

BOCCIONI
Continuity in Space

MUSEU DE ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEA
da Universidade de São Paulo



Ana Magalhães
e Rosalind Mckever (eds.)
MAC USP
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Carlos Roberto Ferreira Brandão

Director MAC USP

The exhibition *Boccioni: Continuity in Space* illustrates the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo way of working. It is based on a multidisciplinary and unpublished research developed by curators Ana Magalhães (MAC USP) and Rosalind McKeever (Victoria & Albert Museum, London), who investigated the historical, aesthetic and technical aspects of Umberto Boccioni's (1882-1916) artistic production, in collaboration with national and foreign institutions: abroad, with the support of the Municipality of Milan and Museo Del Novecento; in the city of São Paulo, in partnership with FAB LAB Livre SP; at the University of São Paulo, in partnership with Institute of Physics and Polytechnic School; in the Museum sphere, with contribution of teams such as Collection (Cataloging, Conservation and Mounting), Research, Planning and Projects (Publishing, Design and Production); along with the necessary support of Administrative and Operational service.

In the present exhibition, the audience may experience the output of academic research through a visual path that allows it to follow the making and diffusion of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* – seminal work of international relevance on MAC USP collection. The sculpture marks the beginning of Italian futurism in the early 20th century and influences the course of later modern art.

In this way, the museum shares the material study of a work of its collection, in the interface between research and curatorship.

The International Conference *Boccioni's Dilemma: In Search of his Sculptural Oeuvre*, which poses a central reflection on MAC USP sculptures, object of the exhibition and intense research, enriches the exhibition and follows its developments.

We thank all collaborators and, in particular, the sponsorship of Consulate General of Italy and Institute of Italian Culture of São Paulo.

“Mi sforzo di fissare la forma che esprima la sua continuità nello spazio”

“Rovesciamo tutto, dunque, e proclamiamo l'assoluta e completa abolizione della linea finita e della statua chiusa. Spalanchiamo la figura e chiudiamo in essa l'ambiente.”

Distruggere la nobiltà tutta letteraria e tradizionale del marmo e del bronzo.”

“Noi giungiamo alla generalizzazione dando lo stile della impressione, cioè creando una forma dinamica unica, che sia la sintesi del dinamismo universale percepito attraverso il moto dell'oggetto. Questa concezione che crea la forma della continuità nello spazio ha fondamento nella *sensazione*.”

Michele Galdroni

Director of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura - San Paolo

Umberto Boccioni wrote in the conclusions of the **Technical Manifesto of the Futurist Sculpture** of 1912 that the “literary and traditional nobility of marble and bronze” should be destroyed and posited the possibility of arousing new “plastic emotions” by combining materials commonly considered more prosaic like “glass , wood, cardboard, iron, cement, horsehair, leather, fabric, mirrors, electric light, etc. etc. “ A year later, he would produce *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, a work that gives rise to the valuable exhibition of the MAC USP and that, by the irony of fate, owes its fame in the world to bronze copies after the artist’s death. Perhaps a small revenge of the artist is realized in 2002, when the Italian version of the 20 cent coin of the Euro is introduced, that shows in the obverse the embossed relief of *Unique forms of continuity in the space*, reproduced industrially in Nordic gold, a league of copper, zinc, aluminum and tin. Maybe a material that would have satisfied the artist.

It is with great satisfaction that the Italian Cultural Institute of São Paulo, in collaboration with the Consulate General of Italy, wanted to support this important initiative of rediscovering, in Brazil and in the world, the legacy of Umberto Boccioni, a prominent artist of the futurist movement. Probably, the same Week of Modern Art of São Paulo of 1922 would be unthinkable without the experience of the European vanguards of the early twentieth century and of futurism in particular. One of the protagonists of that time, the writer Graça Aranha, published an anthology of posters of futurism in 1926 and the Italian avant-garde was well present in the years of the formidable renovation of Brazilian art. Sincere thanks then to the curators of the exhibition and to all the people who made possible the reconstruction of the unlikely adventure of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, a work that perhaps represents the apex of the impetuous creative impulse that animated the futuristic movement.

BOCCIONI AND UNIQUE FORMS OF CONTINUITY IN SPACE

Ana Magalhães & Rosalind McKeever

Curators

Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, part of the MAC USP collection for 55 years, is the most celebrated work by the Italian Futurist Umberto Boccioni. It marks the apex of the artist's attempt to enliven sculpture by creating figures in movement. Even after Boccioni's death at the age of 33 in 1916, this dynamic sculpture has not become static. This exhibition traces its changing material history from the artist's studio to MAC USP, and – through metal casts – to other museums worldwide.

Boccioni's use of plaster, as opposed to the more durable materials of traditional sculpture, is essential to the fleeting, ephemeral nature of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. The sculpture's fragility, combined with the artist's untimely death, has created a complex history. The majority of Boccioni's sculptures were destroyed in 1927. Despite the artist's aversion to bronze, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* was cast in this medium from the 1930s to the 1970s in order to preserve his reputation. As a reproducible artwork it became popular in the art market, fuelling further confusion about its original medium. We have been able to clarify its material history by using technical examination of the plaster and bronze casts, and compiling archival sources from Brazil, Italy, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Comparing X-ray imaging (a technology that fascinated the futurists) of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* to photograph from Boccioni's first sculpture exhibition in 1913, has shown that both objects have the repair to the figure's back leg, confirming the MAC USP plaster as the object Boccioni exhibited. 3D scanning the plaster, and metal casts in MAC USP, the Museo del Novecento in Milan and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, has confirmed archival evidence that these were among the seven runs made from the plaster. The 3D scans also highlighted that

each reproduction has slight differences in form, as well as the color and surface differences are obvious to the naked eye. The same 3D scanning technology offers new possibilities for reproducing sculpture, which has been exploited by contemporary artists with an interest in Boccioni.

Even though Boccioni was allied with an artistic movement that welcomed its own destruction by younger generations, the photographs of him posing with his sculptures and plaster cast-makers emphasise that he was fully aware of the reproducibility of sculpture, and may have recognised the potential of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* for fixing his own artistic continuity.

1912



Boccioni publishes his **Technical Manifesto of the Futurist Sculpture**, dated April, but perhaps written in the summer in 1911.

He starts to make sculpture.

1913



In between May and June, Boccioni moves to a larger studio where he works feverishly on sculptures, the last of which is *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*.



In July, he opens an exhibition of 11 sculptures and a series of drawings at Galerie la Boétie in Paris, which is photographed by his friend Lucette Korsoff. The exhibition travels to Rome (Galleria Futurista) and Florence (Galleria Gonnelli, in 1914). In his catalogue foreword, Boccioni expands upon the statements in his manifesto.



In the fall, Boccioni acknowledges the importance of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* for his work in a letter to the gallerist Giuseppe Sprovieri, who commissions photographs of his sculptures.



1914

Boccioni publishes a book, **Pittura Scultura Futuriste**, and the art historian Roberto Longhi publishes his essay **Scultura Futurista Boccioni**. Both consider *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* Boccioni's sculptural masterpiece. The piece is exhibited in the Doré Gallery, London. Boccioni returns to making sculpture in mixed-media with *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse + Houses*.

1916



Boccioni dies on August 17th. In December, Marinetti organizes a memorial exhibition at Palazzo Cova in Milan featuring nine sculptures. Some damage to them may have occurred at the close of this exhibition. The sculptures are then taken across the city to the atelier of sculptor Piero da Verona.

1921



In his novel **L'alcova d'acciaio**, F.T. Marinetti, leader of the Futurist movement, recalls the presence of three sculptures by Boccioni in the collection of the Marquise Luisa Casati Stampa in Rome in 1918. The plaster of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is thought to be one of them, as is *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse + Houses* which Marinetti acquires from her in 1923 when she moves to Paris.

1924

Marinetti organises another Boccioni retrospective at the Bottega di Poesia in Milan, but *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is not included.

1927



Marco Bisi, son of Boccioni's cousin, the painter Adriana Bisi Fabbri, learns that Piero da Verona has disposed of the Boccioni sculptures in his possession at the Acquabella dump. Bisi manages to salvage the broken *Development of a Bottle in Space (through color)*, thanks to its red color, and reconstructs the work by gluing it back together. Boccioni's sister, Amelia, instructs Bisi to give the piece to Fedele Azari, secretary of the Futurist movement, so it could be cast in bronze. Azari then makes copies in plaster, for Amelia Boccioni and Marinetti.

1931

After the death of Azari, his brother and father write to collector Gianni Mattioli asking for the return of the two Boccioni's sculptures that had belonged to Azari. Given that one of the two versions of *Development of a Bottle on Space through Color* was destroyed during transportation, this suggests that they were the plasters. Mattioli's interest in Boccioni's sculptures suggests that his bronze of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* was cast in this period.

1932-33

In December, Luisa Casati Stampa, now living in Paris, goes bankrupt and sells her art collection; Marinetti buys from her a "statue" probably *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*.

1933



In June, the first metal cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* commissioned by Marinetti from the Chiurazzi Foundry, with workshops in Naples and Rome, is exhibited in a Boccioni retrospective in Milan belatedly celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of his birth. This cast has a dark patina and is made of brass, an alloy like bronze but containing more copper. In November, Marinetti offers this cast to the city of Milan (this work is today in the city's Museo del Novecento), telling them that there are four casts. October to November, Marinetti exhibits the plaster *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* at the *Prima Mostra Nazionale d'Arte Futurista* in Rome.

1934

The second "highly polished" cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is made by the Chiurazzi Foundry.

1936

March to April, a metal *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (probably that belonging to the city of Milan) is displayed at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, in the landmark exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

1937

In June, the plaster *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is exhibited at the Galleria d'Arte di Roma in the exhibition *Omaggio a sedici artisti italiani*.

1944



Marinetti dies on December 2nd; his widow, the futurist artist Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, inherits his art collection, including four Boccioni sculptures: *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, *Development of a Bottle in Space*, *Antigrizioso* (mother) and *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse + Houses*.

1948

Benedetta sells to MoMA the second Chiurazzi cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*.

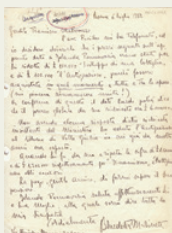
1949

June to September, the cast purchased by MoMA is shown at their exhibition *Twentieth Century Italian Art*.

1950

Benedetta signs a contract with the Giovanni & Angelo Nicci Foundry in Rome, commissioning two casts in bronze of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* and *Development of a Bottle in Space*. The American collector Peggy Guggenheim expresses interest in a cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, but Benedetta sells it to the Italian collector Paolo Marinotti.

1952



Benedetta sells the plasters of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* and *Development of a Bottle in Space* to Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, but they are not shipped immediately.

1953



The Milan cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is exhibited by the Italian delegation at the II Bienal de São Paulo, in its retrospective show of the Italian Futurist movement.

1955

The Milan cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is exhibited at the 7th Quadriennale di Roma. The second Nicci cast, belonging to Benedetta, features in the exhibition on Italian art organized by the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, in Rome, which travels to Spain, to Madrid, San Sebastián, and possibly Barcelona.

1956

Benedetta sells the second Nicci cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* and *Development of a Bottle in Space* to the American collector couple Harry and Lydia Winston, from Detroit.

The New York gallerist Sidney Janis writes to Benedetta also expressing interest in purchasing a bronze cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*.

1957

In May, Sidney Janis writes again to Benedetta, this time asking about the conservation condition of the plaster *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, for which he is making an offer to buy. The plaster had been already sold to Matarazzo, but it seems to have remained with Benedetta until Matarazzo's lawyer was able to ship it to Brazil.

In July, the Marinotti bronze *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is exhibited outdoors in the Parco Sempione at the XI Triennale di Milano.

In September, the Winstons exhibit their cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* for the first time in an exhibition of their collection at the Detroit Institute of Arts, which travels around the United States.

1958



A new photo of the plaster of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is published in the anthology **Archivi del Futurismo**. Peggy Guggenheim acquires *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse + Houses*.

1959



The plaster of the *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is shown in Brazil for the first time, at the V Bienal de São Paulo, where it is photographed.

1960

Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho commissions a new cast in bronze of the *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* for the São Paulo MAM from the Foundry Benedetto Mettelo, in São Paulo. Matarazzo asks for Benedetta's authorization to do so. The original plaster is restored by Italian-Brazilian sculptor Vittorio Sinigaglia.

1962-63

MAM collections are transferred to the University of São Paulo, giving birth to the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC USP). The plasters of both (*Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* and *Development of a Bottle in Space*) arrive first at the University, coming from the personal collection of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho; they were followed by the two bronzes from the collections of MAM.

1971

MAC USP director, Walter Zanini, asks Benedetta's authorization to cast another bronze of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* for an exchange between MAC USP and the Tate Gallery in London. The foundry L. Lazzeroni Benedetti is hired to cast the piece. The original plaster is once again restored by Vittorio Sinigaglia.

1972

Ten metal casts of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* appear for sale in Rome at Galleria La Medusa. They are *surmoulages* (overcasts) made not from the plaster, but from the Marinotti bronze cast.

Tate receives its cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, commissioned by MAC USP, in exchange for a bronze by Henry Moore.

1973

July to September, the Tate cast is shown at the *Pioneers of Modern Sculpture* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London.

1975



A MoMA curator visits MAC USP during the Bienal São Paulo. She takes photographs of the museum's plaster and the bronze of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*; extensive correspondence between Walter Zanini (director of MAC USP) and Ronald Alley (Keeper of the Modern Collection at the Tate Gallery) to attest the authenticity of the bronze cast in São Paulo for the Tate.

1986



The plaster *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* and *Development of a Bottle in Space* are loaned to the exhibition *Futurismo e Futurismi* at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. The plaster *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is restored for the third time once back in Brazil.

1989

Lydia Winston Malbin bequeaths to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York the works she lent to the Boccioni retrospective they held in 1988, including *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* and her other two bronzes.

2000

The Hilti Art Foundation in Lichtenstein acquire the cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* formerly in the Marinotti collection (Nicci Foundry, 1950).

2002

The Italian 20 cent Euro coin features an image of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*.

2004-6

Conservation work on the Milan cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, including 3D scanning and alloy analysis, undertaken by the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro in Rome.

2012

Non-destructive analysis of plaster *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* begun by the Department of Applied Nuclear Physics of the University of São Paulo, coordinated by Prof. Márcia Rizzutto.

2015

3D scanning of both the plaster and the bronze cast of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* of MAC USP are realized in collaboration with the Interdisciplinary Center of Interactive Technologies of the University of São Paulo, coordinated by Prof. Marcelo Zuffo, and Faro Technology; comparative analyses are also undertaken with the Milan cast.

2016



X-Ray of the plaster *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* undertaken by Prof. Rizzutto's team at the Department of Applied Nuclear Physics of the University of São Paulo. 3D scanning and alloy analysis of the Metropolitan Museum of Art bronze.

Booklet credits

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Image credits (page)

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p. 18 *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. Photograph of plaster in process of restoration, 1986. Responsible: Anne Pauline Thomas and Renato Luiz de O. Carvalho.

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*** p. 3** I strive to assign the form that expresses its continuity in space.

So, let us destroy everything, and proclaim the absolute and complete abolition of the finite line and the closed statue. Let us open the figure and incorporate the environment into it.

Destroy the totally literary and traditional nobility of marble and bronze.

We arrived at the generalization conceiving a style of printing, that is, creating a unique dynamic form, which is the synthesis of the universal dynamism perceived through the movement of the object. This conception that creates the form of continuity in space is based on *sensation*.

Exhibition Boccioni: Continuity in Space

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Curated by Ana Magalhães and Rosalind McKeever

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