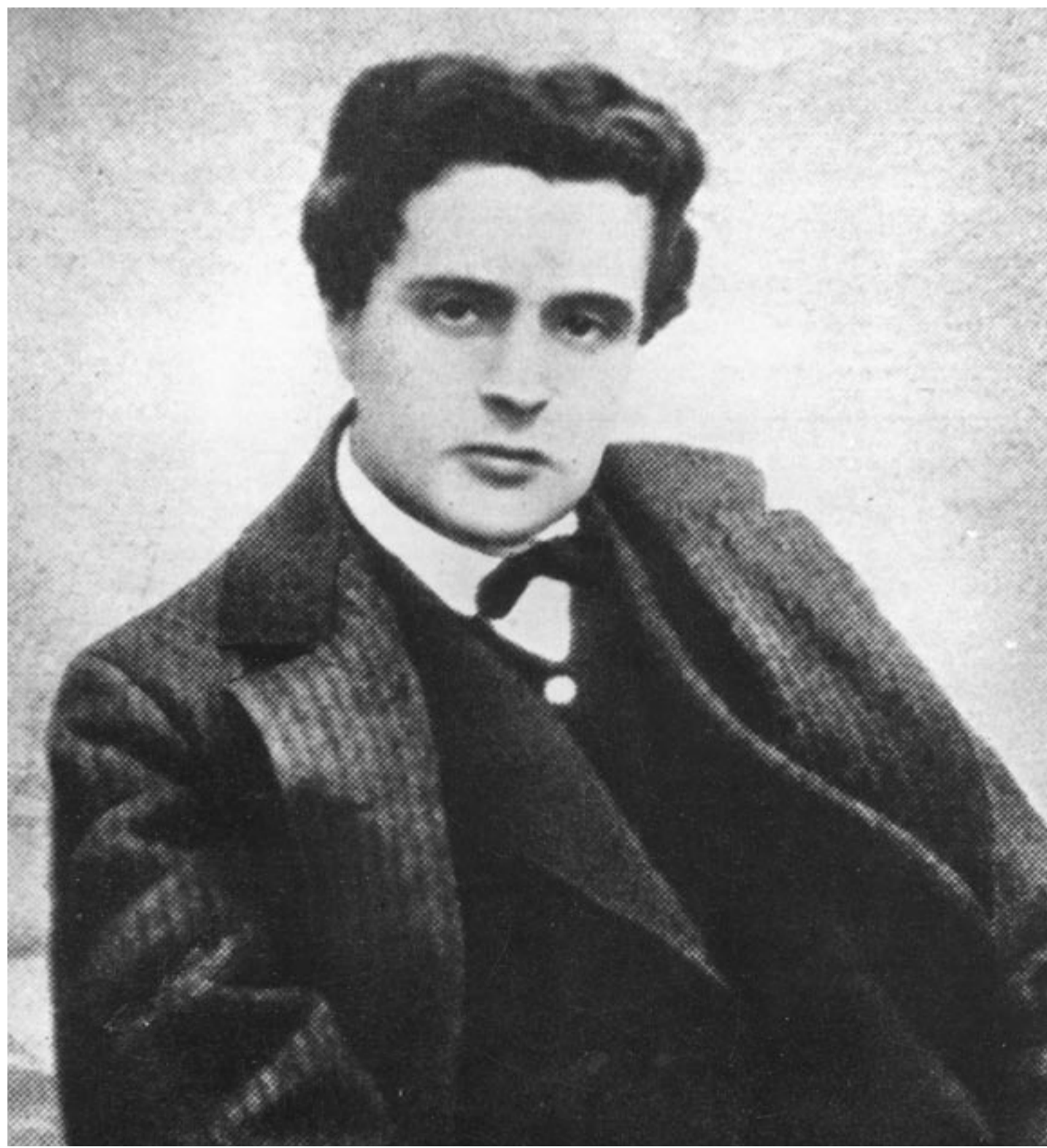


# Modigliani and Epstein

## The Pillars of Tenderness



Amedeo Modigliani



Amedeo Modigliani, Caryatid, Frontal view. Black crayon (Fig. 1)



Amedeo Modigliani, Caryatid c. 1914 Limestone (Fig. 2)

When Jacob Epstein travelled to Paris in the summer of 1912 to install his sculpture for the tomb of Oscar Wilde, he met and made friends with many of the artists who were at the forefront of the creative avant-garde of the century. Among them was the charming and excitable young bohemian artist Amedeo Modigliani. An immediate rapport sprang up between the two artists, to such an extent that they decided to look for a studio together. After a fruitless tour of the huts of the vacant grass plots of Paris-observed and interrogated by suspicious owners or guardians-they gave up. But their ideas and artistic influences held many similarities and throughout his life Epstein kept the blue crayon 'Caryatid' drawing now in the Garman Ryan Collection, given to him by Modigliani at this time, in his main living room.

Modigliani's studio in Paris was a 'miserable hole' according to Epstein but 'It was then filled with nine or ten of those long heads which were suggested by African masks. At night he would place candles on the top of each one and the effect was that of a primitive temple. A legend of the quarter said that Modigliani, when under the influence of hashish, embraced these sculptures.'

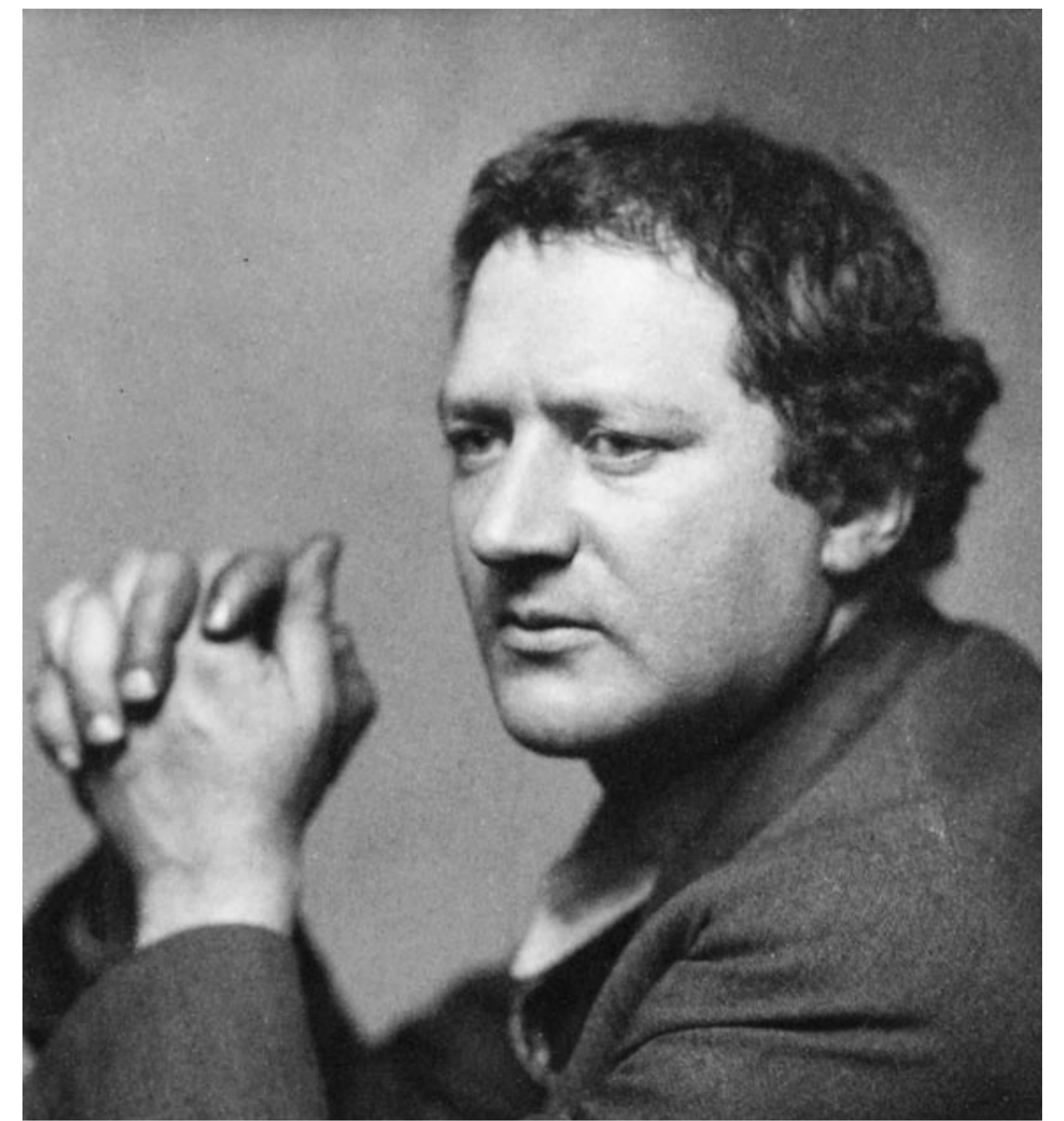
Both artists were concerned with the representation of the human figure, in particular the female figure. They were also both concerned with the relationship between sculpture and architecture and the integration of these disciplines. Modigliani's caryatid figures owe a debt to classical Greek sculpture and architecture. Epstein, on the other hand, was also greatly influenced by Egyptian and Assyrian sculptures, which he had seen and studied in the British Museum.

According to the Modigliani legends (of which there are many) the artist dreamed of creating a 'Temple of Beauty' dedicated to the glory of man rather than God, with a series of hundreds of stone caryatids that he called 'The Pillars of Tenderness', which were to support the roof. A number of Caryatid drawings exist but sadly only one half-finished stone sculpture. (Fig. 2) In 1910 Epstein aspired to create a 'sort of twentieth century stonehenge' at Asheham House in Sussex with artists Eric Gill and Augustus John. In 1912 Epstein decorated the pillars in the Golden Calf nightclub in London with Egyptian motifs, sadly now destroyed. The erotic drawing (Fig. 4) was probably a design for the 'stonehenge' temple.

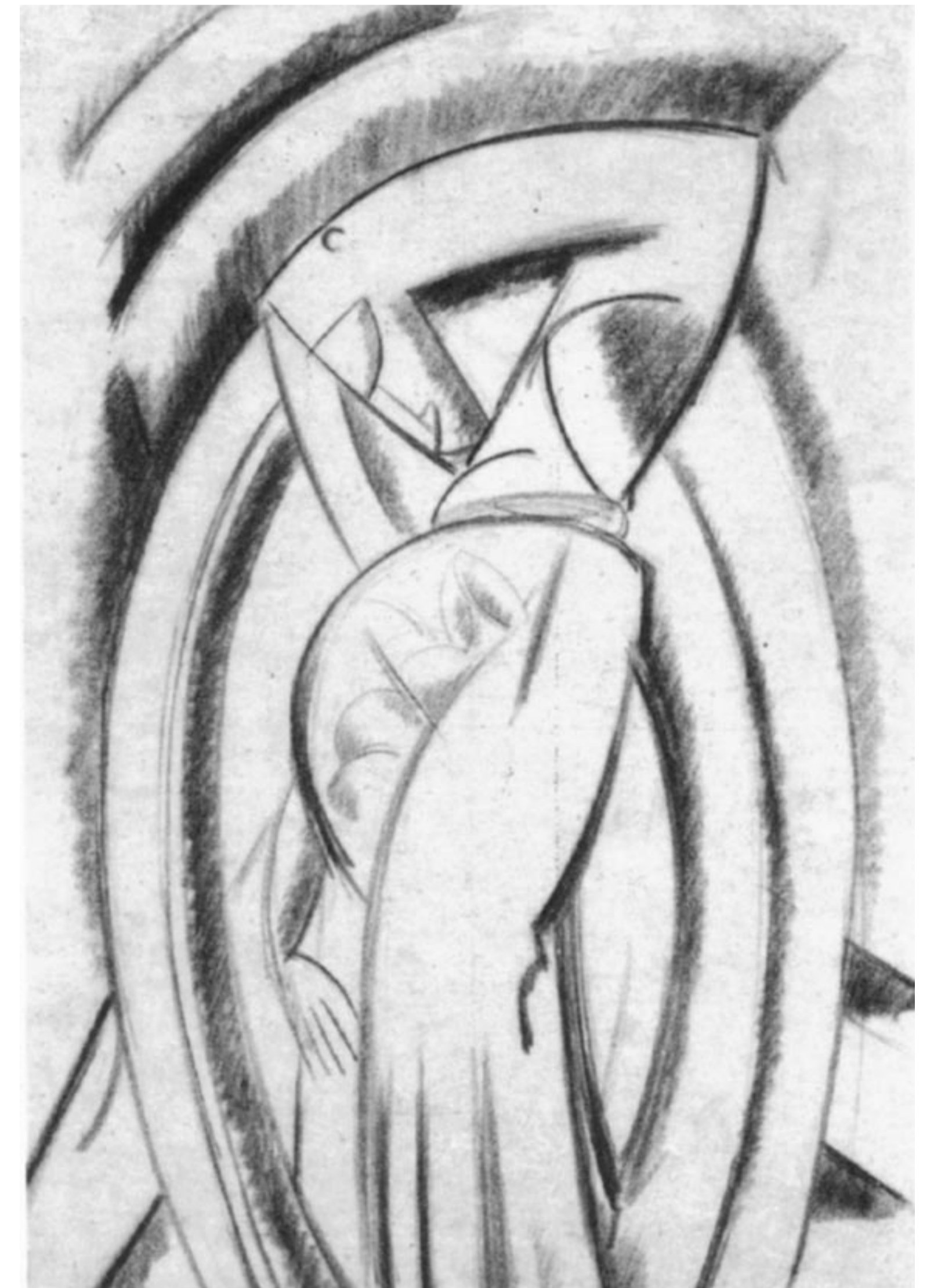
Epstein's work at this time was quickly assimilating the formal qualities of African sculpture and changing rapidly in response. He continued to be concerned with fertility and birth and the wonder of human creation and reproduction. Epstein was also a passionate collector of African Art, eventually creating probably the best private collection in the world. Modigliani's interests, whilst also being influenced by African sculptures, took on a flavour of Cambodian (Khymer) sculptures which led to a more classically beautiful and sensual evocation of the female human form. (Figs. 1 and 3)

The first decade of the twentieth century had bought many new social, psychological, spiritual and aesthetic factors to bear on artists' work. As well as benefiting from the legacy of Post Impressionist artists such as Cézanne, Gauguin and Renoir, artists like Picasso and Brancusi were drawing into the creative melting pot of their minds the formal and emotional qualities of artworks from diverse cultures. Their influences include Romanesque sculpture, Cambodian sculpture, Greek Attic vases, Catalan frescos, European folklore and popular art, Chinese and Indian sculpture and the many and diverse artworks from Oceania, Africa and Central and Southern America.

Epstein and Modigliani were to become friends with many of these artists in Paris and were able to view and be inspired by the many diverse cultural artworks which were arriving in Paris at this time.



Jacob Epstein



Jacob Epstein, Study for Figure in Flenite c.1913. Crayon (Fig. 3)



Jacob Epstein, Study for 'One Hundred Pillars of the Secret Temple' c. 1910. Pencil (Fig. 4)