

# Reclaiming Modigliani

**While Rome has won back from Paris Amedeo Modigliani's archives and hopes to create a museum for them, allegations of forgeries cloud his legacy**

**A**medeo Modigliani's personal archives have moved to Rome after more than 80 years in Paris, but the preservation of his legacy has recently been overshadowed by questions regarding alleged forgeries. Previously scattered throughout various locations in Paris, the archives contain

nearly 6,000 documents and memorabilia—including letters, photographs, film footage, and commercial records. Italian officials have been in talks to celebrate the move with a new museum dedicated to the artist.

Presiding over the transfer are Modigliani's granddaughter, Laure Nechtschein Modigliani, who lives in Paris and controls the rights to the materials, and Christian Parisot, a Modigliani scholar who directs the archives and inherited the

artist's *droit morale*—the legal authority to authenticate his works—from Modigliani's daughter, Jeanne, and has written four volumes of a continuing catalogue raisonné on the artist.

Modigliani, who lived in Paris for 14 years until his death in 1920 at age 35, was born in Livorno, Italy. He studied art in Florence and at the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, where he was active in the Italian avant-garde. Parisot says that the archives have been reunited with documents gathered in

Livorno and Sardinia relating to Modigliani's early life, and Rome mayor Walter Veltroni has praised the move as an opportunity for Italy to welcome home its prodigal son.

After the archives' transfer was announced, however, Paris police descended in late June on the tiny Musée du Montparnasse, which Parisot had claimed as the official location of the archives. The authorities demanded to search the archives as part of a case involving several Modigliani works that Parisot had authenticated for a collector, which are now being investigated as possible forgeries. But the museum's director, Jean Digne, surprised them by saying they had raided the wrong place. "The archives are not here, and they never were, because we don't have the proper facilities for storing documents," Digne explains. "Except when we showed originals for an exhibition, all we ever had were photocopies of the Modigliani documents." Parisot says he only used the museum as a mailing address and adds that the archives are now stored in a bank in Italy, which means that French police will have to work through European Union authorities if they wish to access them.

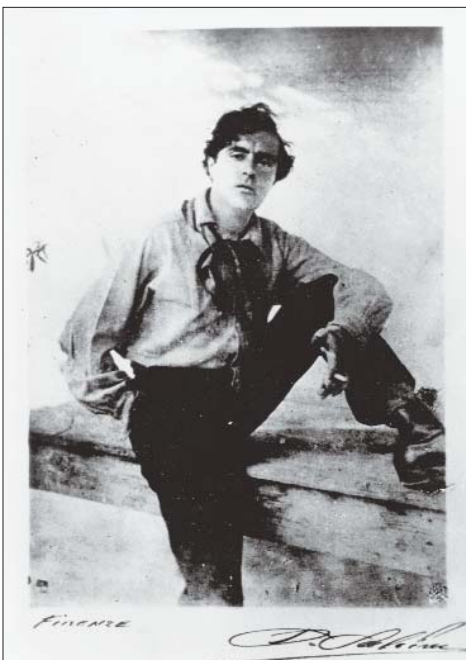
Parisot has not been targeted in the investigation of the alleged forgeries. "I don't think he risks much in this case," Pierre Gamichon, Parisot's lawyer, says. "Other experts also authenticated them, and until they're proven fake, he's not even legally implicated." If Parisot were to be charged, explains Gamichon, the prosecution would have to prove that he knowingly authenticated a fake, rather than made a professional error.

Parisot has also been accused by family members of Jeanne Hébuterne, Modigliani's lover, of having faked 77 drawings by her and displayed some of them in a series of exhibitions in Spain in 2002. Police seized the drawings in Segovia after a complaint by Hébuterne's grandnephew Luc Prunet, and the case remains under investigation. Prunet says he expects it to proceed to trial early next year.

A third case involving Parisot was recently resolved in his favor. In early July he won a libel suit in which he had accused another Modigliani scholar, Marc Restellini, of defaming him by telling newspaper reporters that 80 percent of the works in an exhibition Parisot curated in Venice last year were forgeries. A judge concluded that Restellini could not support this statement with evidence and ordered him to take out an advertisement publicizing the decision, reimburse Parisot for his court fees, and pay him a single euro in damages. Restellini told *ARTnews* he is appealing the decision.

Newly appointed Italian culture minister Francisco Rutelli, who had been enthusiastic about the archive's return, declined to comment when informed of the raid on the Montparnasse museum. Parisot, however, claims that his legal troubles have not affected the potential museum. "This search had no effect at all on the project in Rome," says Parisot. "The city wants to get a patrimony for research on Modigliani."

Art historian Massimo Riposati, a member of an Italian committee campaigning for the museum, says that Parisot and the committee are still seeking an appropriate venue for the proposed Modigliani center—"preferably in a Roman palazzo," he says, adding that the museum would be limited to materials illustrating the artist's life and period. "It is unthinkable today to assemble a collection of paintings for a dedicated museum," he says, citing the high prices of Modigliani's works. "On the other hand, the archives are a trove of riches that illustrate Modigliani's life." —*Judith Harris and Marc Spiegler*



**A 1909 photograph of Modigliani in Florence at age 24 from the archives, which also include documents and other memorabilia.**