



Amedeo Modigliani
Cariatide Rouge sur Fond Noir
c.1913-1914

Gouache and charcoal on paper 62.5 x 42.5 cm

Red and black gouache with admixtures of white and blue
waterbased thickened paint and stick charcoal on thin white
wove paper laid down to medium weight wove paper

Provenance

- From the artist c.1913-14 direct to his friend Mariska Diederich (1884?-1953?), Paris, between the teens and mid-1940's
- Sydney G. Biddle (1889-1954), West Chester, PA, by descent to his wife Cornelia Trowbridge
- Biddle (1906-1978), West Chester, PA;
- Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, 2 May 1974, Lot 123 (cover color illustration and full page color illustration within the catalogue)
- Ian-Erik von Löwenadler (1936-2010), Stockholm, Paris, Los Angeles
- Private collection, Auckland
- Private collection, Auckland and London
- 2022 to David Tunick, Inc., New York

Exhibition History

- *Modigliani: The Sydney G. Biddle Collec5on*, Perls Galleries, New York, 8 Oct – 10 Nov, 1956, p. 10, no. 6, illus.
- *The Nudes of Modigliani*, Perls Galleries, New York, essay by William S. Lieberman, 11 Oct – 12 Nov.1966, no. 14, full pg. illus.
- Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1969 (Summer loan)

Published References

- A. Werner, *Modigliani the Sculptor*, 1962, New York, p. XXXII, no. 76, full pg. illus.
- A. Ceroni, *Amedeo Modigliani Dessins et Sculptures*, avec Suite de Catalogue
- *Illustré des Peintures*, vol. II, Milan, 1965, p. 34, no. 116 (not illus. – [incorrect illus.])
- J. Lanthemann, *Modigliani - Catalogue Raisonné*, 1970, Barcelona, no. 562, illus. p.301
- O. Patani, *Amedeo Modigliani, Catalogo Generale, Scultore e Disegni*, Milano, 1992, p.198, no. 225
- C. Parisot, *Modigliani: Catalogue Raisonné*, Archives Légales Amedeo
- *Modigliani*, Rome, 2006, vol. III, p. 272, no. 72/13, illus. p. 97, plate 72/13.

History

Modigliani had intended to be a sculptor. He met Brancusi in 1909, took a studio next to him on the rue du Montparnasse, and an exchange of ideas ensued between the two. Like Brancusi, Modigliani carved heads in stone, but among the roughly two dozen sculptures he produced between 1910 and 1914, there was only one full caryatid and a few caryatid heads. He made, however, numerous drawings, watercolors, and gouaches of caryatids during the same period, experimenting with the forms of the figure in brilliantly creative twists and turns, all loosely columnar and as if supporting an entablature or other unseen weight. His inspiration may have been ancient Cycladic, Oceanic, or primitive African sculpture – all on view, collected, and in the artistic eye and air of Paris at the time. In 1916 Modigliani and other Parisian artists showed their work alongside African sculpture in an exhibition organized by the dealer Paul Guillaume.

Modigliani had studied drawing at the Accademia in Florence and considered his drawings, which he often exhibited, as an end in themselves. He said, “The art of drawing should not be allowed to die. It would mean the death of art itself.” After executing his caryatid drawings, watercolors, and gouaches, Modigliani turned to the painting of nudes, by which he is better known to the public. They were done during five brief years, 1915-19, before the artist’s early death at age 35 in 1920.

The first owner of this gouache was Mariska Diederich the Scandinavian-Russian wife of Hunt Diederich, a Prussian-American sculptor in Paris. The couple was close to Modigliani. Mariska particularly favored works on paper by Modigliani and purchased many. The next owner of the present work, Sydney Biddle, was also in Paris in the teens and later. He acquired all or most of his c. thirty-five drawings and gouaches from Diederich when she had run out of financial means (according to an essay by Biddle’s brother, the Hon. George Biddle, in the Perls 1956 exhibition cat. cited above, p. 3).

Ceroni viewed this work in the 1956 Perls exhibition cited above. Of that visit, he wrote in his catalogue raisonné of Modigliani’s paintings, sculpture, and (only some) drawings:

“In 1956 I was astonished by the exhibition in New York [Perls Gallery] of the collection Sydney G. Biddle.... In 1958 on a radiant afternoon in the spring Dr. Paul Alexandre showed me the drawings that Modigliani had chosen for him in 1913. While the drawings in the American collection struck me by the diversity of their style, the drawings chosen by the artist himself for his friend and Parisian collector astonished me and with the others [the Biddle drawings] form the basis for understanding [and] classifying in time the drawings by Modigliani from 1907 to 1914.” (Ceroni, *Modigliani: Dessins et Sculptures*, Milan, 1965, pg. 7.)

On September 1, 1962, Ceroni wrote to Klaus Perls and requested a photograph of our work for inclusion in the catalogue raisonné that he (Ceroni) was compiling. He said that he hoped to produce an “interesting volume containing about 200 reproductions of Modigliani works, many of the same never reproduced before...If the photos are good for reproduction, I would publish the following (from your catalogue 1956 Sydney G. Biddle collection) NN. 1 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 18 – 19 – 20 – 23 – 24 – 25 – 26 – 27 – 28 – 29 – 30 – 34 – 35....” [Perls Galleries Archive, Smithsonian Institution, copy of letter in our files and available online]. He follows with another letter asking for more reproductions from the Biddle collection, including no. 7. In the published volume cited above, the text under Ceroni no. 116 identifies the entry as for no. 6, but illustrates no. 7. Either Perls did not correctly identify the photos of the caryatids that he sent, or Ceroni was in error citing Biddle no. 6, but reproducing no. 7. In either case, it is clear that he intended to include all the Biddle drawings, including both of the great Biddle caryatid gouaches, ours in red and the other in blue.

The present work is singular in Modigliani’s oeuvre for its deep red coloration set against a black background. It has not been on the market in nearly half a century.

Condition

Caryatid, a monumental composition by Amedeo Modigliani in excellent condition. It is executed in opaque red gouache with admixtures of white and blue water-based paint and stick charcoal with touches of graphite, on thin off-white wove paper laid down to slightly thicker off-white paper. Technically and aesthetically, it is extraordinary as a “finished” drawing in its fluid handling of paint, extending almost to the edges of the support as if an easel painting, and in its carefully rendered contours. It is as well a preparatory study for the caryatid motif, which the artist repeated numerous times in different scale and media, in series, singularly, and in combination with other figures in related poses.

Modigliani's interesting and complex drawing process is revealed in the layering of the media starting with the inner and outer black contours of the figure, in the broad strokes of the black background paint, the red gouache layer, and in the marks in charcoal and graphite applied above the gouache. Approximately six horizontal charcoal lines intersect the figure in regular intervals on the red gouache (a color that is chromatically close to cadmium red but requires analytical testing for precise identification of the pigment).

They were applied late in the development of the composition and appear to have served as measurements for transferring the figure to other types of supports in larger or smaller formats, such as murals of the motif or small sketches on paper. Their relatively pronounced presence in this drawing speak to the important role Caryatide Rouge sur Fond Noir had in the subsequent works of this subject.

Another indication of Modigliani's working process is the curvilinear lines impressed into the thick gouache layer at sites along the figure's contour. These were applied after the figure was painted. The multiple repetitions reveals the artist was seeking to regain the curves of the body that were inadvertently over painted in black. The variations in the flow of the line and their thickness suggests that the more precise ones were drawn with a flat ended metal stylus, whereas the irregular lines were applied freehand with an implement prone to slight bending, such as wood. Collectively they serve to define and separate the figure from the background which they overlap. It was perhaps also for the purpose of balancing the many curves of the body that he reworked some sections numerous times.

A horizontal fold intersects the sheet, but was not part of the drawing process. The absence of flaking along its length suggests that the fold was likely to have been in the sheet prior to the execution of the paint layer. Both the fold and the incised lines would have caused the paper to weaken, and it was perhaps to strengthen the sheet that it was backed with paper. Unlike the charcoal lines, the fold does not appear to have played a role in Modigliani's development of the subject's proportions.

The relatively uneven paint layer also provides insight into how Modigliani developed the composition. For the figure, he used a gouache mixture, red with admixtures of white and blue that are not completely combined with the primary color. It is applied in a thin layer with subtle evidence of brushwork in blue and white marks in and above the gouache mixture, revealing both the black under-drawing, the first layer of the composition, but texturally suggests that the artist was seeking to emulate a smooth sculptural surface. Despite serving as a plan for the composition, a sense of speed and lack of exactitude is evident as seen in the presence of bare paper at sites along the perimeter of the figure, in the exposed paper surrounding the raised hand at the upper right, and at the top edge of the sheet, by the uneven surface of the paint, and the variations in the artist's handling. The latter is evidenced by the irregular, areas of reflectance, or low luster, produced by burnishing or rubbing of the paint by the action of his brush.

The composition is in extremely good condition. The primary support is a sheet of thin wove paper, small areas of reserve suggests it was originally off white. The sheet was laid down to a slightly thicker sheet of wove paper following the execution of the drawing and then was cut down on all edges. The secondary support has darkened on the verso. The adhesion between the two layers is strong as is indicated by the absence of air pockets or any separation of the two layers within the design area or along the perimeter. The excellent condition of the composition is also indicated by the absence of flaking of the paint layer. Small tears are present along the right edge of the primary support but are held in place by the backing layer. They have been carefully inpainted. The tears are stable and not at risk of additional tearing.

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The composition shows no evidence of color alteration due to light exposure. A one-eighth inch mat burn is present along the top edge where the composition was previously over-matted with an acidic paperboard mat or other acidic material. This particular site is not at risk of darkening. Several of the black underdrawing lines, such as the figure's elbow at the upper right are white and slightly reticulated (broken up) and have sustained minor flaking. This results from the drying of the paint's binding medium. It is stable.

A bloom is present intermittently in both the black and red paint which results from the constituents of the paint drying at different rates and the variations in its thickness. This condition is stable and is unlikely to undergo change. The exposed paper at the upper right corresponding to perimeter of the figure's hand has yellowed as a result of the residues in the paint layer and is stable.

The composition as indicated above is in extremely good and stable condition and does not require conservation. The secondary layer of paper should be left intact. It should not be removed because it does not present a risk to the artwork. The composition should be matted in ragboard, as it is at present, and hinged to the backboard with Japanese tissue and wheat paste.

To preserve the freshness of the colors, the drawing should be protected from high levels of illumination and from ultraviolet light. The work should be kept matted in acid-free ragboard and framed and glazed with ultraviolet filtering acrylic sheeting. It should be displayed and stored in a stable environment of 68-72F temperature and 50% relative humidity.