



Standing Woman

Alberto Giacometti

On display

Title/Description: Standing Woman

Artist/Maker: Alberto Giacometti

Born: 1958 - 1959

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Bronze

Measurements: h. 1307 x w. 200 x d. 345 mm

Accession Number: 48

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: France

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This large bronze sculpture was a variation on the group of standing female figures that he showed at Venice Biennale in 1956. It is a magnificent example of the artist's attenuated figures that are characteristic of his late style. This he famously announced to the world in his show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York in 1948, with an essay by Jean-Paul Sartre. Although he was already highly regarded as the most important sculptor of the Surrealists of the 1930s, it is his late style that cemented his reputation as one of the most important artists of the 20th century.

Standing Woman was acquired in 1959 after a visit to the artist's studio, where Robert and Lisa Sainsbury saw the sculpture in its plaster state. Although reluctant at first, they convinced him that it was completely satisfying and he agreed to their request to have it cast in bronze, keeping one for himself. Robert Sainsbury later explained that although they had known the artist for a decade this was their first purchase of a sculpture. He recalled that he had not yet seen a sculpture that touched him deeply. But one day, walking into Giacometti's studio he saw *Standing Woman* and remarked, 'This is it', he said to himself. He then told Giacometti how much he would like to have it. [1]

The work was originally intended to form part of his commission for the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York but this project was never realised. The single figures of standing women almost invariably seem to remain beyond one's reach, whatever one's physical distance from them. They are

motionless relics seemingly of glacial time. The inspiration for his series of female standing figures was the artist Isabel Rawsthorne, who Giacometti had met in 1935. On one occasion, Giacometti glimpsed Isabel standing some distance away from him on the Boulevard Saint-Michel in the shadow of the surrounding buildings. The vision of a solitary figure, whom he desired, engulfed by darkness and as if unobtainable, made a lasting impression on him. He spent the following years desperately attempting to capture that impression of Isabel as he had seen her. This vision of Isabel as a lone figure would haunt his work for the rest of his life. There is a closely related drawing in the collection, *Standing Nude*, 1955.

Calvin Winner, February 2022

[1] Calvin Winner, *Alberto Giacometti: A Line Through Time* (Bloomsbury 2016), p.100.

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Alberto Giacometti was interested in poetry and philosophy, and was influenced by, among many sources, ancient and African sculpture. He progressed from being a sculptor of the Surrealist movement in the 1930s to a postwar singular focus on the human figure. His men remain forever in motion, while his women are still models of compressed energy - also suggesting, perhaps, the calm at the eye of the storm.

Visiting Giacometti's studio in Paris in 1959 Robert and Lisa Sainsbury saw and greatly admired the plaster for *Standing Woman*, only to be told that the artist had refused his dealer's request to have it cast in bronze. When they persisted in their positive view, Giacometti relented, and agreed to have a single copy cast for them. Later he decided to approve two copies, keeping the second for himself.

Standing Woman now stands tall as one of the greatest treasures in the Sainsbury Centre.

—

Ian Collins, journalist and writer

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

The restrained pose, lithe limbs and block-like base of this sculpture evoke ancient Egyptian sculpture. Giacometti was interested in many ancient sources, including pharaonic Egypt. A frequent visitor to the Louvre, he made hundreds of sketches of Egyptian sculptures and kept several small Egyptian objects in his studio.

Exhibitions

London Art Fair, Business Design Centre, London - 22/01/25 - 26/01/25

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1959. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
