

Estorick Collection
of modern italian art

LINO MANNOCCI
SHAPING THE IMAGE

The display of the series of “postcards” by Lino Mannocci fits very well within the idea that we have to involve contemporary artists in a response to our historical art collection. “Shaping the Image” is the latest project in a series and complements our temporary exhibition programme offering new perspectives on our twentieth century Italian holdings.

These tiny images evoke and somehow bring to life some of the protagonists of our permanent collection, a dialogue is started between the artists. I am pleased that Lino has accepted the challenge to work within the restrictions of the collection, with the project developing from my initial idea of reworking images of the futurist paintings to a more extensive series, taking in a greater variety of the artists and contexts that make up the Estorick Collection. The resulting postcards are fascinating in their poetic encapsulation of the essence of the artists.

Roberta Cremoncini
Director

Lino Mannocci: immagini in libertà

Andrew Dempsey

We are lucky to have the Estorick Collection in London. It provides a special link with the heroic period of Italian modern art and has some of the masterpieces of Futurism. Lino Mannocci, born in Viareggio but living and working in London since 1968, inevitably has a special relationship with the Estorick, the more so since he is an artist with an acute awareness of the regional and national traditions of his native country.

Lino has said that his English friends tend to see the Italian aspects of his art whereas his Italian friends see the results of his long exile in England. Well, for his English friends he is a wonderful conduit for our love of his country. And here we have him musing about Marinetti and the Futurists in a new set of 'treated postcards' which comment in a most subtle and elegant and elliptical way on that most brilliant and Italian of art movements.

The series includes images of other Italian masters, of Modigliani, Morandi, Marini and Emilio Greco, all of whom are represented in the Estorick Collection. So it seems highly appropriate that this series of works initially shares the gallery with works on paper by Modigliani and then, when the exhibitions change over in July, with Fausto Pirandello. What a contrast there is between Marinetti and Modigliani, the one breaking with all traditions and the other tradition itself.

Something of this division is present in the works of 'Shaping the Image', the title given to the new series. Mannocci takes a photograph of Modigliani, something which can be serially reproduced, and through his intervention turns it into a unique work. It seems to be a direct homage to an artist he loves and admires. But perhaps the key works, in terms of the artist's intentions, are those related to the Futurists. The series actually began with a group photograph, a famous one of Russolo, Carrà, Marinetti, Boccioni and Severini in Paris in 1912, in front of the offices of *Le Figaro* newspaper which had published Marinetti's Futurist manifesto.

In Mannocci's image the group is disappearing before our eyes, the painters sport colour brushmarks above their hats while Marinetti has a black mark at his feet, a mark that looks a little like a moustache ('like an ogre's blue moustache...' is a line in one of Marinetti's poems) but which might alternatively be the smudge of Mannocci's thumbprint.

Marinetti, breathing fire and destruction, is the central figure in this work and also perhaps of the set as a whole in which Mannocci seems to be commenting on, and countering, Marinetti's radical ideas – his disapproving thumbprint also appears on the work based on Marinetti's slogan about war as the world's only hygiene (*Guerra sola igiene del mondo*). So these works are in part a critique of the Futurists and particularly of the extremes of Marinetti, his love of war, his wish to sweep away the museums, to do away with 400 years of Italian art. With a light touch (which I wish I could emulate) Mannocci is commenting on the terrible history of the twentieth century. An Italian, born in the immediate aftermath of the war, how could he not be intensely aware of the part played by his own country in that history:

'Nothing is left
of these houses
but a few
tatters of wall

Out of the many people
who used to be like me
not even
that much is left

.....

(From Giuseppe Ungaretti, *San Martino del Carso*)*

These images of artists come from catalogues and journals and the internet. Mannocci has had them printed in postcard format but they are not postcards in the sense of his 'cartoline a olio', postcards in oil, in which he selectively paints over, and changes utterly, touristic postcards of London scenes or of Viareggio or other places and interiors. He has been doing this for 30 years and it is a genre that he has made his own, a kind of metaphysical game in which the meaning of an image is altered through the intervention of the artist and in which the painting adds poetry and mystery to the image. As with the 'Shaping the Image' series the painting, which is almost like that of a miniaturist, has considerable attractiveness in terms of the marks and surfaces, the 'facture'.

The 'portrait' photos of these new works have been rubbed with solvent which initially creates the fragmented effect evident in, for example, the image of Russolo with his sound machines, and when taken further, so that the photographic film is entirely removed, leaves a rather beautiful white surface, as in the lower half of the group photograph of the Futurists in 1913 (Palazzeschi, Carrà, Papini, Boccioni and Marinetti). A third stage is the addition of oil paint with a fine brush, the pastel shades of blue and yellow in the images of Severini or of pink in the image of Morandi. These colours are quite removed from the palette of the Futurists, they belong to the world of Matisse rather than Picasso, and presumably this distancing is deliberate. Despite their exaggeratedly small scale these passages of finely worked colour have their equivalents in recent painting. They reminded me of the pastel shades of Richard Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* series. The small versions of those paintings, on cigar box lids, suggest that scale is entirely relative.

'Shaping the Image' is the second set of new work on a specific subject Mannocci has produced this year (in addition to holding a major monographic exhibition at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence and, I understand, another in prospect later this year). In London, immediately preceding our display, a group of monotypes related to the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta were shown in the Temple Church of the Inns of Court. These monotypes, considerably larger than postcard format, were printed over old legal documents. Mannocci began by washing and flattening the sheets of parchment, removing some of the writing in the process, before adding from his specific repertoire of images: birds and horses and riders; the silhouetted

outlines of solitary and vulnerable figures, often derived from early Italian painting, and, quite separately, washes of strong colour. The way that the writing of the original document is partially removed and the addition of colour are parallels with the new works of 'Shaping the Image'. Perhaps the Magna Carta pieces represent an 'English' project complementing the new 'Italian' works, an expression of his engagement with his adopted country. English tradition (and pragmatism), Italian innovation.

In both there is something of Mannocci the limner, even of Mannocci the medieval monk-illuminator, endlessly varying the letters and colours of a set text. And I get a sense in both sets of work of art before Raphael, the apparent simplicity of early panel painting in those areas of flat powdery colour masking areas of the photographs.

Some contexts for the new work have been suggested here but there is another, more personal to the artist, and more speculative on my part, which is a kind of nostalgia for the group of artists with a manifesto, a common project, like the Futurists who feature here so strongly. Although Mannocci in writing and talking about the Futurists and indeed the artists of 'Pittura Metafisica', stresses the short-lived or even illusory nature of these groupings, he has himself shown considerable determination in getting his unclubbable 'amici inglesi' to exhibit together on several occasions, most recently with works on paper in the offices of Clifford Chance in London's Canary Wharf, but most ambitiously in the Estorick itself in an exhibition called 'Another Country' in 2010, an exhibition which involved each artist spelling out a relationship with Italian artists represented in the Estorick Collection and in which Mannocci himself spoke of de Chirico and Carrà, who of course reappear in the present exhibition, as 'two magnificent trees in the Italian landscape, under which occasionally I find shelter and comfort'.

But exile is exile even if voluntary. And in the end there is the studio, a place of meditation, a place to test the limits of when the image dissolves and a place for thinking about those pioneers of a century ago and their rhetoric. We know that what lasts are the memorable forms of Carrà, de Chirico, Boccioni and Morandi. To

these artists and others Mannocci has made in the works of 'Shaping the Image' a most attractive homage. They have many meanings, though ambiguity is the realm of both art and poetry:

If you see a shadow
It's no shadow – it's me.
If only I could tear it off
And offer it to you.

(From Eugenio Montale, *Ossi di Seppia*) **

* Translated by Andrew Frisardi

Di queste case
non è rimasto
che qualche
brandello di muro

Di tanti
che mi corrispondevano
non è rimasto
neppure tanto
....

** Translated by Jonathan Galassi

Se un'ombra scorgete, non è
Un'ombra – ma quella io sono.
Potessi spiccarla da me,
Offrirvela in dono.

Shaping the Image
Treated Postcard

Russolo, Carrà, Marinetti, Boccioni e Severini

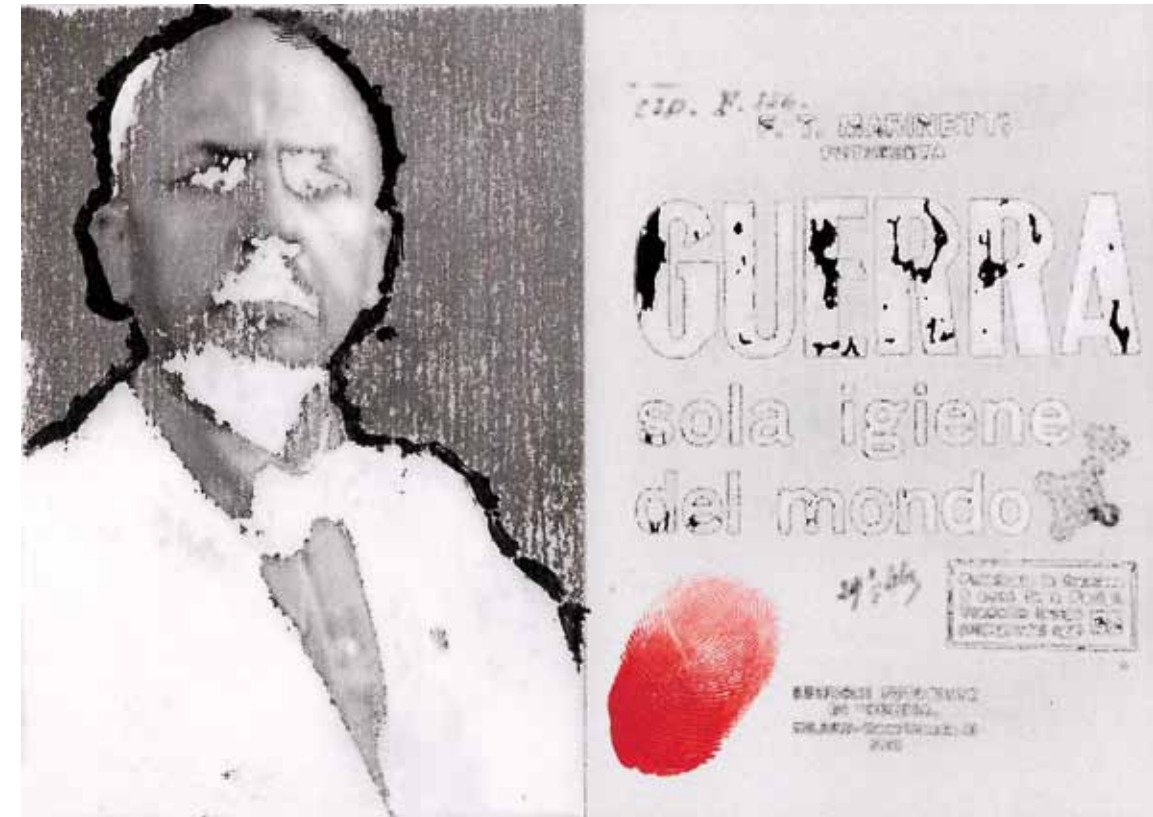
“We shall destroy the museums.”

Paris, 9th February 1912



F.T. Marinetti, Alexandria 1876-Bellagio 1940

“Guerra sola igiene del mondo.”



Palazzeschi, Carrà, Papini, Boccioni, Marinetti, in 1912 or 1913



Boccioni, Marinetti, Sant'Elia e Sironi

“We intend to sing the love of danger.”
Gallarate 1915



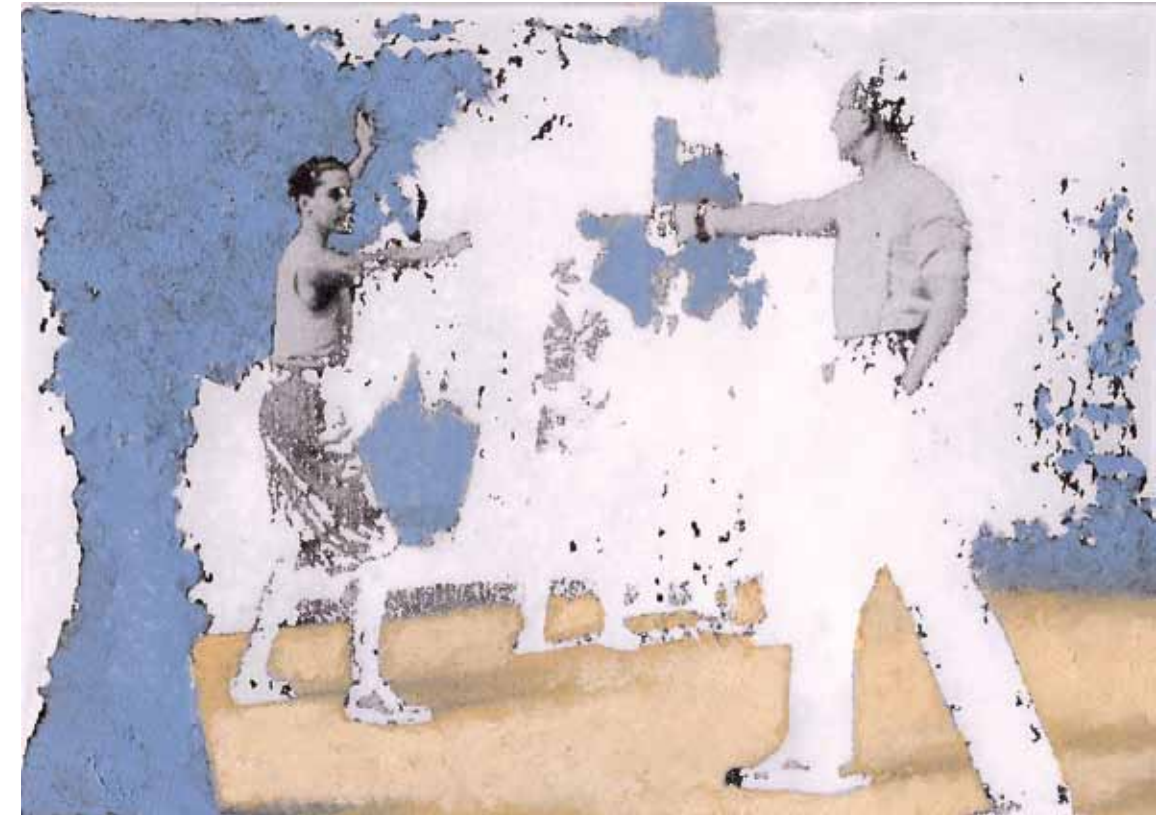
Villa Ginanni Corradini, 1917

We recognise Perocampus, Corra, Squarzina, Balilla Pratella and Ginna



F.T. Marinetti, Alexandria 1876-Bellagio 1940

“We will fight against the superficial.”



F.T. Marinetti, Alexandria 1876-Bellagio 1940

F.T.M. with his wife Benedetta Cappa



Guillame Apollinaire, Rome 1880-Paris 1918

“I wish there be in my house:
A woman possessing reason,
A cat among books passing by,
Friends for every season
Lacking whom I’m barely alive.”



Amedeo Modigliani, Livorno 1884- Paris 1920



Gino Severini, Cortona 1883-Paris 1966

“In our young days, when Modigliani and I came to Paris in 1906, nobody was very clear about ideas.
But unconsciously, we knew quite a lot of things, of which we became aware later on.”



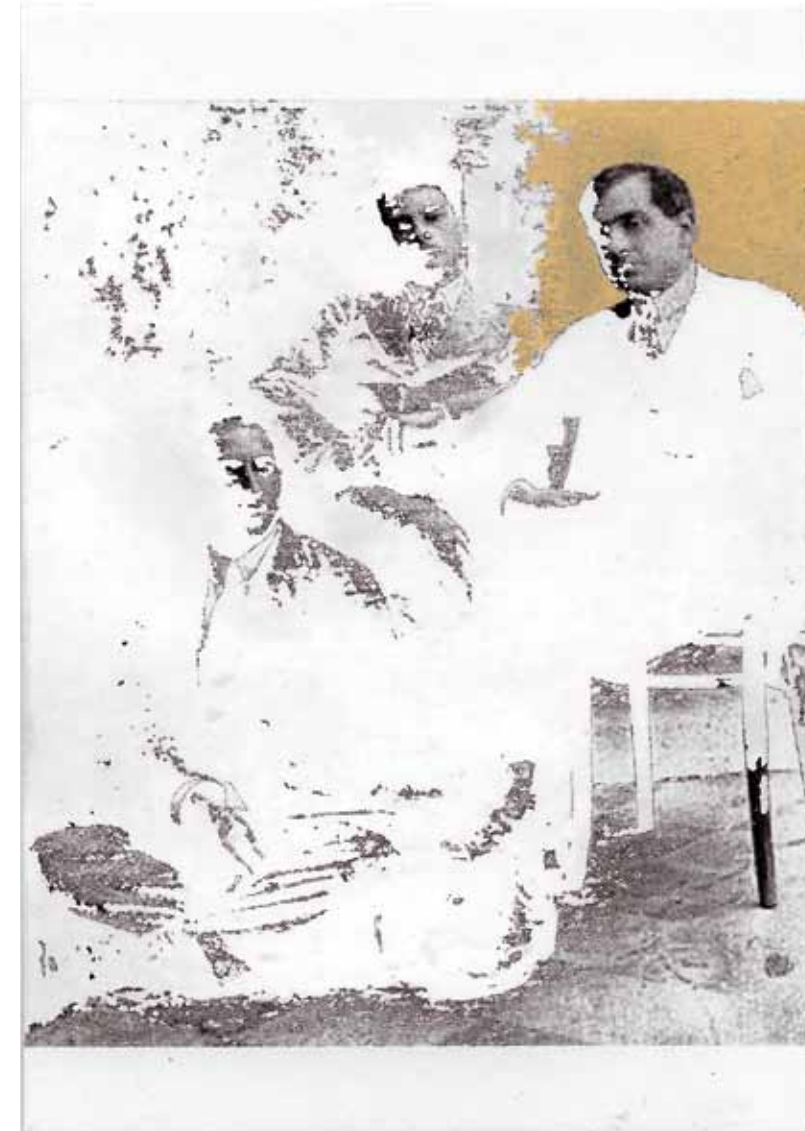
Gino Severini, Cortona 1883-Paris 1966

“I have found consolation in Blake; ‘Without Contraries is no progression’ he says in his Proverbs of Hell.”



Alberto Savinio, Athens 1891- Rome1952

“Diffido di coloro che non hanno lasciato traccia scritta del proprio pensiero.”



Giorgio de Chirico, Volos 1888- Rome 1978

Ergo sum



Giorgio Morandi, Bologna 1890-Bologna 1964

“It takes me weeks to make up my mind which group of bottles will go well with a particular coloured tablecloth.”



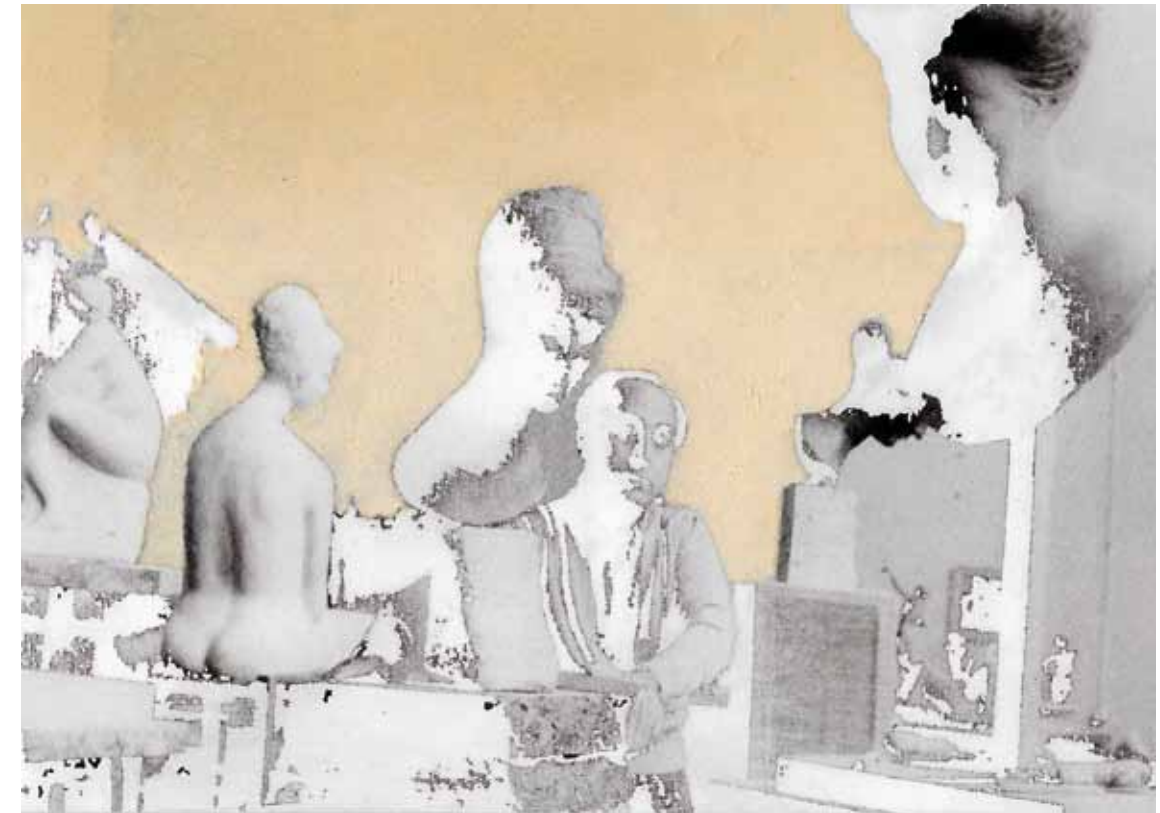
Marino Marini, Pistoia 1901-Viareggio 1980

M.M. with his wife Marina and Pomona



Emilio Greco, Catania 1913-Rome 1995

“L’irruenza vittoriosa della femminilità.”



Lino Mannocci was born in Viareggio in 1945.

In 1968 he came to London.

From 1971 till 1976 studied at Camberwell School of Art and The Slade school of Art in London.

As a postgraduate student he developed a keen interest in both the practice and the theory of printmaking.

Since 1976 Mannocci spends the summer months in Montigiano, in Italy, between Viareggio and Lucca.

In the early eighties became a founder member of the Italian group “La Metacosa”

In 1988 Yale University Press published his Catalogue Raisonné’ of the graphic work of Claude Lorrain.

Over the last thirty years he has shown in London with the Curwen Gallery and recently with Art First. He shows in Italy with the Galleria Ceribelli in Bergamo.

In 2007 curated a show in Bergamo called “Gli amici pittori di Londra”

In 2008 SKIRA published a small volume of photographs with his own account of a journey through India on the occasion of his exhibitions in New Delhi and Mumbai.

In 2009 showed his work at The Mead Art Museum in Amherst.

In February 2009 Mannocci exhibited his monotypes at The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, where he is also curated a show on the theme of the Annunciation.

In 2010 Mannocci exhibited at The New York School of Painting in New York.

In 2010 curated a show “Another Country” at The Estorick Collection in London. A group of 10 London-based artists in dialogue with Italian Art of the 20th century. During the summer months he exhibited his monotypes at the “Museo della stampa” in Soncino, Italy.

In 2011 he exhibited his work at the “Museo Civico di Pizzighettone, Italy and at The Larkhall Fine Art in Bath, England.

In 2012 at Jill Newhouse Gallery in New York and at the “Cartiere Vannucci” in Milan.

In 2014 at the Galleria san Fedele in Milan.

In 2015 at The Galleria Nazionale, d’Arte Moderna, Palazzo Pitti, Florence and at Temple Church in London with a group of monotypes relating to The Magna Carta.

Estorick Foundation, “Shaping the image” a group of worked over postcards relating to Italian artists of the first half of the 20th century.

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