



Palazzo
Medici
Riccardi

DEPERO

CAVALCATA FANTASTICA

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CITTÀ METROPOLITANA
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FLORENCE
ART WEEK



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In the aftermath of the tragic flood that ravaged Florence **in 1966**, the naval engineer **Alberto Della Ragione** donated his collection of 241 works of art to the **City of Florence** in response to the appeal that **Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti** and the **International Committee for Florence** addressed to artists and collectors to "*contribute to the resurrection of Florence*".

One of the most valuable works donated was a stunning oil on canvas by **Fortunato Depero** entitled ***Nitrito in velocità***.

Starting from this work, now in the collection of the **Museo Novecento in Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi** is hosting an exhibition dedicated to the great Trento native artist, bringing together masterpieces from a prestigious private collection and from **Mart, the Museum of modern and contemporary art of Trento and Rovereto**, which keeps an important group of works that Depero donated to the City of Rovereto in **1957** for the creation of a museum dedicated to him.

Fortunato Depero (1892-1960) was born in Fondo, Val di Non. At an early age, he moved with his family to Rovereto, which he considered his adoptive city. There, he studied at the Scuola Reale Elisabetтина, a technical institute of applied art meant to favour interdisciplinarity between practice and academics. Young Depero was immediately attracted by Italian art and its influences. Even before reaching the age of twenty, he visited Turin, then Florence, eventually, **Rome**, where he relocated for a short period together with his wife-to-be **Rosetta Amadori**.

In Rome, Depero was bewitched by **Umberto Boccioni's** oeuvre and made the acquaintance of **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti**, **Giacomo Balla**, and **Francesco Cangiullo**, and adhered to the **Futurist movement**.

The Futurist aesthetics, which aimed at restyling daily life with new forms and colours, abandoning the academic division between "higher" and "lesser" artistic expressions, echoed the artistic ideals of young Depero perfectly.

In **1915**, he was the signatory together with Balla of the manifesto entitled Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe in which they sought to "*achieve a total fusion to reconstruct the universe by making it more joyful, in other words by an integral re-creation*".

The mechanical tale staged with **I Balli plastici** followed a previous theatre experience that Depero shared with the founder of the **Ballets Russes, Sergei Djagilev** who, in **1916**, had entrusted him with the set and costume designs for ***Le Chant du rossignol*** by **Igor Stravinsky**. Depero produced some costume sketches and a large mock-up for the set, imagined as a fantasy place made of flowers and geometrical compositions, an “*abstract landscape consisting of cones, pyramids, and polyhedrons*”, which the painter had already envisaged theoretically in the manifesto **Futurist reconstruction of the Universe**.

However, the complex staging – and a probable collaboration with **Picasso** for the costumes for the ballet ***Parade*** – aborted the project, which was ultimately brought to the stage in **1920** with costumes designed by **Henri Matisse**.

This did not stop Depero, though: the characters and the set designs conceived for the Ballets Russes played a leading role in some of his most famous works, and the textiles that were not used for Djagilev’s show were employed for the fabric creations that put the painter in the international spotlight.

Bright colours, flat fields of paint, and geometric and joyful forms, which are distinctive of the Depero style, pervaded the canvas going beyond its borders, leaping into daily life. The artist designed and created **toys, furniture, furnishings, tapestries, pillows, and other textiles.**

In **1919**, he established a true **House of Futurist Art** where he would produce his creations in Rovereto, which had been destroyed by the Great War. The beating heart of his artistic workshop was represented by "**patchwork tapestry**" based on his designs and assembled by a group of embroiderers under the supervision of his wife Rosetta.

According to Depero, these tapestries, which stood out for their dazzling colours, simple lines, and imaginary characters, were meant to *"advance an ultra-modern solution that would replace any type of Gobelins tapestry, or Persian, Turkish, Arab, Indian tapestry that today invade any distinct environment"*.

One of the first cloth patchworks produced in the Rovereto workshop is ***Cavalcata fantastica***, commissioned by writer Umberto Notari for the Smoking Room in his villa in Monza.

The idea of *“painting using colourful textiles”* came to his mind a few years before establishing his **“House of Futurist Art”**, when the artist was a guest in Capri of **Gilbert Clavel**, a Swiss poet who had relocated to Italy in the early 20th century.

The acclaimed *“professor of ancient Egypt, an explorer and an observer endowed with an artist’s sensitivity, a writer, an enthusiast of peoples, of poetry, and metaphysics”*, spellbound by Depero’s fantasy characters and distinctive style, had welcomed the painter to his villa to work on the illustrations for his book **An institute for suicide**, released in **1917**.

That was the beginning of a collaboration and a friendship between the two men that would lead to a stunning theatrical project, **I Balli Plastici**, with **choreography by Depero and Clavel** and music by **Alfredo Casella**, who is portrayed here in a drawing from that time.

The show, which was successfully staged in **1918 at the Teatro dei Piccoli in Rome**, represented one of the first avant-garde theatre experiments. In line with the idea of a Futurist drama, actors were replaced by automatons, designed by Depero based on the world and friends surrounding him: for instance, the little clown brings Clavel to mind, while the man with a moustache is most probably a tribute to the father of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti.

Driven by curiosity in **1928**, Depero and his wife made their way to **New York** intending to open a **branch of his art gallery**. New York represented **the Futurist city par excellence** for the artist, the temple of modernity where mechanics, speed, lights, and skyscrapers reigned supreme. The metropolis immediately became the subject of many of his works. Here, he had the opportunity to come in contact with **the advertising and publishing world**, and collaborated with acclaimed magazines, including *Vanity Fair* and *News Auto Atlas*.

Yet, his arrival in the Big Apple coincided with the **Great Depression of 1929**, and his project for the **"Depero's Futuristic House"** did not take off, forcing him to return to Italy in **1930**.

Two years later, Depero exhibited *Nitrato in velocità* at the **Biennale di Venezia** the painting was probably purchased by **Alberto Della Ragione**. The subject was so successful that Depero created various versions of it. The new plastic and mechanical language translated the dynamic motion of the horse and rider, a theme already extensively explored by other Futurist artists and that Depero rendered masterfully with his lines of force and triangles.

It's time to stop recognising artists after their death or in an elderly age. The artists need to be recognised, appreciated and glorified during their lives, and so they have the right to use the most efficient and unexpected ways for the advertising of their own genius and works.

F. Depero

BIOGRAFIA

Fortunato Depero was born in Fondo (TN) on **30 March 1892**. At an early age, he moved with his family to Rovereto where he studied at the Scuola Reale Elisabetтина, a technical and applied art institute which was attended in those same years by other illustrious personalities, including **Luciano Baldessari, Carlo Belli, Fausto Melotti, Lionello Fiumi, and Tullio Garbari**.

After a short period spent in Turin and Florence, he relocated to **Rome in 1913** with his wife-to-be **Rosetta Amadori**. While in Rome, he was introduced to **Giacomo Balla** and **Francesco Cangiullo**, and, most importantly, to the father of **Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti**, and **Umberto Boccioni** whose art was particularly fascinating to him. **In 1915**, he joined the Futurist movement and, in March of the same year, was the signatory together with Balla of the manifesto ***Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe***, in which the authors expressed the need for an art that was all-inclusive, that might embrace every aspect of daily life, from music to cuisine, from design to advertising, from fashion to theatre.

In 1916, the impresario of the **Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev**, commissioned him to design sets and costumes for the ballet ***Le Chant du rossignol*** to music by **Igor Stravinsky**.

BIOGRAFIA

Unfortunately, though, this ambitious project, which would lay the foundations for what would later be called '**Plastic Theatre**', was aborted and the show was ultimately brought to the stage with costumes designed by another internationally acclaimed artist, **Henri Matisse**.

In 1917, Depero made the acquaintance of the Swiss poet **Gilbert Clavel**, who entrusted him with the illustrations for his latest book ***An Institute for Suicide***. That was the beginning of a collaboration and a friendship between the two men who, in 1918, will stage ***I Balli Plastici***, a five-act show to music by **Casella, Malipiero, Bartok, and Tyrwhitt** featuring automata realized in colourful wood in lieu of actual actors.

In 1919, Depero returned with his wife to Rovereto, where he established the "**Casa d'Arte Futurista Depero**", an artistic workshop where he would produce **design objects, furniture, toys, textiles, and above all, large cloth patchworks**.

Depero's artistic career moved along with numerous engagements. **In 1923**, he took part in the **I Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa** held in Monza, while in Milan, in **1924**, he staged his mechanical ballet ***Anihccam del 3000*** to music by **Casavola** with Marinetti's theatre company, **Compagnia del Nuovo Teatro Futurista**.

BIOGRAFIA

In 1925, he exhibited in **Paris** at the **Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes** and, in December of that same year, he held a solo show at the **Théâtre des Champs-Élysées**.

In 1927, he published **Depero-Dinamo-Azari**, better known as the "**Bolted Book**", the first specimen of a Futurist book-object, which put Depero in the limelight of advertising and graphic design.

Thanks to his friend **Fedele Azari**, Depero began an important collaboration with **Campari**, for which **he designed**, at least until the early 1930s, **several advertising campaigns**, besides the iconic small **Campari Soda bottle**.

In **September 1928**, Depero and his wife made their way to **New York** intending to open a branch of his art gallery. Although the project for the **Depero's Futuristic House** did not have the success he had hoped for, the artist was however largely committed in those years with advertising companies and designed the covers of acclaimed magazines, including **Vogue**, **Vanity Fair**, **Sparks**, **The New Yorker**, **News Auto Atlas**, and **Atlantica**.

BIOGRAFIA

In **1930**, he returned to Italy and, the following year, displayed with the Futurist group at the **I Quadriennale Nazionale d'Arte** in Rome, followed by his participation in **XVIII Biennale di Venezia** and in the **V Triennale di Milano**, besides numerous national and international shows.

In **1940**, he published an important autobiography, ***Fortunato Depero nelle opere e nella vita***, featuring writings, drawings, reviews, and reproductions of his works.

In **1948**, he was once again in **New York** to take part in some exhibitions and to promote "**buxus**", a material that Depero had perfected and used to upholster Futurist furniture, wishing to export it overseas. However, the climate in the United States had changed dramatically and Futurist artists were no longer well regarded. Depero was forced to return to Italy without any success.

Once back in Italy, he was commissioned with some works for the ***Sala del Consiglio Provinciale in Trento*** and, in **1957**, in collaboration with the city council of Rovereto, he set up the **Galleria Permanente e Museo Depero** featuring a wide array of works, drawings, manuscripts, and books that he donated to the city. These works later flowed into the Depero Collection conserved at **Mart, Museum of modern and contemporary art of Trento and Rovereto**.

Fortunato Depero died in Rovereto on **29 November 1960**.