

# FUTURISM

1909 - 1944

**Reconstruction of the Universe**

- Futurism was an Italian art movement that aimed to capture in art the dynamism and energy of the modern world
- Futurists artists thought that the world is stuck in tradition and wanted it to look forward by celebrating **innovation**, **modernity** and **speed**.
- Futurism was exceptionally strong in its denunciation of the past. This was because in Italy the weight of past culture was felt as particularly oppressive.



[Futurism](#) was launched by the Italian poet **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti** in **1909**. On 20 February he published his ***Manifesto of Futurism*** on the front page of the Paris newspaper ***Le Figaro***.



Born in 1874 Alexandria, Egypt. His father a successful commercial layer, went to Alexandria a thriving trade center after the opening of the Suez Canal, thriving trade center. He showed interest in poetry at an early age and published his poem in a magazine age 17.

He tried to follow his father's footsteps in law, but he was more interested in being a poet. Later in his life he would use the skills he learned from his father in relation to publicity and contacts to further Futurist movement, and his inherited wealth enabled him to support artists, writers and poets financially.

After graduating he published his poems and worked for Magazines. Even his early poetry work referenced cars and speed "Death at the Steering Wheel" and "To the Demon of Speed".

His early work is also fraught with a rhetoric of extraordinary violence, charged with elements of the grotesque, the lurid— deliberately cross over into the comic, producing an uncanny effect



Marinetti proffered advice to an artist on how to succeed gives insight into his character and thinking:

“In order to win over Paris and appear, in the eyes of all Europe, an absolute innovator, the most advanced of all, I urge you to get to work with all your heart, resolute on being bolder, crazier, more advanced, surprising, eccentric, incomprehensible, and grotesque than anybody else in music. I urge you to be a madman.”



In 1905 Marinetti founded a journal named *Poesia* (*Poetry*) a venture that would last until 1909. From this experience he learned a lot about marketing and networking.

“On 11 October, 1908, after having worked for six years at my international review, *Poesia*, in order to liberate the Italian lyrical genius, which was threatened with extinction from traditional and commercial obstacles, I suddenly felt that all the poems, articles, and debates were no longer sufficient. **A change of method was absolutely imperative: to get down into the streets, to attack the theaters, and to bring the fist into the midst of the artistic struggle.**”

With help from his father’s friend, the Pashah Mohammed el Rachi, an Egyptian ex-minister who resided in Paris and owned a large number of shares in *Le Figaro*,” Marinetti managed to get **“The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism”** onto the newspaper’s front page.

The manifesto is a list of eleven demands and it appeared on 20 February 1909, and Marinetti instantly became an international celebrity.

## MANIFESTO OF FUTURISM

1. We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness.
2. The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity and revolt.
3. Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy and slumber. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist.
4. We declare that the splendor 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.





Victory of Samothrace  
now in Museum in Paris

- 5.** We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurled along its orbit.
- 6.** The poet must spend himself with warmth, glamour and prodigality to increase the enthusiastic fervor of the primordial elements.
- 7.** Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man.
- 8.** We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed.
- 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.

**10.** We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.

**11.** We will sing of the great crowds agitated by work, pleasure and revolt; the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals: the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the workshops beneath their violent electric moons: the gluttonous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; factories suspended from the clouds by the thread of their smoke; bridges with the leap of gymnasts flung across the diabolic cutlery of sunny rivers: adventurous steamers sniffing the horizon; great-breasted locomotives, puffing on the rails like enormous steel horses with long tubes for bridle, and the gliding flight of aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds.

The years 1910 and 1911 would witness Futurism's lavish expansion, culminating in the spectacular exhibition of Futurist painting that would open in Paris in February 1912. Three developments contributed to this.

1. The extension of Futurism to the visual arts, music, and photography.
2. The development of the Futurist serata, or evening performance.
3. A sharp acceleration in the production of manifestos.

## **Futurist Serata “Evening Performance.”**

**Often deemed the progenitor of the entire tradition of performance art.**

## First Evening Performance in Trieste at a theater

12 January 1910

Trieste, the setting for the first “evening performance”, was then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The city’s population was more than 60 percent Italian and had sentiments of wanting to be part of the nation of Italy which was founded in 1860.

Marinetti began the evening with a speech:

**“All freedom and all progress occurs within the circle of the Nation!”**

No one had doubts what nation he was referring to!

This was followed by the reading of the Manifesto and other poems.

The Italians felt passionate while the Austrians were intimidated.

In other “performance evenings” it was the common occurrence the evening would end in **“Slaps, fists, and beatings were soon flying about” and the Futurist would be arrested.**

Marinetti created this association between Futurism and threat of violence. This created a lot of debate and publicity around the movement.



Marinetti met with three painters from Milan: Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, and Luigi Russolo, and Futurism in painting was born!

# Manifesto of the Futurist Painters

## 11 Feb, 1910

To the Young Artists of Italy!

The cry of rebellion that we launch, linking our ideals with those of the Futurist poets, does not originate in an aesthetic clique. It expresses the violent desire that stirs in the veins of every creative artist today.

We rebel against the spineless admiration for old canvases, old statues, and old objects... we deem it unjust and criminal that people habitually disdain whatever is young, new, and trembling with life.





## **The City Rises (1910)**

### **Umberto Boccioni**

The painting depicts the construction of Milan's new electrical power plant. In the center of the frame, a large red horse surges forward, as three men, their muscles straining, try to guide and control it. In the background other horses and workers can be seen.

The blurred central figures of the men and horse, depicted in vibrant primary colors, suggests that change is born from chaos and that everyone, including the viewer, is caught up in the transformation.

## **Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash (1912) - Giacomo Balla**

The painting shows a woman, as she walks her small black dog down a city sidewalk. Cropped to an extreme close-up, the woman's feet, along with the bottom folds of her black dress, as well as the dog's feet, tail and floppy ears are multiplied and depicted in varying degrees of transparency. The fine metal leash becomes four curves connecting the woman to the dog.

This repetition and replication of the moving elements creates a sense of forward motion which is in opposition to the pavement's diagonal lines.



## Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (1913) - Umberto Boccioni

111.2 x 88.5 x 40 cm

Originally made in plaster and later cast in bronze after his death.



“The fluid, rippling forms that make up this strange body are not its own; what Boccioni shows us, is the air moving around and about it as the body steps forward, seemingly against some great resistance.

The figure seems both superhuman and robotic, a kind of machine man of the modern age.

Boccioni's form becomes a metaphor for progress acting against the forces of traditionalism and a testament to the role that machinery will play in the new age that he has envisaged.” TATE, London

Italian Neoclassical art (before the Futurist movement) was based on the principles of Ancient Roman and Ancient Greek art and Italian Renaissance.

The Futurist Painters and Sculptures were against nudes and religious scenes. They favored subjects that dealt with technology, speed and movement. They did not believe that the painting needed to depict the space exactly as it is, instead it needed to express the world's dynamic movement.

Let us compare Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (1913) - Umberto Boccioni and Victory of Samothrace (220-185 BC) condemned by Marinetti in the founding Manifesto:

How do they depict the body and movement differently?





Winged Victory of Samothrace  
circa 220-185 BC  
Marble

Height 5.57 meters.  
Statue wings is 2.75 meters tall.

We see the folds from the wind on the drapes and folds. And the gesture of the wings implies the body will move.

It captures movement in a single moment in time.

The details of the body are clear. Even though it is a mythical figure, it is depicted realistically in the details of bird and human.





Watch the artwork in the MOMA gallery [here](#)

“A figure strides powerfully forwards, his form deformed by the speed at which it is traveling.

For Boccioni, this was an ideal form: a figure in constant motion, immersed in space, engaged with the forces acting upon it.

An abstract expression of speed, it has no arms, no features in the head.”

MOMA, New York

# FUTURISM IN LITERATURE AND GRAPHIC DESIGN:



*Filippo Tommaso Marinetti,  
Montagne + Vallate + Strade x  
Joffre (1915)*

*‘words in freedom’ or ‘liberated words’*

words have no grammatical connection between them and are not organised into phrases and sentences. The style was as phonetically revolutionary as it was visually.



**Filippo Tommaso Marinetti - *Zang Tumb Tumb*(1914)**  
typography by Cesare Cavanna published in "Poesia"



*Zang Tumb Tumb* was Marinetti's first published collection of *parole in libertà* (words in liberty), a form of poetry at the same time verbal and visual.

The work is an account of Marinetti's experience as a correspondent in the Balkan War of 1912. The title *Zang Tumb Tumb* evokes the sounds of mechanized war—artillery shelling, bombs, explosions. The typography reflects the evocative power of the language. Rather than follow the rules of punctuation, the letters come alive and express themselves on the page.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1Yld7wGWEI>



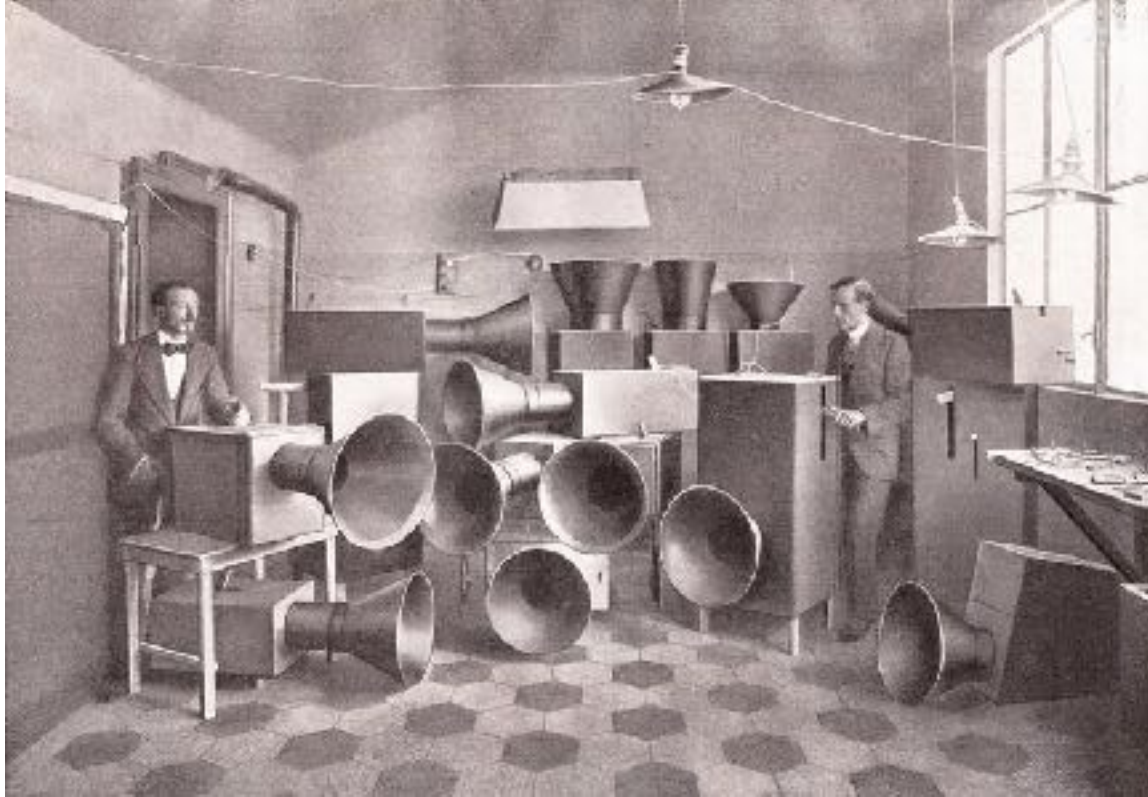


*Fortunato Depero, Depero  
Futurista (1927)*

In making books they also incorporated metals



## FUTURISM NOISE MUSIC



## Art of Noises 1913 - Russolo

- Aimed to combine the noise of trams, explosions of motors, trains, and shouting crowds.
- He built special instruments to produce such effects.
- He called it: Family of Noises: The Futurist Orchestra
- <https://www.openculture.com/2018/03/the-original-noise-artist-hear-the-strange-experimental-sounds-instruments-of-italian-futurist-luigi-russolo-1913.html>

# **FUTURISM IN PHOTOGRAPHY**



**“Smoker”, 1913, Anton Giulio Bragaglia**



**“Self-Portrait r”, 1913, Anton Giulio Bragaglia**



"Photodynamic portrait of a woman", 1924, Anton Giulio Bragaglia





**Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *The Typist (Il dattilografo)*, 1911**



**Mario Bellusi, *Modern Traffic in Ancient Rome (Traffico moderno nell'antica Roma)*, 1930**

## Further Links and Resources:

Futurism: An Anthology (Book)

<http://exhibitions.guggenheim.org/futurism/>

<https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/futurism>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/futurism>

