

ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities . . . no material compensation," Stieglitz believed America's intervention to be commercially motivated. He was convinced that the German people were victims of the war.

Stieglitz later observed, "Much of the enthusiasm that had existed at 291 gradually disappeared because of the war." After taking his daughter [Kitty] to Smith College in September, he returned to Manhattan. With the closing of 291, for the first time in two decades Stieglitz had no magazine to publish, no gallery to run, nowhere to go. Unable to bear the idea of being home all day with [his wife] Emmy, he took an office in the Anderson Galleries, where he conducted business and correspondence. Housed in a neo-classical building on Park Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street, the Anderson Galleries was one of the preeminent auction houses in the city for the sale of rare books, furniture, decorative art, and paintings.

A few weeks after the declaration of war, O'Keeffe, en route to New York, stopped in Chicago to visit her brother Alexius. The twenty-five-year-old engineer had enlisted in the Officers Corps of Engineers and was expected to be among the first to go to France. She was stunned by the effect of the uniform on her lively brother: "A sober — serious — willingness — appalling. He has changed so much—it makes me stand still and wonder—a sort of awe—He was the sort that used to seem like a large wind when he came into the house."

The experience of seeing Alexius in uniform combined with the antiwar sentiments voiced by Stieglitz, Strand, and Politzer, led the usually apolitical O'Keeffe to become an unpopular opponent of the war in a highly patriotic community.

O'Keeffe seethed with impatience over the conformity and pettiness of the Canyon community. By the end of October, she told Strand, "Everything seems to be whirling or unbalanced — I'm suspended in the air — can't get my feet on the ground — I hate all the folks I see every day — hate the things I see them doing. . . . There is no one here I can talk to — it's all like a bad dream."

Hearing of her unhappiness, Stieglitz prodded his niece Elizabeth to offer O'Keeffe her New York studio. Stieglitz could not have extended such an invitation himself. O'Keeffe was somewhat baffled by Elizabeth's solicitation but by December, started to consider it. At two in the morning, unable to sleep, she wrote to Elizabeth asking, "would you get up and leave these stupid maddening sort of folks . . . or would you stay and fight it out?"

O'Keeffe's insomnia may have been the result of the latest scandal. She had told the drugstore owner that his Christmas cards depicting the Statue of Liberty with a printed suggestion that America "wipe Germany off the map" were not in keeping with the Christian spirit. Her heretical opinion got out to the Canyon populace and back to her. "It's amazing to see what is in their heads," she mused. In retaliation, a few months later, she painted *The Flag*, a watercolor of a blood-colored flag disappearing into a storm of roiling blue.

Although she wrote Strand that she had broken up with Reid, fifty years later O'Keeffe bitterly recalled her student's "dropping me like a hot cake." Reid cut off their relationship abruptly after he was visited by a group of faculty women who warned him that he would not receive a diploma if he continued to see O'Keeffe. Without bothering to inform her of the faculty visit, Reid ended their relationship. O'Keeffe's flirtation with a teenage student and her less than patriotic point of view had combined to make her persona non grata around Canyon.

O'Keeffe turned thirty in November in an atmosphere of considerable alienation. She stuffed paper down the front of her dress to buffer the blistering winds. Claudia was away, working as a student teacher in Spur, Texas. Georgia spent Christmas feeling vulnerable and weak. She developed a sore throat that grew so painful she wrote to the president of the college to take six weeks off. On February 21, 1918, the Randall County News announced that she had taken a leave of absence due to illness. She had contracted Spanish flu, an epidemic that was sweeping the country.

News of the illness sent Stieglitz into a panic, and he urged her to come to New York to be cared for by his brother Lee, the physician. O'Keeffe was too sick to travel such a distance, though she managed to take the train some six hundred miles south to Waring, the considerably warmer southeastern corner of Texas. She was invited by her friend Leah Harris, who had taught home economics at West Texas State Normal College, to stay at a boardinghouse called Oaks Ranch. (She had visited Harris six months previous, on the return from her Colorado trip.) The Oaks attracted guests who needed "health cures," especially consumptives who could benefit from the warm and dry climate of the hill country. Harris's brother-in-law, a physician, probably made the arrangements and helped O'Keeffe recover from her flu before it progressed to tuberculosis.

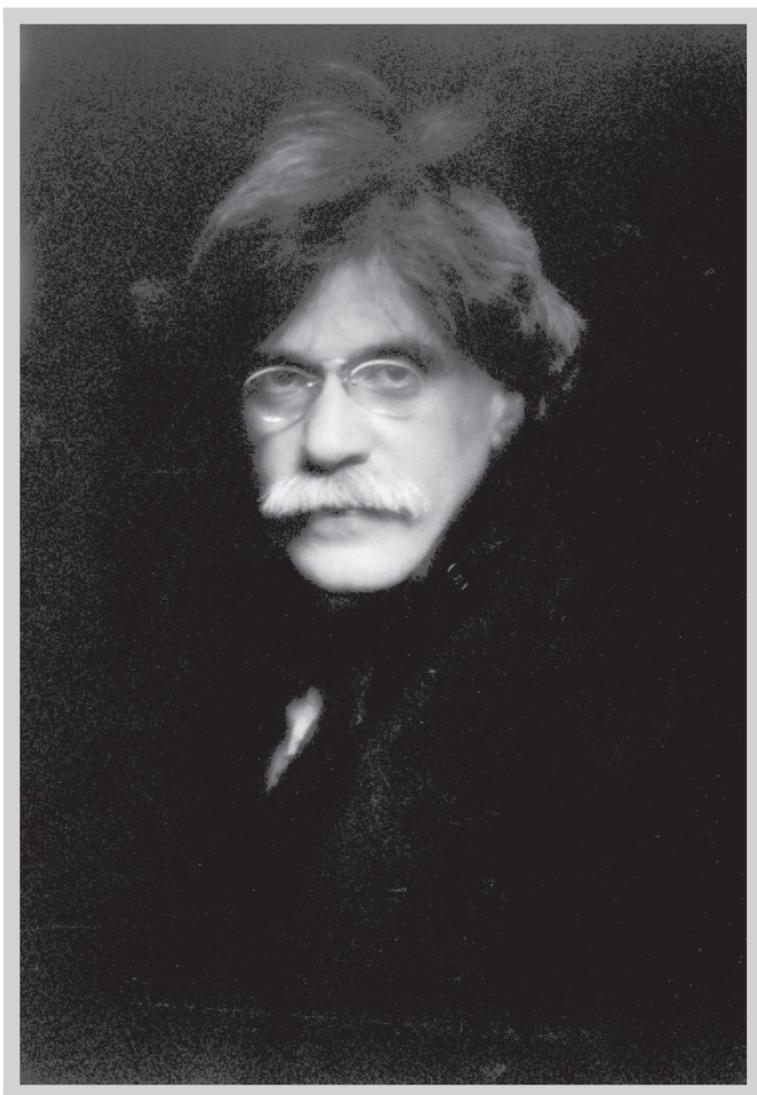
For two months, Stieglitz and Strand discussed O'Keeffe's future on a daily basis. In May, without consulting O'Keeffe, Stieglitz gave Strand funds to take a train to San Antonio. Neither Strand nor Stieglitz knew what to expect from the trip west, and Stieglitz specifically instructed Strand not to encourage O'Keeffe but to allow her to make her own decision about coming to New York.

## EMISSARY

STIEGLITZ sent Strand to rescue O'Keeffe, but at the same time he harbored his own feelings for her. In essence, Strand was sent to discover whom, if anyone, O'Keeffe could love.

Affection was expressed between the artists in an epistolary appreciation of one another's work. To compliment the art was to honor and even to court the artist. The passion of these convictions was evident in their correspondence. Stieglitz told O'Keeffe, "Your drawings . . . would not be so living for me did I not see you in them . . . how I understand them. They are as if I saw a part of myself." O'Keeffe paraphrased Stieglitz's sentiment, writing to Strand, "You would not be what you are to me at all if I had not seen the part of you that is in the big prints. . . . I feel that you are going to do much more wonderful things than any of us have seen yet — that you are only just beginning."

Strand arrived in San Antonio on Sunday, May 12, and took a one-dollar-a-night room at the Hotel Lanier. Nearly two hundred thousand troops were stationed nearby, and most of the soldiers seemed to be swarming the streets that night. The following morning, Strand called O'Keeffe,



The J. Paul Getty Museum © Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe

## AN INVITATION

*New York photographer and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz, depicted in "Self Portrait, 1907," showed O'Keeffe's work at 291, his celebrated gallery on Fifth Avenue. He became the artist's mentor and later her husband.*

who was staying in town with friends and must have been greatly relieved to hear from him. O'Keeffe arranged a rendezvous in a nearby park. Sitting on a bench by the bandstand, he watched the approach of her tiny figure in a long black dress and black hat and felt as though he were in a dream.

Rarely given to verbosity, O'Keeffe talked ceaselessly in her excitement, guiding Strand around balmy San Antonio, where pecan trees and tropical flowers bloomed along the banks of the river.

O'Keeffe was pleased that Strand had come, not realizing, of course, that he had been sent by Stieglitz.

At the Cafe Del Rio, the couple sat by a window overlooking the river, eating enchiladas and beans and talking until three in the afternoon. When Stieglitz's name came up, O'Keeffe remarked casually, "Oh, I would like to talk to him."

Strand mentioned a return to the east, but O'Keeffe protested that she had to teach summer school in Canyon because she had no money.

Strand moved into a local boardinghouse a few doors away from O'Keeffe's lodging. For several days, there were more strolls through town, followed by long lunches at the Mexican cafe. O'Keeffe took Strand to the barrio, where the Mexicans from south of the border lived in low adobe houses decorated with flowers. She stopped to paint watercolors of the picturesque scenes, and the locals gathered around her to watch.

When Strand brought out his camera to photograph La Villita, as the area was known, the locals ran away. But Strand did manage to shoot a dozen plates in the first three days, many of O'Keeffe, though they have since been lost. "She is just like a child," he wrote Stieglitz. "Stopping to look at something . . . everything giving her such a good time." Strand confessed that they'd been together every day and every evening. It was hard to find time to write: "She is very wonderful — very beautiful. I know pretty well now that it isn't an idea. No, it's all very real."

Remembering the purpose of his visit, to discover O'Keeffe's feelings, and whether she would be returning to New York City, he assured Stieglitz, "I am saying very little — neither urging or the reverse. Just trying to let things clarify — as they will freely. She is very much mixed up and it ought to unravel without pressure of any kind — for the present."

On Wednesday morning, Strand met Leah Harris, whom he described as "a tall, thin girl — a Jewess, very nice but not at all good-looking." Harris's brother-in-law was the local doctor and, as a favor, treated O'Keeffe for free. Harris, who still took treatments for the tuberculosis she'd suffered a year before, told Strand that O'Keeffe had veered dangerously close to contracting the illness. Strand learned that tuberculosis ran in the O'Keeffe family.

After speaking with Harris about O'Keeffe's health, Strand determined that Harris was more stable than O'Keeffe. They agreed that she needed someone to take care of her.

Neither Strand nor Stieglitz knew the true state of O'Keeffe's poverty before Strand's visit. Having associated mostly with middle- or upper-class women with independent or family income, they were uncertain how to proceed. O'Keeffe mentioned the need for money several times to Strand. "She certainly doesn't need very much — that isn't what she means — but I fancy she hasn't anything left to speak of," he reported to Stieglitz.

On Sunday, May 17, Strand mailed what he called "letter X" (so Stieglitz could refer to it and identify it from the others sent previously). In it, he told Stieglitz,

*Georgia is a child and yet a woman but there is a clash. Leah said she didn't think anyone could satisfy her — She can't stand anyone for long —*

*and that he would have to be a millionaire. "Georgia needs money." Of course, that is largely true. I've seen it very well and if we weren't going out to Waring tomorrow, I'd soon be broke.*

*Not of course that she wants the money itself but it doesn't mean anything to her. There are so many things she would like to do and it's really a wonder that she paints at all. But there is no stability of living to match the stability of fineness and spirit.*

*I don't believe she could keep a home because she couldn't do any work. . . . She would have to be done for practically all the way thru. When you said it takes money — you are right. But I'm not certain she has found herself yet — not at all — The relative importance of some values in living are not clearly crystalized. Leah herself said . . . "she has a mind but she does not use it."*

Confronted with this portrait of O'Keeffe as financially and emotionally dependent, Strand had to face the limitations of his own circumstances. A young artist of modest family origins, he could hardly support himself, let alone another artist. He wrote to tell Stieglitz that he was bowing out. "If I had some money I might be able to help her — I know I wouldn't be afraid despite all the difficulties of living with such a person. But I haven't," he wrote. "So it is all very clear that I am not the one." Then, in a surprising declaration, Strand told Stieglitz that he felt his two friends were destined for one another: "So it seems that you and she ought to have the chance of finding out what can be done — one for the other."

He added, "New York may clarify things for her and may even lead to at least some consummation. I think before she could go with you — there would be many things to be given up. . . . She may be able to do it because she is seeking — deep down — something with finality in the sense of a tangible

solid living basis. . . . She really looks wonderful — and she is wonderful . . . I love her very much — You know my feelings for you."

Before receiving Strand's remarkably honest assessment of their situation, Stieglitz had worked himself into a manic state of anxiety. "Of course I'm human and I suffer terribly at moments . . . life — death — I want her to live — I never wanted anything a much as that — She is the Spirit of 291 not I — That's something I never told you before — that's why I have been fighting so madly for her life — She really doesn't know me."

Realizing that O'Keeffe was too much of a responsibility for him, Strand urged his mentor to carry on. "The spirit of 291 — yes — she is — thru you — now — I don't see how it can ever really take form in her until you or some man can give her the necessary stability — There is no stability now — just a more or less formless drifting — she is a woman — hysterical — cruel — and yet so lovely — so like you fundamentally if it could only take form in a stability of living." Strand told Stieglitz to save his energy for her arrival in New York, noting, "You will need all of your vitality for that."

Strand accompanied O'Keeffe and Harris back to the Oaks Ranch in Waring. Harris allowed Strand to photograph her nude, an allowance that led him to alter his initial opinion of her physical attributes. "Very wonderful," he enthused to Stieglitz. "You can imagine how free things must be for anything like that to have happened. . . . She is long and slender, very beautiful white skin." A few days later he sent a hastily scrawled note to further tantalize the older photographer: "I am in a state — photographing Leah — nude — body wet, shining in the sunlight . . . Georgia painting Leah . . . wonderful days — yesterday — and today — All of us happy."

After settling in at the ranch, Harris informed Strand that a neighboring rancher named Zoeller had been spying on her and slandering her reputation. She had filed a complaint but wanted Strand to have a talk with him. The beleaguered photographer wrote Stieglitz, "You know this Southern attitude which expects somebody to go and beat up the offender." He was especially reluctant after learning that the neighbors had beaten another interloper only weeks before.

O'Keeffe regarded Strand's reticence as cowardice. In their ensuing argument, she learned the extent to which her two friends were discussing her mental and physical health, her finances, and her future.

Most important, she discovered that Strand had come to see her as Stieglitz's emissary. Referring to Stieglitz's habit of speaking through others, she snapped to Strand, "First Elizabeth and now you." Infuriated by these covert arrangements, O'Keeffe also felt romantically betrayed, since her feelings had grown more passionate toward Strand, who had encouraged her attention. He admitted, "She lets me touch her — wants me to — But with me at least . . . no passion — except in a far off — very far off potential . . . all a nightmare."

[Stieglitz] wrote Strand, "I don't know what made me do it but I have just sent a wire."

Stieglitz's formal invitation to O'Keeffe to come to New York provided her exit line. As Strand and O'Keeffe readied to return to New York, their discussions took on a franker tone. It appears that O'Keeffe still hoped to elicit a commitment from Strand. She wondered if he really wanted her to come to New York, and hoped that they might stay together out west. In a rash moment, he capitulated to her urging. "I . . . told her — simply because I thought it — felt it and meant it — that if she wanted it — I would take care of her as long as she wanted it — a job anywhere she wanted to be — without expecting anything in return except the joy of doing it," he told Stieglitz. "Perhaps naïve — but I could do it if it were to be — But it isn't — which I knew long ago. Still I felt it was only fair to say it and to tell you that it has been said."

Despite her strong feelings for him, O'Keeffe accepted that Strand was unable to support a relationship.

As the train hurtled northeast and she tried to absorb the life-changing circumstances of the past three weeks, she relapsed into illness. From Charlotte, North Carolina, Strand wired Stieglitz with the date and time of their arrival.

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