Artist Resources – Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)



Giacometti in his atelier, 1957
Photograph: Robert Doisneu

Fondation Giacometti: The Institut Giacometti, artist biography, artwork and archives, exhibitions and publications

In one of his final interviews, Giacometti spoke with noted art critic David Sylvester about his sculptures and the aesthetic of ever-increasing slenderness and height. Sylvester curated the Tate Gallery's inaugural retrospective of the artist in 1965.



Giacometti, ca. 1950s
Photograph: Gordon Parks/Getty Images

The British Film Institute produced a short film in 1967 in conjunction with the Tate's exhibition, capturing Giacometti at work in his studio sketching from his own sculptures and hand-modeling clay maquettes.

Giacometti returned to the Tate in 2017 for the eponymous survey, *Giacometti*. With the collaboration of Fondation Giacometti and the generosity of the artist's late wife, Annette's, estate, the Tate Modern took visitors through ten rooms representing the totality of Giacometti's prolific fifty-year career, featuring a treat with previously un-exhibited plaster casts and drawings.

The Guardian profiled Giacometti's personal and professional life in honor of the Tate's ambitious 2017 exhibition.

Through summer 2020, the Institut Giacometti is hosted *Giacometti: À la recherche des oeuvres disparues (In Search of Lost Works)*, exploring the myth of Giacometti's artistic dissatisfaction and destruction of his own work. Using sketches, notebooks, and photographs from their archival collection, the Institut reconstructs the artist's infamous "lost" works.

In 2025, *Encounters: Giacometti* was launched at the Barbican in London as a series of programs and exhibitions that put Giacometti in conversation with contemporary artists including Huma Bhabha, Mona Hatoum, and Lynda Benglis.



Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)
Buste mince sur socle (did Aménophis) (Slender Bust on a Base (Amenhotep)), 1954 (cast 1955)
Bronze

Private Collection; L2026:75.5

Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti spent the majority of his career in Paris in the wake of World War II. The artist's thin, elongated figures often reflect the existential fear and loneliness that permeated life in postwar Europe. **Buste mince sur cocle (did Aménophis) (Slender Bust on a Base (Amenhotep))** departs from the artist's spindly, full-body portraits by depicting the figure as a bust inspired by ancient Egyptian sculpture. Giacometti's brother, Diego, sat as the model for the series. When asked about working with his brother, the artist reflected: "When he's sitting there, I don't recognize him. I like to get him to sit, so as to see what I see."

On view October 21, 2026 – February 15, 2027

Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)
Homme assis (Seated Man), c. 1950
Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2026:18.2

“The object of art is not to reproduce reality, but to create a reality of the same intensity.” – Alberto Giacometti

Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti is known for his sculptures, paintings, and drawings that process the traumas and lasting consequences of war. The artist spent the majority of his career in Paris in the wake of World War II, but frequently traveled to his studio in the Bregaglia Valley at the Swiss-Italian border. **Homme assis (Seated Man)** was painted during one such visit to Switzerland, where he often painted domestic scenes and references to the people dearest to him – his aging mother, brother Diego, and wife Annette – in his dark, existentialist style.

On view April 29 – August 2, 2026





Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)
Grande tête noire (Large Black Head), 1961
Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2023:103.3

Alberto Giacometti's sculptures, paintings, and drawings process the traumas and lasting consequences of war. Active in Paris in the wake of World War II, Giacometti created thin, elongated figures to embody the existential fear and loneliness that permeated life in postwar Europe. **Grande tête noire (Large Black Head)** features a solitary figure in grayscale, meeting the viewer's eyes with intense emotion. The artist often used such figures as proxies to understand his own lived experience, once saying: "I paint and sculpt to get a grip on reality…to protect myself."

On view January 10 – April 14, 2024

Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)
Buste d'homme (Bust of a Man), 1951
Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2023:74.7

Sculptor, painter, and printmaker Alberto Giacometti is known for his elongated figures that embody the fear and loneliness of post-World War II Europe. The artist spent most of his career in Paris, where his work was influenced by existential philosophers and writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). **Buste d'homme (Bust of a Man)** depicts a lonely figure set against a mysterious background. Giacometti partially credited this mode of representation to an experience at the cinema: "It happened after the war, around 1945, I think. Until then… there was no split between the way I saw the outside world and the way I saw what was going on on the screen. One was a continuation of the other. Until the day when there was a real split: instead of seeing a person on the screen, I saw vague blobs moving. I looked at the people around me and as a result I saw them as I had never seen them…. That day reality was completely revalued for me."

On view October 25, 2023 – January 28, 2024





Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)
Tête d'homme, ca. 1955
Colored wax crayons on paper

Private Collection; L2022:139.1

Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti spent the majority of his career in Paris in the wake of World War II. The artist's thin, elongated figures often reflect the existential fear and loneliness that permeated life in postwar Europe. Though he is primarily known as a sculptor, Giacometti also created drawings, paintings, and prints of his figurative subjects. **Tête d'homme** ("Head of a man") is a rare example of the artist's work in vivid color. Giacometti later reflected: "…it was never my intention to paint only with gray. But in the course of my work I have eliminated one color after another, and what has remained is gray, gray, gray!"

On view February 1 – May 7, 2023

Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)
Femme qui Marche II, 1932-36
Bronze

Private Collection; L2020:9.1

Sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti studied in Geneva and worked mostly in Paris, where he settled in 1922. It was here that Giacometti witnessed the radical experimentations of the city's avant-garde movements, such as Cubism and Surrealism, which introduced new avenues of expression to his philosophical interest in the human condition. The physically and psychologically haunting array of tall, slender figures he produced after WWII established Giacometti as one of the most important sculptors of the 20th century. **Femme qui Marche II (Woman Walking II)** provides a glimpse into artist's brief flirtation with Surrealism in the early 1930s. He found affinity with the movement's visionary embrace of dreams, the unconscious, and the uncanny, which he incorporated into a renewed interest in the human figure. Despite the title, this "walking" woman seems to stand perfectly still. Absent a head and arms, with regal posture and subtle *contrapposto*, she evokes the ancient statuary of Egypt, Greece, and Rome that Giacometti sketched during trips to the Louvre.

On view February 16 – May 31, 2020



Alberto Giacometti (Swiss, 1901-1966)
Buste d'Annette VIII, conceived in 1962 and cast in 1965
Bronze with brown and green patina

Private Collection; L2019:138.1

Modern artist Alberto Giacometti created eight plaster busts of his wife, Annette, in 1962, completing the series with two more in 1964 and 1965. The group marks the only period of concentrated portraiture of his wife in the artist's career. Giacometti's idiosyncratic manipulation of bronze yields a heavily textured surface at odds with his choice of medium. The delicate features and abstracted upper body of Annette seem to have more in common with an unfinished mass of modeled clay that still retains the heat of the sculptor's hands. Her face is alive with wisdom and discerning beauty as she gazes unflinchingly toward viewers. Though remembered as one of the most significant sculptors of the twentieth century, Giacometti was also a highly creative painter, draftsman, and printmaker. His innovative conceptual style transitioned away from the influence of Cubism and Surrealism in the 1930s as the artist settled into the psychological, often haunting, explorations of the human figure for which he is best known.

On view January 15 – April 19, 2020



Giacometti, ca. 1960
Photograph: Henri Cartier-Bresson