

LUCA BUVOLI
Instant before Incident
14 February – 21 March 2009

Since 1992, I have been developing three projects, Meta-Futurism, Flying—Practical Training, and Not-a-Superhero, using a variety of media including animated film and video, installation, sculpture, drawing, and artist's book.

The project entitled Meta-Futurism includes Instant Before Incident, A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow (Un Bellissimo Dopodomani), and Velocity Zero. I envision this project as a "Futurism without optimism": an homage to the movement as part of my Italian cultural heritage, as well as a memory of my nation's political history and of my own personal history—my father was a pilot during World War II and I grew up watching aerial exhibitions. It is an attempt to question the authoritarian and threatening side of our fascination with the future, velocity and power.

Instant Before Incident

Images 1-5:

The large sculpture entitled "Instant Before Incident (Marinetti's Drive 1908)" and the animated documentary video "Ave Machina (Instant Before Incident)" are based on the car crash that supposedly inspired Marinetti to write the Futurist Manifesto in 1909.

A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow (Un Bellissimo Dopodomani)

Images 8-16

In this times, the euphoria of flight is as spectacular as the danger. The project's initial phase, Anachroheroism, explores aesthetic and well as political aspects of aeronautics. Dynamic vector lines and an idealized, mechanized flying human shape surround the viewer upon entering the Arsenale. Hand-made "Propaganda Posters" and words rendered in mosaic and resin rise along the walls. The style of these works not only refer to myths of velocity, virility and violence, but also deflate them with entangled rhythms, collapsing letters, and non-heroic content.

The second phase of this project, Entanglement of Modernist Myths, hangs in the cylindrical room. The flight trails --large lines and beams made of resin-- of the initial "Vector" in phase 1 soar upward and weave between a large resin marquee spelling out the project title before becoming entangled and falling to the floor. This project for the 52nd International Venice Biennale elaborates on and questions the prediction, "There will be a very beautiful day after tomorrow." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti—founder of Futurism, the avant-garde movement that brought Italy up to speed with Modernism and into a controversial relationship with Fascism—tried to reassure his daughter with these hopeful words near the end of his life.

The video, shown inside the circular room, begins as Vittoria Marinetti recounts her father's prophecy. As Vittoria fades out, the video lyrically transitions between animated segments and archival footage of political rallies and air shows.

Velocity Zero

Images 6-7:

Velocity Zero is presented in the Pavillion Velocità Zero", after it was shown as the third phase, entitled Aphasia, in two anterooms just off the main circular room at the Arsenale. With the assistance of several speech-language pathologists, I recorded individuals who have aphasia or stutter reading the Manifesto of Futurism. Their slowed speech-- transformed into fragmented animated sequences-- mirror the readers' efforts to fluently capture the text. Their interpretation deflates the Manifesto's praise of speed and aggression, and continues my "re-reading of Futurism from a post-utopian perspective."

The project entitled Flying—Practical Training consists of three “levels:” Beginners (images 7-11), Intermediates (images 1-6), and Advanced.

Flying—Practical Training for Intermediates

In the second part of the Flying project, begun after 9/11, I expand my interest in flight by associating the dream of defying gravity to the development of military technology and by dealing with the fears associated to flying.

Images 19-20:

The sculptures Vectors, made of translucent resins and pigment utilized in the aeronautics industry, address the heritage of Italian Futurism and its problematic absorption and mutation into the aesthetics proclaimed under Fascism. In the Vectors, I focus on the representation and rhetoric of velocity and heroes from Nietzsche’s Übermensch to Siegel and Shuster’s Superman (see extruded human figure in flight, in the front views).

Images 17-18:

For an exhibition in Rome I created a two-room installation entitled Dov’è La Vittoria? (Where is the Victory?). Here I experimented with an integration of contemporary materials (resin, computer generated animated video), forms (stealth bombers, aerobatics), and themes (the loss of faith in major religious and ideological systems) with traditional ones (mosaic, the rhetorics of homeland, the dream of flight).

In one of the two rooms I projected an animated/documentary video, inspired by my mother’s early memories of air raids and by my father and uncle’s careers as Italian pilots in World War II. One of the animated sequences shows the figure of my father extruding into the form of a Vector, as seen in my sculptures (see stills in image 17-18-19, and in DVD of Adapting One’s Senses to High Altitude Flying—For Intermediates—An Almost Silent Version).

Flying—Practical Training for Beginners

The first part of my project (started in 1997) is the Beginners Level (see images 21-25), a step-by-step method of teaching unassisted human flight. It includes a fictitious instructional film (part live-action part animated), along with sculptures made of synthetic materials for kite-building and large diagrams inspired by Leonardo’s drawings. In these works I explore the relationship between science and the spiritual, between imaginary and real in the creative process.

Images 24-25:

The form of the helix in the sculptures and videos is originally based on a diagram in F. De Lacerda’s flight instruction manual Surviving Spins, which shows how to recover from a loss of orientation that pilots experience when their airplane loses control and is thrown in an infinite spin. I used that image to represent the combination of idealism and confusion, ascent and descent, experienced under a dictatorial regime.

Images 21-23:

The sculpture Flying Title Kite, illustrates the title of my “33-step Method” for human unassisted flight. I built Flying Title Kite in Japan with the assistance of a local kite expert. I fabricated the sculpture with spinnaker cloth and carbon rods so that it could fly. When the piece traveled to the MIT space, I thoroughly modified it by extending some of the letters and by adding white arrows indicating the airflow, and black arrows indicating the four fundamental forces in aerodynamics (weight, lift, thrust, and drag).

Not-a-Superhero series:

The serial project Not-a-Superhero (started in 1992), named after its protagonist, is based on my early fascination with the American mythology of the superhero, which I was exposed to as a child living in the U.S. (from 1963 to 1967). I have been revisiting this mythology through the existential adventures of Not-a-Superhero, who gives voice to our vulnerability and struggle in constructing our identities.

Images 30-32:

I play with notions of time through sculptures in the forms of a Moebius strip (image 32), or of a marquee outside the video gallery (image 30-31), and through the accordion-like structure of the related 16mm animated film (Not-a-Superhero—Inside and Outside Time, 1997). In this installation/episode Not-a-Superhero is trapped by Temporibus, the Guardian of Pseudocyclical Time.

Images 28-29

In Part I (right) of this three-part installation at the Queens Museum of Art, I made a small action figure of Not-a-Superhero with plastic bags, foil, and wire so that it could fly, on a kinetic mechanism, above the large model of New York City (originally built for the 1964 World Fair). From the balcony one could see this small character (here barely visible next to me installing it) hovering over the city; simultaneously, she/he could listen to the Mini-Series of Radio Episodes, an eleven-minute audio piece I bombastically narrated, with sounds and music by Jeffrey Lependorf, to deal with Not-a-Superhero's displacement in the city without language.

In Part II (left) the viewer was invited to look out at another vestige of the World's Fair, the Unisphere, through the eyepiece of a sculpture/telescope. Inside this "telescope," however, I had placed a small TV monitor showing an animation of Not-a-Superhero. In it, Not-a-Superhero flies around a globe as the continents separate and merge into each other, while the oceans are drained (see three stills in the center). Above the "telescope," the composer and I had installed a two-channel audio piece including sounds of crashing glass and waves.

In Part III of the installation at the Queens Museum of Art I recreated the water drained from the skeletal globe of the Unisphere, as if it were poured in the gallery space of the museum. I made the wave with blue recycling bags and plastic letters—sometimes reversed or upside down—spelling out the names of oceans and seas, and words such as "Displaced," excerpted from the radio episodes. The wall and opposite columns held up six speakers connected to three audio pieces in which choruses of people emphatically recited vowels and blended progressively with the sounds of crashing waves.

Images 26-27:

The issues explored in *Around, Around, and Away: Not-a-Superhero and the Myth of New York* where further expanded in this permanent public commission for the elementary school in Far Rockaway, Queens.