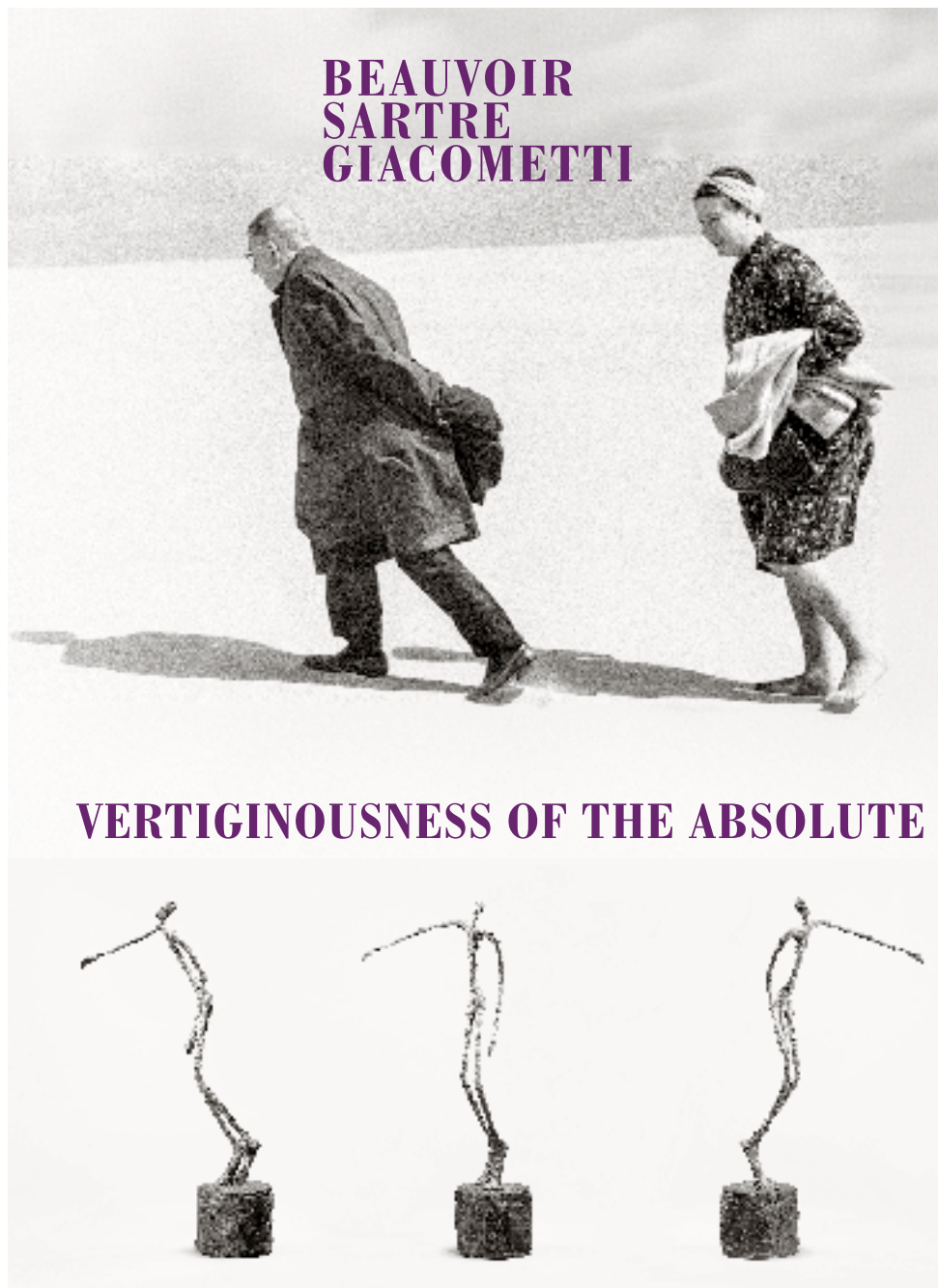




Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Lithuania, 1965
© Photo Antanas Sutkus / Adagp, Paris 2025
Private collection

Alberto Giacometti
Falling man, 1950
Anonymous photographer
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

BEAUVOIR, SARTRE, GIACOMETTI Vertiginousness of the absolute

19.06 > 12.10.2025

Press visit
Wednesday 18 June 2025,
3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

with the participation of Agnès Geoffray



Alberto Giacometti
Bust of Simone de Beauvoir
around 1946
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

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Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



Institut Giacometti
5, rue Victor-Schœlcher
75014 Paris

institut-giacometti.fr

President
Catherine Grenier

Director
Françoise Cohen

Curator
Director of the collections
Émilie Bouvard

Scenographer
Éric Morin

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#GiacomettiBeauvoirSartre



The Institut Giacometti presents an original exhibition centred on the intellectual and artistic friendship that developed between Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and Alberto Giacometti.

Entitled “Beauvoir, Sartre, Giacometti. Vertiginousness of the absolute”, this exhibition explores the strong bonds uniting these three major figures of the 20th century. Through an approach at the same time philosophical, literary and artistic, the exhibition questions the search for an absolute - in art, in thought and in life itself.

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

This exhibition sheds light on a rare friendship founded on a deep intellectual appreciation, the strength of political commitments and a certain idea of creative work as that which gives meaning to existence. In that dark period of the Occupation, Sartre is writing *Being and Nothingness*, which will be the base of what will be called existentialism: the commitment of man in his existence that gives meaning to his life. Giacometti was working on a complete rejuvenation of his art practice, that the philosopher approached in 1948 in his famous essay "The search for the absolute".

Between philosophy, literature and sculpture, the exhibition is organised around major artworks, *Falling man* (1950), *The Hand* (1947), some archives not previously displayed and a reconstruction of Simone de Beauvoir's "Room of one's own" at 11bis rue Schoelcher, her living and working space.

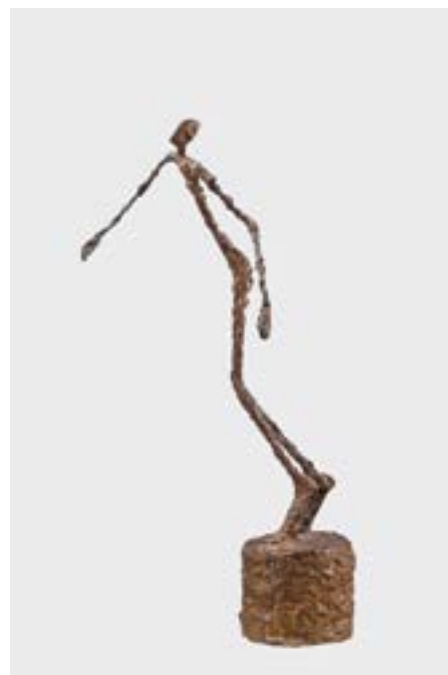
The Institut Giacometti offers an immersive trail designed to introduce Giacometti's artworks in relation to the essential questions put forward by Beauvoir and Sartre, creating in the process a dialogue between thought and art practice. The artist Agnès Geoffray gives body to that vertiginousness with a series of photographs entitled: "Falling woman", especially made for the exhibition.



Alberto Giacometti
Jean-Paul Sartre in profile, 1949
Graphite pencil and eraser on loose
notebook page
29,3 x 22,5 cm
Fondation Giacometti © Succession
© Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
Falling man, 1950
Anonymous photographer
Fondation Giacometti © Succession Alberto
© Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Agnès Geoffray
Falling woman, 2025
Pigment print
© Agnès Geoffray / ADAGP, Paris 2025



Contact press
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

The catalogue

Fondation Giacometti, Paris, Fage éditions, 144 pages

The catalogue, under the direction of Émilie Bouvard, exhibition curator, reflects the conversation that took place over several years between Beauvoir, Sartre and Giacometti. It includes a dialogue between Esther Demoulin, Kate Kirkpatrick, Géraldine Gourbe and Émilie Bouvard, the outcome of a round table on the issues of art practice and commitment. The latter also presents an essay on the vertiginousness of perception, from reality to the imaginary, formulating the hypothesis of an aesthetics of existentialism. An interview with the artist Agnès Geoffray sheds light on the series of photographs, "Falling woman".

Michal Sobanski pens a text on the collection of objects belonging to Simone de Beauvoir. Richly illustrated with the works, archives and photographs of the exhibition, the catalogue amply quotes from the texts of the two philosophers as well as from Giacometti.

Around the exhibition

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

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)

dimanche de 10h à 11h

Family workshops

(creative workshop and visit to the exhibition)

Parents and children 5 years and up

Sunday from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. during the school holidays in zone C



Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

EXHIBITION TRAIL

The encounter, new departures

The exhibition opens on a journey, that which Beauvoir and Sartre undertake in autumn 1946, invited by the editor Albert Skira, through Giacometti. The young star couple of the philosophical movement people begin calling "existentialist" stride along the streets of Geneva in front of the cameras of RTS (Swiss radio television). It seems to be a time for strolling; but it is in Geneva that Sartre presents the conference "Qu'est-ce que l'existentialisme?" and Beauvoir, "Existentialisme et métaphysique". Before, they both wrote in the journal directed by Skira and co-founded by Giacometti, *Labyrinthe*, whose front pages were displayed in prominent places. That publication is the organ of a transition: that of the shift from surrealism to existentialism, in life as in thought, from one revolutionary concept to another. This transition has been carried out by Giacometti for several years already.

The three of them have been friends since 1941. They might have crossed paths before the war, in a Saint-Germain-des-prés still free and carefree. But at that time, Paris is occupied. Sartre has just come back from the stalag, where he began thinking about Being and Nothingness. Giacometti had tried the exodus, crossed zones that have been bombed, before returning to occupy his studio. Beauvoir writes at the Dôme, where it is warm, her novel *She came to stay*; it's one of her lovers, Nathalie Sorokine, who introduces them to Giacometti. Those months of the beginning of their friendship are intense, before Giacometti leaves to visit his mother in Switzerland and is unable to come back to Paris before September 1945. Exodus, Occupation, Liberation; wounded bodies, freedom impeded to be regained; fragilities of men and women, traumas one carries in one's mind and in one's flesh; question of commitment. Giacometti's fragmentary sculptures of the post-war era, Sartre and de Beauvoir's texts respond to the tensions of the times.



Alberto Giacometti
Simone de Beauvoir, 1946
Plaster - 13,9 x 4 x 4,1 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
The Nose, around 1947-50
Plaster - 43 x 9,7 x 23 cm
Fondation Giacometti
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Press contact
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+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
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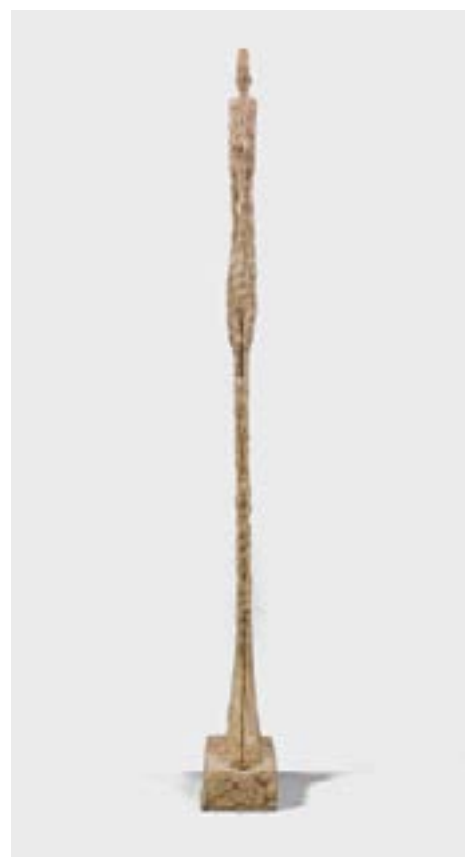
am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

1948 – “The search for the absolute”

What a strange exhibition. We are in 1948, in Pierre Matisse's gallery in New York. In a rather narrow room, *Invisible object* (1934) sits alongside *Apollo* (1929) and *The Nose* (1947) as well as several elongated women and men making minimal movement, as if they had been pulled out of the void to be placed on pedestals. The sculptor has worked with furious energy to create new works for the show. The New York public, familiar with Giacometti the surrealist, discovers another style alongside old works, and reads in the catalogue a perceptive text by Jean-Paul Sartre: “The search for the absolute”. The philosopher describes a sculptor carefully hollowing matter in a search that has nothing to do with “progress” but which, in its vertiginousness, is that of the “absolute”. An absolute of merging times and civilisations, an absolute of the distance between the work and the person contemplating it, a space both empty and vibratory modified by the sculpture. Absolute is the sense that the art practice gives to the existence of the one who devotes himself to it fully.

“Giacometti does not recognize such a thing as Progress in the fine arts, he does not consider himself more ‘advanced’ than his contemporaries by preference, the man of Eyzies, the man of Altamira. In that drastic youthfulness of nature and of men, neither the beautiful nor the ugly yet existed, neither taste nor people possessing it; and there was no criticism: all this was still in the future. For the first time, the idea came to one man to sculpt another in a block of stone. There was the model: man.”

While both men work together for the New York exhibition, Beauvoir publishes chapters of her new book, *The Second Sex* (1949) in *Les Temps modernes*. Giacometti is part of the few encouraging the publication, probably not for feminist reasons, but because of his commitment to the irreducibility of everyone's freedom, which goes as far as a form of freedom regarding love affairs. Beauvoir becomes friends with Annette Arm, the sculptor's future spouse, met during the war in Switzerland, is supportive of her during the difficult time of her settling in Paris, and speaks, if necessary, with an anxious Giacometti. The exhibition puts on display a few passages in Beauvoir's diaries and memoirs divulging the friendship between the two women and the attentiveness Beauvoir shows for women's status.



Alberto Giacometti
Tall Figure II, 1948-49
Plaster
173 x 16,5 x 34,5 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

Falling man (1950)

In 1945-46, Giacometti experienced a hallucinatory episode around the sensation of depth as he was coming out of a cinema on boulevard Montparnasse. In her memoirs, Simone de Beauvoir, who saw him almost every day at that time, wrote:

"For a long period, when he walked down the streets, he had to touch the solidity of the walls with his hand to resist the chasm opening next to him. At another time, he had the sensation that nothing had any weight: in the avenues, in the squares, it seemed to him that the passers-by were floating. At Lipp's, where he was pointing to the mural decorations, he joyfully said: 'not a hole, nor an empty space! Absolute plenitude!'"¹

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*

Giacometti didn't lose his footing completely. Those sensations bring to light a kind of exacerbation of a peculiar sensitivity to space, to the emptiness between objects, and to forms, especially in their dimensions. In experiencing those sensations, Giacometti was indeed a "falling man". De Beauvoir's biographies and her memoirs disclose that that feeling was not foreign to her, nor to Sartre: the ambition of the practice of writing and creating, the unrestrained commitment to existence as well as losing one's grip on the imaginary open up to extreme perceptions.

Falling man (1950) and *The Hand* (1950) are the two emblematic works of that period shown in the exhibition. The vertiginousness, the sensation of emptiness and loss of balance are displayed alongside a large photograph by Agnès Geoffray, *Oblique Woman* (2025). In her work, Geoffray sets out to represent precarious lack of balance, unstable bodies falling but still holding themselves, experiencing limits: "For me the figure of the oblique body is a manifest figure. It's a female body which is meant to be dissident, a body aside, withdrawing from the norm, from uprightness and verticality. It's a figure completely lacking balance, on the point of falling but facing us, it withstands the fall." The series of photographs is further displayed in the Cabinet of graphic art in dialogue with the portraits of Sartre and of Beauvoir by Giacometti, and plays on a feminisation of the sculptor's figures.



Alberto Giacometti
Falling man, 1950
Anonymous photographer
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
The Hand, 1950
Bronze - 57 x 72 x 3,50 cm
Private collection
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Presentation of the exhibition

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

11 bis, rue Victor Schoelcher, the writing room of Simone de Beauvoir

From her window at 11 bis, rue Victor Schoelcher, Simone de Beauvoir had the same view as the one from the first floor at Institut Giacometti over the cemetery of Montparnasse. She settles there in 1955:

"My way of life had changed, I stayed home a lot. That word had acquired a new meaning. For a long time, I possessed nothing, no furniture, no wardrobe. Now there was in my wardrobe, jackets and skirts from Guatemala, Mexican blouses, a suit and coats from the USA. My room was decorated with worthless objects, but precious in my eyes: ostrich eggs from the Sahara, tom-toms in lead, drums Sartre had brought back from Haiti, glass swords and Venetian mirrors he had purchased on rue Bonaparte, a plaster mould of his hands, Giacometti's floor lamps. I enjoyed working in front of the window: the blue sky, framed by red curtains, resembled a decor by Bérard."

Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of circumstance*

The interior decoration of Simone de Beauvoir shows her indifference to all hierarchy in works of art, and her taste for the arrangement of objects in space, as she created real little playlets echoing her enduring love of theatre. This luminous room is also a library and a workroom in which to write. The exhibition ends with an evocation of Beauvoir's living and working space, her own "studio", in which the visitor will be able to read and think. Immersive in its scenography, this last room gives us the feeling of the necessity for a writing room of one's own.



Simone de Beauvoir in Berlin, sometime between 28 January and 5 February 1948, for the dress rehearsal of Sartre's *The Flies*.
Photographer Frédéric Hanoteau / Gallimard.
Collection Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir.

Work meeting for *Les Temps modernes* at Simone de Beauvoir's, with Jacques-Laurent Bost, Claude Lanzmann and Jean-Paul Sartre, 1969
Photographer Claude Lemant.
Collection Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir.

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



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 oeuvre.

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. With *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 Biennale. 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

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

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 from Tuesday to Sunday,
10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Weekly closure on Monday

Booking online and on site
(bank card only):
[fondation-giacometti.fr](https://fondation-giacometti.fr/fr/billetterie)
[/fr/billetterie](https://fondation-giacometti.fr/fr/billetterie)

Full price: €9
Reduced price: €3

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

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Press contac
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



Alberto Giacometti
Bust of Simone de Beauvoir, circa 1946
Fondation Giacometti
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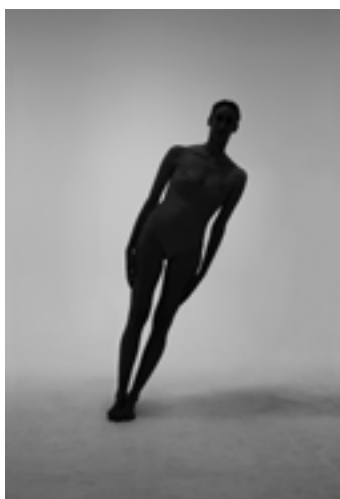


Alberto Giacometti
Jean-Paul Sartre leaning on his elbows, 1949
Graphite pencil and eraser on a loose notebook page
29,3 x 22,5 cm
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Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



Alberto Giacometti
Jean-Paul Sartre in profile, 1949
Graphite pencil and eraser on paper
29,3 x 22,5 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
Simone de Beauvoir, 1946
Plaster - 13,9 x 4 x 4,1 cm
Fondation Giacometti
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Agnès Geoffray
Oblique woman, 2025
Pigment print
© Adagp, Paris 2025

Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



Alberto Giacometti
Composition, figurine and small bust, before, before 1951
Painted plaster
22,5 x 13,2 x 14,5 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti /
Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
Small bust of Annette, around 1946
Painted plaster
19 x 15,9 x 9,6 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti /
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Alberto Giacometti
Falling man, 1950
Anonymous photographer
Fondation Giacometti
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Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



Alberto Giacometti
The Night, first version, around 1946-47
Plaster and traces of colour
21 x 26,5 x 7,9 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
Bust of a man on a base, around 1948
Plaster, terracotta
34,2 x 9,2 x 9 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025

Alberto Giacometti
The Nose, around 1946-1950
Plaster
43 x 9,7 x 23 cm
Fondation Giacometti
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+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr



Alberto Giacometti
Small bust of Annette, around 1951
Plaster
21,5 x 14,5 x 9,4 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025



Alberto Giacometti
Head on a rod, 1947
Painted plaster
54 x 19 x 15 cm
Fondation Giacometti
© Succession Alberto Giacometti / Adagp, Paris 2025



Alberto Giacometti
Head of Simone de Beauvoir, around 1946
Plaster
14,8 x 8,5 x 9,4 cm
Fondation Giacometti
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Press contact
Anne-Marie Pereira

+33 (0)1 87 89 76 75
+33 (0)6 48 38 10 96

am.pereira@fondation-giacometti.fr

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Fondation Giacometti wholeheartedly thanks

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Daniella Luxembourg
Eyal et Marilyn Ofer

and other members of the circle who wish to remain anonymous.



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