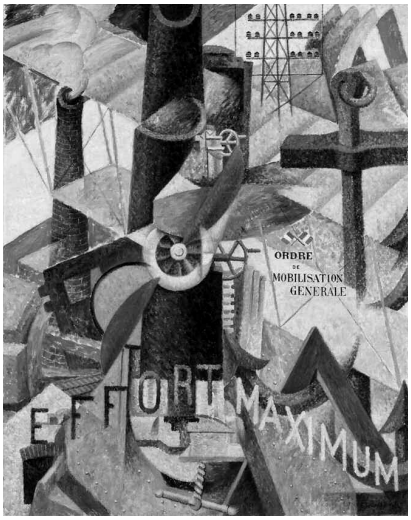

IMAGE TWELVE: Gino Severini. Italian. 1883–1966. *Visual Synthesis of the Idea: "War."* 1914. Oil on canvas, 36½ x 28¾" (92.7 x 73 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Bequest of Sylvia Slifka. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

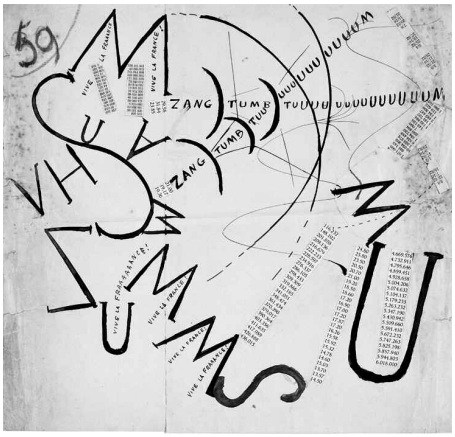

IMAGE THIRTEEN: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Italian, 1876–1944. *Vive la France.* 1914–15. Ink, crayon, and cut-and-pasted printed paper on paper, 12⅛ x 12¾" (30.9 x 32.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Benjamin and Frances Benenson Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Artists have used their work for social and political commentary—protesting, dissenting, questioning, and depicting the world around them—over the last century. In the early 1900s, when entire nations were mobilizing against each other, individuals banded together to make their voices and opinions heard, and artists responded with works about war, both for and against.

The Futurist movement, in addition to exploring concepts of simultaneity, dynamism, and speed in life and art, was aggressively political and glorified war as a way of obtaining national supremacy for Italy. In 1909 the group's leader, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, wrote a **manifesto** declaring the beliefs and intentions of the movement.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- **Students will be introduced to the concept of the manifesto and will investigate its relationship to an artistic movement.**
- **Students will explore how art can be used as a response to political and social issues.**

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- **Ask your students to discuss the clubs or groups they belong to. Break the class into partners and have them interview each other about how their club was established, what happens in it, what unifies the club's members, what the club rules are and how they are recorded and disseminated, and how the club is structured and led.**

- **Define manifesto as a class. Have the class write its own manifesto, with bullet points outlining what the class is for and against. Include what the class thinks the future should hold and what actions it might take toward creating that future. Post the manifesto in a public place, such as a school hallway, and invite other classes either to join the movement or to dissent and create a rival manifesto.**

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- **Turn your students' attention to *Visual Synthesis of the Idea: "War"* and have them come up with as many observations as they can about the painting. Have students take turns contributing a new observation, one going after another without repeating anything that has already been said. Any student can contest another student's observation. See how many rounds the class can complete.**

- **Tell students the title of the work and ask them what they think it means. Engage them in a discussion of the visual symbols the artist has included that represent aspects of war as he might have experienced them in 1914.**

- **Ask students what words they see in the work. Ask them what the text represents and what other text Severini could have included in the work.**

- **Turn students' attention to what is missing from this painting about war. Ask them why Severini might have left out the human presence.**

- **Show students *Vive la France*. Ask them to describe what they see. Explain to students that this work is a poem created by Marinetti, author of the Futurist Manifesto. Ask them to describe how Marinetti's poem is different from traditional poems written in verse form.**

Vive la France is a word poem written in the "free word" method, which was invented by Marinetti. In this method, words are freed from syntax and the rules of grammar and are no longer elements in linear sentences strung together to make paragraphs. Instead, they are organized across the page to form evocative shapes much like brush strokes create objects in a painting. Marinetti was inspired to invent this kind of writing by his experiences in the cockpit of a biplane, hearing the roar of the aircraft's propellers and seeing the exciting new views of cities from the air. After these episodes, he wrote, "I sensed the ridiculous inanity of the old syntax inherited from Homer. A pressing need to liberate words, to drag them out of their prison . . . . This is what the whirling propeller told me, when I flew two hundred meters above the mighty chimney pots of Milan."[6]

- **Marinetti's free-word poems, which he often performed, were governed by strict rules including phonetic spelling, no punctuation, and mathematical symbols used as conjunctions. Bold type and varying font sizes were used for emphasis. Have students take turns reading the text parts of *Vive la France* out loud. Encourage them to look for visual clues, such as the size, spelling, and repetition of words, to guide their decisions about tone and volume as they read aloud.**

6. Jodi Hauptman, *Drawing from the Modern, 1880–1945* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 14.

- **Explain to students that Marinetti was a reporter during the Balkan Wars of 1912, and that *Vive la France* was written as a response to his experiences. Discuss the ways in which the work is reminiscent of war, paying attention to the work's different parts and its composition. Encourage students to think about the sights, sounds, and smells that Marinetti might have encountered. Ask them to think about how Marinetti's interpretation of a war-related subject differs from Severini's.**

ACTIVITIES

Have your students look in newspapers and magazines and on the Internet for articles about and pictures of war, and bring what they find into class. Have them make a list of all the words that occurred to them while looking at the articles and pictures; the list may also include words from the articles themselves. Then ask them to choose words from this list and write two poems, one in linear or prose form and another in which the words are arranged creatively on the page, akin to Marinetti's word poems. Have your students share their poem with the class and discuss the different creative choices everyone made.