O’Keeffe, Georgia, *In Her Own Words: Kaye Donachie*, Tate etc, Issue 37 Summer 2016, p 76.

Georgia O’Keeffe was a prolific letter writer. A single letter written to the poet Edna St Vincent Millay in 1934 documents their only known encounter. Poetically, O’Keeffe describes her impressions of their meeting in the form of a vision: unable to grasp the physical presence of her visitor, she describes Edna as a fleeting ‘hummingbird’ caught within the bleached white landscape of the studio.

I found this literary visualisation compelling and used her narrative as an emotive tone when making paintings for my solo show, *Dearest*, held last year at the Fireplace Project in the Hamptons, New York. The same summer, as I stood in front of O’Keeffe’s *Summer Days 1936* at the Whitney Museum, echoes of this correspondence created a script that allowed me to look at the painting differently.

It is a strange painting, and a painting of strangeness. Bones and blossoms float above rolling arid red hills. These forms are all painted with the same pitch and intensity. The painted space is constructed in layers forming a schism between the real and the imagined. This space is illuminated through colour and light — through a ‘touch’ that creates a haptic sense. We see a prelude for this in Alfred Stieglitz’s photograph *Georgia O’Keeffe – Hands and Horse Skull 1931*, which evidences that images can be a mode of seeing — groped, probed and caressed into becoming — seizing hold of life.

O’Keeffe’s *Summer Days* in its vividness attests to this haptic sense of the eye, a sense that grips the action of the hand, a sense that simultaneously grasps creation and destruction, between flesh and sense. *Summer Days* reminds us that painting is an etherial stage on which images have the potential to appear and dissolve. Here, the studio is a desert and the desert a studio. Visions in the bleached sunlit sky merge with the white luminous clouds of an endless studio — a mirage of emergent images. Hovering like a hummingbird, it is an elliptical and poetic painting.

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