GIACOMETTI AT THE TATE: 10 years later, his exhibition returns
PAGE 22

KEEP IT SIMPLE AND CARRY ON: 5 British masters of minimalism
PAGE 34
The genius and torment of Alberto Giacometti

In 1957, the writer Jean Genet described the studio of his friend Alberto Giacometti. It was “a milky swamp, a seething dump, a genuine ditch”. There was plaster all over the floor and all over the face, hair and clothes of the sculptor; there were scraps of paper and lumps of paint on every available surface. And yet, “lo and behold the prodigious, magical powers of fermentation” – as if by magic, art grew from the rubbish; the plaster on the floor leapt up and took on permanence as a standing figure.

Of all the artists working in Paris in the 20th century, Giacometti was the great enthusiast of plaster. He worked away at it with his knife, often subjecting it to so much pressure that it finally crumbled away, forming the rubbish observed by Genet. When he was happy with it, he painted it. The original Women of Venice exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1956 were plaster figures with black and brown lines etched on to their faces and bodies, making them resemble the women in his paintings.

Now the Giacometti Foundation in Paris has found new methods of restoring his plaster sculptures, many of which were damaged by being broken apart and covered in orange shellac to be cast in bronze. The Women of Venice, whose painted surfaces have been revealed, can once again be exhibited as they were at the Biennale, rather than as bronzes. And they will make their first appearance at a major retrospective opening at Tate Modern in London next month. This will be Giacometti’s first Tate show since a retrospective in 1965, when the sculptor worked away in a basement, perfecting the works that he was never quite prepared to declare finished. It will be his first major exhibition in London for a decade.
Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) was one of the leading Surrealism sculptors of the 20th century.
Giacometti was born in a remote Swiss valley in 1901, the son of a successful, conventionally realist Swiss painter. He made his first sculpture of his brother Diego at the age of 13, and swiftly dedicated himself to art. In 1922 he moved to Paris, where he discovered surrealism, becoming a friend of André Breton. He stopped modelling from life and devoted himself to dreamlike visions, claiming in 1933 that for some years he had “only realized sculptures which have presented themselves to my mind in a finished state”.

During the second world war, Giacometti returned to Switzerland. There he met Annette Arm, the ingenuous and adoring girl who seems to have decided almost immediately that she would share his life, and waited patiently for him to agree. Living in a hotel with her in Geneva, he sculpted smaller and smaller figures, claiming that they shrunk against his will. Many were only the size of a finger.

After he returned to Paris in 1945, he had a vision that enabled him to break away from the miniature. Coming out of a cinema on the Boulevard Montparnasse one day, he experienced a “complete transformation of reality” and understood that, until that moment, his vision of the world had been photographic, though in fact “reality was poles apart from the supposed objectivity of a film”. Feeling as though he was entering the world for the first time, he trembled in terror as he surveyed the heads around him, which appeared isolated from space. When he entered a familiar café, the Brasserie Lipp, he found that time froze and he experienced the head of a waiter as a sculptural presence as he leaned towards him, “his eyes fixed in an absolute immobility”.

Now he was able to enlarge his figures, but he found that as they became taller they lost heft, becoming inevitably more slender. It was thanks to these elongated, pointy figures with heavy feet that he swiftly rose to fame. He had some money now, though he insisted on living in his studio, refusing to indulge Annette in her desire for an ordinary home. He became acquainted with many of Paris’s most exciting writers and artists. He drank in cafés with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, went for late night, largely silent walks with Samuel Beckett, and became a regular – though often rather critical – visitor at Picasso’s studio.

In 1998, Switzerland made a 100 Franc note to celebrate the Swiss-born artist.
Though renowned as a sculptor, Giacometti was also a printmaker, a draughtsman, a designer of decorative objects — and a painter. The Tate exhibit will include several of his portrait paintings, some of which have never been exhibited in the UK.

Seated Man (1949)

Like his sculptures, Giacometti’s portraits emerged from an intense scrutiny of his subjects, and a process of continually reworking the image in order to record his shifting visual impressions. Seated Man depicts his brother Diego, one of Giacometti’s most frequent and popular models, but even this familiar face became an object of investigation and discovery for the burgeoning artist.

Jean Genet (1955)

Genet was among the French writers of the twentieth century. Like many of Giacometti’s portraits, it gradually builds its likeness of Genet with a series of small brushstrokes. This technique creates a shifting outline around the figure, which parallels Giacometti’s sculptures.

Diego (1959)

Diego was a recurrent subject of Giacometti’s. Here he is depicted against a sparsely grey backdrop, with tones of ochre and sage. The background is built on layers, so the periphery of the painting, where the canvas is exposed, gives way to a painted center and the figure of Diego.
The album cover dates from 1939, when Columbia Records art director Alex Steinweiss decided his label’s offerings might find a wider audience with some added visual appeal. Since the very first Steinweiss design, an album of showtunes by Rogers and Hart, album covers have represented the apotheosis and nadir of graphic design, and have touched all points in between. Last weekend we asked our readers to select the best album covers of all time. British bands took four out of five of the top spots. In the age of the digital download, the album cover is sadly a lost art – which probably explains why 90 percent of the albums that readers selected come from the 1960s and the 1970s. Here are the Top 5:

1. The Beatles - Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band
   (1967, Apple Records)
   DESIGNER: Peter Blake
   TOTAL READER VOTES: 1,202
   The cover was originally going to show the Beatles playing in a park. That slowly evolved into the final concept, where they stand amidst cardboard cutouts of their heroes. The band originally planned on including Leo Gorcey, Gandhi, Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler. Common sense kicked Hitler off the cover, the still lingering bitterness of John Lennon’s “bigger than Jesus” comment kicked Jesus off the cover and Gandhi got the boot over concerns that India wouldn’t print the album. Actor Gorcey requested $400 for his likeness, a decision he probably lived to regret.

2. Pink Floyd – Dark Side Of The Moon
   (1973, Harvest records)
   DESIGNER: Hipgnosis
   TOTAL READER VOTES: 933
   Hipgnosis had designed several of Pink Floyd’s previous albums, with controversial results: the band’s record company had reacted with confusion when faced with the collective’s non-traditional designs that omitted words. Their initial inspiration for Dark Side was a photo of a prism on top of some sheet music. It was black and white, but a color beam was going through it. Hipgnosis presented the prism design along with some other ideas to the band including a design that featured the Marvel Comics hero the Silver Surfer.

3. Nirvana, ‘Nevermind’
   (1993, Geffen records)
   DESIGNER: Robert Fisher
   TOTAL READER VOTES: 755
   Spencer Elden, the naked baby on the cover, said he feels weird about his bizarre role in history. “It’s kind of creepy that many people have seen me naked,” he said. But what does this cover mean? “Kurt was intellectual and deep-thinking about his work,” says Fisher. “I must assume that the naked baby symbolized his own innocence, the water represented an alien environment, and the hook and dollar bill his creative life entering into the corporate world of rock music.”

4. The Beatles, ‘Abbey Road’
   (1969, Apple Records)
   DESIGNER: John Kosh
   TOTAL READER VOTES: 729
   Beatles nuts who believed that Paul McCartney died around 1967 and was replaced by a dopplegänger found a lot to examine on this cover. They saw the picture as a funeral procession: John as the preacher, Ringo as the mourner, George as the gravedigger and Paul as the corpse. Iain Macmillan shot the cover on August 8th, 1969, outside of Abbey Road studios. The shoot involved just six frames and 10 minutes of work. Tourists flock to the spot, and it’s been parodied countless times – sometimes by members of the Beatles themselves.

5. The Clash, ‘London Calling’
   (1979, CBS Records)
   DESIGNER: Ray Lowry
   TOTAL READER VOTES: 695
   Pennie Smith was snapping photos of the Clash at New York’s Palladium when she captured one of the most iconic images in rock history. Paul Simonon was annoyed by the relatively quiet audience, so he began smashing his bass guitar against the floor. Clash singer Joe Strummer loved the photo, but Smith tried to convince him it was too out of focus for the cover. The pink and green lettering of the design was an intentional echo of Elvis Presley’s 1956 debut album.

The iconic pool shoot for “Nevermind” is one of the most popular album covers of all time, according to Billboard.

When people think of The Beatles, they think of John Legend. He and his band won 25 Grammys in their 10 year career.