fig. 1
Paintings by Goncharova, Larionov, Lentulov, Malevich, Rodchenko, Rozanova, and Shterenberg among works awaiting shipment to the art museum in Penza, January 1920.
A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

The Creation of the Museum of Painterly Culture

Svetlana Dzhafarova

Among the new museums that proliferated in Moscow in the first years of the Soviet state, the Museum of Painterly Culture was clearly the most distinctive; it was without precedent anywhere in the world. The museum was exceptional, above all, because it had been created and was administered directly by artists themselves—by the most notable representatives of the left art of the 1920s: Vladimir Tatlin, Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia, Kazimir Malevich, Aleksandr Drevin, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Vasilii Kandinskii. Early in the 1920s, stewardship of the museum passed into the hands of a younger generation of artists—Petr Vil'iams, Nina Kogan, Aleksandr Labas, Aleksandr Tyshler, and Solomon Nikritin—who had come to prominence after the October Revolution. It was the artists who were in charge of acquisitions, registry and storage, and the assembling of a central collection in Moscow and of collections to be sent to the provinces, and the artists who organized representative exhibits, engaged in analytical and scholarly work, amassed a library, and arranged the most timely exhibitions, as well as tours and lectures on issues in contemporary art.

Like all the new museums which it had been resolved to create from "examples of living art," the Museum of Painterly Culture was initially called the Museum of Artistic Culture. "Artistic culture" became so entrenched a concept that the museum was often called by its old name even after assuming the new one. The later name signaled a turning away from "plastic culture" (three-dimensional works, at any rate, proved a burden in the peregrinations, arduous enough as they were, of the museum's collection from one Moscow address to another in search of more or less temporary haven) and had the added advantage of serving to distinguish the Moscow museum from Petrograd's Museum of Artistic Culture.

In a 1925 guide to Moscow museums, the Museum of Painterly Culture was fourth in a group of eight,[1] and was briefly described as a collection of Futurist and Cubist paintings. It stood out, however, for the way in which its collection was presented: "The Museum has set itself not only the usual goal for a collection of paintings but also, in part, an educative and cultural one, seeking to bring the spectator inside contemporary artistic-and-technical investigations and to illuminate for him the complicated and, at times, still poorly elucidated paths by which they proceed." The guide also noted that apprehension of the museum's works entailed a certain difficulty and demanded from the spectator "suitable preparation and knowledge of the history of the new art."[2]

It is not possible at this time to reconstruct step by step the brief but eventful life, from 1919 to 1929, of the Museum of Painterly Culture. Yet from memoirs, archival documents, and contemporary periodicals, one can trace the origins of a truly new type of artistic institution, one that was avant-garde in its aspirations.

I

The idea of establishing a museum of contemporary art crystallized amidst a museum renaissance and flurry of museum creation.

An enormous quantity of works of art "of all times and peoples," appropriated from their previous owners by the state after the Revolution and stored to prevent theft and removal abroad, had accumulated in Moscow. A desire to classify them, determine their value, and group them together led to the creation of specialized museums—the Furniture Museum, the Porcelain Museum, the Museum of Eastern Art (Ars Asiatica), and the First and Second Museum of New Western Painting (as Sergei Shchukin's and Ivan Morozov's galleries of Impressionist and Postimpressionist works were renamed).

In the outlying districts of Moscow, fourteen proletarian

museums were created, distinguished by the heterogeneous contents of their temporary exhibits. It should be emphasized that only one of them—the A. V. Lunacharskii Seventh Proletarian Museum at 26 Staro-Basmannaia Street, which opened on the first anniversary of the Revolution—had a significant number of works by contemporary artists (Aristarkh Lentulov, Il'ia Mashkov, Petr Konchalovskii, Pavel Kuznetsov, and David Burliuk) in its collection; the museum had been installed in the former home of the collector Isadzhan (Isak) Isadzhanov.[3]

Such small district museums stood in contrast to "supermuseums" with holdings numbering in the thousands, and were intended for workers from nearby factories, who would not need to expend any extra effort traveling about the city from their place of work in order to visit the realm of the beautiful and to be exposed, very often for the first time, to the storehouse of culture—which was henceforth the property of every proletarian.

The idea of making artistic treasures accessible to the masses, together with the belief in their educative value, constituted the cornerstone of all museum creation.

In the summer of 1919, Narkompros (the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment) ratified the Statute on a Unified National Museum Fund, which provided for an orderly, integrated system of registering art works and for strict adherence to scholarly criteria and government policy in allotting works to the Republic's museums, whether they served the capital or other cities, districts, and provinces. This statute made into law a plan for the creation of museums drawn up by the artist and art historian Igor' Grabar', which had been announced at the end of 1918 and had already begun to be implemented. Full implementation of the plan required tremendous energy and faith on the part of scholars and museum professionals, for their exertions on behalf of the national heritage took place during years of deprivation brought on by civil war and foreign intervention.

II

Perceiving themselves as "proletarians of the paintbrush" (a formulation of both Kandinskii's and Rodchenko's), left artists were quick to join in the public life of the new workers' and peasants' state. Abram Efros, an observant and incisive art critic and an eyewitness to events, described the interrelation of artists and the state thus:

> *Futurism became the official art of the new Russia. Its life in the Republic of the Soviets proved a paradox. It came to power from another quarter. The dispute over power was settled not by a preference in art but by a preference in people. "Futurism" wasn't needed, but the "Futurists" were; Realism, on the contrary, was needed, but Realists weren't. The former were embraced, and the latter spurned, not as artists but as public individuals of art, as citizens of aesthetics . . . The left artists made friendly overtures to left politicians as people of a kindred temperament: radical, logical, and destructive. The left artists said to the left authorities: "A left art befits a left state. The right artists aren't on your side, because their art is the fruit of a reactionary social order. Futurism is the artistic form of Communism. A Communist in art can't* not *be a Futurist."*[4]

Malevich—another example—joined the Presidium of the Commission on the Preservation of Monuments, as well as the Museum Commission of the Moscow Soviet (along with representatives of museums and archives, collectors, and art historians such as Nikolai Romanov, Grabar', Nikolai Mashkovtsev, and Shchukin), which decided the fate of private estates and collections and granted charters of immunity. It was as the result of this collaboration with art professionals, apparently, that Malevich distanced himself from old notions of what a museum should be as his vision of a new museum of contemporary art took shape.

Left artists were involved in the work of Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment) from the moment of its creation on January 29, 1918. Malevich, Antoine Pevsner, Tatlin, Dymshits-Tolstaia, Władysław Strzemiński, and Drevin attended the May–November 1918 sessions of the Artistic and Building Subsection[5] of the Moscow Izo Narkompros at which a network of museums of contemporary art, with a central all-Russian museum in Moscow, was planned and where the guiding principles of state exhibitions, tours, and lectures sufficient to satisfy an enormous audience were discussed. Malevich's insistence on the necessity of left artists' training "their own" lecturers[6] gives some indication of the direction these discussions took. Many of the debates centered on the need to affirm the new revolutionary art via exhibitions. Pevsner noted that the idea of disseminating such exhibitions the length and breadth of Russia was a particularly significant one, and never before entertained.

An active group of artists of the "left camp" regarded the arranging of exhibitions and the creation of museums of artistic culture as part and parcel of the new organizational effort to which many had dedicated themselves unreservedly. Their position was inflexible enough: "Our object," said Pevsner, "is to educate the popular masses in a new direction . . ."[7]

The influence of left artists on the evolution of ideas about the preservation of artistic monuments and the creation of museums was not long in making itself felt. Artists' relations with the old organizational structures, moreover, quickly became contentious. In mid-January 1918, one of the chief proposals for restructuring entailed replacing the former administrations of the city's museums with artistic councils and curators chosen from among artists and the museums' junior staff, all to be nominated and confirmed by the Department of Plastic Arts of the Museum Commission. The Tret'iakov Gallery was the primary target of the proposal, since its acquisitions profile and collection of contemporary art made it more attractive than the scholarship-oriented Historical Museum, Rumiantsev Museum, or Museum of Fine Arts as a field for the artists' innovations.

Such innovations, however, were what Grabar' and the Tret'iakov Gallery's professional staff desired least of all, and they adopted a strongly protective stance. They were concerned that the museum not be transformed into "one more Moscow exhibition hall, where the exhibits will determine the tastes and allegiances of the artist-curators [rather than the reverse]."[8]

The Tret'iakov's defense held, and the artists focused their energy on the creation of "their own" museum of contemporary art. Yet the artists' activity continued to be resisted from within the gallery, as became evident when, in the late 1920s, the Museum of Painterly Culture became first a branch of the Tret'iakov Gallery and then a mere department, and ultimately was abolished entirely.

III

The idea of creating a museum of "living art" heralded a specific stage of maturity in the self-awareness of artists of the new tendencies, a stage at which the need to take stock of the existing multiplicity of forces, methods, and discoveries was finally acknowledged. This occurred at precisely that juncture in the evolution of the Russian avant-garde when the first stage—with its typically Russian acceptance of Western influences, absorption of them into itself, and filtering them through its own "ego"—was far behind, and the second

stage—the peak of original discoveries and a period marked by the emergence of new trends—had been succeeded by a third, characterized by recognition of the need to attract a new audience and not just a narrow circle of admirers, and by a desire to effect the "return" to the world (the West included) of accumulated experience and invention. By 1917–18, the chief discoveries had already been made and the pioneering *maîtres* already had followers and disciples; formulations were being honed and individual solutions derived from the generative systems of Cézannism, Cubism, Suprematism, Constructivism, and expressive abstraction. There were meetings of the minds and partings of the ways; Constructivism was soon triumphant at Inkhuk (the Institute of Artistic Culture) and Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops); while in its own way Suprematism maintained a quality of universality. In such a context, the possibility of viewing the entire spectrum of ideas, already endowed with their own tradition and evolution within the broad phenomenon of the avant-garde, and of artists' making classifications and rendering judgments according to their own standards—as the initiators of the new museum had in mind—might have seemed illusory. For the first time, a museum devoted to a specific phenomenon was being created while that phenomenon was still in full swing, before it had become history.

Artists' dissatisfaction with the critics who, from the beginning of the 1910s, had attempted to interpret the new art impelled them to offer their own analysis of their and their colleagues' art. Thus Ol'ga Rozanova accused the critics and their brethren of bad faith, citing as a prime example Aleksandr Benua's "Kubizm ili Kukishizm" ("Cubism or *Je-m'en-foutisme*"), a scathing 1912 review that discounted the significance of "vanguard trends." "Opponents of the New Art," wrote Rozanova, "fall back on this calculation, rejecting its self-sufficient meaning and, having declared it 'Transitional,' being unable even to understand properly the conception of this Art, lumping together Cubism, Futurism, and other phenomena of artistic life, not ascertaining for themselves either their essential differences or the shared tenets that link them."[9] After offering her own estimation of all previous art, she defined the essence of the new art:

Only contemporary Art advanced in all fullness the seriousness of such principles as those of dynamism, volume, and equilibrium in a painting, the principle of gravity and weightlessness, of linear and planar dislocation {sdvig}*, of rhythm, as well as the regular division of space, layout, the planar and surface dimension, density* {faktura}*, color relations, and many more. These principles, which set the New Art apart from the Old, have only to be enumerated for one to be convinced that they are in fact that Qualitative—and not merely quantitative—New Basis which proves the "Self-sufficient" meaning of the New Art. Principles heretofore unknown, signifying the emergence of a new era in creative work—an era of purely artistic achievements.*

An era of the final emancipation of the Great Art of Painting from Literary, Social, and crudely everyday attributes uncharacteristic of it at its core. The elaboration of this valuable world outlook is the service of our times, irrespective of idle speculation about how quickly the individual trends created by it will flash by.[10]

Rozanova's precise conception of the evolution of contemporary art and faith in the correctness of her chosen path were evidently what prompted her to join the Moscow Art Board of Izo Narkompros and, with Rodchenko, the Artistic and Industrial Subsection, as well as to perform truly missionary work organizing art schools, free artistic-and-trade workshops, and museums of artistic culture throughout the country.

As at the beginning of the 1910s, so at the end of the decade there was virtually no critic who brought to contemporary art the discrimination evident in Varvara Stepanova's review of the posthumous Rozanova exhibition (the First State Exhibition) held in Moscow in the winter of 1918–19. "Closely examining Rozanova's Suprematist period," wrote Stepanova, "we see that Rozanova's Suprematism is contrary to that of Malevich, who constructs his works from a composition of quadrate forms, while Rozanova constructs hers from color. For Malevich, color exists solely to distinguish one plane from another; for Rozanova, the composition serves to reveal all the possibilities of color on a plane. In Suprematism, she offered a Suprematism of painting, not of the square."[11]

Scholars have attributed to Rozanova authorship of an appeal "to the St. Petersburgers"[12] issued by the Council of the left federation of the Moscow Professional Union of Artists and Painters in response to the arrival in Moscow in April 1918 of leaders of the Petrograd Izo Narkompros—Nikolai Punin, Natan Al'tman, and Artur Lur'e—for the organization of the Art Board:[13] "Comrades, we welcome the creation of a commission on artistic matters from among vanguard artists and believe that the new art will not lie in basements but will assume its proper place in new creative work."[14]

Rozanova knew well from her own experience how works of the new art were purchased out of exhibitions in the years before the Revolution, when the largesse of the factory-owner Levkii Zheverzheev hardly covered the cost of paints and canvas and low-paying technical work on the side was necessary for subsistence. After the Revolution, the private collector disappeared, although certain individuals—Shchukin, Morozov, Isadzhanov, Valentina Labinskaia, Nadezhda Dobychina, and some more incidental figures—kept up this role for left artists. Yet it was left artists who had the least cause for dismay: their names were at the top of the list the moment the state became the new buyer of art. "Legalizing" sales of art, making them systematic and thereby providing a rather wide circle of artists with a means of earning a living was of greatest expediency and most fully warranted in the case of the creation of the Museum of Artistic Culture in the capital and—the next step—of a network of similar museums throughout the country. For many artists, the purchases made by the Museum Bureau and Izo Narkompros at exhibitions and in artists' studios during 1918–22 constituted, on one hand, their sole means of support and, on the other, moral compensation for the neglect of the new art before the Revolution and a vindication of its unwavering orientation toward the future.

IV

Rozanova's writings are one index of the self-awareness of the artists of her circle, and her organizational work one example of the social engagement of left artists. Under the heading "Nashi zadachi" ("Our Tasks"), Malevich offered his list of activities in which artists might invest their energies in the new society:

1. *A war on academicism*
2. *An administration of innovators*
3. *The creation of a worldwide collective on artistic affairs*
4. *The establishment of embassies of the arts in other countries*
5. *The creation of stationary museums of contemporary art throughout the country*
6. *The creation across the entire Russian Republic of a traffic artery for living exhibitions of creative art*
7. *The establishment of a Central Museum of Contemporary Creative Work in Moscow*
8. *The appointment of commissars of artistic affairs in the provincial cities of Russia*

9. Agitation among the people in support of creative work in Russia
10. The publication of a newspaper on artistic matters for the broad masses[15]

Malevich's description of the attitude of museum professionals toward the new trends in art in preceding years matched Rozanova's assessment of the critics' stance: "The work of the innovators was driven, by conditions created by these refined connoisseurs, into cold attics, into squalid studios and there awaited its lot, pinning its hopes on fate . . . All the old museums were built on chance, and the emergence of new museums on a chance amateur, who robbed, who pawnbrokered the work of a starving artist for a few pennies and made a name for himself."[16] He gave this account of the evolution of the idea of creating a new museum:

The Art Board discussed the creation of a museum of contemporary art, then the creation of a museum of painterly culture, and ended with a museum to be created primarily on the basis of painterly culture.

This is an enormous concession, an enormous step backward, an enormous covenant with yesterday . . .

Now they're laying the foundations of a museum primarily of painterly culture. Under this banner they'll gather everything that is more painterly than not. Consequently, all trends of the school will end up here.[17]

Malevich had jealously watched over the makeup of the new museum's collection, concerned with the ratio of exhibits "from the past" to those representing specific tendencies of the new art—and favoring the latter. He had accused the members of the Art Board of being soft and of maneuvering, locating the reason for their behavior in the composition of the board: the members were all left artists, but of a varying leftism. Majority opinion had yielded a list of 143 artists representing a rather wide range of artistic achievement. Among them were members of Mir iskusstva (World of Art)—Benua, Aleksandr Gaush, Evgenii Lansere, Sergei Chekhonin, Nikolai Krymov, and Nikolai Rerikh; the Realists Abram Arkhipov, Aleksandr Moravov, and Sergei Maliutin; members of Golubaia roza (Blue Rose)—Kuznetsov, Matiros Sar'ian, Pavel Utkin, and Elena Bebutova; members of Bubnovyi valet (Jack of Diamonds)—Robert Fal'k, Lentulov, Vasilii Rozhdestvenskii, Aleksandr Kuprin, Mashkov, Petr Konchalovskii, and Aleksandr Os'merkin; former members of the Soiuz russkikh khudozhnikov (Union of Russian Artists)—Leonard Turzhanskii, Konstantin Iuon, Sergei Gerasimov, Konstantin Korovin, and Vasilii Baksheev; members of Oslinyi khvost (Donkey's Tail)—Mikhail Larionov, Natal'ia Goncharova, Mikhail Le-Dantiu, Aleksandr Shevchenko, and David and Vladimir Burliuk; and vanguard artists of various allegiances: Malevich, Tatlin, Pevsner, Kandinskii, Rozanova, Dymshits-Tolstaia, Rodchenko, Ivan Kliunkov, Nadezhda Udal'tsova, David Shterenberg, Aleksei Morgunov, Drevin, Aleksei Grishchenko, Vera Pestel', Liubov' Popova, Boris Shaposhnikov, Strzemiński, Mikhail Men'kov, Aleksandr Vesnin, Pavel Mansurov, Aleksandra Ekster, Mikhail Matiushin, Iakov Pain, Ender, Pavel Filonov, Petr Miturich, Vladimir Baranov-Rossine, Iosif Shkol'nik, Vera Ermolaeva, Al'tman, and others.[18] Malevich labeled this selection the consequence of traditional professional criteria, whereas he conceived the museum as "a place where men are all gathered together . . . To create, furthermore, an image of man only in his contemporary form resulting from his latest transfiguration and not to drape over his shoulders the mantles and togas of the past."[19]

In Malevich's eyes, the museum's novelty lay in the devotion to painting which guided it (it should be noted that sculptors, too—Sergei Konenkov, Anna Golubkina, Aleksandr Matveev, Petr Bromirskii, and others—had originally been included in the list of recommended artists), and he regarded the dissemination of the works of the country's artistic forces to every far corner as the central museum's chief function. This was a universal function and had enormous transformative implications:

In this way, the living cause of exemplars of creation penetrates throughout the country and will be a stimulus to the transformation of forms in life and of artistic representations in industry.

Since the museum will be comprised of the most diverse forms of representation, installation will be a matter of extraordinary importance, for installation plays a large role in its construction and conception, and in order to reveal the museum's true face, it is necessary to alter the old principle of arranging works by by schools and trends, by eras and events.

I suggest, therefore, that the walls of the museum are surfaces on which works should be placed in the same sequence as a composition of forms is placed on the surface of a painting, that is, if on the surface of a painting there emerge rows of identical forms, then the work itself loses intensity, and vice versa.

If we arrange a row of identical works on a surface, we get an ornamental line, which cancels out the power which might have been revealed with heterogeneous juxtapositions.

The most advantageous installation, therefore, is the sequence: icons, Cubism, Suprematism, the classics, Futurism—painterly perception.[20]

Rodchenko and Stepanova were also involved in deliberations on the future shape of the museum, and Stepanova recorded Rodchenko's views on the matter in a March 27, 1919, diary entry:

Brik, the current head of the Department of Fine Arts, got the idea of enlisting the support of the Professional Union of the New Art; he was at the Union today—a whole series of issues in this connection were discussed, one of them—of great importance—the organizing of the Museum of Painterly Culture. The end result is that the Union will hold a closed debate for its members on the subject and then submit a report to the Board {the Museum Board of Izo Narkompros}. Anti {Rodchenko's nickname} and I talked it over. His thoughts boiled down to approximately the following.

French painting should not be lumped together with Russian, inasmuch as Russian painting follows its own path, only we stubbornly refuse to see it, don't value it, and idolize Westerners. To combine the pictures of Russian painters with the museums of Shchukin and Morozov means to subscribe to our own bankruptcy, to close off our past, which is just as rich as that of the French. Above all, this boundary must be drawn: Russian painting does not exist in a line of succession from the West, and if the West finds some reflection in it, that is only a minus for the essence of Russian painting.

We follow our own path, and our painting is so different from the West that it is inept and sinful to jumble them together. Western painting's element, its significance, is the easel painting, a painting of set dimensions, made to measure for a room—for an office or museum; therein lies its sense and purpose, that is the outward hallmark of Western painting. Western painting is an investigation into light and volume—into form. Western painting can never be compared with Russian, for Russian painting is diametrically opposed to it: outwardly—there are no set dimensions but rather inordinately large canvases and microscopic ones—and inwardly—an investigation into space and surface plane, a desire to conquer space of any dimensions whatsoever. Ergo it is clear that Western painting is in essence easel painting and synthetic. Russian painting is decorative and analytical. Ergo the tasks pursued in painting by West and East are entirely

different, and one is not comparable with the other. Russian painting's source is the icon—decorative adornment, that is, a value unto itself, unlike applied ornament, which has no life of its own but exists only as an adjunct to an object. This great decorative, color-resplendent element is the prime mover of Russian painting, which we do not value, do not know.

We have to take our painting out into the streets, onto the fences and roofs . . . Because that's how we cultivated the icon, the signboard, and the lubok *{illustrated broadside}. And it's clear in my mind that we must create and display our Russian culture of painting, which, unfortunately, we consider worthless—and we try to follow strictly in the leading strings, and at the bidding, of the West.*

I envision the arrangement of the Museum of Painterly Culture thus:

Icons
Signboards
The lubok *(for its connection with graphic art)*
Impressionism
Futurism
Cubism
Orphism
Suprematism
Non-objective creation

This arrangement is by trend, with one immediate caveat: checking off Impressionism, Futurism, Cubism, and so on, we are confronted right away with a whole series of artists whom it is impossible to assign to one or another of these rubrics, for extreme individuality is one of Russian painting's peculiar characteristics, and therefore I think the stages in the culture of painting ought to be set out not according to particular movements in painting but according to exhibiting organizations and groups—this subdivision into groups is likewise a characteristic trait.

Thus, concretely, the museum should be divided into these sections:
Icons
Signboards
The lubok
World of Art (Sar'ian, Sapunov, Kuznetsov, Iakulov, Lentulov)
Donkey's Tail and Target (Larionov, Goncharova, Zdanevich, Le-Dantiu, Bart)
Primitivism (Shevchenko)
Color Dynamics (Grishchenko)
Expressionism (Kandinskii)
Jack of Diamonds (Mashkov, Konchalovskii, Rozhdestvenskii, Kuprin, Fal'k)
Suprematism (Popova, Malevich, Kliun, Men'kov, Udal'tsova, Drevin)
Non-objective creation (Rozanova, Rodchenko, Tatlin)

Asiatic art is spiritual, was regarded with religious awe, with faith, the creation of the artist not endowed with charming effect but considered something grand and spiritual. The West treats art lightly, in material terms; the East worships art and elevates it above everything else, does not make it utilitarian.[21]

Dymshits-Tolstaia and Tatlin had put forward their ideas on how the museum should be organized at a meeting of the Moscow Art Board in the autumn of 1918. They rejected the selection of objects based on individual taste that had ruled museums and private collections and which, in their opinion, was a feature of the "life of the past." The new museums ought to acquire works of art "based on the principle that {museums} truly represent in full the best examples of the artists produced by the nation."[22]

V

In December 1918, Anatolii Lunacharskii, the People's Commissar of Enlightenment, had approved the list of 143 artists whose paintings and sculptures were to be bought for the State Museum Fund. The Moscow Purchasing Commission and the Artistic and Industrial Subsection of Izo Narkompros had quickly begun acquiring works from which a separate collection for the Museum of Artistic Culture would be drawn.

At this juncture, the proposals concerning the character and organization of the museum were refined and elaborated, first at a meeting of a special commission on the museum's creation in Petrograd and later at a series of meetings of Izo Narkompros. The resulting special statute on the Museum of Painterly Culture and definition of the concept of artistic culture were presented to the museum conference convened on February 11, 1919, at the Palace of the Arts (as the Winter Palace had been renamed).

The conference approved the statute on the museum unanimously and endorsed the concept of artistic culture, which was declared the criterion by which works would be selected for the museum's collection and which was outlined thus:

1. The concept of artistic culture *is one of the positive achievements of contemporary creative work, which in the course of recent decades has amplified, in the main, questions of the professional quality of artistic works and thereby of their universal significance.*

2. The concept of artistic culture is thus linked to the strivings of new artistic schools and may be revealed only by them.

3. The concept of artistic culture is at the same time an objective criterion of artistic value, insofar as that is defined as a professional value.

4. The concept of artistic culture contains, in accordance with the very meaning of the word "culture" as a dynamic activity, a creative element; creative work presupposes creation of the new, invention; artistic culture is nothing other than the culture of artistic invention.

5. By sustained artistic labor, contemporary schools of art have been able to reveal many elements of artistic activity and thereby to establish the objective criterion of artistic value as a professional value.

6. These elements are: (1) material: *surface, elasticity, density, weight, and other qualities of material; (2)* color: *saturation, intensity, relation to light, purity, transparency, independence, and other qualities of color; (3)* space: *volume, depth, dimension, and other properties of space; (4)* time *(movement): in its spatial expression and in connection with color, material, composition, and so forth; (5)* form, *as a result of the interaction of material, color, and space and in its pure guise, composition; (6)* technique: *painting, mosaics, reliefs of various sorts, sculpture, stonework, and other types of artistic technique.*

7. While there are no grounds for thinking that mankind has arrived at the sum total of artistic elements, further discoveries in this area cannot alter the direction of artistic activity as professional activity.

8. The evolution of and alteration in artists' treatment of the aforementioned elements is the evolution of art itself, and changes of every kind in this area can be objectively and precisely established for every given artistic phenomenon individually.

9. Artistic culture, as the culture of invention, can be revealed only insofar as artists either radically altered their treatment of the aforementioned elements or discovered these elements.

10. Inasmuch as artistic culture is the achievement of contemporary schools of art, it can be utilized as a principle of contemporary artistic activity, and artists thereby have every basis for aspiring to reveal via this culture an image of man, primarily in his latest transfiguration. Works of the past—even those inventions that broke new ground in their time but have no connection with contemporary formations—need not be utilized, since they have lost much of their active force and thus their cultural significance.[23]

The general mood may also be gauged from excerpts from Izo Narkompros's Declaration on Principles of Museum

Administration and reports prepared for the museum conference. The declaration, approved by the Art Board at a February 7, 1919, session, stated that

(1) artists, as those solely competent in matters of contemporary art and as the forces who create artistic values, alone may oversee acquisitions of contemporary art and guide the artistic education of the country; (2) as professionals organizing their world outlook on the basis of universal artistic culture, artists must be allowed access to art works of the past—so as to select from the mass of artistic monuments that which is characteristic of artistic culture and, having made their selections, to create a museum, for themselves as professionals and for the growth of the nation's artistic life—a museum of creative artistic culture.[24]

Punin's theses on the relation between artists and museums drew attention to the divide separating them and to the psychological peculiarities of the professions of artist and museum administrator:

The aspiration of museum professionals in the West and in Russia in recent times to expand their influence. The special reasons for Russian museum administrators' enthusiasm for aesthetic pretensions in connection with artists' unsuccessful aspiration to museum work . . .

The professional qualities of the museum administrator as principles of his negative attitude toward artistic creation. Museum administrators' battle with artists . . .

The claim of contemporary artistic schools on the museum and the special bases of this claim. The organized state of contemporary artistic creation. The activism of artists in connection with their role as artistic educators and with the activism of the workers' movement . . .

The ideological foundations of the contradictory professional interests of the museum administrator and the artist. The museum professional as a scholarly machine, curator, and researcher. The artist as a creative and educative force . . .

The basis of the Museum of Artistic Culture as a museum of the creative and educative. Artistic culture as an objective criterion in the appraisal of artistic monuments . . .

Selection as the method of building the Museum of Artistic Culture . . .[25]

In his report, Grishchenko enumerated the distinctions of the new museum:

The Museum of Painterly Culture should reveal the essential element of painting, of its creative inventiveness in the realm of color, architectonics, composition, and faktura . . .

The Museum of Painterly Culture is not for the education but for the illumination of the spirit and the creative work of the masses, for the nurturing and building of the artist's trade . . .

The Museum of Painterly Culture must embrace the painterly art of the individual artist and of a collective of artists in the interests of an exchange of energy and vital powers . . .

The Museum of Painterly Culture is always adding new holdings, now from this quarter, now from that, in accordance with the spirit and movement of the living creative basis of painterly art . . .

The Museum of Painterly Culture serves as a guarantee of and a solid foundation for the renewal of art in the country.[26]

By 1920, the idea of artists working in museums had gained a foothold in certain circles, and it raised artists to a position in the cultural and social hierarchy higher than the one they had previously occupied. In his report to the museum conference, Sergei Ol'denberg concluded: "It is absolutely essential that the artist join in museum work alongside the scholar, and not only in those activities of museums touching on the arts but in their activities in general; not only when it comes to displays, where there can be no substitute for the creative and experienced eye of the artist, but in approaching every object, whether a monument of nature or of culture, from the vantage of the arts, from the vantage of a certain artistic intuition."[27]

—Translated, from the Russian, by Jane Bobko

Notes

1. The other museums were the Tret'iakov Gallery, the Tsvetkov Gallery, the Museum of Icon-Painting and Painting (the former Ostroukhov Gallery), the Museum of Eastern Art, the Museum of Fine Arts (the former Museum of Aleksandr III), the First Museum of New Western Painting (the former Shchukin Gallery), and the Second Museum of New Western Painting (the former Morozov Gallery). P. Pertsev, *Khudozhestvennye muzei Moskvy. Putevoditel'* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925).

2. Ibid., pp. 81–82.

3. The holdings of this museum were later absorbed into the State Museum Fund; some went to the State Tret'iakov Gallery, others to the State Mustafaev Azerbaijan Museum of Art in Baku.

4. A. Efros, "Kontsy bez nachal," in F. Stepun, ed., *Shipovnik. Sbornik literatury i iskusstva,* vol. 1, pp. 109–25, as quoted in *Tvorchestvo* 3 (1990), p. 15.

5. The Artistic and Industrial Subsection was created largely at the initiative of Ol'ga Rozanova, who had been elected to the Moscow Art Board, and was briefly headed by her.

6. T. V. Vlasova, "Iz istorii khudozhestvennoi zhizni Moskvy. Deiatel'nost' Vserossiiskogo tsentral'nogo vystavochnogo biuro (1918–1921)," *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie 23. Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1988), p. 320.

7. Ibid.

8. Iu. N. Zhukov, *Sokhranennye revoliutsiei* (Moscow, 1985), pp. 73–74.

9. Ol'ga Rozanova, "Osnovy Novogo Tvorchestva i printsipy ego neponimaniia," *Soiuz molodezhi* 3 (March 1913), p. 18.

10. Ibid., pp. 20–21.

11. Varst [Varvara Stepanova], "Vystavka Ol'gi Rozanovoi," *Iskusstvo* 4 (February 22, 1919), pp. 2–3.

12. See Vera Terekhina, "Life–Work of Olga Rozanova," in *Olga Rozanova, 1886–1918,* catalogue for exhibition organized by the Helsingin kaupungin taidemuseo (Helsinki: Helsingin kaupungin taidemuseo, 1992), pp. 9–17.

13. The Petrograd Narkompros had immediately organized two departments, the Department of Fine Arts (Izo) and the Department of Museums and Protection of Antiquities. The initial members of the former's Art Board were David Shterenberg (chairman, and also head of Izo), Natan Al'tman, Aleksei Karev, Aleksandr Matveev, Nikolai Punin, Sergei Chekhonin, Petr Vaulin, and Georgii Iatmanov. They were later joined by Vladimir Baranov-Rossine, Iosif Shkol'nik, Vladimir Maiakovskii, and Osip Brik. On April 11, 1918, a similar Art Board was created in Moscow; it had the same rights as the Petrograd board and was considered part of the All-Russian Board on Fine Arts Affairs. The members of the Moscow board were Pavel Kuznetsov, Il'ia Mashkov, Aleksei Morgunov, Kazimir Malevich, Ivan Zheltovskii, Sof'ia Dymshits-Tolstaia, Nadezhda Udal'tsova, Stanislav Noakovskii, Robert Fal'k, Ol'ga Rozanova, Aleksandr Shevchenko, Boris Korolev, Sergei Konenkov, and Vasilii Kandinskii; Vladimir Tatlin was its chairman, as well as assistant director of Izo. The makeup of the board later changed.

14. "Obrashchenie Soveta levoi federatsii peterburzhtsam," *Anarkhiia* 4 (1918).

15. K. Malevich, "Os' tsveta," *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* 1 (1919), p. 27.

16. Ibid., p. 28.

17. Ibid., p. 27.

18. Artists are given in the order in which they appeared in the list published in "Otchet o deiatel'nosti Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv Narkomprosa," *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* 1 (1919), p. 74.

19. Ibid., p. 29.

20. Malevich, "Os' tsveta," p. 30.

21. Varvara Stepanova, diary, March 27, 1919, A. M. Rodchenko and V. F. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

22. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 665, op. 1, ed. khr. 31, l. 1.

23. "Otchet o deiatel'nosti Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv Narkomprosa," pp. 73–74.

24. "Deklaratsiia Otdela izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv i khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti po voprosu o printsipakh muzeevedeniia, priniataia Kollegiei otdela v zasedanii 7 fevralia 1919 g.," *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* 1 (1919), p. 85.

25. "Tezisy po dokladu N. Punina po voprosu ob otnoshenii khudozhnika k muzeinoi deiatel'nosti," *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* 1 (1919), p. 86.

26. "Tezisy po dokladu khud. Grishchenko 'Muzei zhivopisnoi kul'tury,' priniatye Otdelom izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv Moskvy i Petrograda," *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* 1 (1919), pp. 86–87.

27. *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn'* 1 (1920), p. 11.

The Great Utopia

The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde,

1915–1932

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
State Tret'iakov Gallery
State Russian Museum
Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

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Prefaces

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