

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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PAINTINGS OF GEORGIA O'KEEFFE SHOWN IN RETROSPECTIVEEXHIBITION AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Finally a woman on paper."

These words, spoken by Alfred Stieglitz in 1915, were the actual launching of Georgia O'Keeffe on a career that has led to her recognition as a major American artist. On Wednesday, May 15, a retrospective exhibition of her works will open at the Museum of Modern Art and continue through August 25. The exhibition has been selected and installed by James Johnson Sweeney, Director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture. Mr. Sweeney has also written the book on O'Keeffe which the Museum will publish concurrently with the exhibition.

When the internationally known photographer spoke his career-launching words he had for more than a decade, in his small but famous gallery "291", been introducing to the American public the most modern painting and sculpture from abroad as well as the most advanced American art. When a friend showed him several drawings by Georgia O'Keeffe, at that time teaching art in a South Carolina college, Stieglitz was instantly impressed. He kept the drawings and in the spring of 1916 put ten of them on exhibition in "291."

This was Georgia O'Keeffe's debut as an artist. The next year Stieglitz gave her a one-man show, the last exhibition before he closed the gallery at "291." In 1923 he presented at The Anderson Galleries 100 oils, watercolors and pastels and drawings by O'Keeffe. In 1924 Stieglitz married the artist whom he had taken such pride in having discovered. The next year and annually since then he has held an exhibition of her work in his gallery, now "An American Place."

In the text Mr. Sweeney has written for the O'Keeffe book he comments on the artist and her work as follows:

"An expression of intense emotion, stark but always constrained, is the essence of O'Keeffe's art. And the way she came to this was by the severest critical self-stripping."

In 1923 Georgia O'Keeffe herself explained the process by which she reached her highly individual artistic expression.

"I grew up pretty much as everybody else grows up and one day seven years ago 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 - . 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 at least to paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only thing that I could do that did not concern anyone but myself - that was nobody's business but my own. So these paintings and drawings happened and many others that are not here. I found that I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way - things I had no words for.

"One day I locked myself up in my room and held a private exhibition of everything I had painted. I noticed which paintings had been influenced by this painter, which by that one. Then I determined which of the finished pieces represented me alone. From that moment forward I knew exactly what kind of work I wanted to do. And I have been doing that for many years."

Georgia O'Keeffe was born in Sun Prairie, near Madison, Wisconsin, November 15, 1887, second child in a family of seven, Irish on her father's side, Hungarian and Knickerbocker-Dutch on her mother's. Both grandmothers were interested in painting and before she knew what it meant Georgia had made up her mind to become an artist.

Before she was ten she was being taught to copy flowers and draw from plaster casts. When she was fourteen her family moved to Williamsburg, Virginia and in 1904 she was graduated from the Chatham, Virginia, Episcopal Institute. The next autumn she enrolled in the Art Institute of Chicago and worked a year with John Vanderpoel, famous teacher of drawing. The year 1907-08 she spent in New York at the Art Students League, studying under William Merritt Chase, F. Luis Mora and Kenyon Cox.

The following year she was in Chicago, doing free lance commercial art. For several years she did almost no painting. In the summer of 1912 she went to the University of Virginia for a course in art teaching with Alon Bement. Then began her pedagogical period in art: supervising art in the public schools of Amarillo, Texas; art instructor in the summer school of the University of Virginia; and head of the art department of West Texas Normal College, Canyon, Texas. This period, interspersed with art courses at Columbia University under Alon Bement and Arthur Dow, lasted from 1912 until 1918, when she was forced by overwork to give up teaching.

From that year on Miss O'Keeffe has devoted her time to

painting, making New York her headquarters. The summer of 1929 she spent in New Mexico where she now has a ranch, her second home. In 1932 she painted on the Gaspé Peninsula in Canada; in 1934 she went to Bermuda and was in Hawaii 1938-39 on an assignment. She holds the degree of Doctor of Fine Arts from William and Mary College, Virginia, and Doctor of Letters from the University of Wisconsin. Her paintings are owned by many museums in this country and in 1940 the Art Institute of Chicago held a retrospective exhibition of her work.

In the catalog Mr. Sweeney quotes from a considerable group of unpublished early correspondence--generously put at his disposal by Miss O'Keeffe--between the artist and her discoverer, Alfred Stieglitz. This interchange between an emerging artist and an extraordinarily discerning critic throws a revealing light both on the tendencies of American art in one of its most critical periods and on the evolving interest of an artist who has become one of the leading figures in American art today.