

## Bruno Giacometti

Bruno Giacometti, who has died aged 104, was the last surviving member of a notable family of artists and sculptors — among them his brother Alberto Giacometti — but chose to follow a different vocation, becoming a leading architect in Switzerland.



The Giacometti family, with Bruno (on his father's knee), Alberto (left) and Diego (front, seated)

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The youngest of four children, Bruno Giacometti was born on August 24 1907 at Stampa, a hamlet in Bregaglia, a small and at that time undeveloped Italian-speaking valley in the Swiss canton of Graubünden. His father, Giovanni (1868-1933), was a “Swiss colourist” landscape and portrait painter of some repute; his cousin and neighbour, Augusto Giacometti, was also a prominent artist. His brothers Alberto and Diego were, respectively, six and five years older than him.

The Giacometti children grew up with no electricity or running water. Transportation was by stagecoach. The fastest way to Chur, the capital of the region, was by foot over the Septimer, an old Roman pass. If those making the journey did not beat the first snow, they were usually not found until the next spring.

The principal crop of the Bregaglia valley was hay, and the Giacomettis, like other boys in the village, helped to bring in the harvest. In a 1912 painting by Giovanni, the family is depicted clustered around a thick wooden table in the family living room under a low-hanging wrought-iron lamp, reading, drawing, crocheting.

The firstborn, Alberto, was his parents' favourite. Celebrated in later life for his etiolated bronze sculptures of men and women, his artistic destiny was clear from an early age, and his parents did everything they could to encourage him. A drawing, dating from 1913, when Alberto was just 12, shows Diego and Bruno asleep in bed. His first bust, made a year later, was of Diego, who would become his lifelong assistant (while carving out his own reputation as a furniture designer), and whose head Alberto would portray again and again.

Bruno, though, proved a more difficult proposition, and would recall an occasion in 1915, when he was just eight years old, when Alberto decided to attempt to capture him in clay: "He had an old, rather rusty pair of compasses that he used to measure my head," he said. "I was scared whenever he came near my eyes with the points. It seemed to me as though he wanted to gouge them out."

When Bruno sought refuge with his mother, Annetta, a furious Alberto and his compasses in hot pursuit, she "took the artist's side". It probably came as something of a relief when, in 1919, Alberto entered Geneva's School of Fine Arts and subsequently moved to Paris, where he was joined by Diego. Bruno went on to train as an architect at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, studying under the modernists Otto Salvisberg and Karl Moser.

In 1930 he joined the Zurich architectural practice of Karl Egender, where he worked for 10 years before going freelance, designing, among other projects, the plans for Zurich's Hallenstadion (1939), now a venue for sporting events and concerts.

After the war, he conceived his best-known work — the Swiss pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1952 — and worked on many other projects, mainly in the Swiss cantons of Zurich and Graubünden. Bruno Giacometti's style was an unfussy modernism that placed more emphasis on functionality than shape.

Alongside his architectural practice, Bruno collaborated in staging art exhibitions, particularly those of the works of his brother Alberto, and, after Alberto's death in 1966, he worked to preserve his artistic legacy, donating many works to the Alberto Giacometti Foundation in Zurich and to other museums.

He married, in 1935, Odette Duperret, who died in 2007.

## **Bruno Giacometti, born August 24 1907, died March 21 2012**

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