

An abstract painting in a Futurist style, featuring a complex composition of overlapping, angular shapes and vibrant colors including blue, purple, yellow, and red. The brushstrokes are visible and energetic, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is a dynamic and somewhat chaotic visual field.

english

FUTURISMO

AVANGUARDIA AVANGUARDIA AVANGUARDIA

Scuderie
del
Quirinale
Roma, via XXIV Maggio 16

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Futurism

“Standing upright on the peak of the world we once more hurl our challenge at the stars!”

These are the closing words of the *Futurist Manifesto* published by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti on 20th February 1909 in the French daily “Le Figaro”. The piece violently shocked the Paris art and literary world. Modernity was exalted in all its aspects: speed, energy, revolutionary scientific discoveries. Paris was the centre of art, a metropolis in continual transformation with museums, galleries and yearly exhibitions that animated the intellectual climate of the age. The art market was one of the most important and there were numerous collectors in search of new talent. Paris was the new launching platform for young artists from all over the world: Spain, Italy, Russia and Germany. Marinetti, whose culture was French, was often in Paris in those years. Gino Severini, established in France since 1906, kept the other signatories of the 1910 *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters* – Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Luigi Russolo – informed about the new artistic movements that followed one upon the other in a passage that saw new personalities and tendencies coming to the fore, the transformation of expression from fauvism to cubism. In 1910 Picasso’s and Braque’s first cubist compositions heralded a period rich in experimentation. The futurists stepped into a

cultural situation already boiling with ideas when, in 1912, they held their first exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery. It was an immediate scandal. Nothing of the kind had ever been seen. The French press described the works and the violent reactions of public and critics. The echo spread throughout Europe. On the wave of enthusiasm Marinetti led “his” artists on an actual tour, organising shows in the main European capitals: London, Berlin, Amsterdam and Brussels. With his great communication skills he got the manifesto published in numerous foreign newspapers, very efficiently spreading the new message as far as Russia. Futurism – an international movement – therefore marks the artistic fabric of those unrepeatable years and tells a story of mutual influences and ongoing exchanges in which the diversity and uniqueness of individual works trace out a shared intention: the quest for new compositional languages. This exhibition is about the début of futurism and the extraordinary correspondences and oppositions in the early avant-gardes up to the outbreak of the First World War.

Room 1. Lights

In the 20th century urban populations grew in leaps and bounds and cities were transformed with the construction of new districts, new tramlines and railways. Umberto Boccioni’s *Workshops at Porta Romana* (1909) is an image not only of these

changes and the expansion of the suburbs but also, pictorially, a development of divisionist technique. An infinity of lines, diagonal foreshortenings, compressed angulations, sudden bursts of colour and the opacity of chimney smoke in the distance announce the advent of a new pictorial vision constructed on light.

“Your eyes accustomed to twilight will open up to the most radiant visions of light. The shadows we paint will be more luminous than the light of our predecessors and our pictures, in comparison with the ones stored in museums, will be as the most resplendent day set against the darkest night,” declared the futurists in their technical manifesto. It was the triumph of electricity. In Carlo Carrà’s *Nocturne in Piazza Beccaria* (1910) it is electricity with its artificial glare that lights up the nocturnal view of the city, transfigured and unreal. It is electric light that creates beams of luminous refractions, lighting up the moving tram and the figures of the passers-by, phantoms discoloured by the bright rays. As in *Leaving the Theatre* (1910 ca.) where the artist alters perception of outlines and balances. Other angulations are found in the contrast between light and shadow. In Boccioni’s *Modern Idol* (1910-1911), a spectral icon, the face is transfigured, crossed by blinding rays: *“Everyone will realise that it is not brown that meanders beneath our epidermis: yellow shines there, red flames there, green, light-blue and violet dance there, voluptuous and caressing! How can one still see a human face as pink, while our life has been*

undeniably doubled in noctambulism? The human face is yellow, it's red, it's green, it's light-blue, it's violet."

Whereas the colour of memory is lively in Severini's *Memories of a Journey* (1910-1911), a mnemonic assembly of figures, places and moments, in the immediacy of the memory of an itinerary recomposed in the vivid and variegated fragments of the canvas.

Room 2. States of Mind

As in a mosaic that beats out the rhythm of the city, in *The Boulevard* (1911) Severini brings out the vibrant and splendid atmosphere of a frenetic dance.

In this room, the various ways of expressing futurist dynamism.

"We shall place the spectator at the centre of the picture" the futurists declared vehemently. It was the beginning of the overturning of classical perspective. Following the compositional lines of Paolo Uccello's battles, Carrà painted *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* (1910-1911), setting the scene around the red of the waving flags: *"If we paint the phases of an uprising, the crowd fraught with punches and the noisy cavalry charges are translated into sheaves of lines that correspond to all the conflicting forces in accordance with the picture's general law of violence."*

Emotions and sensations enter into Boccioni's representation of *States of Mind* (1911), in the

passage from the expressionist flow of ungraspable feelings to the crystallisation of the second version shown here, painted after his trip to Paris and his encounter with cubism. Three works, three distinct moments, describe leave-taking: *"In pictorial description of the different plastic moods of a departure, certain perpendicular lines, undulating and as if fatigued, attached here and there to forms of empty bodies, may easily express languor and discouragement. Confused lines, jerking, straight or curved which blend in with outlined gestures of call and hurry, will express a chaotic agitation of feelings. Horizontal lines, fleeting, rapid and convulsed, which brusquely cut faces from vague profiles and leaping strips of landscape, will give the plastic emotion aroused in us by the person departing."* In *The Farewells* the chaos and clash of forms mingle in sections, numbers and figures in a tangle of bright colours. The long diagonal brushstrokes of *Those who Go* cut the pictorial field into a darting of planes that intersect with faces and constructions highlighted by ultramarine, the chromatic synthesis of a feeling of melancholy. In *Those who Stay* the green accentuates verticality and the sense of weight and gravity of the soul in the moment of abandonment.

Close to Boccioni, also in the echo of a rarefied symbolism, is Luigi Russolo's *Memories of a Night* (1911) which seems to allude to a literary and oneiric idea.

Room 3. Sounds Noises Odours

Marinetti sang of “*deep chested locomotives that roughshod ride the rails like enormous steel horses in tubular harness*”, figures of an imagery delineated in futurist painting together with the advent of the modern. Thus in Carrà’s *Milan Station* (1910-1911) and *Jolts of a Cab* (1911) the movement incorporates the gleaming rumble, the bustle and the noises of the city, the crowds, the engines, the wheel-rail contact of trams and trains: “*The sixteen people around you in a tram under way are one, ten, four, three,*” said the futurists; “*they are stationary and they move; they come and go, they are reflected on the street, devoured by a zone of sunlight, whence they return to sit down, persistent symbols of the universal vibration. And sometimes on the cheek of the person we speak to along the way we see the horse that passes in the distance, our bodies enter the seats we sit on and they enter into us, just as the passing tram enters the houses which in turn hurl themselves into it and amalgamate with it.*”

Thus in *What the Tram Told Me* (1911) the confusion of people and objects shatters and clashes in a myriad of lines, recomposing into a hammering and frenetic halo, frozen by brown and almost monochromatic tones, while in *Woman in a Café* (1911) the glasses seem to tinkle with the sound of the movement and glare of a necklace.

In September 1913 Carrà published the *Manifesto of Sounds, Noises and Odours*, and in March

Russolo formulated the theory of ‘enharmonic’ music with the *Art of Noises* where he announced: “*Every sound bears a tangle of sensations*”. It was the sound generated by his *intonarumori* (noise machine) which brought together disharmonies and dissonances in a new score of mechanical screeching. Severini’s *Yellow Dancers* (1911-1912 ca.) and *The Voices of my Room* (1911) put forward a further rhythm, the breaking down of steps and inanimate things, set to the time signature of a pulsating colouring.

Room 4. Tempos and Rhythms

Boccioni’s *The Laugh* (1911) ricochets throughout the planes of the composition, outlining Bergson’s philosophical idea of a mutable and fluid temporality, an expression of the intermingling of duration and memory. In *Simultaneous Visions* (1911) Boccioni achieved a poetical and theoretical development in which sensation is translated into a mental element, brought to the centre of vision. It is the visual representation of the “*sensation of interior and exterior,*” as Boccioni said, “*of space and movement in all directions that we feel on approaching a window.*” The vortex and whirl of the city, reflected in and introjected into the tumult of sensations, are imposed in the intersecting angles, concentric forms and cut planes that trigger the circular motion of the image.

Carrà’s *Women Swimmers* (1910-1912) and *The Movement of Moonlight* (1910-1911) are

other guiding principles that define the planes of figuration: diagonals and intersections incorporate the subject painted.

Severini, in the big canvas *The Dance of the «Pan-Pan» at the Monico* (1909-1911), which was destroyed but repainted in 1959-1960, synthesises the atmosphere of the famous Paris dancehall in the giddy turmoil of colours syncopated and broken down by the light that transmutes and declines all the forms of movement.

Room 5. Force Lines

Different motions define the futurist idea of dynamism: Giacomo Balla analyses it as if in a succession of superimposed and slightly staggered frames. A time sequence where movement does not yet cancel out the subject, as in *Girl Running on a Balcony* (1912). For Boccioni form and spatiality are amalgamated in a universal synthesis with colour, in the tension of an ascending movement or of force lines marked by beams of light that break up the unity of an objective vision, as in *The Forces of the Street* (1911), an extraordinary reiteration of segments that overturn and shift the directions and depths of the pictorial planes in the brilliant intersection of blinding beams and shadow. In Russolo's *The Rebellion* (1911) the unidirectional movement advances in a succession of red triangular forms, summarising an unstoppable march towards the future: "things in movement multiply, are deformed, coming one after the other

like vibrations in the space where they move."

Second Floor

Room 6. Dynamisms

The futurist exhibition in Paris at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in February 1912 created great schisms among the disordered threads of the various artistic groups. It was a painting of colours and lines that exalted the intrinsic spirit of progress. A painting of breaking down, not analytical like the cubists from whom the futurists had intuited synthesis but violently opposed stasis. The confrontation of the avant-gardes became more intense. And the futurist language entered the collective imagination, measuring itself against the style of other tendencies. That tension towards the modern, that dynamic motion, polemics notwithstanding, attracted the interest of new pictorial research. To represent movement, express the essence of dynamism, was what fascinated a great number of new generation artists. Including Marcel Duchamp who moved away from the solidity of cubist forms and experimented with the dimension of movement, accentuating the plastic sense of the image through monochrome. A mechanical movement, based on his more technical interests where gears and devices became a subject for representation, this to such an extent that critics of the day considered his *Nude Descending a Staircase n° 2* (1912) as being "too close to futurism".

If Duchamp and Balla share the succession of the image moving in time, what Boccioni and Duchamp share is the sense of three-dimensionality. In Boccioni bodies and faces – *Antigracious* (1912) and *Horizontal Construction (Horizontal Volumes)* (1912) – are broken down, following traces in opposition which intersect the figure and the surroundings in a simultaneous play of divergent motions. A breaking down which can also be noted in his sculpture, where facial segments alternate concave to convex in a modelling that is ready to accommodate the dimension of external reality. In *Dynamism of a Human Body* (1913) the interpenetration of planes and violent colourings mark a further step in Boccioni's painting and integrate the motion of the object to a complete spatial fusion of form and light.

Room 7. Cubisms

If Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque inaugurated the cubist season and did not hold public exhibitions, their followers came out into the open at the Salon des Indépendants in 1911 and 1912. For some years Picasso had been exploring the classical themes and genres of painting – portrait, still life and landscape – and he shattered the language from within, reinventing a new architectonic grammar, as in *Woman in an Armchair* (1910). At the same time Braque was investigating the same subject with greater attention to the surface of the canvas, in a more decorative measure. The passage from *Large Nude* (1907-1908) to the more cubist

moment of 1911 – *Still Life with Violin and The Guéridon* – underscores his interest in the plane while nonetheless setting forth the dictates of a new interpretation of the object in space.

The book *Du Cubisme* came out in October 1912 to affirm cubism as opposed to futurist theories, a cognitive synthesis of the fragmentation and geometrising of the image. It was written by Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger whose painting, in a more scholastic manner, followed the road of Picasso, with more realistic results in Metzinger, *Teatime (Woman with Teaspoon)* (1911), and with more scenic effects in Gleizes: *Portrait of Jacques Nayral* (1911).

Among the different linguistic expressions of the exponents of cubism an outstanding personality is Fernand Léger who, though he admired the masters, distanced himself from their themes and painted contemporary subjects, as in *Contrast of Forms* (1913) where he achieved a balance of lines, forms and strong colours.

Room 8. Orphism Synchronism Rayism Vorticism

“Simultaneity for us,” said the futurists, *“is lyrical exaltation, the plastic manifestation of a new absolute: speed; of a new and marvellous spectacle: modern life; of a new fever: scientific discovery. Simultaneity is the condition under which the various constituent elements of DYNAMISM appear. And is therefore the effect of that great cause which is universal dynamism. It is the lyrical*

exponent of the modern conception of life, based on rapidity and contemporaneity of knowledge and communications. If we consider the various manifestations of futurist art we see simultaneity violently asserted in all of them."

In 1913 avant-garde artistic circles were drawn into the debate about the idea of simultaneity which laid bare the dramatic tension of a whole generation and the radicalisation of currents of opinion. At the centre of the polemics, the painting of Boccioni and of Robert Delaunay with his orphism (as defined by the great poet Guillaume Apollinaire). On the one side a breakdown oriented by lines of force and the sensitivity of objects, and on the other the pure pictorial sensitivity of chromatic dynamism where equilibrium of the parts opened up to the achievement of a 'pure reality', of an absolute 'unity', almost abstract, as in Delaunay's *Circular Forms, Sun n° 2* (1912-1913), shared in a more decorative way by his wife Sonia and in a more swirling way by the Czech artist František Kupka. From 1912 orphism also attracted the American artists Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell whose synchronist canvases are moved by similar chromatic rhythms and animated by a purity of timbres analogous to that of the futurists (at the end of the room: *Conception Synchromy and Cosmic Synchromy*).

A family of artists, the Duchamp brothers emerged in the same period – Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon – with further artistic variants, combining plasticism and pictorialism and moving

in a direction different from the dynamic trajectory of their other brother Marcel. In particular Jacques Villon, in *Young Woman* (1912), disarranged the cubist orchestration with accents close to futurism, while the same structural idea is seen in Francis Picabia's *Dance at the Spring I* (1912) with a flowing of rhythms in an almost mechanical crescendo. And Raymond Duchamp-Villon, in the audacious modelling of *The Large Horse* (1914), shows an extraordinary hand in line with the ascending motion of Boccioni's sculptures. The only French signatory of a futurist manifesto, in 1913, was Félix Del Marle. Close to the modulated cadence of Severini, his more rigid and schematic formulas were such that the futurists themselves eventually excluded him.

Meanwhile in pre-war Europe there was an interweaving of expressions with experiences, styles with techniques, but shared directions and characteristics were moving towards the same modernist tension. With a different intensity, new formal assonances were appearing in Russia, building up a surprising fabric not yet contaminated by ideology. In the name of the impulse towards research and experimentation. In the name of the mythology of the new and a new aesthetic idea which fused the cubist manner with the futurist experience. Michail Larionov and Natalja Gončarova, in the *Rayist and Futurist* manifesto of 1913, declared the centrality of the creation of new forms, of 'a self-sufficient painting', as in the famous Russian painter's *The Cyclist* (1913).

Whereas Kasimir Malevič already prefigured, in the primitivism of cubo-futurist forms (*Aviator*, 1914), an extraordinary utopian vision of future humanity; and in the *Portrait of Ivan Kliun (Builder)* (1914) he revealed his belief in the triumph of technique, through the face of his artist friend who, in the same year, painted *Ozonator or Electric Fan*. Technique which also won over Ljubov Popova with her solidly geometrical canvases, whereas what dominates in Aleksandra Ekster is kaleidoscopic chromatic exuberance, as in *City at Night* [1913].

In England too the vorticists, a term coined by Ezra Pound, pursued a dynamic machine age painting in the name of progress. But it was a more incisive, synthetic painting which followed the explosive lines of the magazine “Blast”, as in *The Crowd* by Percy Wyndham Lewis or in Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson who signed the manifesto *Vital English Art* with Marinetti in 1914 and whose subjects (*The Old Port*, 1913 and *The Arrival*, 1913 ca.) have a curious assonance with the work of Del Marle. And again David Bomberg who, in *The Mud Bath* (1914), pursued an essential, almost theoretical analysis. In Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s sculpture *Red Stone Dancer* (1913 ca.) the modern subject reverberates with echoes of non-European cultures while Jacob Epstein, who felt the same fascination, translated it into *The Rock Drill* (1913-1914), an effective hybridisation between the animal world and the machine. An interesting connection and fulcrum, almost a lever appropriate for activating an ideal relationship between the

sculpture of Duchamp-Villon and that of Boccioni.

Room 9. Architecture and Memory

Delaunay’s *Eiffel Tower* (1911) marks a shifting of axis in relation to orthodox cubism, with planes slipping in an upward motion, fixed around the symbol of modern civilisation where iron and transparency at the same time structure and empty the architecture, together with the overall idea of the image. It is the sense of fragmentation – which originated with Cézanne – that defines volumes and lines, giving rise to that special interpretation of cubism which, also in colour, goes beyond the static nature of cubism. Here it is red that dominates and gives order to a work whose confines are still bound to representation of the real, a representation that would take a different, more abstract direction in its circular forms.

In this period there is a similar energy in Delaunay’s and Léger’s canvases that places them close to the futurist dimension in the explosion of pictorial depiction. Thus in *The Wedding* (1911) Léger’s dynamism fuses reiterated elements and vividly coloured epiphanies in a circularity interrupted by luminous rips. Picabia on the other hand, though fascinated by futurist aesthetics, explored the mnemonic depths of a ‘mechanical biomorphism’, as in *I See Again in Memory My Dear Udine* ([1913]-1914), close to a monochromy of a more poetic nature.

Room 10. Injections of Reality

Futurist forms, together with the cubist break-up of the planes of representation, bear witness to the powerful evocations that burst materially into the artists' works, along with an idea of accelerated and transformed reality. Ardengo Soffici, in touch with the French art scene since the early years of the century, spread awareness of cubism in Italy. It was also reflected in his paintings such as *Lines and Volumes of a Person* (1912). Interaction between art and life, revealed by the cubist collage technique. In this example of *Pipe, Glass, Newspaper, Guitar and Bottle of Vieux Marc: «Lacerba»* (1914), Picasso showed an interest in the Italian intellectual scene which returned in different ways and formulas with the futurists, especially Severini – *Still Life with Newspaper «Lacerba»* (1913) and *Portrait of Paul Fort* (1915) – and in Russian cubo-futurists like Ljubov Popova (*Study for a Portrait*, 1914-1915). In the end reality burst forth in its most violent form: war. It was a wound that rent the cultural fabric of Europe and the world. In this dramatic climate art was brutally shaken and took different avenues, spreading into itineraries that touched the absolute extremes of realism or abstractionism. And creativity, touched by tragedy, transferred a suprahistorical dimension to its forms, the powerful dimension of lines and colours. Balla's *The Risks of War* (1915), Severini's *Suburban Train Arriving in Paris* (1915) and Nevinson's *Bursting Shell* (1915) are interpretations of the same overwhelming moment echoing an

extraordinary tension and a powerful propulsive thrust, impressed and driven by the spiral motion of Boccioni's *Development of a Bottle in Space* (1912).

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