

a bland, portly man, with a jowled, Roman-nosed face, and he had a retinue of three other men, only slightly less jowled and portly, and there was something vaguely political about him: was he the mayor, the podestà himself, or a delegate from that office?

I don't know, but like all true dignitaries everywhere—at championship prize fights, at first nights, at opening-of-the-season ball games—he had known the precise moment for arriving: or was the time accommodated to his convenience? At any rate, the *gimkana* started at once.

It turned out to be an anticlimax. The contestants all had to wear crash helmets, and they had a Le Mans start (toe a mark, and then, at the signal, run over to the scooter, get the engine going, and be off). But the course stressed control so much that all efforts at speed had to be abandoned. The curves were so tight and the obstacles so numerous that the contestants' pace was reduced to a crawl; and though this probably was a fine object lesson to the youths of Arezzo—in whom I'd already detected a more than usual tendency toward loud exhausts and hot-rodding generally—it hardly made for a spirited showing.

The contest, I recall, was won by a red-covered Vespa Club man from Florence who had only one arm. He alone socked his dart into the bull's-eye of the target; he alone made the circuit without knocking over a single pop bottle, and teetered up and teetered down the plank without mishap. He alone was able to make much speed on the straightaway, and he was well applauded at the finish.

But the crowd had already begun drifting away by then, children, soldiers, lovers, families fragmenting off on their separate errands. The race was over and we were halfway down the hill into the town before an idea that had been lying tantalizingly in the nether regions of my mind came bubbling to the surface, and I realized suddenly where it was that we had been. Unquestionably, we had been in the ancient tilting yard of the castle, and the races we'd seen—and it gave them a certain fortuitous dignity—had been in a sense modern replicas of the knightly jousting that had gone on there, centuries before.

The Future That Came to Pass

HILTON KRAMER

ART MOVEMENTS, even the most radical and extreme, have a way of becoming respectable. Cubism astonishes us at first with its multiple surfaces and its changing views of an object, and then, within the span of a single lifetime, whole cities begin to embody its visual prophecies as a matter of course. Surrealism turns up some comic and wicked inventions that seem disruptive and revolutionary at our first encounter, but within a generation its devices stare back at us from a thousand book jackets and record covers. Such has been the fate of nearly all the radical styles that avant-garde movements have contributed to modern culture. Dadaist decorations fill the windows of department stores; neoplastic designs govern the look of our new banks and insurance companies. Visual ideas that were originally intended to challenge the status quo are neatly converted to practical and conservative functions.

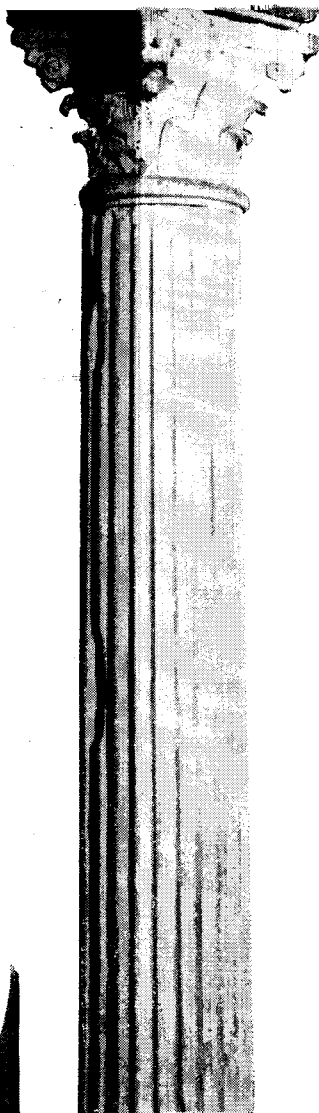
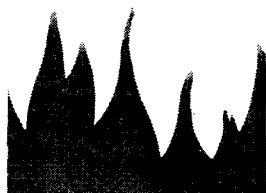
Futurism had a somewhat different fate, however. It was, first of all, never exclusively an aesthetic movement. From the moment that the Italian poet Marinetti invoked the "good incendiaries" in his *Initial Manifesto of Futurism* of 1909, and invited them to "Set fire to the shelves of the libraries!," its commitment to social violence was clear and uncompromising. In announcing, moreover, in this same manifesto, that "a roaring motorcar . . . is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace," Marinetti raised the question of whether the conventional modes of painting and sculpture could ever really become the proper expressive vehicles for an aesthetic philosophy that clearly implied their obsolescence in the new world of speed and mechanics. Futurism seemed doomed from the beginning to search for an artistic fulfillment that its own doctrines announced as outmoded.

Between 1909 and 1912 Marinetti was joined by the painters Boccioni,

Carrà, Russolo, Balla, and Severini in issuing fiery manifestoes and staging public demonstrations and exhibitions to back up their demands for an art that would enlist itself in the service of the new technology and turn its back forever on classical culture. Polemics, theatrical performances, and exhibitions of various kinds were carried on in the major Italian cities as well as in Paris, London, and Berlin. By a canny deployment of publicity devices, and never hesitating to employ physical violence where it would advance their cause, the Futurists managed for a few years to insinuate themselves into the main stream of artistic affairs in Western Europe. Guillaume Apollinaire wrote them up in the *Mercure de France* in 1911, and the next year Herwarth Walden published their manifesto in *Der Sturm*. In the lively period preceding the First World War, Futurism became, for a time, the name adopted by vanguard movements in other countries to indicate their dissatisfaction with inherited values.

THE DISCREPANCY that always existed between Futurist theory and its actual artistic practice could, for understandable reasons, be overlooked in the midst of the noise and bombast that surrounded the movement in its early years. While never inventive or original in conception, Futurist painting was sufficiently up-to-date in its plastic devices to pass for truly modernist work when it made its debut. Heavily supported by a barrage of rhetoric that sounded revolutionary themes, the paintings themselves could seem revolutionary to their first viewers.

As one looks back on the movement today, however, it is precisely the contrast between its revolutionary claims and its rather mundane, second-rate accomplishments that is most striking. After fifty years, the Futurists have the look of Italian provincials caught in an unreward-



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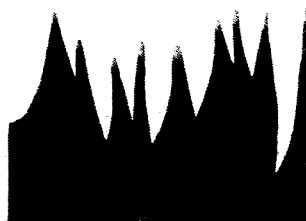
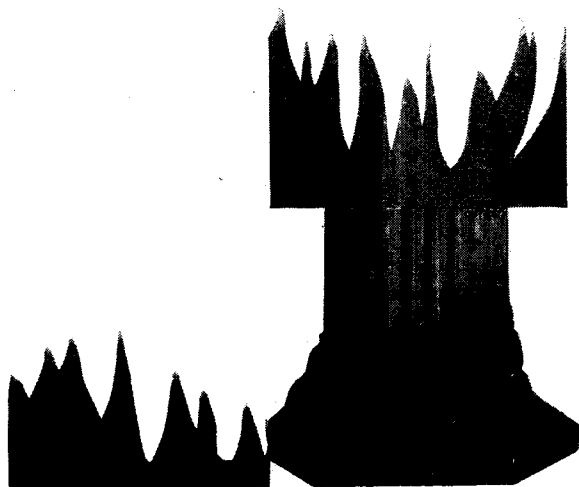
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ing confusion of turn-of-the-century aesthetics and local political frustrations. The large exhibition of "Futurism," organized by Dr. Peter Selz at the Museum of Modern Art over the summer and being shown this fall and winter at the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Los Angeles County Museum, was intended to mark the movement's fiftieth anniversary and perhaps to underscore some connection with current artistic interests, but for this observer it has only served to diminish the idea that the movement had something crucially relevant to say about modern experience.

Consisting of 103 works—paintings, sculpture, graphic art, and architectural drawings—by eleven artists, the exhibition displays a congeries of meager talents and mediocre minds straining to realize conceptions of art and life of which they have a very imperfect understanding. The chief value and interest of the show lie in the earlier and more conventional works being shown, those which give us a highly emotional glimpse of urban Italian life at the turn of the century.

None of them are great works, but they have a value as social and psychological reportage. Balla's "Work" and "Bankrupt" (both 1902) and "The Stairway of Farewells" (1908), Boccioni's early portraits and self-portraits, his "Mourning" (1910), and the early drawings of his mother and his artist friends—these convey the Italian *mise en scène* very effectively. (In addition to the main exhibition organized by Dr. Selz, the museum showed 137 items from the Winston Collection of Boccioni drawings and etchings.) The work of Severini, on the other hand, is interesting chiefly for the light it sheds on the predicament of an Italian artist who went to Paris early (in 1906, when he was twenty-three), immersed himself in the delights of French painting and Parisian Bohemia, and then faced—without ever successfully resolving—the problem of squaring such congenial allegiances with the necessities of Futurist doctrine.

Once we have paid our respects to Balla, Boccioni, and Severini, there is very little in the Futurist exhibition that rewards serious study. Gide said of Marinetti that he enjoyed "a

lack of talent that permits him to indulge in every form of audacity," and the majority of Futurist painters, though similarly afflicted, were even lacking the gift for audacity. The architect Sant'Elia, who died before any of his projects could be realized, is an interesting minor figure—there is an account of him in Reyner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, which places him in a more meaningful context than the current exhibition makes any attempt at—but beyond this there are only the odds and ends of styles and techniques gone stale after fifty years.

MOREOVER, even in the work of Balla and Boccioni there is an abrupt change from the personal quality of their early work, with its commitment to observation and representation, to the later work in which the dynamics of a Futurist style are desperately attempted in a mixed-up foray into abstraction. This style consists, for the most part, of neo-Impressionist methods out of Seurat and Signac, Cubist techniques from Braque and Picasso, and various mannerisms from the Fauvist and Expressionist painters then active in Paris and Berlin. Excepting a certain tendency to keep its forms in motion—but more often in the manner of a juggler keeping balls going in the air than of anything as dynamic as a speeding automobile—there is almost nothing in the actual paintings that can be identified as specifically Futurist. Professor Joshua C. Taylor, in his painstaking monograph for the exhibition (*Futurism*, distributed by Doubleday, \$6.50), admits that "To search for a 'Futurist Style' in the work of the original Futurist painters is a fruitless activity." He concludes that "Futurism was not a style but an impulse..."

In trying to grasp the exact nature of the Futurist impulse, one can be easily led astray by the Futurists themselves. Since their theory is more interesting than their art, there is a tendency to take them at their word. The truth is, they often said one thing and did another. Boccioni, in his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture* of 1912, invited artists to "Destroy the wholly literary and traditional nobility of marble and of bronze. . . . Affirm that

"A POWERFUL PICTURE OF
THIS MAN'S AMBITION,
HEARTLESSNESS, VANITY,
AND IGNORANCE."*

Mussolini

By Laura Fermi

Pacifist, warmonger; socialist, monarchist; atheist and staunch supporter of the Church — on his devious road to power Mussolini confounded enemies and friends with chameleon reversals in role and point of view.

At last, as *Il Duce*, he stood at the gateway of a new Roman Empire. Then his reckless course delivered him into the hands of Hitler . . . and left him, finally, hanging by his heels in a Milan gas station.

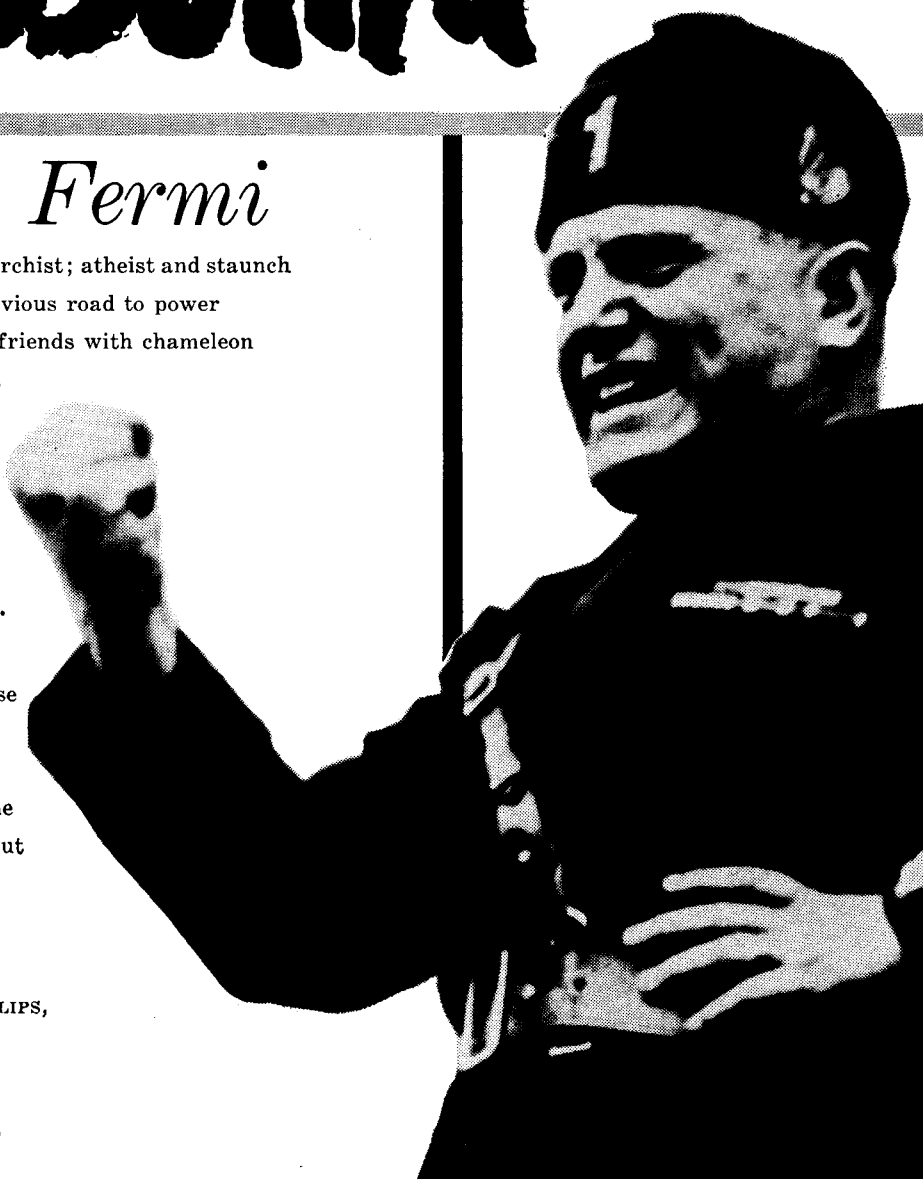
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even twenty different materials can compete in a single work to effect plastic emotion. Let us enumerate some: glass, wood, cardboard, iron, cement, horsehair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric lights, etc." But in the only Futurist work that looks as if it might survive as a noble expression of the period, Boccioni's own sculpture called "Unique Forms of Continuity in Space" (1913), the semi-abstract figure is rendered in classical proportions, the work is meticulously executed in shining bronze, and the whole conception could very well be entitled "Mercury" without distortion. It looks back to Rodin, to the Renaissance, perhaps even to the Victory of Samothrace, far more than it looks forward to racing motorcars.

WHERE the Futurist impulse defined itself unequivocally, where the gap between theory and practice was effectively closed, was in the political sphere. It was Croce who remarked (in 1924) that "For anyone who has a sense of historical connections, the ideological origins of Fascism can be found in Futurism, in the determination to go down into the streets, to impose their own opinions, to stop the mouths of those who disagree, not to fear riots or fights, in this eagerness to break with all traditions, in this exaltation of youth which was characteristic of Futurism. . . ." And in 1924 Croce hadn't yet seen the worst. When Marinetti threw in his lot with the Fascists and thus effectively cut himself off from aesthetic concerns altogether, he finally resolved the contradiction that had been implicit in his initial declaration.

It is a mistake to assume, as some critics have done, that Futurism represents a prophetic attitude toward the mechanistic civilization in which we live today. By the time the Futurists took up the problem fifty years ago, thoughtful men elsewhere were already grappling with the destructive effects of technology on human affairs. They saw what the provincialism and late industrialization of Italy prevented the Futurists from grasping: that the crucial problem was going to be the preservation of human freedom in the face of the machine, not in acting as cheerleaders to the inevitable.



RECORD NOTES

CHABRIER: SUITE PASTORALE, ETC. Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Paul Paray, cond. (Mercury MG 50212, mono; SR 90212, stereo.)

The best and last word on Chabrier was said by Constant Lambert, who called him "the first important composer since Mozart to show that seriousness is not the same as solemnity, that profundity is not dependent upon length, that wit is not always the same as buffoonery, and that frivolity and beauty are not necessarily enemies." Perhaps Lambert somewhat overstated the case when he went on to characterize Chabrier as "the most genuinely French of all composers, the only writer to give us in music the genial rich humanity, the inspired commonplace, the sunlit solidity of the French genius that finds its greatest expression in the paintings of Manet and Renoir" (the description, after all, could apply equally well to Bizet), but the essential truth is there. Alas, we take ourselves even more solemnly in 1961 than in 1934 (when Lambert's brilliant *Music Ho!* was published), and Chabrier is still dismissed as light and inconsequential by most of the conductors who currently preside over our major orchestras.

Not so Paul Paray. As this record makes abundantly clear, he is a devoted Chabrier man and accords this music the same perfectionist care and concentrated enthusiasm that others reserve for Beethoven and Berlioz. Nothing goes amiss in these performances—the tone is ravishing, the articulation snappy and crackling—and nothing of Chabrier's

"genial rich humanity" goes unnoticed. In addition to the piquant *Suite Pastorale*, the collection includes the overture to *Gwendoline*, the "Fête Polonaise" and "Danse Slave" from *Le Roi Malgré Lui*, and the familiar *España*.

To make matters perfect, Mercury's engineers have at last found a recording studio in Detroit—the Cass Technical High School auditorium—that does justice to Paray's excellent orchestra. The hard, fatiguing sound that has marred so many Detroit Symphony recordings in the past is now supplanted by far more lively and ingratiating acoustics. (The widely spread-out stereo version, incidentally, makes the most of the composer's bright instrumentation.) All we need now is more Chabrier—in particular, his enchanting *Ode à la Musique*—from the same source.

BRAHMS: SYMPHONY No. 2. Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, William Steinberg, cond. (Command Classics CC 11002SD; stereo.)

After two years of dominating the stereo best-seller lists with a succession of ingeniously scored percussive "pop" albums, Command Records is now branching out into the classics. The label's reputation has been built on ultra-clean sound and the tasteful exploitation of musical ping-pong effects. Fortunately, Enoch Light, Command's commander in chief and a onetime classmate of Herbert von Karajan at the Salzburg Mozarteum does not play ping-pong with Brahms. He has, however, striven for the same crisp clarity in reproducing