**Modigliani Answers His Critic** *by Sheila Aldous*

It is true – I paint in a hurry. I stand accused —

my hand denies individuality, my greed for art

sucks potential, replaces their fame with mine.

What can I say, I am their master, but they dress me

in a fever: these peasants, street girls, flower sellers.

I am caught like my brushes, colouring in my own folly.

Such is this: they sit, recline, smile, place

their hands, just so. Their tapering fingers long

to touch canvas, the gilded frames, to stroke the oils.

I cannot but draw them into me. Each pout, a smile

of a cupid bow, kisses me; and it matters not if they

are men or women, they bequeath their breath to me,

endow me with their secrets. You will see my addiction

this peintre maudit, frequenter of bars, boulevards,

in my joie de vivre, in the boudoirs, in my soul.

My models do not laugh, but interrogate, penetrate

with serenity; with eyes one blue, one grey, ask nothing

in their elegance, just whether they sit, or stand, or lie down.

And yes, they are me and I am them. My nudes,

you say — well, what of them? They are the perfection

of a world bracing itself: a curl of pubicity

this triangle that shocks the mesdemoiselles et messieurs

parading with parasols in the parks, mannequins of Paris.

Oh, so disapproving — but so all-knowing.

Whether my models are fully dressed in the finest

couture, in the undergarments of a paid putain

or in their own skin, the alabaster light plays on.

Do not say they disappear like fog into this spectacle,

that I am a wastrel who stretches necks, for I pour them

elongated like bottled wine into my blood.

You ask if I care for them: of course, this press of creation

are my lovers on canvas, they are frisson at my fingertips.