



Josephine Halvorson

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Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM, SANTA FE, N.M.

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Director's Foreword

Cody Hartley, Director, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

What if creativity is a tangible substance? What if inspiration is its own unique form of matter, as real as water, and capable of existing in various forms, changing from a nebulous gas to a flowing liquid or an absolute solid? Spend enough time in the Piedra Lumbre basin, rimmed by the cliffs of Ghost Ranch to the north, punctuated by Cerro Pedernal to the south, bisected by the Rio Chama hidden beneath the gathered waters of Abiquiú Lake, and it becomes quite easy to imagine creativity as a multi-phased matter. It is carried on the wind like a whisper. It crunches under foot in the alkaline soils. It rains down from the azure sky. Our species has been inspired by this place for as long as it has known human habitation, as evidenced by the abstract petroglyphs, elegant flint-knapped tools, and time-worn dwellings that dot the landscape. In modern times it has and continues to inspire makers of all manner, from the workshop participant picking up a brush for the first time to artists like, well, Georgia O’Keeffe, and now, Josephine Halvorson.

In 2019 the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum welcomed Josephine as our first artist-in-residence, offering the rare opportunity to be immersed in the landscape and light of Ghost Ranch, and moreover, unparalleled access to the home and belongings of Georgia O’Keeffe. This residency was an extension of our “Contemporary Voices” exhibition series, which is intended to enrich our understanding of the relevance and vitality of O’Keeffe’s legacy as seen through the eyes of contemporary artists. Josephine has been the recipient of an impressive list of residencies and worked in other significant artists’ studios, from Robert Rauschenberg to Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres. This residency perhaps is distinct in that we invited Josephine to experience all the resources of the O’Keeffe Museum, not just our galleries and art collections in Santa Fe, but also our archive and collections of O’Keeffe’s personal belongings, and of course the artist’s two homes in Northern New Mexico, at Ghost Ranch and Abiquiú. Her sensitivity and sensibility, creating work that is in dialogue with the past in ways that are subtle and surprising while also being wholly original, made Halvorson ideally suited to be our inaugural artist-in-residence. Brimming with fresh insight and revealing aspects of O’Keeffe’s homes, belongings, and the surrounding landscape that are (as yet) largely hidden from public view, the resulting artwork is evocative and compelling. While the museum has aspirations to open the Ghost Ranch home to the public, for the time being, Josephine’s work provides a rare glimpse of some of the unique treasures found within.

Inviting an artist to work in a remote historic site while fulfilling our responsibilities as stewards for these important cultural resources took significant planning and effort from a dedicated team of professionals. I want to extend my gratitude to Stephanie Wilson for coordinating the residency. Judy Chiba Smith, Registrar/Collections Manager, and Sherri Sorensen, Associate Registrar/Collections Manager, were essential in providing access to collection materials and creating appropriate procedures to ensure that Josephine could enjoy unfettered access at both the Ghost Ranch House and the Abiquiú Home and Studio. The project required the assistance and support of all our historic properties staff, including Agapita Judy Lopez, Projects

Director, Belarmino Lopez, Steve Lopez, and Margarito Lopez. We could not have created this catalogue and exhibition without the assistance of Sascha Feldman at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. This electronic publication is a team effort, led by Liz Neely, Curator of Digital Experience. We thank Julia Featheringill for catalogue photography. And none of this would have happened without the inspired collaboration of our Curator of Fine Art, Ariel Plotek, and the artist herself, Josephine Halvorson. We are grateful to Josephine and honored to present this catalogue and accompanying exhibition.

Place and Presence

Ariel Plotek, Curator of Fine Art, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

In the summer of 2019, Josephine Halvorson set out from Massachusetts to Northern New Mexico. It was the first time that the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum would host an artist-in-residence, and Halvorson had chosen to work at O’Keeffe’s Ghost Ranch home, about 50 miles northeast of Santa Fe. The larger Ghost Ranch property, within which O’Keeffe’s home sits, was a “dude ranch” where tourists played at riding horses and roping steers in the 1930s and 1940s. The gate to the larger property still bears the mark of the artist: the cow’s skull she drew for the ranch’s logo. Equally emblematic is the picture snapped in 1944 by Maria Chabot of Georgia O’Keeffe hitching a ride across the badlands near Ghost Ranch with her friend Maurice Grosser [Figure 1].

A fellow east-coast transplant, Grosser would go on to make his name as an art critic with a book, *The Painter’s Eye*, first published in 1951. In a chapter debating the merits of painting versus photography, Grosser begins with the nineteenth-century origins of the latter—stressing the affinity between photography and the school of painting that we call Impressionism. In pursuit of “Truth,” Grosser suggests, these painters of modern life had turned to working out-of-doors, capturing their subjects with the same immediacy as a camera.

Josephine Halvorson, like Georgia O’Keeffe, is not a follower of any school. Nevertheless, she does work out-of-doors—in front of the subject. O’Keeffe, in contrast, preferred the solitude of her studio. Still, she did occasionally paint outside. In a documentary of 1977, produced on the

occasion of the artist’s ninetieth birthday, O’Keeffe recalls how, by turning around one of the front seats of her Model A Ford, she was able to convert the car into a studio on wheels. A photograph by Ansel Adams of 1937, taken near her Ghost Ranch home, testifies to this practice, depicting the painter at work before this makeshift easel [Figure 2]. In New Mexico, O’Keeffe joked about painting the “Great American



figure 1: Maria Chabot. *Georgia O’Keeffe Hitching a Ride to Abiquiú with Maurice Grosser*, 1944. Gelatin silver print, 11 1/4 x 7 7/8 inches. Georgia O’Keeffe Museum. Museum Purchase. © Georgia O’Keeffe Museum. View on Collections Online.

Painting,” and what could be more American than painting in the back of a car? She had only recently learned to drive, affording herself a freedom that would become symbolic of the “American Century.”



Figure 2: *Georgia O'Keeffe Painting in her Car, Ghost Ranch, 1937*. Photograph by Ansel Adams. Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona. ©The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust

In contrast to this forward-looking Modernism, Halvorson looks back on the twentieth century. In her education in New York at the turn of the twenty-first century, Halvorson came of age at a time when painting had already been pronounced “dead.” Small wonder that she turned to painting eulogies; images of obsolete tools in equally outmoded and abandoned settings. Like the Impressionists, O’Keeffe had painted feats of modern engineering [Figure 3]. Halvorson’s subjects are postmodern in the true sense of the word; images of furnaces grown cold and machinery left to rust.



Figure 3: Georgia O'Keeffe. *Ritz Tower*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 40 1/4 x 14 inches. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Museum Purchase. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. View on Collections Online.



Figure 4: Josephine Halvorson. *Ghost*, 2017. Oil on linen, 31 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

More recent paintings by Halvorson move the artist's close-focus vision to the natural world, as in the series *As I Went Walking*, executed in the woods surrounding the artist's home in Western Massachusetts. The dense forest depicted in these works clashes in places with the time-worn signs of human habitation, and the subjugation of nature as private property, such as a tree marked with spray paint or a "No Trespassing" sign. Oil paintings such as *Ghost* (2017) are life-sized [Figure 4], and executed outdoors as a function of daylight and weather. In this case, a tree trunk retains the "ghost" of an old sign, still stapled at the corners. It is a meditation on the passage of time, as well as the specificity of place.

O'Keeffe's voluminous correspondence allows us to locate many of her paintings with unusual precision. Letters from Texas, for instance, beginning in 1916, tell of camping trips at Palo Duro, and the places where she painted the sky at night, and a train as it crossed the plains. It was a connection, an attachment to the land, that she would not feel again until her first summer in New Mexico in 1929. Decades later, this image of the artist in the landscape would be immortalized by photographers like Tony Vaccaro, who accompanied O'Keeffe on her long walks [Figure 5]. In the same way that O'Keeffe had begun picking up bones that first summer in Taos, found objects that she arranged in her studios, she would never tire of collecting stones. Whether chipped from a mountain, or worn in a river, each rock could function doubly: as tangible piece of the vast landscape, and as a still life subject in its own right.



Figure 5: Tony Vaccaro. *O'Keeffe alone with 'Moonscapes'*, 1960. Gelatin silver print, 19 3/4 x 14 inches. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Museum Purchase. © Tony Vaccaro. View on Collections Online.

Like O’Keeffe’s paintings executed at Ghost Ranch, Vaccaro’s portraits of the artist can offer panoramic vistas; views of Chimney Rock and the painted cliffs. Halvorson, in contrast, is a painter steadfastly looking where she walks, attentive to the ground not only for the purpose of collecting what she sees, but for capturing it in situ. Eschewing staged subjects, Halvorson trains her vision on the terrain, presenting a pantheistic portrait of nature; not of tall trees and flowers, but of the ground from which these spring. As O’Keeffe would do, with her paintings of individual blossoms, Halvorson invites us to linger upon the overlooked—the ground which we tromp upon but do not see. While the influence of photography has been detected in O’Keeffe’s practice of enlarging, of filling a canvas with a single flower, Halvorson stresses the one-to-one scale of her more recent works. Paintings from the series *On the Ground* included a screen-printed image of a tape measure as a means of registering and recreating reality. At Ghost Ranch, Halvorson came across O’Keeffe’s pink yardstick, which she has reproduced on six of the paintings in the present catalogue [Figure 6]. Like a stamp or seal, these printed edges denote an authentic relationship to their subject.

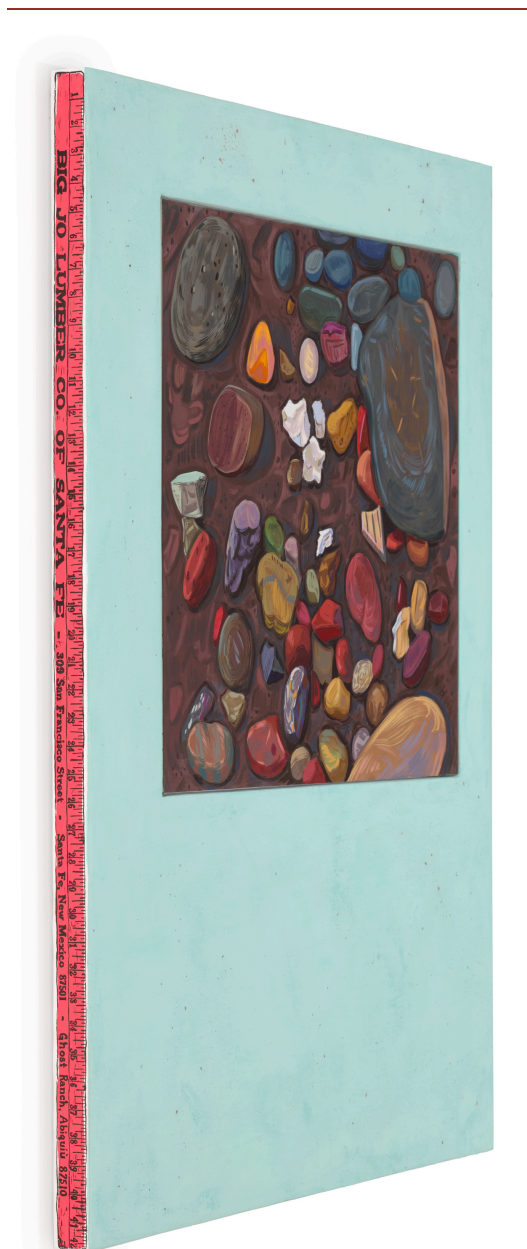


Figure 6: Side view of Josephine Halvorson. *O’Keeffe’s Rocks*, 2019-20. Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels, 42 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York. View Catalogue Entry.

Much more than an art museum in the traditional sense, the O’Keeffe Museum is a constellation of sites and collections. This includes a Research Center in Santa Fe, a Welcome Center in Abiquiú, and two historic properties. Only after an initial exploratory visit did Halvorson settle on Ghost Ranch—a spectacular setting not merely to make work out-of-doors, as she had done most recently in the Massachusetts woods, but inside the house as well. This, I supposed, would be a return of sorts to the painting of unoccupied interiors; in this case, not a derelict factory, or abandoned warehouse, but a carefully preserved historic home.



Figure 7: Josephine Halvorson. *Night Window*, July 27-28, 2015, 2015. Oil on linen, 23 x 15 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

Certainly, Halvorson was no stranger to rarified settings. In 2014, as the first American recipient of the Prix de Rome at the Villa Medici, she had been assigned the former studio of the school's famous director: Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres. In the event, the ghost of "monsieur Ingres" had been an inspiration and an impediment. Even the view out the window was one of the most famous in classical French painting: overlooking the Vatican and the dome of St. Peter's. Stifled by the summer heat and the mantle of an entire European tradition, Halvorson chose to paint at night; setting her easel in front of the window only to paint an invisible view—a window framing a rectangle of darkness [Figure 7]. In this way, Halvorson was able to escape the heaviness of this "hallowed" setting, and engage on her own terms with the opportunity she

had been afforded.

At the end of O'Keeffe's life, she had willed the Ghost Ranch house to her assistant, Juan Hamilton. When the Hamiltons sold the house in 1998, they made a gift to the nascent O'Keeffe Museum of all of its contents. In 2005, the house itself passed to the Museum, and could now be reunited with its contents—staged, in so far as possible, to look the way it had at the end of O'Keeffe's life. In the meantime, every stone, bone, breakfast bowl, and cook book had been inventoried by the Museum. Indeed, I remember being tasked, on one of my very first visits to the house in 2018, with staging O'Keeffe's camping gear, which had returned from an exhibition.

It wasn't until some time into her residency that I shared this memory with Halvorson. It might, however, have prepared her for some of what she would experience as the first person entrusted to make art inside one of the Museum's most precious holdings. Rather than making her feel like an intruder, however, Halvorson notes that the security protocols and the relationships formed with the staff at the historic houses actually helped forge a connection. Here she was alone, not just in O'Keeffe's place, but with O'Keeffe's things, and in dialogue with those who knew her.

This is not to suggest that Ghost Ranch, as a setting, did not impress Halvorson; but when she set up her easel, it was not to paint the Pedernal or the chimney rocks and cliffs. A sense of place is evoked by more impressionistic means, as the sum total of landscape still lifes and vignettes. Some of these, such as a vandalized National Forest

sign, recall the imagery of *As I Went Walking*, and the tension between preservation and property that underlies so much of our interaction with nature.



Figure 8: Dan Budnik. *Georgia O'Keeffe, Ghost Ranch*, 1964. Gelatin silver print, 7 1/2 x 11 inches. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Gift of the Andrew Smith Gallery. © Dan Budnik. View on Collections Online.

As Halvorson remarks, her lifetime coincided (however briefly) with O'Keeffe's. It is the sort of thought one has returning, day after day, to someone else's houses—especially a house that has been so painstakingly preserved. To wit, the efforts of curators like myself “staging” O'Keeffe's camping gear. The log Halvorson paints is no ordinary stump, but the one Georgia O'Keeffe used as a stool [*O'Keeffe's Tree Stump*]; likewise, the mismatched china [*O'Keeffe's Dishes*], also inventoried and

catalogued by the Museum. The intimacy of the latter subject only increases when we consider the nearby breakfast nook, which O'Keeffe had enclosed, and where she was so often photographed taking breakfast alone [Figure 8]. Similarly, the collection of spare keys painted by Halvorson is made memorable by the handwritten labels affixed by O'Keeffe, including the all-too-human “Don't know” [Figure 9].



Figure 9: Detail of Josephine Halvorson. *O'Keeffe's Keys*, 2019-20. Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels, 42 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York. View Catalogue Entry.



Figure 10: Detail of Josephine Halvorson. *Sticks*, , 2020. Gouache and site material on panels, 24 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York. View Catalogue Entry.

In the interview that accompanies this essay, Halvorson speaks about her practice as it pertains to her choice of materials; most notably, her move away from oil paints in favor of water-based acrylic gouache (the material used to execute the paintings in this catalogue). The opacity of gouache, sometimes called “poster-paint,” lends itself to sign-making and illustration, and there is a decidedly calligraphic quality to Halvorson’s line in these works executed relatively quickly with a fast-drying paint. The opacity of these pigments also favors a certain palette,; a light, pastel tone, which can be appreciated, for instance, in the way

Halvorson constructs her shadows, mostly with blues and lavenders [Figure 10]. The indelibility of Halvorson’s notational strokes, rendered in a bright and dusty palette, recall the topography of the Southwest. Indeed, her frames, each a pigmented pastel hue, include fragments of earth and rocks from the sites where the paintings were made.

In a vitrine at the Museum, Halvorson’s earths are presented alongside jars of pigment preserved by O’Keeffe—each labeled in the artist’s hand. Like the raw sienna, burnt umber, and other pigments favored by O’Keeffe, Halvorson’s earth becomes a part of her practice, a further means of grounding her paintings in place. Whether indoors or out-of-doors, Halvorson’s still life subjects remain resolutely site-specific, rooted in the places she has shared with O’Keeffe.

Conversation with the Artist

*Ariel Plotek, Curator of Fine Art, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
Josephine Halvorson*

Ariel Plotek: A single-artist museum, like the O’Keeffe, is a special kind of institution. What did you first think, when you imagined an artist residency in partnership with the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum?”

Josephine Halvorson: Well, funnily enough, I thought of Vincent Van Gogh. He’s the subject of another single-artist museum. There are similar mythologies at play, the larger-than-life personas. When we think of O’Keeffe in Abiquiú, or Van Gogh in Arles, so much of what comes to mind has to do with place. Their best-known work seems to have been made in certain landscapes, and so too were their personas. And when I think about the present, about contemporary art, I’m drawn to artistic practices that exist in relation to regional specificity. For me it’s something that I also associate with painting, a sort of grounding materiality.



Ariel Plotek and Josephine Halvorson, March 2019. Photograph by Peter Buckley.

Much of what we know about Van Gogh’s life and work comes from his correspondence with his brother Theo. It’s a little like O’Keeffe and her letters to Alfred Stieglitz. Like Van Gogh, she was able to exile herself, to work far from any major commercial center for a period of her life. And, because both artists had someone else—someone representing their interests elsewhere—they were more readily able to lose themselves in their work for a period of time. However, the Van Gogh Museum is situated in the metropolis of Amsterdam, whereas the O’Keeffe

Museum in Santa Fe invites visitors to travel to a region that has become synonymous with her paintings.

It's interesting that people continue to make pilgrimages to places like Santa Fe and to her house in Abiquiú. We still travel in real time to see real works of art. Today at Ghost Ranch tours are regularly given to visitors on horseback or in buses to match reproductions of O'Keeffe's landscape paintings with the actual spots depicted in them.

Lately we're so decoupled, it seems to me, and in so many ways, from the physical world, whether socially, economically, technologically. But if you look at O'Keeffe, and the relationship between the objects that she made and the objects that she surrounded herself with—it's all of a piece. Her values were the same, outside the walls of her studio, or inside the corners of her paintings.

I suppose some of that identification, between the art and the life, must have been forged fairly early on. I mean, how could O'Keeffe ever separate out the image of herself from her art, when Stieglitz exhibited his photographs of her alongside her paintings for her first exhibition in New York City?

AP: But she did outlive Stieglitz. And, in time, she got to tell her own story.

JH: Yes, she certainly did. And she had longevity, having lived well into her nineties. I was struck by how O'Keeffe concerned herself with posterity and her own mortality, how she grew, as it were, into her own image. She is kind of immortal. I mean, today there's a Georgia O'Keeffe Museum! For there to be an institution dedicated to the life of a woman, for attention and care be given to her things and her vision, it's profoundly important and moving. I listened to an interview she gave towards the end of her life where she said something along the lines of 'I could have made better paintings, but no one would have cared. It was my person that interested them more than my art.' I found this telling, yet complicated. It opens up all kinds of questions about the expectations society has of artists, the changing nature of public and private life, gender and culture, and much else. I'm still thinking about this and will for a long time to come.

AP: And you've had the opportunity, since, to return to New Mexico.

JH: When I returned to New Mexico to continue painting a year after my residency, I began to reflect more deeply on this issue of lifespan and memorialization. During that visit I came across a site with fragments indicating the locale of a former Native American settlement. Painted pottery shards revealed themselves in the earth, literally washing away.

Along with my painting of the archeological remnants, I found myself painting other objects, notably two signs, clinging to the present. One indicated the boundary of the Santa Fe National Forest, shot through with bullets. Another was from Santa Rosa de Lima, an 18th century abandoned adobe church in Abiquiú. These paintings were made during the summer of 2020 during a transformative and turbulent time in the U.S. where so much was—and remains—at stake. Covid was stealing lives, including my own father's, and I suppose my paintings started to take the form of memorials. I want my paintings to remember more than I ever can. And this issue of memory, whether within a family or an institution or a culture, weighed on me while making this work. I found myself asking what gets remembered and what doesn't.

AP: Yes. And this makes me think of our conservation department, and how their mission really is to “halt” time. And that’s a tall order. And it makes me think also of the bones and skulls that O’Keeffe collected and painted—objects we commonly associate with death, or at the very least the passage of time.

JH: Yes, O’Keeffe and I are both interested in still life, vanitas, and *memento mori*—genres within art that are a reflection on life and its inevitable end. O’Keeffe is not just a historical figure for me, though, when I recall that our lives overlapped by a few years in the early 1980s. She used the same shampoo that I did, for instance, and created shelving out of wooden fruit crates, just like the ones my mother built in my childhood home. She had some of the same art books I do and subscribed to magazines that are still in print. Honestly, it was strange to be surrounded by the ghosts of a consumer culture that belonged to my younger self—and to see them preserved in perpetuity.

AP: Yes, that’s true for me as well. And what do you suppose your earliest memory is—when you first recall being introduced to O’Keeffe?

JH: Do you know, it’s hard to remember, because she’s been a presence for so long. I can hardly recall the first time I learned who she was because she’s always figured in my imagination of what it means to be an artist and an independent woman. As my life has unfolded, it seems we share some similar biographical outlines.

The residency forced me to renegotiate and reconsider who I’d imagined O’Keeffe to be, and see her in more dimensional ways. It was interesting, and complicated, and enlightening. So much has been projected onto her, by so many people, including, of course, myself.

I remember throughout my childhood into my adolescence—and to this day—feeling identified with O’Keeffe and her paintings. As a teenager, I remember listening to the Nields’ song “Georgia O” a third wave feminist anthem, and feeling powerful kinship. And, looking further back, I remember an activity in elementary school art class that probably introduced me to O’Keeffe—we painted flowers. Who I am today, what I choose to do and make as an artist, is undoubtedly influenced by O’Keeffe.

AP: And now, in some sense, the tables have turned—it’s you who’s been a presence in O’Keeffe’s space.

JH: Yes, I felt seen in her space. I also felt present in a temporal sense. I was given a finite amount of time to work there and there was only so much that I could accomplish during the daylight.

It reminded me of working in Rome at the Villa Medici several years ago. I spent a calendar year there as a fellow and was highly attuned to the various durations of time. It was an extraordinary privilege, and quite challenging, to make art in Ingres’ former studio, a studio which was also home to dozens of other artists over the two centuries in between. The thought of making something new in that space, one that presided over “the eternal city”, was actually quite overwhelming.

And then, at Ghost Ranch, I had the voices of the museum staff in my head—all the rules about how and how not to be in this precious space. And that inescapable presence of O’Keeffe, amplified through her home, all while knowing how she herself could be quite proprietary. It made me feel like I was trespassing in some ways. Trespass is something difficult to avoid in my practice. After all, making paintings on site, en plein air, always involves a prolonged visit to a particular place, and even

when I've made work on my own land in Massachusetts, I feel like a visitor. My practice inevitably opens up many questions of ownership and belonging.

After painting I try to leave without a trace. I almost never touch my subject or displace anything around me, except for the ground beneath my feet. Over the last several years I have been gathering a few rocks and debris from the general vicinity underfoot. I then have been incorporating them into frames for the paintings, a kind of surroundings to contextualize the painting.



The ground surrounding O'Keeffe's Ghost Ranch home. Photograph by Josephine Halvorson.



Samples of rocks and earth for use in Halvorson's surrounds. Photograph by Josephine Halvorson.

AP: That's been the case with these paintings as well—the ones in the exhibition at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Tell me a little more about that practice, and the materials you've moved to as you moved away from oil on linen.

JH: Oil was my medium of choice for a decade or so. Many of those paintings were made slowly over the course of a long day or two, where I worked while the paint was wet and stopped when the surface formed a skin. My working time was akin to a curing period, like when you make a cast. Painting felt like taking an impression of not just what I was looking at, but of the time and place as well. I was interested in the way that painting could congeal experience, materially and metaphorically.

At a certain point I noticed my work, which primarily concerns itself with how to transcribe reality, was taking on a *verité* quality—the painterly equivalent of a single take and photographic exposure. I wanted to work with materials—both the paint and the support—to record my observations in real time. I started to work more indelibly, using highly pigmented water-based paints that could soak into an absorbent ground. With oil paint I could wipe away and revise my decisions, but with acrylic gouache my strokes were permanent. This way of painting shares something with fresco, examples of which I had studied in Italy and learned to use when I was teaching at Skowhegan, a school in Maine that continues to teach this ancient technique.

My newer approach has taken on more significance in the last several years as we live in a “post-truth” culture. The more challenges to trust I encounter, the more I am drawn to making paintings-as-facts. I’ve been asking myself what is a fact, what is a reliable source, what constitutes belief? Describing what I see in real time, undeniable through my own notations, allows me to create a subjective account of something that exists. By incorporating “real” site material into the surrounding frames, I hope to add not just context but objectivity as well. I think of this material as evidence of place, geologically speaking. Together, the painting and its surround hopefully offer a testament to something having existed, and to my ability to notice it.

AP: Speaking of new materials and techniques, you’ve been experimenting with photography. How has that informed your practice as a painter?

JH: Photography has definitely informed my thinking, especially around ideas of authenticity and truth telling. I’m fascinated in particular by the tradition of the photo essay—something that really doesn’t exist in painting. I’ve always written alongside my painting practice, and would like to find a way to integrate that writing into the work somehow. By using screen-printed iconography and imagery in the margins of my paintings—the faces or edges of the surrounds—I’ve found a way to incorporate language into the picture. But paintings are still expected to sort of “speak for themselves,” and I think my paintings may have more to say.

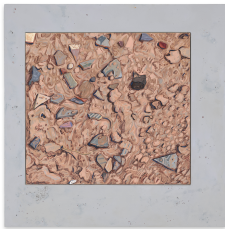
AP: You were speaking a moment ago about language, and it makes me think about the ways in which you’ve incorporated “found” text into your paintings. And how all of your still lifes are really “found” subjects of one kind or another—how we feel like you yourself haven’t moved a thing.

JH: Yes. I think you can tell right away when a subject’s been arranged. We know it when we see it. For instance, a few years ago, I was making a painting of the ground and someone stepped on the patch of ground I was describing. I had to put the leaves back where they were, using my painting as a guide. I found a nearby red leaf that hadn’t been there previously and thought it would add something aesthetically to the painting, so I moved it in. Forever, that painting will look false and contrived to me.

When painting everyday life, there’s an obligation, or at least an assumption, that a found subject mustn’t be composed. You’re supposed to catch it in a sort of candid way, perhaps one more associated with the instantaneity of the photograph. I’m thinking now of my painting of sticks that I made just above the Rio Chama. I spent several days on that piece and each night I would go to bed and hear the strong winds, convinced the sticks were going to be gone by morning. So I have to make room for that element of chance, or luck, or disappearance, which ultimately contributes to the work.

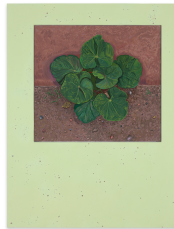
Halvorson’s painting *O’Keeffe’s Rocks* in progress at Ghost Ranch, August 2019. Photograph by Josephine Halvorson.

Catalogue



**Ku'uinge Pueblo Pottery
Fragments**

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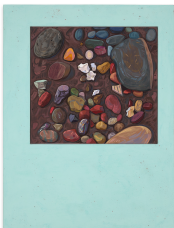
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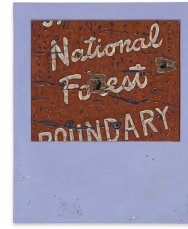
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**National Forest Sign with
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..... 47



Boulder

..... 49



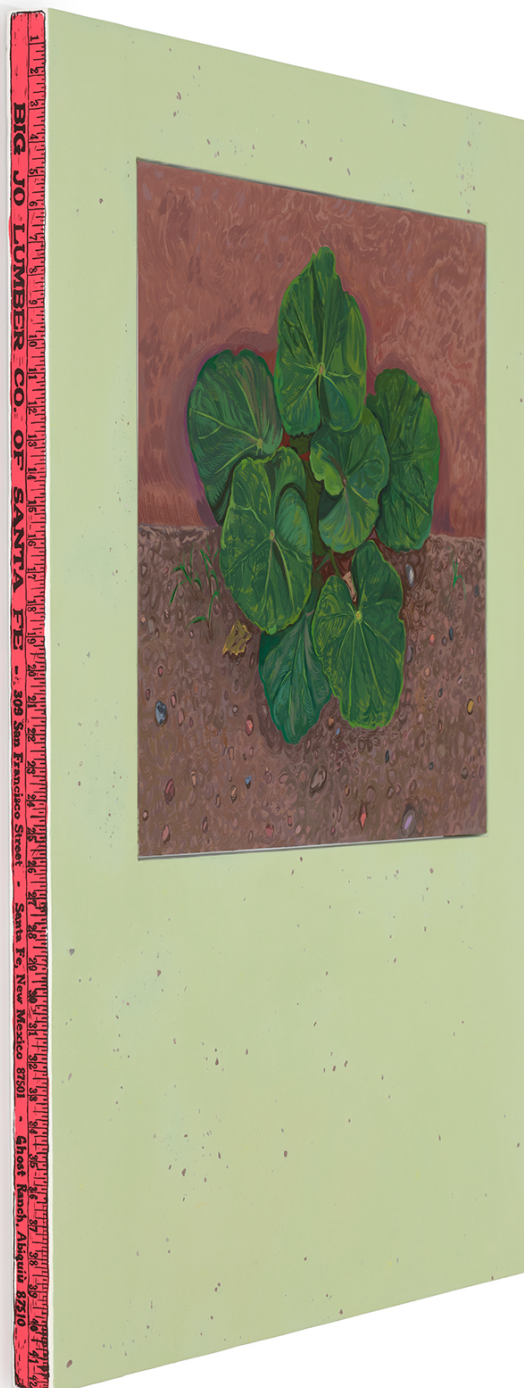
Ku'uinge Pueblo Pottery Fragments

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2020
Dimensions	32 x 32 inches (81.3 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache and site material on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

O'Keeffe never tired of exploring the area around her Ghost Ranch and Abiquiú homes. Halvorson also made a practice of walking and hiking while in Northern New Mexico. On a return visit, following her residency, she

visited Ku'uinge, an ancestral pueblo site that was occupied from around 1366 to 1500. There she painted this work, a meditation on preservation and erasure.





O'Keeffe's Hollyhock

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2019-20
Dimensions	42 x 32 inches (106.7 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Hollyhocks of various colors grow annually along the garden path behind O'Keeffe's home in Abiquiú. Halvorson made this painting in the garden during the early summer, when the plant was shaded in the morning by the adobe house.

As O'Keeffe remarked: she had planted "all the flowers she painted" when she first moved to the house in 1949, "but many of them did not grow in Abiquiú," so after a while she stopped trying.

Halvorson recalls wondering if this plant might indeed have been descended from one of O'Keeffe's?





BIG JO LUMBER CO. OF SANTA FE - 308 San Francisco Street - Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501 - Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu 87510

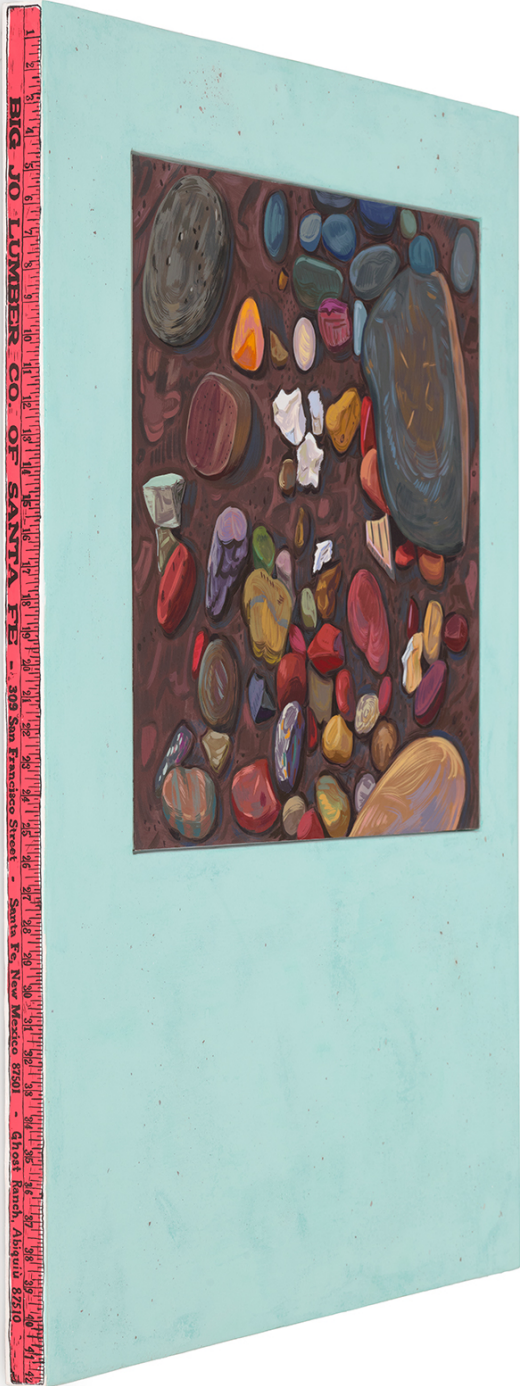
O'Keeffe's Keys

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2019-20
Dimensions	42 x 32 inches (106.7 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

The sets of keys shown in this painting are from O'Keeffe's Ghost Ranch house, where they were kept in a red lacquer box. By having them laid out on the table Halvorson is able to highlight O'Keeffe's hand-written labels. Using fast-drying gouache, Halvorson herself is able to write with paint.

Many of these keys have been matched with locks that still exist among O'Keeffe's things. Others remain a mystery, such as the set in the foreground labeled "Don't know."





O'Keeffe's Rocks

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2019-20
Dimensions	42 x 32 inches (106.7 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

O'Keeffe collected objects she found while walking around her New Mexico homes. Sometimes these items made their way into her paintings, such as the work that hangs nearby, or simply adorned her windowsills and bookshelves.

For Halvorson, these rocks evidence not only O'Keeffe collecting, but the region's geological past. During her residency, Halvorson collected small amounts of earth and pebbles from the area surrounding the Ghost Ranch home, and incorporated these into the paintings' colored surrounds.



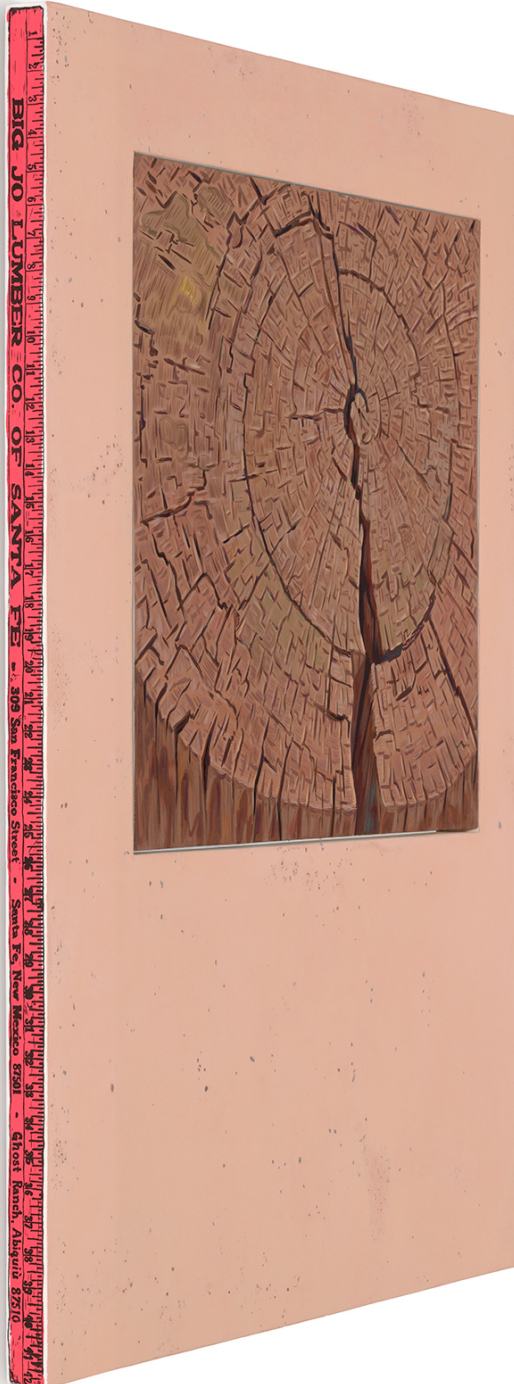
O'Keeffe's Skulls

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2019-20
Dimensions	42 x 32 inches (106.7 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels
Credit	Private collection

The droughts of the 1930s devastated both wild and domestic animals in New Mexico, littering the landscape with their bones. O'Keeffe collected the sun-bleached skulls, antlers, and jawbones of steers and local wildlife on her walks. Many of these bones—often interpreted as

symbols of mortality—appeared in her paintings, eventually becoming synonymous with her aesthetic. Halvorson, who found the bones pictured here in O'Keeffe's collection at Ghost Ranch, considers this painting a reflection on O'Keeffe's legacy.





O'Keeffe's Tree Stump

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2019-20
Dimensions	42 x 32 inches (106.7 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels
Credit	Private Collection

O'Keeffe's home at Ghost Ranch has several red fir stumps under the portal, used by her and her guests to sit in the shade overlooking the Pedernal mountain in the distance.

More than just a means of telling its age, of tracking the passage of time, the rings of the tree in this case recall a favorite motif of O'Keeffe's: the spiral featured, for instance, in O'Keeffe's painting *A Piece of Wood*.



Georgia O'Keeffe. *A Piece of Wood I*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Gift of The Burnett Foundation. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum View on Collections Online.





O'Keeffe's Dishes

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2019-20
Dimensions	42 x 32 inches (106.7 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache, site material, and screen print on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

The dishes in this painting are from O'Keeffe's summer home at Ghost Ranch and were in daily use when she stayed there. The breakfast nook next to this kitchen cabinet was one of O'Keeffe's favorite sitting areas, where she took many meals at the Ranch.

Halvorson is known for her paintings of ordinary, everyday objects. Domestic still life subjects such as this set of dishes have a candid character, as if captured in an instant.



Sticks

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2020
Dimensions	24 x 20 inches (61 x 50.8 cm)
Medium	Gouache and site material on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

I made this painting of sticks just above the Rio Chama. It took several days to paint, and each night I would go to bed and hear the strong winds, convinced that the sticks were going to be gone by morning. I was struck by how dry and silvery they looked, like a pile of animal bones left to

bleach in the sun. My father had just died from COVID the month before and I think of this painting as a memorial to him and so many lost to the pandemic.

—Josephine Halvorson, August 2021



National Forest Sign with Bullet Holes

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2020
Dimensions	24 x 20 inches (61 x 50.8 cm)
Medium	Gouache and site material on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

The Santa Fe National Forest was created in 1915, and flanks Abiquiú to the east and west. During her residency Halvorson spent time hiking in the National Forest, where

she encountered this sign, which had been used often for target practice. She captures every detail of the sign's surface, restoring care to its presence.

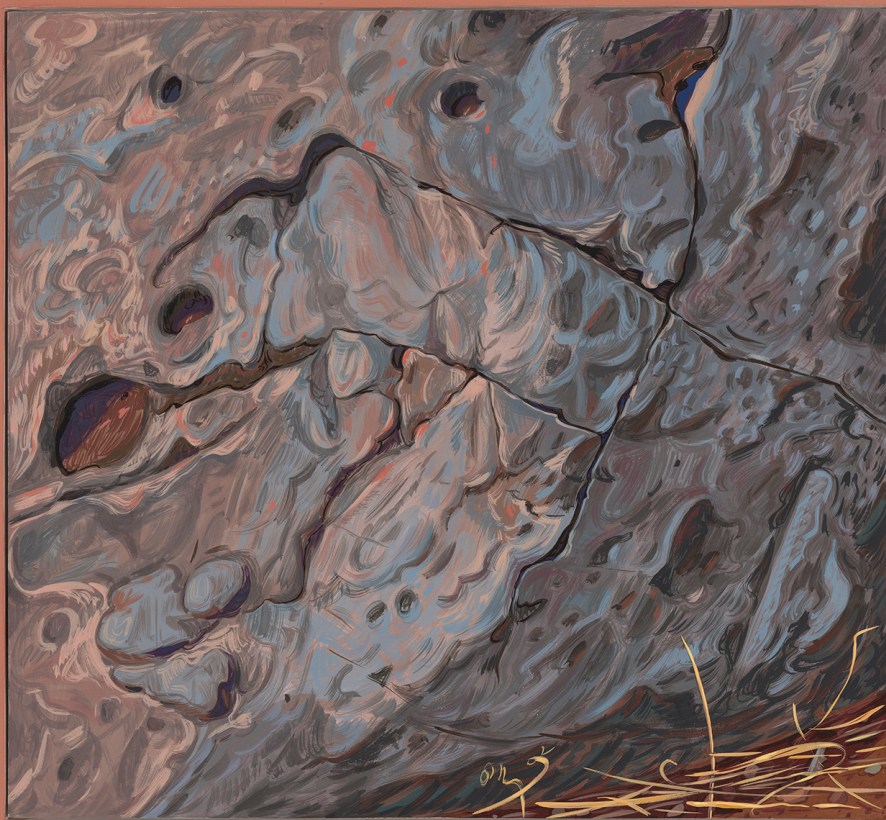


Sacred Site Sign

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2020
Dimensions	32 x 32 inches (81.3 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache and site material on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Santa Rosa de Lima, near the present-day town of Abiquiú, was settled by the Spanish in the eighteenth century, and abandoned in the 1930s—around the time when O’Keeffe first settled in New Mexico, and began painting the crosses

she encountered in the landscape. Today, the ghost town of Santa Rosa de Lima includes the substantial ruins of an adobe church, which the illusionistically painted sign in this work designates.



Boulder

Artist	Josephine Halvorson
Year	2020
Dimensions	32 x 32 inches (81.3 x 81.3 cm)
Medium	Gouache and site material on panels
Credit	Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

I spotted this boulder along a dirt road leading to the monastery of Christ in the Desert, near the Chama River. It stood alone, dark and solitary against the red earth, and initially appeared to be a carved epitaph. Looking closer, I saw its cracks were geological. Its natural crevices presented themselves like a roadmap of the terrain—a connection to a much deeper past.

—Josephine Halvorson, August 2021



Georgia O'Keeffe. *Black Rock with White Background*, 1963-1971. Oil on canvas, 20 3/16 x 16 1/4 inches. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation. [View on Collections Online](#).

About this Publication

This catalogue accompanies an exhibition at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum featuring the artist Josephine Halvorson presented October 1, 2021 - March 28, 2022. It is available in English and Spanish online and in multiple formats for download including PDF and EPUB.

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The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum recognizes the lands of the Pueblo people, on which the sites of the Museum and the historic properties stand as well as where the paintings in this exhibition were created. We recognize and honor Pueblo elders, past and present, and celebrate the vitality of their people today and into future generations. The Museum offers this with humility and gratitude, in acknowledgment of the need to confront the ongoing injustices of settler colonialism.

Josephine Halvorson Biography

Josephine Halvorson makes art that foregrounds firsthand experience and takes the form of painting, sculpture, and printmaking.



Josephine Halvorson standing outside of the garage at O'Keeffe's Ghost Ranch home. Photograph by Peter Buckley.

Born in Brewster, Massachusetts, she studied at The Cooper Union, Yale Norfolk, and Columbia University. In 2021, she was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. Halvorson is the recipient of major international residencies and fellowships: The US Fulbright to Vienna, Austria, the Harriet Hale Woolley at the Fondation des États-Unis in Paris, France, and was the first American pensionnaire at the French Academy in Rome at the Villa Medici. Her work has been exhibited internationally, selected exhibitions include SECCA, Storm King Art Center, the ICA Boston Foster Prize Exhibition, and the Havana Biennial in 2019. She is Professor of Art at Boston University.

[Download Josephine Halvorson's CV](#)