

The Hatted Nude in the Art of Belle Époque Paris

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At the turn of the twentieth century Paris embodied the heart of the art world. Artists flocked to Paris, seduced by the artistic freedom and opportunity it promised. At the same time, the steady rise of fashion in the second half of the nineteenth century and the birth of *haute couture* meant that fashion designers were beginning to see themselves as artists. As a result, high fashion was taking on the shape of an art form, while artists were inevitably influenced by the fashion trends popularized through the increasingly widespread fashion media. This paper analyzes the new trend of using hats in the images of female nudes by the Paris-based artists of the early twentieth century, who thereby created a new genre of the female nude – the hatted nude.

The Hat in the Parisian Fashion of the early 1900s

By 1900, Paris boasted numerous, world-class fashion houses, including those of Jeanne Paquin, Jacques Doucet, Charles Worth, Jeanne Lanvin, and Paul Poiret. While they all designed hats to complement their gowns, the city boasted many hat shops catering for a variety of clientele. Already in the 1890s public venues were expecting compliance with the dress codes which demanded that visitors wear hats.¹ The number of *fleuristes* (or makers of artificial flowers that decorated hats) working in Paris between 1896 and 1906 is estimated at twenty-four thousand.² At the same time, a major feather merchant would receive feathers in thousands and even tens of thousands to be used in millinery.³ All this suggests that the number of *modistes* (or hat makers) would have been also in their thousands. A *modiste* was a respectable profession, one which could enjoy a rich clientele and a high status. Some female *haute couture* designers started their careers as *modistes*, among them Jeanne Lanvin and Coco Chanel, while others, like Caroline Reboux and Madame Virot, enjoyed a long career of designing exclusively for the head. High fashion houses encouraged collaborations with high-end milliners: Charles Worth's customers bought their hats from Madame Virot, located nearby on rue de la Paix.⁴ Henri Matisse's wife Amélie Parayre worked as a *modiste* and ran a small hat shop of her own,

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¹ Roe, *In Montmartre*, 23.

² Chrisman-Campbell, "Hats off to Impressionism!," 39.

³ McDowell, *Le chapeau et la mode*, 101.

⁴ McNeil and Riello, *Luxury: A Rich History*, 164; Snodgrass, *World Clothing and Fashion*, 299.

which sustained the family through financial difficulties.⁵ For Picasso's companion, Fernande Olivier, hats were one of three topics of conversation, measuring success of the hat by its effectiveness in getting her noticed in public.⁶ The hat infiltrated every aspect of the Parisian everyday life, indiscriminate of class, setting or occasion.

With Paris dictating fashion terms to the rest of Europe, the hat became a symbol of feminine aesthetics during the Belle Époque. The accessibility and popularization of fashion media made sketches and photographs of hatted women the visual norm to which women aspired on a daily basis, giving rise to the ideal of the "Parisienne." The "Parisienne" was a specifically Parisian concept promoting an especially modern and French type of urban woman, associated with the city as the cultural, fashion and commercial epicentre.⁷ This was true to such an extent that for the 1900 Paris Exhibition, a giant statue called "La Parisienne" was "dressed" by Madame Paquin and her leading Fashion House.⁸ Provincial and foreign women were encouraged to visit Paris and its "grandes modistes and shops," in order to be "transformed into a 'true Parisienne' with impeccable taste."⁹

The Modernist Nude is a Hatted Nude

The late nineteenth century saw a wave across the arts to redefine the boundaries of what was accepted as the particular specialism of each creative discipline. A movement overseeing not only fine arts and painting, but literature, music, theater and other disciplines, became synonymous with change, abandoning what was considered traditional frameworks in search of newer, and more radical expression. In painting, this evolution produced art that defied the constraints dictated by the established, academic traditions, and favored non-naturalistic depictions that were emotive, radical, and provocative in their use of painting style and subject.

The genre of the female nude had long been a rite of passage for training artists. Until the 1960s the female nude was the "yardstick for determining drawing ability," even when artists did not intend for figures to feature in their work.¹⁰ The Nude implies an aesthetic which is both educational and pleasing. The classical tradition of the female nude, having experienced a rebirth in Italian Renaissance art, remained a popular subject through centuries and art movements. From history paintings and mythological scenes of idealized figures, it transitioned to a more realistic and modern setting in the Impressionist art, and then continued to remain a dominant subject for modern artists, confronting and even shocking audiences. In the time of the artistic developments of the early 1900s the primarily female nude became the platform for experimentation of style and form. For many artists, with the emergence of the "chic Parisienne," contemporary fashion contributed to the shift from academic to modern painting.¹¹ While artists captured images of hatted women both in portraits and in the scenes of urban public spaces, such as dance halls, racetracks, theaters, and cafes, it is the hat's infiltration of the female nude genre that is most poignant and demonstrative of the significance of the hat in the image of the woman during the Belle Époque.

Kenneth Clark, in his classic text *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, suggests that in the genre of the nude, "we do not wish to imitate; we wish to perfect."¹² That is to say, a group of naked bodies does not necessarily inspire empathy resulting in a work of art. Instead, the artist's

⁵ Stein, *Autobiography of Alice B. Tolkas*, 41; Spurling, *The Unknown Matisse*, 153–54.

⁶ Stein, *Autobiography of Alice B. Tolkas*, 19, 31.

⁷ Garb, *Bodies of Modernity*, 81–113.

⁸ Steele, *Women of Fashion*, 27–28; Calahan, *Fashion Plates*, 322; Polan and Trendre, *The Great Fashion Designers*, 18.

⁹ Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity*, 72.

¹⁰ Emery, *Teaching Art in a Postmodern World*, 29–30.

¹¹ Steele, *Paris Fashion*, 6; Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women*, 123.

¹² Clark, *The Nude*, 5–6.

desire is to aestheticize the naked body in order to communicate his vision. Julie Taylor in *Modernism and Affect* suggests that modernism is driven by an aesthetic that is not obvious in the real world, and stems from artists' exploration of techniques as an expression of an aesthetic that is hidden underneath what we perceive as reality.¹³ Clark's idea of "perfecting" encompasses both the artist's vision and the historical conventions within which the art is produced, applicable across artistic styles and time periods. Thus, in Modernism, the nude becomes an abstraction on the theme of the naked woman, and serves as an experimental platform for artists in search of an alternative aesthetic.¹⁴

The amalgamation of fashion and art during the Belle Époque added a new element to the image of a nude – a fashionable hat. Indeed, in the age when fashion designers sought the status of the artist and *haute couture* emerged as a platform for creation of fashion masterpieces, the hat embodied a unique fashion object. Firstly, the hat was indiscriminate of its wearer; that is, as a fashion item, it required minimal or no fitting to make its impression. Secondly, worn on the head, the hat did not obstruct the body in the image of a nude. Finally, the hat mirrored what the female nude traditionally represented in visual art – an aesthetic perfection. Arsène Alexandre, early twentieth-century art critic and fashion writer, argued that "[the hat] is the complement and the crowning glory of the dress, its paramount flare."¹⁵ This "crowning glory" of fashion incorporated in the quintessential genre of art created a symbolic union of fashion and art, binding the woman and the hat into an aesthetic whole where one cannot exist without the other. Artists who at the turn of the twentieth century were entering the vibrant artistic scene in Paris, lived and breathed the Parisian attitudes, exuberance, and its urban aesthetic. Their exposure to the prospering world of fashion penetrated their visions of the female nude, permanently tying the woman and the hat into an inseparable aesthetic entity through a vision of the hatted nude.

This analysis focuses on the depictions of hatted nudes by Paris-based artists in the first decade of the twentieth century. Kees van Dongen left numerous portraits of hatted women, actively engaging with Parisian fashionable city life in his work. His female nudes are depicted in a hat more frequently than in the oeuvre of any other Parisian artist. While female nudes were a popular subject among female artists, Jacqueline Marval seems to be the only female painter who combined the female nude and fashionable hats in her work. Other artists discussed are Amedeo Modigliani, Charles Guérin and Philip Wilson Steer (an English painter heavily influenced by the French School and French artists). The artists discussed here represent those modernists who engaged with the hatted nude as a subject over the first decade of the 1900s, depicting their nudes wearing hats in various settings, and as a result contributing to the modernist emergence of the genre of the hatted nude.

Kees Van Dongen

It is impossible to discuss a hatted female nude without looking at the work of Kees van Dongen, a leading name in the Fauvist movement and eventually a sought-after portraitist of the rich and famous. Unlike other Fauves, who often used their risqué, bold contours and colors to portray landscapes or figures in landscapes, Van Dongen sought inspiration in city life and the pleasures it had to offer. His hatted nudes are a liberal expression of a woman's sexuality and her obsession with fashion. And what better way of highlighting the public obsession with fashion than in a studio portrait of a nude woman?

¹³ Taylor, *Introduction: Modernism and Affect*.

¹⁴ Meecham and Sheldon, *Modern Art*, 123.

¹⁵ Alexandre, *Les Reines de l'Aiguille*, 130.

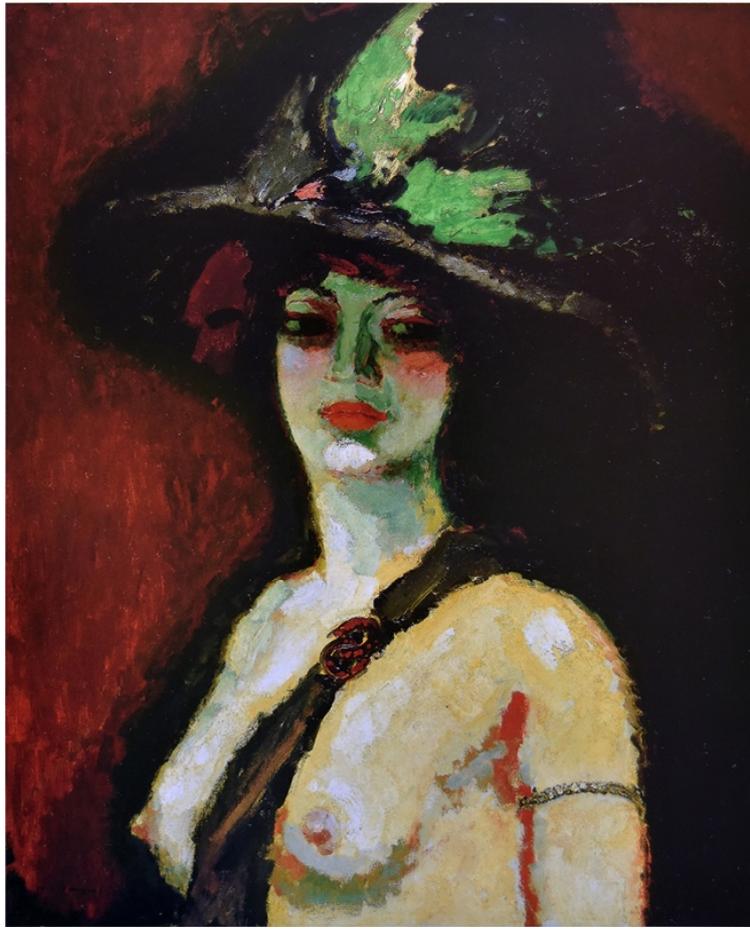


Figure 1. Kees van Dongen, *Femme au grand chapeau*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm, private collection. © Image source: Wikipedia Commons, public domain

Characterized by their minimal background, Van Dongen's nudes (like his portraits) are staged compositions, free from distractions of backdrops, direct and almost confrontational. By keeping the woman's face in the shadow of her giant hat, the focus is brought down onto her body, where the artist uses thick brushstrokes to emphasize patches of light bouncing off her chin, chest, and shoulder. The scarf falling between her breasts accentuates them. The provocatively placed buckle encourages the viewer's eye to drop down, and then to lift up again, only to meet her defiant gaze. Yet the increased sense of nudity does not diminish her power over the viewer. On the contrary, the woman is statuesque and composed, surrounded by earthy tones of non-specific details, while the boldness of the green paint complements the directness of her gaze.

The hat, which seems to extend beyond the confines of the canvas, is decorated with a green bird. Birds often featured as hat decorations, and by 1900 taxidermy birds were used in hats, as well as cork and cloth bodies of birds decorated with real bird feathers.¹⁶ Bird designs served as a status symbol, with milliners competing for the biggest impression made.¹⁷ As Van Dongen's nude stands proudly underneath her imposing hat, the hat displays just enough detail to become the "crowning glory" that Arsène Alexandre wrote about in 1902, elevating and empowering the nude. The magnetism of her direct gaze conveys more than an expression of

¹⁶ Le Maux, *Modes de Paris*, 112; McDowell, *Le chapeau et la mode*, 101.

¹⁷ Mendes and de la Haye, *Fashion since 1900*, 30.

Van Dongen's "sexual liberationist convictions and outsidehood as radical individuality."¹⁸ It throws a challenge to the Parisian viewer, amidst the poverty endured by the artist. The highest status symbol in the hat's decoration, the sitter's defiant gaze, and the most individual of fashion accessories, all reflect Van Dongen's own ambitions within his new Parisian landscape.

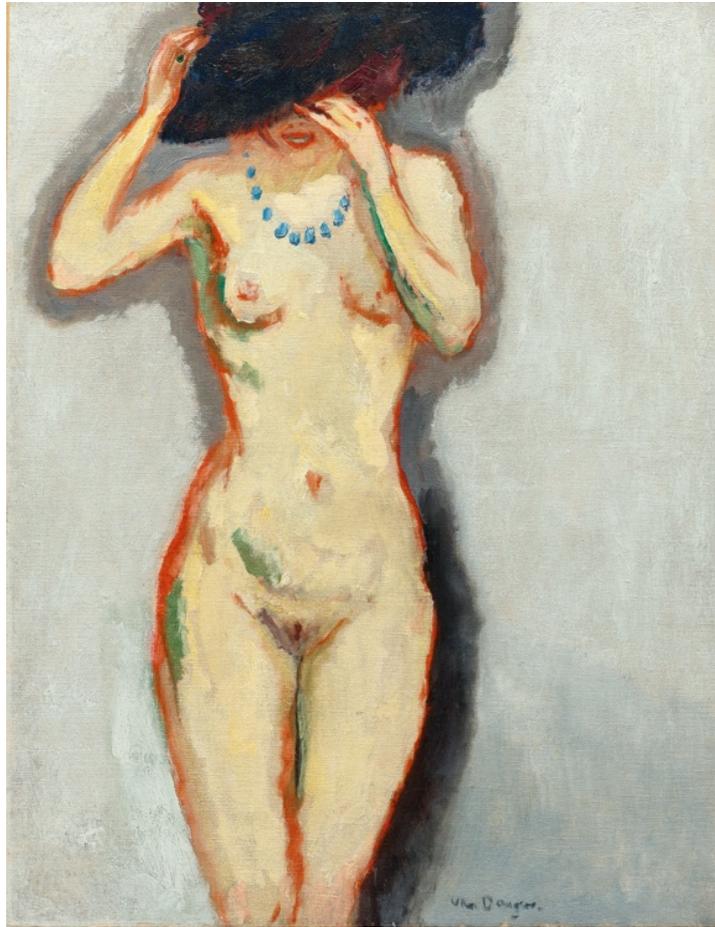


Figure 2. Kees Van Dongen, *Nu au chapeau noir*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 66 x 51 cm, sold by Sotheby's on Nov. 4, 2009. © Image courtesy of Sotheby's

The nude has previously been analysed in terms of an object-subject formula, whereby the nude is a passive "object" and the artists (or the viewer) – an active "subject" imposing a meaning on the nude.¹⁹ It has also been argued that such an approach poses a problem for contemporary art history, as it implies a male artist symbolically painting a female nude, reliance on a male gaze, and disengagement with the woman posing for the artwork. Indeed, the perception of a woman's decorative nature, discussed at length by Tamar Garb, lends itself to the expectation of jewellery and fashion, which emphasize and confirm the traditional decorative character of a woman – intended to entice.²⁰ Such is arguably the case with *Nu au chapeau noir*: the figure's jewelled necklace, large hat and parted lips convey the superimposed elegance and refinement associated with a woman's image during the Belle Époque. At the same time, her body, outlined with the same red contour as Van Dongen uses on her lips, stands forth from the plain background, exposed and vulnerable. The irregularities of the brushwork on her body suggest

¹⁸ Leighton, "A Politics of Technique," 89.

¹⁹ Meecham and Sheldon, *Modern Art*, 95; Emery, *Teaching Art in a Postmodern World*, 66–67.

²⁰ Garb, *The Body in Time*; Garb, *Bodies of Modernity*.

that she is not meant to be seen as a perfect symbol of the feminine. Rather, she appears as a fragile, imperfect, and delicate human, whose hatted head gives a glimpse of the façade that she wears in public.

This struggle between the public and the private exposes the fragility of the artist's subject hidden underneath the fashionable exterior meticulously layered by the social conventions at the time. The strong contours and bold colors of the Fauvist painting style are ideal for conveying non-perfection masked with a colorful exterior. The irregular contours of the woman's torso, rugged and red, are un-idealized in the classical sense. Van Dongen adds a few "dirty" green strokes to convey shadows invited by the curves of the woman's breast, ribs, hip, and abdomen. Unceremoniously he outlines her private parts, leaving the bottom of the painting in stark contrast with the top. Yet the realism exuded by this work is disarmingly honest. What can easily be written off as Van Dongen's sexual liberationism,²¹ actually demonstrates the pressure of fashion experienced by women at the time, captured through the instinctive honesty of artistic expression.



Figure 3. Hat designed by Paul Poiret, 1911, black straw, black feathers, lined with black velvet, 47 cm diameter, 12 cm depth, Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs. © Image source: MAD, Paris/Jean Tholance

The *chapeau noir* is a symbol in itself. Black was becoming a fashionable color, thanks to Jeanne Paquin, who used it as a foil for richer colors,²² and to Jeanne Lanvin and her "assured use of black and white".²³ The *haute couture* hats, such as the one above by Paul Poiret surviving in a Parisian museum collection today, demonstrate the growing size of headgear over the first decade of the twentieth century, as well as the continuous striving for elegance without excessiveness. Poiret's design makes a statement of tasteful chic: the wide brim is not extreme as it had become in some designs at the time (hats reached their maximum size around 1912),²⁴ and the tastefully arranged feathers add movement while keeping the design discrete and graceful. As pertaining to a true "Parisienne", Van Dongen's nude arranges her large, black hat to create just the right amount of mysterious elegance expected of a French woman.

²¹ Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, 464; Duncan, "Virility and Domination"; Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting*, 46–48.

²² Polan and Tendre, *The Great Fashion Designers*, 18.

²³ Polan and Tendre, *The Great Fashion Designers*, 36.

²⁴ Hughes, *Hats*, 231.

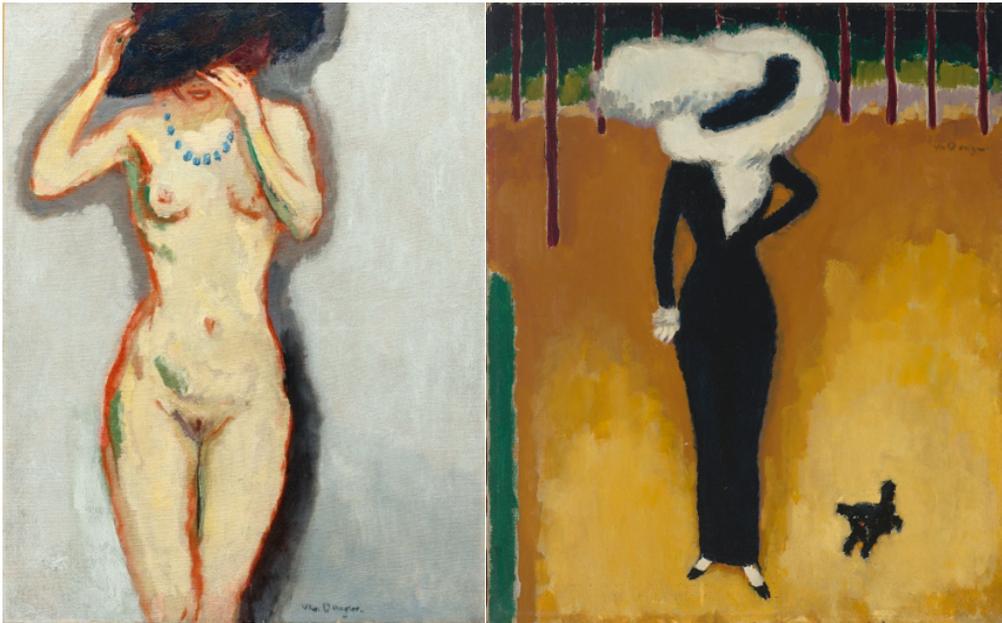


Figure 4. Kees Van Dongen, *Nu au chapeau noir*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 66 x 51 cm, sold by Sotheby's on Nov. 4, 2009. © Image courtesy of Sotheby's

Figure 5. Kees Van Dongen, *The Parisienne*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 61.9 × 50.8 cm, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. ©Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. Photo: Katherine Wetzel.

The portrayal of a woman's face obscured by her hat is not a unique example in Van Dongen's oeuvre. His painting *La Parisienne* (1910) captures the height of the fashion craze, by leaving the woman as merely a mannequin for his symbolic depiction of the typically Parisian fashionista. As this Parisienne towers over the miniscule dog, she echoes another French symbol of modernity and progress – the Eiffel Tower.²⁵ In a public setting that is almost as manicured as the woman herself, this Parisienne is transformed into what the nineteenth-century French journalist Taxile Delord defined in *Physiology of the Parisienne* as “a myth, a fiction, [and] a symbol” found in all places where women show themselves with grace, distinction and spirited elegance.²⁶ Her hat essentially replaces her face, able to make a stronger point than the woman herself.

The Theatricality of the Hat

Logically, the hat is the last thing one would expect to put on, and the first thing one removes when undressing. So, the hatted nude represents an unnatural state, reflecting Tamar Garb's analysis of artifice, and women's femininity as measured “in relation to their narcissistic self-absorption.”²⁷ In this intimate expression through the public means of a painting, the woman and the hat form an inseparable entity, where one does not exist without the other. The hat needs the woman to fulfil its purpose, while the woman is essentially incomplete without her hat in the contemporary conventions of the Belle Époque, unable to perform her role of the modern “Parisienne”. In a way, the hat allows the woman to be more than she is without it, through a new modernist aesthetic.

²⁵ Garb, *Bodies of Modernity*, 117–19.

²⁶ Quoted in Steele, *Paris Fashion*, 75.

²⁷ Garb, *Bodies of Modernity*, 125.

Michael Carter argues in *Putting a Face on Things: Studies in Imaginary Materials* that ornamentation indicates distancing from reality.²⁸ The role play through fetishism of headgear allows the woman to assume a new identity, while to a modernist painter it serves as a tool for creating a new aesthetic in the genre of the female nude, reflecting on the duality offered by the hype of fashion. A simple trip to a local shop was an opportunity to demonstrate a woman's sense of fashion, to which the hat was central. Gertrude Stein in *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* recalls Toklas taking a walk down the street with Fernande Olivier; Fernande wearing a large yellow hat, Toklas a small blue one. When a man on the street compared them to a sun and a moon walking together, Fernande announced the hats to have been a success, "delighted" at the reaction they provoked.²⁹ A successful "performance" such as this not only validated a woman's acceptance within the social context, but also contributed to the visual poetry associated with the image of a hatted woman.

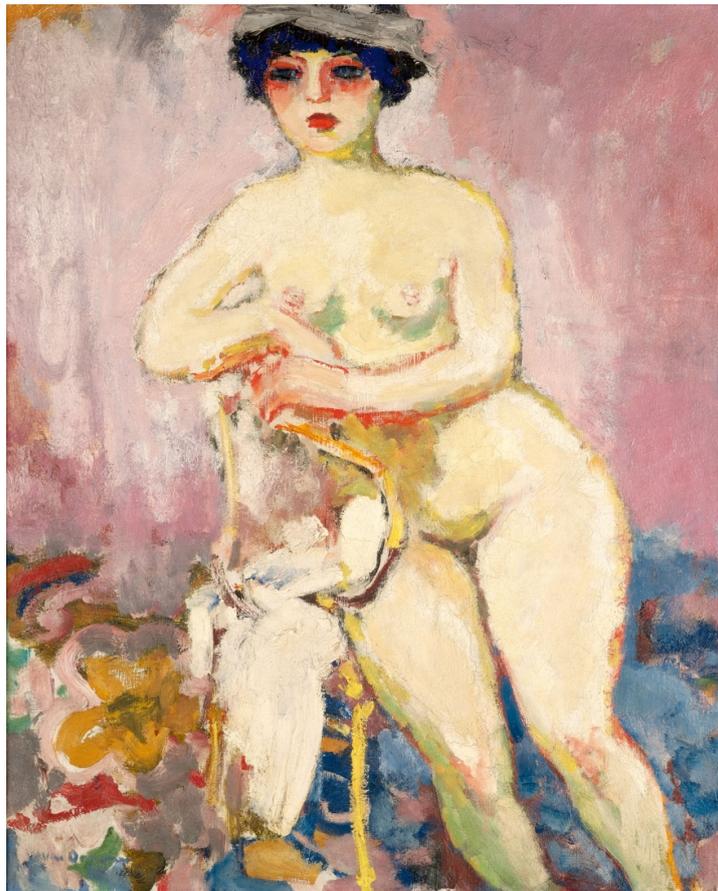


Figure 6. Kees Van Dongen, *Nu à la chaise*, c.1905. Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm, sold at auction May 7, 2013. © Image courtesy of Sotheby's

The performative aspect of the hat aptly echoes the models used by Van Dongen and his contemporaries in the first decade of the twentieth century. Living in the Bateau-Lavoir in the heart of Montmartre, the artist had access to women who modelled, danced, and performed on a regular basis. The buzz of Parisian nightlife, and the freedom and inclusivity associated with Montmartre, provided the perfect mix for the portrayal of the hatted nude. At this time Van Dongen introduced some of his great models, including Fernande Olivier, La Belle Fatima,

²⁸ Carter, "Hats, Ornament and Nature," 124.

²⁹ Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 19.

Nini des Folies-Bergères, and Anita la Bohémienne.³⁰ What looks like scattered clothing around the seated nude in *Nu à la chaise* is not only an emphasis of her nudity, but a suggestion of a change of state between “dress” and “undress”. They echo the artificial colors and the intoxication of the Parisian nightlife which excited the artist, and the rough brushwork they are outlined with prevents them from taking attention away from the woman herself. The make-up on her face, the intensely blue hair, and the hat covering her head highlight her state of theatrical undress. As before, the artist does not bother to specify the details of the hat, or to even place it entirely within the limits of the canvas, pointing to the symbolic and performative function of the hat. As the woman sits distractedly, lost in her internal world, the hat becomes an anatomical extension of her body, inseparable from her identity.

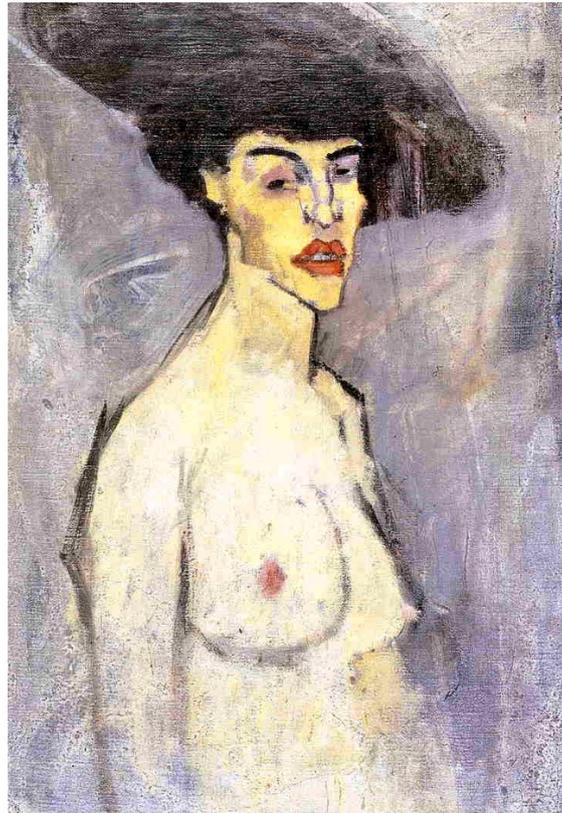


Figure 7. Amedeo Modigliani, *Nude in a Hat*, c.1907. Oil on canvas, 80.6 x 50.1 cm, Rueben and Edith Hecht Museum, Haifa, Israel. © Image source: WikiArt Visual Art Encyclopedia, public domain

Montmartre welcomed visitors of various social classes and standings: courtesans, models, and dancers mixed with upper-class women looking for a risqué atmosphere from a night of entertainment. Hats, however, remain a constant in the paintings associated with the famous hill, having become a natural extension of the woman. Amedeo Modigliani responded to the Symbolic aesthetic and its permeating image of the *femme fatale*.³¹ Mason Klein in *Modigliani Unmasked* defines him as a complex character, who embodied many different social identities and fitted easily into different cultures. He argues that Modigliani’s art was as complex and uncommitted as he himself was uncompartimentalized: “part recluse, part extrovert; part Italian Jew, part French cosmopolitan; part sculptor, part painter; part bohemian, part aristocrat; part

³⁰ Vrolijk, “Orientalism à la Parisienne,” 383; Briend, *Rendez-vous à Paris*, 186.

³¹ Klein, *Modigliani Unmasked*, 2–3.

middle-class respectability, part tainted by family bankruptcy.”³² Modigliani’s portraiture demonstrated the period’s “destabilization of identity,” with artists pulling in so many directions away from naturalism.³³

The artist’s views of women varied just as widely, from religious and sacrificial, to humanist and carnal. Destitute, he was always immaculately clean and dressed to impress in a black suit, starched collar, and a red scarf.³⁴ Modigliani was attractive to women, but shy and weakened by chronic tuberculosis.³⁵ He saw Montmartre through the eyes of a romantic, with an eccentric mix of characters, and he had the ability to evoke the internal life of his sitter with only a few lines.³⁶ His *Nude in a Hat* may not be the provocative seductress in Van Dongen’s *Femme au grand chapeau*, but, much like Modigliani himself, she is open and direct, even if somewhat reserved. Her hair is arranged and layered high, as fashion dictated for supporting a large hat. Like in Van Dongen’s images, the hat is only visible from underneath the brim; its full decoration (if it has any) is not available to the spectator. Whatever the decoration, though, the hat symbolizes a layer of theatricality over the exposed and tired woman. The elegant tilt of the hat contrasts with her absent expression, while the artist’s lack of detail in the rest of her body leaves the viewer conflicted about this portrayal. Essentially, the hat in this painting serves as a theatrical prop, to present a fashionable front in order for the woman to play her public role.



Figure 8. Jacqueline Marval, *La danseuse de Notre Dame*, 1921. 100 x 81 cm, private collection, Paris. © Image source: Comité Jacqueline Marval

Figure 9. *Mes modèles*, no. 36, April 20, 1906, 432. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. © Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

³² Klein, *Modigliani Unmasked*, 3.

³³ Klein, *Modigliani Unmasked*, 4.

³⁴ Roe, *In Montmartre*, 142.

³⁵ Franck, *Bohemia Paris*, 184–90; Roe, *In Montmartre*, 147.

³⁶ Roe, *In Montmartre*, 144.

If the artists of Montmartre relied on the somewhat darker aspects of the hatted dress-ups, Jacqueline Marval celebrated the feminine in portrayals that, according to Guillaume Apollinaire, embodied grace and true Frenchness.³⁷ Her delightful image of *La danseuse de Notre Dame*, although dated later than the other works discussed here, captures the quintessentially Parisian cabaret. What appears to be a skirt is, in fact, an illusion created by two ribbons with which the nude woman dances. In her movement her arms appear to blend into her costume, which, coupled with the bright, wide-brimmed hat, completes the fantasy of her performance. Its role is to enhance theatricality, and, in line with Michael Carter's suggestion, to distance the viewer from reality through ornamentation.³⁸ An image from the 1906 issue of *Mes modèles* echoes Marval's painting in its posed and theatrical nudity. The chic setting of decorated tapestry and animal skins emphasizes the luxuriousness of the interior, while the model's semi-reclined pose attempts to evoke the natural in this unnatural staging of an erotic fantasy – complete with a beautifully decorated hat.



Figure 10. Jacqueline Marval, *Les trois roses*, 1910. Private collection. © Image source: Comité Jacqueline Marval

Even in her depictions of the traditionally feminine milieu of nature, Marval, who was often captured in photographs wearing a hat, firmly integrates elements of fashion into her art. *Les trois roses* (1910) aptly conveys the idea of the inseparability of a woman from her hat, discussed earlier, even while in a natural setting. Marval, who worked in fashion before committing to painting,³⁹ was hailed by critics as a modern painter and became known for her

³⁷ Apollinaire, “Chroniques d’art. Les peintresses,” *Le Petit Bleu de Paris*, Apr. 5, 1912, quoted in Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, 115.

³⁸ Carter, *Putting a Face on Things*, 124.

³⁹ Roux dit Buisson, “Jacqueline Marval: modernity, feminism and fashion,” text for the “Art of MODernity” exhibition, 2018, Geneva, <https://www.jacqueline-marval.com/art-fashion-and-feminism>, (accessed Sept. 28, 2020).

elegant *forme féminine*.⁴⁰ Idyllic depiction of the three nudes, reminiscent of the three graces, invites a predictable interpretation with the emphasis on the decorative nature of the woman. However, while some critics, like George Lecomte, were seduced by the portrayal of “*les petites idoles*,” others, like Apollinaire, place emphasis on the genuine expression and a rare poetic quality in Marval’s work.⁴¹ The sensitive aesthetic of *Les trois roses* is modest in the depiction of the female nudes and attentive to highlighting the hats that preoccupy the women. The poetic quality praised in Marval’s work may be interpreted as a difference in the treatment of the female nude by a female artist, but this view would be short-sighted. The distinguishing quality of the artist’s work, as well as Apollinaire’s comments about the exhibition, demonstrate Marval’s respected position in the Parisian art scene. What is significant is her attention to the hat, even in the portrayals of the female nude. The different design and color of each hat in *Les trois roses* highlight the contemporary obsession with this versatile fashion object, and the difficulty of separating the woman from her hat.

The Hatted Nude in the Interior

The confronting image of a hatted nude positioned against a bare backdrop, locking gaze with the spectator echoes risqué portraiture, creating tension between the viewer and the sitter. The more comfortable interior setting sometimes provides the viewer with a feeling of privacy – not unlike the “looking through the keyhole” feel in Edgar Degas’s images of unaware bathers. Perhaps, if placed in an interior setting, the hat, too, appears more natural on a naked woman – particularly when surrounded by other items of identifiable clothing and furniture.



Figure 11. Philip Wilson Steer, *Seated Nude: The Black Hat*, c.1900. Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Tate Gallery, London © Image source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain

⁴⁰ Perry, “The Parisian avant-garde,” 115, 205–207.

⁴¹ Lecomte, “La vie artistique,”; Apollinaire, “La vie artistique,” *L’Intransigeant*, Feb. 25, 1912.

The loose brushstrokes in Philip Wilson Steer's *Seated Nude: The Black Hat* create a sense of movement in the artificial luxuriousness, which is closer to the bustle of city life and the opulence associated with it than the symbolic bareness of the studio portraits of the avant-gardists. A London Impressionist, Steer's artistic training was French.⁴² His nudes were inspired by French artists (maybe even Degas himself) and were associated with contemporary interiors.⁴³ The hat, while hiding the woman's face, is positioned perfectly on the background of the arch that forms the back of the couch, creating curves that spread in large, bold brushstrokes to match the rhythm of the flowy fabric surrounding the woman. As the interior breathes around her, she plants her feet firmly on the floor, grounding herself in the softness of her surround. This may not be the gentle green of the peaceful outdoors, but she is at peace in the privacy of this room, growing into her contemporary, luxurious setting. The whiteness of her skin glows stronger under the light falling from the left of the composition, while the black decorations on the hat (which could be feathers or lace) shield her face from the light and redirect the focus onto her glowing body, emphasising her nudeness. This painting of a certain Miss Geary, however, was never exhibited because a friend advised Steer that it was improper to show a nude in a hat.⁴⁴ In fact, the comment highlights just how risqué an image of a hatted nude appeared to an academic audience, even when depicted with grace and elegance. It suggests that the hatted nude as a genre was perhaps more suited to those artistic circles that were more open to taking risks in their work, such as the Parisian avant-gardists.



Figure 12. Charles Guérin, *The Nude*, c.1910. Oil on canvas, The State Hermitage Museum, from the collection of Ivan Morozov. © Photo: Roger Benjamin

⁴² Denney, *At the Temple of Art*, 184.

⁴³ Chambers and Paton, *Nude*, 60–61.

⁴⁴ Chambers and Paton, *Nude*, 60; Gray, "The Edwardians: Secrets and Desires," National Gallery of Australia exhibition, <https://nga.gov.au/exhibition/edwardians/default.cfm?MnuID=6> (accessed June 6, 2020).

If Steer manages to create a natural feel in the interior composition of *Seated Nude*, the juxtaposition of the public and the private of Charles Guérin's *The Nude* more explicitly captures the strangeness of a hatted nude that so concerned Steer's friend. The most clearly detailed hat out of all addressed here, it is built up in structural layers, with feathers and grapes encrusting the top of its architectural design. The longing for the natural suggested in the hat and echoed in the wallpaper conflicts with the cornered setting of this clearly staged composition. The furniture crowds the woman, while the picture frame behind her cuts into the composition. She averts her eyes, leaving the viewer unchallenged by her gaze and free to observe. The subject-object relationship between the artist (or the spectator) and the nude⁴⁵ is perhaps most pronounced in this image by Guérin. Kenneth Clark argued that the word "nude" carries "no uncomfortable overtone," as distinct from the experience of being naked.⁴⁶ Yet the artificiality of this private interior feels rather public, with the explicit detail in the hat emphasizing the woman's nudity and vulnerability, highlighting the unnatural in this modern genre of the hatted nude.

The Hatted Nude – The Domain of the Modernist Artist

There seem to be no images of hatted nudes in the photographic media of the early twentieth century. A risqué magazine, *Mes Modèles*, which focused on artistic nudes, sometimes printed photographs of fashionably clothed models next to the images of the same models in the nude. Yet the hatted nude remained the domain of painters, evidently as an experimental and controversial aesthetic. With modernism, the genre of the female nude transcends the confines of its traditional place in the art world in order for the nude to become more human, more real, more desiring of the world around her, even at the risk of becoming less desirable herself in the loss of her idealized aesthetic under the modernist brush. The hatted nude represents an unnatural state of (un)dress, conveyed in an intimate expression through the public means of a painting.

As a radical subject, the hatted nude was, in fact, in the right hands with the avant-gardists. In her "unusualness," the hatted nude confronts the viewer with the person underneath (even while sometimes hiding her face), with the desires of the artists, and with the viewers' own inner selves. It questions the boundary between fantasy and reality, conveys the evolution of the female nude during the Belle Époque, and celebrates the new female form – fashionable, modern, and hatted.

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⁴⁵ Meecham and Sheldon, *Modern Art*, 120–23.

⁴⁶ Clark, *The Nude*, 1.

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