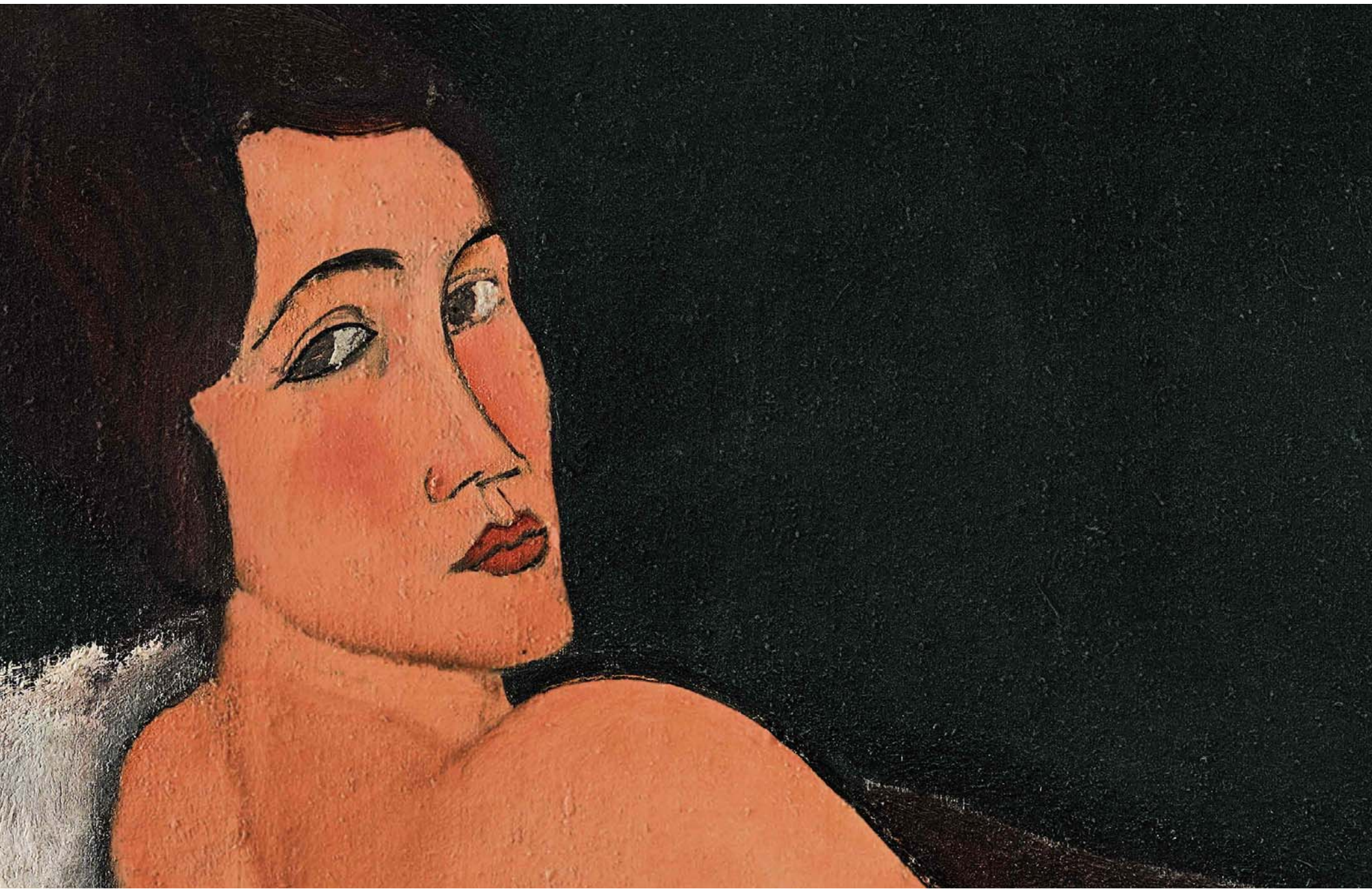




“There is only one painter of the modern nude.”

ANDRÉ SALMON

modigliani



18 ◉ ► AMEDEO
MODIGLIANI

1884 - 1920

Nu couché (sur le côté
gauche)

Signed Modigliani (lower left)
Oil on canvas
35¼ by 57¼ in.; 89.5 by 146.7 cm
Painted in 1917.

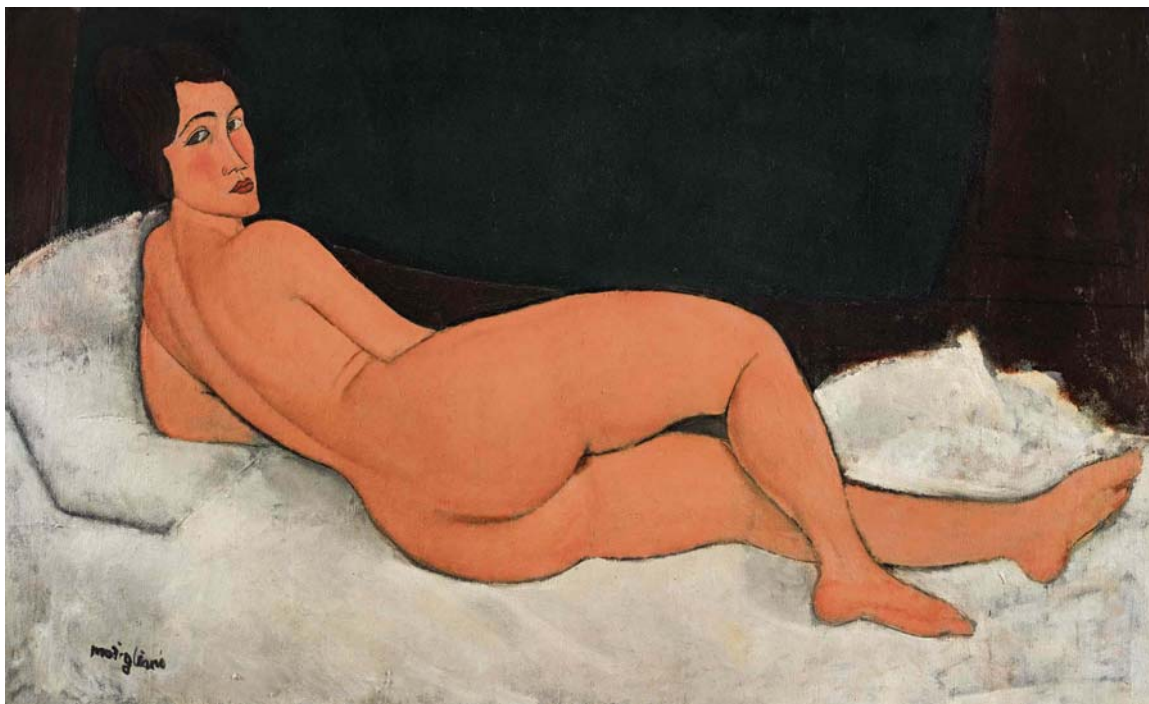
Estimate Upon Request

PROVENANCE

Léopold Zborowski, Paris (acquired from the
artist)
Jonas Netter, Paris (acquired by 1926)
Private Collection, Paris (by descent from the
above)
Private Collection, United States (acquired
from the above and sold: Christie's, New York,
November 4, 2003, lot 29)
Acquired at the above sale

EXHIBITED

Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Modigliani, 1933, no. 15 (titled *Grand nu couché* and dated 1916)
Basel, Kunsthalle, *Rétrospective Modigliani*, 1934, no. 7 (dated 1916)
Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, *Cinquante ans de peinture française dans les collections particulières de Cézanne et Matisse*, 1952, no. 114 (titled *Nu couché*)
Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, *Le Nu à travers les Ages*, 1954, no. 40 (titled *Grand nu couché*)
Paris, Galerie Charpentier, *Cent tableaux de Modigliani*, 1958, no. 63, illustrated in the catalogue (titled *Grand nu*)
Marseille, Musée Cantini, Modigliani, 1958, no. 21, illustrated in color in the catalogue (titled *Grand nu* and dated 1918)
Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Amedeo Modigliani 1884-1920*, 1981, no. 53, illustrated in color in the catalogue
Lausanne, Fondation de l'Hermitage, *Les Peintres de Zborowski: Modigliani, Utrillo, Soutine et leurs amis*, 1994, no. 19, illustrated in color in the catalogue
London, Tate Modern, Modigliani, 2017-18, n.n., illustrated in color in the catalogue and on the cover (titled *Nude*)





LITERATURE

Antoine Salmon, *Modigliani: sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris, 1926, illustrated, pl. 22 (titled *Nu couché* and dated 1918)

Mark Schwarz, *Modigliani*, Paris, 1927, illustrated pl. VI

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Oskar Schirer, "Die Kunst geht nach brot" in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, vol. 67, Darmstadt, 1930-31, illustrated p. 237

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Jean Cocteau, *Modigliani*, Paris, 1950, illustrated in color pl. 15 (titled *Nu couché*)

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Arthur Pfannstiel, *Modigliani et son oeuvre*, Paris, 1956, no. 231, p. 129

Jean-Albert Cartier, *Modigliani nus*, Paris, 1958, illustrated pl. 8

Ambrogio Ceroni, *Amedeo Modigliani*, Milan, 1958, no. 120, illustrated in color pl. 120, catalogue p. 61

Geza Csorba, *Modigliani*, Budapest, 1969, illustrated pl. 32

Joseph Lanthemann, *Amedeo Modigliani 1884-1920, Catalogue raisonné: sa vie, son oeuvre complet, son art*, Barcelona, 1970, no. 143, illustrated p. 198, catalogue p. 117 (titled *Nu couché, vu de dos* and dated 1916)

Ambrogio Ceroni & Leone Piccioni, *I dipinti di Modigliani*, Milan, 1970, no. 184, illustrated p. 97, illustrated in color pl. XXII & a detail illustrated in color on the cover

Jean Dalevize, *Modigliani*, Lausanne, 1971, illustrated in color on the title page

Modigliani (exhibition catalogue), Liège, Musée Saint-Georges, 1980, illustrated p. 39

Douglas Hall, *Modigliani*, Edinburgh, 1984, illustrated in color pl. 37

Thérèse Castreau-Barrielle, *La Vie et l'oeuvre de Amedeo Modigliani*, Paris, 1987, illustrated in color p. 177

Angela Ceroni, *Amedeo Modigliani: Les nus*, Düringen, 1989, no. 11, illustrated in color p. 59

Werner Schmalenbach, *Amedeo Modigliani, Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings* (exhibition catalogue) Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf & Kunsthau, Zurich 1991, illustrated p. 51

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Christian Parisot, *Modigliani catalogue raisonné: peintures, dessins, aquarelles*, Livorno, 1991, vol. II, no. 38/1917, illustrated in color p. 174; catalogue p. 315

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Victoria Soto Caba, *Modigliani el rostro intemporal*, Madrid, 2008, illustrated in color pp. 320-21



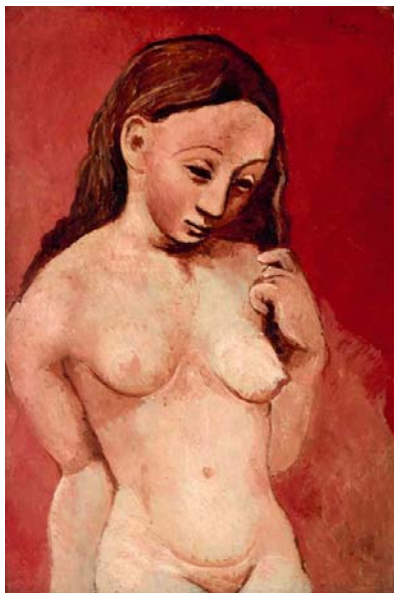
Above
East pediment of the
Parthenon, Athens,
438-432 B.C.

Fifteen Francs a day. That was the stipend Leopold Zborowski, Modigliani's dealer, offered him in 1917 to paint a series of nudes. With this sum Modigliani created several of the most stunning paintings in the history of art, reimagining the nude for the Modern era. *Nu couché* is the masterpiece of that series.

Modigliani's models were paid five francs to pose in an apartment just above Zborowski's own at 3 rue Joseph Bara, tucked between the Cimetière du Montparnasse and the Jardin du Luxembourg. These models, draped in sheets, perched on chairs, reclining on sofas or beds, were relatively anonymous; Modigliani did not paint his paramours *en déshabillé*. While the artist may have had emotional distance from

the sitters of these works, he certainly did not have physical distance. They dominate their space, devoid of setting beyond a pillow or chair, filling the frame with stretching hands and feet, forearms and calves literally off of the edges of the canvas. Sometimes the model clasps a chemise or sheet around her, often putting more on display than the drapery conceals. Modigliani's women feel strong, real, and substantial. Their nudity is self-assured and proud, not cloaked in myth or allegory.

Nu couché is the largest painting Modigliani ever painted, and the only one of his horizontal nudes to contain the entire figure within the canvas. The sitter looks confidently back over her right shoulder, the



Above left
PABLO PICASSO,
Nude on a red background,
1906, oil on canvas, Musée
de l'Orangerie, Paris

Above right
BARNABA DE MODENA,
Virgin and Child, circa
1370, panel, Musée du
Louvre, Paris



Above
DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ,
*The Toilet of Venus (The
Rokeby Venus)*, 1647-51,
The National Gallery,
London



slope of her profile echoing the negative space along the edges of her torso. Combined with the figures' richly modulated flesh tones and dark-hued background, *Nu couché*, delivers a uniquely modern vision of the greatest subject in Western Art.

This series of nude canvases are some of the most joyful and unabashedly erotic images in the history of art. They are deceptively pioneering; they assimilate diverse visual cultures from across the globe and across the centuries while incorporating the avant-garde of his contemporaries. These paintings also represent the new woman of World War I, Paris; a woman whose embrace of her own sexuality alludes to the increasing power and autonomy of women. The year *Nu couché*

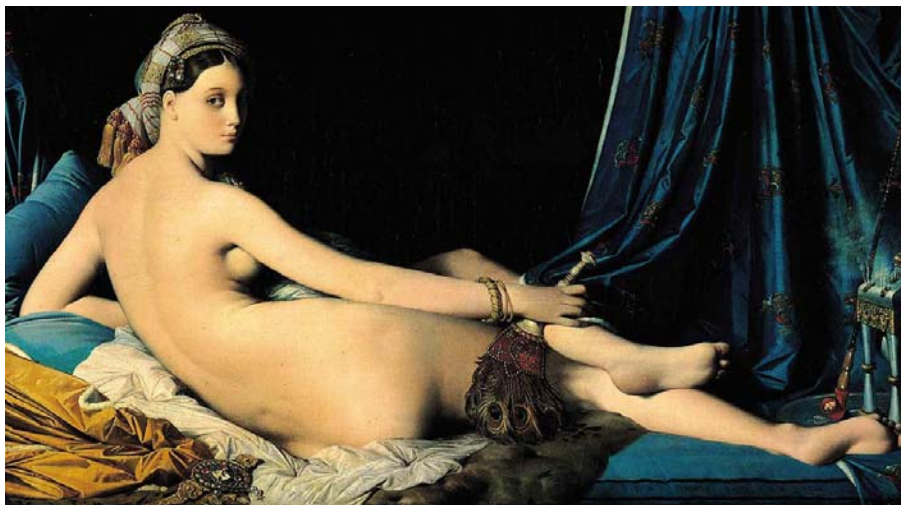
was painted, a woman's right to vote was supported in places as distant as New York State and the Russian Republic. In short order the United Kingdom and United States as a whole would follow suit, and a vast array of legal rights including control over property, wages and child support continued to be made into law throughout much of Europe.

Modigliani began painting nudes in 1908, with four examples marked, it two cases, by their rigidity (Ceroni nos. 10 & 11) and in the others by a unresolved move towards expressionism (Ceroni nos. 7a & 8). A few years later from 1911-12 he executed nudes in the stylized forms of caryatids (Ceroni nos. 32-39), but it was only after he abandoned sculpture in 1914 that he developed the unique

idiom evident in the present painting. His was an aesthetic gleaned from the artistic precedents of Italian Renaissance and Mannerist painting, the linear simplicity of African carvings and the earth-toned palette and geometric modelling of Cubism. All of these influences can be identified in *Nu couché*, painted by the artist in 1917.

The majority of Modigliani's output was based in portraiture, which, more often than not, depicted those who surrounded him: fellow artists Jacques Lipchitz, Diego Rivera, Chaim Soutine, Juan Gris, poets including Jean Cocteau and Max Jacob, lovers from Beatrice Hastings to Jeanne Hébuterne and patrons including Paul Alexandre, Paul Guillaume and Léopold & Hanka Zborowski.

Aside from a veritable who's who of the more bohemian artistic circles in Paris, Modigliani would also seize upon chances to find other sitters – though the opportunities for unpaid models were few and far between. Simonetta Fraquelli reflected on Modigliani's portraiture output: "Modigliani's portraits and single-figure paintings are among the most memorable and popular images of the early twentieth century.... They possess an archetypal quality that sets them apart from the art of his contemporaries in Paris in the first two decades of the last century. Like the artist's nudes, they testify to an enduring fascination with the human form and physiognomy. Modigliani's mastery lies in his ability to retain the essential likeness

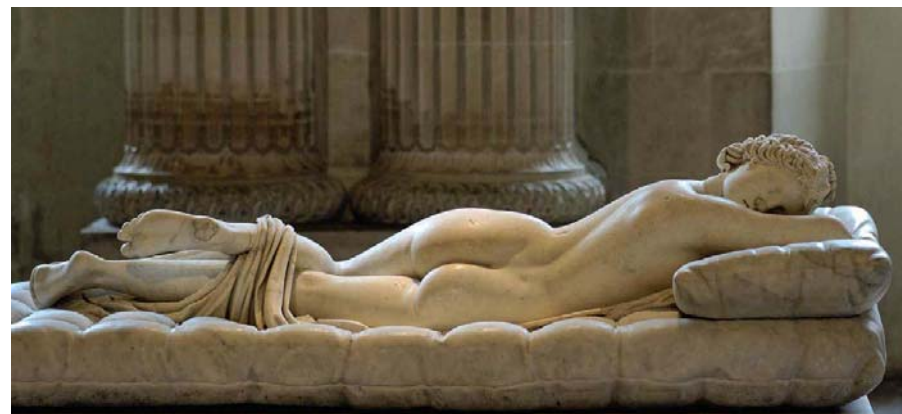


Above
JEAN AUGUSTE
DOMINIQUE INGRES.
La Grande Odalisque, 1814,
oil on canvas, Musée du
Louvre, Paris

of his sitters while couching that likeness in his own circumscribed vocabulary of forms" (*Modigliani and His Models* (exhibition catalogue), Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2006, p. 31).

It was not until Zborowski stepped forward with both a space and paid models that Modigliani embarked on his great series of nudes. "Like the caryatids, the nudes were the result of a concerted effort," Emily Braun relates. "He completed 35 between 1916 and 1919 (the majority in 1917) on commission from the Polish expatriate and dealer Léopold Zborowski.... The artist demanded isolation and was furious when Zborowski once interrupted him to steal a glance at a particularly attractive blonde model.... Of the

35 nudes, some two-thirds feature models reclining along the horizontal axis, while the remaining stand or sit in a vertical format. The artist's fully nude 'grand horizontals' are far more successful than the upright figures, whose bodies appear stiffer in pose and pictorial handling, and are often semi-draped, their facial demeanors less at ease" (*Modigliani and His Models* (exhibition catalogue), Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2006, pp. 52-53). The majority of the artist's reclining nudes are found in museums around the globe; the United States is particularly rich in its holdings with two in The National Gallery in Washington, one in the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia and three in New York at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The

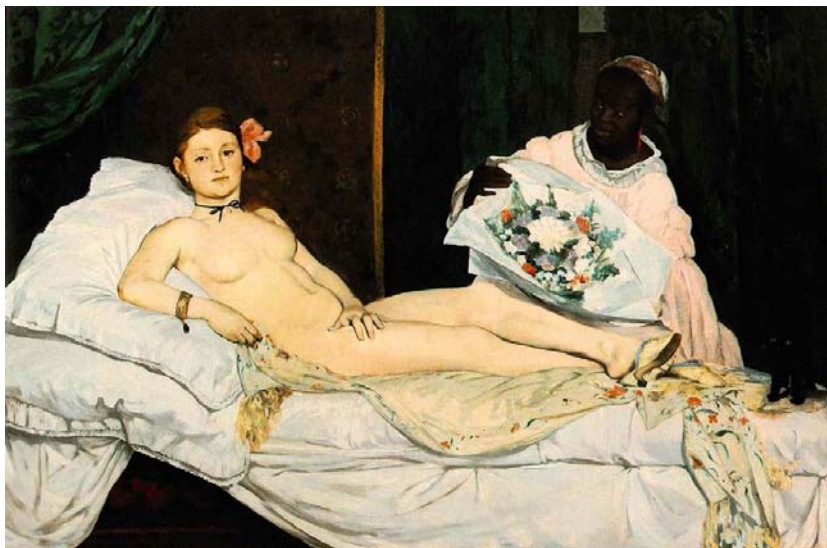


Above
Sleeping Hermaphroditus,
2nd century A.D., Roman
copy of Hellenistic
original, Musée du Louvre,
Paris

Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art respectively; one further reclining nude is found at The Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio.

What is it about Modigliani's nudes that have long drawn fascination? From the first moment they were displayed, traffic – quite literally – stopped. In 1917, Berthe Weill, at the request of Zborowski, staged an exhibition of Modigliani's paintings and works on paper. Weill was long a champion of young Avant Garde artists in Paris. During Picasso's first visit to the city in 1900 she sold several of his pastel bull fight scenes. According to John Richardson, "Berthe Weill was virtually the only one [of the art dealers in Paris] who never took advantage of his [Picasso's] chronic

penury. Her funds were very limited... but she prided herself on her fairness.... No wonder this prickly, peppery schoolmarm of a woman, who prided herself on telling people what she thought of them and had the invective with which to do so, never made enough money to build up a stock" (J. Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, New York, 1991, vol. I, p. 163). For the opening of her Modigliani exhibition "She invited a few carefully chosen people to a vernissage on Monday, December 3, 1917. Unlike the pattern of most such events the guests came and stayed. The door was open and before she knew it passersby joined the throng, there were crowds looking into the windows, and traffic was stopped on the street" (M. Secrest, *Modigliani, A Life*, New



Opposite top
ÉDOUARD MANET,
Olympia, 1863, oil on
canvas, Musée d'Orsay,
Paris

Opposite bottom
FRANCISCO DE GOYA,
La Maja desnuda, circa
1795-1800, oil on canvas,
Museo del Prado, Madrid

Above
GUSTAVE COURBET,
Woman with a Parrot,
1866, oil on canvas, The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, New York

York, 2011, p. 265). The crowds were after all, perhaps not so difficult to explain. In the window of her gallery – by some accounts directly hung in the window and by others clearly visible through it, though hung on the wall – were a number of Modigliani's nudes. Across the way from Weill's gallery was a police station and the aforementioned commotion did not, as one might expect, go unnoticed. An officer traipsed across the road and asked for the removal of the cause of the flap; Weill's subsequent refusal found her in the police station speaking with the police chief: "The chief constable was visibly alarmed. Either she removed them all or he was going to impound them. It was an offense against public morals. How could that be, she asked, knowing perfectly well but making him

say it. "They've got pppubic hair!" That for the moment, was that, and Zborowski only sold two drawings at thirty francs each. Weill, evidently realizing she had made a tactical error, bought five paintings so that the artist would not be too discouraged. Modigliani returned temporarily to portraits and when he tackled other nudes the offending areas were covered, as they had been since time immemorial, by lingerie, draperies, or a hand in the right place" (*ibid.*, p. 266).

Growing up in Livorno and travelling in his youth to Rome, Florence and Venice, Modigliani was exposed to the greats of Medieval and Renaissance Italian art. From the elongated, sinuous lines of trecento and quattrocento images of the Virgin Mary to Titian's voluptuous *Venus of Urbino*,



to Botticelli and Lippi's religious and mythological flights of fancy, the influences of Modigliani's early exposure to the practices of previous generations shaped his later output in much the same way as that of his Montparnasse circle and the new waves of interest in African art and the abstraction of Cubism and Futurism, not to mention the scandalous nudes of the previous century such as Édouard Manet's *Olympia* and Francisco Goya's *La Maja desnuda*. Almost from the moment he arrived in Paris, Modigliani toured the museums and galleries. He could have

hardly failed to see Jean-Auguste-Dominique-Ingres *La Grande Odalisque* whose pose closely mirrors that of *Nu couché*. Painted by Ingres in 1814 and commissioned by Napoleon's sister Caroline Murat, the Queen of Naples, Ingres' nude also met with disapproval when it was exhibited in the Paris salon of 1819 – critics pointed to the anatomical impossibilities of the figure who appeared to have, according to their views, added vertebrae in her overly long, curving back. Despite the initial criticism of this work, which depicts a resplendent member of a Harem, surrounded by and



Above left
MARCEL DUCHAMP.
Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2), 1912, oil canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Above right
WILLEM DE KOONING.
Woman Springs, 1966, oil on wooden door, David Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts



Above left
Nok Sculpture, terracotta, 500 B.C.-500 A.D., Musée du Louvre, Paris

Above left
Nefertiti, limestone and stucco, 1345 B.C., Neues Museum, Berlin



adorned in attributes to identify her as such, this work entered the Musée du Louvre's collection later in the century.

A decade after Manet's death, in 1893, his *Olympia*, at the direction of Clemenceau, was moved to the Louvre where it hung opposite Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*. While Manet's nude wears a ribbon choker and a pair of satin slippers (not to mention her adornments of a flower in her hair, bangle on her arm and delicate earring), Ingres' *Odalisque*, barefoot, holds an ornate peacock feather fan, her hair captured in a sumptuous turban bedecked with jewels and a pipe, of some variety, rests at the base of her blue satin cushion. Almost unrecognizable from these women – who are nude and yet clothed in attributes – is Modigliani's *Nu couché*. She wears quite simply nothing. There are no symbols to

allude to who she is, what her place is, where she belongs. She is simply a nude woman on a white cushion against a dark background. Modigliani doesn't tell his viewer what to think of this. As Meryle Secrest observes, "One can admire any of Modigliani's nude studies for its painterly qualities, its air of assurance, its bravado sweeps of the brush that, with great economy of means, convey the weight of a coverlet, a flash of light in the background, or those tiny, pleasing details that echo the main theme so satisfyingly. One admires most of all the lyrical loveliness of line. Years after he began a search for the simplified line, which Mauroner saw as 'a solution to his search for the essential meaning of life,' he perfected it in his magnificent nudes. The female form, idealized, stretches itself out across his canvases in 'all the lineaments of

Modigliani painted twenty-two reclining nudes between 1917 and 1919, where the present work is by far the largest. Of these twenty-two reclining nudes, all but nine, including the present work, are in Museum collections.



The present work



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu couché aux cheveux dénoués*, oil on canvas, 1917, Osaka City Museum of Modern Art, Osaka



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu couché de dos*, oil on canvas, 1917, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu couché, les bras derrière la tête*, oil on canvas, 1916, Fondation E. G. Bührle, Zurich



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu couché, au collier*, oil on canvas, 1917, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu couché, accoudé*, oil on linen, 1917, National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection, Washington D.C.



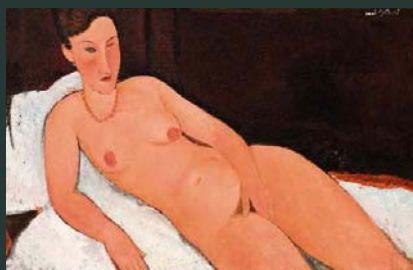
AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu couché, aux bras derrière la tête*, oil on canvas, 1917, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu au coussin blanc*, oil on canvas, 1917, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu sur un divan, les bras étendus*, oil on canvas, 1918, National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection, Washington, D.C.



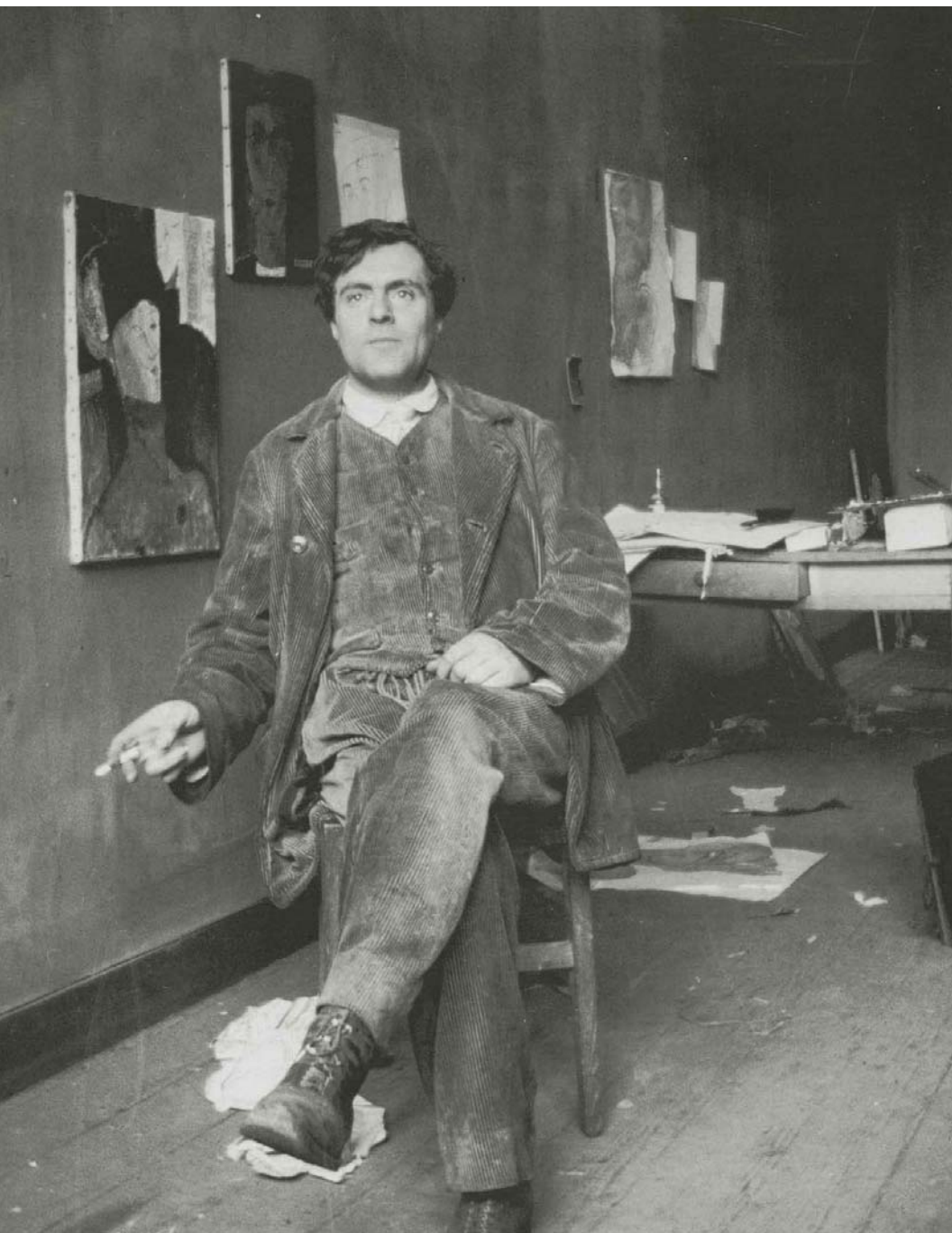
AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu, au collier*, oil on canvas, 1918, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Le Grand nu*, oil on canvas, circa 1919, The Museum of Modern Art, New York



AMEDEO MODIGLIANI, *Nu couché, le bras droit replié sous la tête*, oil on canvas, 1919, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome



Above
LUCIAN FREUD, *Sleeping
Nude*, 1950, oil on canvas.
Private Collection

Opposite
PAUL GUILLAUME,
Modigliani sitting in his
studio at the Ballesau-
Lavoir, Montmartre, 1915-
16, photograph, Archives
Jean Bouret, Paris



gratified desire,' as William Blake wrote.... for in fact these works are 'as simple, sensuous and passionate as the poetry of Keats' to quote Kenneth Clark in *The Nude*. Masks disguise truths, his nudes reveal the essential nature of Modigliani himself" (*ibid.* pp. 262-63).

The sheer lack of explanation which accompanied the female form in *Nu couché* and the other nudes of 1917, combined with certain anatomical details, were enough to severely limit the works displayed in Berthe Weill's gallery on the first day of the exhibition's opening. This perceived indignity was not the same as the outrage which met Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, no. 2 at the Armory Show in New York in 1913, described by one critic as "an explosion in a shingle factory" - and it bears mentioning that his readymade *Fountain* (a urinal signed *R. Mutt*) was created and

exhibited in 1917, the same year *Nu couché* was painted. While those works were too abstract or entirely too shocking to be grappled with by the general public, Modigliani's nudes were too understandable to ignore. Werner Schmalenbach writes: "they shocked the contemporary public.... This, again, is a symptom of Modigliani's position between tradition and Modernism. No other painter, in our century or in any other, has painted the female human body as he did. And yet his nudes evoke involuntary associations of Classicism. They are a continuation of a great tradition of European painting, not only thematically but also in the 'spiritual' interpretation of the theme, insofar as they constitute a celebration of beauty, immaculateness and perfection, and thus an idealization of physical Nature - which, in these pictures, dispenses with an idealized



Above
ANTONIO CANOVA,
Reclining Naiad, marble,
1819-24, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York

visual context and may thus be understood as a contribution to the freeing of sex from moralistic intrusions. The nudes are wholly liberated, even if the artist himself had no thought of making them a liberating gesture” (W. Schmalenbach, *Amedeo Modigliani, Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings* (exhibition catalogue) Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf & Kunsthaus, Zurich 1991, p. 47).

During the recent Tate retrospective, the qualities of Modigliani’s nudes in general and *Nu couché* in particular were fully explored. Jackie Wullschlager writes of the gallery of nudes: “From all sides of a huge central gallery, their dark almond eyes meet our gaze. Unusual vertical figures with luxuriant folds of flesh — ‘Seated Nude,’ ‘La Belle Romaine’ — arrest us with startling arabesque poses. The sweeping, sinuous ‘Nude’ seen from the back [the present

work] turns enquiringly in our direction” (J. Wullschlager, “The Shock Factor: Modigliani at Tate Modern” in *Financial Times*, November 24, 2017). Matthew Collings goes further, exploring the shapes and textures of these canvases: “The nudes are rich in other visual dimensions besides just imagery (or what is depicted). They are arrangements of shapes and spaces, surprising surfaces and scratchy and scrubbed paintwork contrasted with thin, black, elegant lines that stop and start.... you will find yourself lost in lines and structures.... The construction of the nudes as shapes is mesmerizing” (M. Collings, “Modigliani, exhibition review: A Chaotic Bohemian Life Revealed in Mesmerising Form” in *Evening Standard*, December 21, 2017).

Modigliani’s influence is clearly felt in the generations which followed. Canonized by the art world virtually within days of



Above
FRANÇOIS BOUCHER,
Portrait de Marie-Louis O'Murphy, oil on canvas,
1752, Alte Pinakothek,
Munich

his death, and the death of his paramour Jeanne Hébuterne, the myths surrounding his artistic practice and bohemian lifestyle in Paris have become legendary. A certain romanticism, including the view of Modigliani as “the melancholy angel” permeated scholarship for decades, as demand for his paintings and sculpture soared. His shocking new take on the nude would come to influence some of the greatest artists in the generations to follow, including the somnolent figures of Lucian Freud, the brightly colored, pert bodies of Tom Wesselman, Jenny Saville’s tactile nudes who fill her canvases, de Kooning’s brash and flowing brushstrokes forming seemingly disembodied female figures, John Currin’s playful, winking take on the Northern European Renaissance woman and Cecily Brown’s frenetically active canvases

whose nudes emerge on the picture surface. The frank sexuality of *Nu couché* incited the passion for the nude in Contemporary Art.

Over 100 years after its creation, *Nu couché*’s power to amaze and startle remains as potent as it did in 1917. What Modigliani captured was essential in that it captures *the being* or *the essence* of the nude. Writing to his friend Oscar Ghilia in 1901, Modigliani stated “I am trying to formulate with the greatest lucidity the truths of art and life I have discerned scattered amongst the beauties of Rome; and as their inner meaning becomes clear to me, I shall seek to reveal and to re-arrange their composition, I could almost say metaphysical architecture, in order to create out of it my truth of life, beauty, and art” (quoted in *Modigliani Unmasked* (exhibition catalogue), The Jewish Museum, New York, 2017-18, p. 147).

