

# ITALIAN FUTURISM

1909–1944

RECONSTRUCTING THE UNIVERSE

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# ITALIAN FUTURISM 1909–1944 RECONSTRUCTING THE UNIVERSE

## Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

### A NOTE TO TEACHERS

*Italian Futurism, 1909–1944: Reconstructing the Universe* is the first comprehensive overview of Italian Futurism to be presented in the United States. This multidisciplinary exhibition examines the historical sweep of Futurism, one of Europe's most important twentieth-century avant-garde movements.

This Resource Unit focuses on several of the disciplines that Futurists explored and provides techniques for connecting with both the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. This guide is also available on the museum's website at [www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum](http://www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum) with images that can be downloaded or projected for classroom use. The images may be used for education purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition and/or the exhibition website, read the guide, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information and to schedule a visit for your class, please call 212 423 3637.

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## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

*Italian Futurism, 1909–1944: Reconstructing the Universe* examines the historical sweep of Futurism, one of Europe's most important twentieth-century avant-garde movements, from its inception with F. T. Marinetti's Futurist manifesto in 1909 through the movement's demise at the end of World War II. It encompasses not only painting and sculpture, but architecture, design, ceramics, fashion, film, photography, advertising, free-form poetry, music, theater, and performance.

Rejecting stasis and tradition, the first generation of Futurists created works characterized by dynamic movement and fractured forms, aspiring to break with existing notions of space and time to place the viewer at the center of the artwork. Extending into all mediums, Futurism proposed to fashion a way of life and not solely an artistic idiom. Following World War I, Futurism assumed different formal qualities, including that of machine aesthetics or *arte meccanica*. In the 1930s, the popularity and nationalist importance of aviation in Italy led to the swirling abstracted aerial imagery of Futurism's final incarnation, *aeropittura*.

Investigations of "heroic" Futurism, which lasted through ca. 1916, when Umberto Boccioni—one of the central artists and theorists of the founding group—died, have predominated. However, comparatively few exhibitions have been realized on the subsequent life of the movement. The taint from Futurism's sometime association with Fascism has been a cause for this, but these associations, which complicate the narrative of this avant-garde, make it all the more necessary to delve into and clarify the movement's full history.

This exhibition is organized by Vivien Greene, Senior Curator, 19th- and Early 20th-Century Art at the Guggenheim Museum. In addition, an eminent international advisory committee provided expertise and guidance.

*These weights thicknesses noises smells molecular whirlwinds chains webs corridors of analogies rivalries and synchronisms offered offered offered offered up as a gift to my Futurist friends poets painters musicians and noise intoners. —F. T. Marinetti, the closing verse of Zang Tumb Tuuum (1914)*<sup>1</sup>

## ◀ WORDS-IN-FREEDOM ▶

While **Futurism** later expanded to include nearly all mediums, it was born as a literary school. F. T. Marinetti (1876–1944), the movement’s founder, was an Italian poet and author who sought to revolutionize art to address the realities of modern life. The movement began with his first manifesto, published in 1909, which called for the glorification of everything new—speed, factories, trains—and the destruction of everything old, even museums, and is considered to have ended with his death in 1944.

In the beginning, the Futurist writers experimented only with free verse and the new themes of machinery and progress. But by 1912, Marinetti had transitioned into a revolution in not just content but style. He called this new literature “**words-in-freedom**” (*parole in libertà*). Words-in-freedom destroyed syntax, used verbs in the infinitive, abolished adjectives and adverbs, suppressed punctuation, and employed mathematical and musical symbols. Marinetti exhorted writers to “destroy the ‘i’ in literature: that is, all psychology,” to give up on being understood by the reader, and to abandon aesthetic concerns by creating the “ugly” in literature. His prescription for Futurist writing was not only phonetic but also visual. He wanted to



take advantage of the “**typographical** revolution” to use new fonts and arrangements of words.

In 1914, Marinetti wrote a book-length words-in-freedom poem called *Zang Tumb Tuuum* that one scholar, Jeffrey Schnapp, has described as “a text on a mission: to carry out a wholesale demolition of existing literary culture in the act of giving birth to a poetics consonant with the era of industry, wireless telegraphic networks, and mechanized mass warfare.”<sup>2</sup> Schnapp says the poem functioned as the laboratory in which Marinetti carried out his experimentations with literature. Focusing on a pre-World War I battle in the Balkans in which Marinetti had served as a poet-war correspondent, the book demonstrates Marinetti’s desire to fuse the roles of poet and reporter. The title derives from mechanical noises: *zang* for the firing of an artillery shell, *tumb* for its explosion upon impact, and *tuuum* for the resulting echo. Marinetti used **onomatopoeia** like this in part to explore both the visual and performative possibilities of poetry.

F. T. Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tuuum*: Adrianople October 1912; *Words in Freedom* (*Zang Tumb Tuuum*: Adrianopoli ottobre 1912; *Parole in libertà*). Book (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di *Poesia*, 1914), 20.2 x 14 cm. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome. Photo: Courtesy The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Zang Tumb Tuuum: Adrianople October 1912; Words in Freedom* (1914)

- ▶ Look together at the cover of F. T. Marinetti's book *Zang Tumb Tuuum*. What do students notice about the words? About the font and layout? How do these last elements compare to their own reports or papers?
- ▶ These are selections from a book of poetry written by the founder of an art movement called Futurism. The founder, F. T. Marinetti, wanted to revolutionize literature for a new modern era. What can students guess about his ideas just based on this image?
- ▶ The title of the book is *Zang Tumb Tuuum*. These are mechanical noises: *zang* for the firing of an artillery shell, *tumb* for its explosion upon impact, and *tuuum* for the resulting echo. The quote at the beginning of this section is the closing verse of the book and was followed by a chorus of *zangs*, *tumb-tumbs*, and *tuuums*. Read it together and think more about Marinetti's ideas about literature.
- ▶ Marinetti wanted writers to give up on traditional narrative. He wanted writers to abandon syntax, punctuation, adjectives, and adverbs and experiment with font and placement as well as the sound of the poetry, such as onomatopoeia. Ask students what they think about these ideas. Do they think writers should give up on traditional linear narrative? Do they think writers should abandon all of these "rules" of literature? Why or why not?

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Paradoxes exist throughout Futurist mediums and time periods. Within words-in-freedom, one fundamental tension is that the text is presented as a score for a performance in which it is read or "declaimed" out loud, but also has rich typography for the eye to see. Ask one student to read the closing verse of *Zang Tumb Tuuum* (note: this is the opening quote in this section of the guide) and the class to repeat "zang, tumb, tuuum" several times together. Ask students how the writing lends itself to performance. Now, ask students to write a poem that can appeal both to the eye and the voice—with typographical and performative elements.

To scaffold this, ask students to create a list of words that suggest sounds (or, onomatopoeia). Next, have them create their own fonts to convey these sounds. Finally, they can cut and paste the words in an arrangement on paper that suggests how the poem should be read. Ask them to have another student read their poem aloud. Was this the performance they intended?

As a higher-tech alternative, have students record the onomatopoeia poems. Students should then swap the audio recordings with partners who have not seen their written poems and their partner should write or type what they hear. Compare the written poems. How has the partner reinterpreted the visual presentation of the orally delivered poem?

- One scholar has described Marinetti as writing "like a man with a movie camera—zooming back and forth from the micro to the macro, from the molecular to the worm's eye to the aerial view."<sup>3</sup> Discuss this idea and then challenge students to write about a topic (for example, a bad day) in this way.
- One of Marinetti's techniques for Futurist writing foreshadowed the automatic writing of the **Surrealists**, artists and writers from the 1910s and '20s who sought to access the subconscious this way. "The creative mind," Marinetti wrote, could be "freed" by several hours of writing, after which "the hand that writes seems to separate from the body and freely leaves far behind the brain."<sup>4</sup> Ask students to experiment with this kind of automatic writing. Challenge them to write without thinking until the hand leaves the brain behind. Ask them to compare the process and the product to their normal writing methods. What do they like or dislike?

*Let's open up the figure and let it enclose the environment. —Umberto Boccioni<sup>5</sup>*

## < SCULPTURE >

As industrialization swept across Italy, its artists sought to shed the pre-industrialist past in favor of the modern machine age. Elements of this new age, such as speed and technology, were embraced. The “Founding and Futurist **Manifesto**” (1909) declared: “We affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car . . . is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.”

Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), a principal figure of the Futurist movement, was critical of sculpture’s domination by formulas of the past and particularly of “some sculptors desperately trying to free themselves from the holds of the Greeks.”<sup>6</sup> The impressive classical achievements of the Greeks and the Romans loomed large and set the standards for Italian sculptors for centuries. Boccioni had worked primarily in two dimensions before the spring of 1912, but he became obsessed by sculpture. Soon, he had published the “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture” and created several important plaster sculptures, including the plaster version of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, later cast several times in bronze.

In *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913, cast in 1949), Boccioni captured the Futurist love of speed and machinery. The powerful figure is in motion. The lines of its body seem



as if they are molded by the wind and its surroundings and capture various stages of the figure moving through space and time. Boccioni studied and worked on these forms over two years in paintings, drawings, and sculpture before creating this work. Some have pointed out that *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* shares elements in common with the *Victory of Samothrace*—the Greek sculpture from more than two thousand years before that the Futurists explicitly rejected in their manifesto. However, in Boccioni’s sculpture, the figure has been modernized: reshaped by its movement and surroundings and even resembling a machine itself.

Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (*Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio*), 1913 (cast 1949). Bronze, 121.3 x 88.9 x 40 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Lydia Winston Malbin, 1989 © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, New York

# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913, cast in 1949)

- ▶ Ask students to list the words that come to mind when they look at this sculpture.
- ▶ Ask a volunteer to pose, and even move, like the sculpture. What do they imagine the figure in the sculpture is doing? Is the sculpture realistic? Why or why not?
- ▶ Read Boccioni's opening quote to students. Ask them where they see his figure enclosing the environment, if at all.
- ▶ Ask students to compare this sculpture to two works Boccioni was influenced by: Auguste Rodin's (1840–1917) *The Walking Man* (1907) (<http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/walking-man>) and the *Victory of Samothrace* (220–185 BCE) ([http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace\\_acc\\_en.html](http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace_acc_en.html)).
- ▶ The founder of Futurism declared: “We affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car . . . is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.” Ask them how Boccioni's sculpture relates to this quote. Do they agree that a racing car—or even Boccioni's sculpture—is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*? Why or why not?
- ▶ What do students think is a “new form of beauty” in our own modern world? How should today's sculptures respond to this?

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Boccioni also captured speed and movement in two dimensions. Show students his painting *Dynamism of a Cyclist* (1913) ([http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/collections/artisti/dettagli/opere\\_dett.php?id\\_art=3&id\\_opera=61&page=](http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/collections/artisti/dettagli/opere_dett.php?id_art=3&id_opera=61&page=)) and ask them to connect the image to the title. In the “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting” (1910), to which Boccioni contributed, it stated: “To paint a figure one should not paint it as something in itself; one needs to make visible its *atmosphere*.”<sup>7</sup> How did he follow this declaration? Now, ask students to go outside and look for something in motion: a car driving, a child on her scooter. Challenge them to draw the object in motion so that they “make visible its atmosphere.” Look at the results together. What techniques did students use? Did they use abstraction as a tool?
- Although this version was not cast in bronze until 1949, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is often called machine-like because of its shiny metallic surface. For this activity, students will work with tinfoil to create sculptures that capture a figure in motion. Challenge each student to think of two motions or actions they would like to capture with tinfoil. They should try to choose actions that are different from each other in speed and/or quality (for instance, a person writing versus a person skiing). (You may want to first talk about different “qualities” of movement: choppy, smooth, rhythmic, etc.) Display all of the sculptures together and reflect on them. What can students tell about the speed and/or quality of the actions? How did students express these elements in line, form, and material?
- The Futurists communicated many of their ideas through manifestos. F. T. Marinetti launched the Futurist movement with a manifesto that started: “We intend to sing to the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness” and went on to even more radical statements, such as: “We intend to destroy museums, libraries, academies of every sort. . . .”<sup>8</sup> For this activity, challenge students to write their own manifesto. Their manifesto should make declarations about how art should be in their own era. What should be the content of art? What should be the style? What should we “destroy” and what should we “sing to the love of”? Students can view both Boccioni and Marinetti's manifestos online to get ideas about format (for instance, they may want to write in list form). See *Futurism: An Anthology* in Google Books.



*We rebel against the spineless admiration for old canvases, old statues and old objects, ... and we deem it unjust and criminal that people habitually disdain whatever is young, new, and trembling with life.*—“Manifesto of the Futurist Painters,” co-written by Giacomo Balla<sup>9</sup>



## < PAINTING >

Throughout its life span, Futurism remained committed to innovative painting techniques that used dynamic movement and fractured forms to break with existing notions of space and time.

Giacomo Balla's (1871–1958) *Abstract Speed + Sound* (1913–14) presents an abstracted depiction of how a car alters the landscape through which it passes—including sound, light, and even odor. In this work, crisscross motifs represent changes to sound as the car moves. Balla developed the idea for this painting while observing the reflections of cars as they raced past shop windows and their forms and trajectories became infinitely multiplied and unrecognizable.

By the 1930s, the dizzying aerial imagery of Futurism's final incarnation, *aeropittura* (aerial painting), dominated, combining interests in speed, technology, nationalism, and war. The

Italian military's success in aviation coupled with notable daring flights launched the airplane into the spotlight.

The five panels of Benedetta's (1897–1977) *Syntheses of Communications* (1933–34) extol multiple modes of communication: marine, aerial, overland, radio, telegraphic, and telephonic. The panel, *Synthesis of Aerial Communications* (1933–34), depicts houses as specks among geometric patterns as if the viewer were high in the sky.

These monumental canvases were commissioned to hang in a post office in Palermo, a city in Sicily. Early on, Futurists had been interested in moving beyond the canvas to create a “total environment” and in the 1930s, **murals**—a perfect fit for panoramic *aeropittura*—helped revive this notion and the movement.



ABOVE Benedetta (Benedetta Cappa Marinetti), *Synthesis of Aerial Communications* (*Sintesi delle comunicazioni aeree*), 1933–34. Tempera and encaustic on canvas, 324.5 x 199 cm. Il Palazzo delle Poste di Palermo, Sicily, Poste Italiane © Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, used by permission of Vittoria Marinetti and Luce Marinetti's heirs. Photo: AGR/Riccardi/Paoloni

LEFT Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed + Sound* (*Velocità astratta + rumore*), 1913–14. Oil on unvarnished millboard in artist's painted frame, 54.5 x 76.5 cm. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice 76.2553.31 © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome. Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York



# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Abstract Speed + Sound* (1913–14)

- ▶ Describe the artist's choices in terms of elements such as color.
- ▶ Tell students that Balla was inspired by the reflections of racing cars in shop windows. Ask students to look back at the artwork and apply this information to their interpretations. How, if at all, does the car change the environment as it passes?
- ▶ Ask students how Balla has represented the concepts of speed and sound. If there is time, ask students to sketch their own ways of representing speed or sound.
- ▶ Compare Benedetta's *Synthesis of Aerial Communications* (1933–34) to Balla's painting.
- ▶ Tell students the title of Benedetta's painting and explain that this work belonged to a multi-part mural in which other types of communication were also depicted: marine, overland, radio, telegraphic, and telephonic. Ask students how they see the title reflected in the painting.
- ▶ In all parts of the mural, Benedetta employs a **bird's-eye view** perspective. Ask students how they think the perspective affects our understanding of the subject matter.
- ▶ Which technologies do students think exemplify modernity in our era and which should be glorified or rejected? Which kinds of techniques could be used to represent them?

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Paradoxes abound in the history of Futurism. F. T. Marinetti, the founder of the movement, was a supporter of **Fascism** in Italy, and yet the Futurists had anti-Fascist members and their art was eventually rejected by Fascism in the later years. Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto stated clearly: "We intend to glorify ... contempt for woman,"<sup>10</sup> and yet, Benedetta was one of several female participants in Futurism and Marinetti's wife.

For this activity, have students read the first Futurist Manifesto (see *Futurism: An Anthology* in Google Books) and identify statements that they find surprising or paradoxical for an artistic movement. Then, ask them each to pick one statement and try to explain it with contextual research. For instance, why would artists in early twentieth-century Italy want to "destroy museums, libraries"?<sup>11</sup>

- Throughout the decades, the Futurist cult of the machine evolved from the automobile to the airplane. The switch was inspired in part by Italy's success in military aviation and daring flights made by Italians and beloved by their countrymen, particularly Italo Balbo's (1896–1940) transatlantic crossings. Ask students to think about which technologies in our current era merit study by artists. Then, challenge them to make an abstract drawing that uses elements of art such as line, texture, color, and perspective to capture the unique qualities of that technology. The drawing should convey which aspects of the technology they would praise or reject.
- Both of the artists explored in this section worked in multiples. Balla painted many versions of a speeding car and Benedetta realized five large-scale paintings that transformed the conference room of the Palermo post office, creating what Futurists often called a "total work of art" (*opera d'arte totale*). As an extension to the above activity, challenge students to plan either a series or a mural-sized "total environment" painting about the technology or technologies in which they are interested. Encourage them to envision this series or mural as site-specific. In other words, it should be planned for a specific space, such as somewhere in school. Reflect together: How would their plans transform the sites they've chosen, if at all? As a higher-tech alternative to this activity, students could create polyptychs using digital images and exhibit their works in a public online space, such as a dedicated account on Instagram or by tagging their works with the same hashtag on their Instagram accounts.

*Futurist toys will also be very useful for adults, helping to keep them young, agile, playful, carefree, ready for everything, tireless, instinctive, and intuitive.*

—Fortunato Depero<sup>12</sup>

## ◀ DESIGN ▶

Italian Futurism was more than an artistic movement; it was a way of life. It did not limit its aesthetic reach to traditional easel painting but rather embraced the concept of the *opera d'arte totale*, or “total work of art,” which sought to situate the viewer at the center of a Futurist ensemble of painting, architecture, furniture, design, ceramics, art, textiles, and clothing.

In the first phase of Futurism, the *opera d'arte totale* focused on the domestic sphere or intimate public spaces such as restaurants, but by its second phase in the 1930s, it shifted focus to large-scale commissions for public buildings. Giacomo Balla (1871–1958) and Fortunato Depero's (1892–1960) manifesto “Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe” (1915) argues for the concept and reimagines every aspect of life in terms of Futurist aesthetics and ideas. Despite this attempt to tear down the barriers between high and low art, the Futurists still privileged traditional “high art” such as painting.

In 1919, Depero's interests in **design** and business led him to open a workshop in his hometown. From there, he designed and sold tapestries, pillows, posters, furniture, “toys,” and stained glass. These brightly colored



objects feature fantastical imagery such as mechanized dolls and exotic animals. He also produced whimsical vests inlaid with bright fabric in geometric designs representing snakes, fish, and wild plants.

Depero also received commissions to design several interior spaces. For a nightclub in Rome in 1922, The Devil's Cabaret, he divided the space into zones representing heaven, purgatory, and hell. His experience with theatrical set designs from earlier in the century prepared him for these ventures and his interest in the mechanical aspects of set design (such as marionettes) prefigured his toy design. Depero's Futurist world encompassed nearly every aspect of life.

Fortunato Depero, *Depero's Futurist Waistcoat (Panciotto futurista di Depero)*, 1923. Pieced wool on cotton backing, approximately 52 x 45 cm. Private collection © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome. Photo: Vittorio Calore

# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Depero's Futurist Waistcoat* (1923)

- ▶ Look together at Fortunato Depero's design. What do students notice about it?
- ▶ Imagine you could ask this object questions. List them. Help students categorize the questions. Some may be about **function**, others about **form**.
- ▶ Tell them that this is a waistcoat or vest designed by the Futurist artist Depero. In addition to making art, Depero designed clothing along with many other objects such as toys, furniture, and tapestries. Depero and the Futurists did not limit their artistic movement to paintings. Rather, they believed in the concept of the *opera d'arte totale*, or "total work of art," which sought to redesign a new way of life. Ask students about this idea. Do they think artists should limit themselves to traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture or do they think artists should seek to redesign other (and even all) areas of life?
- ▶ According to Giacomo Balla and Depero's manifesto "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe" (1915), all parts of our world should be remade to be abstract, dynamic, transparent, strongly colored and luminous, autonomous, transformable, dramatic, volatile, fragrant, noise-making, and exploding. Ask students what they think of these adjectives. Which adjectives would they use to describe the way they would like to remake their world?

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- The Futurists' belief in the "total work of art" led them to redesign unexpected areas of our lives. One campaign attempted to reimagine men's hats and produced, for example, a "radiotelephonic" hat and a "luminous" hat. Futurism also moved into the realm of the kitchen. Its founder, Marinetti, wrote a cookbook and a manifesto to broadcast his ideas about the Futurist meal. In particular, he declared a war on pasta, arguing that it made people "skeptical, slow and pessimistic."<sup>13</sup> The Futurists wanted to transform meals from monotonous routines into artistic experiences. For this activity, challenge students to work in groups to redesign an unexpected area of our lives—whether that be an aspect of fashion, design, or our social lives, such as meals. They should then present and/or stage this redesign within the classroom. If they are redesigning meals, for instance, they should cook and serve food to their classmates.
- In one section of Balla and Depero's manifesto, they present guidelines on how to design a modern Futurist toy. Read their guidelines and then design your own Futurist toy. "In the domain of games and toys ... one sees only grotesque imitation, timidity ... things that are monotonous and discourage exercise, prone only to dishearten children and make them stupid. ... [W]e will construct toys which accustom the child:
  1. To wholehearted laughter ...
  2. To maximum elasticity ...
  3. To imaginative impulses ...
  4. To the continual exercise and streamlining of his sensibility ...
  5. To physical courage, struggle, and WAR."<sup>14</sup>

Ask students how their designs met Depero's guidelines and how they differ from toys they are accustomed to.

- As an extension to the above activity or separately, ask students whether they agree with Balla and Depero's ideas about the reconstruction of the toy. Challenge them to write their own guidelines for the redesign of toys so that they are more suited to our modern age. Their guidelines should explain why they fit with our new age and give examples for toy designs.



*These investigations have the aim of making the science of photography cross over the border more and more into pure art, and of automatically encouraging its development in the field of physics, chemistry, and war.*  
—“Manifesto of Futurist Photography,” 1930, co-written by Tato<sup>15</sup>

## < PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE 1930S >

As early as 1913, Futurist leaders were exposed to attempts to analyze and synthesize movement using photography (known as photodynamism). While F. T. Marinetti (1876–1944) recognized photography’s potential to contribute to Futurism, Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916) rejected it, fearing that its mechanical vision of motion might degrade the Futurist vision for painting. For more than fifteen years, the possible synergy between Futurism and photography was thus blocked.

Then, in 1930, Tato (1896–1974) and Marinetti signed a “Manifesto of Futurist Photography” that opened the way to Futurist photographic experimentation. Tato was a rebellious artist-provocateur and autodidact who had done commercial graphic work such as publicity posters, advertisements, and book jackets. Tato loved live performance and absurdity. In 1920, he conducted his own funeral in Bologna (which led to his arrest) to be reborn as “Tato, the Futurist painter.” Like his life, his photography had much in common with **Dada** and **Surrealism**.

Tato’s photographic work dealt with the Futurist concept of **simultaneity** through the transparency of objects and the **transfiguration** of the real. He said he sought to achieve “a new reality which has nothing in common with reality.”<sup>16</sup> His techniques included multiple **exposures** and the **superimposition** of photographic negatives. He even envisioned architectural and commercial applications for these techniques such as sequential photographs showing a laxative moving through a body.

Tato’s portraiture layered multiple symbols of the subject’s personality to express his or her “state of mind” or psychology. In his self-portrait, he used a propeller and an engine to represent his passion for flight. In *Fantastical Aeroportrait of Mino Somenzi* (1934), he portrayed a fellow Futurist and aviation enthusiast by superimposing multiple negatives and **photograms** to depict a moving propeller floating over Somenzi’s image.

Tato (Guglielmo Sansoni), *Fantastical Aeroportrait of Mino Somenzi* (*Aeroritratto fantastico di Mino Somenzi*), 1934. Photomontage, gelatin silver print, 24 x 18 cm. Rovereto, MART, Archivio del '900, Fondo Mino Somenzi © MART, Archivio del '900

# VIEW + DISCUSS

Ask students if they have ever taken a photograph of someone. Did their photograph say something about the personality or interests of their subject? How?

Show: *Fantastical Aeroportrait of Mino Somenzi*, 1934

- ▶ What do students notice about this photograph?
- ▶ The artist, Tato, said he wanted to capture the “state of mind” and psychology of the subjects in his portraits. Ask students what they think they can guess about the subject’s psychology or “state of mind” based on the image.
- ▶ This is a portrait Tato made of a fellow Futurist, Mino Somenzi (1899–1948). Somenzi was a radical who believed in the political power of art and aviation. In 1920, he wrote and distributed a document that exhorted citizens to demolish the bourgeois establishment, to “smash to pieces all altars and pedestals” and to destroy the power of “banks, beards, and prejudices.”<sup>17</sup> Do students see these aspects of him in the image? What else could Tato have done to give us the sense for these parts of Somenzi’s life and beliefs?
- ▶ To make this photograph, Tato superimposed multiple negatives and photograms, images produced without a camera by placing an object on photosensitive paper and exposing it to light. How do Tato’s techniques give us a sense of the subject in a way that straightforward photographic techniques cannot?

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Futurist photography shared many techniques with Dada and Surrealist photography, including the use of photograms. For this activity, show students images of photograms made by artists such as Man Ray. Then demonstrate the process to them by placing objects on photographic paper and exposing the paper to light. They should experiment with the process. How do different objects create different kinds of shapes or opacity?

Tell students that they are going to create abstract portraits using the photogram technique. They should bring in objects they want to use to represent the subject of their photogram portrait. Remind them that since these are abstract portraits, they do not have to include the likeness of the person they are depicting. They can simply suggest that person’s “state of mind,” as Tato put it.

As a low-tech alternative to this activity, students can use collage to create abstract portraits by creating silhouettes of objects with construction paper and gluing those down. These silhouettes will abstract the images and mimic the effects of photograms.

- Early on, Futurists such as Anton Giulio Bragaglia (1890–1960) wanted to use photography to analyze and synthesize movement through photodynamism. Painters, Bragaglia wrote in “Futurist Photodynamism” (1911), could use photodynamism to invoke “inter-movemental stages.”<sup>18</sup> In the 1930s, to publicize some performances, Futurists photographed dancer Giannina Censi in poses that she employed in a dance whose movements mimicked airplanes (*aerodanza*).

For this activity, students will use photography to try to capture movement. First ask them: Which techniques, if any, have students used in the past? Which techniques can they imagine using? If possible, make a program such as Photoshop available to students. If not, give them access to a printer and photocopier in order for them to create final products using multiple images. Reflect on the techniques students have used. Which aspects of movement did they capture and how?

- Students can explore how photographs can capture movement with recent technological innovations by creating animated .gifs with multiple photographs. First, they should create digital files of drawings, sculptures, or photographs. Next, they can use a free website to create their .gifs (for instance, <http://gickr.com>). Students also can import photos from Flickr or Picasa accounts or convert a YouTube video. Which aspects of movement did the .gifs capture? How have recent technological innovations affected our perceptions and representations of motion?



*We must invent and rebuild our Futurist city like an immense and tumultuous shipyard, active, mobile, and everywhere dynamic, and the Futurist house like a gigantic machine. —Antonio Sant’Elia<sup>19</sup>*

## ◀ ARCHITECTURE ▶

For the Futurists, a natural extension to the concept of the *opera d’arte totale* was architecture. Industrialization with its train stations, ports, factories, and automobiles had already transformed their old European cities. Inspired by these changes and more, two young architects and friends, Antonio Sant’Elia (1888–1916) and Mario Chiattone (1891–1957), developed projects that manifested both a grand, poetic vision for the future and an apprehension about moving too far away from the past.

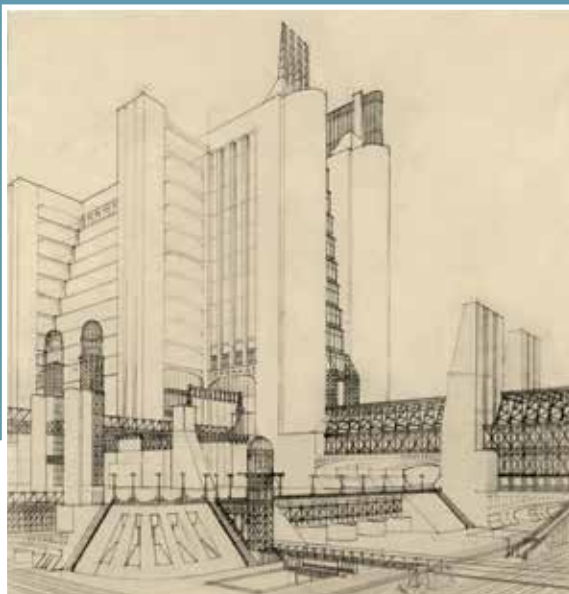
Both architects were inspired by photographs of grain elevators, power plants, and airplane hangars. They also looked beyond architecture for their inspiration, toward the commercial work and advertisements of the time with their stylized forms and bold color combinations.

However, their architectural training had not given them the modern technological and engineering knowledge necessary to actually

build their high-flown visions. Rather than anticipate the need for steel, they advocated for the replacement of masonry with concrete and iron (materials of the 1880s). Rather than envision the transformation of the city as a whole, they only redesigned small fragments. Some of the hesitation was nostalgic. The architects both built on a relatively small scale—fifteen stories as opposed to American skyscrapers several times that height—seeming to adhere to Europe’s old cities’ restrictions on height.

Still, Chiattone’s watercolor *Buildings for a Modern Metropolis* (1914) anticipated today’s skyscrapers. His buildings’ dizzying heights and sleek **facades** were unprecedented for the time. Sant’Elia’s drawings for *New City* (*Città Nuova*) (1914) invented methods for high-speed travel along and even *through* modern buildings, while his elevators “swarm up the facades” of his buildings.

By the time Sant’Elia died in 1916, he had left behind only two built architectural projects: a house and two tombs. Chiattone lived four decades longer than Sant’Elia but only saw unadventurous projects built.



Antonio Sant’Elia, *New City: Tenement Building with Exterior Elevators, Gallery, Sheltered Passage over Three Levels (Streetcar line, Motorway, Metal Footpath), Lights, and Wireless Telegraph (Città Nuova: Casamento con ascensori esterni, galleria, passaggio coperto, su tre piani stradali [linea tramviaria, strada per automobili, passerella metallica], fari e telegrafia senza fili)*, 1914. Pencil and ink on paper, 52.5 x 51.5 cm. Pinacoteca Civica di Como, Italy. Photo: Courtesy Musei Civici Como



# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *New City: Tenement Building with Exterior Elevators, Gallery, Sheltered Passage over Three Levels (Streetcar line, Motorway, Metal Footpath), Lights, and Wireless Telegraph (1914)*

- ▶ Ask students to describe this drawing and compare it to their own architectural surroundings. How would this city function differently than their own environment? What about the form of it is unfamiliar?
- ▶ Share the title and ask students if they can identify the elements listed.
- ▶ Sant'Elia was envisioning a "new city" for Italy in the midst of its industrial transformation. Train stations, ports, factories, and automobiles were relatively new at the time. Ask students to talk about how they think Sant'Elia was addressing these changes in his design.
- ▶ Now look together at another Futurist image of the "new city": Umberto Boccioni's *The City Rises* (1910) ([http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=79865](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79865)). Ask students to compare the two Futurists' takes on the modern city.
- ▶ While Sant'Elia developed projects that demonstrated a grand, poetic vision for the future, he also showed apprehension about moving too far away from the past. Which elements of the past, if any, do you see in his drawing? If you were to design a futuristic vision for your city or town, which elements of the past would you be hesitant to forgo? Which elements would you want to remake entirely?

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Ask students to discuss changes they have noticed in their city or town. Which aspects of life are relatively new? For the early Futurists, factories and even automobiles were new. Students today might list smartphones, telecommuting, hybrid cars, density, or green space.

Now, tell students that an architectural competition has just been announced. Students must enter architectural sketches that redesign aspects of their current city or town to address one or more of these recent changes. How can buildings or other spaces in the community be rethought? What might be outdated? What might function poorly or be clichéd in terms of its form or aesthetics? For instance, a student might rethink the local library for our modern era and technology. In the end, students should present their competition entries and the class should vote on three they would most like to be implemented.

- Both Sant'Elia and Chiattonne looked beyond architecture for their inspiration, toward the commercial work and advertisements of the time with their stylized forms and bold color combinations. (See the picture of Depero's 1927 kiosk for booksellers below.) For this activity, encourage students to design a building inspired by something

modern and non-architectural such as a font or haircut. They will probably focus most on form: shape, color, pattern, texture, or materials. When they have finished, ask them how using form as their inspiration seems different than using function. Is form important to architecture? Why or why not?



Fortunato Depero in front of the Bestetti Treves Tumminelli Book Pavilion at the Monza Biennial, 1927. MART, Archivio del '900, Fondo Fortunato Depero © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome. Photo: © MART, Archivio del '900

- Chiattonne and Sant'Elia were not so future-oriented that they lost all affection for the older aspects of the city. For instance, their drawings demonstrate that they limited their buildings to the restricted heights of the old European cities. Ask students which aspects of their city they would be loathe to lose. Then, ask them to think of the drawbacks that might accompany some of today's technology. Challenge students to write a letter to their mayor that a) argues for the preservation of older aspects of their city or town and b) warns of drawbacks to technological changes. Why is it better to keep some aspects of our cities or towns rather than destroy them in favor of the march of modernity? What would their ideal future city/town look like in terms of its mix of old and new?

## RESOURCES

## BOOKS

- Greene, Vivien, ed. *Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe*. Exh. cat. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2014.
- Rainey, Lawrence, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, eds. *Futurism: An Anthology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

## VIDEOS

- A recitation of the founding manifesto of Futurism at MoMA in honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication  
<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/76/453>
- A reading of Marinetti's Words-of-Freedom at MoMA  
<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/136/1178>
- A reading of the "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe" at MoMA  
<http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/136/1178>

## WEBSITES

- An online guide to the Tate Modern's **Futurism** exhibition  
<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/futurism/futurism-room-guide-room-1-introduction>
- The Guggenheim's **Futurist** works  
<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/movements/195215>
- Yale's Beinecke Library's Marinetti papers  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/filippo-tommaso-marinetti-papers>
- The Getty Museum's exhibition on Futurist poems  
<http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/tumultuous/>
- The Peggy Guggenheim Collection's Gianni Mattioli Collection  
[http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/collections/collection2.php?id\\_cat=14](http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/collections/collection2.php?id_cat=14)
- Italian life under **Fascism**  
<http://specialcollections.library.wisc.edu/exhibits/Fascism/Intro.html>
- PBS's history of the **skyscraper**  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/skyscraper/basics.html>
- Museum of Art and Design's lesson on **design**  
[http://madmuseum.org/sites/default/files/static/ed/%3Cem%3EEdit%20Program%20Description%2C%20Education%3C/em%3E%20Resource%20Materials/what%20is%20design\\_completeTRP.pdf](http://madmuseum.org/sites/default/files/static/ed/%3Cem%3EEdit%20Program%20Description%2C%20Education%3C/em%3E%20Resource%20Materials/what%20is%20design_completeTRP.pdf)
- Marinetti's **Words-in-Freedom**  
<http://cdm.reed.edu/cdm4/artbooks/marinetti.php>
- More on artists' **manifestos**:  
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/2da21a04-3564-11e0-aa6c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2mXH6JxLp>
- More on Surrealism:  
<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/movements/195237/description>  
[http://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/themes/surrealism](http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/surrealism)  
(includes a manifesto writing exercise)

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "On Zang Tumb Tuuum," in *Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe*, exh. cat., ed. Vivien Greene (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2014), p. 158.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 156.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 158.
- <sup>4</sup> Claudia Salaris, "The Invention of the Programmatic Avant-Garde," in *Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe*, exh. cat., ed. Vivien Greene (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2014), p. 31.
- <sup>5</sup> Umberto Boccioni, "Futurist Sculpture," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 117.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Umberto Boccioni, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting," in *Umberto Boccioni*, ed. Ester Coen (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), p. 230.
- <sup>8</sup> Salaris, "The Invention of the Programmatic Avant-Garde," p. 23.
- <sup>9</sup> Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carra, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, "Manifesto of the Futurist Painters," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 62.
- <sup>10</sup> Salaris, "The Invention of the Programmatic Avant-Garde," p. 23.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 212.
- <sup>13</sup> <http://www.cipa.ulg.ac.be/intervalles2/delville.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> Balla and Depero, "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe," pp. 211-12.
- <sup>15</sup> Maria Antonella Pelizzari, "Futurist Photography: Tato and the 1930s," from *Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe*, exh. cat., ed. Vivien Greene (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2014), p. 295.
- <sup>16</sup> Pelizzari, "Futurist Photography: Tato and the 1930s," p. 297.
- <sup>17</sup> <http://books.google.com/books?id=BrjNJ0MD9bQC&pg=PA140&lpg=PA140&dq=%22mino+somenzi%22&source=bl&ots=NEISIGDJXa&sig=6llbgXFeDazZr5z7SU5eYGrNJ8E&hl=en&sa=X&ei=HaGcUqfPN8rlsASXzIG4BQ&ved=0CEsQ6AEwBw#v=onepage&q=%22mino%20somenzi%22&f=false>
- <sup>18</sup> Anton Giulio Bragaglia, "Futurist Photodynamism," trans./ed. Lawrence Rainey, from *Modernism/modernity* 15, no. 2 (2008), The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 371.
- <sup>19</sup> Antonio Sant'Elia, "Futurist Architecture," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 200.

## BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Perspective from above looking down (not from *Merriam Webster*)

## COMMISSION

An authorization to perform prescribed acts; in the case of art, to be asked or to propose or compete to make artworks, often for a fee

## DADA

A movement in art and literature based on deliberate irrationality and negation of traditional artistic values

## DESIGN

The way something has been made: the way the parts of something (such as a building, machine, book, etc.) are formed and arranged for a particular use, effect, etc.

## EXPOSURE

In photography, refers to a single shutter cycle (not from *Merriam Webster*)

## FACADE

The front of a building

## FASCISM

A political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition

## FORM

The shape and structure of something as distinguished from its material

## FUNCTION

The special purpose or activity for which a thing exists or is used

## FUTURISM

A movement in the visual and performing arts, literature, advertising, and even cuisine begun in Italy about 1909 and marked especially by an effort to give formal expression to the dynamic energy and movement of modern and mechanical processes

## MANIFESTO

A written statement that describes the policies, goals, and opinions of a person or group

## METROPOLIS

A large or important city

## MURAL

Large painting that is done directly on the surface of a wall

## ONOMATOPOEIA

The use of words whose sound suggests their sense

## PHOTOGRAM

A photographic image made by placing objects between light-sensitive paper and a light source

## SIMULTANEITY

When more than one view of an object exists on a single plane or when more than one event occurs at the same time (not from *Merriam Webster*)

## SUPERIMPOSE

To place or lay (something) over something else

## SURREALISM

The principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastic or incongruous imagery or effects in art, literature, film, or theater by means of unnatural or irrational juxtapositions and combinations

## TRANSFIGURATION

A change in form or appearance

## TYPOGRAPHICAL

Of or related to the style, arrangement, or appearance of printed letters on a page

## WORDS-IN-FREEDOM

The Futurists' poetic tactic of liberating words from syntax and grammatical structure (not from *Merriam Webster*)

(from *Merriam-Webster* unless otherwise noted)