Press kit

FONDATION-
GIACOMETTI
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ASensitiv

GIACOMETTI / WARREN

Summary

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ASensitiv

GIACOMETTI / WARREN

21.04.2023
02.07.2023

Institut Giacometti
5, rue Victor-Schœlcher
75014 Paris

institut-giacometti.fr

President
Catherine Grenier

Artistic Director
Françoise Cohen

At the invitation of the Fondation Giacometti, Rebecca Warren – one of contemporary art's most prominent protagonists for more than twenty years – has selected a number of Alberto Giacometti works held in their collection to show alongside works of her own, including some new works made especially for this exhibition.

This exhibition presents an opportunity to consider Warren's work in relation to the works of one of the masters of modern art. The Giacometti works chosen by Warren for the exhibition include work from his surrealist period along with his later sculptures, paintings and drawings.

The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue analyse the revealing, even possibly hallucinatory, connections between her own work and the art and personality of Giacometti.

Curator: Françoise Cohen

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ASensitiv
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Giacometti's method was one of quick, nervous, ceaseless action, repeatedly building and demolishing: a paradoxically meticulous process suggesting an intense search for something – images, realities – as yet unknown to him.

Warren's method consists in working slowly, but almost in the dark, through trial and error, while similarly paying exhaustive attention to the – as yet unknown – potential of the particular sculpture she is working on. Warren describes this hybrid experiment – between the two sets of works in a shared space – as the initial contact between almost living organisms, the exact nature of which is to be discovered in the process of assembling the show.

The title of the exhibition *ASensitiv,* a term Warren has coined, emphasises the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the artists – ranging from an idea of a psychic hypersensitivity to one that is necessarily insensitive, almost as if generated by an algorithm.

From her early sculptures displaying heavily erotic volumes to her wall-based vitrines and assemblages, to the recent slender totems, Warren's work shows an unusual attention to the figure, to flesh, matter, the arrangement of parts, the plinth, but also, and fundamentally, to teetering chaos and emergent form. Her broad creative palette incorporates an array of modernist and pop culture influences, and a wide variety of materials including clay, neon and bronze as well as less identifiable fragments.

Born in 1965 in Pinhoe, Devon, Warren lives and works in London. She was elected as a Royal Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2013. In 2020, she was awarded the honour of Officer of the Order of the British Empire for services to art.

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Catalogue

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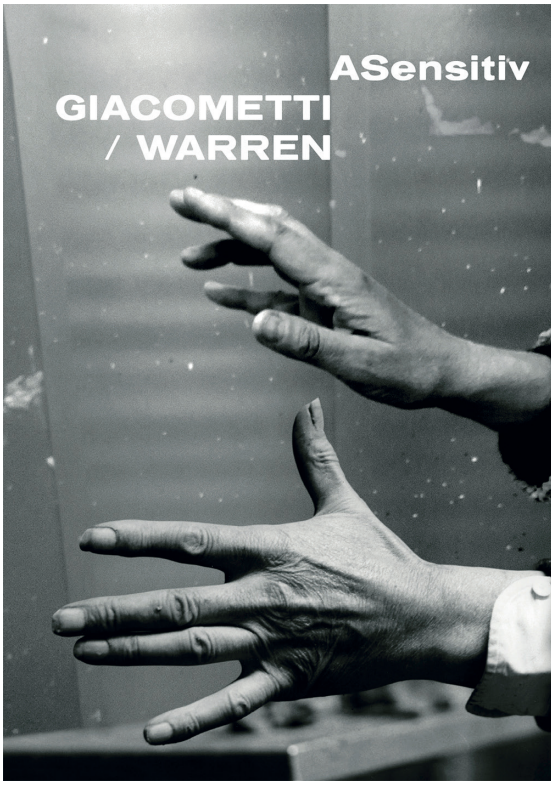
A richly illustrated book of 112 pages, co-edited by Fondation Giacometti, Paris, and FAGE éditions Lyon, in a bilingual French / English edition, presents a selection of works by both artists, with an essay by Fergal Stapleton and an interview with Warren by Françoise Cohen.



Summary

Catalogue co-edited
by Fondation Giacometti
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Excerpt from Rebecca Warren's interview

Interview by Françoise Cohen, curator

(...)

FC - How did you come up with the title ASensitiv? Are you aware that for a French audience, the letter A is a negative prefix?

RW -Yes, I invented the title because I think it has lots of associations that are ambiguous and paradoxical. *ASensitiv* encompasses the idea of a type of person described as a sensitive - like somebody haunted or psychic. It does also seem to be the opposite of this (in both French and English). By joining the indefinite article to the noun it produces a meaning similar to an absence of sensitivity. This is also like something that happens in relationships, which are necessarily selective. So it's operating with a certain amount of irony, or possibly humility. By deleting the final 'e' and colliding the capital letters 'A' and 'S' together, the term is transformed into something less human, a bit like a technical term for a moving part, an algorithm, or a program. The title seems to describe or suggest something of the relationship between Giacometti and me. After all, I am taking another artist's work who is no longer with us, and putting it in relation to my own, without – as far as I know – his knowledge…or approval! This makes for a complicated proposal.

(...)

FC - Many critics quote a constellation of names in relation to your work: De Kooning, Boccioni, Baselitz, Fontana, Degas… In 1935, Giacometti decided to focus on the representation of the human figure as his life's work. In a context which was dominated by abstraction or figuration with a social overtone, he traced a singular path. Your figures are very personal. How did you fit into the context of the late 1990s and the early 2000s which was more open to assemblage or installation?

RW - I think my work was a bit reviled in the 90s – it was as if I was betraying some mob idea of progress or something. The 90s art scene in London was mainly dominated by Goldsmiths' college conceptualism and its YBA offshoot. When I was at Goldsmiths' I felt confused and dismayed by the iron rule of conceptualism, which I found very limiting and frigid. When I did my first solo show of raw clay works on multi-coloured plinths – *The Agony and the Ecstasy* at Maureen Paley (2000), and then *Fleischvater* at Modern Art (2002) – the disgust expressed by some people made me realise that I was probably onto something! Of course I did eventually fit into the context somehow as my exhibition *SHE* at Maureen Paley (2003) that consisted of several large raw clay female figures on wheels, was pretty successful. It must have hit some kind of nerve and provided some kind of relief and hope to some people.

It is true some of my early works did conspicuously refer, or draw from, the work of other artists: *Bunny* (2002) relates to Degas' T*he Little Fourteen-year-old Dancer* (1880), and latterly *Man and the Dark* (2016) relates to Umberto Boccioni, sort of. But I can think of only three others that make explicit, in both their forms and their titles, specific influences: *Helmut Crumb* (1998) – from two pictures, one by style photographer Helmut Newton and the other by cartoonist Robert Crumb; *A.D.* (2000) a sculpture I made from Jean-Honoré Fragonard's 1767 painting *The Happy*

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Accidents of the Swing; and *Croccioni* (2000) – from a combination of Boccioni's work and, more obscurely, Rod Stewart's 1975 *Atlantic Crossing* album cover by Peter Lloyd. I'm still very proud of these works from the early days when I was finding my way. But since then I have definitely honed a peculiar channel of my own much more independently of those initial influences and interests. But yes! Lots of writers do still cite a lot of names. I think for a lot of reasons. One is that some rely on secondary research – i.e. googling what has already been written, so ideas that are out of date with regard to my work have tended to persist beyond their expiry date. Another seems to be a kind of frantic worry at how to contextualise a woman artist who makes broadly figurative, often female, sculptures using ancient methods like modelling and materials like clay and bronze. This seems to cause special concern when they're locked into the way of thinking that everything in art must match up with some prevailing ideology or other. I think that the glitch or disconnect in the thinking there has been the sex of the artist, me, and of the art – and I think the answer to that is to make the art that is truly coming from within me. That has to be the central purpose.

FC - Is your path as singular as Giacometti's?

RW - It's tricky to make a comparison because one of us is still alive! Giacometti's work and his achievement can be seen in its totality whereas mine can't. I suppose one way to look at this could be to do with purpose, core purpose. In that case I feel like I'm heading on a similarly singular path in that I'm always trying to dredge up meaningful form from wherever its weird components lurk within my own self.

FC - Is modelling an out-dated mode of expression?

RW - No. Anymore than human life is outmoded! Or reality. I suppose you would have to look at what there is to replace modelling. Things on the Internet for example are flat and unreal, removed from us, and all lit up in the same way. Those things are not here, and we are not there. I find the idea of the NFT (*non-fungible token*) really feeble. The technology is designed for repetition, so that there can be an infinite number of one image, but now this process is being artificially restricted to produce a false idea of rarity. But it's still a glowing screen. I find it really boring. I know there are all sorts of ways to make work that don't involve modelling but they're mostly not for me.

To me the best things in the world are the things that have had many layers of reality and experience compacted into them by human minds and hands. Nothing so far has replaced intense experience, real presence. Lots of people still go to art exhibitions where everything has been made by hand over time. Why? Why is Giacometti so famous? People respond to these things. People know the value of visceral experience. We need it. On the Internet, real handmade art – Giacometti's, say, or Medardo Rosso's – looks blander and smoother than it does in real life. This can be a shock to people when they encounter the real thing, if they're used to the general blandness of their screens. And this is how all these things were made in the first place –searching, over time, for new, real experiences. Otherwise it's all about staying in and not really experiencing anything!

FC - Do all your works refer to the figure? What does it mean for you to use traditional parameters of sculpture: verticality, the body, the fragment, the plinth, scale and indeed materials like clay and bronze? How did they appear in your work?

RW - Not all of them. I also make assemblages, hung on the wall or inside vitrines, and these tend to not be figurative. Also, lots of my sculptures tend towards the semi-abstract or non-human. But the figurative is certainly a large part of what I do. When I started out I was searching for a thing to make and a way of making it that resonated properly with me. It turned out that this meant making things

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that were specific in every detail of their natures.

This meant modelling. And I suppose this is the tradition I'm part of – probably early Modernist in its attention to this aspect of sculpture's potential. It means finding a likeness for an internal chaos. Finding something you're in control of, or in tune with. Feeling your way into the right form, for whatever it is that's lurking in the darkness of yourself. You're constantly working on the relation between you and it, distinguishing your bit from its bit, your work from its need... It is very odd, very strange. But it feels a bit like I'm a conduit as much as the author of these things. I didn't quite expect it to be this much work, this tricky and elusive, this hard – but it is and I'm okay with that because it's kind of working – though there's more to do. There's more to find.

FC - When did bronze first appear in your work? As the material par excellence of sculpture, does it in itself have a special meaning for your work?

RW - I used bronze in the early 2000s once or twice and then didn't use it again until about 2006. About twenty-odd years ago I started making big, heavy, raw clay sculptures. Back then I think I had a particular interest in the fragile nature of the sculptures, as well as all other aspects of them. Having worked my way through that, I started properly on bronze. It was an interesting transition. I wanted to resist just turning my sculptures into bronze for the sake of it. When some of the early things made in clay were later cast in bronze, it was worrying when they arrived at the studio because they looked so old fashioned, awkward, out of place. Bronze isn't an easy material to use. Certain details and aspects of the work can get lost, but – harder to achieve – certain things can improve in the transition.

Of course it's practical too in terms of permanence and reproducibility for editions. These things are not to be ignored but I only wanted to use bronze if there were other compelling reasons to do so. Bronze definitely has a certain kind of presence. And it can be light, visually I mean. It can have highlights polished into it. It can be painted in pale and shimmering colours. This last method I've used a lot. It seems to upend or reduce the gravity they're subject to as bronze, perhaps bringing the sculptures back to the light appearance of the original clay. Paint makes the sculptures aspirational in a quite funny and touching way. The paint acts a bit like high fashion, or even medium fashion, does on humans. It accentuates wishes beyond the animal, beyond its base nature.

(...)

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Catalogue text

Giacometti / Warren by Fergal Stapleton

An accursed thing, *Anathema*,* has its counterpart in *Anathama* which is the devotional object.

In the presence of Alberto Giacometti's art, Rebecca Warren (to say this with the right shade of delicacy and seriousness) experiences a bristling expectation of trouble, and in two subtly distinct ways — on her own account and through her art. In his famous essay on Giacometti, Jean Genet, noting that the artist had considered making a sculpture specifically in order to bury it, judged that the dead were indeed the most fitting recipients of his output. To bury your own art is to recognise the density — almost to the point of self-sufficiency — of its value as an object of meaning. Giacometti, having made this recognition, even if he did go ahead and secretly bury any of his sculptures, kept the vast majority of them above ground for the living to look at. It's this density of sufficiency that brings these objects into the space between the accursed and the sacred, and keeps the living at a sensible distance from their powers. And those who think and live through art, they, as well as their art, join the assembly of living witnesses. This is the likely meaning of Warren's attitude to Giacometti. She is tuned to the hopes and struggles of her own art to achieve a density of sufficiency comparable to those that have gone before.

Giacometti's standing women sculptures from the 1950s rotate through a set of characteristics (now familiar to us) in various concentrations: narrow, vertical, dissolving, emerging, static as a whole, animated in the flesh, and so on. Each one of these characteristics, and every detail of them, is proof of a drive developing in the artist's mind. One thinks, slightly obliquely, of those mirages that occur at the far end of a hot road where a person appears to be stretched, with elements of the body modularly repeated, the segments compressing and pinching unnaturally as it moves, and so is transformed into a strange new type of being, remote from the usual human pattern. Or *desert* rather than *road*, because there is also something in Giacometti's art that fits Erwin Panofsky's** description of ancient Egyptian sculpture providing a geometrical plan rather than a particular view of the subject, by presenting pure frontages attached to pure profiles.

Then there's all the emerging and receding in Giacometti, as if there were (or had been) a struggle in opposing directions. But emerging from, and receding into, what? There is the bronze in which they are finally cast, the plaster or clay from which they were initially made, and prior to all that, the deep zones of the Earth where the copper, tin, gypsum and loam were excavated. That many of these women resemble pitted and weather-worn ancient bronze spears — whose molten extremities had variously not quite filled the voids of their antique stone moulds, or overspilled them — also turns the actual bronze they are made from into a strange, elemental blend of ancient and new. But the base element from which these sculptures emerge, and into which they recede, is neither plaster, clay nor bronze, nor indeed metaphorical bronze, but thought.

British art critic David Sylvester reported that Giacometti would repeatedly build and tear down, build and tear down: a paradoxically painstaking process suggesting a desire to incrementally gain the knowledge of what the thing should be, before having it arrive as its finished autonomous self. Warren's method is also to work slowly, but almost in the dark, through trial and error, looking for a beginning that might lead somewhere unexpectedly good.

In Giacometti's tearing down method, the focus is tighter, in that it was always going to result in one of those taut and harrowed beings of his. Warren's, by contrast, might produce a whole new identity, gaining or losing a limb, becoming more horizontal or vertical, significantly heavier or lighter.

The initial impulse for each of Warren's works is dimly lit, unformed, scattered through matter and thought. There is no

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completed scheme prior to making the sculpture, which the sculpture is then supposed to exemplify or illustrate. The logic of the art is the logic of finding the art, which starts with the logic of daring to peer into the unarticulated self in order to articulate meaningful form. The method is exhaustive attention: to the material, to the potential of the particular sculpture, to the search for its initial note or chord, to what should follow, to how all this must be continually adjusted and driven forward to a successful conclusion. The materials are typically unfired clay and bronze. The forms are often female, twisted, sinuous, ambiguous, voluptuous, elegant, awkward and bathetic. Paint is applied in shimmering scumbles to bring out details of anatomy or clothing. Alternatively, the paint is sometimes glyph-like, pictogram-like, especially when the sculptures are less female and more like inanimate arrangements. This is because there is also a strain of the alien in Warren's work, of the arrived-from-elsewhere, the opaque. As if a dense and strange communication were constantly being foiled by the lack of a key to it. As if sequence, size, orientation, colour, or any other feature might stand for a segment of, say, a letter or an entire and complex sentence. As if presence itself might be broken down into another set of graspable meanings. This is the corollary or echo-image to the sculpture that strives for its own peculiar and irreducible presence. In these more abstract works, the precise pitch and range of the opacity and strangeness is of course part of their irreducible natures. When her sculptures appear in their final form, Warren has already developed an affection for them and has been known to hug them as if they were vulnerable and needed reassurance now that they're exposed to the bright light of the living world.

It might be said that the artistic act is a kind of arduous effort, for both artists, to summon beings up to the surface from their murky origins, and in one achingly slow move. This is ancient stuff, the uncanny imbuing or capturing of spirits, gods, ancestors in pictures and objects. The golem and the idol. But it relates to — is possibly the same thing as — the hyper-modern question of the manufacture of sentience in the science lab. Here the ambition is to make something that cannot be distinguished in its behaviours, attitudes, reactions, mood displays and utterances from a human. And all the better if it also looks exactly like a human, artificially endued with constant fidgeting, erratic blink patterns, pupil dilation, awkward hair, perspiration, etc. And it's at the point where this technology reaches a pitch of exact and spooky verisimilitude, that the Turing test — where a program's behaviour, being convincingly human, qualifies it as human — clashes with the zombie (in the modern tech sense) — which is a thing that, being convincingly human, tells us nothing whatsoever about whether or not it has become human, and in reality probably has no sense of self, no will, no consciousness. And it won't be of any help at all if, in answer to questions like, 'Hey X32, do you have experiences? Thoughts? Feelings?,' it answers with apparently perfect sincerity and mild alarm, 'Sure I do. And I must say I'm a little wounded that you would ask such a thing.' There's a point at which all this — captive spirits, manufactured sentience — is moot and unfalsifiable. And this is where the art of people like Giacometti and Warren reveal a peculiar purpose. While there's no need for pretence or illusion that ancient magic or modern science have taken hold here, sentience hovers about the place in such concentrations that some of it seems to have compacted into the spaces and shapes of their sculptures.

* *anathema* (n.) 1520s, 'an accursed thing,' from Latin *anathema* 'an excommunicated person; the curse of excommunication,' from Ecclesiastical Greek anathema 'a thing accursed,' a slight variation of classical Greek anathama, which meant merely 'a thing devoted,' literally 'a thing set up (to the gods),' such as a votive offering in a temple. [Online Etymology Dictionary etymonline.com]

** Erwin Panofsky, discussing ancient Egyptian art: 'In sculpture, as in painting and relief, the subject is thus represented in an aspect which, strictly speaking, is no *aspectus* ("view") at all, but a geometrical plan. All the parts of the human figure are so arrayed that they present themselves either in a completely frontal projection or else in pure profile.' *The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles*, 1921, in the collection of his essays *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, 1970, Peregrine Books, Great Britain, p. 85.

Biography

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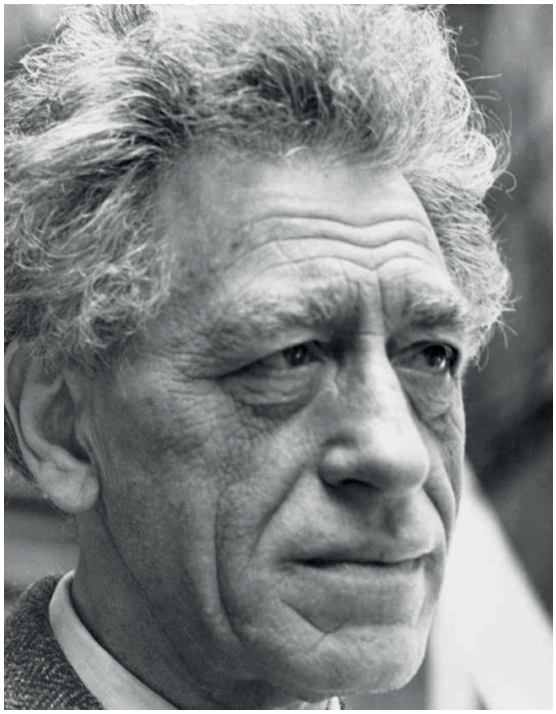
Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966)

Born in 1901 in Stampa, Switzerland, Alberto Giacometti was the son of Giovanni Giacometti, a renown postimpressionist painter with whom he discovered painting and learned about sculpture. At the age of 13, Giacometti made his first watercolours: mountainous landscapes around the family home in the village of Stampa. In 1922, he left his native valley to settle in Paris, where he attended the classes of the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle, at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. At that time, Giacometti worked with models and was interested in the avant-garde, in particular the cubist artists.
In 1929, he began a series of sculptures called "flat women", close to abstraction, that got him noticed by the art milieu.
In 1930, he adhered to the surrealist movement of André Breton in which he became an active member. His sculptures, and notably the *Suspended Ball*, played an essential part in Dali's definition of 'surrealist' objects and 'symbolic function'.



He then distanced himself from the surrealist group, even though his works of the early 1930s continued to be presented in the group's exhibitions. In 1935, he devoted himself intensely to the representation of the human figure, a subject that remained of great importance throughout his career. His younger brother Diego, who had joined him in Paris ten years earlier, was one of his permanent models.
After having spent the war years in Switzerland, on his return to Paris, Giacometti carried on working, mainly with models. Annette Arm, whom he married in 1949, became another model omnipresent in his work. Giacometti also went back to painting and returned, at the start of the 1950s, to the subject of landscape.
Between 1958 and 1961, Giacometti created, within the commission for the Plaza in front of the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York, a *Tall Woman* and a *Large Head*, on a monumental scale, alongside a *Walking Man*. Those three sculptures were to become iconic works.
In 1962, Giacometti was awarded the Grand Prix for sculpture at the XXXI Venice Biennial. In 1965, the retrospectives at Tate Gallery (London), Museum of Modern Art (New York) and Louisiana Museum (Humlebaek, Denmark) consecrated the artist shortly before his death in January 1966 at the Hospital of Coire, in Switzerland.

Alberto Giacometti, 1965
Photo : Gisela Wolbing/
Gertrud van Dyck
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Rebecca Warren

Rebecca Warren is a sculptor who works in clay, bronze, and steel, and also makes collages and wall mounted vitrines using objects and fragments that she has collected. Always evident in Warren's work is the negotiation between thought and process. Ideas and influences are filtered, distorted and often discarded as they find three-dimensional form. Her sculptures can be tender and droll, yet also unsettling in their depiction of the female form. Whilst she has invoked certain aspects of art history and pop culture, especially in her early work, Warren has developed an entirely modern, complex and distinctive visual perspective.
She has had solo shows at museums and galleries across Europe and the United States including Belvedere 21, Vienna; Musée National Eugène Delacroix, Paris; Le Consortium, Dijon; Tate St Ives; Dallas Museum of Art; Kunstverein Munich; The Art Institute of Chicago; and the Serpentine Gallery, London. She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2006 and the Vincent Award in 2008 and is represented in collections internationally.

Rebecca Warren
© Johnnie Shand-Kydd

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The Giacometti Institute is the part of the Fondation Giacometti devoted to exhibitions and research in art history and pedagogy. Created in 2018, it is chaired by Catherine Grenier, the director of the Giacometti Foundation since 2014.
A museum on a human scale, enabling the visitor to get close to the works, the Giacometti Institute is an exhibition space, a place of reference for the oeuvre of Alberto Giacometti, a research centre in art history specialising in modern art practices (1900-1970) and a place for discovery accessible to all the public. An exceptional reconstruction of Alberto Giacometti's studio, whose elements, in their entirety, had been kept by his widow, Annette Giacometti, is on permanent display. Among these elements are several very fragile plaster and clay pieces, some of them not shown previously in public, as well as the furniture and the walls painted by the artist.
The ambition of the Institute is to refresh the way we look at the work of the artist, and at the creative period in which he was involved. The programme for research and teaching, L'École des modernités, is open to researchers, students and art lovers. Conferences, symposiums and master classes give a platform to art historians and curators who present their works and the current state of research.

Pratical information

Institut Giacometti
5, rue Victor-Schœlcher
75014 Paris

Open: Tuesday to Sunday
from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Closed: Mondays
Ticket reservation online and on site:
www.fondationgiacometti.fr/fr/billetterie
Price: 8.50€
Reduced prices: 3 €
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Exhibitions

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On permanent display

Alberto Giacometti's studio

Introducing the visitors into the intimate universe of the artist's practice, the studio gathers more than sixty original works and faithfully displays all of the furniture and walls of the studio painted by Alberto Giacometti.

In 2023

Alberto et Annette Giacometti

11 July - 1st October

Curator: Thierry Pautot

In 2023, the Giacometti Foundation celebrates a double anniversary: the centenary of the birth of its founder Annette Giacometti (1923-1993) and the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Foundation. The Giacometti Institute will present this summer an exhibition dedicated to the woman who was the wife and main female model of Alberto Giacometti.

Le Nez

12 October 2023 – 7 January 2024

Curator: Hugo Daniel

Among Giacometti's sculptures, Le Nez is one of the most important and intriguing at the same time, having been the subject of many specific studies.
By bringing together for the first time the different versions of this iconic work, this exhibition aims to broaden the understanding.

Visuals for the press

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For Rebecca Warren's works
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Alberto Giacometti
Tall Woman II, 1960
Fondation Giacometti
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Visuals for the press

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Alberto Giacometti
Suspended Ball,
1930–1931,
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Rebecca Warren
Helmut Crumb, 1998
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Alberto Giacometti
Femme au chariot,
1943 - 1945
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Hot Nike, 2020
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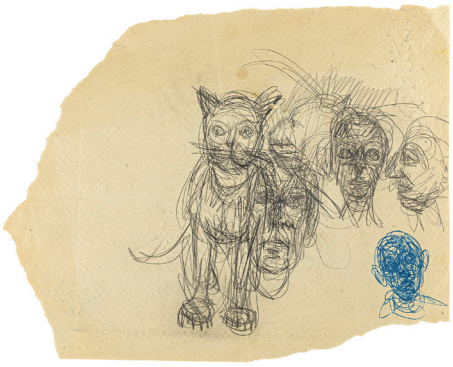

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The Cat Stays in the Picture, 2010
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Alberto Giacometti
Têtes d'hommes de face et de profil et chat, c. 1962
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The Cat, 1951
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Alberto Giacometti
Quatre pommes
sur une table, c. 1947
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Mélancholie, 2011
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The Fondation Giacometti warmly thanks Franck Giraud, Ronald S. Lauder, Daniella Luxembourg, Eyal and Marilyn Ofer, the Don Quixote Foundation and other members of the circle who wish to remain anonymous.

EYAL & MARILYN OFER
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