



## Georgia O'Keeffe (Critical Lives)

*Nancy J. Scott*

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Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), the most famous woman artist of American modernism in the twentieth century and a pioneer in shaping abstract art, created an unprecedented, fiercely independent and intense world, focused as much on the grandeur of the high desert mesas and cliffs as on the smallest flower. A world has formed around O'Keeffe as well, incorporating the photographic nude studies of her by Alfred Stieglitz, a gallery impresario and leading advocate of photography as a fine art as well as O'Keeffe's mentor and later husband, and the photographs of O'Keeffe in her later years.

Nancy J. Scott examines O'Keeffe's work, its evolution and the conflicts between the artist's inner self and public personality, using a broad range of sources including many of O'Keeffe's letters. Her letters exchanged with Stieglitz, long restricted by the terms of O'Keeffe's will, show that her words could be as revelatory as her painting, as they intimately show her growing love for Stieglitz, and the tumult of their long union as artists.

O'Keeffe's reputation as a sexually inspired, Freudian-minded artist preceded the reception of her art in the gallery. Neither wholly abstract nor realist, but a melding of realist interpretations of flowers, bones, shells, rocks and the landscape, her art is structured with abstract design. She identified the power of landscape, discovered first in Texas and later in the desert of New Mexico, as a primary inspiration.

Nancy J. Scott's succinct yet comprehensive account of O'Keeffe's long life and prolific body of work, and her presence at the forefront of American abstract art over eight decades, will both inform and fascinate.

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