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ELIZA KURAKOVA
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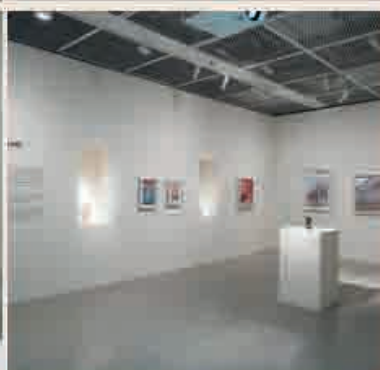
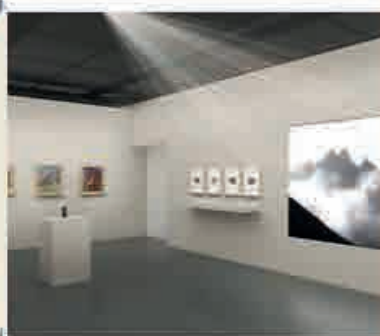


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Welcome back, Art Enthusiasts.

For most of his life, Alberto Giacometti worked in a twenty-three-square-metre studio at 46 Rue Hippolyte Maindron in Paris, a room that served as both his home and workplace from 1928 until his death in 1966. Sculptures in various stages of completion, drawings, paintings, tools and personal objects accumulated within its modest walls. It was here, in this remarkably small space, that Giacometti developed some of the most recognisable sculptures of the twentieth century. In 2015, his *L'Homme au doigt* (Pointing Man) sold at Christie's for \$141.3 million including fees, setting a world auction record for a sculpture at the time. This July, sixty years after his death, Shanghai's Minsheng Art Museum opened **"Alberto Giacometti: A Life of Creation."**

Running from July 17 through December 6, the exhibition brings together 212 works and archival materials from the collection of the Fondation Giacometti across thirteen sections. Organised jointly by the Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing Minsheng Art Museum and Fondation Giacometti, it offers a panoramic account of Giacometti's artistic development and personal world, from his childhood in Switzerland to his decades in Paris. The exhibition is also one of the major projects of the 2026 Festival Croisements, marking the festival's twentieth edition.



Courtesy of Cécile Degos, Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum and the Fondation Giacometti.

More than a conventional retrospective, **"Alberto Giacometti: A Life of Creation"** seeks to reconsider the image of Giacometti as the isolated artist of the postwar imagination. Its thirteen sections bring together sculpture, painting, drawing, prints and manuscripts, while tracing his relationships with his family, his memories of Switzerland and his daily life in Paris. The result is an exhibition concerned not only with the famous elongated figures, but with the experiences, places and people that shaped them.

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Giacometti and the problem of distance

The figures for which Giacometti became famous were not simply the product of a distinctive style. They emerged from his attempt to understand how the human figure appears to the eye. From a distance, a person can seem surprisingly small, fragile and almost absorbed by the space around them. The sculptor repeatedly returned to this problem, trying to reconcile what he saw with what sculpture could actually represent. The result was an art in which distance became almost as important as the figure itself. That relationship between the human form and the surrounding void is central to the Shanghai exhibition.



Courtesy of Cécile Degos, Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum and the Fondation Giacometti.

The scenography was conceived to establish a continuous dialogue between the figure, emptiness and distance, translating one of the fundamental concerns of Giacometti's practice into the physical experience of the exhibition.

The exhibition's spatial design is by **Cécile Degos**, one of France's leading exhibition and museum designers. Her practice spans museums, foundations, galleries and major cultural institutions, with projects including the Bourse de Commerce, the Royal Academy of Arts in London, the Musée Picasso and the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris. Her recent work in Shanghai includes *Paths to Modernity: Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay, Paris* and *The Wonder of Patterns: Masterpieces from India, Iran and the Ottoman World from the Musée du Louvre* at the Museum of Art Pudong.

Details of Cécile Degos: Inside the Mind of the Woman Who Designs the Way You See Art

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Her approach is particularly suited to Giacometti. Instead of treating the exhibition space as a white-cube space, Degos uses volume, perspective, material, colour and transitions to shape the visitor's perception. Her design for *A Life of Creation* was developed around "spatial storytelling", using carefully calibrated viewing angles and changes in scale to create a sequence of encounters with the works. Having encountered Degos's work firsthand at the Musée de la Vie romantique and in her scenography for George Condo at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, I was particularly interested to see what this language would do with Giacometti. Here, it becomes clear that the scenography is not an aesthetic layer placed around the works. It establishes the conditions in which they are seen.

With Giacometti, this becomes particularly significant. His sculptures depend on intervals, on the distance between viewer and figure and Degos's architecture gives those intervals a physical presence. Her forthcoming scenography for Kerry James Marshall's *The Histories* at the Musée d'Art Moderne offers another indication of the range of this practice. Marshall's paintings demand an entirely different relationship to scale, colour and the body, yet the fundamental question remains similar: how can the architecture of an exhibition influence the way an artwork is perceived?

In Shanghai, this question becomes particularly precise because the architecture is responding to an artist whose entire practice was concerned with seeing

A childhood in the mountains, a family who never left him.

The exhibition begins in Stampa, in Switzerland's Bregaglia Valley, where Giacometti was born in 1901. His father, Giovanni Giacometti, was a prominent Swiss painter, and Alberto grew up in quite intense artistic environment. The opening section presents landscapes, portraits and sculptures from his youth, revealing an early sensitivity to both people and the natural world:



Courtesy of Shanghai Museum Art Museum and the Fondation Giacometti

From there, the exhibition follows his development through his arrival in Paris, his encounters with Cubism and Surrealism, his experiments during the 1930s, and his gradual return to the human figure. The wartime period brought him back to Switzerland before he returned to Paris, where his small studio became the centre of his mature practice. Works such as *The Nose*, *Tall Woman I* and *Walking Man I* chart the transformation of the human figure through these years. They are familiar images, but seen alongside the earlier works and archival material, their development becomes easier to understand.



Courtesy of Cécile Degos, Shanghai Museum Art Museum and the Fondation Giacometti



Courtesy of Cécile Degos, Shanghai Museum Art Museum and the Fondation Giacometti

A dark, abstract sculpture of a standing figure, possibly a bronze or wood, with a very thin, elongated body and a flat base. The figure is standing on a rectangular base, with its legs spread apart. The body is extremely thin, with visible ribbing and a long, narrow torso. The head is small and rounded. The overall form is elongated and vertical, with a sense of reaching or stretching. The material appears dark and textured, possibly patinated metal or carved wood.

His life in Paris was embedded in a network of family, friends, artists and writers. Jean Paul Sartre and Jean Genet both wrote extensively about his work, while his friendships and encounters with artists of the Parisian avant garde placed him firmly within the intellectual and artistic life of the city.

One of the exhibition's more intimate chapters is devoted to Paris sans fin, Giacometti's extensive series of lithographs devoted to the city. The project records the Paris of his everyday life rather than its monuments. Streets, cafes, acquaintances, interiors and his studio appear repeatedly, transformed by the restless line of the artist's hand. The series reveals something essential about Giacometti's way of looking. He returned again and again to the same people and places, not because they had become familiar, but because familiarity never seemed to exhaust what could be seen. Photography offers another way into this world.



Giacometti was photographed by some of the most important photographers of the twentieth century, including Man Ray, Henri Cartier Bresson, Ernst Scheidegger, Irving Penn, Richard Avedon and Yousuf Karsh. These photographs place him within the physical environment of his practice: in the studio, on the streets of Paris, surrounded by sculptures and often appearing deep in concentration.

Seen together, they provide more than a portrait of the artist. They document the world in which the sculptures were made. The relationship between Giacometti and his models is particularly striking when photographs and sculptures are considered together. Diego, Annette and other recurring figures appear not simply as subjects, but as people whose presence was repeatedly observed, reconsidered and transformed through the artist's work. The photographs therefore reinforce one of the exhibition's central propositions: Giacometti's art was deeply rooted in human relationships, even when the resulting sculptures came to embody solitude.



Final details

"All that I will be able to make will be only a pale image of what I see." Giacometti wrote these words in 1959, describing the gap between what the eye perceives and what the artist can ultimately put into the world. He understood that gap not as a problem to be solved, but as the reason to keep looking, drawing and sculpting. "I do not know whether I work in order to make something," he wrote, "or in order to know why I cannot make what I would like to make."



Tall Woman I (Alberto Giacometti) - Bronze, 1960s (© Succession Giacometti/Art & Co Paris, 2025)

This perpetual search is perhaps the most revealing way to leave *A Life of Creation*. Across the exhibition, Giacometti emerges not simply as the author of his iconic figures, but as an artist whose entire practice was shaped by the possibility of fully capturing what he saw. Cécile Degos's scenography brings this question into the space itself, making the distance between the viewer, the figure and its surroundings part of the experience. And perhaps this is what the exhibition ultimately leaves us with: what happens when the space around the figure becomes part of the figure itself?

Until next time.

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(Sources: Cécile Degos, Shanghai Museum Art Museum and the Fondation Giacometti)