



FILMING O'KEEFFE

BY ERIC LANE



DRAMATISTS
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*To Mark Fleischer, Martha Banta
and the Adirondack Theatre Festival
for bringing this play to life*

AUTHOR'S THANKS

So many people contributed to the creation of this play. Deep thanks to Mark Fleischer, Producing Artistic Director of the Adirondack Theatre Festival, which commissioned, workshopped and premiered *Filming O'Keefe*. It was a joy to work with Martha Banta, my long-time collaborator and friend, who beautifully directed this piece. This play would not exist without their support.

Much of the play was written at the artist's colony Yaddo; I am incredibly grateful to Elaina Richardson, Candace Wait, and the staff for their constant generosity. Also the following theaters where *Filming O'Keefe* received developmental readings: Ensemble Studio Theatre (Billy Carden, Artistic Director), New York Theatre Workshop (Jim Nicola, Artistic Director) and W.H.A.T. (Dan Lombardo, Artistic Director).

Many thanks to our terrific premiere cast and Stephanie Klapper, who brought them all together. Our wonderful design team. And the many actors who generously performed the play's readings and workshop: Michele Pawk, Molly Carden, Brendan Cataldo, Johanna Day, Lily Flores, Eli Gelb, Megan Hill, Bob Jaffe, Andrew MacLarty, Jordan McArthur, McNeely Myers, Robin Russell, Guy Strauss and Alex Wyse.

Deep gratitude to Dramatists Play Service and its amazing staff. Susan Cohen at the Gersh Agency for her continued faith. The Hyde Collection. Capital Rep. Sculptor Victoria Palermo, who drove me around Lake George and shared her knowledge of the area. My many friends who always show up, offering an ear, encouragement and support. And my husband, Bob Barnett, who brings me more joy than I can say.

FILMING O'KEEFFE premiered at the Adirondack Theatre Festival (Mark Fleischer, Producing Artistic Director; Landrie Bock, General Manager), July 12th, 2013. It was directed by Martha Banta; the set design was by Bob Barnett; the lighting design was by Matthew Frey; the associate lighting designer was Natalie Robin; the costume design was by Isabel Rubio; the sound design and original music was by Scott O'Brien; the stage manager was John Michael Crotty; the assistant stage manager was Bryan Russell; and the casting was by Stephanie Klapper Casting. The cast was as follows:

MAX.....Noah Galvin
MELISSA.....Anne-Marie Cusson
LILY.....Jessica Brown
MARTIN..... Martin LaPlatney

FILMING O'KEEFFE was commissioned by the A.T.F. Founders' Fund for New Work.

CHARACTERS

MAX, 17 years old, a junior in high school. Bright, creative, sensitive, yearning. Trying to make sense of his body, his thoughts, feelings, the past and the world around him. At that awkward stage where he is no longer a boy, but not yet a man.

MELISSA, 40s to 50s. Attractive, down-to-earth, articulate, used to getting things done herself. Loves her son Max and can be fiercely protective.

LILY, 17 years old, her own unique style — rebellious for her age and Lake George. She is smart, somewhat angry, with a genuine warmth and vulnerability underneath.

MARTIN, 60s to 70s. An aging businessman who had to fight for all he has gotten and can be relentless. Friendly, but beneath is a sense of loneliness and someone who has been through a lot.

TIME

The present. June.

SETTING

Outside a house on the hill facing Lake George, in an area that was once part of the Stieglitz family property. The current house was part of a 1960s development. The yard is green and a bit overgrown. A few flowers which O’Keeffe painted on Lake George — poppies, larkspur and jack-in-the-pulpit.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is performed without an intermission. Scene titles (e.g. “Getting Started,” “True or False?”) are not intended to be projected or used in production.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

There is a wealth of material (books, letters, artwork, films, exhibits, websites) about O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, and Lake George. I've listed a few resources on information specifically referenced in the play.

Scene 1: The caricature Melissa imitates is by Marius de Zayas: "Alfred Stieglitz," 1910. This is the full-length caricature, drawn from the side and back, with Stieglitz's hands in his pockets and his hair wild.

Scene 3: For Lily's pose like a photo, see Alfred Stieglitz's portrait, "Georgia O'Keeffe," 1920. She is in profile, holding up her arms.

Scenes 4 & 11: The wonderful *American Masters* documentary *The Eloquent Eye* includes footage of O'Keeffe and Stieglitz on the sidewalk mentioned by Max. Also included are the clips of them at Lake George that Max refers to at the end of the play.

Scene 4: The works that O'Keeffe kept for herself can be found in the book *O'Keeffe's O'Keeffes: The Artist's Collection* by Barbara Buhler Lynes.

Scene 6: For the painting that Max refers to at the end of the scene, see O'Keeffe's "Series I — No 10," 1919, and "Series I — No 10A," 1919. The Hyde Collection's excellent exhibit *Modern Nature: Georgia O'Keeffe and Lake George* (curated by Erin B. Coe and Barbara Buhler Lynes) included the paintings. They can be found in the book of the same title, along with many of her paintings and his photos from Lake George.

Scene 10: #6, "Minne-Ha-Ha." "Minne" is pronounced as in "Minnie Mouse."

A few more books of the artists' works that I found particularly helpful include:

Alfred Stieglitz: Camera Work, The Complete Photographs (Taschen)

Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs & Writings (National Gallery of Art)

Georgia O'Keeffe by Georgia O'Keeffe (Penguin Books)

Georgia O'Keeffe: Art & Letters by Jack Cowart, Juan Hamilton
(New York Graphic Society)

My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz: Volume One, 1915 – 1933 (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library)

Plus exhibits and websites by the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

*“I have used these things to say what is to me
the wideness and wonder of the world as I live in it.”*

— Georgia O’Keeffe

FILMING O'KEEFFE

Scene 1

“Getting Started”

Lake George, the present. June. Afternoon.

Outside Max and his mom Melissa's house. It is on a hill facing Lake George, in an area that was once a part of the Stieglitz family estate. The current house was part of a 1960s development. The yard is green and a bit overgrown. A few flowers which O'Keeffe painted on Lake George — poppies, larkspur and jack-in-the-pulpit.

Max enters carrying his tripod and digital camera that shoots both video and still photos. He sets up the camera and space for a video he is shooting.

MAX. Ma, come on.

MELISSA. *(Offstage.)* Max, I don't know.

MAX. I'm telling you. You look perfect.

MELISSA. *(Offstage.)* But the hair.

MAX. Just trust me. *(Melissa enters in a homemade Alfred Stieglitz costume. She wears a red vest and homemade version of his black loden cape. She wears a wig with silver hair standing on end. Eyebrows and tufts of hair out her ears, plus a big mustache. She holds her script.)*

MELISSA. You don't think the eyebrows are too much?

MAX. Ma, you're wearing a mustache and dressed like Alfred Stieglitz. No, I don't think anyone's going to be noticing your eyebrows. Can we get started?

MELISSA. What about Lily?

MAX. She's on her way.

MELISSA. Isn't this supposed to be her project, too?

MAX. She's in it. She'll be here.

MELISSA. I just thought you might want to wait for her.

MAX. Ma — Let's just start. Just stand over here, say your lines and I'll walk you through.

MELISSA. Why is she always late?

MAX. Because she is. You ready?

MELISSA. Hold on. *(She adjusts her costume, then nods. Max takes on the role of "director" and gets into position.)*

MAX. Digital Media. 11th Grade. Final Project. Scene 1. Take 1. Action. *(He claps his hands once, loudly with focus and enthusiasm.)*

MELISSA. Are you filming this?

MAX. It's a rehearsal. Say the words, okay. *(Melissa gets ready. Then:)* Action. *(Max claps his hands again, once, loudly with focus and enthusiasm.)*

MELISSA. My name is Alfred Hitchcock. I mean, Stieglitz.

MAX. Ma —

MELISSA. What? It was a mistake.

MAX. Very funny.

MELISSA. It's just the way you start —

MAX. Look, I only have 3 days —

MELISSA. It just sounds like —

MAX. ... To film it, edit and add the credits.

MELISSA. Well, whose fault is that?

MAX. What? I've been working on it. I had to write it first.

MELISSA. If someone didn't always leave everything 'til the last minute ...

MAX. Ma, this isn't helpful, okay.

MELISSA. I'm just saying —

MAX. I know what you're saying, okay.

MELISSA. Don't use that tone with me.

MAX. What tone? All I said was —

MELISSA. I'm still your mother.

MAX. Your mustache is falling off. *(She presses her mustache back on. He straightens it. They laugh a little. She looks at him fondly.)*

MAX. What?

MELISSA. What about Lily? This is her assignment, too.

MAX. She'll be here. Can we just start?

MELISSA. Okay.

MAX. You ready? (*Melissa adjusts her costume.*) You're going to walk forward a few steps, then talk to the camera. Just pretend like you're talking to me. (*Melissa nods.*) And try standing like that caricature of him. (*Melissa imitates Marius de Zayas' caricature of Stieglitz. She bends at the knees, puts hands in pockets, slouches, and juts her neck forward.*)

MELISSA. (*Off Max's look.*) What?

MAX. Maybe not so much. (*She adjusts. Straightens a bit.*) Better.

MELISSA. Okay?

MAX. Okay ... Action. (*As before, Max loudly claps his hands once. Melissa walks forward a few steps, then addresses the camera. Melissa alternates between her "Alfred Stieglitz voice" when doing the film, and her own voice when not.*)

MELISSA. "My name is Alfred Stieglitz. I was born in Hoboken. I am an American. Photography is my passion. The search for Truth my obsession."

MAX. Now walk forward.

MELISSA. Okay. Okay. (*Walks forward.*) "My family lived in New York City and we spent our summers on our beloved Lake George."

MAX. Now point.

MELISSA. (*Points.*) "Over there is Oaklawn. Now it's condominiums, but there is Oaklawn. We enjoyed the large Victorian house from 1886 until 1919, when my dear mother who was dying insisted we sell it to save money. We moved up the Hill."

MAX. Walk.

MELISSA. Forward?

MAX. Yes.

MELISSA. (*Walks.*) "... To this land that was once a pig farm. Family and friends would come visit every summer including world-renowned writers and artists such as my wife, Georgia O'Keeffe.

O'Keeffe had a very complicated relationship with the lake. She painted endless of her most famous — " (*As herself, to Max.*) Endless?

MAX. Many.

MELISSA. "*Many* of her most famous works here but didn't like all the guests, especially when they would all eat corn-on-the-cob at the same time." (*As herself.*) Really?

MAX. Keep going.

MELISSA. "She preferred the lake in the fall after all the guests had gone. Eventually she'd find her true inspiration in the desert of her beloved Southwest."

MAX. Now, take a few steps and point.

MELISSA. (*Gestures.*) “Today, the land that was once our home is divided into an inn, a restaurant, and several houses. In fact, behind me is the home of one of your classmates — ” (*Looks off and sees Lily.*) Oh, look, here comes O’Keeffe now. (*Lily runs on, late from school. She is out of breath and somewhat harried. Lily has her own unique style of dress — rebellious for her age and Lake George.*)

LILY. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

MAX. You’re late.

LILY. I know. I said I’m sorry twice. You want me to say it again.

MELISSA. Why are you late Georgia O’Keeffe?

LILY. ’Cause in the middle of French class, Madame Livingston farted then made us all stay after.

MELISSA. Oh, *c’est terrible*.

LILY. *Oui*. Nice mustache.

MELISSA. *Merci*, Miss O’Keeffe.

LILY. (*Lily snaps a quick photo of Melissa with her phone.*) Whatever.

MAX. Did you memorize your lines? (*Max sorts through clothes from Lily’s bag to help her get into costume.*)

LILY. Yes, I memorized my lines.

MAX. All of them?

LILY. No, every other word. So why are we even doing this?

MAX. ’Cause it’s our assignment.

LILY. The assignment’s artists we admire.

MAX. Yeah ...

LILY. Well, I read the website.

MAX. Finally.

LILY. This afternoon. And well, he’s kind of an asshole.

MELISSA. Excuse me?

LILY. Stieglitz. Don’t you think?

MELISSA. That’s an interesting critical assessment.

LILY. Why?

MELISSA. Because if nothing else, he was one of the foremost figures of 20th century American art.

LILY. And...?

MELISSA. Don’t you think that’s a little — I don’t know — dismissive?

LILY. No.

MAX. Maybe we should get started on the movie ...

LILY. Look, I'm reading the website and I see he was like this big-deal photographer who introduced all these amazing artists to America.

MAX. ... 'Cause the light's kinda changing ...

LILY. So it says he married O'Keeffe and showed her stuff at his gallery and was this like huge influence on her career. I know Max has done all this research and has to say something profoundly interesting if he wants to get the highest grade in class like always —

MAX. Not always.

LILY. Always. But I'm reading and it's obvious, he still sucks.

MELISSA. Stieglitz?

LILY. (*Nods.*) Okay. So he cheats on his first wife with O'Keeffe, who's like half his age. Okay, that's bad enough. So it says he divorces his first wife, marries O'Keeffe, then cheats on her, too. Like that makes sense. And like his daughter ...

MELISSA. What about her?

LILY. I mean, just because he's some big photographer doesn't mean his sneaking around doesn't affect her like personally. I mean what're she supposed to say? "My dad's messing around with some other woman but his photo of her naked hangs in the Met. I guess it's okay."

MELISSA. I'm sure it was very difficult.

LILY. For who?

MELISSA. His daughter. I'm sure that must've been very hard.

LILY. What difference does it make, they're all dead anyway. Are we gonna get started on this or what? (*Off Max's look.*) What?

MAX. Fine.

LILY. I mean, it's your movie.

MAX. That's what I thought.

LILY. So ...

MAX. Right. Okay, so, starting again ... Stieglitz was a complicated personality. He was a great champion of American art. He had a burning passion for personal expression and seeking the truth.

LILY. He screwed other women and lied to his daughter.

MELISSA. And he loved playing miniature golf.

LILY. No way.

MELISSA. He would walk into town with O'Keeffe and their friends, and he'd play at the Tom Thumb Golf.

LILY. My mom loved that place.

MELISSA. Of all the things he ever did, it kinda makes me like him the most. The middle of summer in his long black cape, red

FILMING O'KEEFFE

by Eric Lane

2M, 2W

Set in the present, Max and his classmate Lily are making a film for their high school project. It is about legendary artists Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz. Max and his mother, Melissa, now live on the Lake George property that was once part of the artists' home. When Max's estranged grandfather unexpectedly shows up, the four characters clash as the teenager uncovers his family's hidden past.

"[A] small, perfect jewel ... Running at barely over an hour and 20 minutes, every minute has to count, and it absolutely does. The big ideas that playwright Eric Lane packs into such a seemingly small show are beautiful and thought-provoking."

—**The Daily Gazette (Schenectady, NY)**

"FILMING O'KEEFFE feels fresh and satisfying; it's truly about something, and it has something to say ... Though the play contains a lot of biographical material about [Georgia] O'Keeffe, FILMING O'KEEFFE isn't really about her. [It is] about legacy, remembrance and passing art on into the future."

—**The Albany Times Union**

"One of the great takeaways from this play is how deeply original the characters are, what sticking power each has, how complete the portrayals."

—**The Chronicle (Glens Falls, NY)**

"FILMING O'KEEFFE is a bounty, full of inspection of both Lake George and the artists [Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz] as inspiration for art past, present, and future, historically and theatrically."

—**Metroland (Albany, NY)**

Also by Eric Lane

RIDE

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