

Maria Chabot - Georgia O'Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949



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Maria Chabot met Georgia O'Keeffe in Northern New Mexico in 1940. O'Keeffe, one of America's most celebrated artists, was fifty-three and had just purchased a house at Ghost Ranch where she had painted over several previous summers. Chabot, a San Antonian and an aspiring but unknown writer, was a robust twenty-six and familiar with the largely Spanish-speaking culture of the region.

The two were drawn to each other for different reasons. To be free to paint, O'Keeffe needed capable help to sustain and provision her remote household, and although Chabot needed a place to live where she could pursue her writing with minimum distraction, she was also seeking a mentor.

For four summers beginning in 1941, when O'Keeffe was in New Mexico, Chabot lived with the artist at Ghost Ranch, managing her house and guests, and organizing the famed camping-painting trips from which came some of O'Keeffe's most distinguished works of the period. In 1946, Chabot agreed to conceive and oversee the reconstruction of a ruined adobe house in Abiquiu, NM, that would become O'Keeffe's permanent home in 1949.

During the periods when O'Keeffe was in New York where she lived with her husband, famed photographer Alfred Stieglitz, the two women wrote each other with remarkable frequency. Their letters describe their love for northern New Mexico, the hardships of life there during World War II, and their interactions with the diverse cultural groups of the region. The letters also offer insights into the women's very different ways of dealing with the world and their differing perceptions of a complex and sometimes tempestuous friendship.

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