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Monday Sept. 24, 1973 - morning

Ghost Ranch

About sixteen miles ~~west~~ ^{west} of Abiquiu, off Rte. 84. Turn right at the sign, ~~xxx~~ into a harsh landscape, ~~of~~ a valley bounded by high sandstone cliffs. Ghost Ranch is owned now by the Presbyterian Church which uses it as a year-round conference center. Before that it was a dude ranch, and before that a working ranch. ~~xxx~~ One of the legends is that in the oldest house a woman holding a baby sometimes appears.

Quilt by Arthur Poch - see letter)
O'Keeffe's place is some distance from this complex, down another dirt road and closer to the cliffs. You go past two small adobe houses that were built once as a movie set and have never been lived in. ~~Her~~ house is low to the ground, with large windows that she had put in when she bought it. There is also a small shed that she says is for packing boxes, and an engine room or pump house. Her white Lincoln Continental sits under an arbor in the driveway. O'Keeffe comes out to greet me, a small erect figure ~~ix~~ dressed entirely in white, with white hair.

There is a small breakfast room off the kitchen, with windows facing the cliffs. But she prefers usually to sit in the ~~xx~~ patio which faces south and gets the full sun. The patio is enclosed on three sides. Animal skulls hang on the brown adobe walls, and her rocks are spread out on tables and benches everywhere, together with other skulls (antelope and deer as well as cow), gnarled sticks, etc. The central portion of the patio is grown high with wild sage, which started there on its own -- she likes it. Crush it in your hands and the smell is intense. Huge sawn stumps placed against the wooden uprights supporting the roof and fitted with cushions, are used as seats; there are also a few lounge chairs. O'K sits on a stump and tells how she came to be here.

(Facing the open end of the patio, you see the ^{bluish} Jemez Mts and the Pedernal, a high, flat-topped ^{volcanic} peak). *Ladder to roof, where she sometimes sleeps.*

"I'd been staying down in Alcalde for five years or so, from 1930 to 1935. I liked those sand hills, the shapes of the hills down there. But I soon began going up to the country around Abiquiu. One woman I knew in Alcalde told me that if I saw a single cloud in the sky I should come right back, or I might get caught up there. Well, for a while I tried to find a place in Abiquiu. I finally found a room next to the cantina, it was absolutely spotless, and scrubbed white. But it was awfully close to the cantina, so I decided I couldn't live there. I went up further, to Barranca, and camped out around there. I think I've taken a bath in every brook from here to Espanola, ~~andxxxxx~~ Irrigation ditches are good to bathe in, too, you know -- they're just about wide enough to lie down in. [The road between Abiquiu and Espanola is full of those sand hills, with the dark messes behind them. I never really did ~~xxxx~~ get into those hills, although I walked toward them often enough -- it seemed as tho no matter how far you walked you never got any closer.]

"I found I could work in a place for two days before anybody bothered me. After two days people would get curious. Then I would move on somewhere else, and if I hadn't finished I could come back in a week and get another two days. I was painting what I saw, as best I could. Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes not.

"One day, the boy ~~whm~~ was teaching me how to drive a car said, he knew

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mariposa lilies (small white)

no phone at hotel for years

Santo Domingo cor. dome

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Ghost Ranch (cont)

of a place he thought I'd like. He brought me up here. The funny thing was we couldn't even find the road in. It was hard to see, and I didn't know then that there was a cow's skull beside the road to mark the turn. It was operating as a dude ranch then, being run by the same people who started Bishop's Lodge over in Tesuque. I came back a few days later by myself, after I'd found out about the cow's skull. I went in and asked if I could live there, and he said I could stay the night but that unless someone decided not to come there wouldn't be room for me. That night a family moved out -- the son had developed appendicitis in the night -- and I moved in. I've been here every summer since then."

O'K bought her house there in ¹⁹⁴⁰~~1935~~. People in Alcalde asked her why did she want to live way up there, with no phone, dirt roads, etc. "When I drove up here that summer, though, in an open car, and got to this plateau, I knew this was where I lived. We're at our best up here at the ranch. In Abiquiu there are always things to do. The 'phone rings, people want you to do things, strangers come and say they want to see me. There's the garden, and letters, and all sorts of problems.

"I'm through with the Abiquiu house. I'd sell it tomorrow, if I could be sure somebody would stay with me up here in the winter." Jerrrie Newsom, who came originally from Abiquiu, has married twice and lived other places (she goes home to her husband in Taos weekends) looks after her here, "keeps me slave." Last year they were here into December. But it gets cold and it's hard to get fresh food in the winter. The sitting room that she uses as a studio is chilly. She could put in a new heater, but the pipe would have to go where the dog, Jingo, likes to lie, "and I wouldn't want to take the dog's place." (Jingo is a year-and-a-half chow bitch, the successor to O'k's line of chows.)

She likes the remoteness and the stillness. When there's no wind there's ~~usually~~ silence is awesome. You hear no birds, even. Sometimes coyotes, coming back slowly after the mass poisonings.

The house itself is furnished very sparsely. Only essential furniture. Her sitting room-studio is dominated by long work table. Over fireplace, a small crosscut saw hangs from a nail. Big brass urn beside fire -- from '291. White muslin curtains at windows, clipped together with clothes pins. Colors inside are mainly black and white, like her clothes -- People ask Jerrrie if Mrs. O'K has only one dress, "I tell them she's got a hundred dresses but they're all the same cut." (On cold days she sometimes wears two dresses, one over the other). "I've never wanted to have a lot of things. I used to be afraid somebody might come in here and clear everything out while I was away, altho nothing like that has ever happened. The only thing I've ever lost here was a bucket of tar and a folding bed I had stored in the garage, and I think I know who took those..."

Impression of cleanliness and order. Dust cloths over things. No clutter.

"Last Supper" poster - brought out by John Bruce Hamilton (Juen), her new secretary. O'K is Christ in parody of Leonardo done by women's lib!
 "I never deny anything anybody says about me, but why did they have to make it so big?" (Women's lib quote here)

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Other Artists

(We talked about some ~~of them~~ ^{of them} there on patio ^{at ranch;} others from later conversations).

Paul Strahd - "He was one of Alfred's children, and he grew up. It seems when this happens it's usually necessary to turn against the parents. To be frank I liked his early work better... Paul always thought he deserved things, somehow. Nobody deserves things. You're given a chance, that's all."

Duchamp - Met him several times, first thru the Stettheimers. "Florine Stettheimer was a very special person. In her house ~~the~~ the furniture looked as tho it had never been used. Once I made this comment about a red cushion, and she said indignantly, 'I sit on it every day!' ~~She said~~ Whenever Florine finished a painting she'd invite ~~me~~ ^{me} to ~~come in~~ ^{come in} for tea. One time, I remember, I was sitting there just behind the new painting, and Duchamp was sitting facing me. I finished my tea, and he got up from his chair and took my teacup with the most extraordinary grace -- with a gesture that was so elegant that I've never forgotten it. And I haven't seen anything so elegant since. It was strange, because he never dressed well or anything like that -- his suit was even a little shabby."

Demuth - "Demuth was more amusing than any of the artists I knew. He had diabetes. He would come to New York from Lancaster, and eat every-thing he shouldn't, and get sick. He was very elegant, too. In my memory he is the only artist who was any fun to be with. We were always going to work on a picture together -- a flower painting. We never did. He had a club foot, and the effort of walking must have been terrific -- his collar was wilted from the strain even on the coldest days. He lived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in ~~his~~ house that had been in his family since about 1745. I think he had a very strong mama. His ears stuck out from his head like horns. We always had lunch and dinner with him when he was in town, and we always enjoyed it."

Dove - "I think he really came to that (abstraction) quite naturally. It was his way of thinking. Kandinsky was very showy and all that, but Dove had an earthy, simple quality that led directly to abstraction. I loved his things. I always wish I'd bought the ones I wanted, but Stieglitz always told me to wait... And all the people Dove influenced, who are more well known now than he is. The Modern Museum never did give him a show -- I don't know why, probably somebody there didn't like him. Dove used to make a lot of small pictures, little landscapes, that didn't look particularly distinguished at first glance. But in them he'd get the feeling of a particular place so completely -- you'd know that you'd been in that very place."

Marin - "There was something a little too soprano about his work, do you know what I mean? Of course we've never had anybody who could touch him in watercolor -- I doubt whether there's ever been anyone able to do what he did with watercolor, except the Chinese. But when he tried to achieve the same effect in oil it was never quite as good. Marin used to come over every Saturday afternoon to see Stieglitz. They knew each other so well, they'd never say much. Just sit quietly, smoking. Marin had beautiful eyes, very bright -- the eyes made him very attractive."

Hartley - "Hartley wrote such a terrible thing about me once, in the catalog to one of my shows. I thought after reading it I could never hold up my head again. I showed it to Hutch Hapgood, who ~~xx~~ read it and said, 'Hartley's not writing about you at all, he's writing about himself. Don't you know critics always write about themselves?' I never forgot that. It made things much easier for me. The critic I really liked was

(over)

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Henry McBride. He'd write about all sorts of other things besides art, and then mention your exhibition in the last paragraph. He was very nice. He said he'd really wanted to be a drama critic, and that if he had he would have been much better known."

But she is not happy about what critics have written about her work. "I'm such an ordinary person -- often they make me feel like I'm floating around in chiffons."

Murie: "I can't remember when I couldn't read music." Sometimes thought she might have become a musician, "but I think I made the right choice."

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Early Life

"We lived in southern Wisconsin, which is wheat farming country. My mother was a great talker. She told wonderful stories, and she read to us on rainy days and weekends. My older brother had bad eyes, and she'd read to him, and I always listened even after I could read myself. I think that reading was a good start to a lot of things. The reason I was always so anxious to come out here was that I'd loved all the western stories my mother read to us -- about Kit Carson and Billy the Kid, The Last of the Mohicans was another I remember being excited about.

"We left Wisconsin the year I was ~~thirteen~~^{fifteen}. My mother's and my father's families had properties that adjoined there. My father had bought my mother's property. They raised all kinds of things, even tobacco. I remember there was a lot of burr oak, the coarsest of the oaks. I can see enormous loads of hay coming in in the evening -- I've never seen loads of hay like that anywhere else. I also remember feeding the horses fresh oats and making them sick. My memories of childhood are quite pleasant, although I hated school. I left the local school when I was twelve, and was sent to boarding school, to a convent in Madison. It was the one year I ever ~~hardly~~ really learned anything. The next year I lived with my aunt in Madison, ~~and then we moved to Virginia~~. The winters were awfully cold in Wisconsin. You could hear ~~in~~ the snow creek underfoot all winter.

"I remember standing one time with ~~the daughter~~ my friend Lena, the daughter of the woman who did our washing, and saying I was going to be an artist. I haven't any idea where that came from. My ~~sister~~^{two younger sisters} and I were sent to a woman in town for drawing and painting lessons for several years. We copied things -- I can remember laboriously copying a baby's hand..." (O.K. was the second of seven children)

(see class plays)
(1902)
The move to Virginia was for reasons of health(?). It was warmer there, but damp. O.K. remembers that a lot of children used to come and play at their big house, mostly boys. The O.K. children were not very close. "I didn't play with any of my sisters or brothers. I had a doll family and a doll house, and my great pleasure was making things for them. I was satisfied to be all by myself." The doll house had a park around it, with a lake, and tall weeds for trees, and could be folded up and moved indoors. It had four rooms. O.K. sewed clothes, curtains, etc.

In Virginia she was sent to the Chatham Episcopal Institute, in the mountains, now quite fashionable but not so then. "At the Convent in Madison I don't ever remember wanting to do anything I shouldn't do, but at Chatham the atmosphere was entirely different. I used to stand there and think, 'Now what can I do that I shouldn't do and not get caught?' I'd go for long walks with another girl, which was not allowed. I had enough demerits to get expelled if I got one more. I wouldn't read my French lessons aloud three times to myself, as we were told to do; when they asked me whether I done it I'd say no, I didn't have enough time for that. Also I could never learn to spell. Doris Bry says now that I've ruined her spelling because I mis-spell with such authority.

"The girls at Chatham thought I was pretty strange and ~~I~~^{they} thought they were pretty strange, mainly because we spoke differently. They said things like 'Do' for 'door' and 'flo' for 'floor.' We had stoves in our rooms to keep warm by, and the food was very bad. The principal was the art teacher. She rather favored me, and years later she used to come to my shows.

"There was one girl at Chatham, Alice Peretta, who ~~hated~~^{told the others she} hated me. She was from Laredo, Texas. Well, I bet some of the others that I could get her to like me, and I got to work on Alice. When we left school we corresponded. She began teaching school in Amarillo. At that time I

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(early life, cont)

needed to get some experience teaching, and when the art teacher in her school left Alice suggested that they hire me, and they did. I was very excited about the idea of going to Texas, where Billy the Kid had been...

"I got very interested in teaching. I became head of the art department of the normal school in ~~Amarillo~~ ^{Amarillo}. I enjoyed teaching people who had no particular interest in art." Dow's teaching had been based on ideas that the same principles applied no matter what sort of work you were going - pottery, painting, etc. "He had the idea that everybody had to use these principles of art in everything they did. He gave us exercises in the arrangement of color and shape, of dark and light. One exercise of his was to take a maple leaf and fit it into a seven-inch square in various ways. But then when I got to north Texas there was nothing like a leaf to use..."

Note: In Amarillo, O'K applied the principles she had learned from Arthur Dow at Teacher's College, where Dow was head of Dept of Fine Arts. He had studied in Paris and painted with Gauguin at Pont Aven. In Boston he had worked with Ernest F. Fenellosa. Developed "his own abstract principles which were to appeal so strongly to Georgia O'Keeffe... Dow...insisted that 'Art is decadent when designers and painters lack inventive power and merely imitate nature or the creation of others... The Japanese knew no such divisions as representative ~~xxx~~ or decorative..." (Dan Rich in 1943 Chicago catalog).

Dow taught the method of "abstract design." Line, dark and light, shapes, and color experiments -- "color detached from illusionism."

Year at Art Students League -- O'K had just recovered from typhoid, and her hair was short and very curly as it grew in. The others liked to touch her hair -- so unusual. "I was everyone's pet, which was sort of nice. I went to Lake George that summer, to ~~the League's summer~~ ^{the League's summer} art ~~camp~~ ^{Schoen} and I would have liked to come back to the League in the fall but there wasn't enough money."

O'K "seems to have other people's color, texture, and feelings" (Miss Jody Fisher, 1960 in file)

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O'K "seems outside other people's codes, customs, and folkways."
(Mabel Dodge Luhan, "O'K in Laos")

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lunch at the ranch - 9/24/73

Sitting in small dining room with large window facing sandstone cliffs in back. Steep eroded sides, wrinkled like ancient animals. Cliffs come to an end in a steep chimney that O'K says can be reached by a foot trail. Now and then a piece of rock falls with a sound like thunder, she says, and a great plume of dust ascends. Pinon and juniper and sage dot the dry land. There has been more rain than usual this year, and there is more green as a result. We eat cold steak, ~~xxx~~ beans, zucchini, homemade bread, and raspberries from the Abiquiu garden.

O'K says she came here ~~xxxxthe~~ (New Mexico) for the first time in 1917, with one of her sisters who was in O'K's art class and whom O'K had promised to take to Colorado on their vacation. There had been heavy flooding that year, and the bridges in Colorado were washed out and the trains weren't running, so they figured out an alternate route thru Albuquerque. Spent three days in Santa Fe, then up to Colorado. "I was trying to get back here from then on," she says, "and in 1929 I finally made it." Came in 1929 with Rebecca Strand, stayed the summer in Taos, in the house that D.H. Lawrence had had the previous summer -- one of Mabel Dodge's houses.

Frieda Lawrence -- "She was very special. I can remember very clearly the first time I ever saw her, standing in a doorway there, with her hair all frizzy, wearing a cheap red calico dress that looked as tho' she'd wiped the frying pan with it. She was not thin, and not young, but there was something wonderful about her. I also remember my last sight of her. Her hair had gone white, and she was wearing a blue dress the color of that blue glass (pointing to a flat glass ornament on which a piece of lava rock was standing, as table decoration), deep blue, with silver beads at her neck. She was very beautiful. Oh, Frieda would come into this house with that huge voice of hers, ~~xxxx~~ 'Georgie!' -- her voice would fill the house. She stayed top of the heap. I really liked her."

Mabel Dodge, she says, was "pretty mean. I enjoyed worrying her, I must admit. One of my favorite ways to worry her would be to leave her house after a party and pretend I'd forgotten to say goodbye to Tony, and then come back and say goodbye to Tony. Mabel had the ability to paralyze a room, you know. She would invite a lot of people and seat them around in a circle, and they'd be so intimidated that nobody would say anything, and then the next day Mabel would go on about how everyone in Taos was so stupid. Tony stayed top of the heap, though, and he did it through silence. He never said anything, so people always wondered what he was thinking. Mabel and Tony really met their match in each other, I always thought. Sometimes he'd get mad at her, and wrap his blanket around him, and say he was going to the pueblo. Mabel was worried he'd decide to stay there permanently. But then when Mabel went to the hospital in Santa Fe for an operation once, Tony lay like a log across her bed for days, missing her. They heeded each other, there's no doubt about that.

"Mabel was going away one time, and she invited me to come and use her studio. I thought it might be nice ~~for me~~ to be up there for a while, so I went, but I only stayed one night. I smelled trouble, and after the first night I left and went to the Sage Brush Inn in Taos. Well, Mabel came back early, and found I'd been there, and demanded that I come back and stay with her. I told her I just couldn't work all day and then be with people in the evening, it was just impossible. But I said that if I have a day when I'm not working I'll call you and come

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(lunch cont)

over some evening. I did call, and Mabel said ^{'Oh, no,} you can't come. Tony's invited the peyote singers here and we have too many people and you can't come. Later that afternoon, Tony came to pick me up. I explained to him that I'd called Mabel about coming and what she'd said, and Tony came into the room and sat down in the rocking chair in the corner, ~~and stayed there all evening.~~ 'I go to lot of trouble, get peyote singers,' he said. 'She no invite my friend. I not go.' And he didn't. He sat there all evening, rocking in the corner.

"They were a funny crew over there in Taos. There were not that many interesting people around. They'd have terrible fights, and not speak to each other for days, but then they'd get bored and make up. Mabel was always perfectly awful to Brett, who never heard anything she didn't want to hear. But they'd always get together again."

"I painted around Taos for one summer, but I came to prefer the country here. It was the shapes that fascinated me, the shapes of the hills.

"I've never cared for games, but I always liked to walk. Tony Luhen and I went camping many times, once we went up to Mesa Verde together." Didn't Mabel mind? "Mabel had periods of minding and periods of not minding. She really knew there was nothing to mind in that."

"Mabel had known Stieglitz long before I did, and she always wanted to get him out here. He never came. I wouldn't let him. He had the sort of mind that wouldn't have let me drive five miles to the market by myself. He was a worrying person. Are you? At Lake George sometimes, he and I would row on the lake at night, and his mother would walk the porch until we got back -- she worried about him even then, altho he'd been rowing on that lake since he was a boy.

"I stayed up at the Lawrence bench quite a bit with Brett in the old days. There was a wonderful big pine tree in front of the house, with a carpenter's bench under ~~in~~ it. I used to lie on the bench and look up, and eventually there was nothing to do but paint that tree." ("The Lawrence Tree").

"Taos is a high, wide, sage-covered plain. In the evening, with the sun at your back, it looks like an ocean, like water. The color up there is different from here -- the blue-green of the sage and the mountains, the wildflowers in bloom. It's a different kind of color from any I'd ever seen -- there's nothing like that in north Texas or even in Colorado. And it's not just the color that attracted me, either. The world is so wide up there, so big. It's one of the things I like about this part of the country. I went once to an exhibition of paintings from some eastern European country, mostly landscapes, and came away with the feeling -- 'that world is so small.'"

"Stieglitz ~~had~~ saw color differently from the way I see it. His color sense was much more delicate. Mine is more obvious -- I like the spectacular things."

"One winter I kept a car in New York, and on weekends I drove all around the surrounding area to see if there wasn't some place outside of the city where I could live. There wasn't. I even went down to Virginia, but it wasn't for me. This is where I belong. The city's very hard. I lived there for thirty years, except in the summers. I did my duty, don't you think?"

"The difficulty in getting out here was enormous, but I came."

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of Christ

The Trip to the Monastery in the Desert

O'K said the rocks she picks up are chosen for shape and texture -- she never knows what they are. Nor does she know the names of rock formations around her house. "I think the same soft spot in my brain that makes me such a poor speller must also keep me from learning the names for things."

She also said she doesn't really see birds -- hardly aware of them.

Lake George "was not really painting country. Out here half your work is done for you. ~~xxxxxxx~~ I felt the same about the Gaspé -- I could have lived there, except it gets so cold in the winter." O'K was fascinated by the difference between the Spanish crosses and the French. Did her famous black desert cross the year before going to Gaspé, where she did equally famous seaside cross. "The Spanish crosses are always sad, but the French are almost gay."

We drove for seventeen miles along a dirt road almost washed out in places, into the Chama Valley. Green strip along Rio Chama, the largest of the Rio Grande's tributaries. Spectacular rock formations -- reds and ochers, jagged cliffs, arroyos that turn into raging torrents after a heavy rain. O'K had wanted to go partly for the wild asters that she thought would be blooming in profusion at the monastery, as they were this time last year. It was not visiting day, but Juan said that didn't matter. O'K has been out here several times, the last time being Easter, for the dawn service. Juan, it turned out, had considered spending the winter there, working, for his board and keep -- Father Gregory said he seemed to be very strongly attracted to the place.

We arrived about 4 PM. Few asters. But the Chapel, built 1966 by Nakashima, very lovely against high cliffs. Brother Anthony appeared while Juan went for Father Gregory -- he quickly made known that he was the monk who was lost in the mountains last February, and got severe frostbite on both feet. Father Gregory very cordial to O'K (they've tried unsuccessfully to get her to give money). We went inside the Chapel, and she liked the fact that there seemed very little difference between outside and inside -- could still see cliffs through high windows. Very spare inside, like her house. Two carved wooden figures by Ben Ortega, who uses natural contours of tree or branch; a bloody Christ Crucified in the Spanish manner; a candlestick made from a birch tree; two Navajo rugs; large central altar a slab of rock on pedestal; benches made of split tree trunks on stump supports. Father Gregory said there were four monks at present.

Saw the main house and refectory, stoves made of automobile parts by one of the monks. Met Brother Christopher and Brother Franciscus. Listened to coyotes howling in the hills across Rio Chama. The monastery is close to failure. Raising goats didn't work, and they have to buy most of their food. We left about five.

Going back, O'K said she thought it would be easy for her to convert people to Catholicism. "It has great appeal. It's not for me, of course..."

Has never given to monastery because there are more urgent needs at home in Abiquiu, nearer at hand.

We talked about her travels:

"Stieglitz was a bad traveller. He couldn't do it simply, and he was such

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More on Travels (Paris, Spain)

~~xxxxxx~~ * "One time I was in such trouble with all sorts of ~~things~~ problems here that I just decided to go away and tell nobody where I was -- only the man who handles my money. I went to Paris. Mary Callery had been asking me to come, so I just went. I stayed three months. I toured most of France. We went to Lascaux. The country is beautiful, but I like our country. I have no wish to go back.

"We went on to Spain, which I ~~xxxxxxx~~ liked very much. I was really very excited by the Prado, which made me think there must have been something the matter with me. Because I always destroy pictures for myself. I'm very critical. I don't seem to have the kind of pleasure I know a lot of other people have in pictures. I just can't look at a picture and get pleasure out of it like they can. But the Prado was very exciting for me. The pictures had not been cleaned there, which may have had something to do with it.

"It's funny to me that I enjoy Goya so much. One of the first things I ever bought was a reproduction of a Goya in the Metropolitan, a portrait of a man in knee britches. I carried that around with me for years. Goya seems like something so foreign to me, and yet I enjoy him as much as any occidental artist. His prints, a lot of them anyway, are about pretty terrible things, and I'm usually rather squeamish about that sort of thing; but not the way Goya does it."

(O.K. also likes Pissarro, and dislikes Blake -- paintings, not poetry; she doesn't read poetry. Blake "is so apt to be sentimental," and she can't stand that. Her favorite is Chinese painting. "I'd say it's the best that's been done.")

Paris add -- talking about art with her friend ^{William} Einstein, "not the big one, the painter." Only person she's ever liked to talk about painting with, although she could hardly bear to look at his paintings."

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a worrier..." They never went to Paris together, for example. "I couldn't imagine being in a place where I couldn't talk, and where Stieglitz would have said everything I wanted to do was impossible. I couldn't have proved that it wasn't. Besides, I was more interested in coming out here then."

Peru - (with Betty Pilkington, friend from Abiquiu)

The colors there are almost unbelievable. "Here we have a little color, and wonderful shapes. Mostly the earth colors, brown and reds. But in Peru there are marvellous purples, violent colors. And the Andes are sparkling -- they freeze at night, and in the morning they glitter. I think it's the most beautiful country I've ever seen.

"I don't know why these forgotten cities have such a lure for me. I'd read a book about Macchu Picchu when it was first discovered, and I'd wanted ever since to see it. I was the same way about Angkor Wat.

"...And the Indian eye that passes over you without lingering -- the same way I used to look at the Presbyterians who bought Ghost Ranch, so they wouldn't become friendly. The Indian eye passes over you as though you didn't exist."

Dinner at the ranch - 9/24/73

Served at 6 PM - soup with cut up chicken, saled greens from Abiquiu garden, cold fish salad, bread. Sunset on high cliffs thru window.

We talked about Juan's problem getting started again doing pottery. Juan grew up in Venezuela and other parts of South America, of American parents, came to US when he was 17 or so. He's been to several colleges, majoring in English and Art, and done graduate work. Got married and moved to Vermont, where he raised vegetables and did pottery. The marriage broke up and he began travelling, coming here because (as he later told me) he had idea he'd like to work for O'K -- and as it happened he turned up at her door the day after her secretary had left. O'K would like him to build a kiln at the ranch, for reasons of her own -- then she could stay there year round. But he's uncertain, doesn't know whether his talent is sufficient for the commitment.

StKx

"I think work encourages work," O'K said. "Often when I get an idea for a picture, I think, how ordinary, why paint that old rock? Why not go for a walk instead? But then I realize that to someone else it may not seem ordinary at all. And then once you get started the idea usually begins to seem more and more interesting."

But she agreed that this takes a certain degree of ego. "In my case I never cared anything at all what other people thought. ~~So~~ I was just doing what I wanted to do.

"I always knew I could earn a living doing something else, which is after all a problem for artists. So I wasn't worried. I could just do it because I wanted to do it, and I didn't have to care what anyone thought. I've always been able to earn enough money to live on. More than enough. I'm not interested in money anyway. I've never wanted

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more possessions. Besides I've always thought maybe someone would come here while I was away and clear everything out. It's never happened. The only things I've ever lost are a bucket of tar and a folding bed that was stored in the garage -- and I think I know who took those.

"I gave away everything of value before moving out here in 1949. The books too -- all I kept were the Museum of Modern Art catalogs, which are useful for reference. I don't want to own any new things.

Tuesday morning 9/25/73

Jerrie sick, says it was slice of bread and butter but O'K insists on calling doctor, who says bring her to hospital in Santa Fe. We decide to go to Abiquiu house. The day started brilliant but has clouded over. ~~Some~~ Some rain around nine a.m. (O'K was up at 6, breakfast at 6:45).

The Abiquiu house is much larger. It stands across the arroyo from the rest of the town, surrounded by a high hedge and an adobe wall. There is an outer courtyard overlooking the Chama Valley, then a wide gate leading into the inner court between house and studio. O'K's sister Claudia has been living with her for about a year, but is away in California now. The studio is a large rectangular room, with big window overlooking the valley, white carpet on floor, big work table filled with books, papers, odds and ends such as photograph of a Viking ship dug up in Norway, with high gurling prow, that she likes to look at. Off the studio is her bedroom and bath, all white, spartan but comfortable. The best of her many hi-fi sets is in studio, and most of her huge record collection. Two O'K paintings hang -- the latest in the rock series at far end, and a much earlier picture called "In the Patio" (altho it has nothing to do with the patio) on the long wall opposite the windows, an abstraction with a V-pattern in blue, black, and white, that she recently bought back at an auction. She has them hanging "because I felt that I'd done what I wanted to do in them. I don't always get what I try for, you know." There is also a reproduction of her painting that was used as a poster for the Santa Fe Opera. Also, on the long counter that houses hi-fi and records, is a Hiroshige print, her favorite, a snow scene in three panels; she bought a cheaper copy years ago, got this more recently.

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(Abiquiu - cont)

O'K showed me the rest of the house -- big kitchen and well-stocked larder, dining room, long sitting room with window on garden, old ceremonial kitchen where they now store squashes, etc. Then we toured the big garden, where she ~~is~~ grows almost everything they need -- squash of several kinds, lettuce, tomatoes, lambs quarters, beans, raspberries, corn, peaches, pears, apples; also some flowers -- marigolds for bugs and worms -- and evergreens. Big old mulberry tree right in middle. Outside the wall are cottonwoods and aspens and spruce. "I have to go to the ranch, you see, or I'd spend all my time working in the garden."

She saw the place from the road, before buying the ranch property. It was in ruins. From the road she saw a fenced-in garden -- a tree had fallen and broken thru the fence in one place -- and thought that would be the end of desire. It was originally a farm, built probably by the earliest Spanish settlers here about the time of the Civil War. Her studio was a stable; ~~which she used as a~~ the pigpen. But it was uninhabited and falling to pieces. She wanted it, and tried for years to buy it. It belonged then to a man who planned to tear it all down and build a motel on the site. He asked \$6000 for it, but a neighbor told her he wouldn't pay \$300 for that mudpile. When the owner died she was in process of buying the ranch. The house was offered to her but she said she wasn't interested. After a few years, tho, the difficulty of getting fresh vegetables and meat at the ranch, ~~thru~~ during the war when gas was rationed, led her to start thinking again about the place. It was owned by this time by the Catholic Church. She approached the bishop, and had some not pleasant conversations with him. Eventually, in 1946, she bought it ~~from~~ from the church, and spent three years making it livable. For the first year they couldn't buy anything, not even a nail, because all building supplies were going up to Los Alamos.

Patio - a square space, surrounded on all sides by brown adobe walls. In one wall is the deepset black door that she has painted so often (20 paintings). "There was something about that door that fascinated me from the start." The patio has been various colors. Once she had it painted white, but the glare was so intense she had it painted over the next day -- a big disappointment.

There are seven fireplaces at Abiquiu, and eight at the ranch. Indian style, with the logs standing up instead of lying down, and shavings of pinon for kindling. She's rebuilt nearly all of them several times before she got them to draw well. First fire of the season that evening.

Jerrie kept in hospital, so we stay here. O'K never sick, she says. "I haven't a creak." Had bad arthritis at age 35, but got over it. Thinks secret is keeping warm enough.

O'K no interest in women's lib. "How can they ever gain anything, jumping around like that?" She is old-fashioned lady at times, feels present efforts undignified.

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Afternoon 9/25/73 - Abiquiu Studio

Asked her about the time she put up her previous work and decided it ~~xxx~~ all showed the influence of one or another of her teachers.

"I still do that," she said. "It's a good idea to make up your mind about yourself before you let the world see you." But she said story was true. "Everything then had been done according to what some teacher had told me. I thought, well, I'm not going to spend the rest of my life doing that." She destroyed much of this early work, although some survives (e.g., a small portrait of her sister Claudia, age 8, now hanging in Claudia's room at Abiquiu). "Once when I was living in New York, I looked through it again and just put it in the waste basket. I didn't even bother tearing it up. Then Stieglitz and I went out for dinner, and when we came home -- it was a very windy night -- my pictures were blowing all over the streets.

"I hadn't thought before of doing what was in my head. I didn't even know there was anything there. But when I began to think about it, it was very simple and I ~~set out~~ to work at it with great interest, at least to myself. There was just no reason to keep on doing what other people told me to do."

Sources of her work: "Sometimes I know what it comes from, sometimes not. Dove was that way too. Often a picture just gets into my head without my having the best idea how it got there."

The charcoal drawings: "I thought it was easier just to use black and white at first, and not to use color until I had to. It was a long time -- from that fall until the following summer -- before I began working with color again."

Abstraction

"I had seen the Rodin drawings at '291' in When I came back to New York in . . . I saw the Picasso and Breque drawings there -- they were so similar in that period that you could hardly tell which was which. But something (abstraction) was in the air. You pick up ideas here and there, if you mention any particular source it gives that too much emphasis. You'd just push the past out of your way if you could..."

Did the drawings excite you? "I was very interested."

Anita Pollitzer: A girl with very long hair, who used to tag along with O'K and others. She carried everything haphazardly under her arm -- brush and comb, poetry books, notes, etc. -- and usually had paint on her face and hair. After O'K left the League Anita wrote to her about what was happening in NY -- Henri's lectures, concerts, events in city. She was "a very lively, very interested little person." Took the drawings to 291.

"I hadn't made them to pass around. I don't know why, I just didn't. I always liked to do my things by myself in private. (Stieglitz never could understand that -- he'd try to see what I was doing and be surprised that I didn't want him to).

O'K had seen Stieglitz at the Rodin show but hadn't talked. When she learned that the drawings were hanging at 291 she went down to make him take them down. He was away on jury duty the first time, so she had to come back. "He was a good talker." But the show "was no pleasure to me. There was a certain satisfaction, but no pleasure."

Realism and Abstraction

"At times I'm ridiculously realistic... I'll tell you what did go on in

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* her work has been called magic realism, even
surrealism. Early work drew many references
to Freudian symbolism.

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(Abiquiu studio - cont)

my so-called mind when I did my skulls. There was a lot of talk among people my age in New York then about the Great American Painting -- it was like the Great American Novel. The American Scene. I had gone across the country several times, and I knew that a horse didn't look like a skeleton (American scene paintings of bleak scenes, poverty, etc). I knew America was very rich, very lush. Their idea of the American scene struck me as ridiculous. I started painting my skulls about this time. First I put a horse's skull against a blue cloth background, then I used a cow's. I had lived in cattle country -- Amarillo is the crossroads of cattle shipping, you could see the cattle coming in for days at a time. For Goodness sake, I thought, the people who talk about the American scene don't know anything about it. So in a way the cow's skull was my joke, and it gave me pleasure to make it in red, white, and blue...

"Then, in 1949, I felt I hadn't done the country, that I'd failed. What can I take home and keep working on there, I asked myself, (to get the feel of this country around New Mexico.) "I had a barrel of bones that I'd picked up here and there. Around the county at that time you could also buy artificial flowers, made mostly for funerals, and I had a collection of those. I'd never done anything with them. I was looking through them one day, at the ranch, when somebody came and knocked on the kitchen door. As I went to answer the door I stuck an artificial rose down in the horse's eye socket. And when I came back, the rose in his eye looked pretty fine, so I said to myself I think I'll go on with that.

"All the things people said about that picture afterward -- it was just ridiculous.* I think I'm a lot closer to the earth in my work than most people ~~xxxxxxx~~ think I am. All the dreamy nonsense that painters talked when I was first around New York... And the men were not really too interested in having me around, either. That's why I always had to stretch my canvases so well. And to them my color was all wrong, of course. It's interesting to see what people will accept now. Then, you couldn't sell a ~~ppz~~ pink painting...

O'K said she was coming to NY next month for two reasons -- to hear Richter play, and to see the Ellsworth Kelly show. "Sometimes I've thought his things were mine. It's never happened that way with any other painter. I've actually looked at one of his paintings and thought for a moment that I'd done it." ~~xx~~

Absence of portraits

(When Duchamp came into her show at Anderson Galleries, he looked around quickly and said, "Where's your self-portrait?")

"I've been a person other people always wanted to paint or photograph. It started as soon as I came to art school. A girl there had a painting of a figure in an armchair, but she hadn't painted in the face or the arms. 'You're just right,' she told me, and I had to pose. Stieglitz used to photograph me every evening -- often I'd have to sit still for three minutes at a time. I've always minded posing. I thought what Stieglitz did was so extraordinary that I was willing to put up with it. But I never wanted to ask other people to do that.

O'K once said she wished people were trees, then she could enjoy them better.

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Stieglitz

"People are very hard on me. I don't take easily to being with people. Stieglitz always had people around him -- he needed that, I guess. I think it came from his childhood in that family. Even when they went to live in Europe, they stayed in one of those residential hotels and invited lots of their friends to visit. We were always with people. I never knew how many would be there for dinner. It seemed that anyone who was around the gallery in the late afternoon would come back for supper." (O'K and Stieglitz living on 54th street near river).

Stieglitz kept a diary from the age of six or so. It was bound in leather, in many volumes. His mother made him burn it before he married, for fear of offending his wife.

"Stieglitz was very helpful~~xx~~ to young people. He'd be very enthusiastic about somebody, and then he'd forget all about it. I would rather have had him like my work than anyone else at the time. He was always interested in what I did and I was interested in what he did..." (more later)

"He had great power with words. He used words in a unique way, that nobody's ever been able to reproduce. He thrived on violent conversation -- it was appalling the way he could tear somebody to pieces.

"I don't know how well acquainted with himself Stieglitz was. His mind was much quicker than mine, but when I really knew I was right I could wear him down. I seldom argued with him, though. He was the sort of person who could be destroyed ~~by~~ completely if you disagreed with him. You had to let him be what he was. There was that contrary streak in him -- he loved to say no to people buying pictures, for example.

"I can't be responsible for what he said to people..."

"Stieglitz liked the idea of a group. I didn't. He also wanted something to come ~~from~~ out of America, something really important, and he felt you couldn't do that alone." Had always worked with groups -- Photo-Secession, etc.

Stieglitz was concerned about materialistic culture in US, but his artists were not. "They never thought much about~~xx~~ anything but themselves. There was never any real interest in politics, certainly nothing like our interest in Watergate."

Dividing the Stieglitz Collection: He didn't want it divided -- wanted it kept together in New York. She always told him she would divide it. Spent three years at it after he died. Biggest share to Met (because MOMA had recently held an auction and sold a lot of works). Another to Chicago because O'K knew there was "a lot of the country out there." Third share to Fisk Univ. because she'd had a photo of Carl Van Vechten lying around, a newspaper photo from story about his giving his music collection there. Interested in the negro cause, she decided to give to Fisk -- now regrets it because inadequately maintained; would like to take it away, but ~~now~~ such would be considered anti-negro.

"Stieglitz was a very contradictory person. It's almost impossible to describe a person like that. He would start out saying something in the morning, and by that afternoon he'd say something entirely the opposite. He thought aloud. His ideas would be different again that evening. And he'd say it with such conviction each time that people would believe him. Paul Rosenfeld once came to me after an argument with Alfred, and said, 'I know what he says isn't so, but when Alfred Stieglitz says it you can't help believing him.' He could always outtalk you.

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Stieglitz (cont).

"You know, for a person who carried on so much in the world, Stieglitz was very much a child. You had to humor him a good deal."

"When I was first with him he ate for breakfast every morning exactly six pieces of zweiback and a cup of cocoa made with water. And that would be all he had until six o'clock that evening. He had more energy than most people ever thought of having. ~~Ext~~ There was always too much food at his family's; he reacted against all that by not eating enough. There was one time when he got very sick, and I always thought what it really was was that he had starved himself."

At Lake George, St. would spend hours sitting in a chair in the kitchen, talking with Margaret the cook. She'd been there for 20 years, knew everybody, remembered everything.

~~The~~ relationship ~~with~~ Stieglitz and I had was really very good because it was built on something more than just emotional needs. Both of us were very interested in what the other was doing. I think what he did was one of the great documents of the period. Of course, you do your best to destroy each other without knowing it -- some people do it knowingly but most don't. But if you have a good basis you get along in spite of that."

"Stieglitz did all his work in the summers. In the winter, people were his work."

Conversation broken off by rainbow, suddenly framed in large studio window. We hurry outside despite rain, she drawing green shawl over head. It is the most perfect she has ever seen. Both ends visible, spanning the Chama valley. Another one trying to form above it. We watch until it fades.

Dinner - Alen Priest's Buddha in niche behind O'K. He came to visit, went to get it, said that he'd decided to let her have it if he could find a place where it would look well. O'K enjoyed Priest's antics. Told story of the time he took a group of wealthy ladies around China, interior and all. One of them, Mary Wheelwright, kept a diary of the adventure. A friend of hers once showed Priest the diary, and he insisted on taking it to bed with him that night. By morning he had written many emendations and corrections, infuriating Mary Wheelwright. Later he asked O'K whether she couldn't get diary back so he could make more. O'K feels it's a shame he's given no credit for what he did at the Met.

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Sitting Room, Abiquiu, evening of 9/25/73

The fire throws a great deal of heat -- she doesn't hang anything on opposite wall because it gets too hot. A few comfortable modern chairs at the room's end, around fire and picture window with tamarisk outside. Long adobe bench built in on fireplace wall, with cushions -- two are covered with Japanese flags, another, on chair, with Turkish flag. ~~Square~~ Square, glass-topped table beyond chairs. Long low table with books (art). Bookcase with a few books including ~~xxx~~ three or four on the Lippizan horses which she's been to see several times, watching from early morning to late afternoon in the cold palace in Vienna. She says she gets the same sensation watching them as she does watching bull fights -- the glorious movement and strength.

Over the fire hangs a small black Calder mobile (he's a friend, made her the "G O K" bracelet in silver). On low table is a small Dove, "Golden Sunlight," dated 1937 -- yellow and russet. Two thirds of the way down the fireplace wall is an African mask from Stueglitz's first show of African art, at 291. At far end, near ~~xxxx~~ record collection, (Monteverdi strong here) is a lovely "Sky Above Clouds." The room itself is rather dark in daytime. She's had it painted several colors, including white which is best for her pictures, but decided the rich brown adobe is best.

She brought out a few treasures from her travels. A blue porcelain bowl bought in Hong Kong, very thin and delicate, maybe modern but she's not sure. Old Finnish eating utensils sent by an admirer in Finland.

O'K said that in India and other Asian countries you can tell about the relative poverty of different regions by the shades of grey or white in the clothes. In Calcutta the clothes were very grey.

MI liked Nepal, and I don't know why. I like empty spaces. I think the whole bone series came from holding one of those pelvis bones up and seeing the sky through the hole. Holes can be very expressive. I'd been picking up pelvis bones for a long time, I had a big pile in the patio, and I knew I'd use them someday. Then one day I held one up against the sky and saw the blue through that hole..."

O'K and Abiquiu -- she has given a lot to the town. Gymnasium; large contribution toward improvement in water system; Rio Grande Youth Foundation to help needy children thru school (largely a failure, she says; in future she plans to give directly to schools rather than pupils). But the ~~xxxx~~ kids have little to hope for. If they get thru high school in Espanola they're not really ready for college. The people have given up farming, more or less, but have not been assimilated into anything else. "I find the Spanish-American people here very gentle and immensely polite -- not like the German people where I grew up.

"I live here in this village, and I hardly know the people on the other side of the wall. I know faces but very little about them. Richard Fritzlaff, who lived over on the other side of the mountains -- he was the one who gave me my first chows -- told me people roamed around his village all night and would break in if they had a chance. That's why he wanted me to have the dogs. I'm sure they don't do that here. The arroyo down there is called "Arroyo of Death" -- I think because somebody once saw a rattlesnake in it. But they don't go thru it. If they're drunk it's too far to come, and if they're sober they're scared. Anyway I'd never want to move into a new village."

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(Evening at Abiquiu - cont)

"When I first moved here the children had nowhere to go when it got dark. They'd play out in the street until sundown, and then often they'd come in here to see me. The boys talked a lot about having a gymnasium. After a while I took to sending them in my car to their games ~~xxxx~~ with other schools. I'd send them to the movies in Espanola once a week. And eventually I had the gymnasium built. Without knowing I was doing it I really bought my way into this village. Now those boys are grown up and have five or six children of their own."

O'K talked briefly about her life in New York. When she first came to the Art Students' League, soon after recovering from typhoid, her hair was just growing in again, and was short and curly. "I was everybody's pet -- they liked to touch my hair. That was sort of nice, being everybody's pet. That summer I went to ^{the house} camp on Lake George. I would like to have come back to New York in the fall, but there wasn't enough money. I rather enjoyed my life in New York, but then I was always very glad to get back to the country. I'm really a country person."

During the early years with Stieglitz she would go up early in May to Lake George, he would come later. Margaret, the cook, was a French Canadian who had been with the family for 20 years. Her son once wrote all over an O'K painting with a brown crayon -- it was very hard to get off. "Margaret would have come out here with me in 1949, but she was one of those people who always talk about the past and I didn't want to hear that. I didn't ask her. I don't want people to attach themselves to me. Maria, who really built this house, became attached to me as a result, and was very jealous. I told her eventually that she'd have to leave and not come back. I don't want to know about the private lives of the people who work for me." (O'K very successful at keeping people at a distance so she can do her work).

"I don't want many things in my life. I wear my clothes forever. Forever. I never dress up in the evening -- and I feel comfortable about not doing it. I like my old clothes."

"With this house, I've never wanted to make it look Spanish, or Indian, or anything like that. I wanted it to be my house. It's a pretty good house. You know, I've driven across the country many times, and after this area you hardly see an interesting house until you get to Pennsylvania."

"I've moved a lot, and always I've left things behind. '291' hardly had anything in it, you know. There was one chair in a corner, that belonged to an antique dealer ~~xxx~~ across the corridor -- he didn't have room for it. I'm sure that did something to me. Also my interest in Chinese and Japanese art. If I come down here to Abiquiu to live, now, I'll be pushing things out -- I'll get rid of most of those art books on the low table, for one thing. I like to have things as sparse as possible. If you have an empty wall you can think on it better -- I like a space to think in. If you call what I do thinking. As a matter of fact if I do get an idea, I usually get it early in the morning..."

O'K said she liked the glass-topped table "because it looks as though it almost didn't exist."

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(Evening at Abiquiu - cont)

O'K is constantly asked to see young artists, look at their work, etc. She rarely does so, says she now keeps a screen door between herself and any caller. Does she have anything to advise them?

"Go home and work. That's all I could tell them. You can't help anybody -- they've got to do it themselves.

"I think one of my best times was when no one was interested in me. It may have come from not being the favorite child and not minding that - it left me very free. My older brother was ~~the~~ favorite child, and I can remember compering myself to him and feeling I could do better. All the time I was at home it was always, 'More of Georgia's crazy notions.' They didn't like the way I did my hair. I wore pink stockings for a while, which scandalized by brother and my mother -- you were only supposed to wear black. It finally got so at home I did what my mother wanted and when I was away I did as ~~xx~~ I pleased.

"Oh, if I'd followed people's advice it would have been hopeless. That man Dement, he gave me some very good advice. He told me things to see and do, and he was really very helpful. But if I'd done what he wanted me to do, nobody would ~~xxxxxxx~~ ever have thought anything about me."

"This life we live out here -- hardly anybody would be able to stand it. But it's what I want."

On doing what you want:

"The truth is I've been very lucky. Stieglitz was the most interesting center of energy in the art world, when I was trying to find my way. To have him get interested in you was a very good thing. My going to Texas was lucky. Aside from my painting I've always been very fortunate. And I've often had the feeling that I could have been a much better painter and gotten less recognition for it. ~~It's just~~ that what I do seems to move people in a way that I don't understand at all...

"One ^{I was} day, out riding with Tony Luhan, The plum trees were in blossom, and there were wild roses everywhere -- the colors were just magnificent. I said, 'Tony, I just don't think you like it around here as much as I do.' He was silent for a long time, and then he grunted and said, 'That's why I here.'

"I just think some people are very lucky. ~~xxxxxxx~~ The fact that the work I've done has been keyed somehow to my time is largely accidental. I happened to fit into the emotional life of my time. Does that sound right to you? I must say I was surprised at the response to my show at the Whitney -- and I've been troubled to death by people ever since."

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O'Keefe - New York, 11/14/73

Moved from Wisconsin because of father's health -- cold winters.

Older brother, the favorite, had poor eyes. Mother used to read to him, hours at a time, and Georgia listened. Boy's tales -- Stanley's Africa, Leathers, Flocking, Old West. As a result, "Texas was the great place in the world so far as I was concerned."

Alice Perotta died before O'K got there, of a fever. She had been great friend of the superintendent, and O'K became same.

After first year in Texas she was offered another teaching job in Virginia, but "I was so crazy about Texas I had to go back." What did she like? "Everything. The wind -- I didn't even mind the dust. Sometimes when I came back from walking I would be the color of the road. I was there before they ploughed the plains. 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. It just happened that I liked the wind. It was a land that looked like the ocean."

"Light Coming on the Plains" -- "Oh, that was something you could see at night, or rather in the very early morning. The light would begin to appear and then it would disappear, but there would be a sort of halo. And then it would appear again. The light would sort of come and go for quite a while before it finally came. It was the same with the trains. I used to get up very early to see the morning train go through; you'd see it coming, and then it would disappear, and then you'd see it again a long way off. The country was so flat, but there were depressions in it, and things would drop out of sight."

O'K refused to ^{use} Prang Drawing Books her second year, had terrific battle with superintendent over it. Pupils so poor they could barely afford shoes, why spend money on terrible texts not worth paper printed on. She lived in a small hotel, the Magnolia House, and took her meals there. Only about four cars in Amarillo then. Never got ~~acquainted~~ acquainted with the other teachers because she "didn't want them to know how little I knew."

An older man in the hotel, McGregor, had been ~~xxx~~ on the first Alaska gold rush, had a great polished gold nugget on a watch chain made of linked ^{gold} nuggets. ~~xxxxxx~~

In Texas, there was not a respectable weed, not a leaf. The only tree was a locust, whose leaves were too small to do anything with. There was nothing to use in school for children to work with, and they were too poor to go and buy an orange. "I had nothing but my pencil in my hand." But she got so interested in teaching, that "I wondered why I should be paid for what I was doing." She used to have them draw a square and put a door in it somewhere; wanted them to think about dividing a space. Also paper cutting.

The third year in Canyon, 20 miles from Amarillo, she got in a cab one morning to go for a drive. Sat in front with driver because smell of whisky and cigars too bad in back. Drove out and saw "the most extraordinary sunrise." When she got back she thought maybe she could paint that, and this was really what started her painting again. Her schedule allowed for certain set times when she ~~was~~ was free "to do and think whatever I wanted, for

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two hours every day." Worked in watercolor because no time for oils. "I was getting very interested in what was mine."

"I remember coming to New York, twenty years later, and seeing things that looked very much like my watercolors of that period, only done very big." O'K got out her old watercolors and gave them to Edith Halpert (this was after 1949), and she had a show at Downtown Gallery. Some critics said O'K was plugging into the new, but Halpert gleefully told them to look at the dates.

American Scene - The people painting it then "would really have liked to be living in Europe only they couldn't afford it. They didn't know much about America, because most of them had been born east of the Hudson. To them the American scene was a broken-down buckboard or a decayed house. But I'd been born west of the Hudson, and I'd been back and forth across the country at least fifteen times by then..."

Lake George

"It was very beautiful, green country, but somehow it didn't touch my heart.

"'291' was one of the most beautiful rooms I ~~had~~^{have} known -- another is the church at Acoma. That was the place I had seen Stieglitz at home. Well, when we got to the Lake George house, his mother met us on the porch, and I can't begin to tell you what the house was like. It was filled with the contents of a brownstone house of twenty years before. There were pieces of tapestry on the walls, and furniture of all kinds, and knickknacks -- that house had everything. And all the family would gather there in the summer, there would be from fifteen to twenty people at the table, and four times as much food as anyone could eat. Of course I was an oddity. Alfred was the family favorite, the eldest child, and really the important person in the family, although one of his brothers was a prominent doctor and the other was a chemist. (Don't use - but O'K found the family's Jewishness a trial; constant dramatic scenes, younger sister who would just destroy everybody each morning, and leave them lying flat on their backs while she went out to play golf, and then she would come back and wonder why everybody was so glum." O'K's own older brother went to military school and became quite a little anti-semitic, used to refuse to drive her home if she was going to visit Jews in NY).

O'K did not work well in Lake George house. "It was hard for me to work there because I can never bear to have people around me when I'm working, or to have anybody see what I'm doing or say anything about what I'm doing until it's finished. Stieglitz never could understand that." Often she didn't get much work done, although she went earlier in the spring and stayed later in the fall than anyone (once stayed until February, with temperature forty below every morning).

Eventually they sold the big house on the lake and moved into the smaller farmhouse on the hill. She put away all the knickknacks, and the family were horrified, but they continued to come. Which was a problem.

"I have to have a lot of time ~~alone~~^{by myself} alone. In the city I spent night after night with people I was bored to death with -- I got by with sewing. And then in the summer there were more people. I had to have my own life. So I began going to New Mexico." Worked things out in Lake George farmhouse so that Margaret, who had worked for Stieglitz's mother, could cook and care for him as well as she could, and so house practically ran itself. "Then I could go away with no real guilty feelings."

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"I really grew to be very fond of Stieglitz. He was so interesting, and so variable. He knew so much that you never knew when he was going to start talking about something you'd never even heard of. Young people were very attracted to him, and it kept him young. His mind was clear as a bell until the day he died."

(St. died of a stroke with a pen in his hand. He had always been in habit of writing, letters, diaries, etc. Was in passageway between O'K's room and his in NY with his pen when he collapsed.)

Beauty in Art

"Among the artists at that time it was disgraceful to think of anything pretty. You could never use pink or yellow in a painting because they weren't 'Patterly.' I didn't understand why, so I kept on using colors like those.

"People felt that painting had to have a sort of dirty look. I felt I could make a dirty painting, too, so I did -- of a shanty up near the lake. I sold it immediately."

"Stieglitz wouldn't let me hang my first New York painting. He wouldn't even discuss it." Couldn't adjust to her phases; she was doing flowers then. The next year, when she'd done another, he hung them.

Dorothy Norman (do not quote) - "I never did like her, from the very beginning. She struck me as a person with a mouth full of hot mush, and why didn't she either swallow it or spit it out? She was one of those people who adored Stieglitz, and I'm sorry to say he was very foolish about her. I don't really know what happened, but I feel he was very foolish. And then afterward, he said to me, 'How did you know she was that way?' She had a lot of money, and she felt that artists shouldn't be given too much. I think if it hadn't been for the money, he would never have noticed her."

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O'Keeffe Quotes

"From experiences of one kind or another shapes and colors come to me very clearly. Sometimes I start in very realistic fashion and as I go on from one painting (to) another of the same thing, it becomes simplified till it can be nothing but abstract, but for me it is my reason for painting, I suppose." (Nature In Abstraction, Baur, NY 1958)

"I've always had a good life, because I've always taken it with me. I've known what I wanted." (In Look, 1960).

Re bone paintings: "The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even though it is vast and empty and untouchable -- and knows no kindness with all its beauty."

"I am guilty of having tried to teach Art for four summers in a university summer school and for two years in a state normal school but I don't know what Art is. No one has ever been able to give me a satisfactory definition.

I have not been in Europe.

I prefer to live in a room as bare as possible.

I have been much photographed.

I paint because color is a significant language to me but I do not like pictures and I do not like exhibitions of pictures. However I am very interested in them..."

From Katherine Kuh interview:

"...the way you see nature depends on whatever has influenced your way of seeing."

On ~~Dow~~ Dow: "This man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way -- and that interested me... By this time I had a technique for handling oil and watercolor easily; Dow gave me something to do with it."

On making blown-up flowers: Saw Fantin-Latour still life with flowers, very beautiful, but if she were to paint same flowers that small nobody would look at them; so she made them big like the new buildings going up overnight, it seemed, in NYC. "People will be startled; they'll have to look at them -- and they did." Adds that photography was never an influence.

"I'm one of the few artists, maybe the only one today, who is willing to talk about my work as pretty. I don't mind it being pretty."

Artists she most admires: The Chinese. (end of Kuh invu)

In letter to art ed. of NYT, Feb 23 1941, she pointed out that the jimson weed in "Jimson Weed" was not an "enlarged flower" - some real ones were bigger.

In 1949 NYT article on Stieglitz coll., bulk of which went to Met (506 items), O'K said "He was the leader or he didn't play. It was his game and we all played along or left the game." O'K came to NY first in 1908, entered Art Students League; class was told to go to "291" and see Rodin drawings, which one instructor considered a hoax. "When I first began to know Stieglitz well in 1918 he was 54..."

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O'K Quotes (cont)

"...I have no theories to offer. The painting is like a thread that runs through all the reasons for all the other things that make one's life."

Letter to a friend (cited in BRose "American Painting")

"I climbed way up on a pale green hill and in the evening light -- the sun under clouds -- the color effect was very strange -- standing on a pale green hill where I could look all around at the red, yellow, purple formations -- miles all around -- the colors all intensified by the pale green I was standing on."

Dan Rich speaks (in 1943 catalog) of O'Keeffe saying she gets "all that into a picture by suggestion. I mean the life ~~is~~ that has been lived in a place."

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O'KEEFE LETTERS - in Stieglitz Collection at Yale

Letters to Mabel Dodge Luhan:

"I feel there is something unexplored about women that only a woman can explore. Men have done all they can about it... Greetings from us both -- and kiss the sky for me." (1925, from NYC).

"And remember that I like you even when you have seemed horrid -- I think the reason you seem funny to me when you behave badly is that I always feel you are mistaken -- and being as clever as you are it seems amusing when you make mistakes." (1933)

"As I read my mail last night I decided it was time for me to go -- that I had finally had enough -- that it was time to be by Stieglitz again..." (no date).

"I had one particular painting -- that tree in Lawrence's front yard as you see it when you lie under it on his table -- with stars -- it looks as tho' it is standing on its head." (no date).

"I am the center for Stieglitz, and he for me." (no date)

"...and let Tony live -- For God's sake -- don't try to squeeze all the life out of him -- I know from experience that it isn't a pleasant sensation -- and you will not like what is left." (no date)

"I feel that I have two jobs -- my own work -- and helping him to function in his way -- And by helping him I sometimes mean I don't want to get in his way. That is why I came out here." (no date).

"I feel that you haven't any more right to keep Tony utterly to yourself than I have to keep Stieglitz." (no date)

"I think I would never have minded Stieglitz being anything he happened to be if he hadn't kept me so persistently off my track..." (July, 1929, to Mabel in hospital in Buffalo)

Letters to Mr./Mrs. Frederick Mortimer Clapp:

"...My world is as it has always been here -- beautiful -- with difficult spots." (1947)

"The odd dark and bright look that comes over my world in the low light after a little rain." (1945)

"I wish I could send you a mariposa lily." (1945)

"Chartres was the first building that seemed wonderful to me like tall trees -- but I'll take the trees if I must choose." (no date)

"The...valley ~~is~~ is all soft greys and tans of winter." (1960)

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From "Alfred Stieglitz Talking" by Herbert J. Seligmann

O'Keeffe once remarked that "living in room 303 was like taking part in a sustained and violent love affair." (vi)

"When she wants something she makes people give it to her. They feel she is fine and has something other people have not." (Stieglitz, about O'Keeffe. p. 13)

"There is something in me," said Stieglitz, "which seeks a balance, a relationship which can be put in a formula. But there is also something in me which, as soon as I have found the formula, insists upon kicking the stuffing out of it."

Story about Anita Pollitzer and the drawings -- p. 23; p. 71.

"Sometimes I have been talking with O'Keeffe. Some men express what they feel by holding a woman's hand. But I have wanted to express the more, to express the thing that would bring us still closer. I would look at the sky, for the sky is the freest thing in the world, and when I would make a photograph from clouds and sky and say to O'Keeffe, 'Here is what we were talking about,' she would say, 'That's incredible, it's impossible.'" (p.58)

"O'Keeffe had gone to Washington the night before to address the National Woman's Party..." (p.63).

O'Keeffe's "whiteness" - p.64.

Brancusi, on seeing O'Keeffe's paintings: "There is no imitation of Europe here; it is a force, a liberating free force." (p.69)

Andrew Dasburg on O'K: Dasburg "said the work was unique, nothing like it was being done or had ever been done in the world; the year's work gave him, in addition to its fiery edge and pure color, a new sense of volume." (p.73).

"I knew beforehand that in trying to interest the American public in art, I was beaten. Yet I would not believe there were not others in America feeling as I did." (p.89)

"Stieglitz also told how in school he had never memorized poetry, had never been willing to speak passages assigned to be learned by heart..." (p.103 -- compare with O'K's story about refusing to practice French).

February 1927 - "A flower painting of O'Keeffe sold for three thousand dollars and another painting for six thousand..." (p.120)

"I was ordered out of my home by my wife while I was working," continued Stieglitz. "It was the unfairest thing that ever happened to any man." He was photographing O'Keeffe. "There was no more between me and O'Keeffe than there is between us here." (p. 125)

Speaking of O'Keeffe and her admiration for Lady Chatterly, Stieglitz said that O'Keeffe was chaste, but warmblooded. "They go together," said Frieda." (p.143)

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Reviews, etc.

Lewis Mumford, in New Yorker of Feb 10, 1934: Compares her use of color to Matisse's. "As for her symbols, they have a sort of fierce virginal candor and purity which make it possible for her to say far more -- and far more completely and openly -- than the baldest sort of realism could achieve."

Mumford, NYorker, Jan. 18, 1936: "O'Keeffe uses themes and juxtapositions in no less unexpected than those of the Surrealists, but she uses them in a fashion that makes them seem inevitable and natural, grave and beautiful..."

Demuth, in 1927 American Place catalog: "FLOWERS AND FLAMES. AND COLOUR. COLOUR AS COLOUR, NOT AS VOLUME, OR LIGHT -- ONLY AS COLOUR. THE LAST MAD THROB OF RED JUST AS IT TURNS GREEN, THE ULTIMATE SHRIEK OF ORANGE CALLING UPON ALL THE BLUES OF HEAVEN FOR RELIEF OR FOR SUPPORT; THESE GEORGIA O'KEEFFE IS ABLE TO USE. IN HER CANVASES EACH COLOUR ALMOST REGAINS THE FUN IT MUST HAVE FELT WITHIN ITSELF, ON FORMING THE FIRST RAIN-BOW."

Marsden Hartley, 1936 catalog: "...it was a woman who rose up out of the drawings with a singularly violent integrity..." Says her maternal grandfather was Hungarian, an aide-de-camp to Louis Kossuth. "She is a woman, utterly free."

(All refer to her as "premier woman painter" of US or world).

Photographed for Vogue (March 1, 1967 issue) at age 80 by Cecil Beaton. Article by Eugene Goossen refers to her "Blue Lines, No. 10" being used as frontispiece to Northrup's "Meeting of East and West." Goossen says that she was way ahead of American artists - who did not catch up to what she had been doing until 1948, with abstract expressionism. O'K. had hued to the "true" American realism that was shattered by the Armory show, a realism without sentiment toward objects and without illusionism or literary subject matter -- formal values, not content, the true line of American painting, which she has always known.

Barbara Rose in New York, Nov. 9, 1970 (after visit to Abiquiu): "...the telescoping of foreground and background, omitting any middle ground, the sharp silhouetting, the rounded, sculptural quality of her forms, the colored atmosphere filling her space: all these are actual qualities of the landscape I am seeing."

See also: Art News, Oct 1970 (Crimp) and Art In America, Oct. 1970(Goodrich).

J.T. Soby in Baur's "New Art In America": "...O'Keeffe's human personality is exceptionally integral with her art: severe in its beauty; warm, direct, and unafraid."

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Reviews etc (cont)

Marsden Hartley on O'K's work: "...probably as living and shameless documents as exist, in painting certainly, and probably in any other art. By shamelessness I mean unqualified nakedness of statement."

BRose, "Ameriden Painting": O'K models her forms in light and shadow, giving structural plasticity and volume that she interprets as "a ripely voluptuous swelling."

"A few dramatically placed austere, uncompromising forms."

"A romantic, for all the severity of her forms."

Daniel Catton Rich, in catalog for 1943 Chicago show:

"The art of Georgia O'Keeffe is a record of intense emotional states resolved into crystalline form."

"O'Keeffe's deepest experiences occur with nature."

Her early shows drew much comment about Freudian symbolism -- didn't recognize her as a pure painter.

"The artist has striven all her life to condense and eliminate."

"...Cow's Skull, Red, White, and Blue, takes on the quality of a banner of death...Unobtrusively the form is made to suggest a crucifixion and the same primitive, religious overtones as in the earlier Black Cross result."

"...that feeling before nature which she once eloquently described as 'sort of sparkling and alive and quiet all at the same time.'..."

F.S.C. Northrup, The Meeting of East and West

(Frontispiece of "Abstraction No. 11. Two Blue Lines" (1916))

"...a new form of art has arisen in the United States -- a form indigenously American yet portraying something of universal validity. It appears in the painting of Georgia O'Keeffe...Paul Gill and others."

Influenced by others, she vowed to start over on her own, with charcoal drawings. Achieved breakthrough in "Two Blue Lines."

"...the aim of this new art is to convey the aesthetic immediacy of things without intellectually added references and interpretations; without, at times, even the things themselves being shown...one is thereby forced to apprehend the aesthetic component of reality by itself and for its own sake."

Cites Stieglitz interpretation of "Two Blue Lines" -- "one line represents the female aesthetic component, the other the male scientific component -- though distinct and irreducible, they are united by a common base."

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Letters to Blanche and Russell Mathias:

Yucca in the spring -- "in ~~the~~ the half light it seemed as if there were tall white candles all around." (June, 1948).

"...being here alone is one of the best things I know." The ranch "isn't as comfortable as Abiquiu but it is more my world." (1952).

Reports going to Santo Domingo corn dance, Zuni Shalako, ~~Navajo~~ ^{Navajo} Yelichai

Letter to Ettie Stettheimer:

"We have little fall color but yellow -- but it is all kinds of yellow -- and when it is brilliant it is so bright you can almost hear it." (1952)

Letters to Henri McBride:

"My particular kind of vanity doesn't mind not being noticed at all... but I don't like to be second or third or fourth. I like being first -- if I'm noticed at all -- that's why I get on with Stieglitz -- with him I feel first -- and when he is around -- and there are others -- he is the center and I don't count at all... I must add that I don't mind if Marin comes first -- because he is a man -- it's a different class."

Teos - "too thickly populated for me."

"This house was built by a well to do man who had a delicate child that he wanted to have live in this climate...but the mother divorced him and went off with the child and he had no use for the house -- could never rent it because it is too far away from every thing -- so he sold it to me for about a fifth of what it cost~~ed~~ him -- and here I am... There is nothing in it that I can get along without."

"I have heard so many strange things of Georgia O'Keeffe for many years that I sometimes wonder if I have a speaking acquaintance with her."

"I always know he (Stieglitz) will beat me -- no matter what I do -- I don't pretend to be able to keep up with him."

"I see Alfred as an old man that I am very fond of -- growing older -- so that it sometimes shocks and startles me when he looks particularly pale and tired."

"...Aside from my fondness for him personally I feel that he has been very important to something that has made my world for me -- I like it that I can make him feel that I have hold of his hand to steady him as he goes on."

"I never see birds -- I only hear them."

Letter to Dorothy Brett:

"...my own feeling about life is a curious kind of triumphant feeling -- seeing it bleak -- knowing it so and walking into it fearlessly because one has no choice."

"...and as one chooses between the country and ^{the} human being the country becomes much more wonderful."

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Donald Gallup - at Beinecke Library, 10/10/73

O'Keeffe's letters to Stieglitz are now sealed until the year 2020. Original stipulation was they be sealed until her death or 1975; recently she made it 2020 - Gallup thinks in order to keep Bry from reading them (O'K wants Bry to write the Stieglitz book, not the book on her).

William Homo (?), author of book on Robert Henri, got a Guggenheim to do a book on the Stieglitz Circle a few years ago. Bry tried to block use of quotes from Archive, but didn't succeed -- book probably going forward.

Anita Pollitzer was writing a book on O'Keeffe for years. Showed O'K the ms, she disliked it intensely. Shock undid Anita, and nothing has been heard of the ms since -- this was 15 years ago. But she interviewed scores of people, many of whom are now dead.

O'K is reconciled to the Protestants who bought Ghost Ranch - is leaving her house to the church, provided the Halls are allowed to stay in their house.

Gallup met O'K in 1949, thru Van Vechten. They talked all evening, and he got agreement for Yale. No Stieglitz connection with Yale, but they ~~xxxx~~ had Stein, Joyce materials and a lot on artists of the St. Circle. When Gallup retired, control was to pass to Bry -- but last year O'K got Gallup to agree to remain in charge of Archive after his retirement. This angered Bry.

O'K realizes she owes Bry a great deal. Whitney Show would not have been possible without her, and the show was very imp. for O'K's reputation and prices. A lot of people thought she was dead.

Dorothy Norman -- O'K paid her after Stieglitz's death to collect letters and other material for the Archive. Norman had a lot of Archive material photostated, and is expected to give her Stieglitz letters to Yale eventually.

O'K did a lot of juggling with the Stieglitz Collection. If something in it was not good enough, in her estimation, she weeded it out and substituted something of her own. Demuth willed her all his oils, and most of them became part of Stieglitz Collection. Things she considered minor she gave to Yale as archival study material.

O'K's eye trouble began last year - something about the optic nerve. Driving out one morning, she thought it was a grey day. This happened again a few days later. By the time she realized something wrong it was too late to do much about it. She's had one operation, won't have another. At first she was very distressed - ~~xxxxx~~ ^{told} Gallup she never imagined this could happen to her. Now seems more reconciled to it.

O'K has written some autobiographical fragments - typed up by her secretary. Ask about them?