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A notable change occurred in the criticism of Georgia O'Keeffe's art in the early years of her career. At the beginning of the 1920s critics characterised her work almost exclusively as the highly personalised, emotional expression of a sexually obsessed woman. During the second half of the decade, however, this perception began to be challenged by commentary that pointed out controlled, intellectual qualities in her work and, thus, described it using terms traditionally applied to the art of men. In this article, I will demonstrate that O'Keeffe herself was instrumental in inspiring this new voice in the criticism; that in response to the reviews she received on the occasion of her first major exhibition in New York in 1923, she set about to persuade critics to define her and her art on her own terms.

O'Keeffe's 1923 show was the first of what would be annual exhibitions of her work in that decade staged by Alfred Stieglitz, her husband to be. It featured more than 100 works, some made as early as 1915, and was introduced, in part, by an essay O'Keeffe wrote for the exhibition brochure Stieglitz had prepared. In this she discussed aspects of herself and of her art:

I grew up pretty much as everybody else grows up and one day seven years ago I found myself saying to myself--I can't live where I want to--I can't go where I want to--I can't do what I want to--I can't even say what I want to. School, and things that painters have taught me, even keep me from painting as I want to. I decided I was a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only thing I could do that didn't concern anybody but myself--that was nobody's business but my own. So these paintings and drawings happened and many others that are not here. I found that I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way--things that I had no words for. Some of the wise men say it is not painting, some of them say it is. Art or not art they disagree. (1)

O'Keeffe made it clear that she defined her art strictly as self-expression and indicated that she had first begun to think of it in those terms in 1915, exactly a decade after she had begun her formal training at the Art Institute of Chicago. In October of that year, while she was teaching in Columbia, South Carolina, she had realised that her work to that point expressed what her teachers or her friends expected it to; and she determined, then, that she should allow it to express what she was feeling. (2) In an effort to achieve this, she began a series of charcoal drawings on inexpensive white paper, which make it clear that what she was feeling could not be expressed with traditional, representational...

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But long before O'Keeffe embedded in the desert, her life included a period in the considerably lush climates of upstate New York, on Lake George, the glacial Adirondack lake near here where she spent a series of summers — creating scores of paintings — while staying with Alfred Stieglitz, the photographer, art promoter and her eventual husband, whose family kept a small estate there. So instead, Ms. Coe traveled to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe to examine its authoritative collection and consult with Barbara Buhler Lynes, an O'Keeffe specialist. Using Ms. Buhler Lynes's catalog, Ms. Coe created a database that identified — to her surprise — about 200 works related to Lake George, or about a quarter of O'Keeffe's paintings. Throughout her career, Georgia O'Keeffe strove to depict what she described as “the wideness and wonder of the world as I live in it.” Her spirit of adventure and passion for the natural world drove her to explore the landscape of the United States, and to do so in such diverse places as Lake George, New York and Abiquiú, New Mexico. The artist grants merely a glimpse into its larger context, showing only portions of its leaves and a vivid blue sky. As the muse and wife of Alfred Stieglitz, O'Keeffe was undoubtedly exposed to his ideas and aesthetic preferences. O'Keeffe's intent foreshadows the work of artists like Mark Rothko, who also used color, shape and scale to induce an emotional reaction from the viewer (fig. 6). Georgia O'Keeffe book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. An historical retrospective that explores the complex universe of an arti... Let us know what's wrong with this preview of Georgia O'Keeffe by Barbara Buhler Lynes. Problem: It's the wrong book It's the wrong edition Other. Details (if other): Cancel.