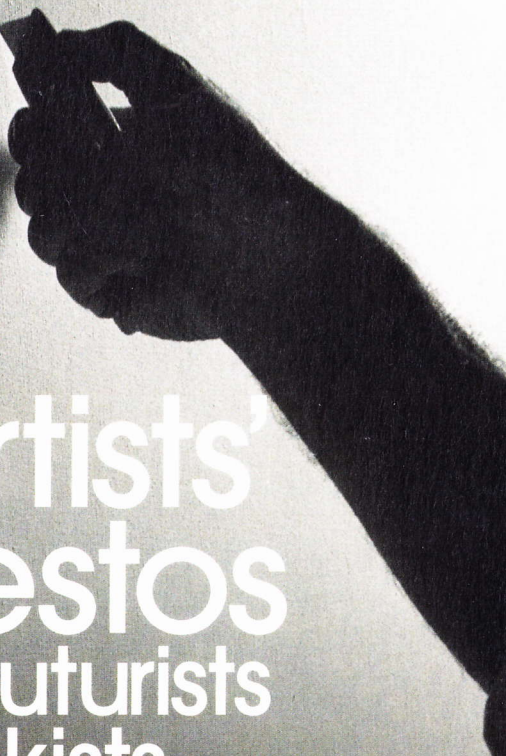


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100 Artists' Manifestos

From the Futurists
to the Stuckists

Selected by Alex Danchev

MODERN CLASSICS

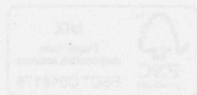


100 Artists' Manifestos

Edited with an Introduction by Alex Danchev



PENGUIN BOOKS



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MI F. T. Marinetti

The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism

(1909)

This historic document announced not only the founding of Futurism, but also the beginning of the very idea of the artist's manifesto. It was at once a new genre and a reinvention (or a remix) of the political original, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), the ur-manifesto of the modern age. The Futurist Manifesto had an impact that was both immediate and long-lasting. It loosened tongues, shortened tempers and emboldened imitators of every nation and persuasion. It triggered an avalanche of artists' manifestos – fifty more over the next few years from the Futurists alone, many of them composed or inspired by the irrepressible Marinetti. The manifesto was a continuation of art by other means. Over the next twenty years, the art wars of the avant-garde produced the canonic manifestos of the classic movements – the Futurists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists and their brothers and sisters and splinters – all of them owing something to this founding text and fundamental example. One hundred years after its first publication, it has not ceased to provoke.

The announcement was suitably spectacular: it was splashed on the front page of *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909. We now know that it had been extensively trailed in Italy before being launched upon the world. After it appeared in *Le Figaro* there was no stopping it. As if in conformity with Futurist principles, the French text was speedily published as a leaflet and all Europe leafleted. It was translated into English, German, Spanish, Russian, Czech and other languages. It appeared as a preface to Enrico Cavacchioli, *La Rannochie turchine* [*The Turquoise Frogs*] and *Enquête internationale sur le vers libre* (1909). The definitive Italian version was published in the Futurist house journal *Poesia* in February–March 1909 in Milan. It was declaimed soon afterwards by Marinetti himself from the stage of the Alfieri Theatre, Turin, and then in other theatres in other cities. Its dissemination, too, was a model for its successors.

F. T. MARINETTI (1876–1944), philosopher, novelist, playwright, poet, propagandist and self-publicist, might be called the first artist of the manifesto. He was not a painter, but he was a figure. The pioneers of Dadaism (the next big thing) were full of admiration for Apollinaire, Kandinsky and Marinetti as 'the greatest figures in modern art'. Tristan Tzara, the capo of Dadaism, and André Breton, the pope of Surrealism, knowingly followed in his footsteps (see M28 and M50). As manifestoists and strategists, artists and revolutionists, such men were in many ways mini-Marinettis. For all his borrowing, Marinetti was a true original. Not only did he instigate something that could credibly be called an artistic movement; as mobilizer, organizer and proselytizer, he was as important in the history of European modernism as Trotsky in the history of the Russian Revolution.

My friends and I stayed up all night, sitting beneath the lamps of a mosque, whose star-studded, filigreed brass domes resembled our souls, all aglow with the concentrated brilliance of an electric heart. For many hours, we'd been trailing our age-old indolence back and forth over richly adorned, oriental carpets, debating at the uttermost boundaries of logic and filling up masses of paper with our frenetic writings.

Immense pride filled our hearts, for we felt that at that hour we alone were vigilant and unbending, like magnificent beacons or guards in forward positions, facing an enemy of hostile stars, which watched us closely from their celestial encampments. Alone we were, with the stokers working feverishly at the infernal fires of great liners; alone with the black spectres that rake through the red-hot bellies of locomotives, hurtling along at breakneck speed; alone with the floundering drunks, with the uncertain beating of our wings, along the city walls.

Suddenly we were startled by the terrifying clatter of huge double-decker trams jolting by, all ablaze with different-coloured lights, as if they were villages in festive celebration, which the River Po, in full spate, suddenly shakes and uproots to sweep them away down to the sea, over the falls and through the whirlpools of a mighty flood.

Then the silence became more sombre. Yet even while we were listening to the tedious, mumbled prayers of an ancient canal and the creaking

bones of dilapidated palaces on their tiresome stretches of soggy lawn, we caught the sudden roar of ravening motor cars, right there beneath our windows.

'Come on! Let's go!' I said. 'Come on, my lads, let's get out of here! At long last, all the myths and mystical ideals are behind us. We're about to witness the birth of a Centaur and soon we shall witness the flight of the very first Angels! . . . We shall have to shake the gates of life itself to test their locks and hinges! . . . Let's be off! See there, the Earth's very first dawn! Nothing can equal the splendour of the sun's red sword slicing through our millennial darkness, for the very first time!'

We approached the three panting beasts to stroke their burning breasts, full of loving admiration. I stretched myself out on my car like a corpse on its bier, but immediately I was revived as the steering wheel, like a guillotine blade, threatened my belly.

A furious gust of madness tore us out of ourselves and hurled us along roads as deep and plunging as the beds of torrents. Every now and then a feeble light, flickering behind some windowpane, made us mistrust the calculations of our all-too-fallible eyes. I cried out, 'The scent, nothing but the scent! That's all an animal needs!'

And we, like young lions, chased after Death, whose black pelt was dotted with pale crosses, as he sped away across the vast, violet-tinted sky, vital and throbbing.

And yet we had no idealized Lover whose sublime being rose up into the skies; no cruel Queen to whom we might offer up our corpses, contorted like Byzantine rings! Nothing at all worth dying for, other than the desire to divest ourselves finally of the courage that weighed us down!

But we sped on, squashing beneath our scorching tyres the snarling guard dogs at the doorsteps of their houses, like crumpled collars under a hot iron. Death, tamed by this time, went past me at each bend, only to offer me his willing paw; and sometimes he would lie down, his teeth grinding, eyeing me with his soft, gentle look from every puddle in the road.

'Let's leave wisdom behind as if it were some hideous shell, and cast ourselves, like fruit, flushed with pride, into the immense, twisting jaws of the wind! . . . Let's become food for the Unknown, not out of desperation, but simply to fill up the deep wells of the Absurd to the very brim!'

I had hardly got these words out of my mouth when I swung the car around sharply, with all the crazy irrationality of a dog trying to bite its

own tail. Then suddenly a pair of cyclists came towards me, gesticulating that I was on the wrong side, dithering about in front of me like two different lines of thought, both persuasive but for all that, quite contradictory. Their stupid uncertainty was in my way . . . How ridiculous! What a nuisance! . . . I braked hard and to my disgust the wheels left the ground and I flew into a ditch . . .

O mother of a ditch, brimful with muddy water! Fine repair shop of a ditch! How I relished your strength-giving sludge that reminded me so much of the saintly black breast of my Sudanese nurse . . . When I got myself up – soaked, filthy, foul-smelling rag that I was – from beneath my overturned car, I had a wonderful sense of my heart being pierced by the red-hot sword of joy!

A crowd of fishermen, with their lines, and some gouty old naturalists were already milling around this wondrous spectacle. Patiently, meticulously, they set up tall trestles and laid out huge iron-mesh nets to fish out my car, as if it were a great shark that had been washed up and stranded. Slowly the car's frame emerged, leaving its heavy, sober bodywork at the bottom of the ditch as well as its soft, comfortable upholstery, as though they were merely scales.

They thought it was dead, that gorgeous shark of mine, but a caress was all it needed to revive it, and there it was, back from the dead, darting along with its powerful fins!

So, with my face covered in repair-shop grime – a fine mixture of metallic flakes, profuse sweat and pale-blue soot – with my arms all bruised and bandaged, yet quite undaunted, I dictated our foremost desires to all men on Earth who are truly alive:

THE FUTURIST MANIFESTO

1. We want to sing about the love of danger, about the use of energy and recklessness as common, daily practice.
2. Courage, boldness and rebellion will be essential elements in our poetry.
3. Up to now, literature has extolled a contemplative stillness, rapture and reverie. We intend to glorify aggressive action, a restive wakefulness, life at the double, the slap and the punching fist.

4. We believe that this wonderful world has been further enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed. A racing car, its bonnet decked with exhaust pipes like serpents with galvanic breath . . . a roaring motor car, which seems to race on like machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace.

5. We wish to sing the praises of the man behind the steering wheel, whose sleek shaft traverses the Earth, which itself is hurtling at breakneck speed along the racetrack of its orbit.

6. The poet will have to do all in his power, passionately, flamboyantly, and with generosity of spirit, to increase the delirious fervour of the primordial elements.

7. There is no longer any beauty except the struggle. Any work of art that lacks a sense of aggression can never be a masterpiece. Poetry must be thought of as a violent assault upon the forces of the unknown with the intention of making them prostrate themselves at the feet of mankind.

8. We stand upon the furthest promontory of the ages! . . . Why should we be looking back over our shoulders, if what we desire is to smash down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the realms of the Absolute, for we have already created infinite, omnipresent speed.

9. We wish to glorify war – the sole cleanser of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive act of the libertarian, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women.

10. We wish to destroy museums, libraries, academies of any sort, and fight against moralism, feminism, and every kind of materialistic, self-serving cowardice.

11. We shall sing of the great multitudes who are roused up by work, by pleasure, or by rebellion; of the many-hued, many-voiced tides of revolution in our modern capitals; of the pulsating, nightly ardour of arsenals and shipyards, ablaze with their violent electric moons; of railway stations, voraciously devouring smoke-belching serpents; of workshops hanging from the clouds by their twisted threads of smoke; of bridges which, like giant gymnasts, bstride the rivers, flashing in the sunlight like gleaming knives; of intrepid steamships that sniff out the horizon; of broad-breasted locomotives, champing on the wheels like enormous steel horses, bridled with pipes; and of the lissom flight of the aeroplane,

whose propeller flutters like a flag in the wind, seeming to applaud, like a crowd excited.

It is from Italy that we hurl at the whole world this utterly violent, inflammatory manifesto of ours, with which we today are founding 'Futurism', because we wish to free our country from the stinking canker of its professors, archaeologists, tour guides and antiquarians.

For far too long Italy has been a marketplace for junk dealers. We want our country free from the endless number of museums that everywhere cover her like countless graveyards. Museums, graveyards! . . . They're the same thing, really, because of their grim profusion of corpses that no one remembers. Museums. They're just public flophouses, where things sleep on forever, alongside other loathsome or nameless things! Museums: ridiculous abattoirs for painters and sculptors, who are furiously stabbing one another to death with colours and lines, all along the walls where they vie for space.

Sure, people may go there on pilgrimage about once a year, just as they do to the cemetery on All Souls Day – I'll grant you that. And yes, once a year a wreath of flowers is laid at the feet of the *Gioconda* [the *Mona Lisa*] – I'll grant you that too! But what I won't allow is that our miseries, our fragile courage, or our sickly anxieties get marched daily around these museums. Why should we want to poison ourselves? Why should we want to rot?

What on earth is there to be discovered in an old painting other than the laboured contortions of the artist, trying to break down the insuperable barriers which prevent him from giving full expression to his artistic dream? . . . Admiring an old painting is just like pouring our purest feelings into a funerary urn, instead of projecting them far and wide, in violent outbursts of creation and of action.

Do you really want to waste all your best energies in this unending, futile veneration for the past, from which you emerge fatally exhausted, diminished, trampled down?

Make no mistake, I'm convinced that for an artist to go every day to museums and libraries and academies (the cemeteries of wasted effort, calvaries of crucified dreams, records of impulses cut short! . . .) is every bit as harmful as the prolonged over-protectiveness of parents for certain young people who get carried away by their talent and ambition. For