

MASI Lugano
Museo d'arte
della Svizzera italiana,
Lugano

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Eye to Eye

Giacometti, Dalí, Miró, Ernst, Chagall

Homage to Ernst Scheidegger

18 February – 21 July 2024

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano
LAC Venue

With works by Cuno Amiet, Hans Arp, Max Bill, Marc Chagall, Eduardo Chillida, Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Fritz Glarner, Oskar Kokoschka, František Kupka, Henri Laurens, Le Corbusier, Fernand Léger, Verena Loewensberg, Richard Paul Lohse, Marino Marini, Joan Miró, Henry Moore, Ernst Morgenthaler, Germaine Richier, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Georges Vantongerloo

Curated by Tobia Bezzola and Taisse Grandi Venturi
In collaboration with Kunsthaus Zürich and the Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv

PRESS RELEASE
Lugano, 17 January 2024

Following on from the activities linked to the centenary of the birth of **Ernst Scheidegger** (Rorschach, 1923 - Zurich, 2016), MASI Lugano opens its 2024 exhibition season with a tribute to the Swiss artist who wrote a key chapter in the history of photography.

A photojournalist who worked for the renowned agency Magnum Photos and was a habitu  of the Parisian avant-garde art scene, Scheidegger is internationally renowned for his artist portraits - including his iconic shots of **Alberto Giacometti**, a lifelong friend. A multifaceted and multilayered figure, Scheidegger was also a painter, graphic designer, filmmaker and later a gallery owner and publisher.

The exhibition in MASI traces the career of this extraordinary figure, presenting more than one hundred images. These include a **numerous selection of previously unpublished early shots**, dated 1945 - 1955, and his famous **artist portraits**, commissioned from the mid-1950s onwards. The exhibition highlights how the social focus and poetic, experimental approach that can be seen in his youthful works evolves into the light, clear, elegantly curated compositions of the artist portraits that made Scheidegger famous.

The "Eye to Eye" encounter between Scheidegger and the big names of 20th century art is explored **in a spontaneous dialogue between the photographic portraits and a selection of important works** by the artists themselves. A separate section, which links these two elements, is devoted to his close bond with Alberto Giacometti. The show also includes the well-known short film 'Alberto Giacometti', that Scheidegger made between 1964 and 1966, in collaboration with Peter M nger.

"Eye to Eye": the layout of the exhibition

The show opens with Scheidegger's early works, with their strong contrasts, unusual angles and a relaxed use of focus. These private shots, taken in black and white with a Rolleiflex camera, were captured during his travels around Switzerland, Italy, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. From Belgrade to Montecassino, from the Verzasca Valley to Paris, the images **immortalise the people of a continent ravaged by war**, but also eager to get back on its feet: abandoned shipyards; the ingenuous gaze of children in orphanages and juvenile prisons; stories of humans desperate to start living again, pouring out onto the streets.

Scheidegger's focus in this period was on people and everyday life, and he captures both with a poetic touch, displaying a keen interest in social issues and appearing to leave behind the lessons on object photography he learnt at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich. As **Tobia Bezzola** writes in the catalogue, his is a repertoire "that takes in **many of the classic themes of post-war photographic and cinematographic neo-realism**: the glare of stage lighting on the faces of circus performers and clowns, the cheap thrills of funfairs and fetes, the noise and bustle of the cities of southern Europe, street children, the Salvation Army, festivals, workers' demonstrations".

From the **hubbub of the streets to the hush of the artists' studios**: Scheidegger's career followed an interesting path, and before long it crossed that of **Alberto Giacometti**, who he had met during military service in the Engadin in 1943. His close bond with the artist is documented in a series of rare **vintage prints** presented in a dedicated room.

The photographs, taken during various encounters, both in Stampa and Maloja in the Bregaglia Valley in the Engadin, and in Giacometti's studio in Montparnasse in Paris, show private moments, captured from unusual angles, which evoke the period they were taken in.

The bond that formed between the artist and the photographer also allowed Scheidegger to get some iconic shots, not least one of the few frontal portraits of Giacometti, which was later used on the Swiss 100 franc banknote. In a sort of mise en abyme between painting and photography, the exhibition also presents **a portrait of Scheidegger painted by Giacometti** around 1959.

Giacometti was not the only artist Scheidegger connected with: in the French capital, he began to frequent the avant-garde art and literary scene and take portraits of artists for journals and books. From Joan Miró to Salvador Dalí, Max Bill and Marc Chagall, the exhibition is a roll call of major 20th century artists captured by Scheidegger's lens. **Rarely posed, never forced, all of the artists are portrayed in their own environment** - at the easel or drawing table, like Verena Loewensberg, or in the studio, like Germane Richier; creators at work. Scheidegger's photography does not set out to celebrate his medium, but rather places itself **at the service of art**. His gaze is calm and composed, and **always discreet**. This level of care and attention does not always belie an intimate connection with the subject: while Salvador Dalí seems to have been taken slightly by surprise, and wears a faintly ironic, amused expression, the photographs of Le Corbusier and Cuno Amiet have the more detached look of commissioned portraits. That of Sophie Taeuber-Arp, on the other hand, is the portrait of an absence: following her early death, Scheidegger photographed her empty studio.

Thanks to a skilful use of lighting and composition, Scheidegger's portraits also take in the artists' studios and the objects around them, revealing something of their **creative process**. This broader viewpoint is echoed in the show, which also features a series of works by the artists themselves. Represented two-fold, the leading lights of 20th century art history stand out in this tribute to an

eclectic artist who was also part of their stories, and always saw **his portraits as a joint undertaking**.

On the occasion of the exhibition, in October 2023 the book 'Ernst Scheidegger. Photographer' was published, with texts by Tobia Bezzola, Philippe Büttner, Alessa Widmer and Helene Grob. German and English edition Scheidegger & Spiess, Italian edition Edizioni Casagrande Bellinzona

Save the date: at 11 AM on Sunday 18th February 2024, Tobia Bezzola, director of MASI and curator of the exhibition, will be presenting the book "Il tempo passa troppo presto. Lettere alla famiglia" (Time Passes too Soon. Letters to the Family) in conversation with Casimiro Di Crescenzo, art historian and editor of the book, which, for the first time, gathers a large selection of the letters Giacometti sent to his family in the Bregaglia Valley, in the original Italian version.

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Exhibition venues

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Press images

01.
Ernst Scheidegger
Children in southern Italy
ca. 1948
© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,
Zürich



02.
Ernst Scheidegger
Man and girl, Verzasca Valley
ca. 1955
© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,
Zürich



03.
Ernst Scheidegger
Man with balloons
probably late 1940s
© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,
Zürich



04.

Ernst Scheidegger

Woman with a tuba in front of the big top
ca. 1949

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05.

Ernst Scheidegger

Game of ice hockey on a frozen lake
early 1960s

© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,
Zürich



06.

Ernst Scheidegger

Installation of the plaster prototype of Max Bill's
Kontinuität sculpture, Zurich

1947

© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,
Zürich; 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich



07.

Ernst Scheidegger
Ballet dancer at Madame Rousanne's ballet
studio, Paris
ca. 1955
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Zürich; 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich



08.

Ernst Scheidegger
Max Bill teaching form at the Schule für
Gestaltung, Zurich
ca. 1946
© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,
Zürich; 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich



09.

Ernst Scheidegger
Salvador Dalí in his studio in Portlligat
ca. 1955
© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,
Zürich; 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich



10.

Ernst Scheidegger

Alberto Giacometti paints Isaku Yanaihara in his
Paris studio

1959

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Zürich; works Alberto Giacometti ©

Succession Alberto Giacometti / 2024,

ProLitteris Zurich



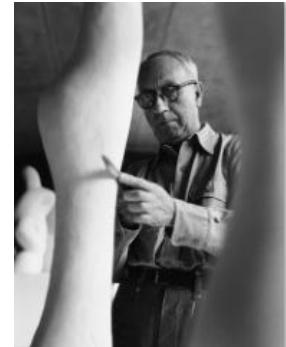
11.

Ernst Scheidegger

Hans Arp in his studio in Meudon near Paris
ca. 1956

© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,

Zürich; 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich



12.

Ernst Scheidegger

Fritz Glarner in his Paris studio

ca. 1955

© 2024 Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv,

Zürich; 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich



13.

Alberto Giacometti

Portrait Ernst Scheidegger

ca. 1959

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich, 2017

© Succession Alberto Giacometti / 2024,

ProLitteris, Zurich



14.

Salvador Dalí

La tour

1936

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich, 2017 © Salvador Dalí,

Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí / 2024,

ProLitteris, Zurich



15.

Marc Chagall

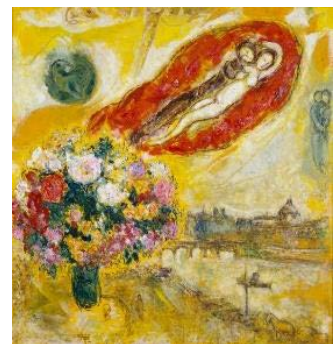
Au-dessus de Paris

1968

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich, 2017 © 2024, ProLitteris,

Zurich



16.

Sophie Tauber Arp

Geometric and Undulating

1941

Coloured pencil and graphite on paper

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Collezione

Cantone Ticino

