GAGOSIAN GALLERY

PARIS

Foundation prepares to emerge from decades of strife and lawsuits

BY FABRIZIO NAYERI

For much of his life, the Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) lived and worked out of a cramped and cluttered atelier in Paris’s 11th Arrondissement, where paint-stained surfaces were covered with books and figurines and walls were scratched and scored over. The artist died at age 63 in 1966. When other artists fell sick or died, Giacometti’s atelier remained as it was when he died, a testament to the artist’s work and his life’s legacy.

Giacometti’s death at 64 — with no will or succession plans — set his widow, Annette, on a crusade to safeguard his legacy. Sublime Weiss, a photographer and friend of the couple, said that when he died, his widow asked her to photograph “everything.” I took pictures of whatever we could find, in the atelier, at the homes of Paris collectors,” Ms. Weiss said, adding that she also photographed his works in museums and collections in Switzerland and Spain.

Annette Giacometti decided to bequeath everything she owned to a foundation and bought back Left Bank headquarters near the Odéon Theater in 1984, another location for Giacometti’s works. She was later the association’s president, and is no longer involved in its affairs. Art historians were eager to set up the association, requiring approval from the Culture and Interior ministries.

When the Foundation Giacometti was finally born in 2003 — a decade after Annette Giacometti’s death — it refused to acknowledge the association, which was at the time run by her former secretary, Mary Lisa Palmer, a Giacometti expert. The two entities operated in parallel, and eventually joined. In 2013, the Foundation’s then-director, Véronique Wiesinger, lost a separate lawsuit she had filed to compel the other representatives of the estate — Swiss family members and the Alberto Giacometti Stiftung in Zurich — to allow her to cast new bronzes without their prior consent.

Today, the foundation is changing directions, thanks to Mr. Grenier and a new president of the board — Olivier Le Grand — who was appointed in 2013. The association has dissolved, allowing the foundation to move into the historic Left Bank premises the association had occupied, and most lawsuits (except those involving Giacometti’s family) have been abandoned.

In addition to the Tate exhibition, a show of Giacometti’s portraits is planned on June 19th at the National Portrait Gallery in London. The next event — the 50th anniversary of Giacometti’s death — are a Picasso-Giacometti show at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston on Jan. 19th, a retrospective at the Vasarely Museum in Shanghai, and the fifth annual Giacometti biennial, which will present an exhibition of Giacometti’s work in New York.

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Giacometti in his studio in Paris in 1954 and, below, outside the studio in 1960. The studio will be recreated exactly as the artist left it as part of the new Institute Giacometti, a research center and exhibition space that will open to the public late next year.
Reviving the legacy of Giacometti

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ponent, since among Giacometti’s earliest buyers were the Museum of Modern Art and a few collectors in New York.

The foundation makes one or two sales a year — via the Gagosian Gallery and the Galerie Kamel Mennour in Paris — of posthumous bronze casts commissioned by Annette Giacometti (with other estate representatives’ consent) to ensure its longevity, Ms. Grenier said, adding that few such bronzes were left and no additional ones were planned. Rather than cover the foundation’s running costs, Ms. Grenier said, proceeds from such sales should help pay for original works to add to the collection — like the 1959 bronze "Homme (Apollon)" purchased for 782,500 pounds, around $1.2 million, from Christie’s London in February. It was the first such purchase by Ms. Grenier.

The foundation’s Paris dealer, Mr. Mennour, said Ms. Grenier was highly reluctant to part with artworks, and described her as "a kind of guardian of the temple."

To avoid the muddling that befuddled Giacometti’s succession, Ms. Grenier said she hoped artists from now on would do more forward planning. "If we want artists and their works to be preserved in perpetuity, their succession has to be organized, preferably before their death," she said. "They are the only ones who can do it."