Heart Academy the young O’Keeffe dutifully exercised her skills in perspective and shading in her drawings of such standard still life subjects as fruit and vegetables and geometric objects (Figs. 2.9-10). O’Keeffe seems to have developed a lasting love for the sensations of stroking graduated tones to create the illusion of solid objects and figures. Flowing surfaces of masterfully controlled modeling featured in most of her mature modern art, both in her 1915 charcoals and in later oils (Figs. 2.11, 3.1-11, 5.47-48). Other mechanical aspects of her school drawings, such as making neat patches of parallel diagonal shading lines behind the still life objects to throw their pale forms into relief, seem to have bored the skillful child. At times she let the ends of these shading lines trail off into playful zigzags that can be read as her earliest, if unintentional, expressive abstractions (Fig. 2.12). The young O’Keeffe gave

closer attention to depictions of teachers and fellow students at their desks (Fig. 2.13). The challenges of combining perspective, drapery, anatomy, shading, and even the rendering of human faces made such subjects far more interesting, but more difficult. Throughout her academic career these same problems loomed until she virtually eliminated literal depictions of the human figure in her modern works.

The most ambitious but least successful of O’Keeffe’s Sacred Heart Academy drawings are landscapes, some possibly drawn from life, in which she struggled and often failed to finish all the details and to keep the rendition of space consistent (Figs. 2.14). For the child O’Keeffe, drawing in school was becoming an ever more varied and exacting discipline. Not everything was easy for her, but she was determined to master all forms of drawing. When she drew on her own, away from the prying eyes of teachers, she did not shy away from landscapes even though they gave her such problems in school. Indeed, landscape would be a favored subject in her mature paintings.

She recalled,

By myself at home, I once copied a lighthouse from the geography book. I had never seen a lighthouse, but I drew one on a long point of land extending into the sea. Of course, I had never seen the sea either, but that didn’t matter. The paper was too empty so I drew a horizon line and then I put in some palm trees. I had never seen a palm tree – but I had looked at them with interest in my geography book. Two or three palm trees went waving in the air. The sky was still empty so I drew in the sun. I painted the sun yellow, the sky and waves blue – left the lighthouse white. My great difficulty was with the sun. It was only a yellow spot with a little pink in its rays. It looked dirty instead of bright and shining. The more yellow and pink I put on, the darker I made it. It didn’t know how else to paint the sun so I left it an unsatisfactory dirty yellow and pink. Then I made another lighthouse painting – this time with a cloudy sky. With the cloudy sky I could make the sun seem a little brighter (Fig. 2.15).⁴¹

Color introduced a higher level of challenge than what O’Keeffe was learning in school, but she gamely fought to make the picture she had envisioned. In the 1910s,

O'Keeffe would reenact this struggle as she again made the transition from black and white work to full color. In Texas in 1916 she chose to make a watercolor of the sun. It was only after years of work, and by use of modernist simplification that O'Keeffe was able to make a successful watercolor of this most brilliant of subjects (Fig. 2.16).

In such private works as her childhood watercolors of lighthouses, O'Keeffe dared to experiment by advancing from direct copying to the slightly more advanced mode of pastiche as she made new combinations based on various images from her book. In this way she learned to construct more complex pictures, both mentally and physically. For her, drawing continued to serve for both public execution of classroom exercises and for privately exploring her own ideas.

The next step she took in her own drawings was to use drawing as a medium for observing the world around her. Thus another major aspect of traditional drawing culture opened to her. Later she would repeat this battle when she integrated observation of nature into her approach to modernism. She remembered an early childhood work made from nature,

One winter night about this time [when she had made the lighthouse watercolors], I stood at the window upstairs looking out at a tall pointed spruce tree in the yard, and across the road a burr oak tree, black against the snow. Far across the field was the smaller outline of another big oak – beyond that a soft line of the woods. It is my first memory of night and snow – bright moonlight night and snow. I started to draw by the light of the lamp what I could remember of what I saw as I had looked out the window. When it was drawn, I didn't know what color to paint it. The bare trees were black against the snow in the moonlight – but dark blue had something to do with night. I put a little dark blue in the black of the tree. The distant trees were very difficult. So was the decision to make the strip of sky a sort of lavenderish grey. That was the color it seemed to be. I had left a big bare space of paper between the near tree and the far trees and woods. It was bare white paper – supposed to be snow – and at night snow isn't white, but it must be made to look white. I couldn't think of anything I could do about the snow, so I left it just white paper. Then it looked so empty that I painted the road passing the house – scratchy grey lines. Those two paintings –

the lighthouse with the cloudy sky and the night with bare trees and snow – must have been important to me because I kept them until a few years ago. They were the only really creative efforts of this period (Fig. 2.15, 2.17).⁴²

With these watercolors made outside of school, O’Keeffe used drawing as a private means both of exploring her visual world and testing her own capabilities. Her school work had left her unprepared for such technical problems as representing changing natural light. Being accustomed to depicting objects in the controlled conditions of the classroom, she was badly out of her depth using drawing to observe such sophisticated phenomena. Although she was not perfectly satisfied with them, it seems doubtful that these watercolors remained truly private for long after they were completed. It is difficult to imagine the child not showing her beautiful new watercolors to her parents and siblings or friends, even if the critical nun at Sacred Heart Academy never saw them. As she would do later with her first modernist drawings mailed to Anita Pollitzer and Alfred Stieglitz, the child used her graphic works as a special form of communication, eliciting emotional support for her artistic ventures into new territory.

As O’Keeffe continued to hone her skills, both at school and at home, she could measure her progress only by comparing her own works with other art she knew. Beyond drawings by her fellow students and teachers, presumably she compared her own fledgling works with the kinds of illustrations and prints that inspired her desire to become an artist. A steel engraving still tucked into the back of her sketchbook from this period is evidence of the kind of graphic art the young O’Keeffe saw and presumably admired. The engraving shows a woman riding toward some soldiers and pointing to warn them of danger. It was just the kind of romantic drama to inspire a teenaged girl.

O’Keeffe may have drawn copies of this picture and others like it, but no such copies survive.⁴³

O’Keeffe at Madison Public High School and Chatham Episcopal Institute

After her year at the Sacred Heart Academy, O’Keeffe lived with her aunt in Madison for a year, from 1902 to 1903, so that she could attend Madison Public High School.⁴⁴ She didn’t usually enjoy her art classes there, yet she paid attention when the teacher showed the class the details of jack-in-the-pulpit plants. This teacher might, O’Keeffe speculated, have “started me looking at things, very carefully at details. It was certainly the first time my attention was called to the outline and color of any growing thing with the idea of drawing or painting it.”⁴⁵ She was engaging more and more strongly with the great European academic tradition of drawing as a rational way of seeing and understanding objects. O’Keeffe’s increasing intensity of graphic observation would eventually charge with authority her mature modernist oil paintings of landscapes, flowers, and other subjects from nature.

In 1902 the O’Keeffe family moved from their farm in Wisconsin to a house in Williamsburg, Virginia, possibly hoping to escape the bitter mid-west winters and the tuberculosis that had killed O’Keeffe’s father’s brothers. After she rejoined her family in Virginia in 1903, O’Keeffe attended Chatham Episcopal Institute where the principal, Elizabeth Mae Willis, was also the art teacher.⁴⁶ The teacher’s high ambitions for her young students are visible in the impressive array of classical sculptural casts shown in the school’s studio as it was illustrated in the Institute’s catalogue.⁴⁷

Miss Willis recognized O’Keeffe’s talent and gave her freedom in class to work how and when she pleased, much to the annoyance of her jealous fellow students.⁴⁸

While most of the girls went no further than the genteel decorative art of china painting, O’Keeffe stood out as an accomplished fine artist. A classmate remembered that in the art studio, “Georgia was queen. We were amazed at what she could do. . . . Our eyes would widen in admiration to see Georgia take a pencil and draw a picture of a girl that was as like her as a photograph. . . . Georgia was the life of the studio as well as the queen. Her easel always stood in the center of the floor and was the high spot of interest.”⁴⁹

O’Keeffe basked in such admiration for her art. Drawing and watercolor brought her the joys of accomplishment. Recognition and practice combined to bolster her confidence in the very skills she would use later to establish herself as a modern artist. The mature artist looked at her childhood still lifes and commented, “I must have painted a great deal with watercolor by that time or I wouldn’t have had the freedom I had with that big sheet of white paper and the big brush I used. . . . I slapped my paint about quite a bit and didn’t care where it spilled.”⁵⁰ In watercolors of fruit and flowers, O’Keeffe’s broad, deft brushwork left behind the self-conscious tightness of her Sacred Heart Academy still life drawings (Figs. 2.18-19). At Chatham she grew accustomed to working in front of an audience led by a teacher who would praise rather than embarrass her. O’Keeffe was gaining the assurance she needed to explore and experiment in her “public” drawings and watercolors as she had previously done only in more “private” creations. The artist would retain this confidence in watercolor twelve years later when she chose it as her first color medium for modernism.

At home in the summer of 1904, O’Keeffe performed for her admiring family circle by drawing pencil portraits of her brothers and sisters. In the careful profile

drawings the young artist gave evidence of the conflicting ideals she derived from her instructors and illustrations and other images she saw around her. She erased and redrew the profiles repeatedly before she was satisfied. Drawings like the portrait of her sister Catherine O’Keeffe were made in the prettified mold of contemporary illustrations (Fig. 2.20). Others, however, like the portrait of her sister Ida, show closer study from life (Fig. 2.21). O’Keeffe was becoming aware of the choices an artist had to make between fitting in with publicly accepted styles and interpreting nature in her own way. She faced similar choices when she crafted her modernist idiom in the 1910s.

At Chatham Institute, O’Keeffe made what must have been one of her first oils, a painting of the Institute’s founder, the Reverend C. Orlando Pruden. This painting would have been O’Keeffe’s most public work to date, since it hung at the school after she left until it was destroyed in a 1906 fire.⁵¹ To this point, and for several years thereafter, O’Keeffe remained largely a graphic artist in practice, but her creation of this oil painting suggests that she may have had aspirations to become a painter rather than simply a drawing teacher or illustrator. This casts her drawing in a new light – as a skill not simply exercised for its own sake, but used to learn to paint and to prepare subjects for paintings.

Continuing the public emergence of her art, O’Keeffe became art editor of the Chatham Academy’s year book, the *Mortar Board*, for the 1904-1905 academic year.⁵² Her illustrations in crisp pen and ink include deft caricatures of teachers and an assortment of decorative figures (Fig. 2.22). An elegant little drawing of a woman’s head gives evidence of the young artist’s familiarity with the newly fashionable style of Art

Nouveau, which she would presumably have known through magazine illustrations, posters, and possibly furniture and decorative arts (Fig. 2.23).

O’Keeffe at the Art Institute of Chicago

Through the academic recognition and publication of her drawing and watercolor skills, O’Keeffe established solid artistic credentials in the eyes of her fellow students, her teachers, and her parents, as well as herself. Although family finances were strained due to business reverses suffered in Virginia, O’Keeffe’s parents paid for her to begin a formal academic art education. The young woman must have continued to emphasize to her parents that she had an ardent desire to study and work in the field of art, and her parents evidently wanted to do all they could to help their daughter. In the autumn of 1905, O’Keeffe traveled to Chicago where she lived with an aunt and uncle so that she could attend classes at the Art Institute of Chicago.⁵³ O’Keeffe’s parents evidently agreed with their daughter that her talent and facility were sufficient for her to have a realistic chance at an artistic career of some kind, possibly even as a fine artist. However, O’Keeffe and her parents did not necessarily have their sights set on that rare and difficult path. Many people bound to become illustrators, commercial artists, or art teachers took classes at the Art Institute and other major American academies of art.⁵⁴ Considering the lack of money in the family at this time, the O’Keeffes probably hoped that this accomplished daughter would soon pay back their support of her education by supporting herself with her art skills.

As a young woman, O’Keeffe was scarcely an oddity at the Art Institute. Women had been attending American art academies, with some of them going on to become professional artists, in increasing numbers since the end of the Civil War.⁵⁵ But

the Art Institute was a major change from O’Keeffe’s girlhood; no longer would her least efforts awe the other school girls. Now she entered a realm of talented and ambitious men and women who competed for the successes that would establish their professional careers. Leaving grade school where art classes merely imitated the traditions of art academies, she entered the arena of true academic art. This was an important social, aesthetic, and professional step. Painting and sculpture at the Art Institute was serious business. Now O’Keeffe had her first exposure to a good collection of fine art works in a variety of media by American and European artists.

For the first time in O’Keeffe’s training, drawing was merely a subsidiary technique within the sphere of painting or sculpture or architecture. Charcoal on paper was the chief medium for training young artists in anatomy and composition. For the mature artists they hoped to become, drawing would be the medium used in the studio to formulate motifs and to prepare designs for finished oil paintings or murals. One who drew at the Art Institute was not so much a draftsman as a student of painting or sculpture.

O’Keeffe recalled that her first drawing assignment at Chicago was a plaster cast of a large male torso. At the Sacred Heart Academy and the Chatham Episcopal Institute she had been accustomed to rendering casts with pale lines and shading to represent the white plaster (Fig. 2.6-7, 2.12). But when O’Keeffe noticed a young man’s drawing, she began to wonder if her background had misled her. “His [drawings],” she remembered, “looked much richer and livelier than mine – very black lines and shadows. Mine were pale and neat like those cast drawings I had made at the Convent. . . . He would criticize my drawings very solemnly and I thought he knew about it. He talked as if he did.”⁵⁶

Having studied previously with only fellow girls, she was perhaps easily over-awed by a young man.

O’Keeffe, however, eventually adapted to the larger scale and increased complexity of her assignments at the Art Institute. She discovered that even in this large, unfamiliar institution she could depend upon her drawing skills. She had only to work hard and build upon what she already knew from the Sacred Heart Academy and the Chatham Episcopal Institute. She “noticed later that my drawings got better marks in the monthly concours than his [the male student mentioned above] did in spite of the fact that he was able to convince me that he knew more about drawing than I did.”⁵⁷ O’Keeffe repeatedly ranked near the top in these monthly competitive exhibitions that determined class standing. This honor earned her not only respect, but an advantageous easel position. As at the Chatham Institute, students, both female and male, watched O’Keeffe’s easel and knew that her results exceeded theirs.⁵⁸ The Art Institute was a larger stage than she had known before, but she could perform successfully upon it. When O’Keeffe came to admire the modern art she saw at 291 in later years, her earlier academic successes would help her to feel that her tried and true drawing skills could triumph in this new arena.

Casts were not the only familiar subjects O’Keeffe depicted at the Art Institute. There were also still lifes, though again they were more challenging than those she had drawn in grade school. Now still life was the vehicle for learning new ways of looking and drawing. In two pen and ink still life drawings she rendered the forms of pots and drapery with parallel ink lines that simultaneously modeled the objects in light and shade and mapped their shapes (Figs. 2.24-25). O’Keeffe appears to have drawn these with her

hand impatiently racing her eye and her mind around the bowls and vases, each line swiftly looping over to the start of the next. Each line was like a finger exploring the object being drawn, revealing its contours a slender segment at a time. This extended drawing as observation to an analysis of form through the linked senses of vision and touch.

Through such exercises, O’Keeffe learned what was to her a new way of drawing, linking the impressions of her eyes and her fingers. This was her first exposure to this important vein of the academic tradition, which British academic artist Harold Speed’s book on drawing articulates, “outline drawing is an instinct with Western artists and has been so from the earliest times . . . this instinct is due to the fact that the first mental idea of an object is the sense of its form as a felt thing, not a thing seen . . . an outline drawing satisfies and appeals directly to this mental idea of objects.”⁵⁹ This theory of drawing was based upon widely known empiricist ideas first formulated in John Locke’s 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke described vision as showing the viewer two-dimensional patterns of color which he could interpret as representing three-dimensional objects only through his memory of tactile experience of three-dimensional objects. Pepe Karmel notes, “The empiricist theory of vision began to play a role in French art only in the second half of the nineteenth century.”⁶⁰ French art institutions such as the *École des Beaux-Arts* provided the models for American institutions like the Art Institute, and therefore these ideas would have flowed easily into America. This academic linking of touch and vision in drawing was vital in shaping modernist drawing, for European artists like Auguste Rodin and Pablo Picasso as well as for Americans like O’Keeffe.

In the academic realm, however, exercises in drawing casts and still lifes prepared students to embark upon what the circular of the Art Institute termed “the basis for the practice of art . . . the study of the human figure.”⁶¹ Even after her work drawing inanimate objects, O’Keeffe felt terribly insecure and utterly unprepared for the living model. She remembered her first anatomy class,

When I went in, the room was full. Most of the students were much older than I was. I was a little girl with a big black ribbon bow on my braid of hair. The man teaching had a soft light-brown beard and an easy way of moving and speaking. After talking a while he said, ‘Come out,’ to a curtain I hadn’t noticed. Out walked a very handsome, lean, dark-skinned, well-made man – finely cut face, dark shining hair, dark moustache – naked except for a small loincloth. I was surprised – I was shocked – blushed a hot and uncomfortable blush – didn’t look around in my embarrassment and don’t remember anything about the anatomy lesson. It was a suffering. The class only came once a week and I had to make up my mind what I was going to do about it before time for the next lesson. I still had the idea that I wanted to be an artist. I thought that meant I had to go to art school. Drawing casts in the upstairs gallery wouldn’t go on forever. If I was any good at all I’d be promoted to the Life Class where there would be nude models. It was something I hadn’t counted on but had to face if I was going to be an artist. . . . Maybe if I had had a passionate interest in anatomy I wouldn’t have been shocked. But I had no interest at all in anatomy and the long names of things – the teacher did not connect it in any way with my drawing upstairs. When the next lesson came and everyone else drifted in the direction of the Anatomy Class, I drifted in, too. I don’t remember learning anything except that I finally became accustomed to the idea of the nude model.⁶²

For O’Keeffe to tell this story, even seventy years after the fact, was strikingly honest. Few readers would have caught the omission if O’Keeffe had left out of her autobiography this embarrassing episode from her long life. By freely admitting, even stressing, her difficulties in dealing with the nude model, O’Keeffe confirmed damaging old stereotypes of ignorant, incompetent women artists who were unable to master this central subject matter of the academic tradition. Perhaps in the context of her autobiography she exposed her unease with the nude in order to help excuse the paucity of literal human figures in her mature oeuvre. She also contradicted the longstanding

critical obsession with finding references to sex and the human body in her mature art. Despite the artist's discomfort with her memories of drawing the nude model, I believe that this training was critical for her when she devised the technical and formal approaches she would use in her modern works. The charcoal she rubbed with a stomp⁶³ into the paper of her abstract drawings in 1915 must have felt the same on her fingers as that she had used to define nude human figures only a decade previously in this central experience of her academic training.

It seems incredible that any art student could long have remained ignorant of the dominant position of the nude figure in academic art study, but O'Keeffe had been studying at all-female religiously affiliated schools that would have been unlikely to expose their students to even the mention of nude men. Possibly she had been aware that the nude would eventually occur in her studies but had tried to ignore the coming challenge. Her skill in drawing and her determination to be an artist, however, enabled O'Keeffe, in time, to master her discomfort. She said that she greatly enjoyed, "John Vanderpoel's lectures on drawing the human figure. . . . as he lectured he made very large drawings on a sheet of tan paper as high as he could reach. He was very clear – drawing with black and white crayon as he talked. I always looked forward to those lectures. They helped me with the drawing of casts and with the Life Class."⁶⁴ In Vanderpoel's classes, O'Keeffe was able to learn the new facts of anatomy through the familiar discipline of drawing.

From Vanderpoel O'Keeffe learned how the human body was constructed and how it moved. This helped her to face and overcome the many challenges of drawing the living human form. As Vanderpoel wrote,

The draftsman's problem in conveying a pictorial representation of a living form lies in his understanding of the structural form depicted. The drawing of a symmetrical inanimate form in a simple view presents difficulties of its own, but when we change symmetry to diversity, transform the inanimate to the living in action, and add the complications that come through choosing a point of view which involves foreshortening, the artist's structural knowledge is keenly taxed. In truth, strength of draftsmanship lies in the degree in which structural form is understood.⁶⁵

In the academic tradition, drawing was as much mental as physical. To correctly draw a form was to understand it. With human models to stand unclothed for her to study and with Vanderpoel as patient guide, O'Keeffe's frustration slowly receded and her understanding advanced. She would have learned one body part at a time, filling pages (now lost) with eyes, noses, torsos, arms, and feet. The strength of her drawing skills had enabled O'Keeffe to survive the crisis of learning human anatomy. Unfortunately, none of O'Keeffe's formal drawings for these classes survive, although in a sketchbook a study of an arm and a pair of small, swift pencil studies of the female nude attest to her experiences drawing the unclothed human form (Fig. 2.26, 2.30).

As she learned her way around the body, O'Keeffe simultaneously gained increased mastery of the charcoal technique she would later use to make her first major modern works. Charcoal, the favored medium of academic life classes in Europe and America,⁶⁶ now replaced the pencil O'Keeffe had mastered during earlier stages in her instruction. The Art Institute circular describes the elementary drawing and painting class as, "Chiefly early charcoal practice from antique fragments in outline and general light-and-shade." The intermediate class, to which O'Keeffe was promoted, is described as "Same, more advanced. More important outlines and shadows carried farther."⁶⁷

Vanderpoel's book based upon his classes, *The Human Figure*, is illustrated with charcoal and pencil drawings of the kind his students would have aspired to create (Fig.

2.27). He described the means of achieving grey tones in such drawings by “smudging the paper with a value of charcoal and removing it for the masses of light with the fingers or kneaded rubber [eraser].”⁶⁸ After the initial application of charcoal, the artist rubbed in shadows and mid-tones with a stomp and picked out highlights with an eraser to describe the curved planes of flesh. As Vanderpoel’s drawings demonstrate, academic students learned to use meticulous craftsmanship to subdue the marks of their individual creative process, revealing only the forms depicted. This was the height of the academic tradition to which as a modernist O’Keeffe would stand opposed; yet she never left behind the understanding she had gained of human forms and academic drawing techniques.

One of the most interesting documents of O’Keeffe’s study at the Art Institute is a sketchbook of drawings and watercolors the artist made in 1905 and 1906. In these sketches she practiced the varieties of academic drawing she learned at the Art Institute. Clearly, her classes covered far more than nude figures and prepared her for more than making academic history paintings. The sketch book includes studies of human figures and faces (Figs. 2.28-29, 2.35) anatomical studies of body parts (Fig. 2.30); a finely shaded still life of flowers (Fig. 2.31); a watercolor portrait (Fig. 2.32); an architectural study of the octagonal tower of Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, where her parents now lived (Fig. 2.33); and several landscapes in pencil and watercolor (Fig. 2.34). This sketchbook demonstrates the varied drawing vocabulary from which O’Keeffe could choose precedents when she later invented abstract works.

The drawing style in these small, rapid sketches is occasionally that of a beginning draftsman struggling inelegantly with new subject matter (Fig. 2.35). But

there are also instances, like a drawing of a reclining girl kicking one foot lazily in the air (Fig. 2.28), where the lines relaxed as self-consciousness fell away. In these informal works, probably intended for only her own eyes, the young O’Keeffe learned to apply academic lessons to support her own vision. She left behind the clenched quality of her school girl studies in favor of a more flowing graphic hand that responded to the caprices of her eye and mind. The best of these sketches are instances of private drawing as neither discipline nor performance, but as delighted discovery. This joy in drawing as a blended process of observing and creating never left her, and indeed, formed the heart of her modernist drawings.

Given O’Keeffe’s rapid advances both in her classes at the Art Institute and in her private sketching, it must have been deeply frustrating when she became seriously ill with typhoid fever and had to interrupt her studies. She remained at home in Williamsburg for a year slowly recovering. When she was well enough, she painted portraits of local children to keep her art skills fresh.⁶⁹ Her family suffered increasing financial difficulties, so she apparently considered applying for a job teaching drawing. In the spring of 1907, a teacher from the Art Institute wrote her a letter of recommendation, “Miss O’Keeffe is a young lady of attractive personality, and I feel that she will be very successful as a teacher of drawing.”⁷⁰ O’Keeffe’s excellent drawing, in which she had always taken such pride, was now a marketable skill.

O’Keeffe at the Art Students League

In September 1907, O’Keeffe began taking classes at the Art Students League in New York City. The artist did not record why she chose to continue her training at the Art Students League rather than at the Art Institute of Chicago, but lower tuition may

have played a part.⁷¹ O’Keeffe’s mentor at the Chatham Episcopal Institute, Elizabeth May Willis, had attended the Art Students League and probably recommended it to her star student.⁷²

At the League, O’Keeffe took a class in Life Drawing and Painting with F. Luis Mora,⁷³ but for the first time her study was dominated not by drawing or watercolor with the anticipation of painting in oils but by the actual practice of painting. William Merritt Chase was the leading teacher at the League and O’Keeffe studied still life painting with him. As Marchal E. Landgren observes in his history of the League, “Chase believed in, and fostered, the teaching of careful drawing. But he also believed that drawing should be taught with paint and brush. Painting, he contended, should be a direct method.”⁷⁴ Drawing at the League (Fig. 2.36), as at the Art Institute, served primarily to prepare the students for either painting or sculpture. But O’Keeffe was now able to devote much time to sustained practice with oils (Fig. 2.37).

O’Keeffe found Chase an impressive, energizing presence who excited her and the other students. The approach that Chase taught broke away from many of the classical traditions of academic art with which O’Keeffe was familiar. She vividly described her experiences in Chase’s class:

Every day we all had to paint a new still life. Then once a week William Merritt Chase came in to criticize. As soon as he arrived in the office downstairs everyone in the building knew it and we all got out our five or six canvases to be criticized. He wore a high silk hat, rather tight fine brown suit, light-colored spats and gloves, a carnation in his lapel. He had a beard and mustache and glasses on a cord. There was something fresh and energetic and fierce and exacting about him that made him fun. His love of style – color – paint as paint – was lively. I loved the color in the brass and copper pot and pans, peppers, onions and other things we painted for him. The slick canvases had eight or ten paintings – painted one on top of the other as the weeks went by. To interest him, the paintings had to be alive with paint and a kind of dash and ‘go’ that kept us looking for something lively, kept us pretty well keyed up.⁷⁵

To a young student like O’Keeffe whose instruction had included so much precise copying, Chase must have seemed the latest word in free and advanced art. He definitively inculcated in students like O’Keeffe the importance of individualism in works of art. This idea, and the bold, gestural brushwork Chase practiced and preached, stylistically brought the teacher and his students close to the brash, brushy new art being produced by the “Ashcan School” artists grouped around Robert Henri first in Philadelphia and then in New York. Yet Chase did not condone the socially low urban subject matter these artists embraced, nor did he break with the academic tradition in which students imitated the art of their masters. Indeed, Chase had acquired the basis for his bravura painting style at the Royal Academy of Munich in the 1870s.⁷⁶ O’Keeffe imitated Chase’s vigorously brushed painting style, and his still life subject matter with great success. In 1908 her still life painting of a rabbit and a copper pot in an approximation of Chase’s style won a prize that funded her study that summer at an artist’s camp at Lake George, New York (Fig. 2.37).⁷⁷ O’Keeffe had begun to emerge from the graphic cocoon of basic academic study and metamorphose into an oil painter.

O’Keeffe’s First Visit to 291

While O’Keeffe was moving toward the end of her academic education within the walls of the New York Art Students League, outside a new kind of art was invading New York. O’Keeffe had her first confrontation with modernism in 1908 at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. Chase enjoyed photography, if not as a fine art, and he liked to visit Stieglitz’s early photographic exhibitions at 291. Stieglitz recalled that when the dapper painter saw an exhibition of Auguste Rodin drawings there in January 1908, he was outraged and left in a fury. Chase knew Rodin as a famous and highly respected

sculptor, but found his sparse graphite and wash drawings incomprehensible (Figs. 2.38-39). Stieglitz, who liked to tell stories playing his own modern ideas against the beliefs of famous conservative figures, said that Chase ordered his League students not to go to see the Rodin drawings.⁷⁸ This story reveals the double standard Chase maintained - requiring far more rigorous accuracy for drawings, as the structural basis for art, than for paintings. Speaking of oil sketches he said, "It is not sufficient to be true. A carefully truthful sketch is often superlatively stupid. Better to be dashingly *bad* and interesting!"⁷⁹

It is quite possible, however, that the ever-theatrical Stieglitz exaggerated Chase's negative reaction to the drawings to help him make his own point about the shock of modernism. Refuting Stieglitz's assertion that Chase wanted his students to avoid the exhibition, O'Keeffe recalled, "Every teacher at the League had insisted that we see them. . . . The teachers at the League thought that Stieglitz might just be fooling the public with the name Rodin, or that Rodin might be fooling both Stieglitz and the public with such drawings."⁸⁰ Surely "every teacher" must have included Chase. O'Keeffe said her teachers insisted, "We must go and see them because it *might* be important."⁸¹

One winter day, O'Keeffe and two or three fellow League students trooped off to 291 Fifth Avenue to see what all the fuss was about. O'Keeffe clearly remembered the fateful moment when she first entered 291,

It was a day with snow on everything. I remember brushing snow off a little tree by the railing as we walked up the steps of the brownstone at 291 Fifth Avenue, where Alfred Stieglitz had his gallery. The boys had heard that Stieglitz was a great talker and wanted to get him going. We went up in the little elevator and entered a small room. Stieglitz came out carrying some photographic equipment in his right hand and he glared at us from behind his pince-nez glasses. Yes, we wanted to see the Rodin drawings.

The drawings were curved lines and scratches with a few watercolor washes and didn't look like anything I had been taught about drawing. . . . At that time they were of no interest to me – but many years later; when I was settling Stieglitz's estate, they were the drawings I most enjoyed.

The boys began to talk with Stieglitz and soon the conversation was heated and violent. I went to the end of the smallest room. There was nothing to sit on – nothing to do but stand and wait. Finally, after much loud talk the others came for me and we went down to the street.⁸²

The drawings they had seen were far from any art O'Keeffe had ever come across; she couldn't understand how these strange works on paper related to the art that she knew. Judged by the academic criteria of how accurately a drawing reproduced visual facts, Rodin's drawings made no sense. A comparison between a tightly-descriptive standard Art Students League figure drawing and Rodin's scanty markings illustrates why the student felt baffled by these shocking new works on paper (Figs. 2.36, 2.38-39). O'Keeffe was unequipped to understand Rodin's formal language nor did she have any idea of what he hoped to achieve with it; the simplicity of the lines and washes was unintelligible. She said that Rodin's drawings to her were “just a lot of scribbles.”⁸³

O'Keeffe recalled that Rodin was supposed to have made some of his drawings “with his eyes shut.”⁸⁴ It seems likely to me that this strange idea arose from a misunderstanding of Rodin's drawing method as it was described in published accounts.⁸⁵ O'Keeffe might have read such an account herself at the time although it seems more likely that she heard distorted second or third hand reports from her instructors or fellow students. A 1903 French art journal gave a typical account,

In his recent drawings, Rodin uses nothing more than a contour heightened with a wash. Here is how he goes about it. Equipped with a sheet of ordinary paper poised on a board, and with a lead pencil – sometimes a pen – he has his model take an essentially unstable pose, then he draws spiritedly, without taking his eyes off the model. The hand goes where it will; often the pencil falls off the page; the drawing is thus decapitated or loses a limb by amputation The master has not looked at it once. In less than a minute, this snapshot of movement is caught.

It contains, naturally, some excessive deformations, unforeseen swellings, but, if the relation of proportions is destroyed, on the other hand, each section has its contours and the cursive, schematic indication [of] its modeling. The correction lines are numerous. Often the pencil, in the swiftness of its progress, missed the contour of a breast, the flex of a thigh; Rodin then goes back over this part with hasty strokes which mix together, but in which the just line is found.⁸⁶

While the drawings that O’Keeffe saw were not actually the ones made in this way from life, but rather were slightly more polished watercolors based on tracings from one or more such drawings,⁸⁷ she would not have known that; the appearance of the works shown at 291 was quite radical enough to puzzle an academically trained artist. Rodin’s aims and methods were in many ways violently at odds with the academic theory and practice of drawing familiar to O’Keeffe and her fellow students and instructors. The modern master concentrated on fidelity to his own vision rather than to any objective visual “truth.” To catch his impressions of the motion and energy of the figure, the artist drew as if his pencil was touching the figure. Rodin, through his imagination, felt the figure as much as he saw it, keeping his eyes riveted to the model all the time that he was drawing. If the artist turned away from the model to look at his paper while drawing he would lose immediacy by filtering his experiences through the distortions of human memory. Rodin’s method of drawing, in defiance of academic tradition, accepted physical distortions in the drawing so long as they did not obscure the truth of his direct visual experience. Yet in other ways Rodin’s drawings picked up and exaggerated aspects of academicism. The academic tradition, as O’Keeffe had found when she made pen and ink still-life drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago, also based visual representations on tactile understanding.

Rodin’s drawings, despite or perhaps because of their lack of evident accordance with her academic background, may have had a lasting effect on O’Keeffe. As she

established herself as a modernist in about 1916 or 1917, she began to employ a kind of contour drawing that appears to be related to Rodin's. In the spare, linear landscape drawings she made from life in Texas and Colorado in 1916 and 1917, she at times seems to have drawn while staring intently at the land forms before her without a glance at her paper until she had captured the main lines of her subject (Figs. 2.40-41) Some lines do not quite connect and others overlap awkwardly in a way that the highly skilled artist probably would not have allowed had she been looking at the paper as she drew.

O'Keeffe used outline alone to describe the landscape, giving no indication of value or texture. Usually she corrected such drawings, if at all, by drawing lines over the original drawing rather than by erasing the errant lines. She was gathering visual facts, not creating drawings for anyone else to enjoy. There is a stripped down quality of basic truth in her contour drawings that stands between the close yet idealized observation of academic drawing practice and the simplified naturalism of O'Keeffe's mature modernist landscape and flower paintings. Contour drawing, by whatever source it entered her repertoire of artistic methods, never lost its importance for O'Keeffe. She used it to make initial sketches of landscapes and architecture in the nineteen twenties and for the rest of her life (Figs. 2.42-43).⁸⁸

In the meantime, O'Keeffe continued under Art Students League instruction, seemingly untroubled as yet by the implications of Rodin's strange drawings. However, her curiosity about modernism may have continued, as Sarah Greenough suggests that she may have returned to 291 in April 1908 to see drawings, watercolors, and prints by Henri Matisse (Fig. 2.44).⁸⁹ That summer O'Keeffe continued her academic progress by attending a summer art camp at Lake George, New York, which was attended by students

from the League and elsewhere.⁹⁰ She was a successful and popular member of the League's artistic community who, like many students there, probably dreamed of becoming a professional painter. She seemed to be well on her way toward an artistic career of some kind.⁹¹

However, O'Keeffe's status as a woman made her fine art professional ambitions problematic. Her fellow League student Eugene Speicher gave voice to the popular gender assumptions of the time when he teased her for preferring to spend her time doing her own painting rather than sitting for his portrait of her. "‘It doesn't matter what you do,' he said, 'I'm going to be a great painter and you will probably end up teaching painting in some girls' school.'"⁹² As when O'Keeffe was growing up and her mother struggled to keep her family on the high side of middle class, in the art world she faced cultural divisions of high and low. Painters and sculptors were at the top, teachers of women and children were near the bottom. Strength of drawing skills could help an artist to climb up the ladder of artistic fields, and O'Keeffe's graphic skills were excellent. Yet there were other factors that could cancel out her technical advantages; O'Keeffe knew that her father, whose business ventures in Williamsburg failed repeatedly, could offer her little financial support as she started out in whatever career she chose.⁹³ Being a woman would make wide public recognition and resulting commissions hard for her to obtain. She probably feared that Speicher was right about her prospects as an artist. She later said, "I never had any idea of making a living out of my painting. . . . Of course, I always intended being a painter. But I meant to stick to something else for my living."⁹⁴ O'Keeffe thus hoped to advantageously combine professionalism and amateurism, reaping the benefits of both. She wanted the independence of supporting herself through

the commercial side of art, while earning the leisure to express her sensibility through the fine side of art. O’Keeffe’s “something else” other than fine art as an art profession was probably teaching drawing, but there were other art professions open to her.

O’Keeffe’s Work as a Commercial Artist

Soon O’Keeffe was forced to take her plans to support herself past the planning stage. By the autumn of 1908 her family was in financial crisis and couldn’t even afford to send the younger children to boarding school.⁹⁵ O’Keeffe wrote to her New York roommate Florence Cooney, “Papa told me two or three days ago that he would send me back to the League if he could, but that he couldn’t just now. . . . He is having hard luck these days but never says much because he doesn’t like to own up to it, even to himself, I guess. My private opinion is that his money is just going down the line and that the wisest thing for Pats [O’Keeffe’s League nick name was Patsy] to do is wake up . . . and see what she can do . . . I am going to get busy and see if I can do anything if I work regularly.”⁹⁶

O’Keeffe, unable to continue with her academic art training, had to make a living with the skills she already had. The art training that her mother had once hoped would act socially to enhance the gentility of her daughter was now reduced to an economic resource. From now on, it was within the scale of artistic professionals that O’Keeffe would move with her graphic skills, not within polite society.

O’Keeffe’s facility in drawing offered more immediate commercial possibilities than did her more recent mastery of oil painting. She found work as a commercial artist and designer in Chicago, where she went to live with her aunt and uncle. O’Keeffe drew lace and embroidery for two different fashion houses and worked for an advertising

agency.⁹⁷ In these positions, O’Keeffe recalled that she “learned to hurry. The idea was to do it faster or you didn’t get the job. I pretty soon found out I wasn’t cut out for that. It was appalling.”⁹⁸ Thus O’Keeffe, for a time, followed the professional applied art path for which the Prang drawing books of her childhood had begun to prepare her. It was grueling work that she hated. For about two years she doggedly used her pencil and pen to support herself. She was forced to admit the defeat of her plans to help her family economically when a bad case of the measles temporarily weakened her eyes so that she could not continue to engage in such close work.⁹⁹

O’Keeffe Becomes an Art Teacher

The recovering O’Keeffe returned to her family, now in Charlottesville, Virginia. The O’Keeffes had moved from Williamsburg in the vain hope that a change of climate would help Mrs. O’Keeffe’s recently diagnosed case of tuberculosis to improve.¹⁰⁰ O’Keeffe’s eyes recovered but she did not find employment for some time. She must have had time to paint, had she wished to. But, exhausted and embittered by her forced retreat from studying art, and dreading work in commercial design, she lost her enthusiasm for art, or at least for painting. After all her years of striving since her first childhood drawing lessons, she had still not become a creative artist.

O’Keeffe later recalled her frustration at this time, “Well, I was taught to paint like other people and I knew that I’d never paint as well as the person that I was taught to paint like. There was no reason why I should attempt to do it any better. I hadn’t been taught any way of my own.”¹⁰¹ She said that she “was beginning to wonder whether this [Chase’s] method would ever work for me.” Trying to surpass Chase and other established masters of painting struck O’Keeffe as “just futile for me.”¹⁰² At 291 Gallery

O’Keeffe had seen a new kind of art that flew in the face of all she had been taught. This may have suggested to the young artist that she could and should break away from her academic background. However, she simply did not yet know how to do this. She had to cope with the pressure of knowing that, whatever she decided to do with her art, she would have to support herself. Her disappointment with painting was probably compounded when her boyfriend from the League, George Dannenberg, after offering to take her to Europe with him to study art, left her behind.¹⁰³ O’Keeffe recalled that she then “stopped painting for quite a while.”¹⁰⁴ O’Keeffe for years after this “never touched a brush, could not bear the smell of paint or turpentine because of the emotions they aroused.”¹⁰⁵

While O’Keeffe had stopped painting, she could not afford to stop drawing; it remained the skill that might support her. She made an unsuccessful application to teach art in the Williamsburg public schools.¹⁰⁶ While her drawing skills were strong, she had not previously taught art, nor had she been trained to teach any subject.¹⁰⁷ O’Keeffe’s mentor, Miss Willis of the Chatham Episcopal Institute, nevertheless gave her former student the chance to prove herself as an art teacher. In the spring of 1911 Miss Willis took a leave of absence for six weeks and arranged for O’Keeffe to take her place. The new teacher acquitted herself well and seemed to find the teaching experience rewarding. The job was important for both O’Keeffe’s resume and her confidence.¹⁰⁸

O’Keeffe and the Teachings of Arthur Wesley Dow

By the summer of 1912 O’Keeffe was again unemployed and without prospects. Her sisters Anita and Ida were taking classes in drawing and other subjects at the University of Virginia’s summer school in Charlottesville. Their drawing teacher was

Alon Bement, a disciple and associate of Arthur Wesley Dow, the well-known professor of art education at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York.¹⁰⁹ Anita found Bement's classes unusual and stimulating, so she tried to convince her older sister Georgia to take his classes as well. O'Keeffe resisted the idea at first, but eventually relented and signed up for Bement's class in Drawing I for elementary school teachers.¹¹⁰

The classes with Bement brought O'Keeffe to a turning point in her conception of drawing and in her career as an artist. Bement taught the methods of Dow, who turned upside down the academic approach to drawing O'Keeffe had learned. As Dow explained it in his book *Composition*,

I hold that art should be approached through composition rather than through imitative drawing. . . . This approach to art through Structure is absolutely opposed to the time-honoured approach through Imitation. . . . Good drawing results from trained judgment, not from the making of fac-similies or maps. Train the judgment, and ability to draw grows naturally. Schools that follow the imitative or academic way regard drawing as a preparation for design, whereas the very opposite is the logical order – design a preparation for drawing.¹¹¹

Dow de-emphasized the physical skill of drawing, giving primacy to the mental creation involved. In Dow's conception, drawing was not merely a subsidiary medium in the orbit of painting and sculpture; design as it was embodied in drawing was the central creative medium at the heart of all kinds of art. The artist in Dow's view was less a painter or a sculptor than a designer of paintings, sculpture, or even pottery or textiles.

Bement's mode of teaching had familiar aspects that helped O'Keeffe take to it at once. Like Vanderpoel and other instructors at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York, Dow and his followers used drawing to demonstrate visual ideas. Max Weber, a student of Dow's at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn [and later a modernist who showed at 291] described the teacher's graphic methods:

He would come into class and make an unbounded drawing of trees and hills, or perhaps a winding road against the sky. Then he would ask the class to copy the drawing freely and to enclose it in a rectangle, to make a horizontal picture or a vertical, as they chose, and to make whatever changes necessary to fit the drawings to the frame which they had selected, to balance the drawing by making less foreground and more sky, to change the masses, and what not. He would then criticize the studies, emphasizing good design. Later the students would make similar studies in several colors, always giving first consideration to spatial organization and distribution of dark and light masses (Fig. 2.45).¹¹²

Soon the students progressed to making their own original compositions. This swiftly gained creative control was tremendously freeing for O’Keeffe. Leaving behind the dull tradition of drawing as rote discipline that had dogged her since childhood, she had finally been able to make her own creative designs. She now found drawing charged with fresh possibilities.

This new approach was open to many kinds of art. Modernist works, like Rodin’s drawings, made sense in this new light. Their distortions of fact were unimportant beside their expressive designs. The applicability of Dow’s form of teaching to modernism is illustrated by the ease with which his student Max Weber connected to the modern art he saw in Europe.¹¹³ As Dow said in *Composition*, “Study of composition of Line, Mass and Color leads to appreciation of all forms of art and the beauty of nature.”¹¹⁴ In Bement’s classes and Dow’s books, especially the highly influential *Composition*, O’Keeffe found unfamiliar kinds of art such as Japanese prints, Chinese paintings, European and Asian architectural details and decorative art. Where she had previously felt that her art training had taken her down a dead-end road, now she could see and appreciate the many other artistic paths available to her. O’Keeffe said that Dow’s teachings “helped me to find something of my own.”¹¹⁵

O’Keeffe Teaches Art in Amarillo, Texas

After her eye-opening summer with Bement, her new qualifications in art teaching led to her taking the position of supervisor of drawing and penmanship for the Amarillo, Texas, public schools. O’Keeffe, using Dow’s methods of teaching, proved to be a gifted teacher who kept her students interested and motivated. She was frustrated by the school superintendent, however, because he insisted that she use Prang drawing books that were merely the latest versions of the books from which O’Keeffe had first learned drawing. The young teacher, now an enthusiastic convert to Dow’s principles of art education, stood her ground and refused to buy the Prang books. Drawing as creative design must take priority over the rote copying and physical skill she had learned as a child. Through a long battle with the Amarillo school superintendent, she never gave in to the Prang method.¹¹⁶ One wonders if she ever actually looked at the new Prang drawing books. Prang, who had admired Dow’s prints and paintings since the 1890s, had incorporated some of the influential Columbia University professor’s ideas into the new editions of his drawing books.¹¹⁷

O’Keeffe found the Southwestern landscape as much of a revelation as Dow’s ideas had been. She said, “I couldn’t believe Texas was real. When I arrived out there, there wasn’t a blade of green grass or a leaf to be seen, but I was absolutely crazy about it. . . . For me Texas is the same big wonderful thing that oceans and the highest mountains are.” When she recalled Bement’s classes and Dow’s ideas during a much later interview, she interwove them with descriptions of the Texas countryside which formed her new aesthetic ideas just as strongly. In 1912, 1913, and 1914 she taught in Texas during the fall and spring and returned to Virginia to assist Bement in teaching

during the summer.¹¹⁸ If she made any art depicting the Texas scenery she saw during her years in Amarillo, it has unfortunately been lost or destroyed.

Now O’Keeffe had almost completed her formal artistic training. She was a strongly grounded graphic artist and teacher of graphic art who brought far more to the Stieglitz circle than an eager mind and a quick hand. The academic traditions of drawing as discipline, observation, and design, had laid the framework of her aesthetic understanding and practice. She had perfected her physical skills in using a variety of graphic media that would continue to serve her. Drawing had become a versatile skill that helped her to observe, learn, and impress both authority figures and fellow students. She was a master of drawing - the most responsive and accessible means of making images that both expressed and pleased herself.

O’Keeffe had been seriously frustrated by her training in a tradition that held out no promise of anything more than the replication of the works of recognized masters. If William Merritt Chase and Kenyon Cox defined what it was to be a painter, O’Keeffe rejected that title. In her study with Bement of Dow’s teaching that drawing was far more than the handmaiden of greater arts, O’Keeffe found and celebrated identities as a draftsman, designer, and teacher of art. These areas of her art would prove fruitful in the coming months and years as she entered the Stieglitz circle.

Notes

¹ O’Keeffe biographer Hunter Drohojowska-Philp notes that O’Keeffe’s father “Frank [Francis O’Keeffe] was meant to know that he had married up.” Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, *Full Bloom: the Art and Life of Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 17. On the contrasting social backgrounds of Francis and Ida O’Keeffe, also see Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: a Biography of Georgia O’Keeffe*, revised ed. (New York: Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, 1986), 3-8.

² Catherine O’Keeffe Klenert, interview by Laurie Lisle, tape recording, 11 July 1977, Laurie Lisle research material on Georgia O’Keeffe, 1903-1989, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. The quote Lisle published in Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 7, differs slightly.

³ Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Life* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 27; Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 16.

⁴ Benita Eisler, *O’Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1991), 14.

⁵ Helena Wright, *With Pen & Graver: Women Graphic Artists Before 1900* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1995), 3.

⁶ Josephine Withers, “Artistic Women and Women Artists,” *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (1976): 330-331.

⁷ Wright, *Women Graphic Artists*, 3.

⁸ Ralph Flint, “Lily Lady Goes West,” *Town and Country* (January 1943): 64. Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 16. Art by O’Keeffe’s grandmothers appeared in a 1933 exhibition of works by O’Keeffe’s younger sister Ida Ten Eyck O’Keeffe at the Delphic Studios in New York. “On the distaff side there was Isabel Dunham Wyckoff, and in connection with Ida’s [O’Keeffe] exhibition two of her flower pieces painted ‘circa 1840’ are being shown. On the bread-and-butter side there was Mary Catherine O’Keeffe, and three of her fruit and flower pictures, also painted about 1840, are revealed.” “An Art Sisterhood,” *Art Digest* 7, no. 13, (April 1, 1933): 27.

⁹ O’Keeffe recalled going into town for these lessons. See Georgia O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), initial essay, not paginated. Other sources maintain that the teacher boarded with the O’Keeffe family and gave their daughters drawing lessons at home. Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 27; Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 64; and Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 2:1142.

¹⁰ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay.

¹¹ Katharine Morrison McClinton, *The Chromolithographs of Louis Prang* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., Publisher, 1973), 126.

¹² Diana Korzenik, *Drawn to Art: a Nineteenth-Century American Dream* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), 37-53, 159-171, 194-199.

¹³ Wright, *Women Graphic Artists*, 3-12.

¹⁴ Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists & the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1. For a detailed account of this late-nineteenth-century generation of women art students and artists, see Swinth, *Painting Professionals*, 1-162.

¹⁵ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 6, 7-8. Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 117. Ida O'Keeffe (O'Keeffe's sister named after their mother) taught art in Virginia and later became a nurse, but also exhibited her art. Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 434-435; Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 199-200, 253-254. Anita O'Keeffe began training as a nurse and later married a business man. Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 94, 117; Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 258. Catherine O'Keeffe trained as a nurse and worked in that field until she married a banker. Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 117, 153; Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, Lisle 88, 207. Claudia O'Keeffe earned a teaching degree at Columbia University Teachers' College and became a teacher. Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 229; Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 301.

¹⁶ Catherine O'Keeffe Klenert, interview by Laurie Lisle, Lisle Material on O'Keeffe, AAA.

¹⁷ L. Prang & Co. *American Text-Books of Art Education, Nos. 1-5*, revised eds. (Boston: L. Prang & Co., 1878-9).

¹⁸ "The instruction for the exercises in this book should begin from models and objects." L. Prang & Co., *American Text-Books of Art Education, No. 2*, (Boston, L. Prang & Co., 1878), 2. The Prang Educational Company, *The Use of Models: a Teacher's Assistant in the Use of the Prang Models for Form Study and Drawing in Primary Schools* (Boston: The Prang Educational Company, 1887), selected pages reprinted in Foster Wygant, *Art in American Schools in the Nineteenth Century* (Cincinnati: Interwood Press, 1983), appendix O, p. 252-257.

¹⁹ Mrs. Zed Edison quoted in Helen Renk, "Georgia O'Keeffe - Sun Prairie Native," *Wisconsin Star Countryman*, September 2, 1948, 4-5.

²⁰ Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 64.

²¹ Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²² O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay. Regrettably, the drawing is not listed in Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, and so must have been lost or destroyed, although in her account in her 1976 book O'Keeffe said, "I kept the little drawing for a long time."

²³ *Georgia O'Keeffe*, VHS, directed by Perry Miller Adato (New York: WNET, 1977).

²⁴ Quoted in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks With Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 199.

²⁵ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.

²⁶ Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 56.

²⁷ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid; Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 16.

³⁰ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.

³¹ Drohojowska-Philp, *Full Bloom*, 24-25.

³² Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 23.

³³ “By the end of the [nineteenth] century, the proliferation of magazines and illustrated books significantly increased opportunities for women graphic artists.” Wright, *Women Graphic Artists*, 11. The 1890 United States census listed almost 11,000 women artists, sculptors, and teachers of art. Swinth, *Painting Professionals*, 3.

³⁴ Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 78. Pollitzer, an ardent suffragist, tended to stress any potentially feminist elements in O’Keeffe’s background, so it is hard to say how accurate she was in this observation.

³⁵ Quoted in Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 18.

³⁶ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay.

³⁷ Ibid. This story is earlier cited in Ernest W. Watson, “Georgia O’Keeffe,” *American Artist* (June 1943), 6.

³⁸ See Daniel Catton Rich, *Georgia O’Keeffe* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1943), 9.

³⁹ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:29, and 2:1040, #3 and #1733.

⁴⁰ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 23.

⁴¹ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay. Only the darker version of the picture survives. See Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:29.

⁴² O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay.

⁴³ The engraving is “The Warning at Green Spring” by unknown engraver, of unknown date. It appears to date to the mid to late 19th century. It is enclosed in Lakeville Drawing Book sketchbook, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, numbers 1721-1741, Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

⁴⁴ Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 31-33.

⁴⁵ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay. In 1930 O’Keeffe made a series of oil paintings of a jack-in-the-pulpit. The works are now in a private collection (*Jack-in-Pulpit No. I*), and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (*Jack-in-Pulpit – No. II, Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. III, Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV, Jack-in-Pulpit Abstraction – No. V, Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. VI*), Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* #s 715-720.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 33-34, 40.

⁴⁷ *Catalogue of the Chatham Episcopal Institute, a School for Girls, Ninth Session*. Chatham, Virginia: Chatham Episcopal Institute, 1903, 44.

⁴⁸ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 32-35.

⁴⁹ Christine McRae Cocke, “Georgia O’Keeffe As I Knew Her,” *The Angelos of Kappa Delta* (1934): 30-31.

⁵⁰ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay.

⁵¹ “Chatham Hall [the current name of Chatham Episcopal Institute] was founded in 1894 by Rev. C. Orlando Pruden to provide secondary school education for Virginia girls.” Chatham Hall, “Our Heritage Site,” Web page, [accessed 30 July 2003], available at <http://www.chathamhall.com/heritage>; Frances

Hallam Hurt, "O'Keeffe When Young, " photocopy of unpublished manuscript, p. 3, Lisle material on O'Keeffe.

⁵² Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 43-45; *The Mortar-Board* (Chatham, Virginia: Chatham Episcopal Institute, 1905).

⁵³ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 37.

⁵⁴ Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 26-28.

⁵⁵ Swinth, *Painting Professionals*, 4-5, 18-19.

⁵⁶ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 53; Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 38.

⁵⁹ Harold Speed, *The Practice & Science of Drawing*, 3rd ed. (New York, Dover Publications, Inc., reprint of 1917), 58. The book went through multiple editions printed in both Great Britain and the United States.

⁶⁰ Pepe Karmel, *Picasso and the Invention of Cubism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 2-3.

⁶¹ *The Art Institute of Chicago: Circular of Instruction of the School of Drawing, Painting, Modeling, Decorative Designing, Normal Instruction and Architecture, 1905-1906, With Catalogue of Students for 1904-1905* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1905).

⁶² O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.

⁶³ A stomp or stump is a tool made of rolled paper or cardboard that is used to rub charcoal or pencil to create smooth gray shading.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ John Henry Vanderpoel, *The Human Figure*, 13th ed. (Chicago: The Inland Printer, 1923), 22.

⁶⁶ Jójtech and Thea Jirat-Wasiutynski, "The Uses of Charcoal in Drawing," *Arts Magazine* 55, no. 2 (October 1980): 128.

⁶⁷ Art Institute of Chicago, Circular, 1905-1906.

⁶⁸ Vanderpoel, *Human Figure*, 11.

⁶⁹ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 42; Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 54.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 42.

⁷¹ Lila Wheelock Howard in interview by Laurie Lisle remarks upon the very low tuition at the Art Students League, tape recording, 28 September 1977, Lisle material on O'Keeffe, AAA; Marchal E. Landgren, *Years of Art: the Story of the Art Students League of New York* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1940), 77.

⁷² Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 42.

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- ⁷³ Student Record card for Georgia O'Keeffe, Archives, The Art Students League, New York, New York.
- ⁷⁴ Landgren, *Years of Art*, 83.
- ⁷⁵ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.
- ⁷⁶ Ronald G. Pisano, *William Merritt Chase, 1849-1916: a Leading Spirit in American Art* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1983), 27-30.
- ⁷⁷ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 49.
- ⁷⁸ Herbert J. Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of His Conversations, 1925-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 111.
- ⁷⁹ Frances Lauderbach, "Notes From Talks by William M. Chase, Summer Class, Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, Memoranda From a Student's Note Book," *American Magazine of Art* 8, no. 11 (1917): 434.
- ⁸⁰ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.
- ⁸¹ *O'Keeffe*, Adato, VHS.
- ⁸² O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.
- ⁸³ O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), not paginated.
- ⁸⁴ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay; Georgia O'Keeffe, "Stieglitz: His Pictures Collected Him," *New York Times Magazine* (1949): 25.
- ⁸⁵ For the popularity of accounts of Rodin's drawing methods, see Patricia G. Berman, *Modern Hieroglyphs: Gestural Drawings and the European Vanguard 1900-1918* (Wellesley, Massachusetts: Davis Museum and Cultural Center Wellesley College, 1995), 19-21. The conclusion that O'Keeffe's idea of Rodin drawing with his eyes closed came from misreports or an incorrect memory of these accounts is my own.
- ⁸⁶ Clément Janin, "Les Dessins de Rodin," *Les Maîtres Artistes* (October 15, 1903): 286-287, quoted in translation in Albert E. Elsen and J. Kirk T. Varnedoe, *The Drawings of Rodin* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 69-76.
- ⁸⁷ Kirk Varnedoe, "Rodin's Drawings: Life Drawings and Watercolors," in Albert Elsen, editor, *Rodin Rediscovered* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 179.
- ⁸⁸ The term "contour drawing" as I am using it and as it is understood in art teaching and critical literature grew from long established aspects of the academic tradition. The concept of contour drawing was definitively formulated and published by Kimon Nicolaides, who began teaching at the Art Students League in 1922. O'Keeffe, studying at the League several years earlier, could not have understood contour drawing precisely as Nicolaides taught it, but she was exposed to much of the same art and many of the same ideas that would have inspired the later instructor's ideas. Rodin, whose art Nicolaides must have known, drew rapidly, while Nicolaides advocated that contour drawings be made as slowly as possible so that the artists could see, and mentally feel, in great detail, as if they were touching the contours of the model as they drew. O'Keeffe's pace of drawing, to judge from the shape of her lines and the degree of detail she recorded, was perhaps slower than Rodin's but faster than what Nicolaides advocated. Rodin's and O'Keeffe's outline drawings lack the obsessive, gnarled detail of slow contour drawings made with Nicolaides' method. Rodin's use of rapid sketching to capture the energy of the figure relates more to

Nicolaides' method of "gesture drawing." See Landgren, *Years of Art*, 115. Nicolaides' methods of teaching are recorded in his highly influential book *The Natural Way to Draw*, published in 1941, after his death in 1938. Kimon Nicolaides, *The Natural Way to Draw: a Working Plan for Art Study* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941), Publisher's Note, vii, and text 9-18.

⁸⁹ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2:1142; Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters*, letters selected and annotated by Sarah Greenough (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 136.

⁹⁰ Lila Wheelock Howard, interview by Laurie Lisle, tape recording, 28 September 1977, Lisle material on O'Keeffe, AAA.

⁹¹ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 49.

⁹² Quoted in O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.

⁹³ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 49.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Carol Taylor, "Lady Dynamo: Miss O'Keeffe, Noted Artist, Is a Feminist," *New York World-Tribune*, 31 March 1945.

⁹⁵ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 49-52.

⁹⁶ O'Keeffe to Florence Cooney, November 3, 1908, quoted in an unpublished manuscript for a biography of Georgia O'Keeffe by Anita Pollitzer, quoted in Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 74.

⁹⁷ Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper*, 100.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Ralph Looney, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Atlantic Monthly* 215 (1965): 107.

⁹⁹ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 75.

¹⁰¹ *O'Keeffe*, Adato, VHS.

¹⁰² Quoted in Kuh, *Artist's Voice*, 189.

¹⁰³ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 73-78.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Kuh, *Artist's Voice*, 189.

¹⁰⁵ Helen Appleton Read, "Georgia O'Keeffe - Woman Artist Whose Art Is Sincerely Feminine," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 6, 1924, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2:1142.

¹⁰⁷ In 1907 O'Keeffe had tried to give private lessons to a girl in Virginia, but she soon gave it up in frustration, so the experience would not have contributed to her résumé. See Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 42.

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁹ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 53-54, 57-58; Nancy E. Green, "Arthur Wesley Dow: His Art and His Influence," *Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922): His Art and His Influence* (New York: Spanierman Gallery, LLC, 1999), 27-28.

¹¹⁰ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 58. The highly skilled O'Keeffe soon moved to Drawing II, and then Drawing III. Permanent record card, University of Virginia Summer School, Georgia O'Keeffe, 1912, Lisle material on O'Keeffe, AAA.

¹¹¹ Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: a Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, 13th ed. (1920; reprint Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 63-64.

¹¹² Holger Cahill, *Max Weber* (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1930), 5.

¹¹³ Jerome Mellquist, *The Emergence of an American Art* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969), 83-84.

¹¹⁴ Dow, *Composition*, 64.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Kuh, *Artist's Voice*, 189.

¹¹⁶ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 85-94; Looney, "Georgia O'Keeffe," 107.

¹¹⁷ Frederick C. Moffatt, *Arthur Wesley Dow, 1857-1922* (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 76-82.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Kuh, *Artist's Voice*, 189-190; Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2:1142.

Chapter Three: Georgia O’Keeffe Enters the Stieglitz Circle Through Drawings

Autumn 1914 and Spring 1915: O’Keeffe on the Outer Rim of the Stieglitz Circle

In the autumn of 1914, O’Keeffe decided to move to New York; this decision would send her life and career on a radically new path. Alon Bement, with whom she had taught during the summer at the University of Virginia, had urged her to go to New York to study in person with his mentor Arthur Wesley Dow. Dow was the head of the art department at Columbia University Teacher’s College.¹ If O’Keeffe could afford the financial outlay to get a degree at Teacher’s College, the investment promised to pay well in the future as she stepped up from her status as an occasional art teacher with no college degree to a being fully qualified professional art educator. In the fall of 1914, a monetary gift from her aunt Ollie enabled O’Keeffe to go to New York and enroll at Teacher’s College.² But in the area of O’Keeffe’s fine art production the move was even more important. In New York she was positioned to see the avant-garde art that would give new meaning to her training with Dow and Bement and her earlier academic training. Her time in the city would lead O’Keeffe to start making the art that would bring her into first the outer rim and later into the center of the Stieglitz circle and American modernism.

Graphic media played a major role in establishing O’Keeffe as a modern artist. While from mid 1918 forward she would make most of her major mature works in the form of oil paintings on canvas, I assert that graphic media provided the foundation of both her modern art practices and her critical reception. The first works by O’Keeffe that

Stieglitz saw were charcoal drawings; on this graphic basis he began to build the image of O'Keeffe that he would project to the public (Figs. 3.1-3.11). For the artist herself, drawing and watercolor were media of beginning; these were the first media she had learned as a child and through them she had learned academic art. She returned to graphic media as she re-learned art in the modernist mode. In New York, her artistic past came into contact with modernism in a fecund marriage of nominally opposing forces.

O'Keeffe's curiosity about modern art and her graphic modernist background had both begun in New York six years previously, when she had visited Stieglitz's 291 gallery where she saw something strange and new going on in drawings by Auguste Rodin (Figs. 2.38-39). Her interest may have been sufficient for her to return to the Little Galleries that same year to see an exhibition of drawings, watercolors, and a single oil painting by Henri Matisse (Fig. 2.44).³ When O'Keeffe returned to 291 in 1914 and 1915, again most of the art works she encountered were drawings and watercolors. What she knew best of modernism to this point was on paper. I believe that her graphic initiation into modernism combined with her own training in these media to make O'Keeffe feel most comfortable making her first modernist works in the graphic mode of drawing.

This is not to say that O'Keeffe was unaware of modern paintings, but she had seen few, if any, of them in person. If she did, in fact, attend the 1908 exhibition of Matisse's works at 291, O'Keeffe would have seen one small oil painting by the European modernist master in this epochal showing (Fig. 3.12).⁴ O'Keeffe also would have seen only a minimal selection of avant-garde paintings among a much larger graphic number of graphic works at 291 in 1914 and 1915. She knew modern paintings best

through reproductions, often in black and white. In the summer of 1914 O'Keeffe had, on Bement's advice, begun reading publications that showed her reproductions of modern paintings and gave her a glimpse into the larger world of ideas surrounding these odd new images.⁵ Among the books Bement suggested to O'Keeffe were Wassily Kandinsky's *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* and Arthur Jerome Eddy's *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*.⁶ Kandinsky's book included the author's own bold abstract woodcuts and diagrams of his visual ideas about color, in addition to black and white halftone reproductions of his abstract oil paintings (Figs. 3.13-14).⁷ Eddy's book stressed the importance of Stieglitz's gallery in introducing modern art to Americans.⁸ Among several modernist American and European paintings reproduced in color, Eddy included an earth-colored painting by and quotations from an American artist who showed at 291, Arthur Dove (Fig. 3.15). O'Keeffe recalled that it was through Eddy's book that Dove first caught her attention.⁹ Bement also must have talked to O'Keeffe about 291. It had been in this gallery that O'Keeffe had felt so uncomfortable while her fellow students debated with the proprietor in 1908. Now she had the background to realize the importance of what she had seen and where she had seen it in, and she would be tempted to return to this venue to see modern works in person.

When she moved to New York, O'Keeffe entered a stimulating artistic world that was rapidly becoming conscious of modernism. She had been teaching in Amarillo when the 1913 Armory show brought large numbers of American and European modern works to the attention of the American public, garnering a great deal of publicity.¹⁰ The buzz from that controversial exhibition, and from exhibitions at 291, was still in the air when O'Keeffe returned to the East. The cultural vibrations that had first reached her through

Bement and books he recommended continued through Dow, other Teachers College professors, and O’Keeffe’s fellow students.

O’Keeffe at Teachers College, Columbia University

While Dow was no artistic radical, he helped his students to connect with the modernist ethos. He said, “I confess to sympathy with all who reject traditional academicism in art. I often regret the years [I] spent in the Academie Julian where we were taught by professors whom we revered, to make maps of human figures.” A strong advocate of Asian art, Dow speculated, “Japanese art has done much toward breaking the hold of this [academic] tyranny, the incoming Chinese art will do more, but it may remain for modernist art to set us free.”¹¹

As an amateur photographer, as well as a practitioner of abstract principles of design, Dow had great respect for Stieglitz. In 1907 Dow had proposed that Stieglitz teach the first photography class at Teachers College. Stieglitz refused the offer, but this did not end the professor’s interest in him.¹² When Dow articulated his own conflicted reaction to modernism in his 1917 article “Modernism in Art,” he began with a story set in “a well-known Fifth avenue gallery” that showed modernist works – an obvious reference to Stieglitz’s 291 gallery.¹³ Nancy E. Green notes, “Dow, though he never taught beyond the Impressionists, encouraged his students to explore the galleries and museums thoroughly and to expose themselves to both historic and contemporary art. In 1911 he added a course in modern art to the Teachers College offerings.”¹⁴ When Dow thought of modern art, he thought of Stieglitz; when he drew his students’ attention to exhibitions of art in various galleries and museums around New York, he must have included 291.

Dow's ideas as taught by his student Bement had already done much to transform O'Keeffe's approach to drawing from an academic means of observing and depicting the forms of nature into a mode of expressive abstract design. The essential harmony between Dow's understanding of design and the modernism that interested Stieglitz is demonstrated by the fact that several artists who studied with Dow at the Pratt Institute and Teachers College later exhibited at 291; these included the photographers Gertrude Käsebier and Alvin Langdon Coburn, and the painters and graphic artists Max Weber and Pamela Colman Smith, as well as O'Keeffe herself.¹⁵

At Teachers College O'Keeffe also studied with Charles J. Martin, a former student of Dow's.¹⁶ Martin has, I believe, been unjustly neglected as an influence on O'Keeffe's move from Dow's proto-modern teachings to the modernism of the Stieglitz circle. The September 1915 *Teachers College Record* described an exhibition of work by Martin's students,

Mr. Martin's work is after the new modernist school, the art that seeks essence rather than form, interpretation rather than faithful representation. The results of this first year's training in a type of work so entirely new to Teachers College students are highly gratifying to Professor Dow. According to Mr. Martin, modernist painting must be preceded by ordinary symmetrical drawing by the student. In other words, rules must be learned before they can be departed from. The exhibit showed, therefore, not only paintings of this new character, but also drawings of the old style, - symmetrical, detailed, precise.¹⁷

It is, unfortunately, impossible as yet to be certain exactly what is meant here by Martin's work being "after the new modernist school," since no art works made by Martin or by students working in his classes are currently located. Any understanding of the work O'Keeffe did for Martin's classes can come only from study of O'Keeffe's correspondence and her two surviving works made a few months later. By that time she was no longer in Martin's class but was still sufficiently under his influence that she sent

her new art to him for his critique (Figs. 3.16-17). In Martin's class, O'Keeffe would have seen how the familiar practices of drawing and design linked her earlier art experiences to the kind of work she now aspired to make. Martin, like Bement, helped her to feel at home seeing, discussing, and eventually making modern art.

In Martin's painting class O'Keeffe met and became friends with her fellow Teachers College students Anita Pollitzer and Dorothy True, who joined her in responding to their teacher's interest in modernism.¹⁸ There is no evidence that Martin specifically urged the three to visit 291, but they connected his teaching with what they saw at the gallery. Pollitzer described the trio of friends moving between "the League & Mr. Martin & the Photo Secession."¹⁹ In the summer of 1915 Pollitzer and O'Keeffe bought a past issue of *Camera Work* as a present for Martin. He told Pollitzer that he greatly appreciated the issue (July 1911, No. 34/35), which was devoted to Rodin's drawings.²⁰

O'Keeffe's Return to 291

During the fall of 1914 and the spring of 1915, O'Keeffe ventured into the heart of the New York modernist milieu: 291. She was borne along by the infectious enthusiasm of her two classmates. When the three attended exhibitions at 291, Benita Eisler observes, "O'Keeffe seems to have remained an unobtrusive presence, letting the lively Anita and the seductive blonde Dorothy engage the impresario."²¹ O'Keeffe recalled one visit when Stieglitz asked her friends such personal questions that she "backed away thinking, 'That isn't for me. Let them talk if they want to.'"²² O'Keeffe did not back away from the art on the walls, however. Her appreciation of the art at 291 had been transformed since her first visit to the gallery. In 1908, her exposure to modern

art had been sudden and isolated, with no background to help her comprehend the unfamiliar images. In 1914 and 1915, O’Keeffe came to exhibitions with friends keenly interested in modernism. Through her studies with Bement and Martin, discussions with them and their students, and readings in modernist books and periodicals, O’Keeffe gained a burgeoning understanding of this new art.

The first exhibition at 291 that O’Keeffe recalled attending with Pollitzer and True was the “Exhibition of Recent Drawings and Paintings by Picasso and by Braque, of Paris,” on view from December 9, 1914 to January 11, 1915.²³ This was the first exhibition that Pollitzer had seen at 291 gallery, but she quickly became an enthusiastic convert to Stieglitz’s ideas.²⁴ This show, dominated by drawings, continued O’Keeffe’s graphic exposure to modernism. Charcoal drawings by Picasso proved to O’Keeffe, I believe, that this traditional academic medium was also suited for avant-garde expression. O’Keeffe probably saw the Picasso exhibition in December, near the end of her first semester in New York, since the following October she wrote to Pollitzer about a Picasso still life drawing of a violin in the exhibition (Fig. 3.18), “It was the first thing I saw at 291 last year . . . and I looked at it a long time but couldn’t get much.”²⁵

O’Keeffe’s bafflement in late 1914 reflected how new Cubism was to her, and to her friends, as it was to almost all Americans who encountered it. Although O’Keeffe would have seen the cubist works reproduced in Eddy’s book and may have read the convoluted text, the radical concepts were difficult for her to digest. She later remembered, “It took some time before I really began to use the ideas [that she had read about modernism].”²⁶ She already knew enough, however, to be certain that Picasso’s art was worthy of her attention.

In December 1914, gazing in puzzlement at Picasso's and Braque's works on the walls of 291 (Figs. 3.18-20), O'Keeffe confronted something even more foreign to her than Rodin's drawings had been six years before (Figs. 2.38-39). Like Rodin, the Cubists attacked the sacred tradition at the heart of academic art: "correct" drawing. While Rodin had maintained the traditional centrality of observation, Picasso and Braque treated drawing as less about seeing the subject than about the process of devising new approaches to form and space.²⁷ Stieglitz, who termed his exhibitions "Experimenting in the little garret," was pleased to expose the public to the graphic experiments of the Cubists.²⁸

Judging from their correspondence, O'Keeffe and Pollitzer were most struck not by Picasso and Braque's works in the unfamiliar media of papier collé or oil paint mixed with foreign matter (Figs. 3.19-20), but by Picasso's charcoal drawing of a still life with a violin. This was the first thing they both saw as they entered the gallery (Fig. 3.18).²⁹ The young women evidently found the still life just familiar enough to give them points of reference for appreciating its strangeness. Beyond his shocking fracturing and flattening of forms, Picasso used his graphic medium in a manner totally at odds with the students' experience. While the smoothly modeled academic charcoal nudes that O'Keeffe knew so well (Fig. 2.27) could be read as relatively transparent records of appearance filtered through shared ideals, it was impossible to read Picasso's and Braque's drawings this way. Picasso did not rub the charcoal into paper to make smooth gray tones describing surfaces; he left the lines rich and black on the surface of the paper. Each stroke was an unmodified record of a creative gesture by the artist. In other works in the same 291 exhibition, such as *Table with Bottle and Wine Glass* (Fig. 3.19), Picasso

used scratchy lines to present facture even more baldly. He broke the contours into coarse, angular sections so that the eye could not move around any form without being aware of the aggressive irregular movements of the artist's human hand, and therefore of the eye and mind that directed it.³⁰ Critic Henry McBride, an adherent of the Stieglitz circle, aptly termed Picasso's linear networks "skeletons of thought," and "straggling, lazy charcoal lines . . . [that] . . . breathe intensity and force."³¹

This way of reading drawings informed the more savvy viewers of the 291 exhibition of works by Picasso and Braque. The anonymous reviewer for the *American Art News* noted, "The remark has been made that Picasso is not a draftsman. To those who do not understand his abstract lines it will be necessary only to look at the etching entitled 'Les deux Amis,' than which nothing could be more exquisitely drawn, to realize that in this work the same fine feeling exists as in the other drawings, only in the etching, it is obscured by the descriptive quality of the picture [(Fig. 3.21)]."³² Charles Caffin seized upon "the processes of Picasso's mind, as laid bare in these drawings."³³ For these critics, the artist's thoughts and feelings were central; representation only got in the way of appreciating expression.

The few paintings in the exhibition, such as Picasso's *Violin and Guitar* (Fig. 3.20) were but graphic armatures clothed with a little color. Viewers at 291 could follow the conceptual and physical construction of cubism from drawing much as connoisseurs had long observed the genesis of old master paintings in preparatory drawings. In fact, the Cubists used drawing for very traditional academic purposes familiar to O'Keeffe: to study parts of objects or figures; to study whole objects or figures; and to devise compositions based upon these studies.³⁴ But Picasso and Braque pushed these traditions

to a new level. American viewers at 291 could witness on the walls around them the evolution of new ways of making art. As her familiarity with modernism increased, O’Keeffe found these new visual languages more intelligible. In October 1915, she wrote to Pollitzer of the Picasso violin drawing that had baffled her less than a year before, “I wonder how it would look to me now.”³⁵

Seeing these ground-breaking charcoals and watercolors by Picasso and Braque, as well as those in other 291 exhibitions by Rodin, Matisse, and Cézanne, American artists like O’Keeffe embraced graphic media as part of these works’ position on the cutting edge of modernism.³⁶ Such drawings were like thrilling news bulletins from the front lines of art, coming before the artists had even had time to transfer their ideas from paper to canvas. The message of graphic art as an avant-garde mode was reinforced when Stieglitz followed the Picasso-Braque exhibition with a small show of Picasso drawings in the back room of 291 while paintings and watercolors by Francis Picabia hung in the front room.³⁷ There is no evidence that O’Keeffe saw this second exhibition of recent Cubist works, but it would undoubtedly have interested her and her friends.

Probably the first time that O’Keeffe saw art by an American artist at 291 was in *An Exhibition of Water-Colors, oils, etchings, drawings, recent and old, by John Marin, of New York*, on view from February 23 to March 26, 1915 (Fig. 3.22).³⁸ In Marin’s watercolors, etchings, and drawings, along with a few oils, O’Keeffe saw a fellow American artist who had chosen to make most of his major visual statements on paper rather than on canvas. He had taken up the graphic challenge of the European modernists. Marin’s works impressed and intrigued O’Keeffe. Months later she still felt their impact, writing to Pollitzer,

Do you remember the blue crayon of – "Rain in New York" by Marin – It hung on the door in the front room – I thought that was great – It was great to me anyway – Art like that[.]

What's the use in talking.³⁹

Decades later O'Keeffe had not forgotten Marin's blue crayon drawing. She recalled seeing,

a Marin show of watercolors – watercolor as a medium handled as no other American has handled it. . . . Stieglitz had made enough for Marin to carry him through the year, and when Marin returned [to New York] in the fall he told Stieglitz he had bought an island in Maine so he had no money left for the year ahead. Stieglitz was quite upset as he was desperate to know how he could again get enough to carry Marin through another year. He told me all this – both of us standing with no place to sit. I was facing the back of a door with a small blue crayon drawing hanging on it. I was listening to his sad tale about Marin, but was constantly looking at this abstract blue crayon drawing – and vaguely thinking in the back of my head, "If Marin can live by making drawings like this – maybe I can get along with the odd drawings I have been making." I asked if that drawing could be sold – "Yes."⁴⁰

This conversation tells us that even while she was still taking classes in art education, O'Keeffe was considering trying to become an artist of the kind whose art Stieglitz showed – a modern artist. The question of whether she could become a commercially viable professional modernist was so pressing that she gathered her courage to talk with the intimidating Stieglitz. The conversation as O'Keeffe recorded it implies that by the winter of 1914-1915 she was already making art (all or almost all now lost or destroyed) daring enough for her to term it "odd." And what is more, her first attempts in this radical direction were apparently drawings. Possibly these were drawings she made under the influence of Dow, Bement, and Martin. O'Keeffe seems to have envisioned making not only sketches, but salable works on paper rather than paintings. The work in Marin's show she admired most was a drawing.⁴¹ Such inspiration would help lead her to enter modernism by way of drawing.

O’Keeffe and Pollitzer Question the Training of the Modern Artist

In the summer of 1915 when O’Keeffe returned to the University of Virginia to teach with Alon Bement as she had during previous summers, she and Pollitzer both pondered how or whether they should continue their training in the fall. O’Keeffe began to question whether she, or any aspiring modernist, needed advanced traditional art training. By 1915 Dow and Bement, once O’Keeffe’s guides to radicalism, seemed too old-fashioned to guide her on her new road. O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer in October, “In that color Printing class [taught by Dow] I used to nearly go crazy – they all flattered him so much – and I was liking such snorting things that his seemed disgustingly tame to me.”⁴² O’Keeffe recalled Bement, sensing her growing rebellion, telling her, “Now when I talk to your classes I don’t want you to get up right after me and tell the class that what I say isn’t so and to pay no attention to me.” But while O’Keeffe termed Bement “a very poor painter” with “no courage,” she acknowledged him as “a very good teacher” who had been “of great use to me when he first knew me.”⁴³

When Pollitzer wrote to O’Keeffe that she was considering taking further classes at the Art Students League, O’Keeffe replied, “I would stay with the [Teachers] College if I were you. Alon [Bement] is a funny little fellow but I like the way he teaches. I just wouldn’t take anything for having stumbled around in his class. You have to stumble sometimes. You might just as well do it now as anytime. I think you have a better chance of keeping your own way of doing things with him.”⁴⁴ Having imbibed new artistic concepts from Dow and various authors on modernism, she now saw the freedom to experiment with her new ideas as more important than the continuation of her training.

Pollitzer replied to her friend,

praps you're right about my not going to the League – but I hate to risk not going there – at least for a try – I think you rather forget that while Mr. Bement & people who let you stumble around, may be good for you *now*, they wouldn't have *been* before you'd had good solid grinding. Then too I feel that if my own way of doing things isn't strong enough to go thru the grind of the League and come out pretty whole, its not worth much in the first place! Of course I'd a million times rather work anywhere – float around 291 – the [Teachers] College Life Room, but I rather think I'd be sorry at the end of the year. You see I'll register for a month, and if at the end of that time I'm dead spiritually – I'll leave. But wouldn't it be tragic if some day – when I'm an old lady – I'd like to express something on paper – that had to be drawn correctly - & suddenly realized I'd never learned to draw – It would be a shock. Wouldn't it.⁴⁵

Pollitzer's unease with leaving the security of the academy was palpable.

Younger and with less artistic training than O'Keeffe, she clung to Martin's academic belief in the centrality of correct drawing. O'Keeffe eventually conceded that Pollitzer should have the training she felt she needed.⁴⁶ But Pollitzer wrote that when she told Bement that she was taking life classes at the League he witheringly asked, “Why?”⁴⁷

Pollitzer wrote to O'Keeffe of a conversation she had had at 291 with Stieglitz circle artist Abraham Walkowitz, who had studied at the National Academy of Design.⁴⁸ He said to her, “You know what I think – that you should go to the league & learn all they've got to teach you – then work by yourself & forget *all* you can of what they've told you & what's left will be the part that's good for you.”⁴⁹ Walkowitz's advice, as Pollitzer recorded it, sums up the conclusion that O'Keeffe and Pollitzer both seemed to reach about training for the beginning modernist: academic training provided necessary foundational skills and insights, but it was only a beginning. Eventually the modern artist must adapt methods from both academic and modern sources to develop his or her own individual means of expression. O'Keeffe was in the midst of this very process of innovation.

O’Keeffe’s Art Made During the Summer of 1915

O’Keeffe once again taught with Bement at the University of Virginia in the summer of 1915. Modernism was on the young teacher’s mind that summer and she passionately discussed it with her students.⁵³ In her own art, this was a productive summer of experiments as she tentatively waded into unfamiliar waters, still watched by instructors who could rescue her if she foundered. In addition to having Bement teaching alongside her at the University of Virginia, O’Keeffe mailed works off to Pollitzer and True to get their opinions of them. She asked her friends to show the works to Mr. Martin at Teachers College and send back his critiques, which they did.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, neither the majority of O’Keeffe’s art works made in the summer of 1915 nor records of Martin’s critiques survive. The artist’s correspondence with Pollitzer, however, gives some idea of what the missing art was like. O’Keeffe’s summer of experimentation is reflected in the descriptions of work in a variety of media, including pastels and watercolors.⁵⁵ At the beginning of the summer, O’Keeffe’s works described in the correspondence were representational and in color, in contrast to the black and white abstractions she would make in the fall. Letters between O’Keeffe and Pollitzer refer to portraits, flowers, landscapes, and architectural subjects.⁵⁶ But O’Keeffe was already starting toward abstraction. In June 1915 she wrote Pollitzer a letter on which are various schematic little drawings made either by O’Keeffe or by Pollitzer after she received the letter. These images include an abstract geometric sketch that may depict a work of art O’Keeffe had sent to Pollitzer (Fig. 3.23).⁵⁷ Pollitzer replied that she liked O’Keeffe’s “blue & yellowish steps picture ever so much,” adding to her own letter a similar but simpler sketch of repeating geometric forms (Fig. 3.24).⁵⁸

Judging from these tiny sketches, O’Keeffe’s early tries at abstraction were more or less geometric and included rhyming forms lying alongside each other.

Perhaps the most tantalizing of the now missing works O’Keeffe sent to Pollitzer that summer was one the artist called simply “my music.” She specified that she, “didn’t make it to music – it is just my own tune – it is something I wanted very much to tell someone – and what I wanted to express was a feeling like wonderful music gives me – Mr. Bement liked it very much.”⁵⁹ Pollitzer replied, “Your music was beautiful in color.”⁶⁰ This work, perhaps in watercolor or pastels, was apparently abstract and one of the first of many works referring to music that O’Keeffe made at various times during her career. It was probably not, however, O’Keeffe’s first art work related to music. She had been exposed in a variety of ways to the idea of relating art, especially abstract art, to music. Dow, in his text book *Composition*, said that his own mentor, Oriental art scholar Ernest Fenollosa, “believed music to be, in a sense, the key to the other fine arts, since its essence is pure beauty; that space art [visual art] may be called ‘visual music’, and may be studied and criticized from this point of view.”⁶¹

When O’Keeffe made “my music” and shared the work with Bement, she was perhaps following up on an experience in his class room. She later told the story of how,

Walking down the hall of Columbia University Art Department, I heard music. Being curious, I opened the door and went in. The instructor [Alon Bement] was playing a low-toned record, asking the class to make a charcoal drawing from it. So I sat down and made a drawing too. Then he played a very different kind of record – a sort of high soprano sounding piece for another quick drawing. The two pieces were so different that you had to make two quite different drawings.

Drawing No. 14 [(Fig. 3.25)] is the one that I made at the time and it gave me an idea I was very interested to follow – the idea of lines like sounds.⁶²

This incident could have happened at any time during the semesters when O’Keeffe was studying at Teachers College, fall 1914, spring 1915, or spring 1916.⁶³ While Barbara Buhler Lynes in *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* dates *No. 14 Special* (Fig. 3.25) to 1916,⁶⁴ I believe that O’Keeffe’s initial experience in making musically-inspired abstract art must have occurred in the spring semester of 1915. The artist wrote to Pollitzer on January 14, 1916, mentioning what could be the lost “my music,” or *No. 14 Special* or the visually related *No. 20 – From Music – Special* (Fig. 3.26) or related works now lost or unlocated, or a combination of these works. “Yesterday just by accident I found those music things I did with Bement last year and they are certainly different.”⁶⁵ Therefore O’Keeffe certainly made drawings to music with Bement in 1915. Possibly the work O’Keeffe made that summer and termed “my music” was a color variant of the black and white originals she had made in Bement’s classroom a month or two before. To make such a work she would not have had to work while listening to music – she could have simply have looked at an earlier work and interpreted it, or similar forms, into color. O’Keeffe’s drawing or drawings made in Bement’s class in 1915 inspired by music were probably connected with her reading, at Bement’s urging, Kandinsky’s *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*. Kandinsky described how, “A painter who finds no satisfaction in mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts today, achieves this end. He naturally seeks to apply the methods of music to his own art.”⁶⁶

The drawing to which O’Keeffe referred in *Some Memories of Drawings, No. 14 Special* (Fig. 3.25), is obviously not a sketch that she could very easily have made swiftly

on the spot in response to recorded music (remembering that the gramophone records of the early twentieth century played for no more than four or five minutes per side and O’Keeffe did not mention Bement’s playing a whole series of records).⁶⁷ Rather, it is a fairly polished charcoal drawing, probably a more completed work based upon a sketch that O’Keeffe had made in Bement’s class. *No. 14 Special* combines a range of charcoal application techniques including a rubbed gray tone like that in an academic drawing as well as roughly textured shading and directly drawn black outlines more like those drawn by Picasso. With this lively combination of academic and modernist graphic approaches, O’Keeffe began the body of works that would culminate in charcoal drawings she made in the autumn of 1915. These works would bring her into the Stieglitz circle and establish her as a viable modern artist.

No. 20 – From Music – Special (Fig. 3.26) to 1915 could be, or be related to, the original sketch that O’Keeffe refined into *No. 14 Special*. Like *No. 14 Special*, *No. 20* includes black rectangular forms overlapping gray circular forms, each repeated in close variations like recurring themes in a classical composition. The work’s sketchiness is evident in the rough gray shading of the shapes and the white lines at the upper right that the artist crossed out impatiently. *No. 20*’s identity as a sketch rather than a finished work is confirmed by the fact that it was never exhibited during the artist’s lifetime, whereas Stieglitz exhibited the more finished *No. 14 Special* in 1917.⁶⁸ *No. 20* is bounded by a strong black line around its margins like the lines around compositional exercises that Dow and Bement taught (Fig. 2.45). This characteristic would be repeated in some of O’Keeffe’s autumn 1915 charcoals. In *No. 20* O’Keeffe combined the kind of geometric repetition of parallel forms she evidently explored in her “steps” picture (Figs.

3.23-24) with abstract biomorphic forms, shaded in gray, like those that would appear in her 1915 charcoals. Thus, it was apparently under Bement's, and possibly also Martin's, direction that O'Keeffe began the graphic experiments that evolved into her first independent modernist works. Drawings like *No. 14 Special* may have been among those that O'Keeffe described as "odd" ones she was making when she asked Stieglitz whether abstract drawings like those by Marin could possibly sell.⁶⁹

During the summer of 1916, O'Keeffe made experiments in color that probably were based upon from the kind of drawings she had first tried in classes with Bement and Martin at Teachers College. "My music" was only one among many color experiments she made that summer. When O'Keeffe sent a group of her summer's works to True in October, Pollitzer also saw them. She was very excited by what O'Keeffe had produced, writing to the artist,

I saw them yesterday – and they made me *feel* – I swear they did – They have emotion that sing out or hollar as the case may be. I'm talking about your pastels – of course. They've all got *feeling* Pat – written in red right over them – no one could possibly get your definite meanings Pat – that is unless they knew you better than I believe anyone does know you – but the mood is there everywhere. I'll tell you the ones that I sat longest in front of:-

The crazy one – all lines & colors & angles – There is none other like it so you'll know the one I mean – it is so consistently full & confused & crazy that it pleased me tremendously. It struck me as a perfect expression of a mood! That was why I liked it – not because it was pleasing or pretty for its far from that – It screams like a maniac & runs around like a dog chasing its tail. . . .

Your color in that orange & red ball one – is very strong & powerful – It doesn't mean just as much to me as that first – I guess its more yours Pat & less any body else's. The blue purple mountain is exquisitely fine & rare. It expresses perfect strength – but a kind not a brutal strength.

Your trees – green & purple are *very* simple & stand well & firmly. I like that as it is – but Dorothy wrote you what Mr Martin said I guess last night.

Then the smaller one of the yellow & redish orange pictures struck me as awfully good but *I didn't like it* – It meant something *awfully different* to me & I couldn't get that out of my head.⁷⁰

To judge from Pollitzer's emotionally-charged commentary, O'Keeffe during the summer used bright colors in making works that were increasingly abstract, although some depicted or strongly evoked landscape elements like mountains and trees. O'Keeffe's use of pastel may have started in her class with Martin, whose students at Teachers College worked in the very similar medium of colored chalks "to develop expression."⁷¹

Pollitzer's words (and the now lost words written by Dorothy True and Charles Martin) were the most immediate reactions that O'Keeffe got to her new graphic works. The bubbling praise in Pollitzer's letters helped to spur O'Keeffe to keep creating at a furious pace that summer. She worked, however, in hopes of pleasing herself more than her friends. In the autumn, beginning to work in a more serious mode, she wrote to Pollitzer, "During the summer – I didn't work for anyone – I just sort of went mad usually – I wanted to say 'Let them all be damned – I'll do as I please'?"⁷²

While most of the art that O'Keeffe turned out so rapidly during the summer of 1915 did not survive her severe later editing of her oeuvre, two works are still extant (Figs. 3.16-17) to speak for those that have vanished.⁷³ O'Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer, including a sketch that refers to the two existing related pastels (Fig. 3.27). The artist said that the work was prompted by her current love-interest, Arthur Macmahon, a professor of political science at Columbia University.⁷⁴ He spent time with O'Keeffe while they were both teaching at the University of Virginia that summer. She wrote that the work,

is Political Science and me – dabbling our feet in the water – It is about fifteen feet deep right under our feet – is red from the red clay – and comes down with a rush like all the mountain streams. He got me to put my feet in because he said the motion of the water had such a fine rhythm – I still had on my stockings - !
Those two things were just my ways of trying to express it to him.⁷⁵

Many years later O’Keeffe corroborated and expanded her earlier account of the pastels in a letter to a private collector, “These abstractions were done after sitting on the edge of a river and having a conversation with a friend about abstractions from nature. I went home and made two pastels to illustrate to him what I meant.”⁷⁶ O’Keeffe’s words elucidate how her relationship to close friends like Pollitzer, True, and Macmahon helped to further her modernist artistic project. She wrote to Pollitzer, “I thank you and Dorothy for giving me a jolt that started me at work.”⁷⁷ The interest of friends prompted the artist to realize the “shapes” in her head in visual form, using rapid graphic means, so that she could share and discuss her “shapes.”⁷⁸

Using bright colors reflecting the rich red-orange of Virginia clay and gestural lines inspired by the natural currents of water, O’Keeffe plunged into abstraction. The inspiration of flowing water recommended itself for abstract compositions. No longer tied to strict mimesis, she improvised, changing and adding elements as she went. For instance, over existing orange forms she added a yellow and pale green diagonal line curling across the center of the lower part of one drawing (Fig. 3.16). O’Keeffe set aside academic perspective, modeling, and composition to fill these two sheets with flat, lyrical fantasies. In such works the artist strove to rid herself of trammeling rules and conventions. Even so, familiar forms found their way into these works, as Peters points out their close kinship to populD art nouveau nature-based whiplash patterns.⁷⁹

Autumn 1915: O’Keeffe in South Carolina

During the summer of 1915 O’Keeffe had weighed the options that would shape her own future. Did she need to continue studying and seeing exhibitions in New York or was she ready to go off on her own? Should she take the job she had been offered

teaching art at Columbia College in South Carolina? O’Keeffe knew that if she took the position at the small Methodist school located in College Place, outside Columbia, she would miss her friends and the exciting procession of shows at 291 and elsewhere in New York.⁸⁰ But such a sacrifice could have its compensations. O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer,

I think I will go to South Carolina – for time to do some things I want to do as much as anything - It will be nearer freedom to me than New York – You see – I have to make a living.

I don’t know that I will ever be able to do it just expressing myself as I want to – so it seems to me that the best course is the one that leaves my mind freest . . . to work as I please and at the same time makes me some money.

If I went to New York I would be lucky if I could make a living – and doing it would take all my time and energy.⁸¹

Economic reality dictated that despite any dreams of making her own art full time, O’Keeffe should continue working as an art teacher. She would take such positions as the one at Columbia College with hopes of having the time and motivation to make her own art on the side. It was not until September that O’Keeffe at last made up her mind to brave what she saw as the provincialism of South Carolina, far from the American avant-garde capital of Manhattan. As she later put it, “I had gotten a lot of new ideas and was crazy to get off in a corner and try them out.”⁸² She had reached a level in her studies where she could begin her individual experimentations in the modernist mode outside the academic group in the classroom, even though she had not yet moved into the Stieglitz circle.

In South Carolina, where she arrived in September to begin teaching at Columbia College,⁸³ O’Keeffe devoted her time outside of school to devising a new modernist formal vocabulary. No one whom O’Keeffe encountered at the college seemed to know or care the least thing about modern art. She had the opportunity to work in relative aesthetic isolation, with no one looking over her shoulder. She wrote to Pollitzer that she

was glad to have “time to get my breath and stand still and look at the world” although she “would like something human to talk to.”⁸⁴ She had plenty of time for her own work, as she informed Pollitzer,

[I] Have four big classes in Design once a week – and the rest is studio work. We have Monday free and afternoons after 3 but I always have plenty of time to get in at least two hours work myself during school hours so I always take a walk in the afternoon.⁸⁵

Now O’Keeffe was left free to consider the art and ideas of Bement, Dow, Eddy, Kandinsky, and the artists whose works she had seen at 291. During the autumn these elements began to coalesce in O’Keeffe’s mind and in her art. As she later wrote, “I didn’t start at it [using these new ideas] until I was down in Carolina – alone – thinking things out for myself.”⁸⁶

O’Keeffe had Pollitzer’s enthusiasm to support her artistic ventures and even Stieglitz had sent encouragement, saying to Pollitzer in response to tales of her absent artist-friend, “When she gets her money [from teaching] – she’ll do Art with it & if she’ll get anywhere – its worth going to Hell to get there.”⁸⁷ However, O’Keeffe’s first few weeks in South Carolina only led her to questions and frustrations. The lonely O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer from the small, impoverished, women’s college,⁸⁸

It is going to take such a tremendous effort to keep from stagnating down here that I don’t know whether I am going to be equal to it or not. I have been painting a lot of canvases and boards white – getting ready for work – I think I am going to have lots of time to work but bless you – Anita – one can’t work with nothing to express. I never felt such a vacancy in my life – Everything is so mediocre – I don’t dislike it – I don’t like it – It is existing – not living – and absolutely – I just wish some one would take hold of me and shake me out of my wits.⁸⁹

Her preparation of boards and canvases implies that O’Keeffe intended to begin painting in oils. But before moving forward with her art the confused and depressed

O’Keeffe stopped and considered the direction she should take. It is easy to see her desire at this moment to stop playing at art and graduate at long last from student to mature artist. But was she ready to use those white-primed boards and canvases to make mature modernist oils, or was she not yet sure enough of her direction to leave behind the drawing media of the student?

291 shaped O’Keeffe’s frighteningly high aspirations at this point. She had earlier written to Pollitzer, “The last time I went up to 291 there was nothing on the walls – chairs just knocked around – tracks on the floor and – talk behind the curtain – I even liked it when there was nothing.”⁹⁰ Her longing to enter the inner circle behind the curtain was palpable, but how could she gain entry? As she worked on her new art, O’Keeffe revealed her highest aspirations to Pollitzer, “Anita – do you know – I believe I would rather have Stieglitz like some thing – anything I had done – than anyone else I know of – I have always thought that – If I ever make any thing that satisfies me even ever so little – I am going to show it to him to find out if it’s any good.” But art that satisfied the artist herself only “ever so little” did not give O’Keeffe enough courage for her to show it to Stieglitz. She was probably too insecure about her first tries at modernism to think any of her actual works were good enough to please Stieglitz. What she really wanted was to make art embodying the kind of independent individual expression she believed that Stieglitz admired. As she continued in her letter, “I don’t see why we ever think of what others think of what we do – no matter who they are – isn’t it enough just to express yourself?”⁹¹

Jonathan Weinberg in *Ambition & Love in Modern American Art* sees these two passages as exemplifying how O’Keeffe at this moment in her career “oscillates between

the desire for approval from Stieglitz, or Dow, or Pollitzer, and the insistence that her goal is to express herself.”⁹² I believe, however, that O’Keeffe herself felt no inconsistency in her desires. At this moment she seems to have totally conflated her own striving for individual expression with Stieglitz’s aesthetic ideas. Judging from what she wrote to Pollitzer, O’Keeffe felt that if she attained true personal expression, Stieglitz would approve. If she compromised truth to self in an effort to please any critical eye, even Stieglitz’s own, he would perceive the betrayal and reject the art. As Anne M. Wagner phrases it, “Stieglitz . . . had become her key ‘imaginary viewer’ – the person whom she envisioned her work as addressing.”⁹³ It is no wonder that the artist felt discouraged as she attempted to create specific works of art that would fulfill such a vague, lofty, and impossible ideal.

As she was striving to make the leap into ultimate freedom of creation, O’Keeffe pulled against the gravity of her past. In the same emotionally fraught letter quoted just above she went on,

I am getting a lot of fun out of slaving by myself – the disgusting part is that I so often find myself saying – what would you – or Dorothy – or Mr. Martin or Mr. Dow – or Mr. Bement – or somebody – most anybody – say if they saw it – It is curious – how one works for flattery –

Rather – it is curious how hard it seems to be for me right now not to cater to some one when I work – rather than just to express myself

During the summer – I didn’t work for anyone – I just sort of went mad usually – I wanted to say ‘Let them all be damned – I’ll do as I please’? – It was vacation after the winter – but – now – remember – I’ve only been working a week – I find myself catering to opinion again – and I think I’ll just stop it.⁹⁴

In 1923, in a statement for an exhibition, O’Keeffe remembered this time of struggles to find her own voice,

One day seven years ago [I] found myself saying to myself – I can’t live where I want to – I can’t go where I want to – I can’t do what I want to – I can’t even say what I want to. School and things that painters have taught me even

keep me from painting as I want to. I decided I was a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only thing I could do that didn't concern anybody but myself – that was nobody's business but my own. So these paintings and drawings happened.⁹⁵

Yet, as much as she desired to find her own path, O'Keeffe could not simply throw out her past. At this moment, preparing to strike off in a new direction, she paused to look back at the training that had become so much a part of her. Taking up the modernist attitudes of 291 that demanded an artist strive for individuality above all, she wanted to free herself from the long conditioning of the academic routine of pleasing one teacher after another. She later said,

It was in the fall of 1915 that I first had the idea that what I had been taught was of little value to me except for the use of my materials as a language – charcoal, pencil, pen and ink, watercolor, pastel, and oil I had become fluent with them when I was so young that they were simply another language that I handled easily. But what to say with them? I had been taught to work like others and after careful thinking I decided that I wasn't going to spend my life doing what had already been done.⁹⁶

To discover what she wanted to make that was new, and what would be true to herself, O'Keeffe had to consider the past that had shaped her to this point. What ideas had she acquired along with the physical mastery of her materials? What was worth keeping and what had to go? Studying her own work from the past few months, O'Keeffe reviewed her history as an art student, reconsidering the people and institutions that had shaped her work. It is worth noting that she listed the media she had learned with charcoal and other drawing media first and oil painting last – roughly in the order that she had learned them and also roughly in the order in which she would take them up in her mature art (with the exception of pencil and ink, which she would never again use to make finished fine art work). She took a moment to engage in reassessment:

I hung on the wall the work I had been doing for several months. Then I sat down and looked at it. I could see how each painting or drawing had been done according to one teacher or another, and I said to myself, “I have things in my head that are not like what anyone has taught me – shapes and ideas so near to me – so natural to my way of being and thinking that it hasn’t occurred to me to put them down.” I decided to start anew – to strip away what I had been taught – to accept as true my own thinking. This was one of the best times in my life. There was no one around to look at what I was doing – no one interested – no one to say anything about it one way or another. I was alone and singularly free, working into my own, unknown – no one to satisfy but myself.⁹⁷

O’Keeffe was repulsed by the obvious signs of teachers so crowded on the pages and canvases of “her” art that there was hardly room for her own marks. Her own “shapes” had to take priority. To become, as she desired, modernist, to learn to trust her own vision more than that of any other, the artist had to sort her own thought from the traces of other minds. Even her wild summer abstractions looked derivative to her now. There was a lot to throw away. Only then could she find a clear space for her own personal shapes. O’Keeffe wrote telling Pollitzer to keep the works she had sent her and do what she liked with them. O’Keeffe declared her independence,

I am starting all over new –
Have put everything I have ever done away and don’t expect to get any of
it out ever again . . .
I feel disgusted and am glad I’m disgusted.
Yes – I’m feeling happier – Anita – maybe it would be better to say that I
feel as if I have my balance.⁹⁸

But balance would not result from a panicky run from her past with no certain path into the future. She could not define herself only negatively by what she was not. She was bound to take the advice that Walkowitz had given to Pollitzer, “forget *all* you can of what they’ve told you & what’s left will be the part that’s good for you.”⁹⁹ As O’Keeffe would discover over the course of the coming months, certain parts of even a modernist’s academic background would be so engrained that she could not forget them.

Nor would the artist or her art benefit from total amnesia. As Weinberg cogently describes O’Keeffe’s realizations at this time,

It turns out that to eliminate entirely the influence of her teachers, friends, and critics is virtually impossible. They inhabit her mind even when they are not present. The artist’s own critical faculties are the product of training. Where to make a mark or apply a color, what is worth painting, and what can safely be ignored, finally what constitutes an acceptable picture – these are decisions that the artist makes as a result of training and in response to real and imagined audiences. What O’Keeffe calls the artist’s desire for ‘flattery’ is a necessary part of the process of finding a voice. Yet at the same time producing an art that is too familiar, too acceptable, also threatens the process of finding a personal style.¹⁰⁰

O’Keeffe’s Turn to Charcoal in Autumn 1915

I would further say that the artist realized how a stronger, better balanced, art would result if she could manage to integrate the influences of her past with the new art she now admired. The work that I believe she made based upon her sketch from Bement’s class room, *Number 14 Special* (Fig. 3.25), had proven to O’Keeffe that such integration was possible in the medium of charcoal. This medium had, after all, been used by both academic artists like John Vanderpoel and that most radical of avant-garde artists, Pablo Picasso. O’Keeffe’s artistic ideas at this moment combined the values she had learned at easels in academic classrooms with those new truths she had found while standing rapt and startled before new art at 291.

Returning in the autumn of 1915 to a medium familiar from her academic days, and from Bement’s classes, O’Keeffe decided to forge ahead with a piece of charcoal in her hand. She poured her creative thought and energy into a series of abstract drawings, many of them later titled with the apt word “Special” (Figs. 3.1-11), that she would also apply to her charcoals made in or after Bement’s class.¹⁰¹ After Bement’s music exercises, and deriving from them, the charcoals made in the autumn of 1915 were some

of the first works that satisfied her as being her own, at least enough for her not to tear them up. Her own voice was emerging from the fading chorus of her past teachers and influences, even as she reworked strains of their melodies into her own.

The questions surrounding O’Keeffe’s choice and use of medium at this critical stage of her career have previously been subordinated by most art historians to the investigation of her abstract “subjects” and their sources. Peters, for instance, concentrates on “concrete references” to Art Nouveau in all of the abstract charcoal drawings of this period.¹⁰² Judith Walsh, the paper conservator who was a key member of the O’Keeffe Catalogue Raisonné team, however, observes, as previously mentioned, the reiteration of her schooling in O’Keeffe’s choice of media in the autumn of 1915.¹⁰³ I see the decision as more complex than that, however. There are many layers of meaning tied to the choice and use of medium at this daring yet vulnerable moment of transformation when the former student, now a teacher, turned to teaching herself.

It is revealing that O’Keeffe chose at this moment to be neither oil painter nor watercolorist, leaving her future options open. Drawing could potentially ally her with any medium since it was equally a foundational skill for painting, sculpture, architecture, printmaking, illustration, interior design, and other areas of art. She knew this both from her academic training at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League and through her study of Dow’s ideas, which classified all art equally as design. In 1915 O’Keeffe entered works in an exhibition by the Philadelphia Watercolor Club, as well as the National Arts Club’s *Forty-Eight Annual Exhibition of the American Watercolor Society* and the New York Water Color Club’s *Twenty-sixth Annual Exhibition*. She must have seen possibilities for working in watercolor and other graphic media, although this

does not rule out an interest in eventually working in oils.¹⁰⁴ While she had primed boards and canvases for paintings in oils, she momentarily put aside that dominant medium. Possibly, for the moment, the artist was content in the fecund motion of pulling a piece of charcoal down the textured surface of her paper. Almost anything might grow from this.

O’Keeffe could appreciate the powerful emotional charges carried by media. She still carried the scars of her painful decision to give up painting when she left the Art Students League, dreading the very “smell of paint or turpentine because of the emotions they aroused.”¹⁰⁵ Oils could no longer have held so much anxiety for O’Keeffe, since she had used that medium successfully when she was at Teachers College.¹⁰⁶ Yet she momentarily rejected the expected medium.

According to her letters, O’Keeffe made a false start in color, struggling for many days with a watercolor. But color was throwing obstacles into her path. She interrogated both creation and teaching, wondering in a letter to Pollitzer, “What is Art any way?” To continue to teach, she just had to “give myself some little answer to” this question. But in the next paragraph, O’Keeffe revealed how she was beginning to work out her own answers – in monochrome on paper by drawing rather than by writing. “The things I’ve done that satisfy me most are charcoal landscapes – and – things – the colors I seem to want to use absolutely nauseate me.”¹⁰⁷

For a brief period, she worked in color alongside the beginnings of her sequence of charcoal works. She wrote in October 1915, “I am starting to paint little realistic landscapes like Mr. Martin said and they are ridiculously funny.” But in the same letter she affirms that the works she found most exciting and challenging were her abstract

charcoals. She said, “I made a crazy thing last week – charcoal – somewhat like myself – like I was feeling – keenly alive – but not much point to it all – Something wonderful about it all – but it looks lost – I am lost you know.”¹⁰⁸ O’Keeffe struggled to find a productive artistic path.

Setting forth with only the directive of making modern art to express herself was too broad an enterprise. As Clive Bell in his newly published, seminal volume *Art* stated the problem, “few artists, if any, can sit down or stand up just to create nothing more definite than significant form, just to express nothing more definite than a sense of reality. Artists must canalize their emotion, they must concentrate their energies on some definite problem.”¹⁰⁹ O’Keeffe set herself a problem in the form of an exercise like those she had done in school or might be setting her own students. She later recalled how she consciously, “began with charcoal and paper and decided not to use any color until it was impossible to do what I wanted to do in black and white.”¹¹⁰ By thus narrowing the field of possible endeavor to black and white, she concentrated her energies on the problem of finding monochrome modernist forms.

Charcoal was, by the late nineteenth century, the classic academic medium of training and planning, learning and experimenting.¹¹¹ In this graphic medium, O’Keeffe was certain of her technical mastery. While she associated oils with the defeat of leaving the Art Students League before her training was complete, she could align charcoal and other drawing media with her triumphs and growth as an artist. From her first drawing lessons, through all the schools she attended, making drawings and watercolor granted her technical facility, social recognition, and personal satisfaction. Perhaps most dramatically, with charcoal drawings she had subdued the dragon of the nude model; her

graphic mastery had taken her to the top of her class at the Art Institute of Chicago.¹¹² As Walsh notes, charcoal for O’Keeffe was “an old friend,”¹¹³ and thus it was an ally at this pivotal moment. While changing many aspects of her art in 1915, O’Keeffe found continuity by reviving her earliest and, thus far most successful, artistic identities as a student, a graphic artist, and an art teacher. As Anne Wagner sums up the situation, “The *Specials* had behind them a decade of experience from which they can be seen to profit, but at the same time, they mark her emergence as an ‘artist’ for the first time.”¹¹⁴ I observe O’Keeffe in her 1915 charcoals engaging in graphic performance not for a teacher critiquing her in front of a class, but first for herself alone, and then for those few friends whom she trusted to tell her the truth.

Modernism broke academic “rules,” but O’Keeffe took it as seriously as any of her previous studies. As the school year began, she taught her students and herself simultaneously. The academic tradition of drawing asserted that a student must master the delineation of forms in monochrome before he or she could earn the privilege, and face the complexities, of working with color. Dow, despite all his revisions to the academic approach to teaching art, agreed. He wrote in *Composition*, “a study of art should begin with line. One should learn to think in terms of line, and be somewhat familiar with simple spacing before attempting notan [dark and light] or color.”¹¹⁵ Once his students had mastered line he recommended they use charcoal for learning to work with values of black, white, and gray.¹¹⁶

At this moment when she was teaching her students art using Dow’s ideas, O’Keeffe started herself as she would have begun her students, in black and white. She stripped away both outside influences and the complications and temptations of color so

she could concentrate on the new shapes she was finding. Her medium was familiar when all else was new. Arthur Jerome Eddy's book quoted French modernist Francis Picabia as saying, "Creating a picture without models is art."¹¹⁷ O'Keeffe now had no model to look at and no teacher to guide her. As she said later, "I was alone and singularly free, working into my own, unknown – no one to satisfy but myself."¹¹⁸

O'Keeffe later recalled of her autumn 1915 venture into modernism, "It was like learning to walk."¹¹⁹ She had learned to walk before, during her first studies of art, in the academic tradition. The motions of academic drawing, almost as much as the mechanics of walking, were programmed into her mind and body. The chief question facing O'Keeffe at this time was how to redirect her existing art practices toward making a modernist product. While Dow's teachings helped O'Keeffe to make strong abstract compositions on the page using elements from varied sources, he could not resolve for her the technical, aesthetic, philosophical, and historical tensions between opposed artistic traditions. As she made her new works, O'Keeffe would have had to consciously reconsider every aspect of her physical and psychological processes. Her endeavor was parallel to that of the poet William Carlos Williams, at times part of the Stieglitz circle, who said that as he created modern poetry he had to "re-valuate" the words he used to "liberate" them from old literary traditions.¹²⁰ O'Keeffe went through a similar process of "re-valuating" and "liberating" the technical vocabulary of drawing.

The clash of academic and modern traditions, with their opposed criteria for success, seems to have sparked the creation of her new drawings. This aesthetic battle caused the artist some insecurity. She wrote to Pollitzer, "Anita – I wonder if I am a raving lunatic for trying to make these things – You know – I don't care if I am – but I do

wonder sometimes.”¹²¹ Offsetting her anxieties, charcoal renewed her school-girl joy in creating illusionistic modeled forms in fictive space (Figs. 2.9-10). While Dow’s mode of drawing stressed the kind of decorative flatness she had used in her abstract pastels of the summer, she now used more traditionally academic modes of drawing to fill her new charcoals with modeled forms set into the suggestion of space. O’Keeffe drew the dripping and growing shapes crowded into *No. 5 Special* (Fig. 3.2) with well delineated highlights and shadows that gave them the weight and presence of three-dimensional objects, even if the identities of the objects remained obscure. A central sphere in *No. 12 – Special* (Fig. 3.6) has a bright highlight on the upper left and a dark shadow on the lower right with gray graduating between them, much as an academic artist would have drawn an apple or any spherical object in a still life (Fig. 2.9). Rather than sitting on a table, however, the “apple,” hangs in a space dense with curvilinear forms that recede from the viewer through the basic pictorial means of overlap. Even as O’Keeffe rejected linear perspective, she retained other traditional means of achieving illusionistic depth in order to create art of a seriousness and psychological depth that might eventually be worthy of public attention.

While hanging on to certain familiar conventions, O’Keeffe turned away from those aspects of academic drawing practice that had made her so uncomfortable when she studied at the Art Institute. She was alone with her thoughts as she drew. No nude model stood before her and there was no teacher and no crowd of students to impress. She had no physical facts outside of herself against which to match her depictions to learn if they were “true.”¹²² All she had to consult was the “shapes” in her mind derived from a lifetime of seeing and thinking about what she saw. It was a profoundly new way to use

drawing to look and learn. By shifting from representation to abstraction, as art historian Kirk Varnedoe defined it, she moved from exploration to discovery.¹²³

Yet the abstract forms in O’Keeffe’s “Specials” retained a kinship with the academic graphic practices and subjects so ingrained in her hand and memory. She discovered a new way of combining and reading the forms and media she had learned in school. She rejected the faceted forms of cubism (Figs. 3.18-20). Instead, she chose to draw organic forms, as many of Stieglitz’s favored American modernists often did (Fig. 3.15). O’Keeffe’s drawn shapes were rounded and modeled in a way that suggested living forms – perhaps body parts – even if they did not specify any namable subjects. As Anne M. Wagner asserts, although “there is no body in *Special No. 4* [(Fig 3.5)]. . . this is an imagery that solicits a bodily reading despite the absence of bodily form.”¹²⁴

Some aspects of these carefully delineated yet mysterious shapes appear to have grown out of O’Keeffe’s academic anatomy classes with Vanderpoel in which students drew one body part at a time, a hand or eye or foot abstracted by being visually detached from the complete human body for analysis (Fig. 3.28). Often the edge of the paper in O’Keeffe’s abstract drawings crops the unspecified members as if they were seen in very close up views of fractions of some larger and more complex entity. The bulbous curves in *No. 3 – Special*, *No. 4 Special*, and *Early Abstraction* (Figs. 3.4-5, 3.9) are cropped at the bottom where they might attach to a “body.” *No. 5 Special*, (Fig. 3.2) with its dense composition of forms crowding past the edges of the drawing is framed like a detail, perhaps as a biologist might see a specimen greatly enlarged by a microscope.

Dow’s methods of teaching composition would also have contributed to this mode of framing. As student Max Weber recalled, Dow would make an “unbounded” drawing

for students to copy and recompose within horizontal or vertical rectangles of their own choosing.¹²⁵ Many of O’Keeffe abstract charcoals made in 1915 and 1916 are enclosed in neat black lines (Figs. 3.1-2, 3.6-8, 3.11, 3.26, 3.29-30) like those around the sample compositions in Dow’s book Composition (Fig. 2.45) and presumably like the drawings students made in Dow’s, Bement’s, and Martin’s classes. The boundary lines around O’Keeffe’s drawings emphasize her considered division of the space within this chosen area. So modest a technicality as black borders thus offers proof of the overall continuity between her modernist formal practices and her schooling.

While O’Keeffe did not include Dow-influenced boundary lines in *No. 3 – Special*, and *No. 4 Special* (Figs. 3.4-5), these works, in addition to whatever phallic or vegetal imagery they suggest, make reference to O’Keeffe’s graphic background. The long, arched, parallel members could be read as a greatly enlarged detail of curled fingers. They might be vast echoes of the drawings that the child O’Keeffe had made of casts of human hands, drawings which she later recalled with a potent blend of shame and triumph (Figs. 2.3-4).¹²⁶ The inner surfaces of the curled forms in the 1915 drawings fold and bulge alternately much like the flesh of flexed human fingers. As O’Keeffe drew abstractions, she constantly saw and felt her own hands applying, blending, and erasing charcoal. Finger marks abound in these works as both drawing in dark charcoal, as around the inner edges of the front form in *No. 3 – Special*, and as erasing to make highlights, like those pale marks running up the long shafts of the forms in both *No. 3 – Special* and *No. 4 Special*. The trails of fingers in charcoal unite the form of fingers with the action of fingers. The physicality of drawing with the hand and revealing that hand, rather than painting with a brush and covering over the means of production, is far from

the accident of a randomly-selected medium. These abstract works strongly present the manual experience of drawing and the inherent self-examination involved in graphically depicting a fellow human form.

In *No. 3 – Special* and *No. 4 Special* the artist simplified the outer edges of her bent forms into sweeping abstract shapes that might seem to deny specifically anatomical references. Yet I see these large, simple curves as not randomly imposed geometry but natural lines described by the human arm pivoting from the shoulder. O’Keeffe drew as Dow advised his students to, “with the whole hand and arm in one sweep, not with the fingers.”¹²⁷ These large curves are indexes of the drawing arm - measures of the artist’s reach. The lines trail off at what must have been the limit of the artist’s range of motion, and then take up again in new, noticeably discontinuous marks. As O’Keeffe described in a letter to Pollitzer, she worked on the floor of her room at night, “I’ve been crawling around on the floor till I have cramps in my feet.”¹²⁸ She evidently had to creep along to a new place when she got to the end of her arm’s reach.

Where the lines left off and were continued near the bottom margins of the sheets, and to the left of the strongly modeled forms, the modeling flattened into strokes of a wet brush or rag drawing out the last dregs of charcoal.¹²⁹ Here the taut balance between the vivid description of form and the openly displayed evidence of the artist’s physical creation momentarily fails. As Anne Wagner describes this part of the drawing, “The form fades and flattens, losing corporeality as it travels down the paper, leaving only charcoaled strokes. Their intensity varies without resolving into form. Any sense of bodily presence thus cedes promptly to absence, to an encounter with the marks that made it.” Where Anne Wagner describes as this “bodily failure, or *disembodiment*”¹³⁰ in

the realm of representation, I see the body of the artist emerging in another way. These marks, even less so than the others on the page, do not deny that they were made by a finger, naked or enclosed in a rag. The marks did not simply appear, but are the traces left by a human body. The rhyming of the flattened arch of clear finger marks with the arch that was carefully modeled reminds the reader that all we see is, equally, art, and thus human.

With these tracks left by her own body on her paper, O’Keeffe asserted her own presence and artistic control by actively disrupting the degree of perfect finish expected of academic work. She refused to stay within the old bounds that demanded an artist hide all evidence of facture. She chose to leave clear signs of process that Stieglitz and other viewers would soon read as giving clues to her character and feelings. In some cases, as *Second Out of My Head* (Fig. 3.10), the artist seems first to have created an almost academic drawing of carefully modeled forms, rubbing the charcoal with a stomp to achieve precisely modulated tones of gray. But she then fixed the drawing and over it added overt signs of her process in bold, fresh charcoal lines and highlights made by dragging a fingertip down the page.¹³¹ Such a drawing was a passionate performance that invited the viewer to imaginatively glimpse the artist molding, grasping, and scratching silver and black forms into being.

Such obviously deliberate disclosure of process raises the question of how private or public O’Keeffe intended her 1915 charcoals to be. She seemed, at least at first, to be feeling her way and was often surprised at where she wound up.¹³² Yet, the works were of a size that would hold up in exhibition and they are too well crafted to be mere sketches. Since O’Keeffe sent her drawings to Pollitzer and Dorothy True within a few

weeks of making them, she was conscious that they were worthy of sharing with at least a few other sets of eyes besides her own. She therefore must have retained some self-consciousness while making these works. She may have imagined that they might one day be exhibited, even if she might have regarded an exhibition at 291 as an unrealistic dream. Thus, O’Keeffe’s 1915 charcoals straddled the line between sketch and finished drawing, private and public. Perhaps the artist herself could not make up her mind which she was attempting.

O’Keeffe in certain ways continued to hide behind the cool detachment of the academic artist. However suggestive they might be, her drawings remain abstract and do not make overt anatomical references nor do they contain tight description of any surface imperfections that would represent a specific person. There is no suggestion of wrinkles, hairs, or scars. The truth O’Keeffe’s new drawings evoked was generalized in a modernist parallel with academic drawings of nudes created to represent anatomical facts rather than the specifics of a particular model.

The nude was not the only academic form O’Keeffe re-visualized in her 1915 charcoals. She wrote to Pollitzer that she was most satisfied with her charcoal drawings of “landscapes – and – things.”¹³³ *Untitled* and *Second, Out of My Head* (Figs. 3.8, 3.10) contain vegetal forms growing up from earth-bound roots to stand silhouetted against cloud-like forms in elemental landscapes. As in her nude-derived abstractions, O’Keeffe eliminated unnecessary and distracting details to bring out essential vegetal shapes and processes and their similarities to artistic creation, a parallel that Stieglitz would later point out to critics reviewing these drawings. In such works, motions of growth and unfolding dominate, brought out by pale finger trails through the charcoal. In *Untitled*,

the artist even added thin black lines to refine and draw attention to the original finger marks.

O’Keeffe’s mode of modern drawing in her 1915 charcoals was made up of a curiously powerful and harmonious mixture of academic and what I see as anti-academic techniques. That is, in some places she carefully blended gray tones to assert described forms and hide the marks of her hand; in other places, within the same drawing, she asserted the actions of her hand over and above the illusion of described forms. Her hybrid graphic approach came about as her stock of graphic memories and instincts merged with modernist imagery. As previously discussed, I believe that O’Keeffe’s conception of modernism at this time was strongly graphic. Of the exhibitions that she had seen at 291 of works by Rodin, Matisse, Picasso and Braque, and Marin, all had been largely composed of drawings, watercolors, and prints. Picasso’s drawings shown at 291 had demonstrated to O’Keeffe the use of charcoal as an avant-garde medium. However, the Spaniard’s technical language of scratchy lines and textured facets was as unsuited to O’Keeffe’s own ideas as was his formal language of fragmented volumes and spaces (Figs. 3.18-20). She looked elsewhere to find formal approaches to modernism amenable to her own vision.

Periodicals and Books as Sources for O’Keeffe’s Modern Graphic Vocabulary

Although in the autumn of 1915 O’Keeffe was teaching in South Carolina far from the galleries of New York, she had a variety of modernist visual sources available to her. Her understanding of modernism was in formation through exclusively graphic means. The mail brought her books and periodicals, as well as Pollitzer’s often illustrated letters. The pictures and words on these sheets of paper were her lifelines.

Anne Wagner envisions O’Keeffe in South Carolina “feeding herself on the reproductions of Rodin and Cézanne in issues of *Camera Work* sent straight from New York.”¹³⁴ Indeed, O’Keeffe herself at the time described such printed sources as providing her with “food.”¹³⁵ I observe that O’Keeffe viewed the enterprise of making new art in an artistic backwater as a trial of her personal and artistic strength, with only graphic sustenance permitted. She wrote to Pollitzer at the beginning of the autumn, “If I can’t work by myself for a year – with no stimulus other than what I can get from books – distant friends and from my own fun in living – I’m not worth much.”¹³⁶ Printed words and images urged O’Keeffe on. She ordered the latest fiction and political books and subscribed to magazines she felt would be bracingly new to her, telling Pollitzer, “You have to read to get jolts in a place like this.”¹³⁷

O’Keeffe got some of her strongest jolts from the radical journal *The Masses*. She told Pollitzer that, along with other periodicals she subscribed to in South Carolina, “I had to have *The Masses* too.”¹³⁸ The stirring articles and illustrations kept her in contact with the far left political world she and the ardent suffragist Pollitzer had inhabited in New York. The journal supported the young women in their views about such issues as their support of woman’s suffrage and their resistance to the United States’ entry into World War I. The magazine included a bookstore column listing political, scientific, spiritual, and fiction publications that subscribers could purchase through the magazine. *The Masses* would also try to provide other books that their readers sought. For instance, when O’Keeffe wanted to buy Kandinsky’s *On the Spiritual in Art*, she turned to *The Masses*.¹³⁹

While most of the political cartoons in *The Masses* were in a relatively conservative realistic style, they demonstrated to O’Keeffe the power and efficacy of graphic art. At times the magazine reproduced drawings simply for their art value, labeled only with the artists’ names. But the most characteristic illustrations took on thorny social and political problems, engaging the viewer with sharp wit, gritty realism, and strong graphic design (Fig. 3.31). Many of the artists who contributed to *The Masses*, including John Sloan, George Bellows, Glenn Coleman, and Stuart Davis, were members of Robert Henri’s artistic circle rather than Stieglitz’s.¹⁴⁰ From light humor to stark tragedy to righteous fury, the small monochrome drawings commanded an impressive range of expression. The artists of *The Masses* worked in the long tradition of graphic artists like Goya and Daumier who used the physical darkness of their media to address moral darkness.¹⁴¹ Black words and images on white paper, traveling through the mail to shout across the miles, inspired O’Keeffe. She evidently saw the mailing of her own drawings as a mode of communication parallel to the journals that stirred her. Having sent her most radical new abstract charcoals to Pollitzer, O’Keeffe wrote, “Of course marks on paper are free – free speech – press – pictures – all go together I suppose.”¹⁴²

While *The Masses* showed O’Keeffe strong, politically relevant graphic art, the aesthetic she sought for her new drawings was much closer to the art reproduced in the Stieglitz circle journals *291* and *Camera Work*. These periodicals presented to O’Keeffe a modern visual world concentrated into intimate, usually monochrome, images. Pollitzer, knowing how excited her friend had been by the Marin show at 291, asked Stieglitz to send O’Keeffe a copy of volume 4 of *291*. It featured a Marin drawing on the

cover with a ramifying streak of hand-applied blue (Fig. 3.32). O’Keeffe greeted the arrival of the folio-sized journal with excitement, writing to her friend, “291 came and I was so crazy about it that I sent for Number 2 and 3 – and I think they are great – They just take my breath away – It is almost as good as going to 291. I subscribed to it.”¹⁴³ Through *291* O’Keeffe imbibed the most cutting-edge, and the most European, aspects of Stieglitz circle modernism. The daring design of the journal was shaped by Marius de Zayas, a Mexican-born caricaturist who had immersed himself in the modernist milieu of Europe during travels in 1910-1911 and 1914.¹⁴⁴ De Zayas, Stieglitz, French business man and photographer Paul Haviland, wealthy young art patron Agnes Meyer, and French modernist Francis Picabia, cooperated to produce *291*.¹⁴⁵ The journal was printed in unmodulated black on white with occasional passages of bright flat printed color or, for a few featured illustrations, hand-applied watercolor in a single color (Figs. 3.32-35). The drawings, often integrated with modern typography, featured hard curves, crisp geometry, and either broad areas of pure black or vigorously scribbled ink shading. *291* exuded youth and confidence. Rarely did it include anything gray or vague. For O’Keeffe, looking to escape her uncertainty and go forward, *291* provided a stimulating model.

O’Keeffe’s *Specials* partake of *291*’s large format and bold compositions. The strong black rectangles and stripes played against rounded forms in *No. 12 – Special*, and *Untitled* (Figs. 3.6, 3.8) and the dense black curves in *Early Abstraction* (Fig. 3.9) recall similar forms in drawings in *291* by De Zayas, Picabia, and Katharine N. Rhoades (Figs. 3.33, 3.35). Black for O’Keeffe, as for *291*, was new and energetic rather than lugubrious. But O’Keeffe’s rectangles are far less pristine in outline and more varied in

value than what she saw in *291*. The flat black of printed illustrations would have seemed, I imagine, painfully similar to the shallow pen drawings she had cranked out during her dreadful two years as a commercial artist in Chicago, and the childish illustrations she had done for her school year book (Fig. 2.22-23). O’Keeffe, trying to make important new work, needed to join bold compositions inspired by *291* to a very different technical approach that would have expressive depth.

Camera Work gave O’Keeffe the alternate aesthetic she required, confirming that modernism did not have to be stark and hard-edged. Stieglitz took obsessive care to ensure that the photogravure illustrations appeared in the richest and most subtle possible array of values, often enhanced by their presentation on tipped-in Japan tissue (Fig. 3.36-42).¹⁴⁶ In *Camera Work* black and white, and the full range of grays between, were beautiful and full of possibilities. The publication gave O’Keeffe a modernist precedent for retaining the modeling, illusionistic depth, and variety of tones she knew from her academic background.

Trained by Dow to appreciate the designs of small, graphic forms, O’Keeffe must have found the elegant little monochrome illustrations in *Camera Work* wonderfully engaging. Many of the pictorial photographers whose works Stieglitz reproduced used soft focus lenses and such printing techniques as platinotype and gum-bichromate to blur and smooth forms. The results, with details softened to emphasize pose and structure, often purposefully recalled traditional figural studies in charcoal and Symbolist variants upon them (Fig. 1.9-10, 3.36-37).¹⁴⁷ O’Keeffe, looking for the avant-garde, ironically found *Camera Work* reflecting her own academic past back at her. One could, indeed, use aspects of academic technique for modernist purposes.

Being printed largely in photogravure, all art reproduced in *Camera Work*, whether the original was a painting, sculpture, drawing, photograph, or print, became graphic and thus fed O’Keeffe’s perception of modernism as a graphic phenomenon.¹⁴⁸ But the originals of one important group of plates in *Camera Work* were drawn in the very medium O’Keeffe chose for her new works. Volume 46 of *Camera Work* reproduced ten richly shaded caricatures drawn in charcoal by De Zayas, the same artist whose crisp black and white modernist compositions had so caught O’Keeffe’s eye in 291 (Figs. 3.38-3.42). *Camera Work* number 46 is dated April 1914, but was actually published in October of that year; thus it was issued just after O’Keeffe arrived in New York to study with Dow. The De Zayas caricatures in that *Camera Work*, still current during the Picasso and Braque drawings show of December 1914 and January 1915, was presumably much in evidence at 291 when O’Keeffe and her friends visited. De Zayas showed O’Keeffe an appealingly warm modernist charcoal technique at odds with the Cubists’ harsh lines. Stieglitz noted, “The De Zayas caricatures . . . are photogravure reproductions made from the De Zayas charcoal originals, the sizes of which are 20 x 25 inches. . . . In the reproductions some of the quality of De Zayas’s work has been necessarily lost, nevertheless its spirit has been fully preserved.”¹⁴⁹

The many technical parallels between O’Keeffe’s abstract charcoal drawings and De Zayas’s caricatures leave little doubt that the young American looked hard at reproductions of the Mexican’s caricatures.¹⁵⁰ De Zayas’s abstraction *Mrs. Eugene Meyer, Jr.* (Fig. 3.38) seems to have particularly impressed O’Keeffe, who echoed the wave-like composition and subtle range of grays in her *Early No. 2* and *Early Abstraction* (Figs. 3.29, 3.9). The caricaturist, in imitation of pictorial photographic portraits and

their painted ancestors by such old masters as Rembrandt, often played pale forms against deep gray grounds to create spot-lit drama.¹⁵¹ This was most notable in his “relative,” or more traditionally representational, caricatures including *Rodin and Eduard J. Steichen* and *John Marin and Alfred Stieglitz* (Figs. 3.39-40). O’Keeffe in *No. 2- Special*, *No. 5 Special*, and *No. 12 – Special* used deep gray grounds much like De Zayas’s (Figs. 3.1-2, 3.6). O’Keeffe’s dark grounds, however, created deep space while De Zayas’s dark grounds often read as flat.

De Zayas’s frankness of touch showed O’Keeffe how to combine the open traces of the creative hand she had seen in Picasso’s charcoals with the controlled gray tones of academic charcoal drawings. In De Zayas’s *Dr. A. A. Berg* (Fig. 3.41) the swooping pale forms of the doctor and the patient’s stylized innards make striking pale abstract elements created by a finger, bare or clothed in a chamois skin, picking up the loose charcoal. O’Keeffe used finger gestures of erasure just as clearly in lines like the white fountain-like curls of O’Keeffe’s *No. 2 – Special* (Fig. 3.1), leaving her own mark on each of her abstract drawings.

O’Keeffe’s Charcoal Experiments

O’Keeffe called her dusty sticks of charcoal “a miserable medium for things that seem alive – and sing.”¹⁵² Yet charcoal was the ideal medium for O’Keeffe’s enterprise in many ways, and her continuing use of the medium proves that she understood this well. Charcoal made broad, strong marks with an engaging silver sheen, and the friable medium could be erased easily and repeatedly while the artist tried out shape after shape.¹⁵³ It was an ideal material for testing and exploring, as well as for making exhibitable drawings, as many academic artists had found.¹⁵⁴ We can never know how

many forms O’Keeffe tried out for each of her drawings; she removed almost all traces from the paper or hid them below the final surface of compositions she chose to finish. Nor can we know how many sheets she discarded. But *No. 20 – From Music – Special* (Fig. 3.26) survives to show how O’Keeffe played with her materials and forms while working out her modernist vocabulary. For instance, the wavy erased line at the upper right is partially crossed out. Elements from this small, perhaps very early, sheet recur in many other *Specials*. The bulging organic shapes tried out in the background of *No. 20* reappear in slightly altered form in *No. 12 – Special* (Fig. 3.6) with slender black rectangles behind them rather than in front of them. In *No. 7 Special* (Fig. 3.3) O’Keeffe enshrined the marks of her play, making wavy vertical strokes with the side of a piece of charcoal and then drawing with the point of a sharpened stick of charcoal and erasing to elaborate the strokes into three-dimensional abstract forms.¹⁵⁵

It is, however, deceptive to see O’Keeffe’s development in these drawings as simply moving from open play to closed finished compositions. In fact, I think that the reverse may be closer to the truth. There are several reasons to suppose that the smoothly finished *No. 2- Special* (Fig. 3.1) was an early drawing in the autumn 1915 sequence. It appears to exemplify the “old style” work “symmetrical, detailed, precise” that Charles Martin’s students made in his Teachers College class before they progressed to freer compositions.¹⁵⁶ This work mimics smoothly curving, symmetrical Art Nouveau wood, metal, or ceramic objects, as Sarah Whitaker Peters discusses.¹⁵⁷ The artist may have been proving her craftsmanship with such works, declining to make modern art in the rough and thus risky vocabulary used by artists like Picasso, Matisse, and Marin. As a woman, she could legitimately fear that such modernist styles would leave her opened to

the nineteenth-century stereotype of the female artist as amateurish and unpolished.¹⁵⁸ If so, she soon gained enough confidence for her anxiety on this score to subside. In 1916 O’Keeffe made a drawing, *I – Special* (Fig. 3.43) in which she retained the symmetry of *No. 2 – Special* but rejected the precisely rendered surfaces. In other abstract charcoals she moved away from symmetry and tightly polished forms, using more roughly textured and hand-marked surfaces to explore new variations on biomorphism. In *No. 12 – Special* (Fig. 3.6), for instance, she left most of the charcoal unblended, its mottled texture contrasting with the smoothly blended areas at the center of the composition where traditional dark and light modeling throws a round form into relief. The frankness of this contrast between raw and reworked charcoal pointed out the artist’s command of the varied techniques in which she expressively fused the traditional and the avant-garde.

Indeed, the “Specials,” while united by their abstraction, common scale and use of charcoal, technically are an exceptionally varied group of works. In these drawings, O’Keeffe experimented with her medium as well as her formal vocabulary, exploring various effects of value and texture. She used many kinds of charcoal and with them achieved values ranging from pale silvery gray to deep black. In *No. 4 Special* (Fig. 3.5) and *Second, Out of My Head* (Fig. 3.10), for instance, O’Keeffe worked in a thin single layer directly on the paper. She created long swaths of delicate tones by spreading the charcoal down the paper with water, perhaps applied with a wet rag. By contrast, she used complex layers of charcoal treated in various ways to create the effects in *No. 12 – Special* (Fig. 3.6). O’Keeffe rubbed in background gray tones, and then sprayed fixative over the drawing.¹⁵⁹ When she drew over this background, the charcoal caught on the raised spatters of fixative, creating an assertive texture of very black dots on the gray

ground. In other areas of the same drawing, as in the central sphere, O’Keeffe rubbed in the charcoal before and perhaps also after fixing it to create smooth gray tones that contrast strikingly with the textured areas, drawing attention to her varied methods of applying the medium. This was far from the uniformly smooth, rubbed texture of the methods of using charcoal that O’Keeffe had learned during her academic training.

O’Keeffe was never careless with her materials. In these exploratory works she used a variety of brands of papers, but all were of good quality and well suited for charcoal. She rubbed down or fixed charcoal layers to minimize smearing or rubbing off. No matter what she later said about the private nature of these works and how she felt like tearing them up, on some level O’Keeffe apparently wanted them to last and to be well-crafted enough that she could show them proudly.¹⁶⁰

Living on Paper: The Emotional Life of the “Specials”

O’Keeffe forged her new visual vocabulary of techniques and forms under the stresses of an often tumultuous period in her life. During the summer and autumn of 1915 her romantic attraction to Arthur Macmahon surged and ebbed while she groped for ways to express her feelings. She wrote Pollitzer about this process, saying, “that wild blue picture with the yellow and red ball in the corner – I made during the summer when one of his letters almost drove me crazy – I just exploded it into the picture – it was what I wanted to tell him only didn’t dare in words – words seem to me such a poor medium for expression – for some things – that little blue mountain with the green streak across it is what he expresses to me.”¹⁶¹

When Macmahon visited in November 1915, O’Keeffe’s letters to Pollitzer were filled with excitement about him.¹⁶² But when she picked up her charcoal again after he

had left, as Vivien Green Fryd describes it, she made her abstract drawings “to express her profound new feelings.”¹⁶³ O’Keeffe so strongly connected her relationship with Macmahon to these drawings that, after she heard something that made her think that he was seeing another woman, she wrote to Pollitzer that she didn’t want to ever see the drawings again unless she turned out to be wrong about his unfaithfulness.¹⁶⁴ O’Keeffe may not have associated all of the abstract charcoal drawings of 1915 with Macmahon, since she identified *No. 9 Special* as a “drawing of a headache.”¹⁶⁵ and she declined to identify the events, feelings, or people connected with most of the other works. O’Keeffe must, however, have addressed at least one, and possibly all, of the drawings specifically to Macmahon. She wrote to him in January 1916, “I said something to you in charcoal.”¹⁶⁶

While O’Keeffe found an emotional outlet in her art and hoped that this would give her works engaging life, she feared to reveal herself too particularly. She wanted to express strong feelings universal enough to stir any viewer, without exposing the specifics of her personal life. Traditional connoisseurship threatened to discover in the drawings all too much about the artist and the emotions she had felt when creating them. O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer, “Anita – I feel bothered about that stuff [art works] I sent Dorothy. I wish I hadn’t sent it – I always have a curious sort of feeling about some of my things – I hate to show them – I am perfectly inconsistent about it – I am afraid people won’t understand and – and I hope they won’t – and am afraid they will.”¹⁶⁷ Pollitzer had already written about the works done during the summer, vainly trying to sooth the artist’s fears both that the drawings said too much and that they said too little, “They’ve all got *feeling* Pat – written in red right over them – no one could possibly get

your definite meanings Pat – that is unless they knew you better than I believe anyone does know you – but the mood is there every time.”¹⁶⁸

With O’Keeffe working at such a distance from her friends and the avant-garde art milieu of New York, Pollitzer was a major influence on O’Keeffe’s artistic decisions. Even as the artist strove for creative independence and originality, she responded to her friend’s guidance. She wrote, “Anita – you are not going to stop writing to me are you – your letters are the livest most human things I get.”¹⁶⁹ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in an October 1915 letter O’Keeffe, groping toward artistic expression as she began the abstract charcoals, wrote to ask Pollitzer if she could say what art was. Pollitzer found it funny that O’Keeffe trusted her with so grave a question, yet she gave a thoughtful response that echoed for some time between the friends and had continuing repercussions beyond their correspondence,

Do you think I know? [What art is.] Do you think I’d *care what* anybody thought? Now if you ask me what we’re trying to do that’s a different thing – We’re trying to live (& perhaps help other people to live) by saying or feelings – things or people – on canvas or paper – in lines, spaces & color. At least I’m doing that – Matisse perhaps cares chiefly for color – Picabia for shapes – Walkowitz for line – perhaps I’m wrong – but I should care only for those things in so far as they helped me express my feeling – To me that’s the end always – To live on paper what we’re living in our hearts & heads; & all the exquisite lines & good spaces & ripingly good colors are only a way of getting rid of the feelings & making them tangible.¹⁷⁰

O’Keeffe, her friend’s letters pointing up her isolation in South Carolina, wrote back,

you get mightily twisted with your self at the tale end of the world with no one to talk to – The thinking gets more serious when you wonder and fight and think alone – Of course I have thought what you say about it – but some times hearing some one say it again – just the phrasing – gives you a starting point for a new idea. I don’t know that my heart or head or anything is worth living on paper. We ought to be as busy making ourselves wonderful – according to your theory – as we are with expressing that self.”¹⁷¹

With her friend's encouragement, O'Keeffe found the courage to keep trying to live, whether or not she was wonderful, and to project her life on paper through both drawings and letters. Pollitzer's phrase and concept of living on paper had caught O'Keeffe's imagination. She strove to make her art a tangible reflection of her life despite the risks of so direct a connection between art and life.

When O'Keeffe first sent Pollitzer a group of her charcoal abstractions, Pollitzer responded,

They came today – I took them in an empty class room – got thumb tacks and stuck them over the wall. First of all came your two moods – They are pretty fine I think but you know I'm crazy when it comes to things like that. I like the one in black & gray on the very white charcoal paper – it is very pure I think and besides feeling that, it satisfies me, I feel that it's good from an Art point of view. The other is quite dramatic – I like it, but its so sensational – so explosive that it's bound to carry me – I don't know what to say about it – I'd love to ask Mr. Stieglitz Pat. Of course I never should till you said the word & I don't feel the time's come yet – but keep on working this way like the devil. Hear Victrola Records, Read Poetry, Think of people & put your reactions on paper.¹⁷²

Thus Pollitzer continued to stimulate O'Keeffe and to help clarify her ideas about how to transfer life to paper. The idea of exposing herself to music and poetry, then drawing, reflected what O'Keeffe was already doing. In October 1915 she had written to Pollitzer about trying to capture her reactions to conditions around first in music, then in visual art,

It's a wonderful night-

I've been hanging out of the window waiting to tell some one about it – wondering how I could – I've labored on the violin till all my fingers are sore – you never in your wildest dreams imagined anything worse than the noises I get out of it – That was before supper Now I imagine I could tell about the sky tonight if I could only get the noises I want to out of it

-Isn't it funny!

So I thought for a long time – and wished you were here – but I'm going to try to tell you about tonight – another way – I'm going to try to tell you about

the music of it – with charcoal – a miserable medium for things that seem alive – and sing.

-only I wanted to tell you first that I was going to try to do it because I want to have you right by me and say it to you.¹⁷³

Together, Pollitzer and O’Keeffe had formulated how an artist could live on paper. First, the artist needed to live an experience that moved her, be it through nature, music, or contact with other people. Then, she would get it on paper as quickly and vividly as possible. If O’Keeffe could do this well enough, both women seemed to feel, then her art would be good enough for a wider world to see. In no surviving letter did O’Keeffe argue that her works of October 1915 were ready for 291, as Pollitzer hinted, but neither did she object to the idea that soon Stieglitz might see her productions.

O’Keeffe found it challenging to match her modernist ambitions with actual works. She wrote to Pollitzer,

Did you ever have something to say and feel as if the whole side of the wall wouldn’t be big enough to say it on and then sit down on the floor and try to get it on to a sheet of charcoal paper – and when you had put it down look at it and try to put into words what you have been trying to say with marks – and then – wonder what it all is anyway – I’ve been crawling around on the floor till I have cramps in my feet – one creation looks too much like [she made a drawing of two opposed curves] the other is much like soft soap – Maybe the fault is with what I’m trying to say – I don’t seem to be able to find words for it.¹⁷⁴

In December O’Keeffe again dispatched a shipment of drawings to Pollitzer.

Stieglitz’s Initial Reaction to the “Specials”

On January 1, 1916, Pollitzer received the new roll of drawings. She *did* feel that O’Keeffe had made significant progress. Pollitzer’s reaction to the drawings would change the course of O’Keeffe’s life. Pollitzer wrote to the artist to tell her what had happened,

Astounded and awfully happy were my feelings today when I opened the batch of drawings. I tell you I felt them! & when I say that I mean that. They’ve

gotten past the personal stage into the big sort of emotions that are common to big people – but it’s your version of it. I mean if they’d been stuck on a wall & I’d been told XZ did them I’d have liked them as much as if I’d been told Picasso did them, or someone I’d never heard of. Pat – Well they’ve gotten there as far as I’m concerned & you ought to cry because you’re so happy. You’ve said something! I took them up on the 4th floor & stayed alone with them in one of the studios. And they spoke to me I swear they did[.]

Then I left – flew down to the Empire Theatre with them under my arm & saw Maude Adams in Peter Pan – I hope you’ve seen her & if you haven’t, I hope you will. Theatre was over at 5 and Pat – I had to do it, I’m glad I did it, it was the only thing to do – I’d have – well I had to that’s all. I walked up to 291 – It was twilight in the front room Pat & thoroughly exquisite. He came in. We spoke. We were feeling alike anyway and I said ‘Mr. Stieglitz would you like to see what I have under my arm.’ He said ‘I would – Come in the back room’ – I went with your feelings & your emotions tied up & showed them to a giant of a man who reacted – I unrolled them – I had them all there – The two you sent . . . & those I got today. He looked Pat – and thoroughly absorbed & got them – he looked again – the room was quiet – One small light – His hair was mussed – It was a long time before his lips opened . . . Then he smiled at me & yelled ‘Walkowitz come here’ – Then he said to me – ‘Why they’re genuinely fine things – you say a woman did these – She’s an unusual woman – She’s broad minded, She’s bigger than most women, but she’s got the sensitive emotion – I’d know she was a woman – Look at that line’ – And he kept analyzing & squinting Pat – Then little Walkowitz came. His eyes got big & swan like – ‘What do you think’ Stieglitz asked him – ‘Very fine’ and then he sat down & held them – Pat they belonged there & I took them down – I had to – They gave those men something – your pieces did – they give me much. It’s 11 at night & I’m dead tired in bed & they’re with me – next to my bed – I left them alone – They lived thru them – Then Stieglitz said ‘Are you writing to this girl soon’ I said ‘Yes’ ‘Well tell her,’ he said ‘They’re the purest, finest, sincerest things that have entered 291 in a long while’ and he said ‘I wouldn’t mind showing them in one of these rooms one bit – perhaps I shall – For what they’re worth’ – ‘You keep them’ – (he turned to me & said this) ‘For later I may want to see them, & I thank you, he said – for letting me see them *now*.’”

Pat I hold your hand I think you wrote me once ‘I would rather have Stieglitz like something I’d done than anyone else’ It’s come true I’ve written you only what I plainly remember – Those are might near his words – I’ve left out what I wasn’t sure of – Pat –

They do it to me too. Or I wouldn’t give a hang – You’re living Pat in spite of your work at Columbia! South Caroline!¹⁷⁵

The drawings by O’Keeffe that Pollitzer had showed to Stieglitz, according to this letter, combined the shipments of November and December. They probably included the works now known as *No. 2 – Special* (Fig. 3.1), *No. 5 Special* (Fig. 3.2), *No. 7 Special*

(Fig. 3.3), *No. 3 – Special* (Fig. 3.4), *No. 4 Special* (Fig. 3.5), *No. 12 Special* (Fig. 3.6), *No. 9 Special* (Fig. 3.7), and *Untitled* (Fig. 3.8). They could have included two out of *Early Abstraction* (Fig. 3.9), *Second, Out of My Head* (Fig. 3.10), or *Abstraction with Curve and Circle* (Fig. 3.11), although one of these may have been made slightly later.¹⁷⁶ This was apparently the entire body of this work that O’Keeffe had yet made in South Carolina; she later wrote to Pollitzer “I’ve rather wished – since I sent you those drawings that I had only sent you the best ones – I just wanted to get rid of them all though.”¹⁷⁷

I find it strange that Pollitzer’s elaborate letter of January 1 has previously been accepted by scholars as a simple statement of fact. I see the letter and the episode it recounts as a piece of highly-wrought theater for one. Certainly Pollitzer’s words had a decided influence on O’Keeffe’s later actions and are thus important in themselves. Pollitzer devised this letter carefully, taking her time setting the scene before springing the delicious climax on O’Keeffe. Despite Pollitzer’s previous mention of possibly showing O’Keeffe’s work to Stieglitz, she knew it would be a shock to her artist friend that the moment had finally come. At last O’Keeffe was known, as an artist, to Stieglitz. And he approved; he approved mightily according to Pollitzer’s account.

Pollitzer’s letter gives the deceptive impression that January 1, 1916, was the first time that Stieglitz had been aware of O’Keeffe in any form. Pollitzer quotes him as saying, “You say a woman did these?” as if he didn’t know the woman at all. Stieglitz, of course, did know O’Keeffe, although it suited his purposes to deny this in a letter to O’Keeffe’s rival woman artist Katherine Rhoades in 1916.¹⁷⁸ Aside from O’Keeffe’s visits to 291 with or without Pollitzer and True, Pollitzer had written to Stieglitz asking

him to mail 291 issues to O’Keeffe.¹⁷⁹ Stieglitz had even sent a message via Pollitzer to O’Keeffe urging her on in her career.¹⁸⁰ None of this was any secret to Pollitzer, to O’Keeffe, or to Stieglitz himself. Unless he had a dreadful memory for names, or simply had not previously cared, Stieglitz would have known of his previous meetings with, discussions about, and mailings to O’Keeffe. So what explains the strange hide and seek between Stieglitz and O’Keeffe in this letter?

When Pollitzer showed O’Keeffe’s drawing to Stieglitz on that January eve, she must not have told him the artist’s name. Stieglitz much later recalled, “I asked no questions. I had no idea who the artist was.”¹⁸¹ This could have been one of Stieglitz’s typical distortions of the past for his own purposes were it not for the contemporary evidence of Pollitzer’s letter. Perhaps she left O’Keeffe in momentary anonymity out of lingering respect for the artist’s uncertainties about her work. O’Keeffe had, however disingenuously, specified that the drawings should be shown to no one.¹⁸² Pollitzer must have told this to Stieglitz that night or within a few months, since that May Stieglitz wrote to Katherine Rhoades about the drawings he had seen on January 1, “I felt that the woman had made them for herself, that they were to be shown to nobody, except possibly to the friend of hers who betrayed the trust when she brought the drawings to me.”¹⁸³ If Stieglitz did not know whose drawings he had seen, it would minimize O’Keeffe’s initial embarrassment, and he may have knowingly cooperated in this. The line between total privacy and an expanded audience for the works was crossed as gently as possible. Whatever the truth, when Stieglitz saw O’Keeffe’s drawings, they created in his mind a new identity for the person who had made them. The shy visitor, Pollitzer’s anonymous friend, and the addresses in Virginia and South Carolina, all were forgotten in favor of

the woman who had drawn these abstractions. On the basis of what he had seen and heard on January 1, Stieglitz began to build the image of O’Keeffe that he would present to his world of artists, critics, and appreciators.

Stieglitz’s construction of O’Keeffe’s identity at this moment was based upon two things: the abstract drawings before him, and what Pollitzer told him about the artist who had made them. Judging from her January 1 letter, the only thing that Pollitzer certainly told Stieglitz was that a woman had made these drawings. Pollitzer related to O’Keeffe that Stieglitz, already informed of this, hastened to say he would have been able to identify the gender of the artist on the basis of the art. With twenty-twenty hindsight, he credited “line,” meaning perhaps graphic touch, for this supposed revelation.

In his 1919 essay “Woman in Art” Stieglitz asserted a contrasting nature between men’s and women’s art due to the differences in their bodies.¹⁸⁵ He was sure that, “Woman *feels* the world *differently* than Man feels it.” Stieglitz went on, “Woman’s and Man’s [elemental feelings] are differentiated through the difference in their sex makeup. The Woman receives the World through her Womb. That is the seat of her deepest feeling. Mind comes second.”¹⁸⁶ For Stieglitz, males were the assumed artistic standard; differences between the gendered bodies and minds of men and women accounted for contrasts he saw in their respective art. Thus, seeing O’Keeffe’s abstract drawings and being told they were by a woman, Stieglitz immediately sought visual evidence that this was not just an individual, but a woman, a representative of her gender, on paper.

Stieglitz had a long-standing interest in women as artists. As I noted in my first chapter, at a time when women in any aspect of American society could not assume inclusion, there were a number of women in the Photo-Secession. The first non-

photographic artist Stieglitz had shown was Pamela Colman Smith. However, Stieglitz stopped showing Smith after her third 291 exhibition in March 1909, as his taste for modern art advanced past her illustrative symbolist drawings.¹⁸⁷ After 1913 he stepped up his promotion of women Photo-Secessionists. But in the field of non-photographic modern art, he found fewer women whose work he thought worthy of exhibition. His only exhibition of work by women artists (not counting art by female children) between 1913 and 1916 was a two-person exhibition in January to February of 1915 of works by Marion H. Beckett and Katharine N. Rhoades. Sarah Greenough, in her discussion of Stieglitz's promotion of women photographers and other artists, notes, "His motives . . . were not entirely dispassionate: he was personally involved with Rhoades and Steichen was romantically linked to Beckett."¹⁸⁸ Stieglitz wrote in 1919 of his frustrations in seeking strong women artists to show, "In the past a few women may have attempted to express themselves in painting. Remember when I say themselves I mean in a universal, impersonal sense. But somehow all the attempts I had seen, until O'Keeffe, were weak because the elemental force & vision back of them were never overpowering enough to throw off the Male Shackles. Woman was afraid."¹⁸⁹ In O'Keeffe, Stieglitz asserted, he began to think that he might have found a woman strong and fearless enough to throw off those shackles and justify his own long-standing confidence in female powers of expression. By 1919, Stieglitz had assembled a strong enough image of O'Keeffe that he felt justified in valorizing her, at least in part to promote her art.

O'Keeffe's reply to Pollitzer's January 1, 1916, letter about Stieglitz's reaction to her drawings, despite her friend's disregard of her instructions to show the drawings to no one, does not sound angry, but rather more stunned and relieved,¹⁹⁰

There seems to be nothing for me to say except thank you – very calmly and quietly.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I read your letter this afternoon – I haven't been working – except one night all during the holidays – that night I worked till nearly morning – the thing seems to express in a way what I want it to but – it also seems rather effeminate – it is essentially a woman's feeling – satisfies me in a way – I don't know whether the fault is with the execution or with what I tried to say – I've doubted over it – and wondered over it till I had just about decided it wasn't any use to keep on amusing myself ruining perfectly good paper trying to express myself – I wasn't even sure that I had anything worth expressing – there are things we want to say - but saying them is pretty nervy – what reason have I for getting the notion that I want to say something and must say it –

Of course marks on paper are free – free speech – press – pictures – all go together I suppose – but I was just feeling rather down cast about it – and it is so nice to feel that I said something to you – and to Stieglitz. I wonder what I said – I wonder if any of you got what I tried to say – Isn't it damnable that I can't talk to you. If Stieglitz says any more about them – ask him why he liked them –

Anyway Anita – it makes me want to keep on – and I had almost decided it was a fool's game-

Of course I would rather have something hang in 291 than any place in New York – but wanting things hung is simply wanting your vanity satisfied – of course it sounds good but what sounds best to me is that he liked them – I don't care so much about the rest of it – only – I would be interested in knowing what people get out of them – if they get anything – Wouldn't it be a great experiment – I'll just not even imagine such luck – but I'll keep working – anyway.¹⁹¹

At last O'Keeffe was released from the months of worry over whether she could ever produce anything that would get in the door of 291. The thing was accomplished and a promising path might have been opened for future work and even a future career. O'Keeffe, however, was unsure exactly where this path lay. Knowing that Stieglitz had seen something in her work, she was eager to know just *what* he had seen. What qualities in her work had triggered his positive reaction? Her anxiety about revealing too much of herself in her work was unabated.

One thing that O'Keeffe knew Stieglitz had seen in her work was her gender. As Swinth alertly notes, only after knowing of Stieglitz's gender-motivated response did O'Keeffe discuss her own work as being “rather effeminate” and having “essentially a

woman's feeling."¹⁹² Since O'Keeffe and Pollitzer were both women who worked in the context of many fellow students who were women, they had never experienced art by women at their own student level as unusual. When O'Keeffe started to enter the ranks of exhibiting professionals, however, she could have had no doubts that the situation would be entirely different. For Stieglitz, finding a promising woman artist was a major event. O'Keeffe, not having seen the overblown critical reaction that would later arise from Stieglitz's gendered response, did not yet pull away from his gendered interpretation. Groping toward Stieglitz's approval, she tentatively embraced what she could interpret as feminine in her own work.

The Initial Correspondence Between O'Keeffe and Stieglitz

O'Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz, evidently desperate to know what he responded to in her drawings and whether her drawings spoke as she had intended,

If you remember for a week why you liked my charcoals that Anita Pollitzer showed you – and what they said to you - I would like to know if you want to tell me.

I don't mind asking – you can do as you please about answering. Of course I know you will do as you please.

I make them just to express myself – Things I feel and want to say – haven't words for. You probably know without my saying it that I ask because I wonder if I got over to anyone what I wanted to say.¹⁹³

Now O'Keeffe's identity in Stieglitz's mind was sharpened to include the specifics of a name, a place, and a tentative string of words. But he did not tell her much about his reaction to the drawings. He wrote back to her only briefly,

What am I to say? It is impossible for me to put into words what I saw and felt in your drawings. As a matter of fact I would not make any attempt to do so. I might give you what I received from them if you and I were to meet and talk about life. Possibly then through such a conversation I might make you feel what your drawings gave me.

I do not want to tell you that they gave me much joy. They were a real surprise and above all I felt that they were a genuine expression of yourself. I do

not know what you had in mind while doing them. If at all possible I would like to show them, but we will see about that. I do not quite know where I am just at present. The future is rather hazy, but the present is very positive and very delightful.¹⁹⁴

He seemed as uncertain about O’Keeffe’s drawings as the artist was. The works had not come with the endorsement of art critics or his accustomed guides to modern art, Steichen and De Zayas. Stieglitz, as he had told Pollitzer and she reported in her letter to O’Keeffe, wanted to see them more over time to be sure of his own reaction to them. He was far from positive about what other modernists would think of them. Seeing how much weight O’Keeffe gave to his opinions, he refused to comment. Already, he may have seen O’Keeffe as an artistic child who could be all too easily swayed away from her natural course by his words.

Stieglitz’s words weren’t as specific as O’Keeffe could have hoped, but she could take comfort in the fact that he saw no overt biographical incidents in the drawings; he saw only larger feelings. As Pollitzer had written to her about the latest drawings, “They’ve gotten past the personal stage into the big sort of emotions that are common to big people.”¹⁹⁵ A highly emotional correspondence ensued between O’Keeffe and Stieglitz. The abstract drawings and the artist who made them now acquired associations with words. These words would have a lasting impact on how Stieglitz presented the works and the artist to his public.¹⁹⁶ O’Keeffe wrote back to Stieglitz on February 1, 1916,

I like what you write me – Maybe I don’t get exactly your meaning – but I like mine – like you liked your interpretation of my drawings . . . It was such a surprise to me that you saw them – and I am so glad they surprised you – that they gave you joy. I am glad I could give you once what 291 has given me many times. . You can’t imagine how it all astonishes me.

I have been just trying to express myself - . . . I just have to say things you know – Words and I are not good friends at all except with some people – when

I'm close to them and can feel as well as hear their response – I have to say it somehow – Last year I went color mad – but I've almost hated to think of color since the fall went – I've been slaving on the violin – trying to make that talk – I wish I could tell you some of the things I've wanted to say as I felt them . . . The drawings don't count – it's the life – that really counts – To say things that way may be a relief - It may be interesting to see how different people react to them. . . . – I am glad they said something to you. – I think so much alone – work alone – am so much alone – but for letters – that I am not always sure that I'm thinking straight – Its great – I like it – The outdoors is wonderful – and I'm just now having time to think things I should have thought long ago – the uncertain feeling that some of my ideas may be near insanity – adds to the fun of it – and the prospect of really talking to live human beings again – sometime in the future is great. . . . – Hibernating in South Carolina is an experience that I would not advise anyone to miss – The place is of so little consequence – except for the outdoors – that one has a chance to give one's mind, time, and attention to anything one wishes.

I can't tell you how sorry I am that I can't talk to you – what I've been thinking surprises me so – has been such fun – at times has hurt too . . . that it would be great to tell you.¹⁹⁷

O'Keeffe maintained that her chief aim in her works was self expression beyond words. The centrality of self expression was basic to the Stieglitz circle's concept of modernism. It is not surprising that Stieglitz used a similar form of this standard modernist phrasing in his first letter to O'Keeffe, saying, "Above all I felt that they [the drawings] were a genuine expression of yourself."¹⁹⁸ Delighted to realize that Stieglitz found in her drawings the unique expression he favored, O'Keeffe replied, repeating and confirming that this was her chief aim in the works, "I have been just trying to express myself."¹⁹⁹ Through the echoing of familiar phrases, O'Keeffe and her drawings began their verbal ties to the Stieglitz circle and the art philosophies of its members.

Another way that O'Keeffe worded her desire to put her own feelings on paper was in variants of the phrase "living on paper" that had originated in correspondence with Pollitzer. O'Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz, "The drawings don't count – it's the life – that really counts."²⁰⁰ Thus the concept of living on paper moved from the O'Keeffe-Pollitzer

correspondence into the O’Keeffe-Stieglitz correspondence and attached itself to drawings. Life, liveliness, and vitality defined a key theme for the modernism of the Stieglitz circle. 291 habitu  Hutchins Hapgood commented on how Stieglitz talked incessantly about “life.”²⁰¹ Stieglitz quickly identified this strain in O’Keeffe’s words and work with his own modernist enterprise. When O’Keeffe’s drawings were on exhibition at 291 in the summer of 1916, Stieglitz wrote O’Keeffe, “Your drawings on the walls of 291 would not be so living for me did I not see you in them. Really see.”²⁰²

This concept took what would be its most famous form in relation to O’Keeffe in the words Pollitzer or someone else later added to her January 1, 1916, letter to O’Keeffe, “Finally, a woman on paper!” Whether Stieglitz said these words in 1916 or only later, the phrase eventually became central to his presentation of O’Keeffe’s emergence as a modernist through the medium of drawing. He wrote to O’Keeffe in 1918, “Of course I am wondering what you have been painting – what it looks like – what you have been full of – The Great Child pouring out some more of her Woman self on paper – purely – truly – unspoiled.”²⁰³ By 1926 Herbert J. Seligmann records Stieglitz’s telling visitors to his Intimate Gallery, that when he first saw O’Keeffe’s drawings he had exclaimed, “At last a woman on paper.”²⁰⁴ Stieglitz could as easily have said, “A woman living on paper!” For Stieglitz, as a photographer who printed his works on paper and labored so earnestly to reproduce art on paper in *Camera Work*, it was evidently particularly meaningful that it was on paper that he first really met and connected with O’Keeffe and on paper that she first appeared to the audience of 291. Paper, for Stieglitz, as I discussed in my first chapter, was a fine arena for life; it had been his accustomed venue for both appreciation and creation for many years.

O’Keeffe’s Returns to Charcoal in Early 1916

In January and February 1916, O’Keeffe responded to Stieglitz’s encouraging letters by continuing to make charcoal drawings. In February 1916 she sent another mailing tube full of drawings to Pollitzer.²⁰⁵ This shipment may have included *Drawing* (Fig. 3.30). O’Keeffe probably made this work during a semester when she was teaching students to draw; their subjects presumably included still lifes. In parallel with her previous abstract charcoals related to academic traditions for rendering the human figure and landscape, here the artist rethought and redefined the forms and techniques of still life. The work depicts drapery such as might have been put on a stand to receive a human model or a still life set up. It recalls O’Keeffe’s student still lifes drawn in ink in 1905 at the Art Institute of Chicago, in which each line showed the artist imaginatively feeling her way around the contours of the forms she is drawing (Figs. 2.24-25). One 1905 drawing included a piece of striped fabric like that in *Drawing*, draped over the edge of a shelf so that the stripes show the bending of the cloth in linear perspective.

In *Some Memories of Drawing* O’Keeffe said of *Drawing*, “This is a drawing of something I never saw except in the drawing. When one begins to wander around in one’s own thoughts and half-thoughts what one sees is often surprising.”²⁰⁶ At first glance, the most surprising thing about the drawing is that, for a work made at a time when O’Keeffe was deeply involved in abstraction, it is so tamely representational. O’Keeffe, however, judging from her later remarks, conceived of the work formally rather than representationally. In February 1916, perhaps about the time she made this drawing, O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer,

Anita – I had an *idea* today.

I haven't had time to try it yet but let me tell you about it – When we draw we try to make rhythms from right to left – and up and down – that is – flat rhythms like –

You know what I mean – we try to have rhythms running over the surface – why don't we try to make them feel as if they were coming and going to and from you – through the thickness of the paper as well – Maybe it is something everybody else has been trying to do – but I haven't felt exactly what I mean except in part of pictures I've had time to look up since I got the idea.²⁰⁷

Seen abstractly *Drawing* does indeed explore curving contours moving not only across the surface of the drawing but receding into space. The stripes on the “blanket” allow the artist to describe arcs both across and along the tube-like “folds” of “drapery” as they move into space on curving diagonals. Thus, through traditional perspective and modeling techniques, O’Keeffe describes abstract shapes in complex illusionistic space. But the drawing looked too much like a traditional still life to really capture this idea properly, at least in the eyes of Stieglitz, who never showed the drawing.²⁰⁸

In a drawing that may have proved worthy of exhibition at 291, *Abstraction with Curve and Circle* (Fig. 3.11), O’Keeffe made a work that could be related to *Drawing*, as aptly suggested by its placement in the O’Keeffe *Catalogue Raisonné*. In *Abstraction with Curve and Circle* O’Keeffe reversed the curve of the drapery in *Drawing* and made a number of intriguing innovations that took the work much further from academic conventions.²⁰⁹ In *Abstraction with Curve and Circle*, O’Keeffe applied charcoal much more lightly than in *Drawing*, in curves too ethereal to read as corporeal drapery. The cloudy shadows and highlights that describe the curving “folds” are so low in contrast and so softly applied that O’Keeffe had to add a few sketchy lines to enable the viewer’s eye to read the forms as more than a hazy cloud. Rather than tightly describing forms, the light and dark areas seem to hover and waver to and fro, creating the in and out movement O’Keeffe’s letter described. In addition, the stripes that in *Drawing* had

curved across the faces of the tubular curves, in *Abstraction with Curve and Circle* have come loose from the “drapery” to hover independently in space. Some of these claw-like semi-circular shapes are dark, having been drawn with strong pressure into the paper, and some are pale, where O’Keeffe lifted the charcoal off of the paper with an eraser. Thus, in relation to the artist’s gestures into and out from the paper, the little semi-circles move toward and away from the viewer. One claw-like form in particular, the darkest and largest, seems to float much closer to the eye than any other form in the drawing. Ironically, it would have been drawn with the strongest pressure toward the paper to create such dark shading. In this drawing, O’Keeffe continued using the physicality of her drawing methods to explore her personal abstract conceptions of form and space.

As O’Keeffe’s first overtly “modern” works of art, her abstract charcoals of 1915 and early 1916 constituted important beginnings in many directions. She carried forward the long tradition of drawing, particularly in charcoal, as a medium for experimentation and planning of works in other media. As Charles C. Eldredge discusses, in her 1915 and 1916 charcoals, O’Keeffe invented many forms and compositions, both organic and geometric, that she would continue to explore throughout her career.²¹⁰ Specific elements that first appeared in drawings take on color in variant shapes and scales in a wide array of later oils and pastels. For instance rippling lines like those in *No. 20 – From Music – Special* and *Second, Out of My Head* (Figs. 3.26, 3.10) reappear a few years later in *Blue and Green Music* (Fig. 3.44) and ten years later in *Pink Abstraction* (Fig. 3.45).

More profoundly, with her early charcoals O’Keeffe began her career-long alternation between and blending of representation and abstraction.²¹¹ In works like *Second, Out of My Head* the artist carefully negotiated the boundaries between

recognizable subject matter and abstraction, dealing with observable phenomena in a broadly suggestive rather than tightly descriptive manner. For the rest of her life, she would simplify and abstract her recognizably representational images and describe her abstract forms in a compellingly corporeal way. As O’Keeffe herself said in one of her most quoted interviews, “Nothing is less real than realism. . . . Details are confusing. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things.”²¹² It was through drawings that she began this process of seeking meaning in natural forms that she transformed into her own “shapes.”

Widening the Audience for the “Specials”

In 1916 O’Keeffe’s art began an anxiety-ridden emergence from the private realms of classroom, bedroom, and studio into increasingly public spheres. O’Keeffe had made the charcoals during her most private hours, at night, when her public responsibilities for the day were over. She worked in her room, shutting out the clamor of the day and voices of her past. As she recalled, “I was busy in the daytime and I made most of these drawings at night. I sat on the floor and worked against the closet door.”²¹³ In 1916 these works left this hermetic creative realm and began to slip away from O’Keeffe’s control. Now other people not only saw the art, they talked and wrote about it, verbally inscribing meanings onto the drawings.

Once Stieglitz and Walkowitz had seen O’Keeffe’s drawings, immediately the pressure to reveal them to a wider audience began to build in the minds of both Pollitzer and O’Keeffe. A week after the shipment of works had come to Pollitzer, she wrote to O’Keeffe, “Hermie, my cousin, was around the other night & I was just putting away your feelings [drawings] when she came – she begged to see them – but I told her no.

They're not for everybody."²¹⁴ Within four days Pollitzer was so distressed that she wrote, "For heaven's sake tell me should I tell Dorothy [True] about the charcoals I showed Stieglitz or not. I'd say not yet, but still I'd like you to tell me. . . . Pat they thrill me!"²¹⁵ O'Keeffe, sounding tired and out of sorts as she dealt with the demands of teaching and art making, replied, "Yes – tell Dorothy about the drawings if you want to – when you want to – Do just as you please – I don't care a bit – about anything."²¹⁶ But O'Keeffe did care, and the drawings preyed on her mind. She wrote to Pollitzer,

Last night in a careless moment I wrote to Mr. Bement a ridiculous letter. I had to write – and ask him to write to Texas [where O'Keeffe was considering taking a teaching job] for me but I forgot I was writing and just kept on talking – I was beastly tired – He is such a funny little fool – and has been very nice to me you know. I am really very fond of him – and had a notion last night that I would like to tell him about your showing the drawings to Stieglitz – If I could talk to him I would tell him – he has been so nice to me I would just want to – he knows how much a fool I am – Well – I only told him that you knew some thing funny about the music compositions I had been making lately and that you might tell him – if you wanted to and he was interested enough to ask you – He may not ask you – but if he does – you do as you please about telling him – Don't tell him if you think best not to or if you don't want to. Make him promise not to tell if you do tell him.²¹⁷

One immediate effect of O'Keeffe's even thinking about expanding the circle of those who saw her work was that she felt the need to give the drawings some kind of name, to attach them to some existing identity Bement would understand. By-passing Pollitzer's term "feelings" she called them "music compositions," presumably to identify them as something like the abstract exercises she had done for his classes in 1915.²¹⁸

Bement did ask Pollitzer to show him O'Keeffe's drawings. Pollitzer wrote the artist a long letter describing Bement's reaction to her works, saying he found the drawings "great" and offered to talk to Stieglitz about O'Keeffe. He wanted to give her "backing up" to improve her chances of being shown at 291. He also suggested that

O’Keeffe might find a more profitable gallery to show in and that he could help her there, too. Pollitzer was appalled at Bement’s mercenary reaction, feeling that O’Keeffe needed someone to understand her work more than she needed money. Pollitzer told O’Keeffe she felt that, “Mr. Stieglitz would resent good & hard Mr. Bement’s coming down there to praise you up.” Pollitzer admitted that she had allowed Bement to bully her into letting him take a drawing to show to Arthur Dow. It was probably *Early Abstraction*, judging from a sketch on Pollitzer’s letter (Fig. 3.9).²¹⁹ The exposure of her most advanced new art work at Teachers College worried O’Keeffe. At 291, people might understand her kind of abstraction. What would her professors and fellow students think? And even if they failed to laugh, what good did it do the artist? O’Keeffe, incorrectly reading Pollitzer’s letter as saying that Bement had more than one of the drawings, wrote,

I am sorry you let him take the drawings – if he is parading them around T.C. [Teachers College] like curiosities – six legged lions or something of the sort. I don’t mind his seeing them but I object to – Anita those things meant too much when I tried to say them – I object to having it dragged around as a curiosity – it just hurts – I can hardly tell you – and I don’t see that it does any one any good. . .

It is probably a mercenary element in me that objects to showing what I feel and think when I get nothing for it – I could stand it to sell it – for ideas that would help me to go on working – or for money – money gives us the things we need to help us say things – but I hate to give it away – just to be laughed at maybe. I guess I never really thought it out definitely to myself even – before I tried to say it to you. It sounds awful doesn’t it.²²⁰

O’Keeffe worried so much about how the faculty and students of Teachers College would react to her drawings that she wrote to Bement to forbid his showing her drawings to anyone. She wrote Pollitzer, “I could see their smile through space – in the Fine Arts office – and I just couldn’t stand it.”²²¹ Pollitzer, Stieglitz, Walkowitz, Bement, and Dorothy True were enough of an audience for O’Keeffe, for the moment.²²²

O’Keeffe’s Return to New York

Pollitzer was well-heeled enough to think of her soul before her pocketbook, while the impecunious O’Keeffe did not seem to mind Bement’s offer of help.²²³ O’Keeffe had, as yet, no guarantees that her modern work would sell. While her new abstract drawings had transformed her art, they had not earned her a single penny. When O’Keeffe was offered a job teaching art at West Texas State Normal College in Canyon, Texas, she saw it as a good opportunity to continue her current career as an art teacher. O’Keeffe had loved the vast scale and openness of Texas when she taught there previously and she looked forward to returning. Her potential new employers wanted her to take Dow’s class in Methods at Teachers College the following summer to prepare her to teach in the fall. O’Keeffe decided to accept the teaching offer, but opted not to wait until the summer to leave for New York. She went to Manhattan to take Dow’s Methods class during the semester already under way. Making up for the weeks of class she had missed and paying for her time in New York were not sufficient barriers to keep her away from the place that had filled her thoughts more and more.²²⁴

O’Keeffe’s abstract drawings petered out, at least momentarily, in the early months of 1916. She had gone to South Carolina to try out a complex of new ideas; once she had accomplished this it was time to move on. She was getting more and more frustrated by her isolation at Columbia College. She complained to Pollitzer, “Anita – I’d pack my trunk and leave for half a cent – I never was so disgusted with such a lot of people and their ways of doing.”²²⁵

In early March 1916, O’Keeffe left South Carolina for New York, arranging for a friend to finish teaching her classes at Columbia College.²²⁶ O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer

that she was about two hundred dollars short of what she needed to go live in New York and take this class. Pollitzer solved this problem for O’Keeffe by arranging for her to board with Pollitzer’s uncle, Dr. Sigmund Pollitzer, and his family who lived on Sixtieth Street in Manhattan.²²⁷

Having joined the Stieglitz circle remotely, by the agency of drawings sent through the mail, O’Keeffe now moved north to take part in person. Soon the obscurity that had allowed her to draw in complete privacy would be gone forever. In New York in the spring of 1916, O’Keeffe walked through the door that her drawings had opened and found herself in a new phase of her career. Once her drawings appeared on the walls of 291 that summer, she and her art were in the public domain. What had been a personal artistic decision, to draw abstractly in charcoal, now took on new cultural implications. Drawing had been a process by which O’Keeffe utilized her past to create a future. Through drawing she explored and communicated her own visual imagination. Now this same medium helped to mold her image in Stieglitz’s mind, and then in the minds of those who listened to his words.

Notes

¹ Barbara Buhler Lynes, "Georgia O'Keeffe, 1916 and 1917: My Own Tune," in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 263.

² Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Life* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 101.

³ Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters*, Letters selected and annotated by Sarah Greenough (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 136.

⁴ John Cauman, "Henri Matisse, 1908, 1910, and 1912: New Evidence of Life," in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington: National Gallery of Art; Boston, New York, London: Bulfinch Press, 2000), 83.

⁵ Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), commentary with plate 12; Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2: 1142.

⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, trans. M. T. H. Sadler (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914) and Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1914). *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* is best known today by the title *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

⁷ O'Keeffe owned the 1914 Houghton Mifflin edition of *The Art Of Spiritual Harmony* cited in the previous note. See Ruth E. Fine, Elizabeth Glassman, and Juan Hamilton, *The Book Room: Georgia O'Keeffe's Library in Abiquiu*, catalogue entries by Sarah L. Burt (Santa Fe and New York: Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation and the Grolier Club, 1997), 41. O'Keeffe probably read someone else's copy of *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* before she bought the book in September 1915. She had written to Anita Pollitzer in August 1915, asking who published the book because she wanted to buy it, then the following month O'Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer, "Kandinsky is reading much better this time than last time." See O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 25, 1915, and O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia: the Complete Correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer*, ed. Clive Giboire, (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990), 15, 24. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸ Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1914), 211-213.

⁹ *Ibid*, 48-49. "I discovered Dove and picked him out before I was picked out and discovered. Where did I see him? A reproduction in a book. The Eddy book I guess, a picture of fall leaves. In the Forum Exhibitions there were two or three – then later there were more." Told by O'Keeffe to Suzanne M. Mullett in 1943 and quoted in her, "Arthur G. Dove (1880-1946): a Study in Contemporary Art," M.A. thesis, The American University, 27.

¹⁰ Lynes, ed., *O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1142.

¹¹ Arthur Wesley Dow, "Modernism in Art," *The American Magazine of Art* 8, no. 3 (January 1917): 114.

¹² Clarence H. White taught the first photography course at Teachers College. Dow's connection with Stieglitz went back to at least 1899, when the professor's review of an exhibition of Gertrude Käsebier photographs appeared in Stieglitz's journal *Camera Notes*. Barbara L. Michaels, "Arthur Wesley Dow and Photography," in *Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922): His Art and His Influence* (New York: Spanierman Gallery, LLC, 1999), 85-88.

¹³ Dow “Modernism in Art,” 113.

¹⁴ Nancy E. Green, “Arthur Wesley Dow: His Art and His Influence,” in *Arthur Wesley Dow, Art and Influence*, 30.

¹⁵ Melinda Boyd Parsons, “Pamela Colman Smith and Alfred Stieglitz: Modernism at 291,” *History of Photography* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 289. Dram Dijkstra has also noted the convergence between Stieglitz’s pictorialist aesthetic and Dow’s aesthetic and the number of artists who fell under the influence of both men. Bram Dijkstra, *O’Keeffe and the Eros of Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 102.

¹⁶ Frederick C. Moffatt, *Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922)* (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 105.

¹⁷ “Fine Arts: New Types of Work Shown at Annual Exhibit,” *Teachers College Record* XVI, no. 4 (September 1915): 88.

¹⁸ Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 1. Pollitzer recalled that the three met in a class taught by Martin at the Art Students League; however Martin did not begin to teach at the League until the academic year of 1921-1922. *Bulletin*, (Art Students’ League of New York, 1921-1922), 1. O’Keeffe’s records of attendance at the Art Students League do not show her enrolled any time after 1908, although Pollitzer was enrolled there from 1915 to 1917 and True was enrolled from 1915 to 1918. Registration cards for Georgia O’Keeffe, Anita Pollitzer, and Dorothy True, files of the Art Students League, New York. O’Keeffe could have met Pollitzer and True while attending informal sketch classes from the nude for which attendees enrolled and paid one day at a time, with no permanent records of class attendance being kept. Author’s conversation with Art Students League Archivist Stephanie Cassidy, June 30, 2004, at the Art Students League, New York. However, it seems far more likely that the three met, as Pollitzer recalls, in Martin’s class, but that the class was actually the one at Teachers College at Columbia University.

¹⁹ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, August 7, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 10.

²⁰ Pollitzer chose this *Camera Work* issue as the gift without first consulting O’Keeffe. They had originally decided to give Martin a book called *The Life and Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, but it had gone out of print. Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, June 10, 1915, and Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 3-4, 37.

²¹ Benita Eisler, “Letters Exactly Like Themselves,” in *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, xxi.

²² Georgia O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), not paginated.

²³ O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait*. This exhibition, from the private collection of Francis Picabia and his wife Gabrielle Buffet, was made up mostly of drawings and included very few paintings. Pepe Karmel, “Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, 1914-1915: Skeletons of Thought,” in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, Sarah E. Greenough, ed. (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 184-201.

²⁴ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 61.

²⁵ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 66. Pollitzer confirms the identity of the drawing in Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 21. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²⁶ O’Keeffe said that Bement had advised her to only look at the illustrations in *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, not to read the text. O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 12.

²⁷ Flam, Jack, “The Modern Drawing,” in *New York Collects: Drawings and Watercolors, 1900-1950* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1999), 10-11.

²⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, “What is 291?,” *Camera Work* 47 (July 1914): 3.

²⁹ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, and O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 61, 66. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

³⁰ As Jack Flam words it, “In drawings especially, the artist’s gestures came to be understood as acts that to some degree moved *against* the clear articulation of the subject, and in so doing established themselves as the focus of the picture.” Flam, “Modern Drawing,” 19.

³¹ Henry McBride, “Cubistic Water Colors and Drawings Attract Many Visitors to Carroll Galleries – Art News and Comment,” *The New York Sun*, December 20, 1914. Pepe Karmel points out that McBride in this review drew upon the words of Charles Caffin, who called cubist drawings a “skeleton of intellectualized sensations.” Pepe Karmel, “Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, 1914-1915: Skeletons of Thought,” in Greenough, *Modern Art and America*, 194, 196. Charles Caffin, “Picasso’s Latest Pictures of Intellectualized Sensations,” *New York American*, December 14, 1914.

³² “Picasso and Braque,” *American Art News* 13, no. 10 (December 12, 1914): 2.

³³ Caffin, Charles H., “Picasso’s Latest Pictures of Intellectualized Sensations,” *New York American*, 14 December 1914.

³⁴ For examples of Picasso’s use of drawings for these purposes during the period when he made the drawings in Stieglitz’s exhibitions, see Jeffrey Weiss, Valerie J. Fletcher, and Kathryn A. Tuma, *Picasso: the Cubists Portraits of Fernande Olivier* (Washington, D.C., Princeton, and Oxford: National Gallery of Art, Princeton University Press, 2003), *passim*.

³⁵ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 66. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

³⁶ Fine and Glassman, “Thoughts without Words,” in Ruth E. Fine and Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O’Keeffe on Paper* with Elizabeth Glassman, and Judith C. Walsh (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, 2000), 17, 19.

³⁷ Karmel, “Picasso and Braque,” in *Modern Art and America*, 187-188.

³⁸ “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz” in *Modern Art and America*, 546. O’Keeffe later wrote that she saw the Marin show after seeing an exhibition of works by Marsden Hartley in 1916, but this is impossible because O’Keeffe mentions what is clearly the same Marin show, including the same Marin drawing in blue crayon, in a letter to Pollitzer written in October 1915. See O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait*. For O’Keeffe’s October 1915 letter see the next paragraph of my text and the accompanying note.

³⁹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 66-67. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁴⁰ O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait*.

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- ⁴¹ The blue crayon drawing by Marin to which O’Keeffe referred is now apparently unlocated. This drawing was probably the one listed in the exhibition checklist as *Blue Fantasy*.
- ⁴² O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 58. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁴³ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 11.
- ⁴⁴ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 25, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 14-15. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁴⁵ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, September 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 18.
- ⁴⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 24. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁴⁷ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 34.
- ⁴⁸ For Walkowitz’s training see Kent Smith, *Abraham Walkowitz Figuration 1895-1945* (Long Beach, California: Long Beach Museum of Art, City of Long Beach, Department of Recreation and Human Services, 1982), 12. Pollitzer did not mention Walkowitz’s training in her letter to O’Keeffe.
- ⁴⁹ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed., 38.
- ⁵³ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 75, quoting a letter from O’Keeffe’s student Margaret Davis Benton to Lisle, March 15, 1978.
- ⁵⁴ “Send your drawings (2nd batch) posted up to the college & I’ll get criticisms on them for you from Mr. Martin.” Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, September 1915; “He [Martin] asked me where you were & if you sent pictures to me & what they were like – send me more pastels (the 2nd batch you said you’d send) & I’ll get you a criticism from him.” Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915; “I have written Dorothy a young volume and asked her to show it to you because I am sending my work to her and it is mostly about that. It was nice of you both to offer to take it and show it to Mr. Martin.” O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, “Dorothy wrote you what Mr. Martin said I guess last night.” Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 31, 34, 36, 43. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁵⁵ For pastels, see O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 25, 1915; for watercolors see Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 16, 44. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁵⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 1915; Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, July 26, 1915; O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 25, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 5, 7-8, 16-17. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁵⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 5. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁵⁸ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, July 26, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 7.
- ⁵⁹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 5. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁶⁰ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, July 26, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 7.

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- ⁶¹ Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: a Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, 13th ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 65.
- ⁶² O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 2. O’Keeffe told a slight different version of this story in her 1976 book, specifying who the instructor was. “I never took one of Bement’s classes at Columbia University, but one day walking down the hall I heard music from his classroom. Being curious I opened the door and went in. A low-toned record was being played and the students were asked to make a drawing from what they heard. So I sat down and made a drawing, too. Then he played a very different kind of record – a sort of high soprano piece – for another quick drawing. This gave me an idea that I was very interested to follow later – the idea that music could be translated into something for the eye.” O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 14.
- ⁶³ Lynes, ed., *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1142.
- ⁶⁴ Lynes, ed., *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 59.
- ⁶⁵ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 14, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 123. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁶⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 19.
- ⁶⁷ See “Gramophone (or Phonograph),” *The Oxford Companion to Music*, Percy A. Scholes, ed., (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 420.
- ⁶⁸ Lynes, ed., *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 55, 59.
- ⁶⁹ O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait*.
- ⁷⁰ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 43-44.
- ⁷¹ “Fine Arts: New Types of Work Shown at Annual Exhibit,” *Teachers College Record XVI*, no. 4 (September 1915): 88.
- ⁷² O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 42. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁷³ For the dating of these two works to the summer of 1915 before the transition to charcoal that fall, see Barbara Buhler Lynes, “Inventions of Different Orders,” in *O’Keeffe: On Paper*, 43.
- ⁷⁴ Robinson, *O’Keeffe: a Life*, 112-114; Walter H. Waggoner, “Dr. Arthur Macmahon, 89, Dies; Taught at Columbia for 45 Years,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1980.
- ⁷⁵ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 48. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁷⁶ Quoted in Lynes, ed., *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 57, #57.
- ⁷⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 47. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁷⁸ *Georgia O’Keeffe*, VHS, directed by Perry Miller Adato (New York: WNET, 1977).
- ⁷⁹ Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe*, 49-52.

⁸⁰ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: a Life*, 117.

⁸¹ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 24. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸² Quoted in Ralph Looney, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Atlantic Monthly* 215 (1965): 107. "I have at last made up my mind. I am going to Columbia. I made it up yesterday – Made it all up in a package – tied with a rope and stomped on it with my heels." O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 18, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 29. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸³ Lynes, ed., *O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1142.

⁸⁴ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 60. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸⁵ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 49. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸⁶ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, commentary with plate 12.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 39.

⁸⁸ "When Georgia arrived in the fall of 1915, the college looked forlorn. It had recently been rebuilt after a disastrous fire and it stood among piles of rubble on a treeless hill. . . . Many families could no longer afford to pay their daughters' tuition and the college was deeply in debt. Only about one hundred fifty girls and a handful of teachers were on campus that year. The faculty members had been released from their contracts – and most had left – because there was no money to pay them." Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 76-77.

⁸⁹ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1915 [after Sept. 22nd], *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 32-33. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁹⁰ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 6. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁹¹ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 40. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁹² Jonathan Weinberg, *Ambition & Love in Modern American Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii.

⁹³ Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London : University of California Press, 1996), 34.

⁹⁴ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 42. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁹⁵ Georgia O'Keeffe, statement from *Alfred Stieglitz Presents One Hundred Pictures: Oils, Water-colors, Pastels, Drawings by Georgia O'Keeffe, American*, exhibition brochure, The Anderson Galleries, New York, 29 January – 10 February, 1925, not paginated, reprinted in Lynes, ed., *O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1098.

⁹⁶ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, commentary with plate 1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

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- ⁹⁸ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 46. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁹⁹ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 38.
- ¹⁰⁰ Weinberg, *Ambition & Love*, xiii.
- ¹⁰¹ “O’Keeffe or Stieglitz inscribed the word ‘Special’ on backings and versos of 33 works completed between 1915 and 1934. Works now inscribed with ‘Special’ were among the first O’Keeffe’s Stieglitz saw and exhibited in 1916 and 1917 at 291. It is obvious that the word was significant to both of them, but neither Stieglitz nor O’Keeffe clarified its meaning.” Lynes, ed., *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 23.
- ¹⁰² Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe*, quote on 44, 44-61.
- ¹⁰³ Judith C. Walsh, “The Language of O’Keeffe’s Materials: Charcoal, Watercolor, Pastel,” in *O’Keeffe on Paper*, 58.
- ¹⁰⁴ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 44; and Lynes, ed., *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1150.
- ¹⁰⁵ Helen Appleton Read, “Georgia O’Keeffe - Woman Artist Whose Art Is Sincerely Feminine,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6 April 1924.
- ¹⁰⁶ Dow wrote a letter of recommendation stating that O’Keeffe excelled in her use of fine art media, “especially in oil painting.” Laurie Lisle research material on Georgia O’Keeffe, 1903-1989, AAA.
- ¹⁰⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, ed., *Lovingly, Georgia*, 59-60. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁰⁸ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 66. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁰⁹ Clive Bell, *Art*, new ed. (New York: Frederick A Stokes Company, Publishers, 1923; first edition February 19, 1914), 63-64. It is uncertain when O’Keeffe first read Bell’s *Art*. By December 1916 she was reading it for at least the second time. O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, December 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 227. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. Already in November 1915, Pollitzer mentioned the book to O’Keeffe in a letter by only the author’s name, as if assuming that her friend would know the book without the need to give the title. Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, November 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 90. If O’Keeffe was familiar with Bell’s book by the time she began making her charcoal abstract drawings in the autumn of 1915 it is conceivable that her idea of setting herself this formal exercise could have come from his words which addressed so precisely the problem she faced of beginning to make modern works.
- ¹¹⁰ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 1.
- ¹¹¹ Jajtch and Thea Jirat-Wasiutynski, “The Uses of Charcoal Drawing,” *Arts Magazine* 55, no. 2 (October 1980), 131.
- ¹¹² O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay.
- ¹¹³ Walsh, “O’Keeffe’s Materials,” 58.
- ¹¹⁴ Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women)*, 53.

¹¹⁵ Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: a Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, 13th ed (1920; reprint Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 68.

¹¹⁶ Arthur Wesley Dow, *The Theory and Practice of Teaching Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University Press, 1912), 39.

¹¹⁷ Francis Picabia, in "A Post-Cubist's Impressions of New York," *New York Tribune*, March 9, 1913; quoted in Arthur Jerome Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1914), 96-97.

¹¹⁸ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, commentary with plate 1.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Carol Taylor, Lady Dynamo: Miss O'Keeffe, Noted Artist, Is a Feminist," *New York World-Tribune*, 31 March 1945.

¹²⁰ William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (Dijon, France, 1923), 93, quoted in Bram Dijkstra, *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 140-141.

¹²¹ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, December 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 103. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹²² For a discussion of the concepts of making and matching, see Gombrich, "Pygmalion's Power" in *Art and Illusion: a Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. Bollingen Series, XXXV 5 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 93-115.

¹²³ Kirk Varnedoe, "Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art Since Pollock, Number six: Abstract Art Now" (The Fifty-Second A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., May 11, 2003).

¹²⁴ Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women)*, 53.

¹²⁵ Holger Cahill, *Max Weber* (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1930), 5.

¹²⁶ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, initial essay.

¹²⁷ Dow, *Composition*, 74.

¹²⁸ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, December 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 103. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹²⁹ The details of technique are from Judith C. Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003.

¹³⁰ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 54.

¹³¹ The details of technique are from Judith C. Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003.

¹³² For instance, when O'Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer, as quoted above, "I made a crazy thing last week – charcoal – somewhat like myself – like I was feeling – keenly alive – but not much point to it all – Something wonderful about it all – but it looks lost – I am lost you know." O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 66. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹³³ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 54. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹³⁴ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 22.

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- ¹³⁵ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 4, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 118. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹³⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 24. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹³⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 54. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹³⁸ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 25, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 15. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid and Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, September 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 19. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁴⁰ Rebecca Zurier, *Art for The Masses: a Radical Magazine and Its Graphics, 1911-1917* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), xv.
- ¹⁴¹ Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 114.
- ¹⁴² O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 4, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 117. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁴³ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 25, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 15. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁴⁴ Wendy Wick Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America* (Washington, D.C., New Haven, and London: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in association with Yale University Press, 1998), 72, 95, 97.
- ¹⁴⁵ Dorothy Norman, “Introducing 291,” in *291*, reprint (New York: Arno Press, 1972).
- ¹⁴⁶ Marianne Fulton Margolis, ed., *Camera Work: a Pictorial Guide* (New York: Dover, 1978), ix.
- ¹⁴⁷ The pictorialists openly imitated fine art media, see Robert Doty, *Photo-Secession: Photography As a Fine Art*, reprint ed. (New York: Dover, 1978), 28-32.
- ¹⁴⁸ As Weinberg notes, “*Camera Work* became the ultimate level playing field since, no matter what the medium or size of the work of art, in reproduction it would share the same format as the photograph.” Weinberg, *Ambition and Love*, 85.
- ¹⁴⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, “Our Illustrations,” *Camera Work* 46 (April 1914): 51.
- ¹⁵⁰ Fine and Glassman note that “For his expressive caricatures, De Zayas often preferred the large sheets of paper and rich grays and blacks that would later engage O’Keeffe in many of her early ‘Specials.’” “Thoughts Without Words,” 25.
- ¹⁵¹ Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature*, 78.
- ¹⁵² O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 71. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁵³ Judith C. Walsh, “O’Keeffe’s Materials,” *O’Keeffe on Paper*, 59.

¹⁵⁴ The friability of charcoal “which produced scattered splinters of carbon, and its lack of covering power, made it an excellent tool for setting-in preliminary outlines. . . . It was these latter characteristics and virtues which originally led to its acceptance as a useful preparatory medium. Over the centuries sketching with charcoal was described in almost every manual which included a section on drawing.” James Watrous, *The Craft of Old-Master Drawings* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 130.

¹⁵⁵ Walsh describes the technical aspects of this drawing in more detail: “She dragged a short piece of charcoal on its side to create the broad lines at the center, while the sharpened point of a charcoal stick was used to make the dark outlines. In the midtones, she smudged the applied charcoal with a stomp, which filled the paper texture with pigment and created an even tone. In the broad lines that were not stomped or blended, she left the topography of the paper clearly visible, creating a dappled effect. The hard edges of the squares in the center were probably defined by lifting charcoal with an eraser.” Walsh, “O’Keeffe’s Materials,” 60.

¹⁵⁶ “Fine Arts: New Types of Work Shown at Annual Exhibit,” *Teachers College Record* XVI, no. 4 (September 1915): 88.

¹⁵⁷ Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe*, 41-53.

¹⁵⁸ Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists & the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 27. Swinth describes the stereotype of the amateurish woman artist. It is my belief that O’Keeffe feared she would give this impression.

¹⁵⁹ O’Keeffe at this period would have applied fixative with an atomizer or mouth blower. Both of these tools survive in the collection of her materials at the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center. Walsh, “O’Keeffe’s Materials,” 62-63.

¹⁶⁰ Technical insights derive from Judith Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003. O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz on July 27, 1916, “sometime I may have to tear them all up.” Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 154. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁶¹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 48. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁶² O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, November 1915, December 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 87, 92, 94-95, 96-97. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁶³ Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O’Keeffe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 118.

¹⁶⁴ O’Keeffe wrote, “This afternoon I met a woman who knows one of my sisters and my mother – She knows Arthur too – and something she said – makes me – Oh – just sort of think – that . . . Why Anita – I can hardly get it into words – I am not more disappointed in him than in myself – but I seem to have just seen my bubble burst

I’m awfully glad those drawings are gone [O’Keeffe had sent them to Pollitzer.] I like to feel that I am rid of them – It seems of [sic] give me more breathing space.

And – I fancy – I’ll not want to see them again unless I by some accident – or happenstance I find that my bubble didn’t break.” O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 143-144. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁶⁵ Georgia O’Keeffe, *Some Memories of Drawings*, ed. Doris Bry (Albuquerque: The University Press of New Mexico, 1988), commentary with plate 5.

¹⁶⁶ O’Keeffe to Arthur Macmahon, January 6?, 1916, Family of Arthur W. Macmahon, copyright Estate of Georgia O’Keeffe, quoted in Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 130. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁶⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 46. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁶⁸ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 43.

¹⁶⁹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 66. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷⁰ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 63-64.

¹⁷¹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 68. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷² Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, November 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 84.

¹⁷³ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, Sunday night, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 71. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷⁴ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, December 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 103. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷⁵ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, January 1, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 115-116. In my quotation of this letter, I have removed the phrase “Finally, a woman on paper” from the middle of this letter as printed in *Lovingly, Georgia*. The catchphrase has been repeated countless times in articles and books about O’Keeffe, but its origins are murky. Whether or not Stieglitz said it to Pollitzer on January 1, 1916, it was certainly not in the letter that O’Keeffe got from her friend. I read the letter at the Beinecke Library on August 2, 2004, and saw that the words “‘Finally a woman on paper’ – he said” have been added in pencil between the lines of the original letter that is written in ink. I find the neat pencil printing impossible to identify. If the handwriting is Pollitzer’s, it was not written at the same time as the rest of the letter. Pollitzer probably got her old letters back from O’Keeffe to use when she was writing *A Woman On Paper: Georgia O’Keeffe*.

Sarah Whitaker Peters notes that the phrase “Finally, a woman on paper!”, “seems to have been added to the original letter later, by a hand other than Pollitzer’s.” Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe*, n. 23, p. 312. Naomi Rosenblum agrees that these words “were penciled into the Pollitzer letter at a later date and do not seem to be in her hand.” Rosenblum, “‘Georgia O’Keeffe,’ review of *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life*, by Roxana Robinson; *O’Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance*, by Benita Eisler; *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, by Barbara Buhler Lynes; Giboire, Clive, Editor. *Lovingly, Georgia: the Complete Correspondence of Georgia O’Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990; and *Becoming O’Keeffe: The Early Years* by Sarah Whitaker Peters,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 1 (1992): 107. Nancy Scott notes that “The famous phrase ‘At last a woman on paper!’ which Stieglitz reportedly uttered on first seeing the O’Keeffe works, is written only in pencil, between the lines, in the Pollitzer letter postmarked 1 January 1916. It may thus represent her afterthought; the phrase appears to be in her handwriting.” Nancy Scott, “The O’Keeffe-Pollitzer Correspondence, 1915-1917,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 3, no. 1 (1983), p. 40, n. 3. Anne Wagner agrees on the handwriting although not the wording, writing of this phrase in pencil that Patricia C. Willis, Curator of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, wrote to her identifying “the phrase ‘Finally, a woman on paper’ as ‘probably written in Pollitzer’s hand.’” Wagner, *Three Artists*, n. 12, p. 298. Pollitzer herself, many years later writing her recollection of that January day in 1916, asserted that when Stieglitz first saw O’Keeffe’s drawings he “exclaimed: ‘Finally, a woman on paper!’” Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 46-48.

¹⁷⁶ I am judging what O’Keeffe sent Stieglitz from what he exhibited at 291 in 1916. Lynes, *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:51-56, 58. See my Introduction, note 1.

¹⁷⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 146. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷⁸ Stieglitz to Rhoades, May 31, 1916, Stieglitz/O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷⁹ Pollitzer to Stieglitz, July 3, 1915, Stieglitz to Pollitzer, August 9, 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 6-7, 13-14. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁸⁰ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 39.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, An Aperture Book (New York: Random House, 1973), 130.

¹⁸² Anita Pollitzer recalled that O’Keeffe sent her drawings “with the express injunction that I was to show them to no one.” Pollitzer, “That’s Georgia,” *The Saturday Review* (November 4, 1950), 42.

¹⁸³ Stieglitz to Katherine Rhoades, May 31, 1916, Stieglitz/O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁸⁵ It is perhaps more than merely entertaining to note that Stieglitz’s well-known British contemporary, the caricaturist Harry Furniss, in a comical book about illustration jokingly asserted that he felt certain that he (or anyone) could tell illustrations drawn by women from those drawn by men. Furniss professed to detect gender through the artistic weaknesses and “special aptitudes” of women artists. He said that women illustrators fell down in rendering the physique, actions, and clothing of male subjects, while they had a special ability to draw those of their own gender. Male illustrators faced almost equal difficulties in depicting female subjects and their accoutrements, and had similar strength in drawing their fellow men. The drawings Furniss made to illustrate his ideas were extremely silly, but his written assertions may have been slightly less so. He stated, “When drawing figures, particularly figures in action, or those representing expression, the draughtsman will, as it were, act the part of the person delineated. . . . He will, with his own muscular tension, produce the prose that his drawing is to reproduce.” Harry Furniss, “A Few Hints to Lady Students” in *How to Draw in Pen and Ink*, 3rd ed. (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1905, reprinted 1914 and 1923). 73-99. The quote is from page 74. I am certainly not asserting that Stieglitz or anyone in his circle knew Furniss’s book; I merely note the fascinating cultural parallel between the two statements. Perhaps it shows us how extreme Stieglitz’s ideas already were, even in his own time.

¹⁸⁶ Alfred Stieglitz “Woman in Art” printed in Norman, *American Seer*, 137.

¹⁸⁷ See Melinda Boyd Parsons, “Pamela Colman Smith and Alfred Stieglitz: Modernism at 291,” *History of Photography* 20, no. 4 (1996), 285. “Stieglitz tried, years later, to excuse his early interest in Smith, at times claiming he had only shown her work to disconcert photographers in his group, on other occasions suggest in a world-weary tone that while her work had seemed fresh and new at the time he had quickly grown beyond it to an appreciation of abstraction.”

¹⁸⁸ Sarah E. Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries* (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 51.

¹⁸⁹ Stieglitz “Woman in Art” in *American Seer*, 137.

¹⁹⁰ O’Keeffe said “After I had some I sent them to her to look at. And told her not to show them to anybody.” *O’Keeffe*, VHS, Adato.

¹⁹¹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 4, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 117-118. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁹² Swinth, *Painting Professionals*, 195.

¹⁹³ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, January 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 123-124. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁹⁴ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, mid-January 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 124. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁹⁵ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, January 1, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 115.

¹⁹⁶ Only a few letters from O’Keeffe and Stieglitz’s correspondence have been published; the rest will not be made available to the public by the O’Keeffe estate until 2006. See Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe*, 8.

¹⁹⁷ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, February 1, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 150. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁹⁸ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, mid-January 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 124. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁹⁹ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, February 1, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 150. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Hutchins Hapgood, *Victorian in the Modern World* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939), 337.

²⁰² Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 139. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²⁰³ See note 169 above. Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, March 31, 1918, quoted in Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 159. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²⁰⁴ Seligmann, *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of His Conversations, 1925-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 23. By the time that Stieglitz retold the story to Dorothy Norman as she recorded it in *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, no doubt after countless repetitions over the years, it had evolved into a more elaborate form. Stieglitz then said “I studied the second and the third, exclaiming, ‘Finally a woman on paper. A woman gives herself. The miracle has happened.’” Norman, *American Seer*, 130. Many authors over the decades have taken up the phrase “A woman on paper” and used it in texts and titles of articles and books about O’Keeffe.

²⁰⁵ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 4, 1916- Thursday; O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916; O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916 – Monday afternoon; O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 129, 136-137, 143-144. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²⁰⁶ O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 8.

²⁰⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 4, 1916, Thursday, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 129. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²⁰⁸ Lynes, ed., *O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 58.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe: American and Modern* (New Haven, CN and London: Yale University Press in association with InterCultura Fort Worth and the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, 1993), 161-163.

²¹¹ O'Keeffe's movement back and forth between representation and abstraction is noted by many scholars, including Fine and Glassman, "Thoughts Without Words," 28, where they note the similar alternation in Arthur Dove's art.

²¹² "I Can't Sing So I Paint." *New York Sun*, 5 December 1922.

²¹³ *O'Keeffe*, VHS, Adato.

²¹⁴ Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, January 8, 1916, Thursday, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 119.

²¹⁵ Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, January 12, 1916 – 10:30 at night, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 121.

²¹⁶ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 14, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 122. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²¹⁷ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 124. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²¹⁸ "Yesterday just by accident I found those music things I did with Bement last year and they certainly are different." O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 14, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 123. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²¹⁹ Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 135-136, 138-140.

²²⁰ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, Monday afternoon, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 142. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²²¹ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 153. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²²² Pollitzer told True about O'Keeffe's drawings being shown to Stieglitz, and showed her the works, in February 1915. Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, February 1916 – Thursday night, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 132.

²²³ For Pollitzer's wealthy family, see Eisler, "Letters" in *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, xiv-xv.

²²⁴ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 149-150, 152-153. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²²⁵ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 14, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 123. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²²⁶ Lynes, ed., *O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1142.

²²⁷ Robinson, *O'Keeffe, A Life*, 135. O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916 *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 152.

Chapter Four: O’Keeffe’s Debut at 291 and Her Watercolors

O’Keeffe’s Return to New York in 1916

In South Carolina, O’Keeffe at times felt desperate to be back in New York. In late January 1916, she wrote to Anita Pollitzer, “Isn’t it devilish that I can’t talk to you all . . . You and Dorothy [True] and Stieglitz and Arthur [Macmahon] . . . even little Bementie [Alon Bement] – all floating around in the little space called New York.”¹ In the spring of 1916, O’Keeffe returned to New York. Knowing that she would spend the summer teaching in Virginia and then in the autumn would leave for her teaching job in Texas, this newly formed modernist availed herself of the many opportunities in the capital of American modernism during the few months she was in the city. She renewed ties with friends and moved between school and the galleries busily gathering a new crop of visual ideas that would broaden her understanding of avant-garde art. These experiences would help her to open up her own palette and use of media.

Although she freely explored new artistic subjects and formal languages, O’Keeffe at the same time had to cope with new conditions imposed upon her. Her first modernist exhibition opened in May 1916. After this her art would never again be simply what she made; now O’Keeffe’s art would involve a give and take between her creation and Stieglitz’s interpretation and presentation of the works. It would be impossible for O’Keeffe merely to look forward to what she wanted to create next. Stieglitz forced her to keep looking over her shoulder at what she had already made. This new condition of art making began in 1916 while O’Keeffe was expanding the range of her art into

watercolor and landscape at the same time that Stieglitz was busily creating a public image of the artist and her art based upon her abstract charcoal drawings made during the previous year.

Following the highly publicized success of the 1913 Armory show, more and more commercial galleries had begun exhibiting European and American modern art in New York. 291 was no longer the only game in town. Stieglitz had to fight to maintain leadership of the modern art field as it became increasingly commercialized.² O’Keeffe benefited from the increased range of modernist venues when she returned to New York in the spring of 1916. The most prominent of the shows available for her viewing was the *Forum Exhibition of American Painters* held from March 13 to March 25 at the Anderson Galleries.³ When O’Keeffe arrived in the city in early March,⁴ magazines and newspapers were previewing this exhibition. *The New York Sun* gushed, “Wherever two or three were gathered together the topic was sure to be the ‘Forum’ exhibition of modern art that opens tomorrow in the Anderson Galleries. Expectations are keen.”⁵

Willard Huntington Wright, art critic for *The Forum* magazine, headed the committee that mounted this large exhibition named for the publication. Through an extensive presentation of American modern art the Forum exhibition committee intended to redress the neglect that American modernists had felt when European modernists garnered most of the press attention from the 1913 Armory Show. Wright was particularly keen to establish the importance of the Synchronists, a group of artists including his brother Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who made luminous color-based abstract paintings (Fig. 4.1).⁶ Stieglitz, also on the Forum Committee, brought to the exhibition such veterans of 291 as Alfred Maurer, Oscar Bluemner, Arthur Dove,

Marsden Hartley, Abraham Walkowitz, and John Marin.⁷ O’Keeffe would not have wanted to miss such an important event and she did not. The Forum Exhibition catalogue is still in her library.⁸ O’Keeffe was pleased finally to see in person the art of Arthur Dove that she had previously known only through reproductions,⁹ and now she also became familiar with a broader range of the young Americans who showed with Stieglitz. The reviewer for the *New York Times* mentioned that the artists shown submitted five drawings each to demonstrate to “the public that the painters represented are capable of drawing objects in a recognizable manner if they choose.”¹⁰ Paintings, however, dominated the exhibition and many demanded attention with saturated primary and secondary colors.

O’Keeffe also attended a Marsden Hartley show that was probably the first she had seen at 291 made up entirely of oil paintings (Figs. 4.2, 4.21).¹¹ At 291, as at the Forum Exhibition, color and pattern assaulted O’Keeffe’s senses. It was a startling contrast to the smaller, often black and white, graphic works she had previously seen in the little gallery. “In 1916,” she recalled, “I went in alone to see the Hartley show. It was his war pictures and was like a brass band in a small closet. . . . Stieglitz got out some of Hartley’s fall paintings from Maine that were quite different. There was a dark one I liked very much – he handed it to me and said, ‘Take it home with you if you wish. If you get tired of it, bring it back.’”¹² She wasn’t happy with the painting on her wall for more than a few days,¹³ but the medium of oil painting had undeniably found a place in her experience of modernism. O’Keeffe’s conception of avant-garde art was expanding beyond her previous understanding based upon monochrome graphic media. She had now seen first-hand how important American modernists employed color abstractly in

both oils and watercolors. Neither color nor the oil medium would remain exiled from O’Keeffe’s own oeuvre much longer.

Modern art in graphic media did not by any means disappear from O’Keeffe’s experience. She invited Arthur Macmahon to accompany her to an exhibition of European and American modern art, including many works on paper, on view at the Bourgeois Galleries.¹⁴ The show featured a wide variety of drawings and prints by European artists including Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Odilon Redon, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Duchamp. Americans represented by paintings and drawings included Maurice Prendergast and Joseph Stella.¹⁵ The exhibition, ranging from Symbolism to Cubism, must have been eye-opening for O’Keeffe; it even included two of Duchamp’s ready-mades, possibly *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (a snow shovel) and *Traveler’s Folding Item* (a typewriter cover),¹⁶ although there is no record of O’Keeffe’s reaction to these radical works.

In addition to the seminal exhibitions already discussed, in the spring of 1916 O’Keeffe could have seen the Montross Gallery’s April 1916 exhibition of works by the French Cubist painters, Marcel Duchamp, Jean Crotti, Albert Gleizes, and Jean Metzinger, although there is no evidence that she did so.¹⁷ At De Zayas’s Modern Gallery, originally conceived as a more commercial adjunct to 291,¹⁸ there was an exhibition of paintings by Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia, and Diego Rivera.¹⁹ Even if she did not attend these last two exhibitions, within a few weeks the breadth of O’Keeffe’s previously limited first-hand exposure to modern artists, modes, and media vastly increased.

Blue Lines

Even as O’Keeffe steeped herself in avant-garde art, she carried out her ostensible reason for going to New York, which was to take Arthur Wesley Dow’s class “Methods of Teaching” at Teachers College.²⁰ While she became increasingly attached to the Stieglitz circle, O’Keeffe continued to look to Dow for aesthetic ideas. The give and take between Dow and modernism that informed one of O’Keeffe’s key early graphic works, *Blue Lines*, illustrates how O’Keeffe adapted her art background to modernism at this transitional moment of her career. This watercolor was the culmination of a series of works she made in New York that spring (Figs. 4.3-5).²¹ *Blue Lines* has usually been interpreted as being wholly nonrepresentational and critics seemed to understand it in this way when it debuted. Barbara Buhler Lynes, however, has discovered that O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz saying she had found the inspiration for *Blue Lines* in “the verticality of the city’s skyscrapers that she could see from the window of her room.”²² O’Keeffe was well aware that New York skyscrapers were a major theme for the Stieglitz circle. Marin’s etchings of the Woolworth Building in his 1915 exhibition at 291 had particularly caught O’Keeffe’s fancy. She wrote to Stieglitz in February 1916, playfully asking, “if Marin’s Woolworth has spring fever again this year . . . I hope it has.”²³

In *Blue Lines* O’Keeffe married a classic modernist theme, far from the calm rural subjects typical of Dow’s prints and paintings (Fig. 4.28), to what Lynes describes as “O’Keeffe’s sophisticated grasp of and continuing experimentation with Dow’s theories of opposition in design.”²⁴ O’Keeffe described Dow’s influence on the work in her book *Some Memories of Drawings*, “Along the way I had probably looked very carefully at

Chinese and Japanese paintings and calligraphy before I got to the BLUE LINES. I had practiced a good deal with the watercolor brush, but I considered that it would be impossible for me to have the fluency developed by the Orientals who always wrote with the brush.”²⁵ The Oriental influence must have come through Dow’s classes, books, and followers. In addition, the formal basis of *Blue Lines* was in line (Fig. 2.45), which was one of the three major elements in Dow’s theory of design, the others being color, and the light and dark contrast he called notan. Dow defined “Line-beauty” as “harmony of combined lines or the peculiar quality imparted by special treatment.”²⁶ *Blues Line* embodied Dow’s ideal of a simple, harmonious, but expressive combination of lines.

Blue Lines is probably the earliest surviving example of O’Keeffe’s work in a tightly related series developing a particular image. This mode of working would be habitual for the artist for the rest of her career. Many years later O’Keeffe told an interviewer, “I have a single-track mind. I work on an idea for a long time. It’s like getting acquainted with a person, and I don’t get acquainted easily.”²⁷ In this case, the process began with the traditional planning medium of charcoal used as Dow advised his students, “Make many trial arrangements, sketching lightly with charcoal on ‘bogus’ or lining paper. Select the best, correct them, and draw with brush and ink over the charcoal lines.”²⁸ O’Keeffe described her similar approach, “Blue Lines was first done with charcoal. Then there were probably five or six paintings of it with black watercolor before I got to this painting with blue watercolor that seemed right.”²⁹

While the charcoal beginnings of the 1915 abstractions are lost forever on discarded sheets of paper or hidden under the finished compositions, the initial drawing for *Blue Lines* survives to afford a rare view of how O’Keeffe used charcoal to draw and

erase over and over in inventing and refining her compositions (Fig. 4.3). Thickets of incompletely erased lines gather around the two vertical elements, indicating many slight adjustments of placement and proportion as O’Keeffe perfected her composition. She played with larger variants of design as well; at one point a diagonal line appears to have connected the two vertical lines, and she evidently considered having the branching section of the left-hand line at a very different angle. Once O’Keeffe was content with the shapes and their relationship, she applied lines of fixative or varnish and drew over them to make crisp black lines that would not become confused with the clouds of erasure behind them.³⁰

This charcoal compositional drawing for *Blue Lines* was never exhibited during O’Keeffe’s lifetime.³¹ While most of the artist’s 1915 charcoals have many sets of tack holes in their corners where Pollitzer and others tacked the drawings up to look at them, the sketch for *Blue Lines* is pierced by only a single set of holes probably made by the tacks or pins O’Keeffe used to attach the work to her drawing board while she worked.³² This sketch was a plan for O’Keeffe’s own work, and thus a private studio document rather than a public statement. Now that O’Keeffe knew her art might be exhibited, such distinctions took on renewed importance. She would not allow a recurrence of the unplanned transformation from private to public that had happened with her 1915 charcoals.

O’Keeffe found watercolor the medium best suited for realizing the long, flowing shapes of *Blue Lines* in its the final, public version. She practiced the calligraphic strokes over and over to get the right graceful flow in an exercise that would have been familiar from her studies with Dow and probably her own teaching as well (Fig. 4.4).³³ As in her

charcoal abstractions drawn with her arm swinging freely from the shoulder, O’Keeffe used graphic techniques taught by Dow. He instructed the student,

Japanese brushes, ink and paper are to be preferred for exercises in line drawing, tracing, notan massing and washes in grays. . . .

For line drawing the brush is held in a perpendicular position, that it may move freely in all directions Draw with the whole hand and arm in one sweep, not with the fingers. Steady the hand if necessary by resting the wrist or end of the little finger on the paper. Draw very slowly. Expressive line is not made by mere momentum, but by force of will controlling the hand. By drawing slowly the line can be watched and guided as it grows under the brush point. Slight waverings are not objectionable; in fact they often give character to the line. . . . Begin with straight lines, remembering that straightness of direction is the essential thing, not mere geometric straightness.³⁴

In *Blue Lines* (Fig. 4.5) O’Keeffe followed this advice; the “slight waverings” of the long lines imbue the spare forms with an immediacy absent from ruler-straight lines. O’Keeffe’s sensitivity to nuance in these works also emerges in her slight adjustments of proportion in each new version. The final version, the only one shown in O’Keeffe’s life time, *Blue Lines*, is the most attenuated of the surviving three examples.

O’Keeffe’s Return to Color

The blue color O’Keeffe used in *Blue Lines* was probably the first to appear in a finished work since she had committed herself to charcoal abstract drawings the previous autumn.³⁵ She had progressed to the next stage of art study beyond line and value: working in color. Blue was an important color to choose for her emergence from the black and white exercise of 1915. It was the color of the designs on blue and white Chinese porcelain O’Keeffe would have studied often in Bement’s and Dow’s classes. In the avant-garde world, Kandinsky saw blue as imbued with powerful emotion, writing that, “Blue is the typical heavenly color. The ultimate feeling it creates is one of rest. When it sinks almost to black, it echoes a grief that is hardly human.”³⁶ Dark blue, with

its deep value providing a natural transition from her previous work in black and gray, would be a recurring color in O’Keeffe’s work for the next several months.

Although the colorful abstractions O’Keeffe had seen in New York exhibitions that spring may have contributed to her impetus to leave black and white behind, she had been striving for some time to return to using color. In February 1916, while still in South Carolina, O’Keeffe had written to Pollitzer, “I haven’t done anything with color for ages – haven’t wanted to – but I think I’m going to water color evenings – again – from 4 till six – outdoors – Getting myself together for the first start is like pulling teeth but I’m going to try to do it next week – It’s so much trouble to hunt up all your things again. I just haven’t even wanted to think about using color.”³⁷ She soon followed through on her resolution to return color to her art, although she confessed to Pollitzer later that month, “Anita – I’ve just come to the comforting conclusion that I’ll have to paint acres and acres of watercolor landscapes before I will look for even a passably fair one. After about ten attempts – I certainly have to laugh at myself – It’s like feeling around in the dark – thought I knew what I was going to try to do but I find I don’t – and guess I’ll only find out by slaving away at it.”³⁸

The tentative return of color, in the lost South Carolina watercolors and again with *Blue Lines* in New York, coincided with O’Keeffe’s renewed study of her visual environment outside of the influence of art works she admired. She now continued the kind of nature-derived abstraction she had tried to explain to Arthur Macmahon in the summer of 1915, when she was working with bright pastels (Figs. 3.16-17). The mode of drawing as observation that she had learned in her academic training here took on a new meaning in relation to her modernist project. In *Blue Lines*, she observed without

copying and invented without losing touch with the stimulation of the world around her. She was learning to apply to her own visual experiences the formal lessons she had taken from avant-garde art as well as from Dow and his followers. It was a moment similar to that documented in her Chicago Art Institute sketchbook in which she learned how to apply her classroom studies to her own art (Figs. 2.28, 2.31). O'Keeffe now attempted to extend her new progress to painting in oils, making a color depiction of skyscrapers seen at night with their windows glowing gold (Fig. 4.6). She was again following a progression advocated by Dow, who asserted, "Painting with the Japanese brush leads directly to oil painting."³⁹ O'Keeffe, however, could not manage this transition in media easily. The flow of *Blue Lines* did not translate into her choppy oil painting technique. She kept the ungraceful early painting, perhaps because this early attempt at modernist oil painting signified her ultimate aspirations, or perhaps simply because she later made another painting on the other side of the canvas.⁴⁰

The Death of O'Keeffe's Mother

In the beginning of May 1916, O'Keeffe's viewing, studying, and making of art were all painfully interrupted when her mother died after years of suffering from tuberculosis. O'Keeffe immediately took a train to the family home in Virginia. A neighbor later gave a dramatic description of Mrs. O'Keeffe's death:

On May 2 the landlady went to the O'Keeffe house and demanded the overdue rent. The girls told her that they had no money to give her, but she refused to budge from the doorstep, insisting that their mother come to the front door. As Mrs. O'Keeffe got slowly out of bed and began to inch her way down the hallway, she was seized by a lung hemorrhage, collapsed, and died. In the following days, people were shocked to find the family's kitchen cupboards almost bare.⁴¹

Only O’Keeffe’s younger sisters Ida and Claudia and their great aunt had been living with Mrs. O’Keeffe as the family suffered increasing financial desperation. O’Keeffe’s other siblings were living elsewhere pursuing married life, studies, or careers. Their father, after a string of business failures, was traveling to find work wherever he could.⁴²

There is no certain evidence of whether or not O’Keeffe went with her siblings to bury their mother in the family plot in Madison, Wisconsin, but in any case she could not afford to spend much time with her family.⁴³ She had already missed weeks of her Methods class at the beginning of the semester and to miss more time might have prevented her from getting credit for her work. Considering her family’s desperate financial situation, she presumably lacked the resources to stay in New York during the summer to take the class again. She needed the money she would get from teaching summer school at the University of Virginia with Bement, as well as what she would earn when she taught in Texas. Despite her grief, she had no choice but to return to New York and take up her studies for the few weeks that remained in the semester. In June at the University of Virginia, she wrote to Pollitzer that she “spent most of the time in bed,”⁴⁴ apparently worn out by grief and stress. It was not until two months after her mother’s death, that O’Keeffe wrote to Macmahon that she finally began to feel “alive again” for “the first time in ages.”⁴⁵

The Private Made Public: O’Keeffe’s First Exhibition at 291

In New York, little more than three weeks after her mother’s death, O’Keeffe faced a further emotional strain. She remembered,

someone at Teachers College asked me if I were Virginia O’Keeffe. I answered, “No, I am Georgia O’Keeffe.” “Well, I thought that maybe you were Virginia.

Virginia O’Keeffe is having a show of drawings at the Stieglitz Gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue.”

I knew this show was mine because Stieglitz had seen my drawings and kept them, telling the person who had taken them to him that he intended to show them. Even though I had heard this, I was startled and shocked.⁴⁶

Ten of the drawings that O’Keeffe had sent to Pollitzer were on view, along with a few works by the equally unknown artists Charles Duncan and René Lafferty (Figs. 3.1-11).⁴⁷ Although previous scholars have not noted this connection between the artist’s family and professional lives, O’Keeffe reacted to her first exhibition at 291 with an extremity that seems to reflect her fragile emotional state after her mother’s death as much as any insecurity about the strength of her drawings. Having just lost her mother, O’Keeffe could hardly have been prepared to suddenly undergo another major transition in her life, from art student to exhibiting artist. She described how she angrily fought for control of her art, “So I went [to 291] – I was furious . . . he [Stieglitz] had said that he had told her⁴⁸ he was going to show them but he hadn’t told me and when I got down there I really was incensed that he should hang up my drawings and I not know anything about it. But he wasn’t there – he was on jury duty somewhere.”⁴⁹

Stieglitz’s plans to show O’Keeffe’s drawings along with works by Duncan and Lafferty dated back at least to March 1916.⁵⁰ Stieglitz may have intentionally avoided telling O’Keeffe about the exhibition, possibly fearing that the inexperienced and uncertain artist would deny him permission to show her works. Perhaps also to spare O’Keeffe scrutiny and pressure, Stieglitz later said he had “waited to show the O’Keeffe drawings until the art season was over and the critics were laid off.”⁵¹ The group exhibition of works by O’Keeffe, Charles Duncan, and René Lafferty began at 291 on May 23 and Stieglitz extended it until July 5.⁵²

Still determined to stop this unauthorized showing of her works, O’Keeffe returned to 291 to find Stieglitz. O’Keeffe related that, “I went again to have him take my drawings down. Well, we had a little argument and the drawings stayed up. . . . Listen, you try arguing with him and see where you get.”⁵³ Previously, when he had mentioned his desire to show her works, there is no record of O’Keeffe’s having objected. She had even written to Pollitzer in January 1916 saying she would like to have her works shown at 291.⁵⁴ O’Keeffe had talked to Stieglitz on multiple occasions earlier in the spring,⁵⁵ but the same feelings that had previously made it difficult for her to share her drawings even with friends now both frightened and excited the artist as the public gained access to her works. As she had earlier written to Pollitzer, “I always have a curious sort of feeling about some of my things – I hate to show them – I am perfectly inconsistent about it – I am afraid people won’t understand and – and I hope they won’t – and am afraid they will.”⁵⁶

Although the large size and relatively high degree of finish in her 1915 drawings strongly suggests O’Keeffe’s intention to share them with a wider world, she professed to feeling betrayed and exposed by this transformation in the identity of her works, saying that, “For me the drawings were private and the idea of their being hung on the wall for the public to look at was just too much.”⁵⁷ But O’Keeffe was no longer in a position to equivocate about whether the works should be public or private. She had created these works with intense concentration in the privacy of her room in South Carolina at night, but Stieglitz had dragged them into the harsh daylight of the New York art world.

With this exhibition, Stieglitz transformed the purpose of O’Keeffe’s drawings. The “Specials” had begun life in one of the chief traditional roles of drawings as the

artist's private mode of learning and exploration; now they assumed the traditional role of paintings as the artist's means of communication to the public. In normal academic or even avant-garde practice, preparatory works and works for exhibition would have been separate entities. Stieglitz, however, valued the immediacy of drawings he showed by artists like Picasso and Matisse. 291 exhibited not only finished drawings but some works that are clearly unresolved sketches made for the artist's own private use (Fig. 1.20).

For better or for worse, O'Keeffe would no longer have control of who saw her drawings, or at least those she entrusted to Stieglitz. Now that Stieglitz had the "Specials" in his possession, he, the critics in his circle, and those who visited 291 would have their say about the meaning of these works and even about the abilities and character of their creator. O'Keeffe had lost hold of her own public image as well as that of her art. As Weinberg states it, "The shifting from creation to exhibiting, which is the very means by which the artist's name becomes a well-known commodity, is destabilizing."⁵⁸

Stieglitz recounted, in his typically dramatized fashion, how O'Keeffe found him at 291 and tried to get him to take her drawings down, struggling to keep control of her own art and identity,

a girl appeared – thin, in a simple black dress with a little white collar. She had a sort of Mona Lisa smile. "Who gave you permission to hang these drawings?" she inquired.

"No one," I replied. Still with a smile, she stated very positively, "You will have to take them down."

"I think you are mistaken," I answered. "Well, I made the drawings. I am Georgia O'Keeffe." "You have no more right to withhold these pictures," I said, "than to withdraw a child from the world, had you given birth to one." She seemed surprised.

“I took her into the little gallery and asked where a particular charcoal – all of the drawings were abstract – had come from. She told me, ‘I often get headaches and this is the picture I see.’ That corroborated something I knew. I pointed to another. “And what is the origin of this?” She began to talk, but after a few words she drew herself up straight and challengingly said, “Do you think I am an idiot? I refuse to say anything more.”⁵⁹

If this story is at all accurate (and, as previously mentioned, in defiance of the impression given here that the two had never met, Stieglitz had already met O’Keeffe multiple times before this meeting and he assuredly knew who she was), it shows how, having begun to give anecdotal information about her drawings, O’Keeffe suddenly realized that she was in danger of exposing her inner feelings and the biographical connections with her drawings in precisely the way she had most feared. Relating a single anecdote to each drawing would give short shrift to the depth and complexity of meaning with which she had worked so hard to imbue each of these drawings. O’Keeffe had previously written asking Stieglitz about these same drawings, “I wonder if I got over to anyone what I wanted to say.”⁶⁰ If her modernist enterprise was to succeed, she had to leave her art to communicate on its own, whether or not viewers interpreted her works as she had originally intended them. No matter what O’Keeffe said, Stieglitz was going to talk about her works to gallery visitors, as he did with all the art works he exhibited. He had wrenched these works out of the artist’s grasp. After the exhibition, she wrote to him from Virginia, sounding almost hysterical,

I seem to feel that they [the abstract drawings] are as much yours as mine—
They were only mine alone till the first person saw them –

I wouldn’t mind if you wrote me that you had torn them all up – I don’t want them – I don’t want even to see them – but I’m not always the same – sometime I may have to tear them all up myself – You understand – they are all as much yours as mine.

I don’t care what you do with them so long as I don’t have to see them.”⁶¹

O’Keeffe was not the only artist in the circle who felt that Stieglitz took control over art works after they left the private context of the studio. Dove, for instance, wrote to Stieglitz, “You know the paintings are as much yours as they are mine.”⁶² There was a clear division of power with respect to art made by those in Stieglitz’s stable. While an artist was creating art, he or she had control over the art (although subject to the influence of Stieglitz’s urgings); once Stieglitz had the art, it was his to show or not and to interpret to critics as he pleased. If an artist didn’t want his or her art shown, it was best not to give it to Stieglitz. The significance of O’Keeffe’s graphic media divided along this same line between creation and presentation. While O’Keeffe found it stressful to have drawings reflecting her innermost thoughts exposed to strangers, I see Stieglitz as gearing his gallery toward the exposure of human feelings. O’Keeffe, having gazed in fascination at innovative drawings by other artists on the walls of 291, now found herself uneasily positioned on the other side of the equation.

Stieglitz intensified the immediacy of the works by his informal presentation of them. As Henry Tyrrell, reviewing the May 1916 exhibition for the *Christian Science Monitor*, noted in exasperation, “there is no such thing as a catalogue and the things tacked up on the walls are uniformly innocent of title, number, or signature of any kind.”⁶³ Probably O’Keeffe’s drawing were literally “tacked up” on the gallery walls bare, or perhaps matted, with or without sheets of glass fixed over them on the wall as seen in Stieglitz’s installation photographs of O’Keeffe’s 1917 show at 291 (Fig. 4.7). A photograph by Stieglitz of *No. 9 Special* (Fig. 4.8) shows the work unmatted and unframed, without even a sheet of glass over it, tacked directly to the wall with push pins.

The photograph may document how the work was displayed during the 1916 exhibition, although it is also possible that Stieglitz tacked up the work simply to photograph it.

Not long after the exhibition ended, Stieglitz wrote to O’Keeffe that he was having some of the drawings framed to protect them. This unmistakably indicates that the works had been shown without frames. Stieglitz wrote to O’Keeffe, wondering, “Will the pictures lose any of their freedom? I don’t like the idea of a frame around any of them – any more than I’d like the *Mountain and Night* [this could refer to Figs. 4.18-20 or to a work that does not survive] framed in – but there is no way out if the drawings are to be protected, and that I insist they must be. So frame goes into that! Life again!”⁶⁴ Informally tacking the “Specials” up without frames had left the works exposed to the eyes and possibly the hands of visitors, without the physical protection and psychological distancing that frames and glass would have provided. Stieglitz evidently found the psychological availability of the works more important than their physical safety in the short term. During the exhibition, Stieglitz wanted O’Keeffe’s art works, like all works shown at 291, to “speak for themselves.”⁶⁵

Stieglitz and the Critical Reception of the “Specials”

Visually O’Keeffe’s works communicated on their own; verbally was another matter. Without labels, a checklist, or literature to help them to interpret the works by such newly exposed artists, those who wrote about the 1916 exhibition had to turn to Stieglitz for guidance. As usual, he was only too happy to oblige. Lynes explained,

It was Stieglitz’s habit to invite critics to the exhibitions he organized and to lead them around the gallery, talking incessantly and convincingly about the work on display. When Edmund Wilson described the experience sometime later, he revealed how difficult it had been to separate his own ideas from Stieglitz’s, agreeing with a critic-friend whose similar experience had caused him to remark,

“When I came away, I couldn’t help wondering a little whether it hadn’t been a case of the innocent young serpent being swallowed by the wily old dove.”⁶⁶

Stieglitz, an avid but not doctrinaire Freudian,⁶⁷ presented O’Keeffe’s 1915 charcoals as articulating the artist’s unconscious. He stated in *Camera Work* that, “Miss O’Keeffe’s drawings besides their other value were of intense interest from a psycho-analytical point of view. ‘291’ had never before seen woman express herself so frankly on paper.”⁶⁸ As Barbara Lynes discusses, Stieglitz felt “that unconscious states of being were the real subject matter of the artist and that the unconscious could be most appropriately articulated through abstraction. . . . He associated her [O’Keeffe’s] ‘Woman’ feelings with innocence and purity, qualities he admired in the art of children and the art of so-called primitive cultures.”⁶⁹ 291 had shown the art of children, as well as African masks and archaic Mexican pottery. Stieglitz valued art that he felt put the artist’s true self, unmediated by convention, before the viewer. In 1918 Stieglitz wrote to O’Keeffe when she was working in Texas, asking her what she had been “full of – The Great Child pouring out some more of her Woman self on paper – purely – truly – unspoiled.”⁷⁰ O’Keeffe, of course, was far from uneducated or naïve in her art and at thirty years of age she was hardly a child. As I explored in the previous chapter, she had made her drawings with full consciousness of a wide range of visual precedents and ideas from academic figure drawings, to the abstract design principles of Arthur Wesley Dow, to the most modern works shown at 291 and reproduced in *Camera Work*, 291, and such modernist books as Kandinsky’s. Yet, for Stieglitz, the fact that O’Keeffe was a woman made him theorize her as a direct and natural artist. He was like many European early twentieth-century modernists in identifying man with culture and woman with nature.⁷¹

Stieglitz wrote in 1919, “The Woman receives the World through her Womb – That is the seat of her deepest feeling. Mind comes second.”⁷²

I would further assert that medium worked in concert with gender in shaping Stieglitz’s reading of O’Keeffe drawings as transparent windows to her unconscious. As I discussed in the first chapter, Stieglitz had inherited the tradition of drawings connoisseurship that saw the graphic marks in drawings as making the artist’s character and emotions available to the sensitive and educated viewer. The assertive marks of O’Keeffe’s hands on the surfaces of these works seemed to urge Stieglitz into an exaggerated reading of the “Specials.” Critic Henry Tyrrell, obviously listening to Stieglitz’s words in presenting O’Keeffe’s drawings, wrote that O’Keeffe “draws with unconscious naiveté what purports to be the innermost unfolding of a girl’s being, like the germinating of a flower.”⁷³ The word “purports” in Tyrrell’s article, as Lynes points out, reveals that “it is likely that he was paraphrasing, if not quoting, a Stieglitz monologue on the subject of O’Keeffe’s art and its relationship to natural growth.”⁷⁴ This art, Stieglitz would have people believe, had grown on the page as directly and naturally as a flower from the ground. This was in direct contradiction to the elaborate crafting and conscious planning of academic art. Charles Duncan may have heard the same or a similar Stieglitz monologue, for he said that he saw in the drawings shown alongside his own art, “the fire and flow of a fresh sensualism; tremulous, giving – a flower, opening.”⁷⁵ Stieglitz’s monologues also seem to lie behind Tyrrell’s description of the “dozen or so charcoal drawings alleged to be of thoughts, not things, by Georgia O’Keeffe of Virginia.”⁷⁶ That is, the artists’s thoughts appeared on paper unencumbered by the obligations of mimesis and academic crafting, and thus fully opened to the viewer.

Judging from such reviews that Stieglitz assuredly guided, and his own words in *Camera Work*, the complexity of O’Keeffe’s compositions and her drawing techniques seem to have been either unclear or unimportant to him. Since O’Keeffe was in school when the 1916 exhibition opened, and teaching by the time it closed, Stieglitz must have known that she was well educated artistically. Yet the critical literature he inspired ignored or suppressed awareness of O’Keeffe’s academic training. Stieglitz looked past the polished charcoal techniques and sophisticated compositional skills underlying the bold finger marks on the works. He did not consider the artist’s purposeful decision to combine academic and anti-academic technical approaches in her modernist works. I believe that Stieglitz, who had no training in drawing,⁷⁷ but was a close observer, consciously chose to respond to the marks of O’Keeffe’s hands as the natural, crude technique of an innocent creator responding directly to the promptings of her emotions. He clearly felt that one could read O’Keeffe’s character directly through the shapes deposited on paper by the forces of her unconscious working through her hands. Stieglitz wrote that O’Keeffe’s drawings showed how “big and fine” her “nature” was.⁷⁸ Carefully delineated shapes and subtly rubbed gray areas did not interest him – he preferred the “big” marks.

Stieglitz’s interpretation of O’Keeffe’s graphic medium must have been very different from the views of the artist herself. O’Keeffe knew how many kinds of art she had consulted and how hard she had labored to devise a way of expressing her feelings and thoughts without specific references to the visual world. She knew what complex thought and crafting had gone into the “Specials.” Not tied to actual history of how the works had been made, Stieglitz’s public statements about this art evolved subjectively

and creatively in accordance with his overall enterprise of exhibiting and promoting modern American art. In particular, Stieglitz created his interpretation of O’Keeffe’s drawings to advance his own ideas about the artistic creativity of Americans and of women. This helped to create a profound and continuing disconnection between the artist’s views of her own art and those of Stieglitz and the critics who followed him.

Yet the themes that Stieglitz stressed grew at least in part from the ways that O’Keeffe herself had discussed her art in letters. O’Keeffe had written only of her desire for “self-expression”⁷⁹ and to be “living on paper.”⁸⁰ She stressed these as her central concerns, saying nothing of more complex and specific ideas embedded in her drawings. In analogous fashion, she left direct marks exposed on the top layers of the actual drawings, over the more delicately manipulated layers beneath. Stieglitz and his followers looked where O’Keeffe had led their eyes and their minds, to the simple marks and simple interpretations laid like a mask over more complex marks and meanings. Stieglitz averted his eyes from anything that might interfere with his reading of these drawings as simple sensuous outbursts. This reinforced his presentation of O’Keeffe as a young, naïve woman-child with a completely American background.⁸¹

Stieglitz’s attitude toward O’Keeffe’s abstractions also reflected an understanding of the drawings less as individual images than as a linked expressive group much like his own later photographic cycles, such the *Equivalents* and the composite portrait of O’Keeffe. Tyrell and those reacting to the 1916 exhibition in *Camera Work* wrote about generalized thoughts, feelings, and suggested motions in the group of drawings as a whole rather than fixing on any particular work. Only the anonymous critic for the *American Art News*, whose words Stieglitz did not see fit to reprint in *Camera Work*,

broke away from the established 291 line to speak specifically of two drawings as “one case in conflagration and another in a stalagnite [sic – stalagmite] state (presumably Figs. 3.7, 3.2).” The *Art News* critic resisted Stieglitz’s ideas so far that he saw the drawings as representing “inanimate objects” rather than the organic forces perceived by 291’s adherents. This reviewer further contradicted Stieglitz’s reading by looking closely enough at the technique of O’Keeffe’s works to see that they were not naïve, crude productions but rather “carefully presented and artistic in quality.”⁸²

Barbara Lynes in *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics, 1916-1929* lays out the important social, cultural, and psychological factors that contributed to Stieglitz’s gender-biased understanding of O’Keeffe; other scholars have made use of Lynes’ important work.⁸³ I would add medium as a formative influence on O’Keeffe’s critical reception. I see Stieglitz’s emotional reactions to medium as contributing to his reading of O’Keeffe’s drawings as overtly gendered and sensual. In addition to his reading of her approach to drawing as primal and untutored, and thus both American and female, Stieglitz’s excitement about O’Keeffe’s use of a medium that was monochrome like his own helped to establish his sexual associations with her creations. The empathetic connections forged between Stieglitz and O’Keeffe by these drawings would endure as O’Keeffe moved into working in watercolor and later into oils.

Stieglitz printed in *Camera Work* a letter from a woman visitor named Evelyn Sayer, who said of the drawings she called “the woman pictures,” “I was startled at their frankness; startled into admiration of the self-knowledge in them.” The word “frank,” signifying the most open and honest of expressions, probably implying a sexual content, was one of Stieglitz’s favorite descriptions of these works. He wrote “‘291’ had never

before seen woman express herself so frankly on paper.”⁸⁴ In a letter to Katherine Rhoades, Stieglitz made clear his understanding of O’Keeffe’s drawing as proclamations of an explicitly female self, saying that when Pollitzer had first shown him the drawings, “I had never seen anything in painting or drawing by woman so thoroughly feminine, so thoroughly frank, self expressive.”⁸⁵ Paper and openness about such personal feelings as sexuality evidently went together in the photographer’s eyes, in accord with the tradition of drawings connoisseurship. As a kind of graphic artist himself in his photography, he seemed to take particular pride in the fact that these graphic works surpassed in this regard not only their fellow drawings but also anything he had seen on canvas.

I believe that Stieglitz’s reaction was in response to the combination of the body-like abstractions O’Keeffe drew and the assertively tactile marks of the hands that had made them. If these drawings suggested living human forms, they were forms that had been created by touch and in turn invited the vicarious touch of the viewer. The marks of the artist’s living hands on these almost living forms stirred Stieglitz to think specifically of their creator as a person of both mind and body. In June 1916, after O’Keeffe had left New York to teach for one final summer with Bement at the University of Virginia, Stieglitz wrote to her about how much he identified her with the expressive evidence of herself she had left on paper,

Your drawings on the walls of 291 would not be so living for me did I not see you in them. Really see. . . .

. . . [T]hose drawings, how I understand them. They are as if I saw a part of myself – Queer! Queerer still that during your stay here we never had a chance to compare notes – to be alone to compare.⁸⁶

This was the ultimate indexical reading of art; for Stieglitz, O’Keeffe and the marks she had made on paper had nearly become one. So accustomed was he to

projecting his own thoughts and feelings onto paper, both in the countless letters and articles he wrote and in his photographs, that at this moment he felt closer to O’Keeffe, body and mind, in her drawings than to the woman herself. In 1917 and 1918 Stieglitz’s reading of immediacy and bodily sensuality in O’Keeffe’s graphic works would be expressed in impassioned photographs of the artist with her works, as I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

That the first works by O’Keeffe Stieglitz had seen were in a black and white medium on paper was a factor that drew him (pun fully intended) to the art and the artist. Stieglitz, the majority of whose photographs were black and white, had been obsessed with the aesthetic and symbolic properties of black and white since his childhood. He told his biographer Dorothy Norman how, as a boy, he had been fascinated by a friend of his mother’s whom he knew as “the lady in black” and remembered for her striking black clothing and white skin. He admitted, “I always have been fascinated by black. I believe this may well be related to my early infatuation for the lady in black.”⁸⁷ Stieglitz related opposed visual values symbolically to the values of life, saying “Man is faced by inevitable choices. He is forever being asked, in one way or another, whether he believes in white or in black How conceive of black without white? Why reject either, since both exist? Indeed, it is at the very point at which black and white form a position of manifestation of life that I am most aroused.”⁸⁸ O’Keeffe’s visual play of black and white in her charcoals deeply stirred Stieglitz, forming a “manifestation of life” on paper. He even suggested to the artist, when he saw her first modernist works in color, that she confine her future work to black and white. She did not obey this restriction and Stieglitz soon realized it was ridiculous.⁸⁹

O’Keeffe’s Work in the Summer of 1916

When O’Keeffe left New York to teach summer school at the University of Virginia, she continued to work largely in graphic media, but the black and white dam broke as she created a flood of watercolors. In some works, she confined herself to the Prussian blue that had first appeared in *Blue Lines* and that was so close in value to the black of her charcoals, but in other works she used the whole spectrum.⁹⁰ While Stieglitz was still enchanted with the primal markings of O’Keeffe’s initial modernist abstractions in black and white, the artist moved forward with colorful works whose clean surfaces often hid the marks of her hands. This was, I believe, the beginning of her reaction against the sexual content Stieglitz and associated authors assigned to the “Specials.”

In June 1916, O’Keeffe arrived in Charlottesville for what would be her last summer teaching alongside Alon Bement at the University of Virginia.⁹¹ Before she left New York, O’Keeffe gave some of her new works on paper to Stieglitz, who wrote her in June, “. . . I have been thinking of your new drawings – and have been telling of them to some of those people enthusiastic about the drawings now on the walls.”⁹² Stieglitz thus encouraged her to do more art and send it to him. She had trouble moving her work forward, however, probably because she was still exhausted from the emotional stresses of the spring. She wrote to Pollitzer, “A couple of weeks ago I made myself work one afternoon and Anita – the results were so awful that I made up my mind I wouldn’t try again till I really wanted to – I’ve only had one idea since I’ve been here anyway – sounds pretty bad doesn’t it – one idea in five weeks – yesterday I had a pale desire to work it out – and the result is a bit queer. I’m going to try it again – I have just been too tired to do anything[.]”⁹³ The sequence of O’Keeffe’s works of the summer of 1916 is

vague enough that it is not possible to know to which works she referred, if she even kept the art she had made.

It is little wonder that O’Keeffe found getting back to work a challenge during and after her first exhibition at 291. The proposition of making art had changed materially since she made her abstract charcoal drawings in the autumn of 1915. Where once she had worked as a private individual, talking to herself visually by putting the shapes in her head down on paper, now other parties had entered the conversation. First Pollitzer joined the discussion, then Stieglitz and Walkowitz, True and Bement, and finally the crowd of artists and visitors at 291. O’Keeffe herself and her art had now become associated with not only images but words in the minds of Stieglitz and the audience to whom he spoke. This audience would see all aspects of O’Keeffe’s new art works, from what medium she used to how abstractly she worked, in relation to the works she had already shown and the words said about them. As T. J. Clark notes of a painting Camille Pissarro made in 1892, “Thinking of pictures as primarily episodes in an individual’s career – as opposed to, say, contributions to a public dialogue in the Salon, or responses to moments [in history] . . . was to become natural to modernism The retrospective . . . teaches artists to view their work proleptically, as part of a singular, continuous past; and therefore to produce work to fill the bill.”⁹⁴ Judging from the progression of O’Keeffe’s works in charcoal and watercolor that summer and autumn, she did, indeed, keep past works and their reception in mind as she determined what medium and approaches to use in her new works.

Continuing to show in the same venue, 291, made the relations between an artist’s works particularly clear even before Stieglitz staged a retrospective of the artist’s works.

To “fill the bill,” should O’Keeffe keep to the one area that she knew Stieglitz approved of, abstract drawing in charcoal, or should she move in a new direction? As the artist hesitated in her creative endeavor that summer, she felt pressure from Stieglitz. Having received no art from O’Keeffe during the whole month of June, he wrote to her in early July, prodding and flattering, “Have you drawn any since you left New York? Where is Anita Pollitzer? – has she left town? . . . Little did I dream that one day she would bring me drawings that would mean so much to 291 as yours have meant – nor did you dream when you did them that they would – or could – ever mean so much to anyone as they have to 291.”⁹⁵ It wasn’t difficult for O’Keeffe to read Stieglitz’s desires. The words “drawn” and “drawings” and the high praise for the works he had already shown urged the artist to continue in her established graphic, monochrome, abstract mode. Yet the artist strove to expand her art beyond this relatively restricted technical and expressive territory, working at last in color. If she continued on an individualistic modernist path that would take her where she wanted to go, she would constantly risk losing the hard-won approval of Stieglitz and the critics. Such perils were inherent in making truly expressive art. If she maintained her earlier image of Stieglitz as embracing only perfectly independent individual expression, she must have hoped that his approval would accompany her down whatever new road her own expression required. O’Keeffe later said, “because of what I had seen in his gallery, I was more interested in what Stieglitz thought about my work than in what anyone else would think.”⁹⁶ Stieglitz’s praise in his letters gave O’Keeffe encouragement she needed at this pivotal moment. She wrote to Pollitzer,

Stieglitz asked about you – I think I never had more wonderful letters than he has been writing me

But his letters Anita – they have been like fine cold water when you are terribly thirsty[.]⁹⁷

In evident response to Stieglitz's affirmation of her black and white works, O'Keeffe periodically returned to the touchstone of charcoal during the summer of 1916. *I - Special* (Fig. 3.43), for instance, appears to have been an attempt to remake the 1915 *No. 2 – Special* (Fig. 3.1) into a form that was more organic and less overtly Art-Nouveau, as mentioned in chapter 3. Such a reiteration of earlier work was perhaps not original enough to fulfill Stieglitz's expectations, since he never chose to exhibit the later work.⁹⁸

That summer O'Keeffe broke away from monochrome in a series of biomorphic watercolors in pure red, blue, green, yellow, and orange (Figs. 4.9-10). Her color scheme in these works is much like the rainbow of colors she had seen describing abstract curvilinear shapes in Synchronist paintings in the Forum Exhibition that spring (Fig. 4.1). Like Morgan Russell and other Synchronists, O'Keeffe in her watercolors juxtaposed saturated primary and secondary colors. She, however, paid less attention to describing forms in depth than did the Synchronists and did not confine her strokes to geometric curves. Rather than imitating the properties of oil paint, she played with color moving over the two-dimensional paper, taking advantage of natural properties of her own medium. Her watercolor flowed from meandering brushstrokes around the edges of forms to open pools in the interior of the compositions. A group of works related to *Untitled (Red, Blue, and Green)* (Fig. 4.9) may have responded to brilliant effects of natural light, tapping the history of watercolor as a landscape medium. In a series related to *Blue, Green and Red* (Fig. 4.10), calligraphic curves recall the water O'Keeffe had

abstracted in her pastels made during the previous summer in response to the experience of dangling her feet in a flowing stream with Arthur Macmahon (Figs. 3.16-17).

In her watercolors, O’Keeffe continued the modernist retraining enterprise she had begun with her charcoal abstractions of 1915.⁹⁹ Watercolor had been the first color medium O’Keeffe used as a child when she began by copying color prints. In school, she had achieved great freedom and confidence working in watercolor, as she remarked in her 1976 book.¹⁰⁰ More importantly, she had used the medium in her first struggling attempts to keep her colors bright enough to record natural light (Fig. 2.15).¹⁰¹ Her adult avant-garde works in the medium continued not only her technical progress but her emotional history of working with watercolor.

O’Keeffe had begun as part of the tradition of children, women and amateurs who worked in the “minor” medium of watercolor rather than the “major” medium of oils. However, in the late nineteenth century male artists in America began taking up and professionalizing this “feminine” medium.¹⁰² American artists followed the distinguished male British watercolorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as J. M. W. Turner and Thomas Girtin who had used watercolor to capture fleeting effects of weather and light. By the nineteen teens, watercolor had achieved unprecedented prestige in America as institutions like the Brooklyn Museum; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Worcester Museum of Art in Massachusetts vied to acquire admired works in the medium made by Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, and other major, male, American artists.¹⁰³ Through her use of watercolor, O’Keeffe embraced both her gendered personal past and the respect garnered by the male professional American tradition of this medium.

Watercolor, however, was no longer merely a medium of tradition. When O’Keeffe saw her first modernist art in person at 291 in 1908 at the exhibitions of works by Rodin (Fig. 2.38-39) and Matisse (Fig. 4.11) and in 1915 at the Picasso and Braque exhibitions, she discovered the avant-garde applications of this fluid and adaptable medium. Like other drawing media, watercolor could be used as much to trace expressive motions of the artist’s hand as to depict scenes from nature. While O’Keeffe’s technical approach to watercolor was very different from John Marin’s, his example as a gestural American modernist in the medium was important to her. In February of 1916 O’Keeffe had written to Pollitzer about what a difficult time she was having making art, but then, “I got out that Marin number of 291 (Fig. 3.32) and put it where I could see it.”¹⁰⁴ Evidently Marin’s work, with its hand-applied, ramifying blue streak, provided O’Keeffe with inspiration, and the blue color may even have helped to spur her use of that color in her own watercolors like *Blue Lines* (Fig. 4.5).

In addition to watercolor’s prominence in O’Keeffe’s own life and the artistic life of her country, it had the more prosaic but undeniable advantages of being affordable, portable, and expeditious. With this medium she could practice as much as she pleased without worrying about wasting expensive oil paints and canvases. Additionally, she could carry her materials around and so react swiftly and directly to observed phenomena. When her time was limited by the responsibilities of teaching, O’Keeffe later noted that she “worked in watercolors, because I never had the time for oils.”¹⁰⁵ The paint dried quickly, and then she could easily roll up the art she had made and send it to Stieglitz as an expressive extension of their correspondence, just as she had done with the charcoals she had sent to Pollitzer and Dorothy True. In her renewed mastery of the

watercolor medium she reaped the rewards of the “acres of watercolor landscapes” she had painted earlier in the year.¹⁰⁶

O’Keeffe’s 1916 Art Based upon Camping Trips

By July 1916, O’Keeffe was dissatisfied with her summer’s production. Her teaching schedule and poor physical and psychological condition had cut her off from sources of inspiration in nature. In July she wrote to Pollitzer about how she hoped to remedy this situation, “This coming week end I’m going to walk even if I’m not very spry yet – The same crowd with two or three new recruits are going to Sta[u]nton¹⁰⁷ and from there climb Mt. Elliott – I couldn’t resist the temptation so am saying I’m going if nothing happens.” She noted that this was the fifth year she had gone with a party to climb the mountain.¹⁰⁸ Elliott Knob, as the highest part of Great North Mountain is now known, at 4,463 feet affords striking views of the forested Shenandoah Mountains and the farms in the hilly green valleys below.¹⁰⁹

When she returned from the mountain, O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz,

I’m feeling all right again – Went up to Mt. Elliott Springs [a small town near the mountain] above Staunton over the weekend and climbed Mt. Elliott.

I got to the top alone in the moonlight – just as day was beginning to come – it was great – the wind – and the stars and the clouds below – and all the time I was terribly afraid of snakes –

The others slept about a mile below by the campfire – and I was glad.¹¹⁰

The experience of hiking and camping in the wilds excited O’Keeffe and engaged her eye. She had more outdoor adventures that August after summer school was over when she and some friends drove from Charlottesville to Knoxville, Tennessee. She told Pollitzer, “We camped nights – had a tent – just did as we pleased – you can’t imagine how much fun it was.” They went to Ashville, North Carolina, where O’Keeffe met a friend from the University of Virginia, Katherine Lumpkin, and the two traveled and

camped between small towns. O’Keeffe had not been planning on the trip with Lumpkin but, she told Pollitzer, “I got up there in those mountains and I simply couldn’t leave till the last train that could get me here [Canyon, Texas] on time.”¹¹¹ O’Keeffe’s biographer Roxanna Robinson notes that O’Keeffe completed her trip “in a mountain cabin, from which she wrote rhapsodically to Macmahon, announcing that she had found her spiritual home: ‘the only place I know of that I am sure of going back [to].’”¹¹²

On either her July or her August camping trip, O’Keeffe made contour sketches of farms in the local valleys with what she noted on the sketch as “blue misty mountains” in the background (Figs. 4.12-13).¹¹³ These are some of the earliest surviving instances of what would become O’Keeffe’s characteristic method of capturing shapes with simple contour drawings, sometimes augmented by color notes, and later making watercolors or oils based upon them. O’Keeffe’s farm sketches and some quick watercolor portraits of local children would not develop into anything of lasting interest to Stieglitz or herself. On her camping trips, however, O’Keeffe found some striking shapes that lodged in her mind and became the basis for series of works.¹¹⁴ I believe that the artist scribbled her two surviving sketches of tent interiors on scraps of paper to capture them before they could escape her eyes and memory (Figs. 4.14, 2.2). The awkwardness of the lines in both sketches and the folds in one of the sheets suggest to me that these sketches were actually made in the dark tent with the paper propped on the artist’s knee or some other improvised support.

O’Keeffe thus used drawing for one of its most traditional purposes: to gather source material on the spot so that she could develop it later into more formal works. The question, as O’Keeffe later explained, was how to recast her source material into her own

modernist idiom, “I make little drawings that have no meaning for anyone but me. They usually get lost when I don’t need them anymore. If you saw them, you’d wonder what those few little marks meant, but they do mean something to me. I don’t think it matters what something comes from; it’s what you do with it that counts. That’s when it becomes yours.”¹¹⁵ O’Keeffe firmly separated the creation of her own private, working images, from those public images that she had reconsidered and reworked into versions she thought worthy of exhibition.

O’Keeffe later recalled the private origins of one of her 1916 camping sketches and how its public offspring resulted from experiments with media, (Figs. 4.14-16, 4.7),

ABSTRACTION IX was first made with charcoal, then it was painted many times with red, and I finally went back to the charcoal. I even now have another way in my head that I might have done it.

I had been walking for a couple of weeks with a girl in the big wood somewhere in the North Carolina Mountains. One morning before daylight, as I was combing my hair, I turned and saw her lying there – one arm thrown back, hair a dark mass against the white, the face half turned, the red mouth. It all looked warm with sleep.¹¹⁶

The humanity of the forms O’Keeffe drew and the warmth of her subject’s flesh were essential to her expression, therefore she did not obscure her visual source as she had in her 1915 abstract charcoals. The use of charcoal in the initial version and in the final version of this image, however, tied them to the proven part of O’Keeffe’s modern oeuvre. The title *Abstraction* draws attention to the fact that this vision, while clearly grounded in visual experience, was much simplified and abstracted, almost like the “Specials.”¹¹⁷ O’Keeffe carefully expanded the boundaries of her modernism. Now she allowed herself to engage in a more accurate description of nature while keeping formal qualities of line and shape a priority.

The red painted watercolor versions of *Abstraction* are no longer extant, but an installation photograph by Stieglitz of O’Keeffe’s 1917 exhibition at 291 probably records one of them (Fig. 4.7). The artist elaborated the sketch into a complex of undulating lines whose calligraphic quality exaggerates the lateral motions seen in *Blue Lines* (4.5).

In the final charcoal version of *Abstraction* (Fig. 4.16), O’Keeffe rejected the linear elaborations of the red watercolor and returned to the simple lines of the initial sketch (Fig. 4.14). She merely enlarged the tiny drawing, combed out the tangled lines and created bands of charcoal shading for emphasis around the central shapes. O’Keeffe concentrated on expressive formal qualities rather than representational details. I see in *Abstraction* a deliberate tension between the academic figural tradition of the charcoal medium and the modernist nature of O’Keeffe’s work. The clash between the academic and the modern in the traditional subject of the nude was familiar territory for modernists, of course. In the same charcoal medium, for instance, O’Keeffe would have seen a particularly radical cubist nude by Picasso that Stieglitz reproduced in three different issues of *Camera Work* (Fig. 4.17).¹¹⁸ An academic artist like her teacher John Vanderpoel would typically have drawn the figure and used a stomp to rub the black powder into smooth, graduated gray tones (Fig. 2.27). He would have hidden the marks of his hands, erasing his presence and directing the viewer’s attention to the subject being drawn. O’Keeffe, by contrast, asserted her modernism through her creation of a flattened pattern of black lines and gray bands silhouetted against a pale ground. While the figure she drew was important, O’Keeffe as artist also claimed the viewer’s attention. Her identity as artist merged with the woman she depicted. Her lines are cleaner than those in

her 1915 charcoals, the marks more graceful and polished as the woman artist showed off her mastery of composition and medium in a way less opened to Stieglitz's interpretation as naïve than her previous charcoals had been.

In a series of works based upon a view from inside the tent, including the watercolor *Tent Door at Night*, O'Keeffe coped with another major area of tension between modernism and more traditional art: the depiction or contradiction of deep space (Figs. 4.18-20). In her works based on the sketch of the tent door view (Fig. 2.2), O'Keeffe experimented with ways of applying color to this simple combination of shapes. In two watercolors she used rich warm colors for the close, dark tent, contrasting with paler cool blues of the distant tree-clad mountain dimmed by the mist of a humid Virginia or North Carolina summer evening (Figs. 4.18-19). She tried two ways of applying color – in thick brushstrokes and in layers of transparent wash. In both watercolors she used color to suggest the kind of atmospheric space often seen in more traditional watercolor landscapes, but then in the modern mode denied this depth by breaking up the composition with white or black lines between shapes to create a flat pattern rather than receding space.

Some aspects of O'Keeffe's approach to her technique in these works seem influenced less by watercolors than by works in other media. For instance, the black outlines, strong colors, and assertive brushwork in the O'Keeffe Foundation's version of the tent door may have been spurred by oil paintings by American modernists like Marsden Hartley whose works O'Keeffe had seen at 291 and in the Forum exhibition and other venues that spring (Fig. 4.2). Her attention to Hartley is confirmed in her oil version of *Tent Door*, which with its bright orange tent flaps and nearly symmetrical

triangular geometry (Fig. 4.20) particularly recalls Hartley's *Indian Composition*, included in his 1916 show at 291 (Fig. 4.21).

O'Keeffe was considering avant-garde art in all media as she constructed her own modernist idiom and decided in what media she would work. The *Tent Door at Night* suite of works, moving between pencil, watercolor, and oil, demonstrates O'Keeffe's expanding understanding of media in modernism. She had finished her formal exercise of moving linearly from medium to medium like a student; now she could turn to whatever medium she thought would best serve her needs for a particular subject. Between 1916 and mid-1918, O'Keeffe periodically experimented with work in oils, but she did not yet shift the center of her attention away from graphic media. The majority of the surviving finished works she made during this period are watercolors.

Watercolors like those by Cézanne (Fig. 1.21) and Matisse (Fig. 4.11) that O'Keeffe saw at 291 and in *Camera Work* exposed the physical means used to make them as much as did monochrome drawings. O'Keeffe brought the watercolor medium to the fore in a series of paintings depicting mountains she saw during her July or her August camping trip (Figs. 4.22-27). In these works, O'Keeffe depicted a mountainside like the one she had seen out of the tent door, but now she removed the tent to simplify the composition and concentrate on her vision of the distant wooded mountains. In these watercolors she put aside the question of deep space to concentrate on color, atmosphere, and volume as rendered in translucent washes.

The compositions of O'Keeffe's small watercolors of Virginia or North Carolina mountains are minimal and relatively flat, recalling Dow's designs that juxtaposed simple, biomorphic shapes in subtle colors. In the clearest example of this influence of

her teacher, the configuration of colored shapes in O'Keeffe's watercolor *Evening* (Fig. 4.22) echoes Dow's color wood block print *Marsh Creek* (Fig. 4.28). Since O'Keeffe had taken a color printmaking class with Dow at Teachers College, she would have known his prints as well as the Japanese color woodcuts of landscape subjects that inspired him.¹¹⁹

Dow's prints may also have led O'Keeffe to another graphic source of formal ideas for her watercolors. In the spring of 1916, the Berlin Photographic Company in New York included Dow's works in an exhibition of color woodblock prints.¹²⁰ If his student O'Keeffe dutifully went to see her teacher's works, she would also have seen the New York City debut of the Provincetown printmakers (Fig. 4.29).¹²¹ These artists, who worked in Provincetown, Massachusetts, during the summers, simplified the process of making multi-colored woodcuts by printing them from a single wood block rather than using the traditional method of carving and printing a separate block for each color. In a process invented by B. J. O. Nordfeldt, the printmaker cut grooves into the block to separate the areas that would be inked to print in different colors; this allowed all colors to be applied and printed in a single pass. The resulting prints have a distinctive flat, patterned, abstract appearance caused by the white lines between colored shapes that disrupt any illusion of spatial overlap.¹²² In several of O'Keeffe's 1916 watercolors she used narrow white paper lines to separate color shapes, creating a similar patterned appearance. Her neat division of brilliantly colored shapes would become even more prominent in watercolors she made later in Texas (Figs. 4.91-92).

In some of her mountain watercolors, O'Keeffe concentrated on subtle manipulations within areas of color, disrupting the flat planes of color and asserting the

liquid flow of her medium as she broadly indicated the volume and visual texture of the forested mountains(Figs. 4.23-27). Where major watercolorists like Homer, Sargent, and Marin usually worked on expensive, dense, textured, heavily-sized watercolor papers that allowed them to repeatedly rework their pieces, O’Keeffe, beginning with these 1916 watercolors often used quite a different support.¹²³ As Judith Walsh notes, O’Keeffe chose for these works a cheaper paper sold as “drawing cartridge” that was smoother and less absorbent. This cartridge paper was too thin and its surface too delicate to allow O’Keeffe to remove colors once she had applied them, so she could not slowly explore and experiment with compositions as she had with charcoal. She had to execute each work with verve and precision from the beginning. O’Keeffe’s choice of paper demonstrates her rising confidence. She no longer felt her way, drawing and erasing and drawing again as she had in the autumn of 1915 when she had termed herself “lost.”¹²⁴

This new assurance allowed O’Keeffe to take advantage of her cartridge paper’s peculiar technical properties.¹²⁵ The smooth surface of the paper let her freely manipulate pools of wet color without a heavy texture to interrupt the flow of the paint. She dropped dark brush loads of paint or water into previously applied still damp paint to smoothly merge new colors into the composition. In this way she modeled the undulating slope of the mountains, directing the wet color with her brush or slanting the paper to pour the liquid across the surface.

In one of O’Keeffe’s favored techniques during this period, she dropped in paint or water which possibly included ox gall or some such agent to increase the flow of the water. This caused the particles of color to form intricate complexes of tide lines in the dried paint in what are known as dendritic patterns. These branching shapes resemble

natural growth patterns like those of a tree, a most appropriate effect for the depiction of forested mountains (Figs. 4.23-27). The Prussian blue O’Keeffe used in *Blue Hill No. I*, *Blue Hill No. II*, and *Blue Hill No. III* contained particulate matter that tended to settle out in this distinctive way that the artist clearly enjoyed, since she retained these works and repeated the technique several times.¹²⁶

In one of her mountain watercolors, O’Keeffe introduced into her harmony of blues and greens a contrasting pink mountain (Fig. 4.23), perhaps capturing the brilliant colors of sunset or sunrise. O’Keeffe’s inspiration for this bold color combination could have come from John Marin’s use of orange streaks along with the blue and purple washes in his watercolors of mountains in the Tyrol. During the summer Stieglitz had sent O’Keeffe five issues of *Camera Work* that could have included the July 1912 number with its two color half-tone reproductions of Marin’s mountain watercolors, or the artist could have already owned this issue (Fig. 4.30).¹²⁷

I believe that O’Keeffe’s virtuosic play with her materials in her small watercolors may have constituted a reply to Stieglitz and critics who had interpreted the obvious marks of the artist’s hands in her 1915 charcoal drawings as mere naïve expressions of emotion. In her 1916 mountain watercolors, by contrast, O’Keeffe hid evidence of her physical hand while displaying her technical mastery. As O’Keeffe wrote decades later to a researcher, “The use of the medium of watercolor was no problem for me so I really played with the material. I was free with it.”¹²⁸ Yet O’Keeffe’s watercolor gymnastics in these small works apparently failed to impress Stieglitz. He never exhibited any of the 1916 mountain watercolors except for one from the *Tent Door at Night* series (Fig. 4.18). His choice to show three from O’Keeffe’s

series of four watercolors titled *Blue No. I*, *Blue No. II*, *Blue No. III* and *Blue No IV* shows his preference for more direct brushwork and open abstraction, and possibly for larger works that would hold the wall more strongly (Figs. 4.31-34).¹²⁹

The *Blue No. I-IV* and *Blue Series*

The *Blue No. I – IV* series may also have grown at least in part, I believe, from O’Keeffe’s camping experiences. The curves and diagonal lines of *Blue No. I-IV*, like many shapes in the 1915 charcoals, are basic and universal enough to evoke a variety of natural forms. Related organic shapes appeared in an oil painting O’Keeffe titled *Anything*, which shows green conical tree-like or mountain-like volumes and burgeoning curved yellow and orange forms suggesting autumnal hills or rising suns against a blue sky-like area (Fig. 4.35). The painting seems to be abstracted from works like *Blue Hill No. III* (Fig. 4.27), in which angular pine trees tower in the foreground against the distant mountain with a moon or sun emerging from behind it. Confining herself in watercolor to the single color of blue made these shapes more open to alternate or overlapping or interpenetrating readings as a variety of natural forms without losing a stress on the creative gestures of the artist.

O’Keeffe labored intensely to find just the right combination of abstracted shapes, making, she wrote Pollitzer a “dozen or more” works in the *Blue No. I-IV* series,¹³⁰ from which only four survive. The experimental nature of O’Keeffe’s play between representation and abstraction in these related suites of 1916 works is paralleled by her explorations of medium. In *Blue No. I – IV*, for instance, O’Keeffe used a thin, smooth Japanese *gampi* paper that swelled when wet. As Walsh notes, “Responding to water, the sheet cockled in a subtle, energetic pattern radiating from the image.”¹³¹ The linear

pattern of the paper added a striated halo around the blue abstract forms, evoking the energy of the living forms. O’Keeffe played in this case with the three-dimensional texture of her support as she had played with the visual texture of her watercolors in the *Blue Hill* series. The formal innovations in both cases complemented the suggestive abstraction of the works, drawing attention to the artist’s imagination and physical skill.

In the various groups of works that grew from her camping trips, in the summer of 1916 O’Keeffe moved between specific natural forms and abstractions based upon those forms. This opened up new avenues of approach to subject matter. By shifting these visual ideas between the media of charcoal, watercolor, and oils, O’Keeffe established a plethora of new technical and expressive possibilities from which she could choose freely.

These formal and technical innovations continued in a series of spiral compositions that she made just before or soon after she journeyed to Canyon, Texas, to teach in the fall of 1916 (Figs. 4.36-40).¹³² O’Keeffe said of this basic curvilinear form, “I have made this drawing several times – never remembering that I had made it before – and not knowing where the idea came from.”¹³³ In 1915 she had utilized such forms in *Early No. 2* (Fig. 3.29) and *Early Abstraction* (Fig. 3.9), and less fully curled forms in a number of other drawings (Figs. 3.1, 3.3-3.5, 3.8). In 1916 O’Keeffe drew two charcoal versions of a spiral form, the slender swirl of *No. 12 Special* (Fig. 4.36) and the more robust vortex of *No. 8 Special* (Fig. 4.37). The latter found a color form in *Blue I* and *Blue II*, (Figs 4.38-39) a pair of blue watercolors painted on a larger scale than any of O’Keeffe’s previous works on paper. In the massive swirls of these images, O’Keeffe combined the light and dark modeling and abstract space of her charcoal abstractions

with the rich liquid color of her watercolors. A similar combination drawn from O'Keeffe's experiences in charcoal and watercolor would also lead to her mature oil painting style.

In *Blue I* and *Blue II* O'Keeffe extended the short arc of the *Blue No.* series (Fig. 4.31-34) into longer spirals as if through a natural continuation of the gesture. O'Keeffe in these massive watercolors (Figs. 4.38-39) documented the motions of creation even more strongly than in previous works, using a broad brush or rag to make sweeping pale arm's length strokes removing and shifting the rich blue watercolor.¹³⁴ The spiral, laden with myriad symbolic meanings, worked with the creative motions of the artist's arm to create a grand visual dance on paper.

O'Keeffe attempted to extend the ideas from *Blue I* and *Blue II* into an oil painting, but the graceful, swirling gestures that gave drama to the watercolors lost momentum in the alternate medium (Fig. 4.40). The lifeless oil version, which appears unfinished, was never exhibited. O'Keeffe had not yet found in oils the balance between gesture and form that she had realized in works on paper. Stieglitz's enthusiasm for the watercolors, however, led him not only to exhibit *Blue I* in 1917, but to make photographs of the artist with the work (Figs. 5.2-4).

Her camping trips had lifted O'Keeffe out of her artistic doldrums as she had hoped. The emotional and visual experiences of her trips helped to urge O'Keeffe into a period of technical, formal, and expressive innovation that would continue through much of the following two years in Texas. Moving back and forth between the safe touchstone of her 1915 charcoals and her new experiments in watercolor, O'Keeffe used graphic means to consolidate new artistic territory where she would lay the foundations for her

exploration of natural color and shapes and abstraction in oil paintings during the rest of her long career.

Stieglitz and the Works From the Summer of 1916

Late in August 1916, when Stieglitz was summer as usual at Lake George, O’Keeffe sent him a bundle of her new art. The photographer seemed unsure what to think of the new works in which his protégé moved out of black and white into color and made stronger contact with the natural world around her. He wrote to Marie Rapp, his secretary at 291, “Yesterday I had a great surprise. A package came from Virginia, a lot of new drawings. Different. – I wonder how you will like them. . . . Miss O’Keeffe is on her way to Texas. – She is without doubt a girl much out of the ordinary.”¹³⁵

But Stieglitz had lost none of his enthusiasm for the abstract charcoals. In July he sent O’Keeffe some photographs that he had made of her drawings on the walls of 291 (the photograph in Fig. 4.8 may have been one of them). The artist, seeing her work transformed into the photographic format she so admired in *Camera Work*, was fascinated by this new way of viewing her art. In Stieglitz’s photographs the “Specials” O’Keeffe had sent away in part because she could no longer stand to be around them assumed a new appeal, due at least in part to the artist’s growing enchantment with the photographer himself. O’Keeffe wrote Pollitzer,

Stieglitz sent me nine wonderful photographs of my exhibition
Isn’t it funny that I hate my drawings – and am simply crazy about the
photographs of them[.]
Really – Anita – he is too good to be true.¹³⁶

O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz, seemingly granting her charismatic mentor visual control of her art through his photographs as she had already surrendered critical control,

Today the photographs were here when I came in at noon – and I am speechless.
What can I say - ? You must just say it yourself.¹³⁷

Once she had created the works, O’Keeffe seemed to say, she was resigned that they should move into Stieglitz’s sphere. In fact, however, the artist never ceased to care about her works and to respond when she disapproved of Stieglitz’s actions as guardian of her creations.

O’Keeffe’s Arrival in Texas

Despite the rise of O’Keeffe’s star at 291, she had not yet sold a single one of her new art works. Economic necessity dictated that she continue to support herself by teaching. Therefore, at the end of the summer of 1916, O’Keeffe moved to the small Texas panhandle town of Canyon where she would be the sole art teacher at West Texas State Normal College until 1918.¹³⁸ Her years in Texas proved to be a period of growth during which she matured as both a watercolorist and a modernist. In 1917, while O’Keeffe was dividing her time between depicting the Texas landscape and teaching, back in New York Stieglitz mounted her first solo exhibition, which would turn out to be the last exhibition at 291. For Stieglitz, an era was coming to an end, but O’Keeffe’s career was just beginning.

In Texas, O’Keeffe continued to use many of the artistic practices she had worked out during her previous months in South Carolina and Virginia. As before, she split her time between teaching and making art. Her attention likewise remained divided between her own activities and the events in far off New York that she followed by reading periodicals and corresponding with Pollitzer, Stieglitz, and other friends. O’Keeffe must have remained acutely aware that the best of her art could expect to find a place on the

walls of 291. As during the summer in Virginia, she moved back and forth between media, each medium spurring her work in the others. She used pencil to make sketches from nature and to work out compositions for finished works. Watercolor dominated her production of major works, but she still made some finished drawings in charcoal. Once she had worked out a subject in graphic media, she at times went on to paint it in oils, but she was evidently still most at home in drawing and watercolor.

One element that appeared, or rather re-appeared, in O’Keeffe’s artistic practice in Texas was commercial art work. Rather precious, perhaps mockingly art-nouveau-like ink drawings of women by O’Keeffe appeared in the November 8, 1916, and August 8, 1917, issues of the popular magazine *Vanity Fair* (Figs. 4.41-42).¹³⁹ She also made other illustrations that appear suited for unidentified publications or advertisements, although they are not known to have been published. Possibly O’Keeffe made more such commercial works that have vanished. As a mature artist, she was anxious to hide her commercial work and did not keep the original drawings for the *Vanity Fair* illustrations. Having clawed her way up the artistic ladder to the level of exhibiting fine artist, she evidently resented or felt ashamed of the financial necessity for making commercial illustrations. Pollitzer and Dorothy True must have been aware of O’Keeffe’s distaste for commercial work, for they gently kidded her in a letter containing a copy of the November 1916 *Vanity Fair* which reproduced O’Keeffe’s drawing. True asked Pollitzer to ask O’Keeffe if she “had seen the design out on the plains.”¹⁴⁰ The pillows and parrot of O’Keeffe’s fantasized debutant (Fig. 4.41) were far from the bare prairie and brilliant sun of the Texas landscape the artist depicted in her serious art of the period (as Figs. 4.43-46. 4.50-59).¹⁴¹

As Bram Dijkstra notes, O’Keeffe’s illustrations and abstract works both reveal her familiarity with the more decorative illustrations included alongside the strident political images in *The Masses* as well the range of graphic art in *Vanity Fair* and other fashionable popular magazines.¹⁴² The artist remained aware of wider trends in popular art, even as she strove to separate her serious modern art from such prosaic graphic connections. O’Keeffe’s Texas efforts in commercial art may have been her response to financial need, made more acute when she took on the care of one of her younger sisters. Seventeen-year-old Claudia came to live with O’Keeffe and attend college in Canyon.¹⁴³ When Claudia arrived she shared O’Keeffe’s passion for the Texas plains, joining her on her long walks, glorying in the immense sky and the vast open country.¹⁴⁴

Within hours of arriving in Canyon, O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz, “It seems so funny that a week ago it was the mountains I thought the most wonderful – and today it’s the plains – I guess it’s the feeling of bigness in both that just carries me away.”¹⁴⁵ Most of O’Keeffe’s art produced during her years in Texas reflected her ardent emotional response to the prairie. In November she wrote to Pollitzer that she had developed “a fever for painting and drawing.”¹⁴⁶

Nature was not the only force that shaped O’Keeffe’s art and her life in Canyon. She immediately faced off with the rigid academic and social systems of the college and the town. In her first letter to Stieglitz from Texas she moaned,

I have been here less than 12 hours . . . have talked to possibly 10 people – mostly educators – *think* quick for me – of a bad word to apply to them – the *little* things they forced on me – they are so just like folks get the depraved notion they ought to be I wonder if I am going to allow myself to be paid 1800 dollars a year to get like that – I never felt so much like kicking holes in the world in my life – still there is something great about wading into this particular kind of slime that I’ve never tried before – alone – wondering – if I can keep my head up above these

little houses and know more of the plains and the big country than the little people.¹⁴⁷

O’Keeffe’s eccentric propensity for dressing in plain black and her blatant disregard for such niceties as the need for a chaperone when socializing with young men, not to mention her odd art, kept her in constant conflict with the conventions of the small town and the college.¹⁴⁸ She said, “Oh, I was a trial to the Normal administrators. . . I was always doing something unorthodox.”¹⁴⁹ But she had the courage of her convictions and kept to her own course. Keeping her mind as opened as the plains around her, O’Keeffe read the most advanced literature she could find in the realms of art theory, philosophy, fiction, and politics.¹⁵⁰ She redoubled her reading after she accepted the invitation of the Normal School faculty to address the Faculty Circle in January 1917. O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer that to prepare for the talk she had been busy,

laboring on Aesthetics – [Willard Huntington] Wright – [Clive] Bell – [Marius] De Zayas - [Arthur Jerome] Eddy – All I could find – every where – have been slaving on it since November – even read a lot of [Charles H.] Caffin – lots of stupid stuff – and other stuff too – Having to get my material into shape – Modern Art – to give it in an interesting $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour to folks who know nothing about any kind of Art . . . I worked like the devil – and it was a great success – You see – I hadn’t talked to the Faculty at all and I was determined to get them going – They kept me going all through the time allotted to the man who was to come after me and an hour after it was time to go home – and some of them wanted me to talk again next time . . . Really – I had a circus. It was so funny to see them get so excited over something they had doubts about the value of.¹⁵¹

As a reflection of the importance of this reading for her, O’Keeffe also assigned Wright’s *The Creative Will* and *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning*, Bell’s *Art*, and Caffin’s *A Guide to Pictures* as texts for her classes along with Dow’s *Composition and Theory and Practice of Teaching Art*.¹⁵²

In the Texas prairie O’Keeffe found a giant laboratory where she could experiment with ways of applying what she had learned from modernist art and writings.

She found many stimulating subjects for her pencil and brush. The harsh climate deterred her not at all. She recalled that she “liked everything about Texas. I didn’t even mind the dust, although sometimes when I came back from a walk I’d be the color of the road. Oh, the sun was hot and the wind was hard and you got cold in the winter – I was just crazy about all of it.”¹⁵³

O’Keeffe’s Texas Charcoals and Watercolors

O’Keeffe produced groups of works on an array of themes that caught her eye and engaged her aesthetic ideas. She recalled, “My teaching schedule was usually arranged so that I had two hours a day to myself, and that’s when I used to paint. It was a good time for me. I was getting very interested in what was mine.”¹⁵⁴ O’Keeffe claimed characteristic Texas sights as her own. She made, for example, small watercolors of the typical small wind mills needed in the parched Southwest to pump precious water out of the earth (Fig. 4.43).

O’Keeffe described one of her local subjects as “a black shape with smoke above it, a picture of the early morning train coming in.”¹⁵⁵ When Barbara Buhler Lynes and Judith Walsh visited the building in Canyon where O’Keeffe taught, they discovered that its main floor where her classroom had been, raised high above the level prairie, afforded a wide view of the town including the exact perspective of the train that O’Keeffe depicted in her drawing and watercolors called *Train at Night in the Desert* (Figs. 4.44-46).¹⁵⁶ These works recorded a scene whose shapes and colors must have impressed themselves deeply on O’Keeffe’s mind.

O’Keeffe drew the scene in charcoal on a rich gray ground with the strokes of her fingers describing the swelling cloud of smoke above the dense black of the engine (Fig.

4.44). O’Keeffe also made a pair of watercolors of *Train at Night in the Desert* (Fig. 4.45-46). The color medium enabled the artist to capture the gray-green of the prairie in the faint dawn light and, silhouetted against the still dark sky, the cloud of smoke tinted gold by the coming sunrise and the train’s headlight. In all three versions, the artist concentrated on the central visual facts – the dark mass of the engine, the great cloud of smoke rising around it, and, in the watercolors, the beam of the headlight, and the curve of the railroad tracks. These were the striking elements of the scene; they made up what the British art critic Clive Bell termed the “significant form” with the power to emotionally move the viewer.¹⁵⁷ Nothing more was needed; details of prairie plants, or the train station, or human figures would have fallen into the area of naturalistic detail that Bell dismissed as “literary” and “irrelevant”¹⁵⁸ and the American critic Willard Huntington Wright rejected as merely “documentary and technical.”¹⁵⁹ Also, by reducing the level of detail, O’Keeffe drew attention to her graphic medium and her own touch. Formally, her drawing was even simpler than her 1915 charcoals and nearly as abstract.

O’Keeffe’s three depictions of the train are similar in their reductive abstraction to her depictions of Virginia or Carolina mountains, which reflect similar modernist aesthetics (Figs. 4.22-27). Indeed, some of her new Texas watercolors were akin to her more abstract series, with the addition of only a very few more colors and elements of description. The Texas works, however, are more specifically descriptive, placing more emphasis on time, place, and atmosphere than on the sweep of the artist’s creative hand. This embrace of the moment, and particularly of the place where the moment took place, set O’Keeffe against the purity of Bell’s and Wright’s modernist aesthetic theories.

While both critics praised artists who painted specifics of time and place, they reserved their highest praise for those who did not need such descriptive specifics.

Stieglitz and those in his circle, however, came to value local American subjects as a key part of their specifically American version of modernism, as Wanda Corn discusses in *The Great American Thing*. According to Corn, place in the Stieglitz circle “connoted commitment to drawing one’s art from deep personal experience with an American locale – not from imagination or literature but from a sustained engagement with some small piece of the planet.”¹⁶⁰ Stieglitz’s photographs communicated his long, intimate experience of urban New York (Figs. 1.6-7, 1.11) and rural Lake George. The watercolors of John Marin spoke of his connections with American forests, fields, and coasts, as well as New York City (Figs. 3.22, 1.24). From this perspective, O’Keeffe’s use of watercolor was important because the translucent color and rapid application of the medium enabled her to match on paper the spectacular, evanescent atmospheric effects peculiar to this deeply American local. Black and white could never have spoken of Texas as O’Keeffe’s watercolors did. Only a luminous color medium could capture the vast glowing sky above the plains.

In her Texas watercolors, including *Train at Night in the Desert* (Figs. 4.45-4.46), as well as *Roof with Snow* (Figs. 4.47-49), *Sunrise* (Fig. 2.16), *Morning Sky* (Fig. 4.50), the *Evening Star* series (Figs. 4.51-54), the *Light Coming on the Plains* series (Figs. 4.55-57) and many others, O’Keeffe blended the modernist power and breadth of her abstractions with a distinctly local American, place and time. She achieved a delicate balance of the universal abstract and the specific local that she would strive for again and again in her Texas watercolors and throughout her career painting in oils.

This balance was not easily attained. The artist probably discarded many works from her known Texas series and others that we will never know as she perfected her images. She could use cheap watercolor paper and paints prodigally in her quest. In each version of such series as *Train at Night in the Desert* or *Evening Star*, O’Keeffe altered only formal details from work to work, striving to perfect her rendition of what she had seen in nature. Although there is a narrative aspect to a subject like a train pulling into a station, she did not usually shift the moment depicted from version to version, only the technical means of depicting her chosen instant. As she told Perry Miller Adato, “I get this shape in my head.”¹⁶¹ It was a shape from within the temporal sequence that caught her eye – not, apparently, the story itself. She had only to figure out which shape was most powerful and how to communicate it most effectively. In her suite on *Roof with Snow*, which depicted a pattern of melting snow on the roof of a house in Canyon as it was tinted magenta by the intense rays of a Texas sunset, O’Keeffe worked on such a problem.¹⁶² In three surviving watercolors, including one with color notes that may have been made on the spot, O’Keeffe tinkered with the relationship of colors and the part of the roof to depict.¹⁶³ The pattern of the snow, however, remains essentially the same from work to work, signaling the choice of a single moment in the presumably rapid progress of snow melting in the bright sun.

While O’Keeffe was obviously not doing all of her landscape watercolors on the spot, the momentary quality traditionally associated with watercolor landscapes made *à plein air* was a reading she may have desired for these Texas watercolors. Many of her images caught a distinctive, memorable configuration that occurred but once and made a forceful impression on the artist. Clive Bell supported such attempts to seize upon an

inspirational instant, saying, “The artist must know what he is about, and what he is about must be, if I am right, the translation into material form of something that he felt in a spasm of ecstasy.”¹⁶⁴ O’Keeffe could identify with Cézanne, whose life, Bell said, “was a constant effort to create forms that would express what he felt in the moment of inspiration.”¹⁶⁵

O’Keeffe and the Texas Sky

The feature of the Texas landscape that provided O’Keeffe with the most moments of inspiration was the sky, with its many brilliant colors at various seasons of the year and times of the day. Soon after her arrival in Canyon, she wrote to Pollitzer ecstatically describing a sequence of sky scenes she had observed in a single evening,

Tonight I walked into the sunset – to mail some letters – the whole sky – and there is so much of it out here – was just blazing – and grey blue clouds were riding all through the holiness of it – and the ugly little buildings and windmills looked great against it.

But some way or other I didn’t seem to like the redness much so after I mailed the letters I walked home – and kept walking-

The Eastern sky was all grey blue – bunches of clouds – different kinds of clouds – sticking around everywhere and the whole thing – lit up – first in one place – then in another with flashes of lightning – sometimes just sheet lightning – and some times sheet lightning with a sharp bright zigzag flashed across it-. I walked out past the last house – past the last locust tree – and sat on the fence for a long time – looking – just looking at – the lightning – you see there was nothing but sky and flat prairie land – land that seems more like the ocean than anything else I know – There was a wonderful moon.

Well I just sat there and had a great time all by myself – Not even many night noises – just the wind

I am loving the plains more than ever it seems – and the SKY – Anita you have never seen SKY – it is wonderful.¹⁶⁶

Using the swiftness, brilliance, pure color, and flow of hues that are the natural characteristics of watercolor, O’Keeffe painted the sky she loved (Figs. 2.16, 4.50-59). It is revealing that she did not use large sheets for this vast subject, but continued painting on the approximately nine by twelve inch format that she had taken up during the

summer in Virginia.¹⁶⁷ No matter how large her paper, it would not have been large enough to capture the enveloping Texas sky. For the few reductive shapes she deployed, a small sheet was sufficient, and afforded both better technical control over pools of flowing color and the ability to work rapidly in response to swiftly changing conditions. Utilizing the white boundaries between shapes she had learned from the Provincetown printmakers (Fig. 4.29), O’Keeffe delineated the clean, straight prairie horizon in *Sunrise* and set the golden disk of the sun off from the crimson light radiating from it (Fig. 2.16). These white spaces, vital for the clean delineation of primal natural forms but having no counterpart in the actual scene, demonstrate that pure naturalist imitation of what she saw, even in a clarified version, was not her goal. She wanted rather to communicate the emotional power of what she had seen using the medium at her command.

O’Keeffe could dramatically describe a Texas sunrise and the prairie it illuminated using only a series of watercolor stripes, some blended and some crisply separated, in a work like *Morning Sky* (Fig. 4.50). With even more reduced means, O’Keeffe used watercolor pools in *Light Coming on the Plains* (Fig. 4.55-57) to fix on paper a peculiar phenomenon of the prairie. She explained many years later,

We would drive away from the town at night. You could drive *right* out into space – you didn’t have to drive on the road. . . . And when the sunset was gone, you turned around and went back and were lighted back by the light of the town. And sometimes the town would be out of sight and then you’d see it again – it was that level. And that painting of the *Light Coming on the Plains* was from that sort of thing.¹⁶⁸

If, as Judith Zilczer believes, the three versions of *Light Coming* with their different degrees of brilliance depict different moments as the glow grew brighter and softer, I believe that it is a rare instance of serial or cyclical imagery in O’Keeffe’s series depicting the Texas sky. Indeed, this variance from a single selected moment was rare in

any of her art series.¹⁶⁹ The flowing action of color through pools of water that O’Keeffe used to create these shapes on paper paralleled the waxing and waning of light witnessed by the artist.

The effectiveness of such unelaborated forms, however, depends upon a certain amount of understanding and cooperation from the viewer. Lisle tells how O’Keeffe once showed other professors at her boarding house one of her watercolors of *Light Coming on the Plains*, “Mary Hudspeth, the mathematics and Spanish teacher who owned the boardinghouse, ventured that it was a watermelon. When Georgia explained that it was the light of the town against the black night sky, everyone burst into laughter.”¹⁷⁰

This experience and, no doubt, other such misunderstandings may have been part of O’Keeffe’s motivation to use the ironic strategy of moving farther from imitating reality to actually clarify her views of nature. She later described how, in her *Evening Star* series (Figs. 4.51-54), she gradually increased the degree of exaggeration of form and color to capture the drama of the moment she had observed, so that the viewer could not easily escape her meaning,

My sister and I used to walk out from Canyon. . . We would go out toward the sunset. And she would carry bottles, and she was a very good shot. She would throw her bottles in the air and see how many she could shoot and I was looking at the evening star. And the evening star would come when it was still sunny. It would be still bright daylight and there would be the evening star sitting up in the sky which I thought was very exciting and I began painting the evening star. And my first painting was just the horizon and the sky and a little star [(Fig. 4.51)]. Well, that didn’t give you any idea of the painting; it had to be more exciting than that. I think there are eight of these variations of this that I did at that time.¹⁷¹

As with her other series (apart from *Light Coming* (Fig. 4.55-57), the *Evening Star* series depicts but a single instant. The star retains approximately the same relation

to the horizon in each of the works. From image to image O’Keeffe simply worked with her technical means in watercolor, experimenting with white borders between colors, the natural commingling of watercolor hues, and the brilliance of translucent watercolor, to achieve an emotional reality approaching what she had originally experienced.

Physical aspects of a little work on paper must somehow communicate such passion. The power of color was essential. As Judith Walsh observes, O’Keeffe squeezed paint directly from the tube of moist watercolor onto the paper to achieve maximum purity and intensity of color in these works.¹⁷² The “kiss of the tube” is visible as a concentrated dot of color at the center of the lower edge of *Evening Star III* (Fig. 4.53). Walsh comments upon O’Keeffe’s technical mastery, as she “applied [each band of color] in one sure stroke, with a sweep of a big sable watercolor brush.”¹⁷³ I observe, however, that the bands do not have perfectly rounded boundaries. The sweeps of color have faceted or wavering edges that, like the intentionally uneven lines of *Blue Lines*, speak of the human hand and eye (Fig. 4.5). The jagged edges of the white areas compressed between the colors, and the imperfectly circular white central area of each star, evoke the humanity of the artist-witness and the twinkling of a star sending its beam across light-years of empty space.

The stars that shone so brilliantly above the plains, far from the lights of the big city, also led O’Keeffe to paint the watercolor *Starlight Night* (Fig. 4.58). In this simple watercolor, stars appear as gaps in deep blue sky, the tiny wavering points of light evoked by the changes of size and shape from gap to gap. O’Keeffe revisited this concept in the watercolor *Abstraction* (Fig. 4.59), which showed the same view in an oval format within a series of enveloping lines. As in her other groups of related images made in Texas, she

strove to balance the expressive power of abstraction with truth to what she had experienced.

O’Keeffe’s emphasis on particulars of place, time, and narrative in her Texas watercolors, particularly evident in her stories about how she came to make the works, is in decided contrast with her earlier insistence that no one should be able to figure out what biographical event lay behind such abstract works as her 1915 charcoals. In the Texas watercolors, the experience of place took precedence over personal specifics. While it was O’Keeffe who had experienced these moments, it was Texas, not herself, that she was describing to her viewers. It was impossible, of course, to separate the experience from the who had experienced it. Somehow representational art seemed, to this artist, less revealing than the abstraction that Stieglitz or a critic could pull loose from the artist’s intentions. Pictures of a place were symbolically attached to the earth where the artist had painted, and thus could not be so easily moved away from her intentions.

O’Keeffe and Palo Duro Canyon

The most distinctive place O’Keeffe depicted during her Texas sojourn was Palo Duro Canyon, which gives the town of Canyon its name. This deep, sudden interruption in the flatness of the prairie inspired O’Keeffe to create a large and varied group of works in pencil, watercolor, charcoal, and oils, straining her technical means to capture the canyon’s colors and shapes (Figs. 4.60-69). With its dramatic walls of rich red, bright orange, pale gold, and ochre, streaked with white minerals and studded with a variety of trees, cacti, and wildflowers, the canyon thrilled O’Keeffe. From early in her Texas sojourn, she went there as often as possible.¹⁷⁴ She described an early venture there to Pollitzer in September 1916, “Last night couldn’t sleep till after four in the morning – I

had been out to the canyon all afternoon – till late at night – wonderful color – I wish I could tell you how big –and with the night the colors deeper and darker.”¹⁷⁵ Later she again wrote her friend, “I wish you could see the landscapes I painted last Monday out where the canyon begins . . . Slits in nothingness are not very easy to paint – but it’s great to try.”¹⁷⁶

O’Keeffe recalled that “Saturdays, right after breakfast,” she and her sister Claudia,

often drove the twenty miles to the Palo Duro Canyon. It was colorful – like a small Grand Canyon, but most of it only a mile wide. It was a place where few people went unless they had cattle they hoped had found shelter there in bad weather. The weather seemed to go over it. It was quiet down in the canyon. We saw the wind and snow blow across the slit in the plains as if the slit didn’t exist.

The only paths were narrow, winding cow paths. There were sharp, high edges between long, soft earth banks so steep that you couldn’t see the bottom. They made the canyon seem very deep. We took different paths from the edge so that we could climb down in new places. We sometimes had to go down together holding to a horizontal stick to keep one another from falling. It was usually very dry, and it was a lone place. We never met anyone there. Often as we were leaving, we would see a long line of cattle like black lace against the sunset sky.

Those perilous climbs were frightening but it was wonderful to me and not like anything I had known before . . . Many drawings came from days like that, and later some oil paintings.¹⁷⁷

Evidently O’Keeffe took a small sketch or note pad with her to the canyon; on sheets of paper only about 3 ½ by 5 inches the artist made contour sketches of the canyon’s eroded walls (Figs. 2.40, 4.60-61). These drawings show nothing of color or texture; they concentrate instead on the spare contours of the geological formations, giving no details beyond with a few loops to indicate trees or bushes. Based on such quick notations, O’Keeffe then arranged and rearranged the earth shapes she had seen in a series of compositional sketches (Fig. 4.62), some on rough pieces of brown paper that show the artist improvising ideas that played in her head whether proper materials were

available or not (Fig. 4.63). She made various combinations of mesas, cliffs, and hills, changing the proportions and contours, scattering clouds above and bushes and trees below. During this process of drawing and redrawing, the angular forms of the canyon in O'Keeffe's initial sketches took on rounded, biomorphic contours much like those in her 1915 charcoals. Perhaps the very process of drawing itself, with the natural pivoting of the hand from the wrist, elbow, and shoulder helped to round these forms.

Eventually, O'Keeffe settled on a final arrangement that pleased her. This composition, with a great hill at the left and a mesa at the right, appeared in two equally finished forms. One was a charcoal drawing, *No. 15 Special* (Fig. 4.64), and the other an oil painting, *No. 21- Special* (Fig. 4.65). The artist adjusted small details between the two works; in the oil painting the level cliff in the background of the charcoal does not appear, and the arrangement of clouds differs in the two works. O'Keeffe seems never to have shifted a composition from one medium to another without continuing to evolve her conception. One can, for instance, also observe editing between the black and blue versions of *Blue Lines* (Figs. 4.4-5). She did not seem to have regarded a drawing with any degree of finish as merely a sketch for a painting. Rather, both drawing and painting were equally important works that happened to be realized in different media. Indeed, while Stieglitz showed both depictions of Palo Duro Canyon, he chose to photograph O'Keeffe with the drawing rather than the painting (Figs. 5.22-29). O'Keeffe found both of her color media well suited to depicting the colorful canyon walls. She made three other oil paintings of various parts of Palo Duro Canyon, exaggerating the earthy colors of the canyon walls into brilliant red, blue, and green (Fig. 4.66). O'Keeffe also made a number of colorful watercolors that appear to depict the canyon (Fig. 4.67).

The tough little juniper and cottonwood trees that cling to the earth in Palo Duro Canyon interested O’Keeffe not only as naturalistic details but as small, compact abstract forms in relationship to the vast spaces around them. She featured a procession of little low spheres probably representing trees in the canyon in *No. 15 Special* (Fig. 4.64) and *No. 21 – Special* (Fig. 4.65).¹⁷⁸ In *No. 20 – Special* (Fig. 4.66), O’Keeffe shifted the format to vertical and elongated the tree shapes to harmonize with the overall composition. The play with the burgeoning forms of the desert trees continued in the charcoal drawing *No. 13 Special* (Fig. 4.68), “simplified,” the artist said, “from the canyon landscapes.”¹⁷⁹ In this drawing the little trees become the center of the composition, played against a jagged form at the left and a flowing vertical at the right, causing the little balls of abstracted greenery to take on symbolic elemental status. O’Keeffe made all of the forms generalized enough to leave the door open to a range of interpretations.

In returning to the charcoal technique of 1915 (Figs. 4.64, 4.68, 3.1-11), she also took up again the open-ended abstraction of those drawings. In another charcoal drawing that could be related to the Palo Duro Canyon works, *Untitled* (Fig. 4.69), O’Keeffe continued this charcoal abstract vocabulary, giving the tree shapes even more generalized forms as black arches that extend shadows of charcoal into empty space. The abstract rounded forms seem closely allied with O’Keeffe’s earliest abstractions. In her explorations of the creative ideas she derived from the canyon, O’Keeffe moved back and forth between media. Oil painting grew increasingly important for her work, but graphic means remained important far beyond mere sketching of ideas for paintings.

O'Keeffe's New York Exhibitions in late 1916 and 1917

While Texas provided plenty of motifs to keep O'Keeffe busy creating, she could find further impetus in news from New York, where her career proceeded apace in her absence. In November 1916, Stieglitz hung a small exhibition in the inner room of 291. Simultaneous a show of drawings and watercolors by his ten-year-old niece Georgia S. Englehard - part of Stieglitz's continuing experiment with showing drawings by children, hung in the front room. The artists shown in the inner room included Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Abraham Walkowitz, Stanton MacDonald-Wright, and O'Keeffe, presumably represented by only one or two works each in so small a space.¹⁸⁰ As Sarah Greenough observes, this little exhibition was important in establishing O'Keeffe in the art world of New York.¹⁸¹ I also believe that this little-mentioned exhibition must have been very encouraging to the young artist because it grouped her with established 291 insiders. The only artist in the exhibition who was not part of Stieglitz's inner circle was Stanton Macdonald-Wright, a Synchronist whom O'Keeffe admired and to whom Stieglitz would give a solo show at 291 in March 1917.¹⁸² Pollitzer wrote O'Keeffe a letter including a sketch of *Blue Lines* (Fig. 4.5) to let the artist know it was the work in this show, saying,

your two dependent on each other yet perfectly separate individual lines of fine dark blue – are on the wall – nearest to his [Stieglitz's] back room.
I was thunderstruck!¹⁸³

There was no stronger way for Stieglitz to tell O'Keeffe that he approved of her watercolors than by exhibiting them. But not only encouragement came from Stieglitz to O'Keeffe. She wrote to Pollitzer, “The letters – 291 [Stieglitz] letters – have been great – sometimes they knock me down – but I get up again.”¹⁸⁴ O'Keeffe continued to send her

work to Stieglitz, who wrote to her using her own terminology of “self-expression” from her letters to him, “This merely to tell you the drawings are safely in my hands and that I am grateful – as I have ever been to you since I was first given the privilege to see your self-expression.”¹⁸⁵ Stieglitz’s moral support continued to be vital to O’Keeffe, who still gave in to her self-doubt at times. She wrote to Pollitzer after receiving some of her own drawings and photographs of them in the mail, “The drawings and photographs came – Thanks – They look awful to me – all of them – I don’t see how I ever had the nerve to show them to anyone – queer isn’t it.”¹⁸⁶

While O’Keeffe was teaching in Texas, Stieglitz kept her in the public eye in New York as opportunities presented themselves. A January and February 1917 exhibition held by the People’s Art Guild included a work by O’Keeffe.¹⁸⁷ This organization, founded in 1915, held dozens of exhibitions in small venues around New York including art by a great variety of living artists.¹⁸⁸ O’Keeffe’s entry in the 1917 exhibition, identified in the catalogue only as “A Self-Expression,” hung alongside works by such Stieglitz circle artists as John Marin, Abraham Walkowitz, Max Weber, and Arthur Dove, as well other Americans and such Europeans as Picabia and Picasso.¹⁸⁹ Pollitzer informed O’Keeffe that Dorothy True had sent her a copy of the People’s Art Guild show catalogue and raved, “you *have* a thing in it – I don’t care about its hanging on a wall – but I *know* it’s thru Stieglitz & *that* I do care about! I care a great deal!! And you’re hanging with Marin – and with Marin means a big fine thing. . . . Tell me about it – or didn’t you know about it till now – I call this important & I know I’m right!”¹⁹⁰ Probably the work exhibited was one of the 1915 charcoals, although Stieglitz could have chosen any one of her works in his possession. O’Keeffe’s work was listed in the catalogue as

“sold,”¹⁹¹ presumably indicating that the piece entered was one Stieglitz wished to keep in his own collection, since O’Keeffe had not yet actually sold any works.

Pollitzer also wrote to O’Keeffe asking if she would join the Society of Independent Artists so that she could enter their colossal unjuried and unjudged show to be held at the Grand Central Palace in New York from April 10 to May 6, 1917.¹⁹²

O’Keeffe, probably urged also by Stieglitz to enter the sensational exhibition, was represented in it by *No. 12 – Special* (Fig. 3.6) and *No. 14 Special* (Fig. 3.25).¹⁹³

O’Keeffe’s first solo exhibition at 291 had opened a few days before the Independents Exhibition; Stieglitz saved for his own venue the privilege of introducing the artist’s first modernist works in color.¹⁹⁴

On April 3, 1917, O’Keeffe achieved the distinction of a one-person show at 291; it ran until May 14 (Figs. 4.7, 4.70-71). The exhibition contained twenty-two works, including a small sculpture O’Keeffe had modeled in New York in 1916 (pictured in Fig. 5.8 with the feet of its maker).¹⁹⁵ In this, O’Keeffe’s first one-woman show, Stieglitz repeated many aspects of his 1916 presentation of the artist. Reviewer Henry Tyrrell moaned, as he had in 1916, “The work has to speak for itself, as it is not numbered, catalogued, labeled, lettered, or identified in any way – in fact, it is not even signed.”¹⁹⁶ Judging from Stieglitz’s installation photographs, again many of the graphic works were unframed, protected only by sheets of glass over the matted art, or given no protection at all. Other works, including the oil paintings and some charcoals, were framed with the plain, narrow light or dark moldings visitors were accustomed to seeing at 291. As in the first of O’Keeffe’s exhibitions, Stieglitz left O’Keeffe’s art as unfettered as possible, the

lack of frames emphasizing the freedom and immediacy of the graphic works in particular.

In the 1917 exhibition Stieglitz shared with the public the geographical and aesthetic progress of his protégé's work since 1915 when she had made the charcoals he had shown in 1916. Judging from the eight installation photographs Stieglitz made of the show (Figs. 4.7, 4.70-71), it included the watercolor *Blue Lines*; nine charcoals, watercolors and oils O'Keeffe had made in Virginia or North Carolina during the summer just past; ten works in charcoal, watercolor, and oil she had made in Texas; and one charcoal, now unlocated, whose origins are uncertain. The hanging stressed the newly expanded range of O'Keeffe's use of media, while demonstrating that similar formal and thematic concerns linked works in all of the artist's media. For instance, *Number 15 Special*, the charcoal version of Palo Duro Canyon (Fig. 4.64), hung next to a bright Texas watercolor of clouds whose forms related to the clouds in the charcoal, while on the other side of the charcoal was a watercolor of the Canyon train (Fig. 4.46), whose billowing puffs of smoke rhymed formally with the swelling hill in the center of the charcoal (Fig. 4.70).

The charcoal version of *Train at Night in the Desert* (Fig. 4.44) became O'Keeffe's first modern work to be sold.¹⁹⁷ She could not live on the proceeds from a single sale, but it was a start. It is perhaps revealing that the artist's first sale as a mature modern artist was of a work in her most established medium, charcoal. Yet the sold work came from O'Keeffe's new home, and new subject matter, of Texas. Stieglitz's special promotion of O'Keeffe's work made in the wide open spaces of Texas was evident in her identification in the exhibition announcement as "Georgia O'Keeffe, of Canyon,

Texas.”¹⁹⁸ Henry Tyrrell’s review of the 1917 exhibition described the artist as having been “born in Virginia,” and having “grown up in the vast provincial solitudes of Texas.” We may deduce from these biographical errors that Stieglitz did not give critics like Tyrrell a clear understanding of the actual facts of O’Keeffe’s life such as her academic training (if he even knew particulars himself), but simply emphasized her presence in American places far from New York. Tyrrell saw in “everything she does” the “impress” of the “loneliness and privation” he supposed her to have suffered.¹⁹⁹ This reading of O’Keeffe, presumably fomented by Stieglitz, simply deleted the artist’s many hours in the classroom learning and practicing art technique, theory, and pedagogy. The artist as inhabitant and recorder of the American landscape was central.

While the version of O’Keeffe that Stieglitz presented was rural and American in contrast to artists who were sophisticated and had trained in Europe, in the face of this exhibition of well-executed works in a variety of media he could not maintain the myth of O’Keeffe as a primitive. The raw marks of her hand were less evident in most of these works, possibly, as I have suggested, in response to the condescension of critics toward the “Specials.” Tyrrell noticed her “technical abilities quite out of the common.”²⁰⁰ This did not, however, stop him from carrying through Stieglitz’s suggestion of 1916 that O’Keeffe’s work revealed her inner nature and would be of interest from “a psycho-analytical point of view.”²⁰¹ Tyrrell saw her art as symbolic of gendered insights, expressing “‘What every woman knows,’ but what women heretofore have kept to themselves.”²⁰² This witty “analysis” shows the critic gently poking fun at O’Keeffe’s and Stieglitz’s modernist and feminist pretensions, since Tyrrell and Stieglitz would both surely have remembered “What Every Woman Knows” as the title of a humorous play

performed in New York in 1908.²⁰³ This is in line with what Lynes notes of the *Christian Science Monitor* critic's "guarded but tolerant attitude toward the goings-on at Stieglitz's gallery."²⁰⁴

Yet in an extended exploration of an individual work of art, Tyrrell turned very serious and seemed genuinely moved. It is hard to tell whether he was more moved by O'Keeffe's art or by Stieglitz's explication of it. About *Blue Lines* (Fig. 4.5), the critic waxed almost poetic,

"Two Lives," a man's and woman's, distinct yet invisibly joined together by mutual attraction, grow out of the earth like two graceful saplings, side by side, straight and slender, though their fluid lines undulate in unconscious rhythmic sympathy, as they act and react upon one another: "There is another self I long to meet, / Without which life, my life is incomplete." But as the man's line broadens or thickens, with worldly growth, the woman's becomes finer as it aspires spiritually upward, until it faints and falls off sharply – not to break, however, but to recover firmness and resume its growth, straight heavenward as before, farther apart from the "other self," and though never wholly sundered, yet never actually joined.

This is one of the 'drawings,' purely symbolistic, a sort of allegory in sensitized line.²⁰⁵

This interpretation of the drawing seems certain to have been based upon one of Stieglitz's monologues. The photographer later told author F. S. C. Northrop, who illustrated *Blue Lines* on the cover of his book *The Meeting of East and West*, "the one blue line represents the female aesthetic component; the other, the male scientific component in things. And the common base from which they spring expresses the fact that although each is distinct and irreducible to the other, both are united."²⁰⁶

Stieglitz must have had strong feelings about this simple watercolor, for he showed it twice in 1917, and again in 1923, 1934, 1937, and 1943; he showed this work far more often and into later years than any of O'Keeffe's other early modernist works.²⁰⁷ I believe that this continued interest in *Blue Lines* stemmed from Stieglitz's reading of the

unusual graphic work as a kind of diagram for his own ideas about gender. While he claimed that he “never drew . . . never desired to draw,”²⁰⁸ Stieglitz had, I observe, a habit of using diagrams in his rhetoric, and thus I think it is consistent for him to have read certain formal graphic elements as intellectual diagrams. For example, Herbert Seligmann recorded that in December 1925, Stieglitz in a monologue mentioned how, “utter simplicity held something bordering on the mystical for him. He drew a diagram making adjacent dark spots. ‘Here,’ he said, ‘is reality. When that is seen it is so close to the mystical that the dividing line is almost imperceptible.’ He drew a line between the two spots. ‘That is the line of my life running between them.’”²⁰⁹ Despite knowing objectively that O’Keeffe had based *Blue Lines* on her observations of skyscrapers,²¹⁰ Stieglitz must have felt that the deeper truth of the watercolor was found in reading its lines shapes, like those in his own diagrams, as charts of human existence. The simplicity and openness of such graphic elements for him seemed to dramatize aspects of thought and feeling that words alone could not make clear.

Color had its own powers of communication that Stieglitz also appreciated. In a 1919 essay, he strongly equated O’Keeffe’s use of color with music, “She has the sense of Color in the modern acceptance of the word Color – it is part of her very self – as music is part of the Composer.”²¹¹ O’Keeffe’s watercolors of natural forms and light evoked, for the critic William Murrell Fisher, presumably guided by Stieglitz, spiritual universals by way of music. He observed, “In recent years there have been many deliberate attempts to translate into line and color the *visual* effect of emotions aroused by music, and I am inclined to think they failed just because they were so deliberate.”²¹² This critic, who published in *Camera Work*,²¹³ was presumably well aware of the ideas

about parallels between music and art printed in that publication and by such authors as Wassily Kandinsky and Arthur Jerome Eddy. When he spoke of failed attempts to translate music into visual art, it is possible that Fisher was thinking of works by Pamela Colman Smith, with their classical music titles and illustrative figures (Fig. 1.18). Fisher acclaimed O’Keeffe’s drawings and paintings, so much more straightforwardly abstract than Smith’s, for having at last achieved the condition of music toward which Walter Pater had found visual art aspiring. Fisher did not specify particular works that moved him. It seems to me that the glowing watercolors from Virginia and Texas are most likely to have inspired his discussion of how in the forms she set down without conscious thought, the artist became “a willing medium, through which this visible medium flows.”²¹⁴

O’Keeffe’s 1917 Visit to New York

Between the spring and summer terms of the Normal College, O’Keeffe decided to go to New York despite the expense of the trip.²¹⁵ She recalled, “I was busy with the last quarter of school work in Texas but when I had time to think about it, I decided to go to New York to see the show.”²¹⁶ Stieglitz recalled her unexpected return, “One day I was standing in 291 . . . and there stood someone behind me. It was Georgia O’Keeffe.”²¹⁷ O’Keeffe remembered, “When I arrived at ‘291,’ Stieglitz had taken my show down, but he put it back on the wall for me.”²¹⁸ The sudden appearance of the teacher from distant Texas buoyed up Stieglitz during the dark days when his beloved gallery had just closed. The impromptu rehanging was 291’s swan song. The family of Stieglitz’s wife Emmeline Stieglitz, who had helped Stieglitz financially and thus enabled him to run his gallery, could provide less as prohibition damaged the finances of their

brewery. As Stieglitz wrote to Mitchell Kennerley of Anderson Galleries, “My family and I have been badly hit. So badly, that I am compelled to give up 291 and *Camera Work*.”²¹⁹

On her return, O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer, “being in N. Y. again for a few days was great – I guess I did as much in the ten days as I usually do in a year.” She saw old friends and mentors like Dorothy True, Alon Bement, Charles Martin, and Arthur Macmahon.²²⁰ Stieglitz introduced O’Keeffe to such important modernists as John Marin, Stanton MacDonald-Wright, and the young photographer Paul Strand.²²¹ O’Keeffe told Pollitzer about Strand, “Dorothy and I both fell for him[.] He showed me lots and lots of prints – photographs – And I almost lost my mind over them – Photographs that are as queer in shapes as Picasso drawings.”²²² This early admission of O’Keeffe’s interest in art photography is interesting in that it shows the relationship she saw between photography and drawing. The connection of those particular two media, rather than simply photography and modern art, seems important since she chose to specify that she related Strand’s photographs to Picasso’s *drawings* rather than to his paintings.

But O’Keeffe told Pollitzer, “Stieglitz – Well – it was him I went to see – Just had to go Anita – There wasn’t any way out of it – and I’m so glad I went.”²²³ Stieglitz was cheered by the return of his new star artist. He paid her the greatest attention that he could – he photographed her. Expressing his esteem for both artist and art, he took advantage of his rehanging of O’Keeffe’s exhibition to pose her with her watercolor *Blue I* (Figs. 5.2-4). O’Keeffe said, “A few weeks after I returned to Texas, photographs of me came – two portraits of my face against one of my large watercolors and three

photographs of hands. In my excitement at such pictures of myself I took them to school and held them up for my class to see. They were surprised and astonished too. Nothing like that had come into our world before.”²²⁴ I will discuss these photographs in my fifth chapter in the context of Stieglitz’s images of O’Keeffe.

O’Keeffe in Colorado and New Mexico

O’Keeffe continued making watercolor landscape and sky images of Texas after her return. There are series from her Texas era that were not represented in the 1917 solo show, but which Stieglitz did show in 1923, so these were presumably made after the 1917 show. These include the *Evening Star* series (Fig. 4.51-54), the *Light Coming on the Plains* series (Fig. 4.55-57), and *Starlight Night* (Fig. 4.58) and the related *Abstraction* (Fig. 4.59).

Watercolor was also most often her medium of choice during a trip to Colorado with her sister Claudia during the summer of 1917. Stieglitz later paraphrased O’Keeffe’s description of the trip in a letter to his assistant Marie Rapp “She & her sister seemed to walk on an average of 20 miles a day – in the mining district - & came into contact with workers – A real healthy existence.”²²⁵ In Long Lake, Colorado, O’Keeffe drew the spectacular mountain scenery and looming pine trees in a sketchbook of roughly textured paper very different from the smooth cartridge paper she usually used for watercolors (Figs. 2.41, 4.72-74).²²⁶ As with her depictions of Palo Duro Canyon, O’Keeffe began work with these subjects in contour sketches that she would work up in multiple forms in watercolor and oils (Figs. 2.41, 4.72). In the most complete sequence of images she made based on her Colorado trip, O’Keeffe gathered visual information in a group of contour drawings, some inscribed as having been made at Long Lake on

August 21 and 22 (Fig. 4.72). The drawings take more note of texture and detail than the Palo Duro drawings, including specifics of trees and architecture, perhaps because O’Keeffe could not count on going back to Long Lake, Colorado nearly as easily as she could Palo Duro while she was living in Texas. In areas of the Colorado sketches she added numbers keyed to colors (Fig. 4.72). Some of the drawings are finished in watercolor over the initial pencil lines and others are left bare.

One drawing completed as a watercolor and labeled “Long Lake,” is of a view that looks almost post-card-like in its realistic detail and picturesque composition as compared to the stark Texas watercolors (Fig. 4.74). O’Keeffe made many watercolor versions of this and related views, playing with the formats, trying various more intense reds and blues for the mountains, and greatly reducing the specificity of detail, gradually creating a modernist composition (Fig. 4.73-78). As Eldredge describes this suite of watercolors, “In transforming her impressions into a series of watercolors, O’Keeffe reversed the role of the sketch as traditionally employed by [nineteenth-century landscape artists.]”²²⁷ That is, she recorded detailed information in her sketches for the purpose of selectively simplifying it in later abstractions, where more traditional artists made their final paintings far more detailed and polished than their rough sketches made on the spot. O’Keeffe’s sequence of Long Lake images culminated in abstracted watercolor versions of the scene, transforming the jagged mountain peaks into sleek bands of color arching upward toward a blue sky animated by the white billows of clouds (Figs. 4.77-78). Into the foreground green and gray areas, the artist dropped in brush loads of water or paint to create vertical patches of dendritic patterns schematically suggesting the spiky pine trees shown in the foregrounds of the earlier watercolors.

O’Keeffe and Stieglitz were momentarily thrilled with her Colorado work. Stieglitz wrote to Marie Rapp that O’Keeffe “writes Colorado has virtually washed the slate clean of Canyon – New York – the past.”²²⁸ O’Keeffe sent her summer’s work to Stieglitz and he wrote to Rapp, “A batch of watercolors came . . . A few wonders. But I’m sure the Colorado stay will have a decided effect upon her further work – will add something very big.”²²⁹ Yet, for all O’Keeffe’s labor to create modernist abstractions based upon her Colorado experience, Stieglitz never showed any of the Colorado watercolors. In fact, O’Keeffe wrote to Strand that she found her Colorado work “so bad that it’s funny.”²³⁰ The lasting impact of the trip on O’Keeffe’s life was actually due to floods that caused O’Keeffe and her sister to go out of their way through New Mexico, a state they had never seen before, on their way between Colorado and Texas. They stopped in Santa Fe and O’Keeffe may have made a couple of landscape watercolors of the area. She later said “From then on I was always on my way back.”²³¹

The Human Presence in O’Keeffe’s Watercolors

O’Keeffe did not reserve her attention for landscapes and skies. The human figure took on a new importance in her art after her return to the Southwest from New York. Perhaps O’Keeffe’s experiences meeting people in New York, and Stieglitz’s directing his attention to her body as a subject for his photography stirred something in the artist. She made two series of watercolor abstract “portraits,” one of Paul Strand (Fig. 4.79), and one of a mechanic named Kindred M. Watson whom she knew in Canyon (Fig. 4.80).²³² These works are made up of open, flowing washes, ranging from pale yellow and red to dense blue, green, and black shadows. O’Keeffe worked these watercolors intensely, adding layer after layer of color teased into visual fantasies. In

Portrait – W – No. III O’Keeffe suggests with the varied translucency of her medium the inner world of a personality where different elements emerge into warmly glowing light or hide in cool or red-lit dark recesses. The artist achieved a kind of virtuosic drawing with the dark tide lines left at the edges of the pools of watercolor.²³³

In a return to a more traditional rendering of the human presence, O’Keeffe also made a series of watercolors of a nude woman (Figs. 4.84-88). She thus returned to one of her chief enterprises of 1915 and 1916, rethinking and reconfiguring the human figure in her own graphic modernist terms. I agree with Anne Wagner who sees these nudes as engaging with the abstract “portraits” in the modernist debate about whether a modernist should represent the inner or the exterior world. In addition, she notes the importance of O’Keeffe’s attacking this question in watercolor, in each side of the abstract-representational debate exploring a “different sense of what watercolor can do.”²³⁴ By opening up her own medium, O’Keeffe expanded the possibilities for her own work in ways that went far beyond mere technicalities.

I see this modernist debate in the wider context of other watercolorists in the Stieglitz circle. John Marin, who appears to have served as O’Keeffe’s major model of modern American watercolorist, was pushing the borders of the same medium at the same moment. Alongside the assertively abstracted architectural and landscape watercolors for which he was best known, Marin also attempted, in works O’Keeffe would not yet have seen, such unusual watercolor projects as in 1915 a cubist-influenced portrait of his infant son (Fig. 4.81) and in 1917 a pair of planar collections of geometric shapes both titled *Abstraction* (Fig. 4.82). Charles Demuth, also, in the teens and twenties took watercolor into fresh modernist territory. He depicted living fish, flower

and fruit still lifes, various narrative scenes from literature or his own experience, and daringly fractured and abstracted architectural views (Fig. 4.83). Again, O’Keeffe would not yet have known these works. Each of these artists worked independently, yet in the New York avant-garde around Stieglitz, they all gained boldness and an opportunity to exhibit their works. His reception was positive enough to make his circle fertile ground where watercolor could grow into a medium fit for much more than pretty landscapes.

I differ from Anne Wagner in identifying the exact genre O’Keeffe attacked in her series of nudes, and therefore I disagree with her about the significance of O’Keeffe’s female figures in watercolor (Fig. 4.84-88). Wagner, following the suggestion of Michael Fried, believes that these watercolors must have been based upon photographs of a woman whose identity she can not know. She finds them too technically complex, requiring too many separate colors and too much waiting for colors to dry, to have been made from a live model or as self-portraits by looking into a mirror.²³⁵ I disagree with this reasoning. I argue that O’Keeffe’s mastery was greater than my fellow Wagner imagines. O’Keeffe had grown accustomed to the patience required for posing during her years at the Art Students League, where she was often asked to pose for other artists.²³⁶ I think that O’Keeffe was fully capable, as Peters, Rose, and Messinger suggest,²³⁷ of making these self-portraits by looking into a mirror, juggling the competing requirements of holding still, looking closely, and painting in watercolors.

Although O’Keeffe showed her nudes in varied seated and reclining poses, in each case the subject’s left hand (the right hand seen in mirror image) is firmly in contact with the horizontal surface where she sits. This is consistent with the pose necessary for an artist painting on a horizontal support. In *Nude Series XII* (Fig. 4.84) one hand is

rendered as spread against the floor, supporting the figure, but close examination reveals that the arm was rendered in two attempted strokes of which only one was completed and the other was left as a kind of cloak or shadow (an error that might indicate the distraction of the artist), and the hand added afterwards from the painter's anatomical knowledge or study of her left hand outside the mirror. In *Nude Series* (Fig. 4.85) the figure's pose is uncomfortably stretched by the need to rest her hand on a firm surface beyond her bent legs. The heads of the figures, too, alertly face the viewer; that is, they look up at the mirror. In *Nude Series X* (Fig. 4.86) the subject's head looks slightly down, but the pose would easily have allowed the artist to glance up at the mirror by moving only her eyes. Lynes confirms that these works are self-portraits on the basis of the O'Keeffe-Stieglitz correspondence.²³⁸

I emphasize this argument for these as self-portraits because I find it of material importance in establishing what was at stake in this series of figural watercolors. These works served not only to expand O'Keeffe's modernism, and the watercolor medium, to representations of the figure; they also applied the artist's current favorite medium to her self-image. She had the boldness to expose her own figure to the same kind of unpredictable, organic flows of watercolor that she had applied to depictions of the blazing Texas sky.

As mentioned above, while O'Keeffe was in New York in 1917, Stieglitz had made several photographs of her, including some with her own watercolor seen behind her (Figs. 5.2-4). O'Keeffe proclaimed her "excitement at such pictures of myself."²³⁹ Stieglitz, in written and spoken words and now in photographs, had begun taking over O'Keeffe's image. Early twentieth-century male modernist artists in Europe, including

Rodin, Matisse, and Picasso in works O’Keeffe had seen, made the male-dominated female nude a major genre of modernism. Such images challenged O’Keeffe, like other woman modern artists, to as feminist art historian Carol Duncan phrases it, “master her own image.”²⁴⁰ In making pictures of herself, O’Keeffe seized the right to examine and present her own likeness. Stieglitz had previously made images of O’Keeffe in New York and sent them to her in Texas; she now replied in art as clear as any letter, depicting herself in Texas and sending the depictions to New York. O’Keeffe’s identity was not only in 291 in New York where Stieglitz showed her work, it was where the artist had chosen to be, making her own work with her own hands. O’Keeffe was not only a subject for Stieglitz’s medium of photography, and the tradition of male depictions of women in oils; she was her own subject in her own medium.

Yet O’Keeffe was still perhaps feeling the shyness about self-exposure that made her so anxious for no viewer to be able to read the biographical specifics of 1915 charcoals. The public was not to know that these were self-portraits. As Wagner observes, the artist obscured the figure’s identity by giving little attention to the head and facial features.²⁴¹ O’Keeffe blurred or excluded the eyes (Figs. 4.85-88). By avoiding engagement with the eyes of the figure she portrayed, O’Keeffe avoided portraying the disquietingly intense gaze native to, and revealing of, the self portrait. She drew a curtain over her difficult balancing act of seeing and being seen, studying and posing.

Like the Rodin drawings of nudes with watercolor wash that O’Keeffe had seen on her first visit to 291 in 1908 and afterward in the pages of *Camera Work* (Figs. 2.38-39),²⁴² these figural works are about the merging of vision with touch. Rodin paid most attention to the linear contours of his models’ bodies and how these revealed their motion

- both qualities communicated equally by swift outlines. He was only observing and drawing, not posing. He captured the outlines of the bodies he drew, running his eyes over them, but he did not inhabit these bodies. Rodin used watercolor to wash color into the outlines he had drawn in pencil.

O’Keeffe, in contrast to Rodin, used little contour drawing in her figures, graphite being evident only in *Nude Series IX* (Fig. 4.87). Only in the flattest and most simplified watercolors, like *Nude Series VII* (Fig. 4.88), and *Nude Series XII* (Fig. 4.84), did O’Keeffe draw the viewer’s attention to the silhouette of the figures; in the other nudes she placed the emphasis on mass and surface rather than line (Figs. 4.85-87). The poses bring skin against skin, juxtaposing shapes visually as she, posing, would have felt them touching - thigh against calf, hand against thigh, arm against breast. The subject is the living volume of the figure, not only its contours but the full surface of the skin and the masses of the body it covered. She explored skin and mass through the play of watercolor over paper equated to light playing over flesh. The viewer can almost feel the meeting of the two sides of the sensation: viewing and being. It is as if the hairs of the watercolor brush swept over the swelling volume of the breasts and belly, even though in reality it merely glided over flat paper.

O’Keeffe masterfully matched the living warmth of her subject with the visual warmth of translucent color lit by light reflected off the white paper. She exaggerated this effect in some of the watercolors by depicting her own skin in tones of red, and even in magenta infused with yellow (Fig. 4.84). In other cases, she brought out the warmth of flesh by contrast, using blue to paint shadows on skin (Fig. 4.88). By using the medium of watercolor to depicting the nude in as free and reductive a manner as she depicted

landscapes and skyscapes, O’Keeffe extended the expressive possibilities of her medium and her modernism. She also indicated her mastery of the female form, not only in suggestive abstractions, but in unequivocal depictions. Stieglitz recognized the importance of these nude watercolors, including six of them in O’Keeffe’s 1923 solo show at Anderson Galleries alongside many more abstract works.

O’Keeffe’s Last Works Made in Texas

O’Keeffe’s open self-expression became a problem in Canyon, Texas, as the United States moved to join the allied powers in fighting World War I, hastening changes in the artist’s life and art. Amid the war fever that swept the country and caught up citizens of rural Canyon, she took on a controversial persona at West Texas State Normal College by attempting to persuade her students to finish their education before joining the patriotic rush to enlist for military service.²⁴³ O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz’s niece Elizabeth, “You will laugh if I tell you what the last piece of excitement is over – it seems to be growing as the days go by Some Xmas cards at the Drug Store that I asked the man not to sell . . . it seems the whole town is talking about me – Not patriotic.” The cards included verses “to the effect that we wanted to wipe Germany off the map [and] something about hating the Kaiser . . . certainly not in keeping with any kind of Xmas spirit I ever heard of.”²⁴⁴

At the end of 1917, dismayed by the war hysteria around her, and left alone when her sister Claudia moved to another Texas town to student-teach, O’Keeffe seems to have fallen into a deep depression.²⁴⁵ In December she wrote to her friend Anna Barringer, “I did some better painting last spring and summer than I’ve done before – It hasn’t been shown yet – but probably will be this winter – don’t know – don’t seem to care . . .

Stieglitz said he was going to but I haven't heard . . . I don't seem to care – 291 closed you know . . . I haven't worked for three months now – the longest time in several years – four – I guess.”²⁴⁶ In January 1918, in the icy Texas weather, O’Keeffe became seriously ill with the deadly Spanish influenza that was epidemic across the country. The College, possibly as worried about O’Keeffe’s stance on the war as about her health, granted her a leave of absence. When she was able to travel, O’Keeffe went to stay with her friend Leah Harris at her farm in Waring, Texas, about 30 miles outside San Antonio.²⁴⁷

On the farm with Harris and her brother, O’Keeffe slowly recovered. Perhaps she longed for the modernist realms of far off New York, since it was possibly during this time that she made her only surviving truly cubist work (Fig. 4.89). It is a tiny still life drawn in pen and ink on paper, made with a broad nib like the one she used to write letters in her flowing script. I suggest that this drawing, undated and undocumented, might have been made during O’Keeffe’s 1918 recuperation because on the back of the paper are mostly illegible words that could refer to directions for taking medicine. However, O’Keeffe and Stieglitz were sick on various occasions, so this is only one possible dating out of many. One wonders if the artist made the drawing to demonstrate the ideas of cubism to Leah Harris or some other Texas friend who was no habitu e of 291.

For months O’Keeffe’s illness remained serious enough to worry her eastern friends. She wrote about the farm to comfort a concerned Stieglitz, “It’s a wonderful place – I wonder why everyone doesn’t live here.”²⁴⁸ Stieglitz, ever the worrier, had written to the artist,

You have become a very important factor in 291 – a concrete force. . . Of course I am wondering what you have been painting – what it looks like – what

you have been full of – The Great Child pouring out some more of her Woman self on paper – purely – truly – unspoiled.
. . . Your health is my first thought.²⁴⁹

As in earlier letters, Stieglitz urged O’Keeffe to continue working on paper, in graphic form. He confirmed his graphic aspirations for O’Keeffe by sending her a box of watercolor paints and brushes.²⁵⁰

O’Keeffe eventually responded to her surroundings and to Stieglitz’s encouragement by taking up her brushes and returning to her art in the spring of 1918. In brilliant watercolors she explored a variety of subjects, from a graceful blue watercolor of Leah Harris bathing (Fig. 4.90) (in a flat, simple mode with a graceful pose unconstrained by the demands of self portraiture), to neatly drawn and intensely colored still lifes and landscapes.

On the Spanish-influenced streets of San Antonio, O’Keeffe discovered a new palette of colors – bright blues, rich purples, brilliant pinks, magentas, and oranges that she utilized in watercolors of brightly local architecture, capturing the brilliant glow of colored surfaces under the intense Texas sun and playing with the patterns of roof lines, windows, and fences (Fig. 4.91). O’Keeffe also took up a new subject - genre scenes of local women in black shawls and gaily colored dresses (Figure 4.92). The figural scenes look strikingly like southwestern versions of Provincetown prints (Fig. 4.29), with their colorfully dressed local figures rendered in blocks of colors separated by bands of white paper.²⁵¹ As with watercolors she made in Colorado, sometimes O’Keeffe executed these watercolors over pencil sketches with numbers as color keys, indicating that the drawings were made from life and then the watercolors added later. As usual, O’Keeffe busily gathered fresh visual material when she was in new surroundings. The colors she found

in San Antonio found a permanent place in her imagination, recurring often in abstract oil paintings she made later (Figs. 3.44-45).

While O’Keeffe was recovering and beginning to work, Stieglitz never ceased worrying about her. He wrote to Paul Strand “in my mind there always looms the terrible? – Life – Death – I want her [O’Keeffe] to live – I never wanted anything as much as that. She is the spirit of 291 – Not I.”²⁵² Stieglitz’s niece Elizabeth knew her uncle’s feelings and wanted to help. O’Keeffe recalled that Elizabeth, “wrote me many letters – many long letters trying to get me to come to New York again . . . She offered me her studio on the top floor of a brownstone house on Fifty-Ninth Street.”²⁵³

Hoping to bring O’Keeffe back to New York, in early May 1918 Stieglitz sent his friend Strand down to Texas, despite his knowledge of the passionate correspondence that had been going on between O’Keeffe and Strand.²⁵⁴ Stieglitz, aware of O’Keeffe’s independence, feared that if she felt coerced she would not come. He wrote to Strand, “There must be no suggestion or interference one way or another” with her decision to come back or stay. Stieglitz did, however, offer to provide the money O’Keeffe needed so badly and added, “If she wants to come – really wants to – feels the necessity – and feels that she can stand the trip physically – all else would arrange itself.”²⁵⁵

During her travels, study, and work in South Carolina, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, Texas, and Colorado, O’Keeffe had covered a lot of artistic ground. She had broken the bonds of black and white, opening her previous hermetic abstraction not only to color but to cityscape, landscape, skyscape, and figuration. While Stieglitz was establishing acceptance for her previous works, O’Keeffe was forging ahead. As her circumstances changed and she had to make her art between studying, making a living,

and managing her family responsibilities, watercolor proved a flexible and expressive medium well suited to her needs. If O'Keeffe returned to New York with Strand, it would be as an artist, not an art teacher. She would face major changes in her personal life and her career. The two sides of her life that had continued separated by thousands of miles, her artistic explorations and Stieglitz's exhibition and promotion of her works, would come together. O'Keeffe's situation would change again, and her medium of choice would need to change to accommodate this.

Notes

¹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 28, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia: the Complete Correspondence of Georgia O’Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer*, ed. Clive Giboire (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990), 128. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

² Sarah Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas,” in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, ed. Sarah Greenough (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 42.

³ “Art Notes: Portraits of Academicians and Associates at National Arts Club,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1916; “‘The Ten,’ and Numerous Other Art Exhibitions: Art at Home and Abroad: the ‘Forum’ Exhibition,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1916; “‘Armory Show’ in Petto,” *American Art News* 14, no. 23 (1916): 3.

⁴ O’Keeffe arrived in New York during the first week of March 1916. Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: a Biography of Georgia O’Keeffe*, revised ed. (New York: Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, 1986), 87.

⁵ “Current News of Art and the Exhibitions,” *New York Sun*, March 12, 1916.

⁶ Anne Lumsden Harrell, “America’s Coming-of-Age: ‘The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters’ and American Cultural Nationalism,” MA thesis, Florida State University, 11-12. Harrell’s MA thesis includes a detailed discussion of the Forum Exhibition, which appears in a shorter form in her essay in Anne Harrell and Ellen Mahoney, *The Forum Exhibition: Selections and Additions* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, Midtown at Philip Morris, 1983), 4-15. For Wright’s relationship to Macdonald-Wright, see Harrell and Mahoney, *The Forum Exhibition*, 4.

⁷ 1985 Harrell, “America’s Coming of Age,” 1-2, 11-12.

⁸ Sarah L. Burt, catalogue entry in *The Book Room: Georgia O’Keeffe’s Library in Abiquiu* (Santa Fe, NM and New York: Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation and the Grolier Club, 1997), 30.

⁹ See my chapter 3, note 9.

¹⁰ “‘The Ten,’ and Numerous Other Art Exhibitions: Art at Home and Abroad: the ‘Forum’ Exhibition,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1916; and Harrell and Mahoney, *The Forum Exhibition*, 5.

¹¹ “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz, 1905-1946,” in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, ed. Sarah Greenough (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 546.

¹² Georgia O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), not paginated.

¹³ Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Life* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 136.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 133-136. “Exhibition of Modern Art” at Bourgeois Galleries was initially on view from April 3 to April 30, 1916, and was extended until May 13. Bourgeois Galleries, “Exhibition of Modern Art” (advertisement), *New York Times*, April 2, 1916.

¹⁵ “More Modern Art at Bourgeois’,” *American Art News* 14, no. 27 (1916): 3.

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- ¹⁶ Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915-1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1994), 43-44.
- ¹⁷ Naumann, *New York Dada*, 10-11.
- ¹⁸ Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife," 43.
- ¹⁹ Marius De Zayas, *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, ed. Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1996), 140.
- ²⁰ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 135.
- ²¹ Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1:60-61.
- ²² Barbara Buhler Lynes, "Inventions of Different Orders," in *O'Keeffe on Paper*, Ruth E. Fine and Barbara Buhler Lynes (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, 2000), 44. The words are Lynes' paraphrase. "This information has been verified in the correspondence between Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, edited by Juan Hamilton and Sarah Greenough, publication of which is forthcoming." *Ibid.*, n. 14, p. 55.
- ²³ O'Keeffe to Stieglitz, February 1, 1916, Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 150. For the inclusion of at least one etching of the Woolworth Building in Marin's 1915 exhibition at 291, see "John Marin's Points of View," *American Art News*, no. (February 27, 1915), 3. Also see a transcript of the exhibition checklist in the Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ²⁴ Lynes, "Inventions of Different Orders," 44.
- ²⁵ Georgia O'Keeffe, *Some Memories of Drawings*, ed. Doris Bry (Albuquerque: The University Press of New Mexico, 1988), commentary with plate 1.
- ²⁶ Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: a Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, 13th ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 67.
- ²⁷ Quoted in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks With Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 191.
- ²⁸ Dow, *Composition* (1997), 86.
- ²⁹ O'Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 1.
- ³⁰ Technical elements of drawing from Judith C. Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003. This technique is similar to Walsh's description of O'Keeffe's later drawing *Crazy Day*, "The extra medium provided by the varnish held much darker blacks, but the artist lost the luxury of lifting or correcting marks placed on it. She also lost the luxury of time, as varnish dries in a matter of minutes." Walsh, "The Language of O'Keeffe's Materials," in *O'Keeffe on Paper*, Ruth E. Fine and Barbara Buhler Lynes (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, 2000), 61.
- ³¹ Lynes, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 60.
- ³² For example Pollitzer wrote to O'Keeffe about a group of drawings the artist had sent to her that she had used thumb tacks to put them up on the wall. See my chapter 3, note 169. Judith Walsh confirms my observation of multiple tack holes in O'Keeffe's 1915 drawings. Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003.

³³ O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 1.

³⁴ Dow, *Composition*, 73-74. Linda Thomas notes the importance of this passage by Dow for *Blue Lines* in “Georgia O’Keeffe: Origins and Sources,” M.A. Thesis, University of Oregon, 1979, pp. 37-38.

³⁵ “It was in the fall of 1915,” O’Keeffe remembered, “that I decided not to use any color until I couldn’t get along without it and I believe it was June before I needed blue.” O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 1.

³⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 38.

³⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 131. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

³⁸ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 145. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

³⁹ Dow, *Composition* (1997), 73.

⁴⁰ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:62, 101.

⁴¹ Lisle, Portrait: *O’Keeffe*, 88-89. The story is paraphrased by Lisle from the story told by the O’Keeffes’ neighbor, Ethel Holsinger.

⁴² Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 153-154.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 154.

⁴⁴ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 159. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁴⁵ O’Keeffe to Macmahon, June 28, 1916, (family of Arthur W. Macmahon, Estate of Georgia O’Keeffe), quoted in Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 155. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁴⁶ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 10. It was the Teachers College student who spoke to O’Keeffe, not Stieglitz, who was confused about O’Keeffe’s first name. The exhibition at 291 was titled “Exhibition of Drawings by Georgia O’Keeffe, of Virginia; Water-Colors and Drawings, by C. Duncan, of New York; and Oils, by René Lafferty, of Philadelphia.” “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz, 1905-1946,” in *Modern Art in America*, 546.

Stieglitz later said that Pollitzer had left O’Keeffe’s drawings with him when he first saw them on January 1, 1916. “She left the drawings.” Stieglitz, quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer*, An Aperture Book (New York: Random House, 1973), 130. Pollitzer’s letter at the time to O’Keeffe, however, says that she kept the drawings herself that day. “You keep them . . . For later I may want to see them.” Pollitzer quoting Stieglitz speaking to her, Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, January 1, 1916, Giboire, ed., *Lovingly, Georgia*, 116. Stieglitz said that he looked at the drawings multiple times in the succeeding months and finally decided to show them. “Day in, day out, I pored over the pictures. I became convinced they should be given to the world.” Stieglitz, quoted in Norman, *American Seer*, 130. At some point between January and May 1916, Pollitzer or O’Keeffe must have given Stieglitz the drawings, since he was able to study them and to hang them at 291 without asking O’Keeffe to bring them to 291.

⁴⁷ See my Introduction note 1 and Chapter Three section “Stieglitz’s Initial Reaction to the ‘Specials’” for discussions of which works by O’Keeffe were included in the exhibition.

⁴⁸ It is unclear whether the person Stieglitz had told about the exhibition was Pollitzer or the student who had mentioned the show to O’Keeffe.

⁴⁹ *Georgia O’Keeffe*, VHS, directed by Perry Miller Adato (New York: WNET, 1977).

⁵⁰ In March 1916, Stieglitz wrote to Arthur Jerome Eddy, who was putting together a second edition of his book *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* and wanted an up-to-date listing of exhibitions at 291, “If not too much trouble and to make the record complete through the 1915-1916 season at ‘291’, will you kindly add the following:

May 1916 An Exhibition of Abstractions by Three Newcomers:

Drawings by Miss Georgia O’Keeffe of So. Carolina

Paintings by Mr. Rene D. Lafferty of Philadelphia

Watercolors and Drawings by Mr. C. Duncan of New York.

This exhibition will end the season. I have watched these three people for some time and all three are of an unusual type fitting together.” Stieglitz to Eddy, March 30, 1916, Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. Barbara Buhler Lynes draws attention to this letter in *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916-1929* (Ann Arbor, London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 321, n. 18. Note that while Stieglitz here referred to O’Keeffe as “of So. Carolina,” in the actual notices for the exhibition, he referred to her as “of Virginia.” See note 46 above.

⁵¹ Paraphrased by Herbert J. Seligmann in *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of His Conversations, 1925-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 23.

⁵² Stieglitz had usually ended the 291 exhibition season in May. The only exceptions occurred in 1909, when an exhibition of Japanese prints from the F. W. Hunter collection lasted until June 2, and in 1910 when the exceptional popularity of an exhibition of caricatures by Marius de Zayas kept it on view from April 26 to November 1910. “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz, 1905-1946,” in *Modern Art in America*, 543-546. For the enthusiastic public response to the De Zayas installation of caricatures set up as a panorama of prominent New Yorkers parading on Fifth Avenue, see Wendy Wick Reaves’ assertion that “In October 1910 . . . visitors were still swarming to see ‘Up and Down Fifth Avenue.’” *Celebrity Caricature in America* (Washington, D.C., New Haven, and London: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in association with Yale University Press, 1998), 95.

⁵³ *O’Keeffe*, VHS, Adato.

⁵⁴ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 4, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 117-118. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁵⁵ Stieglitz wrote to Katherine Rhoades that he had met O’Keeffe “in the mean time [after he had first seen her drawings in January] two or three times.” Stieglitz to Rhoades, May 31, 1916, Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁵⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 46. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁵⁷ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 10.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Weinberg, *Ambition & Love in American Modern Art* (Yale Publications in the History of Art, Editor. Walter Cahn. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii.

⁵⁹ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *American Seer*, 131. O’Keeffe confirmed Stieglitz’s account of the inspiration for *No. 9 Special*: “Drawing No. 9 is the drawing of a headache. It was a very bad headache at the time that I was busy drawing every night, sitting on the floor in front of the closet door.

Well, I had the headache, why not do something with it? So – here it is.” O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 5. Note also that in this version of the story Stieglitz pretended that he had not met O’Keeffe before he hung her exhibition at 291, which was far from true. See note 55 above.

⁶⁰ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, January 1916, Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 123-124. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁶¹ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, July 27, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 154. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁶² Dove to Stieglitz, May 5-7, 1931, Arthur Dove and Alfred Stieglitz, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, ed. Ann Lee Morgan, The American Arts Series (Newark, Delaware, London and Toronto: University of Delaware Press, Associated University Presses, 1988), 221.

⁶³ Henry Tyrrell, “New York Art Exhibitions and Gallery News: Animadversions on the Tendencies of the Times in Art - School for Sculpture on New Lines,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 1916, p. 10; reprinted in Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916-1929* (Ann Arbor, London: UMI Research Press, 1989), as Appendix A, #1, p. 166.

⁶⁴ “Some of your drawings, I’m having framed to protect them – they have meant so much to me that I can’t bear the thought they may be soiled – rubbed – for they are not fixed.” Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, July 16, 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 140. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. Some of the 1915 charcoals are badly abraded from their hard and unprotected early life, and many or perhaps all of the works included in that first exhibition have multiple sets of pin holes in their corners, presumably marking where they were tacked to the wall during various viewings by Pollitzer, Stieglitz, and the public. Judith Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003.

⁶⁵ Anne Wagner notes this connection between the informal physical display of the art at 291 and the idea that the works must “speak for themselves.” Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 37.

⁶⁶ Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 21-22, quoting from Edmund Wilson, “The Stieglitz Exhibition,” in *The American Earthquake* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1958), 102.

⁶⁷ As Marcia Brennan notes, Stieglitz, critic Paul Rosenfeld and others in the New York avant-garde found the works of Sigmund Freud and British sex researcher and essayist Havelock Ellis important and exciting, but interpreted them very freely and generally. Stieglitz knew Dr. Abraham A. Brill, an American who translated Freud’s works into English. Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: the Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 102-107.

⁶⁸ Stieglitz, statement *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13. Reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166.

⁶⁹ Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 9.

⁷⁰ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, March 31, 1918, quoted in Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 159. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁷¹ Carol Duncan, “Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting.” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 302-303.

⁷² Alfred Stieglitz “Woman in Art” in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 137.

⁷³ Stieglitz, statement *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166. Henry Tyrrell, "New York Art Exhibitions," *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 1916, p. 10. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #1, p. 166.

⁷⁴ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 22.

⁷⁵ Statement by Charles Duncan included in "Georgia O'Keeffe - C. Duncan - René Lafferty," *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166.

⁷⁶ Tyrrell, "New York Art Exhibitions," *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 1916, p. 10. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #1, p. 166.

⁷⁷ To extend the quote that begins my chapter 1, Stieglitz wrote to Stanton MacDonald Wright, "I never drew – painted – had any art lessons – never desired to draw – never tried to – never dreamed that I might be or become an artist – knew nothing about any of these things when I started photographing in 1883." Stieglitz to Wright, October 11, 1919, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁷⁸ Alfred Stieglitz, in "Georgia O'Keeffe - C. Duncan - René Lafferty," *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166.

⁷⁹ O'Keeffe to Stieglitz, February 1, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O'Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 150. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸⁰ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, Lovingly, *Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 68. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸¹ For a discussion of Stieglitz's presentation of O'Keeffe as naïve, see Sarah Whitaker Peters, *Becoming O'Keeffe: the Early Years*, updated and expanded ed. (New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press, Publishers, 2001), 37-38.

⁸² "Shown at the Photo-Seccession," *American Art News* 14, no. 23 (1916): 2.

⁸³ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, passim.

⁸⁴ Stieglitz's statement and letter from Evelyn Sayer in "Georgia O'Keeffe - C. Duncan - René Lafferty," *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166. Lynes states "I have been unable to discover anything about Sayer." *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, p. 327, n. 86.

⁸⁵ Stieglitz to Katherine Nash Rhoades, May 31, 1916, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸⁶ Stieglitz to O'Keeffe, June 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 139-140. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁸⁷ Norman, *Stieglitz: American Seer*, 16.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 202.

⁸⁹ Stieglitz's words are paraphrased by Seligmann in Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 117.

⁹⁰ “She chose Prussian blue apparently because it enabled her to replicate the tonal range she had found in charcoal.” Walsh, “The Language of O’Keeffe’s Materials,” in *O’Keeffe on Paper*, 63.

⁹¹ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1143.

⁹² Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 1916, in Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 140. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁹³ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, July 1916, Wednesday, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 163. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁹⁴ T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes From a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 55-56.

⁹⁵ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, July 10, 1916, Pollitzer, *Woman on Paper*, 140. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁹⁶ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 13.

⁹⁷ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, July 1916, Wednesday, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 164. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁹⁸ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:81.

⁹⁹ Lynes notes that O’Keeffe’s continued work on paper from 1915 to 1918 “demonstrates not only her commitment to the discovery of a personal language but also her selective use of many elements of her previous training.” Lynes, “Inventions of Different Orders,” 43.

¹⁰⁰ “I must have painted a great deal with watercolor by that time [1903-1905 when she was attending the Chatham Episcopal Institute] or I wouldn’t have had the freedom I had with that big sheet of white paper and the brush that I used. . . . I slapped the paint about quite a bit and didn’t care where it spilled.” O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay.

¹⁰¹ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, initial essay.

¹⁰² Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists & the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 5, 65-66, 74-76.

¹⁰³ Susan E. Strickler, “American Watercolors at Worcester,” in *American Traditions in Watercolor: The Worcester Art Museum Collection* (Worcester, MA, New York: Worcester Art Museum, Abbeville Press, Publishers, 1987), 11-16; Linda S. Ferber, “Watercolors by Winslow Homer at the Brooklyn Museum of Art,” in *Masters of Color and Light: Homer, Sargent, and the American Watercolor Movement* (Brooklyn, Washington, D.C., and London: The Brooklyn Museum of Art in association with Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 93-106.

¹⁰⁴ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, 11 a.m. Thursday, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 147. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁰⁵ Calvin Tomkins, “Profiles: the Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine,” *The New Yorker* 50 (1974), 42. This quote refers specifically to O’Keeffe’s years teaching in Texas between 1916 and 1918, but this mode of working began in the summer of 1916 before she arrived in Texas.

¹⁰⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, February 1916, Giboire, ed., *Lovingly, Georgia*, 145.

¹⁰⁷ Staunton, Virginia, is about fifty miles west of the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville.

¹⁰⁸ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, July 1916, Wednesday, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 164. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁰⁹ Fellow University of Maryland graduate student Elizabeth MacKenzie Tobey and I climbed Elliott Knob on May 8, 2004. For the height of Elliott Knob see United States Geological Survey, “Feature Name: Elliott Knob,” *National Mapping Information*, <http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnis> (accessed March 15, 2004).

¹¹⁰ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, July 27, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 154. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹¹¹ O’Keeffe said “Katherine [Lumpkin] was in Ashville and she and I went up to Weaversville [probably Weaverville, North Carolina, just north of Ashville] and from there up to Beach [possibly Beech Glen, North Carolina, just north of Weaverville] – and from there to the end of the road.” O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 180. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹¹² O’Keeffe to Macmahon, before September 7, 1916, (family of Arthur W. Macmahon, Estate of Georgia O’Keeffe), quoted in Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 157. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹¹³ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 71.

¹¹⁴ O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 3.

¹¹⁵ Kuh, *The Artist’s Voice*, 199.

¹¹⁶ O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 3.

¹¹⁷ It is not clear when O’Keeffe first applied the title *Abstraction* to this work. The title *Abstraction* is in the information for this work in the O’Keeffe artist files of the Whitney Museum of American Art Library and the title *Abstraction IX* is on a fragment of the original backing in the files of the Museum of Modern Art, on a label from the First Municipal Art Exhibition, held at Rockefeller Center in 1934. See Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:73.

¹¹⁸ Picasso’s *Standing Female Nude* was reproduced in *Camera Work* No. 36 of October 1911, a Special Number of August 1912, and a Special Number of June 1913. O’Keeffe particularly admired this drawing. She had written to Pollitzer about a past issue of *Camera Work*, “I can’t begin to tell you how much I have enjoyed that *Camera Work* – It surprised me so much – and you know how much I love what is inside of it – that Picasso Drawing is wonderful music isn’t it - Anita.

I like it so much that I am almost jealous of other people even looking at it – and I love the Gertrude Stein portrait [a word portrait of Picasso included in the August 1913 *Camera Work*].” O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 4, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 118. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹¹⁹ Frederick C. Moffatt, “Composition,” in *Arthur Wesley Dow: His Art and His Influence*, 39-43.

¹²⁰ Berlin Photographic Company, *Exhibition of Original Block Prints and Wood Engravings Exhibited at the Berlin Photographic Company, May 1 to May 31, 1916* (New York: Berlin Photographic Company, 1916).

¹²¹ Janet Altic Flint, *Provincetown Printers: a Woodcut Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Museum of American Art by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 16. Bram Dijkstra suggests that O’Keeffe’s watercolors appear to have been influenced by Provincetown woodcuts, but he does not

mention how the artist could have known the works. Dijkstra, *O'Keeffe and the Eros of Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 175-176.

¹²² The Provincetown printmakers included Edna Boies Hopkins, who had studied printmaking with Dow at the Pratt Institute in 1899, and taught his methods to other artists in the group. Flint, *Provincetown Printers*, 10, 15. O'Keeffe would certainly have understood the harmony between Dow's approach to printmaking and that of the Provincetown printmakers. Dow may possibly have mentioned the Provincetown artists to his students.

¹²³ Judith C. Walsh, "Observations on the Watercolor Techniques of Homer and Sargent," in *American Traditions in Watercolor: The Worcester Art Museum Collection* (Worcester, MA, and New York: Worcester Art Museum and Abbeville Press, Publishers, 1987), 54.

¹²⁴ "I am lost you know." O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 66. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹²⁵ Walsh, "The Language of O'Keeffe's Materials," in *O'Keeffe on Paper*, 64-65. Walsh notes further that "The term 'cartridge' originally described a paper that would burn without ash and could therefore be used to wrap powder for loading firearms. By the mid-nineteenth century, the term referred to a sheet of good, but not the best, quality. When O'Keeffe used it, the paper sold under the name 'drawing cartridge,' was machine-made, and contained some lesser fiber, in this case esparto, in addition to cotton or linen rag paper." *Ibid*, n. 25, p. 79.

¹²⁶ The technical analysis of O'Keeffe's technique is from Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003.

¹²⁷ Since O'Keeffe's original collection of *Camera Work* is no longer preserved in her library, it is impossible to know which issues she owned when except when she makes a specific statement about it in her surviving correspondence. O'Keeffe mentioned that Stieglitz sent her five issues of *Camera Work*, but did not say which issues they were. O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 159. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹²⁸ Georgia O'Keeffe quoted in Peters, *Becoming O'Keeffe*, 8.

¹²⁹ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:69-70, 76-80.

¹³⁰ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 198. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹³¹ Walsh, "The Language of O'Keeffe's Materials," in *O'Keeffe on Paper*, 65.

¹³² Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:82-83.

¹³³ O'Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 4.

¹³⁴ Analysis of O'Keeffe's watercolor technique from Dale Kronkright, Conservator, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, in discussion with author, February 26, 2003.

¹³⁵ Stieglitz to Rapp [Boursault,] August 26, 1916, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹³⁶ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 174-175. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹³⁷ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, July 27, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe Art and Letters*, 155. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹³⁸ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 93-94; Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 157. I agree with Barbara Buhler Lynes, who chose for a variety of reasons not to include in the *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* the so-called “Canyon Suite” of watercolors supposedly made by Georgia O’Keeffe when she was working in Canyon, Texas. These works debuted as having been made by Georgia O’Keeffe in Barbara J. Bloemink, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Canyon Suite* (New York: George Braziller in association with Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Design of Kansas City Art Institute, 1995). For the history of how the works were discovered and later discredited, see Ellen Berkovitch, “The Peters Principals: A Closer Look at Gerald and Georgia,” *Pasttempo, The Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 14-20, 2000, 40-50; Steve Paul and Mike McGraw, “The Selling of the Canyon Suite,” *The Kansas City Star*, January 14, 2001.

¹³⁹ Lynes, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 90, 103.

¹⁴⁰ “I am mailing a Vanity Fair which Dorothy mailed to me & asked me to send to you, for her. She wondered if you had seen the design out on the plains.” Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, November 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 214.

¹⁴¹ O’Keeffe’s association with *Vanity Fair* later proved useful for her fine art career. Twice the magazine included promoting O’Keeffe as an important woman artist. See “The Female of the Species Achieves a New Deadliness: Women Painters of America Whose Work Exhibits Distinctiveness of Style and Marked Individuality,” *Vanity Fair* 18 (1922): 50 and “We Nominate for the Hall of Fame,” *Vanity Fair* 22 (1924): 49.

¹⁴² Dijkstra, *O’Keeffe and the Eros of Place*, 109-121.

¹⁴³ Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 160-161.

¹⁴⁴ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plates 5 and 6; Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 161.

¹⁴⁵ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, September 4, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe Art and Letters*, 156. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁴⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, November 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 216. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁴⁷ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, September 4, 1916, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 155. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁴⁸ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 95-97; Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 159-161, 171-172.

¹⁴⁹ Vivian Robinson, “Artist’s Journey to the Top Began at West Texas,” *Amarillo Globe-Times*, August 27, 1965.

¹⁵⁰ O’Keeffe’s reading included Ibsen, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, books by Friedrich Nietzsche, and Goethe’s *Faust*, which Stieglitz had sent her. She also subscribed to the feminist publication *The Forerunner* and Arthur Macmahon gave her a subscription to *The New Republic*. Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 165-169.

¹⁵¹ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, January 1917, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 238. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. Sarah Greenough believes that the book by Caffin O’Keeffe referred to in this letter was probably *Art for Life’s Sake: An Application of the Principles of Art to the Ideals and Conduct of Individual and Collective Life* (New York: The Prang Company, 1913). Sarah Greenough, selected and annotated, “Letters,” Coward and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, p. 276, n. on letter 16.

The writing by De Zayas to which O’Keeffe referred was probably Marius de Zayas and Paul B. Haviland, *A Study of the Modern Evolution of Plastic Expression* (New York: 291, 1913).

¹⁵² Bulletin of the West Texas State Normal College, 1916-1917 (Canyon, Texas: West Texas State Normal College, May 1916), 29, 34-35.

¹⁵³ O’Keeffe quoted in Tomkins, “Rose in the Eye,” 42.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 43.

¹⁵⁵ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 10.

¹⁵⁶ Walsh in discussion with the author, December 30, 2003.

¹⁵⁷ The British critic Clive Bell found that “lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call ‘Significant Form.’” Clive Bell, *Art*, new ed. (New York: Frederick A Stokes Company, Publishers, 1923), 8.

The American Willard Huntington Wright, whom O’Keeffe preferred to Bell, had similar ideas on the subject and on occasion used Bell’s phrase “Significant Form.” For example, “Significant form must move in depth – backward and forward, as well as from side to side.” Willard Huntington Wright, *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (New York: John Lane Company, 1915), 93. On Bell and Wright O’Keeffe wrote to Pollitzer that she had “been reading Wright’s ‘Creative Will’ – Have you got it? If you haven’t I want to give it to you – It has been great to me – that’s why I want to give it to you – It wouldn’t be any fun to give you some thing I only half way liked myself – he gets me so excited that sometimes I think I must be crazy.

Have been reading Clive Bell again too.

He seems so stupid beside Wright – Bell reminds me of Bement – only he has a little more ‘pep.’”

O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, December 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 226-227. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁵⁸ Bell, *Art*, 220. Both Bell and Wright equally dismissed the importance of accurate representative details.

¹⁵⁹ Wright, *Modern Painting*, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 249.

¹⁶¹ *O’Keeffe*, VHS, Adato.

¹⁶² The distinctively decorated roof line O’Keeffe depicted in *Roof with Snow* was probably that of the L. G. Conner residence which still stood in Canyon, Texas, when I visited it in March, 2003. For the identity of the house, see Fred Stoker, *Georgia O’Keeffe in Canyon* (Canyon, Texas: Fred Stoker, 1990), 37.

¹⁶³ O’Keeffe made an additional watercolor of this same roof that is now known only through a photograph; however it does not show snow on the roof. Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1100.

¹⁶⁴ Bell, *Art*, 233.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 211.

¹⁶⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 11, 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 183-184. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁶⁷ “O’Keeffe also exercised control over her work in watercolor by deciding to use a consistent format. Most of her watercolors from the teens measure about 9 by 12 inches.” Walsh, “The Language of O’Keeffe’s Materials,” *O’Keeffe on Paper*, 66.

¹⁶⁸ *O’Keeffe*, VHS, Adato.

¹⁶⁹ Judith Zilczer, “Light Coming on the Plains: Georgia O’Keeffe’s Sunrise Series,” *Artibus et Historiae* XX, no. 40 (1999), 194-195.

¹⁷⁰ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 101-102.

¹⁷¹ *O’Keeffe*, VHS, Adato.

¹⁷² Walsh, “The Language of O’Keeffe’s Materials,” *O’Keeffe on Paper*, 67.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 66.

¹⁷⁴ Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 161.

¹⁷⁵ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, September 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 186. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 207. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷⁷ O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 5. Roxanna Robinson points out that O’Keeffe exaggerated the loneliness and isolation of Palo Duro Canyon. “It was a popular place to climb and picnic: there was a Palo Duro Club in the early years of the century, and a train from Amarillo went out there three times a week.” A student of O’Keeffe’s recalled visiting the canyon often. Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 161-162.

¹⁷⁸ Udall speculates on the root identity of these small forms “Here, the bulbous forms descended from her charcoal Specials take on new identities as clouds and a great tumbling flow of circular shapes in the lower portion. Were those shapes inspired by shrubs, or tumbling water, or tiny cattle trailing along the canyon bottom? We can’t know for certain; O’Keeffe’s passages from mind-forms to landscape forms flow in both directions, teaching us to relax such inquiries into an appreciation of her inventiveness, not her literalness.” Udall, *O’Keeffe and Texas*, 25-26. Having visited the canyon myself in March 2003, the relative proportions of the small forms and the large forms lead me to believe that the small round forms must be derived from trees and bushes rooted in the landscape rather than water or cattle moving through it.

¹⁷⁹ O’Keeffe, *Memories of Drawings*, commentary with plate 7.

¹⁸⁰ “In co-relation to this Child Exhibition [of Georgia S. Engelhard’s work which opened on November 22, 1916], hung in the main gallery, a representative group of paintings and drawings by Hartley, Marin, Walkowitz, Wright, Georgia O’Keeffe, was hung in the inner room.” Alfred Stieglitz, “Exhibitions at ‘291,’ – Season 1916-1917,” *Camera Work* 49-50 (June 1917), 33.

¹⁸¹ Sarah Greenough mentions this little exhibition as one of the three in which “Stieglitz introduced Georgia O’Keeffe to the artistic community at 291.” Greenough, “Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Mid-Wife to a Thousand Ideas,” *Modern Art and America*, 52.

¹⁸² In June 1917, O’Keeffe, after spending a few days in New York, wrote to Pollitzer how excited she was to have seen a new painting by MacDonald-Wright and to have met the artist. O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 20, 1917, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 254-255. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. For the MacDonald-Wright show at 291 see “Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz, *Modern Art and America*, 547.

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- ¹⁸³ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, December 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 222.
- ¹⁸⁴ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, October 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 207. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁸⁵ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, 1917, *A Woman on Paper*, 143. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁸⁶ O’Keeffe to Pollitzer, December 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 226. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹⁸⁷ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:54, 2:1150.
- ¹⁸⁸ Gail Stavitsky, “John Weichsel and the People’s Art Guild,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 31, no. 4 (1991): 12-19.
- ¹⁸⁹ *The People’s Art Guild: Modern Art Exhibition at the Parish House of the Church of the Ascension* (New York: People’s Art Guild, 1917), 5-6.
- ¹⁹⁰ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, February 19, 1917, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 243.
- ¹⁹¹ *People’s Art Guild*, 7.
- ¹⁹² Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, February 1917 and February 10, 1917, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 241-243.
- ¹⁹³ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:54, 59.
- ¹⁹⁴ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2:1143.
- ¹⁹⁵ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:62. Lynes identifies twenty-three works in the exhibition based upon Stieglitz’s exhibition photographs, but I think that she identifies two views of the same work, *Inside the Tent While at U. of Virginia*, oil on canvas, in separate photographs as two different works. Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2:1110-1111. The *American Art News* review of the exhibition says that “There are 21 pictures in this exhibit,” not mentioning the lone sculpture. “Another ‘Futurist;’ at the Photo-Secession,” *American Art News* 15, no. 26 (1917): 2.
- ¹⁹⁶ Henry Tyrrell, “New York Art Exhibition and Gallery Notes: Esoteric Art at ‘291,’” *The Christian Science Monitor* (4 May 1917), 10. Reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #3, p. 167-168.
- ¹⁹⁷ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:86.
- ¹⁹⁸ The announcement is reproduced in “Appendix III,” in Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2: 1109.
- ¹⁹⁹ Henry Tyrrell, “New York Art Exhibition and Gallery Notes: Esoteric Art at ‘291,’” *The Christian Science Monitor* (4 May 1917), 10. Reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #3, p. 167-168.
- ²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 168.
- ²⁰¹ Stieglitz, “Georgia O’Keeffe - C. Duncan - René Lafferty,” *Camera Work*, no. 48 (October 1916): 12-13; reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166.

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- ²⁰² Henry Tyrrell, "New York Art Exhibition and Gallery Notes: Esoteric Art at '291,'" *The Christian Science Monitor* (4 May 1917), 10. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #3, p. 168.
- ²⁰³ William C. Young, *Famous Actors and Actresses of the American Stage: Documents of American Theater History* (New York and London: R. R. Bowker Company, 1975), 1:7.
- ²⁰⁴ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 17.
- ²⁰⁵ Henry Tyrrell, "New York Art Exhibition and Gallery Notes: Esoteric Art at '291,'" *The Christian Science Monitor* (4 May 1917), 10. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #3, p. 168. Tyrrell may have mis-heard the title of the work as *Two Lives*, or Stieglitz may have altered the title while speaking to the critic, since no titles were given on the walls or checklist.
- ²⁰⁶ Stieglitz quoted in F. S. C. Northrup, *The Meeting of East and West: an Inquiry Concerning World Understanding* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 163.
- ²⁰⁷ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 61.
- ²⁰⁸ Stieglitz letter to Stanton Macdonald-Wright, October 11, 1919, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation . For a fuller quotation, see the first page of my chapter 1.
- ²⁰⁹ Stieglitz paraphrased and quoted by Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 2.
- ²¹⁰ Lynes, "Inventions of Different Orders," in *O'Keeffe: On Paper*, 44.
- ²¹¹ Alfred Stieglitz, "Woman in Art," in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: American Seer*, 137.
- ²¹² William Murrell Fisher, "The Georgia O'Keeffe Drawings and Paintings at '291,'" *Camera Work*, nos. 49-50 (June 1917): 5; reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 169.
- ²¹³ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 17.
- ²¹⁴ Fisher, "Georgia O'Keeffe Drawings and Paintings," 169-170.
- ²¹⁵ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 173-174; Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 12-13.
- ²¹⁶ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, commentary with plate 10.
- ²¹⁷ Quoted in Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 13.
- ²¹⁸ O'Keeffe, *O'Keeffe*, commentary with plate 11.
- ²¹⁹ Alfred Stieglitz to Mitchell Kennerly, May 1917, New York Public Library, quoted in Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 385. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ²²⁰ O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 20, 1917, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 254-255. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ²²¹ Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 106.
- ²²² O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, June 20, 1917, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 256. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait*.

²²⁵ Stieglitz to Marie Rapp [Boursault], September 12, 1917, Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²²⁶ This sketchbook is stamped “Adrian Brugger, München,” so it may have been a gift from Stieglitz, who had been to Munich when he was studying in Germany in the 1880s. For Stieglitz’s visit to Munich in 1887 at the beginning of a photography trip, see Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 83. Perhaps only a sentimental association with Stieglitz would recommend O’Keeffe’s use of this roughly textured paper that was so different from the smooth cartridge paper she usually favored for watercolors at this time.

²²⁷ Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O’Keeffe: American and Modern* (New Haven, CN and London: Yale University Press in association with InterCultura Fort Worth and the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, 1993), 167.

²²⁸ Stieglitz to Rapp, September 12, 1917, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²²⁹ Stieglitz to Rapp, September 10, 1917, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²³⁰ O’Keeffe to Paul Strand, September 12, 1917, Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, Estate of Georgia O’Keeffe, quoted in Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life*, 190. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

²³¹ Sheila Tryk, “O’Keeffe: ‘My Time . . . My World’,” *New Mexico* (1973): 19.

²³² Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1: 112-113. For Watson, see Sarah Greenough, ed., “Letters,” in *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, p. 285, n. 69.

²³³ Lisa Mintz Messenger suggests that O’Keeffe may have been thinking of such works when she said, “There are people who have made me see shapes – and others I thought of a great deal, even people I have loved, who make me see nothing. I have painted portraits that to me are almost photographic. I remember hesitating to show the paintings, they looked so real to me. But they have passed into the world as abstractions – no one seeing what they are.” O’Keeffe, *O’Keeffe*, commentary with plate 55. Lisa Mintz Messenger, *Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 36-37. I believe, however, that O’Keeffe must have been referring to other works that were never titled as portraits.

²³⁴ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 59.

²³⁵ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 60, and p. 302 note 56.

²³⁶ Lisle writes that at the Art Students League, “The portrait students often used to ask striking Patsy O’Keeffe to pose for them.” Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 45. A portrait of O’Keeffe by Eugene Speicher is in the collection of the Art Students League.

²³⁷ Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe*, 109; Barbara Rose, “O’Keeffe’s Originality,” in *The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum* (New York and Santa Fe: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, in association with The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, 1997), 102; Messenger, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 37.

²³⁸ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:106.

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- ²³⁹ O’Keeffe, introduction to *O’Keeffe: A Portrait*.
- ²⁴⁰ Carol Duncan, “Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting,” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 302.
- ²⁴¹ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 60.
- ²⁴² The connection of these nudes to Rodin is discussed by Wagner, *Three Artists*, 58; Messinger, *O’Keeffe*, 37; and Peters, *Becoming O’Keeffe*, 110, among others.
- ²⁴³ Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 191.
- ²⁴⁴ O’Keeffe to Elizabeth Stieglitz Davidson, January 1918, Cowart and Hamilton, *O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, 166-167. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ²⁴⁵ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 110.
- ²⁴⁶ O’Keeffe to Anna Barringer, December 1917, Barringer Family Papers (#9431-a), Manuscripts Divisions, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library (Estate of Georgia O’Keeffe); quoted in Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 191-192. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ²⁴⁷ Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 193-194.
- ²⁴⁸ O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, April 19, 1918, *A Woman on Paper*, 159. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ²⁴⁹ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, March 31, 1918, *A Woman on Paper*, 159. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ²⁵⁰ *A Woman on Paper*, 159.
- ²⁵¹ Bram Dijkstra also notes this striking formal connection. Dijkstra, *O’Keeffe and the Eros of Place*, 175-176.
- ²⁵² Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Strand, possibly a draft, May 17, 1918, quoted in Robinson, *O’Keeffe: A Life*, 199.
- ²⁵³ O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait*.
- ²⁵⁴ Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 397.
- ²⁵⁵ Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Strand, May 27, 1918, Center for Creative Photography, quoted in Whelan, *Stieglitz*, 397. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

Chapter Five: O’Keeffe’s Drawings and Watercolors in Photographs and Words

O’Keeffe’s Return to New York in 1918

Strand had been in Texas for a month trying to convince O’Keeffe to return east before she relented in June 1918 and took a train with him to New York. O’Keeffe’s move from the open plains of Texas to the urban center of American modernism was decisive in transforming both her life and her art. With Stieglitz’s help, she was able to leave teaching behind and devote herself to making art. At this same juncture, O’Keeffe made the transition from the graphic media she had previously favored to the oil painting that would dominate the remainder of her career. It was, I am sure, far from coincidental that O’Keeffe’s alteration in medium occurred while other important changes in her life were underway. As I have asserted throughout this dissertation, an artist’s choices of media often respond to practical and emotional as well as aesthetic considerations.

For Stieglitz as well, O’Keeffe’s return to New York was a moment of transformation. He left his unhappy marriage to move in with this young artist who became a central presence in his life and art. O’Keeffe’s female sexuality became a powerful theme in Stieglitz’s verbal, written, and visual expressions. But the subject of O’Keeffe’s gender did not distract him from her graphic media. Indeed, as I discussed in previous chapters and will explore further in this chapter, I see these two aspects of Stieglitz’s understanding of O’Keeffe as interrelated. O’Keeffe’s 1915 charcoals and his stories about them remained presences in Stieglitz’s galleries for decades as he discussed with visitors the artist’s identity as a woman.

But all of this lay in the future when, in June 1918, Stieglitz met O’Keeffe and Strand at the train station in New York. Exhausted by the trip and still feverish, O’Keeffe stayed in Elizabeth Stieglitz’s Manhattan studio where Stieglitz nursed her. He excluded Strand from the studio, pleading that visitors would exhaust the patient.¹ Stieglitz and O’Keeffe, who had corresponded avidly during the preceding months, now communed ardently in person. Soon after his protégé’s arrival, Stieglitz wrote to Arthur Dove,

These last 10 days have been very full ones – possibly the fullest I have had in my life. . . . Of course the important thing during the last 10 days has been O’Keeffe. – She is much more extraordinary than even I had believed. – In fact I don’t believe there ever has been anything like her. – Mind & feeling very clear – spontaneous - & uncannily beautiful – absolutely living every pulse-beat.-
She has to be very careful - & is in bed much. – And I’m a strict nurse.²

The woman whose character Stieglitz had felt so strongly on paper now became an immediate presence in his life. He wrote to his niece Elizabeth, “We have talked over practically everything. . . Into one week we have compressed years.”³

Stieglitz Begins Photographing O’Keeffe

Stieglitz’s fascination with O’Keeffe quickly found a visual outlet. He began photographing her obsessively, and soon she was posing for him partially or fully nude (Fig. 5.1). Among the multitude of images he produced, there were many in which he paired the artist with her works (Figs. 5.8, 5.9-10, 5.18, 5.22-5.34, 5.39). These images expanded the vision Stieglitz had begun to articulate in his 1917 photographs of O’Keeffe posed with her watercolor *Blue I* (Figs. 5.2-4).

In July 1918, Stieglitz was photographing O’Keeffe at his home in Manhattan when his wife Emmeline returned unexpectedly and found the two together. Mrs. Stieglitz ordered her husband to stop seeing O’Keeffe or leave the house. He promptly packed up his belongings and moved into his niece’s apartment with O’Keeffe.⁴ At first,

O’Keeffe hung a blanket over a clothesline to separate their beds.⁵ But during these days alone together in the Manhattan apartment biographers assume that Stieglitz and O’Keeffe become lovers.⁶ The sexual relationship between the two was a potent force in the photographs Stieglitz made of O’Keeffe.

O’Keeffe recalled that after her 1918 arrival in New York, “I was photographed [by Stieglitz] with a kind of heat and excitement and in a way wondered what it was all about.”⁷ What was it all about? Stieglitz’s photography of O’Keeffe was the realization of his long-held artistic conception of a complete portrait of a person achieved as a composite of many images. As O’Keeffe defined it, “His idea of a portrait was not just one picture. His dream was to start with a child at birth and photograph that child in all of its activities as it grew to be a person and on throughout its adult life. As a portrait it would be a photographic diary.”⁸ Stieglitz had first attempted such a project with his daughter Kitty as subject, starting soon after her birth. Emmeline Stieglitz eventually objected on the grounds that her husband’s incessant photographing made their daughter self-conscious (Fig. 5.5).⁹ As Doris Bry described Stieglitz’s task in portraying O’Keeffe, “The true portrait had to be many prints, including all possible phases of the person, which together would convey more than the same pictures seen singly. Hands, feet, torsos, love, hate, tones, lines, every possible experience and feeling – taken over the years – all belonged.”¹⁰

In O’Keeffe, Stieglitz found not only a willing subject but an attractive fellow artist. Although he could not photograph O’Keeffe beginning in her actual childhood since she was already thirty years old, he expressed his view of her in a letter to Dove, “O’Keeffe is truly magnificent. And a child at that.”¹¹ Stieglitz may have felt that he

was witnessing the rapid maturation of O’Keeffe’s artistic powers from a state like childhood. As discussed in the previous chapter, Stieglitz did not intend his labeling O’Keeffe a child as an insult to the artist; in fact, it was quite the reverse. He placed a high value on the creative directness and honesty of childhood and even showed drawings by children at 291.¹² Such statements by Stieglitz, however, demonstrate his assumption of the senior, dominant role in the relationship.

On another level, Stieglitz used the words “woman” and “child” in letters to O’Keeffe (and presumably in conversations with and about her) to voice the ideas about the creativity of women that he spelled out in his 1919 essay “Woman in Art.” Stieglitz said in this essay that men and women were fundamentally different in how they perceived the world and how they expressed these perceptions. As previously quoted, Stieglitz stated that, “The Woman receives the World through her Womb – That is the seat of her deepest feeling. Mind comes second.”¹³ Women who wanted to make art had always been taught by men, but what male artists had to teach was useless to the women because of the fundamental differences between their natures and thus between their proper modes of making art. Women in earlier times had been able to create only by bearing children. But in his own, in O’Keeffe’s time, Stieglitz perceived, “The Social Order is changing. Woman is still Woman – but not so entirely *His* [Man’s] Woman. The potential Child brings about its equivalent in other forms. It may be in Color & Line – Form – Painting. A need. Woman finding an outlet – *Herself* – *Her* Vision of the World – intimately related to man’s – nearly identical – yet different.”¹⁴ That is, Stieglitz equated the creative power and potential of the woman with the child she would have produced had she given birth to a human being rather than to art.

Before the modern era, Stieglitz said that woman had been too afraid “to throw off the male shackles” and to produce art that was really her own. In, O’Keeffe’s art, Stieglitz felt, “we have the Woman unafraid – the child finally actually producing Art!”¹⁵ I believe that Stieglitz used the word “child” in relation to O’Keeffe to indicate her creative power – the unconscious force that brought about her creations. That is, it was not so much that he thought of O’Keeffe herself was child-like as that he equated her creative output with giving birth to a child. He wrote to her while she was in Texas asking her what she had been “full of – The Great Child pouring out some more of her Woman self on paper – purely – truly – unspoiled.”¹⁶ He appears to have seen O’Keeffe the woman artist as a conduit for the child-creative-force that needed to come into the world through her. If the artist was able to create as she should, the essences of artist and of art would be the same. Since O’Keeffe’s art was part and parcel of O’Keeffe, as the first truly successful artist in Stieglitz’s experience she embodied both creative woman and woman’s creation – both mother and child. In Stieglitz’s eyes, O’Keeffe was the child-self of all women’s art.

Stieglitz, in both physically loving O’Keeffe and in photographing her, examined what it meant for this woman to embody female creativity. Stieglitz is said to have stated, “Each time I make a photograph, I make love.”¹⁷ As a fellow artist and a promoter of art, and as a man, he was drawn to O’Keeffe and to her art. He seemed to feel a need to join with both the woman and her creation in physical love and in visual art. Literally, he apparently felt, female creativity was present in the world through this particular body and this particular body of art. To cope with this concept, his photographs (and his life with O’Keeffe) had to blend exploration of O’Keeffe’s

character, body, and art. Following Stieglitz's ideas, I think that in his images of the artist with her art he showed how he felt the process of creation worked. He portrayed the artist's body acting as a conduit between pure creative energy and the paper where it was translated into physical form. Therefore I see Stieglitz in these photographs making visible his feelings about medium – the physical means of artist expression.

While a number of O'Keeffe's oil paintings were available for Stieglitz's use in his photographs, he chose instead to depict the artist with her drawings. In fact, in the years to come, he rarely photographed O'Keeffe with her oil paintings and never in so intimate a fashion as he had with her drawings and watercolors (Fig. 5.6). Most of the pictures Stieglitz did make of O'Keeffe with paintings are little more than documentary images of her working with canvases (Fig. 5.7). The only other images Stieglitz made of O'Keeffe in close contact with her own works of art show her grasping or touching her small sculpture *Abstraction*, whose generalized figural form the photographer obviously saw as phallic (Fig. 5.8). The number and intensity of Stieglitz's images of O'Keeffe with her own drawings and watercolors far exceed any other group of photographs he made of the artist with art work. As I demonstrated in the first chapter, Stieglitz assumed a modernist version of the traditional connoisseur's approach to drawings as the most direct and personally revealing of art works. The graphic medium embodied the place where the spirit met the physical. Stieglitz would make this symbolic revelation literal in his photographs of the artist, particularly the undraped artist, with her drawings.

O'Keeffe could easily have seen these photographs of herself with her art quite differently than did the photographer. The artist dismissed lofty idealizations of herself as primal woman creator. For instance, O'Keeffe wrote to a friend commenting that she

wanted to “snort” (presumably with laughter, but possibly with annoyance) about a *Vanity Fair* page on women artists that said of O’Keeffe, “Her work was undistinguished until she abandoned academic realism and discovered her own feminine self. Her more recent paintings seem to be a revelation of the very essence of woman as Life Giver.” The article’s, “only redeeming feature,” O’Keeffe opined, was “the line at the bottom of it.” This line subtitled the magazine feature, “Women Painters of America Whose Work Exhibits Distinctiveness of Style and Marked Individuality.”¹⁸ Evidently O’Keeffe most valued individuality. During her long career, she resisted any exhibition or publication that pushed her into the category of “woman artist.” As Barbara Lynes demonstrates, it was not that the artist denied the importance of being female, but she wanted to speak for herself as an individual rather than as simply a representative of her gender.¹⁹ As she told an interviewer near the end of her life, “I have always been very annoyed at being referred to as a ‘woman artist’ rather than an ‘artist.’”²⁰

While Stieglitz remained deeply excited by O’Keeffe’s existing drawings and watercolors and how he could use them in his photographs, during this period the artist’s own thoughts were apparently directed away from the past and toward the new art she was making and the changes in her personal and professional life. O’Keeffe recalled,

When I knew I was going to stay in New York, I sent for things I had left in Texas. They came in a barrel and among them were all my old drawings and paintings. I put them in with the wastepaper trash to throw away and that night when Stieglitz and I came home after dark the paintings and drawings were blowing all over the street. We left them there and went in. But I remember a large watercolor of many hollyhocks sticking out of a big wastecan.²¹

The works O’Keeffe had previously sent to Stieglitz, those she considered her best efforts, survived in his collection, but the artist discarded many of her lesser works made since 1914. O’Keeffe carefully edited her oeuvre, but outside of her general statements

like the quote above it is difficult to say at what point she destroyed or discarded any particular work or body of works.²² In the middle of 1918, as she focused her gaze on the future, Stieglitz managed to convince her to pose with works he had already shown. She might well have found this a tiresome exercise had the photographer not been her mentor, her lover, and an artist she deeply admired. She may have found his ideas about her art exciting, but long minutes holding still in awkward poses could easily try the patience of even a highly motivated model.

The Question of Relative Power in Stieglitz's Photographs of O'Keeffe

Art historians have debated to what extent Stieglitz coaxed or demanded that O'Keeffe pose for his camera - whether she merely acceded to his wishes or asserted her own ideas for the compositions. For my project, the key concern is to determine how Stieglitz and O'Keeffe each shaped those images that included or commented upon drawings or watercolors.

O'Keeffe herself insisted that Stieglitz was the principle driver of the composite portrait project. When asked if posing for Stieglitz was something she wanted to do, she answered, "It was something *he* wanted to do."²³ She described the photographic sessions as completely under Stieglitz's control,

He wanted head and hands and arms on a pillow – in many different positions. I was asked to move my hands in many different ways – also my head – and I had to turn this way and that. There were nudes that might have been of several different people – sitting – standing – even standing upon the radiator against the window – that was difficult – radiators don't intend you to stand on top of them. There were large heads – profiles and what not. . . . For those slower glass negatives I would have to be still for three or four minutes. That is hard – you blink when you shouldn't – your mouth twitches – your ear itches or some other spot itches. Your arms and hands get tired, and you can't stay still. I was often spoiling a photograph because I couldn't help moving – and a great deal of fuss was made about it (Fig. 5.1).

O’Keeffe concluded that Stieglitz, in this photographic project as well as all of his others, “was always photographing himself.”²⁴

Yet O’Keeffe did not deny her engagement with the project. She found the results of the photographic process self-revelatory, recalling that in “Stieglitz’s photographs . . . I was always amazed to find out what I looked like. You see, I’d never known what I looked like or thought about it much. I was amazed to find my face was lean and structured. I’d always thought it was round.”²⁵ O’Keeffe also stated how impressed she was by the photographer’s mastery of his art, “Stieglitz had a very sharp eye for what he wanted to say with the camera. . . . For me he was much more wonderful in his work than as a human being. I believe it was the work that kept me with him – though I loved him as a human being.”²⁶ The sheer quality of the photographs she saw being produced of herself was a force that helped to keep O’Keeffe involved in the enterprise. The love between photographer and model, growing rapidly in 1918, also gave Stieglitz the power to keep O’Keeffe involved with his portraiture even as she returned to making her own art. Stieglitz wrote to Dove that at this time he was “photographing much - & wonderfully at moments.” But he was not the only one producing art in the little household – he also noted that, “O’Keeffe is working.”²⁷

Is it accurate to see these photographs as part of O’Keeffe’s oeuvre as well as Stieglitz’s, as Janet Malcolm noted had been the case in the past?²⁸ Were these photographs a “lover’s dialogue between equals” as Sarah Whitaker Peters suggests?²⁹ Sanford Schwartz has posited that O’Keeffe controlled her images in these works to thwart Stieglitz’s attempts to probe her emotional interior. Stieglitz, says Schwartz, got from his model only “a performance” from “the one great actress of still photography.”³⁰

In this view, O’Keeffe enacted characters of her own devising while Stieglitz simply documented them. Sarah Greenough replies that,

To me, that is utterly preposterous, an absurd notion. No one would claim that Rembrandt’s portraits of Saskia are Saskia’s understanding of who she was; they are Rembrandt’s interpretation. O’Keeffe was clearly a willing participant in all of this, but it’s Stieglitz’s view of her. Stieglitz decided when to photograph, what to photograph – not O’Keeffe. She could provide the stimulus, and the hints. But when you see pictures of O’Keeffe by other people, you see a totally different person than in Stieglitz’s pictures.

Greenough goes on to explain that in 1918, “O’Keeffe was thirty-one years old and Stieglitz was fifty-four. He was the world’s most famous photographer, certainly the most important person in the New York art world. . . . She was enamored of him. They were deeply in love.”³¹

Lynes establishes that contemporary viewers who knew both subject and photographer read these photographs as sexually charged statements of Stieglitz’s love for O’Keeffe and as a more general examination of love itself.”³² Such contemporaries saw these images as very much Stieglitz’s project about, but not by, O’Keeffe. Stieglitz’s friend Hutchings Hapgood found Stieglitz,

full of love in the sense that he attributes great value to the object of his interest. For example, the scores of photographs of O’Keeffe reveal a love that is poignant in the extreme – or an appreciation that is the same thing objectively expressed. On one occasion I was with a young woman who, after she had been looking at these photographs for some time, began to weep. And when I asked her why, she said, “He loves her so.”³³

It must have been mostly in response to the first public exhibition of Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe included in his 1921 show at Anderson Galleries,³⁴ that critic Waldo Frank wrote, “By talk, atmosphere and the momentum of a personal relationship, Stieglitz lifts the features and body of his subject into a unitary design that his plate

records. His work in thus *moulding* material is analogous to the work of any good portraitist, who does his moulding in his eye and with his hand on canvas.”³⁵

It was not a mere lay figure that Stieglitz “moulded” in his photographs of O’Keeffe, however. When any human being gazes at another, as here Stieglitz gazed at O’Keeffe through the camera lens, Margaret Olin states that, “There is a struggle over the gaze: one gets to look, to be master of the gaze; the other (the Other) is looked at.”³⁶ Certainly O’Keeffe contested Stieglitz’s gaze at times, creating a situation more subtle than merely a master and a subject. As Anne Wagner observes, O’Keeffe’s entire relationship with Stieglitz, including these photographs, was not mere exploitation of the woman by the man. O’Keeffe as well as Stieglitz “stood to gain from it” both personally and professionally.³⁷ I see O’Keeffe in these photographs as performing like a dancer executing steps choreographed and directed by another. Stieglitz acted as director, framing the poses, but in her interpretation of the direction given her, O’Keeffe had a place in the presentation of herself and her art. It is not only Stieglitz’s choice of art and pose that gives one 1918 photograph of O’Keeffe with a charcoal of Palo Duro Canyon its power – it is the distant but focused eyes of the artist-model (Fig. 5.9). By contrast, in another photograph of the same model with a different work of art, O’Keeffe’s bored face and the lack of conviction in her hand gesture undermine the authority of the image (Fig. 5.10). As O’Keeffe had remarked, it was difficult to keep still for the long exposure times Stieglitz often demanded; if the model did not feel strongly motivated by Stieglitz’s idea for the image, she would not be able to maintain concentration.³⁸ This is clear in the resulting photographs.

Anne Wagner asserts of Stieglitz and O’Keeffe’s collaboration in these photographs, “What they most shared, perhaps, was their fascination with the novel complexity – the modern contradictions – of the female subject: O’Keeffe.”³⁹ I also observe how O’Keeffe and Stieglitz became absorbed in one another’s media. I have traced Stieglitz’s long-standing interest in drawing and watercolor in my first chapter, and in the fourth chapter how the appearance of these media in the hands of O’Keeffe enhanced their appeal for him. The chance to study O’Keeffe in company with her drawings elicited from Stieglitz photographs that constitute some of his most profound statements about art, and more specifically about drawing and watercolor.

O’Keeffe had her own history of interest in photography. She had originally become familiar with art photography in *Camera Work*. When she lived with Stieglitz she saw his extensive photography collection. She wrote in 1922, “I feel that some of the photography being done in America today is more living, more vital, than the painting. . . . I have looked with great interest through rafts of photographs done before the war by Steichen, [Adolph] De Meyer, [Alvin Langdon] Coburn, [F.] Holland Day, [Clarence] White, [Heinrich] Kuehn, Frank Eugene, Craig Annan, [Robert] Demachy and many others.”⁴⁰ Photographs by Paul Strand intrigued O’Keeffe, especially during the period when she had a romantic interest in the photographer. She wrote to him, “I believe I’ve even been looking at things and seeing them as though you might photograph them – Isn’t that funny - making Strand photographs for myself in my head.”⁴¹

When she became enamored of Stieglitz and his work, O’Keeffe could see her own creations anew through Stieglitz’s eyes and his medium. As she had written to Pollitzer about the first photographs Stieglitz took of her art in 1916, “Isn’t it funny that I

hate my drawings – and am simply crazy about the photographs of them.”⁴² It was perhaps satisfying for O’Keeffe to see her art translated into the same graphic language that had fired her interest in modernism in the pages of *Camera Work*. Stieglitz, indeed, had planned to feature O’Keeffe in an issue of his journal, and he might have envisioned using some of his 1917 photographs of O’Keeffe with her art in this venture. This project was never completed because Stieglitz stopped publishing the journal in June 1917.⁴³

Stieglitz and Portraiture as Community Building

Even without publishing his images of O’Keeffe and her art in *Camera Work*, Stieglitz used his camera to take O’Keeffe and her drawings and watercolors into the body of his own art, ideas, and community. While 291 had closed, Stieglitz’s circle of artists and other friends continued to gather around him wherever he happened to be living.⁴⁴ He made many portraits of friends, often posed with art (Figs. 5.14, 5.16-17). Sarah Greenough describes how in these photographic portraits, “Stieglitz looked for a union of subject, setting, and formal elements as well as gesture and expression that collectively expressed his understanding of the subject’s personality.”⁴⁵ Relations within the group of artists certainly played an important role in the personalities Stieglitz depicted. O’Keeffe told an interviewer, “Stieglitz liked the idea of a group. He wanted something to come out of America – something really important – and he felt you couldn’t do that alone.”⁴⁶ The varied group of artists, writers, collectors, and other modernists in the Stieglitz circle came to know each other through regular conversations at Stieglitz’s galleries and nearby restaurants.⁴⁷

As Weinberg explains, Stieglitz also worked in other ways to weave together those in his circle, “He encouraged his artists to write about one another, so that an

exhibition of O’Keeffe’s paintings would be accompanied by a Hartley essay, or Strand would write a review of the latest Marin show.” Such writings, working with images such as “the caricatures by Marius De Zayas and Picabia, contributed to the sense of an aesthetic community.”⁴⁸ Demuth, for example, made symbolic portrait posters of O’Keeffe, Marin, and others in the circle (Fig. 5.11).⁴⁹ O’Keeffe brought the photographer Strand into her own art through abstract watercolors (Fig. 4.79). Stieglitz, who made myriad photographic portraits of artists and writers, also made photographic reproductions of art works in *Camera Work*, thus making both people and art all equally photographic.

De Zayas turned the tables when he inserted Stieglitz and other photographers into his own manual graphic universe of drawings. De Zayas made caricatures of photographers Clarence White, Paul Haviland (Fig. 5.12), Alvin Langdon Coburn, and Gertrude Käsebier with their cameras, and of Stieglitz holding up a photograph to gaze at it (Fig. 5.13). As Wendy Wick Reaves observes, De Zayas’s charcoal caricatures are “strikingly similar to photographs” in the early pictorialist mode of portraiture, with each displaying “brightly lit face and hands” and a “shadowy background.”⁵⁰ In the Stieglitz circle photographic and anti-photographic art alike wove a web of resemblance, influence, affection, and mutual comment. Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe were strands in this web that brought her techniques of charcoal drawing and watercolor into contact with his own photography.

In his photographic portraits of friends, Stieglitz used some of the same approaches he used in his portraits of O’Keeffe. It seems, at first glance, that Stieglitz intended little more than to indicate his subject’s interest in cubism when he showed

Alfred Maurer, an American artist in the Stieglitz circle, with a drawing of *A Head of a Man* by Pablo Picasso hanging on the wall behind him (Fig. 5.14). One must, however, remember that Stieglitz had chosen to show this drawing in an exhibition at 291, in the same space where he and members of the New York arts community gathered. Stieglitz thus photographed Maurer as much in relation to a place and a group of people as to a work of art.

In addition, by making this photographic view of a person's head with a drawn head behind it, Stieglitz paralleled his own photography to Picasso's drawing.⁵¹ The two kinds of art making seem to have been, in Stieglitz's eyes, equally valid and equally modern even while positioned on opposite sides of the photographic/ anti-photographic divide. As Greenough asserts, such comparisons of photography with modern art in other media also "advanced the concept of correspondence between the arts."⁵² A similar assertion of inter-media connection occurs in Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe, where he places drawings and watercolors within his own graphic art, asserting their common graphic modern nature.

Stieglitz engaged in biographical commentary on his artist subject in his portrait of John Marin standing in front of a charcoal caricature of himself and Stieglitz drawn by Marius de Zayas (Figs. 3.40, 5.15). Stieglitz positioned Marin so that the real man stood in front of, and blocked out, the drawn version of himself. This allowed De Zayas's drawing of Stieglitz to peer over Marin's shoulder and look into the camera lens controlled by the real Stieglitz. Thus the photographer made visible the cultural understanding of any photograph (or, indeed any work of art) as a record of the gaze of the artist. This was a realization also stressed in Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe.

In his image of Marin with the caricature by De Zayas, Stieglitz effectively drew with his camera, changing the form and content of the drawing in his photograph of it. His play with this image is evident in a number of alternate versions that he made and rejected.⁵³ In one rejected negative Stieglitz posed Marin in front of the drawn Stieglitz so that the real Marin stood next to his own drawn image. In another negative Marin stood in the middle of the image, with the drawings of himself and Stieglitz looking over his shoulders. Stieglitz chose how he himself would appear in this image he created of an artist whom he could claim to have “created,” along with a caricature by an artist whose career Stieglitz had also advanced.⁵⁴ Stieglitz did not have to include a representation of himself in his photographs to be, as O’Keeffe later asserted, “always photographing himself.”⁵⁵

In a photograph of artist Francis Picabia with his own painting *Comic Wedlock*, Stieglitz also positioned the artist in front of his own work (Fig. 5.16). In this case the photograph showed a section of the large painting arranged so that rows of linear elements seemed to spring from the head of the artist who conceived them. In addition, a looping white line at the lower right ran beside the arm of the artist who painted it, mirroring the wrinkles in his jacket sleeve to strengthen the connection between creative hand and created painting.⁵⁶ Such a photograph not only linked artist to art but stressed the visual sensitivity and wit of the photographer. Also, while Picabia appeared in the context of his own creation, no informed viewer could ignore Stieglitz’s role in exhibiting and publicizing Picabia’s works.

O’Keeffe and Stieglitz: Artist and Art in Photographs

As in portrait photographs Stieglitz made of his other associates, one function of Stieglitz’s composite portrait of O’Keeffe was to place her within the photographer’s own artistic and social circle. In photographs of O’Keeffe with her art, however, the dichotomy between photography and drawing is at times almost as important as that between photographer and model. Beginning with his three 1917 images of O’Keeffe with *Blue I* (Fig. 4.38), Stieglitz made statements about the artist’s relationship to her art, and his own relationship to both the artist and her media (Figs. 5.2-5.4).⁵⁷ *Blue I* was a watercolor that Stieglitz had included in O’Keeffe’s 1917 solo exhibition at 291. As discussed in the previous chapter, when O’Keeffe returned to New York from Texas after the exhibition came down, the photographer rehung the exhibition and from it chose this image as a backdrop for his photographs of O’Keeffe. *Blue I* was large and bold enough for viewers of the photographs to see the marks the artist had made on the paper.

In one of these photographs with *Blue I*, Stieglitz depicted O’Keeffe wearing a hat that framed her face within the round forms of the picture behind (Fig. 5.2). The formal rhyming of clothing with art is similar to that in Stieglitz’s photograph of Picabia (Fig. 5.16) O’Keeffe’s foreshortened hat brim encouraged the viewer to combine drawn space with photographed space to envision the artist within a three-dimensional whirling maelstrom. The two monochromatic graphic languages of photography and watercolor worked in harmony, but without any confusion between the two technologies. From the first, Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe with her art emphasized the hand-created quality of her works - their anti-photographic quality - in contrast to the photographs

within which the drawings appeared. This became increasingly clear in the many images that included the artist's hands juxtaposed with her art.

As in the portrait of Picabia, Stieglitz in a second portrait of O'Keeffe with *Blue I* (Fig. 5.3) positioned the subject so that elements of the watercolor appeared to spring out of her head. In this way he suggested the imaginative creativity of the artist inventing abstract forms. This is particularly apt in the visual play between the curling forms of paint and the curling of O'Keeffe's hair knotted around her head. The white collar on O'Keeffe's dress reflected the pointed pale strokes in the watercolor behind her, again likening artist to art. Through such tactics, Stieglitz displayed his own sensitivity to subtleties of art works, and to his corresponding sensitivity to "his" artists themselves. In addition, Stieglitz brought out the contrast between O'Keeffe's medium and his own. While seeing a drawing or watercolor, viewers might imagine the artist at work; the photographer had the unique ability to actually show such viewers an image of the artist.

In examining these photographs of O'Keeffe with her art, one can never afford to forget the professional interests of the photographer as the promoter of O'Keeffe's art. Stieglitz made photographs of drawings and watercolors he had already presented to the public in exhibitions at 291. In the gallery he had had ample opportunity to share with the critics and other viewers his feelings about the works as direct expressions of an American woman. In his 1918 photographs he visually elaborated his existing verbal interpretations of O'Keeffe and her art. His photographs showed known images, but also suggested the creative powers O'Keeffe employed as she created new art that Stieglitz might exhibit in the future.

While the closing of 291 meant that he no longer directed his own exhibition venue, Stieglitz still acted as O’Keeffe’s agent. He arranged numerous exhibitions at Anderson Galleries, of which his friend Mitchell Kennerley was president. O’Keeffe had no solo exhibitions between 1917 and 1923, but Stieglitz made sure that critics and other writers saw her new art and discussed it in their writings. The erotic nature that Stieglitz stressed in many of his discussions and photographs of the artist also emerged in these publications.⁵⁸ The new dominant critic of the Stieglitz circle, Paul Rosenfeld stated, for example, that O’Keeffe’s “art is gloriously female. Her great painful and ecstatic climaxes make us at last to know something the man has always wanted to know.”⁵⁹ Such melodramatic erotic prose became common among critical writing about O’Keeffe’s works in the 1920s, much to the embarrassment and consternation of the artist.⁶⁰

As Barbara Lynes asserts, Stieglitz’s photographs as well as his words lay behind such critical interpretations of O’Keeffe. The subject of the images appears not to have fully anticipated what these portraits would mean for the reception of her own work. O’Keeffe saw the aesthetic importance of Stieglitz’s project as art in its own right. However, Lynes asserts, “It is impossible to believe that O’Keeffe did not understand how controversial Stieglitz’s photographs of her would be when they were exhibited.”⁶¹ Yet she apparently simply did not completely realize the profound ramifications that would come from her appearance as artistic subject as well as artist. Through his photographs of the artist with her art, as well as his accustomed monologues, Stieglitz spoke about O’Keeffe to his audience of artists, critics, and art appreciators. His portrait project was equally artistic exploration and publicity campaign. Indeed, O’Keeffe

achieved a new level of stardom when Stieglitz's photographs of her debuted in 1921 at Anderson Galleries in a one-man exhibition. Critics like Henry McBride were well aware that Stieglitz was using his own art to promote his protégé. He later noted that the show had been "something new in the way of introducing a budding artist. . . . It made a stir. Mona Lisa got but one portrait of herself worth talking about. O'Keeffe got a hundred. It put her at once on the map. Everybody knew the name. She became what is known as a newspaper personality."⁶³ As Lynes emphasizes, "Almost one-third of the prints Stieglitz exhibited [out of 145 prints in the show] were of O'Keeffe and anyone who had been unaware of her before the show would certainly never forget her after seeing it."⁶⁴ The nude portrayals garnered particular notoriety.⁶⁵

By including art as well as the artist in his photographs, however, Stieglitz made sure that his viewers did not forget that O'Keeffe was an artist and not simply a beautiful woman. These pictures gave those, like Rosenfeld, who already knew O'Keeffe's drawings and watercolors, something to consider beyond the mysterious iconography of the abstract works: the artist herself. Stieglitz brought art and artist together, making explicit the indexical nature of O'Keeffe's bold graphic strokes by displaying the literal image of the artist with the marks that she had made. During his first exhibition of O'Keeffe's drawings in 1916 Stieglitz wrote to Katherine Rhoades that he had found O'Keeffe's 1915 drawings "so feminine, so thoroughly frank, self-expressive" and felt "It is a terrible responsibility to exhibit purely personal notes to the public view – even at 291."⁶⁶ Through the creation and exhibition of his own photographs of the artist with her drawings, he yet more drastically exposed O'Keeffe and her creative acts to the public.

Hands and Touch in Stieglitz's Photographs of O'Keeffe's Drawings

Stieglitz focused many of his images on that key site of creativity, the artist's hands.⁶⁷ The first of these was Stieglitz's 1917 photograph of O'Keeffe with the watercolor *Blue I* (Fig. 5.4). The photographer posed the artist gently caressing the graceful spiral she had painted. In this photograph I see statements about the physical rather than the mental aspects of artistic creation – the body that was the conduit for the creative force that in other circumstances might have appeared as a child. This might seem to reduce the artist to a mere body, to a womb and hands without a controlling mind. But O'Keeffe did not, evidently, feel belittled by the image. Indeed, as Weinberg observes, O'Keeffe found this image so important that she insisted upon its inclusion in the 1978 exhibition of Stieglitz's photographs of her at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁶⁸ O'Keeffe was well aware that in other photographs, Stieglitz had balanced his interpretation of the artist by placing the stress on her creative mind through the symbol of her eyes (Fig. 5.9). All of Stieglitz's images of O'Keeffe functioned as parts within the complex whole of his composite portrait of the artist.

Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe's hands with *Blue I* (Fig. 5.4), and of the artist's face and arms with *No. 12 Special* (Fig. 5.17) illustrated modernist changes in drawings connoisseurship. The history behind such images lay in the traditional connoisseurship Goethe summed up in a statement about a Rembrandt drawing, "Such drawings are invaluable, not only because they give the artist's mental idea in all its purity, but also because they put us into his mood at the moment of creation. In every stroke of this drawing . . . we perceive the clarity and serene resolution of the artist's mind, and this state of mind is transferred to us as we look at it."⁶⁹ For such a

connoisseur, the ideas and emotions seen via the drawing were a main focus of looking. He gave scant consideration to the body and tools, the physical means, by which the artist had created his work. The important goal was to disentangle the thoughts and emotions of the artist from the overriding element of mimesis.

Modern connoisseurs gave priority to the artist's communication with the viewer, now with the physical aspects of creation moving to join mental creation at center stage. In increasingly abstracted modern drawings the "element of performance" which Jack Flam finds in all drawing, emerged from behind the curtain of mimesis.⁷⁰ Indeed, Roger Fry stated in 1919 that in drawings by modern artists like Matisse and Picasso,

The calligraphic line is the record of a gesture, and is, in fact, so pure and complete a record of the gesture that we can follow it with the same kind of pleasure as we follow the movement of a dancer. It tends more than any other quality of design to express the temperamental and subjective aspect of the idea, whereas in structural line the artist shows himself as more or less completely absorbed in the objective realization of form.⁷¹

Gestural abstraction functioned like the dance, using creative gestures to express the artist's thoughts, emotions, and deeper nature.

If the modern drawings connoisseur imagined a creative dance recorded in the shapes of a drawing, Stieglitz in his photographs made this dance literally visible. Inevitably the still nature of Stieglitz's medium meant that he could not show the on-going dance, but only still shapes excerpted from it. Therefore his true subject had to be the dancer herself. Stieglitz celebrated rather than elided the necessity of the physical in the creation of a drawing, glorying in the palpable female body of O'Keeffe the creator.

By photographing the artist performing in parallel with her art, Stieglitz with utmost clarity linked the graphic stroke with the actual hand that had made it (Figs. 5.17). In photographing O'Keeffe's hands with *Blue I* (Fig. 5.4), he paired the hand with a work

which showed their marks (or rather a large brush or rag controlled by her hand) the most plainly in the largest scale. The finger-like ends of the pale strokes he placed just above the fingers that had created them. This image, with the artist stroking her creation, restated in visual form what Stieglitz and others in his circle had verbally described as the “frankness,” the “living” quality, and the “sensualism” of O’Keeffe’s 1915 drawings seen in her 1916 exhibition at 291.⁷²

This image of O’Keeffe with *Blue I* is not by any means reportage. Stieglitz later made two photographs of O’Keeffe in something closer to that mode, showing her making art (the watercolor on the block is now unlocated) at Lake George (Figs. 5.18-19). In one photograph she posed holding a pencil, in another image she held a watercolor brush; these were two of her most important graphic tools. These photographs reflected more of the practical understanding that O’Keeffe would have had of her own graphic media. She knew how a pencil or a brush felt in her hand, how it moved over paper, and what marks it could make.

The photograph Stieglitz made of O’Keeffe’s hands with *Blue I* was of a totally different kind – it was high, balletic drama. This was his connoisseur’s idealized fantasy of graphic creativity. Stieglitz’s image omitted the prosaic tools of the artist to stress the hands in all their numinous glory.⁷³ Unlike the Lake George photographs, in this image with *Blue I* Stieglitz cropped the rest of the artist’s figure and the setting out of the composition, emphasizing this exclusion through the visual barrier of the artist’s black sleeves. The artist’s hands and art appeared isolated from any worldly setting. Sensual artistic creation was all.

As Weinberg discusses, throughout the history of art, “the creative act is centered in the gesture of hands.”⁷⁴ Stieglitz asked O’Keeffe to create a theatrical version of such gestures. She recalled, “My hands had always been admired since I was a little girl – but I never thought much about it. . . . I was asked [by Stieglitz] to move my hands in many different ways.”⁷⁵ The creativity of the artist’s hands extended throughout the composite portrait, whether her art was included in a specific image or not. Again, this reflected Stieglitz’s wider practices of portraiture, for he also made photographs of the hands of other artists, as in an image of Charles Demuth’s painfully lean, sensitive hands and wrists (Fig.5.20).

When O’Keeffe held up her hands in a dance-like gesture alongside her *No. 12 Special*, she evoked but did not literally describe the flowing gestures with which she would have made the abstract drawing (Fig. 5.17). In a later photograph, O’Keeffe assumed a similar pose against a black background (Fig. 5.35), thus separating drawing as a noun from drawing as a verb. If a viewer at 291 had closed his or her eyes and imagined the artist’s creative act, such a beautiful vision of her body in motion might have come to mind. The photographs seem to imply that through such gestures the artist might summon forth a drawing like a genie from a lamp. Significantly, O’Keeffe’s eyes looked down at her own body in this pose, implying the inspiration for her creative dance in her own body. In such photographs Stieglitz seems to have envisioned the creative gesture as a form of spiritual or psychological development. These images seem to be the visual counterpart of Charles Duncan’s previously quoted description of O’Keeffe’s 1915 charcoals as “innermost unfolding of a girl’s being, like the germinating of a flower.”⁷⁶

In such images evoking the creative process, Weinberg finds Stieglitz “intent on *possessing* a painter and her craft.”⁷⁷ The photographer caught not only the results of the craft, but the process itself in dramatized form. I must point out, however, that the crafts Stieglitz froze for the viewer were not painting but drawing and watercolor. Drawing had long been celebrated as displaying the work of the creative hand, while photography had been attacked, as discussed in my chapter one, because it was created with a machine rather than by hand.⁷⁸ In his photographic celebrations of the creative hand Stieglitz took visual possession of this creative member, bringing the manual graphic arts of drawing and watercolor inside his own putatively non-manual art of photography. Paul Rosenfeld noticed how in photographs of O’Keeffe’s hands apart from her art Stieglitz had “arrested apparently insignificant motions of the hands . . . hands sewing (Fig. 5.36), gestures of hands poised fitfully on the breast, motions of hands peeling apples. And in each of them, he has found a symbol of himself.”⁷⁹ As Marcia Brennan states, “according to Rosenfeld, the aestheticized fragments of O’Keeffe’s body actually functioned as symbols of Stieglitz himself, as agents of his sight and touch.”⁸⁰ In this way Stieglitz added manual touch to the range of his photographic expression, most keenly in his photographs of O’Keeffe’s hand with her art (Fig. 5.4).

As Weinberg elucidates, “In emphasizing the hands of O’Keeffe, Stieglitz not only seemed to assert his power over her; he also seized for photography one of the powers of modernist painting [or here drawing]: the ability to suggest touch. . . . Touch in Stieglitz’s photograph is communicated through a kind of performance rather than by the medium itself.”⁸¹ I agree with this, but not with Weinberg’s vision that by having O’Keeffe pose actually touching her own drawing Stieglitz violated the artistic strength

of touch he had set out to capture, “Literally, to touch a painting or drawing is to negate its ability to convey an illusion to the person who is doing the touching. In feeling its surface the toucher relegates the picture to dead matter.”⁸² Weinberg, I believe, has missed the central meaning of Stieglitz’s image.

The “illusion” of a drawing can be violated only if the drawing attempts to depict a real, or potentially real, subject. But *Blue I* is abstract (Fig. 4.37). It may suggest natural forms, but it does not depict any particular natural subject. The watercolor lived not in its description of life but in the touch of the artist on paper. By touching her paper again for Stieglitz’s camera, O’Keeffe opened to the viewer the sensual experience of artistic creation. This touch of fingers on paper became parallel to the emotional thrill of flesh contacting flesh. One could think of Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling in which the touch of the divine hand of God is about to awaken the Man he has created. Similarly, O’Keeffe’s touch awakens her drawing for the viewer of Stieglitz’s photograph.⁸³

In the delicate gesture of her extended left index finger O’Keeffe’s touch was as soft as a mother’s caress of her child. This was a parallel that Stieglitz, seeing art as a child-substitute for a woman artist, may have relished. O’Keeffe’s right hand, too, tenderly cradled the biomorphic spiral shape as if it were her offspring. Such gestures evoked both human contact and the illusionistic power of shaded academic drawings to create forms that appear to be available for touching. Human skin and paper, the arenas of life and art, met in Stieglitz’s photograph. Stieglitz thus illustrated the very process of “living” on paper for which O’Keeffe had striven so passionately.

As previously mentioned, Stieglitz had written to O’Keeffe about how “living” he found her drawings and how he saw the artist in them.⁸⁴ In his photographs, Stieglitz actually did see, and allow others to see, O’Keeffe, photographically placed visually within her drawings. And, by shaping his photographic images of the art and the artist, capturing his own ideas about this art, he could see himself projected into O’Keeffe’s drawings.

Stieglitz told a visitor to his gallery that in love, “Communication beyond words will inevitably be involved as in touch itself. It is the same with regard to the relationship between a person and a picture.”⁸⁵ This intimate flow of life between artist and viewer via such touch was, I think, at the heart of how Stieglitz believed art should function. It is no wonder that he eagerly exhibited Auguste Rodin’s drawings in which the artist’s drawing instrument moved like a hand along the contours of his nude models (Figs. 2.38-39). Stieglitz found visual touch operating both in such anti-photographic modern art and in his own photography. He refused to mass reproduce his photographs because, “The quality of touch in its deepest living sense is inherent in my photographs. When that sense of touch is lost, the heartbeat of the photograph is extinct. In the reproduction it would become extinct – dead – my interest is in the living.”⁸⁶

Without picturing hands such as O’Keeffe’s, Stieglitz’s photographs could claim to have “touch” only indirectly. The touch of light, not of man, created Stieglitz’s photographs. Only through profound visual empathy or a cultural interpretation of qualities identified with touch in a drawing or in real life - surface texture and structure - could Stieglitz claim to have the quality of “touch” in his photographs. Paul Rosenfeld observed this evocative visual surface in the photographs of O’Keeffe, “Indeed, the prints

of Stieglitz are among the very sensitive records of human existence. So vivid and delicate are they that one wants to touch them.”⁸⁷ Stieglitz’s friend the critic Lewis

Mumford rejoiced at the photographer’s successful

endeavor . . . to translate the unseen world of tactile values as they develop between lovers not merely in the sexual act but in the entire relationship of two personalities – to translate this world of blind touch into sight, so that those who felt could more clearly see what they felt, and so those who could merely see might reach, through the eye, the level of feeling. . . . It was his manly sense of the realities of sex, developing out of his own renewed ecstasy in love, that resulted in some of Stieglitz’s best photographs. In a part by part revelation of a woman’s body in the isolated presentation of a hand, a breast, a neck, a thigh, a leg, Stieglitz achieved the exact visual equivalent of the report of the hand or the face as it travels over the body of the beloved.⁸⁸

In his images of O’Keeffe with her art photographic touch met and merged with graphic and human touches.

Sexuality and Gender in Stieglitz’s Photographs of O’Keeffe

As Mumford realized so keenly, the power of the communicative hand belongs both to art and to sexuality. Perhaps inadvertently by attracting attention to the marks of her fingers in her 1915 drawings, O’Keeffe had aroused not only aesthetic but sexual reactions in Stieglitz and other viewers. In his photographs of O’Keeffe posed nude or partially nude with her drawings, I believe that Stieglitz intended to replicate and exaggerate his initial sexual response to O’Keeffe’s abstract drawings. In this way he worked against the direction in which O’Keeffe was taking her own art. He kept visible in his photographs the artist’s earlier stress on touch and physicality even as the artist herself strove to hide the touch of her hands. As Anne Wagner says, Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe are an effective means of keeping “their maker’s femininity well in mind,” identifying O’Keeffe and her art with her body.”⁸⁹ Stieglitz certainly had no fears that his expressions of artistic creativity through photographs of O’Keeffe’s

body, including her hands, would be mistaken for sexual expressions; apparently to him, such a reading would have been no mistake at all. He seems to have drawn no firm line between sexual and artistic creation. His approach to photography of O’Keeffe led her to recall,

When his photographs of me were first shown, it was in a room at the Anderson Galleries. Several men – looking around awhile – asked Stieglitz if he would photograph their wives or girlfriends the way he photographed me. He was very amused and laughed about it. If they had known what a close relationship he would have needed to have to photograph their wives or girlfriends the way he photographed me – I think they wouldn’t have been interested.⁹⁰

O’Keeffe, by contrast, was eager to avoid specifically, or at least exclusively, sexual interpretations of her works. She knew how the use of her hands could be misunderstood. As an avid reader of *The Masses*, O’Keeffe must have encountered the short story “Hands” about a person who lost a battle with such misinterpretation. “Hands” is the story of Wing Biddlebaum, a teacher who uses his hands to communicate with his students. Their parents disastrously mistake his poetic gestures and expressive touching for homosexual advances and drive the teacher from their town.⁹¹ O’Keeffe could well have identified with the protagonist of the story, of whom Anderson wrote, “Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression. . . . The hands alarmed their owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away.”⁹²

O’Keeffe drew much with her hands, but after their marks in her 1915 charcoals had been read as sexual, I believe that she often strove to hide away finger marks under the surface of more sleekly finished drawings and watercolors and later yet sleeker oils. After photographs of the artist in the nude appeared in the 1921 exhibition of Stieglitz’s

photographs, the situation grew much more difficult. O’Keeffe was deeply upset by the critical sexualizing of her art. She wrote to Sherwood Anderson, “I suppose the reason I got down to an effort to be objective is that I don’t like the [sexual] interpretations of my other things.”⁹³

In 1918 O’Keeffe, anxious about her future and grateful for the support and recognition Stieglitz granted her as an artist, had perhaps been so eager to please him that she was willing to take poses that might in other circumstances have displeased her. She later recalled being flattered by his attention.⁹⁴ But by 1921 O’Keeffe was an established artist with much more confidence in herself. The initial awe of being part of Stieglitz’s “stable,” and his lover, had worn off. So, to avoid the sexually-based criticisms of her art that so angered her, she changed strategies, as Lynes explores in *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*.⁹⁵

O’Keeffe knew she would now be a press “star” for the foreseeable future and she could not avoid being written about. But she could try to change what was written. She could and did tend to paint more representations of identifiable objects and fewer abstractions that could be openly interpreted as any reviewer pleased. She worked with woman writers, including Mabel Dodge Luhan and Blanche Matthias, whom she hoped would write about her in a more acceptable way than men had done. In the case of Luhan, the project was a disaster. Luhan’s essay turned out to be a vitriolic attack on O’Keeffe for capitulating to Stieglitz’s domination. Matthias, however, produced an article that Lynes sees as communicating O’Keeffe’s own ideas about her art. For instance, in Matthias’ article in the *Chicago Evening Post Magazine of the Art World*, she stated that O’Keeffe’s art “is not an attempt to reveal, as so many people suggest, some

morbid mood or some attitude toward sex, nor is it a desire to attract attention by outward display of the erotic.”⁹⁶ O’Keeffe never again, so far as surviving prints allow us to know, posed for Stieglitz in the nude with her art. In fact, she seldom posed nude for him at all after 1921. A group of 1931 photographs showing the front and back of O’Keeffe’s torso is the major exception.⁹⁷ Lynes finds that O’Keeffe’s efforts to distance herself from sexually-based criticism were fairly successful, at least for a while. She was able, for instance, to prevent a flood of Freudian interpretations of her 1925 solo exhibition.⁹⁸

But in 1918, O’Keeffe was still an apparently willing participant in Stieglitz’s project of capturing her body and her art in photographs, exploring her many facets. His 1918 portraits of O’Keeffe with her charcoal drawing of Palo Duro Canyon, *No. 15 Special* (Fig. 4.64) show how his images of the artist with her art covered a wide span from strongly aesthetic to overtly sexual (Figs. 5.9, 5.21-28). In some images the photographer stressed the artist’s mind by silhouetting her head against the central pale area of the drawing with dark framing elements rising around it (Figs. 5.9, 5.21-22). In a photograph Stieglitz, and possibly O’Keeffe, must have found particularly telling, since it was so often chosen for reproduction in literature about O’Keeffe (Fig. 5.9),⁹⁹ O’Keeffe seems to be contemplating the space around her much as she must have done in Texas, when she was in Palo Duro Canyon looking up at its walls and the sky above them. The art seen behind the artist can be imagined as a projection of O’Keeffe’s vision of the Canyon that she had captured in her mind and on paper and canvas. Stieglitz thereby portrays the creative power of the artist’s eye, and the mind behind it.

But the parallels Stieglitz found between creative communication and sexual communication emerged in a procession of images in which Stieglitz related O’Keeffe’s

art to her body, and particularly to her breasts. In these photographs Stieglitz probed the unabashed physicality he had first perceived in O’Keeffe’s 1915 charcoals. The touch of the fingers on charcoal and paper is equated with increasing force to the caress of fingers on flesh; the delights of artistic creation and of human love-making mirror one another. In one of Stieglitz’s simpler portraits of O’Keeffe with *No. 15 Special* (Fig. 5.21), her figure happens to frame a part of the drawing at the left so that it suggests a breast hanging behind her with the pale nipple silhouetted against black shading. In the original drawing without the figure in front of it, the pale shape has no likeness to a human breast (Fig. 4.64). But in his photographs of O’Keeffe with the drawings, Stieglitz often placed his model to more or less outline this breast shape, effectively teaming his camera with the artist’s body to inscribe sexuality into her drawing.

In one image, Stieglitz playfully suggested the relationship between O’Keeffe’s physical self and her drawing by having her clutch at a bright metallic button on her dark suit (Fig. 5.23). She held up the button to liken this small bit of herself to the small dark marks she made to represent trees in the drawing. The light button plays against the artist’s dark form in a reversal of the dark trees against the pale bulge of a hill.¹⁰⁰ In a related image, O’Keeffe reaches a hand around her body and behind her toward the drawing (Fig. 5.24). The tip of one finger comes precisely to the edge of O’Keeffe’s body and the lower edge of the drawing, proving a carefully calculated link between artist and art.

In images of the artist with *No. 15 Special* (Figs. 5.9, 5.22-5.25), the pale forms of the hill bulging behind the artist’s dark clothing have a relative value close to that of the artist’s skin. This similarity of value suggests a parallel between the land the artist has

seen, and drawn, and her own flesh. In one image, Stieglitz, through O’Keeffe’s pose, makes this connection more overt by having her touch her own bare skin as she would have previously touched her drawing in creating it (Fig. 5.25). One hand touches only her hard sternum, but it partially hides the fingers below that may find contact with fuller, softer flesh. In these images, Stieglitz displays his belief that in Texas, and in America in general, O’Keeffe had found a place deeply like herself.¹⁰¹ His photographs suggest that she made art by combining the land with herself. Such images (5.28) also demonstrate again the equivalence Stieglitz saw between a woman’s artistic creation and giving birth. O’Keeffe here is shown cupping her breast as if she were going to nurse a child; she can be seen metaphorically nourishing her art with her female body.

The play between body and drawing, biology and art, self and creation, continued in photographs Stieglitz made in 1918 of O’Keeffe in front of the watercolor *Blue II* (Figs. 4.39, 5.10, 5.29-30). In one of these images, O’Keeffe clutches toward her own body, specifically her own clothed breasts, with both hands. *Blue II* looms behind her, encircling her head and pointing toward her body. The allusion to the body under the clothing is unmistakable. O’Keeffe seemed to find these dramatic gestures a bit of an overstatement or simplification, for there is an over-the-top quality of mocking melodrama to her expressions and poses. Stieglitz, however, seems to have been very serious in his visual assertions about the importance of woman’s body to her creation of art. The circular form in *Blue II* can easily be seen as womb-like or fetus-like, as Stieglitz made reference to O’Keeffe’s creative body more than to her mind.

Stieglitz also connected O’Keeffe’s art in her body in three photographs of the artist with a charcoal drawing known only through these images (Figs. 5.31-33). In two

pictures, the drawing hands above O’Keeffe’s head and her up-stretched arms link to her nearly bare body (Figs. 5.31-32). In a third image the upward spiral of the drawing seems to emerge from the artist’s head, much as Stieglitz had shown Picabia’s art emerging from its (male) creator (Fig. 5.33, 5.16).¹⁰² Are we to read the head in the photograph of O’Keeffe as merely providing linkage to the rest of her body, or was Stieglitz considering whether O’Keeffe’s art might spring as much from O’Keeffe’s mind as from her bodily passions? Had he not yet fully come to the conclusion, which he would voice the following year, that woman’s art was womb-derived rather than mind-derived?¹⁰³ At least if mind came second to the womb, it did figure somewhere in woman’s art.

The identification of O’Keeffe’s body with her art takes its strongest form in a second group of photographs with *No. 15 Special* (Figs. 5.25 – 5.28). In a logical (but not necessarily chronological) sequence of these images, O’Keeffe first bared her breasts to view, then laid her hand alongside one breast; then she grasped her breasts, allowing the nipples to peek through her fingers; and last she cupped one breast as if to nurse a baby. The “nipple” shape at the bottom of the hill in the drawing, and the round dark tree forms against the pale hill closely match the forms of the artist’s actual breasts. Stieglitz thus made the artist parallel to both her Texas landscape subject and the art she made depicting the land. In the cliffs and hillside of Palo Duro Canyon, and the American land in general, Stieglitz evidently saw O’Keeffe as having found a subject like herself in beauty and mystery. Stieglitz may be seen to state visually that modern drawing such as O’Keeffe engaged in was an act of exposure of this mystery. The pun is suggested that

the hands reveal the artist - metaphorically in the visible marks of the artist's hand in O'Keeffe's drawings and literally in Stieglitz's photographs.

Is this to say that in Stieglitz's eyes, as in his images, "O'Keeffe's body and art were one"?¹⁰⁴ That is the view of Greenough, and Wagner speaks similarly of a visual "parallelism or reiteration: by this means the artist and her body are identified as one and the same."¹⁰⁵ Is there nothing deeper that Stieglitz found to show than the lovely, fecund body of this young woman who also happened to be an artist? Anne Wagner sees in these images Stieglitz's "erasure of the artist herself. If O'Keeffe *is* her picture, then she cannot be accordingly thought to stand 'behind her work,' external to it, in the customary position of the author as rational producer."¹⁰⁶ Further photographs in which O'Keeffe displays and grasps her breasts, without art even being included (Fig. 5.34), would seem to confirm this exploitative view of Stieglitz as devaluing O'Keeffe's drawings along with their creator. With or without art, breasts became the central imagery. The hands upon the artist's breasts, as Rosenfeld had seen O'Keeffe hands in other poses, could stand in for Stieglitz's hands (Figs. 5.27, 5.34).¹⁰⁷ Stieglitz puts his subject's hands to work manipulating her own breasts as a man might desire to handle them. The same manipulation of breasts occurred in photographs Stieglitz made of several other women, including his teenaged niece Georgia Englehard, whose drawings had previously appeared at 291 (Fig. 5.37).

Stieglitz certainly presented O'Keeffe, in photographs and in exhibitions, differently than he presented male artists. So far as we know, his relationship with O'Keeffe as lover was not a consideration with his male artist photographic subjects. No male artist appeared nude in Stieglitz's known photographs. When reviewers in the

1910s, presumably led by Stieglitz, discussed drawings by male modernists like Picasso and Matisse, they often considered the intellectual play and creative processes of graphic art rather than the gendered body of the artist. Charles Caffin, for instance, found Picasso's,

in fact, the most original, intrepid and logical mind among all those which to-day are bent upon intellectualizing their sensations in pictorial terms.

It is the kind of mind that, though one may not be able appreciate its products, is worth examining for the sake of its processes.

. . . the processes of Picasso's mind, as laid bare in these drawings, might well be studied by our artists, not for imitation – they are too personal to this particular artist – but for the purpose of eliminating from their work its concrete superfluities and raising its capacity of intellectual suggestiveness.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps the reviewer who made the most reference to Picasso's body was Elizabeth Luther Cary, who credited the Spaniard's drawings to "that one brain and that one pair of hands."¹⁰⁹

During the 1920s, however, Stieglitz and the critics who followed his lead, particularly Paul Rosenfeld, placed increased emphasis on the gender and bodies of artists of both sexes. The application of Marin's watercolor medium, for instance, now was made parallel to the ejaculation of semen.¹¹⁰ O'Keeffe became the standard female artist against whom such male artists as Dove and Marin were played to assert their masculinity.

Graphic Art Within the Multiplicity of Stieglitz's Composite Portrait of O'Keeffe

There can be little doubt that Stieglitz's carnal view of O'Keeffe was vital to him. He was an aging man in love with a beautiful young woman and he certainly found tremendous sexual excitement in her body. But he found many other qualities to contemplate in his lover, as one can see in the range of images he made of her, both with and without her art. The eye and mind, as well as the hand, interacted with the artists's

works and provided comments upon them. As Lynes asserts, “Stieglitz’s portrait presented a woman whose sexual nature was only one dimension of her being.”¹¹¹ The purpose of a composite portrait was to provide a complex and nuanced view. O’Keeffe’s physical and mental means of producing art, and the art that she produced, remained crucial to Stieglitz in both his photographs and his exhibitions of her work. O’Keeffe displayed myriad identities in these photographs, with master graphic artist as an important and recurring facet of her personality in Stieglitz’s eyes and images. It was, after all, through her abstract drawings that Stieglitz had come to know and be fascinated by the artist, not through her body or even her words. Stieglitz said of O’Keeffe, “whenever she looks at the proofs [of the composite portrait] she falls in love with herself. – Or rather her Selves – There are very many.”¹¹² The images purposefully evolve and change rapidly from image to image and many readings are possible for each image, creating ever-shifting and complexly layered impressions of both the woman and the art Stieglitz depicted.

Stieglitz was fully aware that he could not capture O’Keeffe’s drawings in a single photograph any more than he could capture the artist herself in one image. As a master reproducer of art in *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, no one was more conscious than Stieglitz of what the camera and the printing press failed to put across. He wrote apologetically of photographs reproducing De Zayas’s charcoal drawings in *Camera Work*, “In the reproductions some of the quality of De Zayas’s work has been necessarily lost, nevertheless its spirit has been fully preserved.”¹¹³ In the photographs of O’Keeffe with her drawings, the drawings necessarily lost their true color, scale, texture, and that very sense of touch Stieglitz valued so highly. He could only hope to suggest the graphic

aspects of O’Keeffe’s art through the addition of images of the artist, and through the multiplicity of images. Through a gathering of photographs, Stieglitz could find and reveal aspects of O’Keeffe’s graphic art, and the graphic media themselves, that might otherwise remain hidden to viewers.

Stieglitz’s choices of works to photograph with O’Keeffe give us important information about his conceptions of both art and artist. The charcoal of Palo Duro canyon was the twin, and probably the basis, for an oil painting. Stieglitz chose the drawing for his photographs. Perhaps this was because he worked in black and white and the drawing was also monochrome, but his photograph would also have rendered any painting into black and white. Yet it was important to choose the drawing – the design that, symbolically at least, lay under or behind the painting and revealed its conception. The culture of connoisseurship said that only a drawing could, as Meder said, “disclose the artist’s soul.”¹¹⁴ Stieglitz captured this quality of graphic revelation by gradually stripping away O’Keeffe’s clothing in image after image to reveal the artists’s breasts (Fig. 5.27-28).¹¹⁵ The nipples, as the centers of the woman’s breasts and sources of both milk and sexual arousal, could stand for the central mysteries of the woman that Stieglitz and allied critics found revealed in O’Keeffe’s drawings. Through multiple images of the artist with her drawings Stieglitz displayed the “the innermost unfolding of a girl’s being,” as Henry Tyrrell had phrased it in 1916.¹¹⁶

This quest for the center also helps to explain Stieglitz’s choice to photograph O’Keeffe with her large spiral compositions *Blue I* and *Blue II* (Figs. 5.2-4, 5.10, 5.29-30, 4.37-38). These spirals could be read as radiating creative energy from within, but could equally be seen as bringing the viewer into a deep, private center of her being. They thus

promised revelation of personal and creative truths. Tellingly, the boldest gestures in these two works were created not only by adding pigment, but by taking it away. The hands (and tools) of the artist had removed blue paint to allow light, reflecting off the white paper, to shine through in a manner peculiar to watercolors.

The changes in the image of O’Keeffe between Stieglitz photographs, almost as much as the actual forms shown in them, may be seen as another subject of the composite portrait of the artist. Stieglitz’s ideas about her drawings continued evolving long after he first saw them and first showed them. As he wrote to a friend in 1917, “I am interested in development, in growth.”¹¹⁷ He also said, “Exhibitions as such . . . do not interest me. Unless they add something, I see no reason for having them.”¹¹⁸ Unless a new photograph added something to his exploration of O’Keeffe and her art, there would be no reason to make it. Thus he made a string of related images, constantly moving around to see additional angles of his subject, both physically and psychologically. Shifts from image to image gave still photography its closest approach to the sense of time and transformation inherent in a drawing, made by the moving hand of the artist. Accumulating images allowed the eye and the mind to move between them and compare them.

It is worth noting that in 1919 and later, as O’Keeffe established herself more strongly as a painter, Stieglitz still at times chose to photograph her with her drawings (Fig. 5.38). In the case of O’Keeffe’s 1919 drawing *No. 17 – Special* (Fig. 5.39), Stieglitz chose to have the artist playfully pretend to grasp one of the pair of suggestive dark spheres in the drawing rather than the related painting *Green Lines and Pink* (Fig. 5.40) which might not have reproduced as well in black and white. Many of O’Keeffe’s

crisply delineated abstractions of this period (Fig. 5.41) would no doubt have reproduced well and would have provided interesting objects for the artist's visual interaction, yet Stieglitz clung to O'Keeffe's rare graphic works in his photographic portraits.

Stieglitz's Poems Including Images from O'Keeffe's Graphic Art

To further understand how Stieglitz utilized O'Keeffe's graphic images in his own work, we can look back to a period in 1918 when the photographer strung together O'Keeffe's images using words rather than photographs. He looked to O'Keeffe's art and added words from her letters from the past several months to create his own narrative. He dated a manuscript of the following poems to March and April 1918, although they were not published until they appeared in the Stieglitz circle journal *MSS* in 1922.

The flesh is starving
Its soul is moving starward
Seeking its own particular star
A man intercepts
Receives the flesh
Millions were ready to receive it
The flesh is no longer starving
Its soul is moving starward
Seeking its own particular star¹¹⁹

This first poem seems to make use of O'Keeffe's images of the *Evening Star* (Figs. 4.51-54), connecting Stieglitz's aspirations for the artist to the images she had painted in watercolor. In this poem Stieglitz apparently presents a conception of how he had acted and would continue to act as O'Keeffe's interpreter to the public. He would understand the artist and know how to present her images so that the "millions" would be able to appreciate them. The poem operated in a way similar to Stieglitz's photographs - showing to the public both images O'Keeffe had made and Stieglitz's vision of the

artist herself. Thus, Stieglitz, in words as in images, married his own ideas to O'Keeffe's images. Again, he chose graphic images in media to which he had felt particularly close since childhood.

He further developed his story around O'Keeffe's graphic images in a second longer poem:

The Stars are Playing in the Skies
The Earth's Asleep –
One Soul's Awake
A woman

The Stars Beckon –

The Room is a Whiteness
Whiteness Opens its Door
She Walks into Darkness
Alone
With the Night – alone with the Stars
A Mountain nearby
Its peak near those Stars
She climbs the Steep Mountain
Alone –
To the Top.

Her bed is its back
Her Blanket the sky
Her eyes smiling Starlight
Her lips are half-open
And moist with Night's Dew

The Blue of the Heavens
Comes Down to those Lips
Takes Form

The Stars are Playing in the Skies

The Woman Walks Homeward
To her Little White Room
No longer Alone
She Carries Dawn
In Her Womb¹²⁰

Here, Stieglitz seemed to link O’Keeffe’s art to her letter about her night-time climb up Mount Elliott to see the stars.¹²¹ The charcoal drawing *Abstraction* which O’Keeffe made, probably inspired by Katherine Lumpkin lying inside a tent (Fig. 4.16), Stieglitz made into an image of O’Keeffe herself on the mountain top gazing up at the stars. The blue mountains she painted in watercolor now reappeared in words (Fig. 4.23-27). And again, the evening star seen in Texas somehow finds its way from the skies above the flat prairie to the skies about a tall mountain (Fig. 4.52-54). Here also is another instance of Stieglitz’s paralleling art creation by a woman to the bearing of children. O’Keeffe’s numinous images on paper held for Stieglitz the stuff of inspiration – malleable enough to suit the ideas he wished to present.

O’Keeffe Paints for a Year, and a Lifetime

In 1918 while Stieglitz devoted himself to exploring and interpreting O’Keeffe’s past drawings in his photographs, and studying the artist herself from every angle, she was getting back to work on her art. She recalled, “one day he asked me if I could do anything I wanted to do for a year, what would it be. I promptly said I would like to have a year to paint. I enjoyed my work teaching, but I would rather just try to paint for a year. He thought for awhile and then remarked that he thought he could arrange that – so I kept on painting in the studio.”¹²² I believe that O’Keeffe meant literally what she said – that while she had been making watercolors and charcoals in the limited hours available between the classes she taught, now she wanted fewer restrictions on her time so that she could use the more laborious medium towards which she had been working all through her art training. She wanted to paint in oils. She later recalled that before this time she had “worked in watercolors, because I never had the time for oils.”¹²³ Now, as a

consciously mature modern artist, she wanted that time. And when she said “try to paint for a year,” I think she meant that she was not sure that she would be able to make modern oil paintings, as opposed to modern drawings and watercolors. The oils she had painted previously had often failed and even the successes had been mostly minor variations on her more successful graphic works (Figs. 4.6, 4.20, 4.35, 4.40). Her early oil paintings indisputably had less assurance, formal strength, and originality than her works on paper. The strong gestures and flowing paint application of O’Keeffe’s charcoals and watercolors had not yet translated effectively into oils. She evidently wanted to remedy that; she wanted to work out an approach to oils that was as graceful and as much hers as was her approach to graphic art.

Stieglitz did, indeed, find a sponsor who would give O’Keeffe the money to paint for a year; the year, however, wound up turning into a lifetime painting in oils. Stieglitz said that he “approached a friend who had sometimes helped painters” who gave the necessary money to support O’Keeffe for a year.¹²⁴ O’Keeffe did not move immediately or exclusively into painting with oils. Her year’s work included momentary returns to the charcoal medium through which she had entered modernism (Fig. 5.42). When she and Stieglitz went to stay at his family’s summer home in Lake George, New York, she made some bright watercolors of trees in a mode similar to that she had used in Texas (Fig. 5.43).

Soon, however, O’Keeffe began to make a higher percentage of her works in oils. She took joyously to this opportunity to devote herself to art without monetary worries, recalling, “I had so much to work out that I had started on at the ranch [Leah Harris’s ranch in Texas], and in New York I went on working. . . I painted all day.”¹²⁵ She thrived

on life with Stieglitz and the chance to paint whenever she pleased.¹²⁶ She wrote to Elizabeth Stieglitz, “I was never so happy in my life.”¹²⁷ Stieglitz documented O’Keeffe at Lake George making a watercolor from nature in a pair of photographs discussed above (Figs. 5.18-19). Even as she was moving into oils, he showed her with a pencil, and then a watercolor brush, in her hand, as if to preserve a memory of the young graphic modern artist he had discovered in 1916 and nurtured at a distance through 1917, and early 1918.

During 1918, in Manhattan or Lake George, O’Keeffe moved into an abstract vocabulary that fully realized in color forms like those of the 1915 charcoals. She made a small abstract watercolor in reds, blues and oranges of a swirling wave-like form (Fig. 5.44).¹²⁸ It is impossible to know which was made first, but she made three oil paintings that were larger variants of the same composition with variations in forms and colors (Fig. 5.45). O’Keeffe also made an abstract pastel of forms folded back to reveal a hollow center, closely related to a pair of brilliantly-hued oils larger than any modern work she had made thus far (Figs. 5.46-47). This exploration of similar biomorphic forms in both graphic media and oils was much like O’Keeffe’s use of media in such 1916 and 1917 series as her depictions Palo Duro Canyon (Figs. 4.64-65). Now, however, she added pastel as a graphic mode in which she could draw much as she did in charcoal but in colors like those of her oil paintings. Gradually, O’Keeffe created a directly painted but smoothly finished style of oil painting that she could use to describe the surfaces of biomorphic forms. In her 1918 oils, the gestural element of her graphic works fell away as she developed a new emphasis on richly colored surfaces.

After her 1919 charcoal drawings *No. 17 – Special* (Fig. 5.39), and the related oil *Green Lines and Pink* (Fig. 5.40), she would (so far as surviving works allow us to know) very rarely work out a subject in finished works in graphic media and then move the visual idea into oils as she had done often in 1916, 1917, and 1918. She continued, however, for the rest of her career to use pencil sketches from nature as the basis for paintings. While the graphic media of watercolor, pastel, and charcoal remained a part of her technical repertoire, oil painting would be the focus of her most important art for the rest of her career. As Lynes enumerates, “Known surviving works indicate that whereas she produced 111 watercolors from 1916-June 1918, in the next two years, she produced only 10. Moreover, only 10 known watercolors date from the 1920s, and only 36 date from 1930 to the mid-1970s.”¹²⁹

The Question of O’Keeffe’s Change to Oil Painting in 1918

Why did O’Keeffe, who had begun her modernist career so successfully on paper, turn the center of her attention to oils once she moved to New York? Was it a technical decision? The graded modeling of biomorphic forms that O’Keeffe had used so effectively in her charcoals was not able to take on color form in her watercolors. Her watercolors had shown fairly flat areas of color. Judith Walsh, having inspected over a thousand of O’Keeffe’s surviving works on paper during her work on the O’Keeffe Catalogue Raisonné project, believes that

Although she seems to have tried a variety of ways to achieve the subtle gradations in tone that she explored in charcoal and her first blue abstractions, in watercolor the merging of color is additive. That is, a third, darker color is created by mixing two wet colors, so chromatic transitions are not easily rendered.

...

Watercolor is simply not the proper tool for exploring the subtle shift of one color into another. For this she required the more opaque and controllable media of oil or pastel. By June 1918 . . . she had apparently exhausted

watercolor's appeal, as the medium appears only rarely in her work after that. Her main episode of watercolor use lasted about three years – from June 1916 to early 1919.¹³⁰

To achieve in color the kind of shaded forms that had delighted O'Keeffe since she was a school girl, she had to turn to painting in oils.

In addition to being a response to the artist's technical interests, O'Keeffe's move into painting in oils was probably a practical business decision. She is said to have remarked, "she had abandoned watercolor for oil because she wanted her work to be seen; people simply weren't paying enough attention to her watercolors."¹³¹ O'Keeffe's 1923 exhibition at Anderson Galleries, her only solo show since 1917, included a large selection of watercolors and a few charcoals from the teens in addition to the many newer oil paintings. Critics, however, largely referred to her works in this exhibition as "paintings," either not separating watercolors from oils or simply ignoring the older graphic works.¹³²

O'Keeffe had begun her move into oils, but she did engage in a few backward glances. In 1919 she made a group of formally related abstract charcoals that were finished works (Fig. 5.48), certainly strong enough for exhibition. Stieglitz, however, never showed the new charcoals, although he did exhibit the geometric watercolor *Blue Shapes* made in the same year (Fig. 5.49).¹³³ Apparently Stieglitz had decided that charcoal was O'Keeffe's past, and oil was her present and future, with watercolor finding an awkward place in between.

As Lynes observes,

the decline in the number of works on paper produced by O'Keeffe after her move to New York in 1918 may have been the result of her attempt to redefine herself as an oil painter, an idea that could well have been generated by Stieglitz's keen understanding of the New York art world. Despite the unparalleled success of the

Stieglitz-supported John Marin as a watercolorist in the first half of this [twentieth] century, prowess in easel painting was still a measure of artistic accomplishment; for a woman who aspired to be taken seriously in this environment, it was probably a necessity.¹³⁴

Indeed, even within Stieglitz's own circle of critics, watercolors simply could not command the respect accorded to oils. Henry McBride, a critic who often applauded watercolors by Charles Demuth, still admitted, "In fact I share in the conventional prejudice against an artist's career that shall be worked out exclusively in water color."¹³⁵ It was not impossible for viewers to admire watercolors, but the art world expected an artist to move at some point into the more serious, adult realm of oils.

Stieglitz, having faced such powerful prejudice against his own medium of photography, fought for the equality of all media. He battled to have Marin's watercolors granted both the critical respect and the monetary value traditionally reserved for oil paintings.¹³⁶ But Stieglitz's victories on Marin's behalf were not automatically extended to other workers in watercolor. Stieglitz would presumably have been reluctant to have to wage such an onerous battle against watercolor prejudice for multiple artists simultaneously. He saw Marin as the pinnacle of watercolorists, and thus the only necessary representative of his breed within the circle, saying, "As my wife must stand in my eyes for all women, as my child must be to me all children, so Marin must be to me all watercolorists. Otherwise he would mean nothing."¹³⁷ O'Keeffe may have run up against Stieglitz's reluctance to take on another modernist American watercolorist who might endanger Marin's image as unique. In the larger and more respected realm of oil painting, there was more room. In addition, Stieglitz may have feared that O'Keeffe's use of watercolor would cause critics to associate her with the tradition of both amateur and commercial women artists.

I also believe, regardless of Stieglitz's attitudes toward media, that O'Keeffe had been aiming toward a career in oil painting for a long time. While during her early years she worked almost entirely in the graphic media of pencil, charcoal, and watercolor, her aspirations from the beginning seem to have been fixed on oil painting. Pencil and charcoal were, among other things, media for training to make oils and for planning works in oil. O'Keeffe's identity as an artist long remained suspended between her hopes of painting and her actual experiences in graphic media. When O'Keeffe as a school girl asserted that she wanted to become an artist when she was grown up, she was accustomed to making drawings and watercolors. When pressed, she thought she might eventually be a portrait painter rather than a professional graphic artist.¹³⁸ At Chatham Episcopal Institute she made her portrait of the school's founder in oils and it was hung on the wall of the school for all to see. Yet all known examples of her other work at the Institute are graphic.¹³⁹ Drawing and watercolor were the media with which she was familiar in practical terms. At the Art Institute of Chicago, she entered the academic realm where students were divided according to their aspirations to become sculptors or painters in oils. Only at the Art Students League in New York did O'Keeffe at last have the opportunity to develop a command of the oil medium, winning an award for her still life of a dead rabbit with a copper pot.¹⁴⁰ When she grew disgusted with the limited possibilities of academic art, it was painting she was so pained to leave behind for years, shying away from "the smell of paint or turpentine."¹⁴¹ It seems that her strongest artistic yearnings were concentrated on oil painting, and therefore in that medium that her hopes could be most keenly disappointed.

When O'Keeffe returned fully to art during her studies with Arthur Wesley Dow, she found high regard again accorded to painting in oils. Although Dow drew much inspiration from Japanese and Chinese prints and brush paintings, he stated, "Painting with the Japanese brush leads directly to oil painting."¹⁴² This statement, showing the advance from Oriental to traditional European media, implies that Dow's European art background caused him to assume the superiority of the traditional European form over the traditional Asian one. He advised that many of the most advanced exercises in color and value in his book *Composition* could be executed in oil paint and evidently O'Keeffe used this medium in Dow's classes. He wrote a letter of recommendation for O'Keeffe in which he praised her, "She excels in drawing and painting, especially oil painting."¹⁴³

As she moved into abstract art, O'Keeffe re-enacted her artistic training. She confined herself to drawing in charcoal during her initial attempts to learn the new artistic approach of modern so that she could concentrate on form rather than color in 1915. Then, in 1916, when she was ready for the complexities of color, she moved into watercolor. Soon she tentatively attempted to make the final step to painting in oils, transferring into that medium some of the compositions she had invented in charcoals or in watercolors. However, lack of time and concentration seemed to doom most of her earliest modern oils to incompleteness. In 1918 and 1919 it was not a sudden move for her to begin concentrating on oil painting, relegating drawing and watercolor to more minor roles in her oeuvre. Oil was the medium toward which she had, I believe, long been working. In 1918, at last O'Keeffe the art teacher considered O'Keeffe the art student to have graduated; she was ready to work in the mature medium of oil paint. When Stieglitz

offered her the chance to choose what she wanted to do next, she did not hesitate to ask for time to paint.

This is not to say that O’Keeffe failed to respect her graphic skills, or to enjoy utilizing them. Watercolors and pastels continued to recur in her oeuvre for the rest of her career, and they were often accorded the honor of exhibition. Indeed, after Stieglitz’s death the Downtown Gallery, O’Keeffe’s new dealer, featured the artist’s watercolors from the 1910s in a 1958 exhibition.¹⁴⁴ And O’Keeffe always drew, filling sketchbooks with contour drawings and sketches. But her oeuvre became numerically dominated by oil paintings and her most important works were made in that medium.

O’Keeffe’s Graphic Works in Stieglitz’s Later Gallery Rhetoric

As O’Keeffe established her new reputation as a painter in oils, Stieglitz kept fresh the memory of her early graphic modernist works and he made sure that critics did not forget them. Stieglitz’s installation photographs reveal that O’Keeffe’s first solo exhibition to focus mainly on her paintings, held in 1923 at the Anderson Galleries, featured a large selection of the drawings and watercolors O’Keeffe had made in Texas after her 1917 solo exhibition at 291 (Fig. 5.50). In addition to these new works, Stieglitz included in the 1923 exhibition a single 1915 charcoal drawing that had hung at 291 in the 1916 group show through which he had introduced O’Keeffe (Fig. 3.7). After 1923, O’Keeffe’s solo exhibitions would all be dominated by oil paintings for as long as Stieglitz lived.

But Stieglitz and O’Keeffe did not discard O’Keeffe’s early drawings and watercolors. The pair retained almost all of the earlier graphic works in their own collection, except for the charcoal of the *Train at Night in the Desert* which had been sold

in 1917.¹⁴⁵ O’Keeffe recalled many years later, “Stieglitz had a portfolio of my drawings that he used to carry around with him all the time, and Hartley used to call them ‘Stieglitz’s Celestial Solitude.’”¹⁴⁶ For many years, Stieglitz continued to show the drawings privately to visitors to his galleries.¹⁴⁷

As Stieglitz showed friends and critics O’Keeffe’s early drawings he wove stories around them that contributed to her growing mythos. As Herbert Seligmann, noted, Stieglitz spoke in parables, “He might tell a story hundreds of times, but never twice the same It was as if Stieglitz sought . . . to arrive at the very core of the experience he was seeking to make clear.”¹⁴⁸ Or, one might say, Stieglitz could bend his material to make a variety of points, with little regard for the truth of details. In these stories, O’Keeffe’s drawings took a major role.

Stieglitz told two basic kinds of stories about O’Keeffe’s entry into modernism. The first laid out her background before she entered the Stieglitz circle. For example, in 1926 he told visitors to O’Keeffe’s show at his Intimate Gallery, “Georgia O’Keeffe is American. She has never been in Europe. Her work is too big for this Room. She has lived on the plains of Texas where she taught school. American trees, the pine tree for example, are similar to trees in Europe, but the American trees have their own character.”¹⁴⁹ This story is typical in Stieglitz’s stress on O’Keeffe’s naïve American background. Stieglitz told another visitor that O’Keeffe had studied at the Art Students League and realized that the paintings she had been making had to do with her teachers rather than herself. She also then studied at Teachers’ College and visited 291 while she was in New York, “She eventually went to teach in Canyon, Texas . . . saying quite frankly that she did not know what art was.”¹⁵⁰ Again, Stieglitz brought out O’Keeffe’s

simplicity, and her association with the vast American space of Texas. He added here more detail about her rejection of tradition and her confusion before entering the Stieglitz circle. These stories that Seligmann happened to record were apparently typical of those that Stieglitz told about O'Keeffe's background countless times over many years to many listeners.

The second genre of story that Stieglitz told about O'Keeffe's history, about how he had discovered her through her graphic art, was built upon the first genre of story through its focus on the artist's naïve but instinctively expressive nature as an artist and a person. Seligmann recounted that in March 1926, soon after O'Keeffe's annual exhibition at The Intimate Gallery had closed:

Stieglitz told today of how he met O'Keeffe. Eleven years ago . . . a young girl, Anita Pollitzer, Secretary of the New York branch of the National Woman's Party, walked in with a roll of drawings under her arm. "I've been asked by letter not to show anyone these," she said, "but they belong here, and here they are."

When Stieglitz saw the first one he said: "At last a woman on paper." He looked through all the drawings, and told the girl who had brought them that he would keep them for several months and look at them once or twice daily, and if at the end of that time he felt as he did then, he would show the drawings publicly. "And there will be hell raised here."

Stieglitz, to test his own feeling showed them to a painter friend, A. Walkowitz, whose remark upon viewing a number of the drawings in silence, "Just see how the charcoal is put on the paper," confirmed Stieglitz's feeling.

He waited to show the O'Keeffe drawings until the art season was over and the critics were laid off. Old men cried. Young men did not understand. The painters said: "We thought you were interested in art."

"And," added Stieglitz, "you should have seen what happened to the faces of women, young women, and middle-aged women when they saw them."¹⁵¹

Stieglitz in this story emphasized how he had needed to study O'Keeffe's drawings at length, and show them to friends, before being sure of their merit. A bit later

that same year he said, “he had looked at the drawings even six and seven times a day, one of them being a wash drawing of two blue lines in relationship, the most marvelous thing he had ever seen made by anybody.”¹⁵² Stieglitz here was probably incorrect in remembering that *Blue Lines*, one of his favorite works by O’Keeffe, had come to him at the same time as the first charcoals. This detail would not have bothered him if he felt that he had caught the spirit of the tale. By the time he exhibited the drawings, Stieglitz asserts in these stories, his study of them had made him certain of their importance, and he was willing to defend them from skeptics. Thus, Stieglitz praised himself almost as much as O’Keeffe, dramatizing his amazing ability to find in drawings the depth and importance of an artist whose strength others failed to discern.

In another aspect of the story Stieglitz told on March 14, 1926, Seligmann related, “In 1916 when Stieglitz was alone . . . in that darkest of dark periods he passed through a young woman, a bundle of energy, suddenly came to 291 with a roll of drawings, saying they had been sent to her with the request that she show them to no one. But she had to bring them to 291.”¹⁵³ Again, Stieglitz pointed out that these drawings had come out of the blue, and that there was a quality of privacy, or even secrecy, about them; the drawings had not been intended to be seen by anyone but Pollitzer. Yet Stieglitz had realized the universal importance of the works.

In Stieglitz’s stories about his discovery of O’Keeffe’s drawings he dramatized his own prescience – his ability to see the extraordinary possibilities in works whose simplicity he was stressing by the 1920s. While noting the simplicity of O’Keeffe’s graphic works, Stieglitz allowed others to see their significance. He said that in 1916, when the drawings were first shown, people without his guidance could not understand

them, “the artists asked him why he desecrated the room, saying that these things were not art. One remarkable girl . . . said they were too obvious.”¹⁵⁴ Stieglitz could see before anyone else saw. His trust in his understanding of drawings seems likely to have been based upon his special appreciation of drawings and watercolors that he had maintained since his experiences as a child art collector and through his years looking for artistic models for photography.

In 1926, while O’Keeffe’s paintings were on the walls around him,

To the people who had been listening, Stieglitz showed two of the earliest charcoal drawings, and when he inquired if they were not the same in spirit as the paintings of 1926 on the walls, all answered in the affirmative. Now, said Stieglitz, the critics and painters who had ridiculed the drawings were admitting that a woman could really paint. What had happened to them in the meantime?¹⁵⁵

What had happened, in Stieglitz’s eyes, was no doubt that he had used exhibitions and monologues to teach his visitors to see more clearly. Also, O’Keeffe’s gifts, formerly hidden in mere “minor” graphic art, had emerged into oil paintings and gained public recognition.

Stieglitz seemed to feel that graphic art, other than photography, was of a basic, primal nature. Tales of origin in the Stieglitz circle were often tales of graphic art. In May 1927 he related how he had discovered John Marin. In 1908 Stieglitz had opened a box of watercolors by Marin that had been sent to him from France by Steichen. Charles Lang Freer, the great collector of art by Whistler and of Asian art, saw in the early Marin watercolors only the surface influence of Whistler. Stieglitz, however, said “Well, I see something more than that.” Later, Stieglitz met Marin in his studio in Paris. Marin showed him a little water color and “Whistlerian” etchings, but “there was one etching that was different. Stieglitz found it related to the water color.

“Why don’t you do more in this spirit?” asked Stieglitz.

“Sh!” said Marin.

“Why?” inquired Stieglitz.

Well, both of Marin’s dealers had been there . . . and told him they could sell the Whistlerian ones, but the other kind they could not dispose of.

“So you are to be their servant – really their slave?” said Stieglitz.

“Oh, it’s not so bad as that,” explained Marin, saying he would always do the other thing for his pleasure.

“Well, if I could do what you have done in that water color, and that etching, I’d tell the dealers to go to hell,” exploded Stieglitz, and realized then that he had taken on a responsibility.¹⁵⁶

Stieglitz asserted that he had discovered a great modern artist by recognizing in his graphic work something that no one else could see. Even the artist had not recognized the full value of his own art.

Stieglitz also told in 1926 how, “Dove fourteen years ago had brought in a dozen pieces of work, drawings and pastels, and Stieglitz had given him a show.” Again, the seer Stieglitz had spotted promise in works on paper too minor for others to appreciate. Yet, much as he had done for O’Keeffe, “Stieglitz had given him [Dove] five hundred dollars and told him to paint.”¹⁵⁷ Despite his arguments against dividing “minor” media from “major” media,¹⁵⁸ Stieglitz continued to act on a traditional belief that graphic art (except perhaps in the case of Marin, who also later worked more in oils) functioned to develop an artist until oil paintings came with maturity. Perhaps Stieglitz objected to an artist’s continuing to produce art that was too “easy.” Stieglitz quoted Arthur Dove as having said, when he first saw O’Keeffe’s drawings, “That girl is doing without effort what all we modernists have been trying to do.”¹⁵⁹ Stieglitz and Dove seemed to agree that drawings were simple, basic, and natural, but not highly developed or challenging in comparison with oil paintings. Dove, however, may have changed his mind, since he

made a number of abstract charcoal drawings that appear to be heavily influenced by O’Keeffe’s 1915 charcoal abstractions (Fig. 5.51).

Stieglitz, despite a history of being obsessed by the black and white palette of his own photographic medium, nonetheless apparently saw much of the importance of black and white works in the color works that might develop from them. He said that he felt O’Keeffe’s “color sense to be implicit in the original drawings.”¹⁶⁰ Stieglitz’s fellow photographer Paul Strand saw this also, writing in 1924, “Even the black and white drawings [by O’Keeffe] seem to have been felt in color and evoke a sense of it.”¹⁶¹ Stieglitz further stated that when he had seen O’Keeffe’s “first attempts in color, he ‘foolishly’ advised her to stick to black and white as there was more color in her work of this sort. But O’Keeffe found color and went to red, then green, then other colors, exploring each one thoroughly.”¹⁶² Despite the “color” that might be inherent in black and white drawings, for an artist to develop fully, he or she had to work in color. It is worth noting that in 1907 Stieglitz and photographers in his circle became excited by the development of the Autochrome technique of color photography,¹⁶³ but their enthusiasm was short-lived.

Stieglitz continued to repeat his stories about O’Keeffe’s graphic genesis for many years, often while showing the original drawings to visitors to his galleries. His ideas about the place of drawings and watercolors in the development of O’Keeffe’s oeuvre echoed in critical writings for decades. Undeniably, Stieglitz thought that O’Keeffe’s art would be better appreciated if people had access to the artist through biography and her earlier graphic works. Articles beginning in 1926 summarized, often with numerous errors, O’Keeffe’s childhood in Wisconsin and Virginia (and,

erroneously, Texas), followed by her studies in Chicago and New York, her work as a commercial artist in Chicago, her realization that all of her art had been made to please others, her conversion to modernism, Pollitzer's taking the abstract charcoals to Stieglitz, and the 1916 exhibition at 291. The story was told so many times, with such stress on the dramatic aspects of O'Keeffe's emergence through her drawings, that by 1934 critic Elizabeth McCausland complained that "perhaps the O'Keeffe myth has done this serious and honest artist a disservice by emphasizing certain romantic aspects of her personality at the expense of putting a precise and scientific value on her work."¹⁶⁴

During the 1920s, having heard Stieglitz's stories about the artist, critics stressed the slight, modest nature of the drawings with which O'Keeffe's modern art had begun. Henry Tyrrell, for instance, one of the few who had actually seen the drawings in their original 1916 and 1917 exhibitions, wrote in 1923, "it is now about a decade since Miss O'Keeffe's timorous drawings of flower germination and embryonic life first appeared among the other incomprehensibilities offered to a skeptical public by Alfred Stieglitz at 291."¹⁶⁵ Waldo Frank, in his 1926 book *Time Exposures*, said of the 1915 charcoals, "Alfred Stieglitz, after forty years in comradeship with art, said he had been waiting for just these particular modest drawings."¹⁶⁶ Frances O'Brien, writing for *Nation* in 1927, told how Stieglitz had found the 1915 drawings he saw in 1916 (reduced for some reason in O'Brien's account to only two drawings) "refreshing."¹⁶⁷ "Timorous," "modest," "refreshing," – the drawings of 1915 became in retrospect slight, unsophisticated, even child-like predecessors of O'Keeffe's masterly oils.

O’Keeffe’s Invention of an Oil Painting Style

The majority of O’Keeffe’s art starting in late 1918 explored graceful forms in space, be they representational or abstract. Her oils in effect merged the brilliant hues of her watercolors with the pseudo-academic modeling of her 1915 and 1916 abstract charcoals (Fig. 5.47). The direct finger marks of the 1915 drawings and 1916 watercolors disappeared in favor of an increasingly smooth-surfaced, detached oil style. Thus O’Keeffe drew attention to her forms, colors, and compositions rather than to her own creative gestures. She left behind the oil style she had learned from William Merritt Chase that had asserted the artist’s individual identity through bravura brushwork. O’Keeffe may have backed off from leaving overt hand marks in her art for the same reason that Lynes has established she largely abandoned her early abstractions - to avoid having her art interpreted as naïve sexual expression.¹⁶⁸

By the thirties Henry McBride could say, “the best O’Keeffes seem wished upon the canvas – the mechanics have been so successfully concealed.”¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth McCausland saw in O’Keeffe’s works “a consummate control of paint and canvas, clean and pure to a miraculous degree.”¹⁷⁰ In comparison to more openly gestural Stieglitz circle artists like John Marin and, at times, Marsden Hartley, O’Keeffe’s polished surfaces ironically seemed assertively individualistic to critic Margaret Breuning. Breuning exclaimed over O’Keeffe’s “individuality of . . . technical handling,” and noted, “Her technical equipment of draftsmanship, brushwork and incisiveness of pattern seems as definite a personal artistic idiom as a painter could employ.”¹⁷¹ It was impossible for O’Keeffe to withdraw her personality from scrutiny in her oils once Stieglitz had exposed

her in his monologues about her graphic art, and in his photographs of the artist with her drawings and watercolors.

O’Keeffe devoted the late teens and early twenties to moving past her early, more gestural graphic ventures to develop a sophisticated and highly controlled approach to painting modernist works in oils. This was a period when the small spaces of 291 had closed. Stieglitz now devoted his galleries largely to showing American art that he thus did not have to ship from Europe. Stieglitz now could easily afford to show oil paintings and thus had fewer technical reasons to stress small, inexpensive drawings, prints, and watercolors in his exhibitions. Other than Marin’s watercolors, a few watercolors by Dove, and O’Keeffe’s occasional returns to watercolor and pastel, the majority of the works Stieglitz showed for the rest of his life were paintings and photographs.

During the twenties O’Keeffe further distanced herself from her previous intimate graphic technique by adding the precise geometry of the Manhattan cityscape to her range of subjects (Fig. 5.52). Her cool and polished oil surfaces would perhaps have kept viewers at a distance if Stieglitz had allowed the oil paintings to be the only visual voice of the artist. The critics’ “intense interest from the psycho-analytical point of view”¹⁷² in O’Keeffe’s art would remain so long as Stieglitz literally continued to hold up the artist’s early drawings for critics to view and assert the instinctive directness of their expression of womanhood. In his photographs of the artist with her drawings and watercolors, and in his oft-repeated stories about her early works on paper, Stieglitz kept alive the image of O’Keeffe as an adventurous young artist. The more naively executed (in his eyes) early drawings were the means by which Stieglitz kept opened a window into O’Keeffe’s personality and passions (as he saw them). In effect, the drawings became Stieglitz’s

illustrations of what he perceived to lie under, behind, and before O'Keeffe's mature modernist oils.

Notes

¹ Richard Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: a Biography* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 397-398.

² Stieglitz to Dove, June 18, 1918, Arthur Dove and Alfred Stieglitz, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, editor Ann Lee Morgan (The American Arts Series. Newark, Delaware, London and Toronto: University of Delaware Press, Associated University Presses, 1988), 59-60. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

³ Stieglitz to Elizabeth Stieglitz Davidson, June 16, 1918, quoted in Roxanna Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Life* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 203-204. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁴ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: a Life*, 208-209.

⁵ Whelan, *Stieglitz*, 399.

⁶ Robinson, *O'Keeffe: A Life*, 206; Whelan, *Stieglitz*, 399-400.

⁷ O'Keeffe, Georgia, introduction by. *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978, not paginated.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Whelan, *Stieglitz*, 154-155.

¹⁰ Doris Bry, "Alfred Stieglitz: Photographer," in *Exhibition of Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1958), 16.

¹¹ Stieglitz to Arthur Dove, July 1918, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 61.

¹² "Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz," in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, Sarah E. Greenough (Washington, D.C., Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 545-547.

¹³ Alfred Stieglitz "Woman in Art," Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 136-138. This quotation page 137.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Stieglitz to O'Keeffe, March 31, 1918, Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 159. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

¹⁷ Stieglitz quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Encounters: a Memoir* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 102.

¹⁸ O'Keeffe to Doris McMurdo, July 1, 1922, Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987), letter #25, p. 169. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

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- ¹⁹ Barbara Buhler Lynes, "Georgia O'Keeffe and Feminism: a Problem of Position," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, Editors Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 436-449.
- ²⁰ Quoted in Mary Lynn Kotz, "A Day With Georgia O'Keeffe," *Artnews* 76, no. 10 (1977): 43.
- ²¹ Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), unpaginated.
- ²² For the history of O'Keeffe's collecting and destroying her own works, see Barbara Buhler Lynes, "O'Keeffe's O'Keeffes: The Artist's Collection," in *O'Keeffe's O'Keeffes: the Artist's Collection*, Barbara Buhler Lynes with Russell Bowman (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 30-70. A comparison of O'Keeffe's correspondence with Pollitzer with the works from the 1914-1915 recorded in the *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* reveals that many of the early works do not survive or their locations are not known. See *Lovingly, Georgia: the Complete Correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer*, ed. Clive Giboire (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990), 5-13; and Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1: 40-58.
- ²³ Quoted in Kotz, "A Day With Georgia O'Keeffe," 44.
- ²⁴ O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait*.
- ²⁵ Quoted in Kotz, "A Day with O'Keeffe," 44.
- ²⁶ O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait*.
- ²⁷ Stieglitz to Dove, July 1918, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove*, 61.
- ²⁸ Janet Malcolm, "Photography: Artists and Lovers: Review of *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz*," *The New Yorker* 55 (1979): 118.
- ²⁹ Sarah Whitaker Peters, *Becoming O'Keeffe: the Early Years*, updated and expanded ed. (New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press, Publishers, 2001), 160.
- ³⁰ Sanford Schwartz, "Georgia O'Keeffe Writes a Book," *New Yorker* (1978): 93.
- ³¹ Sarah Greenough quoted in "Alfred Stieglitz: An Affirmation of Light," conversation in Weston J. Naef et al., *Alfred Stieglitz: in Focus. Photographs From the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1995), 125, 127.
- ³² Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916-1929* (Ann Arbor, London: UMI Research Press, 1989), p. 44, and n. 30, p. 331. She notes examples of Stieglitz's friends' reactions to these photographs, including Herbert H. Seligmann, 291: "A Vision Through Photography," in *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait*, ed. Waldo Frank et al. (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1924), 116-117."
- ³³ Hutchins Hapgood, *A Victorian in the Modern World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), 339.
- ³⁴ "Exhibitions Presented by Stieglitz," in *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, Sarah E. Greenough (Washington, Boston, New York, London: National Gallery of Art and Bulfinch Press, 2001), 547.
- ³⁵ Waldo Frank, "A Thought Hazarded," *MSS* 4 (December 1922): 5.

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- ³⁶ Margaret Olin, "Gaze," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. By Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 325.
- ³⁷ Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London : University of California Press, 1996), 77.
- ³⁸ O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait*.
- ³⁹ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 95-96.
- ⁴⁰ Georgia O'Keeffe, "To MSS. and Its Subscribers and Others Who Read and Don't Subscribe!," letter to the editor, *MSS.*, 4 (December 1922): 17-18; reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics* as Appendix A, #10, p. 183.
- ⁴¹ O'Keeffe to Strand, June 3, 1917, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters*, letters selected and annotated by Sarah Greenough (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 161. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁴² O'Keeffe to Pollitzer, August 1916, *Lovingly, Georgia*, ed. Giboire, 174. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.
- ⁴³ The following statement (presumably written by Stieglitz), appeared in the last number of *Camera Work*: "In the next number of *Camera Work* we hope to introduce our readers to examples of Georgia O'Keeffe's work." "Exhibitions at '291' – Season 1916-1917," *Camera Work* 49-50 (June 1917): 33.
- ⁴⁴ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 45.
- ⁴⁵ Sarah Greenough, "The Key Set," in *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set: the Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs* (Washington, D.C. and New York: National Gallery of Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2002), 1:xxxii.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles: the Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine," *The New Yorker* 50 (1974): 44.
- ⁴⁷ During the early years of 291 Stieglitz began at the nearby restaurant Holland House what Lowe calls "a Stieglitz Round Table that persisted in one form or another until the last few years of his life." Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: a Memoir/ Biography* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), 126. During the twenties "On Saturday nights Stieglitz usually took a half dozen friends to the Far East Tea Garden, a moderately priced Chinese restaurant on the second floor of a building at Columbus Circle overlooking Central Park. While the men argued across the marble-topped tables, Georgia sat wordlessly, bemused and detached, amazed that they could talk so much." Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: a Biography of Georgia O'Keeffe*, revised ed (New York: Washington Square Press, Pocket Books, 1986), 158.
- ⁴⁸ Jonathan Weinberg, *Ambition & Love in American Modern Art*, Yale Publications in the History of Art (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 78.
- ⁴⁹ Charles Brock, "Charles Demuth: A Sympathetic Order," in *Modern Art and America*, 366-368.
- ⁵⁰ Wendy Wick Reaves, *Celebrity Caricature in America* (Washington, D.C., New Haven, and London: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in association with Yale University Press, 1998), 78.
- ⁵¹ Richard Whelan sees Stieglitz also pointing to affinities between Cubism and photography by pairing reproductions of a cubist drawing by Picasso with his own photograph *Spring Showers* in *Camera Work*. Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 295.

⁵² Sarah E. Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Rebellious Midwife to a Thousand Ideas," in *Modern Art and America*, 36-38.

⁵³ Prints from the cancelled negatives are preserved in the Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL.

⁵⁴ For commentary on the degree to which Stieglitz created Marin as a modern artist, see Timothy Robert Rodgers, "Making the American Artist: John Marin, Alfred Stieglitz and Their Critics, 1909-1936," PhD diss., Brown University, 1995.

⁵⁵ O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait*.

⁵⁶ Sarah Greenough observes of Stieglitz that, "In 1915 he posed Picabia in front of his paintings *This Has to Do with Me* and *Comic Wedlock*, repeating the shape of the artist's tie, the arch of his shoulders, even the creases of his jacket in the biomorphic and sexually charged paintings in the background." Greenough, "The Key Set," 1:xxxii.

⁵⁷ The watercolor appears in these photographs, and in Stieglitz's installation photographs of O'Keeffe's 1917 exhibition at 291, oriented differently than it is in the O'Keeffe catalogue raisonné. Lynes based her orientation of the watercolor in the catalogue raisonné on Stieglitz-O'Keeffe correspondence and the 29 three-ring binders about O'Keeffe's work assembled by her assistant Doris Bry beginning in the early 1950s and now known as the Abiquiu Notebooks. Barbara Buhler Lynes, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:82, 15.

⁵⁸ For instance Marsden Hartley, "Georgia O'Keeffe," from "Some Women Artists in Modern Painting," chapter 13 in *Adventures in the Arts: Informal Chapters on Painters, Vaudeville, and Poets*, introduction Waldo Frank (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921; reprint, New York: Hacker Art Books, 1972), 116-119; Paul Rosenfeld, "The Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe," *Vanity Fair* 19 (1922): 56, 112, 114, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #8, p. 175-179; Paul Rosenfeld, "American Painting," *The Dial* 71 (1921): 649-70, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #6, p. 171-174; and "I Can't Sing So I Paint," *New York Sun*, 5 December 1922, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #9, p. 180-182.

⁵⁹ Rosenfeld, "American Painting," 649.

⁶⁰ O'Keeffe wrote to Mitchell Kennerley in 1922, "You see Rosenfeld's articles have embarrassed me – I wanted to lose the one for the Hartley book when I had the only copy of it to read – so it couldn't be in the book. The things they write sound so strange and far removed from what I feel of myself." O'Keeffe to Kennerley, Fall 1922, Cowart and Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters*, letter #26, p. 170. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. For more on O'Keeffe's reactions to such criticism, see *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 55-88.

⁶¹ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 57, 55.

⁶³ Henry McBride, "O'Keeffe at the Museum," *New York Sun* (May 18, 1946): 9; cited in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 43.

⁶⁴ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 41-43.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 43.

⁶⁶ Stieglitz letter to Katherine Rhoades, May 31, 1916, Stieglitz/ O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.

⁶⁷ Greenough notes Stieglitz's focus on O'Keeffe's hands in his photographs of the 1910s. "The Key Set," in *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set*, 1: xxxvi.

⁶⁸ This image “is a key picture in the series. We know that O’Keeffe felt that without it the 1978 exhibition [of Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe] would have been incomplete.” Weinberg, *Love & Ambition*, p. 92 and n. 31. “It was the only picture in the 1978 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition that was borrowed from another museum, the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., suggesting that O’Keeffe felt its presence was necessary to the success of the exhibition.” Ibid, 284. “When O’Keeffe selected the photographs for the 1978 book, she found sufficient material in the group of pictures she had placed on long-term loan at the Metropolitan Museum in 1949, with one suggestive exception: she insisted on including the image borrowed from the ‘key set’ of prints she had lent to the National Gallery of Art.” Maria Morris Hambourg, (afterword), *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz*, reprint with additions (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 127.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations With Goethe*, Everyman's Library Ernest Rhys, 851 (London and New York: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd. and E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1946), 74.

⁷⁰ Jack Flam, “The Modern Drawing,” in *New York Collects: Drawings and Watercolors, 1900-1950* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1999), 10.

⁷¹ Roger Fry, “Line As a Means of Expression in Modern Art,” *Burlington Magazine* 34 (1919): 62.

⁷² See my chapter Four notes 64, 74, and 75.

⁷³ As Belinda Rathbone states, “Rarely stooping to the literal depiction of brush in hand, he nevertheless made explicit the connection between her hands and her work.” Belinda Rathbone, “Like Nature Itself,” in *Georgia O’Keeffe & Alfred Stieglitz: Two Lives*, editors Alexandra Arrowsmith, and Thomas West (New York and Washington, D.C.: Callaway Editions in association with The Phillips Collection, 1992), 54.

⁷⁴ Weinberg, *Love & Ambition*, 91.

⁷⁵ O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait*.

⁷⁶ Charles Duncan quoted in *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13. Reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166.

⁷⁷ Weinberg, *Love & Ambition*, 91.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Stieglitz’s story cited in my first chapter about artists who saw his early photographs made in Europe, “One of the artists remarked, ‘Isn’t it too bad your photographs are not paintings. If they had been made by hand, they would be art.’” Quoted from Stieglitz in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: an American Seer* (An Aperture Book. New York: Random House, 1973), 30.

⁷⁹ Paul Rosenfeld, “Stieglitz,” *The Dial* 70 (April 1921): 399.

⁸⁰ Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: the Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 83.

⁸¹ Ibid, 98-99.

⁸² Weinberg, *Love & Ambition*, 93.

⁸³ Thanks to Professor Sally M. Promeey for bringing my attention to the connection between this image and divine creation.

⁸⁴ Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, June 1916, Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper*, 139-140. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Norman, *American Seer*, 10.

⁸⁶ Written for and reproduced in Frederick Julius Ringel, ed., *America as Americans See It* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932). Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL.

⁸⁷ Paul Rosenfeld, “Stieglitz,” *The Dial* 70, no. 4 (April 1921): 398.

⁸⁸ Lewis Mumford, “The Metropolitan Milieu,” in *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait*, edited by Waldo Frank et. al. (New York: The Literary Guild, 1934), 57.

⁸⁹ Wagner, *Three Artists*, quote on 79 and further discussion of the composite photographic portrait as embodying Stieglitz’s ideas about O’Keeffe’s art 79-94.

⁹⁰ O’Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O’Keeffe: a Portrait*.

⁹¹ Sherwood Anderson, “Hands,” *The Masses* 8, no. 5 (March 1916): 1, 7. Weinberg also mentions Anderson’s “Hands” in connection with Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe, but only to stress that homosexual hands “had a grace indicative not of prowess or potency but of weakness.” Weinberg does not bring out the role of hands in both this story and Stieglitz’s photographs as organs of artistic or sexual communication. Weinberg, *Love & Ambition*, 95-96.

⁹² Anderson, “Hands,” 1.

⁹³ O’Keeffe to Anderson, February 11, 1924, Cowart and Hamilton. *Georgia O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, letter # 30, p. 176. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

⁹⁴ O’Keeffe speaking in *Georgia O’Keeffe*, VHS, directed by Perry Miller Adato (New York: WNET, 1977).

⁹⁵ Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, 89-111.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 100-103, 107-111. The quotation is from Blanche C. Matthias, “Georgia O’Keeffe and the Intimate Gallery: Stieglitz Showing Seven Americans,” *Chicago Evening Post Magazine of the Art World* (March 2, 1926), 1, 14, reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, Appendix A, no. #, p. 246-250.

⁹⁷ Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set*, 2: 818-821.

⁹⁸ Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, 110-111.

⁹⁹ Perhaps the first reproduction of this photograph was as plate 23a in *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, in 1924. For the many instances in which this photograph was reproduced between 1934 and Stieglitz’s death in 1946, see Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set*, 1: 293.

¹⁰⁰ Greenough notes how Stieglitz would pose O’Keeffe’s hands “to hold a button on her coat, repeating the forms bubbling up from the canyon floor.” Greenough, “The Key Set,” in *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set*, 1: xxxvi.

¹⁰¹ See my Chapter Four.

¹⁰² As Greenough phrases it, “In one study he made her charcoal drawing appear to spring forth from the crown of her head as the manifestation of creative invention.” Greenough, “The Key Set,” *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set*, 1: xxxvi.

¹⁰³ Alfred Stieglitz “Woman in Art,” Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 137.

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- ¹⁰⁴ Greenough, "The Key Set," *Alfred Stieglitz: the Key Set*, 1: xxxvi.
- ¹⁰⁵ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 87.
- ¹⁰⁶ Wagner, *Three Artists*, 37.
- ¹⁰⁷ Paul Rosenfeld, "Stieglitz," *The Dial* LXX, no. 4 (April 1921): 398.
- ¹⁰⁸ Charles Caffin, "Picasso's Latest Pictures of Intellectualized Sensations," *New York American* (December 191, 1914), sec. 1 p. 8.
- ¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Luther Cary, "Picabia and Picasso," *The New York Times* (January 24, 1915): sec. 5 p. 11.
- ¹¹⁰ Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, 107, 143-145, 155 etc.
- ¹¹¹ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, and the Critics*, 50.
- ¹¹² Stieglitz to Paul Strand, November 17, 1918, quoted in Lisle, *Portrait: O'Keeffe*, 133.
- ¹¹³ Alfred Stieglitz, "Our Illustrations," *Camera Work* 46 (April 1914): 51.
- ¹¹⁴ Joseph Meder, *The Mastery of Drawing*, trans. and revised by Winslow Ames. revised ed. (New York: Abaris Books, Inc., 1978), 16.
- ¹¹⁵ An unidentified critic for *Time* magazine later commented upon this same process of paring back to the truth in O'Keeffe's own art. "Whatever else can be said about her, no one paints a pelvis or a skull more cleanly or searchingly than O'Keeffe. Her brush like a surgical knife, pares the bony convolutions to paper thinness, sculpturing them in icy white against the ice-blue sky of New Mexico." The title of the article is more suggestive about how this visual revelation works. "Austere Stripper," *Time* 47 (May 27, 1946): 74-75. Thanks to Professor Sally M. Promey for mentioning the "striptease" at work in Stieglitz's sequence of ever more revealing images.
- ¹¹⁶ Henry Tyrrell, "New York Art Exhibitions," *Christian Science Monitor* (2 June 1916), 10, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #1, p. 166.
- ¹¹⁷ Stieglitz to John G. Bullock, March 26, 1917, YCAL, quoted in William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphics Society, 1977), 175.
- ¹¹⁸ Stieglitz quoted in Norman, *American Seer*, 175.
- ¹¹⁹ MSS 22 (March 1922): 9-10, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 36-37.
- ¹²⁰ MSS 22 (March 1922): 9-10, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, 35-36.
- ¹²¹ See my chapter 4.
- ¹²² O'Keeffe, introduction to *Georgia O'Keeffe: a Portrait*.
- ¹²³ Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles: the Rose in the Eye Looked Pretty Fine," *The New Yorker* 50 (1974): 42. This quote refers specifically to O'Keeffe's years teaching in Texas between 1916 and 1918, but this mode of working began in the summer of 1916 before she arrived in Texas.
- ¹²⁴ Jean Evans, "Stieglitz -- Always Battling and Retreating," *PM*, 23 (December 1945): magazine sec., 12.

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- ¹²⁵ Quoted in Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper*, 165.
- ¹²⁶ Whelan, *Stieglitz*, 400.
- ¹²⁷ Georgia O’Keeffe to Elizabeth Stieglitz Davidson, August 1918, Stieglitz/ O’Keeffe Archive, YCAL, quoted in Whelan, *Stieglitz*, 400. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.
- ¹²⁸ This watercolor has faded a great deal over the years. Originally, its color would probably have been much closer to those of the related oils. Judith Walsh conversation with the author, September 8, 2004, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- ¹²⁹ Barbara Buhler Lynes, “Inventions of Different Orders,” in *O’Keeffe on Paper* (Washington and Santa Fe: National Gallery of Art and Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, 2000), 48-49.
- ¹³⁰ Judith Walsh, “Solving Puzzles, Discovering O’Keeffe: The Georgia O’Keeffe Catalogue Raisonné: IFAR Evening, April 24, 2002,” *IFAR Journal* 5, no. 2 (2002): 31 (on Walsh’s role in the catalogue raisonné project), 34 (the quotation).
- ¹³¹ Paraphrase in from Georgia O’Keeffe in Kenneth Baker, “The World in a Drop of Water,” *Artforum* 24, no. 4 (1985): 58.
- ¹³² For example see Alan Burroughs, “Studio and Gallery,” *New York Sun*, February 3, 1923, 9; reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #12, 185-186; and Elizabeth Luther Cary, “Art - Competitions, Sales, and Exhibitions of the Mid-Season: Georgia O’Keeffe, American,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1923, sec. 7, 7; reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #13, 186-187.
- ¹³³ Lynes, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:148-149.
- ¹³⁴ Lynes, “Inventions of Different Orders,” 53.
- ¹³⁵ Henry McBride, “Works of Charles Demuth Shown in Daniel Galleries,” *New York Herald*, December 2, 1923.
- ¹³⁶ Timothy Robert Rodgers, “Alfred Stieglitz, Duncan Phillips, and the ‘\$6,000 Marin’,” *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (1992): 54-66.
- ¹³⁷ Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 7.
- ¹³⁸ O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, initial essay.
- ¹³⁹ See my chapter 2, note 51.
- ¹⁴⁰ Lisle, *Portrait: O’Keeffe*, 49.
- ¹⁴¹ Helen Appleton Read, “Georgia O’Keeffe - Woman Artist Whose Art Is Sincerely Feminine,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 6, 1924, 4, reprinted in Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #30, p. 211-214.
- ¹⁴² Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: a Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, 13th ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 73.
- ¹⁴³ Arthur Wesley Dow to Mr. C. J. Scott, Superintendent of Schools, Wilmington, Delaware, July 12, 1915, copy in Laurie Lisle Papers, AAA.

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- ¹⁴⁴ *O'Keeffe: Exhibition, Watercolors, 1916-1917* (New York: The Downtown Gallery, 1958).
- ¹⁴⁵ Lynes, ed., *O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1:86. Also see Lynes, "O'Keeffe's O'Keeffes: The Artist's Collection," 30-70.
- ¹⁴⁶ Mary Lynn Kotz, "A Day With Georgia O'Keeffe," *Artnews* 76, no. 10 (1977): 44.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ralph Looney, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Atlantic Monthly* 215 (1965): 108.
- ¹⁴⁸ Herbert Seligmann, "Foreword," *Stieglitz Talking*, vii. Seligmann recorded conversations and monologues in Stieglitz's Intimate Gallery between December 1925 and May 1931 in his book *Alfred Stieglitz Talking*.
- ¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 27-28.
- ¹⁵⁰ Paraphrased in Seligman, *Stieglitz Talking*, 70.
- ¹⁵¹ Quoted in Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 23-24.
- ¹⁵² Paraphrased in Seligmann, March 24, 1926, *Stieglitz Talking*, 70.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁴ Paraphrased in Seligmann, March 24, 1926, *Stieglitz Talking*, 70.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 129-131.
- ¹⁵⁷ January 20, 1926, paraphrased in Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 13.
- ¹⁵⁸ Stieglitz quoted in Dorothy Norman, ed., "From the Writings and Conversations of Alfred Stieglitz," *Twice a Year*, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 1938), p. 79.
- ¹⁵⁹ Quoted, February 5, 1926, Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 44.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ¹⁶¹ Paul Strand, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Playboy: a Portfolio of Art and Satire* 9 (1924): 19, reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #32, p. 216-220.
- ¹⁶² December 1926, paraphrased in Seligmann, *Stieglitz Talking*, 117. Judging from surviving works, Stieglitz was incorrect about the order in which O'Keeffe took up colors during 1916, since he does not mention blue that was the first color she used.
- ¹⁶³ Whelan, *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography*, 226-227.
- ¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth McCausland, "O'Keeffe Retrospective Shows Artist's Growth," *Springfield [Massachusetts] Sunday Union and Republican*, 18 February 1934, sec. E, 6.
- ¹⁶⁵ Henry Tyrrell, "Art Observatory: Hide Tide in Exhibitions Piles Up Shining Things of Art: Two Women Painters Lure With Suave Abstractions," *The World*, February 4, 1923, sec. M, 9; reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #15, p. 189.

¹⁶⁶ Waldo Frank, *Time Exposures by Search-Light* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), chapter 3 reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #54, p. 254.

¹⁶⁷ Frances O'Brien, "Americans We Like: Georgia O'Keeffe," *Nation* 125 (1927): 361-362; reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #67, p. 271.

¹⁶⁸ Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, passim.

¹⁶⁹ Henry McBride, "Georgia O'Keeffe's Exhibition" *New York Sun*, January 14, 1933, 10.

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth McCausland, "O'Keeffe Exhibition Shows Progress From 1926 to 1932," *The Springfield Sunday Union and Republican* (22 January 1933).

¹⁷¹ Margaret Breuning, "Art World Events," *New York Evening Post*, January 16, 1933, 9.

¹⁷² Stieglitz, statement *Camera Work* 48 (October 1916): 12-13. Reprinted in Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics*, as Appendix A, #2, p. 166.

Conclusion

On January 1, 1916, a roll of ten abstract charcoal drawings brought together two powerful creative personalities – Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz. In this dissertation I assert that the graphic media of these works, and O’Keeffe’s watercolors that soon followed them, had great importance for the artist Georgia O’Keeffe, the photographer and impresario Alfred Stieglitz, and their joint modernist enterprise.

Medium is an apt term for the physical means of art making because the work of art is the median term in the equation that links artist with audience. Both creator and viewer engage with the same physical stuff; in the case of charcoal drawings this is silvery gray dust on textured white paper. O’Keeffe and Stieglitz each brought a wealth of individual experience, preconceptions, and opinions to their understanding of this new art. Each focused upon different qualities in the art works and the media from which they were made. That is to say, O’Keeffe and Stieglitz each had a distinct personal culture of graphic media. These two people, coming together with the many artists, critics, and other members of Stieglitz’s circle, assembled a rich collective body of cultural material reacting to and commenting upon O’Keeffe’s early works on paper. While O’Keeffe made most of her finished art works in oil paint during her long career, her modernist oeuvre and Stieglitz’s approach to it both emerged from this graphic cultural context.

In 1915, when O’Keeffe wanted to escape the limitations of traditional academic art, she was not willing or able to completely forget her conventional training. Her invention of a personal modernist idiom followed the process Abraham Walkowitz had recommended to Anita Pollitzer when she wondered whether to continue her academic

training or to abandon it, “you should . . . learn all they’ve got to teach you – then work by yourself & forget *all* you can of what they’ve told you & what’s left will be the part that’s good for you.”¹

Analysis of the media in which O’Keeffe rendered her abstract forms reveals how, in South Carolina in 1915, and in the next few years in New York, Virginia, and Texas, she put together varied elements to arrive at a personally expressive modernist vocabulary. While the rhetoric of early twentieth-century modernism stressed rebellion against academic conventions, strong technical and historic ties remained in place between the two kinds of art. The anti-academic theories behind such modern art movements as Cubism and Futurism did not, in themselves, interest O’Keeffe. Her eye seems to have been caught by how modern drawings and watercolors she saw modified familiar technical properties of line and color. The assertive clarity of Picasso’s charcoal drawings and the free play of colors in Matisse’s watercolors acted as bridges between O’Keeffe’s academic past and her modernist future.

From childhood on, O’Keeffe deployed her charcoals, watercolors, and other art materials as means to an end. When visual forms caught her attention, pencil or watercolor were media well suited for transferring these shapes and colors to paper as sketches or finished works. These graphic media, however, proved to be far more than simple physical tools. They carried a heavy freight of history that O’Keeffe encountered in the course of her technical instruction. Charcoal, she learned, was not only an apt medium for making drawings; it was the traditional academic medium for beginnings. It was in charcoal that young artists learned to draw and in this same medium that mature artists experimented with new visual ideas and planned compositions for major works. In

addition, charcoal was the medium for drawing that subject at the heart of the western art tradition, the nude human figure. Academic artists stressed the subjects they depicted and suppressed evidence of their physical work.

In making her 1915 charcoals, O’Keeffe added her own personal memories to the institutional traditions of the medium. In charcoal she had conquered the frightening challenge of drawing the nude figure; in charcoal she had advanced to the head of her classes at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York. Even when O’Keeffe broke from academic art, her guide into modern design, Arthur Wesley Dow, advocated charcoal as a medium for sketching compositions. Finally, at 291 gallery and in its associated publications, *Camera Work* and *291*, O’Keeffe saw charcoal drawings made by such modernist exemplars as Pablo Picasso and Marius de Zayas. When O’Keeffe sat down in 1915 to attempt making works that could bring her into the realm of modernism, she found in charcoal a medium that combined positive personal associations with a heritage of both academic and modernist authority.

Charcoal’s technical characteristics and the traditional methods of using the medium were also key elements in the artist’s choices. As O’Keeffe felt her way into modernism, seeking shapes that both felt and looked satisfying to her, drawing with dusty charcoal sticks allowed her to draw and erase over and over. The same charcoal that she had used to draw the academic nude seemed to help guide her into making abstract forms reminiscent of living things. As an aspiring modernist, O’Keeffe could have discarded these academic techniques of drawing but she did not. When she had found the right outline, she deployed academic techniques in making gray tones, dark shadows, and highlights to create forms that would read as three-dimensional. O’Keeffe must have

valued the visual weight, depth and complexity of modeled shapes. She seemed to love lingering over the creation of her forms, caressing the paper, investing her drawings with personal meanings.

O'Keeffe gave new life to her academic drawing techniques by refusing to hide the evidence of her hands at work on the paper. After laying down basic shapes in smooth grays, O'Keeffe made white erasure marks that preserved the shape of fingertips. Taking up her charcoal sticks again, on top of her abstract shapes she drew dark, bold lines that recorded the manual actions of creation. This blend of academic and anti-academic techniques asserted both biomorphic abstract shapes and the artist who had envisioned them and transferred them to paper. A viewer could almost feel the rhythm of O'Keeffe's hand moving over the paper, and intuit the dance-like grace of the artist's body at work.

When she had found the shapes she wanted and completed some art, working on paper allowed O'Keeffe to roll up her productions and send them to New York to solicit reactions in letters from Anita Pollitzer, Dorothy True, and Charles Martin. Thus drawing kept O'Keeffe in communication with her artistic community. This same technical process of creation linked the artist to her memories of making drawings through the years. Drawing was the universal means of learning about, exploring, and planning art in any media. Working in charcoal did not commit O'Keeffe to any one future medium; it left open exciting options. She could move into working in watercolor, pastel, oils, or even sculpture; in fact, she would use all of these media during the teens. The process of drawing therefore bound together in a single creative act O'Keeffe's past, present, and future.

As O’Keeffe made her abstract charcoal drawings in the autumn of 1915, she hoped that they might gain her admittance to the Stieglitz circle. These drawings fulfilled the dreams of their maker, opening Stieglitz’s eyes to the promise of this young artist. I believe that the medium of O’Keeffe’s drawings worked with their abstraction and the artist’s gender to capture Stieglitz’s interest. From the beginning he was intrigued by the fact that a woman had made these unconventional non-representational works. Stieglitz at first was uncertain whether to trust his reaction to the drawings because they had arrived without the recommendation of his accustomed guides to modernism, Steichen or de Zayas. But the black and white palette of the charcoals gained Stieglitz’s support in part because of its likeness to his own photographs and the illustrations he selected for *Camera Work* and other journals.

The graphic nature of the charcoals as works on paper also helped to recommend them to Stieglitz. He had been collecting drawings and watercolors since he was a child. Much as O’Keeffe utilized academic drawing traditions in her own mode of modernism, Stieglitz applied traditions of connoisseurship in his modes of understanding, exhibiting, and promoting modern art. As when he had collected drawings and autographs, Stieglitz the modernist continued to value open graphic revelations of human character. This approach meshed with his modernist embrace of art by children, non-European people he saw as primitive, and those few modernists whose art had the same straight-forwardness. Stieglitz looked to O’Keeffe’s drawings, made by a woman, for a similar frankness, as the child-self within the woman expressed itself through art rather than the birth of a child.

Stieglitz found in O’Keeffe’s drawings the same advantages that had led him to feature many works on paper at 29. While large enough to hold the wall well, the charcoals fit easily into the small spaces of 291 and invited close study by visitors. Stieglitz did not feel any hesitation in showing these “private” drawings that the artist had urged her friend Anita Pollitzer not to share with anyone. He was used to revealing the personal thoughts and working methods of artists like Picasso and Matisse by showing their informal sketches. Stieglitz saw in the biomorphic shapes and finger marks in O’Keeffe’s drawings the frank disclosure of sexual passions. He believed that modern art should work between artist and viewer to create deep understanding like that between two lovers. Thus he valued the tactile qualities of O’Keeffe’s drawings as providing personal revelations through the imagined sensation of touch.

The artist faced an emotional struggle when she learned that her “private” drawings were on public view. She was embarrassed by the sexuality attributed to her works by Stieglitz and the critics who followed his lead. It was with this disagreement over O’Keeffe’s 1915 drawings that a profound and lasting rift began to open between Stieglitz and O’Keeffe in the ways they interpreted her art.

While Stieglitz was still excited over the 1915 monochromatic drawings, the artist moved in new directions that he at first resisted. O’Keeffe chose to use watercolor so that she could capture the colors of eastern mountains and the brilliant Texas sky. Watercolor was an affordable, swift, portable medium well suited to capturing effects of direct light. Like charcoal, it was a medium with which O’Keeffe had become confident during her school years. It did not have the repressive academic heritage of charcoal or oils, however, and so was well-suited to making the small, experimental images in which

O'Keeffe adapted her abstract vision to the representation of the land around her.

Watercolor had the additional advantage of being sanctioned by modernists who showed at 291, including Rodin, Matisse, and Marin. Once Stieglitz had adjusted to O'Keeffe's change of technique, he found that her watercolors worked as well as her charcoals as vehicles of revelatory touch.

When O'Keeffe moved to New York and lived with Stieglitz in 1918, he offered to find funding for her so that she could stop teaching for a year. Now she would not have to hurry to fit her art in between her classes. She could devote herself to painting full time. O'Keeffe's new status as a professional artist turned out to last for the rest of her life. I believe that O'Keeffe, progressing from charcoal to watercolor like an art student, had long planned to graduate from graphic media to oils. In 1918 she finally felt ready for this final step. She took up a brush that would leave no finger marks for Stieglitz and the critics to read as naïve sexual expression. Only the "shapes" she had seen in nature or imagined would remain in view.

Once Stieglitz began to show O'Keeffe's works, the artist was forced to deal with his attitudes toward her art, including his ideas of media. When O'Keeffe felt the urge to work in color, Stieglitz at first resisted her move from charcoal into watercolor. Later, Stieglitz apparently pushed O'Keeffe toward working in oils, perhaps because he worried about whether working in a "minor" medium would undermine the artist's credibility with critics who might also take a woman artist lightly. Stieglitz may also have worried about O'Keeffe's competition with the established Stieglitz circle star in watercolor, John Marin. O'Keeffe had to cope with pressure from Stieglitz at every turn. Her choice of

medium was now not only a technical or personal decision; it was a social and economic one. What would Stieglitz think? What would the critics say? Would the works sell?

O’Keeffe felt strongly about her media, but she was not sentimental about them. It was no problem for her to leave behind her watercolors in favor of oils, although she did occasionally return to her earlier media when they suited a particular subject. The formal and emotional discoveries that O’Keeffe had made in the process of making her 1915 charcoals and subsequent watercolors became part of the artist. These visual ideas were inherent in the modernist art she made in any medium.

While O’Keeffe confidently went forward, exploring the abstract qualities inherent in the colors and forms of urban buildings, natural objects, and American landscapes, Stieglitz looked back. Even while helping to propel O’Keeffe toward painting in oils, he did not allow the artist or her audience to forget the graphic works through which he had come to know the young artist. He photographed O’Keeffe’s hands in telling juxtaposition with the graphic works on which they had left their marks. He thus used his own art to assert his reading of O’Keeffe’s art as overtly physical, sensual, and sexual. The drawings and watercolors were particularly exciting for Stieglitz as manifestations of the artist’s graceful, expressive, fecund, passionate female body. Through his photographs, he metaphorically bound O’Keeffe’s creativity to his own conceptions, and her body to his own.

Stieglitz kept O’Keeffe’s early drawings in his galleries for decades, taking them out to share with visitors and telling stories that kept the naïve young graphic artist alive in myth long after she had matured into a painter in oils. During the 1920s and 1930s, while O’Keeffe progressed along her own creative path, Stieglitz used words and images

to make sure that visitors to his galleries could see how her journey had begun with the charcoals and watercolors he had discovered.

Beginning in 1918, O’Keeffe turned increasingly to working in oils. The heritage of her graphic beginnings in modernism, however, would last for the rest of her career. Her characteristic paintings of sleek biomorphic surfaces began in the rubbed gray charcoal aspects of her 1915 drawings and the flowing colors of her subsequent watercolors. The evocation of nude human forms that critics found in O’Keeffe’s brilliant oils of flowers, rocks and shells, and southwestern landscapes, arose from the biomorphic implications of her abstract charcoals and related watercolors such as *Blue I* and *Blue II*. O’Keeffe’s periodic shifts between abstraction and representation, and the deep formal and emotional ties between her bodies of work in each of these two modes, originated on paper in 1915 and 1916.

Making art was a major activity in O’Keeffe’s life, taking up many hours of both work and thought. A shift of medium was a shift of physical and mental process that influenced many aspects of her existence. Drawing for O’Keeffe was something too rich and essential to be summed up in a single image, or even the many photographs that Stieglitz made of her with her graphic works. For the artist, her media were the stuff not of contrived poses and aesthetic conceptions but of life. When, in a 1930 interview, the political activist and writer Michael Gold accused her of being “interested in art for technique’s sake, instead of for life’s sake,” O’Keeffe exclaimed, “Can’t you see they come to the same thing?”² Medium of art and mode of living were equivalents for the artist.

Since childhood O’Keeffe had always understood drawing and watercolor as media of discovery and beginning. It was in these media that she invented the approaches to art that she would explore through many decades of artistic activity. It is no wonder that O’Keeffe sketched during her entire career and often made art in watercolor, pastel, and other graphic media.

Drawings and watercolors, and the complex of emotions and concepts adhering to these media, were powerful tools that O’Keeffe and Stieglitz utilized in their modernist enterprise. These two formidable individuals created potent intertwined cultures of graphic media that helped to shape American modernism. Cultural aspects of graphic art excited both O’Keeffe and Stieglitz: the swiftness and accessibility of drawing for recording momentary thoughts and observations, the intimacy of works on paper that invited the viewer to come near and look closely, the identification of a mark on paper with the body of the artist who had made it; and the open, intimate communication possible between artist and viewer via marks on paper. Stieglitz and critics and his circle discovered these characteristics in graphic works, but soon they celebrated such properties investing modernist works in all media.

Through my detailed consideration of a brief period of Georgia O’Keeffe’s art production, from 1915 to 1918, I have put forward a case study in how cultures of media function in the creation, presentation, and understanding of art. It is my hope that such an approach may increase understanding of the broader cultural impact of medium in many areas of art.

Notes

¹ Pollitzer to O’Keeffe, October 1915, *Lovingly, Georgia: the Complete Correspondence of Georgia O’Keeffe & Anita Pollitzer*, Clive Giboire, ed. (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990), 38. Permission and Copyright. The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation.

² Gladys Oaks, “Radical Writer and Woman Artist Clash on Propaganda and Its Uses,” *The World* (New York), March 16, 1930, women’s section, 3.

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