

Press release
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Kunsthaus Zürich embarks on the most ambitious evaluation and restoration project ever attempted on the oeuvre of Alberto Giacometti

In 2006, after decades languishing in external warehouses, the vast majority of Alberto Giacometti's plasters were relocated to Zurich. Technical and art-historical evaluation of the fragile works can now begin, an expensive and labour-intensive undertaking due to conclude in 2014.

The Alberto Giacometti Foundation, based at the Kunsthaus Zürich, has at its disposal the most significant collection of work by Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966), who came to international fame through the slender statuery of his late phase. Many of Giacometti's sculptures, paintings and drawings are on display at the Kunsthaus, and are to receive more space when the extension is completed in 2015. In preparation for that day, a four-year evaluation and restoration project has now been initiated, focusing on the 80 plasters that were relocated to Zurich in 2006, 40 years after the artist's death, from a Paris warehouse and from the Bregaglia region of Switzerland, and presented as a gift by Bruno and Odette Giacometti to the Alberto Giacometti Foundation. The public was able to form an opinion of the state of the plasters at an exhibition held in the year of their transfer.

EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL

Comprehensive measures are required for the permanent display of the plasters alongside Giacometti's sculptures in bronze, stone and wood, and Hanspeter Marty, chief restorer at the Kunsthaus Zürich, is to head a team during the initial phase of technical evaluation, due for completion by the summer of 2012. Their work, which includes material and object analysis as well as research in the relevant literature and archives, will lay the groundwork for a decision as to which conservation and restoration measures are to be included in the project's second phase. The information accumulated during the evaluation is to be entered into a database, and thus be available for future restoration projects. The results of the scientific analysis may also have an influence on the value of individual works. The plasters to be evaluated all come from Giacometti's Paris studio and his hometown, and forgeries have been ruled out. Some of the pieces bear marks, possible clues to the process of their manufacture or the order of their casting; these in turn may be of decisive value to the ascription and appraisal of discrete works. For instance, its pristine white surface may indicate that a given plaster is unique, that the sculpture was never intended for casting, or that it was a doublet. Certain objects were painted before casting, while

others have been discoloured by the layer of shellac applied to them prior to casting. Many of the pieces are broken or cracked; others are mutilated, since their immense size meant they were sawn up and cast as separate components.

PERMISSIBLE INTERVENTIONS

The experts agree: traces of the artist's own work on his pieces, coats of shellac or paint, and pencil marks are to be conserved. Whether to leave dismembered objects as individual pieces, however, or reassemble them for display – and if the latter, so as to make what sort of artistic statement – is to be decided at the end of the evaluation phase. Finally, the restorers' agenda includes preventive conservation: how to improve transport and storage so as to avoid future damage.

ONLINE DOCUMENTATION AND ART EDUCATION

Three specialists will share a full-time position over the course of four years. The project's principles and progress are documented on the Kunsthaus website. Guided tours behind the scenes are planned for the halfway mark, to provide visitors with a glimpse at the restorer's handwork. Once the various measures have been implemented, the plasters will be exhibited among the other sculptures, drawings and paintings by Giacometti on display at the museum. The work of evaluation and restoration over a period of several years, to the tune of half a million francs, is only possible thanks to the financial participation of private donors.

The project is supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and by the Ars Rhenia Foundation for the trans-regional promotion of art and culture.

Note to media

Visual material can be downloaded under www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/information/press.

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