

May 12, 2017

Out of nothing - something.

Alberto Giacometti

9 May -10 September 2017

Tate Modern, London



Alberto Giacometti
Jean Genet 1954 or 1955



Alberto Giacometti
Man Pointing 1947

In the mid 1530's Michelangelo wrote a sonnet to his muse, Vittoria Colonna, about how he worked as an artist. For him, a sculpture was already buried deep within a piece of stone and the sculptor's mission was to uncover it, "when the hand obeys the mind". For him, sculpture was a matter of revealing something that already existed in some pre-ordained and contained form. He was a carver, a maker of new art out of old matter.

For Giacometti, in his golden later great period from the 1940's and 50's, matter is created from scratch, from the air and the ether. He works from nothing and matter accrues. He works in plaster, in wax, in wood and (for me, a painter) magnificently in paint. There is a revelatory film halfway through this retrospective. This is sadly a silent film with few subtitles. It is of him working in his crowded Parisian studio. He is curiously both frenetic and calm as he systematically adds small gobbets of clay onto a figure head, moulding, incising, smudging with huge flat thumbs, and knifing the clay with a sharp tool. He moves his hands and eyes around the whole sculpture. A tiny piece of clay goes on the head, a piece of clay is removed from the torso. Cézanne said that a painter had to work all the way around a painting, without focusing on one area - advice that I have always taken. Giacometti cleaves to this approach. He looks like one of his own works, ascetically thin, aquiline features, glasses askew, bronchitic. A handsome man with deep carved lines etched into his antique, pharaonic face.

This show - quiet, serious, and deeply considered by its curators, shows Giacometti in all his incarnations. I have seen many Giacometti shows in my life, most recently in Paris last January at the Musée Picasso, and I never tire of his work. It sideswipes me every time with its authority and its seriousness. Here at Tate Modern, we see the best and most comprehensive retrospective of his work I have ever seen, including plaster originals, working drawings and notebooks, significant source books, paintings both large and small, and even decorative work. Amazing. Satisfying. Thought provoking.

The huge, attenuated striding figures *The Women of Venice* shown in the 1956 Venice Biennale have a presence here at Tate Modern that is simultaneously ghostly and hungry whilst also being deeply human, urgent and alive. The gallery has never looked better or more energised. Would that the sculpture currently occupying the British pavilion at the Venice Biennale was as

compelling, humble and interrogative of life as this work. Stay away from Venice. Go to London.

"I have the feeling or the hope that I am making progress each day. That is what makes me work, compelled to understand the core of life."

Alberto Giacometti
1901 - 1966.