



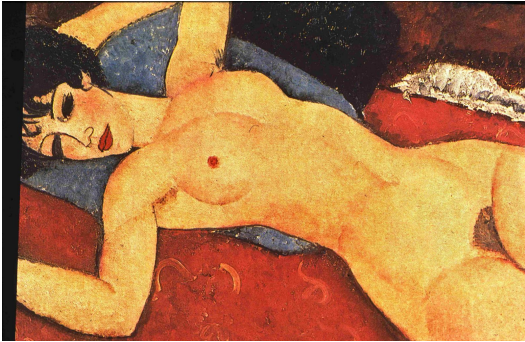
# The Comparative Study

IB Visual Arts  
Grade 12



## 'Nu couché' and 'Reclining Nude' by Amedeo Modigliani , and 'Venus of Urbino' by Titian

### Introduction



**'Nu couché by Amedeo Modigliani'**



**'Reclining Nude' by Amedeo Modigliani**



**'Venus of Urbino' by Titian**

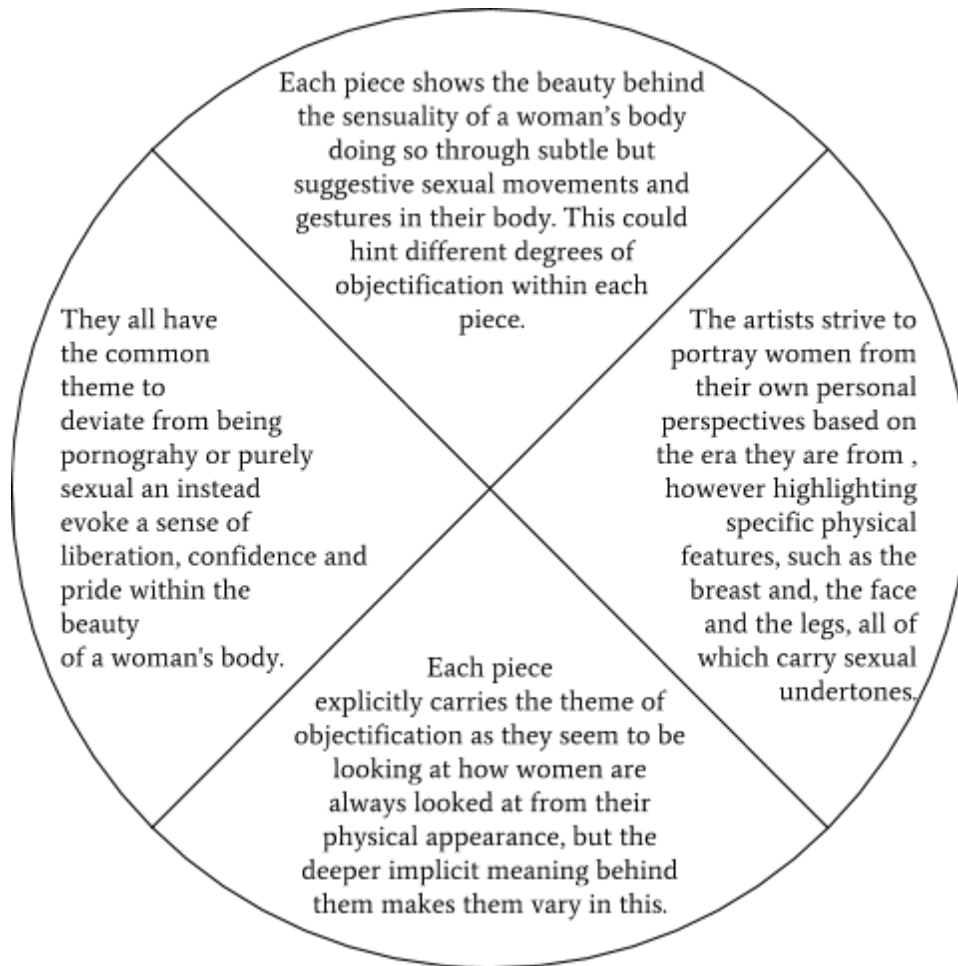
I chose these 2 artists, specifically these 3 paintings, because for the past 4 months I have been working on my Extended Essay, my subject area being Visual Arts, and I mainly focused on the perception of beauty relating to the female body after the Renaissance in Italy. Henceforth, coincidentally I happened to show great interest in art of the human body and I wanted to see how that was represented in women across different time periods and artists. The first painting I thought of for the comparative study was piece I looked at in my essay, 'Nu couché' by Amedeo Modigliani. I found the portrayal of the female beauty to be so beautiful, moreover, the extended metaphors and deeper connotations of how beauty in women should be represented. I just felt as if my ability to think beyond one idea and concept was broadened.

Henceforth, from there, I looked at more of Amedeo's work and other artists and I found so many that were so similar in appearance but implied deeper and different contextual meaning given that they created in different time periods. I found it amazing that an artist from a different time period and era could have another artist illustrate work so similar to theirs but have different meaning. They all a different power and sensuality behind a woman in her most physically vulnerable state.

## Common Themes

In each piece there seems to be a paradoxical battle between the explicit and implicit meaning behind the beauty of a female's body. How a woman's body is interpreted varies according to the era, as Titian's piece was created in 1538 it is key to the social mindset of Italians during the Renaissance. Whilst on the other hand Modigliani's work is affected by the general philosophy and context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Below shows how the themes of the different artists pieces are connected and form a whole.



## Cultural Context - 'Venus of Urbino' by Titian

**Artist:** Titian (c.1488–1576)

**Medium:** Oil painting on canvas

**Genre:** Portrait art - one of the most famous female nudes in art history

**Movement:** School of Venetian Painting

**Location:** Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Since 1518 Titian was a leading Venetian artist of the Italian Renaissance. The Renaissance was a time of "rebirth" in the arts and culture in most of Europe during the 1500's. It was a paradigm shift from the fixed conception of art in the Dark Ages.

During this era, Venice was one of the most prosperous cities of all of Europe in terms of power and wealth. Venetians were resigned to hierarchy in light of their government and society, allowing it for it to be very stable. Hence this contextual depth gives an element of wealth and contempt in the art of the time.

It was a time of wealth and flourishing which was reflective in art of Venice, in terms of the general content, esteemed tone, which is seen in the explicit appearance.

However, implicitly, it is known that the 'Venus of Urbino' was painted for the Duke of Camerino to commemorate his marriage and celebrate marital love and physical intimacy between husband and wife ("Venus of Urbino (1538)", Encyclopedia of art education)

TOK: To what extent does culture influence artist's intent and purpose in their work?

Other works: Danaë by Titian (LEFT) and the artist (RIGHT)





## Cultural Context - 'Nu couché by Amedeo Modigliani

Artist: Amedeo Modigliani

Year: 1917

Type: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 60 cm × 92 cm (24 in × 36 in)

Location: Italy

Movement: Neoclassicism



Being one of his most well-known nudes, 'Nu couché' was created under the patronage of his Polish dealer Léopold Zborowski. (Wikipedia. "Nu Couché"). Ensuing the Liberal this time period was a very difficult time for Italy. The country had debt, few natural resources, little to no transportation or industries, and moreover, high poverty, illiteracy, and few Italians and voting rights.

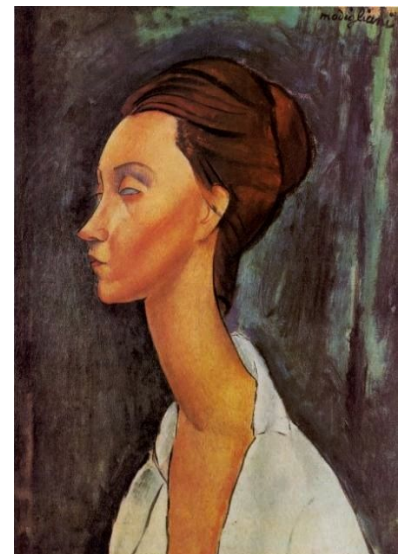
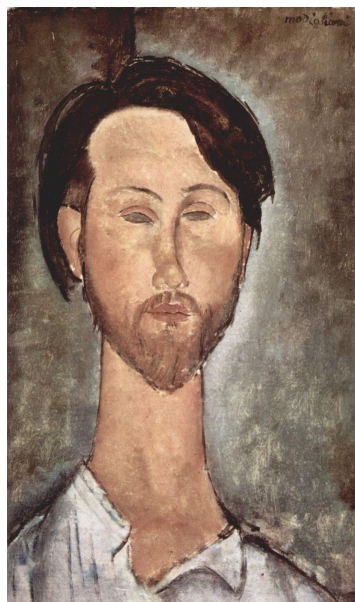
It was a return to the purity of the arts Rome, the more vague perception ("ideal") of Ancient Greek arts, and, to a lesser extent, 16th-century Renaissance Classicism. Reflective of all the radical shifts in the different sectors of the Country.

Milan was the major centre of Romantic art which could have been where Amedeo painted 'nu couché', as romanticism is seen in the sensuality of the piece. (Wikipedia. "Italian Neoclassical and 19th-century Art.")

This was all due to the series of liberal politicians who could not unite to form a majority. The social, political, cultural and economic changes affected the style of the art of the time.

TOK: How can one reliably deduce that all artwork from a specific time period is influenced by cultural context?

Other works by Amedeo Modigliani:  
Patronage of Léopold Zborowski (Left) and Tête (Right)



## Cultural Context - 'Reclining nude 'by Amedeo Modigliani

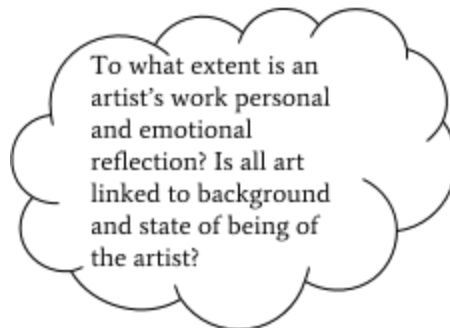
**Artist:** Amedeo Modigliani (Italian, Livorno 1884–1920 Paris)  
**Date:** 1917  
**Medium:** Oil on canvas  
**Dimensions:** 23 7/8 x 36 1/2 in. (60.6 x 92.7 cm)  
**Classification:** Paintings  
**Movement:** Neoclassicism  
**Credit Line:** The Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls Collection, 1997



During the Neoclassical period, Amedeo contemporized the everlasting themes of art history: the nude and the portrait. Having been influenced and inspired by Constantin Brancusi and African Art, Amedeo's art not only reflected the social and political changes in the country as mentioned before, but was also characterized by melancholy, elongated faces and mask-like faces.

A general sense of sensuality is seen in the work of Amedeo. Henceforth the influences of the Italian culture and the background of his life all merry together to the formation of his work .

Other works by Amedeo :-  
 Similar to reclining nude(Left)  
 and Jeanne Hebuterne,  
 1919(Right)



Modigliani held the tradition of the nude and his work was devoid modesty, which reflect his bohemian life. Amedeo had fragile health since he was a child, struggled economically and had a careless lifestyle of sexual debauchery and drug abuse. This could, to a certain extent, be linked to the radical shift in the dynamics of the country which affected many social classes. (Ng, Tracee, 'The Art Story' 2016)

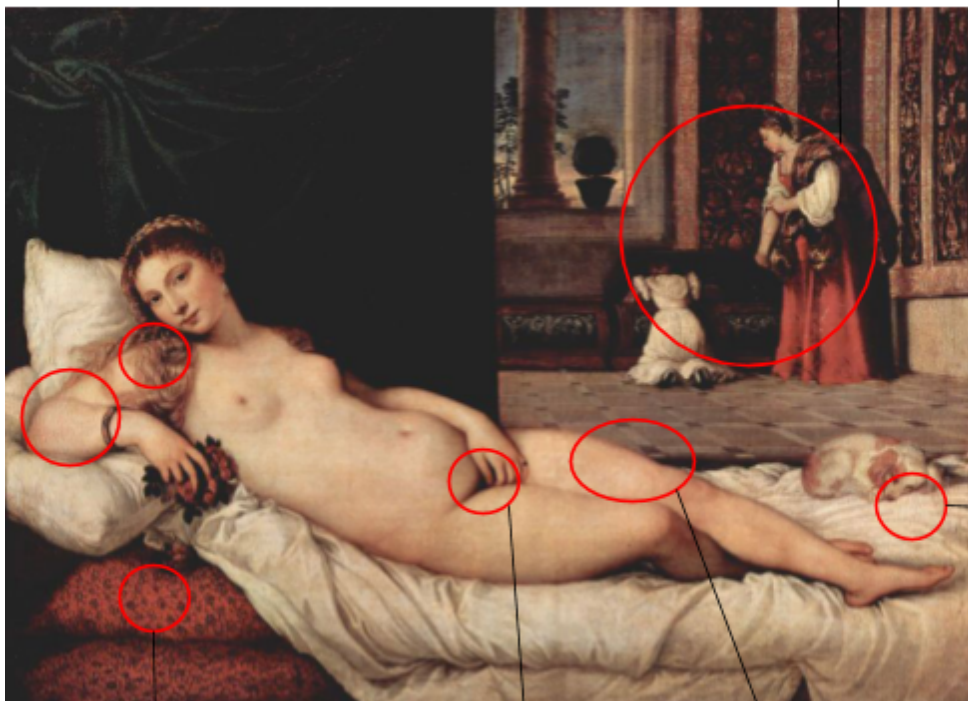




## Formal Visual Analysis 'Venus of Urbino':by Titian (1488 -1576)

This painting is oil on canvas and contains different formal elements that marry together to form the whole. Within the composition of the piece the woman is lying down on a bed with a relaxed demeanour. Her hand is bent and resting a pillow which allows her to appear elevated and her face is slightly tilted as she looks at the viewer. The visual undertones of her eyes give of the impression that she knows that she is being painted or that she is aware of herself. This creates a confident and esteemed tone in her body and in her wealth, evident in the detail of the cushions and the subtle hints of prestige in the architecture. These are all reflective of the time period. He, moreover, contrasts her voluptuous curves with the vertical and horizontal lines of the architecture (Encyclopedia of Art Education, 2016).

Moreover in the composition behind the woman is a dog and further behind are two women, who can be deduced to be maids which further emphasize the idea of wealth. Although there are other people in the composition she remains the main focus.



The hues used within the piece all create a sense of balance with the main colour being reddish brown. This technique of creating uniformity through the entire work in terms of balance of colour is key to the majority of artwork during the Renaissance Period.

The balance of colour is seen in the tones, darks and lights of her skin, her hair, the bed sheets, the dog and even the background. This harmony allows the piece to be more visually stimulating.

There is minimal use of texture within the piece, but the artist's use of line, shape and form work harmoniously to fall within the lines of the Golden ratio, creating a very realistic image. The Renaissance included art that was in the most part realistic and celebratory of the beauty behind the human body, particularly females. This is evident as the piece is devoid of modesty due to her revealed pubic region and breasts. In addition, the art was more focused on the narrative alongside the conceptions of classicism and detail-oriented work.

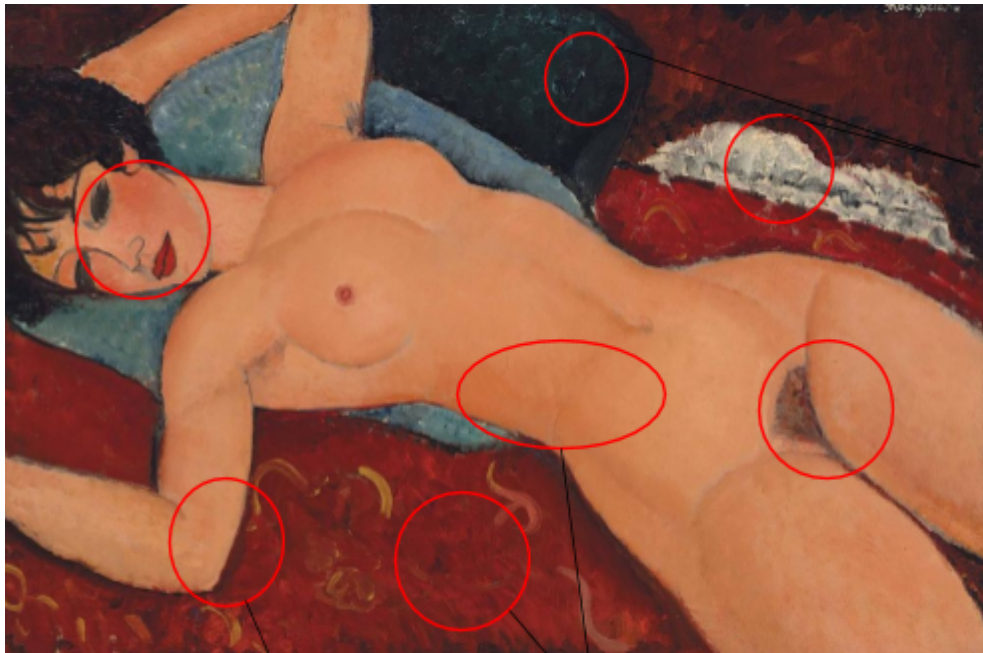
Moreover, colours that were key to the Renaissance include yellows, reds and reddish browns, which gives contextual depth to the painting.

The woman is placed in an esteemed upper class home and the sense of contempt and pride in wealth is represented by her elevated torso, the expensive chair she is on, the rich colours of red and deep yellow and the presence of maids in the background. Thus, the artist uses composition alongside deep and rich hues and tones to link the sense of place and time with the way the woman is presented.

## Formal Visual Analysis

### 'Nu couché': by Amedeo Modigliani (1917)

This is an oil on canvas in which the woman is laying on her back, seemingly oblivious to that fact she is the focus of attention. This shy and underlying supercilious and prideful tone is subtly seen in the calm nature of her face which bears a hint of a smile. This nature is further emphasized by her reclined hands which expose her chest and the curve of her hips such that her pubic region is face on. The body is not proportional but in this there is the implication that there should be pride and confidence in whatever form and shape the woman's body is in. The artist's use of line, shape and form highlights the woman's sensual features but also the features key to her unique figure, such as her shortened elbows, and wide hips.



Amedeo applies varied techniques in his application of oil, whereby the woman has clean smoothed tones which enhance the realistic undertones, whilst the background, pillows and blanket, are textured to add visual stimulation. There are swirled and add to the diversity of the formal elements of the piece

The tone and hues of the piece create a sense of balance in terms of having a shade of red. This is even seen in the rendering of tone in creating form in the body of the woman. The artist is expressionistic in use of colour and form and his technique is more simplistic in comparison to Titians.

The artist aims to create minimalism in the piece by drawing away from the Golden Ratio and as well as the conventions and standards of art in illustrating 2-dimensional images. This is reflective of the Modernism era, where there is deviation from the set standard of what art is perceived to be.

The artist contrasts the dark hues of the background/the bed that the woman is lying on, with the light hues of the woman to draw more attention to her as she is the main focus. There appears to be more focus on the erotic parts of his reclining nudes that on the narrative.

The tradition of portraiture and the nude has been carried throughout art history for a long time and is apparent in this art of 1917, Italy. Where, the beauty of the woman, as in the past is the main attraction to Italian artists.



## Formal Visual Analysis

### 'Reclining Nude': by Amedeo Modigliani (1917)

Reclining Nude is an oil on canvas in which the subject is lying down on a bed with their arms reclined behind their head, their crotch turned away and their chest facing upwards. The subject's is facing forwards which gives off the impression that they are aware that they are the focus of attention which creates a tone of confidence and self-pride. Her crotch is turned away which evokes a slight sense of modesty within the piece which juxtaposes the explicit representation of her nakedness, but also carries sensual undertones. Her disappearing limbs add mystery to the piece as if she didn't want to be there or that she was bound and questions the purpose of the woman within the context of the implicit narrative. .

Moreover, the artist draws away from the Golden Ratio in terms of the proportion of the figure particularly in the elongation of the woman's face which is a key feature of Amedeo's artwork.

The artist utilises shape and form simplistically in such a way that the background behind is 2-dimensional which draws more attention to the woman. However, there is an attempt at depth and form in the woman in terms of the artist's use of tone and hue to create value



The artist creates a sense of balance in terms of using the common colour of reddish brown which allows the piece to be more visually appealing but also allows the woman to stand out more due to the light hue of her body contrasting with the dark background.

The artist's attempts to create a sense of texture by creating swirls in the bed that she is lying on. This creates greater interest in the piece due to varied use of technique.

The artist creates an under-toned sense sensuality through the curvature fo the woman's buttocks, hence use of line. If the piece was divided into 9 sections this would be a main focal point that the eye is naturally inclined to be drawn to. Hence the main focus is the appraisal of the beauty of the female body and the tradition of the nude in the world of art.

## Function and purpose

### 'Venus of Urbino':by Titian (1488-1576)

The explicit intention of 'Venus of Urbino' was to be a celebratory gift for the marriage of Guidobaldo, an Italian condottiero and duke. A commemoration. Hence despite the erotic nature of the piece in her being naked and the pretentious and contemptuous air that she evokes the painting's purpose is meant to be a symbol of love. Even in looking at the roses that she is holding one can see this. Roses carry connotations of love and purity and an everlasting feeling of endearment towards another human being, which further emphasizes and evokes a mood of delight and pleasure in the audience. (Encyclopedia of Art Education, 2016).

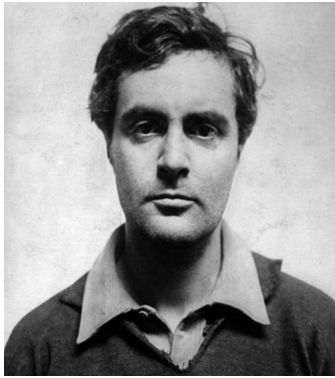
Other symbols in the piece which portray the function and purpose are seen in the dog. The dog can be seen as a symbol of fidelity and faithfulness. This is significant because it gives greater meaning and depth to the purpose of the piece in being a tribute to the marriage of two people.

During the Renaissance a bride would keep her clothes, household linen and other belonging known as the trousseaux, in a large chest known as a cassone. A cassone was the most important trophy furnishing of rich merchants and aristocrats in Italian culture since the Middle Ages and was given to a bride and placed in the bridal suite. In the background of the piece, maids are seen going through the traditional cassone and this emphasizes the contextual depth of the piece aside from the formal elements. This is striking because it re-emphasizes the function of the piece to be an ode to marital love by actually representing traditional customs of marriage in Renaissance Italy .

It also portrays the culture of wealth and social prestige in the economic culture that came in the flourishing nature of the Renaissance. Moreover it must be noted that it was very common for artwork of such an erotic nature to be commissioned to celebrate a wedding it was the culture of Italy at the time. However they were intended for private view only which gives further view of the the function and purpose of the piece(Encyclopedia of Art Education, 2016).



## Function and purpose of 'Nu couché': Amedeo Modigliani (1917)



Amedeo arrived in Paris in 1906 and created this piece during the time of World War 1. He had become associated with Bohemian circles where he had great interest in both literary works and the visual arts. As a result he would live on the edge which was also a result of his critical health - him wanting to use all the time he had left. He was considered the leading romantic artist. Amedeo was commissioned to paint a series of reclining nudes for patron Léopold Zborowski. His main purpose in 'Nu couché' was to portray what he believed to be the most beautiful thing he could imagine.

This painting was created to debunk previous conceptions and ideas of the female nude in visual arts and to deviate from classicism. This is evident in the dynamism and raw energy of the piece and she is mostly open and literally tumbling out of the picture frame. This purpose works harmoniously with the intention to depict blazing eroticism. (Christie's Editor. "Video: Amedeo Modigliani's Nu Couché." ). This eroticism allows the piece to be seductive in terms of the subtle realism but allows marries with the idealized vision of beauty that Amedeo's strives to achieve. The function of this piece is to illustrate what Amedeo's perception of beauty in the woman and in life truly is.

Amedeo strove to combine classical idealism and sensual realism through a modernist lens to create a sculptural icon in the form of a woman of which he called a 'column of tenderness', with acknowledging the 'gritty reality' of his Bohemian lifestyle as a poverty-struck émigré living in the poor district of Paris. Given the tragedy of his immediate like and that of Europe in terms of World War 1 the piece the piece contrasts and juxtaposes the sad, dark and traumatic environment to celebrate a certain perspective of beauty.

## Function and purpose of 'Reclining Nude':by Amedeo Modigliani



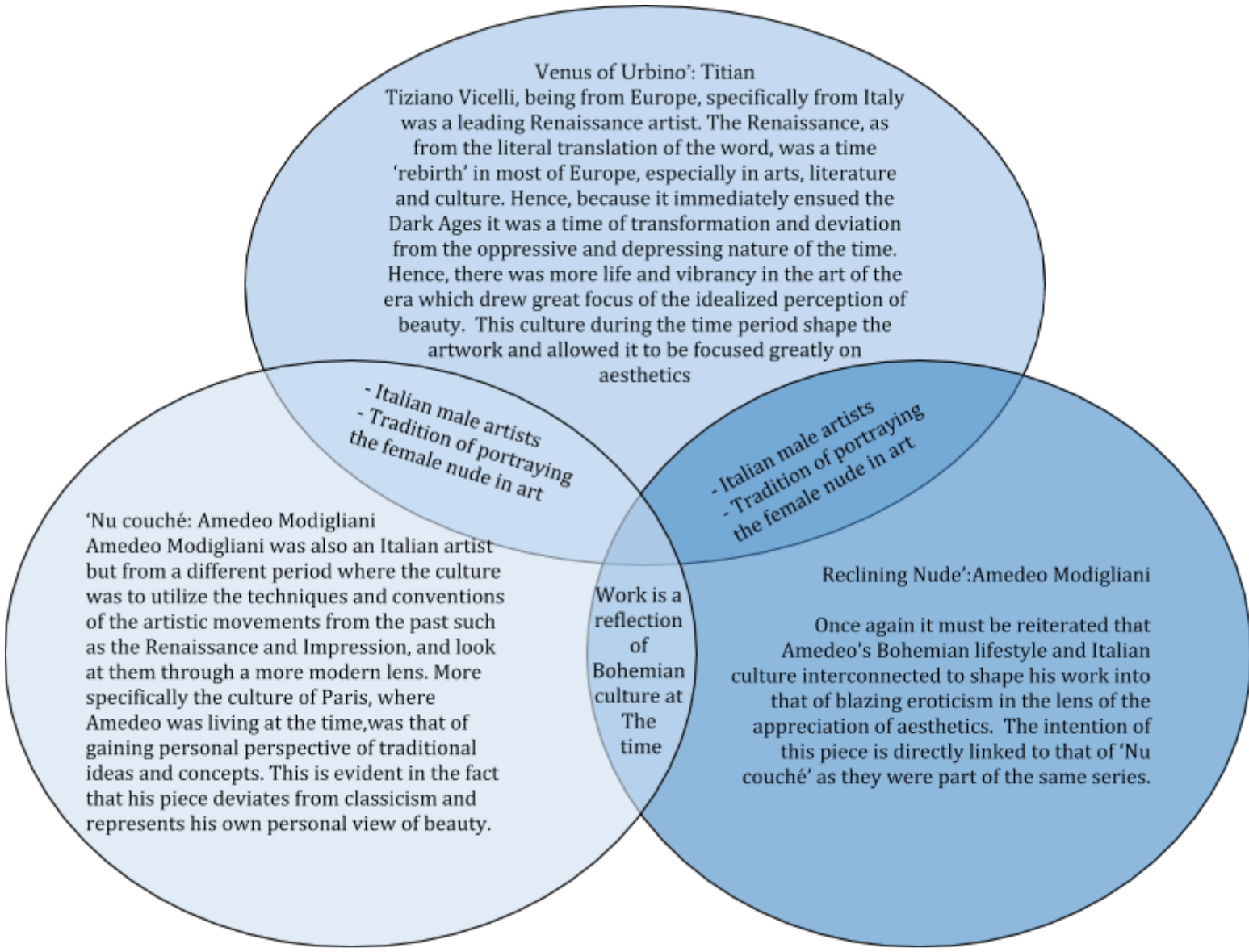
As mentioned before, Amedeo Modigliani a created a series of reclining in celebration of the modern perception of beauty behind the female body and of life. Moreover, they were intended to be given to the patron Léopold Zborowski.

Beginning this series in 1916, Amedeo was influenced by the representations of the female body during the Italian renaissance and other other idealized female figures. It must noted that he intended to deviate from the traditional conventions of how the female body's beauty should be represented. (Unknown. "Amedeo Modigliani | Reclining Nude | The Met.", 2016)Hence, the depictions of Venus from the Renaissance were characterized by mythology and symbolism in order to provide contextual depth to the piece and insight on the artist's intent for the figure's nudity. Modigliani strove to deviate from this and instead, provocatively represented the 'Reclining Nude' without any reference which actually highlighted the figure's eroticism.

The model's is depicted in such a way that her body covers most of the canvas and is viewed from an interestingly skewed angle and her upper limbs are not visible, as she juxtaposes the red bed/ couch in order to stand out. The explicit nature of his piece marries together with the artist's intent to honestly depict his perception of beauty in life. (Unknown. "Amedeo Modigliani | Reclining Nude | The Met.", 2016)



## Making connections The Artworks and their Contexts



All three paintings carry the timeless tradition of portraying the beauty behind the female nude in the world of art. In my perspective, I believe that the perceptions of beauty in the female body evolve and grow according to the cultural mindsets of the people of a nation. How a certain culture, nature, race, ethnicity perceives aesthetics and the ideal of it, affects how artists of that society will portray this perception; through the female nude within the context of this study.

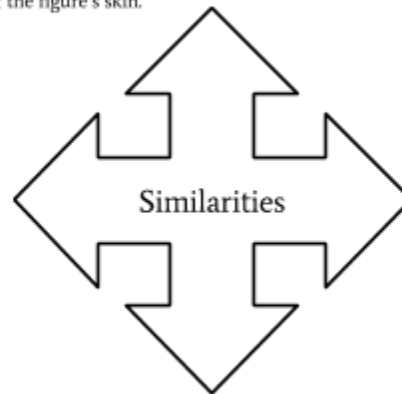
## Making connections: Media and Formal Elements

### *The Composition:*

In each piece the model has been placed on either a bed or couch and they are lying down, right in the centre of the canvas. Each model is fully nude with their breasts exposed and are caucasian in colour. The artists of all three attempts to juxtapose a darkly hued and toned background with the light tones and hues of the figure's skin.

### *Medium:*

Each painting is an oil on canvas and in order to create a unified sense of balance the artists have used the common colour of reddish brown in the tones and hues of the pieces. Even in creating darks and lights the artists deviate from using white and/or black and instead the common colour.



### *Symbolism:*

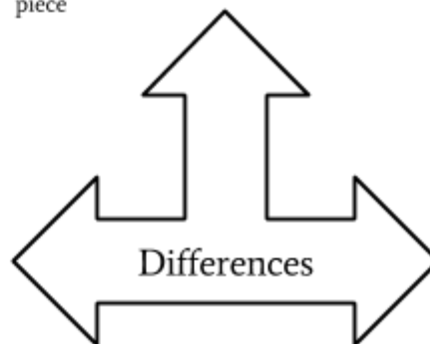
Explicitly each piece carries a sense of eroticism but all strive to celebrate and/or admire the beauty behind the female body which is dependant on the artist's intention and cultural background.

### *Line, shape and form:*

Given that each painting is of a woman, the artists have juxtaposed the sensual curvatures of the woman's key features( breast, buttocks, curves) with either the vertical and horizontal lines of the architecture( 'Venus of Urbino') or the simplistic 2-Dimensional nature of the background (Amedeo's paintings)

### *Use of medium:*

Each artist creates different textures in their pieces whereby in 'Venus of Urbino, the artist creates a smooth texture in order to achieve realism and fall in line with the standards of Renaissance of art. Whilst in Amedeo's work the artist uses a rugged texture in the bedding of the two women to create visual juxtaposition and create greater interest in the piece



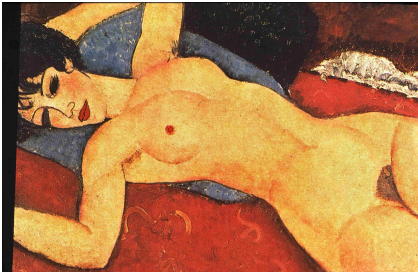
### *Composition:*

Although all figures are lying subtle features of their composition differ. The Venus figure has one elbow elevated and appears to be posing for the painting. In 'Nu couché' the figure arms are reclined behind her her head, whilst in 'reclining Nude the crotch of the woman is turned away.

### *Setting:*

The setting of each piece differs according to artist's intent. Titian's setting is in an upper class wealthy home with maids in the background and an esteemed prestigious architecture. Whilst the other paintings are set on beds or couches, as the artist wants all attention on the model and has no need for cultural references.

## Making connections Function and Purpose



'Nu Couché' is part of series of paintings of reclining nudes by Amedeo, for the patron Léopold Zborowski. This female model was meant to be Amedeo's perception of what was the most beautiful entity he could imagine in existence. The portrayal of a woman's beauty in being nude.

It's not meant to have this underlying implicit and broad meaning in terms of cultural context. Amedeo didn't want the piece to have any references of cultural aspects in his piece, intentionally that is.

He strove to explicitly show what he believe beauty to beauty and to against any form of modesty in terms of being raw highly erotic with undertones of realism.

Like in 'Nu Couché', the ' Reclining Nude' bore the same purpose and function, This being, to be celebratory of the female beauty in the nude.

She also evokes a sense of eroticism in the sensuality of her nudeness which links to the purpose of the piece to in a way be appreciative of raw beauty without any manmade, synthetic and/or materialistic elements.

'Venus of Urbino' like the other two paintings also strove to illustrate the beauty of the female body but it differs in the sense that it was meant to be a celebration of the marriage of the model in the piece and her husband Léopold Zborowski.

The piece symbolises marital love and commitment in subtle aspects such as the dog in the foreground, as well as the cassone in the background, all of these subtle elements add contextual depth to the piece and further tie into the function and purpose of the piece.



## Making connections

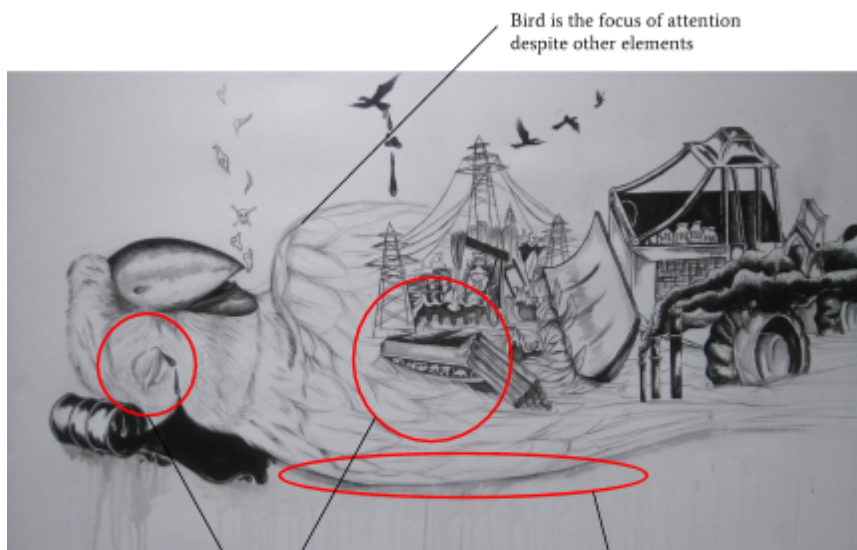
### My artwork - An objectification of nature

I have been exploring the theme of birds for the past couple of months and I felt I could link this piece to this comparative study. In my work I like to make my audiences aware of greater issues that they are usually blind to, either by putting it simply in their face or placing a specific, social group, race, or species in the controversial position that will bring awareness to the topic I want to address.



**Vulnerability:** In my piece the subject being the bird has been literally exposed to the point of utmost vulnerability: dead on the inside and out. I believe that this exposure, this vulnerability can be linked to the pieces I have been studying because in being nude the women are physically and emotionally vulnerable.

However, the difference between the two which links to their purposes is that the bird, is forced into the submission of being vulnerable which goes to the purpose of the piece to create awareness of environmental degradation in the Amazonian rainforest. However, the women embrace their vulnerability and the audience is made aware in a way of the beauty behind the sensuality of the female nude.



Bird is the focus of attention despite other elements

Bird is exposed physically and emotionally. Carries an extended metaphor:- Pain beyond the physical due to losing it's home or family.

Bird is **LYING DOWN** on a surface

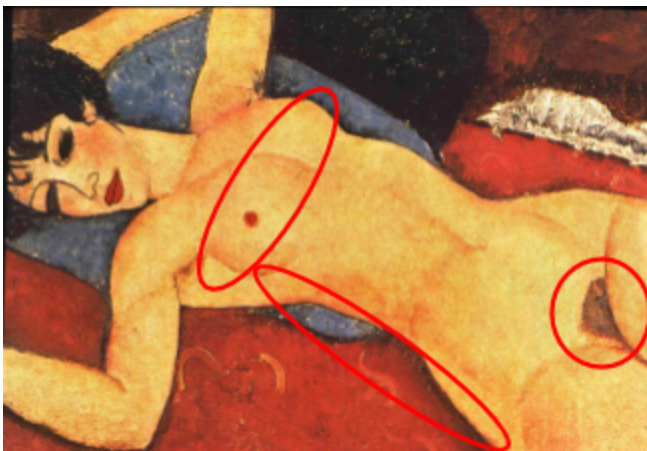
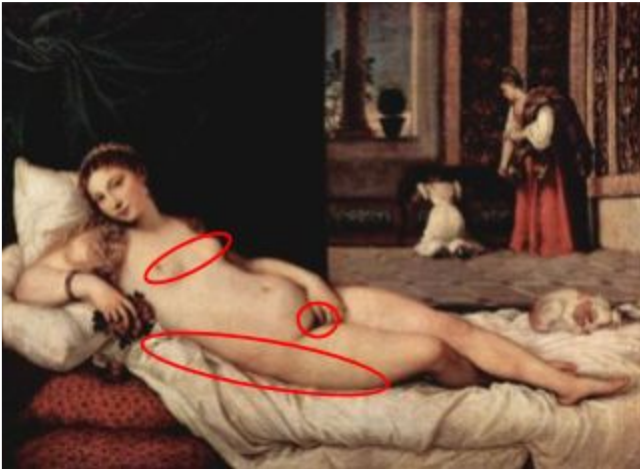
Piece above:-

Artist :- Sei-kashe M'pfunya  
Title :- The Amazonian Bird  
Dimensions :- 84.1 (W) x 59.4 (H)

There is a beauty in seeing the implicit and underlying connections between artwork. The connections may not be visually explicit such as the fact that in all of the art pieces they are lying down. The connection between my work and that of these Italian artists is behind the intention of the piece, which is to expose the subject and make them impotent whether it is to

their likening or not. This has allowed me to realise that artworks don't to look the same or similar in order to have connection, neither do they have to have the same message. The depth of perspectives that can be within a single topic or subject area means that there can be links in more than just one area.

## Concepts and Ideas Comparisons Side by side analysis



### Explicit Comparison: DENOTATION

In each painting:

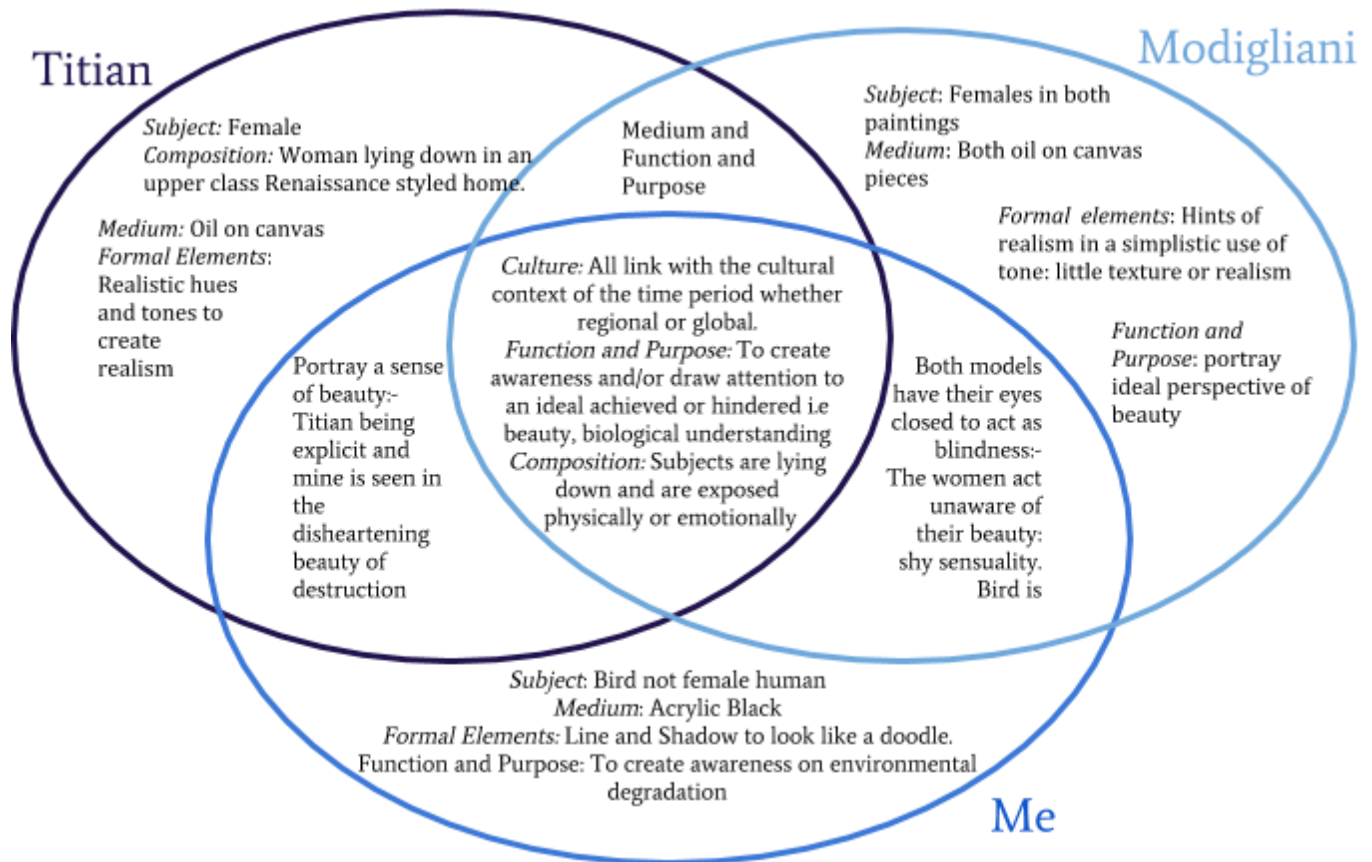
- The central figure is lying on a surface
- They are exposed either physically or metaphorically
- Each figure seems to embrace the situation they are in:- The women are submissive to the idea of celebrating eroticism whilst the bird submits death as he has no control over deforestation and development.

### Implicit Comparison: CONNOTATION

Objectification:-

In each piece the figure seem to be placed in such a way that almost makes it appear as if they are objectified. Where instead being portrayed or celebrated for a particular er characteristic of feature they represented as a vessel of a deeper connotation: The bird is an objectification of Deforestation and greed in development, whilst the human represents the objectification of women by means of sexual desire.

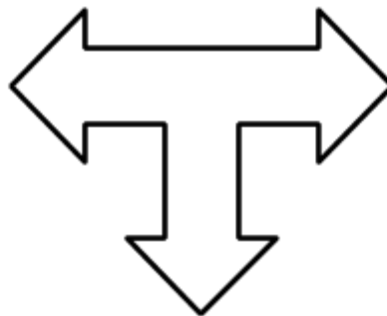
## Formal Qualities with my own Artwork



## Cultural Context Comparisons

Titian: 'Venus of Urbino'

This piece was written within the cultural context of the Renaissance Period time of Classicism from around 1488 - 1576. The culture reflected the newly found rebirth art, literature and wealth, which reflects why the woman is presented in and upper-class home.



Modigliani: 'Nu couché' and 'Reclining Nude'

Both pieces were painted during the cultural context of 1917 which was the era of Modernism where the culture embraced the beauty in sensuality and the erotic nature of the female nude.

My artwork: 'The Amazonian Bird'

My piece was painted in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century within the cultural context of climate change and global warming and its effect on birds in particular. The focus on birds grew from a childhood likening to the animal whilst the focus on the environment grew from seeing the drastic impacts of climate change on animals learn from taking the subject, Environmental Systems and Societies.



## Artist Development

After doing this comparing study I have a more in-depth understanding of the role of women within the art world and as I was writing I was able to link my ideas and thought processes from here to my extended essay but also how to see these similar themes and/or concepts in my own work: Role of women in society, Tradition of beauty and the female nude.

In being able to see ideas holistically, hence in other areas of the IB, I have realised that my artistic development does not only need to be influenced by the world of art but other areas of knowledge. This has allowed me to grow as an artist from a TOK standpoint where when I analyse or look at art I can ask: To what extent do other areas of knowledge influence Visual Arts? Hence in reflecting back on my work I feel as though I can look at my artwork and how it links to other areas of knowledge. Moreover, I can even look at how the artistic intention and culture influence the outcome of the art piece, I feel as though there is an opportunity for me to marry my cultural context to my art work so that it carries more personal meaning, but still at the same time can be social, political, economic and environmental, as I want my pieces to speak volumes to people.

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