

Life & Times Exhibition

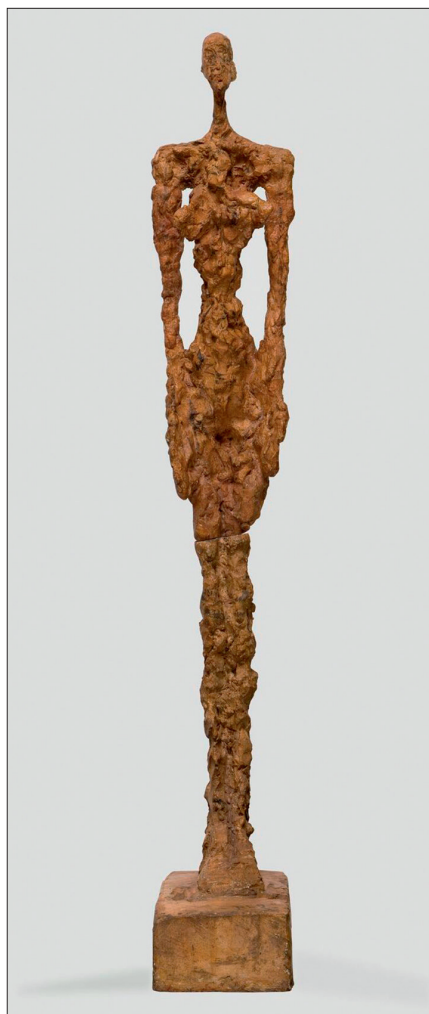
Giacometti

Tate Modern, London, 10 May–10 September 2017.

GIACOMETTI REIMAGINED

I met a stranger on a train and a week later we are at the Alberto Giacometti exhibition at the Tate Modern. I fear being smothered by the stench of decay, depression, and despair. A confrontation with atrocity and human isolation. A Godless world of self-deception, anxiety and ego. A futile search for meaning when there is nothingness and suicide. Dear reader, I share with you the cluttered colours in my mind with honesty and sincerity, exposing my vulnerability and

Woman of Venice IV, 1956. Plaster, 121 × 16.5 × 34.5 cm. Collection Foundation Alberto et Annette Giacometti, Paris. © Alberto Giacometti Estate, ACS/DACS, 2017.



fragility, with rawness and trepidation.

I step inside with the vinyl music of Joy Division's *Closer* playing in my mind. Immediately, the mundane transcends the exceptional to the sublime with Giacometti's flirtations with cubism, primitivism, surrealism, violence, and sexuality: a plaster heart dangling by a thread; a scorpion with a half-cut throat; a peach and a melon making love. And I sense an affinity with his playwright friend Samuel Beckett and *Waiting for Godot*.

I stroll into the piercing gaze and judgement of a group of elongated sculptures, *Women of Venice*. I see their tears, hear their screams, and suffer their scrutiny of my nakedness. The memories of a teenage romp through the ugliness of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* cascade through my mind, causing crisis, confusion, and contradiction.

I tiptoe towards Giacometti's iconic sculptures of emaciated men: the artist's response to the horrors of the Second World War; an assimilation of history and symbolism of opportunity. He embraces the philosophy of existentialism, of individual freedom and conscious choice, articulated by his friend Jean-Paul Sartre in his essay *Being and Nothingness*. He works frenetically, relentlessly, tenderly, and meticulously, reapplying, removing, smoothing, and ripping pieces of clay to create the essence of resilience and survival: trees without leaves.

It is the distance between the figures, the aggressiveness of the void and the lingering hate in the silence that is so haunting. In this existential community there is no conversation, no celebration of trust, no encouraging and enabling relationship, no collaboration and fighting for shared values,



Diego Seated, 1948. Oil paint on canvas, 80.5 × 65 cm. Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, Norwich. © Alberto Giacometti Estate, ACS/DACS, 2017.

no appreciation of spirituality, no solace in enduring love, no hope, no joy.

My companion whispers in my ear and we smile. I catch a glimpse of her beauty. I feel the compassion of a gentle caress. For a moment, memories and possibilities collide and she is the most important reason for my existence, for my being. Are we still strangers? Can we become friends? Will we be lovers? A transition from the cataracts of my mind and the steel scaffolding of my identity to the passion of my heart and the clarity of my soul.

So, dear reader, go with a stranger, a friend, or a lover, to explore and discover the exceptional potential of every brief encounter and find meaning in your endeavour.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp17X691481>