

Session 1 - Saturday, 12 September. "He pulled his easel into position and placed in the front of it a small stool," [Lord wrote,] "carefully adjusted the front legs to red marks painted on the studio floor. There were similar marks for the front legs of the model's chair, which he instructed me to set in place with equal precision [The stool and chair were four-and-a-half feet (137 cm.) apart]... He selected a fresh canvas and placed it on the easel. Beside his own stool he placed another stool, which held a clutter of old brushes and a small dish. From a quart bottle he poured so much turpentine into the little dish that it overflowed and dripped onto the floor. Then he took his palette and a bunch of about ten brushes and sat down.

Then he began to paint, holding his long fine brush by the end and almost at arm's length, dipping it first into the dish of turpentine, touching it to one of the blobs of paint on his palette. He painted only with black at first. As he worked he looked at me constantly and also at everything around me. What he was painting obviously included his entire field of vision" (op. cit., 1965, pp. 6-7).

"We can't stop now," [Giacometti stated after a while.] "I thought I'd stop when it was going well. But now it's going very badly. It's too late. We can't stop now... The head isn't too bad. It has volume. This is a beginning. It's gone too far and at the same time not far enough." "It's impossible to paint a portrait," he said. "Ingres could do it. He could finish a portrait. It was a substitute for a photograph and had to be done by hand...but now it has no meaning. A novel like one of Zola's would be absurd today, because any daily newspaper is more infinitely alive." [Lord pointed out that Cézanne painted some good portraits] "But he never finished them," [Giacometti responded] (ibid., p. 9).

"Hardly sketched in, or treated with utter unconcern"—Jacques Dupin described Giacometti's portraits of the 1960s—"the lack of differentiation of the backgrounds sets off the isolation of the subject and reveals the presence of emptiness around beings and things. The figure occupies, without inhabiting it, a vague, mysterious, dilapidated space... The background is purposely left to itself, gray and formless, both dirty and luminous; it takes on the aspect of a mist, a cloud of soot, of leaden or silver pools of vapor. Traversed by vague currents whose light and shadow sluggishly oppose or penetrate each other, it gives the sensation of a substantial but neutral and unreal space, whose colors are those of waiting and foreboding. It is a propitious space for apparitions. Seemingly random lines cross it, organize it, detach in passing the outline of an easel or sofa. Careless indications, but they give this immense, uncertain space its exact dimensions, and provide unreal space with its own sensory quality" (Giacometti: Three Essays, New York, 2003, p. 68).

Session 2 - Monday, 14 September. "It's impossible. I don't know how to do anything... I'm going to work on this painting for another day or two, and then if it doesn't turn out any good I'll give up painting forever... All these years I've exhibited things that weren't finished and never should have been started. But on the other hand, if I hadn't exhibited at all, it would have been cowardly, as though I didn't dare

to show what I'd done. So I was caught between the frying pan and the fire" (Giacometti quoted in J. Lord, *op. cit.*, 1965, pp. 10 and 11).

Session 5 - Thursday, 17 September. "His constant expression of self-doubt," [Lord surmised,] "is neither affectation on his part nor an appeal for reassurance but simply the spontaneous outpouring of his deep feelings of uncertainty as to the ultimate quality of his achievement. In order to go on, to hope, to believe that there is some chance of his actually seeing what he ideally visualizes, he is obliged to feel that it is necessary to start his career over again every day, as it were, from scratch... He often feels that the particular sculpture or painting on which he happens to be working at the moment is that one which will for the very first time express what he subjectively experiences in response to an objective reality" (*ibid.*, p. 18).

"Now, Giacometti's aim, as he put it"—David Sylvester wrote—"is 'to give the nearest possible sensation to that felt at the sight of the subject.' It is evident that for him this entails making it clear that the sensation is fugitive... The most striking thing about the paintings...is their density of space. Furthermore, it is uncertain where solid form ends and space begins. Between mass and space there is a kind of interpenetration" (*exh. cat.*, *op. cit.*, 1996, p. 4).

Session 6 - Friday, 18 September. "Everything must be destroyed, I have to start all over again from scratch... It's impossible to reproduce what one sees" (Giacometti quoted in J. Lord, *op. cit.*, 1965, pp. 20 and 21). "Giacometti goes from known to unknown by stripping down, by progressive asceticism," Dupin observed. "He flays appearances and digs into reality until he renders visible the essence of their relationship, that is, the presence of something sacred... There is a sacredness in the excess relationship between man and reality, the impossible communication of the one with the whole, laceration of oneself and lacerating of the other, sole threshold and lightning flash, which the totalizing power of the creative act establishes" (*op. cit.*, 2003, p. 74).

Session 7 - Saturday, 19 September. [The head is going poorly; Giacometti, however, cannot simply turn to some other part of the canvas.] "Everything has to come in its own time. If I paint in the body or background just to do something, to fill in the space, that would be obvious, that would be false, and I'd have to abandon the picture completely." [Lord is worried:] "What really disturbs me, is the way the painting seems to come and go, as though Alberto himself has no control over it. And sometimes it disappears altogether" (*op. cit.*, 1965, pp. 27 and 28).

"In a portrait, Giacometti treats the background hastily, lingers but little over the body and the arms"—Dupin stated—"to apply all his care and effort to the head. The head is all the more vague and fleeting for being worked over, weighted with color and loaded down with line. For the looming of its totality, that is, the condition of its truth and its likeness, depends on the indefiniteness of its parts and the eruption of the surface. The face appears like an arena of fierce combat; it is there the match is played, that the frenzied interrogation of the eye and brush together must operate

with patience as well as cruelty. The immediate presence demands rapidity, violence of attack and penetration... The struggle has its ups and downs, its successes and reversals. From one day to the next the portrait can vanish, reappear, disappear again, revive again; and nothing allows one to foresee the outcome... A line is added to another line, obliterates it and advances. Innumerable lines which outline nothing, define nothing, but which cause something to appear... Multiplying and dividing, the lines seem to cancel each other out, and vanish in the totality of a head which bursts spontaneously out of the void, the excess of work effacing the traces of work" (op. cit., 2003, pp. 73-74).

Session 9 - Monday, 21 September. "Although he always held a bunch of about eight or nine brushes," [Lord wrote,] "he never used more than three: two fine ones with long, thin, supple tips of sable hair and one larger one with a much thicker, shorter, and stiffer tip. One of two fine brushes was used with black to 'construct' the head, building it up gradually by means of many small strokes one on top of each other. After working for a time in this way, he would dip the brush into the dish of turpentine and squeeze the tip between his fingers. He would begin to work with the same brush but using white or gray pigment... Before long he would take another fine brush and begin to work over that he had already painted but using white pigment only... the head would soon enter the 'disintegration' phase... The large brush would be brought into play...to form space behind and around the head...to complete the gradual process of 'disintegration' by painting out details. Then, with the first of the fine brushes he would begin once more with black pigment, to try to draw from the void, as it were, some semblance of what he saw before him. And so it went on, over and over again" (op. cit., 1965, pp. 31-32).

"Giacometti's paintings are painted less with colors than with lines"—Dupin discerned—"and his palette is as restricted as his subject. A range of grays and ochres, black, white and gray lines are apparently sufficient. Starting with gray and using it as an alembic, Giacometti re-sensitizes colors, gives them back their subtlety and acuteness. They emerge from gray, but remain suspended in it. They no longer act on their own, but are strictly subjected to the necessities of a pictorial language, itself dominated by the subject. That is, they obey that gradation in expressive intensity which mounts from distances and inanimate things to the human face, passing through familiar objects and places. As one draws near the face the intensity increases and the difficulties of portrayal increase. The light fails, the color becomes dimmer. The grays in the figure paintings...are the very color of that unfathomable and hallucinated space of which the figure is captive. They create obsessions, dull the light and sometimes make it well up behind the head which then seems surrounded by a mysterious halo" (op. cit., 2003, pp. 71-73).

Session 10 - Tuesday, 22 September. "It seems impossible. How can you hope to do a nose in relief on a flat canvas? It's an abominable undertaking... Everything has to come through the drawing. After that the colors will be inevitable... Drawing is the basis of everything. But the Byzantines were the only ones who knew how to draw. And then Cézanne. That's all..." [Annette Giacometti commented:] "It could go on and

on indefinitely. Alberto seems to find it more and more difficult to finish things... He likes work against a deadline sometimes" (op. cit., 1965, pp. 34, 35 and 37).

"At the same time, the paintings and drawings lay great emphasis on the distance of things in them from the beholder's eye," Sylvester wrote. "The perspective is often elongated... The near extremities of bodies tend to be enlarged... Giacometti, then, is preoccupied with problems that concerned Cézanne—the elusiveness of the contour which separates volume and space, and the distance of things from the eye. The stylistic resemblance between his drawings...and those of Cézanne is not superficial. The attributes of sensation which obsess Giacometti there present no major problems which painting has not confronted hitherto" (op. cit., 1995, pp. 4-5)

Session 11 - Wednesday, 23 September. "The most difficult thing to do well is what's most familiar" (Giacometti quoted in J. Lord, op. cit., 1965, p. 38).

Session 12 - Friday, 25 September. "The portrait qua portrait no longer had any meaning," [Lord noted.] "Even as a painting it didn't mean very much. What meant something, what alone existed with a life of its own was his indefatigable, interminable struggle via the act of painting to express in visual terms a perception of reality that happened to coincide momentarily with my head. To achieve this was of course impossible, because what is essentially abstract can never be made concrete without altering its essence. But he was committed to the attempt, which at times seemed rather like the task of Sisyphus" (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 41).

Session 13 - Saturday, 26 September. "Cézanne discovered that it's impossible to copy nature," [Giacometti stated]. "You can't do it. But one must try all the same, try—like Cézanne—to translate one's sensation" (*ibid.*, p. 46).

Sylvester pointed out that "It was Cézanne (according to Gasquet) who said: 'Everything we see disperses and vanishes, doesn't it? Nature is always the same, but nothing remains of it, of what we see. Our art has to inspire a feeling of its permanence while still showing the elements of all its changes. It has to make us sense it as eternal.' Giacometti's work lays naked the despair known to every artist who has tried to copy what he sees. At the same time it is an affirmation that there is a hard core which remains from all that has been seen and that this can be stabilised, this can be saved, this can be rendered as if indestructible" (op. cit., 1995, pp. 35 and 36)

Session 15 - Monday, 28 September. "The painting is flat," [Giacometti said.] "One must do something which is like a relief on the canvas, even behind the canvas. It isn't enough that it should seem to be in relief." [Lord wrote in his notes:] "So once more we were confronted by the utter impossibility of what Giacometti is attempting to do. A semblance, an illusion is all that can be obtained, and he knows it. But an illusion is not enough. This inadequacy becomes literally, day by day, less acceptable, less tolerable—almost in a physical sense—even as he strives to go on, to go further. There is always, perhaps, a possibility of going a little further...and in the

realm of the absolute a little is limitless. It is this possibility, I think, that gives to Giacometti's work such arresting intensity, an intensity that has increased with time. But it may also be that it is just this possibility which has made it more and more difficult for him to produce work that seems conventionally 'finished.' ...What is important is the acuity of the artist's vision and the degree of realization of that vision, nothing more. And Giacometti's visual acuity has not, I believe, been equaled since Cézanne's" (op. cit., 1965, p. 52).

Giacometti won the prize for sculpture at the 1961 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Paintings and Sculpture. Tradition obliged the winner to send a work for the next exhibition, scheduled to open in late October 1964; the artist's selection had to be submitted no later than 2 October. This became the deadline that Giacometti and Lord (who needed to return to New York) agreed should be met for completion of the portrait, which the artist would then send to Pittsburgh.

Session 16 - Tuesday 29 September. "It had never been nearly as good," [Lord thought.] "The head and body had acquired a new tension and solidity. The features were vivid and finely realized, and the likeness, I thought, was excellent, though idealized." [But Giacometti exclaimed,] "It's abominable!" [Lord] "realized perfectly, after sixteen sittings, that without doubt he would paint over the head if he were to work on the picture again." "Tomorrow we'll see," said Giacometti. "Tomorrow," [Lord responded,] "you'll be walking a tightrope." "Oh, tightropes," he said shrugging, "I've got plenty of those" (ibid., pp. 55-56).

Session 17 - Wednesday 30 September. "Now I am doing something that I've never done before," [Giacometti stated]. "I have a very large opening in front of me. It's the first time in my life that I've ever had such an opening... It's possible for me now to undo the whole thing very quickly. That's good. Because I'm beginning to know what it's all about." [Later during this sitting, Giacometti claimed:] "The paint isn't going onto the canvas at all well. The soup's too thick, too much turpentine. I shouldn't let so much paint accumulate on the canvas this way." [Lord thought the painting] "was very gray, uncertain, dislocated, a grave disappointment compared to its appearance an hour and a half before" (ibid., pp. 56-58).

Session 18 - Thursday, October 1. "I don't mind telling you that I'm demolishing everything," [Giacometti stated as he began working. An hour and a half later, neither he nor Lord was pleased with it.] "There's an opening," [Giacometti nevertheless insisted.] "That's sure." [He began to paint out what he had done, "undoing it." Forty-five minutes later, he had reached the stage where he was working on the eyes.] "I stood up, went behind him, and looked at the painting," [Lord wrote.] "It was superb." [Giacometti said,] "Well, we've gone far... We could have gone further still, but we have gone far. It's only the beginning of what could be. But that's something, anyway... That's the whole drama" (ibid., pp. 61-65).

“Giacometti’s peculiarity is to combine rather traditional aims with an untraditional self-consciousness about the limitations of art,” Sylvester stated. “His art is self-regarding, a criticism of art, a laying naked of certain of art’s paradoxes, an analysis of the process by which a work of art is achieved, a questioning of the validity of the kind of art identified in the iconography of his paintings.” [Giacometti reminded Sylvester of the modern philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who questioned in his analysis of language what philosophical discussion might achieve:] “There is a similar consuming dedication to an activity, and a similar refusal to take for granted accepted assumptions about the purpose and possibilities of that activity” (op. cit., 1995, pp. 10 and 11).

Giacometti delivered the painting the next day, on the deadline, for shipment to the 1964 Pittsburgh International Exhibition. The Portrait of James Lord was also exhibited in the large retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1965.