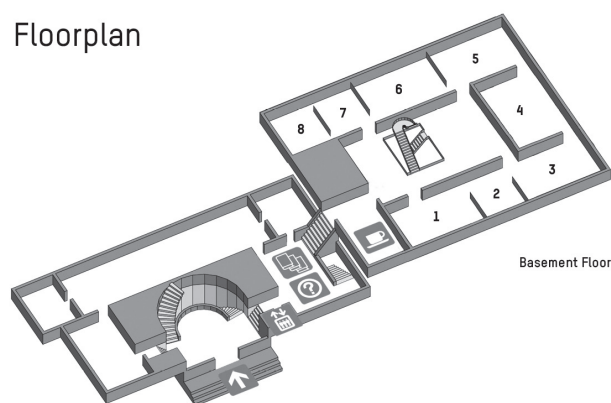


Color and I. Augusto Giacometti

September 19, 2014 – February 8, 2015

Floorplan



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Augusto Giacometti was born in 1877 in the village of Stampa situated in the Val Bregaglia. He is a distant relative of the other Giacomettis from Stampa who are now famous figures in the world of modern art, that is of Giovanni (1868 – 1933) and his son Alberto (1901 – 1966). But they seldom spoke with one another. Augusto left his hometown early to study in Zurich, and then he went to Paris and Florence. Over the years he developed into a sophisticated grand seigneur. The village of his birth nevertheless played a prominent role in his work, while Zurich was seldom a motif in his art. Augusto Giacometti's special importance for art lies in the fact that he independently invented a new kind of painting: his work seldom even attempts to still imitate perspectival views and instead arranges colored shapes next to one another. They constantly remind the viewer of the fact that they are areas of colored paint on a surface. As early as 1910 he was painting in a way that

appeared as if his pictures were constructed of a myriad of single, colored mosaic stones. Augusto Giacometti developed a new type of picture that comprised abstraction – together with many other artists, including Vassily Kandinsky in Munich, Adolf Hölzel in Stuttgart, Piet Mondrian in the Netherlands, or Kasimir Malevich in the Soviet Union. These artists no longer viewed paintings as open windows, but considered them independent worlds made of an interplay and interaction of colors that unfold its innate principles and effects. In 1934, Augusto Giacometti published a small book under the title of *Die Farbe und ich* (Color and I), which we have also taken for our exhibition title.

Great Hall: Large-Format Paintings and Abstractions

Our introduction to Augusto Giacometti takes the shape of four large-format paintings executed between 1916 and 1932, pointing out the way his artistic life was to take. His landscapes from Italy and North Africa seem almost like interwoven rays of light. In them he has used exotically bright colors and applied them sumptuously, and the same is true for his interior view of the Olympia Bar in Paris. Beginning with studies of butterflies, Augusto Giacometti executed his first entirely abstract color studies already before 1900. They became the cornerstones for his art and his entire oeuvre: a thorough, yet equally sensual investigation of the principles and scope of color and its many combinations.

Room 1: Symbolism 1903 – 1910

As was the case for many artists, in art nouveau and symbolism Augusto Giacometti found an ideal basis for discovering and applying color and form as autonomous artistic means. In striving for spatial abstraction, clear contours, and coherent color combinations, Giacometti pursued a stylized representation of things and underscored the two-dimensionality of the picture surface. Illusionism became more and more marginal. This is evidenced by his large symbolist paintings, which he executed in Florence.

Room 2: Watercolors 1908 – 1915

The medium of watercolor allowed Augusto Giacometti to experiment with how contrasting colors influence one another and how to translate objectivity into individual areas of color areas. Although he no longer lived in Stampa, his hometown remained a source of inspiration and place of yearning his whole life long.

Room 3: My Hometown 1910 – 1914

In the paintings he executed during this period we can observe clearly how Augusto Giacometti constructed his pictures using lots of individual dabs of color. They are set close together but do not overlap. His paintings almost resemble tapestries, which hardly

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present a naturalistic view of Stampa. The artist nevertheless managed to capture the unique atmosphere of the village and the valley – and his love for his hometown.

Room 4: Abstraction and Sumptuous Colors 1912 – 1927

In 1910, Augusto Giacometti reached a stage in painting where he discarded representation altogether. As the titles reveal, he nevertheless still found inspiration in nature. At the same time he was still producing representational art. The headway Giacometti made in art lay more in his discovery of an independent and novel way of painting than in discarding representation altogether. For him abstraction meant a way of painting in which individual colors can be clearly discerned on the picture surface, creating a composition through their interplay. This does not mean that his paintings do not contain recognizable objects.

Room 5: Paintings that Glow 1917 – 1945

Some time around 1917, Augusto Giacometti became less stringent about keeping his color dabs distinctly separate. Additionally, he brought his colors to smolder in the depths of a dark background: his paintings seem to literally glow. Until his death in 1947 he pushed coloration to its utmost intensity. Color is the most important factor of his painting and its very substance.

Room 6: Augusto Giacometti and Color Painting in Europe

We only realize what an important figure Augusto Giacometti was in European art for painting when we view his work in the context of those by other artists. Augusto Giacometti occupies a key position in that species of painting that focuses especially on the phenomenon of color, among an array of other artists ranging from Paul Cézanne, Adolf Hölzel, and Josef Albers to Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Raimer Jochims, and Jerry Zeniuk.

Room 7: Self-Portraits 1910 – 1947

In his self-portraits we encounter the artist himself. Here we can follow his entire life from a young man to the grand seigneur of the very last year of his life. In these paintings Augusto Giacometti embodies his colors himself; he is less concerned about depicting a person than with exploring the genre of portrait, directing his attention explicitly to painterly and color issues.

Room 8: Walls of Colored Glass

From 1917 to 1945, Augusto Giacometti executed a number of exceptional works in the technique of lead glazing. These works greatly contributed to the art of stained-glass windows in Switzerland. Stained glass windows are suited for displaying the autonomy of color in a very special way. No other medium produces such an intensive impression of color like light passing through a glass partition. In the exhibition we are showing especially his pastel studies for stained windows. The drawings have an intensity of color that approaches that of glass lit up from behind. A livestream video brings the choir windows of the Zurich Grossmünster (Great Minster) directly into the exhibition room: as they cannot be transported, this kind of digital technology is our only way of providing a reasonable representation of this artwork in its architectural surroundings.

Biography: Augusto Giacometti **(An excerpt from Beat Stutzer's contribution to the catalogue)**

Quotes of the artist in italics are excerpts from his memoirs: Giacometti 1943 (hereafter: [I]) and Giacometti 1948a ([II]).

1877

I was born in Stampa (Graubünden) on August 16, 1877. The black cherries growing on the three cherry trees in our garden must have been ripe, and in the fields the second batch of hay must have been mown. [I, p. 7]

Antonio Augusto Giacometti was the first of three sons born to Giacomo Giacometti (1853 – 1918) and his wife Marta Stampa (1859 – 1928), who married on November 5, 1876.

1894 – 1897

Spring was approaching as I happened to read the advertisement of the Zurich College of Applied Arts in a newspaper. The advertisement stated that the summer semester would begin at such and such a time, and that enrollments must be addressed to the secretary's office. I no longer know who gave me the newspaper: whether it was the head of our boarding school, my Uncle Zaccaria or Aunt Marietta. I know for sure that it made its impact on me. I was totally fascinated by the advertisement. [...] When I once went from where I lived [Stampa] to visit my Aunt Augusta in Borgonovo and told her that I will be going to Zurich to study at the College of Applied Arts, she was overjoyed and said: «So it will be art after all!» [I, p. 37]

Augusto Giacometti studied for three years at the Zurich College of Applied Arts. Training there comprised drawing figures, portraits, and nudes, free-style perspective drawing, descriptive geometry, flower and ornament drawing, modeling, theory of style, and anatomy. During this period Giacometti lived with his Aunt Marietta Torriani on Bahnhofstrasse.

In the library of the Crafts and Industry Museum, Giacometti discovered the book *La plante et ses applications ornementales*, which was published in 1896. The author was Eugène Grasset (1845 – 1917), and Giacometti was so fascinated by the book that he wanted to move to the author's choice of residence, Paris. But first he graduated from college with a drawing teacher diploma.

1897 – 1901

In early summer, 1897, Giacometti traveled to Paris. He attended courses at the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs and studied at the Académie Colarossi of an evening.

We studied together at the Ecole Nationale des Arts Décoratifs. It was located on Rue de l'École de Médecine – in an old, cramped building with narrow stairs. To be admitted to the life drawing classes we had to pass an exam. Once we were admitted we had life drawing in the mornings and in the afternoon decorative composition downstairs. The teaching methods were incredibly pedantic and old-fashioned. We did not like the school and called it «Bocula nullatif.» Of an evening we would go together to life drawing at the Académie Colarossi. [I, p. 47]

Fall 1897 Giacometti began studying at the École normale d'enseignement du dessin, where Eugène Grasset was a teacher and Giacometti quickly adapted the vocabulary of art nouveau for his art.

When Grasset's courses finally began, the evenings were already cool because of the fall and the flowerbeds in the Luxemburg Garden had long withered. My route to Rue Vavin led me through Luxemburg Garden. [...] The director of the school was Monsieur Guérin, an architect. Grasset was quite small, and had dark, very alert eyes, was beginning to bald a little, had a moustache, and wore a pince nez. [...] Everything that had hitherto been part of the

curricula was suddenly worthless and thrown overboard. We would begin with a dot, and then came a row of dots; various rows of dots one over the other, the rows not equidistant. Then we began to draw the straight line, various rows of lines one over the other, not equidistant and with differing strengths of line. Then we drew wavy lines, zigzag lines, explored the development of the straight line, of curved lines, the «lignes harmoniques,» correcting the dissonant lines by several repetitions and always with the emphasis: «Tout soit voulu et préconçu d'avance.» This was all very profound and made me think a lot. It all seemed very solid, very logically and consistently constructed. [...] A new world was in the process of being generated. How very different this was to copying «motifs,» as was normally expected of a landscape painter! We were God in a way, and could analogous to God treat nature in the very same way he did. [I, p. 48/49]

At the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris he was awarded a silver medal for artisanal works he had made.

1902

The long hall featuring Italian painting at the Louvre and my admiration of Fra Angelico filled me with the desire to go to Florence and see Angelico on home ground, so to speak. This was authentic, real art—not what was being produced in Paris. [I, p. 54]

After staying at home in Stampa for a few weeks, Giacometti was finally able to travel to Florence, where he then lived for thirteen years.

Arriving mid-May, Giacometti annually spent the spring and summer months in his hometown Stampa in Val Bregaglia.

For the summer I usually left Florence either mid-May or at the end of the month and went to Stampa, where I would stay until early October. From there I would often go on trips to Zurich, partly to see Aunt Marietta and Uncle Torriani, partly to travel by train, which I always delighted in. [II, p. 16]

1907 – 1913

Giacometti's studio in Florence was situated at no. 8 Via degli Artisti. He was appointed a teaching lectureship for life study drawing at the Accademia Internazionale di Belle Arti, a private art school that had been founded by his Swiss compatriot Joseph Zbinden (1873 – 1924). Giacometti made contact with the Italian avant-gardists and the futurists.

At this period in time one would bump into Papini, Prezzolini, and Soffici, or the sculptor Griselli at «Caffè delle giubbe rosse.» I would then often read Soffici's essays in «L'Acerba,» especially his «Giornale di bordo.» This was not the Florence of Giotto and Benozzo Gozzoli but modern Florence! The movement inaugurated by this group ran parallel to futurism, and somehow political revolution was already in the air even at this early date. [I, p. 78]

1913

After Giacometti exhibited a selection of his work at Mietke Gallery in Vienna in 1910 for the first time, his first exhibitions were shown in Switzerland: at the Kunsthalle Basel and in the Rätischer Volkshaussaal in Chur, where he exhibited 32 paintings, 10 watercolors, 2 abstract color works, and 40 drawings, among them also the large-format symbolist works *Dado di Paradiso*, *Contemplazione*, *The Orbits of the Planets*, *Fixed Stars*, *Phaeton in the Sign of Scorpio* and *Garden in San Domenico*.

1915

After Italy entered into the war, the academy where Giacometti taught was closed down. Giacometti returned to neutral Switzerland and spent the summer in Stampa. However, he planned to move to Zurich.

I spent the summer of 1915 in Stampa. [...] My assets were exactly 1100 francs. It was in one-hundred-franc banknotes [...] How much work was involved in accumulating this small sum of money! It had been inexpressibly difficult. [...] Often I have to worry if these 1100 francs will be sufficient to rent a work space in Zurich and live on until I get settled. [II, p. 43]

In Zurich, Giacometti moved into a studio on no. 5 Rämistrasse, close to Bellevue-Platz and Café Odeon, in which he would work until he died.

Mid-September in 1915, on an oppressively hot day late in the summer, I traveled to Zurich. [...] Zurich was my actually my city. [...] However I was coming from Florence, so that because I was continually comparing my life here in Zurich to that in Florence it seemed rather depressing. [...] Therefore I would have preferred to leave again. Zurich now seemed so colorless. [II, p. 43–45]

1917

Besides the author Friedrich Glauser (1896 – 1938) and the painter Alice Bailly (1872 – 1938), Giacometti is one of the very few Swiss artists in Zurich who were in touch with the circle of Dada artists, that is, with Hans Arp (1886 – 1966), Hugo Ball (1886 – 1927), Marcel Janco (1895 – 1984), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889 – 1943), and Tristan Tzara (1896 – 1963), who had founded the Cabaret Voltaire as a literary circle, a small theater, and an exhibition space in the city.

Those were the times when I would go to eat at Seehof restaurant at Limmatquai in Zurich for lunch and supper, and the Dadaists [...] would be there too, sitting at the next table. Over time we got to know one another and began sharing the same table. After our meals, Alice Bailly [Bailly] or Oskar Lüthy or Franz Riklin would sometimes pop in for a visit or share a coffee or beer with us. [II, p. 82]
At a small Dadaist film screening at the Kunsthaus, a half-opened hand was visible, it was the hand of a worker. Ants crawled all over this half-opened hand. [...] The same evening a reading also took place of abstract poems and short pieces of Dadaist prose. It expressed the pure sounds and rhythms of words, without the words communicating anything or having any sense. [II, p. 84]

In a solo exhibition Giacometti showed his work for the first time at the Kunsthaus Zürich. This occasioned his meeting up with the silk manufacturer and art collector Alfred Rüttschi, who purchased numerous paintings and made it possible for Giacometti to travel to various places.

1921

From now on Giacometti often spent his summers in Stampa and journeyed practically every year to Paris for brief sojourns.

In order to take a break from my daily work in Zurich, but really and especially to see Paris again, I would regularly visit Paris, mostly mid-December, over a number of years. I usually left when the Salvation Army instituted their pots at Bellevueplatz and on the other streets of Zurich. Every time I felt very excited. [II, p. 99]

1922

He went back to Italy too. Erwin Poeschel authored the first monograph devoted to Giacometti in a small volume that was published by Rascher Verlag in Zurich. The Kunsthaus Chur organized a solo exhibition of his work.

1927

On the occasion of his fiftieth birthday, the Kunsthaus Zürich mounted an exhibition showing works by Vassily Kandinsky (1866 – 1944), Alexander Soldenhoff (1882 – 1951), Pierre-Eugène Vibert (1875 – 1937), and Augusto Giacometti, who was able to present over one hundred works.

1932

Giacometti represented Switzerland with a selection of his work at the XVII Venice Biennial.

1933

In September Giacometti went on a two-week trip to Venice and in November gave the radio-broadcast talk *Color and I* at Studio Fluntern in Zurich.

1934

Giacometti's radio lecture *Color and I* was published by Verlag Oprecht & Helbling in Zurich. The Kunsthaus Chur organized a solo exhibition for Giacometti comprising his paintings. He was elected member of the Swiss Federal Art Commission under the presidency of Daniel Baud-Bovy.

And now I sat at the same table, in a meeting room of the Bundeshaus, was entitled to vote, to make and submit proposals. It was a very strange feeling indeed. I dressed very smart for the occasion. I wore my brand-new grey suit made of hand-woven good cloth of real wool from Bündner Oberland sheep. [...] Baud-Bovy, who was President of the Swiss Federal Art Commission and who had an eye for things like that, came over to me immediately and said: «Mais c'est beau ça, c'est très beau.» [II, p. 103/104]

1937

The Kunsthaus Zürich devoted a large exhibition to Giacometti to celebrate his sixtieth birthday.

1939

In January Giacometti was elected President of the Swiss Federal Art Commission, which he remained until he died.

Each of us had our work to do at home, their chores, their difficulties, their failures, their successes, and their joys. And then one suddenly meets up in Bern, cheerful and in a good mood. One sees in oneself and in one's fellow human beings the «pauvre maladroit être humain,» as [John] Ruskin once said. Everything has a special, Bernese early morning beauty. [II, p. 109]

At the Kunsthalle Basel, Giacometti had a solo exhibition with 77 paintings from all phases of his artistic career.

1942

At the beginning of the year Giacometti suffered from a choking fit and a heart attack. This prevented him from traveling to Venice, where he was supposed to be part of an international jury for the Biennial. Instead he was forced to stay at Hirslanden Clinic in Zurich. In fall he suffered another heart attack.

I was so indescribably tired that I, already in the mornings just after breakfast, ended up lying on my drafting table and, without eating, stayed like that until evening. Then the disaster happened. During the night from the second to the third of September, around three in the morning, I suddenly woke up. I could no longer breathe. It was terrible. [II, p. 111]

1943

Von Stampa bis Florenz (From Stampa to Florence), the first volume of Giacometti's memoirs was published by Rascher Verlag in Zurich. The second volume, *Von Florenz bis Zürich (From Florence to Zurich)*, was still being edited in 1948, a year after the artist died. Arnaldo M. Zandralli published a book with various essays about Giacometti and updated the catalogue raisonné for the period from 1936 to 1942.

1947

Augusto Giacometti became very ill on May 28 and was brought back to the clinic, where he died on June 9 aged seventy years. The

funeral took place at the cemetery of San Giorgio in Borgonovo near Stampa; the villagers, many friends, and cantonal and federal official representatives came to pay their last respects. Cuno Amiet, Erwin Poeschel, and Arnaldo M. Zandralli spoke at his funeral. Augusto Giacometti's epitaph reads: «QUI RIPOSA IL MAESTRO DEI COLORI.»

Information

Curators: Daniel Spanke, Beat Stutzer

Entrance fee: CHF 18.00 / red. CHF 14.00

Private guided tours, schools: T +41 (0)31 328 09 11, vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Opening hours:

Tuesday: 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Wednesday – Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Holidays: 25.12.2014: closed

31.12.2014 / 01.01. / 02.01.2015: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Catalogue (in German / French)

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