

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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MODIGLIANI: AN ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION
AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 23, 1983. To celebrate the approaching centenary of the birth of Modigliani, an anniversary exhibition of the Italian painter and sculptor will be on view from December 11, 1983 through March 18, 1984 at the National Gallery of Art's East Building. Works from the National Gallery's Chester Dale collection, the largest public holding of Modigliani paintings in the United States, are complemented by outstanding loans from private collections.

Modigliani's brief life was characterized by poor health and poverty, combined with an intense dedication to his art. The twenty-five paintings, twenty-six drawings, and two sculptures included in this exhibition illustrate the significant contribution to modern art that Modigliani achieved before his premature death at thirty-six, from tuberculosis.

Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) was born in Livorno (Leghorn), Italy. He studied in his native Livorno, in Florence, and in Venice until 1906 when he went to Paris and quickly became acquainted with the leading avant-garde artists. Through exposure to the art of such men as Brancusi, Archipenko, and Nadelman, Modigliani turned from painting and drawing to sculpture and produced a small body of work from 1909 to 1914. Utilizing a variety of sources, most significantly the sculpture of Africa, Archaic Greece and India, Modigliani

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developed his own distinctive style of elongated heads, stylized features and masterful handling of materials.

Forced by his bad health to abandon sculpture around 1914, Modigliani returned to painting and was very prolific, focusing on portraits and female nudes. He captured many of the leading artistic personalities in Paris in penetrating character studies. Highlights of the exhibition include his portraits of Jean Cocteau (1916), the writer and director who befriended Modigliani; Leon Bakst (c. 1915), the stage designer and member of the Diaghilev circle; and fellow artist Chaim Soutine (1917).

Other paintings by Modigliani on view include examples from the approximately thirty-one female nudes that he painted in the years preceding his death. Typical of these paintings are their realism and frank immediacy, characteristics considered scandalous when they were first exhibited. Landscape at Cagnes (1919) is one of only four landscapes painted by Modigliani during his career and is the only landscape in the exhibition.

The drawings in the exhibition range from studies for paintings, such as the three drawings for the large portrait of The Amazon (1909), to studies for sculpture, to a series of drawings of caryatids, or architectural support figures, in gouache or crayon.

Eliza Rathbone, assistant curator of twentieth-century art at the National Gallery, has organized the exhibition and written a comprehensive petit journal to accompany it.

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