

# Sotheby's

## Books & Manuscripts

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Abiquiu, N.M.  
7/20/68

Dear Marilyn:

I have your letter. It will take me  
a little time to get check to you  
but it will get there.

Do not hurry to read my your  
creation. Give it no thought at this  
moment -

Will write more later

Hastily Sincerely  
Georgia O'Keeffe

I want you to be working - free in your mind.

### LOT 64

#### PROPERTY OF MYM TUMA O'KEEFFE, GEORGIA

Important group of letters, cards and a telegram to the young artist, Marilyn Thuma (now known as Mym Tuma), Abiquiu, New Mexico, 14 May 1964 to 9 May 1973, including: twelve autograph letters signed, two autograph cards and a telegram; all letters and cards with autograph envelopes; all in good condition. Accompanied by: Marilyn Thuma. Twenty-nine autograph copies of her letters to Georgia O'Keeffe, Jacotepec, Jalisco, Mexico, 15

July 1968 to 19 June 1973, all in good condition.

**ESTIMATE 20,000-30,000 USD**

## CATALOGUE NOTE

O'Keeffe as mentor. In 1963, Marilyn Thuma was a freshly graduated scholarship student with an M.A. from the painting program at Stanford University. She fully believed her artistic strengths were waiting for the opportunity to be explored and developed. When she saw the images of O'Keeffe's home in Abiquiu, New Mexico, and her art, in the April 1963 issue of House Beautiful, she was duly inspired. Thuma felt she found someone who shared her excitement of nature, someone with whom she shared common ground, philosophically and artistically. With naive confidence she wrote O'Keeffe a short note asking if she could visit. O'Keeffe responded with a large card with an image of Starlight Night (with the autograph envelope postmarked 14 May 1964), simply stating, 'Yes—GOK. Thanks for your page—!'

Thus began a string of visits to O'Keeffe by the young artist extending through the summer of 1971. With over fifty years separating them, O'Keeffe assumed the role of mentor and Thuma the eager student looking for a kindred spirit who could provide guidance and direction. From early on in the correspondence, O'Keeffe provides encouragement and support. In her letter to Thuma of 3 July 1968, she is explicit in her level of support: "I am glad you came and were here a few days. Do not sell your car or part with your dog. I will send you the two thousand that you need to get your next three paintings done . . . . It may take ten days or two weeks. If I send it may I consider your black creation mine?" The black creation O'Keeffe mentions is an early fiberglass form by Thuma called Obsidian. Thuma delivered it to O'Keeffe and it became a part of her art collection at her home in New Mexico. The issue of money comes up frequently in the correspondence and O'Keeffe understood how needy the young artist was at this stage of her life. The elder artist believed if the younger artist was freed of financial distractions, Thuma could focus on her artistic output and assemble enough to have an exhibition and sell her works. In her letter of 20 July 1968, O'Keeffe simply states: "I want you to be working—free in your mind." O'Keeffe advanced her another \$2,000 in the late autumn for a work she considered would be a sale item eventually. Not too long after this advance, Thuma did sell a major work to the Hirshhorn Collection with the help of O'Keeffe's business agent, Doris Bry, and promptly sent O'Keeffe a check for \$1,000.

More exchanges of money are documented in the correspondence. Despite O'Keeffe's generosity, she became prickly over non-art-related expenditures. When Thuma fell ill at O'Keeffe's residence, she badgers Thuma to pay the doctor's bill of \$18.31. When Thuma wrote she had no money, O'Keeffe curtly replies in a one-line letter: "I think you had better pay the bill when you have some money."

Despite O'Keeffe's strong support, the frailties of old age began to have its effects on O'Keeffe and her relationship with Thuma. Letters become shorter and more terse after a bout with shingles and then the onset of vision problems. The friendship ends abruptly, but the spontaneous and deliberate attempts of a sustaining mentor to help a young artist remain and are beautifully recorded in this correspondence.

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