



Georgia O'Keeffe
American, 1887 - 1986

Sky with Flat White Cloud

1962

oil on canvas

overall: 152.4 x 203.2 cm (60 x 80 in.)

framed: 153 x 203.8 x 3 cm (60 1/4 x 80 1/4 x 1 3/16 in.)

Inscription: center right reverse: Sky With Flat White Cloud / 1961?

Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe 1987.58.8

ENTRY

Sky with Flat White Cloud is the second among a series of seven paintings in which Georgia O'Keeffe explored an unfamiliar perspective—the sky and clouds as seen from an airplane in flight. [1] The artist described how her unusual and original choice of viewpoint was inspired by an experience she had traveling by air: “One day I was flying back to New Mexico, the sky below was a most beautiful solid white. It looked so secure that I thought I could walk right out on it to the horizon if the door opened. The sky beyond was a light clear blue. It was so wonderful that I couldn’t wait to be home to paint it.” [2] The view from the airplane window evoked two recurrent themes in O'Keeffe’s work, serenity and limitless space. While she was working on the cloud series, she said, “I’ve often thought how wonderful it would be to simply stand out in space and have nothing!” [3] These images evoke her fantasy of stepping into that void.

O'Keeffe’s cloud paintings are reminiscent of her husband Alfred Stieglitz’s photographs of cloud formations from the 1920s, collectively known as *Equivalent*s, that he defined as “direct revelations of a man’s world in the sky—documents of eternal relations—perhaps even a philosophy.” [4] O'Keeffe had also experimented

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with cloudlike forms in an earlier painting, *A Celebration* (1924, Seattle Art Museum).

In *Sky with Flat White Cloud*, O’Keeffe represented the sky as three horizontal bands. The largest represents the solid cloudbank, surmounted by a narrow band of yellowish haze (possibly inspired by the airplane’s contrail) that leads to the blue sky above. The composition corresponds to that of the first picture of the series, *Sky Above the Flat White Cloud II* [fig. 1], but the painting in the National Gallery of Art’s collection is twice as large. [5] The large canvas fills the viewer’s field of vision, and the exaggerated horizontal axis emphasizes a sense of infinity.

The next three versions of the theme, *Above the Clouds I* [fig. 2], *Sky Above Clouds II* [fig. 3], and *Sky Above Clouds III* [fig. 4], were all inspired by a different flight in which the artist found the sky dotted with “little oval white clouds, all more or less alike.” [6] In these paintings, she represented the clouds as pebble-like forms arranged in a bright blue sky. In the sixth painting in the series, *Clouds 5/Yellow Horizon and Clouds* [fig. 5], O’Keeffe reverted to the format of the first two pictures but added a diagonal path through the clouds ascending from left to right. In the seventh and final painting in the series, the twenty-four-foot-long *Sky Above Clouds IV* [fig. 6], O’Keeffe returned to the “little oval white clouds” motif on a monumental scale.

Robert Torchia

July 24, 2024

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Sky Above the Flat White Cloud II*, 1960–1964, oil on canvas, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, NM, Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, 2006.5.364. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



fig. 2 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Above the Clouds I*, 1962–1963, oil on canvas, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, NM, Gift of The Burnett Foundation and The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, 1997.5.14. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



fig. 3 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Sky Above Clouds II*, 1963, oil on canvas, private collection. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



fig. 4 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Sky Above Clouds III*, 1963, oil on canvas, private collection. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



fig. 5 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Clouds 5/Yellow Horizon and Clouds*, 1963–1964, oil on canvas, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, NM, Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, 2006.05.364. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



fig. 6 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Sky Above Clouds IV*, 1965, oil on canvas, The Art Institute of Chicago, Restricted gift of the Paul and Gabriella Rosenbaum Foundation; gift of Georgia O'Keeffe, 1983.821. © The Art Institute of Chicago. Image: The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY

NOTES

- [1] Prior to the publication of Barbara Buhler Lynes's catalogue raisonné of O'Keeffe's works in 1999, this painting was known by the title *Sky Above White Clouds I*.
- [2] Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York, 1976), n.p.
- [3] Ralph Looney, "Georgia O'Keeffe," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1965): 110, quoted in Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe: American and Modern* (Fort Worth, TX, 1993), 209.
- [4] Alfred Stieglitz, "Statement," in *Third Exhibition of Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York, 1924), n.p.
- [5] O'Keeffe likened the format to the work of contemporary minimalist painters such as Kenneth Noland. Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York, 1991), 147.
- [6] Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York, 1976), n.p.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The unlined, medium-weight support remains mounted on an original stretcher manufactured by Arco, Inc., Glendale, New York. The tacking margins are intact,

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and selvage edges are present at the right and left sides. The artist probably applied the thin white ground after the support was stretched. The paint layers were applied thinly and in opaque layers, with some variation in texture. Despite passages of thicker, raised brushwork, where broader handling is evident, the weave of the canvas remains prominent. Other than minor damage caused by a dent in the lower-right corner and some areas where crackle has developed, the painting is in good condition. The surface is coated with a thin layer of synthetic resin varnish.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

PROVENANCE

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

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1970 Georgia O'Keeffe Retrospective Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Art, 1970-1971, no. 116.

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. 85.

1997 Birth of the Cool. American Painting - from Georgia O'Keeffe to Christopher Wool, Deichtorhallen Hamburg; Kunsthaus Zürich, 1997, unnumbered catalogue, pl. 2.

1998 American Light: Selections from the National Gallery of Art, Art Museum of Western Virginia, Roanoke, May-August 1998, no catalogue.

1998 Shifting Visions: O'Keeffe, Guston, Richter, Des Moines Art Center, 1998-1999, no. 33, repro.

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1998 Treasures of Light: Paintings from the National Gallery of Art, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis, March-April 1998, no catalogue.

2000 [O'Keeffe exhibition], Bakersfield Museum of Art, California, 2000.

2001 O'Keeffe's O'Keeffes: The Artist's Collection, Milwaukee Art Museum; Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark, 2001-2002, no. 72, repro.

2007 Georgia O'Keeffe: Nature and Abstraction, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Vancouver Art Gallery, 2007-2008, no. 72, repro.

2011 Georgia O'Keeffe, Fondazione Roma Museo, Palazzo Cipolla, Rome; Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich; Helsinki Art Museum Tennis Palace, 2011-2012, no. 65, repro. (Italian catalogue), no. 171, repro. (German and Finnish catalogues).


2013 Letzte Bilder: Von Manet bis Kippenberger [Final Works. From Manet to Kippenberger], Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 2013, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

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

2016 Georgia O'Keeffe, Tate Modern, London; Bank Austria Kunstforum, Vienna; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 2016-2017, unnumbered catalogue.

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- 1970 Goodrich, Lloyd, and Doris Bry. *Georgia O'Keeffe*. Exh. cat. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Art. New York, 1970: 28.
- 1971 Eldredge, Charles C. "Georgia O'Keeffe: the development of an American modern." Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1971: 108-110, fig. 72.
- 1984 Hoffman, Katherine. *An Enduring Spirit: The Art of Georgia O'Keeffe*. Metuchen, NJ, 1984: 118.
- 1991 Eldredge, Charles C. *Georgia O'Keeffe*. New York, 1991: 147, 150, repro.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 252, repro.
- 1993 Eldredge, Charles C. *Georgia O'Keeffe: American and Modern* Exh. cat. Hayward Gallery, London; El Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico

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City; and Yokohama Museum of Art, 1993-1994. New Haven and London, 1993: 209, color pl. 85.

1999 Lynes, Barbara Buhler. *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*. 2 vols. New Haven and London, 1999: 2:902-903, no. 1473, color repro.

2004 Joseph S. Czestochowski, ed., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Vision of the Sublime*. Memphis, 2004: pl. 77

To cite: Robert Torchia, "Georgia O'Keeffe/Sky with Flat White Cloud/1962," *American Paintings, 1900–1945*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/70184/2024-07-24> (accessed July 24, 2024).