



Viktor Mikhailovich Vasnetsov (1848–1926), *Tsar Ivan The Terrible*, 1897, 247 × 132cm, Tretyakov Gallery

Royal Academy 'Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932', 11 February — 17 April 2017

- This talk was inspired by an exhibition at the Royal Academy on Russian revolutionary art from 1917 to 1932. I have extended the period in order to explain the background to this revolutionary period.
- A bit of background, as you may know, Russia is by far the largest country in the world and extends over eleven time zones. It is relatively thinly populated, although it has the largest population of any European country (143 million), and it has vast forests, in fact the largest area of forest on the planet with more than a fifth of all the world's trees.
- It was ruled by the Mongols from the 13th century until they were defeated by **Ivan the Great** in 1480, just before Columbus discovered America (1492) and the Tudor period started in the UK at the Battle of Bosworth Field (1485). (CLICK) The notorious **Ivan the Terrible** (1530-1584) became the first Tsar

of all Russia in 1547, and to put that in context it was the year our Henry VIII died. The reign of the Tsars continued for **370 years until Nicholas II abdicated in 1917.**

- This picture incidentally is a much later representation painted during the period I am about to cover by Viktor Vasnetsov (pronounced 'vaz-net-sof').

NOTES

EARLY RUSSIA

- Russia was ruled by the **Khan of the Golden Horde until Ivan the Great** defeated them and freed Russia from the Mongols in 1480. In the year that Henry VIII died, 1547, **Ivan the Terrible** became the first Tsar of Russia. On 15 March 1917, **370 years later, Nicholas II abdicated.**
- Ivan the Terrible was known for his fits of temper and mental instability. In a fit of anger he murdered his eldest son leaving his incompetent younger son, Fyodor I, to inherit the throne leading to the end of the dynasty and the beginning of the Time of Troubles (1598-1613).

BEFORE 1917

- See <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/feb/12/revolution-russian-art-1917-1932-review> . "After the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, no social group was more caught up in the revolutionary spirit than artists, composers and writers. And their ambitions – quite possibly for the first time in history – were identical with those of the country's rulers. Both believed that art could have a purpose beyond itself, that it could help to remake an entire nation ...". Artists believed "the only way to serve the people was through the universal language of abstraction".

- Russian avant garde 1890-1930
 - '1863 revolt of the 14'. Fourteen artists were expelled from St. Petersburg Academy of Arts as they refused to paint an exam picture on a given topic. They demanded contemporary Russian subjects, not classical
 - 1870s – Mother Russia, Nesterov, Levitan, Society of Itinerant Exhibitions – suffering of the people, Kramskoi, Repin, Yaroshenko
 - Shishkin a song of praise to Mother Russia, detail – ‘the accountant of leaves’
 - Kuindzhi – melancholic lonely landscapes
 - 1900 Bilibin Russian Folk Tales
 - Mikhail Vrubel (1856-1910)
 - A, Benois, movement like Art Nouveau, art for art’s sake, Diaghilev formed World of Art in 1898. Combined European art with Russian – known as the Russian Revival. Mikhail Larionov, Goncharova
 - **Jack of Diamonds** group, 1910-1917.
 - **Donkey's Tail**, 1912-13 was a more radical group.
 - **Rayonism**, 1912-14. In 1912, Goncharova and her lifelong partner Mikhail Larionov left in protest at the group's reliance on French art, and organised their own rival exhibitions. It was then that Rayonism began.
 - **The Blue Rider**, 1911-14. Goncharova was a member of the Blue Rider group from the beginning in 1911. In 1921 she moved to Paris and stayed there all her life.
 - Realist art – Valentin Serov (semi-Impressionist), Mikhail Vrubel, Abram Arkhipov

DURING THE REVOLUTION

- Vasili Kandinsky
- Marc Chagall
- Russian Futurism — Natalia Goncharova
- Suprematism — Malevich
- Constructivism

AFTER

- Socialist Realism, abstract art banned, no foreign art shown for 30 years, many artists denounced, suppressed. Many left the country.
- There was an unofficial art movement in the 1960s but it was dangerous to belong. Modern art continued to be officially banned until the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

ROYAL ACADEMY

- “Renowned artists including **Kandinsky, Malevich, Chagall and Rodchenko** were among those to live through the fateful events of 1917, which ended centuries of Tsarist rule and shook Russian society to its foundations.
- Amidst the tumult, the arts thrived as debates swirled over what form a new “people’s” art should take. But the optimism was not to last: by the end of 1932, Stalin’s brutal suppression had drawn the curtain down on creative freedom.
- Taking inspiration from a remarkable exhibition shown in Russia just before Stalin’s clampdown, we will mark the historic centenary by focusing on the 15-year period between 1917 and 1932 when **possibilities initially**

seemed limitless and Russian art flourished across every medium.

- This far-ranging exhibition will – for the first time – survey the entire artistic landscape of post-Revolutionary Russia, encompassing **Kandinsky's** boldly innovative compositions, the dynamic abstractions of **Malevich** and the Suprematists, and the emergence of **Socialist Realism**, which would come to define Communist art as the only style accepted by the regime.
- We will also include photography, sculpture, filmmaking by pioneers such as Eisenstein, and evocative propaganda posters from what was a golden era for graphic design. The human experience will be brought to life with a full-scale recreation of an apartment designed for communal living, and with everyday objects ranging from ration coupons and textiles to brilliantly original Soviet porcelain.
- Revolutionary in their own right, together these works capture both the idealistic aspirations and the harsh reality of the Revolution and its aftermath.” (Royal Academy)



Mikhail Vrubel (1856–1910), *Portrait of Savva Mamontov*, 1897, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, the largest collection of Russian fine art in the world

Imperial Academy of Arts, St Petersburg, built in 1789 on the Neva River

- Moscow was the original capital of Russia but from the beginning of the 18th century it was St. Petersburg (and from 1918 onwards Moscow again became the capital). **From 1757** Russian art was controlled by the **all-powerful Saint Petersburg Academy of Art** renamed the **Imperial Academy of Arts** when this building was commissioned in 1789. It was not the earliest national Academy but it was founded 11 years before our Royal Academy.
- It was in effect a government department that controlled art throughout Russia for over a hundred years but by the 1870s the new millionaire merchants of Moscow created a modern movement in Russian art.

NOTES

- Saint Petersburg was founded by Tsar Peter the Great in 1703, it was renamed Petrograd in 1914, meaning 'Peter's City' to remove the German parts of the name and then Leningrad in 1924 until 1991 when it reverted to its original name.

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Mikhail Vrubel (1856–1910),
Portrait of Savva Mamontov,
1897, Tretyakov Gallery,
Moscow



Mikhail Vrubel (1856–1910), *Portrait of Savva Mamontov*, 1897, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, the largest collection of Russian fine art in the world

Imperial Academy of Arts, St Petersburg, built in 1789 on the Neva River

- The leading art patron of this new group of businessmen was **Savva Mamontov (1841-1918), a Russian railway tycoon**. He surrounded himself with avant garde artists, composers, singers, architects, writers and actors. The aim of the **Mamontov Circle** was to create a **new progressive, modern Russian culture**. In 1870 he created an artists colony that included most of the best Russian artists of the beginning of the 20th century. They sought to recapture the spirit of medieval Russian art which might sound contradictory for a modern art movement but think of the Pre-Raphaelites who were inspired by the art before Raphael to produce a new revolutionary style of painting. Later, **Mamontov was financially ruined** (in 1900) and died in 1918 after a long illness.
- This painting is from the 'Moscow period' of Mikhail Vrubel. He was criticised by the Academy where he had been a brilliant

student but was supported by Mamontov and other patrons. Later, Vrubel started breaking forms into cubes and his work was influential on the young Pablo Picasso who called him a genius. Vrubel's mental health started to deteriorate and he lost his sight. Distraught by his inability to paint he stood by an open window and died of pneumonia a week later.

NOTES

- Leading artists of this period included Konstantin Korovin, Rafail Levitsky, Mikhail Nesterov, Ilya Repin, Vasily Polenov, Valentin Serov, **Mikhail Vrubel**, the brothers Vasnetsov, sculptors Viktor Hartmann and Mark Antokolsky

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Ivan Kramskoi (1837-1887), *Portrait of the painter Ivan Shishkin*, 1873, 112 × 80 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

Ivan Kramskoi (pronounced eye-von kram-ski', 1837-1887),
Portrait of the painter Ivan Shishkin, 1873, 112 × 80 cm,
Tretyakov Gallery

- Going back a generation, this was painted by **Ivan Kramskoi** (pronounced 'eye-von kram-ski'), the leader of a breakaway group of fourteen artists who left the St. Petersburg Academy. They rejected history painting, regarded as the highest form of painting, as irrelevant to the people and refused to paint a history painting for the Academy's annual competition.
- This was known as the "revolt of fourteen" and they called themselves **The Wanderers** (Peredvizhniki, pronounced 'piradis-ny-kee') as their aim was to travel round Russia and paint what they saw. Their subject matter was contemporary Russian subjects, village life and the Russian landscape, not the classical works of the Academy. One of the leading landscape painters of the group was **Ivan Shishkin** (pronounced 'ivon shoosh-kin') the subject of this painting and we will see his work next.
- **Kramskoi formed the Artel of Artists**, a cooperative association (artel) of democratically-minded artists who thought

the regimented training and examination of the Academy was irrelevant in the modern world. Similar, in some ways, as I said, to the **Pre-Raphaelites** breaking away from the stranglehold of our **Royal Academy** and the **Impressionists** breaking away from the **French Academy of Fine Arts** (*Academie des Beaux-Arts*, founded much earlier in 1648).

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Ivan Shishkin (1832–1898), *Morning in a Pine Forest*, 1886, 139 x 213 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, formerly signed by Konstantin Savitsky (1844–1905)

- This is perhaps Shishkin's (pronounced 'eye-von shoosh-kin') **most famous work**, *Morning in a Pine Forest*. He was one of the **most popular landscape artists in Russia** and became known as "**Tsar of the Woods**". This is typical of his work, it was a **song of praise to Mother Russia**. *The Morning in a Pine Forest* became very **popular and was reproduced** (CLICK) on many consumer goods including a range of chocolate bars (the "Clumsy Bear" chocolates by Krasny Oktyabr, pronounced 'kraz-nia ok-tee-ber'). According to one poll, **the painting is the second most popular in Russia** (behind *Bogatyrs*, pronounced 'bog-a-tee'), 1898, by Viktor Vasnetsov, which shows three medieval Russian bogatyr on horseback, a bogatyr was like our Knights of the Round Table and today the word means 'hero').
- (CLICK) There was some confusion as it was **originally signed**

by Konstantin Savitsky as he painted the bears but his signature was removed and it now regarded as **entirely by Shishkin**. This is a typical Shishkin which emphasises the vastness and eternal quality of the Russian forests. He often showed a close-up view with the tops of the trees cut off to immerse us in the beauty and wildness of the forest.

- Increasingly, though, in the 1880s the Wanderers lost their status as progressives and were even invited to join the Imperial Academy of Arts. Young artists were turning to Western art for inspiration. The Wanderers restricted their membership and became institutionalised although later Soviet critics recast them as precursors to Socialist Realism, which we will hear more about later.

NOTES

- “The coniferous forest motif that Shishkin refers to in this picture is typical of his work. Evergreen pine and spruce emphasise the feeling of greatness and eternity of the natural world. The compositional technique is often found in the artist’s paintings, when the tops of trees are cut off by the edge of the canvas, and huge powerful trees seem to not even fit into a fairly large canvas. A peculiar landscape interior appears. The viewer has the impression that he was inside an impassable thicket where the bears sitting on a broken pine tree feel comfortable. They were depicted by K. A. Savitsky, who told his family: "The painting was sold for 4 thousand, and I am a participant in the 4th share." Further Savitsky reported that he had to put his signature on the painting, but then he removed it, thereby giving up copyright” (translated from Russian by Google)

- Another painting by Shishkin is *Sosnovy Bor* or *Pine Forest*. “*Sosnovy Bor* (1872) is a "portrait" of a thoroughly studied forest, where the artist himself grew up. A portrait that is deeply true both in the general formula and in small details, a portrait solemn in its structure, requiring a certain audience distance and at the same time openly personal in relation to the object. When characterising Shishkin’s works, their indissoluble artistic integrity is revealed, in them one quality does not exist without another. So, in his canvases, neither fluttering butterflies against the backdrop of a mighty ship forest, nor bears looking with lust at a tree with a beehive in a pine forest, or wildflowers dotting the golden sea of rye and painted with reverent attention do not look discordant. This is a single living world of nature in all possible for the image of the fullness of its incarnations. Shishkin sought to identify, capture the sustainable values of the landscape. He created images in which nature expressed itself almost in an absolute degree. The magnificent structure of his works, derived primarily from the object itself, is largely based on the constant correlation of small and huge, ephemeral and eternal.” (translated from Russian by Google)

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Shishkin

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morning_in_a_Pine_Forest



Valentin Serov (1865–1911),
*Girl with Peaches (Portrait of
Vera S. Mamontova)*, 1887, 91
× 85 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

Valentin Serov (pronounced 'ser-off', 1865–1911), *Girl with Peaches (Portrait of Vera S. Mamontova)*, 1887, 91 × 85 cm, Tretyakov Gallery

- This is **Valentin Serov's** famous painting *Girl with Peaches*. Described as his greatest work and even the "**the masterpiece of Russian painting**". He was one of the leaders of the semi-Impressionist style seen in this painting. He was born in Saint Petersburg, the son of a parents who were both composers. He was encouraged in his art and studied in Moscow and Paris. His earliest works concentrated on light and colour and a fresh picturesque perception of the world. He is seen as an early Russian impressionist although at the time he painted this he was not aware of French Impressionism and his style is derived from his study of Frans Hals (c. 1582-1666) and Diego Valázquez (1599-1660).
- The painting is direct and full of light. He has captured the freshness and the quality of light as it streams in from behind the sitter. This complex **contre jour**, or against the light composition uses the light to create an aura or glow around

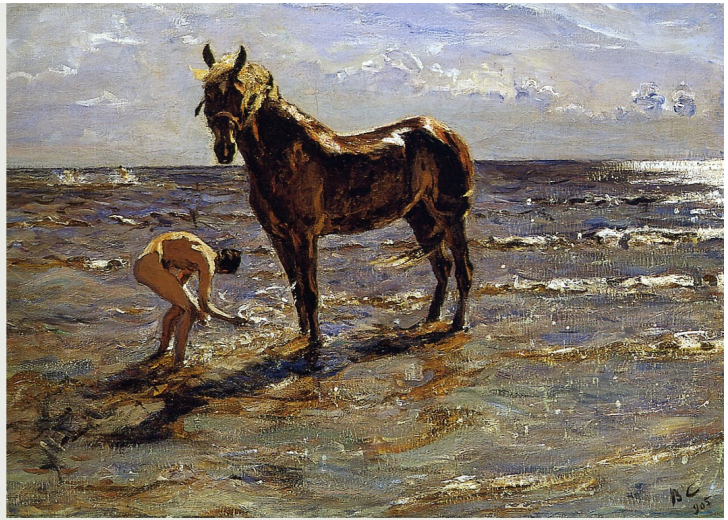
the sitter.

- The sitter is **Vera Mamontova**, the 11-year old daughter of **Savva Mamontov**, the millionaire I mentioned who created the artists' colony. Incidentally, Mamontova is the female form of Mamontov.
- Serov later recalled, "**All I wanted was freshness, that special freshness that you can always feel in real life and don't see in paintings. I painted it for over a month and tortured her, poor child, to death, because I wanted to preserve the freshness in the finished painting, as you can see in old works by great masters.**" In 1887 the painting won first prize at the Exhibition of the Moscow Society of Lovers of Art.

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Valentin Serov (1865–1911), *Bathing of a Horse*, 1905, 72 × 99 cm, Russian Museum

Valentin Serov (1865–1911), *Portrait of Princess Olga Orlova*, 1911, 237.5 × 160cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Valentin Serov (1865–1911), *Bathing of a Horse*, 1905, 72 × 99 cm, Russian Museum

Valentin Serov (1865–1911), *Portrait of Princess Olga Orlova*, 1911, 237.5 × 160cm, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

- Another painting by Serov who joined **The Wanderers** and took on important commissions including a portrait of a grand duke and a princess. He married in 1889 and his wife and children were often the subject of his paintings. He taught in the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (from 1897 to 1909) and influenced the next generation of Russian artists. His best works are regarded as among **the greatest work of Russian realistic art**.
- **He is still very popular and a major exhibition in Moscow in 2016 had crowds queueing round the block in sub-zero temperatures. On the day Vladimir Putin visited the exhibition the crowds were so great the doors of the museum were broken down. The Minister of Culture ordered the gallery to stay open and provide porridge and hot tea to the people in the queue. That's how popular he still is.**

NOTES

- 400,000 attended the Serov exhibition in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow and temperatures were -10°C and snow was falling. His most famous work *Girl with Peaches* was in the exhibition.



Natalia
Goncharova
(1881-1962),
Self-portrait,
1907



Natalia Goncharova
(1881-1962),
Rayonist Lilies,
1913, 91 x 75 cm,
Perm Art Museum

Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962), *Self-portrait*, 1907

Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962), *Rayonist Lilies*, 1913, 91 x 75 cm, Perm Art Museum

- Moving forward a few years, in 1910, a group of Russian artists led by **Natalia Goncharova** founded **Jack of Diamonds** (1910-1917), the most important group of avant-garde artists in Russia between 1910 and 1917.
- Their first exhibition was in 1910 and included work by **French Cubists**, and by the Russian artist **Wassily Kandinsky** (pronounced 'vass-ily kan-din-ski'), who was living in Germany at the time. Goncharova and her fellow artists were strongly **influenced by Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse**. **Kazimir Malevich**, who I talk more about later, also participated in the first exhibition.
- **Goncharova** was a member of the avant-garde **Der Blaue Reiter** group from its founding in 1911 which I also talk more about later. The following year she left **Jack of Diamonds** because of its reliance on French art and with her lifelong partner Mikhail Larionov (pronounced 'mick-heel larry-own-off')

invented **Rayonism** (1912-1914), one of Russia's first abstract art movements which **pre-dated the abstract art of Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich**. Goncharova developed Rayonism after hearing a series of lectures about **Futurism by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti** (1876-1944) **in Moscow**.

- The Futurists took speed, technology and modernity as their inspiration but **the Rayonists sought an art that floated beyond abstraction, outside time and space, and to break the barriers between the artist and the public**. The name comes from the use of dynamic rays of contrasting colour, representing lines of reflected light from various objects. Cubism breaks down forms into geometric shapes and Rayonism breaks down appearances into rays of light. In their literature they described Rayonism as naturally **encompassing all existing styles and forms of the art of the past**.



Natalia Goncharova, performance art, 1913
on the streets of Moscow



Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962, aged 81), *Cyclist*, 1913, 79 x 105 cm

Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962, aged 81), *Cyclist*, 1913, 79 x 105 cm

- In 1913 Goncharova and her fellow artists walked through the streets of Moscow with symbols on their faces and she would walk **topless with symbols painted on her chest**. It was perhaps the first performance art ever staged and it was used to create publicity for their forthcoming exhibition. But she didn't need much publicity as she was already well known, as she had been **charged with obscenity and had her paintings confiscated**. She said, "**The authorities think a woman artist should not paint the female nude so explicitly**".
- Her exhibition featured an astonishing 800 works. It was an astounding success and captivated Russian society including **Sergei Diaghilev**. He commissioned her to work on costumes and backdrops for his **Ballet Russes**. She moved to **Paris in 1921 and lived there for the rest of her life**, becoming a key figure in the city's cutting-edge art scene. She became famous for this **Cubo-Futurist style** which we see in the work *Cyclist*. She taught American artists and her fame spread and she started to sell in Chicago and New York. Goncharova's artistic

output was immense, wide-ranging and at times controversial. The aftermath of the Russian Revolution meant that it became impossible for her to return to Russia.

- During her dazzling and sometimes controversial career she created paintings, sculptures and religious series, **refusing to let gender define her artistic approach**. She also worked on stage sets, illustrated socialist newspapers and designed dresses.

Notes

The sign behind the cyclist says шелк, pronounced 'shalk', meaning 'silk', and the right (шляпа, pronounced 'shlapa') we see the first three letters of the word that means 'hat'. I don't know what нит (pronounced 'neet') means other than 'nit' or they could be the first three letters of "нитка", meaning "thread".

BIO:GONCHAROVA

- Natalia Goncharova was an early leader in the Russian avant-garde. Her experiments in art and design led the way for other artists.
- She was born in the Tula Oblast region and her father was an architect. She grew up in the countryside and she moved with her family to Moscow when she was 11. When she was 20 she was accepted by the prestigious Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. She studied to become a sculptor and exhibited in major Russian salons. At the turn of the century women were denied the right to gain a diploma so she left the Moscow School in 1909 to join a private studio where she could study male and female nudes. When she was 19 she met **Mikhail Larionov**, a fellow student, and from then on they worked side-by-side and remained together for the rest of

their lives.

- In 1910 she and a number of other students were expelled for imitating European modernism. The students formed the **Jack of Diamonds**, a radical independent exhibiting group of avant garde artists. The group split in half in 1912 to form the more provocative **Donkey's Tail** and at their first exhibition she exhibited 50 paintings. The organisation broke with European art to form a uniquely Russian modern art. The exhibition was controversial and her work was confiscated as it was deemed obscene and blasphemous because it was named after the rear end of a donkey and because she painted explicit female nudes and women were not permitted to paint religious icons.
- At this time her works show the influence of Futurism with which she mixed Cubist elements. She became famous for this Cubo-Futurist style which we see in the work *Cyclist*. In 1911 she developed **Rayonism**, one of the first abstract art movements.
- She became famous for her shocking behaviour, for example, she would paint symbols on her face and chest and walk topless through the streets.
- In 1913 her astonishing exhibition featured some 800 works. It attracted the attention of Sergei Diaghilev and he commissioned her to work on costumes and backdrops for his Ballet Russes. She moved to Paris and lived there for the rest of her life, becoming a key figure in the city's cutting-edge art scene. Goncharova's artistic output was immense, wide-ranging and at times controversial.
- During her dazzling and sometimes controversial career she created paintings, sculptures and religious series, refusing to let gender define her artistic approach. She

also worked on stage sets, illustrated socialist newspapers and designed dresses, using diverse sources and influences – from Russian folk art and textile designs to the latest trends in modernism

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Wassily Kandinsky, *The Blue Rider*, 1903



Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *The Blue Rider*, 1903

- **Wassily Kandinsky** (1866-1944), is one of the **great Russian avant-garde artists** whose name is well-known in the West. He is one of the three or four artists credited with creating abstract art although, as we have seen, Goncharova also had a claim as well as the Swedish artist **Hilma af Klint**, 1862-1944.
- Kandinsky was **born in Moscow** and studied to **become a lawyer**. He **became a professor in law and economics in Moscow** and when **he was 30**, he **attended an exhibition** where he saw a **painting by Monet** of a haystack. He could not recognise what it was and this disturbed him particularly as he could not erase the image from his mind. As he put it, “**Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendour**”. As a result, he gave up his career and moved to Munich to study art.
- He moved there in 1896 and did not return to Moscow until 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War and in 1911 **he formed the Blue Rider group** (*Der Blaue Reiter*) with August Macke, Franz Marc, Albert Bloch, and Natalia Goncharova.
- After the Russian Revolution he worked for the cultural

administration but **his spiritual outlook conflicted with the materialism of Soviet society so he returned to Germany in 1920**. He **taught at the Bauhaus** school of art from 1922 until the Nazis closed it in 1933, when he moved to France. He became a **French citizen in 1939** and produced some of his most significant art. He died in France in 1944.

BIO:KANDINSKY

- **Wassily Kandinsky** (1866-1944) was born in Moscow and grew up in Odessa, Ukraine. He studied law and economics in Moscow and was offered a professorship. When he was 30, he saw an art exhibition which included Monet's Haystacks. He did not recognise them, but the image stuck in his mind. He said, 'Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendour'. He settled in Munich and was one of the founders of the Blue Rider school.
- Swinging suggests movement and the rhythms of modern jazz. Kandinsky was a pioneer of abstract painting and regarded it as a mystical approach to art. His treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1911, argued that art must be cleansed of all references to the material world. He felt that colour was essential for liberating art from naturalistic appearances.
- This picture is No.291 in Kandinsky's hand-list, with a note that it was painted in February 1925. It was therefore executed at Weimar, before he moved with the Bauhaus to Dessau in June that year. Its emphasis on regular geometric forms such as circles and triangles is related to the ideas set out in his book *Point and Line to Plane* which he wrote in its final form in the latter part of 1925 and which was published in 1926.
- When World War I started he returned to Moscow and

following the Russian Revolution he worked in the cultural administration. However, his spiritual approach was at odds with the materialism of Soviet society and he returned to Germany in 1920. In Germany he taught at a famous school of art and architecture called the Bauhaus until the Nazis closed it in 1933. He moved to France where he lived for the rest of his life.

- Kandinsky knew Malevich in Moscow and lived in the same apartment block as Alexander Rodchenko.
- Swedish female artist Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) may be the first abstract artist in 1806. In Sweden women could enter art school. Like Kandinsky she studied theosophy, the first religion that did not discriminate against women.



Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), *Cossacks*, 1910-11

- As we have seen **his early work was representational**. He was influenced by a spiritual philosophy called **theosophy** which teaches that creation is a geometric progression starting with a single point and he wrote a book called *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910). His work gradually became more abstract and within a few years (by 1915) any reference to material objects had gone.
- This is a half-way point on that journey. In this painting there are still elements we can recognise, reinforced by the title, the cossacks can be seen on the right with what appears to be a building behind them. There is a rainbow in the centre and what appear to be birds at the top flying above a castle-like structure.
- He wanted to produce object-free, spiritually deep pictures that suggested **feelings and emotions like music**. He wrote, **“Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul”**.



Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), *Yellow-Red-Blue*, 1925, 128 × 201.5cm, National museum of modern art, France

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), *Yellow-Red-Blue*, 1925, 128 × 201.5cm, National museum of modern art, France

- In 1914 Kandinsky returned to Moscow and stayed until after the Revolution. **In Moscow his work became completely abstract** and the titles no longer named a particular subject.
- In 1917 he married and became involved in the cultural politics in Russia during and after the Revolution. **He collaborated in art education and museum reform enthusiastically** and he, like many avant garde artists, believed they could completely revolutionise art and make it more relevant to the people.
- He taught his idea about form and colour and did little painting and he became the first director of the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow. **His spiritual, expressionistic view of art was ultimately rejected** by the radical members of the Institute as too individualistic and **bourgeois**.
- In 1921, Kandinsky was invited to go to Germany to attend the Bauhaus of Weimar by its founder, architect Walter Gropius and he stayed to teach. This was painted in 1925 and as we see, geometric elements became increasingly important, the circle,

half-circle, the angle, straight lines and curves.

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Swinging*, 1925, Tate



Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Swinging*, 1925, Tate

- This work is called *Swinging* and the shapes and colours suggest **movement and maybe modern dance**, which in **1925 was jazz**. The work is at the **Tate** although it is currently on loan to China. When it was on display many people I talked to about it saw a **person sitting in a chair being stabbed by knives**, I see what they mean but it is intended to be **entirely abstract**.
- Between 1922 and 1933 he taught at the Bauhaus in Germany. He taught the basic design class for beginners and the course on advanced theory; he also conducted painting classes and a workshop in which he augmented his colour theory with new elements of form. His theoretical thinking led to the publication of his second book, *Point and Line to Plane* in 1926.

NOTES

- The original German title 'Schaukeln' has sometimes been translated as 'Shaking' or 'Rocking', but the most accurate English equivalent would seem to be 'Swinging'.

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Marc Chagall (1887-1985), *The Fiddler*, 1912-13, 196.5 × 166.5cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

- There is an important Russian artist that I should mention at this point—Marc Chagall (born Moishe Shagal, 1887-1985).
- He was a Russian-French artist of Jewish origin; art critic Robert Hughes referred to Chagall as "**the quintessential Jewish artist of the twentieth century**" although Chagall saw his work as "**not the dream of one people but of all humanity**".
- This painting, *The Fiddler*, was completed in 1913 when he lived in Paris. It shows a fiddler from his home town of **Vitebsk** (pronounced '**vee-tesk**') in Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire. His father was a **herring merchant** and his mother sold groceries from home.
- In the Russian Empire at that time **Jewish children were not allowed to attend regular schools or universities**. He studied Hebrew and the Bible until he was 13 when, **bravely, his mother bribed a professor with 50 roubles to let him attend school**. The turning point of his artistic life was when one day he **saw another student drawing**. He wrote that watching

someone draw "**was like a vision, a revelation in black and white**". He said that up to then the concept of art was entirely alien to him. There was one art school in his town and the artist running it admitted him free of charge.

- In 1906 he **moved to Saint Petersburg** which was still **the capital** of the Russian Empire. Before World War I, he travelled between Saint Petersburg, Paris, and Berlin. During this period he created his own mixture and style of modern art based on his idea of Eastern Europe and Jewish folk culture.
- He spent the wartime years in **Soviet Belarus**, becoming one of the country's **most distinguished artists** and a member of the modernist avant-garde, (founding the Vitebsk Arts College) before leaving again for Paris in 1923.

NOTES

- When he moved to Paris in 1923 he experienced modern art's "golden age" in Paris. According to one art historian (Michael J. Lewis) "**he synthesized ... Cubism, Symbolism, and Fauvism, and the influence of Fauvism gave rise to Surrealism**". Yet throughout these phases of his style "**he remained most emphatically a Jewish artist, whose work was one long dreamy reverie of life in his native village of Vitebsk.**" (pronounced 'vee-tesk')
- Throughout several centuries the lands of modern Belarus and the Republic of Lithuania were both parts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Following the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1920), under the terms of the Treaty of Riga, Belarus was split into Eastern Belorussia (under Soviet occupation) and Western Belorussia (under Polish occupation). Following the Soviet annexation of Eastern Poland in 1939, including Western Belorussia, Belarus would again have 1,175,000

Jews within its borders, including 275,000 Jews from Poland, Ukraine, and elsewhere. It is estimated 800,000 of 900,000 — 90% of the Jews of Belarus — were killed during the Holocaust.

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Marc Chagall (1887-1985), *The Blue Circus*, 1950, 34.9 x 26.7cm, Tate



Marc Chagall (1887-1985), *The Dance and the Circus*, 1950, 34.9 x 26.7cm, Tate

Marc Chagall (1887-1985), *The Dance and the Circus*, 1950, 34.9 x 26.7cm, Tate, presented by the artist 1953

- This is out of the period I am covering but in the 1950s, The Watergate Theatre in Westminster (a small theatre club that in 1950 planned to expand) approached **Chagall to produce murals** for the walls of the theatre. He started work on two large paintings, *The Dance and the Circus* and *The Blue Circus* which were installed on the walls of the theatre. The following year he recalled them for an exhibition in Nice and **lent the theatre two small studies**. One of the **founders of the theatre died** and the theatre passed into other hands and so **Chagall decided to present these oil sketches to the Tate** in 1953 in her memory.
- "When Matisse dies," Pablo Picasso remarked in the 1950s, **"Chagall will be the only painter left who understands what colour really is"**.

NOTES

- According to art historian Michael J. Lewis, Chagall was considered to be **"the last survivor of the first generation of**

European modernists".



Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956), Lilya Brik (1924-1997), 1924, photograph



Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956), Lily Brik (1924-1997), 1924



Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956), Lilya Brik (1924-1997), 1924
Bark for Barack poster design, 2008

- Back to 1924. Even if you have no interest in Soviet art you might **recognise this powerful image**. On the left is a photograph of the writer Lilya Brik (pronounced 'lil-ya brick') taken by Alexander Rodchenko and on the right is the poster he made from the image.
- The poster was made for a book publisher and she is shouting "LENGIZ BOOKS ... in all branches of knowledge".
- The poster itself was constructed as **part of Vladimir Lenin's** (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, 1870-1924) **New Economic Policy** — a combination of private enterprise and public campaigns to improve literacy, health, employment and education. **Lenin needed the working class to become literate and educated after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie as his second step in the push to Communism.** Rodchenko understood that the Soviet Union needed to **beat capitalism at its own game** and that advertising was a very powerful tool to bring that about.
- Rodchenko was originally a painter influenced by Cubism,

Futurism and Malevich's Suprematism but he proclaimed, **"I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue, and yellow. I affirmed: it's all over."** He believed he had reached the end of easel painting with its bourgeois practices and he was one of the **founders of Constructivism, of which more later**. His work has influenced graphic designers in all Western countries throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

- (CLICK) To illustrate his influence and to show the power of the image remains after the meaning is lost his design has been used over the years for many other posters such as this one for Barack Obama.
- **Interestingly, Lilya Brik was a key figure in the avant garde art world but has been written out of history.** She was a **society beauty who hosted salons attended by every notable avant garde figure of the 1910s and '20s.** She was married to a great aesthetic theorist (Osip Brik) and **had an affair with the famous Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky** (pronounced 'Mya-kov-sky') who committed suicide when the affair ended. He had supported Lenin and his work was controversial but Brik bravely wrote to Stalin in 1935 supporting Mayakovsky and Stalin wrote across the letter **"... Mayakovsky is the best and the most talented poet of our Soviet epoch...."**. The result was startling immediate, he was hailed as a hero, the town where he was born renamed Mayakovsky, his controversial work was destroyed and Brik's **name was removed from his biographies** and she was **even airbrushed of of photographs** showing her with the famous Russian poet. Her face remains on one of the most influential posters of the twentieth century but her personal identity has been erased.

NOTES

- Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956) was a Russian artist, sculptor, photographer, and graphic designer. He was one of the founders of constructivism and Russian design. He was born into a working-class family in Saint Petersburg and first learnt art from studying magazines. Later he attended Kazan Art School and the Stroganov Institute in Moscow where he created his first abstract drawings, influenced by the Suprematism of Kazimir Malevich, in 1915. The following year, he participated in "The Store" exhibition organised by Vladimir Tatlin, who was another important influence. Rodchenko's work was also heavily influenced by Cubism and Futurism.
- He worked as Director for the Bolshevik Government and taught at an art college until 1930. In 1921 he gave up painting to concentrate on posters, books and films. His work has influenced graphic designers in all Western countries throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. He believed his design work marked the end of easel painting with its bourgeois practices and this introduced a new mode of production and a new culture.
- He was a central artists in the movement called Constructivism which sought to created geometric compositions with images from modern technology and industry, considering themselves 'artist-engineers'.

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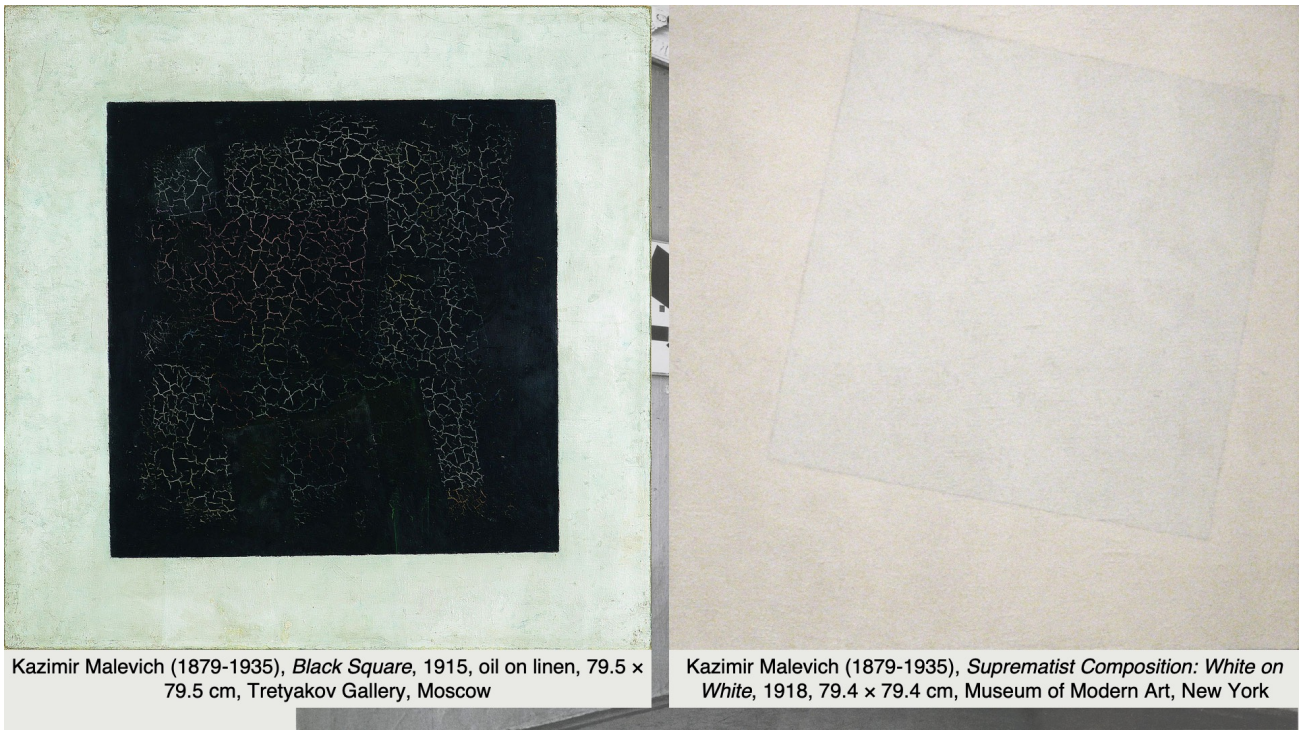


Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956), *Stairs*, 1930, photograph

- He is one of the great photographers of the twentieth century but in 1928 he was charged with formalism, that is a concentration of line and colour at the expense of subject at a time when **Party guidelines were insisting on Socialist realism**. Rodchenko concentrated on sports photography and parades. He returned to painting in the late 1930s and produced abstract expressionist works and he died in Moscow in 1956.

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Suprematist works by Malevich at the 0.10 Exhibition, Petrograd, 1915

Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935), *Black Square*, 1915, oil on linen, 79.5 x 79.5 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935), *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918, 79.4 x 79.4 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- **Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (1879-1935) was born in Ukraine to Polish parents** and when he later visited France he stated his nationality as **Polish**. In **1904** after the death of his father he moved to **Moscow** and studied at the **Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture from 1904 to 1910**. He worked with Vladimir Tatlin and was influenced by Goncharova (and in 1912 exhibited at the Donkey's Tail). He quickly assimilated the movements of Impressionism, Symbolism and Fauvism, and Cubism.
- In **1915** he published his manifesto ***From Cubism to Suprematism***. He gradually **simplified his style** culminating in his first ***Black Square*** exhibited at the Last Futurist

Exhibition 0.10 in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg) in 1915. As you can see his work consisted of pure geometric forms and their relationships to one another, set against minimal grounds.

- (CLICK) His *Black Square* (1915), a black square on white, represented the most radically abstract painting known to have been created so far and drew what has been called "**an uncrossable line (...) between old art and new art**". This work was exhibited as you can see in the corner of the room, high up, in a position typical of religious icons in many Russian homes. The implication being that the works should be considered as the secular equivalent of a religious icon—worthy of meditative contemplation.
- ***Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918), a barely differentiated off-white square** superimposed on an off-white ground, would take his ideal of pure abstraction to its logical conclusion. In addition to his paintings, Malevich wrote about his ideas in ***From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism*** (1915) and in ***The Non-Objective World: The Manifesto of Suprematism*** (1926).

NOTES

- Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and he spoke Polish, Ukrainian and Russian. His father managed a sugar factory and he was one of 14 children of whom nine survived. His father moved between villages when he was young so until he was 12 he knew nothing of the professional art world.

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Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935), *Dynamic Suprematism*, 1915-16



Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935), *Dynamic Suprematism*, 1915-16

- One other work by Malevich.
- This work is called *Dynamic Suprematism*. We can see three groups of carefully delineated, multi-coloured objects at the corners of a grey-white triangle. If you look closely the objects have been carefully marked using pencil and there are no horizontals or verticals, everything is placed on a diagonal which gives it a feeling of instability and action. Malevich was working in Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution and he and other artists wanted to discover a new form of art that was free from what he called **‘the dead weight of the material world’**. He rejected capitalist art, such as portraits of wealthy people and believed his abstract works represented a **higher, spiritual realm whose contemplation could lead to peace, harmony and a Utopian society**. He believed only the cowardly base their art on the **forms of nature** and that reproducing **little corners of nature was like a thief being enraptured by his leg irons**. Malevich thought that ‘pure painting’ required the rejection of what he called **‘bits of nature, Madonnas and shameless nudes’**. That is, he rejected all previous art forms and saw his art as truly revolutionary.

- In 1923, Malevich was appointed director of Petrograd State Institute of Artistic Culture, which was forced to close in 1926 after a Communist party newspaper described it as rife with "**counterrevolutionary sermonizing and artistic debauchery**." The Soviet state was by then heavily promoting an idealized, propagandistic style of art called **Socialist Realism**—a style Malevich had spent his entire career repudiating. Artists had to produce art that glorified Russian history and its working-class heroes. He conformed with the state's requirements and was quietly tolerated by the Communists.

NOTES

- Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (pronounced 'Malayvitch', 1879 1935) was born Kazimierz Malewicz to a Polish family who moved to Ukraine and Russified their Polish names. Kazimir was born in a sugar beet growing region close to Kiev and his father was the manager of a sugar processing factory. Malevich studied drawing in Kiev (1895/6) and from 1904 at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. His father died in 1904. Malevich, up to his mid-thirties was interested in peasant art and became a member of the Moscow avant-garde, although he was not at the leading edge, and he collaborated in a successful cubo-futurist opera called 'Victory Over the Sun' in 1913.
- In 1915, Malevich published his manifesto 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism' and he participated in an exhibition entitled the 'Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10' (Zero-Ten) in St Petersburg. He declared the Suprematist experiment was finished in 1919 but published 'The Non-Objective World' in 1927. His career languished following Stalin's rise to power after Lenin's death in 1924. Stalin promoted Socialist Realism as the only permitted form

of art. The Agitprop movement started in the 1920s in communist countries and it urged (agitated) people through propaganda to do what their leaders expected them to do. Malevich prudently left his works in Switzerland after an exhibition there, possibly saving them from obscurity or destruction. Allegedly a handsome man who had a wide, popular following. When he died he was exhibited with Black Square above his grave.

- Communist critics derided abstract art as bourgeois as they felt it could not express social realities. Malevich was derided [by Western critic Alexandre Benois] for negating everything good and pure: love of life and love of nature. Malevich responded that art can advance for art's sake alone, regardless of its pleasure: art does not need us, and it has never needed us since stars first shone in the sky.
- Malevich contemporaneously influenced major artists such as El Lissitzky and Olga Rozanova. She in turn is thought to have influenced Mark Rothko, eight of whose works have a room to themselves on the other side of this level. His legacy continues with the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. On the wall over there we can see his Metaesquema (1958) which was inspired by Malevich.
- Malevich wrote, **'To the Suprematist the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless: the significant thing is feeling'** and **'I transformed myself in the zero of form and emerged from nothing to creation, that is to Suprematism'**.
- Constructivism was an artistic philosophy that originated in Russia in 1913 with the work of Vladimir Tatlin. It rejected the idea that art is independent from society and was involved in design for industry, public festivals, posters and all aspects of public life— **'the streets our brushes, the**

squares our palettes'. Constructivism influenced many modern art movements such as the Bauhaus and De Stijl. The term Construction Art was first used as a derisive term by Malevich to describe the work of Alexander Rodchenko in 1917. Constructivism first appears as a positive term in Naum Gabo's Realistic Manifesto of 1920. Constructivism was a post-World War I development of Russian Futurism.

- Malevich, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky are regarded as the fathers of abstraction and competed to show they were first. It is believed Malevich backdated some 1915 works to 1913 in order to establish his primacy. However, the earliest abstract artist may, in fact, be Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) a previously unknown Swedish artist who started painting abstract art in 1905.
- Suprematism was an art movement founded by Malevich two years before he painted this work. He wrote, '**By Suprematism I mean the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art**' rather than the visual depiction of objects. He created a type of language or grammar of abstract objects, such as triangles, squares and circles and he was reacting against both academic art and the utilitarian art that had come before [called **Constructivism**]. This was the time of revolutions in Russia and Malevich wanted a complete break from the old world of bourgeois art and imagined a world of pure feeling where people would live in harmony with nature.
- It was a revolutionary time in Russia and in Western art. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque had developed Cubism in Paris a few years earlier and in Italy, the Futurists were excited by modernity as represented by mechanical power and speed. Malevich believed he had gone beyond both Cubism and Futurism by developing a world of pure abstraction.

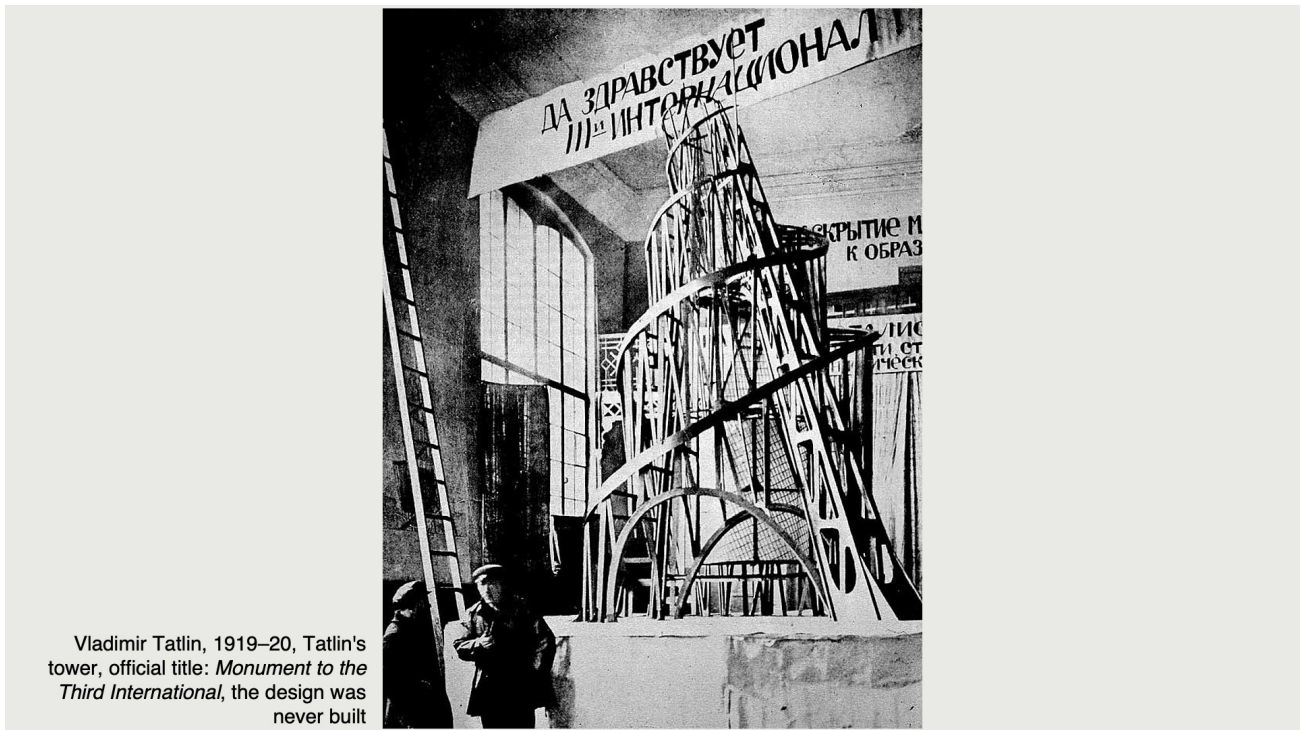
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Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953), *Tatlin's tower*, official title: *Monument to the Third International*, 1919–20, the design was never built

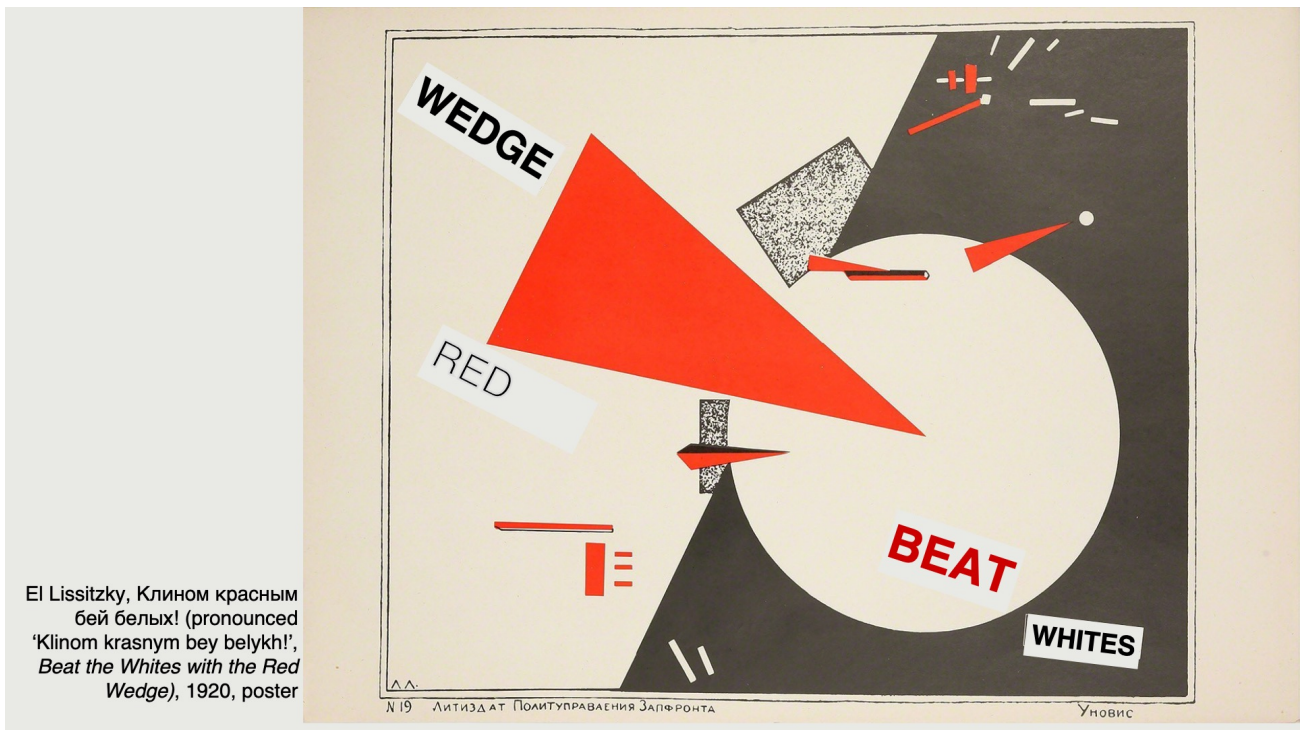
- This is **Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*** also known as ***Tatlin's Tower***. **Tatlin and Malevich** were two of the most important figures in the Soviet avant-garde art movement, and in 1915 was, with Rodchenko the founder of the **Constructivist movement**.
- *Tatlin's Tower* was to be a huge tower of glass, iron and steel, one third taller than the Eiffel Tower. Inside the two spirals were three blocks which would have rotated at different speeds (the first one, a cube, once a year; the second one, a pyramid, once a month; the third one, a cylinder, once a day). The entire building was to house the executive and legislature of the **Comintern, an international organisation that promoted world communism**, and the tower was to be the centre for the creation and dissemination of propaganda. **For financial and practical reasons, however, the tower was never built.**
- Vladimir Yevgrafovich Tatlin (1885–1953) was a Russian and Soviet painter, architect and stage-designer. He was born in

Moscow and his father was a hereditary nobleman and a mechanical engineer who worked for a railway company. **He failed to get into the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture and was supported by his father.** When his **father died** in 1904 he had to get a **job as a merchant seaman** and he travelled round the Black Sea sea and to Egypt. **He entered art school and exhibited in Moscow and St. Petersburg and settled in Moscow as an icon painter. In 1919 he achieved fame for designing the Tatlin's Tower.** He was also regarded as a **founder of Soviet post-Revolutionary Constructivist art** although he did not regard himself as a **Constructivist**.

- **Constructivism** rejected conventional art and all spiritual associations and Tatlin and Malevich broke with each other over this. Constructivism insisted art must make things for practical and social purposes based on scientific laws. It combined art and architecture and art and engineering and had an enormous influence on the Bauhaus and De Stijl movements.

NOTES

- Tatlin argued with his friend Malevich over Suprematist art at the time of the 0.10 exhibition which led to Malevich breaking away and forming UNOVIS (Champions of the New Art).



El Lissitzky (1890-1941), Клином красным бей белых! ('Klinom krasnym bay bilyk!', *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*), 1920, poster

- **Lazar Markovich Lissitzky known as El Lissitzky designed this propaganda poster called *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*.** Its design was based on the ideas of Suprematism, as I said, an approach to art that he developed with Malevich.
- This poster was designed to support of the efforts of the Bolshevik Red Army to overcome the anti-communist White Russians, the poster creates a powerful dynamic composition using basic geometric shapes in red, white, and black.
Lissitsky was a leading Bolshevik artists who shaped the aesthetic program of Soviet Russia. He was a pioneer of design, architecture, typography, and installation art and experimented with new technologies and media, developing a style that helped define 20th-century propaganda and modern graphic design. (CLICK) To explain the meaning I have translated the words.

NOTES

- Building on the philosophy of Kazimir Malevich and Suprematism, Lissitzky, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and the Constructivists sought to dedicate their art to the advancement of Soviet society. Lissitzky's political poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge!* is a seminal example of Constructivism, which employs allegorical geometric shapes and text to capture the Bolshevik ideology of progress, formalising the rejection of established artistic traditions. Believing art to have the power to transform society, Lissitzky said, "Art can no longer be merely a mirror, it must act as the organizer of the people's consciousness."
- **Lazar Markovich Lissitzky** (1890-1941) believed that art could transform society. He was born a Lithuanian Jew and began his career illustrating Yiddish children's books. When he was only 15 he started teaching which he would continue throughout his life. With Malevich he set up the suprematist art group UNOVIS and then developed a variant of his own called Proun.
- He became Russian cultural ambassador to Weimar Germany and influenced many important figures of the Bauhaus and De Stijl movements during his stay. In his remaining years he brought significant innovation and change to typography, exhibition design, photomontage, and book design, producing critically respected works and winning international acclaim for his exhibition design. This continued until his deathbed, where in 1941 he produced one of his last works – a Soviet propaganda poster rallying the people to construct more tanks for the fight against Nazi Germany.

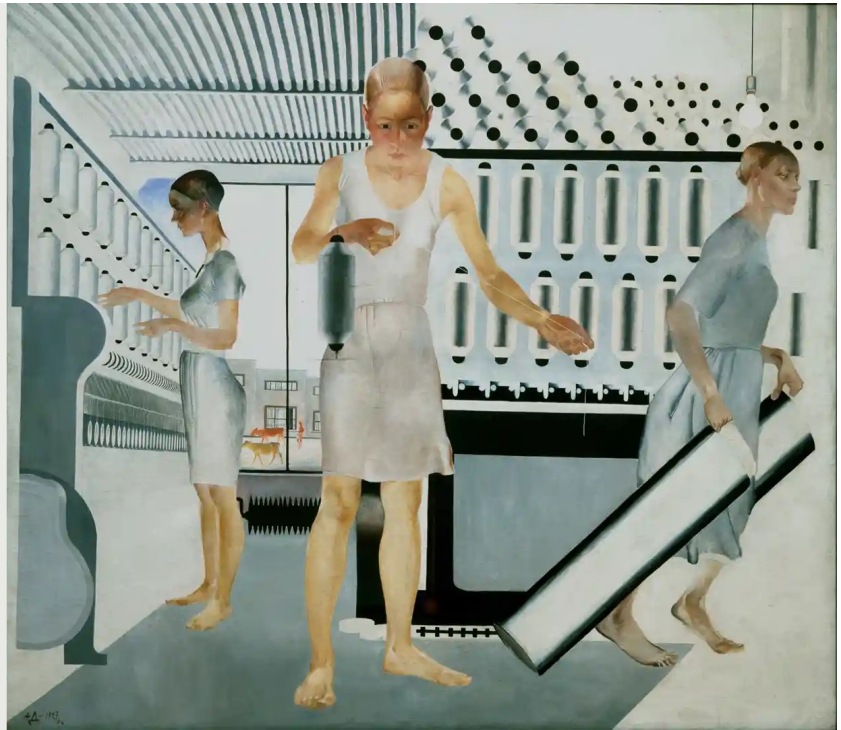
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Free fall of the parachuter, 1938, detail, mosaic on the Mayakovskaya metro station

Aleksandr Deyneka (1899-1969),
Textile Workers, 1927, State Russian
Museum, St Petersburg



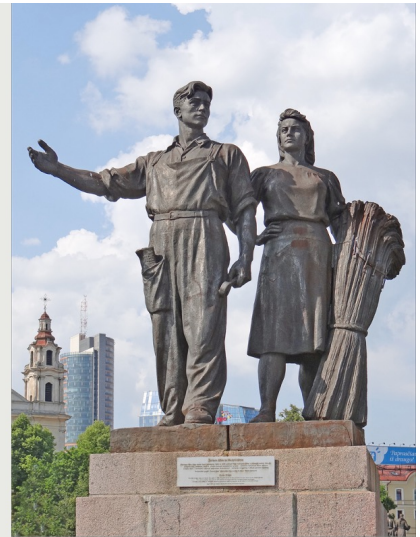
Aleksandr Deyneka (1899-1969), *Textile Workers*, 1927, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Free fall of the parachuter, 1938, detail, mosaic on the Mayakovskaya metro station

- Deyneka (pronounced 'day-necka') was a Soviet Russian painter, graphic artist and sculptor, **regarded as one of the most important Russian modernist figurative painters of the first half of the 20th century.**
- This is a **remarkably modern looking representation** with textile workers looking like robots. It was painted in 1927 when **Stalin's new requirement for Socialist Realism art** was coming into force.
- Deyneka was born in Kursk and studied at art college. He was widely exhibited and his work depicted genre scenes and labour and often sports. Later he began painting monumental works and (CLICK) his mosaics are a feature of the Mayakovskaya (pronounced 'my-yee-kov-kay-er') metro station in Moscow, this is *Free Fall of the Parachuter* a small detail of the design.



USSR Pavilion, 1937 Expo pavilion in Paris



Sculpture in Vilnius Lithuania

USSR Pavilion, 1937 Expo pavilion in Paris

Sculpture in Vilnius Lithuania. On 13 January 1991, Soviets began using tanks to shoot and crush unarmed independence supporters. On 11 March 1990, the Supreme Council announced the restoration of Lithuania's independence. Lithuania became the first Soviet occupied state to announce restitution of independence. In 2015 the statue was removed.

- And so we leave behind modern art and come to Socialist Realism.
- **When Stalin (1878-1953, in office 1922 to 1953) came to power on Lenin's death in 1924 the only form of art he allowed was Socialist Realism. Abstract art was banned as bourgeois and no foreign art was shown for 30 years.** Many artists were denounced and executed and many fled the country.
- Socialist Realism was a **style of idealised, realistic art** that became the **official style in Russia between 1932 and 1988**, as well as in other socialist countries after World War II. There **was an unofficial modern art movement in the 1960s** but it

was still dangerous to participate. There was no real modern art movement in Russia until the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

- **Socialist Realism glorified the depiction of communist values**, such as the emancipation of the proletariat. Despite its name, the figures in the style are often idealized, especially in sculpture.



Boris Vladimirski (1879-1950), *Roses for Stalin*, 1949, 100.5 x 141cm

Boris Vladimirski (1879-1950), *Roses for Stalin*, 1949, 100.5 x 141cm

- **This is a later work showing Socialist Realism in painting.** A group of children are giving Joseph Stalin (1878-1953, in office 1922 to 1953) a bunch of roses and showing their love for him. It was painted by Boris Vladimirski (pronounced 'vlad-e-meer-ski') in 1949; a year before his death and four years before Stalin's death. Despite it being pure propaganda it is undoubtedly Vladimirski's best known work.

BIO:STALIN

- Joseph Stalin (1878–1953), whose real name was Ioseb Jughashvili (pronounced 'joseph yug-arsh-vili') was a Georgian revolutionary and the ruler of the Soviet Union from 1927 until 1953. He first used the name Stalin in 1912 and it is derived from the Russian word for steel (stal) combined with the last two characters of Lenin's name.
- Stalin was born into a poor family in what is now Georgia. He joined the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. He went on to edit the party's newspaper, *Pravda*, and raised funds

for Vladimir Lenin's Bolshevik faction via robberies, kidnappings and protection rackets. He was arrested and sent to Siberia but escaped and over the next eight years was arrested and escaped many times, he was very tough and street smart. After the Bolsheviks seized power during the October Revolution and created a one-party state under Lenin's newly renamed Communist Party in 1917, Stalin joined its governing Politburo, the highest policy-making authority. Stalin assumed leadership over the country following Lenin's 1924 death.

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Soviet magazine, "USSR in Construction", 1940

- I will end with a sad tale which ends in black comedy.
- From 1930 the Soviet Union published a propaganda journal called ***USSR in Construction*** in Russian, French, English and German (and from 1938, Spanish). Its purpose was to promote the Soviet Union as a leading agricultural and industrial nation and it was read in Britain by communist idealists who used it to show the successes of the Soviet Union.
- From the 1920s Stalin had imposed a centralised command economy based on a series of Five-Year Plans which continued until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. They set impossible targets that led to lying and exaggeration. This issue for example tells how a **State Farm called Kuban was congratulated personally by Stalin** (in 1935) for exceeding its targets. We are told how it beat every target for cereal, milk, the size of pig litters, lambs per ewe and wool per sheep every year for the previous five years.
- **The reality was disaster and led to the severe disruption of food production that contributed to the famine of 1932–33 and the death of 5-7 million people.**

- The horror of what was happening was witnessed by Western visitors who were invited to the Soviet Union but they largely ignored what they saw. **One exception** was the author **Arthur Koestler** who visited the Soviet Union believing it embodied a semi-mystical vision of the future, that is until he travelled to the Ukraine. He described (in *The Invisible Writing*, 1954) how he saw **out of the train window** at every station "infants pitiful and terrifying with limbs like sticks, puffed bellies, big cadaverous heads lolling on thin necks. I had arrived, unsuspecting, at the peak of the famine of 1932-33 which had depopulated entire districts and claimed several million victims."
- Later, to eradicate so-called "enemies of the working class", **Stalin instituted the Great Purge**, in which over **a million were imprisoned and at least 700,000 executed** (between 1934 and 1939). By 1937, he had complete personal control over the party and state. (In addition, the **Gulag system led to the deaths of 1.5 to 1.7 million people** between 1934 and 1953.) The **total number of deaths** is unknown but one estimate made after the archives were opened **calculated 9 million deaths including 6 million deliberate killings**. This figure excludes the 5-7 million deaths I just mentioned during the Ukrainian famine which 26 countries have classified as genocide.



Armando Iannucci, *The Death of Stalin*, film, 2017

- Finally, if you haven't seen it I recommend the black comedy, ***The Death of Stalin* by Armando Iannucci** which was released in 2017.
- In 1953 Stalin organised the arrest and a show trial of doctors in Moscow based on their alleged poisoning of patients. Many of the doctors were Jewish and we now know that Stalin planned to transport all of the Soviet Union's two million Jews to a specially built, vast Siberian Gulag to massacre them.
- The so-called "**doctors' plot**" resulted in the **arrest, torture and death of all the Jewish and many non-Jewish doctors in Moscow and others left the city**. The film tells the true story of how **Stalin suffered a severe stroke and became paralysed**. His guards did not **dare enter** his room and he only found the next morning by his housekeeper. However, there were **no competent doctors left in Moscow and Stalin died**. As a final comment on art in Russia today, the film was banned.



NEXT WEEK - CABARETS & CLUBS

Next week is the last talk this term and we start again on 5 January. Next week we have a more light-hearted topic, or more accurately it is light-hearted in parts. I cover art and artists associated with cabarets and clubs in Paris, Vienna, Zurich, Rome, Strasbourg and Berlin, from Toulouse Lautrec to Otto Dix.



LIGHTBOX, WOKING

- **Angelica Kauffman**
 - 4 December 10:30 - 12:30am
- **Mary Moser**
 - 11 December 10:30 - 12:30am
- Each talk is £15 and £12 for members

Angelica Kauffman won international acclaim as a painter, printmaker, and decorative artist. She was a Founder Member of the Royal Academy and friend of some of the leading cultural figures of her age, whom she portrayed. Born in Switzerland she trained in Italy, learning from her father. This talk discuss her illustrious career after she came to London in 1766 and stayed for fifteen highly successful years.

Mary Moser was the daughter of George, a Swiss goldsmith, and enameller, who settled in London in c1726. Like her father, she was a founder member of the Royal Academy joining with Angelica Kaufman. Peter will talk about her art and about how at only 24, she was then the youngest ever RA and in 1805 she was proposed as President. This shows her popularity, principally but not exclusively, for her flower paintings.