

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****The Museum of Modern Art**

For Immediate Release  
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**MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF WORK BY ALBERTO GIACOMETTI  
CELEBRATES HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AS PAINTER, SCULPTOR, AND  
DRAFTSMAN  
AND MARKS CENTENNIAL OF HIS BIRTH**

**First New York City Museum Exhibition in Nearly 30 Years**

**Includes Many Works Never Before Seen in the United States**

*Alberto Giacometti*

**October 11, 2001–January 8, 2002**

*Alberto Giacometti*

is the first retrospective devoted to the work of the internationally renowned Swiss sculptor, painter, and draftsman to be held in a New York museum in almost three decades. The exhibition aims to show Giacometti's artistic achievement in its true richness and diversity, surveying his entire career in its full developmental range from 1919 through 1965. Key examples from each of Giacometti's major periods, including his Surrealist phase, emphasize his importance as a sculptor while revealing his great gifts as a draftsman and painter. In addition to the artist's well-known exaggeratedly elongated sculptures of the human figure, the exhibition includes paintings, drawings, and, exceptionally, many unique plaster, wood, and terra-cotta works that have never or rarely been seen on this continent. The exhibition also celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the artist's birth in October 1901; it will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from October 11, 2001, through January 8, 2002.

The exhibition is presented in collaboration with the Kunsthaus Zürich, and with the active cooperation of the Alberto Giacometti Foundation. It is organized by Carolyn Lanchner, former Curator, and Anne Umland, Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art; and by Christian Klemm, Deputy Director, Kunsthaus Zürich, and Curator, Alberto Giacometti Foundation, and Tobia Bezzola, Curator, Kunsthaus Zürich.

The Museum of Modern Art will be the sole U.S. venue for *Alberto Giacometti*, which was previously on view at the Kunsthaus Zürich, from May

18 to September 9, 2001. The Museum has a long-standing commitment to the art of Giacometti. In 1936, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., at that time the Museum's Director, purchased Giacometti's Surrealist masterpiece *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (1932), making MoMA the first museum to acquire a work by the artist. The work was included in the Museum's *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism* exhibition in 1936. In succeeding years, MoMA continued to seek out exemplary works by Giacometti for its collection and supported his work, notably with a major retrospective in 1965.

**Alberto Giacometti** features some 90 sculptures, 40 paintings, and 60 drawings, with special emphasis on works done between 1929 and 1934—sometimes referred to as avant-garde or Surrealist—and those executed from 1947 to 1951, often characterized as representing the "classic" Giacometti. Approximately 80 of the works date from the artist's pre-World War II period, including an early self-portrait painted in a Post-Impressionist style, Cubist-influenced sculptures, bronze and marble portrait heads of the artist's parents, Surrealist sculptures that often incorporate moving parts, and drawings. One hundred ten works from Giacometti's "classic" phase, from World War II up to his death in 1966, include his filament-thin sculptures of men and women, paintings of family members and close associates, still lifes, and landscapes.

Giacometti first made a lasting impression on an American audience in 1948, with a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York that included his attenuated figures. The influential existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre contributed an essay to the accompanying catalogue interpreting Giacometti's work as revealing the anxiety and alienation of twentieth-century life. Though this existentialist view of the artist's work continues to exert a powerful hold, Giacometti himself characterized his work in different terms. He saw himself as a realist, attempting to represent his perception of the appearance of things, acknowledging that comprehension of the world can never be fixed but is constantly subject to change. His preoccupation with what he described as "rendering my vision" led him first to radically reimagine the forms of modern sculpture and subsequently to return to drawing, painting, and sculpting from the model, rendering these most conventional aspects of academic discipline powerful in important new ways.

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Organized chronologically, the exhibition opens with works created in Stampa, the small village in the southeastern Swiss Alps where the artist was born on October 10, 1901, and continues with sculptures made in Paris between 1925 and 1927. The sculptures, drawings, and paintings he produced in Stampa between 1918 and his departure for Paris in 1922 reflect Giacometti's close contacts with contemporary Swiss modernism as well as his serious study of traditional European art. Dramatic in concept and execution, Giacometti's *Self-Portrait* of 1921 reveals much about the young artist. In this, the largest painting he would make until 1947, Giacometti drew together all that he had learned from his father, Giovanni Giacometti, a Post-Impressionist painter, in an image of himself as master of his trade. The sure brushwork and the flattened patterning of bright, densely packed colors show his easy control of

the Post-Impressionist style. The artist's pose is intensely self-aware; set against the background of the father's studio, the figure's foot and the top of his head strategically escape the borders of the canvas. The picture can be interpreted as a literal and metaphorical declaration of the artist's intent to move beyond the familiar world of his youth. This important work has never before been on view in New York.

In January of 1922, Giacometti enrolled in Émile-Antoine Bourdelle's sculpture class at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. From then on, with the exception of three wartime years, Giacometti would live in Paris until his death in 1966, although he would make frequent and sometimes lengthy visits to Stampa. These two vastly different places were the vital points of Giacometti's life, at the center of his energies and creativity.

Giacometti's most famous and imposing piece of the second half of the 1920s is the single, monumental figure *Spoon Woman* (1926-27), in which he explores the boundaries between abstraction and representation. Though only 57 inches high, the figure seems larger than life and combines both curved and rectilinear forms; its vast concave belly is surmounted by a tiny waist and a sharply geometric bust and head. The first in what would become a procession of standing female figures, *Spoon Woman* anticipates important characteristics of the later, far less massive women of the 1940s and 1950s in its symmetry, hunched shoulders, and slender, if more emphatic, profile.

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Giacometti's so-called plaque sculptures from the late 1920s are among the earliest considered surreal. While virtually abstract, these flat sculptures project a magnetic sense of human presence. For example, in works such as *Gazing Head* (1928) and *Woman* (1928-29), human features are suggested by subtle indentations and raised areas on their otherwise uninflected surfaces. *Gazing Head* immediately attracted the attention of Surrealist artists when it was exhibited in 1929 in Paris. Giacometti suddenly found himself the center of attention in avant-garde Paris—his work was lauded in contemporary publications and he was warmly welcomed by such influential figures as the opposing leaders of Surrealism, André Breton and Georges Bataille.

During the years 1930 to 1934, Giacometti created many more works that show Surrealism's influence, ranging from portable objects and works with moveable components to models for environments around and in which the spectator was intended to move. In works such as *Reclining Woman Who Dreams* (1929), one of Giacometti's most succinct works from this period, the idea of a cage-like construction, or framework, is first suggested. The artist would continue to explore this motif throughout his career. One of the great sculptural masterpieces of this time is *Woman with Her Throat Cut* (1932). A jumble of abstracted body parts displayed horizontally, the work represents a strangled woman with her legs splayed out beneath her. The connection between sexuality and violence, a predominant theme in Surrealist work, is presented here in a formidable sculptural statement.

In line with the kind of spontaneous creativity favored by Surrealism,

Giacometti claimed that *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (1932) appeared in its finished form before his inner eye and was quickly realized, only then revealing to the artist images, impressions, and experiences that profoundly affected him. According to the artist, the sculpture represents a time when he and a woman nightly tried to build a palace out of matchsticks, which collapsed at the slightest movement. Giacometti identifies the spinal column to the right as the woman, the standing figure to the left as his mother as she appeared to him as a child, and the phallic object toward the center as himself. In one of two drawings made of his studio in 1932, *The Palace at 4 a.m.* is depicted in the center of the room in detail and with a clear precision. The drawings themselves amount to an inventory of Giacometti's production to that date.

Giacometti's first large representational image of a whole human figure, *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)*, appeared in 1934. Highly stylized, a nude female figure balances on a sort of throne, which, together with the pillorylike board covering her shins, appears to form a partial cage restraining her from any action other than the holding gesture she makes with her hands. The empty space or "void" that she gently grasps has been interpreted variously, sometimes as the soul of the artist's deceased father, sometimes as a child's toy, and sometimes as the void itself—that metaphysical, frightening, invisible force against which art might act as protection.

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In the summer of 1937 Giacometti produced several paintings that anticipate those he would make from the late 1940s to the end of his life. In a portrait, *The Artist's Mother* (1937), and two still lifes, *Apple on a Sideboard* and *Apple on the Sideboard* (1937), he created a framework of energetic lines and contrasts of light and dark in his own interpretation of Cézannian technique. In each of these works, the beginnings of an internal frame within which the action of the composition takes place are visible, and traces of rapid execution are combined with an obviously sustained effort.

In 1946, Annette Arm, who married Giacometti three years later, moved to Paris and almost immediately became his model. In pencil drawings of 1946 and 1947, it is most likely she who is presented as a slender, central vertical mass on an otherwise unworked page. The expanse of white paper around the figure creates a spatial field whose proportions establish distance between subject and viewer, while the gouged and kneaded contours of the sculptures to come are anticipated in outlines made shadowy by the abrasions of pencil and eraser.

Giacometti's first renderings of attenuated figures such as *Walking Man* (1947) and *Tall Figure* (1948) appeared shortly after these drawings. Though the works are frequently interpreted as existentialist commentaries on the human condition, Giacometti's aim was more closely tied to his inner vision. The space around the figures and the elongation from head to toe tend to establish distance, fostering an appearance of the model as seen across a room. One of several pieces to assemble groups of figures in seemingly sterile encounters, *City Square* (1948) depicts both male and female figures confronting each other on an otherwise empty plane. Often interpreted as expressing the loneliness,

isolation, and even alienation of the human being in contemporary society, it may more strongly reflect the artists's fascination with the scene around him in which, he said, "people form and reform living compositions of unbelievable complexity."

Giacometti's near constant sculptural motif was the human figure. As a painter and draftsman, however, he expanded his subjects to include the landscape and still life. Of his portraits, one of the most naturalistic is *Diego in a Plaid Shirt* (1954), in which the half-length figure confronts the viewer much as he must have faced his brother while sitting for the picture. Giacometti's economy of motif was matched by the very limited number of his sitters—for the most part, they were his family: his brother Diego, his wife Annette, and mother Annetta. Nonetheless, from time to time, he would become deeply involved with portraits of such friends as David Sylvester, James Lord, Isaku Yanai-hara, Jean Genet, and his last mistress, Caroline, a young Parisian prostitute. In 1954, commissioned to design a medallion depicting Henri Matisse, Giacometti made numerous masterful drawings of the great painter in the last months of Matisse's life.

The landscapes Giacometti chose to paint were confined to the locations in Paris and Stampa he knew well. *The Street* of 1952 shows a view he might have experienced leaving his studio on the rue Hippolyte-Maindron in Paris. In the contemporary *Landscape at Stampa* of 1952, his parents's home appears at the right of the picture, and from there the viewer's eye travels to the garden of his grandparents home up in the mountains.

In whatever medium Giacometti worked and throughout his mature career from the 1920s until his death in 1966, he consistently maintained that his goal was "to render my vision," trying to capture the fleeting, ephemeral moments of human perceptual experience.

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## Publication

*Alberto Giacometti*

, edited by Christian Klemm, Carolyn Lanchner, Tobia Bezzola, and Anne Umland, with essays by Ms. Umland, Mr. Bezzola, and Mr. Klemm, accompanies the exhibition. A German-language edition of the publication will be published simultaneously by Nicolai Verlag, Berlin, in collaboration with Kunsthaus Zürich. An in-depth press release is available.

## Educational Programs

A series of public programs accompany *Alberto Giacometti*, including a panel discussion with contemporary artists, a series of scholarly lectures, Brown Bag Lunch Lectures, school and family programs, and programs for visitors with special needs. A separate press release is available.

## Sponsorship

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