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PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE EUROPEAN COLLECTION

**Amedeo Modigliani**

*NU ASSIS SUR UN DIVAN (LA BELLE ROMAINE)*

Estimate   Estimate Upon Request **LOT SOLD. 68,962,500 USD (Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium)**

## DETAILS & CATALOGUING

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Amedeo Modigliani

1884 - 1920

*NU ASSIS SUR UN DIVAN (LA BELLE ROMAINE)*

Signed *Modigliani* (lower right)

Oil on canvas

39 3/8 by 25 5/8 in.

100 by 65 cm

Painted in 1917.

# IMPRESSIONISM & MODERN ART EVENING SALE

02 NOVEMBER 2010 | 7:00 PM

EDT

NEW YORK

## PROVENANCE

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Leopold Zborowski, Paris (acquired from the artist)

Dr. Raymond-Jacques Sabouraud, Paris (most likely acquired from the above and until his death in 1937)

Georges Renand, Paris (probably acquired through a dealer from the estate of the above, and sold: Drouot-Montaigne, Paris, November 20, 1987, lot 6)

Private Collection, Asia (sold: Sotheby's, New York, November 11, 1999, lot 125)

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

## EXHIBITED

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Zürich, Kunsthaus, *Italienische Maler*, 1927, no. 106

Paris, Galerie Charpentier, *Cent chefs-d'oeuvre des peintres de l'Ecole de Paris*, 1946

Paris, Galerie Charpentier, *Cent chefs-d'oeuvre d'art français*, 1947, illustrated in color in the catalogue

Paris, Musée national d'Art Moderne, *L'Art Moderne Italien*, 1950, no. 49 (titled *Nu assis*)

Rome, VI Quadriennale Nazionale d'Arte, *Amedeo Modigliani*, 1951-52, no. 13

Tokyo; Osaka; Sapporo; Nagoya, Mitsukoshi, *La Ruche-Ecole de Paris et Montparnasse*, 1978, no. 56

Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, *La Ruche et Montparnasse*, 1978-79, no. 94

Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Amedeo Modigliani*, 1981, no. 54, illustrated in color in the catalogue (titled *Nu assis sur un divan, La Belle Romaine*)

Düsseldorf, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen & Zürich, Kunsthaus, *Amedeo Modigliani, Malerei, Skulpturen, Zeichnungen*, 1991, no. 62, illustrated in color in the catalogue (titled *Nu assis*)

## LITERATURE

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Maurice de Vlaminck, "Modigliani," *L'Art Vivant*, Paris, 1925

"Gemälde von Modigliani," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, Darmstadt, July 1925, illustrated

André Salmon, *Modigliani, sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris, 1926, illustrated pl. 6

Mark Schwartz, *Modigliani*, Paris, 1927, illustrated pl. XI

Arthur Pfannstiel, *Modigliani*, Paris, 1929, catalogued p. 24

Michel Georges-Michel, *Les Montparnos*, Paris, 1929 (revised edition), illustrated p. 189



"Amedeo Modigliani," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, Darmstadt, January 1931, illustrated p. 245

René Huyghe, *French paintings, the Contemporaries*, Paris, 1940, illustrated pl. 6

Georges Besson, *1900-1940*, Amplepuis-Rhône, 1944, illustrated pl. 18

Rafaello Franchi, *Modigliani*, Florence, 1944, illustrated pl. 11

Rafaello Franchi, *Modigliani*, Florence, 1946, illustrated pl. XIX

Pierre Descargues, *Modigliani*, Paris, 1951, illustrated on the cover

Enzo Carli, *Modigliani*, Rome, 1952, illustrated pl. 17 and on the cover

Paolo d'Ancona, *Modigliani, Chagall, Soutine, Pascin - Aspetti dell'Espressionismo*, Milan, 1952, illustrated pl. 18

Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, *Geschichte der Modernen Malerei*, Zürich, 1952, illustrated pl. 16

"Omaggio a Amedeo Modigliani," *Rivista di Livorno*, Livorno, July-August 1954, illustrated pl. 14

Georges Poisson, *La donna nella pittura francese moderna*, Novara, 1955, illustrated pl. 44/a

E. Lavavigno, *L'Arte Moderna*, vol. II, Turin, 1956, illustrated p. 1033

Arthur Pfannstiel, *Modigliani et son oeuvre, Etude critique et catalogue raisonné*, Paris, 1956, no. 147, fig. 31, illustrated p. 114

Marcel Brion, *La peinture moderne de l'Impressionnisme et l'art abstrait*, Paris, 1957, illustrated p. 81

Jean-Albert Cartier, *Modigliani- Nus*, Paris, 1958, illustrated pl. 15

Ambrogio Ceroni, *Amedeo Modigliani, Peintre*, Milan, 1958, no. 129, illustrated in color pl. 129 (titled *Nu assis (au divan)* and as dating from circa 1917-18)

Franco Russoli, *Modigliani*, London, 1959, illustrated pl. 21

Corrado Pavolini, *Modigliani*, Milan, 1966, illustrated pl. 14

Alfred Werner, *Amedeo Modigliani*, New York, 1968, illustrated p. 135

Gaston Diehl, *Modigliani*, Lugano, 1969, illustrated p. 69

Csorba Geza, *Modigliani*, Budapest, 1969, illustrated pl. 15

Nello Ponente, *Modigliani*, Florence, 1969, no. 50

Ambrogio Ceroni & Leone Piccioni, *I dipinti di Modigliani*, Milan, 1970, no. 192, illustrated p. 97 and pl. XXXIII (as dating from 1917)

Joseph Lanthemann, *Modigliani, 1884-1920- Catalogue raisonné, sa vie, son oeuvre complet, son art*, Barcelona, 1970, no. 141, illustrated in color p. 196 (titled *Nu assis*)

Ambrogio Ceroni & Françoise Cachin, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Modigliani*, Paris, 1972, no. 192, illustrated p. 97 and in color pl. XXXIII

Carol Mann, *Modigliani*, London, 1980, no. 102, illustrated p. 142

Bernard Zurcher, *Modigliani*, Paris, 1980, illustrated pl. 39-40

*Modigliani, gli anni della scultura* (exhibition catalogue), Museo Progressivo d'Arte Contemporanea, Livorno, 1984, no. 23A, illustrated p. 123



Gaston Diehl, *Modigliani*, New York, 1985 (revised edition), illustrated p. 59

Claude Roy, *Modigliani*, Geneva, 1985, illustrated pp. 100, 104 and in color on the dust jacket

Alfred Werner, *Amedeo Modigliani*, New York, 1985, illustrated p. 107

Thérèse Castieau-Barrielle, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Amedeo Modigliani*, Paris, 1987, illustrated in color p. 149

Angela Ceroni, *Amedeo Modigliani- Les Nus*, New York, 1989, no. 18, illustrated in color p. 71

Christian Parisot, *Modigliani, catalogue raisonné, peintures, dessins, aquarelles*, vol. I, Livorno, 1990, illustrated p. 152; vol. II, 1991, no. 33/1917, illustrated in color p. 169 (*Nu assis sur le divan (La Belle Romaine)*)

Werner Schmalenbach, *Amedeo Modigliani, Paintings, Sculptures and Drawings*, Munich, 1990, illustrated in color pl. 62

Oswaldo Patani, *Amedeo Modigliani, Catalogo generale*, Milan, 1991, no. 195, illustrated in color p. 205 (titled *Nudo seduto su un divano*)

Victoria Soto Caba, *Modigliani, El rostro intemporal*, Madrid, 2008, illustrated in color p. 328

## CATALOGUE NOTE

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**N***u assis sur un divan (La Belle Romaine)* exemplifies Modigliani's conquest of the nude, a subject that is considered his greatest accomplishment in painting. Continuing the tradition of Botticelli's *Venus*, Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus*, Ingres' *Baigneuse turque* and Manet's *Olympia*, it ranks among the definitive nudes in the history of Western art.

Few pictures explore the pleasures of the flesh with such candor, intimacy and immediate appeal. Modigliani believed that "to paint a woman is to possess her." Indeed, her availability to engage with us is undeniable, with her rosy thigh projecting into the foreground. The tilt of her head, piled with lustrous black hair, the strained exposure of the neck, the arch of her brow and the glint in her eyes all accentuate the full complicitness of this woman in the art of seduction. Captivating the imagination with her sensual appeal, *La Belle Romaine* is nothing less than a goddess of the modern era.

*La Belle Romaine* belongs to Modigliani's most important series of nudes, all painted in 1917 (figs. 2, 3, 4 & 6), that created a sensation when they made their début in Paris. Seven of the nudes from this series were exhibited that year at the Galerie Berthe Weill, four of them catalogued simply as *Nu*. The present work may have been among these pictures. The explicit paintings that hung in the gallery window caused a commotion on opening day, attracting a crowd of passers-by and the attention of the local police precinct who temporarily shut down the exhibition. What was so shocking was the fact that these nudes were contemporary women, decontextualized from any allegorical or historical narrative. Furthermore, the models' permissiveness and the artist's accessibility to them implied that these oils were post-coital renderings, the women still flush and basking in the afterglow.

Contemporary accounts tell of how Modigliani insisted on privacy when he held sessions with his models. Supposedly, he was once interrupted by his dealer Zborowski and immediately flew into a fit of anger, throwing out his model and threatening to destroy the canvas. It is important to remember that Modigliani's nudes were a financially-incentivized endeavour, commissioned by Zborowski for future sales. Furthermore, painting nudes required hiring models, and Modigliani depended on his dealer to cover this expense. During the months that he worked on these pictures, the artist set up his studio in Zborowski's apartment on the rue Joseph Bara, and was very



much dependent on the dealer's financial support. It is most likely the case that the present work was sold by Zborowski to the renowned collector Dr. Raymond-Jacques Sabouraud not long after Modigliani completed it.

Modigliani began painting nudes in 1908, generally in the forms of caryatids, but it was only after he abandoned sculpture in 1914 that he developed the unique idiom evident in the present painting. His was an aesthetic gleaned from the artistic precedents of Italian Renaissance and Mannerist painting, the linear simplicity of African tribal carvings and the earth-toned palette and geometric modeling of Cubism. All of these influences can all be identified in *La Belle Romaine*. For example, the provocative pose of the model here recalls the curvacious anatomy of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (fig. 9), and the elegant sway of the figure's body can also be likened to the swooning Madonnas of the early Renaissance. The dramatically contoured and foreshortened pose of *La Belle Romaine* has a distinctly three-dimensional appeal that is indebted to the artist's own experience with stone-carving and his appreciation for sculpture. Matisse's bronze *Figure decorative* (fig. 7), completed in 1908 and which Modigliani may have seen in Paris, comes to mind as a possible inspiration. Another contemporary influence may have been Picasso's Rose-period depictions of monumental female nudes, particularly the seated figure from 1906 (fig. 10). The physical gravitas of the present picture is comparable to that of Picasso's painting, but Modigliani presents the strength and power of the female body as a more explicitly sexual force.

The sensual allure of *La Belle Romaine* is reflected in its palette and the pose of the model. The amber and rose-colored tones evoke the radiant warmth of the figure's flesh and the intimate atmosphere in which the artist painted his picture. Seated on a cushioned surface and draped in a sheet, the model tantalizes us with a coy attempt at shielding her nudity. To heighten the erotic anticipation of the scene, she draws attention to her obscured genitals with an arm that touches both her breast and the top of her raised thigh. Her legs extend beyond the edge of the canvas and her lower torso is the center of mass in the foreground, confronting the viewer with its uncompromising proximity.

Carol Mann discusses the strategic modeling of Modigliani's nude, and how the woman's bodily positioning guides the eye around her voluptuous contours: "When she is not parallel to the picture plane, the legs and elbows always point earthwards -- basic reassurance, *Venus naturalis*. The sensuous line leads the spectator's eye slowly round the woman, and the rhythm of the brushwork gathers momentum in the area surrounding the pelvis....In some of the seated and standing nudes, the antique *Venus pudica* cliché is used convincingly: the models conceal their sex with a convenient piece of draperly, or better still with their hand, thereby only making it more obvious." (C. Mann, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44).

Emily Braun has written about the appeal of Modigliani's nudes and explains why they are so irresistible: "The most startling aspect of a Modigliani nude, what makes it immediately identifiable, is the way in which the female body is literally in your face. A more delicate way of putting it is not possible, nor would it do justice to the manner in which the bodies languish parallel to the picture plane and then sprawl into the foreground....The women's bodies flow expansively beyond the edge, as if to emphasise that the bounded plane of the canvas cannot adequately encompass the swell and stretch of line and muscle. Modigliani's compositional strategies draw attention to the physicality of the human form and to a female sexuality that exceeds the 'normal' confinement of the nude in painting. Although his canvases are only average size these images often take up the entire room. Long before Helmut Newton, Amedeo Modigliani did big nudes, big in presence, sexuality and historical ambition" (E. Braun, "Carnal Knowledge," in *Modigliani and His Models* (exhibition catalogue), Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2006, p. 45).



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