

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

1901 Borgonovo – Chur 1966

*Étude d'après la tête de la déesse Mut*, [Egyptian Museum, Cairo]

Pen and black ink on notepaper.  
269 x 209 mm

PROVENANCE: Gift of the artist to the publisher Tériade (Efstratios Eleftheriades) – Thence by descent

EXHIBITIONS: Berggruen & Zevi Ltd., London, *Alberto Giacometti, 26 drawings from the Tériade collection*, London 1993, no. 4 – Christian Klemm and Dietrich Wildung, exhib. cat., *Giacometti, der Ägypter*, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and Kunsthaus Zurich, 2008, p.100, plate LVII, repr. p.51 – Ortrud Westheider, exhib. cat., *Giacometti und sein Kreis*, Bucerius Kunstforum, Hamburg 2013, no. 16, repr., p.90

From early childhood Alberto Giacometti was a relentless copier of artworks. He worked on single sheets of paper, in notebooks and in the margins of illustrated books from both his father's and his own personal library. *I have always copied, ever since childhood, absolutely everything that came my way, paintings and sculptures from every era.*<sup>1</sup> These copies were based on a wide range of sources – European, African, Oceanic and Indian art, prehistoric art and works by contemporaries such as Matisse, Mondrian and Picasso. The present drawing was copied from an illustration of an Egyptian sculpture of c.1300 BC [Fig. 1: *Head of the Goddess Mut*] in an art reference book.<sup>2</sup> The sculpture is in the collection of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

In Giacometti's *œuvre*, the term 'to copy' has a highly complex significance and is linked to his two fundamental working principles – 'vision' and 'resemblance to reality'.<sup>3</sup> He often stated that he copied in order to see better and thus to understand better: *In copies, it's the nature of the object that changes. Although the reality is the work of another artist, the project remains the same: understanding what it is.*<sup>4</sup>

Giacometti discovered Egyptian art in Florence in 1920. It was his first encounter with the realization of a principle that he saw as his own central artistic objective: to record a specific reality, to create a visual style that communicated the vibrancy of a human presence. In the summer of 1933 his father,

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Giacometti, *Entretien avec Georges Charbonnier*, 28 October 1950 (radio interview broadcast live), INA archives.

<sup>2</sup> Hedwig Fechheimer, *Die Plastik Der Ägypter*, Berlin 1923, fig. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Cecilia Braschi, *Drawings: The Question of 'Copying the Past'*, in exhib. cat., *The Studio of Alberto Giacometti*, Fondation Alberto et Annette Giacometti, Paris 2008, p.233.

<sup>4</sup> Luigi Carluccio, *Alberto Giacometti: Le copie del passato*, Turin 1967.

Giovanni, died. He returned to working from the model in 1934 after the break with André Breton and the avant-garde theories of Surrealism but continued to find working from reproductions in books easier.<sup>5</sup> The formal severity of the artistic sources he draws on is translated into a geometrically articulated linear system. His draughtsmanship is rapid, delicate and precise, complemented in part by the use of continuous, curving strokes.

The present drawing is one of a group of sheets which were probably a gift – as Casimiro Di Crescenzo has pointed out<sup>6</sup> – from Giacometti to Tériade, the publisher, in connection with the publication of nos. 5-6 of the French art journal *Verve* (1939). The special focus of this issue of *Verve* was the human figure.

Mut was the ancient Egyptian word for ‘mother’. In ancient Egypt Mut was a mother goddess, a multifaceted primal deity associated with the waters which generated life through parthenogenesis. Mut was also depicted as a woman bearing the crowns of Egypt on her head. Although the ancient Egyptian rulers supported the cult of Mut, most exploited it for political ends to justify their authority and right to rule.

The drawing is listed under no. 1703 in the Fondation Alberto et Annette Giacometti, Paris.



Fig. 1: *Head of the Goddess Mut*, limestone, Egyptian c.1300 BC, height 50 cm, Egyptian Museum, Cairo

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<sup>5</sup> Christian Klemm and Dietrich Wildung, op. cit., Berlin 2008, p.85.

<sup>6</sup> *Alberto Giacometti. Dialoghi con l'arte*, exhib. cat., Museo d'Arte, Mendrisio 2000.