

COMPARATIVE STUDY

THE PORTRAYAL OF MOTION

BY: JACOB STAUB

PIECES: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

All three pieces intend to portray motions that are often overlooked in an individual and abstract way. Two of the pieces I will look at are fruits of the futurist movement and the other is from a contemporary artist who doesn't align with any particular movement.



1.)

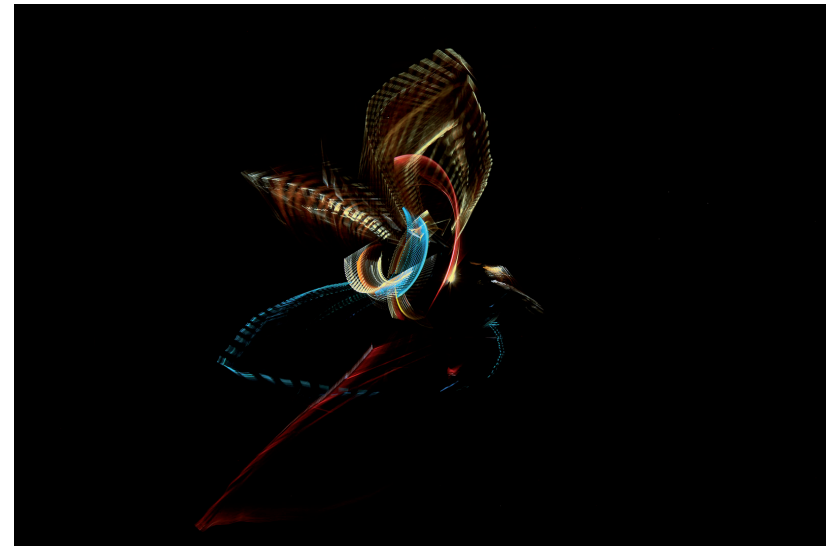
MARCEL DUCHAMP,
Nude Descending
a Staircase, No. 2,
oil on canvas,
57 7/8" x 35 1/8"
Painted in 1912

2.)



AUTOMOBILE IN CORSA,
Giacomo Balla
Oil and ink on paper
laid down on board
29 by 41 in.
Painted in 1913

3.)

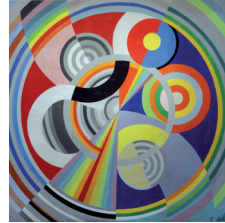


ERUPTION,
camera with
long exposure,
Jan Leonardo

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FUTURISM

CUBISM

- Time: 1870-1910
- Founded/developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques
- Intended to revamp existing styles of arts
- Influenced by the geometric shapes in some of Paul Cezanne's later works
- Generally characterized by geometric shapes such as squares and rectangles (hence cubism)
- Responding to and influenced by the early stages of growing industrialization. Cubists had a fascination for machine driven objects, thus portraying organic shapes in a more mechanical way (harsher transition between colors and cubistic representation of rounded shapes)



Some of the main contributing artists are:

Pablo Picasso
Georges Braque
Jean Metzinger
Albert Gleizes
Marcel Duchamp
Robert Delaunay



SIMILARITIES:

Both cubism and Futurism reject the Idea of photo realism and accurate depictions of movements and objects. This rejection stems from fast moving advancements in technology and generally undergoing changes. For some of the artists it was difficult to understand and keep up with the rapid advancements of technology and society resulting in a more abstract representation of their reality in their pieces. Furthermore, both movements are characterized by their use of abrupt and sharp edges along with polygonal shapes as a substitute for rounded photorealistic representations, which were more common prior to both movements. Also, the accurate representation of light and shadow is uncommon for both cubism and Futurism as the the emphasis is placed more on the expression of the shapes and objects in the composition and less on their photorealistic detail.

FUTURISM

- Time: Started around the 1900's
- Founded/started in Italy, England and Russia
- Developed from Cubism and Vorticism
- Depicts and incorporates themes of war, technology, the fully fledged industrial revolution, mechanics and the overall change in society
- Generally characterized by strong, geometric bold shapes (similar to cubism), along with an absence of a any kind of photorealistic detail. Furthermore, the layering and overlapping of the shapes, textures and colors is a common denominator for most futurist works



Some of the main contributing artists are:

Umberto Boccioni
Giacomo Balla
Marcel Duchamp
Alexander Bogamazov
David Bomberg



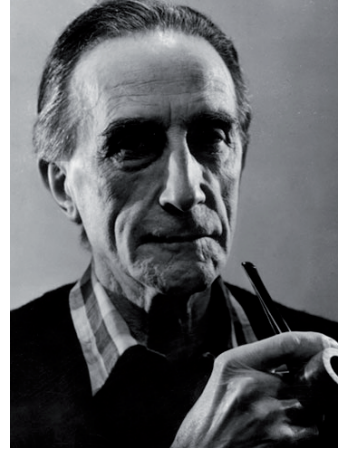
DIFFERENCES:

The major differences between the two movements are the portrayals of motion and dynamics in the pieces. Whereas cubists focused mostly on still representations of particular scenes, futurist pieces are characterized by their capturing of motion and movement. This could be attributed to the fact that motorcars and planes developed into more widespread means of transportation as oppose to being reserved for the excessively wealthy as the had been before (1890-1905). The experience of this along with other "wonders" from the industrial revolution triggered the interest in dynamics and movements that usually don't meet the eye.

MARCEL DUCHAMP

- 1.) Marcel Duchamp was born on July 28, 1887 in the Normandy in France and died on the second of October in 1968 in Neuilly-sur-seine, Paris, France. Duchamp studied fine arts in paris, yet not showing much vigour in doing so. His three older brothers had already become artists as he went to school. During his studies he was heavily influenced by Cezanne, symbolism, cubism, fauvism and popular illustration. At one point he made a few comics for a local paper, which also inspired him to incorporate comedic elements in his later art works. Throughout his career Duchamp was linked to various movements. He was active in cubism, futurism and eventually spearheaded the American dada movements with two of his fellow artist friends (Man Ray and Francis Picabia). Despite being involved in various movements he never admitted allegiance to any of them. He said that art should be driven by ideas, not movements. During his working period Duchamp produced fewer artworks than most other artists. He was considered to be the “father of conceptual art”.

One of Duchamp’ most famous artistic approaches was the creation of so-called “readymades”. “Readymades” were ordinary, mass produced objects which duchamp pulled completely completely out of their context and intended use. He preferred concept driven pieces to pieces with pure visual pleasure (photorealistic pieces) as he believed they were too simple and un-intellectual. Despite this he still maintained an eye for perspective and proportion over the years, which came in useful in is experiments with machines and the capturing of motion. As mentioned Humor and satire play a roll in many of his pieces (subversive humor, puns and sexual connotations)



BICYCLE WHEEL, 1951
Marcel Duchamp,
Metal wheel mounted
on painted wood stool,
51 x 25 x 16 1/2“

1.) NUDE DESCENDING A STAIR CASE

BY MARCEL DUCHAMP,

COMPOSITIONAL:

Nearly all of the shapes and forms that occurs in the piece are in some way stacked or superimposed especially so in the lighter areas that the viewer sees first. The focal point is the area that is substantially lighter in tone than the rest of the painting. The viewer will look at this section before any other. For this reason Duchamp decided to display the “nude” in the lighter section of the composition, in order to immediately draw attention to it. The colors used in this painting are dark browns, greens, beiges and grays. Duchamp uses black swirls around the outside of the “limbs” of the nude to show trembling movements of said “limbs”. This effect can also be seen in comics occasionally. The proportions of the nude are very difficult to grasp as the piece focuses more on the abstract portrayal of the motion. If any thing then her limbs seem slightly larger than normal. The canvas is fully loaded and used up. There is no empty space left any where in the piece.

CONTEXT/CONCEPTS:

The piece is called” Nude descending a staircase” and the choice of portraying a Nude immediately takes the subject out of a any context, such as gender, ethnicity, time period and culture. The “nude” as figure is entirely neutral. This is done to focus the piece on the different stages of motion the “nude” undergoes and on the abstract capturing of this motion. Duchamp tried to omit all details of the human body or of the surrounding that aren’t related to the movement of the nude. The colors and the cubistic approach to representing the limbs of the nude can be attributed to the futurist movement. The colors feel simple and mechanical and lack empathy and soul. The depictions of the limbs are superimposed in such a way that the movements of the nude seem mechanical and un-rhythmic, which is an allusion to the themes of war, industrialization and changes society was going through at the time the piece was created.

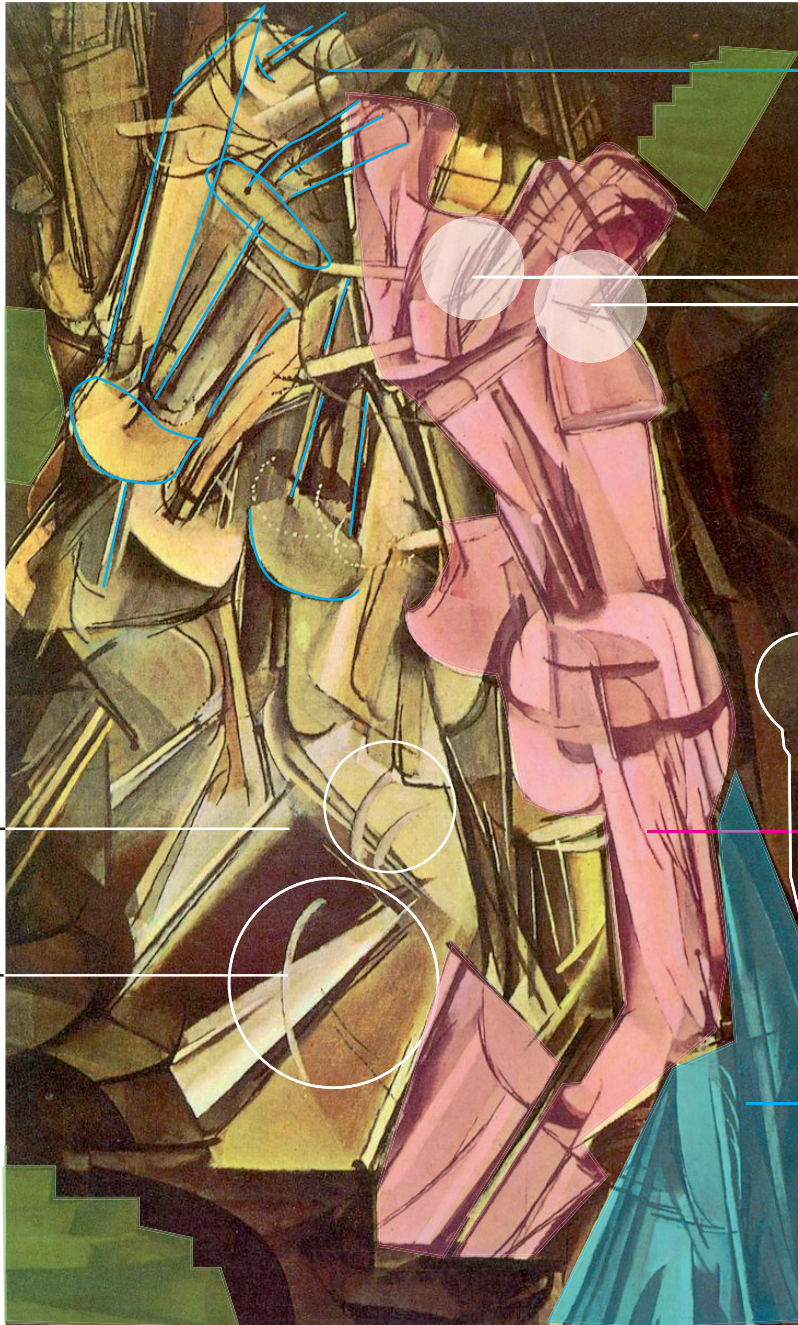
TECHNICAL:

The media Duchamp used to create his art work was oil on canvas. The strokes are very coarse and deliberately imprecise which is characteristic for Duchamp since he largely rejected pieces in photorealistic detail. He uses slightly finer brushstrokes for the squiggles he uses to show the trembling motions of the “nude”. He also uses very dark shades both in the fore and back ground to represent an abstract interpretation of shadows.



1.) NUDE DESCENDING A STAIR CASE (FURTHER ANALYSIS)

(Area shaded in green)
Elements of “stairs” are shown, but subdued in the back ground by blending them into the darker tones of said background and blurring their lines slightly. Duchamp does this to focus the viewer on the nude, not the background.



The blue lines highlight some of the sections that are strongly superimposed and layered. This Duchamp's way of portraying all of the motions the nude undergoes.

Two examples of the swirls/squiggles that Duchamp uses to portray the motions/trembles within the limbs of the nude.

This is probably the only photorealistic element of the entire piece. The stair post, like the rest of the “stair” elements is drawn in a darker tone and thus subdued in the background.

(Area shaded in red) This the lightest section (tone) of the composition and thus the focal point of the piece. It also shows the nude in it's final state of motion (there is very little visual motion to the right of this section/focal point).

(The area shaded in Blue) This is a sample section of the piece that shows the coarse, imprecise and vivid brushstrokes that Duchamp uses throughout the piece. This technique is characteristic for the futurist movement.

A slightly larger swirl that Duchamp uses to show the motions/trembles of the entire “nude”.

GIACOMO BALLA

- 2.) Giacomo Balla was born on July 18th in Turin Italy and died on the first of march in 1958, in Rome, Italy. Balla was an autodidact, receiving very little in the way of formal Art schooling. He was greatly influenced by French Neo-Impressionism as a young artist resulting from an extended stay in Paris. Upon returning home he shared his experiences with two other fellow young artists, Umberto Boccioni and Gino Severini. After that he was further influenced by poet Filippo Marinetti (who launched the literary movement of futurism). As a result he and the other two artists started the movement of Italian Futurism in 1910. Balla remained faithful to the futurist movement long after it was considered “over”.



Unlike most futurists Balla was particularly interested in themes of war, evolution and revolution. He was more interested in the portrayal of dynamics, motion and light. In 1913-14 he devoted his focus to the movements and dynamics of racing cars. The series was called “speed of racing automobiles” and began with sketches of a fiat type 1 (modern then but an old-timer today) to understand the forms and concepts of a still car, before focusing on the motions of said car (one example is the piece I am looking at “automobile in corsa”). Despite the usual connotations of futurism (strength, steel, machinery and advancement) Balla considered himself to be a lyrical painter. He appreciated rhythm and composition in his paintings almost as much as the classic futurist elements (see cultural context “futurism”). A different way Balla portrayed motion was in his piece “Dynamism of a dog on a leash” where he painted and then superimposed various stills of a dog’s and it’s owner’s stride in order to show the movement that aren’t usually visible to the eye.



DYNAMISM OF A DOG
ON A LEASH,
1912,
Oil on canvas ,
35.5" x 43.25

2.) AUTOMOBILE IN CORSA

BY GIACOMO BALLA

COMPOSITIONAL:

The piece is laid out on a white background with black diagonal lines on it. The lines outline the space in which the car was travelling, the pit garage perhaps. . In the foreground there are a multitude of swirls that show the motion of the turbulations caused by the cars wheels as it drives past. Strangely, the focal point of the piece is not one of the swirls in the foreground of the image but rather the top left corner of the image where most of the diagonal lines meet. The colors used in the piece seem mechanical and man made as most of them resemble the the color metals (silver, bronze, gold, gray). Balla also uses a variety of different brushstrokes/technique such as blurred and soft strokes for the swirls, coarse yet determined strokes for the diagonals and shading to give the room realistic depth and space. Lastly, the piece is very light in the foreground and then fades into darker tones in the back ground.

CONTEXT/CONCEPTS:

The main Idea of Balla's piece is to capture the motion of the turbulences and vortices caused by a race car in a closed space. He focuses on the motions that are usually hidden to the eye as the turbulations can't be seen without an indicator (such as smoke). Despite not incorporating classical themes of futurism such as war and the industrial revolution into his art work Balla did find the race car (also a new invention in Balla's time) deeply fascinating. This piece is part of an entire series devoted to various aspects of racing cars. Balla uses soft yet dominant round swirls in his piece to show the motion of the wheels. He strips the piece of everything that is not to do with the space and the movement of the wheels, initially, it is almost difficult to recognize said swirls as what they are yet once one does the piece shows a completely new perspective of the car and it's movement. In that way Balla's piece clearly links to futurism as it offers a completely new viewpoint of an almost unfamiliar object.

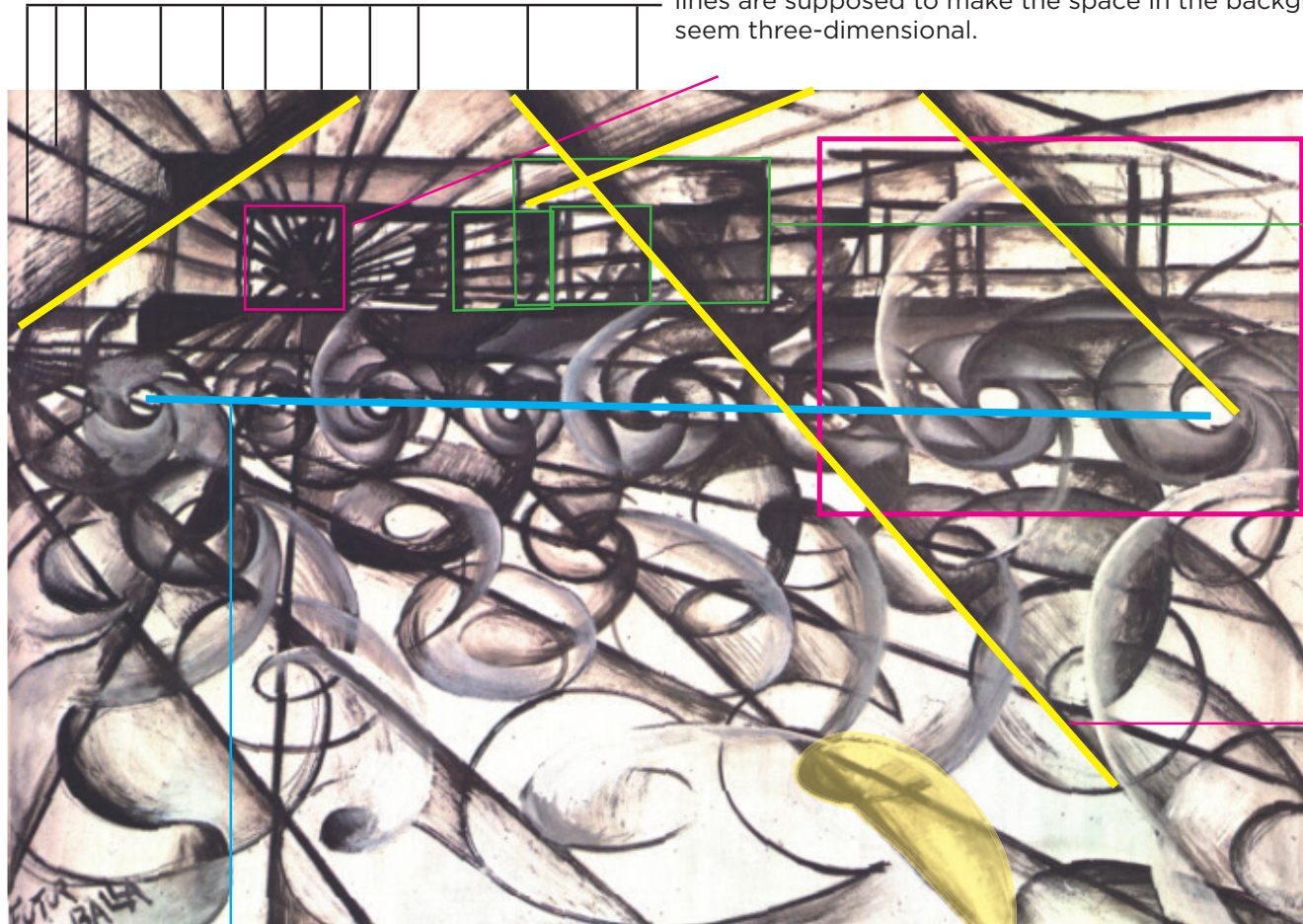


TECHNICAL:

Balla employed a unique technique of preparing the canvas before painting on it. He layered the paper with gesso (white chalk and/or gypsum mixed with a binder) and color in certain areas in order to provide a surface that can already be described as "in motion" to create his piece on. This kind of preparation of the paper makes it more difficult to paint exactly which helps this particular piece to further portray the motions of the turbulences as none of these motions are perfect or uniform. After the first layers he laid a matrix in pale gray paint (a matrix is a joined arrangement of squares or rectangle created by vertical and horizontal strokes). This helps to create a new subtle texture that helps to distinguish the paint the paint from the background (the image quality is not doing this effect any justice).

2.) AUTOMOBILE IN CORSA (FURTHER ANALYSIS)

These are a few examples of dominant diagonal lines that stretch throughout the piece and meet at the focal point in the back left of the piece (shown in the red box). The lines are supposed to make the space in the background seem three-dimensional.



These four-sided figures in the background of the piece represent the shelves or windows or doors (one can't be certain which). As with the most Futurist pieces little stress was placed upon the detailing or photorealistic representation of objects. Also, one can only see these figures when examining the piece closely as the Boccioni wanted to focus the piece around the motions of the turbulences created by the car and not so much the location/background.

Two examples of the swirls that Boccioni uses to represent the turbulations, of the wheels, of the car.

These lines (marked in yellow) were added, seemingly at random, to detract further attention from the attributes of the backgrounds as they willingly disturb the order and the flow of the forth-mentioned diagonal lines that lead to the focal point. The lines intend to stop the viewer from seeing the background space as a room or a hall immediately.

The horizontal blue line shows an array of swirls that is lined up next to one another. Boccioni did this to show the varying intensities of the swirls. In the case of the marked swirls one can say that they are the most intense and have most likely just left the car. This is also shown by their color/tone which is darker than most of the other swirls in the foreground. Furthermore, the swirls in the foreground are not only lighter in tone/color, but also more randomly placed and turned, indicating that the turbulations from the car are losing themselves in the air.

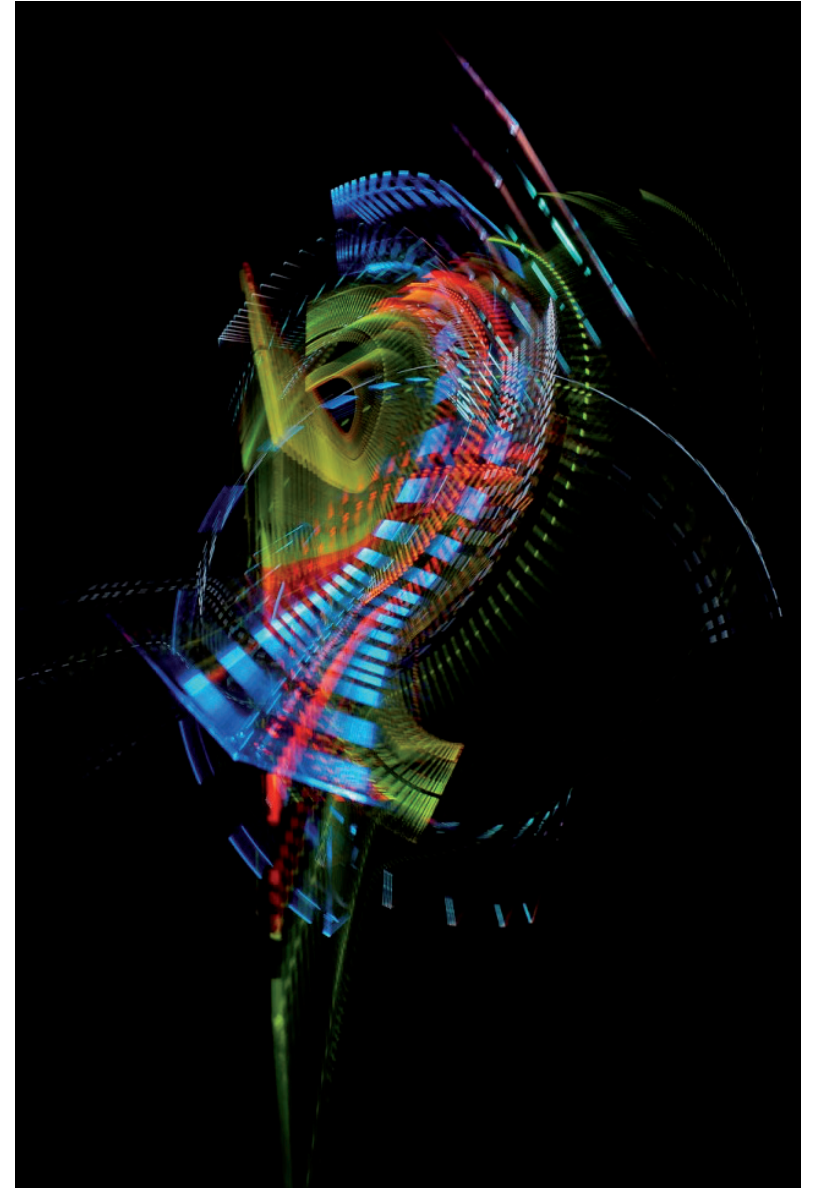
This is an example of how Boccioni's choice to apply gesso on to the paper before painting it, changed the behavior of the paint. The shadows and frays next to the lines can be attributed to the use of this technique. (shaded in yellow)

JAN LEONARDO WÖLLERT

- 3.) Jan Leonardo Wöllert was born in Cuxhaven Germany on the 30th of July in 1970. In 2005 Leonardo began light painting. At that time the only artistic use for light was to outline shapes or to write names in the air. He didn't have any any references or role models, as the art form that he is active in didn't exist as such. With the advances in technology and the initiation of the the light art performance photography (LAPP where light is organized and choreographed in a distinctive location) the images he was able to create became more and more complex. For him light goes beyond just being the 1 dimensional glow to illuminate spaces. By capturing the path of the light with a long exposure Leonardo is able to create three dimensional objects and structures. Furthermore he is able to capture motions and movements of light that would otherwise be forgotten as we could catch them with our bare eyes. Leonardo feels very strongly that the pieces he creates have nothing to do with computer generated images. As futuristic as his pieces may look Leonardo stresses that they are all created exclusively by the choreographed movement of light in a long exposure of a camera.



MOTUS #7,
light and camera
with long exposure,
Jan Leonardo



3.) ERUPTION

by Jan Leonardo

COMPOSITIONAL:

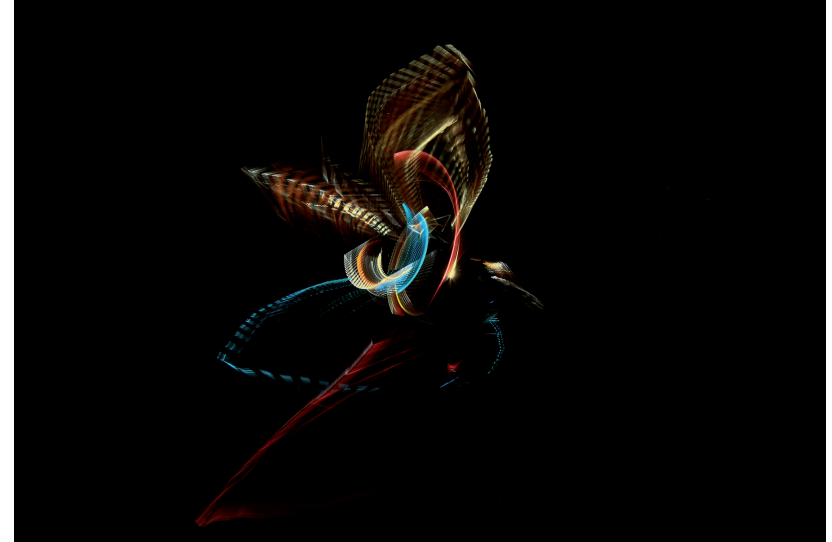
The Focal point is on the blue rim, right in the middle of the composition. The viewers attention is kept near the center of the piece as the light figure is densely packed in the middle of the piece and brought out by the pitch black background and the vibrant colors in the foreground. The colors Leonardo used for this specific composition are various shades of the three primary colors, yellow, red blue. Despite there only being three distinctly different colors the piece still looks varied and colorful. Leonardo decided to keep the light transparent enough for the viewer to appreciate the layers of the strokes of light in the space. The edges between light rays and the general resolution of the piece is very sharp which (given appropriate image quality) evokes a futuristic and digital connotations, despite the fact that the shapes were created organically, by hand.

CONTEXT/CONCEPTS:

Leonardo's intention when creating this piece was to capture the motions and movements of frequencies and waves. He tries to capture the motions that are not usually seen (as we hear sound waves and feel frequencies, yet, rarely see them). When looked at closely the light figure could be reminiscent of a bird jumping off and leaving the nest, which matches the title eruption, as the bird "erupts" by spreading it's wing and beginning it's flight. This motion in itself is one of the most important that a bird can perform and yet it is often unnoticed/undervalued. Leonardo tries to magnify this movement in an abstract approach, which also ties into the idea of frequencies as a bird's wings move in a certain frequency that is also rarely seen broken down the way it is in this piece. Thus, although the image of the bird in the piece is still the entire composition feels like it's in motion.

TECHNICAL:

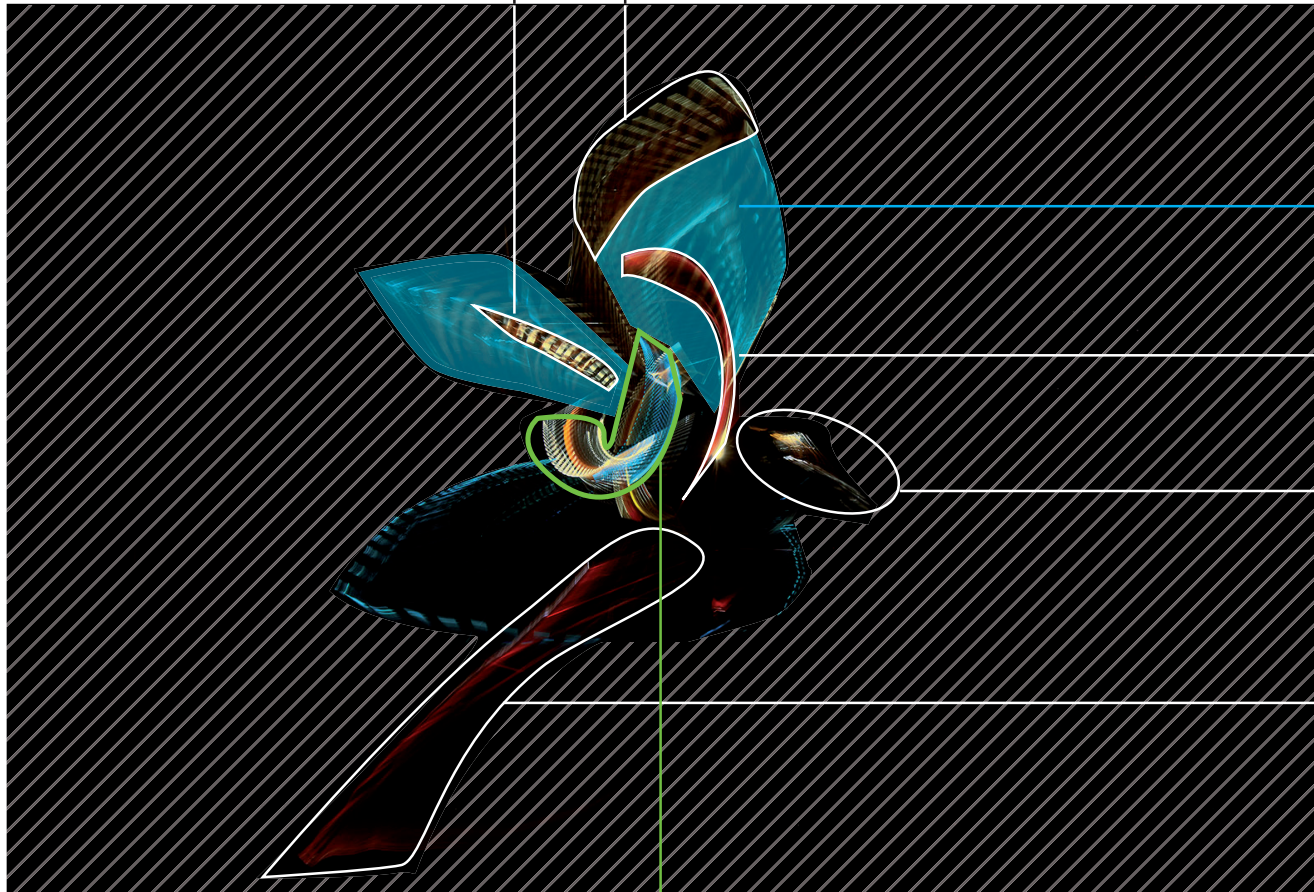
For this particular piece Leonardo set up his camera in a pitch black room and wore pitch black clothes and a balaclava in order to blend into the surroundings. The idea was to create a spotless black background on which to start his painting. In this particular instance he used a flashing LED light beam suspended on a stick in order to have the ability to make the patterns, with his body mostly out of shot. He used lamps with various shades of red yellow and blue (I'm guessing the stick could change color in the middle of painting).



3.) ERUPTION (FURTHER ANALYSIS)

In this part of the left wing Leonardo decided to use intense pale yellow light to indicate a type of bone structure similar to an x-ray vision.

To make the motions of the wings more visual Leonardo decided to go from stronger light on the inside of the wings to softer more faded out light on the outside/tip section, to make them seem blurred. The reason for this is that the tips of the wings of a bird move faster than the inner sections making it harder to seem them sharply.



A lot of emphasis was placed upon the wing and body of the creature, as they are ones under going most of the movements. This can be seen by their placement directly in the center of the piece and also the by the concentration of lines and forms, which is strong in this area.

This is one of the few smooth symbiotic lines among the otherwise very active and disturbed marks that the piece is largely made up of.

Leonardo decided to place less importance on the head of the as he used much softer and weaker light when making the head. This makes the viewer over look this section initially.

The red swirl in the bottom left of the piece represents the motion/flight path of the bird like creature that the piece centers around, as it initially spreads it's wings and flies.

This part of the creature's body is the section with the most focused and most intense light play. The section is also the focal point for this reason as the blue color jumps at the viewer immediately.

COMPARISON

MEDIA:

Leonardo uses various light sources such as torches and LED lights to create marks which he captures with a long exposure on a camera.

FORMAL ELEMENTS: In his compositions Leonardo sticks to various shades and tones of the primary colors (red, blue, yellow) in front of a pitch black background. The shapes created seem inorganic, yet they harmonize with each other in a natural way. The shapes are clustered in the upper middle section of the composition except for one ray of light which continues to the bottom of the piece.

FUNCTION AND PURPOSE: In his piece "Eruption" Jan Leonardo tries to capture the motion and dynamics of waves and frequencies. He tries to make a frequency, something that is usually invisible to the human eye visible and permanent.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Leonardo discovered the virtues of light painting and sculpting quite by accident. He believes in the power and motion of light in itself to create and represent motion. Because of this he never retouches his images (except for brightness, sharpness and saturation) to capture the essence of the light in itself.

In both Balla's and Leonardo's pieces circular objects/shapes are the in the central focus respectively. The swirls in Balla's, and the round cylindrical object in Leonardo's piece are the most prominent details in each piece.

A similarity between Duchamp's and Leonardo's pieces is the use of darkness and shade in the backgrounds of the piece. Both artists deliberately darken the background of their pieces in order to the contrast between the lighter and darker sections, as this helps the viewer focus on the foreground more initially.

One aspect of their art that unites all three pieces is the portrayal of motion, specifically of motion that isn't always apparent to the human eye in its natural occurrence. The artists are trying to show new and different angles to objects and motions in more abstract approaches.

MEDIA: Beside the oil paint Balla also used gesso to enhance the texture of the surface before applying the paint.

FORMAL ELEMENTS: The background of the piece is white and coarse with diagonal black lines, which signify the space the car is moving in. Despite the swirls being in the fore ground the actual focal point is in the back ground where the forth mentioned black diagonal lines meet. The swirls are rounded and look organic.

FUNCTION AND PURPOSE: Balla's piece the rotations and turbulations caused by a moving racecar in a closed space. He omits any details or features of the car and reduces the piece down to the pure movement of the turbulations caused by a car's moving wheels.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Despite identifying with the futurist movement, Balla didn't focus on machines and war as much as other futurists did. He focused more on rhythm and the interpretation of motion in his paintings.

MEDIA:

Duchamp used oil on a canvas

FORMAL ELEMENTS: Largely geometric shapes such as pentagons, hexagons, squares and triangle are used to portray otherwise round images. Dark dashes on the outside of the shapes signify the trembles of the movements. The nude is brought to the front of the composition by an overall lighter tone in relation to the background. The piece is fully loaded with shapes, forms and colors no space is unused. The forth mentioned shapes are stacked and layered on top of each other to show all of the movements.

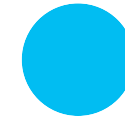
FUNCTION AND PURPOSE: Function and purpose: The piece depicts a nude moving down a staircase. Being a "nude" the center of the piece is neutral in sex, culture, ethnicity and time period. The staircase and the limbs of the "nude" show clear cubist influences.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Duchamp was influenced by cubism when transformed into futurism. He believed in the futurist themes of war, rapid advancement of technology and industrialization which greatly influenced his work.

The palette that both Duchamp's and Balla's piece use is typical for the futurist movement. The tones show strong contrasts and bold color in general.



JAN LEONARDO



GIACOMO BALLA



MARCEL DUCHAMP

CONCLUSION:

MOTION THROUGH THE EYES OF TIME AND ART

Upon final evaluation I would say that Boccioni, Leonardo and Duchamp all pursue and express an interest that not many are initially bothered with, namely the motions in natural occurrences, which are all around us. Of course our eyesight and the convention of time stop us from immediately grasping these aspects of motion as they happen. I thus find it all the more interesting that all three artists have decided to devote their pieces to them. Despite this, obviously, their approaches are wildly different from one another (space-age light painting, and traditional paint), partly due to alignments with

different movements (contemporary and Futurism) and partly to do with advancements of technology that have gone about in the last 90 years. Furthermore, despite being in the same movement, despite working at similar times, Duchamp's and Boccioni's ideas and approaches to conveying motion are as different as can be. This, for me, is what makes art so fascinating. There is no particular way of doing things, there is no wrong or right. How good or bad a piece is, is entirely up to it's viewer... Which gives 7 billion different possibilities for each and every piece of art.

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