

# **SCHIRN** KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

**AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER: THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT PRESENTS  
WORKS BY ALBERTO GIACOMETTI AND BRUCE NAUMAN IN JUXTAPOSITION**

## **GIACOMETTI–NAUMAN**

**OCTOBER 28, 2016–JANUARY 22, 2017**

**PRESS PREVIEW: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2016, 11 A.M.**

The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is presenting a major exhibition of works by Alberto Giacometti and Bruce Nauman from October 28, 2016 until January 22, 2017. The show brings together two artists from different generations with totally different backgrounds. Giacometti (1901–1966) is regarded as one of the most important classical modern European sculptors. Nauman (\*1941) and his multifaceted oeuvre represent the radical upheavals in contemporary art since 1960 and a concept of sculpture liberated from traditional concepts. Featuring some 70 works in all, this is the first exhibition ever devoted to both, Giacometti and Nauman. Sculptures and paintings by the Swiss artist engage in a fascinating dialogue with videos, sculptures, drawings, photographs, and spatial installations by the US multimedia artist. Giacometti is represented by works from nearly all of his important creative phases, Nauman primarily by his early oeuvre from the 1960s and early 1970s, which followed immediately on the heels of Giacometti's works. Although the two artists never met and never referred explicitly to each other, they have a great deal in common. Both revolutionized the concepts and traditions of sculpture from the perspective of their respective times—Giacometti during the first half of the twentieth century, and Nauman from the 1960s to the present. Both are regarded as individualists who worked consistently from a position of self-imposed isolation and loneliness that has left an indelible imprint on their uncompromising art. Both represent utterly radical artistic standpoints, and both have created works of shocking immediacy that pose lasting challenges for viewers. Giacometti and Nauman have ventured with their oeuvres into uncharted regions of art and perception. Their search for artistic truth is a quest, the outcome of which is often manifested in the creative process itself rather than in finished works. The two artists have elevated failure, the absurd, the fragmentary, and the unheroic to the status of essential elements of their art. The art of both Giacometti and Nauman revolves around the human being. Giacometti was concerned consistently and almost exclusively with the human figure in his sculptures and paintings, and he developed an original human image of his own with his unmistakable style of figuration, especially during the years after 1945. Bruce Nauman's work during the 1960s and 1970s was focused above all on the human body (primarily his own), which he took as the point of departure for an investigation into fundamental questions about human nature and the conditions governing human existence. The exhibition enhances our grasp of the oeuvres of two outstanding representatives of the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Giacometti becomes recognizable as a pioneer who paved the way for important developments in art after the 1960s and regains certain aspects of his original radical artistic position, whereas Nauman's outstanding importance as a sculptor is made clear and historically comprehensible in a different way. The exhibition at the Schirn presents works from leading museums and collections in the United States and Europe, including the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., the Tate in London, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Fondation Alberto et Annette Giacometti in Paris, the Fondation Marguerite et Aimé Maeght in Saint-Paul de Vence, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, the Fondation Beyeler in Basel/Riehen, the Lehmbrock Museum in Duisburg, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and the Hamburger Kunsthalle.

The GIACOMETTI–NAUMAN exhibition at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt is supported by the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne and the Verein der Freunde der Schirn Kunsthalle e. V.

# SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

Dr. Philipp Demandt, Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, on the presentation: “At first glance, this juxtaposition by all means seems rather bold—considering the different contexts from which Alberto Giacometti and Bruce Nauman come. Based on the works themselves, however, this encounter evolves into an unexpected and fascinating dialogue: Giacometti regains his original radicalism, and Nauman can be rediscovered as an outstanding sculptor. The exhibition at the Schirn is most of all a gain for visitors, because it opens up a completely fresh perspective on the thoroughly researched and frequently exhibited oeuvres of two outstanding exponents of modern and contemporary art.”

“Although sculpture plays a leading role in the oeuvres of both Giacometti and Nauman, the two artists have little in common in terms of media, materials, or ‘style.’ More closely related are the strategies they employ in the use of artistic resources, their tendency to reduce representation to the point of disappearance, and their constant striving to approach emptiness and nothingness—as well as the questions they raise within the context of their investigations into the relationship between the figure and surrounding space or of the body and its parts,” explains exhibition curator Esther Schlicht.

The thematically structured tour through the exhibition at the Schirn begins with the theme of **Emptiness**. Giacometti’s mysterious bronze figure, *L’objet invisible (Mains tenant le vide)* (1934/35), which holds an empty space in its hands, marks the artist’s break with Surrealism and points to his impending artistic “rebirth,” his renewed interest in nature studies, and his commitment to a phenomenological analysis of reality. Nauman’s installation entitled *Lighted Center Piece* (1967/68) can also be read as an “allegory of emptiness.” Four halogen spotlights mounted on an aluminum square cast light on an empty spot in the middle of the piece. Emptiness and absence and the question of the relationship between the visible and the invisible are constantly recurring leitmotifs in Nauman’s oeuvre, from his early years to the present.

This focus on the phenomenon of emptiness goes hand in hand with an interest in the relationship between **figure** and **space**. This theme is represented in the exhibition by Nauman’s *Studio Films* of the 1960s, for example, in which he combines ordinary movements and actions in performative acts in his empty studio. Nauman repeatedly explores a supposedly unknown space with his body in search of his own physical boundaries. These much-discussed film and video works appear as a radical complement to Giacometti’s sculptural achievements in terms of motion, spatial orientation, and the fundamental investigation of the figure and its preconditions he undertook beginning in the 1940s. That is represented, for example, by the new concept of motion as an explorative measurement of space, as illustrated in the sculptures *Homme qui marche* (1960) and *Groupe de trois hommes I* (1943/1949). Towards the end of the 1960s, Nauman began to expand the scope of his work with figure and space to include the viewer, or rather the viewer’s body. That is exemplified by his narrow, towering *Corridors*—most of which are oppressively narrow, accessible three-dimensional structures in which viewers’ customary perceptions of themselves and their surroundings are threateningly suspended. Giacometti’s slim male and female figures seem tailor-made for these corridors. The Schirn is presenting Nauman’s *Corridor with Mirror and White Lights* (1971), in which viewers can imagine themselves as ultra-thin Giacometti sculptures—even though they are denied access to the corridor.

The writer Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) is introduced as the missing link between Giacometti and Nauman in the section devoted to the **Theater of the Absurd**. Beckett was a close friend of Giacometti’s and a kindred spirit; and Beckett’s writings were an important source of inspiration for Nauman. In the exhibition, the Giacometti-Beckett-Nauman triangle is examined by way of example with reference to *Quad I & II*, the television dramas written by Samuel Beckett in 1981. Four masked figure are held captive in a precise choreography of constantly repeated dance steps on a theatrically illuminated square field. The scene evokes associations with Nauman’s *Studio Films*, but also with his *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)* (1968), with which he refers explicitly to the Irish author. Links between Beckett’s films and the multi-figure sculptures Giacometti realized beginning in the late 1940s are also identifiable. The purposeful wanderings of the figures in Beckett’s *Quad I & II*, their vain attempts to reach the center elevate failure to the

# SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

status of an artistic principle—an attitude from which Nauman and Giacometti harvested much of their own potential as artists.

In the section devoted to **Objects of Desire**, the Schirn presents works from Giacometti's Surrealist phase during the early 1930s. Two of these enigmatic objects are juxtaposed with Nauman's *Device for a Left Armpit* (1967) and the "object study" on film entitled *Bouncing Balls* (1969)—both works that correspond closely to the Surrealist concept of the fragment. Giacometti's Surrealist works also reflect an approach to the use of language that is similar to Nauman's. In his titles, in particular, the Swiss sculptor made use of narrative techniques that would later play an important role in Nauman's art. Nauman attributed his love of word play and ambiguous titles with multiple allusions directly to these early avant-garde artists

The oeuvres of both Giacometti and Nauman exhibit a strong tendency toward incompleteness and an emphasis on process. The **Painting and Process** section of the exhibition is devoted to this theme. Giacometti's works from the postwar years have the look of sculptural "snapshots" of scenes from an ongoing process in which the traces of the creative activity are visible. Yet in his paintings in particular—figures in the studio and portraits—the progress of their creation, the never-ending process of painting and revising, is always evident, as in *Tête de Diego* (1961). Nauman affirmed his belief in the unfinished in his art on multiple occasions. Many of his works from the 1960s reveal their own process of creation. In the video entitled *Flesh to White to Black to Flesh* (1968), for example, he applied alternating layers of paint to his face and torso and presented himself as a painting, a model, and a constantly revised image.

Giacometti investigated pairs of opposites such as fullness and emptiness, closeness and distance, inside and outside in their sculptures, in which they are reversed and redefined. The human being is the **Measure of Things** for both artists. Giacometti's miniature sculptures from the late 1930s and 1940s are evidence of his uncompromising abandonment of established concepts of sculpture, from the analogy between size and importance, the assumption of a found, supposedly "real" space, or the dimension of life-size as a fixed reference. Nauman's early works also reflect his interest in size and scale as they apply to the human figure. He also questions the conventions of figurative sculpture, albeit in a very different way, as his very first neon work, the self-portrait entitled *Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten-Inch Intervals* (1966), demonstrates in striking fashion. Such categories as body and sculpture, presence and absence, fullness and emptiness are negated in this work. Although he refers to the traditional theory of proportions, his self-portrait shows no trace of volume, solidity, or object character. Nauman's interest in measuring the body and in the body as an instrument used to measure space is clear evidence of the extent to which the human scale represents the point of departure for his art.

The last section of the exhibition is devoted to the theme of **Body and Fragment** and features works by Nauman in juxtaposition with Giacometti's famous body fragments and last busts. For both artists, the attempt to deal with the fragmented body in art amounts to an investigation into the question of life and death. The body fragments Giacometti first produced in 1947—a solitary head frozen in death, a nose, a hand, and later a leg—visibly take up the thread of his earlier Surrealist works, in which both the principle of fragmentation and the motifs of violence and shock are firmly rooted. The fragment is omnipresent in Nauman's oeuvre as well—as a motif and a formal element of style in films, photographs, drawings, sculpture, and installations. He also depicts the human body as a showplace of violence and pain in such works as the video entitled *Thighing (Blue)* (1967), in which he abuses his own thigh with both hands in a close-up view accompanied by groans, and *Poke in the Eye/Nose/Ear 3/8/94 Edit* (1994), in which he—inspired by earlier experiments—mercilessly pokes his extended index finger into his eye, nose, and ear, suggesting the violent destruction of the senses. In the late 1980s, Nauman began making wax casts from living models, thereby recalling the technique of producing casts and imprints of body parts he had employed in the 1960s. The men's heads made of tinted, often vividly colored wax suspended on thin wires became a central motif in numerous sculptures and installations. A major highlight within the context of this work group, the Schirn is presenting the ensemble entitled

# SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

*Ten Heads Circle/In and Out* of 1990, in which ten “severed” heads are hung in pairs in an empty room, and juxtaposes it with several of the last busts realized by Giacometti shortly before his death.

**Alberto Giacometti** (Borgonovo 1901–1966 Chur) is, on the basis of his singular oeuvre, regarded as one of the most outstanding artists of the twentieth century. The Swiss artist studied at the École des Beaux-Arts and the École des Arts Industriels (in Geneva) and at the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière (in Paris). He lived and worked primarily in Paris. He joined the group of Surrealists in the early 1930s. Giacometti maintained ties of friendship with writers Samuel Beckett and Jean-Paul Sartre. Numerous retrospectives were devoted to his art during his lifetime, including presentations at the Arts Council in London (1955), the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1955), the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1965), the Tate Gallery in London (1965), and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark (1965). Giacometti received a number of awards, including the Prize for Sculpture awarded by the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh (1961), the Grand Prize for Sculpture from the Biennale in Venice (1962), the Guggenheim International Award for Painting (1962), and the French Grand Prix National des Arts (1965). He was also awarded an honorary doctoral degree by the University of Bern, Switzerland, in 1965, a year before his death.

**Bruce Nauman** (\*1941 Fort Wayne, Indiana) is one of the most influential contemporary American artists. After completing his studies at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and the University of California in Davis, he taught at the San Francisco Art Institute (1966–68) and the University of California in Irvine (1970). His first retrospective was presented in 1972 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, before embarking on a tour through the United States and Europe. Numerous solo exhibitions followed, including presentations at the Baltimore Museum of Art (1982), the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel (1990), the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis (touring exhibition, 1993–95), the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (1997), the Tate Modern in London (2004), and the Berkeley Art Museum (2007). Nauman was awarded honorary doctoral degrees by the San Francisco Art Institute (1989) and the California Institute of the Arts (2000). He has received a number of awards, among them the Max-Beckmann-Preis der Stadt Frankfurt am Main (1990), the Wolf Foundation Prize in Arts, (Israel, 1993), and the Wexner Prize conferred by Ohio State University (1994). He was elected a member of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in 1997 and awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale twice—for his life’s work in 1999 and for the best national contribution in 2009. He was awarded the Praemium Imperiale Prize for Visual Arts (Japan) and the Beaux-Arts-Magazine Art Award as Best International Artist in 2004, and the Friedrich Kiesler-Preis in 2014.

**DIGITORIAL** A digitorial will be published for the exhibition. This free digital orientation program provides visitors with background information on aspects of art and cultural history, important conceptual ideas, and exhibition themes before their visits. It combines multimedia contents in the form of images, videos, sound, and texts and presents them in an innovative format accompanied by appealing narration. The digitorial is sponsored by the Aventis Foundation. It is responsive and can be accessed in German and English online under: [www.schirn.de/digitorial/en/](http://www.schirn.de/digitorial/en/).

**AUDIO TOUR AND SOUNDTRACK FOR THE EXHIBITION** There is an audio tour available for the exhibition. Actress Eva Mattes, known for her collaboration with directors Werner Herzog and Rainer Werner Fassbinder as well as for her role as an investigator in the Lake Constance Tatort, provides background information about the artists and their works. In addition, Viktor Tremmel from Schauspiel Frankfurt reads texts by playwright Samuel Beckett, who was a close friend and companion of Giacometti as well as a source of inspiration for Nauman. For the first time the Schirn has also assembled a soundtrack for the exhibition, which includes compositions and songs by Arnold Schönberg and John Cage to The Bangles and Moondog. It can be listened to as the musical part of the Schirn’s audio tour. **AUDIO GUIDE:** €3.00 plus deposit at the SCHIRN

# SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

**CATALOG** *Giacometti-Nauman*. Edited by Esther Schlicht. Foreword by Philipp Demandt. Essays by Esther Schlicht, Gaby Hartel, Thierry Dufrière, and Robert Storr. German/English edition, 184 pages, approx. 150 illustrations, 30 x 23 cm (portrait format), softcover, Snoeck, Cologne, 2016, ISBN 978-3-86442-180-8, Schirn edition: 35 €, in bookstores 39.90 €.

**BOOKLET** *GIACOMETTI-NAUMAN*. An introduction to the exhibition. Edited by Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, texts by Laura Heeg and Olga Shmakova, German edition, approx. 36 pages, colour images, cut flush binding; design by formfellows, Frankfurt; Rasch Druckerei und Verlag, (Bramsche, 2016), € 7.50, classroom set available for € 1 per booklet (15 or more)

**VENUE** SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt **DURATION** 28 October 2016–22 January 2017 **INFORMATION** [www.schirn.de](http://www.schirn.de) **E-MAIL** [welcome@schirn.de](mailto:welcome@schirn.de) **TELEPHONE** +49.69.29 98 82-0 **ADMISSION** 12 €, reduced 9 €, free for children under 8 years **ADVANCE BOOKING** tickets can be ordered online at [www.schirn.de/tickets](http://www.schirn.de/tickets) **GUIDED TOUR BOOKING** individual tours or group guided tours can be booked under Tel +49.69.29 98 82-0 and email [fuehrungen@schirn.de](mailto:fuehrungen@schirn.de) **AUDIO GUIDE** An audio guide on the exhibition is available for € 3. Narrated by Eva Mattes, it provides essential information on the art works **CURATOR** Esther Schlicht **CURATORIAL ASSISTANT** Natalie Storelli **DIGITORIAL** The digitorial is supported by the Aventis Foundation **THE EXHIBITION IS SUPPORTED BY** Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne; Verein der Freunde der Schirn Kunsthalle e. V. **MEDIA PARTNER** Interview Magazine **CULTURAL PARTNER** HR2 **MOBILITY PARTNER** Deutsche Bahn **DISCOUNT TICKET "KULTUR"** round-trip discount tickets to and from the exhibition, from € 39 (2<sup>nd</sup> class) and from € 49 (1<sup>st</sup> class). Savings of € 10 each for up to four accompanying passengers; available at [www.bahn.de/kultur](http://www.bahn.de/kultur)

**SOCIAL MEDIA** The Schirn will be communicating in the social web with the **HASHTAGS** #GIACOMETTINAUMAN #Schirn **ONLINE MAGAZINE** [www.schirn-mag.com](http://www.schirn-mag.com) **FACEBOOK** [www.facebook.com/Schirn](http://www.facebook.com/Schirn) **TWITTER** [www.twitter.com/Schirn](http://www.twitter.com/Schirn) **YOUTUBE** [www.youtube.com/user/SCHIRNKUNSTHALLE](http://www.youtube.com/user/SCHIRNKUNSTHALLE) **INSTAGRAM** @schirnkunsthalle **PINTEREST** [www.pinterest.com/schirn](http://www.pinterest.com/schirn) **SNAPCHAT** schirnsnaps

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