

# Georgia O'Keeffe: the Brightness of Light

## Director's Statement from Paul Wagner

In 2018, my wife and producing partner, Ellen Casey Wagner, and I encountered a small museum exhibit about Georgia O'Keeffe. We learned that, in 1908 when she was 20 years old, O'Keeffe had given up on her dream of becoming an artist. This young woman, who would later emerge as "the Mother of American Modernism" and *the* iconic woman artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, did not pick up a brush to paint for nearly four years.

But in 1912, as a summer student at the University of Virginia here in our hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia, she encountered the philosophy of a man named Arthur Wesley Dow that transformed her thinking, her art, and her life.

As filmmakers, we were drawn to make a short documentary about this extraordinary moment in her career. But as we reviewed the film work about O'Keeffe, we realized that there had not been an American feature documentary produced about her since 1977.

Twenty years after her death, over 20,000 pages of letters between Georgia O'Keeffe and her husband Alfred Stieglitz, the photographer and leader of the modern art movement in America, were made public. This, on top of fifty years of research, writing, and museum exhibitions, had transformed the landscape of knowledge and understanding about O'Keeffe. A new, comprehensive documentary about her life and art seemed not just possible, but necessary.

In this endeavor, we have won the support of every major O'Keeffe scholar and biographer and the cooperation of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, which controls the licensing of O'Keeffe's art and archival materials. This unprecedented level of support from the O'Keeffe "world" has allowed us to create a film that is detailed and authoritative.

In the last years of Georgia O'Keeffe's life, curator Sarah Greenough of the National Gallery of Art created an exhibit including letters to and from Alfred Stieglitz. O'Keeffe had only two requests regarding the presentation. We have attempted, in creating our film, to adhere to the same two standards – to make it beautiful and to make it honest.