



Head of a Woman (Flora Mayo), c. 1926, painted plaster. Fondation Giacometti, Paris
Flora, 2017, Synchronized double-sided Film Installation with shared Soundtrack © Teresa Hubbard / Alexander Birchler.
Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles and Lora Reynolds Gallery, Austin

PRESS RELEASE

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

TERESA HUBBARD / ALEXANDER BIRCHLER:

FLORA

5 April – 9 June 2019


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Press visit of the exhibition, Thursday 4 April from 11am to 1pm.

The Institut Giacometti presents a reconfigured version of the film installation *Flora* and the accompanying work, *Bust* by the Swiss American artist couple Teresa Hubbard / Alexander Birchler, in conjunction with a collection of sculptures and drawings by Alberto Giacometti, most of which are new to the world of art.

Flora reframes the history of the unknown American artist, Flora Mayo, bringing her compelling biography to life and revealing a particular period in Alberto Giacometti's life.

The exhibition is supported by the Embassy of Switzerland in France and by Pro Helvetia, Swiss Arts Council.

FLORA MAYO

Flora Mayo came to Paris in 1925 to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Antoine Bourdelle's sculpture class. There she met Alberto Giacometti, with whom she began a romantic relationship. Each of them made a portrait of the other. But the consequences of the Great Depression in the United States put an end to Flora's life as an artist in Paris. With her family ruined, she had to go back to America, and earn her living far from the artistic world, in very precarious conditions: first she worked in a factory, then became a cleaning woman. While Giacometti would become world famous, Flora Mayo's fate has left little trace in the history of art, being limited to a few sexist footnotes in the 1985 biography by James Lord dedicated to Giacometti.

THE INSTALLATION

Flora was first presented at the Swiss Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017. In close collaboration between the artists and the Fondation Giacometti, the installation has been especially adapted for the Institut Giacometti, in dialogue with Giacometti's works from the same period.

The story of Flora Mayo, which Hubbard / Birchler have reconstructed after some outstanding detective work, presents an opportunity for Hubbard / Birchler to discuss the role of women in art history and the writing of art history. Hubbard / Birchler have developed a hybrid form of storytelling which interweaves two forms of cinema: a mostly black and white biopic depicting Flora Mayo's Paris studio and a colour documentary which reconstructs Flora's personal history through the eyes of her son David Mayo. Through a common soundtrack, the artists bring together two distinctive versions of the same story, creating a conversation between a mother and her son and building a bridge between 1927 Paris and present day Los Angeles.

THE PORTRAITS ALBERTO GIACOMETTI AND FLORA MAYO

Central to the exhibition at the Institut Giacometti is to have *Tête de Femme*, (Flora Mayo) by Alberto Giacometti, exhibited directly alongside *Bust*, by Hubbard / Birchler. This is the first exhibition in which these two artworks are face-to-face in the presence of each other.

Bust, a reconstruction of Flora Mayo's no longer extant sculpture by Hubbard / Birchler, stems from a historical photograph showing Flora Mayo and Alberto Giacometti sitting on either side of the bust she made of him.

While Flora Mayo's work has been destroyed, Alberto's sculpted portrait of his lover, *Tête de Femme (Flora Mayo)*, is recognised as an important step in the artist's career. It marks a period of transition in his work between the years of training at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and the flat figures that would ensure his recognition in the artistic and intellectual world.

A selection of previously unseen sculptures and drawings by Alberto Giacometti, created by the artist in the 1920s, show his development from a naturalistic representation of models to a quest for new forms.

Curator: Christian Alandete

PERMANENT PRESENTATION ALBERTO GIACOMETTI'S STUDIO

Introducing visitors to the intimate world of the artist's creations, this reconstruction brings together more than sixty original works, and faithfully presents all the studio furniture and walls, painted by Alberto Giacometti.

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

The catalogue

A 176-page book with 150 illustrations is published on the occasion of the exhibition by the Fondation Giacometti, Paris / FAGE éditions. Price: €28.

Guided tours of the Institut

For individuals: Visit by a guide including the reconstruction of the studio and the temporary exhibition.

Duration: 1 hour.

Prices: €15, €11.50, €9,50

For families:

Family visit of the Institut with sketching sessions which will allow children (from 6 years old) and adults to discover Alberto Giacometti's universe.

Duration: 1 hour on Saturdays at 11:15 am

Prices: €6 for children, €10 for adults.

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BIOGRAPHIES

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI (1901-1966)

Born in 1901 in Stampa, Switzerland, Alberto Giacometti was the son of Giovanni Giacometti, a well-known post-impressionist painter. It was in his father's studio that he was initiated into art, and at the age of 14 he produced his first works: a Still life with apples, in oils, and a sculpted bust of his brother Diego. In 1922, he went to Paris to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière with the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle. He learned how to draw models, and became interested in avant-gardist, particularly post-cubist, compositions. In 1929, he began a series of "flat women", which brought him to the attention of the artistic milieu. In 1930, he joined André Breton's movement, and surrealism began to occupy an important place in his creativity: life and death, oneiric visions, ambiguous objects with erotic connotation. In 1935 he began moving away from the surrealists, and developed an intense interest in the human head which remained with him throughout his life.

Having spent the war years in Switzerland, Giacometti returned to Paris, and to his exploration of the human face. His favourite models were drawn from his entourage: Annette, whom he married in 1949, and Diego, who, besides being his brother, was his assistant. Working from nature, his aim was to reconstitute subjects as he saw them. In other cases, the figures were anonymous, and he set them on plinths that isolated them from the ground, or enclosed them in "cages" that constituted virtual spaces. In 1958, invited to submit a project for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York, he proposed large-scale representations of three motifs that had been prominent in his work since 1948: an upright female figure, a walking man and a monumental head. In the end, the work was not installed in New York; but at the 1962 Venice biennial, Giacometti presented an initial version of it in bronze, which won the sculpture prize. In January 1966, after successful retrospectives in Zürich, Basel, London and New York, Giacometti, weakened by a cancer, died in hospital in Coire, Switzerland.

TERESA HUBBARD / ALEXANDER BIRCHLER

Teresa Hubbard (Irish/ American/ Swiss) was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1965. She grew up in Australia and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, USA as well as the MFA Sculpture Program at Yale University School of Art, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

Alexander Birchler (Swiss) was born in Baden, Switzerland in 1962. He grew up in Switzerland and studied at the Academy of Art and Design Basel and the University of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland.

Hubbard / Birchler began collaborating in 1990 as artists-in-residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada and later completed graduate degrees at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, Canada. They currently live and work in Austin, Texas, USA and Berlin, Germany. Hubbard / Birchler's work interweaves forms of reconstruction, reenactment, and documentary into a hybrid form of storytelling. Their projects are research driven and are informed by critical, feminist insights into history and a fascination with the open circuits of social life and memory that sit just outside the frame of an image.

Their solo exhibitions in 2019 include the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, LACMA; the Goetz Collection at the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts Munich; The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver. In 2017, they represented Switzerland in the Swiss Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale.

Hubbard / Birchler's exhibition history includes venues such as the Museum Sammlung Goetz, Munich; Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Kunsthaus Graz; 48th and 57th Venice Biennale; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Mori Museum Tokyo; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Reina Sofia Museum Madrid; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Staedel Museum Frankfurt; Tate Museum Liverpool; Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Their work is held in numerous collections including the Goetz Collection, Munich; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; Kunsthaus Zurich; Kunstmuseum Basel; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts Houston; National Museum of Art Osaka and the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich.

Hubbard / Birchler are Professors in the Department of Art and Art History, College of Fine Arts, at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2017, they were awarded an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University in Halifax, Canada in recognition of their achievements to art and culture. Their work is represented by Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles, Galerie Vera Munro, Hamburg and Lora Reynolds Gallery, Austin.

CATALOGUE



Alberto Giacometti
Teresa Hubbard / Alexander Birchler
Flora

Exhibition catalogue published by
the Fondation Giacometti, Paris / FAGE éditions, Lyon
Bilingual French-English edition
176 pages / 150 illustrations
Hardback, square, sewn back - 16,5 x 23 cm
Price: €28.

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Catherine Grenier

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Christian Alandete

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Introduction

Catherine Grenier

(...) Like Giacometti, Mayo arrived in Paris after the revolutionary period of the avant-gardes. At that time, no art school was teaching its students the most innovative forms of art. Bourdelle was a modern classicist, who retained from his master Rodin a romantic impulse, but whose fascination for mythology pushed towards the monumental and the pompous (...).

(...) Giacometti during his last years at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, simultaneously carried out two types of works: portraits faithfully representing the model, close to the aesthetics of a return to tradition that developed in the 1920s, and neocubists sculptures inspired by Constantin Brancusi, Jacques Lipchitz and Ossip Zadkine. Some of these works, presented in the exhibition, remind us of the context which Mayo lived, and evoke the personality of Giacometti the artist at the time the two artists had a relationship.

Thus, the very original work of Hubbard and Birchler, which made headlines at the 2017 Venice Biennale, has been pursued over the years to give us this installation enriched and totally renewed in its form (...).

Teresa Hubbard / Alexander Birchler

Field notes: Searching for Flora

(...) One of the many details we discovered that is not known about Mayo, is that for about a year, between 1932 and 1933, Mayo lived and worked upstairs from Giacometti's rue Hippolyte Maindron studio. They shared the same courtyard with the rickety wooden stairs, which has been photographed and published so many times. In developing our exhibition, we have envisioned a redux of sorts—a physical and historical proximity echoing 1932, with the recently reconstructed Giacometti studio downstairs at the Institute and the story of Flora Mayo unfolding upstairs (...)

(...) Central to our exhibition at the Giacometti Institute is also the opportunity to have *Tête de Femme (Flora Mayo)* exhibited directly alongside *Bust*, a work which stems from our physical and conceptual reconstruction of Mayo's destroyed bust portrait of Giacometti. Here again, we find ourselves thinking about a doubling, mirroring or redux—around the same time Giacometti was making a portrait of Flora Mayo, she was making a portrait of him. This is the first exhibition in which these two objects are in the presence of each other (...).

Christian Alandete

1926 - *Head of a Woman (Flora Mayo)*

Notes on a work by Giacometti

at the turn of the "Grande Chaumière" years

(...) Giacometti exhibited for the first time at the Salon des Tuileries had just exhibited two new pieces in the Salon de Tuileries 1926: a composition reminiscent of African arts representing a stylised couple whose sexual attributes are expressed with schematic forms (*The Couple*) and *Head of a Woman*, a rather radical portrait of Flora Mayo, that seems to leave aside three-dimensionality for the benefit of a flat engraved figure. Giacometti had just realized that, although three dimensional a head is only ever visible in two dimensions, therefore flat.

That same year was the beginning of the romance between Giacometti and Mayo (...) who had moved from classmates to lovers. That tumultuous relationship however was likely to have stimulated the young artist's creativity as, in the portrait of the young woman, he freed himself from Bourdelle's teaching and its naturalism to begin a more personal quest that eventually saw him joining the family of the moderns. The plasterwork is sculpted in a style both primitive and resolutely contemporary. The artist has hollowed with a penknife the features of his model on the lightly polished surface that sketches the outlines of the faces while the back of the sculpture has been left completely rough, as unfinished. The face is partially enhanced with primary colours: the lips are underlined with a vermillion red, the eyes marked with pale blue, the cheeks lightly rose-tinted, and the hair keeps the traces of a blond shade, as if the artist wanted to palliate the lack of realism of the representation with a colouring close to reality. From the beginning Giacometti considered polychrome a determining element of sculpture. "The idea of a non-painted sculpture has always seemed absurd to me, even at the beginning. I used to invite the model to my place, and I painted the plaster from nature"(...).

INSTITUT GIACOMETTI

The Institut Giacometti is a new permanent place devoted to exhibitions and to research in art history and pedagogy. Chaired by Catherine Grenier, the director of the Fondation Giacometti since 2014, it is a museum on a human scale, enabling the visitor to get close to the works. The Institut Giacometti 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 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

Visits by on-line reservation only at:
www.fondation-giacometti.fr/institut

Price: 8.5 euros
Reduced price: 5 and 3 euros

Open from Tuesday to Sunday with on-line reservation
Closed on Monday
Daily guided visits for individuals and on request for groups

PROGRAMMATION

Alberto Giacometti

HISTOIRE DE CORPS

Curator: Catherine Grenier
5 July – 27 October 2019

FONDATION GIACOMETTI, PARIS

Direction

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

Sabine Longin
Deputy director

Institut Giacometti

Christian Alandete
Artistic director

Stephanie Barbe-Sicouri
Head of Administrative matters and operations

Hugo Daniel, Dr.
Head of the Ecole des Modernites Programs, Curator

Emmanuelle Le Cadre
Head of mediation

EXHIBITION

Curator : Christian Alandete
Scenography Eric Morin