



Home Cultures

The Journal of Architecture, Design and Domestic Space

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfhc20>

There is a Garden in her Face: The *Georgic* O'Keeffe

Cristiana Pagliarusco

To cite this article: Cristiana Pagliarusco (2023): There is a Garden in her Face: The *Georgic* O'Keeffe, Home Cultures, DOI: [10.1080/17406315.2022.2163964](https://doi.org/10.1080/17406315.2022.2163964)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17406315.2022.2163964>



Published online: 16 Jan 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 11



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

CRISTIANA PAGLIARUSCO 

THERE IS A GARDEN IN HER FACE: THE GEORGIC O'KEEFFE

CRISTIANA PAGLIARUSCO RECEIVED HER PHD DEGREE IN HUMANITIES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TRENTO, ITALY. HER RESEARCH FOCUSES ON THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE VISUAL AND THE VERBAL MEDIA WITH THE AIM TO HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF AFFILIATIVE AND AFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY AGE, AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS. SHE IS TENURED TEACHER OF ENGLISH IN A HIGH SCHOOL FOCUSING ON SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES IN VICENZA, ITALY. SHE IS ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AT CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY, VENICE, WHERE SHE TEACHES ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AT THE COMPUTER SCIENCE DEPARTMENT. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF *GEORGIA O'KEEFFE IN POETRY: OFFSPRING OF AN ICON* (PETER LANG 2018), AND OTHER VOLUMES. SHE IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON THE POET SYLVIA PLATH AND HER REVERSE EKPHRASIS.

CRIS.PAGLIARUSCO@UNIVE.IT

ABSTRACT “The cooking has been done for you in the garden; it’s merely finished in the kitchen,” the English biodynamic gardener Alan Chadwick used to say. These were ideas that Georgia O’Keeffe, the American modernist painter, already had in mind when she decided to devote large attention to the creation of vegetable and fruit gardens in her houses in New Mexico between the 1930s and 1940s. When Chadwick, “the gardener of the souls,” started using his Biodynamic Method of organic gardening and farming in North America in the late 1960s, Miss O’Keeffe was already deeply engaged in an agricultural project that had seen her teaching, prodding, cajoling, and strictly guiding her many assistants and guests in New Mexico. Through her idea of hard work applied in any creative context, O’Keeffe anticipated, following the studies of Adelle Davis, an ecology of food instead of an economy. A strong believer in the energy coming from the patient and enduring cultivation of the earth, in its reproductive power comparable to the work and labor of childbirth, O’Keeffe used her adobe gardens, kitch-

ens and cooking habits as a sort of mystical places where labor turned into blessing, giving birth to beauty. Through the reading of O’Keeffe’s letters and books inspired by her life and work, this article intends to analyze the beginning of an ecological, though aesthetically refined, politics of gardening and food in the hands and mind of the modernist artist. O’Keeffe nimbly moved from the stylish urban class-conscious foods and flats of New York City, in the first decades of the century, to the revolutionary culture of local production in the Southwest. In her garden cultivation and food rituals, O’Keeffe reproduced the spiritual landscape that nourished the body and the soul of men and women, both engaged in the prodigious creative project. In addition, her strong relationship with the Indigenous allowed her to rediscover the organic bases of civilization, the “sober reality” (Norman Brown) that helped her fulfill the meaning of her work: giving birth to beauty.

KEYWORDS: food ecology, organic, politics, beauty, garden life

*There is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lilies grow:
A heav’nly paradise is that place
Wherein all pleasant fruits do flow.
There cherries grow which none may buy,
Till “Cherry ripe” themselves do cry.*

Thomas Campion (1567–1620)

INTRODUCTION



In the introduction to Margaret Wood’s book *A Painter’s Kitchen: Recipes from the Kitchen of Georgia O’Keeffe* (2009), the American vegetarian chef and author of bestseller cookbooks Deborah Madison gets to the heart of the American artist’s idea about organic culture and cooking. She relates O’Keeffe’s commitment to vegetable and fruit growing in her houses in New Mexico between the late 1930s and early 1940s to the words and project of English biodynamic gardener Alan Chadwick who repeatedly stated, “the cooking has been done for you in the garden; it is merely finished in the kitchen.”¹ When the British master gardener Chadwick (1909–1980), “the gardener of the souls,” moved to Santa Cruz in California in the late 1960s to start his Biodynamic French Intensive Method of organic gardening and farming, the artist O’Keeffe had long been engaged in a local agricultural project in her New Mexico houses. This article aims at highlighting the regenerative impact that New Mexico land, people, and homes exerted over O’Keeffe’s life and works, as they led the artist through a comprehensive process of self-recreation that

participated to her second birth. Since 1940, when she bought an old, ruined property formerly called *Tapia* (Adobe Wall) belonging to the Roman Catholic estates, O’Keeffe had been teaching, prodding, cajoling and strictly guiding her assistants and guests in the realization of a self-supplying agricultural system and small community she laboriously looked after until her last days. Hard work, labor and action were central throughout her long life. In 1971, when she was 84 years old, O’Keeffe was given the M. Carey Thomas Award together with the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt with whom she shared the three staples of life Arendt had theorized in her volume *The Human Condition* (1958). Arendt, during her speech at the Award Ceremony—while O’Keeffe was silently seated on the stage having previously requested not to be asked to speak—reminded the audience about the importance of the fundamental categories of the *vita activa* (labor, work, action) she had long investigated in her studies. The author of *The Story of American Painting* (1974) Abraham A. Davidson reports the occasion, which he personally witnessed, in his article “Demuth’s poster portraits” published on *Artforum* in 1978.² O’Keeffe’s “radiance” and her “air of imperturbability” (Davidson) in her worldly and domestic chores were captivating and always future-oriented despite her ability to return to the original experiences of a Greek-like representation of life. By borrowing Arendt’s words from her *Between Past and Future* (1961), the Modernist breakdown of tradition had provided the artist the opportunity to look upon the past “with eyes undistorted by any tradition, with a directness which has disappeared from Occidental reading and hearing ever since Roman civilization submitted to the authority of Greek thought” (Arendt 28–9). It is by opposition that the past can be made meaningful again since it allows the present to be illuminated and eager of “new thoughts” without falling into pointless remembrance, an idea O’Keeffe embraced.

Supported by a structured interest in the environment controlled by an organic, physical, and aesthetic perspective, O’Keeffe had long been anticipating what the American scholar, writer, and social philosopher Norman Oliver Brown (1913–2002) defined “an ecology rather than an economy of food” in his essay “My Georgics,”³ included in his collection *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (1981). Brown’s celebration of George, the farmer in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, had also inspired the speech the philosopher delivered in 1970 to pay homage to Chadwick’s garden project at the University of California. Addressing Chadwick, Brown used the myth of Hesiod’s George to explain the meaning of work to countercultural dropouts. Such Georgic celebration of hard work in the garden reconnects this study to O’Keeffe’s philosophy of work to which she remained consistent throughout her life. The *Georgic* O’Keeffe showed to be a strong believer in the regenerative energy of the earth, as in the meaning of her own name, Georgia, composed of *Gê*, meaning earth—as in geology—and *org* or *erg*, meaning organ

or energy, i.e., work, of which she often spoke. In her autobiography, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (1976):

One works because I suppose it is the most interesting thing one knows to do. The days one works are the best days. On the other days one is hurrying through the other things one imagines one has to do to keep one's life going.⁴

O'Keeffe's dedication to her artistic development, to agriculture, and her continuous commitment to be a leading figure in the history of American art as well as a living example of woman's independence and success, give sense to what Brown meant when he spoke about the meaning of work in agriculture. Brown writes that celebrating work means a return to life, to labor, the labor of childbirth, where all men are made into women, engaged in the creative process of giving birth in beauty through the reproductive power of agriculture. O'Keeffe exhibited this concept in her artistic expressions. She gave birth to beauty in any single occasion, according to the lessons that she received from her art teachers Alon Bement of Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York City, and Arthur Wesley Dow: to always fill "a space in a beautiful way."⁵ O'Keeffe used her art, but also her houses, gardens, kitchens and cooking habits as religious, mystical places where labor turned into love and blessing, into a magnificent creation recalling the gardens of mind and beauty.

This article intends to analyze how O'Keeffe arrived at her ecological, though aesthetically refined politics of home living, agriculture and food. Passing through the dairy lands in Wisconsin during her childhood, to the stylish urban class-conscious atmospheres of New York City, in the first decades of the past century, O'Keeffe ended up to the revolutionary culture of self-reliance and sustenance in the Southwest territories. The reading of O'Keeffe's intense correspondence, of the books that she inspired, and the consultation of her libraries in New Mexico, have provided this study with the necessary support. In addition, the scrupulous organization of her garden plan (which has been recently reproduced even at the O'Keeffe Museum) mirrors the emphasis she used to put on the organic shapes she chose for her art works combined with the precision of the geometric regularity that confirmed her attention to the Indigenous artistic expression.

When speaking about O'Keeffe, we immediately think about Nature and about her giant, magnified floral paintings, huge close-ups of calla lilies, poppies or jack-in-the-pulpits whose colors and macroscopic details seize and mesmerize the viewer's eyes. However, fame and recognition were the result of artistic explorations only a few painters had been brave enough to experience. Born in 1887, in Wisconsin—far from the hectic, vibrant art circles in New York City—, O'Keeffe's status as a leading female figure in the visual arts remains groundbreaking in the artistic panorama in the United States of America. Her cutting-edge

abstract experiments with charcoal attracted the photographer and philanthropist Alfred Stieglitz, who eventually became her patron and husband in 1924. O’Keeffe soon met with success for what art critic Paul Rosenfeld used to define “the essence of very womanhood”⁶ in her art. Stieglitz’s pervading patronage affected the way people looked at O’Keeffe’s works encouraging Freudian readings of her pictures and photographs: her femininity became inseparable from her paintings. O’Keeffe rejected this categorization and denied such implications: “You hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower—and I don’t.” (O’Keeffe unpaginated). Jessi Jezewska Stevens offers an illuminating reading of O’Keeffe and, flowers as the primary artistic subjects for women painters in her article “Flowers Are the Ultimate Symbols” (2021). While Stevens analyzes the role of flowers in women’s paintings, she also provides an interesting interpretation of flowers as “passively productive [...] sites of the production of values (beauty, purity, obedience), and of value (life), without appearing to do any work,” a vision that intentionally clashes with the laborious role they had in O’Keeffe’s production. Stevens continues by adding that flowers “are perceived as givers of life, as mothers, the origins of the world—a kind of production that circumvents labor in the classic Marxist sense,” and Karl Marx intended labor, set for exploitation, as the production of use value. Providentially, Stevens highlights Gayatri Spivak’s definition of labor by saying that “It is the body’s susceptibility to the production of value which makes [labour] vulnerable to idealization.” (Spivak 117) In other words, if the production of use value could be a gateway to economic exploitation, the production of the use-less—that of pure value, like life, without an immediate utility—as in the case of O’Keeffe’s vulnerable flowers, might lead to the realm of the idealized.

O’Keeffe’s determination to establish herself as a painter, rather than as a woman painter, frequently clashing even with fellow artists like Arthur Dove, succeeded at using what was imprisoning her, turned it into a profitable brand that allowed her to afford a place of her own, and then she self-exiled to New Mexico. This country, remote and far from any excessive intellectual fervency, revealed to be a preserved, original and intact region that offered continuous inspiration and communion with the earth through its still uncorrupted landscapes and indigenous inhabitants.

O’Keeffe would regularly spend her summers in New Mexico since receiving the invitation in 1929 from the wealthy American patron of arts, Mabel Dodge Luhan in her colony of artists in Taos. Married to the pueblo Indian Tony Luhan, Mabel Dodge purchased a 12-acre property that hosted a large number of influential artists and poets including the English novelist D. H. Lawrence and Willa Cather. The country and its indigenous inhabitants soon fascinated O’Keeffe, who had already experienced the beauty of those lands and skies while teaching in

Amarillo, Texas, at the end of the 1910s. However when in Taos, O’Keeffe never exactly mingled with the colony of artists brought by Mabel, whose artistic productions were just exotic reflections of the European and East artistic traditions. Conversely, O’Keeffe immediately started to explore the land, walking miles through the mesas, hills and desert areas, and collecting objects such as animals’ skulls, bones and local flora. She would eventually send these inspiring pieces into barrels to New York City where she used them as the subjects of her paintings during the winters spent besides her husband until 1946, the year of his death.

O’Keeffe eventually abandons New York in 1949, once the almost ten year long renovation of her house in Abiquiu is finished. Leaving the stylish urban atmospheres of concerts, theaters, Manhattans, creams soups, and canapés, which echoed the European tastes she just intended to avoid in search of an original American way of expression, she writes:

As I was working I thought of the city men I had been seeing in the East. They talked so often of writing the Great American Novel – the Great American Play – the Great American Poetry. I am not sure that they aspired to the Great American Painting. Cezanne was so much in the air that I think the Great American Painting didn’t even seem a possible dream. I knew the middle of the country – knew quite a bit of the South – I knew the cattle country – and I knew that our country was lush and rich.⁷

Following her pioneering spirit, O’Keeffe chased the dream for a renovated and freer reconnection with the earth, whose energetic center helped her shape her expression. In the Southwestern territories, O’Keeffe is seduced by the unbelievable ability of the poor, desert areas to provide for their necessary life sustenance calling for a complete reconstruction and readjustment of personal habits. She would in fact write to her friend Maria Chabot that “one must learn to eat in a new way to live up there.”⁸ Equally, Wood records that O’Keeffe told her: “If I couldn’t get along out here (New Mexico) by myself, I wasn’t worth much.”⁹ The difficulties of growing vegetables in the sandy soil of Ghost Ranch, together with the food and fuel rations as the United States were preparing for military intervention, convince O’Keeffe to undertake this process of reconstruction and readjustment in Abiquiu:

I’m a newcomer to Abiquiu, that’s one of the lower forms of life. The Spanish people have been here since the 18th century. The house was a pigpen when I got it...but it had a beautiful view. I wanted to make it my house, but I’ll tell you the dirt resists you. It is very hard to make earth your own...I grow everything I need for the year in Abiquiu.¹⁰

At the adobe, O’Keeffe realized that she could be self-sufficient. Water access, cultivable land and an environmentally friendly place

were everything she was looking for. In the adobe architecture, she had found the perfect ingredient—and the recipe—for her project. The adobe, which was essentially an ancient building material made of dried mud brick, combined the natural elements of earth, water, and sun, tightly compacted with sand, clay, and straw or grass mixed with moisture. The natural, simple beauty of these bricks, dried or baked in the sun without an oven or kiln, were the expression of natural resilience and adjustment to the land climate, local customs, and the historical era. Although the indigenous people knew about the natural instability of the adobe, they also knew that they could be load bearing, self-sustaining, and naturally energy efficient. Their thickness provided a natural insulation from the environmental heat, which was in part what created and sustained the material itself. These elements convinced O’Keeffe who bought the entire property in 1945. At the end of its renovation, as Cardona-Hire states, the adobe much resembled O’Keeffe’s personality—or O’Keeffe herself bore a resemblance to the property:

The concordance between O’Keeffe’s rhythm and her low adobe buildings, the quietness of the black door, the placement of the garden, were a breath with her own being.¹¹

The renovations to the adobe were completed under the direction of O’Keeffe and, when in New York, by Chabot. The detailed narration of the entire regenerating process is recorded in *Maria Chabot and Georgia O’Keeffe – Correspondence 1941–1949*. The letters describe the intense and attentive works of reconstruction and the meticulous replanting of the large garden. O’Keeffe and Chabot hire labor from the local men and women of the Hispanic and Indigenous communities:

The San Juan Pueblo Indians will probably set up housekeeping in Abiquiu, and I will hire several of the wives to work along with the men in the house. This is the way they do it – men and women together.¹²

The profitable exchange with the Indigenous expertise allows O’Keeffe to see the real possibility to plant and grow a self-supportable vegetable and fruit garden that prevents her from driving 70 miles over dirty roads to Santa Fe in search of fresh food. In addition, the echoes of the war hit New Mexico powerfully, as O’Keeffe would continue writing to Stieglitz (see Hunter Drohojowska, *Full Bloom: Life and Art of Georgia O’Keeffe*, 2004). In her letters to her husband, as she takes her long walks exploring the Navajo countries, close to the Bisti Badlands, about 150 miles northwest of her home in Ghost Ranch, O’Keeffe feels the tension. Scientists and military men on a mesa not far from O’Keeffe’s home are in fact developing the atomic bomb. New Mexican men volunteer for military service and the country becomes the one with both the highest volunteer rate and the highest casualty rate out

of all of the forty-eight states of the Union, and the first Americans to see combat during the war. Women start to do men's work as their husbands and sons are drafted into the war. Other men are recruited because of their fluency in their Navajo language and training as code talkers. Once the war is over, men and women are back together, but poorer. The war impacted the ability to find building materials, as Chabot reported to O'Keeffe in a letter on March 1, 1943. This does not dishearten O'Keeffe's passionate work of renovation that is meant to reproduce the rebirth of the *Tapia* in the absolute respect of the natural setting in which it was built. Reconstruction is a creative act that involves comparing, integrating, translating, and interpreting the spaces and place. O'Keeffe writes on December 29, 1944:

It is as if in almost every way I am doing over and rebuilding my house – by my house meaning my own so-called mind.¹³

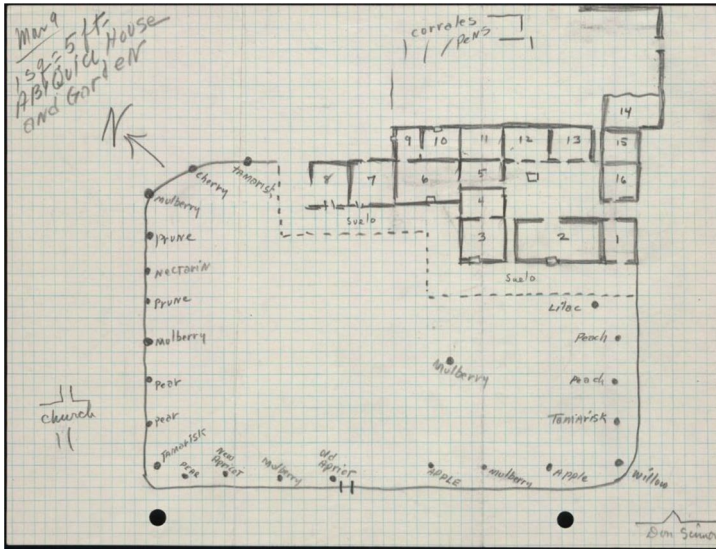
Brown would later theorize this approach to reconstruction and reproduction as the cultivation of the garden of the mind. He writes, "There is planting, hoeing and tilling to be done. Energy, *energeia*, the work of self-realization." Brown speaks of two kinds of energy that O'Keeffe herself experienced in those days: "atomic energy, explosion, ecstasy, mushroom-cloud-in-the-heat, and agriculture, patient enduring day after day."¹⁴ The artist recognizes the indestructible and reproductive power of the latter. In her correspondence with Chabot, we read O'Keeffe's interest in using innovative and eco-friendly materials in the structural rebuilding and in the garden readjustment. The aim is to build a house that is self-sufficient: special thermic windowpanes, radiant heating in the floor,¹⁵ ultimate technology in refrigerating machines to preserve food, stoves and ecological plasterwork are sided outside by a peculiar research of seeds and plants:

You plant trees as it seems best...when you get to it, think of how things will look out of the window too.¹⁶

The garden plantation is made with great accuracy, principally following the millennial tradition of the Navajo early settlers, whose name means, "Cultivated Fields." Together with them and the Spanish-American people, O'Keeffe also started the search for lost seeds and herbs, anticipating the non-profit organization of The Seed Savers Exchange (1975) of about thirty years. While away, taking care of a sick husband in New York, on April 21 1945, O'Keeffe continued to think about Abiquiu and her garden and writes to Chabot:

I love hearing of your farm doings because it is of living growing things that can only exist by coming out of earth.¹⁷

The idea is to produce basic recipes with the best taste: simple garden vegetables and fruit picked daily, following the lessons that the



Reproduction of the original Abiquiu garden plan drawn by Maria Chabot belonging to the Beinecke Digital Collections <http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3520281>

Indigenous had taught her to observe and respect the slow rhythms of the Earth. O’Keeffe’s eyes plan a space of details in which garden and kitchen become the places where the magic begins to occur.

O’Keeffe supports her researches through a resourceful private library in both her homes in Ghost Ranch and Abiquiu. The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center under the direction of Tori Duggan recently catalogued it. It is no surprise to see that almost one third of the books and periodicals are about gardening, farming, food, and health issues, outnumbering books and journals about art and literature. The biographies inspired by the artist and the books written by some of her assistants, such as *Weekends with O’Keeffe*, by the librarian and author C. S. Merrill, or the above-mentioned *A Painter’s Kitchen: Recipes from the Kitchen of Georgia O’Keeffe*, by Margaret



Abiquiú Home and Studio, 2007. Photograph by Herbert Lotz. ©Georgia O’Keeffe Museum. MS.4

Wood, account for the structured interest that O’Keeffe nourished for organic production, and vernacular architecture. O’Keeffe reads the books of the forerunners of organic gardening and healthy food production between the 1940s and 1950s, which reveal the pressing turmoil of the food revolution that occurred in the 1960s. The first book that stands out in the artist’s shelves is *An Agriculture Testament*, by Sir Albert Howard, first appearing in the UK in 1940 and then in 1945 in the USA. The volume and its author are still regarded as the keystones of the organic movement as it presents the main contribution to the solution of soil rehabilitation problems. Together with it, O’Keeffe’s collection claims a long list of other prestigious titles on the topic, such as *Guide to Organic Foods: Shopping and Organic Living* by the eco-pioneer of sustainability Jerome Goldstein. Known as the man who moved “mountains of compost,” Goldstein’s publication was highly treasured by the painter, and a large number of national journals of agriculture. As Merrill reports in her book, “O’Keeffe’s library shares her long memories. [...] O’Keeffe has strong political opinions She is very interested in what is going on in the world at large, economically and physically” (*Weekends with O’Keeffe*, 38). O’Keeffe’s attention to organic produce, local sustainability, and her profound interest for an eco-friendly approach to farming and gardening techniques were also enriched by a refined aesthetic approach to nature that O’Keeffe did not only apply to her canvases but also to the rooms and spaces that surrounded her. Alan Chadwick later shared this viewpoint when, while, speaking about his biodynamic agriculture (and way of life) he stated, “We need to create the beauty and the quality first. The quantity will follow.”¹⁸

By the 1960s, O’Keeffe had become the symbol of woman’s independence and accomplishment. Men and women, from artists to homemakers, were looking at her with admiration and hope, as depicted through a collection of letters at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library of Yale University. The letters document the radicate influence that O’Keeffe exerted on liberating the artistic or individual expression among women. They also witness the far and wide reach of her asserted positions in different fields, among which her real and evident interest for a reconnection with the earth. She gained great respect and the title “Empress of Abiquiu” bestowed upon her from the Spanish-Indian neighbors when she opposed the construction of a dam that would “violate the sacred grounds and encroach on the traditional homes and livelihood of the pueblo peoples.”¹⁹ She is mindful of the notion that the land contains spirits of those who came before them; places vibrate with past energy, showing themselves to be places for rebirth. People tied to their land accordingly speak of how mountains, mesas, hills, and gardens shape their very being, rooting them in place, and serving as the ultimate teachers of human culture. Land and people become inseparable as those responsible for its stewardship

strive to make their places as beautiful, functional, and sustainable as possible. Ways of life attuned to ecological dynamics of this kind differ from those of the modern period oriented to work and practical life, such as chores, through mechanization situated within an economic system. A more direct relationship to one's land changes even the meaning of time when it is dilated by expectation, hope, and intimate knowledge. Organic food becomes the tangible natural produce of our belonging to the planet, a recuperation not only of taste but also of sense. The inspiring vision of local women and men engaged in this seminal garden project allows O'Keeffe to rediscover the organic bases of creation and civilization that she long tried to express in her landscapes painting:

Farm hands come into my kitchen and eat their lunch with me. They are Indians and they talk about Indian things. They have long hair and bright eyes ...I see that their hands are small, fine, hard like the paws of animals, quick with life.²⁰

Differently from common narratives, many visitors with whom she delightfully shared meals and walks, proud of what she had been able to learn from the land and return to it, frequently attended O'Keeffe's residency in New Mexico. Many were inspired by what she saw in the land, for example film director, author and scenarist Henwar Rodakiewicz (1903–1976) who wrote and directed the documentary film "Land of Enchantment Southwest USA" in 1948 for the United States Information Service. The film portrays work and almost sacred dedication: the traditional crafts in an Indian settlement in New Mexico; the images of O'Keeffe's home while she is making pottery with Navaho artists; the tireless occupation of local people engaged in the adobe construction and on the irrigation methods to insure a harvest of corn, peppers and wheat.

To O'Keeffe, creating, building, cooking and gardening are a spiritual endeavor: common elements in the quest for the inner sense of humanity, means of shedding light on a vision of creation and nature. Fascinated by the mystery of nature and the power of its cycles reflected in the subjects of her works, she sees nature essentially as a giver and forgiver. The ability to adjust to these seasons and to the land's recurring needs transforms the idea of reproduction into a productive process where life recreates itself. As Brown underlines, the "sober reality" that comes from reproduction, from the prolific reproducers, reproduces the organic base of civilization, takes us away from the Gross National Product, and brings the world back to an ecology instead of an economy of food. Culture becomes then agri-culture, again a garden project that O'Keeffe fully realized in Abiquiu.

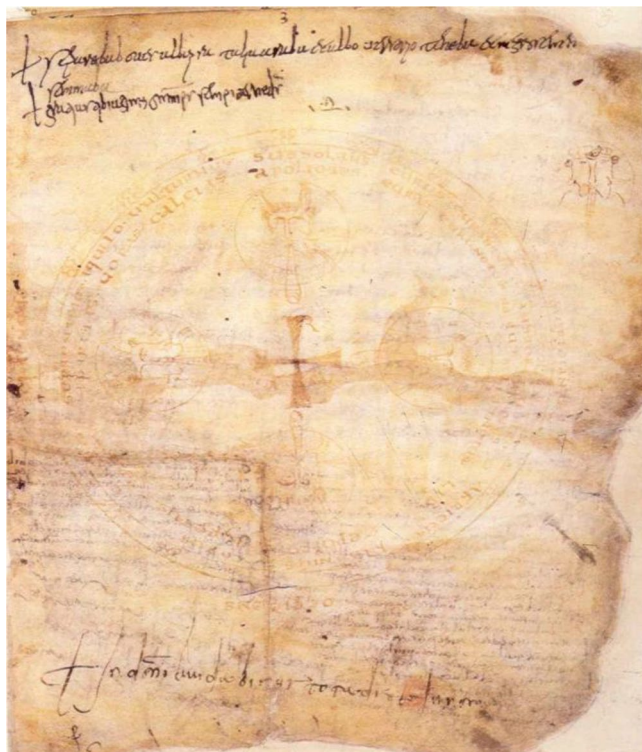
A heavenly garden grew in O'Keeffe's face, paraphrasing English Renaissance poet Thomas Campion: her far-seeing look reflected the labor, the sun, and the earth she looked after: roses and lilies were

blossoming in her canvas followed by “pleasant fruits” (Campion) in her adobe walls, in her garden, a garden of verses, dug by the inscribing plough, as VIII-IX century “*L’Indovinello Veronese*” (The Veronese Riddle) in a prayer book by the monk who copied the *Libellus Orationem* (Verona Orational) would say: “*Se pareba boves, alba pratalia araba, albo versorio teneba, negro semen seminaba.*” (In front of him (he) led oxen, white fields (he) plowed, a white plow (he) held, a black seed (he) sowed), representing the scribe’s act of holding a pen and writing on a white sheet. Labor is translated into poetry, into the art of action, a series of processes that O’Keeffe soon learned to apply in her quiet rhythm of painting, planting and looking. The rituals started by picking lettuces leaf by leaf, Wood tells us while assisting a 90-year-old O’Keeffe. This long, careful process changed her approach to food:

In discussing lettuce, Margaret tells me that she gets a lot of pleasure out of experiencing the range of flavor held in a head of lettuce – how the tastes change from the outer to the inner leaves, form the tips to the stems – something she learned in [O’Keeffe’s] Abiquiu kitchen as a young woman. (XI)

In harmony with the setting she had built around her, the experience of food became mystical, a spiritual practice that combined homemade bread with daily physical and mental exercise—her one-mile daily walk

A reproduction of the Verona Orational, also known as the *Libellus Orationum* (Verona, Cathedral, Biblioteca Capit. Cod. LXXXIX).²¹



around the house. Slow Oriental disciplines (like Tai Chi) blended with afternoon teas in Abiquiu. Simple food plucked from the earth and shaped with patience and care through processes such as grinding grain for flour for bread, or milking local goats for making yogurt transformed morning breakfasts into a fragrant bliss.

O’Keeffe’s position on organic gardening and farming, also studied through the theories proposed by the American nutritionist Adelle Davis, the biochemist Ida Rolf, the eco-pioneer Jerome Goldstein or Albert Howard, reflects the sociological impact that food had in the United States. O’Keeffe’s project embodied the development of two major cases of food protests that the country was facing. Professor of Sociology Jeffrey Haydu describes these two food protests in his article “Cultural Modelling in Two Eras of Food Protest: the Grahamites (1830s) and Organic Advocates (1960s-1970s).” Haydu underlines the similarities that called for natural food alternatives. Although they differed dramatically in framing and tactics, the movements both assigned a healing, mystical, religious significance to food and diet, and revealed a democratic commitment in the relationship they constructed between personal transformation and social ecological change. The protests with their frames and tactics transposed to food reformed the general scripts associated with cultural institutions and movements of the time, in particular evangelical churches and temperance (in the case of Graham’s followers), and environmentalism, the New Left, and the wider counterculture, that advocated an organic agriculture, as in the example of Alan Chadwick’s experience in Santa Cruz.

Through her adobe and gardens, O’Keeffe maybe made peace also with the Freudian readings of her paintings. When labor becomes fertility, Brown affirms, Marx and Freud reconcile: “the proletariat, prolific reproducers” rediscover the creative power of the earth and learn that to learn love is to learn to love labor, as in the definition of *Homo Laborans* (man in labor) and of *amans amare* (in love with loving). The gardener, that is the simple, primitive being, is able to make his/her work agreeable by treating it as the equivalent of a substitute for reproductive activity. Kate Braid’s poem “3” from her collection of *Inward to the Bones* (13), in the voice of O’Keeffe writes:

While Mama minded the house
and Auntie, the other children,
while Papa ran the farm,
I took my own family
to the garden.
[...]
Here was my world, mirror,
in which I alone
decided the order of life, the fate
of my small but perfect family.

The intimate relationship that she created with the earth, *in primis* taught by the Indigenous, is an act of labor, an act of love that reconciled her with all her art, and transformed any form of death into endless rebirth. O’Keeffe gave new life to the places she inhabited—even to the cow skulls and bones she collected and painted—and from them she received life in return, confirming the regenerative impact of nature, domestic sphere, artifacts, spaces and relationships in which she chose to start anew once and again.

Recently, the Santa Fe Botanical Garden has cooperated with the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, supervised by the museum director Linda Milbourn, to take cuttings and other means of propagating plants growing in the late artist’s garden, with the eventual aim of transplanting them into the Museum Hill Garden in Santa Fe. This confirms once again the importance that the garden has represented for the artist and for the local communities—a true offspring of beauty, creative energy.

NOTES

1. Alan Chadwick, John Jeavons, Stephen J. Crimi, *Performance in the Garden: A Collection of Talks on Biodynamic French Intensive Horticulture*, Logosophia, 2008.
2. “A personal experience may be relevant here. In the autumn of 1971, I attended a function at Bryn Mawr College, at which the late Hannah Arendt and Georgia O’Keeffe were honored as outstanding women. Arendt delivered an extraordinary speech, but O’Keeffe said nothing (the President of the college explained that that had been her wish) While seated on the stage. O’Keeffe seemed to exude a radiance, an air of imperturbability, which I thought affected others as deeply as me. The hall was jammed, and as the crowd filed out a bottleneck, developed O’Keeffe, unable to move, stood next to me for about five minutes. I thought of telling her that I liked her paintings. Then realized that such a statement would be superfluous. Later, I realized that never before had I attended a function where the honoree neither spoke a word nor (as far as I could see) had a word spoken to her.” (Davidson 57)
3. Norman Brown, “My Georgics,” *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, University of California Press, 1991, p. 25.
4. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, The Viking Press Penguin Books, New York, unpaginated.
5. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, The Viking Press Penguin Books, New York, unpaginated.
6. In 1921, Paul Rosenfeld declared about O’Keeffe’s art: “Her art is gloriously female” (*Dial*, December 1921). The following year he added that “there is no stroke laid by her brush, whatever it is she may paint, that is not curiously, arrestingly female in quality.

Essence of very womanhood permeates her pictures” (*Vanity Fair*, October 1922).

7. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, Viking Press Penguin New York, 1976, unpaginated.
8. Georgia O’Keeffe writes to Maria Chabot in April 1943, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941-1949*, University of Arizona Press, 2005, p. 150.
9. Margaret Wood, *A Painter’s Kitchen*, Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe, 1997, p. 58.
10. Dorothy Seiberling, “Horizons of a Pioneer,” *Life*, March 1 1968, p. 45.
11. Christine Taylor Patten and Alvaro Cardona-Hine, *Miss O’Keeffe*, University of New Mexico Press, 2013, p. 135.
12. Maria Chabot to Georgia O’Keeffe, January 25, 1946, from Georgia O’Keeffe, Barbara Buhler Lynes, Ann Paden, Maria Chabot, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941-1949*, University of New Mexico Press, 2003.
13. Georgia O’Keeffe, Barbara Buhler Lynes, Ann Paden, Maria Chabot, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941-1949*, University of New Mexico Press, 2003.
14. Norman Brown, “My Georgics,” *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, University of California Press, 1991, p. 28.
15. Georgia O’Keeffe to Maria Chabot, letter 22, March 8, 1947, from Georgia O’Keeffe, Barbara Buhler Lynes, Ann Paden, Maria Chabot, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941-1949*, University of New Mexico Press, 2003 p. 402–403.
16. Georgia O’Keeffe’s letter to Chabot in January 1946 from Georgia O’Keeffe, Barbara Buhler Lynes, Ann Paden, Maria Chabot, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941-1949*, University of New Mexico Press, 2003.
17. Georgia O’Keeffe’s letter to Chabot in January 1946 from Georgia O’Keeffe, Barbara Buhler Lynes, Ann Paden, Maria Chabot, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941-1949*, University of New Mexico Press, 2003.
18. <http://www.alan-chadwick.org/html%20pages/quotes.html>.
19. Georgia O’Keeffe’s letter to Alfred Stieglitz in November 1943.
20. Georgia O’Keeffe, Barbara Buhler Lynes, Ann Paden, Maria Chabot, *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941-1949*, University of New Mexico Press, 2003
21. This late 7th or early 8th century Visigothic prayer book written before the Moorish invasion is the only surviving Visigothic manuscript containing figural decoration. The manuscript has 127 folios that measure 330 mm by 260 mm. The text was written in Visigothic minuscule. A marginal gloss indicated that the manuscript was produced in Tarragona, at the church of Saint Fructuosus.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Cristiana Pagliarusco  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8125-7769>

WORKS CITED

- Arendt, Hannah. 1970. *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2006. *Between Past and Future*. With an introduction by Jeromy Kohn. New York: Penguin.
- Braid, Kate. 2010. *Inward to the Bones: Georgia o’Keeffe’s Journey with Emily Carr*. Halfmoon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press.
- Brown, Norman. 1991. “My Georgics.” In *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 23–30.
- Campion, Thomas. 1970. *The Works of Thomas Campion*. Edited by Thomas Davis. New York: The Norton Library.
- Chadwick, Alan, John Jeavons, and Stephen J. Crimi. 2008. *Performance in the Garden: A Collection of Talks on Biodynamic French Intensive Horticulture*. Asheville, NC: Logosophia.
- Davidson, Abraham A. 1978. “Demuth’s Poster Portraits.” *Artforum* (November). <https://www.artforum.com/print/197809/demuth-s-poster-portraits-35921> (accessed September 25, 2022).
- Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter. 2006. *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O’Keeffe*. New York: W W Norton & Co Inc.,
- Goldstein, Jerome. 1970. *Guide to Organic Foods Shopping and Organic Living*. Edited by Jerome Goldstein and M. C. Goldman. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press.
- Haydu, Jeffrey. 2011. “Cultural Modeling in Two Eras of U.S. Food Protest: Grahamites (1830s) and Organic Advocates (1960s–70s).” *Social Problems* 58(3): 461–487. doi:10.1525/sp.2011.58.3.461.
- Hesiod. 2008. *Theogony and works and days*. Translated by M. L. West. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merrill, C. S. 2010. *Weekends with O’Keeffe*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Norman, Jeremy. “The Veronese Riddle, the Earliest Known Sample of an Early Italian Language.” <https://historyofinformation.com/detail.php?entryid=2594> (accessed October 30, 2022).
- O’Keeffe, Georgia, and Maria Chabot. 2003. *Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe Correspondence 1941–1949ia*. Edited by Barbara Buhler Lynes and Ann Paden. Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press.
- O’Keeffe, Georgia. 1976. *Georgia O’Keeffe*. New York: Viking Press, reprinted, New York: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Rodakiewicz, Henwar. 1948. “Land of Enchantment: Southwest U.S.A.” https://youtu.be/wrw5_QqfPPg

- Rosenfeld, Paul. 1921. "Georgia O'Keeffe." *The Dial*, vol. LXXI n.6 (December).
- Rosenfeld, Paul. 1922. "The Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe," *Vanity Fair* (October). <https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/1922/10/01/the-paintings-of-georgia-okeeffe> (accessed September 20, 2022).
- Seiberling, Dorothy. 1968. "Horizons of a Pioneer." *Life*, March 1.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2008. "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's 'Stanadayini'." In Nivedita Sen and Nikhil Yadav (eds.), *Mahasweta Devi: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- Taylor Patten, Christine, and Alvaro Cardona-Hine. 2013. *Miss O'Keeffe*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Wood, Margaret. 2009. *A Painter's Kitchen: Recipes from the Kitchen of Georgia O'Keeffe*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.