Italian Futurism

Futurism was an artistic and social movement that originated in Milan, Italy, and to a lesser extent in other countries, in the early 20th century. It emphasized dynamism, speed, technology, youth, violence, and objects such as the car, the airplane, and the industrial city.

The Futurists practiced in every medium of art, including painting, sculpture, ceramics, graphic design, industrial design, interior design, urban design, theatre, film, fashion, textiles, literature, music, architecture, and even cooking.



Russolo, Carrà, Marinetti, Boccioni and Severini In front of Le Figaro:

According to the poet **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti** (1876–1944), attributed as the originator of the movement, futurism was born as a direct consequence of a 1908 car crash in which, attempting to avoid two cyclists, he crashed his Fiat and went flying head over heels into a ditch. The experience led directly to the first futurist manifesto, published in Bologna on the 5th January 1909. It then achieved an extraordinary *coup-de-theâtre* when Marinetti persuaded the editor of *Le Figaro* to publish the entire Futurist Manifesto on the front page, on February 20th, 1909.

"A roaring automobile is more beautiful than the Winged Victory [of Samothrace]" - Marinetti

The Futurists were vociferous in embracing technology and proclaiming the irrelevance of the "art of the museums." Indeed, they were reacting against the perception by visitors to Italy that the country was nothing more than a gigantic 'museum', and that Italian art and culture were frozen in the past. According to the *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters* (1910) by Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini, Giacomo Balla, and Carlo Carrà, "We want to fight implacably against the mindless, snobbish, and fanatical religion of the past, religion nurtured by the pernicious existence of the museums." The Futurists believed that art should be inspired by the modern marvels of their newly technological world. "Just as our forebears took the subject of art from the religious atmosphere that enveloped them, so we must draw inspiration from the tangible miracles of contemporary life"

In the introduction to the Manifesto of Futurism Marinetti declaims: "Let us leave good sense behind like a hideous husk and let us hurl ourselves, like fruit spiced with pride, into the immense mouth and breast of the world! Let us feed the unknown, not from despair, but simply to enrich the unfathomable reservoirs of the Absurd!"

From the manifesto:

- 1. We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness.
- 4. We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.
- 9. We want to glorify war the only cure for the world militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman.
- 10. "We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice".

"For other peoples, Italy is still a land of the dead, an immense Pompeii whitewashed with sepulchres."

"We declare war, resolutely, on all those artists and institutions that, while disguised in a garb of false modernity, remain entangled in tradition, in academicism, and above all in a repugnant cerebral laziness."

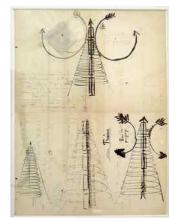
Every sentence is a tirade against academies and their teachers, against museums, against devotees of the classical, against official art. The new painting must magnify modern life, the magnificence of the future. "It is vital only that art which finds its own elements in its surroundings."

Marinetti was also a co-author of the Fascist manifesto, which was more progressive and in which he advocated: "Universal suffrage with a lowered voting age to 18 years; proportional representation; voting for women; an eight hour working day; a minimum wage; reduction of the retirement age from 65 to 55 and a peaceful foreign policy."

Translatable as 'words in freedom' or 'liberated words', the phrase **Parole in Libertà** is an essential slogan of the Italian Futurist movement, and refers to a radical new way of using literary language and liberating it from the bounds of tradition. First coined by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* (1912) the phrase has come to define the entire futurist aesthetic of visual language. The technique primarily applies to the invention of specific tables of words (*tavole parolibere*) artfully arranged in typographical innovative patterns (e.g. through the procedure of 'typographic analogy', where, the verb 'to go down' has to graphically mimic the action of descending.



Zang Tumb Tuumb, Marinetti's first published collection of words in liberty, was begun in 1912 and published in 1914. The work is an account of Marinetti's experience of the Siege of Adrianople during the Balkan War of 1912, which he cover-



Trains 1910

ed as a war correspondent. The title *Zang Tumb Tumb* evokes the sounds of mechanized war—artillery shelling, bombs, explosions. The work is now seen as a seminal work of modernist art, and an enormous influence on the emerging culture of European avant-garde print.

The book is a 228-page softback which includes foldout pages as part of the poem. The poem opens with *Corrections of Proofs & Desires*;

'No poetry before us with our wireless imagination and words in freedom LOOOng live Futurism finally finally finally finally finally finally Poetry being BORN

and ends with Bombardment;

'1 2 3 4 5 seconds siege guns split the silence in unison tam-tuuumb sudden echoes all the echoes seize it quick smash it scatter it to the infinite winds to the devil

'In the middle these tam-tuuumb flattened 50 square kilometers leap 2-6-8 crashes clubs punches bashes quick-firing batteries. Violence ferocity regularity pendulum play fatality

ZANG-TUMB TUMB-TUMB TUUUUUM

In 1927 futurist painter, writer, sculptor, and graphic designer Fortuno Depero issued his sensational *Depero Futuristo* a "mechanical" book full of futurist poetry and graphics that featured a binding held together with two machined bolts. In 1932 Marinetti introduced his definitive model of the mechanical book, *Parole in libertà*, printed entirely on tin sheets, reflective of the materials and textures of the Machine Age. It was also intended to be an imperishable book. The book's content was also innovative, as Marinetti introduced new references between words and physical interaction with olfactory, tactile, and thermal sensations.



Zang tumb tumb

Hoge Rijndijk 8, Leiden.

In the Evening, Lying on Her Bed, She Reread the Letter from Her Artilleryman at the Front





The founding manifesto did not contain a positive artistic programme, which the Futurist painters attempted to create in their subsequent *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* (published in Italian as a leaflet by Poesia, Milan, 11 April 1910). This committed them to a "universal dynamism", which was to be directly represented in painting. Objects in reality were not separate from one another or from their surroundings: "The sixteen people around you in a rolling motor bus are in turn and at the same time one, ten four three; they are motionless and they change places. ... The motor bus rushes into the houses which it passes, and in their turn the houses throw themselves upon the motor bus and are blended with it."



Giacomo Balla (1871 – 1958) was a painter, art teacher and poet. In his paintings he depicted light, movement and speed. He was concerned with expressing movement in his works, but unlike other leading futurists he was not so interested in machines or violence with his works tending towards the witty and whimsical.

Born in Turin he was the son of a photographer and as a child studied music. At age nine, after the death of his father, he gave up music and began working in a lithographic print shop. Following his studies at the University of Turin he moved to Rome in 1895, working as an illustrator, caricaturist and portrait painter. In 1899, his work was exhibited at the Venice Biennale and subsequently in Rome, Venice, Munich, Berlin and Düsseldorf; and at the Salon d'Automn in Paris. Around 1902, he taught Divisionist techniques to Boccioni and Severini.

Artistaplástico Is a Photomontage self-portrait.

Street Light (1909) depicts an electric street lamp casting a glow that outshines the crescent moon.

An analytical study of the patterns and colours of a beam of light, Balla stated that it "demonstrated how romantic moonlight had been surpassed by the light of the modern electric street light. This was the end of Romanticism in art. From my picture came the phrase (beloved by the Futurists): 'We shall kill the light of the moon'.

Marinetti's 1909 manifesto (*Let's Kill the Moonlight!*), in which Marinetti writes, "three hundred electric moons wiped out with their dazzling rays of plaster the ancient green queen of love."

Representations of movement, as well as new technological inventions, was a principal concern of the Futurists; as such they were influenced by the chronophotography of Etienne Marey





Étienne-Jules Marey (1830 – 1904,) was a French scientist, physiologist and chronophotographer. His work was significant in the development of cardiology, physical instrumentation, aviation, cinematography and the science of laboratory photography. He is widely considered to be a pioneer of photography and an influential pioneer of the history of cinema.

His revolutionary idea was to record several phases of movement on photographic surface. In 1890 he published a substantial volume entitled *Le Vol des Oiseaux* (*The Flight of Birds*), richly illustrated with photographs, drawings, and diagrams. He also created stunningly precise sculptures of various flying birds.

He fixed a gold foil to an insect wing and shone light on it to study the flapping of the wing. In 1869 Marey constructed a very delicate artificial insect to show how an insect flies and to demonstrate the figure-8 shape it produced during movement of its wings.

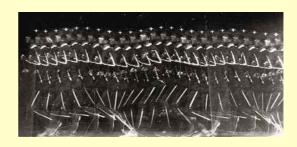
His chronophotographic gun, made in 1882, was capable of taking 12 consecutive frames a second, with all the frames recorded on the same picture.





Using these pictures he studied horses, birds, dogs, sheep, donkeys, elephants, fish, microscopic creatures, molluscs, insects, reptiles, etc. Marey also conducted the famous study about cats always landing on their feet.

The Running Lion Tamer (1886). In his experiments documenting humans in motion, Marey had his subjects dress up in a black garment and would apply small reflective markers on their joints. This enabled him to make a detailed report of their movement.





In *Girl Running on a Balcony* (1912) the painting has no central point on which the eye focuses; instead the eye travels across the canvas. The running scene appears to continue beyond the frame's surface, attesting to the girl's dynamic energy and momentum in the piece.

Webster defines dynamism as the "theory that all phenomena (as matter or motion) can be explained as manifestations of force."

The Futurists believed that everything is made of dynamic forces, and that everything is in constant motion. This idea is best noted in the girl's repeated form across the canvas, which works to represent her actual movement through space.

Balla uses tiny squares to create a mosaic effect. The many squares further break down the image of the girl herself and force the viewer to focus not on her form, but on her fragmented motion through time and space. Her movement, blurred lines between each step, is not exactly disjointed nor is it really fluid, but it is definitely continuous.

Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but it constantly appears and disappears. On account of the persistency of an image upon the retina, moving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations, in their mad career. Thus a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular. – Futurist Manifesto

Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash (1912) is influenced by the artist's fascination with chronophotographic studies of animals in motion. Rapid motion is indicated by the blurring and multiplication of the various parts: the leash, the tail and feet of the dog and the feet of the woman, introduces the dimension of time in its representation of the subject.

The repetition of lines in Balla's representation of the dog's legs, tail, and ears crisply conveys in a whirl of movement the action of the dog walking in the street; while the body of the dog at the centre seems to remain still. This painting presaged Balla's future work, which included vibrant abstract compositions depicting movement and speed.



The blurring, multiplication, and superimposition of body parts—perhaps in an effort to imitate the mechanical images of Marey's photographs—can also be seen in Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, painted in the same year, to which Balla's painting has been compared, often unfavourably.

In 2009, art critic Tom Lubbock declared the painting "one of the most striking" chronophotography-inspired works, pointing to several features which create a comical effect: the "abrupt close-up" on a trivial subject—a "twee prim sausage dog"—which might have been a single detail in anImpressionist street scene; the bathetic juxtaposition of the word *dynamism*, "with its connotations of heroism, of the mighty modern machine world" against that subject; the cropping of the owner at the knee, giving a dog's view (and anticipating Tom and Jerry cartoons); and the apparently frenetic motion of the dog's limbs and tail coupled with the stillness of its body, suggesting little forward progress.

".... and we [the Futurist artists] must invent dynamic designs to go with them and express them in equally dynamic shapes: triangles, cones, spirals, ellipses circles etc." – Balla



The Hand of the Violinist (The Rhythms of the Bow) (1912) depicts a musician's hand and the neck of a violin "made to look like it's vibrating through space"—blurred and duplicated to suggest the motion of frenetic playing. It has been said to bring the viewer "inside the reverberations of the instrument itself".

The image of the neck of the violin, which is more clearly defined at the top, becomes less distinct further down until the outline is almost lost. The movements of the hand and fingers form a composite image which becomes near abstraction at the bottom of the triangle. The shirt cuff becomes a long patch of white as it follows the wrist's movement. The painting is an evocation of the

assertion, in the Technical Manifesto of 1910, that "movement and light destroy the substance of objects"

"We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth, along the circle of its orbit." – Marinetti

The Abstract Speed triptych of 1913 is intended to represent the passage of a car through the landscape.

The presence of the car, i.e. its penetration into space at high speed, transforms the entire landscape. Balla successfully presented the futurist idea of permanent transformation and permeation of space and all living and non-living elements in it. He writes about this idea together with Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini in the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting*.

"The gesture which we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed moment in universal dynamism. It shall simply be the dynamic sensation itself. Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. A profile is never motionless before our eyes, but it constantly appears and disappears. On account of the persistence of an image upon the retina, moving objects constantly multiply themselves.

"Living art draws its life from the surrounding environment. Our forebears drew their artistic inspiration from a religious atmosphere which fed their souls; in the same way, we must breathe in the tangible miracles of contemporary life—the iron network of speedy communications which envelops the earth, the transatlantic liners, the dreadnoughts, those marvellous flights which furrow our skies, the profound courage of our submarine navigators and the spasmodic struggle to conquer the unknown."

The futurist landscape loses the pastoral qualities of traditional landscape painting. It represents the dynamics of movement in nature. Balla painted over the frames, thus continuing the space of the painting beyond the space it traditionally occupies. In this way, Balla extracted the scene from the reality of the painting and brought it closer to the viewer.

On the left: **Abstract Speed + Landscape** introduces the viewer to the characteristics of the dynamism of the landscape itself just before the appearance of the moving car.

The surface of the ground is separated from the space of the sky by three rounded forms representing hills. In terms of colourism, this composition is based on a double dynamic of contrasting relationships. The first layer of contrast refers to white and black surfaces, while the second is formed by the ratio of warm and cold tones of red and blue. The composition is divided vertically by three clearly visible slightly rounded lines.



In this work, Balla avoided the idea of perceiving the landscape as a spatial framework for action or the landscape as a harmonious oasis. On the contrary, he placed the landscape in the position of a generator of dynamism together with the car that is sensed, that is, later passes and leaves the field of observation.



In the centre: **Abstract Speed + Sound (noise)** represents the very moment of the car passing. The composition is dominated by green, blue, red, and white. In addition to the outline of the landscape, which Balla introduced in the first painting of the triptych, the central segment of the composition is occupied by an abstract representation of a car at high speed.

This painting does not record only the visual components of the car's presence in the space, but primarily, as the title suggests,

the car's presence in the domain of sound. The cross-shaped forms in the middle and upper parts of the painting symbolize the noise generated by a moving car.

On the right: **Abstract Speed – The Car has Passed** is the most reduced in colour. The contours of the landscape are made clear, colouristically following the three-part structure of the scene through the dominant blue, green, and white. The traces of the exhaust fumes in the air left by the passing car, presented in pale pink tones, are the only element that indicates the car's recent presence in space.

By dealing with the visual components of the car's absence, Balla directs the viewer to an intuitive relationship with the scene. This is exactly what he writes about in the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* from 1910:



In order to conceive and understand the novel beauties of a Futurist picture, the soul must be purified; the eye must be freed from its veil of atavism and culture, so that it may at last look upon Nature and not upon the museum as the one and only standard.

As soon as ever this result has been obtained, it will be readily admitted that brown tints have never coursed beneath our skin; it will be discovered that yellow shines forth in our flesh, that red blazes, and that green, blue, and violet dance upon it with untold charms, voluptuous and caressing.



Mercury Passing Before the Sun (1914) is one of a series of paintings depicting the transit of Mercury across the face of the Sun on November 17, 1914, in which he uses the opacity of gouache to suggest a dense fusion of cosmic forces. Balla, an amateur astronomer, observed the transit through a telescope, probably fitted with a smoked glass filter.

His composition, according to his daughter Elica Balla, depicts two intersecting views of the event: through the telescope and with the naked eye.

During this period, Balla had begun to experiment with the use of geometric and curving forms and transparent planes to convey movement. Composed of circles, spirals and triangles, with a pallet of mostly oranges and grey-blues, the painting represents Balla's subjective experience of the event. It exemplifies his transition to a more abstract style, as well as his interest in themes of cosmology.

Iridescent Interpenetration is the title of several artworks and studies which Balla created between 1912 and 1914, featuring intersecting triangles and other geometric patterns in kaleidoscopic colour.

In these colour exercises he attempts to separate the experience of light from the perception of objects as such, in an approach he had experimented with in *Welcome to Düsseldorf*. The works suggest an extension of the pictured surface beyond the borders of the frame.

The earliest known study in the series was on a postcard which Balla mailed to his friend and student Gino Galli on November 21, 1912. He referred to the images as *iride* ('spectrum' or 'rainbow').





Umberto Boccioni (1882 – 1916) became the main theorist of Futurism and helped shape the revolutionary aesthetic of the movement as one of its principal figures. Despite his short life, his approach to the dynamism of form and the deconstruction of solid mass guided artists long after his death

Toward the end of 1911 Boccioni, Balla, Severini and a few other Futurists travelled to Paris and saw the work of Braque and Picasso, and from then the movement began to take shape.

His **Self-Portrait** of 1905 shows him as a young dandy; proud, if not somewhat arrogant.

"Your eyes, accustomed to semi-darkness, will soon open to more radiant visions of light. The shadows which we shall paint shall be more luminous than the highlights of our predecessors, and our pictures, next to those of the museums, will shine like blinding daylight compared with deepest night." – Boccioni, Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto

Three Women (1909-10) portrays his mother, Cecilia, his sister, Amelia, with his lover, Inis in the centre background. It is painted in a style influenced by the theories of divisionism, imparting a sensation of luminosity; however, the strong light from the left, casting areas of dark shadow across parts of the painting is not characteristic of the style of Seurat and the French divisionists, where the distribution of light and shadows would be indicated by the weighting of lighter and darker toned colours.

Although painted with the small colour strokes of Divisionism the way that the light enters the room, the varying and visible strokes of colour, and the depiction of rays of light cast across the dresses is characteristic of Futurist painting, so that the group portrait can be seen as a transitional work, between Divisionism and Futurism.





The City Rises (1910) is a large painting: two metres by three metres on which Boccioni worked for almost a year and considered to be his turning point into Futurism; although realistic elements are present, such as the building and the spacial perspective. "I attempted a great synthesis of labour, light and movement" he wrote to a friend.

The scene depicts buildings in construction in a suburb of a new city, with chimneys in the upper part. Most of the foreground space is occupied by men and horses, fused together into a dynamic unison as they toil on the building site.

Boccioni thus emphasizes some of the most typical elements of the Futurist's pictures: the exaltation of human labour and their enthusiasm for the modern town, built around modern necessities. Suburbs, and the urban environment in general, formed the basis of many of Boccioni's paintings, from the capture of the staccato sounds of construction in *The Street-Pavers* to the riot of sound and colour presented to the observer of street scenes, as typified by *The Street Enters the House*.

Laughter (1911) is considered Boccioni's first truly Futurist work. At this time he had departed from Divisionist techniques, and now focused on the sensations derived from his observation of modern life. The public reception of this work was quite negative, and compared unfavourably with *Three Women*. It was defaced by a visitor, running his fingers through the still fresh paint. Subsequently criticism became more positive, with some considering the painting a response to Cubism. It is said to be an expressive parallel to Bergson's "theory of laughter". Bergson believed there was healing and relaxation found in laughter that could relieve tension and break down the individual's reserved mentality towards life.



The scene is fragmented, with a loss of structure and borders, and appears to be set in a cafe or night-club, or at a show. The viewer (or audience) is required to dissect the the image and locate each object: tables, bottles and wine glasses, in its separate position in the room. The figure of the laughing woman at the upper left dominates the scene. What appears to be her yellow and red costume seems to billow out and mutate into a slug like form draped over some architectural feature.

Her gaze is directed slightly upward and not towards any other individual. The lighting is from below, creating a theatrical sense about the woman as if she were performing on a stage. She is gaudy, vibrant and full of animation; and her laugh seems to engulf the whole scene and draw he audience irrevocably into the drama of the painting. Other figures may be discerned lurking in the web of riotous colour: just below her right shoulder a red faced man throws his head back with a maniacal grin on his face, while to the right of the picture a man in a jacket and frilled white shirt leans in smiling indulgently on the proceedings.

Henri-Louis Bergson (1859 – 1941) was a French philosopher who was influential in the tradition of analytic philosophy and continental philosophy, especially during the first half of the 20th century.

In Laughter: an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, Bergson develops a theory of how laughter can be provoked. He describes the process of laughter used in particular by comics and clowns, as caricature of the mechanistic nature of humans (habits, automatic acts, etc.), one of the two tendencies of life (degradation towards inert matter and mechanism, and continual creation of new forms). However, Bergson warns us that laughter's criterion of what should be laughed at is not a moral criterion and that it can in fact cause serious damage to a person's self-esteem. This essay made his opposition to the Cartesian theory of the animal-machine obvious.



Boccioni spent much of 1911 working on a trilogy of paintings titled "Stati d'animo" ("States of Mind"), which he said expressed departure and arrival at a railroad station — The Farewells, Those Who Go, and Those Who Stay. Set in a railway station, the three works attempt to depict the psychological aspects of the drama and emotion of modern travel.

In *States of Mind, The Farewells* the would be travellers and those seeing them off, the steam and smoke of the railway engines and even the station environment itself are all swirling together in a tumultuous vortex of waves around the only element of calm, the railway engine's number. The other two paintings in the series separately explore the feelings of the travellers and of those left behind on the platform.

All three paintings were originally acquired from the artist by Marinetti and sold by his widow to Nelson A. Rockefeller, who donated them to MOMA in 1979.

"Our bodies penetrate the sofas on which we sit, and the sofas penetrate our bodies. The motorbus rushes into the houses which it passes, and in their turn the houses throw themselves upon the bus and are blended with it."—Boccioni

The central figure of *The Street Enters the House* (1911) is a woman dressed in blue and white, viewed from behind and above. She looks over her balcony at a busy street scene, a riot of colours, lines, and angles. On the road in front of her, workers lift poles to form the walls of a new building, surrounded by a pile of bricks. On every side of this construction, white and blue houses lean into the street. Two of the balconies are occupied by other figures peering down into the road. A line of horses flies past the foreground.

The identity of the woman is the subject of debate. Whether she was an entirely imagined character, or, as some suggest, possibly his mother, as he would often employ members of his family as models.



The painting in general showcases Boccioni's evolution from a Neoimpressionist style to one more aligned with the ideals of Cubism, and the catalogue description for the piece demonstrates his increasing fascination with scientific terminology. It includes lines such as "The principles of Roentgen rays [more popularly called X rays] is applied to the work, allowing the personages to be studied from all sides, objects both at the front and the back are in the painter's memory." Boccioni experiments here with Cubist techniques as a way of keeping elements in both the foreground and background "rushing into the window at the same time" He also weaves in references to his earlier works. See for example, the visual pun of the horse's appearance on the woman's buttock when compared with a line from his earlier Manifesto: "How often have we seen upon the cheek of the person with whom we are talking the horse which passes at the end of the street."

"Let us fling open the figure and let it incorporate within itself whatever may surround it." - Boccioni

Futurism is essentially an attempt to illustrate the totality of our daily experience of shifting viewpoints as we move through the world and life whirls noisily around us.



The writing of his *Technical manifesto of Futurist sculpture*, published in 1912, was Boccioni's intellectual and physical launch into sculpture; he had begun working in sculpture in the previous year. He exclaimed that "these days I am obsessed by sculpture! I believe I have glimpsed a complete renovation of that mummified art."

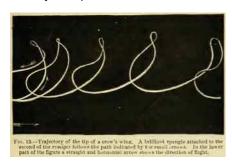
Head + House + Light (1912, destroyed), depicting a female form with 'solidified' vector rays signifying movement and elements of landscape and the environment intruding into the figure, is an attempt to make a sculptural equivalent to Futurist painting. It is a brave attempt and technically brilliant, but in the end looks overwrought and grotesque; so rather comic and failing in its intensions. Other early lost sculptural pieces are *The Anti-graceful*, also known as *The Mother* and *Synthesis of Human Dynamism*. (see below) These likewise seem rather more comical than serious.

"It seems clear to me that this succession is not to be found in repetition of legs, arms and faces, as many people have stupidly believed, but is achieved through the intuitive search for the unique form which gives continuity in space." – Boccioni

By the end of 1913 he had completed in wax what is considered his sculptural masterpiece, and a more successful representation of three dimensional movement, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. His goal for the work was to depict a "synthetic continuity" of motion, instead of an "analytical discontinuity" that he saw in such artists as František Kupka and Marcel Duchamp. During his life, the work only existed as a plaster cast. It was first cast in bronze in 1931. Although in appearance it is a monumental piece it is only 111 centimetres high.

The sculpture depicts a human-like figure apparently in motion with an aerodynamic and fluid form. Breaking with the tradition of self-contained sculpture, Boccioni opened up the silhouette of this marching figure, who forges ahead as if carved by forces such as wind speed. While the triumphant stance and armless torso evoke statues from earlier art history, the polished metal alludes to sleek new technologies.





In place of a pedestal, two blocks at the feet connect the figure, which is also armless and without a discernibly real face, to the ground. The form was originally inspired by the sight of a football player moving on to a perfectly weighted pass.

Marey's chromatograph describing the *Trajectory of a crow's wing*, achieved through attaching reflective material to the wing tip, elegantly records dynamic movement through space, comparable to the sweeping curves of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*.

Boccioni professed no love for classical or Renaissance sculpture. In 1914, he wrote that "anyone today who considers Italy to be the country of art is a necrophiliac who thinks of a cemetery as a delightful little alcove;" declaring that art should "have a strict historical relation with the moment in which it appears". The sculpture of the early twentieth century, he felt, would evoke the speed and dynamism of Italy's recent industrialization.

In a recent project three previous plaster sculptures, since destroyed, of which **Synthesis of Human Dynamism** was the first, exploring the theme of a figure in movement and culminating in **Unique Forms of Continuity in Space** have, by a process of analysing photographs and 3-D printing, been reconstructed.



In May 1916 Boccioni was drafted into the Italian Army. On 16 August 1916, he was thrown from his horse during a cavalry training exercise and was trampled. He died the following day, age thirty-three.



This sculpture has been the subject of extensive commentary, and in 1998 it was selected as the image to be engraved on the back of the Italian 20-cent euro coin.

"To obtain this total painting which calls for the active cooperation of all the senses: painting of the plastic mood of the universal, you have to paint the way drunkards sing and vomit sounds, noises and smells." – Carrà

Carlo Carrà (1881 – 1966), in addition to his many paintings, wrote a number of books concerning art. He taught for many years in the city of Milan. At the age of 12 he left home in order to work as a mural decorator. In 1899–1900, he was in Paris decorating pavilions at the *Exposition Universelle*, where he became acquainted with contemporary French art. He then spent a few months in London in contact with exiled Italian anarchists, and returned to Milan in 1901.

In 1906, he enrolled at Brera Academy. In 1910 he signed, the *Manifesto of Futurist Painters*.



Self-Portrait 1951



The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli (1911) depicts the violent funeral of the anarchist Angelo Galli, who was killed in 1906 on the eve of an Italian general strike.

Hundreds of people attended the funeral, which was monitored by police on horseback. The police refused the procession of anarchists entrance into the cemetery. When the anarchists resisted, the police responded with force and a violent scuffle ensued. Carrà was associated with the Milanese anarchist movement at the time and was present at the funeral.

In the centre of the painting, Galli's coffin is draped in red cloth, held aloft but dangerously tilted at an angle. Around

the coffin are a series of darkened figures, depicting the anarchists, seemingly engaged in a fight. These figures are illuminated by two light sources emanating from the sun and the coffin. On the left, the police cavalry are shown opposing the anarchists. The top third of the piece is dominated by darkly drawn diagonal lines, indicating banners, lances flagpoles and cranes, and drawing parallels to weapons of war. The harsh angles and directional lines emphasise the chaos and energy of the scene.

Carrà recalled in his autobiography:

"I found myself unwillingly in the centre of it, before me I saw the coffin, covered in red carnations, sway dangerously on the shoulders of the pallbearers; I saw horses go mad, sticks and lances clash, it seemed to me that the corpse could have fallen to the ground at any moment and the horses would have trampled it. Deeply struck, as soon as I got home I did a drawing of what I had seen."

The Futurist Manifesto would praise Carrà's use of fracturing in his piece, stating:

"If we paint the phases of a riot, the crowd bustling with uplifted fists and the noisy onslaught of the cavalry are translated upon the canvas in sheaves of lines corresponding to the conflicting forces, following the general law of violence of the picture. These force-lines must encircle and involve the spectator so that he will in a manner be forced to struggle himself with the persons in the picture."

The art historian and former director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr Jr., wrote that "fundamentally, in its main lines and masses Carrà's *Funeral is* as classically organized as a fifteenth-century battle piece by Paolo Uccello."

The art historian Dr. Rosalind McKever has also proposed that *Funeral* is compositionally similar to Uccello's *The Battle of San Romano*, noting: "The clash between the anarchists and the police...the dominance of black and red....and the melee of flag poles, lances and cranes jutting into the sky...."





The sense of movement in *Simultaneity, Woman on the Balcony* (1912) is expressed by decomposing an object into separate components. In the central part a woman on a balcony is hanging out clothes. The image of the woman is fixed simultaneously in several phases of her movements. Across the road or the square a house and fragments of buildings may be clearly seen, placing the episode in an urban setting.

Although described as a woman hanging washing it is a little difficult to make out the activity; unless we read the lighter curved and cuboid shapes on the right side as sheets flapping in the breeze.

Carrà wrote in one of his manifestos on painting, "We Futurist painters maintain that sounds, noises and smells are incorporated in the expression of lines, volumes and colours just as lines, volumes and colours are incorporated in the architecture of a musical work."

In the 1914 collage *Pursuit* Carrà did this by making the work look like an architect's table and spreading out all of the materials so that the viewer can explore the newspaper clippings to see the bigger picture of the horse and the jockey. Carrà pieced together the collage to show small parts of every newspaper clipping he included. It is as if he wants the viewer to see the bigger picture, but also notice the small details that make the bigger picture.

Carrà's Futurist phase ended around the time World War I began. He went on to paint in a Metaphysical style, along with Giorgio de Chirico.



"In antiquity there was only silence. In the nineteenth century, with the invention of the machine, Noise was born. Today Noise triumphs and reigns supreme over the sensibility of men." – Russolo

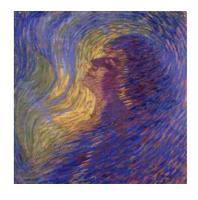


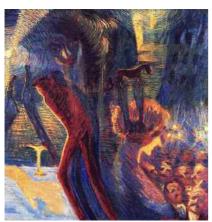
Luigi Russolo (1885-1947) was born into a musical family. His father was the organist of Portogruaro Cathedral and both his brothers studied at the Milan Conservatory. Russolo was also gifted musically, but decided to embark on a career as a painter at an early age.

His 1909 **Self-Portrait with Skulls** shows a young man with a wide eyed, or even astonished look on his face, surrounded by skulls; memento mori; one, behind his head seems to be staring down at him, as if in a dead, eyeless echo of his own terrified visage.

Russolo was among the most stubborn and constant in the search for a multisensory art, a synaesthesia between forms.

Profumo (Perfume) (1910) and Boccioni's *Portrait of a Futurist* have been said to be painted as a response to a Marinetti text, *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna (We kill the moonlight)*: Maurizio Calvesi had pointed out that both paintings, Boccioni's and Russolo's, would seem to have been inspired by that 1909 text, which speaks of "vaporous locks of countless swimmers sighingly opening the petals of their moist mouths and eyes", and of an "intoxicating deluge of scents" where "we saw a fabulous forest growing expansively around us, whose arching foliage seemed to be blown out by a too-slow breeze." Russolo, however, manages to be even more impetuous than Boccioni: in an article published in *La Nazione* on May 25, 1911, critic Carlo Cohen wrote that *Profumo* "gives precisely the sense of voluptuousness and abandonment." Odours, sounds, and scents.





Memories of a Night (1911) is an example of "painting of the state of mind," in which the central role is given to unconnected memories and snatches of thoughts that arise in the mind of a person against their will. The mysterious and mystical work recalls the author's fascination with Symbolism. There is no active movement and frantic rhythm of Futurism, but there is increased emotional tension and expression. In his painting, the artist combined various elements from life, such as a concert hall, a galloping horse, city streets, a festively dressed audience, and threw them into an inflexible and ruthless vortex of time. The faceless central figure, obviously symbolizing the artist himself, is trying to discard the chaos and vanity of their familiar environment and plunge into a world dominated by the sense and pure art.

In The Art of Noises, written in the form of a letter to the composer Balilla Pratella, Russolo wrote:

"Beethoven and Wagner for many years wrung our hearts. But now we are sated with them and derive much greater pleasure from ideally combining the noise of streetcars, internal-combustion engines, automobiles, and bust crowds than from rehearsing, for example, the 'Eroica' or the 'Pastorale'...away! les ust be gone, since we shall not much longer succeed in restraining a desire to create a new musical realism by a generous distribution of sonorous blows and slaps, leaping numbly over violins, pianofortes, contrabasses, and groaning organs, Away!"

Francesco Balilla Pratella (1880 – 1955) was an Italian composer, musicologist and essayist. One of the leading advocates of Futurism in Italian music, much of Pratella's own music betrays little obvious connection to the views espoused in the manifestos he authored.

Pratella joined the futurist group in 1910 and became one of its most ardent activists, publishing three tracts which were combined into the pamphlet *Musica Futurista* in 1912, with a cover designed by Russolo. Inspired by Pratella, Russolo created his *Intonarumori* (Noise Intoners) in 1913 and wrote his own manifesto, *The Art of Noises*, introducing the futurist concept of introducing noise into music. Pratella was less than enthusiastic about the use of *Intonarumori*, but he agreed to utilize their resources in his opera *L'aviatore Dro* (1911–1914) which was written in close collaboration with Marinetti.



Russolo is often regarded as one of the first noise music experimental composers with his performances of *noise music concerts* in 1913–14 and then again after World War I, notably in Paris in 1921.



Score of en harmonic notation, for Intonarumori (1913)

A performance of his *Gran Concerto Futuristico* in 1917, utilising his noise-generating devices – *Intonarumori*, which produced a startling range of sounds – was met with strong disapproval and violence from the audience, as Russolo himself had predicted. In 1913–14, he gave noise concerts in Milan (causing a riot), Genoa, and London.

Although Russolo's works bear little resemblance to modern noise music, his pioneering creations cannot be overlooked as an essential stage in the evolution of the several genres in this category.

In his manifesto he stated that the industrial revolution had given modern men a greater capacity to appreciate more complex sounds, and argues that the human ear has become accustomed to the speed, energy, and noise of the urban industrial soundscape.

Furthermore, this new sonic palette requires a new approach to musical instrumentation and composition. He proposes a number of conclusions about how electronics and other technology will allow futurist musicians to "substitute for the limited variety of timbres that the orchestra possesses today the infinite variety of timbres in noises, reproduced with appropriate mechanisms".

The Art of Noises is considered by some authors to be one of the most important and influential texts in 20th-century musical aesthetics.

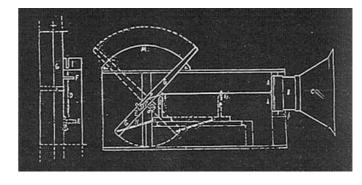


The intonarumori in London's Coliseum Theatre, June 1914

Luigi Russolo c.1916

Many artists are now familiar with Russolo's manifesto; and several leading composers, notably Ravel and Stravinsky, thought they opened up interesting possibilities, and Russolo has been regarded as a pioneer of today's electronic music.

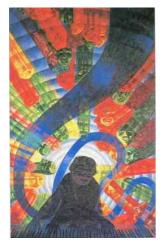




The **Intonarumori** were sound generators consisting of a wooden case and a cardboard or metal loud-speaker, created with the aim of evoking the sounds of a city in motion, of a battle, of a racing automobile: rumbles, thunders, buzzes, gurgles, bursts, hisses, howls, voices, laughter, crackles, rustles.

"Our ear demands ever broader acoustic emotions," Symphonies of noises to express "the rotating noise of the African sun and the orange weight of the sky." – Russolo, The Art of Noise

None of his intoning instruments have survived: some were destroyed in World War II; while others have been lost. Replicas of the instruments have since been built and performed.



La Musica (1911–12) depicts a pianist playing for his audience, and is an attempt to nail "the complex of musical emotion", as he described it. The central shadowy figure is a spider-like pianist with five arms, suggesting his speedy finger-work. A blue whiplash of melody issues from the keyboard; and a backdrop of rhythmic circles of blue sky brightens into a halo of light behind the pianist, silhouetting him against a wall of brilliant colour filled with grinning carnival masks in red, green and yellow meant to represent, as he stated, "harmonic or complementary chords".

Russolo had an interest in occultism and Theosophy. In the opinion of musician, installation artist, and musicologist **Luciano Chessa** (b. 1971) Theosophy is the "key" that makes it possible to "identify, decode, and contextualize" Russolo's interest in the occult, which is present in his compositions: from his "printmaking and paintings" to his theoretical works on music.

Charles W. Leadbeater (member of the Theosophical Society, associate of Annie Bessant and teacher on the human aura in the early 1900s), "the hidden side of the performance of a piece of music." The painting demonstrates a pianist playing in a "state of rapturous enthusiasm." The lines of his face can hardly be distinguished. His hands are "represented in a mad, virtuosic dash along an infinite keyboard." This work... shows a series of flying masks with various expressions that can readily be interpreted as a "visualization or materialization of the different states of mind" of a pianist-medium, which performed by spirits he himself has summoned. The authors of *Thought-Forms: a record of clairvoyant investigation* (Besant and Leadbeater) explained that the spirits that "reside in the astral plane have the energy to change the course of thoughtforms that already exist, and to make them move." In Chessa's opinion, this painting is "structured according to criteria presented in *Thought-Forms*, in particular the section of the book that describes the forms produced by music."

"It should also be born in mind that the research on 'movement' and the dynamic outlook on the world, which were the basis of Futurist theory, in no way required one to paint nothing but speeding cars or ballerinas in action; for a person who is seated, or an inanimate object, though apparently static, could be considered dynamically and suggest dynamic forms." – Severini

Gino Severini (1883 – 1966) was born into a poor family in Cortona. His father was a junior court official and his mother a dressmaker. For much of his life he divided his time between Paris and Rome. He was associated with neo-classicism and the "return to order" in the decade after the First World War. During his career he worked in a variety of media, including mosaic and fresco.

In 1900 he met Boccioni. Together they visited the Balla's studio where they were introduced to the technique of Divisionism, painting with adjacent dots of colour rather than mixed colours and breaking the painted surface into a field of stippled dots and stripes. The ideas of Divisionism had a great influence on Severini's early work and on Futurist painting from 1910 to 1911.

He was an important link between artists in France and Italy and came into contact with Cubism before his Futurist colleagues. Following a visit to Paris in 1911, the Italian Futurists adopted a sort of Cubism, which gave them a means of analysing energy in paintings and expressing dynamism.

In his **Self-portrait** of 1912 he depicts himself as a debonair man about town, bowler hatted and complete with monocle, but fragmented into a variety of views in characteristic futurist manner.





"Space no longer exists: the street pavement, soaked by rain beneath the glare of electric lamps, becomes immensely deep and gapes to the very centre of the earth. Thousands of miles divide us from the sun; yet the house in front of us fits into the solar disk." – Futurist Manifesto

Souvenirs of a Journey (c.1911) depicts a locomotive, a double decker bus, a horse carriage and the upper section of the *Arc de Triomphe*, represented in a wild gyrating motion of memories. The brushwork in thick colour dots gives the im-pression that everything is about to dissolve, like things vaguely remembered from a trip or a dream.

That same year, Severini's shattered vision found a spectacular expression in a Paris view simply titled *Le Boulevard*. The boulevard filled with walking people turns into a colourful kaleidoscope where trees, horses and people mixed in a single festive mood. The light falling on the street from above is presented in the form of diagonal lines that clearly delineate the space of the canvas. People, patches of greenery and marquee-like triangular shapes are reduced to geometrical facets. Thin black tree trunks spring up at intervals. Together with the black hats and coats of small characters walking away they give a brisk rhythm to a landscape that has something in common with the views that Lyonel Feininger was painting at the time in Germany.



Severini had moved to Paris in 1906, and *The Boulevard* epitomises the differences between what he described as "Futurism as conceived in Milan [...] and Futurism as conceived in Montmartre".



It was painted around the same time as Carlo Carrà's **Leaving the Theatre** and depicts a similarly nocturnal, wintry cityscape. Yet whilst Carrà continued to employ the Divisionist technique, Severini here reveals a familiarity with Cubism, employing its geometric vocabulary to create a fragmented surface that is vividly expressive of movement and bustle. In terms of its subject matter, Severini's image is also more emphatically 'Futurist' than that of Carrà, featuring a red automobile (at the upper left) and a dazzling array of electric streetlights. As the only member of the movement to be based in the French capital, Severini served as something of a foreign correspondent for his Italian colleagues, encouraging them to experiment with Cubist principles.

In his autobiography, *The Life of a Painter*, Severini wrote:

"In the early days the Cubism method of grasping an object was to go round and round it. The Futurists declared that one had to get inside it. In my opinion the two views can be reconciled in a poetic cognition of the world. But to the very fact that they appealed to the creative depths in the painter by awakening in him hidden forces which were intuitive and vitalising, the Futurist theories did more than the Cubist principles to open up unexplored and boundless horizons."

Severini was less attracted to the subject of the machine than his fellow Futurists and frequently chose the form of the dancer to express Futurist theories of dynamism in art. He was particularly adept at rendering lively urban scenes, for example *The Boulevard*. During the First World War he produced some of the finest Futurist war art, notably his *Italian Lancers at a Gallop* (1915) and *Armoured Train* (1915). He spent part of the war in Barcelona, but returned to Paris by July 1915. Between 1910 and 1914 he created over 100 works portraying dancers in various settings.

The Haunting Dancer, (Ruhelose Tanzerin) (1911) is portrayed in several fragmented views, as if moving in front of the viewer from left to right across and out of the picture. In the background she appears twice again, having returned with arms raised playing castanets. The angular fragmented shapes, filled with small dabs of tile-like colour, transmit a synaesthetic sense of the clack of the castanets.





Blue Dancer (1912) represents the movement and sensation of dancing. Filling the foreground is the figure of a ballerina in a blue dress dancing gracefully, but with her skirts swirling, around in an agitated frenzy of blue shapes. Her head is fragmented and shown in different positions, her right eye half closed suggests that she is absorbed in her dance, enraptured by the music and swaying of her body. The bunches of her elaborate coiffure coiling upwards and out of the top of the frame.

In the upper right corner is the figure of a violinist, dressed in red, his instrument on the very edge of the picture and seeming to cut his head in two.

The effect of refracted light is achieved by a combination of white, grey, and black zones surrounding the pyramidal form of the dancer's body. Black and silver ornamental sequins are added to areas to create a shimmering surface.

The dancehall as a subject offered Severini the opportunity for the depiction of a multisensory experience. In *Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bal Tabarin* (1912) he depicts a number of figures in a swirling froth of movement; fragmented and rearranged almost to the point of complete dissolution.

The dominating image is of a woman with brown curls and a white, blue, and pink flounced dress as she dances to music in the Paris nightclub *Bal Tabarin*. Different elements of the work point to current events—the Arab riding a camel refers to the Turco-Italian War of 1911, and flags convey sentiments of nationalism. In his depiction of Bal Tabarin the artist merges the Futurists' interest in capturing the dynamism of motion with the integration of elements of text and collage components, such as sequins, influenced by his study of French Cubism. Although a fervent Italian nationalist, Severini insisted that his fellow Futurists come to Paris, as he had, to learn about the latest developments in modern art.





The Bear Dance at the Moulin Rouge (1913) represents two dancers locked together in a gyrating whirl of movement: she in a blue striped dress, he suited in formal black. Their legs are intertwined and their upper bodies merged into a pulsating vibration of shapes and lines evoking the motion and ecstatic transportations of the dance.

The fragmenting of the edges, creating curved and straight lines of force impart an illusion of movement. It is a trope where motion lines are frequently used by cartoonists to indicate speed.





Benedetta Cappa (1897 – 1977) was born in Rome. She began her training as a painter in the studio of Giacomo Balla. She produced novels, essays and lectures, stage design and verbal-visual experiments of free word composition. In 1923 she married Marinetti. Her work fits within the second phase of Italian Futurism.

One early abstract painting, **Velocity of a Motorboat** (1923–24), contains many of the elements that would come to mark Cappa's painting style.

The action and aesthetic of the machine age is a trope within Futurism that appears frequently in Cappa's artwork. Well defined, curvilinear shapes, painted in gradient tones are compositionally arranged to imply objects in motion: "... the interplay of 'force lines,' become the subject".

The artist's exploration of the machine continued with *Lights + Sounds of a Night Train* (c. 1924) and with *Aeropittura*

Her best known works are the five monumental mural paintings for the Conference Room at the Palazzo delle

Poste in Palermo, Sicily, *Synthesis of Communication* (1933-34) stemming from the muralist movement of the second wave of Futurism, which began in the early 1930s.

This new emphasis on murals by the Futurists was brought to prominence in 1934, when they published three articles on muralism in their new magazine, *Stile Futurista*.



Joseph Stella (1877 – 1946) was an Italian-born American Futurist painter best known for his depictions of industrial America, especially his images of the Brooklyn bridge. He is also associated with the American Precisionist movement of the 1910s–1940s.

He moved to New York first in 1896 to study medicine, but changed to studying art. In 1909 he returned to Europe By 1911, he had departed Italy, where the omnipresence of the Renaissance presented its own kind of obstacle for contemporary painters, and relocated to Paris. His return to Europe led to his first extensive contact with Modernism which would ultimately mould his distinctive personal style, notable for its strong colour and sweeping and dynamic lines.

Of his arrival in Paris he wrote: "Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism were in full swing," and "[there] was in the air the glamour of a battle." It was the right place to be, at just the right time, for a man of Stella's curiosity, openness to new trends, and ambition.

In Paris, Stella attended the salon of Gertrude Stein where he met many other painters. "[Stein] found the big and boisterous painter rather like [her friend, the poet] Apollinaire; they both had a fund of sarcastic wit that was frequently turned on their hosts." Stella's view of his hostess was indeed sarcastic: she sat, he wrote, "enthroned on a sofa in the middle of the room," surrounded by her Cézannes and Picassos, "with the forceful solemnity of a pythoness or a sibyl ... in a high and distant pose."

Having met Boccioni and Severini he became associated with the Italian Futurists and began to incorporate Futurist principles into his art, though he was also interested in the structural experiments of the Cubists and the dynamic colour of the Fauves.

In 1913 he returned to New York in 1913, becoming a part of the Alfred Stieglitz and the Walter Arensberg circles in Manhattan and enjoyed close relationships with fellow expatriates Albert Gleizes and leader of the New york Dada movement Marcel Duchamp (Stella and Arensberg accompanied Duchamp to the plumbing supply store in 1917 to purchase the infamous urinal.)

In 1913–14, he painted *Battle of Lights, Coney Island*, said to be one of the earliest and greatest American Futurist works.





In New York during the 1920s, Stella became fascinated with the geometric quality of the architecture of Lower Manhattan. In these works he further assimilated elements of Cubism and Futurism.

He shows, in *Brooklyn Bridge* (1919–20), his fascination with the sweeping lines of the bridge, a motif he used several years before poet Hart Crane turned to this structure as a symbol of modernity. Stella's depictions of the bridge feature the diagonal cables that sweep down-ward forcefully, providing directional energy. While these dynamic renderings suggest the excitement and motion of modern life, in Stella's hands, the image of the bridge also becomes a powerful icon of stability and solidarity.



Among his other well-known paintings is *New York Interpreted, The Voice of the City* (1922), a five-panelled work (almost twenty-three feet long and over eight feet high) patterned after a religious altarpiece, but depicting bridges and skyscrapers instead of saints. This work reflects the belief, common at the time, that industry was displacing religion as the centre of modern life. The painting is in the collection of the Newark Museum. "At a time when virtually all modernists tried their hand at representing the city," Wanda Corn has written, "Stella's painting is the summa."

GALLERY

Balla



Warship, Widow and Wind 1916



Numbers in Love 1920



Iridescent Interpenetration no13 1914

Boccioni



Modern Idol, 1911



Simultaneous Vision



Elasticity 1912



Dynamism of a Soccer Player 1913



Dynamism of a Man's Head 1913



Development of a Bottle in Space 1913

Carra



The Station at Milan 1910-11



Milan Station 1910-11



Jolts of a Cab 1911



Rhythms of Objects 1911



Cyclist 1913



The Red Horseman 1913

Russolo



La Rivolta 1911



Plastic Synthesis of a Woman's Movement 1912



The Sinner Within 1913



Dynamism of a Car 1913



Tower Bridge 1929



Soapdish 1929

Severini



The Milliner 1910-11



The Dance of the Pan Pan at the Monico 1911



Dancer at Pigalle 1912



Dynamism of a Dancer 1912



Danseuse articulem 1915



Armoured Train in Action 1915