

ARTS

# Amedeo Modigliani

As with Botticelli four centuries before him, form does not take precedence over Modigliani's response to, and expression of the inner life and character of his sitters.

Instead of employing his considerable skills of draughtsmanship to give us a visual 'copy' of the figures which he

has before him, he reduces faces and bodies to essentials, elongating both, placing form at the service of expression, and seeking a deeper truth.

**Pat Kane** explores the work of painter and sculptor Modigliani (1884-1920) who worked in both Italy and Paris.

We can see echoes of Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus', or 'Primavera' in the gentle sway of so many of Modigliani's portraits. We are left in no doubt that we are looking at real people here, not unlike the way in which a young child's drawing captures the essence of a personality. Modigliani had thoroughly absorbed the 'voice' of artists of the past, made this his own, and became part of the artistic expres-

sion which pushed the boundaries towards abstraction and Modernism in the twentieth century.

He first trained in Italy, studying the Italian Renaissance and Classical art, before going to Paris in 1906, where he remained for the rest of his life, although his most fundamental vision both aesthetically and emotionally was very much formed by his Jewish background and early life in Italy.

Strong necks and suggestions of Cubism are evidence of the influence of Picasso, who was working in Paris at the same time. This characteristic of considering the three-dimensional is also a reminder that Modigliani was a sculptor as well as a painter.

Modigliani had contracted tuberculosis as a child. One wonders if an experience of sickness in childhood, and its consequent quiet time, might allow imagination and a sensitivity to the contemplative to develop.

Living a turbulent, bohemian life, which was almost expected of artists in Paris then, Modigliani became addicted to drugs and alcohol, although he possibly used these in order to mask symptoms of the tubercular meningitis from which he sadly died at the young age of 35. And like too many great artists, he was destitute, having no hint of the worldwide esteem in which his work would be held years later. 

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**Tate Modern** is showing an exhibition of Modigliani's work until **2 April 2018**.

It is the most comprehensive collection of Modigliani's work ever seen in this country. The exhibition includes a Virtual Reality experience of Modigliani's studio in Paris.



**Juan Gris**  
oil on canvas, 1915

Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York



**Jacque and Berthe  
Lipchitz**  
oil on canvas

The Art Institute  
of Chicago



*'What I am seeking is not the real and not the unreal, but the subconscious, the instinctive mystery of the human race.'*

*Modigliani*

*'With one eye you are looking at the outside world, while with the other you are looking within yourself.'*

*Modigliani*

*Jeanne Hubertine*  
oil on canvas, 1919  
private collection

