



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI (1884-1920) A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY FOR TEACHERS

Amedeo Modigliani, 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 and form.

Born July 12, 1884 into a Jewish family in the port town of Livorno, Italy, Modigliani was the youngest of four children. Never physically strong, he was seriously ill several times during his youth. When he was thirteen he began to study painting, but his studies were often interrupted by illness. During visits to Naples, Capri, Rome, Florence, and Venice with his mother, he was exposed to many of 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 participated in artists' gatherings and enrolled in a private art academy. In 1907 he met the young doctor Paul Alexandre, who became his first patron and eventually acquired hundreds of drawings and paintings.

In late 1908 or early 1909 Modigliani moved to Montparnasse, a bohemian neighborhood in Paris. There he met Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi, who stimulated Modigliani's interest in sculpture. He concentrated on sculpture and related drawings for the next five years. Due to poor health he produced relatively few sculptures: only about twenty-seven carvings in stone are generally attributed to him. 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 art dealer. 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 friends, colleagues, and lovers in Montparnasse. His work was extremely autobiographical and provides the most striking evidence of his numerous contacts with the artistic and literary avant-garde in Paris. He also painted many poignant portraits of children, giving them a nobility and presence never-before seen.

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 the woman he loved.

Modigliani's work was shown at a number of galleries in Paris, often with that of other artists, such as his friend and contemporary, Pablo Picasso. In December 1917 Modigliani had a one-person exhibition at the Galerie Berthe Weill in Paris, which included his great series of reclining nudes; the exhibition was closed down by the police on the grounds of obscenity.

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. He was buried at Père-Lachaise cemetery, the final resting place of numerous famous and important people.

Bibliography:

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