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| Giacometti, Giovanni Alberto (1901–1966) |
| Giacometti, Alberto |
| Alberto Giacometti’s oeuvre of sculpture, painting, and drawing ranks alongside pioneering artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Constantin Brâncuşi. Giacometti arrived in Paris in 1922 to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Montparnasse with France’s then leading sculptor, Emile-Antoine Bourdelle; he attended periodically until 1927, principally creating drawings in a cubist manner. By the mid-late 1920s, Giacometti’s sculpture was intimately associated with surrealism. His exhibition at the Gallery Pierre, in particular, attracted the attention of the Gallery’s leader, André Breton, who would later acquire *Suspended Ball* (1930). The exhibition also drew the admiration and support of fellow artist-friends including André Masson, Hans Arp, Man Ray, Salvador Dalí, and Picasso. Giacometti not only became close friends with art theorists like Georges Bataille (1897-1962), Michel Leiris (1901-1990), and others surrounding the dissident periodical *Documents* in 1929-30, but associated with important writers and intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Becket (1906-1989), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). By 1934, Giacometti departed the surrealist milieu, the rupture coinciding with a return to the life model and bringing about a new philosophical awareness in his sculpture. Existential theories from the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre relating to isolation, helplessness, and disquiet – including *Nausea* (1938) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943) – influenced Giacometti’s tall standing figures of the late 1940s and early 1950s. |
| Alberto Giacometti’s oeuvre of sculpture, painting, and drawing ranks alongside pioneering artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Constantin Brâncuşi. Giacometti arrived in Paris in 1922 to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Montparnasse with France’s then leading sculptor, Emile-Antoine Bourdelle; he attended periodically until 1927, principally creating drawings in a cubist manner. By the mid-late 1920s, Giacometti’s sculpture was intimately associated with surrealism. His exhibition at the Gallery Pierre, in particular, attracted the attention of the Gallery’s leader, André Breton, who would later acquire *Suspended Ball* (1930). The exhibition also drew the admiration and support of fellow artist-friends including André Masson, Hans Arp, Man Ray, Salvador Dalí, and Picasso. Giacometti not only became close friends with art theorists like Georges Bataille (1897-1962), Michel Leiris (1901-1990), and others surrounding the dissident periodical *Documents* in 1929-30, but associated with important writers and intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). By 1934 Giacometti had departed the surrealist milieu, the rupture coinciding with a return to the life model and bringing about a new philosophical awareness in his sculpture. Existential theories from the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre relating to isolation, helplessness, and disquiet – including *Nausea* (1938) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943) – influenced Giacometti’s tall standing figures of the late 1940s and early 1950s.  [File: Suspended Ball.jpg]  Figure 1 Alberto Giacometti, Suspended Ball (1931), Plaster and metal, 60.6 x 35.6 x 36.1 cm, Fondation Alberto et Annette Giacometti, Paris  <http://www.fondation-giacometti.fr/en/art/16/discover-the-artwork/>  Giacometti was born on October 10, 1901 in the village of Borgonovo in the Bregaglia valley, in Italian-speaking Switzerland. His father, Giovanni, was a post-impressionist painter who had studied in Paris. His mother, Annette, was from a wealthy family in the locality of Stampa. Giacometti had three siblings, brothers Bruno and Diego, and sister Ottilia. Bruno was also an artist-craftsman, and would inhabit Alberto’s life and work, consistently posing for his brother until his death in 1961.  Influenced by modernist movements in Paris and inspired by tribal art, particularly ancient Egyptian, Cycladic, Sumerian, African, Oceanic, and Mesoamerican forms, Giacometti synthesized these ‘primitive’ sources with the cubist idiom to develop, in 1926-27, as series of highly compact, totemic works that strongly recall the sculptures of Brâncuşi, Henri Laurens, and Jacques Lipchitz. Giacometti’s interest in the cubist vocabulary is evidenced by figurative compositions that include *Torso* (1925-26) and *Man* [*cubist Composition*] (1926-27). The latter simultaneously demonstrates the sculptor’s working knowledge of the cubism as well as his gradual move towards a surrealist visualisation of the figure, where the form is merged with, or menaced by, eerie shapes, claw, or pitchfork-like elements.  Giacometti acquired a reputation as one of the most original sculptors working in Paris, and by 1929-30 his work began to gather critical momentum, featuring in important exhibitions of contemporary sculpture including the *Galerie Georges Bernheim* and the *Galerie Pierre [Loeb]* in Paris. Here sculptures such as *Three Figures Outdoors* (1929) and the famous *Suspended Ball* (1930) were exhibited in the company of illustrious sculptors including Aristide Maillol, Brâncuşi, Lipchitz, Joan Miró, and Alexander Calder. In a reassessment of surrealist themes, Giacometti’s works of the late 1920s and early 1930s combine an exploration of forms with intimations of physical violence, onanistic sex, and pain. In works such as *Head on a Rod* (1947), *The Hand* (1947), and *Three Men Walking* (1948), there is a preoccupation with the tragedy of the human condition and seemingly anguished figures; figures placed in bleak isolation and wasted away by the surrounding space.  [File: HeadonRod.jpg]  Figure 2 Alberto Giacometti, Head of a Man on a Rod (1947), Bronze, 16.0 x 14.9 x 15.1 cm, MOMA, New York  <http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81632> |
| Further reading:  (Bonnefoy)  (Centre Georges Pompidou)  (Di Crescenzo)  (Hohl, Alberto Giacometti: Sculpture, Painting, Drawing)  (Hohl, Giacometti: A Biography in Pictures)  (Krauss)  (Lord)  (Stooss and Elliot) |