



Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life Well Lived

Malcolm Varon, Photographer

Barbara Buhler Lynes, Contributor

Cody Hartley, Contributor

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Not just one of the most renowned women artists, Georgia O'Keeffe is one of the most iconic American artists. Her challenges and sustained dedication in achieving this status were great. This new collection of photographs and essays rounds out a portrait of the artist in her nineties: firm, serene, and in control of her personal and artistic legacy.

Many of these photographs of O'Keeffe, her beloved New Mexico landscape and homes, and her coterie of friends and employees have never been published before. They were taken by her preferred art photographer, Malcolm Varon, and grouped in a trilogy to showcase her intense personality, relationship with long-time assistant Juan Hamilton, and the people and places around her during her last years.

Barbara Buhler Lynes's introduction notes that O'Keeffe took great pains to shift from the sexualized artistic identity cultivated by her mentor and husband Alfred Stieglitz. After his death in 1946, she moved to the Southwest and began painting her large-scale flowers and desert landscapes, bedecked with bones and floral imagery. Varon's color portraits depict the serious, self-determined artist in her signature black-and-white clothing and broad-brimmed hat. Even in her nineties, skin furrowed and vision limited, she is a striking figure against an equally dramatic backdrop of weathered rocks and trees—at ease, but still aware of how to model for the camera.

A more relaxed and candid portrait emerges in photographs of O'Keeffe with Hamilton. He, with his floppy hairstyle, wrist loop camera, and denim shirts, contrasts in an acute way with his subject. An unguarded O'Keeffe is seen smiling and laughing, and these revealing images, and Varon's documentation of the architectural and interior details of O'Keeffe's Ghost Ranch and Abiqui residences, are valuable contributions to understanding more about the intriguing artistic genius.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2020)

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