

FUTURISM IN PARIS – THE AVANT-GARDE EXPLOSION

Pompidou Centre, Paris, from 15 October 2008 till 26 January 2009

Quirinale Stables, Rome, from 20 February till 24 May 2009

Tate Modern, London, from 12 June till 13 September 2009

INTRODUCTION

A CENTENARY/ CUBISM AND FUTURISM = CUBO-FUTURISM

To see reproductions of the works commented on, see the French version of the pack or the exhibition film trailer.

On 20 February 1909 Marinetti published his *Futurist Manifesto* on the front page of the *Figaro*, a spectacular start for a poetic and literary movement which rejected any legacy of the past. A year later, this movement acquired a pictorial wing. The painters Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini proclaimed themselves the only moderns, in opposition to the young cubists, Paris' latest trend in painting. They sought to replace the poised, static quality of the cubist works with a dynamic, jarring urgency of forms. Art for them was a strategy for conquest, and their activism breathed a new spirit into avant-garde circles.

Drawing on original works and on writings left by the artists and critics, this exhibition offers a new reading of the relationship between cubism and futurism. The early days of mutual rejection gave way to mutual observation followed by a synthesis of their respective qualities which led, on the eve of the First World War to a formula rich in promise, cubo-futurism and its various manifestations: vorticism in England, Russian cubo-futurism and synchromism in the United States.

The exhibition brings together more than 200 works and documents, from all the futurist painters and other leading figures: Georges Braque, Robert Delaunay, Félix Del Marle, Marcel Duchamp, Albert Gleizes, František Kupka, Fernand Léger, Wyndham Percy Lewis, Kasimir Malevitch, Jean Metzinger, Francis Picabia, Pablo Picasso, Ardengo Soffici...

What constitutes modernity in art?

In answer to cubism's restricted palette, futurism introduced painting with colour. Cubism's subjects, the nude, still life, landscape, etc. were replaced by the modern city, speed, the machine. Instead of its static compositions, we see a fragmentation of form to express the "dynamic sensation itself": life.

By placing cubist works and futurist works side by side, this exhibition begs a more basic question: what constitutes modernity in art? **Its subject matter? Its forms? The ideas which underpin the artist's creative energy?**

By revisiting the adventure of futurism, it also hopes to show **how the artist's perspective draws from and nourishes each epoch's thinking, activity and perceptions.**

CUBISM

The first room of the exhibition is given over to cubism, and in particular that cubism which the Italian futurist painters first discovered when they stayed in Paris in September-October 1911. It highlights the specificity of cubist iconography: nudes, still lives, landscapes, to which the futurists were soon to riposte with the image of the modern metropolis, the automobile, movement, energy.

Nudes by Picasso and Braque which gave birth to the movement are brought together here, alongside paintings exhibited at the 1911 Autumn Salon (Fernand Léger's *Nudes in the forest*, 1909-1911, Jean Metzinger's *The Snack*, 1911, Robert Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower*, 1911 etc.) and a work from 1912: Albert Gleizes' *Chartres Cathedral*, spotlighting the initial standoff between futurism and cubism.

IN 1909, BRAQUE'S "LITTLE CUBES" DO NOT AMOUNT TO "CUBISM"

Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O) was painted in 1907 but could only be viewed in the artist's studio. The term "cubism" was invented in 1908 concerning Braque's works but they were rejected in the salons. From 1909 onwards, Braque and Picasso exhibited only with their dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. The *Futurist Manifesto* was published in 1909, making it later than cubism, and yet!

"In 1909, Braque's 'little cubes' did not yet amount to 'cubism'. More time would have to elapse [...] before the term would designate a school, before it would become associated with a first theoretical definition. While they didn't create cubism, Braque's canvases nevertheless marked a major stylistic turning point in the evolution of Parisian painting." (Didier Ottinger, catalogue of the exhibition, "Cubism + Futurism = Cubo-futurism".)

From the entrance of the exhibition, the visitor sees in front of him a neon sign announcing the exhibition of the futurists in Paris in 1912, then turns left, (going back or around?) and enters the first room, hung with 5 Braques, 4 Picassos, 3 Gleizes, 2 Metzingers, 1 Delaunay and 1 Léger.

BRAQUE AND PICASSO: THE BIRTH OF CUBISM

Georges Braque, *The Viaduct at L'Estaque*, [June-July] 1908, Paris

Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 59 cm

Pompidou Centre, Mnam

In 1907, Braque visited the **Cézanne retrospective at the Autumn Salon**. His admiration for the painter's works took him to l'Estaque, where Cézanne had himself painted. He returned from this stay with a series of paintings which he presented to the jury of the Autumn Salon in 1908. The jury of admission was composed of artists who all happened to be the inventors of fauvism. **Matisse** was the chairman, flanked by Marquet and Rouault. Braque's paintings challenged his aesthetics of colour and fusion with nature, the very qualities that made him Paris' leader of contemporary painting. There, what did he see before him? **A limited colour palette and a system of construction based on breaking nature down** into small cubes, cones and spheres according to Cézanne's vision. A critic (Charles Morice) relayed Matisse's words and spoke of Braque's little cubes.

The rejected paintings were shown in November at the Kahnweiler Gallery. It was Braque's first exhibition, with an introduction by Apollinaire. The word "cubism" caught on with other critics, including Louis Vauxcelles.

The motif of the viaduct at l'Estaque inspired Braque to produce three paintings which mark his **work's passage from fauvism to cubism**: the quest for simplification of form, deconstruction of the perspective, colour harmony of ochres and greens, hatched treatment of colour and black outlines of planes.

In this version, unlike the other two, painted from memory in his Paris studio, Braque simplified the curves to create geometrical forms, while combining front and side views, making the volumes palpable, and bringing, in the painter's words, "**the object towards the viewer while keeping its beauty, its concrete flavour**".

Georges Braque, *Large Nude*, 1907-1908

Oil on canvas, 140x100 cm

Pompidou Centre, Mnam

Exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in March 1908, reworked and finished during his stay at l'Estaque in 1908, then rejected at the Autumn Salon in 1908 along with the *Viaduct at l'Estaque*, this work harks back to the discovery of the *Demoiselles of Avignon*, as well as to Cézanne's painting (with its parallel brush strokes, its angular drawing, its palette of blues and browns), and to Matisse's *Blue Nude (Souvenir of Bistra)* (1907). Here, **Braque explores the motif of the female nude just as he did with landscape**, to breathe new life into painting. **The futurists were soon to demand the total elimination of the nude.**

The Nude is one of the great themes of classical painting, but here, with Braque, there is nothing classical about it. There is not an ounce of sentimentality in the representation of the body. Massive and monumental, the body is poised on its right leg, suggesting a rotating movement in the surface of the canvas. In contrast, the face, inspired by *Fang* masks, seems fixed and flat. Black outlines simplify the features as well as the lines of the body, as in the *Demoiselles of Avignon*. **Stillness and movement seek a balance within the surface of the canvas.**

Pablo Picasso, *The Dryad*, 1908

Oil on canvas, 185x108 cm

Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg

Another canvas which marked the birth of cubism was this *Dryad*, or *Nude in the forest*, begun in spring 1908, the start of relations between Picasso and Braque, a moment when

the two painters conceived all the components of painting as **doors to a new freedom**. After his first version, Picasso, who was discovering Braque's works, took up his nude.

The same remarks about movement in a flat space apply: the figure oscillates between a standing and a sitting posture. The massive body comes towards the centre of the canvas, surrounded by trees, abstract planes picked out with thick lines, which balance the composition. Here **for the first time, Picasso uses landscape around a female figure**. This work is also reminiscent of Cézanne's *Bathers*: with its subject, a nude – a *Dryad*, a figure from Greek mythology, protectress of forests and woods –, the attempt to suggest presence by the imbalance of the body and the pyramidal structure of the branches at the top of the painting.

With Picasso, the lesson of African sculpture is not limited to the face. He also derives his *Dryad's* posture, half standing and half sitting, the forms of the extremities of the limbs and the apparitional nature of her presence.

CUBISM FROM 1910-1911

In 1911, the cubists began to exhibit as a group at the Salon des Indépendants and the Autumn Salon, when earned them the name of the **Salon cubists**. As for **Picasso and Braque**, they showed their canvases at the gallery of their dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. In 1910, they entered their so-called "analytical" period, based on fragmentation and work on light, towards a homogeneous, painterly space.

The works presented in this first room are among those which the futurists were to discover during their stay in Paris in September-October.

1912: THE CATHEDRAL, A CONTROVERSIAL THEME

Albert Gleizes, *Chartres Cathedral*, 1912

Oil on canvas, 73.6 x 60.3 cm

Sprengel Museum Hannover

Gleizes' *Cathedral*, dated 1912, the last work presented in this room, symbolises all that stood between cubists and futurists. What went on between the two avant-gardes?

In February 1909 the *Futurist Manifesto* was published, followed a year later by the *Manifesto of the Futurist painters*, proclaiming a clean break with the past. These painters vaunted their own aesthetics by **systematically attacking the values of the cubists**. Their subjects – nudes, still lifes, landscapes, portraits –, their static compositions, their monochrome palette – a palette which belonged to the 17th century, or perhaps Chardin's at best – were, in the eyes of the futurists, the expression of **an art which rejects modernity**.

Cubism's public birth: the Salon des Indépendants, April 1911

In the autumn of 1910, the young cubists, hitherto lacking a group strategy or theoretical writings, decided to fight back, along with some poet friends and critics (Guillaume Apollinaire, André Salmon, Roger Allard...).

In April 1911, they organised their **first group show at the Salon des Indépendants** (room 41), followed by a second in Brussels in June and a third at the **Autumn Salon** (room 8) in October. At the time Apollinaire gave them his unqualified support: they certainly form a **"school"**, he wrote, "Cubism represents the highest in today's French art" (Autumn Salon, October 1911, *Chroniques d'art*, Gallimard, Folio, Essais, pp. 254-255).

In the meantime, emulating the futurists, they began to formulate their principles, **situating cubism in the classical tradition**. They nevertheless had to renounce part of their visual heritage and certain theoretical features, which had already been claimed by the futurists: the **divisionism** of Seurat and Signac and **Henri Bergson's** philosophy which Gleizes and Metzinger regularly quoted in their early texts, seeking a theoretical underpinning of their artistic intuitions.

In "**Cubism and tradition**" (*Paris-Journal*, 16 August 1911), Jean Metzinger defined cubism using a typically Bergsonian phrase: "**Painting already owned space, and now it reigns over time**", in spite of Apollinaire's injunction against all "metaphysical" references. Apollinaire had just announced the birth of a modern style, of a "brand new art" influenced by Picasso.

See the chapter: **The Futurist Manifesto** / The influence of Bergson, a philosophy of Becoming.

Apollinaire and "gothic cubism"

But the futurists were not the only detractors of the cubists. The conservative press called them "fumistes" and "farceurs" (smoke and farce artists). At the House of Deputies speeches were made to warn the nation against the cubist peril and its artists whom they suspected of antinationalism. Stirred up by this "hate" campaign, Apollinaire invented "**gothic cubism**" by way of reply. "Today's art", he wrote in his review *les Soirées de Paris*, "belongs to Gothic art via all that was most truly French in the intervening schools, from Poussin to Ingres, from Delacroix to Manet, from Cézanne to Seurat, from Renoir to Douanier Rousseau [...]" (4 May 1912, *les Soirées de Paris*, pp.114-115). Braque and Picasso stayed aloof from the wrangling.

Gleizes' Cathedral, exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in March 1912, is **the epitome of this "Gothic cubism"**. Its subject – a Cathedral –, its shades of ochres and greens, its monumental composition with interlaced geometric planes go against the futurist *tabula rasa*. **Gleizes refuses to allow the choice of subject to be a yardstick of modernity**. In 1912, the Salons saw increasing numbers of paintings with Gothic cathedrals... Delaunay set up his easel in front of the towers of Laon.

THE FUTURIST MANIFESTO

The second room of the exhibition is given over to futurism's founding text. Alongside the historic page of the *Figaro* of 20 February 1909, some of the original manuscript drafts which preceded its final version are shown, as well as works showing Marinetti's links to French literature, and his first novels published in French.

At the time Marinetti was drawing up his *Manifesto*, he had no thought of creating a new pictorial avant-garde. His programme was primarily a literary programme aimed at changing the assumptions of an age which he considered stuck in the past.

F.T. MARINETTI: CHANGING THE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE AGE

"French in his head and Italian in his heart"

Born in Egypt (in 1876) of Italian parents, Marinetti received an Italo-French education in a school run by French Jesuits in Alexandria. "You might say that he was French in his head

and Italian in his heart", wrote Giovanni Lista (catalogue of the exhibition, "The Italian sources of futurism").

In fact it was not until he was eighteen that he discovered Italy and France (where he came to have his A-levels recognised). His emotional image of Italy was based on the literary culture of his mother, who read to him from Dante's *Divine Comedy* or poems imbued with **the spirit of the Risorgimento**, the political and cultural movement which led to the unification of the peninsula between 1860 and 1870. The idealisation of the past was to contribute to forging national sentiment.

The young Marinetti imagined this mythical Italy from the balcony of the family home which overlooked the **port of Alexandria**, and faced the sea beyond which lay the Italian peninsula. The location was even more loaded with significance since it was where the famous library of antiquity stood before being consumed by fire, "All in all, the place was virtually predestined to give birth to the biblioclast who would found futurism." (G. Lista, *F.T. Marinetti. L'anarchiste du futurisme. Biographie*). The sea was also the setting of a traumatic initiation for the five-year-old child when his father threw "his little body" into it without a life-ring "... forcing to swim to save his life", Marinetti later wrote.

His earliest poems, published in Alexandria, were signed **Hesperus**. *Hesperia* is the ancient Greek name for Italy which means "the land which lies in the direction of the Star of the West".

Their second son's illness brought the Marinetti family back to Milan. The jealousy aroused by his father's success – as a lawyer he had served rich Egyptians – and the conformism of the Milanese bourgeoisie put him into a state of dejection which was deepened by the death of his brother. Italy seemed to him to be a land bending under the weight of its past, **a rotten land**, as he was to write in the *Manifesto*: "[...] **we want to liberate Italy from its gangrene of professors, archeologists, guides and antique dealers**".

In Milan, through the bilingual review *Anthologie-revue* which he worked with from 1898, he kept up with developments in French poetry (Francis Jammes, Paul Fort, Laurent Tailhade...) and the debates which tied the **free verse** revolution to anarchist theories.

France, the land of modernity

For Marinetti, France was the land of modernity, and above all, the land of revolutionary fervour. And it was in Paris, which he had visited regularly since 1894 that he decided to start out as a writer. Through the intermediary of poets published in the Milanese review, he joined literary circles with **anarchist connections**. From them he drew his **religion of Becoming** and learned the use of leaflets, posters, manifestos, loose sheets, written on coloured paper with expressive typesetting.

His work with the reviews *la Vogue*, *la Plume*, *la Revue blanche* made him intimate with the work of the great poets of the time, such as Emile Verhaeren and Walt Whitman, who defended the modern city and the mechanical world, the machine.

His collection of poems, ***La Conquête des étoiles***, written in French, was published in Paris in 1902, the year his mother died. It was a symbolist epic describing a titanic combat with the armies of the sea setting out to conquer the stars. The work ends with **the death of the "star of Italy"**. The same theme of challenging the stars concludes the *Futurist Manifesto*. **"Standing on the peak of the world, once again we send out a challenge to the stars!"** (*Futurist Manifesto*, last verse.)

Another aspect of his personality is expressed in ***Destruction / Poème lyrique***, 1904, written in French, in which the gloom and loneliness of city life in the industrial civilisation lead a poet in search of the absolute towards **an aesthetic of destruction**. The theme of the doppelgänger appears in the form of a dialogue between the poet and his soul.

Le Roi Bombance and the review *Poesia*

On the day after the 1904 general strike organised in Italy, Marinetti completed *le Roi Bombance* and wrote to a Parisian correspondent: "The work was finished during the general strike in Milan. Unremittingly pessimist about the insurmountable imbecility of the people and the savagery of human nature, I make a burlesque out of the tragic and fatal victory of idealistic individualism over the coarse masses. In a word, I end with the break-up of socialism, the glory of anarchy and a complete mockery of smooth talkers, *reformists* and other 'cook's boys of Universal Happiness'" (quoted by G. Lista, in his biography).

The work's boldness is in associating symbolist writing with the current political situation. Having grabbed power, the revolutionaries have no food and have to eat the corpse of the king, who thereby comes back to life, thus showing the vanity of all revolutions. In this burlesque drama in which **Death feeds on Life**, the poet himself also realises that he is "short-selling the ideal". The only alternative is Becoming: **"Becoming, that is the only religion... When you regret something ... you are already carrying the seeds of death inside you."**

One of the sources of *Le Roi Bombance* was Alfred Jarry.

In 1905, Marinetti wrote his **first poems on the automobile** and launched his review *Poesia*. The program of the review was summed up in the leaflet put out when it was launched: **"Idealists, workers in thought, unite to demonstrate how inspiration and genius walk hand in hand with the progress of the machine, of aircraft, of industry, commerce, sciences, and electricity"**.

In 1909, Marinetti published an enquiry into **free verse** in *Poesia* – an enquiry which was to lead him to new literary forms using syntax and punctuation to reflect the agitation of modern life (*Les Mots en liberté*) and which inspired Apollinaire in his *Calligrammes*. Open to poets and writers from all over Europe, *Poesia* allowed him build up contacts which would later help him spread his *Manifesto*.

The last link worthy of mention before reading the founding text of futurism is his stage play *Les Poupées électriques*, written in 1905 and published in 1909, which interweaves the theme of being haunted by the past, in the form of flashbacks which lead his protagonist to suicide, with the idea of splitting in two and the machine which fascinates and unsettles – the couple in the play double up in the form of two robots. The machine takes on different aspects including that of conductor of **energy which replaces physical vitality with electricity**.

THE LAUNCH OF THE *MANIFESTO*: ORCHESTRATED INTERNATIONALLY

On 20 February 1909 the front page of the *Figaro* carried the *Futurist Manifesto*. Speed, the destruction of museums and libraries, the beauty of the modern world and machines, all Marinetti is there. His primary target was Italian society and its culture which he judged to be suffocating under the weight of its past.

Front page of the *Figaro*, 20 February 1909

Futurist Manifesto, carried on the front page of the *Figaro* on 20 February 1909

61.5 x 44 cm

Private collection

In mid-January, the text was sent to his friends in the form of a **leaflet written in blue** asking them to subscribe to the futurist programme, with copies sent to the Italian and then to the world's press. The *Manifesto* published in the *Figaro* bears a **prologue** in addition, in which Marinetti recounts the circumstances leading up to its launch: an accident he had while

driving his 5 HP motor. In order to avoid two cyclists, his car left the road, tipping him into a muddy canal. Trapped under his automobile, he felt his death was imminent. And it was his deliverance from the "**maternal ditch half full of muddy water**", which led him to dictate his will "**to all living men on Earth**". The accident, with its happy outcome, wrote Giovanni Lista, brought back to him again the anxiety felt when his father had thrown him into the water to force him to swim, "a compulsive flashback to the repressed memory which Freud calls 'abreaction'".

The newspaper's editors were careful to introduce the text with a warning to readers, and it was thanks to his father, who had shares in the paper, that it was published.

Shortly afterwards, the *Manifesto* was republished in the form of a leaflet written in black, accompanied by the prologue. He then gave lectures in London, Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and Berlin. The review *Poesia* published the complete text in French and Italian, and the walls of Milan were hung with posters of the *Manifesto* one metre high and three metres wide announcing futurism in fiery red characters. **Marinetti thus orchestrated the birth of his movement.**

Futurism, "the new formula of Action-art"

The *Manifesto* itself contained **an eleven point program** of calls to action, followed by a direct call for cultural revolution: "**And set fire to the shelves of libraries! Divert the canal beds to flood the cellars of the museums! Oh! Let those glorious canvases drift away on the water! Get to your picks and hammers! ... Undermine the foundations of the venerable cities!**"

How did he come up with the word futurism? He recounts the epic trance-like moment: "On 11 October 1908, after working six years in my international review *Poesia* in order to liberate the Italian lyric genius from its traditional and mercantile chains and save it from imminent death, I suddenly felt that articles, poems and polemics were no longer enough. [...] My friends and I [...] looked for the key word. I hesitated for a moment between the words **dynamism and futurism**. My Italian blood leapt higher when my lips formed the word **futurism** aloud. It was the new formula for Action-art, and a law of mental hygiene." (Text from 1915, quoted by Giovanni Lista, in his biography, p. 77.)

By professing a clean break with the past, the anarchist Utopia was a world self-managed by the working class. For Marinetti (cf. *le Roi Bombance*), the Utopia was already just a vain hope. **The future is what the life force, speed and progress are leading us towards. Artists are the forerunners, in the sense that they are rushing towards an unknown future.** Abolishing romanticism and naturalism – two values which sap the capacity for action – the modern beauty of the machine opens the way to the march of civilisation and progress.

THE INFLUENCE OF BERGSON. A PHILOSOPHY OF BECOMING

While futurism owed a lot to the Italian context, the rejection of the immutability of the past also has origins elsewhere. Didier Ottinger wrote: "Marinetti borrowed from Henri Bergson his vitalist poetics, his conception of a self in perpetual becoming, and his lyricism culminating in a dream of cosmic fusion."

Henri Bergson was in fact the great man of the age. Translated into various languages including Italian, his courses at the Collège de France were true "happenings" where the cream of society pressed into the packed amphitheatre. Bergson called into question the classical order of ideas, adopting a **conception of form and values based on evolution, movement, and metamorphoses**. His philosophy seemed to provide answers to the

becoming of a new man, faced with the changes in society at the beginning of the 20th century.

Not only Marinetti and, as we shall see later, the futurist painters – but also the cubists – derived some of their concepts from the philosopher's thinking. But it was that much harder for Marinetti to "break free" from them, exposed as he was, both in Milan and in Paris, to both artistic and anarchist circles which adhered to his ideas.

For him, the poet is the one who incarnates the "**vital force**" better than the others; the same vital force which is the unique origin of life in Bergson's definition of the creator's role. His manifesto begins with the exaltation of **movement** and ends with a declaration **against intellectualism** in favour of **intuition**: "We are well aware of what our fine false intelligence tells us ...", a choice which emanates from this philosophy. He also derives the sources of his **action-art** from Bergson's definition of action with an indeterminate element.

The Bergsonian principles which the futurist painters were to apply in their works, apart from those already mentioned, are those of **duration** and the representation of the world shaped by **memory** (*Matière et mémoire*, 1905), of **dynamism** and **simultaneity** which were to lead them to invent a system of representation incorporating inputs from several senses.

One of the futurists' great contributions was to be the introduction of the idea of duration into the painted space.

JEFF MILLS, MUSICIAN OF THE FUTURE

In connection with the question of representing the future, the exhibition offers a **sight and sound installation** by the artist Jeff Mills. The spectator is plunged into a gigantic mechanical beehive made of videos piling up at breakneck speed, reminiscent of the wheels of the machines celebrated and praised by the futurists. The installation includes a sound creation specially composed by Jeff Mills, inspired by noise music.

Jeff Mills comes from Detroit and is considered one of the most brilliant DJs and producers of electronic music in the world. For over ten years, Mills has had multiple collaborations in the field of contemporary art and experimental performance: a great lover of the cinema, he works on the fusion between image and sound and delves into the world of psychology, science-fiction and futurism.

THE 1912 FUTURIST PAINTERS EXHIBITION, BERNHEIM-JEUNE GALLERY, IN PARIS

This section reconstructs the historic Paris exhibition of Italian painters in February 1912. It brings together most of the thirty-four paintings exhibited in it (including masterpieces displayed in the permanent futurism room at New York's MoMA). They are dominated by the themes characteristic of futurism: the modern city with its electric lighting, dance, the movement of crowds, riots ...

APRIL-MAY 1910, THE *FUTURIST PAINTERS MANIFESTO*

In 1910 three painters from Milan, **Umberto Boccioni**, **Carlo Carrà**, **Luigi Russolo**, as well as **Giacomo Balla** from Rome and **Gino Severini** who had lived in Paris since 1906, joined

the futurist cause. The *Futurist Painters manifesto* appeared in leaflet form on 11 April and was published on 18 May in *Coemedìa*. Boccioni was mainly responsible for drafting it. These artists were all influenced by symbolism, divisionism and the pure colours of Seurat and Signac. The tone was that of **the vital force**, and spontaneity. Their declarations (immersion in the universal dynamism, the colour heritage of the divisionists) serve to distance them from the cubists (stability, formal analysis and monochrome palette).

"The movement that we want to reproduce on the canvas will no longer be a fixed instant of the universal dynamism. It will simply be the dynamic sensation itself. For everything is in motion, everything runs, everything is in rapid transformation."

"Divisionism, for the modern painter, should be an innate complementarity."

"... our art is intoxicated with spontaneity and power."

The Futurist Painters manifesto

(Extracts, in Giovanni Lista, *Futurism. Manifestos, proclamations, documents*, p. 163.)

First futurist exhibitions in Milan, 1910-1911

The futurists organised an exhibition in March-April 1910, "a luminous event", they wrote in their *Manifesto*, adding: "That's it! The futurists revolutionise Italy". The following year, in June, their first large exhibition brought together works by Boccioni (including *the Laugh*), Carrà, Russolo, to which they invited **Ardengo Soffici**, an Italian critic and painter living in Paris. Soffici was one of the few artists to have been present at the birth of the *Demoiselles of Avignon* in Picasso's studio. He dismissed their works as "**foolish and ugly braggadocio**", and recommended that the young agitators **inform themselves on the developments of cubism**.

In September 1911, they were received by **Gino Severini** who took them to see Picasso and Braque, to the Kahnweiler gallery, to the Autumn Salon (where Gleizes, Metzinger, Léger, Le Fauconnier and Delaunay were showing), and introduced them to Guillaume Apollinaire. The first room of the exhibition displays what they saw then (see the chapter on **Cubism**).

During their stay in Paris, they made an appointment with **Félix Fénéon**, director of the Bernheim-Jeune gallery. A former anarchist militant and theorist of French post-impressionism (Seurat and Signac), Fénéon gave them a friendly reception.

5 FEBRUARY 1912: NEON LETTERS LIGHTING UP THE NIGHT BOCCIONI – CARRÀ – RUSSOLO – SEVERINI

On the night of the opening, on 5 February 1912, neon letters lit up the night in the capital: Bernheim Gallery – Exhibition of futurist painters – Boccioni – Carrà – Russolo – Severini. Despite of the fury of the critics, the event was full until 24 February.

Crowded balls, cafés, wide boulevards, evenings at the theatre, railway stations and revolts are the main themes of the works on show: **subjects inspired by the modern city**. Their works, according to their catalogue, convey not only the soul of the beholder, but also the energy of what they are looking at. To reflect this **simultaneity**, they appeal to all the senses. This "**polyphony**" of the senses gave rise to some very fragmented paintings – which seriously questioned the cardinal values of cubist painting.

The exhibition created a scandal but internationally, it was the **start of the spread of futurist painting's influence**. It would later be presented in London, Berlin, Brussels, and then in most of the large European capitals.

Umberto Boccioni, *La Risata*, 1911

[The Laugh] Oil on canvas, 110.2 x 145.4 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The Laugh represents a woman bursting into laughter in a café. The reference to Bergson is evident in the title. Here the painter is interested in the propagation of the laugh in this medium which **immerses the individual in a world of movement and sensations which involve all the senses**.

Lines propagating the laugh radiate outwards from the woman's face and crystallise into geometric shapes. In the middle of the canvas, in the foreground of the scene, the spectator's place is taken by a yellow ostrich feather stuck in a hat, and it conveys the **nature and the intensity of the laugh**: an energy which takes up the space more than any other concrete reality.

Boccioni is also interested here in the breaking down of forms under the effect of **the electric lighting**. Following in the ideas of Marinetti's tract *Tuons le clair de lune* (*Let us kill moonlight* - 1909), the painter replaces the romantic milky glow of the moon with the electric light, symbol of modernity.

The work was damaged at its first public exhibition in 1911, and was reworked by the painter. Opinions are divided on whether this happened before or after it passed through Paris, in September-October 1911. In the catalogue of the exhibition presented in London (March 1912), Boccioni described his work: "This scene takes place around a table in a restaurant with a gay atmosphere. The figures are studied from all sides, the objects in front and behind should all be visible, since they are all present in the painter's memory." Does this all-inclusive approach stem from the cubist influence or from Bergson? Does it constitute a **multiplication of angles of view** or does it represent **memory and "duration" in the work?**

Painted when the painter renounced divisionism, the work nevertheless demonstrates his acquired skills, as announced in the *Futurist Painters manifesto*: "Divisionism, for the modern painter, must be an innate complementarity". In the painting we see the **simultaneous** appearance of primary colours and their complementary colours, greens, violets, oranges where the "facets" of the laugh crystallise.

Carlo Carrà, *I Funerali dell'anarchico Galli*, 1910-1911

[The Funeral of Galli the Anarchist]

Oil on canvas, 198.7 x 259.1 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The Funeral of Galli the Anarchist is also a pure manifesto of futurist painting. Its subject was a tragic episode of the 1904 great strike in Italy, the burial of the anarchist Galli, assassinated during a workers' demonstration. But the tragic nature of the episode was not so much the man's death, but the way the funeral procession, led by anarchists in a final homage to Galli from the revolutionaries and the mass of workers, was put down by a mounted troop. **A death within a death** which harks back to the subject of Marinetti's work, *le Roi Bombance*.

The work was started six years after the event, using sketches made from memory, by the painter, who sympathised with the anarchist theories since his first stay in Paris, when he

dreamt of the "inevitable transformations of human society, and free love". (C. Carrà, *L'Eclat des choses ordinaires*, pp.45-46.)

The tonality of the work is in a palette of earth colours, a striped hell of reds, yellows and greens. The dominant brown is that of the **horses**, prime **conductors of energy in this confrontation between anarchists and the forces of repression**.

A web of lines criss-crosses the painting in bundles "corresponding to all the forces in conflict [...] These *force-lines* are intended to envelop and draw in the spectator and oblige him somehow to struggle alongside the figures in the canvas" (catalogue of the futurist exhibition, "From the exhibitors to the public").

In the upper part of the canvas, striated arabesques of vibrations resonate with the sounds of the confrontation, while the lances and banners take us inevitably back to the horses, banners and lances of the soldiers in **Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano***.

Carrà wrote in his Manifesto *La peinture des sons, bruits et odeurs* (*The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells* - August 1913): **"Each succession of sounds, noises and smells traces in the mind an arabesque of forms and colours. [...] This vertiginous bubbling of visual and luminous incarnations of sounds, noises and smells was partly expressed in my *Funeral of Galli the Anarchist* and *Les Cahots de fiacre*; and by Boccioni in *Les Etats d'âme* and *Les Forces d'une rue*; by Russolo in *La Révolte* and by Severini in *Le pan-pan*, paintings which sparked off violent discussions at our first exhibition in Paris"**.

Luigi Russolo, *La Rivolta*, 1911 [The revolt]

Oil on canvas, 150.8 x 230.7 cm

Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, La Haye

Unlike the *Funeral of Galli the Anarchist*, *La Révolte* is not a record of particular event. It illustrates "the collision of two forces, that of the revolutionary element formed from enthusiasm and red lyricism against the force of inertia and reactionary resistance of tradition" (catalogue of the exhibition of futurist painters in London, The Sackville Gallery, March 1912.)

The red mass, of these **"rouges, rouououououoges, très rououououoges qui criiiiiient"** ("red, re-e-e-e-e-e-d, very re-e-e-e-e-ed, who are screaming" C. Carrà, *La peinture des sons, bruits et odeurs*) represents **the demonstrators**, whose aura reverberates in space in the form of arrows. The yellow mass in front of them reinforces **the sensation of penetrating** the city. In blue, we see the houses of the bourgeoisie which the revolutionaries lean over and crush.

With its striking geometry, its dynamism and its violent juxtapositions of colours, the painting resonates with **the tumult of revolt**. It also echoes the "huge crowds agitated by work, pleasure or revolt; the multicoloured and polyphonic waves of revolutions in the modern capitals", evoked by Marinetti in his founding *Manifesto*.

In 1913, leaving aside painting, Russolo published his Manifesto *L'Art des bruits (Art of noises)*. His works were to revolutionise musical tradition by using natural noises and modern cacophonies as artistic material.

Gino Severini, *La Danse du "pan-pan" au Monico*, 1909-1911/1959-1960

[The pan-pan Dance at the Monico club]

Oil on canvas, 280 x 400 cm

Pompidou Centre, Mnam

Having lived in Paris since 1906, Severini was immersed in a milieu which somewhat insulated him from the violence of the Italian futurists, which was above all a reaction to the suffocating context of Italian conservatism. He had already become **somewhat French** and what interested him was the life of the cabarets, and popular dances. With his *Danse du "pan pan"*, he joins the tradition of Toulouse-Lautrec, Renoir, Manet or Seurat (*la Grande Jatte*). His painting is nonetheless futurist because **it subscribes to the idea of dynamism and movement**.

Preparatory drawings made in the famous Monico cabaret, in which he captured the dancers, the spectators, the decor, were used in composing this fresco of 2.80 x 4 metres with its exuberant colours. While the painter has foregone the divisionist technique, he has retained the post-impressionist lesson of juxtaposing primary colours (red and yellow) and their complementary (green), in the form of schematised and swirling facets. This procedure earned the work the distinction of being compared to an "enormous puzzle" or a kaleidoscope.

Carrà counts the Severini's *Le pan pan* among the works "portraying noises and smells" in his Manifesto *La peinture des sons, bruits et odeurs*. The painter himself was to describe it "as a **purely musical canvas**" (in a letter from Severini to Soffici, 27 September 1913). *La Danse du "pan-pan" au Monico* had a relatively friendly reception from critics and public. Guillaume Apollinaire spoke of it as "the most important work painted by a futurist brush" (*The Intransigent*, 7 February 1912, *Chroniques sur l'art*, p.272). Destroyed probably during the war, the canvas was repainted by Severini from a postcard in 1959-1960.

"FROM THE EXHIBITORS TO THE PUBLIC": CUBISM IS "MASKED ACADEMICISM"

In the catalogue of the exhibition, under the title "From the exhibitors to the public", the futurist painters wrote: "**They strive to paint what is immobile, frozen and all nature's static states**", "**cubism is a sort of 'masked academicism'**".

Apollinaire's reply: "The futurists [...] have almost no painterly concerns. [...] They are first and foremost concerned with the **subject**. They want to paint **moods** [...]. It is the most dangerous form of painting imaginable". (*Le Petit Bleu*, 9 February 1912, *Les Chroniques d'art*, p.277.) But in the same article he adds: "However, the exhibition of the futurist painters will teach our young painters to be a bit more daring than they have been up to now".

The cubists rallied once more. Gleizes and Metzinger undertook the writing of the work *Du Cubisme (On Cubism)*. Léger, Delaunay, Metzinger, Gleizes, Duchamp and František Kupka, but also Severini, were to meet regularly on Sundays in Jacques Villon's studio on the heights of Puteaux.

FÉLIX DEL MARLE AND VALENTINE DE SAINT-POINT

In Paris, the poetess Valentine de Saint-Point and the painter Félix Del Marle were the only ones to rally unreservedly to the cause of futurism. Each of them contributed a manifesto, as a sort of entrance exam before plunging headlong into the *tabula rasa*.

VALENTINE DE SAINT-POINT

Valentine de Saint-Point's *Futurist Woman's Manifesto* (March 1912) could have been a feminist text (if she had not asserted: "Feminism is a political error"), claiming equality between men and women, the element of masculinity and femininity in each sex, with Nietzschean fervour: **"Let us stop denying desire", "Women, become once more sublimely unfair, like all the forces of nature! [...] Let men be liberated from the family to pursue his life of daring and conquest, insofar as he has the physical strength [...]"**.

In her *Manifeste futuriste de la Luxure (Futurist Manifesto of Lust* - January 1913), published simultaneously in French and Italian, she goes overboard with incitements to free up one's energy, going beyond all sentiment: **"Lust is the quest of the flesh for the unknown, just as intellectualism is the mind's quest"**.

FÉLIX DEL MARLE

For Félix Del Marle, all that was needed was to destroy Montmartre, the "old romantic leper". The *Futurist Manifesto against Montmartre* (July 1913) also had its calls to arms: **"MAKE WAY FOR THE FUTURIST PICK!!! Montmartre has had its day. It will cease being the rotten brain crowned with a clerical skullcap, weighing on Paris as it awakes to the inspiration of the future"**.

Félix Del Marle, *Le Port*, 1913-14

Oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm

Musée des Beaux-arts de Valenciennes

At the beginning of 1913, Félix Del Marle met Severini who introduced him to futurist painting. As Didier Ottinger explained in the catalogue *"Le Port*, begun during the winter of 1913-1914, illustrates the complexity, the tight binding of relations between cubism and futurism. The canvas harks back to Picasso's *Souvenir du Havre*, which was in turn conceived as a reply to a painting by Severini, *Souvenirs de voyage*, for which the Italian painter had been inspired by one of Bergson's readings."

On each side of a central axis, two hulls of a ship fill the centre of the canvas, **two open ellipses** creating a dynamic tension – the "spectator's place in the centre of the canvas" according to the *Futurist Painters manifesto*. One of the hulls, bearing the word NIAGARA seems to be arriving in port, and simultaneously leads the eye to read the word NEW YORK (situated at bottom left of the canvas), the ship's home port. The other hull is already moored to the quay.

The solid blacks and ochres of the hulls contrast with the environment; cranes, hangars, details of the quays: a plethora of brushstrokes and coloured lines which evoke the life of the port with its noises, colours and smells. The intrusion of words into this collection of signs and the spatial layering recall techniques used by Braque and Picasso. The painter has undertaken a **synthesis between cubism and futurism**.

The work introduces the next room of this exhibition: "Hybridations".

HYBRIDATIONS: DIALOGUE BETWEEN CUBISM AND FUTURISM

The standoff phase between futurist and cubist values soon gave way to that of hybridation. The "Salon cubists" (Robert Delaunay, Fernand Léger, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Jacques Villon...) adopted a brighter and more colourful palette. They drew their subjects from popular spectacles such as sport or dance.

The futurist painters adopted a duller palette and composed subjects which hitherto seemed to be the province of the cubist painters (Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini, Ardengo Soffici).

FUTURISM → CUBISM

SALON DES INDÉPENDANTS & AUTUMN SALON 1912 ROBERT DELAUNAY / FERNAND LÉGER

Delaunay's *Ville de Paris* and Léger's *La Noce*, presented at the Salon des Indépendants in March 1912, were a high point in the both painters' development. Leaving behind analytic cubism, they had discovered a new way, drawing notably on futurist influences.

Looked at in the light of the relations between futurism and cubism, these works reveal the range of their intentions: humour, the quest for the new, assimilation of influences, a creative demonstration which became the obvious.

Robert Delaunay, *La Ville de Paris (The City of Paris)*, 1910-1912

Oil on canvas, 267 x 406 cm
Pompidou Centre, Mnam

Apollinaire wrote about the Salon des Indépendants in his *Chroniques*: "This work titled *The City of Paris* is from a young painter who up to now had exhibited works which were certainly interesting, but incomplete [...] *The City of Paris* is a canvas in which all the effort of painting since possibly the great Italians is concentrated." (Le Petit Bleu, 20 March 1912, *Chroniques d'art*, pp.297-298). In the catalogue of the Salon des Indépendants in Brussels, in June 1911, he had called for a return to the "vast subject". This painting answered the call with a large "classical" format canvas – cubist paintings were, apart from the *Demoiselles of Avignon*, generally small format – in which the painter retraces the **stages of his passage through analytic cubism**.

While the three Graces placed in the centre of the composition are **nudes**, and furthermore nudes inspired by a **Pompeian fresco** – a retort to the futurists and their hatred of the nude and of archaeology – the painter was not clearly opposed to them, and even thought, as he wrote to his friend Sam Halpert (February 1912): **"What they say is good"**.

Like Boccioni with his triptych *Les Etats d'âme (Moods)*, he divided his composition into three parts. The left part, with its quotes from the painter's previous canvases of the city, dominated by an **orthogonal arrangement** stabilised by the horizontal line of the bridge, before which flutters a small red white and blue flag, a homage to Douanier Rousseau. In the centre, the three Graces impose their **verticality**, in line with the famous cubist stability. But this verticality is broken up on the right side by the angular fragments of the tower, in the style of the futurist **compenetration of planes** – the self-citation of the Eiffel tower serving as a reminder that he was the first to deal with this modern subject.

Marie-Laure Bernadac wrote: "The accelerated unrolling which takes place as the eye surveys the canvas, using a "cinematic" technique, evokes solutions explored by the futurists. [...] the synthesis of mental images which evoke the past, the present and the future of the city, is undoubtedly a reference to Umberto Boccioni's attempts to reflect a 'simultaneity of ambiance' in his *Etats d'âme*" (catalogue of the exhibition).

La Ville de Paris also contains early signs of a new manner of painting which was soon to lead Delaunay towards "pure painting". The cubist "broken lines" have disappeared and been replaced by the **deconstruction/reconstruction of form through colour**. The three parts of the composition are unified by **transparent coloured planes**. Delaunay calls this method of composition by light and colour "**new realism**". He wrote about *the City*: "transition towards constructive colour, a halfway state between the destructive and the constructive".

Fernand Léger, *La Noce (The Wedding)*, 1911-1912

Oil on canvas, 257 x 206 cm
Pompidou Centre, Mnam

His choice of **subject** – a wedding, an animated scene like those so dear to the futurists –, the **dynamism of its composition** – a series of acute angles radiating outwards from zigzagging axes – and the **appearance of colour**, give one reason to think that for Léger also, "what the futurists say is good".

A blend of figurative and abstract elements, the subject here receives an original treatment. Léger himself indicated that he was "determined not to make the canvas sentimental (in opposition to the chosen theme)", and **here, eclipses the subject** – which nonetheless remains present – to the point that Apollinaire wrote: "Léger's canvas belongs to pure painting. No subject, lots of talent." (Le Petit Bleu, 20 March 1912, *Chroniques d'art*, p.299.)

There are numerous **figurative elements**: houses around a steeple, the bride and groom and their guests huddled in the centre of the composition, the sensation of a jostling crowd with some "tubist" arms emerging and some congratulatory hands. On the right of the canvas, a row of trees suggests the obligatory passage by which the guests arrived at the wedding. All in all it is the illustration of **an atmosphere, simultaneity and duration**, ideas dear to the futurists.

The abstract elements, of imposing geometric forms in white and ochre – hues from the cubist palette and cloudy forms of the futurists – contrast with crumbling surfaces and the broken lines of the crowd and the landscape, the famous contrasts which Léger used for his "**pictorial realism**".

This dynamic meshing seems to echo the introductory text of the futurist exhibition catalogue which appeals to "[...] horizontal lines, fugitive, rapid and staggered which cut brutally across faces with drowned profiles and crumbling ribbons of bouncing countryside".

**ALBERT GLEIZES / JEAN METZINGER
DU CUBISME, 1912, A COUNTER "MANIFESTO"**

Jean Metzinger, Study for "*Le Cycliste*", 1911

(Front side of an untitled drawing)
Pencil and charcoal crayon on beige paper, 38 x 26 cm
Pompidou Centre, Mnam

Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger were also part of this convergence of cubist evolution, though in a more restrained way. Brighter palettes, "modern" subjects (sport and dance). Jean Metzinger produced such paintings as *The Cyclist* or *Dancer in a café*, and Gleizes painted *The Footballers*, 1912-1913, who nevertheless look more like **odd knights in armour**.

Du Cubisme (On cubism - October 1912)

Begun at the end of 1911, *Du Cubisme* was to contribute, alongside the group's exhibitions, to giving the movement its public identity. This first theoretical work was published a year later.

Realism as the foundation of cubism. In order to set itself apart from the futurists and distance itself from any metaphysics – Bergson's philosophy – Gleizes and Metzinger anchored cubism in that **realism** which began with Courbet and continued to Cézanne via the impressionists. A two-layer realism since the impressionist legacy was also claimed by the futurists. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between "**superficial realism**" (Courbet and the blurred forms of the impressionists) and "**deep realism**" (that of Cézanne, with his rigorous geometrical reconstructions of the motif).

The subject: a pretext. "The beauty of a work resides expressly in the work and not in what is nothing more than a pretext." This approach to the subject, according to them, is what distinguishes cubism from futurism at a deep level. In riposte to the futurists, they held up Manet, a "precursor" of modern art, as the one who had "reduced the value of the anecdote to the point of painting anything at all". (p.39).

The "murky grey" of post-impressionism. A whole chapter is given over to the post-impressionists' "art of colour". They acknowledged it as a "bold and necessary experiment", but based on a **contradiction**: "Apart from the prism, whether we mean an optical mix or a mix on the palette, the sum of the complementary colours gives a murky grey, and not a bright white. The contradiction is arresting." They go on to explain that the problem has been bypassed by the cubists, with their way of seeing **light**: "According to them, to cast light is to reveal; to colour is to specify the mode of revelation. They call a thing luminous when it impinges on the mind" (pp.55-57).

Cubism and non-Euclidian geometries: the 4th dimension. Eschewing Bergsonism, they sought their justification in the latest advances in mathematics, as laid out in **Henri Poincaré's** work, *La Science et l'hypothèse (Science and the hypothesis - 1902)*: "If one wished to map the painter's space to some kind of geometry, one would have to refer to non-Euclidian scholars [...]" (p.49).

The cubists challenged representation and perspective in order to **transcend the illusion of sensory perception**, the outward appearance of the motif. By showing the object under its different aspects, real and imagined, their declared references become multidimensional spaces and non-Euclidian geometries, with the 4th dimension which for a time had been "Bergsonian", interpreted as the introduction of duration into the space of the painting (Jean Metzinger, see the chapter: **Cubism** / The Cathedral, a controversial theme.)

The question of dynamism: a new outlook

Some months later, in February 1913, the ever zealous Gleizes published "**Cubism and Tradition**" in a new review called *Montjoie!* – a title borrowed from the war cry of the Capetian knights who came to seize the banner of Saint Louis in the Cathedral of Saint-Denis... Which is where he got **the knights** whose features he used for his painting **The Footballers!**

He reconstructed a genealogy of French art, from François Clouet to Cézanne, via Philippe de Champaigne, the brothers Le Nain and Chardin, "artists who nearly all share the common trait of having reacted to Italian influence" (Didier Ottinger).

For the moment, Cubists and futurists focussed on a new bone of contention: who should get the credit for the idea of **dynamism**. In this article Gleizes offers his own definition:

"dynamism is born from the subtle relations of objects to objects", while making **Cézanne** one of its forerunners. (See the chapter **Cubo-futurism**, this is also what Malevitch says.)

CUBISM → FUTURISM

UMBERTO BOCCIONI / GINO SEVERINI / GIACOMO BALLA

In 1912 Boccioni – the "prince of the futurists", according to Duchamp, started writing *Dynamisme plastique. Peinture et sculpture futuristes*, a work which G. Lista considers deserving of a place "beside the most important texts on art left to us by the avant-gardes of the first half of the century". (Umberto Boccioni, *Dynamisme plastique. Peinture et sculpture futuristes*, 1914. Preface by Giovanni Lista. Published by L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 1975.)

An early cubo-futurist synthesis. In his introduction he states his wish to offer an explanation of some poorly understood futurist statements. Above all he states the desire to elucidate the difference between futurism and cubism, to anchor futurism in **impressionism**, and prove the futurist origin of the principles of **dynamism** and **simultaneism**. He chooses Léger as an illustration of dynamism, and Delaunay for simultaneism. But one can detect a wish to be more conciliatory towards the cubists – especially with Picasso – when he imagines the beginnings of a cubo-futurist synthesis: "We wanted complementarity of form and colour. We therefore performed a synthesis of the analyses of colour [divisionism of Seurat, Signac and Cross] and analyses of form [divisionism of Picasso and Braque]" (p.83).

Dynamism, is: "object + medium". The demonstration centres on **impressionism** which was a first step towards dynamism: "Where the impressionists were interested in light and colour, by giving forms as dynamic sketches, it is up to us now to [...] create [...] a form definitively linked to colour" (p.50).

This new synthesis of form and colour finds the source of its renewal in **the life of matter**. Matter is merely the effect of a **double movement**: the **absolute** movement of the object ("its particular characteristic movement") and its **relative** movement ("the transformations which the object undergoes in its displacements relative to the medium"). Dynamism is: "object + medium", that is the combination of both movements and the integration of duration, which explains why speed and machines play an essential role here. The simple cubist breakdown of forms of an object is therefore not an expression of dynamism.

The ideas of compenetration of planes and of force lines are visual means of translating the dynamism of "object + medium". This architecture of the canvas has no pre-ordained rules. It is born from **visual intuition**, "the act by which the artist fuses with the object to experience its characteristic movement". (p.86).

The visual translation of the dynamism of "object + medium" by the intuition is what he calls **Moods**. So the idea should not be taken in the sentimental sense.

Simultaneity represents the set of all these data.

(See the chapter **The Futurist Manifesto** / Bergson, a philosophy of Becoming.)

Umberto Boccioni, *Costruzione orizzontale (volumi orizzontali)*, 1912

[Horizontal Construction or Horizontal Volumes]

Oil on canvas, 95 x 95.5 cm

Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Pinakothek der Modern, Munich

The last painting in a series of three works on the same theme, *Horizontal Construction* stands apart from the two others (*The Street enters the House*, 1911 and *Matter*, 1912) with its astonishingly traditional figuration. The **subject**, in the centre of the composition, an old lady posing seated on a balcony with her hands crossed on her lap; the **palette**, dull blues

and ochres; the **geometric treatment of the forms**, notably in the upper half of the canvas, seem to pay tribute to **cubism**.

Preparatory sketches show that he hesitated whether to depict his mother in profile or full face. Boccioni seems to have set himself a set of constraints in order to better fulfill futurist principles: **the compenetration of planes**, the fusion of the figure with its environment. Head and body form an architecture of vibrant, spiraling surfaces, overlaying each other to the point of merging with the balustrade which rises halfway up the canvas to the left, the buildings and the road in the background. **The artist's mother is the heart of the vibratory structure** which unifies all the elements of the canvas.

Gino Severini, *Still life with newspaper* Lacerba, 1913

Indian ink, pencil, charcoal crayon, gouache and chalk on paper, 50 x 68 cm

National Contemporary Art Collection, Ministry of culture and communication, Paris

In this collage Gino Severini takes up the technique invented by Picasso and Braque in the spring of 1912, **glued paper**, with its happy feeling of experimentation. Each form, each piece of "matter" plays the part of plane and line, tone and rhythm in **the game of compenetration**, making a rich accumulation of **visual** and **tactile sensations**: the motif of the wood of the table, the transparency of the glass, the corrugated thickness of the cardboard. To the left, as in the cubist collages, appears part of the title of the review *Lacerba*, a futurist review with contributions from Boccioni, Marinetti, Carrà... but which is also open to French painters and writers. There too, hybridations, were taking place.

From 1916 onwards, Severini split away from the futurist movement to join Picasso, Braque, Gris, Léger, Laurens and Metzinger with Léonce Rosenberg who would organise an exhibition of *the Modern Effort* in his gallery in 1918.

Giacomo Balla, *Bambina che corre sul balcone*, 1912

[Girl running on a balcony]

Oil on canvas, 125 x 125 cm

Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan. Collection Grassi, Milano

Balla, one of the five signatories of the *Futurist Painters manifesto*, had not exhibited at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery in February 1912. Boccioni – who with Severini had been his student at the Rome Fine Arts Academy – had judged that his former teacher's conversion to futurism was not yet sufficiently clear. A year later, Boccioni wrote to Severini: "Balla has astounded us, not content to make a futurist campaign which I leave to your imagination, he has gone through a complete transformation. [...]" (G. Lista, *Giacomo Balla futurist*, L'Âge d'homme, 1984, p.44).

In 1912, perhaps in reaction to Boccioni's challenge of his credentials, the painter produced three works: *Dynamism of dog on a leash*, *The hand of the violonist* and *Girl running on a balcony*, in which he attempts to represent the "**dynamic sensation itself**" (7th point of the *Futurist Painters manifesto*). With *Girl running on a balcony*, painted from studies of movement by the photographer **Etienne-Jules Marey**, he succeeds in creating the illusion of his model's walking: "It should interest artists because I made a special study of this girl's *way of walking*, and in fact, I have succeeded in *creating the illusion* that she is moving forward. (Letter from G. Balla, in G. Lista, *Balla*, catalogue raisonné, 1982.)

Unlike Duchamp (see following chapter), where the movement of the *Nude* is achieved by a succession of static positions, Balla dissolves his figure using colour and a technique borrowed from his post-impressionist past. In this he is applying another point of the *Manifesto*: "**Movement and colour destroy the materiality of bodies**".

SALON OF THE GOLDEN SECTION, OCTOBER 1912

1911 saw the formation of the Puteaux group. It met at the house of the Duchamp brothers (Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon) or at Gleizes' studio at Courbevoie, and included Gris, Delaunay, Kupka, La Fresnaye, Le Fauconnier, Léger, Metzinger and Severini, as well as some poets and critics. Between games of chess, they again discussed Bergson's thought and the new mathematics. The idea of another event, *the Salon of the Golden Section*, to display their latest researches, was born. The golden section is that divine proportion invented by the classical Italian painters.

The Salon, organised at the La Boétie gallery in October 1912, took a quite different turn with works by Duchamp, Picabia and Kupka on show, and became the first cubo-futurist salon. Delaunay presented his latest abstract works, which Apollinaire labeled as *Orphism* (see last chapter: *Orphism*).

This room brought together the works of Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, as well as those of the painters of the Puteaux group: Jacques Villon, František Kupka, and Raymond Duchamp-Villon.

MARCEL DUCHAMP AND FRANCIS PICABIA

Marcel Duchamp, *Nu descendant l'escalier n°2*, 1912

[Nude descending a staircase]

Oil on canvas, 147 x 89.2 cm

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Duchamp explained his intentions in painting this canvas: "This final version of the *Nude descending a staircase*, painted in January 1912, was the convergence in my mind of different interests, including the cinema, still in its infancy, and the separation of static positions in the chronophotographs of Marey in France, and of Eakins and Muybridge in America".

"Painted, as it is, in the sober colours of wood, **the anatomical nude is non-existent**, or rather, is invisible, because I completely gave up on making a naturalist likeness of a nude, only keeping these twenty-odd different **static positions** in the successive stages of the descent." (*Duchamp du signe*. Marcel Duchamp's writings gathered and introduced by Michel Sanouillet. Collection Champs / Flammarion, 1994, p.151.)

Like Léger's *Les Noces*, *Nude descending a staircase* uses **a subject which is in fact non-existent**. For Léger, it was **a wedding**, with all trace of sentimentality removed. For Duchamp, it was **a nude**, a subject anathema to the futurists, but which does not exist from a "naturalist" point of view.

Another aspect which reflects both Duchamp's humour and his quite personal spirit of synthesis: **the movement is nothing more than a succession of static positions** borrowed from those photographs rejected by the futurists (with the exception of Balla). A final detail: the nude is painted in the **colours of wood**, that is to say with the browns and ochres of the cubist palette.

When it was presented at the Salon des Indépendants, the canvas was removed from the canvas rail at the request of Gleizes and Metzinger, who considered that it leaned too much towards futurist values.

In October, the *Nude* was shown at the *Salon of the Golden Section*, and in January 1913 at **the Armory Show in New York**, where it received an enthusiastic reception. In New York,

the painter declared that the idea "of demolishing old buildings and old memories is good". His disappointment with the blinkered attitude of the cubists contributed in large measure to his decision to give up painting, which later led to *the Urinal*.

Francis Picabia, *Udnie*, 1913

(American Girl; the Dance)
Oil on canvas, 290 x 300 cm
Pompidou Centre, Mnam

Picabia presented thirteen canvases in this salon which he helped organise. Some of them are a far cry from the works of preceding years, a sign of his assimilation of futurist visual formulas.

Udnie was painted the following year, during the summer of 1913, in memory of the dances of Stacia Napierkowska seen on the boat taking him to the *the Armory Show*. The painter himself explained the meaning, comparing it to phenomena of memory, the **moods** of futurist painting: "*Udnie* is no more the portrait of a girl than *Edtaonisl* is the image of a clergyman, as they are commonly understood. They are memories of America, evocations of that place which, subtly placed like musical chords, become representative of an idea, of a moment of nostalgia, of a fugitive impression".

"The composition of *Udnie* is a visual synthesis of the sensual evolutions of the dancer, rendered by arabesques and fragments of coloured volumes, themselves subjected to the ship's movements. The centrifugal dynamic clashes slightly with the divergent lines of force and the sharp edges of the planes." (Camille Morando, catalogue of the exhibition.) One could also say that the dancer has been transformed into a sort of **machine**.

The canvas was presented at the Autumn Salon in 1913 in the company of Duchamp-Villon, Gleizes, Kupka, Metzinger and Villon, by which time cubism was almost "accepted" with a dominant "orphist" tendency.

THE PUTEAUX GROUP

Jacques Villon, *Soldiers marching*, 1913

Oil on canvas, 65 x 92 cm
Pompidou Centre, Mnam

Jacques Villon was the *Golden Section's* main theoretician. While the works he presented at the Salon are not in the least a cubo-futurist synthesis, *Soldiers marching*, 1913, the fruit of a series of preparatory studies made in 1912, gives an idea of the **work done to make movement the very object of the canvas**. "The troop's movement has been reduced to a system of force lines. The column of soldiers has taken the form of spaced polyhedra receding into the depth of the canvas. The movement which Villon has worked to achieve is that of two columns of soldiers marching either side of a spectator placed in the centre of the composition. [...] Another futurist trait, or a sign of futurism's impact on the Parisian scene, is the colour key of his work, with its acid colours so foreign to the cubist palette. [...]"

Other characteristics of the work show his relationship with cubist painting. "[...] Villon has subdivided the surface of the canvas using a guiding line based on the numerology of the Golden Section, derived from Leonard da Vinci's treatise on painting [...] The movement which Villon has chosen, far from destabilising the composition, strengthens its symmetry." (Didier Ottinger, catalogue of the exhibition.)

This work has often been described as futurist, something which Villon denied.

František Kupka, *Woman picking flowers*, [1910-1911]

Pastel on paper, 48 x 52 cm

© Pompidou Centre, Mnam

The Salon also revealed the existence of Kupka's "pure" painting, which Apollinaire compared to Delaunay's abstract explorations. With *Woman picking flowers*, Kupka delivers his personal vision on the question of the **representation of the object in movement**. He felt that the **impressionists**, unlike the cubists, had found a new and definitive solution to the problem of representing the phenomena of nature and movement, by **abandoning fixed outlines** "to avoid the errors which they might easily have committed by outlining solids in space" (F. Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 1923). Cubism and futurism were only desperate attempts to "render reality".

Woman picking flowers is part of a series of five pastels made between 1909 and 1911. For this work, he drew his inspiration from **Marey and Muybridge's chronophotographs**, breaking down reality in order to rebuild it, giving an almost abstract synthesis.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE. THE CUBIST PAINTERS, MARCH 1913

With *The Cubist Painters*, Apollinaire played one of those magic tricks of which only he knew the secret. In an eagerly awaited panorama of cubist art, he took up the substance of the lecture he had given at the *Salon of the Golden Section* in which he divided cubism into four trends: scientific, physical, orphic and instinctive.

Begun just after the futurists' exhibition in Paris, while he was creating his new review *les Soirées de Paris*, the work *The Cubist Painters, Aesthetic Meditations* was published in March 1913. Apollinaire had titled it *Méditations esthétiques. Les nouveaux peintres*. His publisher, Eugène Figuière, also publisher of Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger's *Du Cubisme*, apparently renamed it on his own initiative, according to Apollinaire, *Les peintres cubistes* with *Méditations esthétiques* as the subtitle. The story is actually more complicated than that.

Contradictory sentiments

At the beginning of 1912, the poet gathered together his chronicles on art in order to pass his ideas in review, without giving preference, as he tells it, to the cubist painters in particular.

The word "cubism", which in the end got accepted because the artists used it, was originally a word used in ridicule by Matisse ("Gosh the little cubes!"), and **seemed to him outmoded**. In April 1912, he wrote: "The time is perhaps past when we can talk of cubism. The period of research is past. Our young artists now want to deliver definitive works". (L'Intransigeant, *Chroniques d'art*, 3 April 1912, p.293.) Other publications were being prepared, that of **André Salmon**, *Young French painting*, including a chapter dedicated to the cubists, and *Du Cubisme* by **Gleizes and Metzinger**. But his name was by now associated with cubism, and caught in the crossfire of the conservative press and the futurist avant-garde he took up the challenge.

The Cubist Painters bring together two series of texts: **On Painting** – two date from 1905 and 1908 – and **New Painters**, a series of articles which had appeared in his review *les Soirées de Paris* on Picasso, Braque, Metzinger, Gleizes, Marie Laurencin, Gris and Léger. In addition there was an **Appendix**, a commentary on the work of Duchamp-Villon, and a **Note** referring to the critics who defended the artists belonging to the cubist currents which he had recently defined – which allowed him to mention **Matisse, Derain** and the futurists

Severini and **Boccioni**. The poet observed, not without nostalgia, that in the last two years, "Matisse's influence seems to have almost disappeared" (Le Petit Bleu, 20 March 1912, *Chroniques d'art*, p.295).

The Quartering of Cubism

The work could have been published in the autumn of 1912 if Apollinaire had not taken back the proofs, following his rapprochement with **Robert Delaunay** (see the chapter *Hybridations*), who with his series of *Windows* and *Disks*, had recently (since April 1912) been developing "**pure painting**" – "art which is to painting what music is to literature" – which Apollinaire had been calling for since 1908.

In the *Salon of the Golden Section*, where Delaunay was exhibiting, Apollinaire gave a lecture to explain the re-working and the postponement of the publication. Under the title "**Cubism Quartered**", he proposed dividing the movement into four currents, "two of which are parallel and pure" (p.68), a classification which he used in *Les peintres cubistes*.

Scientific cubism, the first of the pure currents (Picasso, Braque, Metzinger, Gleizes, Laurencin, Gris), is "the art of painting new sets with elements borrowed not from the reality of what is seen, but from the reality of what is known" and **physical cubism**, which is parallel to it (Le Fauconnier), "[...] with elements borrowed mostly from the reality of what is seen", along with a measure of "constructive discipline".

Orphic cubism is the second great tendency of modern painting which Delaunay had just invented "and in which Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp also laboured" (p.69). This new art, in which colour played an essential role, reconciled the painting of the French avant-garde with the heritage of impressionism and post-impressionism. Lastly, there was **Instinctive cubism**, a current which "for a long time has been tending towards orphism"; no names are given but they are mentioned in the *Note*: Matisse, Derain, the two futurists etc.

The three plastic virtues of art

Having completed his quartering, Apollinaire wanted nonetheless to publish his meditations, fed over the last few years by the cubist polemics.

The three plastic virtues of art are **purity**, **unity** and **truth**. The artistic tradition is "**the flame**", ever pure and unique which is the breath of life. The truth of art is what it owes to its epoch, like that of Léger, "one of the first to happily trust to the instinct of the civilisation in which he lives", without letting this instinct become the "frenzy of ignorance" (p.102). And while art has no social goal, "it might be the task of an artist as detached from aesthetic concerns, and as devoted to energy as Marcel Duchamp, to reconcile art and the People" (p.111).

A work published too late, or before its time?

Published in March 1913, with 45 reproductions of canvases, the work was perceived as a manifesto of the cubist school. Nevertheless, it appeared as a work which had come too late.

Each painter had affirmed his style. Picasso and Braque had moved cubism forward towards its synthetic phase and invented glued papers. The new Salon des Indépendants showed a quite different face, marked by orphism and the triumphant return of colour (see the last chapter: **Orphism**). The classification of cubism earned the poet a number of negative reactions both from artists and critics, some of whom compared his style to Baudelaire's.

The Cubist Painters enjoyed a much warmer reception abroad and from a later generation. Translated into English in 1922, with a preface by the painter **Robert Motherwell** when it was republished in 1944, it was rediscovered in France after the Second World War. (To

know more about the fortunes of *The cubist painters*, read the introduction to the book by L.C. Breunig and J.-Cl. Chevalier, in the collection *Savoir*, éditions Hermann.)

Apollinaire's efforts failed largely because art history only chose to preserve **orphic cubism** out of his fourfold classification. Nevertheless, he must be given his due for trying to **transcend school chapels** and "**shift the lines**"; something which he was to repeat, some months later (in August 1913), by writing *The Futurist Antitradition, Manifesto-synthesis* for Marinetti and by participating in the futurist reviews including *Lacerba*.

RUSSIAN CUBO-FUTURISM

The year 1913 saw the formation of a group of artists in Russia (around David Burliuk) which claimed to be "cubo-futurist" and which had Malevitch as theoretician. This great moment of cubo-futurist synthesis born in Russia found its echo in Paris with young artists whose attachment to their native land contributed to the spread of avant-garde ideas.

Presented here are the works of Alexandra Exter (*Firenze, 1914-15*), Kasimir Malevitch (*the Portrait of Ivan Kliun, 1911, the Portrait of Mikhail V. Matyushin, 1913-1914, the Aviator, 1914*), Natalia Goncharova, Michel Larionov, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova.

THE CONTEXT. FUTURISM / CUBISM / PRIMITIVISM

In March 1909, the Muscovite press announced the birth of futurism, followed by studies on the literary movement. The first stirrings of Russian futurism appeared in April 1910 – at the same time as the *Futurist Painters manifesto* was published – in the form of a publication (*Je Vivier aux juges*) in which painters and poets, such as **Velimir Khlebnikov**, the **Burliuk brothers**, and **Vassili Kamienski** took part. A first group, *Hylaea*, was formed which included the poet **Vladimir Mayakovski**, and which was to be the most futurist of them. For Russian futurism was marked from the outset by cubism. The painters from Russia and from the Russian community established in Paris followed the birth and evolution of cubist painting. In this combination of several pictorial cultures, the specifically Russian component was **primitivism**, which was expressed through theme of rural life, peasant civilisation, and a vibrant polychromy.

In December 1910, the first exhibition of the *Valet de Carreau (Knave of Diamonds)* brought together the works of the Burliuk brothers, Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Kandinsky, Larionov, Malevitch as well as Gleizes, Le Fauconnier and Metzinger. On this occasion, Vladimir Burliuk gave a lecture in which he asserted that the **question of the subject** was marginal. But some months later, the *Valet de Carreau* saw its first split with the birth of a new association, *la Queue d'âne (The Donkey's Tail)*, closer to **vernacular art**.

At the beginning of 1912, Natalia Goncharova and Larionov accused the "Cézannians" of **conservatism** and eclectism... a refrain which was beginning to sound familiar ... Larionov created **rayonism**, close to futurism. At the end of 1912, the group *Hylaea* published a manifesto written by Burliuk: **A slap at public taste** which reaffirmed Cézanne as the father of all the pictorial avant-garde.

Gleizes and Metzinger's *Du Cubisme* was translated in 1913, shortly after its publication in French. Mayakovski affirmed **the independence of Russian futurism** from the Italian movement.

Undeterred, Marinetti continued his lecture tours to spread the word about his movement in all its components. Malevitch saw him, alongside Picasso, as one of the two great artists of his age. Everything new from Russia was labeled **futurism**, though with a pejorative connotation.

Michel Larionov co-authored *Le Manifeste des rayonnistes et aveniriens* with Goncharova, Malevitch and Tatlin.

Also noteworthy towards the end of 1913, were **two cubo-futurist performances** which exemplified the complicity between painters and poets: *Vladimir Mayakovski, the tragedy* by Mayakovski, and *Victoire sur le Soleil*, an opera by Matyushin, with a libretto by Khlebnikov, sets and costumes by Malevitch.

The year 1914 saw the Russian cubo-futurists and the vorticists (see following chapter) distancing themselves from futurism. In Russia, futurism would be discredited on account of Marinetti's political commitment and beautification of war, which tended to obscure the links of his pictorial side with the other movements.

KASIMIR MALEVITCH, THEORETICIAN OF RUSSIAN CUBO-FUTURISM

From 1912 on, Malevitch began theorising on cubo-futurism. The following year (at the Saint Petersburg *Youth Union*), he exhibited a series of works grouped under the title of **cubo-futurist realism**. This expression is a direct reference to Gleizes and Metzinger's book.

In later analyses, Malevitch would distinguish **kinetic futurism** – "the fixing of instants, depicting all the forms of the moving figure with an academic technique (or aspect)" – from **dynamic futurism** – the true Italian futurism reflecting "a movement which our eye is not able to catch but which we can feel" ("Le futurisme dynamique et cinétique", *Ecrits III*, 1929). It draws heavily on Boccioni's analysis and his criticism of French style "dynamism". (See the chapter *Hybridations* /Umberto Boccioni.)

Malevitch saw cubo-futurism as one of the three stages of futurism: **kinetic, cubo-futurist and dynamic**.

Kasimir Malevitch, *Portrait of Mikhail V. Matyushin*, 1913-1914

Oil on canvas, 106.6 x 106.6 cm
Tretyakov National Gallery, Moscow

More than the other works presented in the exhibition, *The Portrait of Mikhail V. Matyushin* is intriguing because of its apparent abstraction, its colours and its square format. This portrait is one of a series of canvases (including *Perfected portrait of Ivan Vassilievich Klyunkov*, 1911, *The Aviator*, 1914) in which the painter brings into play what he terms "**transmental realism**" – or, from 1914 on, "**alogism**". The expression combines the word "realism" – which refers back to the "profound realism" defined by Gleizes and Metzinger in *Du Cubisme* – and the adjective "transmental" – a reference to a practice of his cubo-futurist poet friends.

In the "transmental realism" of the *Perfected portrait of Ivan Vassilievich Klyunkov*, the outline of the face is still visible, even though the details are reduced. The portrait of the composer Matyushin marks a further stage in the **abandonment of the object**.^{*} Figurative elements appear here and there: a portion of the musician's head and hair, the keys and various bits of the piano. But their placing makes no figurative sense, even reduced to outlines.

From futurism, Malevitch drew the **dynamic interpenetration of the human world and objects**, echoing the *Futurist Painters manifesto*: "Our bodies permeate the sofas on which we sit, and the sofas permeate us ..." **From Cubism**, he drew the overall structure of **geometric surfaces** and the palette of ochres and greys of the analytic period.

As for the raw colours, the blues, the greens and the association of red, black and white, they hark back as much to the futurist palette as to the **Slav tradition**. From his earlier works he kept some cylindrical forms.

In a letter addressed to the musician in 1913, Malevitch wrote: "We have rejected Reason because with us a new kind of reason has been born which we can call transrational, which too has its own law, its own construction and meaning. [...] This reason has found a means – cubism – to express the object".

LIUBOV POPOVA

Liubov Popova, *Study for a portrait*, 1914-1915

Oil on cardboard, 59.5 x 41.6 cm (front)

Study for *Italian Still life*

Oil, marble dust, collage on paper (reverse)

State Museum of Contemporary Art – Thessaloniki

Costakis Collection

Liubov Popova stayed in Paris from October 1912 and frequented the *la Palette* studio where Metzinger and Le Fauconnier were teaching. At the beginning of 1914, she exhibited at the 4th exhibition of the *Valet de Carreau* alongside works by Braque, Picasso, Alexandre Exter, and Malevitch. 1914 was the year Russian art came into its own as such.

"CUBI[sme] – FUTURISMO": here, Liubov Popova explicitly **joins the two movements** and proposes burying the hatchet: an invitation reinforced by the use of the **Latin alphabet** rather than the Cyrillic used in other works painted at this period.

From Picasso's **synthetic cubism**, she had assimilated **the simplification of forms**, and broad coloured surfaces. Some borrowings are clearly acknowledged, such as the wavy hair and the form of the face which suggests the top of a string instrument. **The force lines** taken from futurism build the canvas' dynamic. The juxtaposition and overlapping of planes produce an effect of depth accentuated by the colour contrasts.

Study for a portrait is one of a series of portraits made in the two years 1914-1915. In her theoretical writings, Liubov Popova conceives the evolution of art as a progress towards **non-figuration**, a stage which her work was to reach in 1918-1920.

VORTICISM

English vorticism, another cubo-futurist synthesis, was founded in 1914 by the writer and painter Wyndham P. Lewis, the poet Ezra Pound and the philosopher T.E. Hulme. Because of its short life-span, cut off one year after the beginning of the First World War, vorticism remains relatively unknown in France.

This room contains paintings by David Bomberg (*The Mud Bath*, 1914), Wyndham P. Lewis (*The Crowd*, 1915), Christopher R.W. Nevinson (*The Arrival*, circa 1913), and sculptures by Jacob Epstein (*Torso in Metal from "the Rock-Drill"*, 1913-1914) and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (*Red Stone Dancer*, circa 1913).

THE CONTEXT, AN IMBROGLIO BETWEEN CUBISM AND FUTURISM

The *Futurist Manifesto* was launched in 1909 in London. **Marinetti**, who loved London for its cosmopolitanism and its "mysterious energy", went there regularly for lectures and readings of his works. With his innate sense of provocation, he also liked to get embroiled in what were sensitive issues of the day for English society. Hence his *Futurist Speech to the English*, in April 1910, in which he denounces the hypocrisy of the British with regard to homosexuality (against the background of the trial and death of Oscar Wilde); or again his lecture on feminism (*Futurism and Women*, December 1910) which, however, did not win over the suffragettes.

The painter and writer **Wyndham P. Lewis**, the future leader of the vorticist movement, was in contact with the ideas and works of the cubists and futurists in Paris. He followed Bergson's classes at the Collège de France and was drawn to anarchist ideas. He shared this intellectual background with the philosopher **T. E. Hulme**, the movement's future theoretician.

The exhibition of futurist painters, presented in March 1912 at the Sackville Gallery, created a stir in London, as it had in Paris.

Simultaneously with the Manifestos, lectures, group and one-man exhibitions – by Boccioni or Severini for example, who there too played a role of link between the artists –, **cubism** found its place in the London galleries. At the end of 1910 the critic **Roger Fry** organised a first exhibition on the theme of the heirs of French post-impressionism, followed by a second show in October 1912 where, alongside works by Braque and Picasso, Wyndham Lewis exhibited some wash drawings similar to certain works by Léger and Boccioni's *Moods*.

Anything out of the ordinary counts as "futurist"

The press had plenty of fun with futurist art, seeing in it nothing but madness and hysteria. As in Russia, everything out of the ordinary was labeled "futurist". This usage of the word was taken up by the critic **Frank Rutter** who organised an exhibition (October 1913-January 1914) bringing together artists of different styles, titled "Post-Impressionism and Futurism", in which the painter **Christopher Nevinson** (the future co-founder of vorticism) took part.

Refusing to be bundled along with the English avant-garde as a futurist, Wyndham Lewis created *Rebel Art*, to assert his independence while promoting a cubist aesthetic. He brought along with him **Edward Wadsworth**, **Frederik Etchells** and **Cuthbert Hamilton** who would later regroup under the vorticist banner.

Meanwhile, Nevinson took the stand as Marinetti's leading disciple in a series of lectures given on the occasion of a new exhibition of futurist paintings and sculptures (at the Doré Galleries). Together they published *Vital English Art. Futurist Manifesto*, on 7 June 1914, in which they included the young artists of *Rebel Art* without consulting them. In this context the birth of vorticism was announced. Although Marinetti would have liked to enroll the young English painters into the futurist movement, the Italian painters were not prepared to welcome them, complaining of already having had to accept Félix Del Marle into their ranks! (See the chapter *Hybridations* / Félix Del Marle.)

"Peace at its most vertiginous"

On 20 June the first issue of *Blast* was published. **Ezra Pound** added the word "vortex" in a subtitle: *Review of the Great English Vortex* (a term already used by the futurists to express the energy of the city, and which gave the group its name: vorticism).

The texts of this first issue define the movement's program. The poet Ezra Pound opined that painting must reject "facts, ideas, and truths" and exist only in and of itself. As for Lewis, he quoted **Baudelaire** and his hatred of the "movement which moves the lines", asserting: "Long live the great artistic vortex which arises in the centre of this city! We represent the Reality of the Present, not the sentimental future or the shameful past." Then: "The Automobilmism (Marinettism) bores us. We don't want to go about making a hullabaloo about automobiles, any more than about knives and forks, elephants or gas-pipes".

A year later – Gaudier-Brzeska and Hulme died in the war – Wyndham Lewis wrote: "It has always been plain that as artists two or three of the Futurist Painters were of more importance than their poet-impresario. **Balla and Severini** would, under any circumstances, be two of the most amusing painters of our time. And regular military War was not their theme, as it was Marinetti's, but rather very intense and vertiginous Peace." (*Blast* n^o2).

David Bomberg, the independent

David Bomberg, *The Mud Bath*, 1914

Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 224.2 cm

Tate, London

David Bomberg was one of the artists "enrolled" without his consent by C. Nevinson in the Manifesto of English art. Nevertheless, while he wished to dissociate himself from futurism, he was just as keen not to appear under the vorticist banner. In July 1914, his first one-man show (at the Chenil Gallery in Chelsea) contained fifty-five paintings, including *The Mud bath*. **The point of departure was a steam bath, and the painter claimed to be independent of the currents which surrounded him.**

However the work hints at the spirit, like a simultaneous record of some of the most impressive paintings of this period. Geometric simplicity and dynamism of forms which seem to break out from the edges of the canvas, and the clean palette are somewhat reminiscent of **Luigi Russolo's** *The Revolt*. The dialogue between the large red surface in the background, a sort of immobile platform, and the tumbling stick figures in the foreground remind one of **Fernand Léger's** contrasts, the motors of pictorial reality. And how can one ignore this central pillar which gives the composition all its strength?

The title of the work, *The Mud Bath*, may even be an allusion to the **prologue of the Futurist Manifesto** in which Marinetti relates the car accident that plunged him into a ditch full of muddy water, from where he emerged to dictate his will "to all men *living* on Earth"?

Wyndham Percy Lewis, leader of the vorticists

Wyndham Percy Lewis, *The Crowd*, [1915?]

Oil and crayon on canvas, 200.7 x 153.7 cm

Tate, London

A simultaneity of interlocking spaces. **In vain, we search for the crowd** in the title of the painting. On the right, rise the geometric forms of a skyscraper. Distributed over the rest of the surface of the canvas, more numerous in the central window, shapes suggest the building plans of dwellings, vestiges of a vanished city? **The city is seen from in front and from above** as in Russolo's *The Revolt*, and one might have said seen in the duration as well, had not Lewis professed to be interested only in the present reality.

Below and to the left, in the space where a perspective is suggested, schematic figurines are the sole signs of life, above which appear the letters ENCLO – which could be a reference to the Closerie des Lilas. In the middle ground two red flags seem to confront a tricolor. Conservatism against socialism? Or opposite poles between which the energy of the city

develops? Piercing this labyrinth of walls and places in sanguine colours, white gaps offer breathing space.

Lewis gives **his vision of the city**. In a text published in the second issue of *Blast*, he describes it as the place of "the masses" and of the annihilation of individualities. "Laboratory of death" for which "the crowd is the subject of its experiment" (cf. Colin Lemoine, catalogue of the exhibition), the city also fixes its disorder. In this work **nothing moves the lines**, least of all the disorderly energy of "automobilism". Wyndham Lewis implemented his program:

"By Vorticism, we mean (a) ACTIVITY as opposed to the tasteful PASSIVITY of Picasso; (b) SIGNIFICANCE as opposed to the dull or anecdotal character to which the naturalist is condemned; (c) ESSENTIAL MOVEMENT and ACTIVITY (such as the energy of the mind) as opposed to the imitative cinematography, the fuss and hysterics of the futurists."
(*Blast*, n2.)

ORPHISM

The last room of the exhibition brings us back to the Parisian scene, with orphism, a movement brought to public attention by Guillaume Apollinaire at the 1912 Salon des Indépendants, confirmed by the works shown at the *Salon of the Golden Section*. It then moves on to the American scene with synchronism, a trend related to orphism by its forms and colours, and a work by Joseph Stella.

Paintings by Fernand Léger (*Shape Contrasts*, 1913), Robert Delaunay (*Circular Forms. Sun n2*, 1912-13), Sonia Delaunay (*Simultaneous Contrasts*, 1912), Morgan Russell (*Cosmic Synchrony*, 1914), Stanton Macdonald-Wright (*Conception Synchrony*, 1914), Joseph Stella (*Battle of Lights, Coney Island, Mardi Gras*, 1913-14), Giacomo Balla (*Luna Park in Paris*, 1900).

ORPHISM: "PURE PAINTING, SIMULTANEITY"

At the Salon des Indépendants (March-May 1913), orphism marked the triumphant return of colour and refinement of forms. Apollinaire had officially announced its birth in his book *The Cubist Painters* (see the chapter *The Salon of the Golden Section*). He now exulted: "Cubism is dead, long live cubism. The reign of Orpheus is beginning" (Salon des Indépendants, *Montjoie !*, 29 March 1913.) and speaks **"of impressionism of 'forms'"**. He defined orphism in these terms: "pure painting, simultaneity". Here began, somewhat foreseeably, a new controversy over the term **simultaneity**, pitting futurists against cubists.

First was **Boccioni**: "Orphism [...] is nothing more than an elegant masquerade of the fundamental principles of futurist painting" (*Lacerba* n°7, April 1913). **Léger** then carped at futurism for being merely the sum of the principles of the impressionists and Cézanne (*Montjoie !* May and June 1913). **Boccioni**, came back asserting the priority of the notions of "visual dynamism", "innate complementarity" in the use of colour, and of "simultaneity" (August and December 1913). **Delaunay** gave his reply in his review *der Sturm* (January 1914). It was then the turn of **Carrà**, **Papini** and **Soffici** (March 1914) to claim to be originators of the concept

The cubists had asserted their theoretical bases by distancing themselves from post-impressionism (see the chapter *Hybridations* / Futurism→Cubism / Metzinger and Gleizes).

But the word "simultaneous" was indeed part of their **theoretical inheritance** (from a scientific analysis of colour inherited from Seurat). Its appropriation by the futurists led them to avoid using it. In 1913, "**simultaneous**" became once again a "**French**" word. "This argument about 'simultaneity' says a lot about the symbiosis which went on between cubist and futurist values around 1913". (To find out more: see the text by Didier Ottinger: Cubism + Futurism = Cubo-futurism, exhibition catalogue).

ROBERT DELAUNAY: CONSTRUCTING WITH COLOUR AND LIGHT

Delaunay had commented on his *City of Paris*: "transition towards constructive colour, a state between the destructive and constructive" (see the chapter **Hybridations**. Futurism→Cubism).

He was later to attain this art constructed solely from colour and light. The futurist juxtaposition of forms replicates all our sensations, present or past, to "create the illusion", and is according to him, a "simulacrum of movement".

Robert Delaunay, *Circular Forms. Sun n2*, 1912-1913

Painting with glue on canvas, 100 x 68.5 cm
Pompidou Centre, Mnam

Circular Forms. Sun n2 is part of a series of paintings made in the spring and summer of 1913 (*Circular Forms, Soleil*; *Circular Forms, Lune*; *Circular Forms, Soleil and Lune*).

Sonia Delaunay tells of the origin of these works: "Robert wanted to look at the midday sun directly, the perfect disk. [...] He forced himself to watch it until he was dazzled. He lowered his eyelids and concentrated on the reactions of his retina. Coming back into the house he tried to throw onto the canvas what he had seen with his eyes open and with his eyes closed; all the contrasts which his eyes had recorded. – 'Sonia, I can see the black spots of the sun'... he had discovered disk-shaped spots. He was going to pass from prismatic colour to Circular Forms". (Sonia Delaunay, *Nous irons jusqu'au soleil [We will go to the Sun]*, Robert Laffont, 1978, p.44.)

As opposed to futurist conceptions based on a "polyphony" of the senses, Delaunay shared Leonardo da Vinci's view that **the organ of sight was the only sense from which painting proceeds**. "The eye is our most developed sense, that which communicates most directly with *our brain and our consciousness*. [...] *Our comprehension is correlated with our perception*". The eye is what lets us rediscover innocence, **a primitive language of colours** which finds its origin in the "the luminous essence" of the world. (*Robert Delaunay. De l'impressionnisme à l'abstraction, [From Impressionism to Abstraction] 1906-1914*, éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1999, p.167.)

As for the circular form, while it is the shape of the Sun with which the artist conducted his **experiment**, (for there is nothing mystical or emotional with Delaunay, unlike say, Kupka), it is reminiscent of the disks for colour studies by Chevreul or Rood. A sort of propellor blade fixed on a central axis, with each coloured surface appearing **independent and with unlimited freedom of movement**. In the centre: **white**, the sum of all the colours.

AMERICAN SYNCHROMISM: PAINTING AND MUSIC

Stanton Macdonald-Wright, *Conception Synchrony*, 1914

Oil on canvas, 91.3 x 76.5 cm

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., NY

The synchronists **Morgan Russell** and **Stanton Macdonald-Wright** exhibited at the Salon des indépendants in 1913. **Synchromism**, the name given to their movement, is a contraction of the words "symphony" and "chromaticism". They were both pictorial disciples of the scientific theoreticians of colour (Eugène Chevreul, Charles Henry etc.). They were received in October-November 1913, by the Bernheim-Jeune gallery and its director Félix Fénéon. Fed on the debates between futurists and cubists in Paris, they were to assert their difference, notably with orphism, despite the apparent similarity of their compositions with the "disks" by Delaunay, whom they berated for his inability to "**suggest volumes**".

The *Armory Show*, February 1913, New York

While cubism was affirming its orphic turn at the Salon des Indépendants, *the Armory Show* revealed the diversity of modern European art to the American public. Though the futurists were absent because the organisers had refused to show them in the same room, they came out strengthened. As far as the press and the public were concerned, modernity was called "**futurism**". Cubism appeared as a "static kind of futurism" with Picasso and Braque being under-represented. **Duchamp** triumphed with his *Nude descending a staircase*, and **Picabia** became the darling of the media.

To consult other information packs:

In French 

In English 

Contacts

In order to answer all your needs as well as possible, we would like to have your reactions and suggestions concerning this document. You can contact us via our website, [under Contact, subject education.](#)

© **Pompidou Centre, Direction de l'action éducative et des publics** [Department of Education and Public Information], **December 2008**

Text and coordination: Marie-José Rodriguez