



Georgia O'Keeffe
American, 1887 - 1986

Line and Curve

1927

oil on canvas

overall: 81.2 x 41.2 cm (31 15/16 x 16 1/4 in.)

framed: 83.8 x 43.2 x 3.5 cm (33 x 17 x 1 3/8 in.)

Inscription: across top reverse, in pencil: *Line and Curve-27* / signed within five-pointed star: OK

Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe 1987.58.6

ENTRY

During the mid-1920s, Georgia O'Keeffe and her husband, Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864 - 1946), lived on the 30th floor of the Shelton Hotel on Lexington Avenue at 49th Street in New York City. Designed by the architect Arthur Loomis Harmon and opened in 1924, the 35-story residential skyscraper was considered the epitome of contemporary metropolitan living, and the *New York Times* proclaimed it a “stately, breath-taking building.”[1] Her new home inspired O'Keeffe to paint a number of New York views ranging from the East River as seen from her window to specific skyscrapers in her midtown Manhattan neighborhood. While some of these urban paintings are more clearly representational, such as *The Shelton with Sunspots* [fig. 1], others more closely approach pure abstraction, for example *City Night* [fig. 2].

Executed in 1927, *Line and Curve* consists of a simple juxtaposition of a vertical line that runs down the center of the canvas intersected by a sweeping curve that extends through the upper right quadrant of the composition. The painting combines architectonic elements with hints of more natural, curving, organic forms. The mottled, gently undulating, white paint surface with evanescent violet hues and the shading of the vertical line suggest the shallow spatial recessions of New York's crowded spaces. The gray-white palette evokes a cloudy sky.

Line and Curve is the last in a group of four highly abstract, predominantly white, narrow vertical compositions by O’Keeffe. The two initial works from 1926—*Abstraction* [fig. 3] and *White Abstraction (Madison Avenue)* [fig. 4]—are more fragmented and complex. The 1927 pair—*Abstraction White Rose* [fig. 5] and *Line and Curve*—are concisely rendered and feature just a few, minimal elements. O’Keeffe returned to this line of inquiry in 1930, when she produced *Black and White* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Lynes no. 700) and the Gallery’s *Black White and Blue*, two works that can also be linked to skyscraper motifs.[2]

All four of O’Keeffe’s white paintings should be understood in the context of the ongoing, complex dialogue in her work between hard-edged urban and softer, curvilinear natural forms, and more broadly between objective representation and subjective abstraction. *New York-Night*, for instance, has been interpreted as an abstract rendering of the convergence of Madison Avenue and two side streets seen from an elevated vantage point in the Shelton Hotel or, alternately, as a view across the sky comparable to a series of cloud photographs by Stieglitz known as *Equivalent*s.[3] An additional source for the imagery of *Line and Curve* and its related works has recently been suggested by Bruce Robertson: “The space of these pictures is shallow: *folded, crumpled, or pleated* are useful adjectives, all terms one might use to describe paper or fabric.”[4] Shortly after completing *Line and Curve*, O’Keeffe painted *Black Abstraction* (1927, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Lynes no. 574), a work inspired by her recollection of a vision she had prior to succumbing to anesthesia before an operation. The various associations conjured by O’Keeffe’s paintings from the 1920s—skyscrapers, clouds, crumpled paper, and anesthetic dreams—are reminders of how indebted the Stieglitz group was to the allusive, protosurrealist imagery favored by late 19th-century symbolist poets and painters, such as Stéphane Mallarmé (French, 1842 - 1898) and Odilon Redon (French, 1840 - 1916).

In 1976 at nearly 80 years old, O’Keeffe, echoing Stieglitz’s strategy with his *Equivalent*s series, offered one of her most articulate statements on the relationship between objective realism and nonobjective abstraction: “I long ago came to the conclusion that even if I could put down accurately certain things that I saw and enjoyed it would not give the observer the kind of feeling the object gave me. I had to create an equivalent for what I felt about what I was looking at—not copy it.” She continued:

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It is surprising to me how many people separate the objects from the abstract. Objective painting is not good painting unless it is good in the abstract sense. A hill or tree cannot make a good painting just because it is a hill or tree. It is lines and colors put together so that they say something. For me that is the very basis of painting. The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint.[5]

Robert Torchia

September 29, 2016

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Georgia O'Keeffe, *The Shelton with Sunspots, N.Y.*, 1926, oil on canvas, The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Leigh B. Block 1985.206. Image no. 00000080-01, www.artic.edu. © 2016 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



fig. 2 Georgia O'Keeffe, *City Night*, 1926, oil on canvas, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Gift of Funds from the Regis Corporation, Mr. and Mrs. W. John Driscoll, the Beim Foundation, the Larsen Fund, and by Public Subscription. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



fig. 3 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Abstraction*, 1926, oil on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase, with Funds from Georgia O'Keeffe and by Exchange 58.43



fig. 4 Georgia O'Keeffe, *White Abstraction (Madison Avenue)*, 1926, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida, Gift of Charles and Margaret Stevenson Henderson in Memory of Hunt Henderson



fig. 5 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Abstraction White Rose*, 1927, oil on canvas, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Burnett Foundation and The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation 1997.04.002. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

NOTES

- [1] Helen Bullitt Lowry and William Carter Halbert, “The New Architecture and the Old,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1924.
- [2] Because of its harsh angularity and monochromatic quality, Charles Eldredge has related *Black White and Blue* to O'Keeffe's Manhattan skyscraper subjects. Charles Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York, 1991), 95.
- [3] Jennifer Hardin, *Georgia O'Keeffe: The Artist in Focus* (St. Petersburg, FL, 1998), 8.
- [4] Bruce Robertson, “Useable Form: O'Keeffe's Materials, Methods, and Motifs,” in Barbara Haskell, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction* (New Haven and London, 2009), 128.

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- [5] Georgia O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe* (New York, 1976), below pl. 62, and opp. pl. 86. O’Keeffe had already articulated identical ideas about abstraction in a letter to an unknown recipient of March 21, 1937, quoted in Charles Eldredge, *Georgia O’Keeffe: American and Modern* (Fort Worth, TX and Abiquiu, NM, 1993), 171.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The unlined plain weave fabric support remains mounted on its original stretcher. All the tacking margins are intact. The artist applied paint directly and thickly over a bright white paint layer that was placed on top of the commercially prepared gray-white ground. There is evidence of a rudimentary pencil underdrawing. The painting is in excellent condition. The surface has not been varnished.

PROVENANCE

The artist [1887-1986]; her estate; bequest 1987 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1933 Georgia O’Keeffe: Paintings--New and Some Old, An American Place, New York, 1933, no. 23, as Abstraction, White, Grey and Violet.

1940 Some Marins, Some O’Keeffes, Some Doves, An American Place, New York, 1940, no. 14.

1941 Arthur G. Dove, John Marin, Georgia O’Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz, An American Place, New York, 1941, no. 10.

1946 Georgia O’Keeffe: Retrospective Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1946, no. 26.

1947 Alfred Stieglitz Exhibition: His Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1947, no. 79 (circulated to Art Institute of Chicago in 1948; see next citation).

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1948 Alfred Stieglitz: His Photographs and His Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, 1948.

1966 Georgia O'Keeffe: An Exhibition of the Work of the Artist from 1915 to 1966, Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, March-July 1966, unnumbered catalogue.

1966 Georgia O'Keeffe, The Art Museum, The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, September-October 1966, unnumbered catalogue.

1986 Georgia O'Keeffe: Paintings, Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, 1986-1987, unnumbered catalogue.

1993 Georgia O'Keeffe: American and Modern, The Hayward Gallery, London; Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City; Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan, 1993-1994, no. 40, repro.

2009 Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, 2009-2010, unnumbered catalogue, pl. 94.

2015 Collection Conversations: The Chrysler and the National Gallery, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, 2015-2016, no catalogue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 249, repro.
- 1999 Lynes, Barbara Buhler. *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*. 2 vols. New Haven and London, 1999: 1:328, no. 572, color repro.
- 2000 Kirsh, Andrea, and Rustin S. Levenson. *Seeing Through Paintings: Physical Examination in Art Historical Studies*. Materials and Meaning in the Fine Arts 1. New Haven, 2000: 264.

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