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# INTERNATIONAL YEARBOOK OF FUTURISM STUDIES

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**International Yearbook of Futurism Studies**

# International Yearbook of Futurism Studies



Edited by  
Günter Berghaus

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# International Yearbook of Futurism Studies

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Giuseppe Virelli

# From Bologna to the World: The International Futurism of Athos Casarini

**Abstract:** Athos Casarini (1883–1917) played an important rôle in the cultural life of his day, yet has been all but forgotten as a consequence of his untimely death during the First World War. Born in Bologna, he grew up in a cultural and artistic environment that, while fiercely proud of its own traditions, also offered encounters with novel ideas from beyond the city walls. F.T. Marinetti’s founding manifesto of Futurism was originally published in the local *Gazzetta dell’Emilia* on 5 February 1909, and many texts by the movement’s key protagonists circulated in the city well before the Futurists made their first official visit to the Emilian capital in 1914 on the occasion of a performance of Marinetti’s *Elettricità* at the Teatro del Corso. Nevertheless, Casarini’s initial encounter with the men who would later become protagonists of the Futurist movement did not occur in Bologna, but in Milan, between 1908 and 1909, through the painter Ugo Valeri. Moreover, his adherence to the movement took place on the other side of the Atlantic. Frustrated by the local culture he considered too provincial and traditionalist, and eager to engage with a more ‘advanced’ and modern society, Casarini moved to New York in the spring of 1909 and it was in the great American metropolis that he became not only the first Bolognese artist to convert to Futurism, but also the first Futurist to live and work in the USA.

**Keywords:** Futurism in Bologna, Marinetti’s *Elettricità* at the Teatro del Corso (19 January 1914), Futurist ‘blitz-exhibition’ at the Hotel Baglioni (20–21 March 1914), Futurism in the USA, Futurism and Expressionism, Futurism and WWI

## Introduction

When Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *La fondazione e manifesto del futurismo* (The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism) appeared on the front page of the local *Gazzetta dell’Emilia* on 5 February 1909, under the heading “Cronache letterarie: Il ‘futurismo’”, some fifteen days before its ‘official’ publication in *Le Figaro*, the response from the city of Bologna was rather muted. Although willing to print its manifesto, the newspaper’s editor expressed doubts as to the new movement’s chances of success, and he introduced it with the following laconic comment:

It has been invented by Marinetti, the most ‘dynamic’ of Italian poets. The journal ‘Poesia’ sends us this fiery proclamation with which the new literary party is entering into battle. We shall see if its premises lead to ideas, books and concrete achievements. The manifesto bears the signature of Marinetti himself. We reproduce it here in its entirety ... for the record.<sup>1</sup>

Proud of its great medieval past and its local traditions, *in primis*, the Alma Mater Studiorum, recently recognized as the oldest university in the world, the Emilian capital was not exactly the natural habitat for Marinetti’s iconoclastic, anti-traditionalist and anti-academic followers. At the turn of the twentieth century, the city’s cultural climate was still dominated by an aesthetics epitomized by the great poet Giosuè Carducci, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1906, although there were also signs of a cautious Symbolist current informed by the poetry of Giovanni Pascoli and Gabriele d’Annunzio.<sup>2</sup> Within the fine arts, these moderately innovative trends can also be observed in the works of artists who were belatedly receptive to artistic currents coming from Northern Europe – above all, those associated with William Morris’s Arts and Crafts Movement and with the English Pre-Raphaelite group. This can be observed, above all, in Alfonso Rubbiani’s *Gilda* (Guild),<sup>3</sup> an association that generated a number of Symbolist and Art Nouveau innovations that underwent rapid development at the turn of the century.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, during the early 1900s, Bologna came to be associated with an elegant and aristocratic neo-medievalism, on the one hand, and with a fresh *stile floreale* close to Art Nouveau, on the other. This, however, allowed little room for further innovations of a more radical nature:

At that time, the figurative arts sought the virtues of their own ideal and formal renewal in simple primitive sources. Pre-Raphaelitism triumphed, as did ideal and formal Symbolism. At the turn of the century, Italy had a new style, too: a new style that, of course, grew older day by day, which is always fatal to anything youthful.<sup>5</sup>

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1 “Lo ha inventato Marinetti, il più ‘dinamico’ dei poeti italiani. La rivista ‘Poesia’ ci manda il proclama focosissimo con cui il nuovo partito letterario scende a combattere. Vedremo se alle premesse seguiranno le idee, i libri e i fatti. Il manifesto porta la firma dello stesso Marinetti. Lo riproduciamo per intero, a titolo ... di cronaca.” [Anon.]: “Cronache letterarie: Il ‘futurismo’.”

2 See Fasoli and Saccenti: *Carducci e Bologna*.

3 See Bernardini et al.: *Aemilia ars 1898–1903: Arts and Crafts a Bologna*.

4 See Solmi: *Il Liberty a Bologna e nell’Emilia Romagna: Architettura, arti applicate e grafica*; Marzocchi: *Il Liberty in Emilia*.

5 “A que’ tempi le arti figurative ricercavano nelle limpide fonti primitive le virtù del proprio rinnovamento ideale e formale. Trionfavano il preraffaellismo, il simbolismo ideale e formale. Anche in Italia, alle soglie del ‘900, avevamo uno stile nuovo: stile nuovo che, naturalmente,

Eventually, a small number of restless young artists began to protest against this cultural stagnation, expressing their frustration with the widely practiced models that had lost their original innovatory force. They launched an imperious call for revitalization that made the pillars of Bolognese society tremble. After a while, this desire for change was felt within the local academy and outside of it, especially amongst the younger generation born during the 1880s and 1890s. They leafed through magazines arriving from Northern Europe, such as *The Studio*, *Gil Blas*, *L'Assiette au beurre*, *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus*, as well as the illustrated catalogues of the Venice Biennales and of exhibitions at Ca' Pesaro in nearby Venice. In student haunts such as the Caffè dell'Arena, the Birreria Ranzoni and the Trattoria dello Studente, the *biassanot* ('nighthawks' in the local dialect) discussed novelties seen first-hand while visiting nearby Milan, or even Munich, Berlin and Paris. Like those who would go on to become protagonists of the Futurist movement, the most daring of these young artists emancipated themselves from Realism, Impressionism and Symbolism. Adopting a modern 'primitivism', they arrived at freer solutions grounded in the use of bright colours, formal distortions and broken lines. Externalizing their inner psychic state, they created a 'low' form of painting that showed a clear engagement with Fauvist and Expressionist principles.<sup>6</sup>

Among these 'new savages' either born or educated in Bologna were the protagonists of the first Futurist exhibition held in the city in March 1914, namely Giorgio Morandi, Osvaldo Licini, Mario Bacchelli, Giacomo Vespignani and Severino Pozzati, as well as other artists who are today almost forgotten, such as Mario Bazzi and Aldo Boni. Mention must also be made of Ugo Valeri, an artist from Padua who, despite being a good ten years older than these aspiring avant-gardists, would become an important point of reference for them. A tragic yet brilliant figure, embodying all the libertarian values associated with a non-conformist and rebellious bohemian artist, Valeri was a 'transitional' figure. His artworks – characterized by rapid, sketchy brushstrokes – exerted a crucial influence on many local painters, including Athos Casarini.

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invecchiava di giorno in giorno, come è fatale sempre a tutte le giovinezze." Da Bologna [Baruffi, Alfredo]: *I Giambardi della Sega: Un quarto di secolo a Palazzo Bentivoglio*, p. 111.

<sup>6</sup> For a consideration of Expressionism in Italy, see Barilli: *L'espressionismo italiano*; Borgogelli et al.: *Aspetti del primitivismo in Italia*.

## Futurism in Bologna before the Great War

It was against this multifaceted backdrop that Futurism began to penetrate into Bologna, albeit slowly and not without some misinterpretations. Although the city could not boast of an official Futurist group until after the First World War, echoes of the new avant-garde movement began to resonate in the Emilian capital relatively early, ‘electrifying’ the minds of intellectuals and artists open to innovative developments. However, the initial manifestations of ‘Futurist’ practice in Bologna diverged from orthodox Futurism, and the first isolated examples of Futurist imagery by local artists were, paradoxically, created beyond the city walls. In other words, during this pre-war awakening, Futurism was understood in Bologna as a temperament or impulse rather than as a school or an organized movement: “Sometimes, and certainly not in contradiction with Marinetti’s dictates, this constituted an existential choice; at other times it simply represented a way of comporting oneself.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to outline this para-Futurist phase, which emerged during the first, so-called ‘heroic’, phase of the movement, before discussing Casarini’s contributions to Futurism.

After Marinetti’s dramatic message appeared on the front page of the *Gazzetta dell’Emilia*, the Futurist movement was frequently discussed in the columns of the local newspapers and in more serious periodicals. Two such articles are particularly noteworthy, since their authors were quite receptive to the movement. The first appeared in the weekly *L’agitatore* (The Agitator) on 7 August 1910 and was written by the journalist and political activist Maria Rygier (1885–1953), an active member of the anarchist-syndicalist movement, who declared a certain empathy for the Futurist movement: “I have followed attentively, and not without a certain aesthetic sympathy, the various manifestations of the young Futurist movement. Marinetti himself is a sympathetic poet and a writer of robust, original, vibrant prose whose work can be read with pleasure, even if one does not agree at all with his thinking.”<sup>8</sup> The second appeared in the *Gaz-*

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7 “Talvolta, e ciò non certo in contraddizione con il dettato marinettiano, una scelta esistenziale, talaltra rappresentò anche solo un modo di presentarsi.” Ortenzi: “Sintesi storico-artistica di Bologna futurista”, p. 55.

8 “Io ho seguito, con attenzionie e non senza una certa simpatia estetica, le varie manifestazioni della giovane corrente futurista. Marinetti poi, individualmente, è un poeta simpatico ed uno scrittore di prosa robusta, originale, vibrante, che si legge volentieri, anche se non se ne condivide affatto il pensiero.” Rygier: “Futurismo politico.” The occasion of the article was Marinetti’s lecture on “Necessity and Beauty of Violence” at the Sala d’Arte Moderna in Milan on 30 June 1910, organized by the Circolo Giovanile Socialista Rivoluzionario. The article has been reprinted in Marinetti: *Necessità e bellezza della violenza: Discorso futurista*, pp. 153–155.

*zetta dell'Emilia*, on 7 April of the same year, and included perceptive comments regarding Futurism's artistic theories by the sculptor Vincenzo Gemito (1852–1929).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, some of the first Futurist books circulated in the city thanks to courageous booksellers such as Beltrami and Bongiovanni who, in addition to distributing works by Marinetti himself, published an enlarged edition of *Arte dell'avvenire* (Art of the Future, 1911) by the Corradini brothers, as well as Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra's *Il pastore il gregge e la zampogna: Divagazioni sul libro di Thovez* (The Shepherd, the Flock and the Bagpipe: Digressions on the Book by Thovez, 1912)<sup>10</sup> and *Musica futurista* (Futurist Music, 1912) by Balilla Pratella.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the avant-garde journal *Lacerba*, published in nearby Florence, proved to be very popular in Bologna and was read by individuals belonging to a broad range of social classes.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, its editors noted the city's interest in Futurist writings when they observed that “[Bologna's] newspapers – being less cowardly than those of Rome and Milan – have treated the movement with generosity and comprehension”.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the first concrete manifestation of Futurist activity in the city did not occur until the beginning of 1913 when, on 27 January, a small group of young artists inspired by Balilla Pratella's new musical theories disrupted a performance of Giacomo Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* at the now destroyed Teatro del Corso in a typical Futurist fashion by making as much noise as possible and by picking fights with bystanders.<sup>14</sup> A second, equally controversial episode took place on 19 January 1914, when Marinetti visited Bologna for a performance of his play *Elettricità* at the same theatre. That morning, the movement's founder went to the university and took over the classroom of Professor Alfredo Galletti, whom the associated with Carducci and Pascoli.<sup>15</sup> Marinetti's speech urged students to eradicate “professional culture and mould” (“la cultura e la

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9 Gemito: “Il pensiero di Vincenzo Gemito sulla concezione pittorica dei futuristi.”

10 A volume of literary and artistic criticism concerned with the journalist and critic Emilio Thovez, who denounced D'Annunzio's plagiarism of French poets in *Il pastore, il gregge e la zampogna: Dall'Inno a Satana alla Laus vitae*. Napoli: Ricciardi, 1910. 2nd rev. and enlarged edn 1911.

11 The latter publication contained three manifestos on the subject of Futurist music by Balilla Pratella and the piano score of *Musica futurista op. 30*, with a cover designed by Boccioni.

12 “dall'intellettuale all'uomo della strada”. Cervellati: *Bologna futurista*, p. 32.

13 “I giornali [Bolognesi] – meno vigliacchi di quelli di Roma e di Milano – si sono occupati con larghezza e con simpatia del movimento”. [Anon.]: “Il futurismo a Bologna.”

14 See Cervellati: *Bologna futurista*, pp. 45–46; Salaris: *Storia del futurismo*, p. 57. For more information concerning the influence of Balilla Pratella on young artists from Bologna, see Nalini Setti: *Storia, fatti d'arte, costume a Bologna nella prima metà del secolo*, pp. 36–37.

15 See Galletti: “Galletti e il futurismo.” The action at the university and its context has been discussed in Berghaus: *Italian Futurist Theatre*, pp. 74, 191–192.

muffa professionale”) and to take their lead instead “from the paradoxical ignorance of the Futurist poet Francesco Cangiullo” (“dall’ignoranza paradossale del poeta futurista Francesco Cangiullo”).<sup>16</sup> This was evidently a premeditated act of provocation, given Bologna’s reputation as ‘la dotta’ (a ‘learned’ city), due to her ancient and prestigious university:

Bologna is particularly afflicted by this passéism. It is in Bologna that Italian poets habitually come to settle, and then to die. They install themselves and die in a truly Bolognese institution: namely, in university chairs (a comfortable place for all forms of intellectual relaxation). This reminds me of other institutions, furnished with monastic latrines where learned monks would go to empty their bowels and mouths from useless prayers. I insist on this brutal image since my friend Pratella here tells me that there is no difference between the products of monastic intestines and the latest works of Bologna’s professors.<sup>17</sup>

Marinetti’s speech was met with both applause and whistles, but also with the throwing of various objects. The whole event was accompanied by the predictable exchange of shoves, slaps and punches.<sup>18</sup> *Lacerba* summed up the expedition as follows:

Invasion of the venerable University at the points of bayonets. Speeches, declamation. Lively sympathy expressed by the students. Contradictory assertions. Readings of Free-Word poetry. Crusade launched against culture and professors in the lecture halls. Gallettino [Prof. Alessandro Galletti] (the successor of Carducci and Pascoli, in the same way as Romulus Augustulus was the successor of Caesar and Augustus) had to improvise some humorous

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**16** Cervellati: *Bologna futurista*, p. 51. Marinetti recalls this episode as follows: “Con Boccioni, Russolo, Carrà, Pratella e Settemelli invado l’Università di Bologna nella quale, occupata militarmente da noi, svolgiamo per quattro giorni dei corsi di Futurismo liberatore.” Marinetti: “Prime battaglie futuriste”, pp. 235–236.

**17** “Bologna è particolarmente affetta da questo passatismo. È a Bologna che sistematicamente vengono a sedersi e perciò a morire i poeti che dà la razza italiana. Si insediano e muoiono in una istituzione prettamente cittadina, cioè la cattedra universitaria (luogo comodo di tutte le rilassatezze intellettuali) che mi rammenta quelle con latrine monastiche dove i monaci dotti venivano a liberare l’intestino e la bocca delle preci inutili. Insisto sull’immagine brutale tanto più che il mio amico Pratella, qui vicino, mi dichiara che tra i prodotti degli intestini monastici e le ultime opere dei professori di Bologna non c’è alcuna differenza.” Speech cited in Cardona: “Le idee e i propositi dei futuristi.”

**18** Regarding the Futurist manifestation at Bologna University, see [Anon.]: “I futuristi a Bologna”; [Anon.]: “Io, il futurismo!”; [Anon.]: “Il futurismo all’Università di Bologna”; [Anon.]: “Futurismomania goliardica”; Card. [Cardona]: “Il corso di futurismo alla nostra Università: Marinetti declama ‘parole in libertà’.”

banalities about Futurism. The Rector threatened to close the University should the intruders not retreat.<sup>19</sup>

The morning's events whetted the city's appetite for the theatrical offerings still to come. Although the purpose of the event was clear, Marinetti took precautions to defend himself in advance from criticism:

The great electrical energy released by our words and audacious gestures immediately spreads throughout the population, waking up the most lethargic individuals and causing excited delirium in those few – but very important – brilliant and innovative spirits who can benefit from Futurism. So, as always, we are confident and optimistic about tonight's soirée. However, should a large number of disruptive *passéists* come to the theatre and set up a prolonged and deafening uproar, be assured that Bologna will not be cheated of a chance to witness the fortifying effects of a Futurist '606'<sup>20</sup> when applied against the *syphilitis of Italian passéism*.<sup>21</sup>

The “pleasure of being booed” (*voluttà di essere fischiati*) described in the *Manifesto dei drammaturghi futuristi* (Manifesto of Futurist Dramatists, 1911) was evidently courted in Bologna, but as Marinetti's private correspondence of these months shows, he was no longer willing to accept transgressive behaviour in the Futurist *serate*. On 25 January 1914, he reassured one of *Lacerba*'s editors, Giovanni Papini, who was also becoming irritated by the brawls, that the evening

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**19** “Invasione alla baionetta della veneranda Università. Discorsi, declamazione. Simpatie allegre di studenti. Abbozzi di contraddittori. Letture di parole in libertà. Crociata contro la cultura e i professori nelle stesse aule accademiche. Il Gallettino [prof. Alessandro Galletti] (successore di Carducci e di Pascoli come Romolo Augustolo era il successore di Cesare e di Augusto) ha dovuto improvvisare alcune umoristiche banalità sul Futurismo. Il Magnifico Rettore ha dovuto minacciare lo sfratto dell'Università se gl'intrusi non si sguagliavano”. [Anon.]: “Il futurismo a Bologna”. On the Rector's reaction, see also [Anon.]: “Si dà atto.”

**20** Marinetti was wont to present himself as “dottore Marinetti” who conducted with his Futurism a therapeutic campaign against the perceived illnesses of the body politic. His publicity campaigns earned him the reputation of being *il Poeta Pink*, named after a popular medicine. Compound 606 (or arsphenamine; commercially known as Salvarsan) was developed in 1909 by the German bacteriologist Paul Ehrlich and was used to treat syphilis. This marked the beginning of chemotherapy. See Berghaus: *Italian Futurist Theatre*, pp. 398–399.

**21** “La grande energia elettrica, sprigionata dalle nostre parole e dai nostri gesti strafottentissimi, si propaga immediatamente in tutta la popolazione risvegliando i più addormentati ed esasperando fino al delirio quei pochi, ma importantissimi spiriti geniali e novatori che dal futurismo possono trarre giovamento. Siamo dunque come sempre fiduciosi ed ottimisti circa la serata di stasera. Qualora vi giungesse in teatro una maggioranza di passatisti disturbatori, e che si giungesse ad una gazzarra prolungata ed assordante, si può essere certi che Bologna non per questo rimarrebbe defraudata dei fortificanti effetti che il '606' futurista esercita in Italia contro la *lue passatista*.” Cardona: “Le idee e i propositi dei futuristi.”



at the Teatro del Corso was not “a *serata* in the true sense of the term, but a performance of *Elettricità* with the addition of a one-act play by Settimelli”.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, the event turned out to be a full-fledged and highly eventful Futurist *soirée*, leaving a fair amount of commotion in its wake.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 1. The Futurists at the Teatro del Corso in Bologna, in a caricature published by the *Giornale del mattino* on 21 January 1914.

When Marinetti and his companions appeared onstage, they were immediately greeted by both whistles and applause. The evening’s programme was continuously interrupted by a barrage of objects so heavy and sustained that the actors could not proceed as originally planned (see the in-depth account in Appendix 1). The painter Carlo Carrà later remembered the event as being “movimentatis-

<sup>22</sup> This letter, in which Marinetti asserts that the evening was not “una serata propriamente detta, ma una rappresentazione di *Elettricità*, cui si aggiunge un atto unico di Settimelli”, can be found in the Archivio Conti in Fiesole and has been discussed in Berghaus: *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909–1944*, p. 127. A reconstruction of the history of the play *Elettricità* can be found in Berghaus: *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909–1944*, pp. 74–75 and pp. 188–189.

<sup>23</sup> The evening’s programme had been described by Marinetti and his fellow Futurists to a journalist from the newspaper *Il resto del carlino*, with more or less in-depth explanations of its individual sections; see [Anon.]: “Io, il futurismo!” For the evening itself, and how it amounted to a dramatic performance with all the hallmarks of a *serata futurista*, see Gramigna: “I saturnali del passatismo al Teatro del Corso”, reprinted in the Appendix.

sima e persino violenta” (very lively, even violent),<sup>24</sup> while Balilla Pratella defined it as a “bacchanale carnevalesco” (bacchanalian carnival; see Fig. 1).<sup>25</sup> These testimonies suggest that, at this point, most of the audience had succumbed to the provocation without having fully grasped the innovative aspects of the movement’s avant-garde programme:

The misunderstanding between the public and the Futurists has lasted for many years. The Futurists, who set up this misunderstanding in a singular and, I would say, appealing way – promising punches, insults, masterpieces, obscenities, slaps, poetry and spitting – still have the shrewdness of knowing how to exploit it and make the most of it, something for which nobody can blame them. However, the public committed a grave error by having gone along with the joke, thereby ensuring that the Futurists would never have to be judged by ... the *passéists*. If, at its birth, Futurism had been discussed serenely, no one would still be talking about it, despite the fact that, initially, Futurism had proclaimed a very worthy programme: that of removing from the shoulders of young people all of the old academic and conventional baggage, which always ends up paralyzing and harming any daring forms of artistic expression.<sup>26</sup>

At the end of the performance, the battle between the movement’s supporters and detractors continued at the Caffè San Pietro. The next day, newspapers reported an equal number of wounded, on both sides.<sup>27</sup>

A few months later, Marinetti returned to Bologna, once again accompanied by Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo, Carrà and Balilla Pratella, to inaugurate the first official exhibition of Bolognese Futurism in the basement of Hotel Baglioni. The protagonists of this show, which lasted a mere twenty-four hours (20–21 March), were five artists from the local Accademia di Belle Arti. All of them were very different from one another, but were united by the desire to break

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24 Carrà: *La mia vita*, p. 96. See also Carrà’s letter to Soffici of 22 January 1914 in Drudi Gambillo and Fiori: *Archivi del futurismo*, p. 313.

25 Pratella: *Autobiografia*, p. 128.

26 “L’equivoco tra il pubblico e i futuristi dura da parecchi anni. I futuristi che seppero impostare questo equivoco in modo singolare, direi attraente, promettendo pugni, ingiurie, capolavori, oscenità, schiaffi, liriche e sputi, hanno ancora scaltrezza, tutt’altro che biasimevole, di saperlo sfruttare e di trarne il maggior profitto. Al pubblico non rimane che il torto gravissimo di essersi prestato allo scherzo negando ai futuristi il diritto di domandare giudizio... dei passatisti. Se al suo nascere il futurismo si fosse discusso serenamente a quest’ora non se ne parlerebbe più, benché il futurismo del primo tempo si informasse a un programma degnissimo: quello di scrolare dalle spalle dei giovani il vecchiume accademico e convenzionale che finisce sempre col paralizzare e col nuocere ad ogni ardita espressione artistica”. Mazz. [Mazzucato]: “Quando Marinetti non riceverà più patate.” Additional information concerning this *serata* can be found in [Anon.]: “Lo spettacolo al Teatro del Corso.”

27 See [Anon.]: “Epilogo... di echimosi al caffè S. Pietro.”

with traditional models: Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), Osvaldo Licini (1894–1958), Mario Bacchelli (1893–1951), Giacomo Vespignani (1891–1941) and Severo Pozzati (1895–1983). However, this first “*blitz*-exhibition” (“*mostra-blitz*”)<sup>28</sup> included very little in the way of authentic Futurism. Indeed, none of the approximately fifty works of painting, drawing and sculpture illustrated any of the innovations called for by the original followers of Marinetti’s creed. From the meagre descriptions provided of the works on display, and from the few pieces that have so far been identified, the most one can say is that the artists departed from traditional canons by emulating late Post-Impressionist, Secessionist and Expressionist styles. Nevertheless, this was sufficient for visitors to consider the works on show to be ‘Futurist’, evidently understanding the term to be synonymous with ‘being avant-garde’. The press, on the other hand, did not fail to underline the evident differences and to draw some necessary distinctions:

Avant-garde painters. That is what they call themselves; but they are not Futurists in the official and catastrophic sense of the word. Indeed, the leading lights of Italian Futurism have crudely attempted to draw boundaries between themselves, these figures and other young people with advanced artistic ideas [...]. One cannot say that the avant-garde artists exhibited here in Bologna are any less obscure in their intentions and purposes than those others, but it seems that they are more cautious and naïve and sincere, possessing a frankness that is childish and almost poetic in character. They have forged their own aesthetic, transcending the formulas in use up to now; they have desperately and angrily kicked aside existing precepts in order to confront external reality as pure and sensitive souls, and to interpret and express it in accordance with individual criteria and techniques – that is to say, just as they experience the world, irrespective of whether their sensations are beautiful or ugly, good or bad, distorted or perfect [...]. These artists charge towards their ideal goal with all the generous impetuousness of their youth, passing through brambles and obstacles with heads lowered, stubborn and persistent.<sup>29</sup>

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**28** Gottarelli: “Il futurismo, a Bologna, iniziò nel 1914 con una mostra-blitz nei sotterranei dell’ Hotel Baglioni.”

**29** “Pittori d’Avanguardia. Si chiamano così; ma non sono futuristi, nel senso ufficiale e catastrofico della parola, anzi i patroni del futurismo italiano, nel loro organo magno, hanno inteso di segnare crudamente i confini tra se stessi e questi, e gli altri giovani d’idee artistiche avanzate [...]. Non che del resto gli artisti d’avanguardia, qui a Bologna, siano meno oscuri d’intenzioni e propositi di quegli altri, ma mi son sembrati più cauti ed ingenui e schietti, d’una schiettezza infantile e quasi poetica. Essi si sono forgiati una loro estetica superatrice delle formule fin qui in uso, hanno buttato in un canto con un calcio disperatoso e iracondo i precettari, per affacciarsi con puro animo sensibile alla scena della realtà esteriore e interpretarla, ed esprimerla con criteri e procedimenti individuali, vale a dire così come la sentono, bella o brutta, buona o cattiva, deforme o perfetta che sia la loro sensazione [...]. Codesti artisti irrompono verso una loro meta ideale con la generosa violenza della loro gioventù, passando tra rovi e ostacoli a capo chino, ostinati e pertinaci”. Sani: “Pittori d’Avanguardia.”

For his part, the critic of *Il resto del carlino* wrote:

Three quarters of the public who visited the fifty works on show [...] summarily decreed: It is a Futurist exhibition [...]. But there is a difference between the exhibition that has everywhere brought gold and bruises to Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla, Severini and Soffici, and the small exhibition at the 'Baglioni', which only makes the sweet thistle of amazement and the nettle of ignorance bloom.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, as Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti perceptively notes, this exhibition was the usual act of "Futurist appropriation, which frequently took place during the two years in Italy prior to the war [...] and which involved 'avant-garde' phenomena and manifestations of a general character, or rather of insurgency".<sup>31</sup> In fact, only in this context can one account for Boccioni's decision to invite the five young artists – whose works had largely disappointed Futurist expectations – to participate in the *Mostra d'arte libera futurista* (Free Exhibition of Futurist Art), which opened on 13 April that year at the Sprovieri Gallery in Rome.<sup>32</sup> Not surprisingly, soon afterwards all five artists moved on and followed completely different paths. Indeed, Morandi later abjured his youthful adherence to Futurism to the point of almost completely 'forgetting' the Baglioni episode.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, if we were to base our assessment of Bolognese Futurism during the pre-war years entirely on this particular exhibition, we would inevitably have to conclude that the city was "poco futurista" (barely Futurist).<sup>34</sup> If, on the other hand, one looks beyond major events such as these and sets aside the usual emphasis on group activity, one can identify other protagonists of the Bolognese art scene who – albeit in isolation and in different ways – embraced Futurist principles and made them their own.

In fact, even before the exhibition at the Hotel Baglioni took place, evidence of the movement's beneficial influence on some of the city's artists can be dis-

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30 "Tre buoni quarti del pubblico che ha visitato i cinquanta lavori esposti [...] ha sentenziato sommariamente: È [sic] una mostra futurista [...]. Ma v'è differenza fra la mostra che ha fruttato dovunque oro ed ecchimosi a Boccioni, a Carrà, a Russolo, a Balla, a Severini, a Soffici e la piccola mostra del 'Baglioni' che fa soltanto fiorire il cardo soave dello stupore e l'ortica dell'ignoranza". ASK: "La Mostra dei 'Secessionisti' al Baglioni."

31 "La mostra bolognese rientrava nel quadro del piuttosto disinvolto annessionismo futurista, che fu esteso nei due anni prebellici in Italia [...] e comprese fenomeni e manifestazioni di 'avanguardia' in generale, o piuttosto d'insorgenza." Ragghianti: *Bologna cruciale 1914*, pp. 2–3.

32 On this point, see the letters of Bacchelli, Morandi and Licini to Boccioni of 31 March 1914, from Boccioni to Balilla Pratella of 2 April 1914, and from Marinetti to Balilla Pratella of 14 April 1914 in Drudi Gambillo and Fiori: *Archivi del futurismo*, pp. 325–327.

33 See Ragghianti: *Bologna cruciale 1914*, pp. 59–61.

34 See Nottoli: "Bologna (poco) futurista: Tutte le mostre."

cerned in the work of the aforementioned Mario Bazzi (1891–1954), then a student at the local Collegio Artistico Venturoli. Thanks to a scholarship, Bazzi lived in Rome and Florence between 1912 and 1915 before settling in Lombardy. There, he commuted between Lecco and Milan, working as an illustrator and poster designer. He most likely came into direct contact with the initial group of Futurist painters while frequenting Florentine and Milanese literary and artistic circles. Moreover, a number of his works executed around 1913 corroborate this hypothesis, especially *Ritratto dell'architetto Pietro Garolini* (Portrait of the Architect Pietro Garolini), a collage created with pastels, newspaper clippings and typographical elements, which recalls contemporary works by Carlo Carrà and Ardengo Soffici. His *Autoritratto futurista* (Futurist Self Portrait) dates from around the same period, yet this is a less innovative composition in which Futurism's stylistic principles are barely discernible.<sup>35</sup> When the First World War broke out, Bazzi left for the front, where he shared the trenches with Antonio Sant'Elia and other Futurists.<sup>36</sup> During this time he contributed to the so-called 'trench magazines', publishing Expressionist drawings which foreshadowed his return to a more sober art created in accordance with the ideas of Margherita Sarfatti's Novecento.<sup>37</sup>

Angelo Caviglioni (1887–1977) adhered to Futurism in a manner that was altogether more convincing and continued until his death at the age of 90. Initially, he also pursued a career outside the walls of his native city. In 1911, he exhibited a self-portrait that showed "a marked originality and an expressive force all its own, far from the prevailing figurative trends that were then in vogue",<sup>38</sup> but it relied on Paul Cézanne and the Fauves rather than the Futurists. While still a student at the local art school, Caviglioni travelled extensively. Between 1905 and 1914, he visited Northern Italy, France and England, studying closely the artistic innovations emerging in Europe's great urban centres. During one of his trips,

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**35** See Virelli: "Mario Bazzi."

**36** Marinetti mentions Bazzi and Sant'Elia in relation to a project for a military cemetery dedicated to the Brigata Arezzo, which was commissioned from the artists in 1916 by General Fochetti. See Marinetti: "Sant'Elia e la nuova architettura." Subsequently, Bazzi would create a large painting in accordance with Novecento aesthetics entitled *La morte di Antonio Sant'Elia* (The Death of Antonio Sant'Elia) in which he depicted his dead friend surrounded by fellow soldiers.

**37** In addition to painting, Bazzi would continue to work as a graphic designer after the First World War, creating a number of Art Déco advertising posters.

**38** "Anch'egli vibra già di una spiccata originalità e di una forza espressiva propria, ben lontano dalla pittura di figura che era in auge e del tutto imperante in quell'epoca." Guatteri: *Angelo Caviglioni: Pittore futurista*, p. 60. Cavaglioni demonstrated his irreverent personality (which was already completely Futurist in spirit) by asking 100,000 lire for his self portrait. This was an enormous sum at that time, for which an entire district of the city could have been bought.

the artist met Marinetti in London at a lecture given on the occasion of the Futurist exhibition at the Sackville Gallery (1–31 March 1912). This meeting sparked a decisive shift toward Futurism, as can be seen in a series of works he created in 1913, which included *Chelsea Bridge London*, *Ferrovía sotterranea* (Underground Railway), *Uscita dal Royal Albert Hall* (Leaving the Royal Albert Hall) and, later, *I trams* (Trams, 1914), “the first truly Futurist work to be exhibited in Bologna”.<sup>39</sup> Over the following years, Caviglioni, alongside the more famous Tato (Guglielmo Sansoni), became the leader of Bolognese Futurism, exhibiting at many local and national events.<sup>40</sup> Even after the Second World War, when Futurism was officially over and was marginalized due to its relationship with Fascism, Caviglioni’s commitment to the movement remained very much alive, to the extent that in 1971 he painted a picture in his singular dynamic style in which the word “Fut[urismo]” was set amidst a forest of violent colours, accompanied by the phrase “ai critici mafiosi merda” (shit on the mafiosi critics).

In conclusion, although during the first half of the 1910s Bologna was somewhat diffident toward the innovations introduced by Marinetti’s movement, the seeds sown during that period did not take long to bear fruit. In fact, both Caviglioni – based in the city itself – and Casarini, who lived abroad, prepared the ground for younger artists such as Tato, Ferdinando Sabattini, Ago (Antonio Agostini), Fausto Giorno and the members of the group ‘La Ghebia’ (Alessandro Cervellati, Nino della Casa, Giovanni Marescalchi, Ferruccio Giacomelli, Natale Pirazzoli, Mario Brasa, Francesco Bonafede and Aterol), whose works would more clearly define Bolognese Futurism between the two world wars.

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<sup>39</sup> Cervellati: *Bologna futurista*, p. 59. The author refers here to the painting published in the journal *L'alba: Periodico mensile di battaglia* (vol. 1, no. 4, July 1915) that is often confused with another very similar work by Caviglioni entitled *Luci e trams di Bologna* (Lights and Trams of Bologna), likewise dating from 1914. During that year Caviglioni also painted the works *Dinamismo di treno* (Dynamism of a Train) and *Attacco a Dieppe* (Attack on Dieppe), both of which were markedly Futurist in character.

<sup>40</sup> For an exhaustive list of the various Futurist events that took place in Bologna after the First World War and, in particular, those in which Caviglioni participated, see Nottoli: “Bologna (poco) futurista: Tutte le mostre”; Buscaroli: *Aeropittura futurista: Angelo Caviglioni e gli altri protagonisti*.

## Athos Casarini: Training and first contacts with Futurism

Casarini had already been living in New York for some time when the events described above were shaking up Bologna's art scene. Accordingly, it is necessary to look back to an earlier period in order to characterize the artist's education and to understand the motives that led him to adhere to Futurism.

Athos Casarini was born in Bologna on 3 January 1883 into a middle-class family. After leaving school in 1896 at the age of 13 he enrolled at the Reale Istituto di Belle Arti where, in 1904, he graduated with honours in 'painterly practice' ('*esercente in pittura*'). During his studies he attended courses held by the painter Domenico Ferri (1857–1940), a professor of life drawing trained at the Istituto di Belle Arti in Naples and who had been a pupil of the well-known Neapolitan painter Domenico Morelli (1823–1901) as well as a fellow student of Francesco Paolo Michetti (1851–1929). The latter was a celebrated 'D'Annunzian' painter whose art was located midway between a sketchy Impressionism informed by photography and an aestheticizing *Japonisme*, infused by a dreamlike, proto-Symbolist atmosphere.

Under Ferri's guidance, the young Casarini ignored rigid academic canons and was open to experimentation. In fact, some of his earliest known paintings, such as *Ciociera* (c. 1898) and *Paesaggio campestre* (Rural Landscape, c.1900), recall Michetti due to their modest attempts to introduce Impressionist effects into the more conventional framework of nineteenth-century Naturalism. Despite this relative progressive training, Casarini was unable to develop an art attuned to the latest stylistic trends. He therefore left the Academy and began to follow initiatives promoted by the Società Francesco Francia per le Arti, an independent association founded in 1894 and open to all young artists. Whilst dominated by a *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic similar to that of Rubbiani's *Gilda*, the Società also promoted exhibitions that presented different forms of artistic research in the city and beyond. Although not comparable to the later activities of the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna at Ca' Pesaro in Venice, this organization played an important rôle around the turn of the century by rejuvenating local traditions and allowing young artists to exhibit.

In 1900, the young Casarini participated, for the first time, in the exhibitions promoted by the Società and displayed a series of unspecified studies alongside the very young Marcello Dudovich (1878–1962). The latter was a renowned poster designer who had moved from Milan to Bologna in 1898 to work at the Atelier Chappuis. This, in due course, had notable consequences: "With them and Ugo Valeri, a fresher air began to circulate in the exhibitions of the 'Francesco Fran-

cia', reflecting the influence of the Venice Bienniales and the new artistic ideas spreading throughout Europe".<sup>41</sup> In addition to the Società, Casarini frequented another, less official artistic association, the 'Giambardi della Sega'. This comprised a group of young bohemian artists who worked in studios at Palazzo Bentivoglio. This building, located a stone's throw from the Academy, had been transformed into a sort of La Ruche *ante litteram*, and the group's disparate personalities were united by an anarchic and rebellious spirit:

Alongside the doctrinaire, bourgeois and traditionalist Bologna arose another, very small and noisy community [...] comprising those who were young in years or in spirit, who felt seized by a restless desire to liberate themselves from scholastic fetters and fashions, and to vigorously proclaim the beauty and sanctity of their idealistic and aesthetic motivations.<sup>42</sup>

Casarini was familiar with this association from a very young age because his father ran the aforementioned Trattoria dello Studente opposite the university in Via Zamboni, which was frequented by the 'giambardi'. One of these artists stood out from the rest of the group: the aforementioned Ugo Valeri (1873–1911) who had moved from Padua to Bologna in 1897 to attend the city's Accademia di Belle Arti:

At one time, the Trattoria dello Studente was run by 'Sgner Gaitàn', or simply 'Gaitàn', who was Athos Casarini's father. Bizarre characters from the Accademia di Belle Arti used to gather at this hospitable inn, led by Ugo Valeri, the frenzied animator of the strangest rites, and sometimes the protagonist of cheap, popular orgies of hearts and brains as agitated as his own. Valeri was, above all, a wonderful dynamo; his style lived and moved, flowed and jumped: it was astounding and made even the houses, the streetlights and the trees participate truthfully in its dance, sometimes gentle, sometimes dizzying.<sup>43</sup>

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41 "Con essi e con Ugo Valeri inizia a circolare nelle esposizioni della 'Francesco Francia' un'aria più aperta che risente delle Biennali veneziane e dell'arte nuova che sta diffondendosi in tutta Europa". Pasquali: *Francesco Francia Associazioni per le Arti 1894–1994*, p. 25.

42 "Accanto a questa Bologna dottrinarina, buongustaia e fedele alle tradizioni, un'altra comunità, assai piccola e più rumorosa [...] sorse fra i giovani d'anni e di spirito, i quali sentivano presi da un'irrequieta volontà di liberarsi dalle pastoie scolastiche e dalle mode, e di proclamare vivacemente la bellezza e la santità dei loro moventi ideali ed estetici". Da Bologna: *I Giambardi della Sega: Un quarto di secolo a Palazzo Bentivoglio*, p. 111.

43 "Una volta la trattoria dello Studente era condotta dal 'Sgner Gaitàn', o semplicemente da 'Gaitàn', il padre di Athos Casarini. Nella locanda ospitale capitavano gli spiriti bizzarri dell'Accademia di Belle Arti, condotti da Ugo Valeri, l'indiviolato animatore delle più strane tregende e talvolta il protagonista delle orgie popolari a buon mercato di cuori e cervelli fumanti come il suo. Valeri era soprattutto un meraviglioso dinamico, aveva il segno che vive e si muove,



Expelled from the Academy due to his rebellious and undisciplined behaviour, the ‘giambardo’ Valeri was already recognized at this time as an extremely talented artist. Indeed, he exhibited not only in Bologna but also Padua, Venice, Rome and Milan, winning several prizes and enjoying a certain success thanks to his highly personal “rapid, swift and dynamic style”.<sup>44</sup>

In 1899, Valeri rented a room in the house of the Casarini family. He became a close friend of the younger Athos and, to some extent, his mentor, involving him in all his personal and artistic affairs.<sup>45</sup> The importance of this relationship is evident in a series of Casarini’s paintings, one of which is a copy of a detail of the canvas *Il flauto magico* (The Magic Flute), painted by Valeri in 1902. In 1905, Casarini submitted a sketch for the Premio Baruzzi, a painting competition organized by the Società. The oil on cardboard in question, *I tintori* (The Dyers, 1905), shows a markedly volumetric approach that experiments with masses of dark, heavily outlined colours.

Several contemporary critics compared this and other works by Casarini to paintings by the Belgian-born English artist Frank William Brangwyn (1867–1956), who had achieved a certain measure of success at the Venice Biennale.<sup>46</sup> However, whilst one might discern similarities in terms of content, they shared few stylistic qualities. On a formal level, Casarini’s canvases were in fact far stronger and less idealized than those of the English painter; one might define them as an Expressionist interpretation of Brangwyn’s imagery, an approach similar to that of his friend Valeri who was, unsurprisingly, also accused of “brangwinismo”.<sup>47</sup>

The following year, Casarini participated in Milan’s Premio Fumagalli with *I gessaioli* (The Plaster Workers, 1906), which reflected the same Expressionist aes-

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corre, che salta: era sbalorditivo e faceva partecipare fedelmente nella sua danza, ora molle ora vertiginosa, anche le case, i fanali, gli alberi.” Solmi: *Athos Casarini pittore 1883–1917*, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> Luser: *La mentalità randagia*, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Ugo’s brother Diego paid an extended visit to Bologna and recalled the close relationship that existed between the two artists: “I spent around a month in Bologna as a guest of the Casarini family in the summer of 1900 or 1901; at that time, Athos was very young... I well remember certain discussions we had... my relative youthfulness (my brother was 13 years older than me) did not prevent us from discussing art with great seriousness”. (“Passai forse un mese a Bologna, ospite dei Casarini, nell’estate 1900 o 1901; allora Athos era giovanissimo... Ricordo bene certe discussioni che facemmo... la mia piccola età (mio fratello aveva 13 anni più di me), non impediva che discutessimo d’arte con grande serietà”). See Solmi: *Athos Casarini pittore 1883–1917*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>46</sup> See c. d. f. : “Arte municipale.”

<sup>47</sup> See c. d. f. : “L’Esposizione Francesco Francia.”

thetic.<sup>48</sup> On that occasion, Valeri, who had moved to this city to seek his fortune, wrote to Casarini: “I’ll tell you my impressions straight away. There’s a lot of crap here and a few good pieces, including yours.”<sup>49</sup> Several months after this event, Casarini, frustrated by the ‘provincial’ Bologna, prepared to move north, following his mentor, who had contacted the most important artistic circles of Padua, Venice and Milan thanks to his virtuoso drawing skills.<sup>50</sup> In the Lombard capital, Valeri contributed to magazines such as *Il secolo XX*, *L’illustrazione italiana* and *Varietas*. He also came into contact with Marinetti and illustrated his book *Les Dieux s’en vont, D’Annunzio reste* (The Gods Leave, D’Annunzio Stays, 1908) and the journal *Poesia*, including the landmark February–March 1909 issue in which the birth of the Futurist movement was announced.<sup>51</sup> Finally, again thanks to Marinetti and a mutual friend named Gino Damerini, Valeri exhibited some 60 works in Ca’ Pesaro in Venice (8 September – 4 November 1909), he became friends with Romolo Romani, Aroldo Bonzagni, Luigi Russolo and Carlo Carrà. The latter remembered him as follows:

The year before my entry into the Brera, I had met Ugo Valeri, with whom I developed a close friendship. An incorrigible drinker, each time I met him I ended up getting drunk as well. So great was my friend’s lightheartedness that his company had the rare power of persuading me that one does not need many things in order to be happy in this world. Impetuous by nature, Valeri sometimes acted under the effect of wine, for which he then bitterly castigated himself. He particularly loved to declaim in the streets at night Carducci’s *Ça ira*, Leopardi’s *To the Moon* or other poems, of which he had a rich repertoire [...]. More than once he appeared the following day with his face covered in bruises, and in answer to my questions he would reply: “It was those police pigs”.<sup>52</sup>

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48 See [Anon.]: *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti. Catalogo illustrato*, pp. 144, 148, 154.

49 “Ti dico subito le mie impressioni. Moltissime sono le vacade [vaccate] pochi i lavori buoni fra i quali il tuo.” Undated letter from Ugo Valeri to Athos Casarini (most probably 16 April); Bologna, private collection.

50 From 17 May to 13 July 1908, he once again participated in Francesco Francia’s Premio Baruzzi, exhibiting the paintings *I conquistatori* (The Conquerors, 1908) and the *Ritratto di Mario Pozzati* (Portrait of Mario Pozzati, 1908). However, by that point Casarini had almost certainly left Bologna for Venice, as suggested by a letter asking him to greet Vittorio Battoni, a fellow citizen of Bologna who was living in Venice, and who had founded the Associazione degli Emiliani there (private collection).

51 Valeri also illustrated Enrico Cavacchioli’s *Le ranocchie turchine* (The Turquoise Frogs, 1909) for the “Poesia” publishing house. An unpublished sketch by Valeri for the cover of another of Cavacchioli’s books, entitled *Marinetti*, was recently sold at an auction.

52 “L’anno precedente il mio ingresso a Brera avevo conosciuto Ugo Valeri, con cui strinsi ora maggiori rapporti. Bevitore impenitente, tutte le volte che lo incontro finivo anch’io per farmi riscaldare dall’alcool. E tanta era la spensieratezza del mio amico che la sua compagnia aveva il raro potere di farmi persuaso che la per essere felici in questo mondo non occorrono poi tante

More difficult was the painter's relationship with Umberto Boccioni, with whom he spent a fair amount of time. Although both artists respected one another, there was also a certain incompatibility of character between the two.<sup>53</sup> Valeri and Boccioni's paths crossed on several occasions during the first decade of the twentieth century, first in Padua and then in Milan.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, it is likely that it was Valeri who introduced the younger painter to Marinetti in January 1910, just as it is likely that his mediation resulted in Boccioni's first solo show at Ca' Pesaro on the occasion of its fifth annual summer exhibition in 1910.<sup>55</sup>

Returning to Casarini, one can reasonably suppose that the young Bolognese painter frequented the same places and met the same people as Valeri did. In fact, he was in Padua and Venice with Valeri when the latter associated with Boccioni, and was with him again in Milan when he was close to Carrà, Bonzagni, Romani and Marinetti.<sup>56</sup> It is likely that his name is not mentioned in the

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cose. Impetuoso di carattere, Valeri compiva talvolta sotto l'effetto del vino che poi deplorava amaramente. La sua mania era di declamare la notte per le strade il *Ça ira* di Carducci o *Alla luna* di Leopardi o altre poesie di cui aveva ricco repertorio [...]. Più di una volta ricompariva il giorno dopo pestato in viso e alle mie domande rispondeva: 'Sono stati quei porci poliziotti'." Carrà: *La mia vita*, p. 49.

53 "I forgot to mention that knowing Valeri [the painter Giovanni Grandi and he] talked about me – critically, of course. Above all, however, Valeri has convinced him of my obsession with philosophizing and with solving problems. Now, since Valeri has got into some heated debates with me the poor fellow also believes he must somehow make me stop when I get into a discussion. And he thinks that Valeri can do it because I can't blame it on the wine that he drinks, am familiar with his strange and morbid temperament and also admire his wit which, unfortunately, is in decline". "[Il pittore Giovanni Grandi] Mi dimenticavo di dire che conoscendo Valeri hanno parlato insieme di me e ne hanno detto malino, naturalmente. Soprattutto però Valeri lo ha suggestionato su la mia mania a filosofare e a sciogliere problemi. Ora siccome Valeri mi ha fatto delle scenate per le discussioni anche lui poveretto si crede in dovere di farmi in un certo modo smettere quando discuto. E pensa che Valeri può farlo perché non posso andarmela a prendere con il vino che beve e poi so il suo temperamento anomalo e morboso e ammiro anche l'ingegno purtroppo in declino". Diary entry by Boccioni dated 13 February 1908, cited in Birilli: *Umberto Boccioni: Scritti sull'arte*, p. 281.

54 On the relationship between Valeri and Boccioni, see Baradel: "'Il più geniale e il più bizzarro degli artisti nostri': Padova, Ugo Valeri e Umberto Boccioni", and Baradel: *Boccioni prefuturista: Gli anni di Padova*.

55 See Perocco: "Venezia: Gli anni di Ca' Pesaro, 1908–1920", p. 29.

56 The only suggestion of a direct relationship between Casarini and Boccioni is contained in an article that appeared on 28 October 1917 in the Italian-American magazine *Follia di New York*, in which an acquaintance of the Bolognese artist refers to Boccioni as "his illustrious friend and fellow disciple in matters of art and politics" ("illustre suo amico e correligionario in arte e in politica"). Ferri: "In memoria di Athos Casarini."

aforementioned artists' diaries and memoirs because Casarini – unlike the exuberant ‘maestro’ – was an introverted and taciturn character. Yet he was no less receptive to external stimuli, always being “eager to translate the slightest idea that came his way into concrete work”.<sup>57</sup>

Given his friendship with Valeri, we can surmise that shortly before moving to New York, Casarini had already come into contact with the artistic and cultural climate out of which Futurism would soon emerge. More importantly, this brief yet intense experience of the movement's germinal phase would later enable him to be one of the first artists working overseas to comprehend its revolutionary spirit.

## Athos Casarini in New York: “The leading exponent of Futurism in this country”

On an unknown day between the spring and summer of 1909, Athos Casarini embarked for New York. The reason for his decision remains unknown, but it seems that it was not dictated by economic motivation. His colleague, the painter and critic Nino Corrado Corrazza, concluded that it reflected the artist's desire to pursue his artistic vocation with complete autonomy:

Casarini's emigration appears to have offered him a long-craved outlet for his spiritual restlessness, a thirst for freedom, liberation from tradition and constraint, rather than for material gain [...]. He was not the typical emigrant: rather, the pioneer of a new age that for pre-war Italy came too soon, as it was not yet mature enough for it.<sup>58</sup>

Waiting for him in the United States was his brother Alberto, who had emigrated to New York in 1903 and was working for *Il giornale italiano* and *Il progresso italo-americano*, two important Italian-American newspapers. As soon as he arrived, Casarini settled into a small studio located on the top floor of a building on Brooklyn's Popular Street facing the East River's industrial port. Athos was introduced by his brother to the city's print media culture and quickly obtained work as an illustrator, initially for publications popular amongst the Italian-American

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<sup>57</sup> “sempre preoccupato di tradurre in lavoro concreto la minima idea che gli si presentasse” Solmi: *Athos Casarini pittore 1883–1917*, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> “L'emigrazione di Casarini appare come lo sbocco disperato della sua inquietudine spirituale piuttosto assetata di libertà, di non-tradizione, di non-costrizione, che di guadagni [...]. Non l'emigrante comune: piuttosto il pioniere di una nuova età che l'Italia prebellica era troppo presto perché potesse maturare”. Corazza: “Ricordo di Casarini.”

community, such as *Follia di New York* and *L'araldo d'Italia*, and subsequently for *The World Magazine* and *Harper's Weekly*. He created fashionable designs and illustrations marked by a glossy, sophisticated elegance, employing a style located somewhere between late Art Nouveau and an early form of Art Déco.<sup>59</sup> These secondary works allowed him to support himself and, at the same time, to raise his profile within New York's artistic circles. Indeed, due to the success of these drawings and the intervention of the famous tenor Enrico Caruso, Casarini was given his first US solo exhibition in 1910 at the Knoedler Gallery on Fifth Avenue. This featured mostly paintings from his Italian period, which the artist's brother Dante shipped from Bologna for the occasion.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, Casarini began to create his first 'American' paintings, which can be vaguely defined as post-Symbolist. Emblematic in this respect are *David* (1910–1911) and *Horses of Hippolitus* (1911), in which "Classicist-Symbolist overtones with a [...] D'Annunzian flavour"<sup>61</sup> are evident. However, this phase constituted a very brief parenthesis. Soon, Casarini changed direction and created works similar in character to those produced by 'The Eight'.<sup>62</sup> This association had been established in 1908 in opposition to the National Academy, and its members pursued a brand of Social Realism that aspired to present a raw and unvarnished image of New York, depicting, for example, the city's violent boxing matches and multi-ethnic population, its snorting locomotives, squalid corners and grey suburbs.

However, Casarini's work went beyond anything produced by The Eight. Mindful of his previous experiences in Milan and Venice, and aware of the innovations taking place within New York's most advanced artistic circles, first and foremost those associated with Alfred Stieglitz's Little Gallery of the Photo-Secession,<sup>63</sup> he eschewed the somewhat loose, para-Impressionist approach of painters such as Robert Henri. Instead, he favoured a more robust and synthetic style

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59 On Casarini's graphic work, see Pallottino: "Athos Casarini: Il segno riaffiorato."

60 See the letter from Enrico Caruso to Athos Casarini dated 28 February 1910 (private collection).

61 Solmi calls it "intonazione classica-simbolista di sapore [...] d'annunziano" in *Athos Casarini, pittore 1883–1917*, p. 35.

62 The Eight was a US-American group of painters whose single group show in 1908 at the Macbeth Gallery challenged the academic tradition that had dominated the American art establishment for many decades. Their Realist portrayals of scenes of everyday North-American life prepared the way for the better known Ashcan School. The Eight are often regarded as the first generation of US-American Modernists.

63 See Marra: "Fotografia e cultura tecnologica nella New York di inizio Novecento." On the Stieglitz circle and its rôle for the philo-Futurist artists in New York see Fochessati: "'Broom' and 'Futurist Aristocracy': When the Futurist Movement Met the Machine Age."

characterized by thick contours, the laying down of colours *à plat* and, above all, violent chromatic contrasts that recalled and updated the Fauvist-Expressionist style he had employed shortly before leaving Italy.

Several paintings depicting New York from the Hudson River reflect this approach. They adopted subject matter of US-American Realism, yet also retained a Fauvist style.<sup>64</sup> Critics often drew attention to the ‘wild’ character of his works, for example in *Brooklyn Bridge* (c. 1913), which a writer for *Follia di New York* described as using “terrible [colours]. Unusual, raw, vulgar hues which, taken separately, would make one believe that the painter suffered from colour-blindness.”<sup>65</sup> Another Italian-American newspaper reported that the Bolognese artist had achieved a form of “painting that was perhaps a bit flat, staying faithful to the panorama of the Metropolis with a *primitive rigidity*”.<sup>66</sup>

A further shift in this direction came with a series of ‘grotesque’ works in which Casarini’s earlier Primitivist-Expressionist approach acquired great vigour. Whilst paintings such as *Money* (1914), *The Great Actor Gakulai* (1913), *Crime* (1913) and *The Calumny* (1914) reveal a certain “stylistic continuity”<sup>67</sup> with his previous imagery, they also represent the extreme point of an idiosyncratic artistic path, in which Casarini exaggerated his linear distortion and broad brushstrokes, as well as further accentuating his palette’s vivacity and contrast:

Satirical, sarcastic paintings such as those of the selfish and cynical nature of the stock exchange, of the exploiter, the swindler, the nabob and other ‘types’ of American civilization, are rendered in deconstructions of a purely graphic nature, almost *deformed* and caricature-like interpretations of physical nature.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Solmi: *Athos Casarini, pittore 1883–1917*, p. 38. The known paintings belonging to this series are *Nocturne* (1910), *Lower New York at Dusk* (c. 1910), *The East River* (c. 1910–1912), *New York at Evening* (c. 1911–1912), *New York seen from Brooklyn* (1911), *New York Harbor / From East River* (1912), *Brooklyn Bridge* (c. 1913) and *New York Skyscrapers* (c. 1913). On the basis of stylistic affinity, one can add to these *Glen Island* (1912), *Under Brooklyn Bridge* (1913–1914), *The Undertaker’s House* (1914) and *The House of Mystery* (1914–1915), in which lively Expressionist elements give way to disquieting atmospheres where time and space seem suspended in a silent tension, anticipating the imagery of Edward Hopper by several years.

<sup>65</sup> “[Colori] terribili. Tinte insolite, crude, volgari, che prese separatamente farebbero credere il pittore affetto da daltonismo.” Ferri: “In Memoria di Athos Casarini.”

<sup>66</sup> “Pittura un po’ piatta forse, obbedendo al panorama della Metropoli con una fermezza da *primitivo*”. Anonymous article cited in Poppi: “Athos Casarini: Un futurista sulle onde dell’Atlantico”, p. 114.

<sup>67</sup> [Anon.]: “Casarini’s Works include Grotesque.”

<sup>68</sup> According to the reviewer, these “quadri satirici, sarcastici come l’egoista e il cinico della borsa, lo sfruttatore, il gabbamondo, il nababbo e altri ‘tipi’ della civiltà americana sono resi

These works showed that Casarini had yet to respond to Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo or Severini's rupture, since he remained on the 'safer' side of the avant-garde barricade, much like the early Futurist dissidents Romolo Romani and Aroldo Bonzagni.<sup>69</sup> However, the strong 'primitivism' and Expressionist 'distortion' present in these works prepared the ground for his subsequent adhesion to Futurism. In fact, Marinetti himself described these paintings as a premonition of Casarini's Futurist phase:

At that time, Athos Casarini indulged in Symbolism and allegorical forms which abruptly displeased him, and thereby propelled him forward. He felt that obsession with reality was vain, and with an abundance of post-Impressionist colour he created his magnificent *Japanese Actor* [*The Great Actor Gakulai*]. Meanwhile, the Futurist revolution of Boccioni's plastic dynamism inspired spirited groups both in Italy and abroad, opening Casarini's imagination up to the possibility of interpreting forces beyond time and space.<sup>70</sup>

Once in New York, Casarini's shift from Expressionist to Futurist forms of expression was fast and dramatic. The animated and proud flag-bearer of the most important Italian innovations quickly became "an instinctive precursor and pioneer of renewal, in an age of anxiety and restlessness, which had not yet been transformed into inquisitiveness, into volition, into a programme."<sup>71</sup> The first painting to fully reflect this transition is *The Hudson River* (1913) which, although still linked to his earlier series of New York cityscapes, represents an almost direct visual illustration of the "vibrant nightly fervour of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons" and of "factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke", which Marinetti had exalted in his *Foundation and Mani-*

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con scomposizioni di puro valore grafico, quasi interpretazioni *deformate* e caricaturali della natura fisica". R. B.: "La mostra retrospettiva di Athos Casarini."

<sup>69</sup> See Poppi: "Athos Casarini: Un futurista sulle onde dell'Atlantico", p. 134, and Evangelisti: "Athos Casarini."

<sup>70</sup> "In quel tempo Athos Casarini si compiaceva di simbologia e di forme allegoriche che bruscamente scontentandolo lo proiettano in avanti. Egli sente quanto l'ossessione della realtà sia vana e con un'abbondanza di colore postimpressionista crea il suo magnifico *Attore Giapponese* [*The Great Actor Gakulai*]. Intanto la rivoluzione futurista del dinamismo plastico boccioniano moltiplicando in Italia ed all'estero i suoi gruppi animosi spalanca nella Sua fantasia le possibilità di una interpretazione delle forze fuori tempo-spazio". From a text included in the catalogue of a posthumous exhibition dedicated to Casarini, held at Bologna's Salone del Circolo della Cultura between 15 and 31 May 1937. Cited in Solmi: *Athos Casarini pittore 1883-1917*, p. 100.

<sup>71</sup> "Il futurismo fu per Casarini [...] un legame artistico, un legame di anima con la Patria italiana ed europea. [...] Egli è e rimane un precursore, un pioniere del rinnovamento, allo stato istintivo, nell'età del nervosismo e dell'inquietudine non ancora trasformati in curiosità, in volontà, in sistema". Corazza: "Ricordo di Casarini."

*festo of Futurism*. These initial signs of Casarini's Futurist sympathies can be perceived, above all, on a formal level. In this image, swirls of smoke emanate from the chimneystacks of tugboats on the Hudson and from factories overlooking the East River, which envelop and almost obscure the imposing skyscrapers of the American metropolis, echoing the fumes that surround the train in Boccioni's *Gli addii* (The Farewells, first version, 1911). Both works display the same type of broad brushstrokes, which aims to 'obliterate' the subject in favour of capturing an elusive sensation or psychic condition, as Marinetti perceptively highlighted in his remark: "He felt the urgent need for a vigorously Italian syntax that could summarize the mammoth city overflowing with details to be destroyed and longing for plastic unity".<sup>72</sup>

From this point onwards, Casarini's works became increasingly oriented toward a more 'orthodox' brand of Futurism, reflecting the influence not only of Boccioni, but also of works by Russolo, Severini, Carrà and even Balla. Knowledge of their theories and works came to him from different sources, above all through his brother Dante, who remained in Italy and updated him regularly on the latest artistic innovations by sending him publications such as *Lacerba* as well as texts by Marinetti and his comrades. A second channel of communication was his friend and colleague Joseph Stella, who had recently returned from a long visit to Europe during which he had come into direct contact with the Futurists.<sup>73</sup> Finally, American newspapers played an important rôle in informing the artist on new developments, since those geared towards the Italian-American community as well as other local and national publications discussed the Futurists and reproduced some of their paintings.<sup>74</sup>

Evidence of Casarini's knowledge of the ideas and themes explored by Futurism is further provided in an anonymous text in *The World Magazine*, likely to be written by Casarini himself in November 1914. The article referred to Boccioni and Severini, as well as Carrà and his manifesto *La pittura dei suoni, rumori e odori* (The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells, 1913):

This development has taken on some aspects of the ultra-modern movement known as Futurism, of which Marinetti, Boccioni and Severini are among the propagandists [...]. Painting the mere surface of things does not satisfy this artist. He is curious about their inner soul and significance, which he tries to convey by means of lines and planes and broken

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72 "Egli sente l'imperioso bisogno di una sintassi vigorosamente italiana che possa riassumere la mastodontica città straricca di dettagli da distruggere e ansiosa essa stessa di unità plastica". [Anon.]: "Una prefazione di S.E. Marinetti alla mostra Casarini."

73 See Sansone: "Joseph Stella e i rapporti con i futuristi italiani", pp. 613–629.

74 See Hand: "Futurism in America: 1909–14."



color combinations suggesting the rhythmic sensations of motion and speed, and even of sounds and odors.<sup>75</sup>

This article was accompanied by reproductions of four works that perfectly summarized Casarini's interpretation of Futurism: *Monkey House* (1913–1914), *Vampire* (1913–1914), *Vision of the Stock Exchange* (1914) and *War* (1914). In the lost *Monkey House*, he attempted to evoke a “state of mind” electrified by a modern civilization enthralled by rapid forms of communication and transportation:

Instead of a photographic representation or detailed drawing of a troop of monkeys I endeavor to convey here the actual instantaneous impression or feeling one gets upon entering the monkey house at the zoo – a sense of alertness and quick, restless activity, with a mischievous eye twinkling here and there, and funny faces and impish claw-like hands flashing about and mixed up together, as in a kaleidoscope. The futurist strives to paint a state of mind – and that means, in modern society, a state of constant excitement, under the stress of speed-mania, money-getting, and rivalry.<sup>76</sup>

According to the artist, *Vampire* and *Vision of the Stock Exchange*, were “allegories”: “The one depicts, in more or less concrete symbols the mercenary and ruthless motive in eyes coldly gleaming upon intrigue and gold. The other typifies, with the aid of blattant red and yellow color-suggestion, the deadly torrid atmosphere of frenzied finance”.<sup>77</sup>

From a formal point of view, both works represent a further move towards Futurism. *Vampire* closely resembles Boccioni's *Idolo moderno* (Modern Idol, 1911) and, perhaps more surprisingly, also contains similarities to certain contemporary works painted by Balla. Claudio Poppi has identified an echo of the latter's *Mercurio passa davanti al Sole* (Mercury Passing before the Sun, 1914) in the geometric rays of solidified light that dominate Casarini's composition, for example.<sup>78</sup> However, Casarini's work pre-dates that of Balla, making it impossible for the Bolognese artist to have adapted his colleague's imagery.<sup>79</sup> If any-

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75 Casarini: “Futurist Fantasies.”

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Poppi: “Athos Casarini: Un futurista sulle onde dell'Atlantico”, p. 144.

79 Casarini's work was most likely painted between July and October 1914, as it was exhibited for the first time at the Folsom Galleries in New York on 4 November that year. Additionally, a very similar gouache was published in *Follia di New York* on 19 July 1914, where it was used to advertize Italo Stanco's novel *Il nemico del bene*. Balla's work, on the other hand, was painted after 7 November – the day on which the astronomical event depicted in his painting took place. See Balla: “Giacomo Balla: Un artista amico delle stelle.”

thing, this affinity testifies to the originality of Casarini's work, illustrating how he took an active rôle in the development of Futurist aesthetics rather than merely following the others.<sup>80</sup> The pastel *Vision of the Stock Exchange* is equally novel, and was likewise based on a careful consideration of Futurist models, which he reconfigured in a completely personal way:

His cerebral conception finds a vigorous and eloquent means of self-expression in Futurism. The heads in his 'Vision of the Stock Exchange' are highly effective, and from their eyes, mouths and all other features there bursts forth the psychology of the individual obsessed with gold, of the pirate financier, of the modern bandit whose forest is the colonnade of the Stock Exchange.<sup>81</sup>

In Casarini's work, Boccioni's *visioni simultanee* (simultaneous visions) and Marinetti's *parole in libertà* (Words-in-Freedom) coalesce in an original and unprecedented manner. More importantly, Marinetti himself recognized the work's importance, underlining how in this "picture consecrated to financial drama [i.e. the dramatic events on the floor of the Stock Exchange...] the cry of *Money* erupts in *free words* that bite into the colours and dynamically impose themselves everywhere on the faces of stockbrokers".<sup>82</sup>

Of an altogether different tenor is *War*, Casarini first work to address the conflict then raging in Europe. Contrary to his Italian colleagues, the artist adopted a critical stance, as can be seen in a contemporary text by him:

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**80** The same can be said of two other important paintings executed by Casarini around this time: *The Inventor* and *Man in the Machine*, both of which were exhibited in March 1914 at the MacDowell Club in New York and in November of the same year at the Folsom Galleries. The former was reproduced in an article titled "Casarini's Fantastic Symbolism in Gorgeous Color", written by Arthur Benington and published in *The World Magazine* on 29 March 1914. The caption reads: "Not a man but a dream. A rhythmic pattern of farseeing eyes and lines expressive of the correlation of many forces". These were most likely Casarini's own words, indicating the artist's desire to characterize this work in Futurist terms, and thereby differentiate it from the earlier 'grotesques' that appeared in the same article (see Fig. 3).

**81** "La sua ideazione cerebrale trova nel Futurismo un gagliardo ed eloquente mezzo per esprimersi. Le teste della 'Visione in borsa' sono impressionanti, e dai loro occhi, dalle loro bocche, da tutta la loro espressione balza fuori la psicologia dell'ossessionato dall'oro, del finanziere pirata, del bandito moderno, la cui selva è l'intercolumnio della Borsa". [Anon.]: "Athos Casarini." *La Follia di New York*, s.d. [November 1914] [Archival heirs of Casarini]."

**82** Marinetti's observation that in this "quadro consacrato al dramma finanziario [...] *paroliberoamente* il grido *Money* balza graffiando i colori e imponendosi dinamicamente dovunque sulle facce degli agenti di cambio" was made in a speech given by the Futurist leader at the opening of Casarini's posthumous exhibition, held at the Salone del Circolo della Cultura in Bologna from 15 to 31 May 1937; cited in Solmi: *Athos Casarini pittore 1883–1917*, p. 100.

Look war in the face! [...] What does it say to you? What comment does it make on this thing we call civilization? How does it fit in with the complacent praise we have heaped on the culture of the twentieth century? Faugh! It grins hideously at us, mocking our pride of progress, condemning the selfishness we called patriotism and the cruelty we called courage. You cannot make war other than hideous. We are losing our unstinted admiration for the fighter who fights without high cause. He has begun to look like a brute. He is out of key with all the rest of life. He denies all the noblest aspiration of our progress. He has made our pretenses a joke.<sup>83</sup>

Defined by the artist himself as “a cartoon-picture, focused on the idea of aviation”<sup>84</sup>, *War* is a circular work in tempera in which a fierce battle rages between two opposing sides around a menacing black crow at the centre. Beneath the bird’s claws lies a mound of fragmented corpses, while Marinetti’s onomatopoeic “Zang” and “Tumb” whistle through the jumbled mass of horses, sabres, bayonettes, cannons and airships, all of them enveloped by the solidified smoke of gunpowder. Aside from the rather conventional crow, perhaps a vestige of Casarini’s work as an illustrator, the composition is generally faithful to Futurist aesthetics, which Marinetti confirmed in 1937 during a speech at the opening of a posthumous exhibition of the artist’s works in Bologna:

Moving through the exhibition, the public is naturally intoxicated by the triumphant genius of what I consider to be the best work in the show, a canvas entitled *War*. Here, the dense dynamism extending into space conveys in an admirable fashion the anti-traditional desire to capture the earth’s warlike forces and, at the same time, to kill once and for all the distant memory of any analytical realism and any dull symbolism.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, another work linked to the armed conflict, the painting *War against Austria* (1915), reveals a significant change in Casarini’s attitude toward the subject. Adopting an openly Interventionist position, he depicts a riot in city square full of people, flags, banners, bayonets and tricolour lights, yelling patriotic and interventionist slogans such as “Viva l’Italia”, “Viva il Belgio” and “Guerra alla

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**83** Casarini: “A Futurist Vision of the Horrors of Modern War.”

**84** Casarini: “Futurist Fantasies.” It is interesting to note that, in the opening lines of this article, Casarini is described as the “leading exponent of futurism in this country”.

**85** “Il pubblico staccandone lo sguardo s’inebria naturalmente della vittoriosa genialità di quello che io credo sia l’opera migliore della mostra ed è intitolata *Guerra*. Qui sintesi dinamico plastico affermano mirabilmente la volontà antitradizionale di riassumere le forze bellicose della terra e insieme uccidere definitivamente anche il lontano ricordo d’ogni analitico verismo e d’ogni melensa simbologia”. From a speech given by F.T. Marinetti at the opening of Casarini’s posthumous exhibition, held at the Salone del Circolo della Cultura in Bologna from 15 to 31 May 1937; cited in Solmi: *Athos Casarini pittore 1883–1917*, p. 100.

Germania". Here, we find a skilful combination of typical Futurist elements: dynamism, intensity, force-lines, solid rays of light, simultaneous views, an interpenetration of planes and even Words-in-Freedom seamlessly fused within a single image.

Considered by Poppi to be Casarini's most "coherently Futurist" painting,<sup>86</sup> this work thought to be the last produced by the Bolognese artist<sup>87</sup> coincided with the end of his sojourn in the United States. Indeed, Casarini's final exhibition in New York, significantly entitled *Modern and Futurist Works of Athos Casarini*, opened at the A. M. Swift Galleries in April 1915, just a few months before his return to Italy.<sup>88</sup>

## Arrival in Italy and death on the battlefield

Casarini's sudden conversion to the Interventionist cause prompted him, on 14 August 1915, to board the steamship *Duca degli Abruzzi*. This abrupt return to his homeland was prompted by the intention to volunteer, like some of his Futurists comrades, for military service. The spirit in which he took this decision was the same as that which motivated his Italian colleagues:

You are mad! That is what many of my friends have said to me in the weeks since I took my passage for Italy. This is my reply. [...] When Marinetti and his fellows hurled their first Futuristic manifestos like bombs into the face of a moribund world many scoffed; I was filled with enthusiasm. For I felt that Futurism was a true manifestation of the ideals of Italy of the new, modern Italy, the virile, enterprising, progressive, independent Italy that is not known to the tourists who seek in it only the cemetery and museum of Italics long dead [...]. So we shouted, we yelled, we shrieked in prose and poetry, in colors and in lines. My countrymen were awakened by our shrieks; they aroused themselves from the lethargy of easy commercial and intellectual dependence upon others, and when the great war burst upon Europe it found them erect, alert, armed...<sup>89</sup>

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**86** Poppi: "Athos Casarini: Un futurista sulle onde dell'Atlantico", p. 156.

**87** Doubts persist as to the attribution to Casarini of another work entitled *Dynamism of a Metropolis* (*Dinamismo di metropoli*), which belongs to the Genus Bononiae Foundation in Bologna. The entirely abstract-synthetic style of the painting is in fact atypical of the Bolognese artist's work, whereas it *does* strongly resemble that of his friend Joseph Stella, particularly in his famous *Futurist Composition* of 1914 (Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas) for which the piece in question would seem to be a preparatory study (see <https://collezioni.genusbononiae.it/products/dettaglio/2262>).

**88** See [Anon.]: "Calendar of Special New York Exhibition."

**89** Casarini: "The Futurist Hears the Call of War. 'And I'm Going' Says Casarini", published in the *Daily Arkansas Gazette*.

In another article with the same title, which was published in *The World Magazine*, he added:

We Futurists gave an electric shock [...] we set up modern criteria of action, insisted upon Latin ideals and substituted these for all that was weak, sentimental and Teutonic in our country. Futurism purified the atmosphere like a thunderstorm; if it had not been for the thunder and lighting of Futurism my country might to-day have been slumbering peacefully, content to remain a tail to the German kite, or a faithful dog wagging its tail for the bones its German master drops from the table. But Italy, thanks to the Futurists and Nationalists, has found herself again. [...] We Futurists in America are rushing to battle side by side with our Futurists of Europe. I go. I go to fulfil my Futuristic duty and to participate in the new history of Italy that has begun with these first victories.<sup>90</sup>

This article was accompanied by one of Casarini's drawings, once again illustrating how the artist had fully understood Futurism's most advanced ideas and made them his own (see Fig. 2).

Immediately upon disembarking, Casarini returned to Bologna and enlisted in the 3rd Battalion of the 280th Infantry Division. He was sent to the Eastern Front, where he distinguished himself by his courage and commitment, was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant and placed at the head of a unit. There are no letters or diaries recording his war experience, nor did he appear to have created works during his period of active service, except for a tempera and ink drawing entitled *Ecce homo*. It was executed in a somewhat conventional style similar to the modern illustrations he had previously executed for fashion magazines, a retreat perhaps in line with a 'return to order'. We have more information on the circumstances of his death on Monte San Michele near Gorizia on the night of 12 September 1917 during a military engagement:

On the night of 12 September, the 280th Infantry Division, to which the late Lieutenant Casarini belonged, was engaged in a frenzied battle. Second Lieutenant Casarini, who led his platoon into the fray, was at the head of his men throughout the battle, inciting them with his words and example, and exhibited great courage and a strong spirit of sacrifice in fulfilling his sacred duty. While defending the homeland that he loved – something of which he had given proof on many occasions – he was struck in the head by a bullet from a machine-gun. He died instantly. He was buried on the battlefield, as it was impossible to transport his body back due to the continuous and violent enemy bombardment that raged throughout the area for days. The loss of this great officer was mourned by all the soldiers and officers.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Casarini: "The Futurist Hears the Call of War. 'And I'm Going' Says Casarini", published in *The World Magazine*.

<sup>91</sup> "La notte del dodici Settembre il 280° Fanteria di cui faceva parte il compianto Sottotenente Casarini, fu impegnato in un furioso combattimento. Il sottotenente Casarini che guidava il suo



Fig. 2. Athos Casarini: *The Futurist Hears the Call of War*.  
 Reproduced in *The World Magazine* (New York), 15 August 1915.  
 The caption reads: “This picture, drawn by Casarini, is his Futurist  
 expression of his idea of modern warfare, with himself battling for  
 his country.”

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plotone nella mischia, durante il combattimento stette sempre alla testa dei suoi uomini, incitandoli a parole e con l'esempio, dando prova di grande coraggio e forte spirito di sacrificio nel compimento del sacrosanto dovere. Difendendo la Patria, che in tante occasioni precedenti aveva dimostrato di amare, cadde colpito alla testa da una pallottola di mitragliatrice. La sua morte fu istantanea. Fu seppellito in linea, non essendo stato possibile trasportare indietro la salma a causa del continuo e violento bombardamento nemico che per giorni infuriò su tutta la zona. La perdita del bell'ufficiale è stata compianta dai soldati e dagli ufficiali tutti". Letter of the Lieutenant Colonel and Commander of the Porzio Regiment, 10 Ottobre 1917. Library of the Museo del Risorgimento, Bologna.

The death of the young soldier-painter did not go unnoticed, and newspapers in both Bologna and New York sadly announced his passing.<sup>92</sup> The critic of the *American Art News* remembered him as follows:

Athos Casarini, of the Italian army, an artist well known in Brooklyn, where he lived for several years, was killed in the recent battle of San Michele. [...] Noteworthy among Casarini's works were his paintings of the Manhattan skyline and other harbor views. The masses of buildings and the incessant energy of the metropolis exercised a remarkable influence over him and his best work was devoted to its expression. Hamilton Easter Field, who knew Casarini intimately during the years he spent here, recently said that Casarini would undoubtedly be considered as one of the leaders in the 'futurist' movement in America.<sup>93</sup>

In *Democrazia futurista: Dinamismo politico* (Futurist Democracy: Political Dynamism, 1919), Marinetti included Casarini's name in a list of Futurists who had died at the Front, along with those of Cantucci, Stojanovich, Sant'Elia, Carlo Erba, Luca Labozzetta, Luigi Peron-Cabus, Giovanni Visone, Occhinegro, Angelo Della Santa, Annunzio Cervi and Ugo Tommei.<sup>94</sup> A little more than a year after his death, on the occasion of the *Esposizione nazionale di guerra* (National War Exhibition), inaugurated in Bologna on 17 November 1918, just two weeks after the declaration of victory, the artist was remembered in a room specially dedicated to 'martyr-artists' who had died at the front. Casarini was the most prominent of these, and he was represented by some of his most significant works which had hastily been brought back from New York by his brother Alberto.<sup>95</sup> For the first time, the Italian public was able to appreciate the artist's Futurist works. His memory thus lived on thanks to a new generation of Bolognese Futurists who, as mentioned above, emerged during the immediate post-war years.

Following this event, Casarini's name faded from the annals of art history. Only in 1937, on the twentieth anniversary of his death, did Bologna once again pay homage to the artist by holding a retrospective at the Circolo della Cultura. It was inaugurated on 14 May by Marinetti, whose opening speech provided a concise yet accurate profile of the painter, describing his art's "very clear evo-

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<sup>92</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>93</sup> [Anon.]: "Lieut. Athos Casarini."

<sup>94</sup> Marinetti: *Democrazia futurista: Dinamismo politico*, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> See Virelli: "L'arte alla Esposizione nazionale della guerra."

lution from the healthy dynamic traditionalism of the early works to the Futurist syntheses of the later years”.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

Casarini’s distance from Italy, and consequently, from Futurism’s initial battles, has resulted in the artist being forgotten too quickly by the general public and by art historians, including experts on Futurism. Naturally, his premature death also contributed to this general neglect. However, during his lifetime, Casarini was very well-known, particularly in the United States; he exhibited in several of New York’s most important galleries and in the famous Armory Show of 1913.<sup>97</sup> On this side of the Atlantic, his work also achieved a certain level of recognition, as is proven by his admission to the Union Internationale des Beaux-Arts et Lettres in 1913, and by the fact that he was invited to exhibit ten works at the 1914 Salon d’Automne in Paris, scheduled to open in November but cancelled due to the war.

Unfortunately, neither the exhibition of 1918 nor the important retrospective of 1937, both posthumous, made sufficient impact to ensure continued interest in this artist. Two monographic exhibitions – the first curated by Franco Solmi in 1963 and the second, some forty years later, by Claudio Poppi – have gone some way towards making up for this neglect, but the exploration of his work remains to a large extent restricted to specialists on Bolognese art history. Even today, his contribution to Marinetti’s movement has yet to be fully explored, despite the fact that Casarini was not only “the first Bolognese to convert to Futurism” (“il primo bolognese a convertirsi al futurismo”)<sup>98</sup> but also the spearhead of this avant-garde movement in the United States, together with the more celebrated Joseph Stella and James Henry Daugherty. Furthermore, he was also one of the protagonists of Futurism *tout court* during its ‘heroic’ phase. As Poppi correctly asserts:

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<sup>96</sup> “[...] chiarissima evoluzione che da un sano tradizionalismo dinamico dei suoi primi lavori, va fino alle sintesi futuristiche dell’ultimo periodo”. [Anon.]: “S. E. Marinetti inaugura la Mostra d’arte di Athos Casarini.”

<sup>97</sup> Casarini was the only Italian artist (other than the ex-pat Joseph Stella) to be invited to participate in this prestigious survey promoted by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, at which he exhibited his work *Crime* (see *International Exhibition of Modern Arts*, New York, 1913, p. 24).

<sup>98</sup> Cervellati: *Bologna futurista*, p. 59.



Casarini does not appear to have been a simple ‘follower’, but rather a true promoter of Futurism’s pictorial principles in America, before a single painting by Italian avant-garde artists crossed the Atlantic, other than in photographic reproduction. Some delays and approximations were inevitable [...] [but] one cannot [...] fail to recognize Casarini as one of the very first exponents of Futurism.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Casarini non pare un semplice ‘affiancatore’, ma un vero e proprio divulgatore dei principi pittorici futuristi in America, prima che un solo dipinto degli artisti d’avanguardia italiani varcasse l’oceano, se non in riproduzione fotografica. Scontare ritardi e qualche approssimazione era, allora, inevitabile [...] [ma] non si può [...] non considerare Casarini a pieno titolo tra i primi interpreti del Futurismo”. Poppi: “Athos Casarini: Un futurista sulle onde dell’Atlantico”, p. 136.

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## Appendix

**Gramigna, Dario: "I saturnali del passatismo al Teatro del Corso." *Giornale del mattino* (Bologna), 20 gennaio 1914.**

Più che una lotta fra futurismo e passatismo, come Marinetti e C.i [compagni] si ripromettevano, quella svoltasi ieri sera al *Corso*, fu una gazzarra infernale senza altro scopo preciso e ben delineato se non quello di fare chiasso per il chiasso. Capita così di rado al pubblico di teatro di potersi impunemente abbandonare

alla più clamorosa e sincera espressione del proprio pensiero e dei propri convincimenti, che non parrà strano il pubblico bolognese abbia voluto approfittare di una occasione come quella della serata futurista per farlo con tutta quella libertà che la parola futurismo consente. Solo pochi ingenui potevano aspettarsi un pubblico attento e sereno, disposto ad ascoltare prima di giudicare e ad esprimersi, in ogni modo, con queste forme di giudizio che non contrastano con l'educazione con il buon gusto. Se qualche dubbio fosse ancora rimasto nell'animo di alcuno, bastava ch'egli mettesse piede ieri sera nella sala del Corso, rigurciante di un pubblico imponente, minaccioso, indiatolato, per persuadersi di quanto ho più sopra rilevato. Infatti, una mezzora circa, prima che lo spettacolo si iniziasse sul palcoscenico, un altro spettacolo se generato [?] si svolgeva nella sala fra il pubblico e la platea.

A dir il vero la parte attiva era esclusivamente rappresentata dal primo al danno del secondo con grave pregiudizio dell'incolumità personale di questo. Il gettito delle castagne, delle patate e di un'altra infinità di commestibili, che forse, nell'intenzione dei mille Balilla sparsi per il teatro, doveva esser riserbata ai futuristi, in attesa degli agognati bersagli si iniziò contro il più innocuo pubblico della platea che aveva avuto la dabbenaggine di spendere fior di passatistiche lire per esporsi a quella impreveduta grandinata. Come è facile immaginare le proteste, i battibecchi e i pugilati si svolsero rumorosi ed abbondanti prima che il sipario si alzasse e trasmigrarono dalla sala al palcoscenico quando lo spettacolo ebbe inizio.

Inizio veramente non ci fu subito; perché la scamicciata volontà da parte del pubblico della galleria, di ostacolare ad ogni costo la manifestazione futurista, impedì che la signora Berti-Masi, il Savini e gli altri attori della compagnia Tummiati, potessero pronunziare perfino le prime battute di una commedia in un atto di Emilio Settimelli: *Il fanciullo*, che si annunciava per novissima. Dopo replicati e inutili tentativi gli attori, fra un assordante cacofonia ed un inurbano gettito di proiettili, abbandonarono l'impresa e si ritirarono dietro le quinte, fra le proteste di una buona parte del pubblico, quella che aveva pagato salato il biglietto e che voleva pur averne qualche utile. Tutto lasciava, quindi, prevedere che il programma non avrebbe fatto un passo innanzi e che anche a Bologna, come recentemente a Milano, il pubblico sarebbe stato costretto ad andarsene senza aver potuto ascoltare una sola parola e un solo verso futurista.

Le cose, invece, parvero per un momento volgere a miglior fortuna sicché l'attore Savini, pur fra commenti e interruzioni ironiche riuscì a declamare una lirica del Marinetti: *Inno alla Morte*, raccolta in fine dagli applausi di una parte del pubblico più per reazione all'ingiustificato ostruzionismo della folla, che per consentimento alle truculente immagini del vate futurista.



Trascorsa questa breve parentesi, però, lo *charivari* riprese a scatenarsi per la sala con intensità e con violenza maggiore, specie quando apparve alla ribalta il Marinetti in persona, seguito da Carrà, Boccioni, Russolo e dal musicista Balilla Pratella.

A questo punto il caposcuola del futurismo è fatto segno ad una miriade di proiettili di varia natura ch'egli affronta con la più sorridente indifferenza, guadagnandosi le simpatie e gli applausi di buona parte del pubblico che vorrebbe lo si lasciasse parlare.

Fra un incrocio infernale di invettive e di apostrofi egli riesce così a declamare un inno alla poesia nuova di Paolo Buzzi che è salutato da applausi misti a fischi ed a grida ostili, e una poesia futurista di Luciano Folgore, intitolate, mi pare, *strada-folla-luce* (parole in libertà).

Quello, invece, ch'egli non riesce ad imporre al pubblico è la recitazione del suo *Assedio di Adrianopoli*, che buona parte del pubblico, tuttavia conosce per la recente pubblicazione fattane dal periodico futurista *Lacerba*.

Siamo così alla fine della prima parte del programma e i futuristi si ritirano dal palcoscenico seguiti dai proiettili di cui sopra e dalle invettive dei più scalmanati. Nella sala i battibecchi, le colluttazioni e i pugilati si riprendono con rinnovato vigore, finché il velario si alza per la rappresentazione di *Elettricità* dramma in un atto del Marinetti, che l'autore prima di ritirarsi aveva con superba strafottenza di offrire in pasto all'asinità del pubblico. Questi naturalmente non se lo è fatto ripetere due volte ed ha accolto la recitazione del bizzarro (per quel che se ne è potuto intuire più che ascoltare) lavoro con un chiasso infernale in cui primeggiavano le voci delle trombe d'automobili e delle sirene.

Dato, perciò, l'accompagnamento del pubblico alle singole battute del dialogo non è stato possibile afferrare il significato e il valore del dramma che dal titolo alla conclusione (due fantocci raffiguranti il passato vengono gettati in un fiume) è tutto un programma futurista. Per la cronaca dirò che calata la tela Marinetti appare tranquillo e sereno alla ribalta per raccogliere gli applausi di una parte del pubblico e la più abbondante messe di legumi ed altri generi affini. Si giunge così alla terza e ultima parte del programma che i futuristi hanno dichiarato volere svolgere nella sua integrità a qualunque costo. Il pubblico che ha accettato la baldanzosa sfida si adopera con ogni mezzo a frustare i loro tentativi con quale risultato è facile immaginare. Al Marinetti che è continuamente interrotto segue Balilla Pratella il quale dovrebbe spiegare il significato e il metodo della musica futurista; ma sia perché egli è in minor grado fornito di virtù polmonari, sia perché il pubblico si è fatto più intollerante, il discorso è ascoltato dai soli compagni del musico-fururista, i quali lo applaudono freneticamente alla fine. La stessa sorte tocca a Boccioni che dovrebbe parlare della pittura futurista e al Carrà che dovrebbe tener discorso sulla critica d'arte. I due

oratori insieme al terzo e ultimo, Russolo, che si era proposto di spiegare la sua ultima invenzione: *l'intonarumori*, sono zittiti e fischiati durante le loro concioni che la loro voce non giunge che ai più prossimi al palcoscenico, i quali sono anche i più favorevoli alla *troupe* marinettiana se si deve giudicare dal calore con cui applaudono.

Oramai la mezzanotte si avvicina; quella parte del pubblico che si era proposta di giudicare il futurismo rinuncia alla difficile impresa e infila la porta; ma i più accalorati rimangono in sala e si fanno sotto la ribalta donde i cinque futuristi continuano in coro a rimbeccare le invettive della massa. In breve i due gruppi si riscaldano e fra il gettito degli ultimi proiettili si impegna fra futuristi e passatisti una lotta a corpo a corpo. Marinetti, lancia, quindi i due caposaldi del suo programma politico: anticlericalismo e antisocialismo, e si ritira coi suoi dietro il sipario seguito da alcuni simpatizzanti che all'uscita lo accompagnano come scorta d'onore per le vie della città. Così termina la gazzarra durata oltre tre ore ed il teatro si chiude. Chiudendo queste note di cronaca; poiché altro non è stato possibile fare, dirò con schietta sincerità che il pubblico ha qualche volta ecceduto nella forma del suo ... apprezzamento, le cui conseguenze oltre che sui futuristi si sono riversate sul pubblico della platea.

Molti, infatti, ieri sera, deploravano e giustamente che il lancio dei proiettili non si limitasse a quelli di piccolo volume, ma si estendesse persino alle patate, alle arance e alle lampadine elettriche e che non si risparmiassero neppure le signore.

Per buona sorte non si ebbero a deplorare gravi conseguenze; ma non è detto essere passatista non voglia significare in qualunque caso essere ineducati. E questo fia suggel....