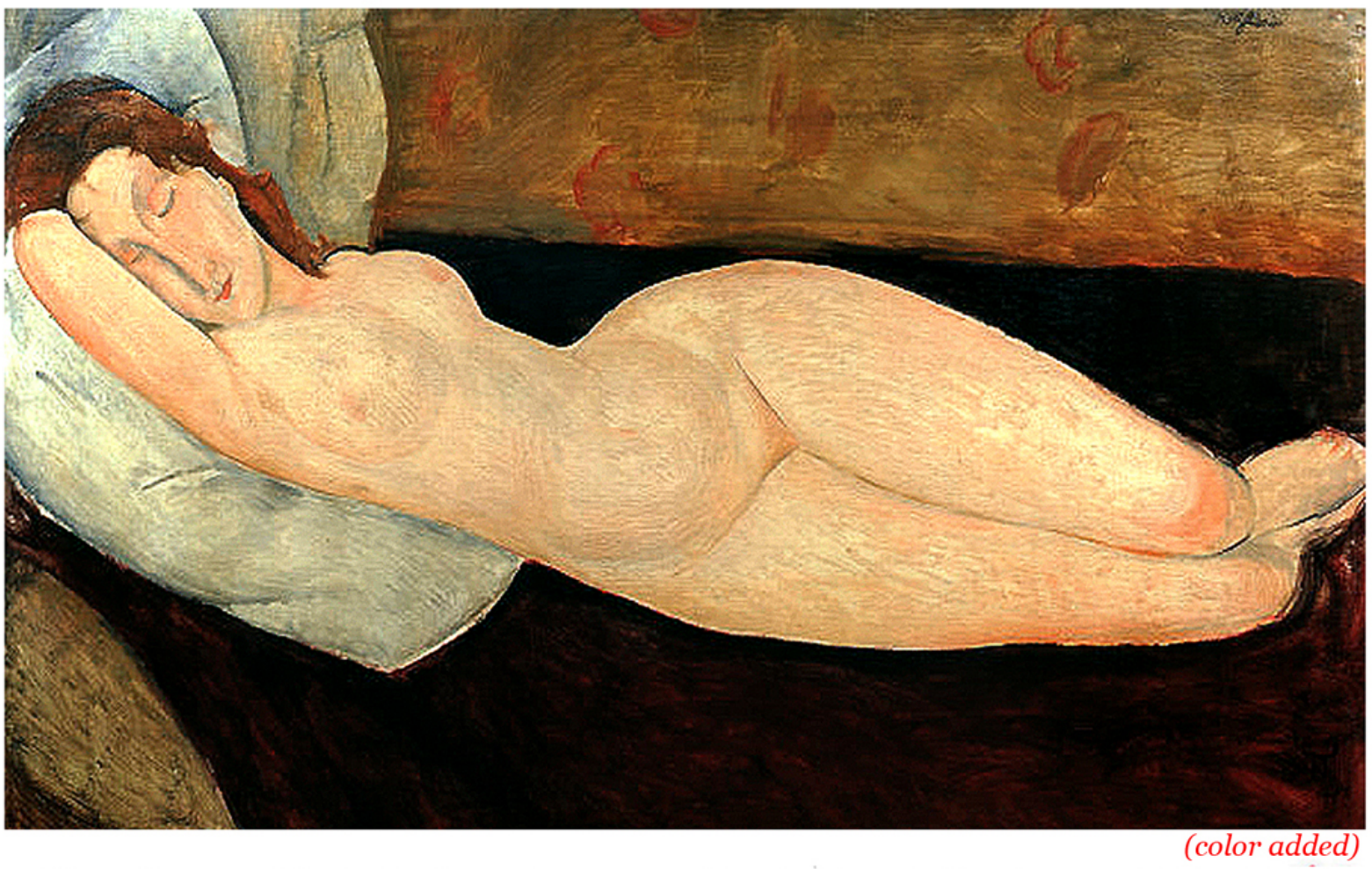
Modigliani, Whose Nudes Are Ranked by Bulliet With the Greatest



(color added)

"Reclining Nude," by Amadeo Modigliani (Italian: 1884-1920).

Modigliani, who gallantly recorded his own visions of beauty and remains a distinct personality in modern art, is the subject of the January exhibition at the Galleries of Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan, New York. Eleven paintings and numerous drawings assert the force of his art which was kindled by the primitives of his native Italy, the resonant paintings of Botticelli, and the strange and powerful forms of Congo Negro sculpture.

C. J. Bulliet, in "Apples and Madonnas," declares that Modigliani's nudes "may be ranked ultimately with the great ones of all time —with Giorgione's 'Sleeping Venus,' Titian's 'Venus Awake,' Goya's 'Maja' (nude and even more impudently clothed), with Manet's sensational wanton in the Louvre. Universal judgment is scarcely ready yet for the 'distorted' female, with greatly elongated torso, monster eyes and lengthened face—yet, withal, possessing a fascinating loveliness, that is reminiscent of Botticelli."

Modigliani's drawings shown by Mrs. Sullivan recall his adventures in sculpture. Thomas Craven in "Modern Art" tells of his friendship with Brancusi and Epstein whose work, plus the acquisition of an African mask, led him to experiment in the round. "Modigliani had," writes Craven, "to some extent, the sculptor's approach to form; his drawings resembled a sculptor's notes; that is to say, he reduced the figures to a balanced arrangement

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of geometrical units; his paintings, one and all, were based on the style of negro statues."

All the work of Modigliani, carries the stamp of his intense personality, the various strains of influence serving to heighten his own aesthetic statements. His "pure and wistful conceptions" express his own spirit even more than the friends whom he painted. Impetuous, he worked at fever pitch when some new personality fired his ambition, and dissipated when the spark died out. Modigliani possessed a magnetic force which won him many friends both in his spasmodic enthusiasm and his days of poverty.

Born in Italy in 1884 he came from a family of wealth and culture. Amadeo contracted an illness in his youth which led to tuberculosis. His mother encouraged the youth's interest in painting and arranged for his studies at Rome, Venice and Florence. Rebellant to formal instruction, Modigliani was impatient to go to Paris there to create his own style which should be as fresh and simple as the Italian primitives. Fortified by his mother's blessing and a few bank notes the young painter, half Italian, half Semitic, came to Paris in 1906. Fervid activity alternated with restlessness and ill health. In the cafes and studios he discussed art with Picasso, Maillol, Matisse, Vlaminck, Soutine, Kisling, Leger, Rivera, Guillaume and other practitioners of his day. He has been called the "last of the Bohemians."

Although Modigliani left some 500 paintings and innumerable drawings, his life in Paris was a gradual down-slope. He had no knack with dealers and sold very few of his works. Unable to pay his rent he accepted the generosity of artists who shared their miserable lodgings with him. What money he had went for drinks or drugs until he was eventually overtaken by his illness. He died in 1920.

While Modigliani's aesthetic conceptions have been echoed in the work of subsequent artists, his work is respected more because it expresses a personal hypothesis than for its influence on the stream of art.

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