



Amedeo Modigliani A Brief Look

Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), Italian painter, draftsman and sculptor is acknowledged to be one of the major artists of his generation and one of a select group of artists whose works represent the birth of modern art. Modigliani achieved an extraordinary range of psychological interpretations of the human face, maintaining his individuality through his distinctive elongations of face or form.

Born July 12, 1884, into a Jewish family in the port town of Livorno near Pisa, Modigliani was the youngest of four children. Never physically strong, he was seriously ill several times during his youth. When he was 13 he began studying painting but his studies were often interrupted by illness. During visits to Naples, Capri, Amalfi, Rome, Florence, and Venice with his mother, he was exposed Italy's most important works of art.

In January 1906, Modigliani arrived in Paris, where, during the next few years, he experimented and struggled to find a personal style. He settled in Montmartre where he joined in artists' gatherings and enrolled at the Académie Colarossi. In 1907 he met the young doctor Paul Alexander, who became his first patron acquiring hundreds of drawings and paintings.

In late 1908 or early 1909 Modigliani moved to Montparnasse, a bohemian Paris neighborhood, and was introduced to the sculptor Constantin Brancusi. That meeting stimulated Modigliani's interest in sculpture and he concentrated on sculpture and related drawings for the next five years. Due to poor health he produced relatively few sculptures: about 27 carvings in stone are generally attributed to him, nine of which will be seen on this exhibition tour. During this period he began to assimilate non-European traditions such as African art into his work.

In 1914 Modigliani met Paul Guillaume, who became his dealer and is the subject of one of the portraits in the exhibition. He also began a stormy two-year relationship with Beatrice Hastings who is the subject of several portraits. Between 1914 and 1916 he completed portraits of his lovers, friends, and colleagues in Montparnasse. Picasso was a contemporary and friend of Modigliani and the artists exhibited together several times.

Among the paintings of his friends and colleagues that are included in the exhibition are *Jacques and Berthe Lipchitz*, 1916; *Portrait of Chaim Soutine*, 1915; and two portraits of artist and writer *Max Jacob* from 1916. He also painted many poignant portraits of children, giving them a nobility and presence never-before seen. His work was extremely autobiographical and provides the most striking evidence of his numerous contacts with the artistic and literary avant-garde in Paris.

In 1917 Modigliani met Jeanne Hébuterne and they lived together until his death. Their daughter was born in 1919. His portraits of Jeanne define his late, highly mannered style, in which the elongation of the neck is increasingly exaggerated. In many of these portraits Modigliani sympathetically captures the warmth and affection of his lover.

In December 1917 Modigliani had a one-person exhibition at the Galerie Berthe Weill, Paris that included his great series of reclining nudes; the exhibition was closed down by the police on the grounds of obscenity. These works continue the great tradition of the nude exemplified by great artists such as Giorgione, Titian, Goya, and Manet. Several nudes are included in the exhibition *Modigliani and the Artists of Montparnasse*.

Modigliani's health began to deteriorate in 1918 and he went to the south of France with Jeanne. Somewhat recovered, he returned to Paris the following year and completed several portraits. He died of tubercular meningitis, aggravated by drugs and alcohol, in a Paris hospital on January 24, 1920 and was buried at Père-Lachaise cemetery, a resting place reserved for famous and important people.

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Bibliography

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