

LE CLAIRE

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KUNST



ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

1901 Borgonovo - Chur 1966

La Mère de l'artiste

Pencil on paper, 1948. Signed and dated lower right: *A Guttuso Alberto Giacometti 1948*. Bearing a personal dedication to the artist Renato Guttuso inscribed *Parigi. 1949*.

460 x 348 mm

PROVENANCE: Renato Guttuso (1911 Bagheria - Rome 1987)¹, gift of the artist (1949) – Private collection, Rome – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: Georgio Soavi, *Disegni di Giacometti*, Milan and Rome, 1973

Throughout Alberto Giacometti's life his mother Annetta (1871-1964) played a very special and unique role. She brought harmony and a sense of security to family life and nurtured the highly artistic environment in which the family grew up. The ramshackle studio Giacometti later occupied in Paris was the opposite of this childhood 'paradise'. Annetta supported him both financially and artistically, also influencing his life choices. In a photograph of the Giacometti family taken in 1907, Annetta and Alberto gaze intently at one another, signaling the special bond between them [Fig. 1]. Later, Giacometti frequently used her as his model on his annual visits to Switzerland from Paris. From the late 1940s, she regularly sat for him. This is documented by an important body of drawings, paintings and sculptures.² In a letter to Pierre Matisse he wrote: "*I also see things more clearly for the [-] drawings. For that, I needed once more to work from nature, and my mother, despite her seventy-six years, sat for me every morning, every afternoon, and often even on Sunday*".³

Giacometti made the present portrait in 1948 at the family house in Stampa. A year earlier he had begun to sculpt slender, elongated figures in his iconic, visionary manner. The year 1948 was a key year for him: his first major exhibition was staged by the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. This landmark event established Giacometti's international reputation as one of the leading sculptors in the immediate post-war period. He had returned to painting and drawing from life in 1934, attracted to the figurative paintings of André Derain and Jean Hélion and, among a younger generation of artists, Balthus, Francis Gruber, Pierre Tal-Coat and Francis Tailleux. It was this move that precipitated his break with André Breton and the Surrealists.

¹ The Italian painter Renato Guttuso was a leading exponent of Social Realism in Italy. From 1946-8 he was a member of the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti, an association whose members included Vedova, Marchiori and Birolli. Guttuso visited Paris frequently and was a life-long friend of Picasso whom he met around 1945-6. The relationship between Giacometti and Guttuso has not been clarified but it is likely that they met through Picasso. Giacometti and Picasso enjoyed an amicable although somewhat formal relationship. They were in intense dialogue in the aftermath of World War II, exchanging on their work and discussing the return of Realism. Visiting Paris in 1949, Guttuso was very probably invited to join them in their discussions. That Giacometti gave the present, highly important drawing to Guttuso can be seen as a mark of mutual esteem. The Fronte Nuovo's aim was to rejuvenate Italian art, combat the pessimism of the post-war period and promote the work of artists prevented from working freely under Fascist rule. The split between abstractionists and realists within the group led to its dissolution in 1948.

² Paul Moorhouse, *Giacometti Pure Presence*, exhib. cat., National Portrait Gallery, London 2016, p. 93.

³ 16 February 1948. Pierre Matisse Gallery Archives, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, box 11, folder 8, item 29.

Giacometti's response to his experiences of the war and its aftermath is reflected in his sculptures and in the many portrait drawings he executed after 1946. Among his sitters were his mother Annetta, his wife Annette and brother Diego, his close friend Jean-Paul Sartre, gallerist Pierre Matisse, the Nouveau Réaliste painter Francis Gruber and the writer Louis Aragon. By contrast, the number of sculptures he made in this period is very small.⁴ He turned increasingly to drawing and painting figures from life. The medium of drawing was ideally suited to convey his perception of the unadorned essence, 'implacable otherness' and vitality of his models discerned in their ever-changing aspect. Writing to Pierre Matisse on the occasion of the 1948 exhibition, Giacometti described the stages of his exploration: 'All this', he said of his contradictions and delays, 'changed somewhat in 1945 thanks to drawing'. In this drawing he concentrates with dynamic, unrestrained strokes of the pencil not on the features so familiar to him but on the tensions that give them cohesion and momentum.⁵

This drawing belongs to a group of similar portraits of his mother [Figs. 2 and 3] and his friend Isabel Rawsthorne (1912–92)⁶ [Fig. 4] dated 1946 and 1948. It is the only known document proving the relationship between Renato Guttuso and Alberto Giacometti.

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Fig. 1: Andrea Garbald, *The Giacometti Family*, photograph. 1909

This work is registered in the Fondation Giacometti, Paris, under no. 3856 and is accompanied by a photo certificate of authenticity.

⁴ See for example *Portrait Bust of Marie-Laure de Noailles* and *Petit Buste d'Annette*, both 1946.

⁵ Yves Bonnefoy, *Alberto Giacometti – A Biography of his Work*, Paris 1991, pp. 304-10.

⁶ The British painter Isabel Rawsthorne had an important influence on Alberto Giacometti's oeuvre. The pair met in 1935 and a friendship developed. They went separate ways during World War II and did not meet again until directly after the war. They became lovers and lived together for a few months in Paris. Rawsthorne married three times. She enjoyed a long friendship among others with Francis Bacon and they participated in group exhibitions together. He claimed she was the only woman with whom he had a close personal relationship. See *Bacon - Giacometti*, exhib. cat., Fondation Beyeler, Riehen and Berlin 2018, pp. 32-5.



Fig. 2: *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, 1946.
Pencil on paper, 495 x 350 mm.
Mira Jacob, Paris



Fig. 3: *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, 1946.
Pencil on paper, 495 x 350 mm.
Wilder Greene, New York



Fig. 4: *Isabelle en buste*, 1948.
Pencil on paper, 500 x 325 mm.
Fondation Giacometti, Paris