



# Head of a Woman

Amedeo Modigliani

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Head of a Woman

**Artist/Maker:** Amedeo Modigliani

**Born:** 1911 - 1912

**Measurements:** h. 495 mm

**Accession Number:** L.234

**Historic Period:** 20th Century - Early

**Credit Line:** Private Collection

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Amedeo Modigliani (1884 -1920) made approximately twenty-eight sculptures carved directly in stone between 1910-14. *Tête de Femme* is one of those select few sculptures whilst almost all the other examples are in major museums across Europe and the USA. [1] This example is apparently unfinished, yet for all that it has greater vitality, power and latent energy. It was exhibited shortly after his death in 1911, in the Studio of Amedeo de Souza Cardoso where it was photographed in its 'unfinished state'. (2) Probably at the time of a small exhibition which Modigliani held there in 1911. [2]

Modigliani followed Constantin Brâncuși's example to establish a new sculptural language within the Paris avant-garde. Inspired significantly by African, Asian and Archaic influences alongside European modernist idioms such as Cubism. [3] Part inspiration and part appropriation moving away from the desire to achieve naturalism of classical or Renaissance sculpture. The elongated head and round mouth recall stylised representations found in African sculpture and dance masks. Such as the famous Fang reliquary head (240) from Gabon in the Sainsbury Centre collection. This once belonged to collector, critic and art dealer Paul Guillaume (1891-1934), a close friend and gallerist of Modigliani. Dance masks, specifically those produced in Côte d'Ivoire, fascinated Modigliani at the time such as the Guro Dance mask (213), also in the Sainsbury Centre collection as well as being previously owned by Paul Guillaume). There is a strong influence of ancient sculpture from Egypt and the highly stylized sculpture from the Neolithic Cycladic Islands. These elongated heads, depictions of women are static and hieratic. The sense of timelessness and universal mystery recalls ancient sacred Buddhist sculpture. His patron Paul Alexandre recalled him looking at sculpture from Angkor, the Khmer Empire, a territory based on modern Cambodia, in the Trocadéro, Paris. (4) For example, sculpture like the Female torso (276) in the Sainsbury Centre collection. Alexandre recalled how Modigliani worked in this period: 'When a figure haunted his mind, he would draw feverishly with unbelievable speed... He sculpted the same way. He drew for a long time, then he attacked the block directly'. [5]

The stone may have come from a fragment left over by masons. The penniless Modigliani befriended Italian masons in Paris who supplied the materials and taught him to carve. (6) Modigliani intended for the heads to be parts of 'columns of tenderness' within a primordial 'temple of beauty' that remained unrealized. According to the account of his friend, the artist Jacob Epstein, Modigliani used to place candles on top of these heads during the night. Spurred on by marijuana, he would give the illuminated sculptures affectionate embraces. [7] There is a fracture in the neck that may well date back to its early history although not before 1911 when it was photographed intact. (8)

Amedeo Clemente Modigliani (1884 -1920) was an Italian painter and sculptor who worked mainly in Paris. He is known for portraits and nudes characterized by a elongation of faces, necks, and figures that were not received well during his lifetime, but later became much sought-after. Modigliani spent his youth in Italy, where he studied the art of tradition, namely antiquity and the Renaissance. In 1906, he moved to Paris, where he came into contact with such artists as Pablo Picasso and Constantin Brâncuși. By 1911-12, Modigliani was exhibiting highly stylized sculptures with the Cubists of the Section d'Or group at the Salon d'Automne. Modigliani had little success while alive, but after his death achieved great popularity both as painter and sculptor. He died of tubercular meningitis, at the age of 35, in Paris.

Calvin Winner, May 2023

[1] Ambrogio Ceroni, Amedeo Modigliani: Dessins et Sculptures, Milan, 1965, no. XIV, illustrated in the unfinished and the final state nos. 68 & 69

[2] Photographed in the Studio of Amedeo de Souza Cardoso, 3 Rue du Colonel Combes, Paris in 1911. Illustrated in *Tête*, (texts by Pilar Ordovas and David Ekserdjian), published by Ordovas, 2023, p.12

[3] J. Lanthemann, Modigliani 1884-1920: Catalogue Raisonné (Barcelona 1970), No.622, p.142, repr. p.314 (dated 1911)

[4] David Ekserdjian, *Tête*, (texts by Pilar Ordovas and David Ekserdjian), published by Ordovas, 2023, p.22

[5] <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/modigliani-head-t03760> , accessed 04/05/23

[6] <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/modigliani-head-t03760> , accessed 04/05/23

[7] <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/head/mwEa1vmQjaddqg?hl=en-GB> , accessed 04/05/23

[8] According to Nina Hamnett, break in the nose the Tate head was caused by Modigliani himself, who bumped into it and knocked it over. It was already broken by the time she first saw it in his studio in 1913 or 1914 <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/modigliani-head-t03760> , accessed 04/05/23

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## Exhibitions

Paris, the Studio of Amedeo de Souza Cardoso, 1911 (an exhibition of Modigliani sculpture, from which photographs of the present work in its unfinished states originate)

Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (on loan 1937)

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Romdon Rodin: Tentoonstelling Honderd Jaar Fransche Sculptuur, 1939, no. 237, illustrated in the catalogue (as dating from 1917-18)

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Oud en Nieuw, 1955, no. 136

Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (on loan 1953-1974)

Liège, Musée Saint-Georges, Modigliani, 1980, no. 64, illustrated in the catalogue (as dating from 1911)

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (and traveling), Amedeo Modigliani: 1884-1920, 1981, no. 13

Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Modigliani: An Anniversary Exhibition, 1983-84

Livorno, Villa Maria - Museo Progressivo d'Arte Contemporanea, Modigliani: gli anni della scultura, 1984, no. 9, illustrated in colour in the catalogue Tokyo, The National Museum of Modern Art & Aichi, Aichi Prefectural Art Gallery, Modigliani, 1985, no. 21, illustrated in colour in the catalogue

Martigny, Fondation Pierre Gianadda, Modigliani, 1990, no. 12, illustrated in colour in the catalogue (image is inverted)

Tokyo, Tobu Musuem; Kyoto, Daimaru Museum Kyoto; Osaka, Daimaru Museum of Umeda & Ibaraki, Musuem of Modern Art, Exposition Amedeo Modigliani au Japon 1992-93, 1992-93, no. S2, illustrated in colour in the catalogue (dating from circa 1911)

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## Further Reading

Tête, (texts by Pilar Ordovas and David Ekserdjian), published by Ordovas, 2023

Modigliani: The Primitivist Revolution, Marc Restellini (Editor) published by Hirmer, 2022

Amedeo Modigliani: Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings, Werner Schmalenbach, published by Prestel, 2016

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