

# PRESS RELEASE

Press Contact

**Rachel Eggers**

Associate Director of Public Relations  
rachele@seattleartmuseum.org  
206.654.3151

MAY 11, 2022

## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS MAJOR ALBERTO GIACOMETTI EXHIBITION

*Toward the Ultimate Figure* presents modern sculptor's explorations of the human form in artist's first Seattle exhibition

SEATTLE  
ART  
MUSEUM

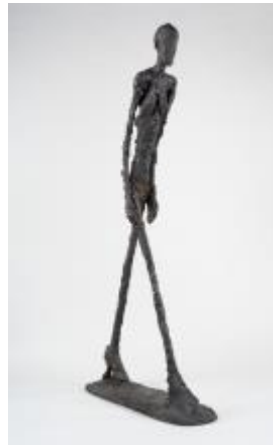
ASIAN  
ART  
MUSEUM

OLYMPIC  
SCULPTURE  
PARK

1300 First Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98101

206.625.8900

seattleartmuseum.org



SEATTLE - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) presents *Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure* (July 14–October 9, 2022), featuring the iconic explorations of the human form by the modern artist, focusing on his visionary achievements during the postwar years including sculpture, painting, and drawing. The exhibition is co-organized by the Fondation Giacometti in Paris; SAM is the second and only West Coast stop on its North American tour. It is the artist's first exhibition in Seattle.

Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) is an internationally celebrated sculptor whose delicate figures speak to the search for humanness and humility following the trauma and destruction of World War II. *Toward the Ultimate Figure* features over 60 portrait busts and statuettes in both bronze and plaster that vary widely in scale—from miniatures to commanding figures that are eight feet tall—as well as drawings and early paintings. Also on view are photographs of the artist and his famed studio by photographers including Richard Avedon, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Gordon Parks, and Irving Penn.

Catharina Manchanda, Jon & Mary Shirley Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art, is the SAM curator for the show's presentation in Seattle; it was co-curated by Serena Bucalo-Mussely of the Fondation Giacometti. "Giacometti's work became a beacon of stubborn and quiet hope against the irrational and devastating turmoil that defined his generation," says Manchanda. "I see a renewed contemporary relevance to his work as we recognize our fragility following two years of a global pandemic years and a new war in Eastern Europe."



## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

*Toward the Ultimate Figure* is organized in broad thematic sections, revealing how the artist came to find new ways of imagining the human figure in space.

### Early Years in Switzerland and Paris



In the first gallery, visitors are introduced to Giacometti's early artistic development. On view are paintings and watercolors of the mountainous landscape of his native Stampa in Switzerland, where his father was a celebrated postimpressionist painter. Forms such as a mass of rock or cluster of trees, and the figure within the landscape were themes to which Giacometti would return in the 1950s and 1960s.

Giacometti moved to Paris in 1922 and spent most of his career there, becoming a vital part of the city's avant-garde scene and keeping his small Montparnasse studio his entire life. Beginning in the 1920s, he began a study of African and ancient art; an alcove between the first and second galleries features two "proto-Surrealist" sculptures in dialogue with two African and one Cycladic figures from SAM's collection.

### The Importance of the Human Figure



Visitors then enter a large gallery that captures the spirit of Giacometti's studio. A range of sculptures from the late 1940s and 1950s show his unique approaches to the human bust and figure and how he played with scale, form, texture, and the relationship between the figure and pedestal. From a distance, Giacometti's full-length figures appear like fragile silhouettes but in close proximity they are highly textured.

Capturing the spark of the human gaze that animates a face was a key concern. He significantly went against the moment's interest in abstraction to reassert the importance of human representation. His reaction to the recent collective experience of war and trauma was to reclaim the human figure and a common humanity that eclipses nationalist borders and ideologies. His vision of the figure contrasted starkly with the idealized, muscular bodies championed by totalitarian regimes and embodied very different values: an acknowledgement of the individual's complex contrasts: vulnerability, fragility, and solitude as well as resilience and strength. Always on the brink of dissolution, his figures appear paradoxically timeless.



One section features the artist's explorations framing his figures and heads in box-like metal frames or placing them on pedestals that are proportionally supersized that make even a small figure appear monumental. *The Nose* (1947-49) is an iconic example, in which a head is suspended within a metal frame with a Pinocchio-like nose projecting grotesquely past the boundaries of the structure. On view in another section are figures in relation to landscapes, in which busts have the heavy, textured appearance of a mountain-like form or delicate figures stand in a group like a dense forest.

### The Process of Creation

Giacometti worked in his cramped, material-strewn Montparnasse studio for over 40 years, until his death in 1966. Giacometti mostly formed his sculptures first in clay or plaster, casting many works in bronze. His crowded studio, covered in plaster dust, became a place where writers and photographers came calling. Giacometti sketched and sculpted the heads of many of his visitors; in turn, he and his studio were increasingly singled out by well-known photographers, especially as he became more widely celebrated in the 1950s and 1960s. Portraits range from candid action shots of the artist at work to carefully staged images by noted photographers such as Richard Avedon, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Gordon Parks, and Irving Penn. The exhibition also features a projected video interview of the artist working in his studio.

### Personal and Artistic Collaborations



From the beginning of his artistic life, Giacometti preferred to work with those closest to him as models, especially his brother Diego and his wife Annette. Sitting for him required long hours of concentration, and both his brother and wife also assisted with various aspects of managing his studio and career. For Giacometti, working with consistent models allowed him to better pursue his vision, unveiling the stranger beneath the familiar.

Giacometti was friends with many writers, poets, artists, and thinkers throughout his life and key encounters are traced in a literary timeline within the exhibition. Initially, his work was inspired by, and inspiring to, the thriving Surrealist movement of 1920s-1930s Paris; after he moved away from Surrealist explorations to his own vision of human representation, he connected with existentialist thinkers including the playwright Samuel Beckett and philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Sartre wrote an influential essay on Giacometti's work, and Giacometti (with Beckett's participation) created a sculpture of a tree for the 1961 performance of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The exhibition includes a video on monitor of Beckett's *Quad I & II*, a choreographed piece for four performers made for television that is purely visual and uses repetitive arabesque movement reminiscent of Giacometti's sculpture *Three Men Walking*. A small bust of de Beauvoir is on view in a small alcove, along with select publications of existentialist works by those from Giacometti's milieu.

## In Search of the Absolute



The final gallery is imagined as an open plaza, inspired by a never-realized commission Giacometti attempted over the course of two years for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York. It features two monumental figures—*Walking Man* (1960) and *Tall Woman* (1960-61)—along with the sculpture *The Dog* (1951). Several drawings provide additional context, and a maquette shows the arrangement he initially envisioned but abandoned as a public installation. Some of these large-scale sculptures envisioned for the plaza became some of his most celebrated works, but Giacometti himself was never satisfied in his search toward the ultimate figure.

## TICKETING

### Museum Hours

- Closed Monday & Tuesday
- Wednesday–Sunday 10 am–5 pm
- Holiday hours on the website

### Special Exhibition Prices

- \$29.99 Adult
- \$27.99 Senior (65+), Military (with ID)
- \$19.99 Student (with ID), Teen (15–18)
- FREE for children (14 and under)
- FREE for SAM Members

### Special Prices

- First Thursdays: Free to all
- First Fridays: Free general admission for seniors (65+)

Details are subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on planning a visit, go to [seattleartmuseum.org](http://seattleartmuseum.org).

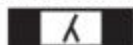
## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A 240-page catalogue with 200 color and black-and-white illustrations published by the Cleveland Museum of Art and distributed by Yale University Press will be available for purchase at [SAM Shop](#) (\$50). Also titled *Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure* (ISBN: 978-0300263916), the catalogue is edited by Émilie Bouvard of Fondation Giacometti, and it features essays by the director and curators of the Giacometti Foundation and by curators of the organizing US museums.

## EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

*Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure* is co-organized by the Seattle Art Museum and the Fondation Giacometti.

**FONDATION-  
GIACOMETTI**



Presenting Sponsor



Lead Sponsors



Major Sponsor  
**Robert Lehman Foundation**

**Image captions:** Alberto Giacometti in his studio, 1951, Photo: Gordon Parks, Archives, Fondation Giacometti, © Gordon Parks Foundation. *Walking Man I*, 1960, Alberto Giacometti, Swiss, 1901-1966, bronze, 180.5 × 27 × 97 cm, Fondation Giacometti, © Succession Alberto Giacometti / ADAGP, Paris, 2022. *The Mountain Road*, ca. 1919, Alberto Giacometti, Swiss, 1901-1966, watercolor and pencil on paper, 22 × 29 cm, Fondation Giacometti, © Succession Alberto Giacometti / ADAGP, Paris, 2022. *Man with a Windbreaker*, 1953, Alberto Giacometti, Swiss, 1901-1966, bronze, 50 × 28.6 × 22.5 cm, Fondation Giacometti, © Succession Alberto Giacometti / ADAGP, Paris, 2022. *The Nose*, 1947-49, Alberto Giacometti, Swiss, 1901-1966, bronze, painted metal, cotton rope, 80.9 × 70.5 × 40.6 cm, Fondation Giacometti, © Succession Alberto Giacometti / ADAGP, Paris, 2022. *Bust of Annette* (known as Venice), 1962, Alberto Giacometti, Swiss, 1901-1966, bronze, 46.2 × 26.5 × 16.2 cm, Fondation Giacometti, © Succession Alberto Giacometti / ADAGP, Paris, 2022. *Tall Woman IV*, 1960-61, Alberto Giacometti, Swiss, 1901-1966, bronze, 270 × 31.5 × 56.5 cm, Fondation Giacometti, © Succession Alberto Giacometti / ADAGP, Paris, 2022.

## ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020, following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.

## **ABOUT FONDATION GIACOMETTI**

Created in December 2003 in Paris, the Fondation Giacometti is a private institution and an officially recognized non-profit organization. Its purpose is the protection, dissemination and promotion of Alberto Giacometti's oeuvre. Sole legatee of Annette Giacometti, the artist's widow, the foundation owns the largest collection of works by Alberto Giacometti in the world. The Fondation Giacometti is directed by Catherine Grenier.

The foundation is dedicated to the preservation and diffusion of its collections (drawings, paintings, prints, plasters and bronzes), and works at promoting and enhancing Alberto Giacometti's oeuvre on an international level.

Its activities include: the presentation to the public of Alberto Giacometti's oeuvre through the organization of monographic and thematic exhibitions in French and foreign museums, the establishing of a catalogue of the artist's authenticated works, the organization and participation in various cultural events, the publication and participation in the publication of research on Alberto Giacometti's oeuvre. The Foundation organizes the committee of authentication of the artist's works, and takes charge of the protection of his oeuvre in France and abroad.