

From: *Alberto Giacometti*, curated by J. Gachnang, R. Fuchs, C. Mundici, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 6 December 1988 - 26 February 1989), Fabbri Editori, Milano 1988, pp. 57-58.

About the exhibition

Johannes Gachnang

These important creations were put on display in the French Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 1962, and then again at the show organized by Balthus at Villa Medici, in Rome, in the late '60s: after that they were never displayed in Italy again. This could be surprising, but it should be kept in mind that, at the time when Giacometti was active, the arts, as well as the cultural and philosophical debate, had their centre in Paris. Actually, Giacometti went to the Venice Biennale, in 1962, to present his works in an international context and thus gain a comparative appraisal of them - on that occasion he was awarded the Biennale's Top Prize for sculpture - but he did not go any further, since Italian relationships pointed towards Milan, but it cannot be overlooked that the powerful force emanating from Milan at the turn of the century was gradually dwindling and would never be on a par again with that of New York or Paris. Back in 1920-21 Giacometti had visited Venice (for Tintoretto), Padua (Giotto) Assisi (Cimabue) and Rome (Sophocles and Aeschylus).

Over the coming months, working in close cooperation with the Maeght Foundation of Saint-Paul de Vence, the Castello di Rivoli is going to set up a show displaying the major works by Alberto Giacometti. Though he spent many years in Paris, Giacometti had been born in Val Bregaglia, Switzerland, close to the Italian border, and that is where he grew up, speaking Italian as his native language; this is also where the artist's tomb can now be found, at Stampa-Maloja, in the valley to which he always returned, on regular visits, throughout his life. Giacometti wrote to New York: we shall mention his famous, often published letter to his dealer, Pierre Matisse, of 1948. In October 1965, shortly before his death, aboard the Queen Elizabeth Giacometti reached the new world and, with New York, a point of departure for his future orientation.

Our selection is of a retrospective nature and it includes works dating back to the early period when Giacometti was under the influence of Surrealism and Primitivism, up to the latest, most original, creations of the early '60s. The aim of this show is to present Giacometti's artistic production, which so far has been viewed as something that belongs to the past, within a contemporary context. The historical setting - the Castello di Rivoli erected in the 17th century by Juvarra, a Sicilian architect of Spanish origin, for the Savoy sovereigns - and the experience we have gained in handling these spaces over the last two decades while working with Minimal Art and with artists like Judd and Andre, make the Castello into the ideal environment for a modern re-examination of Giacometti works, the place where his production can be endowed with a new up-to-date perspective.

Thirty years ago, the famous French critic Berne-Joffroy dreamed of setting up a huge show at the Gare de Lyon by placing Giacometti's sculptures in the large hall of the station, in the midst of a bustling flow of people. But times have changed since then. It is in keeping with this evolution of perception that the catalogue of the show includes pieces by young authors with a new mentality, a new outlook, who have been less influenced by Genet, Beckett and Sartre - Giacometti's

contemporaries - than by Foucault, Barthes and Klossowski. It was Alberto Giacometti who encouraged Klossowski, a writer and philosopher, to draw: Klossowski's first show, displaying his so-called *Compositions* - drawings of gigantic proportions - was organized in 1957, in Paris, by Giacometti himself. It can also be pointed out that Sils Maria on the Engadine plateau, very close to Stampa, is where Nietzsche went on working until he left for Turin¹.

I vaguely recall the mise-en-scène of Beckett's «En attendant Godot» at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris, in 1961. The playbill said the scenes were by Giacometti and I decided to go because his illustrations for the covers of Genet's books in the «éditions l'Arbalète» had aroused my curiosity. Before the intermission, the scene consisted of a thin tree bearing a few leaves, three or four or perhaps as many as seven; when the curtain went up again, there was nothing left but the naked tree, devoid of all its leaves, much in keeping with the vicissitudes of the play being staged. Thus, faltering, this play - which had gone pretty much unnoticed owing to the scarcity of means of its first staging in 1953 - began to reach a wider public, and in subsequent years would be staged in every conceivable fashion, by just about everybody.

Our presentation of Alberto Giacometti's plastic works is flanked by a collection of photos - «Alberto Giacometti vu par les photographes» - that has been made available by the Zürich based Foundation Pro Helvetia, and the catalogue of the show provides a comprehensive survey of the artist's life and activity.

Bern, October 1988

¹ See also Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche e il circolo vizioso*, Adelphi, Milano 1981.