Understandably, men have resisted submitting their most basic relationships with women—as mother, wife, saint, whore—to any critical analysis that threatens to undercut their power. Since they have used their power, not just to defend themselves, but to change things—invent and destroy tools; establish and transcend nations; build industry, then break out of industry’s iron cage; imagine gods, then escape them—this disinclination has posed the most formidable challenge to feminism. In their wish to escape the roles prescribed by men for women, women have had to ask whether they want the same powers men have had. If so, equality, as an ideal, has not sufficed. Equality can be shared by the powerless.


In the past a few women... attempted to express themselves in painting... but somehow all the attempts I had seen, until O’Keeffe, were weak because the elemental force and vision back of them were never overpowering enough to throw off the Male Shackles. Woman was afraid! She had her secret. Man’s Sphinx!! In O’Keeffe’s work we have the Woman unafraid.

Albert Stieglitz (1919) in Dorothy Norman (1960), *Alfred Stieglitz, American Seer*

Social changes, aesthetic transformations, and psychological upheavals, particularly those involving gender identity, rarely coalesce so dramatically as they did in the first 25 years of this century. Western culture experienced the rise of mass consumer democracies, the inclusion of women as voting citizens, an aesthetic revolution called Modernism, and the development of psychoanalysis, importantly based on libidinal desire and re-
pression, bisexuality, and psychosexual stages leading to gender identity. Furthermore, during this time serious debates about women's identity, creativity, sexuality, and political power were formulated that shaped scientific and intellectual discourses for most of the rest of the century. These issues resonate in today's debates, even though the framework for them is often described as "postmodern" (or after-the-"modern"). Through an understanding of their origins in the past, we may gain a different perspective on the present.

I want to connect two stories illuminating the important confluence of these changes. One is that of American Modernist artist Georgia O'Keeffe and her first expressions of "self" on paper, expressions that were revolutionary in the sense that she could be both female and at the cutting edge of her field. The other is the early work of Melanie Klein and her discovery of mental processes arising in the first few years of life, particularly splitting and projective identification, and the primary importance of the mother as well as the father in the origins of the capacity to stand frustration and to think. Her new understanding of these internal object relations provided an alternative route for gender identity. My hypothesis is that Klein put into scientific language truths for psychoanalysis and Western culture that O'Keeffe had represented in visual language for American society.

In O'Keeffe's story, her romantic relationships are integral to her development as an artist. She refused to be disregarded as a serious artist in her relationships with men, and she refused to permit her sexuality or her generativity to be separated from her work. Her earliest efforts, which we will consider in this paper, reflected her thinking about her female identity and creativity, particularly through representations of openings, their possibilities, and the dangers to them. She embarked on her own personal journey seeking what she, a woman and an artist, wanted and needed, listening to her mind and body, her passions and depressions, maintaining an abiding link between "self," "art," and a woman's "life's work." She began our visual thinking about the "hole" in terms of its presence rather than solely in its absence, or in psychoanalytic parlance in its representation of a gap, a wound, or a lack.

Klein began the psychological understanding of why the woman has been alternately idealized and dreaded or vilified, but, finally and most importantly, refused her individuality for generalized categories. She proposed that internal object relations and states of mind evolved primarily from splitting, projective identification, and then (re)introjection, under various experiences of anxiety. This anxiety was intimately connected to the earliest object relations. When she very carefully proposed that anxiety might have an early genesis in relationship to the mother, even before Freud revised his theory of anxiety, she began the twentieth-century under-