

# The Hybrid Artistic Identity: Nicolay Diulgheroff and the Second Phase of the Italian Futurist Movement

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Nicolay Diulgheroff was active in the Turin Futurists group in the years 1928 to 1938. Throughout his artistic career, he produced paintings, collages and drawings hand in hand with architectural projects, interior designs, designs of everyday life objects and advertisements. Diulgheroff considered the pragmatics of the object environment in conjunction with the autonomy of the picture, and vice versa, the abstract structures of paintings and collages related to design and architectural solutions. Diulgheroff's aesthetics emerged in a distinctive artistic milieu at a unique moment in time, when the machine world, having enchanted the Futurists with its novel and revolutionizing potential, established new concepts of human everyday life. At that time, the object world was not yet totally dominated by industrial mass production. In the hybrid sphere between mechanical and craft production, Diulgheroff mediated between both worlds, insisting in his articles on the values of individual consumption and personal choice, yet also calling for the transformation of human life in accordance with demands of the machine era. After the Second World War, despite the monstrous machines that had killed millions of people, Diulgheroff continued to present himself as a Futurist, strove to preserve his positive experiences from the interwar period and put forward his a-political vision of technological progress.

*Keywords:* Nicolay Diulgheroff, Fillìa, *secondo futurismo*, advertising, political propaganda, art and everyday life, interior design, Futurism and architecture.

## Introduction

Nicolay Diulgheroff, born in Kyustendil / Bulgaria in 1901, was an artist, architect and designer, who received his professional training at the Kunstgewerbeschule (Academy of Applied Arts) in Vienna, the Neue Schule für Kunst "Der Weg" in Dresden, the Bauhaus in Weimar and the Regia Scuola di Architettura (Royal Academy of Architecture) in Turin. He spoke German fluently but adopted Italian as the language for expressing his professional concerns. As was the case with many other artists before the Second World War, he saw himself as a citizen of Europe. But he made his home in Turin, lived and worked in the milieu of *secondo futurismo* and died there in 1982.

In this essay I shall address Diulgheroff's artistic practice in the fields of Fine and Applied Arts and attempt to offer some answers to the following questions:

- To what extent do modernism and avant-garde manifestations play a role in the formation of the Big-City life in the industrial epoch, and in a culture based on the stimulation of consumption?
- How did avant-garde and modernist achievements vary in areas of Europe where capitalist societies were developing at different speeds?
- What impact did mass culture and politics have on the manifestations of modern art in different social milieus?
- Which advertising strategies were adopted by artists belonging to the avant-garde?
- How were modernism and avant-garde, in this case *secondo futurismo*, perceived by and reflected in the mass-circulation press as well as other media of the time?

Nicolay Diulgheroff's multiple identities make it difficult to position him in the traditional historical narratives. Even though some of his works can be placed without difficulty among the established artistic schools and movements, his heterogeneous, multifaceted identity puts the label and paradigms of the historical avant-garde to the test and relegates him to a position of marginality.

Diulgheroff was born into a family of typographers and publishers. His first artistic activities were carried out in his birthplace at the foot of the Osogovo mountain some 90 km southwest of Sofia, in an ancient spa town situated, at that time, close to the border of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (and to Macedonia today). Like many Bulgarians, he aspired to an education in an important cultural centre. He went first to Vienna and attended the Kunstgewerbeschule there (1920), then moved to Dresden and enrolled in Edmund Kesting's private academy *Der Weg – Schule für Gestaltung* (1922). A year later, in 1923, he joined the Bauhaus in Weimar and became apprenticed to Johannes Itten. During that period, the artist participated in exhibitions in Vienna (1920, 1921), Dresden (1922 – a solo exhibition, 1923) and Berlin (1922). A severe financial crisis caused by the hyper inflation in Germany forced Diulgheroff to leave Germany and to return to Bulgaria in early 1924.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess his artistic development during his German years, as we do not know exactly the works that were produced and exhibited there. We can only suppose that some of the paintings were identical with those shown during his first years in Turin. Back in Sofia, Diulgheroff organized a solo exhibition in a private gallery in 16 Aksakov Street (15–25 April 1924). Some short reviews were published in



Geo Milev's magazine *Plamak* (Flame), signed by Nicolay Raynov's with the pseudonym "Nic"<sup>1</sup> and in *More* (Sea) magazine, edited in the city of Varna, by Geo Milev. Reproductions of some of Diulgheroff's paintings were published in *Plamak* 4 (25 April 1924) and *Chernozem* 617 (1924). A few pictures from 1923–1924, which were possibly exhibited in Sofia, together with a drawing (project of a memorial in honour of Todor Aleksandrov, one of the leaders of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization IMRO, killed on 31 August 1924), are part of the Galleria d'Arte Narciso collection in Turin.

During the years 1923–1925, Bulgaria suffered an acute political crisis. The country had hardly recovered from the Balkan Wars (1912–13) and the First World War (1915–18). It had suffered territorial losses to Serbia, Greece and Romania, and the impact of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 had led to the soldiers uprising in September 1918 and the proclamation of the Republic of the city of Radomir. After the defeat of the rebels, in October 1918, Tsar Ferdinand abdicated and his son Boris III was crowned. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) was seen by many as a "Second National Catastrophe". Elections in March 1920 gave Bulgaria a first peasant government, which in March 1923 signed an agreement with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia over the recognition of the new borders. This triggered a nationalist reaction and a coup d'état (9 June 1923). The peasant leader, Aleksandar Stamboliyski, was assassinated; a Right-wing government took power and waged terror against the Agrarian Party and the Communists.

Martial law was established and many Left-wing politicians and intellectuals were arrested or killed. One of them was the leader of the Bulgarian avant-garde, Geo Milev. Consequently, the small circle of modernist artists in Sofia, which included Kiril Krustev, Chavdar Mutafov and Mircho Kachulev, was dispersed. In his native city, Diulgheroff became a witness of the political struggles of 1924. Kyustendil had been occupied by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization<sup>2</sup> in 1922. The Leader of this paramilitary group, Todor Aleksandrov, was killed in August 1924. Nicolay Diulgheroff's father, Slavi Diulgheroff, was one of the

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1 Nicolay Raynov (1889–1954) was an influential Bulgarian artist, art critic and writer. He was professor of art history at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia from 1927 to 1951.

2 Vatrashna makedonska revolyucionna organizatsiya (VMRO, commonly known in English as IMRO, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), was the name of a national liberation movement in the Ottoman territories in Europe after 1878. Some of its younger leaders espoused radical socialist and anarchist ideas, but the leadership decided in the 1920s to support the rightist government in Bulgaria in its repressive policy against agrarians and communists.

donors for the erection of a memorial for Aleksandrov, and his son Nicolay participated in the competition. Some project sketches survive, but the cenotaph was never built. The unstable political situation together with the economic difficulties in Bulgaria caused Nicolay Diulgheroff to take up an invitation from a friend of his, who was at that time a student in Turin. In 1926, he left Kyustendil and moved to Turin.

Diulgheroff enrolled in the Regia Scuola di Architettura in Turin (at that time associated with the Accademia Albertina) where, eventually, in 1932, he graduated. He struck up a friendship with Fillia and Alberto Sartoris and quickly integrated himself in the milieu of second-wave Futurism. From 1928 onwards, he participated in the annual exhibitions of the Promotrice delle belle arti (Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts) in Turin. He exhibited with the Futurists regularly in the Venice Biennial (until 1938), in Futurist shows in Milan, Turin, Rome, Florence, Genoa, Paris (1931, 1932), Moscow (1933), Athens (1933), Hamburg (1934), Berlin (1934), Nice (1934), Lyon (1935), Istanbul (1935), etc. He had solo exhibitions in Turin in 1928 and 1929 (inaugurated by Marinetti). After 1931, he participated in the creation and theoretical explication of the new genre of *aeropittura*.

### Diulgheroff's views on modern advertising

Diulgheroff's career as an architect and designer began with his participation in exhibitions of Futurist and Rationalistic architecture in Italy (1928, 1931, and 1932). Among his Futuristic realizations was the interior design of the Santopalato restaurant in Turin (1931). Diulgheroff designed villas, restaurants, residential and industrial buildings, amongst others the Casa Mazzotti in Albisola (1934). He also published critical texts in *Stile futurista* and *Città nuova*.

He participated in different trade fairs with interior design solutions and advertisements, which included a new type of street hoarding on aluminum panels. They were first shown in 1928 in the great Futurist exhibition celebrating the tenth anniversary of First World War (L'Esposizione Nazionale Italiana per il Decennale della Vittoria di Torino). His posters were exhibited the same year in Florence too on the occasion of the Third International Book Fair. In a brochure of 1929 devoted to Diulgheroff and edited by *La città futurista*, Fillia paid tribute to Diulgheroff's collaboration with the advertising company Arturo Tucci in Turin, Milan and Genoa.<sup>3</sup>

3 Fillia: "Diulgheroff cartelonista", pp. 3-4.



The new type of *cartelli* (posters) made of sheets of metal and shining on the boulevards, had, according to Fillia, commercial and artistic value at the same time. As an example he cited, along with others, Diulgheroff's room with 50 advertising posters at the Pesaro Gallery in Milan in 1929. Fillia stated that Diulgheroff "had all the prerequisites required for the modern advertisement artist; in his solutions he balances the values of the unpredictable, of surprise, combination and colourfulness."<sup>4</sup> As Giorgio Di Genova pointed out,<sup>5</sup> Diulgheroff's posters stood in the context of other innovative advertising works undertaken by the Futurists Depero, Balla, Prampolini, Pozzo and Gaudenzi. Di Genova reported Fillia's opinion, expressed two years later, that Diulgheroff's street hoardings of 1929 and 1930 contributed markedly to the changed appearance of the capital city of Piedmont:

[Diulgheroff's] posters on metal have been appearing in Turin for a couple of months now. They seem to have mushroomed and grabbed the attention of the producers and the public alike [...] Located along the big boulevards in Turin, drawn on both sides, placed in a simple yet elegant architectural frame, these big posters re-arrange street advertising from the old days in an ingenious way [...]. Now advertising is alive and it is a harmonious part of the urban landscape, it is solid, fresh and luminous, it is seen as a constructive element.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout his artistic career, Diulgheroff created paintings, collages and drawings. This happened on a daily basis, irrespective of any exhibition opportunities, and went hand in hand with other projects concerned with architecture, interior design, design of everyday life objects, and advertisements. Fillia commended Diulgheroff for practicing all plastic arts together, without making difference between pure and decorative art values, "with an intensity that is less cerebral, but more colourful, cheerful and human."<sup>7</sup> This professional choice was an expression of his view, defended throughout his life, that the artist had to integrate different facets of modern life in his creative output.

4 Ibid., p. 3. "Nicolay Diulgheroff ha infatti I requisiti necessary del cartellonista moderno: I valori d'imprevisto, di sorpresa, di sintesi e di colore si equilibrano nei suoi 'soggetti'."

5 Di Genova: "The Bulgarian Diulgheroff, an Italian Futurist", p. 51; Di Genova: *Generazione primo decennio*, pp. 38–40.

6 Fillia: "Arturo Tucci: Editore di pubblicità." *Oggi e Domani*, 5 January 1931. Cited after Di Genova: "The Bulgarian Diulgheroff, an Italian Futurist", p. 51.

7 "[...] con un'intensità meno cerebrale ma più colorata, più calda e più umana". Fillia: "L'arte di Diulgheroff", pp. 1.



Fig. 1: Left: Poster *Amaro Cora* (1930). Typographic print, applied on folio and canvas. 1,98 x 1,39 m. Right: Cora Bar in the First National Fashion Exhibition in Turin (1933).

In 1970, in an interview about street advertising, Diulgheroff said:

The billboard was a very important experience for us, because we believed it to be a genuine and real picture that was intended for the street, not for museums. The discourses of advertising with their images, words, collages of various materials etc. were highly influential for us [...]. Audience reaction varied from amusement to amazement, and if we achieved something really worthwhile, it was because of the intelligence of the commissioning company, who understood and appreciated our ideas. I have in mind, for example, the advertising poster *Cora* (1928): a spiral seemed absurd for liquor presentation and yet ...”<sup>8</sup>

After the First World War, Italian cities instituted numerous industrial fairs, exhibitions, and retail spaces, which turned into privileged venues for the Futurist attempts at bringing to fruition their concept of “Re-fashioning the Universe” (Balla/Depero). The idea of integrating artistic practices into everyday-life environments was not exclusive to the Futurist movement (see the street advertising in this volume, Puineuf, fig. 8). It also emerged – with varying ideological emphases – at the Bauhaus (where Diulgheroff studied) and in the VKhuTeMas (Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops) of Soviet Russia. In an article from 1935, entitled “Ambientazioni pubblicitarie” (Advertising Environments), Diulgheroff credited the Futurists with having changed the practices of advertising firms and having thus contributed to the economic success of many companies. “Today, as far as advertising is concerned, even antique dealers agree with

8 Quoted after Garuzzo: *Nicola Diulgheroff architetto*, p. 36.



Futurism, even though in daily life they may oppose it.”<sup>9</sup> Such contradictions, Diulgheroff felt, were quite common. As an example he cited an industrialist who, on the one hand, commissioned an “ultramodern” advertising campaign from avant-garde artists and, on the other, had a house built for his family that emulated the styles of Florentine Renaissance and Piedmont Baroque. Tastes cannot be radically changed, Diulgheroff reasoned; however, over time, advertising influences attitudes. That is why, in the following decades, architects, designers and artists involved themselves in the multifaceted domains of modern life and followed a path that had been mapped out by the Futurists.

### Trade fairs – creative opportunities for Futurist art

Diulgheroff regarded the medium of advertising not only as a presentation of a commercial product with the aim of boosting sales, but also as an artistic opportunity for representing the new, technical civilization. In this, he was not unique, as other Futurists had early on seen the great opportunities that modern advertising offered to artistic movements. Marinetti had practised it since the very beginning of his career. The methods of disseminating Futurist manifestos, of distributing signed copies of his books, the way he gave lectures and speeches at the openings of exhibitions in a multitude of galleries and cities surpassed by far all historical precedents. With such advertising practices, called by Günter Berghaus “American style publicity methods”,<sup>10</sup> Marinetti introduced new behaviours and set the conditions for a creative use of media in a technological era.

Fortunato Depero is a famous example for the Futurist exploration of the new field of advertising. His view that artistic ideas and works should be advertised like any other product in the contemporary world was an expression of a Futurist attitude towards an emerging multi-media environment. Diulgheroff had developed his interest in advertising from his early days in Turin. He began working for the advertising company of Arturo Tucci in the first years of his stay in Italy.<sup>11</sup> Diulgheroff's *cartelli lanciatori* (billboards) were displayed in the Prima Mostra di Architettura Futurista (First Exhibition of Futurist Architecture) in the Castello del Valentino in Turin in 1928. His *Amaro Cora* advertising campaign at the beginning

9 Diulgheroff: “Ambientazioni pubblicitarie”, p. 10.

10 Berghaus: *Futurism and Politics*, p. 23.

11 See Anselmo: “Nicolay Diulgheroff e la pubblicità”, p. 29.

of the 1930s could be loosely compared with Depero's famous *Campari*-campaign during 1925–1926.

Trade fairs as focal points of advertising were perceived by the Futurists to offer opportune occasions for the promulgation of their new aesthetics on a grand scale. But Diulgheroff was also aware that commercial advertising, more than possessing just a promotional character for products, was also acting as a means of propaganda for the Fascist regime. Trade fairs, according to government ambitions, had to inspire in the Italians a feeling of pride in the success of their national industries, especially in the light of foreign competition. However, in the mid-1930s, Diulgheroff was enthusiastic about the participation of vanguard artists and architects in the fields of advertising design. In 1935 he wrote: "Today, the vanguard artist takes an active part in the organization of almost all public initiatives and makes an artistic contribution to the creation of a suggestive ambience for each product, irrespective of whether it is related to agriculture or fashion."<sup>12</sup> He noted with great satisfaction that Futurism played a significant role in the success of trade fairs in Italy.

### Diulgheroff and the Futurists' interest in architecture

How was it possible that during the years of Mussolini's regime, with the government getting more and more centralized and totalitarian, Futurism managed to exercise an important influence on mass culture and everyday environments? It is generally accepted that the situation of avant-garde art in Mussolini's regime was different from that in National-socialist Germany. Hanno-Walter Kruft suggested that Fascist Italy did not impair the freedom of (critical) discourses on architecture, despite the fact that they were heavily dependent on political circumstances. In Italy, to a great extent, architectural theory remained unaffected by ideologization because every intellectual group tried to avoid conflict with the Fascist regime in one way or another.<sup>13</sup>

Such an observation does not weaken the argument that architecture was instrumentalized by Fascism for political purposes. Architecture, specifically the design of public buildings, was of central importance to Mussolini. Traces of his building campaigns and urban projects can still be seen

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12 "Oggi gli artisti di avanguardia prendono attivamente parte ai lavori organizzativi di quasi tutte le iniziative pubbliche e portano il loro contributo di arte creando l'ambiente suggestivo ad ogni prodotto, sia esso di agricoltura o di moda." Diulgheroff: "Ambientazioni pubblicitarie", p. 10.

13 Kruft: *A History of Architectural Theory from Vitruvius to the Present*, p. 414.



in Rome, Como, Turin and Florence. The EUR complex south of Rome – legacy of the Universal Exhibition of 1942 – and the so-called *città di fondazione* (Latina, Pontinia, Sabaudia, Torviscosa, etc.) are still witnesses of Fascist urban programmes. What is peculiar and atypical in these cases is that they appropriated modern design practices. In his study dedicated to the Rationalists' role in the Fascist regime, Diane Yvonne Ghirardo<sup>14</sup> established clear distinctions between different groups, between the southern and the northern group, between wings more or less influenced by Constructivism and Functionalism. However, she also points out, that “each of the architectural factions could point to instances where official blessings accompanied their work.”<sup>15</sup> Differences in the sense of closeness to the political power could not be traced through aesthetic styles and artistic concepts, but through the assignment of commissions for public buildings, sponsored by the State.

During the 1930s, Diulgheroff did not receive any major public contracts. He worked mainly for private individuals and companies, and developed his all-embracing conception of architectural and interior design in the artistic and social milieu of Turin. A central figure in this circle was the Futurist Fillia, who considered architecture to be the most influential instrument in the formation of public taste.<sup>16</sup> In April 1928, the Turin group released the first issue of the newspaper *La città futurista*. Fillia acted as publication manager; Sartoris had the role of editor-in-chief, and Diulgheroff functioned as graphic designer. Architecture was seen and presented in *La città futurista* as a living environment, together with the other artistic disciplines in modern conurbations. The authors called for a comprehensive vision of modern architecture and, with such an aim in mind, published in 1931, under Fillia's editorship, a book entitled *La nuova architettura*. It was the first collection of its kind in Italy.

It should be mentioned that, at the beginning of the 1930s, Futurist and Rational architects were no longer at loggerheads with each other. Diulgheroff presented his projects in both Futurist and Rationalist exhibitions. Thanks to Fillia and Sartoris, the two groups collaborated with each other on several projects.<sup>17</sup> Alberto Sartoris introduced the ideas of Functionalism and Constructivism in European and American architecture in Fillia's editorial projects and presented examples by Gropius, Le Corbusier, etc. Diulgheroff was perceived as a go-between to Central-european cul-

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14 Ghirardo: “Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist's Role in Regime Building.”

15 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

16 Quoted after Garuzzo: *Nicola Diulgheroff architetto*, p. 50.

17 See Garuzzo: *Nicola Diulgheroff architetto*, pp. 45–46.

tural experiences and, more specifically, to Bauhaus practices.<sup>18</sup> Enrico Crispolti pointed out that “the non-figurative research of Diulgheroff during the first years after his coming to Italy [...] demonstrated an explicit openness towards Constructivism” and “abstract conceptualization in the Central-european tradition”.<sup>19</sup> Diulgheroff was actively involved in setting up the influential volume, *La nuova architettura*. He wrote brief introductory texts, co-edited the visual material and presented his own architectural projects in the book. In the introduction to the chapter, “Public Buildings”, Diulgheroff wrote:

The general changes in modern life find a natural reflection in the spirit and forms of modern architecture, which exists in harmony with the machines and with everything else that we need more and more in our life. The modern architect's skills have to ensure the best possible balance between these fundamental demands of our age; they have to extort from them aesthetic values that exceed their physical functions in order to convey the essential rhythms of life that transcend time and will delineate the characteristics of this period in human history.<sup>20</sup>

Diulgheroff's enthusiasm for technical modernization and for the artistic arrangement of daily environments found an expression not only in his design projects, but also in his paintings. He made it a principle of his work to mediate between the pragmatics of the object environment and the autonomy of the picture. According to Diulgheroff, all modern conveniences should be shaped in accordance with technical advances; the spaces of recreation and entertainment should be imbued with “the poetry of the environment”. He turned the abstract structures in his paintings and collages into design and architectural solutions. Functional objects propagated abstract forms that could also be perceived as “realist” and figurative ones. I would say that in this way Diulgheroff put the concept of representational reality to the test.

18 See Crispolti: “Il ‘secondo futurismo’ torinese e l’Europa”, pp. 24–25; Pinottini: *Diulgheroff futurista: Collages e polimerici 1927–1977*, pp. 19–20.

19 Crispolti: “Il ‘secondo futurismo’ torinese e l’Europa”, p. 25.

20 “Il cambiamento generale della vita moderna ha naturalmente il suo riflesso nello spirito e nelle forme: l’Architettura moderna è strettamente armonizzante con le macchine e con tutto ciò che ogni giorno più è indispensabile alla nostra esistenza; è merito dell’architetto saper dare a queste forme fondamentali della nostra epoca il miglior equilibrio, estraendo dei valori estetici che sorpassino la funzione fisica per rendere i ritmi essenziali che supereranno il tempo e tramanderanno la fisionomia di questo periodo alla storia umana.”



## The “essential rhythms” of the object environment

Diulgheroff tried to imbue his object environment with “essential rhythms”. He believed in a kind of a cosmic energy that gives humans the sense of “essential rhythms” and harmony.

The communicative process of expressing psychic states through the dynamism of forms and plastic signs was mentioned by Marinetti in his manifesto, *Futurist Dance* (1917): “Dance has always taken its rhythms and its forms from life.”<sup>21</sup> Alberto Sartoris, who was intimately familiar with Diulgheroff’s work, felt that he conveyed “an almost ritual sense of organic beauty” and that his complex art was based on a “search for synthesis and integrations [which] regulates itself in accordance with the limitless lights and powers of a particular knowing, of personal reasoning which are founded even on mystery.”<sup>22</sup> Through the means of intuition, artists and architects should express this knowledge, which exceeds our everyday experience.

A good example of this procedure was Diulgheroff’s project of a villa-cum-store for the Mazzotti family in Albisola. Torido and Tullio Mazzotti were the two sons of the founder of the Mazzotti ceramics factory in Albisola Marina, Giuseppe Mazzotti. It seems that their relations with the art world were developed around 1925, when the ceramics factory participated in the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris.<sup>23</sup> In 1929, Tullio Mazzotti, nicknamed “Tullio d’Albisola” (1899–1971), took part in the exhibition *Trentatre futuristi* (Thirty-three Futurists) at the Pesaro Gallery in Milan, together with Diulgheroff and Fillia.<sup>24</sup> Tullio became an important figure of the second Futurist wave in Turin, and it was on his and Torido’s initiative that artists from the Futurist milieu (Bruno Munari, Fillia, Nicolay Diulgheroff, Farfa and others) were invited to prepare models for their ceramics factory during the 1930s.<sup>25</sup>

Diulgheroff had prepared design for the Casa Mazzotti before he graduated from the High School of Architecture. He had developed a close friendship with Tullio d’Albisola, confirmed by their extensive correspondence over many years.<sup>26</sup> Some of the letters show their discussions during the construction period of Casa Mazzotti.

21 F. T. Marinetti: “Futurist Dance.” *Critical Writings*, p. 208. Quoted after Garuzzo: *Nicola Diulgheroff architetto*, p. 53.

22 Sartoris: “The Futurist Symbolism of Nicolay Diulgheroff”, pp. 12–13.

23 See Marzinot and Mazzotti: “I Mazzotti alla ‘Expo 1925’ di Parigi”, pp. 21–23.

24 See the catalogue of the exhibition, *Trentatre futuristi*.

25 Crispolti: *La ceramica futurista*, p. 8.

26 These were collected in the *Quaderni di Tullio d’Albisola*.

Turin, 26 / 7 / 1932

Dear Tullio,

As far as the colours of your new house are concerned, I am against combining the hues of your house with those of the Faraggiana mansion, i. e. the red ones, as you said, since they do not go well with the open sea in front of the house. Faraggiana is situated amongst saturated greenery and, besides, the stately presence of the edifice dominates over the village and looks good. However, this does not mean that the whole village should be tinged in red. What's more, your house is not a palace and is a stone's throw away from the saturated blue of the sea, which Faraggiana lacks.

I have chosen three tonalities: straw yellow (almost white) for the front part of the shop, which will stand out from the residential building complex with its grey-blue colour, above which the tower with the staircase, set in the central block, will be painted in earthy yellow, or vice versa.

Best regards,

Yours Nikolay<sup>27</sup>

Diulgheroff's project was presented in the Second Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture in Rome at the end of March 1931, together with projects by Sartoris and Vinicio Paladini. Drawing on his Bauhaus experience of the 1920s and Le Corbusier's concepts of the interrelations between form, colour and their psychological effect,<sup>28</sup> Diulgheroff combined the principles of both Futurism and Rationalism in his creations of the early 1930s. Casa Mazzotti is a perfect example of the understanding that the outside appearance, with its articulation of the façade, should give a clear idea about the interior organization of the space. The new way of thinking and designing the living interior spaces produce, as a result, new exteriors and new architectural forms. The articulation of the architectural volumes of Casa Mazzotti is underlined by the use of different colours. Diulgheroff's letter to Tullio d'Albisola demonstrates the importance of the choice of colour for giving architecture its volumetric shapes and, at the same time, making them communicate with the surrounding buildings and nature.

27 "Caro Tullio, per ciò che riguarda i colori della tua nuova casa, sono di parere contrario di voler intonare il vostro edificio ai possedimenti Fareggiana e cioè nei rossi, come dicevi tu, perché si legano poco col mare aperto davanti. Fareggiana sono in mezzo al verde intenso, è poi un fabbricato poderoso che domina con la sua mole il paesello e sta bene, ma ciò non vuol dire di intonare tutto il paese solo per questa ragione in rosso, tanto più che la vostra casa è tutt'altro che castello ed ha a due passi l'azzurro profondo del mare, che Fareggiano non ha.

Ho scelto tre toni: paglierino (quasi bianco) per l'avancorpo del negozio, che spicchi bene nel complesso plastico della casa d'abitazione invece in tinta grigio blu, sulla quale la torre della scala che s'incasta nel blocco centrale è tinteggiata tutta in giallo terra o viceversa. Ti abbraccio, Tuo Nicolay."

Published in Presotto, ed.: *Quaderni di Tullio d'Albisola*. Vol. 2, p. 16.

28 See Garuzzo: *Nicola Diulgheroff architetto*, pp. 46–47.



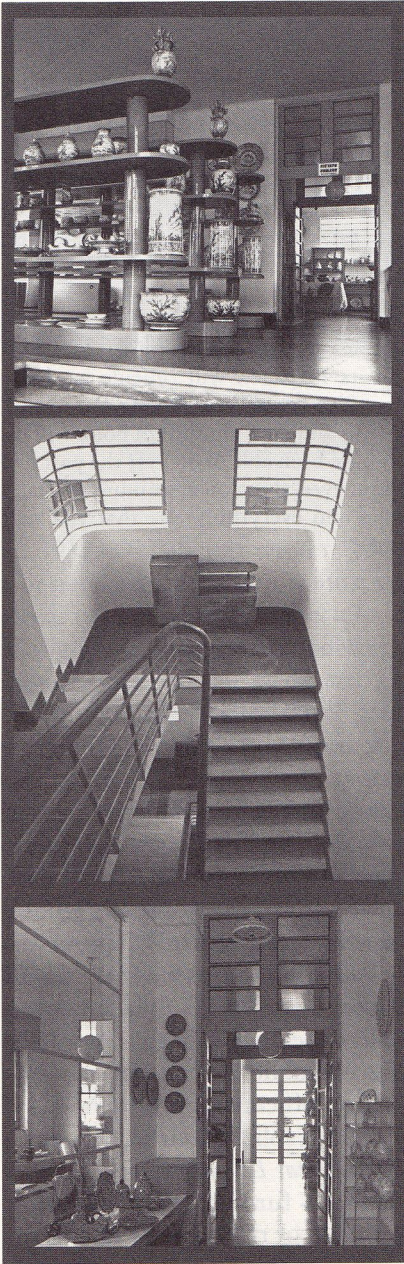


Fig. 2: Mazzotti's House in Albisola (1932–1934). Two interiors and staircase of the ceramics shop.

The art of architecture, according to Diulgheroff, should always be a synthesis of the expressive means of all other arts: sculpture, painting, applied arts, etc. The complete creation is like an organism, in which all the elements are mutually interdependent.

What is also interesting in the case of Casa Mazzotti is the combination of private space for the family with the public space of the ceramic store. Both interiors were designed in great detail by Diulgheroff, and the results of it can still be observed nowadays.

Another example of Diulgheroff's concept of total design and of his artistic partnership with Tullio d'Albisola is the famous book printed on aluminum sheets, *L'anguria lirica* (Lyrical Watermelon, 1933). It was prefaced by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and contains 3 pages of poetry by Tullio d'Albisola, a fourth page with a portrait of Tullio designed by Diulgheroff and 11 pages with lithographs by Bruno Munari. The book consists of 21 metal sheets and was issued in 101 copies. One of these is preserved today in the National Library in Sofia. Diulgheroff imagined the book to be read in an environment that displayed all the qualities and characteristics of pure modernity. In his view, the Futurist book object would have the highest impact and find the deepest appreciation in a world that was designed as a total work of art. In a letter of 2 January 1933, he wrote to his friend:



Dear Tullio,

I've received your "aluminum book" and I am so thrilled. You are absolutely wonderful!!

Such a book, to be read properly, requires a special environment designed in an untainted modern style: the clarity and radiance of metal, the crystal-clear brightness of glass and the elastic feel of cork dipped in rubber.

I can see the future reader of your aluminum book sitting relaxed on a chromium plated steel chair and being absolutely engrossed in it. He turns over the pages of coloured aluminum on a polished, unbreakable and axiometrically designed crystal table top that reflects the lozenges of the linoleum floor covering the rationally designed 50 cubic meters of a room saturated with lyricism and bright light.

Your aluminum book will carry a revolutionarily battle cry into the "rococo-style salon" and, shining mockingly with its 15 pages, will ridicule its dusty furniture made of an amalgamation of so-called "pure" and pseudo-Baroque. I wish you all the best in the world, because you and your aluminum book will do much more than fifty rationalist architects have been able to do over the past five years... Let your publisher move on and print everything on aluminum sheets... without, of course, the matches, spectacles and everything else that you will make from ceramic material! Are you happy?

Kind regards,

Yours, Nicolay<sup>29</sup>

### Presences of Diulgheroff's artistic practice in everyday life today

From today's perspective, it is important to trace the public spaces that keep alive the experience of the artistically designed and "futuristically re-fashioned universe" of everyday life. Thanks to Valeria Garuzzo's book, *Nicola Diulgheroff: The Architect*, we have a relatively complete picture of the architectural projects and realizations of the artist. Many of the buildings he designed no longer exist; some of them, such as the SIMBI Printing Factory in Turin, have changed their function. Only a few apartment blocks have been preserved, as well as the already mentioned Villa Mazzotti. Diulgheroff's interior solutions of public and private spaces – bars, restaurants, dance floors, taverns, shops, offices and private homes – are documented in project schemes and photographs, published in books, catalogues and periodicals, like *La città futurista*, *La città nuova*, *La casa bella* etc. Some objects from private dwellings – furniture, lights, ceramic sets – have been preserved, for example a table in the office of one of the deans in the Polytechnic of Turin and a set of saucers in Sofia (see Fig. 4).

29 The letter is published in Presotto: *Quaderni di Tullio d'Albisola*. Vol. 2, pp. 18–19.



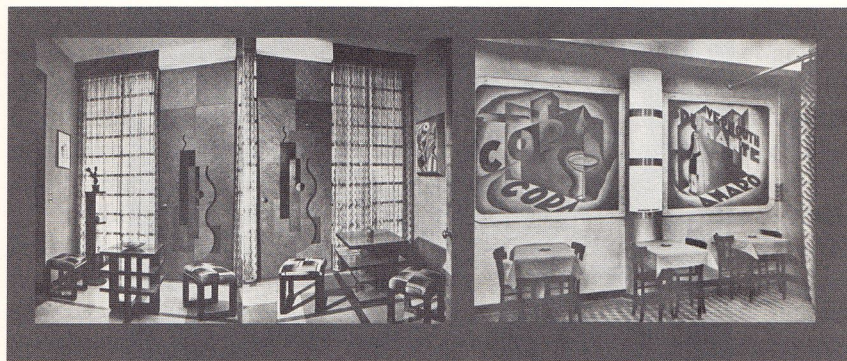


Fig. 3: Two interior designs by Diulgheroff.

Left: Entrance hall of the house belonging to the engineer Jacobacci in Turin (1930).

Right: Interior of the restaurant La Taverna del Santo Palato (1932).

In 1932, Diulgheroff wrote: “The modern flat should neither be a museum nor a picture gallery, it must sensibly meet all practical and intellectual needs of our civilization, i. e. it has to be modern.”<sup>30</sup> As I mentioned above, Diulgheroff’s only public contracts were related to temporary exhibition environments in fair pavilions. The artist did not seek “immortal fame” through the creation of major public buildings, but rather gave expression to the dynamics of time in the form of object environments in dwellings for private individuals and companies.

After the Second World War, Diulgheroff participated in some competitions for public buildings, organized by the municipality of Turin. Amongst them were a project for a skyscraper and one for a spherical building, echoing his Futurist concepts from the 1930s. They were never executed.<sup>31</sup> Turin today preserves only a few apartment blocks, such as the one on Fontanezi Square from 1950, which demonstrates architectural solutions that were different from those of the houses build for individual families.

30 “L'alloggio moderno non deve essere, perciò né un museo né una pinacoteca; ma rispondere equamente a tutte le esigenze pratiche e intellettuali della nostra civiltà: deve essere, insomma, contemporaneo.” Diulgheroff: “Arredamenti nuovi”, p.31.

31 See Garuzzo: *Nicola Diulgheroff: Architetto*, pp. 138–144.

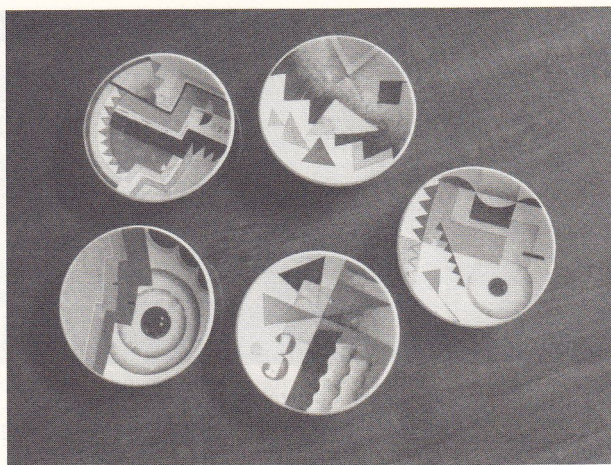


Fig. 4: Ceramics, designed by Nicolay Diulgheroff (1930s).

### Diulgheroff's traces in Sofia today

In Sofia, today, we can find in the homes of Diulgheroff relatives some furniture and ceramics designed by him, as well as some late collages – traces of his summer vacations with his family. Art historical research in Bulgaria, with a few exceptions, has not discussed Diulgheroff's artistic career and œuvre in the fields of painting, architecture, design and advertising. This is probably understandable when considering the under-developed cultural situation in the country, both in the 1920s and 30s and in the post-war period, when the idea of an artist's total involvement with his living environment and of the street as an exhibition space was shared by only a small circle. And yet, in 1934, Diulgheroff intended to launch a major solo exhibition in Sofia, and to show, along with his paintings, architecture, ceramics and advertising, a total of 250 works and photographs. In a letter to Tullio d'Albisola from 18 June 1934, Diulgheroff specified the content of the exhibition and asked his friend for photographs of the villa in Albisola – his first architectural realization. In all probability, the exhibition was never held.<sup>32</sup>

32 "Ora senti amico mio, stò preparando una mia personale a Sofia, molto importante perché completa 250 opere architettura – pittura – pubblicità – quasi tutte realizzazioni. Vorrei aggiungere una serie di 5/6 fotografie della vostra villa. Vorresti far fare anche



After the war, during the period of Communist rule in Bulgaria, there was no public or scholarly debate on issues of modernist interior or graphic design. Even after 1989, the interest in Diulgheroff mainly concerned his Futurist paintings. Furthermore, the lack of a museum in Sofia dedicated to architecture and design deprives the public of the opportunity to become familiar with Diulgheroff's design ideas.

In 2008–10, I curated an exhibition that was dedicated to the multifaceted nature of his oeuvre – architecture, design, painting and advertising – and presented the versatility and richness of Diulgheroff's artistic endeavours. It combined architectural drawings, photographs of interior designs, ceramic sets, projects for advertising posters and paintings, many of these not belonging to public museums but to private collectors. The images were reproduced on aluminum panels and were displayed in the street and in squares, for the hurrying pedestrians and flâneurs, for the residents and tourists. Such an open-air exhibition in a big city was most suited for an artist who devoted his talent to the design of common, everyday spaces. In the 1930s, Diulgheroff made street billboards on aluminum panels. Our exhibition of his oeuvre used the same technique and the works had to compete with the usual advertising hoardings in a street environment. By giving up the “aura” of the “original”, of the authentic object displayed for solitary contemplation in a museum or gallery, our 2008–2010 exhibition gained a much bigger audience and found a more appropriate medium for a presentation of a great part of Diulgheroff's works. Beside that, it problematized the relation between “original work”, “multiple prints” and “public advertising”, and created a multitude of cross-connections between painting and architecture, ceramic forms and interior design, the artist's biography and oeuvre.

## Conclusion

Diulgheroff's experience in the Futurist milieu of the years 1928 to 1938 is mainly documented in his project designs, in photographs published in the contemporary press, in reviews and critical articles, in book such as Fillia's *La nuova architettura e i suoi ambienti* (1935), and finally in texts written by Diulgheroff himself. This material gives me reason to believe that a modernist conception of interior and environmental design continued to have a viable existence under the Fascist regime in Italy. The

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qualche fotografia delle tue ceramiche? Ti abbraccio, tuo Nicolay.” The letter has been published in Presotto: *Quaderni di Tullio d'Albisola*. Vol. 2, p. 19.

totalitarian power and the centralized management of the State did indeed instrumentalize public architecture and urban planning for political purposes, but it did not entirely standardize everyday life or obliterate the design of individualized living environments.

The duality between State commissions and private assignments can be observed in advertising as well. The design of trade fairs and exhibitions became a favourite field of activity for Futurists in the 1920s and 1930s. The Fascist regime made use of these public events for political propaganda. At the same time, advertisements of products intended for the individual user were following artistic trends that were not dictated by the government. At this unique moment of time when technology provided humans with new products but mass industrial production did not yet totally dominate the world, Diulgheroff developed his hybrid form of design poised between mechanical and crafts-oriented production. He created furniture, ceramics, fabrics, etc. in which private use was imbued with the public value of the individual. "A brief glance is enough to detect a house's intimate character, just like the face reveals the owner's identity. The architect, who is almost always a friend, has to create himself, where missing, the atmosphere of modernity".<sup>33</sup> Personal identity was conceived to be of major importance for modern society. For Diulgheroff, as he repeatedly emphasized in his articles, the key task of the artist in the era of the machine was not to create standardized environments, but just the opposite: individualized modern surroundings.

After the Second World War, Diulgheroff continued to present himself as a Futurist. In his vision of progress, he did not register the political implications of technology. He strove to isolate and preserve the positive experiences of his Futurist decade – an experience, which is still valuable for today's critical discourses on hybrid cultural and artistic identities, something that official culture often relegates to the margins of art-historical narratives.

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33 "Basta un'occhiata per scoprire l'intimo di una casa, che si rivela non altrimenti che il volto di un personaggio. L'architetto che è – quasi sempre – un amico, dovrà creare lui, dove manca, un'atmosfera di modernità". Diulgheroff: "Arredamenti nuovi", p.30.



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