

Alberto Giacometti / Petrit Halilaj

We built a fantastic palace at night...

exhibition

14.03 > 08.06.2025



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Anne-Marie Pereira

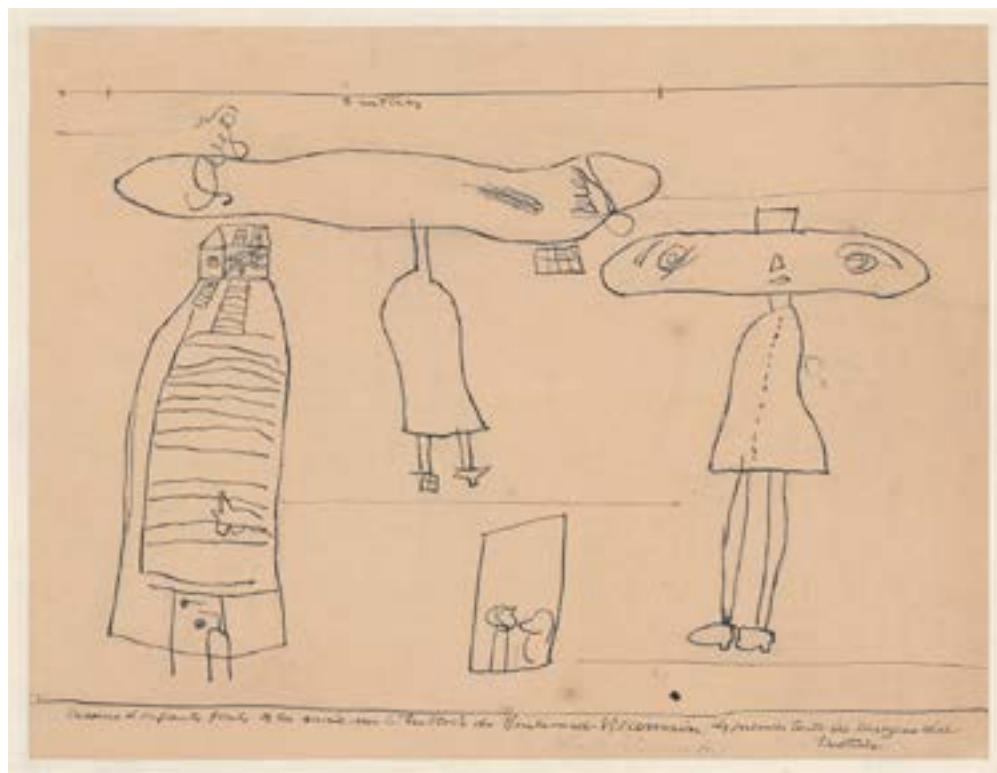
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14.03 > 08.06.2025

Alberto Giacometti / Petrit Halilaj « We built a fantastic palace at night... »

Press visit on
Thursday 13 March
from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.



Institut Giacometti
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75014 Paris

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President
Catherine Grenier

Director
Françoise Cohen

Curator
Hugo Daniel

Scenographer
Éric Morin

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Alberto Giacometti

Copy after children's drawings made in chalk on the pavement of Boulevard Villemain, 1932

Black ink and graphite pencil on a detached page from a sketchbook.

17.20 x 22.60 cm

Fondation Giacometti © Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

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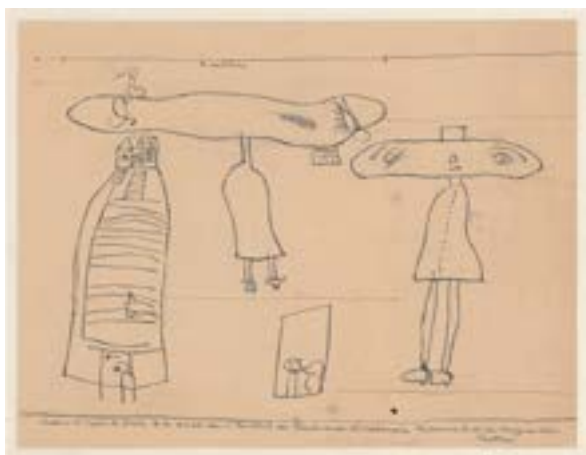
The exhibition “We built a fantastic palace at night...”, presented at Institut Giacometti next spring, places side by side, in dialogue, original works and installations by the contemporary artist Petrit Halilaj, and a selection of works by Alberto Giacometti.

Deeply marked by his childhood in Kosovo during the war, Petrit Halilaj has developed a practice in which individual and collective stories merge in spaces of freedom, not lacking in playfulness and lightness. Children’s drawing feeds his work, in which he opens an oneiric, even magical horizon, to sculpture; a dream-like space that echoes the part of childhood often detectable in Giacometti’s oeuvre.

Related to an idea of Giacometti rooted in his sculpture *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (1932), the title and works presented in the exhibition explore the dynamism of the fantastical and fragile constructions of the works of both artists. In an original installation devised by Halilaj, the exhibition weaves a subtle network of connections between Giacometti’s works and his own. Dreams, hopes but also worries and fears merge in fragile structures that enchant and reveal a capacity to communicate powerful imaginaries. Facing the feeling of a precarious world, the works of Halilaj and Giacometti mobilise a redeeming capacity for invention.

From a children’s drawing reproduced by Giacometti, *Copy from children’s drawings made in chalk on the pavement of Boulevard Villemain* (1932), which is on display in the exhibition, Halilaj creates a subtle and oneiric dialogue by playing on the connections between his drawing and sculpture and that of Giacometti’s oeuvre, of which he shows unusual aspects.

Halilaj’s large spatial drawings that relate to a palace, real as much as imaginary, give him the opportunity to elaborate on the importance of the theme of childhood in Giacometti’s work.



Alberto Giacometti

Copy after children’s drawings made in chalk on the pavement of Boulevard Villemain, 1932
Black ink and graphite pencil on a detached page from a sketchbook.

Fondation Giacometti

© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025



Petrit Halilaj

Abetare House, 2024

Bronze

Courtesy Mennour, Paris

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Around the exhibition

A catalogue, under the direction of Hugo Daniel, richly illustrated, in a bilingual French/English edition, co-edited by Fondation Giacometti, Paris and FAGE éditions, Lyon, accompanies the exhibition.

A cultural programme is proposed to the public for the duration of the exhibition as well as guided visits in French and in English as well as workshops for children and families.

Guided visits in French

Duration: 1 hour

Wednesday at 11 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.

Friday and Saturday at 2.30 p.m.

Every day during the school holidays in zone C

Guided visits in English

Saturday and Sunday at 11 a.m.

Family visits (parents and children)

Sunday from 10 to 11 a.m.

Organised by the mediators at the Institut, these visits propose a sensitive approach to the exhibition through visual and tactile experiences.

Family workshops

(workshop and visit of the exhibition)

Parents and children over 5 years old

Sunday from 3 to 5 p.m.

Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 3 to 5 p.m. during the school holidays in zone C.

Organised by the mediators at the Institut, these art practice workshops propose a sensorial experience and the explanation of sculptural techniques.

Bookings: institut@fondation-giacometti.fr



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Art practice workshops

Art practice workshop connected to the exhibition

Alberto Giacometti/Petrit Halilaj "We built a fantastic palace at night..."

In the studio space, parents and children free their imagination with the technique of drawing with four hands on a variety of supports, and with the help of different techniques (pastel, felt tips, biros and 3D pen etc). The studio becomes an immersive space within which fantastical projections are displayed vertically and horizontally, a real imaginary palace. After the workshop, everyone visits the exhibition to discover a connection between their own works and the works exhibited.

In family (parents and children from 5 to 10)

Sundays from 3 to 5 p.m. outside the school holidays
in zone C.

School holidays in zone C: Wednesday, Friday and Sunday
from 3 to 5 p.m.

15€ per participant

Bookings: institut@fondation-giacometti.fr



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Exhibition trail

The exhibition trail explores the collaborations between artists and children in the making of drawings, family bonds, the transposition of the pictorial vocabulary to sculpture in Giacometti's major works like *The Cage* (1950) and *Apollo* (1929) but also the issue of scale in the apprehension of reality. From the tiniest of sculptures to pieces like *The Couple* (1927), Giacometti's works blend in a visual environment set up by Halilaj.

In nearly thirty works specifically produced for the exhibition, Halilaj explores, in the childlike vocabulary of his 'Abetare', a form of spatial drawing that has become his own means of expression.

The exhibition, sustained by the Halilaj's intense connection with children's drawing as a witness to today's world, shows in a new way an interest and a use close to Giacometti's work, displaying the rich themes of childhood, dreams, associations of ideas and the relation to wonder.



Silvio & Luna

"When we talk about drawing, we talk about imagination, and that's what I've been feeling since my childhood," Halilaj emphasises. Since childhood, the artist has been keeping an intense relationship with drawing, and his art vocation was hastened by the conflict in Kosovo (1998-1999) that tore apart populations and uprooted the young Halilaj from villages to camps. Encouraged by the Italian psychologist Giacomo "Angelo" Poli, in the refugee camp of Kukës, in Albania, he attracted people's attention with his passion for drawing and his skill at drawing with both hands. He found in the medium of drawing, the means to process and overcome the traumas of the war.

Gradually drawing, and in particular children's drawing, became for him a language of choice. From 2015, he created, with the "Abetare", a new graphic language, a kind of drawing in space in which he transforms children's drawing into drawing in space.

In Geneva, where he was holed up in 1941 because of the war, Giacometti spent time with his mother and nephew Silvio, of whom he made many portraits, sculpted and drawn. In a few sketchbooks he indulged in an original exercise: he invited the child to draw on the sheets on which his silhouette was sketched. On several sketchbooks, a dialogue developed between the child and his uncle, in a series of delicate drawings made by four hands. Halilaj carries on that graphic dialogue with his niece Luna.



Alberto Giacometti
Portrait of Silvio, c.1943
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti /
Adagp, Paris 2025

Petrit Halilaj
Abetare Silvio and Luna, 2024
Bronze
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

Presentation of the exhibition

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In the palace

The Palace, a monumental drawing in space, is displayed in the main room of the Institut Giacometti. Like a dream, it associates unrelated moments and ideas, creating a connection between several works by Giacometti, *Couple* (1926), *Mother and daughter* (1933), *Apollo* (1929) and a man in the children's drawing copied by the artist in 1932.

I can only talk indirectly of my sculptures, and hope to partially say what inspired me to make them, Giacometti wrote in 1933, commenting on his work

The Palace at 4 a.m. (1932), and he continued: We built a fantastic palace at night [...], a very fragile palace made of matches: one wrong move and part of the tiny construction collapsed; we started it all over again and again.

Halilaj identified with that precarious form: "it is the common thread between all the houses I lived in, and that my family and I lost or had to leave, and that we tried to rebuild: that in Runik [Kosovo] after the war, then, in 2010, the family house in Pristina. For this exhibition, the idea of building a dream palace to live in immediately came to my mind."



Works by Alberto Giacometti, among them *The Palace at 4 a.m.* and *The hour of the traces in wood*, from 1932

Photo anonymous

Fondation Giacometti

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Alberto Giacometti

Man (Apollon), 1929

Bronze

39,4 x 30,9 x 8,2 cm

© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

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Alberto Giacometti

**"Notes on sculpture", Minotaure, n° 3-4,
12 December 1933.**

"I take the sculpture reproduced opposite for instance, which represents a palace. The object was created, piece by piece, at the end of summer 1932 and slowly became clear to me, its different parts acquiring their exact shapes and their precise place in the ensemble. By the autumn it had become so real that its execution in space required no more than one day's work."

It no doubt refers to the stage in my life that had concluded a year earlier, a period of six months spent hour after hour with a woman who, concentrating all life in herself, made every moment something marvellous for me.

We built a fantastic palace at night (days and nights were the same colour as if everything had happened just before dawn; throughout this time I never saw the sun), a very fragile palace of matchsticks: at the slightest false move a whole part of the minute construction would collapse: we would always begin it again. I don't know why it is filled with a spinal column in a cage — the spinal column which this woman sold me on one of the first nights I met her in the street — and by one of the skeleton birds she saw the very night preceding the morning on which our life together broke down — the skeleton birds fluttering way above the reservoir of clear green water in which the very delicate and very white skeletons of fishes were swimming, in the grand open-air hall amid the exclamations of astonishment at four o'clock in the morning.

In the middle, the scaffolding of a tower which is perhaps unfinished, or perhaps the whole of its top has fallen in, broken. The statue of a woman has occupied the other side, a woman in whom I discover my mother, as she appears in my earliest memories. I was troubled by her long black dress, which touched the ground: it seemed to be part of her body, and this frightened and confused me; all the rest was lost on me. that figure stands out three times against the same curtain, and onto that curtain I opened my eyes for the first time. Captive of an infinite charm, I stared at that brown curtain under which a thin strip of light was filtered, all along the floor. I can say nothing of the object on a small red board; I feel identified with it."

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Seeing like a child

Petrit Halilaj shares with Alberto Giacometti a fondness for the way children look at adults. As a child, Halilaj benefitted from the unconditional support of his mother in his budding art career, as was the case with Giacometti with both his parents. The figure of the father is important for both artists, but in a different way, between reverence and defiance.

Abetare (Le Coq de Giacometti) (2025), presents a mocking character that looks up and down a portrait of Giovanni Giacometti, the artist's father. **Abetare (La Causeuse de Giacometti)** (2025) is taken from a piece of paper with a drawing on, in which Giacometti covers his father's portrait with imaginary sculptures.

In their respective work, both artists keep up a dialogue between drawing and sculpture. In Giacometti's, some sculptures like **Portrait of the father** (1927-30) or **Walking figure** (1927) offer, as in Halilaj's, a hybrid form between drawing and sculpture.



Essential beings

Discovering, in the storerooms of the Fondation Giacometti the metallic structures that would eventually generate Giacometti's post-war sculptures, Halilaj was struck by their likeness to his own sculptures as much as with his lexicon of forms. That's the case with his "Abetare" and his spindly sculptures like **Pour te rappeler - Struthio Camelus** (2024).

Halilaj speaks about Giacometti's metallic frames in these terms: "it is about the essence of the sculpture and its limits. I was struck, when I saw the choice of rods that make the frame; it says something about the moment the sculpture becomes a sculpture. I see a strong link between his language and mine in those two lines that constitute the essence of so many of his subjects: monochrome black lines that become a drawing in space. I am very interested in the idea of a sculpture that has no volume."

Like Giacometti's main structures on which matter is added, Halilaj's works like **Peut-on faire quelque chose ensemble, simplement ça et ensuite libre pour toujours (blanc)** (2011) make use of light shapes like twigs and feathers, suggesting a lightness in the sculpture that can go as far as emptiness or the evocation of a near disappearance. Halilaj comments on it: "I think about his variations in scale and shapes, at times realist, at times abstract, on the verge of disappearing."

Petrit Halilaj
Abetare Eye, 2024
Bronze
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

Presentation of the exhibition

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Small and big

In Halilaj's work, many pieces make use of children's drawing enlarged to almost gigantic proportions. In Giacometti's, the scale of works is an essential feature. In his work, he favoured the small format, so much so that between 1958 and 1961, he ran into difficulties when he had to make, for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York, sculptures in huge dimensions. As he explained concerning the projects of monuments to the heroes of the Resistance (Rol Tanguy, Gabriel Péri), Giacometti conveyed the greatness of men in a form of humility and in modest, if not very modest, formats. For him, as for Halilaj, all the intensity of human existence can be expressed within the scale of small works.



Petrit Halilaj
Abetare (Giacometti's cockerel), 2025
Bronze
110 x 55 x 10 cm
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

Petrit Halilaj
Abetare Monster, 2024
Bronze
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

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Extracts from the catalogue

Interview Petrit Halilaj/Hugo Daniel, curator



© Daniel

Hugo Daniel

For the title of the show, we came quite naturally on a quote of Giacometti about his iconic work ***The Palace at 4 a.m.***, taken from a text of 1932, "I can only talk indirectly of my sculpture..."

Petrit Halilaj

I identify with the title so deeply, which is a thread between all the houses I lived in, and that my family and I lost and were displaced from and tried to rebuild during my life – our house in Runik after the war, and then in 2010 the family house in Prishtina. For this exhibition, the title came first, this idea of constructing a dream palace to live in. For the Berlin Biennale, I was trying in some ways to do the same thing, to build a family home where I could belong (...)

Another reason why I like this sentence we chose is that we are in a space that has a history and is so related to Giacometti.

(...)



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HD

This is a strong connection between your two works too.

PH

I don't know how much I was aware of it until we started to talk about the idea of the palace or a house where scenarios and dreams need physical fragments that evoke this idea of storytelling. I am always fascinated with the idea that the show brings out something pre-existing within the space and the public activates it, and that the space itself alters personal histories or stories. For example, before we built the Crystal Palace as an environment, I didn't have a space: both my partner and I, being homosexual, accepted by our families only with difficulty, we couldn't dream of where to marry or celebrate our relationship. It became a dream to host our love in a Palace for other important people who make up our life, to create a Palace that goes beyond our own intimate dimension, merging with a more public one.

(...)

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HD

Your encounter with Angelo in the refugee camp and what it meant is seminal to your practice. Considering what you're doing now, it seems there's a great continuity in your art practice with what you did with him.

PH

Yes, this idea of telling personal histories remains at the core of my practice. As a psychologist and therapist, Angelo works with people by using language to tell the stories of their traumas or life.

For me, this was through drawing, in a context that was not a studio, but a group of kids in a refugee camp, during a war that was raging. He was asking us to draw our reality.

For me, this was through drawing, in a context that was not a studio, but a group of kids in a refugee camp, during a war that was raging. He was asking us to draw our reality.

I was always fascinated by that: copying things – chickens, houses, landscapes, dreams. it helped me to release these feelings and to share them. I think in that moment I understood that making something frees you to talk about it. I still have the original notebook, and all the felt tip colours of that moment with Angelo. This completely changed my life.

(...)



Catalogue co-edited by Fondation Giacometti and FAGE éditions, Lyon,
bilingual French/English
112 pages, around 100 illustrations
Format 17 x 23.5 cm
Price: €24
ISBN : ISBN 978 2 84975 803 8

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"From child to child" **Hugo Daniel, curator**

Children have such confidence... They think they are here forever. Who, in reality, doesn't look like they think they are here for ever? Everything became precarious for me at twenty. Alberto Giacometti, 1953.

The problem with childhood, Alberto Giacometti claimed, is that we have to leave it behind, and with it the power and intensity of a relationship with the world. But not everyone experiences a childhood both as peaceful and stimulating as Giacometti's, between the mountain summits and the lakes of Val Bregaglia, under the attentive eye and the caring support of his parents. Or one is deprived of it too early, before one reaches 17 when, in Rimbaud's opinion, one still believes one shouldn't take things seriously.

Born in 1986 in Kosovo, Petrit Halilaj also benefitted, as a child, from the unconditional support of his mother in his budding art vocation, but the latter was hastened by the conflict (1998-1999) that tore the populations and displaced the young Halilaj from villages to camps. The young man who attracted attention because of his intense passion for drawing and his ability to do so with both hands, found in the medium of visual representation, the means to express as well as survive the trauma of the war, and that at the instigation of the Italian psychologist Giacomo 'Angelo' Poli in the refugee camps of Kukës, in Albania. The drawings, simply made with felt-tips on A4 paper, were a means to convey what children have no words for.

In the visual language of 13 years old Halilaj, the drawings made in the camp show, with the cold evidence of the facts, the assassinations at point blank, the tanks criss-crossing the countryside, the stretched-out bodies of wounded adults and children, his house on fire, the countless graves. And at times, a peacock conceals with its iridescent and finely detailed plumage, a hilly perspective; other birds offer a view on the horizon; this one breaks in two the butt of a machine gun with its beak. "We want peace in Kosovo," the caption says, while most of the others refer to massacres. The harshness of the facts, recorded in the drawings, sharply contrasts with the deceptive simplicity and lightness of the means of expression. In the intensity of those evocations between the facts and overcoming them through an artistic process, Halilaj acknowledged art as a powerful medium.

One of those drawings was made for the general secretary of the United Nations Kofi Annan, who had come to Kukës and to whom the child showed the drawing, but in the end did not offer it to him (he had kept in mind the words uttered by his grand-father, for whom the visit was too late). Those drawings remain, for the collective memory, the terrible but precious testimony of what his eyes witnessed.

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Those facts deeply support the belief that a drawing can testify as much as transform the world, that a process, even if it was psychological took place in direct contact with the events experienced and suffered - it has at least the capacity to transform a fact into an experience. Since then, gradually, the drawing and in particular children's drawings have become, for Halilaj, a favourite language, a language to keep up like an exile practices his mother tongue to not completely loose contact with a lost world. From 2015, he went back to it by inventing a new visual language, a kind of spatial drawing reminiscent of Alexander Calder's drawings with wire, the drawings in space of Julio Gonzalez as well as Giacometti's spindly constructions, of which *The Palace at 4 a.m.* (1934) is the most elaborate example.

Going back to Runik where he grew up, Halilaj returned to the village school, about to be demolished. As if from ruins, he retrieved the school desks from which he copied the inscriptions left by the pupils. Houses, human figures, rockets, 'KFOR' (Kosovo Force), hearts and erected penises, etc.: those illustrations, witnesses to anonymous exchanges in which are mixed the evocation of armed forces as much as the first infatuations and schoolboy jokes, are enlarged in sculptures, free drawings in space whose proportions sometimes reach more than three metres. 'ABETARE' is the name given by the artist to that form of children's drawing expanded into the adult space, from a teaching manual for reading in the Latin alphabet used by all the schoolchildren of his generation in Kosovo. Applied from project to project, this form has become a language specific to the artist, which enables him to gradually incorporate, in dialogue with the forms made by the children, his own issues.

Consequently, it's easy to understand how "discovering" Giacometti's work took place in the domain of pictorial representation. A drawing in particular, taken out of the storeroom, generated an echo with his practice, and became the starting point of his exhibition at the Institut Giacometti. It is a small ink drawing, rare and widely ignored, in which Giacometti has carefully reproduced the "*drawings of children made with chalk on the pavement of Boulevard Villemain*", as indicated in the caption hand-written by him, in a piece curiously reminiscent of Paul Klee's "Pedagogic sketches".

Until the recent discovery of that ink drawing, Giacometti's interest for children drawing was not known. Two human figures, a house in flat perspective overlooking a staggered landscape, a dog and a man seen through a window, the whole scene seems to be the collaborative work of a few children who signed the figures. The drawing has been carefully reproduced by the artist who framed it with lines, copied also the same figures on the pages of a sketchbook, and took special care to write down a caption which specifies: "they takes up [sic] the whole pavement". The unintentional playfulness of the grammar mistake badly conceals the desire to be precise. In the inscription on the edge of the frame, traced at the top of the sheet, is mentioned, from one end to the other of the character's tuber-head, its dimensions: '2 metres'.

We are free to speculate on what motivated the taking down of that picture, and even more, its eventual purpose, for few traces, and even less commentaries document it. We can propound nevertheless, in the first instance, that the size appears to have been a determining factor, and undoubtedly also, as is shown by the care brought to the copying process, the exceptional gracefulness of the drawing and the very special likeableness of those drawn out faces whose eyes are touchingly expressive. But the whole economy of the motif has, it seems, also attracted the artist's attention.

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Circumstances play on more than one account in that story. What was in 1932 the “Boulevard” Villemain (today the avenue Villemain) was located just behind the block of houses comprising Giacometti’s studio, at 46 rue Hippolyte-Maindron, while the next number, 48, was the site of the primary and elementary school bearing the name of the street. Coming across that drawing in chalk has as much to do with the exchange of good neighbourhood as with urban wandering, whose creative possibilities were explored by the surrealists.

We can understand why Giacometti was stopped in his tracks by those drawings, beyond their inherent characteristics. In 1930, he became part of the surrealist group and had been quite aware, since the end of the 1920s, of the movement’s concepts. With his sculptures, like *The Couple* (1927) and the many drawings made at the same period, he established a vocabulary of simplified signs, almost like ideograms, whose mobility within the figures and between them already suggested a functioning both associative and by permutations, peculiar to the oneiric concept.

In 1932, he was working on the illustration of the novel of his friend René Crevel, for which he was creating a frontispiece, his first copper engraving to be published the following year. The motif, whose character is maybe reminiscent of the drawing of boulevard Villemain, places face to face a seahorse, the subject of the novel, and a skeleton caught in a cage structured in tiers. Two years later, the engravings for André Breton’s book *L’Air de l’eau* used a same linear outline, which is that of the artist’s surrealist period. We could ponder on what that outline owes to children’s drawing.

It seems from the start that, on top of the motif or subject, it is the functioning of the reproduced drawing that caught the artist’s attention: its linear character enabling readily passing from one figure to another, its fluctuating nature and the association between shapes simply defined. Taken in the continuity of the line drawings and the sculptures with minimal forms that the artist had been making since the second half of the 1920s, of which *Crouched figure* (circa 1926), *The Couple* (1927) and the various *Flat Woman* (1928-1929), the copy of children’s drawing is associated with a reflection on a simplified and combinatory drawing. The treatment of the figure with simple, mobile and at times concatenated signs is reminiscent of the “intellectual realism” with which European authors of the beginning at the 20th century have interpreted African art, as well as the art made by children, by the “insane” and “the savages”, for lack of other tools to understand them. Way before joining the surrealist group, and while coming out of the Académie de la Grande Chaumière he experimented with new ways of representation while taking in everything that was within his grasp in the domain of art, Giacometti positioned himself in the continuity of a globalising assimilation. It is now more than established that, in a manner similar to children’s drawings, the artworks of peoples thought of at the time as “savage”, but also those of “insane” and prehistoric men were, at the beginning of the 20th century, acknowledged within the same general and confusionist primitivist context. The validation of children’s drawings by Paul Klee, Juan Miró and by the surrealists in general, is perceived in the context a search for a shift of art practice to “child’s play” and its forms, supposed to be less subjected to the superego of conventions, if not purely anti-cultural, and of which those works were both the testimony and the living trace.

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Giacometti's interest in children's drawing is seemingly found in that primitivist genealogy that associates models and referents.

The seminal book by the philosopher, psychologist and ethnographer Georges-Henri Luquet, *Le Dessin enfantin*, published in 1927, is among those which contributed the most to disseminate the idea of "intellectual realism" peculiar to children's art. "No term is better suited than the term of realism to qualify as a whole, children's drawing", the author states, bringing out three stages in that approach: the "intellectual" realism follows the "fortuitous" and the "missed", anterior stages from which it allegedly differs because of its capacity to "synthesise", to combine the points of view.

Luquet is also opposed to "visual" realism because of its capacity to superimpose and show by transparency. So various visual characteristics distinguish that realism: the fact of "bringing out in the drawing details that merge or mask one another", then "the transparency" and finally, a process described as "more complicated", consisting in "representing the object by projecting it on the ground, as if it was seen from a bird's perspective [...] especially houses and furniture".

Though we don't exactly know for certain what could have been Giacometti's knowledge and sensitivity to those theories, his interest in children's drawings was contemporary to them, or slightly posterior to them. The references to Luquet's publications in the surrealist magazine *Documents*, in which was published, in 1929, the first article on Giacometti, penned by Michel Leiris, made the artist's ignorance, as far as those theories were concerned, doubtful.

And it's even more unlikely that Giacometti could have failed to notice Luquet's theses for they were specifically discussed in the same publication by Georges Bataille, who made a strong case for deconstructing the opposition, artificial in his opinion, between "intellectual realism" and "visual realism", in his seminal article "L'art primitif".

The latter, in reality a textual criticism of the eponymous book by Luquet, was illustrated, among others, by drawings made by Lili, André Masson's daughter - whom Giacometti have known since 1929. Against Luquet's theses, Bataille intended to validate children's doodles and highlighted the importance of their "dirty hands", as well as the "alteration of the objects" which they reveal. In *Abyssinian children*, the author noted the ability to distort the figures.

By that yardstick, it's clear that for Giacometti, the child cannot entirely be a simple artist "model", as was the case with Vassily Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter, Paul Klee, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, among others. By the same token, can he still be considered a link with a lost "innocence"? It seems rather that the surrealists' inclination to go beyond the limits of "realism" by highlighting non-rational mental functioning was likely to sustain the artist's interest in those pictorial productions.

A drawing that connects assorted figures, the importance of transparency, etc., it is really for its functional properties that Giacometti developed an interest in children's drawing.

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The fascination for the functioning of children's drawing rather than for its form was confirmed by Giacometti years later, in an altogether different context, in which once again he was made to confront that expression. In 1941 in Geneva, where he was holed up because of the war, the artist met his mother, who resided there too, as well as his nephew Silvio, an orphan raised by his father. Alberto became close to his nephew and made many portraits of him, in sculpture and in drawing. And in a few sketchbooks of the same format, he did something unusual: he invited the child to draw on the same pages as those on which he sketched his silhouette. In several sketchbooks, an affectionate dialogue is pursued between the child and his uncle in a series of drawings for four hands, full of grace.

Giacometti was not naive enough to consider children "innocents". Maybe getting close to their drawing was for him a way to find again part of the confidence he regretted having lost when he became an adult. Another sign of that gaze, contemporary to the drawings he made with his nephew: while the war was raging, it might be surprising to see the artist associate childhood with cruelty at work in Jacques Callot's oeuvre. In the article "À propos de Jacques Callot", published in Geneva in 1945 in Albert Skira's magazine *Labyrinthe*, Giacometti emphatically evoked visual means measured up to various acts of violence. Reminiscences of Bataille's texts are palpable, though never mentioned. He expresses his "horror of the war" and "of scenes of massacre and destruction, of torture and rape, of fire and shipwreck", likening cruelty and the "pleasure of destruction" that he sees in children to the "frenetic desire for destruction" of the artists. Giacometti explicitly placed himself in the tradition of Francisco de Goya, Théodore Géricault and Jacques Callot when he mentioned his "horror of the war".

That he resorted to childhood is certainly explained by his exchanges with his nephew Silvio, but also by the fact that contrary to any naive idea, he thought about childhood as grappling with the most important preoccupations in those troubled times in the history of mankind. Undoubtedly, it is also in that tradition that we can consider Halilaj's work, maybe in the difference that the latter leans rather towards the side of the power to subvert and rise above the world's violence.

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Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966)

Born in 1901 in Stampa, Switzerland, Alberto Giacometti was the son of Giovanni Giacometti, a post-impressionist painter of renown with whom he discovered painting and began to sculpt. From his early works to his death, he made around a hundred painted plasters and around sixty painted bronzes. Paintings and sculptures are intimately linked in Giacometti's œuvre.

At the age of 13, Giacometti made his first watercolours: mountain landscapes around his family home in the village of Stampa. In 1922, he left his native valley to settle in Paris and attend the classes of the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle at the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière where he worked with models. In 1925, he became interested in the avant-garde, among them the cubist artists.

In 1929, he started a series of sculptures called "flat women", close to abstraction, that gained the notice of the art milieu. In 1930, he adhered to the surrealist movement

of André Breton, of which he became an active member. His sculptures, especially *Suspended Ball*, played an essential part in the definition given by Dalí of the "surrealist" objects with a "symbolic function".

The theme of the human head became the main subject of Giacometti's research throughout his life, and one of the reasons for his withdrawal from the surrealist group in 1935. For him, at that time, the representation of a head which seemed to be an unremarkable subject, was far from being resolved. The head, and especially the eyes are the centre of the human being and of life, whose mystery fascinated him. After *Head-skull*, made in 1934 after the death of his father Giovanni in 1933, his many variations on heads show that the subject cannot be exhausted, all the more for the matter of scale is combined in it: for Giacometti, representing his vision with accuracy is also marking the distance which the subject has been looked at. In the 1930s, the models used for his research on the head were his brother Diego, his English artist friend Isabel (Delmer) and Rita (Gueyfier), a professional model. Isabel, seen from afar in the Latin Quarter, was the subject of one of his very first tiny figurines. After his return to Paris in September 1945, Giacometti showed that the monumental aspect was dissociated with the actual size of the works as he made portraits in small format of important personalities: the patron Marie-Laure de Noailles, the writer Simone de Beauvoir whom he met in 1941, and, at the request of Louis Aragon, Rol-Tanguy, the hero of the Resistance.

Between 1958 and 1961, Giacometti made, as part of the commission to decorate the Plaza in front of the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York, a *Tall Woman* and a *Big Head* in a monumental scale, next to a *Walking Man*. Those three works became iconic. In 1962, Giacometti was awarded the Grand Prix for Sculpture at the 31st Venice Biennial. The retrospectives of 1965 at the Tate Gallery (London), the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the Louisiana Museum (Humlebaek, Denmark) consecrated the artist just before his death in January 1966, at the hospital of Coire, in Switzerland.

Giacometti in his studio
Photo: Denise Colomb, 1954
Archives Fondation Giacometti

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Petrit Halilaj

Born in 1986 in Kostërrc, in Kosovo, Petrit Halilaj lives and works between Germany, Kosovo, Italy and France.

Petrit Halilaj represented Kosovo in its first national pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennial in 2013.

In 2021, Tate St Ives showed his solo exhibition “Very volcanic over this green feather”.

In 2024, Petrit Halilaj opened a site-specific installation for the Met Rooftop Garden Commission in New York.

In 2025, Halilaj presented a solo exhibition in Hamburg Bahnhof, in Berlin.

Halilaj held solo exhibitions at the Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; Tate St Ives, UK; Palacio de Cristal, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; New Museum, New York; Fondazione Merz, Turin; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Paul Klee Zentrum, Bern; Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan; Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; Fondation d’Entreprise Galeries Lafayette, Paris; the National Gallery of Kosovo, Pristina; Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen; Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon; and WIELS, Brussels, among others. His work was shown in group exhibitions at the 15th Lyon Biennale; the Louisiana Museum in Denmark; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles; Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection, Venice; NEON, Mykonos, Greece; and the Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, Germany.

He received the Kunstpreis Berlin from the Akademie der Künste in 2023 and was honored with the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (SARF) in 2018. In 2017, he earned both the Mario Merz Prize and a special mention from the jury at the 57th Venice Biennale.

Prior to these, he completed the MAK-Schindler Scholarship Program at the Mackey Apartments in Los Angeles in 2016, and participated in residencies at Villa Romana (Florence, 2014) and Fürstenberg Contemporary (Heiligenberg, 2012).

Halilaj studied at the Brera Academy of Fine Art in Milan. He is currently a professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Paris, France, together with his partner and frequent artistic collaborator, Álvaro Urbano.

He is a member of the Akademie der Künste der Welt.

Petrit Halilaj in his studio, 2017
Photo : Archives Kamel Mennour

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The Giacometti Institute is the part of the Fondation Giacometti devoted to exhibitions and research in art history and pedagogy. Created in 2018, it is chaired by Catherine Grenier, the director of the Giacometti Foundation since 2014. 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 the public. Alberto Giacometti's mythical 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.

The ambition of the Institute 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-Schœlcher
75014 Paris

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

Booking online and on site (bank card only):
<https://giaco.shop.secutix.com/content>

Price: 9€
Reduced price: 3 €

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On permanent display

Alberto Giacometti's studio

Introducing the visitors into the intimate universe of the artist's practice, the studio gathers some sixty original works and faithfully recreates the whole set of furniture and the walls of the studio painted by Alberto Giacometti.



In 2025

Beauvoir, Sartre, Giacometti.
Vertiginousness of the absolute

17 June - 12 October 2025

Curator : Émilie Bouvard

The exhibition "Beauvoir, Sartre, Giacometti. Vertiginousness of the absolute" brings to life the friendship that formed between Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and Alberto Giacometti.

A postulation of the visual and philosophical practice as an "absolute", the recognition of each other's sensitivities, the radicalism of their political commitments formed the basis of their profound understanding. Philosophy, the importance of friendship, the reinvention of love, a certain idea of life devoted to the arts brought them together. Here are three human beings deeply engaged in their existence.



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For Petrit Halilaj's works

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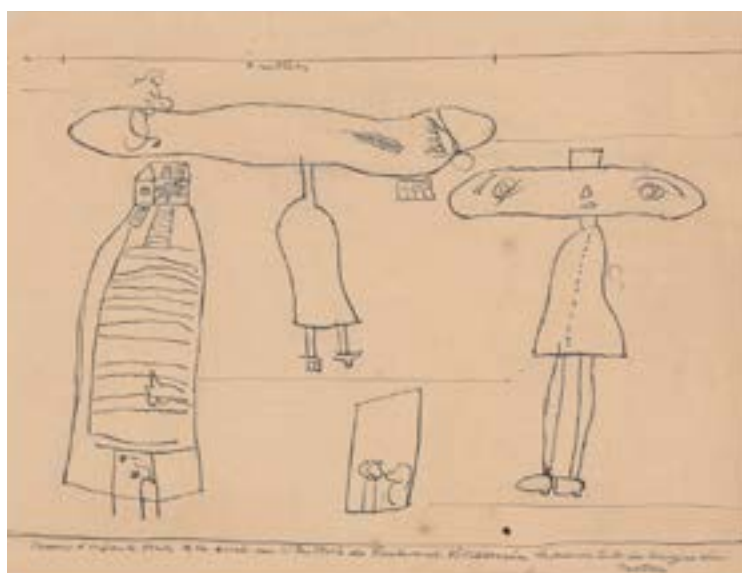


Works by Alberto Giacometti among them *The Palace at 4 a.m.* and *The hour of the traces in wood*, from 1932

Photo anonymous

Fondation Giacometti

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Alberto Giacometti

Copy after children drawings made in chalk on the pavement of Boulevard Villemain, 1932

Black ink and graphite pencil on a loose page from a notebook. 17.20 x 22.60 cm

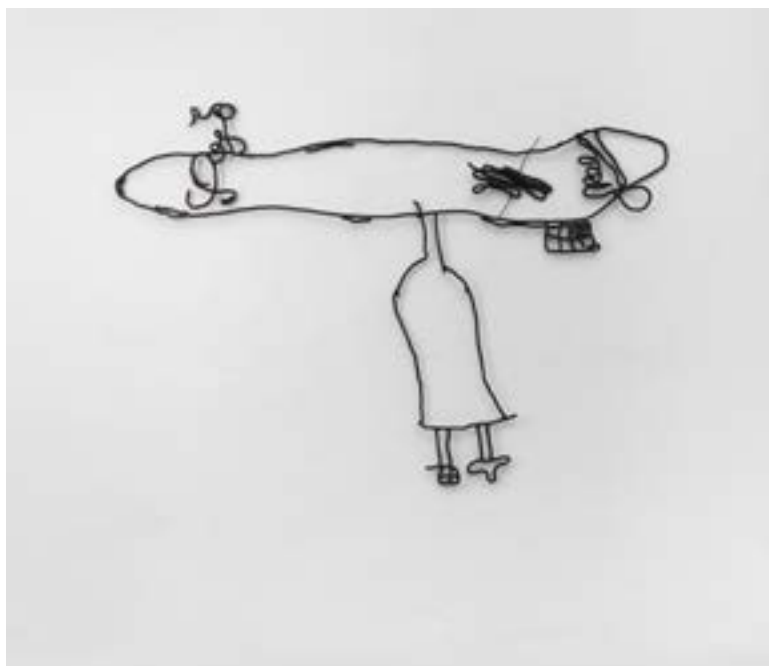
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Petrit Halilaj
Abetare Abetare (Two metres high head Giacometti), 2025
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

Alberto Giacometti
Silvio Berthoud
Drawings of cats and of Silvio, c. 1943
24,5x33,2 / 24,5x66 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
The Cat, 1951
Plaster covered in a release agent
32,8x81,3x15,5 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Petrit Halilaj
Abetare Cat, 2024
Bronze
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

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Alberto Giacometti

Silvio standing up with his hands in his pockets,
1943
Plaster covered in a release agent
11,2x4,6x,4 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris
2025

Petrit Halilaj

Abetare (House on Giacometti's pavement), 2025
Bronze
280x100x10 cm
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

Alberto Giacometti

Portrait of Silvio, c.1943
24,5x33,2 / 24,5x66 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris
2025

Petrit Halilaj

Abetare Eye,, 2024
Bronze
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

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Alberto Giacometti
Sketches,, around 1929
Graphite pencil on correspondence paper
21x27 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
Characters and Animals on a Draft Letter to André Breton, around August, 1933
Graphite pencil, black ink on correspondence paper
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Petrit Halilaj
Abetare Monster, 2024
Patinated steel
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

Petrit Halilaj
Abetare Sylvio and Luna, 2024
Patinated steel
Courtesy Mennour, Paris

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Alberto Giacometti
Man (Apollon), 1929
Bronze, 39,4x30,9x8,2 cm
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
Very small figurine, 1937-1939
Plaster, 4,5x3 x,8 cm
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Petrit Halilaj
Abetare House, 2024
Bronze
Courtesy Mennour, Paris



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Fondation Giacometti wholeheartedly thanks

Sholem Krithalka, Ferdinand Pechmann, Serena Rota, Christina Stathakopoulou
Kamel Mennour, Christian Alandete, Margaux Alexandre, Emma Charlotte,
Gobry Laurencin, Alexandra Khazina

And others who wish to remain anonymous

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Anne Dias Griffin
Franck Giraud,
The Gerard B. Lambert Foundation,
Ronald S. Lauder,
M. et Mme Jeffrey H. Loria,
Daniella Luxembourg,
Eyal et Marilyn Ofer
And other members of the circle who wish to remain anonymous.

