

EPILOGUE – FUTURE PERFECT?

Despite its engagement with the genre of war art and emphasis on up-to-date subject matter, Futurism was not entirely absorbed in contemporary events during the 1940s. As illustrated by the foregoing discussion of late Futurist poetry, the movement's 'presentist' concerns gave way to truly 'futurist' preoccupations as the war drew to its conclusion. Yet literature was not the only sphere in which such a tendency was evident. Other theories or projects for post-war renewal likewise heralded the end of the era of 'good factory muck [...] metallic waste [...] [and] celestial soot',¹ and enthusiastically welcomed a new epoch that would be dominated by science, technology and swift mass communications.

Given that he had been one of the authors of the 1915 manifesto 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe', it is not surprising that Fortunato Depero's thoughts should have turned to the altogether more pressing task of reconstructing Italy around 1943. Following his return from a sojourn in America (1928-30) Depero's Casa d'Arte Futurista secured few orders and was largely inactive, although it did receive commissions to produce promotional imagery and decorative items for the overseas offices of the Italian tourist board ENIT between the late 1930s and early 1940s. Nevertheless, Depero believed that the post-war era would be ripe with practical opportunities in the sphere of the applied arts for any artist bold enough to seize them: 'Dear comrade, we have new cities to enrich with our works. We shall have cities to rebuild and to embellish with new art. An immense future awaits us.'² 'In my opinion', he wrote, 'this war of

¹ Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 49.

² 'Stile di acciaio', in Depero, *A passo romano*, cit., p. 107.

arms must be followed by a war of ideas, of style'.³ Asserting that fashion would be one of the first creative disciplines to manifest a sense of post-war optimism, Depero somewhat prematurely foresaw the development of a new form of clothing appropriate to a nation triumphant in victory following its 'most sacred, most difficult, most metallic'⁴ conflict: 'a style of dress worthy of the new European order'⁵ and redolent of the 'courageous post-war AXIS spirit'.⁶ Characteristically (and somewhat paradoxically) in conceiving such modern apparel Depero drew inspiration from traditional regional costumes with their bright colours and bold forms,⁷ incorporating the 'entire Mediterranean palette granted to us by God'.⁸ In a manner consistent with the prevailing culture of autarky, this new clothing was to be created from domestically produced materials (although Depero also exhorted his fellow designers to 'exploit' the far wider range of resources that would soon be at their disposal)⁹ and to incorporate decorative motifs inspired by the products and industries associated with specific regions, thereby creating contemporary folk costumes for the inhabitants of Fascist new towns such as Carbonia and Sabaudia.¹⁰

Altogether more visionary than this, however, was Depero's notion of a flying-suit (*volabito*) in which 'we will take pleasant little independent strolls, and on oppressively hot days we will open our windows, swoop up to little clouds and happily camp out there in the fresh air at high

³ 'L'abito della vittoria. Il nuovo popolare. Il nuovo tessuto. La nuova moda. Lo stile guerresco. L'abito razionale, scientifico e spettacolare. Gioia e rivoluzione nel vestire', *ibid.*, pp. 89-97 (p. 94).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁷ The artist's affection for Italy's regional dress and folk traditions was apparent in a number of his works, such as the famous patchwork 'tapestry' *Serrada* of 1920.

⁸ 'L'abito della vittoria', *cit.*, p. 90.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

altitude'.¹¹ A 'scientific, or medical, suit' was also foreseen, able 'to massage [and] extract harmful substances from our flesh, [and] to inject curative substances [...]. At every moment it will defend our bodies from the invisible dangers that surround us'.¹² Like the 'New Venice' of Marinetti's late novel *Venezianella and Studentaccio*, the crystal sky of which would be studded 'with a fixed number of inhabitable stars',¹³ such projects resemble ideas from science fiction. Accordingly, they were tragically at odds with (and perhaps represented attempts to escape from) the impending realities of Italian life. For all his jingoism and bravado, they were realities of which Depero was himself keenly aware, as a number of works from the war years illustrate. During this period the artist retreated to the mountain village of Serrada, near Rovereto, where his paintings and drawings chronicling scenes of daily life were imbued with an intense air of melancholy. His gloomy mood is reflected in the uncharacteristically sombre, earthy tones of these works, as well as in their subject matter: scenes of drunkenness and images of careworn, dishevelled and lonely figures, whose mask-like faces seem menacing or vacant rather than playful, as they had been in the artist's earlier works (**Figs 96, 97**).

Another, more practical, manifestation of what one might term the 'utopian' spirit at this time was Enrico Prampolini's theory of a 'collective art' based on the creation of mixed-media mural compositions destined for public spaces. This was outlined in a volume of 1944¹⁴ that presented the artist's extraordinary exhibition installations as examples of the transposition of his research into the expressive potential of different materials from the pictorial sphere into that of three-dimensional architectural space (**Figs 98, 99**), thereby bringing into focus the close relationship

¹¹ Ibid., p. 96.

¹² Ibid., pp. 96-97.

¹³ Cit., p. 36.

¹⁴ *Arte polimaterica (verso un'arte collettiva?)*, in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1944/4.



Fig. 96 Fortunato Depero, *Ritual and Splendours of a Tavern*, 1944
oil on board, 120 x 82 cm, Rovereto: Cassa Rurale Collection

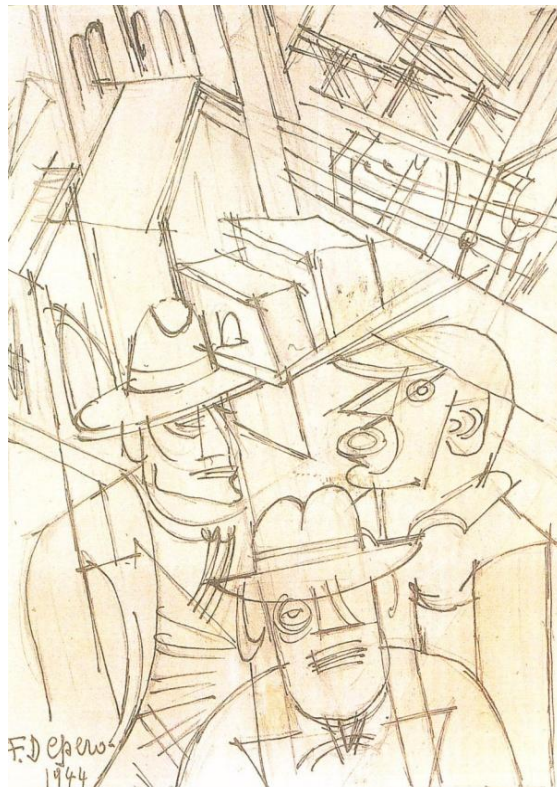


Fig. 97 Fortunato Depero, *Anonymous Village Folk*, 1944
pencil and ink on paper, 24 x 17 cm, Milan: Arte Centro

that could exist between ‘the pure work of art and its practical application’.¹⁵

The roots of this experimentation ultimately lay in those mixed-media compositions Prampolini had been creating since the earliest days of his involvement in the Futurist movement, such as his 1914 work *Béguinage*, which incorporated a range of materials including lace and feathers. The notion of mixed-media murals likewise dated back to an earlier phase of Futurist activity, having been explored during the 1930s in the context of the wider debate over the form of art most appropriate to the Fascist era. For painters associated with the Novecento school, such as Mario Sironi, Achille Funi, Massimo Campigli and Carlo Carrà, Mussolini’s revolution signified that ‘*the individualist conception of “art for art’s sake” is dead*’, and that through mural painting ‘art will once again become what it was in the greatest of times and at the heart of the greatest civilizations: a perfect instrument of spiritual direction’.¹⁶ However, the Futurists believed that painted murals, with their jarringly traditional overtones, decorative character and failure to engage with modern materials, were unable to attain any sense of coherence with contemporary architecture. Accordingly, in 1934 they had made their own distinctive contribution to this debate by launching the concept of mixed-media relief murals (*plastica murale*) with a major exhibition at Genoa’s Palazzo Ducale.¹⁷

Considering this approach a decade later, Prampolini not only exalted the way in which it enabled mural schemes to ‘participate in the life of functional architecture without violating its

¹⁵ Prampolini, ‘Premessa’, in *Mostra del pittore Enrico Prampolini*, (Crispoli, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/3, p. 14).

¹⁶ Mario Sironi, ‘Manifesto of Mural Painting’ (1933), in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, cit., pp. 407-09 (p. 408); original emphasis.

¹⁷ See Romy Golan, ‘Slow Time: Futurist Murals’, in Greene, *Italian Futurism 1909-1944*, cit., pp. 317-20. Nevertheless, Giuseppe Terragni’s striking ‘photoplastic’ mural for the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* pre-dated this exhibition by two years, as we saw in Chapter Three.

theoretical foundations, its constructive requirements and its stylistic values',¹⁸ but also extolled the public character and shared experience of such work, in much the same way that Marinetti had foreseen the communal enjoyment of Carlo Belloli's visual poems, fixed to city walls like bill posters.¹⁹ Significantly, despite asserting: 'history teaches us that the phenomenon of art is bound up with the life of the people, and [...] has always been at the service of an ideology',²⁰ Prampolini now implied that art would no longer be used as a tool by political elites to manipulate the population, but rather would become a vehicle for the people's own aspirations, presenting *l'attività polimaterica* as 'a social phenomenon of our times, which places art at the service of the masses'.²¹ Art would henceforth constitute a genuinely unifying force in society. Indeed, for Prampolini the ideal of a 'collective' art consisted in more than just the manner of its consumption, being considered equally integral to the process of its creation insofar as it necessitated a spirit of collaboration between architects, artists and craftsmen, thereby endowing the art of the post-war period with an 'ethical function'.²²

Like Depero, Prampolini believed that this new era of human history would be dominated by scientific advancement, something foreshadowed in his aeropaintings of the preceding decade. In their concern with the notion of metamorphosis, explored through the use of inchoate, embryonic forms, their 'cosmic' overtones and their themes of terrestrial transcendence, these images suggested the evolution of a 'higher' form of humanity whose ultimate destiny lay among the stars, again in a manner not dissimilar to the predictions typical of science fiction novels.

¹⁸ Prampolini, *Arte polimaterica*, cit., p. 13.

¹⁹ Marinetti, 'collaudo i "testi-poemi murali" di carlo belloli', in Belloli, *testi-poemi murali*, cit., p. 3.

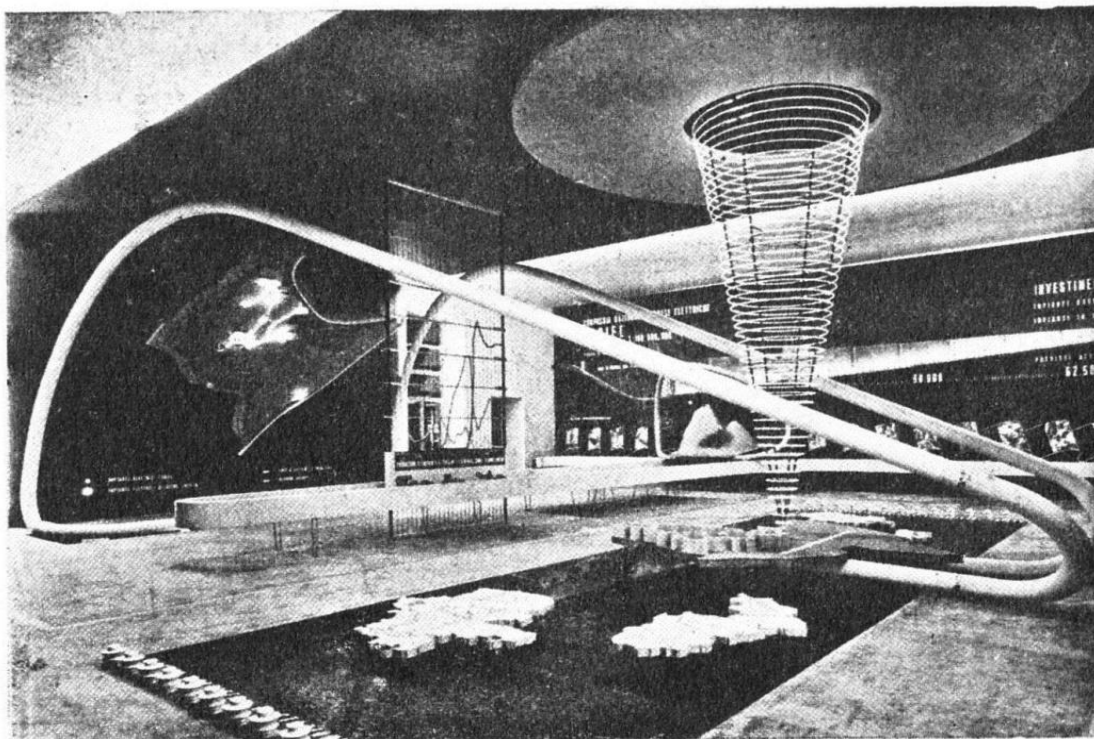
²⁰ *Arte polimaterica*, cit., p. 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²² *Ibid.* In this context it is interesting to note that the 'photoplastics' created by the Macerata Futurist group were also collaborative efforts – their conception, design and execution frequently being credited to several of its members. See above, Chapter Three, and Lista, *Futurismo e fotografia*, cit., p. 309.



Fig. 98 Enrico Prampolini, *Multi-material Automatism 'F'*, 1941
mixed media on board, 32.4 x 40.6 cm, Lugano: private collection



E. PRAMPOLINI. Napoli, 1940. Architettura e polimetrico si identificano nella loro funzionalità costruttiva ed espressiva a servizio della collettività. Interno diagrammatico dimostrativo per una società elettrica.

Fig. 99 Enrico Prampolini, Interior of the Electronics Pavilion at the *First Triennial Exhibition of Italy's Overseas Territories*, Naples, 1940 (taken from Prampolini, *Arte polimaterica*, cit., p. 30)

His unrealised architectural designs for E 42 appear equally 'space-age' in character (as do those of another Futurist, Cesare Poggi), anticipating the pure contours and perfect forms of Oscar Niemeyer's Brasília by almost two decades (**Figs 100-103**).²³ According to Prampolini, the principles of 'TECHNOLOGY [and] ORGANISATION' would be at the basis 'of the new spiritual and social order which will become apparent at the conclusion of the present world war',²⁴ emerging from the ashes of the prevailing industrial culture then in the process of consuming itself on the battlefields of Europe:

While mechanical civilisation, having reached its ultimate point in the current conflagration, has exhausted its ethical and historical role, one can discern the advent of a new civilisation – the *scientific civilisation* – to which we, as innovatory artists, have looked with faith for some time as if to an *unveiled mystery*, and to a new humanity: a *scientific humanity*.²⁵

Such ideas were given symbolic form in an allegorical image of 1942 (**Fig. 107**), in which an amorphous 'heroic' figure discards its earthly, soldierly, form – now nothing more than a broken archaeological fragment – and swoops upward toward the future like a butterfly bursting from its cocoon. To the right of this figure (which possesses a somewhat disquieting intensity) are two geometric shapes enclosed within an amniotic form, suggesting the foundations of a new, more rational, world. One of these is orbited by a tiny sphere that again hints at humanity's cosmic destiny and the final attainment of its long-held dream of liberation from the earth.²⁶

²³ See Crispolti, 'Svolgimenti del futurismo', in *Gli anni Trenta*, cit., p. 177.

²⁴ *Arte polimaterica*, cit., p. 14; original emphasis.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; original emphasis.

²⁶ Analysing this painting in *Mediterraneo Futurista* (15 May 1943, [pp. 12-13]), a commentator identified only as L. S. (perhaps Luigi Scrivo) interpreted the circle and square depicted in the image as symbolic of the spiritual and material aspects of human existence, respectively (BDC / 1979 F. S71, 2109602).

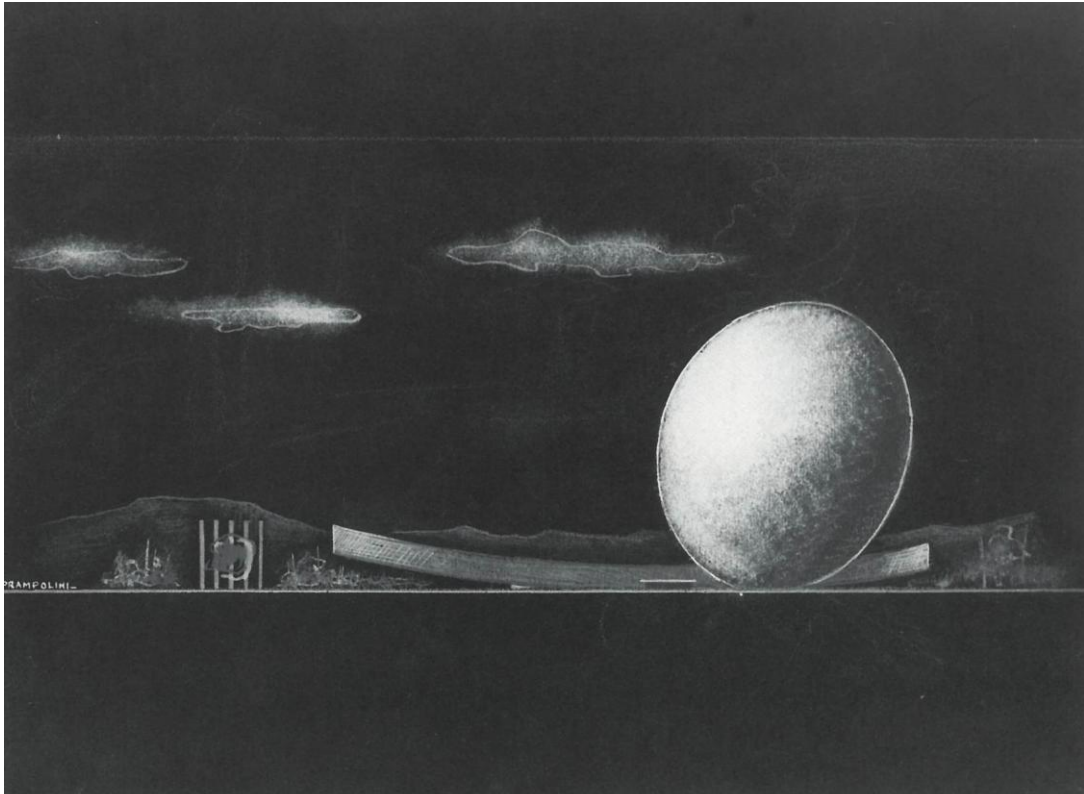


Fig. 100 Enrico Prampolini, *Design for a Theatre at E 42, Rome*, 1940-41
tempera on card, 47 x 65 cm, Rome: private collection



Fig. 101 Haruo Mikami, Photograph of Oscar Niemeyer's Brazilian National Congress
in Brasília (1958), 2015

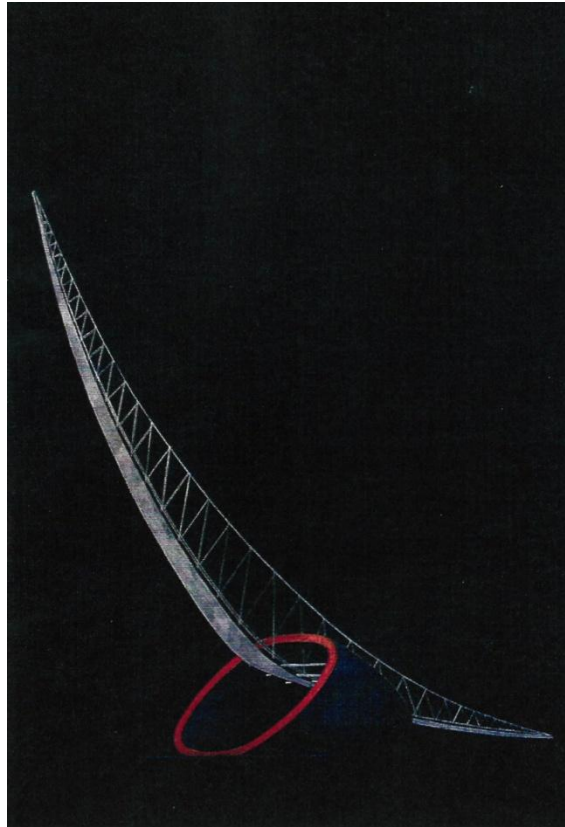


Fig. 102 Enrico Prampolini, *Design for a Multi-material Building at E 42*, 1941
tempera on card, 65.3 x 47.8 cm, private collection

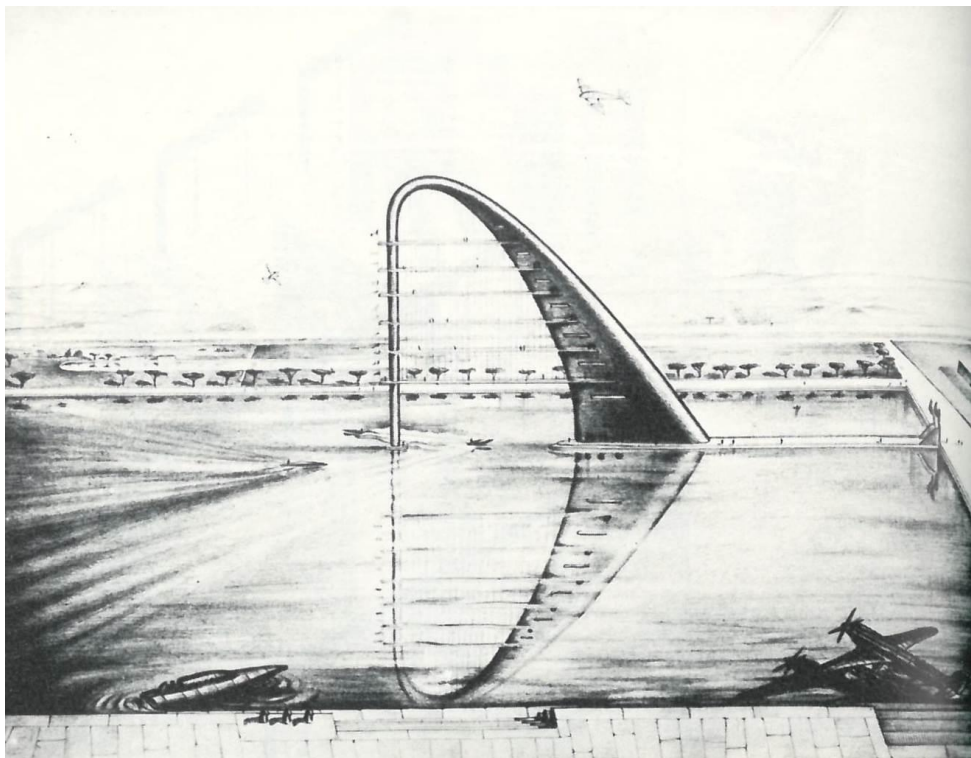


Fig. 103 Cesare Augusto Poggi, *Arched Radio Beacon dedicated to G. Marconi at E 42, Rome*, c. 1941
medium, dimensions and location unknown

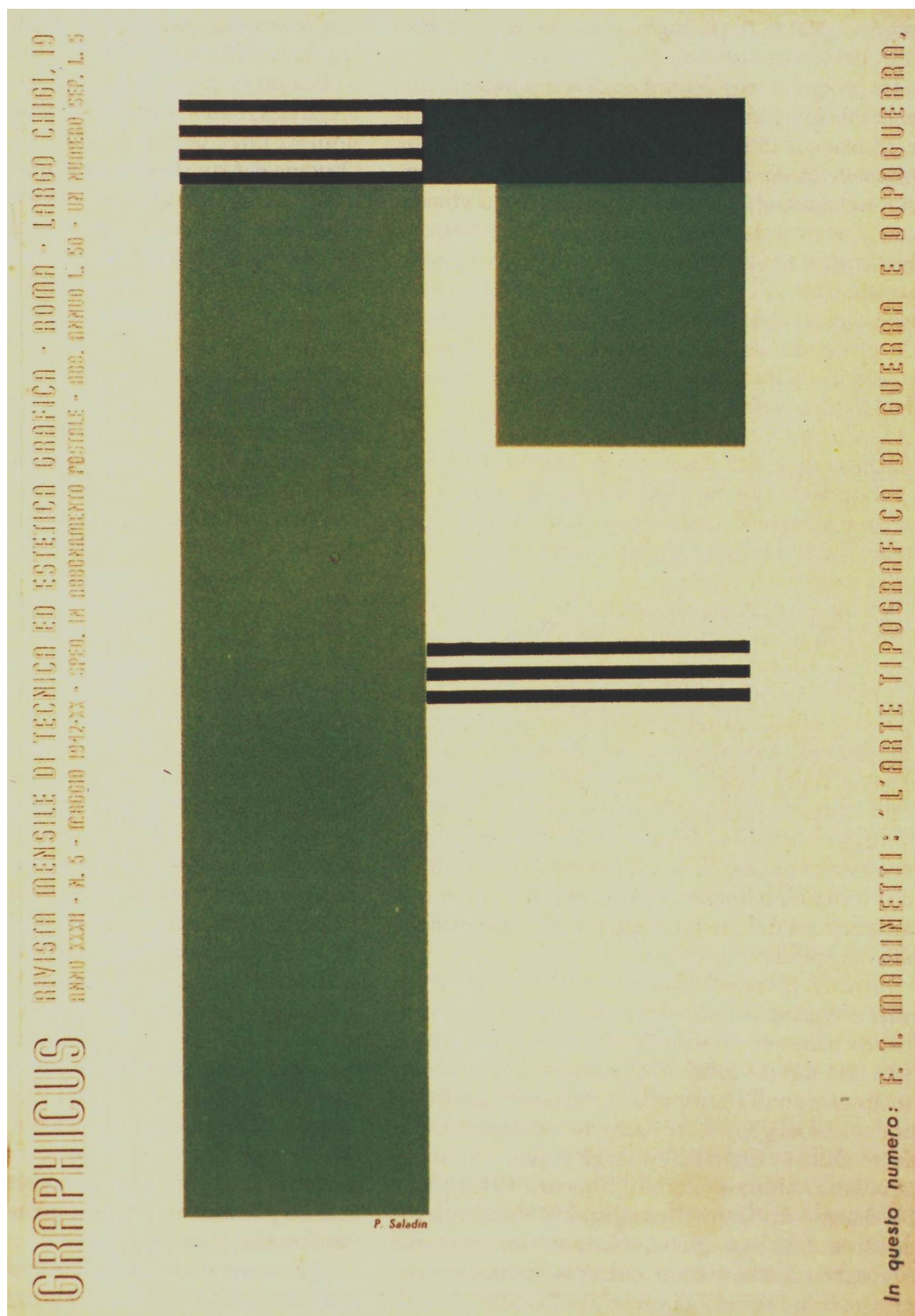


Fig. 104 Paolo Alcidè Saladin, cover of the May 1942 edition of *Graphicus*, including the manifesto 'The Art of Wartime and Post-war Typography'

The speculations of both Depero and Prampolini formed part of a wider Futurist tendency to look beyond prevailing realities at this time (although as Schnapp points out, these impulses were by no means restricted to the Futurist movement).²⁷ Similar forward-looking sentiments were encapsulated in the optimistic title of Piero Bellanova's second 'synthetic novel' *The Great Future* – a volume which, despite being advertised in the preliminary pages of his 1943 anthology *Bombarded Naples Sings*, was never published and indeed may never have been written in the first place. Nevertheless, the title made a brave sound, and its imminent appearance was possibly announced for this reason alone. In any event, it is evident that had Bellanova outlined his vision of this *grande futuro*, his text would only have constituted a personal perspective on the matter, rather than articulate any 'official' line or ideological orientation. Just as artistic Futurism continued to accommodate a range of divergent aesthetic and stylistic approaches at this time, so too it is impossible to identify a unanimous *political* vision for the future of Italy on the part of the movement. Attitudes ranged from the intransigent Nazi-Fascism of Gaetano Pattarozzi to the militant *anti*-Fascism of figures such as Wladimiro Tulli. Somewhere in between these two extremes was Marinetti's own complex brand of ultra-nationalism.

In a letter to Mussolini of 18 October 1943 the Futurist leader admitted to experiencing intense 'sorrow at seeing Italy, you and Fascism assassinated'.²⁸ Yet Agnese has noted how he was also one of several figures who had considered sending a deputation to the fallen Duce immediately after his rescue from prison by Nazi troops that September in order to advise him against 'reviving that which no longer existed either in concrete terms or in the soul of the people', and

²⁷ 'Bruno Munari's Bombs', in Mendelson, *Magazines, Modernity and War*, cit., pp. 155-56.

²⁸ Agnese, *Marinetti*, cit., pp. 303-04.

to impress on him the need for a new, more representative, form of government that would 'transcend Fascism'.²⁹

Marinetti's apparent admiration for Junio Valerio Borghese – maverick Commander of the X^a Mas, the organisation to which the Futurist leader dedicated his final literary work³⁰ – is potentially revealing of his political mindset at this time, insofar as Borghese likewise 'seemed to stress the value of patriotism above (and even without) fascism [...] rather than gathering support for a dying regime'.³¹ Marinetti's acknowledgement of new political realities can be discerned in his adoption of the slogan *adorare l'Italia*³² as the war neared its end, a broadly patriotic appeal that was in marked contrast to the specifically Fascist proclamation of *fede in Mussolini* which figures such as Pattarozzi continued to favour. However, Borghese's later involvement in the 'post-Fascist' Movimento Sociale Italiano, and subsequent role in the formation of the yet more extreme Fronte Nazionale, confirms the true character of his political sympathies, and may therefore also provide clues as to what Marinetti's own ideological orientation would have been had he too survived the conflict. Nevertheless, it is worth

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 300-01.

³⁰ *Quarto d'ora di poesia della X Mas (Musica di sentimenti)* (Milan: Mondadori, 1945); a translation of this text, written the day before Marinetti's death, can be found in Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, *Futurism: An Anthology*, cit., pp. 505-06. Borghese's highly decorated, effective and pioneering naval commando unit was operative throughout the Second World War, being responsible for the sinking of 32 ships prior to the armistice of 1943. Subsequently, its leader elected to remain on the side of the Axis against the invading Allied forces. Due to the esteem in which it was held, Borghese was able to negotiate a high degree of autonomy for his unit within the Italian Social Republic. However, the record of the X^a Mas was ultimately not one of valour and noble independence, but rather of brutal reprisals and atrocities perpetrated against Italian partisans. See Luisa Quartermaine, *Mussolini's Last Republic: Propaganda and Politics in the Italian Social Republic (R. S. I.) 1943-45* (Exeter: Elm Bank, 2000), pp. 36-39.

³¹ Quartermaine, *Mussolini's Last Republic*, cit., p. 39. On this point, see also above, Chapter Five, pp. 186-87.

³² Marinetti distributed postcards bearing this entreaty to members of the Futurist movement *en masse* as defeat began to seem inevitable. See Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 265, and Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', in Rebeschini, *Cralli aeropittore futurista*, cit., p. 172.

considering that the Futurist leader's support for the RSI may have also reflected a quite different form of radicalism for, as has been noted, its establishment 'saw his youthful dream of eliminating the hated monarchy realised, as well as a reflowering [...] of that socialist spirit which had been present in the early political ideology of Futurism and Fascism, but buried by *fascismo trionfante*'.³³ Certainly, Marinetti's 1944 'Futurist Manifesto of *Patriarte*' (a 'fusion of the two sentiments Fatherland [*Patria*] and art')³⁴ reaffirmed those republican sentiments that had informed the movement's initial political programme. Yet it is also true that these had gained in intensity primarily as a consequence of the monarchy's leading role in the collapse of Mussolini's regime, Marinetti's text describing it as an institution 'synonymous with betrayal'.³⁵

Ultimately, despite his initial 'intellectual' misgivings as to the wisdom of reviving Fascism, Marinetti's emotional attachment to the movement never completely evaporated. If, as D'Ambrosio has claimed, the majority of Futurists remained loyal to their own leader at this time out of 'a mixture of admiration, sympathy and [...] solidarity [...] – an attitude that was not without profoundly personal roots',³⁶ much the same can undoubtedly be said of the ties that continued to bind Marinetti to his Duce.

However, it is a rarely noted fact that not all of those figures associated with Marinetti's movement agreed with his tacit endorsement of republican Fascism, and that certain artists fought for a future quite different to that actively proposed by Pattarozzi and his ilk. Naturally, it is difficult to gauge precise levels either of hostility or support for the regime during the period 1940-44, given that the voicing of anti-Fascist sentiments could be a futile and dangerous undertaking. Nevertheless, in light of the aforementioned blanket criticism of Futurism's

³³ De Maria, 'Marinetti poeta e ideologo', in Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, cit., p. xcix.

³⁴ 'Manifesto futurista della patriarte', in Farris, *Manifesti futuristi savonesi*, cit., p. 78.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Futurismo a Napoli*, cit., p. 221.

wartime record – often unfavourably compared to that of other artistic associations such as Corrente³⁷ – it is particularly important to highlight instances of political dissent within the movement's ranks at this time.

On 14 August 1943 Francesco Rampa Rossi expressed his long-standing sense of political impotence and isolation in a letter to Depero: 'I recall the many humiliations I have endured, I recall how dear friends called me a bourgeois when I expressed my sense of shame over the bombardment of London by the Italians [...]. It was necessary to applaud massacres, violence, incarcerations.'³⁸ For some, such as Farfa and Thayaht, the spell cast by Fascism would only appear to have been broken upon the regime's collapse, occasioning a fair amount of soul-searching.³⁹ Yet others, such as Mario Radice, had already begun openly to express a strong sense of disaffection and protest in their works. In 1943, Radice temporarily set aside his characteristic 'concrete' brand of abstraction to produce a series of arresting and anguished images that depict ghostly figures lurking amidst the ruins of devastated landscapes, or raising their arms to the sky in a gesture of anger, despair, or both. Two such images, titled *Collapse* and *Alarm* (**Figs 105, 106**) were exhibited at that year's Quadriennale; clearly, neither were inspired by Fascist rhetoric, calculated to bolster the regime, or to raise morale.

Other artists were stronger still in condemning Fascism, manifesting their desire actively to bring about a new world grounded in rational principles, rather than faith in the slogans of charismatic prophets. Their militant commitment to this vision challenges the perception of the movement as one united in undiminished enthusiasm for Fascism.

³⁷ See above, Chapter One, pp. 31-32.

³⁸ Quoted in Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 281.

³⁹ Ibid. pp. 281-82; Scappini, *Thayaht*, cit., p. 156.

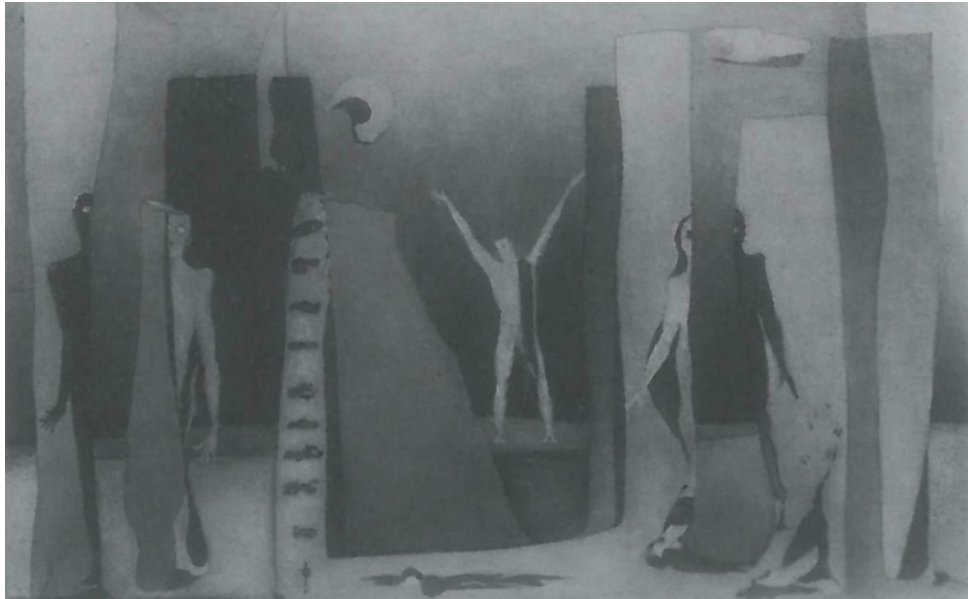


Fig. 105 Mario Radice, *Alarm (Composition with Figures)*, 1943
medium, dimensions and location unknown

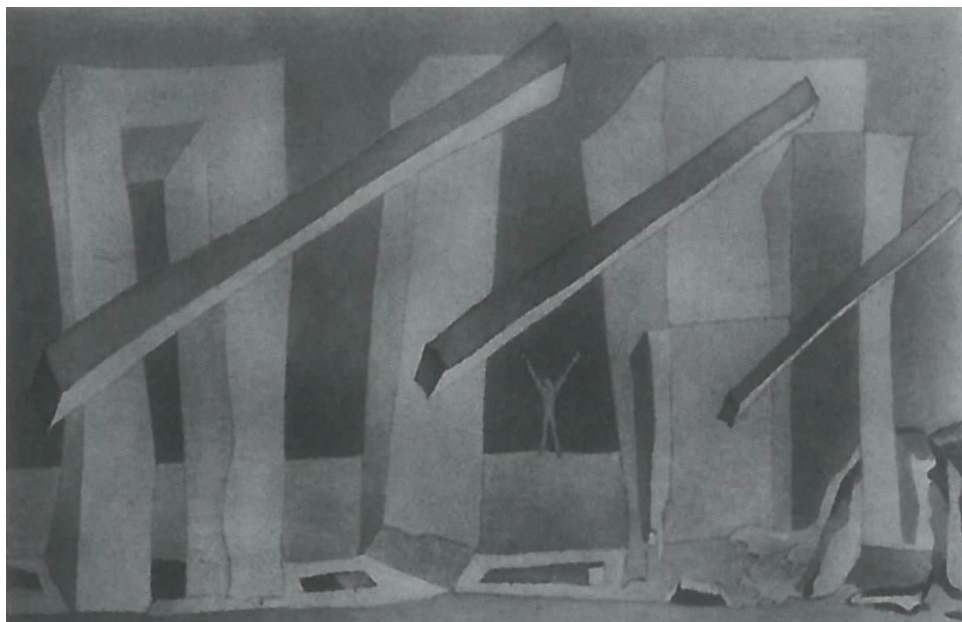


Fig. 106 Mario Radice, *Collapse (Composition with Figures)*, 1943
medium, dimensions and location unknown

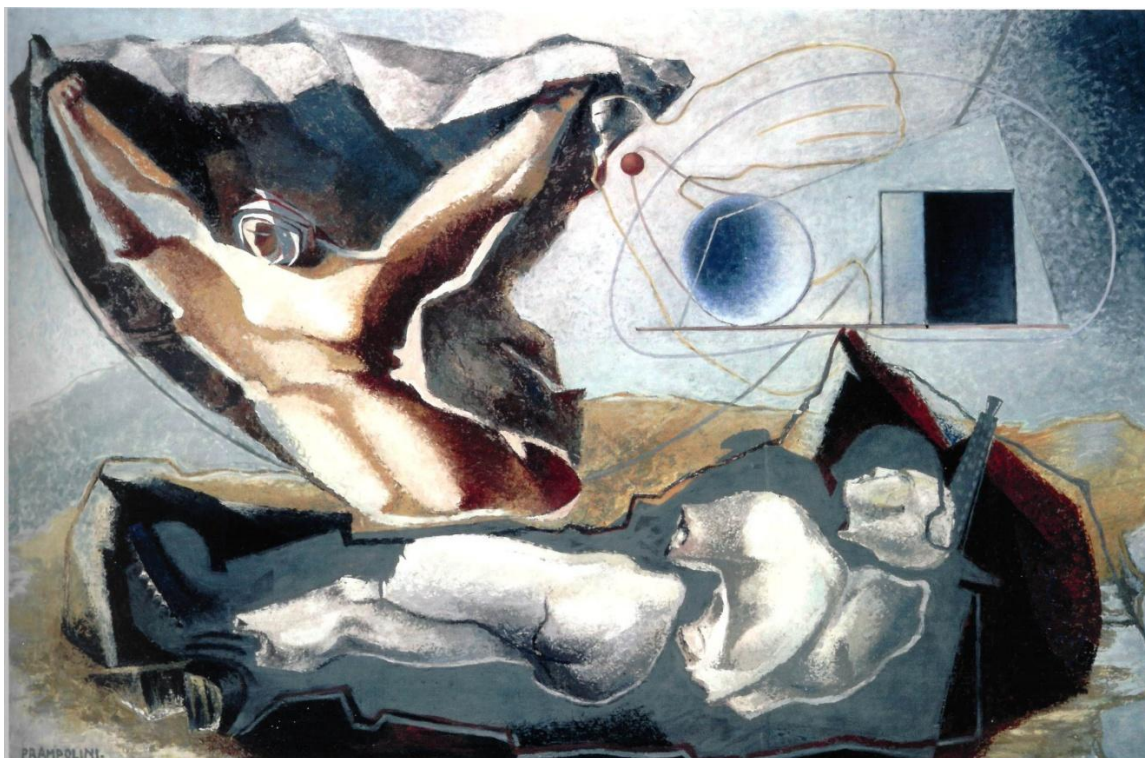


Fig. 107 Enrico Prampolini, *Metamorphosis of the Hero and of the New Europe*, 1942
oil on board, 121 x 186 cm, Frankfurt: VAF Foundation



Fig. 108 Mario Radice, *Collapse A 7*, 1943, tempera on paper, 30 x 38 cm, Sergio Tomasinelli Collection

Sante Monachesi was one such figure, leading the liberation of political prisoners from Rome's Regina Coeli prison on 26 July 1943, immediately after the fall of Mussolini.⁴⁰ The following June, Wladimiro Tulli undertook even more direct anti-Fascist action, participating in events that led to the expulsion of German troops from Macerata as a member of the Banda Nicolò partisan unit. He subsequently enrolled as a volunteer in the 'Cremona' Combat Group, going on to fight Nazi-Fascism on Germany's defensive Gothic Line, which bisected the Italian peninsula north of Florence.⁴¹ Like many of his fellow partisans, Tulli chronicled his experiences in a series of terse drawings. These retain the delicate poetry of his earlier collages, yet also serve a documentary purpose, recording for posterity the faces of his comrades and tragic scenes of wartime brutality (Figs 109, 110).⁴²

Verossi was also involved in the partisan struggle. In a biographical note, Giancarlo Furlan and Giorgio Tirelli state that in 1945, having participated in 'a last desperate attempt to save the nation from the burning fury of National Socialism, he was murdered by a drunken soldier'.⁴³ This is confirmed by Anna Chiara Tommasi in her own biography of the artist,⁴⁴ where she specifies the nationality of the soldier (German) and the date of Verossi's death (26 April 1945) as recorded by the Italian National Partisan Association (ANPI).

The artist Sibò expressed his sense of outrage in the face of such acts in a drawing of 1944 titled

⁴⁰ Papetti, *Monachesi e l'Europa*, cit., p. 83.

⁴¹ Armando Ginesi, *Tulli: i valori della Resistenza come coscienza storica – Inediti sulla Resistenza – 1944-1984* (Macerata: Coopedit, [1984]), n. p.

⁴² Ibid. I am grateful to Umberto Tulli for bringing this aspect of his uncle's life and work to my attention. On the art of the partisans, see also *Against Mussolini: Art and the Fall of a Dictator*, exh. cat. (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2010), pp. 43, 58-62, and Franco Ragazzi, 'Arte e cultura nella montagna partigiana', in *Arte della libertà. Antifascismo, guerra e liberazione in Europa 1925-1945*, exh. cat. (Milan: Mazzotta, 1995), pp. 73-76.

⁴³ *Verossi aeropittore futurista*, exh. cat. (Turin: Galleria d'Arte Narciso, 1992), n. p.

⁴⁴ *Verossi aeropittore futurista*, exh. cat. (Verona: Galleria dello Scudo, 1992), p. 33.

Death of a Partisan, to which he appended the following text:

Death has seized a partisan
 He lies in a wood amongst barbed wire
 His contours blend with it
 A scarf around his throat
 At the moment of death he clenched a fist
 A gesture against Nazi ferocity
 Against all wars
 Against domination and tyranny
 For a better world
 For those who will come after him
 So that they might live in peace
 Summer 44 Sibò⁴⁵

One might object that these acknowledgements of the evils of Fascism count for little, given their retrospective character. However, as both Marla Stone and Christopher Duggan have noted, such belated conversions were in no sense unique to the Futurists: 'In reality it seems that very few [writers, artists and filmmakers] in 1939, 1940 or 1941 saw their political future other than in terms of Fascism (in some form).'⁴⁶ Moreover, it is clear that the image of uncompromising political radicalism popularly associated with a number of prominent artists following the war fails accurately to reflect their true positions during and before the conflict:

Many of the leading figures of the post-war cultural and political scene [...] Renato Guttuso among them [...] were frequently inclined to look back on their 'criticism' [of

⁴⁵ <http://www.sibofuturista.com/#!Sibò> - Morte di un partigiano - tecnica mista 1944/zoom/cay5/image1ju8 [accessed 8 July 2016].

⁴⁶ Christopher Duggan, 'From Apotheosis to Damnation: Mussolini and the Fascist Regime, 1936-45', in *Against Mussolini*, cit., pp. 7-14 (p. 11). See also Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., p. 9, and above, Chapter One, pp. 31-32.



Fig. 109 Wladimiro Tulli, *Vallescura di Monastero*, 1944, ink on paper, 23 x 33 cm, private collection



Fig. 110 Wladimiro Tulli, *Hanged!*, 1944, ink on paper, 27.5 x 16 cm, private collection

the regime] and construe it as nascent 'anti-Fascism'. From a psychological and developmental point of view this was understandable, not least as many of those who had been heavily involved in the cultural life of the regime in the late 1930s and early 1940s passed after the war into the ranks of the Communist Party: with hindsight it made sense for them to read their challenging approach to Fascism as incipient opposition and rejection. But that was to read history backwards.⁴⁷

Until recently, superficial or prejudiced secondary accounts, born mostly of a failure or disinclination to examine hard-to-find but revealing original sources, imagery and creative texts, have persisted in offering a simplistic and one-dimensional picture of the scope of Futurist activity during the 1940s. Yet it is evident from any objective analysis of the facts that 'during the period spanning Italy's entry into the [Second World] war and the death of Marinetti [...] [Futurism] was far more complex than studies have thus far acknowledged'.⁴⁸ The eventual disintegration of the movement in the wake of World War Two was not due to an earlier, catastrophic loss of creative vision on the part of its painters and poets, nor to any renunciation of its forward-looking remit, as some scholars have claimed. Rather, it had more to do with the fact that Futurist artists, stigmatised and disorientated, found themselves unable – or unwilling – to negotiate the paradigm shift in Italian culture that occurred following Marinetti's death in December 1944 and the final collapse of Fascism five months later. Thereafter, this once most dynamic of movements truly started to lose momentum, the energies of its artists being largely dissipated and their activities becoming fragmentary and piecemeal. This disheartening state of affairs was, however, due to a number of factors, not all of which were external to the movement.

⁴⁷ Duggan, 'From Apotheosis to Damnation', cit., p. 11.

⁴⁸ D'Ambrosio, 'La guerra nella letteratura futurista', cit., p. 189.

Among the Futurists themselves, some figures were keen immediately to reconnect, regroup and resume coordinated artistic activity. Yet the practical obstacles to any such plans were formidable, as Alberto Sartoris noted in a letter to Crali of 26 July 1946:

I have so many things to tell you about a new artistic group that I would like to put together, but how is this to be done now that we have all been scattered to the four winds? It would be necessary to see each other regularly in order to define our exact position and our future activity. I have received good news of Depero, Prampolini, Dal Monte, Acquaviva, Marasco, Andreoni, Radice and Rho. Each of us is awaiting the moment to resume our work. I may be able to organise some exhibitions abroad, but only when peace is established will we be able to overcome the serious customs issues involved. [...] Send me some photographs, because I would like to have an idea of your most recent works. Do you have any news of Renato di Bosso?⁴⁹

These years were also unpropitious as regards any attempt to re-launch the movement, due to the character of Futurism's previous ideological affiliations. Crali noted how, in the post-war era, Futurist paintings were 'like truffles – it's rare to find them and they stink (because they are "Fascist" according to journalistic criticism)'.⁵⁰ Moreover, it soon became apparent that no consensus existed among the surviving Futurists as to the best way forward. Once their immediate post-war sense of disorientation abated, many were reluctant to revive a movement the aesthetic innovations and lessons of which were already being fully absorbed by other schools and artistic tendencies. Some welcomed this process of diffusion and even actively engaged with other artists who acknowledged the inspiration of Futurism in their work. This was, for example, the case with Prampolini, who enthusiastically promoted the work of the Forma group in his capacity as Vice President of The Art Club, founded in Rome in 1945. Forma emerged in 1947 as a reaction against what it described as the 'dull and conformist realism that

⁴⁹ Cra.3.251. As noted in my Introduction, Crali later sought out Di Bosso in Verona where, much to Crali's disdain, the latter had been working as an antiques dealer since the end of the war.

⁵⁰ Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', cit., p. 205.

the most recent experiences in painting and sculpture have proven to be a narrow and dismal path'.⁵¹ Despite its Marxist orientation, this association perhaps owed more to the pioneering work of the Futurists than any other group at this time. Dorazio's kaleidoscopic grids were, in fact, directly informed by Giacomo Balla's 1912 series *Iridescent Interpenetrations*, which he had admired at first hand during a visit to the elderly artist's studio in the early 1950s.⁵² In 1948, the group organised an exhibition titled *Abstract Art in Italy* that publicly acknowledged its debts to Futurism. The first room proudly displayed not only works by the early Futurists (many of which were supplied by Marinetti's widow, Benedetta) but also pieces by abstract artists who had been associated with the movement in its later years, such as Rho and Radice.⁵³

Farfa also successfully adapted to the post-war status quo. The playful and absurdist spirit that had characterised his Futurist work was championed by Enrico Baj during the 1950s in the context of the short-lived Movimento Nucleare. In 1959 Farfa signed the group's manifesto 'Interplanetary Art', the language of which was strongly reminiscent of Futurism's more extravagant proclamations, while its ideas addressed those 'cosmic' themes that had been typical of the movement's later phases:

Do not ask too much, but ask much, of our works: they contain our passionate and innovatory desire to take part, against sterile and rotten abstraction, in human knowledge in its latest aspects, to free ourselves from our tyrant earth by transcending the conventional and already abandoned law of gravity; at the risk that our brushes and

⁵¹ From an untitled statement, dated 15 March 1947, which appeared on the front page of *Forma 1. Mensile di Arti Figurative* (1947). Repr in *Forma 1: The First Postwar Abstract Movement in Italy*, cit., p. 95. The signatories of this 'manifesto' were the artists Carla Accardi, Ugo Attardi, Pietro Consagra, Piero Dorazio, Mino Guerrini, Achille Perilli, Antonio Sanfilippo and Giulio Turcato.

⁵² Calvesi, 'Informel and Abstraction in Italian Art of the Fifties', in Braun, *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, cit., p. 293.

⁵³ Landini, "'Forma 1': Ideology and Linguistic Renewal', in *Forma 1: The First Postwar Abstract Movement in Italy*, cit., p. 38.

colours slide out of human control and that our words and typographical characters float in mid-air, in revolt against canvas and paper, like sodium vapour and crystal lithium in suspension in the dense atmosphere of Mars, in the rosy oceans of Venus, in the black depths of Neptune, in the rainbow rings of Saturn.⁵⁴

However, there were also those like Crali and Enzo Benedetto whose inflexible, dogmatic adherence to Marinetti's movement meant they adapted less well, fiercely resisting what they saw as the disembodied, de-contextualised reincarnation of Futurism's principles. For them, the movement remained the pioneering avant-garde *par excellence*, one that was able to incorporate and assimilate new associations, artists and aesthetics, but which could itself never be assimilated or absorbed. These figures were united in their belief that Futurism could outlive the tragedy of the Second World War just as it had the First, maintaining that it remained a relevant, revolutionary force in contemporary culture and rejecting the views of other figures who took a more realistic view of the prevailing situation. In his memoirs, Crali describes the Futurist 'summit' of 26 February 1950 which highlighted the divergent attitudes among the movement's surviving members:

Futurist meeting in Milan. Those present are Buzzi, Mazza, Benedetta (Cappa) [Marinetti], Masnata, Crali, Scurto, Acquaviva, Munari and Andreoni. Benedetta's intention to archive the movement, declaring it finished, quickly becomes apparent. The workshop is closed! There are those who for one reason or another think this would be a good idea – the spent forces, the dead weights, the speculators. I rebel in the clearest possible terms: 'The idea of a Futurist Gallery should be revived, something announced, desired and realised by Marinetti eight years ago with its temporary location in Piazza Adriana, Rome. Let's gather together everything that has been dispersed and make a permanent home for it in Milan. This will be the centre around which Futurism will

⁵⁴ Published in January 1959, 'Interplanetary Art' was signed by several artists including Farfa and Baj. Repr. in Tristan Sauvage, *Nuclear Art* (Stockholm: Eric Diefenbronner, 1962), pp. 211-13. Antonino Tullier was another erstwhile Futurist briefly associated with the Movimento Nucleare (see above, Chapter Five, p. 189).

continue to develop, at least for as long as we Futurists remain alive and working. It's what Marinetti wanted, as he told us in Venice:⁵⁵ "You must defend and promote Futurism." I do not intend to bury Futurism now that he is no longer with us. Marinetti has gone but the Futurists remain! If you wish to become bourgeois then so be it. I'm carrying on!' The meeting closes: the movement falls to pieces, Futurism continues. [...] A wretched and ridiculous end for a bunch of anti-traditionalist revolutionaries.⁵⁶

Undoubtedly, there was an element of nostalgia in Crali's attitude, an understandable reluctance to say goodbye to past glories. For Crali and others like him, the 1930s and (especially) the early 1940s had represented a pinnacle of success, when their works were exhibited prominently at the Venice Biennale, when they received official commissions and government subsidies to produce works of war art, when they were associated with a movement that was internationally respected and recognised as being of fundamental importance in the development of modernism, and when the establishment of a national gallery devoted to the art of their movement was in the planning stages. The death of Marinetti and the collapse of Fascism pulled the rug from under the feet of such painters, returning them to relative obscurity. Yet Crali's angry objection that Benedetta 'had no right to ask the Futurists to live in the past'⁵⁷ was unfair and misplaced. In fact, it would appear that her intention was to do precisely the opposite, and thereby stay true to the spirit of the movement. As Verdone has observed:

In the face of the surprising activity of an artist such as Gerardo Dottori, who at the age of eighty-six still paints Futurist paintings, one might say that Futurism continues to be

⁵⁵ Crali refers here to the final Futurist reunion of January 1944 (see above, Chapter Five, pp. 206-08).

⁵⁶ Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', cit., p. 185. The date of the meeting – which took place in the home of the Futurist poet Pino Masnata – is confirmed by the latter's invitation to Crali (Cra.3.357). In 1948, the first Rome Quadriennale of the post-war period dedicated a large retrospective to Futurism that was organised in conjunction with Benedetta Marinetti – a fact which perhaps already revealed her desire to historicise the movement. See Salaris, *La Quadriennale*, cit., p. 70.

⁵⁷ Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', cit., p. 185.

alive to this day. And yet we must consider the movement in its unity and its presence – beyond individual artists who persist in their work. [...] The neo-avant-garde, having admitted the ‘historical’ importance of Futurism – having consigned it to the museum – has also negated it [...]. And one must recognise, whether one wants to or not, that it has done so in accordance with Futurist theory.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ ‘Per una storicizzazione: 1909-1944’, in Verdone, *Che cosa è il Futurismo*, cit., p. 112.