

**Media release**  
**Zurich, 6 February 2020**

## **The Kunsthaus Zürich devotes an exhibition to Otilia Giacometti**

**From 7 February to 19 July 2020 the Kunsthaus Zürich presents paintings, sculptures and drawings by Giovanni and Alberto Giacometti that depict Otilia – Giovanni’s daughter and Alberto’s sister. ‘Otilia Giacometti – A portrait’ focuses on the least-known member of the celebrated artist family, who died at the age of just 33.**

Otilia (1904–1937) was the only daughter of Giovanni Giacometti and Annetta Stampa and the sister of Alberto, Diego and Bruno. She is the least-known member of a family that was exceptional not just for the number of artists it produced but also for the love and harmony that pervaded it. When bringing up their children, the parents concentrated on giving them every possible opportunity to live a successful life. They allowed them to complete a training and supported them financially in all their decisions, enabling Alberto and Diego to work as artists in Paris and Bruno to embark on a career as an architect in Zurich. Otilia, meanwhile, received the education of a girl from a good family, initially at a boarding school in Horgen, then at the handicraft school for women in Bern, and finally at a finishing school in Lausanne.

### OTTILIA’S LIFE BETWEEN STAMPA, MALOJA AND GENEVA

Otilia was a good seamstress and skilled at weaving – a job done by many women in the Val Bregaglia – and gained work experience in Paris, Ascona and Chur. She modelled herself on her mother, a practically minded and deeply religious woman. Since Otilia lived with her parents, she often accompanied them on their travels. In Maloja she met Francis Berthoud, a doctor from Geneva who was a passionate mountaineer and art enthusiast, and fell in love with him. The couple married in Maloja on 22 March 1933 and moved to Geneva. This brief period of happiness ended abruptly with the sudden death of Giovanni in June 1933. In March 1934 Otilia and Francis celebrated their first wedding anniversary with a Mediterranean cruise that took them to Italy, Greece and Egypt. In March 1937 they received the happy news that Otilia was expecting a child, and everyone looked forward to the date of the birth. On 10 October, Alberto’s birthday, Silvio

Berthoud was born, much to the joy of all concerned. But Ottilia, exhausted by the birth, died a few hours later. Her death was a tragedy for the family – but the newborn Silvio was still alive and in need of care and attention. Annetta immediately left her valley to live in Geneva and bring up her grandson.

#### FAMILY PORTRAITS AND PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN FILMS

Giovanni exhibits a particular sensitivity in his portraits of his children: he watches in fascination as they grow up and portrays all four of them many times, notably during their childhood. He also returns repeatedly to the theme of motherhood, drawing – as in the painting 'The Mother' – on the compositional scheme of the Madonna from the Italian Quattrocento to depict Annetta holding Ottilia in her arms with Alberto and Diego at her feet. 'The Lamp' demonstrates just how much Giovanni valued the intimacy of his domestic life. The portraits of Ottilia in festive clothing or in a moment of rest convey his profound joy at a life unfolding before his eyes, right up until the portraits of 1923–24 showing the adult Ottilia as a radiant beauty. That this beauty was not merely a painterly invention, and the relationship between the family members has not simply been constructed by posterity, is evidenced by some previously unseen films. The standard-8 movies shot by Ottilia's husband Francis Berthoud in the 1930s and now in private hands bring the spirit and characters of this artist family to life. The fact that they have been preserved in very good condition and are now on show to the public for a short time is a minor sensation.

#### STUDY OF THE HUMAN FIGURE

Giovanni's son Alberto also began his artistic career within the family; but his insistence that his model remain absolutely motionless made him far more exacting and uncomfortable to sit for than his father. Ottilia is often depicted by her brother going about her daily business or with other members of the family. As Alberto's skills grow, his artistic dialogue with his father – his first teacher – becomes ever more intense and mature. In the portraits of Ottilia painted in around 1925, the degree to which he has learnt from his father is clear to see. His plaster bust of his sister has more in common with the work of Charles Despiau than with that of Antoine Bourdelle, his professor at art school. In the 1930s, by which time he was already a recognized artist in the Paris scene, he would continue his studies of the human body on his visits to the valley. The designs for the unexecuted invitation to Ottilia and Francis's wedding are interesting, while the portrait of Ottilia that he probably returned to in around 1934 already shows the signs of a new figuration – an artistic quest that, in February 1935, will result in his exclusion from the Surrealist movement.

## DEATH AND LIFE

The most moving section of the exhibition comprises the works relating to Ottilia's death. There is a dramatic contrast between the calm face of Ottilia on her deathbed and the sketchbooks with their portraits of Silvio in his cradle, full of tenderness and love for this new being who knows nothing of the pain that surrounds him. A head of Ottilia that Alberto worked on from just after returning to Paris until March 1938 was the last attempt to depict his sister. He worked from memory, assisted by photographs; the facial features are less distinct and we see here, for the first time, the reduction in size that characterizes all his works from 1939 into the post-war period. Three sculptures of Silvio from the years 1943 to 1945 embody this almost obsessive artistic quest that preoccupied him during his involuntary sojourn in Geneva, when the war prevented him from returning to Paris. The exhibition ends with a drawing of Silvio as a child, symbolizing the continuation of life.

## EXHIBITION SCOPE, PUBLICATION

The exhibition traces Ottilia's life chronologically, starting with the paintings by her father and moving on to the works of her brother Alberto. It includes outstanding items from Swiss museums, private collections and the Fondation Giacometti, Paris, some of which have not been on view for decades or indeed ever before – in all, around 80 paintings, sculptures and drawings as well as family photos and excerpts from previously unshown film documents on two monitors. The presentation, which has been put together by guest curator Casimiro Di Crescenzo, is accompanied by a catalogue (published by Scheidegger & Spiess, 130 pp., 110 ill.), which is available from the Kunsthaus shop, price CHF 25.

## ADDITIONAL PRESENTATION: CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

Like her brothers and father, Ottilia Giacometti was creatively gifted. Yet unlike Sophie Taeuber, Hannah Höch and Meret Oppenheim, she never opted for an artistic career. Those artists and others are the subject of a parallel presentation, put together by collection curator Philippe Büttner, featuring works from the collection created during Ottilia's lifetime. Admission is included with the exhibition ticket.

## GUIDED TOURS

On 28 February and 12 April, visitors are also invited to discover the exhibition by taking a public guided tour (in German) to learn more about the artistic development and personal relationship between the family members and Ottilia Giacometti. For further information, see the online events calendar at [www.kunsthaus.ch](http://www.kunsthaus.ch).

Supported by the Hulda and Gustav Zumsteg Foundation and Ars Rhenia, the foundation for the transregional promotion of art and culture.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthhaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch)

Fri-Sun/Tue 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Wed, Thu 10 a.m.-8 p.m. For public holiday opening see [www.kunsthhaus.ch](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch).

Admission: CHF 16 / CHF 11 (concessions and groups).

Combination tickets including the collection and exhibition CHF 26 / CHF 19.

Admission free to visitors under the age of 17. Information subject to change.

Advance sales: Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, [info@zuerich.com](mailto:info@zuerich.com), [www.zuerich.com](http://www.zuerich.com).

SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on admission when travelling by public transport: [www.sbb.ch/kunsthhaus-zuerich](http://www.sbb.ch/kunsthhaus-zuerich).

## NOTE TO EDITORS

This media release and illustrations of works are available for download at [www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich/media-corner/](http://www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich/media-corner/).

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