

The 1912 Futurist exhibition at the Sackville Gallery, London: an avant-garde show within the old-master trade

by BARBARA PEZZINI

IN HIS 1909 *Initial Manifesto of Futurism*, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had been openly dismissive of the art of the past, defining it as 'a funeral urn' from which the artist would emerge 'exhausted, reduced, downtrodden'.¹ This scorn of accepted aesthetic values, combined with controversial formal innovation, made the London Futurist exhibition of 1912 – in which four young Italian painters, Gino Severini, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Luigi Russolo, exhibited thirty-five paintings – irresistible to press and public alike (Fig.22).² In fact this touring show, on its first stop after Paris and continuing to Berlin, Brussels and other European cities, rivalled even the 1910–11 exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* at the Grafton Galleries in the attention it received: some fifty reviews were written about it, and the small Sackville Gallery where it was held was crowded with visitors.³ Accounts of this tour heap the Paris, London, Berlin and Brussels shows together in a single narrative that focuses on the stir they created.⁴ But in each venue of the 1912 tour – Bernheim-Jeune (Paris), the Sackville Gallery (London), Der Sturm (Berlin), Galerie Giroux (Brussels) and others – the exhibition related to a different cultural background and produced, de facto, very different shows that deserve separate investigation. An exception to these unifying readings is the work of Luca Somigli on the reception of the London exhibition: he demonstrated that the local press deflected the more menacing implications of the Futurists' professed artistic and political anarchism in the direction of amusing and harmless entertainment.⁵ Critics singled out works that portrayed the non-threatening aspects of modern life, such as Severini's Parisian nightlife scenes. Similarly, they underplayed their political connotations, and the verbal explosions of the manifestos and the pictorial blasts of the



22. Catalogue for *Exhibition of works by the Italian Futurist Painters*, The Sackville Gallery, London, 1912.

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¹ F.T. Marinetti: 'Initial Manifesto of Futurism', as reprinted in exh. cat. *Exhibition of Works by the Italian Futurist Painters*, London (The Sackville Gallery) March 1912, p.5 (cited hereafter as *Sackville Catalogue*).

² For descriptions of the works exhibited, see J.C. Taylor: *Futurism*, New York 1961, pp.41–54. For a reconstruction of the works exhibited in Paris and London and their connections with Futurism in literature, see C. Baumgarth: 'Die Anfänge der futuristischen Malerei', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Institutes in Florenz* 11 (1964), pp.167–92; and A. Coffin Hanson, ed.: exh. cat. *Severini Futurista*, New Haven (Yale University Gallery) 1995, p.20. For the Sackville Gallery exhibition in the context of British art, see A. Gruetzner Robins: 'The Futurist Exhibition', in *idem*: exh. cat. *Modern Art in Britain 1910–1914*, London (Barbican Art Gallery) 1997, pp.56–58.

³ A comprehensive census of contemporary press reviews is still to be undertaken. A first survey was made by P. Ardizzone: 'Il Futurismo in Inghilterra: bibliografia (1910–1915)', *Quaderno (Palermo)* 9 (1971), pp.91–115. Very extensive but not fully comprehensive (for instance, references to *Connoisseur* and *Freewoman* are missing), is V. Gioè: 'Futurism in England: a bibliography', *Bulletin of Bibliography* 44/3 (1987), pp.175–76; and its supplement, *idem*: 'Futurism in England: A Bibliography (1910–1915)', *ICSAC Cahier* 8/9 (1988), pp.107–28. For a first interpretation of the critical reception of this exhibition, see R. Caruso: 'La mostra dei Futuristi a Londra

nel 1912. Recensioni e commenti', *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte* 45 (1991), pp.57–63. Walter Sickert was rather surprised 'to find the tiny galleries in Sackville Street packed with an orderly crowd, consisting mostly of the mothers of England, who were circulating slowly, and verifying with reverence, the statements in the descriptive catalogue by the pictures on the walls', W. Sickert: 'The Futurist Devil-Among-the-Tailors', *The English Review* (April 1912), reprinted in A. Gruetzner Robins, ed.: *Walter Sickert: Complete Writings on Art*, Oxford 2000, p.304. I am indebted to Anna Gruetzner Robins for this reference and comments on its relevance in this context.

⁴ The full itinerary of this tour is not clear: most of the works exhibited in London were bought in Berlin by the banker Wolfgang Borchard, who attempted to take over the touring exhibition. In opposition to this, other exhibitions with entirely different works were set up by the Futurists themselves; see Coffin Hanson, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.19–21. For interpretations, see G. Cianci: 'Futurism and the English Avant-Garde', *Quaderno (Palermo)* 9 (1971), pp.9–66; M. Perloff: *The Futurist Moment, Avant-garde, Avant-guerre and the Language of Rupture*, Chicago 1986 (rev. ed. 2003), pp.80–116 and 171–72; M.A. Coen: *Modernism, manifesto melée. The Modernist group 1910–1914*, Oxford 2004, pp.15–28; and M. Gale: 'A short flight: between Futurism and Vorticism', in D. Ottinger, E. Coen and M. Gale, eds.: exh. cat. *Futurism*, London (Tate Modern) 2009, pp.66–75 (cited hereafter as Tate 2009).

⁵ L. Somigli: *Legitimizing the artist, manifesto writing and European Modernism 1885–1915*, Toronto 2003, pp.168–74; a similar viewpoint is also suggested in Gruetzner Robins, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.56.

THE MARLBOROUGH GALLERY
 Telephone: 388 Regent

On selling his interest in
The Sackville Gallery, Limited,
R. R. MEYER-SEE
 Formerly Manager to the late Martin Henry Cottaugh, Esq.,
 and Joint Founder and Director of The Sackville Gallery, Ltd.,
 has purchased the Lease of
THE MARLBOROUGH GALLERY
 24 DUKE STREET, ST. JAMES'S, LONDON

THE MARLBOROUGH GALLERY
 Telephone: 388 Regent

Mr. Meyer-See and Sam H. Nyburg
 Formerly co-directors
 of the
SACKVILLE OBJETS D'ART, Ltd.,
 15 Duke Street, St. James's, S.W.
 Will in future carry
 on business at
THE MARLBOROUGH GALLERY
 24 DUKE STREET, ST. JAMES'S, LONDON

CURIOS AND WORKS OF ART — PICTURES BY OLD MASTERS — MODERN FRENCH PICTURES
 (See H. Nyburg) (R. R. Meyer-See) (M. Jean Thiebaud)

AMERICAN BUYERS ESPECIALLY INVITED

Gallery for Exhibitions
 COMMISSIONS EXECUTED IN THE SALES ROOMS

23. Advertisement for the Marlborough Gallery, London, from *American Art News* (10th May 1913).

works were seen merely as a rhetorical abundance of words and colours. This article expands on Somigli's reading by focusing on the exhibition's venue, the Sackville Gallery, within the context of the London art market.

Investigations of commercial exhibitions raise questions: are the galleries exhibition spaces or shops, are the dealers patrons or profiteering speculators?⁶ In addition to addressing those questions, a study of the Sackville Gallery as a venue revises the reading of Futurist practices. The Futurists had sonorously proclaimed their contempt for commerce, especially for the old-masters trade, and yet they exhibited in private galleries.⁷ Robert Jensen, in 'The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art', attempted to reconcile this conflict by interpreting the avant-garde as inherently commercial.⁸ According to Jensen, the Futurists recognised that contemporary art was coming to be seen with ever greater exclusivity through the medium of commercial exhibitions and that the Futurists sought these out. This view of them as conscious clients of dealers has been adopted ever since and aptly describes the artists' relations with the more progressive galleries of their tour, Bernheim-Jeune and Der Sturm. But in London the situation was different. The exhibition was organised by dealers-cum-critics who specialised in old-master paintings and was presented to the public at an established gallery that traded exclusively in the art of the past. To exhibit in such a gallery was, it seems, a complete contradiction of their ethos, and, in fact, the old-masters connection was underplayed by the Futurists in communications outside their inner circle of supporters and in later writings when they attempted a narrative of these events.⁹ In contrast to Jensen's interpretation, based on a view of the Futurists as able manipulators of critics and commerce alike, pri-

mary sources and new documents are re-examined in this article to argue that in London the Futurist group assumed a passive role, possibly because of a lack of rapport between the Futurist leader, Marinetti, and the host gallery, or perhaps because the opposition between the Futurist ethos and the exhibition in an old-master gallery was indeed irreconcilable.¹⁰ In London the Futurists were engulfed in a very efficient commercial process that had years of experience in the display of and trade in old masters.¹¹ In this trade the artist had long disappeared from the commercial transaction between buyer, seller and mediator, and a similar suppression was also reserved for the Futurist artists, exploited as curiosities by London high society and appeased by a meagre financial reward from a highly profitable enterprise.¹² Their bombastic prose in the context of the London exhibition can be interpreted as a cry of violent anguish, ultimately frustrated, of being a powerless cog in a ruthless financial and promotional machine.

The Futurist exhibition had opened in Paris less than a month earlier, on 5th February 1912, at the branch of the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery at 15 rue Richepanse. Bernheim-Jeune was a group of four galleries owned by the brothers Josse and Gaston Bernheim, dealers in Manet, Van Gogh and Matisse. Since its opening in 1906, the gallery in rue Richepanse was managed by Félix Fénéon and specialised in progressive French art.¹³ Carrà remembered it as a large room with an adjacent smaller space, with ceiling lighting and with walls covered in fabric of a beautiful shade of grey.¹⁴ Robert Dell, first editor of *The Burlington Magazine* and from 1906 to 1914 its Paris correspondent, gave the Paris Futurist exhibition a tepid welcome for the benefit of the *Burlington's* readers, remarking on its two main characteristics that would also be typical of its showing in London: great public interest and much aesthetic controversy.¹⁵ According to the press, it was the success of the Paris exhibition that suggested to the Futurist group the possibility of the show travelling to other venues, *American Art News* even reporting that a bidding war had started between three galleries to bring the show to London.¹⁶

In accounts of the 1912 London Futurist exhibition, its venue, the Sackville Gallery, described by Jensen as 'one of the foremost galleries of the city', has been either neglected or considered the London equivalent of the progressive Bernheim-Jeune.¹⁷ On the contrary, the Sackville Gallery had a very different identity. Until then, it had shown no interest in modern art and aimed to present only the very best in old-master paintings. From the choice of its name, which referred both to its prime location (28 Sackville Street) near the Royal Academy of Arts, as well as to one of the most prominent aristocratic families, the Sackvilles, it can be inferred that the gallery promoted itself as a conservative operation for the elite. Since it first opened in May 1908, it

⁶ As indicated by Pamela Fletcher in 'Shopping for Art: The rise of the commercial art gallery 1850s-1890s', in *idem* and A. Helmreich, eds.: *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London 1850-1939*, Manchester and New York 2011, pp.86-89 (cited hereafter as Fletcher and Helmreich).

⁷ Balla, Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo and Severini: 'The Exhibitors to the Public', in *Sackville Catalogue*, pp.4 and 9.

⁸ R. Jensen: 'The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art', *Art Journal* 47 (1988), pp.360-67.

⁹ See, for instance, the accounts of these exhibitions in Severini's and Carrà's autobiographies: C. Carrà: *La mia vita*, Rome 1943, pp.140-69; and G. Severini: *Life of a painter*, Princeton 1995, pp.88-94 and 110-20.

¹⁰ In fact, Bürger begins his studies of autonomous artistic currents with the later movements of Dada and Surrealism; see P. Bürger: *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, London 2011, pp.3-14.

¹¹ On the flourishing trade in old masters, especially focused on the United States, but also with many cross references to the British market, see F. Gennari Santori: *The Melancholy of Masterpieces. Old Master Paintings in America 1900-1914*, Milan 2003, pp.123-50.

¹² For instance, see Borchard's speculations in Berlin in Coffin Hanson, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.17-29.

¹³ On the Bernheim-Jeune gallery, see A. Gruetzner Robins: 'Marketing Post-Impressionism: Roger Fry's commercial exhibitions', in Fletcher and Helmreich, pp.86-89.

¹⁴ Carrà, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.155.

¹⁵ R.E.D. [R. Dell]: 'Art in France', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 20 (1912), p.374.

¹⁶ R.R.M. Sé: 'Paris Letter', *American Art News* (2nd March 1912), p.5.

¹⁷ Jensen, *op. cit.* (note 8), p.364.

¹⁸ B. Dolman, ed.: *Who's who in art 1927*, London 1927, p.200. For Rothschild as a

described itself as dealing in ‘Important works by Italian, Spanish, Flemish and French masters of the XIV, XV and XVI centuries’ and its exhibitions of ‘selected pictures of Old Masters’ were listed in *The Times*, *American Art News*, *The Burlington Magazine* and *The Year’s Art*. There were firm connections between the Sackville Gallery and the opinion-makers of the art press: its founder was Max Rothschild, son of the dealer David Rothschild. A specialist in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British and European art, Rothschild also wrote under the nom de plume of ‘Max Roldit’ or under the initials MR.¹⁸ A former contributor to *Connoisseur*, Rothschild was the London saleroom correspondent of the *Burlington* in 1903 and 1904, developing a critical eye and deepening his knowledge of the market. Readers of the *Burlington* were specifically targeted as customers by Rothschild, who, from 1908 to 1931, paid for monthly advertisements in the front pages of the Magazine, which led to some editorial attention: between 1914 and 1932 the *Burlington* published photographs of fourteen works in his possession. But, as More Adey, a future Co-Editor of the *Burlington*, later reminded readers, paying for advertisements in the outer pages of the Magazine did not automatically imply editorial endorsement of the dealer’s wares.¹⁹ In fact, Max Rothschild’s acquisitions received mixed praise and were sometimes openly criticised in the *Burlington*. Occasionally he did secure works of exceptional quality. In August 1923 Roger Fry wrote a highly appreciative piece on his Poussin *Landscape during a thunderstorm with Pyramus and Thisbe*, a work now in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt.²⁰ Several works currently in international museums have a Sackville Gallery/Max Rothschild provenance, attesting to the wide range of clients reached by the gallery.²¹ He did not hesitate to buy from other, cheaper markets and in 1913, for example, he travelled to Spain with this express purpose.²² Rothschild was active in the civic sphere too: in 1912 he supported the public acquisition of Rodin’s *The Burghers of Calais* through the National Art-Collections Fund and in 1916 he opposed the proposed bill that would confer on the Director and Trustees of the National Gallery the power to sell unwanted works in the collection.²³ Rothschild’s support of public acquisitions and his stance against de-accession in museums shows that not only scholars but also art dealers took part in conferring ‘aura’ on a work of art, a process during which objects transcend their nature as exchangeable goods to become national treasures for museums.

The Sackville Gallery was a similarly ‘sacred’ space where works of art were meant to transcend their financial value. Images of its interior have so far not been discovered, yet there is a 1913 photograph of its sister gallery, the Marlborough Gallery, which shows a setting reminiscent of a picture gallery in a stately home (Fig.23). This type of display, where art was associated with social status, was the very same criticised by the

critic, see also B. Pezzini: “‘The Burlington Magazine’”, “‘The Burlington Gazette’” and “‘The Connoisseur’”. The Art Periodical and the Market for Old-Master Paintings in Edwardian London’, *Visual Resources*, forthcoming (September 2013).

¹⁹ M.A. [More Adey]: ‘Mr. Edward Gorer’, *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 27 (1915), p.128.

²⁰ R. Fry: “‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ by Nicholas Poussin”, *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 43 (1923), pp.52–53.

²¹ For instance, *A windy day*, by Jan van Goyen in the Detroit Institute of Art; *The Interior of St Peter’s, Rome*, by Giovanni Paolo Panini and *Madonna and Child and the Infant St John in a Landscape*, by Polidoro Lanzani (purchased as by Titian), in the National Gallery of Art, Washington; *Portrait of John Woodyear*, by Pompeo Batoni in the Minneapolis Institute of Art; *Landscape with St John on Patmos*, by Nicolas Poussin, in the Art Institute of Chicago; two mythological scenes by Sodoma in the



24. Gino Severini on the opening day of his exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery, London, 7th April 1913.

Futurists’ caustic comments on the ‘second-hand market’ of art and stale museum settings. And yet it was in the Marlborough Gallery that Severini was to hold his first one-man show in April 1913 (Fig.24).

In the first decade of the twentieth century the juxtaposition of modern and earlier art was not uncommon in commercial galleries in London: if larger firms specialised either in contemporary works or old masters, smaller galleries such as Carfax & Co., the Leicester Galleries, Dowdeswell’s and others dealt in both – some used the sales of old masters to financially shore up a programme of exhibitions of modern art.²⁴ Most galleries promoted artists who showed at the Royal Academy and their various coteries. But there were other currents. Progressive galleries, such as Carfax, displayed, alongside Florentine cassoni and Dutch genre paintings, work by modern British and French artists, including Rodin, Conder, Ricketts, Shannon, Rothenstein and Fry, often under the umbrella of a group or artists’ association. Such work still referred to the formal canon and subject-matter of the old masters and proposed a moderately modern realism, seen as an antidote to the often moralistic and populist offerings at the Royal Academy’s summer exhibitions. The Grafton Galleries, perhaps the most progressive and notorious of all exhibition spaces, defined as a ‘sumptuous asylum for eccentricities’ by the conservative critic Ebenezer Wake Cook, also exhibited modern French art and had opened new doors with its first Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1910.²⁵ Yet those shows too were part of a varied programme in which old masters and illuminated manuscripts also appeared. Other spaces, such as the

Worcester Art Museum MA; the *Fall of Icarus*, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels; and at least nine paintings from the Francis Lycett Green collection in the York City Art Gallery; see Pezzini, *op. cit.* (note 18).

²² *American Art News* (5th April 1913), p.8.

²³ *Ibid.* (2nd March 1912), p.5.

²⁴ On the art market at the time, see the survey by T.M. Bayer and J.R. Page: *The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse*, London 2011, pp.99–142. On the Carfax Gallery, see also S. Shaw: ‘The new ideal shop: Founding the Carfax Gallery, c.1898–1902’, *The British Art Journal* 13 (Autumn 2012), pp.35–41; and B. Pezzini: ‘More Adey, The Carfax Gallery and “The Burlington Magazine”’, *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 153 (2011), pp.808–10.

²⁵ E. Wake Cook: *Anarchism in Art and Chaos in Criticism*, London 1904, p.17.



25. *Abstract rhythm of Mrs. M. S.*, by Gino Severini. Early 1912. Canvas, 92.3 by 65.4 cm. (Israel Museum, Tel Aviv, on loan from the Ayala and Sam Zacks Collection).

Modern Gallery, pragmatically offered their rooms to whoever paid their rent.²⁶ The Sackville Gallery was not an anonymous space for rent but a self-aware gallery for connoisseurs. In its advertisements and catalogues it used the same elegant typography and design to project a consistent, sophisticated image. From its inception in 1908 to its demise in the 1930s, it exhibited works by old masters almost exclusively: the Futurist exhibition was an isolated, although significant, event in its history.

A distinctive characteristic of the Futurist exhibition was its new type of manager, 'part impresario, part trickster and master of publicity'.²⁷ Usually Marinetti was the organiser of the

Futurist group: he chose Paris as the first venue for the show, discussed with Herwarth Walden in Berlin specific curatorial choices, and corresponded with the dealer Albert Reballo and the Rotterdamsche Kunstkring regarding a later Futurist exhibition that took place in 1913.²⁸ But even Marinetti's powers were limited and the dealers were able to rule on financial matters, such as Bernheim-Jeune imposing a commission of fifteen per cent on the profits of the Futurist exhibition when it travelled to London and Brussels.²⁹ The correspondence with Reballo also shows that, at least in that case, the influence of Marinetti was subordinate to the local organisers, and many conditions and financial agreements were the fruit of tight negotiations.³⁰ In London, Marinetti was merely an illustrious guest at the opening of the show: references indicate that he had no involvement with the Sackville Gallery, but instead reveal the organisation of the show to be led by a London-based dealer who had perhaps negotiated an agreement through Bernheim-Jeune. In his 1946 autobiography, Severini named this dealer by surname only and described him with some contempt as 'a certain Meyer-Sée [. . .] some kind of merchant without a shop of antiques and pseudo-antique paintings',³¹ although Meyer-Sée did in fact have a shop. With Max Rothschild and Viscount Gilbert de Rorthays, another former Paris sales correspondent of the *Burlington*, Meyer-Sée directed the Sackville Gallery, but left it in August 1912 to found the Marlborough Gallery at 34 Duke Street, another space with an aristocratic ring to its name, dedicated to the sale of old-master paintings and objets d'art, and as mentioned, the site of the April 1913 Severini show.³²

Numerous references to Meyer-Sée in Severini's letters to Marinetti between 1912 and 1913 confirm that there was close contact between the two, later underplayed in Severini's memoirs, and that Meyer-Sée had a leading role in the organisation both of the Sackville's Futurist exhibition and the Marlborough's Severini show.³³ A summary of these references is revealing. Severini praised Meyer-Sée for his organisational skills but other remarks indicate a conflict between them: for instance, the resentful comment that 'the idiotic titles are Sée's work', referring to the descriptions of his paintings in the Marlborough Gallery catalogue. Severini admitted that, financially, the dealer was in control: 'Sée is a pig and he is screwing me but I need him'.³⁴ There were, however, other complications in their business partnership. At the time of the opening of his 1913 exhibition, Severini, newly engaged to Jeanne Fort, daughter of the French poet Paul Fort, stayed with Meyer-Sée and his wife, but the relationship was difficult and Severini was uncomfortable in their house: 'I am Sée's guest [. . .] but this state of affairs cannot go on and I have to cross the Channel as soon as possible'.³⁵ Some

²⁶ P. Fletcher: 'Shopping for Art', in Fletcher and Helmreich, p.57.

²⁷ Coen, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.15–28.

²⁸ An interesting account of the display of this exhibition is given by Aby Warburg, who, after having attended the exhibition, wrote on 6th July 1912 to complain that the paintings were positioned on the floor instead of being hung on the wall. The Gesellschaft zur Förderung moderner Kunst replied stating that it was the Italian artists themselves who had insisted that their large paintings should stand on the floor; London, Warburg Institute Archive, ref. no.WIA GC/8508. In January 1912 Marinetti wrote from Libya to Filippo Balilla Pratella, stating that he was planning to organise a Futurist exhibition in Paris; M. Drudi Gambillo and T. Fiori, eds.: *Archivi del Futurismo 1*, Rome 1958–68, II, p.234; cited hereafter as *Archivi*. For the correspondence between Marinetti and Reballo, see T. van Kalmthout: 'Batailles et idées futuristes', *Simiolus* 21 (1992), pp.139–61.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.150–58.

³⁰ For instance, in January 1913, Marinetti waived his honorarium for the lectures

and in April 1913 accepted to cover costs of any unsold exhibition catalogues and of providing the organisers with images; see *ibid.*, pp.150–58.

³¹ I have quoted from Severini's autobiography in its English translation, giving the original Italian text in the footnotes when needed; see Severini, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.106.

³² Rothschild and Meyer-Sée are quoted as joint-directors of the Sackville in an announcement regarding 'A picture by Vermeer of Delft', *The Times* (17th May 1909), p.8. Information on management changes in these galleries is also contained in the Marlborough Gallery advertisements, for example the one published in this article as Fig.23.

³³ The letters preserved in the Beinecke Library, New Haven, are fully transcribed and translated in Coffin Hanson, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.135–56; see especially the letters of 10th June 1912 (p.138), 28th January 1913 (p.143), 7th April 1913 (p.148) and 19th April 1913 (p.149).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31st March 1913, p.146.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19th April 1913, p.149.

circumstantial evidence suggests that perhaps his proximity to Mme Meyer-Sée contributed to Severini's unrest. In early 1912 Severini had painted a Cubo-Futurist portrait of Meyer-Sée's wife, elusively titled only as *Abstract rhythm of Mrs. M. S.* (Fig. 25).³⁶ In his autobiography, Severini claimed that this work was not only a spatial study of the planes generated by the main compositional lines but also an interpretation of the psychological relationship between the painter and the sitter, whose identity he did not disclose.³⁷ Severini was evidently attached to this painting, for it remained in his possession until his death and he produced several replicas of it. Was Mme Meyer-Sée the beautiful blonde woman whom Severini met and 'almost decided to fall in love with' in early 1911 and who was planning to visit his studio to have her portrait painted?³⁸ There is no supporting evidence for this identification, but that there had been a rapport between the two which was now fading is also suggested by Severini's caustic comment in 1913 that 'watching the blonde Madame Sée getting old is a pleasure: she is becoming ugly and is sick of men'.³⁹ The personal situation was aggravated by the emerging contradictions in the professional relationship between an avant-garde artist and a dealer in old masters, as is plain from some comments to Marinetti: 'I have to sustain our moral cause energetically', wrote Severini, 'since our friend Sée openly says he doesn't give a damn. I would add, incidentally, that any future proposal for an exhibition can already be considered out of the question, because for all sorts of reasons it is not working'.⁴⁰

Robert René Meyer-Sée, a French citizen, was another *march-and-amateur* well connected to the art press: until 1913 he was the Paris correspondent of *American Art News* and was a regular contributor to *Connoisseur*. He was a specialist in pastel artists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and his book *English Pastels 1750–1830* (1911) was claimed on its cover to be the art book of the year, although it had received mixed reviews.⁴¹ Meyer-Sée owned and sold works by Jean Baptiste Cipriani, Francis Cotes, John Constable and Daniel Gardner, and concentrated his research on lesser-known artists such as John James Masquerier, Peter Romney and John Russell.⁴² There is something elusive and perhaps even roguish about Meyer-Sée. Implicated in a lawsuit regarding the forgery of some Rodin bronzes in 1913, his gallery was the victim of theft in 1916 while he was serving in the French army and he began legal proceedings for the matter to be settled by his insurers. In the 1920s, after the closure of the Marlborough Gallery, Meyer-Sée moved to the United States where he catalogued the Xavier Haas collection and continued to contribute to *Connoisseur*. In the 1940s he wrote for *Le Courier Graphique* articles on the brothers George and Peter Romney and on George Chinnery. We know as yet



26. *Portrait of Mrs George Sibley-Braithwaite and her son Thomas Gracchus*, by William Armfield Hobday. c.1800. Pastel, 90 by 60 cm. (Whereabouts unknown).

very little of Mme Meyer-Sée, née Grace Mercia Sibley, who, like her husband, owned works of art: according to *American Art News*, her collection was dispersed at auction in Paris in December 1912 and comprised mainly British paintings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with works by Ozias Humphry, William Armfield Hobday and George Chinnery.⁴³ She claimed descent from the Sibley-Braithwaites, for whom Hobday painted *Portrait of Mrs George Sibley-Braithwaite and her son Thomas Gracchus* (Fig. 26), allegedly the great-grandfather of Mme Meyer-Sée.⁴⁴ However, it must be stated that all allusions to the 'Sibley-Braithwaites' originate from Meyer-Sée and that independent references to this family are as yet untraced, and perhaps the name was even manufactured by the Meyer-Sées to facilitate the sale of paintings by lesser artists by means of an aristocratic connection. Severini's portrait of Mme Meyer-Sée, with the social attributes of her plumed hat, cigarette, lap dog and gold stock pin on her rich blouse, is a contemporary interpretation of the earlier society portraits, such as Humphry's *Portrait of a lady of the Sibley-Braithwaite family* (whereabouts unknown), in which the personal charm and status of the sitters are conveyed.⁴⁵

The Meyer-Sées and Viscount Rorthays were part of the Paris-London group of dealers and art writers who organised exhibitions and dealt in modern art and old masters alike. Central to this group was Robert Dell, who in 1906 had resigned the joint-editorship of *The Burlington Magazine* to live and work

³⁶ This work was exhibited for the first time in Rome in February 1913 in *Prima Esposizione di Pittura Futurista* (Ridotto del Teatro Costanzi). For exhibition history and replicas, see D. Fonti: *Gino Severini catalogo ragionato*, Milan 1988, pp.125–26; also mentioned in *Archivi*, I, pp.314 and 338.

³⁷ Severini, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.103.

³⁸ Letter from Severini to Marinetti, 18th January 1911, Coffin Hanson, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.137–38.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, letter from Severini to Marinetti, 19th April 1913, p.149.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, letter from Severini to Marinetti, 31st March and 19th April 1913, pp.143 and 146.

⁴¹ For the news of Meyer-Sée leaving *American Art News* and being replaced by Robert Dell, see [Anon.]: *American Art News* (1st March 1913), p.4. For R.R.M. Sée: *English Pastels 1750–1830*, London 1911, see, for instance, the negative review by Lionel Cust in this Magazine: L.C. [Lionel Cust]: 'English Pastels. 1750–1830 by R.R.M. Sée', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 19 (September 1911), p.361.

⁴² For a biography of Meyer-Sée, see N. Jeffares: *Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800*, London 2006, online edition www.pastellists.com/Collectors.htm (accessed May 2013). For an example of Meyer-Sée's writing, see R.R.M. Sée: 'The Pastel Work of John James Masquerier', *Connoisseur* 55 (1919), p.196.

⁴³ I am indebted to Neil Jeffares for providing me with a copy of the marriage certificate of the Meyer-Sées. For '[A sale of] pictures and drawings of the eighteenth century mostly of English masters composing the collection of Mrs. Sée, née Sibley-Braithwaite', see R.R.M. Sée: 'Paris Letter', *American Art News* (19th October 1912), p.5.

⁴⁴ For this painting (Fig. 26), see exh. cat. *Cent Portraits des femmes*, Paris (Salle du Jeu de Paume) 23rd April–1st July 1909, p.72, no.68. Reprinted (with illustration) in Sée: *English pastels*, *op. cit.* (note 41), pp.325–26; also quoted in Jeffares, *op. cit.* (note 42), p.247.

⁴⁵ The work by Humphry, exhibited in *Les Maîtres anglais, 1740–1840: exposition de pastels, aquarelles et dessins*, Paris (Galerie Henri Barbazanges) 19th December 1919 to 10th January 1920, later belonging to Arthur N. Gibley, was sold at Christie's, London, 25th April 1940, lot 178, p.46; also quoted in Jeffares, *op. cit.* (note 42), p.258.

FUTURISM: The Latest Art Sensation

THE EXHIBITION
OF THE WORKS OF THE
**Italian Futurist
Painters**

which is the talk of Paris to-day, has been transferred to the Sackville Gallery, where it will be on view during
MARCH

THE . . .
SACKVILLE GALLERY, Ltd. 28 Sackville St., Piccadilly, W.

Telephone: MAYFAIR 3589 Telegrams: "OBJEDAR, LONDON"



27. Advertisement for the Futurist exhibition at the Sackville Gallery, London, from *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 20 (March 1912).

The SACKVILLE GALLERY, LTD.
28 SACKVILLE STREET, PICCADILLY

Telephone: 3589 Mayfair Telegrams: "Objedar, London"

**Pictures by
Old Masters**

**Antiques
AND
Works of Art**



28. Advertisement for the Sackville Gallery, London, from *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 20 (January 1912).

in Paris, combining the careers of art dealer, as the proprietor of *Galleries Shirleys* at 9 boulevard Malesherbes, and art correspondent of several publications including the *Burlington*, the *Nation* and the *Manchester Guardian*. Dell was a friend and business associate of Meyer-Sée, Rorthays and Rothschild. Together, he and Meyer-Sée had organised the 1911 exhibition *Exposition des Pastellistes Anglais du XVIIIe siècle* at the newly opened *Galleries Charles Brunner* in Paris, reviewed by Meyer-Sée himself in *Les Arts*.⁴⁶ The Meyer-Sées and Rorthays undertook frequent trips between the two cities, even after September 1911 when Rorthays had joined Meyer-Sée and Rothschild in the management of the Sackville Gallery and had moved in with the Meyer-Sées.⁴⁷ Dell too had a business agreement with the Sackville Gallery but in August 1912 their contract was dissolved, with some relief expressed by Dell.⁴⁸ And so the four business partners separated: Dell continued

dealing from Paris along with Percy Moore Turner; Rothschild became the sole proprietor of the Sackville Gallery; and Rorthays and Meyer-Sée opened the Marlborough Gallery with Sam Nyburg.

The circle of dealers and writers around Dell organised exhibitions in England and France.⁴⁹ At the time, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British and French society portraits were very fashionable, particularly portraits of women.⁵⁰ They had a wide appeal: even the Socialist writer Anatole France owned a pastel portrait, allegedly representing William Sibley-Braithwaite, by George Chinnery, possibly acquired through Meyer-Sée.⁵¹ Drawings by George Romney were especially praised: among their admirers was Guillaume Apollinaire, who was working with Meyer-Sée on a book on Romney's drawings before his death in 1918.⁵² But it was not all pastels and ladies. Dell and his associates also contributed to the introduction of modern French art in Britain: Dell was the principal organiser of the 1910 *Exhibition of the Work of Modern French Artists* at Brighton Art Gallery and was on the executive committee of Fry's two Post-Impressionist exhibitions, although his contribution to the latter is still to be investigated.⁵³ Recently, Anna Gruetzner Robins has indicated how these were important commercial events where the majority of works exhibited came from Paris dealers and where the transition between scholarship and commerce was seamless.⁵⁴ Such shows assured these dealers and their circle that the British public was attentive to modern art and that such exhibitions in London could be a financial success, especially when Meyer-Sée could secure attention in the periodical press, through his position as an art correspondent.

The influence of the press in creating a public for the Futurist exhibition was extensive and it is important to stress the double role of the organisers as dealers and critics. The review of an exhibition by its organisers in an independent journal is now widely condemned as a conflict of interest, but it was generally accepted in the hybrid professional scene of the early twentieth century. In the case of the Futurist exhibition, Meyer-Sée was the Paris representative of the journal that covered this exhibition in detail, *American Art News*, and author of the short, very positive, review of the exhibition that appeared there, and even after the exhibition had closed, Meyer-Sée continued to favour the Futurists in his reviews.⁵⁵ Likewise Dell, then still Meyer-Sée's business partner, had ensured that a notice of the London exhibition was included in his summary of French events for the *Burlington*. Another notice, possibly obtained through Meyer-Sée, appeared in *Connoisseur*, a magazine that did not normally comment on modern art.⁵⁶ But a connection with an art periodical did not guarantee a good review – in fact, with the exception of Meyer-Sée's contribution for *American Art News*, none was

⁴⁶ R.R.M. Sée: 'Une Exposition des Pastellistes Anglais du XVIIIe siècle', *Les Arts* 117 (1911), pp.25–32. The exhibition was also reviewed as 'The Brunner gallery', *The Times* (3rd June 1911), p.8. The exhibition ran from 8th April to 15th June 1911.

⁴⁷ Letter from Robert Dell to his daughters Sylvia and Veronica Dell, 16th September 1911, London, London School of Economics archive, Dell 1/2 (cited hereafter as LSE Papers).

⁴⁸ Letter from Robert Dell to his daughters Sylvia and Veronica Dell, 9th August 1912, LSE Papers, Dell 1/2.

⁴⁹ For instance, the 1911 exhibition of British pastels was anticipated by the *Exposition de cent portraits de femmes des écoles Anglaise et Française du XVIIIe siècle* at the Salle du Jeu de Paume (23rd April to 1st July 1909), a rather grand affair with Queen

Alexandra as patron and with a board which had many luminaries in common with *The Burlington Magazine* Consultative Committee (Charles Aitken, Walter Armstrong, Sidney Colvin, Martin Conway, Herbert Cook, Lionel Cust, Robert Dell, Roger Fry, C.J. Holmes, Charles Holroyd, D.S. MacColl, Claude Phillips, Edward Poynter, A.B. Skinner, John Murray Scott, Edward Maunde Thompson and Whitworth Wallis); see [Anon.]: 'Cent portraits des femmes', *Les Arts* 91 (1909), pp.8–10, with illustrations.

⁵⁰ One British example of this fashion was the exhibition at the New Gallery, London, organised by the International Society, dedicated to portraits of beautiful women; see R. Fry: 'Exhibition of Fair Women', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 15 (1909), pp.14–17.

⁵¹ Work illustrated in R.R.M. Sée: 'Gouaches of George Chinnery', *Connoisseur* 54



29. *Women swimming*, by Carlo Carrà. 1910–12. Canvas, 105.3 by 155.6 cm. (Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh).

positive, but even a negative review brought public attention. For this purpose Rothschild, without openly stating his professional capacity as director of the Sackville Gallery, conducted a polemical correspondence in the *Pall Mall Gazette* with the painter Philip Burne-Jones.⁵⁷ His letters not only defended the Futurist cause but also ensured that the exhibition continued to be mentioned in that newspaper.

The influence of publicity in the periodical press was yet more powerful, with expectation built up through a campaign of controversy and sensationalism consciously orchestrated by the exhibition organisers. For instance, Meyer-Sée was the author of the perhaps spurious news that four galleries in London had fought for the right to show the Futurist exhibition. The paid advertisement for the show in the front pages of the *Burlington* (Fig.27), incorporating a reproduction of *Laughter* by Boccioni (Museum of Modern Art, New York), used a hyperbolic language remarkably different from the usual sparse elegance of the Sackville Gallery advertisements, which normally featured only the name of the gallery and a photograph of its most important work of art currently on view (Fig.28). The Futurist exhibition was described as the ‘latest art sensation’ and ‘the talk of Paris today’. The term ‘sensational’, which had also been employed by Meyer-Sée in his review for *American Art News*, was often connected with decadent French society.⁵⁸ For

instance, in the very first issue of *The Art Critic*, published in November 1893, the term was negatively associated with the supposed decadent way of life in Paris, a city that had ‘developed a taste for the sensational, the morbid and the atrocious without any consideration whether it be vulgar, immoral or sacrilegious’.⁵⁹

The many accounts of the Futurist exhibition in the popular press stressed how it was a must-see, sensationalist spectacle for the upper classes. Both Severini and Carrà had remarked on the predominance of a wealthy, aristocratic public, and Severini was aware of how the Futurists had also become a mere entertainment for the bourgeoisie, and how their paintings ‘were travelling throughout Europe as curiosities’.⁶⁰ It is telling that the choice for the exhibition advertisement was Boccioni’s *Laughter*, a depiction of a laughing woman in a plumed hat, a work that chimed with the risqué, even sensational message that the gallery wished to convey. Similarly, as Boccioni testified, it was an innovation of the British dealer, again rather dismissively called ‘negoziante’ (‘shopkeeper’), to insert ‘explanations’ of the works exhibited, descriptions which, in most cases, translated the Futurist message into familiar terms, either labelling them ‘impressions’ or simplifying them as descriptions of society scenes: *Laughter* by Boccioni, a Bergsonian merger of the individual in a world of motion, was described as ‘the scene round

(1919), pp.141–53. Dell’s correspondence offers tantalising glimpses of Anatole France’s collection that Dell had helped to assemble. For instance, in a letter of 8th May 1917, Dell tells France of a pastel attributed to Prud’hon sold for the very high sum of 60,000 francs, a sale that augments the value of France’s collection which, according to Dell, was composed of ‘much better works’; LSE Papers, Dell 3/2.

⁵² R.R.M. Sée: ‘Les Dessins de George Romney (I)’, *Le Courrier Graphique* 29 (1947), pp.21–28.

⁵³ *Exhibition of the Work of Modern French Artists*, Public Art Galleries, Brighton, 10th June to 31st August 1910, directed by Henry D. Roberts and Robert Dell (catalogue in LSE Papers, Dell 7/15).

⁵⁴ Greutzner Robins, *op. cit.* (note 13), p.85.

⁵⁵ R.R.M. Sée: ‘Paris Letter’, *American Art News* (6th April 1912), p.5.

⁵⁶ [Anon.]: ‘Futurist Art’, *Connoisseur* 32 (1912), p.270.

⁵⁷ ‘Letters’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (4th March 1912), p.8; see also L. Rainey: *Institutions of modernism: literary elites and public culture*, New Haven and London 1998, pp.14–15.

⁵⁸ On sensationalism, see J.F. Codell: ‘The art press and the art market: the artist as economic man’, in Fletcher and Helmreich, pp.128–50.

⁵⁹ [Anon.]: ‘Notes on the Fin de Siècle Movement in Parisian Art and Literature’, *The Art Critic* 1 (1893), pp.4–7.

⁶⁰ ‘Intanto i nostri quadri viaggiavano in Europa come oggetti di curiosità’; G. Severini: *Vita di un Pittore*, Milan 1983 (1st ed. 1943), pp.104 and 133; and *idem, op. cit.* (note 9), pp.92–93 and 104.



30. Advertisement from The Sackville Gallery catalogue, 1912.

the table of a restaurant where all are gay'.⁶¹ *Girl at the window* by Carrà (no.16), a study of simultaneous visual sensations, was dealt with in four words: 'impression of a courtesan'.⁶² Carrà's *Women swimming* (no.17; Fig.29), inspired by Libero Altomare's poem 'Swimming in the Tiber', which was read by Marinetti at several Futurist evenings and described the disappearance of bodies swept away by a fierce river current, was perhaps the most stultifying of all, being recounted as 'the sensuality and the coolness of a bathe in the Mediterranean'.⁶³

A reading clearly emerges of the 1912 Futurist exhibition as an event organised by a group of dealers who commodified the avant-garde, exploited the artists and controlled the media. The 'sensational' Futurist exhibition can be interpreted as part of a marketing strategy by the Sackville Gallery directors to attract ticket-paying customers to their establishment, not only to profit from their entry fees, but also with the aim of selling to them more profitable pictures and objets d'art. The advertisements present in the 1912 Sackville catalogue (Fig.30) point to this. Whereas in the Futurist exhibitions' catalogues in Paris and

Berlin the galleries advertised modern works of art, in this one they promoted 'selected old masters' and fine antique bronzes, as well as the book *English Pastels* by Meyer-Sée. This was also the only catalogue that maintained the usual typographic design of the host gallery, albeit coloured with the orange-red lettering favoured by the Futurists, instead of conforming to the design of the catalogues of Paris and Berlin. In spite of the scandal and sensationalism, the works did not sell well. Of eight paintings sold, seven were bought by the organising dealers: two in Paris by Bernheim-Jeune, one by Meyer-Sée and four by Max Rothschild in London. The only work sold to an outsider (Boccioni's *The rising city*, no.6; now Museum of Modern Art, New York) was bought by a fellow Italian, the musician Ferruccio Busoni.⁶⁴ Boccioni listed, with prices, the four paintings sold to Rothschild: one by Russolo for 1,800 lire; Carrà's *Leaving the theatre* (no.18; now Estorick Collection, London; Fig.31) for 800 lire; and two works by Severini for about 2,000 lire.⁶⁵ The total sales of these four works amounted to 4,600 lire, the equivalent then of about £184, whereas the 11,000 francs quoted by Marinetti in April 1912 for the sale of the eight paintings equalled £440.⁶⁶ These amounts would have bought the purchaser very little at a contemporary auction. For instance, at the November 1912 Sampson sale, contemporary paintings by the Royal Academicians Poynter, Long, Graham and Leader fetched between £120 and £500 each and the works at Fry's first Post-Impressionist exhibition in London commanded similar figures.⁶⁷ Doubtful or obscure works by old masters started at around £300-£400 in London – for instance, a *Madonna and Child with saints*, doubtfully attributed to Pintoricchio, had sold in March 1912 for £441, almost the exact equivalent of all eight Futurist paintings, and Dell had paid £450 to Frank Sabin for an unattributed female portrait that he associated with Goya.⁶⁸ Securely attributed old-master paintings, the category to which the Sackville Gallery aspired, were in another league entirely: in March 1912 a *Madonna* by Andrea Mantegna from the Weber Collection (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), which had already sold for £4,000 from Dowdeswell's in 1902, was purchased for £29,500, then the highest price for a picture ever paid at a public auction.⁶⁹ Futurist works commanded much lower prices and yet the English upper classes, the social group that was principally targeted by the organisers, and that was until recently collecting small Charles Conder fans for up to £70 each, did not respond and most of the paintings left London unsold.

More money was made from the sale of entrance tickets, priced at one shilling, and exhibition catalogues, priced at sixpence each. This was not uncommon for commercial exhibitions in London since at least the nineteenth century,

⁶¹ *Sackville Catalogue*, p.21; Tate 2009, p.130, no.27.

⁶² *Sackville Catalogue*, p.23. This work has been identified, with no supporting documentary evidence in *ibid.*, p.150, no.37. The present writer has some reservations about this identification.

⁶³ *Sackville Catalogue*, p.23; Tate 2009, p.152, no.38.

⁶⁴ Letter from Boccioni to Barbantini, 13th April 1912, stating that Busoni had bought *La Ville Monte (Il lavoro)* for 4,000 lire, of which 3,000 were for the artist. The percentage of 25 per cent is higher than usual, as galleries normally charged up to 20 per cent; see *Archivi*, II, p.44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ These prices are consistent with the 1914 exhibition at the Doré Galleries, where works were priced even lower, at around £35; see Coffin Hanson, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.169. 4,600 lire = 4,600 francs, because of the joint Latin Monetary Union

or Gold Standard in operation between 1865 and 1927; for a recent analysis, see L. Einaudi: *European Monetary Unification and the International Gold Standard (1865-1873)*, Oxford 2001.

⁶⁷ [Anon.]: 'Picture Sales', *Connoisseur* 32 (1912), p.60; hereafter cited as *Connoisseur Sale*. On the prices of the works sold at the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, see Greutzner Robins, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp.90-91.

⁶⁸ For the Pintoricchio price, see *Connoisseur Sale*, p.269; regarding Dell's purchase from Sabin, see LSE Papers, Dell 1/4.

⁶⁹ *Connoisseur Sale*, p.267, ill. p.271, reports that it sold for £29,500 at the Weber auction, and that Weber had bought it for £4,000 from Dowdeswell in 1903.

⁷⁰ G. Guerzoni: 'The British Painting Market 1789-1914', in M. North, ed.: *Economic History and the arts*, Köln, Weimar and Wien 1996, pp.97-132.

⁷¹ On the show's financial success, see letter from Marinetti to Pratella, 12th April

when the profits deriving from exhibition management and reproduction rights were often higher than from any purchases of the exhibited works, a process that often marginalised the artist in the transaction itself.⁷⁰ Marinetti had stated that the London organisers did not want to send the exhibition to Berlin, such were the earnings from the entrance tickets, and he later wrote that at each city of the tour between ten thousand and twenty-two thousand catalogues were sold.⁷¹ This amount was also confirmed by Boccioni, who on 1st March 1912 had written to Vico Baer quoting a similar figure of seventeen thousand catalogues sold in Paris. Boccioni also boasted to Baer that the Futurists went to London with a splendid commercial deal.⁷² It is worth attempting to disentangle Futurist rhetoric from the results of such a deal. In a letter to Nino Barbantini of 13th April 1912, Boccioni confided that all their expenses were paid and that they earned 40 to 50 lire per day through ticket and catalogue sales commission.⁷³ This was indeed a high daily rate for Italy, where the average yearly wage in 1910 was 688 lire for a labourer and 2,244 lire for a teacher. In four days the Futurist painters would have earned as much as an Italian teacher in a month. That would have been a welcome source of income as, apart from Marinetti, the Futurist painters had very limited means: they came from lower middle-class families in one of the poorest countries in Europe. To artists coming from such a background the sums offered may have seemed at first astronomical but soon the reality of the higher cost of living in Northern Europe prevailed: in a letter from Germany Boccioni lamented that life there cost him 30 lire a day and he could not afford to stay any longer.⁷⁴ That the percentage offered to the Futurists was inadequate is also attested by the fact that Severini and Carrà had to return to Paris and Italy respectively as they had no further funds to keep them while away from home.⁷⁵ The deal does not look so splendid.

The temptation to create too sharp a contrast between the wealthy bourgeois dealers and the poor exploited artists must, however, be tempered by other considerations, not least the radical political positions of some of the dealers involved. The political leanings of Meyer-Sée and Rothschild are not known, but Dell, Fénéon and Rorthays were declared anarchists and participated in the radical political ferment in Paris in the early 1910s.⁷⁶ In 1913 Dell and Rorthays founded in Paris the Cercle Carré, a group of artists and writers with the aim of promoting art from a socialist point of view, chaired by Anatole France, with Dell and the artist René Georges Herrmann-Paul on its managing committee and Viscount Rorthays (under his new, more democratic nom de plume, René de Marmande) as its general secretary.⁷⁷ With the onset of the First World War, Dell and Rorthays/Marmande were to abandon the arts for political



31. *Leaving the theatre*, by Carlo Carrà. c.1910. Canvas, 69 by 89 cm. (Estorick Collection, London).

journalism and founded the anarchist newspaper *Les Nations* to diffuse progressive ideas. In this context of shared idealism, the opportunity given to the Futurists by Rothschild, Rorthays and Meyer-Sée of exhibiting their work and allowing them to make their voice heard through such an influential infrastructure was undoubtedly powerful. Even if the Futurists gained financially little from the experience, their exhibition did contribute to the display of an alternative kind of art to that usually seen in such spaces. Avant-garde exhibitions not only became of significant importance in the British art world, but their success with the public contributed to the creation of specific venues for the showing of modern art after the First World War.⁷⁸ If the popular and specialist press trivialised the Futurist experience, other publications were more attentive to its significance. For instance, the quality of this experience for young London intellectuals was conveyed in positive, cogent terms by the critic Edith A. Browne in the early modernist magazine edited by Dora Marsden, *The Freewoman*.⁷⁹ Browne met Boccioni and Marinetti at the London exhibition, she discussed with them the admixture of symbolism and realism in their art and praised their works as responding to 'the very essence of individual nature'. The Futurist exhibition received another perceptive review in the same magazine written by the architect Harry Birnstingl, where the Bergsonian references in the exhibition catalogue were inserted into a discussion of the representation of time and movement in art.⁸⁰ The bourgeoisie might laugh, but other forces were listening.

1912, *Archivi*, II, pp.237–38.

⁷² Letter from Boccioni to Baer, 1st March 1912, *Archivi*, II, pp.40–41.

⁷³ Letter from Boccioni to Barbantini, 13th April 1912, *Archivi*, II, p.44.

⁷⁴ Letter from Boccioni to Carrà, April 1912, *Archivi*, I, p.339.

⁷⁵ Letter from Carrà, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.161. Severini had similar financial problems with Gonnelli, a Florentine dealer whom he took to court for lack of payment in 1914; letter from Severini to Marinetti, 1st September 1914, Coffin Hanson, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.172.

⁷⁶ J.J. Halperin: *Félix Fénéon. Art et anarchie dans le Paris fin de siècle*, Paris 1991, p.181.

⁷⁷ For the Cercle Carré, see LSE Papers, Dell 3/14.

⁷⁸ A. Stephenson: 'Strategies of display and modes of consumption in London art galleries in the inter-war years', in Fletcher and Helmreich, pp.98–125.

⁷⁹ E.A. Browne: 'Free Art', *The Freewoman. A weekly Feminist Review* (14th March 1912), pp.329–31. Edith Browne (b.1874), elected in April 1913 as a member of the Royal Geographical Society, was a prolific writer of monographs on architecture as well as a biography of W.S. Gilbert (London 1907) and a series of books for schoolchildren on geographical matters; see M. Bell and C. MacEwan: 'The Admission of Women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892–1914; the Controversy and the Outcome', *Geographical Journal* 162 (1996), p.310.

⁸⁰ H. Birnstingl: 'Futurism', *The Freewoman. A weekly Feminist Review* (18th April 1912), pp.427–29. Birnstingl, an architect and author of a monograph on John Soane (1935), is better known for his openly controversial views on homosexuality voiced in *The Freewoman*; see D. Cohler: *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, London 2010, pp.89–91.