

# PRESS PACK



INSTITUT-  
GIACOMETTI



exposition  
exhibition

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octobre  
2021

## Giacometti et l'Égypte antique Giacometti and Ancient Egypt

avec la collaboration  
exceptionnelle du musée du Louvre

LOUVRE





# **GIACOMETTI AND ANCIENT EGYPT 2021**

**Exhibition 22 June 2021 – 10 October 2021**

**Press preview  
Monday 21 June 2021  
11 a.m. - 1 p.m.**

In special collaboration with the

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**FONDATION-  
GIACOMETTI  
-INSTITUT**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **GIACOMETTI AND ANCIENT EGYPT**

**22-06 > 10-10-21**

This exhibition proposes a thematic journey that places some of Giacometti's emblematic works in dialogue with exceptional pieces on loan from the Louvre museum.

Alberto Giacometti has always been fascinated by the art works of Ancient Egypt, which he drew throughout his career. This inspiration drawn from Egyptian art is regularly presented in his sculpture and painting, both as a repertoire of forms and an essential element of his aesthetic concept.

This exhibition invites the visitor to extend and deepen that relation of the sculptor with Egyptian art. From previously unseen research on the sources used by the artist, the exhibition offers a thematic journey made of dialogues between Giacometti's works and Egyptian figures, among them that of the scribe, the art of the Amarna period and the Fayum portraits.

By confronting sculptures, paintings and many drawings not shown before with a selection of art works from the Louvre's collections, this exhibition proposes a renewed way of looking at Giacometti's art through the prism of Ancient Egypt, a source for Modern art that still remains to be explored.

#### **Curators**

Thierry Pautot  
Associate curator, Head of archives and  
research  
at Giacometti Foundation

Romain Perrin  
Associate curator, Giacometti Foundation

Marc Etienne  
Chief curator, department of Egyptian  
antiquities, Louvre Museum

#### **Scenography**

Jean-Julien Simonot

#### **Production**

Stéphanie Barbé-Sicouri



Caption: Sculptures in plaster in the studio, 1951

### **Around the exhibition**

#### **Guided visits**

Wednesday to Sunday 11 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.

#### **Family visits**

Sunday 11 a.m.

#### **Associated programme**

A programme of events will be on offer during  
the exhibition: concert, performance...

#### **Study days**

##### **Artists of the modern era with regard to Ancient Egypt**

In collaboration with the musée du Louvre  
Giacometti Institute, October 2021

#### **Concert**

##### **Farrah El Dibany**

In partnership with Opéra de Paris  
Institut Giacometti, 14<sup>th</sup> September at 6.30 pm

### **Creative workshops**

#### **Drawing on books, it's allowed!**

Workshop on drawing with ink,  
for 7-12 years old  
10, 11, 17, 18, 24, 25 July 2021 at 3  
p.m.  
Fee : 20€

#### **Time machine**

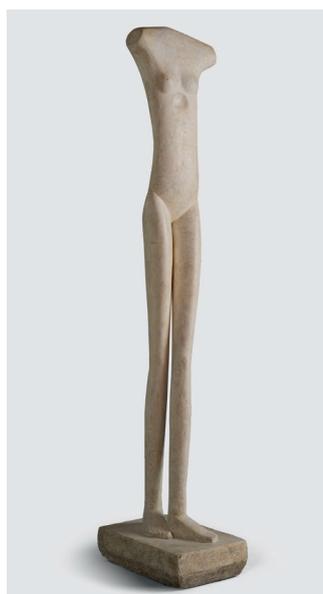
Workshop on comics for all ages  
From 17 to 22 August 2021  
at 3 p.m.  
Fee : 20€

#### **Cat Head, Dog Head**

Workshop on clay sculpture on  
wire  
From 24 to 29 August 2021  
at 3 p.m.  
Fee : 20€

Among the numerous art works that have inspired Alberto Giacometti, those of Ancient Egypt hold a special place. The Egyptian statues, painting and bas-reliefs regularly appear as much in his speech as in the copies he made throughout his life. It is undoubtedly the period in art history that has left the strongest impression on his oeuvre. Beyond the fascination that he experienced facing the ability of the Egyptians to express and represent their vision of the world, Giacometti found in their art a repertoire of forms and a way to question his relation with figuration.

The exhibition is organised around four sculptural and pictorial themes, and a vitrine presenting several previously unseen drawings from reproductions of Egyptian art works. Placing them side by side provides us with an opportunity to show original dialogues taking place between Giacometti's sculptures and the figures of Ancient Egypt. This exhibition also encourages a rereading of the modernity of Giacometti's works facing a historical source still barely analysed in the developments of the avant-gardes.



Alberto Giacometti  
Walking Woman I  
1932-1933  
Plaster  
Fondation Giacometti



Carrier of offerings  
Middle Kingdom, beginning  
of the 12th dynasty (1963-  
1862 BC)  
Painted wood - 63.2x32.8 cm  
Musée du Louvre,  
département des Antiquités  
égyptiennes,

## 1. HIERATIC FIGURES/WALKING FIGURES

Giacometti's sculptures have been compared by the critics to Egyptian statuary because they are very close in terms of the poses and attitudes. The way the sculptor looked at this art shows he did not try to imitate it but to retain some formal principles. Walking Woman seems to be a direct rendering of the Egyptian statues represented in the posture of walking like The carrier of offerings. The feet glued to the ground and the left leg slightly placed forward show a desire to symbolise the act of walking rather than to represent the movement of walking. After that, Giacometti's sculptures of full-length female figures became, because of their hieratic pose - arms alongside the body and joined feet - formally very close to Egyptian statues. The archaic character of Figurine on a big base is reinforced by the modelling of the base, very similar to that of the polychrome statuette of Lady Henen.



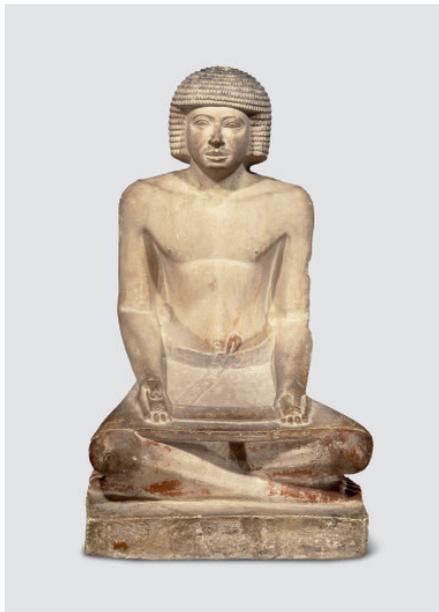
Alberto Giacometti  
Thin Bust on a Base (Known as Amenophis)  
1954  
Plaster  
39.7x33.1x13.7 cm  
Fondation Giacometti



*Fragment of a Relief: Royal Head*  
*New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten (1353-1337 BC)*  
*Limestone*  
*10.7x7.9 cm*  
*Musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités égyptiennes, E 11058*

## **2. AMARNA**

Though Giacometti looked at all the periods of Ancient Egypt, from the old Kingdom to the Roman epoch, it seems he developed a particular interest in the 18th dynasty and the reign of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten. Abandoning religious traditions by establishing the exclusive cult of the sun disc Aten, the young Amenhotep took the name of Akhenaten, left Thebes and founded Akhet-Aten, a new city on the site of Tell el-Amarna in Upper Egypt. A few years were enough to modify the Egyptian canon without the artists renouncing some of the traditional tendencies like the frontal aspect and the balance. The artists introduced more flexibility and deliberately emphasised the features of the face, which accentuated the earlier styles that classic art had a tendency to tone down. Giacometti especially saw the gap between creation and visible reality. The face in a triangle and the forward projection of the neck in Head of Isabel is reminiscent of the features of the royal statues copied by Giacometti in the 1920s. Thin bust on a Base appears, with its profile and accentuation of the lips, the nose and the neck, to be even more directly inspired by the figure of the pharaoh.



*Statue of a Man in the Attitude of a Scribe*  
 Old Kingdom, 5th dynasty (2500-2350 BC)  
 Painted limestone  
 58x35x33cm  
 Musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités égyptiennes,  
 A 42



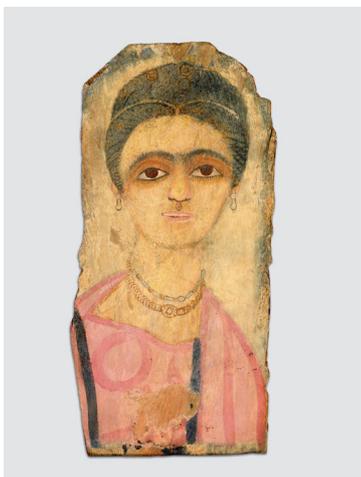
Alberto Giacometti  
 Bust of Seated Man (Lotar III), 1965  
 Painted plaster  
 61.1x28.1x37.6cm  
 Fondation Giacometti

### **3. SEATED FIGURES/FIGURE OF THE SCRIBE**

The seated position is a characteristic of the Egyptian representation that pertains to the intense frontal aspect that the sculptures of the pharaoh and dignitaries offer. Among those, the statues representing scribes hold a particular attraction for Giacometti who copied them several times. Bust of a Man, made after his friend, the photographer Éli Lotar, adopts the same position as the statue of the squatting scribe: his bust is straight, his arms placed on his thighs and his attitude calm and serene. It seems the sculptor had found in the scribe, because of his intellectual activity, a double whose features he copied when he represented himself in a self-portrait made in 1929. The chest muscles enhanced by the deliberate geometrization of the body shapes, evoke the idealised physiognomy of Egyptian statues. Under the features of the artist's face, impassive like those of the scribe, the outlines of the skull appear, reminding us that those sculptures, as alive as they can be, had a funerary function.

#### 4. PORTRAITS

From the middle of the 1930s, after his break with André Breton and the surrealists, Giacometti tried to make a head that was resembling. But resemblance constitutes a stumbling block one has to overcome by capturing something of real life, not the inner life of the model, but something that makes the head alive. It is that characteristic that he praised in Egyptian statuary of the Pharaonic period, and which he also found in the mummies of the Roman era. His small format portraits painted between the end of the 1940s and the end of the 1950s show heads that emerge from a dark background and grab one's attention with their powerful sense of presence. They rely on the same principle of concentration of the gaze as the Fayum portraits. Giacometti tried to materialise the gaze by painting the eyes on some of his sculptures, as Egyptian artists did. That gesture, in a period marked by modernism and the strict separation of mediums, reconnects with the ancient tradition of the polychrome statuary.



*Portrait of a Mummy  
 Roman epoch, Late 4th century  
 Distemper on ficus wood  
 36x17x0.50cm  
 Musée du Louvre, département  
 des Antiquités grecques,  
 étrusques et romaines, MND  
 2029*



Alberto Giacometti  
 Copies of a Fayum mummy portrait, a New  
 Guinea mask and a Malekoula mannequin  
 circa 1950  
 Ink on paper  
 29.5x21cm  
 Fondation Giacometti

## FOCUS



Alberto Giacometti  
Thin bust on a Base (Known as Amenophis)  
1954  
Plaster  
39.7x33.1x13.7cm  
Fondation Giacometti

This bust on a base representing Diego, the artist's brother, was inspired by Egyptian art. Giacometti gave it the name of a pharaoh of the 18th dynasty, Amenophis (Amenhotep) whose representations he also copied in his sketchbooks.

From the ancient figuration, the artist borrowed the attention given to the frontal aspect and the profile view. Seen full face, the head is sharp like a knife edge, stretched upwards. In profile, the head becomes flat, the hair raised, the chin prominent. The neck appears neatly separated from the shoulders, tilted under the weight of the head, following the physiognomy of Egyptian busts. Very elegant but also very radical in its committed stance, this bust is part of a series of representations of Diego made between 1951 and 1957.



*Fragment of a Relief: Royal Head  
New Kingdom, 18th dynasty,  
reign of Amenhotep IV -  
Akhenaten (1353 – 1337 BC)  
Limestone  
10.7x7.9cm  
Musée du Louvre, département  
des Antiquités égyptiennes,  
E 11058*

The fragment probably represents the profile of the pharaoh Akhenaten IV. His accession to the throne was accompanied by a profound religious reform and a radical transformation of the style and art conventions in force till then. As much in sculpture as in the art of the relief, the king imposed a particular mode of representation that deforms the characteristics of the body and stretches the bodily proportions. The face at the top of an excessively long neck is projected forward and conforms to a very geometrical construction. This very peculiar style was specific to that reign, despite a few relics. It was rediscovered in the 20th century especially during the archaeological digs at Karnak and Tell el Amarna.

## **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.

Giacometti discovered the art of Ancient Egypt during a trip to Italy between 1920 and 1921. It proved to be a real aesthetic revelation for the young man he was at the time. Many drawings copied from reproductions of Egyptian artworks show a fascination that lasted his whole life. Some works like *Isabel* (1936) and *Figurine on a big base* are very close to Egyptian sculptures and show that Giacometti retained the lesson of the statuary of Ancient Egypt.

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 'women plates', 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.

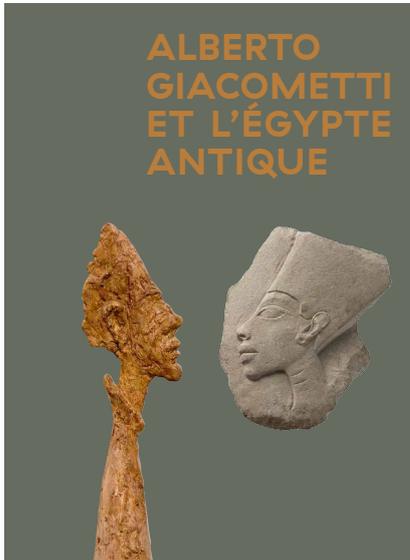
After spending the war years in Switzerland, on his return to Paris, he resumed his work on the human figure. Working mainly from models, he also made more generic figures inspired by art history. He developed a process of personal work, modelling figures that he then transferred to plaster whose surface he reworked with knives and sharp objects. The works in large size were sometimes worked directly with plaster. Though he had most of his sculptures cast in bronze, he also liked to exhibit the plasters, whose surface he sometimes painted.

In 1947, he created his first version of *Walking Man*, then made several variations on the theme, in works of smaller format. In 1959-1961, he produced three other life size models for a commission, never fulfilled, for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York, which became icons in his oeuvre.

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



Alberto Giacometti in his studio, Paris, 1954  
Photo : Sabine Weiss  
Archives Fondation Giacometti



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

Catherine Grenier, Director of the Fondation Giacometti,  
President of the Institut Giacometti

Giacometti the Egyptian

Thierry Pautot, Associate curator, Head of archives and research at Giacometti  
Foundation

Giacometti and the art of Ancient Egypt: the facets of a gaze

Marc Etienne, Chief curator, department of Egyptian antiquities, Louvre Museum

Giacometti, death, Egypt

Romain Perrin, Associate curator, Giacometti Foundation

Catalogue works:

Hieratic figures / Walking figures

Notebook of drawings, unpublished, 1921

Seated figures/ Figure of the scribe

Notebook of drawings unpublished, 1950-1951

Amarna

Copies on Photographic encyclopedia of Art, Cairo Museum

Portraits

**« Like objects that had probably spent a thousand years under ground”...».**  
**Giacometti, death, Egypt**  
**Romain Perrin**

Less than one kilometre from Stampa, in the canton of Les Grisons, in Switzerland, is situated the cemetery of Borgonovo in which Alberto Giacometti is buried. On his grave his brother Diego had placed a bronze copy of his last sculpture, *Bust of a seated man (Lotar III)* (1965). A hieratic figure kneeling, arms resting on thighs, his bust very straight and his gaze lost in the distance, it evokes the statuary of Ancient Egypt. The poet Yves Bonnefoy saw moreover “an Egyptian scribe raising his eyes from the Book of the Dead to stare into the unknown”. For the few years that sculpture adorned Giacometti’s grave, it seemed to keep watch, like a mythologic keeper, over the sleep of the artist. It is true that the latter was fascinated by the arts of the past, and that many commentators looked at his sculptures “like objects that had probably spent a thousand years under ground”. Among the ancient civilisations, his relation to Ancient Egypt was special: its art production wholly turned towards the divine or funerary worlds echoes a certain unease felt by Giacometti who found there, more than a repertory of forms, a reflection on the meaning of his practice. With that proximity brought forth, a hypothesis can be formed that Giacometti’s works are not only traversed by death, but that it is perhaps the reason why they assertively join the art of Ancient Egypt.

The exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in June 1957, a crystallisation of the “Egyptian” reception

In 1957, the exhibition organised by the Galerie Maeght constituted the moment when the reception by the art critics with regard to Egyptian art crystallised. In *L’Atelier d’Alberto Giacometti*, published in the magazine *Derrière le miroir*, Jean Genet was the first to make such an explicit comparison. Already in the introduction, the writer compared the terror he felt facing the statue of Osiris, in the crypt of the Louvre, to that taking hold of him facing the sculptures near which he posed in the studio in rue Hippolyte-Maindron. Later he described full-length figures of women as “golden sentinels - painted at times - which, standing, still, watch over” because, for the writer, “the statues (these women) by Giacometti watch over the dead”. That text played a determining part in shedding light on certain characteristics which other writers would eventually rely on to make their own comparisons between Giacometti’s oeuvre and Egyptian funerary art, even though at the time the artist had only barely mentioned his taste for that production.

The press of the 1957 exhibition was indeed explicit. A journalist from *Cimaise* noted the parallel made by Genet and extended it by comparing Giacometti’s sculptures to “mummies whose heads and skeletons are reduced to the dimensions of dolls. It seems that once freed from their bandages, the mummy is about to rise up with the same spindly aspect, the same gait, the same head raised towards a strange vision”. In an article from *L’Express*, the author remarked on the attitude of Giacometti’s sculptures which would express “this type of magnetic patience which Egyptian statues are permeated with”. *Le Monde* published a review whose title, “Giacometti, le peseur d’ombres” referred to the famous weighing of the souls that precedes the access of the deceased to the afterlife in the religion of Ancient Egypt.

This exhibition was seen as “a modern version of the eternal descent into hell”, the background of painted portraits depicted “funerary chambers”, “tombs”, and the silhouette once again took on the “appearance of a mummy”. Noticing that the evolution of Giacometti’s work related to death, the critic concluded: “The statues with deformed heads expressive in their blade-like aspect will perhaps be our only decent form of funerary art.” This coincidence begs for an exploration of three characteristics that fed this parallel between Giacometti’s sculptures and Egyptian funerary art: the possibility of an art production that would be destined to the dead and the afterlife; a distancing of a sacred nature between the oeuvre and the spectator; a dialectics of representation and incarnation.

The father's grave, the Cube and the statue-cube The father's grave, the Cube and the statue-cube

Though Alberto Giacometti never imagined that one of his sculptures would adorn a grave - let alone his own -, nevertheless he had made funerary monuments. There are six in all with, among them, his father Giovanni's, who died in June 1933 and was buried, like him, in the cemetery of Borgonovo. The Egyptian inspiration for that monument, designed with his brother's help, has already been noted. The shape of the tombstone corresponds to that of a stele, and the symbols decorating it - a stylised bird, a circle, a cup and a star - are arranged like hieroglyphs. Preparatory drawings for the project dating from the end of summer 1935 show that the bird is a recurrent motif that Giacometti had first thought of making into a sculpture. Sketched full-frontal and in profile, that sculpture would have been close to Egyptian statuettes representing a falcon, the attribute of the gods Horus, Rê and Sokar, linked to the protection of the dead in the afterlife. That ornamentation, conjuring up hope for a life after death, also comes within a form of syncretism combining symbols whose meaning refers to other traditions, Christian as well as esoteric. In the 1930s, Giacometti evolved in a cultural environment that appreciated equivocal images. Friend of the German critic Carl Einstein, an expert in African art, he spent time with the surrealists and read the magazines *Documents*, *Cahiers d'art*, and *Minotaure*, whose iconography juxtaposed cultural productions of various epochs and continents.

The Cube, a sculpture on which Giacometti worked till the end of 1933, or early 1934, a little after the death of his father, is perhaps even more ambiguous. However, it let transpire a relation as strong, though less direct, with an emblematic type of Egyptian statuary: the statue-cube. Having appeared in the Middle Kingdom, it represented a still figure waiting for an offering, seated, knees pulled towards the chest and arms folded, placed on the knees. Its function was at the beginning funerary before becoming votive, representing a connection between the living and the world of the afterlife. The compact aspect of the forms of that type of sculpture closed on itself is reminiscent of that of the Cube. Giacometti had copied a statue-cube to study the structure of the human body underlying the geometrical shape. Though it is a polyhedron, the Cube is not for all that an abstract piece. The similarity with Head skull, whose mortuary symbolism makes no doubt, allows us to consider it as a head in which the structure of the skull shows up beneath the geometrical shape. Its dimensions, on the other hand, are closer to those of a curled-up body. The statue-cubes also had the advantage of having four sides on which it was possible to inscribe prayers or images. Like a dedicant, Giacometti had carved his own face on one side of the Cube. Among the multiple interpretations tied to that sculpture, there is one that concerns mourning the father; a similar volume was sketched by Giacometti to decorate his grave. That sculpture could well be, according to the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, an *ex-voto* dedicated to Giovanni. A great number of artefacts like the statue-cubes were found in Egyptian tombs. They were, to repeat what Jean Genet wrote on Alberto Giacometti's sculptures, "destined for the dead". These were therefore not made to be contemplated in a perspective of enjoyment, but played a part in the funerary rite.

Further on in his text on The studio of Alberto Giacometti, Genet also recounts that he discovered, while bending to pick up a dog end, that the most beautiful sculpture was hidden under the table, in the dust. Without lingering on the fortuitous character of the discovery, which resembles the countless accounts surrounding certain archaeological objects, the parallel that can be made between that sculpture - which is not just any but the most beautiful - hidden, that's to say created, but out of sight, and those Egyptian statues created but hidden, could well be anecdotic if Giacometti did not enjoy "images made of burial matters, or made to be buried". Besides, Giacometti confided to Genet that he had had the idea of modelling a statue and burying it so that it would only be discovered a long time after his death - he did not do anything of that sort though. (...)

## Giacometti and the art of Ancient Egypt: the facets of a gaze

Marc Étienne

The art of Ancient Egypt has been present with a remarkable constancy in Alberto Giacometti's life, from the Egyptian-like decor of *Le Sphinx*, the famous brothel in Montparnasse, background to his nights, to the works seen, copied and studied for his art practice research. Contrary to other artists of the 20th century, his interest in Egyptian art did not represent a brief phase in his art research. He constantly questioned, analysed and reinterpreted it depending on the production of his pieces: as many facets of a gaze which also witnessed significant archaeological discoveries that overturned what the world knew about Egyptian art and questioned many received ideas.

(...)

It has always been difficult to distinguish the precise part that appertains to the art of Ancient Egypt in the works of avant-garde artists who have examined it in a more or less profound way or have found in it a real source of inspiration. Several difficulties surface in that examination. In the first place, there is the question of the identification of the sources of their personal knowledge of Egyptian art. The most classic is the direct confrontation with the object during visits to museums. That contact can also take place thanks to friendly relations between artists and collectors.

Another main source of knowledge are the books specifically dedicated to Egyptian art or of more general interest, containing illustrations in line drawing or photographs. From 1870, those publications contributed in a significant way to the diffusion and the popularisation of an iconic repertoire and were often used as main references by the artists in their works during the creative process. The artist retained or interpreted features particular to that art, or selected visual, archaeological, religious, or even symbolic aspects. Those reflected the state of knowledge at the time in the field of Egyptology and the approach made to grasp Egyptian art. Finally appears the pitfall of the formal likenesses or aesthetic subjective similarities made by the artists themselves or their promoters which did not often find favour with the specialist despite their importance. In Giacometti's case, several important exhibitions and contributions have already underlined the relation between Egyptian art and his oeuvre, as well as his interests in certain periods and some statuary types. A constantly refreshed way of looking at his works helps to clarify some aspects or discover new ones, in particular in the identification of his models.

(...)

### A collusion of gazes: Egyptian art and its modes of representation

In the books dedicated to Ancient Egypt or in those on art history of general interest, Egyptian art is most often considered, at the beginning of the 20th century, as turned towards the survival of the individual in a vision presenting death as the main and obsessive preoccupation of the Egyptians. Though it is undeniable that most of the objects from the Egyptian collections relate to funerary archaeology and that the survival of the individual was of utmost importance in Egyptian religion, it was only in the 1960s that studies showed the Egyptians hated death, or more accurately the fact of no longer living. Funerary art contributed to maintaining the link with the world of the living, avoiding sinking into oblivion. The statue was perceived as another subject, considered as a lasting earthly support capable of sheltering or preserving the essence of the being it represented. That role could be attributed to it in the tomb, without necessarily being seen by the one entering it, but also in the temples next to a divinity. The ritual of the opening of the mouth made it possible to consecrate the created object and to bestow upon it the aptitude to transform offerings, prayers, libations and fumigations into elements guaranteeing the preservation of the parts of the personality that are the ka and the ba liberated

from the body after the person's death. Consequently, the representation of the person did not necessarily exclude a certain resemblance with his real appearance. It was that ability of the sculptor to capture some truth about the person and to bind it to his sculpted substitute that found in Giacometti a special resonance, and that he interpreted and reformulated at several moments in his career.  
(...)

**The visitor's gaze: the Louvre of Giacometti** The visits of Giacometti to the Louvre were numerous and regular throughout his life. However, the artist was able to observe and walk through several configurations of the rooms in the Egyptian department. From the 1920s to the 1950s, the modifications of its establishment within the Louvre and its successive refurbishing show the evolution of museology in the 20th century and the progress in the body of knowledge about Egypt.

Launched by Georges Bénédite, the director of the department, it aimed at modernising the presentation and reducing the effect of being a 'jumble sale' display. When Giacometti visited the Egyptian rooms in the years 1925 to 1929, in the Salle du Scribe in the historical heart of the department, four pieces were exhibited that would represent for him constant sources of inspiration: the seated scribe, the head of the man known as the 'Salt Head', the tall woman, carrier of an offering, in wood covered in stucco, painted in the Middle Kingdom (Louvre E 10781) and the bust of Amenhetep IV.

Continued by his successor Charles Boreux, the restructuring of the collections took place in several stages, the first of which was the regrouping of the works dating from the Old Kingdom in the rooms located around the square courtyard and those giving onto the Seine. They opened to the public in 1934, at precisely the same time Giacometti returned to figuration. The rooms of Coptic art were also organised in that circuit. They included the productions of Roman Egypt, with among them the famous Fayum portraits. The gallery Henri IV was also the object of a reorganisation completed with the opening of a crypt in which was set up the big wooden statue of the god Osiris (Louvre E 113) which left such an impression on Jean Genet and made him associate it with the memory of Giacometti's works. That lengthy refurbishing completed after the Second World War helped to create a coherent trail reflecting the historical and aesthetic evolution of Egyptian art.

It is therefore interesting to ponder on the impact of the new museography on Giacometti's gaze in relation to his own research. One notices indeed a renew of interest for some pieces or types of objects, drawn in the 1920s and 1930s, and which were the subject of other sketches from the 1950s, his maturity years. Is it ascribable to new visits? Can we perceive it in his works? Finding an answer is not easy. However, the artist was able to examine again in the rooms of the museum, sculptures reproduced in the books of his library, and which he sometimes copied. That said, that synchronism between Giacometti's art phases and the history of the department is remarkable. It represents an original reflection on the important part played in his oeuvre by Egyptian art, whose remarkable modernity he perceived with exceptional acuity.

**Giacometti, the Egyptian**  
**Thierry Pautot**

In autumn 1957, Alberto and Annette Giacometti were with a couple of friends passing through Paris, Pierre and Patricia Matisse. Pierre, son of the famous painter, had been, since 1948, Giacometti's gallerist in New York, and he also represented the artist in the United States. For more than ten years, they have been meeting in a professional capacity, and as friends. During those meetings, the Matisses regularly took photographs of those shared moments. On 31 October 1957, Pierre wrote as a post-scriptum in a letter addressed to Alberto: "I'm going to send the photographs taken in the studio [...] They are very picturesque. We go from the 18th dynasty to the rue Mouffetard." Among the photographs that can be identified as being part of that letter, one of them seems to directly relate to that Egyptian '18th dynasty' mentioned by Matisse. Alberto Giacometti can be seen seated, his back straight, looking serious, his eyes lost in the distance, his legs together, his arms alongside his body, with his left hand placed flat on his knee, and his right hand, fist closed and vertical, resting on his other knee. On his right, Annette, set back slightly, appearing smaller than her husband, seems to participate in that set-up too. The pose adopted by the couple in that photograph echoes undoubtedly the posture of several sculptures from Ancient Egypt. What was the reason behind that set-up? We will probably never know. What is certain is that this 'Egyptian-like' pose adopted by Giacometti reveals his attraction to the art of Ancient Egypt and his desire to fit into that lineage.

Giacometti's interest in Egyptian civilisation showed for the first time in October 1917, at the evangelical lycée of Schiers in Switzerland, where he was a boarder, in a presentation he made for his classmates from the students' society 'Amicitia'. To the question "What is the most sublime culture: ours or the Egyptian's?", Giacometti responded by placing Egyptian art above that of Ancient Greece or the Ancient Roman world, and declaring that "art today is partly based on Egyptian art". This first experience with the art of Egypt was exclusively based on books. A few more years would pass before Giacometti was able to be in direct contact with the art of that thousands year-old civilisation, and before he experienced his first aesthetic blow in front of it. In May 1920, Giacometti accompanied his father to the Venice Biennial. That journey, which ended up being a real art baptism as it gave him the opportunity to discover, among others, the art of Tintoretto and Giotto, enticed him to return alone to Italy for a second visit. In November 1920, Giacometti was in Florence where he experienced his first revelation standing before Egyptian art: "These last few days, I often went to the Egyptian museum. These are what I call sculptures. They have cut off what needed to be (cut) on the whole figure, there is not even a hole in which to slide a hand, however, we are given an impression of movement and form in an incredible way. There is the bust of a man in red granite, or a similar stone, which has unfortunately lost its nose, but of a greatness and a power no longer seen. And they had also a technique among the most refined and peculiar one can find, especially for the bas-reliefs, there are some which are splendid, with bulls, cows, leaping calves, goats refusing to move forward, and all the animals are full of life and character".

In one of his sketchbooks of that period, the animals mentioned in that letter can be seen gambolling. On the other hand that bust which made such an impression on him, though it is not reproduced, regularly resurfaces in interviews, as "the first head that appeared [to him] resembling" or the sculpture that "gave [him] the impression of real life and made him land on his feet". He referred to it again in 1963: "In Florence, when I was twenty, I was very moved by an Egyptian head so sublime that I decided there and then to go to Rome to see others. But I realised later, when I was studying that subject, that it was a very secondary thing, of the twentieth order. But it had its share of masterpieces. Egypt's whole attitude facing real life was already visible in it". Several art historians have tried to identify in the collections of the museum in Florence

the work that made such a lasting impression on the young sculptor. In 1971 and 2003, Reinhold Hohl and Laurie Wilson each proposed a different sculpture, the first, a woman's head and the second, a woman's bust both dating from the 18th dynasty; in 2000, Casimiro di Crescenzo suggested the seated figure of the High priest Ptahmose that Giacometti had actually copied in one of his sketchbooks, that sculpture also dating from the 18th dynasty. (...)

This work, whatever it is, gave Giacometti such a shock that it validated his decision to leave Florence and go to Rome to admire other Egyptian statues. At the end of the year he settled in Rome for nearly seven months, discovered the city, and "visit(ed) regularly museums, churches and ruins". His aesthetic experience facing Egypt proved consistent. On 4 February 1921, he wrote to his parents: "Until now, and I don't think it will change, the most beautiful statue I have seen is not Greek or Roman, and even less from the Renaissance; it is an Egyptian statue. In the Vatican, there are several incredibly beautiful, but almost no one pays attention to them, and they are very badly exhibited, those idiot curators should be ashamed. Egyptian sculptures have a greatness, a rhythm of lines and forms, a perfect technique that was never used again after. All is made and measured to the smallest details, there is not a single shadow a little too strong or too weak, not a single line or form that is out of place, no hollow in which to slide a finger. And the heads seem alive, it looks like they are staring at you and talking. All the art that followed is more or less descriptive. This art doesn't come down to just forms and lines, there is obviously a very great depth of feelings..." Giacometti never disowned that declaration of love for Egyptian art. Until the end of his life, he regularly made copies of countless pieces from Ancient Egypt, an inexhaustible source of questionings facing the difficulty of representing the reality of a human figure. A sketchbook filled in Rome contains the traces of one of his visits to the Vatican, and especially to the room of Egyptian antiquities: on several pages, Giacometti sought to copy the monumental statue of Queen Tuya. Alternating viewpoints, and outlining details of certain parts, his drawing, made in pencil, is sharp and precise. It is typical of the copies he produced in that period, and of his concern to remain the most faithful possible to the reality of the piece. Those copies, which he made in front of Egyptian statues in the museums of Florence and Rome, are thus the first ones known to us.

But Giacometti's main source for the study and the practice of copying from Egyptian models remained before all else, books. Thus he announced, in his letter dated 4 February 1921, have "bought a good book - German of course - devoted to Egyptian art, with splendid reproductions and also poems that are of a rare energy and vitality!" That book was *Die Plastik der Ägypter* by the Egyptologist Hedwig Fechheimer. As Christian Klemm demonstrated, that publication would have a great impact on Giacometti's thought, for it offered not only many models to be copied, but it also proposed reflections that would eventually influence his conception of art.

The first copies he made from this book are related to the Amarna art, a period corresponding to the rule of the pharaoh Amenophis IV, better known as Akhenaten. His rule, lasting barely seventeen years, was marked by an important religious reform, and a radical transformation of the style and art conventions prevalent until then. On one of the most beautiful pages kept, Giacometti has gathered no less than five different sculptures of Akhenaten, representing him full-face, in profile, in three-quarter profile, as if he had tried to apprehend his face from all angles. Once again, the drawing was made in pencil, and Giacometti's line is sharp in his execution of details. (...)

(...).



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

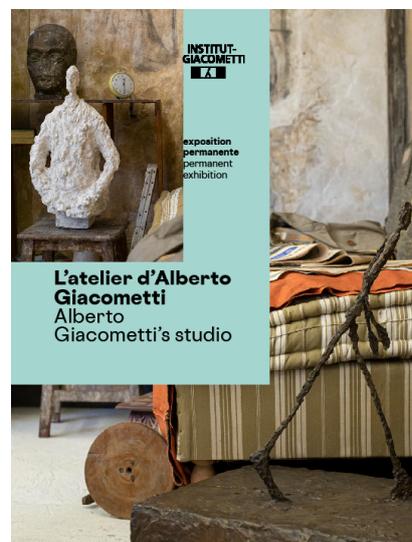
Open from Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Closed on Mondays

Booking on the online ticket office and on site:  
[www.fondation-giacometti.fr/fr/billetterie](http://www.fondation-giacometti.fr/fr/billetterie)  
Price: 8.50€  
Reduced price: 3€

## ON PERMANENT DIS-

### 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



Alberto Giacometti/Barbara Chase-Riboud  
Standing Women of Venice/  
Standing Black Woman of Venice  
20 October 2021 - 9 January 2022  
Curator: Emilie Bouvard

The Giacometti Institute invites Barbara Chase-Riboud to dialogue with Alberto Giacometti's oeuvre. A sculptor, poet and novelist, Barbara Chase-Riboud (born in 1939 in Philadelphia) met Giacometti at the beginning of the 1960s when she had just settled in Paris. Her work was closer to his at first, but was quickly freed from his influence. The monumental-scale works she was to develop after offer points of contact with those of the sculptor: research in verticality, expressiveness, relief, work with bronze, fascination with Ancient Egypt, for the 'monument', closeness to poetry.

© Studio lost but found /VG  
BildKunst, Bonn, 2020

© Succession Giacometti (Fondation  
Giacometti + ADAGP), Paris, 2021



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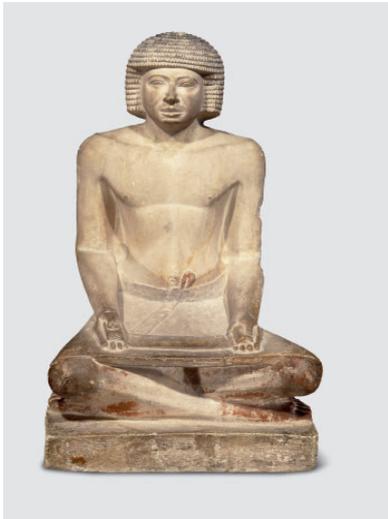
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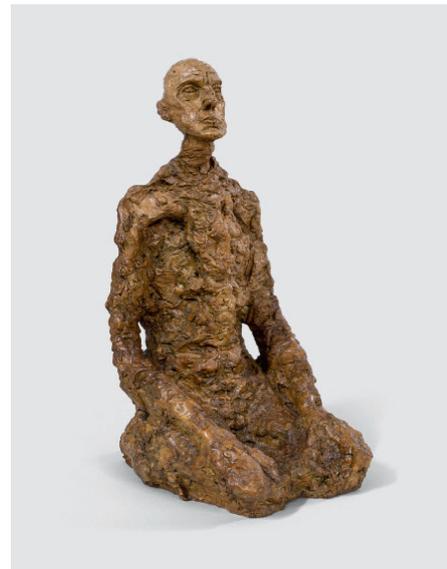
Alberto Giacometti  
*Seated Self-Portrait*  
c. 1929  
pencil on paper  
31,8 x 24,8cm  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP,  
Paris) 2021



Alberto Giacometti  
*in his studio, Paris, 1954*  
Photo : Sabine Weiss  
Archives Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti +ADAGP) 2021  
© Sabine Weiss



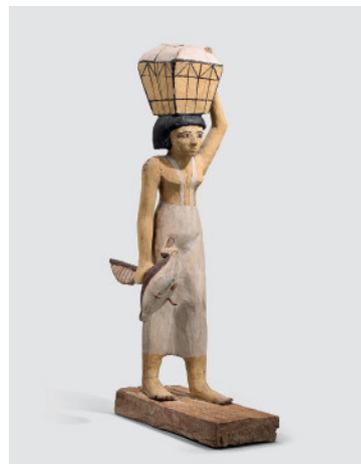
*Statue of a Man in the Attitude of a Scribe*  
Old Kingdom, 5th dynasty (2500-2350 BC)  
Painted limestone  
58x35x33cm  
Musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités  
égyptiennes, A 42  
Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand  
Palais /Christian Larrieu



Alberto Giacometti  
*Bust of Seated Man (Lotar III)*, 1965  
Painted plaster  
61.1x28.1x37.6cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



Alberto Giacometti  
*Walking Woman I*, 1932-1933  
Plaster  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



Funerary Statuette: Carrier of offerings  
Middle Kingdom, beginning of the 12th  
dynasty (1963-1862 BC)  
Painted wood - 63.2x32.8 cm  
Musée du Louvre, département des  
Antiquités égyptiennes, E 11990  
Photo © 2014 Musée du Louvre/  
Benjamin Soligny



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## PRESS IMAGES



Alberto Giacometti  
Four figurines of London, version A  
1965  
Painted plaster  
14x22x4cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



*Statuette of Lady Henen*  
Middle Kingdom, beginning of the 12th  
dynasty (around 1963-1862 BC)  
Painted wood  
35x8.5x18.3cm  
Musée du Louvre, département des  
Antiquités égyptiennes, E 33145  
Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-  
Grand Palais/Georges Poncet



Alberto Giacometti  
Thin bust on a Base (Known as Amenophis)  
1954  
Plaster  
39.7x33.1x13.7cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



Fragment of a Relief: Royal Head  
New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, reign  
of Amenhotep IV - Akhenaten  
(1353-1337 BC)  
Limestone  
10.7x7.9cm  
Musée du Louvre, département des  
Antiquités égyptiennes,  
E 11058  
Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-  
Grand Palais/ Christian Decamps



Alberto Giacometti  
The Cat, 1951  
Painted plaster  
32.8x81.3x13.5cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



*Coffin of a Cat*  
Late period (664-332 BC)  
Painted and gilded wood  
37.7x13.3x19cm  
Musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités égyptiennes, E 2562  
Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/  
Christian Decamps



Alberto Giacometti  
*Copies of a Fayum mummy portrait, a New Guinea mask and a Malekoula mannequin*  
circa 1950  
Ink on paper  
29.5x21cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



Portrait of a Mummy  
Roman epoch, Late 4th century  
Distemper on ficus wood  
36x17x0.50cm  
Musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines, MND 2029  
Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais /Georges Poncet



Alberto Giacometti  
Copy from Head of Amenhotep IV  
circa 1920  
pencil on paper  
29.9x38.4cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



Alberto Giacometti  
Head of Isabel  
Plaster  
30.3x23.5x21.9cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
© Succession Alberto Giacometti  
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Alberto Giacometti  
Small figure on a Base  
circa 1955  
Painted plaster  
39.2x9.2x20.5cm  
Fondation Giacometti  
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(Fondation Giacometti + ADAGP, Paris) 2021



Alberto Giacometti  
Copy from a detail of musicians in a fresco from  
Thebes in Kunst des Fernen Ostens  
Pencil on book  
35x25.7cm (closed)  
Fondation Giacometti  
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