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| Giacometti, Giovanni Alberto |
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| Alberto Giacometti was a titan of twentieth-century art. His rich 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, principally creating drawings in a Cubist manner. By the mid-to-late 1920s, Giacometti’s sculpture was intimately associated with Surrealism. Giacometti’s works of the late 1920s and early 1930s combine an exploration of forms with intimations of physical violence, onanistic sex and pain, and are an obvious reassessment of Surrealist themes. |
| Alberto Giacometti was a titan of twentieth-century art. His rich 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. Giacometti attended periodically until 1927, principally creating drawings in a Cubist manner. By the mid-to-late 1920s, Giacometti’s sculpture was intimately associated with Surrealism. His exhibition at the Gallery Pierre in particular attracted the attention of Surrealist leader André Breton, who would later acquire Giacometti’s *Suspended Ball* (1930). The same exhibition also drew the admiration and support of fellow artists and future friends André Masson, Hans Arp, Man Ray, Salvador Dalí, and Pablo Picasso. During 1929-30, Giacometti not only became close friends with art theorists like Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, and others surrounding the dissident periodical *Documents*, but also important writers and intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett and Simone de Beauvoir.  File: suspendedball.jpg  1 Suspended Ball (1930, Private Collection, Paris)  By 1934, Giacometti departed the Surrealist milieu. The rupture coincided with his return to the use of life models and brought about a new philosophical awareness in his sculpture. Existential theories relating to isolation, helplessness and disquiet drawn from the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, including *Nausea* (1938) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943) correspond to Giacometti’s tall standing figures of the late 1940s and early 1950s.  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, came 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 who would inhabit Alberto’s life and work, consistently posing for him Bruno’s death in 1961.  File: studio.jpg  2 A corner of Giacometti’s studio with Invisible Object: Hands Holding the Void, photographed by Dora Maar, 1934 (Collection of Timothy Baum, New York).  Influenced by modernist movements in Paris and inspired by tribal art, including ancient Egyptian, Cycladic, Sumerian, African, Oceanic and Mesoamerican forms, Giacometti synthesized these ‘primitive’ sources with the Cubist idiom to develop, in 1926-27, a 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, Alberto Giacometti Foundation, Kunsthaus, Zurich) and *Man* [*Cubist Composition*] (c. 1926-27, plaster version, Ohara Museum, Kurashiki, Japan). The latter simultaneously demonstrates the sculptor’s working knowledge of Cubism as well as his gradual move towards a surrealist visualisation of the figure, where the form is merged with, or menaced by, eerie claw- or pitchfork-like elements. Giacometti soon acquired a reputation as one of the most original sculptors working in Paris. 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, Private collection, Paris) were exhibited in the company of illustrious sculptors including Aristide Maillol, Brâncuşi, Lipchitz, Joan Miró and Alexander Calder. Giacometti’s works of the late 1920s and early 1930s combine an exploration of forms with intimations of physical violence, onanistic sex and pain, and are an obvious reassessment of Surrealist themes. In works such as *Head of a Man on a Rod* (1947, Collection M. and Mme Maeght, Paris), *The Hand* (1947, Alberto Giacometti Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Winterthur), and *Three Men Walking* (1948, Foundation Marguerite et Aimé Maeght, St Paul) 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: headonarod.jpg  3 Head of a Man on a Rod (1947, Collection M. and Mme Maeght, Paris). |
| Further reading:  (Albert Giacometti: La Collection du Centre Georges Pompidou, Musee National d'Art Moderne, 1999)  (Bonnefoy, 1991 (2001))  (Di Crescenzo, 1994)  (Elliot, 1996)  (Hohl, 1972)  (Hohl, Giacometti: A Biography in Pictures, 1998)  (Krauss, 1984)  (Lord, 1986 (1996)) |