

CHAPTER TWO – CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

I. CULTURAL POLITICS AND THE VISUAL ARTS IN THE TWILIGHT YEARS OF ITALIAN FASCISM

The historian Marla Stone has identified three phases in the relationship between artists and Mussolini's regime during the course of the Fascist *ventennio*; the period under consideration in the present thesis falls within the last of these, spanning the years 1937-43.¹ During this time the vexed, and still unresolved, issue of 'Fascist art'² became the focus of greater attention than ever before, as ideas imported from Germany concerning (or rather, questioning) the worth of any painting or sculpture which could not be demonstrated to be racially 'pure' or politically expedient gained currency. The tenor of this debate was especially polemical between the years 1937 and 1939. Ultimately, however, it cannot be said to have forced any fundamental reorientation of the regime's (remarkably tolerant) approach to artistic matters. In order to contextualise the period of particular interest to us here, it will be necessary briefly to characterise the evolution of Fascism's distinctive approach to cultural politics.³

The first of the phases identified by Stone (1925-30) witnessed the 'professional and institutional regimentation'⁴ of painters and sculptors – in common with the practitioners of

¹ *The Patron State*, cit., p. 7.

² This debate had its origins in 1926, when Fascist minister Giuseppe Bottai launched a survey on the matter through the pages of his journal *Critica Fascista*. See *The Patron State*, cit., pp. 43-54, and Philip V. Cannistraro, 'Fascism and Culture in Italy, 1919-1945', in Braun, *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, cit., pp. 147-54 (pp. 150-51).

³ An in-depth examination of this subject – particularly in regard to the years 1925-36 – is outside the scope of this thesis, and is exhaustively treated in Stone's excellent volume, in addition to being addressed in Cioli's aforementioned *Il fascismo e la 'sua' arte* and many other studies of a similar nature.

⁴ *The Patron State*, cit., p. 178.

other trades and professions – through the establishment of artists' unions and the official programme of provincial, inter-provincial and national exhibitions they coordinated. In the absence of any government directives concerning aesthetic matters, such measures aimed to ensure that 'people active in the visual arts were drawn into a working relationship with the regime by the practical benefits of exhibitions, prizes and acquisitions [full access to which could be denied those who failed to register in the appropriate *sindacato*]⁵ instituted by the cultural bureaucracy in an attempt to guarantee consensus'.⁶ To a similar end, the second period (1931-36) was marked by a more proactive approach to the problem. During these years of state-sponsored eclecticism, a number of formal vocabularies – from 'the rhetorically "Fascist," yet abstract work of the futurists [to] the classicizing modernism of the novecento'⁷ – were not merely passively tolerated but actively promoted as valid expressions of the Fascist sensibility. This was particularly evident in the realm of architecture: the Rationalism of figures such as Giuseppe Terragni, the more monumental and austere *stile littorio* of Marcello Piacentini, and the anachronistically ornate and rhetorical manner of Angelo Binaghi were all accorded official recognition and support through important and high-profile commissions. These included some of the architects' most emblematic works: Binaghi's Carabinieri headquarters in Cagliari (1930-33), Piacentini's Senate building for the University of Rome (1933-35) and Terragni's Fascist party headquarters (Casa del Fascio) in Como – his undisputed masterpiece, and the most outstanding example of Italian Rationalism (1932-36).⁸

⁵ Ibid., pp. 25-28.

⁶ Luciano Caramel, 'Abstract Art in Italy in the Thirties', in Braun, *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, cit., pp. 187-92 (p. 190).

⁷ Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., p. 178.

⁸ For a concise theoretical introduction to architecture during the Fascist era, see Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 3rd rev. edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), pp. 203-09; pp. 214-15. For a more visual overview see Rossana Bossaglia, *Ritratto di un'idea. Arte e architettura nel fascismo*, exh. cat. (Milan: Mondadori; Bologna: Galleria d'Arte Cinquantasei, 2002). See also Dennis P.

In their own ways, both of these phases reflected the non-coercive character of Fascism's approach to cultural politics – the Duce refusing to endorse, let alone impose, any one style, tendency or school as the official art (or architecture) of the state, preferring instead to co-opt figures with a range of different cultural and aesthetic affiliations into the Fascist system rather than needlessly alienate such potentially subversive elements. Consequently, in cultural matters – as in other areas of policy – Fascism came to represent something of a 'magic mirror in which everyone [...] could see his heart's desire'.⁹ If traditional artists believed that the regime's emphasis on *italianità* and *romanità* reflected their own values, the same was also true of avant-garde figures such as the aesthetic theorist Carlo Belli, in whose writings the 'formal order [of geometric abstraction] was equated with the political order of Fascism'.¹⁰ Ultimately, whilst Mussolini proclaimed that 'art belongs to the realm of the individual [...] the state has only one duty: not to sabotage it, to give artists human conditions, and to encourage them from an artistic and national standpoint',¹¹ the regime's approach to cultural matters can be said to have been dictated more by opportunism than by the widespread existence of enlightened attitudes toward the arts within the Fascist hierarchy.

Such pluralism not only enabled *artists* to be manipulated by the regime, but also proved useful to the Duce as a means of controlling rival factions within the National Fascist Party (PNF) itself. Mussolini's high-profile endorsement of the Gruppo Toscano's sleek design for Florence's Santa Maria Novella railway station in June 1934 is a case in point. Rather than betokening an official

Doordan, *Building Modern Italy: Italian Architecture 1914-1936* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988).

⁹ Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (New York: Vintage, 1983), p. 40.

¹⁰ Caramel, 'Abstract Art in Italy in the Thirties', cit., p. 190.

¹¹ Mussolini made this statement in the course of a speech inaugurating an exhibition by the Novecento group in the early 1920s; quoted in Claudia Salaris, *La Quadriennale. Storia della rassegna d'arte italiana dagli anni Trenta a oggi / History of the Exhibition of Italian Art from the Thirties to Today* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004), pp. 15-19.

commitment to Modernist architecture on the part of the regime, as some initially hoped,¹² it represented an opportunity for the Fascist leader to undermine the altogether wider conservative socio-political agenda of Roberto Farinacci and his followers, who had spoken out vehemently against both this building and the Rationalist ‘new town’ of Sabaudia in parliament that May.¹³ As Doordan has observed: ‘cultural debates [...] [often] reflected a deeper struggle, within the Fascist party, over the control and direction of the “Fascist Revolution.”’¹⁴ Consequently, the fortunes of particular artistic groups or tendencies could fluctuate as and when political exigencies demanded – a fact that is important to bear in mind when attempting to analyse and interpret the vicissitudes of the relationship between Futurism and Fascism between 1937 and 1943, as we shall see.

Regardless of its motivations, Fascism’s approach to artistic matters ensured a more or less steady flow of oxygen to Italy’s cultural producers that was denied German artists as a consequence of Nazism’s emphasis on repression and persecution over the well-established Italian tradition of *trasformismo*.¹⁵ Nevertheless, around 1936, when the existence of a Rome-Berlin Axis was formally recognised, ‘the pressures of the [new] alliance forced a reconsideration

¹² See Doordan, *Building Modern Italy*, cit., p. 109.

¹³ Ibid. On Farinacci see below, and Chapter Three. Inaugurated on 15 April 1934, Sabaudia was constructed in the reclaimed marshlands of the Agro Pontino near Rome to a design by several former members of the Italian Movement for Rationalist Architecture, or MIAR (1930-31). On Sabaudia, see Doordan, *Building Modern Italy*, cit., pp. 105-09, and Giorgio Muratore, Daniela Carfagna and Mario Tieghi, eds, *Sabaudia, 1934. Il sogno di una città nuova e l’architettura razionalista / The Dream of a New Town and Rationalistic Architecture*, exh. cat. (Sabaudia: Comune di Sabaudia, [1998]).

¹⁴ *Building Modern Italy*, cit., p. 110.

¹⁵ A political tactic much employed during Italy’s pre-Fascist Liberal era – but particularly associated with the leadership of Agostino Depretis during the decade spanning the late 1870s and 1880s – whereby centrist parliamentary majorities were maintained through the absorption (and thus neutralisation) of latently divisive elements on both the moderate left and right wings.

and a realignment of cultural forces',¹⁶ polarising opinions on the issue of Fascist art and radicalising the terms of the debate. Hitler's robust, interventionist approach to artistic matters and crusade against *Entartete Kunst* was admired by an increasingly vocal conservative element within Italy's political and cultural establishment. This reactionary wing believed that the existence of Nazism's alternative ideological model strengthened its own call for more stringent regulations on artistic expression, the ultimate aim of which was to foster an indigenous Italian culture cleansed of any international or 'Jewish' influences.

Although a number of journalists, cultural commentators and artists raised their voices both for and against tighter controls at this time, the figureheads of each faction were actually high-ranking Fascist officials: one-time Party Secretary Roberto Farinacci, and Giuseppe Bottai, Minister for National Education between 1936 and 1943. For the former, true Fascist art was that which addressed socio-political themes with didactic intent in an easily digestible figurative style. By contrast, whilst Bottai agreed that art should contribute to the life of the nation and reflect its values, he maintained that its political dimension should be implicit rather than explicit. Rejecting Farinacci's emphasis on stylistic and thematic control, Bottai argued that a vibrant and diverse artistic culture was the best advertisement for Fascism, asserting that 'work lacking artistic quality, whatever its ideological or emotional content, is [...] politically useless'.¹⁷ As Cannistraro has observed: 'always the "liberal" Fascist, Bottai stressed the state's role as a stimulant to artistic labour rather than as an infringement on "free creativity"'¹⁸ – an open-minded attitude that was also reflected in the diverse opinions accommodated by his cultural journal *Primato* between 1940 and 1943.¹⁹ In 1939, Farinacci and Bottai both established

¹⁶ Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., p. 191.

¹⁷ From a speech delivered at the inauguration of the 1938 Venice Biennale; cited by Stone, *ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁸ 'Fascism and Culture in Italy', cit., p. 151.

¹⁹ In this sense *Primato* complemented another of Bottai's journals, *Critica Fascista* (1923-43), which represented a similarly open forum for debate on a far wider range of social and political issues

painting competitions intended to enshrine and promote their divergent visions of Fascist art. The former's Cremona Prize, named after the city of which he was the Fascist *ras*, gave artists little room for manoeuvre, insisting on their engagement with overtly political themes by specifying the subject matter to be interpreted at each of the events. 'Listening to a Speech by the Duce on the Radio' was one of only two options given to painters at the first exhibition (**Fig. 2**), the other being 'States of Mind Created by Fascism'.²⁰ Bottai's Bergamo Prize was considerably more open, allowing artists far greater latitude not only in terms of subject matter (landscapes and figure studies being the topics selected for the first two competitions, the final two exhibitions specifying no obligatory themes whatsoever) but also in terms of their stylistic choices.²¹ Bottai's exhibitions attracted the participation of artists such as Renato Guttuso and Emilio Vedova – painters who would be at the forefront of the immediate post-war avant-garde, and whose 'anguished' expressionism²² and increasingly critical stance in relation to Fascism rendered them not entirely unproblematic figures from the regime's point of view.²³

The discussion concerning Fascist art therefore rumbled on into the early years of the war. But

concerning the direction of modern Italy and Mussolini's regime. On Bottai, see Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Giuseppe Bottai. Un fascista critico* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).

²⁰ The Cremona Prize ran annually until 1941. See Chiara Tellini Perina, 'Il Premio Cremona: "questo novecentismo fascista: forte, vigoroso, epico, romano"' (R. Farinacci, 1940)', in *Gli anni del Premio Bergamo. Arte in Italia intorno agli anni Trenta*, exh. cat. (Milan: Electa, 1993), pp. 51-57; see also Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., pp. 181-86.

²¹ See Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., pp. 188-90, and *Gli anni del Premio Bergamo*, cit. The final annual Bergamo Prize was held in 1942. On Futurism's response to both Bottai's and Farinacci's initiatives, see below, Chapter Three.

²² Monica Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2013), p. 164.

²³ See below, pp. 54-55. The extent of Bottai's liberalism in cultural matters is surprising, and for this reason he is frequently identified as 'one of the more intelligent fascists' (Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, cit., p. 123). However, as Bohm-Duchen points out (*Art and the Second World War*, cit., p. 164), any evaluation of his character must also take into account the fact that he was an enthusiastic supporter of Fascism's Race Laws.

by then it was in truth merely an echo of the more intense and vitriolic debate that had taken place during the late 1930s. Any illusions entertained by the extreme Right that its hatred for modern art might become enshrined in law, as in Nazi Germany, were quick to evaporate – a fact of which Greenberg was unable to take account in his aforementioned essay ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch’.²⁴ This was partly due to Mussolini’s continued evasiveness regarding cultural matters, and partly, perhaps, a consequence of his aforementioned desire to maintain control over those individuals or groups who sought to force his hand on particular issues, or to seek hegemony for their views within the PNF. As we shall see in Chapter Six, Marinetti himself would appear to have perceived that the forces of reaction had been routed even before Italy entered the Second World War in the summer of 1940. Certainly, there seems to be little evidence to support the assertion that the ‘concerted frontal assault from conservative and anti-modernist Fascists [...] succeeded in crushing artistic freedom’.²⁵ Rather, as Stone observes:

The pro-Nazi right’s attempt to wage a degenerate art campaign in Fascist Italy failed. Sixteen years of official sanction for modernist and avant-garde-influenced art and architecture had produced movements that were committed to defending their styles and saw their approaches as authentically Fascist [...]. Further, much of the cultural bureaucracy was not behind the crusade.²⁶

The works exhibited at the Cremona Prize epitomise the first of four dominant tendencies within

²⁴ See above, Chapter One, pp. 28-29.

²⁵ Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 256.

²⁶ *The Patron State*, cit., pp. 193-94. On the repercussions of the ‘degenerate’ art campaign within Italy see, among others, Vittore Pizzone, ‘Il dibattito sull’arte degenerata nella cultura italiana degli anni Trenta’, in Giovanna De Lorenzi, ed., *Arte e Critica in Italia nella prima metà del Novecento* (Rome: Gangemi, 2010), pp. 61-74, Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., pp. 248-55, and Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., pp. 256-71.

Italian art during the 1940s. At the risk of sounding glib, one might define this as (National) Socialist Realism,²⁷ characterised as it was by idealised depictions of (predominantly rural) Italian life in technically accomplished – or else unpretentiously naïve – forms of naturalism. Intentionally emulating Nazi-approved imagery by figures such as Oskar Martin Amorbach or Adolf Wissel, such painting is generally considered an embarrassment by art historians, who have unanimously presented it as sentimental and nostalgic (yet paradoxically cold and mechanically-produced) work, created by an anonymous phalanx of jobbing painters as opposed to individual, authentic, *artists*.

Whilst there is a certain justification for this viewpoint, one should hesitate before dismissing all such work as worthless kitsch, produced exclusively by ‘party hacks’.²⁸ Individual painters associated with Farinacci’s initiative – such as Alessandro Pomi and Baldassarre Longoni (aged fifty and sixty-four, respectively, in 1940) – were established, if not high-profile, figures whose artistic development had been less one-dimensional than might be supposed from post-war critical evaluations of the art they produced at this time. Longoni’s imagery contains distant echoes of his earlier Divisionist style (**Fig. 3**), while Pomi’s vast panoramic images of ploughing oxen recall the influence of Macchiaioli painters such as Telemaco Signorini, as has been noted.²⁹ Whilst undoubtedly anachronistic by this point, such sources of inspiration cannot be classed as art-historically insignificant or ‘academic’ in nature. However, it is undeniable that the overriding characteristic of those images generally considered acceptable by Farinacci’s clique was their extreme, ideologically-driven, stylistic conservatism.

²⁷ As has frequently been observed – not least by Greenberg – distinct stylistic similarities exist between the official Soviet art of this era and that which found favour in Nazi Germany. For visual comparisons, see Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War*, cit., Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art of the 1930s: The Age of Anxiety* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), and *Art and Power: Europe Under the Dictators 1930-45*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1995).

²⁸ Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., p. 196.

²⁹ Bossaglia, *Ritratto di un’idea*, cit. p. 202.

Although embracing a range of different aesthetics, Bottai's Bergamo Prize spotlighted a second – and vastly more significant – vocabulary, that of expressionist realism. This was most closely associated with the art of the Corrente group, which coalesced around Ernesto Treccani's eponymous journal after 1938³⁰ and included painters such as Renato Birolli, Bruno Cassinari, Giuseppe Migneco and Ennio Morlotti, as well as Guttuso and Vedova. The work of these artists laid the foundations for realism's pre-eminence in the immediate post-war years. Indeed, Raffaele De Grada has argued that 'the new direction taken by the arts [...] in Italy [following the war] cannot be understood without reference to *Corrente*'.³¹ The favour bestowed on the group at the Premio Bergamo highlights 'the complex and often contradictory relationship between official culture and the most advanced tendencies of artistic research'³² at this time, Guttuso being awarded prizes in 1940 and 1942 for his paintings *The Flight from Etna* and *Crucifixion*, respectively. After the suppression of the group's journal, the relationship between such painters and Bottai was to continue through the pages of his journal *Primato*.

Despite the association of their imagery with an emotionally-charged figurative vocabulary, Corrente resisted the notion of an art created in accordance with a binding 'ism' (as suggested by the group's name). Nevertheless, its artists' employment of this style was the logical consequence of their call for an 'impassioned and direct relationship between the artist and the

³⁰ Originally titled *Vita Giovanile*, then *Corrente di Vita Giovanile* (I italicise *Corrente* to distinguish the publication from the group itself). Following the forced closure of the magazine in 1940, the group's activity continued until the collapse of the regime in the form of publications and exhibitions at the Bottega di Corrente and Galleria della Spiga. For an excellent, concise, yet detailed overview of the group's history and aesthetics, see Elena Pontiggia, ed., *Il movimento di Corrente* (Milan: Abscondita, 2012). A good visual introduction to the artists of Corrente – and other representatives of inter-war expressionist realism – is provided by *A Loving Hunt: Italian Interbellum Art in the Iannaccone Collection* (Milan: Skira, 2009).

³¹ *Il movimento di 'Corrente'* (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1952), p. 18.

³² Pia Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative Art of the Thirties', in Braun, *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, cit., pp. 181-86 (p. 186).

world’,³³ their rejection of ‘those modes of representation which were not sufficiently concerned with the destiny of humanity’,³⁴ and their insistence that art should engage with prevailing realities – an ambition to be understood in its widest sense, naturally extending to the political sphere. If Corrente’s increasing hostility toward Fascism³⁵ was rarely manifested explicitly in terms of subject matter – Guttuso’s *Crucifixion* of 1941, for instance, being a veiled allegory of the unfolding European tragedy rather than a direct illustration of it (**Fig. 4**) – it was nevertheless implicit in the stylistic approach of its artists, who refused to idealise or passively chronicle in the manner of their Cremona counterparts. However, it is important to recognise that this antagonism was not only directed toward the more retrogressive forces within Italian culture during these years, but was also aimed at certain elements among the avant-garde. Corrente’s commitment to realism manifested the *angst* of a generation that desired to secure greater intellectual freedoms for itself than the right to create imagery totally divorced from life through (what was perceived to be) self-indulgent formalism. Resolutely ‘popular’, Corrente ‘was born from a meeting of men and ideas in a climate that had formed the first and inspired the second. It did not arise as a consequence of the individual initiative of any one figure, or from the discussions of an intellectual clique’.³⁶

As a consequence, the art of Corrente was diametrically opposed – philosophically, as well as stylistically – to the third key tendency of this period, ‘concrete’ abstraction. During the inter-

³³ Ibid., p. 185.

³⁴ Mario De Micheli, ‘Realism and the Post-war Debate’, in Braun, *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, cit., pp. 281-87 (p. 281).

³⁵ Initially, *Vita Giovanile* was far from antagonistic toward the regime – its masthead reproducing one of Mussolini’s slogans concerning the value of youth, and its title being flanked by two sets of *fascies*. The ‘Presentazione’ included in the journal’s first edition of 1 January 1938 had also attacked the ‘raging defeatism of Bolshevism’ and its negative consequences for Italian culture during the inter-war years. See Pontiggia, *Il movimento di Corrente*, cit., pp. 11-12 (p. 11).

³⁶ De Grada, *Il movimento di ‘Corrente’*, cit., p. 18.

war years the work of those artists associated with Milan's important and influential Galleria del Milione, such as Virginio (Gino) Ghiringhelli and Mauro Reggiani, had undergone a 'gradual transition from the formal model of Synthetic Cubism to a more pronounced adherence to a vocabulary informed by Neo-Plasticism'.³⁷ Such work was enthusiastically promoted through the gallery by Carlo Belli, whose hermetic vision of an entirely self-referential art ('an anonymous [...] production free from any subjective references')³⁸ was encapsulated in his assertion that 'Art is. It is therefore nothing outside of itself.'³⁹ Toward the end of the 1930s, Il Milione's emphasis on abstraction was tempered somewhat with the presentation of exhibitions by artists such as Giorgio de Chirico and Alberto Savinio. Yet 'concrete' research continued, most notably in the Como region of northern Italy. Here, a number of artists including Carla Badiali, Mario Radice and Manlio Rho worked in close contact with – and were greatly inspired by – the city's Rationalist architects, such as Cesare Cattaneo, Alberto Sartoris and Terragni, producing crystalline, self-contained and exquisitely balanced geometric compositions that represented something of a painterly equivalent to buildings such as the latter's aforementioned Casa del Fascio (**Fig. 5**).⁴⁰

Futurism represented the fourth of these diverse and conflicting tendencies in Italian art of the 1940s – all of which it criticised, yet from which it also drew varying degrees of inspiration – constituting a significant, and highly complex, voice in contemporary culture.

The work produced by Futurist artists during these years is as striking for its extraordinary

³⁷ Matteo Fochessati, 'In Astratto. Astrazione in Italia 1930-1980', in Fochessati, *In Astratto*, cit., (my trans., from the Italian version of Fochessati's essay, pp. 15-31 (p. 17)).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Carlo Belli, *Kn* (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1935; repr. Milan: All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1972), p. 29.

⁴⁰ Indeed, Radice collaborated on Terragni's masterpiece, contributing striking three-dimensional, mixed-media, abstract murals. See Luciano Caramel, *Radice. Catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 2002), pp. 118-19. On the relationship between abstract painters and Futurist artists at this time, see below, pp. 71-78.

diversity and richness as it is for its sheer quantity, given both the short duration of this concluding phase and the disruption and fragmentation the movement undoubtedly suffered as a consequence of Italy's involvement in World War Two. As D'Ambrosio has observed, despite these unfavourable circumstances, Futurism's 'artistic activity, which had been officially interrupted at the beginning of the First World War, this time not only continued but proved to be particularly intense'.⁴¹ Bohn has also noted how 'although many if not most of the Futurists were drafted, a surprising amount of activity took place during the war'.⁴² Much of this was carried out in the context of the many regional groups and associations that continued to operate throughout this period, albeit often with fewer members than they had had during the inter-war years.

Accompanying this remarkable vitality, however, was a new and corresponding reduction in the fields of activity across which it was manifested, the period witnessing an almost total abandonment of applied arts projects when compared to the *futurismo di massa*⁴³ of the 1930s. This can perhaps partly be explained by the fact that the war impacted on both the relevance and the viability of such projects, and that the earlier, playful character of the movement's interventions in such spheres as fashion and cuisine was fundamentally at odds with the austere mood of the times.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 'La guerra nella letteratura futurista', cit., p. 190. In 1915 it had been announced: 'The literary, pictorial and musical Futurist movement is currently suspended, due to the absence of the poet Marinetti, serving in the theatre of war' (F. T. Marinetti, 'Per la guerra, sola igiene del mondo', in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. I, no. 72).

⁴² *The Other Futurism*, cit., pp. 49-50.

⁴³ A term used by Salaris to define Futurism's expansive character during that decade. See her essay 'Il futurismo e il sacro', in Marinetti, *L'aeropoema di Gesù*, cit., p. 85.

⁴⁴ Although see the 'epilogue' to this thesis.



Fig. 2
Luciano Ricchetti, *Listening*, 1939
oil on canvas (dimensions unknown)
Piacenza: Galleria Ricci Oddi

The section of the painting depicting the mother and child is now all that remains of this once vast work.



Fig. 3
Baldassarre Longoni
Italy's Golden Lands, [c. 1939-40]
oil on canvas (dimensions unknown)
Cremona: Banca Popolare di Cremona



Fig. 4
Renato Guttuso, *Study for 'Crucifixion'*, 1940
Indian ink and watercolour on paper
34.5 x 34.5 cm
Rome: Archivi Guttuso

The inclusion of a figure resembling Hitler in the foreground of this study (omitted from the final work) confirms the political nature of Guttuso's painting.

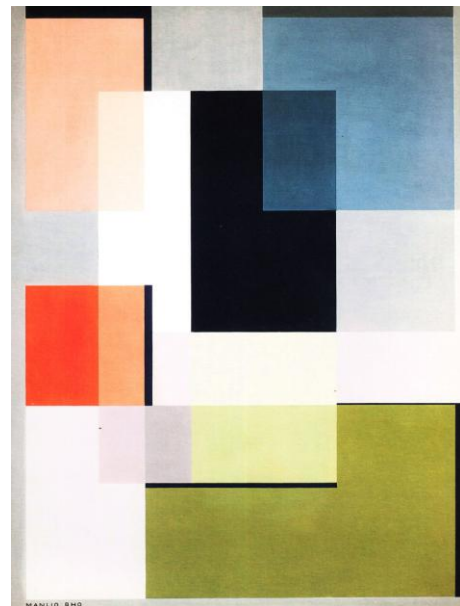


Fig. 5
Manlio Rho, *Composition*, 1940
oil on canvas, 63 x 48 cm
[private collection]

II. FUTURISM AND THE VISUAL ARTS IN THE 1940s

II.I. Evolutions in *Aeropittura*: Aeropainting, Aeropainting of War, Aeroportraiture, Aeroxylography, *Ardentismo*, *Cosmopittura*

During the 1940s Futurist painters continued to explore that fascination with flight which had fed into the movement's aesthetic since its earliest days, 'the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd'⁴⁵ having been identified by Marinetti as a paradigmatically Futurist image in his founding manifesto of 1909. This had reached its apogee with the development of 'aeropainting' at the end of the 1920s.⁴⁶ Over the course of the following decade countless attempts were made by Futurist artists to capture not only the visual novelties experienced in flight, such as vertiginous, topsy-turvy landscapes (**Fig. 6**), but also to explore its metaphysical dimensions through abstract or semi-abstract imagery intended to evoke 'the transcendence of the spirit towards higher states of consciousness'⁴⁷ (**Fig. 7**).

The emphasis of aeropainting was to change from the mid- to late 1930s as this concern with the lyrical and poetic aspects of aviation gave way to a new focus on its military application in the context of contemporary political developments. Italy's entry into World War Two led to an analysis of the defining characteristics of modern conflict – reflections that swiftly fed into the development of an 'aeropainting of war' (**Fig. 8**). During the 1940s the key exponents of this important new genre (to which Chapter Four is devoted) were invited to contribute to

⁴⁵ 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 50.

⁴⁶ On the emergence of this genre see Massimo Duranti, 'Genesi e interpretazioni del *Manifesto dell'aeropittura*', in Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Futurismo 1909-1944. Arte, architettura, spettacolo, grafica, letteratura...*, exh. cat. (Milan: Mazzotta, 2001), pp. 213-19.

⁴⁷ Humphreys, *Futurism*, cit., p. 73.

exhibitions of war art organised by the Air Ministry: initiatives similar in nature to the contemporary activities of Britain's War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC).⁴⁸ Stylistically, such work tended to be figurative yet robust, 'realistic' in the very broadest sense of the term, but always forceful and vigorous. As such, it epitomised one of four aeropictorial tendencies identified by Marinetti in his introduction to the catalogue of the 1939 Quadriennale, distinguished by its 'synthetic documentary [and] dynamic' qualities.⁴⁹

However, the remaining three forms of aeropainting also continued to thrive alongside such imagery, namely: 'A stratospheric cosmic biochemical aeropainting [...] An essential mystical ascensional symbolic aeropainting [and] A transfiguring lyrical spatial aeropainting'.⁵⁰ Enrico Prampolini, for example, continued to explore imagery in which biomorphic elements floating in limitless spaces vividly suggest liberation from the earth's gravitational pull and humanity's attainment of the weightless realms of the cosmos (**Fig. 9**). Likewise, Gerardo Dottori continued to produce his intensely lyrical visions of the Umbrian landscape alongside works of a more martial nature (**Fig. 10**), and Wladimiro Tulli to create his characteristically exuberant collaged images of aeroplanes, possessing an almost childlike innocence recalling that of Matisse's contemporary paper cut-outs, although Tulli's works were far more intimate in scale (**Fig. 11**). As has been observed, the latter's subject matter, 'whilst including aircraft and elevated visions of fields and landscapes, is treated in a language that is lyrical, joyful [and] playful [...]: there is

⁴⁸ On the activities of the WAAC see, among others, Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War*, cit., pp. 33-54.

⁴⁹ 'Mostra futurista di aeropittori e aeroscultori', in *III Quadriennale d'arte nazionale. Catalogo generale*, pp. 184-88 (p. 186); repr. in Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Nuovi Archivi del Futurismo. Cataloghi di esposizioni* (Rome: De Luca, 2010), 1939/2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-86.

nothing complicated or menacing about his aeroplanes; rather, they resemble birds wheeling freely in the skies'.⁵¹

A sub-genre of *aeropittura* known as 'aeroportraiture' was also practised during these years, dominating the Futurist display at the XXII Venice Biennale of 1940. Given the contemporary European situation, this was a curiously neutral choice for such a politicised group – a fact perhaps partly conditioned by Italy's 'non-belligerent' status at the time of the exhibition's inauguration on 18 May. The creation of overtly militaristic imagery at this time may have been considered something of a gamble, not only running the risk of being perceived as an attempt to second-guess the Duce's political judgement regarding the wisdom of involving the nation in World War Two (thereby implicitly questioning the dictum *Mussolini ha sempre ragione*) but also of rendering the movement out of step with the regime's official policy in the event that this was to be one of continued neutrality. Marinetti introduced the works on show in his typical 'aeropoetic' style – unburdened by punctuation of any kind – noting how 'it is today generally accepted within all artistic circles from the traditional to the Futurist that veristic and static portraiture concerned with reproducing every detail every nuance of the human face and body is in a state of crisis'.⁵² According to the Futurist leader, Mussolini posed a particular problem for any portraitist seeking to capture his dynamic spirit and personality by means of such an outmoded and inadequate approach:

Those painters who have attempted to fix his agile figure and his tentacular soul on canvas have never attained their goal nor have those sculptors who have tried to imprison it in marble The difficult task of uniting all of the various and contrasting forces that constitute the DUCE in an efficacious and persuasive harmonious plastic beauty has

⁵¹ Patrizia Nuzzo, 'Bassorilievi', in Giorgio Cortenova and Patrizia Nuzzo, eds, *Wladimiro Tulli. Lirismi alchemici*, exh. cat. (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), p. 90.

⁵² 'Gli aeropittori e l'aeroritratto simultaneo', in *XXII^a Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*, cit., pp. 181-85 (p. 181).

therefore fallen to the Futurist and only to the Futurist aeropainters and aerosculptors eager for movement and simultaneity⁵³

Remarks such as these reveal a concern on the part of Marinetti to stress his painters' repudiation of any conventional or conservative stylistic elements. Yet in truth this particular genre inspired few works of real note. Prampolini's *Simultaneous Aeroportrait of Italo Balbo* (**Fig. 12**) represents an exception to this rule. Painted in 1940 to commemorate the death of Libya's Governor-General, whose aeroplane had been shot down by friendly fire in Tobruk that June, this colossal work depicts Balbo seated inside a form resembling a gigantic, amorphous, fragment of bone. The latter element was typical of Prampolini's pictorial vocabulary at this time, his immaculate sketchbooks being filled with abstractions and metamorphoses of the human form that possess a power and intensity in inverse proportion to their miniature scale (**Figs 13, 14**).⁵⁴

Other manifestations of the 'aerial' sensibility also emerged during these years, such as the 'aerxylography' of Renato Di Bosso, employed in the creation of imagery with a broad thematic range, spanning colonial motifs, aviation-related imagery and sporting subjects (**Fig. 15**). Di Bosso's technique – described in a text published in the catalogue of his 1941 exhibition at Milan's Casa d'Artisti – represented a new approach to the woodcut, eschewing its characteristic sharp contrasts and linearity in favour of powerful yet delicate effects of *sfumato*. As with the artist's work in the fields of painting and sculpture, these prints were marked by an extreme economy of means, substituting the 'complicated arabesques [typical of the medium] with a few plastic masses distilled to their essence, ultimately resulting in synthesis'.⁵⁵ Di Bosso's

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See Enrico Prampolini. *Taccuini inediti 1942-1956*, exh. cat. (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1991).

⁵⁵ 'L'aerosilografia. Manifesto futurista di Renato Di Bosso', in *Mostra personale di Renato Di Bosso. Scultore – pittore – silografo*, n. p.; repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/7.

experimentation with this new technique appears to have influenced his painterly style during these years – a number of contemporary *aeropittura* resembling his woodcuts in their employment of filament-like brushstrokes and cross-hatching (**Fig. 52**).

Attempts were also made by the founders of Monselice's 'Savarè' Futurist Group (Corrado Forlin and Italo Fasullo) to refine and codify two new painterly styles. Forlin's manifesto of 'Ardentism'⁵⁶ – which in fact denominated an approach that the artist had been developing since the late 1930s – was essentially a response to ideas articulated by Umberto Boccioni in a text of 1913 in which the latter outlined his intention to 'model the atmosphere' ('areas between one object and another are not merely empty spaces but continuing materials of different intensities').⁵⁷ Forlin distinguished his approach from that of his predecessor by asserting that whilst Boccioni's understanding of 'atmospheric plasticity'⁵⁸ was bound up with his perception of those rhythms generated by the absolute motion of objects, his own paintings captured the dynamism of the atmosphere *itself*, independently of these:

In fact, whilst that which provides structure and orders emotion in the works of the artist from Romagna [Boccioni] is the abstract motion of objects, I subordinate every constructive function to the concrete motion of the atmosphere, perceived as a vivid lyrical spatial vibration.⁵⁹

In Forlin's imagery, space was rendered tangible by means of a rippling patchwork of multicoloured blotches, similar in size and uniformly distributed across the picture plane. Out of

⁵⁶ 'Manifesto pittorico. L'Ardentismo nell'aeropittura futurista' (*Il Veneto*, 11 July 1940), in Cibir, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 239-40. For a detailed consideration of the manifesto, see pp. 176-81 in the same volume.

⁵⁷ 'The Plastic Foundations of Futurist Sculpture and Painting', in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit. pp. 88-90 (pp. 88, 89).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁹ 'Manifesto pittorico. L'Ardentismo nell'aeropittura futurista', cit., p. 240.

these – aptly compared by Forlin himself to the patterns formed by the ‘reflection of water against the side of a ship’⁶⁰ or ‘incandescent metal plates set in motion and speed by virtue of [their] heat’⁶¹ – emerged bizarre siren-like creatures, soldiers engaged in combat (**Fig. 16**) or other recognisably human figures. According to the artist: ‘immersed in this dynamic atmosphere, bodies lose their characteristic weight force attraction, harmonising with and participating in the voluble play of the atmosphere, which is endowed – for reasons of equilibrium – with an equal corporeal density’.⁶² Initially, Forlin would appear to have wavered between naming his new technique *Prismatismo* or *Vibratismo* before settling on *Ardentismo* – presumably for its greater sense of intensity and reflection of the impassioned *stato d’animo fascista*.⁶³

Fasullo’s own new strain of Futurist painting took as its subject ‘the infinitely large and the infinitely small’ structures of nature explored by scientific research – namely, ‘the atom and the cosmos’.⁶⁴ This represented no substantial innovation, inasmuch as Marinetti had long exhorted his artists and poets to consider ‘massed molecules and whirling electrons’ fertile sources of inspiration for their works, alongside imagery relating to cosmic themes.⁶⁵ However, it did reflect a renewed interest in such preoccupations at this time, finding a literary equivalent in Marinetti’s theory of a ‘poetry of technicisms’.⁶⁶ Fasullo declined to offer any formal guidance to painters intent on creating their own so-called *cosmopitture* beyond discouraging too great a

⁶⁰ Letter to Fasullo of 28 January 1939; cited in Cibir, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., p. 177, n. 422.

⁶¹ ‘Manifesto pittorico. L’Ardentismo nell’aeropittura futurista’, cit., p. 240.

⁶² Corrado Forlin, ‘Contro il passatismo e l’esterofilia’ (*Il Mare Nostro. Stirpe Italica*, supp. to no. 1, 1 February 1941), in Cibir, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 246-49 (p. 249).

⁶³ See Cibir, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., p. 176.

⁶⁴ Forlin, ‘Contro il passatismo’, cit., p. 248.

⁶⁵ See ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature’ (1912), in Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 92-97 (p. 95).

⁶⁶ See below, Chapter Five.

reliance on geometric elements, on the basis that these were alien to nature. Indeed, he ridiculed what he saw as the convoluted theories of other (unnamed) artists, claiming: ‘*Cosmopittura* is not one of those many pictorial contortions that go under various labels and are described with a tangled web of words which, when all is said and done, neither the public nor the individual who has conceived them understand.’⁶⁷ Rather, he stated, the genre ‘imposes no formal technique and offers no commandments ordered by Roman or Arabic numerals: each artist is free to act according to his own inspiration’.⁶⁸ Fasullo’s remarks illustrate the point that Futurist art cannot be defined solely in terms of its formal characteristics. Nevertheless, in this particular context they seem to express a certain cynicism and hostility toward what the artist perceived to be the pseudo-intellectual musings of his peers, rather than representing an impassioned call for artistic liberty. In this regard, they reflect the comparative aesthetic timidity that prevented both Fasullo’s work – and that of his colleague Forlin – from achieving its full potential. (On one occasion, the latter even described his theory of *Ardentismo* as a means of ‘rendering Boccioni’s plastic dynamism lighter, that is to say less aggressive’.)⁶⁹ Yet like Forlin, Fasullo appears to have been a frustratingly inconsistent artist, for whilst certain of his works are literal-minded and poorly executed, other pieces are significantly more subtle and sophisticated. This is evident from his swirling and surreal *Cosmic City* (**Fig. 17**) a beautifully realised dreamlike fantasy that stands comparison with Luigi Russolo’s equally otherworldly *Houses + Lights + Sky* of 1912-13.

⁶⁷ ‘Aeropittura dell’infinitamente grande e dell’infinitamente piccolo’, in *Futuristi aeropittori di guerra*, a brochure published to accompany the ‘Savarè’ Futurist Group’s ninth exhibition, which opened in Ferrara on 27 December 1940, [pp. 8-9 (p. 9)]; repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/1; my italics.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ ‘Appunti sul Prismaticismo’, n. d., in Cibi, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 262-63 (p. 263).



Fig. 6
Tullio Crali, *Horizontal Roll*, 1938
oil on board, 80 x 60 cm
Rome: Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea

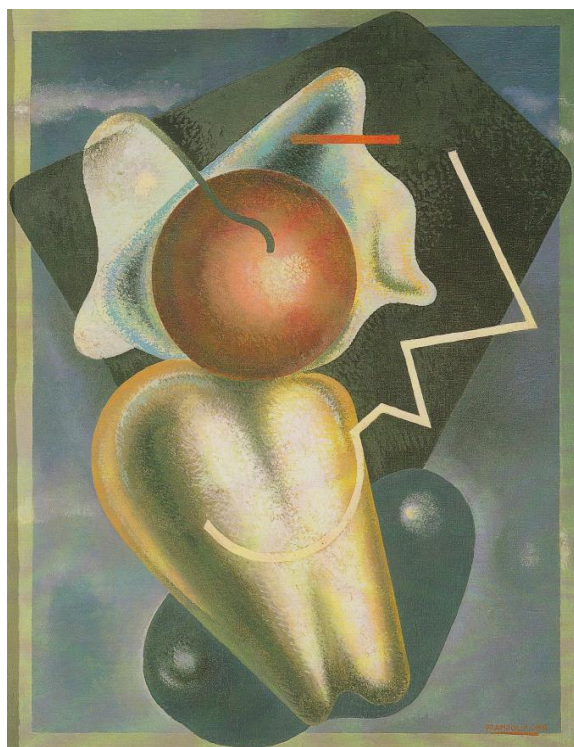


Fig. 7
Enrico Prampolini, *Cosmic Revolution*, 1932
oil on canvas, 66.5 x 53.5 cm
Milan: Arte Centro



Fig. 8 Tullio Crali, *The Victorious Squadron Returns*, 1942, oil on canvas, 86 x 98 cm, [private collection]

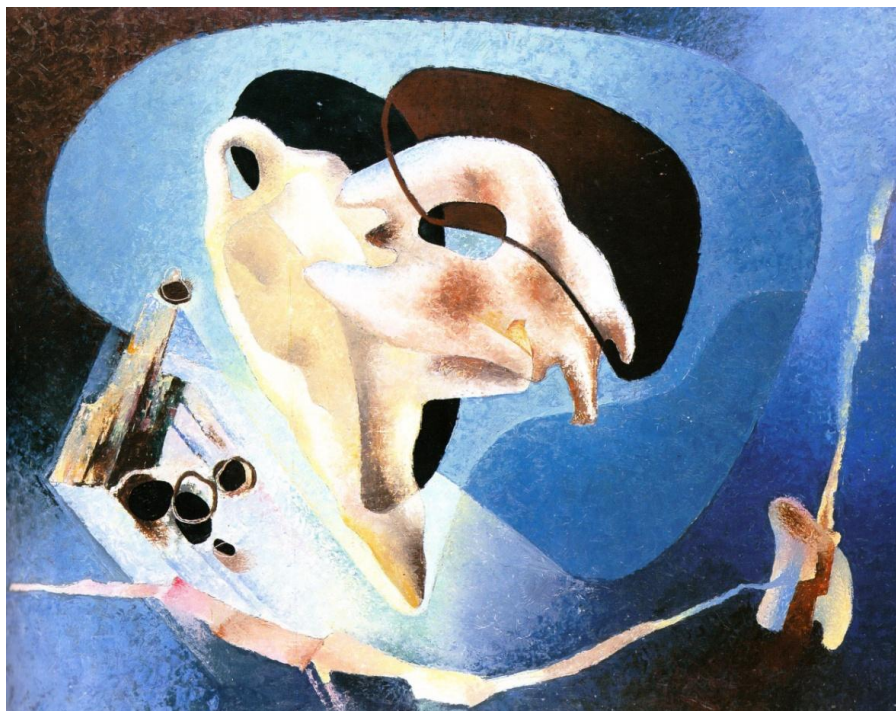


Fig. 9 Enrico Prampolini, *Sidereal Rarefaction*, 1940, oil on board, 80 x 100 cm, private collection

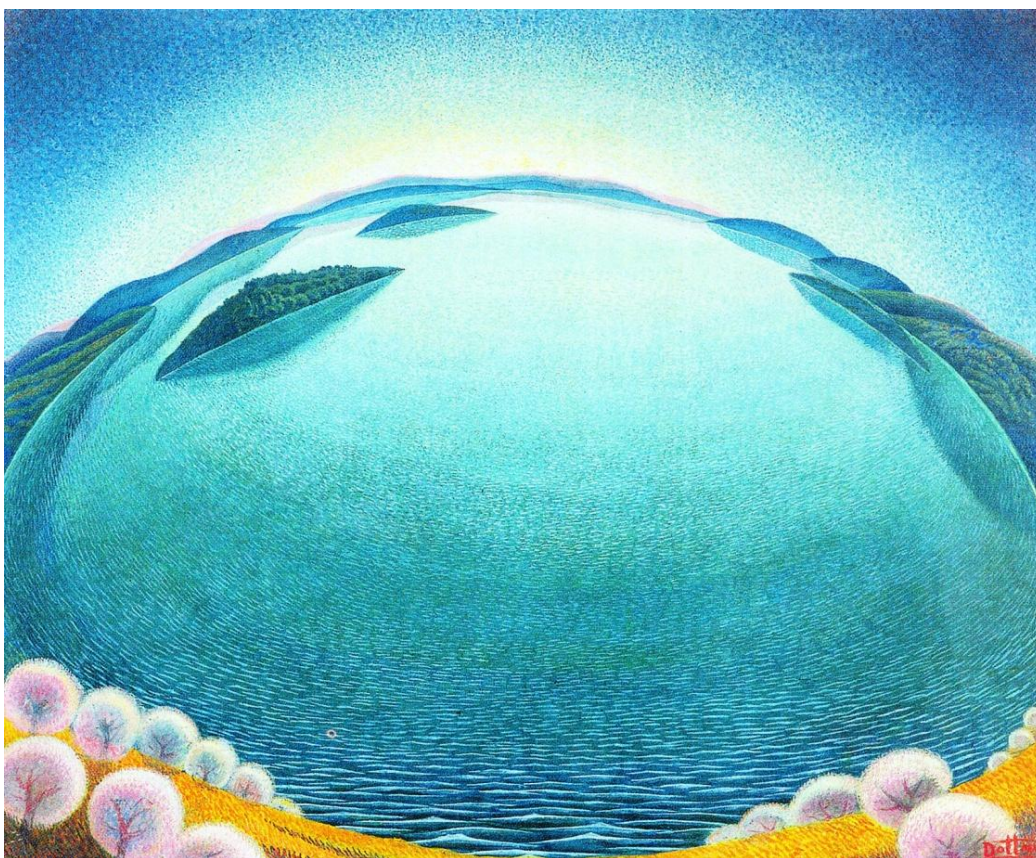


Fig. 10 Gerardo Dottori, *Lake-Dawn*, [1942], tempera on board, 101 x 122 cm
Perugia: Collezione Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia

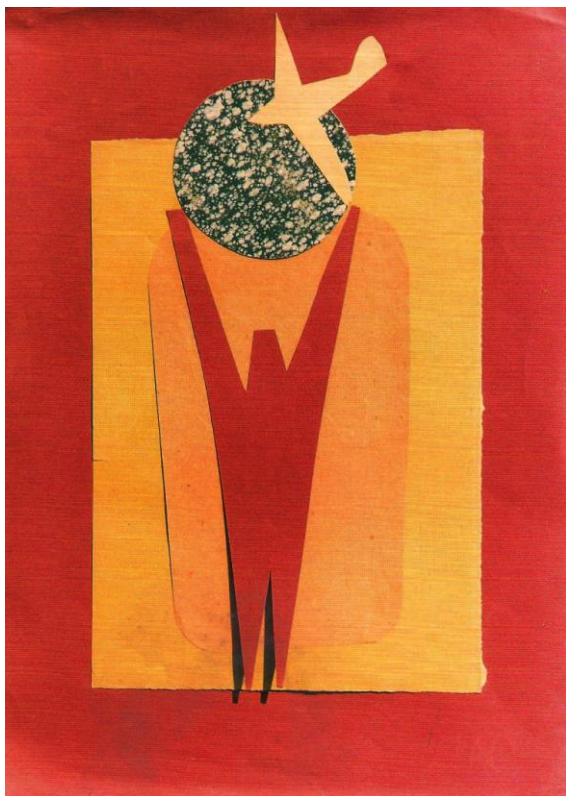


Fig. 11
Wladimiro Tulli
Earth, I Embrace You, 1941
collage, 35 x 25 cm
[private collection]

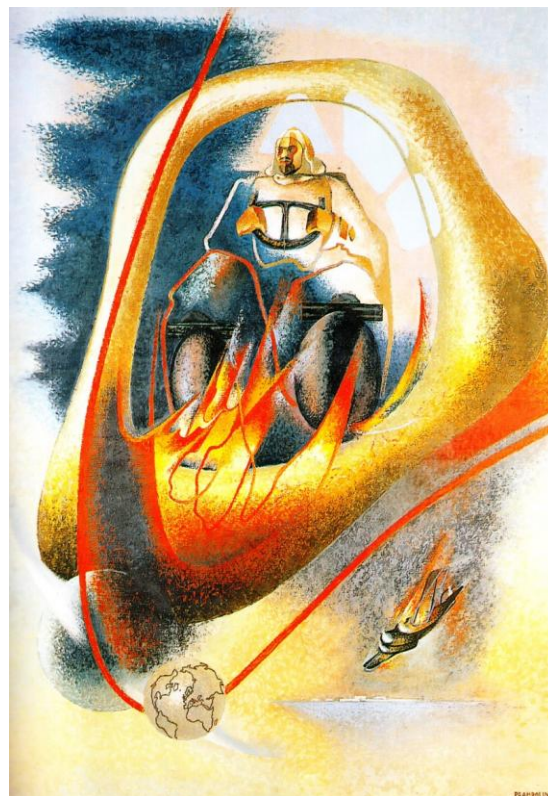


Fig. 12
Enrico Prampolini
Simultaneous Aeroportrait of Italo Balbo
(or, *Transfiguration of the Pilot Italo Balbo*), 1940
oil on board, 210 x 157 cm
Genoa: Wolfsoniana – Fondazione Regionale per la
Cultura e lo Spettacolo

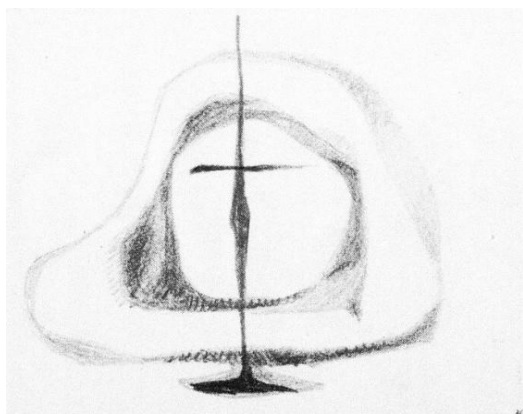


Fig. 13
Enrico Prampolini, untitled study, 1942-43
pencil on paper, 14 x 16.7 cm
[private collection]

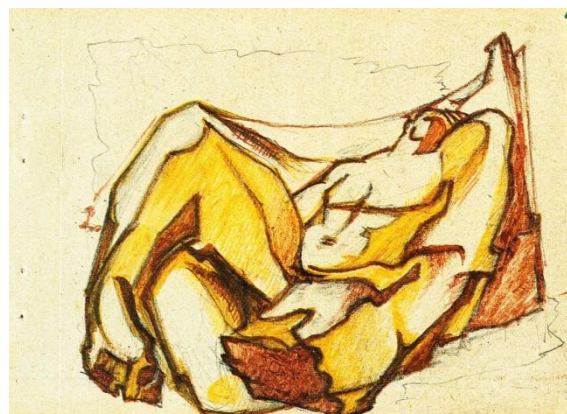


Fig. 14
Enrico Prampolini, untitled study, 1942-43
pencil on paper, 12.3 x 15 cm
[private collection]



Fig. 15 Renato Di Bosso, *Athletics*, 1940, woodcut, 43 x 35 cm, Rome: private collection



Fig. 16 Corrado Forlin, *Untitled*, 1942, medium, dimensions and location unknown



Fig. 17
Italo Fasullo, *Cosmic City*, 1940
oil on canvas, 117 x 87 cm
Monselice: private collection

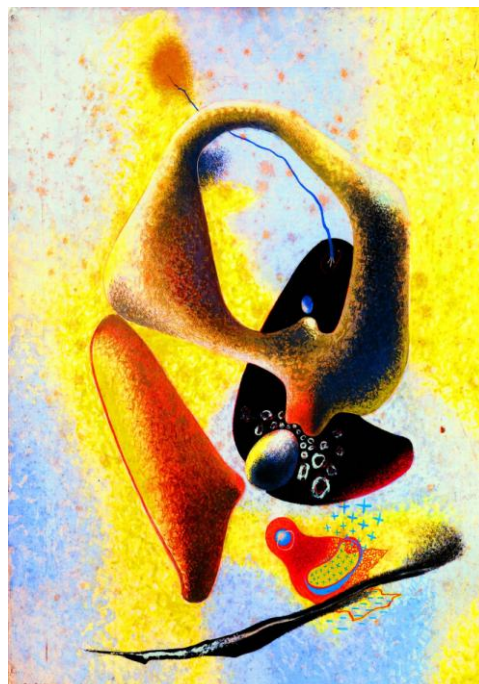


Fig. 18
Enrico Prampolini
Biological Apparition B (or, Origins), 1941
mixed media on board, 65 x 50 cm
private collection



Fig. 19
Mario Radice, *Composition R. S. 15*, 1940
oil on board, 94 x 78 cm
Milan: Museo del Novecento

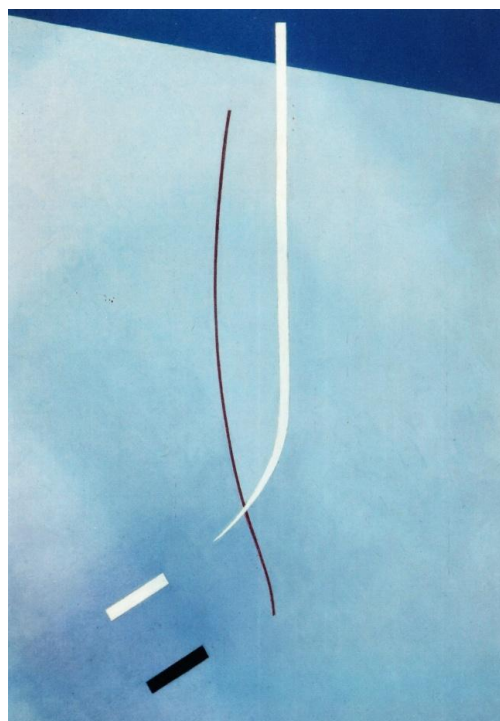


Fig. 20
Carla Badiali, *Le vent se lève*
(*Composition no. 42*), 1942
oil on canvas laid down on card, 41 x 30.8 cm
private collection

II.II. Abstract Allegiances

Likewise concerned with ‘the kingdoms of the microcosm and the macrocosm’,⁷⁰ but inestimably more compelling and successful, was the work of Prampolini around this time. Throughout the 1930s, he had been engaged in the development of a ‘parasurreal’ branch of aeropainting he termed ‘cosmic idealism’, employing a biomorphic vocabulary that contrasted markedly with both the geometric style of his earlier ‘mechanical’ imagery and the figurative work of fellow Futurists such as Alfredo Gauro Ambrosi and Tato.⁷¹ This reflected his increasing interest in the scientific exploration of the organic world, and a desire to seek ‘new plastic harmonies inspired by biochemistry’,⁷² Prampolini characterising his work of the 1930s onward as ‘a continual variation on the theme of the “becoming of matter”, both in the context of the human form and in that of geological, biological and biochemical entities’⁷³ (**Fig. 18**).

Prampolini was undoubtedly the most significant visual artist working within the Futurist movement during the 1940s.⁷⁴ His pre-eminence was recognised by Marinetti, who described him as ‘the greatest painter of our time’⁷⁵ in his introduction to the Futurist pavilion at the 1942 Venice Biennale: an interesting fact, given that his inclusion of just one work relating to

⁷⁰ Enrico Prampolini, ‘Premessa’, in *Mostra del pittore Enrico Prampolini*, exh. cat. (Rome: Galleria di Roma, 1941), pp. 11-14 (p. 12); repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/3.

⁷¹ See Lisa Panzera, ‘Celestial Futurism and the “Parasurreal”’, in Greene, *Italian Futurism 1909-1944*, cit., pp. 326-29.

⁷² Prampolini, ‘Premessa’, cit., p. 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ See Enrico Crispolti, ‘Prampolini protagonista’, in Agnese, and others, *I futuristi e le Quadriennali*, cit., pp. 38-41.

⁷⁵ ‘Aeropitture di guerra cosmiche biochimiche sacre documentarie meccaniche espressioni trasfiguratrici dell’infinitamente grande e dell’infinitamente piccolo in velocità voli micidiali maringuerra matite di fuoco e dinamismi astratti’, in *XXIII^a Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d’Arte – 1942-XX. Catalogo*, exh. cat., 2nd edn (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1942), pp. 222-33 (p. 222).

contemporary events – his aforementioned ‘aeroportrait’ of Italo Balbo – could have left him open to accusations of political absenteeism. So too could the artist’s proud declaration (cited in the same text) that in creating his images ‘every contact with contingent reality has been excluded; the inspiration of the artist is directed toward the extreme latitudes of the introspective world’.⁷⁶ Prampolini’s importance during the 1940s transcended the consistently inventive quality of his painting. Having gravitated toward the movement around 1913, he represented something of a figurehead for the younger Futurist generations, acting as a bridge between *il primo* and *il secondo futurismo*, just as his experimentation with abstraction and unconventional materials was later to constitute an important point of reference for post-war associations including Forma and artists such as Alberto Burri, thereby ensuring a certain continuity of Futurist ideas beyond the lifespan of the movement itself, albeit in a different guise.⁷⁷ He also retained an international outlook that constituted a welcome counterbalance to the obsession with combating *esterofilia* (‘foreign-mania’) within certain sections of the movement. Having been in active contact with foreign avant-garde circles since the early days of his involvement with the Futurist movement – cultivating relationships with the Zurich Dadaists around 1916, and subsequently with a wide range of figures including Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky and Theo van Doesburg – Prampolini’s continuing enthusiasm for the work of his European colleagues is clear from his 1944 volume *Multi-material Art (Toward a Collective Art?)*,⁷⁸ the seventh in a planned series of 33 volumes by a range of commentators, of which number 28 was to be a study by Prampolini himself titled *Paul Klee: Forerunner of Surrealism*.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 223. Marinetti’s text borrowed heavily from Prampolini’s aforementioned ‘Premessa’.

⁷⁷ See Enrica Torelli Landini, “‘Forma 1’: Ideology and Linguistic Renewal”, in *Forma 1: The First Postwar Abstract Movement in Italy*, exh. cat. (London: Italian Cultural Institute, 1995), pp. 29-41 (pp. 34-41), and Massimo Duranti, ‘From Form to Matter, to Abstract Form: The Development of Alberto Burri’s Aesthetic Revolution’, in Massimo Duranti, ed., *Alberto Burri: Form and Matter*, exh. cat. (Perugia: EFFE Fabrizio Fabbri, 2011), pp. 7-33 (p. 17). See also the ‘epilogue’ to this thesis.

⁷⁸ *Arte polimaterica (verso un’arte collettiva?)* (Rome: Edizioni del Secolo, 1944); repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1944/4.

Prampolini's impartial enthusiasm for artistic innovation – which led him to be one of the earliest and most vocal opponents of Nazism's cultural policies during the 1930s⁷⁹ – naturally made him an enthusiastic supporter of the work of the Como abstractionists and other 'concrete' artists whose integration into the movement at the end of the Thirties was to bring an entirely new dimension to Futurist exhibitions.

Elena Di Raddo has pointed out that attempts to find common spiritual (if not necessarily stylistic) ground between the more progressive tendencies in contemporary Italian art had been made in Como from as early as 1936. That year Alberto Sartoris organised an *Exhibition of Modern Italian Painting* which included work by artists whose approaches ranged from Futurism to Metaphysical painting, the aesthetics of the Novecento school and abstraction.⁸⁰ This aim of discerning unifying principles between 'decidedly heterogeneous'⁸¹ forms of artistic expression was pursued more vigorously by another key figure in the city's cultural circles, the philosopher Franco Ciliberti. To this end, Ciliberti founded the magazine *Valori Primordiali* in 1938,⁸² its first and only edition including contributions from figures as diverse as Raffaele De Grada, Prampolini and Salvatore Quasimodo, as well as illustrations of works by Massimo Campigli, de Chirico, Giorgio Morandi and Mauro Reggiani. Despite the somewhat opaque and allusive nature of his writing, Ciliberti's use of the term 'primordial' would appear to have denoted what he

⁷⁹ See Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., pp. 250-51.

⁸⁰ See her excellent essay "'Una centrale elettrica di imperiosa spiritualità": Marinetti, Ciliberti, Sartoris e gli astratti comaschi', *Arte Lombarda*, June 2011, pp. 109-22 (p. 111). The catalogue of this *Mostra di pittura moderna italiana* is reproduced in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1936/16. An exhibition of the following year, also organised in Como by Sartoris and titled *La pittura nella scuola moderna di Milano*, adopted a similarly multifaceted and comparative approach (ibid., 1937/12).

⁸¹ Di Raddo, "'Una centrale elettrica'", cit., p. 112.

⁸² See Claudia Salaris, '*Valori Primordiali*', in Claudia Salaris, *Riviste futuriste. Collezione Echaurren Salaris* (Pistoia: Gli Ori, 2012), pp. 1147-54.

considered to be ‘the essential qualities of modernity’,⁸³ indicating the unprecedented character of those formal vocabularies ‘generated’ by visionary artists and architects in the early years of the twentieth century – principally, Umberto Boccioni and Antonio Sant’Elia.⁸⁴ According to Ciliberti, these had been aesthetic foundations of monumental significance for subsequent generations, the importance and influence of which transcended individual stylistic affiliations. In these respects, his notion of the primordial seems to have corresponded to the early Futurists’ conception of themselves as ‘*the primitives of a completely renovated sensitiveness*’.⁸⁵

The perception of a ‘perfect synergy between primordial aesthetics and the Futurist spirit’⁸⁶ led to Ciliberti’s establishment of the Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi in the summer of 1941.⁸⁷

Dominated by abstract artists and Rationalist architects from the Como region, it initially comprised Badiali, Cesare Cattaneo, Ciliberti, Osvaldo Licini, Pietro Lingeri, Marcello Nizzoli, Radice, Rho and Terragni. Over the course of the year the group’s membership expanded with the adhesion of Marinetti, artists such as Benedetta, Bruno Munari, Prampolini and Atanasio Soldati, and the architects Augusto Magnaghi, Sartoris and Mario Terzaghi. However, its foundation merely formalised a spirit of collaboration and joint action that had been in evidence since late 1938, when figures from both Ciliberti’s and Marinetti’s circles had participated in demonstrations against the increasingly reactionary character of Italy’s cultural climate at public

⁸³ Ibid., p. 1149.

⁸⁴ The 1941 ‘Manifesto del Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi Sant’Elia’ (see below) identified these figures as ‘generating lights’. Repr. in Luigi Cavadini, *Carla Badiali. Catalogo generale* (Milan: Silvana, 2006), p. 17.

⁸⁵ Umberto Boccioni, and others, ‘The Exhibitors to the Public’ (1912), in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit., pp. 45-50 (p. 49); original italics.

⁸⁶ Di Raddo, “‘Una centrale elettrica’”, cit., p. 119.

⁸⁷ Its first manifesto – ‘Primordialità futurista’ – was published on 15 June (repr. in Cavadini, *Carla Badiali*, cit., p. 17). On the activities of this group (in addition to Di Raddo’s essay) see Francesco Tedeschi, ‘Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi’, in Godoli, *Il dizionario del futurismo*, cit., vol. 1, p. 568, Enrico Crispolti, “‘Futuristi astrattisti’ nella III e IV Quadriennale”, in Agnese, and others, *I futuristi e le Quadriennali*, cit., pp. 42-45, and Caramel, *Radice*, cit., pp. 26-28.

events in Como, Rome and Milan.⁸⁸ Licini, Radice, Rho and Soldati had also displayed their works alongside those of Marinetti's artists at the III Quadriennale of 1939, while works by Radice and Rho were hung with Futurist paintings in a further two exhibitions that year,⁸⁹ as well as at the 1940 Venice Biennale. Radice, Rho, Licini and Soldati were again included in the official Futurist selection for the *III Exhibition of the National Fascist Fine Arts Syndicate* in May 1941, in addition to Badiali and two other artists affiliated with the Como group, Aristide Bianchi and Nizzoli.⁹⁰ At the end of the year, the newly-constituted Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi Sant'Elia⁹¹ organised an exhibition at Milan's Galleria Ettore Mascioni.⁹² Futurism's abstract contingent was further enlarged at the 1942 Venice Biennale with the addition of Cordelia Cattaneo and Carla Prina to its ranks. In his introductory text for the catalogue Marinetti enthused over the work of such painters, stating:

The Futurist abstractionists Radice Rho Badiali Bianchi who with the Futurist architects of Como's 'Antonio Sant'Elia' Futurist Group make Como a true powerhouse of imperious spirituality exhibit a number of powerful abstract dynamisms infused with an absolute devotion to Art to the Future to Synthesis and to that Italian pride of ours that has nothing Nordic or standardised about it⁹³

Badiali, Bianchi, Prina, Radice and Rho went on to exhibit with the Futurist group for a final time at the IV Quadriennale of 1943.

⁸⁸ See Di Raddo, "Una centrale elettrica", cit., pp. 113-15, and Caramel, *Radice*, cit., p. 26.

⁸⁹ See Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1939/4; 1939/7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1941/9.

⁹¹ Sant'Elia's name was added following a request from Marinetti to Ciliberti of 20 June 1941, sent by telegram (see Di Raddo, "Una centrale elettrica", cit., p. 118).

⁹² See Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/14.

⁹³ 'Aeropitture di guerra cosmiche biochimiche sacre documentarie meccaniche', cit., pp. 232-33.

Unaccountably, Cattaneo and Prina are not referred to in Marinetti's text.

Despite Marinetti's expressions of esteem, the true extent of the sympathy that existed between his group and that led by Ciliberti is open to debate. Certainly, Antonio Sant'Elia was idolised by Rationalist architects such as Terragni, while the Futurist spirit of their own work had in turn long been acknowledged by Marinetti's circle.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Futurism's multidisciplinary approach and aesthetic pluralism was consistent with Ciliberti's own cultural agenda, as we have seen, while the movement's pioneering role in the development of abstraction ensured that the experiments of the Como contingent met with understanding rather than incomprehension from Marinetti's artists, broadly speaking.

However, there were perhaps as many divergences between the two groups as there were points of contact. For instance, none of the founding members of the Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi belonged to what one might term the 'mainstream' Futurist movement. Moreover, Ciliberti's contingent asserted its complete independence with respect to Marinetti's group in an internal memorandum dated 16 June 1941, where it was specified that 'although adhering unconditionally to the spirit of Futurism, the Group retains full autonomy [for itself] both in terms of its participation in national Futurist manifestations and in announcing [its own] special events'.⁹⁵ Conversely, on a formal basis the work of the Como artists had little impact on the imagery produced by the wider Futurist movement at this time, from which hard-edged geometric abstraction was conspicuous by its absence. The 'concrete' aesthetics of painters such as Rho, Radice and Badiali (**Figs 5, 19, 20**) also conflicted with that of the Futurist movement in other, more important, respects. In his memoirs, Crali recalls how he and Marinetti clashed with Prampolini and the *futuristi astrattisti* over their differing interpretations of modernity and the importance of subject matter:

⁹⁴ See Di Raddo, "Una centrale elettrica", cit., p. 115, n. 26. The journal *Stile Futurista* (1934-35), for instance, had carried regular features on Modernist architecture.

⁹⁵ See Di Raddo, "Una centrale elettrica", cit., p. 118.

Lively discussion at the [1942] Biennale between Marinetti and Crali, on the one hand, and Prampolini and the Como Abstractionists, on the other. We uphold the validity of the path indicated by Boccioni, springing from an encounter with the reality of life enriched by the force-lines of universal dynamism. They counter that art should only employ abstract forms that crystallise in the work itself, and that everything else is a matter of appearance [and thus] extraneous to art. '[...] Abstraction can please the eye, but it is deprived of vitality, deprived of blood.' 'It is today's technological and mechanical civilisation that demands abstraction.' 'You do not seem to realise that you have a close bond with geometry, not with the machine or technology, which it is clear you neither understand nor feel. The machine without energy becomes a still life. You impose method; we defend creative inspiration, which accepts no methods.' After two hours of discussion neither side has changed its position.⁹⁶ (Fig. 21)

Marinetti appears to have been consistent in subscribing to this viewpoint. In his introduction to the Futurist section at the 1930 Biennale, for instance, he had maintained that 'avoiding the erroneous abstract starting point of the French avant-gardes – and, implicitly, their cold and arbitrary monotony – we take reality as our point of departure'.⁹⁷ He expressed similar sentiments in 1943, attacking 'the rancid theory of painting without subject matter based on pure tonal values'⁹⁸ (although by this point Marinetti's objections were as patriotic as they were aesthetic in character). Consequently, the spirit of cooperation between the two factions at this time can ultimately be said to have been dictated more by matters of principle and creative solidarity with other targets of conservative criticism (both Futurist art and Ciliberti's *Valori Primordiali* having been harshly condemned by the conservative journal *Perseo* during the late 1930s)⁹⁹ than by the existence of any profound formal sympathies.

⁹⁶ Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', in Rebeschini, *Crali aeropittore futurista*, cit., pp. 169-70.

⁹⁷ 'La nuova pittura futurista', in *XVII^a Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte – 1930. Catalogo*, exh. cat., 1st edn (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1930), pp. 135-36 (p. 135).

⁹⁸ Letter to Gigli, 23 June 1943 (GRI 850702 / S. III, B. 8, F. 10), p. 4.

⁹⁹ See Di Raddo, "Una centrale elettrica", cit., p. 113.

The constitution of this 'defensive alliance [...] against the attempt of the Fascist right wing to ape the *Entartete Kunst* operation of Nazism'¹⁰⁰ was certainly the most important achievement of the Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi. However, whilst its formation did not lead to any notable levels of aesthetic cross-fertilisation, Di Raddo is justified in describing as 'reductive' accounts that frame its significance *solely* in terms of cultural politics.¹⁰¹ Ciliberti's reflections on 'primordial' values at this time may have turned Marinetti's thoughts to the possibility of another linguistic 'clean-sweep' in formulating certain new poetic theories between 1943 and 1944, while the terse language and graphic economy of the group's manifestos may have exerted an influence on the *poesia visuale* of Belloli around the same time. Additionally, the Futurist movement's accommodation of abstract artists revealed its commitment to supporting truly modern art in all its forms, while also appearing to stimulate a fascinating internal debate on the nature of Futurist painting. Above all, the existence of the Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi constituted proof that it was not only associations such as Corrente that were capable of attracting 'the most lively and progressive forces' in Italian culture at this time.¹⁰²

II.III Sculpture

During the 1940s sculpture continued to played a secondary role in Futurist art, just as it had always done. Crali produced bas-reliefs portraying a number of the movement's icons (**Fig. 22**) and explored his long-standing interest in experimenting with found materials (**Fig. 23**) – an activity that reflected the influence of Prampolini, and which was later to manifest itself in his post-war theory of *sassintesi* ('stonesynthesis'), which exploited the evocative, anthropomorphic

¹⁰⁰ Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., p. 719.

¹⁰¹ "'Una centrale elettrica'", cit., p. 109.

¹⁰² De Micheli, 'Realism and the Post-war Debate', cit., p. 281.



Fig. 21 Anon., Tullio Crali, Ada Crali and Enrico Prampolini at the 1942 Venice Biennale photograph, 8.4 x 13.4 cm, Paris: Giovanni Lista Collection



Fig. 22 Tullio Crali, *Marinetti Poet of Technicisms* (or, *Marinetti Zang Tumb Tumb*), 1942-70
bas-relief, 54.5 x 45.5 x 10.5 cm
Rovereto: Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto

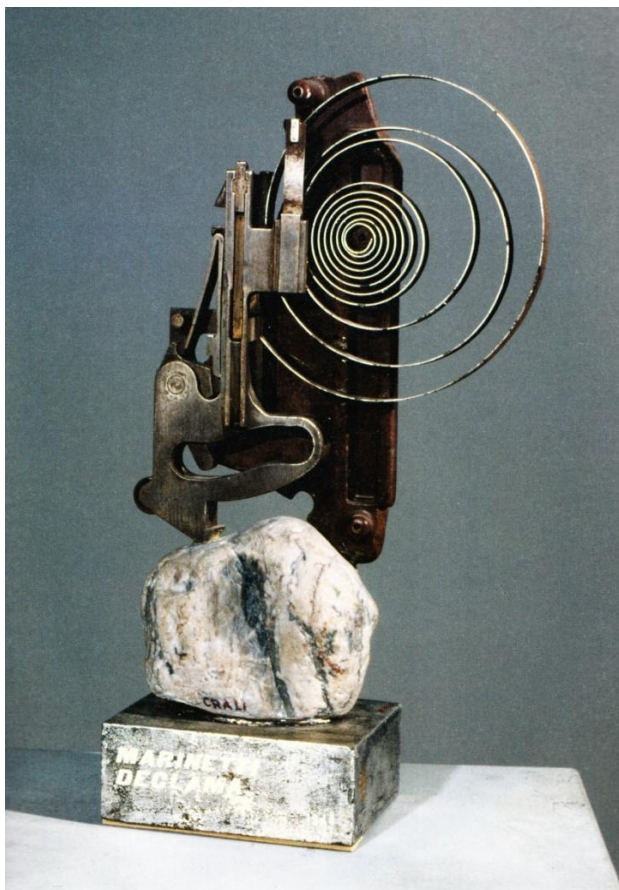


Fig. 23
Tullio Crali, *Marinetti Declaims the War*, 1944
found materials, 38 x 23 x 10.5 cm
Rovereto: Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di
Trento e Rovereto



Fig. 24
Umberto Peschi
Aeroportrait of an Aviator, c. 1940
wood, 58 x 28 x 28 cm
Macerata: Pinacoteca Civica



Fig. 25 Wladimiro Tulli, *Sun and 2 Aeroplanes*, 1942-43
coloured bronze, 41 x 78 cm
Verona: private collection

qualities of geological formations.¹⁰³ However, Umberto Peschi was arguably the most significant artist still working in this field during the 1940s, Di Bosso having turned his attention primarily to painting and printmaking, and both Thayaht (Ernesto Michahelles) and Mino Rosso having scaled down their participation in the movement due to ill health and ideological concerns respectively.¹⁰⁴ Unlike Crali, Peschi was a sculptor by vocation, and created a number of striking wooden pieces which, whilst restricted to a single material, in other respects owed much to the theoretical example of Boccioni. This is particularly apparent in works such as *Aeroportrait of an Aviator* (**Fig. 24**), in which the pilot's head is bisected by the wings of an aeroplane – an image recalling Boccioni's assertion that in Futurist sculpture 'the cogs of a machine might easily appear out of the armpits of a mechanic, or the lines of a table could cut a reader's head in two'.¹⁰⁵ Tulli – a fellow member with Peschi of Macerata's vibrant Futurist group – also produced a significant number of delightful polychrome bronze reliefs and densely textured aerosculptures around this time (**Fig. 25**).

III. LITERATURE AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

The overwhelming majority of literary works published by the Futurist movement during the 1940s were poetic in nature – an area of activity that is considered at length in Chapter Five. However, hesitant experiments were also undertaken with the 'synthetic novel' – a form of

¹⁰³ On what Crali termed his earlier 'poetic games with matter' see Rebeschini, *Crالي aeropittore futurista*, cit., pp. 52-57; on his theory of *sassintesi* see pp. 66-77 (ibid.).

¹⁰⁴ See Alessandra Scappini, ed., *Thayaht. Vita, scritti, carteggi* (Milan: Skira; Rovereto: Mart, 2005), p. 155, and Luisa Perlo's entry on Rosso in Godoli, *Il dizionario del Futurismo*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 994-98 (p. 997).

¹⁰⁵ 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture' (1912), in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit., pp. 51-65 (pp. 62-63).

prose that received codification in manifesto of late 1939.¹⁰⁶ This new genre reflected Futurism's long-standing belief in the virtue of brevity (*'it's stupid to write one hundred pages where one would do'*)¹⁰⁷ that would soon be taken to its extreme, logical conclusion with Belloli's highly distilled poetic compositions. The manifesto's signatories asserted: 'In a century when it is possible to travel at 700km per hour [...] we have nothing but scorn for the depressing monotony of the thousand pages of a Thomas Mann or a Jules Romains'.¹⁰⁸ One text written in accordance with the principles of this manifesto was Piero Bellanova's *Nose-dive into Love*,¹⁰⁹ the theme of which (wartime romance) addressed a topic that preoccupied other Futurist writers and theoreticians at this time.¹¹⁰ Bellanova's text spanned the invasion of Ethiopia and the Spanish Civil War, and chronicled the development of the relationship between the novel's two protagonists, Enzo and Adriana, from their first encounter at the *Exhibition of Italian Mineralogical Autarky*¹¹¹ to their marriage, condensing five highly eventful years into just fifteen terse pages. To satisfy those readers who found such minimalism disconcerting, Bellanova appended a 'Passéist Contents Page' to the end of his text, indicating how 'without adding a single new [i. e. significant] episode one might develop this simultaneous synthetic novel into one of the usual analytical epics'.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ F. T. Marinetti, Luigi Scrivo and Piero Bellanova, 'Il romanzo sintetico. Manifesto futurista' (*Il Giornale d'Italia*, 24 December 1939), in Caruso, *Manifesti*, cit., vol. III, no. 297.

¹⁰⁷ F. T. Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra, 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre' (1915), in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 131-37 (p. 133); original emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ 'Il romanzo sintetico', cit.

¹⁰⁹ *Picchiata nell'amore* (Rome: Unione Editoriale d'Italia, 1940). Geppo Tedeschi's *Gli Adoratori della Patria* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1941) represents another experiment with this new literary genre.

¹¹⁰ See below, Chapter Five.

¹¹¹ Held in Rome between 18 November 1938 and 9 May 1939, this propaganda exercise had pronounced Modernist overtones, incorporating three-dimensional murals and installations by Prampolini. See Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1938-1939/1.

¹¹² *Picchiata nell'amore*, cit., p. 30.

Despite having been the lead signatory of the manifesto, Marinetti never experimented with the *romanzo sintetico* himself (although his introduction to Bellanova's novel was appropriately brief).¹¹³ This is not altogether surprising, given that his works of fiction were rarely concerned with moving the 'action' along swiftly in accordance with any logical, linear narrative. Whilst never prolix or verbose, the intensely lyrical, luxuriant style of his *aeroromanzi* or *aeropoemi*¹¹⁴ never aspired to the kind of schematic quality that characterised Bellanova's novel, the pages of which read like storyboards where the key events of the drama are merely sketched out, an approach intended 'to increase the reader's intuition to the point that he might *suppose* the logical development of the action'.¹¹⁵

From both a stylistic and a structural point of view, one of the most identifiably novelistic compositions produced by Marinetti during these years was *Venezianella and Studentaccio*. In many ways, this bizarre tale of the creation of a utopian 'New Venice' by a group of Futurist artisans – and of the distinctly unsatisfying and inconclusive romance between its two protagonists – epitomises Marinetti's highly unconventional approach to fiction. Its many abrupt changes of situation and scene – and their vividly described, yet deeply incongruous and fragmentary nature – is profoundly suggestive of the skewed realism and logic of the dream-state. So too is the manner in which real-life figures such as Ciliberti, Crali, Mario Menin and the long-dead Futurist artist and aviator Fedele Azari¹¹⁶ are woven into the narrative, participating in the action alongside the novel's fictional characters (a well-worn strategy by means of which

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹⁴ Marinetti's preferred, cover-all, term for his literary compositions at this time, indicating a conviction that their style transcended any traditional distinctions between poetry and prose.

¹¹⁵ Marinetti, Scrivo, Bellanova, *Il romanzo sintetico*, cit; my emphasis.

¹¹⁶ Azari died in 1930. However, the novel is not set in the past, but references contemporary events such as the battle for Tobruk – a city much fought over by Axis and Allied forces during World War Two. It is from here that the injured Red Cross nurse Venezianella is air-lifted at the beginning of the story (*Venezianella e Studentaccio*, cit., p. 3).

Marinetti sought to mythologise the lives of his artists and poets).¹¹⁷ Interestingly, however, Marinetti attributed the fractured, chimerical quality of his tale not to the workings of the unconscious, but to those of the *conscious* mind, stating: 'This aeronovel or aeropoem cares little about time and space since the author considers himself to be in absolute control of his imagination'.¹¹⁸ Marinetti's insistence on this point may have been intended to dismiss any suggestion of his novel's reliance on Surrealist (that is to say, French) models, the 'innovations' of which he consistently maintained had been prefigured in his own poetry and theoretical statements¹¹⁹ but which the above remark suggests he now considered old-hat. And indeed, *Venezianella and Studentaccio* stands as a vivid and irrefutable testament to the enduring singularity, force and mercurial quality of Marinetti's imagination.

Following their manifesto of 1939, Marinetti, Scrivo and Bellanova were to collaborate on a quite different initiative on 22 January 1941, when they interrupted a performance of *Our Town* by the American playwright Thornton Wilder at Rome's Teatro Argentina.¹²⁰ Luigi Bonelli also

¹¹⁷ See, for instance, his allegorical text 'Let's Murder the Moonshine' (1909) in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 53-62, his 1922 novel *The Untameables* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1994) and his 1932 fable 'The Dinner that Stopped a Suicide', in F. T. Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook* (London: Trefoil, 1989), pp. 23-29.

¹¹⁸ *Venezianella e Studentaccio*, cit., p. 107.

¹¹⁹ See, for instance, his introductory text 'Futuristi aeropittori d'Africa e Spagna', in *XXI^a Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte – 1938-XVI. Catalogo*, exh. cat., 2nd edn (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1938), pp. 181-84, in which he asserted that Surrealism, 'as an art of the irrational and the subconscious [is] [...] the descendent of those irrational and subconscious words in freedom published by me 25 years ago' (p. 181). As we have seen (p. 77), Marinetti's rivalry with the French avant-garde was of long-standing, but perhaps naturally intensified during the war years.

¹²⁰ Accounts of this episode can be found in Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre 1909-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 547, and Guerri, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 258.

participated in the demonstration,¹²¹ representing playwrights on behalf of the National Union of Authors and Writers – an institution that would appear broadly to have shared its Secretary's concerns about the decline of contemporary Italian theatre.¹²² Marinetti's protest – which Berghaus describes as having been 'conducted with his usual aplomb in the best tradition of Futurist Action Theatre'¹²³ – was directed in part at Wilder for his failure to acknowledge the Futurist ancestry of certain stylistic conceits (the script for *Our Town* specified that it was to be performed without scenery or props of any kind). However, its main target was the Italian theatrical establishment itself for its complacent neglect of radical, home-grown talent in favour of what Marinetti and his companions perceived to be lesser, foreign, imitators. Defending his actions, Marinetti stated that they were intended

to denounce the shameless plagiarism of Futurism's technical inventions and to strike a further blow against the stupid and repugnant snobbish *esterofilia* of a public that is ready to applaud the apparent originality of non-Italian authors without remembering authentic and creative Italian originality [...] The lesson given by us is directed at passéists of every kind Its aim was to establish the inventive importance of Futurist synthetic theatre the only and decisive theatrical revolution of this century¹²⁴

And indeed, it was the latter ambition – rather than the production of new works for the stage – that constituted the overriding focus of Futurist activity in this sphere during the first two years of the period under consideration here, when Marinetti drafted a number of polemical texts on

¹²¹ See Marinetti's text 'Tumultuosa serata al Teatro Argentina di Roma in difesa del primato teatrale italiano', in F. T. Marinetti, *Il teatro futurista* (Naples: CLET, 1941), pp. 3-4 (p. 3).

¹²² See the article 'Difesa sindacale del teatro di prosa', *Autori e Scrittori*, January 1941 (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10496-01; incomplete). This issue of the journal also carried the article by Marinetti referred to in the preceding note.

¹²³ *Italian Futurist Theatre*, cit., p. 547.

¹²⁴ Marinetti, 'Tumultuosa serata al Teatro Argentina', cit., pp. 3-4; my italics.

the subject.¹²⁵ These did not simply rely on the tedious reiteration of the movement's historical achievements to make their point (something that so often characterised Marinetti's defence of Futurist primacy across the various artistic fields) but instead made incisive, targeted criticisms of contemporary attitudes and practices in which a genuine sense of outrage is palpable.

One might interpret Giovanni Acquaviva's 'Manifesto for a Transparent Theatre' of 1944 as a reaction to this prevailing state of affairs, although – ironically – its call for dramatists to 'highlight [...] every artifice, revealing it sincerely and manifestly for that which it is'¹²⁶ closely recalled the metatheatrical elements of Wilder's aforementioned play. From its initially somewhat surprising criticism of the modern theatre as 'an enormous machine bristling with strangulating levers',¹²⁷ to its call for a 'cosmically transparent theatre without curtain without stage [and] emancipated from the professionalism of actors',¹²⁸ this document reflects the movement's profound disdain for the theatrical establishment at this time, as well as its enduring enthusiasm for 'grass-roots' activity.¹²⁹ However, it is also expressive of the pared-back, minimalist character of Futurism in its final years, as well as the radical transformation of

¹²⁵ In addition to the articles mentioned above, see the press release 'Polemiche teatrali. Una risposta del poeta Marinetti', dated 2 November 1940 (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 08706-01 – 08707-01), the Futurist leader's typescripts 'Il teatro futurista italiano imitato dagli americani' of c. 1941 (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10609-01 – 10610-01) and 'Commediografi stranieri plagiatori del nostro teatro sintetico gabellati per originali', n. d. (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10631-01 – 10632-01; incomplete), and the article 'Una proposta del poeta Marinetti per il potenziamento del teatro italiano', *Autori e Scrittori*, [1941] (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10105-01; 09954-01).

¹²⁶ 'Manifesto per un teatro trasparente', in Giovanni Farris, ed., *Manifesti futuristi savonesi* (Savona: Sabatelli, 1981), pp. 46-47 (p. 47).

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 46. Cf. Marinetti, Settimelli, Corra, 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre', cit.: 'In Milan we shall soon have the great metal building, enlivened by all the electromechanical inventions that alone will permit us to realize our most free conceptions on the stage' (p. 137).

¹²⁸ 'Manifesto per un teatro trasparente', cit., pp. 46-47.

¹²⁹ See above, Chapter One, p. 39. In fact, Farfa (Vittorio Osvaldo Tommasini) spoke of wanting to completely *steatrare* ('de-theatre') the stage at this time; see Giovanni Farris, ed., *Teatro futurista savonese* (Savona: Sabatelli, 1984), pp. 12, 15.

the movement's machine aesthetic, increasingly symbolised by the weightless cosmic radio waves of modern technology rather than the unwieldy industrial hardware of 'marble distribution panels bristling with dials, keyboards, and shining commutators'.¹³⁰

In the broadest sense of the term – and under increasingly difficult circumstances – Futurist 'performance' remained an important aspect of the movement's activities throughout the 1940s in the form of regular *serate futuriste* (**Fig. 26**). These included the *raduni di poesia* (Poetry Gatherings) organised by Crali in German-occupied Gorizia between July 1944 and April 1945¹³¹ and the *Quarti d'ora di poesia* (Quarter-hour of Poetry) evenings organised in Savona by Acquaviva and Farfa from April 1944 until March 1945.¹³² Giovanni Farris has noted that the latter, 'in accordance with a typically Futurist structure (theoretical statements, poetic declamations, manifesto launches, provocations, debates...) involved the public to such an extent that they can be said to have been characterised by a genuine performative dimension'.¹³³ Indeed, Farfa's cosmic 'fable' *Almost a Star* was performed at the fortieth such evening (26 November 1944) by way of an experiment with the principles of 'transparent theatre'.¹³⁴ To a certain extent, such events picked up from where Marinetti's seemingly perpetual cycle of lectures and poetry readings left off after mid-1943.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Marinetti, 'Geometric and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 105-11 (p. 106). On this point, see also below, Chapter Five, and the 'epilogue' to this thesis.

¹³¹ See Tullio Crali, 'Crali. Scheda futurista 25 – Raduni di poesia sotto occupazione', in Crali, *Crali futurista* [1973], cit.

¹³² See Farris, *Teatro futurista savonese*, cit., p. 7.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 9.

¹³⁴ The play was performed once again at an event organised to mark the death of Marinetti, in addition to a work by Acquaviva titled *Light Voice and Dark Voice*. Acquaviva later completely rewrote Farfa's initial script and added a third drama (*The Vastest Horizons*) to form a trilogy. Ibid., pp. 15, 16.

¹³⁵ A constant feature of these had been concert recitals by the pianist Aldo Giuntini. At their most effective, Giuntini's highly compressed compositions resemble musical equivalents of Imagist poetry –



Fig. 26 *Serata d'arte futurista* at Udine's Istituto Tecnico 'A. Zanon', 22 January 1942 (see Fig. 1)
 (left to right: Marinetti, Crali and Aldo Giuntini; in the background is Crali's 1939 painting
Before the Parachute Opens), photograph, 8.5 x 13.5 cm
 (BFTMP GEN MSS 130 / S. VIII, B. 51, F. 1959)

something particularly true of *The Sea*, the swelling, insistent rhythms of which strongly evoke those of H. D.'s famous poem *Oread* of 1915. Giuntini was the most significant composer working within the Futurist movement at this time; others included Carlo Brizzi, Walter Ferrato, Primo Fonario and Chesimò (Mario Monachesi). Two examples of the latter's *aeromusica di guerra* are reproduced in Toni, *Futuristi nelle Marche*, cit., pp. 121-22, one of which is a musical evocation of anti-aircraft fire.