

Georgia
O'Keeffe
PHOTOGRAPHER

Large Print Labels

American artist Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) strived to give visual form to “the unexplainable thing in nature that makes me feel the world is big far beyond my understanding . . . to find the feeling of infinity on the horizon line or just over the next hill.”

After nearly thirty years rendering the vistas of the Southwest on canvas, O'Keeffe still sought new ways to express the beauty and essential forms of the land in all its cycles. She produced more than 400 photographs of her New Mexico home, its surrounding landscape, and other subjects in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Photography offered a new means of artistic engagement with her world. Revisiting subjects she painted years or even decades earlier, O'Keeffe explored new formal and expressive possibilities with the camera.

Like her work in other media, O'Keeffe's photographs demonstrate an acute attention to composition and passion for nature. Her photography provides a window into an artistic practice based on tireless looking and reconsideration. O'Keeffe used the camera to capture both momentary impressions and sustained investigations over the course of days, seasons, and years. Alongside her better-known paintings and drawings, O'Keeffe's photographs open new insight into her unending dialogue with the world around her.

Title wall and balcony title wall: Georgia O'Keeffe with Camera, 1959; O'Keeffe Photographing near Abiquiú, New Mexico, 1959; and Georgia O'Keeffe with Camera, 1959. Photographs by Todd Webb, courtesy of the Todd Webb Archive.

Projection: Land of Enchantment: Southwest, U.S.A. [excerpt], 1948. Directed by Henwar Rodakiewicz, distributed by the United States Information Service.

A Life in Photography

O'Keeffe was no stranger to photography. Family photos and travel snapshots marked her early decades. Sophisticated photographers—including her husband, Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946)—were drawn to picture the enigmatic artist throughout her life. O'Keeffe's approach to the medium was informed by past encounters, but principally guided by her own interests. O'Keeffe dedicated her life to expressing her unique perspective, whether through her clothing, home décor, paintings, or photographs. By the time she began her photographic practice in earnest in the mid-1950s, O'Keeffe brought her singular, fully formed identity and artistic vision to her camera work.

Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)

Georgia O'Keeffe

1933

gelatin silver print

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

The Target Collection of American Photography,
museum purchase funded by Target Stores

78.63

Unknown Photographer

**Alfred Stieglitz Photographing
Georgia O'Keeffe at Lake George**

1918

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe.

Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation

ms.33 02.06.07.nd653

Gallerist, publisher, and photographer Alfred Stieglitz made his first portrait of O'Keeffe in 1917 at the beginning of their romantic relationship. Over the next 20 years, he photographed her more than 300 times. Due in large part to Stieglitz's epic portrait project and his outsized legacy in the American art world, historians have assumed that O'Keeffe's relationship to photography was passive—that of a sitter, assistant, or spectator. However, O'Keeffe's photographs prove that she developed her own visionary practice behind the camera.

Unknown Photographer

Georgia O'Keeffe and Friends in a Boat

1908

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Museum Purchase

2014.3.239

By 1890, the Eastman Company had sold millions of \$1 Kodak Brownie cameras and photography was part of daily life for many people. Family photographs, studio portraits, and snapshots taken by O'Keeffe and her friends mark the artist's earliest decades.

Born in Wisconsin, O'Keeffe studied and worked in Virginia, Illinois, New York, South Carolina, and Texas before she was 30. As she moved from place to place, she kept her close friendships in part by trading snapshots. Her friend Anita Pollitzer wrote, "Won't you send me a Kodak picture...of you?" O'Keeffe responded with her own request, noting, "I want to know what you are looking like this fall." O'Keeffe continued this practice when she began photographing with a clear artistic intention in the late 1950s, sending her photos to family and friends.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Stieglitz at Lake George

circa 1923

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Museum Purchase, Georgia O'Keeffe Photographs
2014.3.297

This double exposure—produced when two images are captured on the same frame of film—shows two views of the Stieglitz family property at Lake George, New York. In the vertical image, Alfred Stieglitz walks ahead on a path, while the horizontal image shows an expanse of the family's summer residence. Though the double exposure was probably unintentional, O'Keeffe kept this photograph for more than 60 years, suggesting she found the image noteworthy even though it was the result of operator error. Her later photographic practice also demonstrated a sense of certainty in her own visual instincts over and above the rules of technique.

Washington, D.C.

probably 1946

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Museum Purchase, Georgia O'Keeffe Photographs

2014.3.307

O'Keeffe photographed in all seasons, embracing the changing appearances of the world throughout the year. While photographs of the Washington Monument surrounded by spring cherry blossoms are commonplace, O'Keeffe produced this unusual view of the Monument during her visit in winter. Undeterred by the snowy landscape, she embraced the formal elements of the scene, framing the flat, white ground in contrast to the angled, dark tree branches and the straight, gray form of the obelisk.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

**Arno Penthouse, E. 54th Street,
New York**
1936–42

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Museum Purchase, Georgia O'Keeffe Photographs
2014.3.267

O'Keeffe moved to New York City in 1918, but from 1929 she traveled to New Mexico almost every summer until moving there permanently in 1949. In the fall of 1931, she began bringing pieces of the Southwest back to the city. In this image of her New York residence, O'Keeffe includes a skull from the Southwest proudly mounted on her patio. In 1938 she posed next to the skull for a *LIFE* magazine essay titled "Georgia O'Keeffe Turns Dead Bones into Live Art." The magazine is on display in a case nearby.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

**Chrysler Building
from the Window of
the Waldorf Astoria,
New York**
1960

**Seagram Building,
New York**
1958–65

gelatin silver prints
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
2006.6.1370 and 2006.6.1290



Like her paintings of New York, many of O'Keeffe's photographs of the city explore aspects of its monumentality and modernity. "One can't paint New York as it is, but rather as it is felt," she noted. O'Keeffe took this photo of the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's minimalist Seagram Building soon after it opened. Her dramatic, low camera angle presents the structure's innovative vertical beams as endless lines stretching into the sky. Her view of the Chrysler Building seems to grapple with a related experience, as a sense of quiet intimacy coexists with the vast scale and loftiness of the modern urban environment.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Small Purple Hills

1934

oil on panel

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art,
Bentonville, Arkansas

Beginning in 1929, O'Keeffe spent part of almost every year in New Mexico until moving there permanently in 1949. Her beloved Southwestern landscape was a continual source of inspiration.

"I never seem to get over my excitement in walking about here—I always find new places or see the old ones differently," she wrote in 1943.

O'Keeffe's paintings, such as *Small Purple Hills*, conveyed her pleasure in the forms and colors of New Mexico. These same vistas would become the subjects of her photographs. In photography, O'Keeffe continued the formal exploration of those places that had ignited her artistic passions.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

The Black Place

circa 1970

black-and-white Polaroid

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe,

Georgia O'Keeffe Papers

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

Untitled (Ghost Ranch Cliffs)
circa 1940

graphite on paper
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation
2006.5.165

Like her photographs, *Untitled (Ghost Ranch Cliffs)* reveals O'Keeffe's restless experimentation with composition. Drawing upon lessons from her teacher, artist Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), O'Keeffe would frame and reframe her landscape sketches, searching for the most expressive arrangement of forms. Here, she selected a section of landscape to produce two masses—one appearing eternally upright and solid, the other diagonal and almost fluid. Accustomed to framing on paper, O'Keeffe's transition to framing in-camera was a natural one.

Antelope

1943–46

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Museum Purchase, Georgia O'Keeffe Photographs

2014.3.291

O'Keeffe added a notation on the back of this photograph: "My back yard pet." The artist was always thrilled by sightings of the antelope around Ghost Ranch—a second, summer home outside Abiquiú, New Mexico. She appreciated the antelope as unique forms in her world, seeing all the elements of her environment as forms to be expressed in her art. In a 1945 letter, she described the antelopes as "long, slender" shapes topped by "sharp, black horns."

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Red Hill and White Shell

1938

oil on canvas

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Gift of Isabel B. Wilson in memory of her mother,
Alice Pratt Brown

91.2027

Red Hill and White Shell embodies O'Keeffe's experiments with the fresh colors and dynamism of the natural world. Using the dual elements of a massive sandstone mesa and a small iridescent shell, the painting expresses attentiveness to environmental forms, both great and small. O'Keeffe's careful abstractions in both painting and photography strove for a perfect union of aesthetic order and emotional expression. She wrote, "It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis that we get at the real meaning of things."

Center of gallery

Georgia O'Keeffe's spotting kit

late 1910s–late 1940s

various materials

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Gift of Juan and Anna Marie Hamilton

Before the advent of digital retouching, flaws in a photographic print, such as dust spots or scratches, were covered on the print surface with a brush and spot tone dye. "Spotting" is a demanding process that requires patience, precision, and a sensitivity to tone. O'Keeffe first learned the technique while assisting Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) in the late 1910s. Decades later, she used her kit again, to eliminate visual interference in the perfect tonal masses and shapes in her own photographs.

O'Keeffe's mastery of painting easily translated to spotting—her touch-ups are so fine that they are almost imperceptible.

Center of gallery

LIFE magazine

**"Georgia O'Keeffe Turns Dead Bones
into Live Art"**

February 14, 1938

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Courtesy of the Hirsch Library

During O'Keeffe's lifetime, articles in newspapers and magazines made her face as recognizable to the public as her art, linking O'Keeffe, the woman, to the landscapes and objects she painted. This *LIFE* essay from 1938 juxtaposes the artist's *Horse's Head with Pink Rose* (1930) with three photos of her handling bones from New Mexico, presenting her art and her life as synonymous.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Fence Morning Glory (*Ipomoea ochracea*)

March 1939

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1111

In 1939, O'Keeffe accepted an invitation from an advertising company to go to Hawaii to produce paintings for the Hawaiian Pineapple Company. She kept these photographs for the remaining five decades of her life. The "Hawaii snaps," as she referred to them, capture subject matter that is quintessentially O'Keeffe—dramatic landforms and perfect flower blooms.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Lava Arch, Wai'anapanapa State Park

March 1939

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1100, 2006.6.1101, 2006.6.1105

O'Keeffe made her first significant body of photographs on her 1939 trip to Hawaii. These photographs make clear that O'Keeffe had an intuitive interest in the photographic frame. Later, reframing would become a central tool in her sustained exploration of the medium.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

**Natural Stone Arch near
Leho'ula Beach, 'Aleamai**

March 1939

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1097, 2006.6.1102

Here, O'Keeffe uses subtle reframing to seek an ideal expression of her experience of the place. She works with four boldly simplified elements—arch, water, sky, and coast—within a square picture area. On the left, O'Keeffe uses the shoreline to bisect the middle of the picture plane, resulting in a composition that feels natural and balanced. On the right, she has raised the shoreline within the frame, compressing the ocean, arch, and sky. How does your experience of the picture change because of her compositional choices?

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

**Sugar Cane Fields
and Clouds**

March 1939

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1098, 2006.6.1099



Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Black Lava Bridge, Hana Coast No. 2

1939

oil on canvas

Honolulu Museum of Art

Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, 1994

O'Keeffe's small oil painting *Black Lava Bridge, Hana Coast No. 2* depicts the same coastline as her nearby photographs. Compared to the square pictures, the painting's wider, lateral format emphasizes the massy character of the rock formation itself, drawing our attention to its horizontality and relationship with the water.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

**Wai'anapanapa Black
Sand Beach**

March 1939

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1108, 2006.6.1109



In many of her letters home from Maui, O'Keeffe described her desire to photograph the island's landscape and vistas. "The black sands of Hawaii—have something of a photograph about them," she wrote. Perhaps the artist was responding to the chromatic simplicity of lacey white sea foam on black sand. Yet, there is also a notable relationship between O'Keeffe's attraction to reframing and the constantly changing, expressive compositions created by nature as the edges of waves skim over the beach. Here, she seems to explore exactly that visual potential.

Adjacent Wall

Todd Webb (American, 1905–2000)

Georgia O’Keeffe in Salita Door

July 1956, printed later

inkjet print

Courtesy of the Todd Webb Archive

Georgia O’Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Todd Webb in the Salita Door

July 1956, printed later

inkjet print

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Museum purchases funded by the Director’s

Accessions Endowment

2021.341, .342

Todd Webb
(American, 1905–2000)

Georgia O’Keeffe
with Camera
1959, printed later

inkjet print
Courtesy of the
Todd Webb Archive



In 1940, O’Keeffe purchased a cottage on Ghost Ranch, northwest of Abiquiú, New Mexico. Ghost Ranch would become her summer and fall home—a place of solitude where she concentrated on painting. In 1945 she purchased a home in Abiquiú, where she would spend the winter and spring seasons. She moved to the Southwest permanently in 1949. In the mid-1950s, O’Keeffe took up the camera in earnest to continue her relentless search for ideal artistic expression. She made most of her photographs on or near her Abiquiú property.

In 1955 O'Keeffe's interest in beginning a photographic practice was sparked by a visit from her friend, photographer Todd Webb. Over the next few summers, Webb visited O'Keeffe in New Mexico, and the pair photographed together, often trading his cameras back and forth. Here, the friends took turns posing for each other in O'Keeffe's Abiquiú courtyard. "As you can see, you are a very good portrait photographer," Webb wrote encouragingly to O'Keeffe. "I like the one of me in the doorway very much."

Todd Webb (American, 1905–2000)

Prepared Canvas, Ghost Ranch Studio
1957

dye transfer print

Collection of W. Burt Nelson

Todd Webb's summer trips to O'Keeffe's home in New Mexico strengthened their friendship and provided a mutual support system for both artists. O'Keeffe granted Webb unprecedented access to her homes and artistic process, inspiring him to create a series of photographs that aimed to replicate the expressive abstractions of her art. In turn, O'Keeffe grew increasingly interested in the potential of photography and began to photograph in earnest, often with Webb at her side to assist with the technical aspects of exposure and camera operation.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Todd Webb

August 1961

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.55

Glen Canyon

August 1961

gelatin silver print, enlarged and
cut 35mm contact sheet

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.75

In August 1961, O'Keeffe explored Glen Canyon — a massive ravine spanning Utah and Arizona— with photographers Todd Webb (1905–2000) and Eliot Porter (1901–1990), and other friends. Inspired by the landscape, O'Keeffe sketched the views and borrowed Webb's camera to capture unique rock formations. As she preferred, Webb made enlarged contact sheets of her frames rather than finished prints.

Next gallery

Reframing

O'Keeffe saw her environment as an array of shapes and forms that took on different relationships and emphases through the lens of her camera. Moving from right to left, angling the camera from high to low, or turning it vertically and horizontally, she organized and reorganized these shapes within the picture frame—restlessly seeking to realize a perfect arrangement. This serial reframing is the most common characteristic of O'Keeffe's photographic imagery; it distinguishes her unique approach to the medium.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

**Garage Vigas and
Studio Door**

July 1956



gelatin silver print
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
2006.6.1393

Garage Vigas and Studio Door

July 1956

gelatin silver print
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Anonymous Gift, 1977
1977.657.1

Garage Vigas and Studio Door

July 1956

gelatin silver print
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
2006.6.1395

Studio Door

July 1956

gelatin silver print

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Anonymous Gift, 1977

1977.657.6

The Abiquiú studio door is a subject unique to O'Keeffe's photography. In this series of photographs, she explored ways to visually compress the subject into two dimensions using the arrangement of forms within the frame. Photographing her studio door from a vantage point inside her garage (which is located across an open courtyard), she positioned her camera to include more or less of the garage ceiling. The linear pattern of *vigas* (round roof beams) and *latillas* (ceiling slats) change the way space seems to work in the picture, moving from three-dimensional depth to increasingly flattened planes of form.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Shell and Old Shingle I

1926

oil on canvas

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Alfred Stieglitz Collection—

Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe

1987.535

Shell and Old Shingle III

1926

oil on canvas

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Alfred Stieglitz Collection—

Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe

1987.537

The paintings *Shell and Old Shingle* demonstrate the same reframing evident in O'Keeffe's photographs. By changing the canvas format, angle of view, and level of detail, she created significantly different works from the same elements. *Shell and Old Shingle I* is clearly a still life, while *Shell and Old Shingle III* more closely resembles a landscape. Like her photographs, O'Keeffe's emphasis here was the relationship between forms. "They fascinated me so that I forgot what they were except that they were shapes together—singing shapes," the artist explained.

Georgia O’Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Salita Door, Patio

1956–57

gelatin silver print

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Lane Collection

Ladder against Wall

1961

gelatin silver print

Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1425

O’Keeffe often claimed that the dark *salita* door—the door leading into her sitting room—was the reason she purchased her Abiquiú home in 1945. She frequently depicted the door in her work, producing 23 paintings and drawings between 1946 and 1960. “It’s a curse—the way I feel I must continually go on with that door,” she noted. Beginning in 1956, O’Keeffe also began to capture her deep passion for her home in black-and-white photographs, including many images of the *salita* door.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Patio and Zaguan

1956–57

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1403, 2006.6.1382, 2006.6.1388

The multiple doors and windows of the central patio in O'Keeffe's Abiquiú home lent themselves to experiments in reframing. By moving the position and orientation of her camera, the artist could explore a huge variety of precise compositions in her own domestic space. Here, she turned toward the entryway of the *zaguan*—a central passage between the interior courtyard and the exterior of the house. O'Keeffe's reflection, sometimes visible in a window at the left of the frame, captures the artist carefully framing the scene.

Todd Webb (American, 1905–2000)

Georgia O’Keeffe Photographing in her Patio

1959, printed later

inkjet prints

Courtesy of the Todd Webb Archive

O’Keeffe’s experimentation with small changes in composition from image to image differentiates her photographs from those made by other artists. None of the photographers with whom she was acquainted photographed in this way. In fact, O’Keeffe’s tendency to reframe piqued Todd Webb’s interest. He repeatedly photographed her as she moved around her environment producing her variations, treating her method as both curious and significant.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Zaguan Door, Exterior

1957

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1375, 2006.6.1376, 2006.6.1377,

2006.6.1379

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Palo Duro Canyon

1916–17

graphite on paper

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation

2006.5.41, 2006.5.42

The artist Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), O'Keeffe's most influential teacher, suggested, "Try only to cut a space finely by landscape shapes... [T]he art in your composition will lie in placing these in good relations to each other." O'Keeffe applied these lessons to her drawings of Palo Duro Canyon. She drew the arresting landforms of the Texas Panhandle in horizontal and vertical "landscape shapes," each time filling her small sheet of paper with a harmonious balance of forms. Though O'Keeffe did not learn photography from Dow, his instruction on seeing and representation influenced her approach to the medium.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Road

1957

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

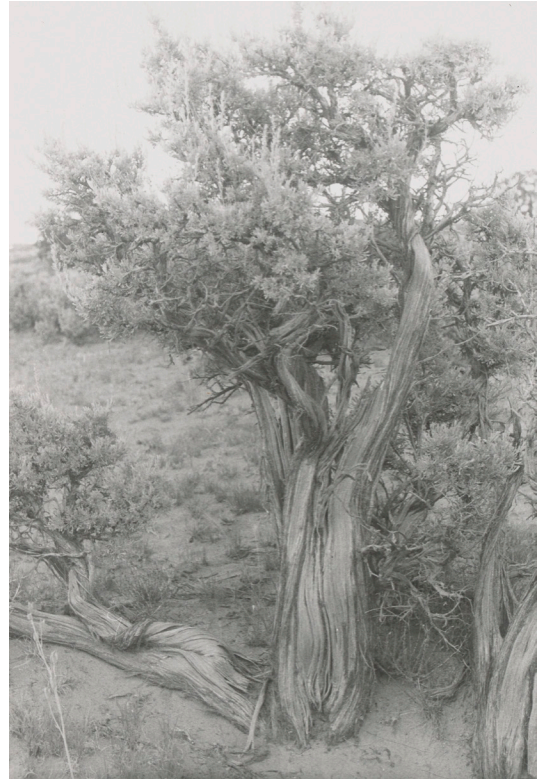
2006.6.1308, 2006.6.1309

Changing her compositions by turning the camera both vertically and horizontally, O'Keeffe created radically different photographs of a dusty road. In the vertical image, the faint horizon at the top edge of the picture gives the road a longer and leaner appearance, focusing the composition on its linear shape. In comparison, the horizontal photograph situates the road as part of the overall breadth of the land.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

Big Sage (*Artemisia tridentata*)
1957

gelatin silver prints
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe
2006.6.1296, 2006.6.1293,
2006.6.1291



In 1957, O'Keeffe produced a group of eight photographs of big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) near Barranca, New Mexico. She pictured the three, tightly grouped shrubs at close range, in contrast to the rolling horizon, or framed against the packed ground. Moving her camera with each capture, she altered the arrangement of the forms and changed the overall organization of the scene. The resulting images are radically different, though each contains the same basic elements.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

No. 24–Special / No. 24

1916–17

oil on canvas

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation

2006.5.62

O'Keeffe's visual experimentation led her to include a window frame in several of her artworks. While these pictures directly represent the artist's intensive looking at the landscape from the interior of her home, they also examine the idea of the frame and its role in helping three-dimensional forms cohere as a picture in two-dimensional space.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Road from Abiquiú

1964–68

black-and-white Polaroid

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1083

Reflection of Road in Window

probably 1957

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Museum Purchase, Georgia O'Keeffe Photographs

2014.3.276

Several of O'Keeffe's photographs depict the road and mesa as seen from the artist's bedroom. This image, in contrast, was taken from outside the house, looking toward the bedroom, with the landforms reflected in the window. O'Keeffe typically included window frames in her pictures to explore a visual ambiguity between two and three dimensions. In this work, she took her exploration a step further, capturing the reflected mesa and road as if the window itself were a canvas, or a frame of film.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

White House Overlook

White House Overlook

Spider Rock

July 1957

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1301, 2006.6.1300, 2006.6.1303

While O'Keeffe organized most of her photographic compositions within single film frames, a few noteworthy examples demonstrate her interest in testing that limitation. In July 1957, O'Keeffe visited Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, making three images at White House Overlook. Together, the images form a panorama, moving from the starburst form of a crag, through the winding canyon below, to the tall sandstone spire of Spider Rock. O'Keeffe's choice to use vertical frames to capture a sweeping horizontal vista is distinctive. What might have interested her about this approach?

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Kiyomizu-dera Temple Pagoda

February 1959

gelatin silver print, enlarged contact sheet

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe,

Georgia O'Keeffe Papers

During her 1959 trip to Japan, O'Keeffe photographed the three-story Koyasu pagoda at Kiyomizu-dera, a Buddhist temple in Kyoto, from top to bottom. Together the images create an elongated, vertical rendering of the tall pagoda in stacked, horizontal pictures.

Center

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Notes

probably 1957

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
Georgia O'Keeffe Papers

Hastily scrawled notes about shutter speed and aperture are remnants of some of O'Keeffe's first lessons in photography. Location notes—"In patio," "out window," and "in the house"—are followed by proper apertures and shutter speeds, which would help the artist produce well-exposed images. O'Keeffe owned two cameras of the type on view here: a Leica If and a Polaroid Land Camera. She learned only enough about each camera's workings to capture and reframe the scenes that caught her eye.

Unlike many photographers, O'Keeffe was unconcerned with creating perfect photographic prints. More interested in the image, O'Keeffe variously used an instant camera, asked photographer Todd Webb (1905–2000) to create test prints or enlarged contact sheets of her pictures, and even printed her work at drugstores. These approaches did not align with the norms of art photography at the time. Yet, they do match O'Keeffe's larger artistic practice, which was free of prescribed rules and centered on her own unique vision.

Next gallery

Light

In O’Keeffe’s images—on paper, canvas, or in a photograph—dapples of sunlight and pools of shade are not merely fleeting effects of the Southwestern environment. Light and shadow are forms as weighty and essential as mesas and mountains. Sensitive to the formal potential of light and shade, O’Keeffe often photographed a single vista over time, allowing shifting shapes of light and shadow to change the scene and create different compositions with the transit of the sun and desert clouds.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

Salita Door, Patio
1956–57

gelatin silver print
Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York
Anonymous Gift, 1977
1977.657.4



On many occasions, O'Keeffe claimed that the *salita* door was the reason she purchased her Abiquiú property. This interior door separates the central patio from the *salita*, or sitting room. O'Keeffe used the *salita* as a workroom and storage space for her paintings, making the door a physical and metaphorical link between her home and her art. "I'm always trying to paint that door—I never quite get it," O'Keeffe wrote. Her 23 paintings and drawings of the door were followed by a series of photographs.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

Salita Door
1956–58



gelatin silver print
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Anonymous Gift
1977, 1977.657.2

Salita Door
1956–57

gelatin silver print
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
2006.6.1407

One of O'Keeffe's first photographs of her Abiquiú, New Mexico home was a carefully and beautifully rendered image of the *salita* door in her courtyard. In the picture, the dark rectangle of the door breaks the adobe wall. A long, sleek shadow cuts diagonally through the frame, and a silvery sage bush fills the bottom left corner.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

**Ladder against Studio
Wall with White Bowl**

**Ladder against Studio
Wall with Black Chow
(Bo-Bo)**
1959–60



gelatin silver prints
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
2006.6.1413, 2006.6.1421

O'Keeffe produced these two photographs in rapid succession. Often, she rendered light as a bright white form and shadow as a weighty dark object. By placing a white bowl to the left of the ladder in one frame and one of her pet dogs to the right in the other, O'Keeffe created startlingly different compositions through one minor change.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Ladder against Studio Wall in Snow

1959–60

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1409, 2006.6.1410

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

In the Patio VIII

1950

oil on canvas

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Gift of the Burnett Foundation and
the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation

1997.5.8

In the Patio VIII depicts the interior courtyard of O'Keeffe's Abiquiú home. In the painting, she uses a bold band of a shadow to pick out the geometry of the space. The dark angular shape cuts across the lower half of the painting, differentiating the planes of walls and ground. It is as if the shadow lends the space a three-dimensional nature. For O'Keeffe, shadows were entities that could define a composition.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

North Patio Corridor

1956–57

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1401, 2006.6.1398, 2006.6.1400

The door, wall, and sagebrush at the north corner of O'Keeffe's Abiquiú patio presented the artist with an eye-catching array of lines, shadows, and shapes. Characteristically, she used these features of her environment relentlessly to search for the perfect arrangement of forms.

Todd Webb (American, 1905–2000)

Georgia O'Keeffe in Doorway

1961, printed later

inkjet print

Courtesy of the Todd Webb Archive



Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Forbidding Canyon, Glen Canyon

September 1964

black-and-white Polaroids

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1086, 2006.6.1092, 2006.6.1087,
2006.6.1088, 2006.6.1084

During her second trip to Glen Canyon in Utah and Arizona, O'Keeffe and her group camped for four nights at a picturesque location near Forbidding Canyon. There, the monumental form of two cliffs meeting in a "V" shape provided a spectacular view each morning. The strong morning light turned one cliff into a bright white form, while the other, cast in shade, became a dark mass. As the sun moved across the morning sky, the shadows quickly shifted. O'Keeffe's Polaroids tracked the changing proportions of dark and light in this dynamic scene, much like she had looked at the surf on the black sands of Maui 25 years earlier.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Goat's Head

1957

oil on canvas

McNay Art Museum, San Antonio

Gift of the Estate of Tom Slick

Skulls were a favorite subject for O'Keeffe, appearing in her paintings from the 1930s until the 1960s and in her photographs until the 1970s. These bones, however, were never depicted in isolation. O'Keeffe's skulls were always juxtaposed with other elements: cloth backgrounds, desert landscapes, architectural forms, and blue skies. In *Goat's Head*, O'Keeffe presents the skull against alternating planes of light and shadow, suggesting a retreating desert landscape. The careful cropping of the composition, like a photograph, unites the forms of the skull and landscape and encourages a comparison of bone and background.

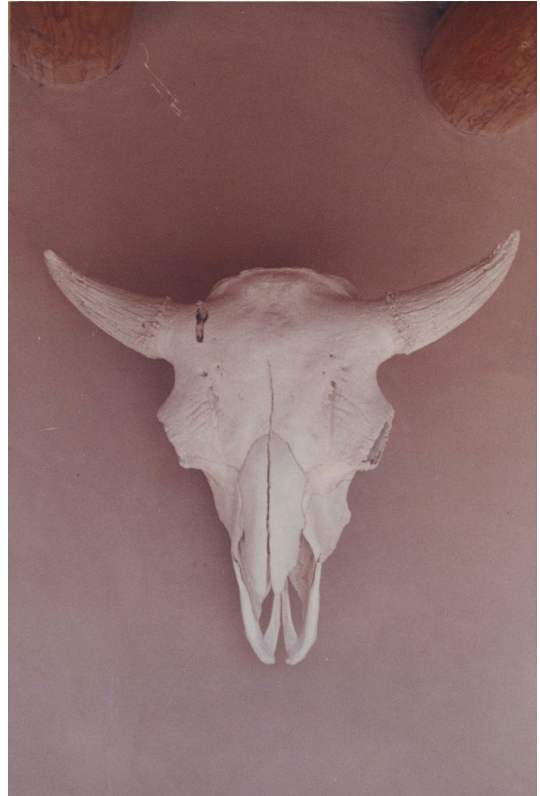
Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

Skull
1964–68

black-and-white Polaroid
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe
2006.6.1066

Skull, Ghost Ranch
1961–72

chromogenic print
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
2006.6.1446b



O'Keeffe shared her photographs with family and friends, often mailing prints with handwritten notes on the back. For the artist, these photographs provided her friends with glimpses of her home and artistic world. *Skull, Ghost Ranch* was printed multiple times. On the verso of one print, O'Keeffe handwrote to an unknown acquaintance, "Another present this is. It is beside the Studio door. Pretty isn't it!"

"It never occurs to me that [skulls] have anything to do with death. They are very lively," O'Keeffe noted. "I have enjoyed them very much in relation to the sky." For O'Keeffe, the artistry in rendering skulls lay in juxtaposition. The harmonious relation of the skull's form to other elements resulted in an artistic play of light and shadow and positive and negative space that sustained her interest.

Yousuf Karsh

(Canadian, 1908–2002)

Georgia O'Keeffe

1956

gelatin silver print

Cincinnati Art Museum

Gift of Elaine and Arnold Dunkelman

1982.215

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

Bo II (Bo-Bo)
1960–61

Bo II (Bo-Bo)
1961

Bo II (Bo-Bo)
1960–61



gelatin silver print
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe
2006.6.1330, .1350, .1319

In these photographs, O'Keeffe's chow Bo II (also known as Bo-Bo) curls up on sun-bleached tree trunks outside the artist's studio door. The dog's body is a dark, weighty form juxtaposed in various ways against the light cylindrical forms of the tree trunks. At the same time, the shadow of a ladder suggests the dog's form could read as a shadow—a negative space without depth or weight.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Dark Rocks

1938

oil on canvas

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Gift of Patricia Barrett Carter

98.648

The painting *Dark Rocks* exemplifies O'Keeffe's talent for abstracting natural forms. Her rendering of stacked rocks includes precisely placed areas of highlight and shadow. These formal elements result in an ambiguous relationship between positive and negative space. What is solid and what is mere shadow? This play of depth and weight is also evident in O'Keeffe's photographs of her chow chows, which she rendered in her art as abstract round forms—much like these rocks. O'Keeffe often used light and dark to explore the qualities of form, dimension, and depth.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Untitled [Dog]

1951

graphite on paper

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation

2006.5.233

O'Keeffe owned eight chow chows—seven blue and one red—over the course of more than 20 years. She received her first two, Bo and Chia, as Christmas presents in 1951. O'Keeffe often described her dogs in formal terms. She wrote to her sister Claudia, "I have two new chow puppies—half grown...not quite blue and against the half snow has a frosty color—very pretty." The artist appreciated the dogs' dark fur in contrast to the bright New Mexico environment and their ambiguous shape when they lay curled on the ground.

Dan Budnik (American, 1933–2020)

**Georgia O’Keeffe’s Chows, Abiquiú,
New Mexico**

1964

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Gift of the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation

2006.6.1356

Photographer Dan Budnik is known for his insightful and revealing portraits of artists. Here, he pictures O’Keeffe’s chow chows—Jango and Inca II—with some of the stones she collected. O’Keeffe appreciated both her stones and her dogs for their shape and texture, a formal relationship Budnick underscores in his picture. O’Keeffe respected Budnik’s perceptive work and invited him to her home several times.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Roofless Room

1959–60

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1430, 2006.6.1431

Roofless Room

1959–60

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1429, 2006.6.1428

Streaked by morning shadows, O'Keeffe's photographs of her "roofless room" at Abiquiú are stunning studies of the dimensional quality of shadows. As the sun's position changed throughout the day, the shadows cast by the *latillas* (ceiling slats) crept down the walls and across the bare floor, reframing the scene. In each image, O'Keeffe uses these dramatic shadows to articulate the planes and angles of the room.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Untitled (Abstraction)

1959–60

graphite on paper

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation,

2006.5.302

In O'Keeffe's drawing of the roofless room, she outlines shadows—intangible absences of light—in the same way as the massive wooden *vigas* (round roof beams) and door.

Center

LIFE magazine

**"Georgia O'Keeffe in New Mexico,
Stark visions of a pioneer painter"**

March 1, 1968

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Courtesy of the Hirsch Library

LIFE magazine's 1968 cover story focused on O'Keeffe's passion for light and shade. The article's first line, "Light edges over the darkened cliffs," brought readers into O'Keeffe's unique visual world and emphasized the intimate connection between her luminous environment and her art. The accompanying photographs by *LIFE* staff photographer John Loengard (1934–2020) highlighted her vision, presenting O'Keeffe in her shadow-filled roofless room and with starkly rendered skulls.

Next gallery

Seasons

In the Southwest, each season brings subtle and dramatic shifts in the quality of sunlight and the appearance of the landscape. While full, leafy trees cast deep shadows in the summer, the same place offers bare branches and evenly lit, snowy ground in the low sun of winter. O'Keeffe photographed her environment in all seasons, allowing the change in nature to act as an inherent formal characteristic in her artwork.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Ladder against Studio Wall in Snow

1959–60

Kiva Ladders against Wall

1957–58

Ladder against Studio Wall

1959–60

**Ladder against Studio Wall
with Black Chow (Bo-Bo)**

1959–60

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1417, 2006.6.1418, 2006.6.1424,

2006.6.1422

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

**Looking from Bedroom at Abiquiú
towards Rio Chama, New Mexico
1957–65**

gelatin silver print

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Anonymous Gift, 1977

1977.657.7

O'Keeffe was a close observer of the seasons. Throughout the year, changing foliage and different angles of light resulted in a natural reframing of the landscape, which she responded to in her art. From her eastern bedroom window, O'Keeffe photographed changes in the valley. Her photographs tracked relationships between the snowy ground, bare trees, and long shadows as fall gave way to winter.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Road from Abiquiú

1964–68

black-and-white Polaroids

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1079, 2006.6.1078

“The valley is wide and flat with a row of bare trees on the far side—masking the river that I do not see because of them—then a very fine long mountain rises beyond. It is all frosty this morning—The sun this time of year hits the mountain first—then the trees— with a faint touch of pink—then spreads slowly across the valley as sun light.” O'Keeffe's sensitivity to the seasonal change outside her bedroom windows is evident in her multiple photographs of those views, which capture the landscape in winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Road from Abiquiú

1959–66

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1372

Road out Bedroom Window

probably 1957

gelatin silver print

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Anonymous Gift, 1977

1977.657.3

Several extant photographs of the mesa and road outside O'Keeffe's east window track the view at different times of the year. In addition to overtly reframing the scene, the artist allowed nature's changes to alter the relationships of form and light within the composition. The strong summer sun cast hard shadows onto the silvery road in one photograph, while in another, the diffuse light of spring highlights the new growth of the thin foliage.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Road Past the View

1964

oil on canvas

Collection of Carl & Marilyn Thoma

In her 1976 Viking Press book, titled *Georgia O'Keeffe*, the artist included the following text next to the seductive painting *Road Past the View*: "The road fascinates me with its ups and downs and finally its wide sweep as it speeds toward the wall of my hilltop to go past me. I had made two or three snaps of it with a camera." It is notable that this anecdote about photography was included in a book with limited text covering an impressive 60-year career. O'Keeffe was sure to write photography into her story.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Road from Abiquiú

1964–68

black-and-white Polaroid

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1082

Road out Bedroom Window

probably 1957

gelatin silver print

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Anonymous Gift, 1977

1977.657.5

Road from Abiquiú

1959–66

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1371

Todd Webb (American, 1905–2000)

**Georgia O’Keeffe Photographing
the Chama River**

1961, printed later

inkjet print

Courtesy of the Todd Webb Archive

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Chama River

1957–63

gelatin silver prints

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1311, 2006.6.1313, 2006.6.1315

Located between O'Keeffe's Abiquiú home and Ghost Ranch, this south-facing elevation overlooks the Chama River as it makes a tight bend. O'Keeffe photographed the view in a variety of seasons, capturing the changing depth of the rushing water, the density of foliage, and the deepness of shadows throughout the year.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Chama River

1958–61

chromogenic print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

RC.2006.1.1

Chama River

1959

gelatin silver print

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1310

Todd Webb (American, 1905–2000)

**Georgia O’Keeffe Photographing the
Chama River**

1961

gelatin silver print, enlarged and cut contact sheet
Courtesy of the Todd Webb Archive

In 1957 Todd Webb wrote to O’Keeffe, “Will we stand on the bridge and watch the Chama in flood?” The pair often visited this spot, located between O’Keeffe’s Ghost Ranch property and her main house in Abiquiú. In these three frames, Webb captured O’Keeffe as she moved along the rise, reframing the river view with her camera.

Georgia O'Keeffe
(American, 1887–1986)

Jimsonweed
(*Datura stramonium*)
1964–68

black-and-white Polaroids
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum,
Santa Fe
2006.6.1070, 2006.6.1076



O'Keeffe's photographs of jimsonweed flowers exemplify her interest in seasonal change. The trumpet-like flowers of the jimsonweed began blooming around her home in late summer and continued through the first frost. The flowers obey both the cycle of the seasons and a shorter daily cycle, opening in the afternoon and closing with the rising sun the next day.

O'Keeffe's many photographs of jimsonweed present the bright white flower in contrast to its dark surrounding leaves. Individually or in groups of blooms, jimsonweed signals O'Keeffe's ongoing fascination with nature's transformation in all its forms.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

White Flower

1929

oil on canvas

The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Hinman B. Hurlbut Collection

Georgia O'Keeffe is perhaps best known for her paintings of flowers. Their magnified structures fill the canvas and absorb the viewer in her unique vision of nature. She magnified her painted flowers so that people would "be surprised into taking time to look at it." O'Keeffe rendered her blooms at their peak, capturing this fleeting view of nature in enveloping detail.

Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986)

Jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium*)

1964–68

black-and-white Polaroids

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe

2006.6.1074, 2006.6.1071, 2006.6.1072

“Well—I made you take time to look at what I saw and when you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower—and I don't,” O'Keeffe scolded. For the artist, her renderings of flowers were about detail, light and shade, and formal juxtaposition. Though many critics read other meanings into these works, O'Keeffe maintained that they signified only the artistic potential of flowers. Here, she distills their potential not with pencil or paint, but with her camera.

Look with O'Keeffe

In the Cincinnati Art Museum's O'Keeffe, *My Back Yard*, the artist depicted the New Mexico landscape immediately around her Ghost Ranch home in the summer of 1943. This is the same place and time period in which O'Keeffe observed the angular forms of the antelope (her "back yard pet") pictured in the first room of this exhibition.

You have just looked at the world through O'Keeffe's photographic eye. What do her photographic engagements with framing, light, and natural cycles help you see in this painting?

Why did she select the size and proportions of the canvas and fill it with areas of flora, earth, and sky as she did?

How did she explore qualities of light and shadow in an artwork rendered in color?

What seasonal qualities do you think inspired her?

After you leave the museum today, try looking at your own world as O'Keeffe might. What will you discover?

On view in Gallery 211



Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887–1986), *My Back Yard*, 1943, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in. (45.7 x 61 cm), Cincinnati Art Museum; Museum Purchase: The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial, Fanny Bryce Lehmer Endowment, Bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Walter J. Wichgar, John J. Emery Endowment, Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Leyman Endowment, and Rieveschl Collection Fund, 2013.51, © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York