

30 Davies Street London W1

an introduction to **Lissitzky** (1890-1941)

Paintings, Drawings, Graphics and photographic material
from the archives of the TRETAKOV MUSEUM, Moscow

First London exhibition of the famous Russian experimentalist

27 September - 22 October 1966 Daily 10-6 pm Saturday 10-1 pm

28 Davies Street London W1

and
some
contemporaries

Grosvenor Gallery

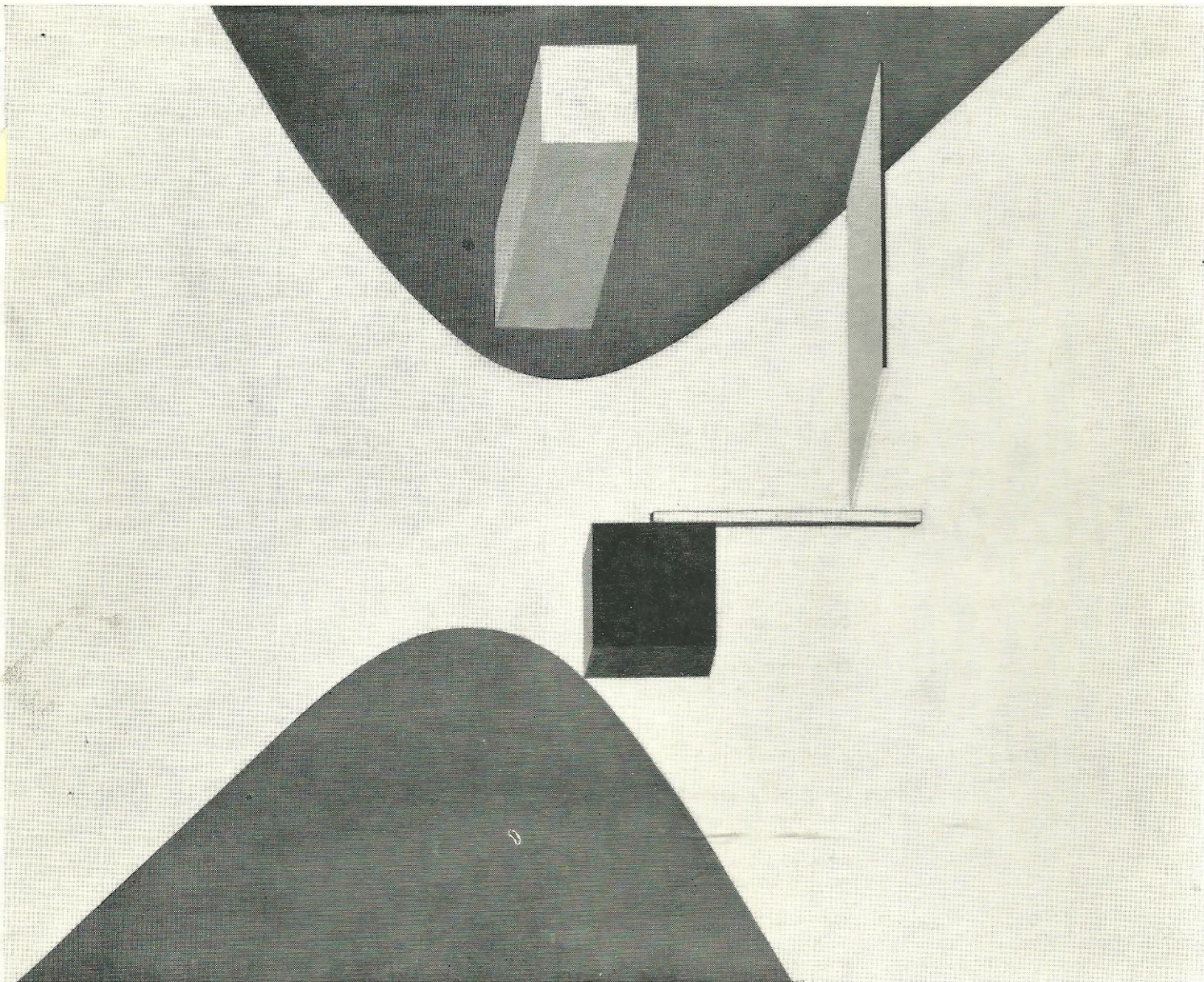
Telephone Mayfair 0891

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an introduction to **EI LISSITZKY**

Priced unpriced not
for sale.

27 September - 29 October 1966



Cat. 3

Grosvenor Gallery 28/30 Davies Street London W1 telephone Mayfair 0891 telegrams Sevenartz London

- | | | | | |
|----|--|------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Chad Gadya | 1918/19 | ink and gouache | $11\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{5}{8}$ |
| 2 | Chad Gadya | 1919
4000 | 11 coloured lithographs
(edition of 75)
approx. | $11\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ |
| 3 | Proun P23 No. 6 | 1919 | oil on canvas | $24\frac{1}{2} \times 30\frac{3}{8}$ |
| 4 | Proun Study 1A (Proun S.K.) | 1919
4000 | pencil, gouache | $6 \times 7\frac{5}{8}$ |
| 5 | Proun Lithographs –
set of 6 lithographs | 49/50
1919/23 | coloured and black/white,
partly with collage –
signed by the artist –
Published Hanover 1923 | approx. $23\frac{5}{8} \times 17\frac{1}{8}$ |
| 6 | Proun Study | c.1920
4000 | pencil, gouache | $11\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$ |
| 7 | Proun Study | c.1920
3800 | pencil, gouache | $10\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{4}$
(sight size $5\frac{7}{8} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$) |
| 8 | Proun Study 1E | c.1920
4000 | pencil, gouache | $7\frac{1}{8} \times 9$ |
| 9 | Proun Study | c.1920
4000 | pencil, gouache | $11 \times 7\frac{7}{8}$ |
| 10 | Proun Study | c. 1920 | pencil, gouache | $5 \times 9\frac{5}{8}$
<i>Collection Ella Winter</i> |
| 11 | Proun Study | c.1920 | pencil, gouache | $6\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$
<i>Collection Ella Winter</i> |
| 12 | Study for Proun 2D | c.1920 | pencil, gouache | $8\frac{3}{4} \times 7$
<i>Collection Ella Winter</i> |
| 13 | Proun Study | c.1920 | lithography, pencil | $10 \times 6\frac{1}{2}$
<i>Collection Ella Winter</i> |
| 14 | Tatlin Working on Third
International Statue | | pencil, gouache,
photomontage | $13 \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ |
| 15 | Sketch for Proun RVN 2 1923
(dated "Revon 23 in Bett") | | pencil, ink, gouache | $9\frac{7}{8} \times 9\frac{3}{4}$
<i>Collection Ella Winter</i> |
| 16 | Die Plastische Gestaltung der
elektro-mechanischen Schau
'Sieg über die Sonne'
1923 | 2800 | set of 10 coloured lithographs
each signed by the artist.
Published Hanover 1923 | approx. $21 \times 17\frac{1}{2}$ |
| 17 | 8 designs for 'Four Rules of
Arithmetic' 1928 | | coloured ink | approx $9\frac{3}{4} \times 25\frac{5}{8}$
<i>Collection Ella Winter</i> |

Photographic archives from the Tretyakov Museum, Moscow

The aim, and inevitable limitations, of this exhibition are summed up in its title "An Introduction to Lissitzky". There are no works by this artist in any public collections in Britain; and only rare examples in private hands. His achievement and influence is difficult to display, both because of the diversity of his talents and the fact that most of his work remains in Russia. Indeed few people have ever seen the series of paintings which engaged him from 1927 until his untimely death in 1941. Nevertheless his ideas and personality are clearly reflected in this exhibition, in the group of paintings called 'Prouns' (the name was based on the abbreviation of the Russian phrase "towards a new art"), the drawings and lithographs, rare copies of his book designs and typography, and the remarkable series of photographs from the archives of the Tretyakov Museum, Moscow, seen in the West for the first time.

Lissitzky is one of the key figures in 20th century art, in the widest sense, and very much part of the aesthetic and philosophical debate which preoccupied his contemporaries in Europe. For a complete understanding of his genius we must await the analysis in depth for which resources of a public institution are required.

The importance of Lissitzky's role as a creative artist and as the fertilising link between Russia and the West in the 'twenties is too complex to summarise in a few sentences. In the first place it is necessary to understand the preoccupation with the social role of art in Russia at the time of the revolution and in the first years of the Soviets: and equally important to place this debate in the context of the parallel concern of Western artists as manifested in the Bauhaus and de Stijl groups, which sought to infuse architecture, industrial design – indeed every-day environmental life – with the highest spiritual qualities of pure art. Lissitzky, who had been trained as an engineer in Germany, acted as the bridge between artists such as Malevich, Kandinsky, and the Pevsner brothers who, as Camilla Gray puts it, "argued that art was essentially a spiritual activity" and that to become an "artist-engineer . . . was to descend to the level of a craftsman", and the Constructivists led by Tatlin and Rodchenko who "insisted that the artist must become a technician". Being both a visionary and a technician Lissitzky formulated a synthesis between these opposing views, first defined in his famous lecture of 1921 "Proun – changing trains between painting and architecture". This synthesis he eventually expressed in a great variety of activities – painting, typography, book design, mass communication, i.e., posters and exhibition design, architecture and even the relationship of works of art to their environment.

After his engineering studies in Darmstadt, Lissitzky trained as an architect in Moscow; the third period of preparation for his historical role was the collaboration with Chagall and other Jewish artists in 1917. "It was from this Jewish tradition", says Camilla Gray, "that the first post-Revolutionary experiments in typography, which are among the first examples of 'modern' typographical design, were done". Chagall later appointed Lissitzky professor of architecture and graphic arts at the Vitebsk School, where he met Malevich, the link with the non-objectivist school.



Sir Herbert Read, in his *Concise History of Modern Painting*, indicates the role Lissitzky played in the European movement: "While Gropius was creating the Bauhaus in Weimar, El (Lazar) Lissitzky was attempting to set up a similar organisation in Moscow (the 'Proun') and when compelled to abandon Moscow, organised a Constructivist movement in Germany in association with Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, a Hungarian who came to Berlin in 1920 already imbued with Constructivist ideals. Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy formed their own group (which they called 'G') and made contact not only with the *De Stijl* group in Holland but also with Mies van der Rohe and other architects. In 1923 Moholy-Nagy joined the Bauhaus staff . . ."

This reference to Lissitzky 'abandoning' Moscow is confusing; some sources suggest that along with other prominent Russian artists he left the country because of internal dissensions and frustrations, while others claim that after the lifting of the economic

blockade in 1921 he was sent abroad officially to establish contact with Western artists. Certainly in that year he left for Germany where he met Schwitters, Hausmann, Grosz, Van Doesburg, Arp, Moholy-Nagy and the architects Hilberaier, Mies Van de Rohe, and Van Eesteren. He addressed conferences of Dadaists in Weimar and Constructivists in Dusseldorf and in the course of the next few years collaborated with Van Doesburg, Richter, and Arp in a series of publications and with Ehrenburg on the constructivist magazine *Veshch*. It was during this period that he began his famous photo-montage experiments.

In these years he acted as a link between the experimental arts of Russia and the West. In his student period he had undertaken a walking tour of Italy, studying architecture, copying mosaics and frescoes; he also visited Paris where he met his friend Zadkine. Thus his ideas were deeply rooted in European traditions, as well as projecting the ideal of a new social order. Alexander Dorner, Director of the Kaestnergesellschaft, who invited Lissitzky to Hanover in 1925, after his long illness in Switzerland, later wrote, "Of all the Russian painters none had such influence on Western art as El Lissitzky . . . (he) developed the vision of a world that was free from spatial tradition and more dynamic with inner movement than anything his Russian co-pioneers envisioned. This modest and quiet man was possessed by a messianic drive to liberate man's vision and thereby man's actions from the shackles of traditional absolutes."

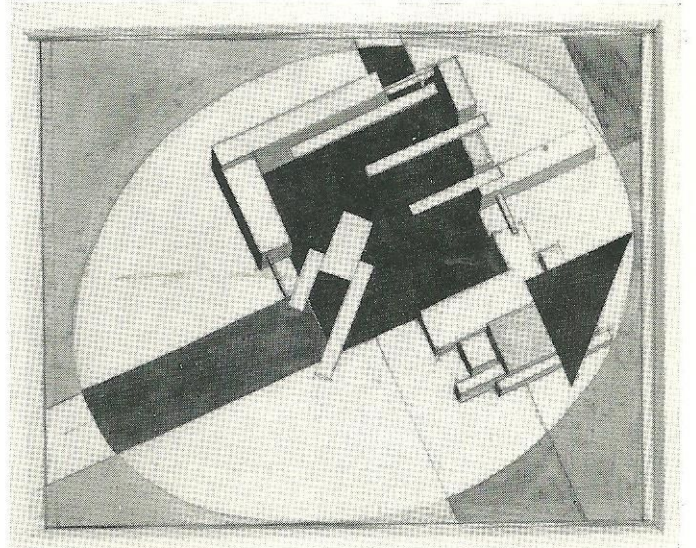
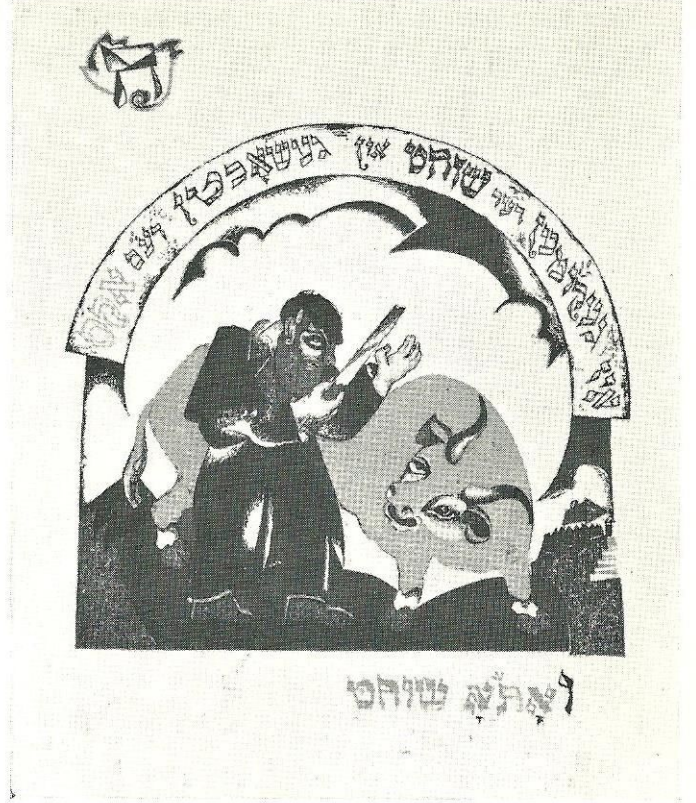
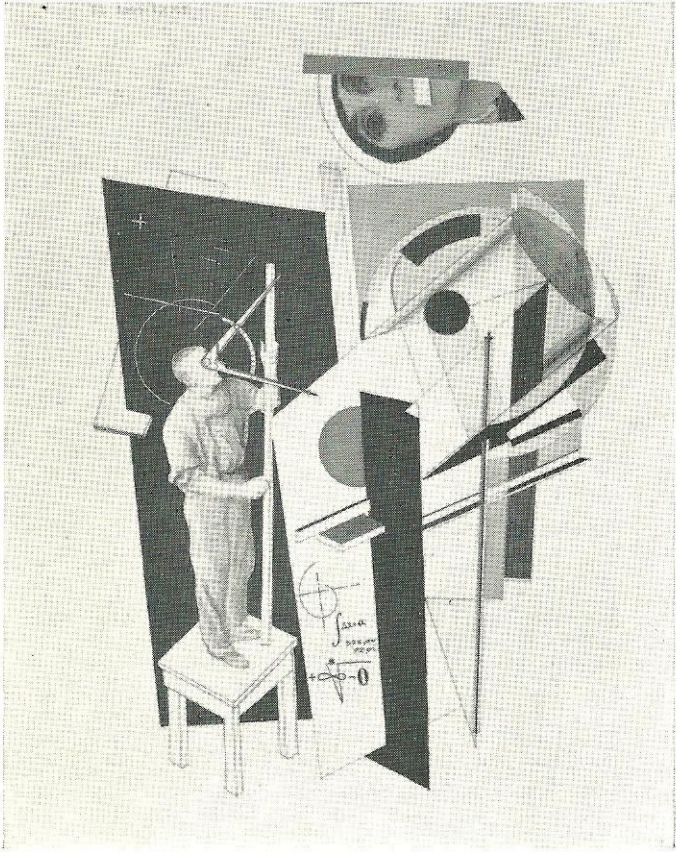
This is born out by Michael Seuphor: "No other Russian artist among those who were active in Central or Western Europe exercised such a radical influence on the course of art. This influence was felt, first of all, at the Bauhaus, through the teaching of Moholy-Nagy". It might further be noted that in 1928 Hannes Meyer, who collaborated with Lissitzky in Switzerland, became Director of the Bauhaus.

These statements reveal the power of Lissitzky's influence on those he met during this period. Before his breakdown with tuberculosis in 1923, he had organised the famous Russian Exhibition in Berlin, which was later shown in Amsterdam, in which one room was arranged along Constructivist lines. In his Hanover period he was invited to design a room of modern art for the International Dresden Exhibition, and later the famous room at the Hanover Museum where the works of art and the space they occupied were regarded as a single entity.

These architectural-environmental experiments, his exploitation of printing techniques, rather than drawing, in book and poster design, his pioneering work in typography and photo-montage, as well as his spatial paintings, greatly influenced artists connected with the Bauhaus and *di Stijl*, and thus the whole development of Western Art. Similarly on his return to Moscow in 1925, he was able to transmit Western ideas in his teaching at the Industrial Arts Workshop and his own work. From then on, until the end of his life in 1941, Lissitzky was principally engaged as the designer of exhibitions in Russia and abroad.

LISSITZKY Lazar (El) 1890-1941

- 1890 Born Pochnik, Smolensk, Russia.
- 1909 Rejected by St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, which operated a Jewish quota, and went to Darmstadt, Germany to study engineering and architecture.
- 1912 Visited Paris and met his friend the sculptor Zadkine. Exhibited for the first time at the St. Petersburg Artistic Association.
- 1913 Walking tour through Italy, studying old masters and copying frescoes and mosaics.
- 1915 Returned to Moscow and worked as apprentice architect; exhibited in mixed exhibitions.
- 1916/7 Exhibited in "Knaves of Diamonds" and "World of Art" exhibitions. Collaborated with Jewish artists on a series of childrens' books.
- 1917 Actively participated in Revolution.
- 1918 Designed first Soviet flags which were carried across Red Square on May 1st.
- 1919 Invited by Chagall to become head of Applied Arts Department at the Vitebsk School of Art; met Malevich who succeeded Chagall as Principal. Later founded departments on Architecture and Engraving and Printing. Executed first poster "Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge". Painted first "Proun", a series in which he tried to create a bridge between architecture and painting.
- 1921 Lectured on architecture and monumental painting at the "Vkhutemas", the Higher Industrial Arts School in Moscow; also taught at the Institute of Art Culture. Sent to Berlin to establish cultural contacts with the West. Met Schwitters, Hausmann, Grosz, Heartfield, Van Doesburg, Arp, Egging, Hans Richter, Moholy-Nagy and the architects Hilbersaimer, Mies Van der Rohe and Van Eesteren. Addressed conference of Dadaists at Weimar and a Constructivist congress at Dusseldorf.
- 1922 Arranged Russian exhibition in Berlin with one room on Constructivist principles (later shown in Amsterdam). Collaborated with Ilya Ehrenburg on constructivist magazine *Veshch* ('Object'). Publication of "Story of Two Squares" a children's book which established his new typographical style; a Dutch edition was published on the initiative of Theo Van Doesburg. First experiments with a synthesis of photography and drawing, which led to his famous photomontage posters. Lectured on Soviet Art in Berlin, Hanover, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague.
- 1923 Designed Mayakovsky's book of poems "For Reading Out Loud". Published "Sieg über die Sonne", album of 10 coloured lithographs, and the first "Proun" album of 6 lithographs in Hanover. First attack of tuberculosis. Entered sanatorium at Lucarno.
- 1924 From sanatorium contributed to *Europe* (Potsdam), Schwitters' *Merz* magazine and the Dutch *de Stijl* magazine. Collaborated with Arp on anthology of art between 1914 and 1924. Helped found *ABC* with group of Swiss architects and artists, one of whom Hannes Meyer became Director of the Bauhaus in 1928.
- 1925 Returned to Moscow and taught furniture and interior design at the "Vkhutemas" School.
- 1926 Commissioned to design room of modern art for the International Dresden Exhibition.
- 1927 Commissioned by Alexander Dorner to design "Room of Abstracts" for the Hanover Museum of Art.
- 1928 Appointed Chief Artist of the Soviet Pavilion at the International Press Exhibition at Cologne, which included a photomontage frieze, 24 meters long.
- 1929 Organised first Poligraphic exhibition in Moscow and Soviet section of "Film and Foto" in Stuttgart.
- 1930 Appointed Chief Soviet designer of Pavilions for the Dresden International Exhibition of Hygiene and the International Fur Exhibition at Leipzig.
- 1931 Chief Designer Permanent Building Exhibition, Moscow. Health begins to decline.
- 1932 Designed Soviet section at International Aviation Exhibition, Paris.
- 1934 Worked in sanatorium largely on book illustrations and photomontage.
- 1939 Designed Russian Restaurant for the New York International Fair.
- 1941 Designed Pavillion for Belgrade exhibition which was cancelled because of the war. Died in Moscow of tuberculosis.
- 1960 First one-man exhibition in Moscow of Lissitzky as painter, architect, book designer, photomontage artist and exhibition designer.
- 1965/6 Touring exhibition Abbemuseum Eindhoven, Kunsthal Basle and Kestner-Gesellschaft. Hanover.
- 1966 First one-man exhibition in Britain, Grosvenor Gallery London.



until 29 October some of Lissitzky's contemporaries

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