

Press Release
Zurich, 15 May 2007

Kunsthaus Zürich shows 'Alberto Giacometti. En Route to the Avant-garde'

From 16 May until 26 August 2007 Kunsthaus Zürich presents an exhibition concentrating on the first major phase of Alberto Giacometti's sculptural oeuvre. Caught between the analytic depth of the figurative sculpture of Rodin and the new interest in Cubism and the art of Black Africa, it was at this point that Giacometti produced the first examples of what was to become his own characteristic style and, in doing so, also arrived at the threshold of his ground-breaking Surrealist work.

With around 30 sculptures, 45 drawings and 18 paintings this exhibition focuses on the less well-known early phase of the Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966), whose later figures and paintings were to make him world famous. The exhibition is presented in the midst of the collection of the Alberto Giacometti Foundation, which provides a comprehensive insight into the artist's oeuvre as a whole.

EARLY DAYS IN HIS FATHER'S STUDIO IN SWISS BREGAGLIA

Giacometti's first steps as an artist were shaped by life and work in the family of the well-known painter Giovanni Giacometti. As a seventeen-year old, the young Alberto was already producing astonishing works in a style that was all his own. However, this level of achievement did not survive the transition to life as a professional artist: what the young Giacometti had previously mastered intuitively now had to be regained through conscious application. From summer 1919 until late 1921 Giacometti searched to find his own way. Unsatisfactory experiences for some months at art schools in Geneva, trips to Italy and a lengthy stay in Rome (which made a lasting impression on him) and crises of confidence were interspersed with the skilful yet restrained encouragement of his father when he painted at home in his native Stampa.

TO PARIS TO STUDY WITH BOURDELLE

It was only when Giacometti moved to Paris and was accepted as a student in the class of Antoine Bourdelle at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in early 1922 that he finally decided to concentrate on sculpture. It can't have been easy to make the move from the family home to one of the leading, international sculpture studios with dozens of students from all over the world. Giacometti still spent many months in Stampa, where he made heads of his mother and siblings. And it was only in 2006 that these works came to light again from the artist's Paris estate. These are the sole surviving sculptures from this period; of

all the other works the artist made in Paris up until 1925, all that remains are the very intense, crystalline life drawings and a self-portrait head.

EN ROUTE TO THE AVANT-GARDE

Dissatisfied with his attempts to capture the living being in likenesses, Giacometti turned to abstract art where the energy of pure forms could be released to greater effect. In so doing he took a step closer to the avant-garde: Brancusi and Archipenko, the Cubism of Lipchitz and Laurens, and the expressive, stylised art of non-European cultures in Black Africa, Indonesia, and the ancient Americas. Thanks to his studies with Bourdelle, Giacometti was now confident enough in his technique to work in parallel in these three different formal languages – figurative, Cubist, and ‘ethnographic’ – and to break new ground as one rubbed off on the other. His analytic approach to his work at the time is perfectly exemplified in the fascinating series of portraits of his father from 1927.

Classical sculptural themes also underpin his Cubist-influenced figurations. For, as he himself noted down, it was also the aim of abstract art to represent life. In his view it was certainly not enough simply to ‘cubify’ individual forms; on the contrary, the work must thrive and be effective on its own terms. In so saying, he was already anticipating the main aim of his mature work: the evocation of the living presence of human beings. Each of these sculptures reflects his efforts to grapple with the fundamental questions of creative forming: thus, in an African figure he discovers the bold opposition of solid and empty forms that ultimately led him to his ‘Femme cuillère’. This is not only the finest sculpture amongst this ‘ethnographic’ works, it is also the first of Giacometti’s great, hieratic, female figures and the outstanding masterwork from this phase.

ON THE THRESHOLD TO SURREALISM

All Giacometti’s struggles and researches during this early period culminated in his ‘Tête qui regarde’ and the similarly disc-like ‘Femmes’. And, in his use of the symbolic language of ‘art premier’ plus the possibilities of abstract stylisation in the design of the heads of his parents, he was to come up with a surprising innovation: a non-corporeal membrane that lives by light and shadow alone. It seems that this truly ‘surreal’ object was exactly what the Surrealists had been waiting for; within a matter of months the previously all but unknown young artist had been adopted by the Parisian avant-garde. And his new friends left him in no doubt as to what was expected of him: his ‘Boule suspendue’ opened a new chapter in Western sculpture during which Alberto Giacometti, as the most important Surrealist sculptor, took three-dimensional forming in an entirely new direction.

This exhibition was conceived in collaboration with the Giacometti scholar Casimiro Di Crescenzo, who was presenting it on a smaller scale in the Brolo Centre of Art and Culture in Mogliano Veneto until 6 May 2007. The considerably expanded presentation is curated by the Keeper of the Kunsthaus Collection, Christian Klemm. It is on show in the Kunsthaus until 26 August.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, 8001 Zurich

Open Tues–Thurs 10 a.m.–9 p.m., Fri–Sun 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Public Holidays: Whitsun 26–28 May and 1 August (National Day) 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Admission: CHF 12.-/8.- (concessions). Free entry for children and young people up to the age of 16.

Public Guided Tours: 23 May, 6/20 June, 4/8 July, and 8/22 August at 6.30 p.m.

Private Guided Tours by arrangement. Please call +41 (0)44 253 84 12 (Mon–Fri 9 a.m.–12 noon)

For further information see: www.kunsthaus.ch

Recorded programme details: Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 97

Advanced Ticket Sales in Switzerland: Kombi-Ticket RailAway/SBB with reductions on rail travel and admission, available at SBB stations and by phoning Rail Service on 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19 per min.), Group tariffs available. Magasins Fnac, Tel. +33 1 4157 3212, www.fnac.ch

Other sales points: France: Magasins Fnac, Carrefour, Tel. 0892 684 694 (0.34 € per min.), www.fnac.com. Belgium: Magasins Fnac, Tel. 0 900 00 600 (0.45 € per min.), www.fnac.be

For further information and visual materials, please contact

Kunsthaus Zürich, Diana Battelli

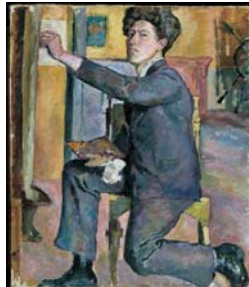
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Alberto Giacometti. Der Aufbruch zur Avantgarde
Kunsthaus Zürich
16. Mai bis 26. August 2007



Jacques-André Boiffard
 Alberto Giacometti, 1931
 Fotostiftung Schweiz, Winterthur
 © 2007 Nachlass Jacques-André Boiffard



Selbstbildnis, 1921
 Öl auf Leinwand, 82,5 x 72 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



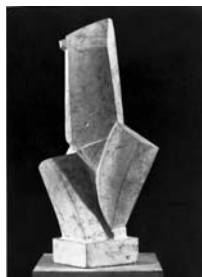
Drei Akte, 1923/24
 Bleistift auf Papier, 44,5 x 28 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Kopf der Mutter, um 1920
 Gips, Höhe 42 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 Geschenk Bruno und Odette
 Giacometti, 2006
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



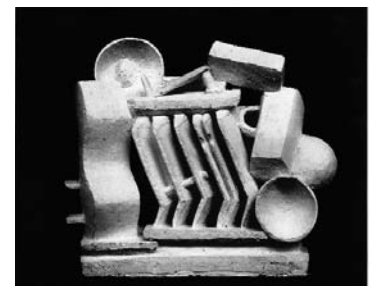
Selbstbildnis, 1925
 Gips, 41 x 21 x 28 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Torse (Torso), 1925
 Gips, 58 x 25 x 24 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Petit homme accroupi (Kauerndes
 Männchen), 1926
 Bronze, 28,5 x 17,5 x 10 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Composition: Le couple (couché)
 (Komposition: Liegendes Paar), 1927
 Bronze, 39,3 x 46 x 15 cm
 Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Composition cubiste [Kubistische
 Komposition], 1926/1927
 Gips, Höhe 51,5 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich, Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 Geschenk Bruno und Odette Giacometti, 2006
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



La mère de l'artiste [Die Mutter des
 Künstlers], 1927
 Bronze, 32,5 x 23 x 11 cm
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 Dauerleihgabe im Kunstmuseum Basel
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Le père de l'artiste [Der Vater des
 Künstlers], 1927
 Marmor, 30 x 23 x 21 cm
 Privatbesitz Schweiz
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Femme (Frau), 1928/29
 Marmor, 33,5 x 31 x 9 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich
 Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Femme couchée (Liegende Frau), 1929
 Gips, 28 x 44,5 x 16,5 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich, Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Femme couchée qui rêve (Träumende Frau), 1929
 Bronze, weiss bemalt, 244 x 43 x 13,5 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich, Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 © 2007 ProLitteris, Zürich



Bruno Giacometti, um 1930
 Gips, 31 x 18,5 x 24,5 cm
 Kunsthau Zürich, Alberto Giacometti-Stiftung
 Geschenk Bruno und Odette Giacometti, 2006
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