

ENRICO PRAMPOLINI

FROM Futurist Scenography (1915)

To us, scenography is a monstrous thing. Today's scenographers, sterile whitewashers, still prowl around the dusty and stinking corners of classical architecture. We must rebel and assert ourselves and say to our poet and musician friends: this action demands this stage rather than that one.

Let us be artists too, and no longer merely executors. Let us create the stage, give life to the text with all the evocative power of our art. It is natural that we need plays suited to our sensibility, which imply a more intense and synthetic conception in the scenic development of subjects.

Let's renovate the stage. The absolutely new character that our innovation will give the theatre is *the abolition of the painted stage*. The stage will no longer be a coloured backdrop but a *colourless electromechanical architecture, powerfully vitalised by chromatic emanations from a luminous source*, produced by electric reflectors with multicoloured panes of glass, arranged, coordinated analogically with the psyche of each scenic action.

With the luminous irradiations of these beams, of these planes of coloured lights, the dynamic combinations will give marvellous results of mutual permeation, of intersection of lights and shadows. From these will arise vacant abandonments, exultant, luminous corporalities.

These assemblages, these unreal shocks, this exuberance of sensations combined with dynamic stage architecture that will move, unleashing metallic arms, knocking over plastic planes, amidst an essentially new modern noise, will augment the vital intensity of the scenic action.

On a stage illuminated in such a way, the actors will gain unexpected dynamic effects that are neglected or very seldom employed in today's theatres, mostly because of the ancient prejudice that one must imitate, represent reality.

And with what purpose?

Perhaps scenographers believe it is absolutely necessary to represent this reality? Idiots! Don't you understand that your efforts, your useless realistic preoccupations have no effect other than that of diminishing the intensity and emotional content, which can be attained precisely through the interpretive equivalents of these realities, i.e., abstractions?

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Let's create the stage. In the above lines we have upheld the idea of a *dynamic stage* as opposed to the static stage of another time; with the fundamental principles that we shall set forth, we intend not only to carry the stage to its most advanced expression but also to attribute to it the essential values that belong to it and that no one has thought of giving it until now.

Translated from the Italian by Victoria Nes Kirby

Enrico Prampolini (1894–1956), Italian painter and sculptor, considered the most important of the second generation of futurists. An admirer of Balla and Boccioni, he joined forces with them in 1912, and exhibited in the large 1914 futurist exhibition in Rome. He believed with Balla that the concept of art overrode the boundaries between the different arts; and with Boccioni that it was linked with cultural action. He wanted to abolish all its psychological, literary and subjective elements, to arrive at an art work that was concrete and autonomous. In 1923 he was one of those who signed the Futurist Machine Art Manifesto, and carried its aims into theatre by replacing the actor with mechanised scenery, lifts, phonographs and other elements. Shows were presented in Paris in 1925 and 1927. In the 1930s he became interested in exploiting the biological presence of matter and its autonomous chemical or other changes. There is some parallel here with Kurt Schwitters' ideas for a 'Merz-Theatre': this was to involve 'solid, liquid and gaseous bodies, such as white wall, man, barbed wire entanglement, blue distance . . .'. (See Henning Rischbieter's *Art and the Stage in the Twentieth Century*, Greenwich, Connecticut, New York Graphic Society, 1968, p. 171, or the collection, Kurt Schwitters, *Poems Performances Pieces Proses Plays Poetics*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1993).