

Umberto Boccioni

Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, 1913

The bronze sculpture of *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913) probably portrays an athlete and seems to suggest a march, a heroic progression, a feeling of confidence and conquest with regard to what lies ahead. This is an example of how symbolism continues to inform Boccioni's *oeuvre*.

Here the artist exalts the courage required to face the future and this emphasis explains the volatile, almost Nietzschean thrust in his modelling.

In order to accentuate the theme of **dynamism** Boccioni conceives the sculpture in **mobility** as communicated by curved lines. Although alluding to the human body and muscular movement, the figure is portrayed without arms, a detail it shares with Auguste Rodin's *Walking Man* (*L'uomo che cammina*, 1907).

Notice how Boccioni has used **convex and concave** workings of the highly-polished bronze surface to accentuate the forms' plastic volumes and dynamism. The anatomical givens fuse with the surrounding space, similarly to Boccioni's painting titled *Matter* (*Materia*) where the borders between the artist's mother and the landscape, between figure and background, meld together.

The artist seems to suggest that in modern society there is **a constant osmosis between the person and his surroundings**. A closer analysis of the compositional lines reveals the clear influences of **photographic studies** of movement such as those conducted by Marey and Muybridge.

The forward stride has often caused Boccioni's work to be compared to the ancient *Victory of Samothrace* (*Nike di Samothrace*). However the artist openly admitted only one influence: **Medardo Rosso's** way of breaking down the inside/outside spatial relationships in sculpture.

Boccioni was a co-signer of the *Futurist Manifestos* which declared radically new ideas in art and, in light of his statements, some critics considered *Unique Forms* to be too dependent upon **tradition**; in this sculpture's vocabulary they saw an excessive referencing of commemorative monuments executed in traditional materials.

Although Boccioni's figure tends toward **an abstract synthesis**, its true formal innovation lies elsewhere: in the breaking apart of what had always been a unitary, static and celebratory base. In *Unique Forms* **the base** is divided into two distinct supports, thereby suggesting movement that is not just bodily but is also – and especially – mental.



Fig. 1 *Victory of Samothrace*, 190 BC ca., h. 245 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 2 Auguste Rodin, *Walking Man*, 1907. Bronze, 213x161x72 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

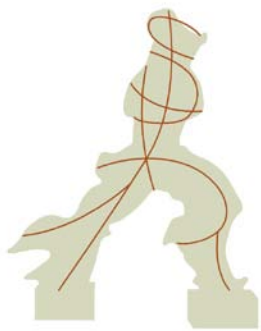


Fig. 3, 4 Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913. Bronze, 112x40x90 cm. Milan, Museo del Novecento. Below: compositional diagram.