

100 franc banknote: Alberto Giacometti, 1901-1966 Sculptor, Painter and Draughtsman

Alberto Giacometti was one of the most outstanding artists of the twentieth century. His international renown is founded on his sculpture, but he also produced notable paintings and drawings. Although Giacometti rose to prominence in the Paris of the thirties as one of the leading members of the Surrealist movement, it is the work produced after the war that constitutes his great artistic legacy. The sculptures of slender, elongated human figures epitomize the distinctive Giacometti style. The core of his oeuvre is a representation of man's existential solitude and angst, in which he tried to capture reality in all its complexity.

Beginnings, 1922-1929

Following the Neo-Impressionist phase of his younger years and such works as *Le Paysan* (1921) and *Autoportrait* (1923), Giacometti produced a series of Cubist sculptures between 1925 and 1928, when he was living in Paris. For the first time, Giacometti worked from memory rather than from life. He wanted to make compositions of symbolic character and find a way of distilling reality into a simple formula. The result was sculptures such as *Femme-Cuillère* (1926-1927) and *Femme couchée qui rêve* (1929).

Surrealist phase, 1930-1934

Between 1930 and 1934, Giacometti belonged to the Surrealist group and was acknowledged as its leading sculptor. Surrealism diverted his interest to the fetish-like character of three-dimensional objects. During this period, he produced sculptures such as *Boule suspendue* (1930-31), *Pointe à l'oeil* (1932) and *Femme égorgée* (1932). The elongated figures that were created in the thirties, with smooth surfaces and precisely drawn lines, still owe something to the Surrealist idea: for example, *Femme qui marche* (1932-34) and *L'Objet invisible* (1934).

Time of transition, 1935-1945

In the mid-thirties, Giacometti began to work from life again. This led to his rupture with the Surrealists. He was searching for a way of representing reality as a whole, something he maintained could only properly be appreciated from a distance. The result was a series of figures on an everdecreasing scale - sometimes no bigger than 1.5 cm. He continued this work during the war in the Geneva hotel room where he lived from 1942 to 1945.

The "Giacometti style", 1946-1951

The turning point in Giacometti's artistic development came in 1946, after his return from Geneva to Paris. Drawings of people he saw in the street inspired the tall, thin sculptures, today regarded as his seminal works. They are far-off figures which seem almost massless and weightless, expressing distance and proximity at the same time. The female figures are portrayed with legs closed, arms pressed to their sides and clump-like feet: *Femme debout* (1946), *Grande Figure* (1947). The male figures are striding: *Homme qui marche* (1947), *Homme qui marche sous la pluie* (1948). Sometimes, the artist placed his sculptures in groups, but in a way that seems to emphasize their isolation and solitude: *Place* (1948), *Quatre Femmes sur socle* (1950), *La Forêt* (1950). In occasional sculptures of animals, such as *Le Chat* (1951) or *Le Chien* (1951), the essential character is captured in a skeletonlike structure.

Later works, 1952-1966

In the 1950s, Giacometti's art underwent another transformation. His figures gradually took on more "substance" again, though this refers less to body than to the artist's working method. The sculptures of this period are marked with thumbprints and knife cuts - direct evidence of the creative process. The works of the last decade - busts of his brother Diego, his wife Annette and his friend Elie Lotar - are characterized by these uneven, deeply furrowed textures, and show the artistic vision as the real creative process.

Drawings and paintings

Apart from his sculpture, Giacometti won acclaim as a distinctive draughtsman and painter. It was only in the crucial phases of his artistic development - in the years after 1925 and in the period of transition between 1935 and 1945, when he was searching for new forms of visual expression – that his drawing and painting remained in the background. The paintings of his mature years, mostly in grey tones, using the techniques of draughtsmanship, show a world stripped of illusion, depicted in schematic style. Besides portraits, Giacometti's chosen themes were still lifes, streets, rooms and landscapes. From the early fifties onwards, he also turned increasingly to printing techniques, creating etchings and lithographs. But Giacometti's unique achievement was to give the existential image of man a sculptural form.

Chronology

1901	Alberto Giacometti born on October 10 in Borgonovo near Stampa (Bergell) in Southern Switzerland. His father is the painter Giovanni Giacometti.
1915 - 1920	Secondary school at Schiers near Chur. Studies at the Ecole des Arts et Métiers in Geneva.
1920 - 1921	Travels in Italy, visiting Venice, Padua, Florence and Rome.
1922 - 1927	Studies sculpture under Antoine Bourdelle at the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière in Paris.
1925 - 1929	"Cubist" sculptures. Stops working from life.
1930 - 1934	Surrealist constructions and sculptures. Friendship with Louis Aragon, André Breton, Salvador Dalí. Member of the Surrealist group.
1934	Excluded from the Surrealist group.
1935 - 1946	Begins working from life again. Creates miniature statues. Friendship with Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Picasso.
1942 - 1945	Lives in Geneva.
1945	Return to Paris.
1947	Creation of the first tall, thin figures.
1949	Marries Annette Arm on July 19.
1948 - 1960	Numerous exhibitions and retrospectives, including New York, Basel, Paris, Berne and London.
1961 - 1962	Carnegie prize for sculpture in Pittsburgh and the sculpture prize at the Venice Biennale.
1964 - 1965	Guggenheim International Award for painting in New York and the arts prize of the City of Paris. Honorary doctorate from the University of Berne. Establishment of the Alberto Giacometti Foundation in Zurich.
1966	Alberto Giacometti dies on January 11 at the Cantonal Hospital in Chur.