

# MODIGLIANI VR: THE OCHRE ATELIER TRANSCRIPT

## CHARACTERS

Lunia Czechowska, a close friend of Modigliani's

Hanka Zborowska, partner of Modigliani's dealer

Francis Carco, author, poet, journalist

Paulette Jourdain, who sat for Modigliani as a teenager

Nina Hamnett, artist, friend of Modigliani

Charles-Albert Cingria, writer

Thora Klinckowstrom, artist and sitter

Nancy Ireson, Tate Curator

Annette King, Tate Conservator

## SETTING

Paris, 1919–1920.

Modigliani's final studio, 8 rue de la Grande-Chaumière

## INTRODUCTION

*Narrator* You are about to enter a recreation of Amedeo Modigliani's final studio in Paris, constructed from a combination of first-hand accounts, historical research,

and recent analysis of works he may have made in this setting.

Please stay seated, but feel free to look around and behind you to explore the environment as much as you wish. You will have the chance to look at the studio from three different positions.

White dots will appear on screen and give you more information about the artist and his environment. To activate one, turn your head to look at it until a white ring surrounds it completely.

Are you ready?

Make sure you are sitting comfortably, and that your headset is on securely, with your headphones clicked into place.

Ready? Now turn to your left and look at the table, focusing on the white dot until it activates.

## **SCENE ONE**

*Narrator* Modigliani moved into what would become his final studio with his partner Jeanne Hébuterne in June 1919. His art dealer's partner, Hanka Zborowska, remembered:

*Hanka* At 8, rue de la Grand Chaumiere, there were two adjoining studios. With a little tidiness and goodwill, one could live and work there nicely. You could live in the back studio and use the one at the entrance for the business of painting.

*Narrator* With a new-born daughter and a second child on the way, optimism must have surrounded Modigliani's move into this space. He had a home of his own and, in Paris and beyond, people were starting to appreciate his work. Lunia Czechovska, a close friend recalls:

*Lunia* This was a very modest kingdom, but it was his [...] His happiness was enough to move us all. Modigliani dreamed of a studio [...] We waited until everything was fitted out to tell him, cleaned the studio and painted it [...] As we didn't have enough money for curtains, we whitewashed the windows in Spanish white.

*Hanka* Hébuterne, pregnant once more, didn't have the energy – or perhaps she lacked the desire – to [...] organise the studio.

*F.Carco* He has deepened the resources that a painter can draw upon and has tested them. From there [comes] this evident revolution in his painting. I would even say the elevation of his painting. The almost uniform tones of his

early work are disappearing. He has made them more worthy of the fine artist we know him to be.

*Nina* parts of the walls had been painted different colours to make different backgrounds

*Paulette* (about Modigliani's drawings) Modigliani had a butcher's hook in the studio (a real butcher's hook that he had probably stolen from someone) where he would stick the drawings that he was rejecting.

*Hanka* [When] autumn came, how many times did they arrive on the doorstep to us to tell us they didn't have the slightest scrap of coal left. Yet it was very easy to sort out that state of affairs. It simply needed them to cross the road to go to the coalman.

## SCENE TWO

*Narrator* By the autumn Modigliani was drinking again and his health had deteriorated.

*Hanka* The studio, very sparsely furnished, was above all a place to spend the night [...] Under these conditions, there was absolutely no question of their child living with them'

*Narrator* But the artist continued to work.

*Hanka* One month before his death, ruined by alcohol and diminished by illness, Modigliani was [still] in full possession of his genius.

*Narrator* Modigliani would die of Tubercular meningitis at the Hôpital de la Charité in January 1920.

*Hanka* His palette and his brushes rested in the place that he had left them for the last time. The colours in their tubes, now useless, would never again serve to create beauty’.

*Lunia* I am convinced that alcohol wasn’t essential to his genius; but it was a refuge and a stimulant, no doubt, which allowed him to forget his troubles. A sort of anaesthetic but not a vice.

*Charles* what finally killed him was a lack of coal, damp, dripping walls, poor and insufficient food.

*Zarate* I was worried about him. “Are you eating at least?” I asked him... I noticed that the two mattresses, the floor as well, were covered with greasy oily markings... with more empty tins and lids all about.

*Hanka* The two lacked any sense of practicality [...] Ash was piled up beside the stove and empty tins of food were strewn everywhere. No more would he hoarsely give

commentary on a poem by Rimbaud or tell [...] of the [...] beauties of Italy.

*Thora* Modigliani drank rum against the cough', he explained (and he really did cough quite a lot)'. He painted fast and drank a little from a bottle of rum, 'against the cough,' he said, and he really did cough a lot.

### SCENE THREE

*Narrator* Modigliani's late self-portrait, which he may well have painted in the studio, is a perfect example of the artist's mature work. Conservation and Curatorial staff from Tate talk about his methods and materials. The self-portrait captures Modigliani's appearance at the end of his life; it shows him as a confident, self-assured artist. Palette in hand, turned towards the viewer, it suggests he had found a way of working that was distinctly his own.

*Nancy* Mario Varoglis was the last person to pose for Modigliani in the studio. Just a few bold lines on sketchbook paper created this lively portrait. In his late self-portrait, Modigliani used warm colours and diluted paint. He probably captured his image quickly; sitters recall that he worked intensely, barely stopping until a work was completed.

*Anette* It seems that the colours that appear on Modigliani's palette in his self-portrait are actually those that he used to make the painting. Modigliani used hogs hair brushes to create the broad, textured strokes in the coloured parts of the painting. He finished the composition with thin black outlines, which he made using fine soft brushes. Analysis of the paint in Modigliani's work indicates that he used tube paints rather than grinding or making his own. He may have obtained his materials from a nearby supplier called Lefebvre-Foinet. There is a great contrast in the way the artist depicted the head and the hands in this painting. He drew the head carefully before applying paint, whereas the hands are a lot more sketchy.

*Narrator* The experience is over now. Please remove your headset and exit quietly, respecting others who may still be in the virtual studio.