

**Two decades of experiment in Russian Art (1902-1922)**



1875-

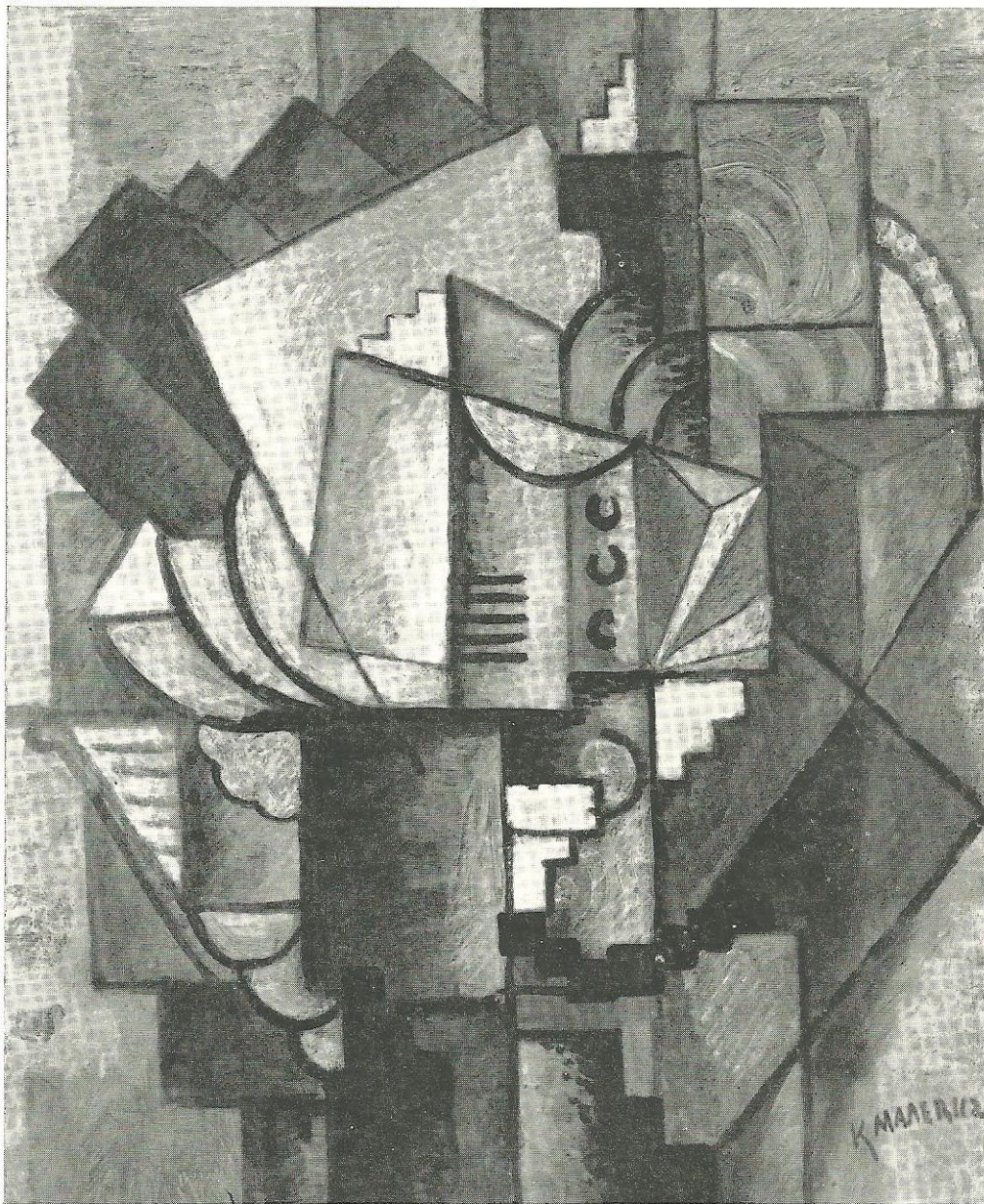
Cover: No 75 Tatlin *Illustration for book*

Kandinsky Malevich Chagall Larionov Gontcharova Lissitzky Archipenko Tatlin

No 13 Gontcharova *Rayonniste aquarelle*



No 69 Malevich *Cubist still life*



No 6 Archipenko *Woman combing her hair*



THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS EXHIBITION is its uniqueness, as pictures of this period are not numerous in the West, and many of these have never been seen here before. The Kandinsky Sketchbook of 1916 is one of only four in existence from his early period, and has never been exhibited anywhere before.

In the period covered by this exhibition, a new era of art was born in Russia. Long before the October Revolution, new art expressions were coming into being through these artists. They were pioneers, artistic revolutionaries during the Czarist regime, because for them art was an active force in society, not an amusement of the richer classes.

With the Revolution they came into their own, and from 1917-1921 controlled artistic life and thought in Russia. The new movements developed against the most dramatic change of political background, and seemed for a time as if they would survive in the new era. But the new art was as incomprehensible to the Bolshevik working classes as it had been to the Czarist middle classes. Only the most cultured leaders continued to support these artists, and by 1921 all official tolerance was dissipated while the artists had fallen into a state of war among themselves as to whether or not they could serve the State with integrity.

Inside two decades one of the most influential revolutions in the history of art had run its course—in Russia. But it affected the development of all forms of twentieth century art.

MALEVICH'S aim was to shed the load of the objective world, to free the artist of all except the supremacy of pure feeling or perception in the pictorial arts. His simple geometrical forms in increasingly complex designs were based largely, as he himself said, on the sensations of flying—the infinite order of space and the geometrical aerial views of cities. The historical 'Black Square' of 1915 was the first purely geometrical abstraction and marked the beginning of Suprematism.

As early as 1910, KANDINSKY painted the first free abstract painting in Europe. Some recognisable objects could be seen in his pictures until 1914, but after his return to Russia in the following year he came more and more under the Suprematist influence of ordered geometrical composition, the circles and straight lines of Malevich.

The Rayonist Movement was simultaneous and equally part of the new art movement, but without the lasting influence of Suprematism. LARIONOV, its founder,

was said to be first inspired by the 1906 Turner Exhibition in London. Rayonism was one of the first attempts to free the feeling for light itself from its attachment to objects and colour, to explore the abstract interplay of colour and lines of force within and beyond the formal object. GONTCHAROVA was always closely associated with Larionov, and both of them with Diaghilev, for whom they later designed many ballets.

Russian Constructivism sprang from Picasso's Cubism. TATLIN took *collage* further, employing more varied materials in his reliefs and achieving more abstract form. Later he turned to industrial materials rather than the traditional ones, and from there it was a short step to engineering, architecture and public monuments such as the famous Monument to the Third International. (See Lissitzky's picture in this exhibition 'Tatlin working on the Model of the Monument to the Third International').

LISSITZKY became important in the Suprematist Movement after the October Revolution. His compositions called 'Prouns' are transitional between painting and architecture, and were based on Malevich's perspective drawings. He worked briefly with Chagall before moving into Malevich's world. He had absorbed Suprematism so thoroughly that for him it was the natural art form of the modern world. 'Why do you call our modern art abstract?' he said. 'Is a radio wave abstract or realistic?' He went to Germany in the early twenties, where he continued his Suprematist activities and became a powerful influence on abstract art in Europe, before returning to the Soviet Union.

CHAGALL was dismayed by the 'earthbound' lack of feeling in pure Cubist painting. With his natural poetry and emotional response to the basic themes of birth, death and marriage, he achieved a new warmth of colour and lyricism of feeling within the precepts of Cubism. For a short while in 1917, he returned from Paris to his native Vitebsk as First Minister of Arts in the Revolutionary Government, but his teaching was undermined by the Suprematists. After a period of designing for the Jewish State Theatre in Moscow he made his way back to Paris where he was still famous after eight years absence.

ARCHIPENKO was the pioneer of Cubist sculpture, freeing it from its dependency on Cubist painting. He used deliberately non-conventional materials—polychrome glass, wood and metal together—and reversed the accepted form of solids. His substitution of voids for solids still has enormous validity in sculpture today.



**Alexander Archipenko** born Kiev, 1887. Lives in U.S.A.

- 1 Seated black torso *bronze* 1909
- 2 Repose *bronze* 1911
- 3 Maternite dans les Rochers *bronze* 1912
- 4 The Boxers *bronze* 1913
- 5 Head *bronze* 1913
- 6 Woman combing her hair *bronze* 1915
- 7 The Portuguese *bronze* 1916
- 8 Still life table and nude *sculpto painting* 1915 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×17 $\frac{3}{8}$
- 9 Vase with flower *sculpto painting* 1919 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ ×12 $\frac{1}{4}$

**Marc Chagall** born Vitebsk, 1887. Lives in France

- 10 Nude *tempera* 1910 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×13 $\frac{1}{2}$
- 11 Still life *oil* 1911 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×13 $\frac{1}{4}$
- 12 The Russian Soldiers *tempera* 1912 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×12 $\frac{1}{2}$

**Natalie Gontcharova** born environs Rayonniste Moscow, 1881. Lives in France

- 13 Rayonniste aquarelle 1911 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ ×5 $\frac{3}{8}$
- 14 Ornement electrique *pencil drawing* 1912 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×9 $\frac{1}{2}$
- 15 Rayonniste drawing *pencil* 1912 9 $\frac{7}{8}$ ×7 $\frac{1}{4}$
- 16 Rayonniste drawing *pencil* 1912 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×9 $\frac{1}{2}$
- 17 Electricitee *pencil drawing* 1912 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ ×9 $\frac{3}{8}$
- 18 Rayonniste drawing *pencil* 1912 13×10 $\frac{1}{4}$

**Wassily Kandinsky** born Moscow, 1866. Died France, 1944

- 19 Landscape *oil on carton* 1902
- 20 House and landscape *oil on carton* 1907 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×13
- 21 Murnau landscape *oil on board* 1909 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×27 $\frac{1}{2}$
- 22-29 Title page and contents of Kandinsky's notebook 1916 10×13 $\frac{1}{2}$
- 30 Abstract landscape *india ink* 1919 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ ×14

**Michel Larionov** born Teraspol, 1881. Lives in France

- 31 La Rissa *oil on canvas circa 1907-1910* 28×37  
32 Composition *oil, tempera 1907* 14½×9¾  
33 Composition *pencil, watercolour 1907* 10 × 7¾  
34 Composition *Aquarelle 1907* 10 × 7¾  
35 Rayonniste composition *watercolour 1910-11* 12 × 8  
36 Rayonniste landscape *ink, tempera, oil 1916* 12½×8½

**El Lissitsky** born Smolensk, 1890. Died Moscow, 1947

- 37 Tatlin working on 3rd International Statue *collage 1917* 11½×9  
38 Chad Gadya *watercolour 1916-1917* 9×11  
39 Proun construction *watercolour 1920* 6×3¾  
40 Proun construction *watercolour 1920* 5½×4½  
41 Proun No. 23 *Tempera and oil 1923* 30¾×24½  
42-52 Chad Gadya *11 Lithographs* edition 75 copies, Kiev 1917 9½×11  
53-58 Proun *Lithographs* No. 49 of edition of 50 copies, Moscow, Berlin 1919-23 23½×17½  
59-68 Die Plastische Gestaltung der Elektro-Mechanischen Schau  
*Illustrations to 'Sieg über die Sonne', lithographs* No. 59, of edition of 75 copies,  
Moscow 1920-21 20¾×17½

**Kasimir Malevich** born Kiev, 1878. Died Leningrad, 1935

- 69 Cubist still life *oil on board 1914* 21¾×18½  
70 Rocket-Sputnik study 1 *pencil drawing 1919-1920* 5½×5½ ✓  
71 Rocket-Sputnik study 2 *pencil drawing 1919-1920* 4½×5 ✓  
72 Rocket-Sputnik study *watercolour 1919-1920* 4½×4¾ ✓  
73 Suprematist construction *watercolour 1919-1920* 3½×3½ ✓  
74 Suprematist construction *watercolour 1919-1920* 4½×3¾ ✓

**Vladimir Tatlin** born Moscow, 1885. Died U.S.S.R. 1956

- 75 Illustration for book combining cubist and construction concept  
*watercolour 1916* 6×7½

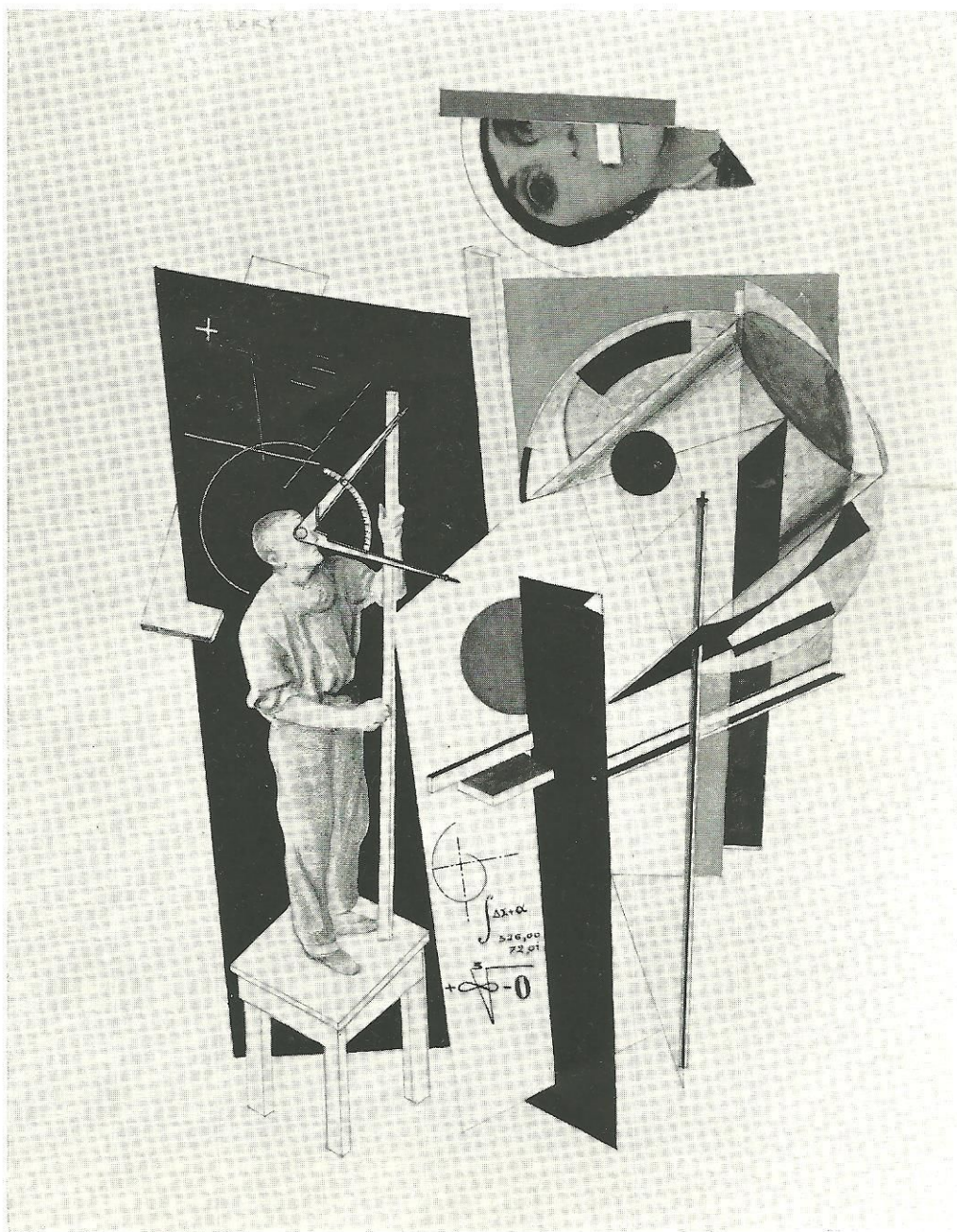
No 31 Larionov *La Rissa*



No 30 Kandinsky *Abstract landscape*



No 37 Lissitsky Tatlin working on 3rd International Statue



No 12 Chagall *The Russian Soldiers*



### **Forthcoming Exhibitions**

Wladimir Favorsky *woodcuts*

Ota Janecek *paintings, watercolours, drawings*

Enrico Baj *collages*

Andrea Cascella *sculpture and drawings*

**The Grosvenor Gallery 15 Davies Street W1 Mayfair 2782 · 15 March to 14 April 1962**