

PRESS PACK



INSTITUT-
GIACOMETTI



exposition
exhibition

6

janvier

→ 28

mars

2021

Giacometti / Beckett
Rater encore. Rater mieux.
Giacometti/Beckett
Fail again. Fail better.





Samuel Beckett and Alberto Giacometti in the
studio called the telephone booth, 1961
Photo : Georges Pierre
Fondation Giacometti

GIACOMETTI / BECKETT

Fail again. Fail better.

Exhibition

6 January - 28 March 2021

Press preview

Tuesday 5 January 2021

11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Press Contact
Anne-Marie Pereira
tel. : 33 (0)1 87 89 76 75/33 (0)6 48 38 10 96
am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

- Press release.....	pages 4-5
- Exhibition path.....	6-10
- Biography of Alberto Giacometti (1901 - 1966)	11
- Biography of Samuel Beckett (1906 - 1989)	12
- Catalogue.....	13
- Extracts from catalogue texts.....	14-22
- The Giacometti Institute.....	23
- Press images.....	25
- Patrons of the Giacometti Institute.....	30

Institut Giacometti
5, rue Victor Schoelcher
75014 Paris

www.institut-giacometti.fr

Président
Catherine Grenier

Artistic Director
Christian Alandete

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira
tel. : 33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
33 (0)6 48 38 10 96
am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



**Samuel Beckett and Alberto Giacometti
in Giacometti's studio, 1961**
Photo : Georges Pierre

GIACOMETTI / BECKETT

Fail again. Fail better. 6 January > 28 March 2021

Among the literary friendships of Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), that which bound him to Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is not the most well-known, but it was one of the most enduring. It goes back to 1937, and developed in the post-war period. The two artists enjoyed meeting up for endless nights spent in the bars of Montparnasse, before wandering through the streets of Paris. Important similarities bring their respective works closer, a connection that was finally expressed in an exceptional collaboration: Giacometti creating the set for a staging of *Waiting for Godot* in 1961.

For the first time, the Giacometti Institute presents the bonds that brought the artist and the author closer. The exhibition will broach their lasting friendship, their collaboration and the affinity between their works which crossed paths with Existentialism.

Curator : Hugo Daniel

Curator

Hugo Daniel

Installation

Eric Morin

Production

Stéphanie Barbé-Sicouri

Follow us on social media on
#GiacomettiBeckett



Samuel Beckett
Waiting for Godot
Théâtre de l'Odéon, 1961
Photo : Roger Pic

Around the exhibition

Free audioguide to the exhibition to be downloaded on the site of the Giacometti Foundation
www.fondation-giacometti.fr

Guided visits

Wednesday, Friday and Saturday
11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Thursday 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.

Sunday 2 p.m.

Family visits

Sunday 11 a.m.

Associated programme

A programme of events will be on offer during the exhibition: Reading, round table, concert, performance (from January to March) with the participation of specialists of Beckett's work.

Creative workshops

Workshops for 7 - 12 years old

'Figure in cage',
modelling of clay on wire

Saturday 19 December & Sunday 20
December from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Fee: €20

Workshop for 13-16 years old

'Heads staged', installation and
video

Directing and making a short,
enigmatic and marvellous video
from experimentations on the
head and its connection to the rest
of the body.

Saturday 27 February & Sunday 28
February from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Fee: €20

Samuel Beckett and Alberto Giacometti, who moved in the same circles, had known each other since the end of the 1930s. Their numerous exchanges were crystallised in a collaboration for the set of *Waiting for Godot* on its revival at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1961, and are noticeable in the resemblances between their respective works.



Gerard Byrne
Construction V (based on Giacometti), 2006
Recreation of the tree made by Giacometti
for *Waiting for Godot*, 1961, Paris, Odéon.

When Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot* (1953), was staged again at the Odéon, he asked Giacometti to create the set. He was satisfied with the tree created by the sculptor, fragile like human existence. Having disappeared after the last performance, the piece has been recreated by the artist Gerard Byrne in 2006.



Alberto Giacometti
Seated Woman, 1949 - 1950



Samuel Beckett
Rockaby, 1981

In the play *Rockaby*, an elderly woman, whose babbling evokes the passing of life, is sitting still in a rocking chair that rocks. Often hindered in their movements, fixed in postures, Beckett's characters recall Giacometti's, like his seated women whose body, suspended in waiting, becomes a structure.



Alberto Giacometti
Three heads of Men and a Head in profile on a page of the magazine Critique, 1960.

Despite their achievements, both Beckett and Giacometti experienced the creative process from the angle of failure. The tireless work on the same motif, and coincidentally with one as with the other, the focusing on faces, a characteristic of that process of depletion. Giacometti's drawings repeat them endlessly, on all supports, here, by chance, appearing on a page of the magazine *Critique* promoting Beckett's novel *Molloy*.



Alberto Giacometti
Head on a Rod, 1947

Among the pieces associated, in the post-war years, with the despair of the human condition, *Head on a Rod*, Giacometti's masterpiece, offers an iconic image. While both the oeuvres of Beckett and Giacometti were assimilated within a humanism close to Existentialism, the publication of the text *Imagination Dead Imagine* in 1965 bore that sculpture on the cover, alluding to the close bond between their respective works.

In Giacometti's work, theatre occupied an important place, and at the turn of the 1950. It was represented around the concept of 'cages'. The closed space constrains and defines the body in a single movement.



Alberto Giacometti
The Cage, 1950



Alberto Giacometti
Bust of Man, 1956

The modelling was gradually accentuated in Giacometti's sculpture during the post-war years. At times, that work on the matter turned out as a fusion of figure and base, giving the paradoxical impression that the former is caught as much as it is shaped by that matter.



Alberto Giacometti
Three Walking Men, 1948

First an urban scene in which the protagonists cross paths without meeting, *Three Walking Men* gives to the existential theme of solitude a form where the space, almost stage-like, holds the protagonists together while revealing the gap that separates them. Beckett's *Quad* plays on that theme in the striking formal similarity where the absolutely precise movement of the protagonists exhausts the square space of the stage as they avoid one another in its centre.



Samuel Beckett
Quad, 1981



Samuel Beckett
Not I, 1972 - 1977
Courtesy BBC

How to express the body? In Beckett's, the elements of language were progressively deconstructed: syntactic articulations and punctuation disappeared. In the video pieces like *Not I*, the body, isolated to become solely an organ of elocution, is as unrealised, fascinating because made too present and disconnected from the rapid flux of words that become almost incomprehensible.

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI (1901-1966)

Born in 1901 in Stampa, Switzerland, Alberto Giacometti was the son of Giovanni Giacometti, a renowned post-impressionist painter.

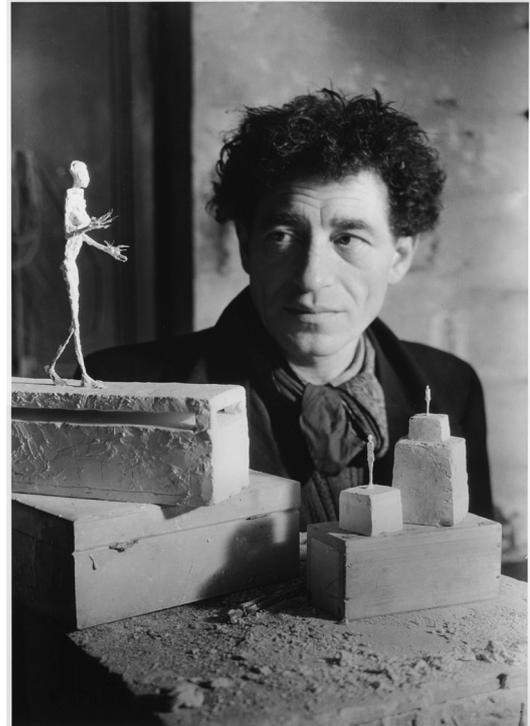
He was initiated into the arts in his father's studio, and at the age of 14 made his first works there, a painting and a sculpted bust of his brother Diego. In 1922, Giacometti left to study in Paris, and was enrolled in the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, where he attended the classes of the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle.

At that time, he drew from models and was interested in the avant-garde, among them the post-cubists.

In 1929, he started a series of 'flat women', which gained him notice in the art milieu. In 1930, Giacometti joined André Breton's surrealist movement, within which he created a series of objects with symbolic and erotic connotations. In 1932 and 1934, he created two emblematic female figures, *Walking Woman* and *Invisible Object*. In 1935, he distanced himself from the surrealist group and returned to the practise of working from a life model, dedicating himself to the question of the human figure, which would remain the main subject of research for his whole life.

The friendship that bound Alberto Giacometti and Samuel Beckett goes back to 1937, and developed in the post-war period. In the years 1945 to 1965, Giacometti's research focused on the space of representation: the figures are placed on bases or held in 'cages' that outline a virtual space. In the 1950s, theatre took up an important part in his oeuvre, and was represented around 'cages'. Important similarities bring their respective works closer, a connection that was finally expressed in an exceptional collaboration: Giacometti creating the set for a staging of *Waiting for Godot* in 1961.

Alberto Giacometti died in January 1966, at the Coire Hospital in Switzerland



Alberto Giacometti in his studio, circa 1946
Photo: Emile Savitry

SAMUEL BECKETT (1906-1989)

Born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1906. After studying Literature at Trinity College, in Dublin, he was offered, in 1928, the position of lecturer in English at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, rue d'Ulm, in Paris. There he befriended Thomas McGreevy, who introduced him to the Parisian intellectual milieu.

After a stay in Dublin in 1930, he devoted more and more of his time to writing a project for a novel, as well as working as a translator. In 1934, a first collection of short stories was published.

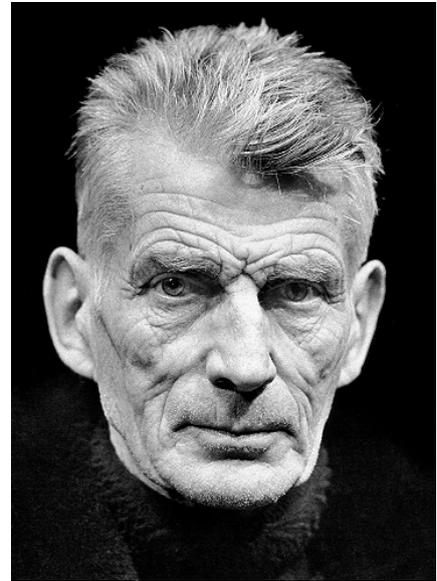
He went back to Paris in 1937, where he settled. He met, among others, the painters Bram and Geer Van Velde, Alberto Giacometti, Marcel Duchamp, Peggy Guggenheim and met up again with Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, who later became his wife.

He joined the resistance in 1941, and had to take refuge in the Roussillon the following year. While several of his texts were published in *Les Temps Modernes*, Beckett worked on several novels among them *Molloy* (his first novel written in French). In 1947 he wrote his first theatre play and the following year, *Waiting for Godot*, produced by Roger Blin in 1953, the year it was published by Éditions de Minuit. From 1949, Beckett was a regular collaborator to the magazine *Transition*, taken over by Georges Duthuit, increasing his production with texts, including for the theatre, *Endgame* (1957) and *Happy Days!* (1961), among others.

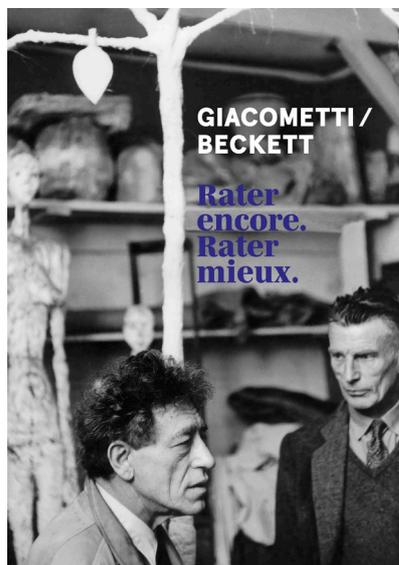
For the revival of *Waiting for Godot* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1961, he asked Giacometti to create the set, that is, the tree.

The adaptation of his piece *Play* (1964) into a film version, was followed by *Film* (shot in New York with Buster Keaton). His texts, gradually becoming shorter, were adapted to the new media of radio and television. In 1969, Beckett did not go to collect the Nobel Prize for Literature he had just been awarded. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s, he wrote many short texts and pieces for the theatre, the radio and television like *Not I* (1972) and *Quad I and II* (1980). His last text to be published was *The Image*, in 1988.

A few months after his wife Suzanne passed away, he followed her in 1989.



Samuel Beckett
Photo: John Haynes



A fully illustrated catalogue, co-edited by Fondation Giacometti, Paris, and FAGE Édition accompanies the exhibition.

192 pages
16.5 x 23.5 cm
Bilingual French/English
Price: 28 €

Summary

Preface

Christian Alandete, Artistic Director at Giacometti Institute

Samuel Beckett and Alberto Giacometti (Work) in progress

Hugo Daniel, in charge of the École des modernités, Exhibition curator

Beckett and Giacometti: An absolute regard

Derval Tubridy

In conversation with Marin Karmitz

On Play, Beckett and Giacometti

Hugo Daniel, Marin Karmitz

In conversation with Maguy Marin

Christian Alandete, Hugo Daniel, Maguy Marin

Samuel Beckett, Alberto Giacometti
(Work) in progress
Hugo Daniel

Compagny

Along a country lane, under the branches of a skeletal tree, two men gaze at the iridescent moon crescent. This small melancholic painting by Caspar David Friedrich, dating from 1819-1820, made an impression on Samuel Beckett when he saw it in the museum in Dresden in 1937. This silent discussion was, according to Beckett, an antecedent to his play *Waiting for Godot* whose set he planted somewhat laconically: "A country road. A tree. / Evening." We could also see the illustration of an ideal artistic exchange similar to that which possibly took place in his long and mysterious relationship with Giacometti. The temptation is all the stronger for their meeting dates from the same year as the discovery of that painting by Beckett and that their only successful collaboration was the tree for *Godot*, in 1961. And that relationship invites us to go beyond the picture.

The relationship between Beckett and Giacometti was ruled by silence and chance meetings. Giacometti welcomed Beckett into his studio, as he had done with many other writers. He made numerous illustrations for his poet friends, from René Crevel and André Breton to Jacques Dupin, and these men wrote on his œuvre. He also made their portraits. Beckett, who had an ambivalent relationship with the image, between attraction and suspicion, had a vast art culture. He was friends with painters like the brothers Bram and Geer Van Velde, Avigdor Arikha, Pierre Tal Coat, André Masson (all of them equally friends of Giacometti), to whom he devoted noteworthy texts in the post-war period. But, except for the tree in *Godot*, the play that put the author on the map, there is no shared work, no portrait of Beckett as there are of André Breton, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Georges Bataille, Jean Genet, Jacques Dupin, Olivier Larronde, etc., no text of Beckett on Giacometti, barely a trace, in the writer's library, only two catalogues of the late exhibitions of Giacometti's work. Their friendship, so hard to fathom, was nevertheless one of the longest they both experienced: it lasted from the end of the 1930s to Giacometti's death in 1966. And their works present so many echoes that they could be considered twins. Between the two men, whose imaginary was haunted by solitude, more than a friendship, it is a company one should consider, in the Beckettian sense of 'need for company not continuous', of that 'another devising it all for company'. So the dialogue does not take place face to face but in parallel, in an exchange where chance prevails - 'he and I, always by chance', Giacometti noted, as if any other more social means of communication would have prevented the relationship from functioning. The conditions for their meetings illustrate their shared interrogation on the power of expression facing a reality that exceeds everything. To be understood, that relationship has to be freed from the stereotypical images of post-war Paris.

Giacometti and Beckett belonged to the same generation of artists who had come to Paris, that 'Tower of Babel', the first at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in 1922, the second as a lecteur at the École Normale Supérieure in 1928. They went to the same cafés in Montparnasse: La Closerie des Lilas, Le Dôme, Le Sélect. At the beginning of the 1930s, they gravitated towards the circles close to surrealism. Giacometti joined their ranks in 1930, and regularly met up with André Breton, Georges Sadoul, Tristan Tzara, Max Ernst, Louis Aragon, René Crevel, etc. Beckett, closer to Philippe Soupault, read them. He was particularly impressed by the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. In 1928, Beckett had a brief romance with Peggy Guggenheim, a pillar of the movement (ten years later, she visited Giacometti's studio and bought some of his works). In this whirlwind of exchanges, their works cohabited before the two men eventually met. The magazine *Transition*, directed by Eugène Jolas, endeavoured from 1927 to introduce its readers to modernism and surrealism. In June 1929, Beckett became a regular contributor, as Giacometti would become in March 1932. In 1931, Giacometti and Crevel became close and started to plan the frontispiece for the

latter's novel *Putting My Foot in It*, an opportunity for Giacometti to work for the first time with the printmaker Stanley Williams Hayter from Atelier 17. It is unlikely that Beckett did not see that publication, for in 1931 he was translating texts by the surrealists for Nancy Cunard's *Negro Anthology*, which included, among others, the manifesto 'Murderous Humanitarianism', signed by the 'Surrealist Group in Paris', but in fact penned by Crevel, who also wrote, for the occasion, the pamphlet 'The Negress in the Brothel'. Crevel was not the only connection between the two artists. In 1934, while Beckett published his first texts and worked on his novel *Murphy*, the editor and surrealist poet Georges Reavey offered to publish him in French at his publishing house Europa Press. Reavey, who usually illustrated the books he printed with frontispieces, was close to Hayter. That explained how an envelope, posted in London, was discovered, addressed by Beckett to Reavey, mentioning the address of the sculptor, hand-written by Giacometti: Reavey had asked Giacometti to create the frontispiece for the book. Though the project did not come to fruition, it attests to the closeness of both artists.

At that time, their practice was based on their experience of surrealism. More than coincidences or borrowing from one another, it was the proliferation of the ways of experiencing which both of their works shared, that conveys the way their intellectual journeys converged. For example, the shape of the cage appeared in Giacometti's work with *Suspended Ball* (1930). It is found in several works after, some of them being the preparatory etchings for the frontispiece of *Putting My Foot in It* (1933), where it is associated with a body that it contains. The novel *Murphy*, in gestation since 1934, opens on the circumstances of an eponymous character who lives in a cul-de-sac in London. "Here for what might have been six months he had eaten, drunk, slept, and put his clothes on and off, in a medium-sized cage of north-western aspect commanding an unbroken view of medium-sized cages of south-eastern aspect.". Murphy's physical impasse is a metaphor for the mental impasse that traverses the novel. A male nurse in a psychiatric hospital, he is stuck in a "come and go". "Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without." So he is "split in two, a body and a mind." This relation to the mind, on a background of chess games between the rational and the irrational explores the gap opened by surrealism. A note by Giacometti from 1934, chimes with that: "Same process in the shaping of my dreams and in the shaping of my objects." But, he noticed retrospectively, "all of this gradually alienated [him] from external reality". In 1935, a pressing need drove him to sit in front of a model in order to go back to confronting reality. Because of this move, he was excluded from the surrealist group, but that return to reality was not a step backwards. It enabled a combination, as Giacometti informed Pierre Matisse: "All this alternated, contradicted itself and continued by contrast." The oscillation is the same as in Beckett's novels that make reality delirious. Before they met, both artists had an understanding of 'reality' that accepted modernism and surrealism. This understanding integrated the tension between an 'inner' reality (mental) and the 'outer' reality, but also the conviction that the way to relate it had to be freed from rationalism.

Hindrance

For Beckett, as for Giacometti, the question of creation was, from then on, that of the relation to reality. The notion of the etiolation of reality, present in one as in the other, brought them to a progressive stripping of their means of expression. The matter in Giacometti's sculptures gradually diminished, in the same way as Beckett's texts were gradually stripped of punctuation and syntax. After becoming close to Georges Duthuit, for whom he translated pieces for *Transition*, Beckett looked at the issue of painting with renewed interest. In 1945 he published in *Cahiers d'art* his first text on the brothers Van Velde, whom he had known since the 1930s. In his exchanges with Duthuit, Beckett spoke about his difficulty facing a painting

that 'seems to him evidently too rich'. However, he mixed with the painters Nicolas de Staël, Joan Mitchell, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Sam Francis, Pierre Tal Coat, André Masson, Henri Matisse, all part of Giacometti's circle. He preferred the erosion of the material he saw in 'Giacometti, granitically subtle, and all in inverted perceptions, very sensible deep down, wanting to figure what he sees which, perhaps, is not so sensible after all when one is able to see as he sees. My timid nays quickly swept away, rather crushed, me helping as is expected.' From the 'cold' shingle of Embers to the pebbles methodically sucked by *Molloy*, mineral aridity is a Beckettian quality. Giacometti was appreciated by Beckett, a visual ascetic who saw Piet Mondrian's painting as 'replete', and Tal Coat's as an 'orgy'. At the turn of the years 1940-1950, the two artists identified the relation to reality as a deception, and accepted that 'fidelity to failure' that concluded the dialogues between Beckett and Duthuit: "The history of painting, here we go again, is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee." These connections to which Giacometti subscribed, define an ethic of art practice in which, according to Beckett, "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world".

Undoubtedly the despair with which the oeuvres of both artists are associated matches that ethic of art practice. Marked by the 'capital of ruins', Beckett shared with Giacometti that feeling of the precariousness of existence. The themes of human solitude and impossibility to communicate present in their oeuvres brought them closer in an uneasy relationship with the world. A shared ambivalence persists however, between dread and the grotesque (that goes as far as humour): it is the smile of Giacometti's Nose, close to what has been called the absurd in the work of Beckett, who, much later on, defined a position: "Facing/the worst/until it makes one laugh". Supported by Sartre, they were assimilated into the nascent existentialism. Both were linked to the founder of the magazine *Les Temps Modernes*, in which they appeared several times. In this publication, Giacometti read, in 1946, the first translations of the (erotic) poems written by Beckett in 1938-1939, to which he responded in the margin with the drawing of a female bust. This document forces on us an evidence: their imaginaries had fraternised. But none of them needed the existentialism and the phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to experience their human condition facing reality - for them, way before the war, God was dead. It is striking that they drew similar forms from this connection. One of their first concerns was the ordeal of the constrained body, or simply the body caught in the matter. Experimented in the pre-war period, the device of the cage, or its transposition on bases and frames, became a recurrent creative tool in Giacometti's post-war oeuvre. The Cages he made at the turn of the year 1950 took on a theatrical dimension, though those scenes distorted the scales and tightly held the busts in heavy blocks of material. To that vision correspond Beckett's many visions of characters nailed to their bed (Malone), bogged down in a ditch (Molloy), stuck at the waist (The Unnamable), caught in a nipple (Winnie in Happy Days), attached to a chair (Murphy, Hamm in Endgame, the woman in Rockaby), etc. Both gave a visual form to the 'hindrance', that is the human condition as well as the condition of creation. The same with the material: it became visible on the surface of Giacometti's sculptures which at the same time reduced in volume. In both artists' work, the importance of the theatre grew from the end of the 1950s. Beckett wrote his first performed play *Waiting for Godot* between 1948 and 1952, in the same period as Giacometti developed his Cages and other figures on pedestal. It is telling that their only collaboration took place on the space of a stage. For Beckett, in his first play, it was already a question of measure. He discussed it: "Honestly, I am completely against the ideas of de Staël [regarding the set for *Godot*, in 1952], perhaps I'm wrong. He sees it as a painter. For me, it's aesthetics. [...]. I don't personally believe in a collaboration between the arts, I want a theatre reduced to its own means, words and play, without painting and without music, without ornament. [...] The set should come out of the text, without adding to it. As for the spectator's

visual convenience, guess where I put it." In March 1961 nevertheless, he invited Giacometti to create the set for *Godot* on its revival at the Théâtre de l'Odéon. "We spent the whole night with that plaster tree, removing, lowering, making the branches thinner. It never looked any good and neither he nor I liked it. And we kept saying to each other: perhaps like this...". The intervention of Giacometti, who had conscientiously studied the various appearances of the tree in the play, went for a 'lowering', which obviously was to please Beckett. In a minimalist set, the tree created by Giacometti was frail and fragile as were his human figures, and it carried the precariousness of human existence.

Theatre exceeded the question of scenography. In one of Giacometti's notebooks from that period, Pierre Jean Jouve's closeness to Beckett was at first sight surprising, but is explained by that question. In 1954, in Jouve's texts on the scenery for Mozart's *Don Juan*, published in *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, Giacometti showed his enthusiasm in the margin, underlining that "the stage is always imagined", then a little further: "The importance of the scenery - the scenery in mind." In Beckett's work as in Giacometti's, the stage is a vision, otherwise immaterial, that has taken on form. It is the space where drama can take place, even though the play might be silent. So Beckett's 'dramaticules' - those little dramas in reality not so trivial - are mental scenes that have taken form. Those materialised dramas are, in both artists, linked to an obsession with certain mental images shown in their respective works, among them some shared: the head-skull, some positions and parts of the body, some movements. That is the case with Giacometti's *Three Men Walking* (1947), which anticipated the television play *Quad* (1982), and which convey, in the circular nature and blinding of the mute bodies, an impossibility to communicate. In *Quad*, as Gilles Deleuze pointed out, the space is a 'mental cabinet' that enables the exhaustion of reality. It expresses the endless combinatorics. This questioning on exhaustion has been focused, strangely, in both men on the matter of the eye. Film was first called *Eye*, at a time when Beckett, suffering from a cataract, was worried about losing his eyesight, and when Giacometti 'only thinks about eyes' facing the impossibility to perceive the details of the face opposite him. In that same relation to the world, the question that seems to surface, in fact, for those artists obsessed with the notion of failing, is the question of the power of creation. "There are many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said", Beckett remarked with a touch of mischief. "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better". The 'fail better' of *Worstward Ho* (1982), that notion that the truth in art resides in failing, was shared by Giacometti who, consumed by that question despite his achievements, finally declared that though he was still creating, "it's no longer to represent the vision [he has] of things, but to understand why it fails". At the end of his life, Beckett, who has gradually stripped the language bare, gave his solution to the question of command, that also applies to Giacometti: "I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, subtracting rather than adding."

Conversation with Marin Karmitz

Hugo Daniel

- You got to know Samuel Beckett following the performance of *Comédie (Play)* in its theatrical form, at the Pavillon de Marsan in the Louvre, in 1963. Jérôme Lindon had made it possible for you to meet him. You had already worked with Marguerite Duras - you were between 25 and 27 years old at the time. You suggested a transition from a form of writing linked to the Nouveau Roman at its most radical with the evolution of new cinematographic forms. Beckett was an additional step in that direction. You spent time with him around 1965-1966, and a little after. In what way did Beckett represent a more radical approach at that moment in your career?

- The Nouvelle Vague represented for me a major change compared to what I had learned at the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques. I could not ignore those changes. I wanted to work from the written language, to try to see how we could link image, sound and writing. Beckett's play was an enormous shock, and a challenge to make into a film. Meeting Beckett seemed even more improbable, for I knew he was not very social, he didn't see many people. But the meeting took place thanks to Lindon and Duras. I had asked Marguerite Duras to write the script for my first short fiction film, *Nuit noire, Calcutta*. She made a book from that script, *The Vice-Consul*. Samuel Beckett helped me to go even further in that reflection on the relationship between writing and image that had started with Marguerite Duras. A very friendly relationship developed between us. We saw each other every day at the restaurant La Closerie des Lilas at 1 p.m., then our wanderings began that ended way in the night, meeting Alberto Giacometti from time to time. I used to go a lot to the Orangerie du Jeu de Paume when I was a boy, but I knew nothing about art. Giacometti was a name I was familiar with, but I didn't know his work. What impressed me first was his appearance, a presence very close to Beckett's. They were both very handsome, with craggy faces, real faces, and both tall. The few times I saw them together, they didn't say much. I saw Giacometti through Beckett's presence, and it was only much later that a connection was made when I discovered *Walking Man*. For me it was obvious that it was Beckett: the very long legs, that way he walked briskly, in big strides, very straight but a bit stooped. There's a very beautiful photograph by François-Marie Banier showing Beckett on a beach in Tangier where you suddenly see *Walking Man*.

- Giacometti was one of the rare persons you met in the company of Beckett.

- I would even say the only one. Even his wife, I only met her once on the landing (they had two apartments next to each other on rue du Faubourg-Saint-Jacques), even though I used to go to his place every day. The others were the tramps on the boulevard de Strasbourg where we used to go at night to play roulette on the first floor of a building where they came to sleep and which was one of Sam's favourite places. It had steeped rows of seats and we could look down at the roulette as in the theatre. Beckett often dragged me along to one of Giacometti's hangouts. That meandering started at La Closerie des Lilas and continued to Montparnasse, Le Dôme rather than La Coupole. Then we went down towards Sébastopol. Several times we went to rue de la Gaîté, and he used to tell me: "We might run into Giacometti." There was a restaurant in that street, on the right when you go down, where we used to eat. Giacometti was often there. There was a connection between them: a flower seller with her basket. She used to go around the bars from rue de la Gaîté to Le Dôme. I met her with Beckett, and I felt at the time that there was a strange relationship going on. I don't know if he went there to see

Giacometti or the flower seller... Beckett used to go towards Le Dôme expressly to speak with her. But when I ran into her in rue de la Gaîté, she was also a friend of Giacometti's. It was rather bizarre to see those two tall, slender taciturn characters admiring that fresh, quite small young woman.

- That's very cinematographic...

-- Yes, but I never used it. It was quite a sight, those two men together! It was incredible, like two Hollywood stars talking in an Ernst Lubitsch film. Another thing about Beckett, perhaps regarding Giacometti, was that he used to say to me all the time: "Painting must be in black and white. I don't like colour". He had very colourful paintings by the brothers Bram and Geer van Velde in his small apartment. Giacometti's painting is essentially black and white. Beckett often came back on that idea of the non-existence of painting from a colour perspective. At my age it was shocking, I didn't understand. Now I think that aspect was a very close bond between the two men.

- Giacometti, who started in a milieu marked by postimpressionism, which is very colourful, said several times that grey was a colour. It's a quality one finds in Beckett's work: *Molloy* is very grey, *Malone dies* too....

- *Comédie* is a film that could only exist in black and white. One day, Beckett brought me a three hundred and fifty page book he had just finished. He thought it was too long, and reduced it to fifteen pages, and that became *Imagination dead imagine*. It is the same for Giacometti. He starts with reality to trim it to such a point that there's not even the bark left or the leaves, only the tree trunk.

- Were they joined together in silence?

-- You said, in an interview, that cinema, compared to painting or literature in their relation to reality, has the particularity of being an immediate apprehension of reality, and that one needs to be rid of it in order to seize it better. Could you tell us how that work took shape for *Comédie*? I'm thinking about the editing work on the heads.

- The whole work consisted of giving life to silence and giving a meaning to darkness.

- Yes, in silence and solitude

- About *Comédie*, you said that it corresponded to a search for abstraction. The term is sometimes used by Beckett, who was going towards abstraction, like Bram van Velde's painting was abstract. Giacometti, after having moved towards a simplification of forms, came back to an art of reality, from life models. How was that question perceived as much for Beckett as for you?

- I think that Beckett's writing is not at all abstract, but very concrete. When we look at the text of *Comédie*, it is a true Feydeau-style comedy, which is transformed as Giacometti transforms the human body. He takes a body, he places it in space, and it becomes the element for multiple possibilities. And it's from realism, from a figure. Beckett uses words until he erases them, but those words still have a meaning, an order, a function. He tells stories and then erases them, like Giacometti. James Lord, in his *A Giacometti Portrait*, tells the process of erasing the face on canvas. Both erase, erase... to end with the right form, the right word.

Conversation with Maguy Marin

Christian Alandete, Hugo Daniel

- You were trained in Classical Ballet before joining Mudra in 1972, the school founded by Maurice Béjart in Brussels. Samuel Beckett's work came into yours very early on, as you brilliantly appropriated it in your piece *May B*, created in 1981 at the Centre national de danse contemporaine in Angers. How did you discover Beckett?

- I came across Beckett's writing at Béjart's Mudra school, thanks to friends. The first work I read was *Endgame*, which I had been given. I'd heard of Beckett before, but little, like he was a strange guy, quite unbearable. When I read that book, I was not interested in theatre, or in texts. Something disturbed me that dramatically changed the questioning around bodies. Because of my training, I had an image of bodies that always had to be fabulous. I wanted to have a fabulous body, very technical. That text moved me deeply and totally changed the way I practise dance. At Mudra, we began working on Act without words, because it was a silent play. I created some works for myself with two or three friends, to see what would happen. I was 19 or 20 at the time, while *May B* was created in 1981 when I was 30 years old. In the meantime, I read biographies and everything I could find to understand his writing, who he was, what artists he liked... I was so impressed that it was paralysing. I felt like working on that in a very instinctive way, because there was this relation to the body, to youth, to competition, to love also. The humour he deployed in his writing touched me deeply. I started with texts for the theatre: *Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot*, then I moved to the radio plays, then to the novels, of course. I read all of his work avidly. Among those attempts at giving it a form, there was *Stirrings Still*, in which a man gets up from his chair and sits down again continuously, and *Ill Seen Ill Said* in which the woman's movements are described very precisely, like the way she brings her hand to her forehead, her hand to her elbow... Those are gestures I imitated completely.

Imitation is interesting. Do you apprehend it through the text?

- Yes, I put it into practice very quickly. In *Footfalls* (1978), Delphine Seyrig played a woman who paces up and down at the front of the stage accompanied by a voice-over. I also worked on that play, but without ever presenting it to an audience. In Beckett's whole oeuvre, I found a connection to the body that seemed to be in conflict with what I had thought of the body for a very long time.

- What triggered you to work on that play ten years later?

- I accumulated many things without ever daring to say to myself 'I'm going to work on that!', I thought it was presumptuous. I didn't see how I could meaningfully add anything. Paul Puaux, who directed the Avignon Festival, asked me one day what my plans were. As I didn't have any, I started talking about Beckett because that's what had been in me for a long time. When I left, I told myself I'd better start working. But Paul Puaux didn't co-produce the play. I sent my project to Jérôme Lindon. I met Samuel Beckett a little while after, it must have been in May 1981 - the play was created in November 1981. During that meeting, Beckett advised me to contact the Festival d'Automne, that was going to be partly about his work. I went there on his recommendation, but the reception was rather frosty. Beckett had been very respectful and attentive when we met at the PLM-Saint-Jacques, contrary to the person who welcomed me at the Festival d'Automne. I was a nobody. It was the team at Maison des Arts in Créteil that supported me by co-producing it, so I was finally able to start working. We then showed the play at the Avignon Festival in July 1983, because it had been performed previously in Créteil.

(...)

(...)

- *May B* borrows several characteristics from the universe and writing of Beckett: the relation to the body, the importance of the rhythm, the use of music and the playing with space... How is the work made and how is the play structured?

- First it is made on paper. When I sent the project to Jérôme Lindon, I'd already written what I wanted to do. I had planned three parts, and, in the second, I had inserted fragments of his texts out of respect for his work, for I had worked only on the body. Beckett advised me not to keep to that respectful attitude and to treat the words in the same way I had treated the body. I had already chosen the musics, among them the songs of the Gilles de Binche, from the Belgian carnival of Binche. That music put me in a body state that helped me come out of my references. The first thing I worked on was to find that body vocabulary that didn't call for a beautiful dance but to states of tension, to blood flows. They were constricted movements, all the time. I had worked with a band at knee level to stop my legs from spreading, and my arms were kept alongside my body. The bodies had to be hindered, like in Beckett's, where they can't sit, or they can't get up, or they are almost completely buried under ground. There's always something that's not functioning, and that's what I wanted to convey in the body. They could do everything, but with shackles. I perceived, in his writing, an intense relation to rhythm, to the musicality that directed me so that the burst of gestures happens in flux, in crises.

- That notion of constricted bodies is present as much in Beckett's as in Alberto Giacometti's *Squares*, or *Cages*, for example. It's obvious that the constraint is as much a way of limiting the body as it is of seizing it and shaping it. Constraint is terrifically productive...

- Exactly. The question of the constricted body also relates to the fact that we are all constricted in some ways. I can't scratch behind my thigh by going over the top of my shoulder, for example. The constraint pays heed to the fact that total freedom is not possible, that one has to do with what one has, what one is, and such is our condition. Beckett also told me that. The dancers have to continuously rework that question of normality and everyone's constraints. It is a matter not of equality, but of inescapable complementarity. One makes up for the other's lacks. We enter another plane, that of life and no longer that of performance.

(...)



**PARTNERSHIP WITH
L'ATHÉNÉE-THÉÂTRE - LOUIS JOUVET**

The Giacometti Institute collaborate with the **Athénée-Théâtre Louis Jouvét** by welcoming two original events specifically designed for the Institute, within its programme around Beckett, dramatised by **Jacques Osinski**

www.athenee-theatre.com

Jacques Osinski is a producer of theatre and opera. In 2017 he began, with Denis Lavant, a Samuel Beckett cycle with *Worstward Ho*, followed by *Krapp's Last Tape* (2019) then *The Image* (Avignon-Théâtre des Halles, Athénée-Théâtre Louis Jouvét...) and will collaborate with Pedro Garcia-Velasquez and Johan Leysen for the creation of *Words and Music*.

PERFORMANCE

by **Pedro Garcia-Velasquez and Johan Leysen**

13 janvier 2021 - 6:30 pm

A sound piece will be performed in the exhibition including robots. This performance is adapted from the play *Words and Music*, to be presented in the Athénée-Théâtre Louis Jouvét.

Pedro Garcia-Velasquez is a Colombian/French composer co-founder of the ensemble Le Balcon.

Johan Leysen is a Belgian actor.

READING

by **Denis Lavant**

24 janvier - 6:30 pm

Denis Lavant will read extracts from Beckett during the exhibition.

Denis Lavant is a French actor who learned his trade by performing mime and street theatre. From his years as a street artist, he kept a preference for the theatre, which turned out to be the most important part of his career. He also acted in films, in memorable roles as in Robert Hosseins's *Les Misérables* in 1982, and in *Les Amants du Pont Neuf* in 1991. He is the favourite actor of the director Léos Carax, who discovered him in 1983 and gave him the main part in *Boy meets girl*. He collaborated with Jacques Osinski on several plays. He will interpret *The Image* at the Athénée-Théâtre Louis Jouvét.



The Giacometti Institute is home to the Giacometti Foundation, a space devoted to exhibitions and to research in art history and pedagogy. Chaired by Catherine Grenier, the director of the Giacometti Foundation since 2014, its Artistic Director is Christian Alandete.

A museum on a human scale, enabling the visitor to get close to the works, the Giacometti Institute is an exhibition space, a place of reference for the oeuvre of Alberto Giacometti, a research centre in art history specialising in modern art practices (1900-1970) and a place for discovery accessible to all public. An exceptional reconstruction of Alberto Giacometti's studio, whose elements, in their entirety, had been kept by his widow, Annette Giacometti, is on permanent display. Among these elements are several very fragile plaster and clay pieces, some of them not shown previously in public, as well as the furniture and the walls painted by the artist. Its ambition is to refresh the way we look at the work of the artist, and at the creative period in which he was involved. The programme for research and teaching, L'École des modernités, is open to researchers, students and art lovers. Conferences, symposiums and master classes give a platform to art historians and curators who present their works and the current state of research.

Practical information:

Institut Giacometti
5, rue Victor Schoelcher
75014 Paris

Open from Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Closed on Monday

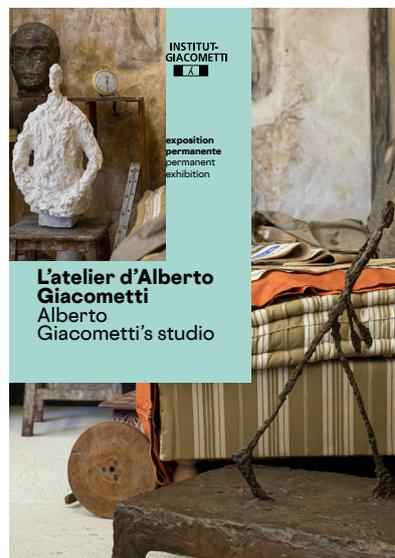
Booking on the online ticket office and on site:
www.fondation-giacometti.fr/fr/billetterie

Price: €8.50
Reduced price: €3

ON PERMANENT DISPLAY

Alberto Giacometti's studio

Introducing the visitors to the private universe of the artist's practice, the studio displays around sixty original works, and faithfully restores all the furniture and the studio walls painted by Alberto Giacometti..



NEXT EXHIBITION



DOUGLAS GORDON - THE MORNING AFTER 8 April - 13 June 2021 Curator: Christian Alandete

The Giacometti Institute gives carte blanche to the contemporary artist Douglas Gordon. Born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1966, Douglas Gordon is a multidisciplinary artist working on video, drawing, sculpture and installation. His work on the distortion of time and the tension between opposite forces (life and death, good and evil) share common ground with Giacometti's questioning on the human condition. Taking hold of the characteristics of the domestic space occupied by the Giacometti Institute, Douglas Gordon imagines a dialogue between his work and Giacometti's work. For the occasion, the artist has made a series of original works never exhibited before that will be presented alongside some sculptures and drawings by Giacometti that are little-known or have never been shown previously in public.

© Studio lost but found / VG
BildKunst, Bonn, 2020 et
© Succession Giacometti
(fondation Giacometti +
ADAGP), Paris, 2020

Conditions of use

The images must have been legally provided by the Giacometti Foundation.

Minimum caption: author, title, date.

Any modification of the image, cut or superimposition is not authorised.

On Internet, only images in average or low definition can be used (maximum resolution: 100 pixels per inch, maximum size: 600x600 pixels).

No storing on a database and no transfer to a third party are authorised.

Obligatory mention: Succession Alberto Giacometti (Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP) PARIS 2020

Any other use than that permitted for the press (article L. 122-5 of the Copyright Code underneath) must be authorised in writing.

'When the work has been published, the author cannot forbid: The reproduction or the representation, integral or partial, of a visual, graphic or architectural artwork, by means of the written, audiovisual or online press, with the exclusive purpose of immediate information and in direct relation with the latter, on the proviso of clearly indicating the name of the author.'

Contact:

Anne-Marie Pereira am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr, press officer



**Samuel Beckett and Alberto Giacometti
in Giacometti's studio, 1961**
Photo : Georges Pierre
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti +ADAGP) 2020



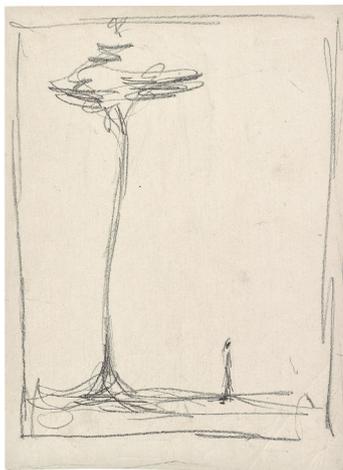
**Samuel Beckett and Alberto Giacometti in the
studio called the telephone booth, 1961**
Photo : Georges Pierre
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti +ADAGP) 2020



Alberto Giacometti
Head on rod, 1947
Painted plaster- 54 x 19 x 15 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti +ADAGP, Paris) 2020



Alberto Giacometti
Seated Woman, 1949-1950
Painted plaster
43 x 8.50 x 5.50 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti (Fondation
Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



Alberto Giacometti
Man and Tree, circa 1952
Lithographic pencil - 39 x 28.50 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti +ADAGP, Paris) 2020



Samuel Beckett
Waiting for Godot
Théâtre de l'Odéon, 1961
Photo : Roger Pic
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti (Fondation
Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



Alberto Giacometti
The Cage, 1950
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



Alberto Giacometti
Bust of a Man, 1956
Bronze – 35.1 x 30.8 x 9.9 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



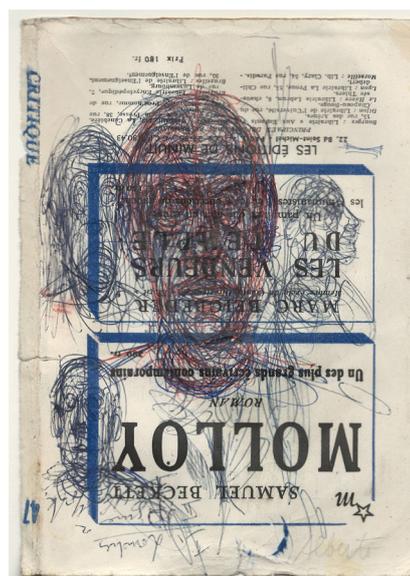
Alberto Giacometti
Three Men Walking (small board), 1948
Bronze - 72 x 32.7 x 34.1 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



Samuel Beckett
Quad, 1981
Television play, video, colour and sound, 15'
Centre Pompidou - Musée national d'art
moderne
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI / Evergreen
Review Inc.



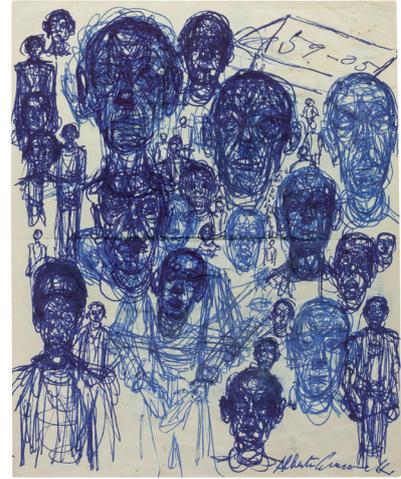
G rard Byrne
Construction IV from existing photographs, 2006
 Recreation of the tree made by Giacometti for the
 production of 'Waiting for Godot', 1961, Paris, Od on
 Collection Fondation Giacometti
   ADAGP Paris, 2020



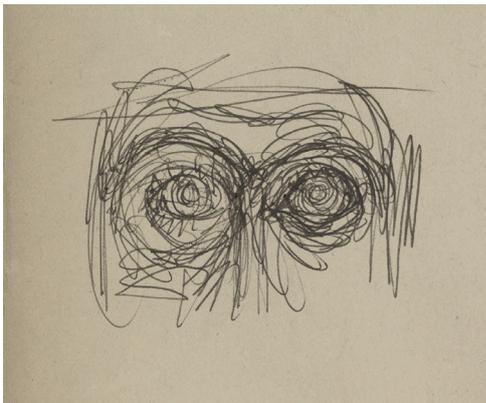
Alberto Giacometti
*Three Heads of Men and a Head in profile
 on a page of the magazine Critique, 1960*
 Cambridge, Harvard Art Museum
 Fondation Giacometti
   Succession Alberto Giacometti
 (Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



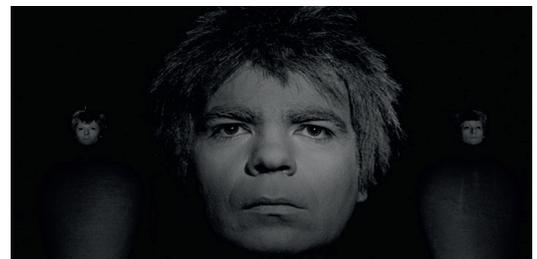
Samuel Beckett
Film, 1965
with Buster Keaton
© Evergreen Theater Productions, NY
Milestone Film & Video



Alberto Giacometti
Head of a Man and figures, circa 1959
Ballpoint on paper
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



Alberto Giacometti
Eyes, n.d.
Ballpoint on paper - 27.5 x 19.3 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP) 2020



Samuel Beckett
Play (Comédie), 1965
Film by Marin Karmitz, 20'
© Marin Karmitz



rêver,
créer,
ériger



INDIVIDUAL PATRONS: THE SOCIETY OF FOUNDING MEMBERS

Special support for this exhibition by



Ambasáid na hÉireann | Páras

Embassy of Ireland | Paris

Ambassade d'Irlande | Paris