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Matteo D'Ambrosio

The Circumvisionisti: A Neapolitan avantgarde during the Fascist era

During May 1996 the Istituto Suor Orsola Benincasa di Napoli hosted the very first exhibit dedicated entirely to **Circumvisionismo**, a forgotten episode of that Neapolitan Culture of the Twentieth Century which, explicitly adopting avant-garde models, favored the poetics of Modernism and renewal in the arts.

Founders of the group were Carolo Cocchia, Guglielmo Peirce, and Antonio De Ambrosio, who issued from Capri the first manifesto in May, 1928. Also active in the group were Mario Lepore, Luigi Pepa Diaz, and Gildo De Rosa, joined later by Carlo Bernari (later to become a successful writer), Paolo Ricci and, for a brief period, Vero Roberti (who actually was from Romagna).

The Circumvisionisti tried to see the avantgarde tradition critically, and sought the most innovative experiments going on in Europe. The critical stance they assumed against Futurism made the intense relationship difficult and contradictory. In 1927 they attempted to secede from Futurism by founding the Unione Distruttivisti Attivisti. On his part Marinetti, during this time lobbying to be recognized as the grand leader of all radical artistic movements, did not hesitate to introduce the shows held in Capri, then Naples, Rome and Milan. He also endorsed their presence at the Biennale Veneziana of 1930, and at the first Quadriennale di Roma, in 1931.

The works and the documents which I recovered manifest a broad array of positions among these young artists. Cocchia prefers to work on volumetric analyses inspired by Leger, Peirce moves toward a post-Cubist meccanomorphic line, De Rosa is inspired by a mittel-European rationalism, Ricci creates portraits with a peculiar expressionistic intensity, Lepore tends toward critical meccanicism, De Ambrosio practices free wheeling eclecticism while Pepe Diaz, as a sculptor, is unabashedly "neo-boccioniano."

The passion, creativity and generosity of the Circumvisionisti, nearly all fervid anti-fascists, quickly dissolved amidst the indifference of urban culture and the persecutions by the regime.

1. G. De Rosa, *Roulette*, 1920.
2. C. Cocchia, *Du tempi di pugilisti*, 1928.
3. G. Peirce, *Le amiche*, 1928.
4. V. Roberti, *Mendicante + strada* (n.d., but 1928?)
5. P. Ricci, *Centrale termica dell'Ilva*, 1928.
6. A. De Ambrosio, *Il prigioniero*, 1928.

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