Boccioni’s ‘The City Rises’ (1909, oil on canvas) is a large scale work showing the construction of a modern city. In the top left hand corner, the train hurtles over the bridge towards the scaffolding of new buildings, in the top right, the factory chimneys belch smoke and the central space is a riot of men struggling to contain horses in a whirlwind of energy. This choice of subject matter is typically Futurist and illustrates Marinetti’s Manifesto aim to “show the total and physical experience.” It gives an image that is modern, full of movement and presents the new world as an exciting, positive environment.

The composition of this work is chaotic and cluttered: the action continues beyond the edge of the canvas to left and right, and the men are cropped in the foreground as they lunge to the left in a swirl of activity. This is a characteristic that is common to many Futurist works as they sought to visualise a world “in a constant state of flux” (Bergson).

The colours used are mainly primaries with the standing men lit by bursts of yellow fire or energy and the riders represented by swirls of blue. Extensive use of red on the horses and buildings adds to the energy and contrasts of this work and maximises the effects of the complementary tones used. These colours are typical of much Futurist work because they show the modern world as such a source of excitement. The colours probably derive more from Post-Impressionism with its emphasis on emotion and symbolism.

Boccioni abandons traditional linear perspective here, presenting a world that happens at the front of the picture plane and at close proximity to the viewer. This is typically Futurist in its aggressive and forceful nature and shows how they were determined to move away from the stifling pressures of traditional art. Marinetti said that the aim of the movement was to “burn the museums and drain the canals of Venice.”

The brushwork here is short and quick with little outlining and indistinct forms. The technique is perhaps more traditional than other aspects of this work, showing Boccioni’s evolution within the style of Futurism. At this stage, he is using a Divisionist technique which allows him to execute the work rapidly.