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The Giacometti show supported by Credit Suisse is part of a unique tie-up with SAM, reports **PARVATHI NAYAR**

SUPPORT of the arts doesn't come and go with market volatility," says Credit Suisse's Dr Francois Monnet, managing director, head of private banking South-east Asia and Australasia. Talking about the impact of the current financial crisis on the bank's ongoing arts sponsorship in Singapore – which primarily focuses on visual arts – he promises theirs is "a long-term play".

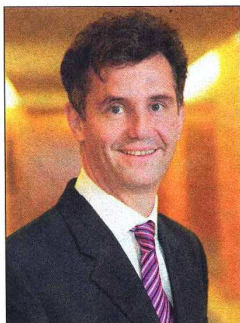
Seeing Feeling Being: Alberto Giacometti, which opened at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) yesterday, is one of the exhibitions supported by Credit Suisse in a unique three-year partnership with SAM, making them the museum's first ever long-term corporate sponsor.

"Innovation in arts – the title of our SAM collaboration – is very close to our corporate ethos, and our 'tradition to innovate' brand message," he says.

The sponsorship is a high six-figure sum but Dr Monnet declines to share the exact amount, preferring to emphasise how the bank's partnership can access "the sort of memorable moments that just money can't buy".

With the Giacometti show, the value-add would include flying down Marco Giacometti, from the family of the great man himself, or getting 100 key clients into the Museum for a unique preview – that also included the special flavours of Swiss foods.

"Adding additional flavour to the cultural life in Singapore," is how Dr Monnet describes bringing the works of Giacometti to Singapore.



Mr Monnet: Bringing in Giacometti's pieces adds additional flavour to the cultural life in S'pore

Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) is probably the most important Swiss artist of the 20th century. Sculptor, painter, draughtsman and printmaker, Giacometti is embedded in some of the most important artistic and philosophical debates of his time. He experimented with cubism and surrealism and was regarded as one of the leading surrealist sculptors.

Equally, he is part of the dialogue on abstraction/figuration, or phenomenology and existentialism, and the works of philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Franziska Lentzsch, exhibitions coordinator at Kunsthau Zurich and a representative of the Alberto Giacometti Foundation, who flew in for the show, describes the SAM exhibition as a "subtle" one.



It is a well-chosen adjective. Those expecting to see the lanky figures of contained power that Giacometti is famous for, are doomed to disappointment. While SAM showcases more than 100 works by the artist, the focus is on his two-dimensional works. And especially, the wonderfully emotive lithographs from the Paris Sans "in series, which was the artist's final record of the places in the city where he lived and worked.

There are also a few excellent

drawings in the show. These can be studied to understand the artist's energetic working style and the way he viewed his subjects, who are depicted using multiple, repeated lines.

If these lines suggest how the energy flows and collides, they also reveal him to be worrying at the shapes of what he was seeing. It's a reminder of how Giacometti has said in his later years that he saw the things of the world in a perpetual state of oscillation between being and not-being.

The sculptural works on show here, however, are small scale, and few in number unfortunately. Perhaps most striking among the five on view is the *Man Crossing a Square*, which hints at the strength of Giacometti's thin men, and the effects created by seeing figures in deep space. As Giacometti once said: "When I see a head from a great distance, it ceases to be a sphere and becomes an extreme confusion falling down into the abyss."



Powerful: Most striking among 5 sculptural works on display here is perhaps 'Man Crossing a Square' (above). The show (left) focuses on the artist's two-dimensional art.

Terms like abyss, being and not-being all seem to refer to the existentialist musings of his day. While the debate continues whether Giacometti can be seen as an existentialist artist, there is no doubt his work is an expression of the thoughts ideas and anxieties of his era.

Kwok Kian Chow, director of SAM, also points out that Giacometti has inspired many artists after him – even in Singapore, where the practices of artists such as Victor Tan show an undeniable debt to the work of the Swiss icon. Also on show at SAM are a range of photographs of the artist at work by Ernst Scheidegger.

For those who have experienced the impact of Giacometti's sculptures – perhaps in their youth – the current show is useful in revealing an aspect of the artist's *oeuvre* that can sometimes be overlooked: his mastery of the line on a two-dimensional surface. But for those who haven't encountered Giacometti before, hopefully, what's on show will be an encouragement to seek out the real power of his large sculptural works as well.

Seeing Feeling Being: Alberto Giacometti, from May 1 to June 15, at SAM