

# Futurism

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Boccioni and Balla

# Introduction

- 'Futurism was an essentially Italian phenomenon linked to particular historical and intellectual circumstances'. (Carlo Carrà 1881-1966)
- Futurism was one of the only early Twentieth Century artistic movements to be independent of Paris and the first Art movement to publish its own political manifesto.

# The Futurist Group

- The first Futurist Manifesto was published in 1909 by the Milanese poet Filippo Marinetti. He was later joined by five young artists:
- Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916)
- Giacomo Balla (1871-1958)
- Carlo Carrà (1881-1966)
- Luigi Russolo (1885-1947)
- Gino Severini (1883-1966)

# The Futurist Movement

- Futurism heralded a return to Italy as the artistic centre of Europe and came hand in hand with a revived sense of Italian national pride.
- The movement denounced all of Italy's historical achievements proclaiming: 'set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums'

# Aims of The Futurist Movement

- To destroy the cult of the past and reject academic formalism in art.
- To invalidate all forms of photographic imitation.
- To encourage originality for it's own sake, however daring or violent.
- To re-define the label 'madman' smeared on all artistic innovators.
- To rebel against the artistic institutions of 'harmony' and 'good taste'.

# Characteristics of Futurist Art

- Refusal to repeat themes and subjects as part of the old academic routine.
- Praise of MODERNITY.
- Concentration on motion and the DYNAMISM of the modern age.
- Love of danger, technology and the machine.
- Glorification of war, aggression and fearlessness.
- Common stylistic features with CUBISM, FAUVISM and EXPRESSIONISM.
- Emphasis on SPEED and continual CHANGE.

# Characteristics of Futurist Art

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- Deep respect for scientific and technological achievement.
- Abstraction of form.
- Non-static compositions, often with no central focal point.
- Non-traditional materials used for sculpture eg. glass cement, cloth and electric lights.
- SIMULTANEITY, the depiction of many moments or an ongoing event in a single painting.
- Influence of DIVISIONISM.
- Fragmentation of the canvas.

# Giacomo Balla (1871-1958)

- Balla was deeply influenced by the Divisionist style of Giovanni Segnati.
- He taught this technique to Boccioni and Severini who he trained in his studio.
- Balla joined the Futurist group in 1910 by signing the Manifesto of Futurist Painters.



# 'Street Lamp' 1909



- In this piece, Balla depicts the Futurist love of technology, showing the lamp outshining the moon.
- The influence of Divisionism is clearly visible.

# 'Dog on a Leash' 1912



- In order to show movement, Balla has embraced the influences of photography, showing the same objects in many different positions as they would appear on a multiply-exposed photographic plate.

# 'Abstract Speed' 1913



This painting is the last in a triptych showing the path of a car. In this panel, the car has already moved on.

- Following the influence of Cubism, the Futurists began to work in a more abstract way.
- Balla is no longer painting what movement looks like, but the experience of speed, the conceptual rather than the perceptual.

# Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916)

- Boccioni is arguably the most talented artist of the Futurist Group.
- He learned the Divisionist technique under the tutelage of Giacomo Balla.
- Boccioni also become a member of the Futurist movement by signing the Manifesto of Futurist Painters in 1910

# 'The City Rises' 1910



The piece is set against a background of rising buildings, symbolising the Futurist dream of an Urban Utopia, envisaged by Futurist architect Sant'Elia.

- The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting (1910) stated that 'universal dynamism should be rendered as dynamic sensation'.
- Here, Boccioni has used the technique of Balla to show the violent movement of a rogue horse on a building site.



# 'The Street Enters the House' 1911



This piece depicts the emotional experience of opening the window, rather than the physical scene.

- Under the influence of Cubism, Boccioni fragments the canvas, separating it into many coloured planes.
- The foreground and background are blended together with the intention that the entire scene hits the viewer at the same time rather than feature by feature.

# 'Unique Forms of Continuity in Space' 1913



- The Futurists tried to 'rebel against the tyranny of the terms 'harmony' and 'good taste''
- For this reason, Boccioni uses abstraction, refusing to depict the body in a naturalistic way.

# 'Unique Forms of Continuity in Space' 1913 continued.



- In his refusal to conform to the accepted ideas of beauty, Boccioni attempts to 'achieve an abstract reconstruction of planes and volumes in order to determine form of sculpture and not figurative value'
- he uses abstraction in order to communicate 'not pure form, but pure plastic rhythm; not the construction of the body, but the construction of the action of the body'



# Boccioni's Sculpture

- Alongside Cubist artist Picasso, Boccioni was one of the first sculptors to experiment the use of unorthodox materials in constructed sculpture.
- He suggested that 'transparent panes of glass, of sheet metal, wires, electric lighting outside and in could indicate the planes, the directions, the tones and half-tones of a new reality.'
- He also proposed the use of cardboard, iron, cement, horsehair, leather, cloth, mirrors and even electric motors to power actual movement.

# 'Lancer's Charge' 1914-5



Shortly after completing this piece, Boccioni went to war. He was killed, thrown from his horse while training with an artillery regiment in 1916.

- Boccioni painted 'Lancer's Charge' while the First World War was going on in France. He used newspaper cuttings about the actions of the French army and painted over them.
- This painting shows the Futurist love of danger and the glorification of war.

# The End of Futurism

- The Futurist Movement came to an end with the death of Boccioni in 1916
- After the war, the movement was briefly revived by Marinetti, whose close friendship with Mussolini gave Futurism the links with Fascism that have soiled the reputation of Futurist art.