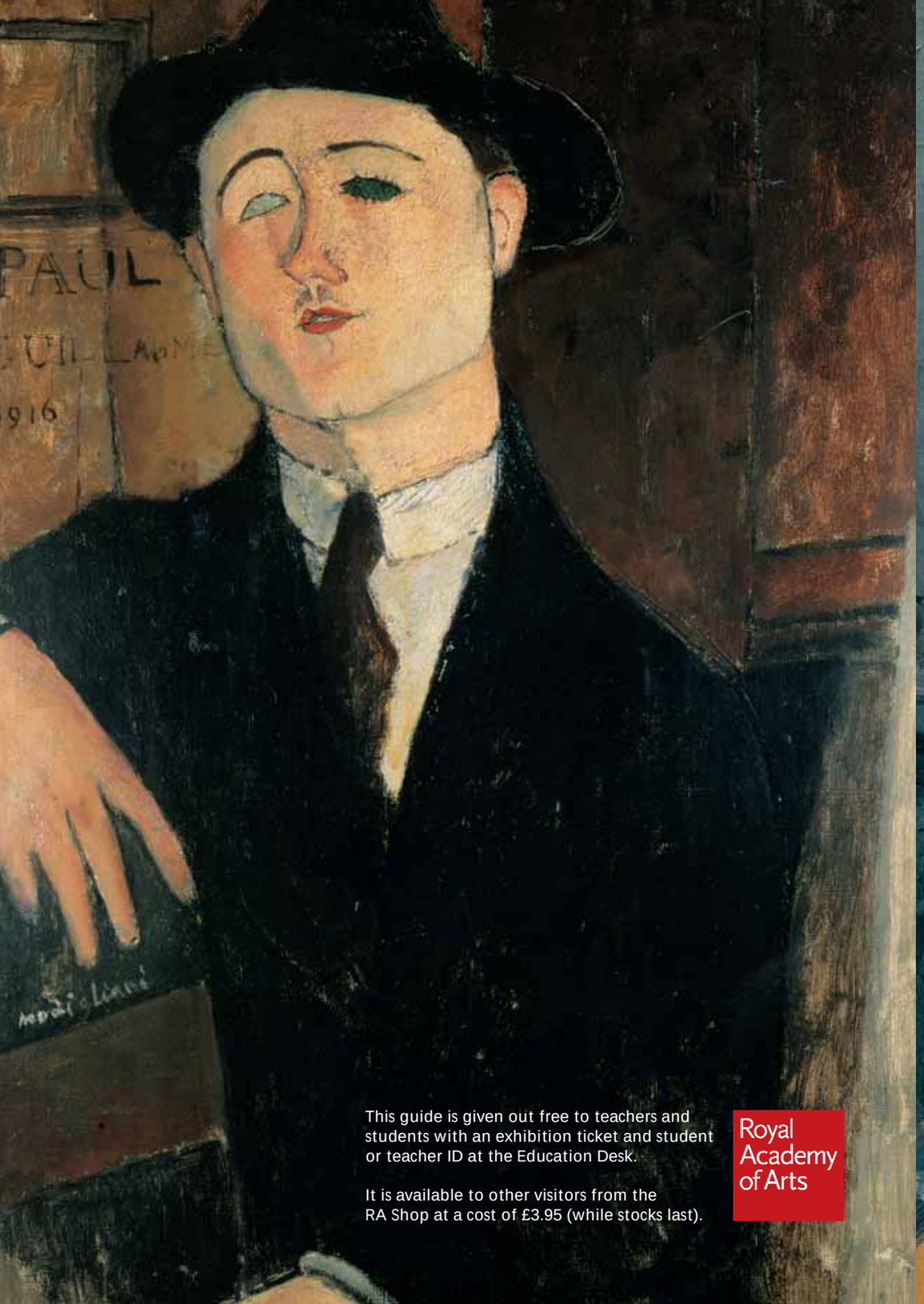

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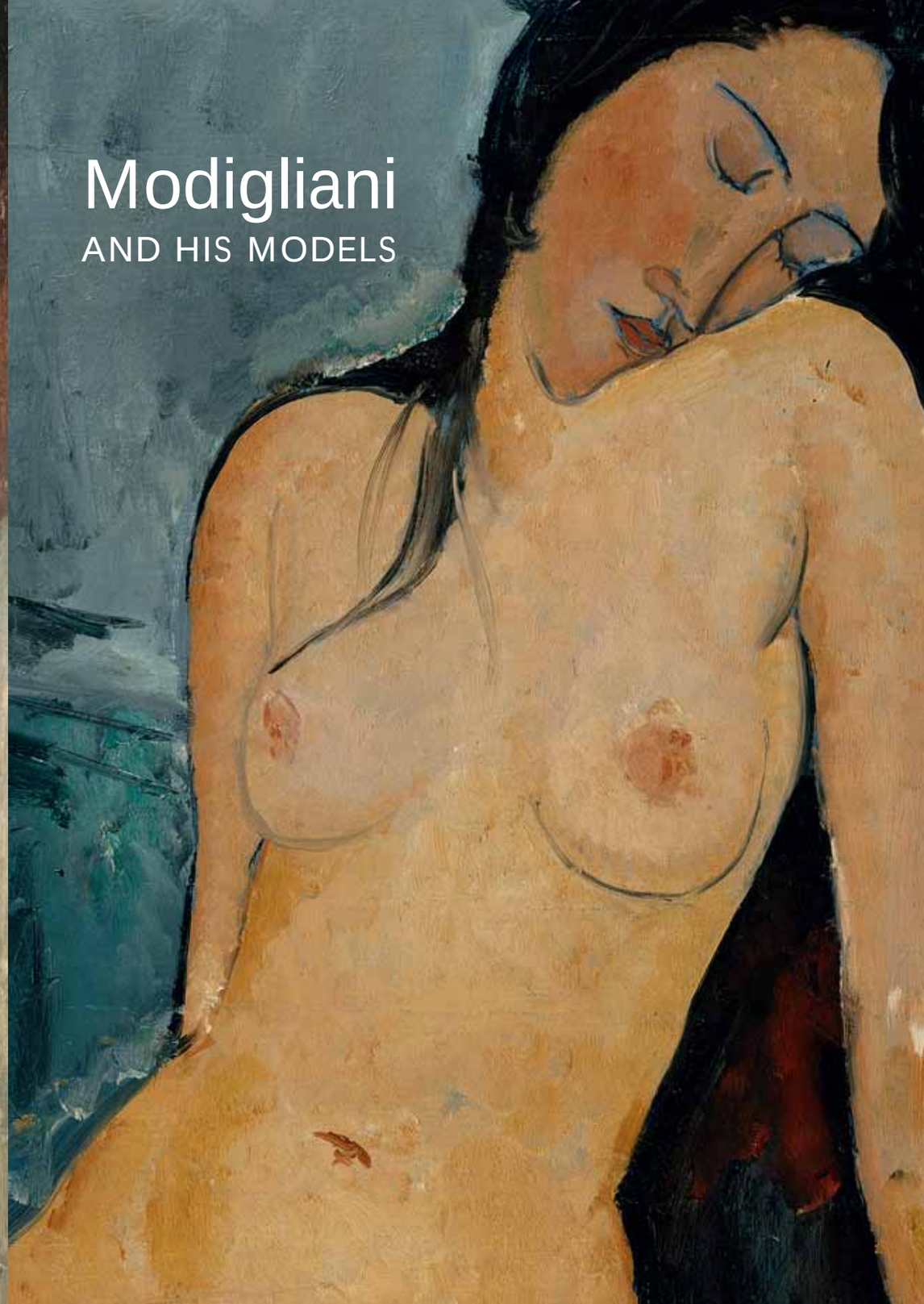
Royal Academy of Arts

Modigliani

AND HIS MODELS



Modigliani
AND HIS MODELS

Sackler Galleries 8 July–15 October 2006

An Introduction
to the Exhibition
for Teachers and Students

Written by Lindsay Rothwell
Education Department

FRONT COVER
Detail of Cat. 14
Female Nude, *c.*1916
The Samuel Courtauld Trust, Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London

BACK COVER
Detail of Cat. 13
Paul Guillaume Seated, 1916
Civico Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan

Designed by Isambard Thomas, London
Printed by Burlington

Royal Academy of Arts

'I am ... trying to formulate, with the greatest lucidity, the truths of art and life I have discovered scattered among the beauties of Rome. As their inner meaning becomes clear to me, I will seek to reveal and to rearrange their composition, in order to create out of it my truth of life, beauty and art.'
AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, 1901

INTRODUCTION

The funeral of Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920) at the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris was attended by the elite and notorious of the Parisian art world, including Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) and André Derain (1880–1954), amongst hundreds of others. The price of Modigliani's art increased tenfold almost overnight, and collectors reportedly solicited mourners for his paintings and drawings even as the cortège progressed along the funeral route. Montparnasse policemen, the very same who had repeatedly arrested him during his many nights of drunken and drug-addled debauchery, lined the streets of the procession, paying their respects to the dead artist and allegedly trying to acquire his work for themselves. Picasso remarked, not without irony, 'Do you see? Now he is avenged.'

Only an extraordinary life and body of work could have produced such fanfare and spectacle at its premature end. Stories abound about Modigliani's excessive entanglement with women, drugs and alcohol, and coupled with myriad posthumous written accounts of his life, they have created a mythology that makes separating the fiction from the fact of his life nearly impossible. The major focus of his work, and the emphasis of this exhibition, is on portraits, generally of his friends, contemporaries and mistresses. These bear strong likeness to their subjects, yet they are unmistakably 'Modiglianis': stylised, formalised and, for the most part, devoid of any analysis of the sitters. At a time when modernism, whose foundation was built on the autonomy of form and colour, was redefining art, and its followers deciding what art was to become, Modigliani stayed firmly tied to the past, as well as to his present, and created his iconic portraits with their elongated necks, oval faces and blank, almond-shaped eyes.

ITALY

Amedeo Clemente Modigliani was born in Livorno on 12 July 1884, the fourth child of a middle-class, intellectual, Sephardic Jewish family. His father Flaminio was of Roman descent and his mother, Eugenia Garsin, Marseillaise, with Tunisian and Spanish ancestry. She taught Amedeo impeccable French, and his background gave him a sophisticated cosmopolitanism that would later appeal to the Parisian art world. Modigliani's family were liberal-minded and unconventional, and although almost destitute at the time of his birth – bad business deals and failed commercial prospects had bankrupted both the Modigliani and Garsin families – all four children went on to achieve success as adults. Umberto became a mining engineer and Margherita a French teacher. Emmanuele, their eldest brother, had a brilliant law career, ultimately becoming leader of Italy's Socialist party and Mussolini's

nemesis. In 1898, at the age of 26, he was convicted of anarchy and imprisoned for six months.

Because of both families' financial ruin, they were forced to move in together, and Amedeo was home-schooled by his mother, who earned a small income for the family teaching English and French. Dedo, as Amedeo was affectionately known, became extremely close to his maternal grandfather, Isaac Garsin, who was well-read, highly educated and had a profound influence on Modigliani's character. Isaac took Dedo on his first museum visits and introduced him to literature, poetry and meditation. Because of Dedo's lack of schoolmates, Isaac was his closest childhood friend, and when he died in 1894, Amedeo suffered deeply. He remained a loner and nonconformist for the rest of his life, both personally and in his art, and the notion of being an outsider remained intrinsic to his nature and work.

Eventually the family's fortune increased somewhat and Modigliani was sent to the Ginnasio, where he studied classics but suffered his first attack of pleurisy. In 1898 he contracted typhoid fever and was severely ill for weeks. During his convalescence, his aunt Laura encouraged him to read, and he was introduced to Dante, who became a lifelong favourite and whose poetry he inscribed in several of his paintings.

The delirium passed, and for the next two years Modigliani attended the studio of the painter Guglielmo Micheli, himself a pupil of Giovanni Fattori, former leader of the Italian Impressionist movement. In 1900, however, Modigliani suffered a tubercular haemorrhage and became so extremely unwell that his doctors considered his chance of survival highly unlikely. Against their wishes, his mother took him to southern Italy to convalesce, and they visited Naples and Capri, making frequent visits to museums to see important works of ancient and classical art. In the years from 1910 until 1914, Modigliani would sculpt almost exclusively, and when his mother wrote to him in Paris, she addressed her letters to 'Amedeo Modigliani, scultore.' Their Italian tour proved immensely influential on him, and the legacy of early Etruscan, Cycladic and archaic Greek art are readily visible in his work, as this Cycladic marble figure clearly shows (fig. 1). Her triangular nose, perpendicular arms, globe breasts and long oval head are all signature characteristics of both his sculptural and painted work, as we will see in his caryatid paintings, nudes and portraits.

'The child's character is so unformed that I cannot say what I think of it. He behaves like a spoiled child, but he does not lack intelligence. We shall have to wait and see what is inside this chrysalis. Perhaps an artist?'
From the diary of Eugenia Garsin

Fig. 1
Cycladic female statue of the "canonical" type (Spedos variety)
Early Cycladic II period (2800–2300 BC)
N.P. Goulandris Foundation – Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens
N.P. Goulandris Collection, no. 724

In 1902, at the age of 17, Modigliani enrolled at the Scuola libera di Nudo (Free School of the Nude) of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, and he often visited the Pitti Palace and the Uffizi. His passion for making art was absolute, and he wrote to his Livorno friend and fellow artist Oscar Ghiglia of 'his total dedication to the supreme vocation that drives [me] compulsively to paint, and to paint in joy'. Significantly he visited Carrara and began experimenting with stone carving, which was to be an overriding passion and influence throughout his life. Modigliani continued his classical training for the next three years, studying at the Scuola libera di Nudo in Venice before moving to Paris in early 1906.

MONTMARTRE

Paris in the early twentieth century was the thriving and cosmopolitan centre of the art world. The avant-garde were shaping art's future and immeasurably changing its purpose and direction. Modigliani first moved to Montmartre, the 18th arrondissement, and for a time lived and worked in a now-famous building called the Bateau-Lavoir – so named because of its resemblance to a boat of laundry women. His neighbours in the squalid apartment block were the future titans of the art and literary world, including painters Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris (1887–1927) and writer Max Jacob (1876–1944), who together experimented with and created modernism. Picasso – in partnership with George Braque (1882–1963) – invented Cubism allegedly in his Bateau-Lavoir studio and painted what is now one of the seminal works of modern art, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Modigliani may well have seen it and, if so, would certainly have been influenced by its African-inspired primitivism and the figures' mask-like eyes and long noses.

Fig. 2
Head of a Woman wearing a hat, 1907
William Young & Co., Boston, Massachusetts, USA / The Bridgeman Art Library

Before Cubism began to make its mark on his work, however, Modigliani was influenced by the paintings of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) and Edvard Munch (1863–1944). Toulouse-Lautrec in particular, with his clear outlines and sensuous forms, was one of the first artists Modigliani encountered in Paris, and his early paintings certainly reflect Lautrec's influence. *Head of a Woman with Hat* (fig. 2) is entirely Art Nouveau in style, with its fluid lines and organic shapes, and in no way does it hint at the strong geometry that would later emerge in his work.

The artist whom Modigliani most revered was Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), whose retrospective at the 1907 Salon des Indépendants affected him deeply, as it did his contemporaries. Like Cézanne, modern painters, and in particular the Cubists, were concerned primarily with the planes of an image, rather than its symbolic or allegorical meaning, and they experimented with deconstructing form through collage and assemblage. Modigliani was equally fascinated by planar space and volumetric separation, but he never deconstructed or shattered the human form; in fact quite the opposite. His work is constructive and informed by sculpture, even when realised on the two-dimensional plane of a canvas.

Cat. 2 Although this work is painted in oil on canvas, it conveys a strong impression of sculpted stone. This painting primarily depicts form; the volumes that make up the caryatid's figure are geometric and articulated. 'Caryatid' comes from the Greek karyatides, the priestesses of Artemis at Caryae, and it means a sculpted female figure built to support entablature. This caryatid is certainly sculptural, but she is also fundamentally paradoxical. Her forearms, perpendicular to her biceps and mirroring the vertical axis of her body, support nothing. Modigliani's primary interest seems to be her figure and the shapes that form it. Her pose is merely an attitude and the rhythm of her body is interrupted. Each form is separated from its neighbour. The caryatids show Modigliani at his most fully abstracted and formalist.

Looking at this image, do you think it might have been influenced by Cézanne's instructions on depicting nature? If so, where can you see these influences?

Why do you think Modigliani has so clearly delineated the sections of her body? Why might he have kept the colour unified?

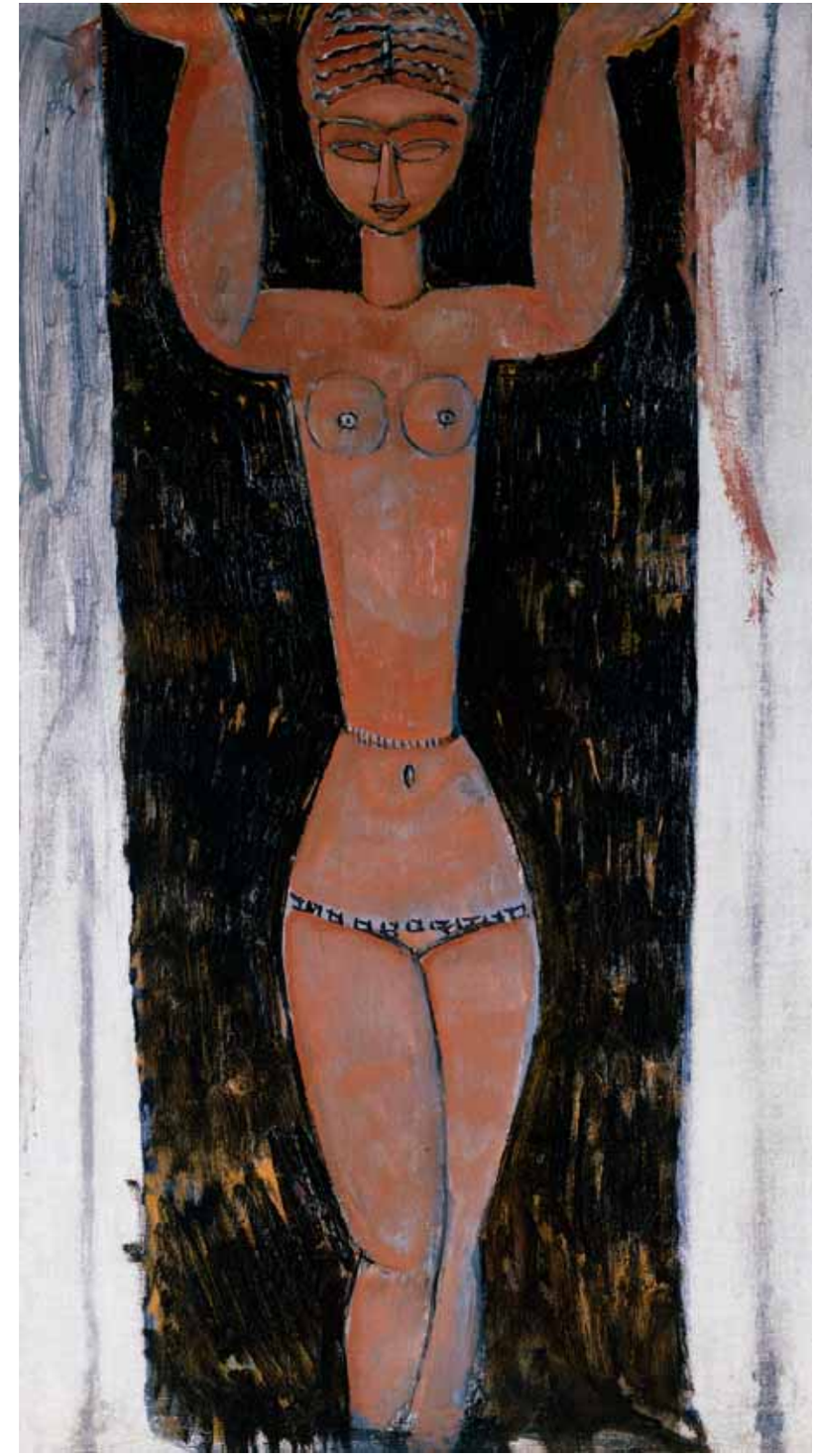
Does the painting tell you anything about feeling or expression, either the caryatid's or Modigliani's?

Look at the brushstrokes that make up the caryatid and those of the background. How and why do they differ?

Modigliani was passionate about sculpture and along with Cézanne's exhortations on geometry, sculpture exists as an intrinsic element in all of his work, regardless of medium. His early experimentations with limestone in Carrara had intrigued him, and his sculptural influences are numerous and varied, ranging from Classical, as we have seen with the Cycladic marble figure, to African carvings and masks from Zaire, Cameroon and Nigeria, to Asian. The influence of the ancient Khmer sculpture of Angkor Wat is extremely apparent in his work, and he

'Treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, the whole placed in perspective, so that each side of an object, of a plane, is directed towards a central point.'

PAUL CÉZANNE, 1904



Cat. 2
Caryatid, 1913
Oil on canvas
81 × 45 cm
Private collection
Photo: Roy Fox

would have encountered it at the Musée Guimet in Paris. Most of his sculptures are idol-like heads, and the one in this exhibition (*Head*, *c.*1911–12, cat. 1) is a prime example. It was given to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1922 and subsequently acquired by the Tate and is in fact the first Modigliani work to enter a public collection. None of Picasso's works were acquired by an English institution until 1930.

THE DELTA

In 1907, Modigliani met Paul Alexandre, a young Parisian doctor who became an early patron and for many years Modigliani's only collector. Alexandre rented a derelict house at 7 rue du Delta, near his Montmatre clinic. The house became known as 'the Delta' and Alexandre offered it as cheap studio space and accommodation to a colony of his artist friends. One day Modigliani arrived on foot with a very elegant friend, Maud Abrantès, and a car full of paintings, sketches and art supplies in tow. He and Alexandre formed a strong friendship which lasted until the doctor's deployment to the trenches of the First World War, after which they never saw one another again.

Another frequent Delta visitor was the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi, and in 1909 he and Modigliani were introduced by Alexandre. They became very close friends with much in common. Both artists worked in stone; Modigliani felt it the only sculptural medium worthy of pursuit. For him, Rodin's work with clay had sullied sculpture, and he referred to it as 'too much mud'. Brancusi's influence on Modigliani's work was profound, as can be seen in his *Sleeping Muse* (fig. 3), which has the same oval shape, volumetric nose and blank almond eyes as Modigliani's signature portraits. The angular and modelled nose is particularly important to both artists' concern with abstracting facial features, as it provides a strong vertical axis and a lack

Fig. 3
CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI, 1876–1957
Sleeping Muse I, 1909-10
Marble
17.2 × 27.6 × 21.2 cm
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966. Photo: Lee Stalsworth

of expressiveness that eyes and mouths rarely escape. However while Brancusi's work became increasingly modernist in its pursuit of abstract form, Modigliani was too attached to the human figure to ever fully abstract it. In 1914 Modigliani gave up sculpting and returned to painting, possibly due to the toll of the manual labour on his weak health, and he and Brancusi became estranged.

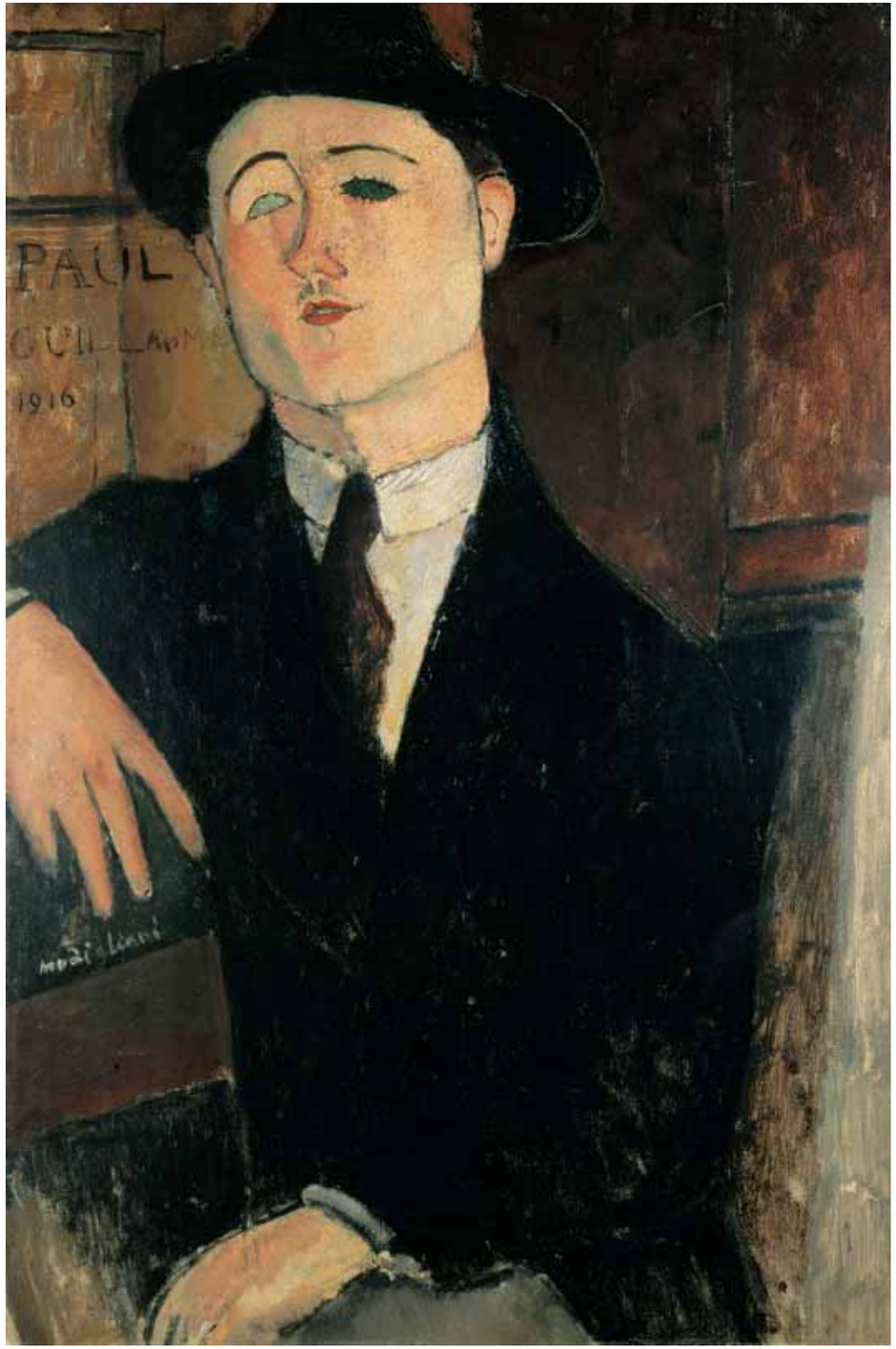
MONTPARNASSE AND THE ECOLE DE PARIS

If Paris was the artistic capital of the world, Montparnasse was its epicentre. The myth surrounding the city attracted myriad foreign artists and writers, many of whom were escaping the Jewish pogroms and seeking political refuge. The melting pot that ensued, most concentrated in Montparnasse, came to be seen as one of Paris's, and indeed France's, greatest artistic assets, and the artists themselves are now known as the Ecole de Paris. Many people saw innovation as allied to foreignness and the avant-garde as antithetical to the French academic tradition. However while the members of the Ecole de Paris knew one another well and influenced one another's work, it is important to remember that they did not have a specific collective style. The range of work and artistic movements they generated is great, and from them originated Cubism and Fauvism. Artists associated with the group include Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall (1887–1985), Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Chaïm Soutine (1894–1943), Tsuguharu Foujita (1886–1968) and Amedeo Modigliani, and his paintings from 1914 until 1916 are primarily portraits of his Montparnasse contemporaries and friends.

'Montparnasse was the first really international colony of artists we ever had. Because of its internationalism it was superior to Montmartre, Greenwich Village or Chelsea. The colourful but non-productive characters of Montparnasse often contributed greatly to the success of the creative group. Liquor is an important factor in stimulating the exchange of ideas between artists.'
MARCEL DUCHAMP, 1934

Cat. 13 Many of these young artists were represented by Paul Guillaume, a young and ambitious Parisian art dealer whose career as a tastemaker began with his dealings in African sculpture. African art heavily influenced both the young dealer and his modern coterie, already fascinated by 'primitivism'. From 1914 onwards, he represented Modigliani, who would undoubtedly have encountered three-dimensional African art at Guillaume's gallery. The collection of work that Guillaume amassed over the course of his life, including seminal works by André Derain, Paul Cézanne and Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) amongst countless others, was of such exquisite quality that on his death, his wife bequeathed it to the Musée de l'Orangerie where it is still housed in its entirety.

Modigliani's practice of inscribing paintings was probably Cubist in influence. Inscription was a device commonly used by other contemporary artists, such as Robert Delaunay (1885–1941) and Paul Klee (1879–1940). Decades earlier, Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) had transcribed letters onto their



Cat. 13
Paul Guillaume Seated, 1916
Oil on canvas
81 × 54 cm
Civico Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan
Photo: Saporetti Immagini d'Arte Snc, Milan

paintings, as had the ancient Egyptians thousands of years before. Modigliani was well aware of their practice; Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966), a Russian poet, would often accompany him to the Egyptian department of the Louvre and claimed that 'he used to rave about Egypt. Told me there was no point in seeing tout le reste'. In this painting Modigliani has painted his sitter with the trademark blank eyes that became one of his important stylistic elements. In this case, one eye is pale and the other dark, and its cross-hatched lines extend beyond the outline, creating a sinister, stitched-together feeling.

How do the inscriptions affect the plane of the painting? Inscribing Paul Guillaume's name flat on the painting's surface reinforces the lack of perspectival illusion – namely depth, space and distant background – and it blurs the line between the image and the actual physical object – the painting itself.

Why does Modigliani paint the eyes different colours? Might they be looking inwards as well as out at the world? If so, which eye is doing which?

Notice the angle in the tie and the way one shoulder hitches up while the other drops steeply down. What effect do the disjunctive and syncopated lines of the background create on the painting? And what do they say about Modigliani's impression of Paul Guillaume?

THE TRADITIONAL AND THE MODERN

A major paradox in Modigliani's painting is his almost exclusive tendency to make portraits of people he knew but his apparent disinterest in saying anything about them. He does not participate in any character analysis of his sitters and, in fact, depersonalises them most effectively by making their eyes blank. The subjects of his portraits thus make no eye contact with the viewer and become like objects. The sitter's gaze is removed and with it his or her psychology, making Modigliani's portraits function as if they were still lifes.

Although an important, well-liked and accepted member of the Parisian avant-garde, Modigliani remained, paradoxically, an outsider. He did not like academic debate or theoretical movements and was careful to distance himself from them while always remaining closely aware of their aims. The Cubists were concerned with deconstructing subjects and objects in painting, not with realistically representing them, and Modigliani's attachment to portraiture, a genre with strong historical ties, made him seem in some ways reactionary to other contemporary artists. However, to see Modigliani as old-fashioned

or ‘un-modern’ is inaccurate; his ability to create strong resemblances while simultaneously omitting information and simplifying shapes is thoroughly modern.

The Cubists strove to dismember and fragment natural objects and forms, and they were led in this pursuit by Picasso. Both Picasso and Modigliani had enormous personalities with reputations to match. In the years from 1914 until 1916, Modigliani was heavily influenced by the Cubists, and his relationship with Picasso was one of mutual admiration, yet slight coolness. They shared many mutual friends, including the poet Max Jacob, who sat for them both. They are, in fact, reputed to have shared a hashish dealer until the drug-induced death of a friend persuaded Picasso to stop. Artistically, Modigliani probably learnt from Picasso what the Spaniard called ‘how to do things wrong’.

Cat. 6 This portrait is recognisably Picasso – certainly his name across the top makes it unmistakably him – but the depiction of him is impersonal, characteristic of Modigliani’s portraiture. Unlike the vast majority of his paintings, both eyes are wide open with clearly defined irises, and their ebony colour matches the outline of the shirt, hair and inscribed name. The lettering is almost identical to what we now recognise as Picasso’s ubiquitous signature, although in 1915 it would not have yet enjoyed its contemporary fame. The first ‘s’ of ‘Picasso’ becomes a lock of hair, and the width and texture of the lettering mirror the lines of the collar, framing the face with two bold areas of dark brown. The word ‘savoir’, meaning ‘to know’ or ‘knowledge’, is inscribed above Picasso’s shoulder. Its handling is very different to the unruly thick letters of the signature. Instead its letters are small, elegant and seem almost carved into the surface of the paint, and their scale and subtlety reflect the lines of the facial features. This is a painting of the disembodied head of a great artist, accompanied by his name and an enigmatic word imbued with layers of meaning.

Cat. 6
Portrait of Picasso, 1915
Oil on board
34.2 × 26.3 cm
Private collection, Moscow

Why do you think Modigliani has chosen the word ‘savoir’ for this particular painting?

Why hasn’t he painted Picasso’s body?

Why has he painted the eyes not blank but with irises?

BEATRICE

As the First World War dawned, a debate raged around Cubism. Picasso was starting again to experiment with portraiture in an attempt to reconquer and redefine it. The ill-informed accused him of deserting modern art, although ultimately they were proven wrong. Beatrice Hastings, a South African poet and journalist and Modigliani’s mistress from 1914 until 1916, had not ingratiated herself with Picasso, having criticised the Douanier Rousseau’s (1844–1910) portraits of his wife and himself, two paintings of which Picasso was particularly fond. Hastings was the Paris correspondent of *The New Age*, a London-based magazine in which she published intimate details of the Parisian avant-garde and her relationship with Modigliani. As Picasso began again to experiment with portraiture, Hastings wrote on 28 January 1915, ‘By the way, Monsieur Picasso is painting a portrait of M. Max Jacob in a style the mere rumour of which is causing all the little men to begin to say that of course Cubism was very well in its way, but it was never more than an experiment. The style is rumoured to be all but photographic … I can’t imagine that Picasso is really doing that. I hope not.’

Beatrice Hastings’s opinion of Picasso’s rumoured new tack was presumably shared by Modigliani. He would most likely have viewed the change in style as regressive, and the couple would undoubtedly have discussed their views with one another. They were close, and

'[Beatrice] who shall be a light between truth and intellect.'
DANTE, *Purgatorio*, canto VI, line 45

Cat. 10
Beatrice Hastings in Checkered Shirt, 1916
Oil on canvas
65 × 46 cm
John C. Whitehead. Courtesy of Achim Moeller, New York

while their relationship was extremely tempestuous and increasingly violent, she was his intellectual counterpart and a perceptive commentator on modern art. Born in London and known as *la poetesse anglaise*, Hastings was opinionated and mercurial. She wrote of Modigliani that he was 'a complex character. A pig and a pearl … Despised everyone but Picasso and Max Jacob. Loathed Cocteau.' She was his primary model for two years, and with her capricious nature and eccentric love of hats, she embodied the spirit that Modigliani wanted to capture. Modigliani painted fourteen portraits of Beatrice Hastings throughout the course of their relationship, and the state of their affair can be traced through the changes in his depictions of her. In the early portraits, she appears serene and delicate, painted with an elongated neck and a symmetrical, heart-shaped face. In 1915 Modigliani painted a portrait of Beatrice and entitled it *Madam Pompadour* (Art Institute of Chicago), named after the mistress of Louis XV. Modigliani thus names Hastings as his mistress but also mockingly calls her 'a madam'. By 1916 Beatrice's portrayal seems distant, cold and aloof, and this depiction signals the impending death of their relationship.

Cat. 10 Sharp and angular lines demarcate Hastings's cheekbone, jaw and temple. They slice across her face, running parallel to one another and emphasising her implied haughtiness and prickliness. The murky grey-blue of the shadows are complementary to the warm pale pink colour of her skin, and they make her seem gaunt and empty. The diagonals are further emphasised by the brushstrokes in the background, which are the same colour and width as the hollows of her face and convene at her profile in a V-shape. The left line of her face creates a strong vertical axis with her neck down the centre of the painting, and her eyes are blank and dark.

What effect do the diagonal strokes have on the sense of the painting?

The mouth and chin are almost in profile, but the eyes and forehead are in three-quarter view. How does this relate to the Cubists' dealings with abstracted form?

THE SHOCK OF THE NUDES

The sexual freedom of Montparnasse made the painted nude a popular genre and one which Léopold Zborowski, Modigliani's exclusive dealer from 1916 onwards, was able to sell with ease. Modigliani's reputation is dominated by his nudes, of which he painted thirty-five, and his name has become synonymous with them. While the portraits painted from 1914 until 1916 dealt primarily with formalism, the nudes are more

free and less structured, and the relaxation of his ordered style started to become apparent.

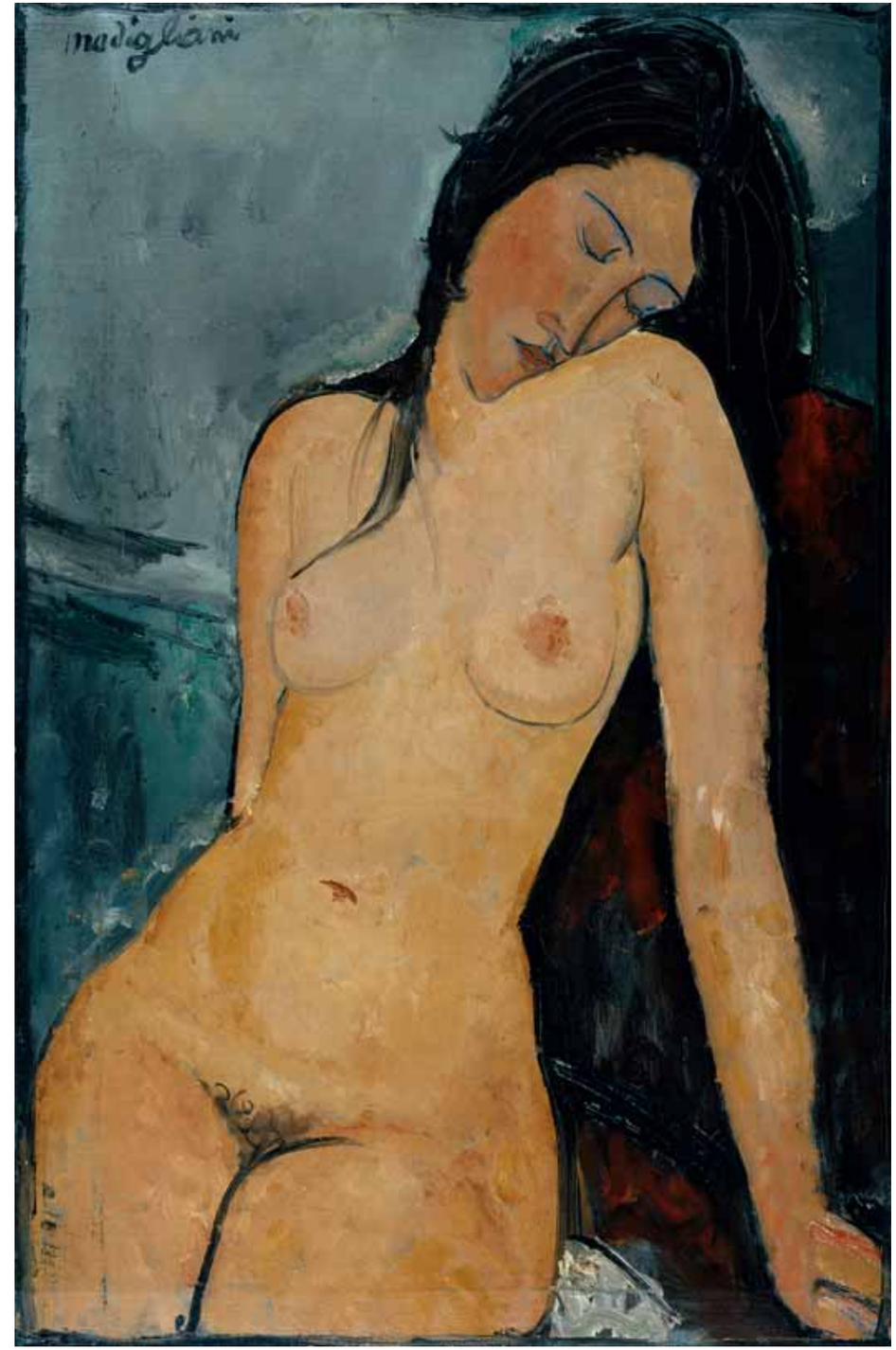
Modigliani's nudes were shocking in their time although their depiction is relatively matter-of-fact. The genre of the nude plays a vast and important role in art history; for centuries its erotic force was masked by its allegorical function. Modigliani's nudes, however, lack any kind of mythology, context or moral lesson. This modernist approach perhaps contains an element of why they caused so much offence. Unlike the nudes of Titian (*c.*1487–1576) or Edouard Manet (1832–1883), the women in Modigliani's paintings do not recline in a middle distance but fully occupy the canvas upfront, in extreme close-up to the viewer's face. Modigliani's nudes are about naked women and nothing more, and they languish unashamedly and unapologetically across the entire canvas.

The only solo show held within Modigliani's lifetime was at the Galerie Berthe Weill on the rue Taitbout. It featured a number of voluptuous nudes, and within hours of its installation, the Chief Constable insisted they all be removed. When Weill tried to petition for their amnesty and asked what in particular was wrong with them, the policeman allegedly stuttered, 'With the nudes! They've got p-p-p-pubic hair!'

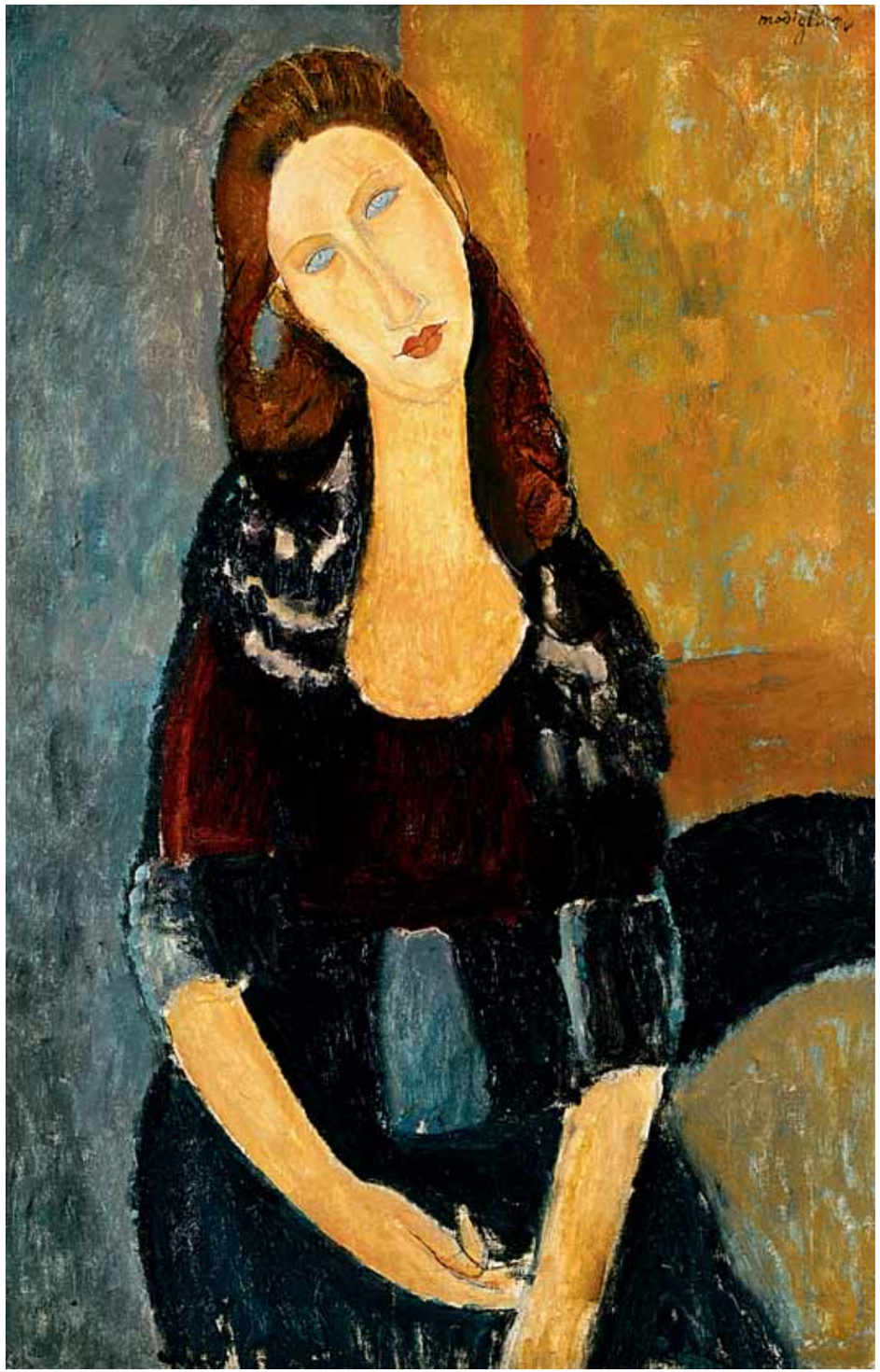
Cat. 14 Modigliani's utmost goal was to give his paintings 'a tight skin of paint', and he seems to have achieved that with this early nude. Her legs extend beyond the canvas and because she exists in the very foreground of the painting, her pelvis, thighs and pubic hair are foremost and unavoidable. Her head droops and her eyes are closed, and while her pose hints at earlier formalist concerns, she is primarily relaxed and natural. Unlike many of Modigliani's nudes, her body is individual; most of his other nude models have very similar figures. The background consists of large, cool areas of teal and grey that contrast strongly with the warm apricot and orange of her flesh. The finer details of her face are picked out in turquoise and her face is flushed orangey-red. Her outline is strong and clear and like all of Modigliani's nudes, she seems almost cut out and pasted onto the background. Also characteristic of his nudes is the lack of compositional or contextualising objects in the painting; the woman is, quite simply, the image.

What techniques has Modigliani used to paint her hair and how do they differ from the depiction of the pubic hair?

What effect do the woman's closed eyes have on the portrait? If she is aware of our gaze how does that make us feel?



Cat. 14
Female Nude, *c.*1916
Oil on canvas
92.4 × 59.8 cm
The Samuel Courtauld Trust, Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London



‘When he was working [he] sometimes talked to himself or recited poetry that he knew by heart, always in Italian. Above all he recited Dante, a pocket edition of whose ‘Divine Comedy’ he always carried with him.’

PAULETTE JOURDAIN,
Modigliani vivo, 1981

Cat. 39
Jeanne Hébuterne Sitting, 1918
Oil on canvas
92 × 60 cm
Private collection, Switzerland

Modigliani’s nudes are yet another means with which he straddles the divide between traditional and modern art. His work is often likened to mannerism, a name given to art from the sixteenth century that deliberately broke the rules of classical art and was neither High Renaissance nor Baroque. Mannerist painters depicted the human figure in strained, elongated poses and often favoured ‘shot’ colours, as in shot silk. Modigliani would have known the mannerist painting *Madonna with the Long Neck* (1534–40) by Parmigianino (1503–1540) well from his numerous visits to the Uffizi. He hung Italian old master prints on the walls of his Paris studio and particularly loved the work of Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), Titian (*c.*1487–1576) and Antonio Correggio (*c.*1489–1534). Both Parmigianino’s *Madonna* and Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (*c.*1475, Galeria degli Uffizi) have famously long, exaggerated necks and while they may not have been direct influences, Modigliani would certainly have been aware of the similarities between his portraits and the mannerist masterpieces.

JEANNE HEBUTERNE

In 1917 Modigliani met Jeanne Hébuterne, a young art student with a graceful figure, placid composure and long, auburn hair. Her look appealed to his aesthetic, and the portraits he painted of her exemplify his mannerist tendencies. She moved in with him shortly after they met, and they became devoted companions for the rest of their lives, although their relationship primarily consisted of Modigliani’s spiralling descent into alcoholism and Jeanne’s unwavering commitment to him. She was the mother of his daughter, Jeanne Modigliani, who wrote one of his many biographies in an attempt to dispel his mythology. Hébuterne’s artistic capabilities were finally acknowledged in their own right in 2000 as part of a Modigliani exhibition at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. Interestingly, Modigliani never painted Jeanne nude, and he may well have seen his love for her as redemptive.

Cat. 39 Only at this late stage of his short career do we see the attenuated limbs, oval face and almond-shaped eyes indicative of Modigliani’s signature style. Jeanne’s gracefulness and patience are emphasised not only by the long swanlike neck and elegant tilt of her head, but by the sinuous S-shape that her body makes. The curvilinear edge of her head and shoulder are parallel to her arm, forming a large oval within the centre of the painting. A smaller oval is formed inside it by the apricot form of her face and neck, floating within the black of her dress and chestnut of her hair. Her hairline and neckline form the top and bottom edges of this little oval, and the overall effect is of symmetry and elegance.

How does the background play against the curvy and high-contrast handling of her figure?

Notice Jeanne's eyes and consider Modigliani's tendency to paint his sitters's eyes without pupils. Why do you think in this case he might have painted Jeanne with both irises and pupils?

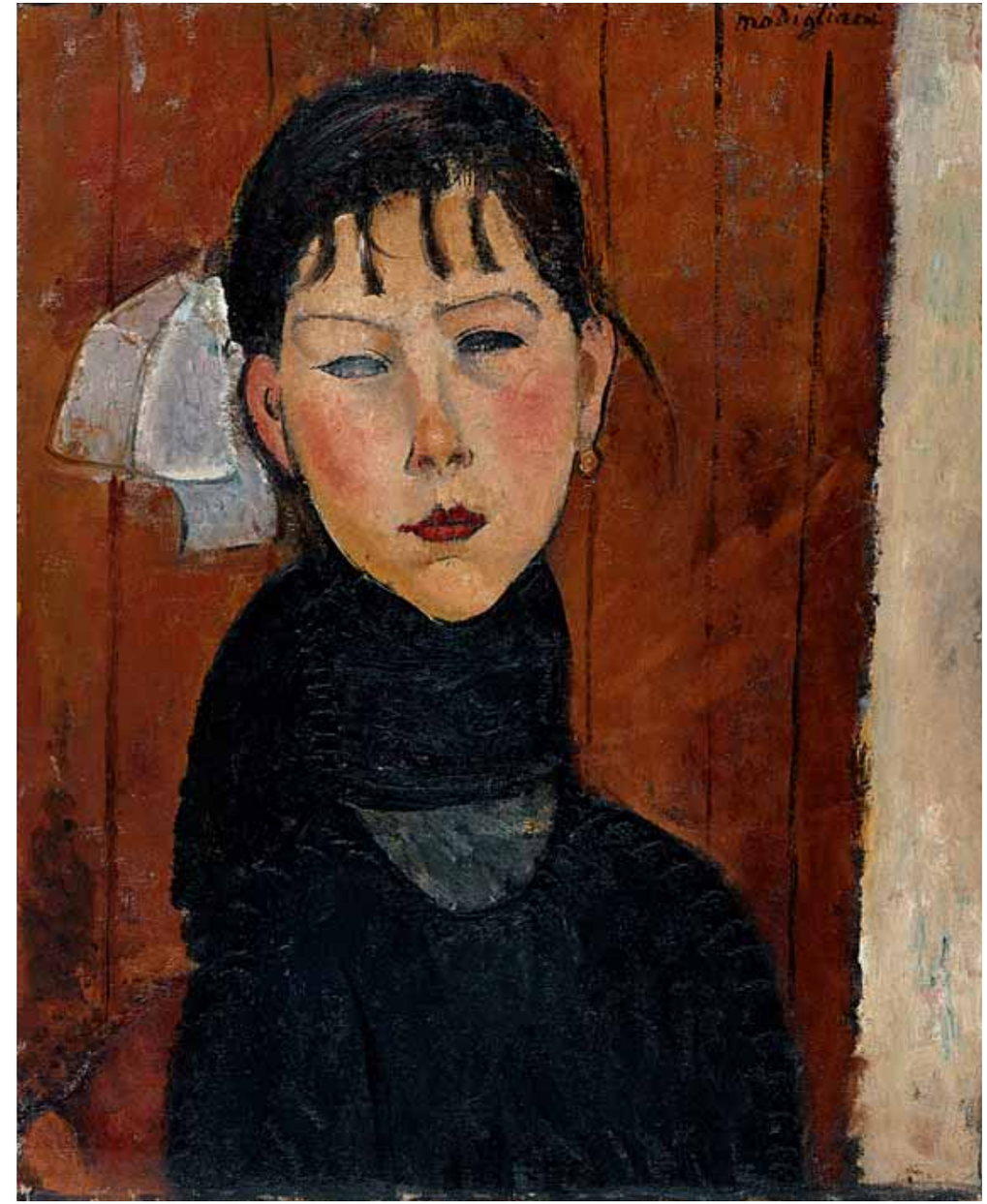
THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

In 1918 Léopold Zborowski and his companion Hanka moved to Cagnes and arranged for Chaïm Soutine, Foujita Tsuguharu and Modigliani and Jeanne to join them. Modigliani's health was deteriorating rapidly, and the Germans were shelling Paris. The Côte d'Azur offered respite from war, Paris's drizzly climate and urban debauchery. During his time in Provence, Modigliani painted local working-class people, as well as Jeanne, numerous times. His interest in painting people of a working-class background has little to do with social commentary but rather with a fascination with humankind. The influence of his revered Cézanne can again be felt, not only in style but in choice of subject matter.

Cat. 34 Modigliani's provincial portraits are not at all mannerist, unlike his other late paintings, although Marie does seem to have a rather elongated neck. The rosiness of her cheeks, lips and the tip of her nose echo the hotly coloured flesh of his nudes and make her seem full of vitality. The red wall behind her further emphasises the flush of youth, and the straight, vertical lines of the wood panels and door frame accentuates the sense of her sinuous grace. The bluey-reds of this painting are more vibrant than the earlier colours we have seen Modigliani use. The translucent and snowy white ribbon seems to flutter behind her black hair and further accentuates her youthfulness and lightness.

How does the portrait change if you cover one of the girl's eyes? And what is the effect of covering the other eye?

How does the semi-oval of blouse below her scarf function in the composition? Does it mirror any other shape within the image and why?



Cat. 34
Marie Daughter of the People, 1918
Oil on canvas
62 × 50.5 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Legacy of Dr. Walther Hanhart, Riehen, 1975
Photo: Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin Bühler

Cat. 51
Portrait of Lunia Czechowska, 1919
Oil on canvas
100 × 65 cm
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
Photo: © P.M.V.P / Photo/Joffre, Paris

'As an artist, a man has no home in Europe save Paris.'
MODIGLIANI, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche

THE FINAL STAGE

In 1919 Modigliani and Jeanne moved back to Paris. The move to Cagnes had not been a success and Modigliani's health and addiction had in fact worsened. Jeanne became pregnant again and some of the most poignant portraits of her are from this period. In the last years of his life, Modigliani painted oils, in his signature mannerist style, of the three important women in his life at this time: Jeanne, Hanka and Lunia Czechowska, a house-guest of the Zborowoskis. Léopold Zborowski was one of a new kind of art dealer known as a *marchand en appartement*. He represented Modigliani out of his apartment, rather than through a traditional gallery, and was a loyal friend to Modigliani, always trying to provide the artist with 15 francs a day.

Cat. 51 Lunia Czechowska was a house-guest of Léopold and Hanka Zborowski and lived in their Paris home while her husband was away at war. Lunia and Modigliani became extremely close friends and her sombre, elegant portraits reveal his admiration and respect for her.

Like the portrait of Jeanne Hébuterne on p.16, Lunia's body makes a graceful S-shape. The rounded V-neck of her yellow dress accentuates her sinuous length, as does the long curve of her fan. Notice the way the upper left-hand line of her fan follows the line of her neck, as the right side of the fan follows her shoulder and arm. The paleness of the cream, dove grey and apricot of her fan, neck and face stand out against the vivid gold of her dress and the claret wall. Her eyes are blank and small but the lids are proportionately quite big and further accentuated by the curve of the eyebrows.

How is Modigliani's depiction of Lunia different from his depiction of Jeanne? Although they are painted in similar positions, the overall effect is not the same.

How do the brushstrokes of the background, dress and bench compare to those of her face and fan? Why might they be rendered differently?

Cat. 52 Modigliani painted his final portraits in 1919. It was also the year in which he painted the only self-portrait of his career. Even while representing himself, Modigliani has painted the eyes his characteristic, distancing black. Maybe he is suggesting deep inner vision, or maybe he does not want to give away his innermost self to the viewer. His back is partly turned, further distancing the man in the image and the viewer watching him. The brushstrokes in this painting are short and quick and appear almost pointillist or Impressionist. However the painting has an air of stillness and transparency. Maybe Modigliani's

conscious motive for painting himself half turned away from the viewer, or for painting himself at all, is eulogistic. It was probably the last painting he ever made.

How do the colours and daubs of paint on the palette mirror the colours and brushstrokes elsewhere in the painting?

Why do you think Modigliani painted himself only once?

CONCLUSION

Modigliani died of tubercular meningitis on 24 January 1920. Two days later, Jeanne Hébuterne, nine months pregnant and grief-stricken, committed suicide by jumping from a fifth-storey window of her parents' home. Modigliani has come to represent the ultimate bohemian, and his tempestuous, torrid and short life story rivals those of Rodolphe and Mimi in Puccini's famous opera *La Bohème*. His death from consumption, like Mimi's, coupled with Jeanne's desperate suicide, has fuelled a mythology that seems to have cemented into fact. But the story of his life does not reflect the story of his art, which was measured, controlled and harmonious. Modigliani's influences span eras from the archaic to the ultra-modern and perhaps this is the key to his work. In an age alive with experimentation, he did not veer from his intended course, although he was unmistakably influenced by Cubism. His exclusive artistic concern was with painting people, yet he hardly ever made social or psychological comment on them. Separating the myth from the man seems to be impossible but maybe trying to do so is in fact irrelevant. Modigliani's art tells its own story, and although enigmatic, it is one of lofty aesthetic ideals and the objective pursuit of human beauty.

Cat. 52
Self-portrait, 1919
Oil on panel
100 × 64.5 cm
Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo
Photo: Nelson Kon

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