OBJECTS OF EXPERIMENTATION:
BOCCIONI AND PICASSO

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In spring 1914 Umberto Boccioni wrote in a letter to Roberto Longhi that Picasso should "sweep away his humble objects of experimentation", unhappy with the influence of his collage and sculpture pipes, bottles, guitars and glasses.[1] Boccioni's phrase inspired my interest in shifting the narrative away from the story Picasso's influence on Boccioni to one about the two sculptors' use of objects, in mixed media and bronze. This paper also owes much to the New York and Paris exhibitions, and their increased precision in Picasso's chronology and emphasis on the dissemination of his sculptures during his lifetime. These struck a chord with my work on Boccioni, which has perhaps similar aims, if for an artist with very different circumstances. Boccioni made fourteen plaster and mixed-media sculptures, but following his untimely death in August 1916, only four have survived. Nine of those lost are known through photographs, giving intriguing glimpses into his process, and making clear the importance of mixed media in his first sculptures. As I will outline in this paper, and as addressed in previous scholarship by Christine Poggi and Maria Elena Versari, Boccioni was using manufactured, multiple, objects in his sculptures in combination with modelled elements.

Pivoting from multiple objects within sculptures, to sculptures as multiple objects, this paper also addresses bronze editions. Boccioni is perhaps best known as a sculptor due to the multitude of posthumous bronze and brass casts in art museums worldwide. For Picasso, on the other hand, his prodigious sculptural output has seemed to require constant reintroduction to the public since the 1966 Petit Palais exhibition. This paper considers whether the casting and dissemination of Picasso's bronzes affected those of Boccioni. Given both artists' interest in the use of mass-produced objects as the subject or material for their sculptures, and their own and others' replication of their work, reintroducing the sculptors on this ground adds greater nuance to these aspects of their relationship.

The interaction between Picasso and Boccioni in the sculptural realm begins at this fulcrum between the former's bronze and the latter's mixed-media experiments. The narrative of Boccioni's first forays into sculpture has been framed in as a response to Picasso's *Head of a Woman* (*Fernande*) (1909).[2] Boccioni could have seen a cast in Ambroise Vollard's gallery when he was in town for the Futurists Bernheim-Jeune exhibition in February 1912. On 15 March he wrote to Vico Baer: "These days I am obsessed with sculpture!"[3] Boccioni returned to Paris in June, and it was on this occasion that he toured the sculpture studios of Archipenko, Agéro, Brancusi and Duchamp-Villon.[4] In July he returned to Milan, wrote the manifesto of, backdating it to 11 April 1912, and then began to sculpt in August. Thus, Boccioni's response to Picasso's sculpture was far from immediate.

The work thought to show the Italian's response was Antigraceful (1913, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome), for reasons both formal and chronological. The formal comparability is enhanced by it being Boccioni's only surviving bust, and the sole work he painted with a bronze-coloured patina. Its status as Boccioni's first work was initiated by Longhi's extended essay on Boccioni's sculptures in 1914.[5] However, Laura Mattioli has convincingly dated Antigraceful to April–May 1913, over a year after his supposed first encounter with Picasso's sculpture.[6]

Fusion of a Head and a Window (figs 1–2) was likely the first, made in August–September 1912. This dating is based on a letter to Severini in which Boccioni describes himself as "battling with sculpture", continuing, "The Cubists are wrong … Picasso is wrong."[7] The work closely follows the ideals of the Futurist Sculpture manifesto. In the text Boccioni argued for the use of numerous heterogeneous materials, listing "glass, wood, cardboard, iron, cement, hair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric lights, and so on".[8] *Fusion* features a real window and pane of glass, a knot of real hair, a glass eye and a wire facial profile.[9]

The argument that Boccioni's encounter with Parisian sculpture first manifests in the mixed-media *Fusion*, rather than the plaster *Antigraceful*, emphasizes the importance of including and representing objects.[10] It is uncertain whether Boccioni could have seen examples of Picasso's adoption of Georges Braque's "papery and powdery techniques" when in Paris in November 1912 for the Salon d'Automne, or indeed Braque's own works, when in the city in five months earlier.[11] After one of his Parisian sojourns, Boccioni wrote to Severini asking him to go to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler to get photographs of Braque and Picasso's latest works. This letter likely dates from July 1912, when Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* (spring 1912, Musée Picasso, Paris)—his only mixed-media work by that date —had not been photographed.[12] In short, Boccioni's divergence from Picasso's use of objects was unlikely a conscious one; indeed it was a "logical internal development" within Futurism.[13]

As Poggi has discussed, Severini's collage and Boccioni's sculpture was more literal than that of Picasso or Braque.[14] The assemblage elements in *Fusion of a Head and a Window* function as themselves, except the glass eye serving as a real eye. The wire profile may have a status closer to the plaster of the body than these elements, but recalls Picasso's decision not to use wire on *Fernande* because he had considered it too literal, too much like painting.[15]

The literalness of manufactured collage elements was noted in February 1914 when Florentine writer Giovanni Papini, who edited Lacerba, published the article "The Circle is Closing".[16] Papini lambasted Boccioni and Picasso, and others, for an artistic tendency that he summaries as :

> **"the way in which the lyrical and rational transformation of things is being replaced by the things themselves".**[17]

Boccioni responded that in Futurism objects become part of the work of art through their inclusion in it. Papini retorted that Picasso is less literal.[18] *The Glasses of Absinthe* are interesting case in point; the apparently literal spoon can also be read as a hat, transforming the still life into a portrait.[19]

Picasso's *Glasses* mark a moment of exchange, closely related to Boccioni's bottles, a motif he plucked from the lower-left corner of Picasso's portrait of Kahnweiler (autumn 1910, Art Institute of Chicago). Boccioni exhibited *Form-Forces of a Bottle* and the red and white versions of *Development of a Bottle in Space* at Galerie La Boetie in June–July 1913. Picasso was away for the opening, but went to the gallery for Boccioni's Conférence contradictoire there on 27 June 1913.[20]

Development of a Bottle in Space *(fig. 3)* is probably Boccioni's first purely plaster sculpture, abandoning the relationship between the real and the modelled, which Picasso found so interesting in the *Glass of Absinthe*.[21] This relationship is amplified by the casting of the work in bronze, as the absinthe glass itself, and indeed the spoon, like the cast artwork, would have been produced using a mould. The same can be said of wine bottles, and so this point transfers to the Futurist sculptures. Boccioni likely created his two identical, if differently coloured, plaster bottles by casting one from the other. This was then used to create the posthumous bronze casts—further emphasising the relationship between the art objects as multiples, and the multiplicity of the objects which they represent.

While Picasso's *Glasses* have managed to maintain their limited edition through their painting, this was not the case for Boccioni's *Bottles*, which have been posthumously reproduced far beyond the two versions made by the artist.[22] The casting of Boccioni bronzes did not begin until 1931, fifteen years after the artist's death. It was instigated by the Futurist leader F.T. Marinetti who may have seen, or at least been aware of the Picasso bronzes already mentioned. By this date Vollard had produced numerous casts of *Fernande* (amongst other Picasso sculptures); Marinetti may well have seen them in Paris on the same occasion as Boccioni, if not later, or in publications such as Christian Zervos's "Les Sculpteurs des peintres d'aujourd'hui" in *Cahiers d'Art* in 1928.[23]
However, there is no indication that Marinetti had Picasso's bronzes in mind when commissioning the three casts—two *Unique Forms* *(fig. 4)* and one *Bottle*—one of the former sold to the Comune di Milano in 1934, the others to the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1948 (eight years after MoMA bought their first Picasso bronze, a *Fernande*). Indeed according to Benedetta Marinetti, these casts were supposedly fulfilling Boccioni's intention, although the only source for this is a letter she wrote to Alfred H. Barr, to whom she was trying to sell the works.[24] Notably, Marinetti had the *Bottle* plated in white metal, perhaps to evoke the white surface of one of the plaster originals.
The next edition of Boccioni casts, commissioned by Benedetta Marinetti after making an agreement with Barr, have a markedly different aesthetic.[25] These casts of *Unique Forms* *(fig. 5)* feature the base present on the plaster original and are rougher (perhaps even rougher than the plaster itself, which has undergone major restoration since the casting). The changes are more apparent on *Unique Forms* than the *Bottle*, but a different alloy renders the Metropolitan Museum's *Bottle* in a warmer tone, quite unlike the silver-plated MoMA cast, and the very dark 1935 cast made by the Comune di Milano.[26] When reflecting on her choices for these casts in 1956, Benedetta explained that she wanted them to be "more faithful to the original" than the overly polished casts commissioned by her husband.[27]
This aesthetic decision could be related to Picasso bronzes. The Spanish artist's sculptures were becoming increasingly known in Italy, in part thanks to Enrico Prampolini's small publication *Picasso scultore*.[28] The latter includes images of both *Fernande* (then at Galerie Rosengart) and a *Glass of Absinthe* (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Prampolini also

emphasizes the relationship by opening his book on Picasso with a quote by Boccioni, and concluding by questioning if Picasso's most recent work freezes the dynamism in modern sculpture instigated by Boccioni, Archipenko and others.

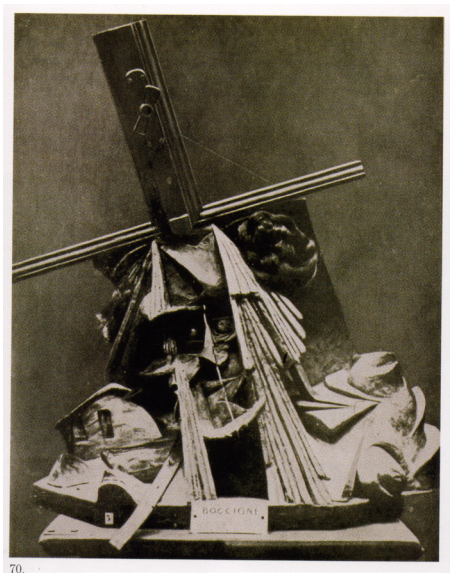
Although Prampolini was part of Marinetti's circle, Zervos, familiar with Picasso's bronzes from his role in their wartime care, seems to have played a more active role in the appearance of the Boccioni bronzes commissioned by Benedetta. The acquisitions notebook of Harry and Lydia Winston, who bought one of each sculpture from this edition in 1956 (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), records that "Zervos helped in suggesting the finishing of the piece".[29] This is supported by my redating of these casts to 1950 (rather than 1949) when Benedetta and Zervos collaborated on the Kunsthaus Zürich exhibition of Futurist and Metaphysical Art and the 1950 special edition of the *Cahiers d'Art* dedicated to Italian art. This publication featured the Comune di Milano bronzes of the *Bottle* and *Unique Forms*, and the plaster original of *Antigrazioso*, suggesting that the new casts were not yet made when it went to press.[30]

The decision to emulate the surface of the plaster, rather than the smoother earlier edition, should not be confused as an attempt to imitate Picasso per se, but the comparative fidelity of his casts to their originals, a trend popular not only amongst Picasso devotees. The collector Paolo Marinotti, when acquiring of the 1950 *Unique Forms* wrote to Benedetta, before it was cast, encouraging her to make it faithful to the original.[31]

By adopting an aesthetic preferred by a better-known artist and collectors alike, Benedetta was making a wise commercial decision; she sold the bronzes she commissioned for more than that of the earlier edition to MoMA.[32] It is perhaps no coincidence that Boccioni and Picasso bronzes seem to become popular with the American market at the same time, a correlation which goes beyond the economic reasons that works were travelling from European to American collections in the post-war period.

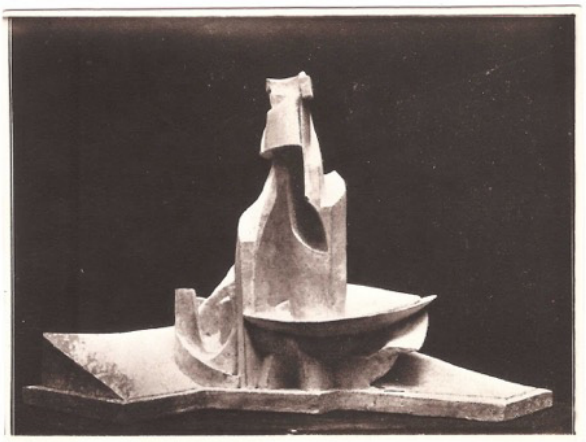
The MoMA purchase of Boccioni sculptures in the late 1940s coincides with the acquisition of casts of *Fernande* by the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. By the mid-1950s, bronzes by both artists were widely collected in the United States. Before the Winstons acquired their bronzes, Peggy Guggenheim and Sidney Janis had both expressed interest to Benedetta Marinetti.[33] The Winston purchase came in the same year that three Picasso bronzes enter the MoMA collection—*Glass of Absinthe*, donated by Louise Reinhardt Smith, *Goat Skull* and *Bottle* (1951, cast 1954) and Baboon and Young (October 1951, cast 1955). The checklist of the 1957 Picasso: *75th Anniversary* exhibition is a testament to the popularity of Picasso bronze amongst American private collectors at this time.[34] Even though the same collectors were not chasing both Picasso and Boccioni bronzes, it could be argued that the dissemination of the multiples by each artist affected the market for the other.

To conclude, the more precise chronologies for Boccioni and Picasso allow a more complex relationship to emerge, highlighting how the sculptures as objects, and the objects within them, were "objects of experimentation" well beyond the 1910s.



UMBERTO BOCCIONI
Fusion of a Head and a Window (front view)
Mixed media, dimensions unknown. Sculpture destroyed
Getty Research Institute Special Collections, Papers of F.T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 1902-1965, Box 22, Folder 6

Alexandre Mercereau posing next to Umberto Boccioni's Fusion of a Head and a Windowat the artist's exhibition of sculptures at the Galerie La Boëtie (June-July 1913).



UMBERTO BOCCIONI
Development of a Bottle in Space through Form
plaster, dimensions unknown

UMBERTO BOCCIONI
Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, 1913 (cast c.1950)
Bronze, 121.3 x 88.9 x 40 cm
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1990.38.3

NOTES

1. Umberto Boccioni, *Umberto Boccioni: Lettere Futuriste*, ed. Federica Rovati (Rovereto: Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 2009), p.122, n°.151.

2. John Richardson, with Marilyn McCully, *A Life of Picasso*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1996), p.139.

3. Boccioni, *Lettere Futuriste*, p.37, n°.29.

4. Gino Severini, The Life of a Painter: *The Autobiography of Gino Severini* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 110. Debates about the date of these visits have been settled by Maria Elena Versari, "The Style and Status of the Modern Art: Archipenko in the Eyes of the Italian Futurists", *Alexander Archipenko Revisited: An International Perspective*, ed. by Marek Bartelik et al. (New York: The Archipenko Foundation, 2008), p.26, n°.2.

5. The work is the first sculpture discussed in Roberto Longhi, "Futurist Sculpture Boccioni", trans. Rosalind McKever and Lucinda Byatt, *Art in Translation* 7, n°.3 (September 2, 2015): pp.311–342.

6. Laura Mattioli Rossi, "From a Sculpture of the Environment to Unique Forms of Continuity in Space", in *Unique Forms*: *The Drawing and Sculpture of Umberto Boccioni* (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2009), pp.7–25; Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p.20.

7. Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, eds., *Archivi del Futurismo*, vol. 1 (Rome: De Luca, 1958), p.249.

8. Umberto Boccioni, "Futurist Sculpture", reprinted in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, eds., *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2009), p.118.

9. Maria Elena Versari, "'Impressionism Solidified' - Umberto Boccioni's Works in Plaster and the Definition of Modernity in Sculpture", in Plaster Casts: Making, *Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Rune Frederiksen and Eckart Marchand (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), p.343.

10. Antigraceful originally featured two prongs of unknown material emerging from the plane behind the head. They appear to be metallic, but Roberto Longhi referred to them as paper-like, see Longhi, "Futurist Sculpture Boccioni", p.316.

11. Poggi has argued that the Italian could have visited the Frenchman in Paris, in early June (p. 177), but Braun does not believe that he would have seen them: Emily Braun, "Vulgarians at the Gate", in *Boccioni's Materia: A Futurist Masterpiece and the Avant-Garde in Milan and Paris,* eds Laura Mattioli Rossi and Emily Braun (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2004), p.15, n°.101. On the dating of Braque's paper sculptures, see Christian Zervos, "Georges Braque et le developpement du cubism", *Cahiers d'Art* 7, n°s 1–2 (1932): p.23; Anne Umland and Ann Temkin, *Picasso Sculpture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015), p.72.

12. Boccioni, *Lettere Futuriste*, 48, 232, n°40, I thank Pepe Karmel for this information.

13. Braun, "Vulgarians at the Gate", p.13.

14. Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting*, pp.175, 178.

15. Roland Penrose, *Picasso Sculpture, Ceramics, Graphic Art* (London: Tate Gallery, 1967), p.10.

16. Giovanni Papini, "The Circle is Closing" (15 February 1914) reprinted and translated in Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, pp.173–175.

17. Papini, "The Circle is Closing", p.174.

18. Umberto Boccioni, "Il Cerchio non si chiude", Lacerba (1 March 1914), pp.67–69; Giovanni Papini "'Cerchi aperti", *Lacerba* (15 March 1914), pp.83–85.

19. I thank Christine Poggi for her insight on this issue.

20. Umland and Temkin, *Picasso Sculpture*, p.74.

21. Werner Spies and Christine Piot, *Picasso*: *The Sculptures* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2000), p.88.

22. Maria Elena Versari, "Recasting the Past: On the Posthumous Fortune of Futurist Sculpture", *Sculpture Journal*, 23.3 (2014): p.353.

23. Christian Zervos, "Les Sculpteurs des peintres d'aujourd'hui" in *Cahiers d'Art 3*, n°.7 (1928): pp.176–189.

24. Benedetta Marinetti to Alfred Barr, 24 June 1948. Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Box 8, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

25. Today found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Hilti Art Foundation in Lichtenstein and the Kunsthaus Zurich.

26. The alloy for the *Bottle* used contains less copper and more zinc than that used for the *Unique Forms*. I thank Bruna Santarelli and Federico Carò of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Scientific Research department for this insight.

27. "per ottenere esemplari più fedeli all'originale." Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 'Sculture di Umberto Boccioni', typescript dated 1956 (contains reproductions of letters by Gaetano Chiurazzi, dated 21 August 1956; by Angelo Nicci, dated September 1956; and by Angelo Perego, dated 4 September 1956). Papers of F.T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Box 7, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

28. Enrico Prampolini, *Picasso scultore* (Rome: Libreria Fratelli Bocca, 1943). See also Giulia Veronesi 'La popolarità di Picasso', Emporium, CX.659, pp.221–227, although this does not include a bronze.

29. Lydia Winston Malbin Papers YCAL MSS 280, Box 57, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Versari has also made this suggestion, based on a 1985 document: Versari, "'Impressionism Solidified'", p.360.

30. *Cahiers d'Art* : *Un Demi-Siècle D'art Italien*, ed. Christian Zervos (1950), 57, 58–59, 61. Zervos had illustrated the two Milan bronzes in a 1938 publication but the clichés were different, so this is not a simple case of recycling. Christian Zervos, *Histoire de L'art Contemporain* (Paris: Éditions Cahiers d'art, 1938), p.362.

NOTES

31. “La prego di far eseguire il lavoro in modo perfetto, chiaro il tono, genuino il tratto dell'artista.” Letter from Paolo Marinotti to Benedetta Marinetti, 31 October 1950. Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Box 8, *Getty Research Institute*, Los Angeles.

32. Rosalind McKever, “Benedetta Marinetti and the Postwar Market for Umberto Boccioni Sculptures”, *Getty Research Journal* (forthcoming).

33. Peggy Guggenheim to Benedetta Marinetti, 17 October [1950]; Peggy Guggenheim to Benedetta Marinetti, 25 October [1950]; Benedetta Marinetti to Peggy Guggenheim, undated, papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Box 8, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Sidney Janis to Benedetta Marinetti, 7 June 1956; Sidney Janis to Benedetta Marinetti, 8 May 1956, papers of F.T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Box 7, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

34. Alfred H. Barr, ed., Picasso: *75th Anniversary Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1957).