

CHAPTER FOUR – FUTURISMO IN GUERRA: THE ART AND AESTHETICS OF AEROPAINTING OF WAR

As previously stated, it would be reductive to consider Futurism of the 1940s synonymous with the genre of *aeropittura di guerra*. However, it is undoubtedly true that such imagery dominated Futurist exhibitions between the years 1941 and 1943. A late manifestation of the Futurist machine aesthetic and fascination with industrialised conflict, aeropainting of war is extremely problematic due its uncritical reflection of Axis militarism.¹ Nevertheless, as an expression of the movement's consistently-held belief that war was 'Futurism intensified',² this important tendency demands much closer attention than it has hitherto received.

In terms of its content and style, *aeropittura di guerra* was to pick up and amplify a number of themes and characteristics that had been in evidence in Futurist art since the late 1930s. Ultimately, however, its ancestry can be traced back to the years of the Great War, when Marinetti first 'mobilised' his artists, exhorting them to turn their attention away from café concerts and nightclub dancers, and to focus instead on the events reshaping the map of Europe. The Futurist leader had been firmly of the opinion that the imagery created in response to these developments should be aesthetically vigorous yet predominantly figurative in character, in order to convey as vividly as possible the movement's excitement regarding the conflict's 'geometric and mechanical splendour', and more effectively to disseminate the group's

¹ Italian artists chronicled the activities of the Luftwaffe as well as those of the Regia Aeronautica (see **Figs 49, 54**).

² Marinetti, Settimelli and Corra, 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 131.

pro-intervention stance.³ In these respects a fundamental continuity can be said to exist between the Futurist response to both world wars.

Distaste for the specific ideological foundations and violent content of Futurist war imagery from the 1940s has led to a general reluctance to engage with this later work to any significant extent, the consequence of which has been a failure to grasp its true breadth. Close examination of the works themselves – and their associated manifestos – reveals such imagery to be far more diverse and inventive than is often supposed, embracing considerable stylistic variations within a broadly figurative framework. Just as Futurist war art of the 1910s did not lapse into mere illustration, but continued to reflect the prevailing dominance of Cubist aesthetics in avant-garde art, the movement's imagery of the Second World War was similarly attuned to wider contemporary artistic tendencies.

I. PLASTIC EXPRESSIONS OF FUTURIST HOURS: THE ROOTS AND DEVELOPMENT OF *AEROPITTURA DI GUERRA*, 1914-39

Although aeropainting only developed as a distinct genre during the 'Second' Futurist phase, the aeroplane had long been an icon for the movement's artists. Likewise, its military application had been explored on numerous occasions prior to the 1940s, when flight and war were to become indissolubly linked in Futurist imagery.⁴

³ After a lengthy period of neutrality, Italy entered the First World War in May 1915 to the delight of the interventionist lobby – of which the Futurist movement had been an active and highly vocal element.

⁴ The same is true of other areas of Futurist activity. See, for instance, Marinetti's 1909 composition 'Let's Murder the Moonshine', in which he exclaims: 'Here it is: my own multicellular biplane steered by the tail; 100 HP, 8 cylinders, 80 kilograms.... Between my feet I have a tiny machine gun that I can fire by pushing a steel button.....' In Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 60. In this context, it is interesting to

In 1915 the irascible Carlo Carrà published his text *Guerrapittura*. Its title was somewhat misleading, for this was not a treatise focused on the Futurist aesthetic of war, but rather a collection of statements concerning a wide range of artistic and political issues, including the 1913 essay 'The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells'.⁵ Nevertheless, the volume did include twelve *disegni guerreschi* directly inspired by the Great War. Many of these appeared somewhat at odds with the strident quality of Carrà's prose, being characterised by imagery that was incongruously delicate and dreamlike, and which in certain respects anticipated the Metaphysical style that the artist was soon to pioneer together with Giorgio de Chirico.⁶ However, works such as *Sky of War, Conclusion* and *Aerial Reconnaissance – Sea – Moon + 2 Machine Guns + North-west Wind* almost certainly represent the first *de facto* examples of *aeropittura di guerra*.⁷ Of these, the latter is perhaps the strongest work, dominated by a sketchily rendered biplane soaring above a battlefield (**Fig. 33**). Various letters, numbers and words are scattered across the surface of this piece in order to aid in its interpretation: '44 spies gunned down' being the message apparently communicated to headquarters via wireless telegraphy (*telegrafia senza fili*, or 'TSF').

note that Italy had been a pioneer of aerial warfare. On 23 October 1911, Captain Carlo Piazza completed the first aerial reconnaissance mission when he flew over Turkish lines during the Italo-Turkish War. Just over one week later, on 1 November, Lieutenant Giulio Gavotti had the distinctly dubious honour of being the first pilot to drop bombs from an aircraft during the same conflict.

⁵ Cit. Whilst wide-ranging in terms of content, *Guerrapittura* was appropriately aggressive and antagonistic in tone.

⁶ See Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory*, cit., pp. 199-200. In fact, Carrà attributed one of the images featured in this text to the workings of his unconscious: *On the Night of 20 January 1915 I Dreamed this Picture (Joffre's Angle of Penetration on the Marne against 2 German Cubes)*.

⁷ Linda Landis has pointed out that the apparently abstract geometric forms which feature in the work mentioned above in note 6 may in fact also relate to specific models of French and German reconnaissance aircraft employed at the time. For an overview of the considerable attention given to military aviation during Futurism's early years, see her excellent essay 'Futurists at War', in Anne Coffin Hanson, ed., *The Futurist Imagination: Word + Image in Italian Futurist Painting, Drawing, Collage, and Free-word Poetry*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1983), pp. 60-75.

Such elements – ‘evocative of the calculations and vast areas involved in the war’⁸ – also featured in the works of Gino Severini at this time. Far more robust than those of Carrà, Severini’s images aspired to represent a *Plastic Synthesis of the Idea: ‘War’* – this being the title of a number of paintings included in a solo exhibition of 1916 devoted to the ongoing conflict.⁹ However, in place of the abstract, formal analogy such an ambition suggests, the artist instead engaged with the eminently concrete elements of armed conflict, accumulating disparate pieces of military hardware in his images in a manner similar to that in which he had quite literally jumbled together his ‘memories of a journey’ in an earlier work of that name.

As in those of Carrà, aviation imagery occupies a significant place within Severini’s war paintings. A biplane swoops down diagonally through one such work (**Fig. 34**) merging with the industrial landscape across which it flies, its propeller located prominently at the centre of the composition. Another image (**Fig. 35**) offers a different perspective, incorporating a view of the underside of an aircraft as it soars overhead.

In suspending the experiments with abstraction that had marked his work since the early months of 1914,¹⁰ Severini would appear to have heeded advice given to him by Marinetti in November of that year:

It is necessary [...] that Futurism not only collaborate directly in the splendour of this conflagration [...] but also that it become the plastic expression of this Futurist hour. By this I mean an enlarged expression, not one limited to a small circle of connoisseurs; an expression so strong and synthetic that it will strike the imagination and the eye of all, or almost all, intelligent viewers. [...] Your paintings and studies will perhaps become less

⁸ Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory*, cit., p. 198.

⁹ Gino Severini. *1^{re} Exposition futuriste d’art plastique de la guerre et d’autres oeuvres antérieures* (see Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1916/1).

¹⁰ See Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory*, cit., pp. 144-47.

abstract, a little too realistic, a kind of advanced Post-Impressionism. [...] We therefore encourage you to interest yourself pictorially in the war and its repercussions in Paris. Try to live the war pictorially, studying it in all its marvellous mechanical forms (military trains, fortifications, the injured, ambulances, hospitals, parades, etc.).¹¹

Laura Brandon has noted how 'many painters returned to more traditional approaches [during the First World War] as they found that tragedy and grief demanded a familiar and more traditional visual language in order to be understood'.¹² One such artist was Wyndham Lewis, who in 1919 characterised his approach to the subject as follows:

The public, surprised at finding eyes and noses in this exhibition, will begin by the reflection that the artist has conceded Nature, and abandoned those vexing diagrams by which he puzzled and annoyed. The case is really not quite that. All that has happened is that in these things the artist has set himself a different task. [...] I have attempted here only one thing: that is in a direct, ready formula to give an interpretation of what I took part in in France. [...] This show, then, pretends nothing, in extent: I make only the claim for it in kind that it attempts to give a personal and immediate expression of a tragic event. Experimentation is waived.¹³

However, Marinetti's letter to Severini makes it clear that his instructions to develop a more 'realistic' war art had little to do with any scruples or concerns over the impropriety of undertaking formal experimentation in such a context.

It is not simply the subject matter of Carrà's and Severini's works that identifies them as authentic precursors of 1940s *aeropittura di guerra*, but also the historical context in which they

¹¹ 'Lettera di F. T. Marinetti a G. Severini', in Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, eds, *Archivi del Futurismo*, 2 vols (Rome: De Luca, 1958; 1962), vol. 1, pp. 349-50.

¹² *Art and War* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. 53.

¹³ 'Foreword' to *Guns by Wyndham Lewis*, in Walter Michel, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), pp. 433-34.

were created, the stylistic characteristics they exhibit and the intended manner of their public consumption. As with many of the most emblematic paintings of the 1940s under consideration in the present chapter, these were images that referenced contemporary events, acknowledged and addressed an audience outside the artistic elite (particularly those of Severini)¹⁴ and contained a political dimension that did not conflict with or undermine their aesthetic aspirations.

Futurist artists were to continue to produce imagery concerned with flight and conflict during the inter-war years in the context of the evolving aesthetics of aeropainting (**Figs 36, 37, 38**). Such works were of significance in terms of later developments by means of the way in which they strengthened the relationship between these two canonical Futurist themes, and through their contribution to the elaboration of that visual repertoire of 'wings, struts, nacelles [and] props'¹⁵ which was to feature prominently in the imagery produced during the years of World War Two. And yet, strictly speaking, the majority of these should not be taken for examples of aeropainting of war *avant la lettre* insofar as they also often employed geometric or biomorphic abstraction, whereas a figurative emphasis was to be the dominant feature of the most archetypal examples of the later genre. Moreover, they only implicitly celebrated the might of the recently formed air force, the Regia Aeronautica.¹⁶ Above all, they were products of fantasy and imagination that contained no obvious references to, or relationship with, events taking

¹⁴ Severini undoubtedly saw his paintings as fulfilling a similar role to the patriotic poems written during the war years by his father-in-law, Paul Fort: a body of work which he admiringly described as constituting 'an unrelenting invective against the Germans [...] and a clear glorification of French virtues' (*The Life of a Painter*, cit., p. 153). It is surely no coincidence that one of Fort's poems, condemning the bombardment of Reims Cathedral in 1914, is paralleled by a drawing of the following year on the same theme by Severini titled *Flying over Reims* (a work which again reflected the artist's fascination with aviation).

¹⁵ Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968), p. 109.

¹⁶ Established in 1923.

place in the real world. By contrast, bona fide aeropainting of war was *di guerra* in the most complete sense, pertaining to armed conflict in terms of both its subject matter and the climate in which it was created.

With the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, and Italy's subsequent intervention in the Spanish Civil War alongside Nazi Germany (1936-39), aeropainting took on a markedly more political dimension, documenting the Fascist regime's colonial and militaristic adventures. Both campaigns were addressed in a selection of works displayed at the 1938 Venice Biennale by Marinetti's troupe of *aeropittori d'Africa e Spagna* (**Figs 39, 40**),¹⁷ and it is with the images created in response to these events (particularly the latter, as we shall see), when representatives of the figurative wing of aeropainting started to come to the fore, that the characteristic traits of *aeropittura di guerra* began to emerge for the first time. Indeed, a work of the late 1930s by Tullio Crali on the theme of the Spanish conflict, titled *Sky of War* (**Fig. 41**), was retrospectively identified by Marinetti as an example of the nascent genre in a newspaper article of 1940,¹⁸ something reflective of the close relationship between such imagery and subsequent developments. At the centre of this painting is an image of a Savoia-Marchetti bomber bearing – on its tail fin – the insignia of the Aviazione Legionaria, the Italian expeditionary force sent to bolster Franco's campaign in 1936 (**Fig. 42**). However, neither this aircraft nor the other located beneath it, and to its left, appears in the version of the painting that illustrated Marinetti's article, where it was titled *Flight Danced above the Enemy* (**Fig. 43**). This may mean that two versions of the image were created by Crali, a hypothesis supported by the fact that both were reproduced in the newspaper *Mediterraneo Futurista* during the course of 1942.¹⁹ However, an equally plausible explanation is that *Sky of War* represents an early version of the image, from

¹⁷ See *XXI^a Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte – 1938-XVI. Catalogo*, exh. cat., 2nd edn (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1938), pp. 181-90.

¹⁸ F. T. Marinetti, 'Aeropitture di guerra', *Meridiano di Roma*, 25 June 1940 (Cra.2.119).

¹⁹ BDC / 1979 F. 571, 2109607; BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10215-01.

which all references to the Spanish campaign were subsequently painted out by way of 'updating' it.²⁰ Despite such correspondences with earlier imagery, it was only during the 1940s that the new genre was given a specific name, and attempts made to bring its aesthetics into sharper focus through the publication of theoretical texts that presented it as a distinct phenomenon, ripe for further investigation, elaboration and definition in the context of the 'terrible and grandiose'²¹ events then unfolding.

II. THE TRAJECTORY OF A GENRE, 1940-43

The earliest use of the term *aeropittura di guerra* can be securely dated to 1940, Marinetti having referred to this new genre in the title of his aforementioned newspaper article,²² published during the summer of that year shortly after Italy entered the Second World War. It quickly gained currency among Futurist artists, Monselice's 'Savarè' Futurist Group promising the inclusion of such work in its eighth, ninth and tenth exhibitions, which spanned late 1940 and early 1941.²³ Yet despite their repeated use of the term, the shows organised by this association ultimately contributed little of real substance to the aesthetics of *aeropittura di*

²⁰ This second (or revised) version is illustrated in Maurizio Scudiero and Massimo Cirulli, eds, *Ali d'Italia. Manifesti e dipinti sul volo in Italia 1908-1943*, exh. cat. (New York: Publicity & Print, 2000), p. 147. Here one can also note the absence of any insignia on the wings of the escorting C.R. 32 fighters.

²¹ [F. T. Marinetti], 'L'aeropittura di guerra' [*Il Mare Nostro*, 1941] (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10035-01).

²² See above, n. 18.

²³ See Cibi, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 188-200. A seventh show – the first to be mounted by the group following Mussolini's declaration of war – had opened on 4 September 1940, making reference to *aeropitture guerriere* in its title (ibid., pp. 183-87; see also BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10050-01). The catalogue of the latter exhibition has never been traced; for those of the group's subsequent shows, see Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1940/9; 1941/1; 1941/2a,b.

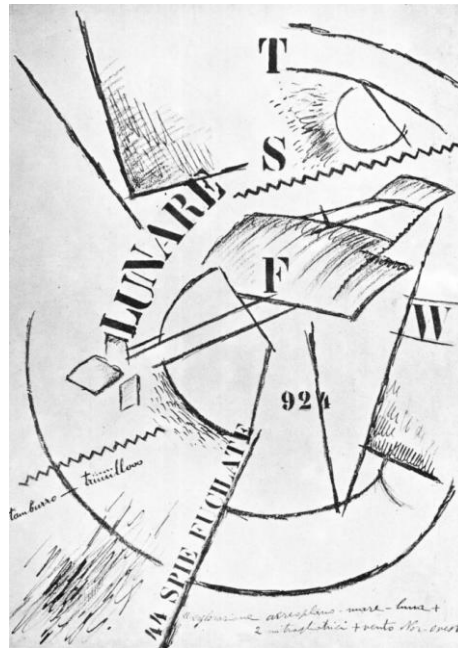


Fig. 33 Carlo Carrà, *Aerial Reconnaissance – Sea – Moon + 2 Machine-guns + North-west Wind*, 1914
(taken from Carrà, *Guerrapittura*, cit., p. 13)



Fig. 34
Gino Severini
Visual Synthesis of the Idea: 'War', 1914
oil on canvas, 92.7 x 73 cm
New York: MoMA (bequest of Sylvia Slifka)



Fig. 35
Gino Severini
The War, 1914
oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm
Munich: Pinakothek der Moderne



Fig. 36 Tullio Crali, *Nocturnal Bombardment*, 1929-30, medium, dimensions and location unknown



Fig. 37
Marisa Mori
Nocturnal Aerial Battle, 1932
oil on board, 71 x 74 cm
private collection

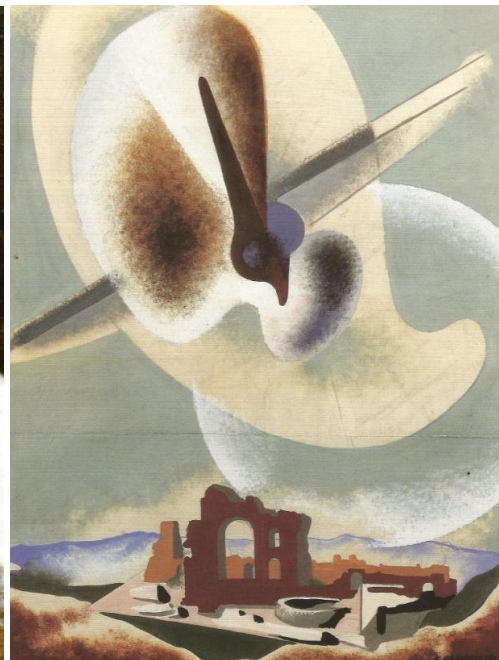


Fig. 38
Enrico Prampolini
Aeropainting, c. 1935
tempera on card, 45.5 x 33 cm
private collection



Fig. 39 Alfredo Gauro Ambrosi, *Bombardment in East Africa ('La Disperata' Squadron)*, 1936
oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm, Trento: Museo dell'Aeronautica Gianni Caproni



Fig. 40 Cesare Andreoni, *The Spanish War*, 1936
oil on board, 110 x 110 cm, Genoa: Wolfsoniana – Fondazione Regionale per la Cultura e lo Spettacolo



Fig. 41 Tullio Crali, *Sky of War*, 1939
medium, dimensions and location unknown



Fig. 42 Savoia-Marchetti S.M. 81 bomber escorted by Fiat C.R. 32 fighters

Quando il grande pittore e scultore futurista Umberto Boccioni, correagendo con me le botte del suo immortale volume « Pittura e scultura futuriste » determinava con esaltanti parole una futura pittura fatta di fumi colorati e quando il pilota e poeta parolibero futurista esperto matematico fedele Azari nel suo appartamento milanese scoppiante di dinamismi e cromatismo misurava e rimisurava le distanze e gli abissi sintetizzati nel suo quadro « Prospettive Aeree » a due metri da me coricato dalla stanchezza di una serata futurista non prevedeva lo sviluppo originale e creativo della ormai indiscussa nuova era dell'aeropittura.

Aeropittori e aereocultori si accaniscono subito a geometrizzare il cielo e ad interpretare stati d'animo aviatori vita spaziosa dei motori e panorami in velocità.

Spontanei dopo una serie di febbrili cerebrali e fantasmi il genio di Fedele Azari Fillia atremato d.l tormento futurista spine con tragico spunto fino alla sua morte la volontà di riformare l'aeropittura in una aerea arte sacra dal tono e dalle trasfigurazioni ebbre di miticismo e di al di là.

Il movimento futurista venne aizzato dal manifesto ideato di Mino Somenzi e firmato da me Balla Benedetta Depero Dottori Fillia Prampolini Somenzi Tato Le esposizioni di Roma Trieste Milano Firenze Torino Genova Savona La Spezia Bologna Livorno Napoli Parigi Atene Amburgo Berlino Nirza furono clamorose per la vivacità delle polemiche e la palpitante attrazione dettata negli aviatori.

Fra i più ispirati aeropittori amici di questi e frequentatori di aeroporti Cralli contribuì subito a determinare le principali quattro tendenze pittoriche e le due tendenze di scultura e ciò fece mediante una vera ossessione del volo e degli spazi da esprimere.

Nella tre tale futurista di questa Biennale da me illustrate alla Mostra del Re Imperatore brillano le opere di 27 aeropittori e aereocultori futuristi fra cui Prampolini Dottori Di Basso Ambrosi Peruzzi Saladin Acquaviva Forlin Veronesi Monachesi Maria Mori Barbara Zna Fazzola Andreoni Caviglioni Magda e Giovanni Korompy Rho Radice dei Gruppi futuristi Boccioni Sav'Elia Savarè Azari Fillia e trionfa la mostra personale di Cralli nuova grande vittoria dell'aeropittura italiana primato plastico sopravanzante le pessime esecuzioni e prunto nella glorificazione aeropittorica della veloce bombardante e miragliante guerra aerea.

Le tendenze di un'aeropittura sistematica documentaria dinamica di paesaggi e urbanismi visti dall'alto è portata a perfezione da Cralli in quasi tutte le opere espone con le caratteristiche di profondità e spaziosità dipinte in modo convincente.

L'istinto il brivido dei combattimenti aerei ed il rombo continuo dei motori che semina bombe sulle spiagge arcuate e i porti spaziosi s'impadroniscono della sensibilità di chi annida questa opera ricca di abitudine aviatoria conoscenza delle macchine disprezzo del pericolo e familiarità con gli alti esplosivi.



AEROPITTORE FUTURISTA CRALLI - PRIMA CHE SI APRA IL PARACADUTE (Benedetta Venezia)

AEROPITTORE DI GUERRA



CRALLI - VOLO DANZATO SUL NEMICO

Fig. 43 F. T. Marinetti, 'Aeropitture di guerra', *Meridiano di Roma*, 25 June 1940 (Cra.2.119)

MOSTRA D'ARTE MONACHESI

 **HOSTARIA DELL'ORSO**

ROMA - VIA MONTE BRIANZO 93
TELEF. 52938

L'AEROPOLITA FUTURISTA

MARINETTI

SANSEPOLCRISTA ACCADEMICO DI
ITALIA PRESENTA IN DUE MINUTI
L'AEROPoesia DI GUERRA
ALLA CHIUSURA DELLA MOSTRA
DEI BOMBARDAMENTI LONDINESI
E AFRICANI DELL'AEROPITTORE FUTURISTA
SANTE MONACHESI
DECLAMERANNO LE LORO AEROPoesie DI GUERRA
MARINETTI - BELLANOVA - SCRIVO - PATTAROZZI - MONACHESI - SIG.NE NUMERICO - MARIA GORETTI - DINA CUCINI
:: :: :: **PARISELLA** :: :: ::
ORE 19 DEL GIORNO 14 GENNAIO
Siete invitato

Fig. 44 Invitation to the *finissage* of an exhibition of *aeropitture di guerra* by Monachesi at Rome's Hostaria dell'Orso, 14 January 1941



Fig. 45 *Futurist Aeropaintings of War* by Andreoni, exh. cat. (Milan: Casa d'Artisti, 1941)



Fig. 46 Renato Di Bosso, *African Aeromachine-gunner*, 1941
oil on board, 120 x 126 cm, Milan: Marinetti Collection

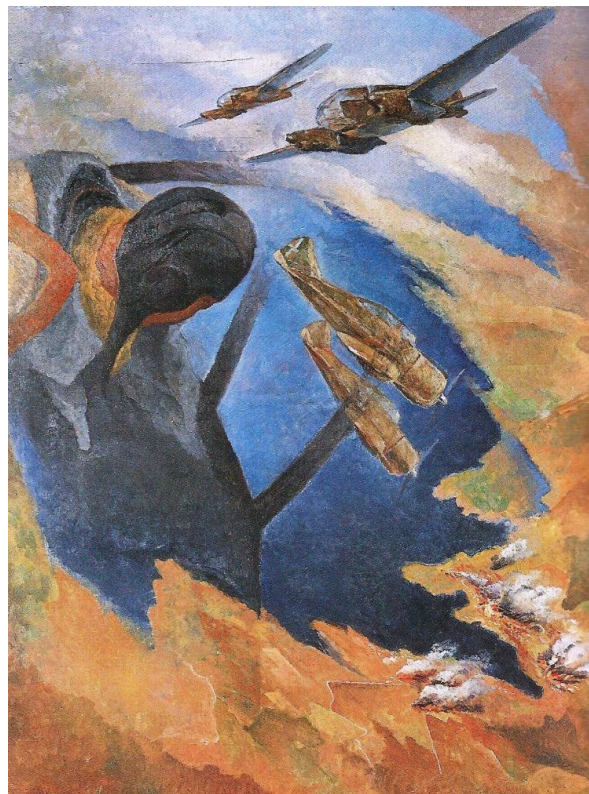


Fig. 47 Alfredo Gauro Ambrosi, *Ready for the Attack – Strait of Sicily*, c. 1942
oil on board, 100 x 80 cm, Trento: Museo dell'Aeronautica Gianni Caproni



Fig. 48 Gerardo Dottori, *Inferno of Aerial Battle above the Paradise of the Gulf (or, Aerial Battle above the Gulf of Naples)*, 1942, oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm, Milan: private collection

guerra, its artists being unable to formulate a convincing pictorial response to the swift chain of events taking place in the political sphere. Rather, figures such as Forlin, Fasullo and Zen continued to exhibit works of aeroportraiture alongside autarky- or aviation-related imagery, painted in accordance with the principles of *Ardentismo* and *Cosmopittura*.²⁴ Nevertheless, it was clearly important to this highly politicised group that it make an immediate gesture of Fascist solidarity in the aftermath of the Duce's decision to enter the war, and it is in this sense that these exhibitions are best understood.

Other painters, however, were quicker off the mark, as illustrated by the important shows mounted at various locations in Rome around this time displaying Sante Monachesi's depictions of the aerial bombardment of military targets in Africa and Great Britain (**Fig. 44**).²⁵ From the spring of 1941 Futurist war paintings began to appear in exhibitions in significant numbers, and continued to occupy a prominent position until the fall of Mussolini in the summer of 1943.²⁶ Whether private initiatives or more official in nature – organised under the aegis of governmental institutions or ministries – these exhibitions brought together works that strove to combine modern aesthetics with patriotic content. The dual character of this imagery was emphasised by Marinetti in pugnacious introductory texts that appeared in the catalogues of these shows, proclaiming the Futurist movement's enduring commitment to artistic innovation and its unshakable, unimpeachable, faith in Mussolini.

The new genre was showcased at two important exhibitions of March 1941. The first, displaying around 30 works by Cesare Andreoni (**Fig. 45**),²⁷ was mounted at Milan's Casa d'Artisti, while

²⁴ See above, Chapter Two.

²⁵ See Toni, *Futuristi nelle Marche*, cit., p. 96.

²⁶ In addition to the larger exhibitions detailed below, individual works of *aeropittura di guerra* were also scattered throughout the many smaller regional shows that took place during these years.

²⁷ See Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/4.

Tato's *Solo Exhibition of Futurist Aeropaintings of War*²⁸ – a major show comprising some 86 works²⁹ – was held at the Air Ministry's Dopolavoro premises in Rome. Like those of Monachesi, both exhibitions featured images relating to specific episodes from the early phases of the various Axis campaigns. One of Andreoni's works depicted Italian aircraft in the skies above Corinth at the very moment of releasing their bombs, glossing Italy's disastrous Greek campaign of October 1940 with a false veneer of military efficiency. The same subject was tackled in two paintings by Tato, five of whose vigorous works also related to the Blitz, while a further image offered an impressionistic rendering of dogfights taking place high above the Norwegian fjords (**Fig. 72**). Both artists subsequently exhibited alongside other *aeropittori di guerra* at the *III Exhibition of the National Fascist Fine Arts Union* in Milan that May.³⁰

Four major group shows incorporating numerous works of *aeropittura di guerra* were to be organised over the following two years. Such imagery was naturally much in evidence at the so-called 'war Biennale' of 1942, on which occasion Marinetti's group was awarded a pavilion in which to mount the most extensive selection of Futurist works ever presented at this event during the movement's lifetime. Five of the genre's leading exponents (Ambrosi, Chetoffi, Crali, Di Bosso and Verossi³¹) exhibited a further 27 works as part of a parallel show in the pavilion of the Regia Aeronautica, one of three armed forces pavilions displaying officially commissioned works of war art.³² The latter images were the fruits of impressions received by these painters while accompanying pilots on combat and reconnaissance missions – an approach consistent with Futurist theory, according to which first-hand experience of flight was an indispensable

²⁸ Ibid., 1941/5.

²⁹ Sixteen of these were satirical works that ridiculed figures such as Winston Churchill, depicted as a barrage balloon.

³⁰ See Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/9.

³¹ Albino Siviero.

³² On the 1942 Biennale, see below, Chapter Six.

condition for creating authentic works of aeropainting.³³ It was in these terms that Crali later rationalised his decision to take part in the project, framing the experience simply as an indispensable opportunity for him and his fellow Futurists to gather new material for their work, insisting that ‘our hands are stained only with colour’.³⁴ ‘Today we are seen as warmongers, almost as criminals’, he lamented, ‘because of our enthusiastic acceptance of that invitation, nobody seeming to notice that between the “still life” and the “aeroplane” it was the latter that excited us’.³⁵ Unlike their British counterparts, who were by and large shielded from peril,³⁶ the Futurists would often find themselves in the thick of the action, with the aeroplanes they were travelling in engaged in dogfights. Di Bosso later recalled:

In 1942 Ambrosi and I received an invitation from the Ministry of Propaganda. I was not a member of the forces. I took off in a flying-suit, but wearing civilian clothes, aboard an ‘S 79’ in place of the tail-gunner. Our role was to patrol the skies of the Mediterranean, from Palermo to Malta and beyond. If we met anything nasty (such as an attack by English fighters) I was supposed to use the machine-gun.³⁷

The fact that such artists experienced military flights at first hand endows their work with a strong dramatic charge and an aura of authenticity that was not lost on contemporary audiences.³⁸ It may also account for the fact that whereas the imagery of artists such as Tato is

³³ In his introduction to the Futurist pavilion that year, Marinetti also suggested Mario Menin’s involvement in this initiative (‘Aeropitture di guerra cosmiche biochimiche sacre documentarie meccaniche’, in *XXIII^a Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d’Arte*, cit., p. 224). However, although both Menin and Monachesi received subsidies of L. 1200 from the Ministry of Popular Culture enabling them to participate (ACS MINCULPOP GAB / F. 190; memorandum of 23 February 1942) neither artist would appear to have had their works selected for the exhibition.

³⁴ Tullio Crali, *Futuristi in linea* (Rovereto: Mart, 1994), p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁶ See Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 137.

³⁷ Quoted in Scudiero, ‘Di Bosso futurista’, in Scudiero, *Di Bosso futurista*, cit., p. 18.

³⁸ See below, Chapter Six.

primarily of aeroplanes, the works of Ambrosi, Crali, *et al.*, tend manifestly to be images *from* aeroplanes, incorporating details of the fuselage or cockpit (**Figs 47, 58, 61, 62**).

In late 1942, Rome's Galleria San Marco hosted an important exhibition by *6 Futurist Aeropainters of War*, which again brought together some of the genre's most representative and significant practitioners.³⁹ Futurist artists also participated in an *Exhibition of Aeronautical Art* organised for the following June by the Air Ministry in Rome.⁴⁰ Held at the Galleria di Roma, this show was similar in scope and intention to that of the Air Force pavilion at the previous year's Biennale, except for the unexplained absence of Di Bosso. Finally, the movement presented a selection of works relating to the war at the IV Quadriennale of 1943.⁴¹ This was destined to be the last time the now-fragmented group would exhibit together: by the time the Quadriennale closed its doors on 31 July Mussolini had been deposed and Fascism's wars against the plutocracies of the West and the bolshevists of the East lay in ruins. Following the signing of the armistice in September, aeropainting of war effectively lost its *raison d'être*.

³⁹ *6 aeropittori futuristi di guerra. Ambrosi – Crali – Di Bosso – Dottori – Prampolini – Tato*; see Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1942/5. This exhibition, which opened on 20 December, also featured work by artists whose engagement with this branch of Futurist imagery was in actual fact somewhat minimal. For instance, none of the works sent to the exhibition by Gerardo Dottori addressed the theme of war, despite the fact that the artist did incorporate military imagery into his rolling landscapes on occasion, as in his *Inferno of Aerial Battle above the Paradise of the Gulf*, depicting fighters duelling high above the Bay of Naples (**Fig. 48**). Other occasional practitioners of *aeropittura di guerra* included Giovanni Acquaviva, Leandra Angelucci, Alessandro Bruschetti and Osvaldo Peruzzi.

⁴⁰ See Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1943/3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1943/2.

III. AEROPITTURA DI GUERRA BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

III.I. Thematic Elements

Despite the absence of a dedicated manifesto on the subject, *aeropittura di guerra* was effectively 'launched by Marinetti'⁴² with the publication of two texts in September and December 1940 in which the Futurist leader attempted to define a new relationship between war and the arts in the context of the prevailing 'aero' aesthetic. The first of these, titled 'The New Aesthetic of War', was primarily oriented toward poets, although generally speaking its prescriptions were equally valid for painters.⁴³ The use of the qualifying term 'new' reflected Marinetti's belief that the incipient *guerra multiframe* possessed certain characteristics that distinguished it from the African *guerra veloce*,⁴⁴ the aesthetic dimensions of which had previously been explored in a manifesto of 1935.⁴⁵ Certain of the ideas contained in this first document informed the emphasis of Marinetti's second text, 'Aeropainting of Bombardments', which was directed exclusively toward visual artists, as its title suggests.⁴⁶ Maritano has argued

⁴² Maritano, *Futurismo in Sardegna*, cit., p. 114.

⁴³ In the tenth point of the manifesto, first published in *Il Giornale d'Italia* on 20 September 1940, Marinetti refers to the work of a number of *aeropittori di guerra*.

⁴⁴ These terms were often used by the Futurist leader to distinguish between the two conflicts. The former was intended to reflect the virility and dynamism of Italy's military campaigns during World War Two. Ironically, however, it also neatly expressed the hubris that was, in part, ultimately responsible for the nation's undoing.

⁴⁵ F. T. Marinetti, 'Estetica futurista della guerra', *Stile Futurista*, vol. 2, nos 13-14, November 1935, p. 9.

⁴⁶ First published in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 4 December 1940. Marinetti consistently credited Sante Monachesi with the formulation of this manifesto, although it was always embedded – somewhat inexplicably – within texts of which the Futurist leader was cited as the sole author. A press release dated 7 December 1940 issued by the Agenzia A.L.A. confirms Monachesi's responsibility for the manifesto itself, whilst asserting Marinetti's authorship of the 'important polemical article' into which it was to be habitually incorporated. 'L'aeropittura dei bombardamenti – Manifesto futurista' (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10287-01).

that in the final analysis neither document justifies Marinetti's claims as to the originality of the ideas contained therein. Nevertheless, both texts contain points of interest that elucidate the movement's evolving response to the shifting nature of modern warfare between 1935 and 1940, and are fundamental for an understanding of the direction aeropainting was to take thereafter.

'The New Aesthetic of War' opens with an extended, rhapsodic evocation of mechanised conflict recalling that of an earlier text by Marinetti titled 'Electrical War'.⁴⁷ This is followed by eleven points setting out the defining traits of the new aesthetic, although the most significant ideas are undoubtedly contained within the first four of these. For Maritano, among the many Futurist concepts 'revisited [and] clarified'⁴⁸ in this text, only one point stands out as being worthy of note: a new emphasis on the impersonal, industrial and mechanical aspects of modern warfare, and a corresponding reduction in the attention given to its human element. This is indeed a key theme of the manifesto, which opens with an impassioned appeal to passéist authors: 'O traditional poets who continue to eulogise the wars of former days by mourning the minute beauties of an individual solely human heroism admire instead admire with us Futurist aeropoets this incomparable war directed by the politico-military genius of Benito Mussolini'.⁴⁹ Expanding on this theme, Marinetti goes on to call for:

On this point, see Toni, *Futuristi nelle Marche*, cit., pp. 96-97. Translations of both texts can be found in the appendix to this thesis, from which all citations are taken.

⁴⁷ 'Electrical War (A Futurist Vision-Hypothesis)', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., pp. 112-16.

⁴⁸ *Futurismo in Sardegna*, cit., p. 115.

⁴⁹ My translation of the text omits this extended introductory section. The version cited here is that published as 'Nuova estetica della guerra' in an unidentified publication (26 October 1940) (Cra.2.141). Marinetti's aforementioned manifesto of 1935 had been similarly critical of 'all those traditionalist denigrators of modern warfare as anti-aesthetic'.

A shift in or metamorphosis of the notion of Military Glory with a cheering Return or a kneeling No Return for the aeroplane or tank or submarine or torpedo-boat worthy of glory independently of the soldiers contained within

and:

The triumphant acknowledgement of machines as military Personnel all having their own highly distinct thoughtful astute intrepid personalities as prophesied by the Futurist aviator and aeropainter Fedele Azari

Summing up his appraisal of the text, Maritano concludes:

The indications of this new manifesto are clear: the exaltation of war in general gives way to a glorification of the war machine as the true protagonist of the new conflict. [...] Accordingly, leaving unchanged the substance of his preceding statements in favour of war, Marinetti simply declares that [...] artists must adapt their work to this new perspective, something requiring no great effort: merely the substitution of the figure of the hero – or better, the superman – of recent Futurist work with machines of war.⁵⁰

The ability to divine the ‘characters’ of individual machines was clearly considered a particularly important skill for *aeropittori* to possess at this time, as illustrated by Marinetti’s introduction to the catalogue of Andreoni’s aforementioned 1941 exhibition *Futurist Aeropaintings of War*, in which he praised the artist for his

dramatic and pulsating characterisation of warplanes that makes one forget human qualities and instead experience every vehicle in its own peculiar that is to say non-human manner with vibrating wings that have nothing in common with those of angels

⁵⁰ *Futurismo in Sardegna*, cit., p. 115.

or birds⁵¹

Marinetti warns against anthropomorphism here, just as he had done in 1912 when outlining his intention 'to substitute for human psychology, now exhausted, the lyric obsession with matter. Be careful not to force human feelings onto matter. Instead, divine its different governing impulses, its forces of compression, dilation, cohesion, and disaggregation [...]. We are not interested in offering dramas of humanized matter'.⁵² Introducing Tato's exhibition of war paintings, Marinetti again remarked on the way in which the artist created 'numerous distinctly individual flying machines each expressing its own sense of elegance impetuosity arrogance delicacy',⁵³ while in an article for *Meridiano di Roma* of 20 October 1940, Marinetti recalled a conversation with Crali in which the artist asserted 'how his paintings were concerned with giving plastic expression to the autonomy and nascent individuality of bombers'.⁵⁴ And indeed, during this period various artists do appear to have aspired to the creation of a kind of 'mechanical portraiture', a case in point being Di Bosso's genuinely terrifying depiction of a Stuka, its angry snout rearing upwards like that of a shark scenting its prey as it hurtles through space in blind fury (**Fig. 49**).⁵⁵

Nevertheless, whilst undoubtedly a distinctive aspect of the iconography of *aeropittura di*

⁵¹ Untitled introduction to *Aeropitture futuriste di guerra di Andreoni*, exh. cat. (Milan: Casa d'Artisti, 1941), n. p.; repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/4.

⁵² 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 95. The Futurist leader gave a concise illustration of how to avoid this danger in a later manifesto: 'to represent the life of a blade of grass, I say, "Tomorrow I'll be greener."' 'Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without Strings – Words-in-Freedom' (1913), in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit., pp. 95-106 (p. 100).

⁵³ 'Aeropittura di guerra', in *Tato. Mostra personale di aeropitture futuriste di guerra*, exh. cat. (Rome: OND Ministero Aeronautica, 1941), [pp. 9-13 (p. 10)]; repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1941/5.

⁵⁴ 'La poesia non umana dei tecnicismi' (Cra.2.165).

⁵⁵ The emphasis given to faithful portrayals of flying machines in Ambrosi's work was undoubtedly related to the fact that one of the artist's most important patrons was the aviation giant Gianni Caproni (**Fig. 50**). See Giovanna Nicoletti, ed., *La Collezione Caproni*, exh. cat. (Rovereto: Stella, 2007), pp. 104-11.

guerra, taken by itself Marinetti's emphasis upon the mechanical rather than the human element of conflict was no real novelty either. The ambition to overturn 'the traditional narrative proportions [...] according to which a battle wound would have a greatly exaggerated importance in respect to the instruments of destruction' had long been a key objective of the Futurist programme, after all.⁵⁶ Moreover, the text's mechanistic thrust is tempered somewhat by Marinetti's insistence on 'the necessity of glorifying with aeropoetic magnificence all of the soldiers who die anonymously in their machines only the latter initially being mentioned on the radio that accelerator of glory'. The importance he attributed to this task is clear from his own literary works, such as *Canto eroi e macchine della guerra mussoliniana* and *L'aeropoema di Cozzarini*, which commemorated the 'heroes' of Mussolini's wars and recounted their individual acts of bravery.⁵⁷

Rather, the truly original aspect of this 'new aesthetic' consists in its reflection of the novel dimension of modern conflict itself: namely, its 'total' character. The concept of 'total war' relates not only to the strategy of throwing the full weight of a nation's social, economic and human resources into the struggle to defeat an enemy, but also to the notion of a war without fronts in which civilians are considered legitimate military targets (or their deaths accepted as an unavoidable consequence of bombing raids aimed primarily at sabotaging a rival power's industrial infrastructure).⁵⁸ Both aspects are acknowledged in the first two points of the manifesto, where Marinetti praises the dynamism of Italy's war effort, and defines a new conception of bravery possessed not only by soldiers, submariners, sailors or pilots, but also by

⁵⁶ Marinetti, 'Geometric and Mechanical Splendor', in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, cit., p. 106.

⁵⁷ Cozzarini was a young soldier who repudiated the armistice of September 1943. Having improvised a unit that fought a last-ditch battle against the invading Allied forces alongside German troops he was killed in action in southern Italy on 10 November 1943.

⁵⁸ See Peter Calvocoressi, Guy Wint and John Pritchard, *The Penguin History of the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 512-32. As its authors state, during World War Two 'defeat in workshop and homestead was to take the place of defeat in the field as the first aim of strategy' (p. 513).

‘factory workers [...] by women by children by the elderly by the injured and by the sick all of whom are exposed to danger’. In this way Marinetti’s ‘new aesthetic of war’ identified areas of thematic interest that were also explored in the war art of other nations at this time, most notably Great Britain, where the home front was considered at least as worthy of attention as other, further-flung, theatres of warfare, if not more so (**Fig. 51**). In fact, in his catalogue text for the 1942 Biennale, Marinetti drew the reader’s attention to works reflecting some of the more mundane aspects of life in the Regia Aeronautica, documenting ‘the everyday existence of pilots at their airfields and in their aircraft’ (**Fig. 52**).⁵⁹ This shift in focus from the distant combat zone to the civilian environment is particularly apparent if one compares Marinetti’s text of 1940 with his aforementioned manifesto of 1935, replete with vivid evocations of the sights, sounds and stench of the battlefield (‘war has a beauty all its own when it harmonises artillery fire cannonades silent pauses echoes songs of soldiers perfumes and odours of putrefaction’).⁶⁰

However, here we also encounter the first divergence between the theory and practice of *aeropittura di guerra*, insofar as the ultimate consequence of this recognition of the suffering of the Italian population as a consequence of Allied air raids⁶¹ was not to be the introduction of a new-found strain of patriotic humanism into Futurist war art, but rather the exploration of what aesthetic novelties this unprecedented form of industrialised conflict might offer the poet or painter.

⁵⁹ ‘Aeropitture di guerra cosmiche biochimiche sacre documentarie meccaniche’, cit., p. 224.

⁶⁰ ‘Estetica futurista della guerra’, cit.

⁶¹ The air campaign against Italy began within twenty-four hours of Mussolini’s declaration of war – Turin being the first Italian city to be bombed when its FIAT plant was targeted on 11 June 1940. For further information concerning the bombing strategy of the Allies in Italy, see Claudia Baldoli, ‘I bombardamenti sull’Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Strategia anglo-americana e propaganda rivolta alla popolazione civile’, *DEP – Deportate, esuli, profughe*, nos 13-14, 2010, pp. 34-49 http://www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/n13-14-2010/Ricerche/casi/2_Baldoli.pdf [accessed 13 March 2013].

Reflections on such matters constituted the basis of Marinetti's second text of 1940, which codified perhaps the most characteristic and distinctive – and certainly the most troubling – expression of *aeropittura di guerra*: the 'aeropainting of bombardments'.⁶² Whilst the 'heroic' dogfight continued to occupy a place within Futurist imagery throughout the 1940s (**Fig. 62**), this *sub-sub-genre* was far more consistent with Marinetti's 'new aesthetic of war' in terms of its stress upon the machine as protagonist and, particularly, its engagement with the notion of total war.⁶³ In his preamble, Marinetti identifies the work of Menin and Monachesi as the foundation upon which artists should build in tackling this theme. As he notes, the manifesto was in fact launched on the occasion of an event at Palazzo Venezia at which both artists exhibited.⁶⁴ However, the work of the latter was undoubtedly the most significant in this context, Menin's imagery being almost exclusively concerned with the depiction of clashes between Italian and Ethiopian ground troops during Mussolini's colonial war of 1935-36. These were based on first-hand impressions received while serving alongside Marinetti in Africa as part of the '28 October' Division.⁶⁵ Not only were they insufficiently 'aerial' in nature to be truly relevant to the matter at hand, their focus on the battlefield was also more characteristic of Marinetti's previous aesthetic of war than that which he developed subsequently. By the same token, the imagery created by Monachesi in response to the Spanish Civil War (rather than that cited by Marinetti, again inspired by the Ethiopian conflict) was of the greatest importance in terms of the future

⁶² Claudia Salaris has also identified such imagery as the defining Futurist response to the war in the sphere of the visual arts. See her *Storia del futurismo*, cit., p. 265.

⁶³ The eighth point of the text refers to the 'home front' dimension of Marinetti's 'new aesthetic' in its call for a 'glorification [...] of everyday work'. The version of the manifesto cited here is that published as 'L'aeropittura dei bombardamenti' in *Convivio Letterario*, December 1940 (Cra.2.170).

⁶⁴ See also the press release issued by the Agenzia A.L.A. on 4 December 1940: 'Il poeta Marinetti inaugura il 22° anno delle Stanze del Libro' (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10031-02).

⁶⁵ See Marinetti, 'Aeropitture di guerra cosmiche biochimiche sacre documentarie meccaniche', cit., pp. 228-30. In January 1936, this unit was besieged for a number of days in the Warieu Pass: an event that was subsequently dramatised by Marinetti in his *Il poema africano della Divisione '28 Ottobre'* (1937).



Fig. 49 Renato Di Bosso, *Machines of War*, 1942, oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cm, Verona: private collection



Fig. 50 Alfredo Gauro Ambrosi, *Attack with Caproni Aeroplane*, c. 1942
oil on canvas, 75.5 x 99.8 cm, Trento: Museo dell'Aeronautica Gianni Caproni



Fig. 51 Sibò (Pierluigi Bossi), *Bombing of Rome*, 1943, oil on board, 44 x 32.5 cm, private collection



Fig. 52 Renato Di Bosso, *Departing-departed Fighter – Macchi 200*, 1942, tempera on card, 27.3 x 20 cm, private collection



Fig. 53 Sante Monachesi, *Desire for Liberation*, 1938, oil on board, 87 x 98 cm, Rome: private collection



Fig. 54 Sante Monachesi, *Architecture No. 1 (Bombardment of the Port)*, 1938
oil on board, 70 x 100 cm, Rome: private collection

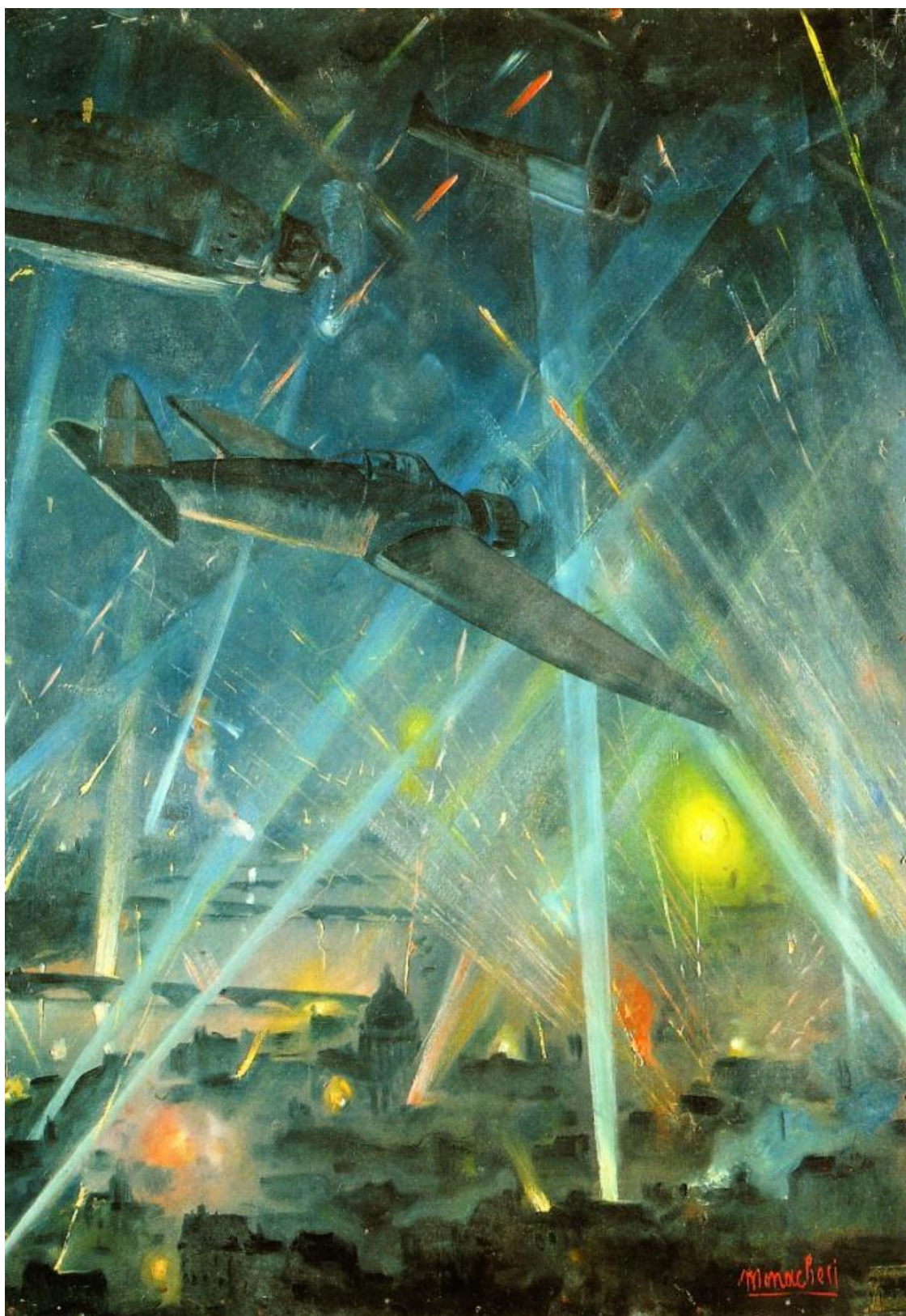


Fig. 55 Sante Monachesi, *Nocturnal Aerial Reconnaissance over London*, c. 1940
oil on board, 110 x 80 cm, Rome: private collection

orientation of *aeropittura di guerra*, being characterised by images of menacingly anonymous flying machines meting out indiscriminate carnage from the skies above densely-populated urban centres, ports or industrial complexes (**Figs 53, 54**).⁶⁶ Witnessing ‘the first near total destruction of an undefended civilian target by aerial bombardment’,⁶⁷ the Spanish Civil War has been seen as ‘a rehearsal for the bigger world war to come, opening the flood-gates to a new and horrific form of modern warfare that was universally dreaded’.⁶⁸ Reflecting these changing realities, the work produced by Monachesi around 1938 likewise anticipated much of what was to follow not only in terms of his own engagement with military themes (**Fig. 55**) but also that of the wider Futurist movement.

III.II. Stylistic Traits and Characteristics

In addition to setting out its thematic concerns, ‘Aeropainting of Bombardments’ detailed a range of formal solutions that artists might employ in order to convey the visual, auditory and olfactory impressions generated by this form of warfare. Many of these were essentially abstract in nature, such as the use of a ‘terrifying contrast of forms and colours’. For instance, it was suggested that the rendering of ‘smoke and its asphyxiating bitterness’ could be achieved by means of ‘forms resembling oaks pines mushrooms canopies ramifications [and] long-tentacled octopi’, while the rumble of explosions might be evoked by the use of abstract pictorial elements recalling ‘breasts blocks jostling porcupines [and] water-skins’. Such ideas echo

⁶⁶ The notion that **Fig. 54** illustrates an episode from the Spanish Civil War is suggested both by the date of the work and its depiction of a Stuka.

⁶⁷ The Basque town of Guernica, famously bombed by the aeroplanes of Nazi Germany’s Condor Legion and Italy’s Aviazione Legionaria on 26 April 1937.

⁶⁸ Paul Preston, untitled introduction to *The Spanish Civil War: Dreams + Nightmares*, exh. cat. (London: Imperial War Museum, 2001), pp. 3-16 (p. 4).

Marinetti's own abstract characterisation of modern conflict ('darting geometric forms with few curves almost all transpierced') in the introduction to his earlier 'New Aesthetic of War'.

These recommendations are striking insofar as they constitute an almost total reversal of those Marinetti had given Severini during the First World War, when he had stressed the need for him to suppress anything abstruse or esoteric in his paintings in order that they might more accurately capture the physiognomy of modern warfare and unambiguously assert Futurism's ideological position with regard to the conflict. They also highlight a second divergence between the theory and practice of *aeropittura di guerra*, given that such elements were in fact to find no place in Monachesi's work either before or after the publication of this text, nor were they to be adopted by the vast majority of artists engaged in the production of such imagery. The same is true of the manifesto's suggestions concerning the incorporation of numerals into Futurist war paintings, elements that were intended to provide 'clarification' of the 'distances proportions quantities [and] weights' depicted, as in the earlier war art of Severini and Carrà.⁶⁹

One can only presume that the suggestions made in this manifesto were not more widely explored for the very same reasons that Marinetti had himself advised against such an approach in 1914. Cibi's observations concerning the way in which Forlin stepped back from the brink of abstraction around 1939 – as Severini had done in 1914 – would appear to confirm this, illustrating how the artist perceived the incompatibility between the kind of abstract formulae advanced by Marinetti's texts and the requirements of official war art:

This was the moment in which Forlin's stylistic research seemed to move toward the possible abandonment of traditional representation, and yet it was only a momentary deviation, since the need to create a Fascist art [...] gained priority over purely pictorial concerns, as Forlin himself noted: '[...] Given that the atmosphere itself constitutes a

⁶⁹ See above, pp. 117-18.

vital plastic element in my works, there are any number of reasons why I could decide to create paintings devoid of subject matter. But I still have faith in my ideas and love for my epoch. [...] Moreover, I am also a Fascist, and I have duties.'⁷⁰

However, it is important to note that relatively few Futurists appear consciously to have adapted their styles in order to render their works less abstract and more easily comprehensible at this time; in this respect, Forlin's case is somewhat unusual.⁷¹ Rather, in the majority of instances, those artists within the movement who were representative of an already existing figurative tendency simply found their work increasingly attuned to contemporary requirements during these years and, consequently, accorded ever-greater prominence. As previously noted, *aeropittura di guerra* corresponded most closely to that branch of aeropainting characterised by Marinetti in his introduction to the 1939 Quadriennale catalogue as 'a synthetic documentary dynamic aeropainting of landscapes and cityscapes seen from aloft and at speed', in other words, one of the four broad approaches identified by the Futurist leader as having evolved independently over the preceding decade.⁷² Accordingly, whilst figurative imagery played a key role in Futurist art of both World Wars (and did so for similar reasons) there was one significant difference: in 1914 the small number of Futurists meant that painters were encouraged

⁷⁰ *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 201-02. Cibin cites Forlin's aforementioned text of 1941 'Contro il passatismo e l'esterofilia'. This emphasis upon recognisable, figurative, imagery was not specific to the war art produced by the Axis powers. As Roger Tolson has noted, the British War Artists' Advisory Committee also sidelined any art which had the potential to confuse or alienate the general public: 'There were [...] some notable omissions from the official programme, artists whose work was deemed too abstract or symbolic'. *Art from the Second World War* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2007), p. 6.

⁷¹ In a text of 1940 Forlin had asserted: 'It is true that art must be understood by the people It is true that it must be universal. But one should not seek to assert on this basis the categorical judgement of the profane of the indifferent and of the completely ignorant The work of art is the fruit of long research of profound uncertainties of heroic leaps [...] For this reason not everyone will be able immediately to understand it and to love it One must approach it without prejudice, with sincerity and with a desire for understanding'. 'Arte dinamica del tempo fascista' [1940]; in Cibin, *Corrado Forlin*, cit., pp. 241-45 (pp. 241-42).

⁷² 'Mostra futurista di aeropittori e aeroscultori', in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1939/2, p. 186.

temporarily to reorient their work along figurative lines, whereas by the end of the 1930s the sheer breadth of tendencies within the movement meant that one of these could simply be promoted over another, as and when circumstances demanded.

One of a small number of Futurists who did explore abstract solutions in their treatment of this theme was the Bolognese artist Angelo Caviglioni. Arguably the most painterly of all the *aeropittori di guerra*, his images easily stand comparison with the contemporary works of Emilio Vedova. Caviglioni's evocation of an *Aeroterrestrial Battle* (**Fig. 56**) is an (abstract) expressionist *tour-de-force* focusing less on the mechanical elements engaged in conflict as on the clashing force-lines and radiating waves of energy generated by their struggle. The same is true of his *Aeronaval Battle* (**Fig. 57**), at the centre of which it is only just possible to discern the prow of a battleship, guns blazing. Caviglioni is also unusual in the sense that he continued to produce imagery concerned with flight and war after Italy's surrender in 1943, thereby offering an entirely different perspective on the subject to that found in the overwhelming majority of earlier *aeropitture di guerra*. For instance, a work of 1944, simply titled *Aeroplanes*, depicts violet aircraft swarming overhead like spectres, seemingly within touching distance, evoking a vivid sense of menace and claustrophobia that was also to be expressed in certain works of Futurist poetry at this time.

Despite the fact that a figurative vocabulary had been employed for several years by a number of artists within the movement, critical appraisals have nevertheless consistently tended to single out *aeropittura di guerra* as representing a genuine stylistic low point in Futurist art, reflective of a servile willingness to pander to the conservative element within the Fascist regime at this time. Mariateresa Chirico's negative evaluation of such work is typical of the vast

majority of responses, describing it as ‘no longer concerned with the aerial view in its own right – a vision of reality caught from a particular perspective and characterised by lyrical tones or transfigured in other ways – but with capturing the reality of war in a raw, almost photographic, representation’.⁷³

In fact, the work produced by the key practitioners of *aeropittura di guerra* was far from conventional – and by no means ‘photographic’ – in nature, frequently incorporating multiple perspectives, an unnatural or exaggerated use of colour and the fluid extension of forms in space in order to convey the plunging, vertiginous sensations and states of mind experienced by pilots or parachutists (**Figs 58, 59**). As one contemporary critic observed in relation to the works on display at a 1940 exhibition of Crali’s paintings:

One would search in vain within his works for those little, well-modelled, static aeroplanes that appear to be suspended from a length of string; rather, one finds [...] the sensations produced by flight in the soul of the pilot. Crali’s conception [of aeropainting] is extremely broad and entirely introspective [...].⁷⁴

Having joined the Futurist movement in 1929, Crali was initially influenced by Prampolini’s semi-abstract vocabulary of sinuous lines and metallic tones. However, by the early 1930s the artist had developed his own highly individual language, creating thrilling imagery that whilst firmly anchored in the recognisable world of clouds, wings and propellers, consistently subverted any conventional notions of realism by means of the most extraordinarily baroque contortions and simultaneous viewpoints (**Fig. 60**). More than those of any other artist, Crali’s war scenes fulfil

⁷³ ‘Ottantasette artisti, trecentosessantuno opere’, in Agnese, and others, *I futuristi e le Quadriennali*, cit., pp. 47-68 (p. 65).

⁷⁴ L. G., ‘Ispirazione e talento di Tullio Crali in una mostra di aeropittura’, *La Voce Fascista*, 6 April 1940 (Cra.2.108).

the early Futurist promise to ‘put the spectator in the centre of the picture’,⁷⁵ drawing the viewer in emotionally through their sheer intensity, as well ‘spatially’ by recourse to a range of judicious compositional devices. For instance, having successfully completed his mission, the protagonist of *Illuminations of War* (**Fig. 61**) casts a tense glance in our direction as if turning to his co-pilot, thereby directly engaging the viewer’s gaze. In another dynamic image (**Fig. 62**) the finger poised above the trigger on the control stick could well be our own. These, then, are not mechanical transcriptions of wartime operations, captured dispassionately by Crali for posterity, but rather compelling dramas in which the viewer is fully involved and immersed. Whilst it is entirely probable that certain aeropainters sought vicarious ‘stimulation [...] in the photojournalistic magazines [...] and newsreels’ of the day,⁷⁶ the work of painters such as Crali – born of personal exposure to the events it chronicled – was as concerned with communicating a subjective experience of warfare as it was with objectively depicting the novel forms of contemporary military hardware.

Repeatedly emphasising the need for painters to ‘exclude any photographic realism’,⁷⁷ Marinetti was quick to refute any charges of pedantic verisimilitude levelled against his artists. For instance, he stressed the way in which Crali’s works aspired to poetry rather than mere transcription:

Scientifically precise as it may appear the [figure of the] ‘parachutist’ is also transfigured as much as the atmosphere which surrounds him ennobled by the heroic furore of the leap The buildings whose façades and cubes and parallelepipeds run reflected and

⁷⁵ Boccioni, and others, ‘Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto’, in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, cit., p. 28.

⁷⁶ Bruno Passamani, ed., *Di Bosso futurista* (Milan: All’Insegna del Pesce d’Oro, 1976) p. 24.

⁷⁷ ‘Aeropitture africaniste degli aeropittori futuristi’, in Ugo Ortona, ed., *Le terre d’oltremare e l’arte italiana contemporanea* (Naples: Edizioni della Mostra d’Oltremare, 1941), pp. 135-37 (p. 136); repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1940/7b.

interpenetrating over the ceiling of the pilot's cockpit are also transfigured beyond any verism⁷⁸

Similarly, the Futurist leader denied the validity of 'any possible accusation of *fotografismo*' in relation to Ambrosi's *Bombardment of Malta* in his introduction to the Futurist pavilion at the 1942 Venice Biennale.⁷⁹ Marinetti's apparent defensiveness on this point is interesting, and suggests that negative remarks concerning the stylistic character of aeropainting of war are not only a recent phenomenon. In fact, in late 1941 accusations were made against Di Bosso that his scenes were copied from photographs, a claim which would seem to have been completely unfounded, given the artist's aforementioned wartime experiences.⁸⁰ However, such criticisms would appear to have been uncommon. An anonymous reviewer of the 1943 *Exhibition of Aeronautical Art* echoed the sentiments expressed in the show's catalogue, praising the Futurists for 'moving beyond exterior appearances and striving for a lyrical interpretation of human flight, bringing aviation into the life of art with their simultaneous, interpenetrating and dynamic compositions'.⁸¹ Similarly, in his introduction to the catalogue, the exhibition's curator Enrico Castello emphasised the inadequacy of photography's 'apparent and cold truth' in

⁷⁸ 'Aeropitture di guerra' (Cra.2.119), cit. Marinetti appears to refer here to Crali's 1939 painting *Before the Parachute Opens*, which illustrated his article (Fig. 43). However, his description does not correspond exactly to this work, and was perhaps intended to stand more as a general observation concerning the expressive quality of Crali's imagery.

⁷⁹ 'Aeropitture di guerra cosmiche biochimiche sacre documentarie meccaniche', cit., p. 224. A critic writing for the aviation magazine *L'Ala d'Italia* also highlighted this work's inventive character, praising the way in which its 'ghostly elements and ellipses of light configure the immensity of the sky with flashes of yellow and iridescent blue zones'. Libero De Libero, 'Il padiglione dell'Aeronautica alla Biennale di Venezia', 16-31 July 1942 (Cra.2.335).

⁸⁰ See the article 'Battute tra futuristi. Di Bosso si difende dall'accusa di copiare dalle fotografie', in *Gazzetta*, 7 October 1941 (BFTML GEN MSS 475 / 10266-03).

⁸¹ 'La Mostra d'arte aeronautica si inaugura oggi', *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 19 June 1943 (Cra.3.47).

attempting to convey the drama and violence of aerial warfare.⁸² His glowing appraisal of the contribution made to the exhibition by Ambrosi, Chetoffi, Crali and Verossi again reflected a conviction that their work in no way aspired to reproduce the qualities of that medium.

Although favouring more traditional compositional structures than those found in the work of the latter two artists, the imagery of Tato also departed significantly from straightforward, photographic realism. His images of bombed cities are not topographically accurate records of military campaigns, but rather fantastical re-imaginings of real-life situations and episodes in which geographical exactness is sacrificed for the sake of greater dramatic impact. An example of this is his *Aeropainting of London under Bombardment* (c. 1940-41), which would appear to depict the bombing of Surrey Docks on 7 September 1940. In this image, a drastically simplified depiction of Tower Bridge leads the viewer's eye across an improbably vast River Thames to the opposite bank, where bombs rain down from aeroplanes enveloped in an immensely exaggerated column of fire and smoke.

Additionally, both Tato and Monachesi tended to incorporate marked expressionist overtones and aggressive brushwork into their imagery, which not only reflects the violence of its subject matter but also imbues their work with its own, eminently painterly, brand of dynamism (**Fig. 63**).⁸³ Although Tato's figurative style had long exhibited a forceful and aggressive quality, certain of his works of the 1940s appear almost savagely physical,⁸⁴ the artist applying paint in

⁸² 'Prefazione', in *Mostra d'arte aeronautica*, exh. cat. (Rome: Galleria di Roma), pp. 9-15 (p. 10); repr. in Crispolti, *Nuovi Archivi*, cit., 1943/3.

⁸³ A. E. de La Ville has observed how Monachesi's later work retained a sense of 'the dynamism [...] of the gesture itself' that he had first explored as a Futurist. 'Sante Monachesi, pittore', in *Sante Monachesi*, exh. cat. (Milan: Galleria dell'Istituto Europeo di Storia d'Arte, 1969), n. p. See also Toni, *Futuristi nelle Marche*, cit., p. 95.

⁸⁴ Marinetti referred to Tato's 'primitivism' in a comment cited in *Tato. Mostra personale di aeropitture futuriste di guerra*, cit., p. 8.

violently gestural daubs and smears, and oppressively sombre, dark tones heightened here and there by the intense reds and yellows of explosions (**Figs 64, 65**).⁸⁵ Stylistically speaking, the work of both of these painters in particular (and to a lesser extent that of Ambrosi) is not dissimilar to the imagery of contemporary figures such as Fausto Pirandello, Mario Mafai of the Scuola Romana (**Figs 66, 67**), or artists affiliated with Corrente such as Guttuso or Cassinari (**Fig. 68**). Likewise eschewing 'the evasiveness of both pure formalism and mere naturalistic representation',⁸⁶ the bold figurative work of the latter group would certainly have been familiar to the Futurists (particularly the Rome-based Tato and Monachesi) who, after all, did not create their art in a vacuum. As we have noted, it is true that the Futurists exhibited hostility toward the work of artists such as Guttuso and Mafai, which was treated with scorn in Di Bosso and Ambrosi's text *Heroes Machines Wings against Still Lives*.⁸⁷ Yet it is also worth noting that these figures were derided for what the Futurists considered to be their outmoded and irrelevant subject matter, rather than for their pictorial vocabularies *per se*. As we have seen, whilst Futurism was distanced from Corrente on political grounds, it nevertheless shared that group's commitment to engage with life in a direct, visceral manner, and likewise questioned the ultimate worth of those timeless and 'eternal' values associated with pure abstraction. In fact, Monachesi exhibited alongside Guttuso as early as 1941 at the Galleria di Roma,⁸⁸ and subsequently adhered to the Scuola Romana, showing work with Mafai (and Giorgio de Chirico) in a show at Rome's San Bernardo Gallery in March 1945. That same month, Crali lectured on the

⁸⁵ In fact, Tato related how the 16 satirical pieces that featured in his 1941 exhibition were included at the urging of friends concerned about the otherwise oppressive nature of the show. See 'Lettera di Tato a Marinetti', *ibid.*, pp. 3-4 (p. 4).

⁸⁶ Vivarelli, 'Personalities and Styles in Figurative Art of the Thirties', in Braun, *Italian Art in the 20th Century*, cit., p. 185.

⁸⁷ See above, Chapter Three.

⁸⁸ Toni, *Futuristi nelle Marche*, cit., p. 98.

topic of 'Expressionism and Aeropainting' at the seventh of his wartime *raduni di poesia*,⁸⁹ while the following year Monachesi again exhibited with Guttuso at Rome's Galleria del Secolo.⁹⁰

These facts alone imply a certain level of interest on the part of individual Futurists in this particular aspect of the wider contemporary art scene during the late 1930s and early 1940s, and that the movement's objections regarding the attitude of groups such as Corrente to pictorial content did not extend to their formal approach.

Ultimately, then, the figurative dimension of *aeropittura di guerra* did not render such work devoid of individuality, complexity, invention, or contemporary relevance. It had little in common with the bland, documentary realism traditionally associated with the genre of war art and typified by the imagery of many painters working in Britain at this time, such as Richard Eurich or Charles Cundall (**Fig. 69**). Certainly, in terms of kitsch there is nothing in the oeuvre of any Futurist artist working during these years to rival the paintings of figures such as Thomas Monnington (**Fig. 70**). Above all, a profound aesthetic gulf separates such work from the arid, idealised and airless imagery promoted by National Socialism in Germany.

IV. WAR ART OR PROPAGANDA?

How, then, should one categorise this work? Undoubtedly, it expressed Futurism's broad solidarity with Fascism, and certain works did manipulate the facts in order to give a false

⁸⁹ See Tullio Crali, 'Scheda futurista 25', in Crali, *Crali futurista* [1973], cit, [p. 3]. Unfortunately, no record of this talk exists – something that may be explained by the fact that Crali insisted such discussions were to be lively and informal affairs rather than structured lectures. See Crali, 'Una vita per il Futurismo', in Rebeschini, *Crali aeropittore futurista*, cit., p. 174.

⁹⁰ For details of the later phases of Monachesi's career see Stefano Papetti, ed., *Monachesi e l'Europa*, exh. cat. (Milan: Federico Motta, 2006).



Fig. 56 Angelo Caviglioni, *Aeroterrestrial Battle*, 1940, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm, private collection

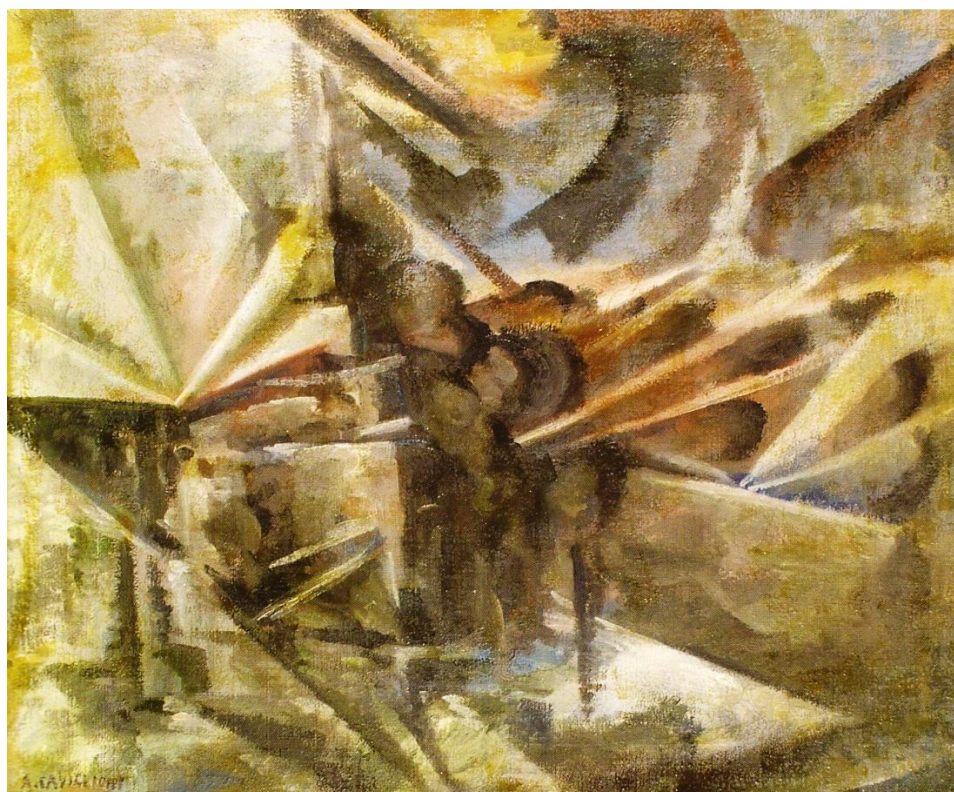


Fig. 57 Angelo Caviglioni, *Aeronaval Battle*, 1941, oil on canvas, 76 x 90 cm, private collection



Fig. 58 Verossi, *Refugees in an S. 81*, c. 1942, medium, dimensions and location unknown



Fig. 59 Tullio Crali, *Space-Speed (Parachutist)*, 1944-49, oil on canvas, 154 x 130 cm
Rovereto: Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto



Fig. 60 Tullio Crali, *Battle Danced by Parachutists*, 1942, oil on canvas, 200 x 220 cm, Regione del Veneto



Fig. 61 Tullio Crali, *Illuminations of War*, 1942, medium, dimensions and location unknown



Fig. 62 Tullio Crali, *Intercepting English Torpedo-bombers*, 1942, oil on board, 78 x 67 cm
Rome: private collection



Fig. 63
Sante Monachesi
Dead Leaf Dive over Rome, c. 1940
oil on canvas, 75 x 46 cm
Rome: Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Roma Capitale

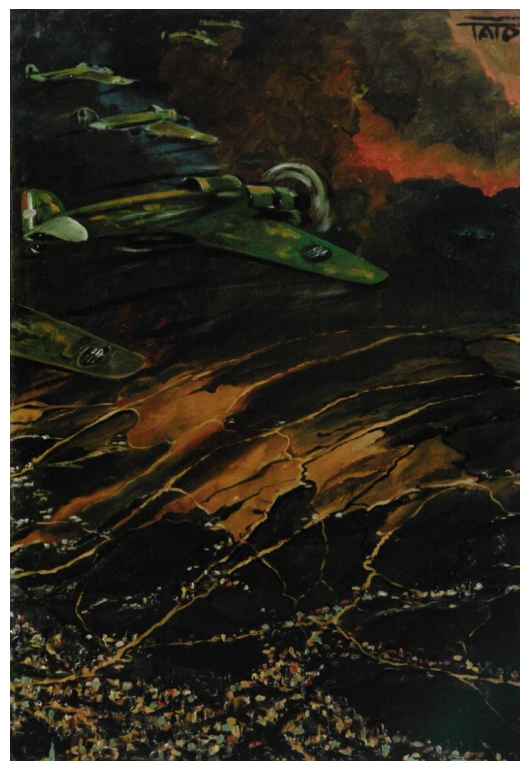


Fig. 64
Tato
Hawks in Action, 1940
oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm
private collection

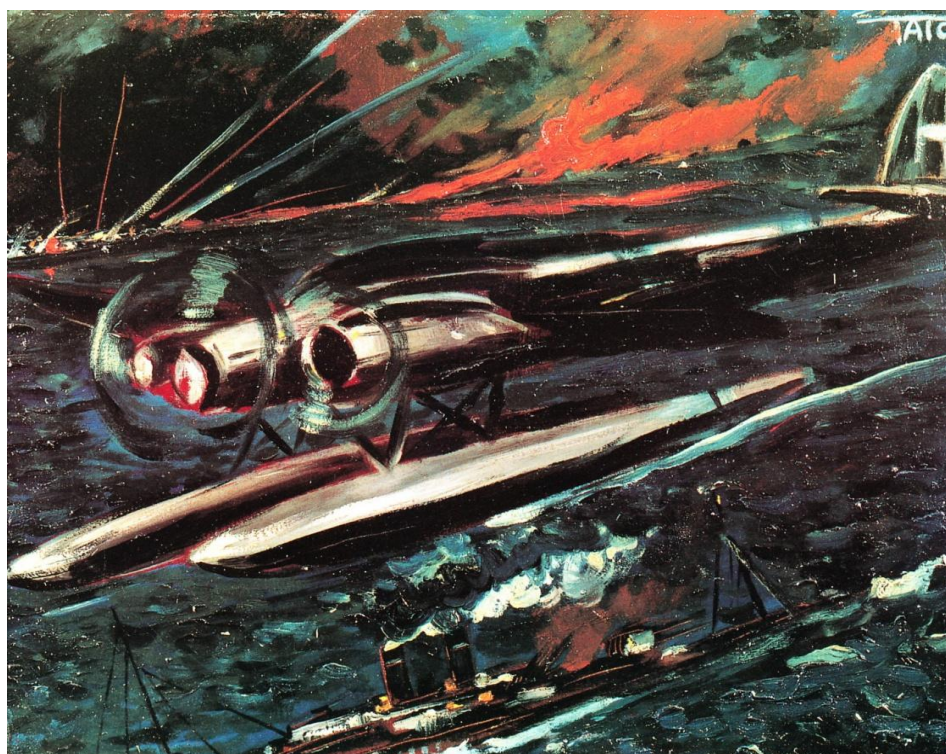


Fig. 65 Tato, *Italian Torpedo-bomber in Pursuit of Torpedo-boats*, 1940, oil on canvas, 49 x 62 cm
private collection



Fig. 66 Fausto Pirandello, *Rooftops in Rome*, c. 1944, oil on board, 35 x 50 cm
Rome – Istanbul: Galleria Russo

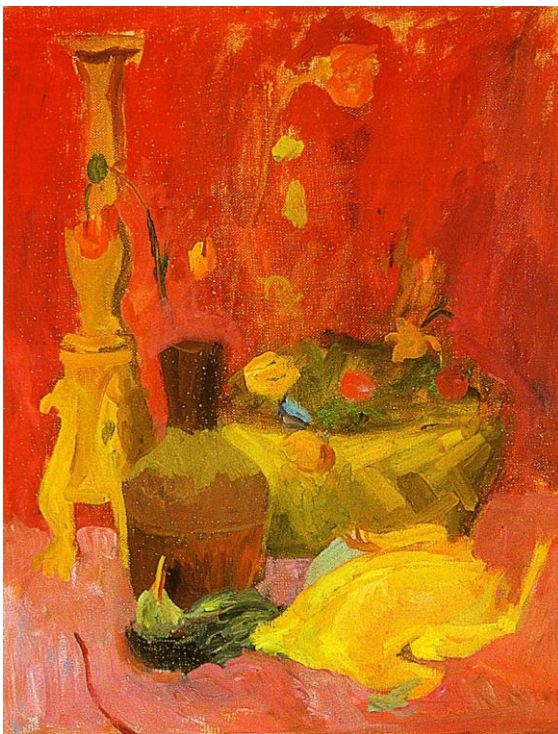


Fig. 67
Mario Mafai, *Still Life with Guinea Fowl and Candlestick*, c. 1940-41, oil on canvas, 62 x 48 cm
Florence: Musei Civici Fiorentini
(Raccolta Alberto Della Ragione)



Fig. 68
Bruno Cassinari, *Butchered Calf*, 1941, oil on canvas, 87 x 63 cm
Florence: Musei Civici Fiorentini
(Raccolta Alberto Della Ragione)



Fig. 69 Charles Cundall, *The Withdrawal from Dunkirk, June 1940*, 1940
oil on canvas, 101.8 x 152.8 cm, London: Imperial War Museum

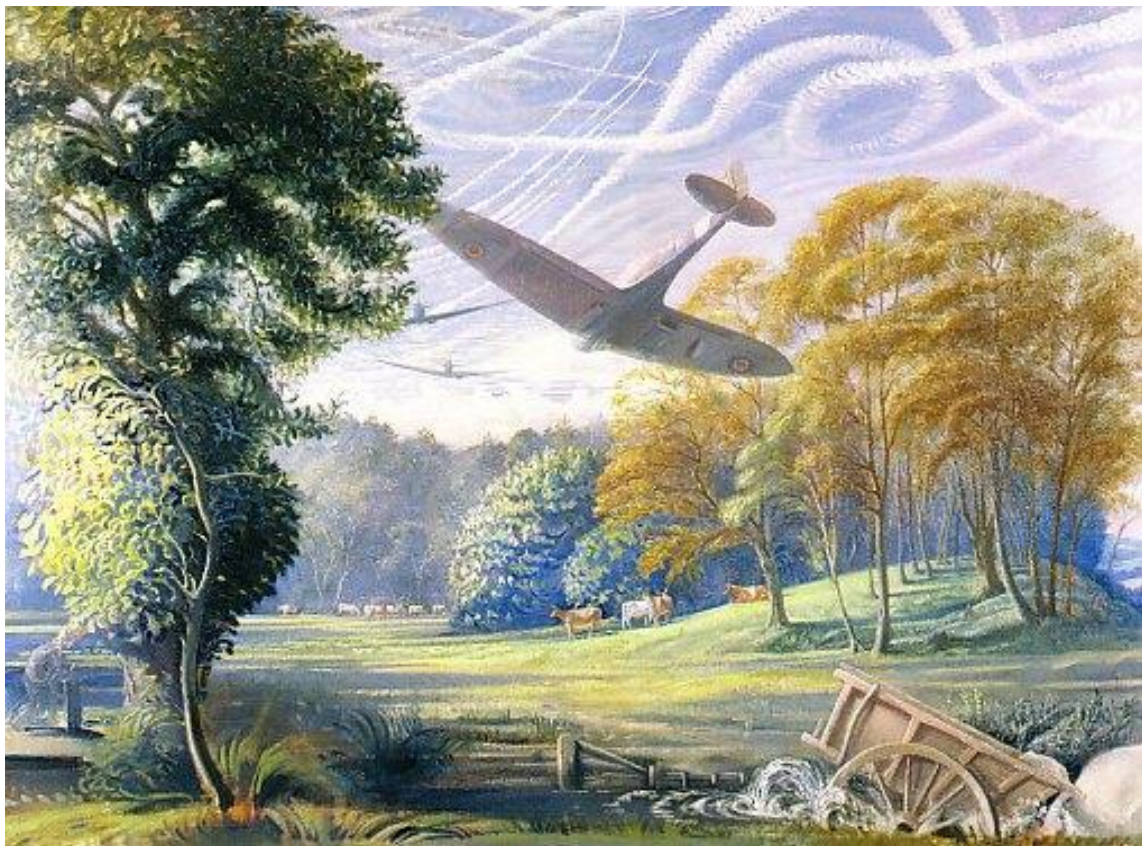


Fig. 70 Thomas Monnington, *Southern England, 1944. Spitfires Attacking Flying Bombs*, 1944
oil on canvas, 105 x 143.3 cm, London: Imperial War Museum

impression of Italy's military prowess. Examples of this tendency might include Andreoni's aforementioned image of Italian bombers above Corinth, or Monachesi's depictions of the Blitz, which rewrote history through their inclusion of Italian aircraft.⁹¹ However, *aeropittura di guerra* resists simplistic classification as 'propaganda', despite the fact that the term was used in relation to it on occasion by those who commissioned such work, as well as by the artists who produced it. For instance, when inviting Crali to participate in the exhibition mounted in the Air Force pavilion at the 1942 Biennale, its curator, Enrico Castello, stressed that whilst any works created for the purpose of this show would remain the property of the artist, the Regia Aeronautica reserved the right to employ such imagery for 'propaganda purposes' as and when it saw fit.⁹² The text 'Aeropainting of Bombardments' also identified one of its goals to be the 'propagandising glorification of heroic patriotism and everyday work'. For the most part, however, Futurist war imagery eschewed the characteristics traditionally associated with such imagery: stylistic conservatism, overt didacticism, recourse to idealised stereotypes (the worker, the soldier, the mother) and emotive scenes of human endurance, bravery, suffering or sacrifice. Moreover, *aeropittura di guerra* cannot be divorced from the context of Futurism's own deeply-rooted *estetica della macchina*. It is the long-standing thematic and iconographical preoccupations of the movement that would appear to dominate Crali's depictions of the acrobatic manoeuvrings of fighter planes, Caviglioni's abstract explorations of the forces unleashed by modern weaponry, and the mechanical 'portraiture' of Tato, Ambrosi and others.

Consequently, I would maintain that the term 'propaganda' is no more applicable to this

⁹¹ **Fig. 55** appears to depict Fiat G. 50 aircraft above London, when in fact the contribution made by the Corpo Aereo Italiano (Fascism's expeditionary air corps) to the Battle of Britain was restricted to raids of minimal importance – and success – around the south-east coast. Cf. Ennio De Concini's poem 'Bombardment of London' in the appendix to this thesis.

⁹² Letter dated 12 December 1941 (Cra.2.212).

imagery than it is to the 'war art' of any other nation involved in the conflict,⁹³ much of which was considerably less interesting, aesthetically speaking. However much one may deplore the acts depicted in such work, a great many of the paintings created by Futurist artists during these years can be considered equally 'notable modern additions to the ancient genre of war scenes'⁹⁴ as those produced by their predecessors, Carrà and Severini. Admittedly, this is an appraisal yet to find widespread acceptance within the academic community, yet the fact that contemporary commentators acknowledged the aesthetic interest and richness of this work – rather than simply its political efficacy – highlights the extent to which ideological objections have coloured post-war judgements of the genre's artistic worth.

In this context it is interesting to consider the very different fate of two works created during these years, images resembling one another in every respect save the political contexts out of which they emerged: Paul Nash's celebrated *Battle of Britain* and Tato's *Aerial Combat in Norwegian Skies* (**Figs 71, 72**). Both dating from 1941, these large paintings address a similar theme and also possess marked compositional parallels. The lower third of each image depicts a watery landscape (in the former, the English Channel; in the latter a Scandinavian fjord), while the central zone is marked by a sunset glowing in tones of peach and cobalt blue. In the upper tier aeroplanes wheel in the skies, vying for dominance over one another, while those that have been hit plummet to the ground, trailing plumes of black smoke.⁹⁵ Neither painting is a documentarily exact rendering of the event depicted, and both were consciously created – and

⁹³ Of course, war art itself serves as propaganda to varying degrees. As Brandon notes: 'In the twentieth century virtually every nation embroiled in the two major world wars commissioned war art for remarkably similar reasons.' *Art and War*, cit., p. 6.

⁹⁴ Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory*, cit., p. 199.

⁹⁵ Interestingly, Lawrence Alloway has identified a possible relationship between the war paintings of Nash and the imagery of Prampolini (*The Venice Biennale*, cit., p. 116). Given that Nash exhibited at the 1938 Venice Biennale – which hosted the aforementioned exhibition of works by 'futuristi aeropittori d'Africa e Spagna' – and was appointed an official war artist in March 1940, working for the Air Ministry, it

displayed – as patriotic works of war art. And yet for all their similarities the historical reception of these two paintings could not have been more different. While Nash's image is universally recognised as a masterpiece – along with his 1944 work *Battle of Germany*, celebrating the devastating raids launched against cities such as Dresden and Hamburg by Bomber Command⁹⁶ – Tato's has been all but forgotten in an apparently clear case of (art) history being written by the victors.

is more than likely that he would have been familiar with the works of his Italian counterparts. See Charles Hall, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, exh. cat. (London: Imperial War Museum, 1996).

⁹⁶ It has been noted that 'Nash's paintings of the First World War are more explicitly pacifist' than those relating to the Second (Hall, *Paul Nash*, cit., p. 7). Images such as *Target Area* (1940) or *Objective: Blenheims Bombing Barges, Le Havre* (1941) recall roughly contemporary works by Monachesi, while the abstract elements and unnatural colours of his later *Battle of Germany* could be direct illustrations of the points made in the manifesto 'Aeropainting of Bombardments' – an impression reinforced by the artist's own description of his work: 'The entire area of sky and background and part of the middle distance are violently agitated. Here forms are used quite arbitrarily and colours by a kind of chromatic percussion with one purpose, to suggest explosion and detonation. In the central foreground the group of floating discs descending may be a part of a flight of paratroops or the crews of aircraft forced to bale out.' Quoted in Tolson, *Art from the Second World War*, cit., p. 46. For obvious reasons, the artist himself repudiated any parallels between his work and Futurist imagery – although his anticipation of such comparisons suggests an awareness of their validity. See Hall, *Paul Nash*, cit., p. 42. The absence of human figures in his war paintings, and his conviction that World War Two was 'the war of machines', suggests other interesting parallels, as does his fascination with 'The Personality of Planes' – the title of an article written by the artist for *Vogue* in March 1942 (ibid., p. 27).



Fig. 71 Paul Nash, *Battle of Britain*, 1941, oil on canvas, 122.6 x 183.5 cm, London: Imperial War Museum

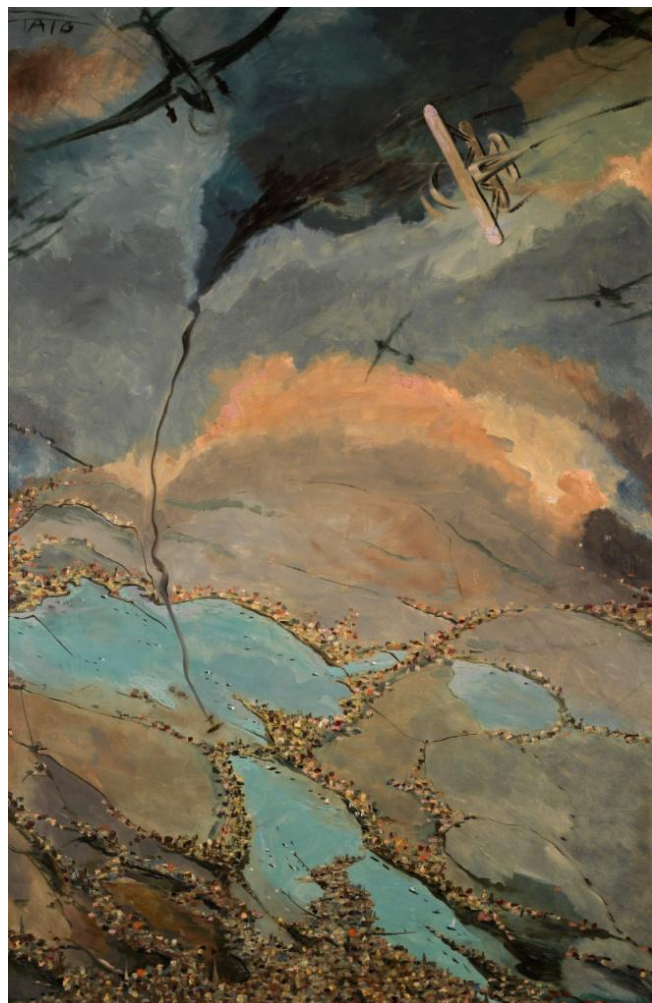


Fig. 72 Tato, *Aerial Combat in Norwegian Skies*, c. 1941
oil on canvas, 150.5 x 99.5 cm, Trento: Museo dell'Aeronautica Gianni Caproni



Fig. 73 Tato, *Aeropainting of War: Fiat C.R. 42s on Reconnaissance*, 1940
oil on canvas, 47.5 x 52.5 cm, private collection