



Once a farm girl from Sun Prairie, the grand dame of American artists Georgia O'Keeffe, 89, returned to

Wisconsin Friday for a reception at the Milwaukee Art Center.

—Sentinel Photo by Robert L. Miller



# Art Giant Back 'Home,' Eager to Leave

By DEAN JENSEN

Georgia O'Keeffe, a month away from her 90th birthday, came back home Friday — and she could hardly wait to leave again.

In describing about how she felt about returning to the area where she was born, the grand dame of American artists spoke with the same honesty and sureness with which she puts paint to canvas.

"There's other parts of the country that are far more spectacular than this if you want to know the truth," said the onetime farm girl from Sun Prairie who helped throw the art world topsyturvy 60 years ago. "I honestly don't think Wisconsin is that interesting."

Miss O'Keeffe, who for many years has lived in hermitage in the tiny desert town of Abiquiu, N.M., was persuaded by Mrs. Harry Lynde Bradley to pay a visit here to see the Milwaukee Art Center.

There are several O'Keeffe paintings in the large and important collection of 20th Century art Mrs. Bradley gave to the Art Center.

"I think this will be the last time I'm going out in the world to be looked at," Miss O'Keeffe said. She chatted amiably in a room at the Art Center while special guests started gathering in the galleries to meet the internation-

ally celebrated painter at a reception.

She is an elfin woman and was wearing a plain black dress with her pepper and salt hair drawn back severely. Upon meeting her one would have to be surprised that such a gigantic and romantic vision could spring from such a figure.

The last time Miss O'Keeffe returned to Wisconsin was in 1942 when she came to the state to receive an honorary degree from the University of Wisconsin. Along with her family, she left Wisconsin for Virginia when she was 13.

While she said she has "slowed down some," Miss O'Keeffe still does some painting and not long ago finished the writing and layouts for a massive, lavishly illustrated book of her work that will be released next month by Viking.

Miss O'Keeffe recalled that her discovery by the art world occurred almost by accident. After leaving the Chicago Art Institute, she took a job at the Texas State Normal School in Amarillo and a friend sent some of her drawings and watercolors to Alfred Stieglitz, the famous photographer, who was operating an attic gallery on lower 5th Ave. in New York.

Stieglitz was impressed by the paintings that revealed such powerful mystery in

humble subjects like flowers, rocks and clouds. Stieglitz, who was to discover such other major modernists as Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and John Marin, also became taken with Miss O'Keeffe. They were married in 1924.

"I was just fiddling around," she said of her early revolutionary paintings where she isolated such objects of nature as flowerbuds, then simplified them and magnified them a hundred-fold on canvas.

The paintings catapulted her to international fame as a founder of American modernism. Since then she has been given one man shows in such

major museums as the Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of Modern Art and Chicago Art Institute, and her paintings hang today in just about every important museum in the world.

Since 1940, Miss O'Keeffe has lived in the same house in the New Mexico desert town of 250, and the spectacular colors she has seen in the desert twilights and the distant mountains have become a part of her palette.

While she said she wouldn't want to be a young person trying to make her way in this world at this time, Miss O'Keeffe added that she doesn't like growing old either.

She said age had robbed her of some of the mettle she showed as recently as 1963, when at age 78, she painted one of her "Sky Above Clouds" works on a 24 by 8 foot wide canvas that she herself had stretched.

Another thing about growing old that she doesn't like, she said, is that one can't become professional at it, the way she became a master of art.

"You don't get any practice at it," she said. "I think it might be kind of nice if you'd have the chance to grow old three or four times. Then you might get pretty good at it."