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Bruno Munari and the invention of modern graphic design in Italy, 1928 - 1945

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In 1927 in Milan Munari met Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the tireless impresario of the Futurist movement, and immediately became part of the Milanese group. Munari often remembered his first contact with the avant-garde movement, and was amused by the paradox—verbal and otherwise—of a Futurist meeting in an antiquarian bookshop.² ‘In my spare time I strolled around Milan, and I liked the bookshops in particular. In corso Vittorio Emanuele there was a little gallery, the Galleria De Cristoforis; its ceiling had a skylight, and it was an antique shop, with antiquarian books. In the window display I saw an essay on Leonardo da Vinci. I went in and asked if I could have a look. The shopkeeper was quite kind to me, I told him why I was in Milan and he told me about the Futurists.’³ The shopkeeper in question was Michele Leskovic, a young poet from the Friuli region who wrote under the pseudonym Escodamè,⁴ and a close collaborator of Marinetti, to whom he introduced Munari after seeing some of his ‘mechanical’ drawings.

1. Bruno Munari, letter to Tullio Crali, undated [1932]. Mart, Archivio del '900, fondo Crali, Cra_01_117.

2. See the interviews by Rossi 1962: 9; Branzi 1984: 40–1; Catalano 1994: 150; Di Corato 2008: 209.

3. Catalano 1994: 152.

4. The surname, coined in 1925, was a pun meaning roughly ‘I take leave by myself,’ with wordplay based strictly on assonance, and

therefore was not merely an Italianisation of a foreign name (as Munari often said). Forced Italianisation of foreign names began only in the thirties, under the Fascist Party Secretary Achille Starace, along with other imposed nationalistic rules (such as using the Roman salute instead of the handshake, the obligatory black shirt worn by government employees, and the abolition of lei, the formal

Their encounter was not entirely casual—they must have met near the bookshop: either at the Trianon,⁵ a well-known theatre (connected to the Hotel Corso, where Marinetti used to stay when he was in Milan) that had been one of the movement's laboratories and had hosted Futurist evenings and events; or at the Ristorante Savini⁶ in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (another rendezvous point for the city's artists and literati, where Marinetti usually met with the young Futurists after dinner). Munari had heard talk of the Futurists from a guest who had stayed at the family hotel in Badia, and as a boy he had discovered painting by following two friends who were aspiring painters:

I came into contact with a lot of people, because all sorts stopped in at the hotel (...) Before the war a lot of businessmen passed through and stayed one or two nights, and one of them told me about Futurism. I remember he had a handkerchief around his neck, which was strange at the time, because most people just wore a shirt and tie, and I was intrigued. I was about eighteen, and I started to do some drawings, but I didn't know how to do anything, I just made it up as I went. I had two painter friends (...) Gino Visentini and Gelindo Furlan: they went around with a little case of paints, and I went with them to paint some landscapes.⁷

The first things I did were some paintings you might call naturalist works, which depicted the mills along the Adige.⁸

We made little paintings we then exhibited in the windows of the town stationer's shop.⁹

Self-taught by his adolescent passion, and perhaps right after deciding to leave the disappointing experience of his incomplete

technical studies behind him, Munari had nevertheless decided he would follow his artistic interests and move to Milan, a city with close ties to Futurism. From 1912 to 1924 Marinetti had managed the movement's official headquarters at the Ca' Rossa on corso Venezia 61, just outside the city's historic centre, and from those offices he published the Edizioni Futuriste di «Poesia» (Poesia Futurist editions).¹⁰ He had also long entrusted the Tipografia Tavvegna, a print-shop on via Ospedale, with the composition and printing of his *tavole parolibere* (words in freedom),¹¹ and in 1919 the movement regrouped around the Esposizione Nazionale Futurista (National Futurist Exhibition) at the Galleria Centrale d'Arte in Palazzo Cova.¹²

Milan was also home to the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera (Brera Fine Arts Academy) and other well-known schools of applied arts, such as the Scuola d'arte del Castello (Art school in the Castello Sforzesco) and the Istituto per le Arti Decorative e Industriali (Institute of Decorative and Industrial Arts) in nearby Monza,¹³ but there

form of 'you': cf. Falasca Zamponi 1997: 118).

5. Damaged by the 1943 bombardments, the hotel and the theatre (designed by Angelo Cattaneo and Giacomo Santamaria) were torn down after the war and replaced in 1954 by the Fondiaria Assicurazioni building and the new Galleria De Cristoforis; the original Art Nouveau facade has now been reconstructed (with significant changes) in nearby Piazza Liberty (Paolo Colussi, *Storia di Milano*, www.storiadi milano.it/citta/Porta_Orientale/teatro_milanese.htm, last accessed September 2009).

6. The Savini was an expensive restaurant during the day, but after dinner 'the tables were cleared and the large hall with red sofas became a literary parlour' (Tofanelli 1986: 35).

7. Branzi 1984: 40–1. Gino Visentini (1907–?) worked in the film industry as critic and writer (he created, alongside Pier Paolo

Pasolini and director Mauro Bolognini, *Il Bell'Antonio*, 1960). Gelindo Furlan (1907–1994) followed his friend Munari to Milan and joined the Futurist group. In 1934, along with Munari and Ricas, he signed the *Manifesto tecnico dell'aeroplasticità futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Aeroplastics). In the forties he collaborated with Munari on the creation of two games, *Il Teatro dei bambini* and *Via dei Mercanti*. Cf. Barillari 2001: 491.

8. Barberis 1978.

9. Alberto Munari 1986: 74.

10. *Poesia* was the literary journal launched by Marinetti in his early years (1905–1909), which later evolved into the main Futurist publishing house.

11. In *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914) Marinetti mentions the foreman Cesare Cavanna.

12. Crispolti 1986: 73.

13. In 1920s Milan, opportunities for training in

are no records of Munari having ever wanted to take art courses, either professional or academic—had he expressed such an interest, he could just as easily have gone to study in Venice, which would certainly have been closer to Badia.¹⁴ His decision seems instead to have been the conscious conclusion of someone equally intent on being an artist and on taking a less traditional route: to the eyes of a twenty-year-old who had just arrived in the big city and was unconditioned by a conventional education, Marinetti's movement must have looked like a breakaway force, a 'symbol of the new, perhaps a little noisy and rascally,' but all the more interesting because of its openness to all disciplines.¹⁵ In choosing to live in Italy's industrial capital, Munari already demonstrated—despite his young age and inexperience—his refusal of the traditional dichotomy between high and low culture, pure and applied art. His convictions, although not yet fully explicated, and perhaps influenced by the Futurists' vehement claims, were nevertheless deeply felt and matched his natural inclination for experimentation.

The Second Wave of Futurism

The term 'Second Futurism' was coined by art historians writing in the 1960s to distinguish between the first and second waves of Futurism, which were split by World War I. Futurism was then experiencing a resurgence characterised by a generational turnover and the expansion of artistic intervention into every aspect of daily life. The latter was a response to the desire

for a *Futurist reconstruction of the universe* as announced by Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero in the eponymous 1915 manifesto, which presaged a total work of art:

(...) We aim to realise this total fusion in order to reconstruct the universe, making it more joyous, that is, wholly recreating it. (...) We will find abstract equivalents for all the universe's forms and elements, and we will combine them all, according to the whims of inspiration, to shape plastic complexes that we will then set in motion.¹⁶

the applied arts abounded: in addition to regular daytime courses of the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, the Scuola degli Artefici (Brera Artists' School, founded by Maria Theresa of Austria in 1776 to train artistic labourers for the construction of La Scala) offered evening classes focussed on copying historical styles, although graphic applications were not included in the course of study. The evening classes of the Scuola d'arte applicata all'Industria del Castello Sforzesco (School of Applied Arts and Industry at the Castello Sforzesco, founded in 1922 as an annex of the Castello's Art museum, later to become the Museum of applied arts) were modelled after a traditional art workshop; yet at the end of the twenties the curriculum was modernised. Moreover, given the variety of subjects offered at the two schools, many students attended both, facilitated by their proximity and their offset schedules. Milan also had the Scuola del Libro della Società Umanitaria (Humanitarian Society's School of the Book Arts, a non-profit organisation established in 1893 to elevate the condition of the lower classes through various activities, including vocational training), which offered courses in book arts and typesetting: both of these programs were also updated in the twenties. In nearby Monza, beginning in 1922 the Villa Reale (which since 1923 had hosted an international

biennial of decorative arts) hosted the Istituto per le Arti Decorative e Industriali (Institute for Decorative and Industrial Arts), a bona fide university of applied arts with a pedagogical model similar to that of the Bauhaus. By the early thirties, the arrival of a few teachers who were actively engaged in contemporary cultural debates—Marcello Nizzoli, Edoardo Persico, Giuseppe Pagano (in Monza), Carlo Dradi (at the Castello), Atanasio Soldati (at the School of the Book Arts)—reflected changing attitudes toward the applied arts (Dradi 1973: 17–9; Pansera 2001a: 17; Pansera 2001b: 29; Origoni 1981: 2; cf. the websites of the aforementioned institutes (last accessed January 2010).

14. Cf. Antonio Marasco, 'Galleria. Bruno Munari' in *Origini* vii: 7–8 (May/June 1943): 6–7: '[Munari] didn't follow any academic studies, but came to art early on, creating remarkable drawings at an incredibly young age.'

15. Meneguzzo 1993: 27–8. Such a stance was practised by early Futurists such as Fortunato Depero.

16. The text of the manifesto *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* (Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe), written by Balla and Depero (with Marinetti's usual editing), was circulated as a pamphlet by the Futurist Directorate in Milan on 11 March 1915. For the full text, see Birolli 2008: 161–4.

The wording here is particularly significant, both in light of the later developments of Futurist activities throughout the twenties and thirties, as well as in regard to Munari's own lines of artistic research after World War II. The use of terms like *abstraction*, *colour* and above all *movement is vital*, as is the list of industrial materials with which they were to assemble the new aesthetic objects, *plastic complexes*:

Coloured strands of wire, cotton, wool, silk, of every thickness. Coloured glass, tissue paper, celluloid, wire netting, every sort of transparent, intensely coloured material. Fabrics, mirrors, metal sheets, coloured tin-foil, and all sorts of incredibly gaudy substances. Mechanical, electrical, musical, and noise-making contraptions; chemically luminous liquids of variable colours; springs; levers; tubes; etc. With these means we will construct (...) plastic complexes rotating on a pivot (...) plastic complexes that disassemble themselves (...) plastic complexes that appear and disappear (...) fantastic toys to be viewed through lenses; little boxes to open up at night, from which pyrotechnical marvels will burst forth; contraptions in transformation, etc.¹⁷

This goal of achieving a total creative intervention, which transcended all traditional genre divisions, was in reality a process that had been triggered at the very beginning of the movement; it was implicit in the Futurist condition of abolishing any separation between art and life, such that Marinetti's initial literary aspirations spread like an oil spill to touch upon fields that were not always close neighbours, such as painting, sculpture, music, theatre, photography, and architecture.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Balla and Depero's theoretical intervention explicitly 'stated the qualitative leap to a level of

greater operative awareness, from synaesthetic affirmation to "reconstruction": in other words, the jump up to creating three-dimensional, polymaterial, dynamic *plastic complexes*. And little by little, as 'the range of interests affected by Futurist interventions grew more precise and ever broader,' the Futurist activities of the twenties and thirties became truly interdisciplinary.¹⁹ Setting the basis for a total design, Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini *in primis*, along with the entire second generation of Futurists, were interested not only in advertising and publishing, but also in exhibition design, theatrical set design, interior furnishings, ceramics, clothing, and fashion accessories.²⁰

While the 1910s brought about the development of poetics (above all literary and pictorial poetics) and strategies for self-promotion (borrowed from advertising), in

17. Ibid.

18. For a concise timeline of the proliferation of specialised manifestos: the founding manifesto of literary Futurism (which appeared in *Le Figaro* the 20 February 1909) was followed in 1910 by the *Manifesto dei pittori* (Manifesto of the Painters) and the *Manifesto tecnico della pittura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting, signed by Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Severini, and Balla); in 1911 came music, with the *Manifesto dei musicisti futuristi* and the *Manifesto della musica futurista* (Manifesto of Futurist Musicians and Manifesto of Futurist Music), followed by theatre, with Marinetti's *Manifesto dei drammaturghi futuristi* (Manifesto of Futurist Playwrights); in 1912 came sculpture, with Boccioni's *Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture), while on the literary front Marinetti was developing *parolibero* (words-in-freedom) and the principles of Futurist typography in his 1912 *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura* (Technical Manifesto of Literature), and

L'immaginazione senza fili e le parole in libertà (Imagination Without Strings and Words-in-Freedom). In 1913 Anton Giulio Bragaglia's *Fotodinamismo futurista* (Futurist Photodynamism) appeared, and soon after came cinema, with the 1916 manifesto *La cinematografia futurista* (Futurist Film). See Crispolti 1980: 15–20.

19. As is amply attested to in the most recent Futurist historiography, following the fundamental research done by Enrico Crispolti: see, in particular, the exhibition catalogue *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*, specifically dedicated to this vein, from which the quotes herein have been taken (Crispolti 1980: 19, 22).

20. Crispolti 1986: ix–xvi. Anticipating the later interest in design culture, Balla and Depero's manifesto is an essential tool for interpreting Futurism in its entirety (Crispolti 1982: 176; cf. Panseca 2001a: 15–6; id. 2001b: 21–2). Tanchis in turn sees it as the origin of many of Munari's visual works, both during the 1930s as well as in the post-war period (Tanchis 1986: 11–2).

the early 1920s the progressive depletion of the subversive energies of Futurism (accentuated by defections and the absence of those who died in the war) carried the movement into a period of decline.²¹ Milan in particular—which had been the cradle of Futurism—despite a few important exhibitions at Palazzo Cova²² had lost its role as the movement's core. More and more activities moved to Rome, which also coincided with Marinetti's move to the nation's capital in an attempt to grow closer to the political regime.²³ In search of a broader audience and level of consensus in society at large, toward the mid-1920s Marinetti along with the young conscripts of the so-called second generation who surrounded him aimed to publicly position themselves in the role of innovators *tout court*, exponents of a mass avant-garde synonymous with modernity, less radical yet still open to a vast array of formal experimentation in relation to contemporary European currents.

The case of Umberto Boccioni is emblematic of this changed approach to commercial artistic practices compared to the beginning of the century: between 1907 and 1910 he worked as an illustrator in Milan, producing magazine covers, illustrations, and poster adverts; nevertheless, as soon as he joined the Futurists as a 'pure' painter, he abandoned all commercial work.²⁴ Yet by the early 1930s, many Futurists of the 'new guard' worked in both realms, making no distinction between the merits of pure art and applied art. In particular, this viewpoint was championed by members of the Turin-based group, led

by Fillia and Nicolaj Diulgheroff, and the Milan-based group, led by Munari—as well as two of the movement's notables who were often in Milan alongside Marinetti: Depero,²⁵ who had actively been involved

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21. 'Futurism was born with a true predisposition for advertising' (Salaris 1986: 13–4), in the sense that Marinetti skilfully exploited the penetrating power of advertising techniques—an approach that had never been seen before within the cultural realm—to give their movement greater visibility in the media: from printed matter (brochures, flyers, posters, advertisements in newspapers), to books and magazines sent 'Courtesy of the Marinetti Company,' and lively Futurist soirées. On an iconographic level, advertising—seen as an integral, meaningful aspect of the modern urban and industrial landscape—was repeatedly used in fragmentary form in works of words-in-freedom and Futurist painting. See Salaris 1994: 17–9, 59–60; Fanelli, Godoli 1988: 119–21; Lista 1984: 63–4; Birolli 2008: 218–24.

22. Of the group of artists who had signed the first Futurist painting and sculpture manifestos, Boccioni and Sant'Elia had died in the war, Carrà turned to Metaphysics, Soffici and Sironi were looking for the return to order championed by the Novecento movement, and Russolo ventured into esotericism (Birolli 2008: 247–52; Scudiero 2009a: 9–10; Meneguzzo 1993: 27–8). Crispolti stresses the discontinuity between the work of the Futurists of the 1910s as compared to those of the 1920s and 1930s: the crisis, which was certainly also physiological, arose in part due to material progress—and the subsequent evolution of taste—of Italian society, which cancelled out the 'utopian/Futurist rejection' advocated by the first wave of Futurism (Crispolti 1986: xvii), and in part also as a result of the trauma of war, which demystified the Futurists' earlier war-mongering. In 1917 the Galleria

Centrale d'Arte in Palazzo Cova hosted a retrospective of Boccioni's work, and in 1919 the Great National Futurist Exhibition, which later travelled to Genoa and Florence, and in 1921 it mounted an exhibition of Depero's work, which was the last major Futurist exhibit until the later events at the Galleria Pesaro (Bassi 1992: 55).

23. Roman Futurism revolved around the ateliers of Balla, Prampolini, and Anton Giulio Bragaglia. After his initial adherence to combative Fascism during the election year, in 1920 Marinetti distanced himself from Mussolini's movement, finding it overly conservative. Marinetti's rapprochement with the political leader, who was now firmly in power, was completed in 1924 with the First Futurist Congress (organised in Milan, 23–25 November) and subsequent move to the capital city at the end of that year. Closer to the centre of political power, Marinetti constantly sought (albeit to little effect) an alliance with the regime in order to have the Futurist movement recognised as the official 'State Art.' See Salaris 1985: 113–25, 136–41, 190–2; Salaris 1994: 67–85; Fochessati, Millefiore 1997: 51; Birolli 2008: 250–1.

24. See, for example, the advertisements and covers made in 1908 for the *Rivista mensile del Touring* (reproduced in Fanelli, Godoli 1988: 126–7). Yet we know from Boccioni's diaries that his attempts to remain a viable commercial artist were largely unrealised: see Fanelli, Godoli 1988: 126; and Poggi 2009: 73–4. For his diaries, see Z. Birolli 1971.

25. For Depero, in addition to Maurizio Scudiero's in-depth bibliography, see Fanelli, Godoli 1988: 38–40, 123–4, 128–31; Salaris 1986: 14–7. Fortunato Depero (1892–1960) is a key figure

in advertising since the early twenties, and Prampolini,²⁶ who by the early thirties travelled between Rome, Milan, Paris, and Prague, working primarily on theatre sets and installations.

An emerging design culture

Within the national context of the Futurist movement, the Milanese group not only seemed more diversified than others in its interests—which ranged from interior design to furnishing, objects, graphics for advertising and publishing, fashion, theatrical sets, and installations—but also more experimental, in terms of the formal languages explored. The group also constituted a significant element of the cultural climate that was widespread in Milan between the two world wars, characterised by the emergent relationship between art and industry—in which the later rise of Italian industrial design is rooted.²⁷ It is no coincidence that the two major architecture and interior design magazines, *Domus* and *La casa bella*, were both founded in 1928: straightaway both became fundamental venues for the spread of design in Italy, while in Milan the Fedele Azari and Cesare Andreoni studios established themselves as bona fide design workshops, producing objects and home accessories (ceramics, cushions, tapestries, toys).²⁸ Invariably these activities were tied to artisanal production methodologies that had become mechanised but were not yet part of a standardised serial production line—a point which reflects the country's cultural and economic backwardness—but they are

for understanding both the theoretical and practical developments of the Futurist movement in the twenties. Born in the Trentino region (which was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), he studied at the Scuola Reale Elisabetтина in Rovereto (Royal Elisabeth School, a hotbed of the theories and poetics of the Viennese Secession, thanks to the teachings of Alwise Comel, and where Luciano Baldesari, Fausto Melotti, Gino Pollini, and Carlo Belli also studied; cf. Scudiero 2009: 6). He later moved to Rome and studied with Balla, with whom he signed the manifesto *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* in 1915. Depero was a thoroughly multidisciplinary artist (painter, sculptor, and designer of theatrical sets, costumes, interiors, tapestries, and advertising), and in 1920 he founded the Casa d'Arte Futurista (Futurist Art House) in Rovereto, which ran workshops through the forties. He was the only Futurist to have direct experience of the modern metropolis, as embodied in the collective imagination of New York, where he lived and worked from 1928 to 1930 and, after the war, from 1947 to 1949. In addition to his famous 1927 'bolted book' *Depero Futurista*, in 1931 he published *Numero Unico Futurista* Campari, a unique collection of writings, sketches, parolibre compositions, and advertisement sketches for Campari, which also contains his manifesto *Il futurismo e l'arte pubblicitaria* (Futurism and Advertising art). Although advertising provided Depero's main economic income, his work with industrial clients—aside from exceptional cases like Davide Campari, with whom he began a lasting collaboration in 1926—remained sporadic.

26. See Prampolini *dal futurismo all'informale* (Roma: Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1992). Enrico Prampolini (1894–1956), painter and scenographer. Travelling frequently outside Italy, Prampolini was directly in touch with European avant-garde groups, especially with those movements more engaged in abstract researches: adhered to

Dada in Zurich in 1916, exposed with the Novembergruppe in Berlin in 1919, had connections with Der Sturm and the Weimar Bauhaus, and collaborated as set designer with Prague's National Theatre. Between 1925 and 1937 Prampolini lived mainly in Paris, where he contributed to Section d'Or and Cercle et Carré, was co-founder of Abstraction et Création with Vantongerloo and Arp, and came into contact with Surrealism. From Rome Prampolini directed the Futurist journal *Noi*. An early adherent to Futurism, his painting soon evolved towards Abstraction and was marked by the introduction of new materials; such modernist conception would eventually lead him towards scenography, wall decoration, and architecture (Crispolti 1986: 59, 239; Crispolti 1989: 165–7; 'Enrico Prampolini,' *Larousse*, <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/peinture/Prampolini/153954>, last accessed March 2011).

27. In what is in many respects perhaps the most comprehensive interview given by Munari, Andrea Branzi emphasises how the Futurists' formal investigations were a precursor of Rationalism, and concludes, 'the phenomenon of Italian design in the fifties (...) has deeper roots in late Futurism than in the Modern movement' (Branzi 1984: 43). See also Crispolti 1992: 71–2; Pansera 2001: 15. Futurist examples of interior design (which, interestingly, they termed 'global' design) include: Balla's interiors for the Bal tic-tac (Rome, 1921); Depero's designs for the Cabaret del Diavolo in the basement of the Hôtel Élite et des Étrangers (Rome, 1922); Gerardo Dottori's decorations for the Ristorante Altro Mondo (Perugia, early 1920s); Fillia's restaurant Ambiente Novatore (Turin, 1927); and Ivo Pannaggi's Casa Zampini (Esanatoglia, Macerata, 1925–26) (Crispolti 1980: 264–91; Fochessati, Millefiore 1997: 46–7).

28. The model was Depero's Casa d'Arte Futurista (Futurist Art House), founded in 1919 in his native Rovereto. Dinamo-Azari, Fedele

nonetheless significant. The Italian Futurist installation at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris proves the connection between the experimental openness of second Futurism and the emergence of design in Milan in the 1950s. Curated by Azari, the installation was entrusted to Balla, Depero, and Prampolini, who were perhaps the most active artists from the first generation still working in the vast field of decorative arts. The controversial exposition highlighted the contrast between two opposing conceptions of design: the traditional artisan, elite approach (which was predominant, even in the Italian pavilion); and the new rational, industrial production. The Futurist work presented to great acclaim in Paris represented (in the concrete works, if not the intentions behind them) an Italian flair for Rationalist, modern lines parallel to the ones seen in Le Corbusier's *L'Esprit Nouveau* pavilion and the work of Melnikov and Rodchenko in the Soviet pavilion.²⁹ Such affirmation on an international level provided yet more proof of the vitality of the network of relationships the Italian movement had with other European avant-gardes, particularly through Prampolini, who lived in Paris between 1925 and 1937. So, over the course of the 1930s, not only did the second generation of Italian Futurists aspire to operate within a broader European dialogue—despite the country's increasingly autarchic closure³⁰—but also (particularly in Milan and Turin) showed a significant convergence with the Rationalist architecture movement and abstract art.³¹

In this sense Munari is perhaps the most explicit example—as he incessantly went from art to design and back again—of a path that crossed through all the many fields of a new phenomenon known as the *cultura del progetto*.³² The Milan Triennale was the main point of reference and offered an essential forum for comparison and interaction on an international level, above all because it was more open to various types of design than the Venice Biennale and Rome Quadriennale, which focussed exclusively on the fine arts.³³ Critics and historians have repeatedly pointed out that, during this period of Futurist militancy, artists operated in two worlds: on the one hand, they experimented with different avant-garde languages, from the various declensions of Futurism (mechanical,

Azari's multipurpose art agency, opened in 1927 in via Sant'Orsola; Cesare Andreoni's Creazioni d'arte (Art Creations) workshop opened in 1928 in via Solferino (later moved to via Moscova), and specialised in tapestries, pillows, fashion accessories, and decorative objects. Other Italian art houses active in the twenties included Prampolini's Casa d'arte italiana in Rome, Thayaht's laboratory in Florence, and Diulghe-roff's Officina d'Arte in Turin (Crispolti 1980: 313–21; Pansera 1992a: 145–52).

29. On events related to the Futurists' participation, see Pirani 1999. Initially excluded from the organising committee, the Italian Futurist group was admitted rather late, after long negotiations (and Mussolini's direct intervention), and even then was only allowed to show outside the Italian pavilion, in the Grand Palais. Balla exhibited large decorative panels and painted tapestries; Depero tapestries, pillows, shawl designs, toys, and furniture designs; Prampolini carpets and theatrical sets (Crispolti 1980: 39). Overall, their work was characterised by an abstract, colourful style, which (according to Crispolti) had been developed by Giacomo Balla in the

mid-teens amid the Roman Futurists (alongside both Depero and Prampolini), and was therefore an alternative to the Boccioni-centric first wave of Futurism in Milan (*ibid.*: 23–5). Beyond the supposed supremacy Futurism vaunted over other European avant-garde movements, the Futurists' success at the Paris Exposition was undeniable, even amidst the sceptical Italian critics, who were generally hostile to Marinetti. On this occasion the art critic Vittorio Pica, secretary of the Venice Biennale, uttered his famous remark, 'The Futurists saved Italy in Paris' (quoted in Pirani 1999: 50).

30. Especially from 1935 on (with the Ethiopian War and the ensuing international sanctions), the Fascist regime increasingly isolated the country, restricting both commercial and cultural exchanges.

31. Crispolti 1986: 43.

32. *Cultura del progetto* is, literally, design culture; the term 'progetto' can be read as 'design,' but also as 'project' and 'plan.' In post-war Italy this new phenomenon encompassed architecture, product design, graphic design, fashion design, urban planning [Trans. note].

33. Crispolti 1992: 71–3.

cosmic, aeropictorial, polymaterial) to surrealism and abstraction.³⁴ On the other hand, they delved into the realm of applied arts, ploughing through advertising design, animation, illustration, photography, object design, furniture design, and architectural installations. Following the examples set by Depero and Prampolini, Munari developed a similar attitude toward all-encompassing creative acts and interventions: specifically, his work already tended toward a transgressive use of techniques and procedures (that were systematically called into question, be it even just on a semantic level, in some cases), which will become a distinguishing feature of his unmistakable stylistic signature.³⁵

The Milanese group

For the Milanese Futurists, the years from 1927 to 1933 were particularly dynamic. They marked the end of a long transitional period, and saw the rise of significant new artists: next to Munari, Cesare Andreoni, Fedele Azari, Oswaldo Bot, Mario Duse, Ivanhoe Gambini, Carlo Manzoni, and Riccardo Ricas were also part of the initial group.³⁶ Munari had the good fortune of being in the right place at the right time, as 1927 was a crucial moment in Milan: in nearby Monza, at the III Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa (3rd International Decorative Arts Show), Depero designed a Book pavilion for publishers Bestetti Tumminelli Treves, creating a rare example of typographic architecture; the publisher Dinamo-Azari published the first book object, *Depero futurista/Dinamo*

Azari (known as the 'bolted book');³⁷ Umberto Notari opened his Futurist bookshop in Milan;³⁸ and the Gruppo 7 sparked the Italian Rationalist movement in architecture.³⁹ Later that same year, after several years of quiescence—since Depero's exhibition at Palazzo Cova in 1921—Futurist exhibitions were once again organised in

34. Bassi 2005: 59.

35. Crispolti 1980: 41.

36. For the broader context and a detailed record of the Milanese Futurists' complex history, see the exhibition catalogue *Cesare Andreoni e il Futurismo a Milano tra le due guerre* (Milan: Archivio Cesare Andreoni, 1992), which features extensive critical appendices, in particular excellent contributions by Alberto Bassi and Enrico Crispolti, from which most of the information herein was drawn.

37. The design of the self-promotional volume was done by Depero, with Azari's collaboration on the cover and title page; the latter also came up with the idea of using nuts and bolts as a binding (cf. Fanelli, Godoli 1988: 38–9). A special edition with a metal cover was produced for prominent figures, such as Marinetti and Mussolini. Inside the book (which has 234 pages) deploys the entire range of Futurist typographic ideas, in the layout as well as in the use of different papers, colour inks, and overprinting. The book contains typographic compositions, proclamations, manifestos, photographs of installations, artwork reproductions, poems, and advertisements. Fedele Azari (1895–1930) was a pilot, artist, and artists' agent (in addition to acting as a mediator in the sale of Futurist works, he negotiated Depero's contracts with companies such as Campari, Presbitero, Linoleum, Bianchi). Appointed National Secretary of the Futurist movement, alongside Mino Somenzi and Umberto Notari he organised the First Futurist Congress in 1924; the following year he curated the Futurist Hall at the Exposition Internationale

des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris. Azari died of a nervous breakdown (Pansera 1992a: 149–50; cf. Collarile 1992).

38. Umberto Notari (1878–1950) was a writer, journalist, Futurist publisher, and Marinetti's long-time friend; along with Fedele Azari, he was the main organiser of the First Futurist Congress in Milan in 1924. Founder of the Istituto Editoriale Italiano (Italian Publishing Institute), of the daily newspaper *L'Ambrosiano* (1922), and of the monthly magazine *La cucina italiana*, he also owned the I.I.I. advertising agency (known as The Three Is, named after the house organ *Le Industrie Italiane Illustrate*), who commissioned Depero his first advertising posters in the early twenties. In 1927 Notari opened the first Futurist bookshop in via Montenapoleone, the Libreria-Biblioteca Notari (a bookshop-library decorated by Luciano Baldessari, another member of the Milan Futurist group). See Salaris 1992b: 41; Bassi 1992: 57–8, e 57n22.

39. The Gruppo 7 was founded by a group of young architects from the Scuola Superiore di Architettura (School of Architecture—Ubaldo Castagnola, Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Gino Pollini, Carlo Enrico Rava, Giuseppe Terragni, and, later on, Adalberto Libera) united by their shared aspiration to renew Italian architecture through Rationalism. It rose to the fore in December 1926 with a series of articles published in the journal *Rassegna Italiana*—in which they announced new standards for modern architecture, in keeping with current European theories.

Milan, and continued annually through the mid-thirties, at various private galleries: Galleria Pesaro, Galleria delle Tre Arti, and Galleria del Milione.

Despite Marinetti's managerial skills, the Italian Futurist movement had never won significant critical or popular favour, as tastes tended toward more classical work, such as that of the Novecento movement. Futurism had taken over alternative spaces, thanks to their strategy of cultural agitation that garnered them a degree of visibility (soirées, theatrical performances, manifestos, and publishers' promotion), yet it continued to suffer a lack of tactical access and the means to mount official events that would have a broader appeal. The new exhibition season began in the autumn of 1927, when the Galleria Pesaro in via Manzoni hosted the *Mostra di trentaquattro pittori futuristi* (Group show of thirty-four Futurist Painters)—and event that marked the beginning of the gallery's long-standing relationship with the Milanese group: they went on to organise not only exhibitions, but also events such as conferences, soirées, poetry competitions, and the Second Futurist congress in 1933. Created as an auction house in the 1910s, Lino Pesaro's gallery had developed a detailed exhibition program of solo and group shows featuring both figurative and decorative art, which had sumptuous spaces (three large rooms with a library annex) in the prestigious Palazzo Poldi Pezzoli; all this was supplemented by his publishing venture, and soon became an important centre for the city's artistic and literary circles.⁴⁰

It was around 1929, during the second wave of Futurism, with Depero, Prampolini, and Dottori, and each year Marinetti organised a show at the Galleria Pesaro (...) For me it was a unique opportunity to exhibit something. (...) I was making paintings that were more abstract than they were Futurist, and I titled them *aeropaintings*. (...) Throughout Italy the Novecento movement reigned supreme (...) and I gladly stood by the Futurists, as they had a greater feel for freedom and respect for others.⁴¹

Munari 'was little more than a kid in that extraordinary city of art, architecture, intelligence, (...) the Milan of "threadbare bohemians" (...) that the Ristorante Savini put up with as they met for an affordable coffee, sipped slowly so as to last, at the tables that weren't already reserved for the high society,' as journalist Guido Vergani recalled.⁴² From his first mechanical drawings 'based entirely on cones'—which earned him Marinetti's respect, as they directly referenced Depero's iconography, and perhaps similar work by Ivo Pannaggi⁴³—Munari 'quickly moved on to more demanding paintings, showed his work again, and sold one painting, to a

40. In 1923 the Galleria Pesaro had launched the historic core of the Novecento group (Mario Sironi, Anselmo Bucci, Achille Funi, Ubaldo Oppi, Leonardo Dudreville, Emilio Malerba, and Pietro Marussi), which Margherita Sarfatti—writer, art critic, and Mussolini's mistress—supported as patroness and curator, contributing to its success in Italy as the regime's official art, despite Marinetti's efforts to have that honour bestowed upon Futurism instead. Lino Pesaro's collaboration with the Futurists continued through 1934, when their rapport ended for unknown reasons (that year the Milanese Futurists' annual exhibition was held at the Galleria delle Tre Arti). The Galleria Pesaro closed in 1938 after serious financial problems; later that same year, Lino Pesaro committed suicide. See Ciceri 1997; Bassi 1992: 56n9, 57n25.

41. Bruno Munari, quoted in Branzi 1984: 41.

42. Guido Vergani (1935–2005) in Finessi 2005: 160. The 'gruppo dei cappotti lisi' is literally the 'group dressed in worn overcoats' [Trans. note].

43. Ivo Pannaggi (1901–1981), painter, illustrator, set designer, graphic designer, architect, journalist. Alongside Prampolini, Pannaggi was one of the Italian Futurists most overtly linked to the European avant-gardes, especially the Russians. He was self-taught, and settled in Rome, where he joined the Futurist group affiliated with the Casa d'arte Bragaglia. He was a close friend of Vinicio Paladini's, with whom he shared both his non-representational pictorial style as well as his political orientation (which lead him to break with Marinetti). Through Paladini he discovered photomontage, and used it primarily

friend, for 50 lire: those were his first earnings as an independent artist.⁴⁴ Without a doubt, the reality of being an artist must have been a good deal less flashy than it seemed in the papers: indeed, as Munari himself admitted, their exhibitions took place exclusively during the 'dead seasons' on the calendar, and the works exhibited were always the same and few in number.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, and despite his young age, beginning as early as 1927 Munari participated in almost all the Futurist exhibitions in Milan. He soon caught the critics' attention, as well as Marinetti's eye, and by October 1929 Marinetti unwaveringly called him the leader of the Milanese group.⁴⁶ His works were regularly shown at important national and international exhibitions: at each Venice Biennale from 1930 to 1936; each Rome Quadriennale from 1931 to 1939; and aeropainting exhibitions in France and Germany between 1930 and 1934. He also signed several of the theoretical manifestos: the unpublished 'Dinamismo e riforma muscolare' (Dynamism and Muscular Reform), co-authored with Aligi Sassu in 1928; the 1934 *Manifesto tecnico dell'Aeroplastica futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Aerosculpture), co-written with the Milanese group; and in November that year the manifesto *La Plastica murale* (Manifesto of Mural Art).⁴⁷

Between World War I and World War II, Munari was intensely active at the core of the Milanese Futurist group. This period is characterised by a heterogeneous artistic output—his work shows both his assimilation of the styles and influences of other artists, as well as his experimentation

with various creative materials and techniques. On the one hand, such open-mindedness led him to try out the various expressive modes of recent artistic trends; on the other, it let him work across all fields, without limiting himself solely to paint, canvas, and brush. His paintings from this time, although they show clear Futurist influences, remained fairly traditional, and included works on canvas, panel, and paper; overall, even though he continued painting through the fifties, it was a sideline for him. As Meneguzzo emphasises,

for publishing commissions. In the early twenties he began intensely working in illustration/caricature, set design, advertising graphics, and interior design. His work as a graphic artist range from advertising posters to book covers, and was clearly influenced by the Constructivists, with extensive use of diagonal compositions, photomontage, and geometric lettering. In 1926 he exhibited for the first time in the USA, at the Brooklyn Museum, on invitation of the Société Anonyme. He intermittently studied architecture in Rome and Florence, and in '29 moved to Berlin, where in 1933 he attended the Bauhaus during its last semester before closure. In the thirties he worked as a foreign correspondent for several Italian newspapers and magazines (*L'Ambrosiano*, *Casabella*, *Edilizia Moderna*, *Domus*). He frequently travelled between Germany and Italy, and in '42 he moved to Norway, where he worked as an architect and designer. He returned to Italy in the seventies. Also alongside Prampolini and Paladini, Pannaggi penned the manifesto *L'Arte meccanica* (Mechanical Art) published in 1923 (Crispolti 1980: 392–3; Luciani 1995: 443–64; Lista 1985: 129; Fanelli, Godoli 1988: 84, 132, 195).

44. Rossi 1962: 9.

45. Munari, quoted in an interview with Bassi 1990a. Ricas concurred, stating that the shows' organisation, spearheaded by Marinetti, was fairly

happenstance (in an interview with Bassi 1990b).

46. From Marinetti's catalogue introduction: 'The group of Milanese Futurist painters, led by the young and ingenious Bruno Munari, appears here in full force' (*Trentatré futuristi*. Milano: Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1929: 12; quoted in Crispolti 1992: 74).

47. The painting manifesto 'Dinamismo e riforma muscolare' (Dynamism and Muscular Reform), dated 31 March 1928, was signed by Munari and Sassu (quoted in Crispolti 1992: 74–5). The *Manifesto tecnico dell'Aeroplastica futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Aeroplastics) appeared with the signatures of Munari, Manzoni, Furlan, and Ricas on the back of the exhibition program for *Scelta futuristi venticinquenni* at the Galleria delle Tre Arti (March 1934) and was simultaneously published (with the addition of Regina's signature) in the Futurist journal *Sant'Elia* (no. 66, 1 March 1934). The manifesto *La plastica murale* (Manifesto of Mural Art) was signed by Andreoni, Ambrosi, Benedetta, Depiero, Dottori, Marinetti, Munari, Oriani, Prampolini, and Rosso, and was published in *Stile Futurista* (1; 5, December 1934) on the occasion of the *Prima Mostra Nazionale della plastica murale per l'edilizia fascista* (First National Exhibition of mural art for fascist building projects, Genoa, November 1934–January 1935) (Crispolti in Andreoni 1992: 82).

'Munari was more interested in the generically creative disciplines, the ones that gave him the means, techniques, and tools that were not yet codified into an established language.'⁴⁸ His decade-long engagement with the Futurists saw him progressively pass through photography, mural decoration, ceramics, illustration, and kinetic objects. Because this path was complex, had many branches, and operated simultaneously on several levels, it is worth taking a closer look at its more striking moments.

An experimenter's way

Already upon his debut at Galleria Pesaro in 1927, Munari showed a marked propensity for crossing over traditional disciplinary boundaries. In the first show he presented, in addition to paintings, a small ceramic sculpture, made according to his sketch at the Casa Giuseppe Mazzotti in Albissola, Liguria, an historic town renowned for its ceramics: this was the first in a series of stylised 'imaginary animals' and a prelude to his long collaboration with ceramist Tullio d'Albisola.⁴⁹

The Futurist exhibitions in 1927 and 1929 really resonated with the Milanese art world; their success was augmented by the presence of several artists from the Futurist group in Turin as well, who were more closely tied to the European Rationalist movement and were particularly involved in architectural, interior, and poster design.⁵⁰ The 1927 catalogue featured the first use of the term 'complessi plastici polimaterici rumoristi' (polymaterial noise-making plastic complexes) as the medium that

would supersede easel painting;⁵¹ and the group show at the Galleria Pesaro in October 1929, titled *Trentatré futuristi. Pittura, scultura, arte decorativa* (Thirty-three Futurists: Painting, Sculpture, and Decorative Art), showed work spilling over into the applied arts, with Diulgheroff and Fillia's *cartelli lanciatori* (launch posters) and ceramic works by d'Albisola and Munari. Munari had a greater number of works in this second show: in addition to his paintings, characterised by dynamic planar penetrations and vivid colours, he exhibited the complete series of ceramic animals produced with d'Albisola's workshop:

48. While Tanchis relegates Munari's painting to a secondary level compared to his use of other artistic media (1987: 24), Meneguzzo admits that, compared to the inventiveness of his graphics, Munari's paintings and drawings perhaps show 'somewhat less advanced formal characteristics' (1993: 30-1), emphasising, on the other hand, his extreme originality of thinking—which led to his creation of the *air machines* and *useless machines* throughout the thirties (ibid.: 29).

49. Over the course of the twenties and thirties, Tullio d'Albisola (pseudonym of Tullio Mazzotti, 1899–1971) profoundly renewed Italian ceramics, freeing the medium from traditional figuration. He collaborated with numerous Futurists from Liguria, Turin, and Milan. Within the still strongly artisanal context of ceramic production in Albissola at the time, Mazzotti's workshop offered both a commercial approach, focussed on modern design (decorative objects by Fillia and Diulgheroff, and more utilitarian objects like Munari's), as well as a more experimental approach, which d'Albisola and Farfa explored (Ravaoli 1998: 11–2). As evidence of their strong, lasting ties to the Futurists, is the new factory built by Diulgheroff in Albissola Marina, 1932–34. As for Munari's ceramics, his rapport with the

factory in Albissola continued through the end of the thirties: see, for example, the 1937 photograph of Munari and d'Albisola in front of the ceramics factory (Tullio d'Albisola's Archives, Albissola Marina; reproduced in Presotto 1981: 145), as well as the June 1938 portrait of Munari in Albissola (reproduced in Lichtenstein, Häberli 1995: 181). In addition to the exhaustive catalogue of Futurist ceramics edited by Crispolti (1982), on the history of the Mazzotti workshop see <http://www.tulliodalbisola.it>.

50. Crispolti 1992: 72–3. Nicolay Diulgheroff (1901–1982), artist, designer and architect of Bulgarian origin. After early studies at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna and the Der Weg in Dresden, Diulgheroff acquired a solid constructivist background at the Bauhaus in Weimar (1923). He moved to Turin in 1926, where he studied at the Scuola Superiore di Architettura of the Accademia Albertina, and joined the Futurist circle headed by Fillia. Diulgheroff's eclectic activities range from painting to architecture, and include advertising, exhibition design, as well as design of furniture, objects, ceramics, tapestries. After the war he resumed work as architect, but devoted himself primarily to painting (Olivieri 2008; Fanelli, Godoli 1988: 187–8; Salaris 1986: 151–2).

51. Ballo 1964: 24.

In 1929, at the group show of 33 Futurist artists held at the Galleria Pesaro in Milan, I had my own room, in which I showed a complete series of my Futurist ceramics (...). Nino Strada and Bruno Munari, two young Futurists from Milan, were my first collaborators (...). At the time, Munari made a series of imaginary animals.⁵²

Munari's ceramic output was not particularly numerous, but it was detailed: the 1929 series consisted of small animal sculptures (Camel, Goose, Monkey, Owl, Hippopotamus, Hen, Elephant) assembled from elementary geometric forms; a second series, made around 1932–33 in terracotta-based majolica, consists of both stylised animals (including a Bulldog, in two versions) and accessories for home and office (including a pen holder). He also designed a series of utilitarian objects, including a decorated triangular plate set and a promotional ashtray for Sanpellegrino (the latter was never produced, but is known through his sketches)—attesting to the growing interest in the production of practical objects for everyday use.⁵³ Aside from the close relationship to his own 'mechanical' magazine illustrations of the same period, and in turn the likely influence of Depero's puppets and toys,⁵⁴ the two series of ceramic animals attest to his precise desire to test out the expressive possibilities of cast clay to create a standardised line. This aspect hints at the exploration of a given technique's limits, a cornerstone of Munari's design method as developed in the post-war years.⁵⁵ Lastly, at the Futurist show mounted by the Galleria delle Tre Arti in 1934, Munari and Ricas exhibited a series of ceramic objects whose

banal appearance denied their ironic intent: each featured a semantic play between the work's surreal look and its title—such as the *Tassa delle imposte*, a goblet-like object whose title could be read as either 'cup with shutters' or 'tax levy'—proving the spontaneous irony that was often a counterpoint of Munari's creations.⁵⁶

In the meantime, the Gruppo Giovani Futuristi Milanesi (Group of Young Milanese Futurists) had come together in 1928, and received full recognition at the opening conference organised by Marinetti for the show the following year.⁵⁷ It was during this period that Munari met Riccardo Ricas, who had joined the Milanese Futurist circle and showed his work for the first time at the exhibition at the Galleria Pesaro in the autumn of 1929.⁵⁸ Throughout the

52. From 'Le ceramiche futuriste di Tullio D'Albisola' in *Futurismo I*; 7 (23 October 1932), reprinted in Crispolti 1982: 169. In a subsequent text, Mazzotti also mentions Marinetti's role—in 1938 they wrote the manifesto *Ceramica e Aeroceramica* (Ceramics and Aeroceramics) together. 'In 1927 (...) Nino Strada, Bruno Munari, and Tullio d'Albisola met in Milan, with the poet Marinetti (...) to establish the guidelines of the work [to come]' (from *La Ceramica futurista*, Albisola Marina: Manifattura d'Arte G. Mazzotti, 1939; quoted in Crispolti 1982: 171–2).

53. Reproduced in Crispolti 1982: 112–7; see *ibid.*: 29–30. In the summer of 1934, in a letter to Tullio d'Albisola, Munari mentions, among other things, a sample plate and the changes he would like to make to some borderless soup plates—which indicates that he was working with Mazzotti on a Rationalist plate service (letter Munari to d'Albisola, [June] 1934, in Presotto 1981: 151).

54. See, for example, the wooden constructions Bear and Rhinoceros (1923), now at Mart, Rovereto (reproduced in Hultén 1986: 329). Depero exhibited with the Futurists at the Galleria

Pesaro in 1927, but also showed at the Biennale di Monza in 1923 and 1927.

55. Crispolti has shown a correlation between these ceramics and Munari and Sassu's manifesto, reading them as an ironic, caricatured reversal of the mechanical approach of industrial production (1982: 30; 1992: 75). On the other hand, Biffi Gentili (2005: 54) rightly connects these works with the use of ceramic draw-plates, which the Mazzotti workshop had a primitive version of. For a discussion of Munari's method, see Meneguzzo 1993: 23.

56. Cf. letter Munari to d'Albisola, 18 February 1934 (in Presotto 1981: 146).

57. The group was already formed in 1928, according to the letterhead on which Munari and Sassu wrote their manuscript (1928, quoted in Crispolti 1992: 74). During 1929, after a show in Varese as the Gruppo Radiofuturista Lombardo (Lombard Radiofuturist Group, Crispolti 1992: 74n8), the collective assumed the name Gruppo Futurista F.T. Marinetti/Movimento Futurista Milanese/Propaganda 'Radiofuturismo' (see letter Munari to d'Albisola, 30 April 1929, in Presotto 1981: 137).

thirties their working relationship—which remained flexible, as they worked both together and on their own—grew into a collaboration that ran much deeper than the average professional partnership. It reached such a degree that their visual languages were almost uniform; they mutually influenced one another, and both went from straight abstraction to more surrealist work (the style Ricas was best known for later on), as well as photomontage and kinetic art; ultimately, both held a stance that remained fairly non-aligned with regard to mainstream Futurist painting.⁵⁹

Between the end of 1929 and the spring of 1932, Munari received additional recognition for his work. He took part in two Futurist exhibitions Prampolini organised in Paris, at the Galerie 23 (*Peintres futuristes italiens*, in which he was the only artist from the Milanese group), and at the Galerie de la Renaissance (*Enrico Prampolini et les aéropeintres futuristes italiens*), both with a lively opening gala thrown by Marinetti.⁶⁰ Further opportunities for the Italian Futurists to exhibit abroad soon followed, and Munari's work was featured in travelling group shows in Germany and France in 1934, as well as in a Vienna and Athens in 1935.⁶¹

The next major Futurist event at the Galleria Pesaro took place in the autumn of 1931 with the *Mostra futurista di Aeropittura e di scenografia* (Show of futurist Aeropainting and set design), accompanied by a solo exhibition of Prampolini's work. This was the first exhibition of aeropainting in Milan—it highlighted the latest trend in Futurist painting, which related to

the widespread popularity of aviation and was based on principles of aerial perspective—and was repeated in another iteration the following year at the same gallery. On that same occasion the *Manifesto dell'Aeropittura* (Manifesto of Aeropainting) was published (its signatories included Balla, Depero, Fillia, and Prampolini)—and although none of the Milanese members signed, the manifesto nevertheless is referred to in the exhibition catalogue text in which the group outlined its theoretical stance.⁶² In the Second Futurism—and therefore also in Munari's work—one can denote two successive stages, corresponding to two distinct lines of research: the first is related to mechanical representations; the second to more surreal atmospheres.⁶³ From this perspective, the sheer experimental versatility of Munari's visual language appears even more complex, as he absorbed metaphysical and surrealist currents through Prampolini's work. Steering clear of the figurative resurgence that

58. Ricas 2005: 62; Bassi 1992: 58.

59. Bassi 1994: 14, 16.

60. Crispolti 1992: 75, 77; id. 1980: 564.

61. Cf. correspondence with Tullio d'Albisola, in Presotto 1981: 151; and Verdine 1988²: 241–2.

62. 'With remarkable clarity, the Milan group (...) raises the issue of renewing [art's] linguistic means in order to achieve an art of pure visibility, based on the use of colour fields and the combination of colour-materials,' wrote Filiberto Menna (1966a, now in *Bruno Munari* 1979: 72). Marinetti organised the *Prima mostra di Aeropittura dei Futuristi* (First Exhibition of Futurist Aeropainting) at the Galleria Camerata degli Artisti in Rome, 1–10 February 1931, followed by two exhibitions on the same theme in Florence and Trieste. A preview of the manifesto had been published by Mino Somenzi in the *Gazzetta del Popolo* (22 October 1929) (Bassi 1992: 60, 60n37; Birolli 2008: 211; Crispolti 1992: 76).

63. 'Early work, done between 1918–20 and 1927–28, is characterised by a predominance of formal analogies in mechanical subjects, and schematic images of landscapes schematised according to bright planes of colour, with uniform geometric fields of colour. All are based on the theories outlined in the manifesto *L'arte meccanica* (...) Later on, between 1927–28 and the end of the thirties, one notes a prevalence of sculptural, occasionally figurative formulations, transferred into a highly imaginative, almost 'neo-metaphysical' realm, and in many respects verging upon surrealism. (...) these were known as aeropaintings' (Crispolti 1986: 37–8). Lista correlates this focus on 'moods' with the interest (widespread at the time throughout the Milanese avant-garde) in the occult and other parascientific subjects (1984: 30). Munari was an avid reader of science and science-fiction texts: 'At the time I was reading many

characterised the more literal strain of aeropainting (which consisted of anecdotal landscapes seen from unusual viewpoints), Munari instead turned to the 'cosmic' vein championed by Prampolini and exponents of the Turin group. These artists were interested in the symbolic, fantastical transfiguration of mental states associated with the experience of flying, which therefore assumed the form of dreamlike visions, sometimes bordering on Abstract compositions.⁶⁴ Munari's surrealist ancestry—interestingly reminiscent of the graphic work of his contemporary Herbert Bayer—is also visible in the illustrations and photomontages he created for magazines.⁶⁵

At the beginning of 1933 the Milanese group revived its activity by participating in the V Triennale with a Futurist pavilion for a civil airport, a project Prampolini spearheaded. Its Rationalist design (with elements of surrealism) called for a number of mural decorations involving many artists: Munari created aeropaintings for Agip (Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli, the national petrol company) in an underground passage.⁶⁶ The pre-eminent aspect of this installation was an intense interest in new materials and experimental building techniques, two currents that had also appeared in the sensational *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* in Rome the year before.⁶⁷ Additionally, in the Triennale's Aeronautical Press Pavilion Munari earned acclaim for a large wall-based photomontage. The photographic medium was increasingly central to Munari's work, and following his extensive experience with photomontage, he began to try his hand

at cutting-edge techniques such as photograms, along the lines of those by Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy. In addition to the numerous images reproduced in magazines he was a contributor for—from *La Rivista Illustrata del Popolo d'Italia* to *Natura*—his photograms were also exhibited in Rome at the *Mostra di Fotografia Futurista* (Exhibition of Futurist Photography) organised by Marinetti that same year.⁶⁸ They were shown again that December in Milan, in another Futurist show held at the Circolo Nazario Sauro, which is interesting for two reasons: not only is Munari's participation in the photographic section especially significant; as reviews attest, an artist named Dilma exhibited work with this group for the first time here—and this is clearly a pseudonym of Dilma Carnevali, Munari's future wife.⁶⁹

books on astronomy, like *Chi vive sulle stelle?* [Bompiani, 1934; originally titled *Was lebt auf den Sternen?*] by Desiderius Papp, and after that—as a consequence of a constant expansion of the universe—I could no longer read ordinary novels' (quoted in Lichtenstein, Häberli 2000: 274).

64. Menna 1966a, now in Bruno Munari 1979: 72; Ballo 1964: 25.

65. Recent criticism has emphasised the dialectical relationship that bound Munari to the Futurists, in particular during the mid-thirties, when he was moving toward an increasingly 'unorthodox' practice compared to the peculiar themes taken up by aeropainting (see Meneguzzo 1993: 29). One revealing aspect is the allusive nature of his painting titles, which allowed Munari to maintain a certain relationship—albeit rather subtle and literal—to Futurism, while he was actually moving in a more abstract direction with his work. Cf. Munari himself: '(...) I made paintings that were more abstract than they were Futurist, which I called aeropaintings' (in Branzi 1984: 41).

66. Di Corato 2008: 223, 223n31; Crispolti 1992: 77; Fochessati, Millefiore 1997: 49–50; Pansera 1978: 44, 263. The exhibition catalogue *Stazione per aeroporto civile—Padiglione del movimento futurista alla Triennale* was issued as a supplement to the June 1933 issue of the magazine *Natura*—for which Munari was a regular contributor. Cf. the catalogue *V Triennale di Milano*. Milan: Ceschina, 1933: 571. See also Prampolini's article 'Lo stile, la funzione e i nuovi materiali edili' in the same issue (*Natura*, vi, 6: 35–43), in which he describes the rooms, the works, and the materials used. Depero, Dottori, Fillia, Andreoni, Thayaht, Rosso, Ricas, and Duse also contributed.

67. Organized in celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the Fascist march on Rome: see Schnapp 2003.

68. Cf. <http://www.munart.org>, in particular the sections 'Dove ha esposto' (Where he exhibited) and 'Il passato futurista, 1927' (The Futurist past, 1927), last accessed February 2010.

69. Bassi 1992: 61n47.

also, on the other hand, represent his clear break from Futurist orthodoxy and open participation in the broader realm of Italian Abstraction.

The Centrale Futurista di Milano

Aside from purely artistic production, the militancy of the Futurist group in the early thirties also benefited from Munari's active participation on an organisational level, at Milan's Centrale Futurista.⁷⁴ Contemporary correspondence shows that Munari and partners were organising a show at the Galleria Bardi set to open in May, but because of the economic stipulations set by the gallerist they decided to let that one go and wait for the exhibition scheduled at the Galleria Pesaro the following autumn.⁷⁵ Unrealised plans to build a centre for a proposed Centrale Futurista Alta Italia (Futurist HQ for northern Italy, which would be managed by Depero, who had just returned from a stay in New York) were also drawn up during this period. The new centre would have had Rationalist interiors and furnishings, and was to include a permanent exhibition space, with a storage annex for works as well as a specialised bookshop, where solo and group exhibitions, reunions and conferences could have been held. The project also called for a promotional campaign and an annual publication, in the aim of raising funds as well.⁷⁶ Although Munari does not appear as a member of the organising committee (which included Depero, Notari, Fillia, Prampolini, and Andreoni), it is hard to imagine, given his role as group leader, that

he would not have had some involvement on such a major project. Indeed in a letter he wrote to d'Albisola in 1929, Munari outlined his work schedule at the time, which seems to have been fairly equally divided between his own studio (in via Sant'Agnese), the Pensione Italia (in via Unione, where he slept and ate), and other activities, which almost certainly included his role as director of the Milanese Futurist group.⁷⁷ The group's management, at no. 14 via Carlo Ravizza, in a recently developed area near the Fiera campionaria (Trade fairgrounds),⁷⁸ moved in 1934 to the home-studio Munari shared with his friend and associate Ricas in the building next door, also in via Ravizza, at no. 16.⁷⁹

for the much-discussed relationship of each artist's priorities in this field, Di Corato (2008: 217–8) has shown that Calder's mobile had appeared as early as 1932 in the first issue of *Abstraction création art non figuratif* 1932, which Munari would certainly have seen through Prampolini, who was amongst the magazine's contributors. Later on, Munari still felt a need to clarify his relationship with Calder in *Arte come mestiere* (1966: 7–15), a distinction he repeated years later in an interview with Irmeline Lebeer ('Qu'est-ce qu'un fricomac?' in *L'art vivant*, no. 53, Novembre 1974: 4–8). A propos of his *macchine inutili*, see also Tisdall 1970: 136; Tanchis 1986: 34–7; and Meneguzzo 1993: 29.

74. Milan's Futurist Headquarters of sorts. The term has also a connotation of 'power plant' [Trans. note].

75. See the 1929 letters Nino Strada and Munari wrote to Tullio d'Albisola (Presotto 1981); cf. also Crispolti 1992: 74.

76. See letter Depero to Marinetti, 21 April 1931 (Mart, Archivio del '900), quoted in Bassi 1992: 59, wherein extended excerpts are reprinted.

77. See letter Munari to d'Albisola, 6 September 1929: '(...) Come visit me in Milan: Munari—via

Sant'Agnese, 4 (from 4 to 6 [each afternoon]—mornings until 10) or at the Pensione Italia from 12½ to 2 (in via Unione) (...) (in Presotto 1981: 137).

78. For the official opening of the Sempione Tunnel) in 1906, the area west of Porta Magenta held the Esposizione Universale di Milano (Milan's Universal Expo, cf. the famous poster by Leopoldo Metlicovitz). In 1923, for its fourth year, the Fiera Campionaria (Milan Trade Fair) was permanently moved to the former site of the Piazza d'Armi, which had been acquired by the government. Moreover, that year a royal decree greatly expanded the outskirts of Milan, such that the municipality now encompassed several small neighbouring villages. Naturally, such conditions triggered a building boom in the area of the fairgrounds between 1923 and 1929. Aside from the area's affordability, perhaps its association with the exhibition—seen as a concrete symbol of technological progress—also explains the Milanese Futurists' decision to open a branch in this area, even though it was relatively peripheral compared to the city centre.

79. As can be deduced from a letter Munari wrote to Thayaht (20 April 1934), on the letterhead of the Centrale Futurista

In addition to their studio practice together, Ricas and Munari also participated in the organisation of Futurist banquets held in Milan between 1930–32, when the Italian culinary tradition became the object of Marinetti's umpteenth offensive. These were goliardic festivities, based more on formal innovations or straightforward wit-ticisms, and were first announced during a dinner at the local restaurant Penna d'oca in November 1930. The requisite manifesto of Futurist cuisine soon followed: *Manifesto della cucina futurista* was published in the Turin-based daily *La Gazzetta del Popolo* on 28 December, and sparked a series of Futurist conferences and banquets throughout the country; in March of 1931 the Taverna Santopalato (Saint Palate Tavern) opened in Turin; and finally, in 1932, the publishing house Sonzogno produced a cookbook titled *La cucina futurista* (Futurist Cookery) by Marinetti and Fillia. While Ricas invented exotically named dishes, Munari contributed to the sets designed for these soirées, using silver foil as tablecloth and placing sculptures around the table-top.⁸⁰ Other provocations of the sort, often in a humorous vein, inspired Ricas and Munari to carry out experiments in 'cinema odoroso' (scented cinema) by wafting scented air (salty sea breezes, freshly cut grass) into screening rooms, and produce 'concerti di silenzio' (concerts of silence) on the radio.⁸¹ 'We also had some real rows in the gallery,' Ricas recalls, 'maybe Munari didn't get involved—actually, he'd look at us, a bit detached, he was never one for polemics.'⁸² Such cultural agitation was, after all, a characteristic part of the

movement, and from the very start Futurist evenings constituted an occasion for direct confrontation with the public, often ending in quite a racket. 'Infatuated with the aerial records set by De Pinedo (...) we showed up on purpose garbed in aviators' blue raincoats, with white spats and bowler hats, and people did double-takes on the street.'⁸³

From Futurism to Abstraction

In March 1934 the Milanese Futurist group turned out in force for a new exhibition, which turned out to be their most cohesive moment, as well as their last major group show of the 1930s. From that point on—up to the 1938 group show at the Galleria del Milione—the group's strength dispersed, scattering into individual events, just as the Milanese Futurists' initiatives began to converge with those of other European avant-gardes. Munari's case is indicative of this; there was a particularly parallel aspect in the work of abstract artists in Milan and Como, and they joined forces in order to counter the attacks of the Fascist right against modern art.⁸⁴

This exhibition (...) will contain: paintings (which push the very limits of painting); aeroplastics (sculptures made to fly); landscape designs (models); useless machines (fantastical, brightly coloured new polymaterial furniture and moving objects); decorative polymaterial works encased in glass (English-style—a

di Milano and R+M (Mart, Archivio del '900, fondo Thayaht, 1.2.07.66).

80. '(...) Rose petals in hot broth, oranges with ice cream inside, and my own creation, called "balls of fire at the North Pole"' (Ricas, quoted in Lopez 1994: 8). Cf. Salaris 1986: 158; and Rossi 1962: 9: '(...) while Fillia tends to the kitchen and serves *Carneplastico* [Sculptural meats] and dates with anchovies.' On Futurist cuisine, see Salaris 1985: 207–8; id. 1994: 58–9; Crispolti 1980: 325–8.

81. 'I recall one *Mutiny on the Bounty* at the Cinema Corso with sea-breezes pumped into the air by two fans ...' Ricas, quoted in Lopez 1994: 8.

82. Ricas 2005: 63.

83. Ricas, quoted in Lopez 1994: 8. On Marinetti's mediatic operations and the dynamics of such Futurist soirées, see Lista 1984: 63–4 and Birolli 2008: 224.

84. Bassi 1992: 56, 63; Crispolti 1992: 74.

85. Letter Munari to D'Albisola, 18 February 1934 (in Presotto 1981: 146). From another letter,

novelty); scratched mirrors (new); and a thousand other interesting things.⁸⁵

With those words Munari wrote Tullio d'Albisola, telling him about the upcoming event. The exhibition, mounted at the Galleria delle Tre Arti and titled *Scelta futuristi venticinquenni. Omaggio dei futuristi venticinquenni al venticinquennio del futurismo* (Selected Twenty-five-year-old Futurists: an Homage of Twenty-five-year-old Futurists upon the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Futurism), practically involved only artists in Milan, including new members such as Gelindo Furlan, Franco Grignani, Regina and, once again, Dilma (who exhibited scratched mirrors and polymaterial compositions).⁸⁶ Munari was not only actively involved in the exhibition's organisation, he was also one of the key players in the lengthy calendar of related events: joining in alongside presentations by Depero, Marinetti, Farfa, Masnata, and Giuntini (an opening conference, poetry readings, debates, and musical performances), Munari compered two themed evenings—one on a recent art event held in Milan, the other on his own *useless machines*. An idea of the tone of these evenings can be gleaned from a contemporary article, which quotes a jocular exchange between Munari and the audience:

And Munari explained how he arrived at his 'useless machines,' following his disillusionment with painting (...) You can just can imagine how the public took these arguments (...) But Munari, small as he may be in stature, skilfully held his own before all attempts to knock him. (...) 'But this is not art, and you are not artists! ...,'

one visitor brusquely decided.

'What you mean by artist?', asked Munari.

'Someone who makes art...'

'Perfect. Someone who makes art! ... But you, who bristle at the misuse of the qualifier *artist*, are you used to—as I am, as everyone is—addressing your barber and your cobbler as artist? ...

A chorus of *ah! eh! ih! oh! uh!* erupts in the audience ...

'... In fact, don't we usually say, "my barber shaves like a real artist!" ... "My cobbler is a true artist!"?... "My tailor, what an artist!"?'

'Well, we'll just have to find a word to substitute the term artist!' an unidentified man in the audience ironically exclaims.⁸⁷

Munari was also the author of an introductory note titled 'Antipolemica' (Antipolemic), which was reproduced in the program flyer along with the text of the *Manifesto tecnico dell'Aeroplastica Futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Aeroplastics), signed by Furlan, Manzoni, Ricas, and Munari—who, as group leader, gave a public reading of it at the opening.⁸⁸ This

probably written in June (ibid.: 151) we know that the exhibition at the Galleria Pesaro was simply postponed until October, as the announcement of a national aeropainting contest (Concorso nazionale futurista della Galleria Pesaro) also attests, published in *Sant'Elia* (1 March 1934) along with the publication of the *Manifesto tecnico dell'Aeroplastica Futurista*. Perhaps because of disagreements with Lino Pesaro, the show never happened, nor did the Futurists have any further relations with his gallery.

86. There is scant information on the Galleria delle Tre Arti. Located in Foro Bonaparte 65, the gallery was open from 1931 to 1934. It was directed by Ugo Roffi, and its exhibitions focussed not only on painting and sculpture, but also on the decorative arts, which were granted ample space. The gallery was affiliated with the magazines *Domus* and *Orpheus*, and acted as a cultural centre open to the public at large through a program of lectures, concerts, and literary readings. It also offered a large

collection of Italian and foreign magazines. Before the 1934 group show, a few Futurists had already exhibited there—Munari (1933), Nino Strada (1931) and Aligi Sassu (1933) had shown work, and Ottone Rosai (December 1933) and Gigi Brogini (1933) had had solo shows. The gallery also organised exhibitions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century old masters from the Hoepli collection (November 1933), and an exhibition of Jewish art (March–April 1934, immediately following the Futurist group show). Information based on a 1933 publication (*Galleria delle Tre Arti*. Milan: Galleria delle Tre Arti, 1933, in the Biennale's Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Venice) and some catalogues found in Italy's major public libraries.

87. Luigi Pralavorio, 'Delle macchine inutili e di altro' in *Cronaca Prealpina* (28 May 1934), now reproduced in *Bruno Munari* 1979: 57–8.

88. In the version published in the Futurist biweekly *Sant'Elia* (11; 5, 1 March 1934: 1) Regina's name also appears (Bassi

manifesto announced a line of visual research stemming directly from the *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*: '(...) a new art without a capital A (...) a manifestation that goes beyond painting and sculpture, to contain a synthesis of film (...) rhythm, material, air, and space'—and translated into landscape design projects that were almost architectural models of surreal environments, and extended the principles of polymaterial creation into three dimensions.⁸⁹ Moreover, Munari was also responsible for the design of the program flyer and, when the show moved on to Reggio Emilia that April, he printed up a typographic poster—almost the sole instance of such work in his entire career.⁹⁰

As we have seen, the two years between 1933 and 1934 were a particularly intense period for both Munari and the Milanese Futurist group in general. Group members showed work in numerous exhibitions both in Italy and abroad, including the Venice Biennale and Rome Quadriennale, with the former being a key event on the international level and the latter being most relevant on the national level. Throughout the twenties, after an exhausting campaign to combat the prejudices of both critics and organisers of the Venice Biennale, Marinetti finally managed to secure the Futurists' participation, and from 1926 each biennial featured a section of Futurist painting.⁹¹ As for Munari, he continually exhibited with the National and Lombard groups between 1930 and 1936, though his presence was still fairly minor.⁹² At the Venice Biennale—which, despite the international scope and the leadership of

Giuseppe Volpi and Antonio Maraini, remained bound to an academic conception of art—the Futurists' participation was clearly limited to painting and sculpture, and the work Munari exhibited there was no exception.⁹³ A significant number of Futurists took part in the XVII Biennale (1930), mounting a show in the recently renovated Palazzo delle Esposizioni; in 1932, next door to Depero's solo show, a group show focussing on aeropainting (curated by Fillia) was installed in the Italian Pavilion, and it was an important theme again at the following Biennale in 1934. And despite Maraini's hostilities and the ample prejudices of the critics, the Futurist sections were always a great success with the public. At the XX Biennale in 1936 (the last one Munari took part in) the Futurists were assigned the Russian Pavilion, which

1992: 61–2, 209; Crispolti 1992: 79–80).

89. Quoted in Crispolti 1992: 79. In addition to Balla and Depero's 1915 manifesto, the new document 'relates to theses already posited by Boccioni in 1911 on the need to go beyond painting and sculpture, with means capable of synthesising movement and rhythm, space and matter' (Ravaioli 1998: 28n88).

90. A review of the two exhibitions in Milan and in Reggio ('I futuristi venticinquenni a Milano e a Reggio') appears in *Sant'Elia* (III; 67, 15 May 1934: 6). Note that Munari is mentioned alongside Carlo Manzoni as a 'poet'—which would indicate that he participated with Depero, Farfa, and Masnata in their *parolibere* readings and events.

91. For the relationship between the Venice Biennial and the Futurists, see Migliore, Buscaroli 2009 (esp. pp. 36–66 regarding the period between WWI and WWII). In 1926, the Futurists were admitted to the fifteenth edition and exhibited in the Soviet Pavilion, courtesy of Moscow after the Soviets decided not to participate, thereby granting Marinetti ample exhibition space. For all

Biennale events through 1942 Marinetti—who felt he need not be subject to the interferences of the Biennale's Directorship—acted as authorising commissioner, delegating exhibition curation to Prampolini; the Futurist artists were, nevertheless, prohibited from exhibiting individually there (ibid.: 36, 40).

92. As reported by the catalogue of artists and works published by the Biennale (*La Biennale di Venezia. Le esposizioni internazionali d'Arte 1895–1995. Artisti, mostre, partecipazioni nazionali, premi*. Venice: Biennale di Venezia/Milan: Electa, 1996), Munari exhibited one painting at each Biennale.

93. Despite the fact that Volpi and Maraini's co-management marked an important opening toward theatre, music, and film (Venice's International Film Festival, launched in 1932, was the first event of its kind in the world, and its extraordinary success led to its annual occurrence), the repertoire of visual arts present at the Biennale would not branch out to photography and architecture until the 1970s (Scalise 2009: 124; Di Martino 1995: 67).

had been renamed the Italian Futurist Pavilion (as had already happened at the V Triennale, with their project for a civil airport); the exhibition, which included a lot of Milanese artists, notably included 'plastic complexes' in addition to the usual paintings and sculptures.⁹⁴

Similar developments took place at the other major Italian art event throughout the 1930s, the Rome Quadriennale, which, much like the Venice Biennale, favoured painting and sculpture. Because these two events largely refused any multidisciplinary work, and were entirely closed to the applied arts, the Milan Triennale stepped forward to feature those fields, along with the nascent field of serially produced design objects. The exhibitions in Rome repeatedly featured the work of the Milanese Futurists; Munari in particular showed there, and though the work he sent was limited to painting and sculpture, he nevertheless took part in their group shows there from the very first year, 1931, through the following quadrennials in 1935 and 1939.⁹⁵ The latter was particularly important, on both artistic and political levels, for the simultaneous presence of the Milanese Futurists (including Munari) and the Lombard abstractionists who showed with the Galleria del Milione (Radice, Rho, Soldati, Licini). The Lombard abstractionists had come together within the broader context of other Italian avant-garde groups' reactions to a campaign launched by the more intransigent wing of the Fascist right against 'degenerate art,' begun in 1938. The two groups again formed a mutual front at the XXII Venice Biennale in 1940 (in

which Munari, however, did not exhibit), with an increase in the abstractionists' participation.⁹⁶

Exhibition installations

It should be noted that, during the 1930s, Fascist political culture in the artistic realm strengthened extant institutions like the Venice Biennale⁹⁷ and Milan Triennale,⁹⁸ and fostered the creation of new events like the Rome Quadriennale.⁹⁹ The newly founded institutions fell under the regime's direct oversight, and were also

94. For details on each individual's participation, see Migliore, Buscaroli 2009: 19, 47, 53–8, 60–2.

95. As with the Venice Biennale, Marinetti again managed, thanks to his personal connections to Mussolini, not only to obtain a space for the Futurists—who were well represented until the V Quadriennale, in 1943—but also to maintain full responsibility of the selection of artists, which de facto resulted in a group presence that went slightly counter to the main selection criteria, which focussed more on the work rather than the individual artist (*ibid.*: 12–3).

96. Crispolti 1992: 85–6; Bassi 1992: 63; Salaris 2004: 45–51.

97. By becoming an autonomous entity in 1930 (the institution was originally controlled by the city council) the Venice Biennale came under the direct control of the Fascist government; it was overseen by the industrialist Giuseppe Volpi and sculptor Antonio Maraini, the National Commissioner of the National Fascist Fine Arts Union (Fagone 1982: 48; cf. Migliore 2009: 36–66). For a general history of the Biennale, see Di Martino 1995.

98. Even the Monza Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, founded in 1922, gradually fell under the increasing oversight of the regime (beginning in 1925) with the government's growing influence. All this culminated in

1929 with the Monza exhibition declared an autonomous institution, moved to Milan, and switched from a Biennial to a Triennial, as well as its inclusion in the *Bureau International des Expositions*. However, 'the Triennale managed to elude, to a certain degree, the autarchic measures inflicted on the Venice Biennale and the Rome Quadriennale' (Pansera 1978: 36). This was due in part to its more international scope, as well as directors like Guido Marangoni (founder and publisher of *La Casa bella* in 1928) and Gio Ponti (founder and publisher of *Domus*). For a general history of the Triennale during the twenty years of Fascist rule see Pansera 1978: 34–59.

99. The Rome Quadriennale was founded in 1927 with the specific goal of 'centralising the most representative Italian art into a single large display connecting provincial and regional exhibitions—organised by art unions—to the international realm of the Venice Biennale.' Entrusted to the directorship of Cipriano Efisio Oppo, a painter and Fascist deputy, the Quadriennale used the typical tool of forming artistic consensus through a complex system of incentives offered in the form of prizes, access to occasional chances to exhibit work, and an intense acquisition programme (<http://www.quadriennaleidiroma.org>, last accessed 8 March 2010; cf. also Fagone 1982: 47–9).

shaped by the more capillary, bottom-up operation of exhibitions organised by the Fascist National Fine Arts' Syndicate. The 1930s were also punctuated by major celebratory exhibitions 'that helped introduce the broader public to the work of artists within the political terms and functional content of the regime's "culture of propaganda".'¹⁰⁰ Worth remembering because of the Futurists' substantial contribution are the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, which opened in Rome in 1932 and remained continuously on view through 1934; the *Mostra dell'Aeronautica*, an Air Show held in Milan in 1934; the *Mostre nazionali di Plastica murale*, national exhibitions of mural decoration held in Genoa and Rome in 1934 and 1936; the *Mostra di Aeropittura Futurista*, an exhibition of aeropainting held at the Aeronautical Ministry in Rome in 1937; the *Mostra del Minerale* again in Rome in 1938; and countless other autarchic and colonial exhibitions throughout Italy.

In the early summer of 1934 the Milanese Futurist group once again set up shop at the Palazzo dell'Arte (new home of the Triennale) to install the *Esposizione Aeronautica Italiana*, a national air show to which they lent the best architects and graphic designers of the time, led by Edoardo Persico and Giuseppe Pagano (respectively, editor and director of the architecture magazine *Casabella*). Munari wrote Tullio d'Albisola at the beginning of that summer: 'My room for the air show is coming along very well, [P]agano says it's magnificent! If he says so...!'¹⁰¹ This was as he was working on the mural decoration for the Sala d'Icaro (Icarus Room) designed

by Pagano—which was, along with the Sala delle medaglie d'oro (Gold-medal Room) designed by Nizzoli and Persico, one of the event's most important installations—wherein he created a large, abstract fresco on the wall surrounding the large steel spiral symbolising the conquest of the air.¹⁰²

December brought additional proof of Munari's keen interest in wall-based work within larger architectural projects (especially monumental public buildings)—an interest that was not limited to the Futurists, but rather shared by artists of opposing groups—when he participated in the *Prima Mostra Nazionale di plastica murale per l'edilizia fascista* (First National Exhibition of mural art for fascist building projects) organised by Prampolini and Fillia at Palazzo Ducale in Genoa, for which he was also a signatory of the manifesto *La Plastica murale* (Manifesto of Mural Art).¹⁰³ Although the Futurist programme did not overtly nod to the ideological aspects of the relationship between art and politics, it nevertheless appeared to be a response to the poetics announced a few months before by the artist Mario Sironi. A key figure of the Novecento movement, Sironi postulated a social function

100. Fagone 1982: 43, 47–8.

101. Letter Munari to d'Albisola, n.d. [June] 1934 (in Presotto 1981: 151).

102. See the extensive review in *Casabella* vi; 80 (August 1934): 4–21. 'Bruno Munari's painting recalls Leonardo's earliest devices, his studies of bird flight, the first, heaviest cells, their gradual improvements, aerodynamic formulas, motors, and increasingly perfect outlines. These abstract images culminate in the great figure of Icarus, sculpted by Marcello Mascherini' (ibid.: 14–16). Crispolti (1992: 82n30) mentions Furlan, Asinari, Scaini, and Rossi (who nevertheless are not mentioned in the meticulous exhibition summary in *Casabella*, ibid.: 10–21), while Gambini appears as a collaborator

with the architects Banfi Belgioioso Peressutti Rogers on the Sala dell'Alta Velocità (Hall of High-Speed), and Manzoni worked with the architect Guido Frette on the Sala D'Annunzio (D'Annunzian Hall). See also Pansera 1978: 45–7.

103. This manifesto appeared for the first time in *Stile futurista* (1; 5, December 1934) and was signed by Andreoni, Ambrosi, Benedetta, Depero, Dottori, Marinetti, Munari, Oriani, Prampolini, and Rosso. In 1936 Asinari, Regina, and Ricas added their signatures to the version reprinted in the exhibition catalogue for the show *Seconda Mostra Nazionale di plastica murale per l'edilizia fascista in Italia e in Africa Orientale* held in Rome's Trajan Markets in 1936 (Crispolti 1992: 83).

for mural decoration—understood as a tool for educating the masses within the Fascist state,¹⁰⁴ as exemplified by the work he showed at the V Triennale. The Futurists naturally adopted this same type of intervention, not just on the pictorial level, but extending it to the polymaterial and photographic fields as well (following the example set by the Russian Constructivists, chiefly El Lissitzky).¹⁰⁵ In his opening speech for the exhibition at the Galleria delle Tre Arti, Depero had already addressed the issue, and expressed his hope that in the 1933 show the traditional genres and techniques (fresco, window, and mosaic designs) could be overcome; above all, he called for a broadening of the formal vocabulary through the use of various industrial materials¹⁰⁶—providing instructions that would appear again in the manifesto and be followed for the exhibition installations in Genoa. Nevertheless, despite their staunch dedication (which continued through the next event, organised in Rome in 1936 and focussed on wall sculpture, in which Munari, Ricas, and other Milanese artists took part), the Futurists still only occasionally found sufficient space and support for the interventions they dreamt of carrying out in public buildings and institutions. Because of this, their works were for the most part limited to temporary exhibitions¹⁰⁷—which was a substantial failure in terms of winning commissions from the regime—but also made them relatively successful in terms of fair installations, which many of the most advanced businesses in Milan commissioned them to create.

Throughout 1936, in addition to confirming the Futurists' major interest in wall sculpture,¹⁰⁸ their contribution to the IV Triennale also led to their inclusion in the Mostra internazionale della scenografia teatrale (International exhibition of theatre set design), with several Futurists represented in the Italian section: Munari created a set of masks, a stage set model, and a dance tool.¹⁰⁹ On the one hand, Munari's new work drew upon the set designs Marinetti had created in the early 1930s, while on the other, they foreshadowed the polymaterial compositions he exhibited as *Oggetti metafisici* (metaphysical objects) in his solo show at the Galleria del Milione in 1940 and, in the advertising realm, the window displays he designed for the GiViEmme company, also in the early 1940s. Furthermore, the versatility and solidity of his graphic design work led him to collaborate with several architects on the 1936 exhibition, hence his contribution was particularly complex and interesting, if not always first-rate: for the Colorificio Italiano Max Meyer, for example, Munari created demonstrative panels with paint samples in a section of the Mostra dei sistemi

104. *Manifesto della pittura murale* (Manifesto of Mural Painting, signed also by Campigli, Carrà, and Funi), published in *La Colonna*, December 1933, quoted in Pansera 1978: 43–4. See also Fagone 1982: 46–7.

105. Fagone 1982: 46–7. Sironi's presence at the Pressa Expo in Cologne in 1928 is especially relevant for his direct knowledge of the Soviet Pavilion designed by Lissitzky.

106. Unpublished manuscript, in Mart, Archivio del '900, Rovereto; quoted in Bassi 1992: 62.

107. Fochessati, Millefiore 1997: 43–51; esp. 49–51, wherein the authors examine the Futurist manifesto in light of the relationship between Marinetti and the architect Angiolo Mazzoni (head of the building department in the Ministry

of Communications, and designer of many public buildings built in Italy in those years, especially post offices and railway stations, including Rome's Stazione Termini), thanks to whom the Futurists were able to mount major exhibitions in Trento, La Spezia, and Palermo.

108. Chiefly with Prampolini's design for the *sala di rappresentanza del Palazzo Comunale di Aprilia*—a design that was ultimately realised, with decorations done in collaboration with other Futurists (but not Munari). Cf. Fochessati, Millefiore 1997: 49–51, 49n23, 50n24.

109. Of the Milanese group, in addition to Munari, Andreoni, Regina, and Ricas also exhibited; while Prampolini curated the international section (Bassi 1992: 210).

costruttivi e materiali edilizi (Exhibition of building systems and materials); for the Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana he made a photomontage mounted on a full-height stage curtain; in the Sezione internazionale di Urbanistica (International Urban Design section) he designed a large abstract glass-paste mosaic. That section was curated by Piero Bottoni, and included a particularly interesting large-scale photographic diorama, also created by Munari, made up of six thematic photomontages addressing various aspects of urban planning, later published in Bottoni's 1938 book *Urbanistica*.¹¹⁰ Finally, it is worth noting that this was also when Munari first met Max Bill, who was briefly in Milan to install the Swiss Pavilion; Bill's concrete visual work had a lot in common with the work Munari was doing at the time.¹¹¹

Munari and the Milanese avant-garde
The Milanese Futurists began exhibiting again in February 1938, in a group show titled *Gli Aeropittori futuristi* (Futurist Aeropainters) at the Galleria del Milione. On the one hand, this was an important moment of exchange with the abstractionists; on the other, it was also the last show to include all the group members who had been working in Milan since the late twenties.¹¹² The Galleria del Milione, located in via Brera just across from the academy of fine arts, was run by the Ghiringhelli brothers, and followed a model (common in France but fairly novel in Italy) that combined a bookshop and annexed exhibition space. Pietro Lingeri's interior design

(one of the earliest examples of Rationalist architecture in Italy), as well as the artistic direction of Carlo Belli (who became Persico's successor there in 1931) and his abstractionist associates, meant that the Galleria del Milione quickly became one of the city's fundamental meeting places in the early thirties. It attracted the attention of Rationalist architects, abstractionists, and modern typographers (championed by the group that founded the magazine *Campo grafico*), all of whom had a deep affinity for each others' work. A rich programme of activities made it more of a cultural centre than just a straightforward art gallery: the bookshop, which offered visitors countless magazines and publications from all over Europe, became a rare window onto foreign avant-gardes; the exhibition spaces featured an average of two exhibitions each month, focussed on drawing, graphic design, set design, architecture, and books, and also hosted conferences (accompanied by a monthly bulletin that included reproductions of visual works and critical texts).¹¹³ The gallery and its activities, while not committed to any one trend in particular—according to Munari, one of the gallery's most devoted regulars, Gino Ghiringhelli was 'in search of a vein of work that would sell well'¹¹⁴—nevertheless managed to counter the prevailing provincial cultural climate of the day by mounting a series of exhibitions, events, publications, and conferences. This continued through the mid-1930s, and brought European artists like Friedrich Vordembergheildewart, Josef Albers, Willi Baumeister, Wassily Kandinsky, and Max Ernst to Milan.¹¹⁵

110. For all the information regarding Munari, see *Guida della Sesta Triennale* [Milano: n.p.], 1936: 42, 51, 69, 115.

111. Pontiggia (1988: 49–50) notes, for example, an affinity between some of Munari's (non-suspended) *useless machines* and certain sculptures by Bill, such as a 1934 piece (reproduced

in *Abstraction-Création. Art non-figuratif* no. 4, 1935).

112. Crispolti 1992: 83; Bassi 1992: 64–5.

113. Pontiggia 1988: 11–3.

114. Munari, quoted in an unpublished interview transcript by Alberto Bassi, 1990.

115. Belli 1980: 11. Cf. Pontiggia 1988: 11, 104–5.

The 'Milione' was an irreplaceable centre (...) for clear, courageous ideas. The members of that group—architects, painters, sculptors, literary critics, poets, and philologists—created a cultural period that was just as felicitous as its surrounding climate was close-minded. The 'Milione' was, for a few brief years, the only little bit of Italy that remained part of Europe.¹¹⁶

By the latter half of the 1930s the Milanese Futurists had opened themselves up to collaborations with other avant-garde groups from Lombardy. In particular they worked with the Como abstractionists, associated with proponents of Rationalist architecture including Terragni and Lingeri, on exhibitions and publications. One of their joint exhibitions was *Dopo il Novecento* (After the Novecento), organised in 1938 by art critic Raffaello Giolli and the philosopher Franco Ciliberti (who also ran his own gallery) and held at the Galleria Dedalo. One of their joint publication projects was a magazine titled *Valori Primordiali* (Primordial Values, founded in 1938 by Ciliberti, along with Rho, Radice, and Terragni), around which the Primordial Futurist Group solidified in 1941, and also included Munari.¹¹⁷ In any case, Munari's presence in the abstractionist circles that frequented places like the Galleria del Milione and Bar Craja, as well as his ties to Giolli and Ciliberti (in whose gallery he had a solo show in 1944),¹¹⁸ clearly indicate that Munari was effectively an intermediary between the various groups of the Milanese avant-garde. Nevertheless, while it cannot be denied he was inching ever closer to abstraction—through his useless machines and his pictorial exploration of perceptive

processes—it is significant that his work was not exhibited at the Venice Biennials or Rome Quadrennials during World War II, in which a near total acceptance and assimilation of Futurism and abstraction could be seen. In fact, such distancing betrays his deliberate autonomy with respect to the currents he was occasionally associated with: however, he nevertheless maintained a 'vibrantly dialectic rapport' with the abstractionism of the Galleria del Milione, refusing both its rigid geometries and its 'mystical' ideologies, as represented in Belli's theoretical text *Kn*. Meneguzzo quite aptly compares Munari's situation to that of an 'electron floating about amid the various nuclei (...) of the artistic currents of those years.'¹¹⁹

As the Fascists' anti-Semitic politics grew increasingly heavy throughout 1938, culminating in the passage of the racial laws, the extreme right—following the model of the purges carried out in Germany, as typified by the travelling exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) of 1937—enacted a violent campaign to denigrate modern art, which it accused of being 'Bolshevist' and in which the Futurists and Rationalists were directly implicated.¹²⁰ The attacks launched from the pages of the regime's most unscrupulous dailies and weeklies—including *Quadrivio* and *Il Tevere*,

116. Carlo Belli, *Lettera sulla nascita dell'astrattismo in Italia* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1978): 14, quoted in Ponente 1980: 10.

117. Munari added his signature to the second version of the *Manifesto del Gruppo Primordiali Futuristi Sant'Elia* (June 1941), which was signed among others by Marinetti, Ciliberti, Rho, Badiali, Licini, Nizzoli, Prampolini, Radice, Sartoris, and Terragni. In December 1941 the group held a collective exhibition at Ettore Mascioni's gallery in Milan (Godoli 2001: 269–70, 568).

118. Bassi 1992: 63.

119. Anzani 1995: 27; cf. Meneguzzo 1993: 29. Belli's

essay *Kn* was published in 1935 by the Edizioni del Milione, and was heralded by Kandinsky as the 'gospel' of abstractionism.

120. In 1937 the Fascist approval of the Nazi uprising in Munich appeared in many regime newspapers, including *Il Popolo d'Italia*. In 1938 the regime's more racist turn became clear: first through two official declarations, the *Manifesto del Razzismo italiano* (Manifesto of Italian Racism, 14 July) and the *Carta della Razza* (Race Charter, 6–7 October); followed in November by the notorious racial laws (Crispolti 1986: 221–2).

directed by Telesio Interlandi, and *Il Regime Fascista*, directed by Roberto Farinacci—provoked a reaction from all the Italian avant-garde groups and a few prominent figures such as Oppo and Giuseppe Bottai. The clash came to a head by the autumn of 1938, culminating in an event announced by Marinetti and Somenzi at the Teatro delle Arti in Rome on 3 December 1938, accompanied by a rather controversial issue of *Artecrazia* (the Futurist paper directed by Somenzi).¹²¹ Although it is not entirely clear how the dispute ended, Marinetti deserves a certain degree of recognition since—beyond his collusion with the regime and his ascription to the idea of a revolutionary, utopian Fascism—he nevertheless managed to wage a cultural war in defence of modern art and personally showed up to lead a cross-party, united front.¹²²

Beyond the political motives of any overlap with the abstractionists, the fact that the Futurists exhibited at the Galleria del Milione indicates the fact the scene was changing, and their cultural and artistic referents were evolving as well.¹²³ Indeed, toward the end of the thirties the activities of the Futurists seem to have been divided between figurative, documentary aeropainting (represented by the work of Andreoni and Crali) and the more imaginative, highly experimental vein of research carried out by Prampolini and Fillia, whose forerunners lay in surrealism and abstraction.¹²⁴ Munari's painting also belonged to this trend, as confirmed by the non-partisan critic and painter Carlo Carrà: 'Munari works within surrealistic criteria, and tends to create magical, abstract

atmospheres in his works (...)'.¹²⁵ Such a definition could be equally applied to Munari's graphic design work of the same period. At the dawn of the 1940s, however, with Italy's entry into World War II the activities of all artistic groups in Milan were abruptly interrupted. By then the line of research pursued by Munari no longer coincided with that of the Futurists: instead he lied 'outside any clearly defined field of pure art, only to delve completely into the realm of perception and gain a deeper understanding of new visual codes (...)'.¹²⁶ These aspects decidedly associate him more with design than with the traditional field of the fine arts. In short, Munari 'was by then alone with his playfully winking, impenitent experimentalism'¹²⁷—as his 1940 solo show of *Oggetti metafisici* (Metaphysical Objects) at the Galleria del Milione and the 1944 exhibition of *Dipinti astratti* (Abstract paintings) at the Galleria Ciliberti attested to. Indeed, in the mid-forties he

121. Mino Somenzi, 'Italianità dell'arte moderna' (The Italianness of modern art) in *Artecrazia* no.117, 3 December 1938, followed in January by another controversial stance (no.118, 11 January 1939) that led to the magazine's suppression (Crispolti 1986: 222–3).

122. Salaris 2004: 45–50. This concurs with the opinion expressed by historian Renzo De Felice in *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962): 358, quoted in Salaris 2004: 63. Cf. also Crispolti 1986: 224.

123. In 1940 at the XVI Venice Biennale Marinetti invited the Como abstract painters Mauro Reggiani and Manlio Rho to exhibit alongside the Futurist aeropainters; their presence was even stronger at the following Biennale, in 1942 (Migliore, Buscaroli 2009: 62–63). At the IV Rome Quadriennale in 1943, the Lombard Futurists were represented by the group of Lombard abstractionists, who were by then acknowledged as Futurists (Crispolti 1992: 85).

124. Crispolti 1992: 83. Marinetti, in his introduction to the exhibition at the Galleria del Milione, identified Munari as one of the artists conducting research in 'stratospheric cosmic biochemical aeropainting' alongside Prampolini ('L'aeropittura futurista inizia una nuova era della plastica', in *Artecrazia* vi; 112, 11 February 1938, quoted in Bassi 1992: 64).

125. Carlo Carrà, 'Cronaca delle mostre. Pittura programmatica al Milione' in *L'Ambrosiano* n.d., 1938; quoted in Bassi 1992: 64.

126. Baroni, Vitta 2003: 194–5. Crispolti similarly concludes that there appear to be no points of contact between the group led by Munari until recently—with essentially allusive, analogous works reminiscent of surrealism and metaphysics—and the group of concrete artists from Como, whose work originated in post-cubist art and aimed in a strictly non-figurative direction (1992: 86).

127. Crispolti 1992: 86.

began to declare, 'I want to go see what lies beyond abstract art, you mustn't believe that these experiences can be surpassed by turning back,'¹²⁸ thereby staking his claim and paving the way for his visual work in the post-war years.

After more than a decade of intense activity, during the war years Munari allowed himself to take a break—in a way distancing himself from his previous advertising and graphic design work, which had culminated in a solo exhibition at the VI Triennale in 1940—and thereafter dedicated his energies to working with the Mondadori publishing house as art director for their new illustrated weeklies *Grazia* and *Tempo*.¹²⁹

128. Quoted by Antonio Marasco in the article 'Galleria. Bruno Munari' in *Origini* vii; 7–8 (May/June 1943): 6–7.

129. Although in the 1940s Munari appeared to distance himself from Futurism, he nonetheless kept personal ties and friendships with many of

his former mates, as proved by his participation in the historic reunion of February 1950 held at Marinetti's house (see the article 'Documenteranno il Futurismo', newspaper clipping [without author or date] in Mart, Archivio del '900, fondo Crali, Cra_03_342; see also Bassi 1992: 66.