Early Abstraction in Russia

Russian Revolution

There were two revolutions in 1917, the one in February which saw the collapse of Tsarism, and the Bolshevik insurrection of October. The revolution took Russia out of WW I. It led to the creation of the world's first communist state and, in 1922, to the formation of the USSR, which lasted until 1991.

In the first years after the revolution, the new Soviet government actively encouraged experimentalism and new forms in the arts to go with the new society communism was attempting to construct. Hammer and sickle symbolizes the unity between industrial and agricultural







Vladimir Lenin addressing a crowd during the Russian Revolution of 1917 Tsar Nikolay II (Bloody Nicholas) and his family were executed in 1918



Kazimir Malevich (1878 - 1935)

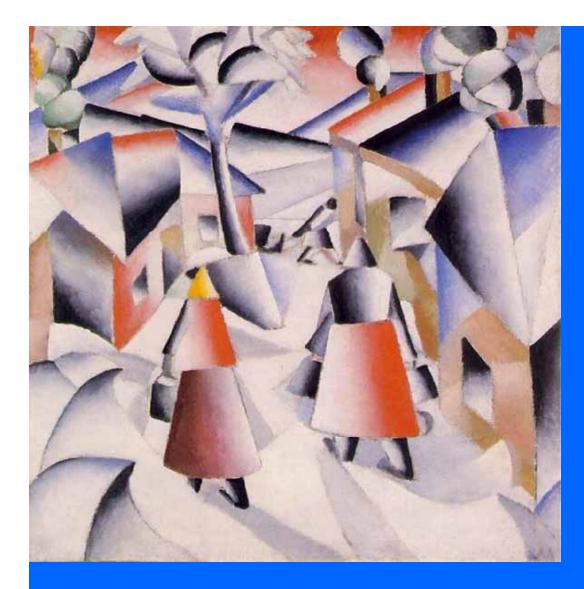
Painter, printmaker, decorative artist and writer of Ukrainian birth. One of the pioneers of abstract art in Russia.

Kazimir Malevich, *Self-Portrait*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 28 1/4" x 26". State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

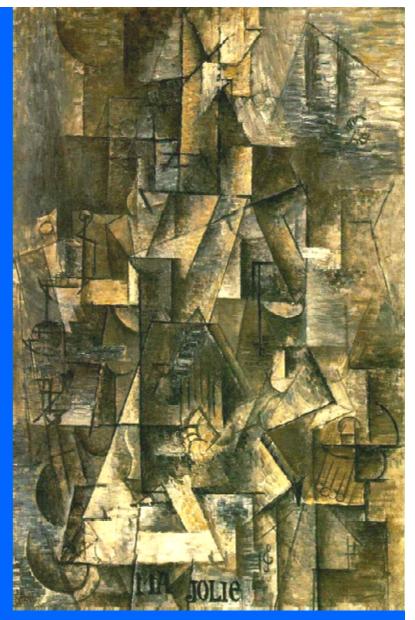


Kasimir Malevich, *Morning in the Village after Snowstorm* 1912 Oil on canvas 31 3/4 x 31 7/8 in. (80.7 x 80.8 cm) Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York





Kasimir Malevich, *Morning in the Village after Snowstorm* 1912, Oil on canvas 31 3/4 x 31 7/8 in. (80.7 x 80.8 cm) Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



Pablo Picasso, *Ma Jolie*, ("my pretty one" – refer to his lover "Eva") 1911-1912, Oil on Canvas In 1913 Kazimir Malevich was asked to produce a series of costumes and set designs for *Victory Over the Sun.*

He designed them in a style he named "Cubo – Futurism"



Kasimir Malevich, Backdrops and Costumes for Victory over the Sun, 1913



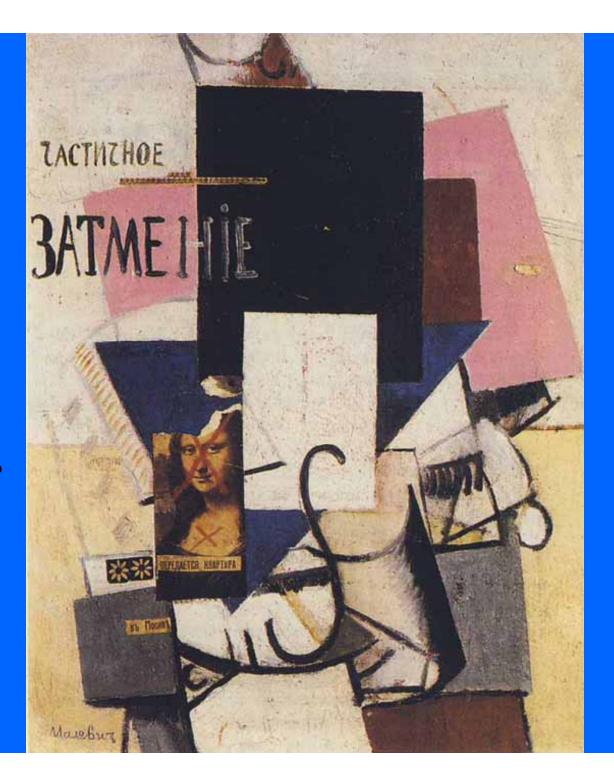
Victory Over the Sun

Experimental performance billed as "The First Futurist Opera" which anticipated the Dada performances. The opera was intended to underline parallels between literary text, musical score, and the art of painting.

The actors were mostly nonprofessionals who recited or sang their lines, accompanied by an out of tune piano. The nonnarrative texts were intended to divest words of all conventional meaning.



Kazimir Malevich, *Composition with the Mona Lisa*, c. 1914. Graphite, oil, and collage on canvas, 24 3/8" x 19 1/2". State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

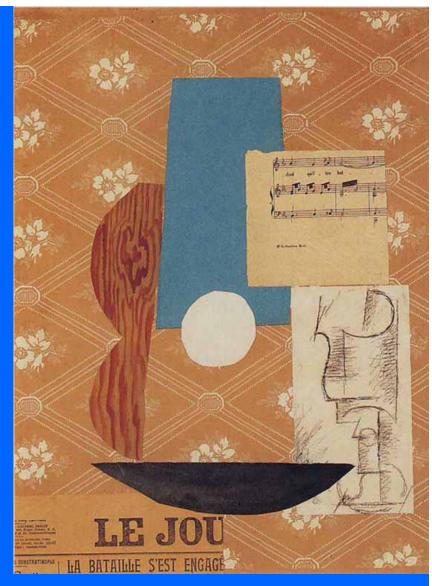




Kazimir Malevich, *Composition with the Mona Lisa*, c. 1914. Graphite, oil, and collage on canvas, 24 3/8" x 19 1/2". State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



Kazimir Malevich, *Composition with the Mona Lisa*, c. 1914. Graphite, oil, and collage on canvas, 24 3/8" x 19 1/2".

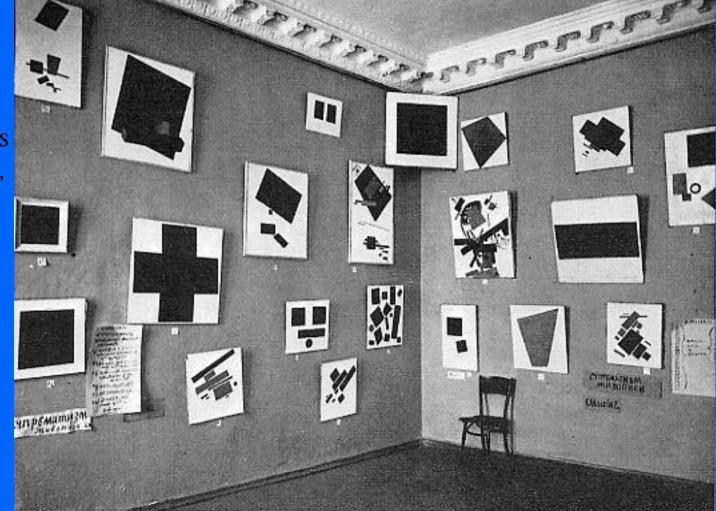


Pablo Picasso, *Guitar and Wine Glass*, 1912. Pasted paper, gouache, and charcoal, 18 7/8" x 14 3/4"

Suprematism

A non-objective type of art, devised by Kazimir Malevich c. 1915, in which 'new symbols' such as the square, triangle and circle replaced the more traditional concern with the human face and natural objects. The term implied the supremacy of this new art in relation to the past. Suprematism had far-reaching influence on Western art and design.

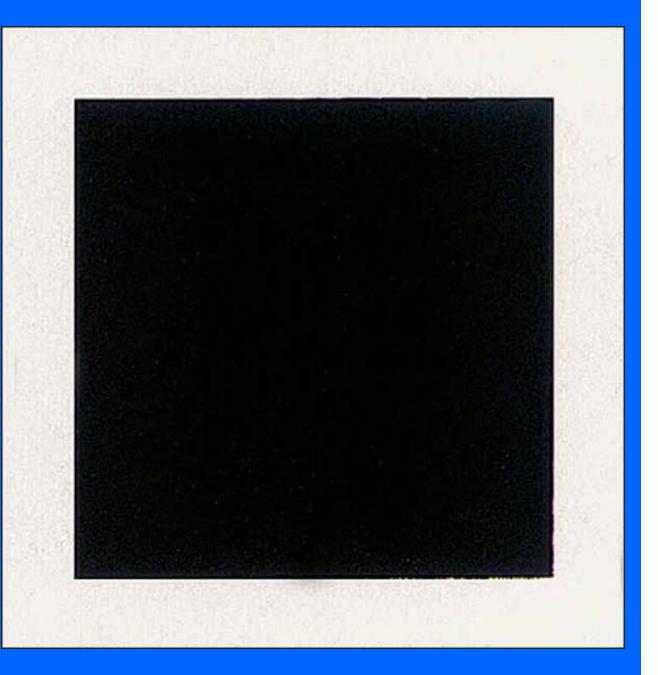
Malevich established three stages of Suprematism – The Black, the Red or Colored and the White. Intallation photograph of Malevich's paintings in 0, 10 (Zero-Ten), 1915



'I felt only night within me and it was then that I conceived the new art, which I called Suprematism'. Malevich "In my desperate attempt to free art from the burden of the object I took refuge in the square form..."

Malevich

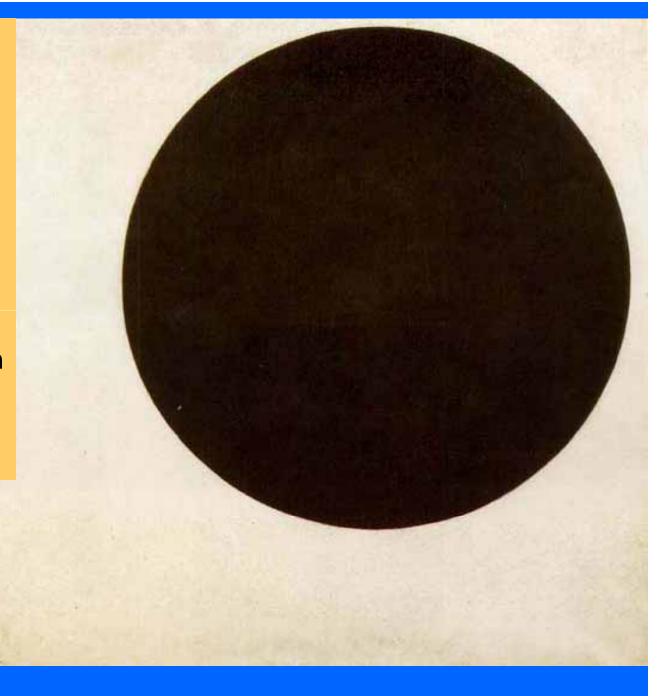
Kasimir Malevich *Black Square on a White Ground* (1914-1915) Oil on linen, 80x80cm State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



Kasimir Malevich *Black Square on a White Ground*. Detail. (1914-1915) Oil on linen

Malevich saw Suprematism as purely aesthetic and concerned only with form, free from any political or social meaning. He stressed the purity of shape, particularly of the square, and he regarded Suprematism as primarily an exploration of visual language.

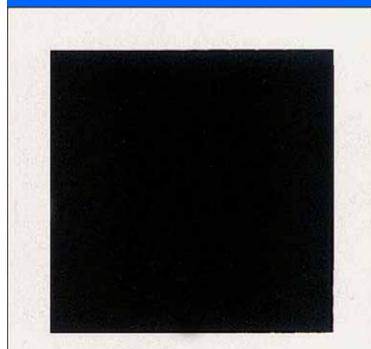
Kazimir Malevich, *Black Circle*, 1914-15. 105.5 x 105.5 cm (41 1/2 x 41 1/2 in); State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg





Vasily Kandinsky, *Composition* VII, 1913, oil on canvas

> **Robert Delaunay,** *Windows Open Simultaneously*, 1912, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 37.5 cm, Tate Gallery, London.



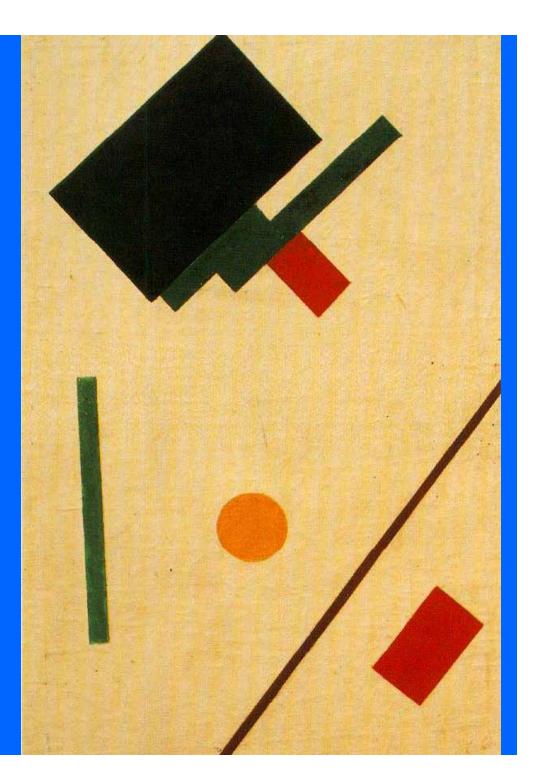
Kasimir Malevich *Black Square on a White Ground* (1914-1915) Oil on linen, 80x80cm State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

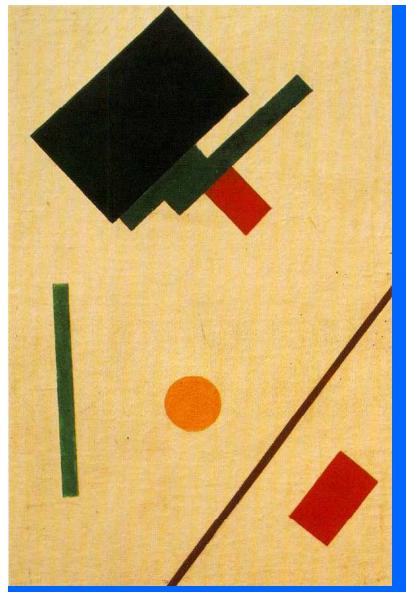


Kasimir Malevich *Suprematist Composition* 1915

Oil on canvas 27 5/8 x 18 1/2 in. (70 x 47 cm.) Fine Arts Museum, Tula

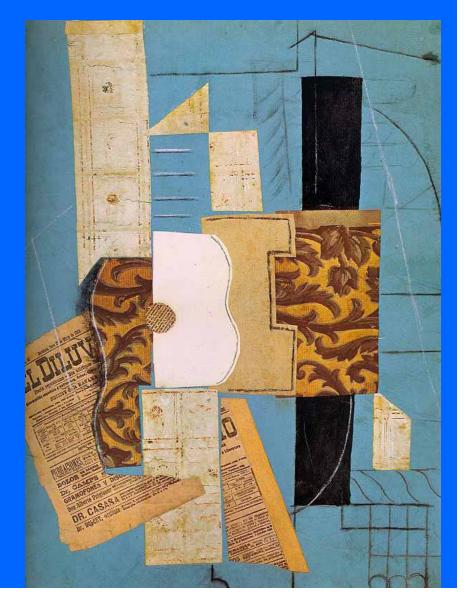
> Malevich aimed to convey the "supremacy of feeling in art," which he believed could be expressed through the simplest of visual forms.





Kasimir Malevich Suprematist Composition

1915. Oil on canvas 27 5/8 x 18 1/2 in. (70 x 47 cm.) **Pablo Picasso.** *Guitar Collage*. 1913 Cut-and-pasted paper and printed paper, charcoal, ink, and chalk on colored paper on board, 26 1/8 x 19 1/2"



KAZIMIR MALEVICH Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying,

1915. Oil on canvas, 1' 10 7/8" x 1' 7". Museum of Modern Art, New York.



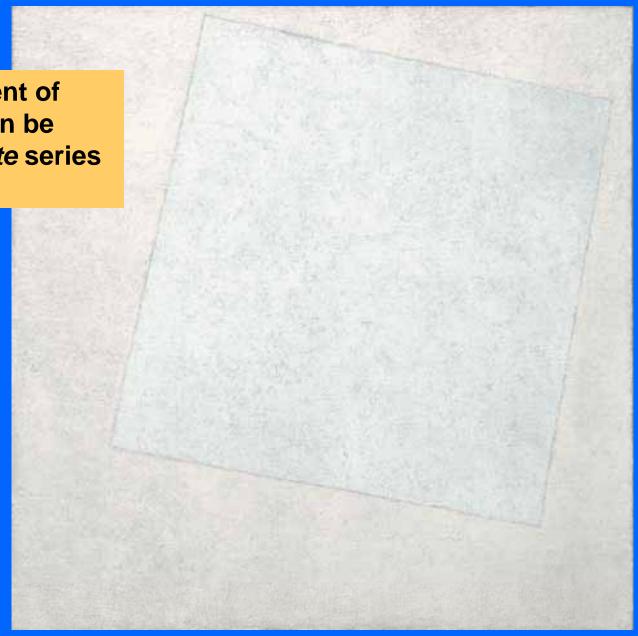
Kazimir Malevich. *Suprematism*.

1916. Oil on canvas. 80.5 x 81 cm. The Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.



The purest embodiment of Suprematist ideals can be seen in *White on White* series (1917 – 18).

Kasimir Malevich Suprematist Composition: White on White (1918) Oil on canvas, 79.4x79.4cm



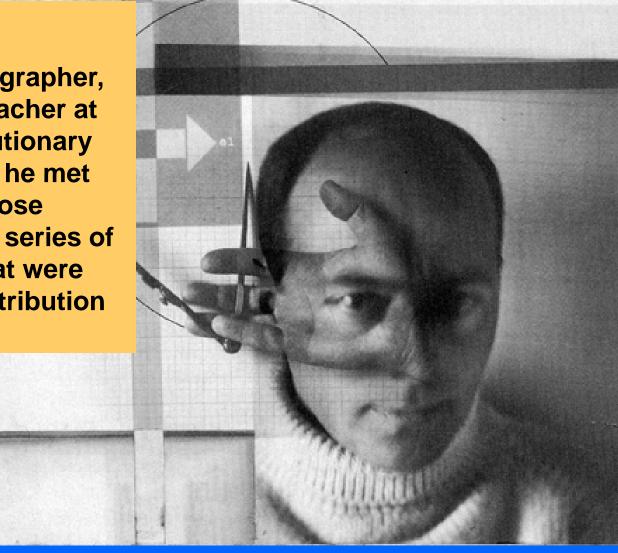


who didn't leave to the West, died in poverty and oblivion.

Kasimir Malevich lying in state in his Leningrad apartment (17-18 May 1935)

EI Lissitzky

Russian painter, typographer, and designer. As a teacher at Marc Chagall's revolutionary art school in Vitebsk, he met Kazimir Malevich, whose influence is seen in a series of abstract paintings that were Lissitzky's major contribution to Constructivism.



El Lissitzky *The Constructor, (self-portrait).* photomontage, c.1925. Gelatin-silver print, 4x4"

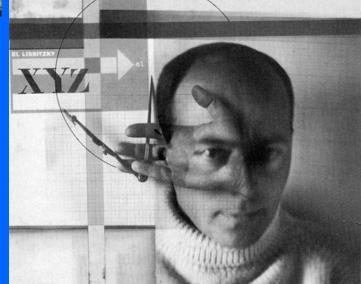


God the Father Measures the Cosmos. Illuminated page from La Bible Moralisee. 12th C.



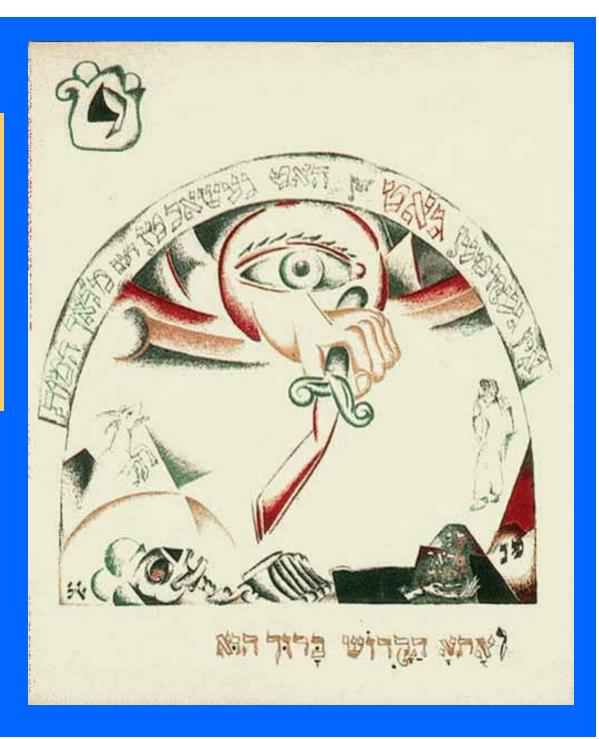
Blake. *The Ancient of Days.* Relief Etching with Water Color, 1794

El Lissitzky The *Constructor, (self-portrait).* photomontage, c.1925. Gelatinsilver print, 4x4"

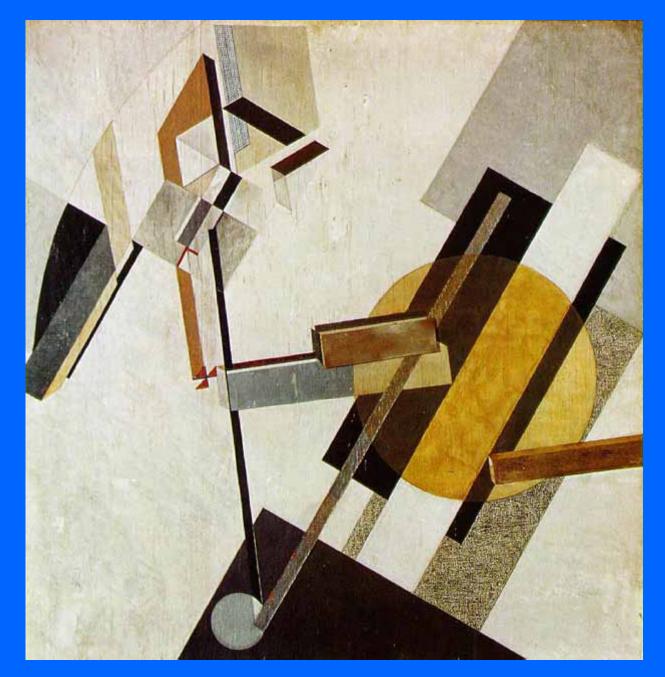


Lissitzky took an active and passionate interest in Jewish culture which, after the downfall of the openly anti-semitic Tsarist regime, was flourishing and experiencing a renaissance at the time.

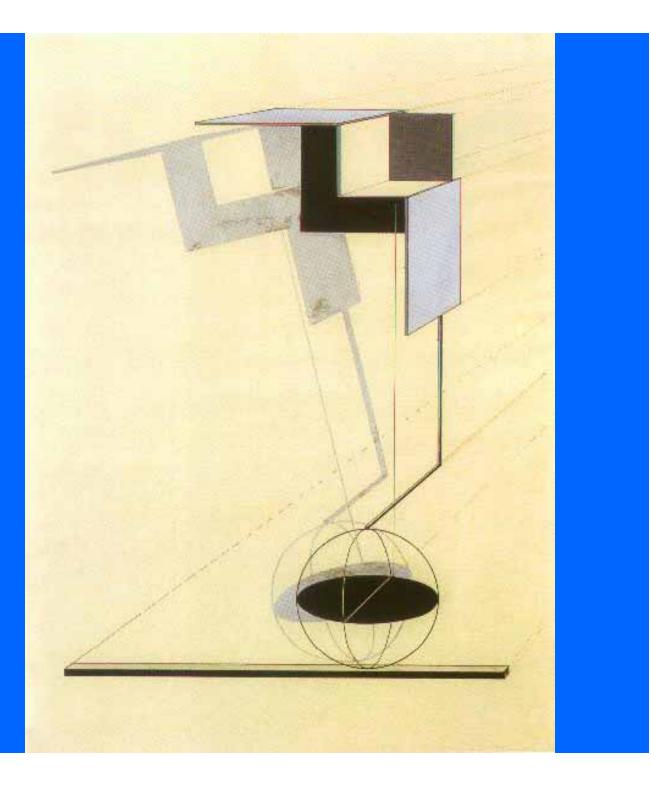
The last page from *Had* gadya (One goat) by Lissitzky, 1919.



El Lissitzky, Proun 19D (Proun: an acronym for "project for the affirmation of the new") c. 1922 Gesso, oil, collage, on plywood 38 3/8 x 38 1/4 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York



El Lissitzky 1922, *Untitled Proun*



Installation: A space presented as a work of art to be entered, explored, experienced and reflected upon.

El Lissitzky, Proun Space, 1923, for Berlin exhibition

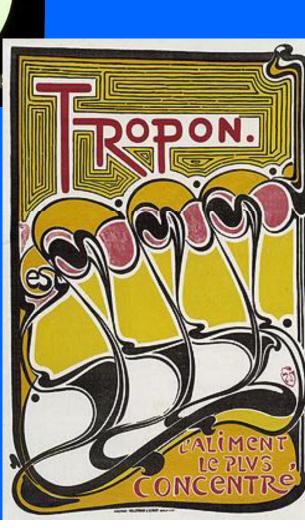


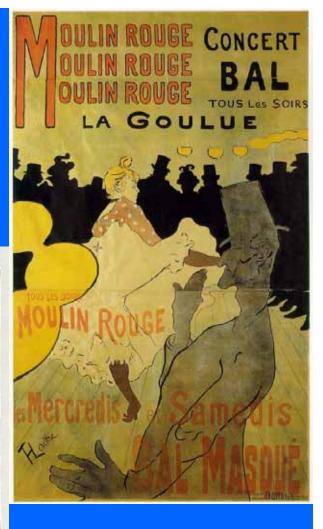
El Lissitzky. Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge. 1919



El Lissitzky. *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge.* 1919

(Art Nouveau) Henry van de Velde. *Tropon: L'Aliment le plus concentré,* 1898. Color lithograph.





Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec, *Moulin Rouge-La Goulue*, 1891. Color lithograph In 1922, after the Soviet government turned against modern art, Lissitzky went to Germany. There Theo van Doesburg and László Moholy-Nagy transmitted his ideas to the West through their teaching at the Bauhaus.



A two-page spread from *Dlya golosa* (*For the Voice*) by Vladimir Mayakovsky, designed by El Lissitzky, 1923.

Utopian Visions: Russian Constructivism

Constructivism: A movement originating in Moscow in 1920 and characterized by the use of industrial materials such as glass, sheet metal, and plastic to create nonrepresentational, often geometric objects. The artists' intention was to merge art with technology in products that ranged from utilitarian household objects to textile design, posters, and stage sets.

Prominent artists: Vladimir Tatlin, Lyubov' Popova, Naum Gabo, Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky, The Constructivists sought to move beyond the autonomous art object, extending the formal language of abstract art into practical design work.

Photograph of Vladimir Tatlin with Monument to the Third International 1919–1920.

The tower was to be built from industrial materials: iron, glass and steel, and to stand 400 m. high. It was never built since there was not enough steel in Russia to build it.

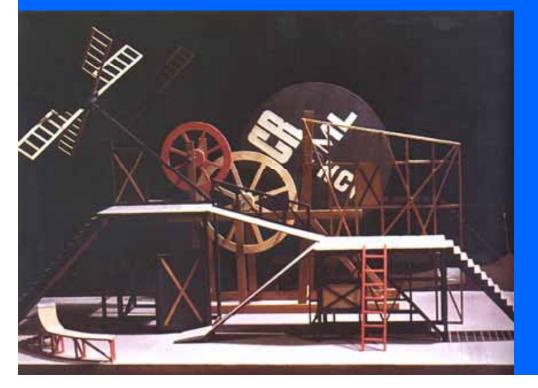




Replica of Tatlin's Tower at the Royal Academy of Arts in London

Inside the iron-and-steel structure of twin spirals, the design envisaged three building blocks, covered with glass windows, which would rotate at different speeds (the first one at the base, a cube, once a year; the second one, a pyramid, once a month; the third one, a cylinder, once a day).





Popova's Constructivist Set for Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, 1922



Lyubov' Popova (1889 - 1924). Russian painter and designer.

Liubov Popova's maquette for the construction used in Meyerhold¹s 1922 production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*.

Varvara Stepanova Design for Sportswear, 1923. Gouache and ink on paper



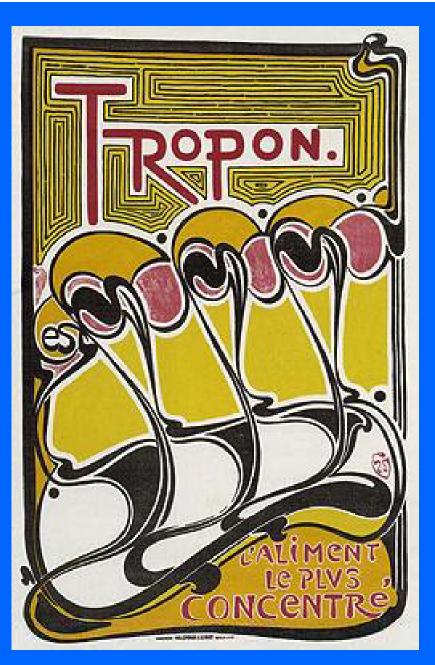


Aleksandr Rodchenko Poster for the movie Kino Eye 1924 **Aleksandr Rodchenko**, *Untitled Advertising Poster*, 1924. Gouache and photomontage on paper. 27x33" R



Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Untitled Advertising Poster*, 1924. Gouache and photomontage on paper. 27x33"

> Comparison: Art Nouevau: Henry van de Velde, (Belgian, 1863 - 1957). *Tropon: L'Aliment le plus concentré,* 1898. Color lithograph.







Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Spatial Construction/Spatial Object*, 1921.



View of the third OBMOKhu exhibition, Moscow, 1921.

Alexander Rodchenko. *Hanging Spatial Construction no. 9 (Circle in a Circle),* 1920-1921 Plywood of peach-tree. 90 x 80 x 85 cm

• Early kinetic works

NAUM GABO Column

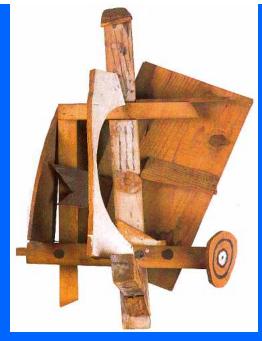
ca. 1923 (reconstructed 1937). Perspex, wood, metal, glass, 3' 5" x 2' 5" x 2' 5". Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.





Aleksandr Rodchenko, Spatial Construction/Spatial Object, 1921. Partially painted plywood





Pablo Picasso, *Mandolin and Clarinet,* 1913. Painted wood construction with cardboard, paper, and pencil marks.

NAUM GABO *Column* ca. 1923. Perspex, wood, metal, glass UMBERTO BOCCIONI, Unique Forms of Continuity in Space 1913 (cast 1931). Bronze,



In 1921 the Soviet state began to impose its doctrine of Socialist Realism. The result was the departure from Russia of Kandinsky, Gabo, Pevsner, Lissitzky, Chagall and many other avant-garde artists who continued to develop their ideas in the west.

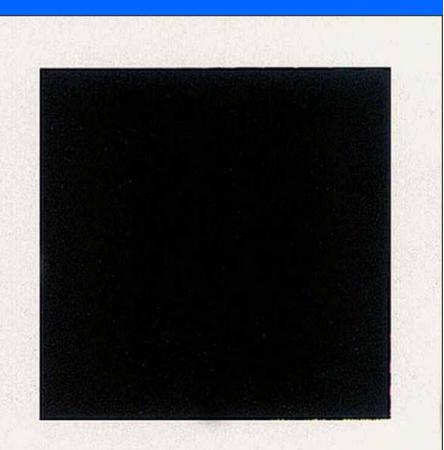


Comparison: Socialist Realism

The construction and industry statue on the Green Bridge, Vilnius; Lithuania.

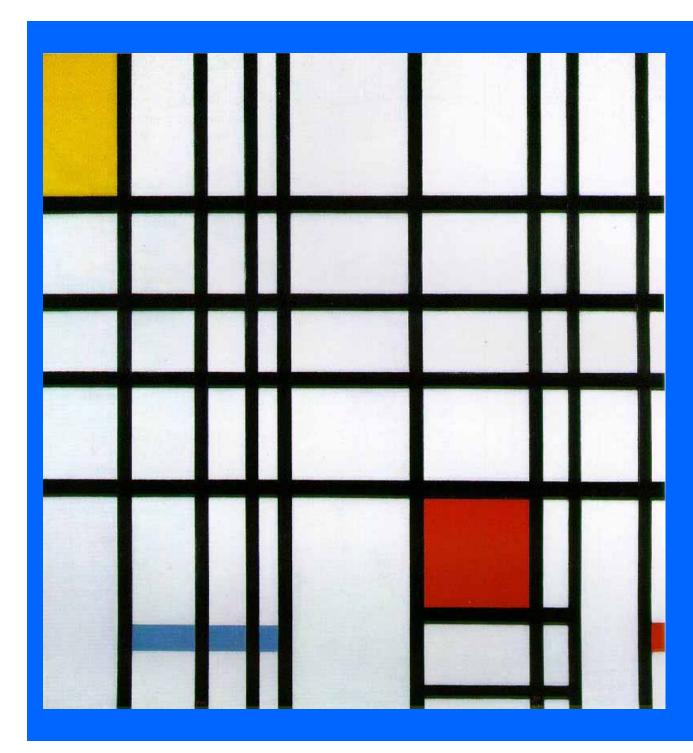
Boris Vladimirski, *Roses for Stalin.* 1949. Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 141 cm.

> Kasimir Malevich *Black Square on a White Ground* (1914-1915)



De Stijl

Dutch artistic movement, founded in 1917. The group advocated a utopian style: "the universal harmony of life." They advocated pure abstraction and universality by a reduction to the essentials of form and color. Its ideal of purity and order in life and society as well as art reflects the Calvinist background of its members.

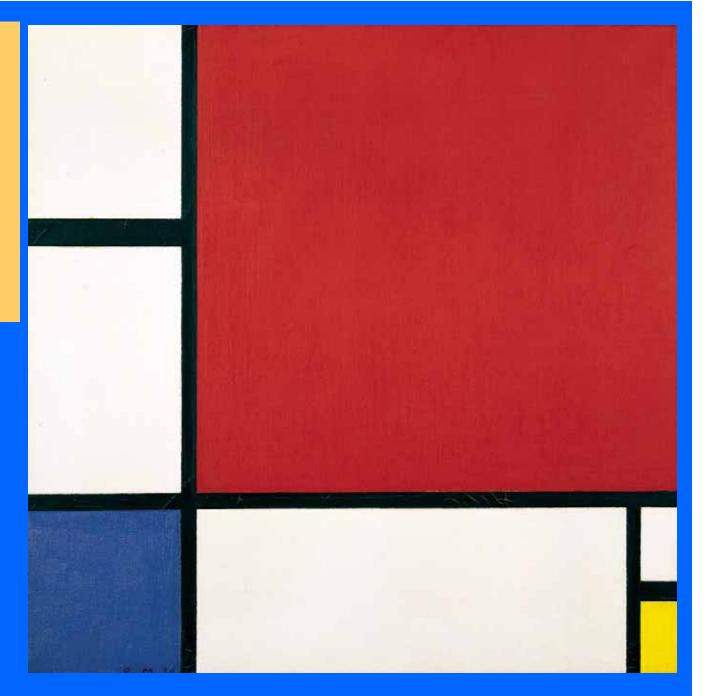


<u>Characteristics of The</u> <u>Stijl:</u>

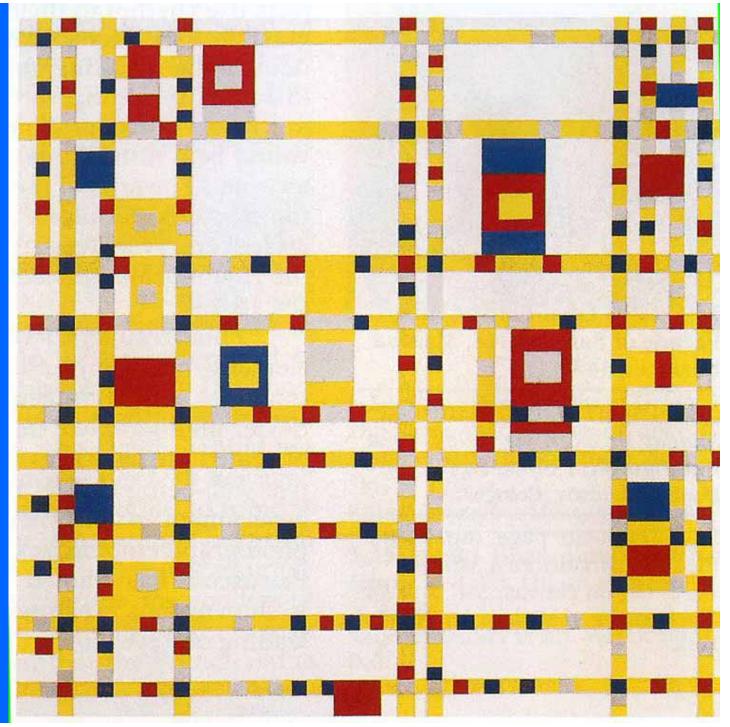
- Non objective and flat
- Geometry of the straight line, the square, and the rectangle
- Asymmetricality
- Use of pure primary colors with black and white.
- Relationship between positive and negative elements

Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* 1921. Oil on canvas Abstraction was in part an attempt to create a scientifically based, universal language of the senses, that would transcend ideologies such as nationalism, communism and fascism.

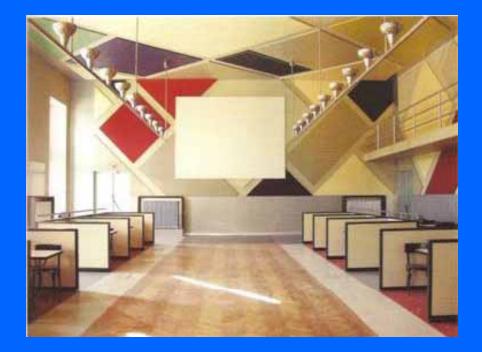
PIET MONDRIAN, *Composition in Red, Blue, and Yellow* 1930. Oil on canvas, 2' 4 5/8" x 1' 9 1/4". Private Collection.



Peit Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, 1942-43. Oil on Canvas, 50X50". Museum of Modern Art, NY



De Stijl – Design and Architecture



Theo Van Doesburg Cinema Hall. c. 1925, France



Théo Van Doesburg Staircase. c. 1925 Strasbourg **Theo van Doesburg , Cornelis Van Eesteren. and Cornelis Van Eesteren.** *Contra-Construction Project, Axonometric*. 1923. Gouache on lithograph, 22 1/2 x 22 1/2"



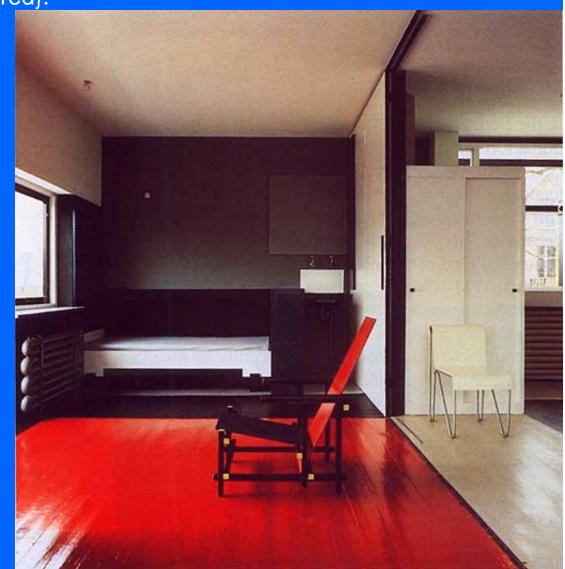


Gerrit Rietveld

(1888-1964), Dutch architect and furniture designer.

He was an apprentice in his father's cabinetmaking business and later studied architecture in Utrecht.

Gerrit Rietveld. *Chair* 1917 (Netherlands) Wood (lacquered}. 66x83x88cm



Gerrit Rietveld. *Chair* 1917 (Netherlands) Wood (lacquered}. 66x83x88cm





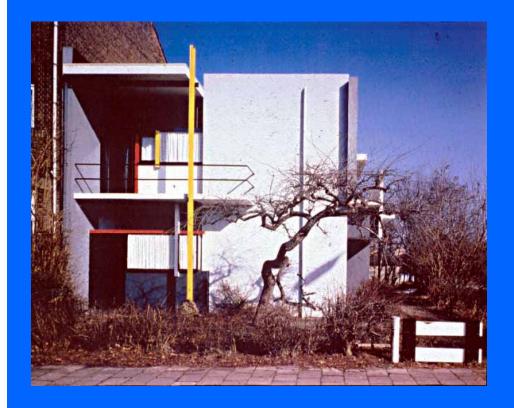


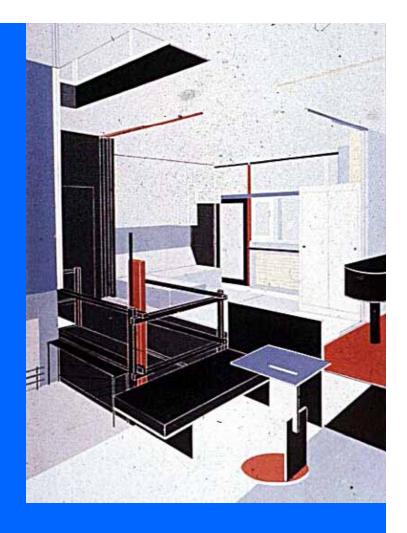
Gerrit Rietveld, Schroder House, 1924, Utrecht, Netherlands



Schroeder House Interior Drawing Utrecht, the Netherlands

Gerrit Rietveld 1924





Created close relationship between the inside and outside.





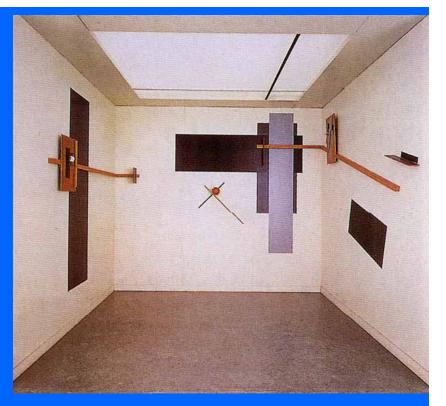












El Lissitzky, *Proun Space*, 1923, for Berlin exhibition



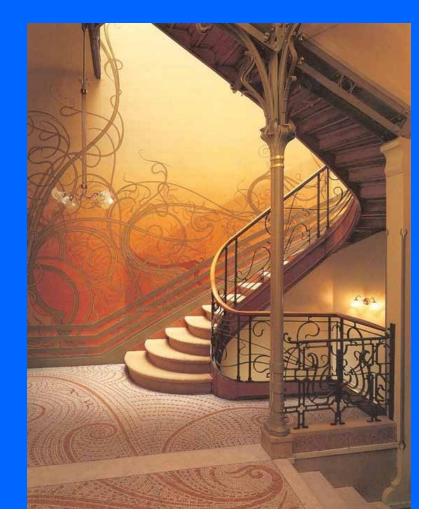
Gerrit Rietveld, *Schroder House*, 1924, Utrecht, Netherlands



Gerrit Rietveld. 1924 Interior of Schroeder House.



Comparison: Art Nouveau Victor Horta, (Belgian, 1861 - 1947) *Interior of the Tassel House*, Brussels. 1893



PIET MONDRIAN, *Composition in Red, Blue, and Yellow* 1930. Jean Arp, Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance, 1916-1917.

Kasimir Malevich *Black Square on a White Ground* (1914 1915)

GINO SEVERINI Armored Train, 1915.



Discuss the various reactions to Cubism by the following artistic movements: Orphism, Futurism, Dada, Suprematism and De Stijl.

Robert Delaunay, *Homage to Bleriot.* 1914.



GEORGES BRAQUE *The Portuguese* 1911.

