



Head of a Woman (Anna Zborowska)

Amedeo Modigliani

On display

Title/Description: Head of a Woman (Anna Zborowska)

Artist/Maker: Amedeo Modigliani

Born: 1918 - 1919

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Canvas, Oil paint

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 537 x w. 368 mm) Framed: (h. 712 x w. 550 x d. 75 mm)

Inscription: Modigliani

Accession Number: 13

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Europe, France

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Not surprisingly, Modigliani's drawings between 1912 and 1915 reflect some influence of Cubism, then the dominant style of Paris. At this time the contours of forms described were not completely closed, so that form and space interpenetrate one another. For a while Modigliani favoured a device reminiscent of Delaunay's orphist style, and rendered backgrounds in faceted forms that themselves seem to emanate like rays from the figure. By 1917, Modigliani had re-simplified his vocabulary and established a way of drawing that was to serve him until his early death in 1920. The face of *Portrait of a Woman* retains some characteristics of the 'cubist' works - most notably the asymmetrical eyes - but the rest of the drawing consists of a few deft lines through which the artist attempted to convey as much as possible with the minimum of information. Variations of this naturalistic and relaxed pose were used repeatedly by the artist for his studies of clothed women.

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

I am drawn most particularly to two very different pieces in the Sainsbury collection.

Amedeo Modigliani's painting of Anna Zborowska is only one of the many faces on display. Not all

these faces are portraits: some are masks, and I feel the ability of masks to suggest power and mystery must have influenced him.

At first glance I saw Mme Zborowska as a real woman with a thoughtful expression. Looking closer, she is a mask. But masks can have eye holes. This woman has no eyes at all. Why?

Eyes are often the focal point of a portrait, giving it life. But the focus here is on the lips. Head and neck are stretched to improbable proportions, pulling our eye down to the intense red lips: a strong mouth that might be about to speak. There is life too in the flush of skin, the fall of hair, the twist of impossible shoulders. So to me she is still a real woman, 'modern' in attitude and style.

Modigliani achieves an intriguing ambiguity by pushing his subject to the verge of abstraction. He flattens the perspective and empties the frame of distraction, so that shape, colour and a few finely drawn lines combine to give Anna Zborowska her powerful presence.

What leads her to my second piece?

Colour and abstraction. She is human. The Javanese axe is an artefact. But the tones of her dress – subtly layered brush-strokes of deep greens, blues and blacks – also appear in the bronze blade. However, the deeper connection is shape. Both are pared down to a purity of form that is beautiful, thrilling, and alive.

—

Margaret Howell, clothes designer

Exhibitions

'Pablo Picasso: The Legacy of Youth', Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, 13/3/2022 - 17/7/2022

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Galerie Zak in 1935.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
