

Art: 2 Sculptors' Works Displayed

Alberto Giacometti at Matisse Gallery

By BRIAN O'DOHERTY

A CRITIC without prejudices is like a dog without a tail. He has nothing to wag. Unfortunately, I have some prejudices to wag today. For Alberto Giacometti usually leaves me unwarmed, and as a rule Dimitri Hadzi's work leaves me cold. Mr. Giacometti is showing at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, 41 East Fifty-seventh Street. Mr. Hadzi is showing at the Stephen Radich Gallery, 818 Madison Avenue. Both of them are exceptionally fine sculptors.

Mr. Giacometti is the Swiss artist-sculptor of plenteous talent and international reputation who has made a career out of asthenia. His sculptures are often as thoroughbred as a Borzoi hound, and as attenuated as a piece of stretched chewing gum. In this exhibition he is showing three huge standing figures, a number of cadaverous, emaciated portraits in bronze, and some magical paintings of faces.

His compass, like Modigliani's is very narrow. In the paintings he confines himself to a strict frontality of pose, but the magical intensity of these portrait heads is remarkable. In one series of five, a head goes through a fascinating series of phases and developments. Trickle of black and white writing wind like ribbons around one head so that it becomes mummified and immured; another achieves, with startling vividness, the hypnotic stare of a Fayum portrait. In another the canvas becomes a palimpsest on which the face is smudged and lost. Through such simple means he isolates moments of psychological revelation, as if the skin had been stripped from the face.



"Diego," a bronze from an exhibition of the work of Alberto Giacometti, at the Pierre Matisse Gallery.

leaving the nerves bare. Like a crevasse, this art is narrow, but deep.

The portrait busts reproduce the scores, incisions, and etchings of the painted heads. In the sculptures, the heads, occasionally bald, emerge from under the crust of the collars like turtles from under their shells. Giacometti has a delightfully fluid way of suggesting features and expressions, and this alertness of expression, together with the pinched and lively surface of his bronze, contrasts piquantly with the rigidity of the pose. Within the limits of his style, he can, in these paintings and sculptures, investigate the vast encyclopedia of human physiognomy.

The large matchstick figures—one of them is a nine-foot-high woman standing rather brokenly at attention—occupy an area somewhere between alert pathos and an

Dimitri Hadzi Exhibit Seen at Radich's

armature. Though some have been willing to support them with a distinguished prehistoric ancestry, even with that aid, in my opinion, they don't stand up. I think also that Mr. Giacometti is too well-endowed by nature to exploit the inventions that he has made so fatally fashionable.

Dimitri Hadzi, showing at Radich's, is a major talent. He is a very thoughtful sculptor, and his work displaces space with the authority and logic of great conviction. His pieces have a remote air about them as if they were descended from some cyclopean conflict. The titles include the trappings of war, "Shield" and "Helmet," and a few proper names that ring sonorously with associations, "Thermopylae" and "Marathon."

The shapes of his sculptures are vaguely preclassical. Many are elevated on one, two or three feet, and are excellently balanced, like a big-chested, spindle-legged athlete of the Ronnie Delaney type. "Shield" is raised on three legs running up into a climbing complex of horizontals that eventually rise to support two shields pointing blunt projections toward each other. Since Mr. Hadzi is a careful worker with planned objectives, it is a thoroughly sculptural conception that draws one around it to display its integrity from every angle.

His other works hint at themes of power and conflict before they are overwhelmed and somewhat deadened by their formal existence. It is this that tends to isolate Mr. Hadzi's sculptures from the emotions. They seem more intent on solving formal problems to the detriment of, rather than to aid, communication.