

MAURO NUTRICATI



# MODIGLIANI

SPACE VOLUME FORM

*editio minor*





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On the cover:  
Amedeo Modigliani, *La Noble Lady*, 1915 (detail of page 50)



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A GIANNA E NICOLÒ



“LA VITA È UN DONO, DEI POCHI AI MOLTI,  
DI COLORO CHE SANNO E CHE HANNO  
A COLORO CHE NON SANNO E CHE NON HANNO”

A. MODIGLIANI



## INTRODUCTION

THE ULTIMATE AIM I HAVE SET MYSELF IN COMPOSING THIS WORK IS TO PROVIDE A CONTRIBUTION TOWARD A MORE ACCURATE READING OF MODIGLIANI'S OEU-  
VRE, WITHOUT, HOWEVER, GIVING RISE TO GENERALIZATIONS THAT MIGHT, FROM  
AN EXEGETICAL STANDPOINT, CONFLICT WITH THE PRACTICE OF AN ARTIST NATU-  
RALLY DEVOTED TO RESEARCH AND, FOR THAT VERY REASON ALONE, DIFFICULT  
TO SUBSUME WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF A GENERAL THEORY APPLICABLE TO HIS  
ENTIRE PRODUCTION. MOVING WITHIN THIS FRAMEWORK, I CAME, AT A CERTAIN  
POINT, TO BELIEVE THAT I POSSESSED A BODY OF REFLECTIONS ENDOWED WITH A  
DEGREE OF COHERENCE AND INTELLIGIBILITY SUFFICIENT TO BE SHARED.

THE STRUCTURE I HAVE DEVISED FOR THE ESSAY I HERE PROPOSE ESSENTIALLY  
CONSISTS OF TWO PARTS: THE FIRST, AND MORE SUBSTANTIAL, IS DEVOTED TO THE  
COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS UNDERLYING MODIGLIANI'S WORK; THE SECOND WILL  
ADDRESS THE ONLY HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION I HAVE UNDERTAKEN  
AND WILL FOCUS ON MODIGLIANI'S STAY AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, A CIRCUMSTAN-  
CE THAT SERVES AS A PRELUDE TO THE ANALYSIS AND DATING OF SEVERAL OF HIS  
NUDES, AMONG WHICH PARTICULAR ATTENTION WILL BE DEVOTED TO WHAT I BE-  
LIEVE TO BE THE MOST CELEBRATED OF THEM: THE RECLINING NUDE.

THE ANALYSIS OF THE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE COMPLEX CREATIVE PRO-  
CESS IMPLEMENTED BY THE ARTIST HAS, IN MY VIEW, REVEALED A REPRESENTA-  
TIONAL SYSTEM CONSTRUCTED UPON THREE PILLARS: SPACE, VOLUME, AND FORM.  
A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF THE LITERATURE HAS APPROACHED THE COMPOSI-  
TIONAL GENESIS OF HIS PRODUCTION BY OFFERING INTERPRETATIONS THAT BETRAY  
A CERTAIN DEGREE OF PRECONCEPTION. THIS HAS GIVEN RISE TO PSYCHOLOGI-  
CALLY ORIENTED READINGS, IN WHICH SOME AUTHORS HAVE PROCEEDED UNDER  
THE CONVICTION THAT MODIGLIANI'S WORK WAS GROUNDED IN AN INTERPRETA-  
TION OF THE UNCONSCIOUS CLEARLY DERIVED FROM PSYCHOANALYTIC THOUGHT.  
OTHERS HAVE IDENTIFIED IN HIS WORKS PRIMITIVIST SUGGESTIONS OR ECHOES  
OF THE SPLENDORS OF THE RENAISSANCE; AT TIMES, THE AESTHETIC OUTCOME  
PECULIAR TO HIM HAS BEEN ASCRIBED TO THE EXCLUSIVE AND DIRECT INFLUENCE  
OF THE PARISIAN AVANT-GARDES OF THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWEN-  
TIETH CENTURIES. IN MY PERSONAL VIEW—AND I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO PROVIDE  
A DEMONSTRATION—WHILE SOME OF THESE FACTORS DID INDEED CONTRIBUTE  
TO SHAPING THE DISTINCTIVE SPATIAL, VOLUMETRIC, AND FORMAL CONCEPTION  
ELABORATED BY MODIGLIANI, I CANNOT REFRAIN FROM POINTING OUT THAT AT  
THE CORE OF THE PRINCIPAL EXEGETICAL APPROACHES THERE LIES A FUNDAMEN-  
TAL MISUNDERSTANDING WHOSE PRIMARY EFFECT HAS BEEN TO CRYSTALLIZE THE  
READING OF HIS WORKS.

IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THIS RIGIDITY, I HAVE SOUGHT TO SHIFT THE INVE-  
STIGATION TOWARD THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF MODIGLIANI'S COMPOSI-  
TIONAL ARCHITECTURE. FROM A STRICTLY PRACTICAL STANDPOINT, I ANCHORED  
THE ANALYSIS IN THE WORKS THEMSELVES, PRODUCING A SERIES OF GRAPHIC ELA-  
BORATIONS IN ORDER TO CONVEY THE CONCEPTS AS EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE. I  
CONFESS THAT I IMMEDIATELY SET ASIDE THE POSSIBILITY OF EVALUATING EACH  
INDIVIDUAL DRAWING OR PAINTING; MY INTENTION WAS NOT TO COMPILE A CATA-  
LOGUE RAISONNÉ.

## FIGURATIVE SPACE, VOLUME, AND FORM IN MODIGLIANI'S CREATIVE PROCESS

AMEDEO MODIGLIANI IS UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ARTISTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. HE POSSESSED THE UNQUESTIONABLE MERIT OF HAVING INTERPRETED, IN AN ORIGINAL MANNER, THE HISTORICAL-ARTISTIC PHENOMENON THAT WAS TAKING SHAPE IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY PARIS, THE VITAL EPICENTER OF A REVOLUTION DESTINED TO LEAVE AN ENDURING MARK ON THE HISTORY OF ART.

BORN IN LIVORNO ON JULY 12, 1884, HE TRAINED IN THE WORKSHOP OF GUGLIELMO MICHELI, A PUPIL OF GIOVANNI FATTORI, WHERE HE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO FORGE HIS NATURAL INCLINATION FOR ART. FATTORI, FOR HIS PART, WAS AN EXTRAORDINARY DRAFTSMAN, ENGRAVER, AND PAINTER, THE PROGENITOR OF A SCHOOL THAT INFLUENCED AND FORMED ENTIRE GENERATIONS OF ARTISTS AMONG THE MOST REFINED IN THE EUROPEAN PANORAMA, YET INEXPLICABLY—AND FOR A LONG TIME—NEGLECTED BY MUCH OF ACADEMIC CRITICISM.

IT IS TO THAT FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY OF GRAPHIC AND PICTORIAL LINE THAT DISTINGUISHES MODIGLIANI'S PRODUCTION MUST BE TRACED. HIS INNATE TALENT FOUND FERTILE GROUND IN THE INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC FERMENT OF HIS NATIVE LIVORNO, FURTHER SUPPORTED BY HIS STAYS IN SOME OF ITALY'S PRINCIPAL ART CITIES: NAPLES, ROME, FLORENCE, AND VENICE. IN THESE LATTER CITIES HE ATTENDED THE LIFE DRAWING SCHOOL, ALBEIT—ACCORDING TO TESTIMONY—INTERMITTENTLY. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE ITALIAN ARTISTIC TRADITION EXERTED A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT UPON HIM AND, VERY LIKELY, IN HIS HANDLING OF SPACE HE ASSIMILATED THE LESSONS OF PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA AND LEONARDO. HIS DISTINCTIVE ARCHETYPE OF VOLUME WAS CERTAINLY INFLUENCED BY DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF CLASSICAL SCULPTURE, AND IN HIS WORKS ONE MAY DISCERN REFERENCES TO EGYPTIAN ART. AS FOR PAINTING TECHNIQUE AND THE CONCEPTION OF COLOR, HE ABSORBED THE TEACHINGS OFFERED—AS PREVIOUSLY NOTED—BY THE MACCHIAIOLI SCHOOL AND BY THE CHROMATIC RESEARCH ADVOCATED BY THE MAJOR ARTISTS OF THE VENETIAN RENAISSANCE: GIORGIONE, TITIAN, VERONESE, AND TINTORETTO. THIS SUBSTRATUM WOULD LATER MERGE WITH THE NEW FORMS OFFERED BY THE PARISIAN AVANT-GARDES, ALTHOUGH HIS AESTHETIC WOULD ULTIMATELY RETAIN AN ENTIRELY PERSONAL ORIENTATION.

HE ARRIVED IN PARIS IN 1906, WHERE HE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE WITH THE PRECEDING GENERATION OF PAINTERS WHO BROUGHT ABOUT THE ARTISTIC REVOLUTION IN FRANCE: MANET, MONET, RENOIR, TOULOUSE-LAUTREC, AND CÉZANNE. IN PARTICULAR, FROM THE MASTER OF AIX, MODIGLIANI ADOPTED THE SYSTEM OF REPRESENTING SPACE AND BODIES THROUGH PLANES AND VOLUMES; THESE INFLUENCES CONVERGED IN SEVERAL PAINTINGS WITH STRONG CÉZANNIAN OVERTONES PRODUCED DURING HIS FIRST PARISIAN PERIOD. I BELIEVE, IN ANY CASE, THAT HE NEVER INTERRUPTED HIS DIALOGUE WITH THE GREAT FRENCH ARTIST.

MODIGLIANI EXPRESSED ADMIRATION FOR SOUTINE, AND I SUPPOSE THAT THIS SENTIMENT WAS PROMPTED BY AN EMPATHETIC PARTICIPATION IN THE SACRIFICE THAT THE BELARUSIAN-BORN ARTIST MADE IN PRESERVING HIS ARTISTIC VOCATION. DESPITE THE STRONG IDIOSYNCRASY BETWEEN THE TWO, AMONG HIS OWN GENERATION MODIGLIANI TRULY APPRECIATED ONLY PICASSO, WHO, AS THE HIGH PRIEST OF THE CUBIST REVOLUTION, EMBRACED CÉZANNE'S INITIAL PREMISES AND BROUGHT THEM TO FULFILLMENT. TOGETHER WITH BRAQUE, THE PAINTER FROM MÁLAGA INTRODUCED INTO THE ARTWORK THE POSSIBILITY FOR THE OBSERVER TO ENJOY A VISION OF THOSE VOLUMES OTHERWISE CONSTRAINED BY THE LIMITATIONS OF THE SINGLE VIEWPOINT OFFERED BY RENAISSANCE PERSPECTIVE.

WHAT WAS THUS INTRODUCED, IN ESSENCE, WAS WHAT SCHOLARS ARE COMMONLY INCLINED TO DEFINE AS THE “FOURTH DIMENSION,” THAT IS, TIME. (IT IS WORTH RECALLING THAT, IN CONTRAST TO THE CUBIST SPATIAL CONCEPT, TRIDIMENSIONALITY IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE REFERS TO THE TECHNICAL DEVICE NECESSARY TO RENDER GRAPHICALLY THE VOLUME OF ARTISTIC OBJECTS AND THE SENSE OF SPATIALITY WITHIN A COMPOSITION THROUGH THE USE OF PERSPECTIVAL AND CHIAROSCURO DEVICES—A FICTIO, SINCE THE CORPUS MECHANICUM UPON WHICH THE WORK WAS EXECUTED REMAINED NONETHELESS BIDIMENSIONAL.). THE MANIFESTO OF THE AFOREMENTIONED RESEARCH IS, BY MANY, CONSIDERED TO BE LES DEMOISELLES D’AVIGNON, A PAINTING EXECUTED BY PICASSO IN 1907, WHEN HE WAS RENTING A STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR.

THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE CUBIST MOVEMENT ARE BY NOW FIRMLY CONSOLIDATED WITHIN THE THEORETICAL HERITAGE OF THE HISTORY OF ART; I SHALL THEREFORE PROCEED WITH A SINGLE EXAMPLE SOLELY FOR NARRATIVE CLARITY.

LET US IMAGINE A THREE-DIMENSIONAL SOLID FIGURE—A CUBE. FROM A GIVEN VIEWPOINT, AT A GIVEN MOMENT ( $t'$ ), IT IS POSSIBLE TO OBSERVE AT MOST THREE OF THE SIX FACES OF THAT SOLID, WHILE THE REMAINING THREE REMAIN HIDDEN FROM VIEW. IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE OBSERVATION OF THE PORTION OF THE CUBE CONCEALED AT MOMENT ( $t'$ ), IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO VARY THE POINT OF OBSERVATION AND, CONSEQUENTLY, TO MOVE INTO ANOTHER TEMPORAL MOMENT, WHICH WE SHALL CALL ( $t''$ ). CUBIST DECOMPOSITION MAKES IT POSSIBLE, IN EXTREME SYNTHESIS, TO CONDENSE INTO A SINGLE OBSERVATIONAL EVENT—LET US CALL IT ( $E$ )—AT A SINGLE TIME ( $t$ ), THE TWO TEMPORAL MOMENTS DESCRIBED ABOVE ( $t'$ ) AND ( $t''$ ), SUCH THAT  $Et = t' + t''$ .

THE THEORETICAL PROCESS LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIFFERENT TENDENCIES AND HAS BEEN FORMALLY DIVIDED BY HISTORIOGRAPHY INTO PROTO-CUBISM, ANALYTICAL CUBISM, AND SYNTHETIC CUBISM. FOR OUR PRESENT PURPOSES, THE RESEARCH ORIGINATED—ESPECIALLY IN ITS PRIMORDIAL THEORETICAL ELABORATION UNDER CÉZANNE—FROM A REDUCTION OF FIGURES AND OBJECTS INTO ELEMENTARY VOLUMES. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY A FRAGMENTATION OF SPACE AND, CONSEQUENTLY, VOLUMES AND PLANES WERE RENDERED THROUGH JUXTAPOSITION, SUPERIMPOSITION, AND INTERPENETRATION. IN THIS WAY, THERE EMERGED A MULTIPLICATION OF VIEWPOINTS AND THE ELABORATION OF A COMPOSITIONAL ARCHITECTURE FREED FROM PERSPECTIVAL, PROPORTIONAL, AND TEMPORAL CONSTRAINTS. THIS PROCESS PRODUCED THE EFFECT OF RENDERING THE REPRESENTED SUBJECT NEARLY UNRECOGNIZABLE AND, FOR THIS REASON, BRAQUE AND PICASSO, IN ORDER TO AVERT AN ABSTRACT DRIFT OF THE COMPOSITION, INTRODUCED INTO THE PAINTING TYPOGRAPHIC CHARACTERS, SIGNS, AND FORMS RECALLING REALITY, THEREBY ANCHORING IT TO THE ARTISTIC ELABORATION.

THE DEVICE JUST DESCRIBED INITIATED AN EVOLUTION OF CUBISM, A TENDENCY DEFINED AS SYNTHETIC CUBISM, WHICH ESSENTIALLY RESOLVED ITSELF IN A TEMPERING OF THE EXCESSIVE FRAGMENTATION RESULTING FROM THE DECOMPOSITIONAL ACTIVITY CHARACTERISTIC OF THE PRECEDING ANALYTICAL CUBIST PHASE. TO THIS END, BRAQUE, PICASSO, AND JUAN GRIS INSERTED INTO THE WORK—AFTER TYPOGRAPHIC CHARACTERS—PAPIER COLLÉ AND TROMPE-L’ŒIL, COMPOSITIONAL ARTIFICES USEFUL IN CREATING A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PAINTING AND REALITY (EVOKED ESPECIALLY THROUGH THE MATERIALS USED IN PAPIER COLLÉ). IN THIS WAY, ANY EXPLICIT SPATIAL INDICATION BECAME UNNECESSARY AND THE COMPOSITIONAL STRUCTURE WAS REFINED THROUGH THE SLIDING AND JUXTAPOSITION OF PLANES. THIS REFLECTION WAS ACCOMPANIED BY A RECOVERY OF COLOR—ALBEIT STILL IN AN ANTI-NATURALISTIC KEY—IN CONTRAST TO THE PRECEDING ANALYTICAL CUBIST TENDENCY, IN WHICH COLOR HAD BEEN REDUCED TO A VERY LIMITED TONAL RANGE.

BUILDING UPON THE PREMISES ESTABLISHED FIRST BY CÉZANNE AND SUBSEQUENTLY BY CUBISM, MODIGLIANI DID NOT EVADE THE IMPERATIVE TO RETHINK FIGURATIVE SPACE IN AN ORIGINAL MANNER; YET HE TRANSCENDED THE SPATIAL FRAMEWORK OF TRADITION IN A WHOLLY PERSONAL AND INDEPENDENT WAY WITH RESPECT TO THE AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS.

FROM CAREFUL OBSERVATION OF HIS WORKS, I HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE ARTICULATION BY PLANES—VISIBLE IN THE CLASSICAL CONCEPTION OF FIGURATIVE SPACE—WAS REINTERPRETED BY MODIGLIANI IN FAVOR OF A UNITY AMONG FIGURE, BACKGROUND, AND SPACE.

AS A RESULT OF THIS RESEARCH, HIS COMPOSITIONS, WHILE ENGAGING MULTIPLE PLANES OF DEPTH, DISPLAY NONE OF THE ELISIONS TYPICAL OF THE SEGMENTATION TO WHICH SPACE WAS SUBJECTED IN THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTION. THIS ORIGINAL CONFIGURATION IS THE OUTCOME, AMONG OTHER FACTORS THAT WE SHALL ANALYZE, OF A THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARTICULATION OF LINE THAT ENABLED THE ARTIST TO DEVELOP HIS FIGURES BY ENGAGING, WITHOUT INTERRUPTION, THE CONSTRUCTED SPACE.

MOREOVER, I BELIEVE I HAVE IDENTIFIED, WITHIN MODIGLIANI'S SPATIAL CONCEPTION, A FURTHER ELEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE PRESENT IN HIS WORKS AND CAPABLE OF DETERMINING THE SENSE OF COMPOSITIONAL DEPTH. AS WE SHALL SEE MORE CLEARLY THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF THE PAINTINGS, STRENGTHENED BY HIS EXPERIENCE IN SCULPTURE, MODIGLIANI OFTEN CONCEIVED FIGURATIVE SPACE AS A SOLID BLOCK FROM WHICH HE CARVED HIS FIGURES; THE IMMEDIATE OUTCOME OF THIS PROCESS WAS THE EMERGENCE OF A NEGATIVE SPACE OPPOSED TO THE FIGURES. BY PLAYING UPON THE DIALOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FIGURE (REPRESENTING A FULL VOLUME) AND NEGATIVE SPACE (EMPTY VOLUME), MODIGLIANI DEVELOPED THE SENSE OF SPATIAL DEPTH THAT IS CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS COMPOSITIONS.

IN THIS REGARD, WE SHALL HAVE OCCASION TO EXAMINE THE MEANING OF A NOTE FOUND IN ONE OF HIS DRAWINGS, DATED 1914–15, IN WHICH THERE APPEARS A GENERIC AND OTHERWISE UNSPECIFIED REFERENCE TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FULL AND EMPTY. THOUGH LACONIC, I BELIEVE THIS ANNOTATION MUST BE INTERPRETED AS A PROGRAMMATIC INDICATION OF RESEARCH SUBSEQUENTLY DEVELOPED IN LATER WORKS.

THAT MODIGLIANI PROCEEDED FROM THE PRIMARY AND INESCAPABLE NECESSITY OF CONFERRING SPATIAL DEPTH UPON HIS WORKS IS MADE EVIDENT BY THE ARCHITECTURE OF HIS PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS, INFORMED BY PERSPECTIVAL AND COMPOSITIONAL CHOICES CLEARLY FUNCTIONAL TO THE CREATION OF A SPACE TENDING TOWARD INFINITY. AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THIS RESEARCH, MANY OF HIS WORKS EXHIBIT A COMPRESSION OF SPACE, RESPONSIBLE FOR THE OBSERVABLE DEFORMATIONS, PRODUCING THE EFFECT OF A CLOSURE OF THE SPATIAL ARCHITECTURE, PARTICULARLY IN WIDTH. IN SUCH CASES, SERVING AS A COUNTERPOINT TO EXCESSIVE OCCLUSION, WE FIND WITHIN THE PICTORIAL VOLUMES OPENINGS RENDERED THROUGH METICULOUS MODULATION OF COLOR, INSERTED WITH THE SPECIFIC AIM OF ALTERNATING VOID AND FULLNESS. THIS CHOICE POSSESSES A PRECISE PERCEPTUAL AS WELL AS COMPOSITIONAL CHARACTER AND IMPARTS AN EXTRAORDINARY DYNAMISM WITHIN THE CONCEIVED SPACE.

THE LIVORNESE ARTIST THUS ARRIVED AT THE ELABORATION OF A COMPOSITE FIGURATIVE SYSTEM IN WHICH THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FULL AND EMPTY—INSTRUMENTAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEPTH—WAS ACCOMPANIED BY A GEOMETRIC USE OF LINE AND THE CONCEPTION OF ORIGINAL PERSPECTIVAL SYSTEMS.

WITH REGARD TO HIS INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROPERTIES OF COLOR, MODIGLIANI—BEING A REMARKABLE COLORIST—TRACED A PATH THAT LED HIM TO DEFINE IN AN ORIGINAL MANNER THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE VOLUMES THAT SUBSTANTIATE HIS FIGURES. WITHIN THIS FIELD OF INQUIRY, MODULATION OF COLOR, PAINTERLY GESTURE, AND PALETTE ASSUMED SIGNIFICANT ROLES—ELEMENTS WHICH, IN MODIGLIANI'S CONCEPTION, RISE AS A REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLE OF ADMIRABLE COEXISTENCE BETWEEN TWO CONCEPTIONS, TRADITIONAL AND MODERN, OF THE ARTISTIC OBJECT.

IT IS NOW APPROPRIATE, ALBEIT BRIEFLY AND IN ANTICIPATION OF MORE ADEQUATE TREATMENT IN THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION, TO ADDRESS THE CELEBRATED STYLISTIC DEVICE OF THE “ABSENCE OF THE EYES.”

THE NEED TO DEVELOP THE COMPOSITION IN DEPTH, TO PRESERVE THE INTERCONNECTION OF PLANES, AND TO REDUCE THE COMPOSITION TO UNITY LED MODIGLIANI, IN MY VIEW, TO ELABORATE A COMPOSITIONAL MODEL THAT ENTAILED THE VISUAL RECOVERY OF THE SPACE SITUATED BEHIND THE SITTERS. HIS INTENTION WAS REALIZED SPECIFICALLY THROUGH THE HOLLOW RENDERING OF THE ORBITAL CAVITIES, THROUGH WHICH THE OBSERVER'S GAZE IS LED BEYOND THE FIGURES. THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURE THAT HAS SO GREATLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE FAME OF THE LIVORNESE ARTIST THUS POSSESSES AN EXQUISITELY SPATIAL MEANING. AS FURTHER CONFIRMATION OF THIS CLAIM, ONE MAY OBSERVE THE COLOR WITH WHICH THE ARTIST RENDERED THE EYES: VERY OFTEN THEY ARE OF THE SAME COLOR AS THE BACKGROUND. IN OTHER PAINTINGS, AGAIN BY VIRTUE OF THE AFOREMENTIONED FUNCTION, MODIGLIANI MODULATED THE TONAL VALUE OF THE EYES' COLOR ACCORDING TO THE DEPTH ASSIGNED TO THEM WITHIN THE FIGURATIVE STRUCTURE.

IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT MODIGLIANI'S WORKS DO NOT EXPRESS A RADICAL FRAGMENTATION OF SPACE AND THE CONSEQUENT FUSION OF FIGURE AND BACKGROUND THAT MAY BE OBSERVED IN THE EARLY TENDENCIES OF ANALYTICAL CUBISM. ALTHOUGH HE SOUGHT TO ACHIEVE UNITY BETWEEN FIGURE AND BACKGROUND AND BETWEEN FIGURE AND SPACE, HE NONETHELESS MAINTAINED A STRUCTURAL AUTONOMY AMONG THE ELEMENTS THAT CONSTITUTE THE WORK. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS DISCUSSION WILL MAKE CLEAR THAT, IN ORDER TO OBTAIN SUCH A RESULT, MODIGLIANI ALSO MADE USE OF COMPOSITIONAL DEVICES THAT I HAVE TERMED "BRIDGE-OBJECTS," WHOSE FUNCTION IS TO CONNECT THE FIGURE TO THE BACKGROUND AND TO SPACE. WE SHALL LIKEWISE COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT, IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCH BRIDGE-OBJECTS, THE COMPOSITION WAS INSTEAD CONCEIVED BY MODIGLIANI AS A SOLID BLOCK FROM WHICH HE EXTRACTED—CUT OUT—THE FIGURE; IN THIS CASE, WE ARE EFFECTIVELY CONFRONTED WITH A HIGH RELIEF RENDERED PICTORIALY.

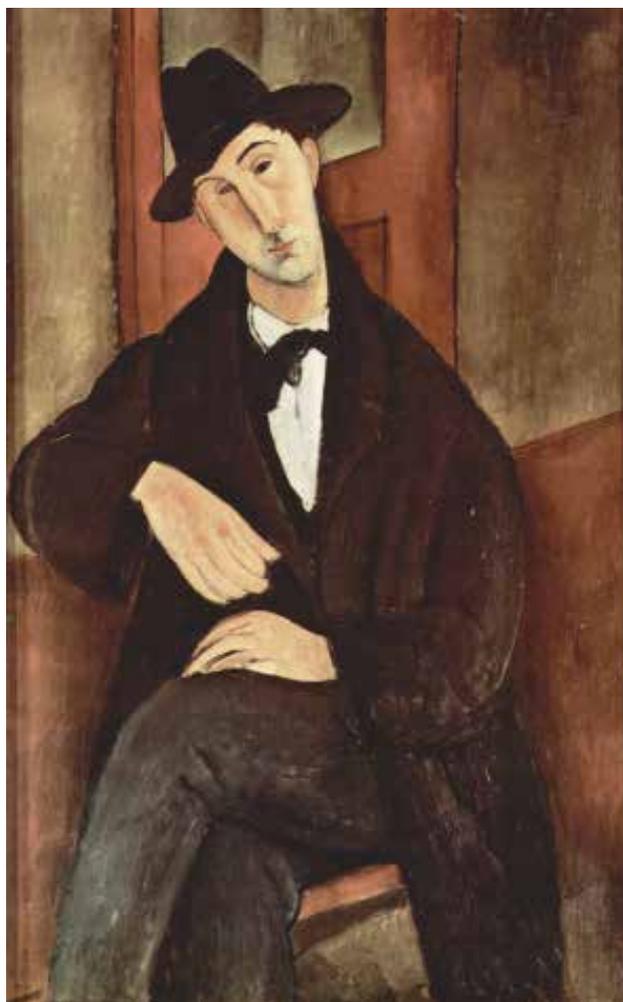
FINALLY, I HAVE IDENTIFIED A FURTHER QUALITY PRESENT IN MODIGLIANI'S WORKS. IN SOME OF THEM, AN ANAMORPHIC ELEMENT APPEARS, REQUIRING A SLIGHT INCLINATION OF THE CANVAS IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A CORRECT READING OF THE PAINTING. THROUGH THIS DEVICE, THE ARTIST INTRODUCED THE OBSERVER'S VIEWPOINT AS A DETERMINING MOMENT IN THE RECOMPOSITION AND GENESIS OF THE WORK. WHAT RESULTS IS A COMPOSITIONAL MODEL CHARACTERIZED BY WORKS CONSTRUCTED ACCORDING TO ORIGINAL PERSPECTIVAL SYSTEMS, IN WHICH THE FIGURES ARE TO BE INTERPRETED AS MASKS OF SPACE WHOSE FORM—ALSO DERIVING FROM THE VOLUMES PRESENT IN THE CONTEXT—BECOMES A GEOMETRIC EXPRESSION, A SYMBOL, OF THE FIGURATIVE ARCHITECTURE CONCEIVED.

IN CONCLUSION, I BELIEVE THAT MODIGLIANI INAUGURATED, IN AN ENTIRELY ORIGINAL MANNER, A TRANSFORMATION IN THE PLASTIC VALUE OF SPACE, CELEBRATING A MASTERFUL SYNTHESIS BETWEEN THE INNOVATIONS INTRODUCED BY THE AVANT-GARDES AND THE LEGACY OF CLASSICAL SPATIAL ORGANIZATION. ALONG THIS THRESHOLD, THE LEGENDARY LINE FULLY MANIFESTS ITS CHARACTER AS A SPATIAL TRANSFORMER CAPABLE OF FERRYING TRADITION TOWARD MODERNITY.

## THE WORKS

### PORTRAIT DE MARIO VARVOGLIS

Fig. 1  
Mario Varvoglis  
1919-1920  
Huile sur toile  
116 x 73 cm  
Coll. particulière  
Ceroni n. 336



FOR THE CONCRETE VERIFICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES SET FORTH, I HAVE TAKEN AS MY FIRST REFERENCE WHAT MANY CONSIDER TO BE MODIGLIANI'S FINAL WORK, NAMELY THE PORTRAIT OF MARIO VARVOGLIS (FIG. 1), A PAINTING IN WHICH THE PICTORIAL ACME AND ARTISTIC MATURITY ATTAINED BY THE ARTIST IN THE FINAL MONTHS OF HIS LIFE ARE MANIFEST. ACCORDING TO WITNESSES WHO RUSHED TO HIS AID, THE CANVAS WAS PRESENT IN THE STUDIO ON RUE DE LA GRANDE-CHAUMIÈRE WHEN MODIGLIANI WAS SEIZED AND TRANSPORTED, IN AGONY, TO THE HÔPITAL DE LA CHARITÉ.

IN THE GRAPHIC ELABORATION I PROPOSE (FIG. 2), ONE MAY OBSERVE, IN THE AREA IMMEDIATELY ABOVE AND BEHIND THE FIGURE, A BACKGROUND—SEEMINGLY A PORTION OF A WALL AND/OR A DOOR—CHARACTERIZED BY A SIGNIFICANT DEFORMATION, VOLUMETRICALLY RENDERED THROUGH MASTERFUL MODULATION OF COLOR BY MEANS OF CERTAIN PRISMATIC FORMS AND APPARENTLY DEVOID OF SPECIFIC COMPOSITIONAL MEANING. IT MIGHT INDEED APPEAR THAT HERE MODIGLIANI MADE A PURELY STYLISTIC CHOICE. WE ARE IN FACT CONFRONTED WITH A SOPHISTICATED ELABORATION THAT DEFINES THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE SITTER: GIVEN THE INCLINATION OF THE HEAD, THE POINTS OF CONVEXITY (INDICATED BY BLUE LINES) AND CONCAVITY (INDICATED BY RED LINES) OF THOSE SOLIDS, WHEN GEOMETRICALLY PROJECTED, DETERMINE—WITH STRICT CORRESPONDENCE—THE POINTS OF CONVEXITY AND CONCAVITY OF MARIO'S FACE AND DEFINE ITS FORM (FIG. 3, DETAIL).



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

WE THUS OBSERVE, REALIZED IN MARIO'S FACE, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIGURE AND SPACE THAT I HAVE DISCUSSED—a NEXUS THAT WILL BECOME PROGRESSIVELY CLEARER AS THE ARGUMENTS ADVANCED IN THIS ESSAY UNFOLD.

ATTENTION MUST BE DRAWN TO A FURTHER ASPECT THAT CHARACTERIZES MODIGLIANI'S COMPOSITIONS, LINKED TO A DUAL OUTCOME ACHIEVED BY THE ARTIST IN THIS AS IN OTHER WORKS: MARIO'S FACE INDEED TAKES SHAPE FROM THE VOLUMES POSITIONED BEHIND HIS HEAD, YET AT THE SAME TIME—THOUGH NOW TRANSFIGURED INTO A NEW, ARCHETYPAL AESTHETIC ENTITY—IT RETAINS A MINIMAL FIDELITY TO THE PHYSICAL PERSON PORTRAYED, MARIO VARVOGLIS (FIGS. 4, 5, AND 6).

MODIGLIANI SUCCEEDED IN PRESERVING HIS FIGURES FROM A RADICAL DECONSTRUCTION OF THE VOLUMES THAT COMPOSE THEM. THIS WAS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH A DYNAMIC USE OF LINE WHICH, ON THE ONE HAND, ENSURED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIGURE IN DEPTH AND, ON THE OTHER, SAFEGUARDED ITS VOLUMETRIC INTEGRITY. IN MY VIEW, THIS REPRESENTS THE MOST CRYSTALLINE EXPRESSION OF A PROFOUND RESPECT FOR THE SITTER, WHO IS THUS NOT REDUCED TO A MERE PRETEXT FOR AN INTELLECTUAL EXERCISE OF ARTISTIC ACTION BUT ELEVATED TO THE GENERATIVE MEASURE OF VISUAL POETRY.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

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Fig. 6

IF THE PURSUIT OF SPATIAL DEPTH AND THE CELEBRATION OF VOLUME CONSTITUTE TWO OF THE CORNERSTONES UPON WHICH MODIGLIANI'S ENTIRE COMPOSITIONAL ARCHITECTURE RESTS, A COROLLARY OF THIS PREMISE IS THE PLACEMENT OF FIGURES WITHIN THE FIGURATIVE SPACE: THEY VERY OFTEN UNDERGO AN INCLINATION TO THE RIGHT OR LEFT RELATIVE TO THE CENTRAL AXIS OF THE PAINTING. IN THE PORTRAIT OF MARIO, THE INCLINATION OF THE HEAD IN FACT ALLOWED MODIGLIANI TO BEGIN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LINE THAT DEFINES THE LEFT PORTION (FOR THE OBSERVER) OF THE FACE AND HAT FROM A PLANE SITUATED DEEPER THAN THE FRONTAL ONE (FIG. 7); THE SAME LINE THEN UNDERWENT ARTICULATION WITHIN THE CONCEIVED SPACE AND, AS A RESULT, TRAVERSED AND ENGAGED SEVERAL PLANES (INDICATED BY THE LETTERS A, B, C, AND D IN FIG. 7).

WE ARE IN FACT VERIFYING THE CELEBRATED THREE-DIMENSIONAL QUALITY OF MODIGLIANI'S LINE, UPON WHICH SEVERAL AUTHORS HAVE EXPRESSED THEMSELVES, AMONG WHOM LIONELLO VENTURI WAS THE FIRST TO ATTEMPT A DEFINITION. THE GREAT CRITIC WAS LATER ECHOED BY HIS PUPIL NELLO PONENTE.

VENTURI, IN AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "SULLA LINEA DI MODIGLIANI," PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL POLIGONO IN 1930, STATED: "THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LINE SEEMS TO BRING BACK ONTO THE PLANE MANY ELEMENTS CREATED FOR DEPTH AND THUS SUGGESTS THAT HE CONSIDERED THE AIM OF ART TO BE DECORATIVE VALUE. AND THEN ONE REALIZES THAT THIS IS NOT AT ALL THE CASE AND THAT HIS LINES NEVER DEVELOP UPON THE SAME PLANE AND REALIZE, IN AN APPEARANCE OF SURFACE, A THREE-DIMENSIONAL VISION."

PONENTE, IN HIS BOOK ON MODIGLIANI, PUBLISHED BY SEDEA/SANSONI IN 1969, WROTE: "MODIGLIANI THUS SITUATES HIMSELF IN THE HISTORICAL PERIOD WHICH, ULTIMATELY, IS STILL OUR HISTORICAL PERIOD, IN WHICH THE HUMAN CONDITION SEEMS UNABLE TO RELY UPON ANY CERTAINTY. THEREFORE, WITH FULL COHERENCE, HE SPOKE TO US IN THE TERMS OF A MODERN LANGUAGE, PURSUED—THIS MUST BE SPECIFIED—MORE RATIONALLY THAN INSTINCTIVELY. BY MEANS OF THE LINE DEVELOPED ON THE PLANE, HE WAS COMPELLED TO DEFORM THE SITE AND THE DIMENSION OF THE IMAGES HE REPRESENTED. ALSO IN ORDER TO PROPOSE MORE INTIMATE TRUTHS, TO REVEAL AN UNKNOWN WORLD. IN THIS WAY HE POSITED HIS ARTISTIC PRACTICE AS THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSCENDING EVERYDAY REALITY..."

I BELIEVE THAT LIONELLO VENTURI HAD INDEED GRASPED THE CORE OF MODIGLIANI'S RESEARCH, AND PERHAPS THE ONLY MANIFEST LIMITATION OF HIS POSITION LIES IN THE ABSENCE OF AN EMPIRICAL DEMONSTRATION OF HIS ASSERTIONS. I HAVE SOUGHT TO REMEDY THIS BY SHARING THE INTERPRETATION PROVIDED BY THE GREAT CRITIC THROUGH CERTAIN GRAPHIC ELABORATIONS (AS YOU HAVE ALREADY SEEN IN THE CASE OF MARIO'S HEAD), WITH THE CAVEAT THAT THE GEOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF THE LINE DO NOT EXHAUST THE FACTORS DETERMINING THE COMPOSITIONAL OUTCOME OF MODIGLIANI'S WORKS.

LET US PROCEED FURTHER WITH THE ANALYSIS OF THE PAINTING.

THE FIGURE THUS EMERGES FROM A KIND OF SCULPTURAL MATRIX RENDERED PICTORIALLY, PREGNANT WITH VOLUMES, WHICH PLASTICALLY RESTORES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FIGURE AND THE CONCEIVED SPACE. LET US OBSERVE THE LINE THAT ALSO DEFINES THE RIGHT SIDE (FOR THE OBSERVER) OF THE HEAD: IT BEGINS TO DEVELOP FROM DEPTH, TRAVERSES SPACE ARTICULATING ITSELF ACROSS SEVERAL PLANES, AND ENDS ON THE FRONTAL PLANE, DIVIDING THE FIGURE INTO TWO PARTS (FIG. 8; THE PLANES ARE INDICATED BY THE LETTERS A, B, C).

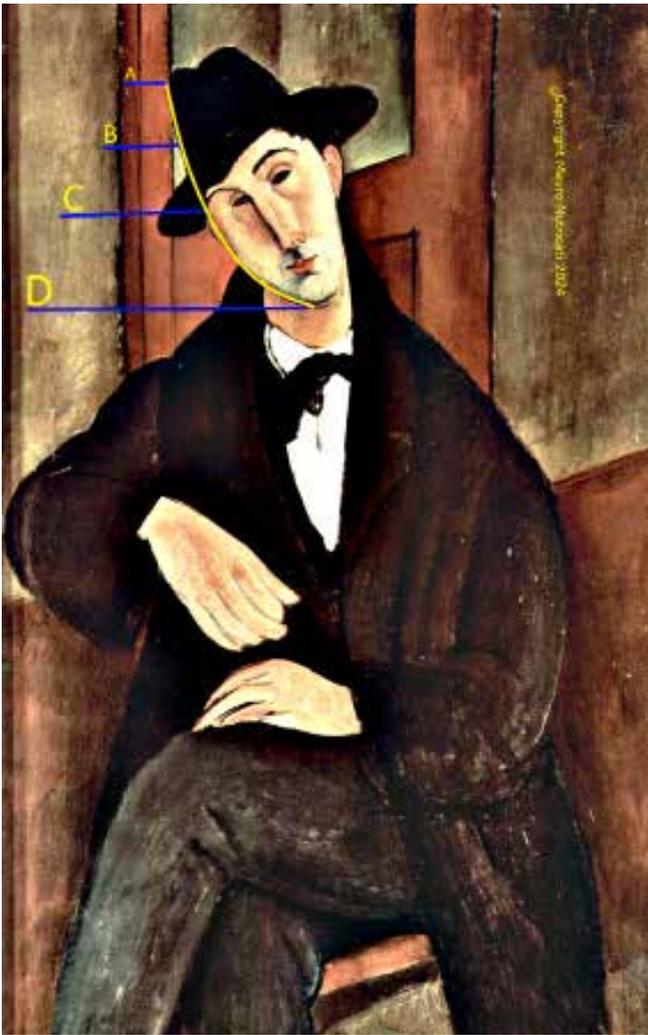


Fig. 7

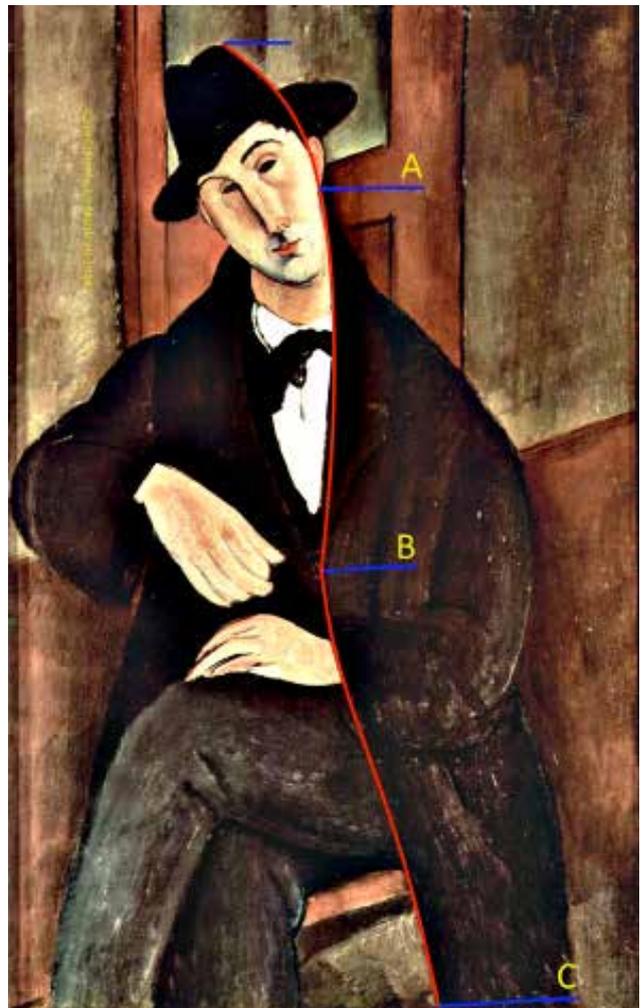


Fig. 8

CONTINUING THE ANALYSIS, WE MAY ALSO NOTE, BEGINNING AT THE HEIGHT OF THE RIGHT SHOULDER, THE PECULIAR CONFIGURATION ASSUMED BY THE LINE DEFINING THE VOLUME AND FORM OF THE RIGHT ARM (FOR THE OBSERVER). ONCE AGAIN, WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO VERIFY THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL ARTICULATION OF THE LINE ACROSS DIFFERENT PLANES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIGURE WITHIN SPACE (FIG. 9: A, B, C, D, E, F).



Fig. 9

FURTHERMORE, THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SHAPE OF THE VOLUMES PRESENT IN THE CONTEXT MARKS THE TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PLANES AND DELINEATES THE RELATIONSHIP OF DEPTH WITH THE FIGURE (FIG. 10). I ALSO SEEM TO DISCERN AN OPENING (FIG. 10, LETTER B) WHICH, TOGETHER WITH THE AFOREMENTIONED ELEMENTS, ACCOUNTS—IN MY VIEW—FOR THE EXISTENCE, WITHIN MODIGLIANI’S COMPOSITIONS, OF THE BIUNIVOCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FULLNESS AND VOID. AS STATED PREVIOUSLY, THIS OPENING ALSO SERVES THE FUNCTION OF MITIGATING EXCESSIVE CLOSURE WITHIN THE FIGURATIVE SPACE.

TAKEN AS A WHOLE, THE PAINTING, IN ITS FINAL AESTHETIC EFFECT, MAY BE LIKENED TO A KIND OF HIGH RELIEF RENDERED PICTORIALLY, WHICH NONETHELESS BETRAYS, THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE ARC OF MODIGLIANI’S ARTISTIC TRAJECTORY, THE PERSISTENCE OF HIS BOND WITH SCULPTURE.

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO DIRECT ATTENTION TO A DETAIL OF THE PORTRAIT OF MARIO THAT WILL ALLOW US TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE DEGREE OF METICULOUSNESS WITH WHICH MODIGLIANI DEVELOPED HIS WORKS (FIG. 11). LET US CONSIDER THE LEFT ARM (FOR THE OBSERVER): IT APPEARS SUSPENDED IN MID-AIR; THERE SEEMS TO BE NO VISIBLE SUPPORT JUSTIFYING ITS POSTURE. NOW LET US OBSERVE THE FINGERS OF THE LEFT HAND: THE THUMB AND INDEX FINGER CLOSE AT A POINT (FIG. 11, RED POINT AND ARROW). WHAT WE ARE OBSERVING IS A SYMBOLIC GESTURE TO WHICH MODIGLIANI ASSIGNED A SPATIAL FUNCTION AND FROM WHICH WE MAY DERIVE THE MAXIMUM POINT OF CONCAVITY OF THE CONCEIVED SPACE. IF WE PROJECT AN IMAGINARY LINE DEPARTING FROM THE JUNCTION OF THE TWO FINGERS, TRAVERSING THE COMPOSITIONAL SPACE, WE REACH THE MAXIMUM POINT OF DEPTH SITUATED BEHIND THE SITTER (FIG. 11, YELLOW LINE INDICATING THE MAXIMUM CONCAVITY OF THE COMPOSITION).

THE OVERCOMING OF TRADITIONAL SPATIAL STRUCTURE WAS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF CUBISM, AND MODIGLIANI MOVED FROM SIMILAR PREMISES WHILE RESOLVING FIGURATIVE SPACE IN AN ENTIRELY INDEPENDENT MANNER.

I ANTICIPATE THAT, IN THE CONCEPTION OF THE LIVORNESE ARTIST, THE IMAGE IS LIBERATED FROM THE CONSTRAINT OF THE SUPPORT AND PROJECTED—THROUGH THE MEDIATION OF THE OBSERVER—INTO A TRIDIMENSIONALITY THAT IS NOT MERELY FICTIVE BUT REAL. WE SHALL HAVE OCCASION TO EXPLORE THIS LATTER CONCEPT MORE FULLY IN THE ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS THAT FOLLOW.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

## LA NOBLE LADY

AT THIS POINT, LET US PROCEED WITH THE ANALYSIS OF A DRAWING ENTITLED LA NOBLE LADY, PROBABLY A PORTRAIT OF BEATRICE HASTINGS (FIG. 26), WHICH WILL ALLOW US TO TAKE A FURTHER STEP TOWARD CLARIFYING MODIGLIANI'S MANAGEMENT OF SPACE.



Fig. 26  
La Noble Lady  
1915  
Crayon gras sur papier  
45,5 x 26,5 cm  
Coll. particulière  
Patani n. 137

BEHIND THE DEPICTED SUBJECT, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, THERE DEVELOPS A VOLUMETRIC BODY SIMILAR TO THAT IDENTIFIED IN THE PORTRAIT OF MARIO VARVOGLIS (FIG. 27).

I HAVE THEREFORE PROCEEDED TO HIGHLIGHT, BY MEANS OF STRAIGHT LINES, THE AFOREMENTIONED VOLUME, WHICH I HAVE HYPOTHESIZED TO BE MORPHOLOGICALLY COMPOSED OF SEVERAL TRIANGULAR PRISMS. EACH SOLID FIGURE COMPOSING THIS VOLUMETRY, ANALOGOUSLY TO WHAT WE OBSERVED IN THE PORTRAIT OF MARIO, POSSESSES POINTS OF CONVEXITY AND CONCAVITY WHICH, WHEN GEOMETRICALLY PROJECTED, RESPECTIVELY GENERATE THE POINTS OF CONVEXITY AND CONCAVITY OF BEATRICE HASTINGS'S FACE AND MODEL HER FEATURES.

SPECIFICALLY, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVAL CHOICE, THE VOLUMETRIC BODY MARKED WITH THE LETTER (A), IN BLUE, POSITIONED TO THE LEFT (FOR THE OBSERVER), IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MODELING THE LEFT SIDE OF THE FACE; THE VOLUME (B), IN GREEN, CONFERS SHAPE UPON THE NOSE; AND THE SOLID BODY INDICATED WITH (C), IN YELLOW, INFORMS THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE FACE (FIGS. 27 AND 28).

MOREOVER, WE MAY VERIFY THE METICULOUSNESS WITH WHICH MODIGLIANI EXECUTED THE DRAWING UNDER EXAMINATION: A SMALL LINE, TANGENT TO THE LEFT NOSTRIL (FOR THE OBSERVER), INDICATES A POINT OF CONCAVITY OF THE FACE CORRESPONDING TO THE CONCAVITY OF THE VOLUME POSITIONED BEHIND THE SITTER (FIGS. 27 AND 28, MAROON LINE).

CONTRIBUTING TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE NOTABLE DEGREE OF ELABORATION TO WHICH MODIGLIANI SUBJECTED HIS COMPOSITIONS IS A DETAIL THAT AT FIRST GLANCE MIGHT APPEAR ALMOST NEGLIGIBLE: THE BROW RIDGE (THE ONLY ONE SKETCHED AND VISIBLE IN THE DRAWING) CONSTITUTES A COMPOSITIONAL DEVICE SUGGESTING THE CHANGE OF PLANE IN THE TRANSITION FROM VOLUME (B) TO VOLUME (C) (FIG. 29).

I HAVE ALSO SOUGHT TO HIGHLIGHT—SOLELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENSURING A MORE ADEQUATE READING—THE SPATIAL CONSTRUCTION PRESENT IN THE DRAWING UNDER ANALYSIS, MAKING USE OF A PARALLELEPIPED TRACED IN LIGHT BLUE, AS MAY BE OBSERVED IN FIG. 30.

FURTHERMORE, THE INSERTION OF THE FIGURE WITHIN ELLIPSES WITH REDUCED SEMI-AXES, REPRESENTED BY AN ARMCHAIR, CONFERS A MARKED DYNAMISM UPON THE COMPOSITION (FIG. 31).

ULTIMATELY, THE FIGURE REPRESENTED IN THIS DRAWING DEVELOPS ACROSS SEVERAL PLANES: THE HEAD OCCUPIES THE DEEPEST ONE, AND THE BODY ARTICULATES ITSELF UNTIL IT REACHES THE PLANE CLOSEST TO THE OBSERVER. FROM THE COMPOSITION THERE CLEARLY EMERGES THE INFLUENCE OF SPACE UPON THE FORMAL OUTCOME OF THE FIGURE, TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT THE LATTER MAY BE CONSIDERED A GEOMETRIC PROPERTY OF THE CONCEIVED SPACE, FROM WHICH IT DIRECTLY PROCEEDS IN ORDER TO ASSUME THE FORM VISIBLE TO US.

Fig. 27



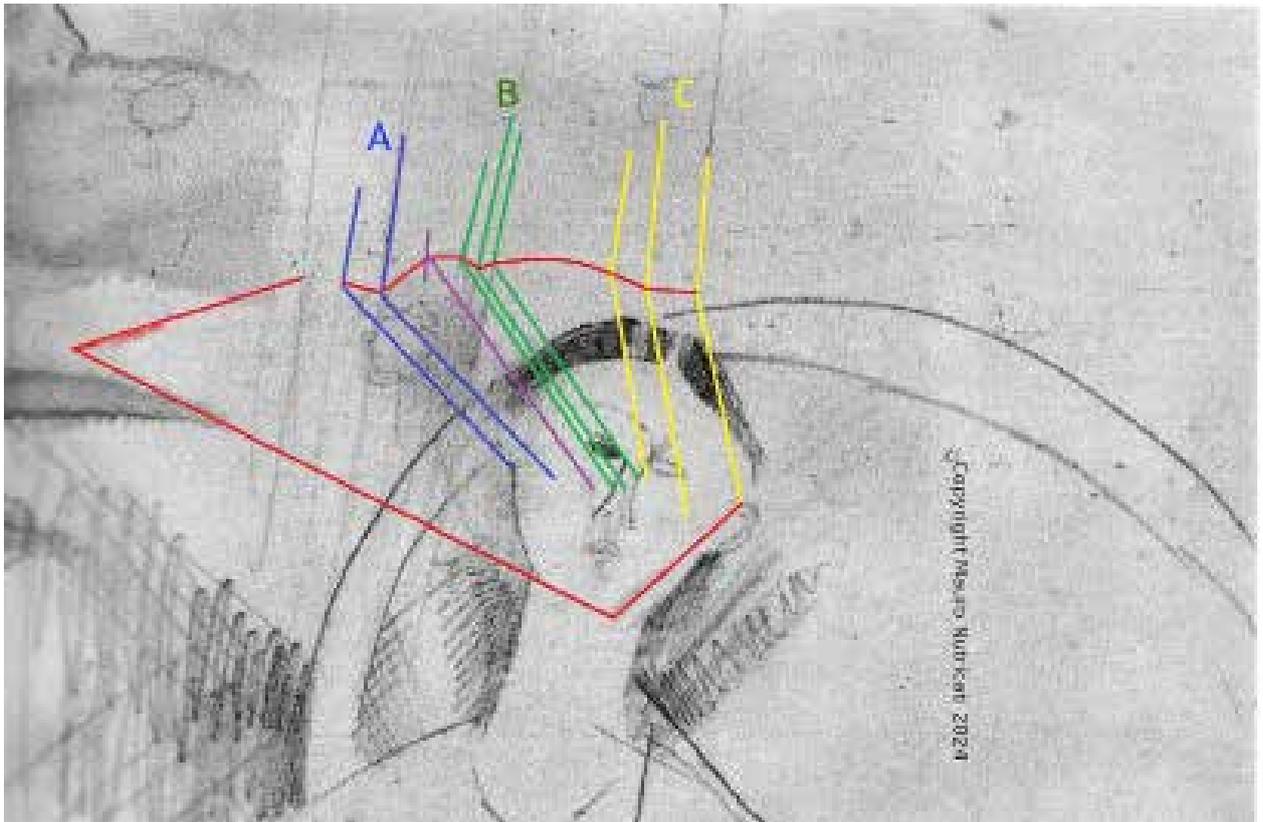


Fig. 28



Fig. 29

Fig. 30

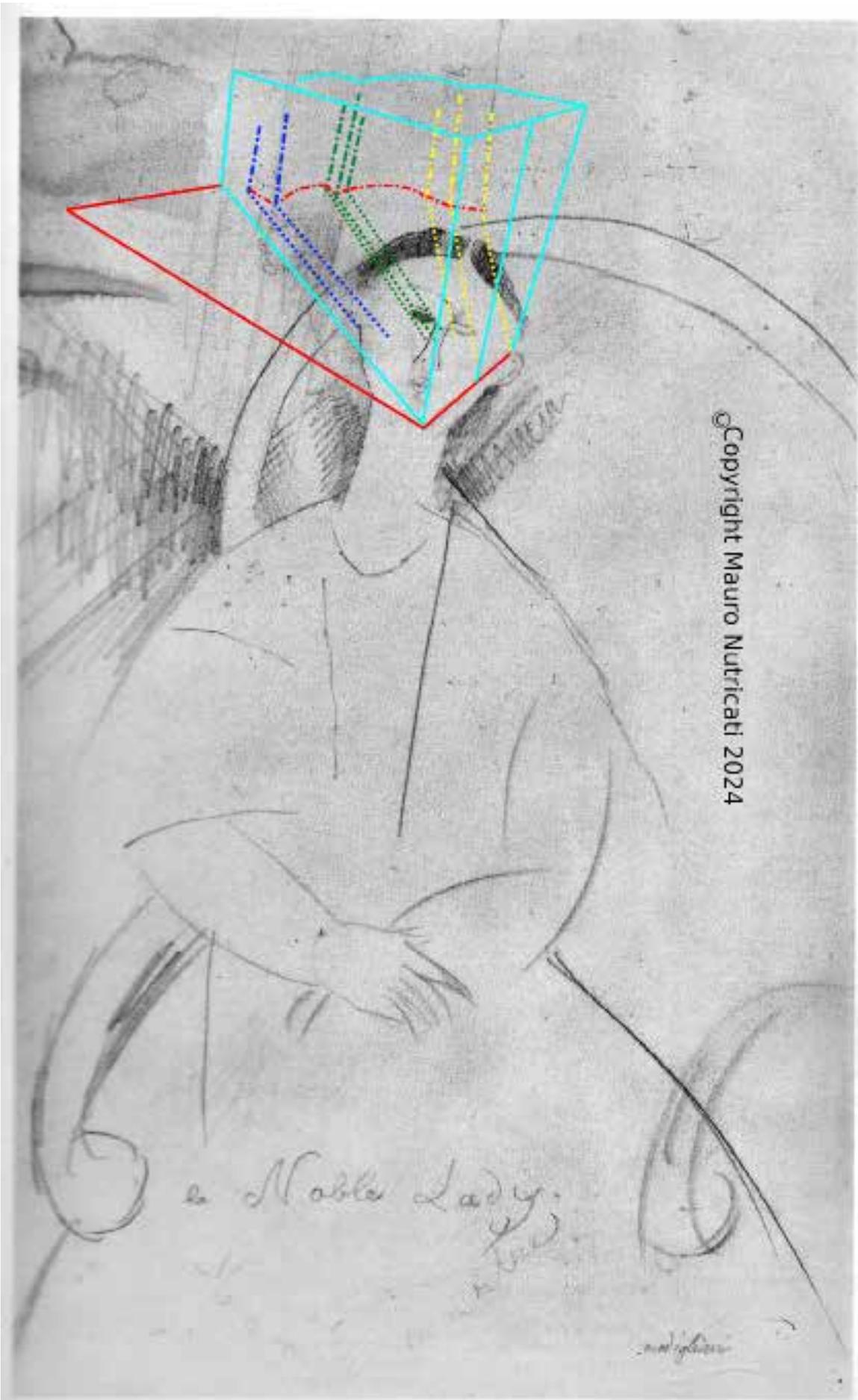


Fig. 31



## PORTRAIT OF BEATRICE HASTINGS

A FURTHER CONFIRMATION OF THE MODUS OPERANDI ADOPTED BY MODIGLIANI COMES FROM ANOTHER PROBABLE PORTRAIT OF BEATRICE HASTINGS, LIKewise EXECUTED IN 1915 (FIG. 34).

FOR THE CONCEPTION AND REALIZATION OF THE FIGURATIVE SPACE OF THE WORK UNDER EXAMINATION, MODIGLIANI FOLLOWED THE SAME PROCESS THAT HAS EMERGED FROM THE WORKS ANALYZED THUS FAR.

THE FIGURE IS PLACED WITHIN A ROOM; THE FACE AND NECK ARE MODELED UPON A HOLLOW VOLUME WHICH I BELIEVE TO BE A WINDOW PRESENT IN THE ROOM OCCUPIED BY THE SITTER. I HAVE THEREFORE ADJUSTED THE CONTRAST OF THE ORIGINAL DRAWING IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE READING OF MY GRAPHIC INTERVENTION: IT WILL BE NOTED THAT THE SHAPE OF THE UPPER PORTION OF THE HEAD AND THAT OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT EXTREMITIES OF THE FACE AND NECK ARE DETERMINED, RESPECTIVELY, BY THE ARCH OF THE WINDOW AND BY THE JAMBS THAT DELIMIT IT (FIG. 35).

LET US OBSERVE, IN PARTICULAR, WITHIN THE GEOMETRIC PROJECTION THAT DETERMINES THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE NECK AND FACE, A SLIGHT TORSION TOWARD THE CENTER OF THE FORM DERIVING FROM THE RIGHT JAMB OF THE WINDOW—AN OPERATION FUNCTIONAL, IN MY VIEW, TO CONFERRING A COMPLETED FORM UPON THE FIGURE.

IN THIS WORK, ONCE AGAIN, THE IMPORTANCE ASSUMED BY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIGURE AND SPACE—AND THE PECULIAR MEANING ATTRIBUTED TO IT IN DETERMINING THE FINAL FORM OF THE COMPOSITION—IS MANIFEST.

THE SPATIAL CONTEXT ELABORATED BY MODIGLIANI, AS WE HAVE VERIFIED, IS PREGNANT WITH VOLUMES AND OBJECTS—WHICH I HAVE DEFINED AS BRIDGE-OBJECTS—VERY OFTEN POSITIONED BEHIND THE SITTERS, AS IN THIS CASE, CONCEIVED ALSO IN RELATION TO CREATING A CONNECTION BETWEEN FIGURE AND BACKGROUND IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE FIGURATIVE SPACE TO UNITY.

AS I BELIEVE, THESE ARE OFTEN ELEMENTS TRULY PRESENT WITHIN THE SPATIAL CONTEXT, FUNCTIONALIZED BY MODIGLIANI ALSO FOR THE PURPOSE OF LINKING REALITY TO THE ARTISTIC COMPOSITION, THEREBY TRANSCENDING MERE REPRESENTATION. AT TIMES THESE OBJECTS (WHICH MAY CONSIST OF PICTOGRAMS, INSCRIPTIONS, SIGNS, OBJECTS, DISGUISED VOLUMES APPARENTLY DEVOID OF MEANING) REPRESENT AN EXERCISE IN PURE COMPOSITION WHICH, BEYOND POSSESSING THE SPATIAL VALUE ALREADY DISCUSSED, ALSO SERVE AS A KIND OF SIGNATURE. AT OTHER TIMES, BOTH ELEMENTS DRAWN FROM REAL CONTEXT AND OBJECTS CREATED PURELY IN FUNCTION OF SPATIAL ARCHITECTURE ARE PRESENT.

IN THIS REGARD, I PROPOSE A HYPOTHESIS CONCERNING THE POSSIBLE ORIGIN OF THE WINDOW AND, CONSEQUENTLY, THE CONTRIBUTION THAT THE CONTEXT MAY HAVE HAD IN DETERMINING THE FINAL FORM OF BEATRICE HASTINGS'S HEAD AND NECK.

IT IS ESTABLISHED THAT THE ENGLISH POET AND MODIGLIANI SHARED, DURING THE PERIOD OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 1914 AND 1915, A SMALL COTTAGE IN MONTMARTRE, LOCATED AT 13 RUE NORVINS. THE PHOTOGRAPHS I HAVE RETRIEVED ONLINE SHOW THE CURRENT STATE OF THE BUILDING (FIG. 36) AND, IF—AS I BELIEVE—ITS APPEARANCE HAS REMAINED SUBSTANTIALLY UNCHANGED OVER THE PAST HUNDRED YEARS, IT IS HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT THE ELEMENT DEPICTED IN THE DRAWING, WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO DEFINING THE SHAPE OF BEATRICE'S HEAD AND NECK, IS PRECISELY ONE OF THE WINDOWS OR THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF THE APARTMENT STILL VISIBLE TODAY (FIGS. 36 AND 37, COMPARISON).



Fig. 34  
La vita domestica  
Beatrice Hastings  
1915  
Crayon sur papier  
42x26 cm  
Coll. particulière  
Patani n. 51



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

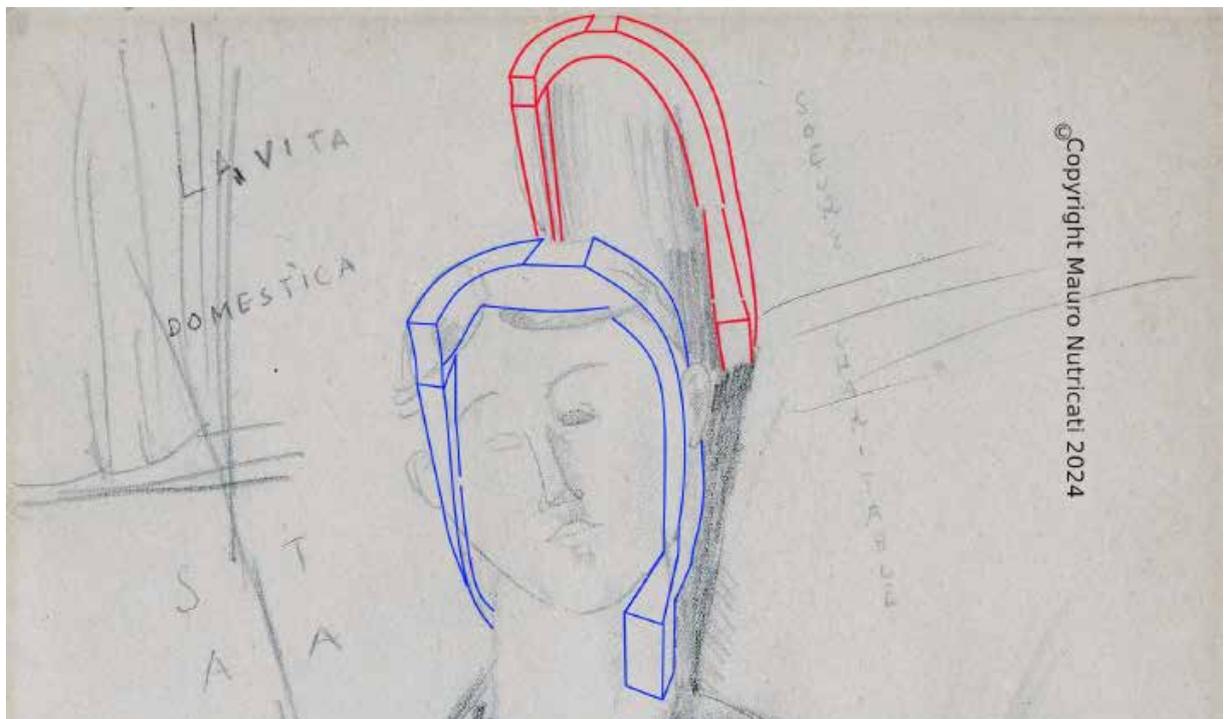


Fig. 37

IN OTHER WORDS, AND IN MY VIEW, MODIGLIANI PRODUCED A SYNTHESIS BETWEEN THE REAL SPATIAL CONTEXT AND THE PERSON PORTRAYED IN ORDER TO DERIVE THE FORM OBSERVABLE IN THE DRAWING. IN THE ELABORATION I HAVE PROPOSED (FIG. 35), I HAVE IDENTIFIED ON THE APEX OF THE SITTER'S HEAD A GROOVE WITH A SQUARE SECTION; FOR THE REASONS STATED, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THIS REPRESENTS THE CAST OF THE LOWER PORTION OF THE KEYSTONE STILL VISIBLE IN THE ARCH OF ONE OF THE WINDOWS OR THE ENTRANCE DOOR OF THE BUILDING AT 13 RUE NORVINS (FIGS. 36 AND 37). IN THIS CASE, THE REAL SPATIAL CONTEXT WOULD RISE TO THE STATUS OF SIGNIFIER OF THE COMPOSITION IMAGINED BY MODIGLIANI, AND THE ARTIST WOULD HAVE INDISSOLUBLY BOUND EFFIGY, SITTER, AND SPATIAL CONTEXT, TRANSFIGURING THEM INTO A NEW ENTITY CHARACTERIZED BY AESTHETIC AUTONOMY.

WITHIN THE CONTEXT THUS DELINEATED MUST BE INSERTED THE READING OF THE SPATIAL VALUE OF THE WINDOW POSITIONED BEHIND THE SITTER, FROM WHICH OPENS A SPACE TENDING TOWARD INFINITY, EVOKED BY THE ARTIST THROUGH MODULATION OF THE TONAL VALUE OF THE GRAPHITE (FIG. 38). INDEED, THE CENTRAL PORTION OF THE FACE REFLECTS THE FIGURATIVE SPACE EXPRESSED IN THIS WORK.

OBSERVE, IN THIS REGARD, THE FURTHER VOLUMETRIC ELABORATION OF THE HEAD (FIG. 38).

YOU WILL NOTICE HOW MODIGLIANI'S INTENTION IS TO INFUSE THE FACE WITH A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT IN DEPTH WHICH, NOT BY CHANCE, HAS BEEN MODELED UPON A HOLLOW BODY: THE COURSE OF THE LINE DEFINING THE BROW RIDGES EVOKES THE DEPTH OF THE WINDOW BECAUSE IT DEVELOPS ACROSS SEVERAL PLANES AND LEVELS OF DEPTH. THE EYES, TOO, ARE PLACED ON A DIFFERENT PLANE, AND ONE MUCH LESS RECESSED, THAN THAT UPON WHICH THE BROW RIDGES ARE SITUATED.

LET US PAUSE FOR A MOMENT ON THE EXECUTION OF THE NOSE: IT IS REPRESENTED AS A HOLLOW VOLUME BECAUSE, THROUGH THE USE OF A VOID—A NEGATIVE SPACE—THE ARTIST SUCCEEDS IN MORE EFFECTIVELY CONVEYING THE SENSE OF DEPTH OF THE FIGURE, RECALLING THE VOID THAT DEVELOPS BEHIND THE FACE IN ORDER TO CREATE A CONNECTION WITH THE WINDOW-OPENING. MOREOVER, THE SLIGHTLY INCLINED NECK AND HEAD CONTRIBUTE TO EMPHASIZING THE DEPTH OF FIELD, RECURRING TO THE SAME COMPOSITIONAL MODEL OBSERVED IN THE PORTRAIT OF MARIO VARVOGLIS (FIG. 38).

THE INSCRIPTIONS VISIBLE IN THE DRAWING—"LA VITA DOMESTICA," "SANTA," DELIMITED BY A PARALLELEPIPED—WERE CONCEIVED AND INSERTED INTO THE SPACE IN SUCH A WAY AS TO RECALL THE PERSPECTIVAL STRUCTURE. THE INSCRIPTION AT THE UPPER RIGHT, "SOEURE CHARITABLE," DEVELOPS ACROSS TWO PLANES: "SOEURE" (INDICATED BY A BLUE LINE) IS POSITIONED DEEPER, WHEREAS "CHARITABLE," ALIGNED WITH A YELLOW LINE, IS PERSPECTIVALLY CLOSER TO THE OBSERVER (FIGS. 39 AND 40).

AS ALREADY NOTED WITH REGARD TO THE SURNAME OF THE LIPCHITZ COUPLE IN THE PAINTING PORTRAYING THEM, WITHIN MODIGLIANI'S SPACES EVERY ELEMENT—EVEN THE ONE APPARENTLY MOST INSIGNIFICANT OR NEGLIGIBLE—CONTRIBUTES TO EMPHASIZING THE SPATIAL ARCHITECTURE AND THE SENSE OF DEPTH OF THE COMPOSITION.

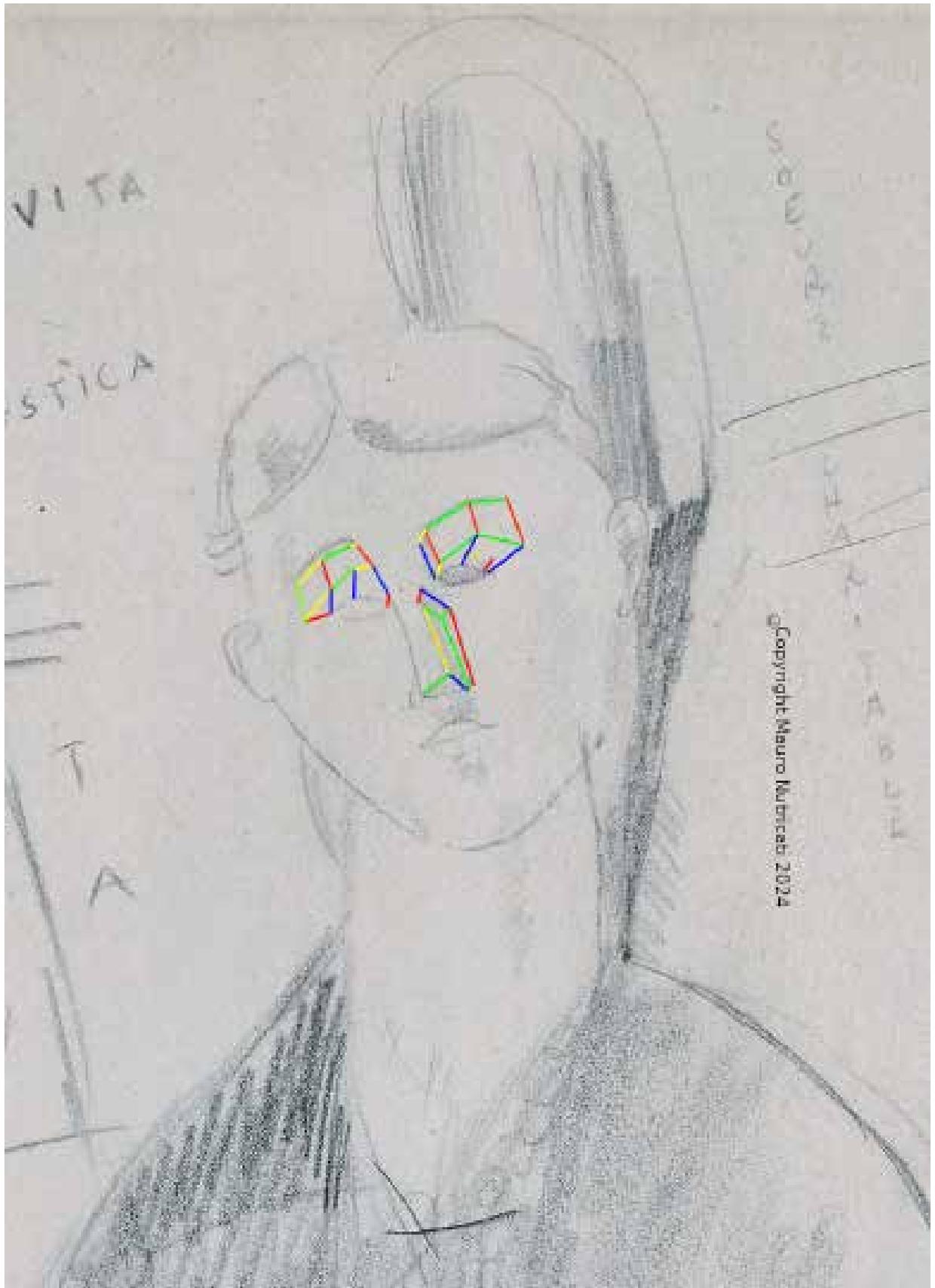


Fig. 38

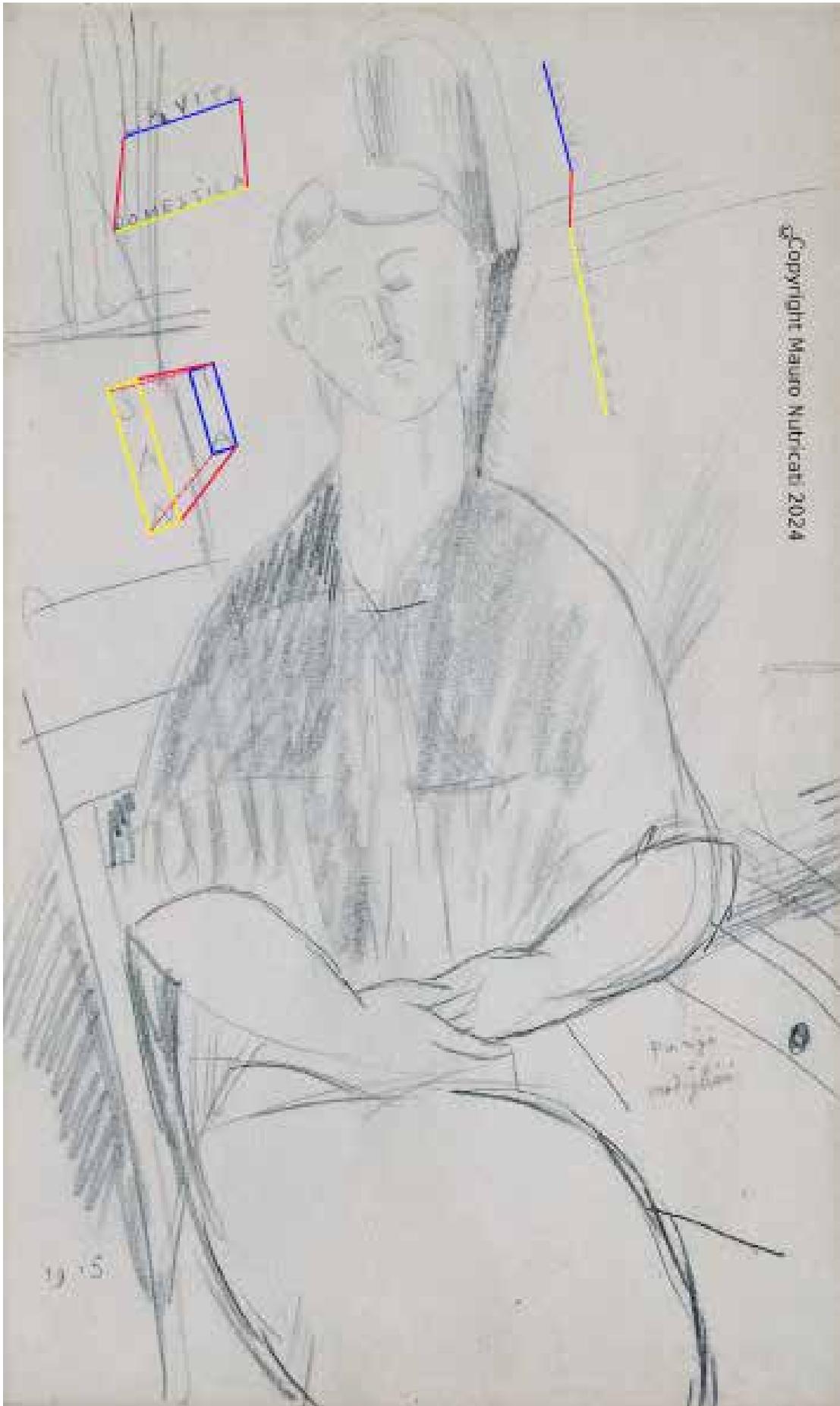


Fig. 39



Fig. 40

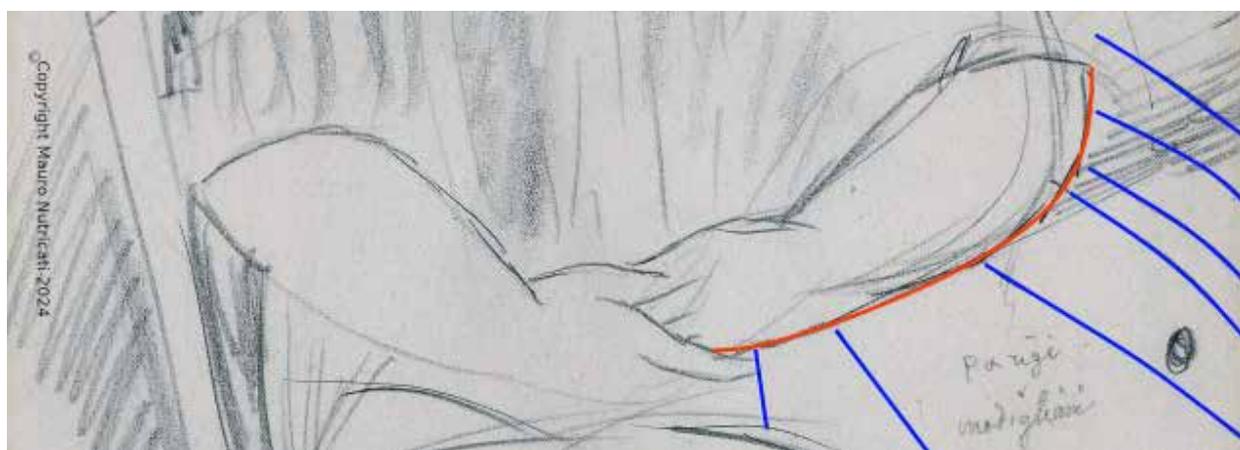


Fig. 41

LET US AGAIN DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TO THE RIGHT ARM (FOR THE OBSERVER) OF THE SITTER. YOU WILL NOTICE HOW MODIGLIANI CONSTRUCTS AND DEFINES THE VOLUME UPON WHICH THE ANATOMICAL SEGMENT IN QUESTION DEVELOPS AND TAKES FORM (FIG. 41, DETAIL).

FROM THE READING OF THIS DRAWING THERE EMERGES, ONCE MORE, THE PARTICULAR CONCEPTION MODIGLIANI HAD OF SPACE AND VOLUME. ALL THE ELEMENTS COMPOSING THE WORK ARE IN SYMPHONIC ACCORD, METICULOUSLY CONCEIVED AS A UNISON IN FUNCTION OF THE OVERALL COMPOSITIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

WE FIND OURSELVES, IN MY VIEW, BEFORE ONE OF THE CRUCIAL MOMENTS OF MODIGLIANI'S ARTISTIC MATURITY.

IT IS 1915 AND, AFTER THE YEARS DEVOTED TO SCULPTURE, THE ARTIST BRINGS TO COMPLETION THE AESTHETIC FOR WHICH HE IS UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED. CERTAINLY AN ANNUS MIRABILIS FOR HIM, BOTH ON THE HUMAN AND ARTISTIC PLANES, ALSO BY REASON OF THE RELATIONSHIP ESTABLISHED WITH BEATRICE HASTINGS, WHICH—DESPITE MOMENTS OF INTENSE TENSION—SEEMS TO HAVE GRANTED HIM A FERTILE CREATIVE IMPULSE.

I PREVIOUSLY REFERRED, IN DISCUSSING THE PORTRAIT OF MARIO AND THAT OF THE LIPCHITZ COUPLE, TO THE TRIDIMENSIONALITY OF MODIGLIANI'S LINE, DEFINED AS ITS SPECIFIC GEOMETRIC QUALITY OF ARTICULATING ITSELF ACROSS MULTIPLE PLANES.

BUT THERE IS MORE.

THE STUDY OF THIS FORMIDABLE DRAWING HAS ENABLED ME TO DEEPEN AN ADDITIONAL SPATIAL CONCEPTION PRESENT IN MODIGLIANI'S WORKS, TO WHICH I HAVE ALREADY ALLUDED.

HIS COMPOSITIONS CONTAIN A TRIDIMENSIONAL PIECE OF INFORMATION INASMUCH AS THEY ARE CONCEIVED THROUGH THE USE OF ANAMORPHOSIS, AN OPTICAL PHENOMENON RESULTING IN AN ABERRATION OF THE IMAGE THROUGH ALTERATION OF HEIGHT-WIDTH RATIOS. THE IMAGE MUST THEREFORE BE OBSERVED FROM A SPECIFIC VIEWPOINT, IN A MARKEDLY INCLINED POSITION, IN ORDER TO BE READ CORRECTLY. IN PAINTING, MANY ARTISTS HAVE EMPLOYED ANAMORPHISM; LEONARDO HIMSELF MENTIONS IT IN CERTAIN NOTES, AND MANY SCHOLARS ASSERT THAT THE DISPROPORTION OF THE ARM OBSERVABLE IN HIS ANNUNCIATION, NOW HOUSED IN THE UFFIZI, IS THE RESULT OF THE USE OF THIS PARTICULAR TECHNIQUE. ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN APPLICATIONS OF ANAMORPHIC TECHNIQUE APPEARS IN THE AMBASSADORS BY HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER, PRESERVED AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY IN LONDON (FIG. 42), A WORK IN WHICH THE IMAGE OF A HUMAN SKULL IS CONCEALED AND WHOSE CORRECT READING REQUIRES A SHARPLY OBLIQUE VIEW (FIG. 43).

WHEN AN OBLIQUE PERSPECTIVAL VIEW IS APPLIED TO THE PORTRAIT UNDER EXAMINATION—ACHIEVED BY INCLINING THE PAINTING—ONE AGAIN OBSERVES A PRONOUNCED DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIGURE IN DEPTH, WITH A PLASTIC RENDERING OF THE TRIDIMENSIONALITY OF THE COMPOSITION.

MODIGLIANI, WITH METICULOUS CARE, ALSO PROVIDES THE INDICATION OF THE EXPANSION OF PLANES IN SPACE, HAVING MODULATED THE FIGURE BOTH IN RELATION TO THE DEPTH HE INTENDED TO REPRESENT AND TO THE PERSPECTIVE FROM WHICH THE WORK IS TO BE OBSERVED.

THE ACUTE-ANGLE REPRESENTATION OF THE SHOULDERS IMPLIES PRECISELY THIS PRINCIPLE, WHEREBY THEY ARE, WHEN VIEWED PERSPECTIVALLY, AT A GREATER DEPTH THAN THE OTHER PARTS OF THE BODY.

TO EMPHASIZE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIGURE IN DEPTH, THE ARTIST SUGGESTS CHANGES OF PLANE ALSO THROUGH THE SUBDIVISION OF THE TORSO INTO SECTIONS. OBSERVE, IN PARTICULAR, THE LINES INDICATED IN RED THAT TRAVERSE THE SITTER'S TORSO TRANSVERSELY: THEY MARK A CHANGE OF PLANE (FIG. 44).



Fig. 42

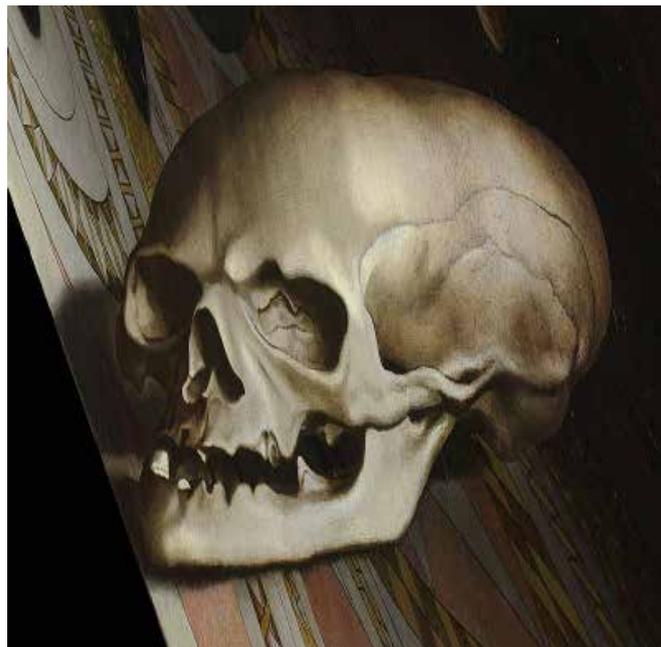


Fig. 43



Fig. 44

FURTHERMORE, FROM THE ADOPTED PERSPECTIVE ONE MAY BETTER NOTICE THE DESCRIPTION OF A HOLLOW VOLUME AT THE CENTER OF THE TORSO (FIG. 44, YELLOW ARROW), SUGGESTED BY THE SHAWL RESTING UPON THE SITTER'S SHOULDERS. ONCE AGAIN, THE PRIMARY INTENTION OF THE LIVORNESE ARTIST IS TO CONFER DEPTH UPON THE FIGURE AND TO ENDOW IT WITH TRIDIMENSIONAL AND SCULPTURAL CONSISTENCY.

I WOULD ADD THAT MODIGLIANI ALWAYS EXPRESSES AN EXCELLENT SYNTHESIS IN THE CONCEPTION OF HIS WORKS, ACHIEVING HIS CHARACTERISTIC AESTHETIC RESULTS THROUGH AN ECONOMICAL USE OF PICTORIAL AND COMPOSITIONAL MEANS.

A PARADIGMATIC EXAMPLE OF THIS PRINCIPLE MAY BE FOUND IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SHOULDERS, WHOSE PECULIAR FORM CONSTITUTES ONE OF THE RECURRING STYLISTIC DEVICES IN HIS PORTRAITS.

WE HAVE ALREADY VERIFIED, IN THE DRAWING UNDER EXAMINATION, HOW THEY WEDGE THEMSELVES—WHEN SEEN FROM BELOW IN PERSPECTIVE—INTO SPACE IN ORDER TO EVOKE DEPTH. IN MANY OTHER WORKS THEY ARE MERELY SUGGESTED, AND THE RENDERING OF A MINIMAL PORTION OF THEM IS OFTEN JUSTIFIED BY THE FACT THAT MODIGLIANI REPRESENTED ONLY THE MINIMUM INFORMATION NECESSARY FOR THE COMPOSITION TO BE READ IN PERSPECTIVE AND FOR THE TRIDIMENSIONALITY OF THE PAINTING TO BE EFFECTIVELY CONVEYED.

## PORTRAIT OF RENÉE

LET US MOVE ON TO ANALYZE A PAINTING FROM 1917 ENTITLED “RENÉE” (FIG. 45). IN ORDER TO EXAMINE THE SPATIAL RESEARCH CARRIED OUT IN THIS WORK, I PROCEEDED TO ADAPT IT TO A RATIONAL PERSPECTIVE FROM BELOW BY TILTING THE CANVAS (FIG. 46).

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT A PORTION OF THE BUST, UP TO A CERTAIN HEIGHT—BEFORE THE SHOULDERS BEGIN TO DEVELOP—HAS A SUBTLER TONAL VALUE OF COLOR (FIGS. 45 AND 46).

I BELIEVE THAT MODIGLIANI MODULATED THE COLOR AND EMPLOYED A DIFFERENT GRADIENT OF BRIGHTNESS (IN HIS DRAWINGS HE PROCEEDS THROUGH A MODULATION OF THE TONAL VALUE OF GRAPHITE OR BY MEANS OF BARELY PERCEPTIBLE ARTICULATIONS OF THE LINE) TO INDICATE NOT ONLY A CHANGE OF PLANE, BUT ALSO THE SPATIAL INDEPENDENCE BETWEEN THEM, AS CAN BE OBSERVED IN FIG. 46. IN THIS PORTRAIT, THE SHAPE OF THE SHOULDERS APPEARS TO REFER TO THE REULEAUX TRIANGLE, WHICH REPRESENTS A CONGENIAL FORM FOR EMULATING THE THREE-DIMENSIONALITY OF THE SPACE IN WHICH THE FIGURE IS PLACED AND DEVELOPS, AND FOR EFFECTIVELY ENGAGING A PLANE SET DEEPER THAN THE FRONTAL ONE. FOR MODIGLIANI, A MERE HINT SUFFICES—OR RATHER, THE SIMPLE REPRESENTATION OF THE ANGLE OF THE SHOULDERS AND A CALIBRATED VARIATION OF COLOR—TO OFFER, THROUGH A MASTERFUL REVERSAL OF THE PLANE, A SCULPTURE RENDERED PICTORIALY. THE PRINCIPLE RECALLS THE SPATIAL FUNCTION OF COLOR, USED AS A GRADIENT OF DEPTH IN STRUCTURING THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE COMPOSITION; AND THE REFERENCE, ONCE AGAIN, TO THE CHROMATIC APPROACH OF CÉZANNE, THE IMPRESSIONISTS, AND VAN GOGH IS CLEARLY EVIDENT, CERTAINLY NOT FORGETFUL OF THE ECHO OF THAT FORMIDABLE INTUITION ON LEONARDO’S PART: THE INTRODUCTION INTO PAINTING OF THE CONCEPT OF AERIAL PERSPECTIVE.

IN THIS REGARD, JAMES M. CARPENTER HAS OBSERVED: “CÉZANNE SEPARATED PLANES IN SPACE BY GRADUALLY LIGHTENING OR DARKENING THE REAR PLANE OF TWO OVERLAPPING PLANES.” LATER, THE CUBISTS USED GRADIENTS OF BRIGHTNESS TO SIGNAL THE RECIPROCAL SPATIAL INDEPENDENCE OF OVERLAPPING FORMS.

WE MAY THEREFORE DEFINE THE PORTRAIT OF RENÉE (THOUGH THE PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO MANY OF MODIGLIANI’S PAINTINGS) AS A PERSPECTIVAL FIGURE OVERTURNED ONTO THE FRONTAL PLANE, WHERE I BELIEVE IT IS EVEN POSSIBLE TO DISCERN, IN THE MODULATION OF COLOR, THE SO-CALLED HINGE OF THE REVERSAL (RED LINE, FIG. 46).

THE ELONGATED SHAPE OF THE NECK ALSO FINDS ITS RATIONALE WITHIN THE CONCEIVED SPATIAL FRAMEWORK: THE APPARENT, ABNORMAL LENGTH BECOMES MORE RESTRAINED WHEN WE OBSERVE THE PAINTING FROM AN OBLIQUE PERSPECTIVE AND, AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE GIVEN BACK THE SCULPTURAL PERCEPTION OF A VERTICAL SETTING INTO THE BUST (FIG. 46).

BY NOW, WE HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT, IN ORDER TO BE PROPERLY READ, MODIGLIANI’S PAINTINGS MUST VERY OFTEN BE OBSERVED WITH THE CANVAS TILTED, OWING TO AN IMAGE CONSTRUCTION GROUNDED IN THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING ANAMORPHOSIS.

IT IS AN ENTIRELY ORIGINAL WAY OF CONCEIVING SPACE AND, CONSEQUENTLY, PERSPECTIVE, SINCE IT FREES THE VISION OF THE WORK FROM THE RIGIDITY OF A FIGURATIVE STRUCTURE ANCHORED TO THE SUPPORT AND OPENS IT TO THE VIEWER’S GAZE AS AN ESSENTIAL MOMENT WITHIN THE OVERALL INTERPRETATIVE PROCESS OF THE WORK OF ART.

MOREOVER, THE COMPLEX INVESTIGATION INTO FIGURATIVE SPACE, WITH THE RESULTS WE ARE HIGHLIGHTING, SHOULD IN MY VIEW BE TRACED BACK TO MODI'S NEED TO REMAIN FUNDAMENTALLY FAITHFUL TO THE SUBJECT PORTRAYED AND TO FREE HIMSELF FROM THE AESTHETIC OUTCOMES OF CUBISM, WHICH, FROM THIS STANDPOINT, BROUGHT ABOUT AN ALMOST COMPLETE DISINTEGRATION OF THE FIGURE—A PROCESS TO WHICH I BELIEVE MODIGLIANI DELIBERATELY REFUSED TO ADHERE.

I AM CONVINCED THAT HEREIN LIES THE INNOVATIVE CONTRIBUTION OFFERED BY THE ARTIST FROM LIVORNO: ON THE ONE HAND, HE WISHED TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO A TRADITION OF FORM; ON THE OTHER, HE NONETHELESS FELT THE NECESSITY OF ENGAGING WITH THE BROAD THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ARISING FROM THE NEW SPATIAL CONCEPTION INAUGURATED BY THE AVANT-GARDES. FROM THIS PRESSING CONTEXT, MODIGLIANI EMERGED BY CARVING OUT A UNIQUE PATH, IN WHICH THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL QUALITY OF LINE, THE EXPERIENCE DERIVED FROM HIS ACTIVITY AS A SCULPTOR, THE USE OF COLOR, AND INNOVATIVE PERSPECTIVAL SYSTEMS BECAME THE INTERPRETATIVE KEYS OF A LANGUAGE THAT TURNED INTO AN ESSENTIAL INSTRUMENT FOR POSITIONING HIMSELF ALONG THE RIDGE BETWEEN TWO SEEMINGLY IRRECONCILABLE CONCEPTIONS—YET MASTERFULLY CONDENSED BY HIM INTO HIS POETIC VISION.

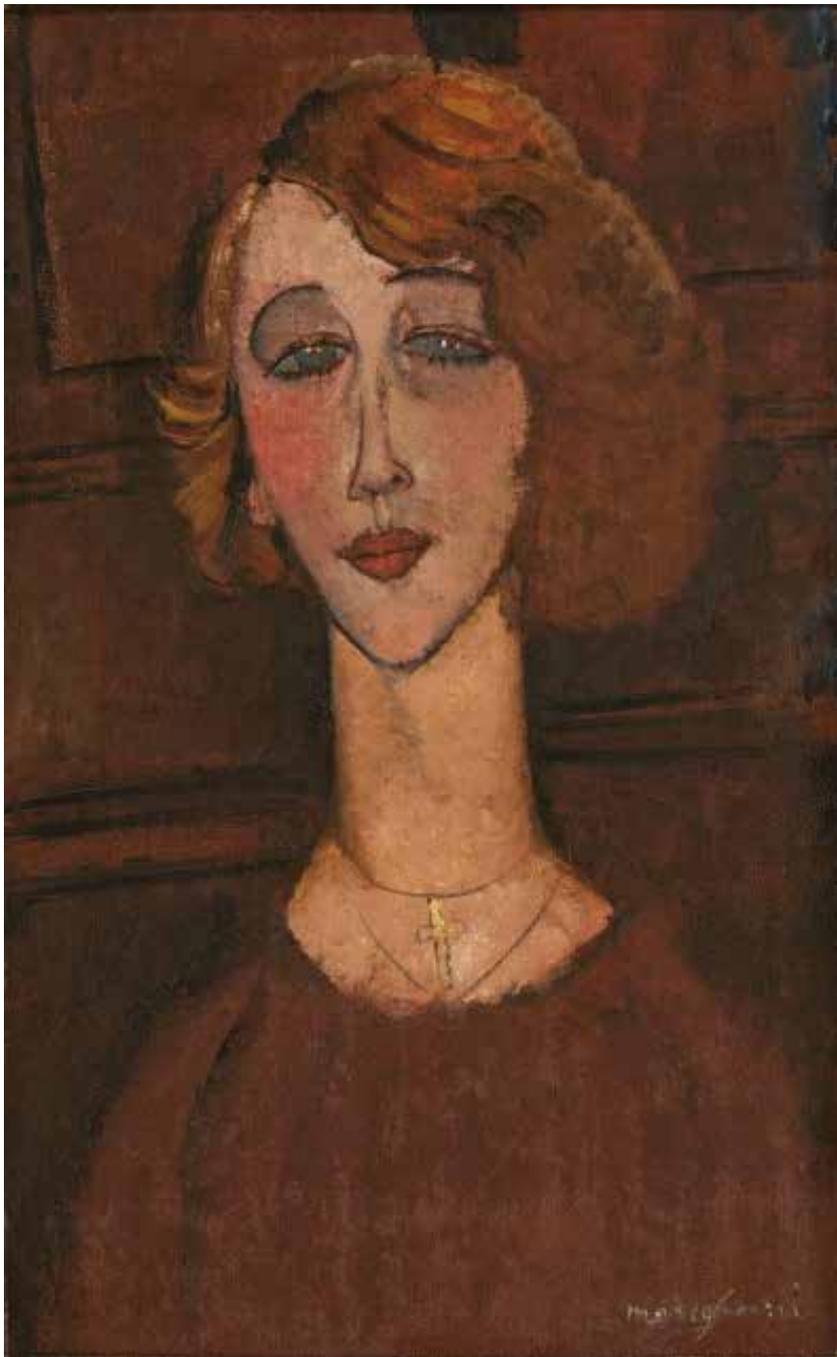


Fig. 45  
Renée  
1917  
Huile sur toile  
61 x 38 cm  
MASP, San Paolo Brasile  
Ceroni n. 137



Fig. 46

## PORTRAIT OF HANKA ZBOROWSKA

WITHIN MODIGLIANI'S OEUVRE THERE EXISTS A PAINTING THAT ENCAPSULATES, WITH EXTRAORDINARY EFFICACY, THE DECISIVE ROLE PLAYED BY SPACE IN DETERMINING THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE DEPICTED SUBJECT. I REFER TO THE PORTRAIT OF HANKA (ANNA) ZBOROWSKA (FIG. 66), COMPANION OF MODIGLIANI'S FINAL DEALER, LEOPOLD ZBOROWSKI.

THE COMPOSITION IS EXECUTED IN THE ARTIST'S CHARACTERISTIC STYLE: THE NECK AND HEAD ARE ELONGATED, WHILE THE SHOULDERS ARE ONLY FAINTLY INDICATED.

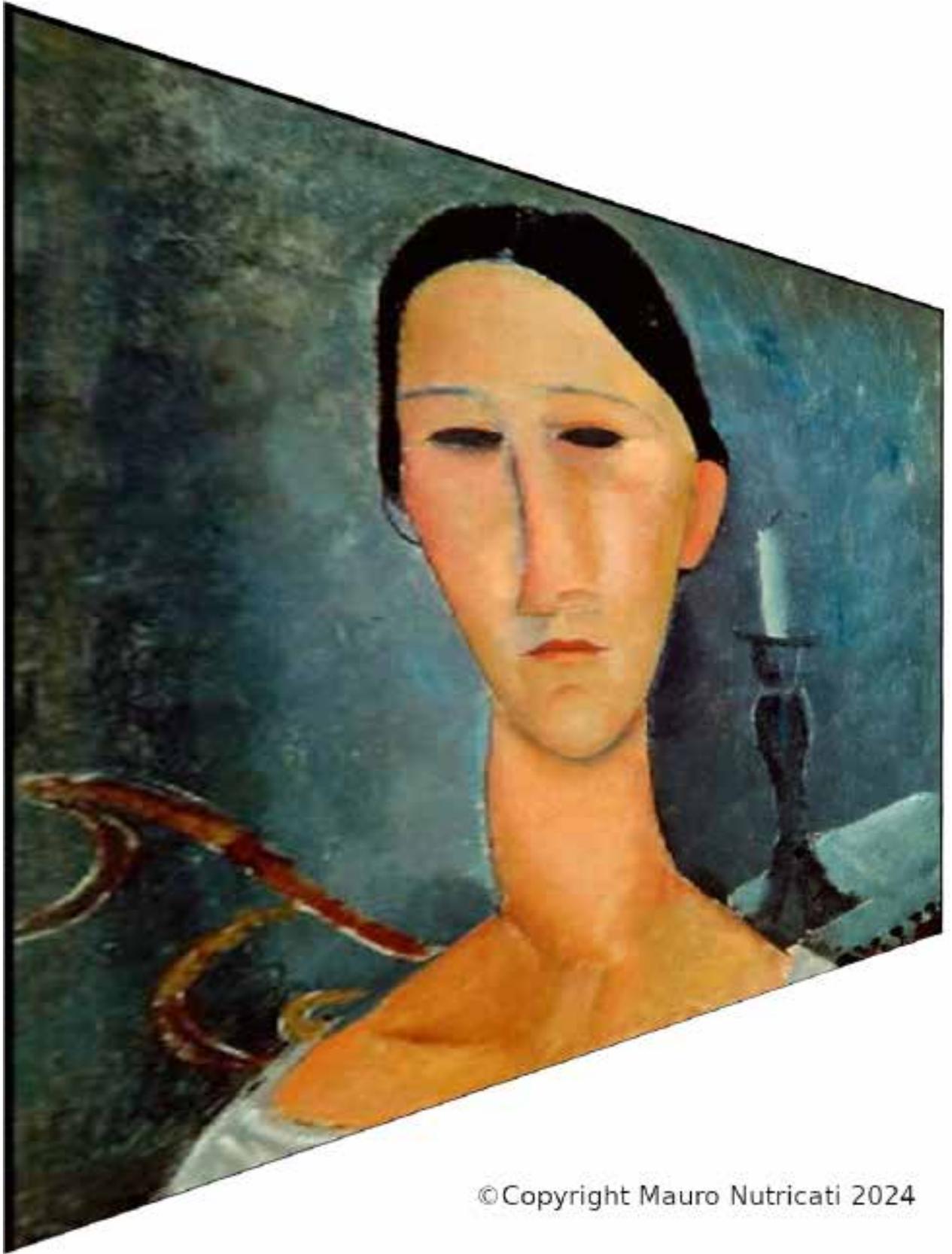
IN MY VIEW, MODIGLIANI HERE ENACTED A COMPRESSION OF SPACE AND, CONSEQUENTLY, OF PERSPECTIVE; THIS OPERATION NECESSARILY ENTAILED A DEFORMATION OF PROPORTIONS AND AN ELONGATION OF THE SITTER'S HEAD AND NECK.

AT THIS POINT, THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THE CELEBRATED STYLISTIC HALLMARK OF ELONGATED FACES AND NECKS BECOMES CLEAR: IT IS OFTEN THE IMMEDIATE RESULT OF A CONTRACTION OF SPACE AND PERSPECTIVE THAT BEARS UPON THE FORM OF FACES, NECKS, AND, MORE GENERALLY, FIGURES, DEFORMING THEM. VERIFICATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE EMERGES WHEN THE PAINTING IS VIEWED FROM AN OBLIQUE OR ACCIDENTAL PERSPECTIVE: SPACE DILATES, AND THE SITTER REGAINS, EVEN IN THIS CASE, MORE CANONICAL PROPORTIONS (FIG. 67).

THROUGH AN INTENTIONAL ABERRATION OF HEIGHT—WIDTH RATIOS, MODIGLIANI CREATED A SPATIAL CONSTRUCTION WHOSE TRIDIMENSIONALITY IS NOT MERELY FICTIVE BUT REAL—PROVIDED, AS I HAVE ALREADY ARGUED, THAT THE OBSERVER ACTIVELY SEEKS THE APPROPRIATE VANTAGE POINT AND DISTANCE REQUIRED FOR A CORRECT READING OF THE WORK.



Fig. 66  
Hanka Zborowska au bou-  
geoir  
1919  
Huile sur toile  
55 x 39 cm  
Coll. particulière  
Ceroni n. 312



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Fig. 67

THIS PAINTING, HOWEVER, OFFERS ADDITIONAL INTERPRETATIVE KEYS DESERVING FURTHER EXPLORATION.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLE PREVIOUSLY ARTICULATED—NAMELY, THAT THE ELEMENTS OF CONTEXT AND SPACE STAND IN A DIALOGICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EFFIGY OF THE PORTRAYED SUBJECT—THE CANDLESTICK VISIBLE IN THIS WORK FUNCTIONS AS A SEMANTIC AND FORMAL METAPHOR OF THE PORTRAIT: A MAQUETTE, SO TO SPEAK, OF HANKA ZBOROWSKA'S PAINTED IMAGE.

IF WE EXAMINE FIG. 68 AND BEGIN FROM THE UPPERMOST POINT, WE NOTE THAT THE CANDLE'S WICK REPLICATES THE FORM OF THE PARTING AT THE APEX OF HANKA'S HEAD AND GEOMETRICALLY REITERATES THE ARC DESCRIBING THE UPPER CONTOUR OF HER SKULL.

MOREOVER, THROUGH THE CONFIGURATION OF THE CANDLE AND ITS HOLDER, MODIGLIANI RETRACES AND SUGGESTS THE SHIFTS OF PLANE, THE DEPTHS, THE ALTERNATION OF FULLNESS AND VOID, THE CONCAVITIES AND CONVEXITIES OF HANKA'S FACE AND NECK.

CONCERNING THE POSSIBLE MEANING OF THIS HIGHLY ORIGINAL FIGURATIVE ARRANGEMENT, I BELIEVE A HYPOTHESIS MAY BE ADVANCED.

IN EARLIER CHAPTERS I ANTICIPATED MODIGLIANI'S INTENTION TO ACHIEVE UNITY BETWEEN FIGURE AND SPACE. THE INSERTION WITHIN THE PICTORIAL CONTEXT OF VOLUMES, OBJECTS, OR FIGURATIVE ELEMENTS—WHETHER REAL OR PURELY ABSTRACT—THAT CONFER OR CONTRIBUTE TO CONFERRING FORM UPON THE EFFIGY FULFILLS A DECISIVE BRIDGING FUNCTION, ESTABLISHING AN INTERDEPENDENT LINKAGE BETWEEN FIGURE AND SPACE.

ONE NEED ONLY RECALL THE WORKS ALREADY DISCUSSED, IN WHICH THE DIALOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIGURE AND SPACE IS CONSISTENTLY PRESENT.

CONVERSELY—YET AT THE SAME TIME CORROBORATING THIS INTERPRETATION—ARE THOSE WORKS IN WHICH SUCH “BRIDGE-OBJECTS” ARE ABSENT. IN THOSE INSTANCES, IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE UNITY TO WHICH I HAVE REFERRED, MODIGLIANI APPEARS TO HAVE CONCEIVED THE PICTORIAL SPACE AS A COMPACT, SOLID BLOCK FROM WHICH HE CARVED THE FIGURE, TREATING IT—AS OBSERVED IN OTHER EXAMPLES—MUCH LIKE A BAS-RELIEF (AN ASPECT TO BE EXAMINED MORE FULLY IN THE ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAIT OF SURVAGE).

IT SEEMS EVIDENT, IN MY VIEW, THAT THIS MODUS OPERANDI REFLECTS THE PROFOUND INFLUENCE EXERTED BY SCULPTURE UPON MODIGLIANI'S PICTORIAL CONCEPTION AND THE FORMATION OF HIS DISTINCTIVE AESTHETIC.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE BRIDGE-OBJECT, MOREOVER, IS NOT UNIQUE TO THE LIVORNESE MASTER; IT FINDS A FORMAL ANTECEDENT IN A CELEBRATED EARLIER WORK, ALBEIT WITH FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT MEANING.

I REFER TO THE SO-CALLED MADONNA DAL COLLO LUNGO BY PARMIGIANINO, HOUSED IN THE UFFIZI GALLERY IN FLORENCE, WHICH MODIGLIANI WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE SEEN (FIG. 69). IN PARMIGIANINO'S PAINTING, THE COLONNADE BEHIND THE MADONNA VISUALLY ECHOES HER ELONGATED NECK. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COLONNADE AND NECK, HOWEVER, CARRIES A SYMBOLIC-THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE, ASSIMILATING MARY TO THE SUPPORTING PILLAR OF THE CHURCH. IN THE PORTRAIT OF HANKA, BY CONTRAST, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CANDLESTICK AND SITTER SERVES A PRIMARILY SPATIAL FUNCTION: IT CREATES A CONNECTIVE BOND BETWEEN THE EFFIGY AND THE CONSTRUCTED SPACE, REDUCING THEM TO UNITY.

A FURTHER CHARACTERISTIC OF THESE SYMBOLIC DEVICES—SOMETIMES EXPRESSED IN THE FORM OF ENIGMATIC PICTOGRAMS—PRESENT WITHIN MODIGLIANI'S SPACES DESERVES EMPHASIS. THEY FREQUENTLY OPERATE AS A FORM OF SIGNATURE AND MAY BE UNDERSTOOD AS MANIFESTATIONS OF THE JEWISH CULTURAL SUBSTRATUM PERMEATING MODIGLIANI'S WORK; INDEED, AS I AM INCLINED TO BELIEVE, THEY MAY REFLECT A CONCEPTION OF REALITY ROOTED IN KABALISTIC TRADITION.

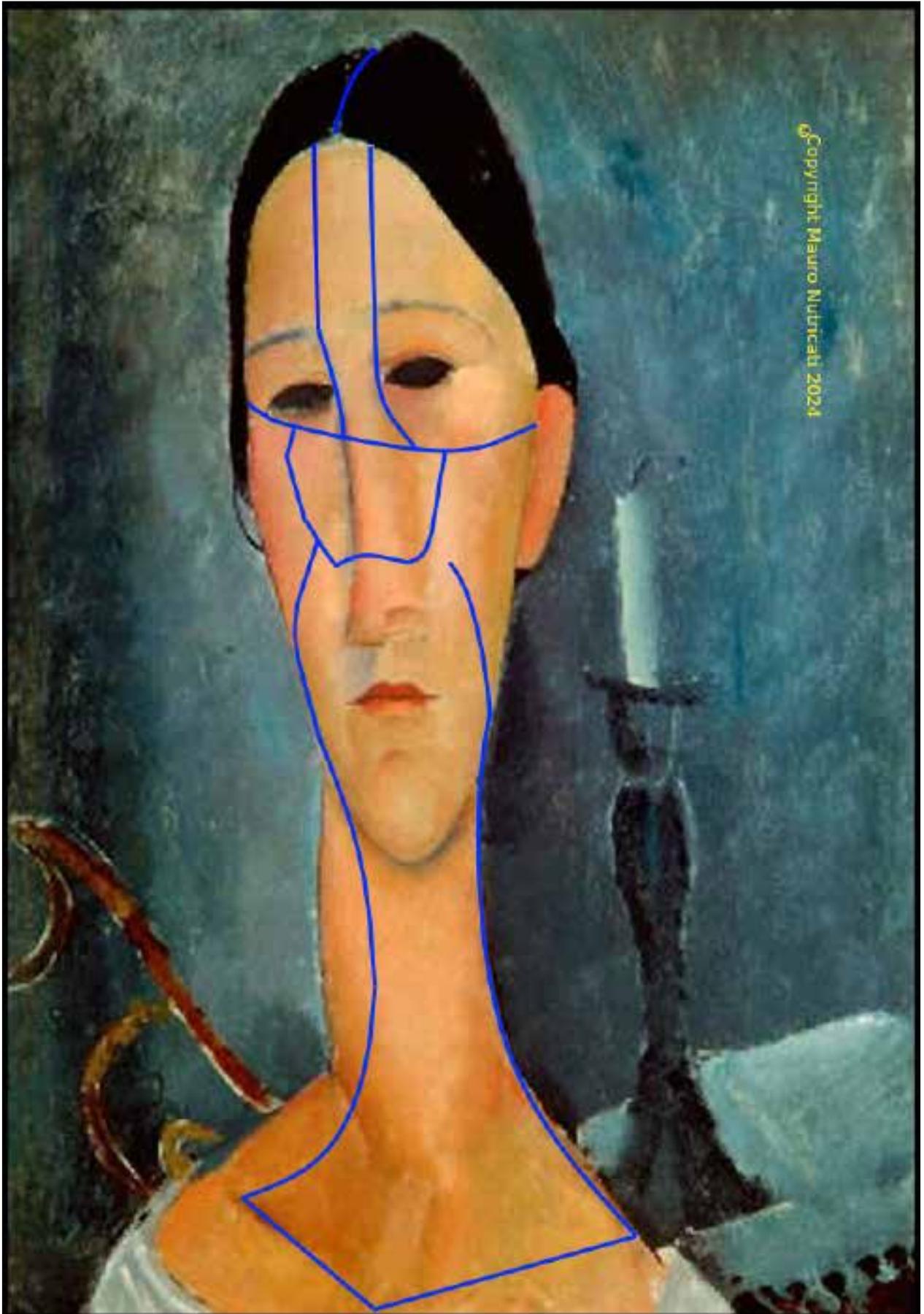


Fig. 68

Fig. 69



## SEATED WOMAN

WE HAVE ALMOST REACHED THE END OF THIS LONG EXAMINATION OF THE WORKS.

THE DRAWING WE ARE ABOUT TO ANALYZE DISPLAYS SUCH COMPLEXITY AS TO JUSTIFY ITS DISCUSSION AT THE CONCLUSION OF A PATH WHICH, I HOPE, HAS PROVIDED ACCESS—ALBEIT NOT DEFINITELY—TO THE MOST HIDDEN RECESSES OF MODIGLIANI'S POETICS. WITH THIS WORK, THE ARTIST OFFERS A FURTHER EXAMPLE OF THE EXTREMELY HIGH LEVEL OF ELABORATION AND ARTISTIC MATURITY OF WHICH HE WAS CAPABLE. IT IS A PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN, A STRONGLY STYLIZED FIGURE (FIG. 96 THE ORIGINAL WORK, FIG. 97 THE GRAPHIC ELABORATION I PROPOSE).

IMMEDIATELY BEHIND THE SHOULDERS OF THE SITTER, TO THE LEFT AND RIGHT, ONE MAY DISCERN THE PRESENCE OF CERTAIN VOLUMES, WHICH I HAVE MARKED WITH THE LETTERS (A), (B), AND (C) (FIG. 98, DETAIL).

FROM THE OUTSET, I MUST INFORM THE READER THAT THESE VOLUMES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SHAPE OF THE HEAD AND NECK OF THE FIGURE AND FUNCTION AS A KIND OF MATRIX.

LET US SEE HOW.

IN THE CASE OF THIS DRAWING, MODIGLIANI TREATED THE FIGURE IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS A SCULPTURE AND, ACCORDING TO THE INTERPRETATION I NOW PROPOSE, PROVIDED US WITH THE ELEMENTS TO READ IT IN THIS SENSE. ONE MUST THEREFORE IMAGINE A SINGLE SOLID BLOCK COMPOSED OF THE SET OF VOLUMES (A), (B), AND (C) (FIG. 98), FROM WHICH THE ARTIST HAS IDEALLY CARVED OUT THE HEAD AND NECK OF THE SITTER.

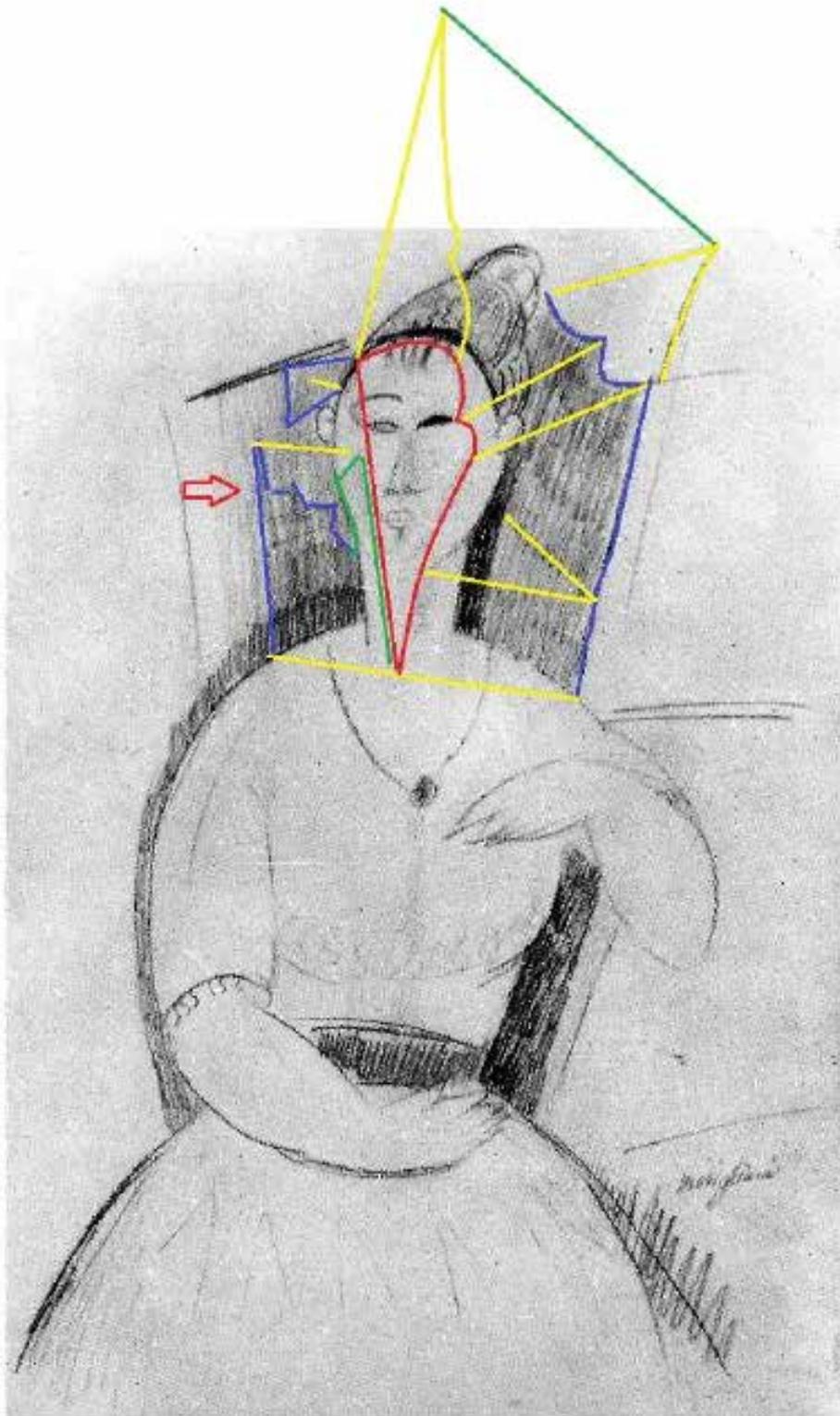
THE FORM DESCRIBING THE CENTRAL PART OF THE FACE AND NECK (VOLUME B)—WHICH I HAVE OUTLINED IN RED AND PROJECTED PERPENDICULARLY ABOVE THE FIGURE'S HEAD TO FACILITATE ITS READING (IN YELLOW)—UNDERWENT A GEOMETRIC PROJECTION BEHIND THE SITTER. AS A RESULT, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT PERSPECTIVAL CURVATURE AND THE DEFORMATION DUE TO COMPOSITIONAL CHOICE, IT WAS REPRESENTED AS A PARTICULAR TYPE OF HYPERBOLIC PARABOLOID TENDING TOWARD INFINITY, INSTILLING A PRONOUNCED DYNAMIC TENSION INTO THE COMPOSITION AND CONVEYING AN INTENSE PERCEPTION OF DEPTH (VOLUME B).

ONCE THE FORM DESCRIBING THE CENTRAL PORTION HAS BEEN ACCOUNTED FOR, THE REMAINING PARTS OF THE FACE AND NECK, LEFT AND RIGHT, WERE DERIVED, IN MODIGLIANI'S CONCEPTION, RESPECTIVELY FROM VOLUMES (A) AND (C), PRESENTED, ONCE AGAIN, AS IF THEY WERE A MATRIX (FIGS. 97 AND 98).

ON VOLUME (A), IN FACT, ONE CAN SEE A MODULATION OF THE TONAL VALUE OF THE GRAPHITE THAT BEARS THE IMPRINT OF THE LEFT SIDE—RELATIVE TO THE VIEWER—OF THE FACE. OBSERVE THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DETAIL OF THE ORIGINAL DRAWING AND THAT OF THE GRAPHIC ELABORATION. MODIGLIANI UNDERTAKES THE CREATION OF A DRAWING OF EXTRAORDINARILY HIGH TECHNICAL QUALITY, SUCH IS THE PRECISION AND LEVEL OF DETAIL ACHIEVED (FIGS. 96, 97, AND 98).



Fig. 96  
Femme assise  
1916  
Crayon sur papier  
45 x 30 cm  
Coll. particulière  
Patani, n. 202



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Fig. 97

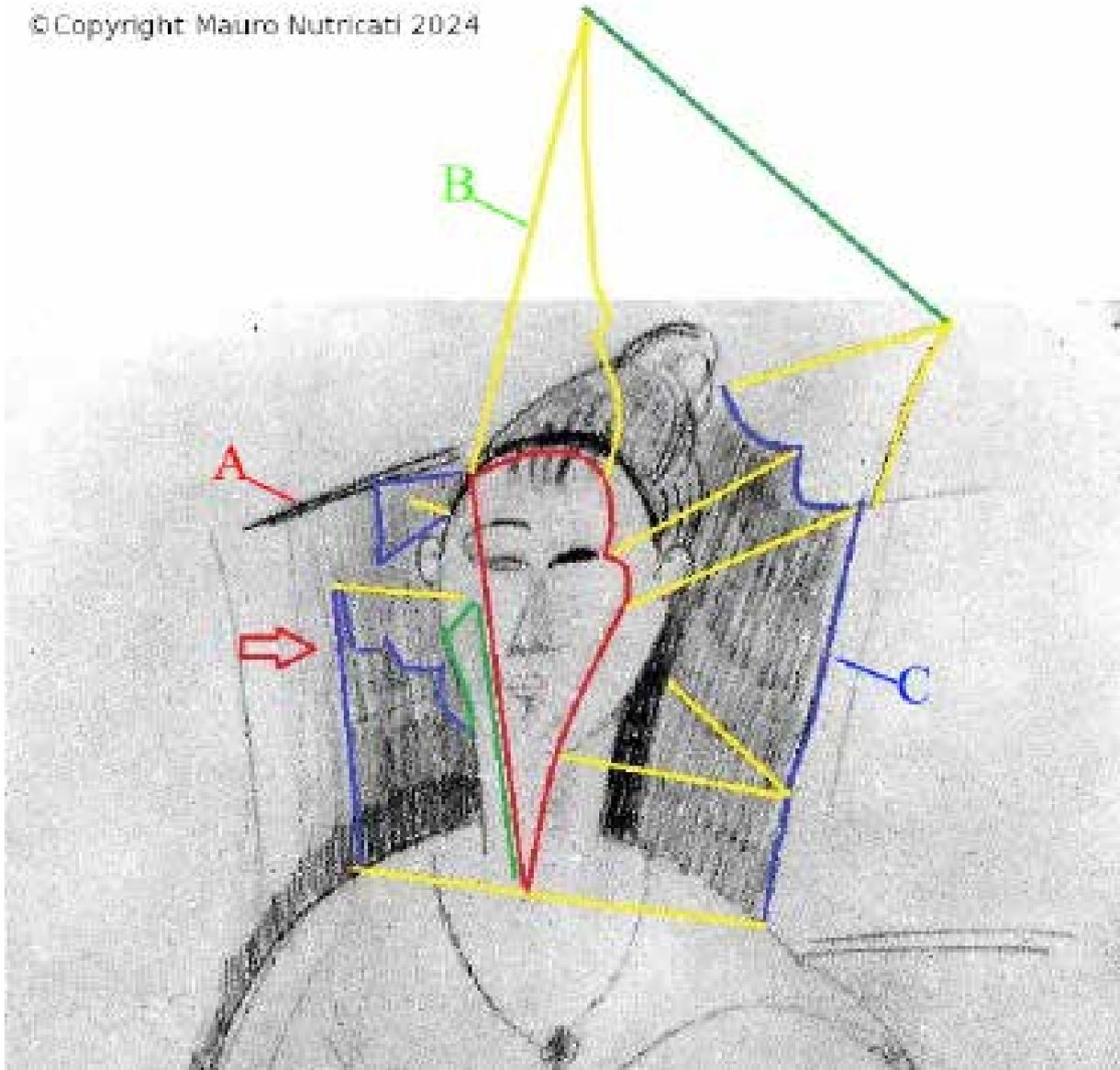


Fig. 98

LET US PROCEED WITH THE ANALYSIS OF THE VOLUME MARKED WITH THE LETTER (C), POSITIONED BEHIND THE SITTER'S RIGHT SHOULDER (FROM THE VIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE) (FIG. 98). THIS REPRESENTS THE MATRIX OF THE RIGHT SIDE—AGAIN, FROM THE VIEWER'S STANDPOINT—OF THE FIGURE'S FACE AND NECK, APART, OF COURSE, FROM THE VOLUME THAT GIVES SHAPE TO THE CENTRAL PORTION OF THE FACE (WHICH, AS NOTED, IS OUTLINED IN RED AND, IN PROJECTION, IN YELLOW, MARKED WITH THE LETTER B).

MODIGLIANI DEPICTED VOLUME (C) AS A CONCAVITY, PRESENTED TO THE VIEWER AND SUBJECT, IN ITS UPPER PART, TO A DEFORMATION RESULTING FROM THE NEED TO HARMONIZE IT WITH THE SINGULAR SPATIAL AND PERSPECTIVAL CHOICE.

FINALLY, IN ORDER TO INFUSE STYLISTIC AND PERSPECTIVAL COHERENCE INTO THE ENTIRE COMPOSITION, THE ARTIST ADJUSTED—THROUGH THE OBSERVABLE DEFORMATION—THE VOLUME MARKED WITH THE LETTER (C) TO THAT INDICATED WITH THE LETTER (B), CAUSING BOTH TO CONVERGE TOWARD A COMMON VANISHING POINT (FIG. 98).

## NU COUCHÉ

WE HAVE NOW REACHED THE FINAL STAGE OF A JOURNEY WHICH I HOPE HAS RESTORED TO VIEW THE POETIC VISION OF AN ARTIST ENDOWED WITH A CREATIVE GENIUS OF INDISPUTABLE ARTISTIC VALUE—ONE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO REDEFINING THE CRITERIA BY WHICH WE COMMONLY APPROACH THE WORK OF ART.

WITH THIS CONCLUDING STEP, I TURN TO THE OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS OF ONE LAST WORK, AMONG THE MOST EMBLEMATIC OF MODIGLIANI'S PRODUCTION, TO WHICH A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER WILL BE DEVOTED.

THE WORKS EXAMINED THUS FAR, AS I HAVE SOUGHT TO DEMONSTRATE, CONSTITUTE FUNDAMENTAL JUNCTURES WITHIN MODIGLIANI'S CREATIVE PROCESS AND DEFINE, I BELIEVE UNEQUIVOCALLY, A DISTINCTIVE MODUS OPERANDI IN WHICH EXTRAORDINARY SPATIAL ELABORATION, VOLUME, COLOUR, THE PURITY OF LINE, AND A PREDILECTION FOR ENIGMA COEXIST IN DYNAMIC EQUILIBRIUM.

NU COUCHÉ (FIG. 99), FOR ITS PART, HAS ACHIEVED RENOWN FOR HAVING BECOME ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE PAINTINGS EVER SOLD AND IS WIDELY REGARDED AS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL NUDES IN MODERN ART.

SUFFUSED WITH GRACE AND FORMAL BALANCE, THE PAINTING REDEFINED THE CANONICAL TREATMENT OF ITS SUBJECT. THE NEED TO INVESTIGATE ITS COMPOSITION IN THIS CHAPTER ARISES FROM THE FACT THAT IT SHARES, WITH CERTAIN WORKS ALREADY SUBJECTED TO ANALYTICAL SCRUTINY, A COMMON DENOMINATOR. INDEED, THERE IS A PARTICULAR DETAIL THAT CAPTURED MY ATTENTION, WHICH I THEREFORE ISOLATED (FIG. 101). I SOUGHT TO DETERMINE WHAT THIS FORM MIGHT REPRESENT AND EXCLUDED THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT WAS A SHEET, AS MIGHT AT FIRST APPEAR; IT LACKS BOTH THE SOFTNESS AND THE AESTHETIC RENDERING OF DRAPERY (AND MODIGLIANI WAS CERTAINLY CAPABLE OF DEPICTING DRAPERY).

I DEDUCED THAT IT MIGHT INDICATE—ANALOGOUSLY TO WHAT WE HAVE OBSERVED IN PREVIOUSLY ANALYSED WORKS—THE MAQUETTE OF A MATRIX: A KEY FOR READING THE PAINTING, AND PERHAPS A SIGNATURE.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THIS MINUTE FORM AND THE REMAINDER OF THE PAINTING IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO COMPREHEND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO ELEMENTS.

I THEREFORE PROPOSE A GRAPHIC ELABORATION FROM WHICH IT IS READILY VERIFIABLE THAT THE MODEL'S BODY RECLINES UPON A BED SATURATED WITH VOLUMES. BY FOLLOWING THE CONTOURS OF THE FIGURE, ONE MAY DISCERN THE CONVEXITIES AND CONCAVITIES PRODUCED BY THE BODY'S WEIGHT UPON THE MATTRESS—EFFECTS THAT MODIGLIANI RENDERED PICTORIALLY THROUGH AN EXTREMELY SUBTLE, METICULOUS, AND REFINED MODULATION OF COLOUR, PRODUCING A VOLUMETRIC ARTICULATION THAT BETRAYS THE PAINTING'S SCULPTURAL ESSENCE. IN PARTICULAR, I BELIEVE THAT MODIGLIANI, IN THIS INSTANCE AS WELL, CONCEIVED THE BED—AND THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH THE MODEL IS PLACED—AS A SOLID BLOCK FROM WHICH HE CARVED THE VOLUME OF THE FIGURE (FIG. 100).

IF WE NOW TURN OUR ATTENTION TO THE SMALL WHITE FORM, WE MAY OBSERVE THAT IT IS TRAVERSED BY A LINE MODULATED IN BLACK. THIS LINE STANDS IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIP TO THE ONE THAT WOULD BE OBTAINED BY DRAWING A LONGITUDINAL AXIS THROUGH THE MODEL'S BODY; BOTH DEFINE THE SHIFTS OF PLANE WITHIN THE WORK. INDEED, THE FUNCTION OF THIS SMALL WHITE MAQUETTE IS PRECISELY TO PROVIDE A KEY FOR IDENTIFYING THE PLANES AND INTERPRETING THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMPOSITION. I HAVE, IN FACT, IDENTIFIED THREE PLANES, INDICATED IN FIGS. 100 AND 101 BY THE LETTERS (A), (B), AND (C).



Fig. 99



Fig. 100

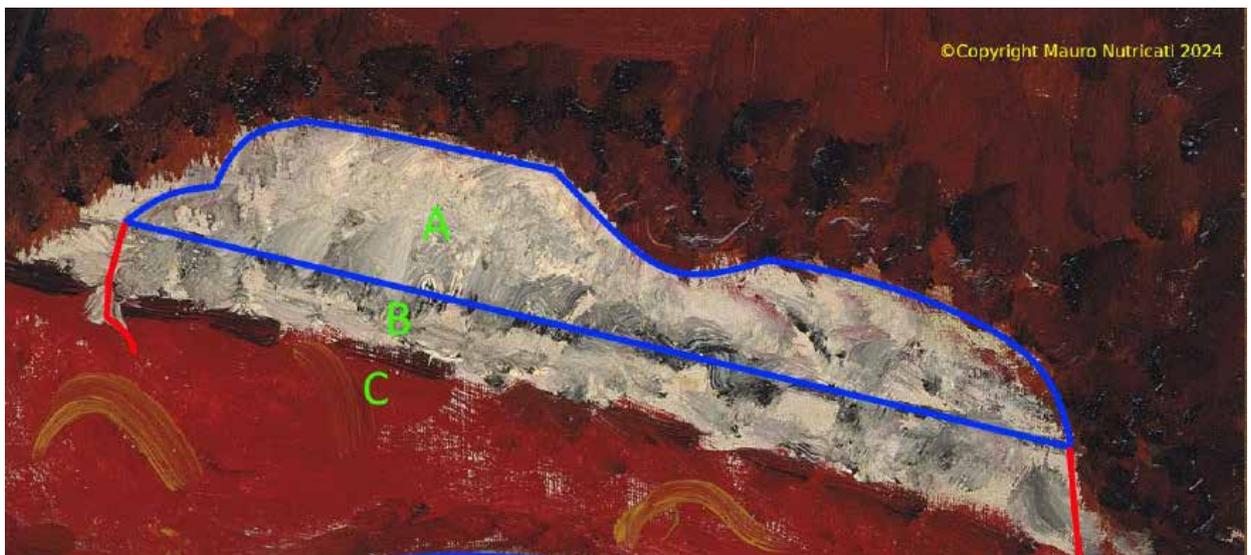


Fig. 101

IN THIS CASE, GIVEN THE OVERALL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAINTING, I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS ELEMENT MAY BE ASCRIBED THE FUNCTION OF MEDIATING BETWEEN FIGURE AND SPACE; THEREFORE, THE CONSIDERATIONS ADVANCED EARLIER REGARDING THE “BRIDGE-OBJECT” CANNOT BE APPLIED HERE.

IT IS PROBABLE THAT MODIGLIANI’S INNATE PROPENSITY FOR ENIGMA LED HIM TO ASSIGN TO THIS MODULE AS WELL THE RECURRENT VALUE OF SIGNATURE AND CRYPTOGRAPHIC KEY THAT CHARACTERISES SUCH ELEMENTS.

I NOW INVITE THE READER TO OBSERVE THE SMALL “STROKE,” MARKED IN RED, POSITIONED TO THE LEFT (FROM THE VIEWER’S PERSPECTIVE) AND OCCUPYING PLANE (C) (FIG. 101), IN ORDER TO ASSESS WHETHER THIS APPARENTLY NEGLIGIBLE DETAIL MAY ALSO FULFIL A SPATIAL FUNCTION WITHIN THE COMPOSITIONAL ECONOMY. IF WE ACCEPT—AS I BELIEVE HAS BEEN AMPLY DEMONSTRATED—THAT MODIGLIANI EXECUTED HIS WORKS WITH METICULOUS CARE, THEN WE MAY RECOGNISE IN THIS SINGULAR PICTORIAL SIGN A FORMAL CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MODEL’S ARM (SPECIFICALLY THE ELBOW) (FIG. 100). THIS IMPLIES THAT WE ARE NOT CONFRONTED WITH A MERE ACCIDENTAL FLOURISH, BUT RATHER WITH AN ELEMENT INTENDED TO INDICATE THE ADDITIONAL PLANE—DESIGNATED, AS NOTED, BY THE LETTER (C)—SITUATED ALONG THE EDGE OF THE BED.

WHETHER THIS IS INDEED A BED WILL BE EXAMINED IN THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER, WHERE I SHALL ALSO ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF THE PLACE AND TIME OF EXECUTION OF *NU COUCHÉ*.

## THE NUDE IN MODIGLIANI'S OEUVRE THE PARTICULAR CASE OF NU COUCHÉ

THE THEME OF THE NUDE OCCUPIES A POSITION OF PRIMACY WITHIN THE CORPUS OF WORKS BY AMEDEO MODIGLIANI. THIS IS DUE PRINCIPALLY TO THE EXCEPTIONAL PICTORIAL QUALITY THAT DISTINGUISHES CERTAIN OF HIS CANVASES AND TO THE ARTIST'S ABILITY TO FORGE A REMARKABLE SYNTHESIS BETWEEN WHAT HE ABSORBED, DURING HIS FORMATIVE YEARS, FROM THE ITALIAN ARTISTIC TRADITION AND THE WHOLLY MODERN AND ORIGINAL CONCEPTION HE BESTOWED UPON HIS SUBJECTS. INDEED, HIS NUDES HAVE BEEN REGARDED AS PRECURSORS OF THAT EXTRAORDINARY SEASON OF AUTEUR PHOTOGRAPHY THAT DEVELOPED FROM THE 1930S THROUGH THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. THE LIVORNESE ARTIST UNQUESTIONABLY MERITS RECOGNITION FOR HAVING REVITALISED A SUBJECT THAT HAD BECOME EXHAUSTED, INFUSING IT WITH A PERSONALITY THAT CONSTITUTES ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL FACTORS BEHIND ITS SUCCESS AMONG COLLECTORS AND THE WIDER PUBLIC. IN MODIGLIANI'S CASE, MOREOVER, ONE OBSERVES A PHENOMENON WHEREBY POPULAR AND COMMERCIAL ACCLAIM WAS FOLLOWED—PERHAPS BELATEDLY—BY RENEWED CRITICAL ATTENTION, INITIALLY HESITANT IN ITS RECEPTION OF AN ARTIST RESISTANT TO FACILE CATEGORISATION. FOR MANY SCHOLARS, MODIGLIANI DID NOT ENGAGE SYSTEMATICALLY WITH THE NUDE UNTIL THE TRANSITION FROM THE PATRONAGE OF PAUL GUILLAUME TO THAT OF LEOPOLD ZBOROWSKI. IT WAS ALLEGEDLY THE POLISH DEALER WHO ENCOURAGED HIM TO DEVOTE HIMSELF CONSISTENTLY TO THIS THEME, UNDOUBTEDLY MORE APPEALING TO THE MARKET. IN TRUTH, THE ARTIST HAD ALREADY PRODUCED CERTAIN "STUDIES" OF THE NUDE DURING HIS EARLY PARISIAN YEARS; YET, LACKING THE REGULARITY THAT IMPLIES SUSTAINED INVESTIGATION, THESE MUST BE CONSIDERED OCCASIONAL INCURSIONS (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE CARYATIDS, WHICH, UNLIKE THE NUDES—PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD AS PORTRAITS—CONSTITUTE, IN MY VIEW, STUDIES DEVOTED TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF VOLUME). SETTING ASIDE THOSE EARLY EXPERIMENTS, I MAINTAIN—CONTRARY TO THE PREVAILING VIEW IN THE LITERATURE—THAT MODIGLIANI EXECUTED AT LEAST ONE OF HIS NUDES, THE MOST CELEBRATED OF THEM ALL, NU COUCHÉ, PRIOR TO ENTERING THE ORBIT OF LEOPOLD ZBOROWSKI, AND THAT THE OFFICIAL DATING TO 1917 OUGHT THEREFORE TO BE RECONSIDERED. AS IS OFTEN THE CASE WITH MODIGLIANI'S OEUVRE, THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE NUDES REMAINS A DEBATED VARIABLE WITHIN THE BROADER FIELD OF SCHOLARSHIP. ALONGSIDE CAREFULLY REASONED DATINGS, ONE ENCOUNTERS OTHERS THAT ARE DECIDEDLY EQUIVOCAL. IN THE CASE OF THE NUDES IN GENERAL, AND OF NU COUCHÉ IN PARTICULAR, I BELIEVE THE UNCERTAINTY HAS BEEN FUELLED ABOVE ALL BY A SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCE: ASIDE FROM A FEW EARLY EXHIBITION CATALOGUES—ALMOST ALWAYS DEVOID OF ILLUSTRATIONS—AND SCATTERED EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS, IN THE ABSENCE OF DOCUMENTARY RECORDS CONTAINING ACCURATE NOTES OF SUCCESSIVE CHANGES OF OWNERSHIP, DATING HAS FREQUENTLY RESTED UPON ARBITRARY ATTRIBUTIONS TO ONE YEAR OR ANOTHER. PROVENANCE HAS OFTEN BEEN RECONSTRUCTED ON THE BASIS OF AN ORIGINAL OWNERSHIP THAT IS ITSELF DEBATABLE, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THAT CERTAIN PAINTINGS PASSED REPEATEDLY FROM PAUL GUILLAUME TO LEOPOLD ZBOROWSKI, AND VICE VERSA, WITHOUT ANY DETAILED ACCOUNT OF SUCH TRANSFERS.

IT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN MODIGLIANI AND PAUL GUILLAUME DID NOT CEASE, EVEN AFTER THE ARTIST HAD FORMALLY JOINED ZBOROWSKI'S CIRCLE. EVIDENCE OF THIS EMERGES FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY MODIGLIANI TO ZBOROWSKI, AND FROM PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN DURING THE ARTIST'S STAY IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE, WHICH SHOW PAUL GUILLAUME IN MODIGLIANI'S COMPANY BETWEEN APRIL–MAY 1918 AND THE END OF MAY 1919, WHEN ZBOROWSKI WAS OFFICIALLY HIS PATRON. THESE ATTEST THAT THE TWO DEALERS COLLABORATED, FOR A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD, IN MANAGING THE ARTISTIC LEGACY OF THE LIVORNESE PAINTER.

IN THIS REGARD, MARC RESTELLINI HAS ARGUED THAT THE TWO GALLERISTS—OPERATING ON THE RIVE GAUCHE AND THE RIVE DROITE RESPECTIVELY—SHOULD BE REGARDED, ALBEIT TO DIFFERENT DEGREES, AS THE PRINCIPAL ARCHITECTS OF MODIGLIANI'S POSTHUMOUS SUCCESS.

IF PROVENANCE-BASED DATING THUS PROVES FERTILE GROUND FOR INEXTRICABLE MISUNDERSTANDINGS, MY INVESTIGATION NECESSARILY SHIFTED TO MORE CHALLENGING TERRAIN, JUSTIFIED—ESPECIALLY IN THE CASE OF NU COUCHÉ—BY THE DISCOVERY OF A DOCUMENT THAT I DEEMED FUNDAMENTAL AND DESERVING OF THOROUGH EXAMINATION. FOR THE PRODUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS AND THE SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS, WHAT PROVES DECISIVE IS THE ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH AS PRECISELY AS POSSIBLE THE LODGINGS OCCUPIED BY MODIGLIANI BETWEEN 1915 AND 1917. IT MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED, PRELIMINARILY, THAT RECONSTRUCTING THE FULL SEQUENCE OF ATELIERS AND DWELLINGS INHABITED BY MODIGLIANI IS A FORMIDABLE TASK, GIVEN CONTEMPORARY TESTIMONIES INDICATING THAT HE—LIKE MANY ARTISTS IN HIS MILIEU—LIVED IN A STATE OF NEAR-CONSTANT DISPLACEMENT IN PARIS.

WITH PAUL GUILLAUME'S INTERVENTION, CIRCUMSTANCES APPEARED DESTINED TO IMPROVE; YET THE DEALER'S CONTRIBUTION, ALTHOUGH IT BROUGHT RENEWED PROSPERITY, MAY REQUIRE SOME QUALIFICATION. A SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS CONDUCTED BY THE CONSORTIUM OF FRENCH MUSEUMS ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXHIBITION AT THE LAM REVEALED THAT DURING THE PERIOD OF GUILLAUME'S PATRONAGE, MODIGLIANI FREQUENTLY REUSED CANVASES—TRACES OF EARLIER COMPOSITIONS BEING STATISTICALLY MORE NUMEROUS IN WORKS FROM HIS EARLY PARISIAN YEARS AND THOSE PRODUCED UNDER GUILLAUME'S AEGIS. THIS MAY INDICATE THAT THE DEALER DID NOT SUPPLY, BEYOND AGREED PURCHASE PAYMENTS, THE MATERIALS NECESSARY FOR THE EXECUTION OF NEW WORKS.

WHAT IS CRUCIAL FOR OUR PURPOSES, HOWEVER, IS THAT PAUL GUILLAUME SECURED FOR MODIGLIANI A NEW STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR.

AS WILL BECOME EVIDENT IN WHAT FOLLOWS, THE PRECISE CHRONOLOGY OF THE (AT LEAST FORMALLY DEFINED) TRANSITION FROM GUILLAUME TO ZBOROWSKI SERVES AS A WATERSHED IN THE RECONSTRUCTION PROPOSED HERE, ENABLING A MORE ACCURATE IDENTIFICATION OF MODIGLIANI'S LODGINGS BETWEEN 1915 AND 1917. IN PARTICULAR, DELIMITING THE PERIOD OF HIS STAY AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR—INDISSOLUBLY LINKED TO GUILLAUME'S PATRONAGE—OPENS THE WAY, IN MY VIEW, TO A MORE PRECISE DATING OF NU COUCHÉ AND TO A CIRCUMSCRIBED HYPOTHESIS CONCERNING ITS PLACE OF EXECUTION. CONSEQUENTLY, I SHALL BE ABLE TO FORMULATE CONJECTURES REGARDING THE DATING OF SEVERAL OTHER NUDES.

## THE PREMISE

HAVING LEFT THE MONTPARNASSE DISTRICT, MODIGLIANI IS SAID—ACCORDING TO HIS DAUGHTER—TO HAVE TAKEN UP RESIDENCE AS EARLY AS 1914 AT 13 RUE RAVIGNAN, WITHIN THE CELEBRATED STRUCTURE KNOWN AS THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, A SETTING OF AUSPICIOUS DAYS FOR THE HISTORY OF MODERN ART. IT REMAINS UNCLEAR WHY JEANNE PLACED HER FATHER'S SETTLEMENT THERE IN 1914; PERHAPS SHE INFERRED THE DATE FROM THE SUPPOSED YEAR IN WHICH PAUL GUILLAUME ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR MODIGLIANI'S ARTISTIC PRODUCTION. I HAVE, HOWEVER, SUFFICIENT GROUNDS TO REGARD THAT CHRONOLOGY AS IMPRECISE. FROM PAUL GUILLAUME'S OWN TESTIMONIES, FROM A LETTER BY MODIGLIANI TO HIS MOTHER, AND FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN GUILLAUME AND HIS MENTOR GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE, ONE MAY INFER WITH NEAR CERTAINTY THAT 1915—MOST PROBABLY SEPTEMBER—WAS THE YEAR IN WHICH AMEDEO MOVED INTO THE BUILDING.

IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO GIOVANNI SCHEIWILLER, DATED 6 APRIL 1932, PAUL GUILLAUME WROTE:

“... IN 1914, THROUGHOUT 1915 AND PART OF 1916, I WAS THE SOLE PURCHASER OF MODIGLIANI'S PAINTINGS, AND IT WAS ONLY IN 1917 THAT MR. ZBOROWSKI TOOK CHARGE OF HIM. MODIGLIANI HAD BEEN INTRODUCED TO ME BY MAX JACOB. HE WAS THEN LIVING WITH BEATRICE HASTINGS, WORKING EITHER AT HER PLACE OR AT THAT OF THE PAINTER HAVILAND, OR ELSE IN A STUDIO I HAD RENTED FOR HIM AT 13 RUE RAVIGNAN, OR IN THE SMALL MONTMARTRE HOUSE HE OCCUPIED FOR A TIME WITH BEATRICE HASTINGS AND WHERE HE PAINTED MY PORTRAIT...”

IN THIS MISSIVE GUILLAUME DOES NOT SPECIFY THE EXACT YEAR IN WHICH MODIGLIANI TOOK UP RESIDENCE AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR; MOREOVER, IT WAS WRITTEN TWELVE YEARS AFTER THE ARTIST'S DEATH. HE WAS MORE PRECISE IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN LES ARTS À PARIS (NO. 6, NOVEMBER 1920), ONLY MONTHS AFTER MODIGLIANI'S DEATH AND THUS CLOSER IN TIME TO THE EVENTS DESCRIBED:

“... IT WAS IN 1915 THAT HE LEFT MONTPARNASSE TO SETTLE IN A STUDIO I RENTED FOR HIM AT 13 RUE RAVIGNAN, IN THAT HISTORIC WOODEN BUILDING WHICH HAD WITNESSED THE DIFFICULT AND EPIC HOURS OF PICASSO, MAX JACOB, THE DOUANIER ROUSSEAU, AND MANY PAINTERS NOW MORE OR LESS CELEBRATED...”

GUILLAUME'S RECOLLECTION IS CORROBORATED BY A LETTER MODIGLIANI ADDRESSED TO HIS MOTHER ON FRIDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 1915, INFORMING HER OF HIS NEW ADDRESS: “NEW ADDRESS: 13 PLACE ÉMILE GOUDEAU XVII...”. PLACE ÉMILE GOUDEAU IS THE SQUARE BEFORE THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, FORMERLY PART OF RUE RAVIGNAN UNTIL 1911, WHEN IT WAS RENAMED. MODIGLIANI WAS THUS CLEARLY COMMUNICATING HIS RELOCATION TO THE BATEAU-LAVOIR.

IF HE NOTIFIED HIS MOTHER IN NOVEMBER 1915, GUILLAUME'S 1920 RECOLLECTION OF HAVING RENTED HIM THE STUDIO IN THAT YEAR GAINS CREDENCE. FURTHER CONFIRMATION MAY BE GLEANED FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN GUILLAUME AND APOLLINAIRE, WHICH MARKS THE MOMENT WHEN THE DEALER BEGAN TAKING A SERIOUS INTEREST IN THE LIVORNESE ARTIST.

ON 10 SEPTEMBER 1915, GUILLAUME INFORMED APOLLINAIRE OF HIS INTENTION TO MAKE AN OFFER TO MODIGLIANI; FIVE DAYS LATER CAME APOLLINAIRE'S LACONIC REPLY:

"MODIGLIANI—BIND HIM, DO NOT LET YOURSELF BE BOUND. DO NOT ARGUE WITH HIM. TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT. BUT ABOVE ALL SCULPTURE, AND VERY, VERY CHEAP."

MOREOVER, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO SUPPOSE THAT, SHORTLY AFTER MOVING TO THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, MODIGLIANI FAILED TO SEND HIS NEW ADDRESS TO HIS MOTHER, AS IN FACT HE DID IN THE LETTER DATED 9 NOVEMBER 1915.

REBUS SIC STANTIBUS, THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL GUILLAUME FROM 1920, THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE DEALER AND GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE, AND MODIGLIANI'S LETTER OF NOVEMBER 1915 INFORMING HIS MOTHER OF HIS NEW ADDRESS ALL CONCUR, UNEQUIVOCALLY, IN ESTABLISHING THE TIME OF HIS SETTLEMENT AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, WHICH MAY BE TRACED, WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF PROBABILITY, TO A PERIOD BETWEEN SEPTEMBER AND 9 NOVEMBER 1915.

A PAINTING FURTHER STRENGTHENS THE EVIDENTIARY BASIS OF THE RECONSTRUCTION JUST OUTLINED: THE PORTRAIT DEPICTING PAUL GUILLAUME, ALREADY ANALYZED IN THE SECTION OF THIS ESSAY DEVOTED TO COMPOSITION AND DATED PRECISELY TO SEPTEMBER 1915, THUS IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH WHAT EMERGES FROM THE GUILLAUME—APOLLINAIRE CORRESPONDENCE.

ALL THAT REMAINS IS TO DETERMINE THE DURATION OF HIS STAY IN THAT BUILDING. THIS ASPECT OF MODIGLIANI'S BIOGRAPHY CONSTITUTES A VEXATA QUÆSTIO WHICH, HOWEVER, DOES NOT PRECLUDE A CAREFUL RECONSTRUCTION.

IN THE AFOREMENTIONED TESTIMONY OF 1932, PAUL GUILLAUME STATES THAT LEOPOLD ZBOROWSKI ONLY BEGAN TO REPRESENT MODIGLIANI STARTING IN 1917, A CLAIM CONSISTENT WITH THE ACCOUNT GIVEN BY HANKA ZBOROWSKA. IN HER MEMOIRS—PUBLISHED BY HER HEIRS—SHE RECOUNTS A SPECIFIC EPISODE DATED TO THE SPRING OF THAT YEAR: MODIGLIANI ALLEGEDLY FELL OUT WITH CHÉRON, HIS DEALER AT THE TIME, AND CONSEQUENTLY ASKED ZBOROWSKI TO BECOME HIS DEALER.

I DO NOT KNOW WHY HANKA FIXED THAT DATE FOR THE MEETING BETWEEN HER HUSBAND (IT APPEARS THEY WERE NOT YET MARRIED) AND MODIGLIANI; HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT SHE ANCHORS IT TO AN EPISODE INVOLVING CHÉRON AS MODIGLIANI'S DEALER—A CIRCUMSTANCE NEVER ENTIRELY CLARIFIED BY OFFICIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY—SUGGESTS THAT MRS. ZBOROWSKA MAY HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN IN THIS RECOLLECTION. INDEED, LEOPOLD HIMSELF REPORTED HAVING MET MODÌ IN JULY 1916.

AS FOR THE SUBSTANCE OF THE 1932 STATEMENT BY PAUL GUILLAUME, ACCORDING TO WHICH LEOPOLD ZBOROWSKI DID NOT BECOME MODIGLIANI'S DEALER UNTIL 1917, MARC RESTELLINI OFFERS WHAT I CONSIDER A PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION. THE ART HISTORIAN MAINTAINS THAT THE MEETING BETWEEN ZBOROWSKI AND MODIGLIANI TOOK PLACE IN MARCH 1916, WHEN MODIGLIANI IS SAID TO HAVE SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH THE POLISH DEALER. HE SITUATES, WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF AN ALLEGED RIVALRY BETWEEN ZBOROWSKI AND GUILLAUME, THE LATTER'S ATTEMPT TO MOVE FORWARD THE DATE ON WHICH ZBOROWSKI ASSUMED CONTROL OF MODIGLIANI'S ARTISTIC CAREER. THE FRENCH DEALER, WITNESSING THE NOW UNSTOPPABLE RISE OF MODIGLIANI'S WORK, SOUGHT EX POST FACTO TO CLAIM FOR HIMSELF THE GREATER MERITS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE ARTIST FROM LIVORNO AND COULD DO SO ONLY BY EXTENDING THE PERIOD OF HIS INVOLVEMENT IN MODIGLIANI'S ARTISTIC LIFE.

MOREOVER, EVEN IF ONE WERE TO CONCEDE EVERYTHING, FOLLOWING THE DATE REPORTED BY GUILLAUME IN 1932 (AND BY HANKA IN HER MEMOIRS) WOULD ALSO MEAN DISREGARDING THE TESTIMONY OF LUNIA CZEKOWSKA, A FRIEND AND MUSE OF MODIGLIANI. IN AN INTERVIEW GIVEN TO ALDO SANTINI, SHE STATED THAT IT WAS ZBOROWSKI WHO INTRODUCED HER TO MODIGLIANI AT LA ROTONDE IN JUNE 1916, AFTER SHE, TOGETHER WITH THE POLISH DEALER AND HER HUSBAND, HAD ATTENDED AN EXHIBITION OF MODIGLIANI'S WORK HELD IN RUE HUYGHENS.

THE FOLLOWING DAY, LUNIA RECOUNTS, AT THE HOTEL SUNNY ON BOULEVARD DE PORT-ROYAL, IN THE APARTMENT THEN OCCUPIED BY THE ZBOROWSKIS, MODIGLIANI PAINTED THE FIRST PORTRAIT OF HIS POLISH FRIEND, NOW HOUSED AT THE MUSÉE DE GRENOBLE.

IN TRUTH, LUNIA'S RECOLLECTION AS REPORTED TO SANTINI IS IMPRECISE, BECAUSE THE EXHIBITION TO WHICH SHE REFERS TOOK PLACE NOT IN JUNE, AS SHE CLAIMED, BUT BETWEEN 19 NOVEMBER AND 5 DECEMBER 1916. THUS, THE FATEFUL MEETING WITH ZBOROWSKI SHOULD BE POSTPONED, AT THE LATEST, TO THAT DATE. WE WOULD THEREBY ARRIVE ON THE THRESHOLD OF 1917, ELIMINATING THE APPARENT DISCREPANCY WITH THE DATE INDICATED BY PAUL GUILLAUME IN HIS 1932 STATEMENT.

FINALLY, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE SCHOLARSHIP ON MODIGLIANI GENERALLY DATES HIS MEETING WITH ZBOROWSKI TO JUNE–JULY 1916, AND WHAT IS CONSIDERED THE FIRST PORTRAIT OF THE POLISH DEALER IS LIKewise DATED TO 1916.

WHETHER THE MEETING BETWEEN MODIGLIANI AND ZBOROWSKI OCCURRED IN MARCH, IN JUNE–JULY, OR AT THE LATEST IN NOVEMBER 1916, THE CRUCIAL POINT FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS ESSAY IS THAT WE HAVE IDENTIFIED, WITH REASONABLE APPROXIMATION, A TERMINUS AD QUEM MARKING THE LATEST POSSIBLE DATE OF MODIGLIANI'S STAY AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR. WITH HIS OFFICIAL TRANSITION INTO ZBOROWSKI'S CIRCLE, MODIGLIANI ALSO CHANGED LODGINGS AND, AFTER A BRIEF STAY AT THE HOTEL SUNNY ON BOULEVARD DE PORT-ROYAL, BEGAN FREQUENTING THE APARTMENT AT NO. 3 RUE JOSEPH BARA, WHERE THE MAJORITY OF HIS NUDES WERE EXECUTED.

IT REMAINS OPEN TO QUESTION WHETHER, AFTER LEAVING THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, MODIGLIANI PAINTED NUDES AS WELL IN THE ZBOROWSKIS' APARTMENT AT THE HOTEL SUNNY, WHERE HE COMPLETED, AS MENTIONED, LUNIA'S PORTRAIT. THIS IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE; YET, IN TRUTH, THE ARTIST'S STAY THERE WAS BRIEF, AND IN ANY CASE IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT HE COULD HAVE RECREATED IN THAT SETTING THE PROVERBIAL INTIMACY HE SOUGHT WHEN PAINTING THOSE SUBJECTS.

## MODIGLIANI'S ATELIER AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR

HAVING ESTABLISHED THE CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF MODIGLIANI'S STAY AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, AND SUBSEQUENTLY WITH THE ZBOROWSKIS, IT IS NOW NECESSARY TO EXAMINE THE CORE ISSUE OF THIS CHAPTER.

THERE EXIST SEVERAL WELL-KNOWN PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN AT NO. 13 RUE RAVIGNAN (OR PLACE ÉMILE GOUDEAU, AS IT WAS LATER DESIGNATED) BY PAUL GUILLAUME HIMSELF. IN ONE, MODIGLIANI IS SEEN STANDING AS HE AFFIXES A DRAWING TO THE WALL; IN ANOTHER, HE IS SEATED BEFORE A GROUP OF DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS DEPICTING BEATRICE HASTINGS AND RAYMOND RADIGUET. IN THE SAME POSITION AND WITHIN THE SAME SETTING—INDEED, EVEN THE SHEETS OF PAPER SCATTERED ON THE FLOOR REMAIN IN IDENTICAL ARRANGEMENT, INDICATING THAT THE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE TAKEN IN SUCCESSION—TWO ADDITIONAL IMAGES PORTRAY PAUL GUILLAUME SEATED ON THE VERY CHAIR PREVIOUSLY (OR SUBSEQUENTLY; IN ANY CASE, I BELIEVE THE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE TAKEN AT THE SAME SITTING) OCCUPIED BY MODIGLIANI. GIVEN THE PARTICULAR CONTEXT AND THE STRIKING SIMILARITY AMONG THESE IMAGES, I AM INCLINED TO THINK THAT PAUL GUILLAUME AND MODIGLIANI ALTERNATED BEHIND THE CAMERA, PHOTOGRAPHING ONE ANOTHER IN SEQUENCE (FIG. 1).

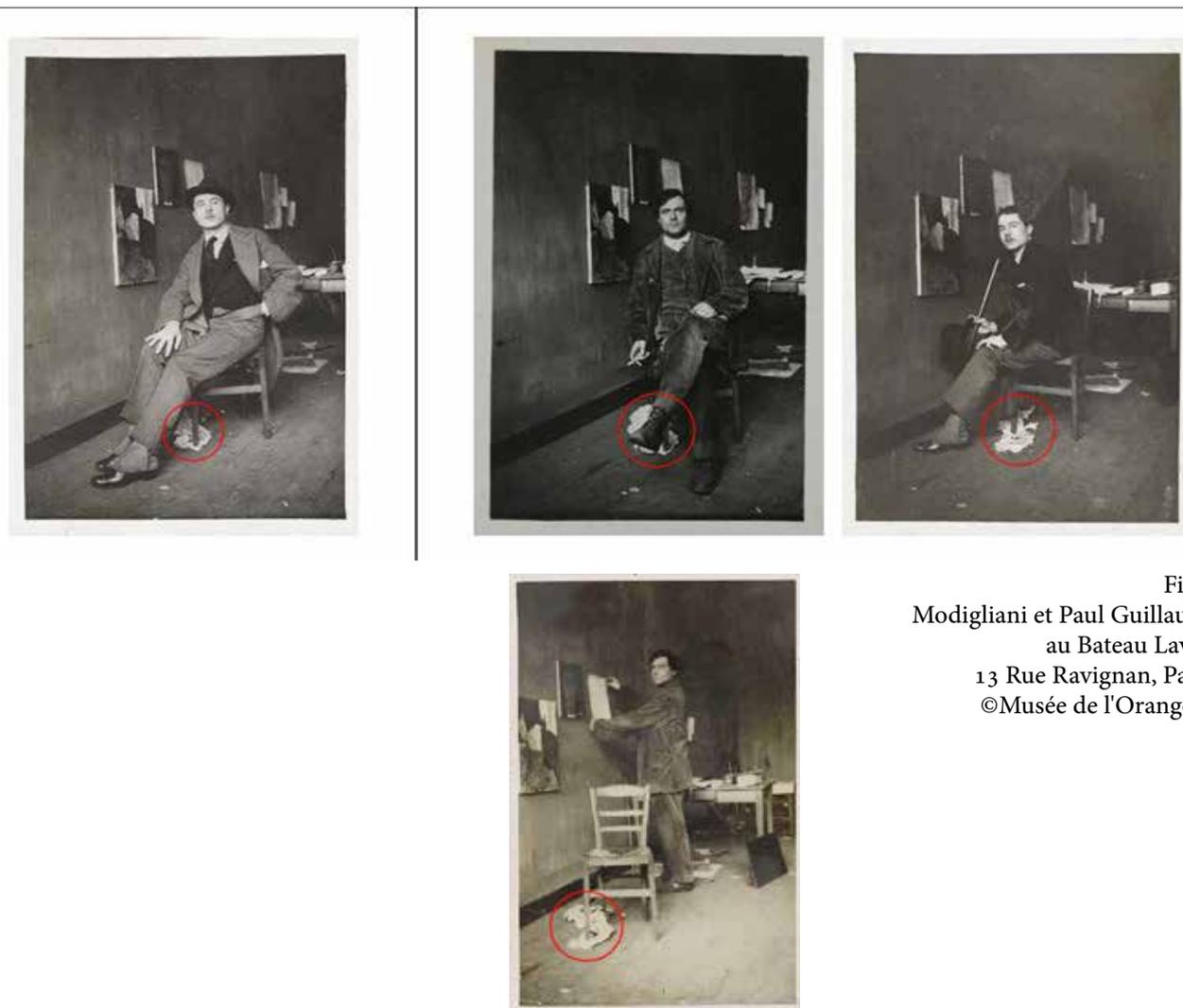


Fig. 1  
Modigliani et Paul Guillaume  
au Bateau Lavoir  
13 Rue Ravignan, Paris.  
©Musée de l'Orangerie

IT IS IN LIGHT OF THIS PRACTICE THAT I CONSIDER THE PHOTOGRAPH PRESENTLY UNDER EXAMINATION, PRESERVED IN THE ARCHIVES OF GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE, LIKewise TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN IN MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO AT No. 13 RUE RAVIGNAN, AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, WITHIN A PERIOD THAT MAY REASONABLY BE SITUATED—ON THE BASIS OF THE EVIDENCE ALREADY DISCUSSED—BETWEEN SEPTEMBER–NOVEMBER 1915 AND, AT THE LATEST, THE END OF 1916.

IN THIS IMAGE WE OBSERVE PAUL GUILLAUME, IMPECCABLY DRESSED IN HIS CUSTOMARY ELEGANCE, SEATED UPON WHAT I AM CONVINCED WAS MODIGLIANI'S BED IN HIS STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR (FIG. 2).



Fig. 2

IF WE COMPARE THIS PHOTOGRAPH WITH THE CELEBRATED IMAGE OF MODIGLIANI AFFIXING A DRAWING TO THE WALL OF HIS STUDIO, THE IMPRESSION ARISES UNMISTAKABLY THAT BOTH DEPICT THE SAME INTERIOR (FIG. 3). THE WALLS APPEAR IDENTICAL: POORLY MAINTAINED, MARKED BY VISIBLE TRACES OF DAMPNES. ALTHOUGH THE PRESENCE OF A COVERLET UPON THE BED MIGHT SUGGEST A DEGREE OF CARE, THE STUDIO WAS IN REALITY LIKELY MODEST AND SPARSELY FURNISHED, AS WAS COMMON FOR ARTISTS' ATELIERS OF THE PERIOD. ON THE WALLS FRAMING AND DELIMITING THE BED HANG SEVERAL DRAWINGS, AS WAS MODIGLIANI'S HABIT—SPECIFICALLY, A CARYATID AND A FEMALE FIGURE.

WHILE I HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO IDENTIFY THE CARYATID AMONG THOSE KNOWN AND PUBLISHED, THE FEMALE FIGURE APPEARS, IN MY VIEW, TO CORRESPOND TO A DRAWING FORMERLY IN PAUL GUILLAUME'S COLLECTION AND DATED 1916 (FIG. 4).

BEYOND ITS UNDENIABLE DOCUMENTARY VALUE, THIS EXTRAORDINARY IMAGE HAS ENABLED ME TO ESTABLISH A CONNECTION BETWEEN NU COUCHÉ AND THE BED VISIBLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH—AND CONSEQUENTLY WITH MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR—BY VIRTUE OF SEVERAL UNIQUE AND UNEQUIVOCAL DETAILS.



Fig. 3

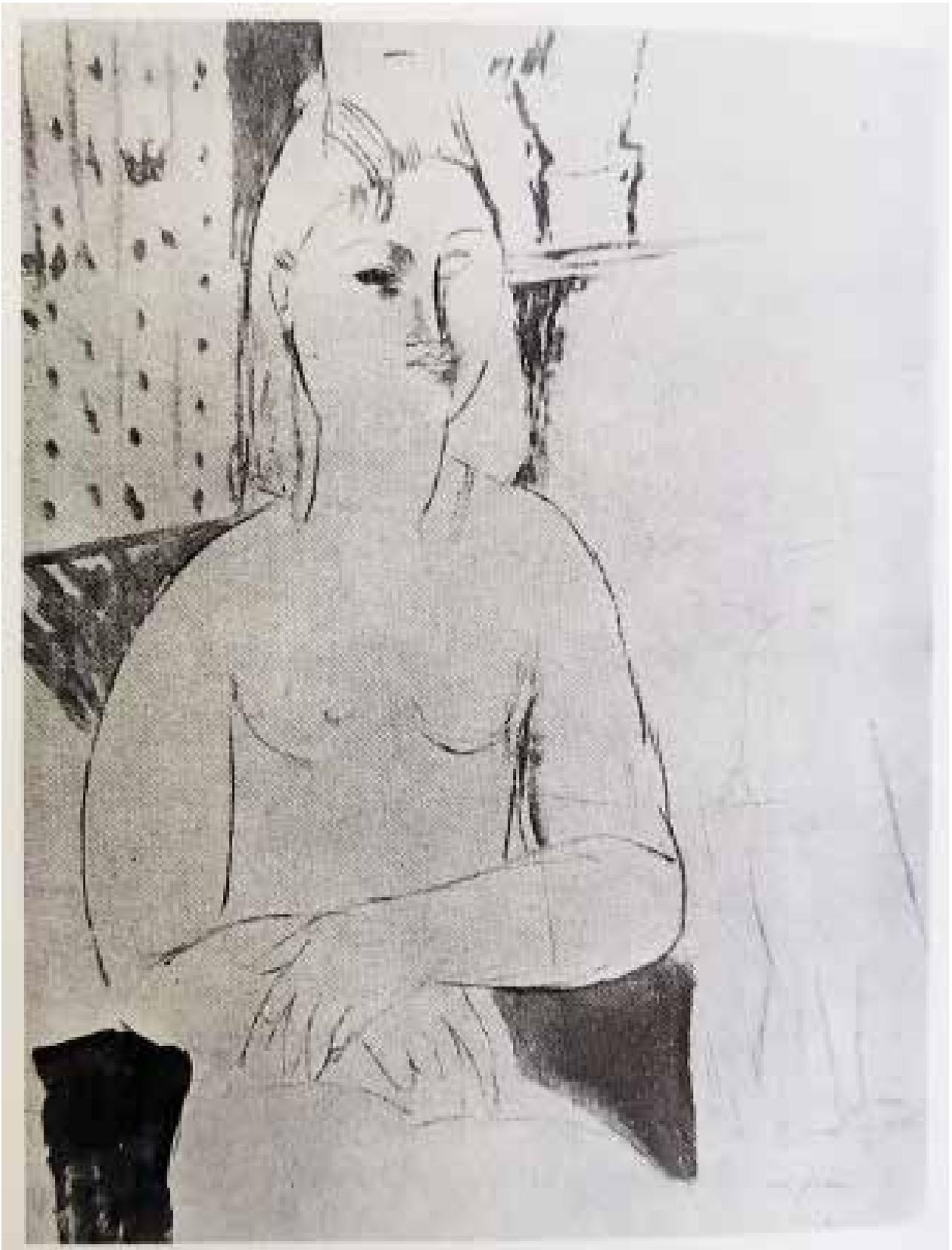


Fig. 4  
Femme nue assise  
1916  
Aquarelle sur papier  
53 x 42 cm  
Coll. particulière  
Patani, n. 280

A CAREFUL OBSERVATION OF *NU COUCHÉ* MAKES IT CLEAR THAT THE MODEL RECLINES UPON A BED PLACED AGAINST THE WALL, COVERED WITH A RED DAMASK BEDSPREAD IDENTICAL TO THAT SEEN IN THE PHOTOGRAPH WITH *PAUL GUILLAUME* (FIGS. 5, 6, AND 7). I AM PERSUADED THAT IT IS INDEED THE SAME TEXTILE, FOR SEVERAL ELEMENTS OF EXCEPTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE MAY BE DISCERNED. LET US EXAMINE THE FLORAL DAMASK MOTIF HIGHLIGHTED IN THE PHOTOGRAPH AND REPRODUCED LITERALLY IN *MODIGLIANI'S* CELEBRATED PAINTING.

AS CAN BE OBSERVED, THE FLORAL MOTIFS RUNNING ALONG THE MODEL'S FOREARM CORRESPOND PRECISELY TO THOSE VISIBLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH, OCCUPYING THE SAME RELATIVE POSITION. THERE IS ABSOLUTE CONCORDANCE BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPH AND PAINTING, EVEN IN THE SPACING BETWEEN THE FLORAL MOTIF CROSSING THE FOREARM AND THE ONE IMMEDIATELY BELOW IT (FIGS. 5, 6, AND 7).

MOREOVER, THE DAMASK MOTIF UNDER DISCUSSION IS POSITIONED ALONG THE UPPER RIDGE OF THE BED, AND THERE IS PERFECT SUPERIMPOSITION BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPH AND PAINTING. STARTING FROM THE IMAGE OF *NU COUCHÉ*, ONE MAY RECONSTRUCT THE POSITION OF THE BED WITH COMPLETE COHERENCE IN RELATION TO THE PLACEMENT OBSERVABLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH WITH *GUILLAUME* (FIG. 8).

A FURTHER DRAWING SUPPORTS THIS THESIS. IT FEATURES A DAMASK-LIKE PATTERN—SIMPLIFIED IN GRAPHIC EXECUTION YET REMINISCENT OF THAT OBSERVED IN *NU COUCHÉ*. IN MY OPINION, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE DRAWING'S GENERAL SPATIAL CONFIGURATION (WHICH I BELIEVE REPRESENTS THE SAME STUDIO ENVIRONMENT), THIS WORK TOO WAS EXECUTED AT THE *BATEAU-LAVOIR ATELIER* (FIG. 9). MIGHT IT BE A PREPARATORY STUDY FOR *NU COUCHÉ*? (CF. FIGS. 9 AND 10).

FINALLY, ATTENTION SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO THE DETAIL BETWEEN THE MODEL'S LEGS IN *NU COUCHÉ*: A STEM ADORNED WITH LEAVES. ALTHOUGH NOT VISIBLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH, IT IS ENTIRELY CONSISTENT WITH THE DECORATIVE MOTIFS PRESENT ON THE BEDSPREAD UNDER CONSIDERATION.

BEFORE PROCEEDING TO A MORE THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS FOR WHICH I BELIEVE THE PHOTOGRAPH TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN IN *MODIGLIANI'S* STUDIO AT THE *BATEAU-LAVOIR*, IT IS NECESSARY TO CONSIDER THAT OTHER PAINTINGS ALSO DISPLAY A DAMASK PATTERN. IS IT IDENTICAL TO THE ONE DISCERNIBLE IN *NU COUCHÉ* AND IN FIG. 2? DOES THIS CONFIRM THAT ADDITIONAL NUDES, BEYOND *NU COUCHÉ*, WERE PAINTED AT THE *BATEAU-LAVOIR*, WITH MODELS RECLINING UPON THAT VERY BED? OR WERE THEY EXECUTED IN THE *ZBOROWSKIS'* APARTMENT AT THE *HÔTEL SUNNY*? ARE THERE SUFFICIENTLY GROUNDED ELEMENTS TO SITUATE THEM INSTEAD WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE APARTMENT AT 3 RUE JOSEPH BARA, RESIDENCE OF THE *ZBOROWSKIS*? (*MODIGLIANI*, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, DID NOT PAINT NUDES IN THE STUDIO AT RUE DE LA GRANDE-CHAUMIÈRE, AS IT WAS UNCOMFORTABLE AND POORLY HEATED; MOREOVER, IT SEEMS IMPROBABLE THAT *JEANNE* WOULD HAVE PERMITTED HIM TO PRODUCE NUDES IN WHAT SHE SURELY REGARDED AS THEIR SHARED DOMESTIC REFUGE.)

I SHALL ATTEMPT TO FORMULATE A HYPOTHESIS ADDRESSING THESE QUESTIONS IN A CHAPTER SPECIFICALLY DEVOTED TO THEM. I NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT THIS REMAINS A FIELD OF INQUIRY STILL UNDER EXPLORATION, AND I EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OTHER SCHOLARS OF THIS NOBLE ARTIST MAY ILLUMINATE THE MATTER MORE FULLY.

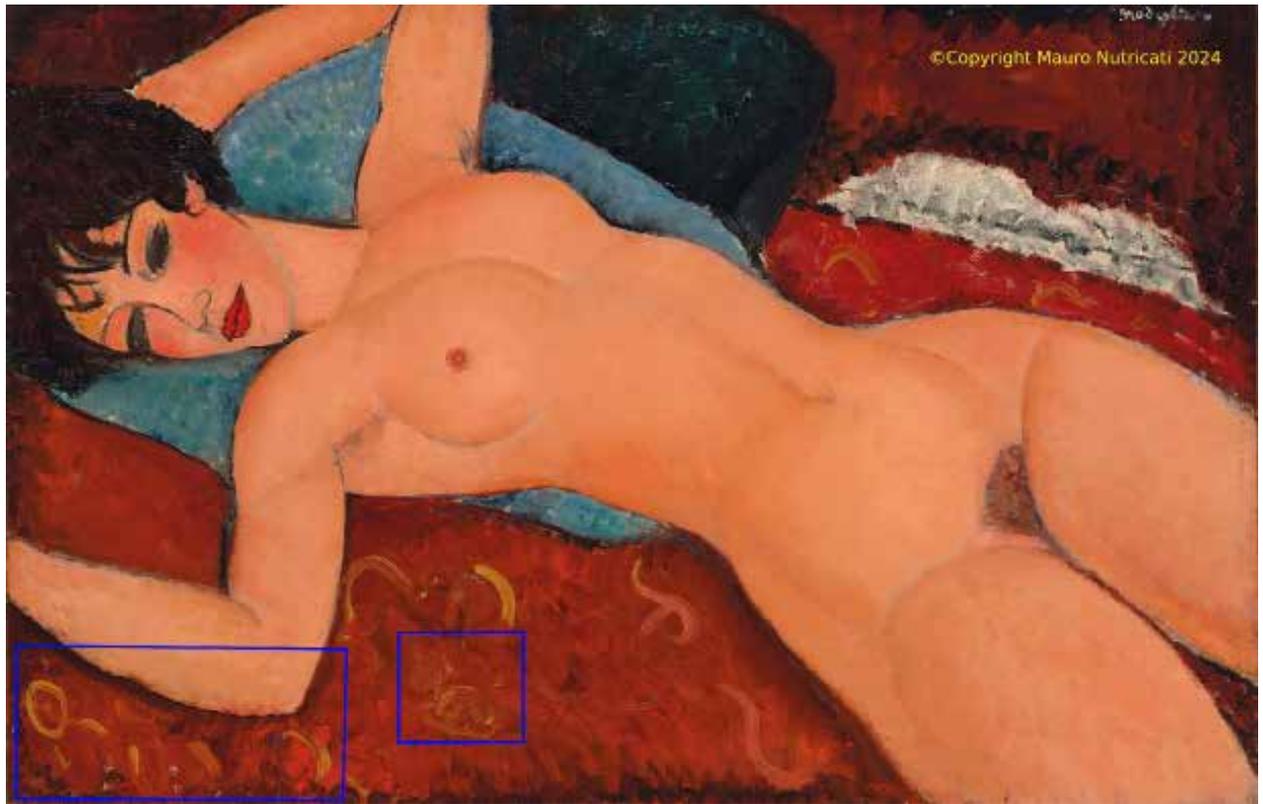


Fig. 5

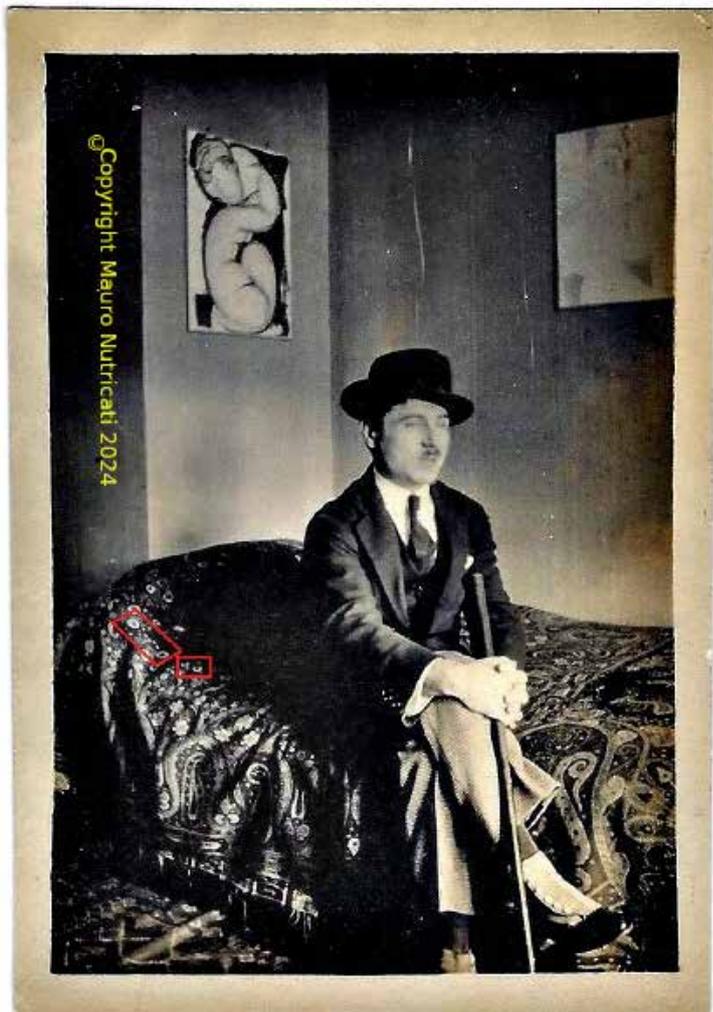
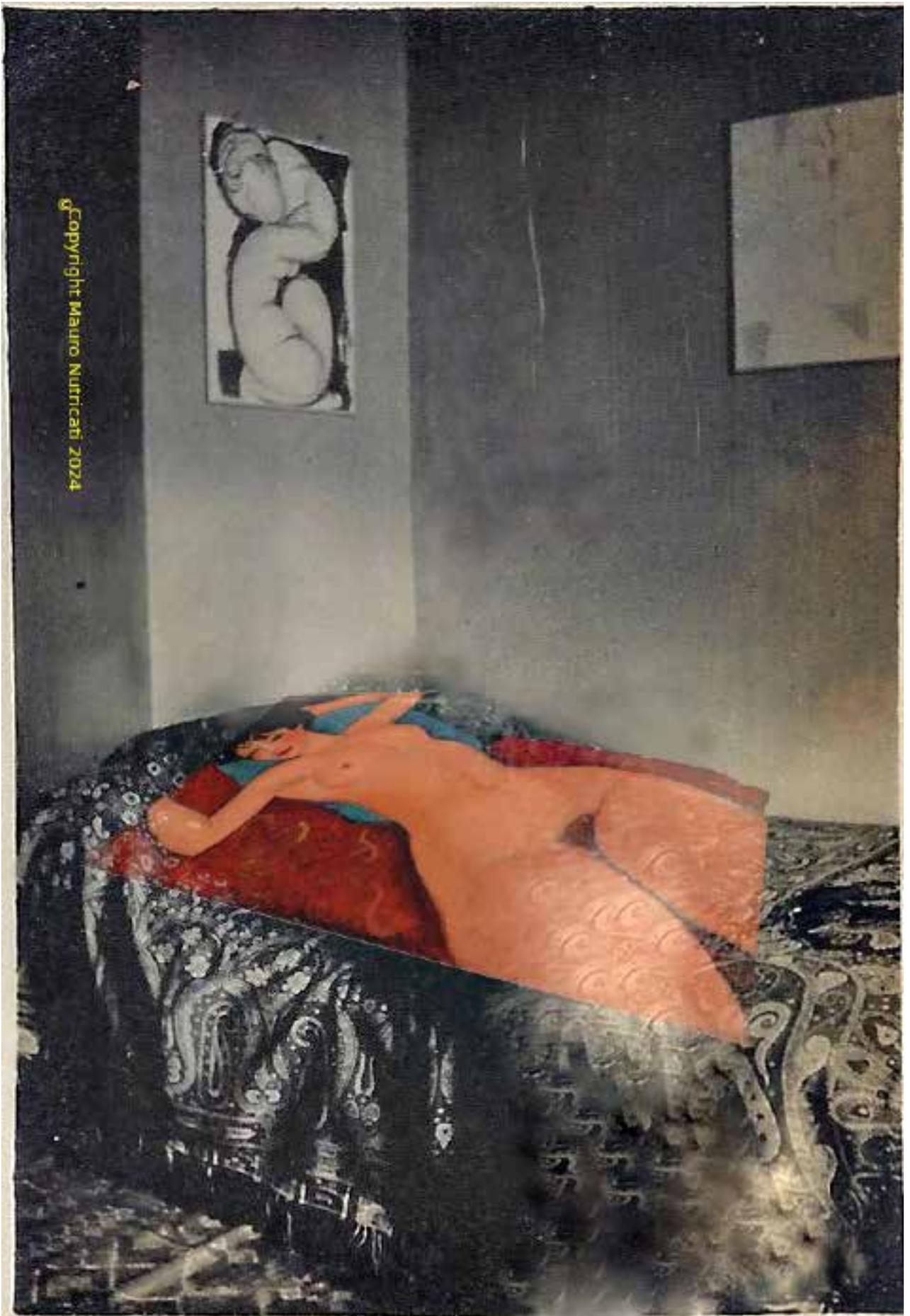


Fig. 7

Fig. 6



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Fig. 8

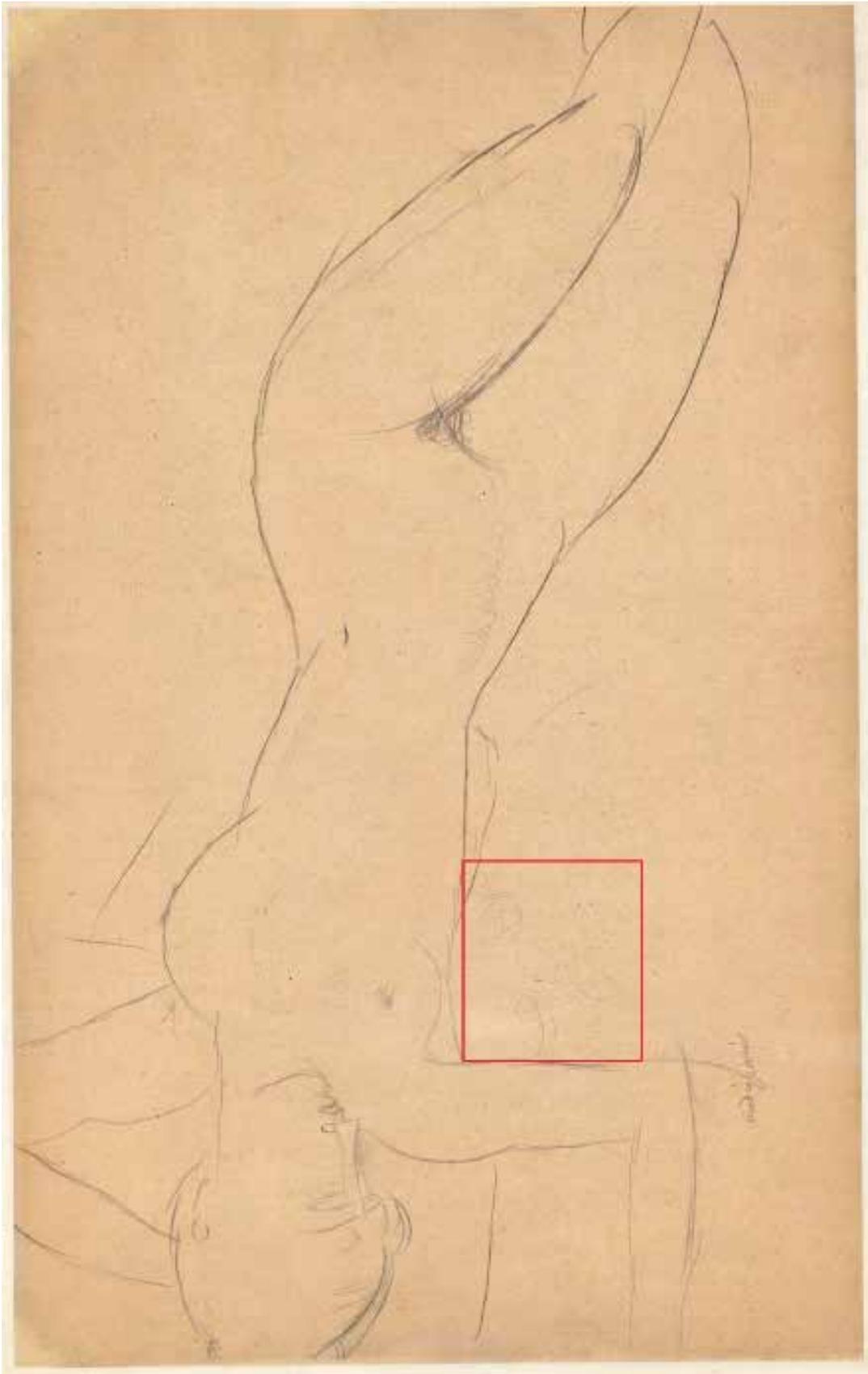


Fig. 9  
Nude resting  
1916  
Crayon sur papier  
29.3 x 48.3 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria  
Australia



Fig. 10  
Nu Couché  
(Nudo rosso)  
1916  
Huile sur toile  
60 x 92 cm  
Liu Yiqian Collection, Cina  
Ceroni n. 198

# MODIGLIANI'S ATELIER AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR

## II

AS HAS BEEN AMPLY DEMONSTRATED, THE PHOTOGRAPH DEPICTING PAUL GUILLAUME SEATED UPON MODIGLIANI'S BED, TOGETHER WITH THE PERFECT CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THAT IMAGE AND THE ELEMENTS PRESENT IN *NU COUCHÉ*, AS WELL AS THE CONCORDANCE OF TIME AND PLACE ESTABLISHED IN THE FOREGOING RECONSTRUCTION, ALL INCLINE ONE TOWARD THE HYPOTHESIS THAT *NU COUCHÉ* WAS EXECUTED, WITH REASONABLE CERTAINTY, IN MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR BETWEEN SEPTEMBER–NOVEMBER 1915 AND, AT THE LATEST, THE END OF 1916.

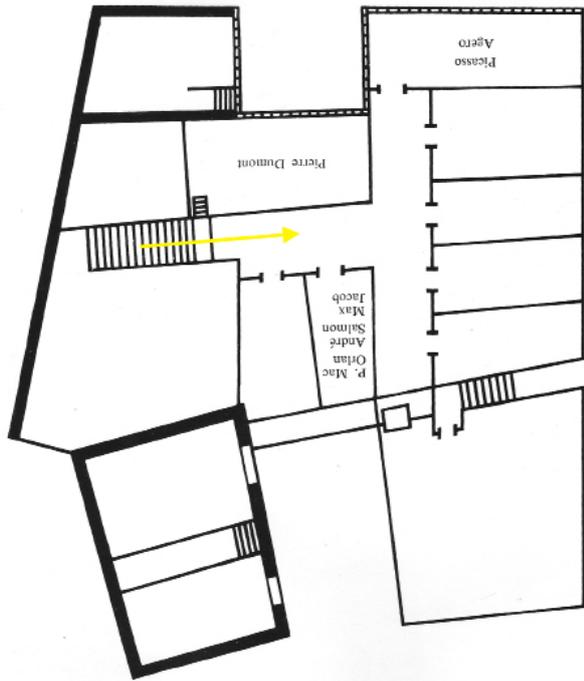
YET WITHIN THIS ANALYTICAL AND RECONSTRUCTIVE PROCESS, ONE FINAL PIECE OF EVIDENCE WAS STILL LACKING—A DIRECT LINK CAPABLE OF DEFINITELY CONNECTING THE PHOTOGRAPH OF PAUL GUILLAUME TO MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR. SUCH A LINK WAS NECESSARY TO IDENTIFY THE STUDIO BEYOND DOUBT AND TO BRING MY HYPOTHESIS TO COMPLETION.

HERE IT IS.

IN 1958, INA FRANCE BROADCAST A DOCUMENTARY RETRACING MODIGLIANI'S FOOTSTEPS IN PARIS. THE FILM FEATURED BLAISE CENDRARS AS ITS GUIDE. THE POET HAD BEEN AMONG THOSE CLOSEST TO MODIGLIANI AND WAS HIMSELF THE SUBJECT OF SEVERAL PORTRAITS. HAVING SHARED IN THE DAILY LIFE OF THE LIVORNESE ARTIST, HE KNEW INTIMATELY THE PLACES MODIGLIANI FREQUENTED. HE WAS THUS ABLE TO REVISIT THEM WITH EASE AND PROCEEDED TO THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, WHICH AT THE TIME OF FILMING STILL STOOD INTACT.

BEFORE A FIRE DESTROYED THE BUILDING IN 1972, THE STUDIOS WERE ARRANGED ON TWO DIFFERENT LEVELS: ONE WAS LOCATED AT THE SAME HEIGHT AS THE ENTRANCE TO THE STRUCTURE FROM PLACE ÉMILE GOUDEAU (FORMERLY PLACE RAVIGNAN) (RED ARROW IN FIGS. 2 AND 3); THE OTHER, SITUATED LOWER DOWN, WAS REACHED BY DESCENDING A FLIGHT OF STAIRS IMMEDIATELY AFTER ENTERING FROM PLACE ÉMILE GOUDEAU (YELLOW ARROW IN FIGS. 1 AND 2).

IN THE FILM FRAMES CAPTURING BLAISE CENDRARS AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR, SEARCHING FOR WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO, WE SEE THE POET DESCENDING A STAIRCASE AND HEADING TOWARD THE STUDIOS LOCATED ON THE LOWER LEVEL (FIG. 4, FILM STILLS). HE THEN WALKED A FEW METERS INTO THE BUILDING, TURNED INTO A SMALL CORRIDOR, TURNED LEFT, AND AFTER ONLY A SHORT DISTANCE STOPPED IN FRONT OF A DOOR. HE KNOCKED AND ATTEMPTED TO ENTER MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO, BUT THE DOOR WAS LOCKED; HE THEREFORE RETRACED HIS STEPS (FIGS. 4 AND 5 SHOW THE FILM STILLS AND THE FLOOR PLAN INDICATING THE ROUTE TAKEN BY CENDRARS, RECONSTRUCTED ON THE BASIS OF THE AFOREMENTIONED FRAMES).

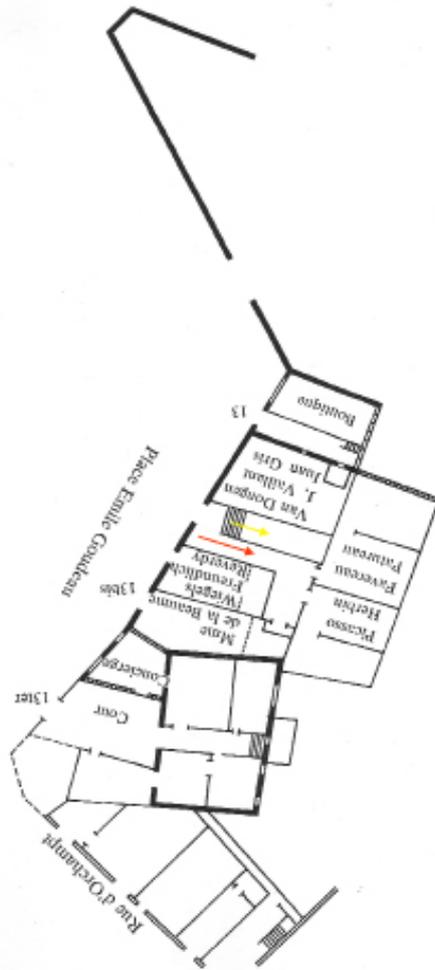


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Fig. 2

Fig. 1



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Fig. 3





Fig. 4

Fig. 4  
The sequence from the film in which we see Blaise Cendrars reaching Modigliani's atelier at the Bateau-Lavoir.

Fig. 5  
The same route shown on the map.

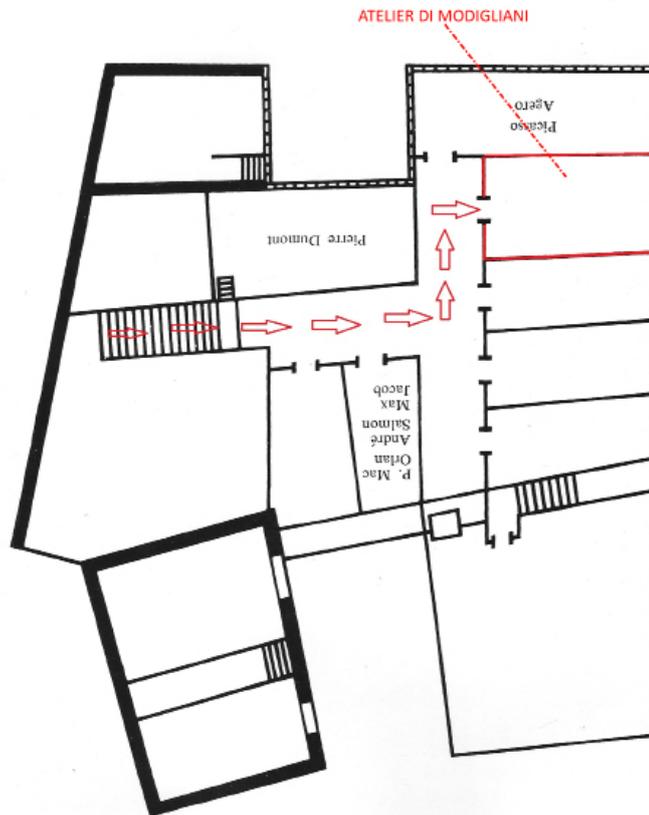


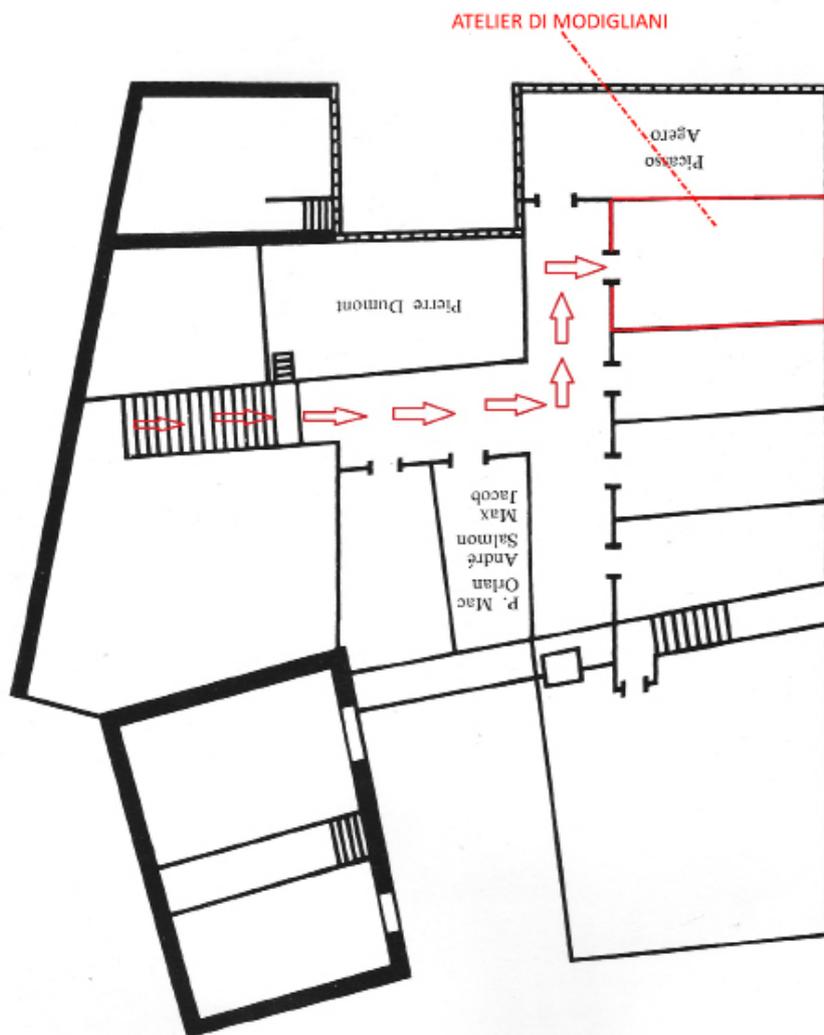
Fig. 5

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NOW, IF ONE COMPARES THE FLOOR PLAN OF THE BATEAU-LAVOIR—ON WHICH I HAVE IDENTIFIED THE LOCATION OF MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO ACCORDING TO THE ROUTE TAKEN BY BLAISE CENDRARS IN THE VIDEO—WITH A PERIOD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE BUILDING, IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT THE DOOR AT WHICH THE POET KNOCKS CORRESPONDS TO THE STUDIO I HAVE HIGHLIGHTED IN RED (FIGS. 6 AND 7).



Fig. 6



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Fig. 7

THIS RECONSTRUCTION IS SUPPORTED BY A FURTHER OBSERVATION. AT THE END OF THE LAST NARROW CORRIDOR WALKED BY CENDRARS, WHICH LED HIM TO MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO, THERE IS A DOOR (FIG. 8, HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW) PROVIDING ACCESS TO THE FINAL STUDIO LOCATED ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE BUILDING (FIG. 9).

CONSEQUENTLY, MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO MUST BE THE ONE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE LAST (FIG. 10). HAVING THUS IDENTIFIED MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR AND HYPOTHESIZED THAT THE PHOTOGRAPH WE HAVE DISCUSSED AT LENGTH MAY INDEED HAVE BEEN TAKEN IN THAT VERY STUDIO, ALL THAT REMAINED WAS TO CONNECT THE PHOTOGRAPH TO THE STUDIO ITSELF.

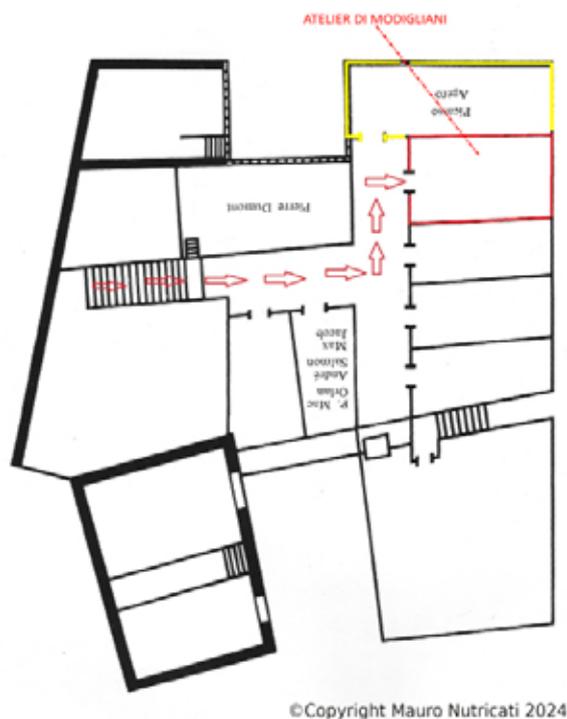


Fig. 9



Fig. 8



Fig. 10

MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO POSSESSED A DISTINCTIVE FEATURE. IN THE HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE BATEAU-LAVOIR REPRODUCED HERE, I HAVE HIGHLIGHTED A CHIMNEY FLUE—LIKELY PART OF A SMOKE EXHAUST SYSTEM RUNNING THROUGH THE ENTIRE STRUCTURE—SITUATED ALONG THE BOUNDARY WALL BETWEEN MODIGLIANI'S ATELIER AND THE FINAL STUDIO ON THE NORTH SIDE. THIS FLUE IS NOTICEABLY THICKER THAN THE OTHERS VISIBLE IN THE ARCHIVAL IMAGES AND IS COMPATIBLE, IN BOTH SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS, WITH THE RECESS OBSERVABLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH OF PAUL GUILLAUME.

ACCORDINGLY, THE BED VISIBLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH MUST HAVE BEEN PLACED AGAINST THE PARTITION WALL SEPARATING THE TWO ATELIERS (TO THE RIGHT FROM THE VIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE), WITH ITS HEADBOARD RESTING AGAINST THE VOLUMETRIC PROTRUSION CREATED BY THE PASSAGE OF THE CHIMNEY FLUE WITHIN THE STUDIO.

HAVING THUS IDENTIFIED MODIGLIANI'S STUDIO AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR AND ASCERTAINED, WITH REASONABLE CERTAINTY, THAT THE PHOTOGRAPH OF PAUL GUILLAUME SEATED UPON MODIGLIANI'S BED WAS TAKEN WITHIN THAT VERY SPACE—AND THAT UPON THIS BED IT IS HIGHLY PROBABLE THE MODEL OF NU COUCHÉ WAS POSED—TOGETHER WITH THE ESTABLISHED FACT THAT MODIGLIANI RESIDED AT THE BATEAU-LAVOIR BETWEEN SEPTEMBER–NOVEMBER 1915 AND, AT THE LATEST, THE END OF 1916, IT FOLLOWS INEXORABLY THAT THE RED NUDE (NU COUCHÉ) MUST BE DATED TO 1915 OR, AT THE LATEST, 1916, AND NOT TO 1917.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

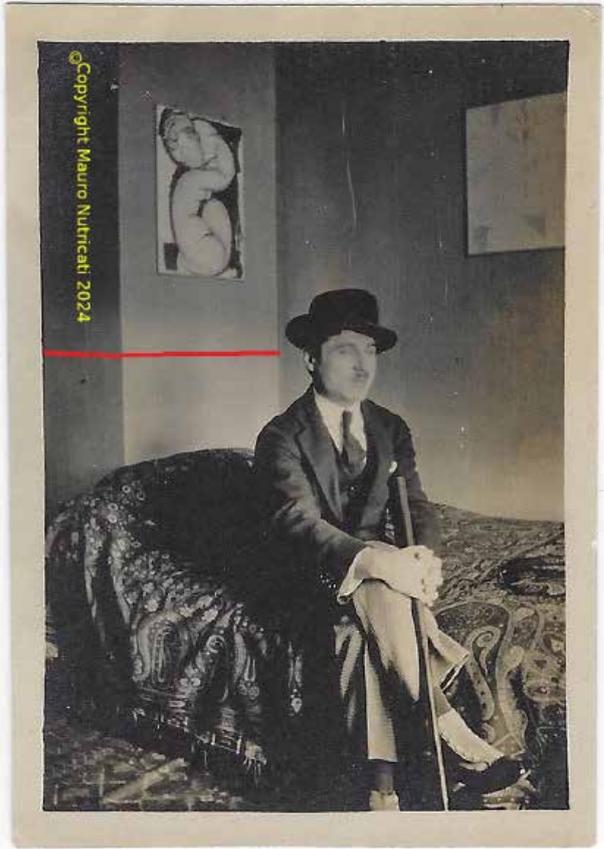


Fig. 13

FINALLY, I AM PERSUADED THAT THE LIGHTING CONDITIONS VISIBLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDE FURTHER CORROBORATION OF THE THESIS ADVANCED HERE. PAUL GUILLAUME, SEATED UPON MODIGLIANI'S BED, IS ILLUMINATED BY A FRONTAL LIGHT SOURCE COMPATIBLE WITH THE POSITION OF THE WINDOWS OBSERVABLE IN HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE BATEAU-LAVOIR. THE CELEBRATED IMAGE OF MODIGLIANI AFFIXING A DRAWING TO THE WALL OF HIS STUDIO YIELDS THE SAME SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION: THE CHAIR REFLECTS LIGHT EMANATING FROM THE SAME DIRECTION AS THAT SEEN IN THE PHOTOGRAPH WITH GUILLAUME.

ADVANCING ONE STEP FURTHER IN THIS RECONSTRUCTION, I HAVE SOUGHT TO IMAGINE HOW THE INTERIOR OF THAT MODEST CELL-LIKE STUDIO MAY HAVE APPEARED; THE RESULT IS THE SPATIAL ELABORATION PRESENTED ON PAGES 81 TO 86 (FIGS. 15–26).

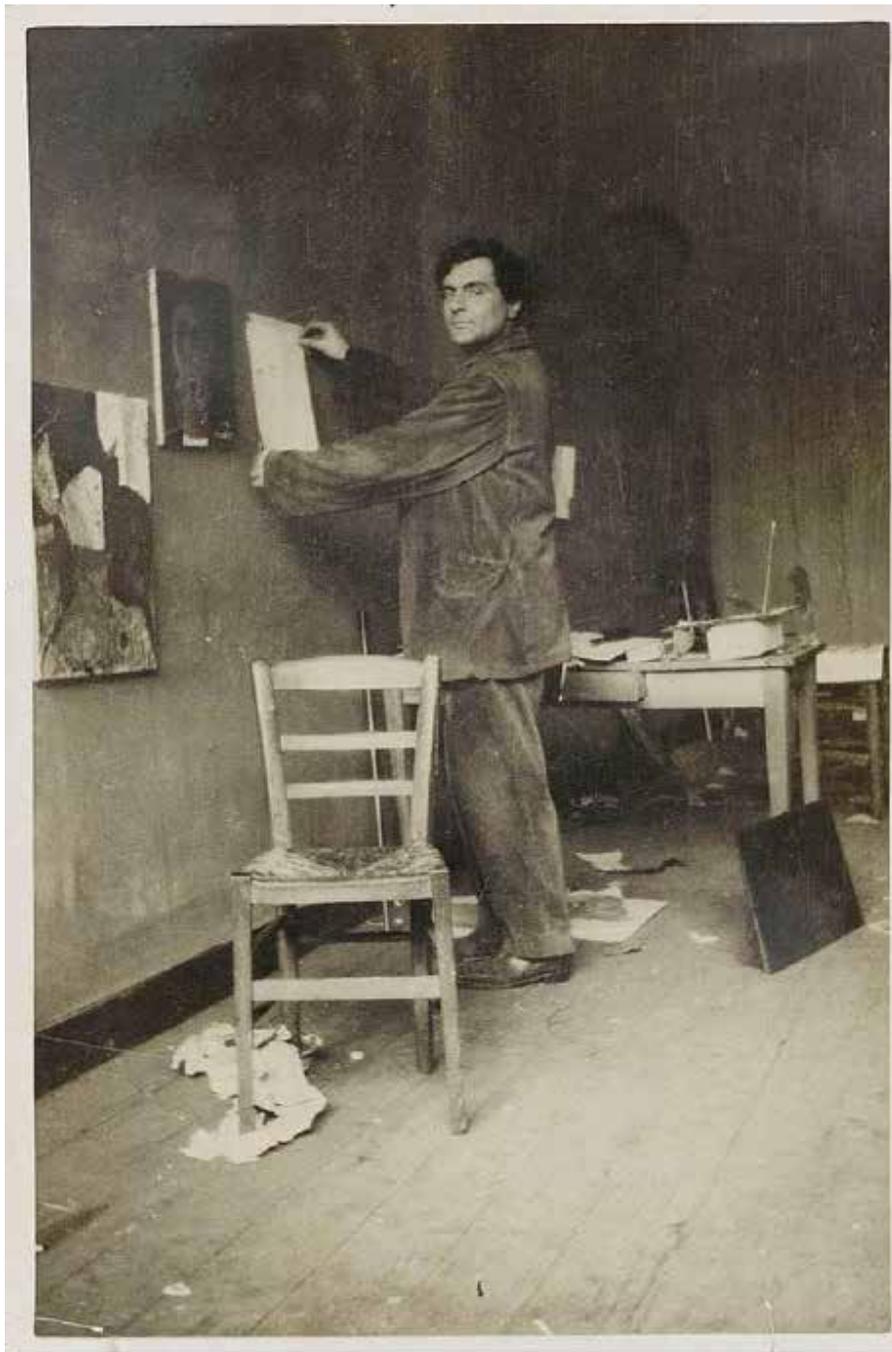


Fig. 14

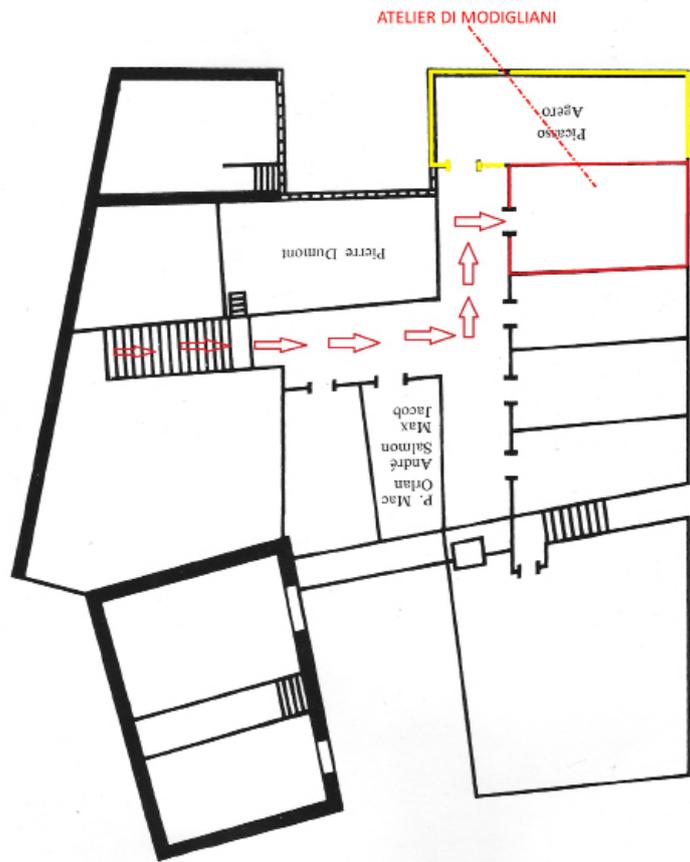


Fig. 15

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Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

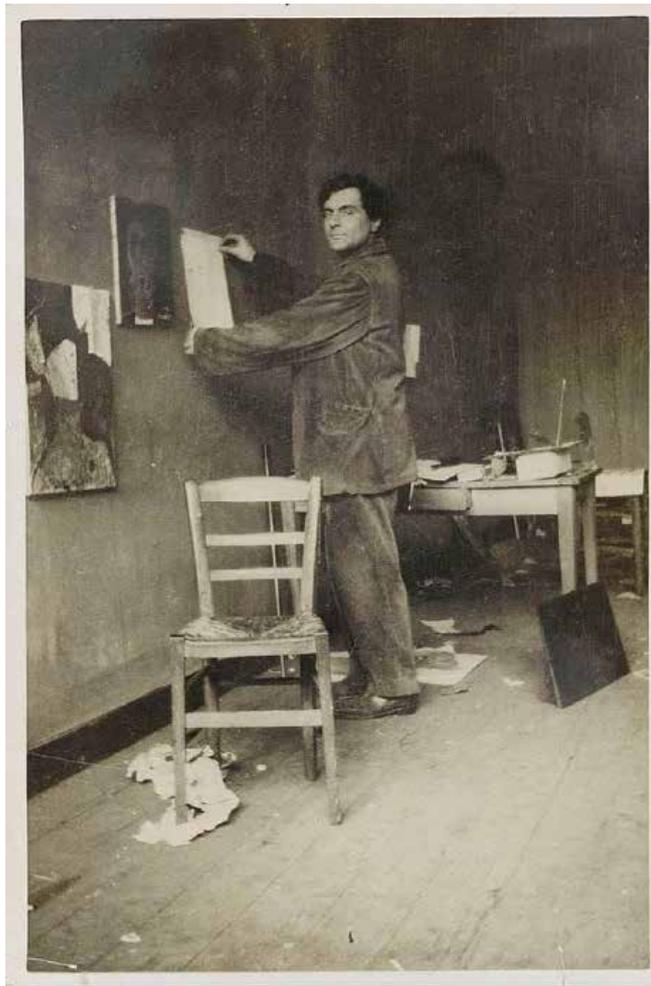


Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

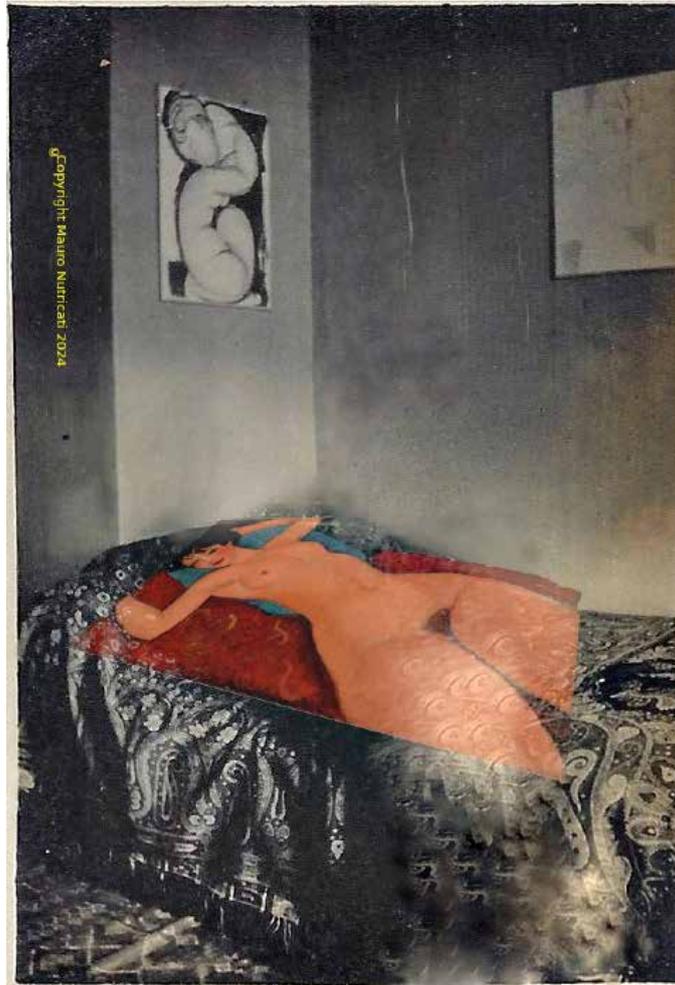


Fig. 25



Fig. 26

## CONCLUSIONS

AN AUTHOR'S HOPE IS ALWAYS TO OFFER THE READER THE MOST COMPLETE WORK, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE WORK IS THE FRUIT OF SINCERE PARTICIPATION IN THE HUMAN AND ARTISTIC JOURNEY OF THE SUBJECT OF THE INVESTIGATION.

HOWEVER, I DO NOT CLAIM THAT THIS ESSAY IS FREE FROM DEFECTS AND ERRORS, BUT THE GOAL I SET MYSELF AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS LONG JOURNEY WAS TO SHED A NEW LIGHT ON MODIGLIANI'S WORK, WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT MANY ASPECTS ARE INEVITABLY DESTINED TO REMAIN IN THE SHADOWS, IF NOT COMPLETELY OBSCURE.

I DO NOT ABANDON, HOWEVER, THE HOPE OF SEEING A PROGRESSIVE, AND I BELIEVE NOW URGENT, CRITICAL REVISION OF THE INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY APPLIED TO THE ARTIST'S WORK, AIMED AT MOVING BEYOND THE USUAL DESCRIPTIVE THESES AND INAUGURATING A NEW PATH THAT RESTORES TO MODIGLIANI THE CREDIT FOR HAVING CARRIED OUT RESEARCH OF ABSOLUTE IMPORTANCE IN THE FIELDS OF COMPOSITION, FIGURATIVE SPACE, AND COLOR.

A NEW WAVE HAS HIT THE TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH APPLIED TO THE ARTIST'S WORKS, AS WE HAVE SEEN WITH THE EXHIBITIONS HELD IN RECENT YEARS IN FRANCE AND AMERICA, BUT THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE ACHIEVED.

THE PORT I WANTED TO LAND IN, AFTER SAILING THIS SEA, WAS THAT OF GRATITUDE. MY HOPE IS THAT I HAVE GIVEN THANKS FOR HAVING MANAGED TO GIVE BACK TO MODIGLIANI

MAURO NUTRICATI

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