

**CHAPTER SIX – ‘JUSTIFIED IN THIS MOMENT AS NEVER BEFORE’: FUTURISM’S POLITICAL AND CRITICAL FORTUNES DURING THE 1940S**

On 13 December 1945, Tullio Crali submitted a statement to the President of Gorizia’s Purge Commission responding to – or, more correctly, repudiating – the charge of having been a ‘fervent supporter of Fascism’, made against him eight days earlier.<sup>1</sup> It is unclear who – if anyone – made the accusation against Crali; the Commission’s interest in him may simply have been a consequence of his imprisonment at the hands of Tito’s forces on similar charges between the late spring and early summer of 1945.<sup>2</sup> Crali’s organisation of poetry evenings in German-occupied Gorizia (the so-called *raduni di poesia*) had been viewed as politically motivated by the city’s new Yugoslavian occupiers – something again strenuously denied by Crali in his statement.<sup>3</sup> Perceiving that his predicament was owed to his association with Marinetti’s movement, Crali criticised that ‘general incomprehension regarding artistic matters’ which had led some ‘to confuse – or better, to fuse – Futurism and Fascism’,<sup>4</sup> thereby giving rise to fundamental misconceptions about the nature of their relationship:

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Al Presidente della Commissione di Epurazione di Gorizia’ (Cra.3.237), [p. 1]. ‘Purge Commissions’ were set up in the post-war period under the government of Ferruccio Parri, leader of the anti-Fascist Action Party, with the aim of weeding out Fascist sympathisers from the civil service and other areas of Italian public life. However, the system was open to abuse, and at times came to resemble a witch hunt: ‘Tough decrees had been passed, laying down criminal sanctions against those who had “collaborated” with the Nazis or with the Salò regime. They could be applied to virtually anyone in Northern Italy who had not actually been a partisan – i.e. to 30 million people. So millions of ordinary Italians began complaining about the injustice of retrospective legislation, and fearing denunciation by personal enemies.’ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1995*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Harlow: Longman, 1996), pp. 317-18.

<sup>2</sup> See Crali, ‘Una vita per il Futurismo’, in Rebeschini, *Crali aeropittore futurista*, cit., pp. 177-80, and ‘Crali. Scheda futurista 25 – Raduni di poesia sotto occupazione’, in Crali, *Crali futurista* [1973], cit., [pp. 3-4].

<sup>3</sup> ‘Al Presidente della Commissione di Epurazione di Gorizia’, cit., [p. 3]

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., [p. 1]

Due to our intransigent attitude toward all forms of passéist art, Futurism made enemies always and everywhere, principally within Italy and certainly within the Fascist regime: press boycotts, exhibition vetoes, exclusions from public works projects, rejections from journals and books, and obstruction on the part of the authorities, from the [highest] Minister to the lowliest lackey.<sup>5</sup>

Even before the end of the war, other artists and writers had protested in a similar vein. In an open letter to the editors of the newspaper *La Tribuna*, published on 22 August 1943, Mario Menin likewise indignantly rejected the notion that Futurism had been favoured by the regime to any significant degree:

As to the quasi-official position given to the Futurist movement by the Fascist government, this is all hot air. No-one I know possesses current accounts or has deposits resting in the bank. None of us has received government prizes. None of us has been able adequately to satisfy his hunger, whilst money has been frittered away on organisations and individuals whose passéism has nothing to do with our Futurism.<sup>6</sup>

First-hand testimonies such as these, summarised in Enzo Benedetto's claim that the Futurists were 'as welcome in the Fascist temples of art as dogs in a church',<sup>7</sup> have frequently been accepted as the official version of events, particularly as these unfolded during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., [p. 2]. The charges against Crali were dismissed on 16 March 1946, as revealed by a certificate issued by the Allied Military Government (Cra.3.236).

<sup>6</sup> Frat., 'Discussioni sull'arte' (Cra.3.67).

<sup>7</sup> A view ascribed to Benedetto by Berghaus in his *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 257. Such views were echoed by other members of the movement following the collapse of the regime, including Depero in his own 'Relazione dei miei rapporti artistici con il fascismo' of 1945. In his above volume Berghaus cites this statement, in which Depero claimed: 'Fascism has never understood me, protected or valued me, sustained or defended me as I would have merited' (p. 293). See also Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*, cit., pp. 281-82.

But to what extent can they be said to reflect the true state of affairs? Clearly, statements written in the immediate post-war period by artists associated with the newly politically-compromised Futurist movement cannot be taken at face value, and need to be subjected to particularly close scrutiny. Unable to deny their association with Futurism, it would appear that after 1945 individual artists sought to evade potentially damaging accusations of complicity with Fascism by cutting the cords that had bound the movement itself to the regime. Yet Crali's assertion that 'the Cremona Prize [...] found its fiercest adversaries among the Futurists'<sup>8</sup> was blatantly untrue, as we have seen,<sup>9</sup> while Menin proved himself to be equally economical with the truth in presenting Futurism as a movement that had never received substantial support or encouragement from the regime. Documents conserved in Rome's Archivio Centrale dello Stato and the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles reveal that this artist in fact received the (not insignificant) sum of L. 29,200 in government funding during the late 1930s and early 1940s<sup>10</sup> in addition to having works bought by official bodies such as the Federazione Nazionale dei Consorzi Provinciali tra i Produttori dell'Agricoltura (L. 15,000),<sup>11</sup> and even by the Duce himself.<sup>12</sup>

The secondary literature on this subject should be approached with equal caution. As we saw

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<sup>8</sup> 'Al Presidente della Commissione di Epurazione di Gorizia', cit., [p. 2].

<sup>9</sup> Chapter Three, pp. 103-08.

<sup>10</sup> See Giovanni Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini. La cultura finanziata dal fascismo* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2010), p. 206. Menin did not become involved with the Futurist movement until c. 1936. By way of a comparison, Sedita describes the sum of L. 23,000 awarded to the poet Libero De Libero as 'considerable' (p. 88). Sedita's study offers a useful and concise analysis of the Fascist regime's provision of financial assistance to artists, writers and journalists through the Ministry of Popular Culture, as revealed by receipts and other documentation conserved at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato.

<sup>11</sup> See the letter from the President of this organisation to Marinetti, dated 23 December 1940 (GRI 850702 / S. I, B. 3, F. 7).

<sup>12</sup> See Marinetti's introduction to the 1942 Biennale catalogue, in *XXIII<sup>a</sup> Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*, cit., p. 229.

earlier, it is Berghaus's contention that the 'degenerate' art campaign of 1938 resulted in the Futurist movement finally being crushed beneath the jackboot of those on the Fascist right wing who had long desired its disappearance from Italy's cultural panorama. Consequently, the concessions which the movement had managed to wring from the regime over the years,

won by perverting nearly every principle Futurism used to stand for, could never be fully consolidated and transformed into a final triumph [due to] the growing influence of Hitler and Nazi politics in Italy. Naturally, the cultural climate in the country was also affected by this, with quite disastrous results for Futurist artists.<sup>13</sup>

Identifying signs of a newfound conservatism in the regime's architectural commissions, contemporary commentators such as Greenberg likewise drew similar conclusions about an inexorable drift toward the right in cultural matters around this time, as previously noted.<sup>14</sup> However, in this area of Futurist scholarship – as in so many others – the outer limits of academic research tend to be represented by the outbreak of World War Two, with little consideration being given to subsequent developments. One consequence of this is that certain presumptions about the fate of Marinetti's movement during the 1940s appear to have been made on the basis of the situation prevailing at the end of the preceding decade. The attacks unleashed against the avant-garde by the extreme Right at this time have been presented as some form of logical, repressive, conclusion to Fascism's cultural politics, enduring throughout the war years with the regime's tacit approval ('when it set up the Cremona Prize at the end of the thirties the Regime made it clear that it knew what it liked')<sup>15</sup> rather than as representing a particular moment in an ongoing, *fluctuating*, relationship between Fascism and Italy's various artistic groupings and associations. Given that an unstable, constantly shifting dynamic had long

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<sup>13</sup> Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> Chapter One, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Rosazza-Ferraris, 'The Aeropainters and the State', in Mantura, Rosazza-Ferraris and Velani, *Futurism in Flight*, cit., p. 35.

since characterised the nature of this relationship, such a presumption is inherently risky and demands closer investigation. The few commentators who *have* looked beyond 1939, such as Salaris and Stone, have reached quite different conclusions on these matters, the latter noting how ‘Futurism’s protected status continued throughout the Fascist era. Even after National Socialist antimodernism and the Nazi aesthetic purges influenced Fascist cultural policy, the futurists and Marinetti remained central players in state-sponsored culture’.<sup>16</sup>

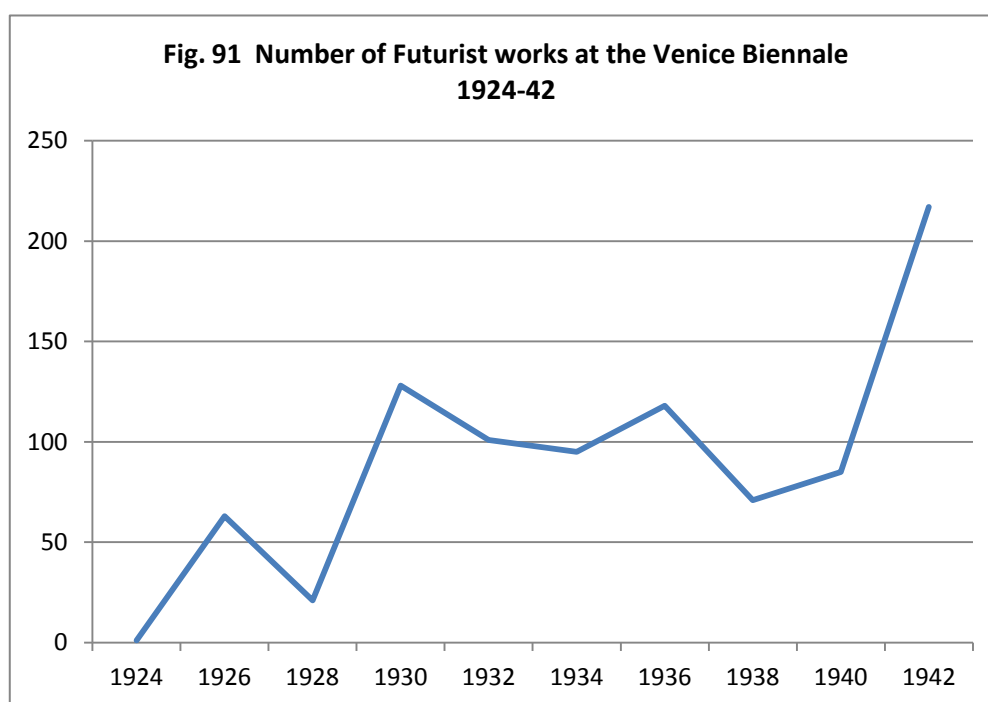
Having examined the available evidence, it is my belief that Futurism’s relationship with Fascism during the 1940s was far more positive than is frequently maintained. I make no claim that Futurism became the official art of the state at this time. However, given that it would be impossible to make this claim in relation to *any* movement or school of painting, Futurism was in no way unique in this respect. Any suggestion that the movement’s failure to attain actual *pre-eminence* in the cultural sphere was tantamount to, or a consequence of, governmental persecution would be a gross exaggeration of the facts, and can only be accounted for by a desire to draw some form of satisfying – albeit artificial – moral conclusion as to the fate of any avant-garde artist who abandons his or her ‘noble’ outsider status in order to make a Faustian pact with the establishment. Nevertheless, I *do* claim that the 1940s witnessed a dramatic improvement in the movement’s political fortunes rather than a decline, certainly when compared to the late 1930s, but even in relation to earlier phases of the relationship between Futurism and Fascism. In illustrating this point, various indicators of official favour will be taken into account, including the movement’s representation at major exhibitions, Marinetti’s status within the regime, and the financial assistance provided to Futurist artists by governmental bodies. Not believing such an upturn to have been coincidental, I will also attempt to identify the reasons why this may have occurred, examining the matter in the context of the regime’s changing priorities going into the 1940s, as well as those of Mussolini himself.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Patron State*, cit., p. 52.

## I. THE REHABILITATION OF FUTURISM

Whilst it would be rash to extrapolate the nature of official attitudes to Futurism during the 1940s from the analysis of a single event, a consideration of the movement's participation in the Venice Biennale is a good place to begin examining the issue. As Stone notes, this institution constituted 'the apex of a hierarchy of Fascist-sponsored exhibitions'.<sup>17</sup> As such, it can be considered a good indicator of the favour in which particular groups or artists were held. Additionally, the statistics relating to Futurism's involvement in the Biennale are sufficiently remarkable as to merit particular attention.



As the above graph illustrates, the movement's representation peaked dramatically in 1942 when a total of 217 Futurist works were exhibited, greatly exceeding the previous high of 128 pieces recorded over a decade earlier in 1930. This figure contrasts even more markedly with the totals recorded at the preceding two Biennales of 1938 and 1940, when just 71 and 85

<sup>17</sup> *The Patron State*, cit., p. 33.

pieces had been displayed, respectively.<sup>18</sup> Given the violence of the debate surrounding Fascist art that occurred during the late 1930s, it is perhaps unsurprising that the first of the latter two exhibitions witnessed the third lowest representation of Futurist art since the group began to participate in the Biennale in 1926.<sup>19</sup> However, this merely serves to render the sharp increase of 1942 even more remarkable, directly challenging the notion of an ineluctable downturn in the movement's official fortunes during the Forties. Indeed, as Giuliana Tomasella has noted: 'The richness of the Futurist presence at the XXIII Biennale was unprecedented.'<sup>20</sup>

No less interesting than the *number* of works at this show was their character and location within the exhibition. Of the 217 pieces displayed, 190 were shown in the vacant Belgian pavilion, which had been placed entirely at the disposal of Marinetti's group. This was the third occasion Futurism had been awarded a dedicated space of its own at the Biennale, the Soviet pavilion having been given over to the movement in 1926 and 1936, when it had hosted two

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the number of works included in Biennales tended to fluctuate over the course of each exhibition. For instance, the first edition of the 1940 catalogue lists 72 Futurist works – the total of 85 given here being recorded in the second edition. Conversely, in 1930 the total of 128 pieces noted above was given in the first edition of the catalogue, this figure falling to 116 by the time it reached its second edition. The figures given here reflect the highest totals for each year, although I have not been able to view every edition of every catalogue. It is also important to note that my figures correspond to the total number of pieces exhibited, rather than the number of catalogue entries stated, given that several works were occasionally grouped together under a single catalogue entry. For instance: 'Diciannove disegni acquerellati' (1942, p. 244) has been counted as 19 works. However, '14. Due dinamismi abissini' (1936, p. 180) has been considered as one work, since the title is altogether more ambiguous, the word *due* most likely referring to the exploration of two contrasting movements in a single image rather than denoting the presence of two separate pieces.

<sup>19</sup> Dottori became the first member of the movement to take part in the Biennale when, in 1924, he exhibited a single work titled *Umbrian Spring* on a unilateral basis – much to Marinetti's displeasure. See Massimo Duranti, 'Dottori: The Futurist of Dynamic Nature and the Avant-garde Landscape', in Massimo Duranti, ed., *Gerardo Dottori: The Futurist View*, exh. cat. (Perugia: EFFE Fabrizio Fabbri, 2014), pp. 7-24 (p. 22; see also p. 111).

<sup>20</sup> Giuliana Tomasella, *Biennali di guerra. Arte e propaganda negli anni del conflitto (1939-1944)* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2001), p. 93.

much smaller selections of works (63 and 118, respectively). It has been suggested that far from constituting a gesture of respect or recognition, the provision of such enviable exhibition facilities represented an attempt to 'segregate' the movement from the national pavilion,<sup>21</sup> so as to emphasise to the outside world that Futurism in no sense reflected mainstream or official Italian culture. However, there is little evidence to suggest that Marinetti was displeased with such arrangements, despite his claim that they were initially necessitated by the hostility of exhibition juries to his movement. Indeed, he would appear actively to have *preferred* his artists to be shown as a distinct group, in order to emphasise the revolutionary character of their work and to avoid any dilution of its impact. In advance of the I Quadriennale of 1931, for instance, Marinetti had written to Mussolini (successfully) requesting that the exhibition's regulations prohibiting group participation in favour of an emphasis on individual works be relaxed in the case of Futurism, arguing that "the inclusion in the jury of ex-Futurists who have now become *arch enemies of Futurism*, excludes any kind of impartiality in the selection of Futurist pictures". He shrewdly concluded that "the only way to solve the problem is to devote – as the Venice Biennale exhibitions have done – a room to Futurist painting arranged by me".<sup>22</sup> Handing Marinetti the opportunity to mount the largest-ever exhibition of Futurist art in the history of the Biennale would have constituted a rather paradoxical and self-defeating means of sabotaging his movement, had this indeed been the intention of the organisers. Certainly, it would not appear to have been considered a snub by those close to the movement,<sup>23</sup> and it is most unlikely that the Futurist leader himself would have wasted any time worrying about the matter.

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<sup>21</sup> See Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., pp. 238-39.

<sup>22</sup> Cited by Salaris in her *La Quadriennale*, cit., p. 14; original emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Umberto Ronchi, 'La XXIII Biennale all'insegna della guerra', in *La Voce di Bergamo*, 1 July 1942 (Cra.2.342). Ronchi's comments suggest that he had been a comrade of Menin's during the Ethiopian war.



Arguably more significant than this was the location and status of the remaining 27 pieces, which were displayed in the Air Force pavilion as part of the aforementioned (and *most* official) exhibition of war art inspired by artists' first-hand experience of aerial combat.<sup>24</sup>

However, it was not only the space made available to Futurism at the 1942 Biennale that suggests a newfound respect for the movement, but also the overwhelmingly positive reviews received by the two exhibitions. As Stone has noted, the significance of these resides in the fact that 'the press was government controlled or monitored [meaning] that even art reviews must be read through the lens of official influence'.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of its size, its elevated status and its official character, Futurism's contribution to this 'War Biennale' was therefore anything but marginal. Taken in isolation it would still be remarkable; in fact, it was reflective of an altogether more general *rapprochement* that took place between Futurism and the political and cultural establishment during these years. As Passamani states, it would be largely fruitless to attempt to account for the improvement in the movement's fortunes at this time in terms of 'a belated aesthetic conversion'<sup>26</sup> to the visual vocabulary of Futurist art. Rather, it would appear to have been the consequence of pressures brought to bear on the regime by a combination of external events – chief among them, of course, being the war – and Mussolini's need to impose his authority in relation to the internal power struggles between the various factions within his government. Both made it necessary to bring Futurist painters in from the cold: in the first instance, to employ their considerable talents as illustrators of modern warfare, harnessing the indisputable force and power of their imagery, and in the second, to send a signal to those on the extreme right of the party that their recent

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<sup>24</sup> See above, Chapter Four.

<sup>25</sup> *The Patron State*, cit., p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Passamani, *Di Bosso futurista*, cit., p. 26.

inflammatory activities had been indulged long enough, and that the leash on which the Duce kept such unruly elements could be tightened whenever he wished.

## II. CONVERGENCES

In a characteristically pungent introduction to the catalogue of the 1942 Venice Biennale, the institution's Secretary General, Antonio Maraini, railed against the detachment from reality that he believed characterised the vast majority of contemporary artworks, arguing that painters and sculptors were evading their responsibility to engage with and chronicle the historic events taking place in front of their eyes. 'Why is it', he fulminated,

that when artists work with the sole aim of giving the full measure of their value [...] they take refuge in a world completely removed from events that affect them as much as any other mortals, and when they do try to consider, interest themselves in and interpret these events they fail to do so with the same interest, the same thirst for research – almost, I would say, the same intellectual commitment? Why do they fear this will belittle them, when the example of our past Masters – Giotto, Paolo Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Tintoretto – demonstrates that it is possible to attain the highest achievements in art by addressing one's own times and representing them? Yet perhaps this problem is not unique to the Biennale: perhaps it is the central problem of all contemporary art.<sup>27</sup>

As in a Venn diagram, one can identify a significant degree of overlapping here between the sentiments expressed by Maraini – which in turn echoed Fascist beliefs and concerns – and Futurist ideology of the preceding three decades. In reviewing the Futurist contribution to the exhibition, Giovanni Sabalich noted ironically that Maraini appeared not to have visited the

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<sup>27</sup> 'Introduzione', in *XXIII<sup>a</sup> Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*, cit., pp. 27-34 (pp. 33-34).

Futurist pavilion before writing his catalogue introduction, observing that ‘the example of [Bruno] Tano alone is sufficient to illustrate that the Futurists seek their emotions *exclusively* within our environment’.<sup>28</sup> However, it is possible that the scale of Futurism’s representation at the event was owed, at least in part, precisely to Maraini’s recognition of the fact that ‘Modernolatry, a term first used by the Futurist painter and sculptor Boccioni, remains [Futurism’s] watchword’ and that ‘Marinetti has encouraged the immortalisation of the events of this century in works of visual art and poetry’.<sup>29</sup>

With its focus firmly on the here-and-now, Marinetti’s recently-embattled movement therefore found itself attuned to the cultural and political establishment at this time to an unprecedented degree. Crucially, however, it would be more correct to speak of the establishment moving toward Futurism rather than vice versa, given that the movement can in no sense be said to have cynically or artificially manoeuvred itself into an advantageous position through a reorientation of its existing concerns, iconography or stylistic approach. Its long-standing passion for the cut-and-thrust of current events rather than the peaceful, eternal rhythms of Italian rural life, its celebration of the machine, its interventionist zeal and – perhaps most significantly – the first-hand experience of warfare that informed many of the works on display at the 1942 Biennale, would appear to have legitimised the movement’s imagery in the eyes of many who had previously dismissed it out of hand, not only endowing it with an undeniable relevance, but also an unassailable aura of moral authority and authenticity. As Tomasella has noted, the consequence of all this was that aeropainting was ‘more in vogue than ever during the war years’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Tano futurista alla Biennale veneziana’, *Adriatico*, 25 September 1942 (Cra.2.343); original emphasis.

<sup>29</sup> Frat., ‘Discussioni sull’arte’, cit.

<sup>30</sup> Tomasella, *Biennali di guerra*, cit., p. 36.

One can detect an apprehension of Futurism's renewed relevance and ability to capture the prevailing zeitgeist in the praise garnered by Crali's solo exhibition of 14 aeropaintings at the preceding Biennale of 1940, where he was one of the most successful participants, selling half of the works on display. Tomasella lists Crali as coming third in terms of sales: his six works placing him slightly lower than Arturo Tosi (8) and Felice Carena (7).<sup>31</sup> However, contemporary newspaper clippings suggest that Crali should be placed at least joint second by this calculation, mentioning as they do a total of seven sales to a range of buyers.<sup>32</sup> *Before the Parachute Opens* was bought by Udine's Museo Civico, and *Horizontal Roll, Take Off* and *Spiralling* by one Angelo Bestetti. *Nose-diving on the City* and *Cloud Seducer* were sold to a certain Bruno Blotto Baldo, while the SNIA Viscosa company purchased *Skimming Over the City*. Moreover, on the strength of the exhibition, Crali received a private commission to paint a replica of his work *Flight Danced above the Enemy*.<sup>33</sup> A review by the art historian Remigio Marini expressed sentiments typical of many reactions to Crali's imagery:

The rooms given over to the Futurist painters form a distinct group: a kind of San Marino within Italy's larger artistic territory. This is entirely appropriate: we are no longer in the sphere of art here, but rather among more or less talented worthies who dedicate themselves to certain technical experiences that occasionally have some kind of relationship with art. But I do not intend to embark on an anti-Futurist tirade here [...]. I will limit myself to speaking of the solo exhibition by Tullio Crali. I can say with complete sincerity that among the many things that I do not admire, and which my constitution will never allow me to admire in this aeroexhibition (an inelegant term, but the fault is not mine) I liked the blue-white fantasies of Crali very much. I find that in these paintings there is not simply eccentricity [...] (something that I would not dare to assert in relation to many of his fellow believers) but genuine feeling and artistic value. Moreover, his dominance within this section has been perceived by the organisers

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Cra.2.153.

<sup>33</sup> See letter from Emilio Pittaluga, 16 March 1941 (Cra.2.152).

themselves, who have awarded a solo exhibition to Crali alone. [...] A clarity of technique, a feeling for the grandiose, and an ability to convey a sense of unlimited space are the qualities of an artist of very great ingenuity whose approach promises an art that is less programmatic and more complete.<sup>34</sup>

Visually compelling and psychologically rich, here was a body of work that suggested even to hostile critics such as Marini that within Futurism there existed artists who were able – and willing – to bridge the gap between the intellectual elite and the masses. Another critic, writing in *Il Piave*, was even more generous, not only in relation to Crali's artistic merits but also – significantly – with regard to the proud patriotic traditions of the Futurist movement itself:

For him Futurism, liberated from cerebral superstructures and schemas, is distilled to that which truly constitutes its essence and its contemporary relevance: the dynamic [...] interpretation of modern life. It ceases to be an intellectual theory and becomes a human and ethical, dynamic and heroic doctrine: the lives and the sacrifices of the Futurists Boccioni and Sant'Elia, killed in the Great War, contain this profound lesson.<sup>35</sup>

As previously noted, the Futurist contribution to the 1940 Biennale was broadly non-committal from a political point of view, perhaps reflecting the fact that it was inaugurated prior to Mussolini's declaration of war later that year. However, by the time the above reviews were written Italy had embarked upon a new phase of its history in which the expansionist objectives of an aggressively nationalistic regime were once more being pursued by means of mechanised warfare. Accordingly, it is plausible to account for the positive noises being made about the work of Crali at this specific moment in terms of an emerging awareness that here was an art

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<sup>34</sup> 'Artisti giuliani alla XXII Biennale', in *La Porta Orientale*, [January-February 1941] (Cra.2.138).

<sup>35</sup> Fernando del Re, 'Voli. Note d'arte', 31 August 1940 (Cra.2.140). Other reviews of the exhibition can be found in Crali's memoir 'Una vita per il Futurismo', in Rebeschini, *Crali aeropittore futurista*, cit., pp. 164-66.

perhaps better equipped than any other to capture this dramatic moment – this quintessentially ‘Futurist hour’ – in the life of the nation. Certainly, this was something perceived by Forlin in recalling the response of visitors to the imagery on display:

After the inaugural speeches we managed to make it to our Futurist rooms. There was nobody there. Yet all of a sudden visitors came flooding in. General interest: a ceaseless flow of strange complicated infantile impressions, but also just, objective reflections. With the war the Futurists this year find themselves on a very elevated plane of topicality. Many of their canvases appear to have been brought out directly from the crackle of battle. Especially those of Crali. Lyrical celebration of wings and of motors inside these three rooms that still represent an irritation and a torment for antiquarian souls.<sup>36</sup>

Naturally, Marinetti was quick to emphasise Futurism’s ‘sudden’ relevance, penning articles in which he pointed up its visionary nature and extraordinary prescience in relation to contemporary international developments.<sup>37</sup> Yet Crali’s works in particular would already appear to have caught the attention of the authorities, *Il Piccolo* reporting how

on the opening day of the Venice Biennale, Crali’s exhibition was honoured by a visit from the Emperor King, accompanied by Minister Bottai, [...] Maraini, a number of other high-ranking officials and representatives of the various participating nations. Academician Marinetti illustrated Crali’s paintings to His Majesty [...], the Sovereign expressing his admiration and enjoyment of them. The other illustrious visitors, like the public crowds, were also extremely interested in the works on display.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Aeroritratti e macchina di guerra alla Biennale’ (For.1.1.15); cited in Cibi, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., p. 173.

<sup>37</sup> See Agnese, *Marinetti*, cit., p. 283.

<sup>38</sup> Anon., ‘Il Re Imperatore e il Ministro Bottai alla Mostra del pittore goriziano Crali alla Biennale di Venezia’, 25 May 1940 (Cra.2.116).

Crali's presence in the Air Force pavilion at the following Biennale of 1942 was considered to be crucial to its success by Enrico Castello, its curator, as his lengthy and enthusiastic commissioning letter to the artist of 12 December 1941 makes clear:

I consider you to be a key figure. Within this environment of ours, your winged spirituality would find new sources of inspiration [...]. I know your aeropainting. You know aviators; you know that among us an Artist such as yourself would be warmly received and would be given every possible assistance. Therefore, if [...] you would like to prepare some works of aerial inspiration for our Salon, and if to this end it would be useful for you to visit and perhaps live among pilots and war machines for some time, you can count on every possible cooperation and hospitality on the part of the Air Force.<sup>39</sup>

However, it was not only Crali's works that would be singled out for praise in the eventual exhibition. In his review of the pavilion for *Il Popolo d'Italia* – the official mouthpiece of the Fascist regime – Raffaele Calzini observed:

It is not enough simply to place oneself in front of a battleship or a tri-motor aeroplane and transcribe its outlines; it is necessary to convey the sensation of power and threat embodied in such instruments of warfare, to identify the relationship between the man and his deadly machine beneath the impassive sky or on the sea, as indifferent to these human brawls as in the days of The Iliad! [...] The Futurists, who were the first proponents of aeropainting, are the best illustrators of aerial warfare.<sup>40</sup>

Such sentiments support Tomasella's assertion that the Futurist contribution to this pavilion

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<sup>39</sup> Cra.2.212. It is not known if Castello spoke for the majority of officials in this respect, or if – as in the British Air Ministry – war artists were rather more widely 'regarded [...] as at best an inconvenience, at worst, impertinent'. (Hall, *Paul Nash*, cit., p. 8).

<sup>40</sup> 'Oggi s'inaugura a Venezia la XXIII Biennale', 21 June 1942 (Cra.2.310).

‘undisputedly dominated’<sup>41</sup> the selection of works on display there. Writing in the aviation journal *L’Ala d’Italia*, Libero De Libero likewise identified the Air Force pavilion as the most successful of the three military exhibitions, praising its ‘poetic’ treatment of ‘the celestial feats undertaken by men during war’:

The works of Renato Di Bosso, of A. G. Ambrosi, Verossi and Crali, are exemplary in this respect; but in addition to their works I would also draw attention to a very large number of those exhibited in the Futurist Pavilion.<sup>42</sup>

Another assessment of the 1942 Biennale in *La Rivista Illustrata del Popolo d’Italia* claimed that Futurism deserved

special mention this year, not only because of the abundant selection of works on show, but also for the value of the pieces exhibited, which attain a synthetic clarification of ideas and possess a highly effective compositional and chromatic quality that is inspired and which throbs with life, released from constructive, heavy [...] programmatic presuppositions. Some names: Prampolini, Tato, Crali, Ambrosi, Dottori.<sup>43</sup>

Seconding Mino Somenzi’s assertion that Futurism was *più vivo che mai* at this time, the correspondent of *La Voce di Bergamo* enthused over the movement’s contribution to the exhibition, noting:

This year, Italian Futurism has a pavilion entirely to itself. And this is as it should be, for Futurist art is justified in this moment as never before, being better able than other descriptive and narrative forms to render the sound-speed and dynamism of aerial warfare pictorially.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Biennali di guerra*, cit., p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Il padiglione dell’Aeronautica alla Biennale di Venezia’, 16-31 July 1942 (Cra.2.335).

<sup>43</sup> Fidenzio Pertile, ‘La Biennale di guerra’, August 1942 (Cra.2.333).

<sup>44</sup> Ronchi, ‘La XXIII Biennale’, cit.



As the war entered its third year, the perception appears to have remained that Futurist painters were among the few artists articulating something significant about contemporary events in their increasingly sombre and intense images. One again receives the impression from reading press reviews at this time that the very image of the Futurist artist had undergone something of a minor transformation, Marinetti's painters no longer tending to be caricatured as hot-headed trouble-makers but recognised as serious and talented painters, and even as role models, one critic characterising them as 'good citizens and brave soldiers'.<sup>45</sup> A reviewer of the 1943 Quadriennale noted how

any visitor to [the exhibition] will pause in the Futurist rooms longer than in any of the others containing works depicting our times. As a simple visitor, I also felt compelled to stop and take in the large works covering the walls. However, I was not alone; the many people who, like me, turned their eyes from one work to another did so in rapt attention, in such a way that made it seem a place of profound reflection. There is still a little bit of scorn for anything Futurist, but this is one of those easy attitudes adopted by people who have little or no ability to judge or discriminate [...]. More important than this, however, is the fact that today one approaches the artworks of this school with a concentration that is inspired by its artists. These are painters who have entered into battle against the romantic moonlight, the still life and sentimentalism because their souls did not wish to have any contact with a past that had already revealed its decadent character. [...] In days gone by, as always happens with anything that goes against convention, the subjects of Futurist paintings were derided or, at best, ignored. Now, instead, there is an interest that is no sense superficial. [...] Today's heroic painting is that created by the Futurists [...]. In the works of Futurism there lives a soul that feels heroically and affirms itself artistically. It is not by chance that worthy Futurist painters – Platone, Forlin and others – have fought and have fallen heroically on the battlefield.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Nicola Vernieri, 'L'ala alla IV Quadriennale d'Arte', in *Le Vie dell'Aria*, 20 June 1943 (Cra.2.416).

<sup>46</sup> Casimiro Fabbri, 'La pittura dell'eroismo. IV Quadriennale d'arte', in *La Fiera Letteraria*, n. d. (Cra.2.415).

Naturally, this consensus was not as watertight or as comprehensive as the aforementioned comments might suggest. Another reviewer of the IV Quadriennale noted with some irony that ‘the only true traditionalists [...] are the Futurists; they have been painting the same thing, in the same way, with the same conviction that it is new for thirty-five years’.<sup>47</sup> Luciano Budigna also filed a damning review of a Futurist *serata* held during the early 1940s, in which he observed:

Whilst some thanked the academician for his visit [to Trieste] I observed this man who has toured around Italy holding his *serate futuriste* for so many years, clinging desperately to something which exists no more, which has possibly had an importance but which has for some time been nothing more than a memory. He is head of a school that has been abandoned by its best exponents, and which rests increasingly on external fashions [...] but who at all costs would nevertheless like to demonstrate that his school still exists although everyone knows it is dead. [...] The verses [...] Marinetti reads count for nothing; not even in a Futurist sense, in my opinion. [...] Unfortunately it has come to this: that Marinetti must accept everything, absolutely everything, that bears even the most minimal imprint of his school.<sup>48</sup>

Futurist artists were of course aware of this perception of their movement, Forlin noting that by 1940 Futurism had been ‘dead for at least 25 years’<sup>49</sup> in the eyes of certain critics – a myth that the Neapolitan Futurist Emilio Buccafusca felt it necessary to explode, insisting that ‘[Futurism] is *not* dead, as certain ill-informed commentators suggest every so often, but continues in its spiritual evolution and in its coherence with those ideal principles that have always been its

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<sup>47</sup> Anon., ‘Piombo alla Quadriennale’, in *Il Travaso delle Idee*, 20 June 1943; cited in Salaris, *La Quadriennale*, cit., p. 63. Cibir records that a similar observation was made by a reviewer in relation to the Futurist works on display at the 1942 Venice Biennale (*Corrado Forlin*, cit., p. 205).

<sup>48</sup> ‘Propaganda di Marinetti’, in *Decima Regio*, 16 May 1942 (Cra.2.359).

<sup>49</sup> ‘Arte dinamica del tempo fascista’, in *Futuristi aeropittori di guerra* [1940], pp. 3-7 (p. 4); repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/1.

lifeblood'.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, on the basis of the reviews cited here, I would still maintain that the 1940s can be said to have witnessed a significant change in the attitude of the cultural and political establishment toward Futurism, without the movement being compelled to relinquish any of its key obsessions, political convictions, iconographical touchstones or stylistic liberties. As Crispolti has noted: 'The principal intention of Futurist artists was to take the theme material (in this case Fascist) and reinterpret it in their own synthetic-dynamic idiom, rather than transform their own style to suit the propaganda needs of the Regime, as normally tended to happen.'<sup>51</sup>

Naturally, I have been selective in my references to particular texts, but no more so than scholars such as Cibir, who emphasise only the negative treatment of Futurism at the hands of the critics, thereby presenting just one side of a considerably more nuanced story.<sup>52</sup> I maintain that it is the broadly positive response to Futurism's pictorial treatment of the war, and the tangible signs of support the movement received from the regime and institutions such as the Biennale at this time, that ultimately represent the more noteworthy developments during these years, outweighing in significance and interest those dissenting voices that had been raised against Marinetti's movement for years.

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By 1940, the regime had good reason to look upon Futurism with a certain degree of favour and indulgence. However, Marinetti would appear to have perceived that the tide of hostility toward his movement had already begun to turn by 1939. Indeed, his introduction to the catalogue of

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<sup>50</sup> 'Eroi macchine ali contro nature morte', in *9 Maggio*, 15 August 1942 (Cra.2.355); my emphasis.

<sup>51</sup> 'Futurism and Plastic Expression between the Wars, in Hulten, *Art in Italy 1900-1945*, cit., p. 212.

<sup>52</sup> *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 204-05.

that year's Quadriennale opened by proclaiming his movement and its allies victorious in the struggle against their mutual enemies on the far right:

In clamorous battles recently fought at Rome's Teatro delle Arti at the Circolo Artistico in Naples at the Circolo Barbera exhibition 'Beyond the Novecento' in Milan and at the Casa del Fascio in Como designed by the architect Terragni in honour of the Futurist architect Antonio Sant'Elia the Futurist Movement has given proof of its creative and combative exuberance in leading the counterattack of all modern Italian artists to sweep away the defeatist denigrators of Modern Art and the architectural achievements of the Regime<sup>53</sup>

Of course, one might dismiss this as mere bluster, but Marinetti's tone here has a conviction, confidence and finality about it that suggests his claim was founded on more than mere wishful thinking or self-delusion. And indeed, by this point the dust would appear to have settled somewhat on the debate surrounding 'degenerate' art. After all, in 1938 Marinetti had already successfully counselled Mussolini to reject plans for a Nazi-style, anti-Modernist exhibition in Italy,<sup>54</sup> and Viola has noted how the vituperative press campaigns against the avant-garde by various journals suddenly came to an end in January 1939 when '[Telesio] Interlandi (perhaps "invited" to desist) published what was, all things considered, a fairly moderate article in [...] *Quadrivio* under the title of "Art and Race: Conclusions"'.<sup>55</sup>

As we have seen, Mussolini was prepared to allow a certain degree of latitude to the various factions within the PNF, but was unwilling to allow any one of these dominate for any length of

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<sup>53</sup> 'Mostra futurista di aeropittori e aeroscultori' (Crispoliti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1939/2, p. 184). Prampolini was awarded a solo exhibition at that year's Quadriennale; whilst this is not surprising in itself, given his stature within the movement, the abstract nature of his work makes it tempting to speculate as to whether this was also intended as a provocative gesture.

<sup>54</sup> See Stone, *The Patron State*, cit., p. 193.

<sup>55</sup> *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 146.

time and thereby usurp his authority by impudently pushing themselves forward as the official face of Fascism.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, it is tempting to see the raised profile of Futurism during the 1940s as reflecting a desire to put the extremists in their place once again, and that his indulgence of their intemperance had served as something of a temporary pressure-valve rather than indicating a long-term policy as they might have hoped, and as many scholars insist was the case. If the audience granted by Mussolini to the Gruppo Toscano in 1934 had represented a high-profile snub to Farinacci's traditionalist clique, it is difficult not to draw the same conclusions about that which the Duce gave to three of Marinetti's poets in the spring of 1941, when it was reported in the newspapers how 'The Duce has much appreciated Gaetano Pattarozzi's "Futurist Aeropoem of Sardinia" and "England: Sewer of Passéism", Geppo Tedeschi's "Worshippers of the Fatherland" and Civello Castrense's "Mother Air".'<sup>57</sup>

Certainly, if the regime had desired to purge Futurism from Italy's cultural scene it could easily have gagged Marinetti by removing him from his position within the Royal Academy (something in fact demanded by Stefano Tuscano in 1937),<sup>58</sup> by dismissing him from his post as Secretary of the National Union of Authors and Writers and by replacing him as the editor of its monthly journal *Autori e Scrittori*, which was gradually transformed into a Futurist mouthpiece by Marinetti during the 1940s. As Salaris has noted, in the final three years of its existence this publication

assumed a more markedly Futurist character, publishing proclamations by Marinetti and a large number of theoretical and creative works by writers close to him. Only during the final years of Fascism, then, did Marinetti seem to achieve in a concrete manner his goal

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<sup>56</sup> See above, Chapter Two, pp. 48-49.

<sup>57</sup> 'Il Duce riceve Marinetti e i poeti futuristi', *Il Messaggero*, 22 May 1941 (ACS SPD CO / B. 1132, F. 509.446).

<sup>58</sup> See Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 251.

of seeing the avant-garde infiltrate official institutions, acquiring a 'status': Futurism conquered the Union, running the journal as if it were its own forum.<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, it need not have appointed him to the Board of Directors of the Commission for the Rights of Authors (1943-46)<sup>60</sup> and – above all – it could have stifled his movement of funds. On the contrary, 'economically sustained, Futurist activity during the early 1940s [...] intensified'.<sup>61</sup>

### III. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Some of the clearest indications of official support for Futurism came in the form of subsidies received by members of the movement through the Ministry of Popular Culture – the regime's equivalent to Nazism's Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Only established in its final form toward the end of the 1930s, this body gradually coalesced over a number of years out of various earlier ministries and governmental institutions, the ever-greater scope and influence of which reflected Fascism's increasingly totalitarian character. During the first decade of Mussolini's rule, the regime had sought to shape and manipulate public opinion solely through the introduction of increasingly tight restrictions on newspapers and other print media, effected through the prime minister's Press Office (this emphasis perhaps being a consequence of the Duce's own background in journalism). However, in 1934 its new head, Galeazzo Ciano, ordered that a study be made of Germany's Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda in order to see what lessons could be learned from Nazism's more holistic approach to the problem of consensus building. Consequently, that September

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<sup>59</sup> *Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 267.

<sup>60</sup> See letter from the President of the Ente Italiano per il Diritto di Autori, dated 21 June 1943 (GRI 850702 / S. I, B. 3, F. 20).

<sup>61</sup> Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 266.

saw the establishment of the Undersecretariat for Press and Propaganda, which was transformed into a Ministry of the same name the following June, bringing cinema, theatre, music, radio and tourism under its control. Ciano remained at its helm until October 1935, when he departed for the Ethiopian campaign leaving Dino Alfieri in charge, on whose watch 'Minculpop' was finally established in May 1937.<sup>62</sup>

Between 1932 and 1943 the above institutions distributed around L. 640,000,000 to newspapers, journalists, artists, writers, poets and musicians through what Giovanni Sedita has described as 'a colossal system of subsidies with which the regime nourished Italy's cultural universe in order to enslave it'.<sup>63</sup> It was no accident that the reorganisation of the regime's 'propaganda machine' should have coincided with Fascism's increasingly ambitious and hubristic foreign policy, for it was in response to this that effective control over public opinion was most urgently required: firstly, to enthuse the masses about Fascism's imperialist 'successes' in Africa; subsequently to foment resentment over the consequent sanctions imposed against Italy by the League of Nations, and ultimately – and most crucially – to galvanise support for the regime in the face of its disastrous wartime campaigns. Accordingly, being eager to secure their continued endorsement of Fascism at such a turbulent moment in the regime's history – or at the very least, to ensure their acquiescence – it comes as no surprise to learn that the Ministry offered a

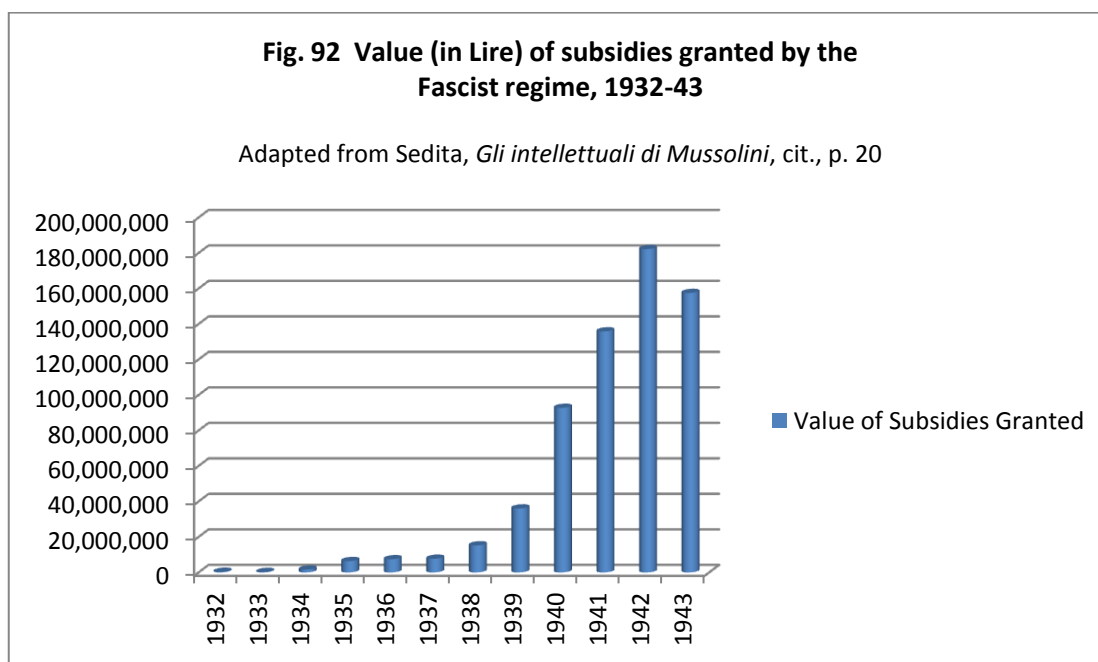
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<sup>62</sup> For a concise overview of the Ministry's history and development, see Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, cit., pp. 13-17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 17. Bizarrely, the money for these subsidies came via the Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, and was secret in nature. It was therefore administered by 'a totalitarian trinity comprising the Duce, the Chief of Police [Arturo Bocchini until November 1940; subsequently Carmine Senise] and the Minister for Popular Culture' (ibid. p. 18). The period covered in the present thesis coincides with Alessandro Pavolini's tenure at the Ministry (October 1939 – February 1943) and that of the subsequent Minister, Gaetano Polverelli.

greater number of financial incentives to cultural figures during the 1940s than it had done throughout the relatively stable 1930s; however, the *scale* of the increase is staggering.

Research has shown that of the L. 643,394,353 distributed during the Fascist *ventennio*, the lion's share (L. 568,300,124) was distributed during the war years; 1940 saw the largest year-on-year increase in spending, when the total leapt from L. 36,053,461 in 1939 to L. 92,745,144: an increase of over 56 million Lire.



Futurist painters, poets and musicians were beneficiaries of this urgent need for consensus in common with a wide range of other cultural figures, the increased frequency with which they obtained funds at this time thereby reflecting an altogether wider trend in Fascist patronage. Of the 37 requests for financial support submitted by the Futurist leader on behalf of his artists between 1932 and 1942<sup>64</sup> over a third of these (15) were made during the final three years of

<sup>64</sup> See Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, cit., pp. 92-95. Documentation relating to these subsidies is conserved in the files of the Ministry of Popular Culture at Rome's Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS MINCULPOP GAB / F. 190); subsequent references to letters from this archive are taken from this particular file unless stated otherwise.



this period, making the number of such requests submitted between 1940 and 1942 proportionally higher than those made over the course of the preceding eight years. The sums demanded by the Futurist leader for individual artists remained fairly consistent and were not vast, generally falling somewhere in the region of L. 3-4000, as they had done during the 1930s (**Fig. 93**). Whilst these figures did not take account of inflation,<sup>65</sup> it is of course important to bear in mind that they were requested during wartime, and may therefore reflect a certain restraint on Marinetti's part. Additionally, the fact that he tended to claim for several individuals at a time meant that the total values involved could still be considerable. In fact, this often led the authorities to adjust the amounts demanded by the Futurist leader, as did the increased frequency of his requests in comparison with earlier years, although it is worth noting that assistance was never refused outright. For instance, in a note to the Duce of 1 February 1942, the bureaucrat Celso Luciano commented: 'Since [this petition for L. 3000] concerns [five] individuals repeatedly and also recently assisted, it is proposed that a sum of just 1,000 (one thousand) lire should be agreed for each.' Likewise, both of Marinetti's requests for L. 3000 on behalf of 19 artists (10 February and 29 December 1941) were adjusted to L. 2000. Nevertheless, the total figure of L. 76,000 awarded was far from negligible.

To put these figures into perspective it is worth considering them in relation to the financial assistance granted to other kinds of petitioners. On 26 June 1940 a certain Luigi Di Vara of 13 Via Monte Giordano, Rome, wrote to the Duce requesting 'a small but urgent subsidy' due to the 'extreme' circumstances in which he and his family found themselves.<sup>66</sup> An official memo of 12 July 1940 summarised the details of the case, presumably for official purposes. Di Vara was noted as being a 56 year-old First World War veteran and bricklayer, capable of only sporadic

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<sup>65</sup> According to Gian Franco Venè, the cost of bread increased by two thirds between 1935 and 1940, while the price of meat more than doubled. *Mille lire al mese. La vita quotidiana della famiglia nell'Italia fascista* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), p. 113.

<sup>66</sup> ACS SPD CO / B. 641, F. 204.792.

work (for which he earned an average of L. 150 per month). Of his eight children ('the only means of support for my family') two had recently been mobilised, four were married and lived separately, while the remaining two earned a total of L. 30 per week. On 18 July 1940 a letter was sent to Di Vara notifying him that he had been granted a one-off payment equal to his monthly wage.

*Ministero della Cultura Popolare*

LUIGI SCRIVO E MARIA

Sussidi avuti :

1/9/34	L. 3.500
6/1/"	2.000
28/5/35	1.000
24/7/"	1.000
25/10/"	1.000
23/7/36	2.000
18/12/"	2.000
13/5/37	2.000
30/11/"	2.000
28/3/38	2.000
21/10/"	1.000
29/9/39	3.000
1/5/40	1.000
13/2/41	2.000
3/5/"	2.000
	<hr/> 2.000
	L. 27.500

**Fig. 93** Subsidies awarded to Luigi and Maria Scrivero, 1934-41

By even the most conservative reckoning, between 1940 and 1942, figures associated with the Futurist movement would receive L. 248,300 in government subsidies according to the receipts conserved in the files of the ACS alone. This figure does not take into account documents that appear elsewhere, such as a letter dated 14 June 1942 notifying Marinetti of two awards granted to Bruno Tano and Alberto Sartoris totalling L. 5000, or later communications such as

that of 4 June 1943 relating news of a grant worth L. 10,000 to be divided equally between Francesco Cangiullo and Alberto Viviani, or another from the Ministry of National Education (19 January 1943) awarding L. 2000 to Franco Ciliberti.<sup>67</sup>

Nor does it take into account various other forms of financial assistance or support involving sums that are more difficult to ascertain with as much precision. A case in point is the journalistic position secured for Geppo Tedeschi ('married with (Aryan) children') in 1941. Considering Marinetti's suggested monthly salary of L. 3000 too extravagant, a pencilled note on his submission of 9 July instead proposed one of L. 1000 – a recommendation subsequently made to the Duce in a note of the following day. In his response to the Futurist leader of 13 July, the then Minister for Popular Culture, Alessandro Pavolini, was to make no mention of the figure ultimately agreed on. Nevertheless, given that the files of the ACS record Tedeschi's receipt of a monthly subsidy<sup>68</sup> totalling L. 24,000, one can only presume that it was indeed the lower figure he received, and that his appointment lasted until the collapse of the regime, exactly two years later. Neither does it include the L. 8000 ('at least') requested in the same letter on behalf of Gaetano Pattarozzi, whose need was owing to the fact that he had 'spent over 40,000 Lire given to him by his father [...] (on the occasion of his marriage) in order to endow the newspaper "MEDITERRANEO FUTURISTA" with the most elegant typographical style'. The figure identified was requested on the basis that it represented the going rate for printing the journal's 'five thousand monthly copies'. An unspecified award was granted, although on this occasion the absence of any comment or adjustment on the part of Pavolini suggests that it was for the full amount.

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<sup>67</sup> GRI 850702 / S. I, B. 3, FF. 13, 20, 16, respectively.

<sup>68</sup> The list of intellectuals subsidised by the regime that was drawn up by the Allies' Psychological Warfare Branch after the fall of Rome (repr. in Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, cit., pp. 190-216) divides the funds they received into 'monthly' and 'occasional' sums.

Works by Futurist painters were also purchased by a range of ministries and other official bodies, such as the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (Crali's *Aeropainting of Parachutists*),<sup>69</sup> the Air Force (Crali's *Intercepting English Torpedo-bombers*, bought for L. 2000)<sup>70</sup> and the Ministry for National Education (Enrico Prampolini's *Cosmic Maternity*, purchased for the 'extraordinary' figure of L. 12,000 at the IV Quadriennale of 1943).<sup>71</sup> Additionally, at the 1942 Biennale the Air Ministry awarded Alfredo Gauro Ambrosi a prize of L. 10,000,<sup>72</sup> while Crali received another, worth L. 5000, from the Ministry of Popular Culture.<sup>73</sup> Notification of these awards appeared in the press on 20 July 1942,<sup>74</sup> making Marinetti's complaint that his artists had been 'unjustly excluded from all the prizes at the Biennale' two days later in a letter to Pavolini somewhat misleading.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps most significant of all, however, were the funds obtained by Marinetti himself during the 1940s, which included L. 25,000 for medical expenses.<sup>76</sup> By the spring of 1941 the Futurist leader found himself unable to sustain the movement financially to the extent that he had done in previous years. Having voiced his anxieties to Manlio Morgagni, a confidant of Mussolini and Director General of the influential Stefani press agency, Marinetti was awarded a monthly stipend of L. 15,000 from government funds to assist with the movement's running costs (a

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<sup>69</sup> Purchased at the 1942 Biennale.

<sup>70</sup> See letter from Enrico Castello to Crali of 10 July 1943 (Cra.2.414); the work was bought at the *Exhibition of Aeronautical Art* held at the Galleria di Roma that June.

<sup>71</sup> See 'Gli acquisti delle opere futuriste alle prime quattro Quadriennali (1931-1943)', in Agnese, and others, *I futuristi e le Quadriennali*, cit., pp. 86-87 (p. 87). See also the letter of 8 July 1943 from the Ministry to Marinetti (GRI 850702 / S. 1, B. 3, F. 21).

<sup>72</sup> According to Tomasella (*Biennali di guerra*, cit. p. 96) Ambrosi was awarded first prize, *ex aequo* with Anselmo Bucci, for his works in the aeronautical pavilion.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Cra.2.353.

<sup>75</sup> ACS MINCULPOP GAB / F. 190.

<sup>76</sup> Guerri, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 260.

*'forte somma'*, according to Agnese).<sup>77</sup> Brushing aside the objections of Benedetta Marinetti in 1942 that the continued receipt of such funds was unconscionable considering the desperate plight of the nation, Mussolini personally authorised the payments to continue;<sup>78</sup> they were only to cease following the collapse of the dictatorship. Spanning the period 1 April 1941 to 1 July 1943, this monthly fee therefore amounted to a total of L. 420,000. Taking all of these figures into account, one can reasonably conclude that, within just four years, members of the Futurist movement received around L. 800,000 from the regime: an immense figure. Given the collective nature of Marinetti's applications, it is difficult to make like-for-like comparisons with the funding received by other individuals at this time (a problem further compounded by the fact that the statistics compiled by the Allies' Psychological Warfare Branch<sup>79</sup> relate to the entire Fascist era, rather than being broken down by decade). However, in terms of the closest equivalent institutions (newspapers, press agencies and the like) subsidies granted to the Futurist movement during the war years alone outstripped those awarded to 349 other such organisations between 1933 and 1943.<sup>80</sup>

Many of the letters in the files of Minculpop are surprisingly cordial, and challenge the notion that the Futurists faced hostility in their dealings with the regime. A message from Pavolini to Ambrosi of 5 May 1941, for instance, notified the artist of an award of L. 2000, granted in order to alleviate 'the difficult economic conditions in which you find yourself [so that] you might be able to attend to your work more peacefully'. Much has been made of the supposed tension between Marinetti and Pavolini, in particular, during the latter's tenure as the Minister of Popular Culture. Undoubtedly, Marinetti's repeated requests for funds did exasperate this

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<sup>77</sup> *Marinetti*, cit., p. 284 and pp. 338-39, n. 98.

<sup>78</sup> Viola, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 154; Guerri, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 262.

<sup>79</sup> See above, p. 249, n. 68.

<sup>80</sup> For a list of these, see Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, cit., pp. 233-44.

*gerarca* at times,<sup>81</sup> and it is also true that Pavolini instructed the head of the national broadcasting company EIAR to suspend Marinetti's radio slots following repeated complaints from members of the public as to their limited appeal and eccentric character.<sup>82</sup> However, to place undue emphasis on individual 'storms in teacups' such as these, as Guerri and Agnese,<sup>83</sup> do leaves one with the impression that these isolated episodes were more significant than the longer-term, concrete benefits Futurist artists received from their dealings with this minister. Undoubtedly, they were not. In any case, these authors fail to balance their appraisal of this relationship by mentioning the fact that during 1941 Pavolini contributed to the volume *Antinglese* (as did the Secretary of the PNF, Adelchi Serena)<sup>84</sup> and that, alongside Vittorio Mussolini, he was a member of a jury that awarded the Futurist poet Castrense Civello the First Aeronautical Literary Prize, an event jointly sponsored by the Ministries of Popular Culture and National Education, for his aforementioned volume *Aria Madre*.<sup>85</sup>

Pavolini was in fact one of several members of the political establishment to offer their support to Futurist initiatives during the war years. These included Carlo Ravasio, Vice Secretary of the National Fascist Party, who opened an exhibition of *aeropittura di guerra* at Palazzo Braschi in March 1942,<sup>86</sup> and Pavolini's successor at Minculpop, Gaetano Polverelli, who in 1943 inaugurated a series of war-themed poetry evenings organised by the National Union of Authors

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<sup>81</sup> See his letter of 21 July 1941, on which Pavolini pencilled a weary 'Oof!' in response to the Futurist leader's request that 'at least' L. 4000 be sent to four of his artists. See also above, Chapter Five, p. 189, n. 69.

<sup>82</sup> Guerri, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., pp. 257-58.

<sup>83</sup> *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., pp. 283, 297. Agnese in fact admits that there is 'no proof' of active hostility toward Futurism on the part of Pavolini (pp. 307-08).

<sup>84</sup> Published as a supplement to *Mediterraneo Futurista* in October 1941.

<sup>85</sup> See the preface to Civello's text, cit., titled 'In volo. I Premio Aeronautico Letterario "Fiera di Padova"', n. p. As we have seen (p. 243), the Duce himself was also an admirer of Civello's text.

<sup>86</sup> Cra.2.299.

and Writers (the aforementioned *dinamismi di poesie guerriere*).<sup>87</sup> These relationships and connections endowed Marinetti's movement with a kind of prestige that subsidies alone could not buy. Far from being shunned or marginalised, Marinetti in turn participated in high-profile public events of an official character, as when he delivered a speech to a vast crowd in Padua's Piazza Cavour as part of the celebrations commemorating the nineteenth anniversary of the March on Rome.<sup>88</sup>

#### IV. PRIZES AND INSTITUTIONS

Futurist artists were also involved in the famous Esposizione Universale di Roma (or 'E 42') during this period. A monumental project involving the creation of an entire new district of Rome (today known as EUR), this event was conceived as a "celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the [Fascist] Revolution and the fifth anniversary of the Empire",<sup>89</sup> but was abandoned in the year of its planned inauguration due to the war. On 13 July 1939, the Vice President of E 42, Cipriano Efisio Oppo, wrote to Marinetti informing him that the movement's participation in this project had been the subject of discussions between Mussolini and Senator Cini.<sup>90</sup> Negotiations would appear to have been somewhat protracted, but on 2 February of the following year Cini himself wrote to Marinetti telling him of the Duce's decision to officially ring-fence the vast sum of L. 2,000,000 for Futurism's contribution to the event.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately, the scale of the movement's participation was not as great as it might have been, as illustrated by

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<sup>87</sup> Cra.3.33. See above, Chapter Five, p. 169.

<sup>88</sup> See BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10263-01.

<sup>89</sup> Richard A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890-1940* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT, 1991), p. 483; Etlin cites the description of E 42 given by its Commissioner General, Senator Vittorio Cini.

<sup>90</sup> GRI 850702 / S. I, B. 3, F. 2.

<sup>91</sup> GRI 850702 / S. I, B. 3, F. 4.





**Fig. 94** Enrico Prampolini, *The Corporations*, mosaic, 1200 x 1200 cm, Rome: EUR





**Fig. 95** Fortunato Depero, *The Professions and the Arts*, mosaic, 1220 x 1000 cm, Rome: EUR

the visionary – yet unrealised – architectural projects for the site submitted by Prampolini and Cesare Augusto Poggi (**Figs 100, 102, 103**). Nevertheless, before work on the project ceased two striking, large-scale murals by Prampolini and Fortunato Depero were realised at the heart of this new district (**Figs 94, 95**). Prampolini's mosaic titled *The Corporations* occupied the exterior wall of the Palazzo delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari (today a national museum of the same name). This work mirrored Depero's equally large mosaic by on the theme of *The Professions and the Arts*, on the external wall of the Palazzo della Scienza Universale (now an ethnographical museum). Both were officially commissioned in October 1941 and completed by the following summer. It is unclear what became of the funds earmarked for Futurism's contribution to E 42. Prampolini received L. 80,000 for his work; Depero's remuneration would have been somewhere in the same region. The costs involved in realising the mosaics were also covered by the event's organisers, but it is unlikely that they would have swallowed up the balance of L. 1,840,000.<sup>92</sup>

Another indicator of official favour at this time was the establishment of two prizes for Futurist painting and architecture worth a total of L. 100,000, named in honour of Umberto Boccioni and Antonio Sant'Elia respectively. Given the attacks directed at both the Premio Bergamo and *Primato* by Marinetti's movement around this time<sup>93</sup> it is somewhat surprising to note that the existence of these new prizes was largely owed to the efforts of Giuseppe Bottai, the outgoing Minister for National Education.<sup>94</sup> His own unflattering assessment of the Futurist leader's

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<sup>92</sup> Further information concerning these murals can be found in *E 42. Utopia e scenario del regime*, exh. cat., 2 vols (Venice: Marsilio, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 386-88 (Prampolini) and pp. 407-09 (Depero).

<sup>93</sup> See above, Chapter Three, p. 105.

<sup>94</sup> Bottai was to lose his position in the cabinet reshuffle of 5 February 1943. Franco Ciliberti also seems to have been admired in Bottai's circle. In a letter of 16 December 1942, Marinetti was informed by Celso Luciano of Minculpop that Ciliberti had been referred to the Ministry of National Education as a worthy recipient of the regime's assistance. A subsequent letter from Bottai's ministry (19 January 1943) expressed admiration for Ciliberti and sympathy for his plight, but noted that it would be unlikely a teaching position could be found for him at the present time ('in the future, who knows!'). However, in

creative powers at this time ('Marinetti has retained the itches of his youth. But old age has taken from him the nails with which to scratch them')<sup>95</sup> make this fact doubly remarkable. On 18 February 1943 the President of the Royal Academy, Luigi Federzoni, informed Marinetti of the Duce's decision to institute the prizes,<sup>96</sup> which were to be awarded by a Commission of the Academy itself, presided over by Marinetti and including Antonio Maraini. (The latter's presence on the jury again suggests that the space conceded to the Futurists at the 1942 Biennale reflected a certain admiration on his part for the aims of the movement, rather than a simple need to bulk out an event left depleted as a consequence of international events.) However, it appears that the prizes had been established somewhat earlier, a press release issued by the Agenzia A. L. A. on 26 December 1942 reporting this 'recent' news.<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, it would appear that the *Premi Boccioni e Sant'Elia* were proposed toward the end of Marinetti's military service in the Soviet Union (July-November 1942) and perhaps constituted some form of reward for it. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that Somenzi's aforementioned article for *Autori e Scrittori*, in which he referred to an Agenzia Stefani press release announcing these prizes, concluded by stating: 'today, at the time of writing, [Marinetti] is again... a volunteer, on the Russian front'.<sup>98</sup>

Only the first of these prizes seems to have been awarded. A small article in *Il Messaggero* of 24 June 1943, one month prior to the collapse of Mussolini's regime, made note of the fact that the Premio Boccioni had been won by Prampolini. Marinetti indignantly gave this news a large,

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order to 'encourage' Ciliberti in his work, he was awarded a one-off subsidy of L. 2000 (GRI.850702 / S. I, B. 3, FF. 15, 16).

<sup>95</sup> Giuseppe Bottai, *Diario 1935-1944*, ed. by Giordano Bruno Guerri (Milan: Rizzoli, 1982), p. 352. Bottai's comments referred to Marinetti's lecture at the Royal Academy on 11 January 1943.

<sup>96</sup> GRI 850702 / S. I, B. 3, F. 17.

<sup>97</sup> 'L'inaugurazione della mostra di aeropittura di guerra a Roma' (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10442-01). Bottai is identified in this document as having been the driving force behind the two awards.

<sup>98</sup> 'La galleria nazionale d'arte futurista', cit. (see above, Introduction, p. 3).

handwritten headline of its own when pasting the cutting into one of his scrapbooks (the so-called *libroni*).<sup>99</sup> Why the Premio Sant'Elia was never conferred remains a mystery, Giuseppe Terragni being an obvious choice for the award.

Another gesture of recognition on the part of the regime came in the form of its decision to establish a National Gallery of Futurist Art and Aeropainting of War. Like the Boccioni and Sant'Elia Prizes, Marinetti claimed that this was 'willed and authorised by the Duce while I was fighting as a volunteer in Russia' in a letter of 23 June 1943.<sup>100</sup> Again, it is difficult to avoid the implication of a correlation between the two facts. However, the roots of this institution would appear to have existed in a private initiative of Marinetti's dating from the autumn of 1941, as revealed in a press release issued that October by the Agenzia A. L. A.<sup>101</sup> announcing the establishment of a 'Gallery of Aeropainting' comprising 190 works (significantly, perhaps, the same number of pieces that would be displayed at the 1942 Biennale). Located at Piazza Adriana 11 – Marinetti's home – this consisted predominantly of recent works, although it was noted that 'a room has been reserved for works by the masters of pictorial Futurism: Boccioni, Sant'Elia, Balla, Russolo, Severini, Carrà, Soffici, Funi, Sironi'. Marinetti's private gallery, also mentioned in the Stefani press release cited by Somenzi, would therefore seem to have been recognised by Mussolini as constituting the foundation of a future public collection around the time that the two aforementioned prizes were established. (As previously noted, the word 'museum' was studiously avoided in any references to this project, for obvious reasons.) Giovanni Lista has pointed out that this institution was never founded owing to the fact that 'after World War II the new Republican State declared Mussolini's commitments null and

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<sup>99</sup> BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10339-01. On these prizes see also Viola, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, cit., p. 158-59.

<sup>100</sup> GRI 850702 / S. III, B. 8, F. 10 (p. 5).

<sup>101</sup> 'F. T. Marinetti fonda in Roma la prima galleria d'aeropittura', 12 October 1941 (Cra.2.210).

void'.<sup>102</sup> However, there is no concrete reason to doubt that it would have been realised, even taking into account the vagaries of Fascism's approach to cultural politics, given that it was the subject of an official press release issued by the regime's favoured public relations agency, rather than an internal memo that could be conveniently discarded or lost among the files of Minculpop, or an informal verbal agreement made between Marinetti and the Duce during a private conversation, which could easily have been 'forgotten' or retracted.

All of the foregoing illustrates that there is little justification for Berghaus's assertion that during the 1940s 'the régime made it emphatically clear that the last vestiges of "liberalism" and "plurality", which for a while had offered a minimal platform for Futurists and other modernists, had been shed once and for all'.<sup>103</sup> This image of a movement fighting for its very existence in a relentlessly hostile environment presents a one-dimensional and misleading picture of the true state of affairs. Moreover, when we recall that we are considering the cultural politics of a right-wing, totalitarian dictatorship, lately in alignment with Nazism, it is extraordinary that Futurism should have received any support whatsoever. Marinetti's continued position as a Royal Academician, his role as Secretary of a national union and his success in obtaining financial support for his artists must therefore be weighed against the notion of an 'embattled avant-garde' struggling to hold its head above water. Whether this was owed entirely to the Duce's cynical approach to cultural politics, or the still broadly amicable relationship between Marinetti and Mussolini, rather than any particular sympathy for the aims and objectives of Futurism per se, is irrelevant insofar as it does not alter the facts. However, in the aftermath of the (unsuccessful) degenerate art campaign, Futurism's enthusiasm for the war and its entirely coherent engagement with politicised, military imagery does appear to have been gratefully accepted and to have led to a certain indulgence towards the movement on the part of the

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<sup>102</sup> *Futurism* (2001), cit., p. 200.

<sup>103</sup> *Futurism and Politics*, cit., p. 255.

authorities. In short, between the late 1930s and the early 1940s, the Futurists found themselves transformed from pariahs, perilously out of step with the mood of the times, into perhaps its most faithful interpreters.