

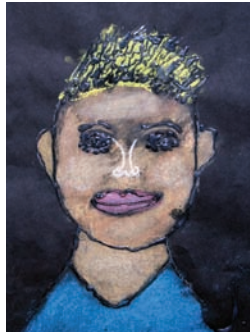
Self Portrait 1996

Joshua Patrick Joseph Slattery

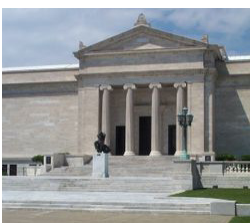


When I was in middle school in Cleveland, the teachers were experimenting with a new test in art history. Many teachers at the time were demanding that art be added to the list of proficiency tests required in Ohio. Proponents of the art proficiency exam claimed that they wanted to elevate their subject matter to the level of math, reading, and science. There was a concerted

effort to get us ready for the art test. My art teacher serviced our grade level for the entire middle school with an “art on the cart” program. For one semester the students would rotate schedules to view a series of slides and films and take notes on the life of an artist or sculptor, the date of birth of the artist, titles of specific works of art, and historical periods. We also spent one day a week painting. Pictured here is my self-portrait completed in that class. One day my art teacher showed us a film about Georgia O’Keeffe. The painting *Cliffs Beyond Abiquiu: Dry Waterfall* appeared for a brief clip during the film, and I said “pause!” as I raised my hand to mention that I saw that painting in the Cleveland Museum of Art. The teacher corrected me and insisted that there were only paintings of *Calla Lilies* and *Morning Glories* by O’Keeffe in the museum. I told her that it was upstairs on the 3rd floor. The Teacher responded that there is no 3rd floor at the Cleveland Art Museum. She did not realize that a 6th grader could be allowed access to the director’s



Self Portrait, 1996



office on a private office floor. My teacher thought I was being a smart alec! I was very familiar with Georgia O’Keeffe and her paintings because my dad arranged a visit to the director’s office on the private floor with my sisters and my grandparents. It was an emotional visit, especially when my grandmother shared that when she dies she wants her ashes scattered in the desert of Abiquiu along the Chama River that runs through Ghost Ranch near O’Keeffe’s home. It is here that my grandmother painted in the desert when she visited with my dad in Abiquiu when he was living at the Christ in the Desert Monastery in the early 1970’s. We had

several of Grandma Pattie’s oil canvases hanging in our home along with reproductions of the *Cliffs Beyond Abiquiu* by O’Keeffe. I was immersed in the artwork of Georgia O’Keeffe from a young age. While visiting the museum, my grandmother shared with the family this poem that she had written by creating the persona of Georgia O’Keeffe:

several of Grandma Pattie’s oil canvases hanging in our home along with reproductions of the *Cliffs Beyond Abiquiu* by O’Keeffe. I was immersed in the artwork of Georgia O’Keeffe from a young age. While visiting the museum, my grandmother shared with the family this poem that she had written by creating the persona of Georgia O’Keeffe:

Georgia O’Keeffe at Ghost Ranch

*Far from Manhattan skies
scraped with girders,
pristine calla lilies and crimson
poppies cultivated on canvas,
I have found my place
with craggy cathedrals
beyond human influence.
Before these mountains were, I am
and I shall leave with them.
Our painting time together
disappears, then stays
frozen into ice I lay upon
waiting for the morning light to reveal
what came before, and is now
compelling me, create what is to be.
Even the death of bones
demands delivery of their pregnant past,
as the moon rises above the pelvis void
alive with cerulean blues
precisely planned,
as though my hand
defines reincarnation.
Now I stand like a moth
pinned by walking stick
to this sacred ground
in which I am eternally encased.
If you dare look with painter’s eyes
you will see my wrinkles
forming the ash grey hills of Abiquiu,
ascending through pinks and ochers
of mountain strata.
I am bones building nature’s skyscrapers.*

by Pattie C.S. Burke

I actually knew more about Georgia O’Keeffe than my teacher realized when I was a middle school student in Cleveland!