Alberto Giacometti and Yves Klein: In Search of the Absolute, exhibition review: Visual thrills from an odd couple

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There can be great pleasure in seeing artists in unfamiliar surroundings. Alberto Giacometti is too often thrust into Paris’s post-war existential gloom: his thin, heavily worked sculptures shown with other torturous representations of the human form. But he adored medieval icons and ancient Egyptian sculpture; his art attempted to be timeless as well as of its time.

So it’s a lovely visual shock to see his sculptures alongside the paintings of Yves Klein. With Klein’s multi-coloured abstracts in Gagosian’s daylit spaces, several top-notch Giacomettis have a lightness without losing their depth. Although they lived near each other in Paris in the late Fifties and early Sixties, Giacometti worked in a chaotic studio making sculpture, paintings and drawings before a model, while Klein was a conceptualist who made some works in public as performances.

The show tries to reveal a common lyrical essence: a shared feeling for the figure in space. But it’s problematic: Giacometti’s art is about a reworking of solid form, while Klein’s is about momentary traces. Klein painted women’s naked bodies blue and they were pressed into or dragged across a canvas, or the outline of their wet bodies was drawn by a blowtorch. The art history feels somewhat dubious, then, but the show is worthwhile for its visual thrills.