

Giacomo Balla



Estorick Collection
of modern Italian art

Giacomo Balla
Designing the Future

Cover

Lines of Force of an Enamelled Landscape, 1917–18

P. 2

Giacomo Balla in front of a self-portrait, c. 1927

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

Giacomo Balla: Designing the Future

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FONDAZIONE BIAGIOTTI CIGNA



Although Giacomo Balla was one of the most important artists associated with Italian Futurism – indeed, one of the key figures of twentieth-century European art more generally – this important exhibition is the first in Britain to be entirely dedicated to his work in its staggering breadth and variety. Spanning his early Divisionist phase, his Futurist period and his engagement with the applied arts during the inter-war years, when the notion of a ‘Futurist reconstruction of the universe’ took practical shape, it reveals Balla to have been a true pioneer whose work not only comprised a large number of Futurism’s most iconic images, but also included some of the earliest experiments in abstraction and proved hugely influential in terms of Modernism’s ambition to transform all aspects of everyday life – a key focus of the show. In his enlightening introductory essay to this catalogue, Fabio Benzi also suggests that Balla’s later imagery – which has tended to be marginalized and misunderstood over the years, but which is included here – was in fact not only consistent with the underlying principles that had guided his art from the beginning, but may even be seen as having anticipated Pop Art’s fascination with celebrity culture. The only initial Futurist to continue to be associated with the movement during its so-called ‘second’ phase, Balla’s career illustrates the fact that Futurism was not simply a formal style but an entire way of life.

First of all I would like to thank Laura Biagiotti with her daughter Lavinia for agreeing so generously to lend a large part of the collection and for her support for this exhibition. Also my thanks go to Barbara Vernocchi for her help in organising the show as well as to Violante Cappuccini and Valentina Virgili. It has been a great pleasure to work with Fabio Benzi again – one of the leading authorities on Balla’s work – and I am grateful to both him and Francesco Leone for their valuable insights into the work of this extraordinary artist.

Roberta Cremoncini

Director

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Giacomo Balla: A Brief Biography

Giacomo Balla: Modernity and the Avant Garde

Fabio Benzi

Balla's Divisionist Beginnings

Giacomo Balla was born in Turin on 18 July 1871;¹ his father, Giovanni, was a photographer, a fact that was to prove decisive for the development of Balla's own artistic vision. Following the death of Giovanni, Giacomo had to give up studying the violin and leave school in order to begin working for a living, but he also began to devote himself to drawing and painting around the same time.

He later attended Turin's Accademia Albertina, where he met the photographer Oreste Bertieri – the brother of a fellow classmate and a friend of Pellizza da Volpedo. In Turin, the young painter encountered the city's established Divisionist culture (influenced by artists such as Giovanni Segantini and Pellizza) and quickly absorbed the style's technical and aesthetic principles. However, the decisive step in Balla's artistic career was taken in January 1895 when he moved to Rome, the city where he would remain for the rest of his life.

At that time, the capital's art scene was dominated by late Symbolism and verist realism. The novelties of the transalpine Divisionist tendency, introduced to Italy by the Grubicy brothers, were still little known further south. With a pioneering spirit, Balla introduced this original and innovative aesthetic vision to the Roman scene, immediately establishing himself as one of the city's most interesting and bold painters, to whom the more promising young artists of the day gravitated (Umberto Boccioni would later remember Balla as having been "different and fierce").² His choice to adopt the Divisionist technique, subjecting every detail of his works to rational reflection, signified a rejection not only of the conventional character of realist and academic painting, but also of the cursive sketchiness of Impressionism – which by that time had come to possess a certain bourgeois respectability – as well as the exhausted motifs of Symbolism. Moreover, by conceiving his paintings in accordance with analytical principles based on scientific observation (Divisionism was grounded in recent discoveries concerning the fragmentation of colour and the mechanics of optical perception), the focus of Balla's artistic activity became the issue of how to depict the world and structure the image, rather than simply the transcription of natural reality in a passive manner. Resolutely 'modern' reflections for the time, such concerns anticipated those of the historical avant-gardes of the early twentieth century (Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism and, of course, Futurism).

The fact that Balla's father was a professional photographer (although he actually seems to have changed his trade several times) would have

given him a special curiosity for the medium – at that moment experiencing a period of widespread diffusion, and therefore exerting a particularly strong influence on the visual culture of the day. The operation of the camera, the significance of rays of light reflecting off surfaces, and the composition of the spectrum would all have been familiar to Balla since his youth, introducing him at an early age to the new formal synthesis conceived by Seurat, of which photography represented a sort of preparatory exposition.

There is no doubt that in considering the eye as a camera (the conceptual basis of Divisionist theory) there is a natural inducement to conceive the painting itself as a visual – or rather, a photographic – field and to consider light not only as a source of visual effects but also as the very substance of the image, as the element that allows the world to be perceived by the human eye. In this sense, all of Balla's artistic experiences – from Divisionism to Futurism, and his return to a figurative vocabulary during the later years of his life – were influenced by his early exposure to photography.

If the image is not loaded with symbolic significance, as it was in the work of the most significant Italian Divisionists (Segantini, Previati and Pellizza), vision is identified with the neutral scientific character of the



1. *Signora Pisani on the Balcony*, 1901, oil on canvas, 203 x 133 cm, private collection

2. Mario Nunes Vais, *Lyda Borelli*, n. d.



3. *Portrait of the Sculptor Glicenstein*, 1903, pastel on paper, dimensions and location unknown



4. Mario Nunes Vais, *The Sculptor Canonica*, n. d.

camera obscura, and the Divisionist method itself becomes a kind of natural amplification of luministic and compositional data, considered as the primary and essential elements of artistic creation. In this sense, there is evident in Balla's work a special emphasis on the value of light – which was to become the primary focus of his aesthetic investigations – as well as on the structure (or 'framing,' to use a photographic term) of the composition. In 1900, Balla wrote from Paris to his fiancée Elisa Marcucci³ (whom he married in 1904): "The feeling of the painting consists in the character of its lines, its objects and its light." Significantly, he even named his first daughter Luce ('Light').

The diagonal crops of Balla's Divisionist works are characteristic of photographs dating from the beginning of the twentieth century, in which a growing awareness of the medium's aesthetic autonomy was evident. The stylistic features typical of the work of Mario Nunes Vais, one of the most famous and significant photographers of the day (it was not by chance that he photographed members of the Futurist group, among other great personalities of the time), are certainly illuminating in terms of photography's influence on the artist, which is clear and overt, as well as in terms of understanding the particular focus of Balla's interests, directed toward photography possessing modern, 'artistic', dimensions and content (Figs 1, 2, 3, 4). Balla undoubtedly shared the widespread taste for the fashionable 'pictorialist' tendency, as vibrant and proactive in its form as in its content. This intense interest accounts for the strong consonance of his work with chronophotography and with Bragaglia's 'photodynamism' during his early Futurist period, when he was still attempting to formulate a new visual language, and – during the 1930s – for his tendency to take inspiration from fashion photography, drawing on images from magazines in the search for a new sense of post-Futurist modernity. From the earliest years of his artistic activity, Balla therefore developed a formidable eye for the intrinsically modern content of the image and an innovative approach to the traditional visual universe. Paintings such as *Autospalla* (Self-Shoulder) (1903), *Bankruptcy* (1903) (Fig. 5) and *The Worker's Day* (1904) (Fig. 6) are among the most radically innovative works to be produced in Europe immediately before the emergence of the avant-gardes. Their social content (very much a feature of the

painting of the day, especially in Divisionist circles – one thinks of Pellizza or Morbelli – due to the consonance between scientific positivism and materialist socialism) was absorbed in the silent drama of a detail, cropped with the ruthless objectivity of the photographic lens (*Bankruptcy*) or rendered dynamic – as in a film – by its division into different 'frames' (*The Worker's Day*, a painting employing the traditional form of a triptych, yet being absolutely unconventional in terms of its compositional structure, depicting three different moments in time). *Autospalla* was a disinterested depiction of a random body part by an artist-scientist / creator of images, rendered with the kind of psychological detachment one might expect from a pathologist looking at a human body. It might also be interpreted as a metaphor for the individual's relationship with the world, of which one can understand only a part – and perhaps not even the most essential or important part. In *Bankruptcy* as in *The Worker's Day*, Balla engaged in a criticism of the conditions endured by society's most vulnerable sectors, something amplified by the seemingly



5. *Bankruptcy*, 1903, oil on canvas, 116 x 160 cm, private collection



6. *The Worker's Day* (triptych), 1904, oil on paper, 100 x 135 cm (overall), private collection



7. *The Paris Fair - Luna Park*, 1900, oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm, Milan, Museo del Novecento

8. *The Mad Woman*, 1905, oil on canvas, 175 x 115 cm, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna

impassive cropping of the image, which serves as a visual metaphor for life's cold and alienating inevitability.

Inspired by a belief in the principles of humanitarian socialism, which the artist shared with a number of intellectuals from Turin and Rome (in the former case Cena, Aleramo and Marcucci; in the latter instance his students Boccioni, Severini and Sironi), these works capture the squalor of lives dictated by material concerns and totally devoid of spirituality. *Bankruptcy* is symbolized by the door of a locked and abandoned shop covered with children's graffiti, while the worker's day is chronicled in the solemn form of a modern triptych depicting its three phases: the start of work at the break of day, noon – when a frugal meal is consumed – and evening, as weary workers leave for home. The viewer senses that their labour will resume at dawn the following day, according to a rhythm without any break, or any hope.

The inspiration Balla received from the photographic view was evident in his work throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, enabling him to fix the light and the structure of the image in figurative objectivity, and suggesting effects of backlighting, transparency and both contrasting and nocturnal lighting, often captured in pure black and white to better emphasize Balla's modern artistic eye, which had of necessity to be 'photographic.'

A stay in Paris between 1900 and 1901 brought him into contact with Post-Impressionist culture. He was not influenced by its suffused atmospheres or Symbolist-inspired formal syntheses, but by the way in which artists were freely inspired by photography (something evident in the work of Caillebotte, Degas and, of course, Seurat – its influence on the latter mainly being observed in charcoal drawings depicting night scenes). Balla's natural propensity for the 'modern' effects of artificial and nocturnal light also inspired his depiction of the *Ville Lumière* (*The Paris Fair - Luna Park*, 1900, Milan, Museo del Novecento) (Fig. 7). In



1903, Balla met a number of artists enrolled at the Scuola Libera del Nudo based in Via Ripetta, Rome. Of the young painters who immediately became his students and followers, Boccioni, Severini and Sironi formed a close-knit group around their teacher 'Giacomo il notturno' (as he was dubbed, due to his penchant for depicting scenes illuminated by artificial light).⁴ Together, they fought against Rome's conservative exhibition culture and shared a belief in the humanitarian socialism promoted in the capital by Giovanni Cena, the Turin poet and intellectual who, together with Sibilla Aleramo, established socialist schools for the peasants of the Roman *campagna* (an initiative that was also supported by a lively artistic coterie formed by Cambellotti, Prini, Baccarini and Carena). Severini, Sironi and Boccioni also contributed to the socialist weekly *L'Avanti della Domenica*, in which Balla too published an illustration, titled *An Old Man*.⁵

Until around 1906, Balla's work was focused on a pitiless and unforgiving analysis of reality by means of an attention to its smallest details, with an impassive, camera-like eye, and brushstrokes that scientifically divided colours. The poor, the mad, the elderly and workers (as in the



9. *Fountain at Villa Borghese*, 1906, pastel on paper, 40 x 55 cm, private collection

paradigmatic *Polyptych of the Living*, 1902–05) (Fig. 8) were among his favoured subjects. Landscape was another – its hidden, microscopic movements being studied as if by way of analyzing its living and agitated character. Theosophical theories were certainly an inspiration for this conception of nature as vibrant and pulsing with energy. But of course it was socialism, in the form of Cena's social idealism, which focused his attention on society's outcasts and workers. This was combined with a thirst for experimentation which resulted in compositional cropping of exceptional modernity and vividness. Fragments, details, parts of the whole: these were Balla's pioneering contributions to the iconography of twentieth-century art, the novelty of which has not yet been fully appreciated.

During the second half of the first decade of the twentieth century Balla began to amplify the spiritual dimensions of his subjects and the content of his paintings to the point that he occasionally infringed the basic principles of Divisionism through what was essentially a Luminist approach. Undoubtedly, his close contact with Roman circles interested in theosophy and esotericism influenced this change of direction, adding to and overlapping with the goals of the ideal Turin brand of socialism to which we have already referred. Among the many theosophists of Balla's acquaintance were the 'Maestro delle Mura' Francesco Randone and Raoul Dal Molin Ferenzona, who were both friends of Balla's,⁶ as well as General Carlo Ballatore – President of the Roman Theosophical Society – who will be discussed later. An effusive sentiment that identified intimate and mysterious echoes in nature replaced cold, photographic analysis, suggesting a lyrical atmosphere with which Balla had not experimented until this point. This phase would come to an end in 1908 with paintings such as *Villa Medici*, recalling the style and feel of Pellizza. The presence of Pellizza da Volpedo in Rome in 1906 may also have influenced this development in Balla's aesthetic, which was expressed in a number of views of Villa Borghese with extremely significant titles (*The Trunks Sing*) and exhibiting a pantheistic and lyrical feeling for nature, in which the artist's psychology and the naturalistic animism of the subjects are transposed with participatory intensity (Fig. 9). During the early months of 1910, Balla created a number of works with

a technique that again related closely to photography. Among these pieces – painted in black and white, and only slightly marked by the dynamism of Divisionist filaments – was the triptych *Affections* (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna). These works can be considered the immediate precedent of Balla's meditation on a Futurist art, characterized once again by an almost mimetic relationship with photography. In *Affections*, completed by February 1910,⁷ the artist continued to explore an area of artistic research that had already aligned his work with the nuanced *chiaroscuro* of Felice Carena for some time, albeit with personal reference points (as in *Doubt*, 1908) (Fig. 10). That February he also exhibited the yet more experimental *Saying Goodbye*, described by a reviewer of the time as "more a photograph than a painting" (Fig. 11). A group of portraits can also be dated to the months between the end of 1909 and the beginning of 1911 in which the sign is imbued with a more accentuated, almost abbreviated, dynamic agitation: the *Portrait of Ida Maini*, heightened by the use of *chiaroscuro*; an image of his favourite student Grethel Kahn Speyr⁸ (who would soon after marry the lawyer and violinist Löwenstein), which is almost a moderate companion piece to Boccioni's more vivid and expressionist *Modern Idol*; and a small oval portrait of his daughter Luce.

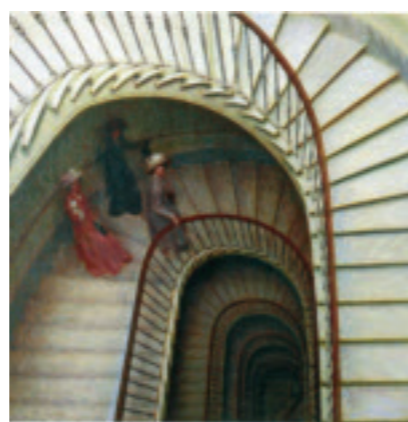
The First Futurist Phase

When Balla signed the 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting' between late April and early May 1910, he simply affirmed a commitment to that avant-garde spirit to which he had always been faithful – albeit in a different guise – and to which he had in fact introduced his younger students Boccioni, Severini and Sironi. Confident of his teacher's enthusiasm for artistic innovation, Boccioni invited him to sign this second manifesto (Balla was not involved in the first, more general, 'Manifesto of the Futurist Painters' that February) despite the fact that his Futurist language had not yet reached maturity. However, it was to take Boccioni himself more than a year of frantic experimentation to achieve a fully original Futurist painting style.

From Balla's adhesion to Futurism until the establishment of his central role in the movement between late 1912 and late 1913 (with his 'iridescent interpenetrations', and his studies of 'speeding automobiles' and the 'abstract speed' series, respectively) the artist's search for a



10. *Doubt*, 1908, oil on paper, 67 x 50.5 cm, Rome, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna



11. *Saying Goodbye*, 1909–10, oil on canvas, 104 x 104 cm, private collection

12. *Villa Borghese – The Deer Park* (polyptych; reconstruction from original elements), 1910, oil on canvas, 190 x 390 cm (overall), Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna



vocabulary capable of fully expressing such new aesthetic concepts was as fraught with difficulties as it was hesitant.

An obvious reason for the exceptionally small number of works painted during the period 1910–12 by an artist who was (and who would be again) extremely prolific was the *impasse* created by his need to develop a new expressive language able to articulate Futurist aspirations without passively relying on the ideas of his former students Boccioni and Severini, whose work was moreover beginning to reflect the influence of Parisian culture in the form of Cubist aesthetics. In August 1910, Boccioni wrote to Severini that he had found "Balla in Rome discouraged with some hesitant yet still robust paintings."⁹ It is not known to which works Boccioni was referring (their 'hesitancy' evidently relating to their failure to manifest a mature and concrete interpretation of Futurist precepts) although one such piece may have been *Diptych of Villa Borghese*, characterized by a radically modified form of Divisionism and a markedly 'photographic' composition (a low horizon, and a scene divided into two contiguous 'frames'). Such was the character of Balla's artistic research at the moment when he began ideologically to align it with a new, Futurist, perspective: a disjuncture between the image itself and the Divisionist technique, which appear in his works as two overlapping realities. The visual starting point – of clear photographic inspiration – is perfectly defined by means of contours and *chiaroscuro*, while Divisionism (or "congenital complementarism", as it was defined in the aforementioned manifesto of April 1910, expressing a desire to modernize the Divisionist technique by means of new terminology) becomes an automatic, abstracting, calligraphy superimposed on the image.

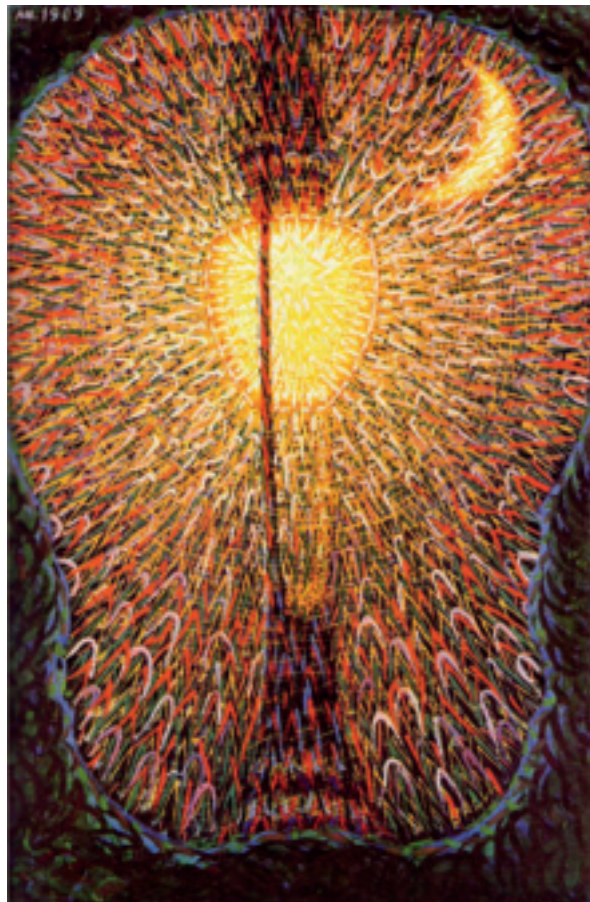
It is probable that the idea for each Futurist artist to paint a large horizontal work – a paradigm of the movement's aesthetic intentions, to be presented in a future collective exhibition (such as that held in Milan in April 1911 as a sort of rehearsal for the key shows mounted the following year in Paris, London, Berlin and Brussels) – dated back to the summer of 1910: that is, during the period of Boccioni's aforementioned visit to Balla's studio. Each member of the group created such a work between the end of 1910 and early 1911: Boccioni's

The City Rises (200 x 290 cm), Carrà's *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* (185 x 260 cm), Severini's *La Danse du pan-pan au Monico* (destroyed, but recreated during the late 1950s; 280 x 400 cm) and Russolo's *The Revolt* (150 x 230 cm).

It would have been rather strange if Balla had not even attempted to participate in a joint venture of this kind. In fact, the artist did create a major work at precisely this time, *Villa Borghese* (190 x 390 cm; Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna), the only piece of such vast dimensions painted by Balla until at least 1913. This was a work of such commitment that it surely could not have been among those described by Boccioni as "some hesitant [...] paintings" following his visit to Balla's studio. Accordingly, Balla must have commenced work on it after that encounter, at some point during the autumn of 1910, and presumably completed it by the end of the year or the beginning of 1911, like the other works mentioned above (Fig. 12).

There is little doubt, then, that this work was conceived as a companion piece to those other great programmatic Futurist paintings (all similarly large and horizontal in format) intended to be exhibited as a group on some unspecified future occasion.¹⁰ The fifteen separate elements which it comprises were intended – as in *The Worker's Day* – to be the panels of a modern polyptych, although certainly not one depicting a naturalistic perspective from an (in fact non-existent) gateway, as is implicitly suggested by the subsequent framing, which completely misrepresents the original meaning of the work. As Calvesi has noted, "it is an overall view, but one resulting from a sum of separate views, each of which are fully, individually, resolved [...]. In essence, it resembles a photomontage. Above all, it is dominated by the idea of time and space as a sequence or succession of different moments and zones [...] almost by way of indicating the sequential mechanisms by which vision is created in the eye."¹¹

But which element of this work did Balla consider to be so specifically 'Futurist' that he felt it was emblematic of the new ideas contained in the manifesto? What "dynamic sensation" could emerge from a view free from people or animals, considered from a central and symmetrical perspective? In fact, Balla seems to present us with a paradox: it is not a single



13. *Arc Lamp*, 1911, oil on canvas, 175 x 115 cm, New York, Museum of Modern Art, Hillman Periodicals Fund

view, but fifteen simultaneous views. It is therefore the *artist* who is moving, who provides fifteen views that are then combined, who relates the detail to the whole – who *interprets* the scene. Certainly, the original conception of the polyptych as a ‘grid’ emphasized the singularity of each ‘frame.’ In fact, each section fails to align exactly with the adjoining image, thereby accentuating the autonomous character of the individual panels. The ‘congenital complementarity’ of Divisionism is instead applied as an overall abstract texture of vermicular calligraphic brushstrokes.

In the early years, Balla’s interpretation of Futurism was therefore intensely conceptual and still associated with photography. As a consequence, its ‘Futurist’ character was less immediately apparent than that of his colleagues, and his works were effectively excluded from the group show of 1911 in Milan,¹² as well as from the subsequent early European exhibitions. The efforts of the other Futurists were at this time more concerned with developing radical stylistic and expressive innovations, whereas Balla continued to employ the Divisionist technique, emphasizing the work’s content and aesthetic dimensions.

His exclusion from the Milan exhibition would have had to have been followed by encouragement from Boccioni (whose letters always reveal great affection and esteem for his old master) to continue undertaking Futurist research – particularly in view of the imminent exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris, scheduled for February 1912.

Doubtless, Balla would have been somewhat disappointed by his exclusion from the first show mounted by the Milan group – although it

avoided (perhaps fortuitously) unfavourable comparisons of the formally more audacious and bold works of his colleagues with a piece whose modernity was so subtle and radical as to be easily misunderstood. Accordingly, when he participated in the *Universal Exposition* of 1911 in Rome¹³ he exhibited two portraits¹⁴ which, as can easily be gleaned from the *Portrait of Mayor Nathan* (Rome, Galleria Comunale d’Arte Moderna), did not differ significantly from the aforementioned diptych and the large polyptych of *Villa Borghese*, characterized once again by the Divisionist treatment of a ‘photographic’ image. Only the slightly unusual, angled posture of the sitter suggests dynamic movement. One can almost note here a halt in Balla’s formal research, which seems to be accentuated in most of the works prepared for the exhibition of the *Agro Romano* in 1911¹⁵: two versions of the *Portrait of Giovanni Cena*, a number of pastels and oils depicting the Roman countryside and, finally, the *Portrait of Tolstoy*. For the most part, these works were created especially for the occasion, between March and June 1911. If in some it appears that Balla was reflecting on previous experiences (especially in those illustrating the Roman countryside), he seems once again to have been ready to experiment with the dynamic requirements of Futurist theory in his portrait of Tolstoy. This group of works was created at the moment when Balla’s Futurist colleagues definitively rejected his painting from the *Exhibition of Free Art* in Milan, inaugurated on 30 April, perhaps resulting in an understandable sense of disappointment on the part of the artist. The *Portrait of Tolstoy* would appear to have been the last of these works to be painted, exhibiting as it does a renewed interest in formal research, albeit still grounded partly in photography. The Russian writer, who had died several months earlier, is represented in black and white,¹⁶ while Divisionism is conspicuous by its absence, as in the triptych *Affections*. However, dynamic lines arc in the background, describing the forms of ploughs, the ‘flowing dynamism’ (*avant la lettre*) of cloud formations, and forking white lines of electricity, as well as in the gestural brushstrokes with which the face and beard are rendered. It is in the context of Balla’s greater adherence to the movement’s theories that he painted *Arc Lamp* during the second half of 1911, a Futurist image of an electric lamp that eclipses – or rather, “murders” – the moonlight, in an evident allusion to the title of a famous text by Marinetti. Later erroneously dated 1909 (Fig. 13), Balla himself confirmed the correct date of the work when exhibiting it in 1928.¹⁷ Nevertheless, *Arc Lamp* was again rejected by the group, in a similar manner to that which we have hypothesized in relation to *Villa Borghese*, and the work was not displayed at the Paris exhibition of 1912, despite being listed in the catalogue. In a letter to Severini dated 11 January 1913, Boccioni indirectly recalled this episode, describing a visit to Balla’s studio on 23 December 1912: “He repudiates all his works and his methods. He has begun four paintings of movement (still realistic in character) but incredibly advanced and very strange compared to those he was producing a year ago [...] yet he is still too photographic and episodic despite being 42 years old [...] He told Palazzeschi: they didn’t want me [to exhibit] in Paris and they were right: they are much more advanced than I am, but I will also work and make progress!”¹⁸ A ‘disagreement’, or rather a dialogue, with the Futurist group can therefore be traced from the beginning of 1911 (with the refusal of *Villa Borghese*, then *Arc Lamp*) to the end of 1912. Following Boccioni’s positive visit to the artist’s studio,

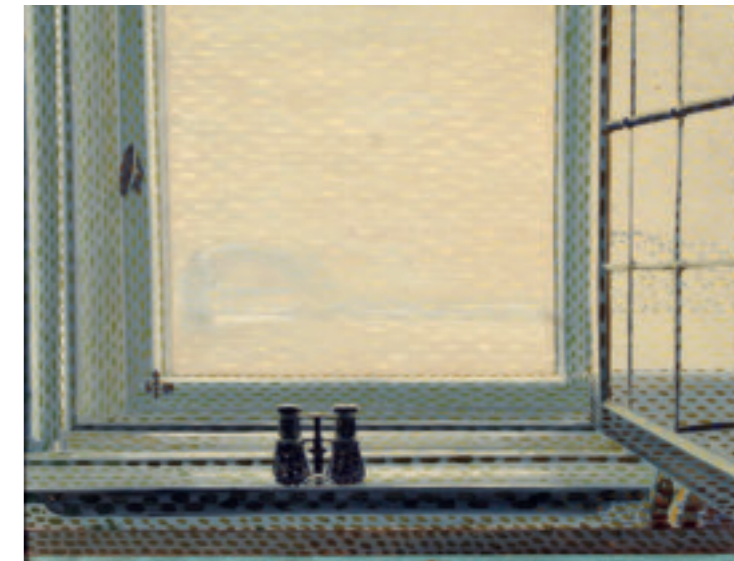


14. Interior of the Löwenstein House, 1912

a more concrete and cohesive enthusiasm for Futurism can be discerned on Balla’s part (in addition to a more mature pictorial syntax). Matters would soon be resolved, as Boccioni confidently claimed in his aforementioned letter: “In a few days’ time Balla is coming to Milan to see our works and stay with us, which will certainly do him good.”

I do not believe that Balla created any significant works during the first half of 1912 (moreover, no trace of any such pieces remains), perhaps once more experiencing a psychological and creative setback resulting from his rejection from the Paris exhibition. During the second half of the year he visited Germany on two occasions, where he stayed with his former student Margherita (Grethel) Kahn Speyr, who had recently married the German lawyer and violinist Arthur Löwenstein. Balla was invited to decorate the study¹⁹ of a villa owned by the couple in Düsseldorf (they actually lived in Berlin) staying there between July and August, and again between October and December. During the latter visit he made his ‘rainbow’ studies – the famous ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ – which will be discussed presently.

This highly significant ‘environmental’ intervention was lost after the couple fled Nazi Germany in 1934 as a result of racial persecution, and the house itself was destroyed during World War Two. However, we know from photographs that the “room,” which the artist described as being “of intangible elegance”²⁰ (Fig. 14), included a Cartesian view that was fragmented in the manner of the *Villa Borghese* polyptych of 1910–11. The substance of Balla’s Futurism at that precise moment – free from iridescent lozenges, and curves or lines of velocity – was still of a rather static, orthogonal character; in this decorative scheme it was once again the photographic simultaneity of vision that constituted the modern element. A frieze divided into various ‘frames’ (many more than the four mentioned in Balla’s letter – at least five are visible in photographs of the room, and these only reveal a part of the project)²¹ ran around the study at head height, offering a panoramic 360 degree ‘view’ of the surrounding city. These scenes were framed in a black geometric grid typical of the *Jugendstil* aesthetic, composed of rectangular forms that also characterized the room’s elegant chairs, bookcases and



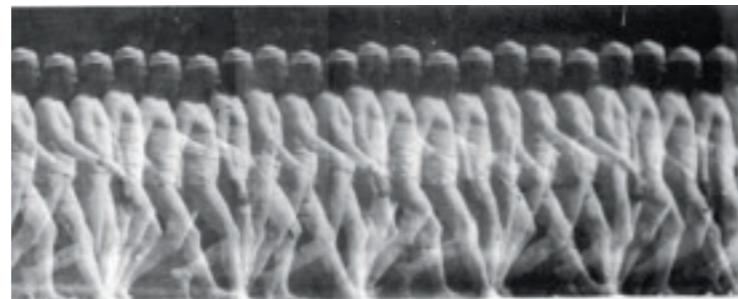
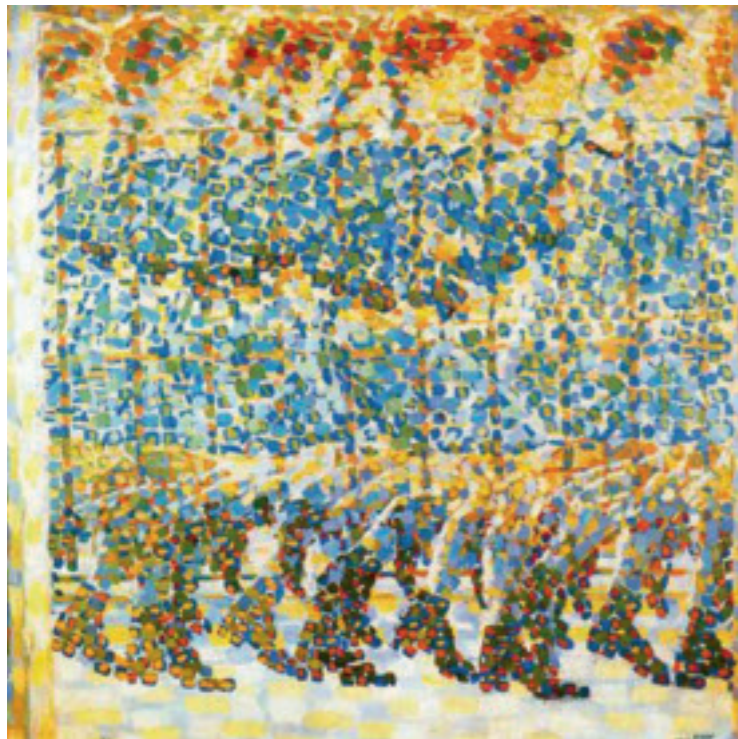
15. *Window in Düsseldorf*, 1912, oil on board, 27 x 34 cm, private collection

tables. Perfectly ‘photographic’ in appearance, Balla’s images were almost certainly executed around the same time as *Window in Düsseldorf*, with a Divisionism of cold tones superimposed on a ‘photographic,’ almost monochromatic, image (Fig. 15).

The latter work probably dates back, at least in conception, to Balla’s first stay in Germany (although a sketch of the composition appears on a letter sent by the artist to his family during his second trip). It is not impossible that this image, which only entered the Balla collection during the 1960s, represents a surviving section of the frieze. Except for its geometric rigor and overall cold tonality, it does not significantly depart from earlier works such as *Villa Borghese*: the ‘photographic’ vision is clearly apparent, movement is entirely absent, and a purposely mechanical Divisionism overlays the base image.

There is no foundation for the theory, developed and sustained by a large number of scholars, that the ‘rainbows’ (which only came to be known as ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ following World War Two) were originally conceived as studies for decorative motifs intended for the Löwenstein home in Düsseldorf.²² This is evident not only from the surviving photographs of the room itself, but also from letters that Balla sent to his friend Gino Galli (21 November) and his family (5 December)²³ containing detailed watercolour sketches and a number of significant comments about them.

These letters provide indisputable evidence concerning the date of this series, as well as its objectives. The artist defined his imagery as “a kind of RAINBOW [IRIDE]” or, more jokingly, an “*iriduccio* [sweet little rainbow],” adding that he “owed the result to an infinite number of trials and experiments [...] the pleasure it gives was finally found in its simplicity. *The study which went into this work will bring about changes in my painting* [my emphasis].” It is worth bearing these words in mind – especially the italicized passage – when considering the significance with which Balla endowed his experiments and their consequent importance for his mature Futurist experience, the artist stating precisely and clearly that they were conceived exclusively as studies relating to his painterly work.



16. *Girl x Balcony*, 1912, oil on canvas, 125 x 125 cm, Milan, Museo del Novecento

17. Etienne-Jules Marey, *Demeny Walking* (detail), 1883, Paris, Collège de France

It is a striking fact that Balla never exhibited a single example of these works publicly during his Futurist period. A mistaken assertion on the part of the artist's daughters has led some to maintain that Balla displayed an 'interpenetration' at the Futurist exhibition held in the foyer of the Teatro Costanzi in February 1913.³¹ This claim, subsequently accepted at face value by many scholars, is not supported by any evidence; in fact, the catalogue of the show only lists the works *Girl x Balcony*, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, *The Hands of the Violinist* and *Arc Lamp*, and there is no mention of an 'interpenetration' in contemporary reviews of the exhibition. This might be explained by the fact that these works essentially served as explorations of the scientific mechanisms of light and the propagation of motion as an abstract element, or as experimental works of abstraction, still far removed from the more explicit depictions of movement and dynamism which Balla was simultaneously undertaking in order to align his own work with that of his fellow Futurists.³² Moreover, although the 'interpenetrations' were initially conceived in late 1912, Balla's sketches, studies and works on this theme were for the most part completed between December 1912 and the autumn of 1913, a period during which no other work by the artist is documented.³³

This can also be deduced by a closer consideration of the chronology of the 'abstract speed' series than has hitherto been made. The period immediately following Balla's first visit to Germany (July-August) was particularly crucial for him. We know from a letter Boccioni sent to Severini³⁴ that the former had gone to see the artist in his studio on 23 December 1912 (when Balla had just returned from his second trip to Germany) and that he had started, work on "four paintings on [the subject of] movement" evidently begun during the period between the two trips to Düsseldorf, and still incomplete. Calvesi rightly identifies three of these as *The Hand of the Violinist*, *Girl x Balcony* and *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*.³⁵ I would suggest that *Flight of a Swallow* was the fourth painting (dated – perhaps later – to 1913) given its unfinished appearance and employment of a Divisionist technique using widely-spaced brushstrokes placed in parallel lines in a similar manner to those found in *Girl x Balcony* (and different to those used in the series of works on the same theme that Balla would develop shortly thereafter). It *might* have been an 'iridescent interpenetration,' worked up from one of the studies executed in Germany,³⁶ but any such claim would be extremely difficult to prove.

In no way intended for a decorative application, these 'interpenetrations'²⁴ were a means of understanding the scientific mechanisms of light and electromagnetic waves – concerns relating to the artist's theosophical interests.²⁵ They are essentially preparatory studies for a deeper exploration of those previously unknown and unseen forces that had been brought to light by recent advances in science – one of the key areas of Futurist investigation.²⁶

The iconographical variety of the 'interpenetrations' reveals that Balla's intention was not to identify a single visual equivalent of light, but rather to reproduce the formal, chromatic and rhythmical sense of different experimental manifestations relating to the electromagnetic theory of light, highlighting characteristic forms and rhythms imperceptible to the eye but intrinsic to the nature of the cosmos. This was one of the theosophical concepts that interested Carlo Ballatore,²⁷ to whom Balla was very close, and which were widely explored in Divisionist circles, as the work of Previati illustrates.²⁸

It should be noted that the purely abstract formal innovations of Balla's mature Futurist style – which, having evolved quietly, reached sudden maturity during the second half of 1913 with the brilliant series of works capturing 'abstract speed' – can undoubtedly be traced back to the rich collection of studies relating to the 'iridescent interpenetrations,' analyzing the propagation of light through electromagnetic waves.²⁹ The forms found in these works constituted the verification of an attempt to represent not the appearance of speed, but rather the universal dynamic forces that enable it. Through the undulating motion of light – the fastest element in the universe – Balla brought into focus an analytical approach that fused the latest scientific research with theosophical and spiritualistic reflections.³⁰ Far from involving any intellectual contradictions, such imagery embodied a dialectic grounded in the reciprocal support that theosophy, science and mathematics offered one another at that time.



18. Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Portrait of Giacomo Balla with Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912



19. *The Hand of the Violinist - Rhythms of the Violinist*, 1912, London, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art



20. Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Typist*, 1911



21. Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Balla Playing the Guitar (Photodynamism)*, 1913

In February³⁷ and May³⁸ 1913 – following the rejection of his works from the Futurist exhibitions of 1911 (Milan) and 1912 (Paris) – Balla was finally allowed to display four works alongside the other members of the Futurist group. Three of these (those seen in an unfinished state by Boccioni the previous December, and obviously completed in early 1913) focused on the theme of movement interpreted in accordance with the visual models provided by chronophotography and photodynamism (*Girl x Balcony*, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* and *The Hand of the Violinist*). The fourth work was *Arc Lamp*, now added as a corollary to the more mature and resolved works, not being invested with the kind of significance it would have had in Paris as Balla's only work. The fact that in May Balla exhibited in Rotterdam the same works that he had displayed in February in Rome suggests that he had not completed any other mature paintings.

Balla's development as an artist experienced a decisive breakthrough

soon after his first visit to Germany, one that was again linked to a meditation on photography. The photographer Anton Giulio Bragaglia, almost the only stable and direct reference point for Balla in Rome, would have introduced the painter to the chronophotography of Marey (a figure mentioned twice in his volume *Futurist Photodynamism of 1911*)³⁹ and Muybridge, whose experiments find clear echoes in *Girl x Balcony* (something even more pronounced in *Flight of a Swallow*, in my opinion) with their separation of the different stages of movement into consecutive 'frames' (Figs 16, 17). In *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (Fig. 18) and *The Hand of the Violinist* (Fig. 19), one can instead identify much more explicit references to Bragaglia's photodynamism (Figs 20, 21), which sought to overcome the mechanical character of chronophotography by means of capturing the continuity of movements lingering on the retina.

Ultimately, by engaging with the photographic experiments of Bra-



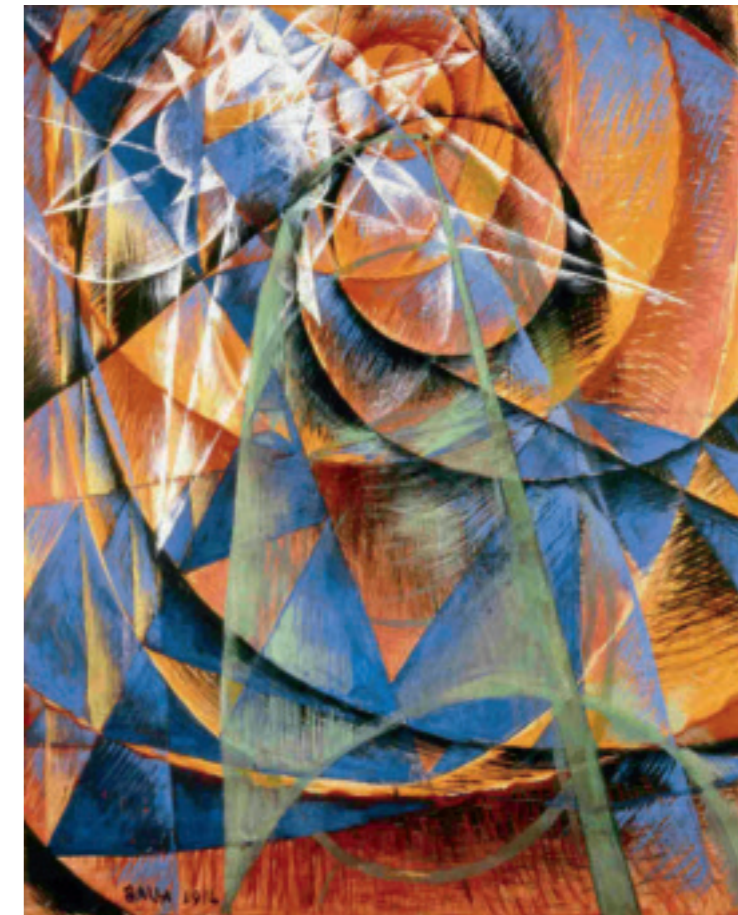
22. *Today is Tomorrow: Iridescent Interpenetration* (triptych), 1913, oil and tempera on board, 51 x 41.5 cm, private collection

23. *Abstract Speed*, 1913, oil on canvas, 202 x 328 cm, Turin, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli al Lingotto



24. *Flowing Lines + Dynamic Successions - Flight of a Swallow*, 1913, oil on canvas, 96 x 109 cm, New York, Museum of Modern Art

25. *Mercury Passing in Front of the Sun*, 1914, tempera on paper, 120 x 100 cm, Mattioli Collection



gaglia, Balla was able at last to intuit a solution to the *impasse* that had troubled him since 1910, alternately distancing him from and bringing him closer to the Futurist movement: namely, an original representation of movement, something he had certainly been unable to express convincingly in his earlier works and which represented the *conditio sine qua non* for any true Futurist.

Accordingly, Balla managed to realize a modern painterly vision grounded in his long-time passion for photography. Energized by this achievement – but especially by the approval he had finally been given by Boccioni and the Futurist group as a whole – he proclaimed his intention to auction off all his earlier, ‘passéist’, production (a leaflet distributed at the beginning of April 1913 proclaimed that “Balla is dead, his works will be sold at auction here [the Galleria Giosi]”).

However, that year the photodynamic influences evident in his imagery brought Balla into conflict with the other members of the Futurist group once again, who did not share his enthusiasms. In September, Boccioni sided strongly against photodynamism, having been stung by French accusations that Futurist art merely reproduced photographic effects,⁴⁰ and commented on the works of Balla – as if he had already discussed the matter with him – in terms resembling the setting out of a cultural policy. Writing to the gallerist Sprovieri on 4 September, Boccioni stated: “I advise you, on behalf of your Futurist friends, to avoid any contact whatsoever with Bragaglia’s photodynamism... [it is] an elementary introduction to what Balla HAS DONE, what he will do will certainly be superior.”⁴¹ Boccioni’s position was reaffirmed in a note published in *Lacerba* on

1 October that was signed by Balla himself, as well as by Boccioni, Carrà, Severini, Russolo and Soffici (that is, by the entire Futurist ‘directoriate’); evidently, however, it was at the peremptory request of Boccioni. For Boccioni, photodynamism could not express the deeper motions of the spirit, nor was it able to capture the dynamic tensions within matter, but was a purely optical and mechanical contrivance. Boccioni and Balla must have discussed this disagreement during their many direct or indirect encounters.⁴² It was only during the second half of 1913 that Balla began the studies for his ‘abstract speed’ series, as certain indications confirm. At the end of April, Balla had planned (only planned) to create a painting that was subsequently destroyed, lost, or perhaps never completed (one can therefore reasonably date it to the period May/June). From the description provided by N. Pascazio (“a representation of Via Nazionale in the exuberance and grandeur of vehicular tumult”),⁴³ it would seem to have marked a moment of transition from the ‘photodynamic’ paintings (of which it too was one) to the theme that Balla would go on to explore in his ‘abstract speed’ series (thanks to his experience with abstraction in the context of the ‘interpenetrations’). There is no suggestion from Pascazio’s brief description that Balla’s intention was to create an entirely abstract image. However, in a letter to Boccioni of 15 October 1913,⁴⁴ Mario Sironi recorded that “Balla is making magnificent progress,” while “Sprovieri and Folgore [...] want to continue strangling him,” adding that “he has thrown himself entirely onto the opposite course from the one he was previously following and is therefore still suffering from an imbalance. For example, he tries to make

abstraction from realism but instead combines abstraction with realism, not yet having a sense of the painting and a mastery of every part, but it seems to me that he is on the right path and that he will do better and better.” Here, Sironi clearly refers to the first ‘abstract speed’ images, and indicates that the transition from those paintings informed by photodynamism was still underway. The fact that Sironi’s letter was a much delayed response to one from Boccioni (due to a state of depression from which he had only just emerged, as he relates in his letter) might mean that Sironi’s observations concerning Balla’s work relate to an earlier point in time, possibly the period spanning August and early October. In fact, although Boccioni clearly stated that Balla had not yet identified a means of overcoming his aesthetic *impasse* by 4 September,⁴⁵ it is also the case that he would not have been fully up-to-date with the latest developments in his friend’s work, given that between June and July he was in Paris, where he would not have been able to follow his progress, and that in August he was in Milan, where he could only have received vague news, perhaps from Sprovieri. Therefore, it was between summer and October 1913 (certainly not before) that Balla realized his first studies of speeding automobiles, which would be exhibited in Florence that November at an exhibition of Futurist painting organized by *Lacerba*. Several different dates have been suggested for the beginning of this cycle of works: Lista⁴⁶ has proposed late 1912, but all the evidence makes this seem completely impossible; Baldacci⁴⁷ has instead located it between February and March 1913, but without any evidence this is equally improbable, since Boccioni (who was then in Rome) would have

been able to see any such works at first hand, and consequently would not have written as he did in the letter of 4 September.

During the period spanning late December 1912 and summer 1913 – when he produced no other paintings – Balla must have realized the greater proportion of his ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ before he was completely engrossed by and absorbed in his work on the ‘abstract speed’ series. This theory is all the more compelling as the leap from photodynamism to the pure abstraction of the latter works would have necessitated a profound meditation on abstraction that only the ‘interpenetrations’ could have provided.

The ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ (Fig. 22) therefore constitute one of Balla’s most important conceptual achievements, yet simultaneously present the most significant problems for any exegesis of his artistic development, as we have seen from the above observations. If in reality the question of their actual aesthetic role appears to have been substantially resolved – these works clearly representing the basis for the movement’s experiments with abstraction – there remain justified doubts as to their historical presence in Balla’s oeuvre and the actual chronological position of a large number of them.⁴⁸

How he arrived at results of such absolute originality in his studies of speed – even when compared to the achievements of his fellow Futurists – is the story of an almost ascetic process of continual advances and disappointments. In fact, Balla produced very few works during 1913, evidently being much preoccupied with attempts to formulate a new and definitive Futurist vocabulary.



26. *Patriotic Hymn in Piazza di Siena*, 1915, enamel on paper laid down on canvas, 36 x 45 cm, private collection

As Balla's daughters related to me – and as Pascazio's aforementioned article confirms – Balla arrived at the abstract representation of speed by viewing moving vehicles reflected in the shop windows of Via Nazionale, multiplying their trajectories and forms, which were rendered unrecognizable by the reflection of the glass. Naturally, this was merely the starting point for an elaboration of the 'abstract speed' series, which was able to summarize in a vivid, definitive, fluid and synthetic form the Futurist principles of dynamism and simultaneity, of environmental influences (noises, lights, dynamic power, odours) and of the space-time continuity of Bergsonian philosophy, as well as the theosophical vision of a supra-dimensional world (Fig. 23). Throughout 1914 (it is certain that during this intense and fruitful year he realized a number of works that he subsequently backdated to 1913 – as we saw earlier, in November 1913 he exhibited a number of studies of speed that he had begun to paint no earlier than September-October) Balla continued to elaborate the themes intuited during the previous year in a series of extraordinary painting cycles. In addition to the 'abstract speed' series, these included works capturing the swirls and dynamic lines of the landscape, the 'flights of swallows' (Fig. 24) and different versions of *Mercury Passing in Front of the Sun* – symbolic of cosmic dynamism (Fig. 25). The 'flights of swallows' still reveal a contradictory link with the chronophotography of Marey, reabsorbed in a dynamic continuum that Balla gleaned from his experience in capturing 'abstract speed' (evidently, the artist wished more fully to resolve that study which, we have hypothesized, remained unfinished by December 1912, and which was therefore based on a superseded approach). The astral trajectories of Mercury eclipsing the sun instead record the reflections of the smoked glass through which Balla observed them, yet here too the sense of progress in comparison with the graphic reflections of the *Arc Lamp* appears enormous.

Balla was now able to develop a completely original, multifaceted language which, unlike that of his Futurist friends, neither depended on nor echoed Cubist fragmentation, and which provided an intense and

highly original interpretation of the Futurist principles of speed, simultaneity and modernity, connecting them to a sensibility that was also able to grasp the most subtle and constituent dynamics of the universe – those lying beneath reality.

Balla and Theosophy: Notes for an Interpretation of Futurist Abstraction

Balla's Futurism was based on very different principles to that of many other members of the group. Whilst for Boccioni, Severini and Carrà an understanding of Cubist fragmentation was of fundamental importance – a vocabulary which they took in new aesthetic directions, yet which remained stylistically dependent on the experiences of Picasso and his followers – Balla's long and complex development of an innovative Futurist iconography was grounded in concepts that were entirely alien to Parisian culture. Futurist scholarship has often tended to underestimate this singular originality, which had no parallels in contemporary European art, aside from finding certain echoes in the work of another Futurist of the first hour, Luigi Russolo.

Theosophy was certainly one of the most important influences on Balla's conception of Futurism. The first precise reference to his interest in the subject was made by his daughter, Elica: "In 1916 Balla also became interested in psychic phenomena and attended meetings of a theosophical society presided over by General Ballatore; the group performed a number of séances."⁴⁹

After 1915, following the 'abstract speed' series (one of the creative pinnacles of early European abstraction), Balla dedicated himself to the synthetic definition of abstract dynamisms, including those of a psychological nature – attempting to discover visual equivalents for 'sensations,' feelings or 'states of mind,' in addition to 'passions' such as patriotism or interventionism – and the acoustic or dynamic aspects of the landscape (Fig. 26). The fruits of this research were presented at the artist's first solo exhibition at Bragaglia's Casa d'Arte in Rome in October 1918. On that occasion he also introduced many of the themes that he would explore in painterly cycles over the following years: synthetic landscapes, states of mind and impressions connected with the seasons. Compared to the sinuous forms of Balla's 1915 'interventionist' paintings, and the geometric synthesis typical of his works dating from 1916 and 1917, a significant softening of forms characterized Balla's immediate post-war imagery, as well as a greater attention to nature.

As previously mentioned, one of the themes that permeated Balla's work – especially that of his Futurist phase – was the possibility of giving artistic expression to theosophical concepts. This was not unique to Balla, but was a fundamental and striking element of his oeuvre. An interest in 'the invisible' (but conceptually concrete) rules underpinning the workings of the universe was in fact common within Futurist circles (one thinks of Russolo, Romolo Romani, Boccioni and Marinetti among the early members of the group, in addition to the Rome contingent dominated by Balla, which included younger figures such as Evola, Prampolini and the 'theosophical' brothers Ginna and Corra) as well as within those contemporary European avant-garde associations attempting to develop an abstract-figurative system (Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, etc.). The close links that we know existed between Balla and General Carlo Ballatore, President of the Rome Theosophical Society, give weight



27. Illustration from *Man Visible and Invisible*, by Charles Webster Leadbeater, London, 1902



28. *Form-Spirit Transformation*, 1918, oil on canvas, 50 x 62 cm, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna



29. *Pessimism and Optimism*, 1923, oil on canvas, 115 x 176 cm, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna

to the notion that his early abstract achievements (the 'abstract speed' series, *Mercury Passing in Front of the Sun*, etc.) had deep roots in theosophical principles. Even the vocabulary used in the titles of Balla's works stems from theories concerning the fourth dimension propagated by Ballatore in Rome.⁵⁰

The Futurists' familiarity with theosophy and other esoteric philosophies has been examined in Futurist scholarship since the 1960s⁵¹ and the importance of those theories to the wider historical avant-gardes – especially in relation to the development of abstraction – has likewise been well-documented. Moreover, as already noted, such interests were explicitly referred to in the 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting' of 1910, which posed the rhetorical question: "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies, since our sharpened and multiplied sensitiveness has already penetrated the obscure manifestations of psychic phenomena?" Balla's exploration of theosophical themes was to remain characteristic of his Futurist vision throughout the 1920s, and would profoundly influence the movement of which he had by that point become the most prominent exponent. The theory of light waves, explored by Carlo Ballatore, had

already been illustrated by Balla in his series of 'iridescent interpenetrations,' indicating the influence theosophy exerted on his work from the earliest years of his Futurist activity. Other concepts expressed by Ballatore find so clear an exposition in Balla's imagery that it cannot be considered purely coincidental. The terms 'elasticity,' 'fluidity' and 'interpenetration' are precisely those found in the titles of the artist's Futurist works, which can therefore only be fully understood as intuitive representations of a supposed higher world, driven by dynamic forces that transcend the limitations of three dimensions. It is difficult to comprehend or visualize the graphic definition of an object in four dimensions, yet in attempting to convey his ideas Ballatore evoked imagery typical of Balla's Futurist production from the 'abstract speed' series onward, in addition to works by other great avant-garde artists such as Naum Gabo or Pevsner,⁵² thereby highlighting the Europe-wide influence of new theories concerning the fourth dimension in the world of culture and art. Years later, Marinetti would also recall such theories,⁵³ confirming the extent to which they had been debated and disseminated within the Futurist movement. Other touchstones of Futurism – such as those 'lines of force' that consti-



30. *The Idea Arises*, 1920, oil and enamel on canvas, 77 x 55 cm, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna

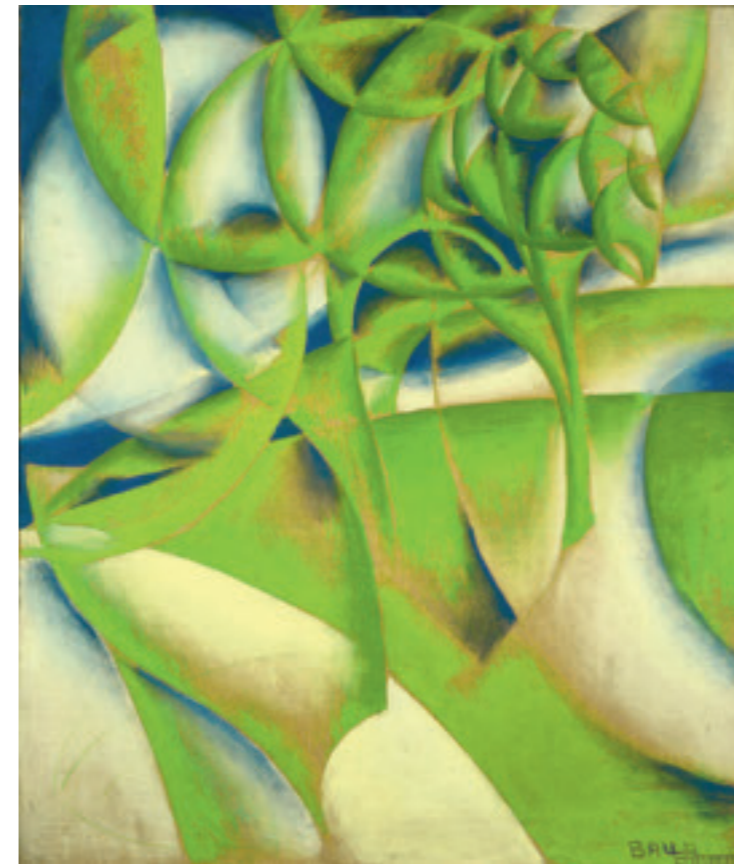
tuted such a key element of the movement's pictorial vocabulary – were mentioned by Ballatore, who described a universe conceived as a set of vital vibrations: “By means of their swift coming and going, those vibrations that stream towards and blend themselves with the Supreme divine energy, and which (to adhere to scientific terminology) I may define as hyperhertzian, confirm the law of attraction and repulsion according to the nature of their affinity, or rather their syntony. These form *lines of force* [my emphasis], where energies polarize in the same way as they do in light, in the warmth of magnetism and in electricity.” The theosophist goes on to present an image of these lines of force in terms that closely recall one of Balla's paintings: “Immediately, an image of the universe presents itself to us as a vast, highly complex, enclosure from which an infinite number of branching lines spread out in every direction.” Balla's works therefore outlined and depicted a new universe of pure forces, universal rhythms and mathematics in imagery that transcended logical representation, being born of intuitions and visions.⁵⁴ His paintings abound with concepts and iconographical elements derived from theosophy. Even the famous *Mercury Passing in Front of the Sun* is not a straightforward empirical transcription of optical effects, but rather depicts the propagation of light by means of multi-dimensional geometric

forms contained in the ether, while the mixed-media sculptures of 1914 are likewise evident attempts to represent the fourth dimension. Comparing such imagery with an illustration (Fig. 27) from a famous book of 1902 by C. W. Leadbeater titled *Man Visible and Invisible* (available in French from 1903, and widely read in theosophical circles) one can note striking similarities not only with Balla's works of 1916–22 (such as the ‘form-spirit transformation’ series (Fig. 28), the ‘enamelled landscapes’ and *Pessimism and Optimism* – a key painting of the early 1920s (Fig. 29)) but also with the ‘vortex’ and ‘abstract speed’ cycles of 1913–14, incunabula of Balla's brand of Futurism.

Each of Balla's Futurist images seems to represent a theosophical interpretation of the universe. In line with his personal conception of Futurism, the artist intended to ‘reproduce’ or realize in terms of a new reality the sensations of higher worlds brought to light thanks to science and the recent conquests of philosophy, indicating a new way of feeling which, in common with other major European masters of abstraction (Kandinsky, Mondrian, etc.), he also traced back to theosophical ideas: “We Futurists [...] seek to realize this total fusion in order to reconstruct the universe by making it more joyful, in other words by a complete re-creation. We will give skeleton and flesh to the invisible, the impalpable, the imponderable and the imperceptible. We will find abstract equivalents for all the forms and elements of the universe, and then we will combine them according to the whims of our inspiration” (from the manifesto ‘Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe,’ 1915).

Balla was also influenced by photographs of ectoplasm, which was supposed to materialize during séances and which had become notorious due to experiments carried out at the turn of the century (*Towards Night, Form-Spirit Transformation, My State of Mind*). In this regard, it should also be noted that Marinetti and Boccioni were interested in the extrasensory manifestations of Eusapia Paladino, a Neapolitan medium and seer whose activities were frequently chronicled in Ballatore's magazine *Ultra*, and that Balla himself participated in séances.⁵⁵ Alongside – and intersecting with – this interest in esoteric photography, with its attempts to capture the invisible manifestations of the spirit world and other paranormal phenomena, Balla was also fleetingly inspired by aerial photography. Such interests would later capture the imaginations of fellow Futurists such as Prampolini, Dottori, Benedetta, Tato (Guglielmo Sansoni), and so on, culminating in the drafting of the ‘Manifesto of Aeropainting.’ Balla himself was a signatory of this document, which constituted the final expression of his esoteric and theosophical passions in a Futurist context.

Until around 1922, Balla deepened his research into spiritual and metaphysical matters, evoking passions and cosmic dynamisms by means of Futurist imagery that employed softened but always brilliant colours and forms that were in turn dramatic, playful, sentimental or complicated by lines interwoven with planes articulated in a strange or mysterious manner. From 1916, two major trends can be identified in the artist's work: an interest in the vital movements of the universe (interpreted according to esoteric and spiritualist principles in works such as *Primaverilis* and *The Idea Arises* (Fig. 30)), often accompanied with a typically Futurist brand of optimistic and ‘mechanical’ humour (as in *The Spell Is Broken* (Fig. 31), which vividly evokes a shattering sensation by means of an ironic pun). It is in this context that one can also locate the development



31. *The Spell is Broken*, 1922, oil on canvas, 106 x 76 cm, private collection

32. *Softnesses of Spring (Expansion of Spring)*, 1918, oil on canvas, 81 x 75 cm, Milan, Museo del Novecento, Jucker Collection



of an important formal element in Balla's mature Futurist vocabulary, that of the ‘flowing lines’. These complemented the organic construction of the ‘lines of speed’ (curved and elliptical lines, representing dynamism), the ‘lines of force’ (a variety of forms, including curved and straight lines, expressive of tension) and the ‘noise lines’ (zigzagging and fragmented lines, intended to convey the impression of sound). Balla had experimented with flowing lines in 1913 in depicting the flight of swallows; however, at that point they still represented a solely physical trajectory (in the sense of indicating the direction of motion); during the second half of the 1910s these curved, interconnecting and intertwined lines were instead employed to convey the ‘rhythmical’ representation of those vital, universal, natural life forces that govern the movements of the universe – the undulating generative forces out of which everything is formed. With the crystallization of these multiple stylistic elements, Balla's Futurist style attained full maturity.

Around 1920 Balla began various works, including a series of marine views titled *Libeccio* (named after the south-west wind) which he started during a fortnight's stay in Viareggio in September 1919. In 1916 he

began a cycle of works taking as their theme the expansive forces of spring, which started with the ‘softnesses of spring’ series (Fig. 32), continued with studies of the four seasons and was finally completed with the masterpiece *The Idea Arises* of 1920. Other works included the ‘form-spirit transformation’ series of 1917–18, as well as the more mystical works *Towards the Night* and *My State of Mind*. The artist created and refined a repertoire of highly original themes and forms that were deployed in both public and private environments, which Balla furnished with glowing brilliance. Lines of force, spatial lines, flowing lines, noise-forms, lines of speed, plastic forms and vortices became the artist's minutely formalized basic language, used to create increasingly complex and articulated compositions dominated by geometric imagery, brilliant inventiveness and bright colours. Around 1923 Balla returned to a synthetic phase marked by futuristically ‘mechanical’ content (*Aeronoise, Pessimism and Optimism*) the foundations of which had already been prepared between 1917 and 1920.

Thanks to Balla, Roman Futurism experienced a period of great vivacity during the 1920s, witnessing the adhesion of enthusiastic young artists

RICOSTRUZIONE FUTURISTA DELL'UNIVERSO

Leggete **LA BALZA**
GIORNALE FUTURISTA
MESSINA

Col Manifesto tecnico della Pittura futurista e colla prefazione al Catalogo dell'Esposizione futurista di Parigi (firmati Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla, Severini), col Manifesto della Scultura futurista (firmato Boccioni), col Manifesto La Pittura dei suoni rumori e odori (firmato Carrà), col volume *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, di Boccioni, e col volume *Guerrapittura*, di Carrà, il futurismo pittorico si è svolto, in 6 anni, quale superamento e solidificazione dell'impressionismo, dinamismo plastico e plasmazione dell'atmosfera, compenetrazione di piani e stati d'animo. La valutazione lirica dell'universo, mediante le Parole in libertà di Marinetti, e l'Arte dei Rumori di Russolo, si fondono col dinamismo plastico per dare l'espressione dinamica, simultanea, plastica, rumoristica della vibrazione universale.

Noi futuristi, Balla e Depero, vogliamo realizzare questa fusione totale per ricostruire l'universo rallegrandolo, cioè ricercandolo integralmente. Daremo scheletro e carne all'invisibile, all'impalpabile, all'imponderabile, all'impercettibile. Troveremo degli equivalenti astratti di tutte le forme e di tutti gli elementi dell'universo, poi li combineremo insieme, secondo i capricci della nostra ispirazione, per formare dei complessi plastici che metteremo in moto.

Balla cominciò collo studiare la velocità delle automobili, ne scoprì le leggi e le linee-forze essenziali. Dopo più di 20 quadri sulla medesima ricerca, comprese che il piano unico della tela non permetteva di dare in profondità il volume dinamico della velocità. Balla sentì la necessità di costruire con fili di ferro, piani di cartone, stoffe e carte veline, ecc., il primo complesso plastico dinamico.

1. Astratto. — **2. Dinamico.** Moto relativo (cinematografo) + moto assoluto. — **3. Trasparentissimo.** Per la velocità e per la volatilità del complesso plastico, che deve apparire e scomparire, leggerissimo e impalpabile. — **4. Coloratissimo e Luminosissimo** (mediante lampade interne). — **5. Autonomo.** cioè somigliante solo a sé stesso. — **6. Trasformabile.** — **7. Drammatico.** — **8. Volatile.** — **9. Odoroso.** — **10. Rumoreggiante.** Rumorismo plastico simultaneo coll'espressione plastica. — **11. Scoppiante,** apparizione e scomparsa simultanee a scoppi.

Il parolibero Marinetti, al quale noi mostrammo i nostri primi complessi plastici ci disse con entusiasmo: «L'arte, prima di noi, fu ricordo, rievocazione angosciosa di un Oggetto perduto» (felicità, amore, paesaggio) perciò nostalgia, statica, dolore, lontananza. Col Futurismo invece, l'arte «diventa arte-azione, cioè volontà, ottimismo, aggressione, possesso, penetrazione, gioia, realtà brutale nell'arte (Es.: onomatopoe. — Es.: intonarumori = motori), splendore geometrico delle forze, «proiezione in avanti. Dunque l'arte diventa Presenza, nuovo Oggetto, nuova realtà creata cogli elementi astratti dell'universo. Le mani dell'artista passatista soffrivano per l'Oggetto perduto; «le nostre mani spasimavano per un nuovo Oggetto da creare. Ecco perchè il nuovo Oggetto» (complesso plastico) appare miracolosamente fra le vostre.»

La costruzione materiale del complesso plastico

MEZZI NECESSARI: Fili metallici, di cotone, lana, seta, d'ogni spessore, colorati. Vetri colorati, cartoveline, celluloidi, reti metalliche, trasparenti d'ogni genere, coloratissimi, tessuti,

Il paesaggio artificiale

Sviluppando la prima sintesi della velocità dell'automobile, Balla è giunto al primo complesso plastico (N. 1). Questo ci ha rivelato un paesaggio astratto a coni, piramidi, poliedri, spirali di monti, fiumi, luci, ombre. Dunque un'analogia profonda esiste fra le linee-forze essenziali della velocità e le linee-forze essenziali d'un paesaggio. Siamo scesi nell'essenza profonda dell'universo, e padroneggiamo gli elementi. Giungeremo così, a costruire

l'animale metallico

Fusione di arte + scienza. Chimica, fisica, pirotecnica continua improvvisa, dell'essere nuovo automaticamente parlante, gridante, danzante. Noi futuristi, Balla e Depero, costruiremo milioni di animali metallici, per la più grande guerra (conflagrazione di tutte le forze creatrici dell'Europa, dell'Asia, dell'Africa e dell'America, che seguirà indubbiamente l'attuale meravigliosa piccola conflagrazione umana).

Le invenzioni contenute in questo manifesto sono creazioni assolute, integralmente generate dal Futurismo italiano. Nessun artista di Francia, di Russia, d'Inghilterra o di Germania intul prima di noi qualche cosa di simile o di analogo. Soltanto il genio italiano, cioè il genio più costruttore e più architetto, poteva intuire il complesso plastico astratto. Con questo, il Futurismo ha determinato il suo Stile, che dominerà inevitabilmente su molti secoli di sensibilità.

MILANO, 11 Marzo 1915.

**Balla
Depero**

astrattisti futuristi

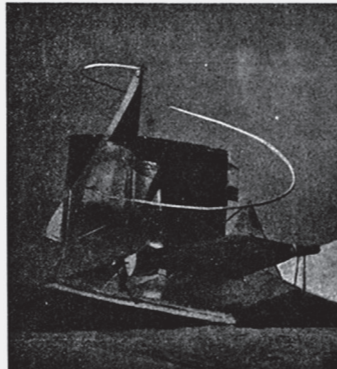
DIREZIONE DEL MOVIMENTO FUTURISTA: Corso Venezia, 61 - MILANO

BALLA



N. 1. Complesso plastico colorato di frastuono + velocità (Cartone e stagne colorate)

BALLA



N. 2. Complesso plastico colorato di frastuono + danza + allegria (Specchi, stagno, talco, cartone, filferro)

33. *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, Futurist manifesto, 1915

such as Pannaggi and Paladini, and the artistic development of Prampolini and Depero. The work of these figures was frequently oriented toward 'mechanical art', taking its cue from one of the master's themes, linked to the myth of the machine, applying pure, linear, geometric shapes to scenes in which figures and nature itself are dramatized by mechanical mannequins.

The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe

In 1915, Balla established an increasingly individual Futurist language, abandoning once and for all the fragmented brushstrokes which represented the final link to that 'congenital complementarism' described in the 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting', and which were still present in the 'abstract speed' series (1913-14) as well as in those works depicting *Mercury Passing in Front of the Sun* (1914). He also began to use a range of unusual media, such as industrial enamel paint, ink washes, and collage elements including shiny paper and foil. These materials accompanied (in fact, almost replaced) his use of other, more traditional, media such as oil and tempera. Such innovations not only expressed a desire for modernity in terms of materials, but also endowed Balla's paintings with an unusual chromatic brilliance, with which he created

34. *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, Futurist manifesto, 1915

uniform and synthetic fields of colour, and slicing, interpenetrating forms redolent of speed. His works of 1915 (or late 1914) also included the now lost 'plastic complexes': pure, "anti-atmospheric" structures incorporating three-dimensional elements such as mirrors, wire, cardboard and foil, which sublimated Boccioni's concept of mixed-media sculpture, dissociating it from any physical or iconographical reference points so as to express dynamism in a purely abstract sense. That year (1915) also witnessed the extraordinary series of 'interventionist' paintings, likewise comprising pure and enamelled colours, and sinuous geometric shapes that bore no resemblance to elements within objective reality. In fact, in the manifesto 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe' (11 March 1915), Balla defined himself as an 'abstract Futurist' in common with his co-signatory Fortunato Depero.⁵⁶

Since its inception, the Futurist movement had sought to bring art into everyday life, but Balla was the first artist to fully achieve this goal, eliminating hierarchical divisions between the various spheres of creative activity. It was his idea to translate Futurist aesthetics from painting to clothing, furnishing, design, theatre, cinema and architecture, thereby realizing a ground-breaking concept of 'total art.' As Boccioni observed: "It would be difficult to find anyone else at the same point

today anywhere in Europe."⁵⁷ Balla's important intuitions, which were to influence the entire European avant-garde, were most fully expressed in the aforementioned manifesto, which proposed the application of Futurist principles to all areas of life. As Gino Galli emphasized in 1919: "In Italy, G. Balla was the first to turn his attention to the industrialization of Futurism, to the applied arts, to everyday objects."⁵⁸

Although 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe' was certainly written in collaboration with Depero (in fact, the latter drafted a handwritten version of the text in 1914 in which a number of its concepts – including that of the 'plastic complex' – were already sketched out), it is difficult to imagine that so young an artist, who had only been introduced to Futurist concepts a few months earlier, would have been able single-handedly to develop one of the most revolutionary manifestos in the entire history of the movement, marking the transition between the first, painterly, phase of Futurism and a 'second,' more expansive one.⁵⁹ It is therefore much more likely (as other points in the text suggest)⁶⁰ that Depero, like a faithful and enthusiastic student, transcribed those ideas concerning extra-pictorial innovations that Balla had been developing for around a year, and which he would certainly have discussed with his young pupil (ideas which met with disapproval from other members of the movement's 'central committee' – especially Soffici and Carrà, but also Severini).⁶¹ In particular, one thinks of Balla's manifesto concerning the *Vêtement masculin futuriste*, which he first published on 20 May 1914, and republished in Italian that September with a more 'interventionist' ("anti-neutral") character. This text anticipated the altogether more complete proposal to expand Futurist aesthetics from painting and sculpture to every aspect of daily life contained in 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe' (Figs 33, 34). If, as stated, the plastic complexes represented Balla's own personal meditation on Boccioni's mixed-media sculpture, they constituted a radical re-imagining of the latter's theories. In translating his favoured imagery into three dimensions, Boccioni always considered the subject to be the central element of the work. Despite asserting his intention to "achieve an abstract reconstruction of planes and volumes in order to determine the forms of sculpture, not their figurative value," such abstraction was understood in a purely stylistic sense, and Boccioni's work would always retain links to reality: "The cogs of a machine might easily appear out of the armpits of a mechanic, or the lines of a table could cut a reader's head in two, or a book with its fanned-out pages could intersect the reader's stomach." The innovative aspect of Boccioni's approach to sculpture consisted in its multi-material character, but this was employed in the same manner as Cubist collage: that is, to directly evoke the object(s) represented ("spherical fibrous forms for hair, semi-circles of glass for a vase, wires and netting for atmospheric planes"), an approach that would lead to heated exchanges with Papini and the magazine *Lacerba*. By contrast, while Balla also incorporated different materials into his works, the 'abstract equivalents' of reality were completely unshackled from any associations with concrete subjects (they were different, too, from Severini's 'plastic analogies,' which went further in terms of abstraction than Boccioni's work, but which still retained a link to reality insofar as they were 'analogies' of specific elements within it). Balla's concept was similar in some respects to that of the "dynamic arabesque [...]" the sole reality created by the artist from the depths of his sensibility,⁶² described by Carrà in his manifesto



35. *Feu d'artifice*, study of scenery for Igor Stravinsky's ballet, 1916, oil on paper, 35 x 50 cm, Milan, Museo teatrale alla Scala

'The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells' – a text that was in fact mentioned in the preamble to 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe', together with references to the freed-word poetry of Marinetti and the music of Russolo. The manifesto traces the genesis of the abstract 'plastic complex': "Balla started by studying the speed of automobiles, and in so doing discovered the laws and essential force-lines of speed. After more than twenty paintings exploring this, he understood that the flat plane of the canvas prevented him from reproducing the dynamic volume of speed in depth. Balla felt the need to construct, with strands of wire, cardboard planes, material, tissue paper, etc., the first plastic-dynamic complex." From this he passed on to give an analogical-abstract rendering of every aspect of reality, recreating it and subjecting it to an unprecedentedly comprehensive interpretation: "We will give skeleton and flesh to the invisible, the impalpable, the imponderable and the imperceptible. We will find abstract equivalents for all the forms and elements of the universe, and then we will combine them according to the caprice of our inspiration, to shape plastic complexes which we will set in motion." The Futurist reconstruction of the universe encompassed the plant world, the animal kingdom and even children's toys, through "the discovery – infinite systematic invention" of different mechanisms. The text's abandonment of logic – something later treasured by the Dadaists – is clear, as is a particular kind of free imagination and creativity that would have an even longer legacy in twentieth-century culture.

In 1916, Balla designed the scenery for Stravinsky's *Feu d'artifice*, organized by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and staged the following year (Fig. 35). The morphology of its abstract elements represented a three-dimensional evolution (or rather, multi-dimensional, given the set's employment of transparent veils and beams of coloured light, which were intended to give an impression of unprecedented depth and volume) of the artist's magnificent 'interventionist' paintings of 1915. Balla's scenery was comprised entirely of brightly coloured geometric elements and moving lights, filtered by silk screens; there were no dancers, the



36. Contemporary photograph of the Bal Tik-Tak

37. Cabinet, 1918–20, private collection

‘ballet’ being performed solely by a disembodied and abstract flow of light and colour – a first for the theatre.⁶³

Whilst highly original, Balla’s conception of scenographic and choreographic abstraction again reveals links with theosophical culture, an aspect of the project that has never been analyzed. There is no doubt that its precise form developed out of the artist’s reflections on a similar experiment presented by the Russian composer Alexander Scriabin⁶⁴ at New York’s Carnegie Hall on 20 March 1915. On that occasion his composition *Prometheus* had been accompanied by a synaesthetic light show. This was achieved by means of a special instrument devised by Scriabin named the *clavier à lumière*, comprising a keyboard that activated a range of coloured lights corresponding to different notes.⁶⁵ There is an obvious similarity between this apparatus and the complicated console Balla constructed to control the lighting of his own set, which allowed 76 different light combinations, and which was so complex that it short-circuited during the second performance of the ballet, plunging the stage into darkness. Scriabin’s connections to theosophical circles would have meant that news of his experimental performance in New York – and belief in the existence of abstract connections between

sounds and colours – would have reached Balla by a very direct route, providing him with exciting ideas on which to reflect. Balla did not hesitate to explore these, and in fact went further than Scriabin by transforming the purely ‘environmental’ approach of the Russian composer (the coloured lights merely accompanied the orchestral performance) into a more complete and dynamic theatrical set design. Moreover, the deep interest aroused by Scriabin’s synaesthetic experiments within avant-garde circles is illustrated by the many articles devoted to it in contemporary journals, such as that published by Sabaneev in the 1912 almanac of the Blaue Reiter group, edited by Kandinsky and Marc.⁶⁶

Picasso travelled to Italy with Diaghilev to make studies for the ballet *Parade*, on which occasion he also met Balla. However, the influence of the Futurists on Picasso’s Roman works⁶⁷ has not received due emphasis over the years. His mechanical costumes have a marked Futurist quality, while his costume for the Acrobat includes dynamic forms typical of Balla’s imagery (which was reviled in Picasso’s notebooks, illustrating the point that artists’ claims should be read critically, and certainly not taken at face value).⁶⁸ Finally, although painted in the Cubist idiom, another work of Picasso’s created in Rome during 1917, titled *L’Italienne*, recalls

the bright colours and zigzagging forms characteristic of Depero – who also worked for Diaghilev.

In 1916 Balla collaborated on the film *Vita futurista*, directed by Arnaldo Ginna to a ‘script’ drafted by Marinetti, Settimelli, Corra and Balla himself. The latter contributed ideas for various scenes, including the *Dance of Geometric Splendour*, and another capturing a symbolic *Marriage to the Object*.

He also designed ‘total’ Futurist spaces for nightclubs such as the Bal Tik-Tak (1921), formerly located in Rome’s Via Milano. His phantasmagorical décor was inspired by the swirling motions of dance (Fig. 36), and incorporated witty visual references to the choreographic notation systems he had become familiar with as a result of his contact with the Ballets Russes, which he had subsequently explored in both ancient and modern texts on the subject, creating a synthetic calligraphy that in fact anticipated some of the most modern notations, such as those of Merce Cunningham.⁶⁹ Balla’s design also contained references to the Marchesa Casati, a collector of Futurist art and a muse of the movement’s painters and poets (Marinetti had dedicated the ‘Manifesto of Futurist Dance’ to her in 1917). The features of ‘the divine Marchesa’ – an idol of modernity – can be discerned in a preparatory study for the project, as well as in one of Balla’s panels.⁷⁰ The following year, he designed the interior of the new Galleria Bragaglia in a highly original manner, as part of his ongoing project to introduce Futurist motifs into public spaces, cultural centres and entertainment venues – in short, to redesign the modern lifestyle in accordance with new techniques and aesthetics.

Alongside such activities, Balla also designed and manufactured a range of furniture and other everyday objects in accordance with the lively and asymmetrical dynamism of the Futurist style, creating fully resolved ‘total’ environments. He personally designed and constructed the furnishings of his house (Fig. 37) using a range of different materials that were then decorated with variegated Futurist motifs (musical instruments, easels, boxes, chairs, furniture, and so on), turning his own home into a total work of art that was opened to the public one day a week. In so doing, Balla anticipated similar projects such as Schwitters’ famous *Merzbau*. His wife and his daughters also embroidered tapestries, pillows and lampshades based on his designs. Over the years, certain scholars and critics have drawn attention to the limitations of these otherwise revolutionary and highly modern projects by emphasizing their essentially artisanal, non-industrial character. However, these limitations were not due to Balla or his followers, but rather to the lack of Italian companies willing or able to support the mass-production of such avant-garde items. In fact, throughout Europe the post-war period witnessed a sharp decline in industrial activities relating to the applied arts; consequently, projects of a bold experimental character tended to be set aside in order to avoid the risk of a failed enterprise. Italian taste was at that time dominated by a generic form of classicism; accordingly, Italian companies in search of ‘the new’ focused on designs reflecting the so-called ‘return to order’ – perhaps being no less original in aesthetic terms, but certainly appealing more to popular tastes than Modernism. The lack of productive collaborations on the part of Balla and the Futurists was not, therefore, the result of aesthetic elitism on their part, or the impracticality of the movement’s designs, but was instead due to objective circumstances, and a general inability to foresee



38. *Futurist Genius*, 1925, oil on canvas, 279 x 381 cm, Guidonia, Laura Biagiotti Collection

the popular appeal of Futurist items. This contrasted with the situation in the rest of Europe, where the lack of a strong classical tradition meant that companies were more inclined to engage with designs reflecting the stylistic innovations of Modernism.

Following Boccioni’s initial period of leadership (and well before his death in August 1916) Balla became the new point of reference for Futurist artists due to his extraordinary versatility. From 1915 onward – or, more precisely, after the publication of the manifesto ‘Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe’ – Rome became the new centre of Futurist activity, and Balla the figure toward whom the most promising young painters of the day gravitated: principally, Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini, but also Dottori, Pannaggi, Paladini, Galli, De Pistoris, Benedetta, Evola, Zatkova and Tato.

Balla was certainly the key representative of Futurism in the sphere of the applied arts, and of the ambition to construct – in concrete terms – a new universe by means of practical interventions; eventually, these would come to reflect the manifold interpretations of the Futurist aesthetic by the movement’s artists. Balla’s position at the centre of Roman Futurism also led to a gradual, general, move away from the stylistic traits typical of Boccioni’s art, grounded in the formal principles of Cubism, which had dominated the early years of the movement. Moreover, whilst brilliantly innovative, Boccioni’s robust, Michelangesque vision had prioritized the fine arts. By contrast, Balla greatly enlarged the scope of avant-garde activity, expanding it beyond the confines of pictorial or sculptural work, as well as reducing its reliance on foreign reference points, to create a radically innovative vocabulary.

Subsequently, Futurism investigated every conceivable aspect of artistic production, not only what we might term its ‘static’ forms (architecture, ceramics, furniture, glassware, mosaic, monumental art, tapestry (Fig. 38), graphics, fashion, photography, or scenography), but also engaging with such ‘dynamic’ disciplines as film, dance or theatre.

As stated, Balla’s insights would influence the entire European avant-garde, the activities of which were, until that point, essentially bound up



39. *Autocaffè* ('Self-portrait with Coffee'), 1928, oil on board, 63.5 x 42.5 cm, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

with traditional concepts of 'high' art (painting, sculpture and architecture). The idea of an aesthetic continuum seamlessly encompassing life, art and the everyday environment was tackled head-on by Futurism, and subsequently swiftly taken up by groups and tendencies as disparate as the Bauhaus in Germany, Dutch Neo-Plasticism, Russian Constructivism and *Esprit Nouveau* in France, as well as being reflected in the new, popular, 'Déco' style. Balla was the first artist to introduce pure geometric forms into the Futurist vocabulary (his affinity for "steel and crystal" reflecting a quintessentially Déco sensibility),⁷¹ exerting a major influence on contemporary taste.⁷² In fact, one might consider Déco itself to represent the pragmatic realization of the Futurist avant-garde utopia, in Italy as well as in Europe and America.

After 1930: Balla's Late Works, between the Renewal of Futurism, Modern Figuration and Mass-Produced Imagery

The final period of Balla's work – which may be termed 'post-Futurist' or 'figurative' – has never been subjected to a thorough study in terms

of its nature, its dynamics, its deeper significance, or the aesthetic intentions that motivated the artist to embark on his last artistic adventure. The first (and I would say only) attempt to investigate more deeply what cannot be considered a banal, retrogressive, period but rather an initially vertiginous – and perhaps unrealistic – attempt radically to renew Futurism (which, having fallen on deaf ears, led him toward an isolated and extremist position), was made by myself many years ago,⁷³ and was repeated in my monograph on the artist.⁷⁴ The resistance of Italian critics to abandon clichés and outdated ideological connotations when interpreting actions that apparently veer away from the canonical avant-garde path remains very strong; accordingly, there has been no further discussion of the issue. Certainly, the interpretation of this difficult, complex and in many ways introverted phase of Balla's art has been greatly restricted by the truly conservative position of Balla's daughters, who have appointed themselves the custodians of their father's artistic (as well as moral and intellectual) heritage. But this is no reason not to attempt a truthful reading and philological appraisal of the artist's true intentions; if anything, it should act as a spur to provide a more fully-rounded characterization of one of the major artistic figures of the twentieth century.

By the 1930s Balla was a Futurist icon, yet he progressively withdrew into solitary meditation. One aspect of the artist's career that has never been investigated in any depth – despite its apparent ideological dimensions – is the manner of his departure from the Futurist movement. In fact, the timing and process of this are not entirely clear. It is extremely curious that such an important step has, until recently, escaped critical analysis, although this not without good cause. In fact, Balla never explained his decision in any detail, his only comment on the matter being made in a text of 1937 published in the magazine *Perseo*⁷⁵ – an extremely conservative, indeed reactionary, publication in terms of its views on modern art – where he stated that he had not participated in Futurist activity of any kind "for several years." A first moment of friction with Futurism may have occurred with the publication of the 'Manifesto of Futurist Sacred Art'⁷⁶ in 1931, signed by Marinetti and Fillia.⁷⁷ The production of religious work remained a marginal activity for some time: examples of such 'sacred art' only began to appear in Futurist exhibitions in December 1933, becoming more numerous from March 1935. Yet this timing would have coincided with Balla's decision (albeit not yet declared) to distance himself from the movement. Balla's anti-clericalism – which was a key feature of the wider movement's ideology during its early years, and to which Marinetti had continued to subscribe until recent times – as well as his adherence to theosophy may partly account for his decision to break with the movement. However, his practice had been geared to an exclusively painterly investigation of reality for some time and he had definitively abandoned his abstract-Futurist style of days gone by, which he now used only occasionally for decorative work.

However, it should be noted that Balla had created figurative imagery throughout his Futurist period – albeit on an infrequent basis to begin with – despite having categorically stated: "Given the existence of photography and cinematography, the pictorial reproduction of reality no longer interests, nor can interest, anyone" in the first point of his 'Manifesto of Colour' (October 1918), a text contained in the catalogue of his

solo exhibition at the Galleria Bragaglia. One of Balla's early figurative images, which habitually portrayed family scenes, was *Valle Giulia* of 1921 (an earlier version, dating from 1919, was exhibited in 1928), depicting his two daughters Luce and Elica at Villa Borghese; another was *Pink Veils* (a portrait of Luce) of 1922. Similar 'private exemptions' from abstract, avant-garde rigour were frequent among contemporary modernists (Picasso, Sironi, Boccioni, Picabia) and cannot be taken as evidence of a "split personality"⁷⁸ or as signifying an incipient "return to order";⁷⁹ certainly, neither interpretation would apply to Balla. However, practical considerations might have influenced the realization of such essays in figurative art: from June 1922 to June 1923, Baron Alberto Fassini commissioned Balla to produce a number of paintings in return for a monthly fee, with the proviso that "futuristic [sic] art" was to "remain absolutely absent" from them.⁸⁰ During this period the artist delivered ten such paintings to his patron, but it is evident that these were produced out of economic necessity at a time when he was unable to sell his Futurist works (as Balla's daughter Elica has emphasized).⁸¹

By contrast, an increasingly convincing exploration of figurative imagery on Balla's part can be identified during the second half of the 1920s, effectively running parallel to his Futurist output, yet still retaining its episodic character when compared to his vigorous and all-embracing avant-garde practice. Moreover, with works such as *Aidè on the Patio* (1926, Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna) and *Autocaffè* ('Self-portrait with Coffee', 1928, Florence, Uffizi) (Fig. 39), Balla studied an entirely new system of representation that has no parallels in other Italian or European art of the time, inspired by fashion photography, cinematography and photo-reportage.

Until 1933, his work continued to alternate between Futurism and figuration, and this interest in popular culture suggests a plausible interpretation as to the reasons why – one which Balla must have explained to Marinetti and his companions, seeing that articles about him continued to appear in the magazine *Futurismo* (the movement's official organ, where he was consistently referred to as a key figure of Futurist art) until at least that date. An issue of the journal published that year⁸² also contained a large print – the first in a series – of Balla's painting *Autocaffè*, a work of absolute photographic realism. This piece must somehow have been considered 'Futurist' in order to have been published in such a prominent manner in the official mouthpiece of the movement. Both Balla and Marinetti must have considered an image of this kind to have represented a possible continuation and renewal of Futurist principles. And indeed, what could be more modern, more in tune with contemporary popular taste, than the cinema, fashion photography and photo-reportage – the world depicted in glossy magazines, simultaneously looked at and imitated by millions of people at the forefront of taste, a sort of 'avant-garde for the masses'?

In fact, a little-known text published by Balla in 1930 would seem to confirm this interpretation.⁸³ Decidedly Futurist in character (it was signed 'Futurballa'), it stated: "In reaction, the Cinema – a living painting – has overtaken the painters (the crowds are attracted to it, demonstrating this) and our own Mussolini, royal family, Pope, figures of authority and beautiful tableaux of life are all perfectly represented on screen; by contrast, artists have given us inferior, opportunistic and anti-artistic representations of such subjects [...] We must finally surpass any tradi-

tion[al] means of representation and the mechanics of cinematography, and study contemporary reality in a verist manner with a new sensibility in order to create conceptions worthy of the ascensional period of Italian renewal; then we shall have our great historical indestructible work. Futurism is the precursor of such renewal."

Tato, who was very close to Balla during the 1920s, seems to have followed a similar path, perceiving the photograph as a metaphor for modernity, and Balla certainly inspired his realist interpretation of aeropainting, as well as that of other figures such as Tullio Crali (with whom he would remain friends until after the war), Renato Di Bosso, and so on. Evidently the new language (which subsequently came to represent an exit route from the movement for the old master) had been openly discussed and accepted within Futurist circles. Indeed, Balla had even publicly exhibited his figurative works for some time – and in ever greater numbers – at exhibitions such as the Rome Quadriennale (beginning in 1931).

Despite all this, he essentially abandoned canonical Futurism around 1933 (except for a number of strictly 'decorative' applied art projects, as stated). His final participation in a Futurist exhibition took place in March 1932;⁸⁴ thereafter, his painting was exclusively oriented toward a photographic realism even more attuned to the conventions of 'mass media'. It was probably the strength of his convictions on this matter that led to his eventual break with Marinetti's movement. The Futurist leader could hardly impose a single painterly vocabulary on his eclectic phalanx of artists, or insist on their abandonment of such important techniques as *polimaterismo* and aeropainting; moreover, it is possible that whilst Balla's ideas were shared by some within the movement they met with strong disapproval from other quarters. Although hypothetical, such issues – along with his possible objection to the development of a Futurist sacred art – must have influenced Balla to officially distance himself from his old ideologies in 1937.

If he had been deeply interested in photography since his early Divisionist years, the figurative revival of the inter-war period saw Balla's painting once again strongly informed by photographic conventions and imagery, but of a very particular character.

Certainly less investigated than other phases, and frequently underestimated in terms of its true significance, this period contains surprising dimensions that are of interest to any more thorough investigation of the artist's work. Mentioned only in passing by the majority of critics who have written on Balla, the photographic 'air' of his final paintings does not in itself fully explain their aesthetic essence or ultimate meaning. Instead, it is by means of considering these works in relation to Balla's 'photographic eye' that we can begin to penetrate the profound nature of an operation that appears at first glance to have been peculiarly 'unfashionable.' In abandoning Futurism, Balla did not follow the usual path taken by other former members of avant-garde movements – that is to say, by means of a 'return to order,' or by taking inspiration from 'primitivism,' or 'traditionalism,' variously understood; nor did he trace his own artistic journey back to its beginnings in order to update it, take inspiration from an earlier painterly style, or explore some other visual vocabulary popular in Europe at that time.

Just as his own brand of Futurism had been highly personal and unusually free from references to other contemporary avant-garde vocabularies



40. Evening dress in silk crêpe, 1936 (fashion photograph)

41. *Let's Go, it's Late*, 1934, oil on board and screen, 182 x 132 cm, Rome, private collection

(the extent to which the work of Boccioni, Carrà and Severini was indebted to the experiments of the Cubists is well known) creating an independent and original language, so too in determining to renew – and ultimately to abandon – Futurism, Balla had the strength once again to elaborate an autonomous, original approach that had no parallels in European art, or ‘retro’ inflections.

What, then, were the aesthetic considerations and models that led to such radical choices – ones that were undoubtedly original and ‘new’ from a stylistic and formal point of view?

I believe that the answer is fairly straightforward and, from a conceptual point of view, quite clear and evident, being corroborated by the curious aforementioned fact of the reproduction of *Autocaffè*, one of Balla’s earliest and most significant figurative paintings, in the magazine *Futurismo*, as well as by his parallel practice of abstract-Futurist / figurative painting.

Futurism had certainly reached the end of its most dynamic and innovative phase by the 1920s, and the restless Balla – who had already once radically repudiated his past by abandoning Divisionism – was apparently ready to do the same again on the basis of his personal convictions. Moreover, his own avant-garde style was now around twenty years old: an inherent contradiction for an artist belonging to a movement that by its very ideological nature insisted on continual renewal.

With its innovative aesthetic ambitions, the manifesto ‘Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe’ had been a hymn to modernity of epochal significance, giving form to the idea of an extension of the (Futurist) artistic sensibility to all aspects of daily life. In fact, Balla had long identified in fashion the most incisive means by which artistic innovations might pen-

trate into contemporary consciousness (the manifesto of the *Anti-neutral Suit* dated from 1914, but Balla had designed ‘Futurist’ clothes from as early as 1912),⁸⁵ an idea that he would develop to a greater extent than any other twentieth-century artist. For the same reasons, he was dedicated to the theatre and the cinema, believing that they too were able vividly to communicate the values of modernity.

Therefore, in seeking a new avant-garde path that would enable him to overcome the now exhausted language of Futurism, Balla had to consider how best to develop an aesthetic that was at least as ‘modern’ in terms of its style and content, and to experiment with new language that was equally expressive of a contemporary vision of the world – a sort of continuation and renewal of Futurism.

In fashion photography – as in the artistic photography of various Italian figures such as Arturo Ghergo and Elio Luxardo, who emphasized the expressive use of diagonal cropping and raking light – he identified the iconic formal and chromatic structures of the ‘collective imagination,’ of poses reflecting the growing media star system, with an intuition of the importance of the popular image and the publicity shot that seems to anticipate the ideas of Pop Art, just as he had foreseen many other contemporary developments, from pure abstraction to the diffusion of artistic vocabularies in everyday life by means of avant-garde design.

In this way, photography – Balla’s initial passion – continued to be the true source of his artistic research. However, compared to his Divisionist beginnings, the focus of his ‘photographic eye’ was now completely different. The significance of photography no longer consisted in its ability directly to capture reality, or to render movement, but in terms of the way in which it functioned as a repository of ‘modern tastes’, as embodied in

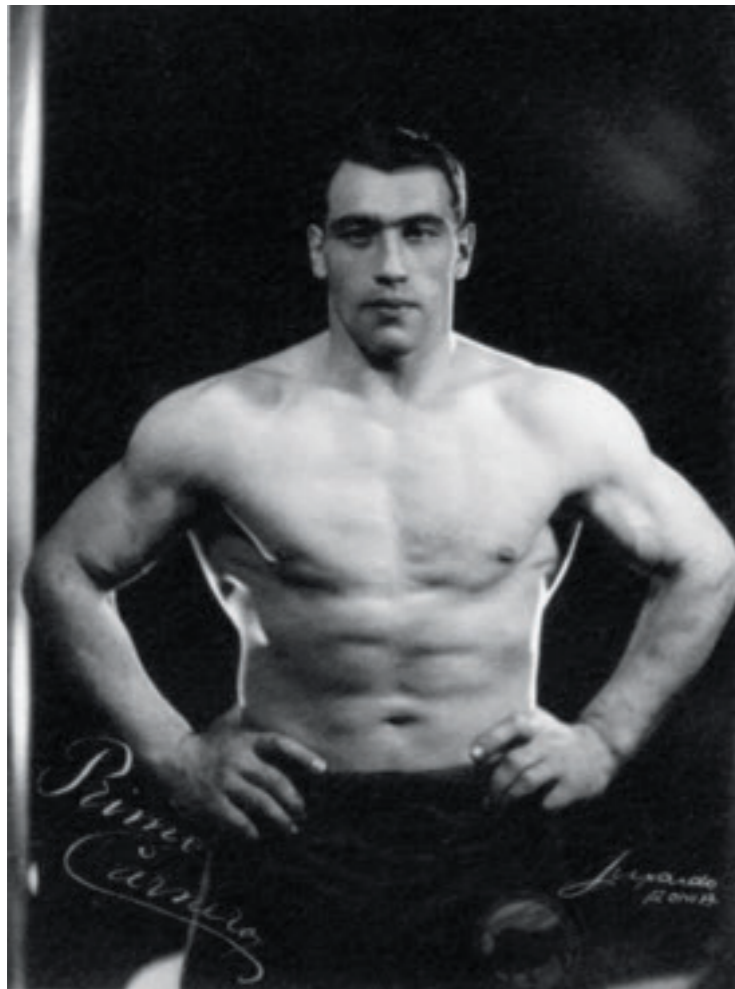


42. Arturo Ghergo, *Isa Miranda*

43. Arturo Ghergo, *Isa Miranda*

44. *Blondebrown*, 1926, oil on canvas, 90 x 100 cm, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna

45. *The Four Seasons in Red: Autumn*, 1940, oil on board and screen, 110 x 80 cm, private collection



46. Elio Luxardo, *Primo Carnera*, 1932

47. Front page of the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, 30 June 1933, with the news of Primo Carnera's victory in the World Championships (photograph by Luxardo)



the worlds of fashion, film and magazines; as an extension of this interest, Balla also carefully studied and adopted the formal structures of images immortalizing actors and capturing theatrical or cinematic scenes. Balla's post-Futurist works are therefore not simply 'realistic' – and still less indicative of a belated 'return to order', as has often been asserted – but rather constitute the elaboration of a sophisticated visual system attuned to the most conceptually distilled visions of modern life. Was this the sense in which Marinetti and the Futurists accepted his new stylistic direction, publishing the results in *Futurismo*? Surely yes, although this acceptance was short-lived. (However, as stated, the survival of Balla's ideas can be discerned in a particular interpretation of the 'aeropainting' genre.)

Balla's innovative approach found no parallels at this time, apart from in certain works by Picabia dating from the 1940s, or De Lempicka's glamorous, decorative interpretations of Déco. Only much later, with American Pop Art, would Western culture engage with the contemporary world with such perspicuity, evaluating and representing it in accordance with mass-media conventions and techniques.

Examples of fashion photography found in contemporary newspapers (Figs 40, 41) as well as images of actors and actresses taken by famous photographers (Figs 42, 43, 44, 45) make for striking comparisons with Balla's works. They illuminate with a new light his alluring images, which give a nod to a popular visual vocabulary – the most 'modern' way of seeing reality during those years.

He ignored, or seemed to ignore, the *in vitro* photographic experiments carried out by members of the historical avant-garde, such as those of Man Ray and of artists affiliated with the Bauhaus, although we know he was familiar with these.⁸⁶ The explanation for this consists in the lack of resonance such 'elitist' experiments had in the popular imagination. The great 'artistic' photographers may have created modern images, but popular photography was modern imagery. Accordingly, Balla's works relate most closely to the work of such 'fashionable' photographers of the 1930s as Ghitta Carell, who captured upper-class life *entre deux guerres*, Arturo Ghergo, the master of nuanced contrasts of light and shadow, and Elio Luxardo, who specialized in dynamic effects and diagonal shots. Luxardo – who was a friend of Marinetti's, and who



48. *Primo Carnera* (verso of *Expansion of Perfume*, 1926), 1933, oil on board and screen, 109 x 100 cm, Rome, private collection

photographed the Futurist leader's apartment in Piazza Adriana – also made an impressive portrait of Primo Carnera which was reproduced on the front page of the *Gazzetta dello Sport* when the boxer won the world championship (Figs 46, 47) – an image that constituted the basis of Balla's famous painting on the same subject of 1933 (Fig. 48).⁸⁷ Balla's decision to paint over sheets of tulle, giving an effect similar to the halftone 'screens' of newspaper images, underlines his intention of mimicking the effects of the oleograph or rotogravure. This was a technique Balla used in many of his most significant works of the 1930s, including the aforementioned portrait of Primo Carnera, the 'red' cycle of the *Four Seasons* and *Let's Go, it's Late*. It clearly signalled Balla's intention – extraordinary for the period – to reproduce the qualities of mass-produced imagery: a fundamental aspect of American Pop Art (from Warhol to Lichtenstein), as stated.

The less 'obsessive' character of Balla's paintings compared to those produced by Pop artists is a consequence of the fact that such imagery

was not yet as all-pervasive as it would become during the 1960s. Yet this only makes Balla's intuitions even more striking. His attempt to reproduce modern images ('modern' by virtue of their being consecrated by the mass-media and, therefore, part of the collective imagination) is also evident in the most monumental works of this period, such as *The March on Rome*, painted on the rear of his largest Futurist work (*Abstract Speed*, 1913, Agnelli Collection) as if to 'turn the page' on that period. Begun around 1932, perhaps on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the 'Fascist revolution', the piece was completed by 1934.⁸⁸ Balla 'photographically' reproduced the founding episode of Fascism in the manner in which it had been captured and disseminated by newspaper photographs, minutely portraying the protagonists in accordance with a technique that undeniably represents an anticipation of Warhol's subsequent contemporary mythology. The painting was only exhibited once, in 1935, and Balla's conception proved too advanced in historical as well as aesthetic terms, attracting no interest on the part of the regime, which favoured the very different mythopoeic iconography of Sironi's mural painting – the central plank of 'official' Italian art at that time. In fact, the painting remained the artist's property, never receiving the public setting that its subject matter and size indicate it was intended to have.

Balla's artistic career ended with these works, which all incorporated such modern features (with varying levels of programmatic rigour). During the 1950s he worked with increasing difficulty (and, of course, with less energy) almost to the point of inactivity due to serious health problems that began in 1952. Although protected by the affection of his two dedicated and reverent daughters, illness isolated him more and more from the world. However, national and international interest in his Futurist phase increased, and his house became a site of pilgrimage for avant-garde artists, collectors and curators from foreign museums. His abstract works (especially the 'iridescent interpenetrations') returned to light, profoundly affecting younger generations of artists during the post-war period.⁸⁹ In his final period of activity, Balla himself painted some new versions of these works⁹⁰ ('updated' in accordance with an increased expressive range and a better knowledge of post-war art) in order to reaffirm his central role in the birth of European abstraction. Despite this renewed critical interest, the artist's final, figurative, period would remain misunderstood until recent years. In fact, all of Balla's work represents a constant and continuous commitment to avant-garde values and modernity: from Divisionism to Futurism, and a return to reality marked by the images of mass communication, he was always faithful to the need for a vision that might be a model and an archetype of the future and for a deep intuition of both the visible and the invisible.

¹ For documents relating to Balla's birth, family and education, see F. Benzi, *Balla. Genio futurista*, Milan, 2007, pp. 16, 26, and G. Lista, 'Divisionismo e visione fotografica,' in G. Lista, P. Baldacci and L. Velani, eds, *Balla. La modernità futurista*, exh. cat., Milan, Palazzo Reale, 2008, pp. 1–3.

² U. Boccioni, 'L'arte di Carlo Fornara,' in *Gli Awenimenti*, no. 15, 2 April 1916.

³ E. Balla, *Con Balla*, Milan, 1984, vol. I, p. 81.

⁴ In an article of the same name by S. A. Nappi, in *L'Italia Moderna*, July 1904.

⁵ *L'Avanti della Domenica*, III, 17, 1 May 1905, p. 7.

⁶ An analysis of Rome's theosophical circles has never been attempted, but would certainly provide interest-

ing results that would often lead back to Futurist circles. Besides the two artists mentioned, one should note Giovanni Amendola – a high-ranking member of the Liberal Party – and his wife Eva Kuhn, who were also close friends of Balla and Marinetti; other theosophist friends of Balla's were his pupil Julius Evola, and Nicola D'Urso.

⁷ Balla exhibited this work at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori* which opened that month, shortly before his adhesion to Futurism toward the end of April.

⁸ The identification of this portrait is based on a comparison with a youthful picture of Grethel (1883–1970) and a portrait by Franz von Lenbach in the possession of the Lucifero family of Aprigliano. See F. Benzi, 2007, cit., pp. 26–27.

⁹ U. Boccioni, *Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. by Z. Birolli, Milan, 1972, p. 342.

¹⁰ I formulated this hypothesis in *Balla. Futurismo tra arte e moda*, ed. by F. Benzi, exh. cat., Moscow, Pushkin Museum, 1996, pp. 34–37. For further details, see also F. Benzi, 2007, cit., pp. 66–68.

¹¹ M. Calvesi, *Il futurismo*, Milan, 1967, pp. 102–03.

¹² The *Mostra di Arte Libera*, which opened on 30 April 1911.

¹³ This exhibition opened on 29 March.

¹⁴ The *Portrait of Mayor Nathan*, dated 1910, and another, lost, “portrait of Sig. Cahn Speyer” [sic] – a rich Austrian banker and the father of Balla’s pupil Grethel [see above, p. 12, and below, p. 15].

¹⁵ The resolution with which this was approved dated back to February of that year; the exhibition opened on 16 June.

¹⁶ Evidently painted to commemorate Tolstoy, who had died on 7 November 1910, this work was clearly inspired by a photograph.

¹⁷ The work was included in Balla’s solo show at that year’s exhibition of the *Amatori e Cultori* in Rome. The same date is also given in several other contemporary publications. The earlier date was certainly added in the post-war period, as was confirmed by research carried out in 1972 on the occasion of the work’s exhibition at the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna in Rome.

¹⁸ Letter from Boccioni to Severini, 11 January 1913, in U. Boccioni, 1971, cit., p. 364.

¹⁹ On this project, see also F. Benzi, ‘Giacomo Balla e le Compenetrazioni iridescenti: approfondimenti e novità documentarie,’ in *Storia dell’Arte*, 39=139, September–December 2014, pp. 157–60.

²⁰ Balla’s letter is published, in part, by R. Carrieri in his *Il Futurismo*, Milan, 1961. In it, the artist states: “I have finished four paintings for the room,” adding: “The room is almost finished and is of intangible elegance.” At the same time Balla was busy painting *The Hand of the Violinist*: “Now I am also finishing a study of the husband’s hand as he plays the violin, but in motion, in different positions, and incorporating the continuous movements of the bow. The thing is very new.”

²¹ M. W. Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory 1909–1915*, Oxford, 1968, p. 175. Martin speculates that *The Hand of the Violinist* was intended to form a part of the frieze, but this was not the case since Balla not only took the work back to Italy, but also mentioned his hope that Mrs Löwenstein would purchase it in a letter to his family (18 November): “The thing is very new and ‘Miss’ is in love with it, so there is no doubt that she will not let me take the canvas away with me, but will buy it”. Clearly, this did not happen, a fact which confirms that it was never meant to be a part of the decorative cycle. On this painting, see also F. Benzi, ‘Luisa Casati e il Futurismo: una musa per la modernità,’ in F. Benzi and G. Mori, eds, *La Divina Marchesa. Arte e vita di Luisa Casati dalla Belle Époque agli anni folli*, exh. cat., Venice, Palazzo Fortuny, 2014–15, p. 105, and M. Patti and R. Cremoncini, eds, *More than Meets the Eye: New Research on the Estorick Collection*, exh. cat., London, Estorick Collection, 2015.

²² This idea was first suggested by Drudi Gambillo (see M. Drudi Gambillo and T. Fiori, eds, *Archivi del Futurismo*, vol. I, Rome, 1958, p. 480, and also E. Crispolti and M. Drudi Gambillo, eds, *Giacomo Balla*, exh.

cat., Turin, Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, 1963, p. 58), apparently on the basis of indications given by Balla’s daughters. It was subsequently accepted, without any verification, by even the most shrewd scholars (see, for example, M. Calvesi, 1967, cit.; M. Fagiolo, ed., *Le ‘Compenetrazioni iridescenti,’* exh. cat., Rome, Galleria L’Obelisco, 1968; G. Lista, *Giacomo Balla*, Modena, 1982) until I made my own contribution to this subject (1996, cit.; 2004, cit.). Only Martin (1968, cit.) has not insisted on this point, having examined the photographs of the study in significantly greater detail. Moreover, a drawing described by Crispolti and Drudi Gambillo as a “*Study for Furnishings for the Löwenstein House in Düsseldorf* (1912)” [in *Giacomo Balla*, 1963, cit., no. 253, ink on paper, 80 x 120 cm, now owned by Turin’s Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna], and later republished with the same title by Lista (1982, cit., no. 243), is in no way stylistically consistent with either that context or that date, as Martin has also noted (1968, cit., p. 175) but rather relates to a point at least three years later. All of the foregoing illustrates how this crucial period has often been considered in a rather superficial manner.

²³ This letter can be found in M. Drudi Gambillo and T. Fiori, 1958, cit., p. 255; the postcard to Gino Galli can be found in M. Drudi Gambillo, *After Boccioni*, Rome, 1961.

²⁴ On the ‘iridescent interpenetrations,’ and the many problems of exegesis and dating which surround them, see F. Benzi, 2014, cit., pp. 157–78.

²⁵ On Balla’s relationship with theosophy, see F. Benzi, 2007, cit.; on the wider links between theosophy and Futurism, see F. Benzi, *Il Futurismo*, Milan, 2008, and F. Benzi, ‘Qualche nota aggiuntiva sulla visione teosofica in Giacomo Balla e nel primo Futurismo,’ in G. Aurigemma, ed., *Dal Razionalismo al Rinascimento. Per i quaranta anni di studi di Silvia Danesi Squarzina*, Rome, 2011.

²⁶ The ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting’ (April 1910) emphasizes precisely this point: “Why should we forget in our creations the doubled power of our sight, capable of giving results analogous to those of the X-rays?”

²⁷ On this figure, see F. Benzi, 2007, cit., pp. 117–45, and F. Benzi, 2008, cit., pp. 216–33.

²⁸ G. Prevati, *I Principii scientifici del divisionismo*, Milan, 1906, pp. 71–72.

²⁹ V. Mosini, ‘The Role of the Electromagnetic Theory of Light in Balla’s Iridescent Interpenetrations,’ in *LDS, Discussion paper series*, London, 1999.

³⁰ See n. 27.

³¹ M. Drudi Gambillo, T. Fiori, 1958, cit., vol. I, p. 480. This assertion was subsequently repeated in E. Crispolti and Drudi Gambillo, 1963, cit., where, in the catalogue of works (no. 55, *Iridescent Interpenetration*, no. 2 (1912), oil on canvas, 77 x 77 cm, p. 58) one reads: “An Iridescent Penetration – currently unidentifiable – was exhibited by Balla in Rome in February–March 1913 at an exhibition of Futurist painting held in the foyer of the Teatro Costanzi. Balla began to develop the motif of the Iridescent Interpenetration during mid-1912, between Rome and Düsseldorf, elaborating on it in numerous paintings and small studies until 1914. In his scheme for the Löwenstein house in Düsseldorf, designed and realized during the second half of 1912, Balla incorporated key decorative elements based on the Iridescent Interpenetrations.”

³² See F. Benzi, 2008, cit., pp. 132–45.

³³ In fact, in all probability – if not certainty – the greater proportion of the ‘interpenetrations’ (including those on paper) dates to the period February–September 1913 rather than late 1912, as is commonly claimed. Even if one accepts a period of hyperactivity on the part of

Balla between late November and mid-December, one must also consider that he was simultaneously working on the series of views for the Löwenstein house, *The Hand of the Violinist*, the practical execution of the Löwenstein study, and a number of portraits and other works. The time available for fully developing the ‘interpenetrations’ would have been rather limited (see F. Benzi, 2014, cit., p. 162 and note 27).

³⁴ See above, n. 18.

³⁵ M. Calvesi, in L. Stefanelli Torossi, ed., *Giacomo Balla. Dall’Autospalla all’Autodolore. Opere 1902–1947*, exh. cat., Rome, 1994–95, p. 9.

³⁶ I believe it is possible to rule out *Arc Lamp*, a work that was already known of, finished and rejected from the Paris exhibition during the previous year by Boccioni himself. One of the earliest ‘interpenetrations’ is surely that titled *Today is Tomorrow*.

³⁷ Futurist exhibition in the Foyer of the Teatro Costanzi, Rome, 21 February – 21 March.

³⁸ Futurist exhibition at the Rotterdamse Kunstkring, 18 May – 15 June.

³⁹ It should be noted that examples of Marey’s chronophotography – which was already internationally renowned – were exhibited in 1911 at the *Esposizione Internazionale di Fotografia* held at Castel Sant’Angelo as part of the *Esposizione Internazionale romana del Cinquantenario*. On that occasion Balla would have studied them carefully, along with his friend Cambellotti who, although not a member of the Futurist group, had already expressly cited two of Marey’s chronophotographs – *Movements of a White Horse* of 1885–86, and *Hammer* of 1885 – in his own works (*Horses of the Pontine Marshes* (1910) and *Blacksmith* (1909)).

⁴⁰ Delaunay was principally behind the attack (see F. Benzi, ‘Giacomo Balla: The Conquest of Speed,’ in V. Greene, ed., *Italian Futurism 1909–1944. Reconstructing the Universe*, exh. cat., New York, The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, 2014, pp. 103–10).

⁴¹ M. Drudi Gambillo and T. Fiori, 1958, cit., vol. I, p. 288.

⁴² Balla visited Boccioni in Milan in January; Boccioni was in Rome in February and March (for the exhibition and Futurist *serate* at the Teatro Costanzi); Marinetti was in Rome in March and during the period September–October (he would certainly have taken news of Balla to Boccioni). In April, a stable Futurist group was formed in the capital (see the letter from L. Altomare to F. Cangiullo, in M. Drudi Gambillo, T. Fiori, 1958, cit., vol. I, p. 263) that monitored the situation through the gallerist Giuseppe Sprovieri.

⁴³ N. Pascazio, ‘La Pittura Futurista,’ in *Humanitas*, III, 16, 20 April 1913, p. 97.

⁴⁴ M. Drudi Gambillo, T. Fiori, 1958, cit., vol. I, pp. 297–98.

⁴⁵ See above, n. 40.

⁴⁶ G. Lista, ‘Analisi del movimento,’ in G. Lista, and others, 2008, cit., p. 55.

⁴⁷ P. Baldacci, ‘La cronologia delle “velocità” di Balla. 1912–1914,’ *ibid.*, p. 281.

⁴⁸ Some of the compositions that we know of today – especially those painted on canvas – are later interpretations by Balla himself who, during the 1950s, became keen to assert his importance both to Futurism and to European abstraction more generally as a result of receiving somewhat belated international recognition. The problematic issue of the dating of these works, raised by me in 2007 (F. Benzi, 2007, cit., p. 80) and considered in greater depth some years later (F. Benzi, 2014, cit.), was examined by Lista in the cultural context of that revival of interest in abstraction following the Second World War: the artist seeking to create a market for a cycle of work that consisted most

ly of studies on paper, with very few examples of what one might term ‘definitive’ pieces (see G. Lista, *Giacomo Balla. Futurismo e neofuturismo*, Milan, 2009).

⁴⁹ E. Balla, 1984, cit., vol. I, p. 387.

⁵⁰ On Balla and esoteric philosophy, see F. Benzi, 2007, cit., pp. 129–30, where theosophical ideas pertaining to the fourth dimension are explored. The topic of the fourth dimension was of particular interest to Ballatore, who spoke on the subject in public lectures in Rome from 1904 onward. The sentences quoted in the text are taken from an unpublished work on the ‘fourth dimension’ preserved at Turin’s Biblioteca Comunale. Ballatore also published a brief text entitled ‘The Fourth Dimension and Hyperspace’ in the journal *Ultra* in 1908.

⁵¹ See M. Calvesi, 1967, cit. (especially pp. 97–160: ‘Penetrazione e magia nell’arte di Giacomo Balla’). Some generic references to the Italian context, and to Balla in particular, can be found in essays by G. Lista and S. Poggianella, in V. Loers, ed., *Okkultismus und Avantgarde 1900–1915*, exh. cat., Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle, 1995. An extraordinary contribution to the subject has been made by S. Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico. Contributi per una storia dell’irrazionalismo italiano tra Otto e Novecento*, Naples 2002 (1st ed. Rome, 1996), although this study mainly concerns literature.

⁵² The reference to Pevsner was significantly and acutely evoked (and curiously never re-examined, other than briefly by Martin in 1968) by Ettore Colla in an article published just after Balla’s exhibition at the Galleria Origine in Rome in 1951, when the artist’s Futurist works were exhibited for the first time after the war (E. Colla, ‘Pittura e scultura astratta di Giacomo Balla,’ in *Arti Visive*, September 1952): “Balla developed new concepts and presented new pictorial solutions, going beyond the limits of space and time, constantly driven by a lively innovative force. In fact, he even attempted to implement the same innovations in sculpture, employing plastic, iron rods and metal plates, and creating forms that today seem remarkably similar to those created by the sculptor Pevsner.” I believe that expressions such as “going beyond the limits of space and time” derive directly from the conversations between Balla and the ‘Fondazione Origine’ artists (Colla himself, Mannucci, and even Dorazio) which led to the organization of the exhibition.

⁵³ See the article ‘Quarta dimensione di matematici e di artisti,’ in *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 30 November 1928.

⁵⁴ See also my contribution to the question of the fourth dimension in relation to Futurism and Cubism (F. Benzi, 2008, cit., pp. 84–87). For a series of statements by Ballatore on these matters, see F. Benzi, 2007, cit., pp. 118–45.

⁵⁵ See E. Balla, 1984, cit., vol. I, p. 387.

⁵⁶ The following texts are fundamental to a consideration of these aspects of Balla’s work: E. Crispolti, ed., *Ricostruzione futurista dell’universo*, exh. cat., Turin, Mole Antonelliana, 1980, and E. Crispolti, ed., *Casa Balla e il futurismo a Roma*, exh. cat., Rome, Villa Medici, 1989.

⁵⁷ See U. Boccioni, 1972, cit., p. 48. This phrase appears in a monographic article on Balla that was to be published in the journal *Gi Avvenimenti*. Announced in the January 1916 edition, it remained unfinished and unpublished due to the death of Boccioni later that year; accordingly, the article can be dated to 1916.

⁵⁸ G. Galli, ‘I nostri artisti. Giacomo Balla,’ in *Roma futurista*, 14 December 1919.

⁵⁹ See E. Crispolti, *Storia e critica del futurismo*, Bari, 1986, pp. 72–80. G. Giani (in *Fortunato Depero pittore*, Milan, 1951, pl. 26) and B. Passamani (in *For-*

tinato Depero, Turin, [1969], and *Fortunato Depero 1892–1960*, exh. cat., Bassano del Grappa, 1970, pp. 136–40) were the first to publish Depero’s manuscript. The latter considers it to have been the basis for the final version of the manifesto, while M. Fagiolo (*FuturBalla*, Rome, 1970, pp. xxii, 71) believes it to have been backdated, and therefore as having been drafted after the manifesto itself (although Crispolti has suggested many reasons for doubting the veracity of this rather superficial claim). Crispolti wisely tends to play down Depero’s role in drafting the final manifesto in comparison to that of the older artist, whilst considering his handwritten text to have been entirely autonomous (an assertion with which I disagree).

⁶⁰ Not least, the fact that the manifesto recognizes Balla’s leading role in the invention of the ‘plastic complexes’: “By developing the initial synthesis of the speed of an automobile, Balla created the first plastic complex. This revealed an abstract landscape of cones, pyramids, polyhedrons and the spirals of mountains, rivers, lights and shadows. It follows that a profound analogy exists between the essential force lines of speed and the essential force-lines of a landscape. We have reached the profound essence of the universe, and we are masters of the elements.”

⁶¹ “Severini has also written to me from Paris saying that Balla’s manifesto is silly, and that he is sick and tired of undersigning things that he has neither seen nor approved” (letter from Papini to Carrà of 29 November 1914, in M. Carrà and V. Fagone, eds, *Carlo Carrà, Ardengo Soffici, Lettere 1913/1929*, Milan, 1983, p. 195).

⁶² C. Carrà, ‘The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells,’ 1913.

⁶³ This innovative concept found a precedent in an article by E. Prampolini (‘Scenografia futurista,’ in *La Balza Futurista*, I, 3, 12 May 1915, pp. 17–21), in which it was stated: “The stage will no longer have a coloured backdrop, but a colourless electromechanical architectural structure, enlivened by chromatic emanations from a source of light, produced by electric reflectors with coloured filters [...]. The luminous radiation of these beams and walls of coloured lights and their dynamic combinations will give marvellous effects of interpenetration and intersection of light and shade.” It is possible that Prampolini’s ideas arose from discussions that took place in Balla’s studio, as in other documented cases.

⁶⁴ On the history of the project and the relationship between Balla and Diaghilev, see E. Gigli, *Giochi di luce e forme strane*, Rome, 2005, and G. Lista, ‘Ricostruzione futurista dell’universo,’ in G. Lista, 2008, cit., pp. 141–43. In his essay, Lista does not mention Scriabin’s work as an example for Balla’s own reflections, but does refer to him on p. 184 of the same text as being one of many figures engaged in similar experiments, including Malevich (who created costumes for the opera *Victory over the Sun*) and Loie Fuller, who performed in *Feu d’artifice* in March 1914.

⁶⁵ On this aspect of Scriabin’s work, see M. Girardi’s preface to Aleksandr Scriabin, *Appunti e riflessioni. Quaderni inediti*, Pordenone, 1992, pp. IX–XXXIII, and M. Lista, *L’œuvre d’art totale à la naissance des avantgardes 1908–1914*, Paris, 2006, pp. 23–65.

⁶⁶ The latter may have been reported to Balla by Jules Schmalzigaug, who established a close friendship with the artist in 1914, and who was well-informed about developments in Central European avant-garde art. See: F. Benzi, ‘Schmalzigaug, Balla and other Futurist Eccentric References,’ in A. Gonnissen, ed., *Jules Schmalzigaug Futurist*, exh. cat., Ostend, Mu. Zee, 2016, pp. 194–209.

⁶⁷ Even in the focused analysis of Picasso’s Italian pe-

riod provided by J. Clair, ed., *Picasso 1917–1924*, exh. cat., Venice, 1998, there is no mention of the clear influences he received from the Futurists. On this subject, see F. Benzi, in F. Benzi, G. Mercurio and L. Prisco, eds, *Roma 1918–1943*, exh. cat., Rome, 1998, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Undoubtedly, the notoriously critical attitude of Picasso toward the Futurists reflected the defensive posture of the Cubists in relation to other avant-garde movements, which they feared might undermine the cultural primacy of their own work. Until very recently, this has shown itself to have been politically and culturally effective, reducing international consideration of the achievements of the Italian movement.

⁶⁹ See F. Benzi, *Giacomo Balla. Genio futurista da Expo Parigi 1925 a Expo Milano 2015*, Milan, 2015, pp. 23–26.

⁷⁰ See F. Benzi, 2014–15, cit., pp. 95–124.

⁷¹ In Boccioni’s aforementioned article of 1916 dedicated to Balla (see above, n. 57) he wrote: “The earth becomes ceramic-crystal. Iron becomes smooth steel. The tree disappears to give way to polished walnut. Colour no longer contains romantic irregularities and becomes flat. A painted surface seems to him to be warmer than the blood that flows and spurts in an irregular manner. Steel and crystal. We have attained the utmost purity” (in U. Boccioni, 1972, cit., p. 48).

⁷² On this theme, see F. Benzi, 2008, cit., pp. 324–41; F. Benzi, 2015, cit.

⁷³ F. Benzi, 1996, cit.

⁷⁴ F. Benzi, 2007, cit., pp. 246–59.

⁷⁵ ‘Futuristi e futuristi – Una lettera di Giacomo Balla,’ in *Perseo*, IV, 3, 1 February.

⁷⁶ Published in *Gazzetta del Popolo* on 23 June 1931.

⁷⁷ This interpretation of events was suggested to me by the Futurist aeropainter Wladimiro Tulli.

⁷⁸ G. De Marchis, *Giacomo Balla. L’Aura Futurista*, Turin, 1977, p. 77.

⁷⁹ P. Rosazza Ferraris, in G. De Feo, P. Rosazza Ferraris and L. Velani, eds, *La donazione Balla*, exh. cat., Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, 1988, p. 27.

⁸⁰ E. Balla, *Con Balla*, 1984, vol. II, p. 122.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Futurismo*, 26 March 1933.

⁸³ Futurballa, ‘Dipingendo,’ in *l’Almanacco degli Artisti*, Rome, 1930, pp. 108–09.

⁸⁴ *Enrico Prampolini et les aéropeintres futuristes italiens*, Paris, Galerie de la Renaissance, 2–16 March 1932.

⁸⁵ See E. Crispolti, *Storia e critica del futurismo*, Bari 1986.

⁸⁶ I have discovered reproductions of two works by Florence Henri on the back of a figurative work dating from after 1935.

⁸⁷ In a manner truly anticipatory of Warhol’s later imagery, Balla faithfully reproduced this picture which appeared on the occasion of Carnera’s victory in the World Championships (29 June 1933). This discovery, by F. Pirani (see M. Calvesi and P. Ginsborg, eds, *Novecento. Arte e storia in Italia*, Rome, Scuderie del Quirinale, 2000) clearly makes evident Balla’s creative process. I believe that the photograph in the newspaper must have been part of a larger photo shoot by Luxardo, as I had previously compared a similar version of the image to Balla’s painting (see F. Benzi, 1996, cit., p. 49).

⁸⁸ See the detailed entry on this painting by F. Pirani in *Novecento. Arte e storia in Italia*, cit., 2000.

⁸⁹ See G. Lista, E. Gigli, *Giacomo Balla. Futurismo e neofuturismo*, Milano 2009, and D. Viva, ‘Gli antenati elettivi. Giacomo Balla astrattista tra Forma 1 e Origine (1948–1954),’ in *Studi di Memofonte*, 13, 2014, pp. 195–221.

⁹⁰ F. Benzi, 2014, cit.

Giacomo Balla and the Origins of Futurist Fashion: Items of Clothing as 'Living Plastic Complexes'

Francesco Leone

Introduction and General Observations

Despite the many scholarly studies that have been dedicated to Futurism over the past forty years, the revolutionary significance of that formal deflagration with which the movement intended to invade the reality of everyday life in search of a totalizing aesthetic synthesis is still not fully understood by the wider public. The strength of this aesthetic, out of which sprang the first conception of a 'total' avant-garde art, released shockwaves that would still be felt in international artistic practice during the second half of the twentieth century, anticipating much later ideas concerning the nature of the artistic object, space and performance.

This ontological redefinition of the creative act – which had first been explored in the context of the English Arts and Crafts movement, the Mitteleuropean *Jugendstil* aesthetic and Art Nouveau, albeit in a far less radical manner – would receive its most complete, authoritative and paradigmatic expression in the work of Giacomo Balla.¹ It was his imaginative genius that conceived and implemented an all-pervasive propagation of artistic principles, allowing them to escape the static borders of the painting or sculpture and infiltrate daily life, the theatre, the cinema, every form of applied art and – of course – clothing.² The ultimate expression of this total reformulation of reality was the manifesto 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe,' signed by Balla and his young student Fortunato Depero on 11 March 1915. In it, these two self-styled "abstract Futurists" posited the creation and subsequent diffusion of 'plastic complexes' formed from "abstract equivalents of all the forms and elements of the universe" in the name of a "total fusion" capable of summarizing, by means of artistic creation, the 'universal vibrations,' 'plastic dynamism,' interpenetrating planes, lines of force and states of mind that, in an invisible, impalpable, imponderable and imperceptible manner, innervate the universe, the world and all things as a unique synthetic and fluctuating force.

Thus configured, these 'plastic complexes' – created with 'crude' or found materials – would be set in motion, change, and dissolve into space. In so doing (as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti himself observed in the manifesto) this truly revolutionary form of Futurist art "became the Present, the new Object, the new reality created with the abstract elements of the universe. The hands of the traditionalist artist ached for the lost Object; our hands longed for a new object to create. That is why the new object (plastic complex) appears miraculously in yours." Viewed in this more general context of universal abstract synthesis, Balla's experiments in the field of clothing assume a truly remarkable aes-

thetic potential, representing the most daring conceptual conclusions and the most extreme development of the analogous 'plastic complex,' of which the individual – by setting it in motion – would no longer just be a simple observer but an integral part, becoming a dynamic instrument and propagator of Futurist ideas through his or her physical actions.³ It was through his clothing revolution that Balla most fully realized that close identification between art and life that Marinetti had insisted on since the beginning of the movement. Balla's initial experiments of 1912 were 'private' in character, only becoming more systematic and programmatic after 1914. His theories and achievements would later lead Volt to proclaim: "We will transform the elegant lady into a real living plastic complex" in his 'Manifesto of Futurist Women's Fashion,' published in 1920 by the magazine *Roma futurista*.⁴ Balla's engagement with fashion, then, did not simply represent an attempt to raise the aesthetic standards of a commonplace object by means of applying an artistic coefficient, or to treat it as a distinct art form unto itself. These were the ways in which fashion was approached in the more or less contemporary work of Sonia Delaunay, who merely translated the chromatic and geometric elements of Orphism into two-dimensional decorative motifs in order to create her so-called 'simultaneous clothes.' Rather, Balla's aspiration – in the context of Futurism's project of universal reconstruction – was to create an environmental and dynamic art, free from any hierarchies or boundaries.

From as early as 1912, Balla identified clothing as a mighty battering ram that would enable art to insert itself into the fabric of daily life, stripping away its banal conventions by means of wonder and renewal. It was no coincidence that the artist's attention remained focused for some considerable time on men's clothing: a stronghold of bourgeois conservatism. It was there that the detonation of his visual revolution was to cause the greatest sensation, partly as a consequence of the male-dominated culture of the time. Far more than women's clothing – generally up-to-date with the latest consumer trends, and consequently possessing a certain unconventionality – male clothing represented that sense of order and those social customs that the Futurists intended to overturn. And this was intuited brilliantly by Balla, perhaps in a dialogue with Marinetti himself. By contrast, all earlier Modernist experimentation in this field had solely concerned itself with women's fashions, revealing a traditional focus and the lingering appeal of exoticism and aestheticism typical of the *Belle Époque*, which was still very much alive in the first decade of the twentieth century. From the drawings of Henry



1. Study for a Suit (Self Portrait), 1912, ink on paper, 18.5 x 11 cm, Milan, private collection

Van de Velde and his wife Maria Sèthe to the experiments of Gustav Klimt (entrusted to the dressmaker Emilie Flöge), Joseph Hoffmann and Kolo Moser,⁵ women's clothing had been identified as one of the many creative spheres to be explored in order to achieve a synthesis of the arts in the years immediately prior to, or contemporaneous with, the appearance of Futurism. Yet for Balla, the principle of the total work of art was connected to another, much more extreme notion concerning the renewal of existence and civil society through avant-garde art, and was not limited merely to decoration. This discourse was articulated in the broader context of Futurism's "paligenetic ideology"⁶ where, for the first time in the history of art and literature, an avant-garde identity

located between art and life was established. According to its dictates, action – always radical and artistically configured – presented itself as a means of total renovation.⁷

It should also be pointed out that Futurist clothing appeared to Balla as an instrument for the diffusion and translation of those important pictorial achievements that he was developing at this time: a sort of constant interpreter of his revolutionary aesthetics that was much more powerful than any other form of applied art by virtue of its ability to be 'in motion' in everyday life. Here too Balla was a pioneer and a forerunner, and his leading role within the movement in this respect was widely acknowledged. In an article of 1925 dedicated to Balla and those works of his on display at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris, the two Sicilian Futurists Guglielmo Jannelli and Luciano Nicastro underlined this fact, highlighting fashion as one of the many forms of decorative art that the artist had revolutionized: "The decorative art of Balla, which undoubtedly represents the most original conquest of modern-day Italy, is but a continuation and application of the ideas, experiences, temperament and vision of Balla the painter. Not everyone is aware of the revolution he has brought about in women's fashion, in the interior decoration, furniture and furnishing of the modern home, in the structure and form of [everyday] objects, toys, lamps, etc. The audacious spirit that is beginning to manifest itself in the industry of the applied arts, and which is apparent in the most typical products on show at the International Exposition of Decorative Art in Paris, is primarily due to Balla."⁸ The international world of applied art had, according to Jannelli and Nicastro, become infused with that "audacious" (read 'avant-garde') spirit typical of Balla's work, exploiting its ideas and insights while reducing its conceptual content somewhat, in order to make it more readily understandable to a wider audience – a phenomenon often encountered in the history of ideas. One must also note that the years when Balla fully developed his conception of (male) Futurist clothing – that is to say, 1912–15 – were years of great complexity in terms of the aesthetic development of the various Futurist painters, and those in which he himself attained the highest conceptual peaks of his entire artistic career. Within this short time-span – firstly with the 'iridescent interpenetrations' and 'abstract speed' series, which focused on the study of light and the nature of dynamic lines, and subsequently with the 'interventionist' paintings of 1915, constructed in terms of simultaneity and sensory syncretism with solidly plastic analogous abstract volumes – Balla developed one of the first European formulations of a non-objective pictorial vision, inaugurating an entirely new phase of Futurist research, associated not with analytical deconstruction but with abstracting synthesis. As is well known, after admiring the 'interventionist' paintings exhibited by Balla at the Angelelli gallery space on 15 December 1915 as part of the artist's solo show *Fu Balla e Futurista* (late Balla and Futurist Balla), Umberto Boccioni noted in the draft of an unpublished article for *Gli Avvenimenti* how: "In a few months [Balla] has undergone an extremely rapid evolution and has arrived at these latest works inspired by violent anti-neutralist demonstrations. It would be difficult to find anyone else at the same point today anywhere in Europe. A single objective plastic value is no longer evident. Everything is transfigured by the dynamic idea, interpreted by exciting his abstract sen-

sibility. Everything episodic and contingent has been abolished."⁹ According to Balla, the most powerful vehicle for the dissemination of these extraordinary pictorial visions was clothing.

Balla and Futurist Clothing: Birth, Development and Dissemination

Let us come to the facts. The artist's initial interest in clothing dated back to 1912, preceding that of the wider European avant-garde. It anticipated the activities of Delaunay, which gave brilliant early results in 1913 that were owed in part to the artist's maieutic exchanges with her husband Robert, but which were subsequently repeated with little inventiveness or change for decades, being constantly focused on the search for simultaneous chromatic relationships, and never really proposing a formal revolution in terms of the cut of the design or a reconsideration of the structure of the garment, unlike Balla's work.¹⁰ Essentially, Sonia simply transferred the researches into chromatic simultaneity elaborated with Robert onto her clothing. Between July and August 1912 Balla was in Düsseldorf, having been invited by the violinist Arthur Löwenstein and his wife Margherita (Gretel, née Kahn Speyr, a former student of Balla's) to plan a decorative scheme for a room in their new house.¹¹ During this visit Balla wrote to his family in Rome on 18 July: "My clothes have caused a real furore, especially the last light, checked one; however, they no longer make me take it off, and I had to go into town with them, with the result that I was looked at in a way that I am not accustomed to, for which reason I'll continue wearing it."¹²

This testimony is of great importance, for two reasons. Firstly, it records *in itinere* Balla's awareness – still tinged with some hesitancy – of the amazement that this new art form was able to generate in society, powerfully contributing to Futurism's subversive cause. Secondly, it reveals that the painter and his wife Elisa, who worked up Balla's designs, had already experimented with such creations, meaning that we can safely date the first such items of clothing to early 1912. Evidently, by that summer Balla already possessed a Futurist wardrobe and had produced a number of clothing designs.

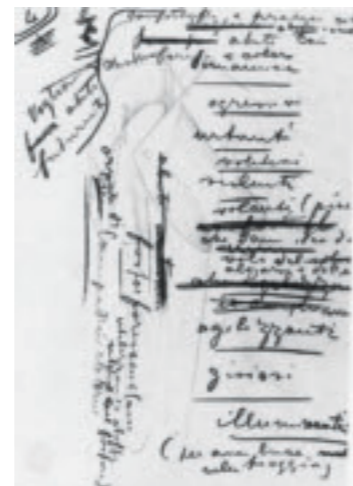
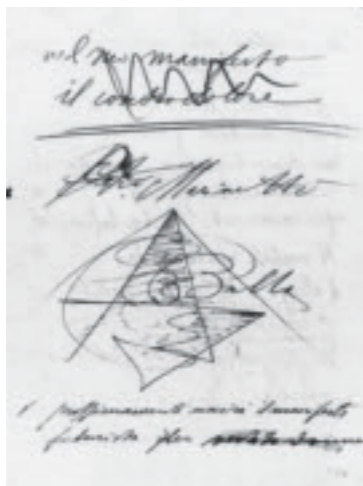
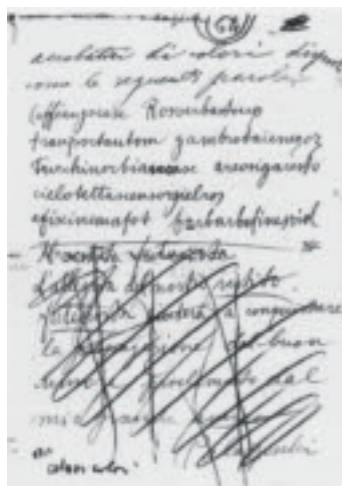
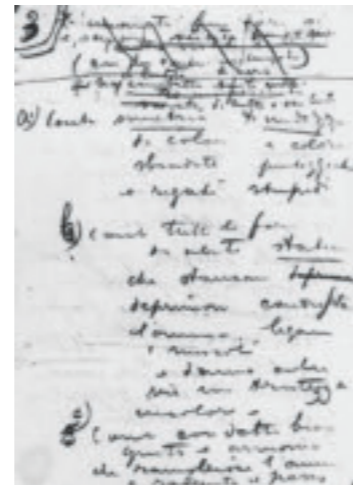
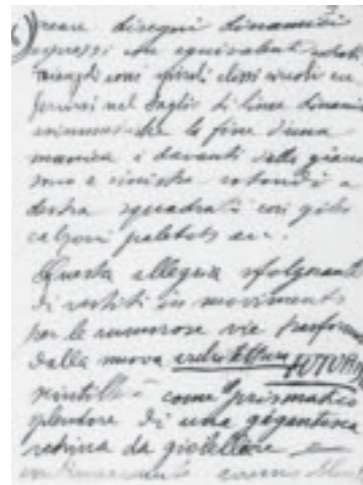
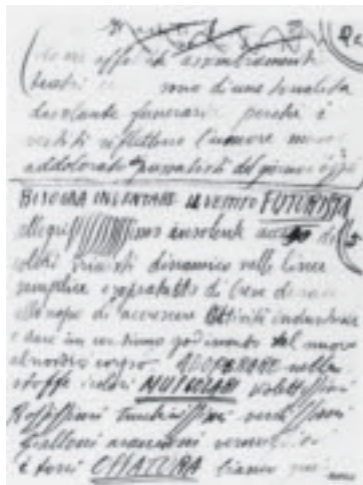
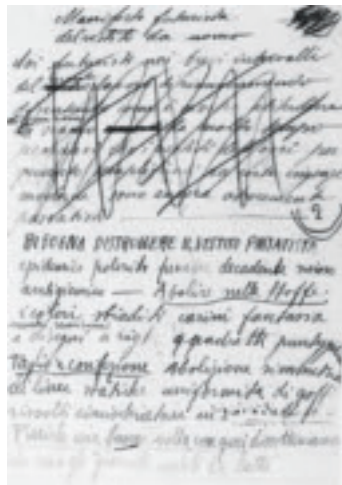
Between November and December of the same year, Balla visited Düsseldorf once again in order to complete his decoration of the Löwenstein home. This was a crucial time in the development of Balla's Futurist style, since it was there, in an atmosphere informed by the linear stylization of a decorative nature typical of *Jugendstil*, that he began to formulate non-figurative compositions comprising fragmented triangular modules relating to experimental studies of light and electromagnetic waves. These were to constitute the basis of his 'rainbows' (only after the Second World War would they be defined as 'iridescent interpenetrations').¹³ In this context Balla again wrote to his family on 18 November: "The black suit with the white stripe is all the rage and 'miss' [Gretel Löwenstein] wants one for herself in velvet and prays dear Elisa to make one for her when her husband is next in Rome so that he can bring it back with him to Düsseldorf."¹⁴ It was therefore in Germany – in the heart of that Modernist culture which had first postulated the concept of an all-pervasive art – that Balla appears fully to have realized the innovative potential of Futurist clothing.

A study for the suit mentioned by Balla – who seems to have shown little



2–5. 'Le Vêtement masculin futuriste. Manifeste,' 20 May 1914

enthusiasm for Gretel's request to have a woman's version, in keeping with his aforementioned focus on male clothing at this time – is characterized by a simple geometric Futurist cut, with a collarless jacket free from lapels; the choice of colour (black trimmed with white) still appears fairly conventional (Fig. 1)¹⁵. But the suit, like those Balla took with him to Germany in the summer, already fully engages with the logical precepts of fashion. Simply put, Balla used these clothes to present himself and his artistic credo in the social context of the cultivated German bourgeoisie, to which he was introduced by the Löwensteins. This provocative 'act' caused a stir in Düsseldorf and above all definitively convinced Balla about how effective the suit could be, by its physical presence alone, to convey that radical break with the past and convention advocated by the Futurists. Ingeniously, Balla had turned an eminently practical requirement (that of needing adequate clothing for his stay in Germany) into an extraordinary opportunity to promote his ideas. Unlike his colleagues, who attended the famous Futurist *serate* in refined yet entirely conventional evening dress, according to current tastes, Balla considered his body as modifying physical presence, again anticipating the ideas of the late twentieth-century avant gardes. Therefore, in accordance with a sensible policy of home economics



6–13. Manuscript of the 'Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing,' 4 sheets (recto-verso), late 1913 – early 1914, Guidonia, Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna

and thriftiness (much practiced in the Balla household) he asked Elisa to produce the first Futurist clothes in history, launching with a new kind of elegance – eccentric, certainly, yet refined – his vision of a regenerated world. In other words, the systems of appearance and social distinction inherent to fashion – that Balla bent to his own use with extreme lucidity, wit and imaginative power – were projected into a far more structural and profound dimension of life. From that point on, Balla wore Futurist clothing constantly.

A testimony dating from 1913 reveals how the artist had by then reached the utmost point in his personal interpretation of Futurism's art / life equation. Describing his early encounters with the Futurist movement in the first edition of *Le serate futuriste* (1930), Francesco Cangiullo relates in great detail, and with beautiful ekphrastic prose, a meeting with Marinetti and Balla in the foyer of Rome's Teatro Colonna in April 1913. He recalls how in his presence Marinetti "was conversing with a diabolical being: small and red like a lively child; with moustaches of red-hot iron wire, cut like a toothbrush; with eyebrows – likewise red – that were thick and curled by his fingers into the form of two uneven 'S' shapes; clear blue eyes, so hypocritical as to seem sweet, a forehead like laundry table; two wrinkles ran down since the sides of the mouth,

covered by a beard of tawny grass that thrived in the furrows. His straw hat seemed like a veneer. The celluloid necktie quivered like gelatin. A checked suit, black shoes and plaster spats: a clown. A being from the circus; eccentric and absolutely absurd outside the café-concert circuit. This man was one of the greatest painters in Italy, recognized as such by traditionalists and Futurists alike: Giacomo Balla."¹⁶ Balla's initial experiments of 1912 opened the way to the altogether more radical works of 1913. Abandoning the use of simple borders and more traditional 'chequerboard' patterns, he now began to import into his creations the dynamic, abstract and synthetic lines he was developing in his paintings, intended to give visual form to the invisible. The fluctuating, sinuous and 'flowing' syntheses of dynamism – such as the 'lines of speed' – or the triangular wedges of the 'iridescent interpenetrations' were ideally suited to be translated into decorative patterns by virtue of their geometric forms and bold character, as well as to be heightened by powerful, flashy colours. Evidence of this decisive shift can be found in three studies for fabric designs (and three related studies for clothing) in the Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna, created by Balla between late 1913 and early 1914 (Cats 37–42; 50–52).¹⁷ These projects (the fabric studies are dated 1913, the clothing designs



14–17. 'The Anti-neutral Suit. Futurist Manifesto,' 11 September 1914

1914), as well as another eight designs for clothing and jackets likewise belonging to the Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna,¹⁸ were produced around the same time that Balla was drafting the 'Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing'. This would initially be published in French in the form of a leaflet printed in Milan by the Direzione del Movimento Futurista on 20 May 1914 titled 'Le Vêtement masculine futuriste. Manifeste' (Figs 2-5). The Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna owns the manuscript of this text which, like the six aforementioned designs, can be dated to the months between 1913 and 1914 (Figs 6-13).¹⁹ The document is extremely interesting since it reveals two different moments of elaboration, clearly identifiable due to the presence of deletions and additions to the text in pencil. The first draft was completed in 1913 or early 1914, as can be deduced from its references to Aldo Palazzeschi's text 'Il controdolore' (Against Sadness) that were subsequently deleted.²⁰ The revisions were most likely owed to a discussion of the text by Balla and Marinetti, in accordance with the latter's usual practice of 'screening' each manifesto that the movement intended to publish. Significantly, the words "For Marinetti" appear at the foot of the first draft, just above Balla's beautiful stylized signature, indicating that the sheets were to be sent to his attention in Milan. As a consequence, various corrections and amendments were made by Balla to the manuscript in the days leading up to 20 May to form a second draft; this was then further enriched with the addition of a preamble and concluding comments in the final version. The content of the manuscript was almost entirely consistent with that of the published version, although something of its discursive and conceptual character was lost with the imposition of a more rigorous structure better suited to the apodictic quality of a manifesto. In fact, the revised manuscript subdivided the various aspects of the subject by numbers, as did the final version of the text (although the points were differently ordered in both the manifesto of 20 May and the subsequent Italian translation of 11 September 1914). The suit illustrated in the manuscript is very similar both to that published in the manifesto itself and the three sketches of 1914 belonging to the Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna. However, both versions of the manuscript are of fundamental importance because they provide the most direct

evidence of Balla's original thinking on the subject prior to the incorporation of Marinetti's propagandizing excesses.²¹ In this regard, it is significant that the final sentence of the manuscript announces the imminent publication of manifesto concerning women's clothing – something deleted from the published text. In fact, such a document would only appear in 1920, written by Volt.²² With the manifesto of 20 May 1914, Balla chose to launch his innovative theories concerning clothing – which until then had only been explored in private – into the public sphere, in a manner that engaged with the Futurist movement's propaganda machine. From the two Italian editions of the manifesto, we know that by 1914 at least two other Futurists (Marinetti and Cangiullo) were dressing in a Futurist fashion according to the designs of Balla, who was by that point increasingly coming to be seen as the leader of the movement in the sphere of the visual arts. The extent to which Balla involved his associates in his ideas concerning clothing as an active proselytizing tool in the context of a 'Futurist reconstruction of the universe' is documented by a lapidary postcard addressed to Cangiullo on 28 June 1914 in which the artist reported: "Produced one [Balla here refers to a suit] which came out well but have not yet collected it, we will go out together as a group, including you – it will be necessary to fix the opportune moment – I'll let you know".²³ Moreover, in a very short time Balla's intuitions concerning the development of a total art had overtaken the research of other Futurists still working in the fields of painting and sculpture. The manifesto of 1914 enucleated eleven points in which all the dynamical-formal-chromatic and conceptual aspects of the revolution inaugurated by Balla in the field of clothing were clearly set out. According to the Italian version of the text (updated in terms of its title and 'interventionist' emphasis in comparison to the first, French edition, but essentially unchanged in terms of its aesthetic and formal content), Futurist clothes were to be "Aggressive" (this definition, expressive of the movement's interventionist agenda, and therefore ranked first in the order of importance in the Italian edition, was the only one of the eleven adjectives to have been changed from the French version, taking the place of "Volants et aériens" (Light and



18. Study for a 'Modifier', 1914, watercolour on paper, 12 x 33 cm, Guidonia, Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna

airy), which was deleted altogether from the Italian text), "Agile," "Dynamic," "Simple and comfortable," "Hygienic," "Joyful," "Illuminating," "Strong-willed," "Asymmetrical," "Short-lived" and "Variable." In every version of the text the aesthetic, and consequently formal, emphasis was placed on "dynamic designs expressed with abstract equivalents" of reality (cited from the manuscript), both two-dimensional and solidly volumetric in character (anticipating the characteristics of the 'plastic complexes'), with geometric forms such as the triangle, the ellipse, the cone and the circle, as well as the bright colours that Balla was employing in his painting during 1914, his *annus mirabilis*. All these elements introduced into daily life would, by opposing the depressing mournful grey of men's clothing – the symbol of bourgeois traditionalism *par excellence* – contribute significantly to the Futurist palingenesis. Amplifying his theories, Balla already imagined his clothes as living 'plastic complexes' in their own right, moving through cities that had been profoundly modernized and enlivened by Futurist architecture. As is well known, 1914 was also a crucial year in the development of theories concerning the latter subject.²⁴ A remarkable phrase contained in Balla's draft manifesto, which was included in the French version but deleted from the Italian text, asserted that: "This dynamic joy of clothing will move along the many streets transformed by the new FUTURIST architecture sparkling like the prismatic splendour of a gigantic jeweller's window." It was in the new city that Futurist clothing would stand out in all its audacity. But what was such clothing to look like? It is described as follows in Balla's first manuscript version of the manifesto: "Extremely cheerful insolent lit with bright rainbow colours dynamic in its simple lines [...] EMPLOYING MUSCULARLY coloured fabrics crazy violets the reddest reds the bluest blues yellows oranges vermilions SKELETAL tones of white grey black to create dynamic designs expressed with abstract equivalents by means of triangles cones spirals ellipses circles etc. incorporating dynamic asymmetrical cuts in such a way that the cuffs

and fronts of jackets will be rounded on the left and squared off at the right in the same way as waistcoats trousers coats etc." The plastic dynamism of decorative designs, based in the forms of the 'iridescent interpenetrations' and the 'abstract speed,' 'lines of speed' and 'flowing lines' series – rendered increasingly synthetic between 1914 and 1915, with large and sharply defined chromatic fields – was echoed in the lopsided and asymmetrical cuts of such clothing, which were equally dynamic and programmatically destabilizing in their rejection of the classic lines and shapes of male apparel. Finally, Balla attached great significance to his invention of 'modifiers': small and colourful fabric elements able to be attached to Futurist clothing and jettisoned with special buttons in such a way as to make it mutable and constantly changing, in accordance with the dynamic principles of Futurism itself. The synthetic, abstract-geometric and volumetric qualities of these 'modifiers' intersected with those theories that would lead to the development of the 'plastic complexes,' being instruments of an analogous abstract (re)construction of the universe. Such ideas began to be intertwined with themes of dynamic synthesis, abstraction and sensory, spatial and temporal syncretism in the lively discussions carried on within Rome's Futurist group between its leader Balla, who had been the first to reflect on such matters, and his young students Depero and Enrico Prampolini during the period 1913–14.²⁵ Such discussions would lead to the drafting of the manifesto 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe' in 1915, focused on the subject of the 'plastic complex.' An earlier, embryonic version of this text dates from late 1914, when the young Depero (its only named author) evidently set down in an organized manner the more mature ideas of his teacher.²⁶ In another manifesto, titled 'The Atmosphere-structure – Basis for a Futurist Architecture,' published in January 1914 (and subsequently expanded in 1918), Prampolini himself conceived of a Futurist city in terms of an abstract, universal and multi-sensorial synthesis.

In other ways, too, 1914 would prove to be a crucial year in the evolution of Balla's aesthetics. At that time, the activities of Giuseppe Sprovieri's Futurist gallery in Via del Tritone greatly intensified, having been inaugurated in December 1913 with an exhibition of sculpture by Boccioni. That year, all the performance-related activities of the movement were held at the Galleria Sprovieri, for which Balla would frequently realize backdrops and scenery in line with his volumetric, abstract, synthetic style. These works would be the basis for Depero and Prampolini's own subsequent theatrical experiments. Balla participated as a true protagonist in all of these manifestations – encompassing dramatic declamations of Futurist poetry, lectures, concerts, and absurdist performance pieces – alongside Marinetti, Cangiullo, Mario Sironi and Sprovieri himself. These were genuine 'happenings,' at which Balla – an eccentric yet indomitable showman – was able to test the provocative, playful and disturbing value of his experiments with clothing at the highest levels of Futurist activism. At the end of the year, following the outbreak of the First World War on 28 July, Balla and his companions embarked on a campaign for military involvement that culminated in the 1915 cycle of 'interventionist' paintings.²⁷ The key features of these pieces – like those of the 'plastic complexes' – were the "synthetic abstract subjective [and] dynamic forms" which they comprised, as Balla himself stated in the brochure that accompanied the exhibition.

However the novel concept of 'modifiers' – examples of which were illustrated at the end of both the French and Italian versions of Balla's clothing manifesto – was central to his theories. They constituted a further fantastical and provocative element, and with the endless number of configurations they enabled these elements allowed Futurist clothing to adapt swiftly to different circumstances and different moods. In this sense, Balla's theories of Futurist clothing incorporated not only ideological and provocative dimensions but also functional ideas relating to practicality, versatility and changeability. In the Italian manifesto of 1914, Balla defined his 'modifiers' as "material elements of varying sizes, thicknesses, designs and colours [...] that one can dispose of whenever and wherever one wishes, from whatever part of the suit, by means of pneumatic buttons," as well as being "imperious, jarring, clashing, decisive [and] warlike" in character. A group of eight 'modifiers' (Cat. 49) along with a watercolour study (Fig. 18) and two further pencil drawings (Cat. 48) in the Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna, all dating from 1913–14, given their employment of triangular motifs characteristic of the 'iridescent interpenetrations,' document Balla's exploration of this subject in an extraordinary manner and offer us further insights into how the painter and his Futurist friends dressed during those years.²⁸ Within the broader definition of the 'plastic complex' one might also include those other clothing accessories to which Balla dedicated increasing attention. From 1913 onward, as many testimonies reveal, Balla invested the tie with a singular power to provoke and shock. Initially, these were fairly conventional triangular or vertical designs, (although naturally always animated by vibrant Futurist colours and geometric patterns) (Cats 45–46).²⁹ Soon, however, they evolved into genuine little 'plastic complexes,' comprising a range of different materials and possessing the character of an artwork. Incorporating light-bulbs, constructed from cardboard and having celluloid inserts, Balla



19. House-suit habitually worn by Giacomo Balla, 1925, various materials, Rome, private collection

saw his eccentric ties, with their grotesque, absurd and playful character, as an expression of his superior artistic sensibility and rejection of bourgeois notions of 'good taste,' revealing the more caustic aspects of his provocative spirit. In his diary, Anton Giulio Bragaglia recalled how "when he was in civilian clothing he always wore – at the very least – a coloured light-bulb inside his cubic tie of transparent celluloid. When his discourse became excited he would press a button and illuminate his tie: they were his 'high notes.'"³⁰ The 1914 manifesto also insisted that shoes had to be anti-traditional ("dynamic, each one different to the other in terms of form and colour") as did hats ("asymmetrical, and with aggressive, joyful colours"). Balla's aesthetic and theoretical revolution in the field of clothing was essentially complete by 1914–15. However, fashion continued to be an area of interest for him until 1930, consistently revealing the artist's kaleidoscopic and extraordinary imagination. This is illustrated by both written and photographic records and, above all, by the numerous designs owned by the Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna, of which only some are displayed in the present exhibition. Returning from a visit to Paris in the mid-1920s, Balla wrote to Pier Luigi Fortunati of his enthusiasm for the world of fashion and his desire to engage with it: "Every night, with my friends Depero and Jannelli, I preferred these theatres of the imagination and the bizarre to all the other trips I made to Parisian museums. I have created studies for new decorative motifs to be applied to Futurist fabric, furniture, scarves, shawls and hats, which I want quickly to create and launch."³¹ During the second half of the 1910s, Balla designed clothing of all kinds and, finally, even some accessories for women, although such



20. Balla in his studio wearing Futurist clothes, photograph, c. 1931

experiments were initially only of a private nature, being created for his wife Elisa and his daughter Luce. His first designs of this kind were for headwear, dating from 1915–18. Conceived as small, wearable ‘plastic complexes,’ they possessed a pronounced ironic dimension, as Lucien Corpechot noted in 1919: “Balla fabrique aussi des chapeaux qui doivent figurer des volutes de fumé-au-dessus de la tête des femmes, ou se poser en accent circonflexe sur leur chevelure, pour imiter le vol d’un martinet.”³² In 1916 Balla designed a handbag incorporating decorative motifs based on the abstract volumes of his ‘interventionist’ paintings (Cat. 47).³³ In addition, he produced countless studies and decorative motifs for scarves, as well as geometric embroidery designs applicable to various types of accessories, including one for a fan, dated 1918 (Cat. 51).³⁴ These experiments continued incessantly throughout the 1920s, no longer focusing on traditional male clothing – an area of research which was in fact ‘abandoned’ in 1915 – but rather

on jackets, jerseys (for tennis as well as for mountaineering), bathing costumes and even scarves. The last of Balla’s designs appears to have been the extraordinary dress he conceived for Luce in 1930, which she herself produced (Cat. 64).³⁵

The execution of Balla’s clothing designs was entrusted to the ‘vestals’ of his household: his wife Elisa and his daughter Luce (born in 1904). The Balla house in Via Nicolò Porpora (and subsequently in Via Oslavia, Rome) was remembered by all who visited it as a wonderful place, the most radical of all Futurist environments, in which the infinite, rapacious imagination of the artist – always dressed in Futurist clothing – achieved the most complete realization of that ‘total’ art advocated by the Futurists and postulated in the manifesto ‘Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe’ (Figs. 19–22). In 1930, Gerardo Dottori wrote: “One sees Balla in his studio, wearing an asymmetrical jacket of his own creation [...] one observes all the objects that surround him, that he uses on a day-to-day basis [...] – from hammers to easels, from ashtrays to utility belts; everything has been created by him, or at least bears a brushstroke that imparts to these objects an original character, like the frames and the titles of his paintings, of which they are the sympathetic and necessary complements.”³⁶ The model for all subsequent case *d’arte futurista* – from those of Depero and Prampolini to that of Braggaglia – Balla’s house was open to the public from 1919 on Sunday afternoons between 3 and 7 pm.

Naturally, Balla’s own research inspired all kinds of Futurist investigations into clothing and fashion. The many different aspects of the subject tackled by the painter in his comprehensive vision of a Futurist clothing revolution – from those of an idealistic character to those of an aesthetic nature, from those concerning the formal dimensions of apparel to those addressing practical considerations – placed the issue in the altogether broader context of a Futurist ‘reconstruction’ of the world, and were separately taken up and examined by various artists belonging to the movement. For example, Depero explored the issue in relation to theatrical costume (although, as far as we know, Balla never realized designs for the theatre, he had nevertheless united the worlds of visual and applied art to the theatre around 1914, as we have seen). Like Depero, Prampolini was especially attracted to theatrical costume, and also designed fabrics and accessories for women’s clothing which he produced at home in his small workshop, exhibiting them to the public in his own *casa d’arte* in Vicolo San Nicolò da Tolentino in Rome. During the 1920s, the brothers Thayht and Ram extrapolated the more practical aspects of Balla’s research, launching their *tuta* as a “synthetic” but also “comfortable” and “aesthetic” mode of Futurist dress.³⁷

A decisive step in the development of Futurist fashion – the importance and artistic value of which had by that point been fully established – was Volt’s ‘Manifesto of Futurist Women’s Fashion,’ published on 29 February 1920 as a belated counterpart to Balla’s own manifesto of 1914. It appeared in the pages of *Roma futurista*, an important journal in the history of Futurism, and one that was consistently attentive to issues relating to fashion (Balla had been much involved with this publication since its foundation on 20 September 1918).³⁸ A passage in Volt’s manifesto, incorporated into section “A. INGENUITY,” left no room for doubt as to the aesthetic value the Futurists attributed to fash-

ion, indirectly acknowledging the importance of Balla’s theoretical and practical achievements in the field. “Fashion – wrote Volt – is an art like architecture and music. A dress that is ingeniously conceived and well executed has the same value as a fresco by Michelangelo or a Madonna by Titian.” Futurism’s intense interest in clothing in the aftermath of the Great War had already been openly declared in 1919, when “Futurist fashion” was listed alongside “Paintings, Plastic complexes, Architecture, Free-word tables [and] Plastic Futurist theatre” as one of the various art forms to be represented at the *Grande esposizione nazionale futurista* in the show’s subtitle.

Under the heading of “ECONOMY” Volt’s manifesto explicitly made the case for the industrialization of Futurist fashion in the name of economic necessity, relating it to the depression of the post-war years. But even this aspect of the subject had been foreseen by Balla. In the first handwritten draft of the ‘Manifesto of Futurist Men’s Clothing,’ dating back to late 1913 – early 1914, Futurist clothing had been described as “simple and, above all, of brief duration, in order to promote industrial activity and to give our bodies the perpetual enjoyment of new things.” Balla was therefore quite clear that the ultimate and necessary characteristic of Futurist clothing was to be its applicability to industrial production. Of course, he was also quite aware that this would not be immediate.

Unlike Depero, who engaged fully with the world of advertising, Balla probably never sought a direct relationship with industry. He was tied to essentially nineteenth-century, artisanal methods of production associated with the family sphere and private clients. But this is not particularly relevant. What is important is the fact that Balla, a tireless creator of innovative formal solutions, opened himself up to the future with his incessant work – as befitted his avant-garde vision – and to the possibility of a real, concrete relationship between art and industry. An early yet significant realization of this occurred during the 1920s in the form of Art Déco.³⁹ Balla’s pioneering role in this respect was recognized early on by Gino Galli when, in an article dedicated to the painter in *Roma futurista* he observed with synthetic clarity: “In Italy, G. Balla was the first to turn his attention to the industrialization of Futurism, to the applied arts, to everyday objects.”⁴⁰ As we have seen, this was later recognized by Jannelli and Nicastro, when they asserted that “the audacious spirit that is beginning to manifest itself in the industry of the applied arts” was essentially owed to Balla.⁴¹ This was a widely shared conviction among the Futurists. Referring to Balla, Enrico Santamaria wrote very effectively in 1920: “Modern man gravitates toward colour. What are generally referred to as ‘Parisian’ fashions demonstrate this. Take a look at the hats, the parasols, the clothes of our ladies, and the handkerchiefs and ties that we wear. And what has Futurist painting concerned itself with from its inception up to the present day if not a search for *abstract chromatic decorativism*? And it is because our art is essentially decorative than we now orient ourselves toward art applied to industry. This art form draws very close to the masses and can be understood and *felt* by everyone.”⁴²

It would be wrong both in substance and method to assert that Futurist fashion – in common with the many other forms of decorative art investigated by the movement – restricted itself to the world of the



21. Balla’s studio in the 1950s

artisan, and that chimerical aspirations to large-scale production were grounded in notions that were not only idealistic but uncertain and vague. Quite the contrary. Italy’s industries of the 1920s and 1930s, sapped by the tragedy of war, and predominantly still pre-industrial in character, proved themselves unable to assimilate the avant-garde formal innovations advocated by Futurism in both fashion and the other fields of the applied arts. Moreover, this was the same fate met by other groups in their attempts to unite the worlds of art and industry at this time. It is sufficient to recall the failure of the Bauhaus in this respect, its industrial designs long remaining at the prototype stage and only entering production many years after their creation in a radically different socio-economic climate. German industrialists of the early 1920s who had programmatically entered into the Bauhaus project quickly disregarded those pacts between art and industry agreed during the short-lived Weimar Republic.

In reality, the universe of forms created by the Futurists was so radically new that when the world of industry approached it after the Second World War it would do so not by recuperating this or that specific creation or form, but rather by rediscovering its highest formal principles



22. A corner of Casa Balla in the 1950s (photograph by De Antonis)

and most extreme conceptual syntheses, which had meanwhile become deeply rooted in – and come to form constituent elements of – the visual culture of industrialized societies. In this respect, it is sufficient to think of the way in which the automotive industry embraced the aerodynamic forms conceived by the Futurists to express speed in terms of aesthetic synthesis; or how the modern film industry drew freely on the forms and urban landscapes of Futurist art in creating its atmospheric visions of the future.

Only then was the Futurist universe that Balla had helped so much

to define – inevitably projected into the future by nature of its avant-garde character – able to intersect with the contemporary aesthetic sensibility. In fact the principles of short duration, decay and renewal inherent in the industrial processes of production and consumption were also inherent to the essence of Futurism (and not only in terms of fashion), focused on the great themes of progress, modernity, speed and change. Even the ‘plastic complexes’ were conceived of by the Futurists as structures that would move, change and eventually self-destruct.

Beyond Futurism

Balla would continue to be interested in the world of fashion at a much broader level – that is, as a distilled manifestation of the more glamorous aspects of modern times – during his gradual move away from Futurism in the early 1930s. He would never again design daring outfits at odds with conventional tastes, but in once more looking to photography as a source of inspiration, as in the earlier phases of his artistic research, he created images suspended somewhere between painting and photography in their evocation of the fashionable icons and heroines of the consumer society that was beginning to emerge in Italy during the 1930s. The figures depicted in Balla’s paintings were the same smiling stars – rouged and dressed in the latest fashions – that could be admired on a daily basis by leafing through those modern illustrated magazines accessible to millions. In this way Balla developed a new, and highly personal, form of avant-garde research by bringing the contemporary world into his paintings, availing himself of the modernity of photographic images from the mass media and even going so far as to emulate the technical means by which these icons of the collective imagination were reproduced.⁴³ Accordingly, Balla embarked on profound – and somewhat surprising – reformulation of his artistic vision by importing into his paintings imagery that was both intrinsically modern and symbolic of those popular (and as such, conventional) tastes that he had sought only a few years earlier systematically to alter by means of his Futurist creations. However, the innovative character of this approach was to be totally misunderstood over the following decades.⁴⁴

¹ A relatively recent monograph that fully reconstructs Balla’s artistic journey, revealing the significance of both its Futurist and post-Futurist phases, is F. Benzi, *Giacomo Balla. Genio futurista*, Milan, 2007.

² See E. Crispolti, ed., *Ricostruzione futurista dell’universo*, exh. cat., Turin, Mole Antonelliana, 1980.

³ The first, and most important, study on Balla and the Futurists in relation to fashion was carried out by Enrico

Crispolti in his *Il futurismo e la moda: Balla e gli altri*, Venice, 1986. The first exhibition dedicated to the vast collection of works owned by the Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna reflecting Balla’s work in this field, and that of the applied arts more generally, took place in 1996 at Moscow’s Pushkin Museum (F. Benzi, ed., *Giacomo Balla. La Collezione Biagiotti Cigna*, exh. cat., Milan, 1996). Inside the latter volume, an essay by

Enrico Crispolti shed further light on the subject (‘Balla oltre la pittura: la “ricostruzione futurista” della moda,’ pp. 17–28). The Moscow exhibition was replicated in 1998 and 1999 at Rome’s Chiostro del Bramante (F. Benzi, ed., *Balla. Futurismo tra arte e moda. Opere della Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna*, exh. cat., Milan, 1998). Other original studies have been published in the wake of Crispolti’s initial investigations of Fu-

turist fashion and design: C. Cerutti and R. Sgubin, eds, *Futurismo, moda, design: la ricostruzione futurista dell’universo quotidiano*, exh. cat., Gorizia, Musei Provinciali, 2009–10, and C. Cerutti and A. D’Agliano, eds (with the collaboration of G. Donati), *Moda futurista: tempere e disegni di Giacomo Balla*, exh. cat., Pistoia, 2015. A far more generic study has been provided by L. F. Garavaglia, *Il futurismo e la moda*, Milan, 2009.

⁴ Volt (Vincenzo Fani), ‘Manifesto della moda femminile futurista,’ in *Roma futurista*, III, 72, 29 February 1920.

⁵ See H. Koeck, ‘Moda e società intorno al 1900. La moda a Vienna,’ in *Le arti a Vienna: dalla Secessione alla caduta dell’Impero Asburgico*, exh. cat., Venice-Milan, 1984, pp. 503–19.

⁶ This definition appears in E. Crispolti, ‘Appunti su futurismo e fascismo: dal diciannovesimo alla difesa contro l’operazione “arte degenerata,”’ in E. Crispolti, B. Hinz and Z. Biralli, *Arte e fascismo in Italia e in Germania*, Milan, 1974, pp. 7–67; republished in E. Crispolti, *Storia e critica del Futurismo*, Bari, 1986, pp. 183–224.

⁷ On the myth of revolution in early Futurism, see E. Gentile, ‘Political Futurism and the Myth of the Italian Revolution,’ in G. Berghaus, ed., *International Futurism in Arts and Literature*, Berlin-New York, 2000, pp. 1–14.

⁸ G. Jannelli and L. Nicastro, ‘Giacomo Balla,’ in *Sicilia Nuova*, 193, Messina, 18 August 1925.

⁹ U. Boccioni, *Altri inediti e apparati critici*, ed. by Z. Biralli, Milan, 1972, pp. 46–48 (p. 48).

¹⁰ Even the recent important exhibition in Paris and London confirmed this impression: J. M. Bonet, ed., *Sonia Delaunay. Les couleurs de l’abstraction*, exh. cat. (Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2014–15; London, Tate Modern, 2015), Issy-les-Moulineaux, 2014. See also A. Malochet, *Atelier Simultané di Sonia Delaunay*, Milan, 1984.

¹¹ As we know from two photographs published for the first time in M. W. Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory*, Oxford, 1968, figs VIII–IX, over the following months Balla realized a continuous frieze painted at eye level along the walls of the room, representing a 360 degree view of the surrounding city and consisting of several photographically realistic scenes, as if it were a sequence of ‘frames.’ The frieze was cropped and divided by a rigid geometric grid, into which the sparse furnishings of the room were also incorporated, so that the painter was compelled to engage with that *Jugendstil* culture with which Düsseldorf was buzzing. On the two photographs, see F. Benzi, ‘Balla e la fotografia. Lo sguardo della modernità,’ in *Giacomo Balla. La Collezione Biagiotti Cigna*, cit., pp. 29–49 (pp. 39–40).

¹² Balla’s letter, of which a number of extracts were published for the first time in M. Fagiolo dell’Arco, *Balla: le “compenetrazioni iridescenti”*, Rome, 1968, p. 30, is reproduced in full in E. Balla, *Con Balla*, vol. I, Milan, 1984, pp. 266–68.

¹³ The most recent and up-to-date study on the ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ is F. Benzi, ‘Giacomo Balla e le “Compenetrazioni iridescenti”: approfondimenti e novità,’ in *Storia dell’Arte*, 139, 2014, pp. 157–73. It is true that Balla began to meditate on the ‘rainbows’ in this context, but it must be stressed that their conception was not bound in any way to the painted decoration of the Löwenstein home, as has been erroneously asserted for decades. The aforementioned photographs, a number of written testimonies contained in Balla’s correspondence, and some sketches all testify to the fact that this was of a completely different nature.

¹⁴ Like Balla’s aforementioned letter, this too was partially reproduced in M. Fagiolo dell’Arco, *Balla: le “compenetrazioni iridescenti”*, cit., p. 31, and in its entirety in E. Balla, *Con Balla*, cit., pp. 279–82.

¹⁵ See E. Crispolti, *Il futurismo e la moda*, cit., fig. 49. The two other suits reproduced in Crispolti’s volume (figs 50 and 51) relate to the same period (all private collection, Milan).

¹⁶ F. Cangiullo, *Le serate futuriste. Romanzo storico-susito*, Pozzuoli, 1930, pp. 51–52.

¹⁷ *Giacomo Balla. La Collezione Biagiotti Cigna*, cit., cats 18–23, pp. 70–72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, cats 24–31, pp. 73–76. Two of these studies are exhibited in the present exhibition (Cats 43–44).

¹⁹ The manuscript was mentioned for the first time in E. Crispolti and M. Drudi Gambillo, eds, *Giacomo Balla*, exh. cat., Turin, 1963, p. 114; it was later published in M. Fagiolo, *Omaggio a Balla*, Rome, 1967, pp. 55–57. As is known, on 11 September 1914 an Italian version of the manifesto was published in Milan which aligned the text with the interventionist cause espoused by the Futurist group by means of a change in its title and content: ‘Il vestito antineutrale. Manifesto futurista’ (Figs 14–17). A further Italian version of the manifesto exists, dating from 1915, depicting a different suit on the front page – not one of those worn by Marinetti in the morning but another (likewise in the colours of the Italian flag) worn by Cangiullo during interventionist demonstrations at the University of Rome on 11 and 12 December 1914.

²⁰ Palazzeschi had been a friend of Balla’s since 1912. The deletion of the reference to ‘Il controdolore’ – dated 29 December 1913, but published in *Lacerba* in January 1914 – occurred after Palazzeschi left the Futurist movement in April 1914, a decision formalized with the publication of a concise statement in the journal *La Voce* on 28 April (VI, no. 9). The dedication of the first draft can therefore be dated to before April 1914, while the revised version of the text – from which the dedication was deleted – was completed just prior to its publication, between April and May.

²¹ For a detailed analysis of the manuscript in relation to the manifesto, see E. Crispolti, *Il futurismo e la moda*, cit., pp. 69–80.

²² Volt, ‘Manifesto della moda femminile futurista,’ cit.

²³ E. Balla, *Con Balla*, cit., p. 345.

²⁴ Prampolini’s manifesto ‘L’atmosferastruttura basi per un’architettura futurista’ was published in *Il Piccolo Giornale d’Italia*, 29–30 January (the text was revised and enlarged in 1918); on 11 July, Antonio Sant’Elia’s ‘Manifesto dell’Architettura futurista’ was published in the form of a leaflet (it was subsequently republished in *Lacerba* on 1 August (II, 15); between the end of 1913 and the beginning of 1914, Boccioni wrote a brief text of his own titled ‘Architettura futurista. Manifesto.’ Never published during the artist’s lifetime, it was discovered among Marinetti’s papers and published by Zeno Biralli in U. Boccioni, *Altri inediti*, cit.

²⁵ On this crucial moment in Roman Futurism, see E. Crispolti, ‘Il “nodo” romano 1914/15: Balla, Depero, Prampolini, Boccioni,’ in S. Fauchereau, A. Porta and C. Salaris, eds, *Futurismo e Futurismi*, Milan, 1986, pp. 45–55.

believe that the young student, having only been introduced to Futurism several months earlier, penned this text on the basis of ideas and concepts that his teacher had discussed with him on various occasions. On this point, see F. Benzi, *Il Futurismo*, Milan, 2008, pp. 199–200. Depero’s manifesto has been published in its entirety by B. Passamani, in *Fortunato Depero*, Turin, [1969]. The historiographical question is summarized in E. Crispolti, *Storia e critica del futurismo*, cit., pp. 72–80.

²⁷ See F. Leone, ‘I dipinti interventisti di Giacomo Balla,’ in F. Leone and F. Mazzocca, eds, *La Grande Guerra: arte e artisti al fronte*, exh. cat., Milan, 2015, pp. 68–79.

²⁸ On these works, see *Giacomo Balla. La Collezione Biagiotti Cigna*, cit., cats 33–36, pp. 79–80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, cat. 37, p. 80.

³⁰ Cited in M. Fagiolo dell’Arco, *FuturBalla*, Rome, 1970, p. III/96.

³¹ P. L. Fortunati, ‘I futuristi italiani all’Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte Decorativa di Parigi: intervista con Giacomo Balla e Guglielmo Jannelli,’ in *L’Impero*, 20, 2 June 1925.

³² L. Corpechat, *Lettres sur la jeune Italie*, Nancy-Paris-Strasbourg, 1919, p. 47.

³³ *Giacomo Balla. La Collezione Biagiotti Cigna*, cit., cat. 41, p. 82.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, cat. 43, p. 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, cats 101–102, p. 111.

³⁶ G. Dottori, ‘Una visita alla mostra,’ in *Oggi e Domani*, Rome, 30 June 1930.

³⁷ These adjectives are used in the ‘Manifesto per la trasformazione dell’abbigliamento maschile’ written by Thayaht and Ram in 1932. The text, dated 20 September, was first published in its entirety in E. Crispolti, *Il futurismo e la moda*, cit., p. 137.

³⁸ Volt, ‘Manifesto della moda femminile futurista,’ cit. *Roma futurista* had two distinct phases: the first, from no. 1 (20 September 1918) to no. 52 (21 December 1919) was exclusively concerned with politics; the second, from no. 53 (4 January 1920) to nos 84–85 (16–30 May 1920), focused entirely on matters of an artistic-literary character.

³⁹ On the extent to which Futurism (particularly that of Balla, and subsequently that of Depero and Prampolini) influenced the development of Déco, see F. Benzi, ‘Il déco in Italia,’ in F. Benzi, ed., *Il Déco in Italia*, exh. cat., Milan, 2004, pp. 36–121; pp. 58–78; F. Pirani, ‘“I futuristi hanno salvato l’Italia a Parigi.” La contrastata presenza futurista all’Exposition des Arts Décoratifs del 1925,’ in *Ricerche di Storia dell’Arte*, 67, 1999, pp. 39–50; F. Pirani, ‘Tre italiani a Parigi. La partecipazione futurista all’“Exposition des Arts Décoratifs” del 1925,’ in *Il Déco in Italia*, cit., pp. 274–93.

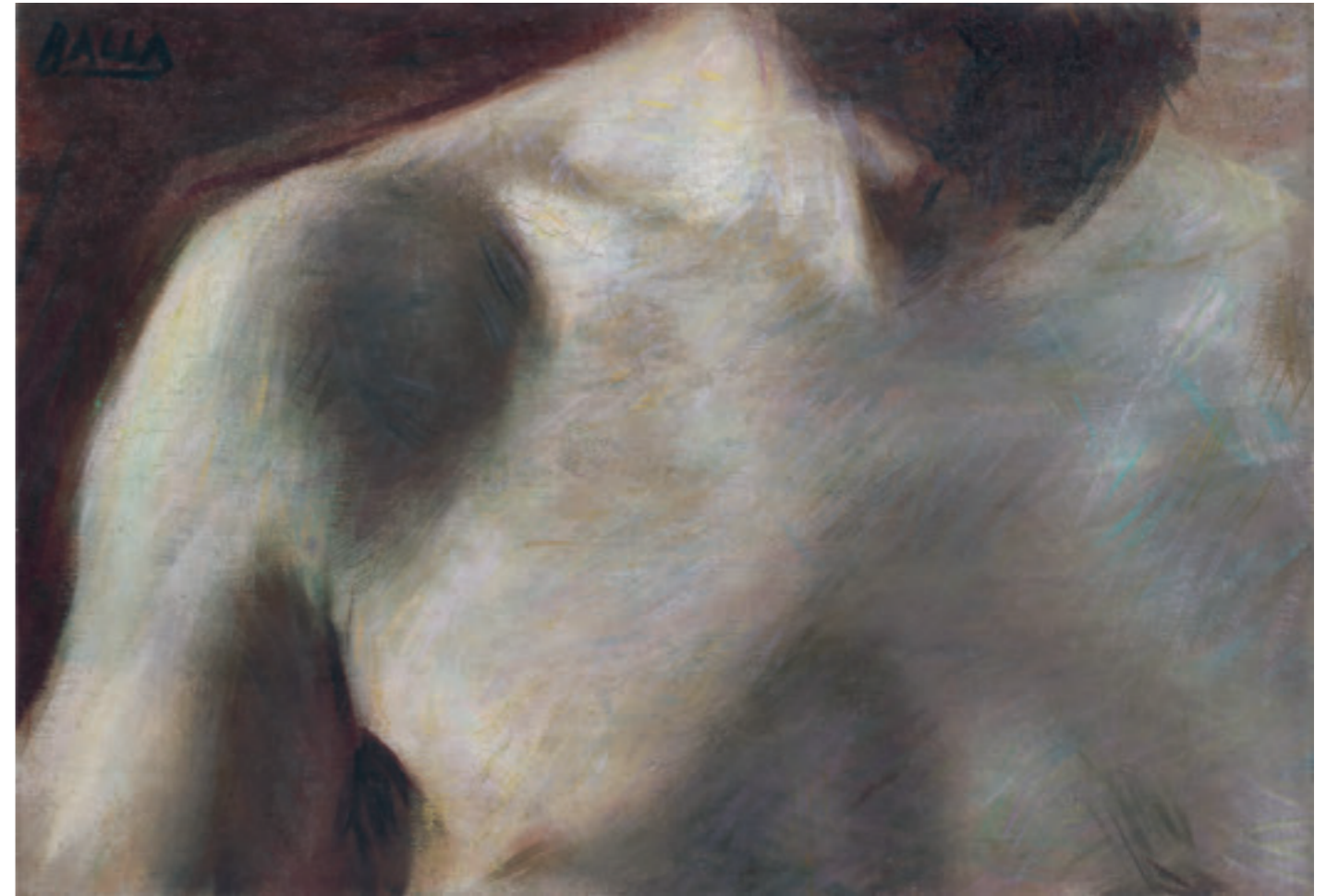
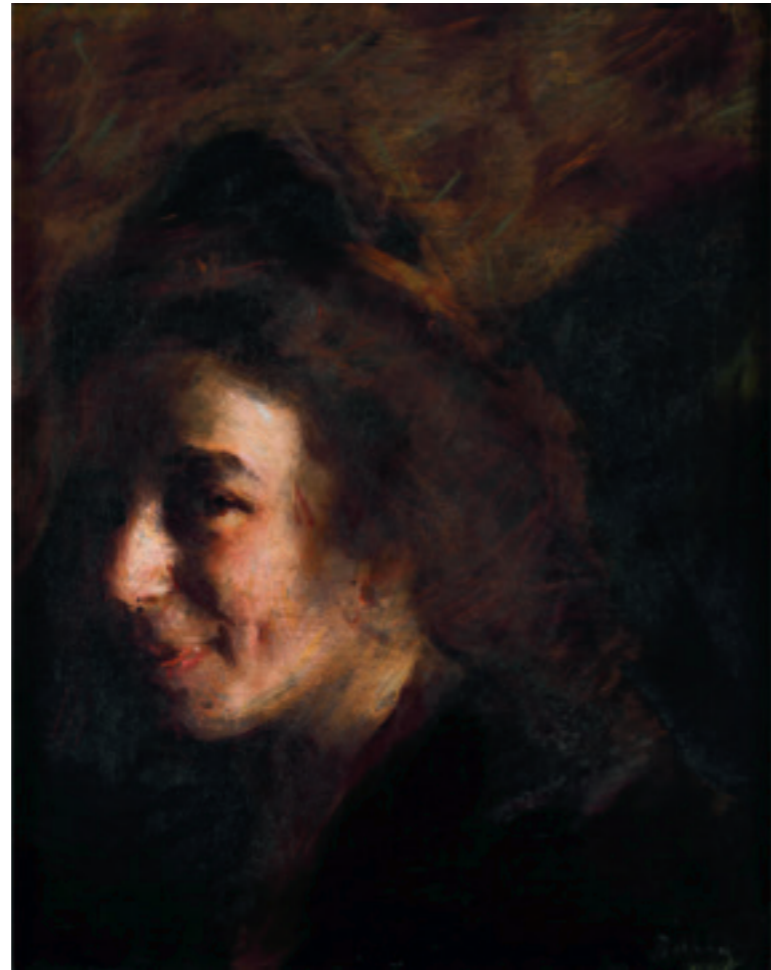
⁴⁰ G. Galli, ‘I nostri artisti. Giacomo Balla,’ in *Roma futurista*, 14 December 1919.

⁴¹ G. Jannelli and L. Nicastro, ‘Giacomo Balla,’ cit.

⁴² E. Santamaria, ‘Conversando con Giacomo Balla,’ in *Griffat*, 10, 15 August 1920; cit. in E. Crispolti, *Il futurismo e la moda*, cit., p. 130.

⁴³ He did this by means of placing a tulle ‘screen’ on the surface of the work, over which he painted the image. The results are a striking anticipation of Roy Lichtenstein’s Pop Art.

⁴⁴ The first significant reconsideration of Balla’s late work can be found in F. Benzi, ‘Balla e la fotografia. Lo sguardo della modernità,’ in *Giacomo Balla. La Collezione Biagiotti Cigna*, cit., pp. 29–49.



1 Woman Sewing, 1895–96, oil on canvas, 158.5 x 112.2 cm

2 Head of a Woman, 1900, oil on canvas, 45 x 35 cm

3 Autospalla ('Self-shoulder'), 1903, oil on canvas, 27 x 40 cm



4 Winter (Triptych), 1905, pastel on cardboard; central panel, 51 x 65 cm; side panels, 51 x 29 cm each

5 Hedgerow at Villa Borghese, 1906, pastel on cardboard, 44 x 63 cm



6 Woman at Villa Borghese, 1906, oil on cardboard, 64 x 80.5 cm



7 Portrait of Margherita Löwenstein, 1911, pastel on cardboard, 49 x 32.5 cm



8 Portrait of Tolstoy, 1911,
oil on paper laid down on cardboard,
82.8 x 85 cm

9 Portrait of Signora Egle Casarini, 1911,
pastel on cardboard, 61.5 x 74 cm





10 Iridescent Interpenetration no. 14, 1913, oil on wood, 32.5 x 19.5 cm

11 Iridescent Interpenetration, 1913, watercolour on paper, 24 x 18 cm



12 Vortex + Landscape, 1913, mixed media on cardboard, 45 x 60 cm



13 Lines of Force of an Enamelled Landscape, 1917–18, oil and enamel on paper laid down on canvas, 41 x 56 cm



14 Expansion of Spring, 1918, oil on board, 45 x 55 cm



15 Landscape of Villa Borghese, 1918,
oil and tempera on silk; batons: enamel on wood,
190 x 50 cm; 57 x 3.5 cm



16 Sea and Beach Huts, 1919,
tempera and pencil on paper,
10 x 15 cm



17 Force-lines of the Sea, 1919,
tempera and pencil on paper,
10 x 14.5 cm



18 *Force-lines of the Sea*, 1919,
tempera and pencil on paper,
10.4 x 15.9 cm

19 *Force-lines of the Sea*, 1919,
tempera and pencil on paper,
10.2 x 15.5 cm



20 *A Passion*, 1920
oil on cardboard; frame: oil on wood
29.3 x 36.8 cm



21 *Flowing Lines*, 1922
tempera and pencil on paper
33 x 41 cm



22 Atmospheric Dynamism, 1922,
tempera and pencil on paper,
34 x 41.6 cm

23 Lines of Space + Speed, 1922,
tempera and pencil on paper,
33 x 44 cm



24 Atmospheric Dynamism, c. 1923–25, oil on canvas, 77 x 77 cm



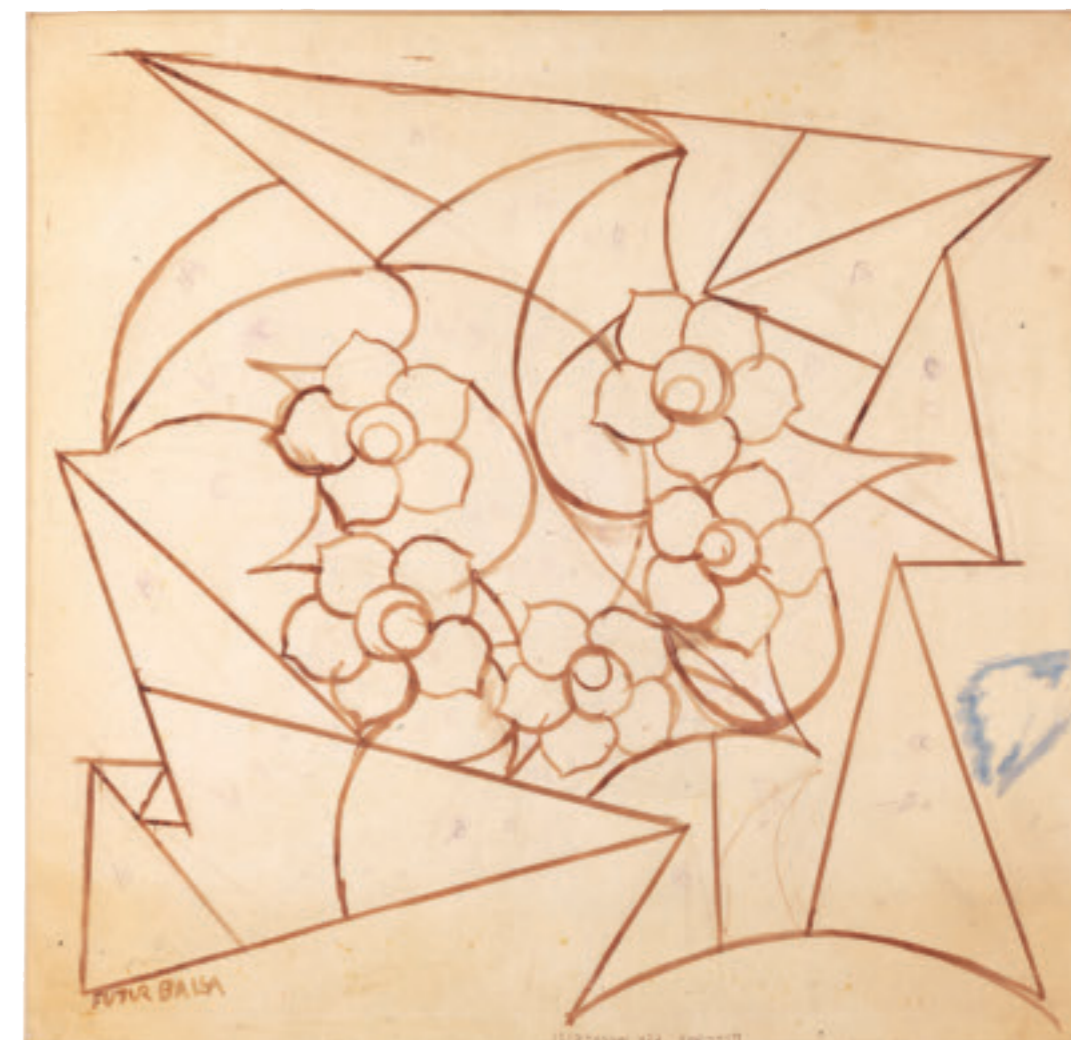
25 Circolpiani ('Circleplanes'), 1922, tempera and pencil on paper, 32 x 40 cm



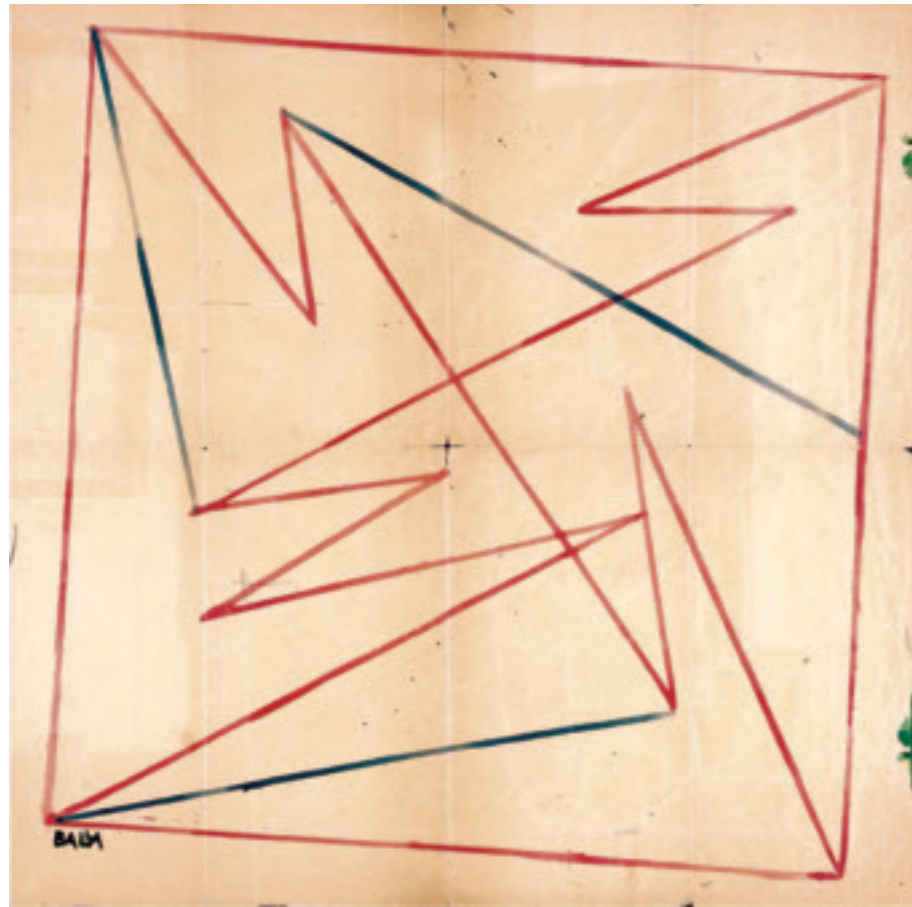
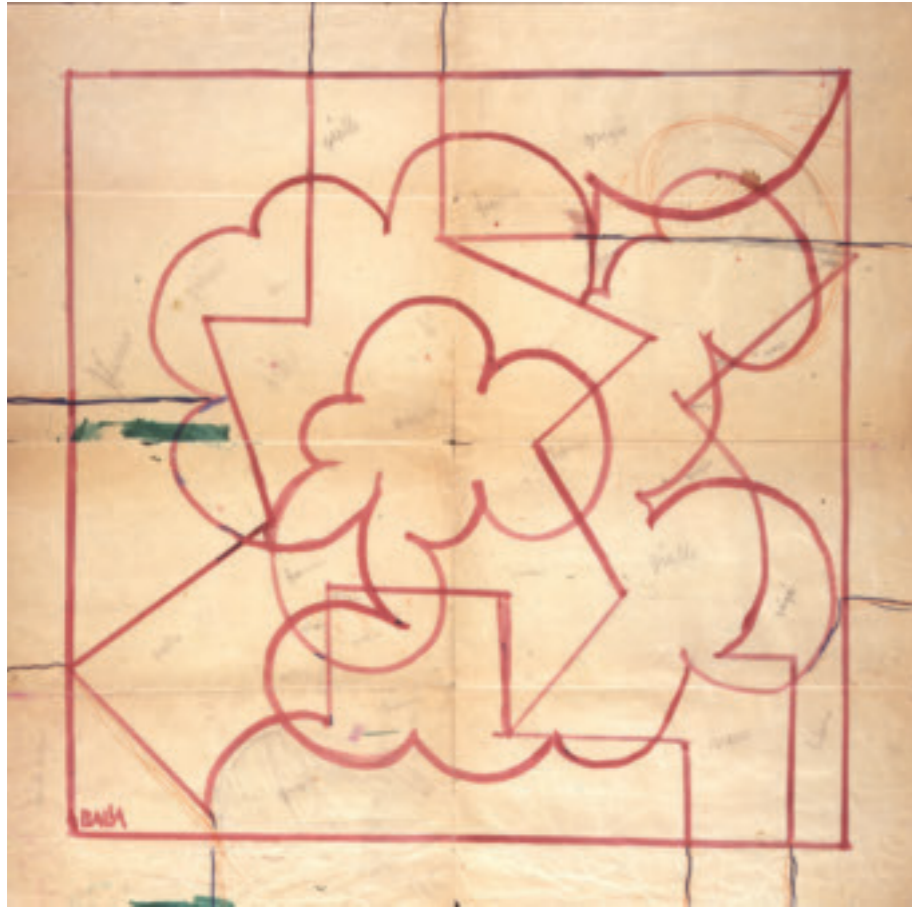
26 Interpenetrating Motif (Landscape), 1923, tempera on paper, 20.8 x 27.8 cm



27 Futurpesci ('Futurfishes'), 1924, tempera on paper laid down on canvas, 65 x 154.5 cm



28 Preparatory study for 'Balfiori' ('Ballflowers'), 1924-25, tempera, ink and pencil on paper laid down on canvas, 84 x 85 cm



29 *Spatial Lines* (recto-verso), 1925,
tempera, pencil and ink on paper
79 x 80 cm



30 *Vapofumo* ('Vaperfume'), 1926, tempera and gold on paper laid down on canvas, 23 x 23 cm



31 Expansion of Spring, 1928, oil on wood, 44.3 x 30.8 cm



32 Expansion + Light, 1930, tempera on cardboard; frame: tempera on wood, 37 x 46 cm



33 On the Patio, 1926, oil on canvas; wooden frame designed and executed by Balla, 75 x 98 cm



34 Chatting, 1934, oil on board, 80 x 94 cm



35 Foggy Morning at Villa Borghese, 1939, oil on canvas, 99 x 87 cm



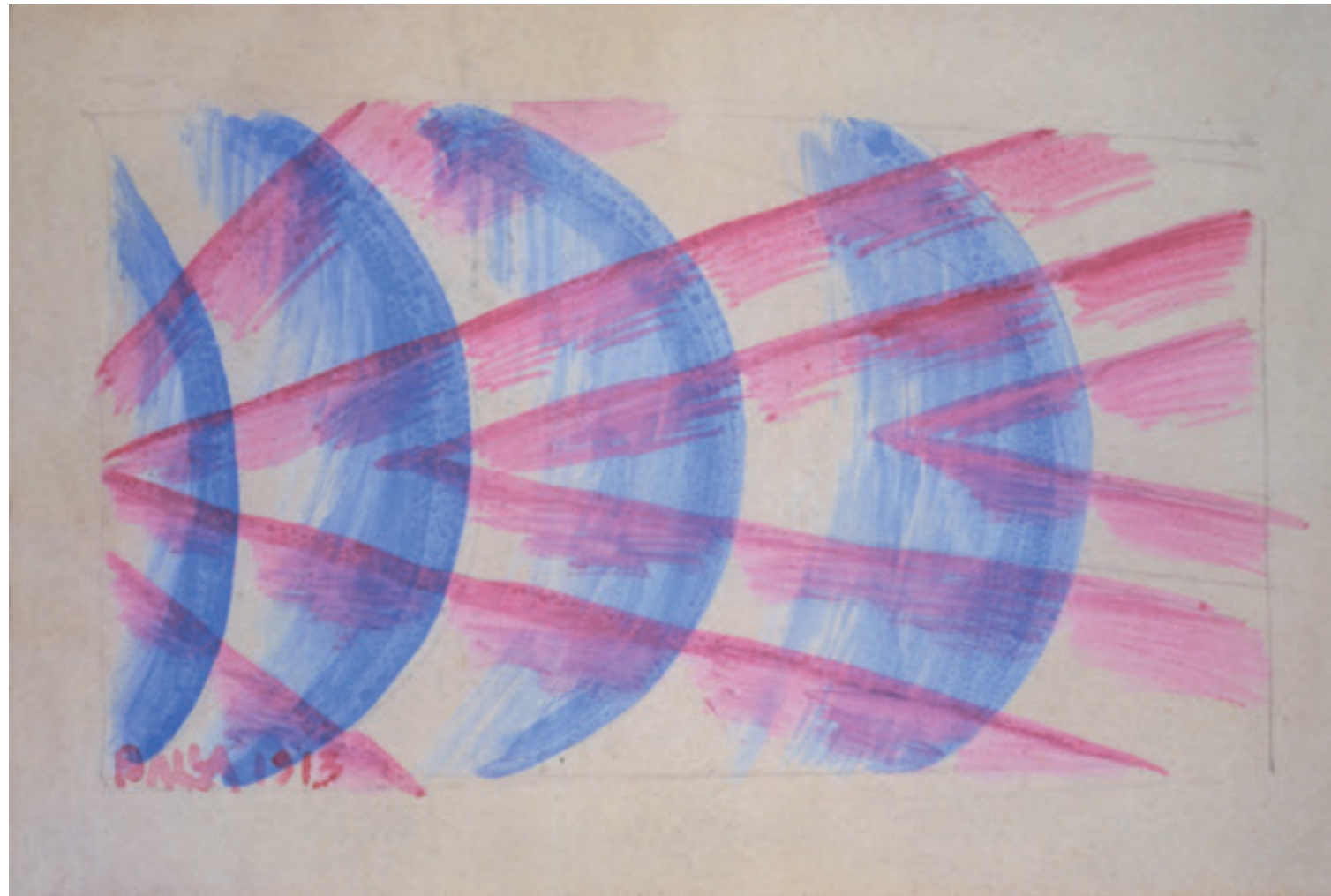
36 Dahlias in the Light, 1949, oil on canvas, 74 x 81.5 cm



37 Study for Fabric Design, 1913, tempera on paper, 13 x 19 cm



38 Design for a Man's Suit, 1913, tempera on paper, 13 x 19 cm



39 Study for Fabric Design, 1913, tempera on paper, 13 x 19 cm



40 Design for a Man's Suit, 1914, pencil and tempera on paper, 29 x 21 cm

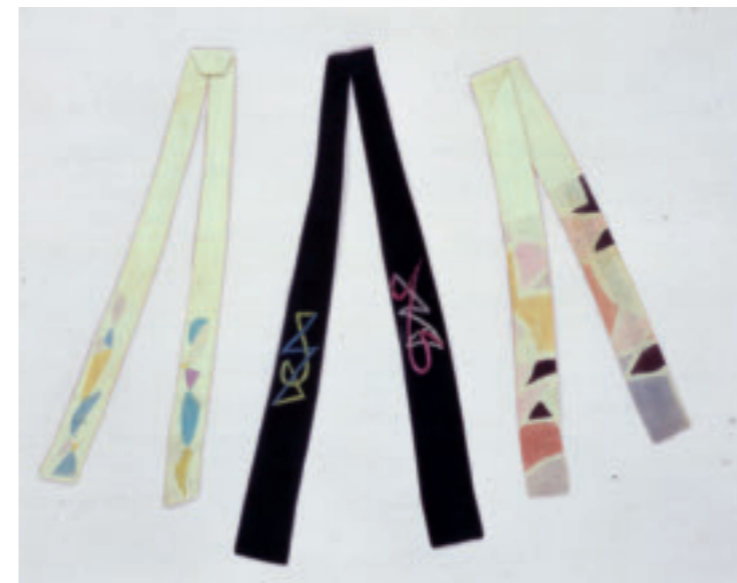


41 Study for Fabric Design, 1913,
tempera on paper,
13 x 19 cm

42 Design for a Man's Suit, 1914,
pencil and tempera on paper,
29 x 21 cm

43 Design for a Man's Jacket, 1913,
pencil and Indian ink on paper,
19.8 x 14 cm

44 Design for a Man's Suit, c. 1913,
and Indian ink on paper,
19.8 x 14 cm

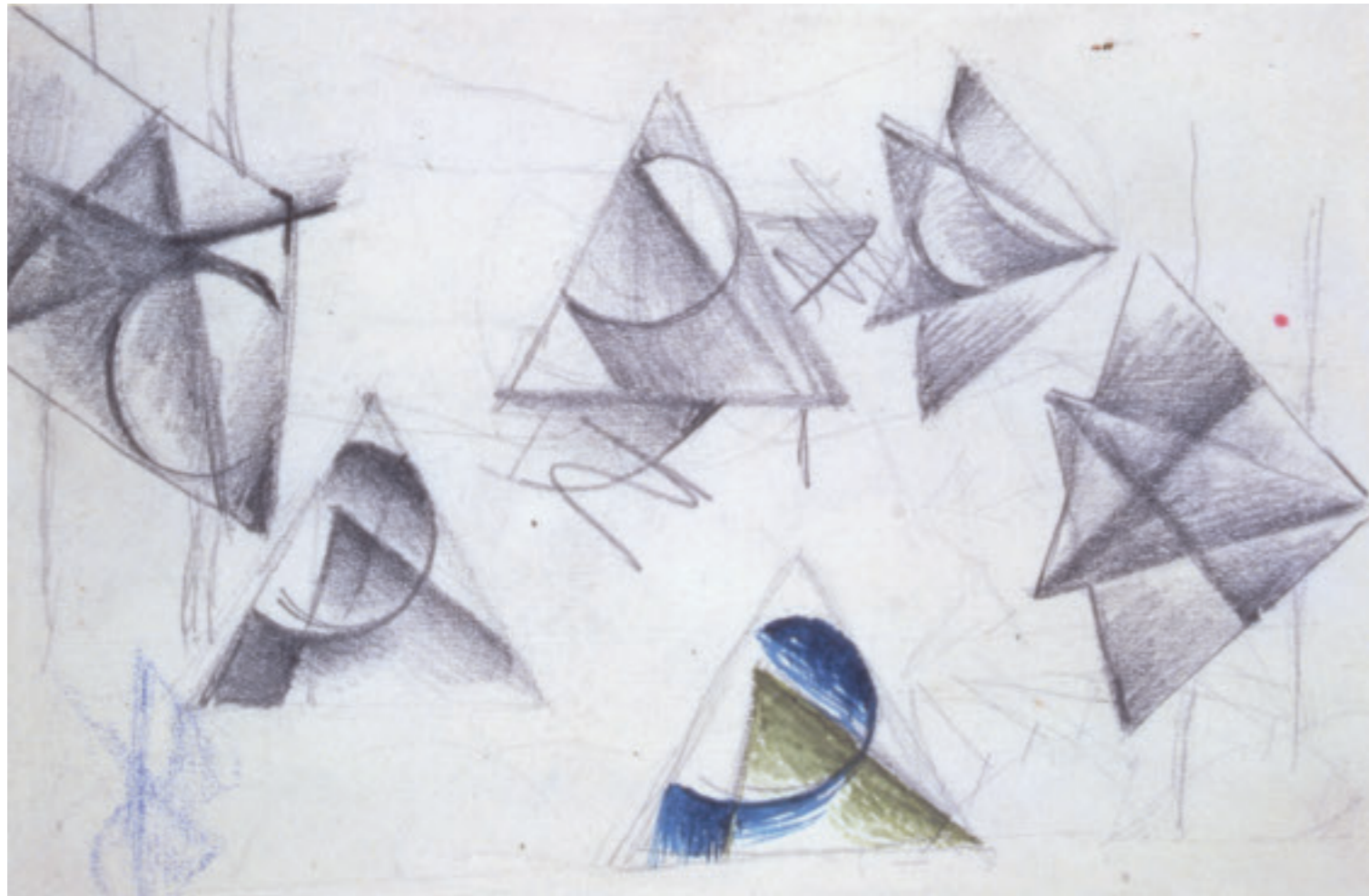


45 Three Embroidered and Painted Ties, 1914
embroidery and mixed media on black and white fabric, various dimensions

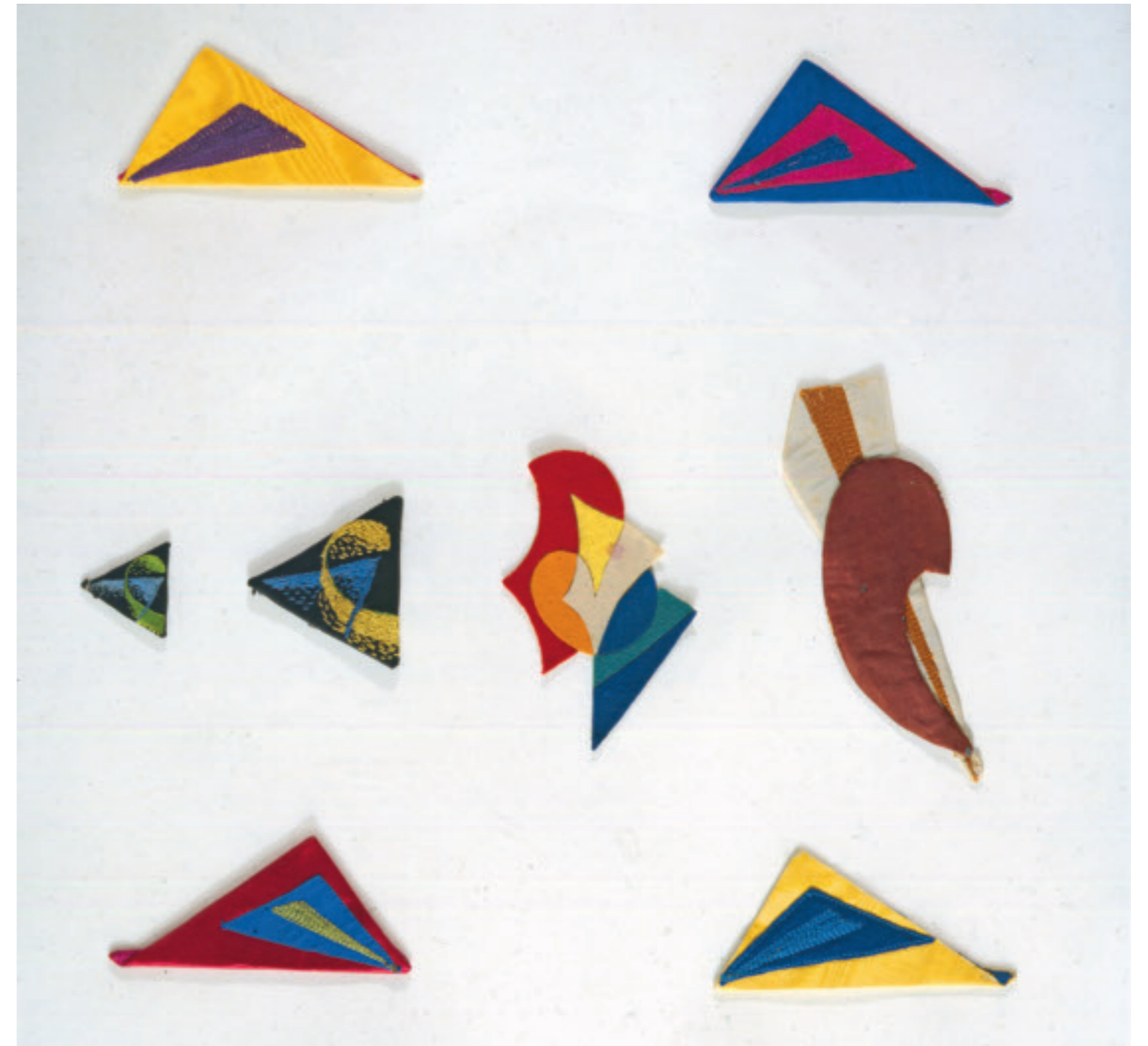
46 Design for a Tie, 1916
watercolour and pencil on paper, 72 x 5 cm

47 Design for a Bag with Lines of Speed, 1916
watercolour and inks on paper, 28.5 x 22.5 cm





48 Studies for 'Modifiers', 1913-14, pencil and watercolour on paper, 14 x 20 cm



49 Eight 'Modifiers', 1914, embroidered fabric, various dimensions



50 Futurist Waistcoat Embroidered with Decorative Motifs based on the Name Balla, 1924–25, embroidered fabric, 61 x 56 cm



51 Design for a Fan, 1918, watercolour and inks on paper, 39.5 x 51 cm



52 Light between the Pines (Study for an Embroidered Tulle Scarf), 1918, coloured pencils on paper laid down on canvas, 120 x 64 cm

53 Design for an Embroidered Tulle Scarf, 1918, coloured pencils on paper, 253 x 57 cm

54 Futurfarfalla ('Futurbutterfly') (Study for Embroidery), 1918-19, pencil, inks and watercolour on paper, 31 x 43 cm



55 Design of Elements (Design for a Scarf),
1918–19, tempera on paper, 26 x 6.5 cm

56 Design of Elements (Technical Drawing
for a Scarf Design), 1918–19, pencil, tempera
and ink on paper,
176 x 48.5 cm



57 Farfalli ('Butterflies') (Design for a Scarf),
1920, pencil and pastel on grey cardboard,
124 x 49.5 cm



58 Autumn (Motif for a Scarf created for Lyda Borrelli), 1925, tempera on paper laid down on canvas, 94 x 59 cm



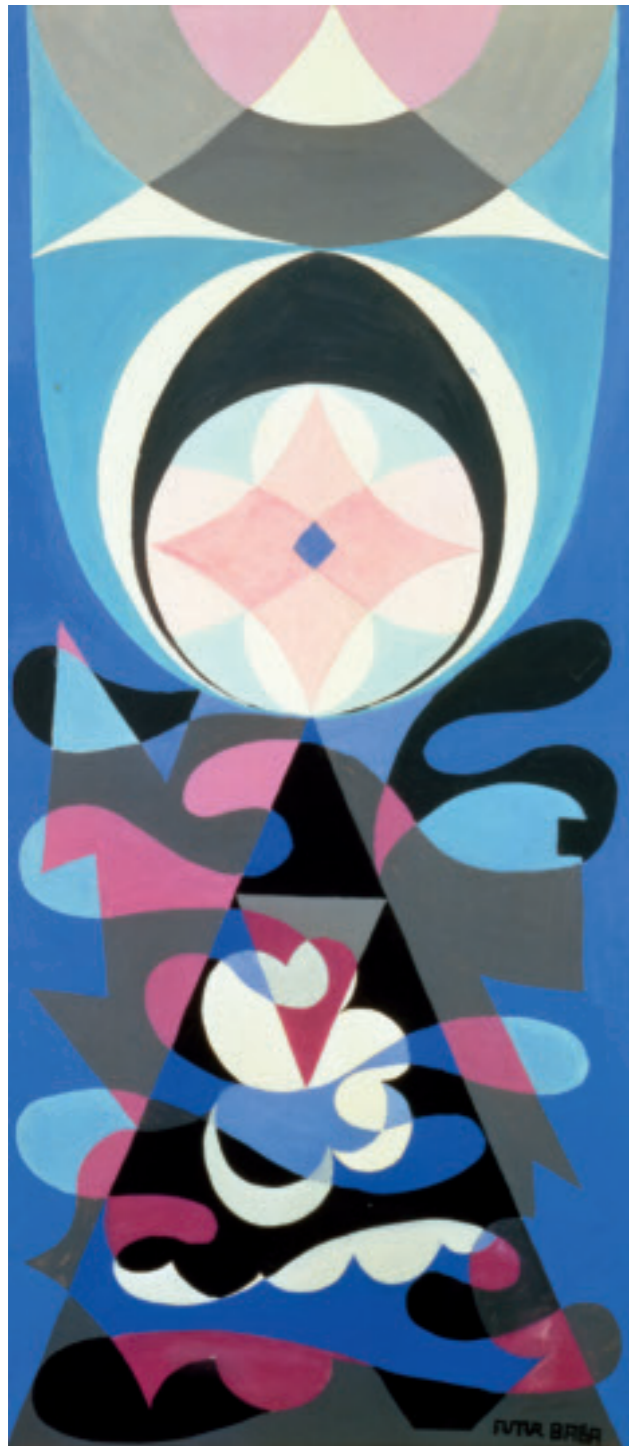
59 Design for a Scarf (Violets and Cyclamens), 1925, tempera on cardboard, 88 x 42.5 cm



60 Shoe Design, 1928–29, pencil on paper, 10 x 14 cm

61 Shoe Design, 1928–29, pencil on paper, 10 x 14 cm

62 Shoe Design, 1928–29, pencil and Indian ink on paper, 13.3 x 20.5 cm



63 Design for a Scarf with Flowing Lines, 1930, tempera on cardboard, 92.5 x 40 cm

64 Dress for Luce, 1930, fabric; buckle: enamel on wood, 121 x 141 cm



65 'Futurfascist' Jersey, 1930, tempera and ink on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm

66 Jersey with Prismatic Motifs, 1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm

67 Jersey, 1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm

68 Jersey, 1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper 22 x 15.5 cm



69 Motif for a Waistcoat, 1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm

70 Waistcoat, 1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm

71 Jersey for Mountaineering, 1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm

72 Bathing Suit, 1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm



73 Jersey for Tennis,
1930, tempera, pencil and ink on paper,
22 x 15.5 cm



74 Stand, c. 1914,
oil and tempera on wood,
62.4 x 42 x 23 cm



75 Futurist Lamp, 1916, embroidered fabric, 94 x 68 cm



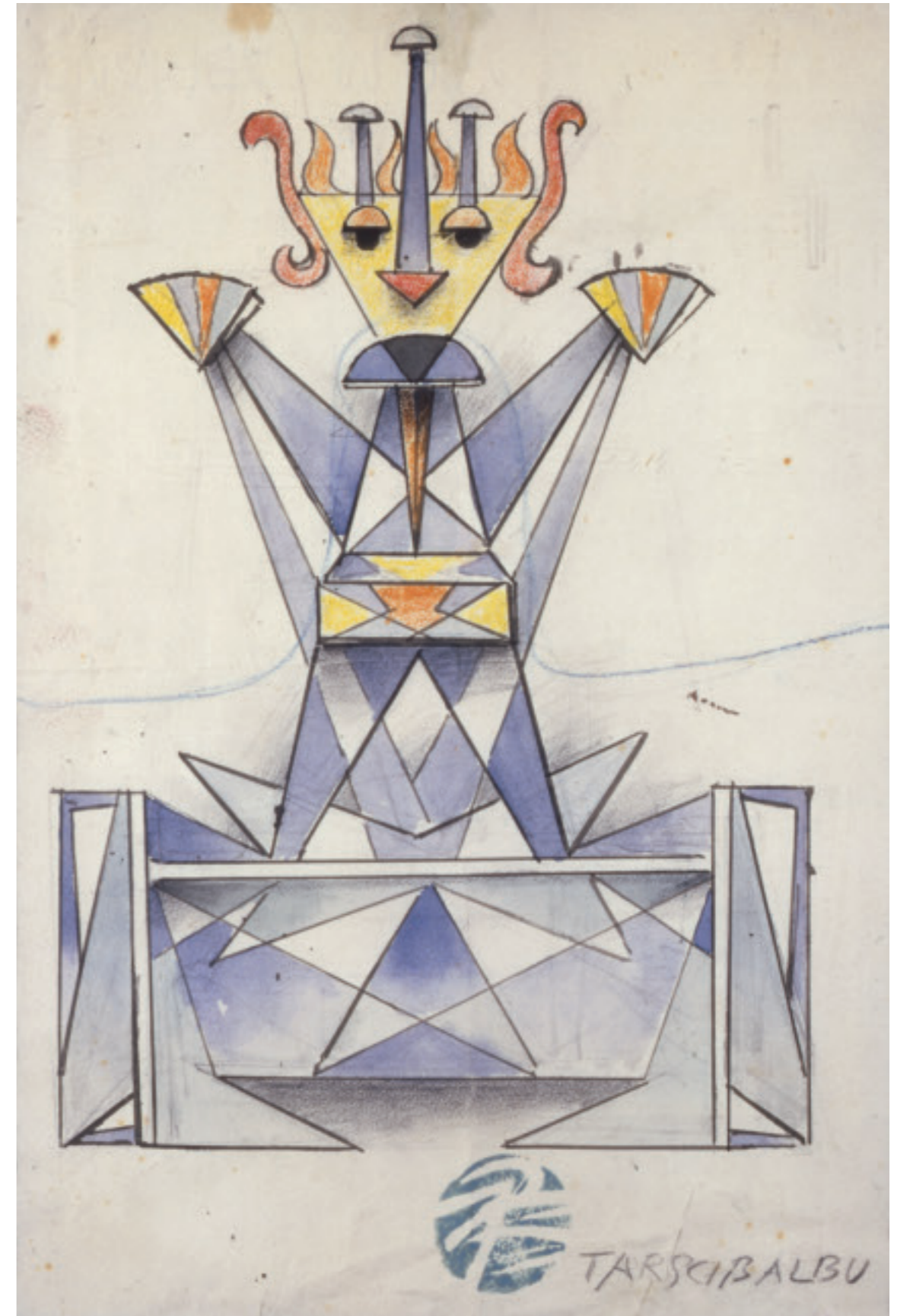
76 Design for a Room in Pink, c. 1916-18, pencil and tempera on paper, 25 x 34.5 cm



77 Study for a Lampshade (Village Festival), 1918, tempera and inks on cardboard, 17 x 31.8 cm

78 Lampshade, 1918, enamel on cardboard, 13.7 x 30.5 cm

79 Study for a Lampshade, c. 1918, pencil and tempera on paper 20.7 x 32 cm



80 'Tarscilbalbu' (Design for Chest and Clothes-stand), 1918-20, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 34.8 x 23.5 cm



81 Coat Hanger, c. 1919, painted wood, 7 x 34.5 cm

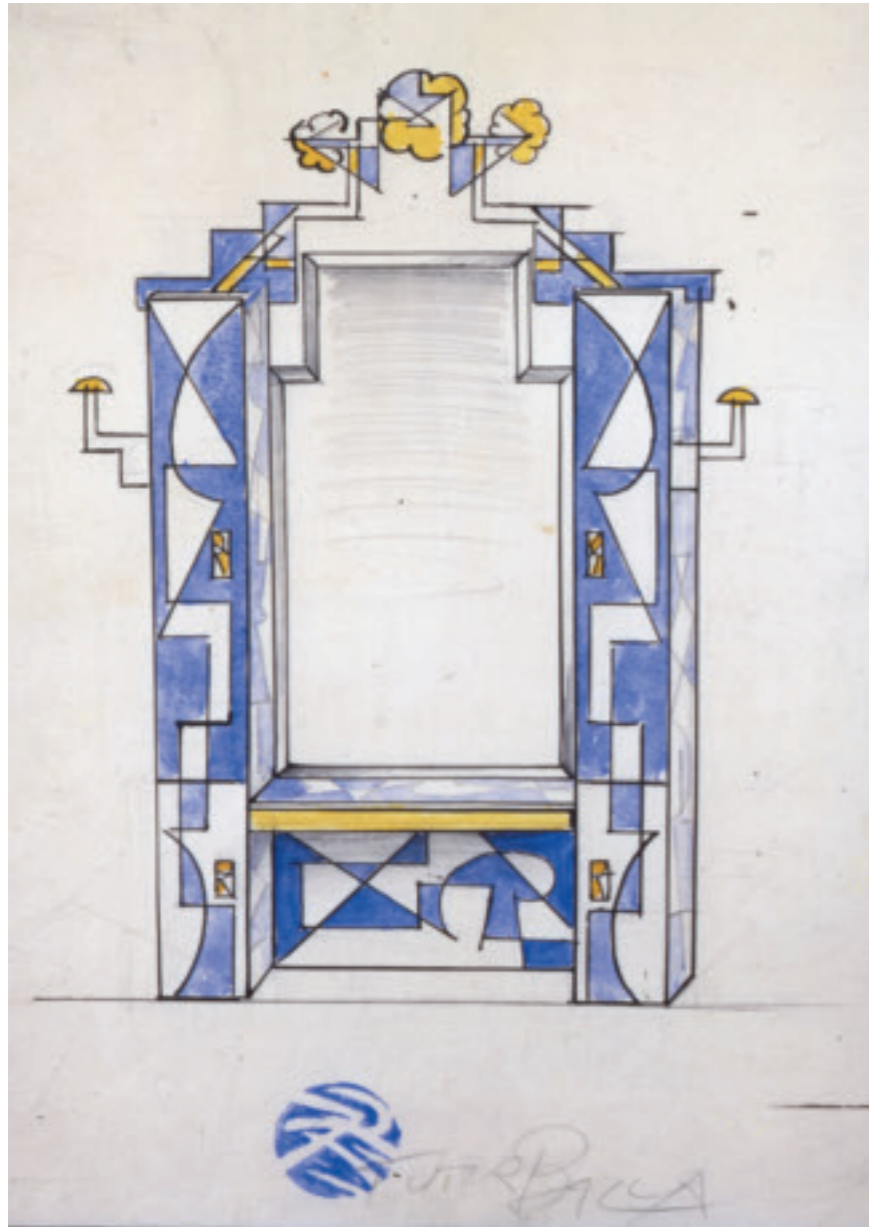
82 Futurist Flower, 1918–20, painted wood, h. 29 cm



83 Panel for Child's Room, 1916, tempera and ink on paper, 36.5 x 67.5 cm

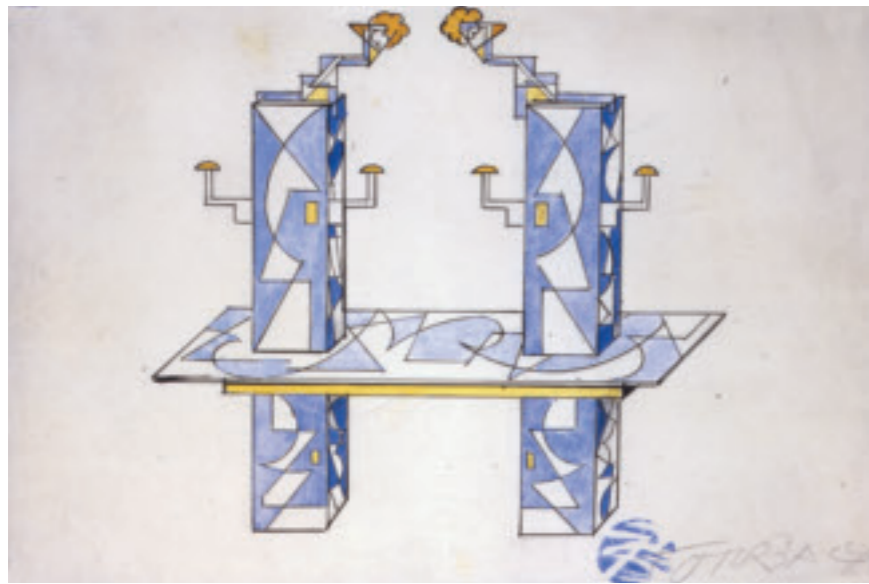


84 Futurlibeccata ('Futurlibeccio'), 1919, embroidered fabric, 34 x 176 cm



85 Design for Shop Furnishing, 1920–22, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 41 x 26.8 cm

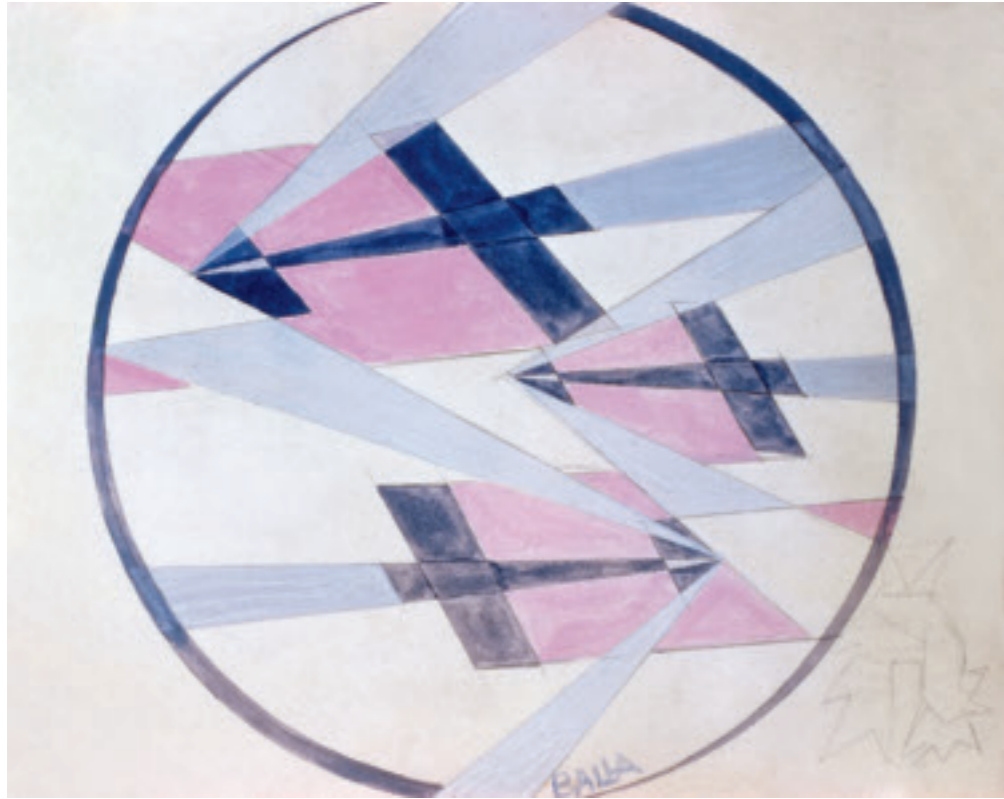
86 Design for Shop Furnishing, 1920–22, tempera, pencil and ink on paper, 28.5 x 42.5 cm



87 Balcornice ('Balframe'), 1925, painted wood, 22 x 25 cm



88 Futurcypressi ('Futurcypresses'), project for a tapestry, 1925, tempera on paper, 22.5 x 29 cm



89 Study for the Decoration of a Plate with Caproni Aeroplanes, c. 1925, tempera and pencil on paper, 23 x 29 cm



90 Pearlescent Reality (Ceiling Light Fixture), c. 1926, oil on wood and metal board, Ø 62 cm



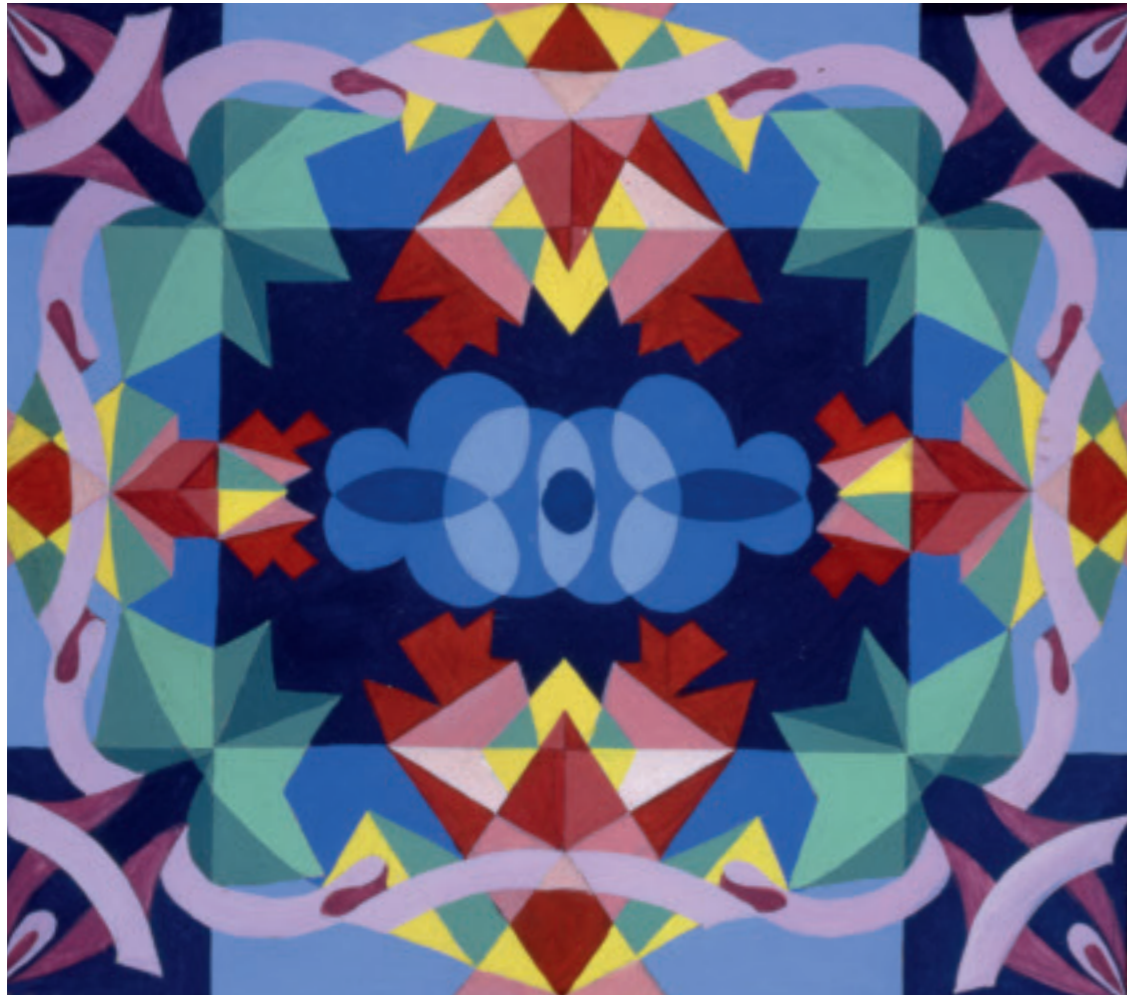
91 Red Studio Door, 1928, oil and enamel on wood, 210 x 91 cm



92 Clothes-stand, 1928, oil on wood, 220 x 200 x 50 cm

93 Portable Study Lamp, c. 1928, oil on wood, 60 x 25 x 11 cm





94 Interpenetrating Prismatic Motifs
(Design for a Rug), c. 1930,
tempera on paper, 25 x 37 cm

95 Motif for a Rug, c. 1930,
tempera on paper, 28.5 x 32.8 cm



96 Motif for a Rug (Flowers + Space), c. 1930, tempera on cardboard, 24 x 32.5 cm

Works on Paper



97 Child's Room for Iris Calabria, 1932, oil on wood (4 pieces), various dimensions



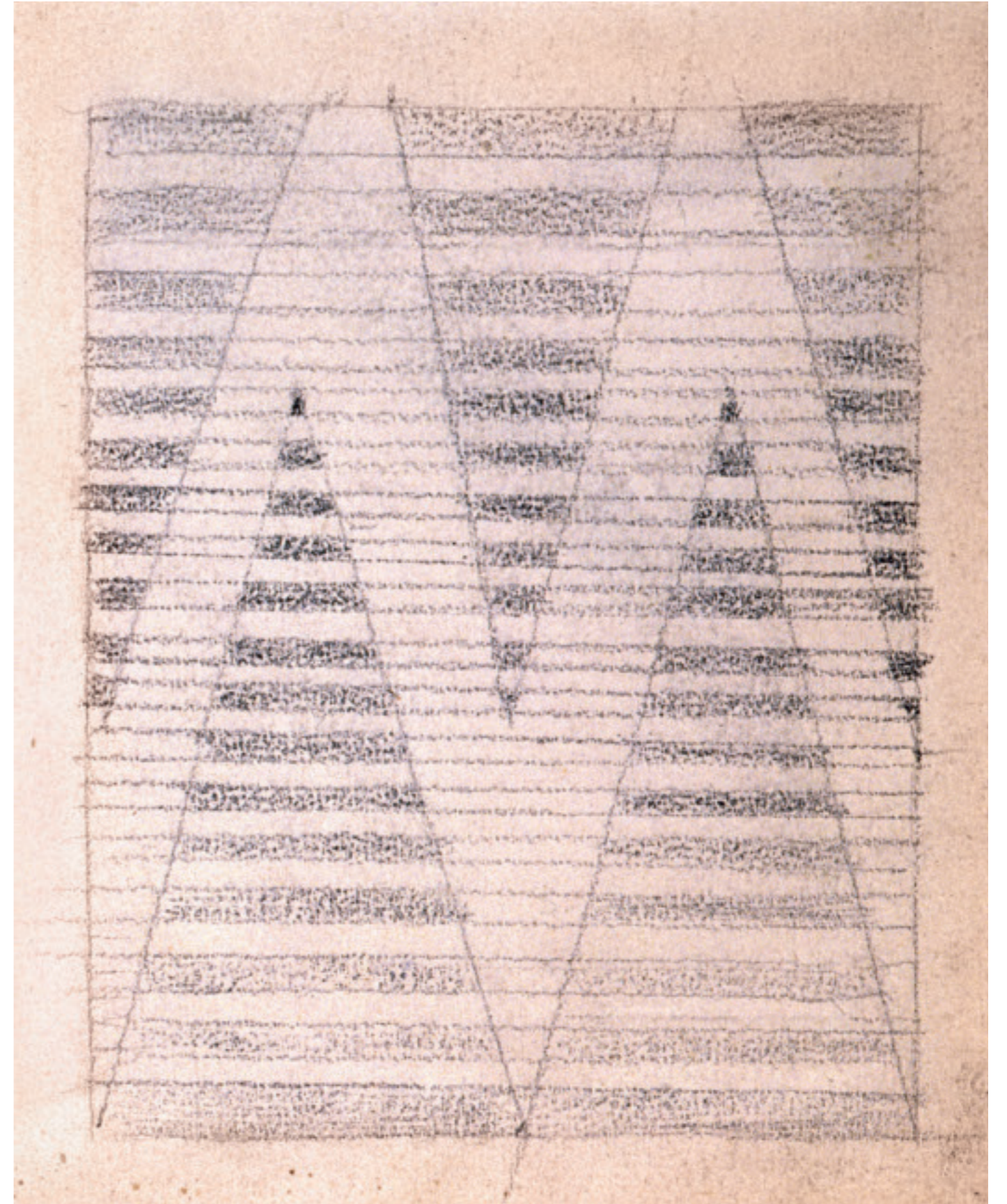
98 My Fiancée at the Pincian Hill (Study for a Portrait), 1902, pencil and pastel on paper, 27 x 22.5 cm



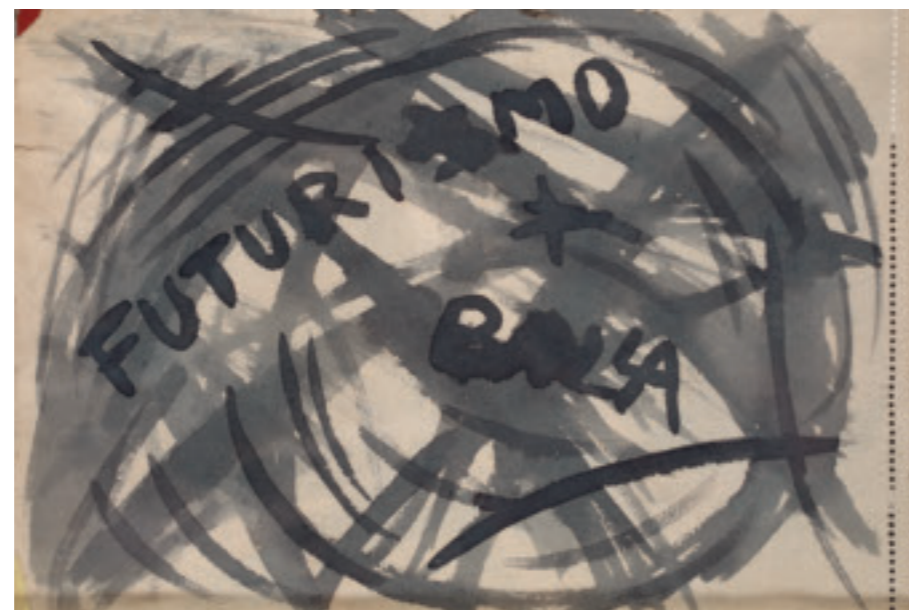
99 Nude Study, c. 1906, pencil on paper, 14.5 x 22.5 cm

100 Nude Study, c. 1906, pencil on paper 14.5 x 22.5 cm

101 Nude Study, c. 1906, pencil on paper, 12.5 x 10.5 cm

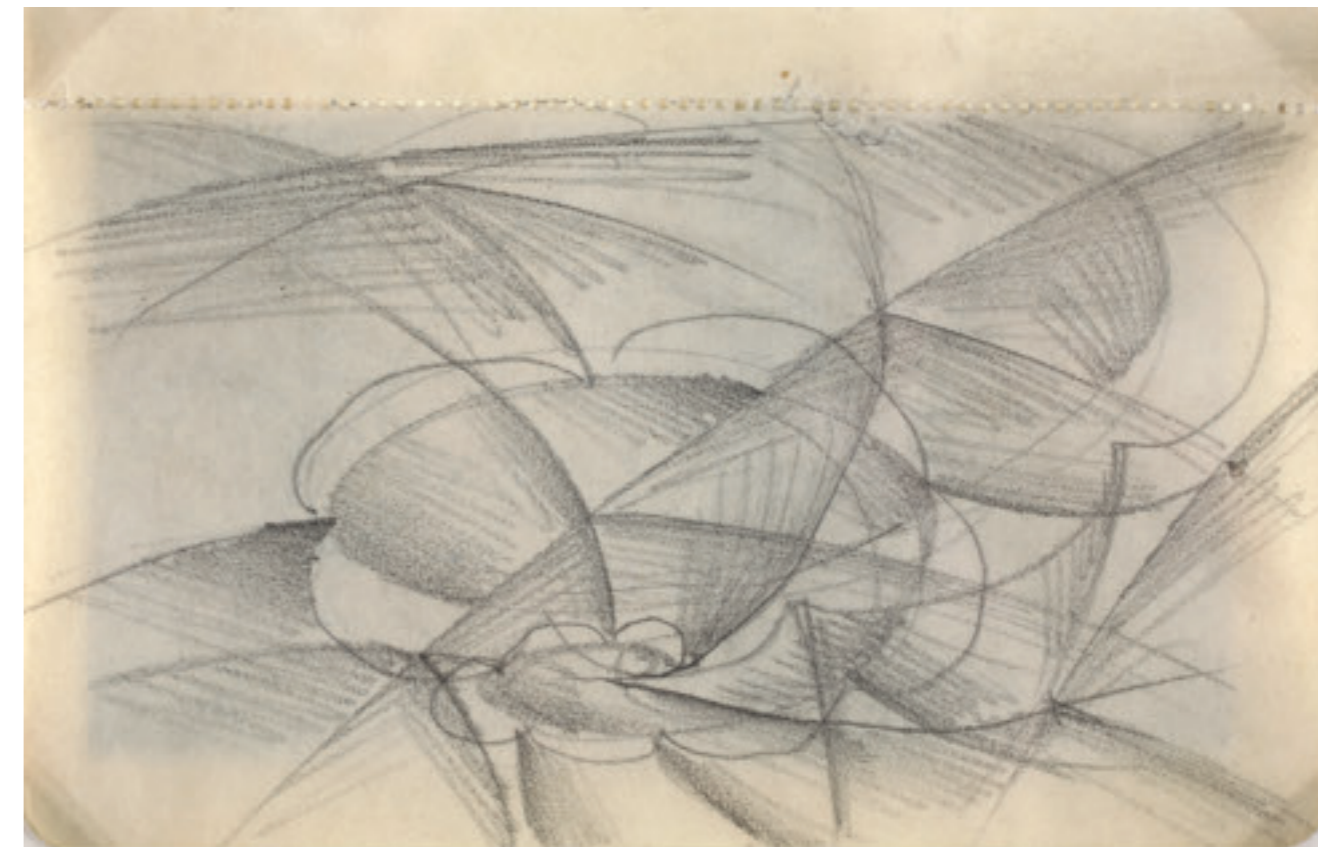
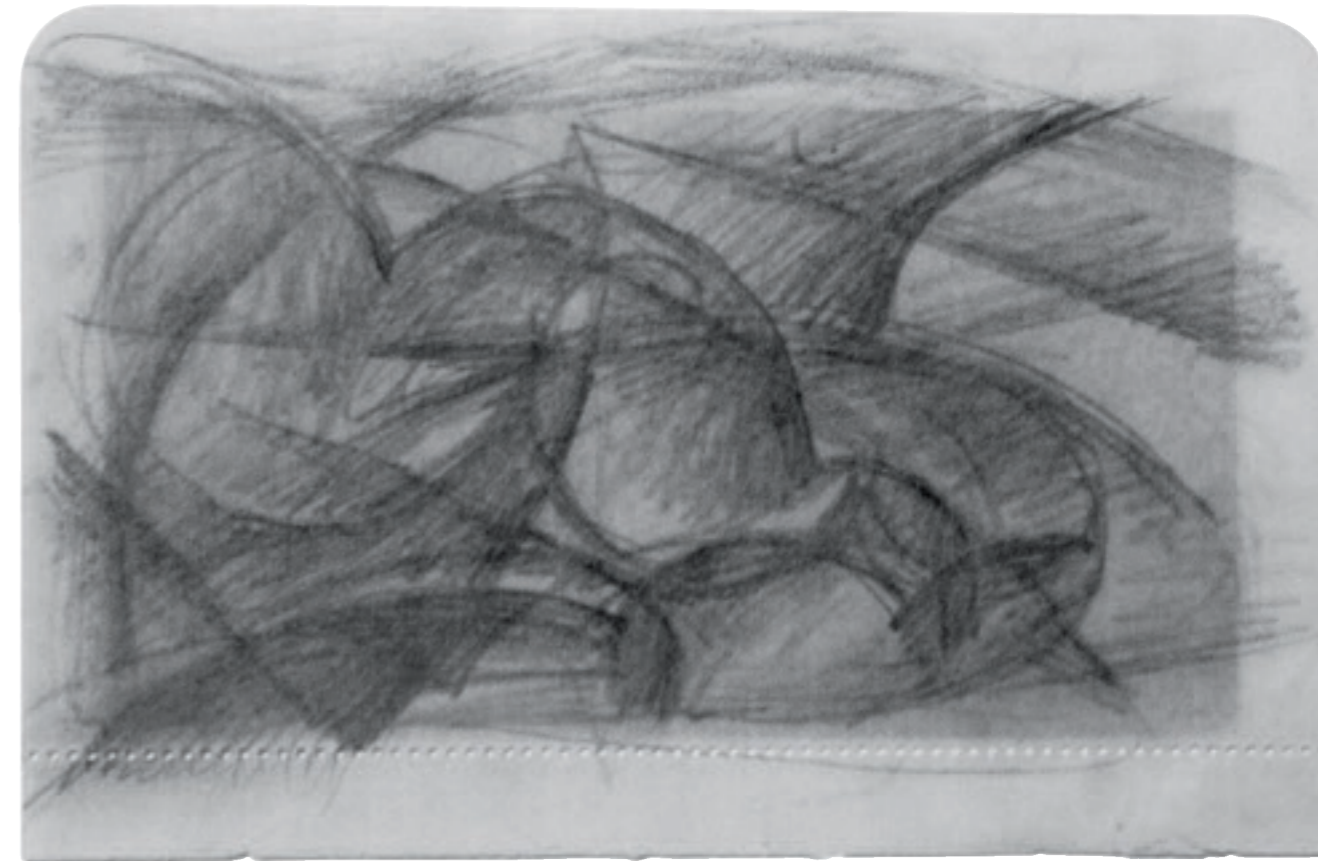


102 Study for Iridescent Interpenetrations, 1913, pencil on paper, 12.5 x 10.5 cm



103 Vortex, 1913–14, charcoal on grey paper; verso: charcoal on paper, 11.8 x 18.2 cm

104-105, Page from Notebook (recto e verso), Lines of Speed and 'Free-word', 1913–14, watercolour on paper, 12.7 x 19.8 cm



106 Page from Notebook, Speed + Environment, 1913–14, pencil on paper, 12 x 8 cm

107 Page from Notebook (verso), Vortex Plus Densities of Space, 1913–14, pencil on paper, 8.1 x 12.7 cm



108 Self Portrait, 1918, coloured pencil and ink on paper, 13.5 x 10 cm



109 Lines of Speed, 1914, watercolour on paper, 10 x 41.5 cm



110 Postcard addressed to Guglielmo Jannelli, 1914, ink wash on cardboard, 9 x 14 cm



111 The Marchesa Casati with Greyhound and Parrot, 1916, ink on paper, 32.3 x 24.6 cm

112 Lines of Speed Plus Landscape, 1916, pencil, tempera and embroidery thread on paper, 21.5 x 25 cm



113 Figure Plus Space (Dancer from the Bal Tik Tak), 1921, pencil on paper, 31 x 22 cm



114 Abstract Composition, 1923, tempera on paper, 28.6 x 53.8 cm



115 Preparatory Study for 'Futurist Genius', 1925, pencil on paper, 20 x 28 cm

116 Portrait of Luce Sewing, c. 1928, pencil on paper, 16 x 13 cm

117 Infinity, 1958, ink wash on paper, 13 x 16 cm

Bibliographical Note

In many ways, critical interest in Balla has tended to reflect the trajectory of Futurist scholarship itself. Immediately after the Second World War there was an understandable reluctance on the part of most intellectuals in Italy (and elsewhere) to shun anything tainted by association with the Fascist regime, even if the relationship had ‘only’ been of cultural character. Despite this, interest began to develop in the work of both Balla and Boccioni. Of these two great artists – in different ways representing the two fundamental pillars of artistic Futurism – the latter enjoyed a faster and initially more complete rediscovery (thanks to the early work of Maurizio Calvesi, who published the first catalogue raisonn  of the artist in 1953, with an introductory essay by Giulio Carlo Argan). This was no doubt influenced by the fact that Boccioni’s death in 1916 pre-dated Mussolini’s rise to power. Balla’s Futurist work received its first reevaluation of the post-war era in 1951 (the following year, a long illness would force the artist to virtually abandon his creative activities for the rest of his life). This took the form of an exhibition at the Galleria Origine that was promoted by some of the greatest Italian artists of the day (Burri, Capogrossi and Colla, as well as other figures related to this group in one way or another, including Manuucci and Dorazio) and an article by Ettore Colla of 1952. Although broadly covering the same period, the dynamics of these reappraisals were very different: Boccioni’s work received the attention of two of the most important Italian critics of the era; by contrast, Balla’s was explored by young artists much more interested in it from a creative point of view than in terms of its historical significance. However, with eminent pragmatism, American museums and collectors indiscriminately bought the works of both artists, along with those by other early members of the movement.

With the publication of the *Archivi del Futurismo* (1958–62),¹ Futurist studies had a foundation on which to build, and the figure of Balla also began to emerge with greater philological completeness. In 1963, Enrico Crispolti organized (with Maria Drudi Gambillo) a large and significant exhibition of his work that served as a starting point for further exploration.² The curators stressed the significance of the ‘Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe’ as one of the turning points of contemporary art, greatly increasing the importance of Balla’s Futurism in terms of its chronological range. But the path was not entirely smooth: in 1967, Calvesi provided innovative interpretations of his Futurist work³ and, immediately afterward, the *Archivi del Divisionismo* (1968)⁴ systematically chronicled his early figurative period; that year, Maurizio Fagiolo also traced his path from Divisionism to early Futurism in three catalogues accompanying exhibitions in a private gallery.⁵ Despite such far-sighted research, an exhibition of 1971 at Rome’s Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, curated by Giorgio De Marchis, essentially limited its evaluation of the artist’s achievements to his early Futurist works. (However, the same show also produced one of the best bio-bibliographical summaries of Balla’s career, edited by Livia Velani.)⁶ During the 1970s, the study of Balla’s work was impacted by a range of factors that proved too complex to be resolved by scholars at the time: the variety and breadth of his research (which few were willing to study with any tenacity); the esoteric, theosophical, scientific and mathematical nature of the interests that formed the basis of his aesthetic reflections; the length of his Futurist phase, which came to be seen as having led to mannerism (interrupted only at the beginning of

the Thirties, by which point the movement’s other major figures had long since abandoned Futurism); the inability properly to interpret his Futurist and post-Futurist return to figuration; and finally, his proximity to Fascism. Other, external, factors influenced the critical appraisal of Balla’s work, such as the management of his legacy by his daughters Luce and Elica,⁷ dedicated and uncompromising – but sometimes rather ‘difficult’ – defenders of their father’s work, who promoted his late figurative period above his abstractFuturist output, which they considered to have been a parenthesis, albeit an important one. Then there was the perception of Balla as a ‘provincial’ artist, due to the fact that he almost never left Italy and was surrounded by his two unmarried daughters with their antiquated ideas (Morandi’s similar lifestyle was instead seen as evidence of his solitary and ascetic commitment to artistic research).

In the 1970s and early 1980s the most significant contributions to the field were made by Enrico Crispolti, Maurizio Fagiolo and Giovanni Lista.⁸ If Crispolti comprehensively contextualized Balla’s role within Futurism,⁹ Fagiolo investigated his work in a number of sporadic publications, summarized and culminating in three organic and rich exhibitions incorporating a great deal of documentary material.¹⁰ In 1982 Lista produced the first catalogue raisonn  of Balla’s work¹¹ – an essential iconographical tool. However, these contributions rarely explored crucial issues in any depth, merely rearranging and re-proposing known material and tracing ideas already fully explored. Consequently, they were important instruments of consultation, but not sufficiently rigorous as to give a decisive impetus to the study of a figure so complex and, ultimately, so mysterious. In addition to these, a number of smaller scale publications (small in terms of their profile, not their scholarly significance) were produced by Federica Pirani,¹² Flavio Fergonzi,¹³ Valeria Mosini¹⁴ and other authors cited in the texts of this catalogue.

In recent years I have produced a number of works on Balla containing new findings and exploring new avenues of enquiry. These began with an exhibition of 1996 in Moscow¹⁵ (in the catalogue of which I clarified many unfamiliar aspects of his career) which was followed by two monographs – one fairly small,¹⁶ the other far more extensive¹⁷ – in which I opened up new ways of interpreting Balla’s work in relation to his theosophical interests and his return to figuration. More recently, I have defined several crucial points concerning Balla’s early Futurism and his work in the sphere of the applied arts.¹⁸

Since 2000, many other studies have dealt with Balla, enhancing and enriching our knowledge about the artist and offering new perspectives on his work.¹⁹ A number of exhibitions have also reconsidered his career, always favouring the Futurist and pre-Futurist periods, and thereby failing to arrive at complete reconstruction of his artistic activity.²⁰

Fabio Benzi

Giacomo Balla: A Brief Biography

1871

On 18 July Giacomo Balla was born in Turin to the photographer Giovanni Balla and Lucia Gianotti. Following the death of his father, the young Balla abandons the violin – and his schooling – being constrained to start work. Simultaneously, he devotes himself to drawing and painting. During these years Balla suffers a nervous breakdown.

1888

He attends the Accademia Albertina in Turin, and exhibits his first painting, *Sunset*, at the city’s *Mostra Promotrice* (Promotional Exposition) of 1891. He encounters the photographer Oreste Bertieri – the brother of a fellow student at the Academy – who is friend with Pellizza da Volpedo.

1895

In January Balla moves to Rome, where he will remain for the rest of his life.

1896

He rents a studio in Via delle Terme di Diocleziano, which he keeps until 1903.

1897

Balla meets and becomes engaged to Elisa Marcucci. Elisa is the sister of Alessandro, a friend of Duilio Cambellotti and later of Giovanni Cena, with whom he will go on to develop a project to establish schools of literacy in the Roman countryside (an idea inspired by the humanitarian socialism typical of the period). Balla exhibits *March Sun* at Turin’s *Mostra Promotrice*.

1899

He exhibits a painting titled *Impressionist* at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori* (Exhibition of Amateurs and Connoisseurs) in Rome.

1900

In February he exhibits a work titled *The Bit-player* at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*. On 2 September he visits Paris, where he remains until March 1901 as a guest of his friend, the illustrator Serafino Macchiariti. He also visits the Universal Exposition held in the French capital that year.

1901

Upon his return to Rome, Balla meets the young Gino Severini. He exhibits nine works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*.

1902

He exhibits 13 works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*. He also meets Umberto Boccioni, who becomes his pupil.

1903

Balla moves to Via Salaria, remaining there until 1904. Mario Sironi (whom he meets this year), Severini and Boccioni form a compact group of Divisionist artists led by Balla. He exhibits six paintings at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori* and one at the Venice Biennale; he also exhibits a drawing at Munich’s Glaspalast.

1904

Balla marries Elisa Marcucci and the couple move to Via Parioli 6 (now Via Paisiello, opposite Villa Borghese) where they remain until the building is demolished in 1926. An article dedicated to his work by S. A. Nappi is published. Titled ‘Giacomo il notturno,’ it

alludes to the artist's predilection for nocturnal scenes illuminated by artificial lights.

He exhibits nine works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*, including the masterpieces *Bankruptcy*, *Work* and *Elisa at the Gate*. In Düsseldorf and Munich he also exhibits two works created some years earlier.

1905

Balla exhibits eight works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*, and executes several drawings for the social-ist newspaper *L'Avanti della Domenica*.

1906

He exhibits two works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori* and one at the *Mostra del Sempione* in Milan.

1907

He exhibits four works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cul-tori*, including the triptych known as *The Worker's Day*.

1908

He exhibits four works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*.

1909

He exhibits five works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*. He also exhibits a group of seven paintings at the Salon d'Automne in Paris, including the four sec-tions of the *Polyptych of the Living*.

1910

Together with Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo and Severini, Balla signs the ‘Manifesto of Futurist Painters’. The document is dated 2 February, although in fact Balla joins the group slightly later, in April.

On 11 April he also signs the ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting’.

He exhibits the triptych *Affections* and *Saying Good-bye* at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*.

Between the end of this year and the beginning of the next he paints *Villa Borghese* (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna), conceived as a monumental polyptych of fifteen separate panels to be presented at Futurist exhibi-tions, but the work is rejected by his colleagues.

1911

He exhibits two works at the ‘Exhibition of Fine Arts’ as part of Rome’s *Esposizione Internazionale*; in June this event hosts the exhibition of the Schools of the Agro Romano, where he presents a series of studies depict-ing peasants and landscapes, as well as his *Portrait of Tolstoy*.

1912

On 5 February the exhibition *Peintres Futuristes Italiens* opens at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris. The cat-alogue lists Balla’s painting *Lumiere électrique* (*Arc Lamp*) created in late 1911 (although Balla will later back-date this piece to 1909); however, the painting does not appear in the exhibition because the artist’s Futurist language is still not considered to be sufficiently mature by his colleagues.

Between July and August Balla visits Düsseldorf, where he stays at the house of the Löwensteins in order to undertake the decoration of their study. He returns there between November and December to complete the decoration. During this second visit Balla experiments with his ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ and executes the painting *Rhythms of the Bow*. He had previously stud-ied movement in paintings inspired by Etienne-Jules Marey’s ‘chronophotography’ (*Girl x Balcony*) and the ‘photodynamism’ of Anton Giulio Bragaglia (*Leash in Motion*).

1913

In February Balla participates in a Futurist exhibition held in the Foyer of Rome’s Teatro Costanzi alongside other members of the movement, presenting three studies of motion made in the second half of 1912 as well as *Arc Lamp* of 1911. He also creates examples of ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ for the cover of a catalogue of an ex-hibition of the Secession (although this is never realized).

In April, Balla publishes a leaflet in which he declares that the ‘old’ Balla is dead, and that his works will be sold off at the Galleria Giosi (in fact, no auction takes place).

He again exhibits the four paintings displayed in Rome at Futurist exhibitions in Rotterdam and Berlin (June and September). That November he participates in the exhibi-tion of Futurist painting organized in Florence by the jour-nal *Lacerba*, contributing four studies of speed painted during the preceding two or three months. Balla finally elaborates a mature Futurist style, employing a language all his own, far removed from the Divisionist tradition. His ‘abstract speed’ series – along with his ‘iridescent interpenetrations’ – represent the artist’s key contributions to the European avant garde during these years.

1914

He exhibits 28 works at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori*. All are pre-Futurist works, except for two: *Rhythm of the Violin* and *Electric Light* (*Arc Lamp*). He exhibits three pre-Futurist works at Probitas in Rome. Parallel to this exhibition, Balla sends 12 Futurist works to an exhibition of Futurist painting at the Galleria Sprovieri in Rome, which subsequently travels to Nap-les. He participates in the Futurist exhibition at the Doré Gallery in London.

On 11 September he publishes the Futurist manifesto ‘The Anti-Neutral Suit’ (which had already appeared in French on 20 May under the title ‘Le vêtement masculin futuriste’) marking the beginning of Balla’s passionate and profound interest in fashion as an expression of Futurist aesthetics in everyday life. However, Balla had been ex-perimenting with Futurist clothing from as early as 1912, as revealed in a letter to his family from Düsseldorf).

1915

On 11 March Balla signs the manifesto ‘Futurist Recon-struction of the Universe’ with the young painter Fortu-nato Depero, introducing a highly innovative concept into international avant-garde practice – namely, the rigorous application of Modernist and Futurist aesthet-ics to every aspect of daily life. Balla is arrested with Marinetti and other Futurists at an interventionist demonstration outside the Chamber of Deputies.

He exhibits paintings by *Late Balla and Futurist Balla* at the Sala d’Arte Angelelli in Rome.

He exhibits nine works at the Panama Pacific Interna-tional Exposition in San Francisco, as part of a Futurist group show.

During 1915, Balla adopted a synthetic style in which any references to Divisionist fragmentation are aban-doned, and abstract-dynamic forces are represented by means of geometric or sinuous shapes painted in pure, vibrant colours (the so-called ‘interventionist’ paintings).

1916

During the summer Balla acts in, and helps to write, the film *Vita Futurista* (*Futurist Life*) directed by Arnaldo Ginna, Emilio Settemelli and Bruno Corra. On 11 September he signs the manifesto of ‘The Futurist Cinema’ with Marinetti, Corra, Settemelli and Ginna. In December Sergei Diaghilev commissions Balla to re-alize ‘sculptural scenery’ for Stravinsky’s *Feu d’artifice* (in accordance with a sketch approved by Diaghilev).

During the war years Balla devotes much of his time to the applied arts and fashion, designing tapestries, ties, etc. These projects are pioneering in terms of the interests of the European avant gardes, anticipat-ing the systematization of artistic production and the concept of ‘design’ enshrined in the work of Bauhaus artists.

1917

The premiere of the film *Futurist Life* takes place on 28 January. *Feu d’artifice* is staged at Rome’s Teatro Costanzi on 12 April, employing Balla’s abstract scenery (sculptural and geometric shapes in bright colours) and a ‘chore-ography’ of moving coloured lights. On the opening night a technical fault means that these remain fixed in place; however, at the premiere – to which the reviews refer – they function perfectly.

1918

In October Balla holds a large solo exhibition of 40 works at Bragaglia’s Casa d’Arte exhibition space; in the catalogue he publishes his ‘Manifesto on Colour’. Following the war, Balla develops themes relating to the ‘states of mind’ and movements of nature, exploring a number of theosophical ideas that had been popular at the turn of the century.

1919

He participates in the Great National Futurist Exhibi-tion at Palazzo Cova in Milan, exhibiting free-word compositions, items of clothing and designs for hats alongside a number of paintings.

1920

Along with Marinetti, Mario Carli and Settemelli, he edits the weekly journal *Roma futurista*.

In March he exhibits a number of ‘passéist’ paintings at the Galleria in Piazza della Scala, Milan, and in December he exhibits five paintings at the *Exposition Internationale d’Art Moderne* in Geneva.

1921

Balla is engaged in the decoration of the Bal Tik Tak, a ‘night club’ in Via Milano, Rome. Immediately there-after he undertakes the decoration of the Futurist Hall in the new headquarters of Bragaglia’s Casa d’Arte in Via degli Avignonesi. He exhibits at the Galerie Reinhardt in Paris, and as part of the Futurist group in Prague. In the 1920s Balla’s work in the sphere of the applied arts almost outweighs his painterly activities.

He begins to create figurative paintings once again, such as *Valle Giulia*, 1921 (Rome, Galleria Nazion-ale d’Arte Moderna). Sporadic at first, such imagery will come to dominate his work during the 1930s.

1925

In January he exhibits at the Futurist exhibition organ-ized by Marinetti at Palazzo Madama, Turin. In March he exhibits 11 works at the Futurists’ group exhibition at the Third Rome Biennale. Balla receives a gold medal for his Futurist tapestries exhibited at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris.

1926

Balla moves temporarily to Villa Ambron in Via Aldo-vrandi, having had to abandon the house in Via Pa-rioli, condemned to destruction along with all of its Futurist furnishings.

He exhibits four works at the Venice Biennale.

1927

Balla exhibits two works at the Turin Quadriennale. A travelling Futurist exhibition (Bologna, Palermo, Milan, Imola) includes a number of his paintings.

1928

Balla displays 93 works spanning his entire career in a dedicated room at the *Mostra degli Amatori e Cultori* in Rome.

1929

Balla moves to Via Oslovvia 39, where he will live until his death.

He has another solo show at the centenary exhibi-tion of the *Amatori e Cultori*, predominantly com-prising figurative, post-Futurist works, but is simulta-neously represented in the Futurist room by abstract works.

1930

Balla exhibits with the Futurists at the Venice Bien-nale; he also has a solo exhibition at the Galleria

del Dipinto in Rome, where he presents works from all phases of his activity in addition to many works of decorative art.

1931

Along with Benedetta, Depero, Gerardo Dottori, Filia, Marinetti, Enrico Prampolini, Mino Somenzi and Tato, Balla signs the ‘Manifesto of Aeropainting’. At the First Rome Quadriennale he exhibits both Futurist and figurative works. A number of exhibitions featuring Balla’s works take place in Italy and abroad during the 1930s; interest in works from his Futurist period increases in the United States (for example, the collector G. Goodyear buys *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*).

1935

Balla is nominated an Academician of San Luca. He exhibits a single figurative work at the Second Quadriennale in Rome. The Galleria L’Antonina in Rome’s Piazza di Spagna mounts an exhibition of his works and those of his two daughters – and pupils –

^[1] M. Drudi Gambillo and T. Fiori, eds, Archivi del Futurismo, 2 vols, Rome, 1958-62.

^[2] E. Crispolti and M. Drudi Gambillo, eds, Giacomo Balla, exh. cat., Turin, Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, 1963.

^[3] M. Calvesi, Il Futurismo, Milan, 1967.

^[4] F. Bellonzi and T. Fiori, eds, Archivi del Divisionismo, 2 vols, Rome, 1968.

^[5] Balla Pre-Futurista, Rome, Galleria L’Obelisco, 1968; Le ‘Compenetrazioni iridescenti’, Rome, Galleria L’Obelisco, 1968; Ricostruzione futurista dell’universo, Rome, Galleria L’Obelisco, 1968. Fagiolo’s three catalogues were subsequently republished in a single volume titled Futur-Balla, Rome, 1970.

^[6] G. De Marchis, ed., Giacomo Balla, exh. cat., Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Mod-erna, 1971. De Marchis presented and developed the same ideas in Balla. L’aura futurista, Turin, 1977.

^[7] Elica Balla was also the author of an impor-tant book of memoirs (in three volumes) titled Con Balla, Milan, 1984-86. The quantity of information this included was vast, although it often required philological verification.

^[8] Two foreign contributions should also be mentioned here: the fine volume, rich in doc-umentary material, by V. Dortch Dorazio, Giacomo Balla: An Album of his Life and Work, Venice, [1970], and the partial – and in certain senses, limited – book by S. Barnes Robinson, Giacomo Balla – Divisionism and Futurism, Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1981.

^[9] E. Crispolti, ed., Ricostruzione futurista dell’universo, exh. cat., Turin, Mole Antonelli-ana, 1980; E. Crispolti, Storia e critica del Fu-turismo, Bari, 1986, E. Crispolti, Il Futurismo e la moda, Milan, Padiglione d’Arte Contempo-ranea, 1988; E. Crispolti, ed., Casa Balla e il futurismo a Roma, Rome, Villa Medici, 1989; E. Crispolti, ed., Futurism 1909-1944, Tokyo, Sapporo, Sendai, Otsu, 1992; Futurismo – I grandi temi 1909-1944, curated by E.Crispolti and F. Sborgi, Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 1997-98 and Milan, Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta, 1998 (exh. cat., Milan, 1997); E. Crispolti, ed., Futurismo 1909-1944, exh. cat., Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 2001.

^[10] M. Fagiolo, ed., Giacomo Balla 1895-1911. Verso il Futurismo, exh. cat, Padua, Palazzo Zabarella, 1998; M. Fagiolo and E. Gigli, eds, Futur natura. La svolta di Balla 1916-1920, exh. cat., Milan, Galleria Fonte d’Abisso, 1999; M. Fagiolo and E. Gigli, eds, Balla a sorpresa, Milan, Galleria Fonte d’Abisso, 2001.

^[11] G. Lista, Giacomo Balla, Modena, 1982.

^[12] A second volume (Lausanne, L’Age d’Homme, 1984), published without the consent of Balla’s daughters, was very debatable from a philological point of view, and included works of dubious authenticity,

^[13] F. Pirani, “I futuristi hanno salvato l’Italia a Parigi”. La contrastata presenza futurista all’Ex-position des Arts Décoratifs del 1925”, in Ricerche di Storia dell’Arte, no. 67, 1999, pp. 39-50; see also the entries on Balla in M. Calvesi and P. Ginsborg, eds, Novecento. Arte e storia in Italia, Rome, Scuderie del Quirinale, 2000.

^[14] F. Ferganzi, La Collezione Mattioli. Capolavori dell’avanguardia italiana, Milan, 2003.

Luce and Elica. Balla begins definitively to distance himself from Futurism.

1937

Balla writes a letter to the newspaper *Perseo* in which he completely dissociates himself from Futurist activities.

1942

Balla holds a large solo exhibition at the Galleria San Marco in Rome, exclusively dedicated to his post-Fu-turist works.

1947-58

A solo exhibition at the Accademia di San Luca planned for 1947 does not take place due to dis-agreements over its organization and the choice of works to be exhibited, which also probably included recent versions of Futurist works.

Balla continues to paint works of a realist character in a manner consistent with his artistic choices subsequent to his Futurist period.

^[15] V. Masini, The Role of the Electromagnetic Theory of Light in Giacomo Balla’s Iridescent Interpenetrations, LSE, London, Discussion Paper Series, 1999.

^[16] Giacomo Balla. La collezione Biagiotti-Cigna, curated by F. Benzi, Moscow, Pushkin Museum, 1996 (then Rome, Chiostro del Bra-mante, 1998).

^[17] F. Benzi, Balla, Florence, 2000.

^[18] F. Benzi, Balla, Florence, 2000.

^[19] F. Benzi, Il Futurismo, Milan, 2008; ‘Giaco-mo Balla: dalla Moda Futurista alla Ricostruz-ione futurista dell’Universo’, in C. Cerutti and R. Sgubin, eds, Futurismo, moda, design: la ricostruzione futurista dell’universo quotidiano, exh. cat., Gorizia, Musei Provinciali, 2009; ‘Qualche nota aggiuntiva sulla visione teosofica in Giacomo Balla e nel primo Futurismo’, in Dal Razionalismo al Rinascimento. Per i quar-anta anni di studi di Silvia Danesi Squarzina, Rome, 2011; ‘Giacomo Balla: The Conquest of Speed’, in V. Greene, ed., Italian Futurism 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe, exh. cat., New York, The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, 2014, pp.103-15; ‘Giacomo Balla e le Compenetrazioni iridescenti: approfondimenti e novità documentarie’, in Storia dell’Arte, n. 139 (January-April 2014), pp. 157-73; Gi-acomo Balla – Genio Futurista: da Expo Parigi 1925 a Expo Milano 2015, exh. cat., Milan, Expo, Palazzo Italia, 2015.

^[20] Reference should also be made to a small publication titled, Balla, Milan 2004, supplement to Il Corriere della Sera, with an introductory (posthumous) text by M. Fagiolo, based on a work of 1992, with notes by V. Gavioli.

^[21] The most recent have been Balla. La modernità futurista, curated by G. Lista, P. Bal-dacci and L. Velani, Milan, Palazzo Reale, 2008 (including some uncertain works), and Giacomo Balla, curated by E. Coen, Alba, Fondazione Ferrero, 2016 (unfortunately, this included some out-of-date references, and mistakes in terms of the chronology of some of the works).



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