

Amedeo Modigliani (Livorno 1884 - Paris 1920)

Standing Nude in Profile (Nu debout de profil)

Charcoal on paper; a page from a large sketchbook.
Inscribed with the Alexandre inventory number 20,1 at the lower right.
427 x 263 mm. (16 3/4 x 10 3/8 in.)

Never without his sketchbook, Amedeo Modigliani drew with incredible speed and assurance, tearing off the finished drawings and giving them to onlookers and friends, or sometimes crumpling them up and throwing them away. His art was invariably about the human form, and, typified by a precise economy of line, his drawings are rendered with a sinuous, graceful effect. Although often ravaged by alcohol and drugs, his extraordinary control of the pencil never suffered, even when he could barely sit upright. Gifted, prolific and intensely focused, he was a draughtsman of the highest calibre. As Franco Russoli has noted, in his monograph on the artist's drawings, 'Modigliani in his drawings attempts different effects of proportion and relief: now the line disintegrates into almost miniscule dashes to render the vibration of contours and surfaces, now it is supple and firm to show the unfolding of pure volumes in space. Or it becomes sharp, almost like silverpoint, accompanied by soft shadings, to restore a sense of the crystalline clarity of stone and polished wood. Cleanly inscribed on the white of the page or set off by strong vibrant borders, the drawings seem ever-changing and alive.'

The present sheet was part of a significant collection of works by Modigliani assembled by one of his first and most significant patrons and supporters, Dr. Paul Alexandre (1881-1968). The young physician met Modigliani in 1907, when the artist was twenty-three and Alexandre just three years older. The deep friendship that developed between the artist and his patron over the course of seven or eight years - between 1907 and 1914 - led to Alexandre amassing a substantial collection of twenty-five paintings

and nearly five hundred drawings by Modigliani. He also commissioned Modigliani to paint portraits of his father and brother, while he himself posed for three portraits in 1909.

Drawn between 1910 and 1911, in the midst of the five-year period when Modigliani was working as a sculptor, this drawing can be related to the artist's only full-length sculpture, the limestone Standing Nude of c.1912, today in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. The largest extant sculpture by Modigliani, the Standing Nude is characterized by 'straight, narrow features and geometric forms [that] compete with sensuous curves in a long, narrow column which could have served as an architectural support or caryatid taking the place of a column or pillar. The folded arms are reminiscent of prehistoric figurines and Greek idols; the elaborate coiffure recalls Egyptian art; and there may be an echo of Cambodian or Khmer sculpture in the suggestion of earrings and a necklace.'

The present sheet is closely related to another drawing of the same subject, dimensions and date, formerly in the collections of Mariska Diederich and Sydney Biddle. Several studies of caryatids with folded arms, seen from the front, are among the cache of drawings assembled by Paul Alexandre and can also be related to the limestone Standing Nude sculpture.

Provenance:

Dr. Paul Alexandre, Paris (his collection stamp, not in Lugt, faintly stamped at the lower right)
Private collection, Paris, in 1963
Berggruen and Cie., Paris
Jocelyn Fielding Gallery, London
Acquired from them in 1968 by David Anthony Jacobs and Evelyn Jacobs, later Baron and Lady Jacobs, London.

Exhibitions

Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Amedeo Modigliani, 1963, no.36.

Literature:

Ambrogio Ceroni, Amedeo Modigliani: Dessins et sculptures, Milan, 1965, p.32, no.94, pl.94 (where dated 1910-1911); Franco Russoli, Modigliani Drawings, London, 1969, no.10, pl.10; J. Lanthemann, Modigliani 1844-1920. Catalogue raisonné: Sa vie, son Oeuvre complet, son art, Barcelona, 1970, p.138, no.481, illustrated p.287, fig.481 (where dated 1910-1911); Christian Parisot, Modigliani. Catalogue raisonné: Dessins aquarelles, Vol.I, Livorno, 1990, p.243, no.44/10 (where dated 1910); Osvaldo Patani, Amedeo Modigliani: Catalogo generale. Sculture e disegni 1909-1914, Milan, 1992, p.93, no.64 (where dated 1910); Simonetta Fraquelli and Nancy Ireson, ed., Modigliani, exhibition catalogue, London, 2017-2018, illustrated p.53.

Artist description:

Amedeo Modigliani arrived in Paris in 1906, after studying at the Academies of Florence and Venice. He settled first in Montmartre, where he joined the avant-garde circle of artists that included Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris and André Derain. In 1907 he met his first important patron, Dr. Paul Alexandre, who encouraged him to participate in the Salon des Indépendants the following year. An intensely literate, cultured man, Modigliani befriended Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, Guillaume Apollinaire and other writers. Despite his friendship with Gino Severini, he declined an invitation to sign the Futurist manifesto in 1910. After moving to Montparnasse, he met Constantin Brancusi and began working as a sculptor, inspired by African and Oceanic art and by Italian Gothic sculpture. Modigliani exhibited a group of his sculptures at the Salon d'Automne in 1912 but, beset by poor health and a shortage of supplies, he abandoned sculpture with the onset of war in 1914. His first one-man show, organized by the Polish

poet Leopold Zborowski at the Galerie Berthe Weill in 1917, resulted in a scandal (due to the nudes displayed in the window) that closed the exhibition after one day, without any sales. The artist died of tuberculosis, from which he had been suffering for much of his life, in 1920, at the age of thirty-six.